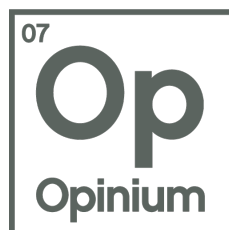


Parents' engagement in the career guidance of their children Autumn 2020

A research report commissioned by the Gatsby Foundation
Report prepared by Opinium Research



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Who we are

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The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

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Introduction

Every young person needs high-quality career guidance to make an informed decision about their future. Following the publication of John Holman's Good Career Guidance report in 2014, which articulated the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, the Gatsby Foundation has worked to support schools and colleges to be able to provide good career guidance for all.

It is widely recognised that parents are one of the most influential forces in a young person's career and education decision-making. It is therefore of utmost importance that parents have the information, guidance and support they need to help their children navigate these decisions. Schools and colleges can play an integral part helping parents to support their children through this process.

Understanding the views and attitudes of parents, and how these differ between families, will help to make sure the most appropriate support can be provided to parents of 11-18 year olds. Therefore, since 2019, Gatsby has been exploring the views and preferences of parents in relation to career guidance.

The piece of research presented in this report explores how attitudes and preferences for engaging with different careers activities and communications have changed following the Coronavirus pandemic which struck the UK in March 2020. The pandemic has had far reaching impacts: from business being required to shut to schools and colleges closing and most young people learning from their homes. The role of parents in their children's education has become more important than ever. The ramifications of the pandemic will frame the experiences parents have and their relationships with their children and their school and colleges – both of which will impact on how best to provide support.

Executive summary

This report outlines findings from a survey of 2,001 parents of secondary school students (11-18 years olds) carried out in autumn 2020. The study explores the attitudes and preferences of parents in relation to the career guidance of their children and how this has changed following the Coronavirus pandemic that began in spring 2020.

A previous piece of research carried out for Gatsby in autumn 2019 used attitudinal segmentation analysis to identify six parent profile groups. The purpose of this segmentation was to help ensure support and communications were tailored to the needs of different parents. The six groups identified were given titles to help with interpretation and analysis. The group names are: Plain sailing optimists, Trust the system, Anxious and frustrated, Distant and disengaged, Hands on high hoppers, and Trust the children.

Key findings from the autumn 2020 survey:

- The uncertainty and fear caused by the pandemic has understandably impacted parent attitudes and feelings about the future. **Fewer parents in autumn 2020 feel positive about their child's future**; 71% down from 81% in 2019. In addition, twice as many parents now say that they do not feel informed to help their child make decisions about their future career choices (27%, up from 14% in 2019). However, some parents that

were more likely pre-pandemic to be involved in their child's decision making were even more likely to want to be involved.

- **Positively, parents are more likely in October 2020 than August 2019 to feel satisfied with how their child's school or college supports parents about both education and career options**, with satisfaction levels increasing by 10% and 9% respectively. In addition, 73% of parents with children in year 8+ think their child's school or college has done well in terms of communicating with them during the pandemic, and that they have done well providing learning support for children. Although there was variation between institution types and Ofsted ratings.
- **The number of parents falling into the Distant and disengaged profile has increased following the pandemic**. Growing from one of the smallest groups (13% of parents in August 2019) to one of the largest (21% in October 2020). With more men and parents from a higher social grade identifying with the characteristics of these groups.
- Despite indications of increasing disengagement, **high numbers of parents are willing to engage with careers activities**. Almost 80% are happy to exchange emails and 76% still have a preference to meet one-to-one when guidelines allow. Although slightly less popular, online/virtual meetings and events are also well received.
- There are a range of ways to communicate to parents. **Parents expect to be communicated to via letters or other written materials (46%) or through the school/college website (44%)**. A further one in four (26%) expect updates via text messages or over the phone (25%). Positively **this broadly matches parent preferences**, with most preferring letters, website information but also more personalised contact such as both virtual and face to face meetings and events. However, there are differences in the preferences expressed by different segments of the parent population.
- **Parents tend to speak to their children about career options once a month (64%)** and are confident when they do so. However, there are indications that this has fallen since the pandemic, and the confidence of the most disengaged parents' has eroded the most. In addition, **fewer conversations are being initiated by children asking their parents for advice (24% in August 2019 vs. 21% in October 2020)**.
- **Parents are predominantly informed by their own experiences (51%) when speaking to their children about careers rather than information provided by schools and colleges (27%)**. This pattern is replicated with respect to conversations about education options, although schools and colleges are seen as a more common source of information in relation to education (37%).
- **Positively, two thirds (67%) of parents said some positive action resulted from their most recent conversations with their children about careers**, for example their children doing further research on their own (24%) or doing research together (22%).
- **Many parents (40%) described the career guidance they received when they were at school as bad or very bad**, and for those Anxious and frustrated parents this rises

to 62%. This may be due to the lack of experiences they had (for example, only 38% had work experience, and only 11% visited an FE college). **However, positively, many parents think career guidance has improved and their children receive better career guidance than when they were in education.**

- **Parents awareness of school and college career guidance programmes increases as their child progresses**, particularly after year 10 and for parents whose children attend higher Ofsted rated schools and colleges. The best channels for communicating the careers programme include the school/college website, email and via the child themselves. The pattern of how influential channels are changes with a child's age. **In year 7 the website is the most important route for parents finding out about careers programmes, but from 11 the child becomes the best messenger of this information.**
- It is vital that all parents are receiving communications effectively and regularly from schools and colleges as parents say this would encourage them. **86% of parents said they would be likely to carry out activities with their child at home if they were prompted to do so by their child's school or college.**
- As parents begin speaking to their children about careers and education from year 7, **schools and colleges should communicate to parents about 18 months to 2 years before decisions need to be made.**

In summary, following the Coronavirus pandemic we are seeing an increasing number of parents that are concerned about the future and becoming more disengaged, although there is high satisfaction with how schools and colleges have performed during the pandemic. This indicates that it is more important than ever to engage with parents as their children navigate an uncertain education and economic landscape, but it also presents an opportunity for schools and colleges to build on these positive foundations and grow their relationships with parents.

Methodology

The findings in this report are from an online survey of 2,001 parents of secondary school students (11-18 years old) in state-funded schools and colleges in England. Fieldwork was conducted between 18th September to 6th October 2020. Comparisons are made with previous research carried out in August 2019 which also surveyed 2,050 parents with very similar demographics (gender, age, location, ethnicity, Ofsted rating of school/college, age of child(ren), whether the child has accessed FSM or is at risk of becoming NEET etc.). The research carried out in 2019 led to a segmentation of parents. Details of the approach to this segmentation are detailed in the following section. Further short surveys with a similar number of parents were carried out in February 2020 and June 2020.

The purpose of the research was to inform Gatsby's continued interest in parental engagement and career guidance, updating the insights on the views of parents, as defined by the segmentation analysis carried out by Opinium in 2019, covering parental views, knowledge and preferred modes of communication.

In particular, this research aims to inform support and communications approaches in regard to:

- Understanding what information parents need now to help their children make informed education and career choices?
- Understanding how parents would like to receive this information?
- Understanding how and where parents are accessing information about careers and education choices?

Gatsby will be starting to pilot activities and communications in selected schools and colleges and with parents from early 2021.

Summary of parent attitudinal segments

People are different in their attitudes, behaviour and needs, and therefore a one-size-fits all approach to communication and support is not the most effective way to help parents. Our previous research (carried out in August 2019) therefore created various parent profile types using attitudinal segmentation analysis. Segmentation analysis is a process to understand the differences between people. Through this, we created profiles of types of parents based on parents' values and attitudes in relation to education and career options as well as their relationship with their child and child's school. A bank of 47 statements were used in the quantitative survey to drive the segmentation, and then cluster analysis was run to profile the segments. We arrived at 6 profiles of parents, briefly outlined below:

1. Plain-sailing optimists
2. Trust the system
3. Anxious and frustrated
4. Distant and disengaged
5. Hands on high hoppers
6. Trust the children

While the segments are devised based on attitudes rather than demographics, where there are distinct patterns in the demographics of parents within segments it has been noted in the descriptions below. It is important to recognise that this type of segmentation provides a way of looking at commonalities and trends across the whole population, rather than a description of any one individual. However, thinking about these broad categories provides a starting point for creating more tailored support to parents.

Segment 1

Plain-sailing optimists equate to 16% of our parent population. Generally, more affluent and educated, they tend to be satisfied with their child's school/college and the quality of education on offer. They actively engage with their child's education, and regularly interact with their child. They tend to be confident about their child's future and have high expectations.

Segment 2

Parents who fall into the Trust the system profile equate to 28% of the parent population, the largest profile of the six. Parents in this group are neither the wealthiest nor the poorest, placing a good deal of trust in the education system. They are well educated, with the majority having qualifications above level 3 (e.g. A levels). They are satisfied with their children's school/college and are positive about their child's prospects. They don't demand a lot from schools/colleges in terms of communication and feel that engagement levels are already adequate.

Segment 3

Parents in the Anxious and frustrated profile segment make up 9% of our parent population. These parents are more likely to be from lower income households and have higher levels of anxiety when it comes to their children. Their children tend to go to schools/colleges that have lower Ofsted ratings, and they don't feel adequately informed or engaged when it comes to their child's education. Parents in this segment are more likely to have children with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties (SEMH) and place importance on the life skills that schools/colleges can provide.

Segment 4

The Distant and disengaged parent segment equates to 21% of our parent population. This group of parents tend to have teenage children and are also more likely to be from lower income households. These parents have conversations with their children but are less likely to do this on a regular basis and consequently have quite a distant relationship with their children. Looking at their relationship with their child's school/college, we see a similar pattern, with these parents showing low levels of engagement in school/college activities and events. These parents are more likely to think it is a school/college's duty to provide careers guidance and subsequently take more of a backseat in providing this to their child.

Segment 5

14% of our parent population consists of Hands on high hopers. Parents in this segment are likely to be well educated high earners with younger children. These parents have a very hands-on approach to their child's life, being actively involved in all major decisions in their child's life. They have aspirations for their child to go on to higher education and it's important for these parents to be 'in the know' about everything related to their child's development.

Segment 6

The Trust the children segment equates to 10% of the parent population. Like parents from the Trust the system segment, these parents are neither the wealthiest nor the poorest. They are slightly more likely to be younger, with a quarter of these parents being under the age of 40. These parents typically have younger children and are more likely to have girls. They have more frequent conversations with their child and consequently are happy to take the backseat when it comes to making decisions about their child's future. They have faith in their child's decision-making abilities and are keen for their child to walk their own path and find their own way.

Research findings in detail

Overall changes in parent attitude due to the coronavirus pandemic

Growing uncertainty about the future

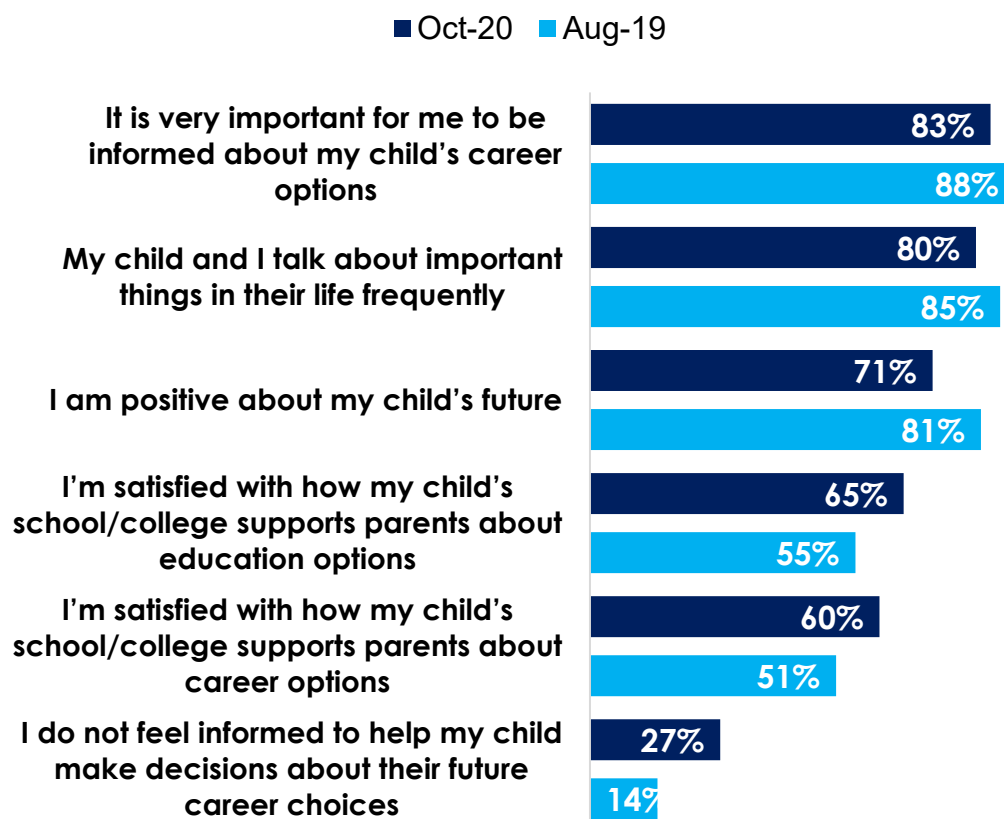
2020 was an unprecedented year for society in general, with a global Coronavirus pandemic not only changing our perceptions of normal, but our family dynamics and our plans for the future. We see the effects of all this trickle down to parent's relationships with their children and their respective schools and colleges.

Over the last few months, we have seen the Coronavirus pandemic have significant negative impact on all corners of the economy. Thus, it is perhaps expected that amidst a global Coronavirus pandemic we see that parents are feeling less informed and optimistic about their child's future.

The growing uncertainty about what lies ahead has also borne a more distant and disengaged relationship between parents, their children and their child's school or college.

Figure 1 shows how sentiment has changed amongst parents between now and just over a year ago.

Figure 1: Proportion of parents agreeing with attitudinal statements in relation to careers and the future



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Positively, parents are more likely to feel satisfied with how their child's school or college supports parents about both education and career options, with satisfaction levels increasing by 10% and 9% respectively. This is a strong indication that the efforts that schools and colleges have gone to during the Coronavirus pandemic have been recognised by the parent community. This is explored further in the 'Schools and colleges in lockdown' section later in the report.

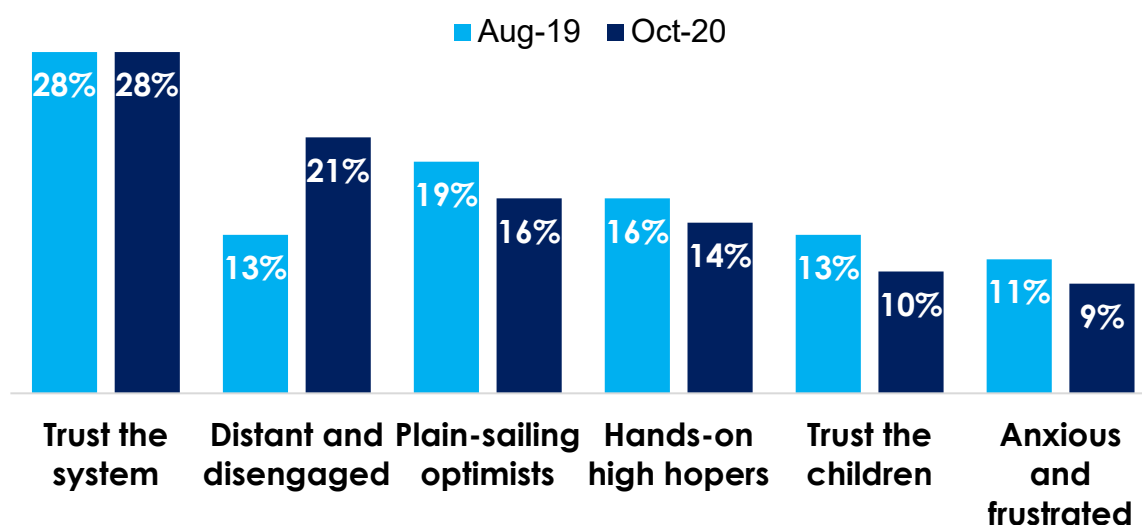
However, there is evidence of growing pessimism amongst parents. Fewer parents in 2020 felt positive about their child's future; 71% down from 81% in 2019. In addition, twice as many parents now say that they do not feel informed to help their child make decisions about their future career choices (27%, up from 14% in 2019).

Changes in parent attitudinal segments due to the Coronavirus pandemic

Greatest shift in Distant and disengaged segment

The effects of a turbulent and unprecedented year is seen in the growth of the Distant and disengaged segment by 8 percentage points. A segment that was previously one of the smallest, has become the second largest segment (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Segmentation distribution in August 2019 compared to October 2020

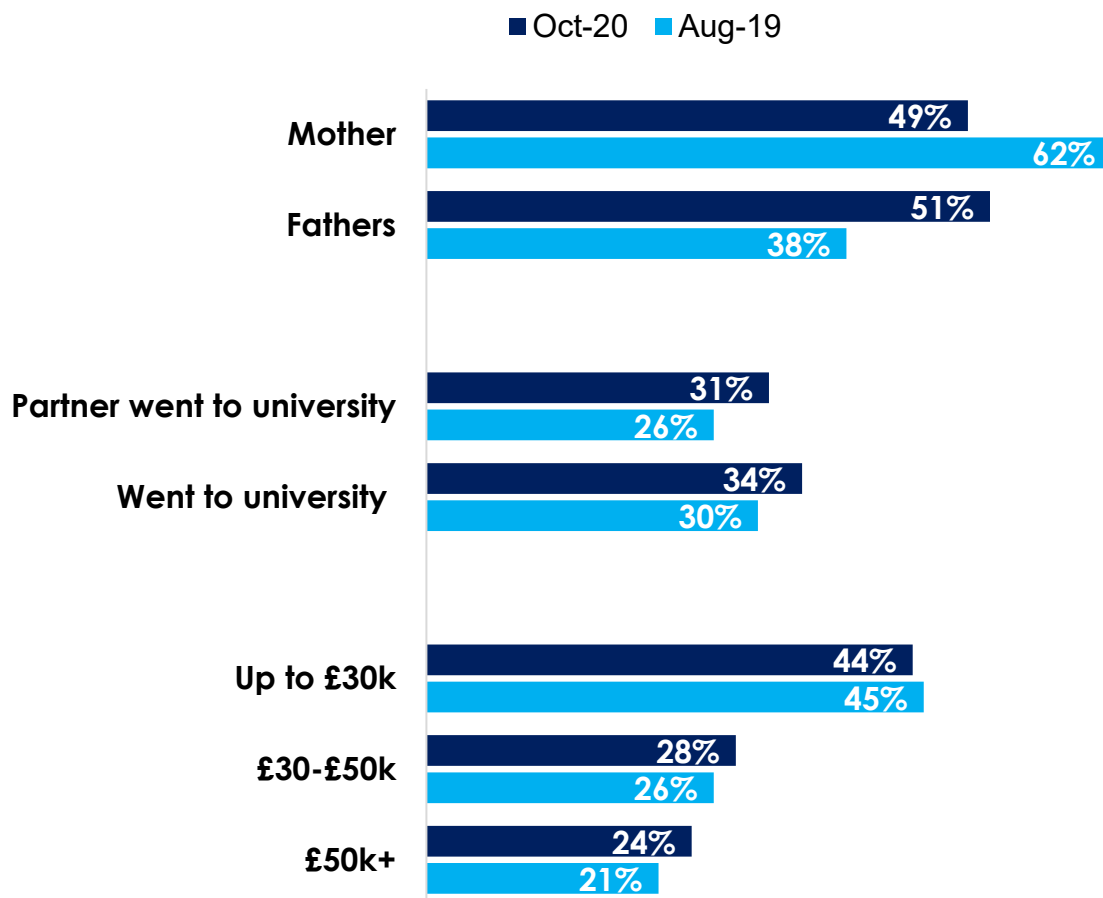


To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

The growth of the distant and disengaged segment has also resulted in a change in the composition of the segment too. While parents in this segment are typically less affluent and evenly split between mothers and fathers, we are seeing more dads and parents with higher incomes fall into this group (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distant and disengaged segment by gender, education, and income

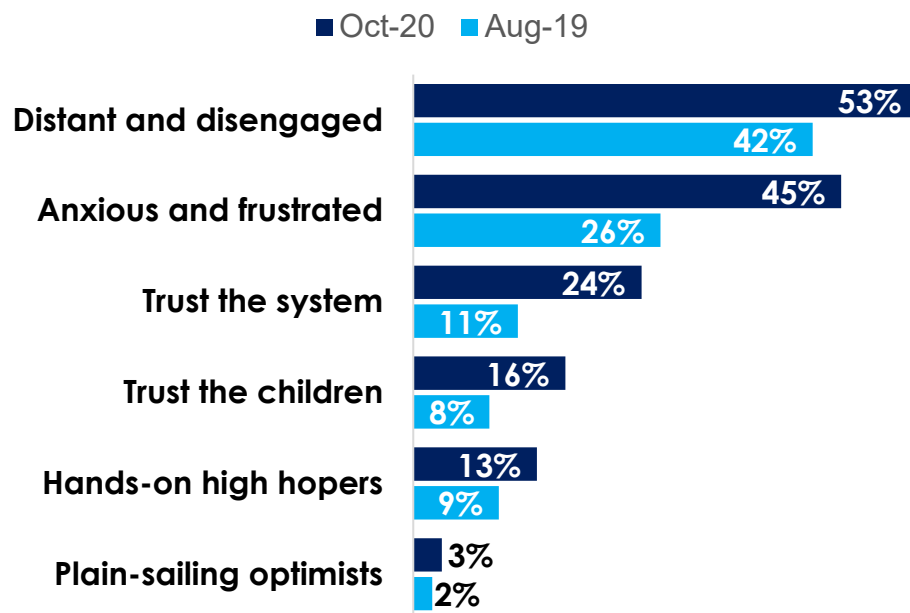


Gender, education and income
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Higher levels of disengagement among all parents regardless of segment

There are certain segments where we would have perhaps expected higher levels of disengagement, such as the Distant and disengaged group, and the Anxious and frustrated group. Regardless of segment, at an overall level we see higher levels of disengagement amongst parents, with more parents feeling that they are not informed to help their child make future career choices. See Figure 4.

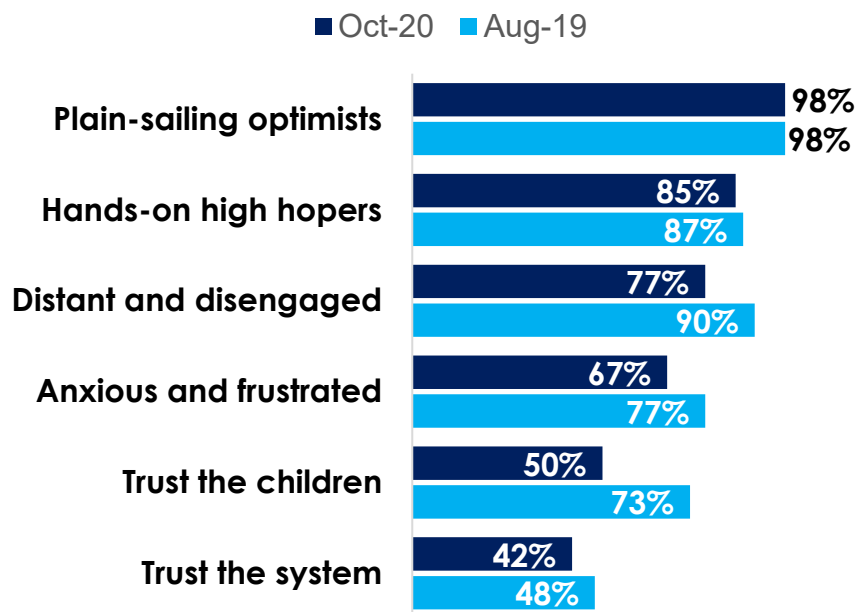
Figure 4: Proportion of parents agreeing that they do not feel informed to help their child make decisions about their future career choices



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I do not feel informed to help my child make decisions about their future career choices.
 Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Delving deeper into the sources of disenfranchisement for parents, we see a growing pessimism amongst a large number of parents across the segments, including those that are typically more positive such as the Trust the children segment. This is highlighted in the lower levels of endorsement for statements such as ‘I am positive about my child’s future’ for parents across all segments bar one (Figure 5). That said, the levels of positivity about the future is still relatively high amongst parents (71% agree that they are positive about their child’s future, figure 1).

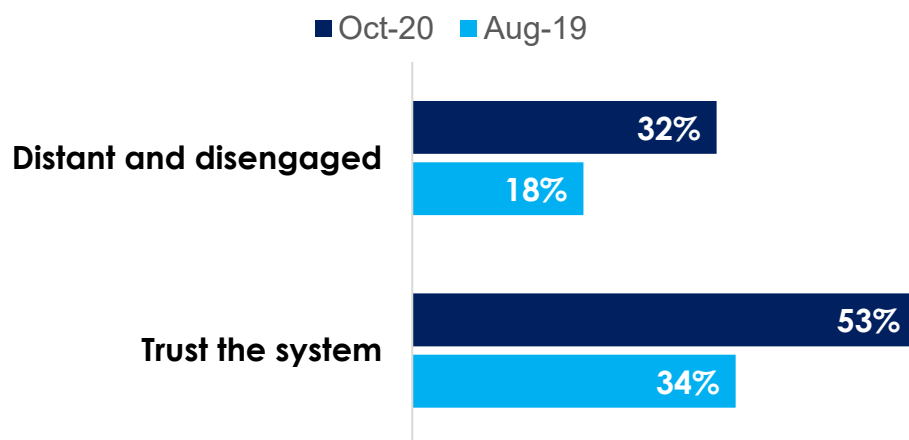
Figure 5: Proportion of parents agreeing that they feel positive about their child’s future



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I am positive about my child's future
 Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

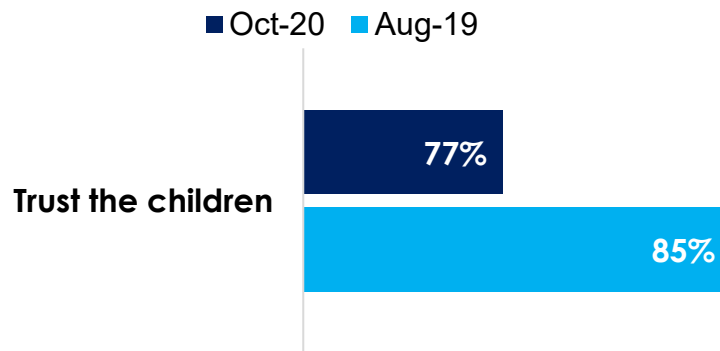
While the Coronavirus pandemic has pushed a significant number of parents in the direction of disengagement, it has also paved the way for a more hands-on parent. For parents that were already very involved in their child's decision making we find that they are even more likely to take this approach. We also see higher levels of endorsement for behaviour such as this across segments which typically do not have this approach. For instance, both Trust the system and Distant and disengaged parents are more likely to have a clear idea of the type of career they envisage their child in (see Figure 6). Similarly, Trust the children parents are less likely to have confidence in their child's ability to make educational decisions without them (see Figure 7), indicating that there is an increased need to support these parents to have more informed discussions with their children.

Figure 6: Proportion of parents agreeing that they have a clear idea of the type of career they envisage their child in



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I have a clear idea of the type of career I envisage my child in
 Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Figure 7: Proportion of parents agreeing that they feel confident that their child can make decisions about their education with little input from them



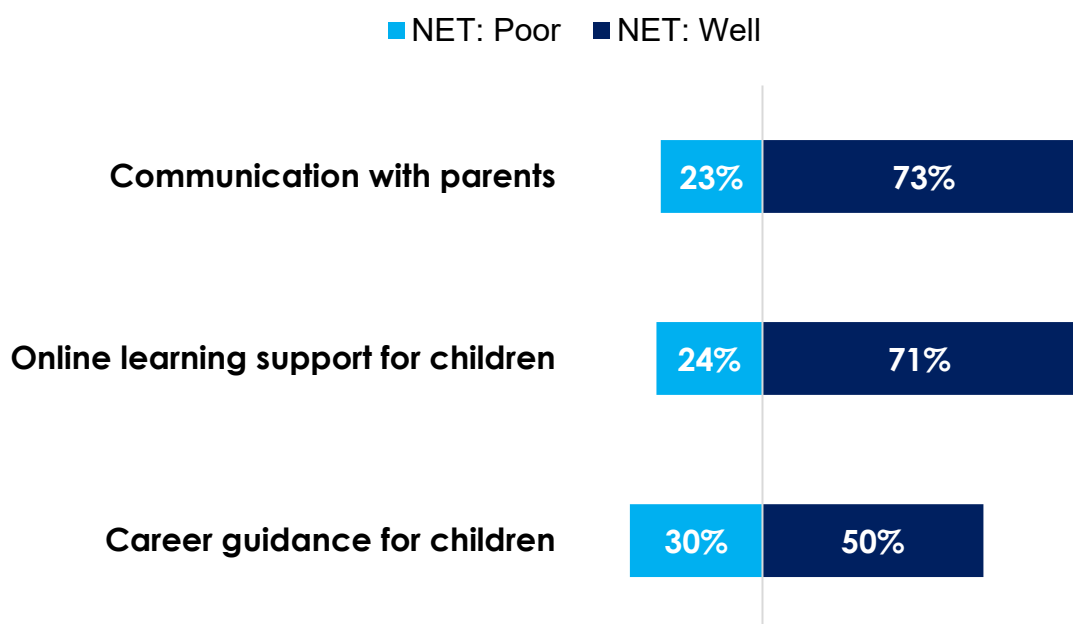
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I am confident that my child can make their own decisions about their education with little input from me
 Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

School and college relationships with parents in lockdown

General consensus that schools/colleges have performed well in lockdown

There is a consensus among parents of children in year 8+ that schools and colleges have performed well during the coronavirus pandemic across a number of areas. Over seven in ten (73%) parents with children in year 8+ think their child’s school or college did well in terms of communicating with them during lockdown (between March 2020 and October 2020), and that they have done well providing learning support for children (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Performance of child’s school/college across the following measures



Thinking about the time during lockdown, how well has your child’s school or college done in terms of the following areas?
 Base: All parents of secondary school age children in year 8 or above: 1,592

Half of parents say their child’s school or college has also done well providing careers guidance for children (50%). A sizeable proportion of parents (20%) said they did not know how well their child’s school or college performed in this area or said that careers guidance was not applicable. This may indicate a shift of priorities away from career guidance and towards core curriculum subjects and wellbeing during the Coronavirus pandemic.

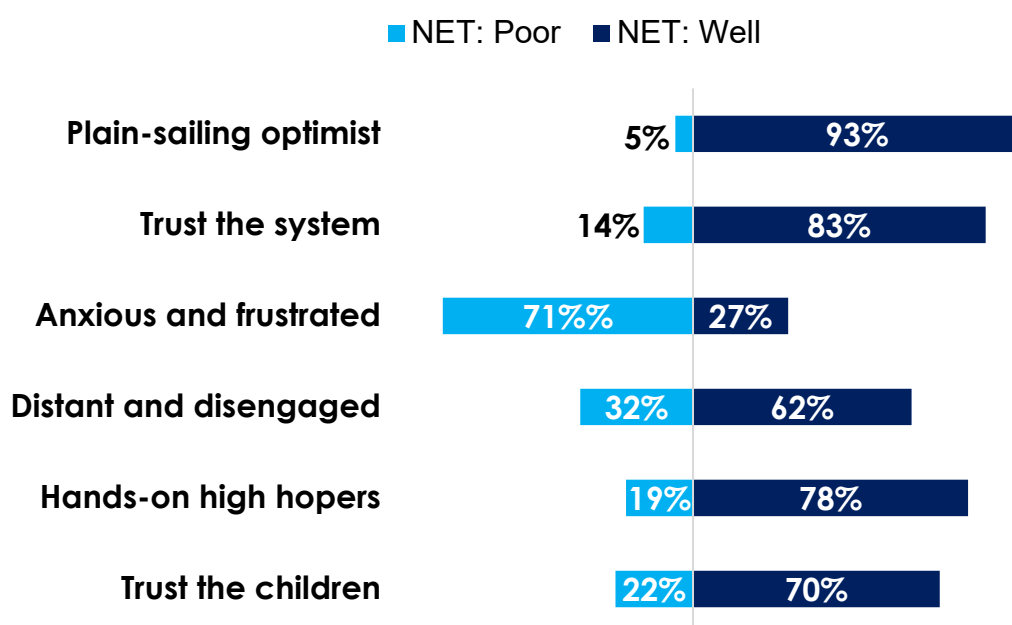
Satisfaction varies between institution type

Parents of children that attend a general further education college were the most likely to say their child’s college has not done well in communicating with them (32%). There was also a correlation with Ofsted rating. Parents with children in schools/colleges with a better Ofsted rating were more likely to say their child’s school/college performed well in communicating with them. Over four fifths (83%) of parents whose child went to a school/college with an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted rating said their child’s school/college communicated well with them, compared to three in four (75%) parents whose child went to a school/college with a ‘good’ rating, and just over half (55%) of parents whose child went to a school/college with a ‘requires improvement’ rating.

As expected, the Anxious and frustrated segment was less likely to think schools/colleges have communicated well

Anxious and frustrated parents displayed higher levels of dissatisfaction with their child’s school/college than other segments (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Performance of child’s school/college in communicating with parents by segment



Thinking about the time during lockdown, how well has your child’s school or college done in terms of the following areas?

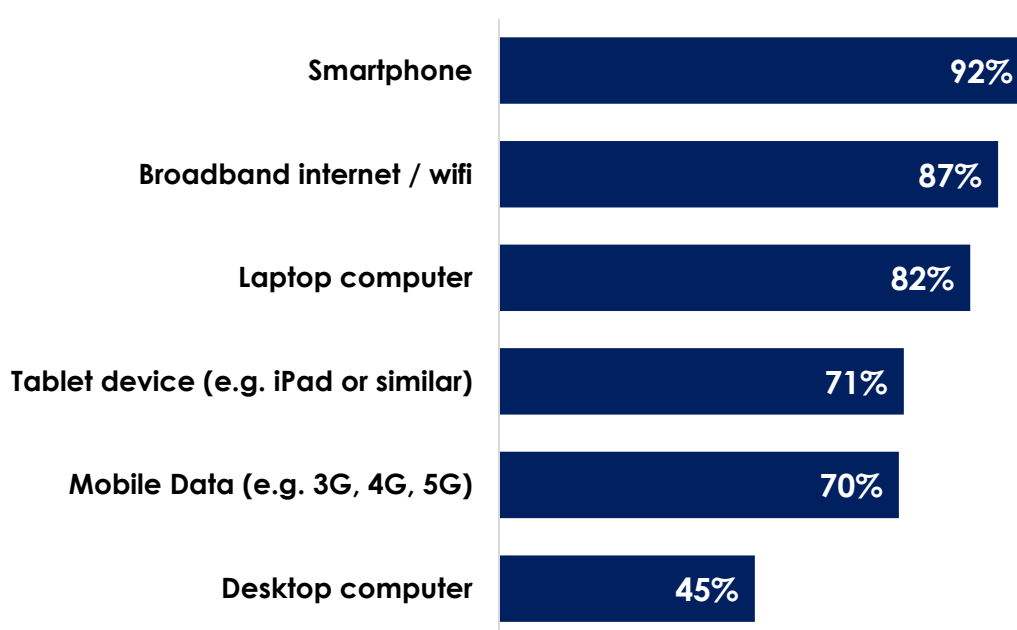
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Schools and colleges engagement with parents

Access to technology and devices at home is high

Almost all (92%) parents we surveyed had access to a smartphone at home and access to broadband was also high (87%). In comparison, access to mobile data was lower (70%) (Figure 10). We recognise that digital access is complex, and these results do not indicate that there is equity of access to sufficient technology in homes.

Figure 10: Proportion of parents who have access to the following devices and services in their home



*Which of the following devices and services do you have access to in your home?
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001*

There was variation by segment type in terms of levels of access to the above devices and services in homes. Across all devices and services, Distant and disengaged parents were less likely to say they had access to them in their homes compared to the other segments. However, access rates were still fairly high. For instance, 78% of Distant and disengaged parents had access to broadband internet/Wi-Fi at home compared to the average of 87%.

Parents are still highly likely to participate in a one-to-one session with school and college staff when government guidelines allow

The current circumstances have not changed attitudes to the way that parents would like to participate in careers guidance programmes in their child's school or college. Parents are still very much keen for one-to-one sessions when government guidelines allow, although this session does not necessarily have to be with a careers specialist. Three in four (76%) parents would like in person one-to-one meetings with staff and a similar number (73%) would want in person one-to-one meetings with the careers team (e.g. a careers advisor or Careers Leader). In comparison, in person group sessions are slightly less popular. This suggests that parents still prefer a personalised approach to education or careers guidance activities (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Proportion of parents likely to engage in education or careers guidance activities, when government guidance allows



When local guidance allows, how likely would you be to participate or engage in the following education and careers guidance activities run by the school / college that your child attends?

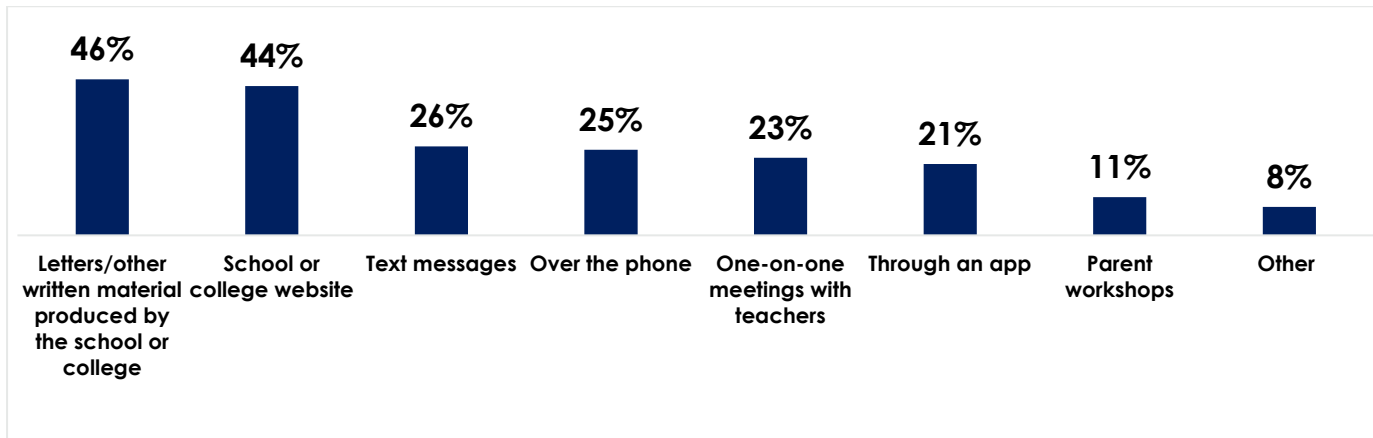
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Despite virtual sessions being less popular than in-person sessions, there is still a high interest in engaging with these approaches. We also see a similar pattern of virtual group sessions being less popular than virtual one-on-one sessions.

Parents primarily expect to be communicated to via letters and websites. This is the same for careers and education options.

Less than one in four (23%) parents think that schools/colleges will be holding in person sessions with them over the 6 months following the survey (October 2020 -March 2021), likely in recognition of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. Parents instead expect to be communicated to via letters or other written materials (46%) or through the school/college website (44%). A further one in four (26%) expect updates via text messages or over the phone (25%) (see figure 12).

Figure 12: How parents expect their child’s school/college to communicate with them over the next 6 months



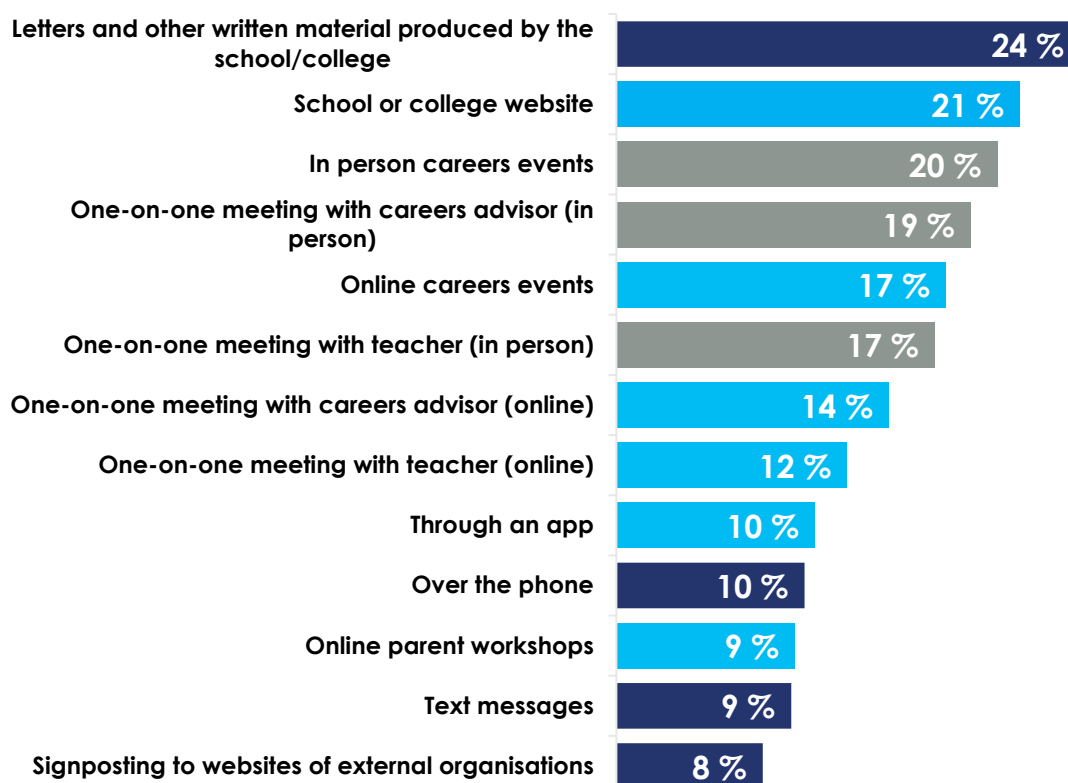
*How do you expect your child(ren)’s school or college to communicate with you over the next 6 months?
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001*

Communication through school and college websites and letters alongside one-to-one support is preferred by parents for information on careers and education

When asked about how they would prefer to be communicated to (rather than how they expected to be communicated to), parents indicated they prefer receiving information from schools/colleges via letters or through the school/college website. In person communication methods are then preferred ahead of online communications as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: How parents would like to receive information over the next 6 months to support their child in making decisions about their education or future career





How would you like to receive information from school or college to support you in helping your child to make decisions about their education or their future career?

Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

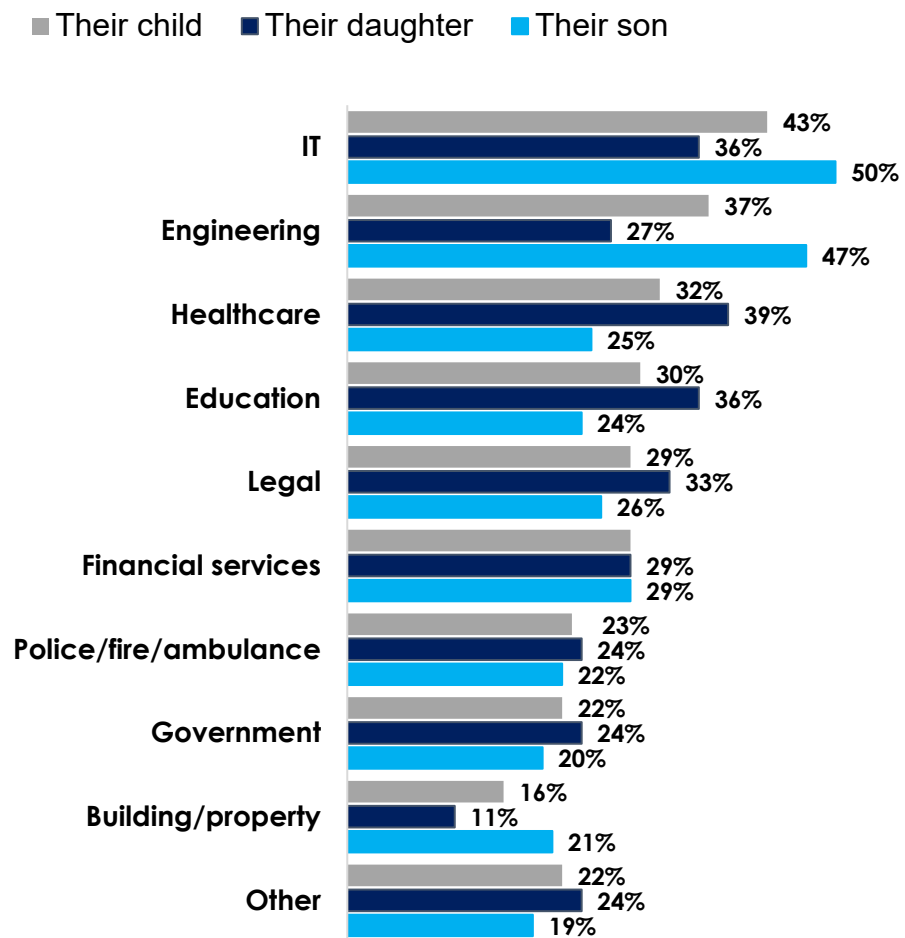
There are differences in preferences according to segment type. Plain-sailing optimists and Trust the system parents most prefer receiving information on education and career options through the school or college website. The rest of the segments most prefer receiving this information through letters and other written material. Anxious and frustrated parents and Hands-on high hoper parents are more likely to prefer one-on-one in person meetings with career advisors than other parents.

Parental aspirations for their children

The careers or jobs that parents would advise their children to have differ by gender

Overall, IT and engineering are the sectors that parents would most advise their children to pursue (see Figure 13), but this hides a significant difference by the gender of the child they are being asked about. Comparing how parents answer depending on whether they are asked about a son or daughter shows that parents are more likely to advise their sons to pursue IT or engineering, with other career choices being ranked lower, while parents of daughters are more likely to advise pursuing a wider range of careers, with the top ones being healthcare, IT, education and legal services. This indicates that some parents still retain biases in relation to gender and careers (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Top 10 jobs that parents would advise their children to pursue



*What types of jobs or careers would you advise your child to pursue¹?
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001*

IT, engineering and legal are considered by parents to offer a good salary, while healthcare and education are thought of as professions that help make a difference

A range of reasons for recommending careers were expressed by parents. These reasons varied across different sectors. For example, IT, Engineering and Legal professions are seen as offering good salaries, while healthcare and education are seen as helping to make a difference (Figure 15). The top reasons for choosing careers are most commonly being enjoyable, offering job security and being a challenge. However, offering a good salary, which is the top or second top reason for IT, engineering or legal does not even feature in the top five reasons for healthcare or education.

¹ The list of jobs presented to parents was a condensed version of jobs listed by the ONS

Figure 15: Top 5 reasons why parents would advise their children to pursue certain careers

| IT | Engineering | Legal | Healthcare | Education |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Good salary 53% | Enjoyable 50% | Good salary 59% | Making a difference 62% | Making a difference 55% |
| Enjoyable 48% | Good salary 48% | Prestigious 52% | Enjoyable 47% | Enjoyable 52% |
| Job security 41% | A challenge 48% | A challenge 42% | Job security 39% | Job security 50% |
| Progression 36% | Prestigious 40% | Job security 41% | A challenge 32% | A challenge 32% |
| A challenge 31% | Job security 37% | Enjoyable 33% | Prestigious 32% | Prestigious 28% |

Why would you advise your child to pursue the following jobs or careers?

Base: Parents selecting each job: IT: 858, Engineering: 736, Healthcare: 636, Education: 593, Legal: 583, Other: 433

While there were differences by gender for the careers parents would recommend to their child, there are few differences in the reasons *why* they would recommend these careers. That said, for IT, a more male leaning career recommendation, parents of boys are more likely to say IT is a career they would enjoy compared to parents of girls (52% vs 41%), while in education, a more female leaning career recommendation, parents of girls are more likely to say education is something they would enjoy compared to parents of boys (56% vs 47%).

Leisure and retail are the least popular jobs for parents to recommend to their children

When it comes to jobs that parents would advise their children not to pursue, the industries that top the list are hospitality (hotels/leisure/entertainment) and retail/wholesale. Unlike with jobs parents *would* advise their children to pursue, there is less of a pronounced difference based on the gender of the child.

When we look at the reasons why parents are reluctant to advise their children to pursue these careers we see that pay and job security are the most common concerns (Figure 16).

For example, among parents who wouldn't advise their children to pursue a career in retail, 43% said they didn't think it would give them job security, and 40% said they wouldn't earn enough. A further 35% said they didn't think they would enjoy a job in this sector.

Figure 16: Top 3 reasons why parents would advise their children to not pursue certain careers

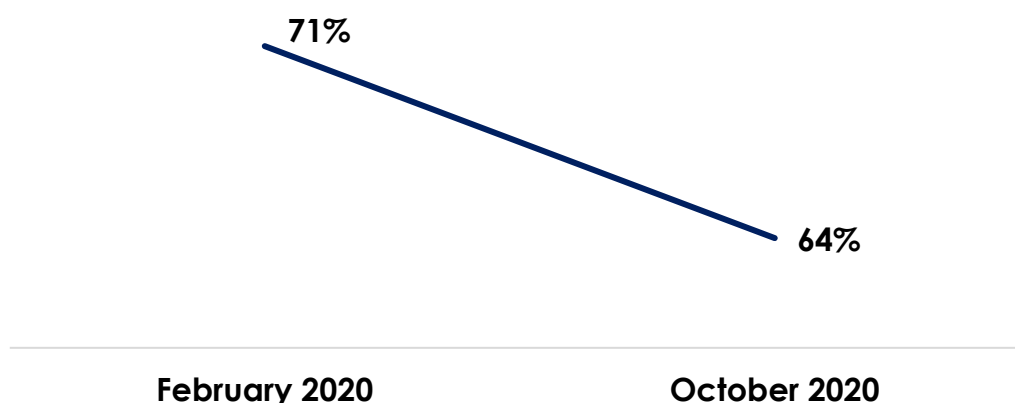
| Hotels/leisure/entertainment | Retail/wholesale | Charity (not-for-profit) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lack of job security 43% | Not a good salary 40% | Not a good salary 49% |
| Not a good salary 40% | Not fulfilling 40% | Lack of security 28% |
| Lack of enjoyment 35% | Lack of job security 37% | Lack of enjoyment 23% |

Conversations with children

Parents are continuing to have conversations with their child about education and career options but there is evidence of a more distant relationship

Regardless of the current climate, parents are still having conversations with their child about education and career options. Two in three (68%) parents have conversations about education options with their child at least once a month, and a similar proportion (64%) discuss career options. However, it does appear these conversations are happening less frequently than before the Coronavirus pandemic, hinting at a more distant relationship between parents and their child; in February 2020, 71% of parents were having these conversations about career options at least once a month (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Proportion of parents who have conversations with their child about career options at least once a month



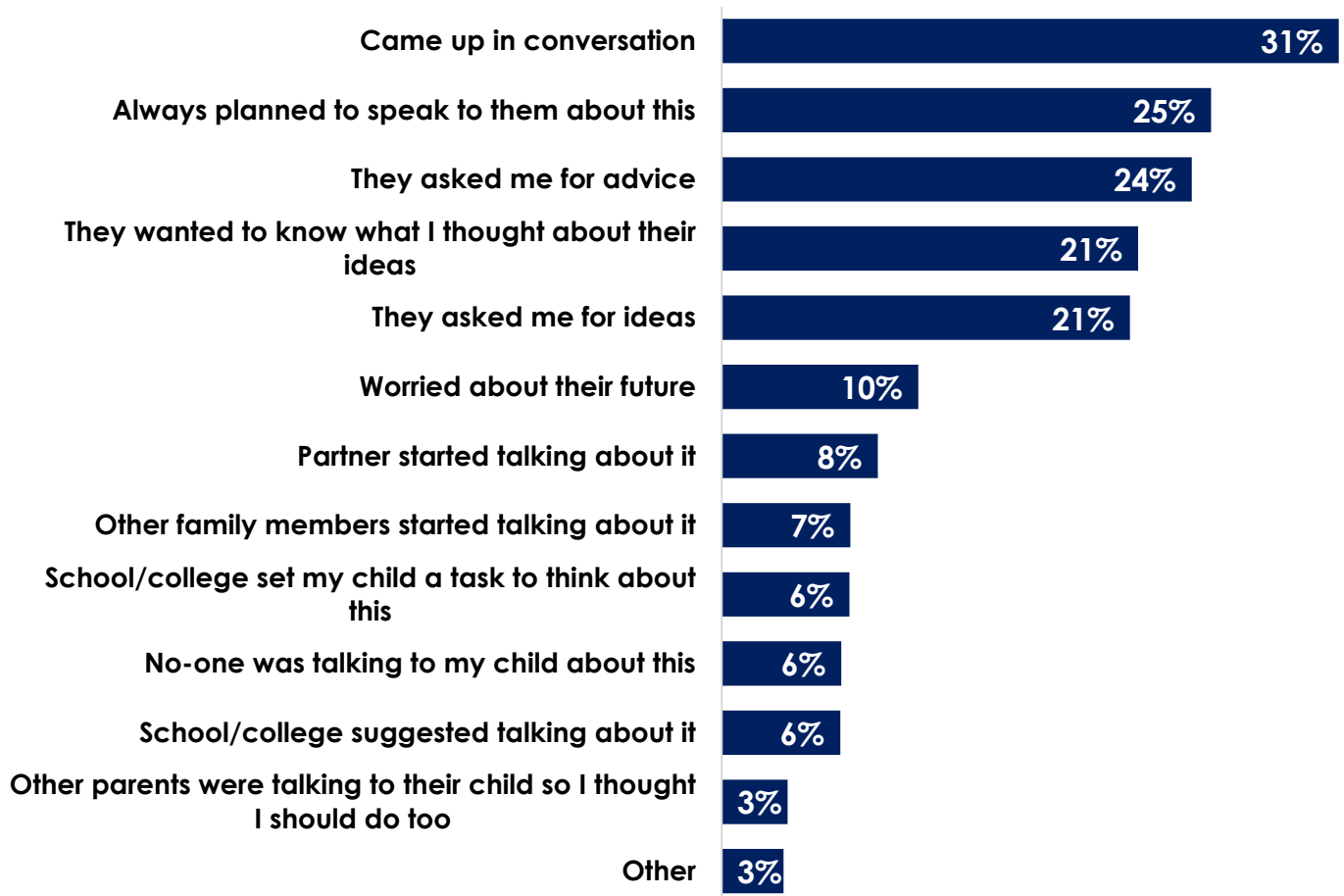
*How often do you have conversations with your child(ren) about their career options?
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001*

Trust the children parents and Distant and disengaged parents are less likely to be having conversations at least once a month with their child about career options compared to other parents.

Conversations are less likely to be inspired by the natural interaction between parents and children

When asked about what prompts career conversations with their children, the most common answer was that it simply came up in conversation (31%), followed by the parent always planning to speak to their child about future career options (25%).

Figure 18: Proportion of parents who were prompted by the following to have conversations with their child about their future career options

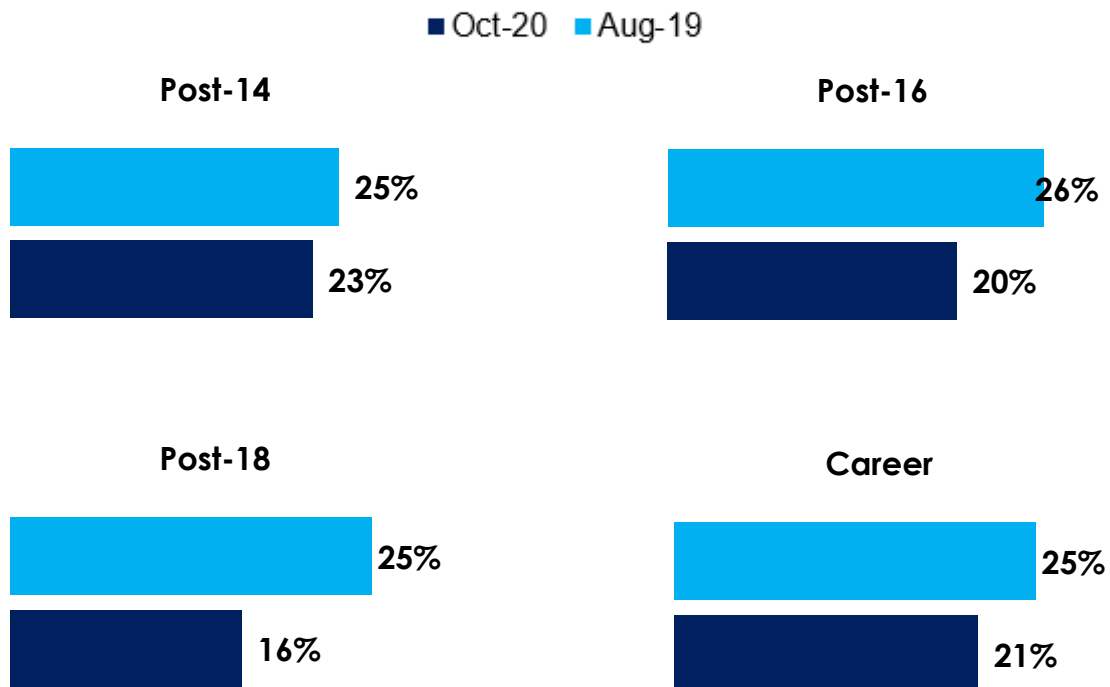


What prompted you to talk with your child about their future options?

Base: All parents of secondary school age children who have spoken to their child about career options: 1,949

Further hinting at the growing distance between parents and children, we see that these conversations are less likely to be inspired by organic interactions between parents and children since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. For instance, when asked about the conversations that took place around all the key decision-making points (post-14, post-16, post-18 and career) parents reported in October 2020 that they are less likely to be prompted by children asking them for advice or ideas than in August 2019 (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Proportion of parents who have conversations with their child about their future options because of their child asking them for advice

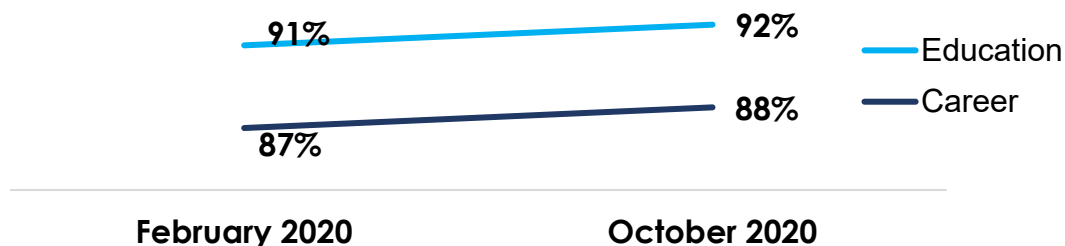


What prompted you to talk with your child about their future options?
 Base: Post-14 (1,950) Post-16 (1,950) Post-18 (1,966) Career (1,949)

Parents remain confident when they do have conversations and are mainly relying on their own experiences to inform these conversations

The dip in the frequency of conversations about education and career options between parents and children has not however affected the confidence parents feel when having these discussions, with most parents still feeling confident when talking to their child about both education and career options (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Proportion of parents who feel very or fairly confident talking to their child about education and career options

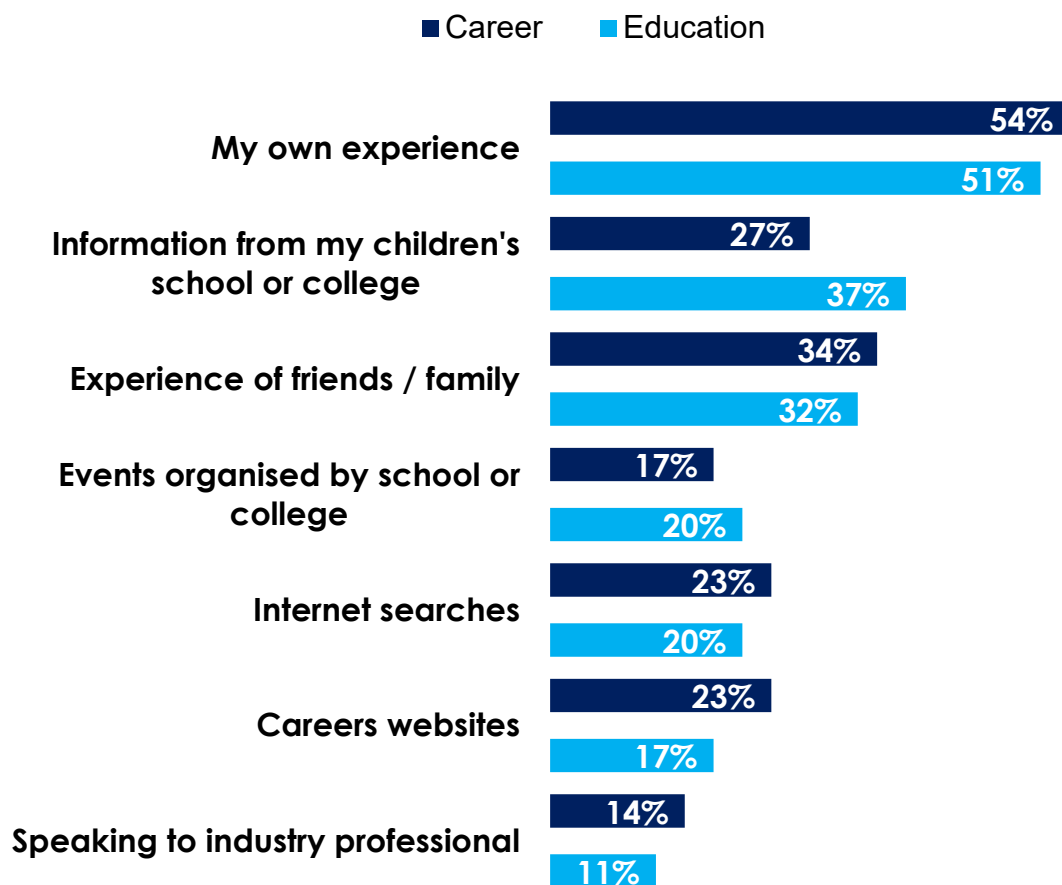


How confident do you feel talking to your child(ren) about their options for the following?
 Base: All parents: 2,001

Confidence does vary by segment. For instance, Distant and disengaged parents and Anxious and frustrated parents are less likely to feel confident discussing career options with their child than other parents.

Parents' confidence in having these discussions can perhaps be tied to them relying on their own experiences to inform their conversations about education and careers with their child. Naturally, they probably feel more versed in the path that they took and so find it easier to relay this information to their child. Information from schools and colleges in relation to careers is only relied upon by 27% of parents, who draw more on the experiences of their own family and friend network. Schools and colleges are seen by parents as a more important source of information for education choices (see figure 21).

Figure 21: Proportion of parents who say the following sources of information have informed their conversations about education and career

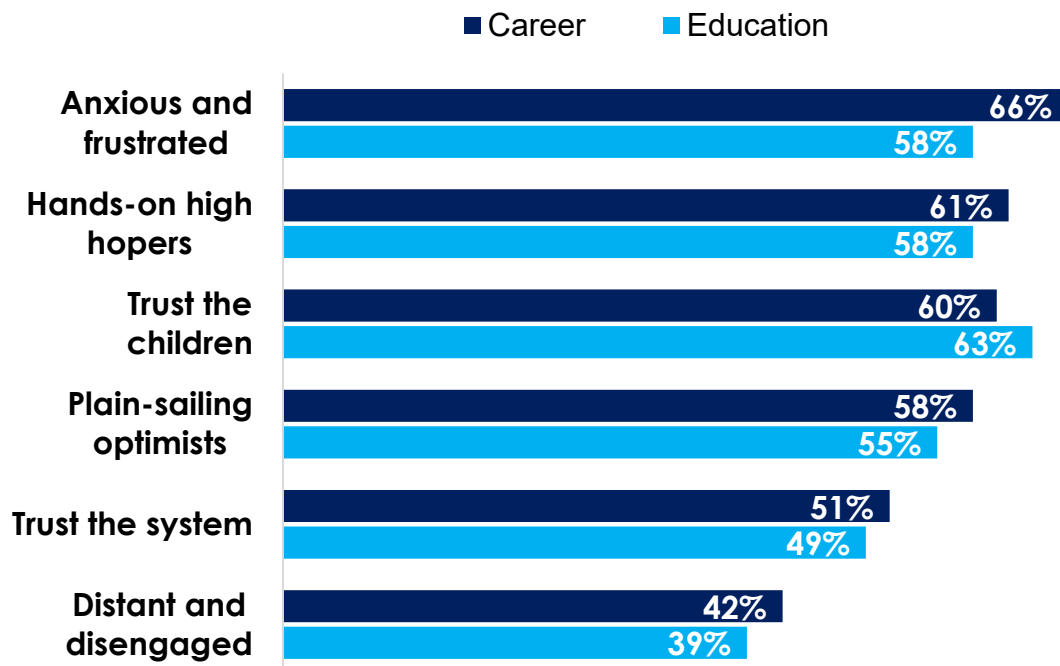


What informs the conversations that you have about...

Base: All parents who have conversations with their children about education and career: 1,966

However, as we might expect, some segments are more likely than others to rely on their own experience when having these conversations. Trust the children parents are the most likely of all parents to rely on personal experience (63%) in regards to conversations about education, while the Anxious and frustrated are the most likely to rely on their own experience in the case of career advice (66%) (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: Proportion of parents that rely on their own experience to inform conversations about education and career by segment



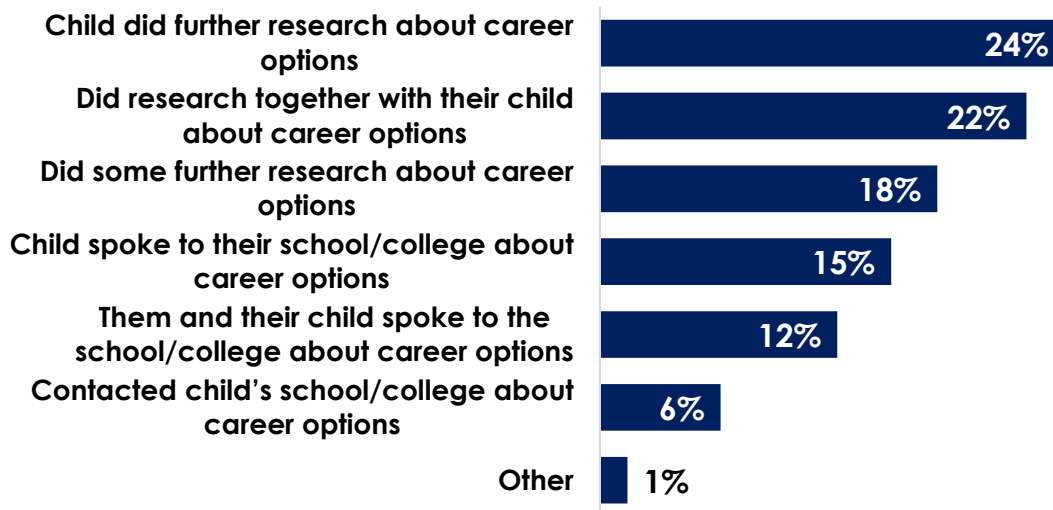
What informs the conversations that you have about...

Base: All parents who have conversations with their children about education and career: 1,966

The majority of parents and their children take actions as a result of these conversations

For the most part these conversations have been successful, with two in three (67%) parents who have had conversations with their child about career options noting that some action has been taken as a result of this (figure 23). The most common action taken was their child doing further research about their career options (24%), followed by the parent and child doing research together about career options (22%) (see Figure 23).

Figure 23: Proportion of parents who say their child has taken the following actions as a result of conversations about career options



*What was the result of the last conversation you had with your child about their career options?
Base: All parents who have conversations with their children about education and career: 1,949*

There are differences by segment. Parents in the Plain-sailing optimist segment are the most likely to have seen any result following a conversation about career options (82%), followed by Trust the system parents (81%) and Anxious and frustrated parents (81%). In comparison, Trust the children parents were the least likely to say this (64%).

Parent perspectives on their own experiences of work and career guidance

Family is far more important to parents than their careers

Almost nine in ten parents would agree that 'my family is more important to me than my career'. There is very little difference in this across different demographics including gender, child's school Ofsted rating, and income, though only three quarters of parents in the Distant and disengaged category agree with this.

Most parents consider their work to be a career and not just a job

Just over half of working parents (53%) agreed that they 'consider my work to be a career and not just a job' while 24% disagreed.

There is a clear trend towards people who have higher paying, full-time jobs and from less deprived areas describing their work as a career rather than a job. Working fathers are more likely than mothers to describe their work as a career (58% vs 48%). Over a third (43%) of those earning less than £30,000 said their work was a career compared to 65% of those earning over £60,000.

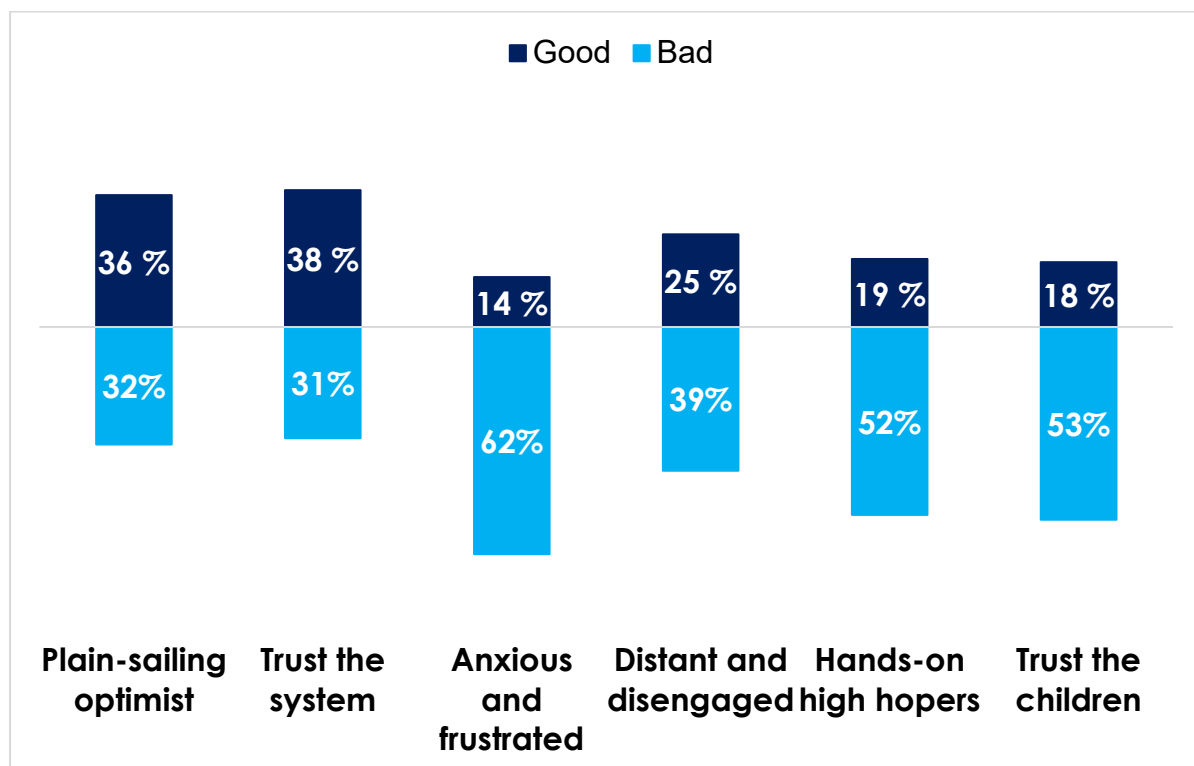
The most disengaged segments are more likely to describe their work as a job. The Anxious and frustrated and Distant and disengaged segments are most likely to say their work is a job.. These differences largely reflect the make-up of the segments, with plain-sailing optimists and hands-on high hoppers tending to be higher earners, while the Anxious and frustrated, Distant and disengaged and Trust the children groups are less likely to be higher earners and are more likely to be mothers.

Parents are more likely to say they had a bad experience of careers guidance when they were young but think this has improved today

Thinking back to when they were in school or college, two fifths (40%) of parents in our survey described the careers advice they received as 'bad' or 'very bad'. Just over a quarter (28%) described their experience as 'good' or 'very good', while three in ten (31%) said it was 'adequate'.

There were differences in experiences among the segments. Anxious and frustrated parents were much more likely to have had a bad experience of careers guidance, as were Trust the children parents and Hands-on higher hoppers (see Figure 24).

Figure 24: Parents experience of career guidance when they were in school or college (segments)

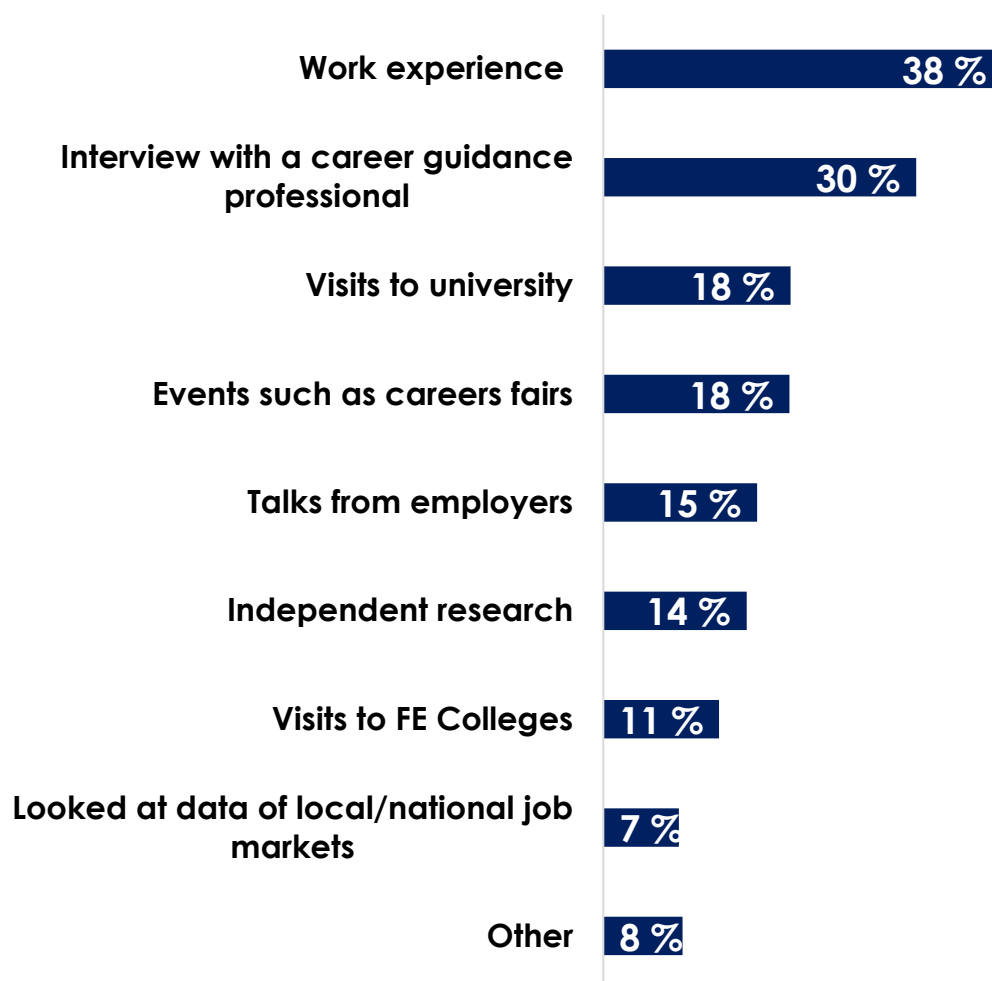


How would you describe your experience of career guidance when you were at school or college?
 Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

Perhaps the reason that many parents described their careers guidance experience as poor is because relatively few engaged in activities in this space. The most common type of careers guidance activities parents engaged with when they were younger was work experience, but

only two in five (39%) parents took part in this. Just three in ten (30%) had an interview with a career guidance professional, and only 18% visited a university or an event such as a careers fair (see Figure 25).

Figure 25: Careers guidance related activities parents engaged with when they were in school or college



*Which of the following career guidance related activities did you participate or engage in while at school or college?
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001*

Positively, when asked about their child’s experience of careers guidance, there does appear to be a perception that careers guidance has improved. Half (50%) of parents say their own experience of careers guidance in school or college is worse than the careers guidance their child receives. Only 20% said the careers guidance they received was better than the guidance their child received, while a fifth (21%) of parents think there is no difference.

There is again a difference in parents perceptions depending on their own experience of careers guidance. Those who described their careers guidance when they were younger as

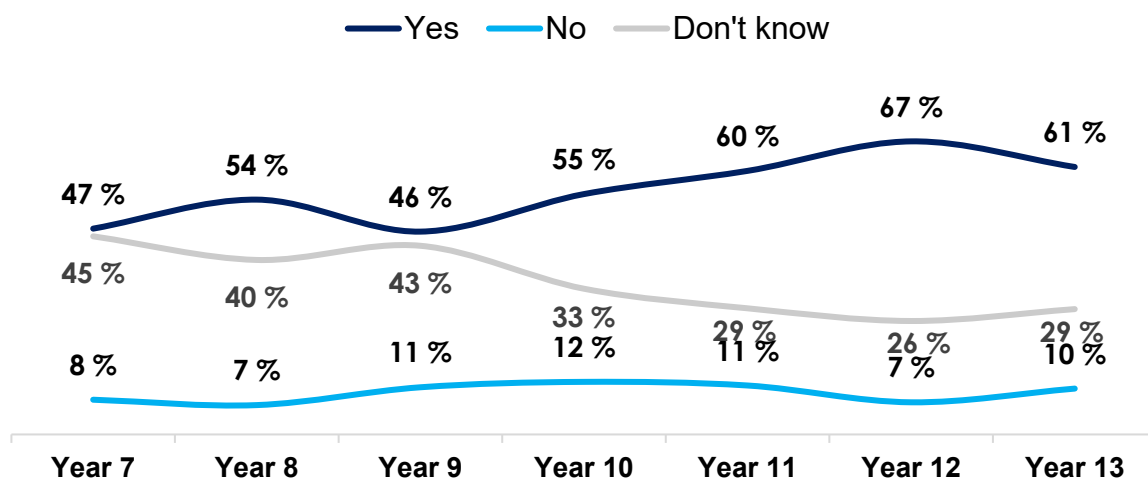
good are more likely to say that they received better careers guidance than their child, compared to those who had a bad experience of careers guidance when they were younger.

Informing parents

Parents become more aware of schools and college career programmes from year 10 onwards

Looking at awareness of career programmes it is perhaps unsurprising that parents become more aware as the child progresses through school/college. As the chart below shows (figure 26), there is a clear increase in awareness from year 10.

Figure 26: Proportion of parent who are aware of careers guidance programme by school/college year of child



*To your knowledge, does your child(ren)'s school or college provide career guidance programmes?
Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001*

Awareness levels are also very different when we look at key demographics. Parents whose children attend schools/colleges with higher Ofsted ratings are significantly more likely to be aware of careers programmes than those who have children in a school/college with a poor Ofsted rating. For example, 66% of parents who have a child in a school/college with an 'outstanding' rating are aware of their child's careers programme compared to only 43% of those with children in an 'inadequate' school/college.

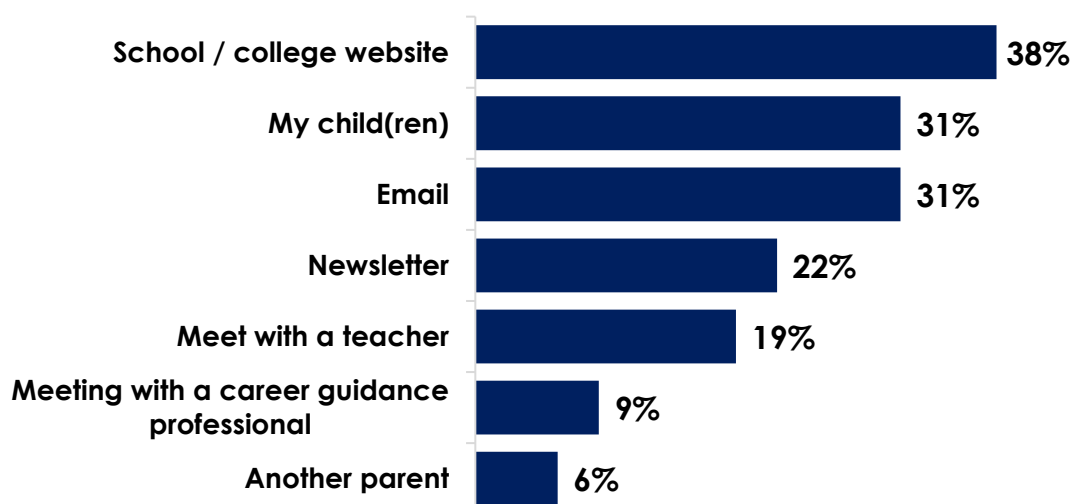
Similarly, looking at segments we see the now well-established pattern. Parents who fall into the Plain-sailing optimist (77%) or Hands-on high-hoper (62%) segments are more likely to say they are aware of the careers programmes available than Distant and disengaged parents (38%).

Interestingly, research we conducted in 2019 showed that many parents discuss education and career options with their child before year 10. One in ten parents first discuss careers options in year 7 and by year 8 a fifth have done so, and by year 9 a third (32%) have. Many parents are therefore discussing career and education options before they are aware of the school or college careers programme.

Communication from school/college and children themselves are a primary way parents hear about these programmes

When asked the ways in which they become aware of careers programmes, the school /college website, the children themselves and emails are the most common channels. Just under two-in-five (38%) of those parents who were aware said they heard about the school or college programme via the website and 31% said they heard about it directly from the child, with the same proportion saying they heard about them through an email (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Proportion of parents who hear about career guidance programmes through the following sources of information



Where did you hear about the school or college's career guidance programmes?

Base: All parents aware of their school or college's career guidance programme: 1,097

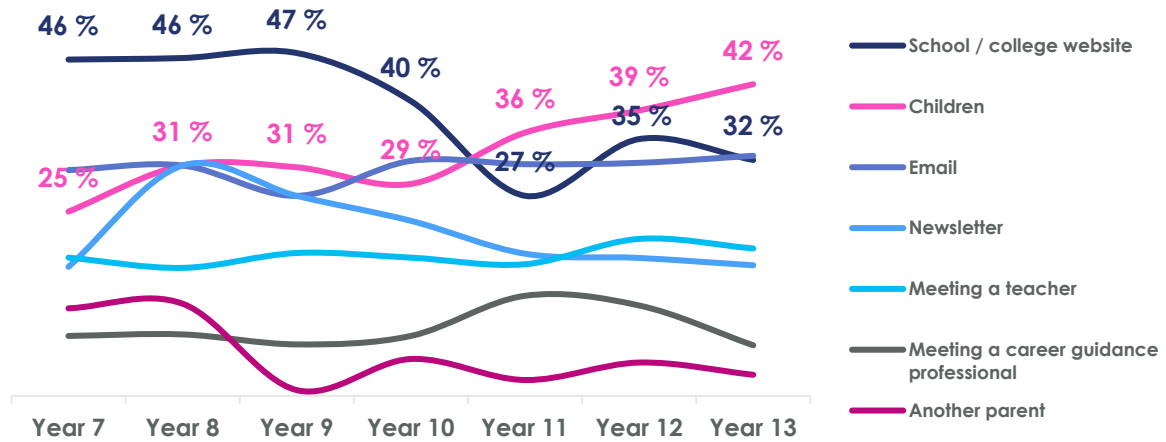
Interestingly, when we look at the segments it becomes clear that for more distant parents, those in the Distant and disengaged and Anxious and frustrated groups, they rely more on their children relative to other forms of information. For instance, 40% of Anxious and frustrated parents say they heard about the careers programme via their child. This is compared to 26% who say the same about the website and 23% who said a newsletter.

It is vital that all parents are receiving communications effectively and regularly from schools and colleges as this would inspire parents engaging with their children. 86% of parents said they would be likely to carry out activities with their child at home if they were prompted to do so by their child's school or college. Likelihood rates do vary by segment, but even so the segment with the lowest likelihood rate (Distant and disengaged parents) still have three quarters of parents saying this would make them likely to carry out activities.

Children become more important communications channel from year 11 onwards just as school/college websites become less important from year 10 onwards

When looking at this data according to the school/college year of the child, it becomes clear that from year 11 onwards children themselves become the most important channel of communication, as demonstrated in Figure 28.

Figure 28: Channels through which parents hear about careers guidance programmes via year group



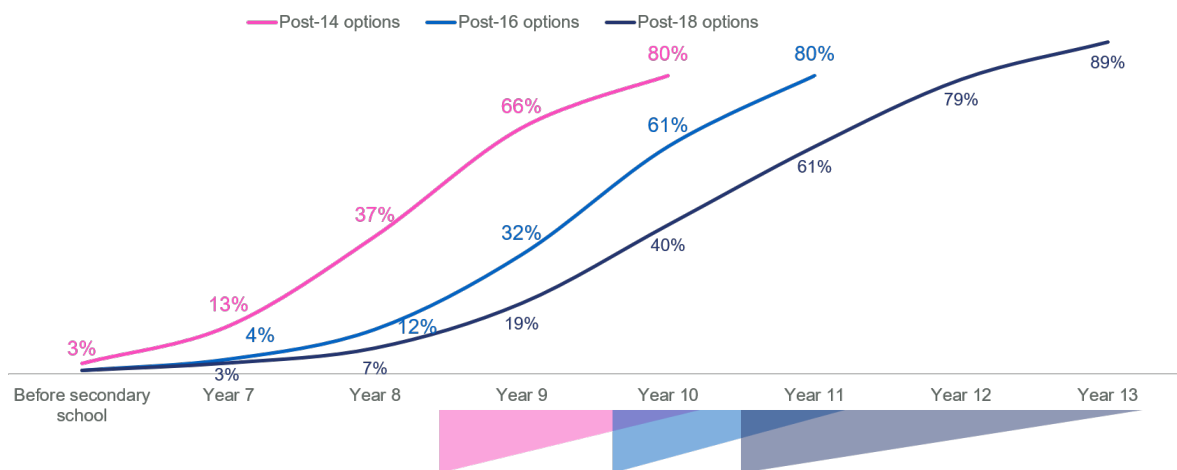
Where did you hear about the school or college's career guidance programmes?

Base: All parents aware of their school or college's career guidance programme: 1,097

It appears that schools/colleges should communicate to parents about 18 months-2 years before decisions need to be made

When we asked parents when schools and colleges should start communicating with them about various educational and career options, according to the data these conversations should begin about 18 months to 2 years before decisions need to be made. See figure 29 and 30.

Figure 29 and 30: When schools/ colleges should start talking to parents about education and career options



When do you think schools/ colleges should start talking to parents about a child's education and career options children? Cumulative

Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001



When do you think schools/ colleges should start talking to parents about a child's education and career options children? Cumulative

Base: All parents of secondary school age children: 2,001

This desire reflects the fact that many parents are having these conversations fairly early on. As mentioned earlier, 35% of parents had conversations about career options with their child by year 9 according to our research in 2019. Similarly, parents were also having conversations about education options early on too. For instance, 17% started to talk to their children about post-14 options in year 7 and by year 8 45% of parents have had this conversation.

Conclusions

The turbulence of the past year following the arrival of the Coronavirus pandemic appears to have impacted parents' perceptions and behaviours.

- Parents are feeling less informed and less optimistic about their child's future
 - In our 2019 research, 81% of parents told us they felt positive about their child's future. That has now dropped to 71%.
 - Twice as many parents now say that they do not feel informed to help their child make decisions about their future career choices (27%, up from 14% in 2019)
- Parents are having fewer conversations with their children about career options, hinting at a more distanced relationship between parents and their children
 - Conversations are happening less frequently than before the Coronavirus pandemic. In February 2020, 71% of parents were having conversations about career options at least once a month, and that dropped to 64% in October 2020
- The Distant and disengaged segment has grown from 13% in August 2019 to 21% of parents in October 2020.
 - This was previously one of the smallest segments, but this growth has resulted in it becoming the second largest segment.
 - This growth has resulted in a change in composition of the segment. While parents in this segment are typically less affluent and evenly split between mothers and fathers, we are seeing more dads and parents with higher earnings fall into this group
- Current circumstances have not changed attitudes to the way that parents would like to be communicated, with parents still preferring a personalised approach to education or careers guidance activities. Parents want to receive letters, use a website and have in-person opportunities when it comes to education and careers advice
 - There does appear to be a recognition of the Coronavirus pandemic, with less than one in four (23%) parents expecting their child's school or college to hold in person sessions with them over the next 6 months.
- Parents predominately rely on their own experience to inform conversations about education and careers.
 - Parents were more likely to say they had a bad experience of careers guidance when they were young and find that career guidance has improved and is better for their children
- It appears that schools/colleges should communicate to parents about 18 months-2 years before decisions need to be made
 - Parents become more aware of schools' and colleges' career programmes from year 10 onwards
 - Children become more of a communications channel as they get older, especially from year 11. On the other hand, school/college websites as an information channel are more important when children are in year 7 and 8.

This evidence can be used to help schools and colleges to shape support and communications to parents, in turn enabling parents to support their children through difficult education and career decisions.