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# ASPIRES 2 Project Spotlight:

*Year 11 Students' Views of Careers Education and Work Experience*



# Executive summary

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## Background:

Careers education is a topic that attracts considerable policy interest. The issue of what, how, how much, when and by whom careers-related education should be provided to young people remains a focus of much debate.

In this short project spotlight report we highlight and present analyses from the ASPIRES 2 project's national survey of 13,421 Year 11 students (age 15/16 years old). We detail students' reporting of their experiences of, and satisfaction with, careers education and work experience.



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There is a demand from students for more and better careers education – those who have had careers education are more satisfied, those who have not had it are dissatisfied.

## Key findings:

- Less than two thirds of Year 11 students have received careers education. Less than half of all students have had work experience. 57 per cent of students are satisfied with the careers education that they have received.
- There is a demand from students for more and better careers education – those who have had careers education are more satisfied, those who have not had it are dissatisfied.
- Careers provision is not just 'patchy', but is 'patterned' – particularly in terms of social inequalities. Careers education is not currently reaching those most in need of it. Girls, minority ethnic, working-class, lower-attaining and students who are unsure of their aspirations or who plan to leave education post-16 are all significantly less likely to report receiving careers education.

- The likelihood of a student having participated in work experience varied by region and by career area. Students aspiring to science and law are the least likely to have had work experience.
- Students planning on pursuing apprenticeships are more likely to have received careers education, work experience, and to be satisfied with their provision.
- Students with high science aspirations are significantly more likely than their non-science aspirant peers to have had careers education and to be satisfied with this provision.

## Recommendations:

- Policy needs to focus on careers education *participation*, not just provision, to ensure that it reaches 'underserved' communities/students.
- All those involved in careers education should *monitor, and take action* to address, inequalities in terms of which students are participating in (accessing and making use of) careers education and work experience provision and opportunities. Greater effort needs to be made to engage those who are not participating.
- *Support* should be provided to schools and careers education providers to enable them to understand, identify and address inequalities in careers education and work experience participation.
- Organisations could usefully be provided with *dedicated resourcing to target, engage and support disadvantaged groups* (especially girls, minority ethnic, working-class, bottom sets and those who are unsure or who plan to leave education post-16) to ensure that they receive appropriate careers education and work experience.
- Organisations *should take particular care with respect to schemes and opportunities that are offered on an 'opt in' and/or 'selective' basis*, to ensure that these do not contribute to the further reinforcement of patterns of unequal participation in careers education and work experience.



## Methodology: the ASPIRES 2 study

The ASPIRES 2 project is the second phase of a major national longitudinal research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (REF: ES/L002841/1), investigating young people's science aspirations and career choices age 10-19. ASPIRES 2 is the second phase of the study, extending the tracking of the cohort from 14-19. ASPIRES 2 commenced in February 2014 and will complete in 2019. Findings from the first phase of the study, focusing on children from age 10-14, can be found via the following link: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/aspires/publications2.aspx>.

The research involves large national surveys of the student cohort (over 32,000 surveys to date) and in-depth longitudinal interviews with a tracked subsample of students and parents. This project spotlight reports on findings from the most recent survey of 13,000+ Year 11 students (age 15/16, GCSE year) and interview data, which covered students' views of careers education and work experience.

<sup>1</sup> This is the number of responses remaining after data cleaning (ie after removal of duplicate and incomplete responses).

### Survey sample:

The survey data reported in this submission was collected from students in Year 11 (age 15/16 years) in academic year 2014/15 and was completed by 13,421<sup>1</sup> students who were recruited from 340

secondary schools in England (296 state schools and 44 independent). This sample represented all regions of the country and was roughly proportional to the overall national distribution of schools in England as measured by attainment and proportion of students eligible for free school meals.

### Interview sample:

The reported interview data pertains to 132 interviews which were conducted with 70 students and 62 parents (all of who had been previously tracked since students were at primary school, age 10/11), conducted while the students were in Year 11 (age 15/16 years).

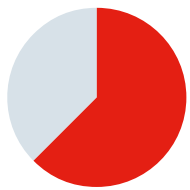
On the survey, students were asked questions about:

- 1 whether they had received any careers education relevant to their aspirations;
- 2 whether they had done any work experience;
- 3 how satisfied (or not) they are with the careers education they have received to date.

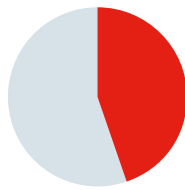
Throughout this report, any reference to 'significance' relates to the results of chi-square tests for independence with post-hoc analyses investigating cellwise adjusted residuals. Any odds ratios presented refer to the results of logistic regression analyses. Please contact the authors for further details if required.



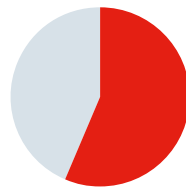
# Findings



**62.5%** received careers education



**44.8%** undertook work experience



**56.5%** were satisfied with their careers education

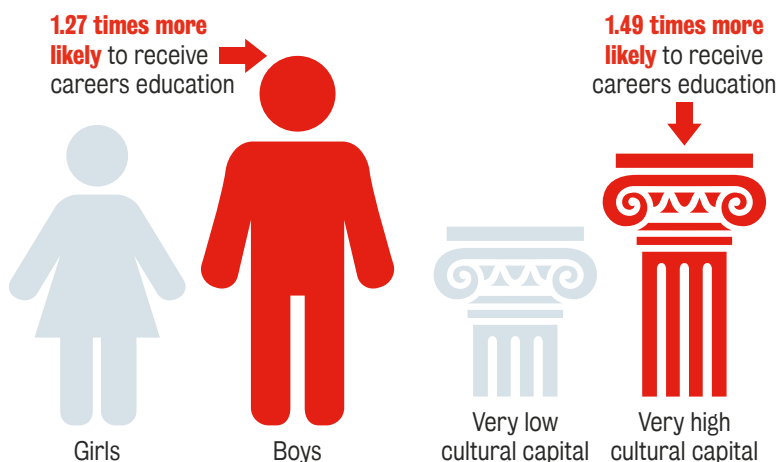
*Less than two thirds of Year 11 students have received careers education:* Overall, 62.5 per cent of the survey sample reported having received careers education, 44.8 per cent had undertaken work experience and 56.5 per cent were satisfied with the careers education that they had received.

*There is a demand from students for careers education:* Students who reported receiving careers education were significantly more likely to report being happy with the provision. Those students who did not receive careers education were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied.

*Careers provision is not just 'patchy', but is patterned – particularly in terms of social inequalities<sup>ii</sup>*

Notably:

- ♦ **Gender:** Boys report receiving significantly more careers education than girls. They also appear to be doing more work experience than girls and are significantly more satisfied than girls with the careers education they receive. (Boys are 1.27 times more likely than girls to receive careers education).
- ♦ **Ethnicity:** White students are significantly more likely than minority ethnic students to report receiving careers education and to participate in work experience. Black and Chinese students are proportionally least likely to report receiving careers education.
- ♦ **Social Class:** Students from less advantaged social backgrounds (with lower levels of cultural capital)



receive significantly less careers education and report being less satisfied – students from the most advantaged backgrounds are significantly more likely to receive careers education. For instance, a student with very high cultural capital is 1.49 times more likely to receive careers education compared to a student with very low cultural capital.

- ♦ **School sets:** Students in the lowest sets at school were significantly less likely to report receiving careers education and were also significantly less likely to report having work experience.
- ♦ **Post-16 plans:**
  - Students who are planning to enter work, and those who do not know what they want to do post-16, are significantly less likely to have received careers education. For instance, a student planning on studying A levels is 1.52 times more likely to have had careers education compared to a student planning on entering full-time work post-16.
  - Students aspiring to careers in beauty and the arts are the least likely to report receiving careers education relevant to their aspirations. Students aspiring to careers in engineering, science or medicine are the most likely to report receiving relevant careers education.
  - Students aspiring to careers in the trades, teaching or business are the most likely to have undertaken work experience. Those aspiring to law or science are the least likely to have undertaken work experience.
- ♦ **Regional differences:** No significant regional differences were found for students' receiving careers education and for satisfaction with provision. However, students in the north-east, north-west and Yorkshire were significantly less likely to have participated in work experience. Students in the south-west were significantly more likely to report having work experience.

## Apprenticeships:

10.8 per cent of the survey sample (1,453 students) were planning to pursue apprenticeships post-16 (with engineering constituting the most common field). Of these students, 65.1 per cent reported having been provided with careers education, 54.3 per cent had participated in work experience and 59.1 per cent were satisfied with the careers provision that they had received. Students planning to pursue apprenticeships were 1.68 times more likely to report careers education than their peers who plan to enter full-time work. These students were also significantly more likely to have received careers education and were significantly more likely to have had work experience and to be satisfied with their careers provision.



## The value of careers education for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) participation:

Our study has a particular interest in understanding the factors influencing STEM participation, given the importance of these fields for national economic competitiveness and for social mobility and social justice<sup>iii</sup>. Survey analysis shows that students with high science aspirations are significantly more likely than their non-science aspirant peers to have had careers education and to be satisfied with this provision. However, they are significantly less likely to have undertaken work experience. Moreover, girls and students with low cultural capital are significantly less likely to take part in extra-curricular STEM opportunities such as Ambassador schemes, science fairs and after-school science clubs.

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**'I could have arranged [work experience] myself, but... I was a bit scared to do work ... I was getting scared to go to the workplace and actually work.'**

*Vanessa, Black African working-class girl*

### Work experience:

Students planning on taking A levels are significantly less likely to report work experience. In the interviews, students who had work experience underlined the

value of these placements. However, work experience was organised more often by parents and families than by schools, meaning that students from socially advantaged families were more likely to be able to arrange 'quality' work experiences and placements.

### Students' voices:

In the interviews, most young people indicated that they want and require more support to navigate the careers education system – this was especially the case for those from marginalised backgrounds, who were more likely to report feeling 'scared' or 'unsure'.

- For instance, Vanessa (a Black African, working-class girl) explained, 'I could have arranged [work experience] myself, but... I was a bit scared to do work ... I was getting scared to go to the workplace and actually work'.
- Those from affluent and professional backgrounds also felt that careers education could be usefully improved, as the following (White, middle-class) mother explained about her son, 'He's bewildered about it and he's terribly anxious about it all'.
- As Buddy (White, middle-class boy) explained, 'I think it's a very good system, but I also think they should try and publicise themselves a bit more, because I think it's an incredibly under-used department, the careers advice department... they've got so many resources down there, but people are afraid to just kind of pop in'.



<sup>ii</sup> As the effect sizes for the analyses presented on the previous page were small, we urge caution in interpreting these results.

<sup>iii</sup> See [www.kcl.ac.uk/aspires](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/aspires) for a list of our publications and reports.

## Findings (continued)

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### Why are some students not accessing careers education?

Initial analyses of our qualitative interview data from students and their parents gives some insight into the reasons why particular groups of students are not receiving as much careers education as others. For instance:

- ♦ Students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend schools that are less well-resourced and/or which have very stretched resources. Some of these students reported difficulty in accessing services, as one student put it 'they haven't got round to everyone yet' (working-class, Y11 girl).

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### Students felt that careers education was offered 'too little, too late' and were put off when they felt that advice was not impartial.

- ♦ Students from disadvantaged backgrounds seemed to be less likely to use a self-referral model ('I think a lot of people in our year kind of were leaving it because they're not being like pushed to do it', working-class Y11 girl). They were also far less likely than socially advantaged students to be able to draw on family social capital to set up rewarding work experience ('I arranged his work placement at a pharmaceutical company', middle-class father).
- ♦ Students were put off when they did not think that they would get impartial advice and guidance. In particular, concerns were expressed that schools or colleges would be 'biased' and would predominantly just want to channel students into their own routes (eg A levels) rather than supporting the student to explore other routes ('She just talked about A levels', working-class Y11 girl, 'They went on a lot about going to 6th form', working-class Y11 boy). Some also worried that they would be dissuaded from particular ambitions ('I don't think they would have supported the way I want to go', working-class Y11 boy).
- ♦ There was some confusion among students regarding the range of careers education provision on offer ('Er yeah, I think its different, I'm not too sure though', working-class Y11 girl) and students reported variable experiences in their encounters with careers education providers ('Some of them they just gave you a leaflet and then you like took a pen and left, so pretty bad', Y11 working-class boy).
- ♦ Students felt that careers education was offered 'too little, too late', for instance, they had already made their subject choices by the time provision was offered ('I think at that point I had already handed in my sheet', working-class Y11 boy). Students talked about their desire for more, earlier and longer-term careers education ('Yeah, I think you should have it over time, instead of just one meeting, I think you should meet several times', working-class Y11 girl).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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Based on our findings, we make the following conclusions and recommendations:

- ♦ Urgent attention needs to be given to acknowledging and redressing inequalities by gender, ethnicity and social class in terms of who is, and who is not, participating in careers education and work experience. ‘Patchiness’ of provision is not just at the school level but also within schools. Careers education is failing to reach those most in need, notably girls, minority ethnic, working-class, low attaining students, those unsure of their aspirations and those who plan to leave full-time education post-16.
- ♦ Policy needs to focus on careers education ‘participation’, not just ‘provision’ – ie who is, and is not, taking up the different careers education offers.

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Careers education policy needs to focus on ‘participation’, not just ‘provision’ – ie who is, and is not, taking up the different careers education offers.

- ♦ We recommend that schools and organisations involved in careers education and work experience delivery should *monitor, evaluate and take steps to address* inequalities in terms of which students do/do not access and participate in careers education and work experience. This is needed to ensure that careers education and work

experience opportunities reach all students – but particularly those most in need.

- ♦ Schools, employers and careers education providers may benefit from *specific support to enable organisations/practitioners to understand, identify and address social inequalities* to tackle the patterned nature of careers education engagement to ensure that it reaches ‘underserved’ communities/students.
- ♦ Organisations should be provided with *dedicated resourcing to target, engage and support disadvantaged groups*. Particular emphasis should be given to ensuring the participation of girls, minority ethnic students, working-class students, students in bottom sets, those who are unsure of their post-16 plans and who plan to leave education post-16.
- ♦ Efforts should be made to *address regional differences* in work experience and explore ways of *providing more work experience in fields such as science and law*.
- ♦ Organisations should *take particular care with respect to schemes and opportunities that are offered on an ‘opt in’ and/or ‘selective’ basis*, to ensure that these do not contribute to the further reinforcement of patterns of unequal participation in careers education and work experience. This will have particular implications for various employer and related initiatives, which are often targeted at smaller or selected groups of students, or are offered just to those young people (or schools) who self-identify and/or express an interest.





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