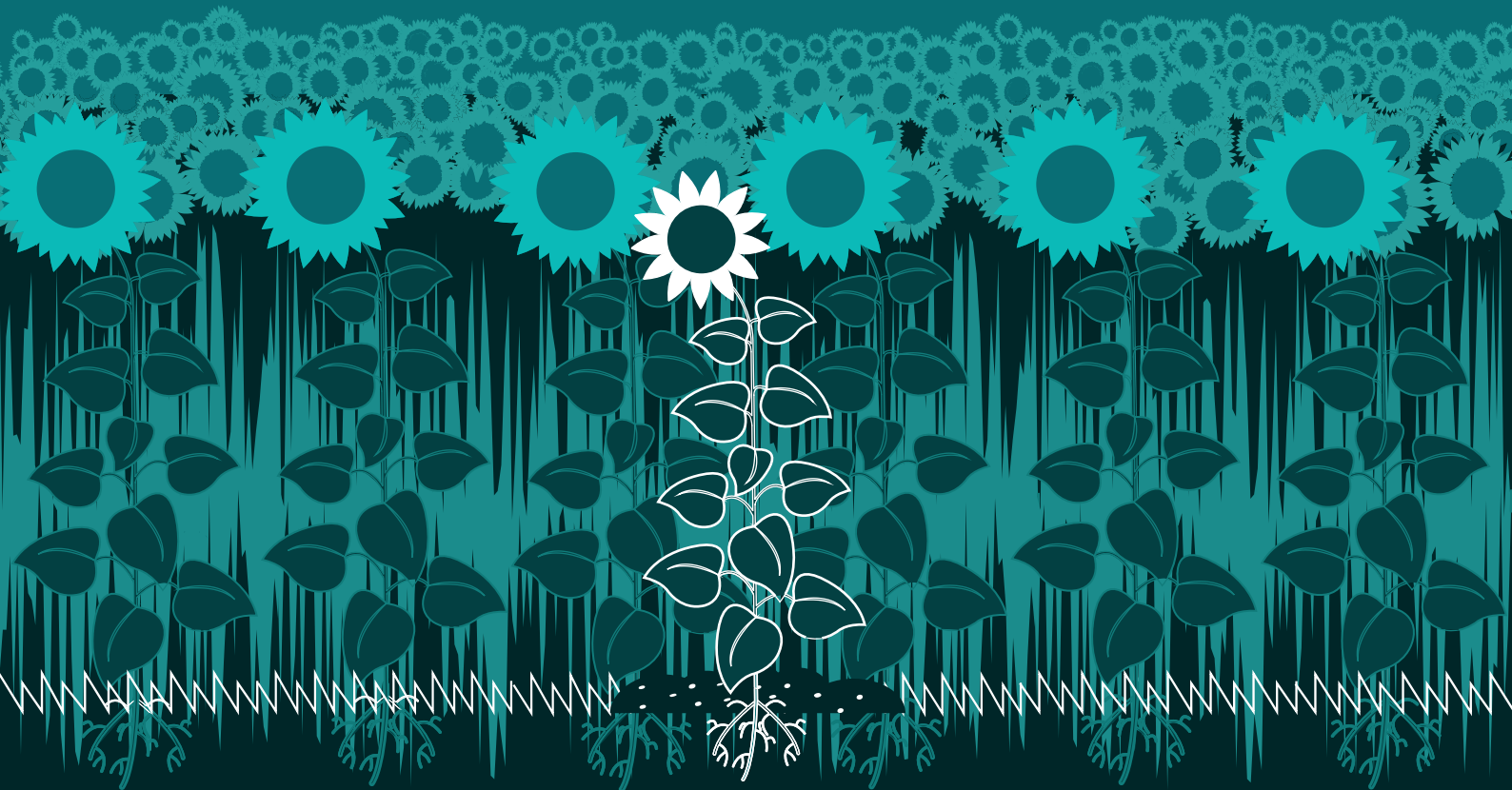


Stoke-on-Trent

# Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy 2022–2027



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# FOREWORD



**Councillor Janine Bridges**

Cabinet Member for Education and Economy,  
Stoke-on-Trent City Council



**Councillor Dave Evans**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People,  
Stoke-on-Trent City Council

## Stoke-on-Trent is on the up

As we write this foreword our city is at the heart of the government's Levelling Up agenda, attracting national attention and investment that ten years ago we could hardly have imagined. Learning and skills are at the centre of the discussion for how we take our city forward, and rightly so.

Our city, and the wider urban area which surrounds it, is a place of massive opportunity, leading the nation in terms of economic growth and job creation. The foundation of our future prosperity is a strong local learning and skills system. In our city, as elsewhere, no one organisation holds the key to this system: schools, colleges, universities, training providers, employers, charities, central government, local government, community organisations and families all have their role to play.

The landscape of skills is changing nationally with a growing role for local authorities working in partnership with other organisations. Working side by side with our local partners, we are setting an ambitious agenda for how we will support young people to get the most from their education and gain the skills to transition successfully into fulfilling, long-term employment.

This document presents a strategy for learning and skills in the city of Stoke-on-Trent over the next five years, focusing on young people aged between 14 and 25. We have put young people at the heart of our policy process; we have heard directly from many young people so far, and we hope to engage with many more as we begin to deliver their priorities.

## Young people, this strategy is for you

# THE STORY BEHIND THIS STRATEGY



**Sinéad Butters, MBE**

Chair of the Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy writing group

During my time as a business leader in Stoke-on-Trent, I have seen first-hand how young people's lives can be transformed by access to opportunity and the right support. As a business leader, I can also say with confidence that our continued prosperity as a city and a region depends on what we do for our young people. Stoke-on-Trent's time in the spotlight gives us all an opportunity to make a difference, but our success can only be sustained if we make the talent and potential of the next generation our top priority.

Young people in our city have choices to make: choices about careers and pathways, and choices about the goals, ambitions and values which will shape their future lives. In 2022, our young people have more choice than ever before, with a variety of vocational, technical, academic, work-based, classroom-based, online and hybrid pathways on offer. They also have more career paths to choose from; it may be that many of the young people who are leaving school this year will—over the coming decades—work in industries, jobs and sectors which do not even exist yet. This strategy sets out how we will support young people to make the best choices and to reach their full potential.

Over the last nine months, I have had the privilege to chair a diverse group of partners, working together to build this strategy for the next five years. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this work for their dedication to our city and young people, and for their passion, vision, and determination. We want this ethos of partnership and collaboration to continue, as the delivery of this strategy will rely on partners each putting their own resources towards our collective objectives.



# WHO WE ARE

This strategy was developed by a writing group including representatives from the local community, schools, colleges, and Stoke-on-Trent City Council City Council, between January and July 2022.

Person	Role	Representing
Sinéad Butters MBE (chair)	Chief Executive, Aspire Group	Local employers
Lisa Capper MBE	Principal and Chief Executive, Stoke-on-Trent College	Further education providers
Daniel Flynn	Chief Executive Officer, YMCA North Staffordshire	Voluntary, community and faith sector
Janet Lee	Health and Wellbeing Partnerships Manager, Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Caroline Mairs	Strategic Manager: Employment, Skills, Enterprise and Growth, Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Paul Mangnall	Facilitator, Stoke-on-Trent Association of School and College Leaders	Secondary and further education providers
Matthew Marshall	Deputy Principal, City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College	Further education providers
Tom Nadin	Head of Project and Business Services, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce	Local employers
David O'Connell	Service Manager: Employment, Learning and Skills, Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Sandra Parker	Partnership Manager for North Staffordshire, Department for Work and Pensions	Department for Work and Pensions
Jim Pugh	Director of the Institute of Education, Staffordshire University	Higher education providers
Victoria Sylvester	Chair of the Management Board, Staffordshire Partnership for Employment and Skills	Independent training providers
Carl Ward	Chief Executive, City Learning Trust	Secondary education providers

We would also like to acknowledge the significant contribution made by other partners and colleagues. Throughout the development of our strategy, Cllr Janine Bridges and Cllr Dave Evans have been strong advocates for the children and young people of Stoke-on-Trent. Development of the strategy was managed by Alastair Hale and David O'Connell. We have received invaluable advice and support from Dan Canavan, Simon French, Adam Jeffrey, Joy Molloy, Thomas Smith and Paul Williams, among others.

# STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY COUNCIL'S VISION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and young people are the number one priority for the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

We want them to thrive and be the most that they can be.

They should be safe, healthy, nurtured and loved.

They should have the best possible start in life, the best education and the best life chances.

Our young people should be enthusiasts, optimists, creators, entrepreneurs and innovators.

They should be kind, empathetic and compassionate.

We want to hear their voice.

We need every adult in Stoke-on-Trent to care passionately about children and young people and express that through relationships, community and business life.



# STOKE-ON-TRENT CORPORATE VISION



The Stronger Together vision sets out the priorities for Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the wider city. The strategic plan has been shaped by the political ambition of the City Council's leadership, as well as the values and aims of the organisation. As such, it is as much a corporate plan for the council's directorates and teams as it is a strategic blueprint for the future growth and prosperity of Stoke-on-Trent as a city. Our Stronger Together principles are embedded in every strategy including this Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Excellent education and training

Drive high-quality provisions through our Improving Education Strategy, Education Challenge Board and Learning and Skills Board.

Good and better Ofsted outcomes in all regulated settings based on robust QA methods

Improve information available about options and career paths

Whole school/college approaches to careers education

High-quality apprenticeships and T Levels as a route into key employment sectors

Connect education settings to the full-fibre network and develop digital skills including via a proposed Free School and existing provision (Silicon Stoke plan)

Support Stoke-on-Trent young people and employers to access and influence the Institute of Technology



## Employers as leaders

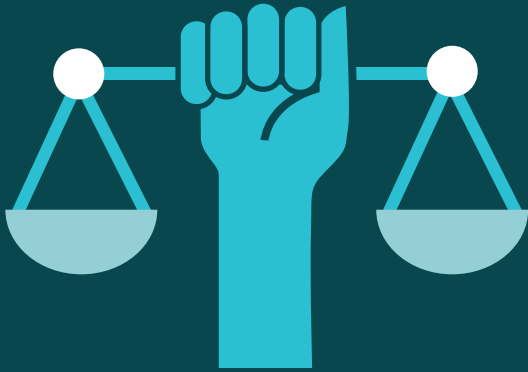
Help shape and deliver a Local Skills Improvement Plan with partners and employers

Continue to support the SSLEP and in particular the Skills Advisory Panel Board

Engage employers in pledging support for young people in terms of skills and employability

Grow the apprenticeship offer in the city and maximise use of the Levy

Encourage employers to further develop skills in their young workforce through training, mentoring and work placement opportunities.



## Tackling inequality and raising aspirations

Expand Virtual School provision to champion the best education outcomes for all young people with a social worker

Use the Be The Future initiative to support disadvantaged young people to access workplace opportunities, beginning with care-experienced young people

Build a holistic partnership approach to preparing young people with SEND for post-16 employment, education and training

Engagement, bespoke support and effective tracking for young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (Neet)



## One community, one city

Strengthen our transition process between providers and Key Stages, including into higher education.

Develop the city's mentorship offer, focusing particularly on supporting young people through transitions

Improve data sharing and build system intelligence, including to design future provision that meets demand

Continued dialogue with our young people so they are involved in shaping skills provision

Robust delivery of this strategy through a partnership action plan

Children and young people are Stoke-on-Trent's number one priority. We believe in a future where all 14- to 25-year-olds have the right to achieve their potential, the ability to understand their choices, and the opportunity to gather the core skills, capabilities and personal values which will serve them throughout life. Moreover, we see high quality learning, training and employment for young people as an essential ingredient for local economic growth. We want to build a city where employers feel confident to invest in local school and college leavers, apprentices and graduates to be the leaders of the future.

Working together, we have identified five areas where we believe we can have the biggest impact on young people's opportunities:



### **1. Excellent education and training:**

We want to drive and promote high quality provision, support good or better Ofsted outcomes, and raise skill levels for key employment sectors, in line with the government's [Opportunity for All](#) and [Skills for Jobs](#) white papers, and Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Improving Education strategy.



### **2. Employers as leaders:**

Employers are leaders in the local skills system; we want to strengthen the local economy by ensuring young people develop the skills employers need.



### **3. Tackling inequality and raising aspirations:**

We want to tackle both inequality of access and inequality of outcomes in our city, to ensure all young people have the best chance to succeed.



### **4. One community, one city:**

We want to create space for even stronger partnerships between educators, employers and community organisations that benefit young people, especially in their transitions from education to work.

We have developed a strategy to deliver our vision over the next five years. Firstly, we want to promote access to our city's education and training offer. To do this we will collaborate with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub to spread the word about courses, career paths, and support for young people. We also recognise the need to develop and adapt our careers education structures to reflect our changing times; we will facilitate schools and academy trusts to work with the Careers Hub to develop their practice. We want more young people (particularly those who are furthest from employment) to access high-quality apprenticeships, which we will promote through our "Be the Future" initiative. We will promote digital skills through the Silicon Stoke programme as a key area of employment growth and ensure that the make-up of the post-16 offer continues to broadly match the city's skill and employment priorities.

Government policy puts employers at the heart of our national learning and skills system; we want to build on strong relationships between employers and education providers locally. We will align partners and bolster good practice under the umbrella of a skills pledge partnership, providing a package for employers who want to contribute to learning and skills in our city. We will use our relationships with employers to tackle inequality of access and outcomes in our learning and skills system; for example, by sourcing opportunities for care leavers and other disadvantaged young people. We will also reform the Stoke-on-Trent Virtual School's offer for children in care aged between 16 and 18, supporting teachers and social workers to raise young people's ambition and achievement. Our learning and skills system must be inclusive of all young people, whatever their learning needs or background. We will engage with young people and parents to ensure that the voices of marginalised groups are heard.

We are proud of Stoke-on-Trent's community; we want to ensure all young people have access to the support they need to make the transition between school, college, university and work. We will support progression projects, aiming to align curricula between Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, and will champion the role of Higher Education outreach. We will promote mentorship and guidance programmes across the city, particularly for young people who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education, employment or training. We will develop youth engagement programmes that build on good practice and take advantage of the Shared Prosperity Fund.

We are one city, and we have always been stronger together. To deliver our priorities, we will create an action plan which is jointly owned by each partner organisation. We will share resources, data, information, and intelligence, adapting our approach flexibly over the next five years to maximise benefits for young people. We want to keep young people at the heart of everything we do, so we will continue to engage with, listen to, and involve young people in our work. We are Stoke-on-Trent and we are proud to live and work in a city where the talent and potential of our next generation is the number one priority.





## WHAT DRIVES US

Our city is in a uniquely exciting position as the country rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years we have led the nation in economic growth and job creation, and have put ourselves at the centre of the government's Levelling Up agenda. Over the next five years we want to harness the power of opportunity in Stoke-on-Trent to tackle the obstacles which hold too many of our young people back, and deliver a learning and skills system that works for everyone.

Young people face challenges of different kinds when following pathways from learning to employment. For some young people, self-belief and motivation are key factors—they need the support and encouragement of peers, role models and their community to reach their full potential. Others are held back by challenges in their personal life, whether that be economic disadvantage, family trauma or instability, or criminal exploitation. Some young people struggle simply because they do not have the right qualifications, missing out on their English or Maths GCSEs or lacking the opportunity to study their chosen subject. We have done much in recent years to remove the barriers faced by young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. We want to continue to build a learning and skills system which empowers young people to be the best they can be.

We have carefully examined the features of our city's learning and skills system during the development of this strategy. Our analysis, which is set out in full in Appendix 1, has drawn us towards four focus areas.



### **1. Excellent education and training:**

We have a wide variety of education and training providers, and most of our young people experience more than one between the ages of 14 and 25. Our Level 2 attainment is improving, but at 19 young people's attainment is several points behind the national average.



### **2. Employers as leaders:**

Stoke-on-Trent's economy is growing, but a higher-than-average proportion of adults with no formal qualifications leaves the city vulnerable. There is a particular shortage of graduates and qualified technicians with digital skills or training in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), construction and care work. As well as formal training, both young people and employers want to prioritise the "soft skills" connected to employment.



### **3. Tackling inequality and raising aspirations:**

Some groups of young people—including those from diverse ethnic minorities, those with experience of being in care, and those with special educational needs—have a generally less positive experience of the local skills system. For example, around half of young people leaving care do not enter education, employment or training.



### **4. One community, one city:**

Our city has a rising population of 14- to 25-year-olds, who will make up 17% of the local population by 2030. Local initiatives to support learning and skills have been led by bodies such as the Department for Education and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, but there is no overarching strategy as such for young people's learning and skills in Stoke-on-Trent.

In the following sections, we set out our collective strategy for tackling each of these focus areas.

The government's Levelling Up agenda provides an exciting context for this work, as learning and skills are now central to national policy. In 2021, the [Skills for Jobs](#) white paper set out an approach to employment and skills which puts the voice of employers at the heart of [local skills systems](#). Alongside this, there is a clear national focus on higher-level technical skills, lifelong learning and initial teacher training. In 2022, the government announced its intention to roll out employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) across England, strengthening skills provision to better meet local labour market needs.

Other national policies such as the [Multiply numeracy programme](#), [Skills Bootcamps](#), and [reforms to further education funding](#) will put the spotlight on local areas and their strategies for learning and skills development. Our Young People's Learning and Skills Strategy also seeks to complement the [Opportunity For All](#) white paper on education and [SEND and AP green paper](#) published in 2022.



## FOCUS 1: EXCELLENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING



### **What drives us**

We have a wide variety of education and training providers, and most of our young people experience more than one between the ages of 14 and 25. Our Level 2 attainment is improving, but at 19 young people's attainment is several points behind the national average.



### **Our commitment**

We are proud of our schools, colleges, university and training providers and want to work together to drive high quality provision and promote the vocational, technical and academic pathways on offer.

We aim to drive high-quality provision through “Aspiration and Achievement for All,” our improving education strategy, Education Challenge Board and other education partnerships in the city. We will strive for “Good” and better Ofsted outcomes in all regulated settings based on robust quality assurance methods. We support the government’s agenda for quality-first teaching and raising attainment, as set out in the [Opportunity for All](#) white paper.

We want to promote awareness of our city’s diverse education and training offer. Accordingly, we will work with the [Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub](#) to promote the options available to 14- to 25-year-olds, alongside information about career paths and links to other resources.

Many of the city’s providers are also able to offer continued learning for young adults aged 19 and over, supporting learners to develop life skills, well-being and accredited qualifications for the workplace. We will work together to continue to promote these opportunities.

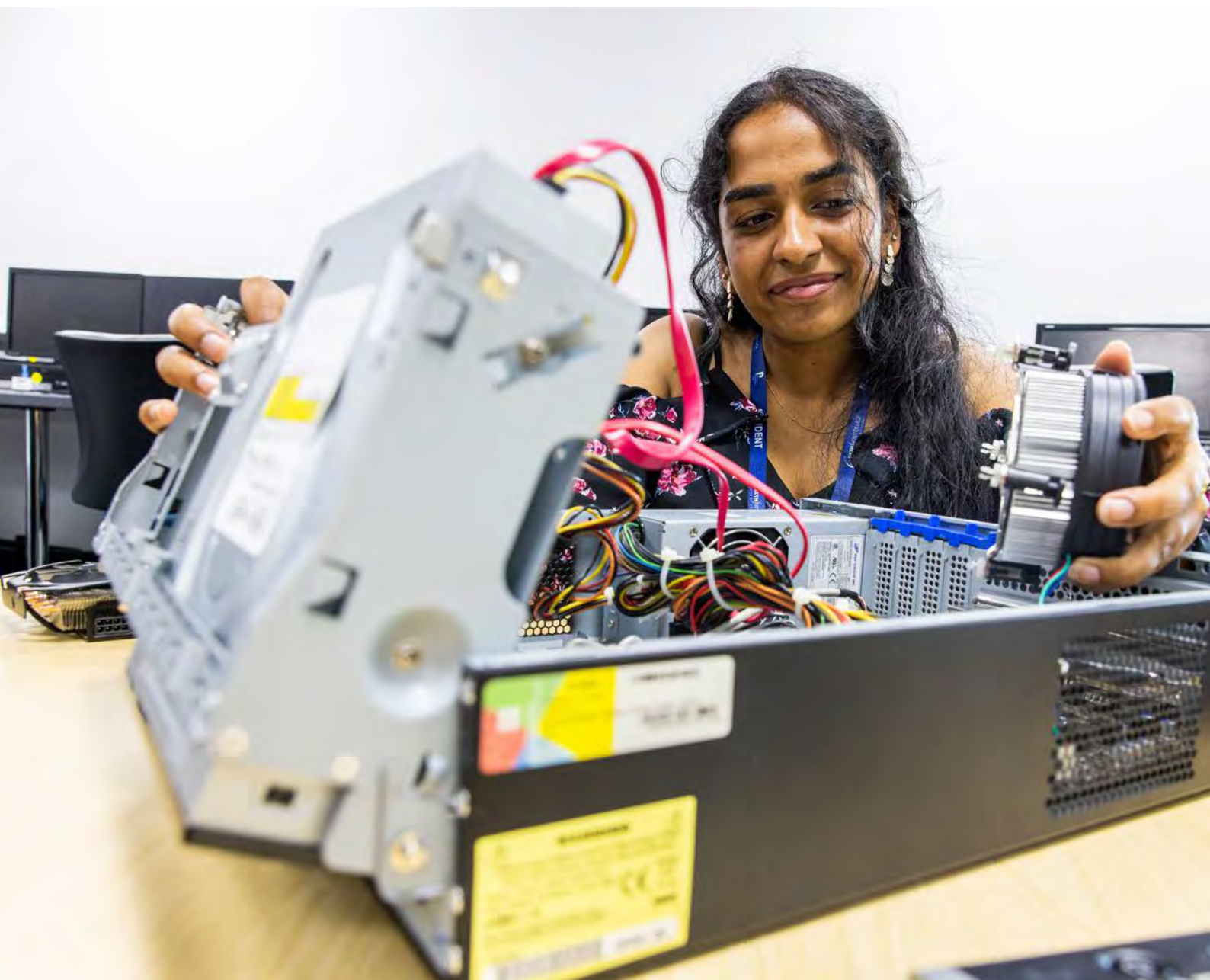
In recent years the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Careers Hub and its partner schools have developed careers leadership in the city, founded on a whole-school approach to careers education at secondary level. A structural approach to careers education can help to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers; pioneering work in the city by St Thomas More Catholic Academy has provided proof-of-concept. We will support the Careers Hub to implement the system changes needed to make world-class careers education an entitlement for our young people. As a partnership we want to support and build on the work of the Careers Hub as both a strategic and operational implementation structure for the Young People’s Learning and Skills Strategy.



We are ambitious to expand awareness and promote take-up of high-quality and degree apprenticeships among young people as well as T Levels. We will promote these opportunities to young people through our “[Be the Future](#)” initiative and in partnership with the Careers Hub.

The education and training offer for young people aged 16 and over in the city is a good match for the city’s skills priorities: digital skills, science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), construction, and health and social care. Digital skills in particular are in high demand: the Silicon Stoke project, led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, has already seen the creation of a citywide full fibre network, more than 100 km in length. We want to connect every education setting in the city to this network, and support providers to make the most of the opportunities this will create.

Recent work with partners has shown that the city is well-placed to develop a digital Free School, with businesses offering both vocational and academic pathways. We intend to jointly pursue an application for this provision. We also plan to take advantage of the new North Staffordshire Institute of Technology to raise skill levels in the city.





## FOCUS 2: EMPLOYERS AS LEADERS



### What drives us

Stoke-on-Trent's economy is growing, but a higher-than-average proportion of adults with no formal qualifications leaves the city vulnerable. There is a particular shortage of graduates and qualified technicians with digital skills or training in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), construction and care work. As well as formal training, both young people and employers want to prioritise the “soft skills” connected to employment.



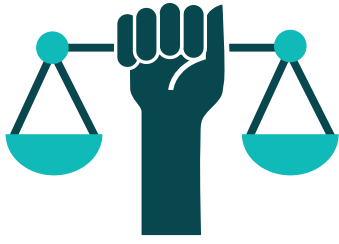
### Our commitment

We value our partnerships with employers, and believe they are leaders in our local skills system. We want to strengthen our local economy by ensuring young people can develop both the “soft” and “hard” skills which employers value.

The government's levelling up plans for skills put employers at the heart of the national education and training system. We look forward to the expansion of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) across England, whilst also continuing to support the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and its [skills plan](#). We are committed to supporting employers by ensuring we have an LSIP that meets the needs of the city. We will work collaboratively across borders, including with Staffordshire County Council and the LEP, where valuable.

To support the work of the LSIP, we will develop a skills partnership pledge in the city to complement the work of the Careers Hub, as part of our “Be the Future” initiative. This will create a package for employers who want to contribute to learning and skills—whether that be through offering opportunities to young people such as guaranteed interviews on completion of specific courses, by working with education providers to develop or co-deliver aspects of the curriculum, or by shaping our learning and skills action plan.

We will support employer investment in the young workforce by working together to grow the apprenticeship offer and maximise employer take-up of the Apprenticeship Levy. Through its own training provision, Stoke-on-Trent City Council is aiming for 500 apprenticeship new starters by 2026.



## FOCUS 3: TACKLING INEQUALITY AND RAISING ASPIRATIONS



### What drives us

Some groups of young people—including those from diverse ethnic minorities, those with experience of being in care, and those with SEN—have a generally less positive experience of the local skills system. For example, around half of young people leaving care do not enter education, employment or training.



### Our commitment

We recognise that not all young people in our city have an equal chance to succeed, with some groups facing more barriers than others. As a city, we will continue to tackle inequality in our learning and skills system—particularly for care leavers, young people with disabilities, and young people from diverse ethnic minorities.





We believe in a fair and effective learning and skills system, which gives young people the support they need to overcome the obstacles they face. We support the government's plans for [secondary](#) and [further education](#) and Stoke-on-Trent City Council's strategy for improving education.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will strengthen its support for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), through improved tracking and engagement processes to increase the participation of young people in post-16 learning. It will continue to work with schools to identify those most at risk, and with colleges and other providers to prevent drop-out. As a partnership, we will collaborate with the voluntary and community sector to develop re-engagement programmes for young people who are NEET, sustaining good practice from recent European Union- funded and government-funded re-engagement programmes, and taking advantage of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other external funding sources.

As a city, we have a collective responsibility to young people in care, and those who have left care. Stoke-on-Trent's City Council's Virtual School is a statutory service which champions the education and achievement of children in care. It links social workers with the schools and colleges which young people attend, putting a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place for every young person in care. To target the inequality of education outcomes for care leavers, we are expanding the Virtual School's offer for young people aged between 16 and 18 and for those up to age 25 through the Next Steps team. We will be partnering with the uniformed services and the armed forces to inspire young people at an early stage in their career thinking and also with the older cohort to offer practical advice on next steps.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Virtual School service will work to upskill social workers, putting a spotlight on the transformational impact of learning and skills for disadvantaged young people. We will provide a designated Virtual School Practitioner for every secondary school and college, and support teachers with training and advice. We will give children in care access to bespoke careers advice and employability training to reduce the number of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training. We will ensure care leavers attending Higher Education institutions have access to the bursary they are entitled to and associated support.

We want to promote opportunities for work experience, mentoring, internships, apprenticeships and pathways to employment to disadvantaged young people. The "Be the Future" initiative matches opportunities from employers with the young people who need them most. Currently, "Be the Future" is open only to children in care and care leavers; we will expand access to other groups of young people (starting with the most vulnerable) within the next five years, and will attract more employers to sign up to this initiative.





We want a learning and skills system which is inclusive of young people with diverse learning needs, helping all to be as independent as they can be. Building on Stoke-on-Trent City Council's [inclusion strategy](#), we will work with partners (including health and social care providers, schools, colleges and parents) to build a holistic approach to preparing young people with special educational needs for adulthood. We will support the work of the Preparation for Adulthood Group and in particular strengthening the transition to post-16 education, training and employment.

We want young people from marginalised groups to have their voices heard. Education providers will conduct regular student engagement, specifically with young people from marginalised groups (including diverse ethnic minorities) to understand their experience of learning and skills and support them to succeed.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council will continue to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and resettled young people, including through opportunities to improve English language skills. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are also entitled to the range of support offered to all care leavers by the local authority.



## FOCUS 4: ONE COMMUNITY, ONE CITY



### **What drives us**

Our city has a rising population of 14- to 25-year-olds, who will make up 17% of the local population by 2030. Local initiatives to support learning and skills have been led by bodies such as the Department for Education and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, but there is no overarching strategy as such for young people's learning and skills in Stoke-on-Trent.



### **Our commitment**

As a city, we have always been stronger together. We want to create the space for even deeper partnerships between schools, colleges, training providers, employers, and community organisations in order to stand behind young people during this important transition period in their lives—from education to the workplace. Our most important partnership is with young people themselves: we commit to keep them at the heart of all we do.

We want to continue to work as one city, drawing on the strengths and resources of many organisations working in partnership. We will develop an action plan, setting out how we will deliver our vision and who will be involved with the intention of different partners leading one or more workstreams. We will come together as partners on an annual basis to refresh and renew this action plan, ensuring we respond appropriately to the changing policy environment in which we operate.

We believe that we can only succeed in an environment of transparency, where appropriate information and data can be shared freely to enhance services, build system-intelligence and help match provision to need and demand. We will develop a common data sharing protocol to facilitate open communication between institutions.

We are accountable to the children, young people and families of Stoke-on-Trent for the delivery of our strategy. Each partner will be asked to adopt this strategy through their own governance arrangements. Collective progress will be overseen by a new Learning and Skills Board.

Partnership and information-sharing are particularly important in supporting young people during their transition between different education and training providers. Building on the work of the Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity Area, we will pilot a project between Alpha Academies Trust, Stoke-on-Trent College and Potteries Educational Trust. These three providers, which collectively support over 5,000 learners in the city at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, will work together to pilot a route map from Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 focusing on vocational areas and also English and maths. They will create shared resources to support transition and track outcomes for pupils moving from one institution to the other. They will develop closer alignment of entrance requirements between courses at different levels, helping to bridge the gap that some young people experience between KS4 and KS5. In time, we take the good practice and learning from this project and apply it more widely.

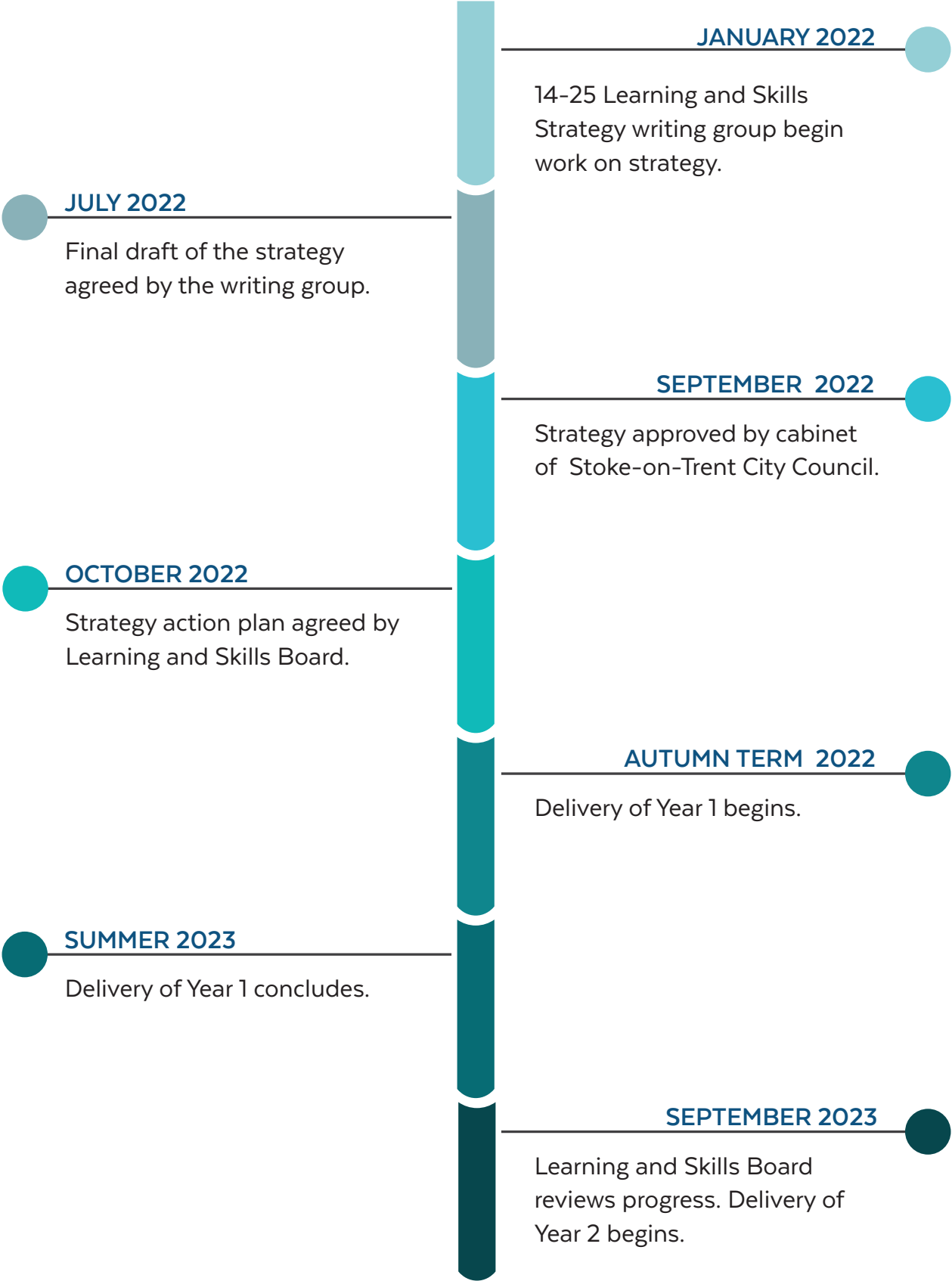
We want to ensure that the transition between Key Stage 5 and Higher Education is well signposted and inclusive. We will support and build on outreach work across the city, including that provided through the Office for Students' Uni Connect Programme.

We will work with the voluntary and community sector to promote mentorship programmes which are sustained across transition periods, giving young people access to advice from peers and community leaders. Our work here will build on the existing mentorship programmes such as those led by Port Vale Football Club and Stoke City Football Club, as well as other charitable and community organisations.

All young people deserve advice and support about careers from people outside their education provider—family members, community leaders, and friends—but we recognise not all have access to this. We will continue to develop our careers advice and guidance offer for young people including more specialist support for particular groups to bridge transitions and to reduce the high levels of churn in and out of post-16 learning in the city. This will include new youth engagement initiatives for young people who are not in education, employment or training, building on local and national best practice, making use of the government's Shared Prosperity Fund.

Young people are at the heart of our city and of our strategy. We can only succeed if we continue listening to, engaging with and involving young people at every level. We will work with young people at a city-wide level through the Stoke-on-Trent Youth Council, using its feedback to inform our annual renewal of our action plan. Each partner will also use their own established mechanisms to continuously engage with young people, embedding their views and expectations in our work.

# DELIVERY TIMELINE



# APPENDIX 1





# WHAT WE KNOW

The population of 14- to 25-year-olds in Stoke-on-Trent is rising. By 2030, there will be 6,000 more young people aged between 14 and 25, with an estimated population of 45,000 compared to 39,000 in 2018. This means that 17% of the local population will be within this age group by 2030.

Our rising population of young people exhibit a greater diversity of needs than their peers across England. They are slightly more likely to have an Education Health and Care Plan (5% of learners compared to 4% nationally), while 18% in Stoke-on-Trent receive SEN support. Economic factors also significantly affect our young people: in 2021-22, 60% of pupils in Year 10 or 11 were eligible for Pupil Premium funding. In the same cohort, 28% were in receipt of Free School Meals, a figure is set to increase in the next four years, as current Year 7, 8 and 9 children graduate to the older age range. Children growing up in Stoke-on-Trent have to overcome more economic problems and barriers than those in most other parts of the country. Higher levels of poverty create serious difficulties for families and put those children at a great disadvantage.

On average, the local authority estimates between 10% and 15% of each cohort of school leavers are likely to be at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) when they leave Year 11. A high proportion of young people are claiming work benefits—8% in Stoke-on-Trent compared to 6% nationally. Stoke-on-Trent has over 1,000 children in the care of the local authority: around one in 60 children in the city are in care, and one in have open involvement with children's social care. Just over half of our young people who leave care are in Education, Employment and Training (EET), and we are working hard to improve outcomes for this group.



## Education and training providers

The Stoke-on-Trent urban area, extending across the City of Stoke-on-Trent and into Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands, is served by a wide variety of education and training providers catering for young people aged 14 to 25. The diversity of this provision has increased in recent years, giving young people a range of academic, vocational and technical training pathways to choose from.

Twelve of Stoke-on-Trent's fourteen mainstream secondary schools are rated as "Good" or "Outstanding" by Ofsted, as of June 2022. The city also has four state-sector special schools (three of which were rated "Good" at their last inspection), alongside a number of independent schools and alternative providers. While the majority of 14-16 year olds are on academic course pathways the vocational offer has been increasing in schools.

From 16 to 18, the choices available to young people widen. As well as four schools with sixth forms, the City has two large colleges: Stoke-on-Trent College and the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College. In the wider urban area, the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG) has a campus in Newcastle-under-Lyme. These institutions are augmented by a variety of apprenticeship and training providers operating across the local area and by voluntary sector-led engagement and pre-employment programmes.

Compared to the rest of England, considerably more young people in Stoke-on-Trent progress from school into a Further Education College or Sixth Form College (64% locally in 2020-21, compared to 49% nationally). The rate of young people aged 16-18 participating in education, training or employment has declined in the last few years; our combined NEET and "Not Known" rates have risen in the same period. Participation rates are highest among 16-year-old school-leavers but decline among older age-groups. A relatively large minority of 16-year-old school leavers opt for employment or apprenticeships (more than 1 in 10 in 2021).

Between the ages of 18 and 25, the options available to young people again expand. The urban area is served by two universities—Keele University and Staffordshire University—and other universities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Derby and Wolverhampton are within travelling distance. Local universities offer a range of complementary subject disciplines at a variety of engagement levels from foundation years to doctorates. These also span vocational awards such as apprenticeships, medical and veterinary schools, law, nursing, and teaching.

Whilst participation across the city remains below national averages, the universities with support from Higher Horizons, the local National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) engage with an increasing number of young people aged 14 to 25 to promote Higher Education: Higher Horizons worked with over 3,000 children from 16 of Stoke-on-Trent's high schools in 2021-22. Staffordshire University's Career Connect team is also strengthening the support it offers to prospective students to ease their transition into university. Further education providers, including Stoke-on-Trent College and NSCG, also take on adult learners, many of whom are under 25.



Several voluntary sector organisations, such as the Prince's Trust and the YES Consortium, support young adults to re-engage with learning.

Between 14 and 25, most young people transition several times between schools, colleges, universities, training providers and employers—Stoke-on-Trent's education system enables this mobility and facilitates a diversity of provision. As well as moves at the end of an academic year, there is a high level of mobility during the academic year compared to other areas.

The trend over the past three years has been an upwards one for the percentage of young people passing GCSE English and Maths. In 2021, 41.1% of sixteen-year-olds gained a strong pass (Grade 5 and above) in these two subjects and 63.8% attained a standard pass (Grade 4 and above). In particular, English and Maths GCSEs are often a gateway to employment, training and further study.

While rising, the percentage of 19-year-olds attaining a standard pass in English and Maths (not having achieved these at age 16) lags behind the England average—23% in 2019-20, compared to 27.5% in England. The percentage of 19-year-olds gaining a Level 3 qualification also trails behind the England average (50.16% in Stoke-on-Trent in 2020-21, compared to 62.2% nationally). The percentage of 19-year-olds achieving a Level 2 qualification in 2020-21 stood at 74.4% for Stoke-on-Trent and 82.9% for England. When considering these figures, it is helpful to note the different cohorts providers serve, and the different starting positions of their young people: for example, 42% of students attending Stoke-on-Trent College arrive without a standard pass in either English or Maths GCSE.



## Skills and employment

Stoke-on-Trent has one of the fastest growing economies in the country, with a 17.1% growth in GVA per capita between 2015 and 2018, and a corresponding 11.7% growth in wages. Through the government's Levelling Up programme, the city is the site of several major redevelopment projects which will generate employment in the coming years. The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership have recently reported on the [skills strengths and skills demands of the local economy](#).

Current strengths					
Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing		Energy		Logistics	
Construction					
Immediate skills demands					
Health and Social Care		Logistics		Manufacturing	
Education		Hospitality		Retail	
Long-term skills development priorities					
Digital		Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM)		Construction	
Health and Social Care					

In addition to formal skills areas, engagement with local employers has also anecdotally indicated that “soft skills” such as professionalism, timekeeping, leadership, team work and “the right attitude” are much sought after by employers hiring young people. Recent research has indicated that these skills are sought by 69% of businesses which recruit young people, compared to only 54% seeking English and maths skills.

The city's existing learning and skills offer is broadly complementary to this range of priorities, but we are ambitious to generate new opportunities for young people. The digital skills agenda has been particularly prominent in recent years, with the Silicon Stoke programme opening up exciting possibilities for digital connectivity in learning and business.

There continue to be significant challenges related to skills and employment in the local area. In 2020, 12.4% of 16- to 64-year-olds had no formal qualifications, compared to only 6.4% in the rest of England. This puts Stoke-on-Trent among the fifty "lowest skilled" local authority areas in the country. Progress has been made in upskilling the local workforce in the last decade, but skills shortages nevertheless continue to present challenges for employers. Many students who study at local universities to degree level do not secure graduate jobs locally, leading to enduring difficulties in recruiting to graduate careers, such as teaching. Furthermore, young people (particularly apprentices) were disproportionately affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, with the Universal Credit claimant rate for 18- to 24-year-olds rising to over 10% in November 2020 locally. While the benefits claimant rate among young people has since declined, it still sits above national and regional averages, with youth unemployment being particularly acute in some neighbourhoods. It is also the case that some employers and training providers in the city report difficulty in attracting sufficient interest and applications from young people for apprenticeship opportunities as the recovery from the pandemic continues.

## **Young people's experiences**

Our engagement with 14- to 25-year-olds during the development of this strategy resonates with the conclusions from our analysis of education provision and skills needs. Young people generally feel confident and well-supported when approaching training and employment, but there is a degree of unevenness between young people registered with different training providers. Some groups of young people—notably those who do not identify as White British, or those who have a disability—have a less positive experience of the learning and skills system.

Young people would particularly value initiatives which improve their professional skills (such as financial management, entrepreneurship, securing work experience) and enhance their ambition and self-confidence. While the young people we spoke to were often confident about their immediate next steps and had a long-term goal in mind, they were less sure of the intermediate steps involved in pursuing a successful career. Some young people would value more choice of vocational training pathways, or support re-taking core academic qualifications (e.g. English and Maths GCSEs). For those unable to access or operate a private car, public transport was often mentioned as a limiting factor in pursuing learning or employment independently.

A full analysis of our engagement with young people can be found in Appendix 2.

# APPENDIX 2





# OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

## Methodology

In our research for the development of this strategy we undertook engagement with young people, gathering information about their knowledge of the local employment and skills sector, their self-perception, the challenges they face, and their career aspirations. We gathered this information through focus groups and an online survey.

Seven focus groups of varied sizes met, comprising of a total of 74 young people. Focus groups were run by an independent training provider, a local employer, a secondary academy, and the Stoke-on-Trent Children in Care Council. Young people were asked to talk about their aspirations for their future life and career, barriers they face when pursuing these goals, and what support would help them to reach their goals.

191 young people aged 14 to 25 responded to an online survey hosted by YMCA North Staffordshire. 49% identified as male, while 46% identified as female. 77 respondents attended Stoke-on-Trent College, 36 attended the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College and 41 were enrolled in courses offered by independent training providers; 12 attended other education or training settings and 16 were in employment. 62% of respondents identified as White British; slightly less than 5% identified as having a disability.



## Analysis: focus groups

Young people displayed a wide variety of aspirations—both for their future careers, and their personal lives. “Dream jobs” range from bookshop owner to gas engineer to Chief Executive Officer to social media influencer. One group of young people summarised their aspirations: “to be successful; to be happy in a job; to be in a stable career; to have a stable income.” Money was a recurring theme in the discussion, with some financial ambitions being relatively modest (“to earn more than minimum wage”). Many young people aspired to “own a car”, perhaps reflecting challenges with the local public transport network (“I’d like to pass my driving test so I can get to and from work independently without relying on others/family”). Many young people expressed an aspiration to travel or live abroad.

When talking about barriers to achieving their ambitions, some young people were happy about their progress:

**“ I don’t feel like anything is stopping me from following these dreams as I luckily have lots of support from my family and lots of support from my manager and other staff at [the training provider]. ”**

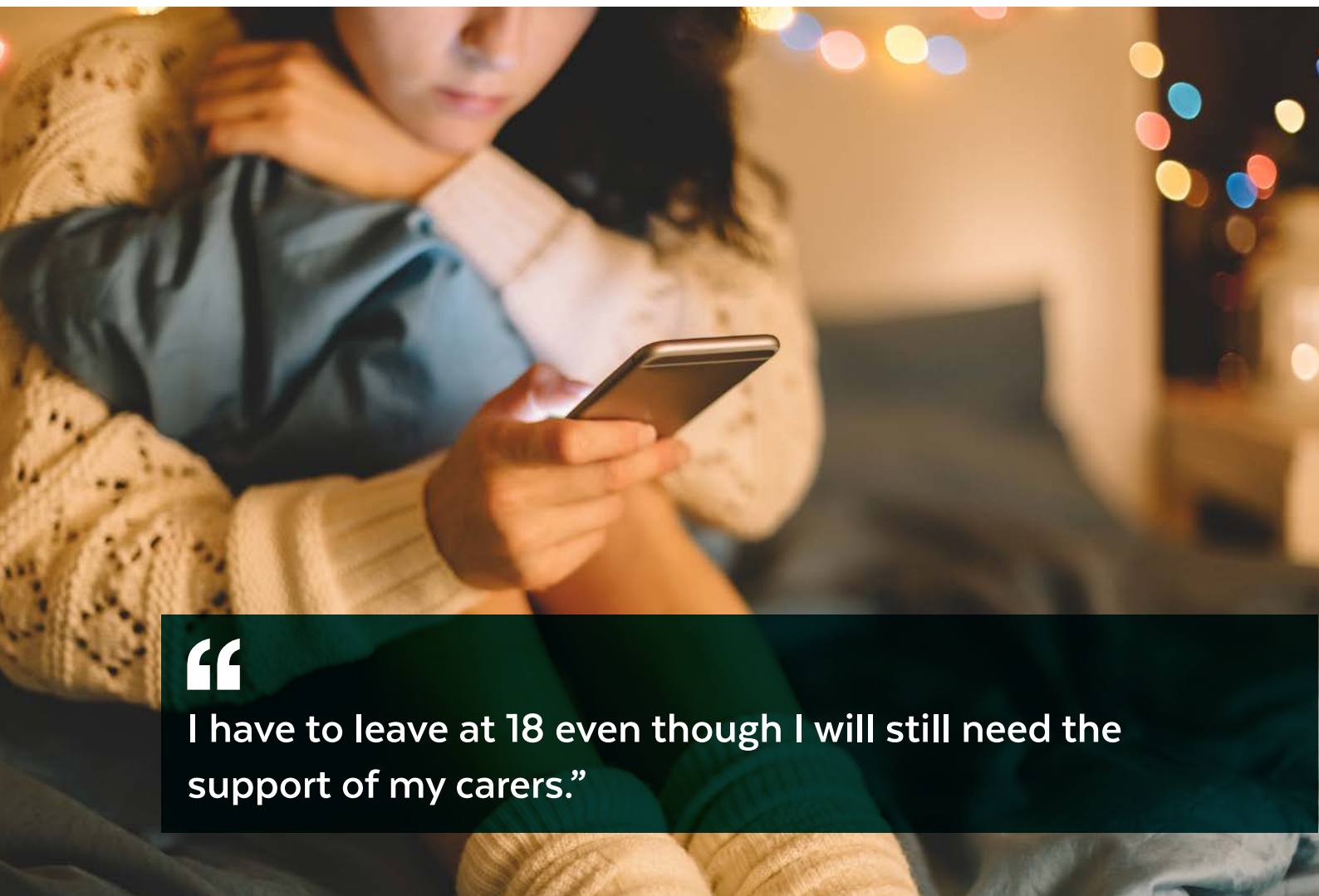
Others, however, identified barriers—for instance, financial means. Reflecting on an ambition to travel internationally, one young person noted, “you can’t travel without money.” Another, who aspires to become a property developer, reflected on the need for “quite a bit of money” to achieve their ambitions. As well as money, young people frequently cited a lack of confidence in themselves as a barrier to achieving: “I need to push myself more and speak up, so I do put myself forward for those better/higher positions.” A lack of self-confidence is often linked in the responses to a lack of knowledge about careers or wider life skills:

**“ Don’t know how to start a business or look for a job.  
Don’t know how the processes work, for example,  
driving license, passport, mortgage, rent. ”**

Some young people felt that their education settings didn't equip them with the skills they needed to pursue their career: "Want to get work experience in this area, not sure how to go about this, school careers [adviser] not helped as yet." One group of young people expressed that, in their school, "the curriculum is limited and doesn't have subjects [such as travel and tourism, or hair and beauty] at GCSE," while others said they needed help and support to get their career back on track after "not getting their GCSEs." Some young people said they struggled with practical problems, like travelling to work without a car or learning the English language.

When asked what help and support they would value, it was sometimes the same practical problems they looked to: one young person asked for "bus passes that could support my travel," another for their "taxis to be on time." Some young people wanted support with their academic learning—for example, "a better understanding of Maths and English." However, a larger number of young people pointed to professional skills such as "report & budget writing" which would support their ambition to take on "higher levels of responsibility" in "higher up positions." Similarly, another group expressed that they "didn't know where to go for help starting my own business." Work experience was also a common theme, with young people asking "to be told how I can arrange work experience" with aspirational employers.

The group of children in care who completed the survey pointed to the particular challenges children in care and care leavers face: one young person identified the care system as a barrier to achieving their goals:



“

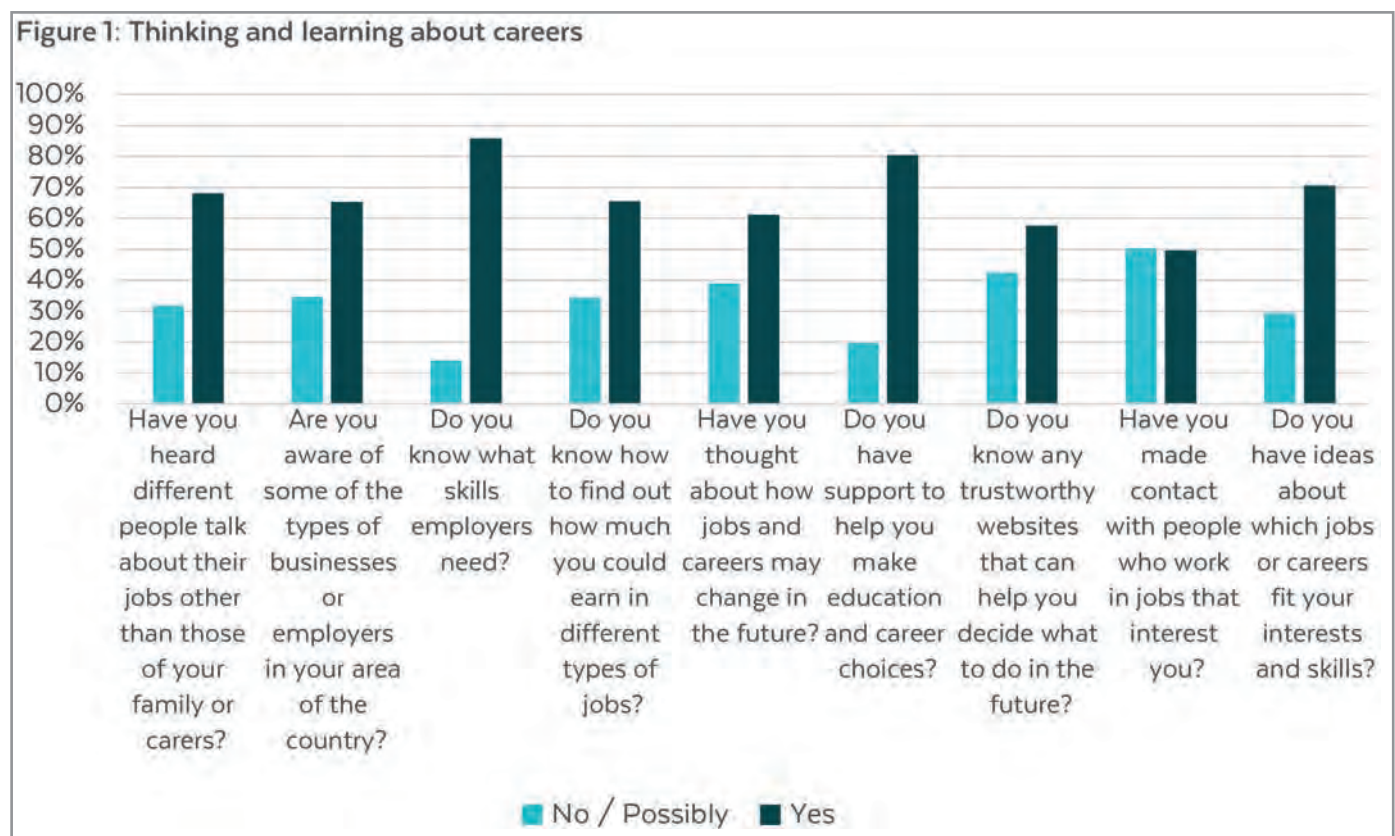
I have to leave at 18 even though I will still need the support of my carers.”



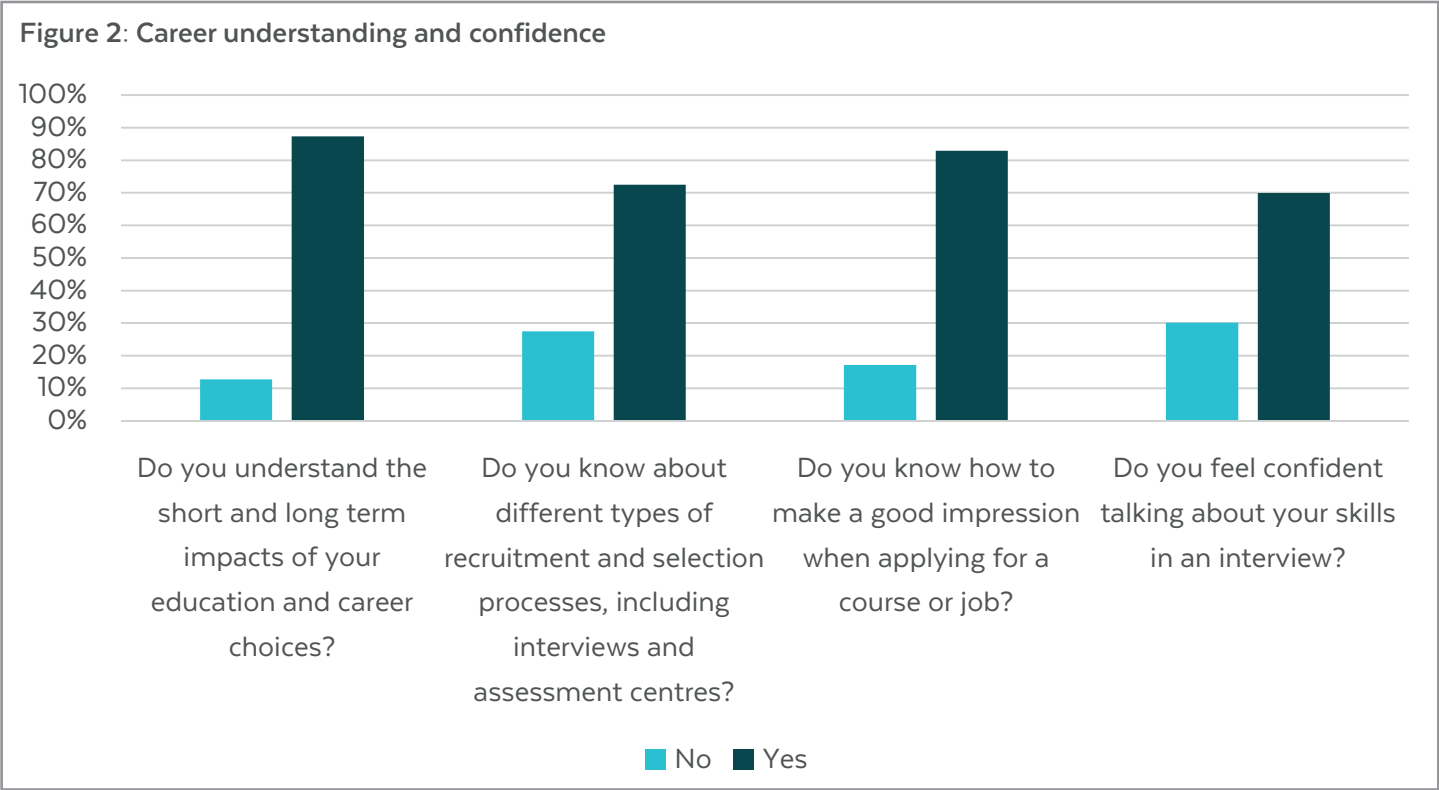


## Analysis: Survey

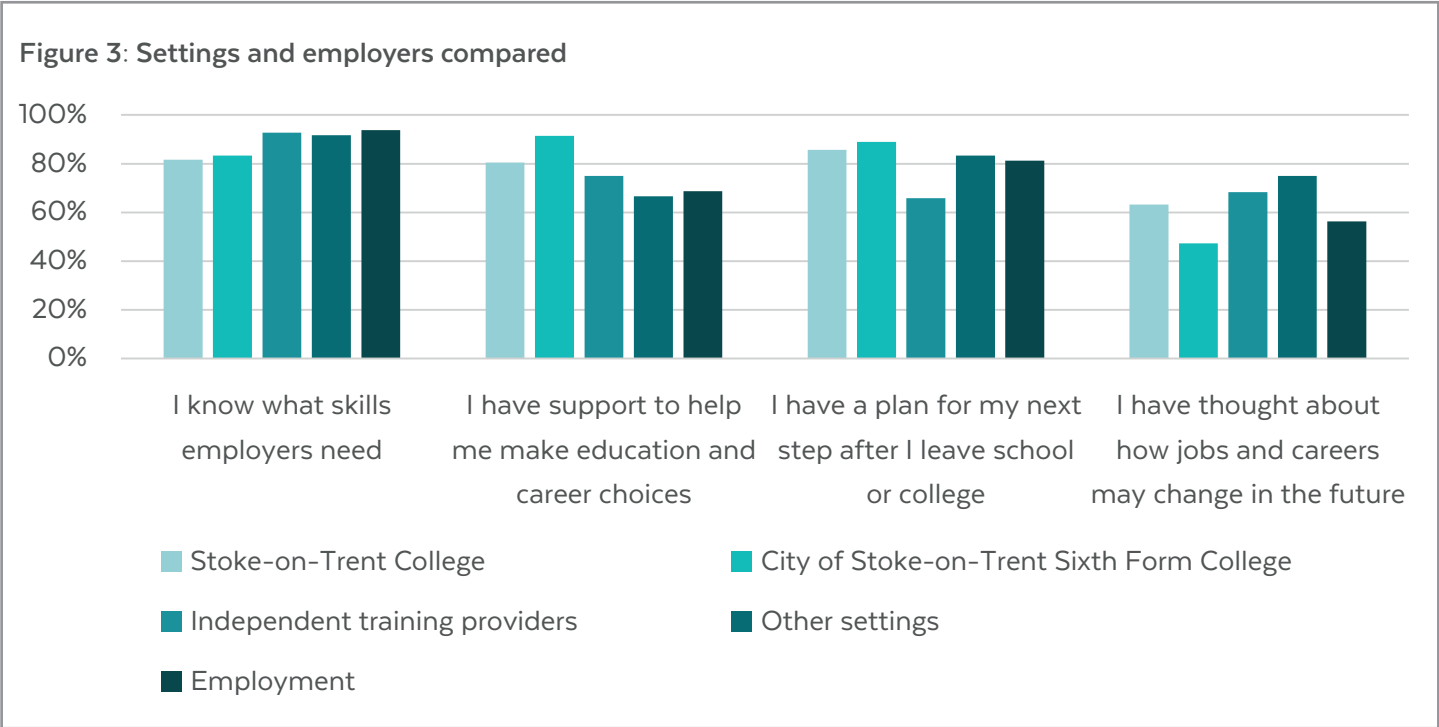
Overall, young people responding to the survey have a positive perception of their knowledge about learning, skills and employment (see figure 1).



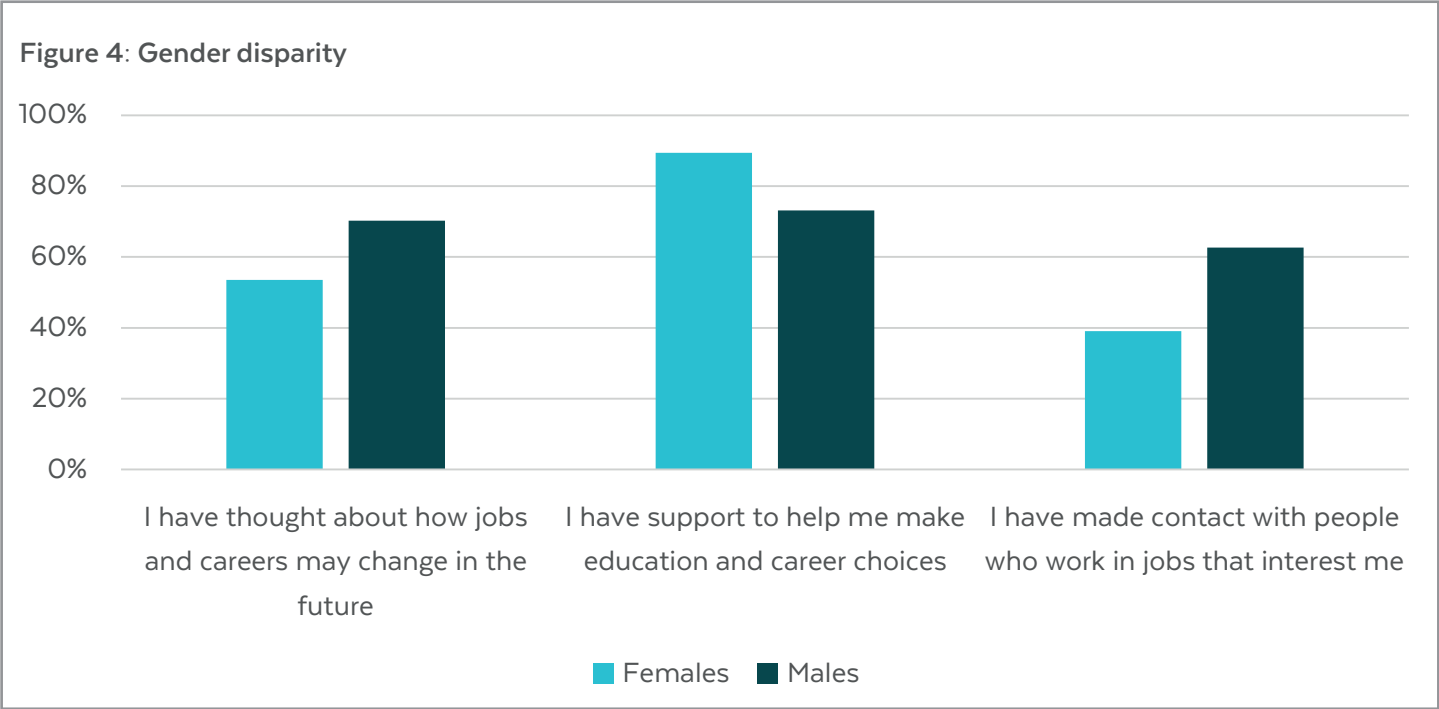
For example, over 80% of young people believed they “know what skills employers need”; a similar number said they “know how to make a good impression when applying for a course or a job” (figure 2).



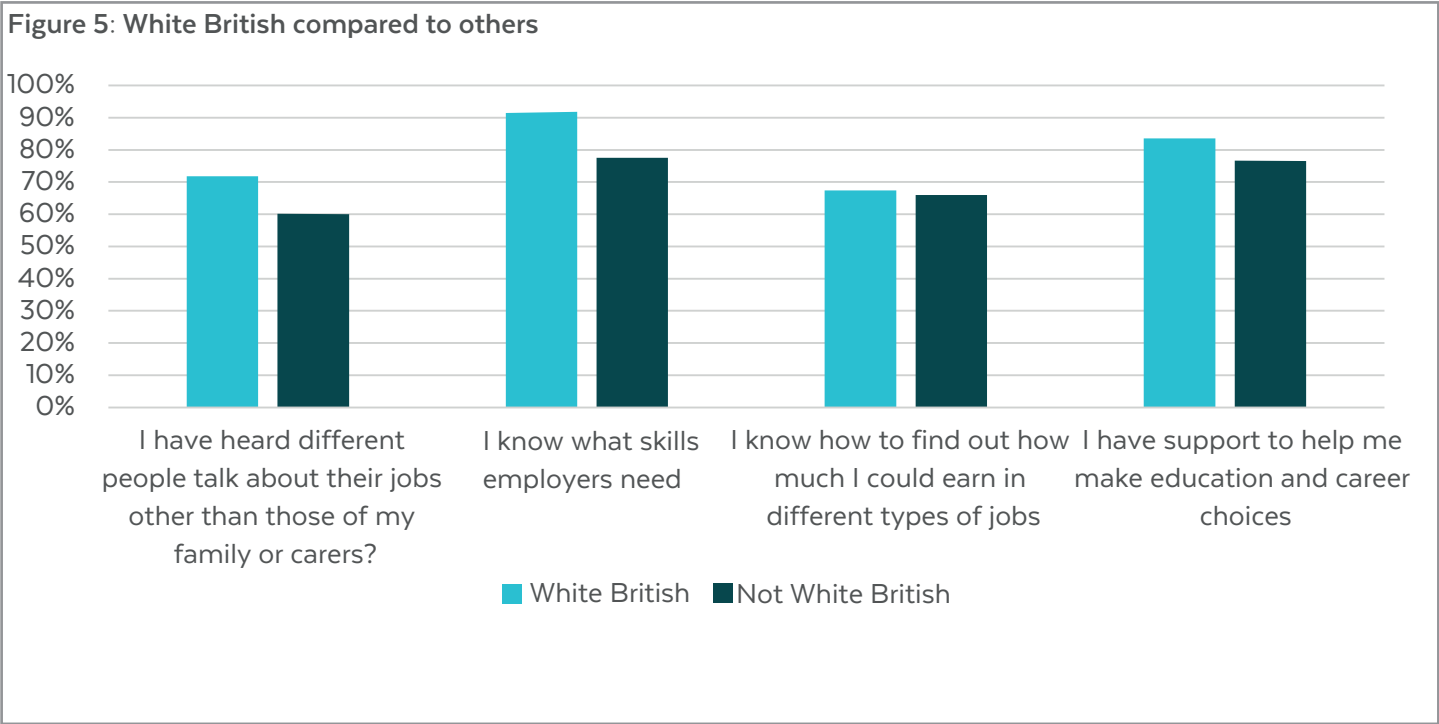
Respondents were less positive when asked about actions they had taken as a result of this knowledge: only 50% of young people said they had contacted people who work in jobs that interested them, while 58% said they knew of “trustworthy websites” which could help them make decisions about their future. When results are split out between different settings and providers (figure 3) it is apparent that there is a degree of unevenness across the city.



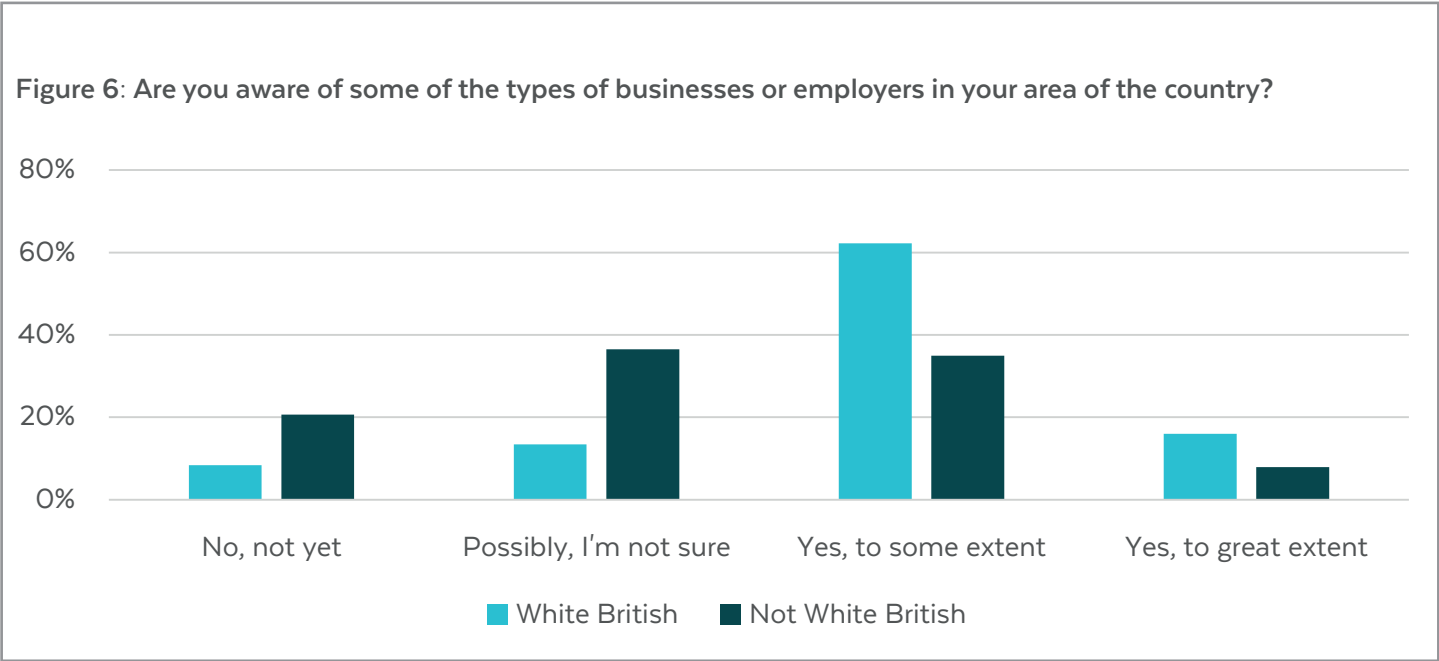
A gender disparity is evident in some responses, with 39% of females saying they have contacted employers that interest them, compared to 63% of males (figure 4).



Conversely, 89% of female respondents said they had support to help them make decisions about their future, compared to 73% of males.



A disparity is also evident between respondents who identify as White British and other respondents. More White British respondents perceive themselves to have a good level of knowledge about the local employment sector (figure 5), and about the needs of employers (figure 6).



Few responses were received from young people who identify as having a disability, but these responses indicate a noticeably lower level of confidence in their own abilities, for example, to “create detailed plans to solve a challenge” or to “change what I say to persuade people” (figure 7).





## Conclusions

Taken together, the focus groups and the survey suggest that 14- to 25-year-olds generally feel confident and well-supported when approaching training and employment. However, we may presume that our results display a positive bias, as young people who are disengaged from education, employment and training are more difficult to reach.

There is a degree of unevenness in responses between different settings and providers, suggesting that greater city-wide coordination and collaboration may be beneficial. Furthermore, some groups display notably lower confidence—for example, young people who are not White British, identify as having a disability, or are leaving the care system—and the experiences of males and females are in some cases dissimilar. Any initiatives must bear these different experiences in mind. Young people would particularly value initiatives which improve their professional skills (financial management, starting a business, work experience) and enhance their level of ambition and self-confidence. The value of these interventions would be to support young people in developing a realistic plan to achieve their dreams, and increase awareness of the intermediate steps involved in pursuing a successful career. When thinking about “gateway” training, some young people would value an expansion in vocational pathways, as well as support with re-taking core GCSEs. Young people would also be in favour of initiatives which make travel easier for them, thereby expanding the range of courses and jobs which are open to them.







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Images courtesy of:  
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Staffordshire University  
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