

Survey report  
March 2015



**LEARNING  
TO WORK**

**TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE, TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE**

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 135,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

# Learning to Work

## Survey report

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# Foreword

*‘The percentage of organisations that currently employ young people has risen to 79%, up from 73% on the previous year.’*

Tackling youth unemployment is now recognised as a major issue by policy-makers and charities. Employers are also increasingly taking action, especially those with an interest in engaging with their local communities and growing their own talent.

The Learning to Work programme was established by the CIPD in 2012 to promote the role of employers in reducing levels of youth unemployment. Over the last three years we have conducted a survey to establish current levels of employer engagement with young people (aged 16–24), with particular focus on the recruitment of young people and the types of programmes offered by organisations. This report sets out our latest survey findings, based on replies from 868 HR professionals across all levels of seniority from organisations across the UK.

In line with recent improvements to youth unemployment levels (youth unemployment has fallen by 188,000 since the end of 2013 (House of Commons Library 2015)), the survey found that the percentage of organisations that currently employ young people has risen to 79%, up from 73% on the previous year. Furthermore, three-quarters (76%) of employers report that they offer some kind of programme aimed at young people; this is an increase from 65% of HR professionals who reported this in 2013.

Since Learning to Work was launched two and a half years ago, we have witnessed a real shift in terms of employer attitudes and

behaviour around the issue of youth unemployment. Levels of youth unemployment are falling and this is in part the result of employer action. All the evidence we’ve gathered around recruitment practices and access routes, as well as the willingness amongst employers to engage with local schools and colleges, suggests that the tide is starting to turn.

Employers are recognising their role in the youth employment agenda and the importance of creating access routes in order to secure future talent pipelines. The latest survey highlights an increase in the number of organisations offering a variety of programmes aimed at young people, particularly Apprenticeships, which half (47%) of the organisations surveyed offer (an increase of 16 percentage points from 2013), and work experience placements, which are offered by 54% of employers (41% reported that they offered them at the end of 2013).

However, while large employers are increasingly doing their bit (86% reported that they recruited at least one young person last year), small and medium-sized organisations (SMEs) are lagging behind when it comes to employing young people (only half recruited a young person in 2014). Although this can in part be explained as a result of lower recruitment levels in smaller organisations, SMEs also fall far behind in terms of their level of engagement with local schools and colleges. Only 38% of SME employers work with schools to offer opportunities for young people or provide employee

volunteer support, compared with 70% of larger organisations.

Given that small and medium-sized business account for 99.9% of private sector companies in the UK and are estimated to provide three in every five private sector jobs (CBI 2014), it is clear that these organisations have an important role to play in overcoming the systemic levels of youth unemployment highlighted by previous CIPD research, *Employers Learning to Work with Young People*, published in June 2014.

The latest survey results also suggest that smaller-sized organisations that do recruit young people are more likely to demonstrate innovative selection methods for entry-level positions. Whereas more than two-thirds (68%) of large organisations use formal qualifications and academic achievement to filter entry-level candidates, only half (54%)

of SMEs do the same, indicating that their agility allows them to try out alternative methods. As the CIPD continues to champion better work and working lives, which starts with young people being able to access the labour market, we intend to harness the agility of smaller businesses to encourage and support more of them to open up their organisations to young people. In the coming months we will be producing a toolkit specifically aimed at SME employers, to help make it as easy as possible for them to introduce access routes and recruit young people. Only once SMEs are fully engaged in tackling youth unemployment will we overcome it once and for all.

For further information and to access our freely available guides and research, please visit [cipd.co.uk/learningtowork](http://cipd.co.uk/learningtowork)

*‘Small and medium-sized organisations (SMEs) are lagging behind when it comes to employing young people.’*

# Access routes and schools engagement

*‘Small and medium-sized employers are much less likely to employ young people, with only 58% reporting that they do.’*

## Recruiting young people

The percentage of organisations that currently employ young people (aged 16–24) has risen in the last 12 months, with four in every five (79%) reporting that they do, up from three-quarters (73%) in 2013. Small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) are much less likely to employ young people, with only 58% reporting that they do, compared with 93% of large organisations. Public sector organisations are also most likely to employ young people; almost

nine in ten (88%) currently do, compared with 76% in the private and voluntary sectors (Table 1).

Linked to this, 72% of HR professionals report that their organisation has recruited young people over the course of last year; this is an increase from 66% of HR professionals that reported this in 2013. Only half (50%) of SMEs reported that they had recruited a young person over the course of 2014, a slight dip from 52% in 2013 (Table 2).

**Table 1: Employers that currently employ young people (aged 16–24), by size of organisation and main sectors (%)**

	All		Size of organisations				Sector					
	2013	2014	SME		Large		Private		Public		Third/voluntary	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Yes	73	79	56	58	95	93	65	76	92	88	60	76
No	26	20	44	42	3	5	34	22	5	10	40	24
Don't know	1	1	0	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	-	1

Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

**Table 2: Employers that have recruited young people aged 16–24 in the past 12 months, by size of organisation (%)**

	All		SME		Large	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Yes	66	72	52	50	85	86
No	30	25	48	49	6	9
Don't Know	4	0	1	0	9	5

Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

### Employability programmes

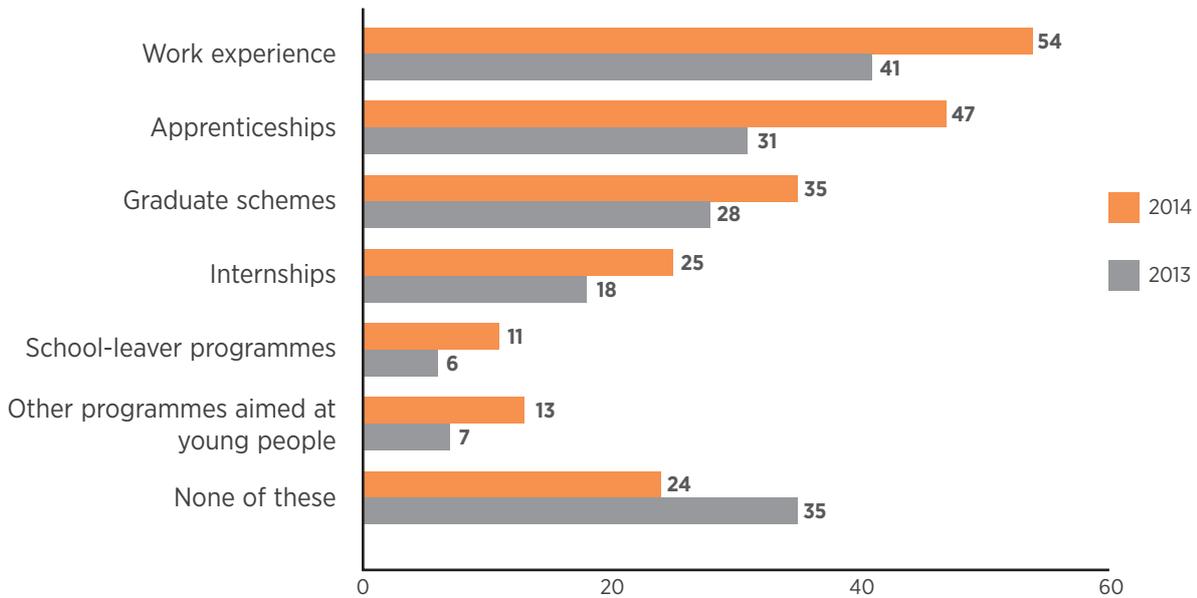
Across the board, the proportion of organisations reporting that they offer entry-level programmes aimed at young people has increased over the past year (Figure 1). In this latest survey, 76% of HR professionals reported that their organisation offered at least one programme aimed at young people, an increase from 65% in 2013.

Apprenticeships have been a particularly popular option, as half of organisations (47%) reported that they now offer

Apprenticeships, an increase of 16 percentage points from 2013. More than half (51%) of HR professionals also report that their organisation has increased the number of Apprenticeships available (Table 3).

The large increase in Apprenticeships offered correlates with over two-thirds (70%) of HR professionals claiming that Apprenticeships are effective at developing the employability skills of young people within the workplace (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Programmes aimed at young people offered by organisations (%)



Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

Table 3: Changes in the programmes aimed at young people offered by organisations (%)

	Work experience		Internships		Apprenticeships		School-leaver programmes		Graduate schemes	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Increased	37	33	44	47	56	51	48	39	36	33
Decreased	19	8	17	6	10	9	12	8	18	13
Don't know	23	3	23	6	17	4	18	3	24	7
No change	22	56	15	42	17	36	22	51	22	47

Base: All HR professionals whose organisation offers: work experience (n=401), internships (n=176), Apprenticeships (n=299), school-leaver programmes (n=55), graduate schemes (n=184)

*‘The large increase in Apprenticeships offered correlates with over two-thirds (70%) of HR professionals claiming that Apprenticeships are effective in developing the employability skills of young people.’*

Apprenticeships came out as the most well-regarded option in terms of the level of effectiveness at developing employability skills, even above graduate schemes, which 66% of employers rated as effective or very effective.

The number of organisations offering work experience placements has risen sharply to 54%, compared with just 41% in 2013. Only 45% of HR professionals consider work experience opportunities to be effective in developing the employability skills of young people, but given the short duration of these programmes, it is perhaps unsurprising that they do not stack up against longer-terms programmes such as internships and graduate schemes.

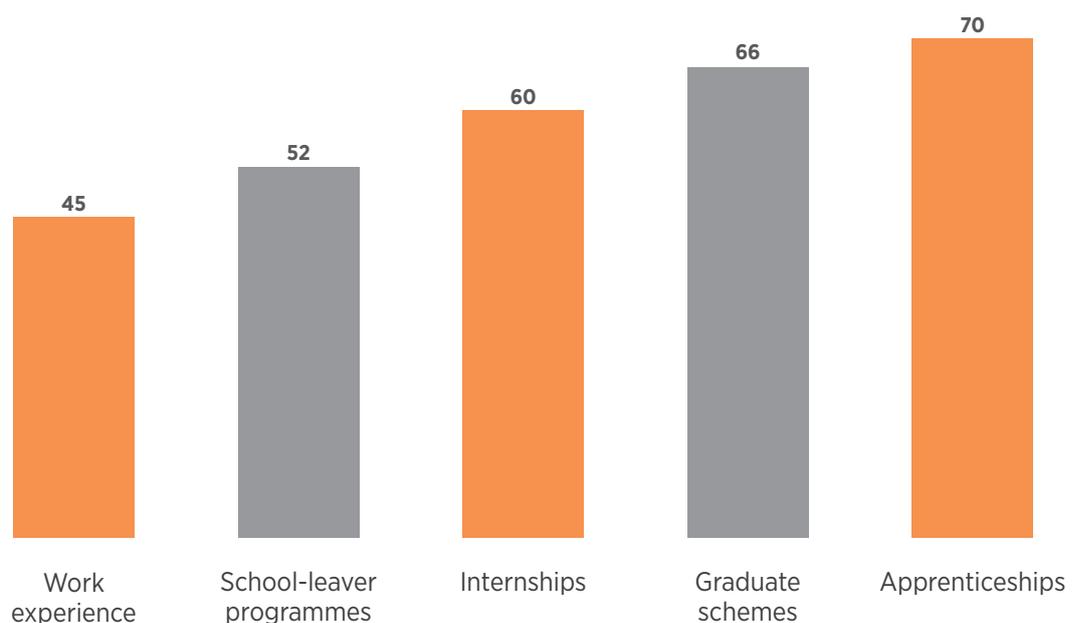
Similarly, the proportion of HR professionals reporting internships being offered by their organisation has risen from 18% in 2013 to 25% in 2014. This is despite 42% of HR professionals claiming that there has been no change in the number

of internships available. Three in every five employers (60%) perceive internships as effective in developing the skills of young people in the workplace. Graduate schemes have seen a similar rise, from being offered by 28% of organisations in 2013 to 35% of organisations in 2014.

School-leaver programmes are considered as effective in developing young people’s employability skills by half (52%) of HR professionals. However, they are one of the least popular types of entry-level routes, with only 11% of organisations offering them, although two-fifths (39%) of HR professionals report that their organisation has increased the school-leaver programmes offered in the past 12 months.

In order to encourage greater numbers of employers to offer high-quality programmes for young people, the CIPD has produced a number of freely available resources for employers on offering

**Figure 2: Effectiveness of programmes aimed at young people in developing employability skills (%)**



Base: All HR professionals whose organisation offers: work experience (n=401), internships (n=176), Apprenticeships (n=299), school-leaver programmes (n=55), graduate schemes (n=184)

work experience, internships and Apprenticeship programmes. These are available to download at [cipd.co.uk/learningtowork](http://cipd.co.uk/learningtowork)

Given that fewer SMEs employ young people (aged 16–24), it is unsurprising that the number offering employability programmes aimed at this age group is also much lower than in larger organisations. More than two-fifths (43%) of SME employers do not offer any opportunities for young people, compared with only 10% of large employers (Table 4). With the exception of work experience opportunities, which are offered by 39% of SME employers, smaller organisations are less than half as likely to offer any type of opportunity aimed at developing young people. Just over a quarter offer Apprenticeships (26%), which are offered by 62% of larger employers, and just 4% offer school-

leaver programmes, compared with 16% of large employers.

The survey also asked employers about their level of engagement with Traineeships. Introduced by the Government in August 2013, Traineeships are designed to help young people (between the ages of 16 and 24, unemployed or who work less than 16 hours a week) who are focused on getting an Apprenticeship or sustainable job but who do not yet have the skills or experience to compete successfully for vacancies. They can last up to six months and consist of work preparation training, English and maths training, as well as a work experience placement for the participant. One in ten (10%) of organisations surveyed stated that they currently offer Traineeships to young people. Further growth of Traineeships appears unlikely, with four-fifths (79%) of HR

professionals reporting that their organisation is not planning to introduce Traineeships in the next 12 months. A third (27%) of HR professionals state that they would be likely to employ a young person who has completed a Traineeship within their organisation in a permanent position, with another third (30%) claiming that it would depend on the circumstances at the time.

### Schools engagement

Over the last 12 months, over half (57%) of organisations have worked with local schools or colleges to either organise programmes (such as workplace visits or work experience opportunities) or volunteer staff time (Table 5). Micro-sized enterprises, with fewer than ten employees, are the least likely to work with local schools and organisations (22%), while large organisations with over 250

**Table 4: Programmes aimed at young people, by size of organisation (%)**

	All	SME	Large
Work experience	54	39	64
Internships	25	14	32
Apprenticeships	47	26	62
School-leaver programmes	11	4	16
Graduate schemes	35	11	51
Other programmes aimed at young people	13	5	19
None of these	24	43	10
Net: Any	76	56	90

Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

**Table 5: Employers that have worked with schools or colleges, by size of organisation (%)**

	All	Micro	Small	Medium	All SME	Large
Net (any method of working together)	57	22	36	58	38	70
No method of working together	43	78	64	42	62	30

Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

employees are the most likely to have staff who volunteer their time or organise programmes (70%). The percentage of all SMEs that report working with local schools in some form is 38%. Working with local schools or colleges to organise work experience placements is the most popular way that employers engage, and in the last 12 months two-fifths (37%) of organisations did this. As Figure 3 shows, the next most popular form of engagement has been via staff volunteering in schools to give talks about their organisation or the jobs they do, with three out of ten (29%) of employers reporting that this took place. Again, SMEs are less likely to do either, with only a quarter (24%) reporting that they work with schools to offer work experience and 14% stating that members of staff volunteer to give talks.

A quarter (23%) of organisations organised workplace visits in the last 12 months, with a third (32%) of large enterprises offering visits. Only one in ten (10%) of SMEs offered workplace visits to a local school or college.

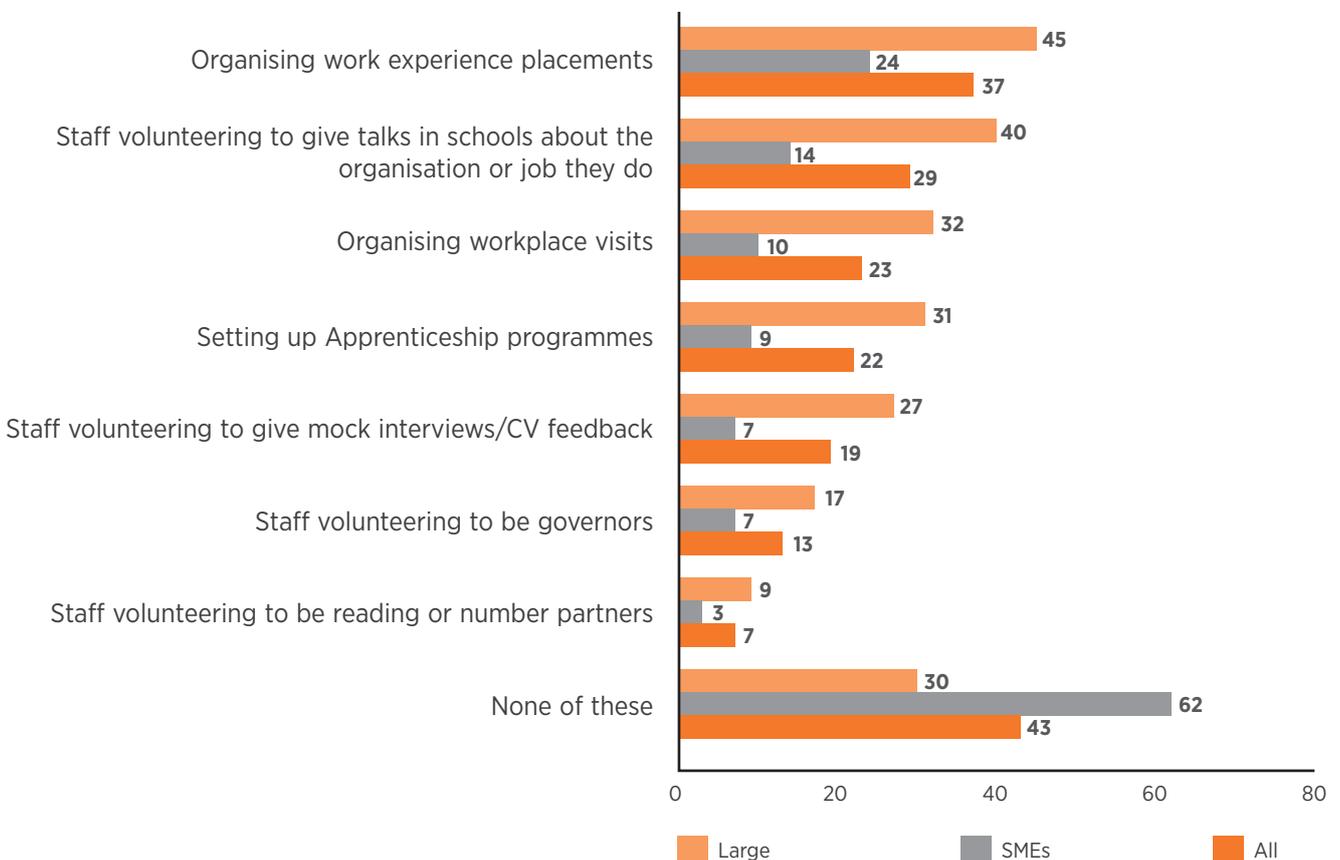
A fifth (19%) of HR professionals report that staff have volunteered to give mock interviews or CV feedback in the past 12 months. Organisations which have recruited young people in the past 12 months are significantly more likely to have staff who volunteer to give mock interviews/CV feedback (23%) than organisations which have not recruited young people in the past 12 months (4%).

Although it is positive that so many employers are working with their local schools and colleges, the survey suggests that there

is still further work to be done in terms of encouraging more organisations to engage with local education providers, as four out of ten (43%) organisations have done none of these volunteering activities with local schools or colleges in the past 12 months. This rises to six out of ten (62%) SMEs not volunteering their time or organising programmes in local schools or colleges.

The CIPD encourages HR professionals to engage with schools via the Inspiring the Future initiative, a free national scheme which allows state schools and colleges to invite professionals in to deliver careers insight talks or CV and interview advice sessions. More than 2,000 CIPD members are currently signed up to the initiative and new volunteers can sign up via [www.inspiringthefuture.org](http://www.inspiringthefuture.org)

**Figure 3: Involvement in schools or colleges, by size of organisation (%)**



Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

# Entry-level recruitment

## Selection criteria

Two-thirds of HR professionals (63%) reported that their organisation uses formal qualifications and academic achievement during the first stage of the recruitment process in order to filter candidates for entry-level roles. This rises to three-quarters of organisations within the public sector (73%), falling to 61% for private sector organisations and less than half of organisations in the voluntary sector (46%).

Perhaps as a result of the quantity of roles and applicants, a greater number of large organisations use formal qualifications and academic achievement to filter candidates. Over two-thirds (68%) of large organisations use them to sift through applications, whereas only half (54%) of SMEs do the same.

Figure 4 is a visualisation of open-ended comments received from HR professionals who do not use formal qualifications or academic achievement to filter entry-level candidates. The size of the word is relative to the number of times it is

mentioned within the total number of comments.

Experience plays a big role in terms of how those who use alternative methods decide which candidates to pick. Of those who said that they did not use formal qualifications and academic achievements, one of the primary methods of filtering candidates was through examining the level and relevance of work experience. As this quote highlights:

*'More their breadth of experience and exposure to activities and academia.'*

Other notable alternative selection criteria were the candidate's demonstrable skills and performance at an interview:

*'I always go by the personality of the candidate and the interview itself rather than qualifications.'*

## Suitability criteria

Two-thirds (65%) of HR professionals believe to some extent that formal qualifications and academic achievement are

*'Two-thirds of HR professionals (63%) reported that their organisation uses formal qualifications and academic achievement during the first stage of the recruitment process in order to filter candidates.'*

Figure 4: Alternative criteria for filtering candidates for entry-level roles





A desire for alternative ways of recruiting talent beyond formal qualifications and academic achievement is seen across the board, with 63% of HR professionals who use formal qualifications in recruitment and 61% of HR professionals who do not use formal qualifications in recruitment indicating their interest in such alternatives. Curiously, SMEs are the least likely to indicate a desire for alternative methods (49%), despite being the most likely to believe that formal qualifications and academic achievement are an unsuitable indicator of suitability (28%).

As noted above, SMEs are less reliant on formal qualifications and academic achievement to filter candidates. They are also less likely to want to find out about alternative methods, possibly indicating a confidence in the recruitment processes they have in place.

**Table 6: Usage of formal qualifications and interest in alternative methods of recruitment, by size of organisation (%)**

	All	SME	Large
Use formal qualifications and academic achievement to filter candidates for entry-level roles	63	54	68
Think formal qualifications and academic achievement are the best indicator of suitability (Net: yes)	77	71	80
Interested in finding alternative ways of recruiting talent beyond formal qualifications and academic achievement	61	49	69

Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

# Young people and skills development

*‘The top three skills [employers are concerned about developing in young candidates] came out as: communication (64%), teamwork (60%) and confidence (45%).’*

## Skills development

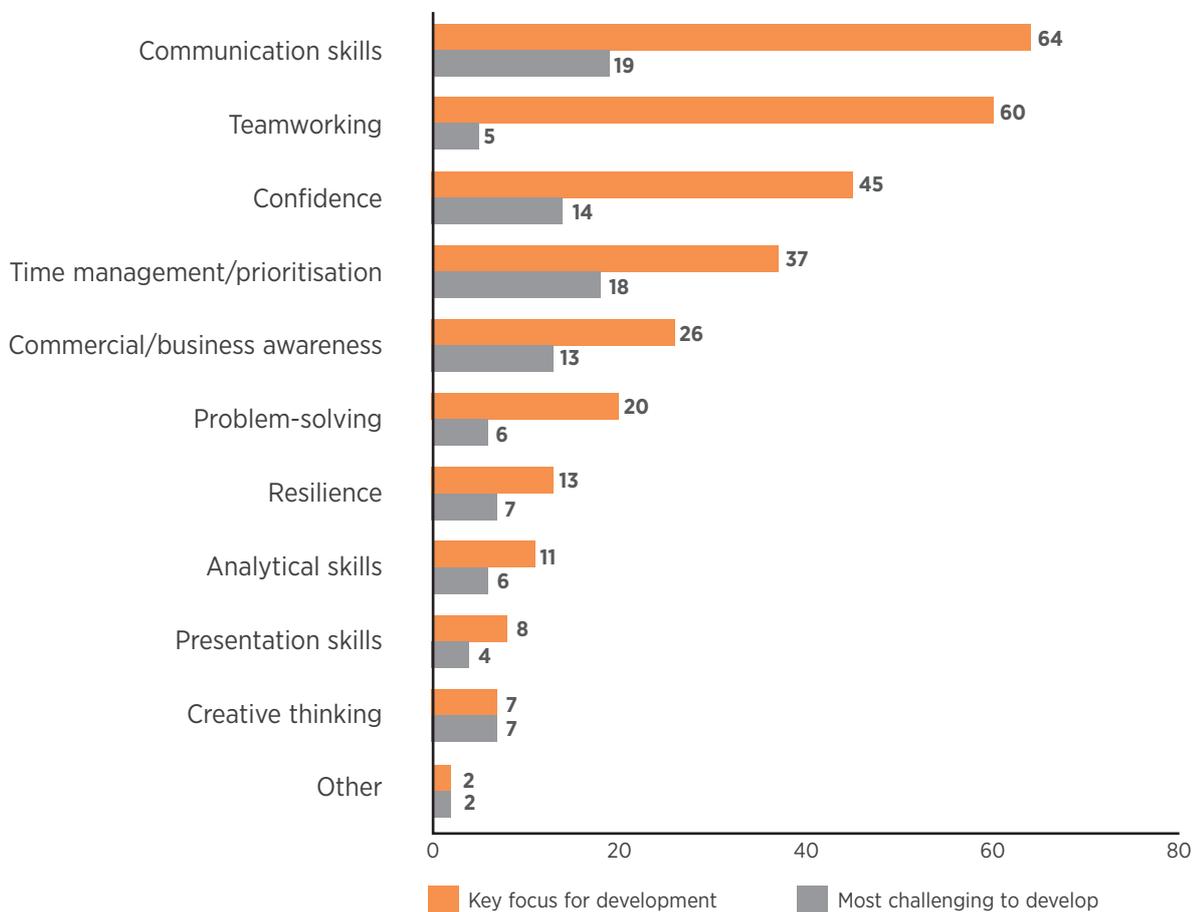
The survey sought to uncover the key skills employers are concerned about developing in young candidates during their first year in the job. The top three skills came out as: communication (64%), teamwork (60%) and confidence (45%). Time management (45%), business awareness (26%) and problem-solving (20%) were also popular options (Figure 7).

Public sector organisations are more likely to consider communication skills as a focus for development than other sectors (69%), while voluntary sector

organisations consider confidence as more important than other sectors (54%). Of least concern to employers is the development of creative thinking (7%) and presentation skills (8%).

Although they are in the top three skills to focus on developing during a young person’s first year in work, communication (19%) and confidence (14%) also appear in the top three skills employers find most challenging to build in young people. Time management/prioritisation (18%) was also one of the most difficult skills to build in young people at work.

Figure 7: The top three skills to develop during the first year in work and the most challenging skill to develop (%)



Base: All HR professionals (n=868)

**Role design**

When considering the design of a role for young people, HR professionals overwhelmingly cite having support networks in place as the most important factor to consider during the design process (72%). This is consistently the most important factor across all sectors (Figure 8).

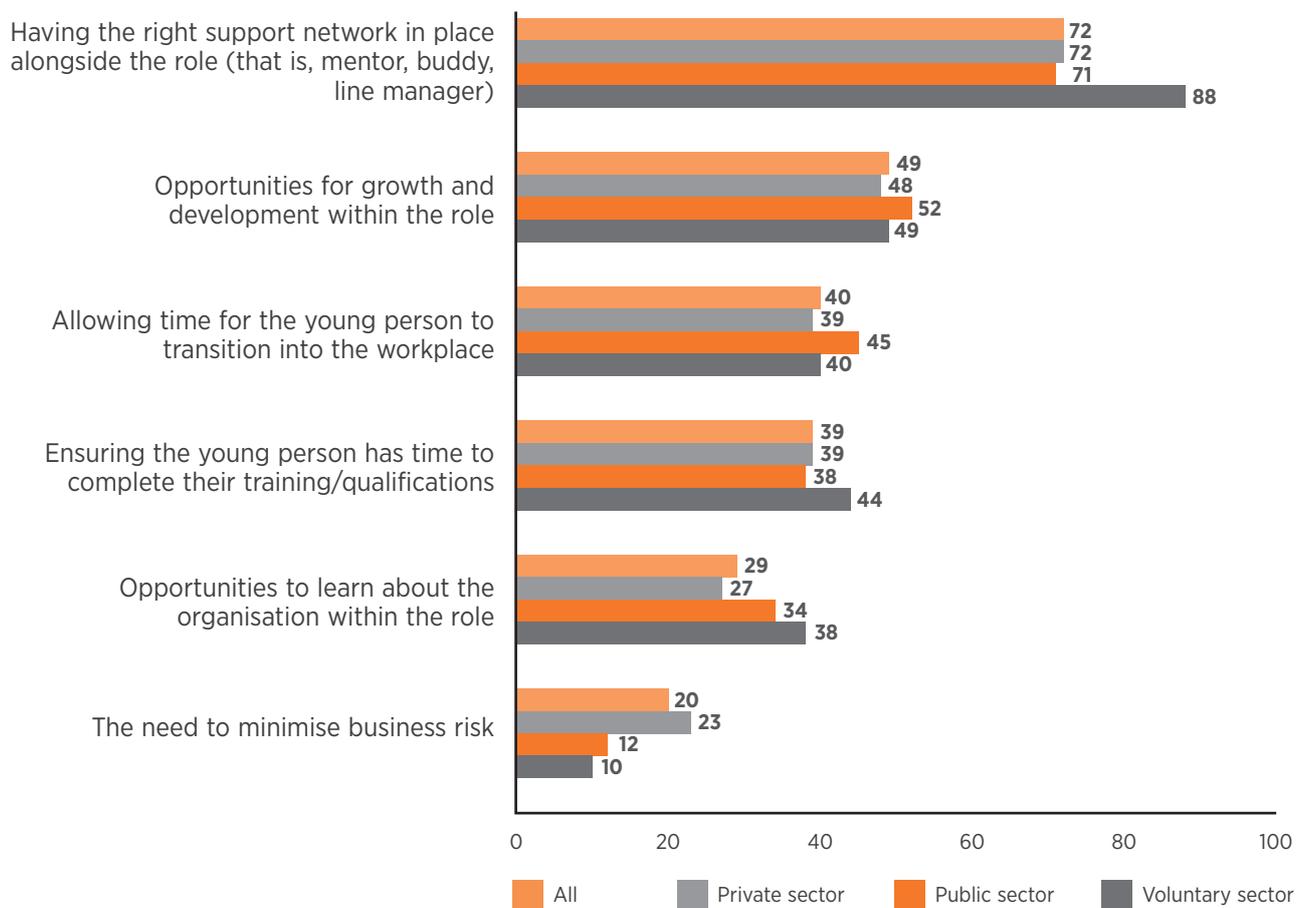
Half (49%) of HR professionals report that opportunities for growth and development within the role is an important factor to consider, closely followed by allowing time for the young person to transition into the workplace (40%) and ensuring the young person has time to complete their training and qualifications (39%).

Of least importance in designing roles for young people is the need to minimise business risk (20%), although this is significantly higher for private sector organisations (23%) than for voluntary sector organisations (10%).

In order to help employers introduce young people successfully into their organisation, the CIPD has produced a best practice guide, *Managing Future Talent*. This guide provides tips and suggestions from employers on how to provide the right level of support to help inexperienced workers adapt to the workplace, encouraging them to develop the skills outlined as important by our survey.

*‘When considering the design of a role for young people, HR professionals overwhelmingly cite having support networks in place as the most important factor to consider during the design process (72%).’*

**Figure 8: Important factors in designing roles for young people, by organisation sector (%)**



Base: All HR professionals who currently employ young people (n=553)

# Parents and careers advice and guidance

*‘Of the parents who seek advice from their child’s school or college, only a third (29%) are satisfied with the quality of careers advice or guidance provided.’*

## Careers advice and guidance

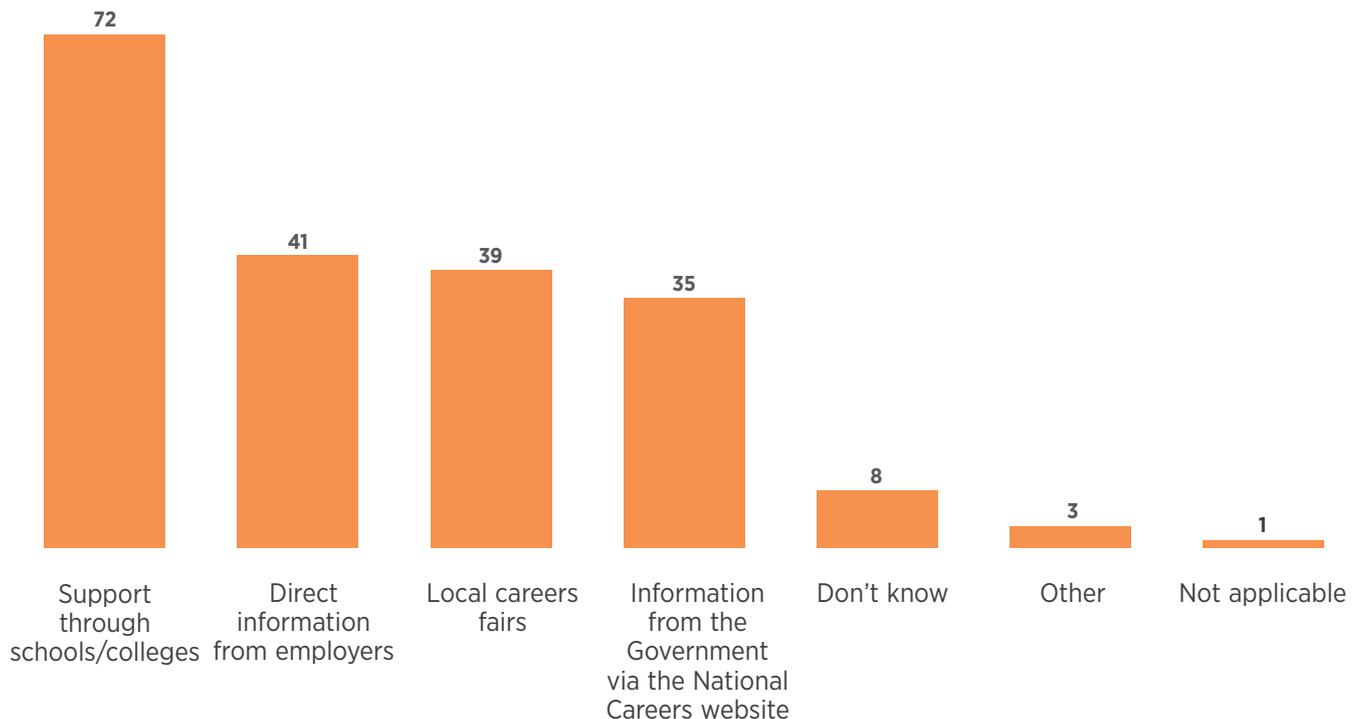
The survey respondents were asked if they were the parent to any children between the ages of 11 and 18. The 201 HR professionals who are were then asked a series of questions regarding careers advice and their needs in supporting their children through education, careers and training.

Three-fifths of parents (62%) are confident that they have the right amount of information to advise their child on education, careers and training, with a quarter neither confident nor not confident (22%). The nature of the survey sample, being made up of HR professionals, may explain why so many feel confident about advising their children. HR

professionals have experience of the labour market and know first-hand what employers consider to be important, all information that they can share with their children. However, the majority of parents will not have this advantage and will be more reliant on outside sources of support for advice.

If they need to seek support in advising their child on education, careers and training, three-quarters of parents would approach their child’s school or college for more effective advice (72%). Two-fifths would seek information directly from employers (41%) or local careers fairs (39%), while a third would seek advice from the Government via the National Careers website (35%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Sources of effective advice on education, careers and training (%)



Q. What support would help you to advise your children more effectively?  
Base: All parents (n=201)

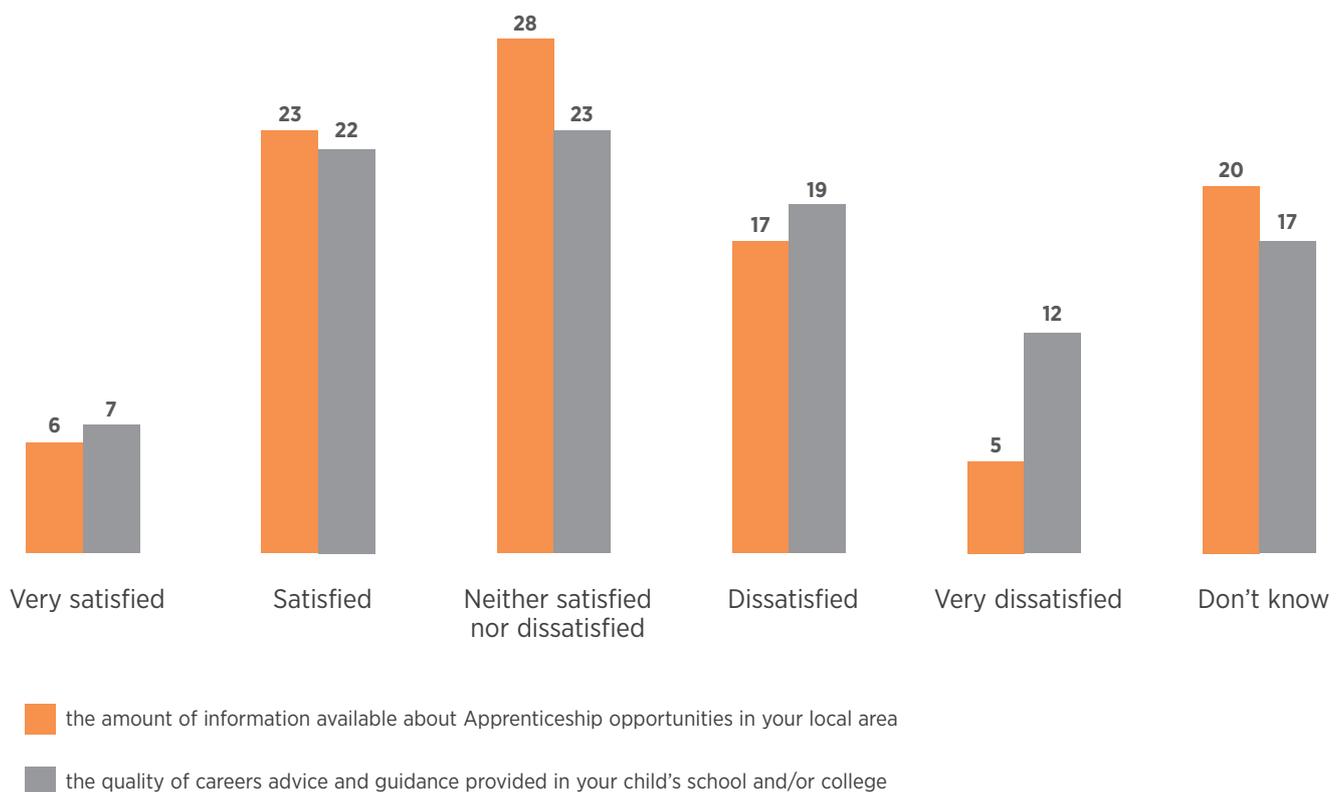
Of the parents who seek advice from their child's school or college, only a third (29%) are satisfied with the quality of careers advice or guidance provided.

Apprenticeship opportunities in their area and a third (31%) dissatisfied with the quality of careers advice and guidance provided in their child's school and/or college.

When asked about satisfaction with the amount of information available about Apprenticeship opportunities in their local area, only a quarter of HR professionals who are parents were satisfied (29%). As Figure 10 shows, this does leave a quarter of HR professionals who are parents (26%) dissatisfied with the amount of information available about

The data indicates that there is more that can be done to improve the level of support available to parents to allow them to best help their children navigate the transition from education into work. Later in 2015 the CIPD will be publishing a guide for parents, to help them understand the different routes available and how to support their children.

**Figure 10: Sources of effective advice on education, careers and training (%)**



Q. As a parent, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with...?  
 Base: All parents (n=187)

# Sample and method

The survey was conducted online by YouGov using the CIPD membership database, consisting of approximately 132,000 members, and the YouGov panel of HR professionals. The survey was carried out 7–30 November 2014.

The survey is based on responses from 868 HR professionals and employers. All respondents have HR responsibility within their organisations, which may or may not be their sole and primary function within their organisation.

The target sample for this survey was the 'HR profession' and includes various levels of seniority. A summary of the sample profile in terms of sector and size of organisation can be seen in Tables 7 and 8.

Independent sample t-tests have been used to examine whether differences between groups are significantly different than could be expected by chance. YouGov reports on statistics at the generally accepted level of significance,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 7: Organisation sector**

Sector	Percentage	Count
Private sector firm or company	73	634
Public	21	182
Charity / voluntary sector	6	52

**Table 8: Organisation size**

Size	Percentage	Count
2–49	28	244
50–99	6	52
100–249	7	61
250–499	11	99
500–999	8	71
1,000–4,999	15	132
5,000–9,999	7	61
10,000–19,999	5	41
20,000 and over	12	106

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# CIPD | Learning to Work

The **Learning to Work** programme is led by the CIPD to promote the role of employers in reducing youth unemployment. The CIPD's purpose is to **champion better work and working lives**, which starts with young people being able to access the labour market.

The overall aim of the programme is to promote the business case for investing in the future workforce. We encourage HR professionals to offer a wide range of access routes into their organisations and ensure their recruitment and management practices are youth-friendly. We also promote direct contact with young people via two youth volunteering programmes, **Steps Ahead Mentoring** and **Inspiring the Future**.

[cipd.co.uk/learningtowork](http://cipd.co.uk/learningtowork)

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Issued: March 2015 Reference: 6890 © CIPD 2015