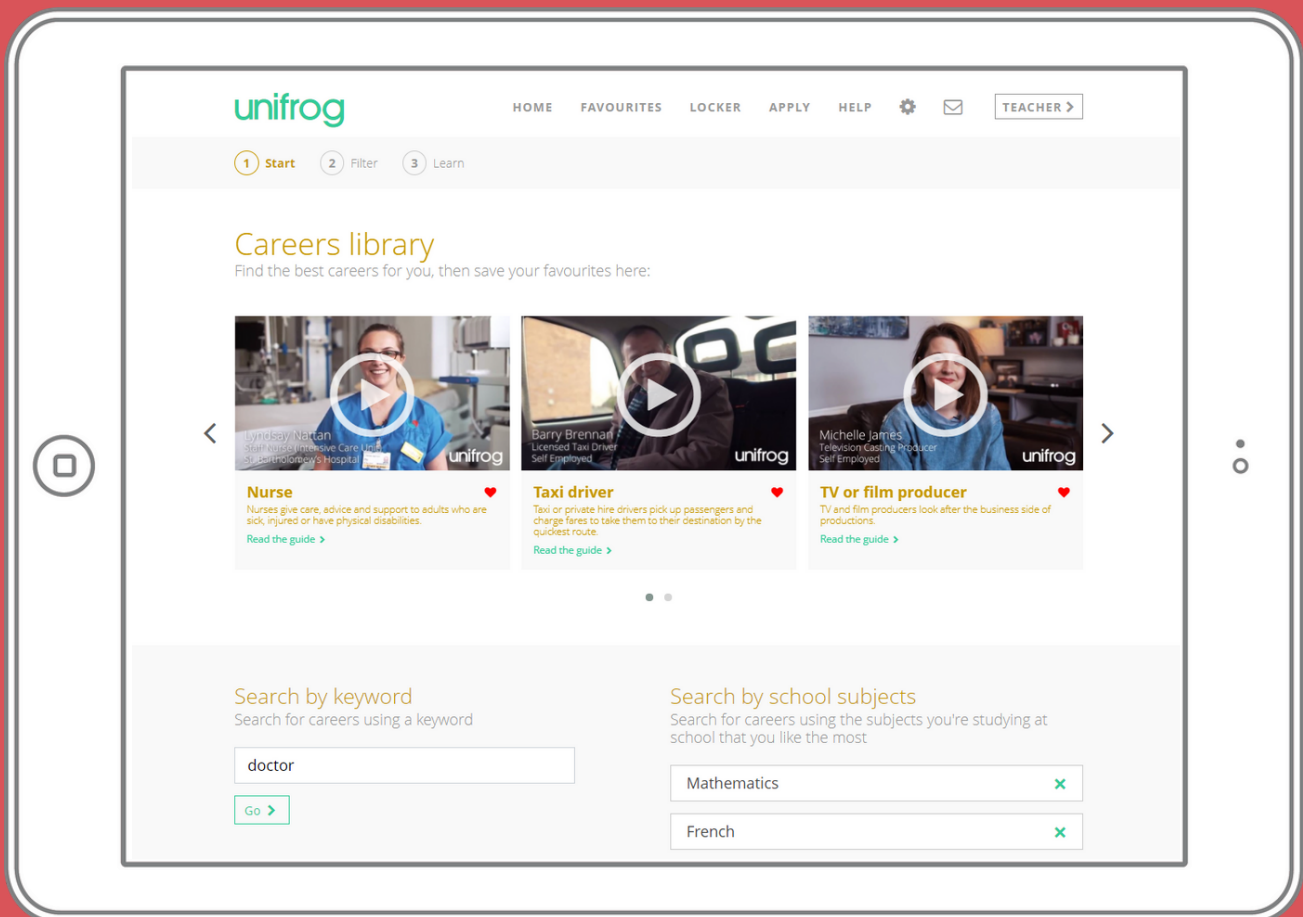


# Skills & Enterprise 2021



A report on students' skills development and attitudes towards their future careers

## KEY FINDINGS

1

**Almost three quarters (72%)** of students believe that the COVID-19 pandemic will make it **harder for them to find a job** in the future.

2

**Job security** is the **most important factor** for students choosing a career path with almost **9 in 10 students** rating it as very or quite important.

3

Students are interested in a **wider range of careers** than in previous years - especially in the **pandemic growth areas** of technology, science, and healthcare.

4

**Independence** has been the **most logged competency** during the pandemic.

5

**70% of students in Year 13** report finding it **more difficult to develop skills** that might be **useful for their career** as a result of the pandemic.

6

Students believe they're **struggling** to develop skills **traditionally reliant on in-person interaction**, especially teamwork and leadership.

7

**Over two thirds** of students (68%) say the pandemic is making it more difficult to find a **work experience placement**.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 USE LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

Put careers in context and help students anticipate what the world of work may look like in the future with LMI so they can research the best careers for them and develop the relevant skills.

### 2 FACILITATE EMPLOYER ENCOUNTERS

Create opportunities for students to interact with employers wherever possible - even if the encounters are virtual. Encounters get students' buy-in, motivate them, and help prevent them becoming NEET.

### 3 TACKLE PERCEPTIONS AROUND IN-PERSON SKILLS

Tackle students' perceptions around skills that are traditionally reliant on in-person interaction. Create opportunities to develop their teamwork and leadership skills by working collaboratively online.

### 4 SCHEDULE TIME TO REFLECT ON AND RECORD SKILLS

Find opportunities for students to practice their skills and schedule sessions throughout the year to reflect on and record their skills to build up a portfolio, ready for Personal Statements and CVs.

### 5 LINK SKILLS TO THE REAL WORLD

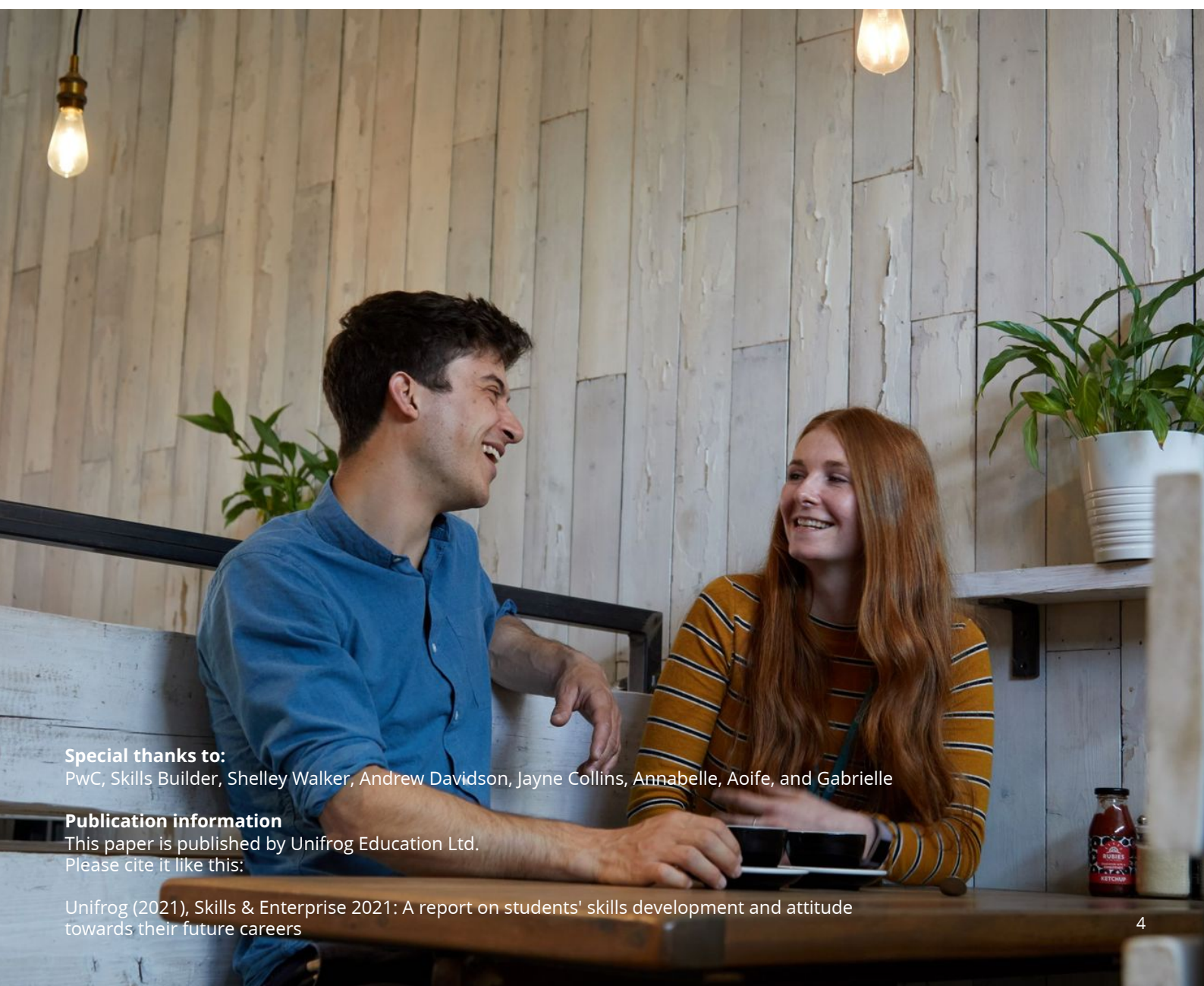
Embed skills in the curriculum and link them to the real world to make them relevant. This will increase students' awareness of the skills they're developing and why they're important for the world of work.

### 6 PROMOTE VIRTUAL WEX OPPORTUNITIES

Encourage students to explore virtual work experience placements as they offer opportunities that may not have been available previously and demonstrate a student's drive and initiative to future employers.

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## INTRODUCTION

As we enter the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across the UK are once again closed to the majority of students and we're starting to gain a better understanding of the impact this is having. In this report, we focus on the impact on students' skills development, their attitudes towards their future careers, and provide tips for those supporting students.

At Unifrog, we're in a privileged position to do this. We analysed data from the 700,000 active UK students on the platform and surveyed 6,253 students on how they felt about the pandemic, their skills, and future careers. We also gained invaluable insights from teachers and careers leads across the UK, Skills Builder - the experts in building essential skills into the everyday curriculum, leading employer PWC, and current students and Whitehat apprentices.

We start by looking at students' attitudes towards their future careers. For many, the profound changes of 2020 have led to a shift in thinking. Students are exploring a wider range of careers than in previous years and are increasingly interested in healthcare, tech and science - areas that saw growth last year. We look at how students believe the pandemic has

impacted their ability to find a job and what's important to them when choosing a career path and researching companies.

In chapter two we examine the skills and competencies that students will need for these future careers. We look at the pandemic's most-logged skills and the misconception among students that the skills that traditionally rely on in-person interaction have been impossible to develop during distance learning. We also look at which skills students believe employers value most highly, the skills they believe themselves to have, and the skills that took the biggest hit in 2020.

In the third chapter we look at the skills-based opportunities out there for students in terms of apprenticeships and virtual work experience placements. We consider whether we were starting to see the green shoots of recovery for apprenticeships at the end of last year and how the shift to virtual work experience placements has opened up new, if different, opportunities for students.



# 1 Students' future careers

For many students, the profound changes of 2020 have caused a shift in how they feel about their future careers. Almost three quarters (72%) of the 6,253 students we surveyed at the end of 2020, believe that the COVID-19 pandemic will make it more difficult for them to find a job in the future. This concern isn't unfounded. The Resolution Foundation<sup>1</sup>, an independent think-tank focused on improving the living standards of those on low-to-middle incomes, argues that evidence from previous economic

downturns indicates that young people's employment is likely to be affected to a greater degree than other age groups. What's more, a quarter of students (24%) say the pandemic has changed what careers they're interested in. In this chapter, we look at how students' career horizons have broadened, the areas that students have become more interested in, and what's important to students when thinking about their future careers.



<sup>1</sup>[www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis](http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis)

## BROADENING HORIZONS

With students reconsidering the careers they're interested in, we've seen a change in behaviour on the Unifrog Careers library. Students are broadening their careers research and favouriting a wider range of careers than in previous years. It may be that students are exploring careers they hadn't previously considered. Or that concerns around the future job market have led them to take a more thorough look at all the options available.

Students in Year 13 favourite the lowest number of careers with the average student favouriting 4.9 careers, perhaps as careers research is more focused by this stage of their school journey. On the other hand, students in Year 12 favourite the highest number - 5.7 careers on average. Year 10s have seen the biggest year-on-year rise in the number of careers favoured. This indicates that the changes we saw in 2020 have focused the minds of students to start thinking about their futures at an earlier age than in previous years.

The increased diversity of students' career interest means they're going to need a diverse range of skills to be competitive and succeed. It's important that students research the skills required for their chosen careers to make sure they're developing the skills that will give them the best chance of securing a job in their chosen field.

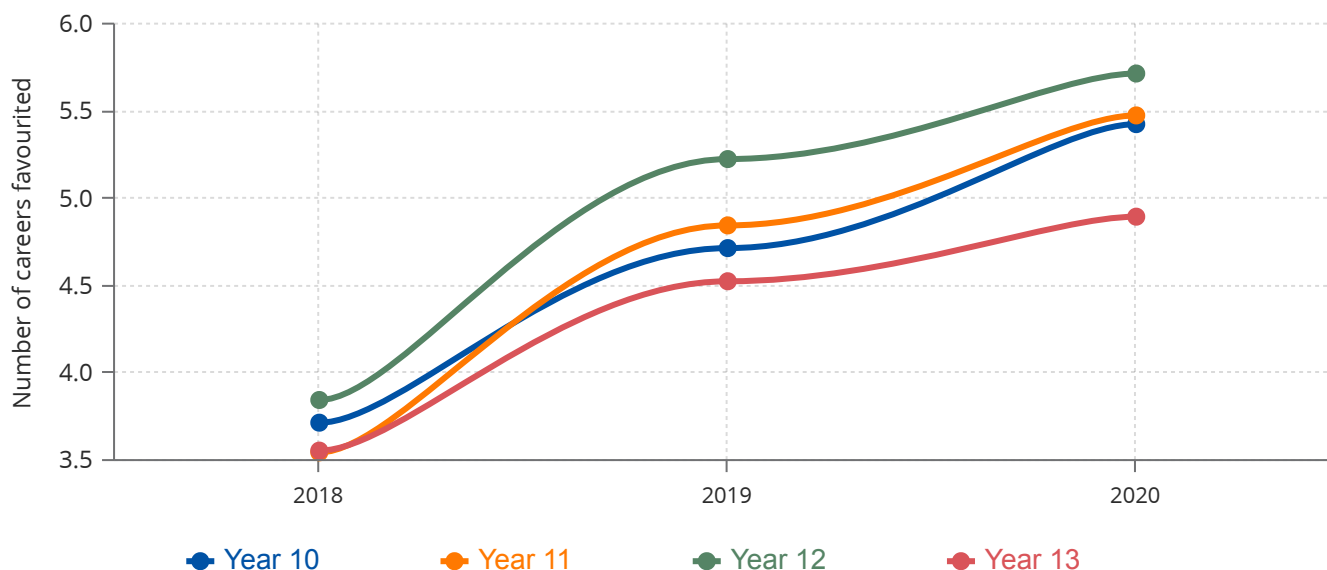


### UNIFROG TOP TIP

Encourage students to research any careers they may be interested in on the Unifrog Careers library and check out the 'Skills required' section of each Careers profile.

Figure 1.1

How many careers has the average student in each year group favourited over the last three years?



## PANDEMIC HIGH GROWTH AREAS

Students' broadened careers interest is concentrated in areas that have seen high growth during the pandemic such as technology, science, and healthcare.

When we look at the 24% of students who say the pandemic has caused a change in career interest, 46% of them say they're now more interested in one of these growth industries. With students concerned about future job prospects, it's not surprising that many are seeking out areas of the economy that grew during 2020. The hope is that careers in these fields will be resilient to future pandemics or economic downturns.

This underscores the importance of using LMI to provide students with effective careers guidance. Giving students impartial, up-to-date information about the labour market will help them make sense of the changing economic landscape and allow them to map out where a career could

lead, helping to support their decision making.

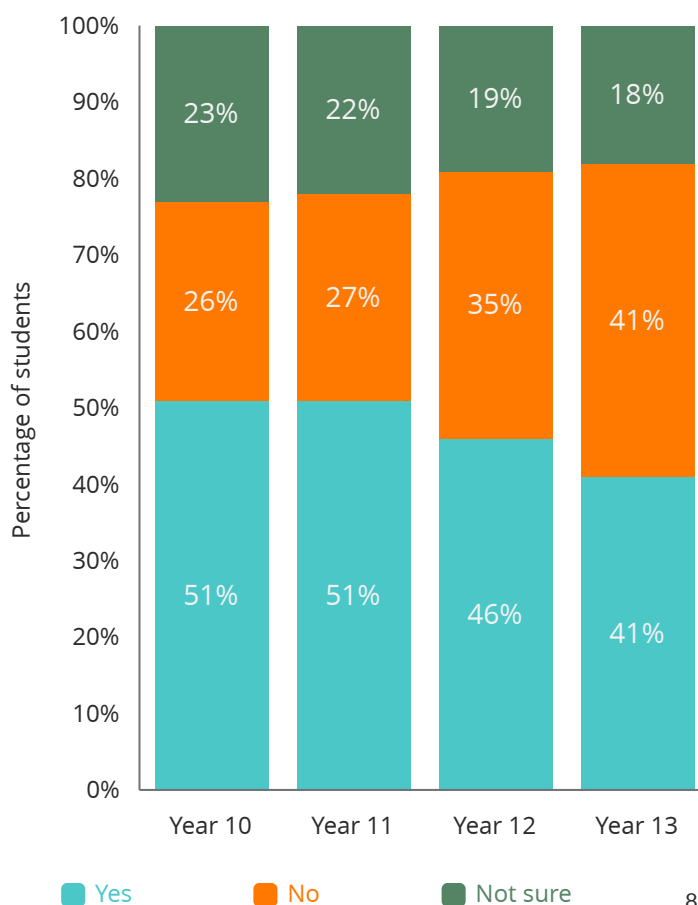
From March to November 2020, Medicine and health was the most popular area of the Unifrog Careers library, with Careers profiles linked to this area favoured over 80,000 times by students in Years 11-13.

Younger students in Years 10 and 11 are more likely to say they're interested in a career in a growth industry. Older students often have more established careers paths in mind, having chosen A-levels or BTECs and started planning potential higher education routes - so they may feel less able to be flexible. It will be interesting to see if this trend plays out over the coming years and we begin to see increased competition for roles in these industries. If so, it will be vital that these younger students start to develop the relevant skills to secure a role in one of these industries in what could be a highly competitive environment.

**Figure 1.2** How many times were careers in each area favoured from March-Nov 2020?

Career area	No. of times favoured
Medicine and Health	81,383
Arts and Media	73,119
Science and Technology	71,547
Law and Public Safety	42,158
Business and Finance	41,751
Human Services and Admin	27,061
Plants, Land and Animals	22,531
Sales, Marketing and Publishing	21,538
Education and Training	19,489
Social Services	17,032
Manufacturing and Engineering	15,750
Hospitality, Tourism and Sport	14,229
Construction and Architecture	10,313
Maintenance, Service and Repair	6,994
Transport and Logistics	3,590

**Figure 1.3** Has the pandemic made students more interested in one of the growth industries?





## WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS?

We've seen that the pandemic has changed what careers students are interested in, but what exactly is it that's important to students when choosing a career path?

We asked students how important different factors were when choosing a career path. Perhaps unsurprisingly given 2020 saw millions furloughed, job security came out as the most important factor with almost 9 in 10 students rating it as very or quite important. This was followed by work-life balance and money, with making a difference coming last.

Interestingly, while money is the most important factor for students in Year 10, it becomes less important as students get older, and other factors become more important. This could be simply a lack of awareness among Year 10s of other factors and their potential importance in the future.

Although it's important that students are realistic and pragmatic when thinking about their future careers, nobody wants to see a generation of young people prioritising job security over trying to find a career they're genuinely passionate about.

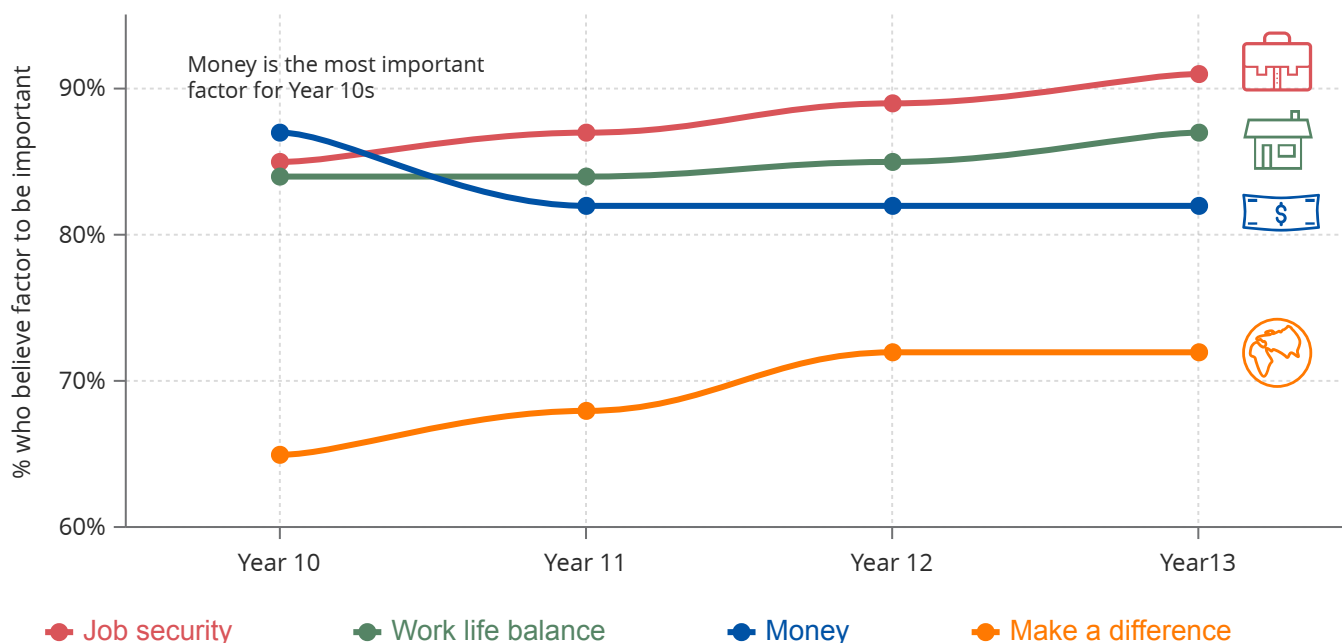
One way to get students, especially those in younger years, to think about careers they may be happier in long term is to encourage them to think about their interests and causes they're passionate about.

### UNIFROG TOP TIP

On Unifrog, both the Myers-Briggs based Personality quiz and the Interests quiz, based on John Holland's theory of personality and job choices, help students to explore careers linked to their personality type and interests.

It's also worth reminding students that having a diverse set of transferable skills and the ability to learn new skills is as important to job security than the specific career or industry you choose. In the Open University's 'Bridging the Digital Divide' report<sup>2</sup>, 85% of senior leaders believe it will become necessary to move to a model of lifelong learning in future, where employees are constantly learning and developing new skills, regardless of the industry.

**Figure 1.4** What is the most important factor for students when choosing a career path?



<sup>2</sup> The Open University, 2019. *The Open University Bridging The Digital Divide*.

## EXPERT VIEW



### Shelley Walker

**Associate Assistant Principal**

**Marine Academy**

Marine Academy is proud to do things a little differently. Their aim is to give every student an education that is comparable to the highest performing private schools in the country. Discipline, leadership, resilience and aspiration are their core pillars and run through everything they do, including their careers teaching.

### Get students to be forward thinking

We encourage our students to think about what the world of work may look like in the future. This helps them to realise that in 10 years' time some of the jobs we take for granted now may be obsolete and so they need to be forward thinking.

We explore events such as Topshop going into administration and get students to consider how their failure to move their offering online and the pandemic contributed to this. This also helps students to see how skills they're developing online and on social media may be useful in the future.

### Use LMI to put careers in context

We hold a termly assembly on Labour Market Information so our students know what sectors to look at locally. In our most recent assembly, healthcare came out as performing well in our area so we explored why this might be and other ways in which the world has changed as a result of the pandemic.

### Connect students with local employers

Last term we ran a virtual world of work week with our Y10 and Y12 students. We invited guests from the big employers in our local area to talk about different jobs in their sectors which helped students to think about jobs linked to areas they didn't know existed previously.

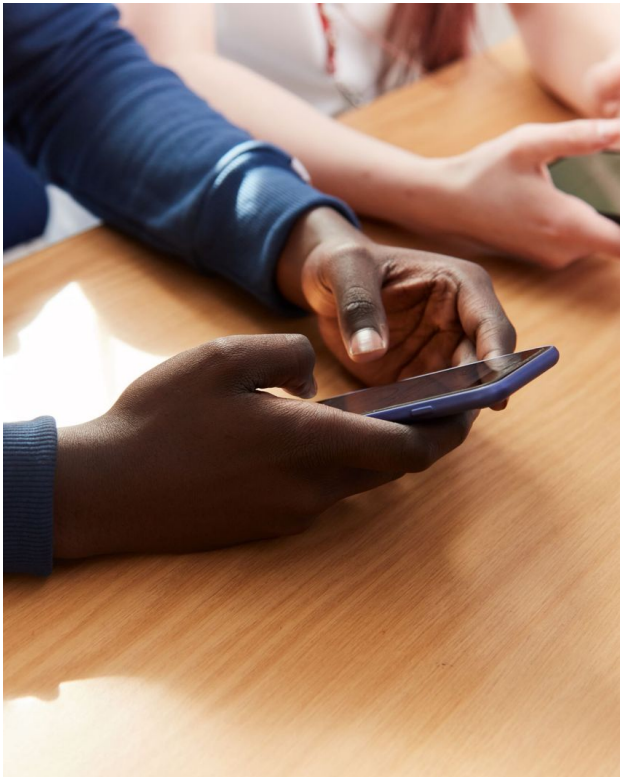
### Prevent NEETs with encounters

Job security is understandably at the forefront of students' minds now as many are living with parents or carers who may have recently lost their job.

We've found that opportunities to meet and speak to people in different careers is the best way to get buy-in from students and to spark their interest in finding careers they're passionate about. Studies show that the more encounters students have with people in jobs they themselves are interested in, the less likely they are to become NEET.

### Use alumni

We're working on using our alumni in different careers so that they're relatable to our students. This helps students see what they're working towards and makes them realise they can do it too – that personal element is really important.



## HOW DO STUDENTS RESEARCH COMPANIES?

We asked students what they would like to know about when researching a company. In a similar vein to their pragmatic approach to choosing a career path, 9 out of 10 students want information about the actual work they would be doing. This was followed by salaries and company culture.

Students say they're least interested in information about the company's mission and stories from current employees. This is interesting as both seem to be the focus of a lot of graduate and school leaver recruitment. You only need to take a look at the recruitment pages of some of the top graduate and school leaver employers to see their mission and videos of recent hires at the forefront.

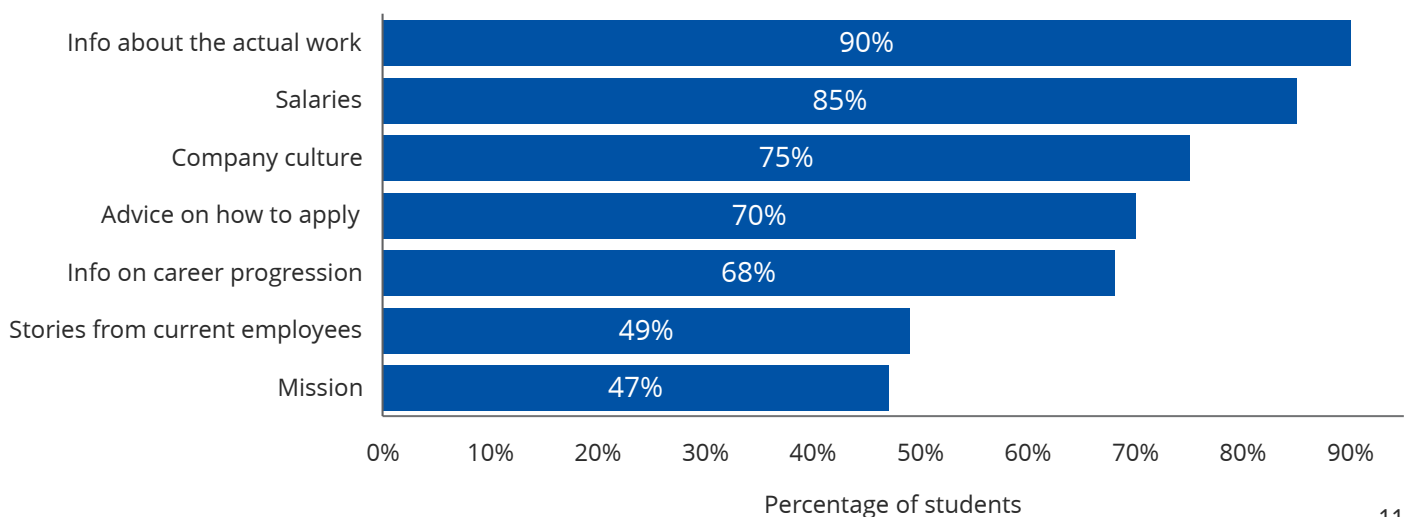
Disinterest in a company's mission may stem from a lack of understanding among students about what this means in practice. It's worth educating students about how many people find it fulfilling to work for a company whose mission they fully support. A 2019 Glassdoor study which analysed millions of employee reviews from around the world found that the culture and values of an organisation are the strongest predictors of employee satisfaction.

One way to inspire students to think about companies they may find it rewarding to work for is to work out what causes they personally feel invested in and then seek out companies whose mission and values align.

### UNIFROG TOP TIP

Point students towards the PSHE section of the Unifrog Know-how library so they can engage with topics including anti-racism and the climate crisis to inspire them to find causes they feel passionate about.

**Figure 1.5** When researching companies, what do students want to know about?



## EXPERT VIEW



### Andrew Davidson

Head of 6th Form

Energy Coast UTC

The Energy Coast UTC is a specialist engineering college for gifted and talented pupils in Years 9-13.

### Links with local employers

We work with lots of local firms and some national firms such as Sellafield, Nuvia and The Rotary club. Our pupils take part in 12-13 week projects based on a real life scenario where they act as mini project teams.

They're often given site visits to see the problem in real life and employees come in to work with the pupils face-to-face. At the end of the project, the pupils present an overview of the project to the board of directors.

### Benefit to students

Pupils gain a vast amount of knowledge about the real world and industry from these projects. We've had very positive feedback from employers that our pupils stand out in interview as they can use the key terms and language of industry and talk about their experience on the project.

### Moving projects online

Our Y12 and Y13s are completing virtual projects delivered by Sellafield and Morgan Sindal Ltd. The expectations of the pupils are the same - they still need to work as part of a team and come up with a solution to a problem. The projects are run via online learning platforms and monitored by school staff.

### Keeping motivation high

Although it's a difficult time for students, we keep explaining how working with employers, work experience, and anything else that takes place outside of school might just make the difference between getting an apprenticeship or not.

The majority of students are focused and are asking what they can do to increase their chances of getting an apprenticeship. We're sitting down with those who are demotivated to talk through their options and encouraging them to apply for as many different apprenticeships as possible.

### First-hand experience

Experiencing different industries and gaining first-hand experience helps pupils focus on the careers they want. We have lots of speakers coming to school to give pupils insight into how they got to where they are today - both via apprenticeships and university - so pupils see how it can be done!

## KEY ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND CAREERS LEADS

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**1**

Encourage students to check out the 'Skills required' sections on the Unifrog Careers library to make sure they're developing the specific skills they'll need to stand the best chance of securing a job in their chosen field.

**2**

Make sure that younger students interested in a growth industry are aware of and developing the relevant skills to secure a role in what's likely to be a highly competitive environment in the future.

**3**

Help students to think about finding a career that aligns with their interests and values - the strongest predictors of job satisfaction - rather than focusing purely on job security.

**4**

Use LMI to put careers in context to help students anticipate what the world of work may look like in the future so they can tailor their skills development accordingly.

**5**

Create opportunities for students to interact with employers wherever possible - even if the encounters are virtual - to motivate students and help prevent them becoming NEET.

## KEY ACTION FOR UNIFROG

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**1**

We want to help students discover the causes they're passionate about and to explore related careers they feel invested in. We're committed to building out our Know-how library to make sure all students are aware of current issues such as anti-racism and the climate crisis to make sure that job security isn't the only consideration when choosing a career.

## 2 The skills to succeed

As we saw in Chapter one, students are considering an increasingly diverse range of careers. To stand the best chance of success, they'll need a diverse skill set to match in order to remain competitive across varied roles.

However, the number of skills and competencies logged on the Unifrog Competencies tool fell from March to November 2020, across all year groups. Students use the Competencies

tool, based on the Skills Builder Universal Framework, to reflect on and record the key skills that employers and HE providers look for, ready to use in applications.

In this chapter we look at the skills students have recorded during the pandemic, the skills that students and employers believe are most important, and which skills were hit the hardest in 2020.



## EXPERT VIEW



The Skills Builder Partnership is a not-for-profit social enterprise that brings together more than 700 organisations including Unifrog towards a common mission: that one day, everyone will build the essential skills to succeed. The Partnership unites educators, employers and organisations by a shared language, principles and outcomes in developing the eight essential skills which feature in this report.

### Our Analysis

It is clear from the data that the development of essential skills is vital for young people to have the best chance of success in the future. There are also clear needs to develop these skills in a more tangible way for learners, as well as highlight new ways that individuals can develop skills during lockdown.

The Skills Builder Universal Framework was created to ensure there was alignment and a common vocabulary for schools, colleges, universities, employers and employees in terms of essential skills. The backing and engagement of the CIPD; the CBI; the Gatsby Foundation; Business in the Community; the CEC and the EY Foundation shows the vital role the framework has to play in the meaningful development of these skills.

### Our recommendations for schools

We have learned a lot over the last decade about how to best build essential skills. We know that to have a real impact, the skills must be taught with consistency and focus, just like numeracy and literacy are.

We've developed and refined our approach to make it easy for teachers and students to build essential skills through our six simple principles, whatever the setting:

#### 1. Keep it simple

A consistent focus on the essential skills helps ensure everyone's shared understanding and makes building these skills as tangible as possible. Using the same language all the time makes a big difference.

- Do all staff and students use consistent language when referring to the skills?

#### 2. Start early, keep going

Starting as young as possible allows more time for mastery. The skills are not just about employability, but about thriving in all aspects of life.

- Could you introduce these skills earlier on?

#### 3. Measure it

Take time to reflect on the skills of young people – by observing or by self-assessment. This gives a balanced understanding of strengths and weaknesses, highlights progress and shows next steps.

- Do you use assessments at the beginning and end of a year?

**EXPERT VIEW****Lockdown opportunities**

During lockdown, there are still opportunities for students to practise, apply and reflect on the essential skills:

- Support students to find opportunities to practise and reflect on the skills as part of everyday life. Do they use Problem Solving with parents? Leadership with younger siblings? Teamwork when working on a group project online?
- Visit the full interactive version of the Skills Builder Universal Framework to find more information and ways that you can build each step as an educator.

**4. Focus tightly**

Building skills should build upon a young person's previous learning and skill attainment. It should allow dedicated time just to explicitly build the skill.

- Do you make time just to focus on explicitly teaching skills?

**5. Keep practising**

To accelerate progress in the essential skills, they should be used and reinforced as often as possible – whenever you have the chance with those young people.

- Is there regular opportunity to actively reflect on the skills and how they have been developed?

**6. Bring it to life**

Ensure young people see the relevance of these skills by linking them with the real world and by bringing real-life problems and challenges to work on.

- Do you use links to employers to support building these skills?



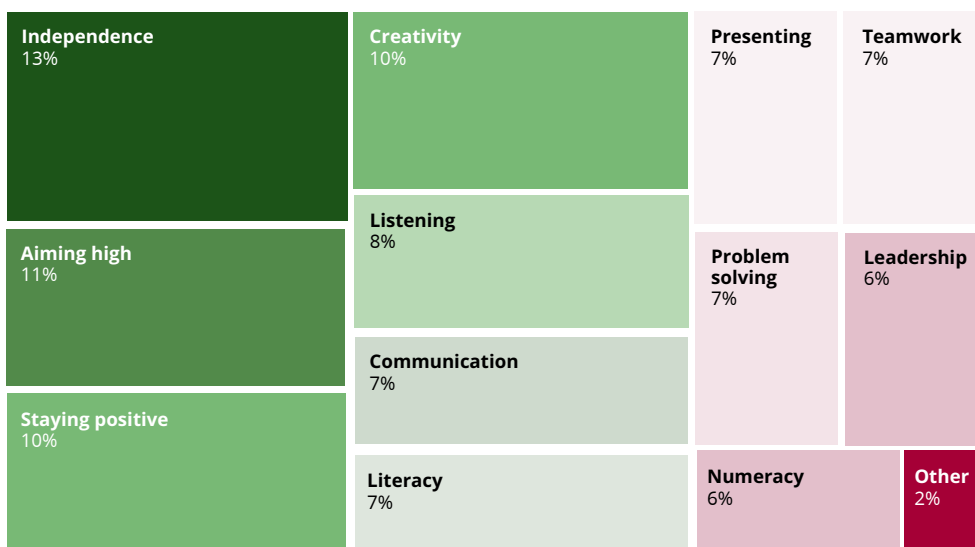


## LOCKDOWN SKILLS

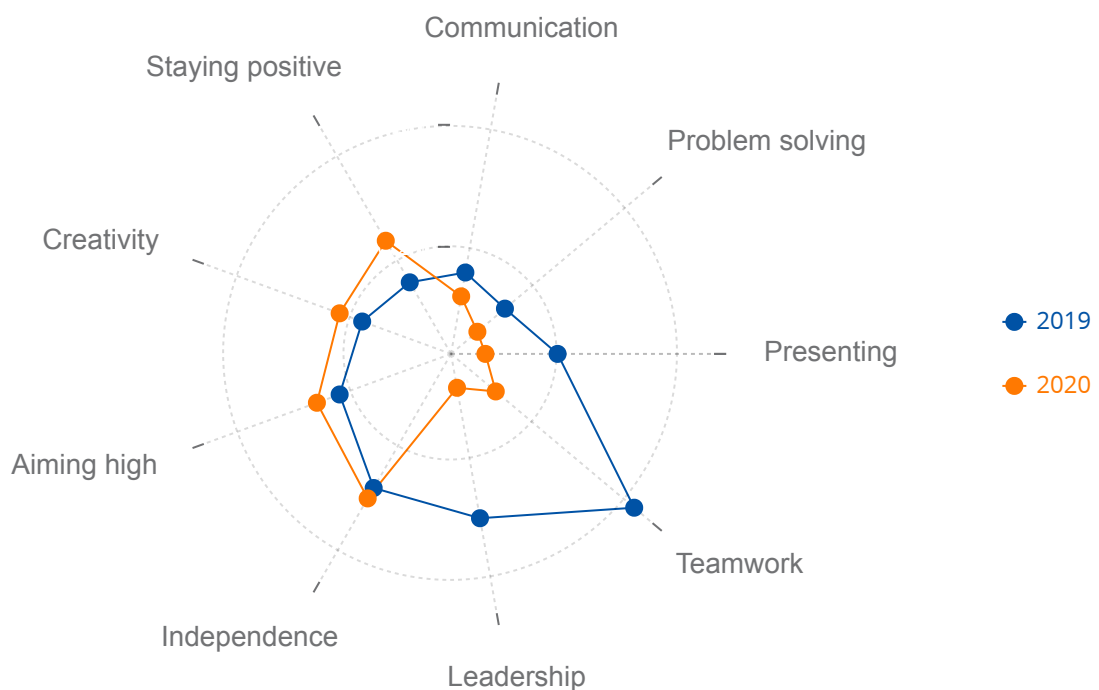
Although fewer competencies are being logged, the pandemic certainly hasn't stopped students' skills development altogether. Since the start of the pandemic, independence has been the most logged competency, making up 13% of all competencies logged. This is followed by aiming high (11%) and staying positive (10%).

The most logged competencies are all individual skills that students have been able to continue to develop easily throughout school closures and lockdowns. It's hardly surprising that independence is now a top skill for students who have spent months distance learning from their own homes.

**Figure 2.1** Which competencies did students log most from March-November 2020?



**Figure 2.2** How has students' competencies logging behaviour changed from March-Nov 2019 to the same period in 2020?



## ARE LOCKDOWN SKILLS USEFUL?

In the survey, we asked students if they believed that skills we've all used during lockdown (such as looking after family, helping out in the community, and using technology to work from home) were valuable to employers. Just over half said 'yes', they believed these skills were valuable to employers.

It's important we remind students about the importance of reflecting on and recording skills to inform future job and HE applications. Reflection is a useful skill in itself - essential for CVs, interviews, and performance reviews in the future. Getting students to consider the skills they may have developed during lockdown and distance learning is a fantastic opportunity to start learning how to reflect on their own progress.

### UNIFROG TOP TIP

Encourage students to log their new skills on the Competencies tool so they have a record for future applications and to help frame the pandemic as an opportunity to develop skills in new and creative ways.

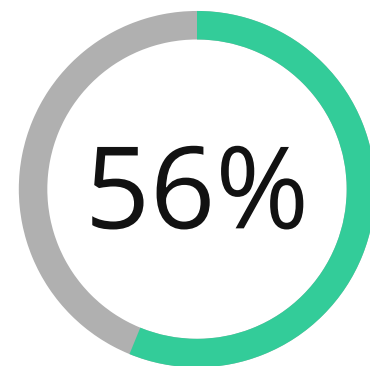


**One of the positives to emerge from this period is that our students are becoming incredibly digitally savvy which will help them in future applications."**

*Natasha Roberts, Assistant Head of College, Melton Vale Sixth Form College*

Figure 2.1

What proportion of students believe skills used during lockdown are valuable to employers?



## EXPERT VIEW



### Jayne Collins

**Vice Principal**

**St Bernard's Catholic High School**

St Bernard's is an 11-16 school in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. They have had their comprehensive Careers and Enterprise Strategic Plan in place for two years now.

### Be inspired by other schools

To put our Careers and Enterprise Strategic Plan together we visited other schools in the local area to see their careers provision and gained inspiration about what would work well for us. Throughout lockdown, we're continuing to set work according to the plan where possible.

### Raise the profile of careers

The plan has been successful in raising the profile of careers in school, both in terms of OFSTED and the importance of careers to our students, parents/guardians, and staff.

There were already lots of things going on that people didn't necessarily appreciate were skills and enterprise focused but the plan has pulled everything together. For example, all our calendared events such as school fundraising, trips and school events are now reviewed to see how they meet the Gatsby benchmarks and what skills they're supporting students to develop. These are all then added as interactions on Unifrog.

### Schedule time for skills

All students have at least an hour dedicated to careers activities or skills reflection each half term. In addition to this each year group has an employer encounter once per term.

We've added the Unifrog competencies to every student's planner so they can reflect on them in lessons and while working independently. This helps students understand the competencies and skills they're developing as they learn.

### Get students to reflect on skills

Students have time scheduled with their form tutors throughout the year to reflect on their skills development and how it can inform future careers and post-16 choices.

An overall review at the end of the year helps them build up a portfolio throughout their time at school. By the time it comes to writing Personal Statements or CVs, all our students have a solid bank of content to draw on.

### Embed careers in the curriculum

Each curriculum area has careers integrated. Subject teachers bring external speakers in and they use the Unifrog Subject library in lessons. As careers becomes embedded into our curriculum, students are becoming increasingly aware of the skills they're developing and need for these in the world of work.

### Run virtual mock interviews

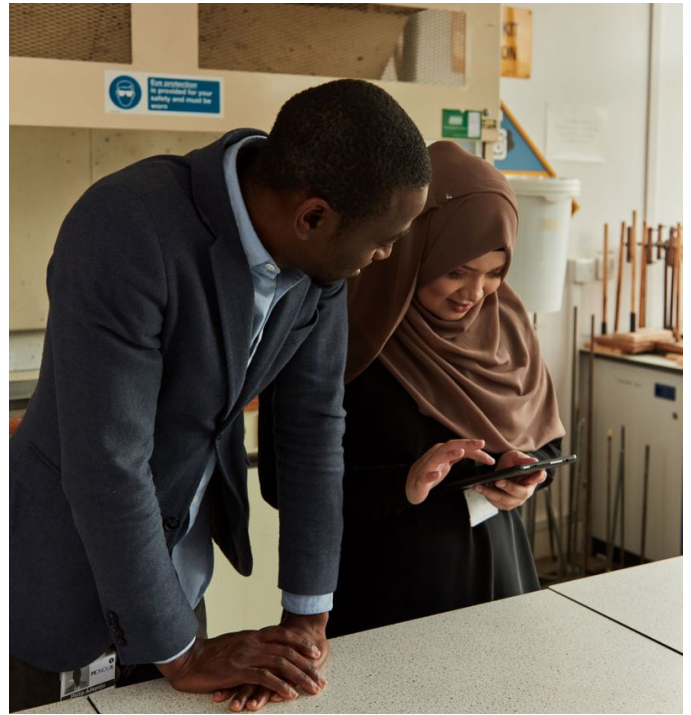
All our Y11 students took part in virtual mock interviews in October. 81% of them said that they now feel more confident communicating to people they have never met before as a result of the experience.

## WHICH SKILLS DO STUDENTS BELIEVE EMPLOYERS VALUE?

We asked students which skills they believe are most important to employers to see if there's a discrepancy between the perceived importance of skills to students and to employers themselves.

Students were most likely to state that communication skills were most important to employers, with 32% believing this to be the case. This was followed by teamwork (19%) and problem solving (18%). It's notable that the two skills students believe to be most prized by employers - communication and teamwork - are skills that have been challenged by lockdown and distance learning.

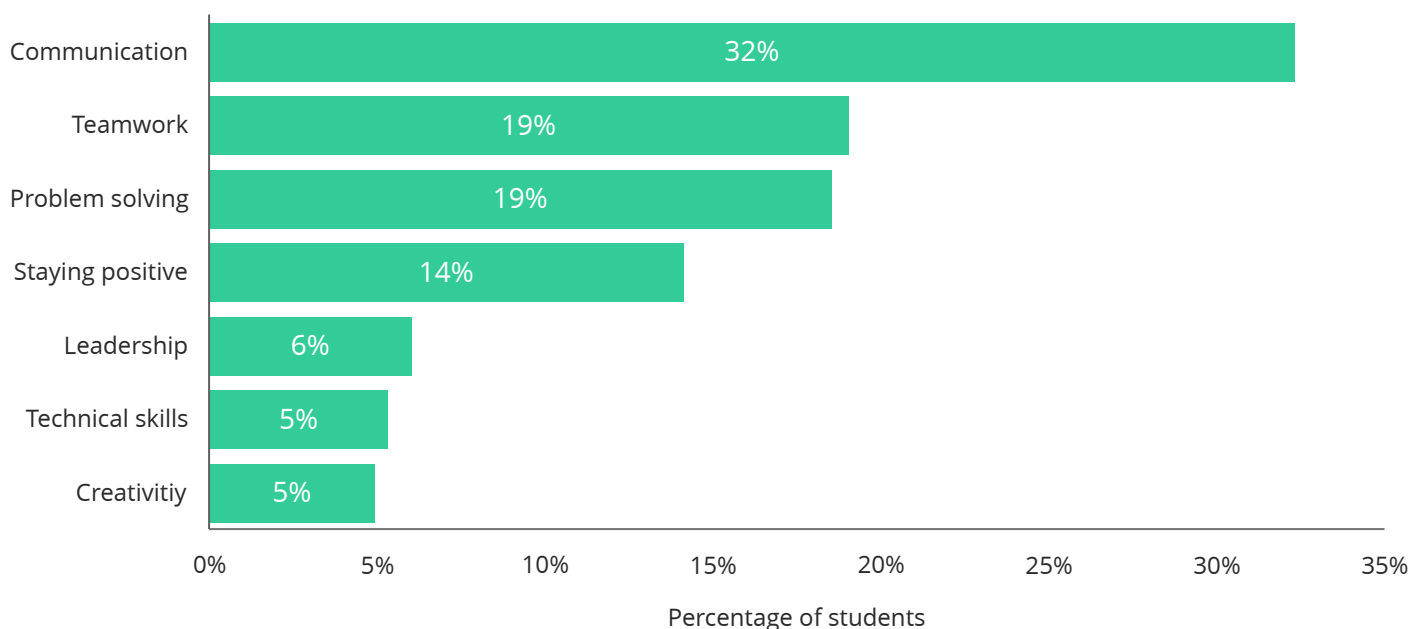
We then split students by which skill they believe to be most important to employers to see if this affected their perspective on whether skills developed during lockdown were useful to employers. Those who believe employers value technical skills most are the least likely to believe that skills developed in lockdown are valuable to employers. Whereas those who believe staying positive is the most important skill to employers are most likely to believe lockdown skills are valuable to employers.



It could be that students who believe staying positive to be an important skill have a more positive outlook in general and are more likely to see the challenges of lockdown as an opportunity. Another possible explanation is that 'soft skills' such as staying positive are easier to develop during lockdown than technical skills which are more likely to require special equipment or support from teachers.

**Figure 2.3**

**Which of these skills do students think is most important to employers?**



## AND THE SKILLS EMPLOYERS REALLY VALUE

Making sure that employers are able to hire people with the necessary skills will be essential to help successfully revive the post-pandemic economy. Even before the start of the pandemic, employers were facing skills shortages. The Department for Education's last Employer Skills Survey in 2017<sup>3</sup> showed 226,000 skill-shortage vacancies.

Another report - the CBI's annual education and skills survey<sup>4</sup> - found that employers perceive wider character, behaviours and attributes to be the most important consideration when recruiting school and college leavers. It also states that what is considered to be 'core education' has changed significantly and that digital literacy is now just as essential to a young person's future as numeracy and literacy.

Another interesting finding from the CBI survey is that employers understand that it's the 'soft skills' such as creativity, problem solving, and the ability for lifelong learning that give humans the advantage over machines.

The report points out that while these skills are often the hardest to teach, it's essential that the education system adapts to create opportunities for young people to develop them and get ready for the future.

As you will see, three of the five skills that PWC look for in new recruits fall under this category - leadership, relationship building, and networking.



<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, 2018. *Employer skills survey 2017*.

<sup>4</sup> CBI and Pearson, 2019. *Education and learning for the modern world: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey report 2019*.

## EXPERT VIEW



PwC offer a variety of programmes for school leavers and graduates with a focus on skills and passions, not just degrees and education. These are the five skills they look for in new recruits.

### Leadership

This is about both leading yourself and supporting others. This doesn't need to be leadership in the obvious sense, e.g. captain of the netball team. It could be having caring responsibilities, or leading a group on a project, taking charge of a travel expedition, and much more.

### Technical Skills

Employers are often looking for students to show a detailed understanding of the role they are applying to, and of the organisation. This includes thinking about the wider industry as a whole, and how the business compares to its competitors.

Students should aim to research beyond an employer's website, and where possible, be proactive in speaking with employer staff ambassadors by attending their events.

### Business Acumen

We look for students who demonstrate a commercial mindset in understanding how an organisation operates, considering both the micro and macro factors facing that organisation.

Students also need to consider times when they have applied this commercial thinking in everyday life (e.g. through involvement in school projects, via work experience and/or any situations that have exposed them to consider the ROI from the work they're doing).

### Relationship Building

Being able to work with others from all backgrounds and build a strong relationship is a key skill; particularly when your colleagues share a different point of view or adopt a different communication style. Students should be ready to share examples where they've done this, and how they've overcome a challenging relationship.

### Networking

Students should aim to have a 'global mindset' so that they are thinking beyond the role they're applying to, considering the bigger picture. It's also important to have an open mind when considering all opportunities available to them, and to ensure they leverage their own network (and continually build on this) to gain the most from their career.

Every new contact is a potential new opportunity (for you and for them) so students should ensure they keep in regular contact, and take advantage of all networking opportunities.

## WHAT SKILLS DO STUDENTS THINK THEY ALREADY HAVE?

Interestingly, there's a huge correlation between an individual student's belief that a skill is most important to employers, and the likelihood they believe themselves to have that same skill!

Overall, teamwork was the skill students were most likely to believe they had, despite it seeing the biggest drop in competencies logged during the pandemic. Just under three quarters of students surveyed (74%) believe themselves to have teamwork skills. One possible factor is the relative ease for most students to develop teamwork skills prior to the pandemic by taking part in a team sport or class project.

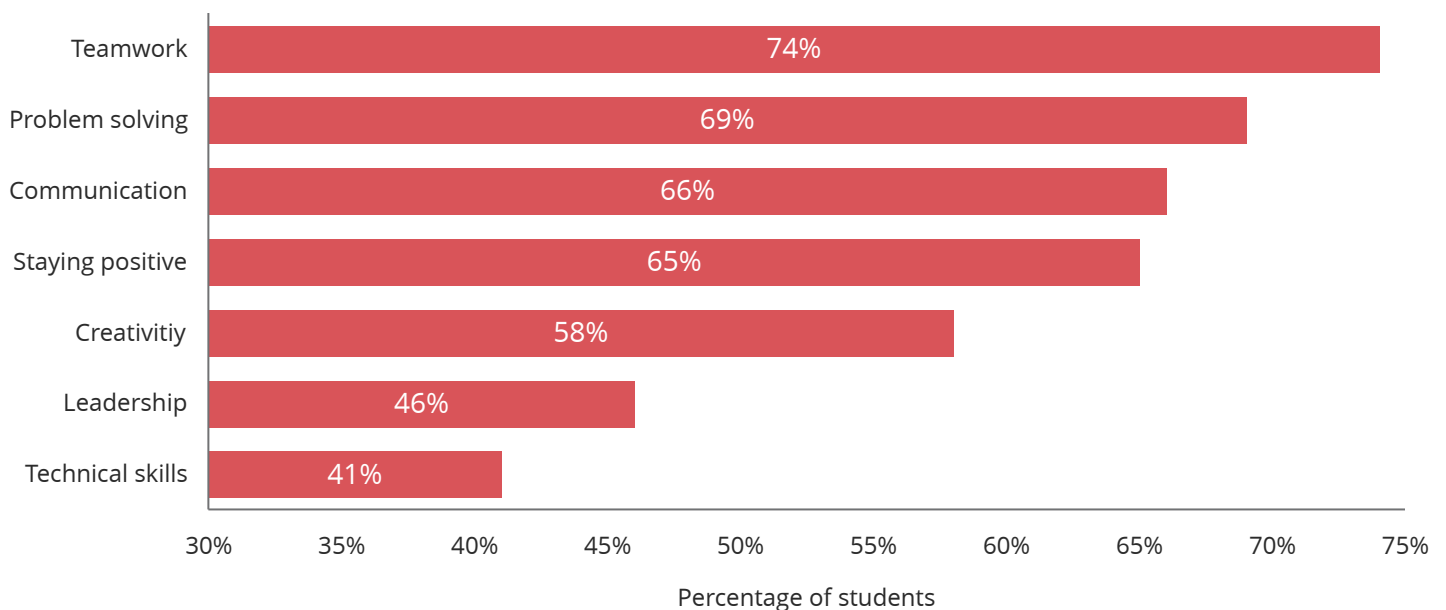
The two skills students were least likely to say they had were technical skills (41%) and leadership (46%). This is backed up by these being the skills students say they want more support with, with 45% of students saying they want more support with technical skills and 42% with leadership.

As challenging as it is during school closures, we need to help students to both develop and learn how to evidence these skills. An easy win is for students to reflect on the digital skills they've developed during distance learning.



These skills will serve them well in future job applications as digital skills are increasingly essential in the world of work. The Open University's 'Bridging the Digital Divide' report in 2019<sup>5</sup> found that 88% of organisations across Britain were lacking in digital skills, with many expecting this to increase in the next five years.

**Figure 2.5** Which of these skills do students think they have?



<sup>5</sup> The Open University, 2019. The Open University Bridging The Digital Divide.

## WHICH SKILLS HAVE BEEN MOST IMPACTED?

The majority of students we surveyed believe the pandemic has made it more difficult to develop skills that might be useful for their future career, with older students more likely to report having difficulties. 70% of those in Year 13 report finding it more difficult to develop useful skills, compared to 46% of Year 10 students.

Students logged fewer examples of each competency during the pandemic but the two competencies which saw the greatest decline were teamwork and leadership. There was an 82% drop in the number of teamwork competencies logged, and a 79% fall for leadership. Arguably these are the two competencies traditionally most reliant on in-person interaction and as a result, students are struggling to demonstrate them.

It’s important to help students realise that, while they may not be able to demonstrate some skills in the traditional way, they’re still using and developing them in other ways. Just as we have all had to learn new ways of working as part of a team and leading others while working remotely, students have adapted in the same way.

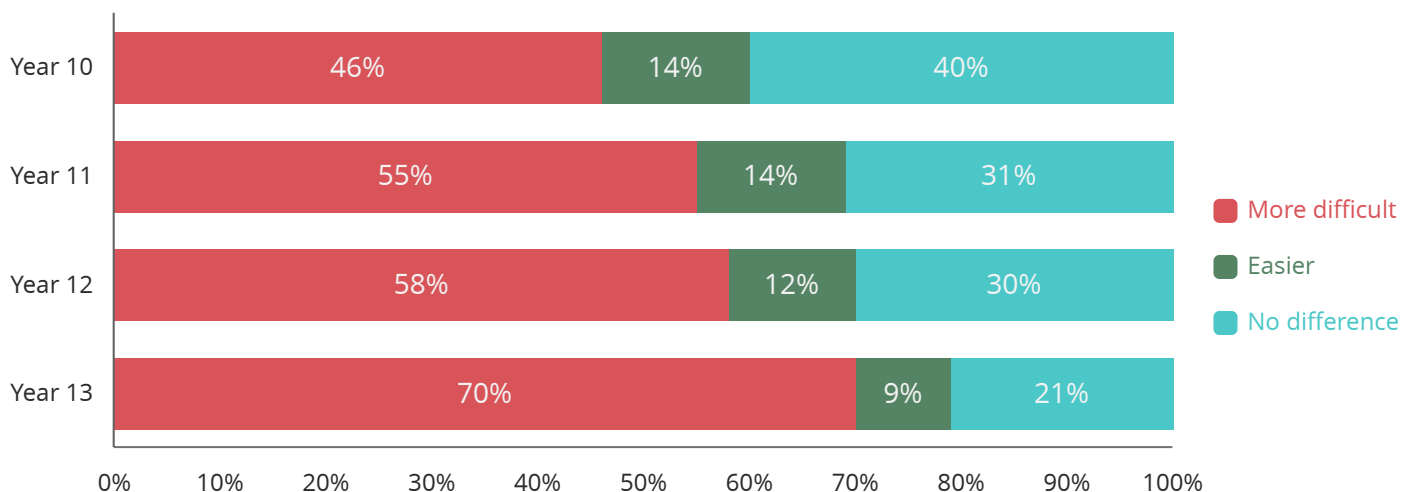
For example, any online collaborative projects will involve students using their teamwork skills as well as leadership abilities if the project requires someone to take a leading role.

Equally, many students have been using their communication and listening skills to support friends who may be struggling during lockdown while using technology to work from home often requires a fair bit of problem solving!

**Figure 2.6** How did the number of times each competency was logged in March-Nov 2020 change from 2019?

Competency	% change
Staying positive	-53%
Creativity	-55%
Aiming high	-56%
Independence	-59%
Listening	-64%
Literacy	-67%
Communication	-68%
Problem solving	-69%
Presenting	-74%
Numeracy	-75%
Leadership	-79%
Teamwork	-82%

**Figure 2.7** What proportion of students believe the pandemic has impacted their ability to develop useful skills?





## KEY ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND CAREERS LEADS

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**1**

Re-frame the pandemic as an opportunity for students to develop new skills and further existing ones such as digital literacy by getting them to reflect on the skills developed during distance learning.

**2**

Schedule sessions throughout the year for students to reflect on and record their skills development to build up a portfolio, ready for Personal Statements and CVs.

**3**

Support students to find opportunities to practise their skills as part of everyday life. Do they use Teamwork when working on a group project online? Leadership with younger siblings? Problem Solving with parents?

**4**

Use consistent language when talking about essential skills to build shared understanding between teachers and students and get students to practice their skills wherever possible.

**5**

Make skills relevant to young people by linking them to the real world and embedding them in each curriculum area so that students are aware of the skills they're developing and why they're important for the world of work.

## KEY ACTION FOR UNIFROG

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**1**

We will create additional remote teaching resources to run with students to help them develop the skills that the pandemic is making it difficult for them to demonstrate, including technical skills and leadership. We will also create a Know-how guide on each competency explaining what it is, why it's important, and ways students can demonstrate it.

## 3

# Skills-based opportunities

While the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly made it harder for students to find traditional skills-based opportunities, there are still placements out there. Both apprenticeships and virtual work experience placements offer students the chance to gain real skills-based experience and develop tangible skills and competencies.

In this chapter we first look at how, despite the pandemic causing a drastic reduction in the number of apprenticeships on offer, it looks like we're starting to see the green shoots of recovery. We then take a look at how the shift from in-person to virtual work experience has opened up new, if different, opportunities for students.



## APPRENTICESHIPS

Compared to the same period in 2019, there was a significant dip in apprenticeship shortlists made on the Unifrog Apprenticeships tool in between March and November 2020.

The main cause is likely to be the lack of apprenticeships available. Research from The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)<sup>6</sup> found that three in five organisations have had to stop apprenticeship starts as a result of the pandemic.

The research highlighted the problems facing apprenticeship providers as their cash flow is being reduced at both ends of the apprenticeship pipeline. Providers only receive funding from the government when an apprentice starts, and 20% of the total funding depends on the apprentice completing their placement. This puts providers who are unable to deliver training in the event of future lockdowns at significant financial risk.

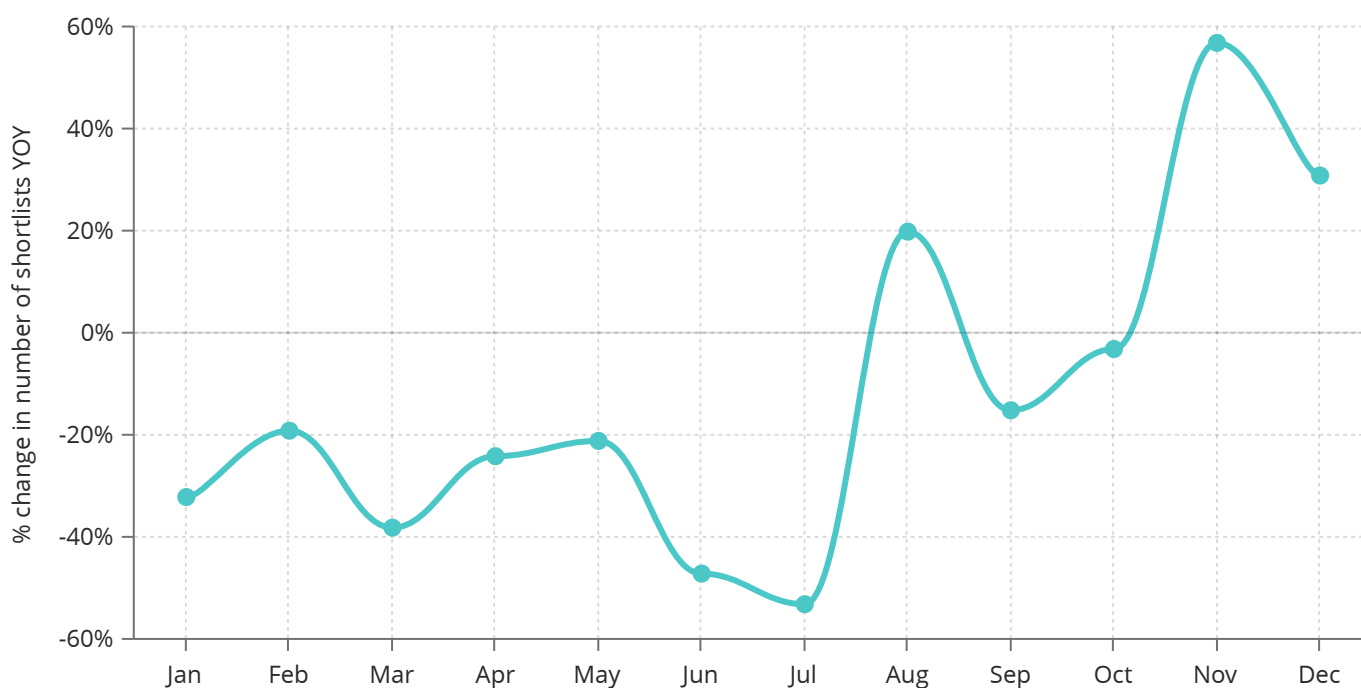
Despite this, students' interest in apprenticeships seemed to have rallied and in November 2020, the number of apprenticeship shortlists was up 58% compared to November 2019. It's too early to say whether we're seeing the green shoots of recovery for apprenticeships or what the impact of the third national lockdown may be. At a time when many conventional ways of life are being challenged, students seem keen to evaluate all the opportunities available to them.

### UNIFROG TOP TIP

To help students weigh up all the options and make an informed decision about their next steps, get them to explore all the Unifrog search tools including the Apprenticeships tool to see what opportunities are currently open.

**Figure 3.1**

**How did the number of apprenticeship shortlists made each month in 2020 change from 2019?**



<sup>6</sup>The Prince's Responsible Business Network, 2020. *COVID-19 and Youth Unemployment Factsheet*.

## EXPERT VIEW

# New Schools Network

## Annabel

### Associate Apprentice

#### New Schools Network

Annabel is a Level 3 Business Associate Apprentice at New Schools Network, a charity which aims to support groups setting up free schools within the English state education sector. She is currently working within the business operations department as an office administrator.

## The role

As an apprentice I spend 80% of my time at New Schools Network, supporting the business operation department. The other 20% I spend working on my compulsory off-the-job training where I focus on my professional development and completing my qualification assignments.

## Benefits of an apprenticeship

I jumped at the prospect to learn whilst earning a respectable salary. The idea of gaining a world-class qualification and valuable work experience at the same time confirmed my decision. It was a reasonably easy jump from my previous job as a Chef as I had many relevant transferable skills such as stakeholder management, attention-to-detail, and organisation.

## Working remotely

Working from home has allowed me to manage my time in an organised way so I have more time to focus on new opportunities and projects at work. I have become much more independent as you often have to complete tasks as an individual, and lastly, I have been able to build great relationships with my colleagues.

## The skills to succeed

**1. Approachability** – It's really important that you're open to new things and meeting new people. This has helped me build an effective professional network and I have had many opportunities such as speaking on panels and attending events as a result.

**2. Time management** - blending full-time work with studying is a brilliant chance to leap straight into the career of your dreams, but without good time management it can be challenging. For me, following the 80% working, 20% off-the-job training structure allows me to focus and gives me enough time to complete all that is required of me.

**3. Communication** – through communicating with my apprentice mentor I've discovered a range of new opportunities such as blogging for the Multiverse community group, while speaking to all the different teams at work has helped me learn which areas interest me.

## Advice to other students

Information is key! Reach out to employers to ask what provisions they've made for their staff during the pandemic, speak to any friends or family who have completed an apprenticeship, or approach current apprentices on LinkedIn. You never know where a conversation might lead you!

## VIRTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE

As well as having the necessary skills and qualifications, another element that often plays a big role in helping students secure employment after school is relevant work experience. A 2017 survey of UK business leaders<sup>8</sup> found that over two thirds (68%) believe work experience helps get young people ready for the world of work and over half (57%) believe it helps instil a good work ethic.

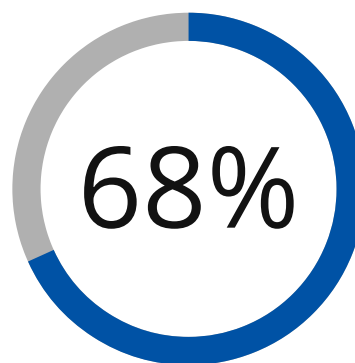
Unfortunately, over two thirds (68%) of the students surveyed say the pandemic is making it harder for them to find a work experience placement. As with apprenticeships, workplace closures, financial constraints, and safety concerns have led many work experience placements to be cancelled.

Students identified not knowing where to find placements as the biggest issue, with 61% of students facing this problem. Reassuringly, only 17% of students reported that their school doesn't have enough time to help them to find a placement, highlighting how Teachers and Careers Leads remain focused on helping students seek out these opportunities in new and creative ways.

38% of students state that they don't want to do an online work experience placement, but it's important that students are aware of the upsides of virtual placements. Top companies such as PWC, JP Morgan, and KPMG are running placements which many more students than usual are now able to complete - in their own time, without the need to be based in a specific location.

Not only is a virtual placement a valuable experience in itself but securing a placement in what future employers will appreciate are challenging circumstances shows real initiative!

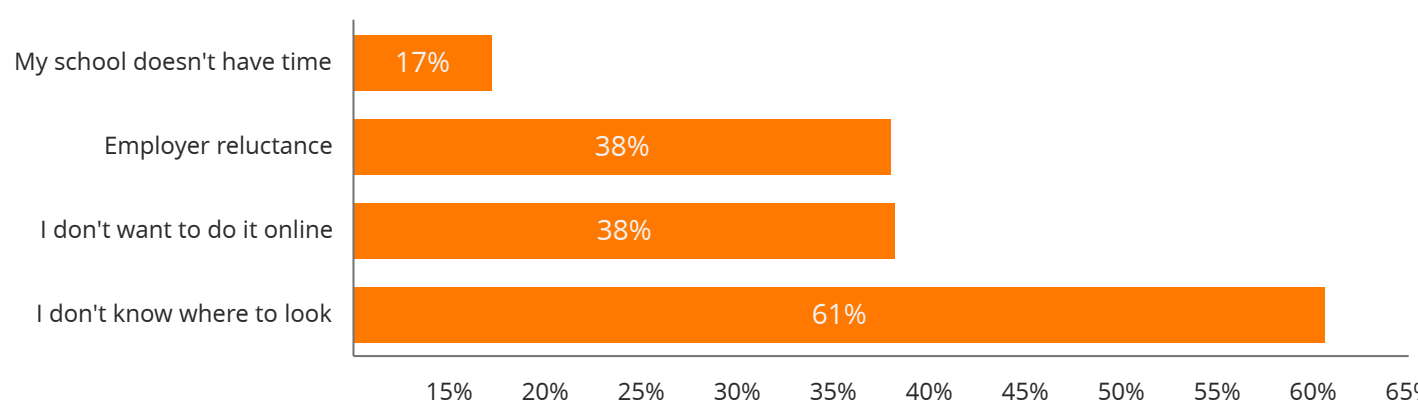
**Figure 3.2** What proportion of students believe the pandemic is making it more difficult to find WEX?



### UNIFROG TOP TIP

The Unifrog Special opportunities tool has a comprehensive list of virtual work experience placements around the world which students can use to search, rank and filter opportunities to find the perfect one for them.

**Figure 3.3** How many students agree with the following statements about why they're finding it difficult to find a WEX placement?



<sup>8</sup><https://www.tes.com/news/make-work-experience-compulsory-again-say-most-business-leaders>

## EXPERT VIEW



### Gabrielle

**Year 13 student**

**Melton Vale Sixth Form**

Gabrielle is a current Year 13 student at Melton Vale Sixth Form who did a virtual work experience placement (VWEX) with Unifrog over the summer.

### Lessons learnt

- **Resilience** – I was set a very big data project, which I didn't think I would be able to complete so felt quite defeated about it. But I managed to and was very proud of myself.
- **Inspiration** - All the employees gave us amazing advice when they spoke to us. Learning about their past working experience and how they got to where they are now was really inspiring for me.
- **Teamwork** – I learned how to work together with two students from different schools that I didn't know to complete tasks. We all challenged each other as well to produce the best work as a team.

### Skills gained

They made me feel like I am prepared for the future, especially with the unknown of who I will be working with. It's amazing to see how comfortable you get once you know the situation you're going into and I learnt that my perceptiveness is a skill that will benefit me. I feel ready to take on anything!

### Ready for the world of work

I got a lot of advice from everyone I spoke to and contacts who have offered to help me in the future that I will take with me through my career. I got to see first-hand what it was like to be a part of a business and to see jobs in action that really inspired me. It also allowed me to prepare for the type of tasks I could get asked to do as well as what it felt like to be a true member of a team.

### Remote benefits

I wouldn't have been able to do this placement if it wasn't virtual due to travelling!

Also, I feel that we had more opportunities being virtual than in person as we managed to speak to at least one person in every area of the business and to sit in on meetings with schools, which wouldn't normally be possible. The two other students doing the placement with me were from completely different areas of the UK so when we spoke to each other about our A-Levels and the pathways we want to go into it was interesting to get other people's perspective.

### Advice to others

Take notes on everything, especially the bits of the placement that are areas of interest that you want to go into. Also, be present - when doing work experience, you're treated like part of the team, so do the same. Engage with the people you are talking to, ask lots and lots of questions and be extremely attentive towards everyone you're speaking to.

Complete the tasks that were set in the same way you would complete schoolwork. Lastly, don't be nervous and enjoy it. It really was one of the best experiences I have done in reflection and I am grateful for the opportunity.

**EXPERT VIEW****Aoife****Year 13 student****Coleg Cambria**

Aoife is a current Year 13 student at Coleg Cambria who did a virtual work experience placement (VWEX) with Unifrog over the summer.

**Business knowledge**

I was able to understand the workings behind the scenes of a business and the operations of an online platform. I also learnt about the various jobs available within the company as well as within the business world and had the opportunity to communicate with a wide variety of people.

**Communication skills**

I have increased my confidence using my communication skills when speaking to a variety of people that I didn't know before. This will help me when speaking to possible future employers and colleagues.

**Work ethic**

I was able to improve my time management skills by completing the projects given to us as well as attending all the online sessions with different people from the company on time. I learnt how to create a structure to my day which is essential for both a good work ethic and work- life balance.

**Shadow online meetings**

Although I think it's easier to develop relationships with members of the team in-person, being online allowed me to easily shadow meetings that I would probably not have been able to attend as they were on the other side of the country. I also got to speak to members of the team based in different areas.



## KEY ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND CAREERS LEADS

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**1**

Encourage students to continue to explore all the post-school opportunities available to them, including HE, apprenticeships, and the world of work.

**2**

Help students considering an apprenticeship reach out to employers, alumni, or even approach current apprentices on LinkedIn to further their research.

**3**

Help students to realise that VWEX placements offer opportunities that may not have been previously available to them, such as the chance to work for a company in a different location.

**4**

Get students to create a shortlist of VWEX placements using the Unifrog Special opportunities tool to help them see that there are still opportunities out there for those who use their initiative.

**5**

Encourage students on VWEX placements to be engaged, make a note of any new contacts, complete the tasks set to the same standard as schoolwork, and most importantly to relax and enjoy the experience.

## KEY ACTION FOR UNIFROG

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**1**

We'll continue to make sure that we bring together all the available virtual work experience placements we can find on the Special opportunities tool to make it easy for students to find the perfect opportunity for them.



Please contact us if you have any questions, comments, or would like to join our growing network of partners.

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