

# North East Ambition Career Benchmarks: Primary Pilot - Parental Engagement report

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# Introduction

This report looks at data and evidence on the extent to which parents of primary school age children are involved in the careers education and advice their children receive.

It provides advice for primary school Careers Leaders who wish to boost parental engagement in careers related learning (CRL), both in school and in the home.

The report is an output from the evaluation of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership's Career Benchmarks: Primary Pilot.

# The Career Benchmarks: Primary Pilot

The Career Benchmarks: Primary Pilot is supporting 70 North East primary schools to develop a careers programme for their pupils.

All schools complete annual audits and surveys which provide a picture of the Pilot's progress and impact.

Analysis of this data shows that the communication and sharing of CRL information with parents and carers (hereafter, 'parents') is a struggle for lots of Pilot schools:

- 2 of the top 5 characteristics that schools are finding more challenging to confidently achieve relate to parental engagement in CRL.
- At the time of the Year 1 survey, 40% of Careers Leaders rated the engagement of parents and carers in the Pilot as neutral; and only 53% rate their involvement as good (43%) or very good (13%).
- At the time of the Year 1 survey, when Pilot schools were asked for their Year 2 priorities, parental engagement was high on their list.

## Evidence base

There is a large body of evidence (Whiston&Keller [2004], Otto [2000], Knibbs et al. [2018]) which shows that parents and carers have a large influence on a child's aspirations and career choices.

Much of the evidence on parental influence over a child's career aspirations relates to the family/home environment in general rather than specific parent-child careers activities, and/or relates to parents of secondary school age children (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/careerguidanceparents/>)

The evidence base is limited in relation to how parents of primary age children can discuss careers aspirations with their child, despite this being the point in a child's schooling when parents are often most engaged with the school.

## Evidence base (cont.)

A European Union Erasmus+ project titled [Crucial Impacts Careers Choices](#) has recently concluded. This involved research in five EU countries (including the UK) over three years. Over 600 young people (both primary and secondary age pupils) and 285 parents were surveyed.

Key findings from the Erasmus+ project include:

- 30% of young people in the UK started thinking about their career plans before they turned 11.
- Young people consider parents to be the biggest influence on their career plans.
- Only 1/3 of UK parents feel that CRL should begin before a child turns 7.
- 90% of UK parents say they actively seek out careers information for their child(ren) and four out of five parents feel the responsibility to advise their child on career choices rests with them.
- Parents want their children to be happy and fulfilled in their career; they are not concerned about the child continuing any family tradition of work or occupation.

# Research methods

The Primary Pilot team commissioned research into how schools can engage parents in CRL.

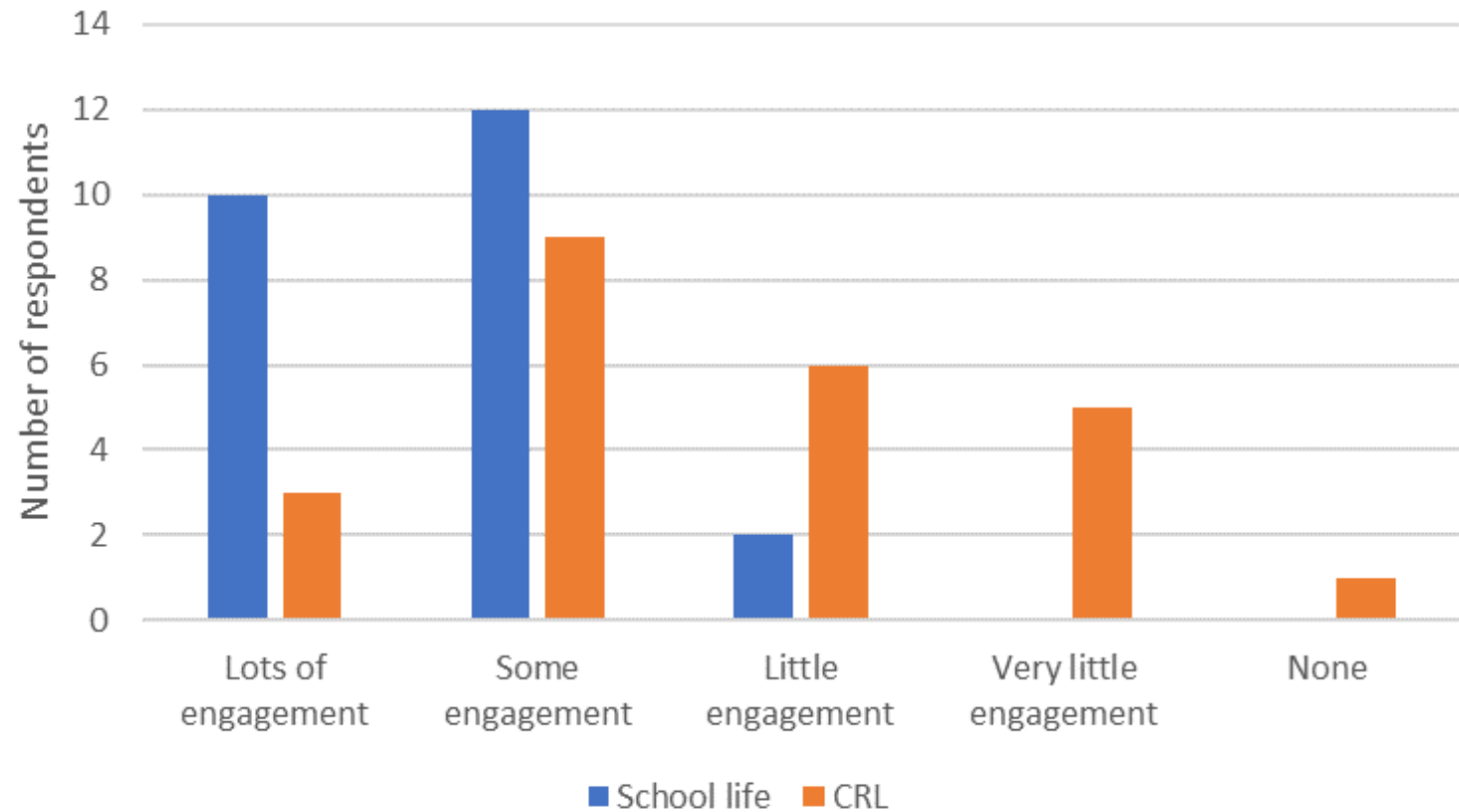
The research has involved:

- A short **online survey** sent out to all Pilot schools in February 2021. 24 Careers Leaders completed the survey. The response sample was representative of the overall population of Pilot schools in terms of numbers of pupils, OFSTED rating, pupil attainment, and so on. The sample included a high percentage of schools in affluent areas.
- **1-2-1 phone discussions** with 5 Careers Leaders.
- An **online focus group** where Careers Leaders compared and contrasted their approaches to engaging parents in CRL.
- **Research** into national and international frameworks for and examples of engaging parents in careers activities.
- **Peer review** of the research's findings by members of the Primary Pilot steering group.



## Survey key findings

Almost all survey respondents felt that parents have '*lots*' or '*some*' engagement in the daily life of their school, but when asked about CRL specific engagement only half of respondents said they had '*lots*' or '*some*' engagement with parents.



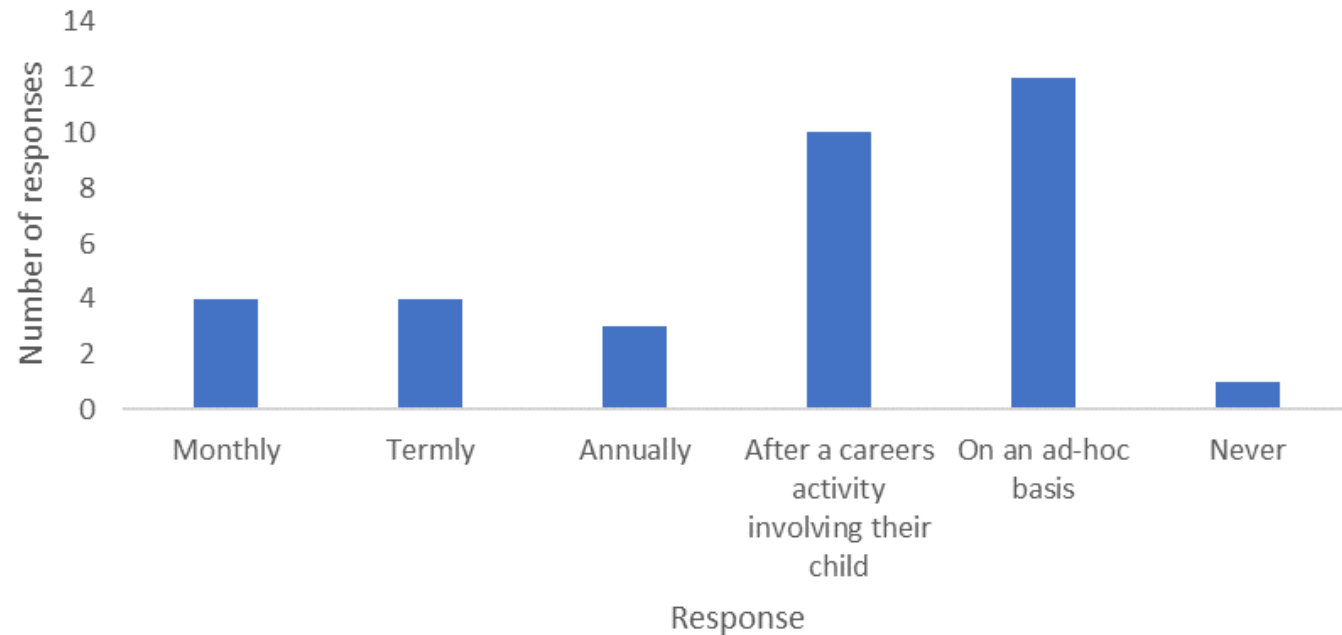
Source: Pilot schools parental engagement survey, n=24

## Survey key findings (cont.)

Few respondents said their school was regularly in contact with parents regarding CRL.

Schools are most likely to be engaging parents in CRL on an ad-hoc basis – for instance, at parents' evening – or following a specific event like a workplace visit.

Q11: Frequency of CRL parental communication

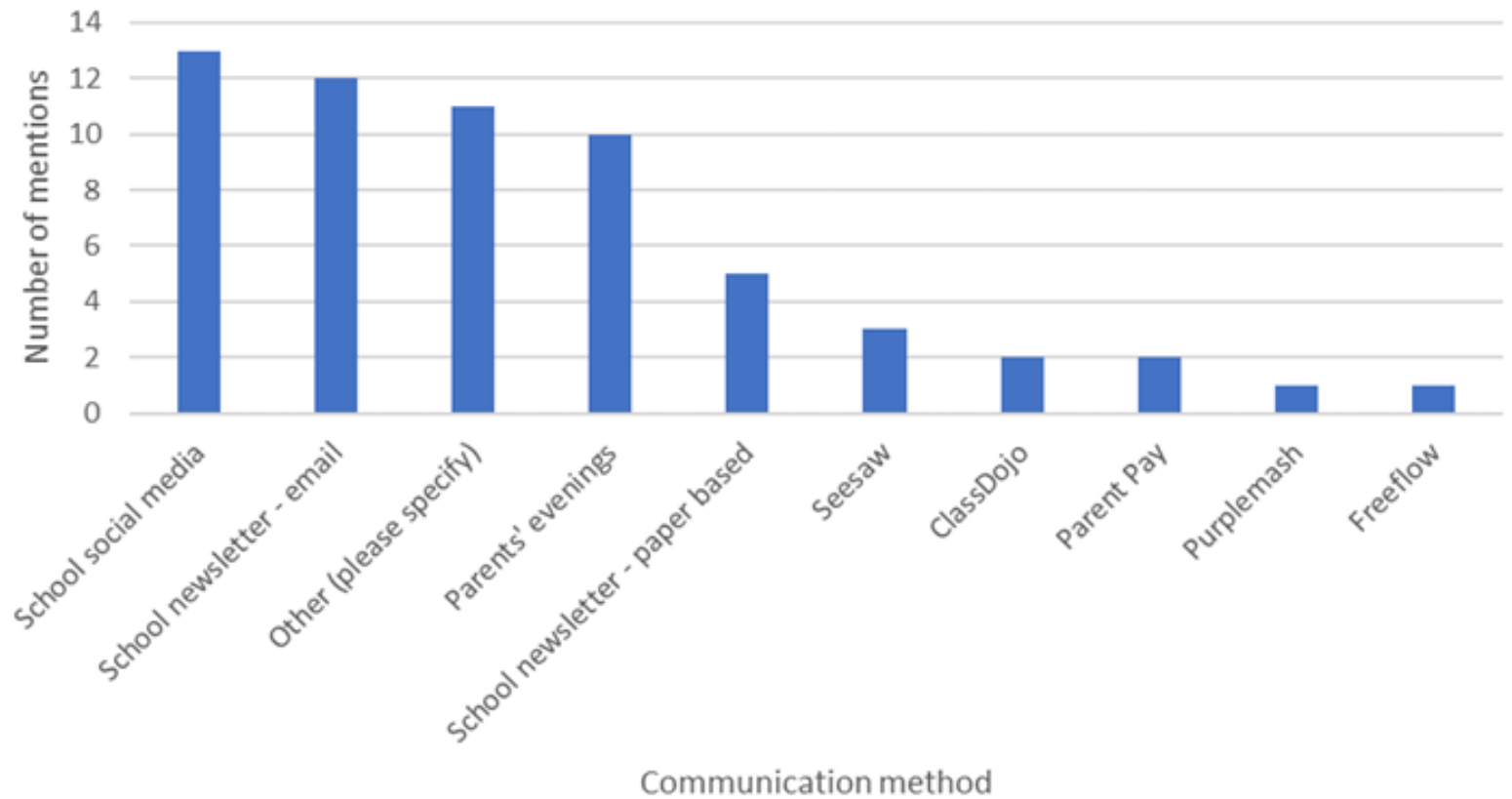


Source: Pilot schools parental engagement survey, n=24



## Survey key findings (cont.)

A lot of engagement with parents on CRL is based around regular school communications – newsletters, social media etc. Careers Leaders find it hard to gauge how many parents read these communications and how engaged they are with CRL.



Source: Pilot schools parental engagement survey, n=24

## Survey key findings (cont.)

When asked to provide examples of how their school has involved parents in a home-based CRL activity, one third of survey respondents mentioned having remote learning activities for parents to do with their children during lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A quarter of respondents did not give an example.

Six Careers Leaders said they are actively trying to improve their engagement with parents, and a further three Careers Leaders have plans to do this.

## Survey feedback

*"I would like to hear how other schools have managed to engage parents in careers information remotely as a result of lockdown."*

*"Our parents like to get involved in our work but sometimes find it difficult in how to help out at home."*

*"If parents do not work or have a good reason they might not want to explain to their child for not working, it can make the child feel removed from this, so alternatives are needed."*

*"So far, I have found that parents have responded better to bespoke information about their individual child's interests. If I have highlighted an area of interest that a particular child has and then presented parents with activities, books or trips that would develop that interest it has been more successful."*

# Focus group

In March 2021 a 90 minute, online focus group was held with three Careers Leaders who had completed the online survey.

Prior to the focus group, 1-2-1 telephone calls were held with each Careers Leader plus an additional two Careers Leaders who had expressed an interest in the research.

The five schools were balanced in terms of the progress they have made towards achieving the Benchmarks, the challenges they have faced engaging parents, and levels of deprivation/affluence locally.

We asked the Careers Leaders to describe and discuss:

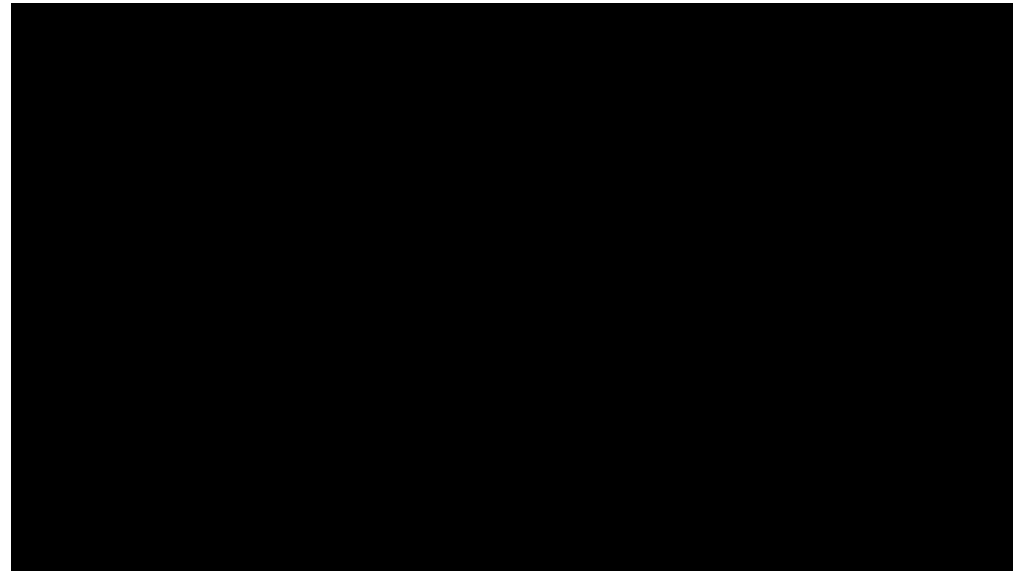
- How to get feedback from parents on school CRL activities and programmes.
- How to make Labour Market Information (LMI) accessible, interesting, and useful to parents when they discuss careers with their children.
- Examples of good parent-child CRL activities to do at home.

## Focus group - key findings

- Careers Leaders spoke about getting oral feedback from parents on CRL activities but this feedback is often from a small number of parents and/or is given in the context of a wider discussion of their child's progress at school at parents' evenings.
- **A few schools are starting to trial more ambitious engagement approaches** – for instance, using MS Forms to send out a short survey on what parents know about the school's careers programme.
- **School websites** are seen as a key resource for sharing careers information with parents.
- **The use of online learning software such as Seesaw and Class DoJo during the school closure periods has improved schools' ability to share information with parents** and given parents the skills to view and respond to this information. Careers Leaders have a better feel for how parents are engaging with the careers information they send out.
- **Careers Leaders do not expect or necessarily want large amounts of feedback from parents.** They recognise that parents are not careers experts and have limited time, so the value to be gained from parental feedback is limited.
- Instead, Careers Leaders view parental feedback as a means to generate the knowledge, contacts and networks that schools need to achieve other Benchmarks such as forming links to local employers who can help a school to achieve Benchmarks 5&6.

## Focus group - key findings (cont.)

- If you share LMI with parents, make sure it is from a reputable source such as the LEP, easy to understand and covers a broad range of sectors and occupations.
- Most Careers Leaders in the focus group were not in favour of providing parents LMI in the context of CRL. They see giving LMI as potentially counterproductive because:
  - It can be hard to understand and harder still to explain to a child
  - It can narrow horizons and aspirations – *"sorry, they are no palaeontologists in our local labour market."*
  - It relates to the North East labour market now and not the labour market that primary school children will be entering in 10+ years.
- Share LMI with parents via resources such as videos and posters which describe future job and career opportunities. Parents may find such material easier to understand and it will be more interesting for children. An example of this approach is included below (Password = STEM555):



## Focus group - key findings (cont.)

- There was strong agreement in the focus group that, **for primary school children, the purpose of careers related learning should be to expose them to as many careers as possible.** When they reach secondary school pupils will have the opportunity to consider how their skills and aspirations relate to the jobs that are available and develop their career plans accordingly.
- **Careers Leaders support the idea of setting parent-child careers 'homework'** – feedback from parents is that this more enjoyable than traditional homework for children and parents alike.
- **But when setting careers homework, schools should be sensitive to home environments** – e.g., consider how a suggested activity will play out in a home where a parent may not be in work/not be able to work.

## Structure of subsequent sections

- The remainder of the report is structured around three issues concerning how parents can be engaged in CRL. Recommendations are made in relation to:
  1. How to communicate with parents about the school's careers programme, the activities their children are undertaking, and the careers aspirations of their children.
  2. CRL activities that parents can complete with their child at home and in the local community.
  3. How schools can improve the feedback they get from parents on the school's careers programme.





# How to communicate with parents about the school's careers programme

# Using websites and newsletters to engage parents



Several Pilot schools have a '*Careers*' section on their **school website**. Careers content includes:

- The school's commitment to developing careers provision.
- Details of the Pilot.
- Careers curriculum links.
- Photos and explanations of careers activities.
- Links to careers research and government guidance.

## **Recommendation:**

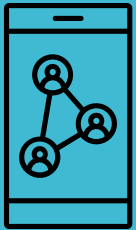
Including contact details for the Careers Leader on your website so parents and employers know who to contact to offer support with careers events.

Schools also mention careers in **newsletters** home to parents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, newsletters have been more focused on restrictions and school (re)openings, but some schools have included a section on the careers programme.

## **Recommendation:**

Have a careers section in the school newsletter. Use this space to share information on activities and to thank parents and employers who support careers activities.

# Using social media to share activities



Some Careers Leaders believe that parents are more likely to engage with the school's social-media accounts (*Facebook, Twitter*) than read a school newsletter or visit the school website.

One school was sharing a video series called '*Science from my sofa*'. Via a link in a Facebook post, the teacher would introduce an activity for pupils to do at home related to certain careers (*material scientists, structural engineers, chemists, etc.*).

## Recommendation:

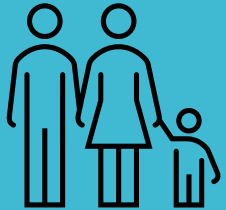
Schools' social media accounts are updated on a daily/frequent basis. Careers Leaders can exploit this by making last minute requests for support with careers activities.

Using social media to share careers activity updates will give greater reach than using the school website alone. Log parents' engagement with and views on careers activities through things like numbers of 'likes' and comments made on careers-related social media posts.



Careers activities  
that parents can  
complete with their  
child

# Ideas for parent-child careers activities



Pilot schools mention using Careers weeks and Careers Fairs, and inviting parents in to speak about their careers as the most common methods of involving parents directly in the careers programme.

But what a child hears and learns about jobs and careers at home is just if not more important in shaping their aspirations and plans.

Whilst involving parents in at home careers activities is still a fairly new concept in the UK, there are several examples internationally of how to involve parents in at home careers activities:

- [9 activities to help children understand careers | myfuture](#)
- [Engaging Parents in Career Conversations \(education.vic.gov.au\)](#)

## Recommendation:

Activities will not be suitable for all households. Consider the practicalities of undertaking an activity in a household where a parent(s) may not work or may be unemployed. Simple changes, like talking about a parent's skills rather than their job, can make activities just as, if not more suitable to more households.

# Screen-free activities



Increasingly, teachers are setting children's homework via online learning software, which leads to screen time.

Careers Leaders feel that setting parent-child careers activities as 'homework' can be one way of reducing screen time.

## Recommendation:

If you do set careers activity 'homework', differentiate this from other homework by encouraging children and parents to switch off devices and to get away from their desks – can you set careers homework that gets children outside and exploring their local community? Can you set careers homework for the whole family, promoting good quality family time?

Note: there are plenty of fantastic screen-based careers activities for children, for example:

- The BBC Bitesize Careers page has lots of resources for pupils and teachers. The resources span across many different Key Stages:
  - [Careers - BBC Bitesize](#)

# Occupation Awareness Activities



Careers homework provides an opportunity to make children, especially younger children, aware of the wide range of jobs and occupations open to them.

## **Activity #1: Build a town – EYFS & KS1**

Set children the task of designing a building out of cardboard/Lego etc. Parents can help with the design and creation of the building and talk about the different roles people working in the building will have.

Pupils can then bring in their buildings and placed on a display board. The roles can also be discussed in class.

## **Activity #2: Occupations out and about – EYFS, KS1 & KS2**

When parents are out with their child they can talk about what happens in the buildings they go past, and what knowledge and skills would be needed. For example:

- A post office – what skills does the clerk need, what other jobs are involved (delivery, stock, management).
- A playground – skills needed to design the layout of a playground, keeping the playground clean, locking up at night.

# Understanding career paths



Careers homework provides an opportunity for pupils to develop their ability to research a topic and communicate what they have learnt. They can also get a feel for the steps/stages in a career.

## Activity #3: Recording your career story – KS2

Once a month/term, ask family, neighbours or friends to discuss their career. The answers could be brought in and discussed as a class. Over time, the child could build a 'My career story' book:

- Someone whose job or life fascinated you,
- Your first full time job and why you chose it,
- Someone who influenced the career direction you took.

Note: be aware of home context before setting this task. The interviewee could be anyone in the wider family (older siblings, uncles/aunts, grandparents), or neighbours.

## Activity #4: Describing your dream job – KS1 & KS2

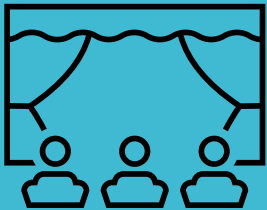
Get children and parents to write down or describe what their dream job would be, and how they could achieve their dream job.

Flip this, and get children to write down a job they don't want to do. Then ask them to think about the skills needed to do this job. This will be a chance to address ideas of 'good' or 'bad' jobs and to ensure that children consider as many career paths as possible.

Note: at this stage, the 'dream jobs' don't necessarily need to be realistic. It is important for young children to speak about their ambitions and develop vocabulary.



# Fun/play activities



Careers homework offers the scope for role play and the development of children's ability to understand and empathise with others.

## Activity #5: Careers dress-up – EYFS & KS1

A fun activity for a child at home is to pick a career (*or have one set by their teacher*), and at home try to gather an outfit from old clothes with toy props they may have. For example:

- A teacher might use pens, paper, files, markers, and a computer.
- A gardener might use a lawnmower, wheelbarrow, shovel, watering can, and hat.

The children could bring in photos of their costumes and discuss the careers as a class.

**Note:** at this early age, children could dress up as characters from books, or television. Teachers can use this activity to help build confidence in talking about careers.

## Activity #6: Careers on screen – KS2

A teacher could set a homework for families to watch a certain movie or tv show or YouTube clip. The family could then go through a set of questions relating to the roles in the video, for example:

- Were certain careers cast in positive and negative lights?
- Was there any activity in the video that excited the children?

When the children are back in class, you could discuss together and decide on 5-10 important attributes and skills.

**Note:** bear in mind some families may not have the same access as others

# Pass the time activities



## Examples of at home careers activities for younger children...

### Activity #7: I-Spy with careers – KS2

Parents and children can play I-Spy, but rather than what they see, try to find a career for each letter of the alphabet. Then discuss what skills or attributes are needed, for example:

- E for engineer, who needs to be:
  - Good at numeracy
  - Punctual and organised,
  - Inquisitive-minded.

Each child could be set a letter, and could create a poster with a picture of the worker, and write the skills and attributes. This could be made into a display board.

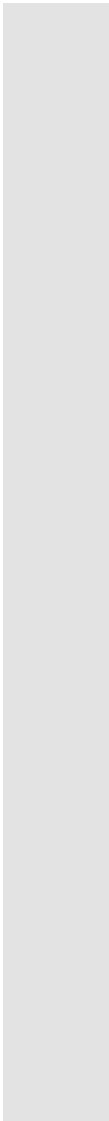

### Activity #8: Talk about likes and dislikes – EYFS, KS1 & KS2

This will help your child to understand what has influenced your life, learning, and choices. Simply, a child and their parent(s) take it in turns talking about what they really enjoy.

Parents could then discuss how that like is related, or unrelated, to their career choices.

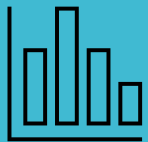
This will help their child to develop positivity around their skills.

**Note: use this activity to help develop vocabulary and confidence in young children when talking about careers.**



How schools can  
improve the feedback  
they get from parents  
on the school's  
careers programme

# How to gather feedback from parents – technology



- Online feedback tools are an efficient way of getting feedback from parents – they don't require you to print lots of forms and you can download the feedback straight away. Examples of feedback tools that schools are using to gather parental feedback include:
  - MS Forms
  - Google Forms
  - Survey Monkey
  - Smart Survey
  - MS Teams – if you start a new conversation in Teams, you can insert a MS Form and give members of the Team answer options
- Most survey software can be used free of charge for short surveys sent to <100 people. If you want more responses, a paid subscription might be needed.
- **Check your school's IT policy when planning an online survey.** You may be required to use certain software and/or only use software that stores data within the UK.

## Recommendation:

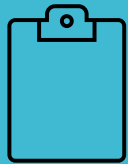
If you are new to collecting feedback from parents online, trial your survey with a small number of parents, maybe those who are school governors, before launching it more widely. You want to ensure that parents understand the questions, and that the survey gives you useful data.

# How to gather feedback from parents – questions to ask



- Parents are unlikely to know a great deal about your school's careers programme or an individual careers activity that their child has undertaken in school; asking for detailed feedback on such things is unlikely to generate much useful feedback.
- **Ask parents to feedback on careers homework that you set:**
  - Did you watch the video/do the activity together?
  - What kind of conversations did this spark?
  - Did your child mention careers that are of interest to them?
- Don't forget to **use contact with parents as a way of delivering other elements of your careers programme.**
  - Ask parents if they or their employer would be willing to give a talk in school or participate in a larger careers event – **remember to ask what job the parent does! That way you can ensure you have a balance of speakers.**
  - Would their employer be willing to offer experience of a workplace, e.g. a visit.
  - Ask parents if they are aware of the school's careers programme, and how they would like to be kept up to date.
  - Ask parents what resources they feel they need to be able to discuss career options with their child.

# How to gather feedback from parents – layout of your questionnaire



- **Keep it short – 5 mins max.** If you are not sure how long it will take to complete your survey, ask a colleague to trial it.
  - Filter questions are a good way of keeping surveys short. For example, if a parent says 'no' to delivering a talk in school, don't then ask for their contact details. It is easy to insert filters using survey software.
- **Use closed or scale answers questions** (Yes/No, Strongly agree – strongly disagree). These will generate comparable answers that are quicker to analyse than lots of open text responses.
- **Include at least one open question** (*what do you think about? is there any other comments you would like to make?*). Collate the responses and give them a read, jotting down common themes (e.g., STEM, workplace visits, classroom activities).
- **Ask the same questions each term/each year** – this will help you to a build a long-term picture of what your parents think and know about your careers programme.
- **Link a parent's feedback to other data** – what year is the child in? Is their child a boy or a girl? This will give you richer data.
- Be happy with 20 - 30 responses. You want to develop ideas, not statistics.

# How to gather feedback from parents – other points



## Recommendation:

Respond to feedback, using the chat functionality offered by software or emailing parents directly. You will start a conversation about the school's careers programme as a whole and over time.

- **When developing your annual plan for CRL, specify how often and when you will seek feedback from parents**
- **Don't overlook verbal feedback from parents** in the playground, at parents' evening and events. These are often good spaces for getting feedback from parents who may not feel confident volunteering their views at other times.
- Don't forget that other staff will be getting feedback from parents. Ask your colleagues to flag feedback which is careers related.
- If you cannot do a survey, use parent response rates for careers events in school or careers tasks set as homework as a proxy for level of engagement.
- Most schools will have their careers programme highlighted on the website. As you gather feedback from parents on your careers programme, you can update this information on the website and highlight changes in response to parental feedback in newsletters.



# North East Ambition Career Benchmark: Primary Pilot Evaluation

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