



School & College Report 2026

Foundations for the future



The story so far...

Together, we're listening, learning and leading the way for positive change.



50,000+ voices having their say on education since 2022



Shaping conversations from staffrooms to parliament on education now and its future

See the whole series



Building foundations for the future

Whether it's happening in schools, colleges, homes or workplaces, learning drives us forward. What we learn today, we build on tomorrow. Lesson by lesson, year on year, learning is shaping futures.

This is the inspiration behind the *Pearson School & College Report* and the milestone edition you're reading today.

Five years on. One big picture.

With every question asked and answer shared, we learn. This is true in both the classroom and across our report series.

Over the last five years, more than 50,000 students, educators and sector experts have had their say on education in schools and colleges. Together, these insights paint a picture of challenges faced, innovation in action and new opportunities to explore.

Building on these foundations, we can collectively continue the conversation on how we best support students, educators, schools and colleges in the future.

Freya Thomas Monk

Managing Director, Pearson Qualifications



What we're exploring...

Educators, students, sector experts and changemakers share their perspectives to help us answer key questions.

Part One: Facing the future

- Where do students hope learning will lead?

Part Two: The power of perspective

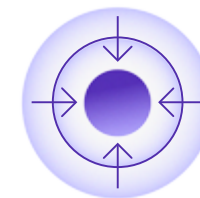
- Where are we now?
- What's changing? What's not?
- What's making a difference?

Part Three: Exploring the possibilities

- How do we build on this to help every student forge their future?
 - Empowering students' choices
 - Equipping with skills and ways to learn
 - Evolving in step with technology and AI

Taking the conversation further

About the research



Pearson commissioned a programme of research and surveys on education between November 2025 and February 2026. This includes:

- Surveys of **primary** and **secondary classroom teachers, middle leaders, school leaders** and **headteachers** working in schools in England conducted by Teacher Tapp, with between **2,355 and 10,100 respondents** depending on the question. Results were weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics.
- Surveys of **1,000 primary pupils** (aged 7–11), **1,000 secondary pupils** (aged 11–16), **1,000 college students** and **1,000 college tutors** in the UK by Censuswide.
- **Reflections from individuals and organisations** across education and industry.

Plus... more than **40,000 educator, student, parent/carers and sector voices** throughout our 2022–2025 report series.

Notes:

We use 'colleges' as an overarching term for all colleges, including sixth-form colleges.

Where we compare *Pearson School & College Report* data trends, this represents a percentage point (pp) change. We refer to +/- 3 pp differences as being a change.

For this report, 'agree' represents a combination of 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses, and 'disagree' represents a combination of 'strongly disagree' and 'somewhat disagree' responses.

Similarly, 'confident' represents a combination of 'very confident' and 'somewhat confident' responses, 'not confident' represents a combination of 'not at all confident' and 'not very confident' responses, and 'ready' represents a combination of 'very ready' and 'somewhat ready' responses.

Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of respondents selected an option such as 'I don't know' or 'neither' or 'never heard of it'.

Part One

Facing the future

To set the scene for exploring education now and what it could become, we asked students: where do you hope learning will lead?



In [last year's report](#), students, educators and sector experts advocated that learning is for life.

This year, students share more about the dreams, destinations and decisions they hope learning will make possible.

“

Dear Future Me,

I hope learning will help me to...

Stay curious, adapt to new challenges, and make informed decisions that benefit both my career and personal life.

I hope it gives me the skills and confidence to solve problems creatively, use technology responsibly, and contribute positively to the world around me.

Most of all, I hope learning will help me keep growing, no matter what changes life brings.”

– School Student

These aspirations are echoed in what **more than 800 school and college students** wrote in letters to their future selves. They share a belief in the power of learning to help them...



Make choices and achieve

“Achieve and work through my goals, get a good job, and be of help to humanity too”

– School Student

“Get the career of my choice and develop it into something better”

– College Student

“Become more confident in my abilities and trust my own decisions”

– College Student

“Make better decisions, solve problems creatively and achieve my personal and professional goals”

– School Student



Feel ready for what the future brings

“Master new technology, turn curiosity into real-world impact, and keep my mind as flexible as a gymnast, so I can solve problems, chase dreams, and still enjoy a good laugh along the way”

– School Student

“Adapt to whatever changes come my way”

– College Student

“Teach me new skills and open doors to opportunities I haven’t imagined yet”

– School Student

“Continue learning new things to stay current in fields that are changing”

– College Student



Grow in many ways

“Learn many new things at school, like maths, reading, and new skills that will help me when I grow up”

– School Student

“Become as well-rounded an individual as possible, [with] learning not necessarily being restricted to my areas of speciality”

– College Student

“Be my best self; I hope to keep learning even for fun not academic success.”

– School Student

“Be a better person tomorrow”

– College Student



“Student voice should shape education by informing learning experiences that prepare learners with skills for fulfilling futures. These voices should be understood and actioned, not simply heard.”

– Rochelle Wong, Co-Chair, FED Learners' Council



Continuing the conversation

The ambitions of students today are inspiring. So too is their belief in learning to support their journeys from who they are now to who they'll become.

Every student's path will differ but their experiences at school and college are crucial in paving the way.

There's no one-size-fits-all future, so how can we support each student in their next steps? To answer this, we need to look at students' hopes and educators' experiences over time to better understand where learning is working well and where we can go further.

Part Two

The power of perspective

As we collectively strive to help students reach the futures they imagine, it's important to reflect on our starting point.

Five years of report insights can help us pinpoint changes, challenges and emerging opportunities to inspire our next steps.



Our starting point: 2026 snapshot

The power of learning shines through...

“My school/college is successfully preparing me to appreciate the power of learning and what learning can do.”

78% of primary students
72% of secondary students
70% of college students

“I feel supported by my teachers/tutors.”

81% of primary students
70% of secondary students
66% of college students

“I enjoy school/college.”

76% of primary students
63% of secondary students
67% of college students

“I feel like I belong at school/college.”

80% of primary students
67% of secondary students
67% of college students

“What’s a great thing my school does? Accept me for who I am.”

– School Student

“[My tutors] treat me as an adult which makes me want to learn more.”

– College Student

“My school is very inclusive and learning is fun.”

– School Student

Schools and colleges are continuously striving to enhance teaching and learning...

Key focuses for improving learning in the last year

Primary		Secondary	
1	Expanding in-school SEND support 47%	1	Attendance schemes 53%
2	Behaviour schemes 32%	2	Behaviour schemes 40%
3	Attendance schemes 31%	3	Expanding in-school SEND support 35%
4	More inclusive resources and texts 29%	4	Expanding access to extra-curricular activities 26%

Key positive impacts on learning in the last two years

College	
1	Improving digital infrastructure 30%
2	Joining/being part of a college group 28%
=	Flexible working options for staff 28%
4	Digital learning resources 27%
=	Mental health and wellbeing initiatives 27%

“[My school] is very inclusive and everyone here has a voice.”

– School Student

“Students have so much potential.”

– Secondary Classroom Teacher

“I think it’s important to keep improving.”

– College Tutor



But pressures are building...

Top areas educators have become increasingly concerned about in the last year

Schools			Colleges				
	1	Prevalence of SEND	63%		1	Student mental health and wellbeing	29%
	2	Student behaviour	58%		=	Impact of cost of living on families	29%
	3	Student disengagement in learning	55%		3	Digital wellbeing	27%
	4	Student mental health and wellbeing	51%		=	Prevalence of safeguarding issues	27%

“The most prevalent challenge for students, that's amplified the most in recent years, is the need for mental health and wellbeing support. At NCC, we've increased student support as much as we can, but there's a critical need for funding to address this.”

– Gerry McDonald CBE, Group Principal and CEO, New City College

Continuing the conversation

These insights showcase the powerful and positive impact of learning today. They also speak to the complex journeys that schools, colleges, and students are navigating every day.

Since 2022, challenges and opportunities in education have changed, endured and emerged. By bringing together five years of observations, we can chart general trends and trace a picture of: *how* are different pressures being felt? *Why* are some challenges persisting? *Where* is progress taking place? *What* is facilitating access to new opportunities?



Challenges being faced: 2026 snapshot

We asked educators about the most significant challenges facing their schools and colleges in the next 12 months.

“We're constantly short of qualified teachers [...] it puts huge pressure on the rest of us to cover gaps.”

– College Tutor

“Money, staffing and time – there are never enough hours in the day for everything that’s expected to be done.”

– Primary Middle Leader

The top three challenges educators expect their school/college to manage in the next 12 months

Primary

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-----|------------------------|
| 1 | Budget pressures | 69% | <div><div></div></div> |
| 2 | Supporting pupils with SEND | 68% | <div><div></div></div> |
| 3 | Teacher and school leader workload | 42% | <div><div></div></div> |

Secondary

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-----|------------------------|
| 1 | Budget pressures | 57% | <div><div></div></div> |
| 2 | Teacher and school leader workload | 47% | <div><div></div></div> |
| 3 | Supporting pupils with SEND | 42% | <div><div></div></div> |

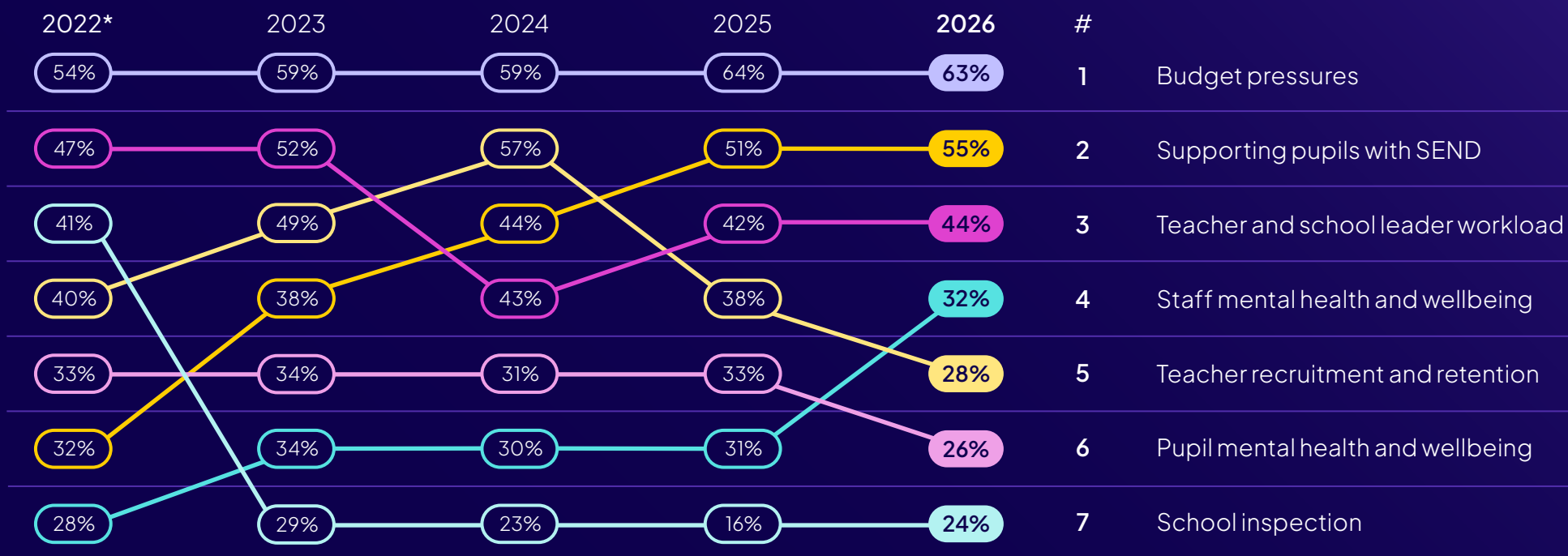
College

- | | | | |
|---|---|-----|------------------------|
| 1 | Tutor recruitment and retention | 24% | <div><div></div></div> |
| 2 | Student mental health and wellbeing | 23% | <div><div></div></div> |
| = | The increasing use of AI in teaching, learning and assessment | 23% | <div><div></div></div> |

Spotlight on school challenges

Charting answers from schools since 2022 reveals that while the **same seven challenges** have consistently topped the list, their prominence is changing over time.

What do you expect to be the top challenges for your school to manage over the next 12 months?



* Note: 2022 results gathered from school leaders only.

Five years on: emerging patterns

Looking beyond the top-ranked challenges for schools overall, we've also tracked a range of **wider trends**.

Going up

- The perceived challenge of **supporting students with SEND** has reached an all-time high for primary and secondary schools. The number of educators highlighting it as a top challenge since 2022 has increased by:
 - **30 pp** for primary (now 68%)
 - **18 pp** for secondary (now 42%).
- The reporting of **budget pressures** as a top challenge by private schools is higher today than at any time in our report series – rising **20 pp** from 2022 (now 59%). There is now only a **4 pp** difference between state and private school educators reporting this top challenge (compared to a **17 pp** gap in 2022).
- **Digital safety and wellbeing** is noted as a top challenge by **7%** of teachers now – up **4 pp** since 2022.

Going down

The number of schoolteachers noting the **continued impact of COVID-19** as a top challenge has decreased **13 pp** since 2022 (was 15%, now 2%). While the legacy of the pandemic can't be underestimated, the downward trend is significant.

Staying the same

Amid year-on-year movement, **performance measures** are highlighted as a top challenge by **15%** of educators today – similar to 2022.

A closer look at 2026

- While shifting in rank as a top challenge since 2022, **school inspection** increased by **8 pp** – the only challenge to increase beyond 4 pp this year.
- Secondary educators are more likely than their primary counterparts to cite **teacher recruitment and retention** as a challenge (38% vs. 17%), as well as **pupil mental health and wellbeing** (31% vs. 21%).
- **34%** of primary educators see **staff mental health and wellbeing** as a top challenge, compared to 30% of secondary teachers.

Spotlight on college challenges

To further understand the shared pressures in education, we asked tutors for the second year running about the challenges their college will have to manage in the next 12 months.

“It remains very difficult to attract and retain talent – especially in relation to the skills priority and shortage areas within the government’s Industrial Strategy.”

– James Scott, CEO,
Trafford and Stockport
College Group

While the reported challenges for colleges remain at similar percentages to 2025, college tutors’ responses show a cluster of high-ranking challenges being managed in parallel. As we saw with schools, there have been subtle shifts in the rankings – with almost every challenge listed changing position.

Top six expected challenges for colleges to manage in the next 12 months*					
2026			2025		
1	Teacher/tutor recruitment and retention		1	Student mental health and wellbeing	
2	Student mental health and wellbeing		=	Digital safety and wellbeing	
=	The increasing use of AI in teaching, learning and assessment		=	Teacher/tutor and college leader workload	
4	Digital safety and wellbeing		=	Budget pressures	
=	Performance measures		5	Teacher/tutor recruitment and retention	
6	Teacher/tutor and college leader workload		=	The increasing use of AI in teaching, learning and assessment	

* Note: Challenges are shown without percentages to reflect the narrow spread of responses. Differences should be read as shifts in emphasis rather than changes in scale.

What we're learning...

“At Eastern Education Group, we recognise these challenges. These findings underline the importance of deeper collaboration between colleges, employers and organisations such as Pearson. By working together, we can ensure that provision remains relevant and future-facing, supporting every learner to progress with confidence in a rapidly evolving world.”

– Dr Nikos Savvas OBE DL, Chief Executive, Eastern Education Group

“It's unsurprising that budget pressures dominate as top challenges for both schools and colleges. Mental health ranking highly also reflects leaders diverting capacity to support students after systemic cuts elsewhere. There is an urgent need to restore funding, close pay gaps and rebuild system-wide support capacity to ensure schools and colleges can focus on their primary role of educating young people.”

– Claire Green, Post-16 and Skills Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders



Barriers to learning: school spotlight

Alongside the challenges facing schools and colleges overall as institutions, we asked schoolteachers about the biggest barriers to their students’ learning in the near future.

“Behaviour can be an early warning signal. Heeded early, it opens a door to support. Ignored, it becomes the first step to lost learning and the path out of school.”

– Kiran Gill, Chief Executive, The Difference

“This data shows how important it is that we rebuild relationships between parents and schools.”

– Frank Young, CEO, Parentkind

2026 snapshot

Top barriers to school pupils’ learning in the next six months

	1	Special educational needs and/or disabilities	72%
	2	Attendance	68%
	3	Behaviour	62%
	4	Parent/carers disengagement	60%
	5	Mental health	59%
	=	Student disengagement	59%
	7	School avoidance	47%
	8	Prior learning experience	44%

Five years on: a changing picture

Expanding on this year's snapshot, **the longer-term view** shows an even more nuanced landscape of barriers to learning.



Sustained pressures

- The top three barriers to learning in 2022 (**attendance**, **mental health** and **special educational needs and/or disabilities**) remain in the top five today.
- **Attendance** continues to impinge on school students' learning, remaining within **3 pp** of its 2022 figure, but **7 pp** lower than in 2024.
- **Student disengagement**, a barrier we first surveyed educators about in 2025, remains at an identical level to last year (59%).



Marked differences

- **Special educational needs and/or disabilities** (SEND) now top the list of anticipated barriers to students' learning – up **15 pp** overall since 2022 (now 72%).
Primary teachers are more likely to perceive SEND as a barrier to learning, with **81%** reporting this compared to **65%** of their secondary counterparts.
- **Parent/carer disengagement** is seen to be a more prominent barrier to learning in 2026 – up **7 pp** since 2025 (now 60%).

Encouraging signs of change

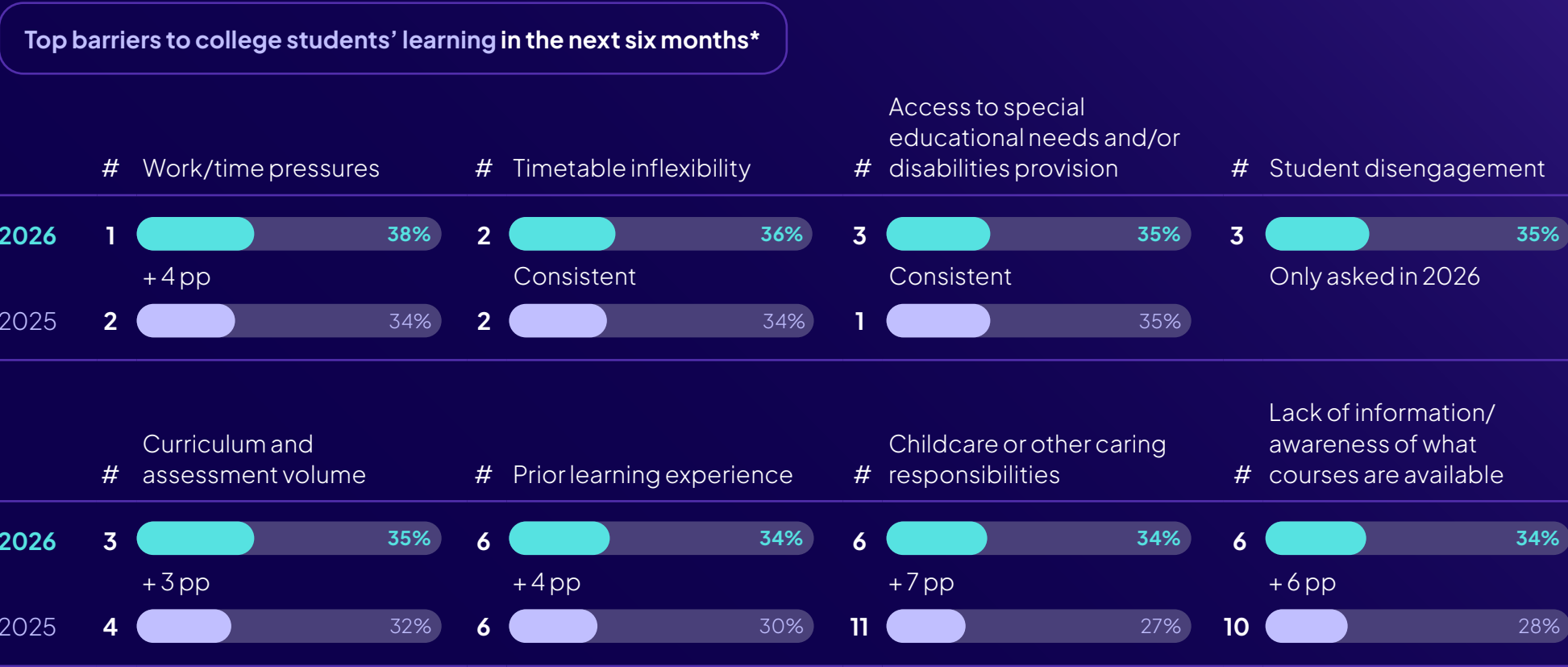
Over the last five years, fewer educators are noting the following anticipated barriers to learning:

- **mental health** – down **23 pp** since its peak of 82% in 2024
- **hunger** – falling **18 pp** from 34% in 2024
- **physical health** – down **17 pp** since its peak of 28% in 2022
- **poverty** – falling **12 pp** from 48% in 2022
- **prior learning experience** – down **19 pp** since its peak of 53% in 2022.

While these factors have not necessarily lessened at a national level, these figures and our conversations with schools suggest that teachers' dedication and school-wide approaches are reducing their perceived impact on learning.

Barriers to learning: college spotlight

Building on our 2025 report, we asked college tutors to share their perspectives on barriers to students' learning in the next six months. In these early stages of charting the trends, we see some variations emerging.



* Note: The answer options given to schools and colleges contain some variation to reflect differences between the phases. 2026 totals are based on a combination of answers for 16–18-year-old students and adult learners respectively.

A closer look: wellbeing and the wider picture

Perceived barriers to learning outside of the top-ranking answers aren't necessarily declining in prevalence or impact. The following have seen year-on-year increases:



Up **4 pp**,
now 33%

Mental health



Rising **5 pp**,
now 32%

**Lack of technology
at home**



Up **3 pp**,
now 32%

**Lack of technology
in college**



Rising **5 pp**,
now 22%

Poverty

“The growing impact of work pressures, mental health, poverty and digital exclusion resonates for our students across the sector.

Colleges are constantly adapting through flexible delivery and enhanced support.

To ensure that these barriers are addressed sustainably, increased focus on collaboration with wider public services such as health and social care and sustained investment is needed; collectively we can support access to learning and create opportunities for life.”

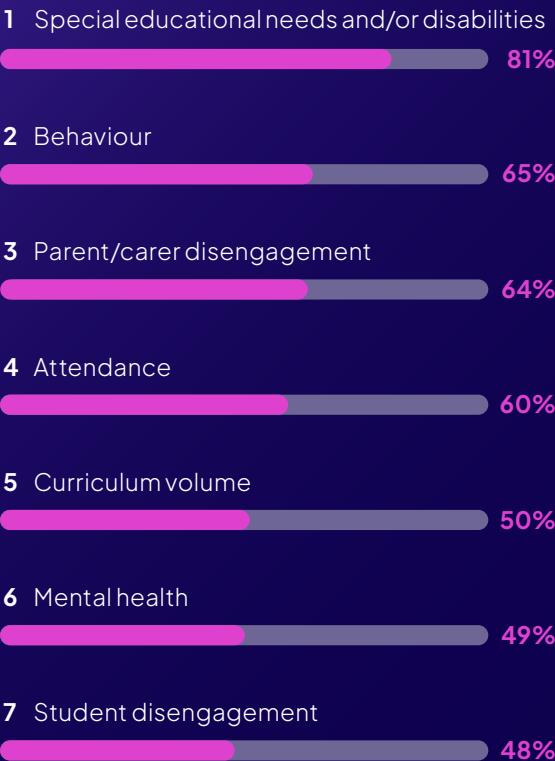
– Vicki Illingworth, Executive Principal/
Deputy CEO, Chichester College Group

Barriers to learning: across the phases

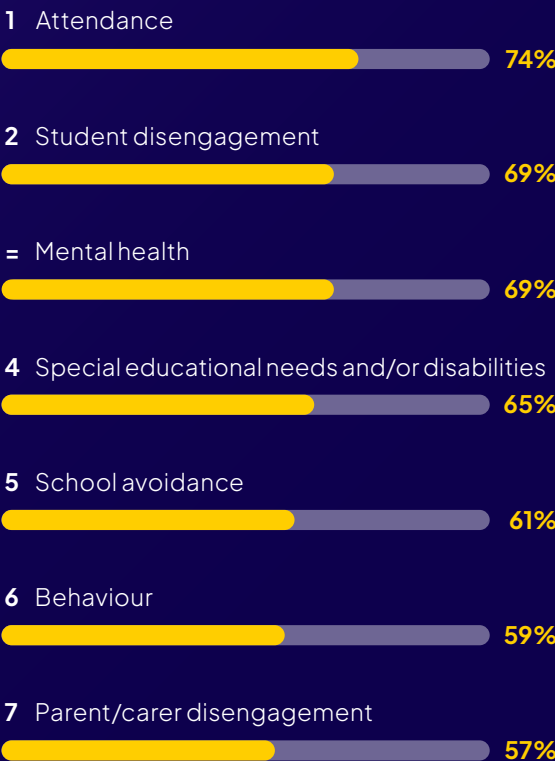
To support connections and conversations beyond these pages, we're also sharing a view of the barriers to learning this year by age and stage – surfacing similarities and shifts across learning journeys.

The expected barriers to learning in the next six months – across phases

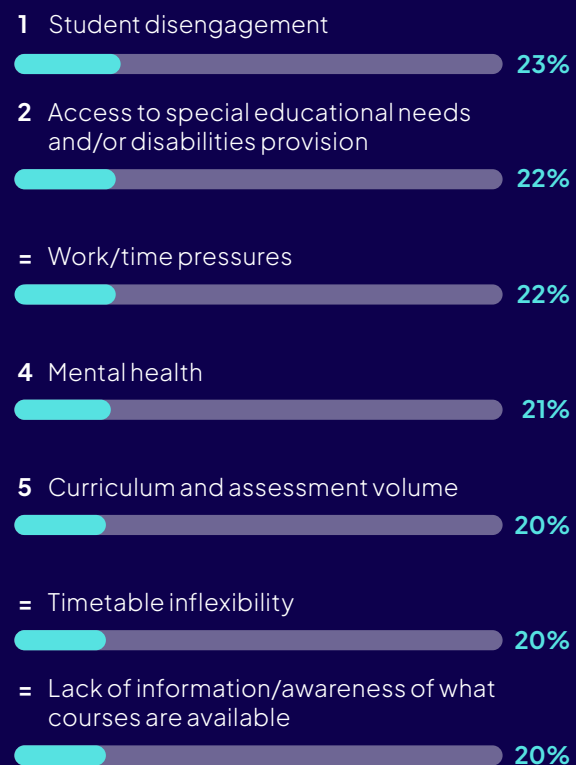
Primary



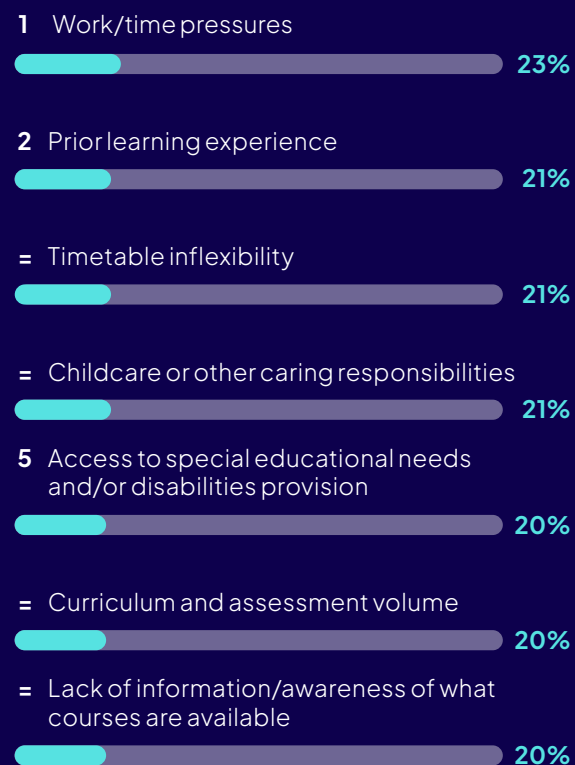
Secondary



College: learners aged 16–18



College: adult learners



The student outlook: impacts on learning

How are the challenges and barriers that educators see manifesting in students' learning experiences?

When we asked students to share their perspectives, they responded in their thousands.

While every student's experience is unique, their combined responses help trace a picture of factors impacting learning within the classroom and beyond.

This year, **fewer students now say that nothing impacts their learning.**

Only **17%** of school students and **3%** of college students reported this in 2026 (compared to 23% and 6% in 2025).

School students say...

Top five factors impacting my learning

"Finding it hard to concentrate because of other students' behaviour"

33% of primary students | **32%** of secondary students

"Not understanding the work"

32% of primary students | **32%** of secondary students

"Not feeling clever enough"

25% of primary students | **29%** of secondary students

"Feeling unwell"

21% of primary students

"My mental health and wellbeing"

21% of secondary students

"Struggling to take part or learn in lessons in the same way as my other classmates"

16% of primary students | **19%** of secondary students

A closer look: emerging patterns

- **Other students' behaviour** (a new option for school students to consider this year) is deemed the top impact on learning. This mirrors teachers' views of behaviour as an area of increasing concern in the last year and its prominent ranking as a barrier to learning.
 - This also echoes Teacher Tapp findings this year, where 54% of primary teachers and 43% of secondary teachers said that students' behaviour disrupted their last lesson to the point that teaching and learning stopped.¹
- **Worrying about money** is the only aspect that has seen an overall two-year increase in impact since 2024 – up **4 pp** (was 5%, now 9%).
- Year-on-year comparisons from 2025 show a jump in students reporting the impact of **not feeling clever enough** and **struggling to take part in lessons in the same way as my other classmates** – up **4 pp** respectively.
- Despite an increase in the number of students that have their learning impacted in some way, there's been a **downward trend** in the level of perceived impact for some elements since 2024:
 - **not understanding the work** – down **13 pp** (now 32%)
 - **being hungry** – falling **7 pp** (now 10%)
 - **feeling unwell** – decreasing **5 pp** (now 18%).

¹ Teacher Tapp. 2026. "Behaviour, menopause policies plus email monitoring." teachertapp.com/articles/behaviour-menopause-policies-plus-email-monitoring

College students say...

Top five factors impacting my learning

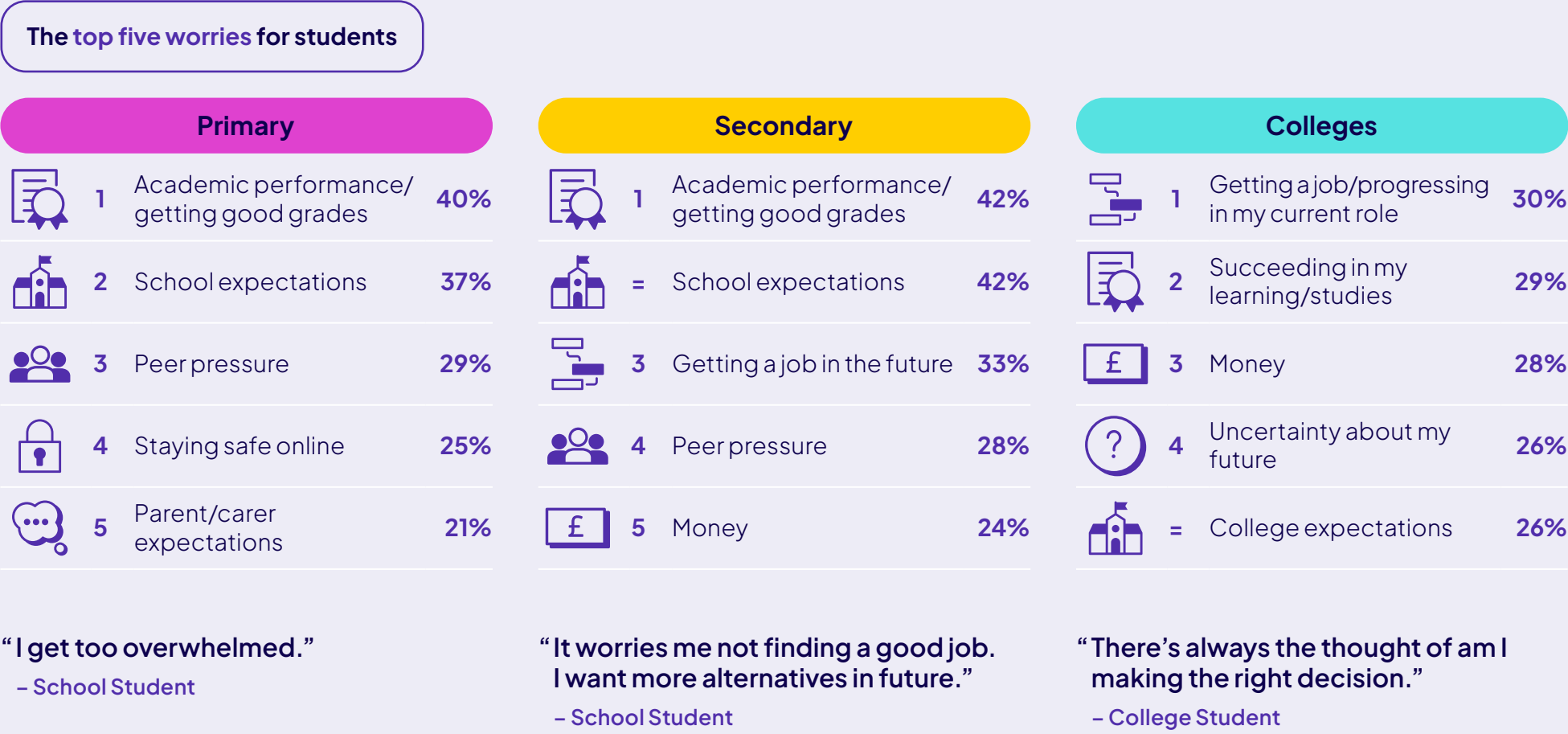


Like their school counterparts, the number of college students reporting impacts on learning has fallen in some areas.

- Despite topping the list of impacts for two years in a row, **mental health** has seen the largest year-on-year decrease – down **11 pp** to 24%.
- A **7 pp** decrease has also been seen year on year for **work/time pressures** (now 23%), **confidence** (now 23%) and **hunger** (now 7%), followed by a **6 pp** fall for physical health (now 13%).

What's worrying students?

With students of all ages noting that mental health and wellbeing can impact their learning, we asked them to share more about their current concerns – with different stories emerging across schools and colleges.



A closer look: one year on

Going up

- For school students, there's been a marked swing towards worries about **academic performance** (up **18 pp** to 41%) and **school expectations** (up **13 pp** to 39%).
- For college students, **succeeding in studies** has climbed from **fifth to second** position overall in the rankings.
- The number of school students citing **peer pressure** as a worry has jumped **13 pp** to 29%, taking it from seventh to third position.
- **Money worries** among school students have risen **6 pp** to 19% in the last year.

Going down

- For college students, **money worries** have dropped by **10 pp** to 28% – falling from first to third position.

Discussion point



In contrast to their school-based peers, the proportion of college students noting the top-listed concerns is generally **lower this year** than in 2025.

Viewed alongside the decrease in college students saying **nothing** worries them, this points to a wider range of concerns than those captured in these lists – perhaps connected to broader challenges, barriers and impacts explored in this report and beyond.

“By prioritising the joy and excitement in learning, we can better support the mental health of our young people.”

– Dr Helen Care, Clinical Psychologist

“The priority is his mental health. We just want him to have a stable, happy life.”

– Parent

What's making the difference?

Throughout our report series and in our work alongside schools and colleges every day, we see educators rising to the challenges and barriers that impact learning. This year is no exception. And students agree.



We asked students what their school or college is doing to help them and their learning.

Here are just some of the 1,800+ answers from students...

It's personal.

The biggest factor school students say is helping their learning: support from their teachers.



“Our teachers make learning super interactive, like doing science experiments and having debates in class, it makes school really engaging!”

– School Student

“We use technology like tablets and interactive boards, which makes lessons more interesting and fun.”

– School Student

“My college is teaching us how to use AI tools.”

– College Student

“My teachers are helping me as I have some learning difficulties, and I do worry I am falling behind others in my class but with their help [...] I am getting better.”

– School Student

“The tutors are really friendly and want us to succeed. They make lessons interesting and we do lots of outdoors stuff – which I like.”

– College Student

“Always reassuring me, always saying they believe in me”

– School Student

“They're helping me realise my potential.”

– School Student

“Every Friday, we have either a talk, a seminar or a carousel activity where we learn about things that will impact us/help us or things we need to be informed on ‘beyond the gates’.”

– College Student

“They create a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and making mistakes.”

– School Student

“Every term we have this progress check-up one-on-one with our form teacher, where we talk with them about how we feel things are going or if an A level is getting overwhelming.”

– College Student

“In class, having open conversation allows me to freely voice my thoughts”

– College Student

Enhancing learning: intent and action

From our wider conversations and research with educators, schools and colleges, it's clear that the support students describe reflects individual efforts and a dedicated focus.

“These findings remind us of the huge impact made by educators every day, and highlight how their dedication and innovation is key to helping schools, colleges and students tackle any challenges that come their way.”

– Mary Palmer, Chief Executive Officer, The Teaching Awards Trust

Last year, we asked:

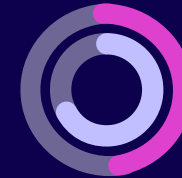
What, in an ideal world, would you prioritise to improve student learning?

This year, we asked:

What has your school focused on to improve student learning in the last 12 months?

Primary

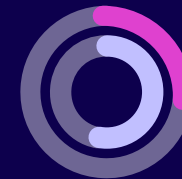
Expanding in-school SEND support



In 2025, **67%** said they'd ideally prioritise this to improve learning.

This year, **almost half (47%)** say their school has actively focused on this.

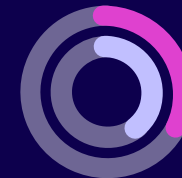
Parent/carer engagement schemes



In 2025, **53%** said they'd ideally prioritise this to improve learning.

This year, **1 in 4 (26%)** say their school has actively focused on this.

Behaviour schemes



In 2025, **39%** said they'd ideally prioritise this to improve learning.

This year, **almost 1 in 3 (32%)** say their school has actively focused on this.

Secondary

Expanding in-school SEND support



In 2025, **48%** said they'd ideally prioritise this to improve learning.

This year, **more than 1 in 3 (35%)** say their school has actively focused on this.

Parent/carers engagement schemes



In 2025, **49%** said they'd ideally prioritise this to improve learning.

This year, **almost 1 in 4 (23%)** say their school has actively focused on this.

Behaviour schemes



In 2025, **48%** said they'd ideally prioritise this to improve learning.

This year, **2 in 5 (40%)** say their school has actively focused on this.

What the responses reveal...

■ Alignment

The three areas teachers wanted to prioritise most to improve students' learning in 2025 *and* have been focused on this year align with many of the top challenges for schools and barriers to learning noted within this report and the overall series.

■ Proactivity and momentum

Many schools are already acting to make their priorities in 'an ideal world' a reality.

■ Foundations to build on

The three areas teachers have focused on most mirror the areas they've become increasingly concerned about in the last year. This underlines the importance of continuing what's already underway in many schools, as well as sharing insights and successes to help the education community enhance learning at scale.

More from us...

To see more inspirational stories and celebrate the innovation and impact happening in early years settings, schools and colleges across the nation, visit the Pearson National Teaching Awards website.



What else is enabling progress?

Every school, college and learning journey is unique. But by asking similar questions across our reports, we see patterns in what's enabling progress within and beyond the classroom walls.

What school students say...

What's helped my learning in the past year or two?



4 in 10 say **support from teachers** (42%)



Almost a third say **access to digital devices** (31%)

Around 1 in 4 say



- **extra-curricular activities** e.g. sport or after-school clubs (27%)
- using **more digital learning** resources and tools (27%)
- **more support staff** in lessons (25%)
- **mental health and wellbeing support** (24%)
- **access to outside green space** (23%)

Around 1 in 5 say



learning about how to use AI (20%)



more diverse resources and texts (18%)



1 in 10 say **climate initiatives or resources** (12%)

A closer look: what's changing?

Comparing students' answers from 2024 and 2026, we see that:

- **Support from teachers** remains the main driver prompting students' progress.
- **Learning about how to use AI** has seen the biggest increase of any response option – **doubling to 20%** in 2026.
- **Access to digital devices** and **using more digital learning resources and tools** both increased – up **4 pp** and **6 pp** respectively.
- **Mental health and wellbeing support** rose **5 pp** (now 24%), as did **more diverse resources and texts** (now 18%).

What schoolteachers say...

We also asked schoolteachers in 2024 and 2026 what's had a **positive impact on their school in the last two years**.

Their responses show what has been supporting school communities between 2022 and 2026, with some increasing over time.

- The number of teachers naming **AI tools** has **more than doubled** – rising from 12% in 2024 to **29%** in 2026.
- **Flexible working options** for staff has increased **5 pp** (now 17%).

Several enablers show a consistent impact, with 2026 levels remaining within 2 pp of 2024 for **mental health and wellbeing initiatives (22%)**, **using digital learning resources (17%)**, **improving digital infrastructure (15%)** and **more diverse resources and texts (15%)**.

What college tutors say...

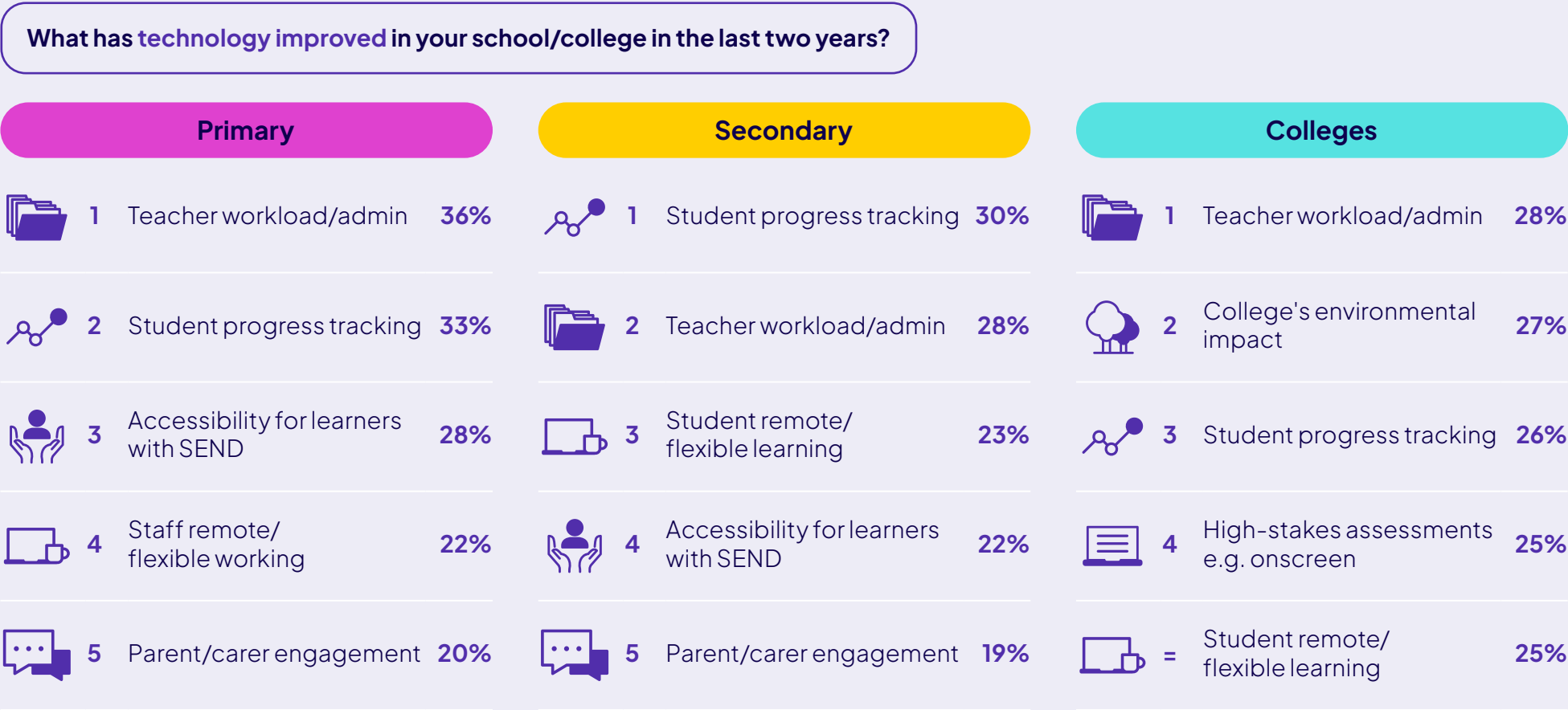
Reflecting on the last two years specifically, college tutors highlight similar enablers having an impact for staff and students.

What's positively impacted your college in the last two years?

	1	Improving digital infrastructure	30%
	2	Joining or being part of a college group	28%
	=	Flexible working options for staff	28%
	4	Digital learning resources	27%
	=	Mental health and wellbeing initiatives	27%

Spotlight on tech enablers

Inspired by what educators and students shared with us, we asked for more detail on how technology is making a difference to school and college life.



A closer look: AI

When reflecting on changes in education over the past five years, **74%** of schoolteachers and **80%** of college tutors mentioned **increased use of AI**. With AI and its presence in lives and learning being the subject of much discussion, we explored how it's being used today.

Educators' views

"I use AI to support teaching and learning."

42% of primary teachers
40% of secondary teachers
27% of college tutors

Students' views

"I use AI as part of my everyday learning or studying."

45% of secondary students
56% of college students

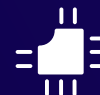


This year, only **12%** of schoolteachers and **9%** of college tutors say they **don't use AI in their role**. Last year, **20%** of schoolteachers said the same.

"AI saves me time in my role."

57% of primary teachers
48% of secondary teachers
26% of college tutors

More than half of secondary and college students feel **AI has had a positive impact on their learning**. **15%** disagree.*



More from us...

As technology evolves, it's shaping the teaching, learning and working experiences of educators and students alike – spanning challenges and barriers, as well as improvements.

To support further reflections and future conversations as a sector, we will build on these findings throughout the report and by sharing more insights online.



* Note: Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of students stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Continuing the conversation

Over the past five years, we've witnessed school and college communities striving to meet the moment with positivity and proactivity, from navigating the Covid-19 pandemic to bringing new innovations into the classroom.

Pressure and progress are happening in parallel. And working together as a sector, we can continue to support students, schools and colleges in the years ahead.



Part Three

Exploring the possibilities

How do we build on these findings to help every student forge their future?



Ready for the future

As with any learning, future readiness isn't taught by one person or achieved at a single point in time. It's **cumulative**: acquired, developed and made tangible throughout school and college, and on into the world beyond the classroom.

Learning as a foundation for the future is clear...

In letters to their future selves, students emphasised that they want learning to underpin personal and professional growth, as well as the pathways that lead there.

"I hope learning will help me to best prepare for the future."

- College Student



For some, learning-fuelled destinations are precise

"I hope learning helps me..."

"Be a better beauty therapist"

College Student

"Become a clinical psychologist"

College Student

"Secure the apprenticeship I want"

School Student

"Be a great cloud programmer"

School Student



For many, they last a lifetime

"I hope learning helps me..."

"In day-to-day life [and] helps me to improve myself"

School Student

"Become successful and happy in what I do"

College Student



Others hope learning will show them the way

"I hope learning helps me..."

"Discover what I'm really passionate about and turn that into a career"

School Student

"Know what I want to do and what job to go for"

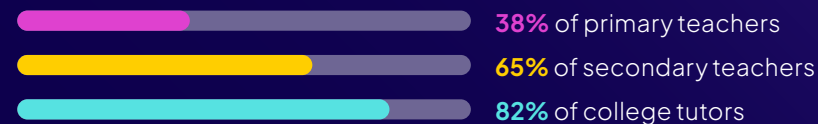
College Student

Together, educators are preparing students for what's next...

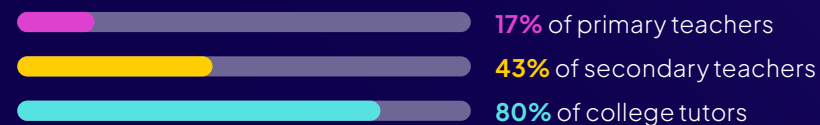
Our findings show educators' efforts to shape future readiness at every stage of the learning journey – connecting and evolving over time.

"I'm currently preparing my students for..."

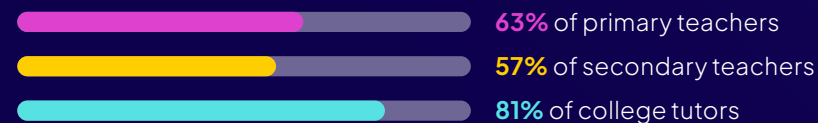
Further study or training



Their future careers



Being responsible citizens



But hopes and actions for the future sit alongside apprehension...

Students' responses highlight that their anxiety about the future is growing across learning phases. Comparing answers to what we've seen on earlier pages, students' biggest worries are ones they anticipate will continue in the future.

“Uncertainty about my future worries me.”



13% of primary students



23% of secondary students



26% of college students



School and college students believe **employment** and **economic pressures** will be two of the **greatest pressures** for their generation in the future.

Considering how we prepare students to encounter these challenges and the unknown is a consistent theme across reflections from educators and students.

“The curriculum has to prepare students for a very uncertain future in terms of job opportunities etc. Are we doing that now?”

– Primary SLT

“As everything is changing so rapidly [...] I have no idea whether the skills that I am learning, my future prospects, or my ideas will be relevant.”

– College Student

Fuelling shared aspirations to go further...

As nationwide reforms progress, our findings show how united educators are in their desire to keep enhancing students' preparedness for their future paths.



In fact, **more than 1,750 schoolteachers and college tutors** took the time to send us their ideas.

In addition to subject-specific suggestions, many responses noted the power of strengthening connections and collaboration between each stage of learning.



**Beyond the numbers:
what would make a difference?**

“Working alongside secondary schools and colleges, so primary children are better equipped”

– Primary SLT

“More vocational learning linked to industry”

– Secondary Headteacher

“More collaboration between schools, universities and employers”

– College Tutor

While we can't make the future more certain, we can explore ways to bolster readiness for what lies ahead...

That's why we're taking a closer look at how, alongside the announced reforms, we can collectively go further to:

- **empower students to choose** what their future learning looks like
- **equip students** with the skills to learn and live
- **evolve in step with future-shaping forces** such as technology and AI.

More from us...

Conversations about future-focused learning will continue beyond these pages. To support these in the run-up to reform and beyond, we'll keep sharing news, insights and support online.



Spotlight on choices: future-shaping moments

As students progress through education, choosing what to study and the pathways to pursue means the future is front of mind.

So how can we go further to empower young people to decide their next steps with confidence?

“I hope learning helps me to acquire the ability to make well-considered decisions.”

– School Student

“I hope learning helps me to find the right path.”

– College Student



“My life, my choice?”

From what thousands of students told us, **having a say** in what comes next and feeling a **sense of control** over their direction matters to young people from an early age.

“Having my voice/
opinion heard at school
is important to me.”

82% of primary students
70% of secondary students

“Being able to make my
own decisions about my
future is important to me.”

87% of primary students
91% of secondary students

Yet, the **level of control** students feel over their future changes between primary, secondary and college.

“I feel in control of my future path after school/college.”*



Agree

69% of primary students
58% of secondary students
62% of college students



Disagree

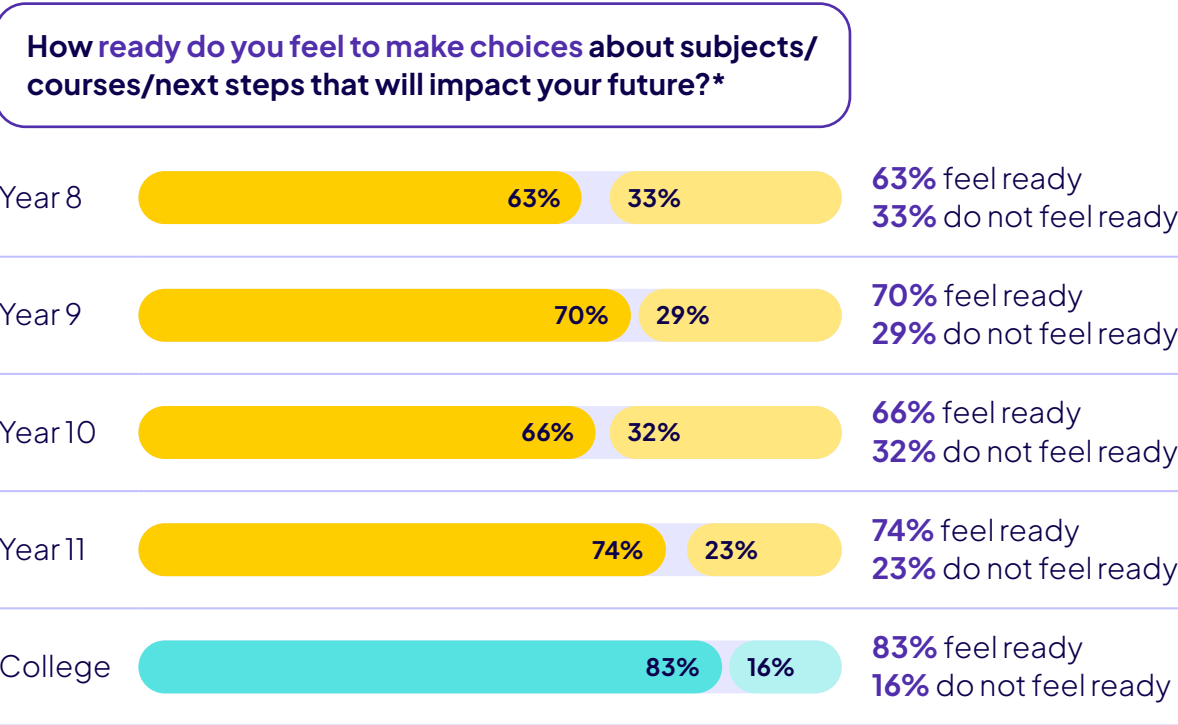
6% of primary students
13% of secondary students
13% of college students



* Note: Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of students stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

“But am I ready to choose?”

Given students’ desires to own and steer their futures, we wanted to delve deeper into their experiences of **choosing next steps** at secondary school and after college – from course options such as GCSEs, A levels and BTECs, to embarking on training, apprenticeships and careers.



* Note: Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of students stated they didn't know how ready they felt.
** Note: Approximate figures calculated by extrapolating the combined totals for each year group reporting feeling ready or unready, using 2025 student population data sourced from the Department for Education (via Explore Education Statistics: explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/).



Over 4 million students in England – from Year 8 to college level – **feel ready** to make choices about subjects/courses that will impact their future. **Around 1.2 million don't.****

The findings echo and expand on what we saw in [our 2025 report](#) where **more than 6 in 10 learners** said they felt ready for the next stage of their learning. Yet teachers and tutors felt that **over 1.9 million were not.**



Beyond the numbers: student stories

As statistics only give us part of the picture, we asked students to tell us more in their own words. Answering openly, they reflected on the reasons why they **don’t feel ready** to make choices about subjects, courses or next steps.

“Limited exposure to real-world careers makes choosing [...] difficult.”

– College Student

“I don’t know what job I want [...] so I don’t want to choose the wrong subject.”

– Secondary Student

“I need to get English and Maths GCSE to do the apprenticeship I want to do and I am dyslexic and have dyscalculia so I might fail.”

– Secondary Student



“I am just starting to discover my interests now in college [...] I feel I need time.”

– College Student

“How am I supposed to know what to do after school when school is the only thing I have ever known?”

– Secondary Student

“Why are we supposed to have this figured out at this age? Why can’t we just learn and grow and be happy?”

– Secondary Student

“What can I choose?”: picking pathways

Across students’ reflections, a clear theme emerges: feeling ready to make choices is closely tied to **feeling informed**. But do students believe they have the information they need to navigate their next steps with confidence?

Which routes are known?

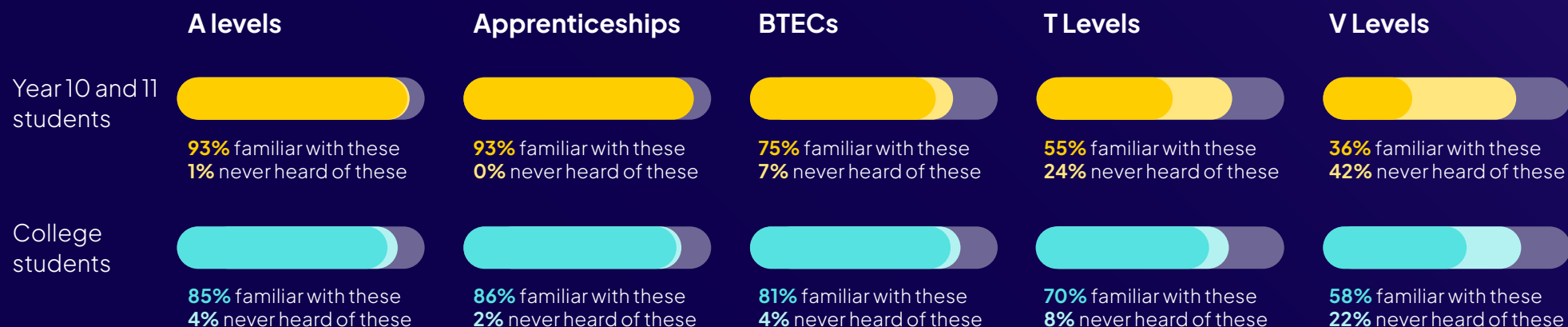
Awareness of different routes is a key starting point for choice. So, we asked students in Years 10 and 11, and at college, **which qualification routes they recognise**.

Year 10, 11 and college students’ awareness of qualification routes*

Discussion point



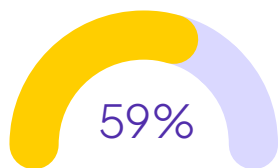
As upcoming qualifications, V Levels understandably have a lower level of recognition, with almost half of Year 10s (the potential first cohort for V Levels from 2027) saying they’ve not heard of them. How can we collectively start building awareness?



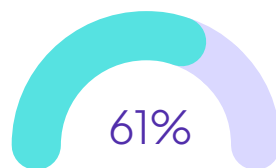
* Note: Where percentages don’t total 100%, the remainder of students stated they’d heard of the qualification name but nothing else.

How well are they understood?

Feeling informed enough to choose learning options depends not just on knowing that pathways exist, but also understanding what they involve and where they might lead.



59% of secondary students feel they have **enough information about all the different paths** they can take after school. **15%** disagree.*



61% of college students say they had **enough information about all their post-16 options** before starting college. **13%** disagree.*

Notably, **open days/evening events** play a significant role, with **81%** of Year 9–11s and college students saying they influence the subjects and courses they choose.



Yet, **11%** of college students say a **lack of information/awareness of which courses are available** impacts their learning.

“I don’t know my options well enough.”

College Student

“I don’t know enough about how certain subjects will be used in real life.”

School Student



Beyond the numbers: what would make a difference?

“More in-depth support from younger school age to map out educational journey and show the benefits of what a good education/ further education can bring”

– College Tutor

“Give more choice [to] allow students to find their niche”

– Secondary Middle Leader

“More [guidance on] creative fields”

– College Student

More from us...

Explore the latest qualifications news and support from us online.



* Note: Where percentages don’t total 100%, the remainder of students stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

“Why am I choosing these options?”

As a next step, we took a closer look at what's influencing students' choices.



The top factors influencing students' choices

Years 8 and 9 For Level 1/2 study

	1	I enjoy the subject	43%
	2	I think I can do well	36%
	3	It links to my career goals	29%
	4	I need it for further study or training	20%
	5	It suits the way I like to learn (e.g. practical, academic, on the job)	17%
	6	It will help me earn more money in the future	16%

For the love of learning...

Educators echo students' sentiments, citing **enjoyment of the subject** as a key motivator behind students' choices – **83%** say this for Years 8 and 9, and **69%** for Year 11.

Year 11 For post-16 study and training

	1	I enjoy the subject	33%
	2	It links to my career goals	28%
	3	I think I will do well on this course or pathway	21%
	4	The courses are available at schools and colleges near me	18%
	5	I need it for further study or training	15%
	=	It will help me earn more money in the future	15%

College For next steps after study

	1	It's something I'm interested in or enjoy	24%
	2	It links to my career goals	22%
	3	It will help me earn more money in the future	18%
	=	I think I will do well in this option or pathway	18%
	5	It allows me to earn money while learning	15%
	=	It suits the way I like to learn (e.g. practical, academic, on the job)	15%
	=	It fits best with my grades or predicted results	15%

Changes over time

As students consider life beyond school, the deciding factors move towards **practicalities** like **course availability**, pursuing **career goals** and **earning money**. This aligns with the proportions of students we saw earlier who feel worried about money and getting a job in future.

“Who’s guiding my choices?”

When we asked about who influences student decisions on subjects and courses more broadly, the power of people was clear to see.

The people most influencing students’ decisions on next steps

Parents/carers



95% of Year 9–11s

Teachers/tutors



90% of Year 9–11s

Peers/friends



84% of Year 9–11s

Careers advisors



78% of Year 9–11s



97% of college students



97% of college students



95% of college students



93% of college students

It’s a mix of the people consistently with us in life – those we trust and interact with most – and those who have expertise to offer, that students are most guided by during decision-making.

“These extraordinary figures show the huge influence of parents on the choices children make.

We need to make sure that parents are well informed when they are the biggest influence over choices children make about their future, particularly where poor choices can have long-term consequences.”

– Frank Young, CEO, Parentkind



In teachers they trust

Students across all phases rate teachers and tutors as **extremely influential in choosing course options** – much higher than educators perceive themselves to be.

While many teachers in [our 2022 report](#) noted their role as being ‘mentors’ or ‘guides’, only **6%** of schoolteachers and **19%** of college tutors believe they’re a significant influence in students’ decision-making processes in 2026.

“It takes a village...”

It's not just individuals at school, college or home who help shape students' choices: influences also emerge from across the community.

Additional influences on students' next steps

Wider family



76% of Year 9–11s



90% of college students

People met on work experience/in jobs



68% of Year 9–11s



92% of college students

Community role models, e.g. youth group leaders



57% of Year 9–11s



87% of college students



While **almost half** of Year 9–11 students (**47%**) and **81%** of college students say **celebrities** or **social media influencers** have some impact on their subject and course choices, these proportions are much lower than all other answers given.

Continuing the conversation

Futures are not defined by the choices made at school or college alone. They are influenced by young people's aspirations and how prepared they feel when taking each next step in their learning journey.

Our findings highlight a clear ambition across education: students want learning to be a foundation for fulfilling, future-ready lives, and educators are actively working to support this through every stage.

However, fears of making the 'wrong' choices, changing career landscapes, as well as gaps in awareness and understanding of available pathways mean these stages can feel uncertain for students.

Greater collaboration and connection across education and industry will help us equip them with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to navigate these choices.



Skills for the future

As the world around us changes, so too do the skills that power how we learn, work and live.

Students, educators and employers told us their thoughts on how we can best equip today's learners with the skills to ready them for what lies ahead.

“I hope learning gives me the skills to follow my dreams, make a positive difference and keep growing no matter what challenges come.”

– School Student

“I hope learning helps me to improve my life skills [and] gets me ready to go to work.”

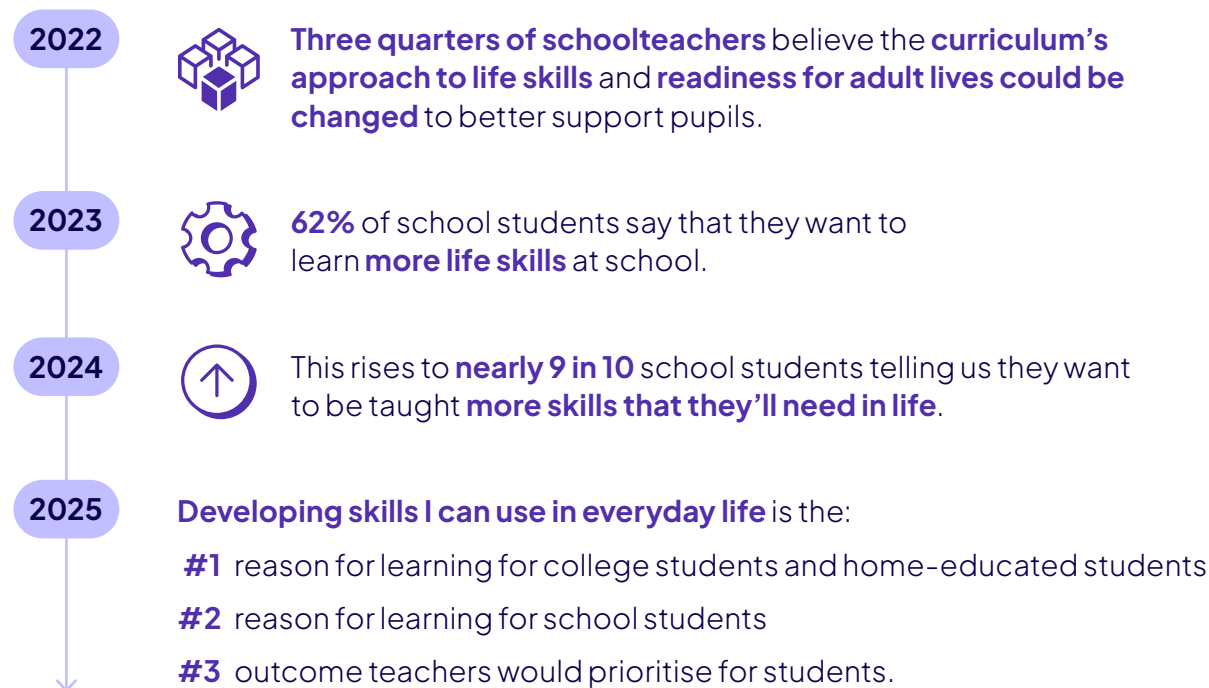
– College Student



Skills: what's the outlook now?

Our findings reflect what's seen and heard in classrooms and nationwide conversations every day: skills matter.

The story so far



Note: We group skills into three types: life skills (for everyday living), transferable skills (used across jobs and contexts), and vocational skills delivered through vocational learning (linked to specific occupations or technical areas).

“There’s undoubtedly a consensus on the importance of developing skills for work; the challenge now is to make sure all young people are getting the practical learning opportunities to gain these skills.

Education needs to keep pace with the world it is preparing young people for; we need to help young people flourish when they transition from education, giving them employability skills as well as technical skills.”

– Ben Blackledge, Chief Executive, WorldSkills UK

Spotlight on 2026: what's important?

At school

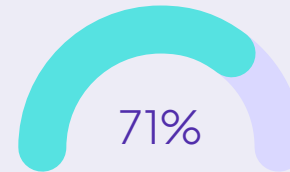


Around **9 in 10** school students say...

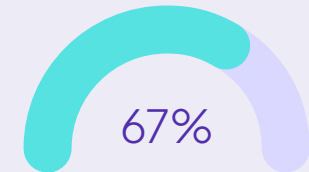
- Learning things that will help them in **everyday life (89%)**
- Learning skills that will help them **get a job** in the future **(88%)**

This level of importance is the same placed on **getting good grades (88%)**.

At college



7 in 10 (71%) of college students believe they're **developing useful life skills**.



Two thirds (67%) of college students state their current course or training **prepares them well for future work or study**.

“I hope learning will help me develop critical thinking skills, foster creativity, and provide practical knowledge for real-world challenges.”

– School Student

“The emphasis students place on practical, career-focused learning reflects the continued importance of aligning education closely with employer needs.”

– Dr Nikos Savvas OBE DL, Chief Executive, Eastern Education Group

And there's opportunity to go further



6 in 10 schoolteachers and **7 in 10** college tutors say today's education system **does not** set students up with the **skills they need to thrive**.

Bringing skills to life, for life

Skills aren't only valued by students, educators and employers for today, but also for how they'll help us adapt to learning, work and life in the future.



78% of school students would like to learn more subjects/topics to **prepare them for their futures**.



Beyond the numbers: what would make a difference?

More than 1,400 school and college students told us which **subject** or **skill they'd add to their current timetable**, as they think they'd need it in future. Suggestions include a mix of life, transferable and vocational skills:

“More practical hands-on job skills for manual trades”
– School Student

“How to take care of bills and taxes”
– College Student

“AI uses – it is the future”
– College Student

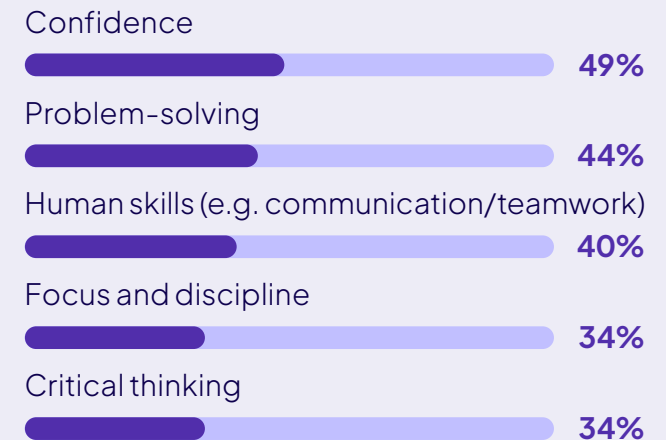
“Mental health education to better manage stress and wellbeing”
– School Student

“Public speaking [and] real-world negotiation skills”
– College Student

“How to cook and take care of a home”
– School Student

Future essentials

In our recent research, students in schools and colleges also ranked the **most important skills for their futures** as:



What stands out: the transferable skills deemed most important for the future are a key focus for many students and educators throughout the learning journey. But are there ways to take this further?

To support ongoing conversations, we asked students and educators which skills they feel are being developed in schools and colleges now.

The top skills students feel they're being helped to develop

School		College	
1	 Problem-solving	 Confidence	
2	 Confidence	 Human skills (e.g. communication/ teamwork)	
3	 Digital skills	 Critical thinking	
4	 Human skills (e.g. communication/ teamwork)	 Problem-solving	
5	 Focus and discipline	 Digital skills	
6	 Critical thinking	 Focus and discipline	

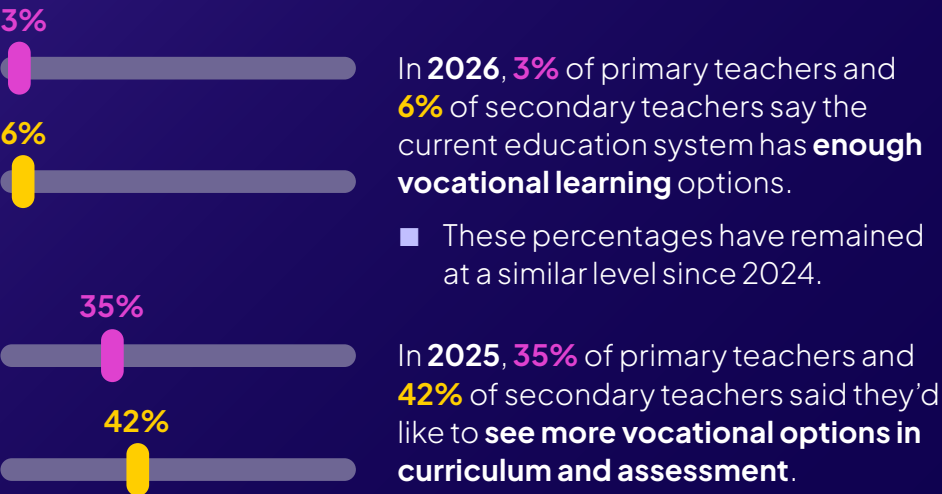
The top skills teachers/tutors feel equipped to foster

School		College	
1	 Resilience	 Critical thinking	
2	 Confidence	 Confidence	
3	 Problem-solving	 Problem-solving	
4	 Human skills (e.g. communication/ teamwork)	 Digital skills	
5	 Understanding the wider world	 Growth mindset	
6	 Curiosity	 Self-awareness	

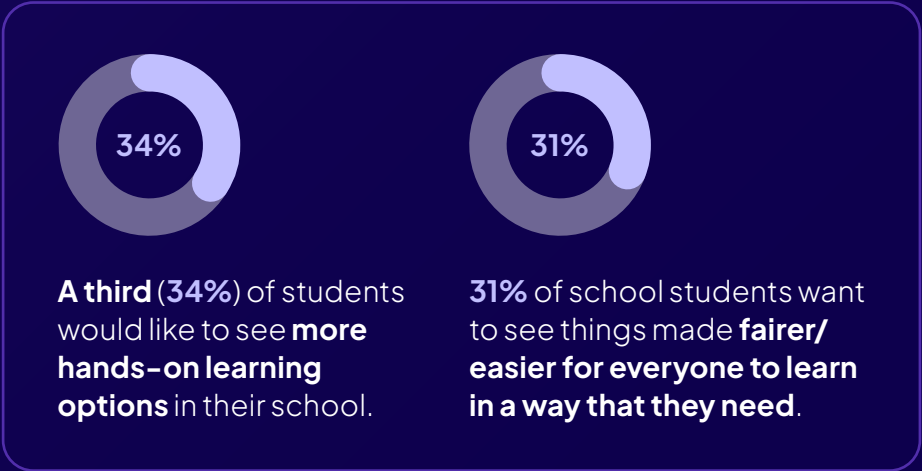
Spotlight: vocational learning in schools

Alongside appetite for more life skills and transferable skills, calls for stronger technical and vocational learning opportunities have been consistent throughout our report series.

Educators' views



Students' views



“Employers across the UK are calling out for talented young people to fill their skills gaps. High-quality vocational education is the engine that can fill those gaps.”

– Olly Newton, Executive Director, Edge Foundation

More from us...

Explore the latest news and support for vocational learning in schools.





Beyond the numbers: what would make a difference?

This year, more than **1,200 secondary teachers** described what '**more vocational education in schools**' could look like.

“More subjects with practical focus, getting them ready for trades”

– Secondary SLT

“I teach a vocational subject [...] but I think it should be more hands on, with usable skills that help them find a direction for what they want to do in the future.”

– Secondary Classroom Teacher

“Greater blending of vocational learning and appreciation that all students have different strengths”

– Secondary Middle Leader

“Vocational subjects should be available earlier than college, as students disengage earlier and don't get to college.”

– Secondary Middle Leader

“Collaboration with schools/colleges that run vocational learning”

– Secondary Middle Leader

“Days off timetable to emulate a vocation e.g. Become a Published Author Day where they have to write/edit/pitch/design a cover for a book”

– Secondary Classroom Teacher

Spotlight: lessons from colleges

Colleges are a driving force for bringing career-focused, vocational and technical education to life. Across the sector, there's a shared aspiration to strengthen this in readiness for the future.

Building strong foundations



77% of college tutors think that the education system has **enough vocational learning**.



More than 6 in 10 college students say...

"I have **opportunities** for practical or hands-on learning."

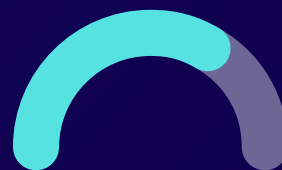
"My college is **successfully preparing me** for my future career."

"The world of work is changing quickly, so students need skills that can evolve with new industries."

– College Tutor

Readying for work

Perspectives across college communities highlight room to build stronger connections between the classroom and the workplace.



65% of students would like their course to include **more practical or work-related learning**.

More than 1 in 3 college tutors say that...



securing **sufficient industry placements (36%)**

and



student readiness for placements (33%)

are challenges.

"Young people clearly understand the importance of developing employability skills and want work experience opportunities and clearer pathways into work."

– Kate Ambrosi, Chief Executive Officer, Baker Dearing Educational Trust



Beyond the numbers: what would make a difference?

We asked the sector what could help build readiness within the classroom and beyond.

“Students being shown general expectations in the workplace (e.g. writing emails and liaising with stakeholders).”

– College Tutor

“Learning how to properly use technology – especially for the future”

– College Student

“Teachers should receive ongoing training in contemporary business procedures.”

– College Tutor

“Students believe college is preparing them well for future work, but there is more to do. We need to prioritise funding, support, simplification and better employer engagement to ensure that all vocational education supports all young people to feel prepared for their future.”

– Olly Newton, Executive Director,
Edge Foundation

“Improve transition support between school, college, university, employment and training”

– College Tutor



More from us...

Discover our range of support for colleges and students now, in the run-up to reform, and beyond.



Explore the latest insights on futureproofing workforces and skillsets.



Continuing the conversation

Skills and vocational learning play a distinctive role in helping students move from aspiration to action.

As expectations for learning, work and technology continually shift, the question is not simply which skills today's students should develop, but how they can be supported to adapt and use those skills in a world that is constantly changing.

This is also where digital and emerging technologies come into sharper focus: not as a separate issue or challenge, but as the most pressing examples of how learning prepares young people for their next steps in life.



Digital and AI: patterns and possibilities

Reflecting on what's happening in education now helps us see the progress, pressure points and considerations ahead when shaping readiness for a digitally enabled world.

"I hope learning helps me to understand how to use AI effectively, as it's going to be everywhere."

– College Student

"I hope learning will help me adapt, grow, stay confident, and succeed in a digital world."

– School Student



The journey so far

As one of the biggest change drivers that educators have witnessed in the last five years, **technology goes beyond hardware and software**. It's simultaneously an **enabler of learning**, underpins an **essential skillset** for life and work, and is an **ever-changing force** shaping how schools, colleges and workplaces operate today and in the years ahead.



Supporting learning today

Students' responses highlight the power of technology in supporting their learning.

"Technology helps me learn."*

82% of school students agree
3% disagree

71% of college students agree
9% disagree

These figures emphasise that technology **isn't a one-size-fits-all experience or solution**. Rather, it's **one of many tools** that educators can intentionally draw on to **maximise learning impact**.



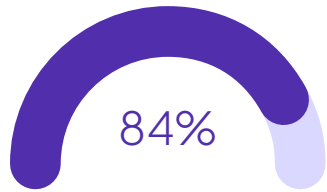
In fact, **74%** of school students and **64%** of college students state that they learn best using a **mix of digital devices, books, pens and paper**.

What's more, technology isn't only a means of bringing learning to life, but also forms the basis of what's being taught.

In the last five years, **21%** of schoolteachers and **80%** of college tutors report seeing **more emphasis on digital literacy** and **digital skills in education**.

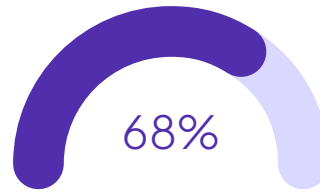
* Note: Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of students stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Future in focus



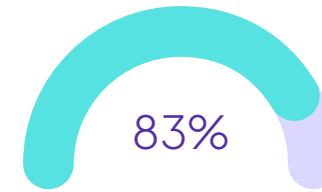
84% of school students say **being prepared for their future in a digital world** is important to them.

■ Up **6 pp** since 2024



68% of school students say their school is **helping them be prepared for a digital world**.

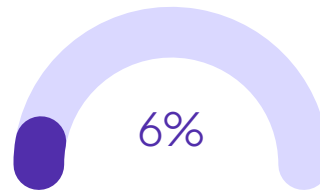
■ Up **11 pp** since 2024



83% of college tutors believe they're **currently preparing** their students to **have the digital skills they need**.

Yet...

6% of teachers believe that the education system has **enough digital emphasis to prepare learners for their futures** – an almost identical proportion to 2024.



“[Technology] is needed in nearly every job.”

– College Student

Building on this...



On the following pages, we're putting the spotlight on **impact-focused edtech use: foundational access, skillsets and connections to the future**.

Developing digitally: the foundations

While technology is supporting teaching, learning and assessment across many schools and colleges, it's being embraced and experienced to differing degrees.

"If the future is digital, then we need to really invest time and energy into this."

– Secondary SLT

"The most valuable products, services and training right now aren't necessarily the most advanced... they're the ones that survive a dropped connection, a frozen screen, or an unexpected update."

– Karen Wespieser MBE, Chief Executive Officer, Teacher Tapp

Connections and divides

Students and educators alike describe how the experiences of using technology for learning vary, particularly with **day-to-day availability** and **reliability**.*

"My school/college has everything I need to complete my work digitally, i.e. through computers/digital devices."

73% of school students | **64%** of college students

"My learning is often interrupted because of poor internet connection or device problems."

44% of school students | **55%** of college students

This aligns with a 2026 Teacher Tapp survey,² which revealed that **1 in 3 teachers** experience **daily tech failures at school**.

* Note: The answer options given to schools and colleges contain some variation to reflect differences between the phases.

² Teacher Tapp. 2026. "1 in 3 teachers face daily tech fails." Public email communication, 19.02.26.

The picture taking shape: digital in schools and colleges

While digital journeys differ across schools and colleges, understanding where experiences **align – and where they don't** – is fundamental to pinpointing what could make the **biggest differences** across the education community.

With this in mind, we wanted to explore what's influencing how technology is being used to support teaching and learning.

“My school/college has embraced technology to enhance teaching and learning.”

61% of schoolteachers agree, **22%** disagree*

61%

91% of college tutors agree, **2%** disagree*

91%

* Note: Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of educators stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.



What's helping and hindering?

Looking holistically, there's a broad range of factors influencing whether technology is being embedded to support teaching and learning.

Comparing the **presence** and **absence** of these factors, an interconnected picture of enablers and barriers emerges across the phases, with differences in emphasis.



Top factors helping schools/colleges embrace technology

	Rank and % answered		
	Primary	Secondary	College
Access to devices in school/college	1 71%	1 57%	2 28%
Availability of digital resources (software/online content) at school	2 43%	3 45%	3 27%
Digital infrastructure (e.g. broadband)	3 39%	4 44%	3 27%
School/college-based tech support	4 37%	2 47%	8 25%
School/college-provided CPD on digital for teaching and learning	5 29%	5 34%	5 26%
Digital skills taught across subjects (beyond computing lessons)	6 25%	9 14%	1 29%
Access to assistive technology for students with SEND	6 25%	6 23%	5 26%
Funding allocated for technology	8 22%	7 20%	5 26%
Clear policy and support from senior leaders	9 19%	7 20%	8 25%
Specific digital skills development for students	10 12%	10 9%	8 25%

**Top barriers to embracing technology for schools/colleges****Rank and % answered****Primary****Secondary****College***

Lack of access to devices in school/college	1 71%	1 62%	8 19%
Lack of funding allocated for technology	2 69%	2 60%	1 38%
Lack of school/college-based tech support	3 44%	7 28%	1 38%
Lack of school/college-provided CPD on digital for teaching and learning	4 42%	4 36%	5 25%
Availability of digital resources (software/online content) at school/college	4 42%	5 33%	5 25%
Digital skills not taught across subjects (only in computing lessons)	6 38%	5 33%	1 38%
Digital infrastructure (e.g. broadband)	7 33%	3 37%	9 13%
Lack of access to assistive technology for students with SEND	8 27%	10 19%	1 38%
Unclear policy and support from senior leaders	9 20%	8 23%	5 25%
Lack of specific digital skills development for students	9 20%	9 22%	9 13%

* Note: Results for college tutors are based on a small sample (fewer than 50 respondents) and should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative.

A closer look

- **Access to devices** is the leading enabler and barrier to technology use in schools. In college, the same is true for **digital skills being taught across subjects**.
- Across schools and colleges, the same **practical factors** (infrastructure, on-site tech support and digital resource availability) consistently appear as both key enablers and barriers.
- **Funding** and **CPD** both feature as mid-table enablers for technology use in schools and colleges but are cited more prominently as barriers when they're less available.



Beyond the numbers: what would make a difference?

Here are just some of the suggestions made by thousands of educators on where we go next to support students' future readiness via tech-enabled learning.

“I’d integrate data literacy, AI, and digital into all post-16 pathways.”

– College Tutor

“I’d like to see computer literacy beyond what a smartphone can do.”

– Secondary Middle Leader

“[Pupils need] basic computer skills. They are not digital natives if it’s not a tablet.”

– Primary SLT

“I’d increase access to assistive technologies that foster inclusive learning environments.”

– College Tutor

“I’d like to see all students receive equal access to technology.”

– Secondary Classroom Teacher

“Children need access to laptops.”

– Primary SLT



More from us...

To support schools and colleges with making the most of technology for teaching and learning, we’re continuing to advocate for **system-wide digital transformation**.



Spotlight: digital skills

Digital skills are key to unlocking what technology can do, but do students have what they need for learning and life?

“My school/college is preparing me to have the digital skills I need.”



77% of school students



69% of college students

When it comes to acquiring digital skills, students feel they're heading in the right direction.

A closer look: confidence

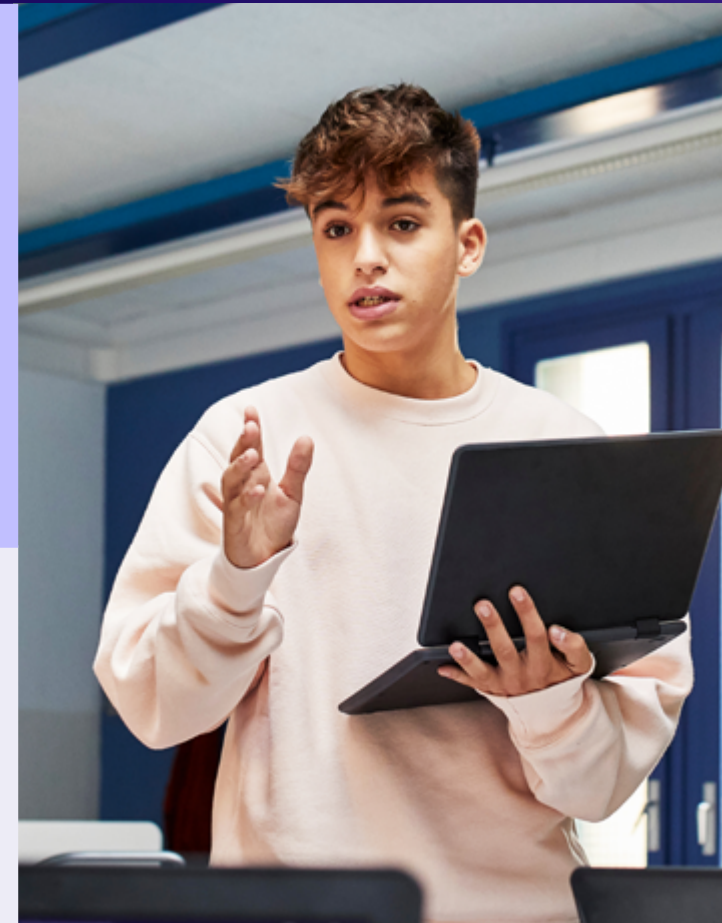
Once we gain skills, confidence is crucial to how we develop and deploy them over time.

That's why we asked students about this in relation to key digital skills that support **everyday learning, work** and **online participation**.

Discussion point



Rather than pointing to a lack of skills, identifying where students feel **unconfident** can guide us in collectively boosting confidence – from practical support and further research to collaboration and action.





Top skills areas where students report feeling unconfident

Putting technology to work – independent use, communication and productivity		Rank and % answered	
		Secondary students	College students
	Using spreadsheet software to organise information or use formulas	1 29%	1 13%
	Writing emails to teachers/tutors or employers using the appropriate tone and structure	2 20%	5 9%
	Using presentation software to design and present a slide deck	3 19%	6 8%
	Using word processing software to create, save and format documents	4 15%	3 10%
	Typing quickly and accurately	4 15%	6 8%
	Saving files and backing them up to the cloud	6 14%	2 11%
	Keeping devices working properly and up to date (e.g. installing updates)	7 13%	3 10%

Navigating the online world – participation, responsibility and safety

		Rank and % answered	
		Secondary students	College students
	Managing privacy settings and understanding data shared with apps or websites	1 22%	1 11%
	Distinguishing between facts, opinions, bias and misinformation	1 22%	3 10%
	Judging whether information found online is reliable	3 21%	1 11%
	Identifying paid for or sponsored content online	3 21%	3 10%
	Knowing how to report unsafe behaviour online	5 16%	3 10%

Upskilling: it's mutual

Educators also emphasise the value of ongoing **digital-focused CPD** for staff to help them guide their students.

“We need teacher training programmes which focus on new technological advancements.”

– College Tutor

“Young people seem increasingly confident in their digital skills, but spotting misinformation and judging reliability lag behind. Embedding critical thinking and media literacy across education is essential for both students and staff.”

– Emma Darcy, Director of Technology for Learning, Denbigh High School

Keeping digital in perspective: balancing next steps

As our reports and sector-wide conversations over the years consistently show, **access to technology** and the **ability to use it well** are increasingly shaping learning today. They also form the foundations that schools, colleges, workplaces, educators and students will build from in future.



There are clear benefits

Across their responses, students point to technology as a support for **engagement**, **participation** and **personalised learning**.

“Technology helps me learn in ways that work for me.”



81% of primary students



77% of secondary students



68% of college students

“Technology makes it easier for all students to participate.”



79% of primary students



74% of secondary students



70% of college students

“Using digital tools helps me engage more in lessons.”



79% of primary students



70% of secondary students



64% of college students

But simultaneously...

The areas where students' confidence with technology is at its lowest are also where the concerns are most pronounced. They also link to wider discussions across today's society about the presence of technology in daily lives.

"I'm worried about staying safe online."



24% of school students



15% of college students

"Digital wellbeing is a top challenge for my school/college to manage in the next year."



7% of schoolteachers



22% of college tutors

"In a world where everything's online, knowing how to navigate, protect myself and create responsibly on the internet is [...] essential for any future."

School Student

Guiding what's next: impact and intent



Any next steps need to acknowledge these multiple perspectives – not as contradictions, but as **co-existing complexities** to be balanced. It isn't a question of using more or less technology. Rather, it's where it can be used safely, responsibly and impactfully in our school and college communities.

The nuances are where there's room for collaboration, alignment and action to guide **intentional, responsible** and **impactful** use of **technological tools and skills** for the benefit of learners and those who support them.

And navigating this becomes increasingly important as newer technologies enter the picture, such as AI.

AI: what's emerging?

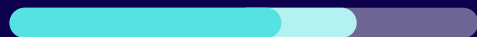
As its presence grows, AI is becoming a **focal point** for discussions about technology in education. Rather than standing apart, it acts as a lens bringing opportunities, challenges and considerations for tech-enabled learning into sharper focus.

Students' views

"AI has changed how I learn."*

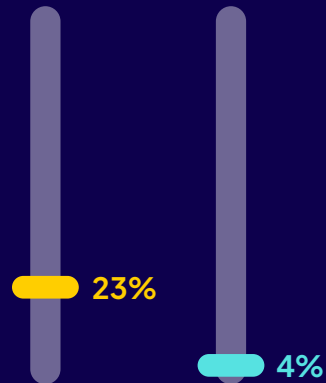


49% of secondary students agree
21% disagree

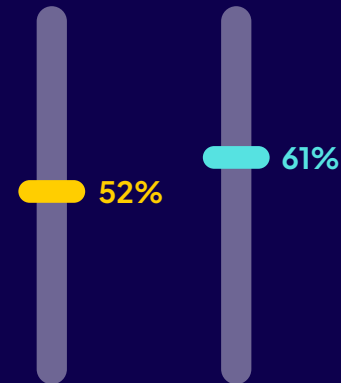


58% of college students agree
16% disagree

* Note: Where percentages don't total 100%, the remainder of students stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.



1 in 5 secondary students (22%) and fewer than 1 in 20 college students (4%) state they **haven't used AI for learning in the last month.**



52% of secondary students and 61% of college students say AI helps make their **learning easier to access** and **more personalised.**



Top three uses of AI for secondary and college students:

- #1 Finding information or sources for my work
- #2 Checking my work for grammar or improving my wording
- #3 Explaining a concept or topic I didn't understand

Educators' views



142%

The number of teachers saying **AI has had a positive impact** in their school in the last two years has risen by **142%** – from 12% in 2024 to **29%** in 2026.

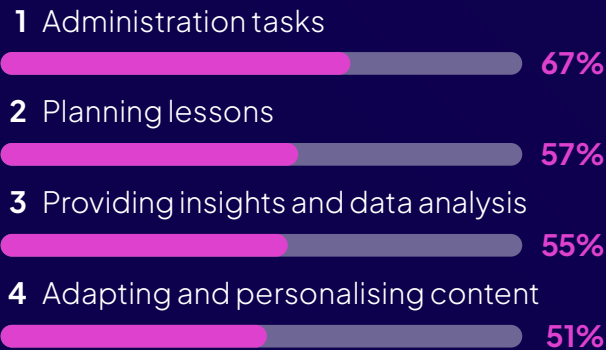


56% of schoolteachers and **31%** of college tutors expect to see **increased use of AI tools** in their settings in the next five years.

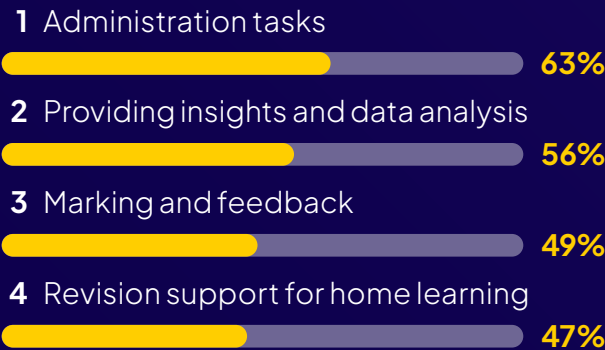
And educators have clear views on the potential for AI to go further to support teaching and learning in the future.

Top areas where educators believe AI could be utilised more for teaching and learning

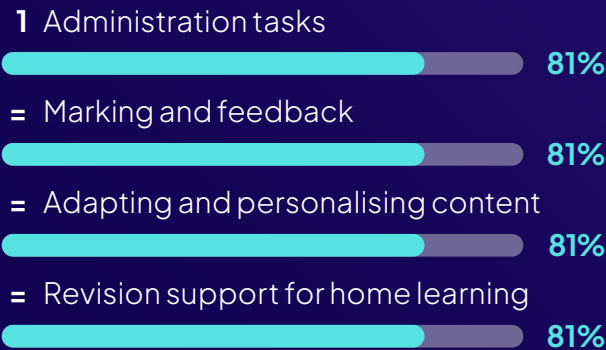
Primary



Secondary



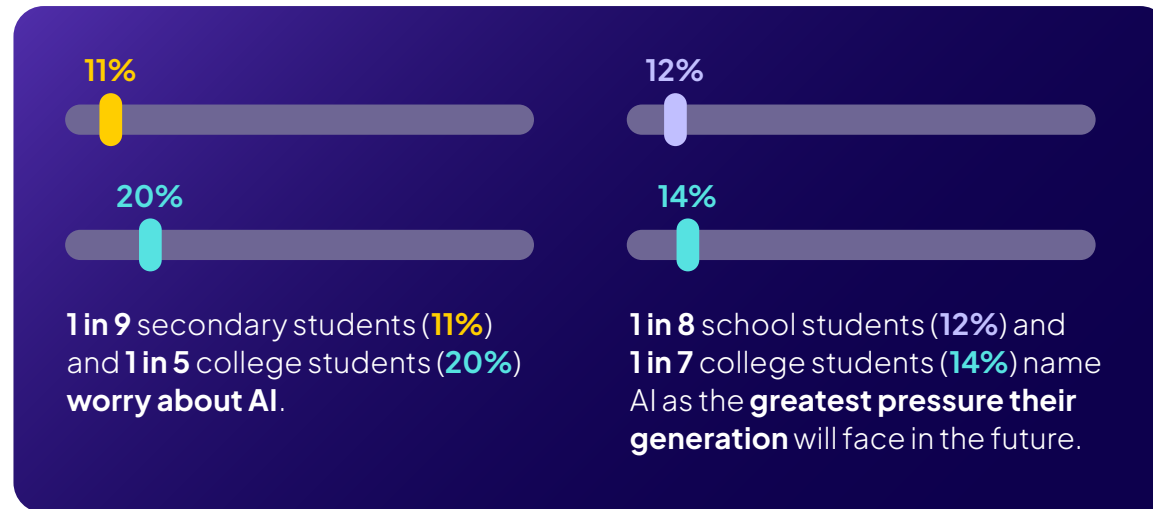
College



Together, these responses signal AI's value in augmenting, not replacing, what teachers do: reducing the administrative burden, enhancing insights and analysis, and supporting day-to-day practice.

Key considerations

Alongside the progress and potential in AI-enabled learning, there's also concern.



“The promise of AI in education is split – it appears to be reducing workload for educators but reshaping the learning process for students. We need to have a joined-up approach across education, which not only supports teaching and learning, but also boosts skills, confidence and responsible usage for the future.”

– Emma Darcy, Director of Technology for Learning, Denbigh High School



What could make a difference?

The search for answers takes us beyond the question of **if** AI is used in education, to focusing on **how** and **why**.

To support discussions as they develop, we're drawing on insights from across the sector to pinpoint where there may be **opportunities** to guide AI usage to positively impact teaching, learning and readiness now and in the future.

The current picture

Schools and colleges are adapting to the emergence and evolution of AI in varying ways and speeds.



Guiding principles

- **54%** of secondary school and college educators report they have an **institutional AI policy**.³
- **19%** of schoolteachers and **23%** of college tutors state their setting has an **AI strategy**.
- **56%** of secondary students and **63%** of college students say their school/college **provides clear rules on how students should use AI**.



Developing skills and understanding

- **1 in 4** school and college educators (**25%**) shared they've had **training on AI** this academic year.
- **49%** of secondary students and **54%** of college students told us they're **taught how to use AI tools as part of lessons**.
- **57%** of secondary students and **62%** of college students say they've **received guidance from school/college on using AI safely and responsibly**.

³ Pearson. 2026. *Assessment Evolved: Redefining formative assessment in a generative AI era*.
<https://plc.pearson.com/sites/pearson-corp/files/2026-03/pearson-assessment-evolved-mar-2026.pdf>

Bridging the gap: empowering confidence

“I feel confident using AI in my role.”

33% of schoolteachers
27% of college tutors

But there’s an **important distinction** between confident usage of AI and teaching AI literacy.

“I feel confident teaching students about AI.”

16% of schoolteachers
27% of college tutors

This is a **7 pp** increase in schoolteachers noting this since 2025, suggesting growing confidence and foundations to build on.



“The report highlights a clear tension: while students are increasingly confident using technology, many educators feel underprepared to fully harness tools such as AI in teaching and learning. Addressing this gap must be a priority if we are to maximise the potential of digital innovation.”

– Dr Nikos Savvas OBE DL, Chief Executive,
Eastern Education Group

More from us...

Our *Assessment Evolved* report and practical educator guides explore harnessing GenAI in formative assessment while building AI literacy in schools and colleges.



Our recent *AI Readiness* report with AWS features more insights on AI skills, higher education and the workplace.





Discussion point



Building on these insights, what more can we do as a sector to strengthen AI literacy and confidence for students and educators alike?

Bridging the gap: awareness and application

When asking students about their digital skills confidence, we also included AI usage.

Understanding AI ethics (e.g. bias/data privacy) is the area where most students felt **unconfident** – reported by **33%** of secondary students and **13%** of college students.

And students' responses indicate there's an opportunity and need to bolster awareness *and* support how this translates into application.

“AI can be wrong or biased.”



Secondary students

64% agree
7% disagree
29% neither agree nor disagree



College students

63% agree
13% disagree
24% neither agree nor disagree

“I always check the accuracy of information provided by AI.”



Secondary students

52% agree
19% disagree
29% neither agree nor disagree



College students

59% agree
15% disagree
26% neither agree nor disagree

A shared view: shaping what’s next

When we asked students what could help them be future ready, an appetite for **more guidance and teaching emerged**, with many suggesting adding it to their timetables. Inspired by this, we asked educators what would help them in guiding and teaching their students about AI for learning.

What would best assist you in supporting students to use AI for learning effectively?

Schoolteachers			College tutors		
	CPD for teachers on using AI	53%		Taking part in research groups for AI	32%
	Tried-and-tested, age-appropriate AI resources	45%		Case studies sharing best practice on using AI effectively	31%
	CPD on using AI effectively with students with SEND	34%		Tried-and-tested, age-appropriate AI resources	30%
	Case studies sharing best practice on using AI effectively	27%		College policies on students' AI use	30%

To help students be future ready...

“[We need] fully funded AI training for staff.”
– Secondary Middle Leader

“[I’d add to the timetable] AI skills – as it’s everywhere.”
– School Student

“[I’d add to the timetable] AI knowledge to work alongside smart tools responsibly in future job settings.”
– College Student

Continuing the conversation

“[I'd have an] AI curriculum focus whilst emphasising human skills.”

– Secondary SLT

“AI use/teaching should not be limited to computer science lessons.”

– Secondary Classroom Teacher

“[I'd] integrate AI and digital literacy into every subject.”

– College Tutor

“[Pupils need to] understand fake news and the dangers and uses of AI.”

– Primary Classroom Teacher

The evolution of technology and the speed of AI's adoption are subjects that have become increasingly prominent in our conversations with students and educators.

Throughout our report series and our work with schools and colleges across the world, we've seen how technology is transforming education. They've told us that integrating tech-enabled learning can be a complex journey, but it's one that's worthwhile when it enhances teaching and learning.

We agree. Technology should never be used for its own sake, only where it supports safe, effective, and meaningful progress. This same journey is underway with AI, and those same guiding principles should apply.

AI has the potential to enrich learning and support teachers, and its success depends on thoughtful, responsible, and evidence-based use, grounded in the lived experiences of students and educators.

As AI transforms the world of work, industries are already feeling the impact of a growing skills gap. Our recent *AI Readiness* research clearly shows the need to ensure students leave education with the right AI skills. This goes beyond just knowing about AI or how to use it, but how to work alongside it too. Building on these insights, we can collectively take steps to make this possible.

To support further reflections and future conversations as a sector, we're sharing more insights and viewpoints on tech-enabled learning, including:

- *Mind the Learning Gap*
- *Assessment Evolved*
- *Lost in Transition*
- *AI Readiness*

With more to follow...





Taking the conversation further



Learning never stops. Every day, teachers, tutors, students and the education community are taking lessons from today to inspire what comes next.

Over the last five years, it's been a privilege to share the views and insights of so many people in education. By featuring their perspectives in one place, [this report series](#) offers a way to see how learning has evolved for young people, schools and colleges.

These pages provide a snapshot of how much educators and students believe in the power of learning, and how they embrace progress and opportunity while navigating pressure and uncertainty.

Looking ahead

Preparing our young people for the future is a shared responsibility. The insights we've shared since 2022 build a picture of perspectives today and possibilities to explore. What's more, they're a set of foundations for conversations and meaningful action.

As we know from previous years, the impact of the reflections and ideas shared here will expand well past these pages. We look forward to continuing the conversation, inviting everyone to join us as we keep listening, learning and exploring what's possible.

That's why we'll conclude these pages as we mean to go on: being guided by those at the heart of education...

“

Dear Future Me,

I hope learning helps me to...

“Do [my] best and if it’s not good enough,
get up and try again”

– College Student

“Solve problems that seem impossible today”

– School Student

“Appreciate little things that go unnoticed
if I didn’t have the passion for learning or the
foundation of knowledge”

– College Student

“Get my dream job of being a teacher and
help others the way my teachers help me”

– School Student

Five years on. One big picture.

Let's shape what's next together...

Join the conversation



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