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What Works?: The power of exploring and affirming aspirations with young people at Risk of NEET

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What Works?: The power of exploring and affirming aspirations with young people at Risk of NEET

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June 2026

We advance
We activate

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Summary

1. What was PfPP2, and who was it for?

Partnership for People and Place 2 (PfPP2) was a targeted career coaching and mentoring programme delivered in five East Birmingham secondary schools in 2025, focused on young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Young people were identified to participate using Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI), with a primary focus on Year 10 pupils at a key transition point. The programme was designed explicitly as an early intervention, supporting motivation, confidence, decision-making and promoting understanding of possible post-16 pathways.

PfPP2 built deliberately on learning from the original PfPP pilot in 2022/23 but with a stronger emphasis on outcome measurement, evaluation robustness, and value for money.

2. What did the programme consist of?

PfPP2 combined four interlinked delivery strands:

- Weekly one-to-one holistic student mentoring with an independent mentor from outside the school designed to build trust, improve mindset, motivation and self-belief and tailor support to individual student needs (the core intervention)
- Structured group sessions aligned to career readiness
- Employer engagement and exposure of students to real-world roles, including a large-scale Big Careers Event
- Light-touch careers support for a wider cohort of pupils and their parents

While the original ambition was to engage six schools and 300 pupils (120 receiving core support, 180 less intensive support), late funding confirmation and school onboarding constraints meant that delivery focused on five schools.

In total:

- 102 pupils formed the core evaluation cohort who received intensive one-to-one support over the Spring and Summer terms in the 2024-2025 academic year and up to the Autumn half-term in 2025.
- A further 12 young people with special educational needs received intensive one-to-one mentoring in Autumn term 2025 who were not included in the evaluation.
- 524 light-touch engagements were delivered, substantially exceeding the original light-touch target.

3. What changed for young people because of PfPP2?

The evaluation found improvements in outcomes associated with reduced NEET risk.

Key changes observed include:

Improved career readiness

- Young people reported clearer, more realistic and more informed thinking about future jobs and pathways
- There was a marked reduction in uncertainty about future jobs and career paths, particularly around *"not knowing what job I want to do"*

Increased confidence, wellbeing and agency

- Improvements in self-reported confidence, optimism about the future and ability to plan next steps
- Increases in overall life satisfaction were observed between the initial baseline and endpoint of the programme

Better understanding of pathways and navigation capability

- Significant gains in knowledge of qualifications, training routes, college and apprenticeship opportunities
- The proportion of pupils unsure how to access training or post-16 routes fell sharply

Reduced perceived barriers to progression

- Fewer pupils reported barriers such as:
  - *"I'm not clever enough"*
  - *"Training isn't available to people like me"*
- By the programme end, over half reported no perceived barriers at all

Together, these shifts point to meaningful movement in the conditions that lead to positive post-16 transitions, even if final outcomes cannot be confirmed. The earliest verified data for assessing positive outcomes will not be available until Spring 2026 when colleges provide information on student enrolments and course drop outs.

Mentors challenged unhelpful beliefs, helped reframe setbacks, and fostered realistic optimism among pupils. Addressing perceptions and confidence is essential in career coaching interventions, not just an optional extra.

4. What worked best, and why?

The single strongest and most consistent finding is the value of ongoing, independent one-to-one mentoring/coaching by a trusted adult.

Across survey data, school feedback, and mentor reflections, one-to-one mentoring:

- Built trust and sustained engagement, particularly with harder-to-reach pupils
- Enabled adaptive guidance tailored to changing circumstances, personalised goal setting and realistic pathway planning.
- Supported changes in confidence, mindset and behaviour alongside practical careers coaching.
- Provided continuity and accountability often missing from standard careers provision.

This individual relationship is consistently identified as the mechanism through which change occurred.

Employer engagement - particularly the Big Careers Event - was also highly valued, especially where speakers lived experience resonated with pupils' backgrounds.

Light-touch support significantly extended reach beyond the core cohort, increasing overall system impact.

5. What did not work as well, and why?

Several delivery and evaluation challenges are clearly evidenced:

- Late funding confirmation constrained early planning and school onboarding to align with the school year
- Group sessions, particularly with boys, were less effective due to behavioural dynamics
- Employer engagement varied significantly by school, driven by staff capacity and timetabling constraints
- Collection of feedback from parents and carers on their observation of benefits to their child was unsuccessful. PfPP2 did not include a supporting intervention with parents of young people receiving one-to-one coaching that could have increased their engagement with the programme. This absence resulted in no completed questionnaires from parents and carers.
- The evaluation remains underpowered for long-term NEET outcomes, due to the timeframe and sample size

These issues are transparently acknowledged and do not undermine confidence in the short- and medium-term outcome findings.

6. Is there evidence of impact on attendance and attainment?

Improved attendance and attainment are indicative of the PfPP2 cohort becoming more motivated through having a clearer understanding of future work opportunities.

These metrics provide useful proxy variables for reduced future likelihood of a young person being NEET when they leave secondary education.

There is tentative but promising evidence, particularly on attendance and Maths attainment, **in one participating school**.

However:

- This evidence is limited in scope
- It cannot be causally attributed at this stage
- It should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive

The evaluation avoids overclaiming, while signalling potential downstream educational benefits worthy of further testing through longer-term follow-up

7. Does PfPP2 represent value for money?

Using established national estimates of the public cost of a young person becoming NEET, the evaluation indicates that:

- PfPP2 would break even if only two young people avoid becoming NEET
- Avoiding NEET outcomes for five to ten young people would generate net public savings of approximately £250,000–£650,000 (2025–26 prices)

While it is too early to assess PfPP2 impact on the likelihood of young people being NEET when they leave secondary education, these figures are indicative that PfPP2 will provide value for money.

8. What are the key learning points?

The evaluation points to a clear, credible and scalable early intervention model, with six practical implications:

1. Prioritise trusted one-to-one mentoring as the core intervention
2. Align programmes to the school year, not funding cycles
3. Include engagement with parents to ensure their engagement as part of the core intervention
4. Strengthen employer and college exposure, including workplace visits
5. Start earlier, with light-touch support in Year 7 and/or Year 9
6. Plan longitudinal data linkage to assess confirmed post-16 outcomes

9. What is the overall conclusion?

Taken together, the evidence supports PfPP2 as an effective early intervention careers coaching model for young people at risk of becoming NEET.

Its defining strength is ongoing one-to-one mentoring by a trusted individual, supported by structured exposure to pathways and opportunities.

With earlier engagement, better alignment to school systems, and longer-term outcome tracking, PfPP2 provides a strong foundation for future investment and scaling within Birmingham's wider youth employment and prevention strategy.

Introduction

This Executive Report aims to summarise the findings of the evaluation of PfPP2 – a Careers Coaching and Mentoring Programme in East Birmingham schools - delivered by Loconomy in five schools in East Birmingham. PfPP2 was funded through Birmingham City Council's Cost of Living Programme, building on learning from the original Partnerships for People and Place (PfPP) pilot. City-REDI at the University of Birmingham, as the evaluation partner for PfPP, have undertaken more robust evaluative assessment of the impacts on young people than was possible for the original pilot.

The origins of PfPP2

The original pilot was funded by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) through its Partnerships for People and Place (PfPP) programme[1]. PfPP was designed to support the development of place-based partnerships to:

- trial new ways of working across local and central government and deliver innovative, locally led solutions to key challenges that communities face.
- look at whether improved government structures, more flexible funding models and greater collaboration across the public sector could be effective in addressing specific issues in local areas.

The pilot brought together Birmingham City Council (BCC) as convenor and Pioneer Housing Association, Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, six secondary schools and the University of Birmingham (as the evaluation partner). It provided an important opportunity for testing new approaches to careers advice, information and guidance and more general awareness of employment opportunities. It thereby contributed to the knowledge base on how to go about 'levelling up' East Birmingham, regarding aligning better young people's educational trajectories with their career and life ambitions and reducing the risk of them being not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The pilot was successful in terms of creating collaborative advantage – partners collectively achieved more together – and providing an adaptable model and learning for delivering career coaching.

The programme was called PfPP2 because it built on the lessons of a Partnership for People and Place funded pilot. The Pioneer Housing Group is a leading anchor institution in East Birmingham and was responsible for delivering the pilot. Loconomy was spun out of the Pioneer Group and was the delivery organisation for PfPP2.

The Rationale for PfPP2 – why career coaching and mentoring is needed

The reasons why PfPP2 is needed include:

- Good quality careers advice, information and guidance has been shown to have a positive impact on not only the employment outcomes of young people but their lives and intrinsic sense of well-being more broadly.
- The focus on well-being is even more important given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people's levels of confidence. Their stress and anxiety levels and motivations to make career decisions have been significantly impacted.

[1] Funded from HM Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund

- The lack of high-quality careers advice, information and guidance is a recurring theme throughout recent literature on school-to-work transitions. For example, just 62.5% of students in Moote and Archer's (2018)[2] research reported having received some kind of careers support while at secondary school. Furthermore, those who did receive some advice often felt that it was too general and not relevant to their specific career decisions and life ambitions.
- The quality of, and access to, provision varies depending upon personal characteristics such as the gender and/or ethnicity of a student as well as the level of economic deprivation present in the community within which the school exists.
- Four of the five schools supported by PfPP2 are located in wards characterised by very high or high deprivation (according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation), while the fifth is located in a mixed area.
- There is a relative lack of focus on vocational options, with greater emphasis placed on applying to university.

What was PfPP2?

PfPP2 was a **targeted careers mentoring and career coaching programme** delivered across five East Birmingham secondary schools to young people identified as being at risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET) when they left school. They were identified using the Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) tool. The original pilot worked with year 11 pupils; PfPP2 worked with Year 10 pupils because this was identified as a key transition point for young people and they would not have the same pressures from preparing for their exams. PfPP2 is an early intervention, supporting motivation, confidence, decision making and understanding of post 16 pathways.

PfPP2 included intensive support for a core group of young people who received:

1) Weekly one-to-one mentoring/coaching (the core intervention)
2) Structured group sessions aligned to careers readiness
3) Employer engagement and exposure, including a large-scale Big Careers Event

and

4) Light-touch careers support for a wider cohort of pupils and parents. This included Loconomy attending parents' evenings to provide information to interested parents around options and how to support their child in developing their career plans and employer talks at school assemblies.

The original ambition was to engage six schools. Delays in funding confirmation and logistical constraints faced by some interested schools meant only five schools were onboarded onto the programme.

The programme aimed to recruit 300 pupils; split between a core group of 120 pupils receiving intensive support and 180 receiving light touch support. In practice, **102 pupils were recruited to the core evaluation cohort**[3] and **524 light-touch engagements** were delivered - substantially exceeding the original light-touch target.

[2] Moote, J., and Archer, L. (2018) 'Failing to deliver? Exploring the current status of career education provision in England', Research Papers in Education, 33(2), pp.187-215, DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2016.1271005

[3] An additional 12 received intensive coaching support at the request of their school towards the end of the programme. They were not included in the evaluation because they received support over a more condensed period and had taken part in the baseline survey.

What changed for young people because of PfPP2?

The 102 young people in the core group receiving intensive support were asked to complete three questionnaires:

1) when they joined to provide a baseline and to provide information on their background (Baseline)
2) halfway through the programme on their perceptions of how PfPP2 was being delivered and making a difference (Midpoint)
3) to measure change against the baseline and young people's overall impression of PfPP2 (Endpoint).

The questionnaires collected data on the following topics:

	Baseline	Midpoint	Endpoint
• Young person's motivations and reasoning for joining the programme	√		
• Factors reported by young person affecting their career choice	√		√
• Young person's assessment of the support they were receiving through PfPP2		√	
• What young person reported they would like to do when they leave school	√		√
• Young person's level of specific career focus and openness to other career opportunities	√	√	√
• Young person's expectations of (occupational) level they will achieve and which sector they will work in	√		**V**
• Young person's interest in alternative careers in the creative sector and sports	√		√
• Young person's expectations of their career pathway to secure future employment	√		√
• Young person's expectations on required qualifications they will need for their ideal job and how to secure them	√		√
• Young person's sense of wellbeing	√	√	√
• Young person's sense of self and agency	√		√

	Baseline	Midpoint	Endpoint
• Young person's views on the likelihood of career / work related life events	√		√
• Young person's reporting of barriers to achieving their ideal career / job	√		√
• Young person's access to, and perceived quality of, support to make career related choices	√		V
• Young person's assessment of the importance of exams	√		√
• Who and what the young person considers to be key influences on their likely future job / career choices	√		
• Parental / carer occupations	√		
• Young person's reporting of parental involvement and support when considering different career pathways	√		

While mentors encouraged young people to complete questions, they were not required to do so, and parental consent was obtained in advance as part of ethical approval. The response rate can be considered 'good' to 'excellent' across the three questionnaires. The baseline and endpoint can both be considered 'excellent' with response rates of 61.7 and 53.9 percent respectively. The midpoint response rate was 43.0 percent. Each pupil was given a unique identifier that allowed linking of questionnaire answers and 29.4 percent completed both baseline and endpoint questionnaires.

Young person's motivations and reasoning for joining the programme

Most students joined PfPP because they were encouraged to do so by trusted adults or their peers. Half reported they were encouraged by their teachers (55.6 percent), a third by their friends (36.5 percent) and a sixth (14.3 percent) by their parents. Around a quarter (28.6 percent) required help with making choices they needed to make and wished to know more about the options available to them (22.2 percent).

Factors reported by young people as affecting their career choice

Having an interesting career and enough time for family retained the same level of importance to young people, whereas other factors changed in perceived importance by the end of the programme:

- Income and job security became significantly more important factors for those who completed both baseline and endpoint surveys.
- While still important there was a decrease in the importance of meeting parent expectations and having a career to help others.
- Time for leisure – or work life balance – became a more influential factor.

Young people were asked about the importance of potential influencing factors on their choice of career or future job in both baseline and endpoint questionnaires. Changes in perceived importance of influencing factors on choice of career from baseline to endpoint are shown below:

Less influential	• Career meets parents' expectations	69.4 percent → 62.3 percent
	• Career to help others	60.7 percent → 56.7 percent
No change	• Finding a career which is interesting is important to me	85.5 percent → 86.8 percent
	• Enough time for family life	71.0 percent→ 71.7 percent
More influential	• Income is important to me*	80.6 percent→ 88.7 percent
	• Job security is important to me*	50.8 percent → 84.7 percent
	• Time for leisure is important to me	45.2 percent → 65.4 percent
	• A career which contributes to society	40.0 percent → 50.9 percent

Of the thirty young people who completed both the baseline and endpoint survey there was a **significant increase in young people rating job security** and **income as important**.

Young people's assessment of the support they received through PfPP2

Young people reported benefiting from support provided directly by the PfPP2 programme team. Young people's access to complementary support not part of PfPP2 (e.g. work placements) was determined by their school having the necessary resources (budget, staff time and contacts). Young people also reported feeling more supported by both their parents / carers and teachers since joining PfPP2.

Young people were asked to rate the availability of different types of careers support at their school at baseline and endpoint and report on the quality of support they had received from PfPP2 at midpoint.

Benefits to young people emerged early on as reported in the midpoint survey. Compared with what their school normally offered, young people reported benefiting from structured careers provision and real-world exposure including timetabled lessons (82.2 percent), and whole class sessions (71.1 percent). They also reported **increased confidence and understanding of career pathways** including being better able to make choices (73.3 percent) and having a stronger grasp of the options available to them (64.4 percent). They also felt **more supported by parents / carers and their teachers** (both 80 percent respectively).

In the endpoint survey **young people reported improvements in the types of support that were directly delivered by PfPP2 mentors,** namely:

- One to one support
- Careers coaching about the future
- Timetabled careers coaching sessions.
- Whole class sessions/ teaching about future choices

Whether young people reported **improvement in availability in other types of support was dependent on their schools' capacity to provide,** including:

- Visiting a workplace, college or university.
- More than one visit to workplaces, colleges of universities.
- Visitors from workplaces, colleges or universities.
- Work experience

Amongst 30 students who completed both baseline and endpoint surveys, there are statistically significant differences[4] due to additional provision by PfPP2 in the perceptions of the quality of offering of **one-to-one support**, **providing careers coaching**, **timetabled careers lessons**, **whole class careers lessons**, and the offer of **visiting an external workplace or university.**

What young people report they would like to do when leave school

Young people tended to focus more on their work and lifestyle than education choices when asked what they would like to do when they leave school. They became more focused on future work, and their answers became more mature during the programme.

Young people's aspirations for when they leave school became more focused on securing work. Young people were asked to list their first, second and third choices of what they would like to do when they leave school. These were grouped into work, education and lifestyle related choices. Work-related choices included finding a job, the type of place they would like to work and work they like to do. Education-related aspirations included going to college, getting an apprenticeship, good exams and choosing the right courses. Lifestyle choices included travelling, pet ownership, buying a home or car, and being successful or rich. At baseline these choices tended to be either work- (42.3 percent) or lifestyle-related (42.9 percent) and became more work-related (55.6 percent) at the endpoint. The share of choices related to education stayed consistent at around 15 percent. If we consider first choices only, 50.8 percent were work-related at baseline, and this increased to 58.5 percent at the endpoint. Lifestyle choices became more mature, but this is a very qualitative assessment based on young people's answers.

Young people's level of specific career focus and openness to other career opportunities

Young people receiving core support became more open to exploring alternative career opportunities during the programme. A third reported staying focused on how they might secure the job they originally wanted when they joined PfPP2.

Just under half of young people (46.8 percent) who responded reported they knew exactly what job they wished to do when leaving education at baseline. Around two-fifths (38.7 percent) said they would 'wait and see' and only a sixth (14.5 percent) reported they did know what job they wished to do.
The career aspirations expressed are highly varied but cluster around a few clear sectors, with health-related professions dominating (about a quarter) and trades and construction also featuring prominently.

Young people receiving one-to-one coaching support were willing to 'unfreeze' their existing ideas around future careers and spend time exploring other options. At midpoint over half of respondents (54.8 percent) were open to a wider range of jobs and this fell to around two-fifths (43.4 percent) at the endpoint. Halfway through the programme, a third of young people (31.0 percent) still aspired to the same job. This continued to be the case when they completed the programme (35.8 percent). Just under a tenth (9.4 percent) reported in the

[4] Paired t-test were undertaken where young people had answered the same question in both the baseline and endpoint survey to assess change over time.

endpoint survey that they wished to do a different job to which they envisaged when they joined PfPP2 because of their discussions with their mentor.

Young people's expectations of the (occupational) level they will achieve and which sector they will work in

During the programme there was a 13.7 percentage point reduction in young people not knowing what career they might wish to follow.
There was an increase in young people wishing to pursue careers as skilled trades persons (14.3 percentage points) and specialists (6.3 percentage points)

Table 1:Expectation around type of work after leaving education

Young people's expectations about future work continue to split between **skilled trades** and **professional careers**, with trades (26 percent) and specialist/professional roles requiring a degree (28 percent) attracting similar proportions. Smaller groups see themselves in managerial, ownership or support roles, and a few remain unsure, indicating a continued mix of vocational and academic pathways in students' post-education plans.

Young people's expectations about future work are split, with a sizeable group picturing professional or specialist careers (22.7 percent) but an equally large share

	Baseline		Endpoint		
	N	Percent	N	Percent	Percentage point change
Specialist with university degree or equivalent	13	21.7%	14	28.0	+6.3
Owner or director	6	10.0%	5	10.0	0
Skilled tradesperson	7	11.7%	13	26.0	+14.3
Worker	6	10.0%	3	6.0	-4.0
Assistant professionals or specialists	4	6.7%	5	10.0	+3.3
Supervisor or manager	2	3.3%	3	6.0	+2.7
Manager with university degree or equivalent	2	3.3%			-
Expertise to assist my manager			1	2.0	-
Other	9	15.0%	2	4.0	-11.0
Don't know	13	21.7%	4	8.0	-13.7
Total	60	100	50	100.0	

unsure of their path (21.7 percent). The rest are dispersed across a wide range of roles suggesting that while some have clear aspirations, many are still exploring or uncertain about their post-education trajectory.

Young people's expectations about their career pathway to secure future employment

At enrolment more young people placed greater importance on 'staying local' and 'getting a job' when they leave their current school. At the end of PfPP2, this changed to more young people seeing 'college' as being an important next step in their career pathway. PfPP2 was successful in reducing the proportion of young people unclear about what their future career pathway might look like.

Young people receiving core support were asked '*Where do you think you will go after your current school?'* and were given the following options:

- Attend university locally
- Attend college locally
- Attend college away from home
- Attend university away from home
- Get a job locally
- Get a job away from home
- Not sure/don't know/none

Because they could choose multiple options it was possible to sketch out what they thought would be their career pathways. We have identified the following pathways:

- **College is important** was the largest grouping**:** this increased from 18 (30.0 percent) in the baseline to 37 (67.3 percent) at endpoint. This included those who planned to attend college locally (23.3 percent at baseline, increasing to 50.9 percent at endpoint). There was an increase in young people who selected both attend college either locally or away from home (an increase from 1.7 percent to 10.9 percent) at endpoint. At the baseline one person thought they would attend college locally and then get a job either locally or away (1.7 percent). At the endpoint three were willing to consider a non-local college but then work locally (5.5 percent)
- **Staying local is important** was the second largest grouping: At baseline a quarter of young people fell into this career pathway (15, 25.0 percent), and this fell to a tenth at endpoint (6, 10.9 percent). This included young people who intend to attend a local college or university or both and then get a job locally. It also includes those who might consider a non-local college to secure a local job.
- **Getting a job is important** grouping was selected by eight (13.3 percent) at the baseline but only one person at the endpoint (1.7%)
- **University is important** grouping included five (8.3 percent) young people at the baseline and three (5.5 percent) at the endpoint

There was reduction in young people who were unclear on their future career pathway. There were 12 young people (20 percent) at baseline who said they were "unsure" [5] and this decreased to five (5.5 percent) at endpoint.

Young people's expectations about required qualifications they need for their ideal job and how to secure them

Young people developed a much better understanding of the qualifications and training they needed. There was both an increase in the perceived importance of passing exams and a decrease in young people thinking they would not get the qualifications they need.

[5] We also included one young person who selecting multiple opposite options at baseline.

Young people generally saw exams as important, but many were unsure whether they would achieve the grades they needed or whether exams will truly shape their future. Over the course of the programme there was a:

- 13.4 percentage point increase in young people agreeing that '*I think they are important for my future*' (61.1 percent to 74.5 percent)
- 29.0 percentage point decrease in young people agreeing that '*I am not sure I will pass my exams to get the job I want'* (61.1 percent to 38.5 percent)
- 0.6 percentage point increase in young people agreeing that '*I am uncertain as to whether tests or exams will help me to get the future I want'*. (28.8 percent to 29.4 percent)
- 39.6 percentage point increase in young people knowing how to obtain the qualifications and training they need (42.1 percent to 71.2 percent).

Young people's sense of wellbeing

Young people reported improvements on wellbeing metrics with the exception of being worried about the future. Young people became more open and willing to report whether they were worried or not, which is a positive outcome.

Young people at the baseline and endpoint were asked '*How satisfied do you feel about your life at the moment*' by scoring on a five-point scale[6] the extent to which they felt happy, okay, excited, relieved, safe, worried/anxious, and about life in general. 'Motivated' was added to this list in the endpoint survey. The average score increased for all metrics except being worried and anxious, so indicating the cohort moving towards of having feelings of being very safe, very relieved, very excited, very happy and feeling more okay about life in general. While there was a decline in the average score for being worried or anxious, this masked an increase in both the portion of young people reporting that were very worried and those that reporting they were not worried, as opposed to selecting 'okay', the neutral midpoint of the scale.

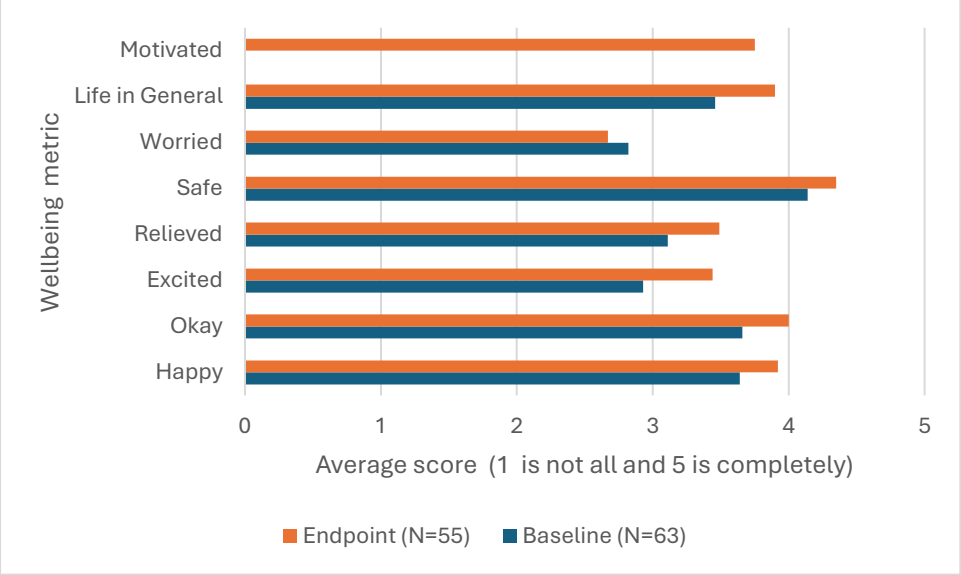

Figure 1: Change in young people's sense of wellbeing

[6] Where 1 = not all, 2= not, (3 = okay), 4 = very, 5 = completely

Young people's sense of self and agency

Two key indicators of programme success were achieved in that young people reported:

- feeling more positive about the future
- feeling confident they can achieve what they want to do

It should be noted that across the board there was an increase in young people agreeing with specific statements about themselves.

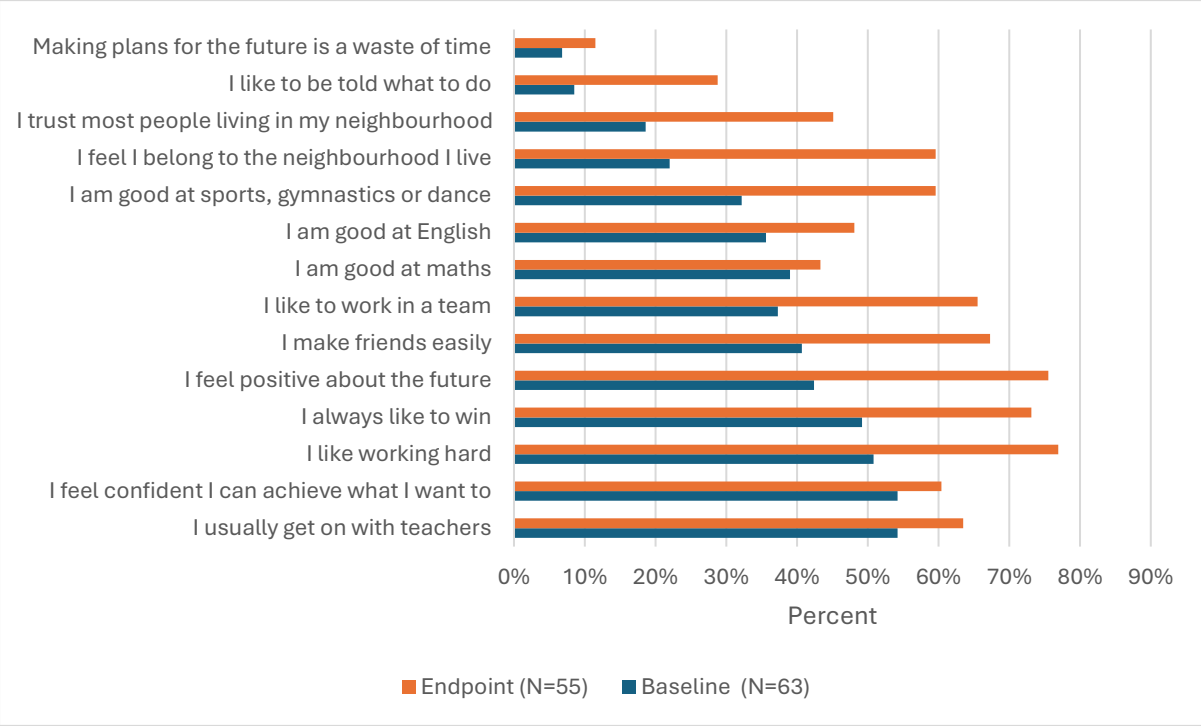

Figure 2: Change in percentage of young people's perception of self

At baseline most young people see themselves in a generally positive way - they get on with teachers and believe they can achieve their goals. But fewer feel confident in specific subjects or feel connected to their neighbourhood, suggesting that they are optimistic about themselves but less sure about their skills and sense of belonging. At the end of the programme young people generally felt more positive about themselves and their future, with strong ratings for **optimism**, **confidence**, **teamwork and liking to work hard.** Feelings of belonging and trust in their neighbourhood are more mixed, and over half disagree that they "like being told what to do," suggesting growing independence. Academic confidence varies by subject, with students feeling more positive about **English and Sport** than M**aths**, and most say they make friends easily.

Young people's views on the likelihood of career and work-related life events

Again, PfPP2 did well in terms of key success indicators. As a result of PfPP2 young people on average:

- were more likely to see themselves both starting and completing training or going to university and finding a job in their chosen career
- consider the possibility of long-term unemployment before returning to the view that it was unlikely

- became temporarily open to self-employment as a possibility halfway through delivery of the programme
- were less likely see themselves being held back by family expectations in their choice of career

Young people were asked about the likelihood of career and work-related life events at the beginning, during, and at the end of PfPP2. The 'forest plot' below shows the likelihood where **-2 equals highly unlikely and +2 equals very likely**.[7]

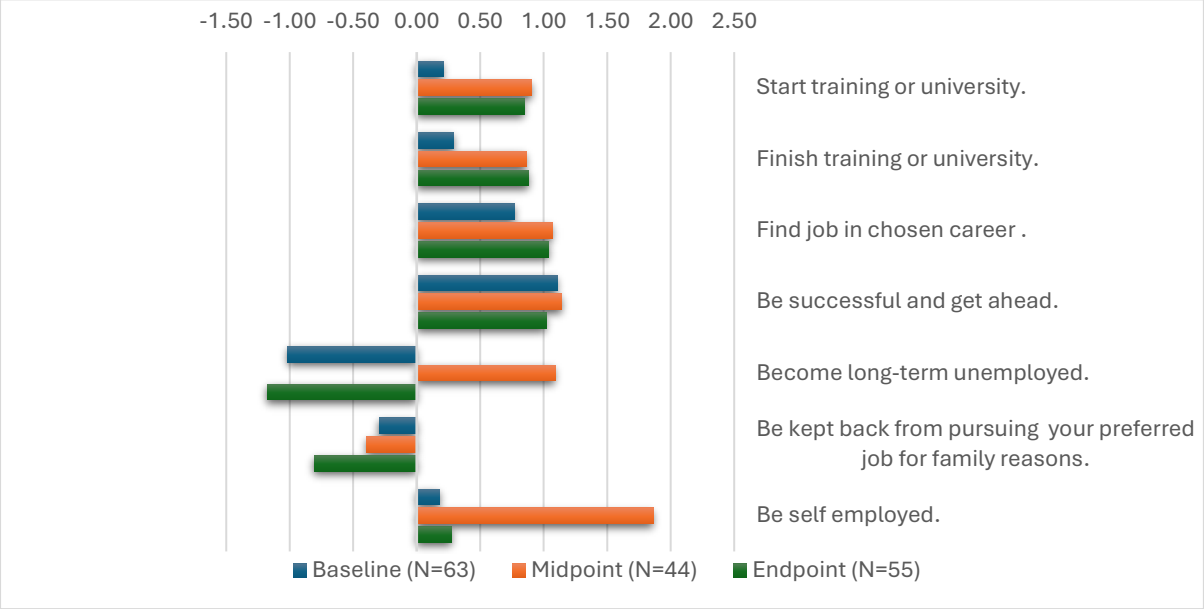

Figure 3: Change in perceived likelihood of career- and work-related life events

Young people's reporting of barriers to achieving their ideal career / job

At the end of the programme amongst those who had an ideal job in mind:

- Over half of young people reported that there was nothing holding them back from getting their ideal job
- Almost none thought the training and education they needed would not be available to them (a fifth thought so when they started PfPP2)
- There was a six-percentage point reduction in the proportion who thought they were not clever enough to secure their ideal job
- None thought the type of work they like to do was not available to people like them (a tenth thought so when they joined PfPP2)

Most young people on PfPP2 were unsure or thought it was impossible to secure their ideal job when they joined PfPP2. Twenty-three out of 63 young people said they had an ideal job in mind which they thought was impossible to obtain. A further 16 reported they did not know whether it would be possible to secure their ideal job. 18 clearly stated that they did not have an ideal job that they thought would be impossible to achieve. They were able to select multiple barriers (see Table 2).

Table 2: Barriers to achieving ideal job

[7] One explanation for slight drop in young people reporting they were likely to ''Find a job in their chosen career' and' Be successful and get ahead 'in the endpoint survey compared to midpoint is the larger number of returned completed questionnaires for the endpoint survey.

	Baseline		Endpoint	
Is there anything preventing you from getting your ideal job?	N	Percent	N	Percent
I'm not clever enough	21	33.3%	15	27.2%
I feel the training/education I need is not available to me	13	20.6%	1	1.8%
My parents or family wouldn't like it	8	12.6%	2	3.6%
Financial or money issues	7	11.1%	6	10.6%
People like me don't do this kind of work	6	9.5%	0	0.0%
My school or teachers wouldn't want me to do it	1	1.5%	1	1.8%
I am behind because of the covid outbreak	1	1.5%	7	12.7%
Nothing			30	54.5%

There was a marked reduction in the number of barriers faced by individual young people. At baseline 52.3 percent selected at least one barrier, and this fell to 29.1 percent. A fifth (22.2 percent) selected between two and four barriers at baseline and this fell to a tenth (10.9 percent).

Young people's access to, and perceived quality of, support to make career-related choices

On the whole young people reported improvements during the period they were on the PfPP2 programme in the availability of the following types of support:

- One-to-one support
- Career coaching and aspiration mentoring
- Timetabled careers education sessions
- Whole class sessions about future career aspirations
- Being able to visit a workplace, college or university
- Visitors to their school from employers and education establishments

There was no reported change in work experience opportunities. This was not delivered by PfPP2 and was usually organised by the school.

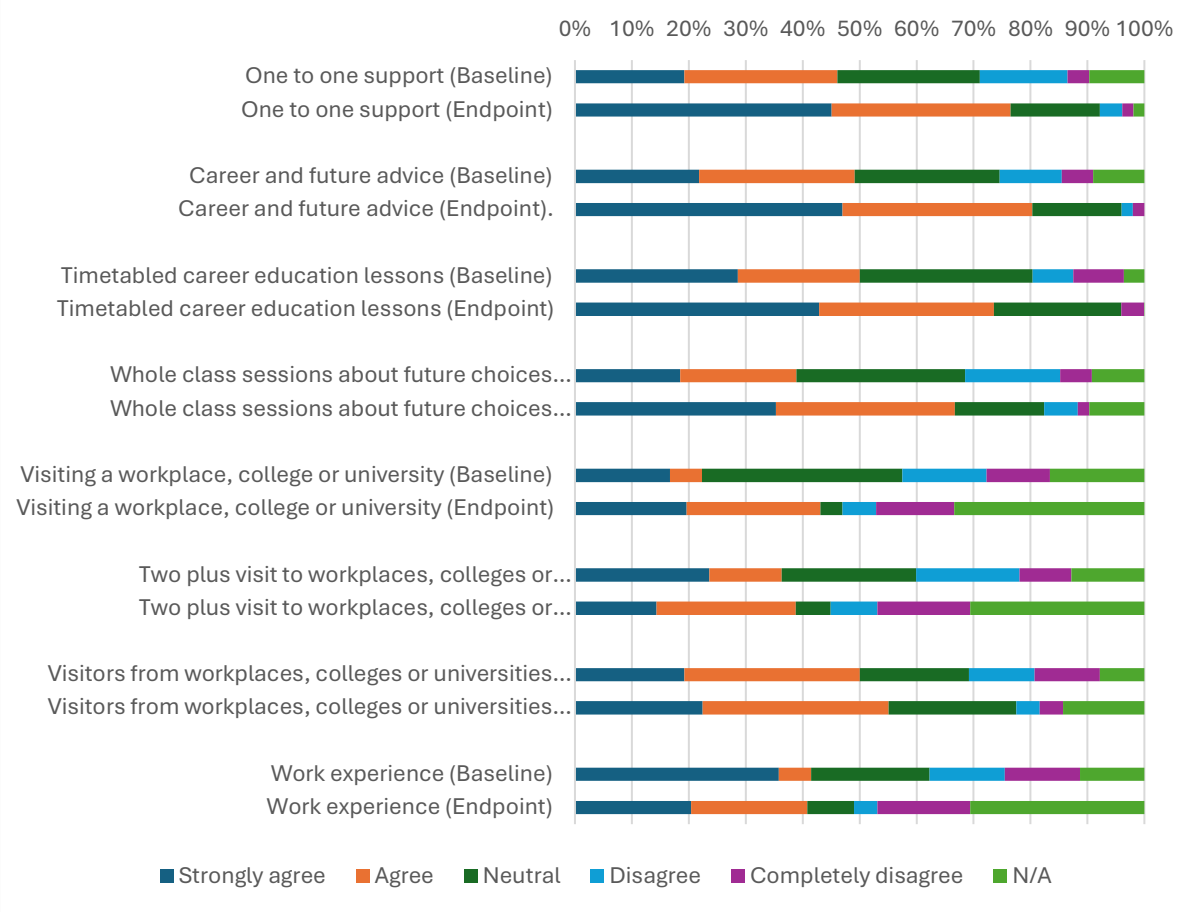

Figure 4: Change in perceptions of the availability of support as result of PfPP2

Young people were able to say in their own words what they liked about being on the PfPP2 programme. They highlighted the programme's role in helping them think through their options, with this being the most common theme (mentioned by 29 percent).

Being able to ask questions about the career I'm interested in.
Being able to understand what I can do in the future

Many also valued how helpful and useful they found the support (24 percent), along with chances to ask questions and build understanding (13 percent).

121 sessions very helpful and tailored to [my] needs

Enjoyed the group sessions and the team building exercises and communication sessions

Group sessions, communication skills, mentoring, and advice were also mentioned, suggesting students appreciated both the reflective and the interactive elements of PfPP2.

Example comments include:

Expanded my knowledge about post 16 options and has made me more confident	***Tailored advice***
How confident the mentor has made me in picking the course to make me be successful	***Really helpful, I was not sure what I wanted to do, having been to the 121 session I now know what I want to do.***
How it made me aware of all the career options	***That you can learn new things each time.***
Provided me with motivation to do well	***Made me feel comfortable and provided me with clear future options***
Really helpful help explore future options	***Enjoyed the group sessions and the team building exercises and communication sessions***

Parental / carer occupations

Young people on entering PfPP2 were asked about their parents' or carers' jobs.

- There was relatively large share who did not know what work they parents or carers did. It may be worth investigating the reasons why some young people selected *Don't know or not sure* option in a future iteration of PfPP2.
- Employment rates were lower for mothers compared to Birmingham average. The same may be true for fathers based on young people reporting they were not sure or did not know what work they did.
- There was a greater share of working mothers in managerial and professional roles than the Birmingham average. The share of fathers employed as Managers, professionals, associate professionals and in operative and elementary occupations was lower than city average.

There was a relatively low share of young people who definitively reported either their father (51.0 percent) or mother (19.2 percent) as working. Whilst direct comparisons with employment rates cannot be made, across Birmingham in 2025, 78.1 percent of males and 71.2 percent females are in work[8]. It would seem that most young people in the PfPP2 cohort did not have working mothers.

[8] Nomis (2026). Birmingham Local Authority Labour Market Profile. https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/lad/1778385147/report.aspx (Accessed 9th March 2026).

Table 3: Young person's knowledge of parents' or carers' jobs

	Mother		Father	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Yes – have knowledge of their job	10	19.2	26	51.0
Don't know or not sure	20	38.5	19	37.3
They do not work	22	42.3	6	11.8
Total	52	100.0	51	100.0

All ten young people who reported knowing their mother's job answered the question on parents' occupation. There was a greater share of working mothers in managerial and professional roles (70 percent c.f. 50.2 percent) than the city average, and a similar share in administrative and skilled trades jobs (Table 4).

Table 4: Occupational class of parents or carers as reported by young people

Standard Occupational Classification Group	Mother (%) n = 10	Father (%) n = 23	Total (%) n = 33	Birmingham average (%)
Managers, professionals, associates etc (Group 1-3)	7 (70%)	5 (21.7%)	12 (36.4%)	50.2%
Administrative and skilled trades (Group 4-5)	2 (20%)	8 (34.8%)	10 (30.3%)	18.6%
Care, service and sales (Group 6-7)	1 (10%)	8 (34.8%)	9 (27.3%)	14.8%
Operatives and elementary occupations (Group 8 -9)	0 (0%)	2 (8.7%)	2 (6.1%)	16.4%

Of the 26 young people who reported knowing their father's occupation, 23 recorded their father's occupation. The share of employment as Managers, professionals, associate professionals and in operative and elementary occupations was lower than city average.

Parental involvement and support when considering different career pathways

Parents were generally supportive of their children's career thinking, but the strength and type of support varied. Young people when **joining** PfPP2:

- Tended to report their parents had high expectations of them (62.7 percent) and took an interest in them by asking about their career ideas (52.7 percent).
- There was a significant group (around a fifth) whose parents did not encourage them to explore different careers, participate in work experience and or provide them with information about jobs.
- Often opted to take a neutral stance on whether they thought their parents provided certain types of support (30.5 percent).

Most young people (80.0 percent) felt their **parents became more supportive since joining PfPP2.**

Around half (51) of the cohort answered the questions on parental support in exploring career options.

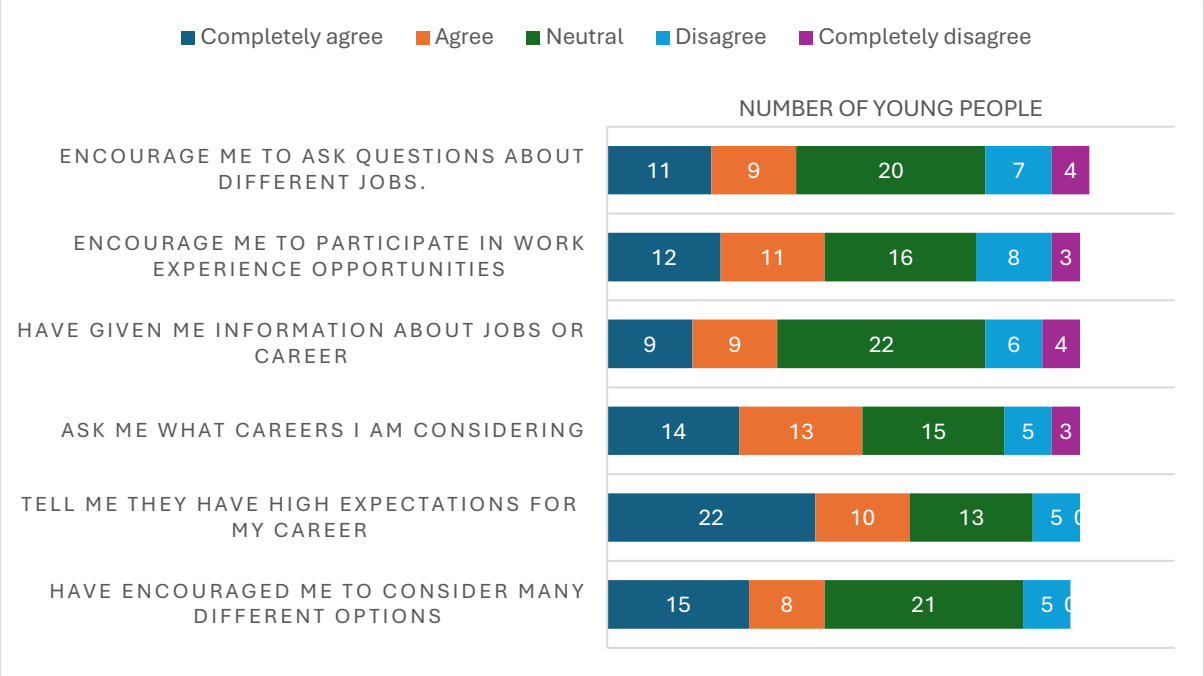

Figure 5: Young people's perceptions of parental support[9]

Four-fifths (80 percent) of young people who completed the midpoint survey, when asked about the benefits of PfPP2 reported they had received more encouragement from their parents.

A questionnaire was developed to collect parents' and carer's observations and impressions of the PfPP2 programme and was issued at the end of the programme. This questionnaire collected information on how much their child involved in them in discussions on future career plans, their expectations and aspirations and expectations and benefits of PfPP2 to their child. No questionnaires were returned. This could be due to four potential reasons: (1) The questionnaire was not directly emailed or posted to parents and was distributed by mentors to young people who were expected to bring back completed questionnaires. (2) Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary, and the need to include a unique reference number for each child to link data may have discouraged parents. (3) The length of questionnaire - which could have been in retrospect broken into two shorten surveys with questions around expectations being asked in a baseline survey, (4) The absence of an intervention with parents that made them more involved and therefore more willing to provide feedback.

[9] Collected in baseline survey

Student school attendance and attainment

There is **tentative evidence[10] to show improvements in student attendance and student attainment in maths over the course of the programme:**

- **Attendance among students on the programme rose by 0.3 percentage points to 95.8 percent** and 2.40 percentage points above the UK average
- **Students' average grade in Maths increased to 3.00 (+0.08).** The number of students working at **Grade 4 and above in Maths increased from 6 (24 percent) to 13 (52 percent**), which is just above the West Midlands average (51.3 percent).
- **The proportion of students working at Grade 4 and above in English improved significantly from 20 percent (5 students) to 44 percent (11 students**), closing the gap with the West Midlands average from 35.2 percent to 11.2 percentage points.

We piloted the use of a template to collect data from schools on attendance and on working at target grades in English and maths. The data collected is for Autumn 2024(baseline) Spring 2025, Summer 2025 terms and Autumn 2025 half-term.

Table 5: Change in attendance and working at specific grades in English and maths

	Baseline (Autumn 2024)	Endpoint (Autumn 2025)	Change (Autumn 2024 – Autumn 2025) (percentage points)	Comparing endpoint to UK / West Midland average (percentage points)
Attendance	95.5%	95.8%	+0.3%	+2.40 (UK average 93.4%)
English (% working at Grade 4 and above)	5 (20%)	11 (44%)	+6 (24%)	-11.2% (West Midlands average 55.2%)
English (average grade)	2.88	2.84	-0.04	-1.66 (England average 4.5)
Maths (% working at Grade 4 and above)	6 (24%)	13 (52%)	+7 (28%)	+0.7% (West Midlands average 51.3%)
Maths (average grade)	2.92	3.00	+0.08	-1.60 (England average 4.6)

Reflections from school careers leads and mentors

[10] The findings are tentative as only one school (25 students) provided attendance and attainment data. This was because the request for data came in the middle of the busy autumn team rather than at the end of summer team when career coordinators had the capacity to provide this data.

In this section we summarise reflections from school careers leads and mentors.

Student selection and engagement: Careers leads selected young people for participation in PfPP2 who lacked career direction at the start of year 10. Mentoring sessions, especially the one-to-one format, were well received and contributed to increased engagement and enthusiasm by those selected.

Observed benefits of having a mentor for young people included:

- they became **more confident and comfortable** due to the consistent presence of their mentor, who provided personalised advice and a supportive environment.
- improved **self-awareness** and ability of young people to **articulate their aspirations**.
- **thinking independently** about their future careers instead of simply following peers, so leading to more informed conversations about post-school options.
- increased **sense of own agency** in that they became more confident and better able to describe their strengths and weaknesses, and to develop plans based on a better and understanding of multiple pathways to their goals.
- **improved attendance and behaviour**: attendance improved - particularly on mentoring days - and students who had been considered challenging showed improved motivation and willingness to participate at school.
- being able to be **more open and trusting**, including sharing more about their interests and aspirations.

In delivering the PfPP2 programme the Loconomy team was able to:

- **recognise socioeconomic and safety factors** that shape young people's aspirations and act accordingly, including, for example, young people raising their concerns about gang crime during a 1:1 session.
- **fill gaps in careers coaching** through the mentoring provision and associated careers events. This provided additional support and exposure to careers options for students, supplementing existing provision by schools and addressing gaps in career mentoring caused by financial constraints.
- provide **mindset and motivation coaching**, including encouraging young people to believe in their potential and providing coaching on revision planning and overcoming self-doubt, which led to observable positive changes.
- provide **guidance on alternative pathways**: Students were informed about various academic and vocational routes, such as BTECs and alternative qualifications, helping them see practical ways to achieve their ambitions beyond traditional A-levels.
- **develop and adapt resources**: The PfPP2 programme has been responsive to the needs of young people and their schools through the ongoing development and adaptation of resources. For example, visual aids and toolkits, to better support diverse student needs, including those with special educational needs, and highlighted the importance of having a variety of materials for effective engagement. This included:
    - **Creation of customised resources**: including booklets, flashcards, and visual aids to facilitate student engagement, especially in one-to-one sessions, and these were particularly effective for students with special educational needs.
    - **Drawing on feedback from teaching assistants**: including the observation that students spoke more during sessions with their mentor

than in previous months, attributing this to the use of diagrams and tailored questioning, which encouraged greater participation.

- **Development of visual resources that are more effective than standard materials for students with special educational needs**, prompting the team to consider a wider variety of tools for future programmes. The mainstreaming of adaptations for young people with special educational needs is integral to the inclusive values of PfPP2. This was demonstrated by tailored support for additional twelve young people towards the end of programme who were not included in the evaluation cohort. PfPP2 provided core support to 12 young people identified as having special educational needs.

Preparation time needed to deliver successful sessions: Significant time was required outside of direct sessions conducting research and follow-up for students, such as checking college open days and course requirements, averaging 20-30 minutes per student in addition to face-to-face time.

In terms of work experience and employer engagement:

- There are challenges in providing work experience opportunities as most schools could not organise placements, but virtual work experience and employer talks were offered as alternatives, with mixed uptake.
- Young people were introduced to a virtual work experience website, allowing them to explore different careers interactively, which was well received by those who participated.
- **Employer Engagement Events:** Employers were invited to assemblies and careers fairs to discuss options with students, but the uptake varied across schools, often limited by teachers' availability and scheduling constraints. PfPP2 facilitated one school assembly with Taylor Woodrow as well as delivering a career fair hosted by Birmingham Repertory Theatre
- **The careers event at the Rep provided beneficial exposure to broader range of career paths** and generated enthusiasm, with some students outside the core programme expressing interest in joining. 88 young people attended the event which included three inspirational speakers and nine employer and college stands.

Observations on school context and the benefits to schools included:

- **Mentoring scheme's benefits to schools**: The mentoring scheme offered an extra layer of support for students, positively affecting pupils' careers conversations and providing staff with new insights, though no formal policy changes were made.
- **School contexts and structural challenges:** Differences between schools in terms of leadership, behaviour policies, and available support, overworked teachers and varying school cultures can impact student aspirations and the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Variation in school policies:** For example, some schools having strict attendance and behaviour policies, while others were more relaxed. Sanctions for poor behaviour might include removal from extra-curricular activities such as those being provided by PfPP2.
- **Capacity limitations of careers lead:** Teachers responsible for careers guidance were often overburdened with teaching and administrative duties, limiting their ability

to provide individualised support, and making external interventions particularly valuable.

- **The power of peer influence and information sharing:** Students began sharing careers information with peers, broadening the impact of the scheme beyond the initial cohort.

In the absence of feedback from parents, mentors and career leads' reflections are the main source of evidence on parental engagement. Their observations were that:

- Parents **appreciated the additional support**, with increased careers-related conversations occurring during parents' evenings, though direct feedback was limited.
- The **importance of involving parents in the programme**, noting that many parents lacked understanding of post-16 options and that direct engagement during parents evenings in two schools highly valued by both parents and school staff. Coaches attended both year 10 and 11 parents evenings at Eden Boys and a year 10 parent evening at Hodge Hill Girls. Each parent was given a post-16 careers booklet produced by Loconomy and in total 200 parents were engaged.
- There was a **recurring issue where parents had high or mismatched expectations for their children**, such as wanting them to pursue STEM careers despite lower academic grades or different interests, necessitating interventions to align expectations with students' strengths and preferences.
- Providing parents with **practical advice**, such as attending open days and understanding the logistics of school commutes helped parents better support their children's decisions.
- Parents directly involved in the programme expressed appreciation for the support provided, noting that schools often lacked the capacity to offer comprehensive careers coaching, and their positive feedback was collected informally during parents' evenings. They valued having information that was accessible and understandable and someone who their child trusted and felt safe with to explore options about their future career and related concerns and aspirations.

What could be improved?

From careers leads' and mentors' perspectives areas for potential refinement of future PfPP2 include considering how best to:

- accommodate longer individual coaching sessions,
- support schools in securing a wider range of employers and professions to visit and participate in Q&A sessions, either for the whole school or specifically for mentoring participants, to provide real-world career insights.
- to work with parents unfamiliar with educational pathways, including provision of coaching during parents' evenings. Being present at parent's evenings as part of the light touch support was well received by parents who were keen receive information about options and advice on how to support their child. Discussions with parents indicated they aware their child was going into a different employment market to when they left school and had make difficult choices about available options and career pathway. Those whose child were receiving intensive support particularly wished to know how to support their child and would have benefitted from more structured support from the PfPP2 programme. The inclusion of such support would have provided valuable feedback to Loconomy during implementation from parents on how their child was progressing and a more effective means of collecting data from parents though a structured baseline and endpoint surveys for the evaluation.

From the perspective of participating young people in the core offer:

- when asked in the midpoint survey nearly half of the 45 responding students felt nothing needed improving
- when asked in the endpoint survey suggestions for improvement focus mainly on **more external opportunities**, with many asking for additional trips, workplace visits and work experience. There was also the desire for **more time and more frequent sessions**, including longer or more regular group and one-to-one activities and some wanted more information (e.g. on local courses or careers).
- Most (90.1 percent) of respondents to the midpoint would recommend the programme to other young people. This continued to be case in the endpoint survey with participants stating their reasons for doing so including that PfPP2 is helpful, builds confidence and provides clarity about future jobs and choices.

Value for Money

PFPP has provided good value for money against the 4 E criteria (equity, effectiveness efficiency, economy) and will break even in terms of savings to the Exchequer if two young people are prevented from becoming NEET between aged 16 to 18.

The programme created immediate value through one-to-one coaching and coach mentoring addressing gaps in existing school provision. **In terms of costs avoided and lost revenue to the exchequer PfPP2 we estimate it would break with the avoidance of two young people becoming NEET between ages 16 and 18.** If this increases to five young people the potential net saving could be around £250,000 and to ten young people, the potential saving would be around £650,000.

The approach is highly scalable and transferable, provided it is supported by centralised resources, experienced and well-supported coaches, and strong partnerships with schools. Future iterations of the programme could be further strengthened by working with mixed cohorts of RONI and non-RONI students and by extending engagement to additional year groups, such as Year 7 or Year 9.

The programme does well on the four E criteria for value for money assessment:

- **Equity (Spending fairly):** The programme was delivered to a diverse cohort in Birmingham, including students traditionally considered difficult to engage. The inclusion of light touch support outside the core cohort enabled their peers who did not meet the stricter criteria for inclusion to derive benefit from their school being part of the programme.
- **Effectiveness (Spending wisely):** The use of RONI to identify those most at risk of becoming NEET ensured resources were used well. Young people's assessment of the programme and self-reported outcomes combined with insights from other stakeholders indicate the programme was effective. Coaches were able to adapt delivery to suit varying needs, confidence levels, languages and behaviours.
- **Efficiency (Spending well):** Refinements during implementation, as well as drawing on learning from the original pilot, have contributed to efficiency. It was not possible to benchmark unit costs against similar programmes.
- **Economy (Spending less):** Compared to the original pilot, PfPP2 was delivered at a lower cost.

Conclusion

Loconomy's delivery of the PfPP2 programme provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of early, personalised career coaching and careers coaching for secondary school students at risk of becoming NEET. The learning from this programme demonstrates that one-to-one coaching, delivered through a flexible and bespoke mentoring approach, is central to building confidence, engagement, and realistic future pathways for young people. Also, such support can lead to improvements in attendance and attainment in maths, which can be considered as lead indicators of reduced likelihood of a young person becoming NEET.

Strong partnerships with schools and earlier, more structured engagement with parents, further strengthens delivery and impact. We have demonstrated it is possible to collect harder metrics from schools which can be incorporated in future iterations of PfPP2. These include average attendance and attainment (targeted and working at grades in English and maths) on termly basis that provide proxies for improved motivation and reduced likelihood of becoming NEET on leaving secondary education.

Beyond individual outcomes, the PfPP2 programme makes a clear contribution to:

- local economic development by supporting early prevention of young people becoming NEET
- young people considering the opportunities available to them and raising their career aspirations.

With a high potential return on investment and a scalable delivery model, PFPP2 offers a robust foundation for future programme development and expansion.

Annex A: Methodological learning

There are challenges around following up young people once they leave school using administrative data. It has not been possible to link data where young people and their parents who have provided consent to do so. Data is often held and maintained on different systems by different directorates within Birmingham City Council. It has also proved difficult to justify the resources required to do so in the absence of larger cohort needed to detect statistically the impact of PfPP2 against a matched comparison group. We have demonstrated it possible to build in the capability to do so in future including testing a GDPR compliant approach that safeguards the anonymity of young people. This involved piloting the use of a data key held by Loconomy. The data key included: (a) a unique reference number for the evaluation that was provided to the young person that enabled linking of their responses to three sets of questionnaires and (b) their official unique learner number that can be used to follow up young people using routinely collected administrative data.

Timing of data collection from schools is important. One school completed the excel template to collect data on changes in attendance and working and target grades across the three terms showing that it is possible to collect such data. The extension of the end date of the PfPP2 programme from the end of the Summer term to Autumn half-term made it more difficult for Loconomy to secure completed spreadsheets due to the capacity of schools being significantly reduced. This also included the ability of school careers leads to participate in a debriefing workshop at the end of programme. In the evaluation of the pilot this was a rich source of information, and an opportunity to test the face validity of conclusions drawn from other sources.

Operational aspects and data management: The practicalities of collecting and managing attendance and attainment data for the mentored cohort were discussed with a careers lead who confirmed the feasibility of using existing school systems and agreeing on the process for data submission. In this discussion the **spreadsheet design and instructions** were described including the structure of the data collection spreadsheet, specifying required fields such as attendance, working grades, and target grades, and instructions for completion and submission were clarified and updated. **System compatibility was also explored and the careers lead** confirmed that the necessary data was available on their school's systems to populate the spreadsheet and being a small cohort would be manageable.

Parents need to be more involved as part of the core offer to provide more structured opportunities in terms of meetings to provide feedback. The use of a parent's and a carer's questionnaire was unsuccessful in part because they were no requirements or incentives for them to complete and return them. It is suggested that a future iteration of the programme could include sessions on how parents and carers can support their child into which data collection activities can be built.