



world**skills**uk  
**GO FURTHER, FASTER**

# ***Closing the gender gap***

*Exploring gender  
differences in careers  
advice and aspirations*

THE **CAREERS &  
ENTERPRISE**  
COMPANY

# Contents

03	<b>Foreword</b>
04	<b>Executive summary</b>
06	<b>Key findings</b>
07	<b>Stemming the tide</b> <i>Gender bias in careers aspirations and advice</i>
11	<b>Jobs for the girls</b> <i>Levels of preparation for the workplace</i>
17	<b>Mother knows best?</b> <i>Parents and careers advice</i>
21	<b>Young and old-fashioned</b> <i>Social attitudes of young people</i>
23	<b>Aspirational strategy</b> <i>Next steps</i>

# Foreword



**Dr Neil Bentley** CEO WSUK



**Claudia Harris** CEO CEC

**Much progress has been made in the past 20 years around gender equality and improving outcomes for young women, in education and their careers. However, despite this, we still have an incredibly long way to go to reach true equality. The Economist's "glass-ceiling index", which provides a benchmark for progress on gender equality in the workplace, places Britain below the OECD average, and in 22nd place out of 29<sup>1</sup>.**

As organisations which strive to give young people the best possible start in work and life, WorldSkills UK and the Careers & Enterprise Company partnered together to develop a better understanding of how gendered career stereotypes impact the career choices of young men and women. We did this with a view to facilitating a conversation amongst key influencers and conveyors of careers advice such as parents, teachers and careers advisers on how we can improve our approach in this area.

We are pleased that the Government's new Careers Strategy for England aligns closely with and addresses many of the concerns in our findings. With a focus on the need to challenge perceptions and raise aspirations so that 'subject and career choices are free from gender bias and people look beyond their immediate environment to new and exciting possibilities'<sup>2</sup>.

The findings in this report are a wake up call and show that, despite past progress, we can never assume that further progress is inevitable when it comes to equality. This report provides a springboard from which we can be more ambitious. We look forward to working together and discussing with our stakeholder networks what more we can do to practically help further the career opportunities of both young women and men whilst, at the same time, supporting their parents and teachers.

**Dr Neil Bentley**  
Chief Executive,  
WorldSkills UK

**Claudia Harris**  
Chief Executive,  
The Careers & Enterprise Company

<sup>1</sup> The Economist, "The best and worst places to be a working woman", <https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/03/daily-chart-0>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664319/Careers\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664319/Careers_strategy.pdf)

# Executive summary

This research provides useful insights for supporting all young people to make informed choices about their career directions.

Despite general perceptions that young people are much more socially liberal than their parents when it comes to diversity, this generation appears to hold more traditional attitudes than their parents.

We found that gendered stereotypes are still very much embedded in the career choices young women are most likely to consider. They are much more likely to consider care-related jobs, such as teaching and being a nurse, whilst young men are more likely to opt for jobs in engineering or IT. This serves to create a self-perpetuating cycle when it comes to the gender pay gap, since the career paths young women are considering are generally lower paid.

Our research demonstrates that parents, especially mothers, are key influencers on their children, with teachers and careers advisers becoming more important as they get older. It is vital that teachers and parents are given the right information to support their understanding of the modern workplace and career opportunities. This, in turn, will lead to young people having higher expectations and aspirations.

Our findings also show that young people learn best through hands-on experience. They told us that they are more likely to feel informed if they speak to a current apprentice, visit a workplace or a university. We know from the work already being done through the Enterprise Adviser Network in more than 2,000 schools in England that participating in careers activities increases both boys' and girls' likelihood of reporting that they feel prepared for work. It also increases the salary expectations of young women.

“

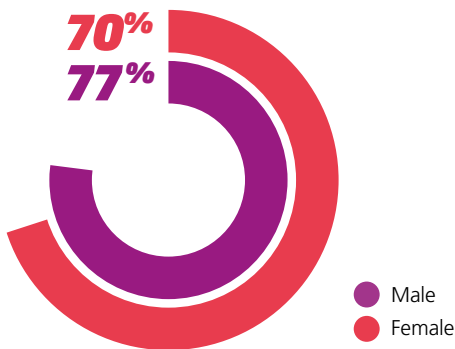
***Schools don't necessarily offer all of the pathways that are available to you so get down to places like the Skills Show and see what is available to you to make a career of. I'm now mentoring the future generation of apprentices in my company.***

Ethan Davies, Manufacturing Technician, Electroimpact

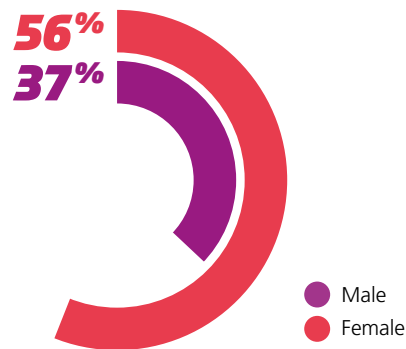


# Key findings

Young men are more positive than young women (17–19 year olds)



More than half of young women feel their career options are limited by their gender



Young men aspire to a median salary of £1,063 more than young women



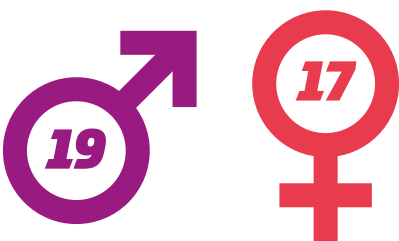
Parents of young men think their child strives towards jobs that pay £1,162 less than parents of young women



Young people learn best through hands-on experience



Age peaks in accessing careers advice



## Scotland

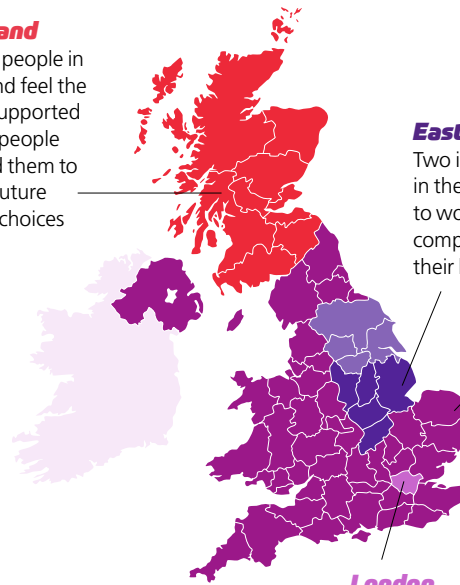
Young people in Scotland feel the most supported by the people around them to make future career choices

## East Midlands

Two in five young people in the East Midlands want to work in one job in one company for the rest of their life

## East of England

65% of girls in the East of England think there are jobs it would be harder to get because of their gender



## London

Young people in London feel the most prepared to start a full-time job and feel the most positive about their future career prospects. They have also accessed the most careers advice

# Stemming the tide

## Gender bias in careers aspirations and advice

Young people are aspirational and future jobs and careers form a big part of those aspirations. While young men and women have equal hopes for the future, it does appear that young women are more negative than their male peers and could be held back unnecessarily.

Jobs hold a significant importance for young people, with nearly all (98%) of both young men and women telling us that figuring out what they want to do in their job is important to them.

Young people are optimistic about their future career prospects. Regardless of their gender, young people become more positive about their future career prospects over time. However, by age 16–19 young men feel slightly more positive than young women.

While overall aspirations remain similar, there are notable differences in potential career directions that young men and women are likely to pursue. True to stereotypes, young women are more drawn to teaching, to creative and caring careers, while young men are attracted to engineering, computing and sports.

As such typically the roles that young women are drawn to are likely to attract a lower median annual salary than those boys are drawn to in this study, with girls aspiring to a £1,063 lower median annual salary than boys, reinforcing issues such as the gender pay gap which is currently garnering public attention.

These biases in direction are not simply internal to each person, but projected onto others, such that young people are likely to direct their peers into careers based on their gender, not simply based on their abilities and interests.

### Males are less likely to suggest their female peers pursue a university education

Recent research from the Education and Employers Taskforce, which looked at children's drawings of jobs they wanted to have when they grew up, found that gender stereotypes were established from an early age. Similarly, when we asked young people to provide careers advice to a peer, we also found that pertinent gender stereotypes existed across the ages.

In one scenario, providing advice to a fictional friend named Jack or Chloe, who equally like maths and are both on course to achieve an A\* at GCSE and are expected to do well in their other subjects', young men are far less likely to suggest that Chloe pursues a university education.

# 77%

of men aged 16–19  
are positive about their  
future career prospects

# 70%

of women aged 16–19  
are positive about their  
future career prospects

## Stemming the tide

### Gender bias in careers aspirations and advice

Overall, young people are most likely to consider a career as a...

Teacher

19%

IT professional

18%

Engineer

15%

Focusing especially on the responses of the 16–19 year olds who saw the academic scenarios, young women were just as likely to suggest that Jack or Chloe goes to university, only 58% of young men suggested Chloe goes to university, compared to 73% who recommended that Jack does.

In the types of jobs that young people advised Jack or Chloe should find out more about, we found that there were again differences based on gender in what young people told us. Becoming an accountant and investment analyst were the top two suggested jobs for both Jack and Chloe amongst both genders, which were the most obvious maths-related choice. However, after this, young men were most likely to suggest Jack considers becoming an engineer, while for Chloe they suggested she considers becoming a cashier/sales assistant.

Similarly, amongst young women the third most suggested job for Jack was engineering, while for Chloe it was to consider teaching. Engineer is third on the list of jobs that Jack should find out more about, but sixth for Chloe. This is driven by fewer young women thinking Chloe should consider engineering than Jack (14% vs 28% respectively).

This gender disparity in career choices is also found in the types of jobs that young people would consider doing in the future themselves. Overall, young people are most likely to consider a career as a teacher (19%), IT professional (18%) or an engineer (15%).

#### Gender percentage point difference in career aspirations





## ***Stemming the tide***

### ***Gender bias in careers aspirations and advice***

However, young women are more likely to consider jobs which traditionally involve caring for others than men; the biggest skew is in teaching where there is a 17-point difference between the number of young men and young women who would consider doing this job in the future. In contrast, young men are more likely than young women to consider certain STEM jobs such as engineering or an IT professional (both have an 18-point difference). In line with this, the Education and Employers Taskforce also found through their research that young women in the UK were much less likely to become engineers or scientists.

We found that young men were also more likely to say they would consider a technical and vocational education or career in the future than young women (40% vs 32% respectively) and also more likely to say that they know about technical and vocational education and careers (38% vs 32% respectively). As chapter three explores, the role of parents in influencing young people is particularly important.

### ***What this means***

WorldSkills UK and the Careers & Enterprise Company welcome the Government strategy to encourage young girls to consider STEM related jobs, particularly with the use of peer role models and other ambassadors, the new £16 million Level 3 Support Programme, and the commitment to taking positive steps towards eradicating gender norms in the classroom that lead to girls narrowing their career choices.



“

***The all-female Industrial Control team took Silver in the WorldSkills UK National Finals at The Skills Show in 2015. This was particularly significant given the shortage of young women in engineering. The team of young women saw their confidence boosted over the competition cycle and have since played an important role in promoting women in STEM careers in their area and acting as role models.”***

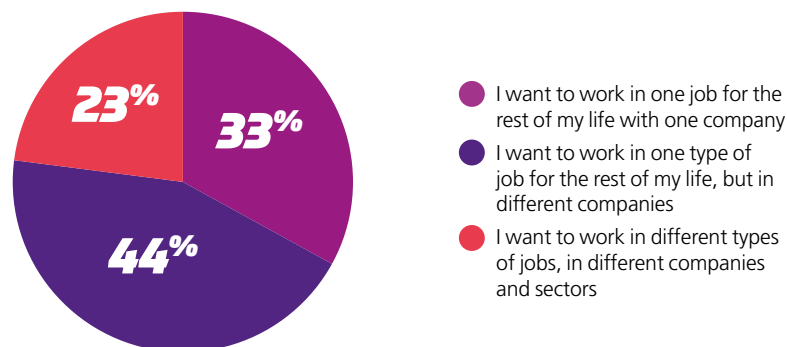
Martin Hottass, General Manager, Siemens Professional Education

# *Jobs for the girls (they're ready)*

## *Levels of preparation for the workplace*

There is a notion we are moving towards a more flexible labour market, with several different types of jobs over a lifetime becoming the norm. However, in reality just as young people have often traditional career aspirations, they also have largely traditional expectations of the workplace.

### Future work life



Young people are most likely to want to work in one type of job for the rest of their life, but in different companies (44%) and least likely to want to work in different types of jobs, in different companies and sectors (23%). This presents a challenge to the plans of employers and those in the education sector who are gearing to move towards a more flexible and informal way of working, and a challenge to young people to adapt to this type of working life. It is also a challenge to teachers, careers advisers and parents to make sure they are appropriately preparing young people for the workplaces of the future.

## Jobs for the girls (they're ready)

### Levels of preparation for the workplace

# 70%

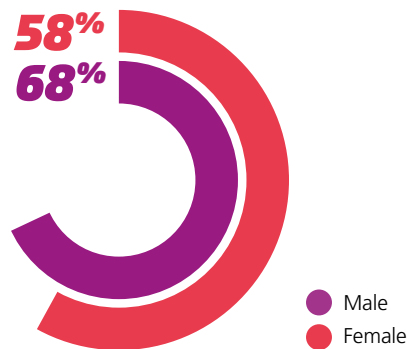
of young people  
feel prepared for the  
workplace by age 19

#### Males feel more prepared for working life than females

In terms of being ready to start work, by age 19 most young people (70%) feel prepared for the workplace. These findings present a real disconnect with employers consistently saying that young people are not well prepared for employment.

Not surprisingly, before 16 most young people in education do not feel prepared to start working in a full-time job.

#### Preparedness to start full time work 16–19 year olds



Confidence amongst both young men and young women is overall fairly high, but we did find a difference in confidence levels. Young men consistently feel more prepared to start working in a full-time job than young women.

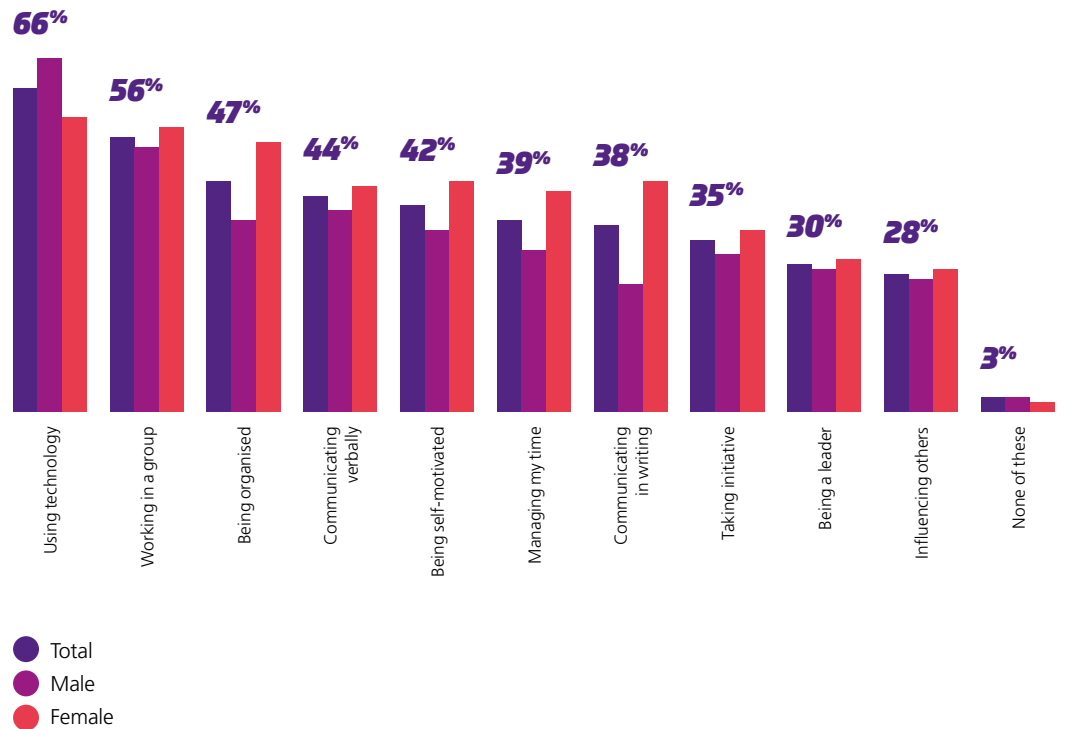
#### But females are better at soft skills required in the workplace

However, although young men feel more prepared for the workplace, today's young women are actively doing more to prepare and are more likely to have the soft skills required by business. Women are more likely to say that they are good at most soft skills than men, with the notable exception of using technology.

## Jobs for the girls (they're ready)

### Levels of preparation for the workplace

#### Soft skills that young people say they have



#### Biggest predictors of young people feeling prepared



Managing my time



Being a leader

Our findings corroborate a recent OECD<sup>5</sup> study which suggests that young women are better equipped for the workplace; women on average are 1.6 times more likely than men to be better at performing in collaborative problem solving.

The key soft skills that are the biggest predictors of people feeling prepared for the workplace are whether they feel they can manage their time and be a leader, two skills that WorldSkills UK develops in competitions. However, only half of young people say they are good at managing their time (46%) and only a third (35%) say they are good at being a leader.

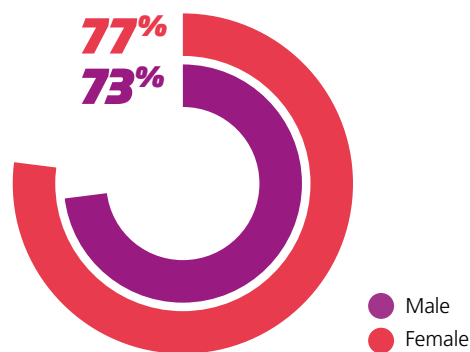
## Jobs for the girls (they're ready)

### Levels of preparation for the workplace

#### Young females are being more proactive about their future

In addition to having more soft skills, young females are also accessing more types of careers information and advice than young men and are also more likely to access careers advice generally.

#### Have accessed careers advice/information



# 31%

Less than a third of young people say they have met someone from the world of work

In light of recent research from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation that sets encounters with workplaces as one of its eight key benchmarks that defines world-class careers guidance, our research found that a third (31%) say that they have already met someone from the world of work and thought this was the type of careers advice and information that both young men and women were most likely to access. Participating in careers activities is likely to increase the salary aspirations for both boys and girls with the pay-off in terms of salary aspirations likely to be stronger for girls.

Aside from this, the types of careers advice that men and women access differ. Women are more likely to access advice about further education, while men are more likely to focus on work related information and advice.

#### Top types of careers advice accessed



Meeting someone from the world of work (while at school)



Accessing information about work and careers



Visiting a workplace



Meeting someone from the world of work (while at school)



Visiting a college



Visiting a university

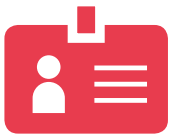
## Jobs for the girls (they're ready)

### Levels of preparation for the workplace

#### Biggest predictors of young people feeling informed



Visiting a workplace



Talking to a current apprentice



Visiting a university

Visiting a workplace, talking to a current apprentice or visiting a university are the most important types of careers advice or information that young people can access to help them feel informed. Only a quarter or fewer are proactively accessing these. A quarter say they have visited a workplace (26%) or a university (27%), and only 9% have talked to a current apprentice.

Young people are also more likely to feel informed if they have attended a career fair or show, but again few actually have (24%).

#### Young people prefer learning through hands on experience

Young people say they learn best through hands on experience (31%), but there is a disconnect between this and the types of careers advice they receive; only 18% received hands on careers advice. This does improve over time though, with there only being a 5-point difference for 16–19 year olds.

#### Hands on experience 11–19 year olds



- How learn things best
- Careers advice received

#### Hands on experience 16–19 year olds



- How learn things best
- Careers advice received

### What this means

- Providing hands on experience to young people is vital.
- Focusing on developing time management and leadership skills of young people will lead to them being better prepared.
- Young women need to be encouraged that they are ready for the workplace.
- Essential that career strategies ensure that young people are visiting a workplace, talking to a current apprentice or visiting a university at a young age to help them make more informed choices.

“

***At school I was a high scorer in mathematical and science lessons but I lacked direction and didn't know what I wanted to do. I was always good at computing and it was my hobby – no one told me your hobby could be your job.***

Kim Reid, Software Engineer, Northrop Grumman



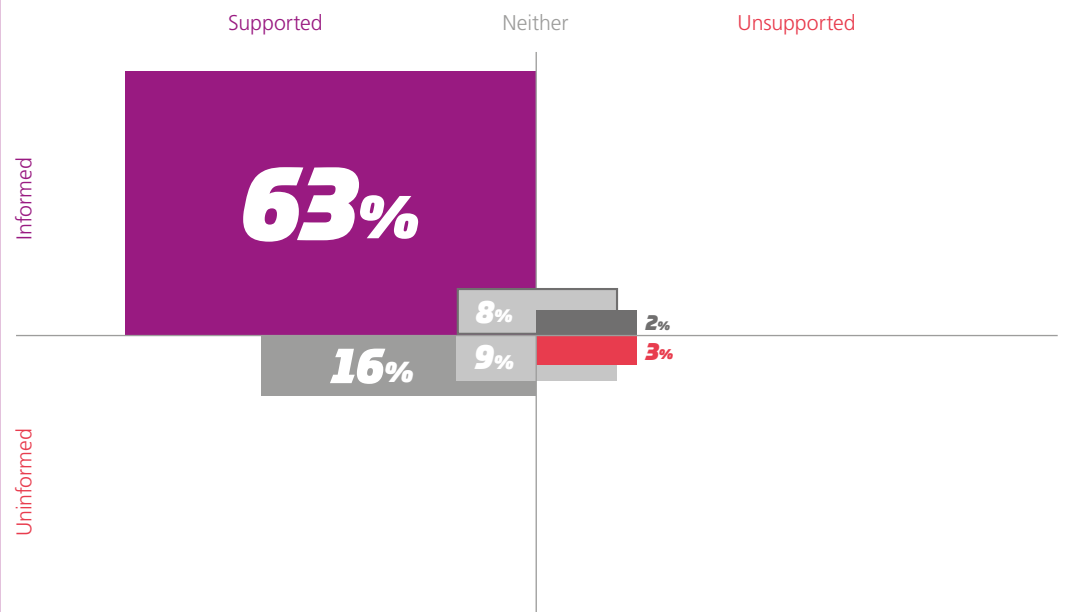


# Mother knows best?

## Parents and careers advice

Parents obviously have a huge influence on their children as they grow up, and this is no less true of careers advice. Young people indicated that mothers especially are key influencers and confidantes not just for girls, but boys too.

Most young people told us they feel informed and supported by their family, teachers and careers advisers when it comes to making career choices.



Two thirds (63%) said they feel both supported and informed to make decisions for the future that will lead to an interesting career, whilst very few said they feel unsupported and uninformed (3%).



In light of the recent Government careers strategy for England to provide clear information about T levels to parents, teachers and career professionals, our research highlights the important role these people play in the lives of young people. Parents in particular play a crucial role in the lives of young people. Our research found that young people feel that their mothers and fathers remain the biggest influences for life decisions of young people across all ages. Young people also told us that teachers are also highly influential. In terms of careers advice, mothers and fathers are early sources of advice, but teachers and careers advisers become more prominent over time.

# Mother knows best?

## Parents and careers advice

59%

Mothers are the biggest source of careers advice



By age 16, the sources that young people use for careers advice does not change, highlighting the need to ensure young people are accessing the correct sources before 16 and are receiving appropriate advice from the right people post-16. It is also vital that teachers and parents are correctly informed, as there is a danger of them only having a limited understanding of the workplace and therefore only being able to provide influence on what they know.

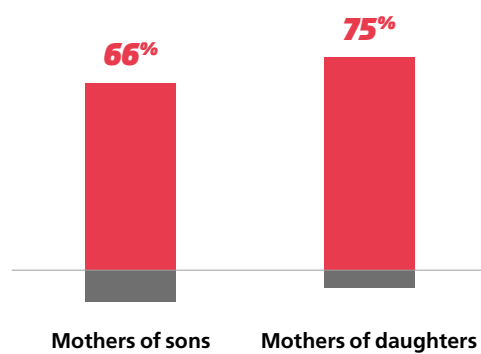
Mothers are the biggest source of careers advice (59%), and remain especially a common point of advice for young women. Mothers are also particularly influential amongst young women; by 19 there is a 16-point gap between mothers and the next influential figure in the lives of women, while this difference is less pronounced amongst men.

### The mother-son dynamic

Our research also revealed an interesting dynamic amongst mothers and sons which suggests parents may be predisposed to certain careers paths for their children based on their own experience.

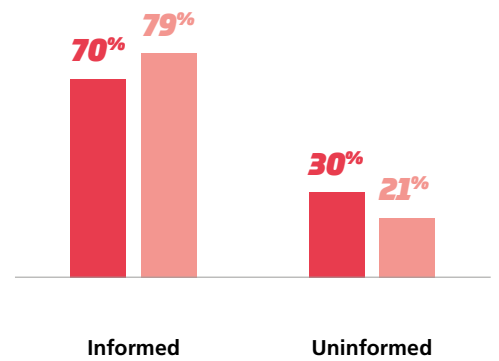
Mothers tended to have a more negative outlook about their sons. For instance, mothers are more likely to say that their daughters have positive future career prospects than they are of their sons. Mothers are also less likely to think their sons are informed.

**Mothers feelings on their child's future career prospects**



● Positive  
● Negative

**How informed mothers think their child is**



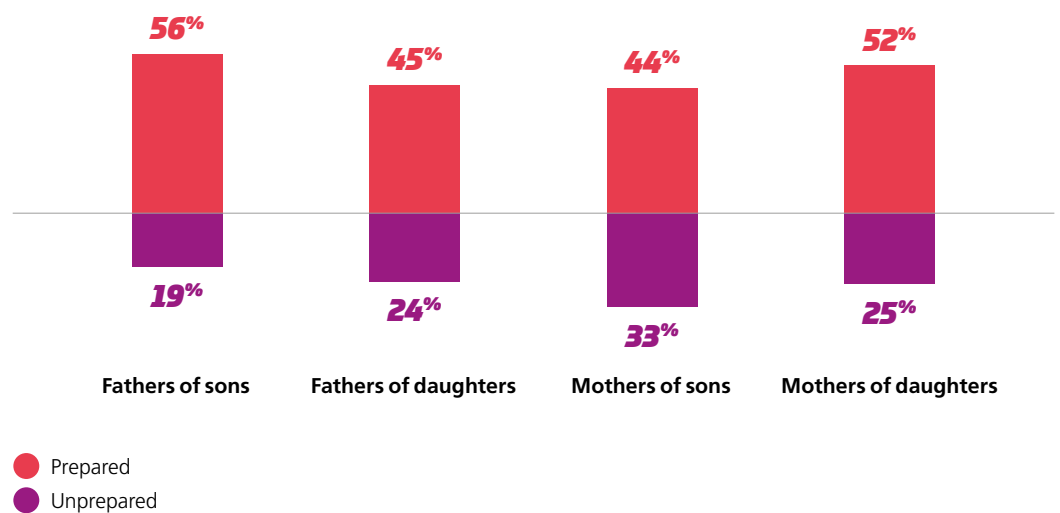
● Mothers of sons  
● Mothers of daughters

## Mother knows best?

### Parents and careers advice

In terms of preparation to start full time work, fathers of are more likely to think their sons are prepared than their daughters, while again mothers are more likely to think their daughter is prepared than their sons. This may reflect the greater likelihood of young women to have soft skills and doing research more than young men. But in contrast, young men have higher levels of confidence and feel more prepared. Indeed, fathers are more positive about their sons' level of preparation. This may reflect a closer bond between fathers and sons or between mothers and daughters and parents having a greater affinity or expectation of the life experiences of children of the same gender.

#### Parental views on levels of preparation



#### What this means

Parents and teachers being key people that young people turn to reinforces the need to inform adults about careers so that they can help the young people who turn to them for guidance.

Parents need to better understand the full range of available careers and the expectations and experiences of their children with a different gender to themselves so that they can best help them feel prepared and offer them relevant advice.



“

***When I told my mum I wanted to be a game developer she was a little sceptical at first. But when she saw how driven and passionate I was, she really pushed me and got me where I wanted to be.***

Dan McCabe, Game Artist, Codemasters

# Young and old-fashioned

## Social attitudes of young people

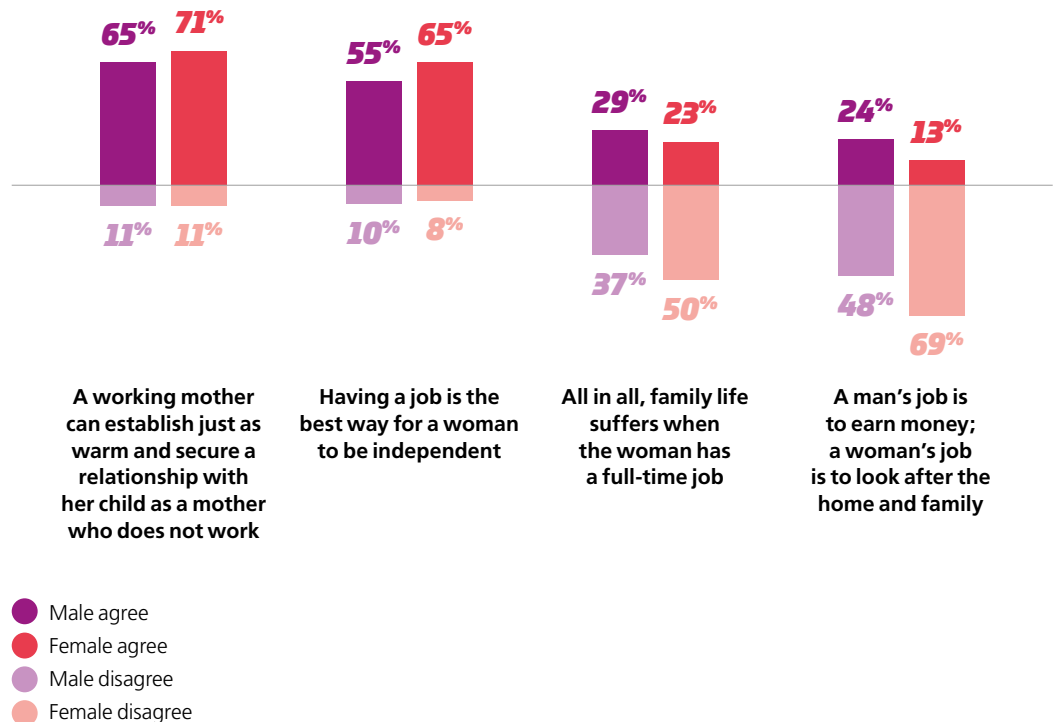
65%

of young women believe that a career is the best way for a woman to be independent

One might believe that young people are more socially liberal than their parents when it comes to family values. Our young people and parents answered questions about family values in similar ways. Traditional social attitudes among young people remain prevalent.

There was a clear gender disparity over social attitudes, with young men being more likely to hold traditional views than their female counterparts. For instance, less than half of young men disagreed with the notion that a man's job is to earn money; a woman's is to look after the home and family, while over two thirds of young women disagreed. Two thirds (65%) of young women also believe that a career is the best way for a woman to be independent.

### Perceptions of working mothers



## Young and old-fashioned

### Social attitudes of young people

# 46%

of parents of young women agree that there are jobs it would be harder to get because their child is female

This difference in perception between the genders appears in expectations of the workplace too. Despite being more prepared, young women are more negative in terms of their expectations. In terms of barriers to accessing jobs, across all ages young women were more likely to say that there are jobs it would be harder to get because of their gender than young men. However, overall parents of girls, are more positive. Under half (46%) agree that there are jobs it would be harder to get because their child is female compared to over half (56%) of young women.

### **What this means**

Girls are more likely to think that their career options are limited by their gender than boys, meaning they are unlikely to consider jobs that are stereotypically seen as 'male' jobs. We need to highlight how women are not limited by their gender and address the areas where limitations exist.

# Aspirational strategy

## Next steps

The Government's new Careers Strategy for England provides a starting point on which we can build, in terms of providing all young people, regardless of their gender or background, with the opportunities to go as far as their talents will take them and have a rewarding career<sup>3</sup>.

**WorldSkills UK and The Careers & Enterprise Company will commit to working together with their stakeholder networks to take concrete action in the following five ways:**

- 1 Continuing to provide opportunities for young people to have meaningful encounters with the world of work, by linking schools and colleges to employers through The Careers & Enterprise Company's Enterprise Adviser Network.
- 2 Supporting young women in non-traditional careers to give role-modelling advice in schools and colleges, as well as in video formats, delivered by WorldSkills UK.
- 3 Driving further forward the Careers & Enterprise Company mentoring programme, including supporting young women's career development.
- 4 Engaging young people and employers in discussion about these research findings in roundtables throughout the rest of this year delivered by WorldSkills UK.
- 5 Ensuring the Skills Show 2018 (delivered by WorldSkills UK) has a clear gender diversity focus in its careers advice content to help young people, parents and teachers explore a range of career routes with employers.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf)



### **About WorldSkills UK**

WorldSkills UK is all about helping young people go further, faster in their careers, gaining the skills that employers need most. We help young people from all backgrounds get the best start in work and life, through our three core programmes: We are a member of The 5% Club, targeted at employers who want to rebalance the economy and build the UK's long-term prosperity through a focus on technical skills to drive innovation.

For more information please visit [www.worldskillsuk.org](http://www.worldskillsuk.org)

### **About The Careers & Enterprise Company**

The Careers and Enterprise Company is an employer-led organisation which inspires and prepares young people for the world of work. It is underpinned by the belief that young people should be given the best support available to develop their careers and to make informed choices about education and employment. It is creating lasting links between schools and employers and enabling senior figures from the local business community – Enterprise Advisers – to help enhance schools' careers advice and prepare young people for the future.

### **Methodology**

The findings of this research were carried out by Opinium Research in an online survey of 2000 young people aged 11–19 and 2,001 parents of children aged 11–19, between 19th to 30th October 2016.

