

## Career Development - how early is too early?

**How early is too early when it comes to active engagement in career development? This is a version of a question we are often asked at Careers Collective: what is the lowest age of person that you would support?**

There are some friends of mine in their forties who haven't ever really thought holistically about their career development and who are realising only recently because of the pandemic that they probably haven't been happy in decades; clearly we would advocate starting a conversation about careers before then.

We know we absolutely want to engage with young people before they graduate so they don't have a crisis, like I did, when it dawned on me that I had spent more time considering which shade of laces would match my DMs than what kind of career my degree might lead to.

Those of us with children will be pleased to know that there is now a Careers Strategy and framework around the delivery of structured careers provision for students at secondary school. My eldest is in Year 10 and is currently being asked to consider where to spend her work experience week; she would say if asked that she started thinking consciously about careers when she was 13... and that was only because, with an entrepreneur mother running a new business in the careers sector, she had no choice but to engage!

**But is age 13 already too late to start thinking consciously about what the future might look like?**

Education and Employers conducted research for their 2018 [Drawing the Future](#) report, which centred on asking children as young as seven to imagine themselves in a future job. It was clear from their findings that even at that tender age of seven children had already discounted so many occupations from their mental list of what was possible because, as the report noted, *'from a young age children often stereotype jobs according to gender'*. Just as concerning to those of us aiming to support young people with their careers education, this means that, because seven year olds have such little awareness of the vast range of jobs that exist now and will be available to them in what is a rapidly changing world of work, they are, effectively, already closing their minds to the possibility of engaging. The jobs most commonly aspired to? Teaching and professional sports. So if, as the report suggests, *'Children's aspirations are often shaped, moulded and restricted by gender stereotyping, socio-economic background and, importantly, who they know'*, how do we respond?

The answer is screamingly obvious: we need to include a programme of careers education at Primary level. If fewer than 1% of children find out about jobs from visitors from the world of work at their school and are influenced in their view of the world of work mainly by what their parents do for a living, then we need to get conversations flowing - and fast.

There are, of course, already some exciting projects and programmes in delivery, such as the DfE's Our Future Project based in the D2N2 Opportunity Area, which takes the learning from the Drawing the Future report and aims '*to inspire children, reduce stereotypes and increase pupils' understanding of the link between what they learn in the classroom and the world of work*'. The interim report can be read here

<https://www.educationandemployers.org/ourfuturederby-interim-report/>

Also of note is the work completed by [North East Ambition](#), which undertook a 2 year project aimed at translating the Good Career Guidance Benchmarks for use and implementation in primary settings, working with 70 primary schools in order to test how that might work. Key findings demonstrate success in the widening of awareness of a more diverse range of career options, a better understanding of the links between what is happening in the classroom and future job options, and the ability to have conversations about possible career plans.

Having informed conversations has to be at the core of careers education. At least, that is what Careers Collective believes, and making career development the focus of transition programmes makes perfect sense. Teachers, coaches, mentors and advisors recognise that transitions are a vulnerable time for us all and any career journey is characterised by transition, whether planned or unplanned, wanted or unwanted, so providing young people with the knowledge, understanding, tools and techniques to be able to manage those transitions is a powerful gift.

In the past, when transition programmes were written, the focus might have been on including literacy, numeracy or 'catch up' content, but perhaps less on the kinds of intrapersonal, capacity building skills that we need to manage a career journey, or some introductory teaching around what we mean when we talk about 'careers' or 'career development'. Now, armed with the knowledge we have gained from research, we can embed that learning into a world of work context and start to inspire children to broaden their horizons, think about what is possible and feel more connected to their studies as a result.

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Careers Collective's current transition programme, Next Steps, for Primary Schools, can be downloaded at [Next Steps Career Transition Programme](#)



