

neaco

Parental perceptions and engagement research



Research report: September 2021

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Executive Summary

Aspirations, confidence, information needs

Parents want their child to get a job that they enjoy or are passionate about. Parents feel somewhat confident to support their child but lack of confidence in finding and reviewing information about their child's future options. Options available to their child and the pathways to get there are seen as useful details to have. Parents were most likely to want to go to their child's school or college for information.

Engagement with children and their education

All parents were speaking to their child about school or college but only around half had had conversations about their child's future. Having conversations with their child can improve their child's confidence at school and give parents the opportunity to learn about their child. Parents struggle to speak with their children due to their child's lack of interest or feel that it is too early to put pressure on their child.

Greater engagement with schools helped parents to talk more with their child about their education and future prospects. Lack of technology or confidence in using technology can impact parental engagement, as well as work or childcare commitments. Parents also feel that they are not given the opportunities to engage with other parents or teachers.

How to best target and reach parents

Information that could help parents and their children should be provided through the school or social media. Parents would need the information about their child's future options to come from an impartial source. Emails were the most popular method for presenting information about their child's future, followed by hard-copy formats. Parents were interested in attending an event particularly if it was held in-person.



Aspirations, confidence, and information needs

Parents want their child to get a job that they enjoy or are passionate about.

When asked about their child's future, the most common response was that they wanted their child to get a job that they enjoy or be in a career path they are passionate about. Parents whose child wanted to go into a role such as footballer were trying to make them consider something more realistic but also something they enjoyed. One parent wanted their child to have a job that suited their personality and not a menial job.

Parents also hoped for their child to carry on their education into further or higher education. Some also mentioned they would be happy for their child to do some sort of workplace training or apprenticeship. One parent said they would like their child to get qualifications or good training, as they would be unable to go on to the work ladder unless they start with very low pay.



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I want her to be in a job that is suited that rather than you know, and I spent quite a long time doing fairly menial jobs. And I'd maybe like her to avoid that, if possible, because I don't think she needs to because I think she's capable of a lot more.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12

Wanting their child to be happy was also a popular response. Parents also wanted their child to have financial security. Parents want to encourage their child to be the best they can be, but some wanted to do this without putting too much pressure on them.

Parents also said they would like their child to have sufficient support or take baby steps, so they are not just pushed into the adult world/workforce. One said they would like their child to go to university for the social experience, as it allows them to go out into the world but in an educational setting.



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I hope they both follow a career path and fully concentrate on making sure their future is financially stable. I would love to see them in a good job where they have job security but also job satisfaction, my oldest suffered with ADHD and ODD so I hope he is able to find something he loves and can keep him concentrated motivated and happy

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Parents hopes and wants for their child's future:

Attend university or college	Have job satisfaction	Be happy	Good social circle
Get good grades	Be financially stable	Be healthy	Have a relationship
Gain work experience	To travel	Be confident	Have children
Learn life skills	Have a good work ethic	Be the best they can be	Stay local
Have awareness of the world	Be themselves	Have job security	Have financial awareness

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I hope to see them want to push themselves to attain their best, be it college or university or even in work training, I want them to have financial awareness, and the confidence to gain their goals.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7

Parents feel somewhat confident to support their child, but more information from the school could help to improve confidence.

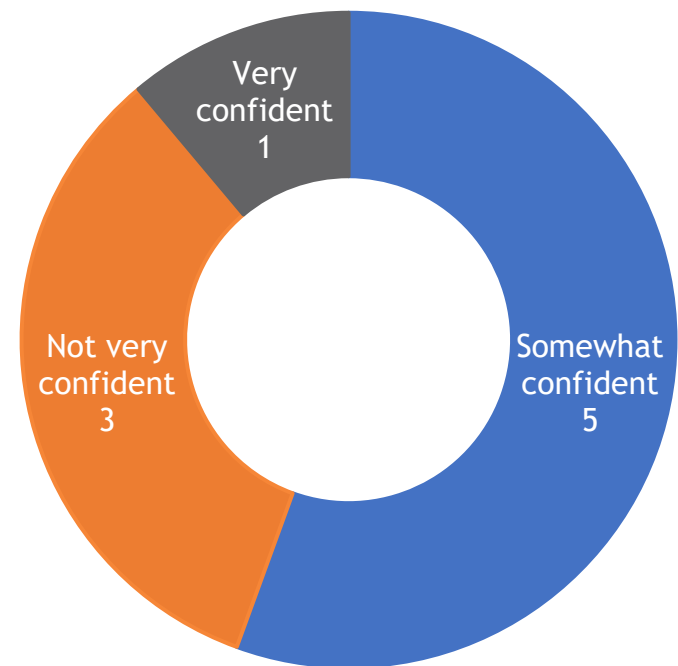
Of the parents who answered the survey, five feel somewhat confident in supporting their child with their options after school, only one said they feel very confident.

Those that feel confident say that they believe in their child and would support them whatever they choose. One said they want their child to make the decision themselves, while another said they would look up anything they did not know already.

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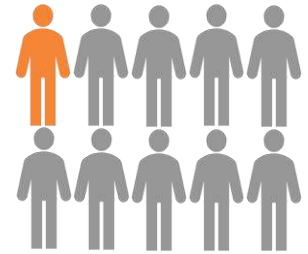
I feel that I would be able to help her by directing her along the right path to be able to succeed with what she would like to do
Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 12

Parents' confidence in supporting their child with their options once they have left school



Parents lack confidence in finding and reviewing information about their child's options.

Only one of the parents had already looked for information about how they could support their child's future options. This parent had looked at college and university websites for information about entry requirements and student finances. They said they found it useful that the requirements were set out clearly and could see what the child could achieve and help them concentrate on getting there.



Parents who haven't looked for information gave the following reasons:

- Concerned that universities would use language that normal people wouldn't use and wouldn't understand;
- Unsure if sites found on Google would be reputable;
- Would not be sure where to look for information;
- Too early for their child to need the information;
- Their child has followed the same path as them so far so had enough knowledge.

Parents feel they are not as confident as they could be due to not getting enough information or support from the school.

Parents who said they do not feel confident are not sure how they can help to support their child. Some feel that things have changed a lot since they were in school, so are unsure of the options that are available now.

Others feel that it depends what their child wants to do as to how confident they'd feel. This also included concerns about if their child went down a different path in their education to them, they would not know how the process worked. For example, parents who had done A Levels would be confident in advising them up to that point but would not be able to help with university.

It was also mentioned that parents do not feel involved in the decision-making process, as some schools or organisations do not provide them with information. They felt that parents are still playing an important role even if they are a young adult, and parents should be included if they want to.

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I have no idea what options they will have apart from college. I have never applied to universities or gone through that process. I do not know about any other options.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Options available to their child and the pathways to get there are seen as useful details to have.

When asked what would make them feel more confident or would be useful to support their child, the majority of parents said that they need details of all the different options available. Details of all the steps needed to reach a particular career or course, such as grades needed or subjects needed to study, was also seen as useful.

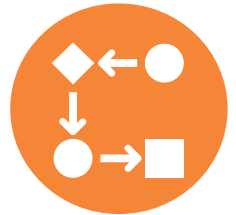
Others would like details of finances involved in the different options and help that might be available. Parents wanted to teach their child to be smart with money, so wanted information about rent, bills and credit cards. Information on tuition fees and student loans was also desired.

Some parents said that they would like to be able to speak to someone about the options available. One mentioned wanting to know what help might be available to those who have special educational needs and how they could access this. Another mentioned that they would need step-by-step guides for specifics of going to university, such as accommodation.

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There are jobs you didn't maybe know about or hear or even touch on, because it was sort of ... something you didn't really know much about, or sort of a new thing coming in

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7



Other suggestions for useful information to have:

Information for children who do not know what they want to do

Recommended jobs if enjoy certain subjects

Information not just focused on university

Information targeted at parents

How to gain work experience

Information about major companies hiring

Agencies or organisations that can help parents

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More information & education targeted at families and how young people can be supported. Knowledge of the agencies and organisations available for info and guidance so that young people can be empowered to approach things independently or with support. Also, a step by step guide of what needs to be done and when for the major pathways

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12

Suggestions of how this information could be best presented to parents included taking information from the child (such as favourite subjects or grades) and using this to create a list of options that could suit the child; flow charts that young people could follow to help them to decide on the different pathways; or case studies to show the different career options and how they reached their goals.

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I'd like some kind of flow charts or step by step guides to how to work out what options are open to young people rather than just telling them about the things out there but leaving it up to them to decide what's accessible etc. Further, if choosing uni what the steps would be, if wanting to work as a cinema usher what the steps would be! It's such a vast amount of pathways and so the information needs to be vast but also not available all at once if that makes sense

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12

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For me, I'm quite happy to sit there and look through it and figure it out in that way, but then not everyone's the same. So I think there's got to be some sort of balance in there. As far as some people might not feel comfortable doing that and clicking on it

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

One parent said it would be useful to have this information when deciding on which GCSEs to choose, so the children can see what direction these choices allow them to access. Another wanted to wait until they'd got through their GCSEs before 'bombarding' them with decisions about whether to go to college or sixth form. This could suggest that a different level of detail could be needed depending on the stage the child is at.

Parents were most likely to want to go to their child's school or college for information.

When asked what source they would use to gain information about their child's options, the most common response was the child's school or college.

Reasons given for this included:

- trusting the school
- the teachers knowing the child and what might be best for them
- not liking technology and searching online

Sources parents would consider included:

Teachers

University / college

Job sites

Friends / family

Google

Government websites

Careers fairs

Careers advisors

Books

Library

Mancroft Advice Project

YouTube

Support Workers

Many parents said they would go to the website of a specific college or university to look at the courses available and the requirements needed, which also might include next steps after finishing. It was seen as more important to get the specific information from those organisations than going to a general website that may refer to requirements for colleges or university which may not be relevant to their child.

Another source mentioned was employment sites, such as Indeed. Others would go to friends or family for their personal experience or ask them to speak to their child about their experiences. Some parents said they would rely on Google searches. Examples of searches include: 'options on leaving school' or 'English literature degree jobs'.

One parent said they would like to go to a website of an organisation that had information about all the different options rather than to a specific university or college website. They felt that an organisation such as this could give you the full picture and lay out all the different options better, which would help to make an informed decision.

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If it had come in a leaflet from a government organisation, or local council or something, and it was all incorporated in the kind of like, the same as uni in the same as work almost like a flowchart, like these are your choices.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12

Conversations about education and future options

All parents were speaking to their child about school or college but only around half had conversations about their child's future.

Around half of parents said that their child was happy to talk to them in detail about what is going on at school. These parents generally had a conversation every day and would just ask how their day had been.

The other half of parents got limited responses from their child when asked. These parents would wait for their child to bring it up, who might tell their parents what they learnt at school if it was something that they found particularly interesting.

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I asked my son how his day had been and what he had done that day. The response I got was the same as I usually get. Mum, its just school. I very rarely get anything more from him than that.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Conversations about how well they were doing at school happen less often. These generally start when the child has received their grades, report or postcard/certification, or if the parent had spoken to the teachers (either over the phone or at parents evening). A few children received a postcard or certificate every week, whereas others were less regular.

The most common topic of conversation was the subjects they were doing well or not so well in. Some would reassure their child about their performance, while others pushed their child to put more effort into school as they could do better.

Parents were least likely to have had conversations about their child's future. Six parents had a conversation about future education or work in the last three months. Of those that had spoken to their child in the last three months, four referenced one conversation, two had only a few conversations.

Most common conversations about their child's future involved parents listening to their child's ideas and being supportive. Others talked through the different subjects the child enjoys and what that could mean. Some parents tried to point their child in the right direction. A few of the conversations revolved around their child being worried about their GCSE option choices.

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We've spoken about her choice in GCSEs, which she needs to take in year eight, which is the next coming September. And that has her very worried. Because she doesn't know what she wants to be, you know, it's a young age to choose. What could possibly be her future in, in everything really, from education through to job choices.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7

Parents who had a conversation in the last three months about....



10 out of 10 spoke to their child about what they are doing at school / college



10 out of 10 spoke to their child about how they are doing at school / college



6 out of 10 spoke to their child about plans for future education/work

Having conversations with their child can improve their child's confidence at school and gives parents the opportunity to learn about their child.

Some parents felt that talking about their performance gave their child more confidence in their abilities. Explaining their school topic can help their child to learn and understand the topic; others said their child feels smart if it's something the parent did not know it.

Benefits for the child:

Help child to learn and understand

Child knows parent is interested

Child feels smart / confident

Relieves their child's worries

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I think it's the confidence in herself that yes, she's actually capable of being in those groups that she is more than capable. And she needs to have a little bit more confidence in herself.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7

Speaking about their options can help to relieve their worries and takes a weight off their mind. One said that their child knows that there are lots of doors or avenues available so if they don't get the grades it's not the end of the world, and you can retrain when they are older if they want.

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It helps them to remember what they've learnt because they then relaying it back to me. And I think that's really good. And also, they might, they might find that actually, what they didn't think they didn't like, in the lesson wasn't isn't as bad. Once the lessons over and they're, you know, telling someone else, what happened. So I think it just gives them a clearer mind. Yeah, and helps and makes them realise, Oh, actually, somebody is interested in what I'm learning, not just the teacher.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7

Parents also said that they get benefits from speaking to their child about school or their future. Most notably, it helped them to learn more about their child. Some thought it was a good opportunity to ask their child if they needed help in any subjects.

Parents liked to hear about what their child found interesting or enjoyed at school. A couple liked to understand how their child was feeling about school.

Benefits for the parent:

Learn if child needs support

Learn what child enjoys

Learn how child feels about school

Learn what child finds interesting

Parents struggle to speak with their children due to their child's lack of interest or feel that it is too early to put pressure on their child.

The most common reason given for what is stopping them from having conversations with their child about school/college or their future was their child's lack of interest in talking about it. The child's mood or what their child is doing could also impact their willingness to speak to their parents.

Some parents who didn't speak to their child often would like to have more conversations. One parent said that they would like more information from the school about what they are learning so this could help them lead the conversation, rather than relying on the child to volunteer information.

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He hates it, absolutely hates it.... He's quiet. He doesn't share things. He keeps himself to himself all the time. Unless you're playing Fortnite, then he don't shut up.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12



Parents who did not speak about their child's future said that they would once their child had a better idea of what they want to do or would try to gradually speak about it as to not overwhelm their child.

For one parent, their child wants to go straight into work, and they do not know how to convince him otherwise as they agree with his arguments and do not want to force him to continue education.

Parents who had not had conversations about their child's future education or work gave the following reasons:

Factors relating to the child:

Too young

Too much pressure

Has a lot of time to decide

Keep changing their mind

Factors relating to the parent:

Don't have knowledge

Unsure how to help

COVID uncertainty

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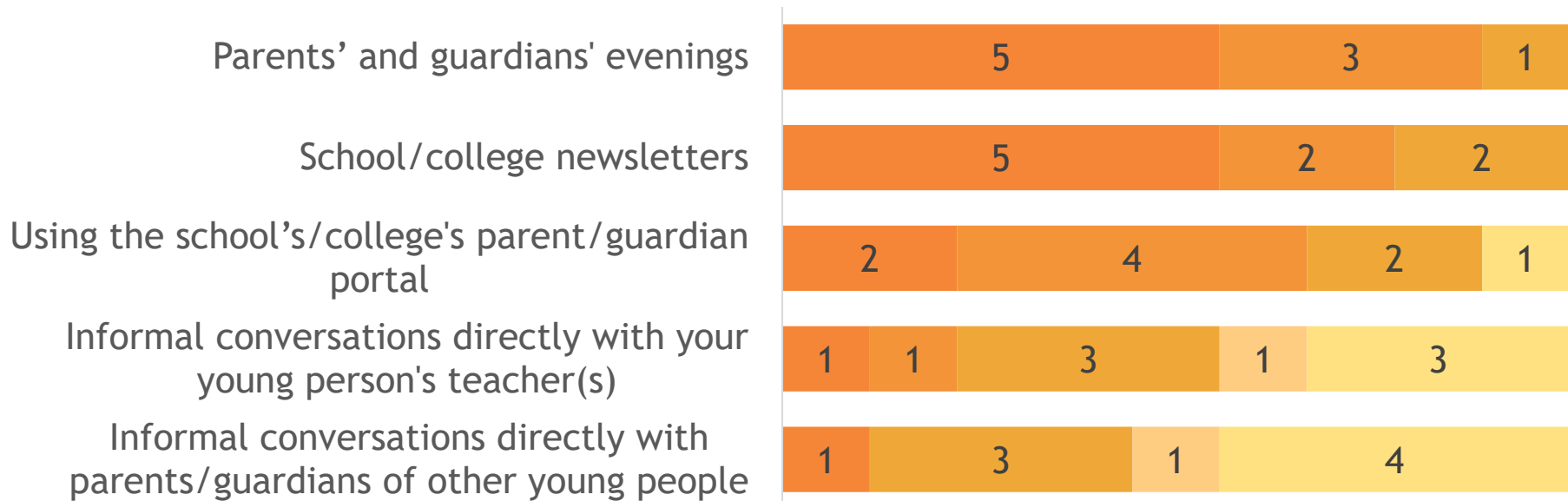
We have spoken about it in the past but I feel that young people have had enough to deal with and enough pressure with Covid and restrictions without adding more about something that is several years away.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Engaging with school

Parents are most likely to be engaged in parents' evenings and school newsletters

Parents responses to 'How often do you attend or take part in the following?'



- Every opportunity I get
- Most opportunities I get
- Some opportunities I get
- I never do this but I'm aware that I can
- I wasn't aware of this/my young person's school or college does not offer this

Greater engagement with schools helped parents to talk more with their child about their education and future prospects.

Parents who engaged in activities with the school said it helped them to start conversations with their child, especially if the child is not forthcoming with information, this allows the parent to lead the conversation.

Parents felt it was useful to go to parents' evenings to know how well their child was doing. Parents also liked to know what their child needs to improve on. Other benefits included knowing what the child enjoys, raising concerns, knowing who the teachers are, and knowing how the child is getting on with other students.

Parents feel that getting updates from the teachers in between parents' evenings can be useful, particularly those whose child would not otherwise tell them.

Some of the parents felt that newsletters, emails or portal updates could be useful for important updates about the school or year groups or have handy dates that they need. However, there was boring information such as uniform or attendance that they did not feel was necessary.

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[I'd be more confident to have a conversation with my child if teachers] actually gave information [about my child] rather than me having to guess or ask him.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Those that spoke with their child's friends' parents about school found this to be useful as they sometimes had information that they did not. One said that they did not like technology so struggled with getting online updates, but their friend would send them any important information.

To help improve their engagement, parents would like to receive more specific information about their child, or their year group, such as what the child's class is studying. More regular communication would be useful for parents to understand how their child can improve.

Some parents would like the newsletters to include information about GCSE options or career information. Those that had received this information felt it was more targeted at the child but sent to the parent.

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It's useful to hear from the teachers on how my children are doing although this often feels pretty generic and I sometimes wonder if they actually know my child that well. It's good to read newsletters to see what's going on throughout the school but I don't often follow up on the careers guidance info as it never seems that applicable. The newsletters are sent to parents and yet most of the info is aimed at the students, why not send to them also?

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12



Lack of technology or confidence in using technology can impact parental engagement, as well as work or childcare commitments.

Parents mentioned that they can be contacted by the school while they are at work meaning they are unable to return the call. One single parent mentioned that they struggle to go events held in the evening, when they need to look after their young child.

A few of the parents mentioned not having the technology to access certain services offered by the school and having to rely on smartphones to read important information. Others don't feel confident using technology for videos calls or accessing apps. One said she felt overwhelmed by the number of emails she receives.

Reasons for not getting involved in school activities included:

Work commitments

Confidence with
technology

Technology issues

Childcare commitments

COVID restrictions

Costs involved

Parents feel that they are not given the opportunities to engage with other parents or teachers.

Parents do not speak to the teachers or other parents at the school because their child goes on their own and there is not the opportunity to speak at the school gates like there is at junior schools.

A couple said that they did not know of any other parents at the current school as their child had moved schools. A few said that they were happy to not speak to other parents, as they didn't feel that they'd get anything useful from it. However, there was some appetite for more engagement here, with a couple of parents saying that it might be useful to speak to other parents to compare their child's experiences, to see if it was just their child who was having certain issues.

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I meet his friends, sometimes, if he goes to meet his friends, he brings a friend around here, but very rarely do I see any parents from school. So I think that possibly is more isolating in that sense when they start High School, because you haven't got that, you know, standing on the playground having a chat.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Some parents felt that they did not feel engaged with the school as they were only contacted or involved if there was something negative happening or an issue with their child and would like to be given more positive information.

Most of the parents said that if there was an issue with their child they would get in touch with the teachers. But parents do not contact the teachers for the following reasons:

- not wanting to bother them
- not having contact information
- wanting their child to be responsible
- feeling patronised by the teachers
- their child is private and wouldn't want them speaking to teachers.

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Due to covid parents evening was online | 5 minute slots with each teacher. This was not really enough time to discuss anything or make a plan of action. Other than that I do not hear from school other than generic letters sent to all. I do not feel that school involve the parent enough.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

How to best target and reach parents

Information that could help parents and their children should be provided through the school or social media.

Many parents said that they would want information and support about their child's future options to be sent to them via the school/college, either through an email or a letter sent home. Others would like to see adverts on social media, such as targeted ads to parents on Facebook who are part of school groups.

Other methods of communication mentioned were adverts on TV or having posters around locally such as in the library or word of mouth through friends.

It was also suggested that parents should be provided with all the information, so then parents can decide if they want to engage.

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It would be good if the information came directly from school. A website, contact number for booklet etc. would all be helpful. If I knew that this would help in making an informed decision with my child about their options, I would jump at the chance

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

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It's difficult to provide that kind of service [that neaco provides], because naturally it's going to come via the school. But ... if you don't feel particularly engaged with the school in the first place, then anything that they ... dish out is not particularly engaging.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12

The information being of benefit to their child would be an important draw for parents. Having all the information in one easy place was another plus for parents. Others suggested that the information should be brutally honest, clear, and independent. Parents would like it to highlight that there are multiple paths that children can follow, and university is not the best or only option.

Parents feel the information would also need to engage the children. The information should be provided to children also, so if the parents are not interested, the child has everything they need.

It was suggested that the information should be provided in different methods, such as online, hard copy or in person, so there is something for everyone.

Providing reviews of the site and highlighting benefits of parents being involved could help encourage parents to get involved.

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[There is] definitely a lot of bias about going towards University and not necessarily the other options that are available. So yeah, I think that, that more of a broad lots more areas of advice, rather than just Your next step is a degree would be good.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 2, child in year 12

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I think that should be it should cover all angles, you know, that is a lecture some people like a lecture some people like hands on. Some people like social media, some people like personal stuff, I think you should just keep all the avenues open and not just keep to one particular thing.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7

Parents would need the information about their child's future options to come from an impartial source.

When asked what might put them off an organisation that supports parents with their child's options, some said that they would not like it if the organisation was affiliated with something they did not agree with, or which they felt might be trying to push them in a certain direction. For example, being associated to a specific university, sponsored by a company, or have a political or religious agenda. As well as being independent, parents also mentioned that they would like the information to come through an accredited or local organisation.

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I'm quite inquisitive. So I probably look them up just to see what they're about and who they are. Whether they're linked to some, you know, I might be a bit sceptical sometimes think, are you linked to a particular you know, is there a reason you're doing what you're doing? Or are you just genuinely there to support?

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

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If they were affiliated to a particular company or group that I did not feel was a good influence / example. They would need to be independent.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Aspects that may put a parents off an organisation / information source:

Affiliations

Not easy to use

Boring

Lack of time

Speaking with a person

Costs

A website being wordy and ‘a bit grey’ might put parents off using a specific source, as well as it being hard to find things on the website. Talking to someone in person or face-to-face was also listed as a something that might stop someone from looking further.

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[It would put me off an organization] if I went to the website, and it was really jumbled, and you didn't really know what you were looking for.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8



Emails were the most popular method for presenting information about their child's future, followed by hard-copy formats.

The majority of parents said they would like to receive direct emails. Many would like to receive a booklet or newsletter (hard-copy) which could make it easier for them to read through with their child. Some said they would like blogs as they can go through these at their own pace.

A couple suggested a forum to allow parents to discuss with each other, for example accommodation options or finances at university. They would like to be able to read about other parents' experiences and ask questions. Others said they would like the information to be displayed on social media, with one saying they could share with other parent friends. Others would prefer to be able to speak to someone than look at a website. Only one said they would like to watch videos.



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I would want to know] options for leaving school, definitely, [through] some sort of newsletter or booklet so that I could look through with my child and explain it too.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 8

Parents were interested in attending an event, particularly if it was held in-person.

Many parents said they would be interested in attending an event if they felt it would help their child, particularly if it would help them with choosing their options. A couple of parents said they would like to bring their child along with them. A few of the parents said they prefer to be told information than reading, so an event would be better for them. One said they would like to attend to pick up leaflets and booklets to take home to read, rather than reading online.

The majority of parents would prefer the events to be held in person. Parents would like to meet other parents in the same position or feel it would be easier to ask questions. One would like it to be a more hands on event, rather than a lecture, as this would be more engaging.

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Sometimes it's better instead of just reading the information to actually have someone tell you the information physically. And it'd be good, I think to see other like minded parents or guardians, with their children that care enough to go to these things.

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 7

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I would be interested in this because it would help me talk with my child about her option and help me explain them better to her

Norfolk, POLAR 4 Quintile 1, child in year 12

One parent said they would prefer the event to be held online, as they would like to just observe and wouldn't have to get involved if they didn't feel comfortable. They said it would also be useful to be able to watch a recording at a later date. Another parent said that, although they'd prefer it to be in person, they would be happy to go to an online event if they felt they would get the same level of support.



To make parents more confident or comfortable attending an event, a few parents would like the event to be held locally so they did not have to travel too far. A couple would like to be provided with all the relevant information about where it is held and how to get there. One parent said they would like it to be held at the school as they are comfortable there and it shows the school is confident in the information.

Concluding thoughts

Concluding thoughts

The research suggests that much more could be done to improve the confidence of parents living in low participation areas in their journey to support their young person with their future options. Educating parents who lack prior experience of post-16 education about their child's options is critical to break down the barriers which lead to this lack of confidence in their own abilities and advice.

Trust was a key barrier which must be addressed to foster positive engagement with parents. The findings allude to a complex relationship between parents and schools. While parents recognise that schools are the most trustworthy source to advise and educate their child, they do not feel empowered to approach teachers directly. Greater opportunities for engagement with teachers in a more informal setting may help to break down such barriers.

Parents were also wary of information sources which they felt may unduly influence their child into considering certain options over others. It is possible such fears are compounded by a lack of information and digital literacy skills; providing parents with the tools to critically evaluate the information they are exposed to online regarding higher education may benefit parents.

Positively, there was appetite among parents for greater outreach, and parents will be particularly keen if activities provide them with the direct resources they need to have better conversations with their children and to interact with other parents in similar situations.

Background

Background

neaco is delivered through a partnership of local universities and further education colleges. It exists to help young people aged 13-19 consider their study options after school or college who live in areas identified by the Government with low rates of progression to higher education.

It is known that parents and carers are key influencers on the next step choices that young people make and institutions regularly target resources at parents and carers to ensure they have everything they need to support their children or wards. However, there are large numbers of parents and carers of priority students who don't engage in the formal/informal channels and are therefore not easily reached.

neaco commissioned Alterline to better understand how to reach the parents and carers of young people who are currently labelled 'hard-to-reach' and 'non-responsive'. The research would explore the barriers to engagement and identify alternative ways to earn their trust and provide appropriate services to enable them to support their child/ward.

The project aimed:

1. To understand the barriers facing target parents and carers in engaging with formal and informal activities that would enable them to access information and support for their child's/ward's future education
2. To understand how neaco can reach these target parents and carers.

3. To understand current information sources that the target parents and carers access to support their child/ward.
4. To understand how neaco can enable target parents and carers to engage with their child's/ward's future education
5. To understand how the target parents and carers would want to access information and support.
6. To understand how to support target parents and carers to transition from being passive to interacting with social media campaigns and activities aimed at them.

Methodology

Recruitment

Alterline worked with the neaco team to produce a communications and outreach plan drawing on local contacts and knowledge to engage with teachers, young people, parents and other local partners to spread the word about the project. We developed a clear but sensitive set of messaging to describe the purpose of the project and the parents and guardians we wanted to speak to. We then produced a range of emails, social media posts, social media adverts, flyers and presentations slides to communicate those messages and recruit the participants.

Online one to one interviews and qualitative questionnaire

Alterline designed a discussion guide in collaboration with neaco based on the research objectives of the project for a researcher led interview. This interview would last between 30 and 45 minutes and could take place over the phone or via video conferencing. This discussion guide was also adapted into an online qualitative questionnaire for parents/guardians to complete in their own time.

Parents/guardians had the option to take part just in the qualitative questionnaire, just in the researcher-led interview, or to take part in both stages. If they took part in both stages, participants would take part in the qualitative questionnaire prior to the researcher-led interview.

The final sample

Parents of young people aged between 11 and 18 who live in areas identified by the Government with low rates of progression to higher education (POLAR 4 Quintile 1 and 2*) were targeted. Parents also needed to be aged 30 and over and have no prior experience of higher education.

In total, 7 parents took part in the interview between 26th July and 16th August 2021 and 9 parents took part in the survey between 15th July and 11th August 2021. 6 parents took part in both the survey and interview and there were 10 participants in total.

Activities through schools and Facebook were the most successful at achieving the sample overall, however, there was some success at a lesser rate with partner social media. A full list of sources can be found in the Recruitment and Outreach plan.

*Visit the Office for Students (OfS) website for more information on the participation of local areas (POLAR) classification: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/>

Sample demographics

Region		
Norfolk	9	90%
Outside Norfolk	1	10%

Age		
30-39	5	50%
40-49	5	50%

Postcode		
POLAR 4 Quintile 1*	8	80%
POLAR 4 Quintile 2*	2	20%

Child/children's year group		
Year 7	4	40%
Year 8	3	30%
Year 10	2	20%
Year 12	3	30%
Year 13	1	10%

Highest qualification		
GCSEs, NVQ levels 1 and 2, BTEC levels 1 & 2, Scottish National 5 or equivalent to any of these	6	60%
University entry qualifications (e.g. AS level, A level, NVQ level 3, Scottish Higher, BTEC level 3, Scottish 6th year certificate (CSYS), Higher Education Access qualification or equivalent to any of these)	3	30%
Other higher education qualification, below degree level (e.g. NVQ levels 4 and 5, Foundation degree, Diploma in higher education, RSA higher diploma, HNC/HND, BTEC higher levels 4 &5 or equivalent to any of these)	1	10%

Child/children's school		
Secondary School	9	90%
College or Sixth Form	2	20%

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alterline

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