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The

Ultimate

Parents' Guide

to

Life

After

School

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The background of the page features a stylized illustration of trees and foliage in various shades of blue. The trees have rounded, cloud-like canopies and simple trunks. The foliage at the bottom consists of various leaf shapes. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Introduction

Every parent wants the best for their child. But what if you don't know what the best looks like?

In today's world, where industries are evolving and workplace norms are shifting, it can be challenging for parents to guide their children through life after school.

From the rise of advanced technology and AI to the resurgence of apprenticeships, there is plenty to consider for parents and students alike.

This guide will tackle the key talking points, challenges and opportunities that young people face today. We'll explore the latest career trends, statistics and predictions while sharing practical tips and insights from industry professionals who lead our work experience programmes to help parents navigate conversations with their children about life after school.

So, what does life after school really look like for students today?

Life After School: Options & Pathways

The best place to start is outlining the various routes available to students after school. Career paths are no longer linear. People may move between education and work, constantly retraining and shifting careers.

While understanding this flexibility can help reduce the pressure, it's important that parents engage and explore the pathways available to find the one aligned to their child's interests, strengths and goals.

Here are the typical routes students pursue after school:

University and Higher Education

University remains a popular choice, with the UK higher education entry rate rising from 24.7% in 2006 to 36.4% in 2024. All higher education applications in the UK are submitted online via UCAS.

Many professional careers require formal qualifications, including medicine and law. However, not all degrees offer the same outcomes, so it's important to understand the differences.

Undergraduate degrees: Traditional Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees in the UK last three or four years and usually require entry requirements, such as specific A-Levels. It is common for undergraduate degrees to offer a year-long industry placement or the opportunity to study abroad.

Postgraduate degrees: Master's degrees are postgraduate academic qualifications that follow an undergraduate degree and provide specialised knowledge in a specific field. A master's degree typically lasts 12-18 months in the UK.



Vocational degrees: Practical, career-focused courses, including nursing and teaching, offer specialised training in workplaces with practical assessments.

Integrated master's degrees: Some universities combine undergraduate and postgraduate studies, providing students with two qualifications. These degrees typically last four years.

While a degree can open doors to professional careers and is still linked to higher employment rates overall, it does not guarantee a job. The graduate job market is challenging, with an increased number of graduates competing for fewer entry-level roles and competitive graduate schemes.

If you're still unsure whether university is right for your child, read this article exploring the various factors that must be considered when deciding to pursue higher education.



50,000
new apprenticeship places
to be made in the next 3 years

The government has also recently announced plans to introduce an apprenticeship clearing system to provide alternative placements for those who miss out.

Here are the different levels of apprenticeships in England, Wales and Northern Ireland:

Intermediate	Level 2 - GCSE standard
Advanced	Level 3 - A-Level standard
Higher	Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 - foundation degree or above
Degree	Levels 6 and 7 – bachelor's or master's degree

Learn more about apprenticeships [here](#).

Degree apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships combine academic study with industry experience. Students can earn a salary while gaining a degree and don't pay tuition fees, which makes them an increasingly attractive option for students.

Degree apprenticeships typically follow an 80% work, 20% study structure, which usually translates to four days of work and one day of study per week. They can last between three and six years and offer a direct route into professional roles.

Degree apprenticeships are available in a growing number of fields, including engineering, finance and business management.

Apprenticeships allow students to enter the workforce from the age of 16 in the UK.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships offer hands-on training across a wide range of industries. Seen as an alternative to higher education, they allow students to enter the workforce from the age of 16 in the UK.

People often choose an apprenticeship if they know the career they want to pursue. Any employer can hire apprentices, with the most popular apprenticeships in 2024-25 in the UK being in business, administration and law.

There were 736,500 apprentices in England in 2023-24, with under-19s making up 23% of new apprentices. However, the number of young people starting apprenticeships has fallen by almost 40% in the past decade, prompting the UK government to announce plans to expand youth apprenticeships to 50,000 places over the next three years.

You can explore available apprenticeships via the UK's National Apprenticeship Service [here](#).

Alternative routes

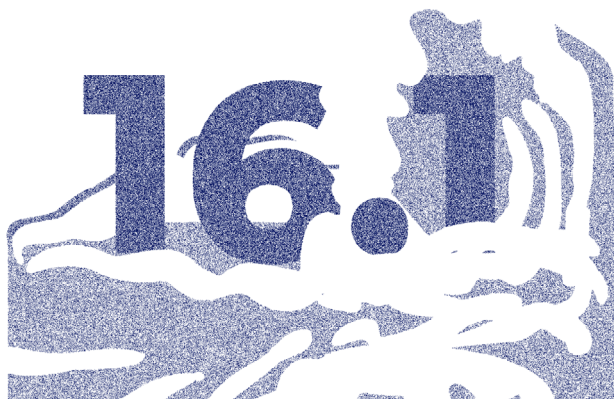
Some students opt for alternative routes, such as the armed forces, taking a gap year or entering the workforce directly. These pathways are credible options for students who may feel that an apprenticeship or further studies are not suitable for them at that moment.

While the armed forces provide structured training, qualifications and career progression, some students may opt to move into full-time employment after school or college and start earning a salary immediately.

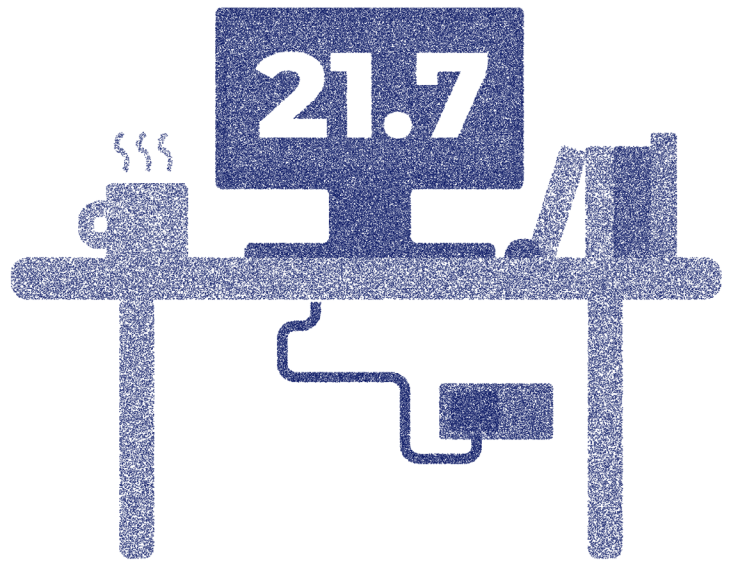
Gap years are popular among students who may need more time to gain a wider perspective before committing to a long-term path. A gap year often precedes higher education and may include travelling, internships and volunteering.

Current Job Market Challenges for Young People

It's no secret that unemployment levels among young people in the UK are concerning for all involved. Unemployment in the UK has risen to 16.1% among 16 to 24-year-olds, the highest level in over a decade.



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21.7 job applications made on average by final-year students in 2025

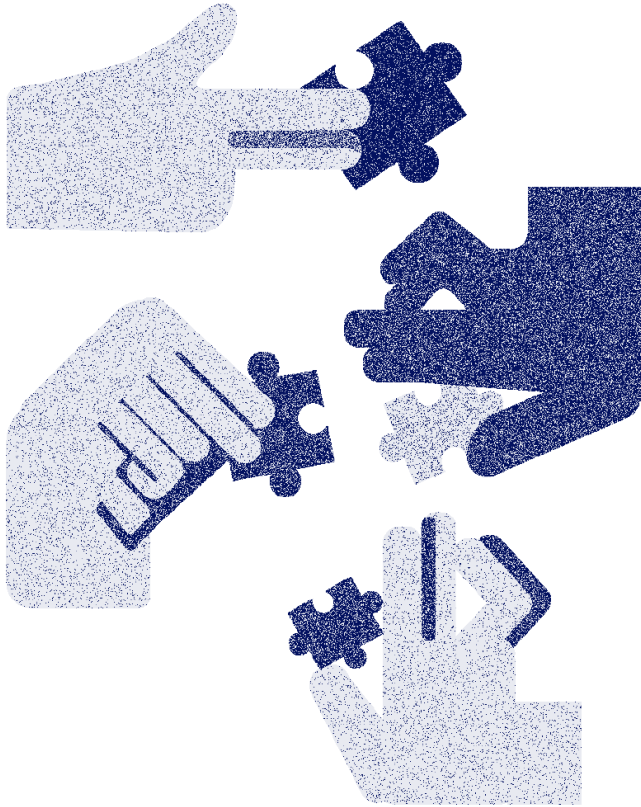
Economic uncertainty, rising costs and the impact of emerging technology have made the transition from education into work challenging in recent years.

While the unemployment rate for graduates remains lower at 6%, the job market is increasingly competitive.

Rebecca Massie, Founder of Juno Pets, explained that employers are looking for more than just a degree. She said: "Having a good degree is simply not enough anymore! Employers are looking for real-world experience and drive/dedication in their employees, and it's essential to be able to show that."

According to a High Fliers study, the number of final-year students who secured a job by the February before graduation dropped from 33% in 2023 to 27% in 2025, while the average number of applications made by final-year students in 2025 was 21.7, up from 12.7 in 2023.

Perhaps the most concerning finding is that job postings for graduates have fallen by 33% on the online job site Indeed, with declines in desirable graduate employment sectors, including marketing, human resources and accounting.



What can parents do to help?

As the threat of advanced technology and rising living costs adds urgency and fear for young people, it is essential for parents to reassure their child that the job market often fluctuates and there are still opportunities available.

From exploring work experience opportunities and using job websites like Prospects to actively engaging with a school's careers advisors, parents can support their child's efforts and help them pursue their dream career.

Jodine Williams, Chartered Sports & Exercise Psychologist, shared her advice for parents supporting their children. She said:

“The most valuable advice I can offer is to take the time to understand what your child wants to do and, importantly, why.”

“Encourage them to develop skills that support their chosen path, while also building transferable skills that will open doors to a range of future opportunities

Read more about how parents can help in our parent tips section in this guide.

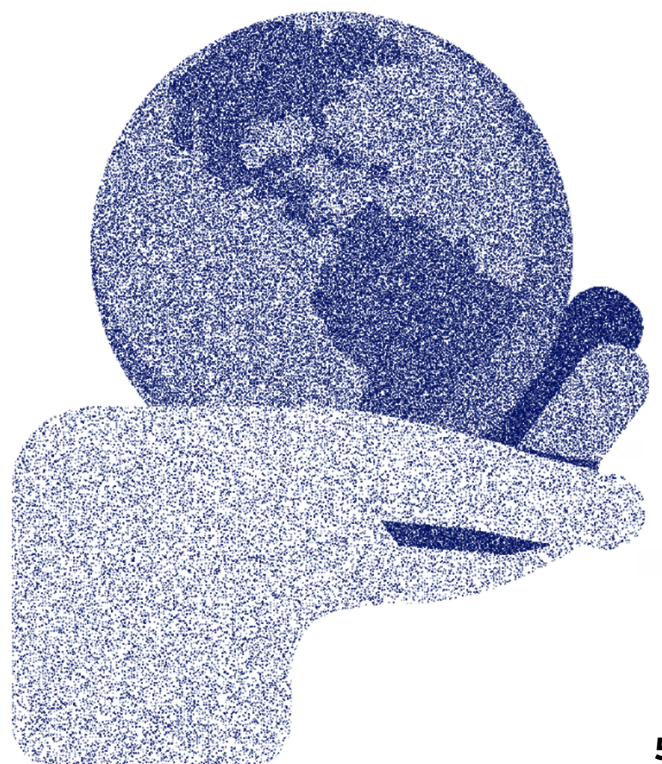
Evolving Professional World: Impact of AI & Career Trends

From advanced technology and automation to growing skills gaps, global career trends continue to shape the future job market for young people.

The impact of global career trends has been seen before. However, the rate of advancement and implementation of new, highly effective technology has sent shockwaves throughout the world.

Today, companies are focusing on streamlining their processes, with emphasis on productivity, efficiency and cost-saving measures.

So, what does this mean for young people entering the professional world?





The rise of AI and advanced technology

In May 2025, Dario Amodei, CEO of AI company Anthropic, warned that half of all entry-level jobs in areas such as administration and tech could be wiped out by AI within five years.

Based on the advancement in AI and automation and the accelerated rate of change, experts predict that between one and three million jobs in declining occupations could potentially disappear by 2035.

While this sounds concerning, it does not paint the whole picture. The shift towards increasingly professional and technical occupations has created many new types of roles and career paths, such as AI Ethicist, Metaverse Experience Designer and Carbon Capture Engineer.

The European Employment Services predicts that by 2030, AI will create more jobs than it eliminates, especially in high-growth sectors such as green tech, healthcare innovation, digital services and creative media.

A recent report by the European Commission forecasts that in scenarios where AI tools become widespread, youth employment will grow significantly, especially in the emerging tech and green sectors.

Alexandra Diaconu, a Consumer Research Manager at Just Group PLC, shared this optimism for the future of entry-level roles but stressed the importance of training and adaptation.

She said: “I think new roles will emerge and human skill still matters – creativity, communication, empathy and problem solving are hard to automate. Education and training must keep up with the change. We must all learn to adapt.”

Therefore, it is important that parents do not fear the changes in the job market and remain positive about the opportunities that advanced technology will bring for young people, who can lead the change.

Shift towards transferable skills

As we continue to embrace the digital world, it heightens the importance of soft and transferable skills.

Kai Hussein, Founder of multiple businesses across automation, legal tech and clean tech, said: “Employers increasingly operate in fast-changing environments, so hiring purely for technical capability is no longer sufficient.

“Transferable skills, such as adaptability, resilience, initiative and problem-solving, are now more predictive of long-term success as businesses must adapt constantly to survive in today’s environment.”

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) identified six essential employment skills young people must have in its Skills Imperative 2035. These skills are:

Communication

Collaboration

Creative thinking

Organisation, planning and prioritisation

Problem-solving and decision making

Information literacy

These skills are not tied to a single role, they enable young people to adapt, learn and grow in a wide range of industries. They are all essential in a digitally connected world and lead to high productivity and performance.

Individuals must be able to share ideas clearly, listen effectively and work with global teams while managing multiple tasks in fast-paced digital environments.

Problem-solving, decision-making and creative thinking are key in environments dominated by automation to help shape change and opportunities, while information literacy allows individuals to evaluate information and spot misinformation in the sea of online content.

How to Engage in Career-Focused Conversations with Your Child

For many young people entering the professional world, their parents are the most important source of career guidance.

According to Talking Heads, around 70% of young people turn to their parents or carers first for advice, yet 65% of parents say they want more support in having conversations with their child about the future.

One of the main issues is a lack of knowledge and awareness. Many adults did not have access to broad career information themselves. Below are some stand-out statistics from a recent Education and Employers study, which surveyed 2,000 adults:

72% say they did not fully understand the opportunities available when they were younger.



68% were unaware of the job they currently do while at school

More than half now work in roles unrelated to their childhood expectations.

The findings highlight how quickly the job market evolves and why it can be challenging for parents to feel confident in speaking about careers with their children and providing informed advice.



How can parents approach career conversations with their children?

Firstly, it's important to acknowledge that you won't have all the answers. What matters is that you stay curious and engaged to support your child.

Dr Ingrid Tamuyeye, a Clinical Psychologist, shared that honesty is key to approaching conversations about the future with young people. She said:

“Be honest about how much you don't know about the precariousness of life after school, while also acknowledging that they may feel similarly. Children may need reassurance that this is not a failure on their part but rather a consequence of the current climate.”

Here are some of the things you can do to help kickstart meaningful career conversations:

- Ask questions about your child's interests and motivations
- Explore how subjects at school link to real-world career paths and industries
- Lean on your personal and professional experiences to answer your child's questions
- Follow up and engage in multiple conversations
- Normalise uncertainty and explain that careers are no longer linear
- Be proactive in finding the answers to questions with your child

Work Experience & Careers Provision

Work experience remains the key to unlocking knowledge and gaining exposure to the real world. But what counts as work experience?

Work experience encompasses part-time jobs, volunteering, shadowing a professional in their workplace, structured internships and career insight programmes. Any professional setting where you are developing and applying skills can be considered valuable work experience.

However, it's important for students to gain meaningful experience in their desired field to determine whether a career is right for them. Work experience is also a requirement for some fields to apply for further studies, such as medical sciences.

While some structured work experience programmes exist, the quantity and quality of opportunities available to under-18s are limited, and it generally requires the individual to seek and create opportunities independently.

It's highly recommended to explore local options, identify potential shadowing opportunities and prepare an impactful enquiry outlining your background, motivations and ways you can support.

Another great way to develop examples of skills in action is to pursue independent projects to document your abilities, such as building a website, organising an event, raising awareness or money for an issue or developing a portfolio of creative work.

The reality of work experience in 2026

Employers today face various barriers to providing work experience placements, particularly for those under 18, due to safeguarding and regulatory requirements.

Without early exposure to real workplaces, young people can't make informed career decisions and lack the skills, confidence and hands-on experiences gained through work experience placements.

Research from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found that only 47% of 18-24-year-olds feel ready for work when they leave education, and two in five have never completed any form of work experience.

2 IN 5

18-24 year olds have never done work experience

The IPPR study also found that the same age range believed that opportunities depend on personal connections, with 60% saying work experience relies on who you know.

At InvestIN, we want to change that. We offer work experience programmes in 15 of the world's most competitive careers for students aged 12-18.

Led by experienced professionals, the career-focused summer schools provide young people with early industry exposure through immersive career simulations and practical experiences. Find out more [here](#).

Access to careers advice at school

All students in the UK should have access to careers guidance at school. It is an important bridge between school and the professional world and often facilitates the first conversations for young people about life after school.

Gatsby Benchmarks are a framework of eight research-based guidelines defining world-class careers provision in English schools and colleges. While schools are working to improve careers provision in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks, some key challenges remain.

A recent Education and Employers study found that 48% of young people rate their careers advice as poor or non-existent, and 57% of parents are worried their children aren't getting enough access to career information.

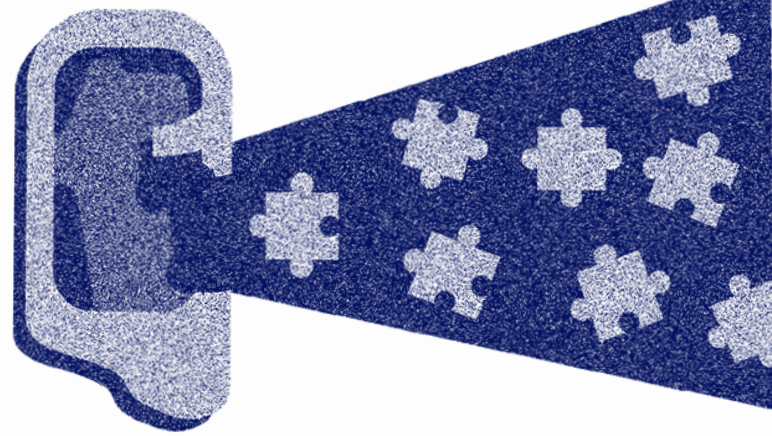
48%

rate their careers advice as poor or non-existent

This is despite 46% of young people in the same study revealing they are uncertain about their career options, an increase of over 20% since 2018.

In light of this, it's important for parents to encourage their children to speak with their school's careers advisors and for parents themselves to actively engage with the school's provision.

This can help parents better understand the job market and the opportunities available to their children. Careers advisors can also answer your questions and advise you on work experience opportunities for young people.



Top Tips for Parents and Carers

Now that you understand the challenges that young people face while navigating life after school, it's time to learn how you can take practical steps to support your child.

Here are our top 10 tips for parents and carers:

Stay informed

Dedicate time to learning about different pathways and emerging career trends. This will give you more knowledge about the current landscape to help you guide conversations with more confidence.

Champion strengths and interests

As a parent, you know as well as anyone what your child is interested in and passionate about, so encourage them to explore their interests and show them what that may look like as a career in the real world.

Encourage exploration

Support your child in trying different activities, from online courses and volunteering to pursuing passion projects. Gaining diverse experiences and learning about your strengths can help build key skills and clarity.

Use your network

If you don't have the answer or solution, your network might! Reach out to friends, family and others in your network who can offer insight into their roles. A simple conversation or shadowing opportunities can inspire young people.

Engage with schools

Stay connected with your child's school and its careers provision. Attend events, ask questions and understand what support is available for you and your child.

Focus on skills, not just outcomes

As you've read, transferable skills such as communication, organisation and problem-solving are key to unlocking diverse career paths. Parents should help their children develop these skills in everyday life.

Remain open and curious

You do not need to have all the answers. Showing a willingness to learn alongside your child and actively seeking answers and solutions can be just as important.

Encourage initiative and proactiveness

Whether it's independent research, creating a blog, organising an event or applying for work experience, it's important to encourage young people to make their own success. Small actions can make a big difference.

Let them lead

While parents are encouraged to initiate conversations about life after school, it's important that young people lead these conversations. Ask questions, listen and encourage them to dive deeper.

Keep conversations positive

Some of the challenges young people face today are hard to ignore, but it's essential to stay positive and focus on opportunities. Normalise uncertainty and anxiety around the future, focus on your child's favourite subjects and strengths and initiate regular conversations.



Next Steps: Supporting Your Child Through Life After School

Every young person is different. Some may know exactly what their dream job is and how they will get there, while most are often unsure what life after school looks like and what options are available to them.

Navigating real-world challenges and chasing limited opportunities requires support, guidance and experience. That's where parents come in.

For parents, the role is shifting from having the answers to helping your children ask the right questions, explore their options and build the skills to futureproof their careers.

Instead of fearing the unknown, parents must champion lifelong learning and go on this exciting journey with their children with a positive, open mind. With the right support, young people can reach their goals and become the leaders of tomorrow.



How can InvestIN help?

Life after school can feel daunting for both students and parents. At InvestIN, we understand the challenges that young people face today and offer a solution to the limited access to work experience placements.

We believe that early industry exposure is essential for young people to gain valuable experience, skills and connections.

Our work experience programmes are designed to provide just that, with industry visits, skill development and up to 65 hours of contact time with industry professionals.

Among our 15 career programmes are some of the most challenging industries to secure work experience, including engineering, healthcare and psychology. We give students the opportunity to stand out from others and prepare for life after school through practical industry experience, additional UCAS points and application support.

Explore our Weekend and Summer Experience Programmes [here](#) and help your child gain valuable industry experience.

Helpful Resources for Parents

InvestIN Career Quiz: [Career Quiz – InvestIN Education](#)

InvestIN Parent Webinar Recording: [A Parent's Guide to Life After School](#)

InvestIN Parent Resource: <https://docsend.com/v/9v3vn/investinparentresource>

Talking Futures: [Making your career conversations easier](#)

Future of Jobs Report: [The Future of Jobs Report 2025 | World Economic Forum](#)

Prospects: [Prospects | Job & Course Search | Career & University Advice](#)

UCAS Discover: [Advice for Parents https://www.ucas.com/discover/advice-for-parents-guardians-and-carers](https://www.ucas.com/discover/advice-for-parents-guardians-and-carers)

Understanding the new UCAS personal statement format: [How to make your University application stand out](#)