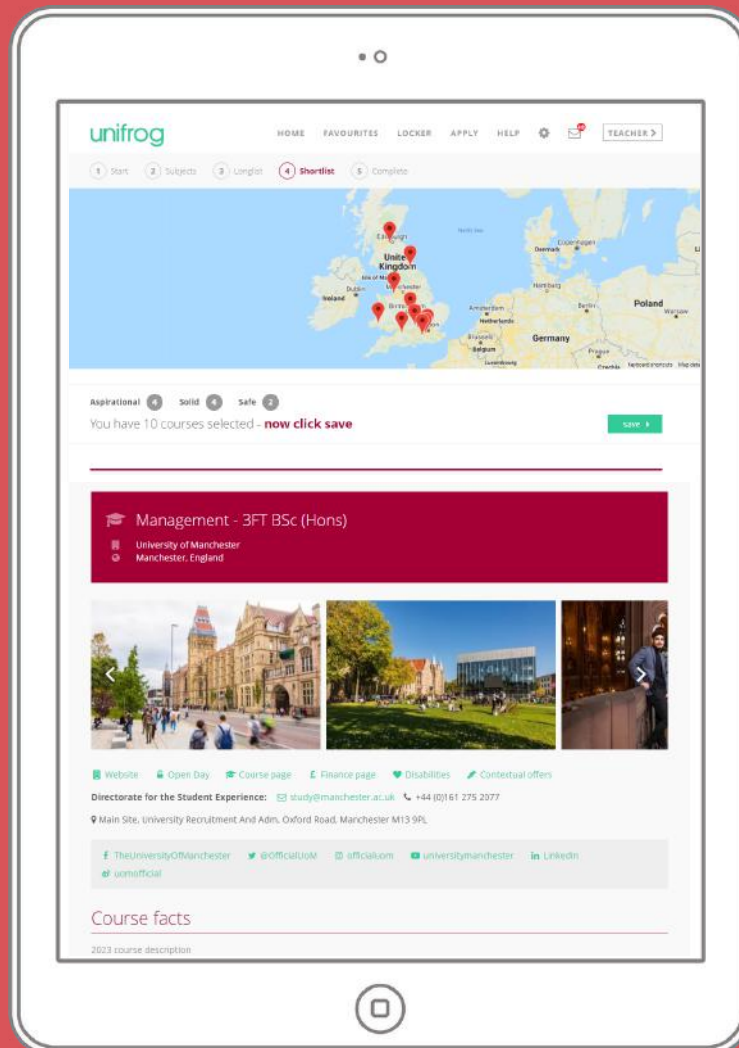


Levelling the playing field

Addressing the disadvantage gap in careers guidance and students' next steps after school



KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Students from **disadvantaged** backgrounds are **7.5% less likely** to complete Unifrog **destination shortlists** than more advantaged students.
- 2 The shortlisting disadvantage gap is most pronounced in the **East Midlands, East of England**, and **Yorkshire and the Humber**.
- 3 UK-wide the shortlisting disadvantage gap is **improving**, falling from **10%** in 2020 to **8.6%** in 2021, and set to fall again this year.
- 4 The shortlisting disadvantage gap is evident as **early** as the **September of Year 12**.
- 5 **74%** of students consider '**employability links and opportunities**' the **most important** factor when making decisions about their next steps.
- 6 **First-in-family** students are **more likely** to find '**writing a Personal Statement**' and '**understanding student finance**' **challenging** than students whose parents attended university.

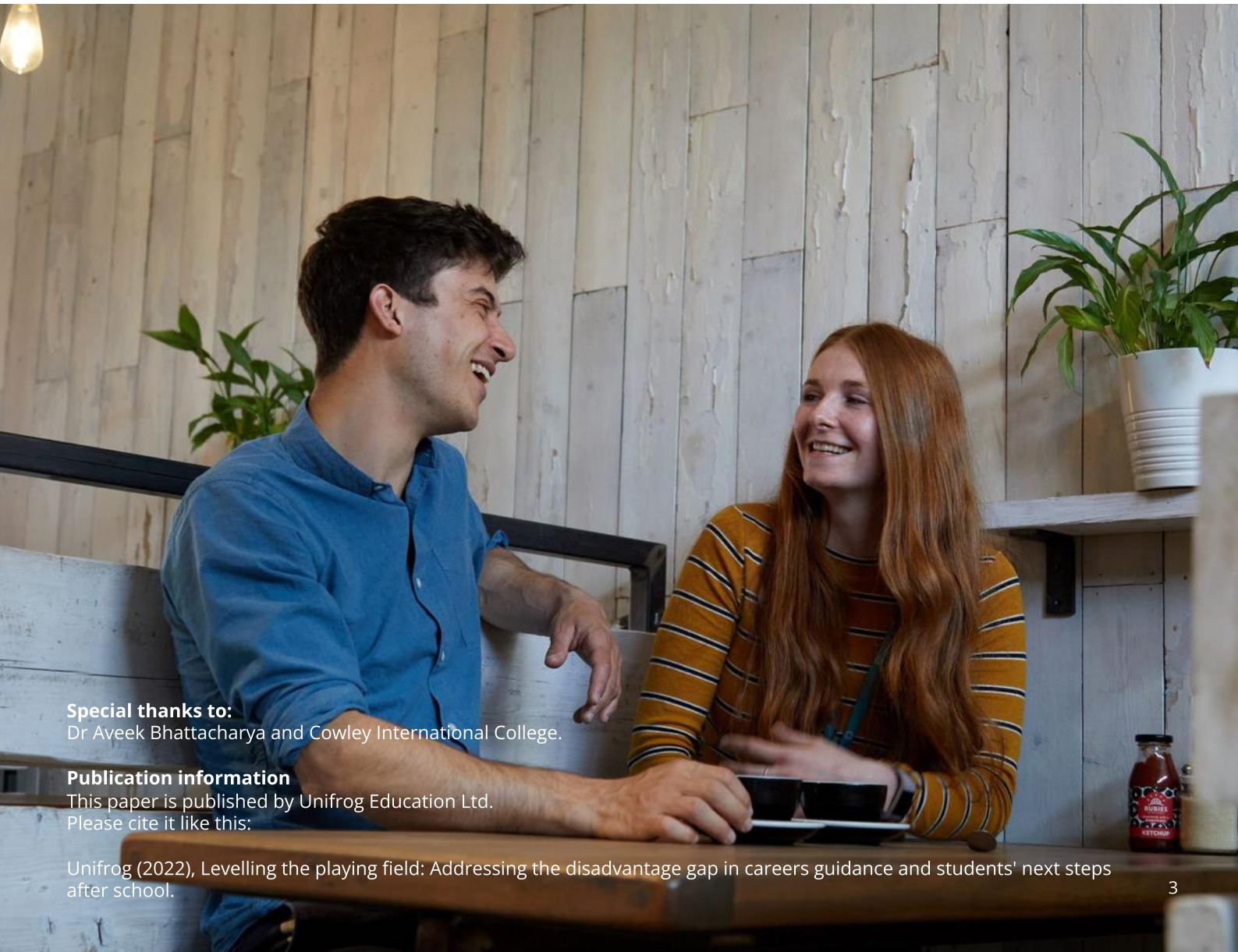
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FOREWORD

The mission at the heart of what we do at Unifrog is to level the playing field for young people finding their next steps after school.

I joined Unifrog seven years ago and although a lot has changed in that time, one constant has been the passion and the enthusiasm the whole team here has to make a difference and achieve our mission.

For several years our main focus was to partner with as many schools and colleges as we could, knowing this was the best way to reach and engage as many students as possible. I'm really proud of what we've achieved on this front - we're now supporting almost 3,000 schools and colleges, and well over 1,000,000 students!

The work we're doing hasn't gone unnoticed - institutions like the Social Market Foundation have even recommended that "the Government should partner with established trusted private brands such as Unifrog to ensure reliable [Careers Guidance] information is easily accessible"¹, demonstrating the scale of our impact.

Importantly, the scale we're now operating at means we can approach our core mission in another way. In addition to reaching more new partners, we're doing more focused work to understand how different students use the Unifrog platform.

The result is that we're better able to identify where we feel the playing field is not yet truly 'level' among Unifrog users, and we're conducting targeted interventions to address that.

I'm pleased to share this latest Insights report that outlines our work on this front so far. I hope the learnings and recommendations we've included are helpful for any schools, colleges, and other organisations pushing to achieve the same mission: to level the playing field and help young people find their best next step after school!



Dan Keller
CEO, Unifrog



¹ Niamh O Regan and Aveek Bhattacharya, 2022. Fulfilling its potential? How well does the careers information, advice and guidance serve the people it is meant to support in England?. Social Market Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Since day one, our mission at Unifrog has been to level the playing field when it comes to students finding their best next step after school. We're super passionate about this and it informs everything we do.

In October 2021, we supported the UK Government's Social Mobility Commission and the Behavioural Insights Team (also known as the Nudge Unit) with a piece of research¹ looking at the increase in online careers advice and how this affects young people from different backgrounds. One of the report's key recommendations was to undertake further work to identify and address disadvantage disparities when it comes to online careers provision.

As a result, we've been looking at how to close the disadvantage* gap by working closely with our partner schools and colleges, and how best to measure the impact Unifrog has.

To do this, we've analysed the platform behaviour of the 1 million active students on Unifrog and data from over 5,500 student survey responses. We're excited to share this report and our initial recommendations to help schools and colleges level the playing field.

*We use the term 'disadvantage' to refer to students in IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) postcodes 1-3².



¹ The Social Mobility Commission, 2021. *Pathways to success: increasing the use of online careers advice by disadvantaged young people*

² www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

1 The disadvantage gap



THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

To explore the disadvantage gap, we set up a working group here at Unifrog. One of our first key findings was that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are 7.5% less likely to complete destination shortlists than their peers from more advantaged backgrounds.

We see this trend in every region of the UK; although in England, the gap is more pronounced in the East Midlands, East of England, and Yorkshire and the Humber.

This really grabbed our attention. Students use the Unifrog platform to explore available opportunities, broaden their horizons, and plan their next steps - all of which puts them in the best position possible to make a successful application. Creating destination shortlists on the university, apprenticeship, and college and sixth form tools is a key part of this planning journey, when students make informed choices about which opportunities they want to apply to.

Figure 1.1

What is the difference between the % of advantaged and disadvantaged students who completed a shortlist in 21/22?

Region	Disadvantage gap
East of England	-10%
East Midlands	-8%
Yorkshire & Humber	-7%
South East	-5%
South West	-5%
North East	-4%
London	-4%
Northern Ireland	-4%
West Midlands	-4%
Wales	-3%
North West	-1%

* sample size in Scotland is too small



OUR INITIAL PROGRESS

Thankfully, we're making progress to reduce this gap. The difference in the proportion of students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds that create shortlists has decreased year on year. It fell from 10% for the cohort that graduated in 2020 to 8.6% for last year's cohort, and it looks likely to fall again this year!

While we're proud of this, there's clearly more work that needs to be done. The aim of careers guidance - and what underpins our work at Unifrog - is to guide young people onto a career path that encourages them to be happy and productive members of society.

As the Social Market Foundation report¹ into whether careers guidance in the UK is fulfilling its potential puts it, "Not only is good careers provision associated with lower unemployment and greater career readiness among young people, it also has the capacity to help millions to achieve their potential by finding the route best suited to them." Therefore, we need to close the gap entirely.

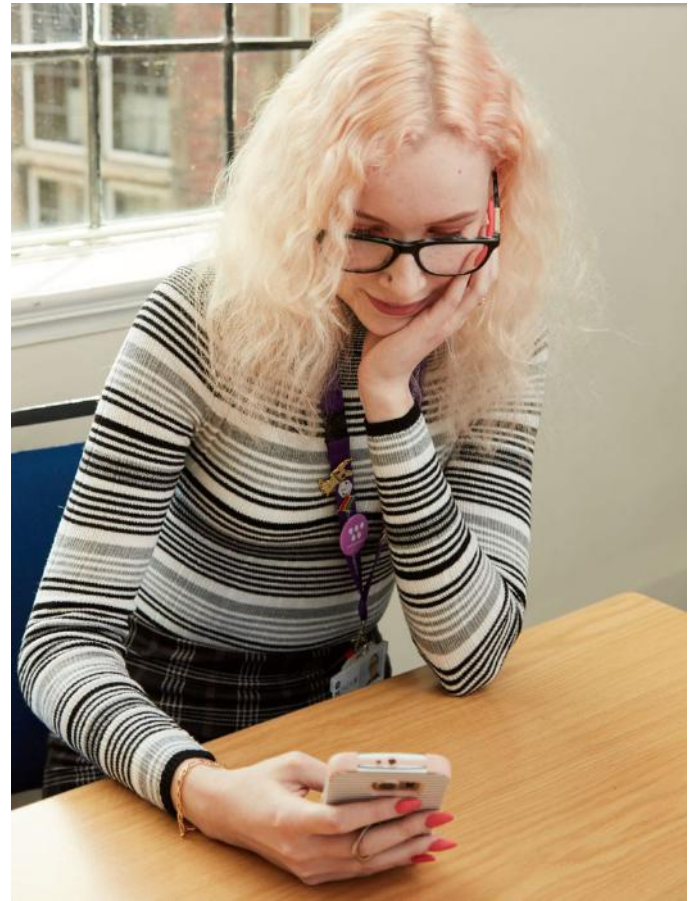
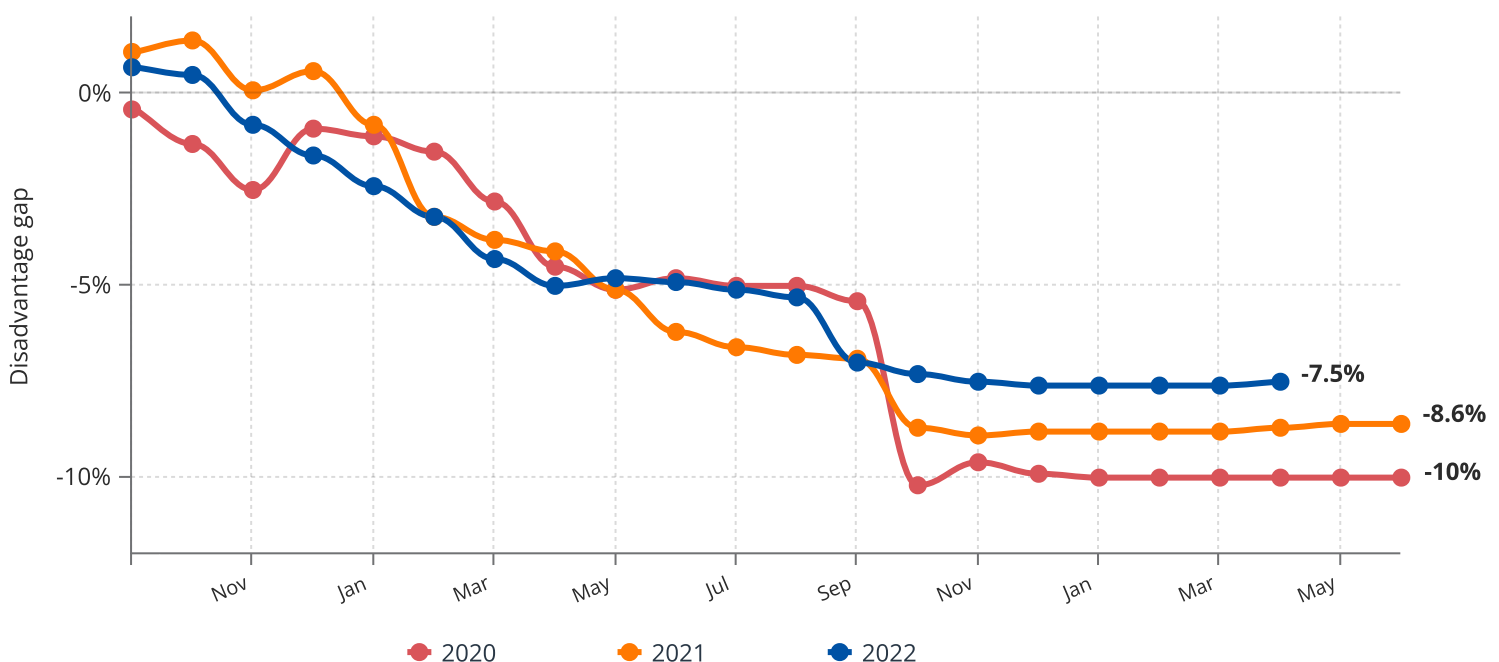


Figure 1.2

How has the month-on-month disadvantaged gap during Year 12 and 13 changed from the 2020 to 2022 graduating cohort?



¹ Niamh O Regan and Aveek Bhattacharya. Fulfilling its potential?

EXPERT VIEW



Dr Aveek Bhattacharya

Chief Economist, Social Market Foundation

The Social Market Foundation is Britain's leading cross-party think-tank, working to develop evidence-based policies that support a fair society and a strong economy.

Aveek and his colleague Niamh O Regan recently wrote a report into whether careers guidance in England is fulfilling its potential, with policy recommendations to increase the personalisation, accountability, and accessibility of IAG.

Typically ambitious

Careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) services are typically ambitious. They want to transform people's lives, shaping the way people view themselves, their skills and their careers. But as much as their role is about raising the ceiling of what people can achieve, it is also critical that they help them to avoid dropping through the floor.

NEETs

One in ten¹ 16-24 year olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET). That figure is alarming, because being NEET appears to have long lasting negative effects for the individual and society.

Young people who are NEET are at heightened risk² of unemployment later in life, and tend to get worse jobs if they do find work. They are also more likely to suffer poor physical and mental health as they get older.

Good careers guidance makes a difference

Good careers guidance has been shown to make a difference. Schools that achieve more of the Gatsby benchmarks (the industry standard for high quality IAG) have been shown to have fewer students leaving without a job or educational opportunity. Encouragingly, the positive effect seems to be even stronger in disadvantaged schools.

Varying standards

The trouble, as we found in a recent Social Market Foundation³ investigation of IAG in England, is that the provision and standards of support vary quite substantially from school to school. Some school students receive sustained, personalised one-on-one support from an adviser with whom they have developed a relationship. For others, IAG is sporadic, late and dependent on the student's own initiative.

¹ Office for National Statistics, 2022. *Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: February 2022.*

² Social Research, 2015. *Consequences, risk factors, and geography of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).* Scottish Government

³ Niamh O Regan and Aveek Bhattacharya. *Fulfilling its potential?*

EXPERT VIEW



Dr Aveek Bhattacharya

Chief Economist, Social Market Foundation

Careers guidance appears to be socially patterned

Even worse, the form and quality of careers guidance appears to be socially patterned. Schools with more affluent intakes are more likely to treat university application as the default to the detriment of vocational options, with more deprived students receiving the reverse message.

Avoid discouragement

Research on NEETs¹ suggests that building students' confidence and helping them to find the pathway that is right for them is crucial to avoiding the discouragement that underpins the phenomenon.

That means investing in careers services to ensure every young person has access to ongoing, trusted and relevant IAG. It means providing schools with the tools and support to reduce the inconsistencies between them. It means presenting academic and vocational options as genuinely equal and viable for everybody regardless of their background.

Policy attention

Careers guidance has not received the policy attention it deserves in recent years. With the Government increasingly aware of the skills challenges the country faces, there is room for optimism that this might be changing.

We all need to do our part

But developing a careers system that gives every young person the ability to achieve their potential requires everybody to chip in: careers services themselves, schools, teachers, agencies like the Careers and Enterprise Company and UCAS and private information providers like Unifrog. There's a lot at stake, and we all need to do our part.

¹ Tom Richmond and Eleanor Regan, 2022. *Finding a NEET solution: How to prevent young people from falling out of our education system*. EDSK.

AN EARLY START

The disadvantage shortlisting gap appears early in the application cycle. It's evident as early as the September of Year 12 and by the July of Year 12, it's already hit 5% in recent years. Given that each year, cohorts of 200,000+ students use Unifrog to make destination shortlists, this is a significant gap.

What this means is that as soon as students enter sixth form, students from more advantaged backgrounds start to pull ahead when it comes to destinations shortlisting and this trend continues, right up to the end of the applications cycle.

In addition, the probability of a student completing a shortlist decreases the later in the academic year their Unifrog account is created. Getting students onto the platform while lower down the school dramatically increases the chance they take the important step of shortlisting.

Taken together, these two findings highlight the importance of early intervention when it comes to supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access the same opportunities as their more advantaged peers. While raising the profile of careers in school from Year 7 can go a long way to educate students on the importance of careers guidance, in some instances it may be that CEIAG support for students

from disadvantaged backgrounds needs to be prioritised over other groups of students.

UNIFROG TOP TIP

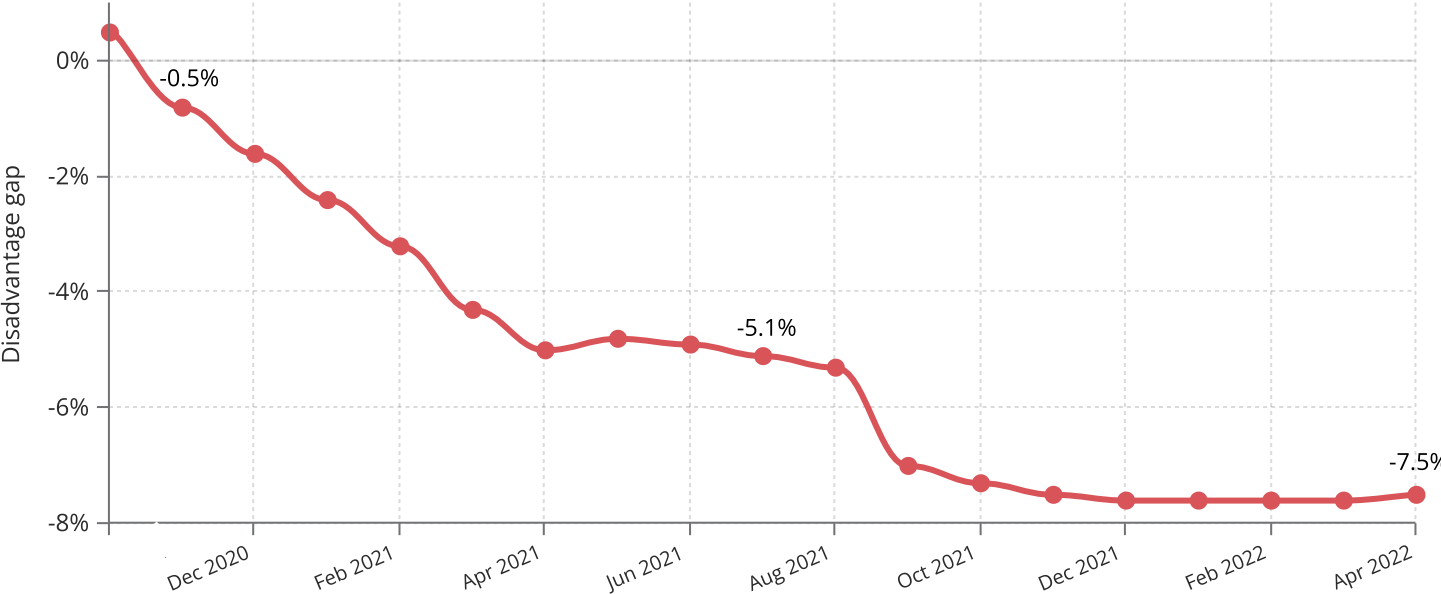
Address the disadvantage gap early by raising the profile of careers from Year 7. Use the Unifrog Careers library as a starter activity in subject lessons to highlight careers linked to curriculum areas (Gatsby Benchmark 4) and deliver motivational sessions from the Resources library to help students identify their interests, skills, and related careers.

UNIFROG TOP TIP

Use the tags and characteristics on Unifrog's Advanced view to identify students from disadvantaged backgrounds and run targeted interventions: share Careers, Subject and Know-how library guides, set careers-related tasks on the Unifrog platform, and monitor engagement.

Figure 1.3

How has the shortlisting gap changed for the 2022 graduating cohort over the course of Key Stage 5?



2 What causes the disadvantage gap?

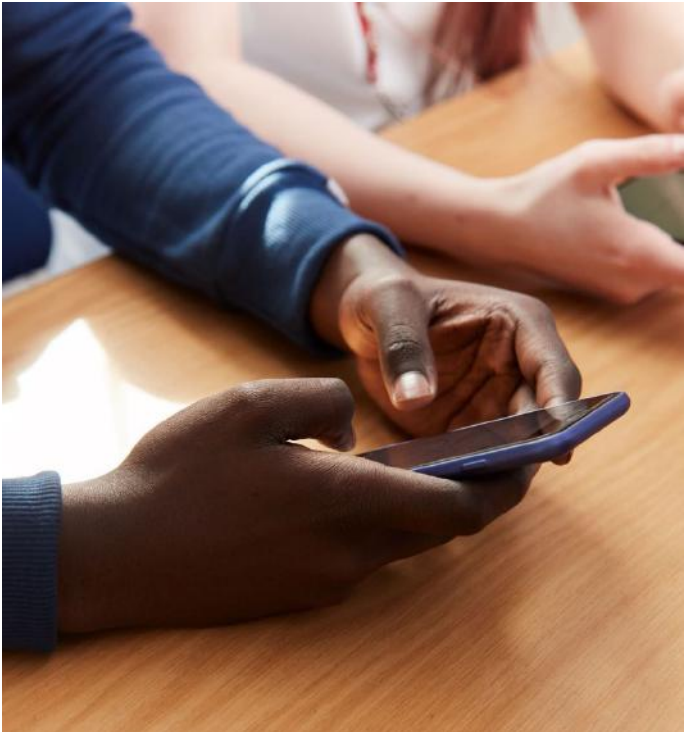


STUDENTS UNSURE OF NEXT STEPS

To try and understand what causes this disadvantage gap and explore students’ own attitudes towards shortlisting and their next steps, we ran a survey in December 2021.

Out of the 5,500+ students who responded, more than 25% said they don’t know what they want to do when they leave school and gave this as the most common reason for why they find completing destination shortlists challenging. The proportion was highest for Year 12 students, with 34% of them unsure of their next steps.

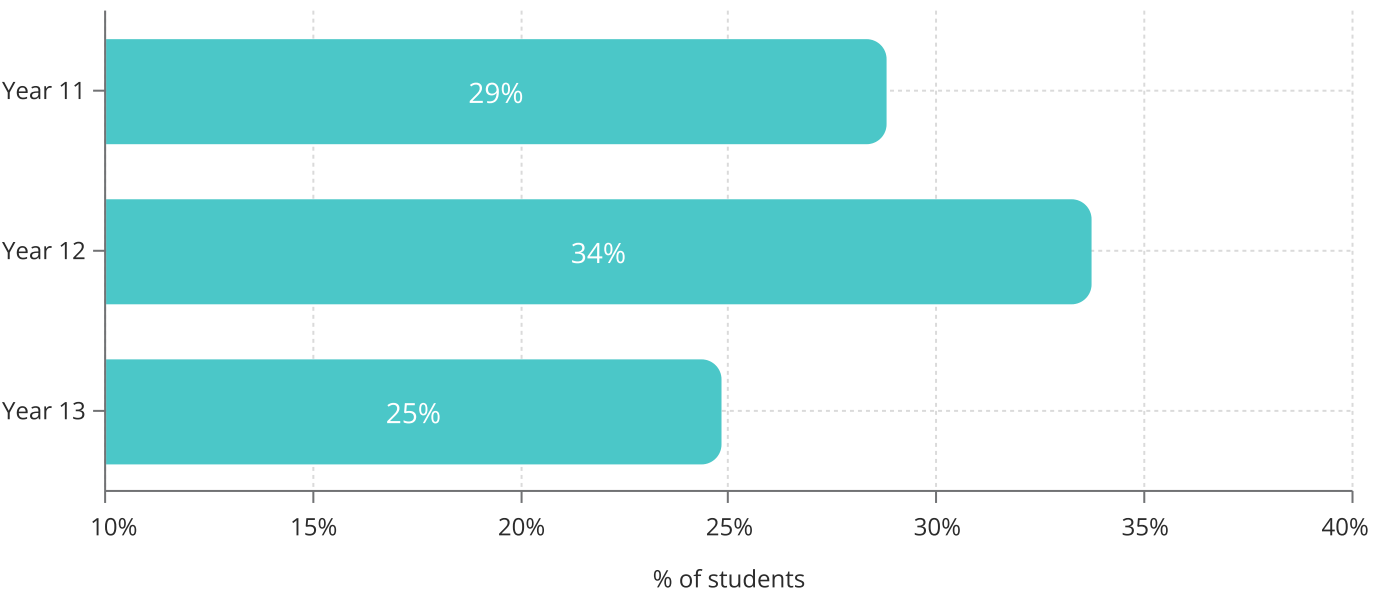
This suggests that students need a better understanding of the options available before they start to shortlist to make the shortlisting process less overwhelming.



UNIFROG TOP TIP

Encourage students to explore different options in Key Stage 3 and 4 using the Unifrog Personality quizzes, Careers and Subjects libraries, and webinars. In Key Stage 5, educate them on the value of creating multiple shortlists to compare destinations and to refine their options based on the factors most important to them.

Figure 2.1 What percentage of students surveyed don't know what they want to do after school?



STUDENT FOCUS ON EMPLOYABILITY

One aspect that students do seem sure of when it comes to their next steps is the importance of future employability. When surveyed, almost three quarters of students (74%) consider ‘employability links and opportunities’ the most



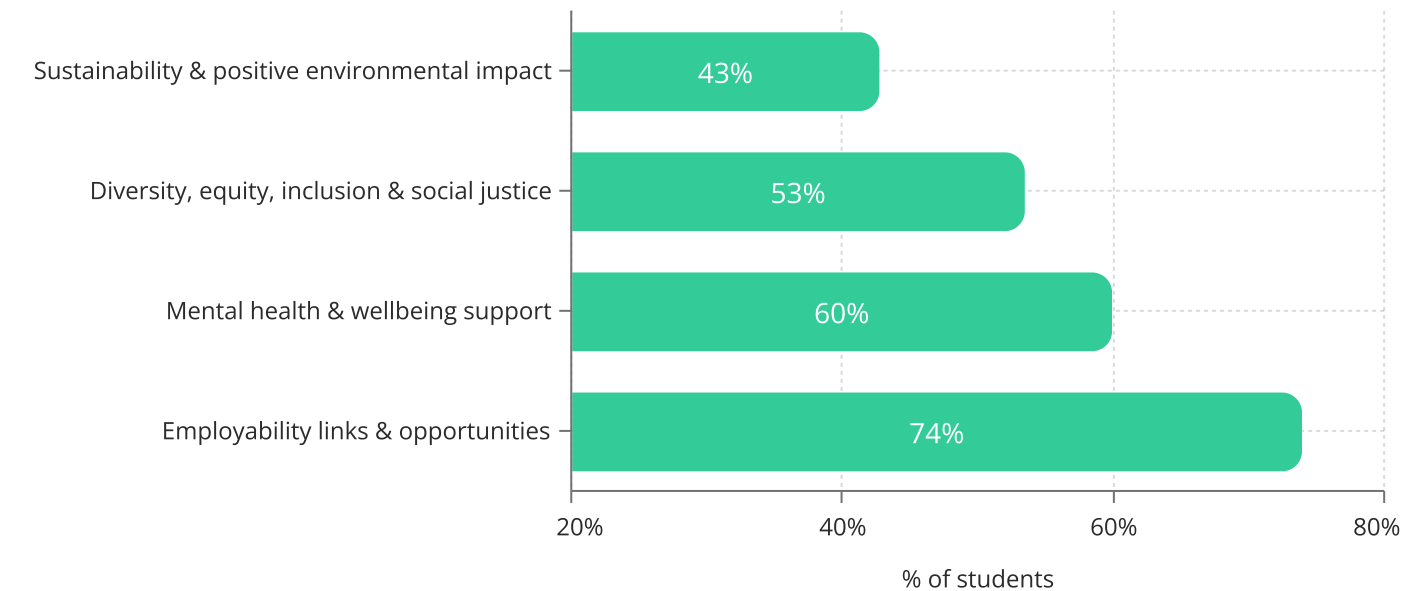
important consideration when making decisions about their next steps.

Unfortunately while they appreciate their importance, a Youth Voice Census Report¹ in 2021 found that only a third (33%) of school students believe they understand the skills employers are looking for. This knowledge gap highlights a discrepancy between students’ awareness of the importance of employability and being able to translate this into developing their own skillset to make themselves attractive to future employers.

UNIFROG TOP TIP

Incorporate encounters with employers (Gatsby Benchmark 5) and LMI (Gatsby Benchmark 2) into your careers programme to expose students to a variety of careers and help them develop an understanding of the skills they'll need.

Figure 2.2 Which factors do students consider most important when making decisions about their next steps?



¹ Youth Employment UK, 2021. Youth Voice Census Report 2021.

FIRST-IN-FAMILY

Our survey also found that students who are the first in their family to attend university are more likely to say they find ‘writing their Personal Statement’ challenging than students whose parents attended university.

The influential ‘Rules of the Game’ report¹ from the Sutton Trust, found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face significant barriers to writing a successful Personal Statement. Not only are their statements more likely to contain spelling and grammar errors as a result of having less support but disadvantaged students also struggle to evidence the work experience and extracurricular activities that many universities ask for.

First-in-family students are also more likely to say that they find ‘understanding student finance’ challenging. Financial concerns were also evident when asked which factors were most important when comparing different universities. While all students placed the most importance on ‘reputation’, ‘location’, and ‘graduate employment rate’, first-in-family students rated ‘fees’, and ‘accommodation costs’ as the next two most important factors. This highlights the weight of financial considerations for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

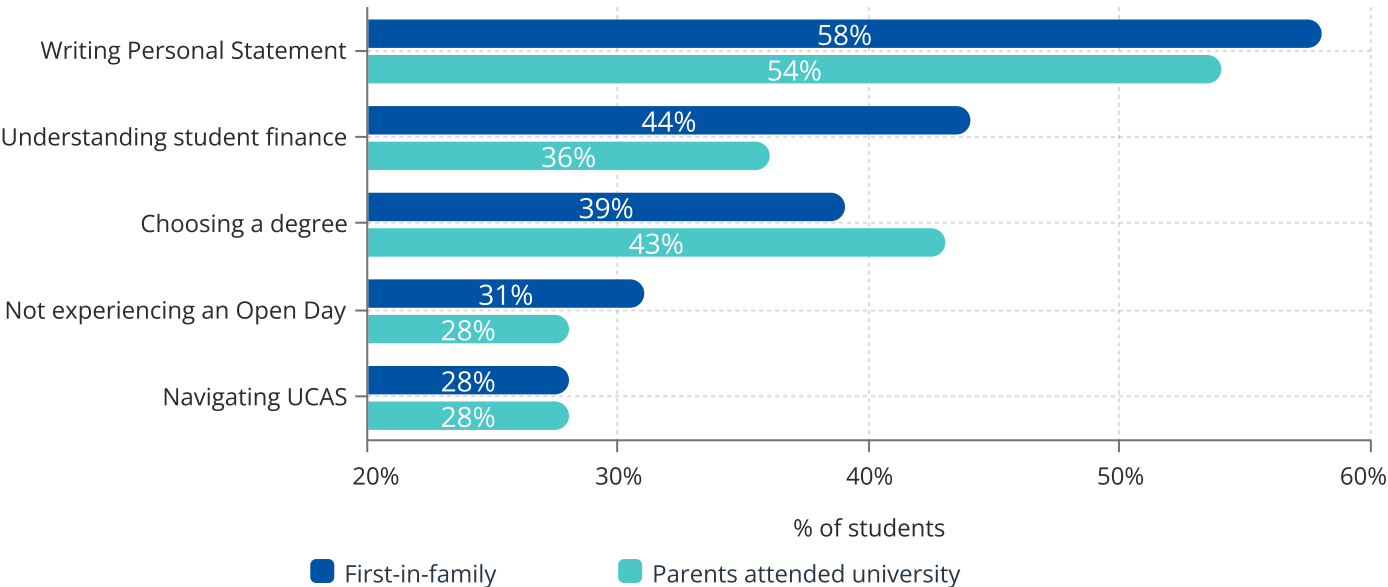
Figure 2.4

Which factors are most important when choosing between universities?

First-in-family		Parents attended university	
Rank	Factor	Rank	Factor
1	Location	1	Reputation
2	Reputation	2	Location
3	Graduate employment rate	3	Graduate employment rate
4	Accommodation cost	4	Social life
5	Fees	5	Application success rate
6	Application success rate	6	Starting salary
7	Starting salary	7	Accommodation cost
8	Social life	8	Fees
9	Lecture hours	9	League Rank
10	League rank	10	Lecture hours

Figure 2.3

Which aspects do first-in-family students find challenging when it comes to applying to university compared to students whose parents went to university?



¹ Gill Wyness, 2017. Rules of the Game: Disadvantaged students and the university admissions process. Sutton Trust.

APPRENTICESHIPS

When it comes to those students considering apprenticeships, 'lack of local opportunities' is cited as the biggest challenge, in particular for disadvantaged students.

In the last couple of years, the already low number of apprenticeships has been worsened by the pandemic, with 6 out of 10 employers¹ stopping all new apprenticeships. At the same time, the Social Market Foundation report found that IAG for those considering vocational options including apprenticeships tends to be weaker, with many students carried towards university by inertia.

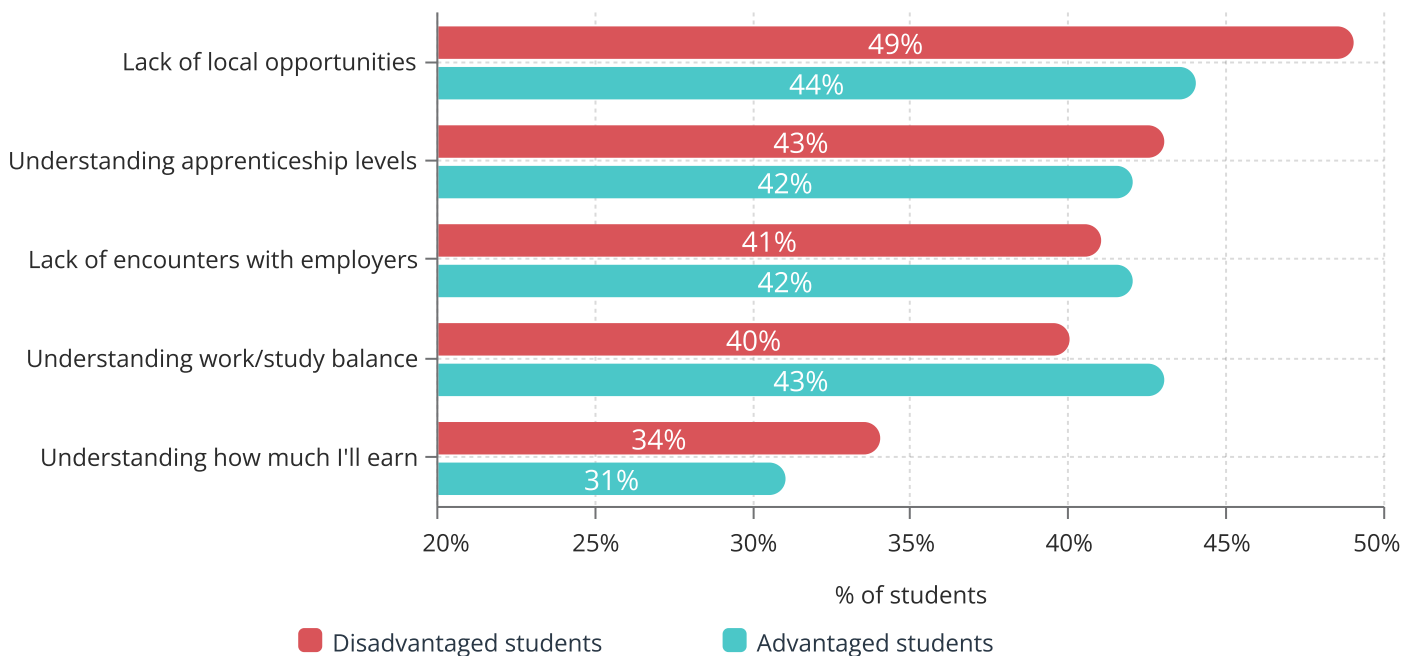


UNIFROG TOP TIP

Make sure students know how to use the distance radius on the Unifrog Apprenticeship tool to look for local vacancies.

Figure 2.4

Which aspects do disadvantaged students find challenging when considering applying to apprenticeships compared to their more advantaged peers?



¹ Association of Employment and Learning Providers, 2020. 'Apprenticeship starts falling off a cliff'.

3

Levelling the playing field



HOW UNIFROG IS ADDRESSING THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

To address the shortlisting disadvantage gap, we're running a pilot intervention with target schools and colleges.

These are schools and colleges with a high number of students in IMD deciles 1-3 who are logging in well, but who are not finalising shortlists to the same extent as their more advantaged peers.

The pilot intervention includes:

1 Regional CPD (Continuing Professional Development) events for careers and teaching staff that feature:

- Expert speakers from universities who provide guidance on the support available to disadvantaged students and how to support students on vocational courses who are aspiring to Higher Education.

- Best-practice sessions from Unifrog schools and colleges on how to support disadvantaged students with applications and how to structure a CEIAG programme across the whole school or college.

2 Staff training events, tailored to each school and college, on how to close the gap among their own students.

3 Strategy meetings with careers leaders where we provide plug-and-play teaching resources to boost destination shortlisting in each school or college.

4 Live interactive webinars for students including 'Applications masterclasses' and 'Demystifying apprenticeships' as well as webinars for teachers and advisors on topics such as supporting disadvantaged students with Oxbridge applications.



EXPERT VIEW



COWLEY
INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

Raymond Mason

**Work Related Learning Mentor
Cowley International College**

Cowley International College is an 11-18 secondary school in St Helens, Merseyside.

Pupil Premium

In terms of how we support disadvantaged students in our college, Pupil Premium helps us to provide:

- High-quality teaching, such as staff professional development.
- Targeted academic support, including tutoring and student support.
- Wider strategies to address non-academic barriers to success in schools like attendance, behaviour, and social and emotional support.
- Financial assistance for paid trips and activities.
- Shaping Futures (part of the Uni Connect programme) also provide free in-college sessions to raise aspirations for disadvantaged students and provide funding for those students to visit universities.

Tailored CEIAG

When it comes to our CEIAG, all our Y11s and Y13s receive a 1-1 careers interview with an independent advisor. These aim to raise aspirations and record destinations as well as giving careers advice. Disadvantaged students in Y10 and Y12 are also prioritised for appointments, with a follow-up appointment in Y11 and Y13.

We also work hand in hand with our PSE Department who deliver some of our Career/Unifrog sessions focused on raising aspirations, linking curriculum learning to Careers, and 'myth busting' in regard to Higher Education.

Embedded careers programme

The careers programme embedded in our curriculum ensures that all students within a Year Group – regardless of background - receive the same Unifrog sessions in class, monitored by PSE Staff and the Careers Team.

An early start

We know that more than one third of children base their early career aspirations solely on people they know. For many reasons, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to have fewer opportunities to meet people in a range of jobs. All of this means that some children's horizons can be narrowed at a very early age.

Seeing those experiences as building important life skills, rather than as simple day-to-day interactions, instils a professional mind-set and or work ethic early on so that students feel more confident when it comes to apply for and begin jobs.

EXPERT VIEW



COWLEY
INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

Raymond Mason

**Work Related Learning Mentor
Cowley International College**

Raising the profile of careers

Our Y7 have an introduction to Unifrog session, explaining why it is so important to think about their future careers and how Unifrog can assist them in doing so.

In their second session, all Y7s are asked to complete both the Interest and the Personality Profiles on Unifrog and then asked to research their results and save any careers that interest them.

We also display a Career of the Week - taken directly from Unifrog's Careers library - on our TV screens around the College. Form Tutors also show this to their Form groups to encourage students to start thinking about their future careers.

Encounters with employers

We help students connect with employers and understand the world of work through a range of initiatives, including Career Fairs, mock interviews with invited employers and Higher Education staff, work-based visits, assemblies with invited employers and individual Work Experience Placements.

Destinations shortlists

To help boost destinations shortlisting in our college, we set shortlists as a task with a deadline via Unifrog and timetable this during PSE sessions. This is closely monitored and followed up by our PSE staff.



HOW SCHOOLS CAN ADDRESS THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

1

Address the disadvantage gap early by raising the profile of careers from Year 7. Use the Unifrog Careers library as a starter activity in subject lessons to highlight careers linked to curriculum areas (Gatsby Benchmark 4) and deliver motivational sessions from the Resources library to help students identify their interests, skills, and related careers.

2

Use the tags and characteristics on Unifrog's Advanced view to identify students from disadvantaged backgrounds and run targeted interventions: share Careers, Subject and Know-how library guides, set careers-related tasks on the Unifrog platform, and monitor engagement.

3

Encourage students to explore different options in Key Stage 3 and 4 using the Unifrog Personality quizzes, Careers and Subjects libraries, and webinars. In Key Stage 5, educate them on the value of creating multiple shortlists to compare destinations and to refine their options based on the factors most important to them.

4

Incorporate encounters with employers (Gatsby Benchmark 5) and LMI (Gatsby Benchmark 2) into your careers programme to expose students to a variety of careers and help them develop an understanding of the skills they'll need.

5

Make sure students know how to use the distance radius on the Unifrog Apprenticeship tool to look for local vacancies.

HOW SCHOOLS CAN ADDRESS THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

6

Take advantage of all targeted interventions and funding available, including the government's National Tutoring Programme (NTP), and encourage disadvantaged students to use the 'Circumstances' filters on the Unifrog Special opportunities tool to find grants they're eligible for.

7

Use the 'Virtual Work Experience' filter on the Unifrog Special opportunities tool to discover online opportunities to help students picture themselves in different careers.

8

Track students' shortlisting behaviour accurately on Unifrog's Advanced view, so you can quickly spot any students who are yet to complete a shortlist and support them to get started.

9

Link up your school's Careers Lead with staff who oversee Pupil Premium funding so that CEIAG considerations are taken into account alongside other interventions for disadvantaged students.

10

Download the Careers Year Plan from the Unifrog Resources library to follow the Unifrog journey with plug-and-play lessons and deliver outstanding CEIAG.

THE UNIFROG JOURNEY

Year 7

- ✓ **Interests profile** to identify & understand key interests
- ✓ **Careers library** intros employability skills and sectors
- ✓ Start to record **Activities**

Year 8

- ✓ **Careers library** and **Competencies** tool link skills used in school with careers
- ✓ **Activities** to further develop skills
- Careers library** builds LMI awareness

Year 9

- ✓ **Subjects** and **Careers libraries** for informed GCSE choices
- ✓ **Competencies** for skillset self-awareness
- ✓ Revisit **Interests** and discover how passions link to pathways

Year 10

- ✓ **Placements tool** to apply for, complete, and reflect on WEX
- ✓ **CV** and **Writing tools** draft application materials
- ✓ Understand **Personality profile** and preferred **Work environments**

Year 11

- ✓ Research post-16 applications on **College & Sixth Form** and **Apprenticeships** tools
- ✓ Learn to manage workload and wellbeing with **Webinars**
- ✓ Prepare for revision and leaving school with the **Know-how library**

Year 12

- ✓ Development goals with **Subjects** and **Careers libraries**
- ✓ Super-curricular reading and activities via the **Read, Watch, Listen** and **MOOC** tools
- ✓ **UK uni** and **Apprenticeships** tools for post-18 options

Year 13

- ✓ Finalise post-18 applications via **Personal Statement** and **CV** tools
- ✓ Learn to manage workload and wellbeing with **Webinars** and the **Know-how library**

Next step

- ✓ Student **successfully applies** to and reaches the **best next step** for them!

UNIFROG TOP TIP

Download the Careers Year Plan from the Unifrog Resources library to follow the Unifrog journey with plug-and-play lessons and deliver outstanding CEIAG.

LOOKING FORWARD

With the UK and global economy under strain, some sectors growing fast (like the green sector and jobs in AI), plus critical skills shortages emerging across various industries, CEIAG is set to become more important. Therefore it's vital that schools and colleges are in a position to provide outstanding careers guidance to their students.

At Unifrog we're committed to closing the disadvantage gap when it comes to CEIAG and student destinations. To do this, we're running our pilot intervention with the aim of rolling it out to more schools and colleges soon, and we're working

hard to meet the targets set by the working group.

Our headline target for this year is to keep the shortlisting disadvantage gap for the 2023 graduating cohort to -5% or below.

Of course, we want to remove this gap altogether in the coming years and we're looking forward to working alongside the Unifrog community of partner schools and colleges to make this happen!



Please contact us if you have any questions, comments, or would like to join our growing network of partners.



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