



# Social Mobility, Careers Advice & Alumni Networks

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A Future First Report Into  
Revolutionising Careers  
Advisory Services in the UK



This report was commissioned by **Future First Networks Ltd.** (Future First) and conducted by **YouGov**. YouGov conducted two polls for Future First. The first surveyed 510 16 to 19 year olds, between March 14th and March 17th, 2011, on their views on their current careers advice. The second surveyed 1,033 UK adults between March 15th and March 17th, 2011, on their views about the careers advice they had received while at school and how that advice had helped them develop their subsequent career. The surveys were carried out online.

Future First would like to recognise and express gratitude for the unwavering support and guidance of **The Sutton Trust**, the **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**, **Future**, the **Wates Family Enterprise Trust**, **The Mark Leonard Charitable Trust**, **UnLtd**, **Alex Smith** and **Katie McCrory** who inspired and guided this research, the team at **Fred Design**, our **Directors**, the **Trustees** of our charity arm, our **Steering Committee Members** and **volunteers**, the fantastic **alumni** who join our programmes, our corporate partners at **Google**, **Taylor Wessing**, **PwC**, **Osborne Clarke** and **Finers Stephen Innocent** and, more than anyone, our incredible staff team led by **Jess Cordingly**, **Nick Wigmore** and **Talia Beni-Randall**.

# Foreword



We all know that access to relevant and relatable role models is crucial for a young person's development. It also has a central part to play in increasing social mobility: through interaction with positive influencers from a range of backgrounds and working in a diverse field of professions, young people can be inspired to think critically about the world of work and take those important early steps to a better future.

There is good and bad news in Future First's latest findings. The study shows that too many young people simply do not have access to a suitable role model when it comes to careers guidance. Over a third of young people do not know anyone in a job they would like to do. This is particularly the case for state school students – and disproportionately so amongst those on free school meals. Inadequate careers advice may well be hampering – rather than promoting – social mobility, and the report highlights the major challenges ahead if current barriers to opportunity are to be removed.

But there are also significant and exciting opportunities to seize. The Future First survey suggests that many British adults would be willing to return to their former schools to tell their stories and to offer counsel to current students on how to get a job they enjoy and one which harnesses their passion and talent. That alumni-based approach inspires and empowers young people – and that is why it is backed by the Sutton Trust.

Future First's programmes offer inspiration, advice and guidance. They benefit those young people who need support the most, and they point the way to the types of opportunities that better-off students already have as a matter of course. That is key to unlocking social mobility and it is key to preparing young people for the world of work.

**James Turner**  
Sutton Trust



Too many young people simply do not have access to a suitable role model when it comes to careers guidance.

# Executive Summary

Britain has the lowest level of social mobility in the developed world<sup>1</sup>. In a country where your parents' wages are more likely to define your career path than your own ability, good advice about the world of work and access to role models making the most of their careers are desperately needed if we are to help young people fulfil their potential.

Future First believes that through the creation of alumni networks, there is a simple and effective way to connect young people to role models who can provide realistic, relatable careers advice. The creation of such networks alongside professional careers advisors in schools would make a significant dent in a significant problem at a crucial time.

That the deficit of opportunity begins in schools is well known: last summer Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg spoke<sup>2</sup> of an "education apartheid" which is deepening "social segregation". He pledged that the coalition government would focus resources on the most disadvantaged, both in the early years and during schooling.

But as Future First's exclusive new research shows, young people are not only being locked out of social mobility and access to the jobs market because of persisting educational or income inequalities alone. They are also being failed by inadequate careers advice. That is disproportionately the case in state schools.

Our study reveals that 64% of adults feel their in-school advice was not important in helping to advance their careers. Only 13% felt their careers advice had helped them define or advance their careers. Those regrets translate to current students too: nearly three quarters of those aged 16 to 19 (69%) fear it will be difficult to gain access to a good career path. Even more worryingly for social mobility, 39% of 16 to 19 year olds who went to state school say they don't know anyone in a career they would like to work in and this rises to 45% amongst the poorest: those who received free school meals.

With existing careers advice provision being cut by many councils to the legal minimum required to support only those with disabilities and those most at risk from entering the criminal justice system, little is being done to mitigate the damage to thousands of school leavers' careers, who enter the world of work without the advice or support they need.

However, our research also presents an opportunity for reform. In 2008, focus groups in London comprehensive schools found out that students had an alternative idea for careers provision. They wanted advice from people actually in jobs and people they could relate to – people "like me" as they put it. Future First's alumni-based careers services were co-created with teenagers at state schools as a viable addition to the careers curriculum.

Now Future First has research showing that young people desire such a service on a national scale. 91% of current state school students would prefer the Future First model of alumni networks to the traditional system of relying solely on in-school careers advisors. 86% of 16 to 19 year olds feel the model we deliver would be helpful to them specifically. And those who have already left school say they would be fifteen times more likely to choose an alumni-based model than the in-school provision they received.

Such a model relies on a culture of volunteerism amongst state school alumni. The research has revealed an untapped army of volunteers across the UK. Indeed, our polling has discovered that well over 10 million British adults would be willing to volunteer time in their old schools to support and advise their successors.

We believe that now is the time for the new government to deliver on its Big Society agenda. Rather than face a lost generation of young people we propose that the government expand the remit of statutory careers provision to include alumni services alongside traditional careers support.

If you have any questions on Future First's research, please call us on 0207 812 0540 or email [info@futurefirst.org.uk](mailto:info@futurefirst.org.uk). For more information, please visit [www.futurefirst.org.uk](http://www.futurefirst.org.uk).

**Jake Hayman**  
Chief Executive, Future First

<sup>1</sup> OECD Going For Growth Report 2010 [http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_34117\\_44566259\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/51/0,3343,en_2649_34117_44566259_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>2</sup> Nick Clegg: Speech on Social Mobility, August 18th, 2010. [http://www.libdems.org.uk/press\\_releases\\_detail.aspx?title=Nick\\_Clegg\\_delivers\\_speech\\_on\\_social\\_mobility&pPK=38cf9a88-0577-403e-9dcb-50b8e30ed119](http://www.libdems.org.uk/press_releases_detail.aspx?title=Nick_Clegg_delivers_speech_on_social_mobility&pPK=38cf9a88-0577-403e-9dcb-50b8e30ed119)

# Social Mobility

In July 2009, the all-party panel chaired by Alan Milburn reported that Britain's professions were a "closed shop" – the near exclusive domain of the middle classes<sup>3</sup>. The report showed how family wealth and private education remain the key to accessing well paid professions in the media, medicine, law, finance and the civil service. With those industries rapidly expanding, and Britain's traditional industries still suffering from the 2008 financial crisis, social mobility is likely to be further entrenched in the coming years unless radical action is taken at the root – in schools.

Experts on social mobility, such as the Sutton Trust, note that access to positive role models and better careers advice is crucial to unlocking opportunity. And yet Future First's research shows that 39% of 16-19 year olds currently in full time state education do not know anyone in a job they would like to do themselves. That shocking statistic increases to 45% amongst young people who received free school meals – a clear picture of how low levels of social mobility can become entrenched.

Future First's award winning model is designed to change this situation. We have built networks of alumni trained to return to their old schools to serve as positive role models for their successors, and to offer the advice, guidance and – crucially – inspiration young people need to succeed and thrive in a job they enjoy.

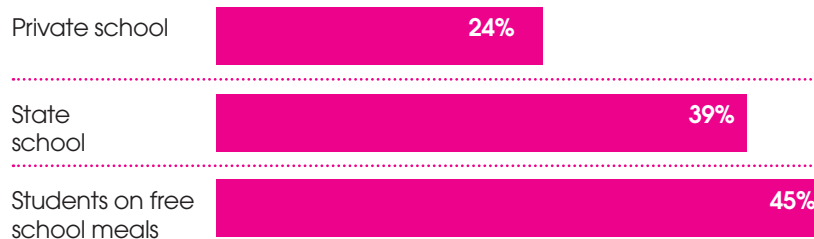
Working with young people with no access to role models can make giving effective careers advice almost impossible for in-school career advisors. Future First's work is not designed to replace the current services, but to complement them.

## How young people rate their careers advice



And yet Future First's research shows that students at the bottom of the ladder – those in state schools, and those on free school meals in particular – are being disproportionately failed by the careers advice they receive. 27% of young people at state schools aged between 16 and 19 said their careers advice was bad or very bad. Conversely only 6% of those currently in private schools say the advice they receive was poor – four times fewer than in state schools.

## Young people who agree with "I don't know anyone with a career that I'd like to do."



<sup>3</sup> Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedd/publications/p/panel-fair-access-to-professions-final-report-21july09.pdf>

# Careers Advice/ The Challenges

Future First's new polling has provided fresh evidence of the scale of the challenge we face in providing high-quality careers advice that helps young people to fulfill their potential.

64% of adults say their school careers advisors had not been important in helping advance their careers. Only 13% said their careers advice had been important in helping them access a job. Nearly three-quarters (69%) of current students aged 16 to 19 believe it will be difficult to gain access to a good career path.

The problem is exacerbated amongst state school students: only a third (36%) think their school is equipping them well for the world of work; in private schools, on the other hand, 58% feel well-equipped to enter work.

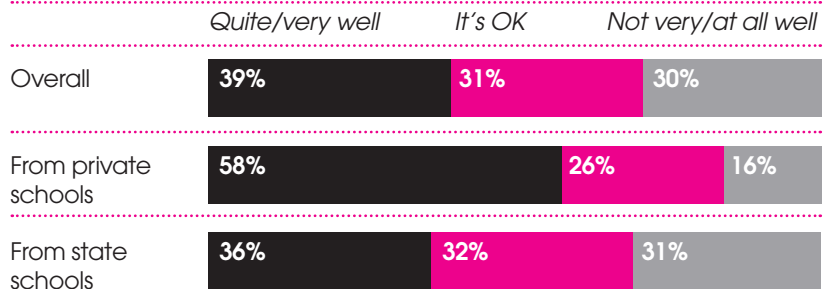


**"In private schools they're told that they can conquer the world, they're given motivation, they're told they can win. We're not told that in state schools so it's harder for us."**

**Future First student, 18**

At a time when the current statutory careers provision, Connexions, is being reduced by many local authorities to the legal minimum requirement – and the Association of College and School Leavers, which represents 15,000 head teachers, is warning that 2 million teenagers may go without any careers advice whatsoever as a result<sup>4</sup> – our figures represent a significant national challenge that must be tackled at the root.

## How well 16-19 year olds feel their school is equipping them for the world of work



Overcoming that challenge will not be achieved simply by informing young people about the opportunities they have. It's also about confidence. When asked whether they thought people from their school would go on to be successful in the world of work, 90% of private school students thought they would. But only 56% of state school students expected success from people from their school, indicating the huge impact a school can have on confidence levels. Careers advice can and must inspire hope in young people.

## Young people who believe that those who go to their school will be successful in the world of work



4 ACSL Press Release 12 March 2011: 2 million young people could lose out on careers advice [http://www.ascl.org.uk/home/news\\_results/?l=ListItemID=759&ListGroupID=2](http://www.ascl.org.uk/home/news_results/?l=ListItemID=759&ListGroupID=2)

# Careers Advice/ The Solutions

Thankfully, the situation is not intractable. As well as the huge challenges, our comprehensive study also revealed a hunger – and a will – to revolutionise how we deliver careers advice to young people in schools. Alumni-based careers advice is effective because young people invariably feel more connected to their peers than to their teachers or careers advisors. Our study shows they are twice as likely to value advice from family (75% say it’s very or quite important) or friends (54%), for example, than from in-school advisors (36%). Strikingly, 86% of 16 to 19 year olds said alumni guidance would be helpful to them. 76% of those who went to a state school say it would be better than the guidance they received.

91% of 16 to 19 year olds who went to state school say advice from people with jobs is preferable to the current system. 49% think just advice from those with jobs would be best, while 42% would prefer a mix of alumni-based and in-school guidance: the model Future First advocates.

And when asked to judge between current-style careers provision in schools and Future First’s alumni community model, adults were fifteen times more likely to prefer the Future First model.

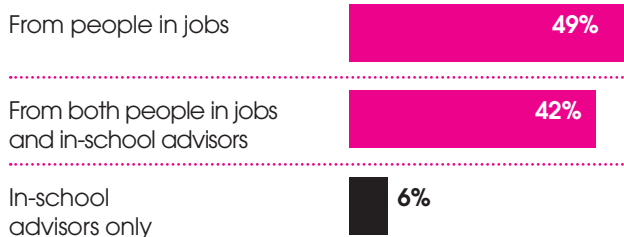
**That’s why Future First is calling for an alumni service in every school as part of the statutory minimum careers advice provision.**



“I didn’t have a role model when I was at school so I had to make decisions by myself. Looking back, I had no idea that I’d be able to make it to where I am today. Being able to share my experience and impart my advice to current students is amazing.”

**Mohammed Awal, 26,  
Future First Alumni Volunteer**

## State school students’ views on ideal careers provision options

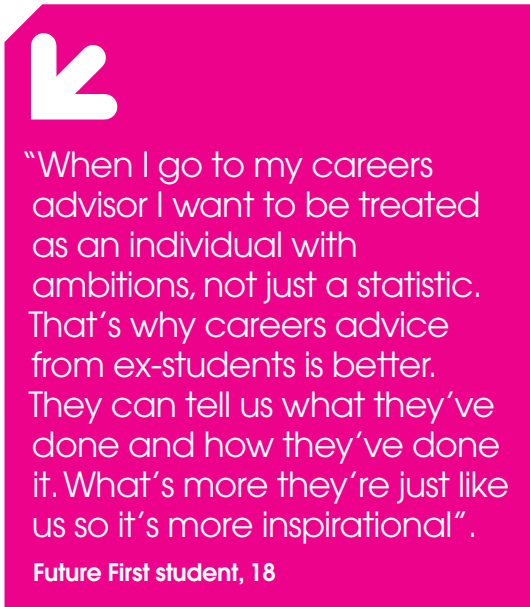


# The Opportunity

There is an exciting opportunity around alumni-based careers guidance. It is one that the government should seize as part of its Big Society agenda, by pledging to support alumni networks in every school.

But with so many people under existing personal, professional and financial pressures, are people willing to volunteer to take time out to offer careers advice to their successors?

Our research has found that 29% of British adults would be likely to return to their old schools to volunteer on that basis if they were asked. That's over 10 million former students nationwide returning to their old schools to work with their successors and offer information, advice and guidance to the next generation. Once the evidence of the benefits is more widely shared, that number is likely to increase.

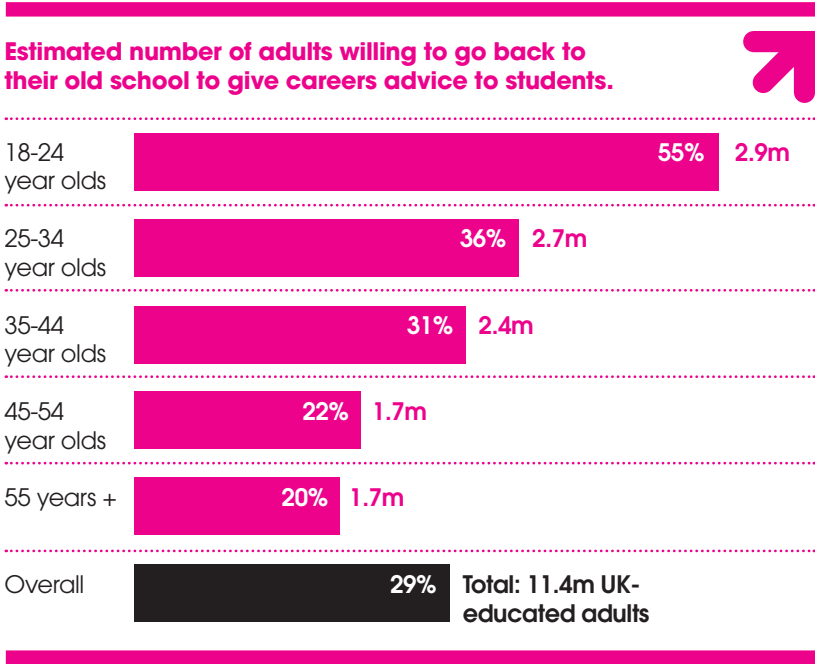


“When I go to my careers advisor I want to be treated as an individual with ambitions, not just a statistic. That’s why careers advice from ex-students is better. They can tell us what they’ve done and how they’ve done it. What’s more they’re just like us so it’s more inspirational”.

Future First student, 18



There are over 10 million British adults ready, willing and able to volunteer their advice at their old schools





# The Case for Acting Now

Britain's young people are standing on the brink: they are facing an uncertain jobs market, dramatic changes to the university funding structure and high youth unemployment. Now more than ever they need high quality advice and support as they begin to make key decisions about their futures.

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of many traditional careers advisors, too many young people are being failed by a flawed system. Without access to relatable role models they feel locked out of opportunities.

But while our research shows that too many young people feel let down by their careers advice, they are nevertheless an ambitious generation. 85% of the young people we surveyed believe the world can offer them a career they will be good at. But their ambitions are not being supported and guided by the advice they receive at school. This may be why, despite their inner ambitions, some 69% of young people think it will be difficult to find the good career they want.



"If you come out with ambitious stuff to a careers advisor they put you down. 'That's not happening', they say. But young people are meant to be ambitious! We don't need careers advisors putting us down!"

**Future First student, 18**

**Future First** is calling on Head Teachers, Governors and those in government to support the establishment of alumni networks in every school in the country to help ensure that every young person is able reach his or her potential.

# About Future First



**Future First** is a social business working to revolutionise careers advice and build communities in schools across the UK. We do this by bringing former students back to their old schools and colleges to inspire, advise and guide current pupils.

Working in partnership with state schools and businesses and complementing current careers provision, Future First creates individually tailored, community-based answers to the challenges that confront young people as they build their CVs, develop their interests and aspirations and start to think about the world of work.

## Our Aims and Services

By working closely with schools, local authorities and our network of partners to ensure a joined-up service, Future First aims to:

- Educate young people about career paths and options
- Improve job readiness and employability
- Raise aspiration and confidence

Future First delivers these objectives through three core programmatic elements:

### Community Building

We build a network of school alumni from a diverse range of careers, who can offer first-hand guidance to students as they make crucial decisions about their future options. By showcasing a range of jobs and skills, Future First broadens students' horizons, breaking down any preconceptions students may have about jobs and celebrating the range of success to come out of a school.

### Community Engagement

Future First runs a curriculum of events for students in Years 8 to 13. Events introduce students to role models, educate them about career and higher education opportunities and help inform the difficult decisions they are making. As well as face-to-face support, students engage with Future First online via an interactive website built uniquely for each school.

### Increasing Employability

Future First leverages alumni networks to offer advice and ideas on internship and work shadowing placements and to open up access to opportunities for pupils. Beyond this, through our network of corporate partners we encourage businesses to open their doors to pupil placements that both build CVs and allow insights into the world of work for students at Future First schools.

In October 2009 Future First was pleased to be featured in the **Government White Paper on Information, Advice and Guidance**<sup>5</sup> as an example of the active and ambitious mentoring in which all schools should be engaged.

To find out more about Future First, please email [info@futurefirst.org.uk](mailto:info@futurefirst.org.uk) or visit [www.futurefirst.org.uk](http://www.futurefirst.org.uk)

5.DCSF Publication October 2009: Quality, Choice and Aspiration: A strategy for young people's information, advice and guidance <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/IAG-Report-v2.pdf>

To become a corporate partner and explore how Future First can help you diversify your recruitment and engage your staff with local schools, please email Joe Kenyon,  
**[joe@futurefirst.org.uk](mailto:joe@futurefirst.org.uk)**

To become a Future First School, please email Jess Cordingly,  
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“It means more when we hear from people from the same school and see how they’ve moved on. It makes you think, ‘I could do that, they started where I was, look where they are now’. It gives you inspiration.”

**Future First Student, 15**