

Regional Career Readiness Pilot Key Messages for Partners

June 2024



Project Overview

- Yorkshire Universities (YU) Career Readiness Project has provided the first ever large-scale picture of student self-reported career readiness at the start of undergraduate study across an English region. This project supports the ongoing collaborative work of the [YU Graduate Implementation Group](#).
- As career readiness is institutional data, the only way to examine this on a regional level is through university collaboration as facilitated through YU. A results sharing approach was used and regional models were established to combine data across institutions.
- The project examined responses from 38,943 students entering full-time undergraduate study at 9 universities in Yorkshire in the 2022/2023 academic year. The response rate remains above 90% with few opt outs.

Key findings

- Over half of students entering undergraduate study are at the early stages of career thinking. Around one in five report that they have not started thinking about their career options.
- Just over a quarter of new students prioritised looking for experience in how they report their career thinking, amounting to over 10,000 year one students in Yorkshire.

What is Career Readiness?

- Universities collect Careers Registration data from students at enrolment and re-enrolment. There are two core elements of this that are common across all 9 universities in Yorkshire that collect this data, questions on career readiness and existing experience.
- For the purpose of the Yorkshire Universities (YU) proof of concept project, we examined just the first question on career readiness.
- **Career readiness** is a subjective self-evaluation of career thinking and planning in which students choose from a pre-defined set of statements the one that best represents their level of preparedness for obtaining a career on graduation.
- Universities have rich and unique insights from this institutionally held data and there is great value in working with universities who have this enhanced level of understanding of their students' thinking that isn't available anywhere else.
- Insights into current students can provide leading indicators for graduate labour market analysis. For example, universities have found strong links between career readiness and graduate outcomes.

Why a regional approach?

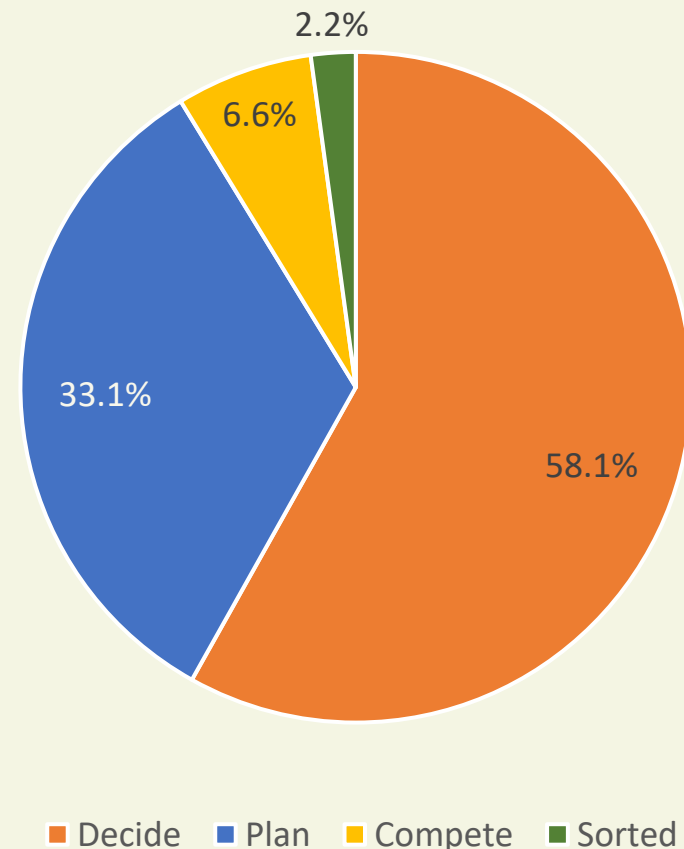
- This project has been part of Yorkshire Universities' (YU) ongoing graduate talent workstream following the production of a collaborative report, where universities and regional partners agreed to work together to support graduate employment and employability in the region.
- Through YU's work on this topic there has been broad agreement to work collaboratively on a regional basis to address inequalities in education and employment opportunities and outcomes, as well as supporting the skills needs of local and regional economies for the prosperity of all.
- One of the priority areas for collaborative action agreed in the report was “**Data sharing & analysis for effective strategy and action**”, which has resulted in the creation of a Graduate Data Group who have led on this work.
- The career readiness of students studying in Yorkshire's universities is of interest to those working on employment and skills across the region as most graduates (66%) from the 2021/22 cohort working in the region 15 months after graduation had also studied in the region (Graduate Outcomes).
- The largest category (52%) of graduate worker in the region 15 months after graduation is those who are from Yorkshire, studied in Yorkshire, and then worked in Yorkshire (Graduate Outcomes), therefore there are many opportunities for regional partners to work together across various stages to support progression.

Overview of results (Model 1)

Decide, Plan, Compete, Sorted phases of career readiness

- **58.1% Decide**
Students in this category have not started thinking about their career yet or have some initial ideas and are ready to start planning.
- **33.1% Plan**
This includes students who report as knowing what they want to do but not how to get there and those who want to gain relevant experience.
- **6.6% Compete**
Students who report as being ready to apply or who have started applying for graduate level opportunities.
- **2.2% Sorted**
Students who already have a job, further study, or a business plan confirmed.

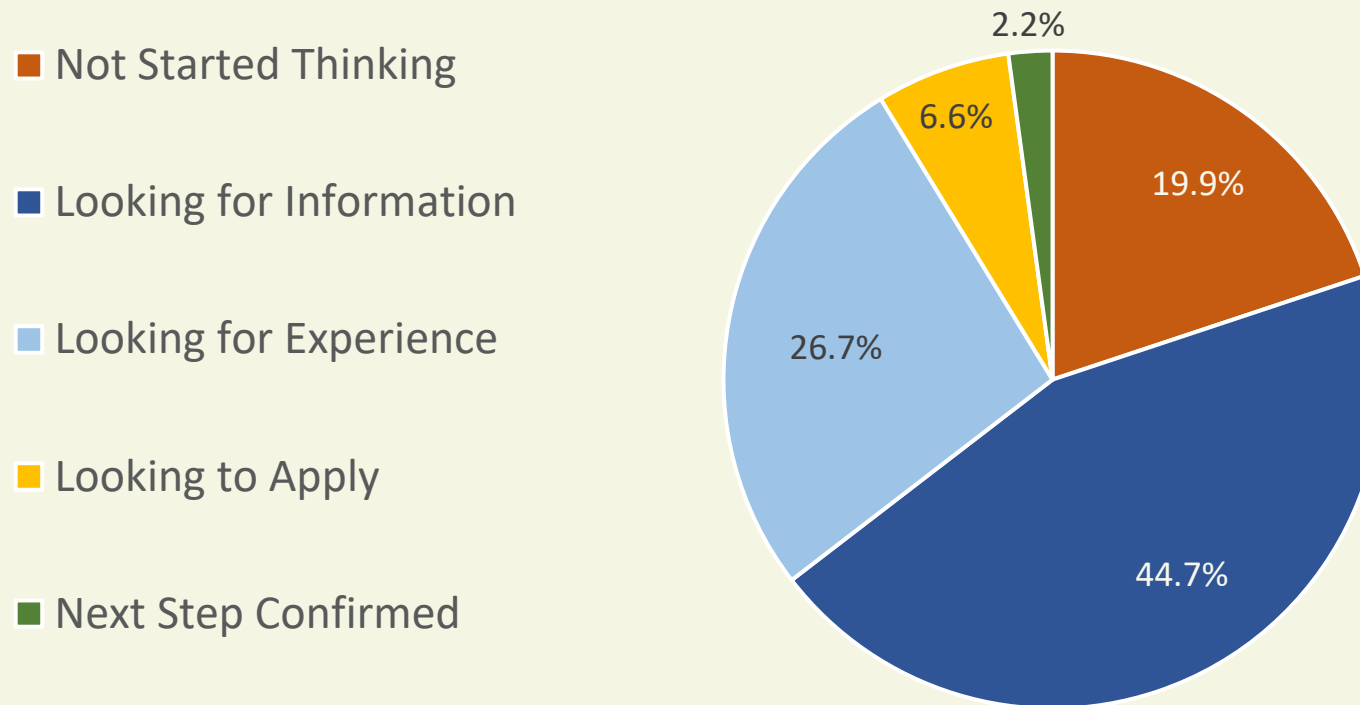
Career readiness at the start of undergraduate study across Yorkshire (Model 1)



Overview of results (Model 2)

We also used a model that groups students into a few more differentiated categories and this approach allows us to examine those who are looking for information or experience.

Career readiness at the start of undergraduate study across Yorkshire (Model 2)

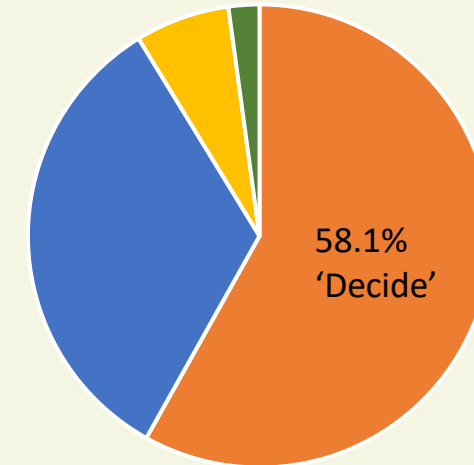


Start of career thinking - Findings

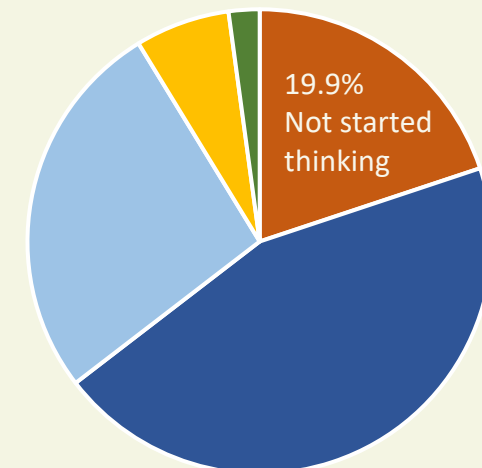
- A key area the project examined was students who are entering university in the very early stages of their career thinking.
- Over half (58.1%) of new full-time undergraduate students were categorised within the early 'Decide' stage of career readiness.
- Around one in five (19.9%) reported that they had not started thinking about their career options.
- 6.7%* of students reported they were not ready to start thinking about their career upon entry to full-time undergraduate study.
- These figures highlight the key role of higher education careers services play in helping students understand and navigate career options and how normal it is for students to be right at the start of their career thinking when starting university.

* As one institution does not have an equivalent statement for students who are not ready to start their career thinking this figure is out of an adjusted total of 33,748

Career readiness at the start of undergraduate study across Yorkshire (Model 1)



Career readiness at the start of undergraduate study across Yorkshire (Model 2)



Start of career thinking - Implications

Before entry to Higher Education:

- It is important that those who support students before they enter higher education are able to help students to understand the opportunities and services that are available at university. It is really helpful for students to enter university knowing that it is normal to still be in the early stages of your career thinking and that university career services are there to help right from the beginning, you don't have to already know what you want to do in order to access support.
- These findings also indicate the opportunities for further careers support ahead of starting higher education to help students with their career readiness and being open to engaging in career development.

Employer engagement:

- Working with universities presents many opportunities to engage with students to increase understanding of and interest in sectors and organisations while their career thinking develops.

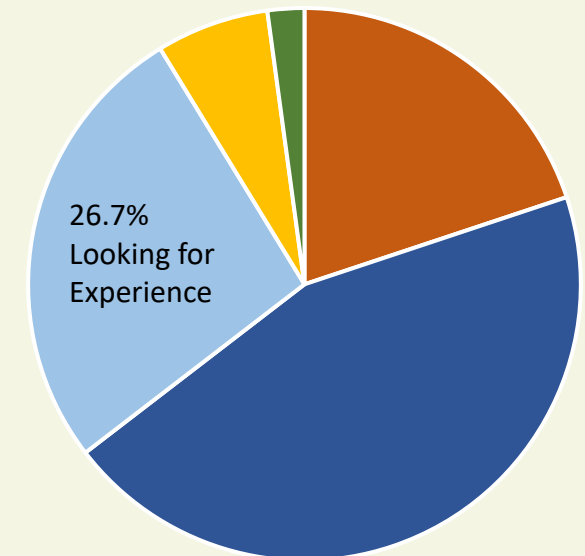
Regional employment and skills:

- There are also opportunities for those working on policy and delivery of employment and skills initiatives to consider how they can create the environment that facilitates employer engagement in education and opens up opportunities for students to explore key sectors to support skills needs in growth areas.

Demand for experience

- There is a high level of demand for experience from new full-time undergrads, with a just over a quarter (26.7%) looking for experience.
- From our sample this amounts to over 10,000 full-time year one students in the region prioritising interest in gaining experience when reporting where they are in their career planning.
- Of those students who are seeking experience, there will be a mix of those who already have an idea of what they want to do and want ‘**confirmatory**’ experience, as well as those who are seeking ‘**exploratory**’ experience to try out different possible pathways.
- There are many opportunities for **employers** in the region to work with students who can bring new perspectives to their organisation, through internships, placements, projects and briefs. This activity can open up students to considering working in different organisations and sectors, as well as supporting their broader career development.
- There are opportunities for **local and combined authorities** to support these opportunities for students to explore key sectors and consider different career paths and benefit businesses in the region.

Career readiness at the start of undergraduate study across Yorkshire (Model 2)



Other motivations for studies

- There is a developing exploration of those studying for other reasons and who are not seeking paid graduate employment from their studies due a variety of reasons, such as being retired or having caring responsibilities.
- This is only explicitly measured at 3 of 9 universities that collect career readiness data in the region and so we were not able to do regional level analysis of this.
- While the proportions of the institutional totals examined were small, it is useful to note their existence in the context of assumptions about student motivations and definitions of “success”.
- Plus, it is possible that numbers and proportions in these categories could have been larger if different cohorts were examined, particularly part-time students, as this project focused on full-time undergraduate students entering higher education.
- Universities all have services and activities focused on supporting graduate employment, but it is also important to consider broader ideas of graduate success and fulfilment that are supported through university study.

Further opportunities

- Universities have rich and unique insights from this institutionally held data and there is great value in working with universities who have this enhanced level of understanding of their career thinking, experience and preferences of their students that isn't available anywhere else.
- As well as the two core questions collected by all institutions in the region, on career readiness and current levels of experience,
 - 5 universities (3 in West Yorkshire and 2 in York and North Yorkshire) have a question on **sector preferences**, which is a particularly interesting indicator given that the UK labour market has a lot of flexibility across degree subjects.
 - 4 universities (3 in West Yorkshire and 1 in Hull and East Yorkshire) collect data on **location preferences** of students, which could be used for analysis of retention and motivations to stay in the region.
- There are lots of ways that working with universities on students career development could support strategy and action in the development of high-skilled economies across the region.
- However, it is important to note that there are constraints on collaborative data work given the current financial pressures on universities and the capacity needed for establishing comparability across institutions.



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