

A photograph of a man in a dark blue suit and tie, smiling broadly, fist-bumping a young man in a black graduation gown and purple tie. They are surrounded by other graduates in a dimly lit hall.

GCSE BOOST IMPACT REPORT

2025

GCSE BOOST

Why we do what we do

In the UK in 2025, significant mental health challenges are faced by GCSE students, particularly concerning exam anxiety and broader well-being issues. Data indicates high rates of exam anxiety, with some students struggling to manage stress and seeking help. Suicidal thoughts are also a concerning issue, with a rise in the number of young people experiencing them in colleges.

The Association of Colleges released a report in 2025 revealing a worrying rise in suicidal thoughts among young people. SaveMyExams found that **85%** of UK students experience exam anxiety. ASCL revealed alarming levels of exam anxiety among GCSE students. GOV.UK is working to provide all schools with access to specialist mental health professionals by 2029/30.

Key Findings and Statistics:

Exam Anxiety:

A large percentage of UK students experience exam anxiety. Many students suffer in silence and do not seek help. A significant portion of students report experiencing physical reactions to exam stress. Some students even report not attending school due to exam anxiety.

Suicidal Thoughts:

A significant number of 16-18 year olds are experiencing suicidal thoughts. Colleges are seeing a rise in the number of students with suicidal thoughts.

Mental Health Support:

There is a need for increased investment in mental health support for young people. More students need access to specialist mental health support in schools.

Factors Contributing to Mental Health Issues:

Social media and cyber-bullying have a detrimental impact on student mental health. Difficulties with healthy relationships and maturity also contribute to mental health challenges. Academic and financial pressures can also impact mental health.

In 2024, approximately **4.6%** of 16 and 17 year olds in the UK were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This means that around **4.6%** of this age group were not actively participating in either education, employment, or training programs.

Key Points about 16-17 year olds in the UK:

Compulsory Education:

Since 2013, 16 and 17 year olds are legally required to be in education or training.

Low NEET Rates:

This legal requirement results in lower NEET rates compared to older age groups.

Recent Increase in NEET:

In October to December 2024, the NEET rate for 16-24 year olds was **13.6%**, an increase from the previous year.

Factors Influencing NEET:

A fall in employment among 16/17 year olds has contributed to the rise in NEET rates.

Gender Differences:

Males in this age group have a slightly higher NEET rate (**4.9%**) compared to females (**4.2%**).

Economic Inactivity:

Economic inactivity, which includes being out of work and not actively seeking employment, is a significant factor in NEET rates, especially for older age groups.

Impact of Pandemic:

The recent NEET increase is comparable to pre-pandemic levels, suggesting a return to earlier patterns.

WE DID IT!!

After 6 years of careful planning and with the trust of students, teaching staff, professionals, employers, and organisations, GCSE Boost was a success in 2025.

My vision was always to create an experience that would help Year 11 students feel more confident going into their exams while being supported in their mental well-being. This was achieved through four different talks and the launch of a brand-new careers show featuring both local and national employers. We began by discussing transferable skills, life skills, and how learners were feeling as they approached their GCSEs. The event offered a warm, approachable atmosphere at the stands, helping to ease the pressure often felt from post-16 providers. This allowed learners to focus on developing broader skills beyond exam results, with the aim of positively influencing not only their academic performance but also their interactions with employers during and after their post-16 journey.

Within our carefully constructed GCSE Boost Impact Report, Redwood Event Solutions compiled valuable data to help us reflect on and improve the GCSE experience.

This data allows the initiative to thrive and evolve heading into 2026. By capturing both live data and post-event feedback, we were able to measure the real impact of GCSE Boost on learners, staff, employers, and providers.

I am personally hopeful that, through our authentic approach and the feedback we've received, schools, apprenticeship providers, colleges, charities, and employers will feel inspired and want to be part of this life-changing experience for the young people of Bristol.

Junior Saunders
Founder
GCSE Boost

OVERVIEW OF GENERAL STATS:

Schools attended from across Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Swindon and Wiltshire.

1516

students and staff attended GCSE Boost 2025

23

schools attended GCSE Boost 2025

5000+

students from over 57 schools across Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North east Somerset and North Somerset gained access to the event pre recorded as a free resource during GCSE exam period

17

businesses were involved in 2025 – showcasing their company to the next generation of potential employees

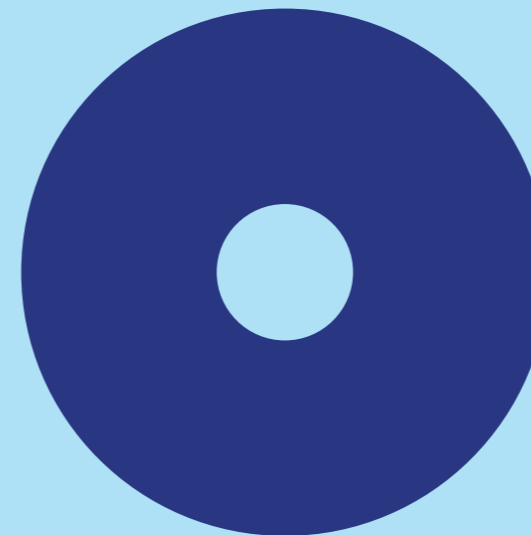


100%

100% of teachers felt that all Year 11 students should have the opportunity to attend GCSE Boost ahead of exam season.

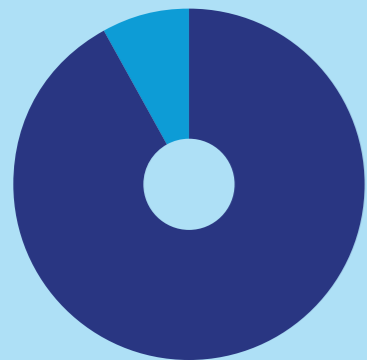
All parents surveyed said they would recommend the session to other parents. They found it useful and empowering, equipping them with the tools and information to support their children through their GCSE exams.

Over 5,000 parents now have access to the session recording, which is being shared as best practice to support young people during exam season.

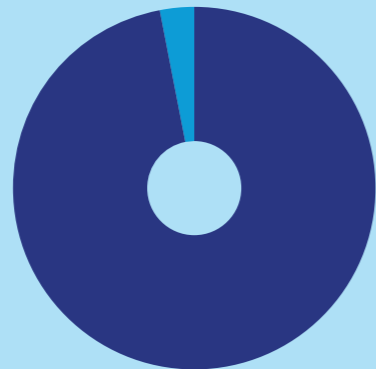


KEY STATS

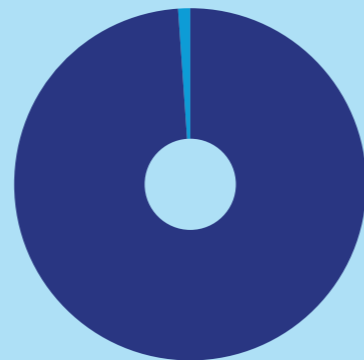
From the schools



92% of attendees engaged with the businesses involved with the careers fair at the show.



97% of parents and carers that attended the "How to best support your child through their GCSES said the information was delivered professionally passionately.



99% of teachers said they would recommend the event to other schools and education providers to attend.



Every student said they felt better and more confident about the exam period ahead because of the event, with 83% saying it had a very positive impact.

All attendees felt more confident about approaching businesses in the future as a result of conversations at the event.



STUDENT

COMMENTS

“Today’s inspired me to try my best for my GCSES. Making sure I am putting in all the effort that I can and it will help me in the long runway down the line. If I want to change my career or do something different, I have the ability to do that because of what I have learned today.”



“The energy and the music of the event were really fun and I loved the teacher dance off!”



“GCSE Boost is a great event for students and teachers dealing with stress”



“Today I learned that no matter what setbacks you get in life, if it’s a disability, mental or physical you can still push through and be who you want to be and get what you want to get”



“When my mum passed away I didn’t know if I was going to be able to get through my GCSES. After today I feel like I can and that’s so important”



“It showed the support from other people and motivated me to do well in my exams”

“The employer’s providers and speakers are relating a lot more to us instead of telling us what to do”

“It took a lot of the pressure off of the exams”

“It was amazing, loved the energy and having other schools in attendance.”



TEACHER COMMENTS

LINDSAY TUBB

Teacher Lindsey Tubb from Abbey Park School commented: "I had the pleasure of attending GCSE Boost in Bristol for Year 11 students about GCSEs, delivered by Junior an exceptional speaker. Their engaging presentation was both insightful and inspiring, offering valuable advice on how to tackle exams with confidence and the importance of maintaining focus and resilience. Junior's relatable approach really resonated with the students, encouraging them to believe in their potential and take charge of their future."

"In addition, the careers fair that followed the talk provided a fantastic opportunity for students to explore various career paths and gain a better understanding of how their GCSEs fit into their broader aspirations. Junior's emphasis on planning for the future, while staying grounded in the present, left the students motivated and ready to face their GCSEs with renewed determination. Highly recommend this session to any school looking to inspire and prepare students for both their exams and their future careers."

"GCSE boost felt like it was going to fill a gap that we don't have within our school programme and GCSE boost has absolutely done that today and covered a wide range of things that students need to be thinking about"-Sadie Mccombe Assistant Headteacher and Head of Post 16 Bradley Stoke Community School.

"GCSE boost provided a Great opportunity for students to engage with providers. The layout allowed students to really see value in the interactions and all the volunteers were so upbeat and positive. I think this session works well in-between the four talks"

"It is helpful for Year 11 GCSE students to have some time off revision and to really focus on Their mental health"



WILL TRICK



Assistant Vice Principal Oasis Academy John Williams

Excitement built throughout the year for our Year 11 students attending GCSE Boost. Junior came in and delivered pre-event information and shared further content with us as an academy to deliver to students.

When the day of the event arrived, our students were so excited, they knew they were about to attend a special event, but enough had been kept as 'a surprise' that the anticipation was clear. As our 170 Year 11 students walked through the doors of The Aerospace museum, they were greeted by the iconic Concorde overhead and a live DJ playing.

The event ran like clockwork with speakers delivering engaging and useful talks across a variety of topics. It was clear that every speaker was there for so much more than 'delivery'. They worked to connect with the students from all schools (a tough task when delivering to hundreds). Following the talks our students took part in the careers fair where providers had been clearly briefed to convert conversations into actions for our students. This event was spectacular and will have had a lasting positive impact on our students ahead of their exams.



PARENTS

& CARERS

The evening was very helpful and inspirational. Excellent range of speakers, with great variety of suggestions for dealing with the exam period. The speakers enthusiastically shared their own experiences. The scientific facts about how the brain operates was informative and insightful, we could have listened to even more guidance on this aspect, thank you!

-Sue-

Professionally organised event, very smooth and impressive, but also warm, friendly and genuine. Really glad we took the time to attend.

An excellent use of our family's time this evening. A very big thank you to you Junior!

- Steve -



EMPLOYER TESTIMONIALS

PETER KYRIACOU



College Admissions & Outreach Manager at Boomsatsuma

"As part of our ongoing outreach at Boomsatsuma, we had the pleasure of supporting the GCSE Boost programme in Bristol — and we came away truly inspired. The energy in the room was electric, with students fully engaged in their learning and clearly benefiting from the targeted support. It was fantastic to see how the programme created an environment where learners felt confident to ask questions, challenge themselves, and build essential skills and techniques to help them prep for their exams.

What struck us most was how much progress the students made not academically, but in their overall mindset over the day. The shift in confidence and ambition was palpable. For many of these young people, initiatives like GCSE Boost are a turning point — helping them realise their potential and opening their eyes to future pathways, including creative and industry-based education options like those we offer at Boomsatsuma.

The programme itself was vital for us to touch base with students whom already had Boomsatsuma as their first choice for their Post 16 option. However, what we noticed was the new connections we made from students whom previously thought Boomsatsuma to be out of their reach due to the pressures of GCSE exams. Whilst exact numbers cannot be given, we estimate roughly 10% of students in attendance reached out to us at the event for more info about Boomsatsuma and our programmes.

We're passionate about nurturing emerging talent, and it's programmes like this that lay the groundwork. We're excited to continue supporting these students on their journey and hope to welcome many of them into our courses in the near future."

STEVE HALL



Head of Employer Engagement SGS college

Junior shared his vision with me for the event back in 2024 and I immediately knew it would be something SGS College should be involved with. The main reason being having the platform to engage with over 1000 Y11s to promote what we offer; and also knowing the Concorde Museum is a fantastic location.

From the moment we expressed interest in participating in GCSE Boost, the process was seamless and well-organized. Junior was incredibly supportive, providing us with all the necessary information and resources to ensure our involvement was successful. Communication was clear and timely, and I felt valued and respected throughout the entire process.

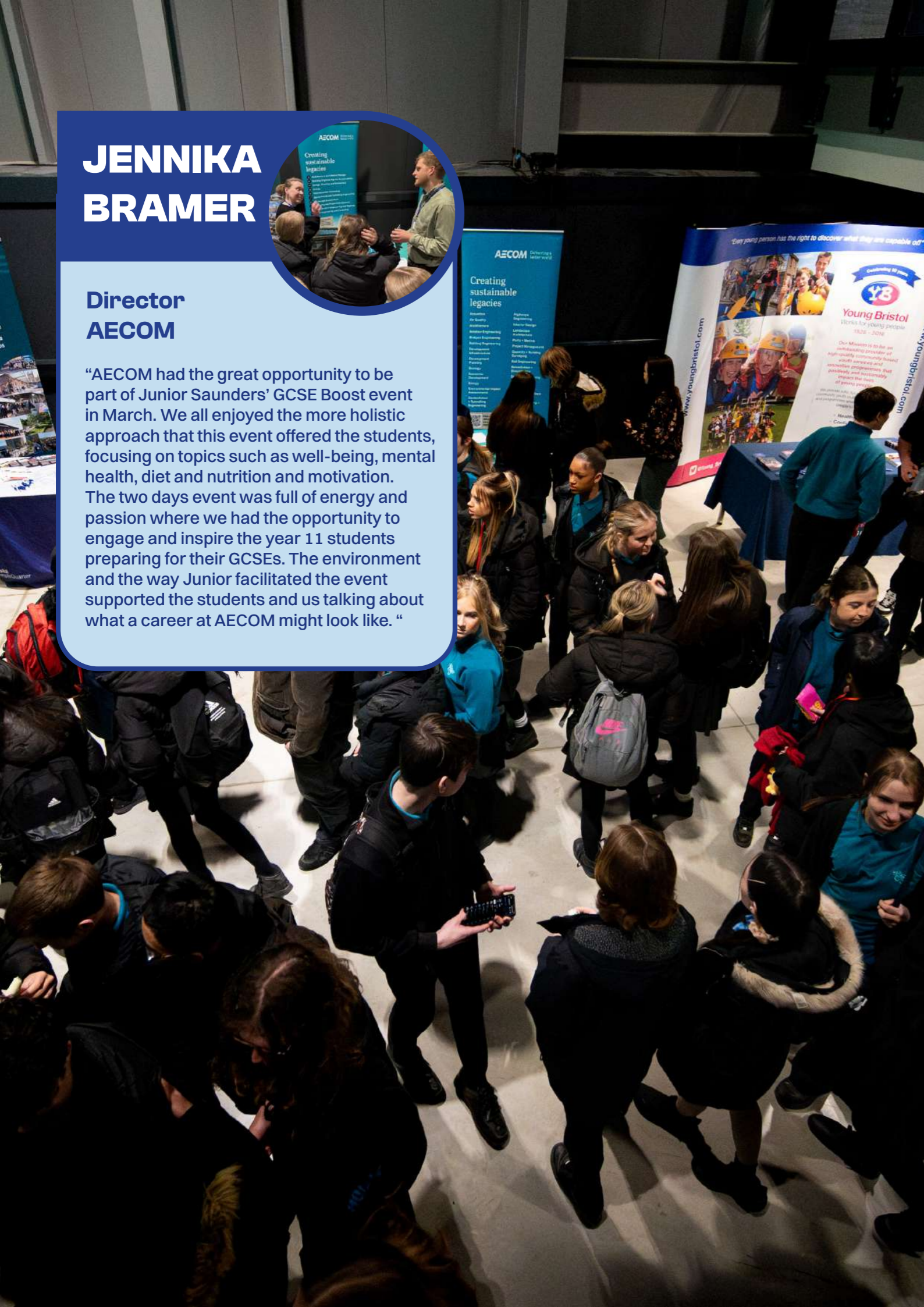
The engagement from Y11s was overwhelmingly positive. We had the opportunity to engage with a diverse group of students (many being neurodivergent) who were eager to learn more about the educational pathways and apprenticeships we offer. The quality of conversations at our stand was exceptional, with students asking insightful questions and showing genuine interest in their future careers. Many of the Y11s were unaware that we offer A-levels so it was extremely useful to promote; and we were able to assist learners in applying for many of our courses at the event.

JENNIKA BRAMER



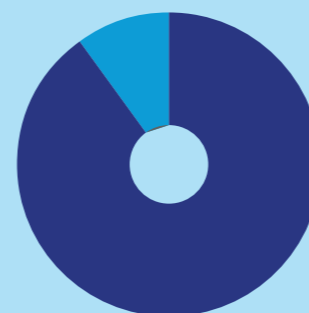
**Director
AECOM**

“AECOM had the great opportunity to be part of Junior Saunders’ GCSE Boost event in March. We all enjoyed the more holistic approach that this event offered the students, focusing on topics such as well-being, mental health, diet and nutrition and motivation. The two days event was full of energy and passion where we had the opportunity to engage and inspire the year 11 students preparing for their GCSEs. The environment and the way Junior facilitated the event supported the students and us talking about what a career at AECOM might look like. “

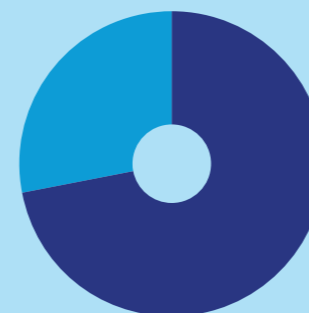


BUSINESS STATS

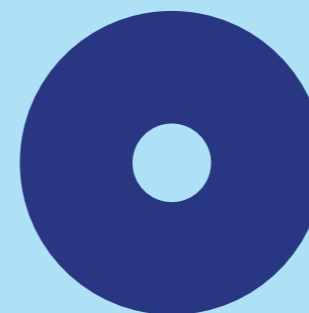
and comments



90% of businesses said that conversations with students were very positive and worthwhile.



72% felt the students' opinion of their business had been positively impacted by presence at the event.



100% of businesses said they would return in 2026 to do the event again!

“Inspiring event where the focus isn’t just on the businesses puts a spotlight on the children by empowering them and giving them confidence.”



“I was really impressed with the number of students in attendance, as well as the effort and soul that was put into the event. It had a fantastic atmosphere that didn't feel corporate and was really enjoyable.”
Meghan Joyce, Business Development Manager at 1625 Independent People, praised the event: “The event was a vibrant, energised and motivating experience. Junior’s zest for life, and infectious passion, is impossible to not be inspired by. The students had the opportunity to learn new skills, consider alternative future options and make new connections both socially and academically. An all-round success.”



FEEDBACK &

IMPROVEMENTS

Here are the three main areas of improvement suggested by attendees of GCSE Boost for 2026:

- If GCSE Boost falls during Ramadan in 2026, a prayer room would be greatly appreciated, along with mindfulness around food and snacks.
- More breaks between speakers to help attendees stay engaged and refreshed.
- A wider range of employers and providers with stands representing different professions, to better promote opportunities for school leavers.



School leads:

Will Trick
 Lauren Stone
 Carey Phillips
 Claire Bulter
 Judith Mckenzie
 Sam Doig
 Adam Knight
 Rachel Throne
 Leeza Cuthbertson
 Del Planter
 Jez Hare
 Craig Jordan
 Claire Butler
 Karen Crossway
 Rachel Martin
 Jane Morgan
 Gemma Larkin
 Shamis Farah

Providers and Employers:

Steve Hall
 Lee Williams
 Mark Curtis
 Ian Browne
 Dom Wood
 Danielle Haskings
 Rebecca Scott
 Jennika Bramer
 Oliva Meacham
 Jane Greenaway
 Donna Woodland
 Rachel Tan
 Erin Famer
 Meghan Joyce
 David Tansley

GCSE boost speakers:

David Tansley
 Lewis Wedlock
 Ellise Hayward
 Lisa Davey
 Rachel Tan
 Paul Burton
 Paul Eme
 Primrose Granville
 Suzanne Paice
 Craig Jordan
 Sangeeta Dewan

GCSE boost support and PR:

Lisa Davey
 Emma Dark
 Paul Burrows
 Folami Prehaye
 Paul Jackman
 Steve Hill
 Rachel Bonner
 Celia Arberry

Aerospace Bristol:

Sally Cordwell
 Charlie Clarke
 Eva Ambler Thomas
 Florian Ehbrecht
 And all the other team members that helped with GCSE Boost behind the scenes.



GET

INVOLVED



GCSE BOOST RETURNS ON THE 12/13TH OF MARCH 2026

**TICKETS FOR GCSE BOOST AT AEROSPACE
BRISTOL GO LIVE ON 5TH SEPTEMBER 2025!**

Secondary Schools

Schools from Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Bath and North East Somerset — secure your complimentary tickets for GCSE Boost 2026 at: www.gcse-boost.co.uk

Next year, GCSE Boost will include apprenticeship engagement employers. It will also be PAL-compliant and contribute towards the updated Gatsby Benchmarks.

GCSE Boost also offers a travel contribution for all school attending the event.

GCSE Boost is committed to the inclusion of all students, whether they attend mainstream, virtual, or alternative provision schools.

Employers

Are you an Employer, Charity, College, SME, or an Apprenticeship Provider interested in having a stand at GCSE Boost 2026? Get in touch by emailing info@gcse-boost.co.uk or visit www.gcse-boost.co.uk to book your planning meeting with a member of our team.

GET IN TOUCH

www.gcse-boost.co.uk

info@gcse-boost.co.uk

GCSE boost impact report 2026
GCSE Boost is apart of Making Careers Happen LTD

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NEXT YEAR!



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