

What factors determine students choices.

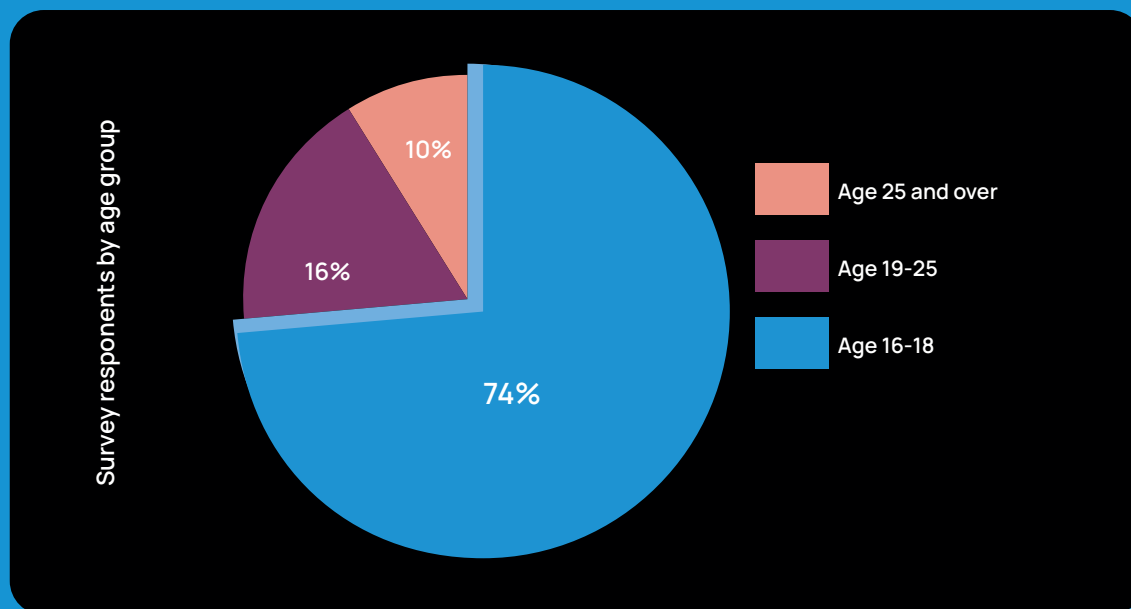


Contents:

Survey Statistics	3	Plans after education	26
Awareness of careers	4	Higher Education the favoured route for many.	27
Impact of career awareness on course selection		University seen as pathway to career success	28
Age-Related Trends in Career Awareness.	5	Uncertainty and Alternative Pathways	29
The Impact of Career Awareness on Student Confidence in Course Selection.	6	Correlation Between Career Interests and Post-FE Choices	30
Advice and guidance	7	Salary and living wage	31
How Trust in Advisers Changes with Age		General Understanding of Salary Differences	32
Confidence Levels in Career Advisers	10	Differences in Salary Expectations by Age Group	33
The Influence of Parents on Student Decision Making	11	Early career aspirations	34
Career aspirations	13	Childhood Career Dreams: Do They Last?	35
How Job Awareness effects Student Confidence		Recalling Childhood Career Aspirations	36
Career Sectors of Interest	15	The Case for Early Career Education	37
The Influence of Family on Career Decisions	16	Contact us	38
Family Influence Across Different Job Sectors	17		
Key Factors Driving Sector Selection	18		
Confidence in getting a job	20		
How confident are you about getting a job after your studies?	21		
Performance Pressure and Career Ambiguity Undermining Student Confidence	22		
The Role of Parental Influence on Confidence	23		
Confidence in Course Choices and Career Prospects	24		
Confidence Levels by Industry Preferences	25		

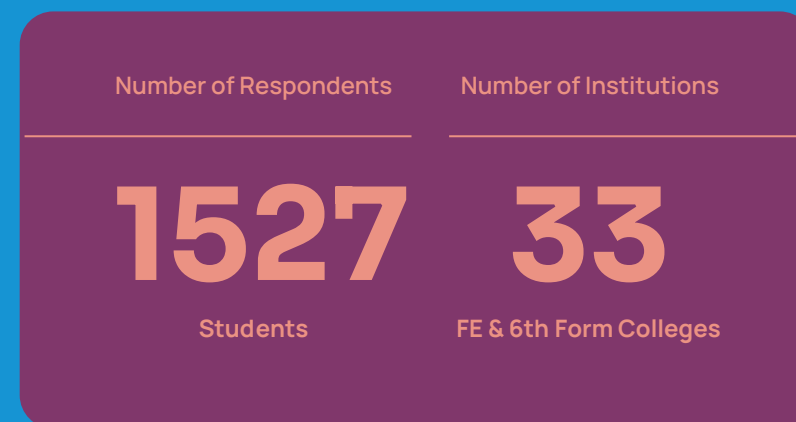
Survey Statistics

The Pathways 2025 Annual FE Students Choices Report analyses the responses collected from a survey focusing on students' perspectives regarding their course and career choices.



The survey explored various aspects, including their awareness of job prospects, factors influencing their decisions, confidence levels, sources of advice, concerns about the future, and career aspirations. The data provides insights into the experiences and concerns of students from different colleges and age groups.

The survey includes responses primarily from individuals in the 16-18 age group and the 19-25 age group, with a smaller number of respondents over 25. There were 33 colleges represented in the responses.





Awareness of careers

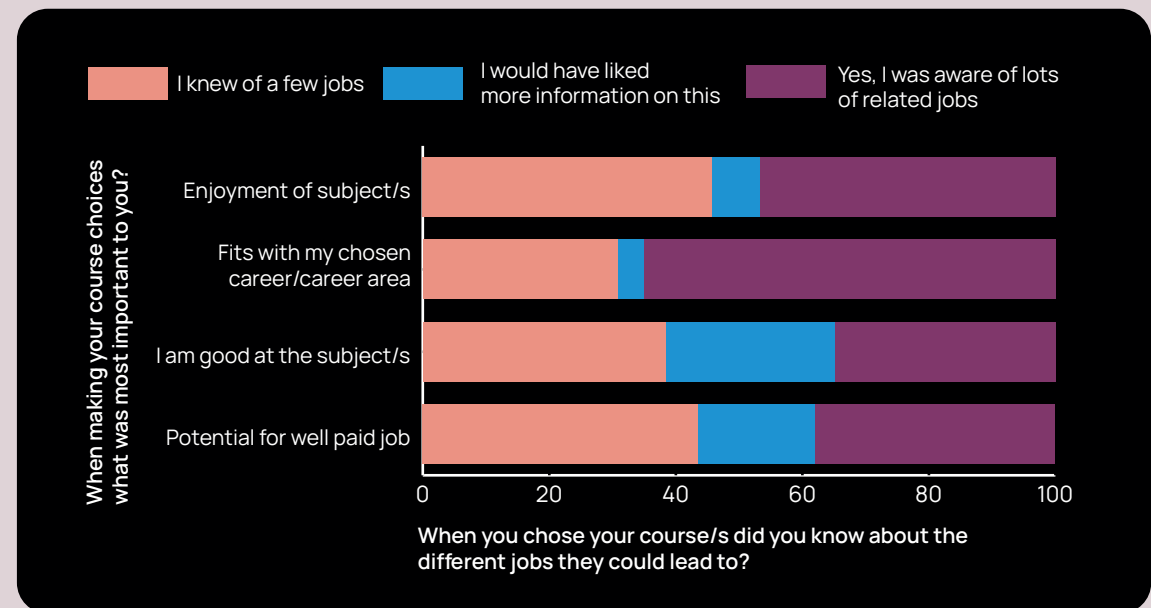
Awareness of careers

A considerable number of respondents reported having an awareness of jobs associated with their chosen courses. Many expressed confidence in their understanding of potential career paths, indicating that they had a clear sense of where their studies could lead.

However, a notable proportion of respondents acknowledged that their knowledge was limited, with some stating that they were only familiar with a handful of job options. Others indicated a desire for more comprehensive guidance on the full range of careers linked to their field of study.

Impact of career awareness on course selection

Upon deeper analysis, it becomes evident that students with a stronger awareness of job prospects may have placed greater emphasis on factors such as how well their chosen course aligned with their long-term career ambitions when choosing their courses. In contrast, those with less awareness of available jobs may have been more inclined to select their courses based on personal interest and enjoyment of the subject, rather than its direct career applicability.

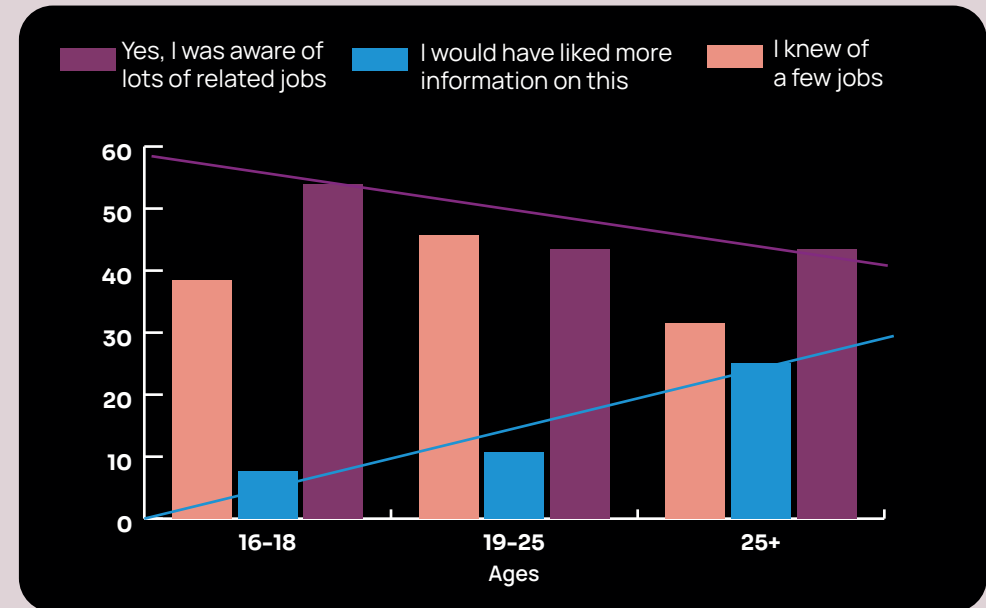


Awareness of careers

Age-Related Trends in Career Awareness.

When examining respondents' awareness of jobs in relation to their age, a clear pattern emerges. The 16–18 and 19–25 age groups display similar levels of job awareness. However, among respondents over the age of 25, more than a third indicated that they would have liked more information about career opportunities and the different jobs related to their studies.

Interestingly, younger respondents (16–18) appear to have greater confidence in their knowledge of job roles. However, this perceived awareness declines in older age groups. A possible explanation for this trend is that younger students may have a more optimistic or general understanding of job prospects, whereas older students, who are closer to entering the workforce, may develop a more realistic perspective on employment challenges and opportunities.



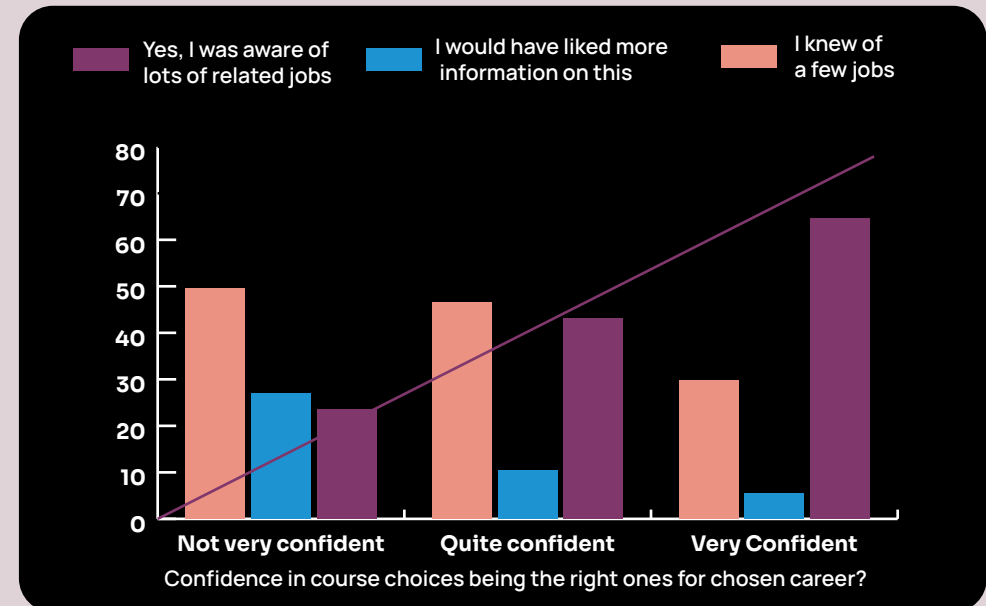
Younger respondents (16–18) are more confident in their job awareness, potentially due to optimism, while older students show less confidence as they gain a more realistic view of employment.

Awareness of careers

The Impact of Career Awareness on Student Confidence in Course Selection.

There is also a clear correlation between students' awareness of potential career paths and their confidence in course selection. Respondents with a greater understanding of related job options were more likely to express confidence that their chosen courses aligned with their intended careers. In contrast, those with limited knowledge of career options reported lower confidence in their course decisions.

These findings indicate that enhanced career guidance and increased exposure to job opportunities may significantly improve students' confidence and preparedness when selecting courses.



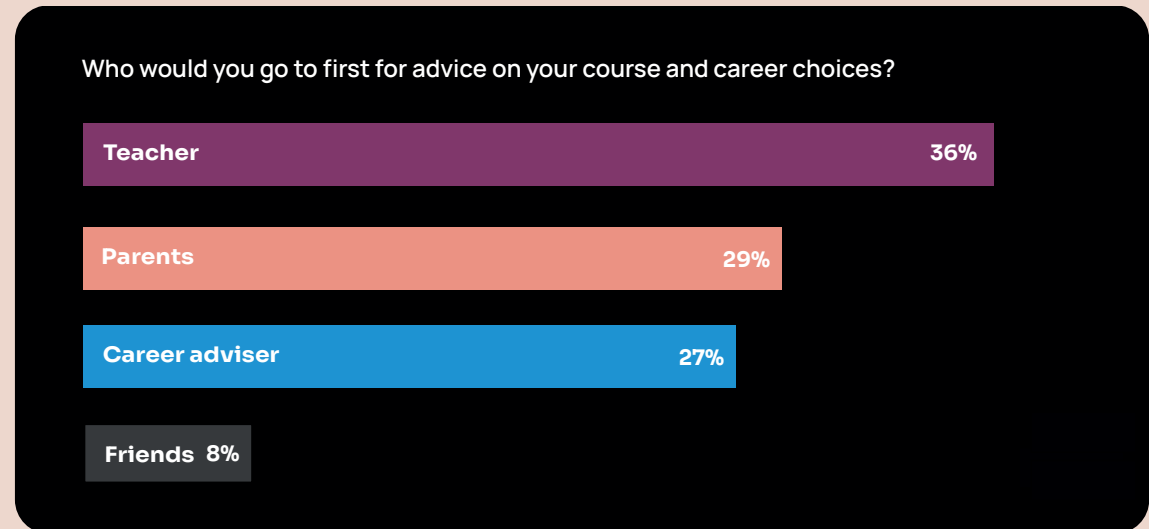
Students with greater career awareness are more confident in their course choices, while those with limited knowledge feel less certain.

A young woman with long brown hair, wearing a denim jacket over a white lace-trimmed top, is smiling and looking towards a professional in a white lab coat. The professional is holding a clipboard and pen, appearing to be in a consultation. The background shows a clinical or office setting with a bulletin board and a potted plant. The image has a warm, reddish-orange overlay.

Advice and guidance

Advice and guidance

The survey aimed to identify who students trust most when seeking information and advice about their course selections and future career paths. The findings reveal a relatively even distribution of trust among three key groups: teachers, parents, and career advisers, with minimal variation across different age groups. Notably, while students often feel pressure from their parents, parental input appears to play a significant role in shaping their overall confidence in making educational and career decisions.



When asked who they would turn to first for guidance, teachers emerged as the most trusted source of advice. However, over a quarter of students identified their parents as their primary source of support, highlighting the significant role that family plays in decision-making.

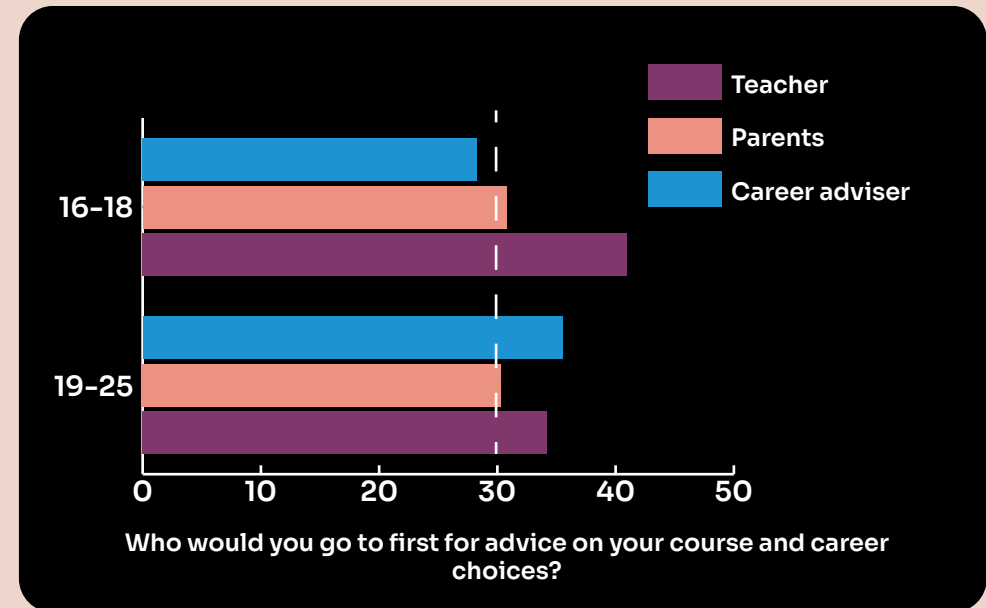
Advice and guidance

How Trust in Advisers Changes with Age

The sources students rely on for career guidance appear to evolve slightly with age. For those aged 16–18, teachers and parents are the most trusted sources for both course selection and career advice.

Notably, there is also an increase in engagement with career advisers among students aged 19–25. This trend may suggest that initial reluctance—particularly among the 16–18 age group, who may feel uncomfortable seeking advice from unfamiliar professionals—diminishes with age and experience.

This slight evolution in trusted advisers suggests that as students gain life experience and move further into adulthood, their reliance on parental and teacher input diminishes, while professional advisers become increasingly influential in shaping career decisions.



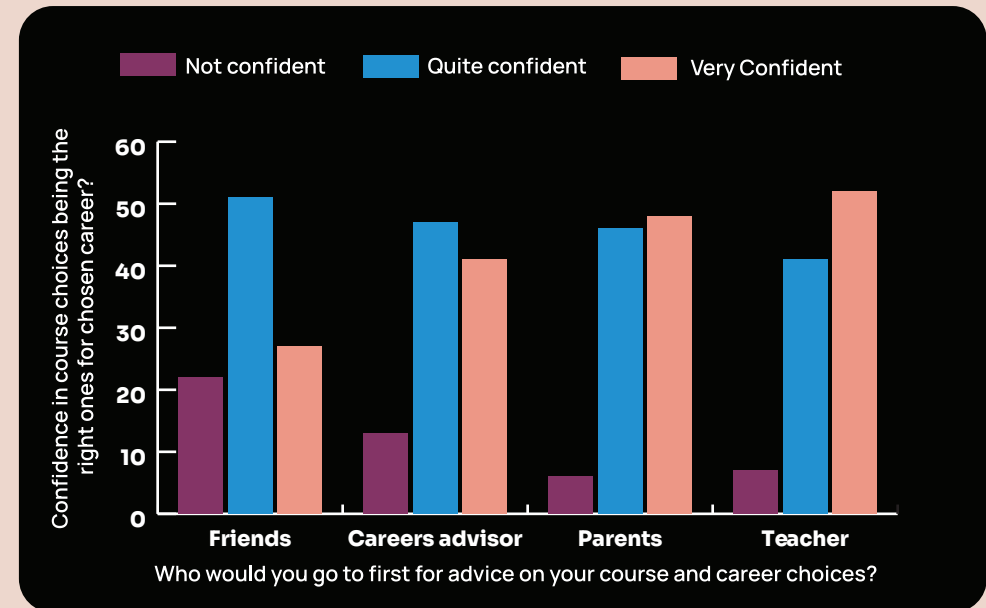
Career advisers become more influential as students get older.

Advice and guidance

Confidence Levels in Career Advisers

The data shows that students who list career advisers as their first choice for guidance tend to have less confidence in whether their course is the right fit for their career aspirations.

This may indicate that students who are unsure about their decisions are actively seeking external professional advice, whereas those with higher confidence levels rely more on teachers and parents for validation.



Where students are advised by teachers or parents we see confidence levels in their choices rise

Advice and guidance

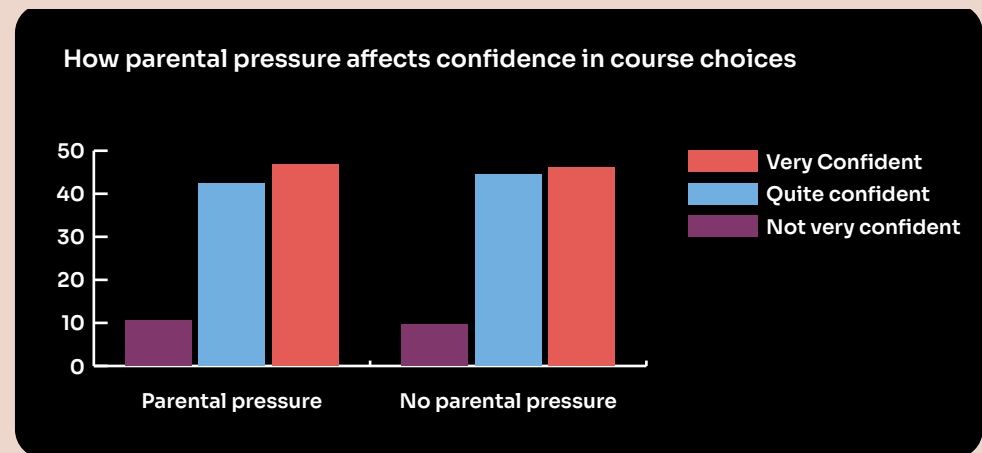
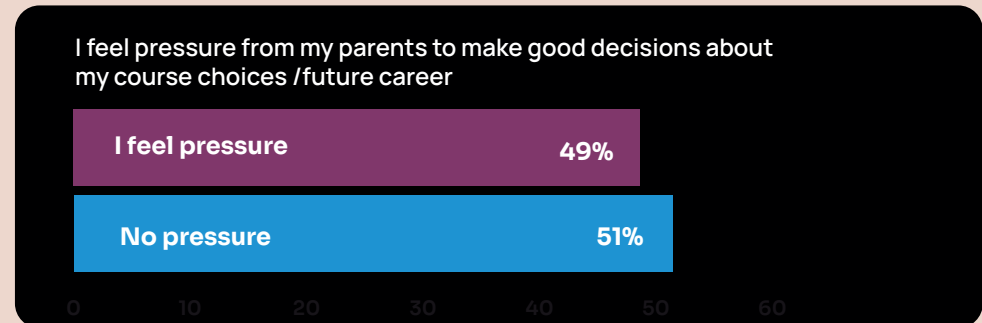
The Influence of Parents on Student Decision Making

As observed previously, both parents and teachers play a crucial role in guiding students' decisions. The survey results reaffirm that when students consider their parents' input to be highly important, they tend to display much higher confidence levels regarding their future careers. However, this raises the question: Is there a downside to strong parental influence?

When asked whether they feel pressure from their parents to make the right choices regarding courses and careers, nearly half of all students reported feeling such pressure.

While this pressure could potentially contribute to increased stress or anxiety, it does not appear to negatively impact students' confidence in their course choices or securing a job after their studies.

This suggests that while parental expectations may create a demanding environment, they do not necessarily lead to greater uncertainty about career success and may even help students feel more confident and committed to achieving their goals.



Pressure from parents to make good decisions about their future doesn't seem to impact confidence about course choices being the right ones for their chosen career or their confidence in getting a job after studies.

Career aspirations

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a grey quilted hoodie and a brown backpack, is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a blurred brick building. The text 'Career aspirations' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font. There are decorative semi-transparent shapes in shades of red and blue on the image.

Career aspirations

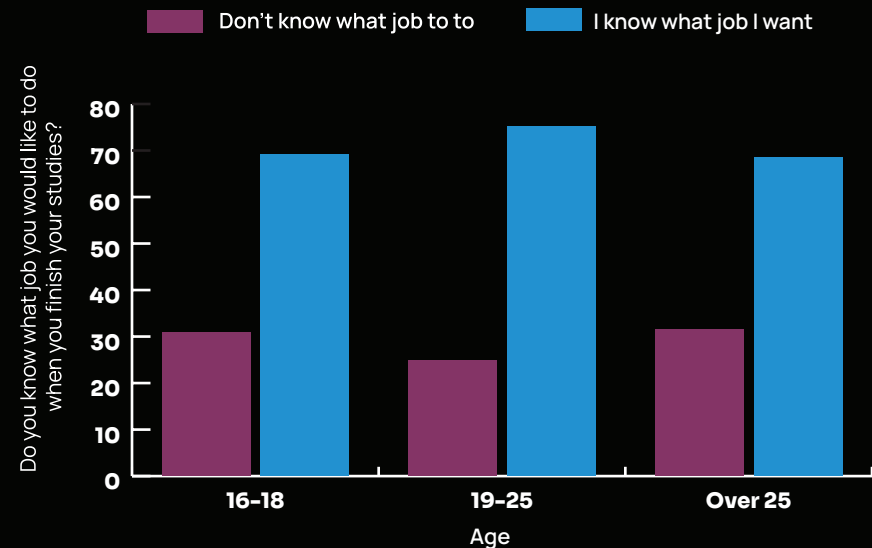
The survey findings reveal that **70%** of respondents indicated that they have a specific job in mind for after they complete their education. This suggests that the majority of students have a clear vision of their future careers, which may be influenced by various factors, including their awareness of job opportunities, personal interests, and external influences such as family and education.

There also very little difference in this percentage when looking across the different age groups.

Do you know what job you would like to do after finishing your education?

Yes I know what job I want to do **70%**

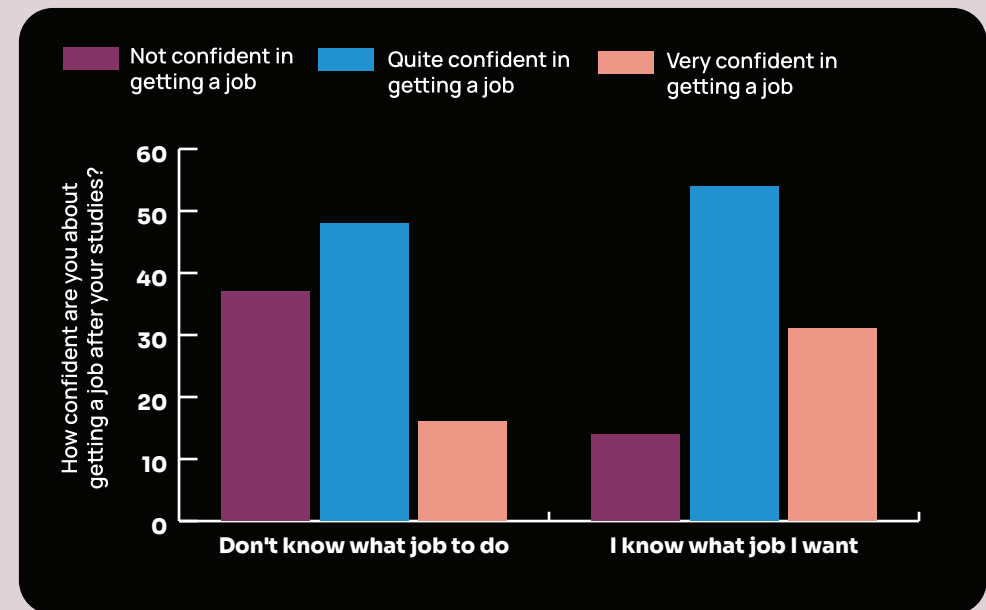
No I don't know yet **30%**



Career aspirations

How Job Awareness effects Student Confidence

A strong correlation exists between students' awareness of jobs and their confidence in both their course choices and career aspirations. Those who were familiar with a wide range of jobs related to their field of study were also more likely to have a specific career path in mind. Additionally, this group demonstrated greater confidence in their chosen course being the right one for their career goals. This suggests that early exposure to career information plays a critical role in reinforcing students' confidence about their academic and professional futures.



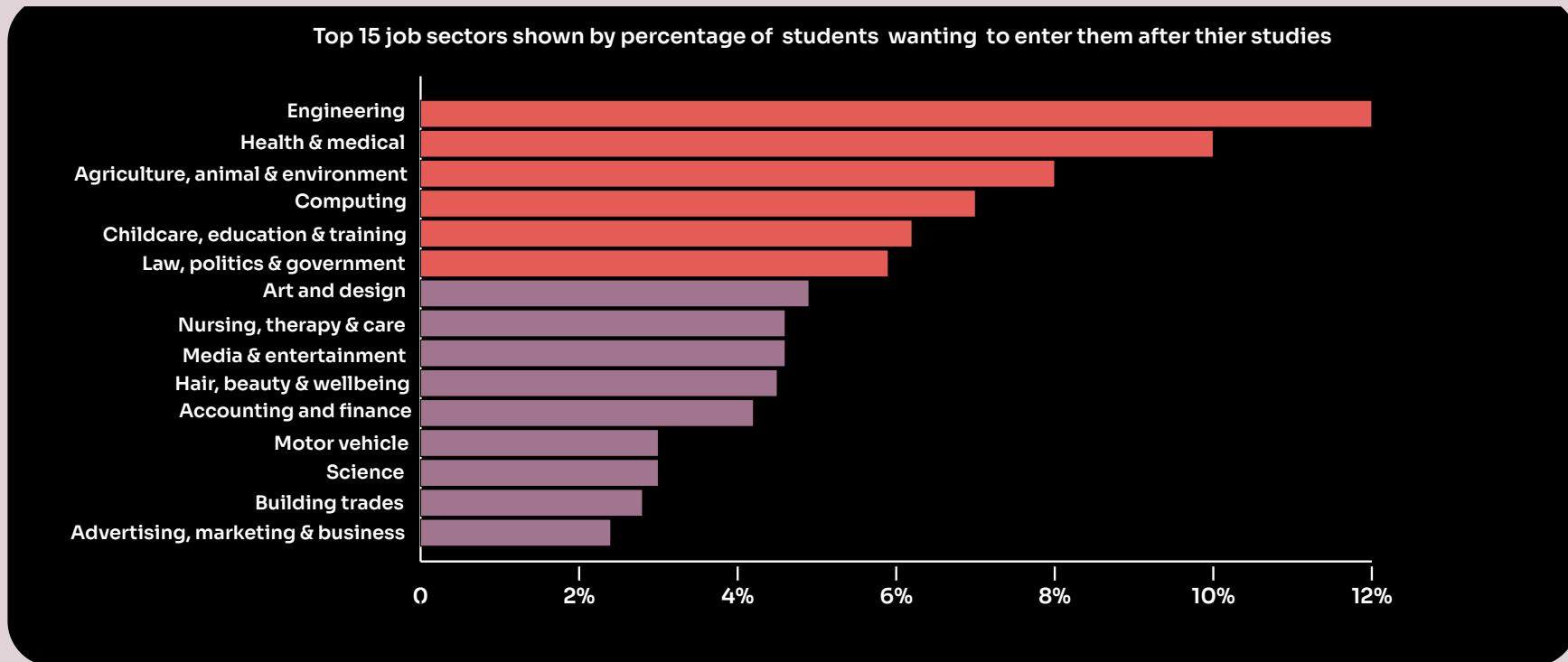
Those students who know what job they would like to do when they finish their studies are more than twice as likely to be very confident about getting a job.

Career aspirations

Career Sectors of Interest

For students who knew what job they wanted to pursue, the survey asked them to identify the industry in which it belonged. The top five sectors chosen by students partially align with existing data from Pathways, indicating consistency in career interests in terms of what they are researching on your college

website and on what they are saying in the survey. These preferred industries highlight trends in student aspirations and provide insight into the fields they are most drawn to.



Career aspirations

The Influence of Family on Career Decisions

A crucial factor in career decision-making appears to be the influence of family members working in a particular sector. When asked whether any of their parents or family members worked in the same industry as their career aspiration, over 40% of all students confirmed that a family member was employed in their chosen sector. This underscores the significant role that family exposure plays in shaping career choices, suggesting that students may be more inclined to pursue careers they are familiar with through their family's experiences.

Do you have family members who work in a similar job

Yes family member in similar job 44%

No family in similar job 56%

Career aspirations

Family Influence Across Different Job Sectors

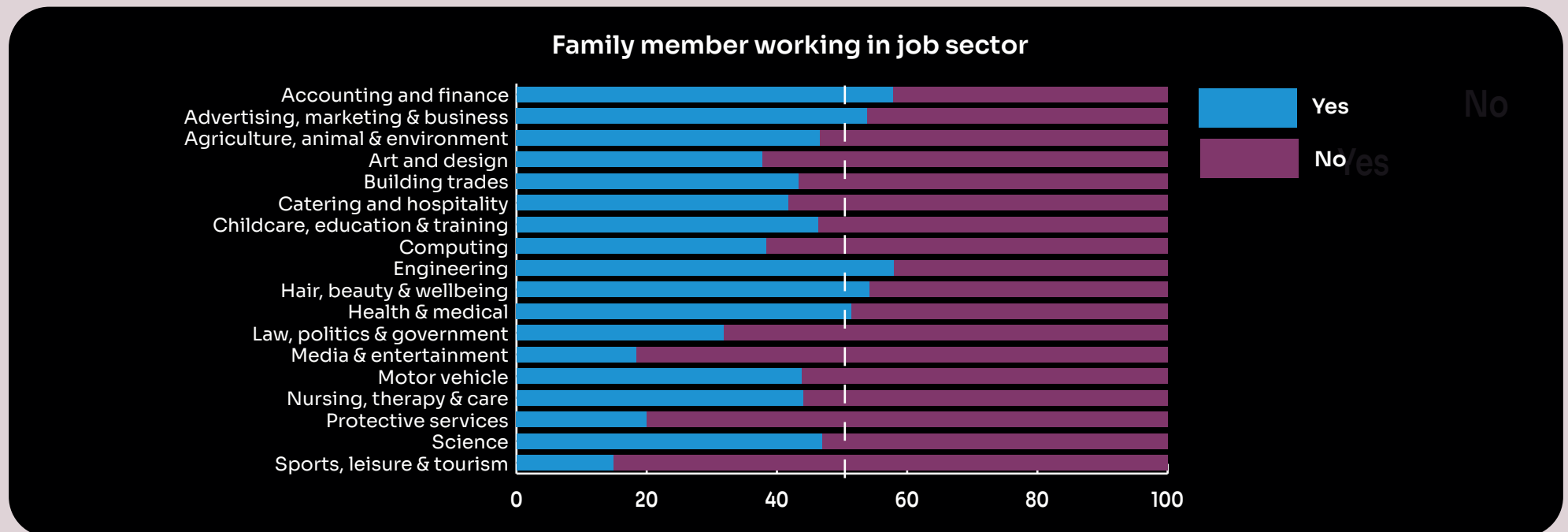
The survey also examined the prevalence of family influence across various job sectors, revealing that it was a common factor in all industries. However, in some fields, this influence was particularly pronounced:

- Hair, beauty & well-being – 55% had a relative employed in this area.
- Advertising, marketing & business – 52% of students interested

in this sector had a family member working in the field.

- Accounting and Finance – 51% reported family connections in this sector.

These findings reinforce the idea that students are significantly influenced by the career paths of their family members, often choosing professions they are already familiar with through direct exposure.



Career aspirations

Key Factors Driving Sector Selection

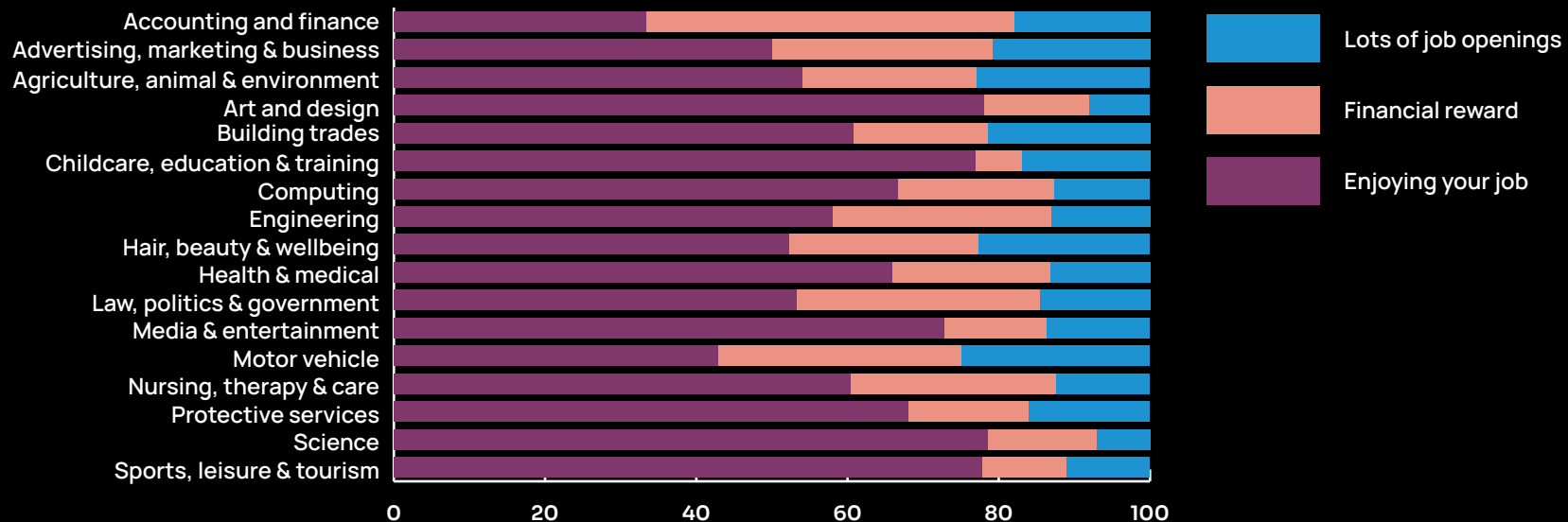
To better understand why students were drawn to particular career paths, the survey explored the most important aspects of their future job choices. Across all sectors, the enjoyment of the job emerged as the primary motivating factor for career selection. However, in certain industries, other considerations played a more prominent role: Financial reward was a significant factor in sectors such as Accounting & Finance, Engineering, Construction

management, and Law.

Job security and availability were less commonly cited as primary reasons for career selection, with only a small percentage of students choosing a sector based on the belief that they could easily secure employment.

These findings suggest that students are primarily motivated by personal interest and passion for their field, rather than simply choosing careers based on job availability.

Reasons for future job choices by job sector.



A photograph of a construction site with a blue tint. In the foreground, a woman wearing a blue hard hat, safety glasses, and a high-visibility yellow-green jacket is looking towards a man. The man is also wearing a blue hard hat, safety glasses, and a high-visibility yellow-green jacket. He is holding a theodolite mounted on a tripod. In the background, there is a construction site with scaffolding and another worker in a blue hard hat. The text "Confidence in getting a job" is overlaid in white on a semi-transparent blue diagonal band.

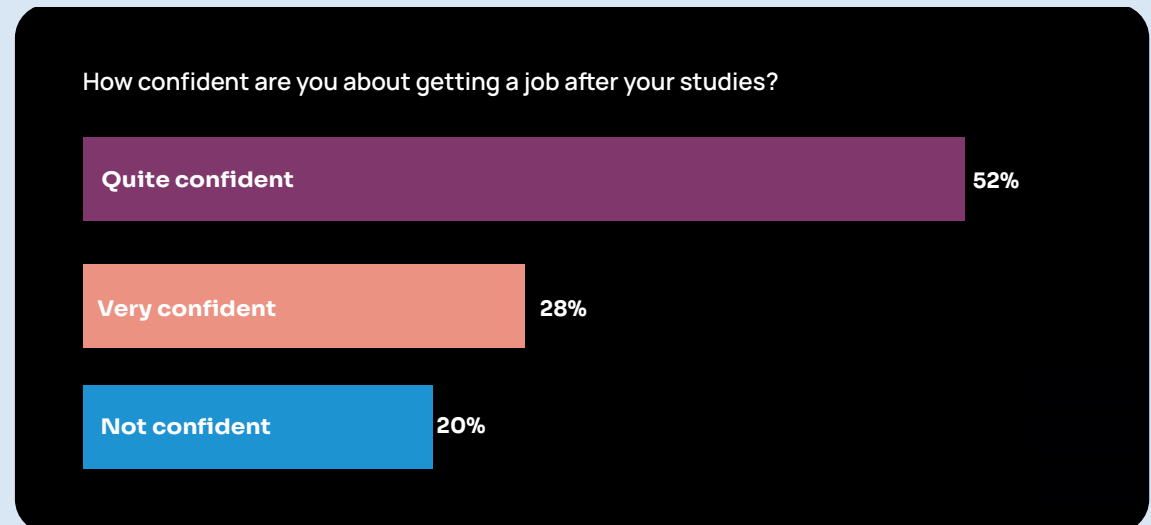
Confidence in getting a job

Confidence in getting a job

The survey aims to assess students' confidence in their course choices and their future career prospects. Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of students feel positively about their job prospects, with most reporting that they are either very confident or quite confident about securing employment after their studies. However, approximately 20% of respondents expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to find a job, highlighting an area of concern.

How confident are you about getting a job after your studies?

While overall confidence levels are high, various factors significantly impact students' perceptions of their future careers. Even among those who identify as very confident, distinct trends emerge that influence their overall confidence levels.



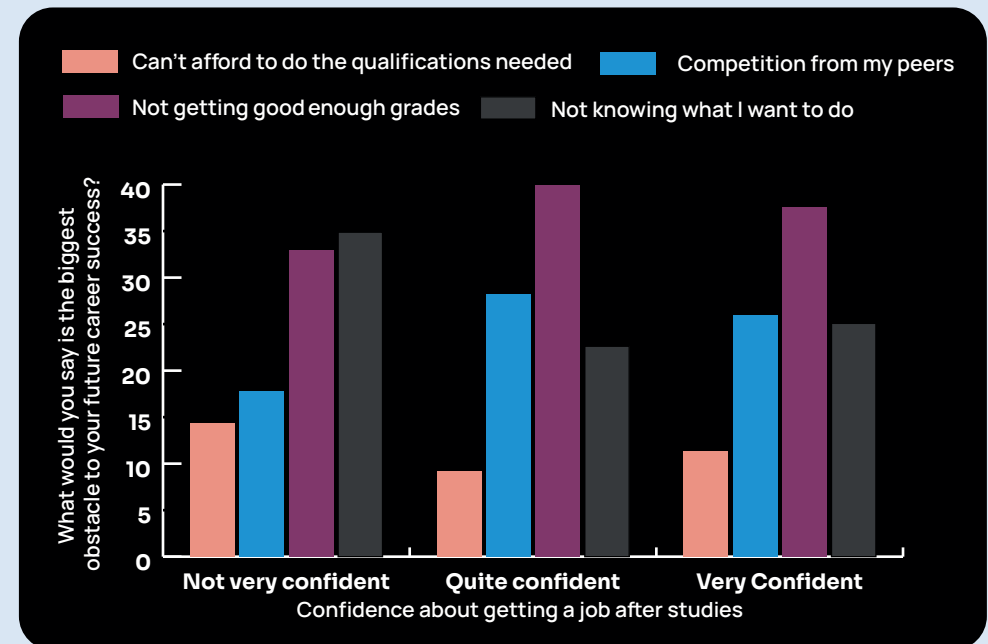
Confidence in getting a job

Performance Pressure and Career Ambiguity Undermining Student Confidence

While overall confidence levels in getting a job are high, various factors significantly impact students' perceptions of their future careers. Even among those who identify as very confident, distinct trends emerge that influence their overall confidence levels.

When examining students' confidence in securing employment alongside their concerns about potential obstacles, a common theme arises: regardless of their confidence level, the most frequently cited concerns are achieving high enough grades and competition from peers. This suggests a heightened awareness of the pressure to perform academically and the competitive nature of the job market. Many students recognize that securing a desirable job requires excelling in their studies, which, in turn, contributes to anxiety about their ability to meet high expectations.

Another significant factor affecting confidence is uncertainty about career direction. Students who are unsure about their future career paths report lower confidence levels, indicating that a lack of clarity about professional goals can be just as concerning as academic performance and competition.



No matter how confident about getting a job, not achieving high enough grades and competition from peers is seen as a major obstacle to future career success.

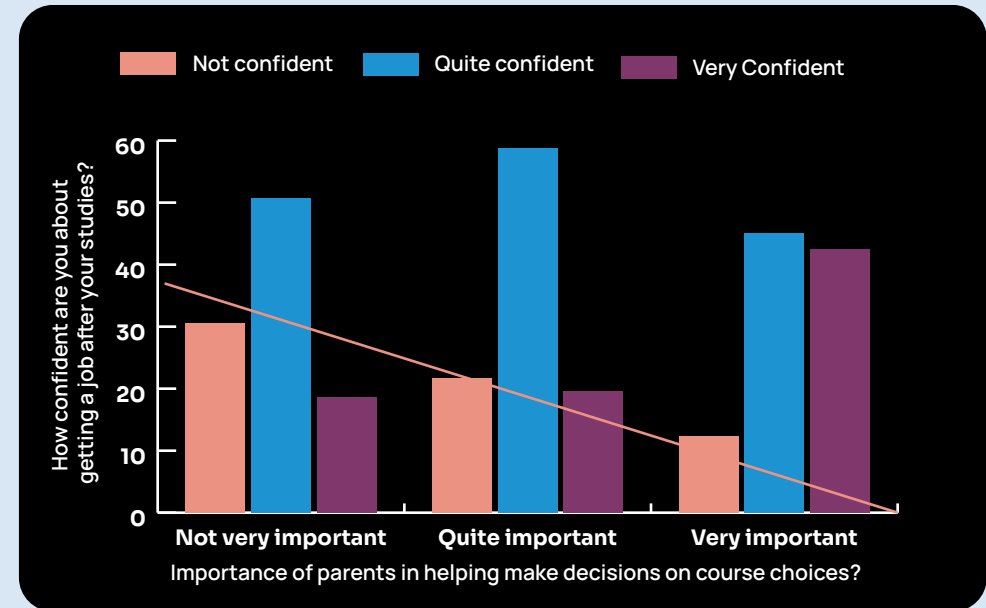
Confidence in getting a job

The Role of Parental Influence on Confidence

One key trend observed in the survey is the impact of parental involvement in course decision-making on student confidence in getting a job after their studies.

Students who stated that their parents' guidance was very important in their course choices were more than twice as confident about their future career prospects compared to those who said their parents were only somewhat or not important in the decision-making process.

This finding suggests that parental support plays a crucial role in reinforcing students' confidence in their academic and career pathways, potentially providing reassurance and validation for their choices.



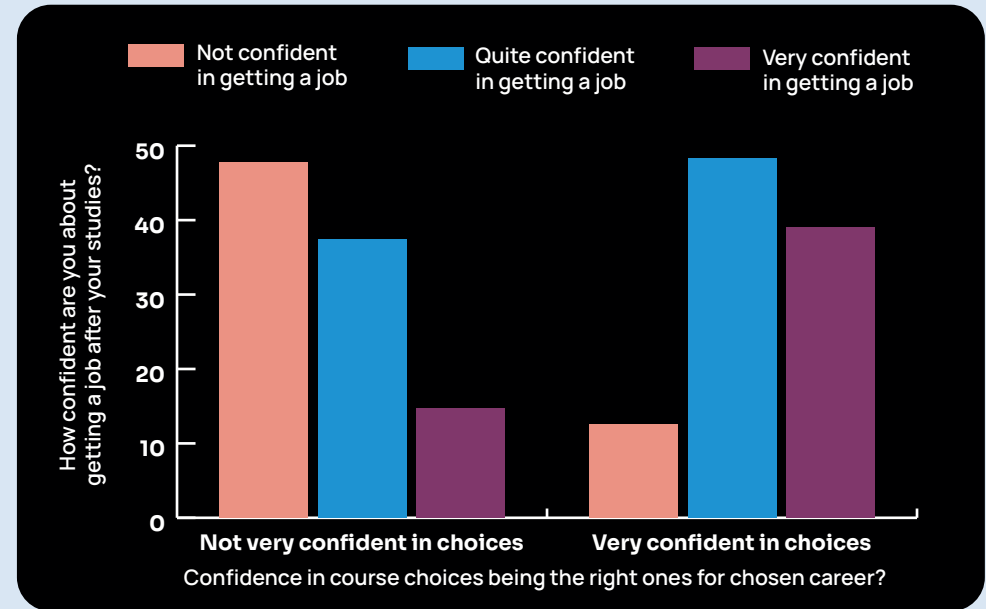
Positive parental input in decision making impacts confidence in getting a job after completing study

Confidence in getting a job

Confidence in Course Choices and Career Prospects

As expected, there is a strong correlation between confidence in course choices and confidence in securing a job post-studies. Students who are confident in their course selection also tend to be confident about their job prospects.

Conversely, students who are unsure about whether they chose the right course display a significant drop in job confidence, demonstrating the interconnection between educational certainty and career optimism.



Clearly illustrates how confidence in course choices also increases confidence in securing a job after education and vice-versa.

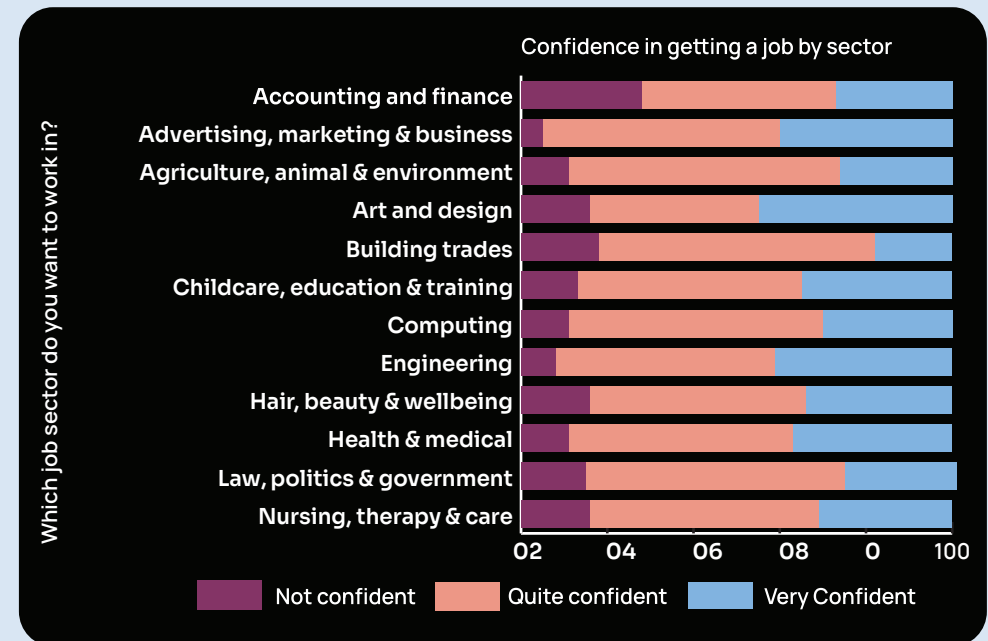
Confidence in getting a job

Confidence Levels by Industry Preferences

The survey also examined confidence levels among students based on their desired job sectors. The findings reveal that students who have a clear idea of the job or industry they want to enter generally express higher confidence in their employment prospects. However, those aiming for careers in Accounting and finance as well as media and entertainment appear to have less confidence.

This could be attributed to an assumed competitive job market or their ability to achieve the grades required.

Among students aiming to enter the Accounting and Finance sector, over 75% identified achieving strong academic grades and competition from peers as their primary concerns regarding entry into the profession.



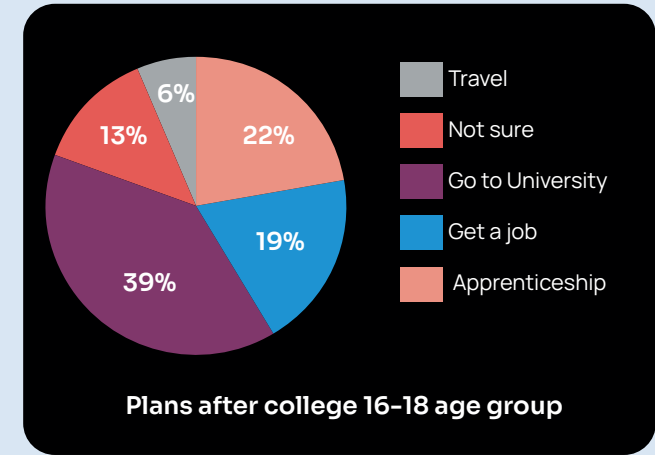
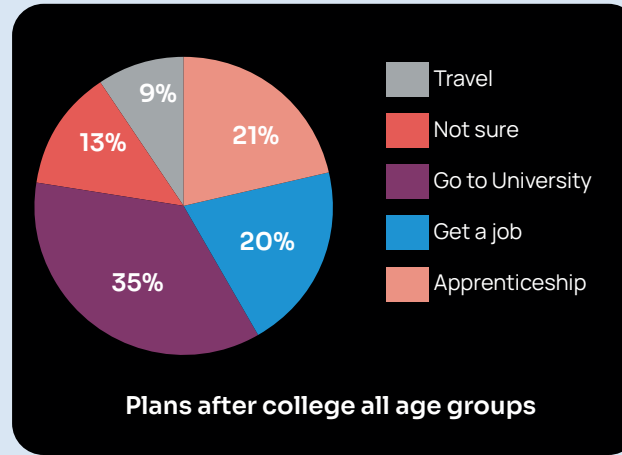
Students with a clear idea of career areas they wish to enter showed high confidence levels in job prospects no matter which sector.

Plans after education



Plans after Further Education

For many students, further education is viewed as a stepping stone to the next stage of their educational or professional journey. Understanding students' post-FE aspirations and the factors influencing these decisions provides valuable insight into their career motivations and potential challenges.



Higher Education the favoured route for many.

The data suggests that university is the preferred choice for the majority of students with 35% of all students saying this was their plan after finishing their course at college. We also see doing an apprenticeship at 21% and getting a job at 20%.

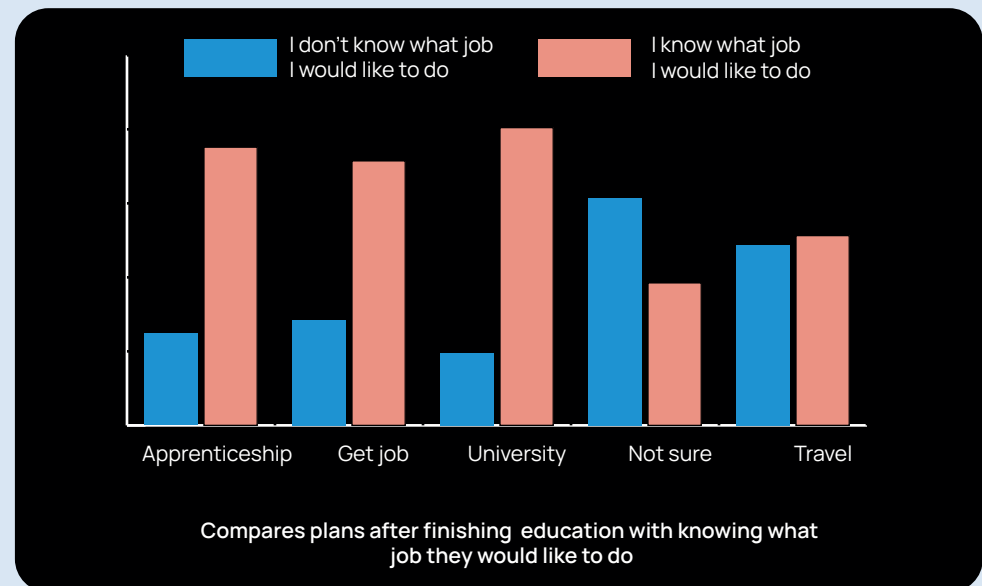
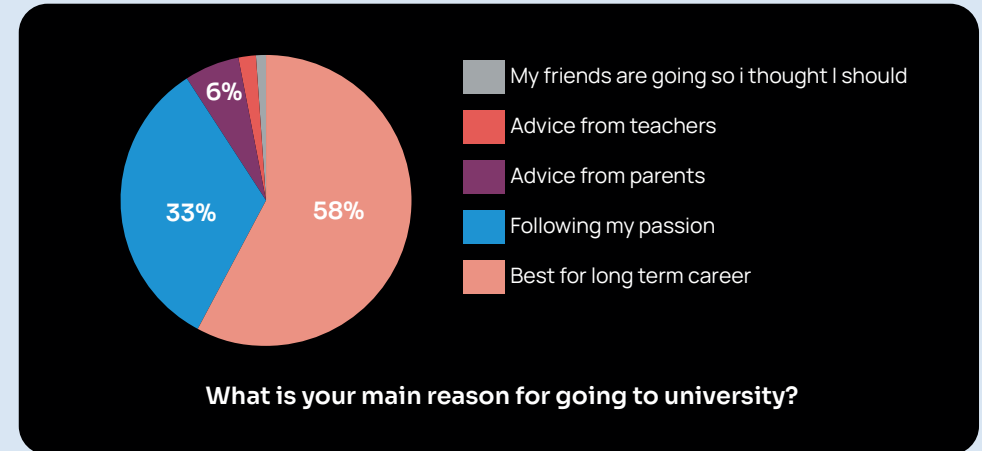
The largest respondent group in the survey was students aged 16-18, and within this cohort, there was a significant increase in the proportion of students planning to attend university, rising to 39%.

Plans after Further Education

University seen as pathway to career success

Among those considering university, the overwhelming majority believe that higher education offers the best pathway to achieving their long-term career goals.

Interestingly, when examining students' responses regarding their future plans after further education, those choosing university are also far more likely to have a clear idea of their desired career path. An impressive 80% of university-bound students already know what job they want to pursue, significantly higher than students choosing other pathways. This suggests that this group is highly career-focused and, as a result, more willing to accept the financial investment required to obtain a degree.



Plans after Further Education

Uncertainty and Alternative Pathways

In contrast, students who are uncertain about their plans after FE are also more likely to be unsure about their future career path. A notable proportion of these students have no concrete plans or intend to take time out to travel, possibly as a means of gaining life experience and allowing themselves more time to make informed decisions.

Beyond university, apprenticeships are a popular option among students, indicating growing recognition of vocational training as a viable alternative to traditional academic routes. However, 27% of students interested in apprenticeships admitted they were unaware of the apprenticeship options available in their chosen career field.

This highlights a potential gap in career and course guidance, suggesting that greater support is needed to ensure students are well-informed about apprenticeship opportunities.

Do you what apprenticeship options are available to you in the career you are interested in



Apprenticeships remain popular however the data suggests a heightened optimism regarding apprenticeship options as over 1/4 of students wanting to do an apprenticeship after college are unsure of the options available to them.

Plans after Further Education

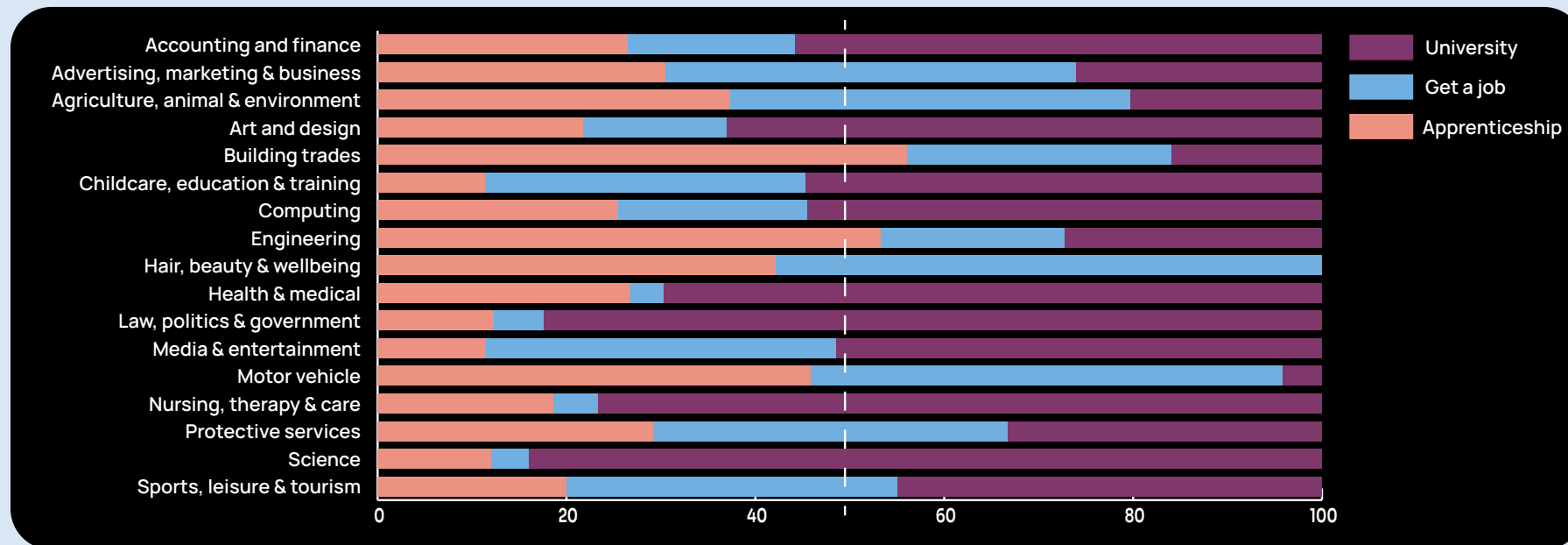
Correlation Between Career Interests and Post-FE Choices

A strong link was observed between students' chosen career sectors and their preferred next steps after further education: University is the dominant route for students interested in Nursing, Health and Medical, Law Politics & Government, Art & Design, and Science.

Apprenticeships are the preferred option for students interested in Building Trades, Motor Vehicle Maintenance, Hair & Beauty, and

Construction careers.

Engineering presents a unique trend, where a higher proportion of students favour apprenticeships over university, despite university often being considered the traditional route into the field. This may indicate an increasing recognition of work-based learning as a valuable alternative to academic study in this sector, particularly as apprenticeships offer a more financially viable route with earn-as-you-learn opportunities, compared to the significant financial burden of university tuition fees and living costs.

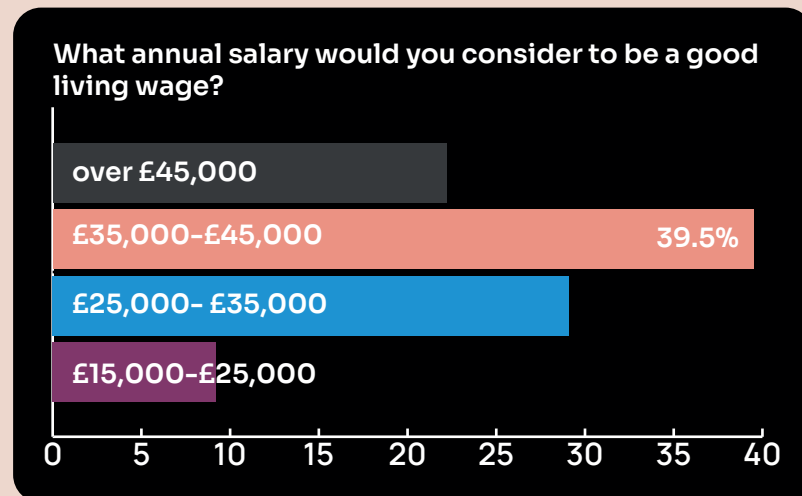




Salary and living wage

Salary and living wage

Understanding students' knowledge of salaries and their expectations regarding a good living wage provides valuable insight into their financial awareness and career expectations. The survey explored students' understanding of annual earnings and their perceptions of what constitutes a sustainable income.



General Understanding of Salary Differences

Discussions with students revealed a broad awareness of salary variations across different industries. Many respondents recognised that certain sectors, such as financial services and law, tend to offer higher salaries, whereas careers in the public sector, such as teaching or policing, are perceived as lower-paying professions.

This suggests that students have a general understanding of income disparities across different career paths. However, when asked to specify a salary range they would consider a good living wage, there was a notable variation in responses.

Some students underestimated realistic salary expectations, with 9% selecting a salary below the legal minimum wage. This finding suggests a knowledge gap in students' understanding of wages and cost of living, particularly among younger respondents or those with limited exposure to financial planning.

The most frequently chosen salary range among respondents was £35,000-£45,000, aligning closely with the UK national average salary of approximately £36,000. This indicates that many students have a reasonable perception of an appropriate income for achieving financial stability.

Salary and living wage

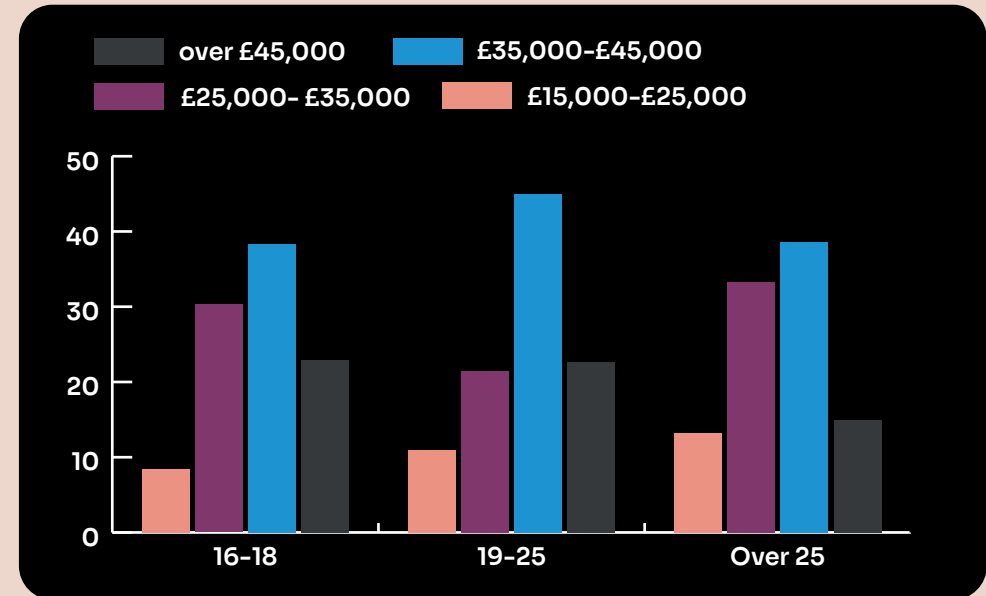
Differences in Salary Expectations by Age Group

When analysing responses by age group, a clear trend emerged:

Older respondents (ages 19-25) demonstrated a more consistent understanding of realistic salary expectations, with nearly half of this group selecting £35,000-£45,000 as a good living wage.

Younger respondents (16-18) displayed a wider variation in salary expectations, with some overestimating potential earnings, while others significantly underestimated wages, suggesting they may have less experience with financial realities such as rent, bills, and cost of living.

Nearly 15% of the oldest respondent (25+) chose £15,000-£25,000 as a good living wage. This shows a worrying lack of financial knowledge as minimum wage for someone their age is just shy of £25,000 per annum.



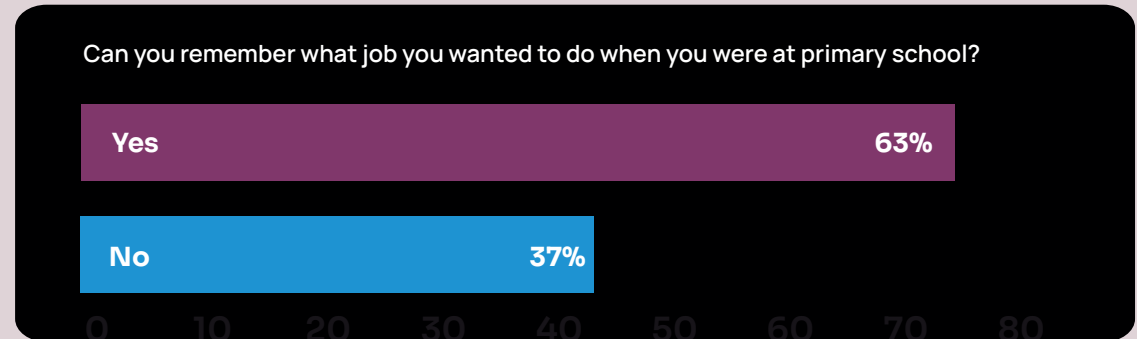
Salary bands chosen by age group indicating thoughts on what constitutes a good living wage.

A young child is dressed as a firefighter, wearing a dark helmet with a yellow stripe and the number '13' in a white circle. The child is holding a fire hose nozzle and looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred fire station with red equipment. A semi-transparent purple and red diagonal overlay is present on the right side of the image.

Early career aspirations

Early career aspirations

Understanding the factors that influence students' course and career decisions is crucial in assessing how their aspirations evolve over time. One interesting area of investigation was whether early career aspirations—formed during primary school—still played a role in students' current choices.



Childhood Career Dreams: Do They Last?

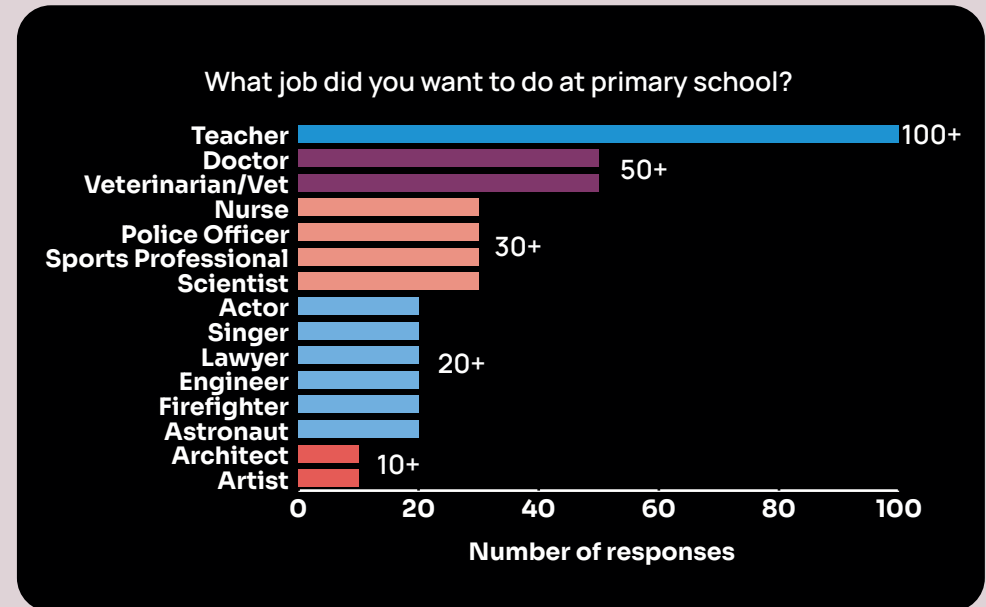
The survey asked students whether they could remember what job they wanted to do when they were in primary school. Its purpose was to determine whether the respondents still aspired to those same careers later in life, in order to understand how much of a student's personality, interests, and career preferences are shaped at a young age and whether these initial ideas continue to influence their future pathways.

Early career aspirations

Recalling Childhood Career Aspirations

Over 60% of respondents reported that they could recall the job they wanted to pursue during primary school. These students were then asked to specify their early career aspirations, revealing a diverse range of professions.

Survey responses indicated that childhood aspirations spanned across multiple sectors, including creative industries, STEM fields, healthcare, public service, and the arts. The most frequently mentioned professions included doctor, teacher, and vet. In total, 260 different occupations were listed by students.



Top 15 job occupations chosen by respondents when at primary school.

Early career aspirations

The Case for Early Career Education

When asked if the job they had chosen at primary school was still something that they thought they might still do now, a huge 44% agreed that this was still the case.

With such a high percentage of students maintaining their childhood career ambitions, this research highlights the importance of introducing career awareness and guidance at an earlier stage in education. If students are already developing career preferences in primary school, it suggests that career-related learning should begin much earlier, allowing them to make more informed choices about their education, skill development, and future pathways.

Providing structured career guidance from an early age could help students:

- Understand job market realities, including salary expectations and employment prospects.
- Explore alternative career options beyond their initial interests
- Develop skills that align with their aspirations, ensuring they make informed educational and career choices.

This research suggests that early career aspirations have a strong influence on long-term career decisions. For many students, their initial interests persist into later years, reinforcing the idea that career awareness should begin as early as primary school. By integrating early career education into the curriculum, schools can ensure that students are better prepared to make informed, strategic decisions about their futures.

Is this the same or similar to what you want to do now?

Yes I still want to do this job 44%

No I want to do something else 56%

Contact us

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For more information about Pathways please see our website:
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