

Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) 2022/23

Key Findings Briefing Paper

SDS Evaluation and Research Team

Background

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency. As the provider of Scotland's Career Service, SDS supports customers to develop the skills and habits they need to make decisions about learning and work.

SDS's strategic plan (2022-27) sets out our goal of ensuring that young people have smoother post-school transitions and are equipped with the skills they need, at every stage of their lives, to have rewarding careers¹.

However, the world of work is changing, and the length of time skills remain relevant is reducing quickly. In an unpredictable and rapidly changing future, the prospect of a linear career journey is no longer an option for young people. It is widely acknowledged that young people face increasingly challenging post-school transitions².

It is therefore essential for SDS to fully understand the experiences of young people when making decisions about their future careers. This will enable SDS to deliver person-centred career services for young people and support them to build the skills, habits, and experiences required to negotiate the rapidly changing labour market.

The Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) research

The Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) project was successfully piloted in 2020. This in-depth study, led by SDS, aimed to collect insight from school leavers across Scotland on their **career choices, influences, and motivations**. The results from this pilot were shared widely, including with the Scottish Government and national agencies. This work was also used to inform the recommendations set out in the recent Career Review led by SDS.

¹ [Skills Development Scotland Strategic Plan 2022-27 – Skills for a Changing World, 2022](#)

² [Musset & Kurekova, Working it out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement, OECD Education Working Papers, 2018](#)

Approach

All young people in Scotland who left school in 2020/2021 were sent a link to a questionnaire via email³. A total of **1,414 young people responded to the research**. The fieldwork was carried out between October and November 2022. The results were weighted by gender, service offer, and SIMD to ensure the results were representative of the Scottish school leaver population.

Areas covered

The research questions were developed by SDS and a wider project steering/reference group. An international academic expert in careers, education, and skills policy, Dr Deirdre Hughes, OBE, also contributed to the project and questionnaire design.

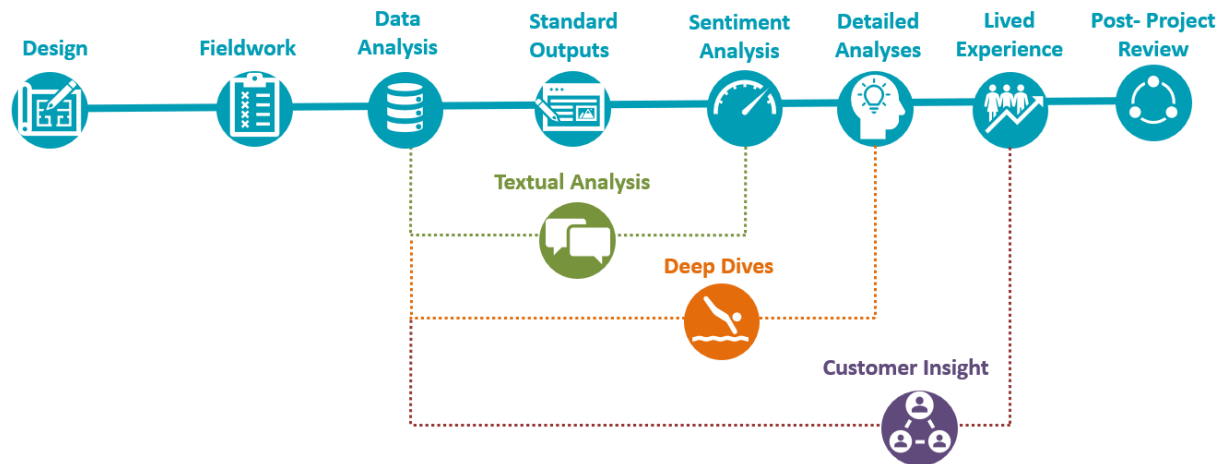
The research covered the following areas:

- **Post-school transitions**
- **Key career influencers**
- **Views on CIAG services**
- **Career Management Skills**
- **Preferred sectors and 'ideal job'**
- **Desirable job attributes**
- **Perceived employer requirements**
- **Perceived career barriers**

³ Only young people for whom SDS had a valid email address were contacted. A small proportion of young people were also sent a SMS text message as part of a pilot approach to encourage a higher response rate.

About this report

This report summarises the key findings from the YPCA research. A series of infographics focusing on equality characteristics have also been produced. The diagram below provides an overview of the research timeline. If you have any queries about this research, please contact SDS's Evaluation and Research team at evaluation&research@sds.co.uk.



About the charts and tables

The unweighted response for each comparison group is provided with the charts and tables in each section. However, please note that the responses to each of the individual statements varied as not all young people completed all questions within the questionnaire.

Post-school transitions

Young people were asked to identify:

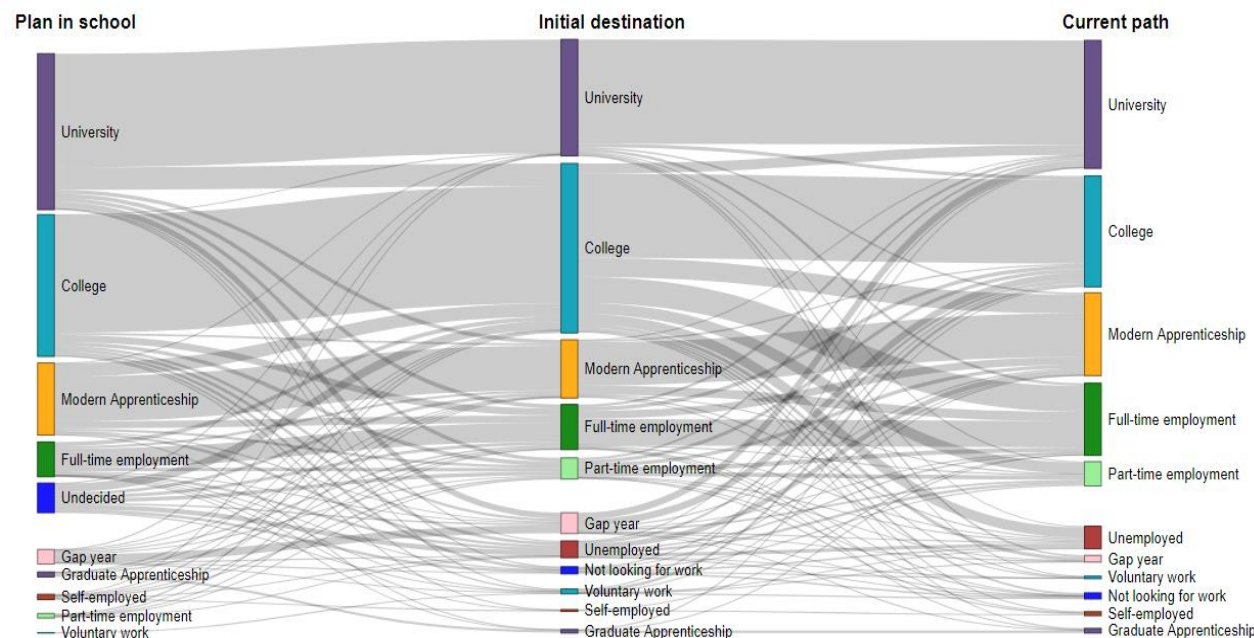
- (i) their **career plans while in school**,
- (ii) their **initial destination immediately after leaving school**, and
- (iii) what they are **currently doing now**.

Most young people planned to go to **college** or **university** when they were in school. This was the most popular destination for young people.

University as a pathway is a relatively smooth transition for young people. Most young people who plan to go to university follow through with their plans. Conversely, there are very few young people at university that *did not* originally plan to be there.

Going to college is a more complex post-school transition for young people. Most young people who plan to go to college follow through with their plans. However, many young people who *did not* plan to go to college choose this pathway following school. Following on from college, there are a variety of other destinations that young people may enter into.

Figure 1: Young people's (i) plans when in school (left), (ii) their initial destination immediately after leaving school (middle), and (iii) what they are currently doing now (right).



*Please note that the school leaver destination statistics published by the Scottish Government categorises Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships as 'employment'.

Satisfaction with current status

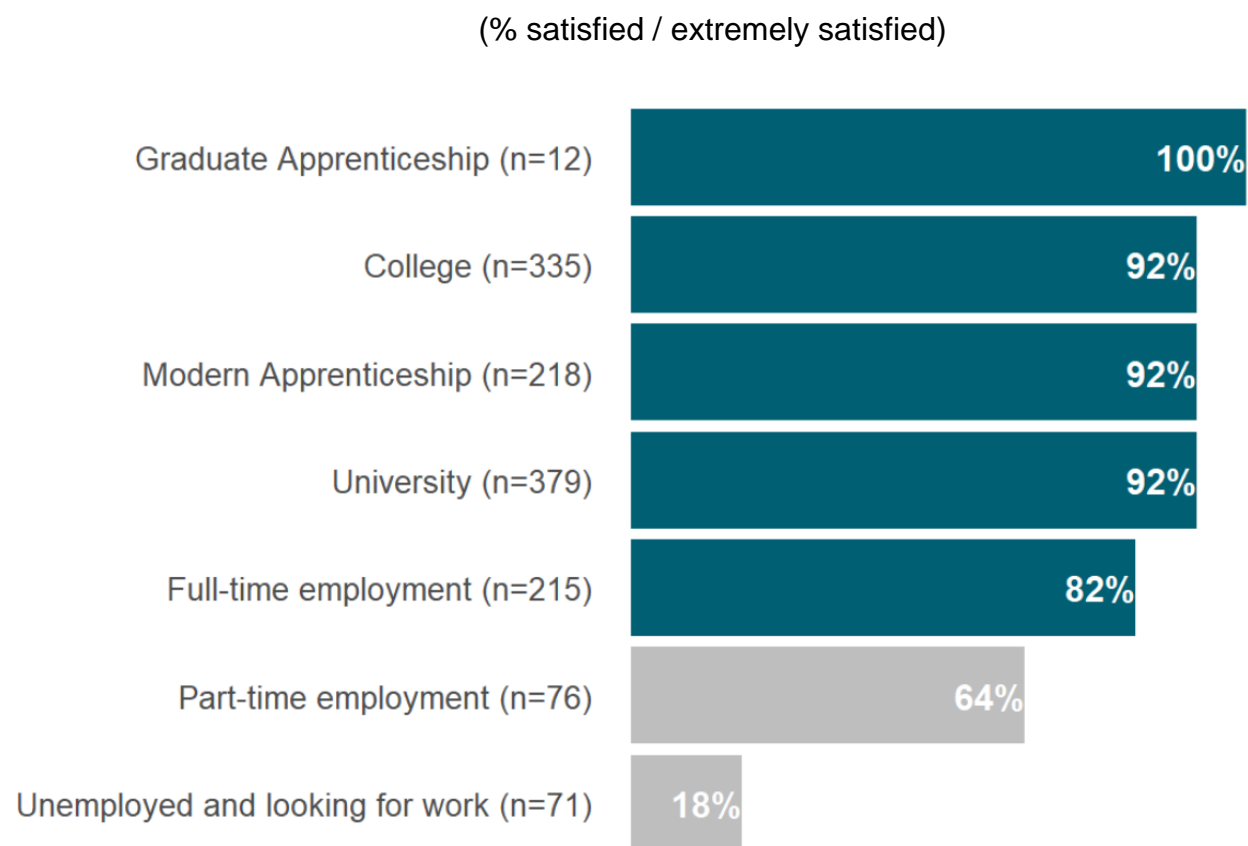
Young people were asked how satisfied they were with what they are doing now in terms of their current career path.

Overall, **83% of young people who had left school in the past year were satisfied with what they are doing now.**

The destinations where young people had the highest levels of satisfaction were **university and college**, or those doing a **graduate or modern apprenticeship.**

Young people who left school and were in full-time employment were slightly less likely to be satisfied than those entering other destinations. Additionally, young people in part-time employment, or those who were unemployed, were substantially less likely to be satisfied with their career status.

Figure 2: Young people's satisfaction with what they are currently doing now.



Post-school transitions by SIMD

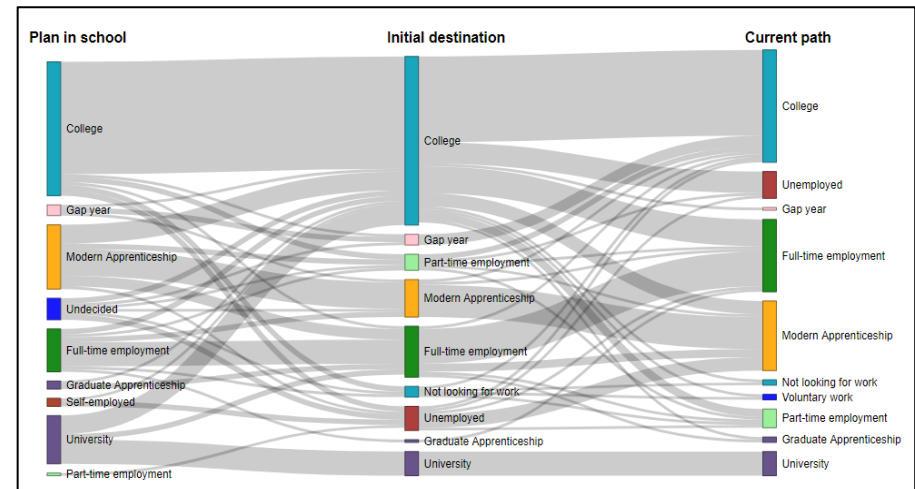
Young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) have **more complex post school transitions** that those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

Those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are more likely to go through the college pathway. This is a more complex route and there is notable fragmentation, with young people leaving college and making decisions about what to do next.

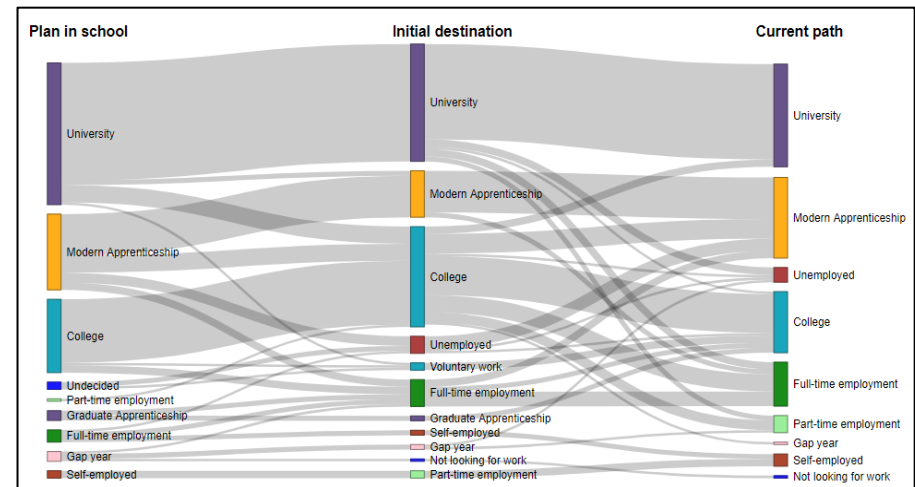
This is in contrast to those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) who are more likely to choose the university pathway where there is a much smoother post-school transition.

**SIMD 1
(Most deprived)
n=324**

Figure 3: Post-school transitions of the most deprived (top chart) and least deprived young people (bottom chart).



**SIMD 5
(Least deprived)
n=262**



Satisfaction with current status by SIMD

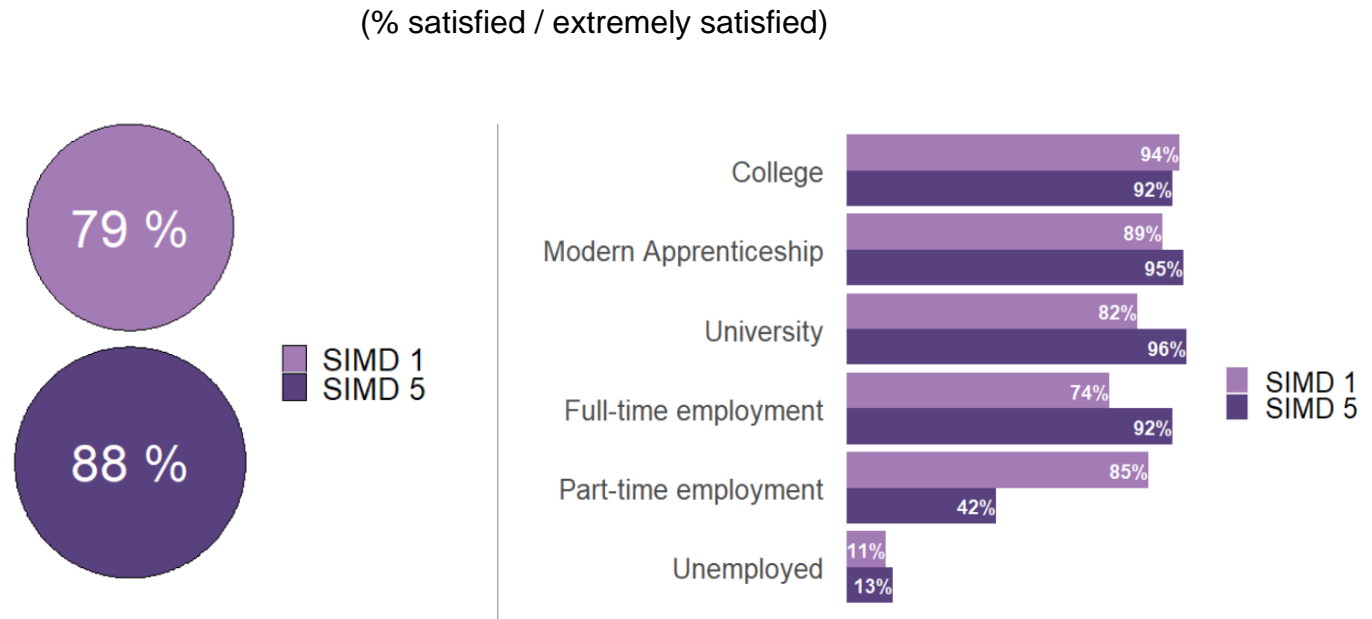
Overall, young people from the **most deprived areas (SIMD 1)** are **less likely to be satisfied** with what they are doing now than those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

Whilst there is little difference in satisfaction levels for college, for destinations such as modern apprenticeships, university, and full-time employment, those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are less satisfied than those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

One exception is part-time employment, where those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are considerably more likely to be satisfied than those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

Figure 4 (left): Overall satisfaction with current status by SIMD*.

Figure 5 (right): Satisfaction with current status broken down by SIMD and destination**.



*Figure 4 unweighted response: SIMD 1 = 321, SIMD 5 = 261.

**Figure 5 unweighted response: SIMD 1 (College = 103, Modern Apprenticeship = 48, University = 37, Full-time employment = 60, Part-time employment = 25, Unemployed = 17). SIMD 5 (College = 44, Modern Apprenticeship = 38, University = 116, Full-time employment = 30, Part-time employment = 10, Unemployed = 8).

Key influencers - People

Young people were asked to rate how influential specific people were on their career decisions.

Overall, **Parent(s)/Carer(s)** were the most influential people on young people's career decisions. However, young people from disadvantaged groups, such as those from SIMD 1 (most deprived) and care experienced young people, were also likely to be influenced by a wider range of people, particularly **Careers Advisers**.

Figure 6: Key influencers on career decisions – People.
(A fair amount / a great deal of influence)

Key Career Influencers - People	All % (1,414)	SIMD 1 % (324)	Care Experienced % (51)
Parent(s) / Carer(s)	78	77	60
Friend(s)	51	54	56
Other family member	49	51	38
Teacher(s)	48	55	45
Careers adviser	47	60	59
Guidance teacher	45	53	56
An employer or training provider coming in to my school to talk about careers	24	31	31
A university or college representative coming in to my school to talk about careers	22	26	27

Key influencers - Factors

Young people were also asked to rate how influential specific factors were on their career decisions. The results indicated that young people are influenced by various factors, but key among these are their **interests/hobbies**, the **need to earn money**, and the **qualifications they achieved in school**.

However, the order of importance of these factors vary depending on the young person's social and demographic characteristics. For example, young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) report the **need to earn money** as their top career influencer. Whereas BAME young people are more likely to emphasise the **qualifications they achieved at school** as a major influencer on their career.

The most influential social media channels on young people's career decisions were Instagram (56%), TikTok (51%), Facebook (49%), and YouTube (48%). Snapchat (17%) and Twitter (16%) were not found to be particularly influential on young people's career decisions.

Figure 7: Key influencers on career decisions – Factors.

(A fair amount / a great deal of influence)

Key Career Influencers - Factors	All % (1,414)	SIMD 1 % (324)	BAME % (89)
My interests / hobbies	76	73	70
The need to earn money	74	78	83
The qualifications i achieved in school	72	68	86
Education / training opportunities available to me	62	63	66
Job / career opportunities available to me	62	56	63
Opportunities available within my local area	43	48	38
Social media	40	41	34
Work experience in school or part-time job	37	41	42
Online careers websites (e.g. My WoW)	31	37	38

Views on CIAG support

Young people were asked to rate statements relating to their experiences of the careers information advice and guidance (CIAG) services they received in school. The findings indicated that most young people felt **supported** and **encouraged** by the careers services they received.

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as care experienced young people and those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1), reported a **broader range** of benefits from the careers services they received in school. This includes support from the Careers Adviser in helping them to identify their skills, strengths and achievements, as well as support in helping them to make career plans going forward.

Figure 8: Views on CIAG support received in school.

(Agree / strongly agree)

CIAG Support	All % (1,414)	SIMD 1 % (324)	SIMD 5 % (262)	Care Experienced % (51)
I was supported to make my own decisions and take control of my career path	80	83	80	83
I was encouraged to aim high for my future career	74	79	74	79
I was encouraged to explore a wide range of learning and career options	66	71	63	91
The careers adviser helped me to identify my skills, strengths and achievements	58	70	47	78
The careers adviser understood me and the support i needed	62	70	54	80
The careers adviser helped me to make a plan of things i would do	54	64	42	63
I was satisfied with the amount of careers support i received in school	53	59	49	68
I was encouraged to challenge stereotypes, such as ideas of "traditional" male or female jobs	50	55	46	60

Career Management Skills (CMS)

Young people were asked about their perceptions of their own career management skills. The results highlighted that young people are highly confident in their ability to **manage their own career**. Young people reported that they can use their **initiative** to work things out and feel they are able to make **informed career decisions**.

Young people from the most deprived (SIMD 1) and least deprived (SIMD 5) areas are both likely to score high in terms of their career management skills. However, although disabled young people also rate their career management skills highly, their scores were generally lower than other demographic groups.

Figure 9: Young people's perceptions of their Career Management Skills (CMS).

(Agree / strongly agree)

Career Management Skills	All % (1,414)	SIMD 1 % (324)	SIMD 5 % (262)	Disabled % (225)
I am able to use my initiative to work things out myself	91	89	96	83
I understand how my experiences and learning can help me make career choices	90	92	92	86
I can make informed career decisions	85	88	84	80
I can find out about the learning, work, and career options open to me	83	83	86	74
I am able to manage change in my life and career	81	84	85	70
I am able to identify and build relationships with people who can help me in my career	80	83	77	74
I can find and use career information easily	79	80	77	70
I am creative and imaginative when it comes to my career development	78	80	81	74
I know how to maintain the right balance between my personal life, learning and work	71	72	68	57

Desirable job attributes

There are various attributes that young people are looking for in their future career. However, key among these are **good pay** and **job satisfaction**.

Work-life balance and **learning new skills** are also important job attributes for young people.

Differences across demographic groups exist. For example, males are more likely to place importance on good pay and job satisfaction than females. Whereas females and BAME young people are more likely to aspire to a career that involves **helping others**.

The attributes that young people desire in their future career are likely to be related to the types of sectors that they aspire to enter.

Figure 10: Attributes that young people are looking for in their future career.

Select up to 5	All % (1,414)	Female % (823)	Male % (566)	BAME % (89)
Good pay	60	56	64	70
Job satisfaction	51	48	55	39
Work-life balance	41	42	40	41
Learning new skills	39	37	42	40
Helping others	37	50	24	49
The variety and interest in the job	33	32	33	18
Job security	29	26	32	29
Being challenged in the work you do	29	27	30	26
Doing valuable work	28	30	27	22
Opportunity to earn while you learn	25	23	27	21
Having a voice / being listened to in the workplace	23	31	15	16
Flexible working options	20	20	19	29
Chances for promotion	19	16	22	18
A job / career within my local area	16	16	16	12
Supporting the climate emergency	5	5	5	7

Preferred career sectors

Young people were asked to identify which sectors they would like to enter in the future.

The results indicate that young people's career aspirations are concentrated in five broad sectors.

There are also clear demographic differences in the sectors that young people aspire to enter. For example, females are much more likely to choose **health, social care, and social work**, whereas males are much more likely to choose **construction and engineering**.

Care experienced young people were much more likely to say they didn't know which sector they wanted to enter than other demographic groups.

Figure 11: Young people's preferred career sectors.

Select all that apply	All % (1,414)	Female % (823)	Male % (566)	Care Experienced % (51)
Arts, culture, entertainment and sport	20	19	20	20
Health, social care, social work	19	29	9	21
Construction and engineering	17	3	31	13
Legal, professional, scientific, and technical	16	17	15	11
Education	15	23	7	8
Public sector, public services, and defence	11	10	11	10
Publishing, broadcasting, communications, and computing	10	6	15	8
Administrative and support services	7	10	4	7
Don't know / unsure	7	6	7	15
Accommodation and catering	6	8	4	10
Manufacturing	6	2	11	3
Energy and renewable	5	2	7	2
Finance, insurance and banking	5	4	6	2
Housing and property	4	3	5	4
Retail and wholesale trade, motor vehicle repair and maintenance	4	2	7	5
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3	2	4	3

Perceived employer requirements

Young people identified the attributes that they think employers are looking for from their workers. The top attributes young people chose included **being reliable**, having a **positive attitude**, and having **communication skills**.

Care experienced young people and those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) were more likely to think that having **confidence** is a key attribute that employers are looking for. Whereas those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) are more likely to highlight **work ethic** as an important quality that employers desire.

Figure 12: The attributes that young people think employers are looking for from their workers.

Select up to 5	All % (1,414)	SIMD 1 % (324)	SIMD 5 % (262)	Care Experienced % (51)
Being reliable	61	59	59	45
A positive attitude	59	63	57	66
Communication skills	56	53	52	54
Work ethic	51	43	53	31
Confidence	47	56	46	56
Being a team player	46	45	46	32
Work experience	35	34	37	28
Being able to work independently	30	26	27	21
The right qualifications	30	24	33	28
Creativity	21	21	21	25
Being able to work flexibly	19	25	19	25
Digital skills	11	15	11	8
Numeracy skills	7	3	8	10
Literacy skills	6	5	6	8

Perceived career barriers

Young people perceive many barriers that could prevent them from making progress in their chosen career. However, key among these is **not having enough confidence in themselves** and not have enough **work experience**.

Young people's social and demographic characteristics were also associated with the barriers they perceive. For example, BAME young people were highly likely to feel that **being discriminated against** is a potential barrier for them in their future career.

For care experienced young people, **not enough jobs and not having the right skills** were specific barriers that they perceive for their future career.

Figure 13: The barriers that young people perceive in their future career.

Select up to 5	All % (1,414)	BAME % (89)	Disabled % (225)	Care Experienced % (51)
Not having enough confidence in myself	47	45	52	51
Not enough work experience	44	36	44	46
Not having contacts / knowing the right people	38	41	40	33
Too much competition	36	45	40	25
Not earning enough money to live on	34	39	41	33
Not having the right qualifications	34	37	32	31
Not enough jobs	32	24	28	36
Not having the right skills	30	33	30	35
Being discriminated against	19	39	32	31
Nothing, i have no concerns	11	6	8	2
Not having any role models	9	6	8	11

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