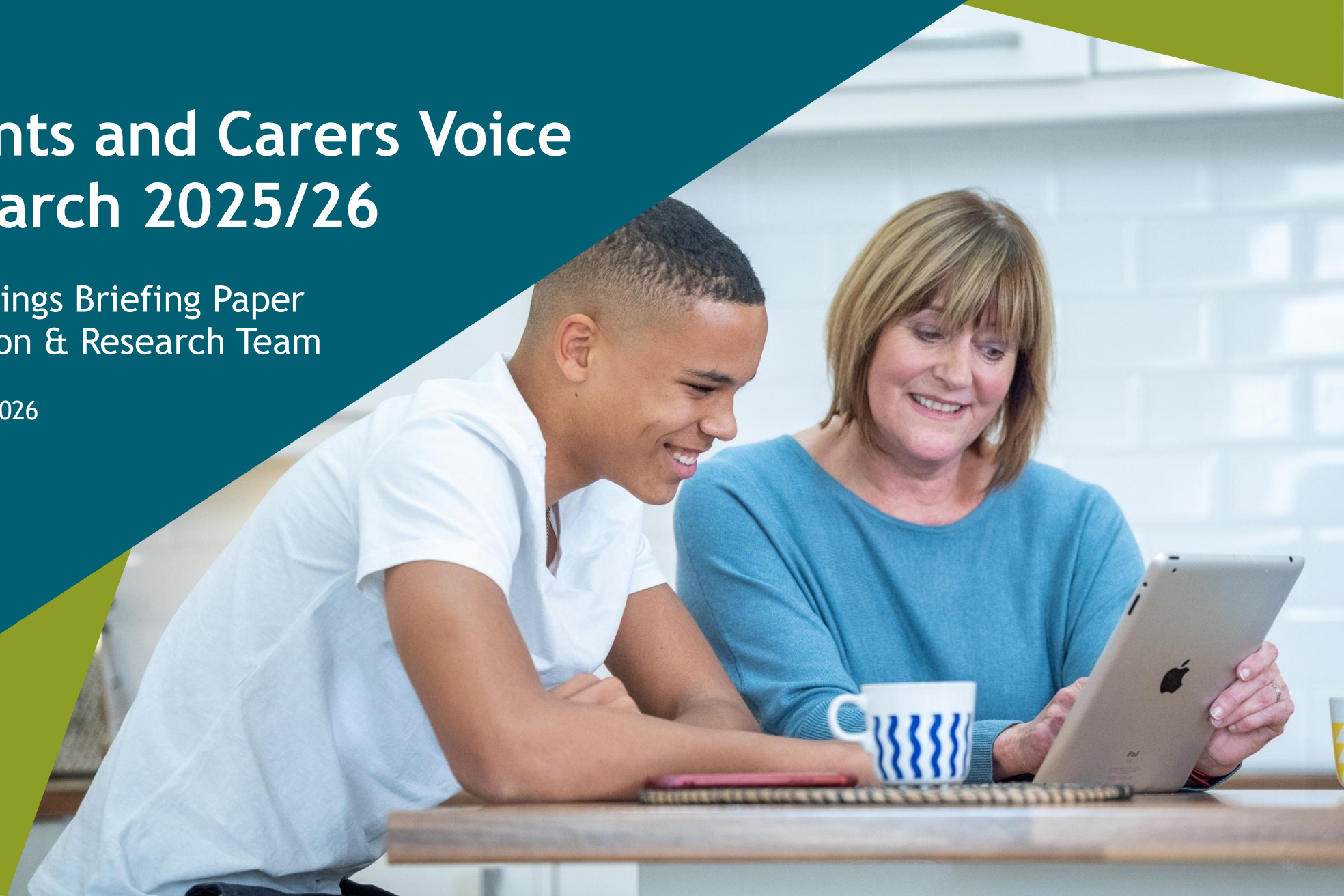
Skills Development Scotland

Parents and Carers Voice Research 2025/26

Key Findings Briefing Paper
Evaluation & Research Team

November 2026



Contents

Background	**3**
Parents and Carers Voice 2025/26 Research	**4**
Approach	4
Areas covered	4
About this report	5
Key messages	**6**
Profile of parents and carers	**7**
Profile of child	**8**
Awareness and use of SDS services	**9**
Awareness and perceptions of apprenticeships	**10**
Satisfaction with SDS services used	**12**
Confidence in career discussions	**13**
Influence	**15**
Considerations during career discussions	**16**
Local skills and job opportunities	**17**
Sources of information on careers	**18**
Preferred communication channels	**19**

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 SDS's goal of ensuring that young people have improved participation in the labour market, smoother post-school transitions and are equipped with the skills they need, at every stage of their lives, to have rewarding careers[1]. Previous research with young people[2&3] demonstrates that parents are key influencers on the decisions and choices young people make about their education and career.

It is therefore essential for SDS to fully understand the experiences of parents when supporting their child in making decisions about their future careers. The findings of the research are used to inform SDS's Parents Strategy and continuous improvement of Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) services for parents across Scotland.

[1] Skills Development Scotland Strategic Plan 2022-27 – Skills for a Changing World, 2022
[2] Skills Development Scotland – Pupil's Voice Research 2025
[3] Skills Development Scotland – Young People's Career Ambitions Research 2025/26

Parents and Carers Voice 2025/26 Research

Parents and carers are a key influencer of young people's career and education choices. As such, SDS seeks feedback from this important group on SDS services, perceptions and attitudes towards work-based learning and other routes, and knowledge of careers and career conversations with their child through the research, which supports SDS to:

- Inform the way SDS communicates with parents to advise them of service offers;
- Develop resources and information to enable parents to support young people in their career choices;
- Increase SDS understanding of parents' awareness and confidence in understanding the full range of post-school pathways and options open to young people.

Approach

An online questionnaire was designed in-house by the SDS Evaluation & Research and National CIAG teams. SDS Careers Advisers used their connections with secondary schools to encourage them to distribute the questionnaire to parents using an anonymous email link. The link was promoted using school channels including school email, school social media and school apps.

The fieldwork was carried out between 29th October 2025 and 30th June 2026, during which time 2,707 responses were received.

Areas covered

The research questions were developed by SDS in collaboration with a project steering and reference group. The research covered the following areas:

- Awareness and use of SDS services
- Awareness and perceptions of apprenticeships

- Satisfaction with SDS services used
- Confidence in having career conversations and perceived influence
- Views on local skills and jobs
- Preferred sources of information

About this report

This report summarises the key findings from the Parents and Carers Voice Research 2025/26. The term ‘parents’ is used throughout this report to refer to all parents, carers and guardians who participated in the research. If you have any queries about this research, please contact SDS’s Evaluation and Research team at:-

Evaluation&Research@sds.co.uk

Key messages

Over 2,700 parents responded to the survey this year, with the feedback providing a strong evidence base upon which to review SDS's offer to parents. The research helps SDS to further support parents, who have a critical role as a key influencer in young people's career decisions.

Figure 1: Key messages from the research



Awareness and usage of SDS services are fragmented. Parents were most aware of school appointments with a Careers Adviser and the My World of Work website was the highest used service. Awareness of apprenticeships was low, although they remained a valued option, with Graduate Apprenticeships most encouraged.



Parents and carers who used SDS services rated them positively. The Results Helpline scored highest, while careers advisers were praised for being friendly, approachable and good listeners. The webinars were seen as relevant for parents. My World of Work and Apprenticeships.scot were valued and considered easy to use. Overall KPIs stayed consistently high.



Parents and carers were generally confident discussing career and learning options with their child. They focused on what their child enjoyed, wanted to do and was good at. However, they felt less able to influence their child's choices compared to last year. Those lacking confidence wanted clearer information on pathways and options, alongside earlier, practical and tailored support.

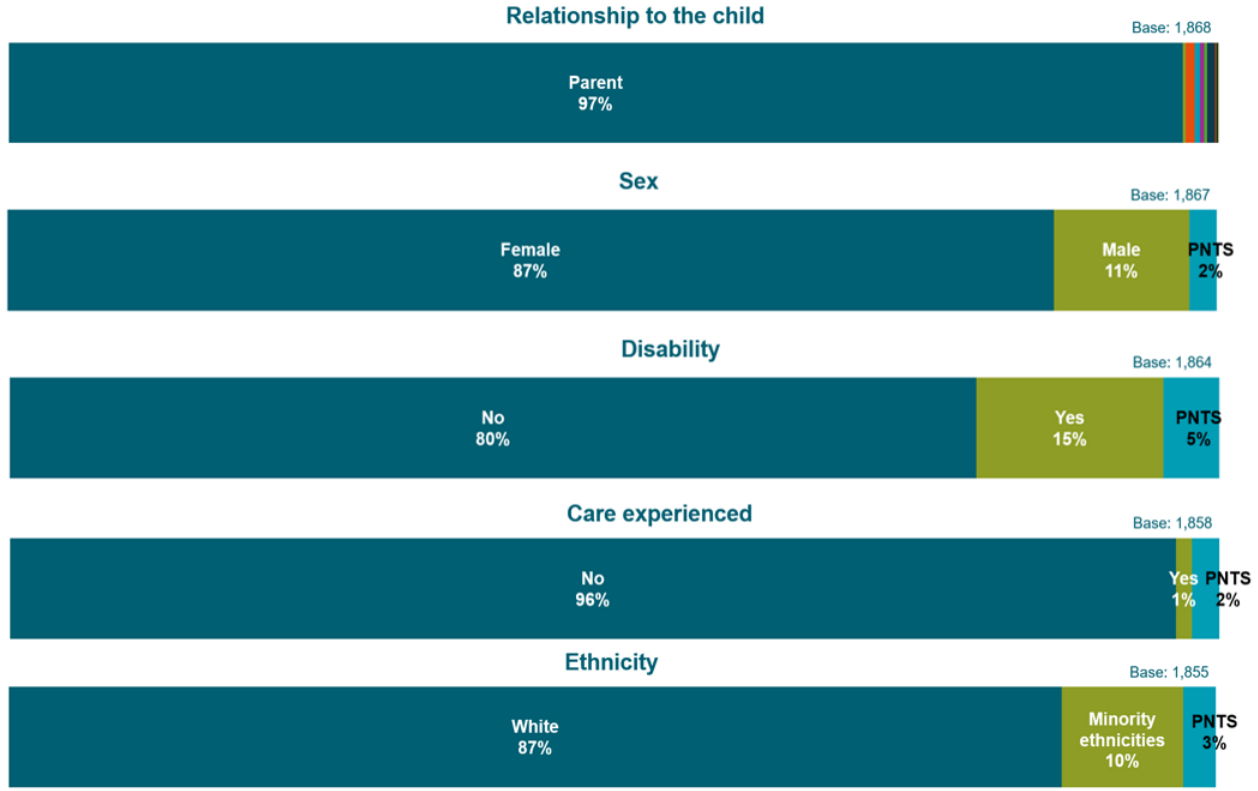


Parents mainly used online searches, universities and schools for careers information, and wanted SDS to provide more resources and communicate directly through schools. Parents also wanted clearer information about local opportunities, as many felt there were too few suitable options or were unsure what was available.

Profile of parents and carers

Most of the respondents who took part in the survey were a ‘parent’ of the child. 0.3% of respondents were carers, 0.8% were grandparents and 0.4% were guardians. A higher proportion of respondents were female. The proportion of respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds was slightly higher than the equivalent proportion in Scotland’s population, while the proportion of disabled respondents was slightly lower.”.

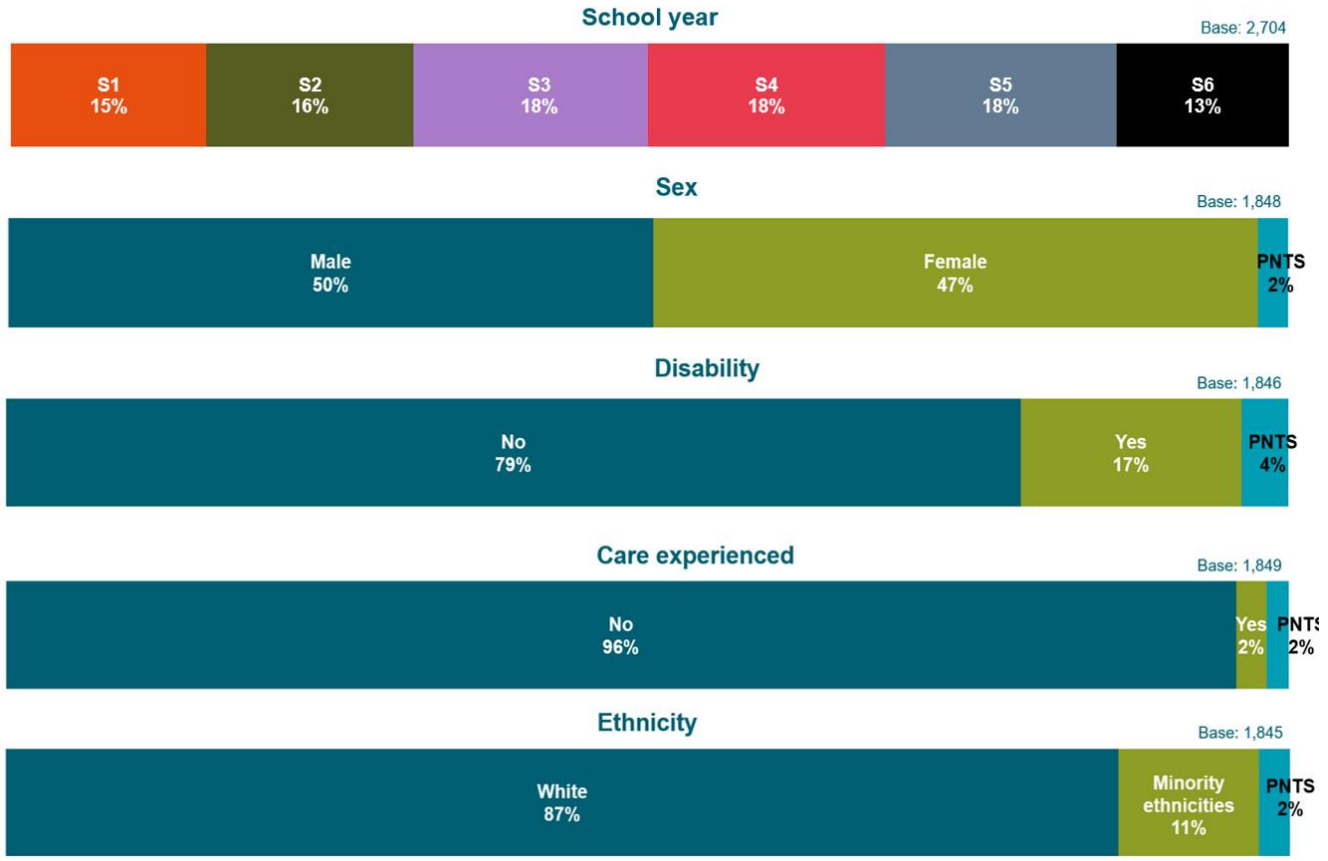
Figure 2: Profile of parents and carers



Profile of child

The survey covered pupils from S1 – S6, with an even distribution across the year groups. There was a slightly higher representation of males than females. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds and with a disability were also represented. Only 2% of children were care-experienced.

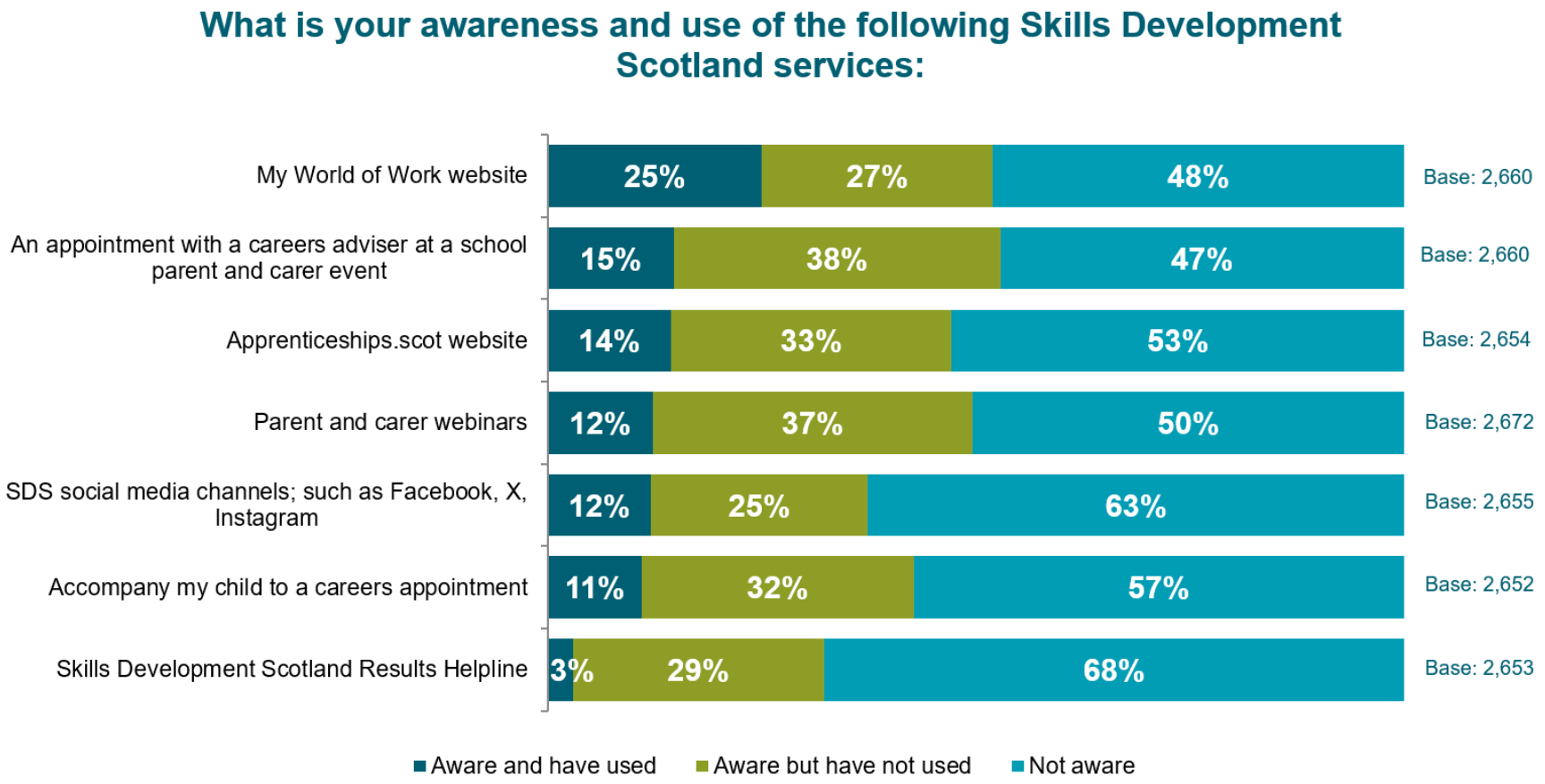
Figure 3: Profile of children



Awareness and use of SDS services

Awareness and usage of SDS services are fragmented. Parents were most aware of an appointment with a Careers Adviser at school. The My World of Work website was used by the largest proportion of parents, with an increase in its usage year-on-year to 25% from 20% in 2024-25.

Figure 4: Awareness and use of SDS services



Awareness and perceptions of apprenticeships

Modern Apprenticeships remained the most recognised apprenticeship type with parents, reflecting their longstanding presence. Awareness of Graduate and Foundation Apprenticeships were lower, and just over one in five parents were unaware of any of the apprenticeship options.

Figure 5: Awareness of apprenticeships

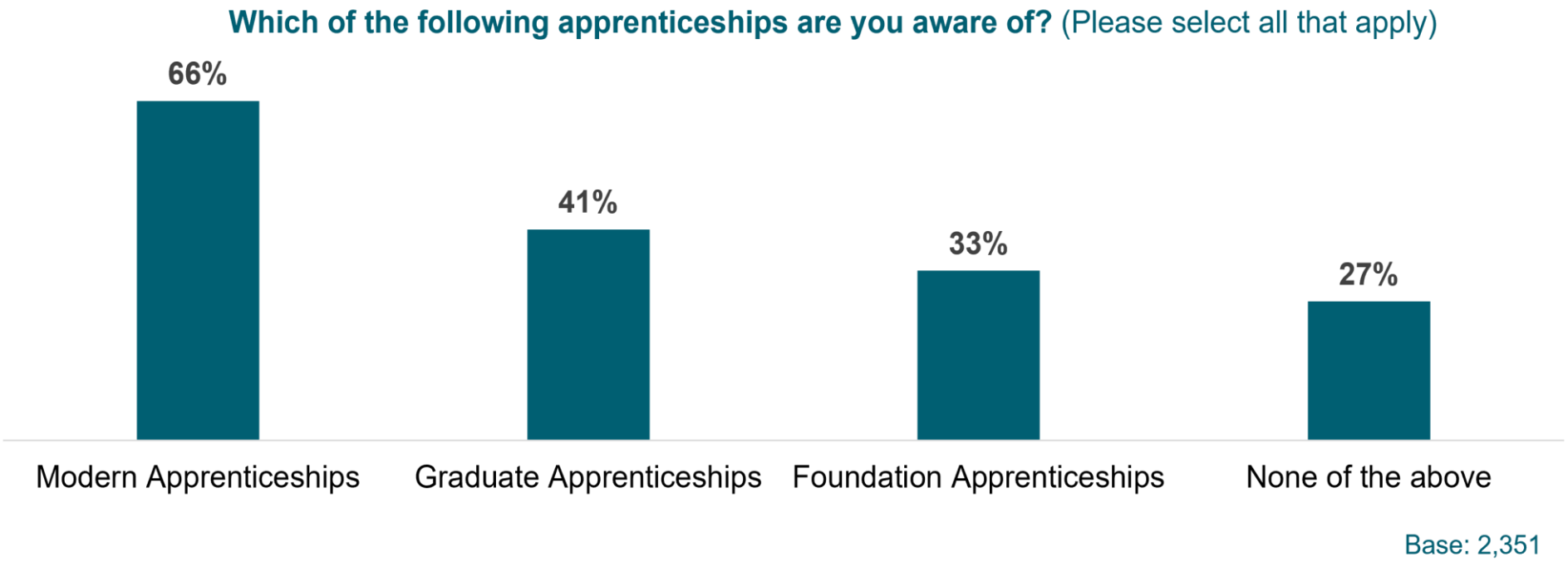


Figure 6: Parental encouragement of apprenticeships

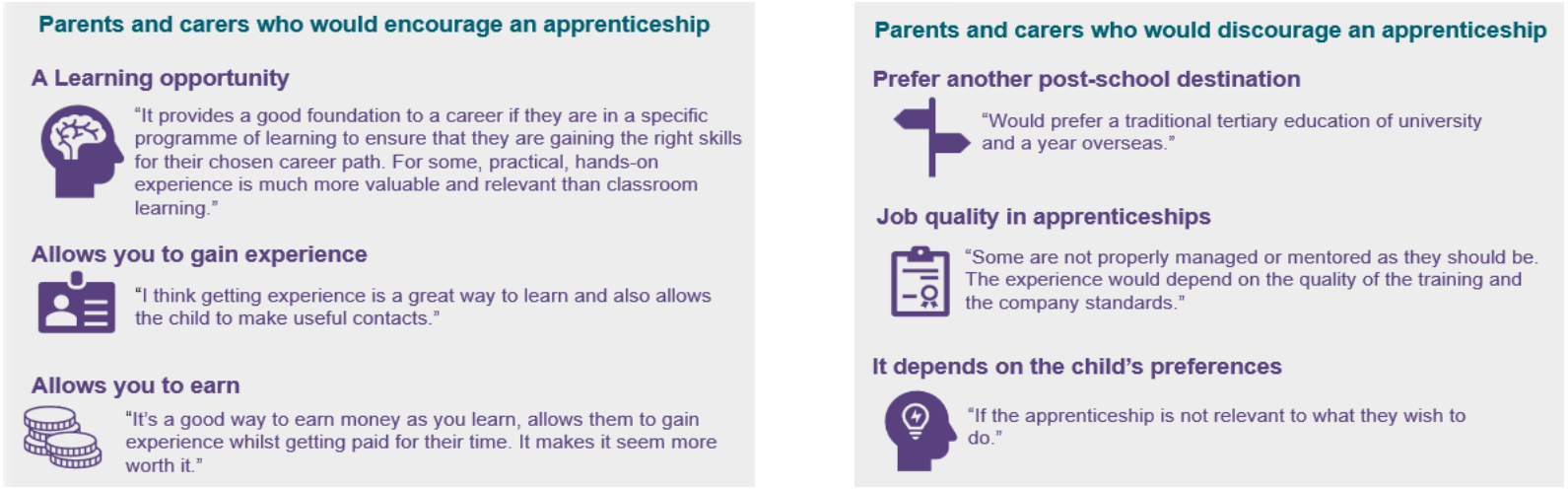


Only those who selected that they were aware of apprenticeships were asked this question

Base: 1,689

Parents who supported apprenticeships saw them as a valuable route into work, particularly for gaining practical experience and learning opportunities. They were also seen as a financially accessible alternative to university and as a way for young people to develop confidence and independence. Graduate Apprenticeships were encouraged by the highest proportion. Parents who would not encourage an apprenticeship were asked why, and the most common response was that they preferred another post-school route.

Figure 7: Reasons for encouragement / discouragement of apprenticeships



Satisfaction with SDS services used

Users reported strong satisfaction across all services, with the results helpline standing out as the highest-rated offer.

Figure 8: Satisfaction with SDS services used (mean point score on a 1–10 point scale)



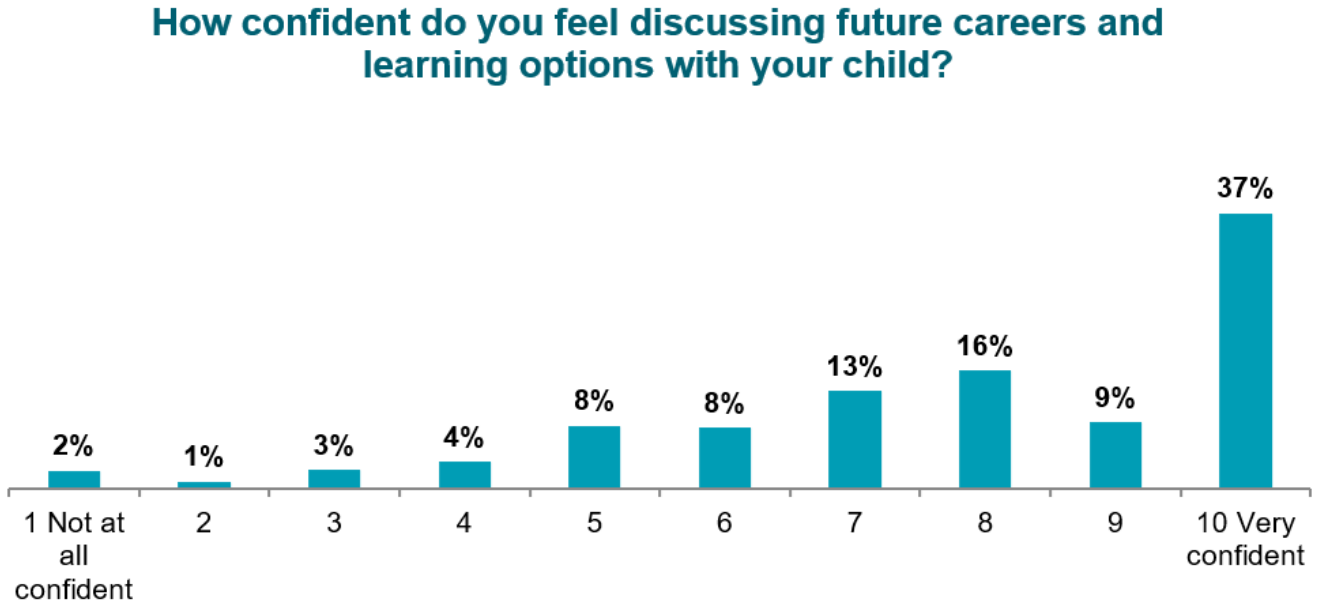
Confidence in career discussions

Almost half of parents reported high confidence (rating 9 or 10) in discussing career and learning options with their child. Those seeking to improve their confidence wanted clearer information about career pathways, subject choices, jobs and employers. They also wanted earlier, more practical guidance from schools, support with advising their child and better provision for additional support needs.

Figure 9: Mean point score for confidence

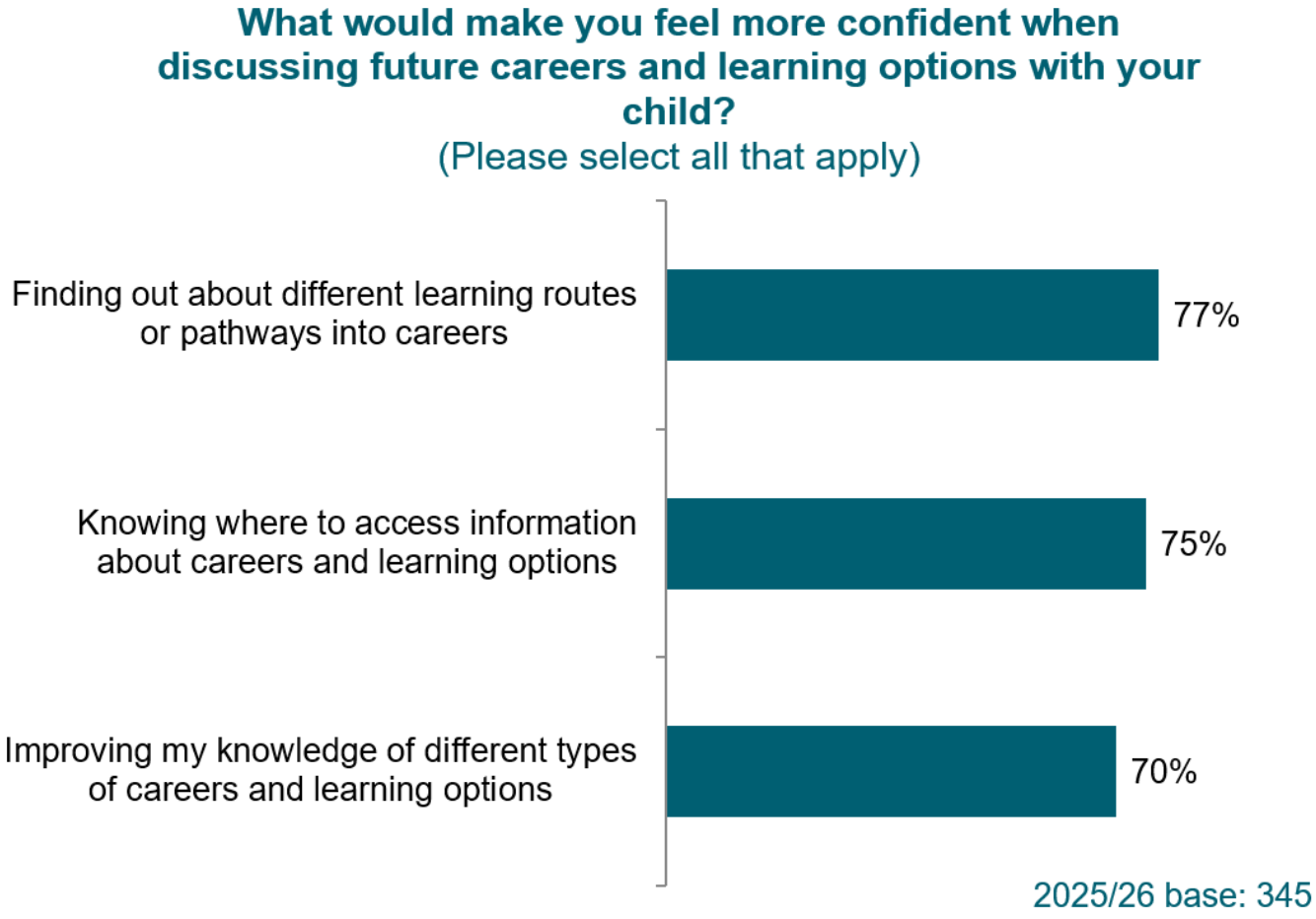


Figure 10: Distribution of confidence scores



2025/26 base: 2,040

Figure 11: Factors that would help parents become more confident



Please note only those who selected a score of 5 or below on the 1-10 scale were asked this follow up question

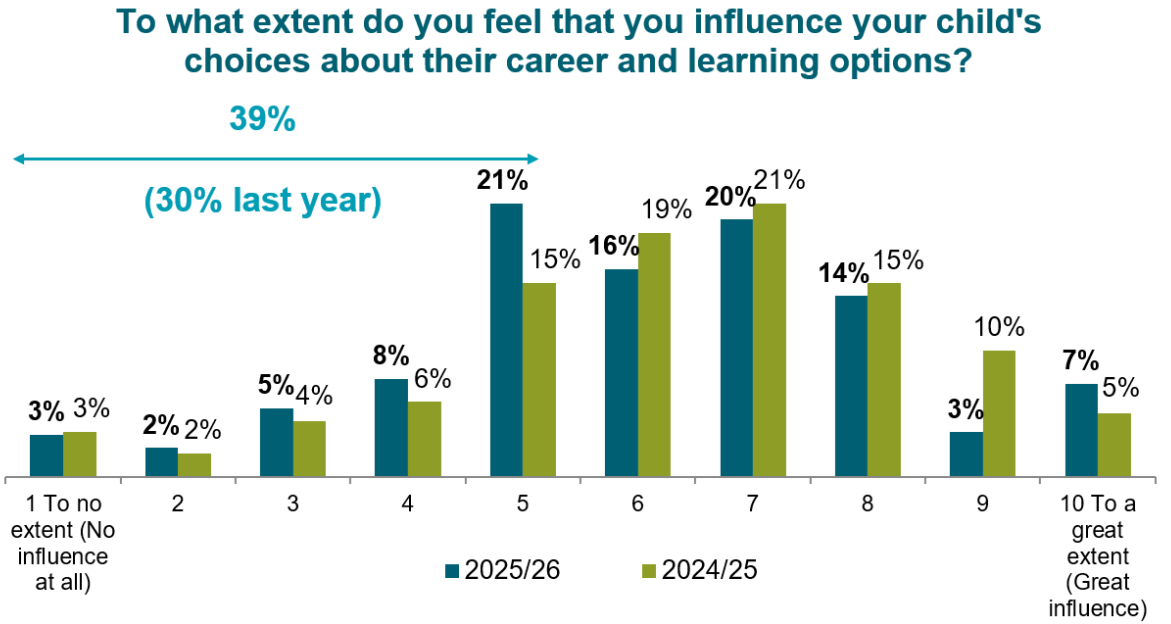
Influence

An increasing proportion of parents feel that they have limited influence on their child's choices. While parents feel confident discussing options, they are less confident about shaping their child's decisions. This differs from our young people's research, where parents are seen by young people as being the biggest influence[4&5].

Figure 12: Mean point score for influence



Figure 13: Distribution of influence scores



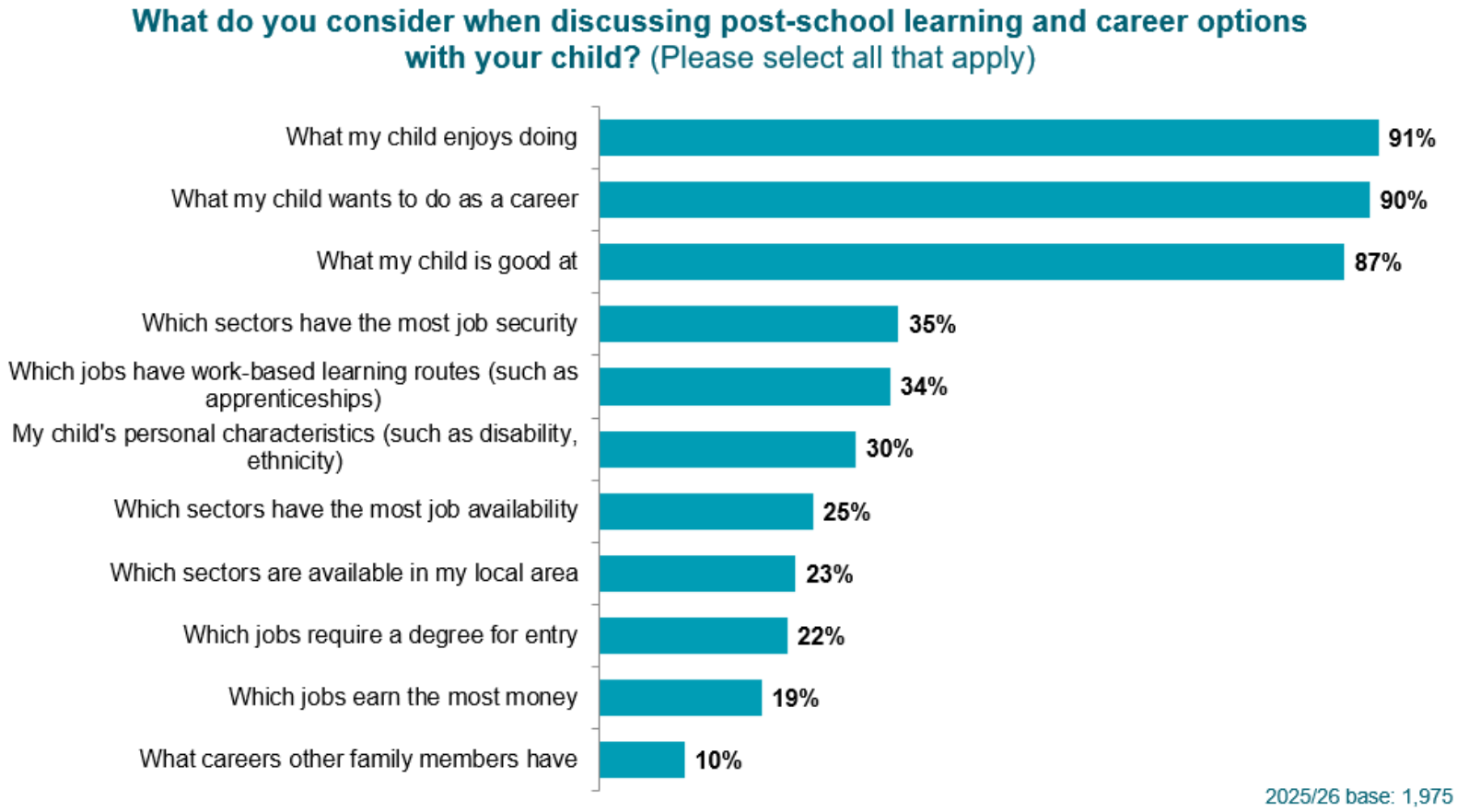
2025/26 base: 1,905
2024/25 base: 3,561

[4] Skills Development Scotland – Pupil's Voice Research 2025
[5] Skills Development Scotland – Young People's Career Ambitions Research 2025/26

Considerations during career discussions

Parents were most likely to consider their child's enjoyment, their career ambitions and what they are good at when it came to discussing careers with their child, which were also the top three choices last year.

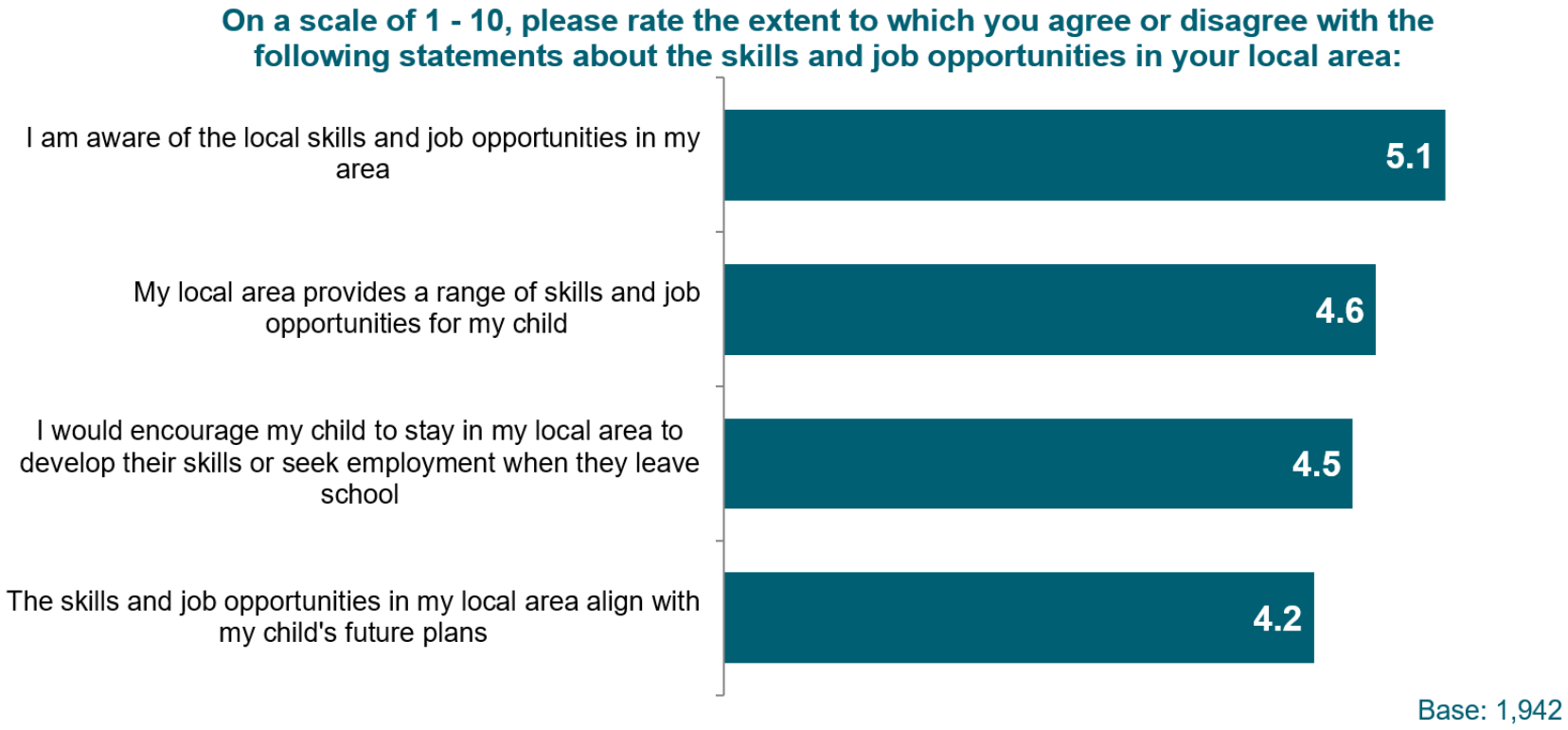
Figure 14: Considerations during career discussions



Local skills and job opportunities

Parents were asked a new question this year about the extent to which they agreed with statements about the skills and job opportunities in their local area. Their views demonstrated that parents had a low awareness of local opportunities and remained unconvinced that they offered sufficient choice or that they aligned with their child's future plans. They were also less likely to encourage their child to stay in their local area.

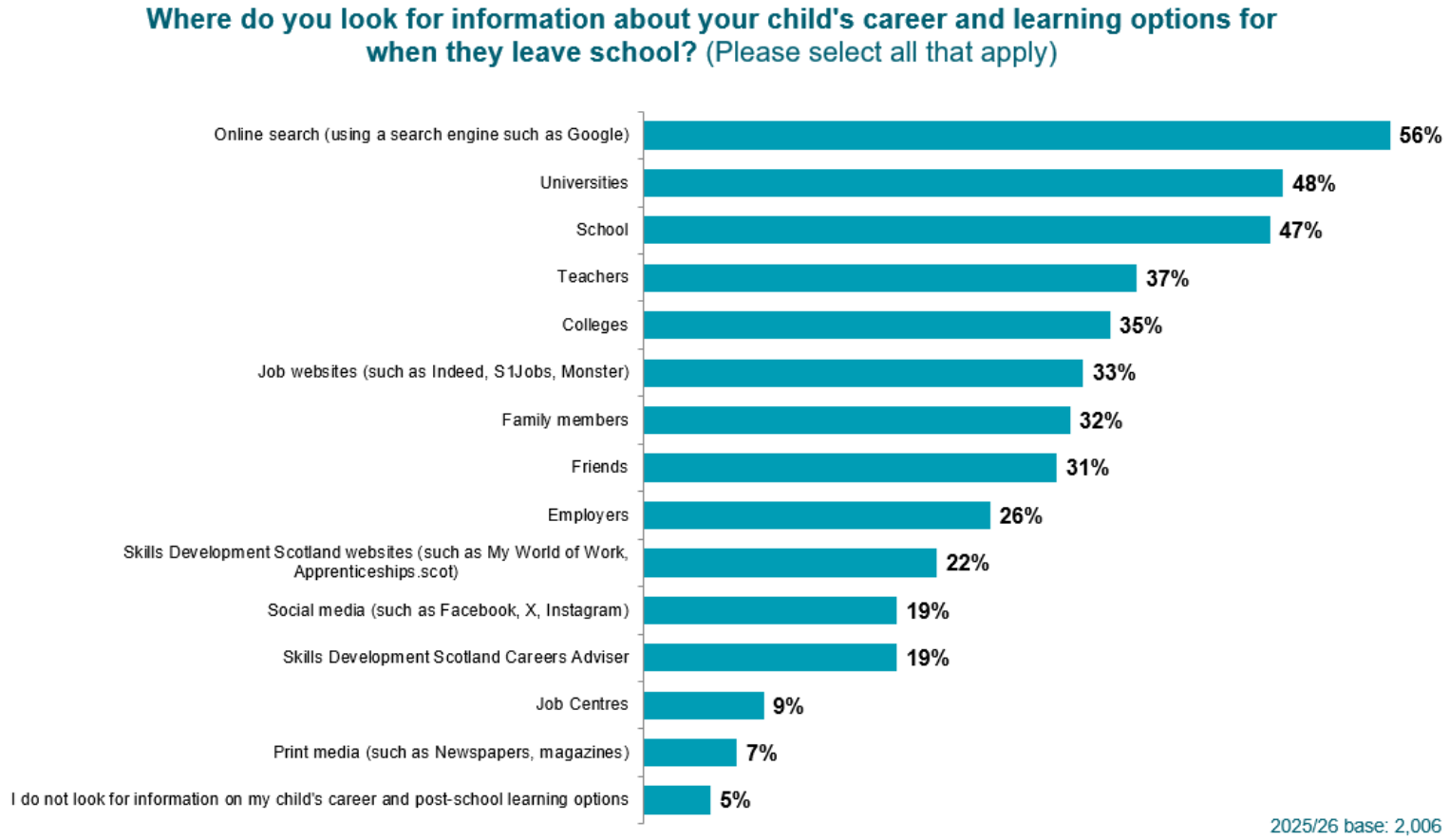
Figure 15: Parents' views on local skills and job opportunities (mean-point scores)



Sources of information on careers

Parents accessed a wide range of sources for career and learning information, with online search being the most used. Educational institutions (particularly universities and schools) were also key sources. Teachers, colleges and job websites were also cited, while job centres and print media were the least frequently consulted.

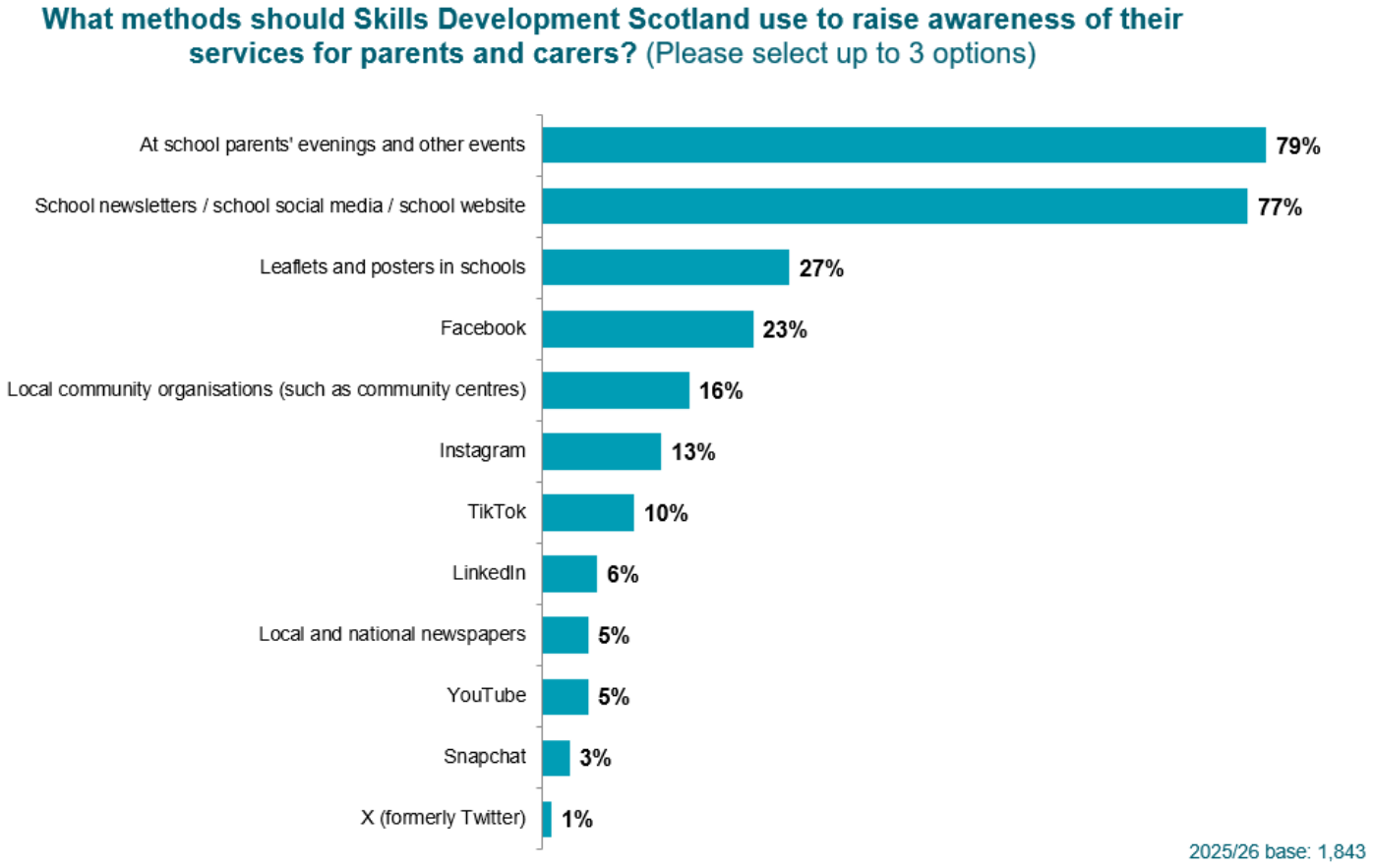
Figure 16: Sources of information on careers and learning options



Preferred communication channels

Parents wanted to hear about SDS services primarily through schools. Parents' evenings and other events were seen as the most commonly identified methods to raise awareness, followed closely by school newsletters, school social media and the school website. Over a quarter of parents wanted to hear about SDS services via leaflets and posters in schools.

Figure 17: Preferred methods of communication for raising awareness of SDS services



Skills Development Scotland
Monteith House
11 George Square
Glasgow G2 1DY

www.sds.co.uk