

Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) 2024

Briefing Paper
Evaluation & Research Team

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Background

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency. As the provider of Scotland’s careers services, SDS supports individuals to develop the skills and mindset they need to make decisions about their learning and career paths. SDS’s strategic plan (2022-27) sets out our goal of ensuring that young people are equipped with the skills they need, at every stage of their lives, to have a rewarding career¹.

Through a comprehensive programme of research, led by the SDS Evaluation and Research team in partnership with CIAG² planning and performance colleagues and other departments across SDS, we aim to understand and support the career aspirations and development of young people in Scotland. This research aims to inform policy, enhance careers services, and support young people to acquire the skills, guidance, and opportunities needed to achieve their career goals.

SDS works in collaboration with various partners within Scotland’s careers ecosystem to deliver this programme of research. The list of external partners is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: List of external partners collaborating on this research.

Scottish Government	Youthlink	Education Scotland
Scottish Qualifications Authority	Developing Young Workforce	Scottish Funding Council
Open University	MCR Pathways	Edinburgh Napier University
Young Scot	College Development Network	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland

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

² Careers Information, Advice and Guidance

The Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) research

The Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) research is one of three main projects within SDS's programme of young people research. The YPCA research aims to understand the career aspirations, influences, and challenges faced by young people in Scotland. This research is focussed on school leavers and gathers feedback at a crucial phase of a young person's journey when they have transitioned from school into the next phase of their career. The previous iteration of this research (2022/23) captured the views of 1,414 young people who left school in the 2020/2021 academic year³.

The results from the YPCA research are shared with SDS colleagues and with our partners to help shape and improve service delivery. The research is also shared with the Scottish Government to support policy development. Our ambition is for the YPCA research to be a key source of insight on school leavers' career ambitions and their post-school transitions in Scotland.

An essential element of this research is also to view the findings from an equality perspective, and to capture the views of young people

with protected characteristics. Protected characteristics include ethnicity, indicators of deprivation/poverty (SIMD)⁴, additional support needs, care experience, and sexual orientation.

Key areas covered

The YPCA research collects views from school leavers on the following areas:

- Post-school transitions
- Satisfaction with current career path
- Impact of COVID-19 on career
- Key influencers on career
- Views on careers support received in school
- Confidence in Career Management Skills (CMS)
- Sources used for career support
- Ideal job and preferred industries
- Salary expectations
- Desired qualities/attributes in future career
- Views on skills needed for the future
- Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on career
- Perceived barriers to career
- Participation in groups/activities

³ SDS (2023) [Young People's Career Ambitions 2022/23 Briefing Paper](#)

⁴ SIMD (The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) is a tool used to identify areas in Scotland experiencing the highest levels of deprivation. SIMD 1 represents young people from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland, and SIMD 5 represents those from the least 20% deprived areas in Scotland (Scottish Government (2020) [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#))).

Study approach

The target cohort for participation in the YPCA research is young people who left school in the previous 12 months. The 2024 YPCA research covered young people who had left school between September 2022 and September 2023. All school leavers (aged 16+ years) who had left school in Scotland within this timeframe, and who SDS held a valid email address or mobile phone number, were included in the research.

The fieldwork was carried out over a five-week period between October and November 2024. The results were weighted to ensure the results were representative of the Scottish school leaver population.

The questionnaire was designed by the SDS Evaluation and Research team in collaboration with SDS colleagues working in CIAG and other departments, as well as our key external partners outlined in **Figure 1**.

Respondent profile

In total, 2,919 young people responded to the research. This response is more than double that received in 2022. Responses were received across all 32 local authorities in Scotland. **Table 1** outlines the responses by age, sex, and SIMD. More detailed information on the respondent profile is provided in **Appendix 1**.

Table 1: Respondents by age, sex, and SIMD.

Demographic	Response (%)
Age	
16	1%
17	34%
18	34%
19	31%
20	1%
Sex	
Female	50%
Male	50%
SIMD	
1 (most deprived 20% areas)	26%
2	20%
3	20%
4	20%
5 (least deprived 20% areas)	14%

About this report

This report summarises the key findings from the Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA) research. The questions young people were asked included a variety of 'select one option only' or 'select multiple option' questions. These are reported as percentages where relevant. Young people were also asked to rate specific statements on a 1-10 scale for some questions. These are presented as mean point (average) scores. Young people were also asked open-ended questions where they were free to answer in their own words. Comments that young people provided were thematically analysed with the assistance of proprietary artificial intelligence software, and the sentiment of each theme (i.e. whether the theme was positive, neutral, or negative, etc.) is provided where applicable. Missing, non-response, 'don't know', and 'prefer not to say' responses have been excluded from the analysis. Please note that not all respondents answered every question, therefore base counts vary across questions. Base counts are presented as the unweighted counts.

A series of infographics focusing on protected characteristics have also been produced. Additional reports on our research with young people can also be found on the SDS website⁵. If you have any queries about this research, please contact SDS's Evaluation and Research team at evaluation&research@sds.co.uk.

If using material from this report, please cite this paper and reference as below:

SDS (2025) 'Young People's Career Ambitions 2024 Briefing Paper'. Skills Development Scotland.

⁵ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/evaluation-and-research/ciag-research>

Mapping the post-school transitions of school leavers

Young people were asked to specify:

- (i) their **preferred destination when leaving school**,
- (ii) their **initial destination immediately upon leaving school**, and
- (iii) what they are **currently doing now**.

Figure 2 shows that most young people planned to attend college or university.

University tends to be a linear path – those who plan to go to university usually do, and few attend without having planned to.

College, however, involves more varied transitions. While many follow through with plans to attend, others who hadn't planned to go also enter college. College also acts as a gateway to many other destinations.

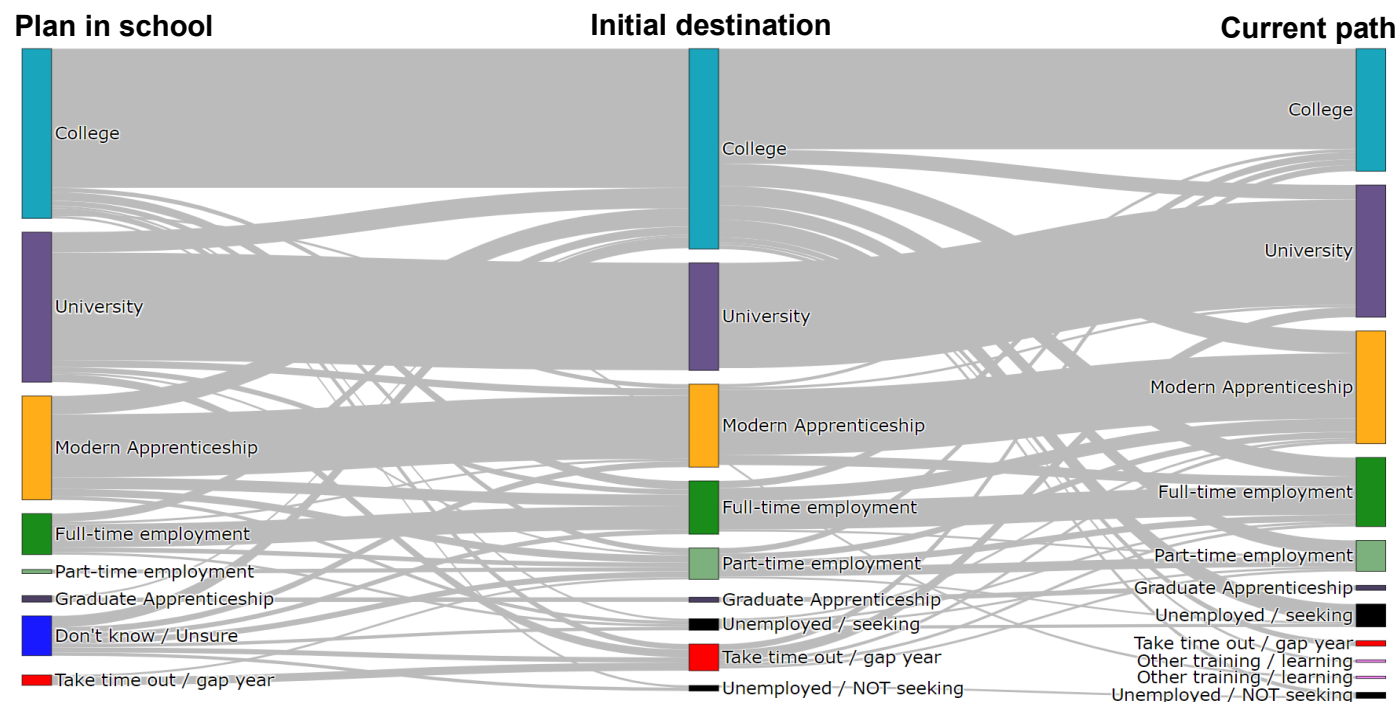


Figure 2: Sankey diagram of the post-school plans and transitions of school leavers (n=2,917). The size (width) of each line presented in the diagram represents the frequency of young people selecting each destination. Connections between destinations that have less than 10 responses are filtered out.

Post-school transitions differ by socioeconomic status (SIMD)

Young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) often have more complex post-school journeys than those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

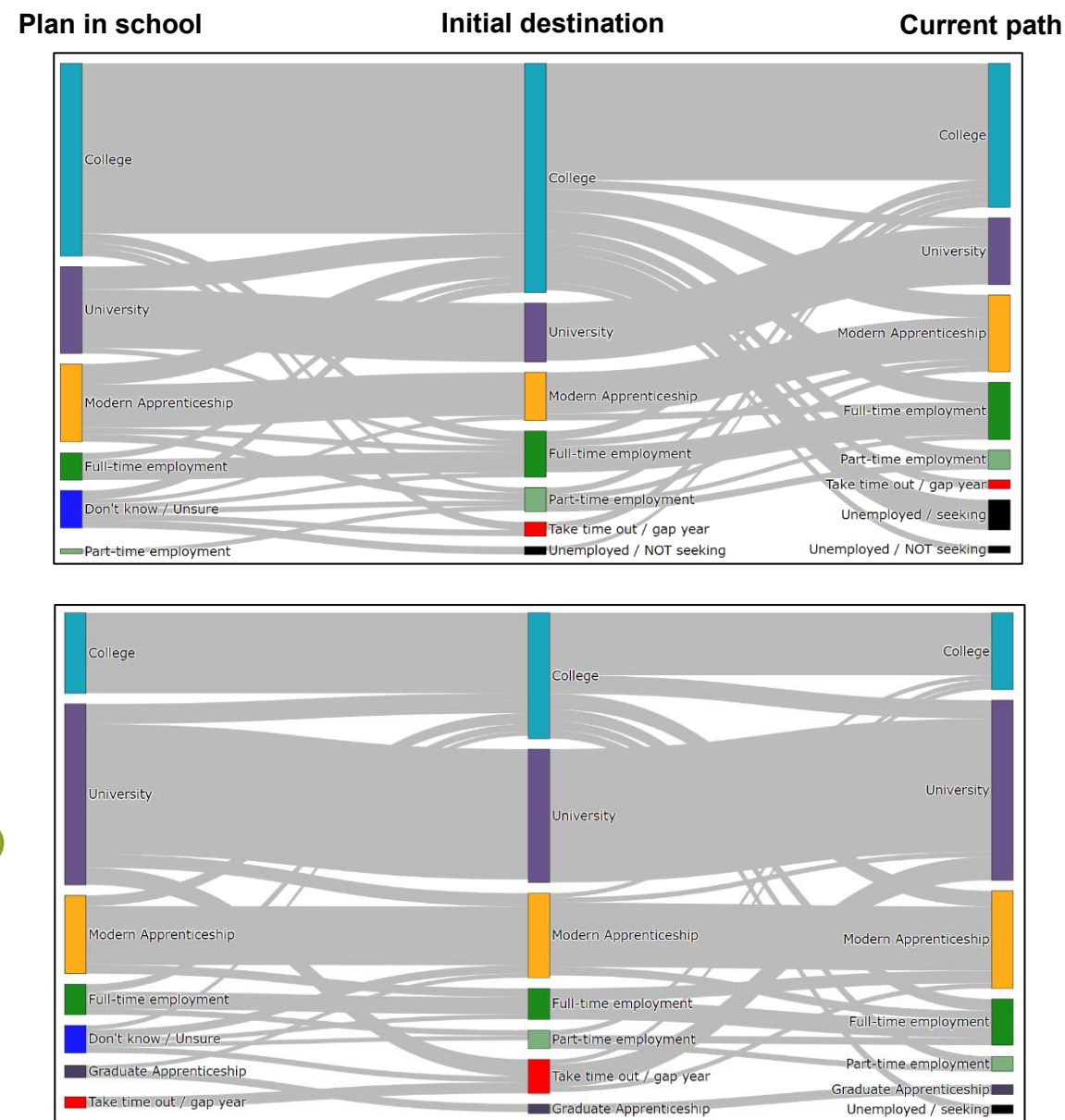
Those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are more likely to enter college upon leaving school. Often, this is their preferred destination, but for some it is not. There are also some young people in this group who wished to undertake a Modern Apprenticeship, or attend university, who were unsuccessful, at least initially.

In contrast, young people from less deprived areas (SIMD 5) are more likely to see university as their preferred route. Many young people from this group wished to go to university, went there on leaving school, and are still there one year later.

SIMD 1
(20% most
deprived areas)
n=748

SIMD 5
(20% least
deprived areas)
n=421

Figure 3: Sankey diagram of the post-school plans and transitions of school leavers by SIMD. Connections between destinations that have less than 5 responses are filtered out.



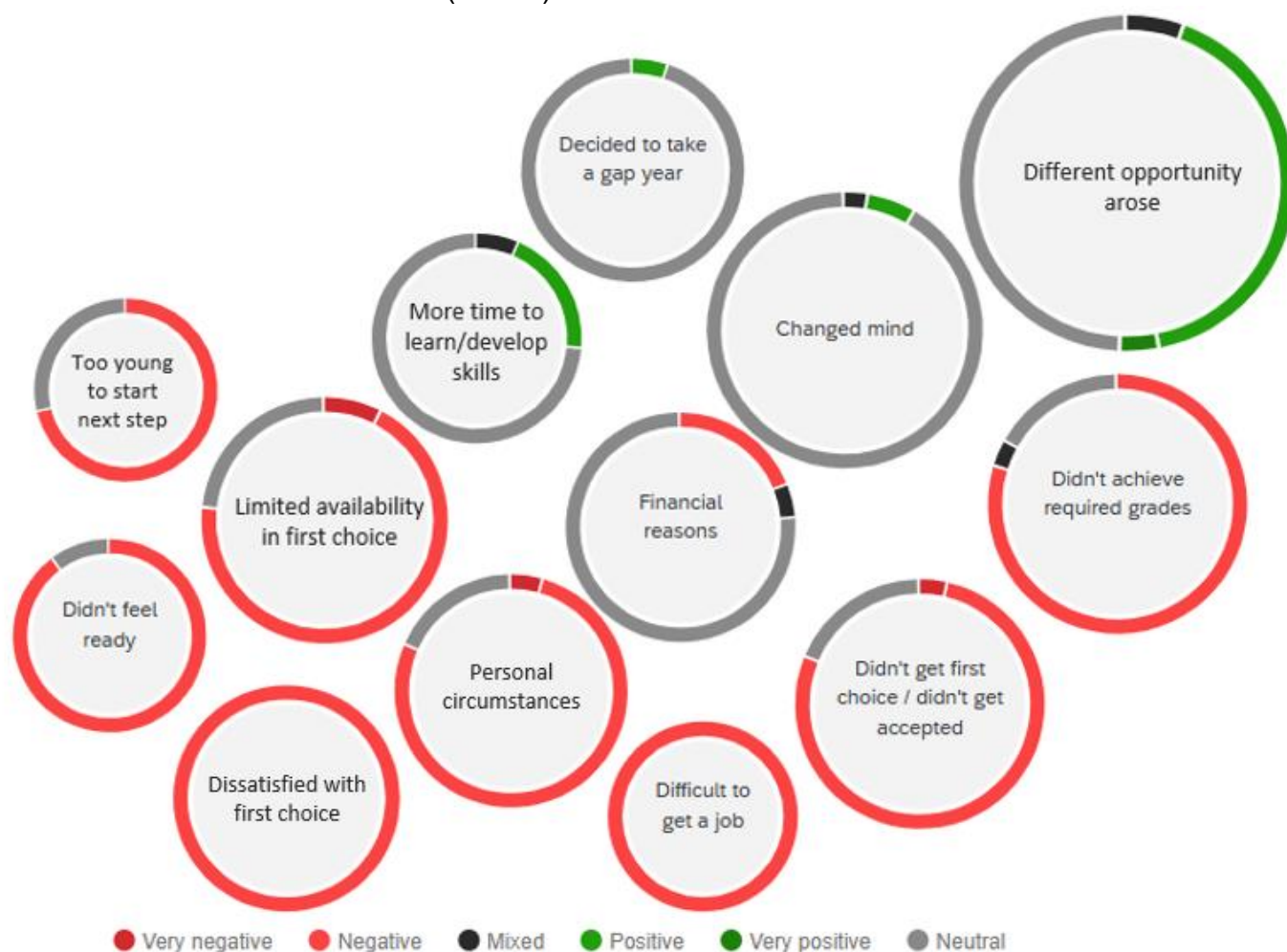
(i) Why was your initial destination different from that planned?

When young people pursued a different path after school than originally planned, they were asked why. Responses varied, including both positive reasons and barriers.

A key reason was the emergence of new opportunities they wanted to pursue. Others changed their minds, took gap years, or sought time to develop skills. Barriers included limited spaces in preferred courses, not being accepted on a course, missing grade requirements, or being too young to start their chosen programme.

Some were also dissatisfied with their initial choice or faced personal challenges, such as health or wellbeing issues.

Figure 4: Thematic analysis of young people's comments on why their plans changed from school to their initial destination (n=325)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

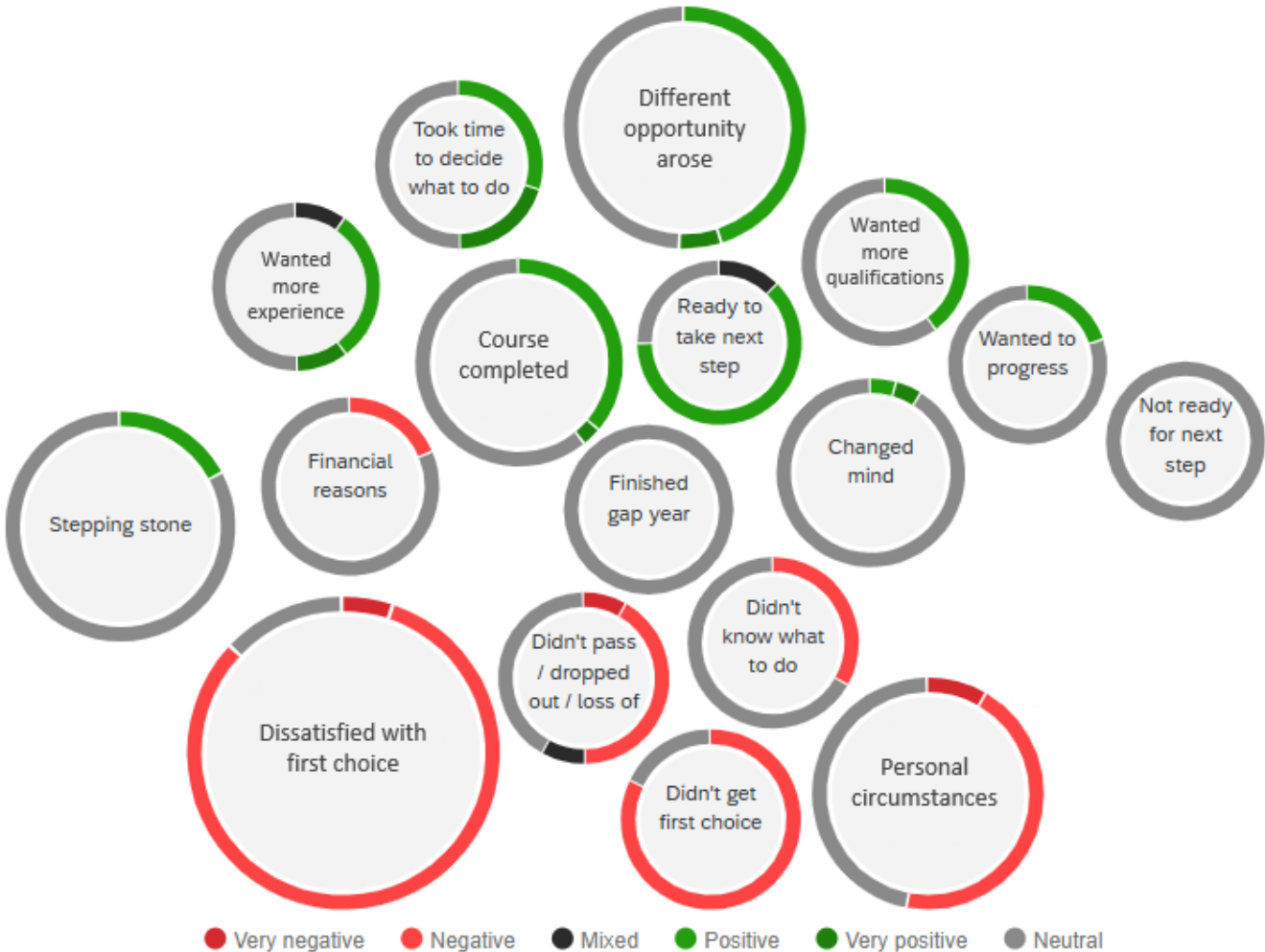
(ii) Why did your plans change (from your initial destination to your current path)?

Young people whose current pathwas different from their initial post-school destination were asked why.

Many cited dissatisfaction with their initial choice. Others viewed their first step as a pathway to their current activity, such as progressing from college to university.

Some had simply completed a course and moved on. Others took up new opportunities, took time to decide, or sought more qualifications or experience before progressing.

Figure 5: Thematic analysis of young people’s comments on why their plans changed from their initial destination to their current path (n=418)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people’s comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

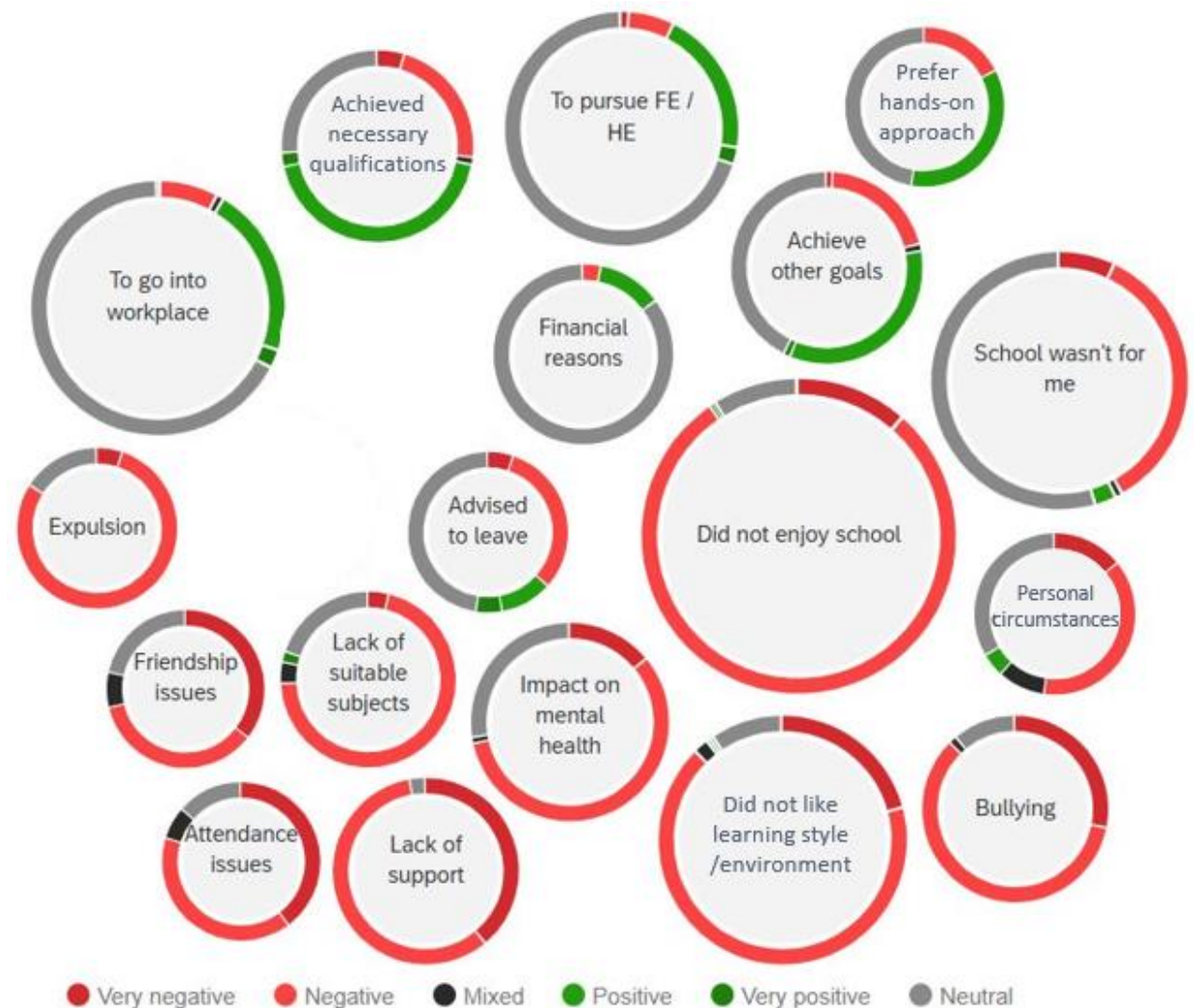
Why did you decide to leave school?

Young people who left school in S4 or S5 were asked why they decided to leave.

The main reasons given were that young people did not enjoy school, did not like the learning style or learning environment, or simply because they felt school wasn't for them.

Some cited more positive reasons, such as to go into work, pursue further education or because they felt they had achieved the necessary qualifications in school.

Figure 6: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "Why did you decide to leave school?" (n=1,262)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

Satisfaction with current career path

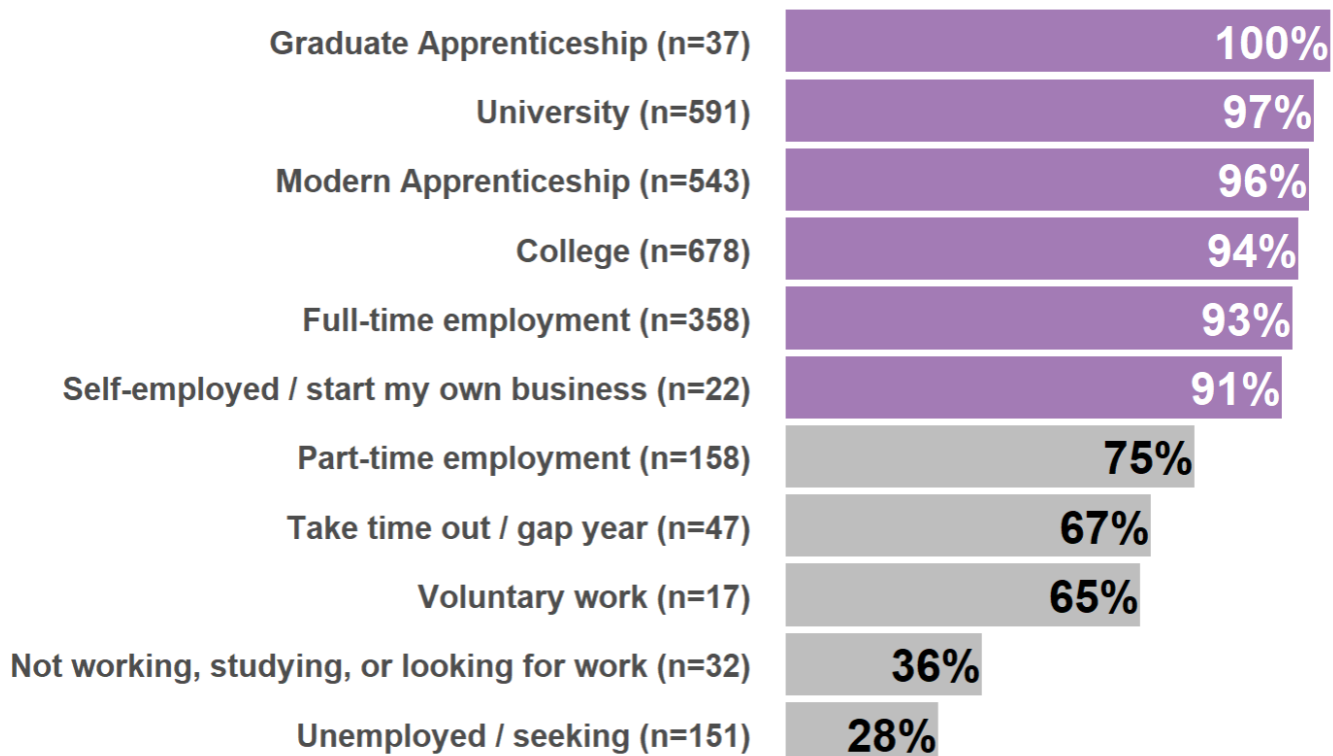
Young people were asked how satisfied they were with their current career path.

Overall, 90% of young people who had left school in the past year were satisfied with what they are doing now.

When looking at the specific destinations that young people enter, graduate/modern apprenticeships, university, college, full-time employment and self-employment had the highest levels of satisfaction (>90%).

Young people were least likely to be satisfied if they were unemployed and seeking work, or not working, studying or looking for work.

Figure 7: Young people's responses to the question: “How satisfied are you with what you are doing now?” (% ,satisfied/extremely satisfied). Results are broken down by various destinations.



Reasons for dissatisfaction with current career path

Young people dissatisfied with their current career path most commonly cited challenges in finding a new job or course as reasons for dissatisfaction.

Others were dissatisfied because their current job or course didn't meet expectations or was of poor quality.

Some also expressed feelings of boredom, lack of direction, and uncertainty about their next steps.

Figure 8: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: *"Why are you dissatisfied with what you are doing now?"* (n=215)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

Impact of COVID-19 on career plans

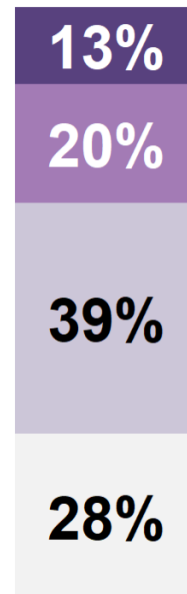
Feedback was gathered from young people on the impact of COVID-19 on their career plans.

One in three young people reported that COVID-19 has had a fair or great deal of impact on their career plans.

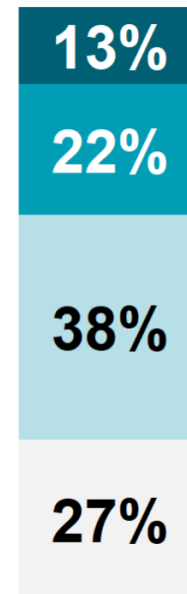
The results were similar for young people from the most (SIMD 1) and least (SIMD 5) deprived areas in Scotland.

Figure 9: Young people's responses to the question: "How much impact did the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) have on your career plans?".

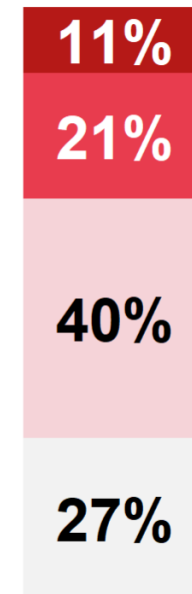
All % (n=2,599)



SIMD 1 % (n=658)



SIMD 5 % (n=381)

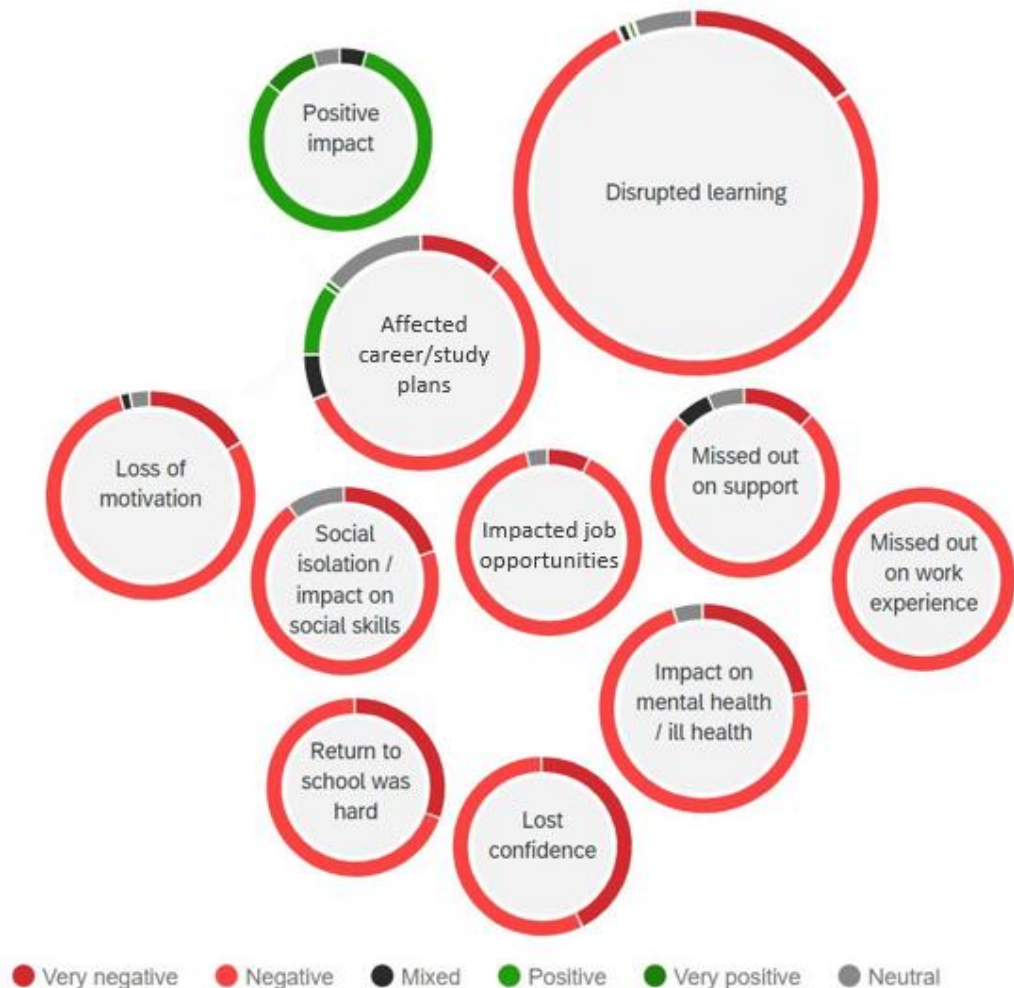


Impact of COVID-19 on career plans...continued

Young people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic often cited **disrupted learning**, which impacted their exam results and career plans.

Many also reported negative effects on their mental health, including worsened conditions, and a loss of motivation and confidence.

Figure 10: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "*Please describe how COVID-19 affected your career plans.*" (n=539)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

Key people that influence career decisions

Young people were asked to rate how influential specific people were on their post-school career decisions. Overall, **parent(s)/carer(s) were the most influential people** on young people’s career decisions. However, young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) were also likely to be influenced by **careers advisers**⁶.

Other family members, friend(s), teachers, and guidance teachers were also likely to be influential, but to a lesser degree than parent(s)/carer(s) overall.

Figure 11: Young people’s responses to the question: “Thinking back to when you first left school, how much influence were the following people on your career decisions?” (% , a fair amount/a great deal). Base counts can be found in Appendix 2.

Key Influencers - People	All %	SIMD 1 %	SIMD 5 %
Parent(s) / carer(s)	79	75	80
Careers adviser	53	63	42
Other family member	52	53	54
Friend(s)	50	50	46
Teacher(s)	49	49	52
Guidance teacher	44	48	42
An employer or training provider coming in to my school to talk about careers	31	34	29
A university or college representative coming in to my school to talk about careers	28	34	30
Youth worker / community worker	16	24	12

⁶ Young people in school receive either a ‘targeted’ or ‘universal’ service based on their level of need. Targeted support is tailored to individuals who may require specific assistance due to their unique circumstances or goals. Young people receiving targeted services are therefore more likely to have one-to-one engagements with a careers adviser. Universal support is designed to benefit everyone, regardless of their situation or background. Young people receiving universal services are provided with general guidance and resources for career development. They can request one-to-one engagements with a careers adviser, but are less likely to have as many engagements as targeted users. It is also important to note that it is not mandatory for young people to use the careers services in school, and attendance at one-to-one sessions is completely optional.

Key factors that influence career decisions

Young people cited key factors influencing their career decisions, with the **need to earn money**, their **interests/hobbies**, and the **qualifications they achieved in school** being most significant.

The importance of these factors varied by socioeconomic status; for example, young people from deprived areas prioritised earning money, while those from less deprived areas were more likely to emphasise school qualifications.

Of the 35% of young people that cited social media as an influence, TikTok (72%), Instagram (55%), and YouTube (40%) were the most influential, while platforms like Facebook (28%), Snapchat (20%), and X (11%) were less impactful.

Figure 12: Young people's responses to the question: *"Thinking back to when you first left school, how much influence were the following factors on your career decisions?"* (% a fair amount/a great deal). Base counts can be found in Appendix 2.

Key Influencers - Factors	All %	SIMD 1 %	SIMD 5 %
The need to earn money	76	80	74
My interests / hobbies	75	73	76
The qualifications i achieved in school	66	61	72
Education / training opportunities available to me	61	57	65
Job / career opportunities available to me	61	53	66
The subject choice available to me in school	55	53	60
Opportunities available within my local area	44	41	46
Work experience in school or part-time job	41	39	40
Social media (tiktok, instagram, etc)	35	41	32
Online careers websites (for example: my world of work)	31	36	29

Careers support received in school

Most young people felt supported in making their own decisions and were encouraged to reach their full potential when they were in school. Those from more deprived areas (SIMD 1) were more positive about the careers support they received, reflecting SDS's service provision of targeting those with greatest need. Over half were satisfied with the careers support they received when in school, and additional SDS research shows a desire for even more support⁷.

Figure 13: Young people’s responses to the question: “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the careers support you received in school?” (% agree/strongly agree). Base counts can be found in Appendix 2.

Careers Support in School	All %	SIMD 1 %	SIMD 5 %
I was supported to make my own decisions and take control of my career path	77	75	75
I was encouraged to reach my full potential in my future career	67	66	65
I was encouraged to explore a wide range of learning and career options	63	66	60
The careers adviser understood me and the support i needed	60	66	53
The careers adviser helped me to identify my skills, strengths and achievements	58	63	53
The careers adviser helped me to make a plan of things i would do	56	63	51
I was satisfied with the amount of careers support i received in school	52	55	51
I was encouraged to challenge stereotypes, such as ideas of "traditional" male or female jobs	42	48	34

⁷ SDS (2024) [Pupil Voice 2024 Briefing Paper](#)

Confidence in Career Management Skills (CMS)

Career Management Skills (CMS) are a set of competencies that enable young people to understand themselves, their strengths, and how they interact with the world of work⁸.

Young people were generally confident in their Career Management Skills (CMS), including understanding their strengths, achievements, and how their experiences inform career decisions. They also felt capable of identifying helpful people and making informed decisions. However, those from more deprived areas (SIMD 1) were less confident in these skills, particularly in making informed decisions and utilising career information, compared to those from less deprived areas (SIMD 5).

Figure 14: Young people's responses to the question: *"Thinking about your Career Management Skills, on a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that you can do the following..."* (% not at all confident/extremely confident). Base counts can be found in Appendix 2.

Career Management Skills	All	SIMD 1	SIMD 5
Understand and build on my skills, strengths, and achievements	7.4	7.3	7.6
Understand how my experiences and learning can help me make career choices	7.3	7.1	7.6
Identify and build relationships with people who can help me in my career	7.2	7.0	7.5
Make informed career decisions	7.1	6.8	7.4
Consider new things i may not have thought of when it comes to my career journey	7.0	7.0	7.2
Find and use career information easily	6.8	6.6	7.0

⁸ Skills Development Scotland [Career Management Skills](#)

Sources of support with career (outwith SDS careers services)

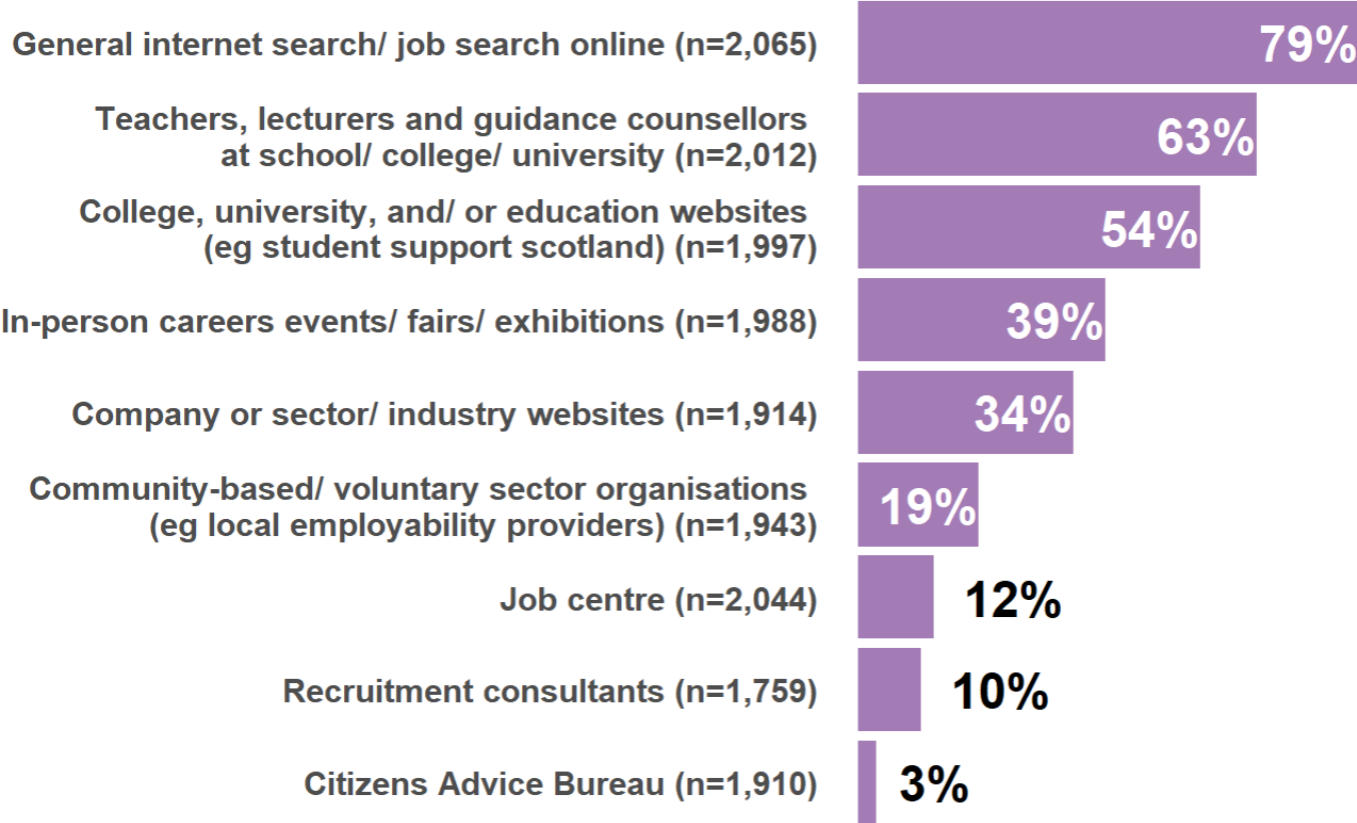
Young people were asked if they have used any of the sources of support with their career shown in Figure 15.

Young people were most likely to have used general internet/job searches online, as well as sourcing careers advice from teachers, lecturers, and guidance counsellors at school or in college/university.

Some young people have also used college/university websites or attended in-person careers events/exhibitions.

In contrast, very few young people had used job centres, recruitment consultants, or the Citizens Advice Bureau as a source of support with their career.

Figure 15: Young people’s responses to the question: “Have you used any of the following sources for support with your career?” (% ‘Yes, I have used’).

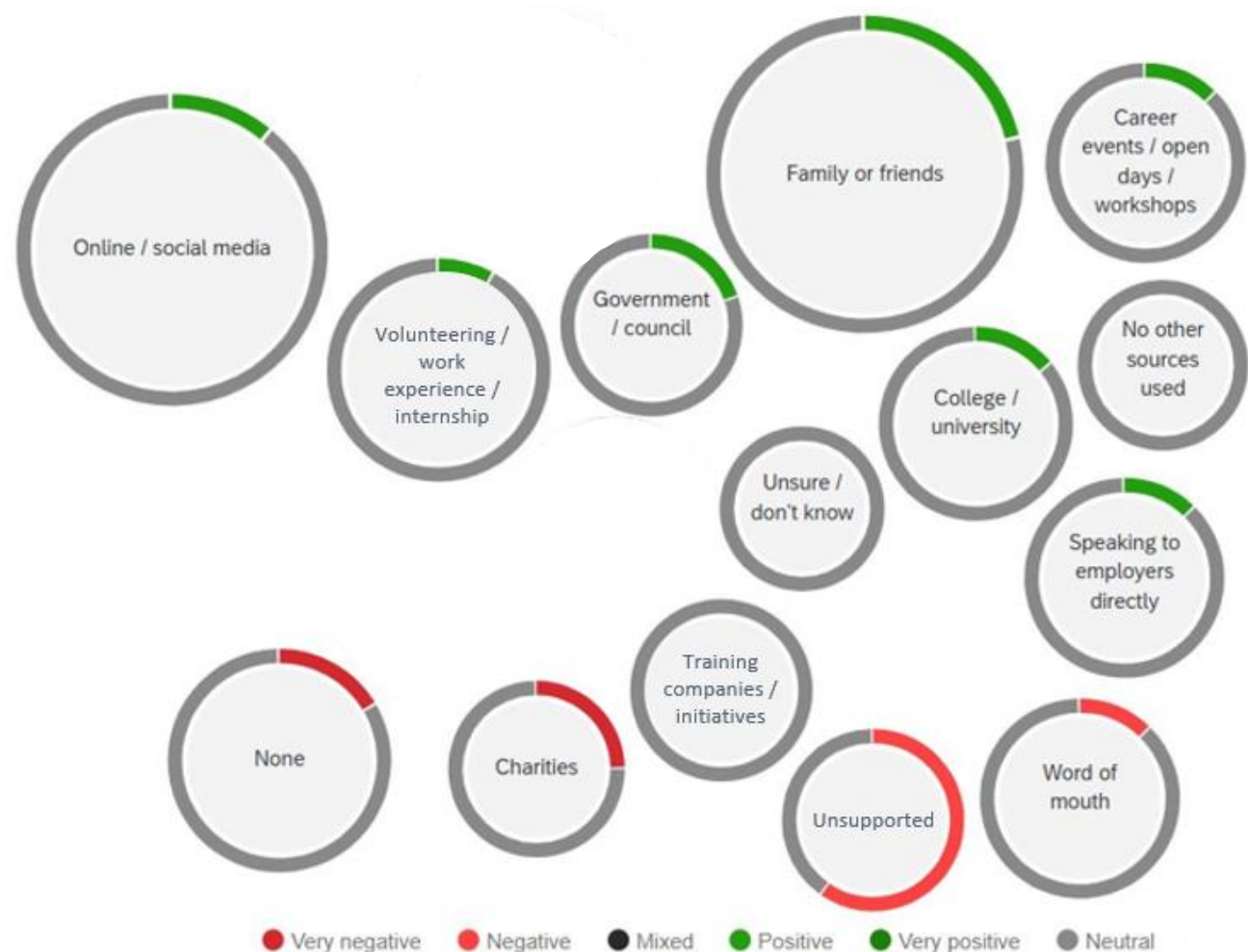


Sources of support with career (outwith SDS careers services)...continued

Young people were also asked to list any other sources of support they had accessed that were not included in the list above.

Key amongst these were family, friends, the internet/social media. Young people discussed getting jobs or opportunities through their family and friends, and using job search websites and social media for looking for opportunities.

Figure 16: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "Please detail any other sources that you have used if not included in the list above." (n=145)*.

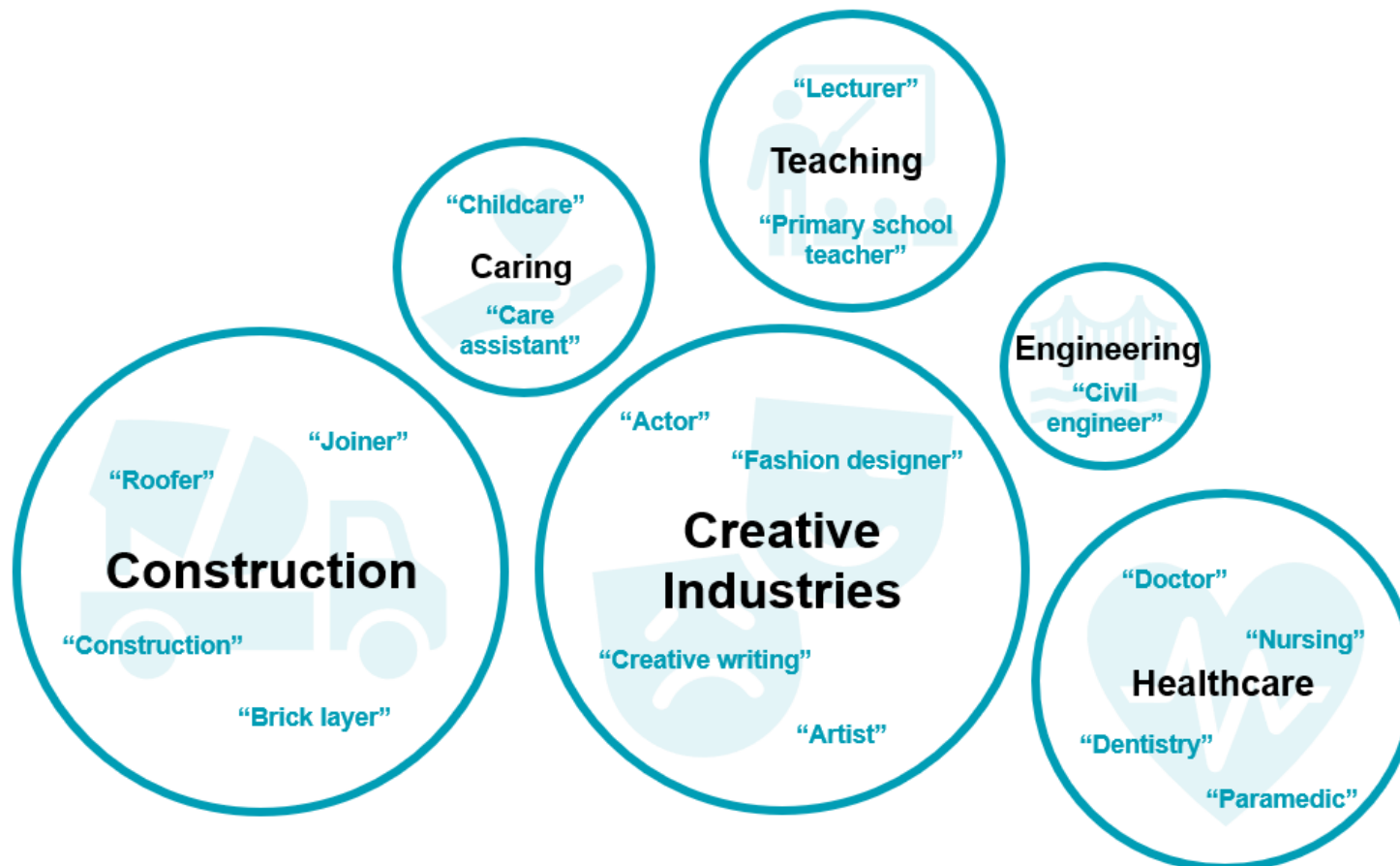


*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

Ideal Job/Career

Young people were asked what job they want to do in their future career. Over 250 different job roles were identified, and over half of the jobs aligned with one of six key sectors below. Construction and the creative industries were popular amongst young people, with a variety of job roles mentioned within each of these industries. Healthcare roles were also prominent, as well as teaching, caring and engineering roles.

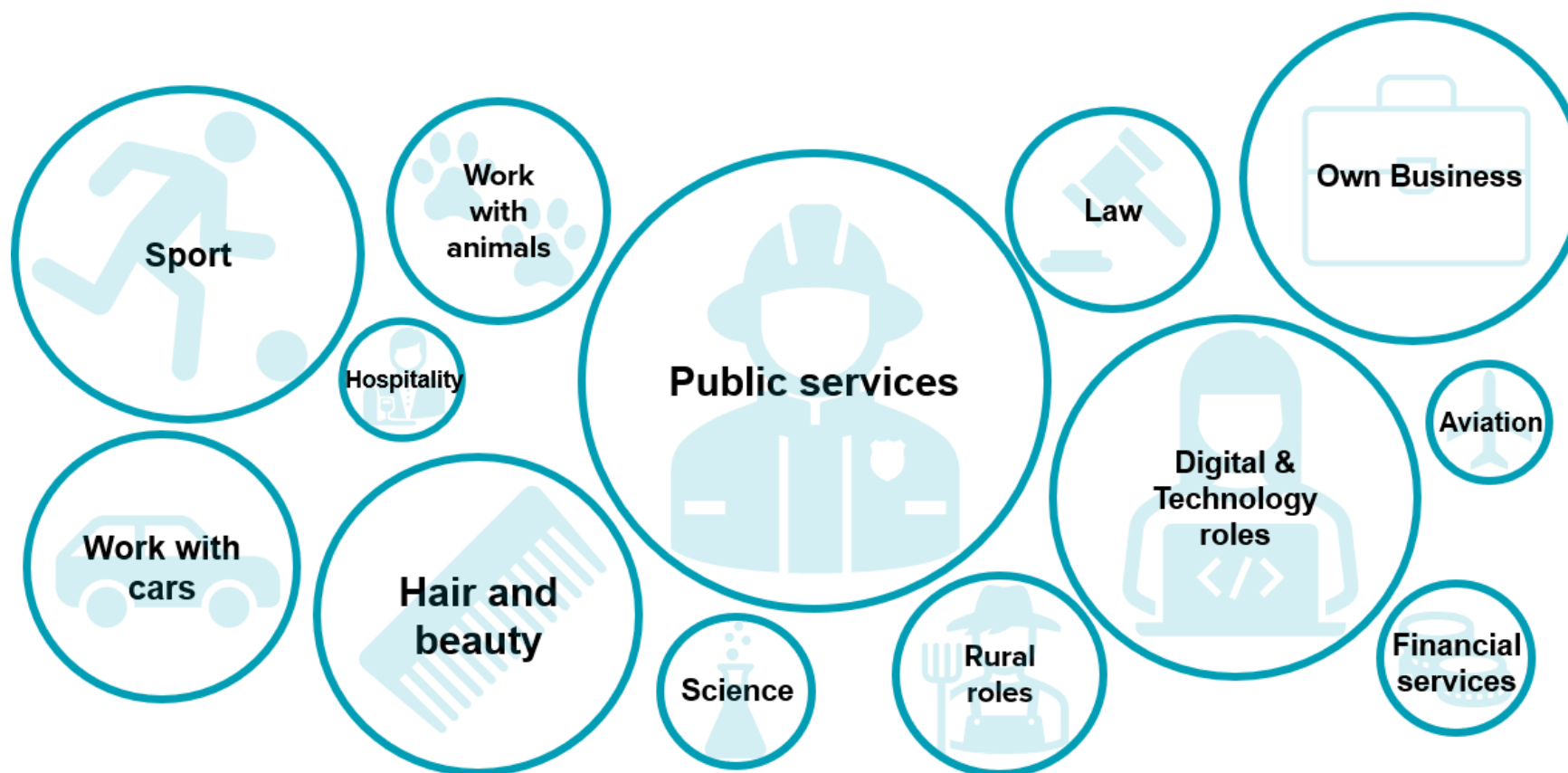
Figure 17: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: *"Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?"* (n=1,629). The larger the circle, the more the job/career area was mentioned.



Ideal Job/Career...continued

There were many other job roles mentioned by young people. Public services included job roles in the armed forces and the emergency services. Digital and technology roles included a variety of jobs such as cyber security roles, software developers and coders. Sport was also a popular area, as was hair and beauty, and owning a business.

Figure 18: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: *"Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?"* (n=1,629). The larger the circle, the more the job/career area was mentioned.



Preferred Industries

Young people were asked what industry they want to work in in their future career.

Young people expressed interest in various industries, with the top choices being engineering, construction, creative industries, and medicine/health.

There were notable differences between males and females: males preferred engineering, construction, and IT, while females were more interested in medicine/health, caring, creative industries, and education.

Figure 19: Young people's responses to the question: "What industries do you want to work in in your future career?" (% , select all that apply). Results are broken down by sex.

Industries	All % (n=1,910)	Female % (n=934)	Male % (n=976)
Engineering	16	4	28
Construction	13	3	23
Creative industries (e.g. Art, design, music, acting)	13	16	10
Medicine and health	13	21	4
Digital, computing, and IT	11	6	15
Media	11	11	10
Teaching / education	11	15	7
Caring (e.g. childcare, social care)	10	17	3
Sport	9	5	12
Armed forces, policing or security	7	6	9
Banking and finance	7	6	7
Science (e.g. Pharmaceuticals, life sciences, biotechnology, etc)	7	8	6
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	6	5	7
Hospitality, food and drink (e.g. working in hotels, bars, restaurants)	6	8	4
Law	6	9	4
Government and public administration	5	6	5
Housing / property	5	5	6
Personal care (e.g. Beauty, haircare, wellness)	5	10	1
Retail	5	7	4
Energy	4	2	6
Environmental science and conservation	4	5	3
Tourism	4	5	4
Transport and logistics	3	1	5

Preferred Industries...continued

Figure 20: Young people's responses to the question: "What industries do you want to work in in your future career?" (% , select all that apply). Results are broken down by SIMD.

There were also differences by socioeconomic status in young people's preferred industries.

Young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) were more likely than those in the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) to want to work in construction and caring industries, while those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) expressed greater interest in creative industries and medicine/health.

Industry	All % (n=1,910)	SIMD 1 % (n=472)	SIMD 5 % (n=287)
Engineering	16	15	16
Construction	13	14	9
Creative industries (e.g. Art, design, music, acting)	13	11	14
Medicine and health	13	11	18
Digital, computing, and IT	11	10	11
Media	11	11	11
Teaching / education	11	11	12
Caring (e.g. childcare, social care)	10	14	6
Sport	9	7	10
Armed forces, policing or security	7	7	6
Banking and finance	7	5	8
Science (e.g. Pharmaceuticals, life sciences, biotechnology, etc)	7	4	8
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	6	2	4
Hospitality, food and drink (e.g. working in hotels, bars, restaurants)	6	8	4
Law	6	6	7
Government and public administration	5	4	7
Housing / property	5	4	5
Personal care (e.g. Beauty, haircare, wellness)	5	6	3
Retail	5	7	4
Energy	4	2	5
Environmental science and conservation	4	2	5
Tourism	4	4	7
Transport and logistics	3	3	3

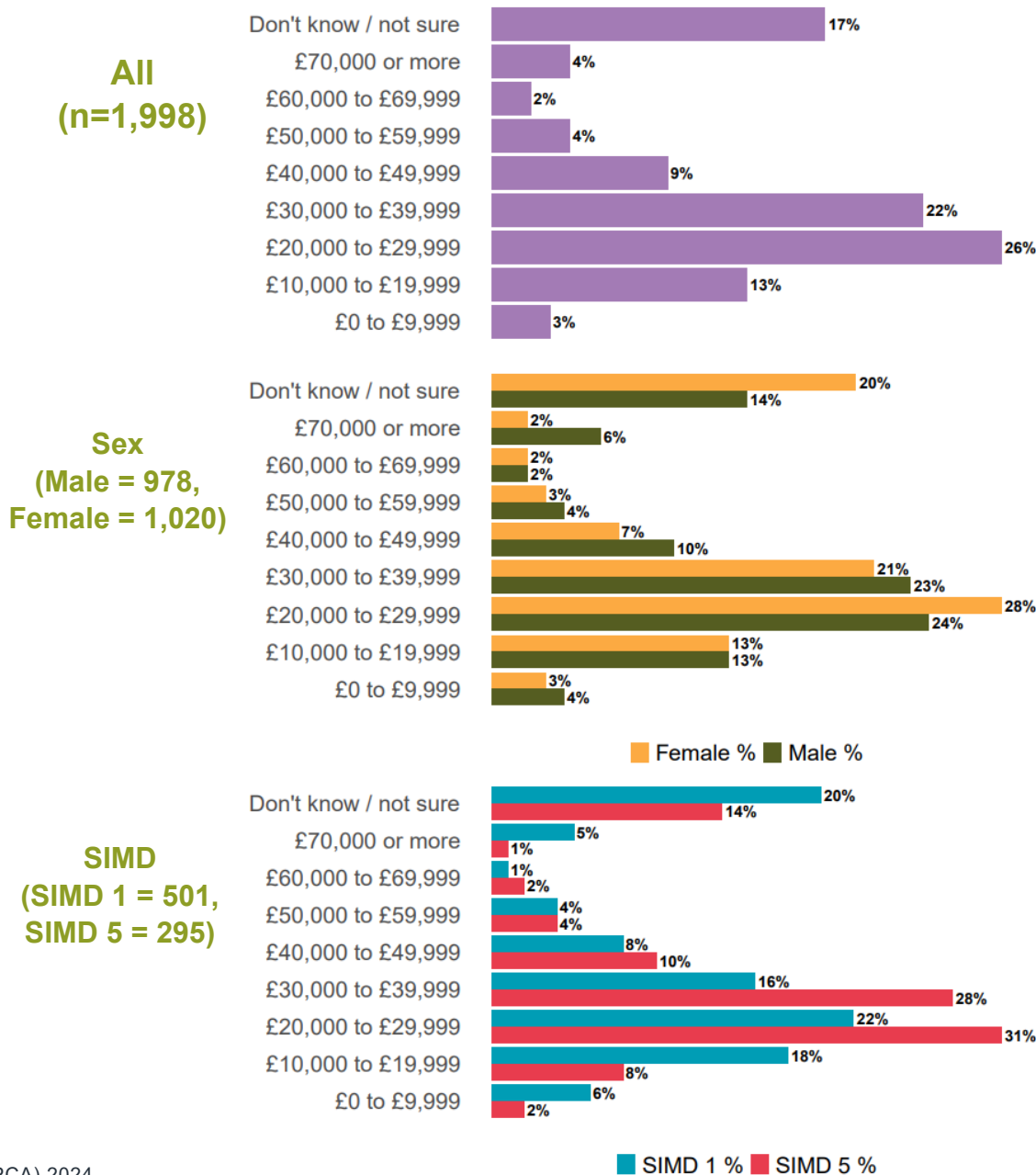
Starting salary

Young people were asked what starting salary they would expect to earn in their ideal job/career.

Almost half of all young people expect a starting salary of between £20,000-£40,000 in their ideal job, while nearly one in five are unsure.

Males tended to expect slightly higher salaries than females. However, those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) were more likely to expect salaries below £20,000 compared to those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5).

Figure 21: Young people’s response to the question: “In your ideal job/career, what would be the starting salary you would expect to earn per year?”.



Important job factors

Young people value various factors in their future careers, with good pay being the most important, followed by job satisfaction and work-life balance.

More males than females were likely to prioritise pay and job satisfaction, while females were more likely than males to focus on careers that involve helping others.

Figure 22: Young people's responses to the question: *"Please select the factors that are most important to you in your future job/career from the list below."* (% , select up to five).

Important job/career factors	All % (n=1,976)	Female % (n=1,010)	Male % (n=966)
Good pay	59	56	62
Job satisfaction	44	38	50
Work-life balance	43	44	42
Learning new skills	33	31	35
Helping others	32	41	23
Working with people i like	30	28	32
Doing valuable work	28	30	27
Job security	26	25	27
Opportunity to earn while you learn	26	25	27
The variety and interest in the job	25	28	23
Being challenged in the work you do	23	24	21
Having a voice / being listened to in the workplace	19	23	15
Chances for promotion	18	14	21
Flexible working options (for example: working from home / flexible hours)	18	22	15
A job / career within my local area	15	16	15
Opportunity to be entrepreneurial (be your own boss)	11	10	12
Autonomy / independence	6	5	6
Supporting the climate emergency	4	5	3

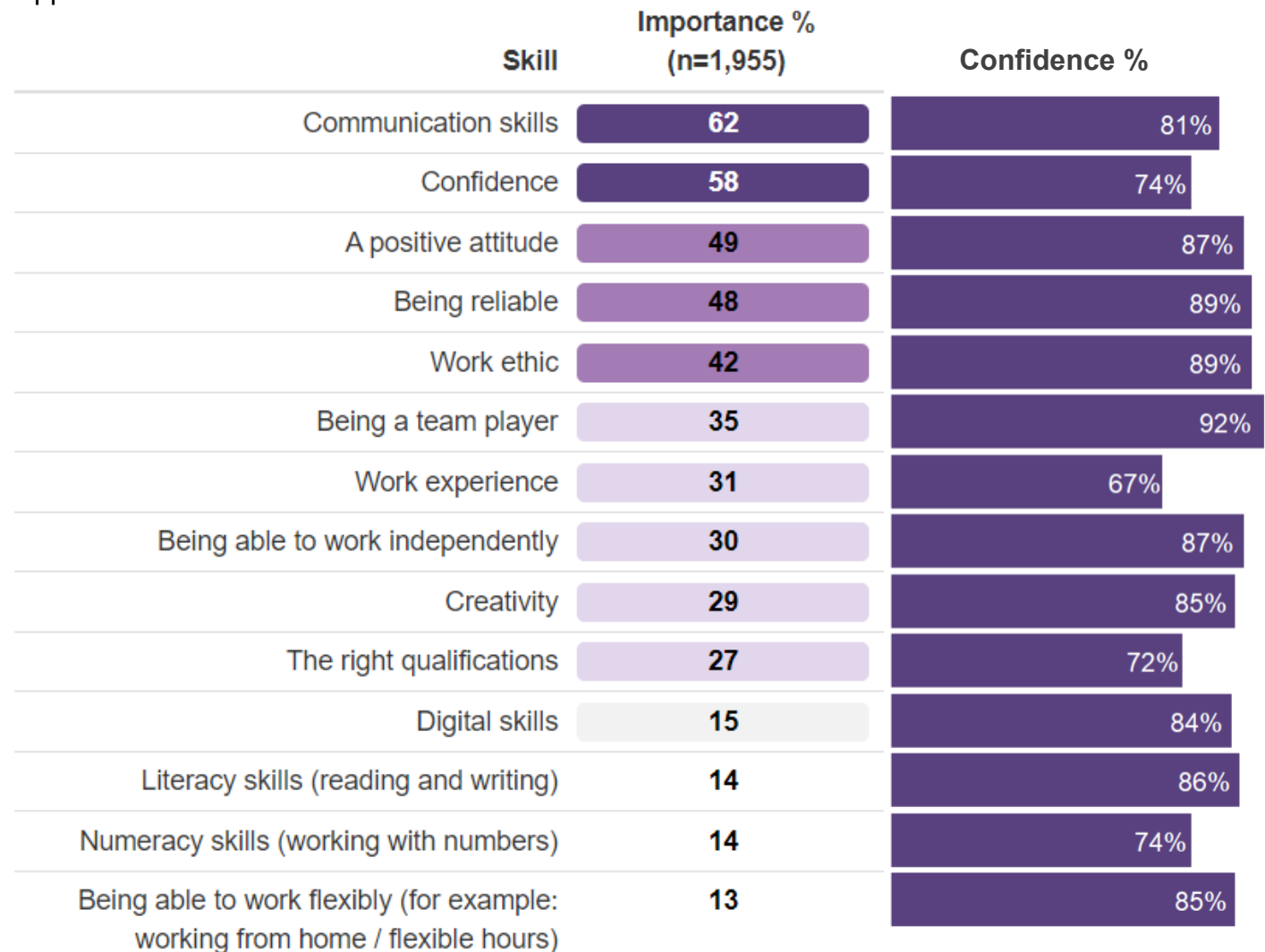
Perceived skills/attributes for the future

Young people were asked to select which skills or attributes they thought were most important for their future career.

Young people prioritised communication, confidence, a positive attitude, reliability, and work ethic as key skills for their future careers, many of which are meta-skills.

Young people were also asked how confident they felt in developing these skills/attributes. While they generally felt confident, they were less confident in gaining work experience and the right qualifications.

Figure 23: Young people's responses to the questions: (i) "Which of these skills or attributes do you think you will most need in your future career?" (% , select up to five); (ii) "How confident are you that you are currently developing these skills?" (% , confident/very confident). Base counts can be found in Appendix 2.



Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on career

Young people were asked in what ways they think Artificial Intelligence (AI) might impact their future career choices or path.

Young people had mixed views on how AI might impact their future careers.

Many felt AI wouldn't affect their career choices or were unsure of its impact.

Some expressed concerns about AI limiting job opportunities, providing inaccurate information, or fostering reliance on technology.

However, others saw AI's potential to assist with tasks, generate ideas, and create new job opportunities.

Figure 24: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "In what way(s), if any, do you think artificial intelligence (AI) will impact your career choices / career path?" (n=1,429)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

Perceived Barriers

Young people identified several barriers to making progress in their career, including lack of confidence, contacts, work experience, and job opportunities. Those from more deprived areas (SIMD 1) cited confidence as the top barrier, while those from less deprived areas (SIMD 5) were more concerned about competition. Young people from deprived areas also reported a wider range of barriers, such as not having enough money or the right qualifications.

Figure 25: Young people's responses to the question: "Which of the following, if any, could prevent you from making progress in your chosen career?" (% , select up to five).

Perceived barriers	All % (n=1,850)	SIMD 1 % (n=459)	SIMD 5 % (n=279)
Not having enough confidence in myself	41	44	39
Not having contacts / knowing the right people	40	38	42
Not enough work experience	38	39	40
Not enough jobs	35	37	32
Not earning enough money to live on	34	36	31
Not having the right qualifications	33	35	32
Too much competition	33	26	43
My wellbeing	27	30	24
Not having the right skills (for example: communication / numeracy / digital / etc.)	24	28	20
Being discriminated against	16	19	13
Not having any role models	8	11	4
Nothing, i have no concerns	8	6	12

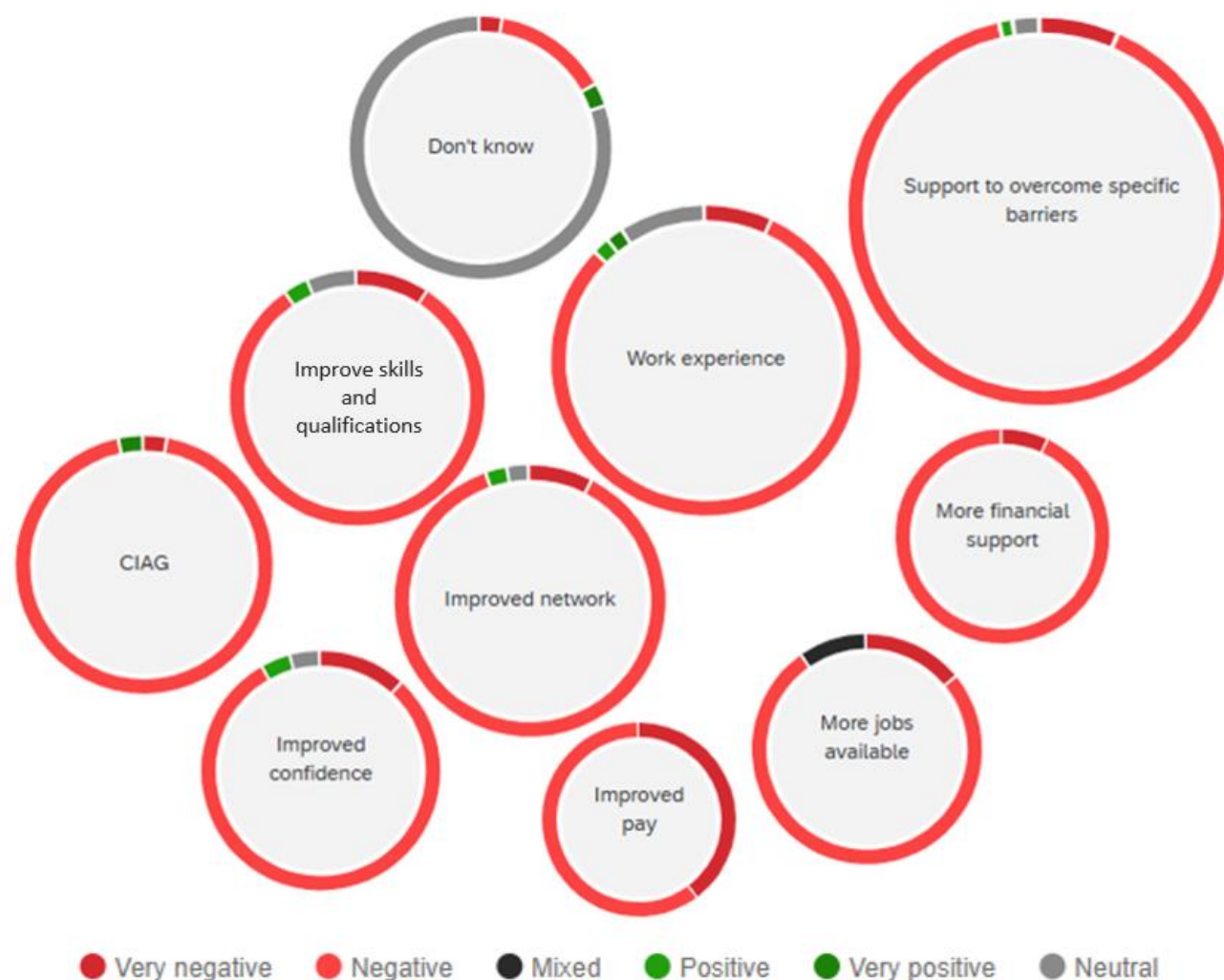
What would help to overcome perceived barriers?

Young people were asked what would help them to overcome any barriers that may prevent them from making progress in their career.

Young people had specific barriers that required targeted support. Specific support mentioned included support with disabilities, mental health, and tutoring. Other key support included mentoring, peer support, encouragement, and work experience.

Young people also highlighted the importance of careers advice, improved confidence, and better financial support in overcoming their perceived barriers.

Figure 26: Thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "What support would be helpful in managing the barriers you have identified?" (n=313)*.



*The larger the circle, the more frequent the theme was. The colour around the circle represents the sentiment of the theme (i.e. whether young people's comments were more positive, neutral, or negative).

Participation in groups and activities

Young people were asked if they had taken part in any groups, clubs, organisations, or activities in the last twelve months. Nearly half of young people participated in part-time work, while around a quarter participated in sports or fitness activities. About one in five hadn't participated in any listed activities in the last year.

Young people from deprived areas (SIMD 1) were less likely to engage in activities like part-time work, sports, and creative arts, with 28% reporting no participation in any activities, compared to 14% from less deprived areas (SIMD 5).

Figure 27: Young people’s responses to the question: *“In the last 12 months, have you actively taken part in any of these types of groups, clubs, organisations or activities (including evening classes)?”* (% , select all that apply).

Activities	All % (n=1,785)	SIMD 1 % (n=444)	SIMD 5 % (n=275)
Part-time work	45	38	51
Sports, fitness or exercise groups (e.g. dance, swimming, athletics, martial arts etc.)	27	18	36
Team sports (e.g. football, rugby, hockey, basketball etc.)	25	20	34
I have not taken part in any of these activities	22	28	14
Volunteering and fundraising groups	16	15	17
Creative arts groups (e.g. drama, art, music, photography etc.)	10	8	13
One-to-one mentoring	9	8	8
Youth clubs	5	9	4
Science and technology (e.g. coding club, science club etc.)	4	3	4
Youth award schemes (e.g. Duke of edinburgh)	4	3	6
Political and democracy groups (e.g. Scottish youth parliament, political parties, representative on boards/youth panels etc.)	3	2	5
Uniformed youth groups (e.g. Scouts, girl guides, army cadets etc.)	3	2	4

Appendix 1: Profile of respondents

Demographic*	n	%
Age (n=2,919)		
16	29	1%
17	1,005	34%
18	978	34%
19	892	31%
20	15	1%
Sex (n=2,919)		
Male	1,463	50%
Female	1,456	50%
Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (n=2,910)		
1 (most deprived 20% areas)	748	26%
2	587	20%
3	580	20%
4	574	20%
5 (least deprived 20% areas)	421	14%
Sexual Orientation (n=1,724)		
Heterosexual/straight	1,372	80%
Bisexual	204	12%
Gay/lesbian	101	6%
Other sexual orientation	47	3%
Ethnicity (n=2,877)		
African/African Scottish/African British/African Other	42	1%
Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British/Asian Other	105	4%
Black/Black Scottish/Black British	15	1%
Caribbean/Caribbean Scottish/Caribbean British/Caribbean Other	8	0.3%
Gypsy/Traveller/Roma	2	0.1%
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	40	1%
Other ethnic group	38	1%
White/White Scottish/White Irish/White Other British/White Other	2,627	91%

* Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Missing/prefer not to say/non-response cases have been excluded from totals.

Demographic	n	%
Disability (physical or mental health condition/illness lasting/expected to last 12 months or more) (n=1,674)		
Disabled	449	27%
Non-disabled	1,225	73%
Impairment, health condition, learning difficulty (select all that apply) (n=411)**		
Autism spectrum condition	128	31%
Blind or have a visual impairment uncorrected by glasses	12	3%
Deaf or have a hearing impairment	12	3%
Learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD	154	38%
Learning disability, such as Down's syndrome	6	1%
Long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy	22	5%
Mental health difficulty, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder	251	61%
Physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches	20	5%
Speech or language impairment	9	2%
Other disability, impairment, or medical condition	78	19%
Care Experience (n=1,787)		
Care experienced	137	8%
Not care experienced	1,650	92%

**Please note that individuals could select more than one type of impairment/health condition/learning difficulty options. Counts/percentages are based on the number of selections ("ticks") of each option rather than the count of individuals answering the question.

Appendix 2: Base counts (unweighted)

Statement	All (n)	SIMD 1 (n)	SIMD 5 (n)
Influencers - key people			
Parent(s)/carer(s)	2,576	646	381
Careers adviser	2,565	645	377
Other family member	2,498	623	366
Friend(s)	2,559	647	376
Teacher(s)	2,547	635	379
Guidance teacher	2,537	637	378
An employer or training provider coming in to my school to talk about careers	2,437	610	364
A university or college representative coming in to my school to talk about careers	2,457	612	368
Youth worker / community worker	2,264	568	334
Influencers - key factors			
The need to earn money	2,365	584	353
My interests/hobbies	2,384	588	359
The qualifications I achieved in school	2,379	583	355
Education/training opportunities available to me	2,392	594	354
Job/career opportunities available to me	2,352	579	346
The subject choice available to me in school	2,343	578	351
Opportunities available within my local area	2,351	579	346
Work experience in school or part-time job	2,296	560	338
Social media (TikTok, Instagram, etc)	2,345	575	348
Online careers websites (for example: My World of Work)	2,309	571	344
Careers support received in school			
I was supported to make my own decisions and take control of my career path	2,112	530	309
I was encouraged to reach my full potential in my future career	2,081	515	308
I was encouraged to explore a wide range of learning and career options	2,121	534	312
The Careers Adviser understood me and the support I needed	2,034	520	292
The Careers Adviser helped me to identify my skills, strengths and achievements	2,055	517	304
The Careers Adviser helped me to make a plan of things I would do	2,067	525	302
I was satisfied with the amount of careers support I received in school	2,031	502	304
I was encouraged to challenge stereotypes, such as ideas of "traditional" male or female jobs	1,803	468	254

Statement	All (n)	SIMD 1 (n)	SIMD 5 (n)
Career Management Skills (CMS)			
Understand and build on my skills, strengths, and achievements	2,020	505	296
Understand how my experiences and learning can help me make career choices	2,019	507	297
Identify and build relationships with people who can help me in my career	2,002	497	295
Make informed career decisions	2,026	505	299
Consider new things I may not have thought of when it comes to my career journey	2,011	503	299
Find and use career information easily	2,010	502	297
Confidence in developing skills/attributes			
Communication skills	1,171	NA	NA
Confidence	1,113	NA	NA
A positive attitude	945	NA	NA
Being reliable	924	NA	NA
Work ethic	792	NA	NA
Being a team player	668	NA	NA
Work experience	593	NA	NA
Being able to work independently	581	NA	NA
Creativity	546	NA	NA
The right qualifications	501	NA	NA
Digital skills	264	NA	NA
Literacy skills (reading and writing)	273	NA	NA
Numeracy skills (working with numbers)	256	NA	NA
Being able to work flexibly (for example: working from home / flexible hours)	249	NA	NA

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