

Pupil Voice

S1 - S3 pilot project
Evaluation & Research Team

October 2025



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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.

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

² Careers Information, Advice and Guidance

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: External Collaborating partners



The Pupil Voice (S1-S3 research)

The goal of the S1 to S3 Pupil Voice Pilot Project was to test the feasibility of collecting the perception of skills and careers from younger secondary school pupils. The project complements the S4 to S6 Pupil Voice and the Young Peoples Career Ambitions research which collects the views of senior phase pupils and recent school leavers. The focus of this paper is on the results from the research which explored the themes and topics shown in **Figure 2**

Figure 2: Themes and Topics



Approach and method

Permissions to test the approach was sought internally through the CIAG Directorate. Directors of Education were informed about the approach. Head Teachers in eight test sites were asked to support the project by allowing pupils time to complete the survey in school hours and providing the technology to allow the online survey to be administered. All participating schools received a £100 Amazon voucher to thank them for their time and support.

The questionnaire was administered through a hyperlink and a QR code. The survey was open mid-April to mid-June 2025.

Careers advisers were asked to work with the eight pilot schools to administer the survey to at least one class in each year group from S1 to S3. In doing so careers advisers had to work with the unique circumstances in each school. Access to IT, Wifi, and personal electronic devices varied between schools. All advisers worked with the schools to ensure the questionnaire was administered within the timetable. A total of 712 responses were collected.

Limitations

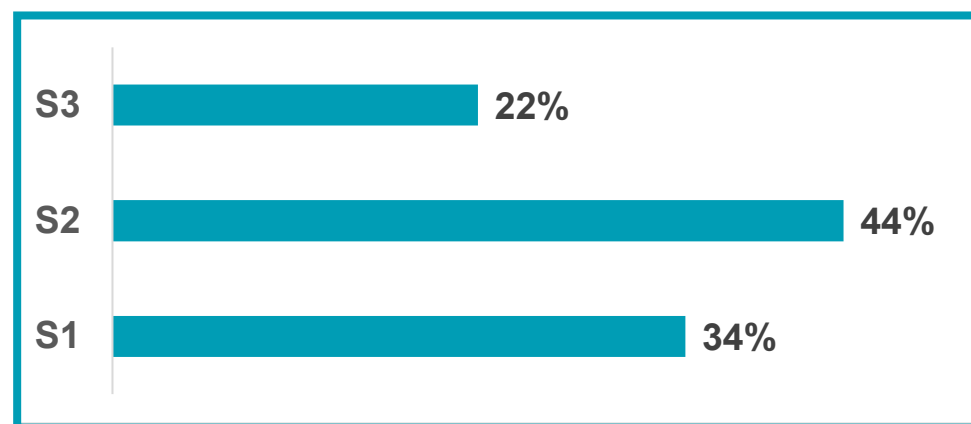
This is a pilot study. It was designed to test the feasibility of conducting a survey with the S1 to S3 year groups during school hours. The responses came from a range of urban/rural schools,

and from mixed socio economic areas. However the study was not designed to be representative of Scotland.

Respondent profile

Most responses came from S2 pupils, however, there was a good spread of responses across the three year groups.

Chart 1: Percentage of responses by year group



The sections that follow explore the findings for the respondents as a whole. Some differences by year group and gender³ were explored, however, a comprehensive analysis of year group and gender was not conducted with these pilot project findings.

³ Respondents were asked "What is your gender?". Options were: Female, Male. In another way and Prefer not to say. 309 respondents indicated they were female, 273 indicated they were male. 7 preferred not to say. 23 described their gender in another way.

Favourite Subjects

Respondents were asked to choose their three favourite subjects from a list of 11.

PE and Creative Subjects were the most popular subjects.

Respondents had a narrow view of the careers and/or skills associated with their favourite subjects.

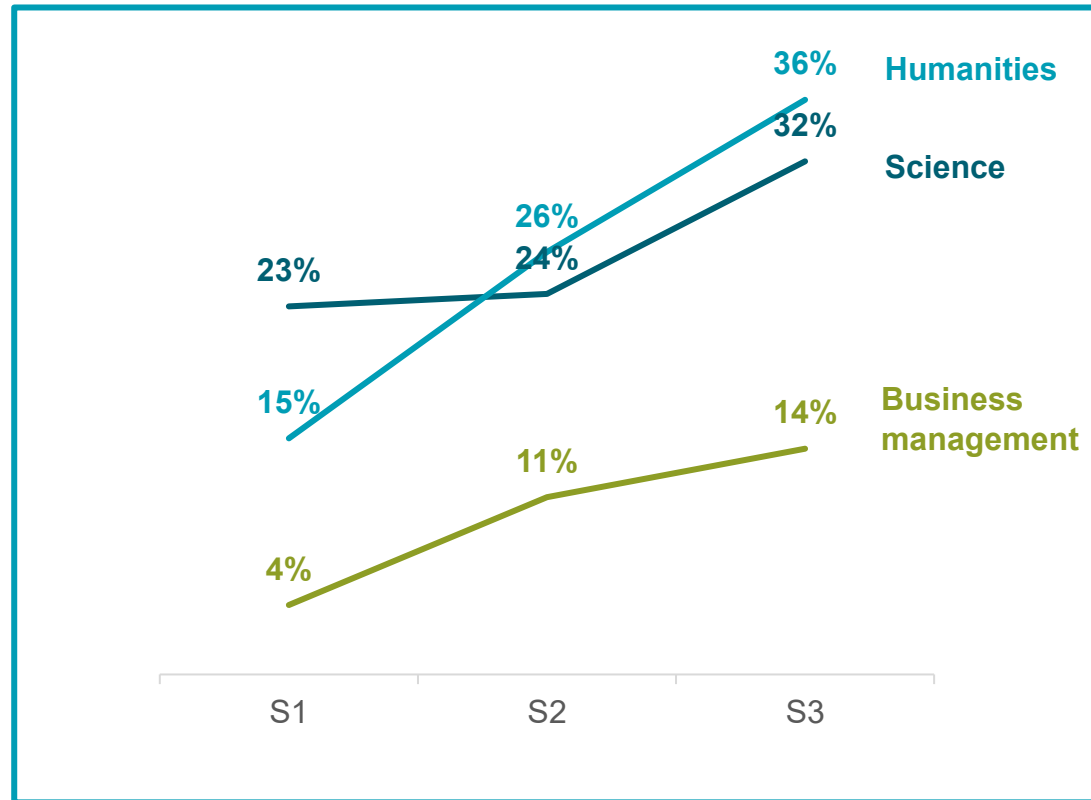
Chart 2: Favourite Subjects⁴

Favourite subjects	All %
Physical Education and/or Sports Coaching	50
Creative subjects (Art, Design and Manufacture, Drama, Music)	41
Science (Biology, Chemistry, Combined Science, Physics)	25
Humanities (Geography, History, Modern Studies)	25
Health and Food Technology	17
English	16
Mathematics	15
Computing Science and/or Technology	13
Languages (French, German, Mandarin, Spanish)	11
Business Management	10
I don't have a favourite subject	7
Religious, moral and philosophical studies	5
Other, please write in	1

⁴ Other subjects included Uniform & Emergency Services, Outdoor Education

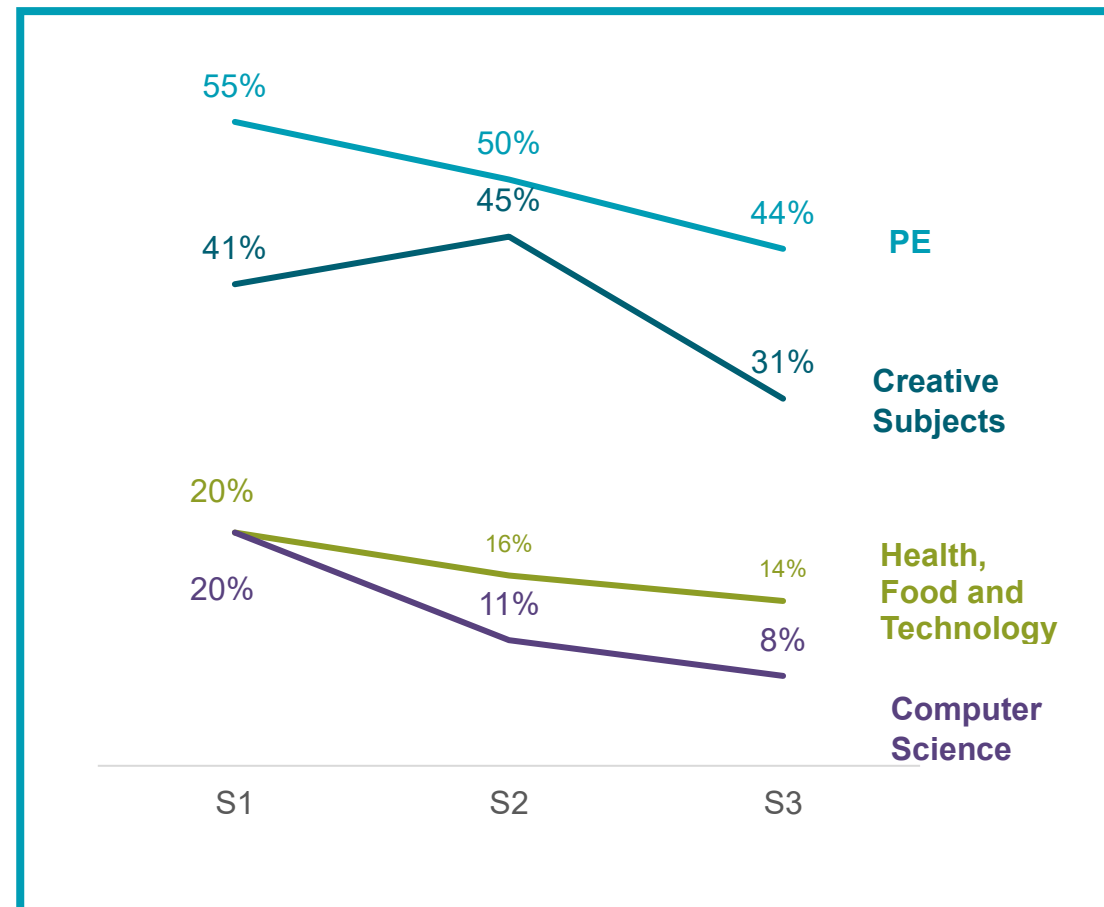
There were differences in favourite subjects by year group. Three subjects (Humanities, Science and Business Management) were more popular with older year groups.

Chart 3: Favourite subject by year group



Four subjects were less popular with older year groups (PE, Creative Subjects, Health, Food and Technology, Computer Science).

Chart 4: Favourite subject by year group



Interest in some subjects varied by gender. Creative subjects, and English were favoured more by females, whereas, PE and Computer Science were more favoured by males. Interestingly no gender differences were observed in some subjects which other studies have found to be associated with gender . For example, Science, Humanities, and Mathematics showed little gender differences.

Chart 5: Favourite subject by gender

Favourite subjects by gender	Female %	Male %	
Creative subjects (Art, Design and Manufacture, Drama, Music)	50	29	
Physical Education and/or Sports Coaching	42	60	
Science (Biology, Chemistry, Combined Science, Physics)	26	27	=
Humanities (Geography, History, Modern Studies)	26	24	=
English	22	9	
Health and Food Technology	19	13	
Mathematics	14	19	=
Languages (French, German, Mandarin, Spanish)	12	10	
Business Management	9	11	
Computing Science and/or Technology	7	18	
I don't have a favourite subject	6	6	
Religious, moral and philosophical studies	5	3	
Other, please write in	1	1	

Respondents were asked which careers were associated with their favourite subjects. Many comments revealed a narrow view of careers. The results for PE are given as an example. Over half the comments (176 comments) were jobs in sport including a range of professional sports (eg football, athletics), sports science and leisure centre work. A further 76 comments mentioned PE teaching, 50 comments stated “Don’t know” which careers are associated with PE. Only 6 comments mentioned other jobs (including chef, jobs in health, translator or the police) and another 6 mentioned other subjects (including Creative Subjects, English and Maths).

Figure 3: Careers associated with PE (320 comments)



Similarly young people had a narrow view of the skills that were associated with their favourite subjects. **Figure 4** provides an example of the skills young people felt were associated with PE. Over half the comments (163 comments) were on subject specific skills (for example football skills, athletics skills, how to play sport). Skills associated with social intelligence were mentioned in 62 comments (eg communication skills, teamwork, leadership). 55 comments stated “Don’t know”. Skills associated with self-management (eg resilience) were mentioned 14 times and skills associated with innovation such as creativity and thinking skills were mentioned 4 times.

Figure 4: Skills associated with PE (290 comments)



Subject Choice

Almost all the S2 & S3 respondents had made their subject choices. Respondents were most likely to have chosen subjects in which they were interested.

Teachers and parents were the biggest influence on subject choice

Chart 6: Reasons for subject choice (% of respondents that agreed with each statement)

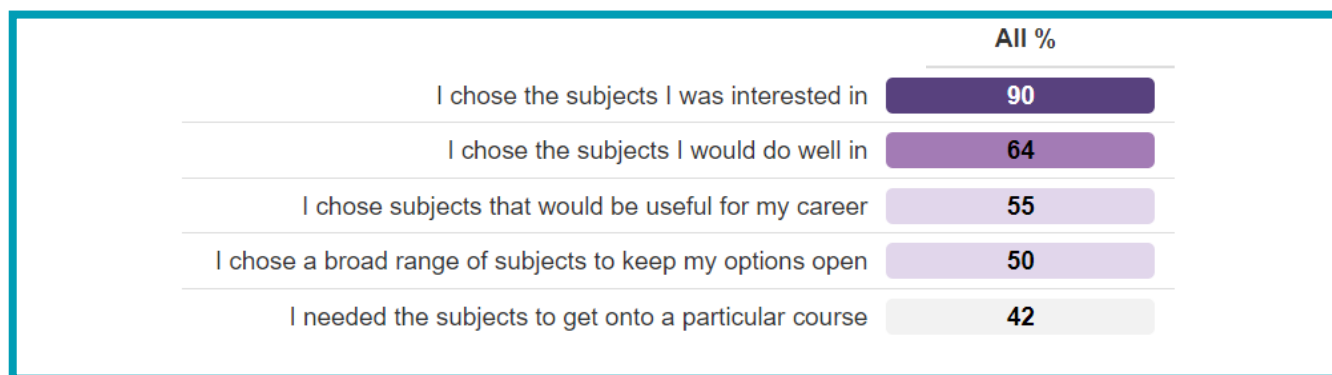
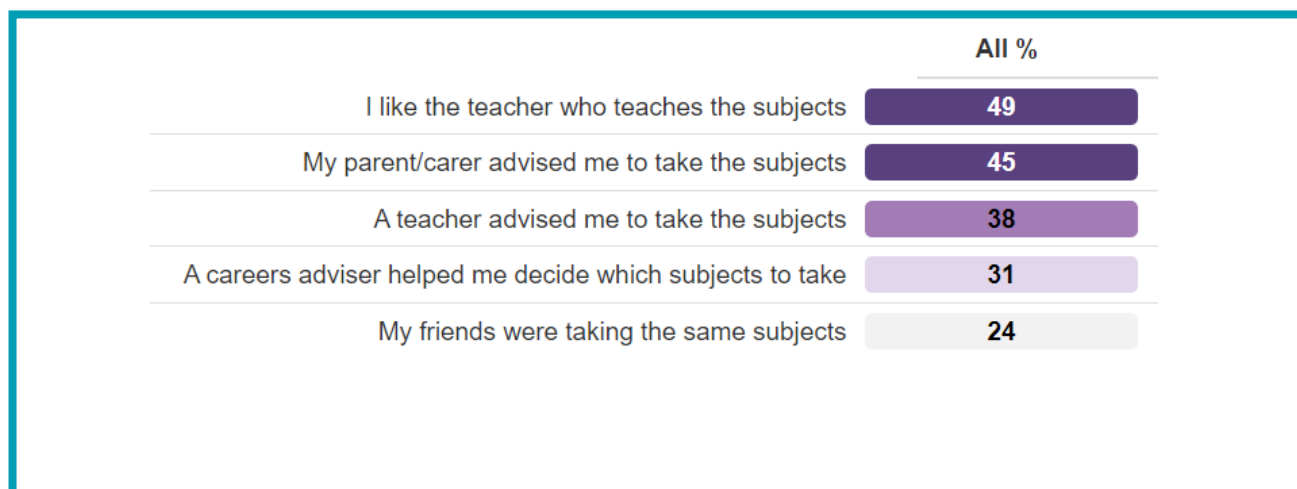


Chart 7: Reasons for subject choice (% of respondents that agreed with each statement)



Staying at School Until Sixth Year

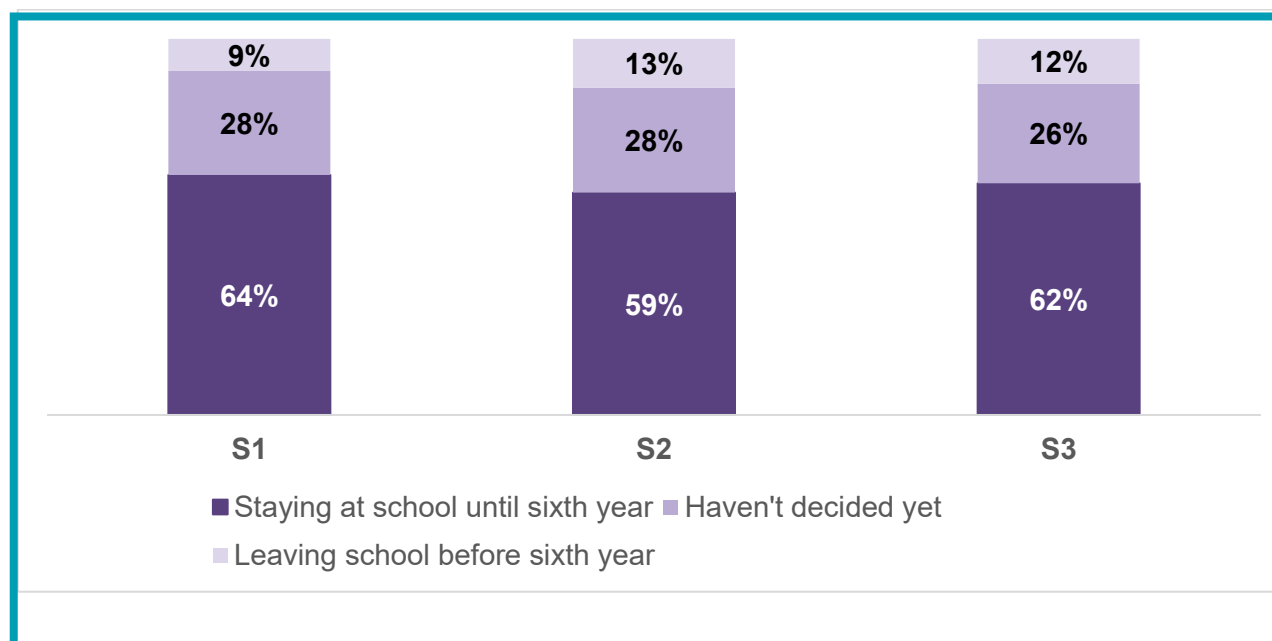
Almost a third of respondents want to stay on until sixth year. Just over a quarter were undecided, and just over 1 in 10 wanted to leave before sixth year. This did not vary by year group.

The most common reason for wishing to stay on until sixth year was to gain more qualifications/education.

Most of those that were undecided about staying on until sixth year were also unsure about what would help them to decide.

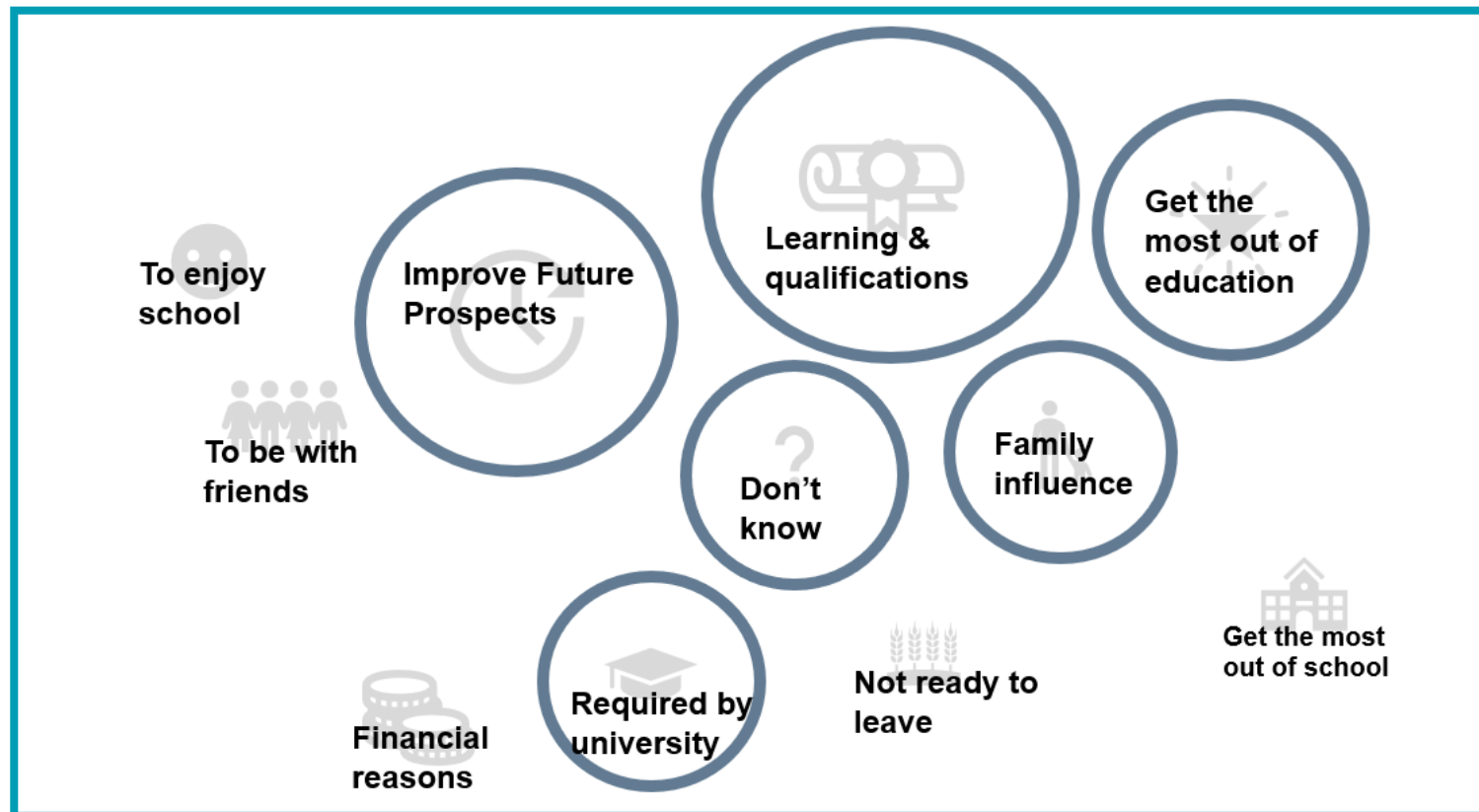
Of those who wanted to leave school before sixth year, most aimed to be in a job, an apprenticeship or at FE/HE

Chart 8: Intentions to stay on at school until sixth year



The most common reasons for wanting to stay on until sixth year were to gain more qualifications/education (118 comments) or to improve career options (93 comments). Other themes included the wish to get the most out of education (54 comments), being influenced by their families aspirations (34 comments) or the need to meet the requirements for university (32 comments). Enjoyment/fun and the prom was important for some (22 comments). Fewer than ten comments each indicated the respondent was staying at school for financial reasons, to be with friends or the respondent did not feel ready to leave.

Figure 5: Why would you like to stay at school until sixth year? (403 comments)



Just over a quarter of respondents were undecided if they will stay on at school until sixth year. These were asked what might help them to decide if they were staying on at school. The most common response was “Don’t know” (72 comments), followed by the need for more qualifications (35 comments). Some respondents indicated they would leave school if they were in a positive destination (18 comments) with most wishing to be in a job (15 comments) and one each wishing to be in an apprenticeship, university or college. Others felt they would be steered by their key influencers thoughts about their decision (12 comments). Some mentioned the need for more support from school (11 comments).

Figure 6: What would help you decide if you were staying on until sixth year? (163 comments)



A smaller proportion of respondents had chosen to leave school before sixth year. Most of these respondents aimed to be in positive destinations before S6 (35 comments). Some respondents disliked school (16 comments), others felt ready to leave (9 comments) and some indicated they would have the qualifications they required for their next step before sixth year (4 comments).

Figure 7: What influences your decision to leave school before sixth year? (70 comments)

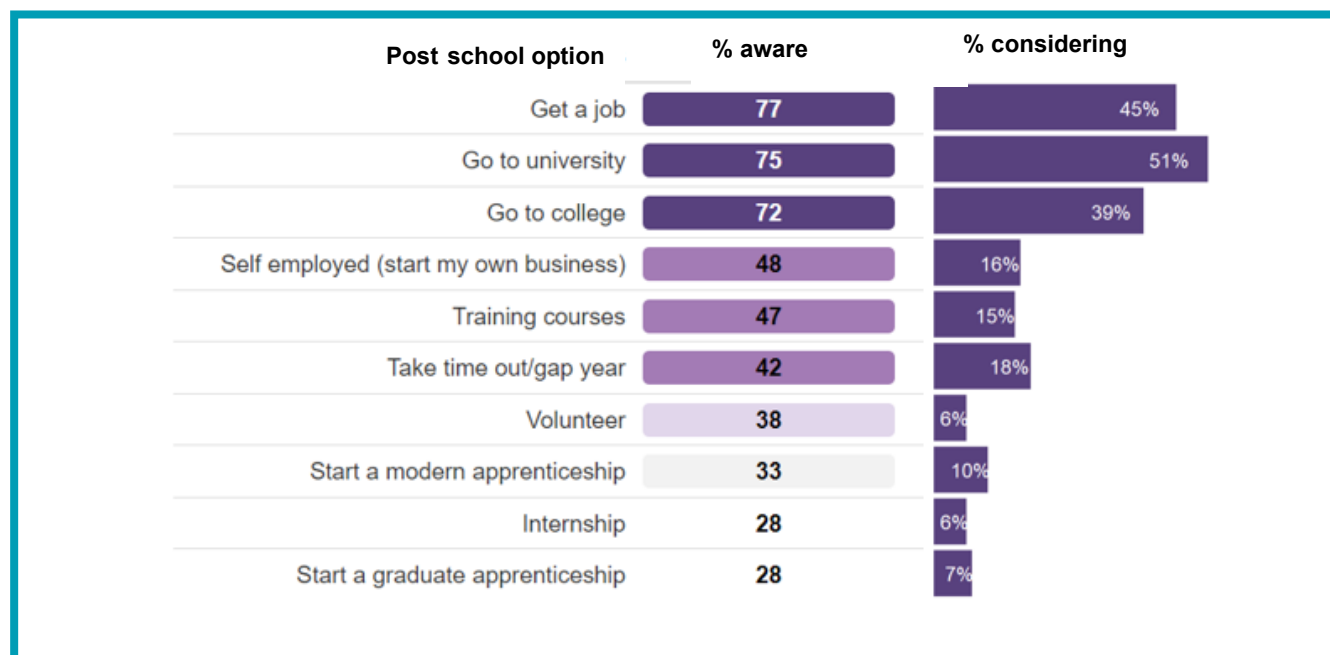


Awareness of Post School Options

Respondents were most aware of getting a job, university or college as a post school destination. The average number of post school options respondents were aware of increased by year group from 4.5 in S1 to 5.6 in S3.

Respondents were asked which of the post school options they were aware of they would consider taking. The most popular option was university followed by getting a job and going to college. The average number of options young people would consider taking did not change by year group (2.4 in S1 and S3).

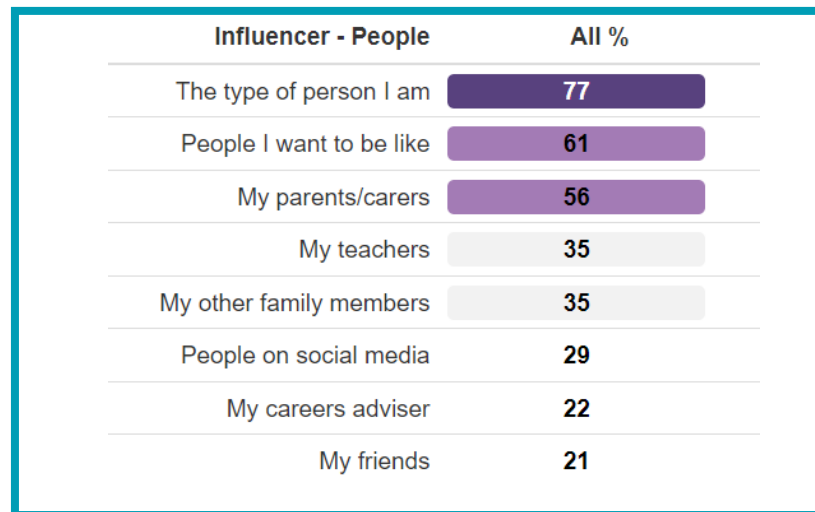
Chart 9: Awareness and considering post school options (% aware/considering)



Influence

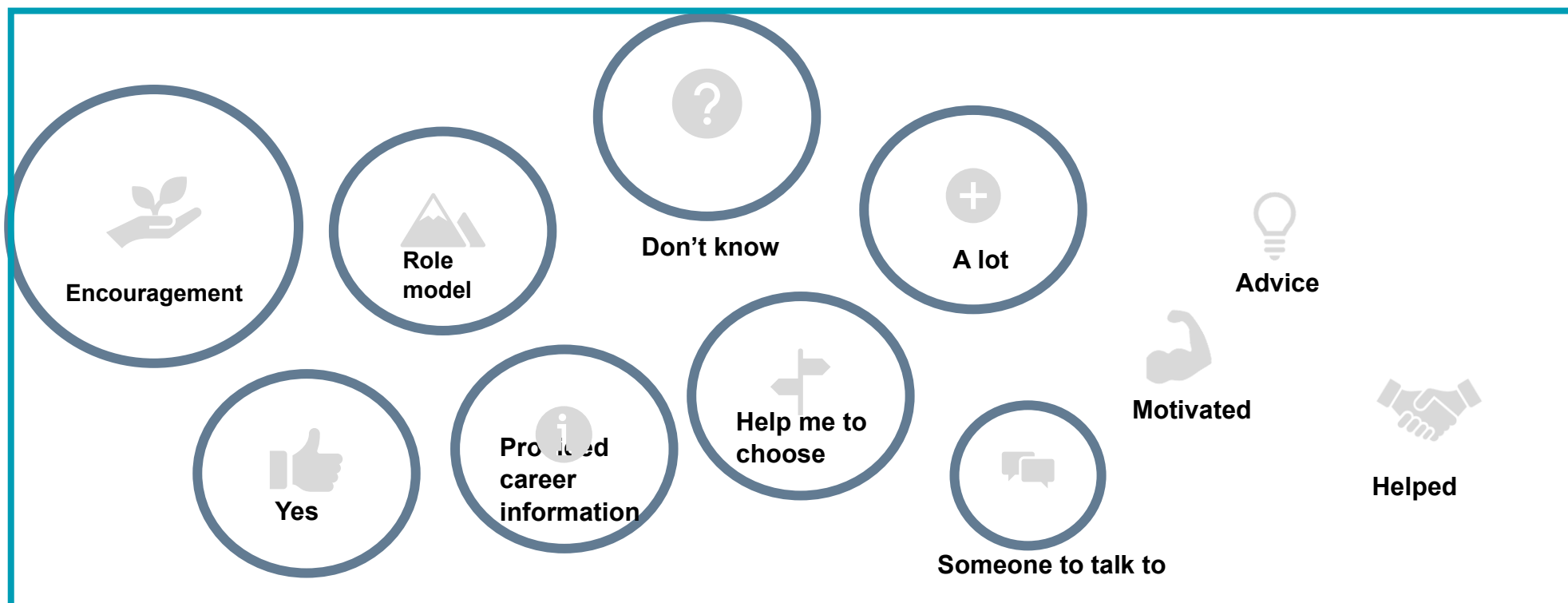
Respondents were influenced by a broad range of people. Beliefs about the type of person the respondent thinks they are, the people they want to be like and parents/carers are the main influencers.

Chart 10: People who influence (% agree)



We know from our Parents and Carers research that parents don't always believe they are an influence on their young people⁶. Respondents were asked how parents had influenced them. The most common response was by offering encouragement (82 comments), and by acting as a role model (52 comments). Thirty eight respondents gave a single word comment "Yes" to this question. Others, felt their parents gave them career information (36 comments). Thirty-four respondents indicated the amount of influence parents had without elaborating further (for example "a lot"). Others felt their parents helped them make choices (31 comments). Twenty-seven comments responded "Don't know". Others indicated their parents were someone to talk to (19 comments) or motivated them (10 comments). Seven comments indicated that parents provided advice and another seven indicated parents provided help (but weren't specific about the help they provided).

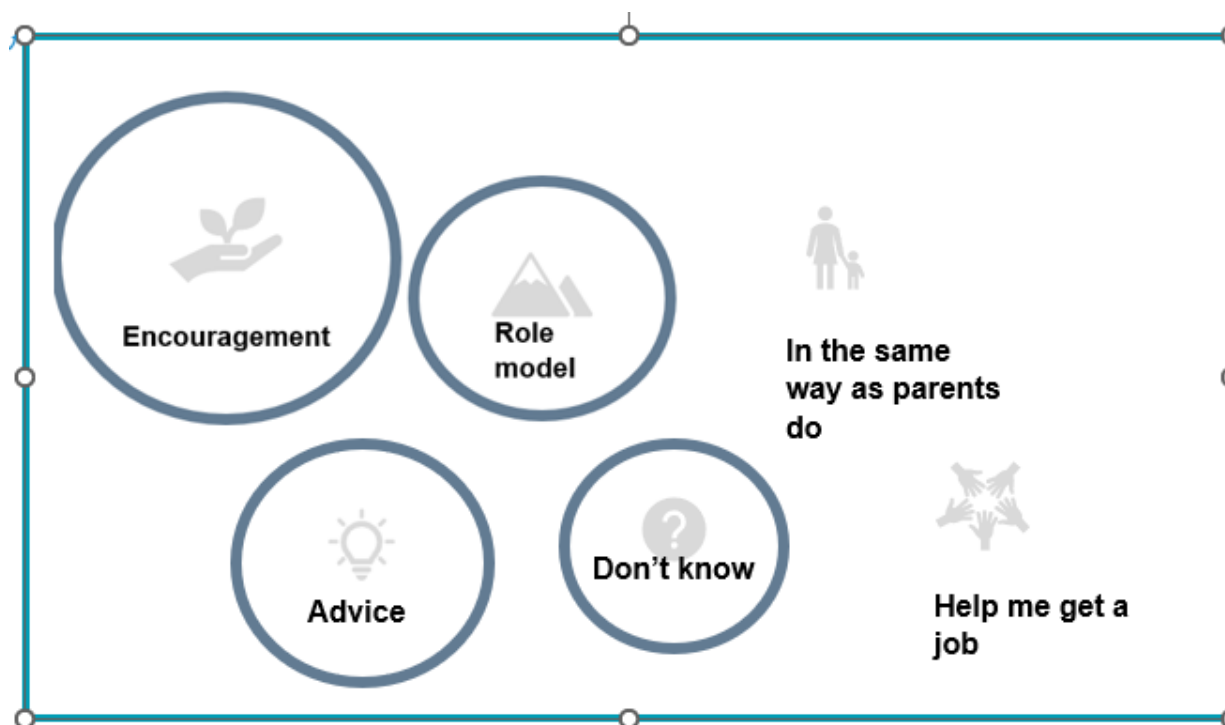
Figure 8: How have your parents influenced you? (305 comments)



Our work on gender stereotyping in careers ⁷ also revealed how parents are having conversations with their young people. We found evidence of different conversation styles. These are styles of conversation so a parent/carer may use more than one type of conversation style. Something that was striking was that sometimes small off the cuff comments can have a profound effect on career choice.

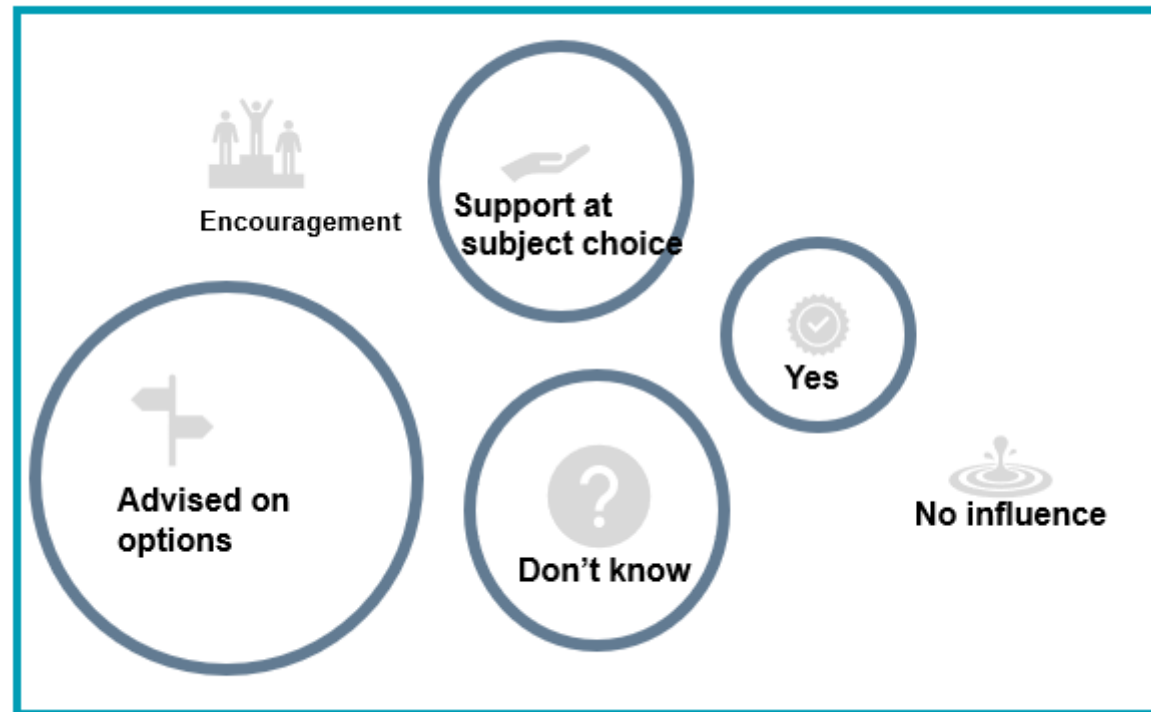
Other family members were also key influencers. They influenced in similar ways to parents/carers by offering encouragement (50 comments), providing advice (42 comments) and acting as a role model (37 comments). Twenty three felt they did not know how other family members had influenced them. Whereas others felt they had influenced in the same way as parents (13 comments) or they have helped the respondent get a job (4 comments).

Figure 9: How do other family members influence you? (207 comments)



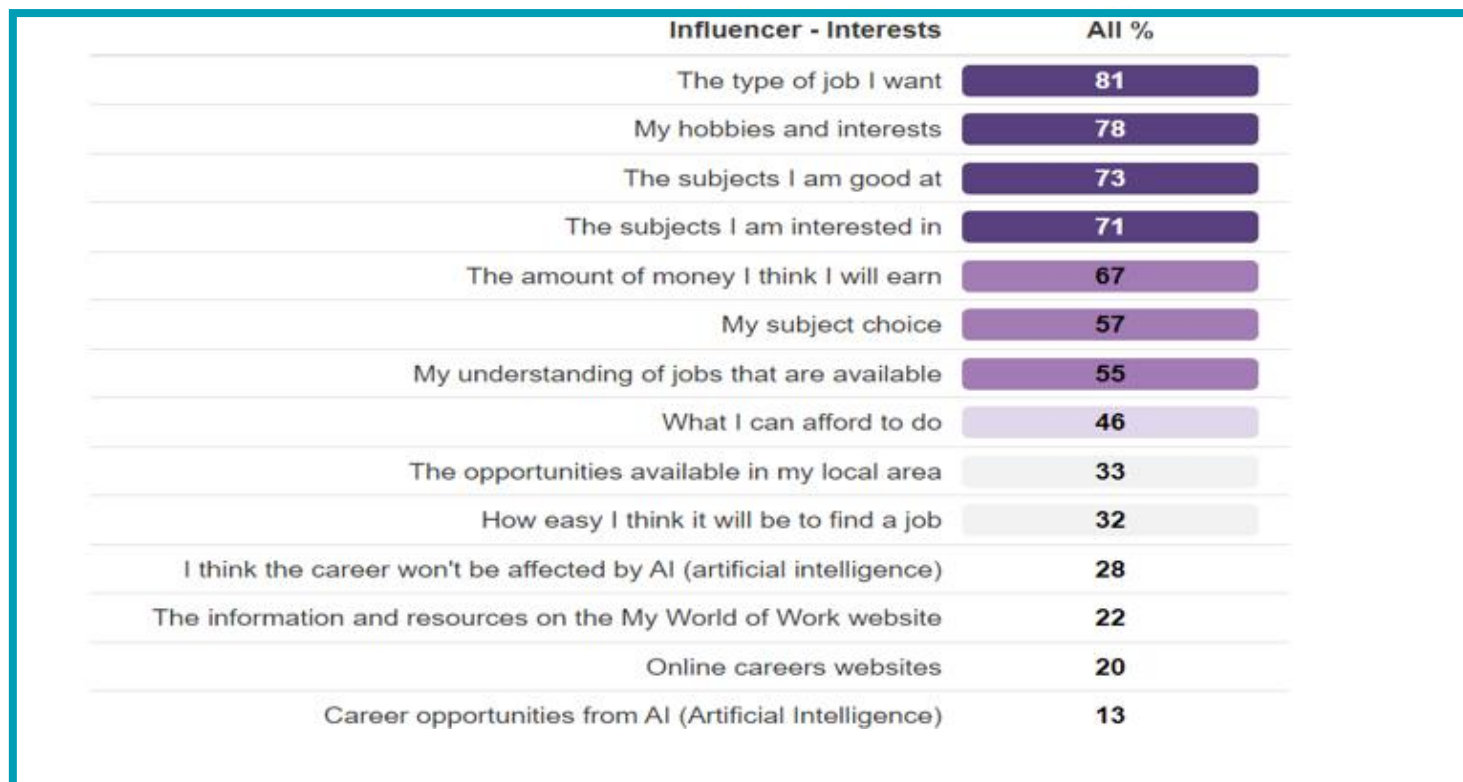
Careers advisers appear to influence in a different way to parents and other family members. The biggest influence they have is by offering advice on options (37 comments). Some respondents felt supported by careers advisers during subject choice (22 comments). Nineteen comments stated “Don’t know” and eleven stated, “Yes”. Others felt encouraged by their careers adviser (7 comments). Some felt they weren’t influenced by a careers adviser (6 comments).

Figure 10: How do careers advisers influence you? (118 comments)



Respondents were also influenced by a broad range of interests just as the type of job they want, hobbies and interests and subjects they are interested in or feel they are good at.

Chart 11: Interests that influence respondents (% agree with each statement)



Career decision making

When making decisions about careers, respondents were most likely to be having career conversations with their parents/carers.

Chart 12: When you are making decisions on careers what approaches do you use?



Preferred Job Sectors and Preferred Jobs

Sport and Creative Industries were the most popular job sectors for respondents.

Preferred job sectors were highly gendered. Females were more likely to want to go into creative industries, medicine and health, and caring. Whereas males were more likely to want to go into Construction, Engineering, and Sport.

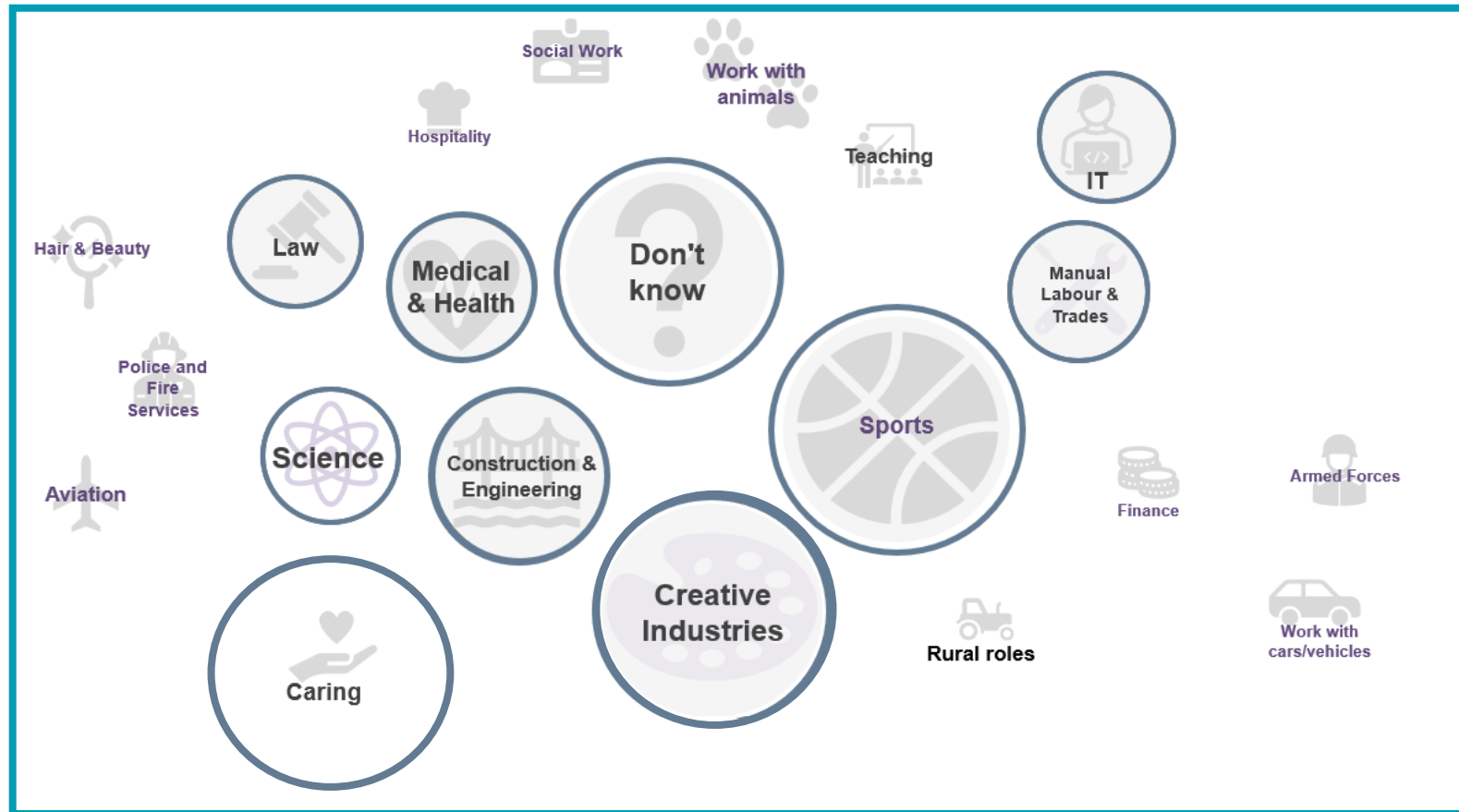
Chart 13: Preferred job sectors (choose up to 4)

Preferred job area	All %	Male %	Female %
Sport	33	41	24
Creative Industries (for example, Art & Design, Music, Acting)	29	19	37
Engineering	20	35	7
Armed Forces, Policing or Security	19	24	15
Medicine and Health	18	11	27
Law	16	10	20
Construction	14	27	3
Teaching	14	4	23
Caring (for example, childcare, social care)	14	3	25
Hospitality (for example, working in hotels, bars, restaurants)	13	7	17
Computing and ICT	11	18	4
Banking and Finance	11	14	6
Energy	3	4	1

Respondents were also asked to comment on their preferred job. 606 comments were received. Almost a third (187 comments) of the preferred jobs were in creative industries and sports. This is closely aligned with favourite subjects.

Almost one in six did not have a preferred job. This corresponds to the question that was asked earlier in the survey on post school destinations.

Figure 11: Preferred jobs (606 comments)



Job Features

The most important job features were considered to be good pay and job satisfaction. Males were more likely to be interested in learning new skills and/or doing valuable work. Females were more likely to be interested in helping others and/or working with people you like.

Chart 14: Job features (tick all that apply)

Preferred job characteristics	All %	Male %	Female %
Good pay	82	86	78
Job satisfaction	61	67	55
Learning new skills	42	45	38
Helping others	38	24	49
Working with people you like	37	30	43
Having a voice/being listened to in the workplace	34	29	39
Work life balance	33	33	32
Travel opportunities	33	33	33
Doing valuable work	31	35	29
Health and safety in the workplace	31	25	35
Flexible working options (for example, working from home/flexible hours)	30	28	33
Chances for promotion	26	31	22
The variety and interest in the job	24	19	28
A challenging job	21	28	15
A job that is high status	20	20	16
Job security	15	16	9
Job availability in my local area	12	13	12

Perception of STEM Careers

Respondents were most likely to agree with statements on, there are a wide range of STEM related careers, STEM subjects are important for my future career, STEM related careers are well paid.

Males were more likely to agree with favourable statements on STEM than females.

Chart 15: Perception of STEM careers (% that agree with each statement)

Perception of STEM careers	All %	Male %	Female %
There are a wide range of STEM related careers	63	64	64
STEM subjects are important for my future career	52	61	47
STEM related careers are well paid	51	58	48
I know someone who works in STEM	46	43	47
I enjoy STEM subjects	45	53	39
I am good at STEM subjects	44	54	38
STEM subjects are hard	43	41	47
I am interested in a STEM related career or job	32	41	24
STEM related careers or jobs are hard to get into	31	34	30
STEM related careers or jobs are not suited to me	26	23	29

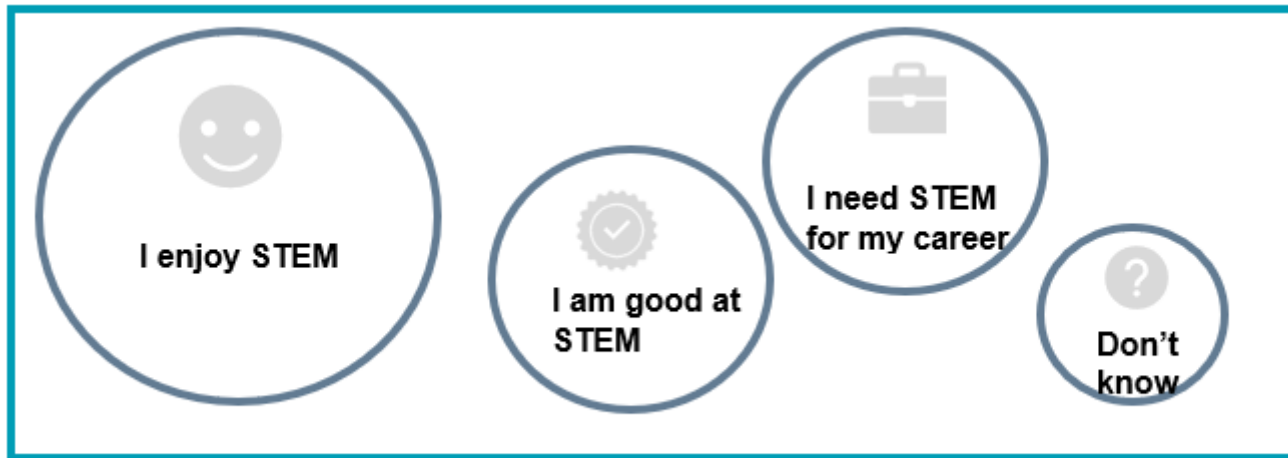
Respondents gave comments about why they felt STEM careers were not suitable for them. Most comments were in the theme “Not interested in STEM careers” (62 comments). Another 29 felt the subjects were difficult and 19 respondents stated “Don’t know”. Some respondents were interested in other subjects (10 comments).

Figure 12: Why do you think STEM careers aren’t suitable for you? (130 comments)



Respondents who felt STEM careers were suitable for them were asked why they felt this way. Enjoying STEM was the most common reason given (45 comments), Others felt they were good at STEM subjects (24 comments). Some felt they needed the STEM qualifications to progress in their career (24 comments). Seventeen respondents commented “Don’t know”.

Figure 13: Why do you think STEM careers are suitable for you? (140 comments)



Perception of Caring Careers

Females were more likely to agree with the favourable statements about caring careers such as being interested in caring as a career.

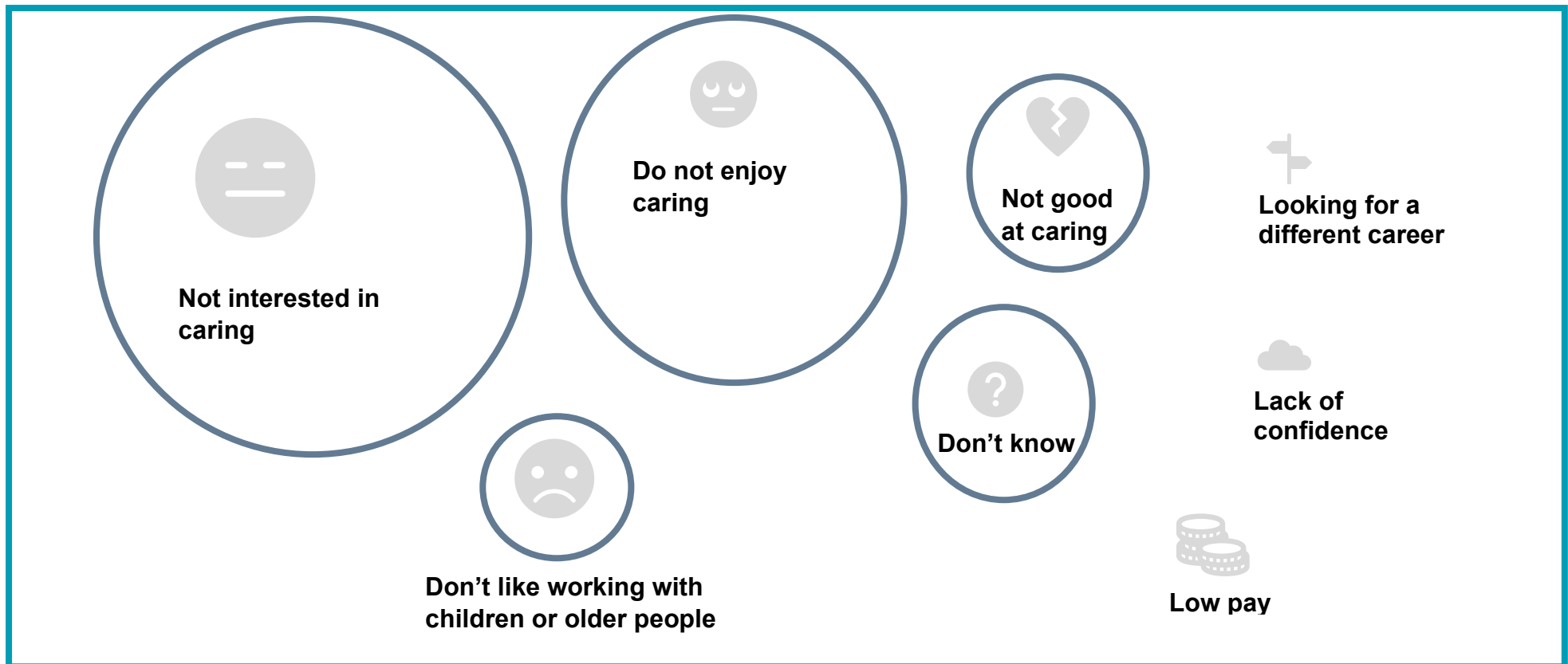
Males were more likely to say that a career in caring is not suited to them.

Chart 16: Perception of caring careers (% that agreed with each statement)

Perceptions of caring careers	All %	Male %	Female %
I know someone in a caring career	62	53	70
There are a wide range of careers in caring	48	38	57
A career in caring is not suited to me	42	56	29
A career in caring would be worthwhile	32	17	30
I am interested in a career in caring	24	8	38
Careers in caring are well paid	21	21	21

Respondents who felt they weren't suitable for a caring career were asked why they felt this way. The majority of comments indicated the respondent was not interested (59 comments) or did not enjoy caring (47 comments). Some felt they weren't good at caring (28 comments). Twenty six respondent commented "Don't know". A further 15 comments indicated that respondent did not like working with children or older people. Eight comments each mentioned that the respondent was looking for a different careers or the respondent lacked confidence and 5 mentioned the low pay associated with caring careers.

Figure 14: Why do you think caring careers are not suitable for you? (213 comments)



Respondents who felt caring careers were suitable to them were asked why they felt this way. The most common response was “Like helping people” (54 comments) followed by a “people person” (31 comments). Some felt they would be good at caring (16 comments) and others mentioned they liked to work with children specifically (14 comments). Eleven respondents felt they didn’t know why a caring career would be suitable for them.

Figure 15: Why do you think caring careers are suitable for you? (126 comments)



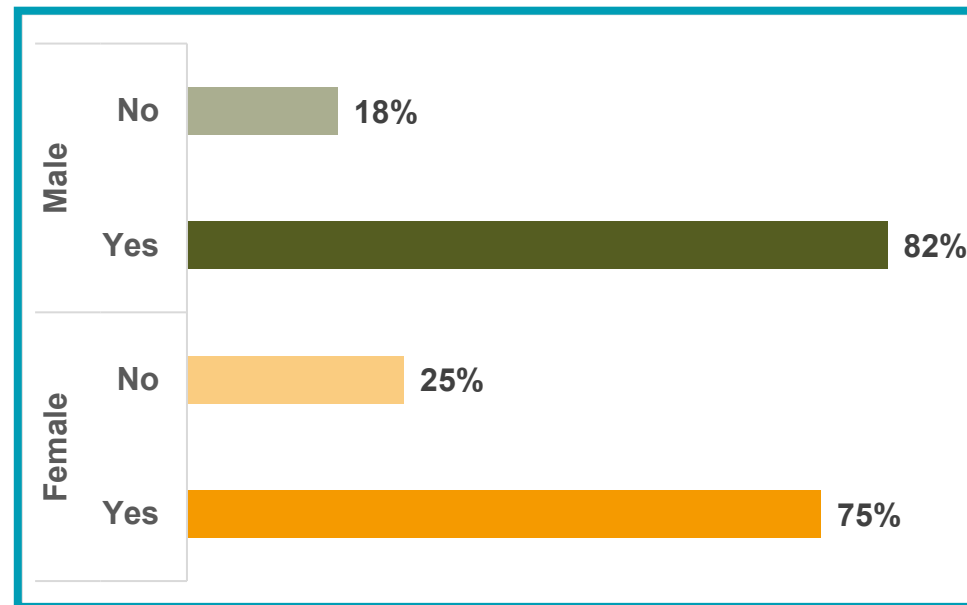
Awareness and Perception of Apprenticeships

The majority of respondents were aware of apprenticeships. Males were more likely to be aware than females. Of those aware of apprenticeships, only 40% had received information about them. Males were more likely than females to have received information.

Parents were the most common source of information about apprenticeships.

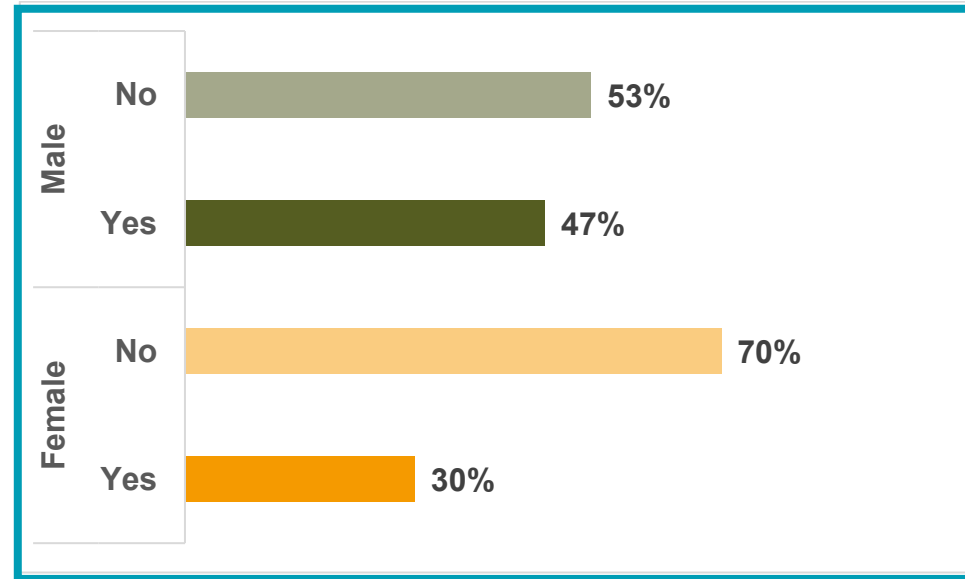
Males viewed apprenticeships more positively than females.

Chart 17: Are you aware of apprenticeships?



Of those aware, only 40% of respondents had received information on apprenticeships. Males were more likely to have received information on apprenticeships (47%) compared to females (30%).

Chart 18: Have you received information on apprenticeships?



Parents were the most common source of information about apprenticeships, followed by teachers and then Careers advisers,

Chart 19: Who or where did you receive information from? (Tick all that apply)

Receiving information on apprenticeships	All %	Male %	Female %
Parents or carers	60	70	45
Teacher	45	43	47
Careers adviser	30	32	34
Friends	24	21	29
School information session for pupils	16	13	18
My World of Work (online service/website)	14	13	15
An employer providing an apprenticeship	10	12	8
School information for parents and carers	9	8	5
College or learning provider	8	9	8
Apprenticeship.scot (online service/website)	4	6	1

Of those aware of apprenticeships, respondents were most likely to be favourable towards the statement “I like the idea of being able to work while getting qualifications.”

There were some gender differences. Males are more likely to think an apprenticeship would be a useful way to start their career and that they would provide useful skills. They are also more likely to be interested in doing an FA. Females are more likely to not know very much about doing an apprenticeship.

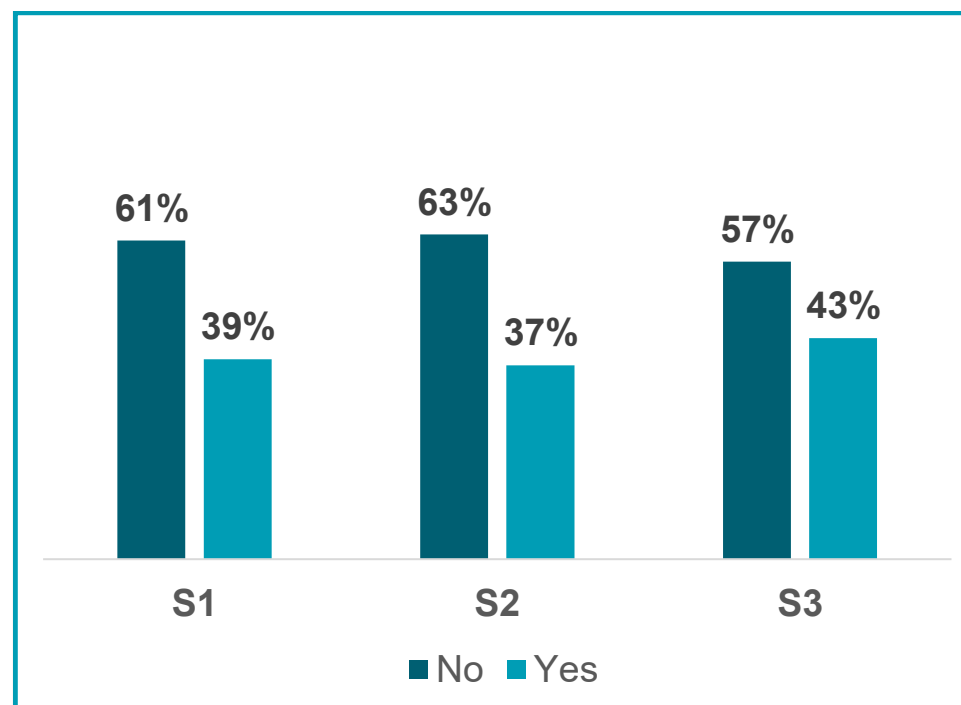
Chart 20: Perception of apprenticeships (Tick all that apply)

Perceptions of Apprenticeships	All %	Male %	Female %
I like the idea of being able to work while getting qualifications	71	71	74
An apprenticeship would be a useful way to start my career	61	69	55
An apprenticeship would give me useful skills I can't get at university or college	52	62	44
I can see myself doing an apprenticeship	38	50	30
I don't know very much about apprenticeships	37	33	42
I would like to start an apprenticeship while I'm still at school (also known as a Foundation Apprenticeship)	35	43	28
I can get a degree level qualification by doing an apprenticeship	28	37	21
A university or college degree is more useful than an apprenticeship	28	28	29
Apprenticeships are not available in the career in which I am interested	17	21	13
Apprenticeships are only available in a small number of jobs	14	18	12
My parent (s)/ carer (s) do not want me to do an apprenticeship	11	13	6

Foundation Apprenticeships

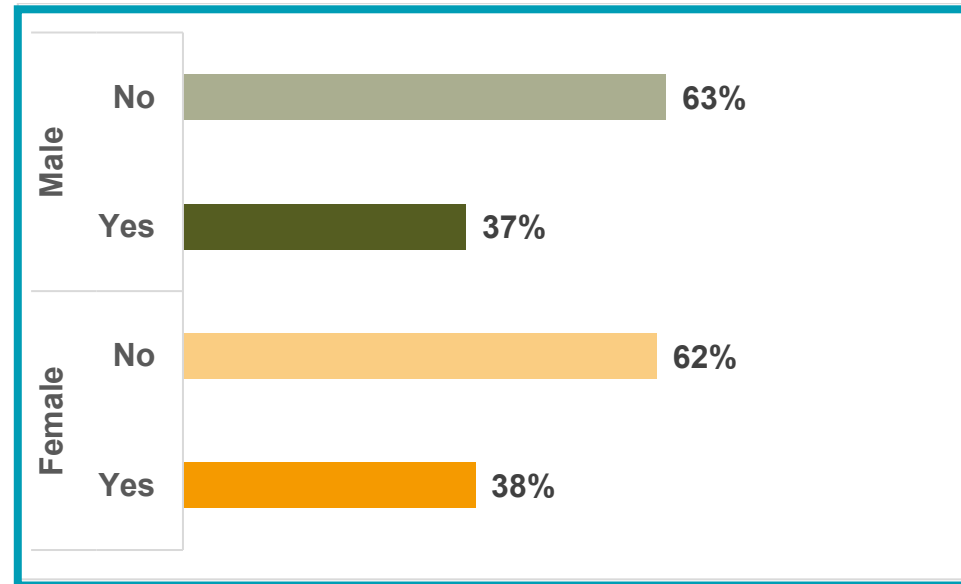
Foundation Apprenticeships are a work based learning course that are available from S3 to S6. Around two thirds of respondents were aware of Foundation Apprenticeships. Awareness of foundation apprenticeships did not vary by year group.

Chart 21: Are you aware that a Foundation Apprenticeship was an option for you?



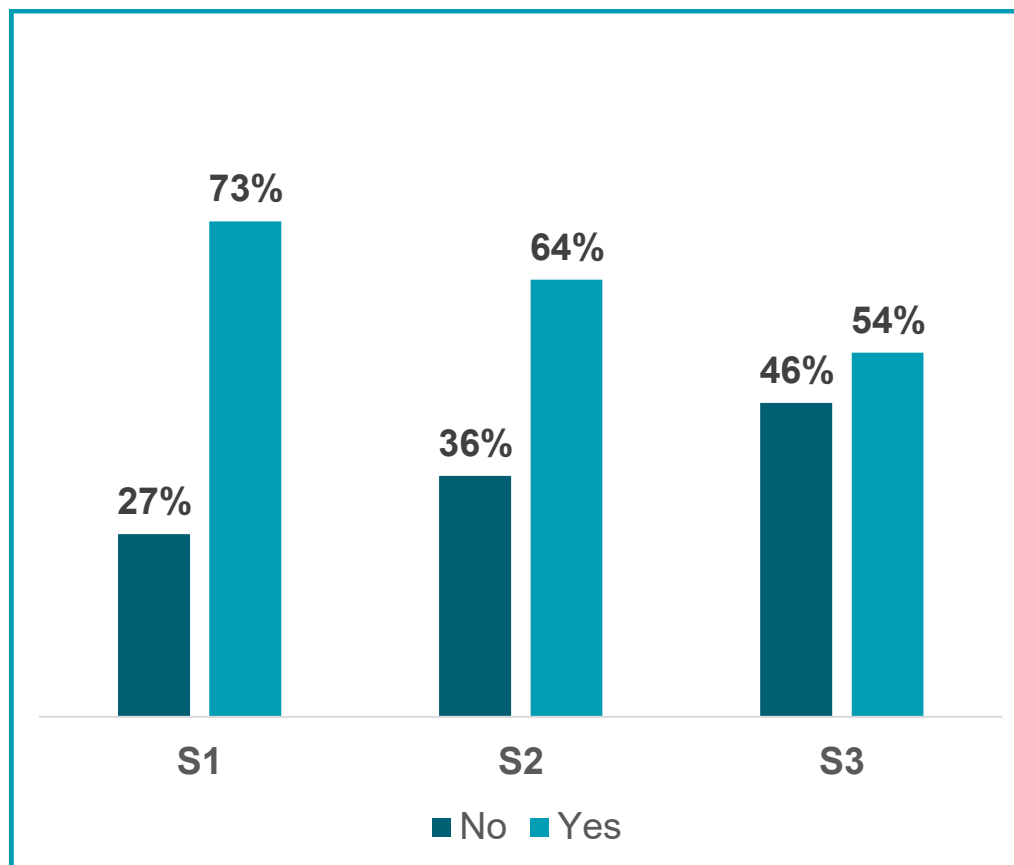
Awareness of foundation apprenticeships did not vary by gender.

Chart 22: Awareness of Foundation Apprenticeship by gender



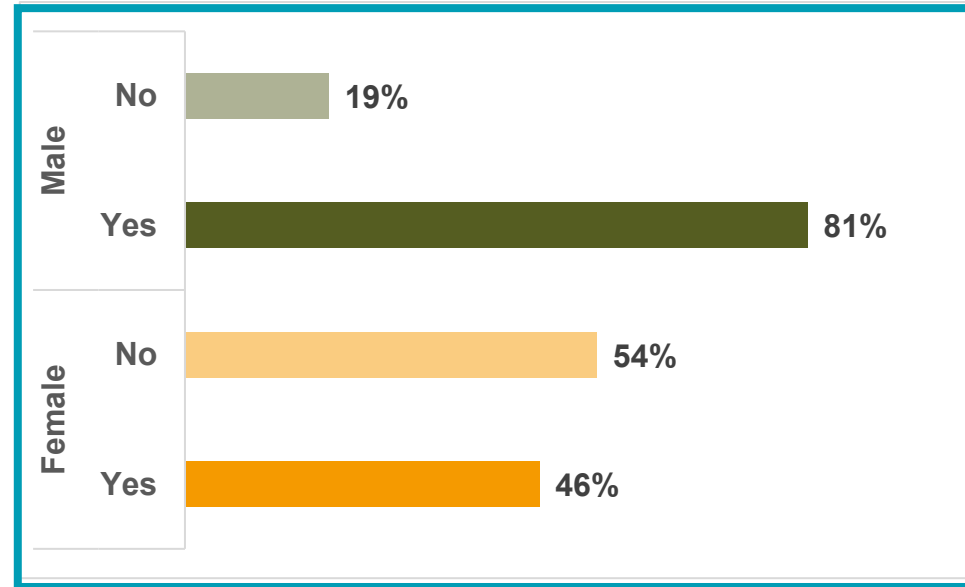
Willingness to take a foundation apprenticeship declined by year group.

Chart 23: Are you doing or would you consider doing a Foundation Apprenticeship while you are in school?



Females were less likely to want to do a foundation apprenticeship (46%) compared to males (81%).

Chart 24: Willingness to do a foundation apprenticeship by gender



Respondents who were considering doing a foundation apprenticeship were asked for their reasons. The most common response was “Don’t know” (24 comments). Some respondents felt the foundation apprenticeship would enable them to gain experience (13 comments) and some felt it be useful for their career (12 comments). For some it was important to gain skills (8 comments) and/or gain qualifications (4 comments).

Figure 16: Why did you do/consider doing a Foundation Apprenticeship (74 comments)



Those respondents that would not consider doing a foundation apprenticeships were asked for their reasons. Eleven respondents indicated they “Don’t know” what they wouldn’t consider a foundation apprenticeship. Twelve commented that they didn’t want to do a foundation apprenticeship. Eight felt they wanted to focus on school work and seven felt a foundation apprenticeship was not available in their chosen career.

Figure 17: Reasons for not considering a Foundation Apprenticeship (49 comments)



Thanks

SDS would like to thank the schools and careers advisers who took part in this pilot.

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