

THE STUDENT ROOM

# OPTIONS

## 2017





# FOREWORD

Welcome to The Student Room's fifth annual Options report. Each year we survey thousands of students to discover their perceptions of the options available to them after school, college or university and give you a unique insight into their decision making journey. This year we've had the biggest ever response, with over 11,000 UK students aged 16 and above taking part, making this the largest survey of its kind.

We've added questions to examine student perception on current HE (Higher Education) and pathway topics including STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), fast-track degrees and the world of work. We examine how STEM remains a popular choice for university and beyond, and the further work still to be done to engage female students. The report investigates the main barriers to choosing a fast-track degree, with insights covering the fears of missing out on the complete university experience. Additionally, students define their expectations for their first full-time job, with responses around expected training and development, clear paths for progression and flexible working hours.

Financial worries continue to be a cause for concern for students. Increasing tuition fees and student debt remain key barriers for students choosing not to go to university, as fears around the potential financial impacts later in life remain.

The survey examines perceptions of apprenticeships and the apparent stigma attached, as well as the evolving perception among school and college respondents.

These are just some of the significant themes taken from this year's published report, which showcases key findings extracted from the full analysis. We hope you enjoy reading this 2017 Options report and join us in continuing to fly the flag for young people and students, as we aim to support them through their journey and ensure they have sufficient advice to make these life-changing decisions.



**CHRIS NEWSON**

**Chief Executive Officer**

The Student Room

# ABOUT THE STUDENT ROOM

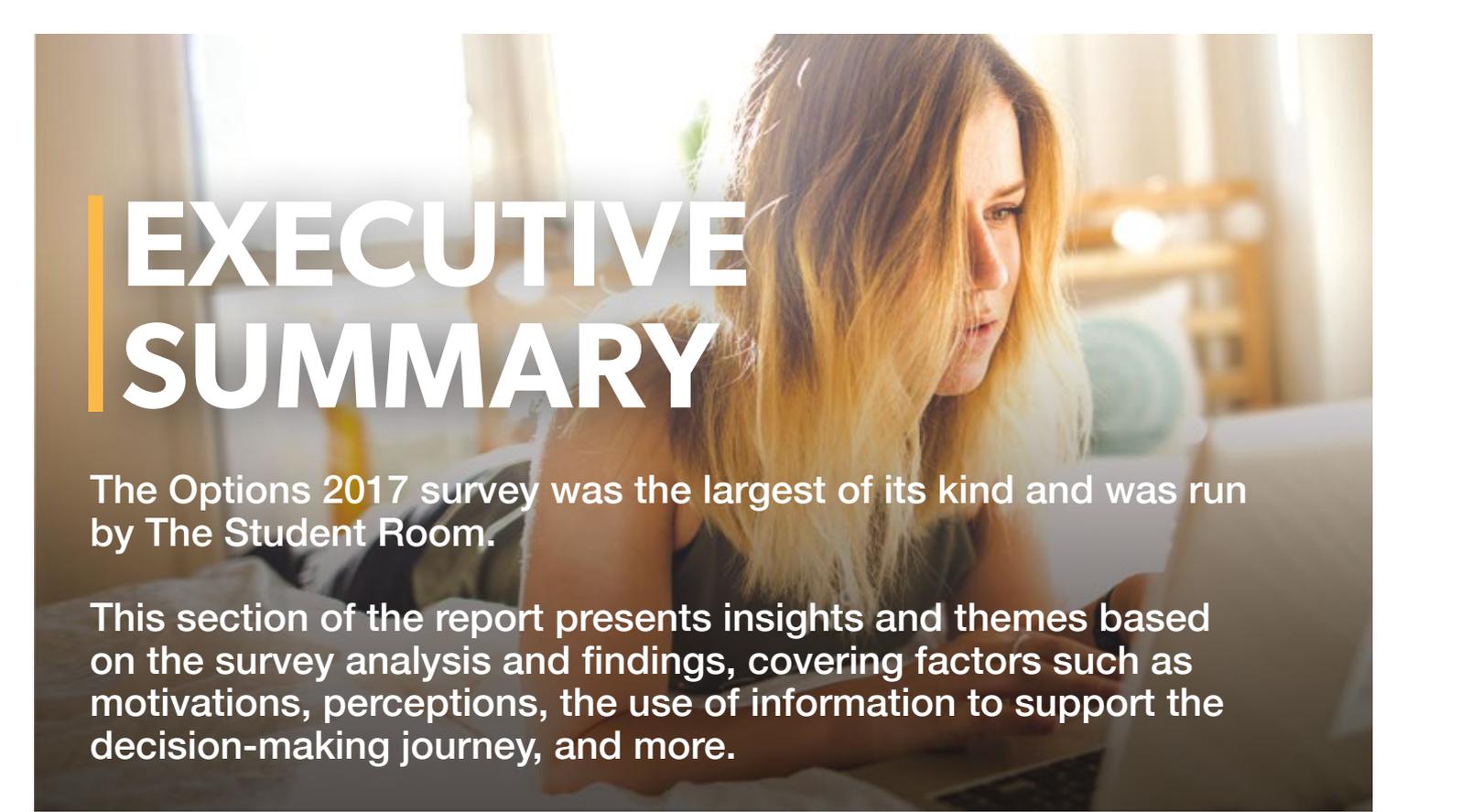
The Student Room is the largest, most useful and best-loved online student community in the UK. With over 1.9 million members, students turn to our community first for information, advice and support on their educational journey and life around learning.

This means we're uniquely privileged to connect educators, recruiters and consumer brands to switched-on young people making decisions, actively seeking answers and building meaningful connections.



# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	1
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	4
<b>FINDINGS</b> .....	8
Student Pathway Options .....	8
Decision-Making Process .....	11
Stepping Stones to University .....	18
Apprenticeships and Vocational Training .....	20
STEM Subjects .....	25
Fast-Track Degrees .....	29
Money Worries .....	31
Satisfaction with University .....	36
Plans after University .....	39
The World of Work .....	42
Widening Access and Participation .....	49
Stress and Satisfaction with Life Attributes .....	51
<b>DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE</b> .....	54
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	56



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Options 2017 survey was the largest of its kind and was run by The Student Room.

This section of the report presents insights and themes based on the survey analysis and findings, covering factors such as motivations, perceptions, the use of information to support the decision-making journey, and more.

## CONFIDENCE WITH FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

**Going to university remained the most popular choice after school and provided the highest levels of confidence with future employment.**

Going to university remained by far the most popular choice for respondents who were still in school or college, and they tended to become more inclined to choose this option as they approached Year 13. Even those decided on gap years were mostly considering going to university afterwards.

Of those in school and college, those considering university were the most confident that their choice would lead to either a job in general, or their dream job. Other than apprenticeships, those decided on other pathways tended to be noticeably less confident.

Unsurprisingly, the key reasons for respondents choosing to continue learning or training were to improve long-term career prospects and to pursue their interest in their chosen area.

Expectations of an active social life were influential for those going to university. For those saying that

they would not undertake a fast-track degree, this was strongly influenced by concerns about missing out on the 'complete' university experience.

Those who were not considering university tended to be motivated to start earning money and avoiding graduate debt.

For those who were undecided, doing something enjoyable was often the main motivator, although this was more likely to be the case for those from more advantaged backgrounds.

The decision not to go to university often did not appear to be permanent, illustrated by an increase in respondents saying that they would consider a range of further study options at a later date. In addition to attending university as a full-time mature student, this included flexible study options such as part-time or evening courses, professional study or online programmes.

## MONEY WORRIES

**Those from more advantaged backgrounds tended to understand the scope and scale of costs at university. Those from less advantaged backgrounds were more likely to consider compromises to mitigate costs.**

When considering university as an option, respondents from less advantaged backgrounds tended to have greater concerns about student debt and, by extension, long-term income, than others. This, at times, seemed to stem from lesser knowledge about the complexities of university fees and the cost of living, such as the scale of accommodation costs. Although this was not an absolute barrier, it appeared they were generally more open to considering a compromise on aspects of their university choices in order to reduce costs where possible, such as the availability of financial support, choosing to live at home while studying or selecting shorter fast-track degrees.

Respondents from more advantaged backgrounds, on the other hand, appeared to feel more able to

explore a wider range of options, either at university or elsewhere, with enjoyment and fulfilment having a stronger influence on choice. Parental experience at university was unsurprisingly a major factor when respondents were considering options, which tended to translate into a greater understanding of the financial complexities of university life. These individuals were often more likely to tackle issues by seeking practical solutions, such as looking for universities in cities that were cheaper to live in or finding part-time work.

Respondents from less advantaged backgrounds indicated that they were generally well prepared for the world of work. They tended to be better informed and more experienced in applying for jobs and thus had more of an idea of what would be required in order to secure a job.

## STEM IS A POPULAR CHOICE FOR UNIVERSITY AND BEYOND

**STEM subjects at university-level were popular, with around half of prospective students saying they would consider them.**

Overall, the majority of respondents felt they had at least some idea of STEM career opportunities, with around two thirds of those who were interested in STEM subjects saying they were attracted by the career prospects.

People of influence may have also had some impact, with most respondents feeling that their parents and teachers were supportive of them pursuing STEM subjects. The main barrier to studying STEM was a straightforward lack of interest but for many, there were also indications that the subjects were perceived to be too difficult.

Background and gender appeared to be key factors influencing STEM interest. Male respondents and those whose parents had been to university tended to be more likely to consider STEM subjects. Female respondents and free school meal recipients were more likely to say they found STEM subjects difficult.

Again, information received from people of influence may have been a driver of interest. Males and those from more advantaged backgrounds generally reported feeling both more informed about STEM career opportunities and more supported by parents.

# PERCEPTIONS AND MANAGING MISCONCEPTIONS

**Timing, context and the delivery of information were important in influencing perceptions and managing misconceptions.**

Information was unsurprisingly crucial in driving interest across the various pathways. Respondents were using a wide range of information sources when considering their options, with the internet, direct communications and word-of-mouth continuing to lead the way in this regard. Information was imperative in preparing young people to enter the world of work, with feeling less informed tending to correspond with lower confidence in this environment.

## *Providing earlier information about postgraduate options*

As respondents progressed through education, their use of information tended to become more anticipatory in terms of their future options.

For those who were still at school or college, the use of the various sources available increased as they approached decision time in Year 13, just as the usefulness of the said sources increased.

For undergraduates, it was those in their final year who felt most informed about postgraduate options. It was clear from the research that making information about postgraduate options available in earlier years could be beneficial.

## *Apprenticeships and changing perceptions*

Interest in apprenticeships among school and college respondents appeared to have increased marginally since Options 2016. Despite the prevailing view that there is a stigma attached to apprenticeships, slightly higher numbers this year said they were considering this option after Year 13 or after a gap year, and a slightly lower number said they were not at all interested.

Together with this slight growth in interest amongst school and college students, general perceptions of apprenticeships also appeared to be changing for the better.

Although the male-dominated perception of apprenticeships persisted, the views of respondents this year appeared to have shifted slightly towards a more gender-neutral stance.

Respondents also generally felt that apprenticeships are taken up for more positive reasons than negative, and most disagreed with the view that they lead to low-income employment. Of those choosing apprenticeships, most cited improved career prospects as the key reason for their decision.

Respondents reported feeling better informed about apprenticeships than in 2016, with online information and word-of-mouth from parents, school staff and other people of the same age serving as key sources.

There were also however, clear gaps in knowledge around the funding options available to those choosing apprenticeships. Nonetheless, it appears that providing apprenticeship information early through a range of media, can serve to shape perceptions and drive interest in this pathway.

## ***Word of mouth support and its role in raising expectations, confidence and preparing for the world of work***

Parents, family and school staff all appeared to play a crucial role in preparing respondents for the world of work. Those who had received advice from these sources tended to feel they had at least some idea of what would be expected of them in order to secure a job. Conversely, those who felt less supported in this way tended to be more concerned about the gaps in their knowledge of recruiting processes.

Information and advice played a role in managing expectations of full-time work, boosting confidence and the motivation to aim high. For example, those

who felt better prepared for the world of work tended to expect clear progression routes and higher salaries, whereas those who felt less prepared were more focused on consolidating their position through training and development.

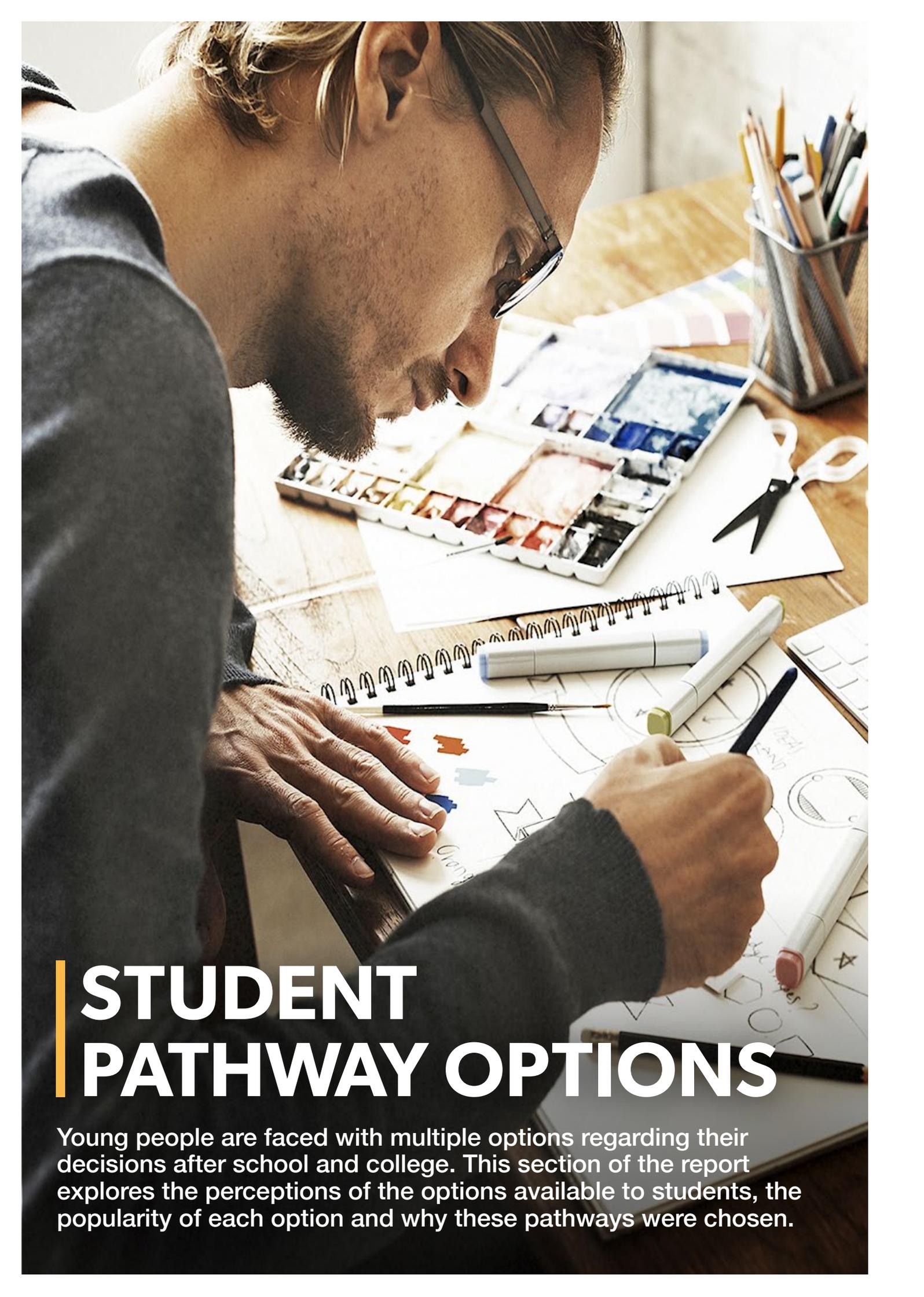
Preparedness also seemed to translate into positive action, with the better-informed tending to say they would either raise any issues in work with their manager or otherwise look for work elsewhere. Again, those who felt less informed were more likely to sit tight and wait for improvement to come to them.

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES**

### ***Males tended to be more confident, whereas females tended to be more cautious***

In general, female respondents tended to feel less supported by those around them than males when considering their options, be it going to university or entering the world of work. For some, anxiety and lower confidence served as barriers to longer-term planning, meaning they were sometimes more inclined towards pathways that would provide a degree of security rather than focusing on clear routes for progression.

Male respondents tended to be concentrated on the future, with earning potential and clear routes for progression being priorities. They also tended to be more confident in taking action and challenging their situation if their expectations were not met. Overall, they appeared to be looking for pathways that would give them the greatest return in the long-term.



# STUDENT PATHWAY OPTIONS

Young people are faced with multiple options regarding their decisions after school and college. This section of the report explores the perceptions of the options available to students, the popularity of each option and why these pathways were chosen.

## KEY INSIGHTS

This series of questions were answered by respondents in Years 11 to 13, relating to the options they were considering after finishing secondary education, and by those who were already on specific pathways.

### Going to university remained by far the most popular pathway choice after either finishing school or college, or taking a gap year

- Those at school or college became increasingly more inclined towards university as an option as they progressed through Years 11 to 13.
- Of those deciding to take a year out, most were still planning on going to university.
- Prospective university students were the most confident their chosen pathway would lead to them getting either a job or their dream job.

### Doing something enjoyable was the biggest deciding factor for those who had not yet decided on a pathway

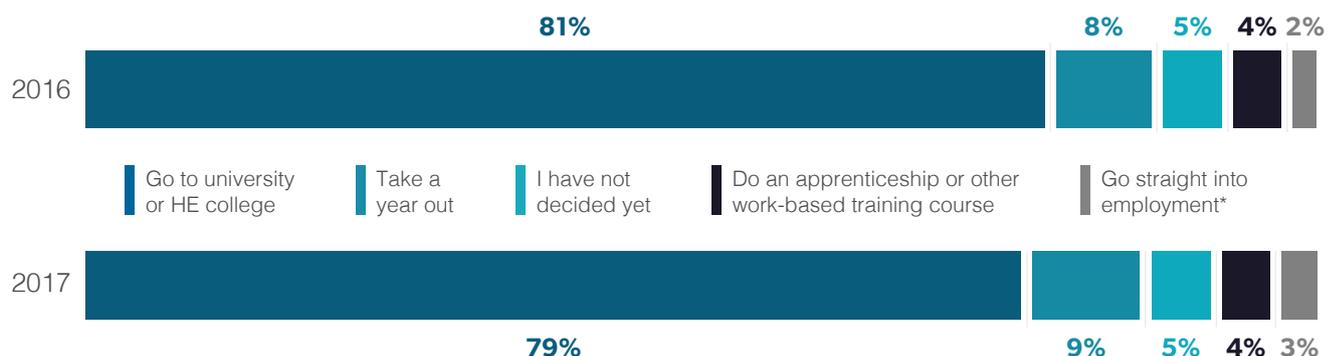
- Motivation by enjoyment was more likely for females, or when a respondent's parents had been to university.
- Males tended to be more focused on earning potential.

## UNIVERSITY IS STILL THE TOP STUDENT PATHWAY

As respondents progressed through Years 11 to 13, they became increasingly more likely to consider attending university or HE college and less likely to consider an apprenticeship or other work-based training courses. When neither parent had been to university, respondents were slightly less likely to say that they were considering taking a year out immediately after finishing school or college (6%) than when either both (12%) or one parent (10%) had been to university.

### WHICH SINGLE OPTION ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO DO IMMEDIATELY AFTER FINISHING SCHOOL OR COLLEGE?

(Single-response) Base (Years 11-13): 5,821 (2016), 5,899 (2017)



\*Please note, that the response option "Go straight into employment" was aggregated from three options which were; "Go straight into employment", "Go into the services (such as armed forces, police force or fire service)" and "Set up own business or go freelance".

# THOSE DECIDED UPON UNIVERSITY AND APPRENTICESHIPS ARE THE MOST CONFIDENT THEIR CHOSEN PATHWAYS WILL LEAD TO A JOB

## HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT YOUR CHOSEN PATH WILL LEAD TO A JOB?

(Single-response, asked of those who had decided on a specific pathway)  
Rank from 1 to 10 where 1 = No confidence and 10 = Total confidence. Average rank by pathway chosen:



\*Please note, that the response option "Go straight into employment" was aggregated from three options which were; "Go straight into employment", "Go into the services (such as armed forces, police force or fire service)" and "Set up own business or go freelance".

# THE BIGGEST DECIDING FACTOR FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET CHOSEN A PATHWAY IS THE ENJOYMENT OF WHAT THEY DO



**48%**

What you really enjoy doing

**3%**

What your parents / family advise you

**20%**

Realistic entry requirements for the course you want to do

**2%**

Employer expectations of what skills you need

**10%**

The earning potential based on which pathway you choose

**1%**

What your school advises you

**9%**

The potential employment opportunities

**<1%**

What your friends do

**6%**

The cost of a university degree



# DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Students face life-changing decisions after leaving school and college. This section investigates the decision-making process for respondents in Years 11 to 13: what the key reasons are for their pathway choices, what influences their decisions and when they make them.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### Choosing to go to university was motivated by career prospects, interest in the subject and social life

- Prospective university students were often much more motivated by the various aspects of university life provided than current university students were, by social life in particular.

### Apprenticeships were being considered more and long-term career prospects were the main driving factor behind choosing one

- Respondents were feeling more informed about apprenticeships than in 2016; however, there was a clear need for more information regarding the types of funding options available for apprenticeships.
- Information from websites and word-of-mouth were the most influential sources when deciding whether or not to do an apprenticeship.

### The main reasons for taking a year out were to travel or to gain work experience

- Some respondents were also using a gap year as a means of having longer to decide on life options and their next steps.
- Choosing to take a year out was slightly less likely when neither parent had been to university, and those choosing to take a year out were slightly less confident in getting a job than in Options 2016.

# KEY REASONS FOR DECIDING TO GO TO UNIVERSITY

There are a range of reasons why people choose to go to university. Here we explore the attitudes associated with choosing this option with prospective university students and those currently at university. Initially we combine these groups, then compare and contrast their attitudes.

## Choosing to go to university is mostly motivated by career prospects

### WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE / WERE THE KEY REASONS YOU DECIDED TO GO / WENT TO UNIVERSITY?

PLEASE SELECT THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT REASONS FROM THE LIST BELOW

(Multiple response) Bases (Current university students or Years 11-13 considering going to university / HE college immediately after finishing school or college): 5,151 (2016), 5,706 (2017)

● Pre-university ● Post university

#### Improved career prospects\*



#### Interest in chosen subject



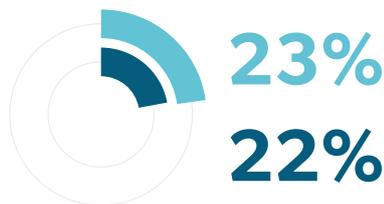
#### Socialising\*\*



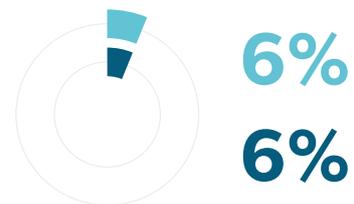
#### Gain independence from home



#### Mental stimulation



#### Access to another course



\*Please note that the response option "Improved career prospects" was aggregated from two options which were: "Improved long-term career prospects" and "Improved short-term career prospects (e.g. getting your first permanent job)".

\*\*Please note that the response option "Socialising" was aggregated from three options which were: "Socialising", "Have a good time" and "Make new friends"

**Prospective university students were often much more motivated by the various aspects of university life provided than current university students were, by social life in particular**

# REASONS FOR CHOOSING NOT TO GO TO UNIVERSITY

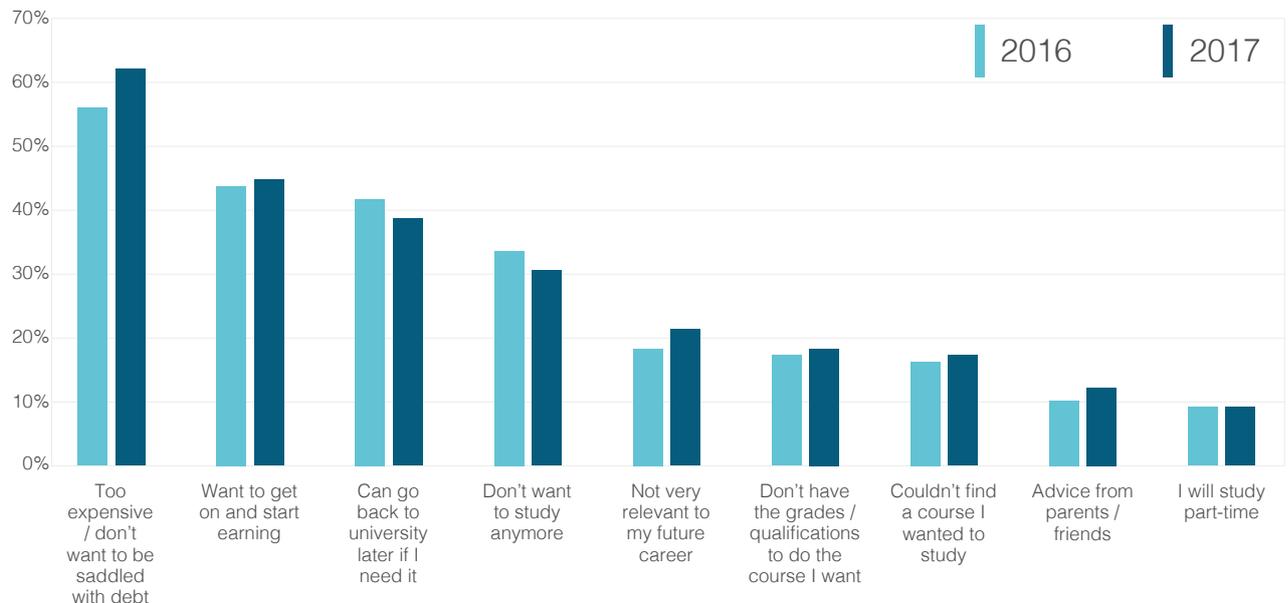
We asked those who decided not to go to university why, and if they intended on returning to study later in life. Responses to these questions were filtered to reflect the views of those at a variety of life stages who had indicated that they were not considering going to university or an HE college.

## Financial concerns were the key factor influencing decisions not to go to university

Respondents indicated that financial factors were key barriers to going to university. For those not considering university, many indicated that they were concerned about student debt and instead appeared to want to start earning money.

### WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE KEY REASONS YOU DECIDED NOT TO GO TO UNIVERSITY?

(Multiple response) Bases (Not considering going to university): 455 (2016), 575 (2017)



## Females tended to be more inclined than males to consider returning to higher education at a later stage



Females were more likely to either feel that they could go back to university later if they needed to, or that they didn't have the grades to do the course they wanted. Males were more likely to feel that university was not relevant to their career goals.

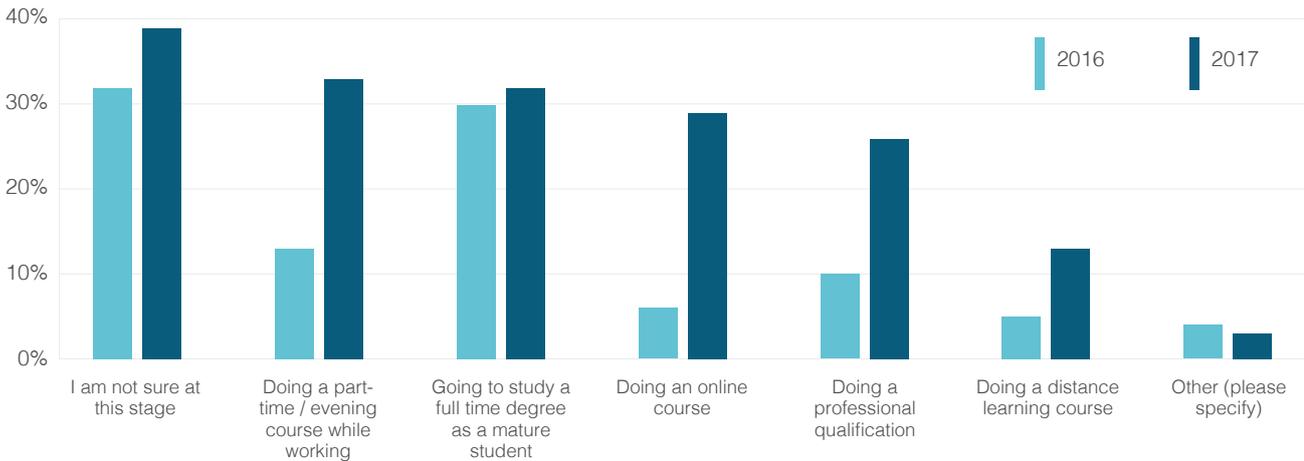
I can go back to university later if I need it	30%	43%
I don't have the grades / qualifications to do the course I want	12%	22%
University is not relevant to my future career	29%	16%

# CONSIDERATION OF FURTHER STUDY AT A LATER DATE

The decision not to go to university did not always appear to be permanent. Many said that they were considering returning to education as a mature student later if they needed to, and more were considering a wide range of flexible study options that could fit around work or family life.

## WOULD YOU CONSIDER FURTHER STUDY AT A LATER DATE?

(Multiple-response) Bases (Not considering going to university): 455 (2016), 575 (2017)



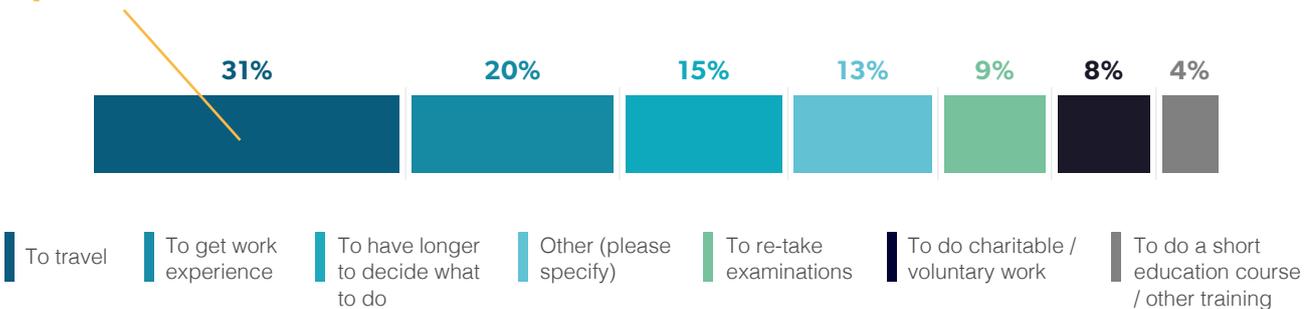
# KEY REASONS FOR CHOOSING TO TAKE A YEAR OUT

Just under a third of respondents, either already on or considering taking a year out immediately after finishing school or college, said that they were doing so or would do so in order to travel, and almost a fifth said that they wanted to get work experience.

## WHAT ARE YOU PREDOMINANTLY TAKING A YEAR OUT FOR?

Up 5% from Options 2016

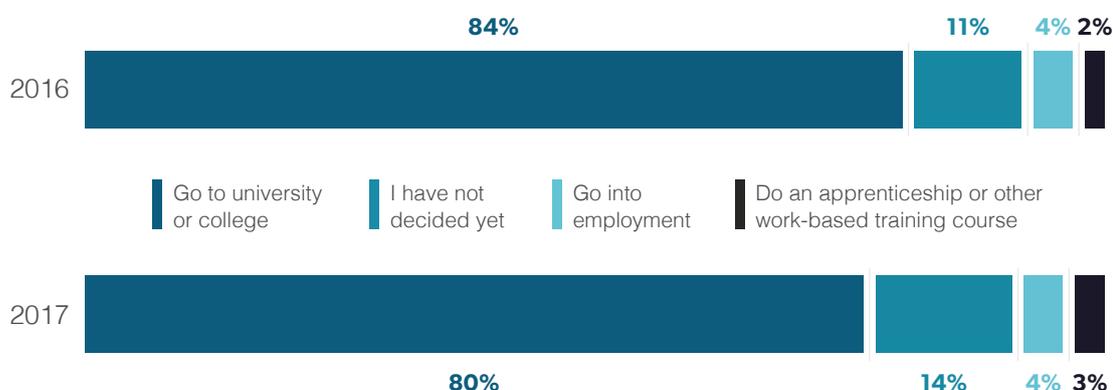
(Single-response) Bases (Gap year and Years 11-13 and considering taking a year out immediately after finishing school or college): 800 (2017)



The vast majority of respondents, either already on or considering taking a year out immediately after finishing school or college, were planning on going to university or college afterwards.

### WHAT WILL YOU DO AFTER YOUR YEAR OUT?

(Multiple-response) Bases (Gap year and Years 11-13 considering taking a year out immediately after finishing school or college): 697 (2016), 801 (2017)

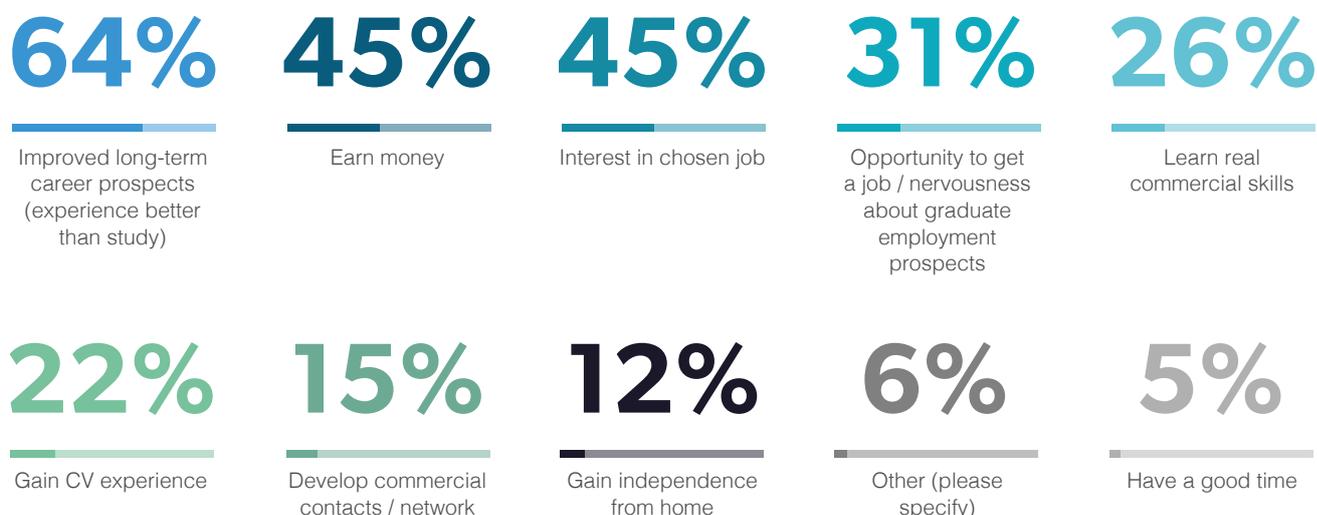


## KEY REASONS FOR CHOOSING AN APPRENTICESHIP

Respondents' top three key reasons for going into an apprenticeship or vocational training were: improved long-term career prospects, interest in the job and to earning money.

### WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE KEY REASONS YOU HAVE DECIDED TO GO INTO VOCATIONAL TRAINING OR AN APPRENTICESHIP?

(Multi-response) Bases (Gap year and Years 11-13 considering doing an apprenticeship immediately after finishing school or college): 339

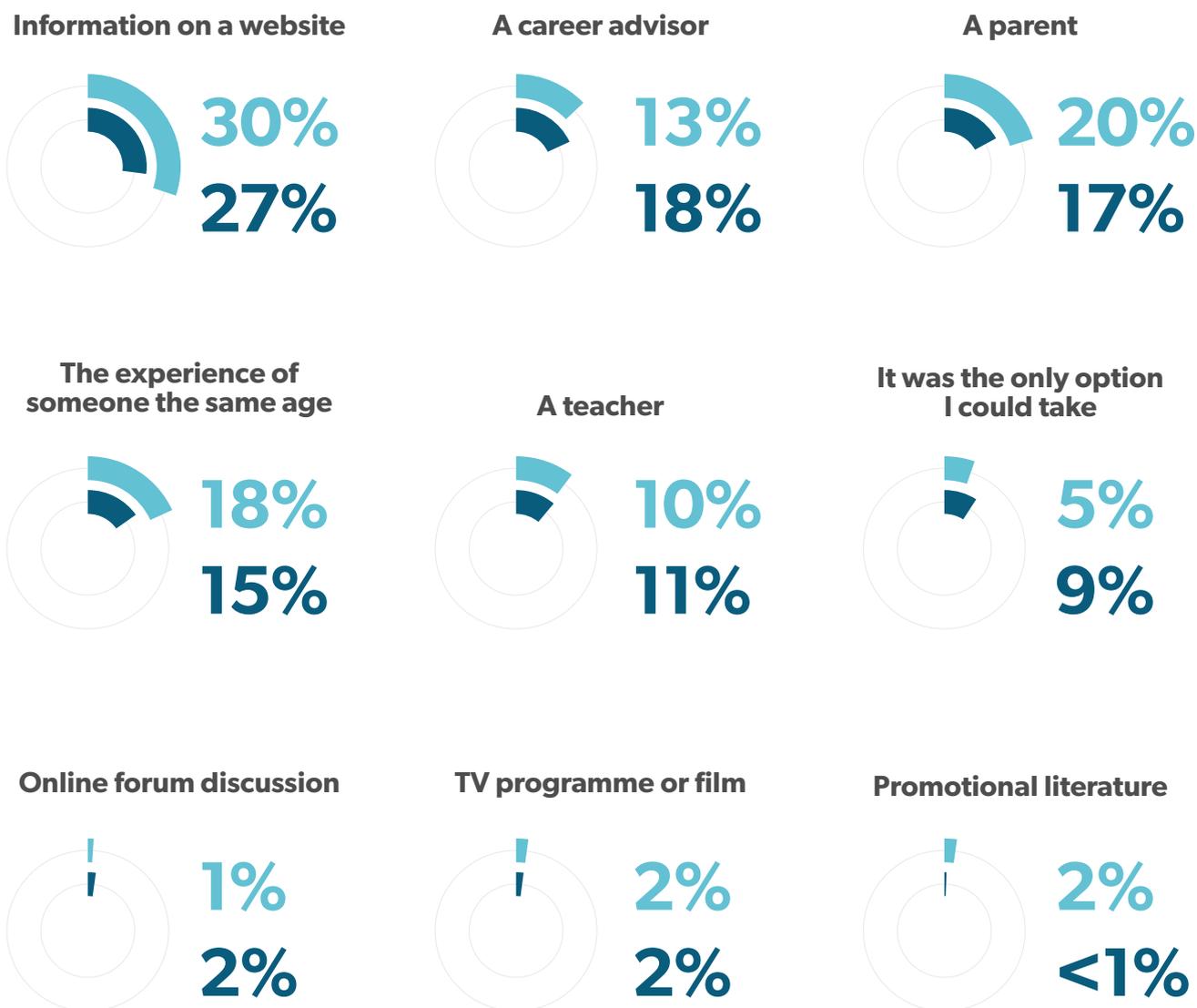


Over a quarter of respondents who were either considering doing or were already on an apprenticeship or vocational training course, identified websites as having the single biggest influence on their choice, followed by a range of word-of-mouth sources.

### WHICH INFORMATION SOURCE HAD THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON THIS DECISION?

(Single-response) Bases (Gap year and Years 11-13 and considering doing an apprenticeship immediately after finishing school or college): 240 (2016), 339 (2017)

● 2016 ● 2017



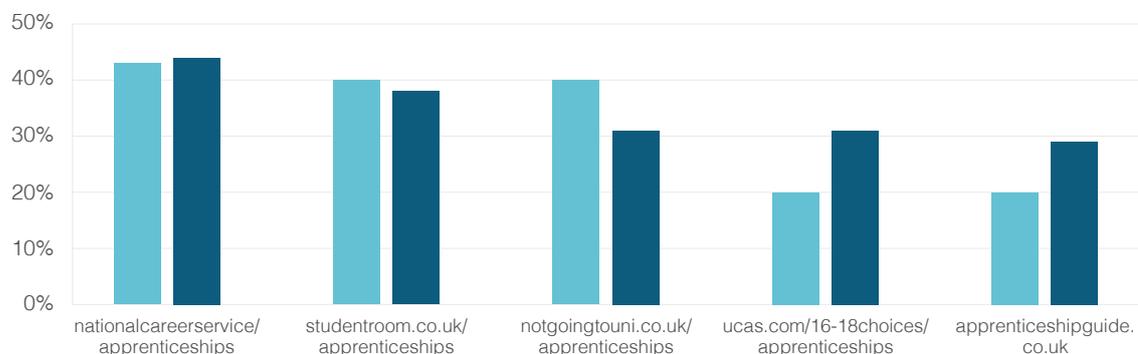
Respondents were then asked for information about the websites they had used. Of the sources listed, the largest single proportion of respondents had visited the dedicated National Careers Service webpages, followed by The Student Room.

## HAVE YOU VISITED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SITES FOR INFORMATION ON APPRENTICESHIPS?

PLEASE TICK ALL YOU VISITED.

(Multiple-response) Bases (Gap year or Years 11-13 considering doing an apprenticeship immediately after finishing school or college): 240 (2016), 339 (2017)

2016 2017



## YEAR 13 STUDENTS DECIDE TO GO TO UNIVERSITY IN JANUARY

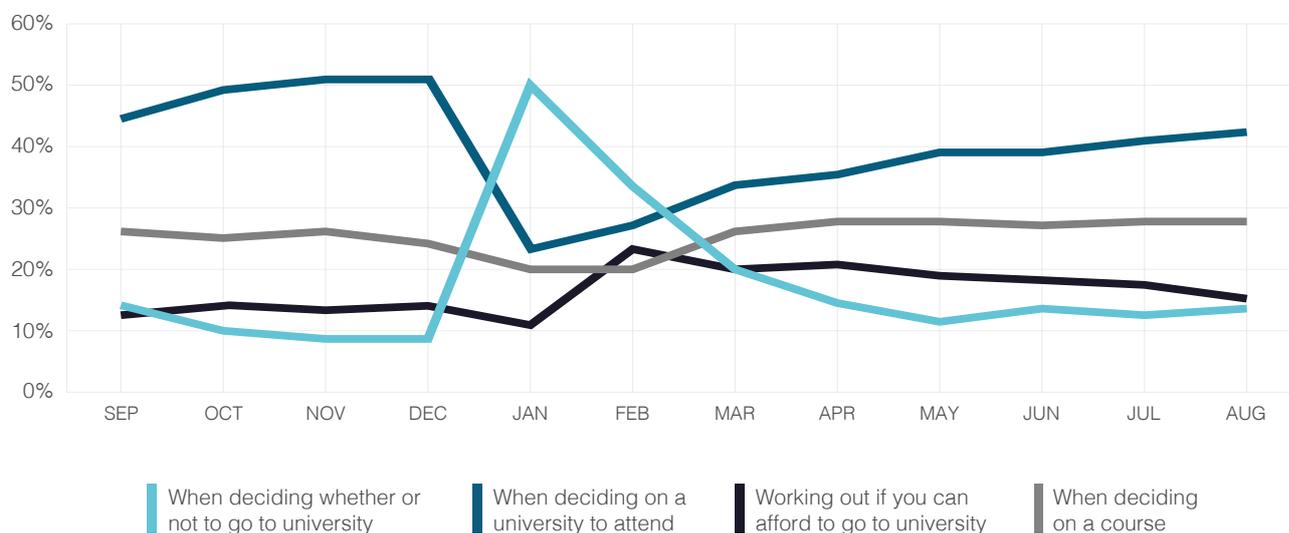
We asked Year 13 students their views regarding the optimum months for making key university decisions.

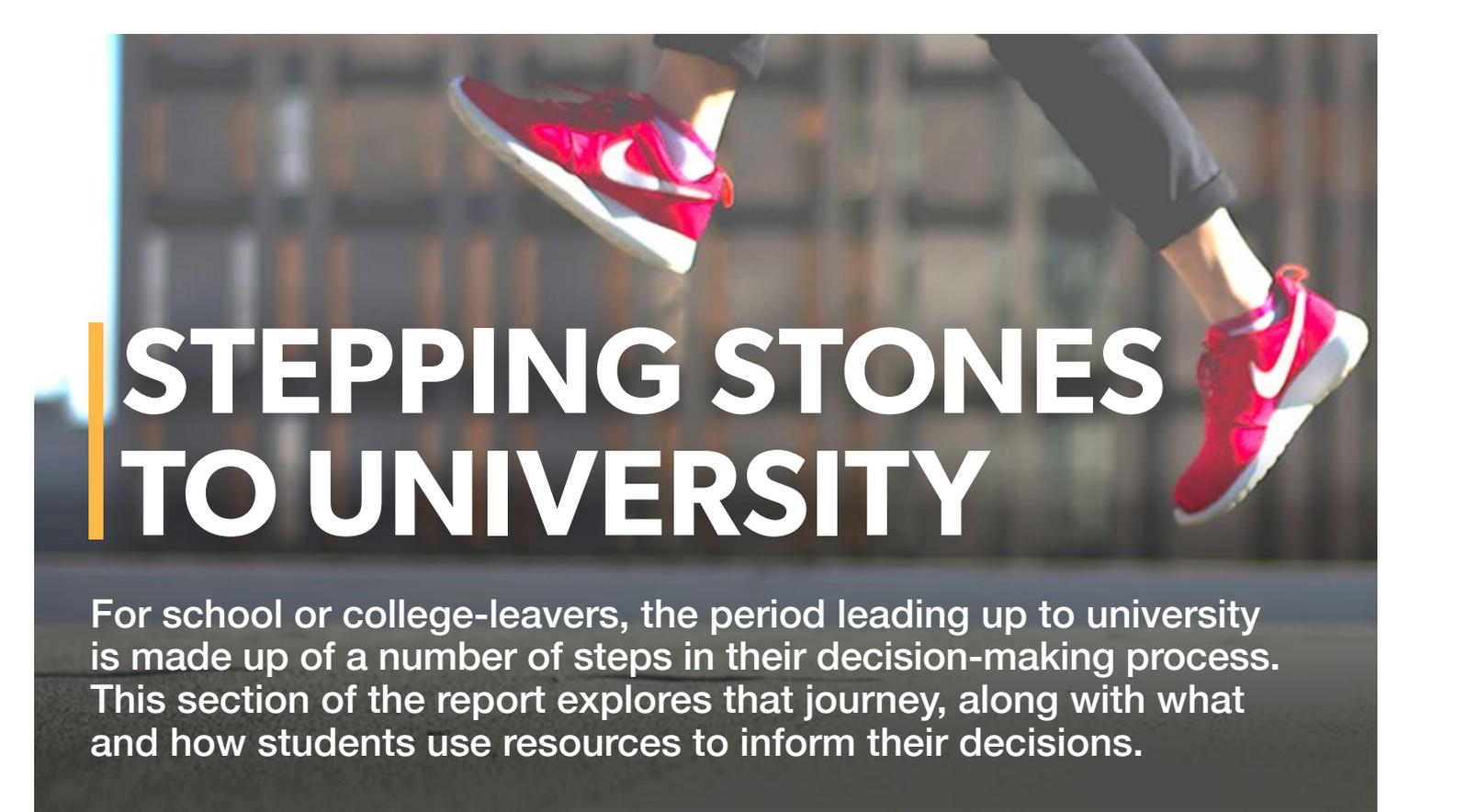
Prospective students appeared to know what they wanted to study and did not appear to change their mind. Thoughts about the affordability of university appeared to run in the background of decision-making, underpinning other decisions.

Unsurprisingly, considerations of which university to attend often took place between October and December. January was the key time to decide on whether to go to university.

### PLEASE INDICATE WHICH MONTH(S) OF THE YEAR ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN EACH OF THE ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED.

(Single-response per month) Filtered base (Year 13): 2,089





# STEPPING STONES TO UNIVERSITY

For school or college-leavers, the period leading up to university is made up of a number of steps in their decision-making process. This section of the report explores that journey, along with what and how students use resources to inform their decisions.

## KEY INSIGHTS

Responses to questions in this section are filtered to present only the views of those in Years 11 to 13 who were considering going to university or HE college immediately after finishing school or college.

### Deciding what to study and where, were the first steps

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- Over the years, Options respondents have consistently ranked career decisions immediately after choice of course and university.
- Factors such as affordability and deciding on where to live while studying came later.

### Prospective university students used a wide range of information sources when making decisions about university

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- Direct university communications, websites and word-of-mouth were the most influential information sources during this time.
- Sources tended to become more useful as school or college pupils neared Year 13.

# ORDER OF DECISIONS ON UNIVERSITY OPTIONS

On average, respondents saw deciding on the course to study as the first decision to be made, followed by the university and then career.

**1 Decide on a course**  
(average rank = 5.2)

**2 Decide on a university**  
(average rank = 4.0)

**3 Decide on a career**  
(average rank = 3.7)

**4 Decide on a city / location to study in**  
(average rank = 3.3)

**5 Decide whether it is affordable**  
(average rank = 2.4)

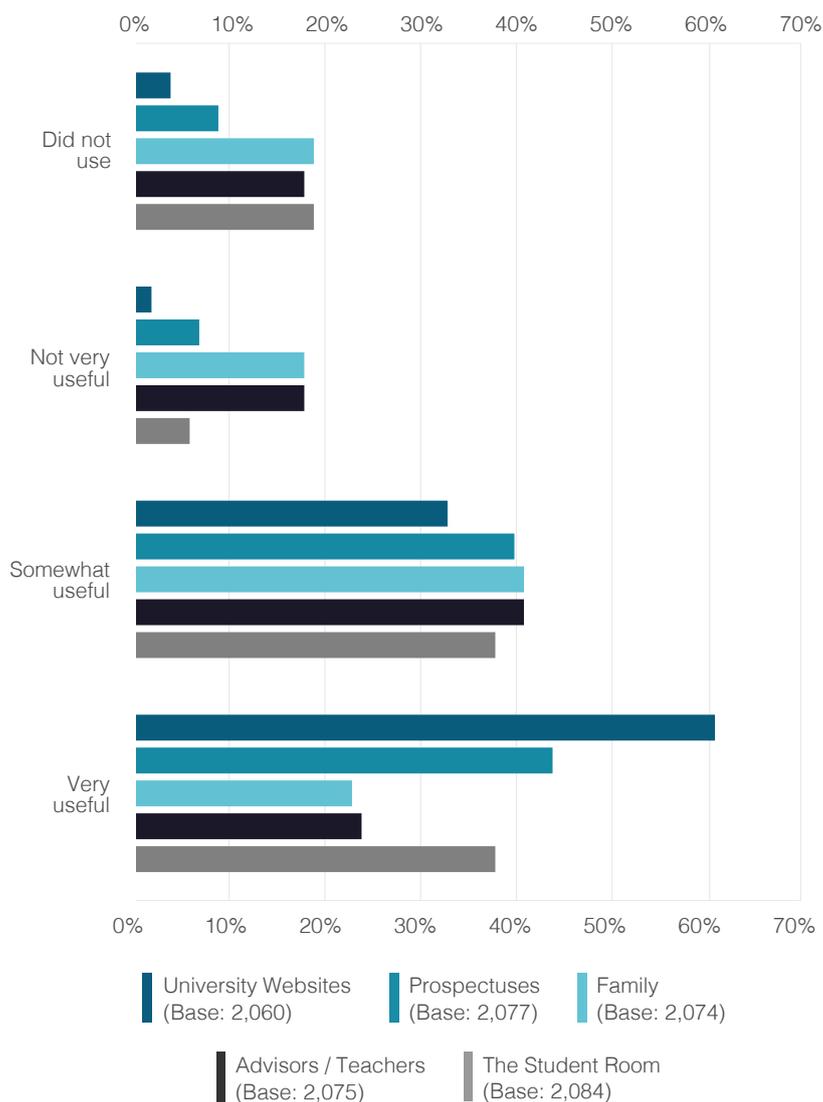
**6 Decide whether to live on campus or at home**  
(average rank = 2.4)

# TOP HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMATION SOURCES WHEN RESEARCHING UNIVERSITY

The majority of respondents had used a wide range of information sources. Here we breakdown both the use and the usefulness of the top-five most used information sources: university websites, prospectuses, family, school advisors and teachers, and The Student Room.

The use of university websites as an HE information source increased as respondents progressed through Years 11, 12 and 13. Below we show the use and usefulness of the five most used information sources for Year 13s. The data for Years 11 and 12 are available upon request.

## TOP HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMATION SOURCES WHEN RESEARCHING UNIVERSITIES





# APPRENTICESHIPS AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

This section explores respondents' perceptions of apprenticeships and vocational training pathways. Initially, these questions were open to all respondents, then questions were specifically aimed at students in Years 11 to 13.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### Gender perceptions of apprenticeships appeared to be changing

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- Although many still believed apprenticeships to be mainly taken up by men, perceptions appeared to be shifting slightly toward a more gender-neutral standpoint. This appeared to be influenced by factors such as school type and family experience at university.

### Apprenticeships appeared to be considered more, but stigma still exists

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- Accessibility of information appeared to drive interest and positive shifts in perceptions. The prospects of earning money whilst doing something of personal interest, and gaining practical experience, were also appealing aspects of apprenticeships.

### Overall perceptions of apprenticeships also appeared to be improving, although there was still seemingly a stigma attached to them

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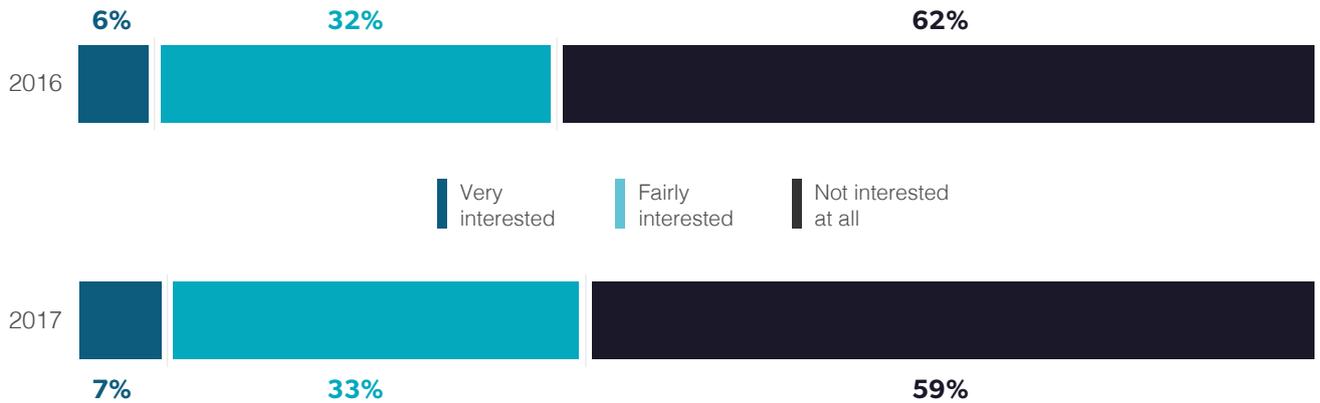
- Generally, perceptions were that apprenticeships were taken up for more positive reasons rather than negative, and that they did not necessarily lead to low-paid employment.
- It appears that the ranking and reputation of those who offer apprenticeships could be a possible influence on perceptions.

# INTEREST AND INFORMATION ON APPRENTICESHIPS OR WORK-BASED TRAINING

The majority of respondents in Years 11 to 13 indicated that they were not at all interested in doing an apprenticeship. Options 2017 respondents in Years 11 to 13 were slightly less likely to say that they were not at all interested in doing an apprenticeship than 2016 respondents.

## HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN DOING AN APPRENTICESHIP OR OTHER WORK-BASED TRAINING COURSE?

(Single-response) Filtered bases (Years 11-13): 5,758 (2016), 5,899 (2017)

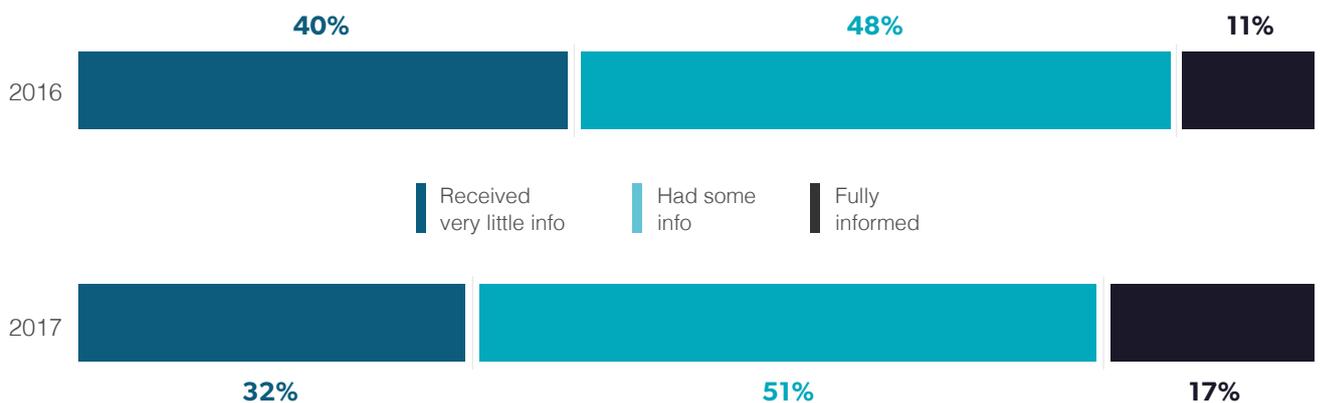


A total of 68% of respondents in Years 11 to 13 indicated that they had either received some information about doing an apprenticeship or work-based training course (51%) or felt fully informed on this option (17%).

Options 2017 respondents were more likely than 2016 respondents to say that they had either received some information, or felt fully informed on doing an apprenticeship or work-based training course.

## HOW MUCH INFORMATION HAVE YOU HAD ABOUT DOING AN APPRENTICESHIP OR WORK-BASED TRAINING COURSE?

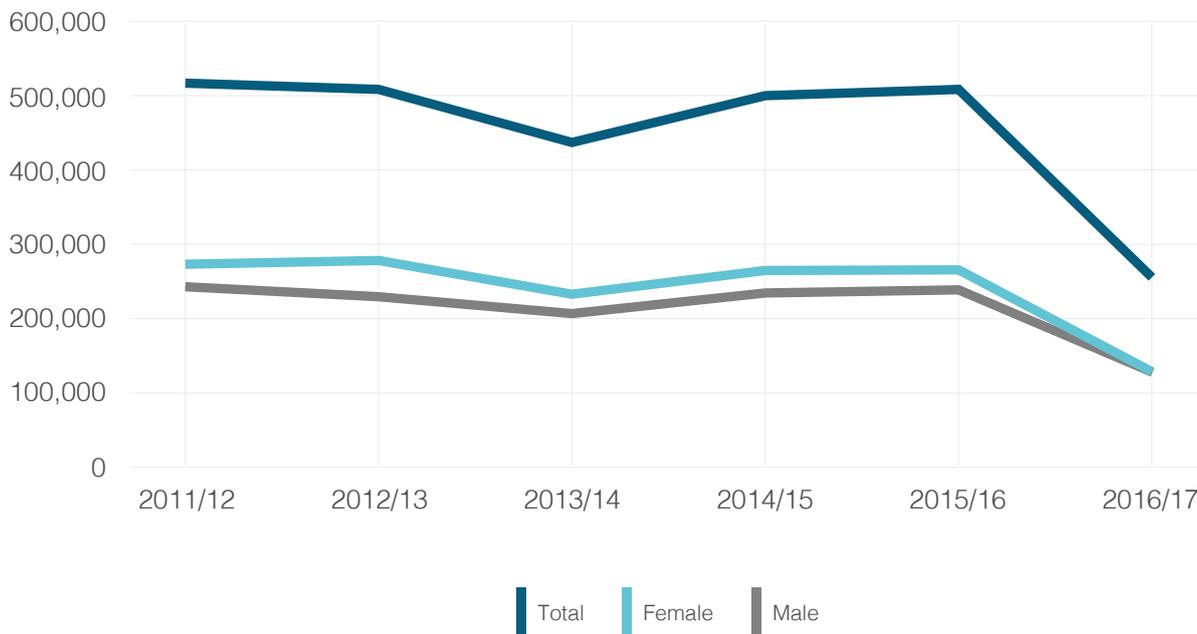
(Single-response) Filtered bases (Years 11-13): 3,996 (2016), 5,899 (2017)



# GOVERNMENT STATISTICS ON APPRENTICESHIPS

## DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION: APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME STARTS IN ENGLAND BY GENDER

(2011/12 to 2016/17)



**Thus far in 2017, the gender balance in apprenticeship starts is almost equal, at 50.1% women to 49.9% men (258,800 starts)**

According to government statistics regarding apprenticeships in England:

- Numbers of people starting apprenticeships increased by approximately **1.9%** (9,500) between the 2014/15 and 2015/16 Years; up from 499,900 to 509,400
- Growth in apprenticeship starts between 2014/15 and 2015/16 was noticeably smaller than the **13.5%** (59,500) increase reported between 2013/14 and 2014/15
- As of 2015/16, the number of apprenticeship starts were yet to recover to the levels reported in 2011/12 (520,600)

According to the same source:

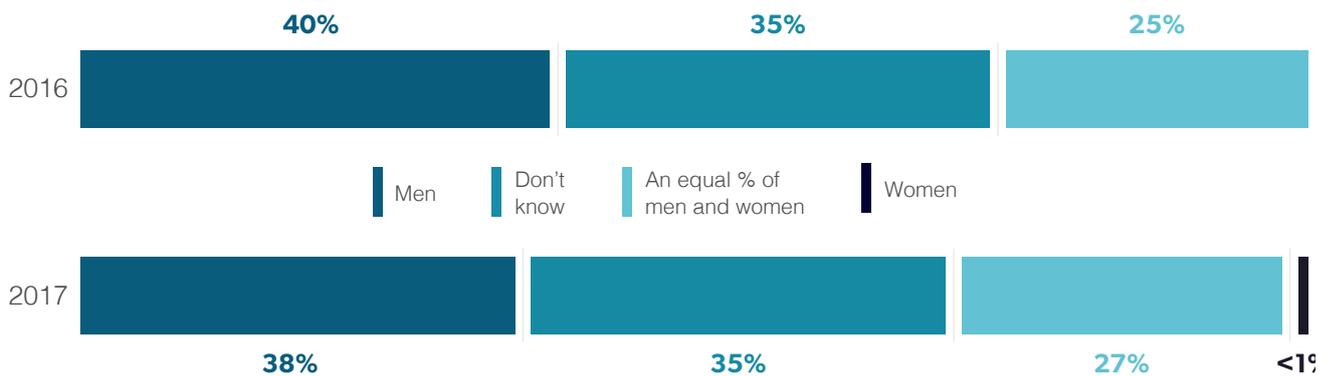
- More women started apprenticeships than men in every year since the 2011/12 academic year
- Proportions of women and men starting apprenticeships remained relatively stable between 2011/12 and 2015/16; approximately **53%** women to **47%** men

# GENDER PERCEPTIONS OF APPRENTICESHIPS APPEAR TO BE CHANGING

Options 2017 respondents were less likely than 2016 respondents to think that apprenticeships were mainly taken up by men and were more likely to think they were taken up by an equal balance of men and women.

## “APPRENTICESHIPS ARE MAINLY TAKEN BY...”

(Single-response) Base: 8,383 (2016), 9,726 (2017)



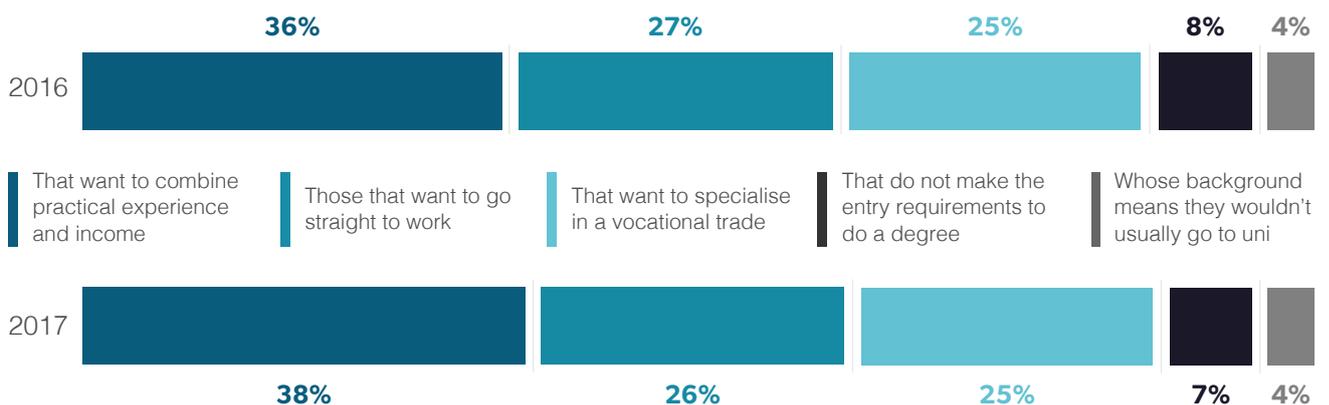
**Female respondents were slightly more likely to think that apprenticeships were mainly taken by men (38%) than male respondents (36%)**

The type of a respondent's school appeared to have an impact on apprenticeship gender perceptions. Comprehensive school respondents were more likely to think that they were mainly taken by men (42%), whereas those at academies, free schools and 6th form colleges were more likely to think that there was a more equal gender balance (ranging from 35% to 37%).

Respondents felt that those taking apprenticeships do so based on positive choices and reasons, rather than negative. Female respondents however, were more likely than males to attribute apprenticeship uptake to positive reasons.

## “APPRENTICESHIPS ARE TAKEN BY THOSE...”

(Single-response) Base: 8,344 (2016), 9,690 (2017)



# RESPONDENTS DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT THAT "APPRENTICESHIPS LEAD TO LOW-INCOME EMPLOYMENT"

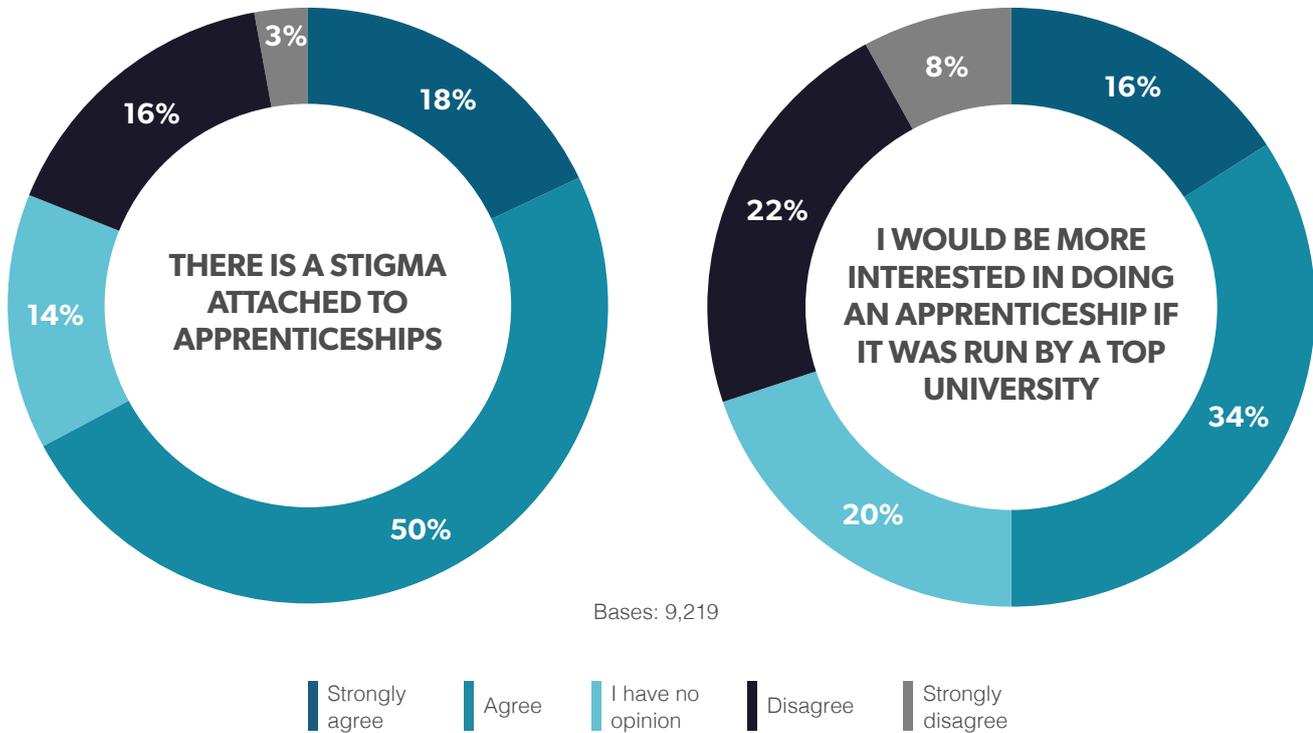
## APPRENTICESHIPS LEAD TO LOW-INCOME EMPLOYMENT

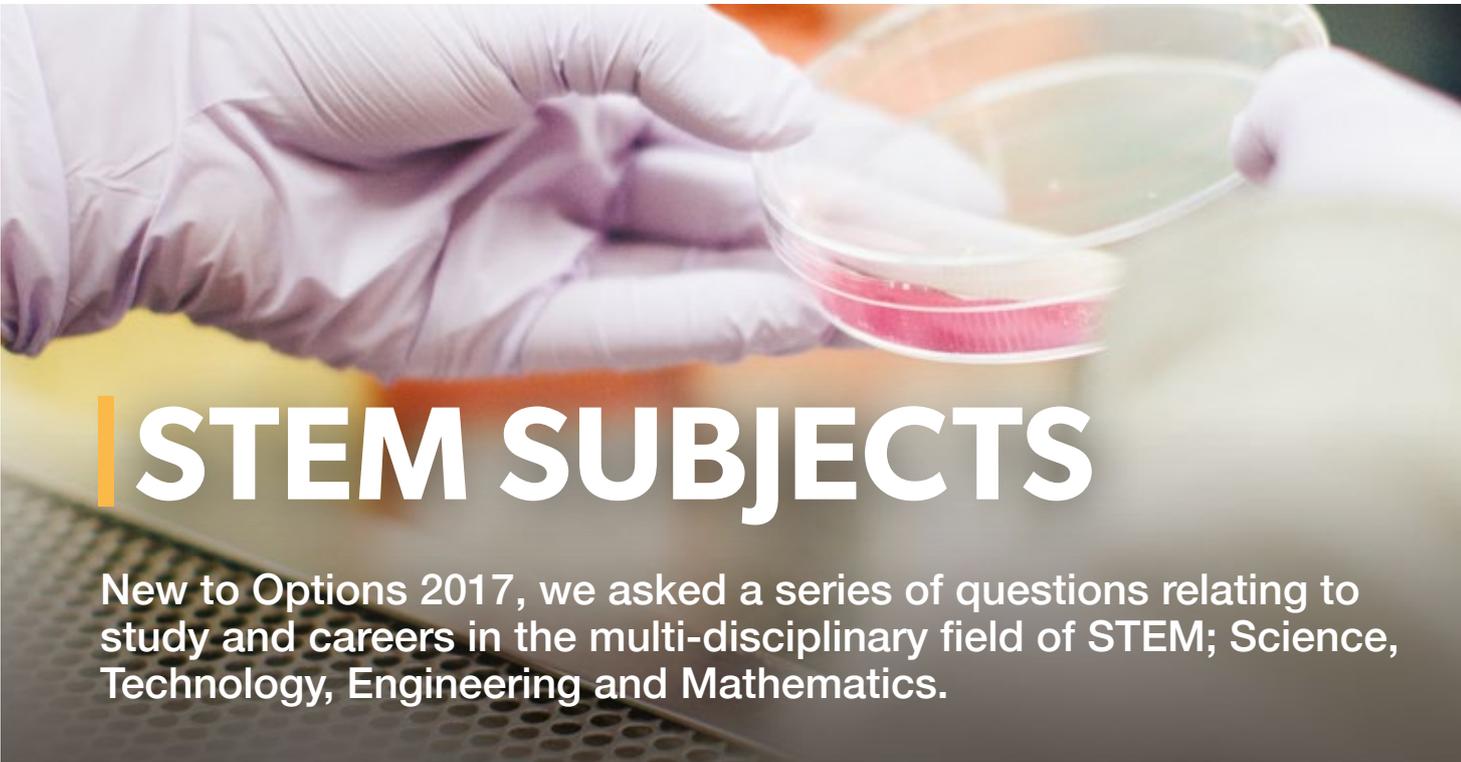
(Single-response) Base: 9,219 (2017)



# APPRENTICESHIPS APPEAR TO BE CONSIDERED MORE BUT STIGMA STILL EXISTS

The majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that there is a stigma attached to apprenticeships.





# STEM SUBJECTS

New to Options 2017, we asked a series of questions relating to study and careers in the multi-disciplinary field of STEM; Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

## KEY INSIGHTS

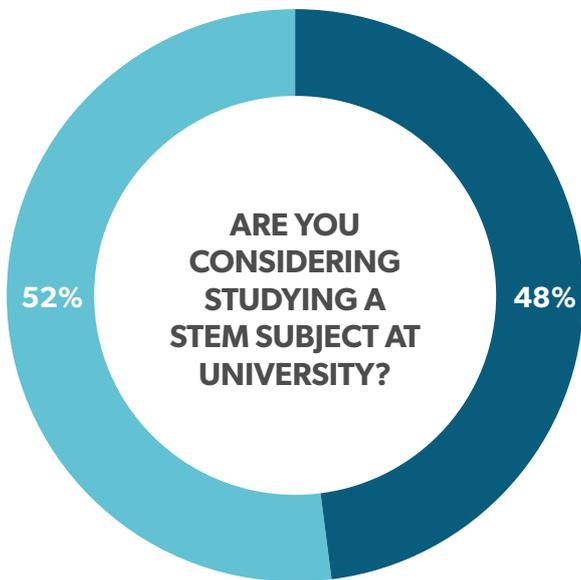
Responses to these questions were filtered to reflect the views of prospective university students; those in Years 11 to 13 who had indicated that they were interested in going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college.

### **STEM was found to be a popular university choice for those at school or college, particularly due to career prospects**

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- Just under half of those at school or college said that they were interested in pursuing a STEM subject at university level. Most of those considering this pathway felt it would be a good career choice.
- Lack of interest in the subject areas however, and the difficulty experienced in studying them previously, were the main barriers to most who were not considering this route.
- Most felt reasonably well informed on STEM as an option but there was clearly a need for more information and for it to be available earlier on in their decision making.
- Females tended to be less inclined towards STEM subjects.
- Female respondents generally felt less informed than males about STEM career opportunities. They also said that they had received less support than males from influential people in their lives, an aspect that appeared to translate into greater interest in the area.
- Parental experience at university and support from parents were the key drivers of awareness and interest in STEM subjects.
- When the parents of those at school or college had been to university, they were generally more likely to be steered towards STEM subjects. They tended to be more aware of the career opportunities available in the sector and this appeared to translate into greater interest in the area.

# JUST UNDER HALF OF RESPONDENTS ARE NOT CONSIDERING STEM SUBJECTS AT UNIVERSITY



**Female respondents (43%) were less likely to consider STEM subjects than males (61%)**

Whether or not a respondent's parents had been to university had a positive impact on their consideration of STEM subjects.



(Single-response) Filtered base (School Years 11-13, considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college): 3,676

# STUDENTS CONSIDERING STUDYING A STEM SUBJECT FEEL IT WOULD BE A GOOD CAREER CHOICE

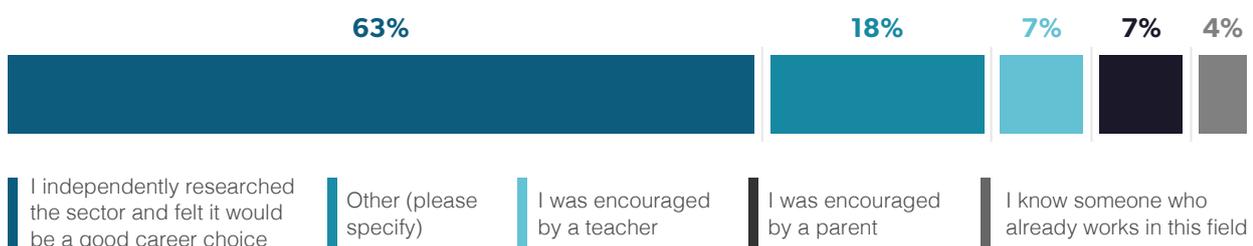
## Whether or not parents had been to university had an impact upon what attracted respondents to STEM subjects

When neither parent had been to university, respondents considering STEM subjects were more likely to say that they felt that it would be a good career choice to pursue STEM subjects (67%), compared to when both parents had been to university (58%).

When both parents had been to university, respondents considering STEM subjects were slightly more likely to say that their parents had encouraged them to do so (9%), than when neither parent had been to university (6%).

## WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO STUDYING STEM SUBJECTS?

(Single-response) Filtered base (School Years 11-13, considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college, considering studying a STEM subject at university): 1,716



# OVER HALF OF RESPONDENTS NOT CONSIDERING STEM SUBJECTS ARE SIMPLY NOT INTERESTED

## WHAT IS YOUR MAIN REASONING FOR NOT CONSIDERING STEM SUBJECTS?

(Single-response) Filtered base (School Years 11-13, considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college, not considering studying a STEM subject at university): 1,879



**Female respondents were more likely to say that their reason for not considering STEM subjects at university was because they found them too difficult**

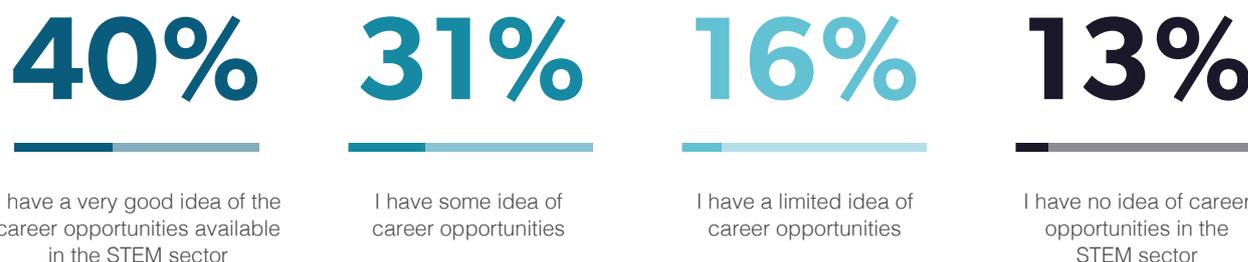
20% of respondents said that they found STEM subjects too difficult. Of those, female respondents were more likely to attribute their decision to not consider STEM at university to how difficult they found STEM subjects (21%) than male respondents (16%).

Free school meal respondents were more likely to attribute their decision to not consider STEM subjects at university to how difficult they found STEM subjects (25%) than non-free school meal respondents (18%).

# FAMILIARITY WITH CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE STEM SECTOR

## HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH CAREER OPPORTUNITIES THAT WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO YOU IN THE STEM SECTOR?

(Single-response) Filtered base (School Years 11-13, considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college): 3,676



Male respondents were more likely to say that they had a very good idea of career opportunities in the STEM sector (37%) than female respondents (28%).

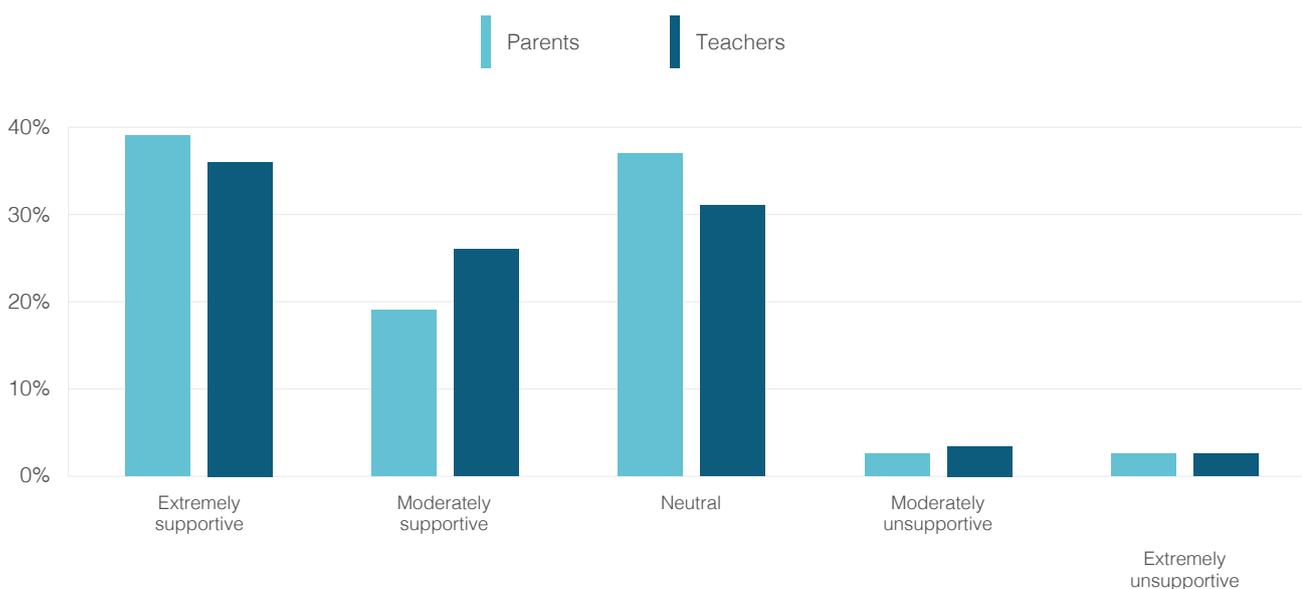
We also found there was a general trend of increased knowledge of STEM career opportunities with increased parental experience at university.

## INFLUENCE ON STEM CHOICES

**Respondents considering going to university said that their parents were supportive of them pursuing STEM subjects**

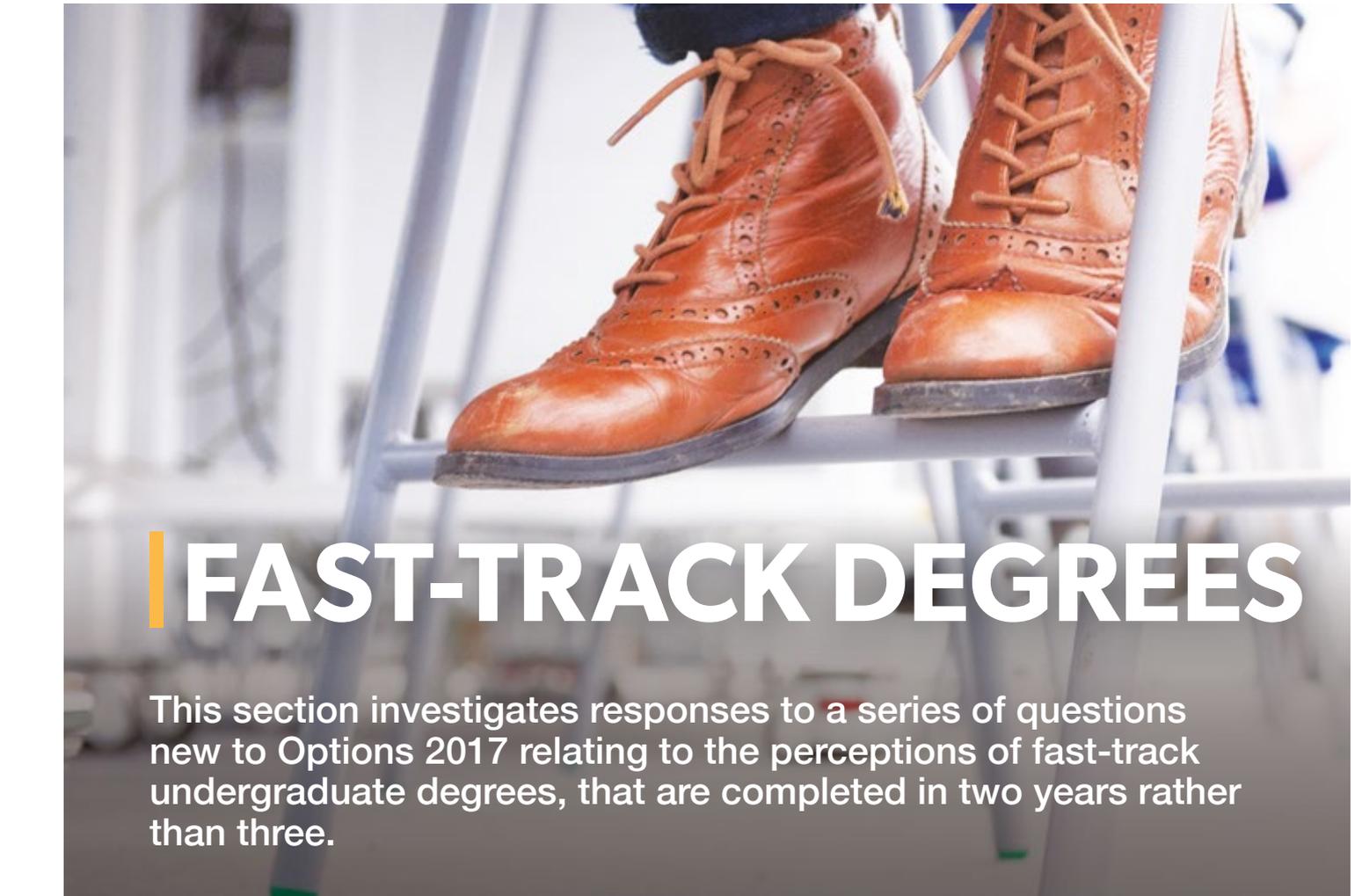
### HOW SUPPORTIVE WOULD YOU SAY EACH OF THE BELOW ARE ABOUT YOU PURSUING STEM SUBJECTS?

(Single-response) Filtered base (Years 11-13 considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college): 3,676



When parents had been to university, respondents were more likely to say that their parents were supportive of them studying a STEM subject.

Non-free school meal respondents were more likely to say that their parents were extremely supportive of them pursuing STEM subjects (40%) than free school meal respondents (34%).



# FAST-TRACK DEGREES

This section investigates responses to a series of questions new to Options 2017 relating to the perceptions of fast-track undergraduate degrees, that are completed in two years rather than three.

## KEY INSIGHTS

Responses to these questions were filtered to reflect the views of prospective university students in Years 11 to 13 who were considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college.

**Many prospective university students said that they would consider a fast-track degree, but most said that they probably would not choose one**

- The main barriers to choosing a fast-track degree were fears of missing out on the complete university experience and of the academic standards being lower.
- Males were also slightly more concerned than females about the academic standards of a fast-track degree.

**Current undergraduate students tended to be slightly more interested in fast-track degrees in general, but most remained unlikely to have chosen one**

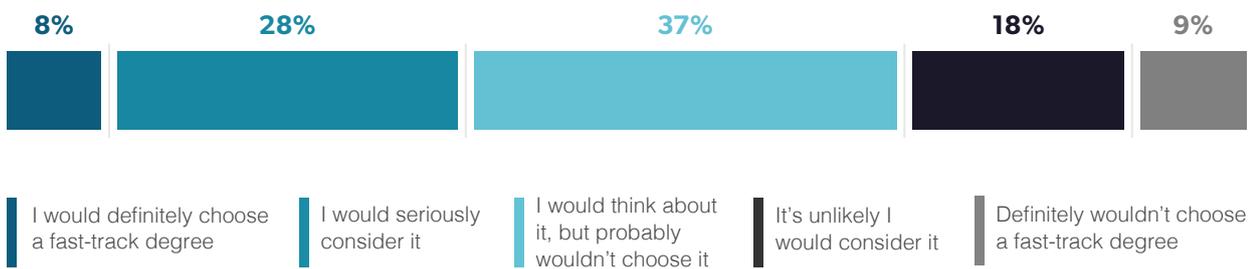
- Fast-track degrees also tended to be of slightly greater interest to those who had received free school meals.

# PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS AND CONSIDERATION OF FAST-TRACK DEGREES

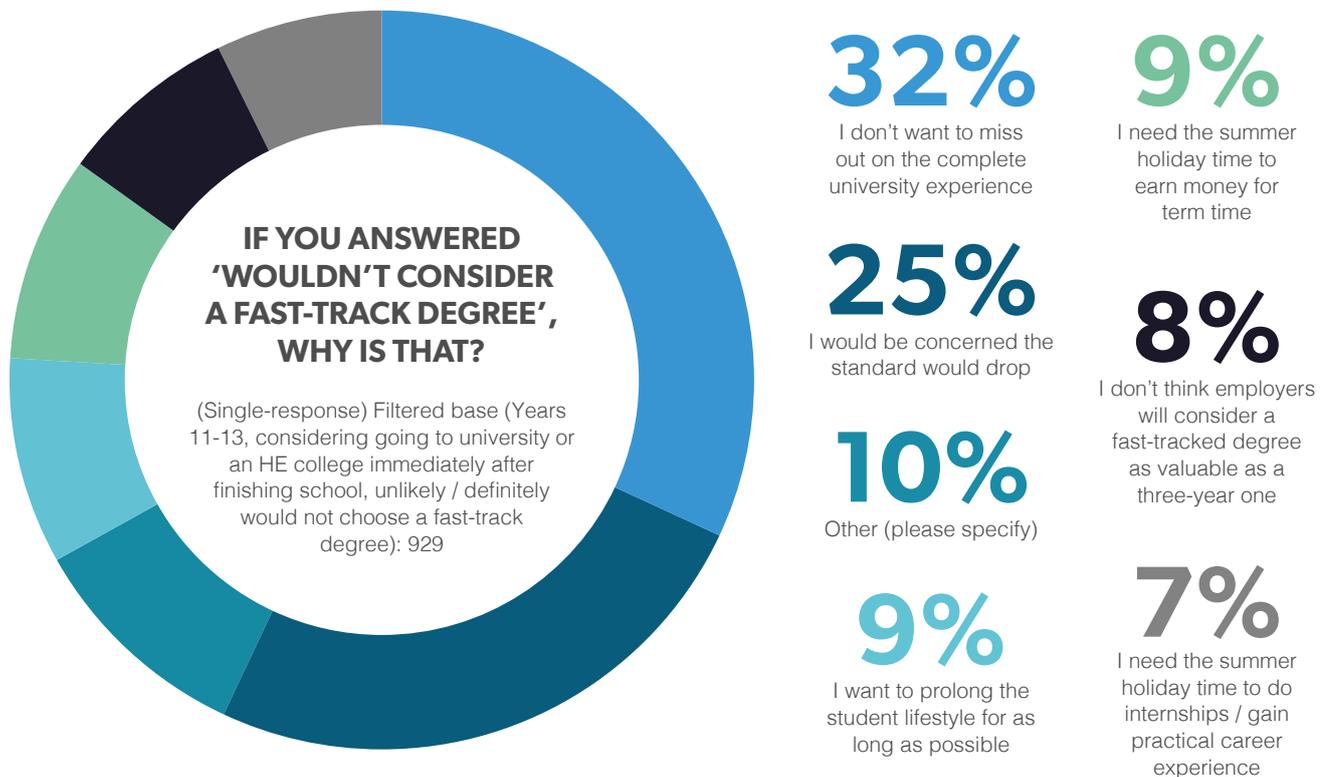
The largest proportion of respondents considering going to university or an HE college said that they would consider a fast-track degree, but not necessarily choose it.

## HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO SELECT A FAST-TRACK DEGREE IF IT WAS AVAILABLE TO YOU (I.E. LONGER TERM DATES BUT YOU WOULD COMPLETE YOUR DEGREE IN TWO YEARS INSTEAD OF THREE)?

(Single-response) Filtered base (School Years 11-13, considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college) 3,664



**Respondents who either said it was unlikely or that they definitely would not choose a fast-track degree, said they did not want to miss out on the complete university experience**



Male respondents who either said it was unlikely or that they definitely would not choose a fast-track degree, were more likely to say that they would be concerned that the standard would drop (33%) than females (23%).



# MONEY WORRIES

Financial worries and concerns over student debt remain a barrier for students choosing not to go to university. This section explores responses to a series of questions relating to the views on both tuition fees and the cost of living. We also consider the areas that both prospective and current university students would consider compromising on, in order to pay a lower fee.

## KEY INSIGHTS

**We filtered the data to reflect the views of respondents in Years 11 to 13 who were considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college and those who were at university, on either undergraduate or postgraduate degree programmes.**

Responses were then filtered to reflect the answers of both prospective and current university students to compare and contrast their views on compromising on tuition fees.

### Money worries for prospective students

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- Prospective university students and current students remain more concerned than not about the financial aspects of university life.
- Most were thinking about the potential financial impacts later in life, but the extent of concern appeared to be influenced by gender and background.
- Females were more likely to be concerned about future debt and the impact later in life, and to consider part-time work.
- Those from less advantaged backgrounds tended to be more likely to consider compromises as part of their university choices to reduce costs where possible, such as choosing a university which offers more financial support or living at home whilst studying.
- Those from more advantaged backgrounds were aware of the issues surrounding tuition fees but were more prepared to accept them and attempt to deal with them; for example, by finding part-time work or by choosing a less expensive city.

## Money worries for current university students

- Around a third of current university students reported that their social life had been limited by the cost of living at university, noticeably higher than prospective students' expectations. Current students however, were much less likely than prospective students to feel that finding part-time work was essential to cover living costs while at university.
- Similarly to prospective students, the level of concern for current students was driven by their individual backgrounds. Those from less advantaged backgrounds were more likely to consider changing university choices based on available funding or to choose to live at home.
- Those from more advantaged backgrounds tended to be aware of potential financial issues but remained pragmatic in their choices, and were aware that they would need to find part-time work to cover costs.

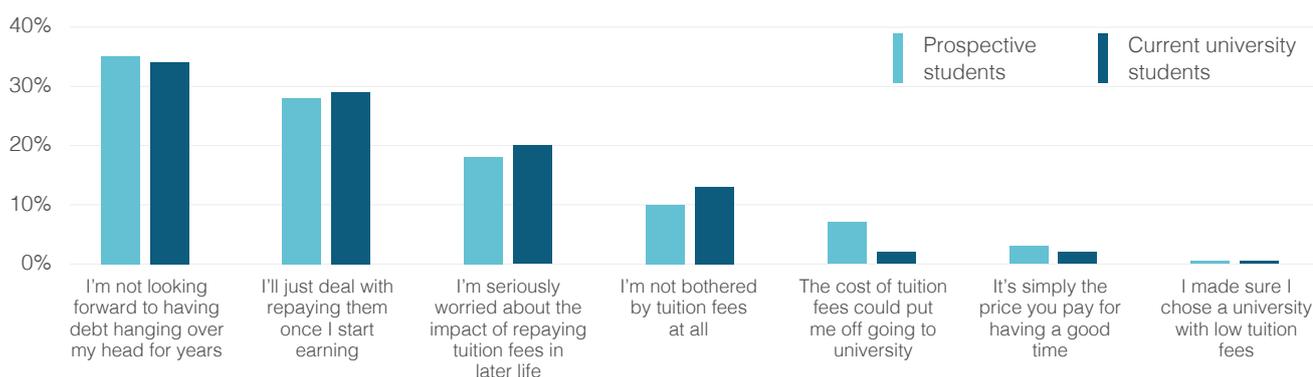
## Paying more for benefits and less for compromises

- Current university students however, were around twice as likely as prospective students to say that they would not consider paying higher fees for added benefits.
- Prospective university students were generally more willing than current students to pay more for added benefits, and to pay less for some compromises.
- Nonetheless, priorities were similar between these groups when considering what they would pay extra for; increased tutorial time, higher graduate earnings, high student satisfaction, and quality facilities all being common areas.
- Priorities were also similar when considering what they would compromise on for a lower fee; larger class sizes, greater distance between university and halls, a less attractive campus, and a less ideal city location all being common areas.
- Around a quarter of both prospective and current students were not willing to compromise for a lower fee.

# RESPONDENTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF TUITION FEES LATER IN LIFE

## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT UNIVERSITY TUITION FEES?

Bases: (Prospective students: Years 11-13, considering going to university or an HE college immediately after finishing school or college, current university students): 4,450 (Prospective students), 1,700 (Current university students)



Female respondents considering university were slightly more likely to say that they were not looking forward to having tuition fee debt hanging over their head for years (36%) than male respondents (32%).

Female respondents considering university were more likely to say that they were seriously worried about the impact of repaying tuition fees in later life (20%) than male respondents (12%).

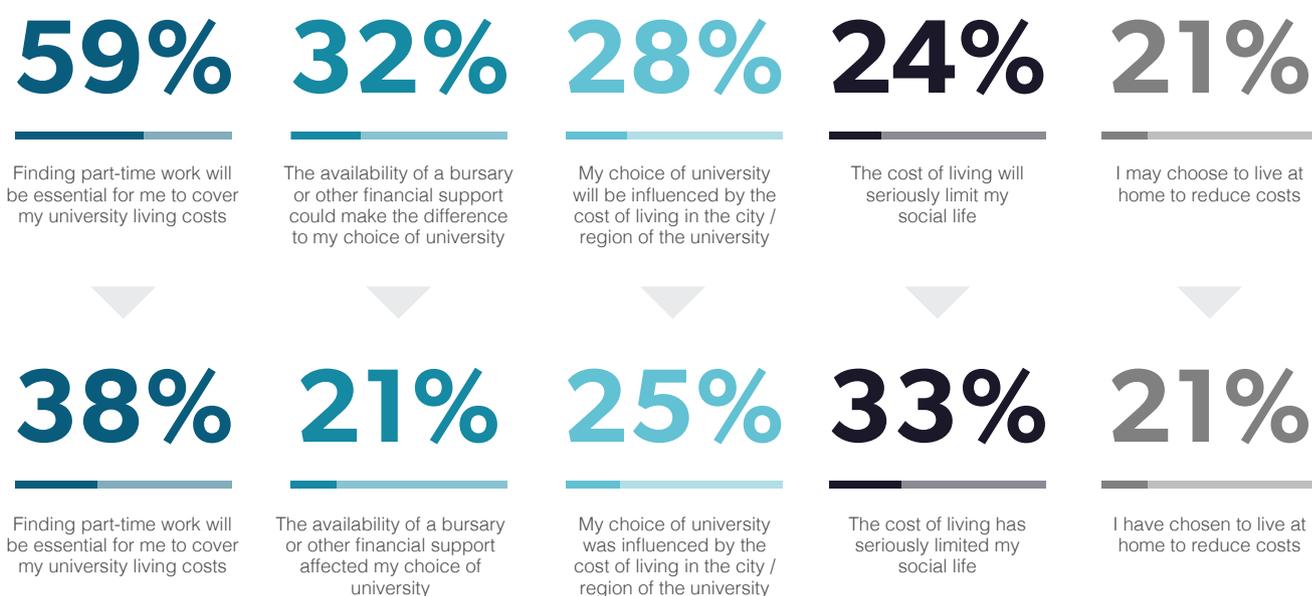
Free school meals (FSM) respondents considering university were more likely to say that they were seriously worried about the impact of repaying tuition fees later in life (24%) than non-free school meals respondents (16%).

Non-FSM respondents considering university were more likely to say that they were not looking forward to having tuition fee debt hanging over their head for years (36%) than FSM respondents (28%).

## RESPONDENTS CONSIDERING UNIVERSITY ARE MORE LIKELY TO FEEL FINDING PART-TIME WORK IS ESSENTIAL THAN THOSE ALREADY AT UNIVERSITY

### HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE COST OF LIVING AT UNIVERSITY?

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS (Multiple response) Filtered bases: 4,536



CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (Multiple response) Bases: 1,700

**Male respondents who were at university were more likely to say that they were not at all concerned about tuition fees (16%) than female respondents (11%)**

Free school meals respondents who were at university were more likely to be seriously worried about the impact of repaying tuition fees in later life (26%) than non-free school meals respondents (19%).

## PROSPECTIVE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

- When neither parent of prospective university students had been to university, respondents were more likely to say that the availability of bursaries or other financial support could make the difference to their university choice (36%) than when either one parent (28%) or both parents (28%) had been to university.
- There was a general trend of an increased likelihood of respondents choosing to live at home to reduce costs with decreased parental experience at university.
- Free school meals respondents were more likely to say that they may choose to live from home to reduce costs (30%) than non-free school meals respondents (20%).
- Free school meals respondents were also more likely to say that the availability of bursaries or other financial support could make the difference to their university choice (48%) than non-free school meals respondents (29%).

## CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

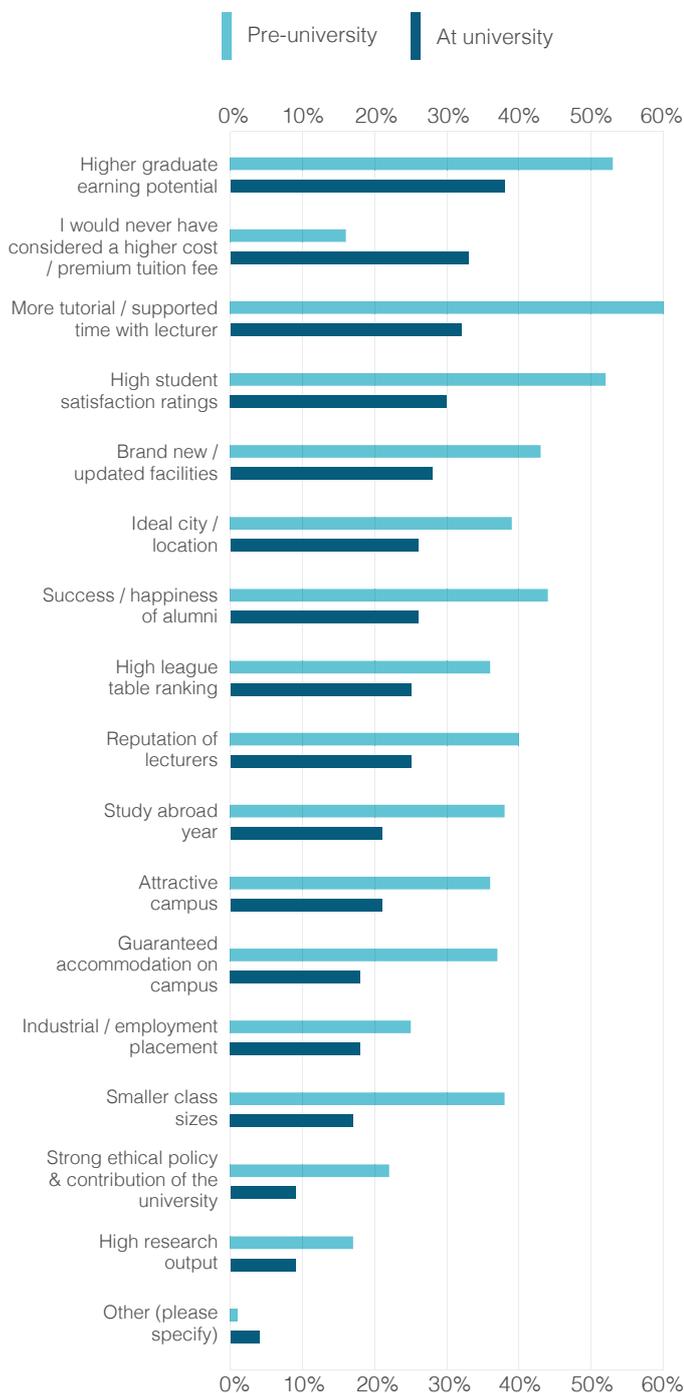
- Male respondents who were at university were more likely to say that their choice of university was influenced by the cost of living in the university city/region (32%) than female respondents (23%).
- When neither parent had been to university, student respondents were more likely to say that the availability of bursaries or other financial support had affected their university choice (24%) than when both parents had been to university (15%).
- Free school meals respondents who were at university were more likely to have chosen to live at home to reduce costs (29%) than non-free school meals respondents (20%).
- Free school meals respondents who were at university were more likely to say that the availability of bursaries or other financial support had affected their university choice (32%) than non-free school meals respondents (19%).

# COMPROMISING ON TUITION FEES

We asked students what they would consider compromising on. Those at university were twice as likely to say that they would not consider paying a higher tuition fee than prospective students.

## WHICH UNIVERSITY ELEMENTS (IF ANY) WOULD NEED TO BE INCLUDED FOR YOU TO CONSIDER PAYING A HIGHER / PREMIUM TUITION FEE? (I.E. WHAT IS MOST VALUABLE TO YOU?)

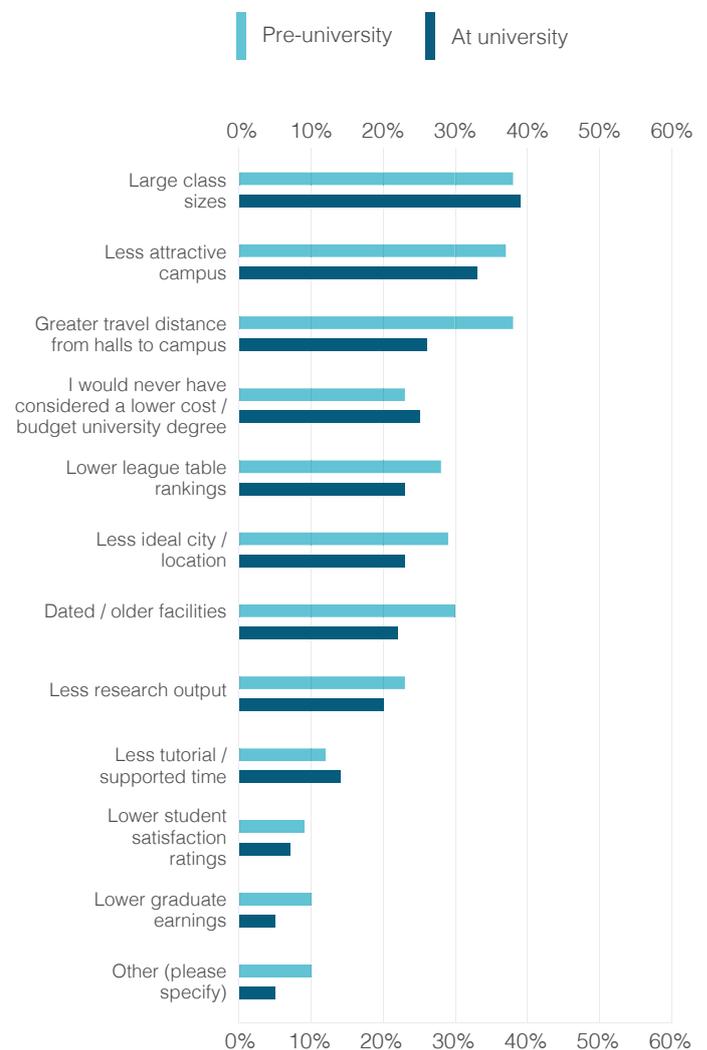
(Multiple-response) Filtered bases (Pre-university = Years 11-13 considering university immediately after finishing school or college, At university = current university students): 4,676 (Pre-university), 1,624 (At university)



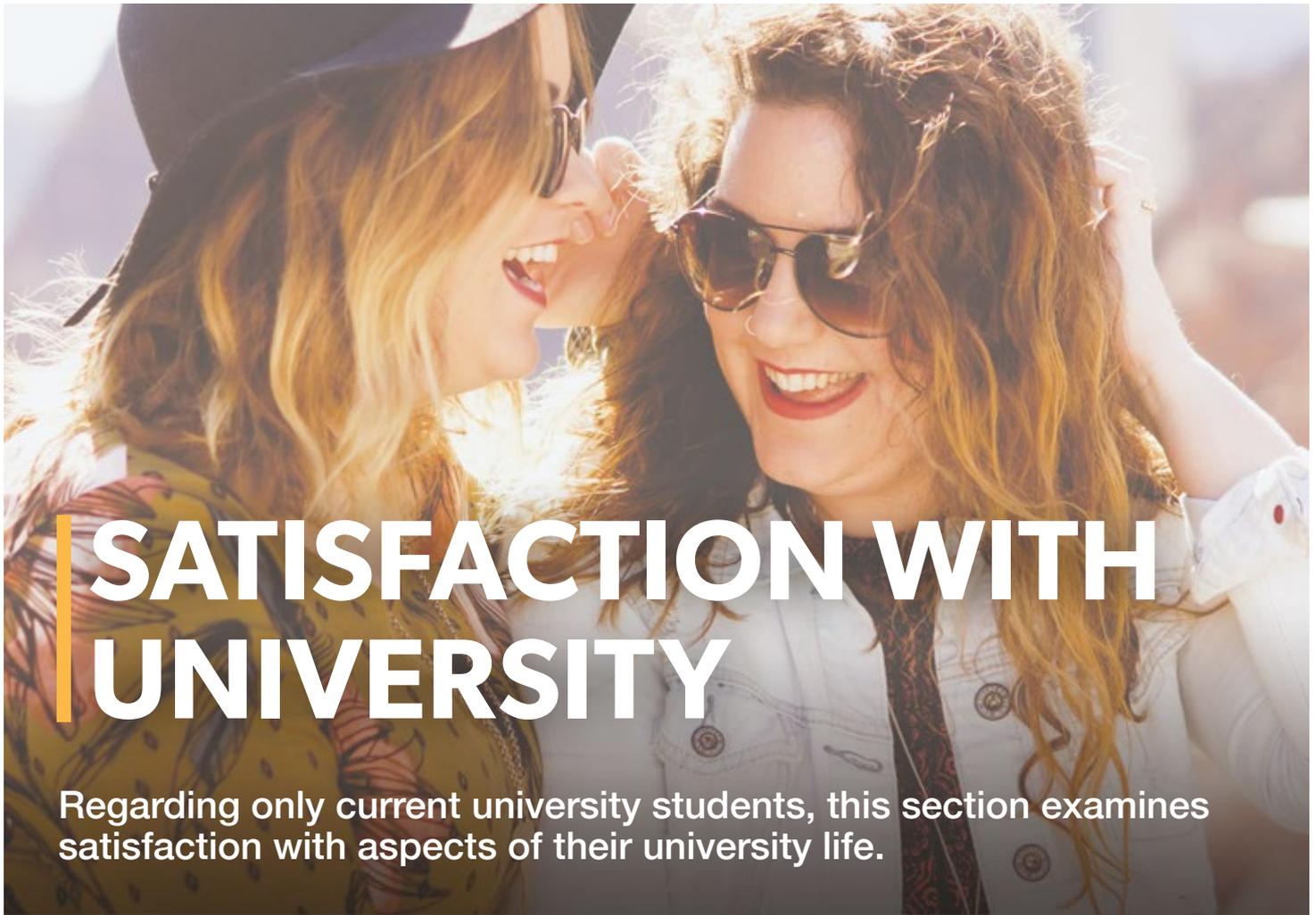
## WHICH ELEMENTS WOULD YOU BE HAPPY TO PAY A LOWER / BUDGET TUITION FEE FOR? (I.E. WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO COMPROMISE ON?)

(I.E. WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO COMPROMISE ON?)

(Multiple-response) Filtered bases (Pre-university = Years 11-13 considering university immediately after finishing school or college, At university = current university students): 4,750 (Pre-university), 1,624 (At university)



Around a quarter of both prospective and current students indicated they would not consider compromising on any university areas in order to pay a lower tuition fee.



# SATISFACTION WITH UNIVERSITY

Regarding only current university students, this section examines satisfaction with aspects of their university life.

## KEY INSIGHTS

Responses to questions in this section were filtered to reflect the views of respondents who were at university, on either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees.

### **Current university students appeared to be slightly more satisfied with their general university experience in 2017 than 2016**

- Satisfaction ratings, with both course and university, were slightly higher than in Options 2016. When looking at more specific aspects of university life, the cost of living was the area where students were the most dissatisfied. Undergraduate students also appeared to become less satisfied with their university in general as they progressed through their courses.

### **The majority of university respondents said they had never considered changing university, yet most felt that it should be easier for students to do so**

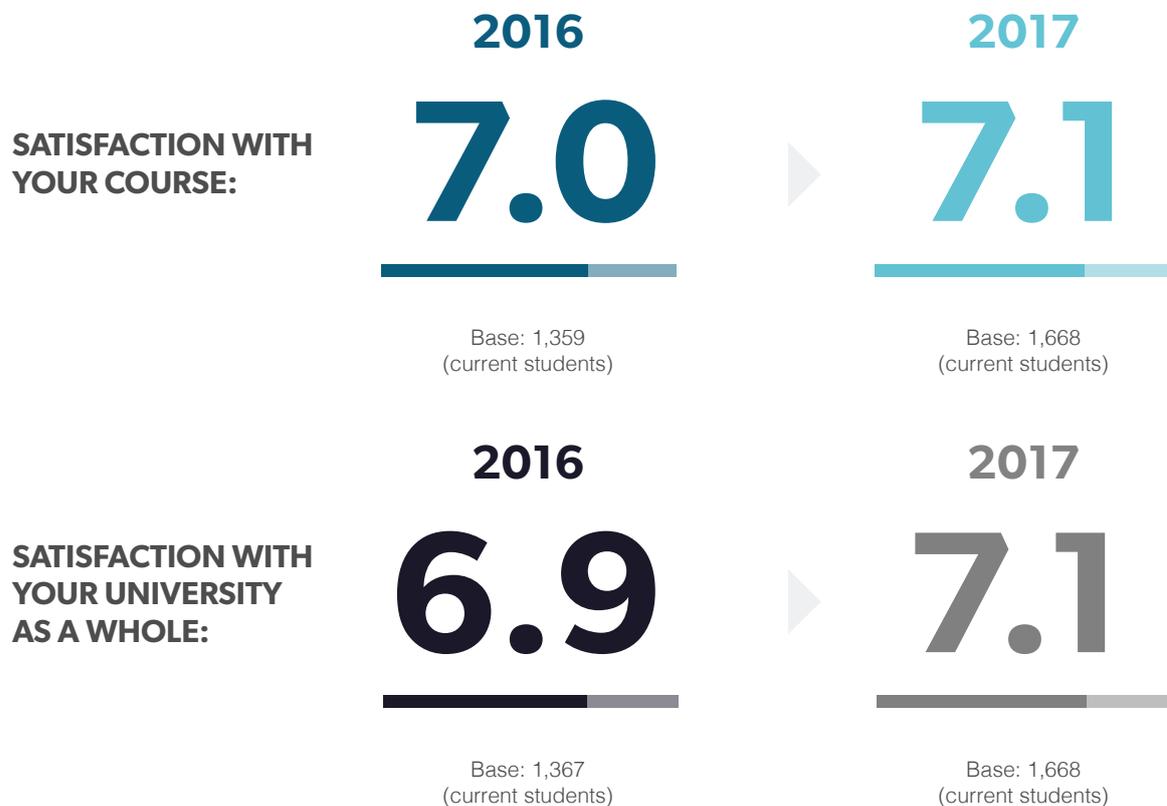
- Around a quarter said that they had considered leaving university or changing either their course or university, but most had not done so. Nonetheless, the consensus was that it should be quicker and easier for students to transfer between universities if they wanted to.

# SATISFACTION WITH UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

## HOW HAS YOUR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE MET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

PLEASE USE THE RATING SCALES TO RECORD YOUR RESPONSE WHERE 1=NOT AT ALL AND 10=COMPLETELY

Average ranks by factor



Overall, Options 2017 respondents were slightly more satisfied that both their course and university experience had met their expectations than those in 2016.

Excluding foundation years, undergraduate respondents' satisfaction with their university tended to decrease slightly as years progressed. Average satisfaction with their university was as follows:

- For Year 1 respondents (882), **7.2**
- For Year 2 or higher (not final year) respondents (408), **7.0**
- For final year respondents (213), **6.9**

Respondents who were at university on either undergraduate or postgraduate courses were asked to indicate their satisfaction with more specific aspects of their university experience.

Here we present aggregated findings, whereby Dissatisfied (thumbs down) represents the total of "Very dissatisfied" and "Somewhat dissatisfied", and Satisfied (thumbs up) represents groups "Very satisfied" and "Somewhat satisfied".

On the following page are the grouped views for each feature complete with response bases: "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" and "Not applicable" responses are not shown here, but make up the difference to 100%.

## HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF YOUR UNIVERSITY OR HE COLLEGE?

Base (current students): 1,646



## MOST RESPONDENTS AT UNIVERSITY HAVE NEVER CONSIDERED CHANGING COURSE

How often have you considered changing course?

(Base: 1,650)

- **47%** (769) had never considered it
- **37%** (609) had considered it once or twice
- **11%** (174) had considered it frequently
- **6%** (90) had considered it all the time
- **<1%** (8) did not know

How often have you considered leaving university

to get a full-time job? (Base: 1,650)

- **66%** (1,087) had never considered it
- **22%** (366) had considered it once or twice
- **8%** (131) had considered it frequently
- **3%** (51) had considered it all the time
- **<1%** (15) did not know

How often have you considered changing university?

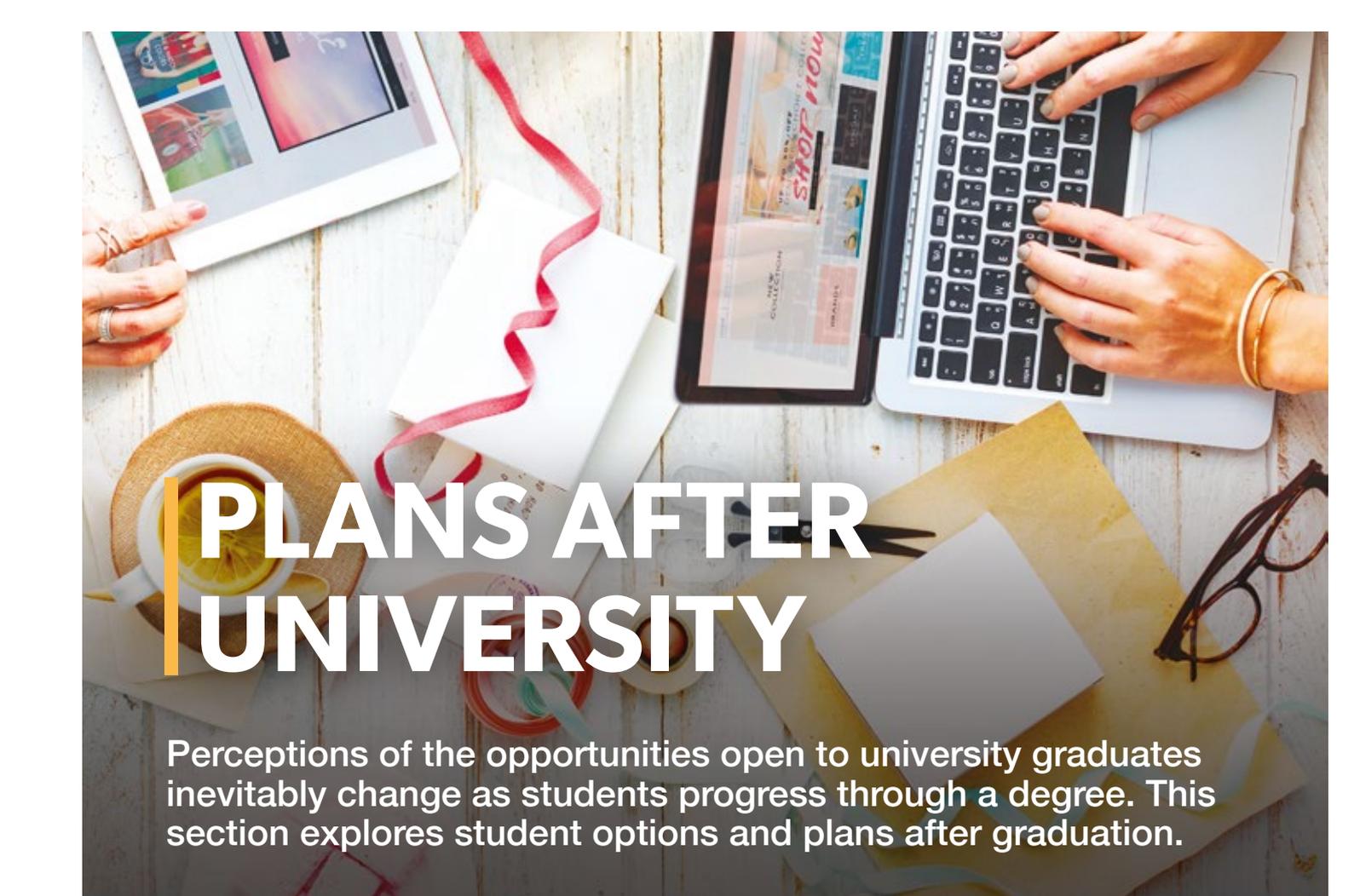
(Base: 1,649)

- **57%** (947) had never considered it
- **25%** (411) had considered it once or twice
- **11%** (187) had considered it frequently
- **5%** (87) had considered it all the time
- **1%** (17) did not know

How often have you considered leaving university

to start a business? (Base: 1,648)

- **84%** (1,388) had never considered it
- **10%** (162) had considered it once or twice
- **3%** (48) had considered it frequently
- **2%** (35) had considered it all the time
- **<1%** (15) did not know



# PLANS AFTER UNIVERSITY

Perceptions of the opportunities open to university graduates inevitably change as students progress through a degree. This section explores student options and plans after graduation.

## KEY INSIGHTS

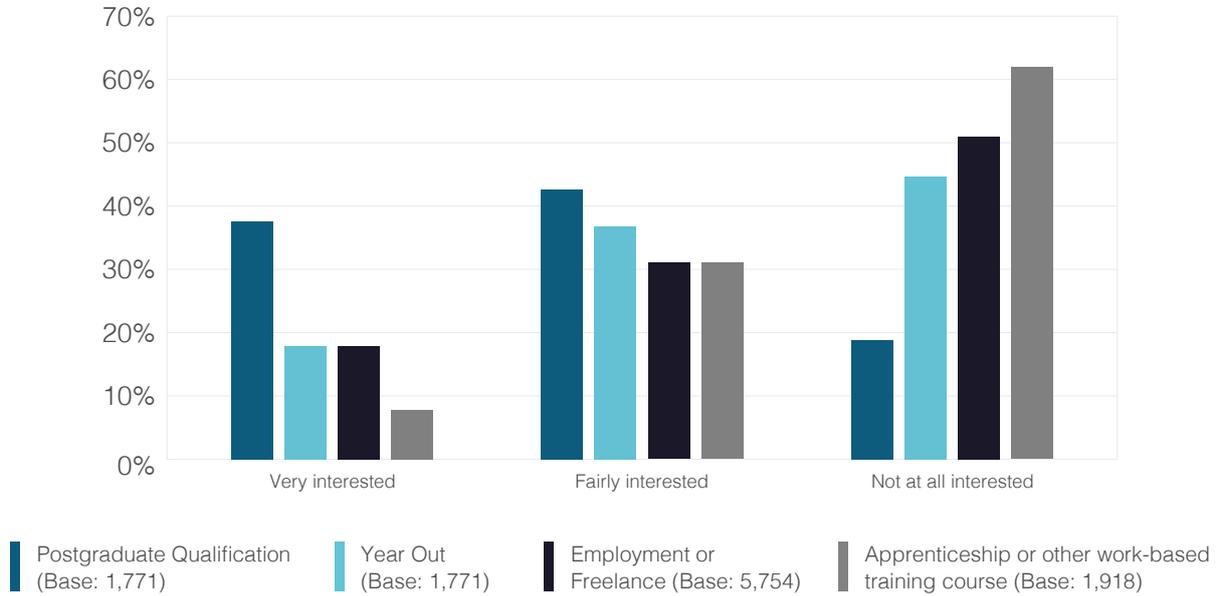
Responses to questions in this section were filtered to reflect the views of respondents who were at university at the time.

### Doing a postgraduate qualification remained the most popular pathway choice after graduating

- Students were feeling more informed about this option than previously but there appeared to be a need for more information earlier on in their degrees. Going into employment also remained a popular choice.
- Although more students were showing interest in taking a year out post-graduation in Options 2017 than in Options 2016, it wasn't likely to be their actual choice.

# INTEREST IN OPTIONS AFTER GRADUATION

## HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS AFTER GRADUATION?

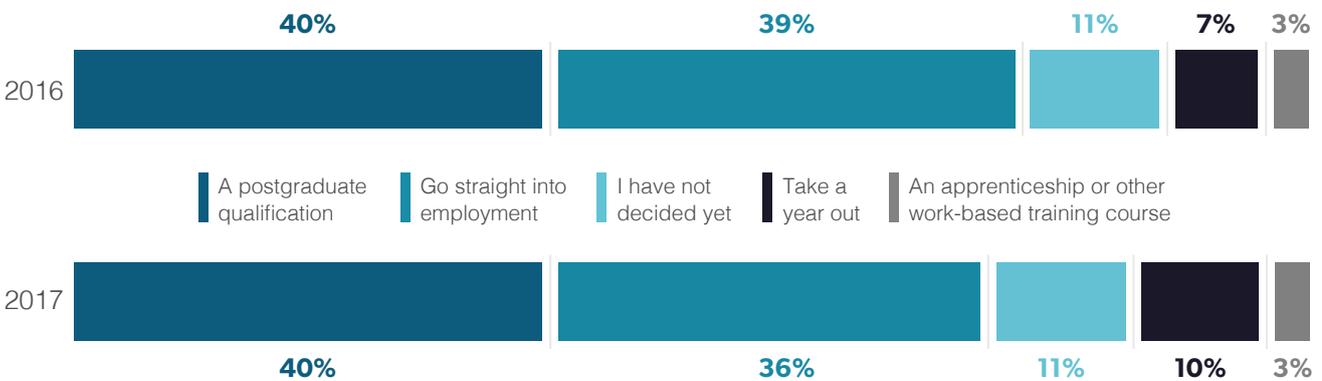


\*Please note, that the response option "Employment or Freelance" was aggregated from three options which were: "Go straight into employment", "Go into the services (such as armed forces, police force or fire service)" and "Set up own business or go freelance".

# MOST RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEY WERE MOST LIKELY TO TAKE A POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION

## WHICH ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO DO AFTER GRADUATING?

(Single Response) Filtered bases (current university students): 1,473 (2016), 1,771 (2017)



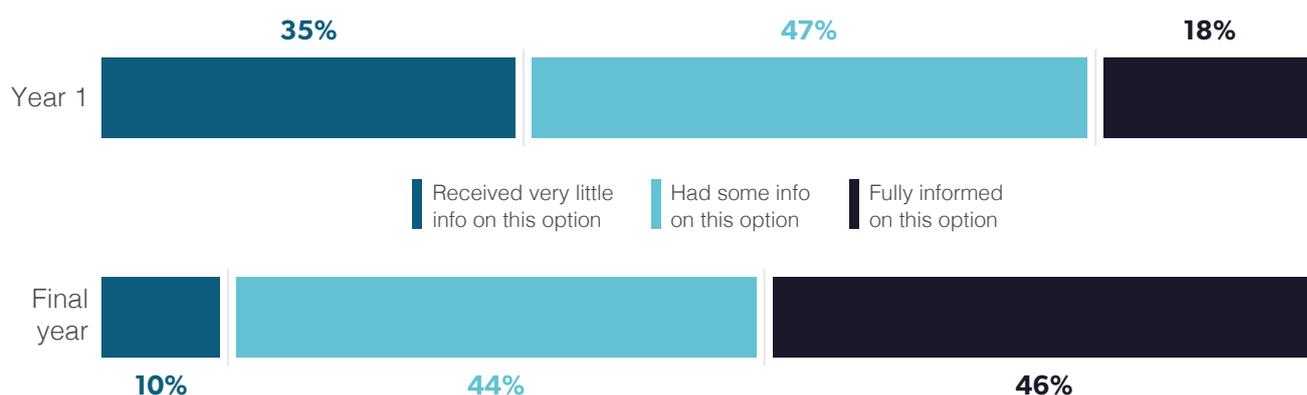
Options 2017 respondents who were at university were slightly more likely to say that they were most likely to take a year out after graduating (10%) than 2016 respondents (7%).

The highest proportions of respondents who were at university said that they were most likely going to either take a postgraduate qualification or go straight into employment after graduating.

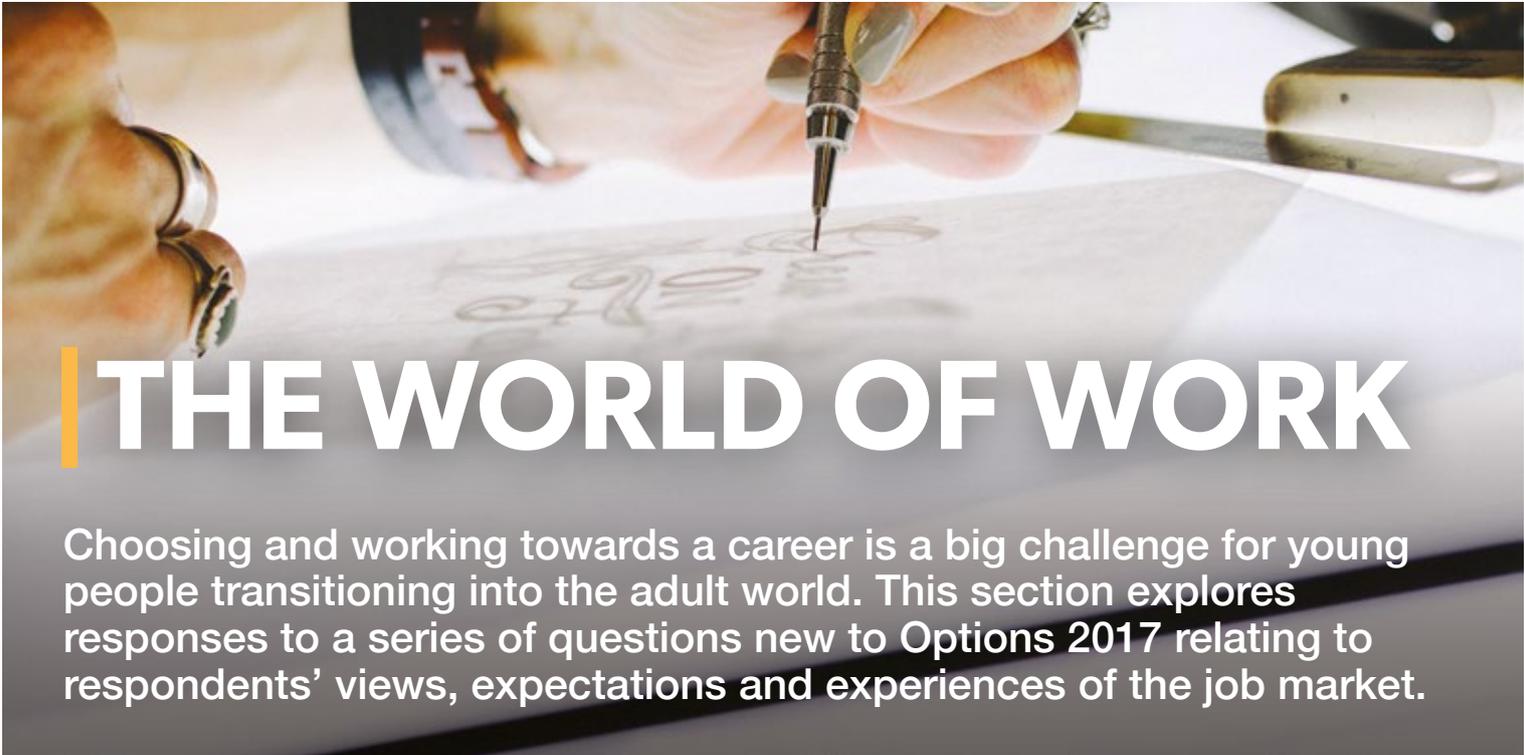
## HOW INFORMED CURRENT STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT TAKING A POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION

### HOW MUCH INFORMATION HAVE YOU HAD ABOUT TAKING A POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION?

(Single Response) Filtered bases (current Year 1 and final year university students): 993 (Year 1), 224 (Final year)



Undergraduate respondents in their final year of university were more likely to feel fully informed on postgraduate qualifications (46%) than first year undergraduates (18%).



# THE WORLD OF WORK

Choosing and working towards a career is a big challenge for young people transitioning into the adult world. This section explores responses to a series of questions new to Options 2017 relating to respondents' views, expectations and experiences of the job market.

## KEY INSIGHTS

This section explores the key reasons and use of information sources by respondents who either had chosen to go into employment or freelance, or who were already employed or had gone freelance.

Responses were filtered to those who were most likely to be thinking about their future careers, including: respondents in Years 11 to 13, those on gap years, on apprenticeships or in vocational training, and those on undergraduate courses.

### Earning money remained the key reason for going into employment or freelancing

- Career factors such as developing skills were valuable.

### Females were generally less confident than males about the world of work

- Males tended to be more confident about what would be required of them to get a job and they tended to report having received more information about careers than females. They also tended to be slightly more future-focused than females regarding earnings and progression, and being more prepared to act if issues arose. They were generally more interested in self-employment in the future than females. Generally, females were more likely to want to feel secure in their job.

### Young people whose parents had not been to university were generally more prepared for the process of applying for jobs

- Most said that they had CV writing and interview experience, had received some information on applying for jobs either at home or school, and were aware of what would be required to secure a job. This was less likely however, when parents had been to university.

### A sense of fulfilment was the most important factor of a job but career progression was also important, as was earning well

- Those from less advantaged backgrounds tended to seek maximum value from their employment, prioritising training and development over personal fulfilment.

## Expectations of a first full-time job were wide-ranging but mainly related to career progression and training

- Most expected training and development on-the-job, clear paths for progression and flexible working hours. Many also expected to have to prove themselves early on.
- If expectations were not met, most were prepared to give their employers a chance to improve before looking elsewhere.

## Most were undecided about self-employment in the future

- Over a quarter said that they would strongly consider this option but almost another fifth said that they would rule this out.

# EARNING MONEY IS A KEY REASON INFLUENCING RESPONDENTS' DECISIONS

## WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE KEY REASONS YOU DECIDED TO GO INTO EMPLOYMENT / FREELANCE?

PLEASE SELECT THE 3 MOST IMPORTANT REASONS

(Multiple response) Bases (respondents who were either going into or were already in employment): 268



Earn money



Improved long-term career prospects  
(experience better than study)



Interest in chosen job



Gain independence  
from home



Gain CV experience



Learn real commercial skills



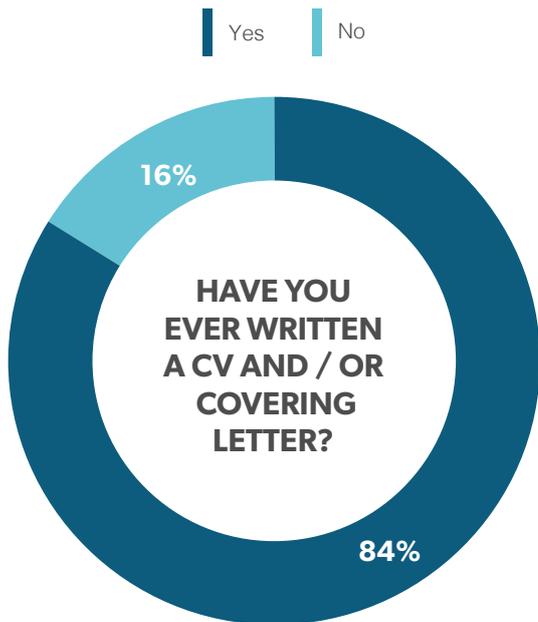
Opportunity to get a job /  
nervousness about graduate  
employment prospects



Have a good time



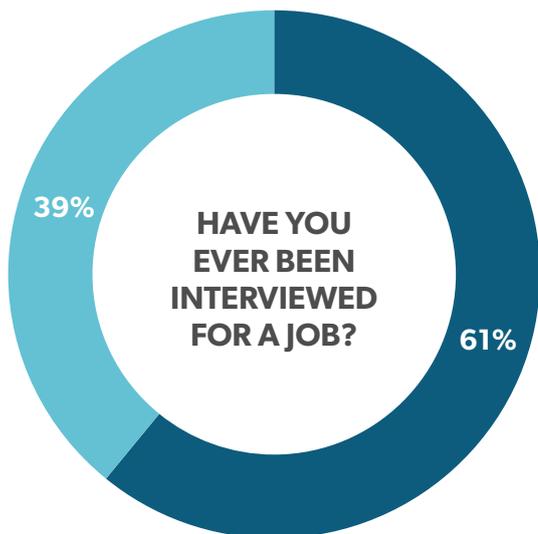
Develop commercial  
contacts / network



## THE VAST MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS HAVE EXPERIENCE OF WRITING CVS AND/OR COVERING LETTERS

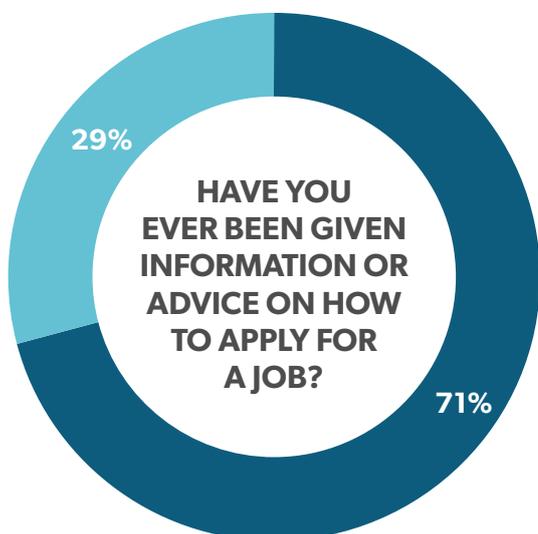
There was a general trend of increased CV / covering letter writing experience with decreased parental university experience.

Free school meal respondents were slightly more likely to have CV / covering letter writing experience (87%) than non-FSM respondents (83%).



## THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS TEND TO HAVE INTERVIEW EXPERIENCE

Female respondents thinking about future careers were slightly more likely to have interview experience (62%) than male respondents (58%).

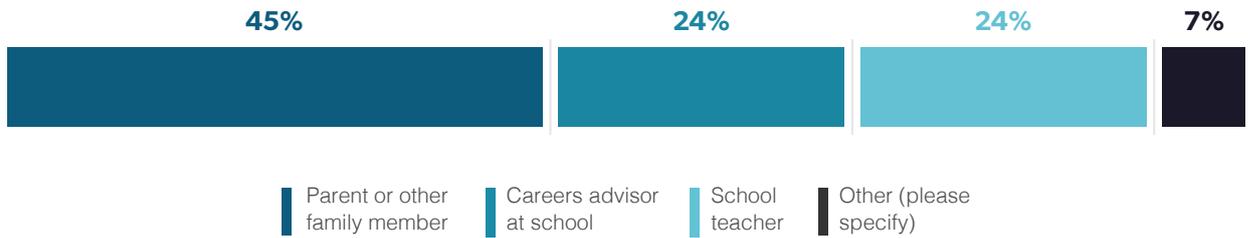


## GENDER DIFFERENCES HAD AN IMPACT WHEN GIVING ADVICE ON HOW TO APPLY FOR A JOB

Male respondents (76%) were more likely than females (70%) to have received advice on applying for jobs.

## WHO GAVE YOU ADVICE ON APPLYING FOR JOBS?

(Single-response) Filtered base (Years 11-13, gap year, apprenticeships / vocational training, current undergraduates, previously been given advice on applying for jobs): 4,600



### Gender and free school meals status each have an impact on the source of information for applying for jobs

Female respondents were slightly more likely to say that they had received advice on applying for jobs from parents or other members of their family (46%) than male respondents (42%). Male respondents however, were more likely to have received advice from careers advisers at school (28%) than female respondents (23%).

Free school meals status had an impact on the sources of information for applying for jobs. Non-free school meal respondents were more likely to have received advice on applying for jobs from a parent or family member (46%) than free school meal respondents (37%).

Free school meal respondents were slightly more likely to have received advice on applying for jobs from a school careers adviser (28%) than non-free school meal respondents (24%).

## HOW CONFIDENT DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU POSSESS THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO SECURE A JOB?

(I.E. WRITING A CV / COVERING LETTER AND GOING THROUGH THE INTERVIEW PROCESS)

(Single-response) Filtered base (Years 11-13, gap year, apprenticeships / vocational training, current undergraduates): 6,511



### Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to feel confident that they possessed the skills to secure a job

Male respondents were more likely to say that they felt very prepared and knew what was required to secure a job (31%) than female respondents (24%).

When both parents had been to university, respondents were more likely to feel they had some idea of what was expected of them to secure a job (55%) than when either one parent had been to university (49%) or neither parent had been to university (48%).

# EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR FIRST FULL-TIME JOB

## WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR FIRST FULL-TIME JOB?

(Multiple response) Filtered base (Year 11-13, gap year, apprenticeships / vocational training, current undergraduates): 6,511

**73%**

I expect to receive formal training when I first start

**50%**

I expect to be shown a clear path for me to progress within the company

**48%**

I expect there to be a keen interest in my own personal development

**38%**

I expect I will have to do a lot of basic admin tasks to prove myself

**30%**

I expect to be able to work flexible hours

**19%**

I expect the company to run social events separate from the job (i.e. team drinks...)

**19%**

I expect to receive an annual pay rise

**8%**

I expect to have the option of working from home

**7%**

I expect to receive a Christmas bonus

**5%**

None of the above

## Gender had an impact on respondents' expectations of a first full-time job



<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>	I expect to have the option of working from home
<b>23%</b>	<b>18%</b>	I expect to receive an annual pay rise
<b>55%</b>	<b>50%</b>	I expect to be shown a clear path for progression within the company
<b>67%</b>	<b>76%</b>	I expect to receive formal training when I first start

# HAVING A SENSE OF FULFILMENT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN LOOKING FOR A JOB

## WHAT WILL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR TO YOU WHEN LOOKING FOR A JOB?

(Single-response) Filtered base (Years 11-13, gap year, apprenticeships / vocational training, current undergraduates): 6,511



Gender had an impact on respondents' most important factors when looking for a job. Female respondents were more likely to prioritise a sense of fulfilment when looking for a job (35%) than male respondents (30%), whereas male respondents were more likely to prioritise a high salary (23%) over female respondents (17%).

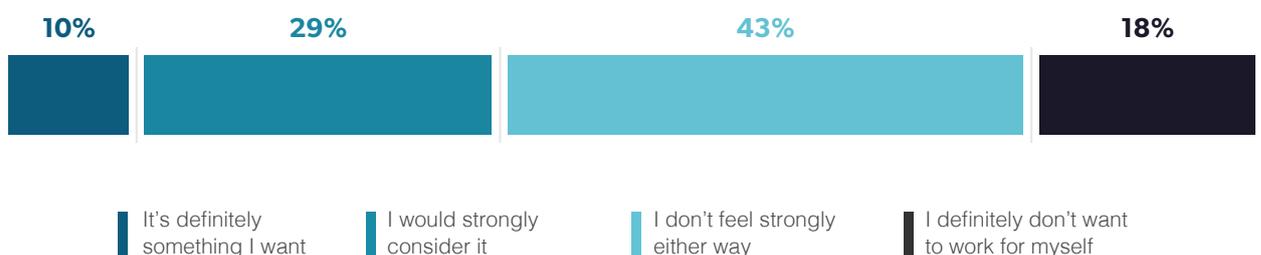
Non-free school meal respondents were more likely to prioritise a sense of fulfilment (35%) than free school meal respondents (28%).

# OVER A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS ARE CONSIDERING BEING SELF-EMPLOYED IN THE FUTURE

## HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO BE SELF-EMPLOYED IN THE FUTURE?

(I.E. OWNING YOUR OWN BUSINESS OR WORKING AS A FREELANCER)

(Single-response) Filtered base (Years 11-13, gap year, apprenticeships / vocational training, current undergraduates): 6,511



**Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to consider self-employment in the future**

Females were more likely to say that they definitely did not want to be self-employed in the future (20%) than male respondents (13%).

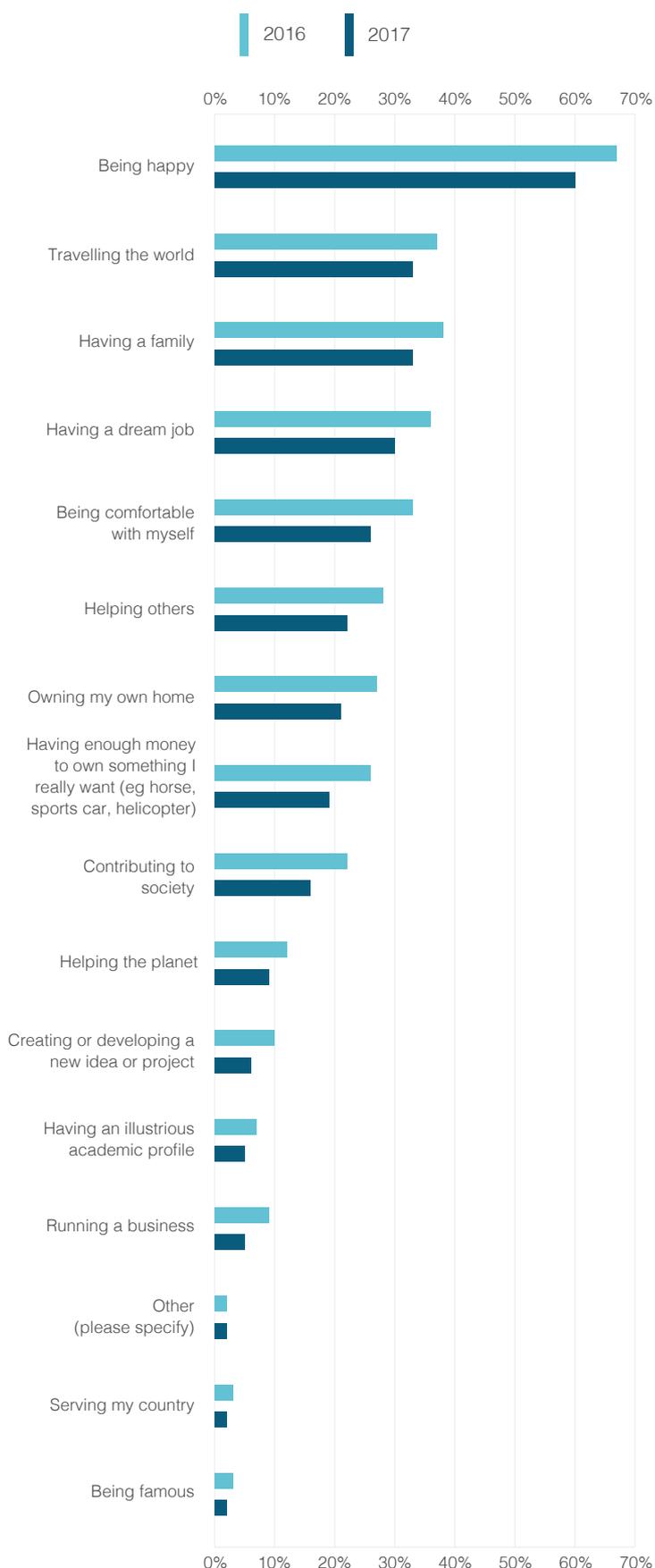
Male respondents thinking about future careers were slightly more likely to say that they would strongly consider self-employment in the future (31%) than female respondents (28%). Males were also more likely to say that they definitely want to be self-employed in the future (15%) than female respondents (7%).

**BEING HAPPY IS THE BIGGEST LONG-TERM MOTIVATION FOR THE FUTURE**

**WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST MOTIVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE?**

CHOOSE UP TO THREE OPTIONS

(Multiple-response) Base: 8,340 (2016), 9,541 (2017)



# WIDENING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Many of the areas explored in this report have included comparisons by widening participation criteria such as free school meals status and parental experience at university. This section investigates responses to a specific series of questions relating to widening access and participation in the higher education sector.

## KEY INSIGHTS

Responses to these questions were filtered to reflect the views of respondents who were at university, on both undergraduate or postgraduate courses.

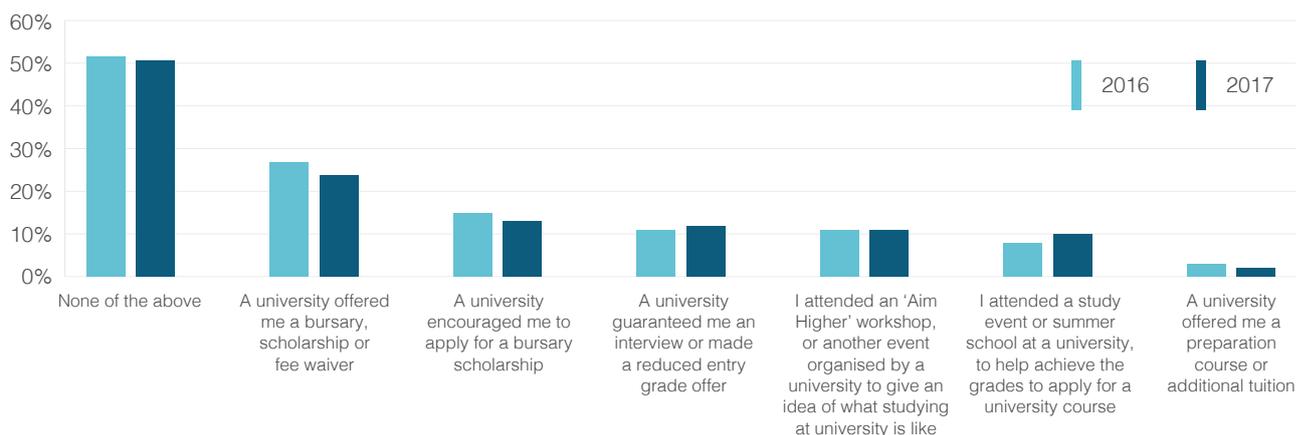
**Around a quarter of respondents at university had been offered some form of financial support or incentive by their university**

- The majority of respondents at university said they had received no access support. Students from less advantaged backgrounds were much more likely to have either received some form of access support, or to have been encouraged to seek it.

## TYPES OF ACCESS SUPPORT RECEIVED

### HAVE YOU RECEIVED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF ACCESS SUPPORT?

(Multiple-response) Base (current university students): 1,363 (2016), 1,790 (2017)



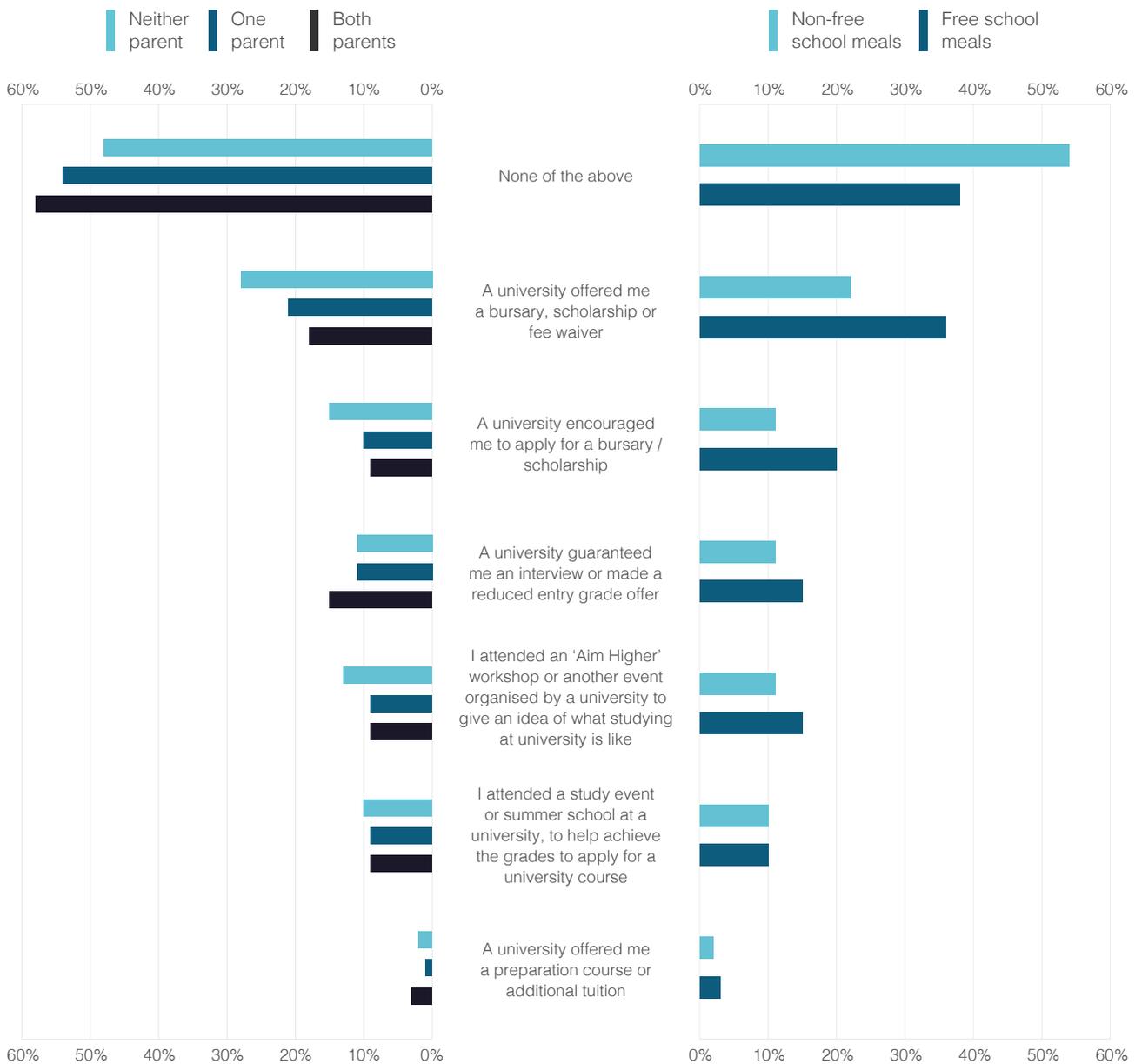
# TYPES OF ACCESS SUPPORT AVAILABLE AND RECEIVED

*When neither parent had been to university, respondents were more likely to say that they had either been encouraged to apply for or were offered a bursary, scholarship or fee waiver*

## HAVE YOU RECEIVED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF ACCESS SUPPORT?

(Multiple-response) Bases (current university students):  
Neither parent (1,322), One parent (500), Both parents (386)

(Multiple-response) Bases (current university students):  
Non-free school meals (1,794), Free school meals (410)



Free school meals respondents were more likely than non-free school meals respondents to have been encouraged to apply for or have received a bursary, scholarship or fee waiver and slightly more likely to have attended a university taster event.

# STRESS AND SATISFACTION WITH LIFE ATTRIBUTES

The transition period from school or college to higher education can be a big change for young people. This section showcases responses to questions relating to respondents' feelings of stress and their views on personal attributes.

## KEY INSIGHTS

Responses in this section were open to all respondents.

### Most were mainly excited for the future and sometimes anxious

- Males tended to report feeling less stressed than females.

### There appeared to be a mismatch between how important respondents thought some life attributes were to other people, and how satisfied they were personally

- Their personal satisfaction however, and the importance of themselves to others was more aligned to their academic ability and their friendship circle.

## FEELINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE

### WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE, HOW DO YOU FEEL?

(Single-response) Base: 10,325

18%

Very excited.  
Bring it on!

54%

Mostly excited,  
sometimes anxious

22%

Mostly anxious,  
sometimes excited

6%

Very anxious, I am quite  
concerned about the future

	<b>Very excited. Bring it on!</b>	<b>Mostly excited, sometimes anxious</b>	<b>Mostly anxious, sometimes excited</b>	<b>Very anxious, I am quite concerned about the future</b>
	<b>27%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>5%</b>
	<b>15%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>7%</b>

**Male respondents were more likely than females to feel very excited when thinking about the future**

## SATISFACTION WITH LIFE ATTRIBUTES AND PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE TO OTHERS

The respondents rated the listed features in order of importance; the importance each feature holds for them and the importance they think each feature holds for others.

### HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE FOLLOWING FEATURES IN YOUR LIFE AND HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK THEY ARE TO OTHERS?

(Single-response): Comparison of all Options 2017 respondents' personal satisfaction with life features with their perceived importance to others by gender

	% Satisfied with self / own performance			% Perceived importance to others		
	Female respondents	Male respondents	Total respondents	Female respondents	Male respondents	Total respondents
Academic ability	<b>74%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>81%</b>
Friendship circle	<b>71%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Income / job status	<b>29%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Personal appearance	<b>40%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>77%</b>
Relationship status	<b>45%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>53%</b>
Social life	<b>54%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>78%</b>
Social profile / reputation	<b>50%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>71%</b>

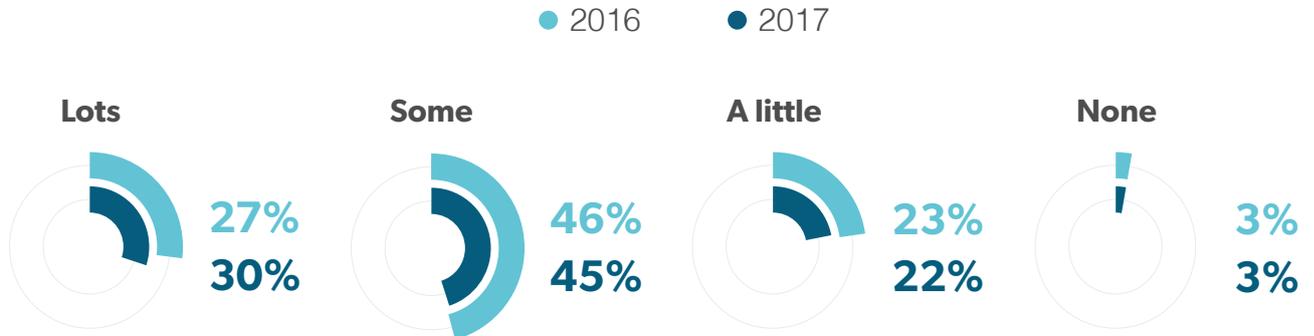
Please note fewer respondents answered the question relating to perceived importance of attributes to others than answered the personal satisfaction question.

**Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to say that they were satisfied with all listed personal attributes other than relationship status**

# DAY-TO-DAY STRESS

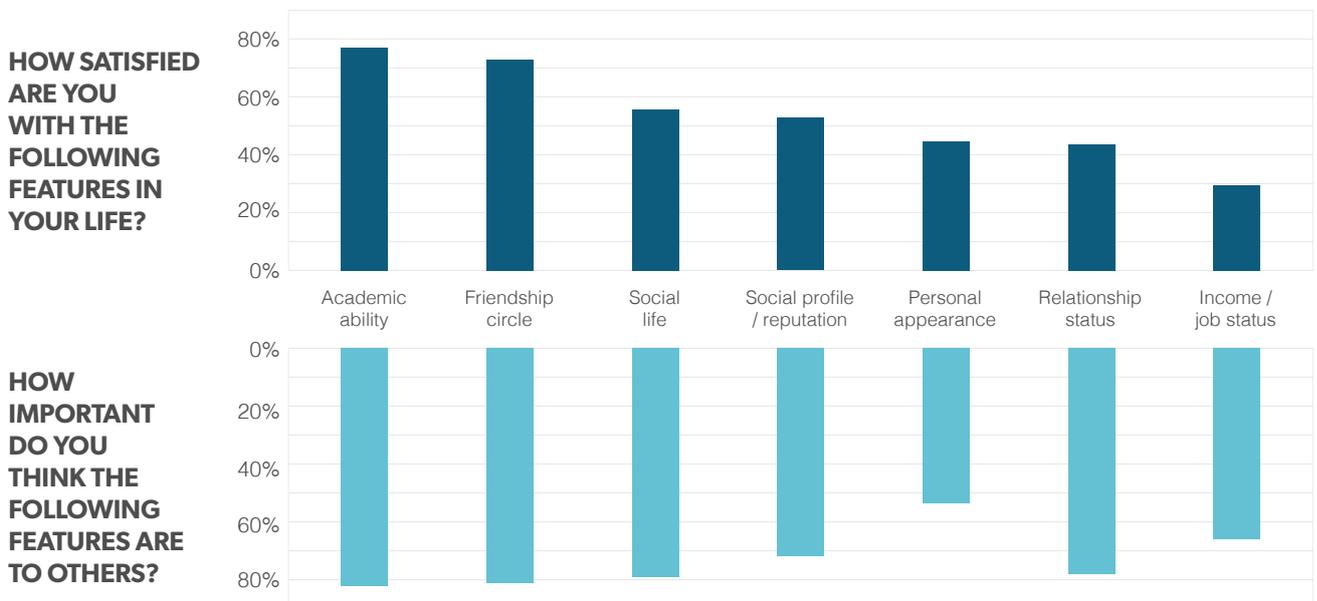
## HOW MUCH STRESS DO YOU FEEL UNDER DAY-TO-DAY?

(Single-response) Bases: 8,749 (2016), 10,265 (2017)

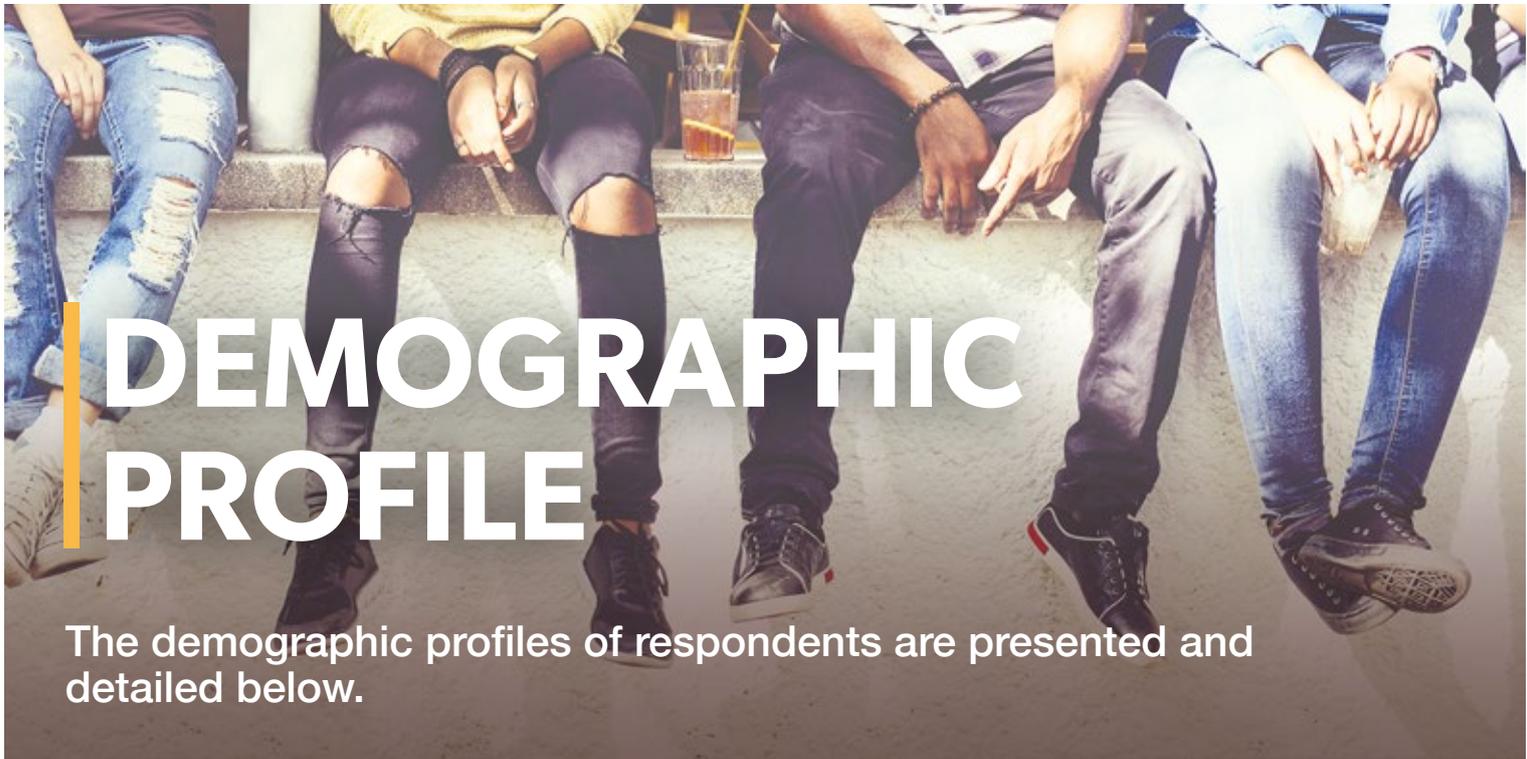


*Female respondents were more likely to say that they felt under lots of stress from day-to-day (35%) than male respondents (20%)*

# RESPONDENTS ARE MOST PERSONALLY SATISFIED WITH THEIR ACADEMIC ABILITY AND FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE



(Single-response): Comparison of all Options 2017 respondents' personal satisfaction with life features with their perceived importance to others by gender



# DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The demographic profiles of respondents are presented and detailed below.

## GENDER

Of 10,236 respondents:

- **70%** were female
- **29%** were male
- **<1%** preferred not to say
- **<1%** were transgender

## AGE

Of 9,884 respondents:

- **74%** were aged between 16 to 18 years
- **17%** were aged between 19 to 20 years
- **7%** were aged between 21 to 25 years
- **1%** were aged between 26 to 30 years
- **<1%** were aged 31 years or over

## LOCATION (UK COUNTRY)

Of 10,238 respondents:

- **91%** were living in England
- **4%** were living in Scotland
- **4%** were living in Wales
- **2%** were living in Northern Ireland
- **<0.5%** were living on the Channel Islands
- **<0.5%** were living on the Isle of Man

## LOCATION (REGION)

Of 10,238 respondents:

- **22%** were living in the South East
- **17%** were living in Greater London
- **14%** were living in the South West
- **12%** were living in the North West
- **10%** were living in the West Midlands
- **10%** were living in the East Midlands
- **8%** were living in Yorkshire and Humberside
- **4%** were living in the North East
- **3%** were living in the East

## ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Of 10,236 respondents:

- **71%** were from white backgrounds
- **15%** were from Asian backgrounds
- **6%** were from black backgrounds
- **5%** were from mixed backgrounds
- **2%** preferred not to say
- **1%** were from other backgrounds
- **<0.5%** were unknown

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Of 9,964 respondents:

- **16%** indicated that they had received free school meals
- **84%** indicated that they had not received free school meals

## COURSES STUDIED

Of 9,839 respondents, responses to the question “What will you/are you/did you study at school?” were as follows:

- **83%** AS / A-levels
- **6%** ‘Other’ responses; mainly relating to GCSEs
- **6%** BTEC
- **3%** Scottish Highers
- **1%** International Baccalaureate
- **<0.5%** GNVQ

## SCHOOL TYPE

Of 9,998 respondents, responses to the question “Which of these best describes your current school (or the school you went to)?” were as follows:

- **50%** - some pupils go to university; some go on to other things. All options are encouraged
- **42%** - the majority of pupils go to university; it’s expected
- **6%** - very few pupils go to university. The majority find work or university alternatives
- **2%** - other (please specify)

## WIDENING PARTICIPATION

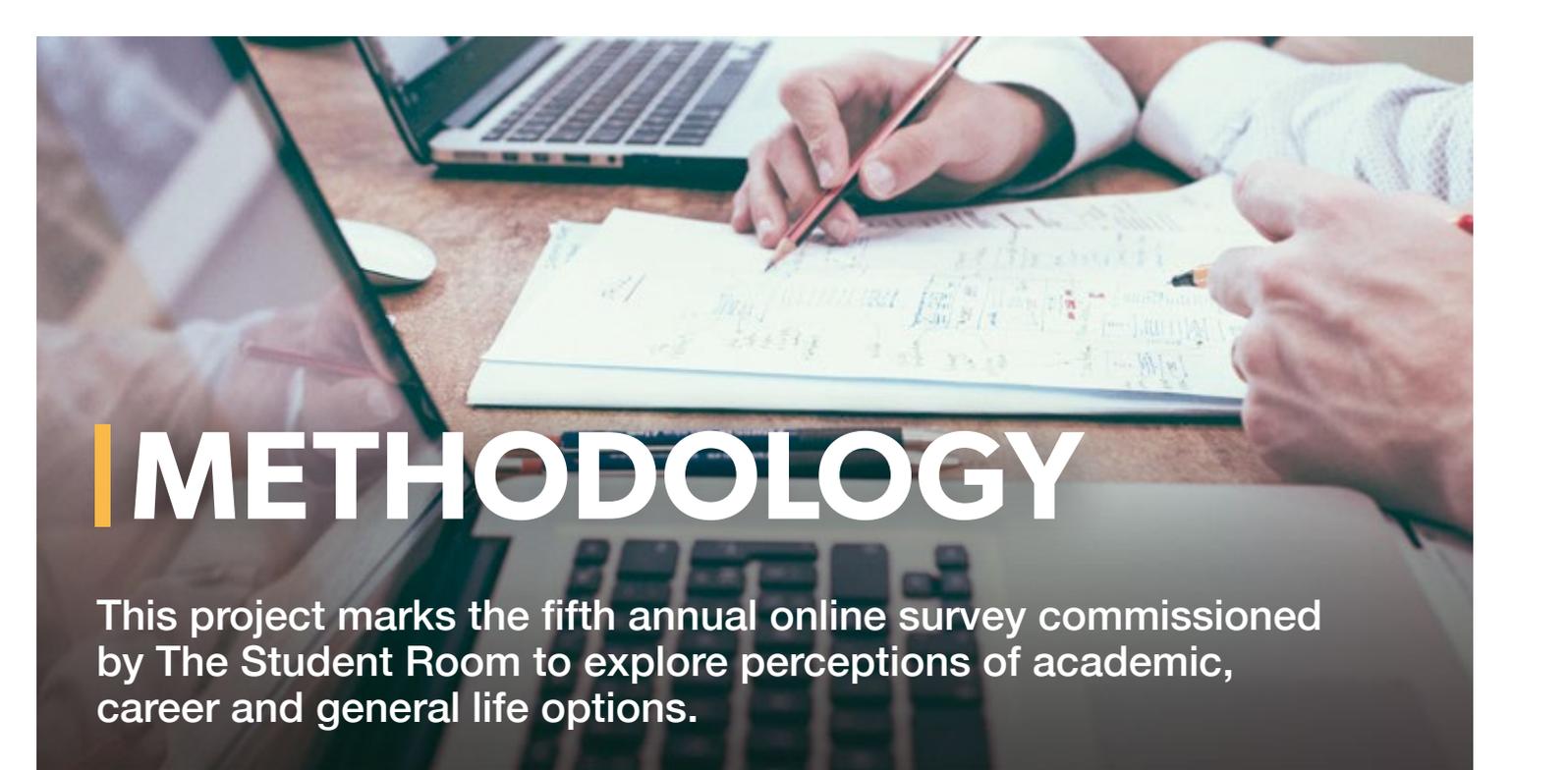
Of 10,041 respondents:

- **52%** said that neither parent had been to university
- **26%** said that one parent had been to university
- **23%** said that both parents had been to university

## ACADEMIC PROFILE

Of 9,883 respondents, responses to the question “What type of school/college do you/did you attend?” were as follows:

- **35%** 6th form college
- **20%** academy school
- **12%** comprehensive school
- **11%** grammar school
- **9%** independent (private) school
- **9%** free school
- **4%** FE college



# METHODOLOGY

**This project marks the fifth annual online survey commissioned by The Student Room to explore perceptions of academic, career and general life options.**

The research sample was derived from The Student Room online community. The population of interest was those aged 16 years or over and living in the UK.

The survey was live between the 11th May to 8th June 2017 and attracted a total of 12,127 responses. An initial screener question disqualified 1,017 respondents who were either aged under 16 years or residing outside of the UK, leading to a final usable sample of 11,110 respondents. Of this figure, 6,763 respondents completed all survey questions to the end, yielding a completion rate of 61%.

The survey was comprised of 109 questions in total, including multiple routes aimed at different respondent types; respondents did not answer all questions, but those deemed relevant to them based on their responses to specific classification questions. Considering the length and depth of the survey, this indicates high levels of engagement among the sample.

The respondent profile can be found in the demographic profile section, on the previous two pages.

**Following on from previous years, the objectives of the Options 2017 project were to explore:**

- Motivations for choosing the three main post-level 3 options; university study, apprenticeships or vocational training, and employment
- The availability of and value credited to information supporting post-level 3 decision-making
- Perceptions and the impact of university tuition fees and cost of living on post-level 3 decision-making
- Perceptions of apprenticeships and vocational training routes
- Pathways into various study options

The research was conducted via an online survey and respondents were recruited through links to the survey featured on The Student Room website, direct email messaging and social media. Participation was incentivised through a prize draw to win a GoPro Hero5 Black, a Nintendo Switch with two games, a day-trip for two to Paris, or one of five £10 Amazon vouchers. Respondents were also given the option to waive prizes in exchange for a charity donation.

**The survey contained a mixture of questions repeated from previous Options surveys with additional questions sourced from collaborators. There were also additional changes to the methodology for Options 2017 compared to previous years, including:**

- Opening the survey earlier in the year and for a longer period; previous surveys opened in June for a period of 12 days
- Changes to the incentives offered
- Changes to the structure of the survey; minor changes to the logic and adaptation of the previous 'Academic year' question to enable differentiation between sub-groups of a given classification (for example, between undergraduate and postgraduate students)

Once the survey was closed, the data was exported into Microsoft Excel for analysis. Pivot tables and SurveyMonkey filtering functions were used to analyse and cross tab various results. A confidence level of 95% ( $\alpha=.05$ ) was used.

The anonymity of respondents has been treated with the utmost importance. The response rate was very high, thus there was low risk of disclosure through data manipulation. Nonetheless, data was grouped or aggregated to avoid accidental disclosure. Values less than 0.5% or 1% are reported as <0.5% or <1%. Other data labels are rounded to the nearest whole number, causing some sets of percentages to not add up to exactly 100%. The exception in rounding to the nearest whole number is <0.5%; if rounded to 0, the data presented would not be true to the results as only true zero values have been presented as 0.

Please note that Options 2016 findings were presented based on weighted data, but the 2017 report focuses on clear bases and unweighted data and establishes trends using unweighted 2016 data.

Please also note that in areas with an exceptionally high response rate, such as questions aimed at respondents who were still in school, small differences between sub-groups are amplified. As a result, some differences may be found to be statistically significant despite being relatively small in reality, particularly after having been rounded to the nearest whole number.

This report takes findings from a much more comprehensive report and some data referenced may not be evidenced fully in this published version. Please get in touch with The Student Room if you'd like more information.









With thanks to **Julie Vincent**, Managing Director, and **Thom Kipling**, Research Analyst, from **Vincent Consulting** who produced the analysis and reporting on behalf of **The Student Room Group**.



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