



# Young people's perceptions about post-18 education and training options

A report for the University and College Union



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## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

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### Objectives

The University and College Union (UCU) commissioned ComRes to conduct research into if and how learners' perceptions of post-18 education and training options vary by gender. UCAS data has shown that young men are a third less likely than young girls to apply to higher education, and the relationship between participation in higher education and disadvantage is such that the more disadvantaged young men are, the less likely they are to apply to higher education. The opposite is the case for young women. Therefore, UCU sought to understand:

- **Why** there are significant differences between male and female participation in higher education;
- **What** levels of awareness about education and training options young people have, and which of these they feel are available to them;
- **What** information, advice or guidance young people have received about the options available to them post-18, and which of these have been most useful;
- **Whether** young people would like to progress to higher education, and what different progression routes into higher education they are aware of;
- **What** the drivers and barriers are to progressing to higher education;
- **What** the value of a degree is perceived to be;
- **If and how** these views vary by demographic group – and specifically gender, age and socio-economic background.

### Methodology

	Young men	Young women
<i>5 day qualitative online community</i>	20 young men aged 13-17 years; spread of age within the age bracket, spread of ethnicity, social grade, educational attainment, school type and region.	10 young women aged 13-17 years; spread of age within the age bracket, spread of ethnicity, social grade, educational attainment, school type and region.
<i>Quantitative survey</i>	1,000 young men aged 13-17 years; spread of age within the age bracket, spread of ethnicity, social grade, educational attainment, school type and region.	1,000 young women aged 13-17 years; spread of age within the age bracket, spread of ethnicity, social grade, educational attainment, school type and region.

## **Online Qualitative Communities**

The focus of UCU was on the differences between the perceptions of young men and young women. As such, ComRes recommended twice as many young men as young women in the qualitative phase for comparative analysis, including an emphasis on young men. This is because the hypothesis was that as social grade decreases, uptake of higher education decreases more dramatically among young men than young women.

Respondents were recruited via a mixture of free-find and database contact. Parental permission was sought for those under age 16 to participate. No set demographic quotas were applied, although a spread of age within the specified age range, school type, region, social grade, qualification type and academic performance were recruited for each gender.

Participants were invited to a private online community. The female group was moderated by Holly Wicks, and the male groups by Tom Clarkson, both Senior Consultants from ComRes. Previous experience has indicated that young males tend to feel more comfortable speaking to a male moderator, and similarly, young women tend to feel more comfortable speaking to a female moderator. The communities ran from Monday to Friday, and each participant was free to log in at a time of their choice.

## **Quantitative Survey**

There was no intentional cross-over between the qualitative online communities and the quantitative survey. The quantitative survey sample was selected via panel participants, and as with the qualitative communities, ComRes sought parental permission from parents of those aged under 16.

*All research was conducted in accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables can be found at [www.comres.co.uk](http://www.comres.co.uk).*

## **Methodology note**

'University' is referred to as a common term used among young people to refer to higher education.

'Social grade' is used to describe socio-economic status by using a combination of the occupation of the Chief Income Earner and education level. Higher social grades (e.g. AB) are more affluent and/or have a higher level of educational attainment than those from lower social grades (e.g. DE).<sup>1</sup>

References to 'younger learners' indicate those aged 13-14 in the 13-17 year old age bracket, and 'older learners' indicate those aged 16-17 in the age bracket.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mrs.org.uk/intelligence/cgg/resources/cggsocialgrade>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This research has identified the following key findings:

- **Aspirations to progress to higher education vary by gender** – Young men are less likely to state that they want to progress to higher education either straight after school or later in life than young women (65% young men, 74% young women). This overall pattern is observed across a number of variables including age, region, social grade, occupation, school/college type, and qualification level.
- **Intentions to progress to HE are affected by school/college type** – Whilst 78% of young people studying in a Private School state that they would like to progress to higher education straight after school or college, three in five (62%) State School students and only three in ten (31%) College students say the same.
- **Aspirations change with age** – Younger learners aged 13 and 14 are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education when they leave school or college than those who are 16-17 years old. Two thirds of 13 and 14 year olds (64% for both) say this, compared to half of those aged 16 or 17 (53% and 55% respectively). This indicates that younger students have good intentions about going on to higher education, but that opinion changes with age. The decline in desire to progress across ages 13-17 is steeper for young women (12%) than young men (5%).
- **Intentions to go on to HE are affected by social grade** – Those from higher social grades are more likely than those from lower social grades to say that they plan to go on to higher education when they leave school or college. More than two thirds (67%) of those from social grades AB say that they plan to go on to higher education, however this decreases to just half (52%) of those from social grades DE. The decline in desire to progress to higher education across social grades AB and DE is steeper for young men (17%) than for young women (13%).
- **Receipt of information, advice and guidance varies by school/college type and social grade** – 16% of learners who attend State School say that they have received no information, advice or guidance. One in six (17%) of those from social grade DE say that they have not received any advice or guidance, compared to just 9% of those from social grade AB. The majority of young people say that they have not received personalised support from an information, advice and guidance professional. Learners are most likely to have received advice or guidance from their family, and older learners are more likely to have received advice or guidance than younger learners. Direct contact with a university is likely to be particularly influential in encouraging participation.
- **Young men tend to source fewer types of advice or guidance** – As a result many have a narrower view of the options available to them. Rather than challenge advice given to them by an information source, they tend to trust that they would be suited to the career suggested to them.

- **Desire to go on to HE is less prominent among those who work part-time** – Those who go to school full-time are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education than those who work part time. Three in five (61%) of those in full-time education say that they want to go on to higher education, compared to half (53%) of those who work less than ten hours a week, and decreasing to just two in five (43%) of those who work for eleven hours or more per week.
- **Young men are marginally more likely than young women to say that they want to avoid debt increasingly as they get older** – 15% of 13 year old males who do not want to go on to higher education say this, compared to a third (32%) of those aged 17, although these differences are not statistically significant. Young women are concerned about debt, but this is consistent across age groups with the exception of those aged 16 years old who are more likely to say this (43%) than those of other ages. Debt is therefore likely to be a barrier to higher education for young men at the time at which they are making the decisions about their post-18 options.
- **Higher education is seen to be costly** – Young people are likely to have financial concerns about going to university. The top drivers for going on to higher education are to get good qualifications and needing to obtain good qualifications to obtain their desired career. The top barriers to going on to higher education are perceived to be the expense, and that there is no guarantee of a job after graduating.
- **Students from lower social grades are more likely to study vocational qualifications than A levels** – Young people studying for A and AS level qualifications decreases across social grades AB to DE. A quarter (26%) of young people from social grades AB say that they are studying A level qualifications, compared to 19% of those in social grade DE. Conversely, the overall incidence of study of vocational qualifications increases across social grades AB to DE.
- **Young people are unsure about whether or not non-A level subjects will support progression to HE** – Four in five (78%) young people say that universities would consider A level qualifications when looking at applicants for courses, but beyond this, young people tend to have far less certainty about other access routes into higher education.
- **Apprenticeships are appealing to young men** – Young men are more inclined (46%) than their female counterparts (36%) to say that it is likely that they will start an apprenticeship when they leave school. In contrast to those who say it is likely that they will get a degree, the perceived likelihood of gaining an apprenticeship increases as social grade decreases. Three in ten (29%) of those in social grades AB say that it is likely that they will get an apprenticeship when they leave school, compared to half (51%) of those in social grades DE. There is evidence that apprenticeships are less likely to be identified as a pathway for young women.
- **Young women have a more detailed plan of post-18 progression than young men** – This difference by gender is reinforced by the knowledge of access routes to their chosen careers;

young women tend to have a more informed view of how to access their careers, compared to young men. This tends to be particularly true of young men who have not decided on a specific career; those who have a clearer idea of their future job are informed about how to attain that role. Despite this, even those informed about the pathway to their ideal job are often less aware than their female counterparts about alternative education or training options available to them.

- **Young men tend to be more cautious about identifying with the type of person that goes to university than women** – Although both young men and young women have concerns about the workload at university, young men tend to be more cautious about identifying themselves with the type of person that they think goes to university than young women, and have concerns that they may not enjoy the academic side of university life because they would want to spend more time pursuing hobbies than their workload might allow.



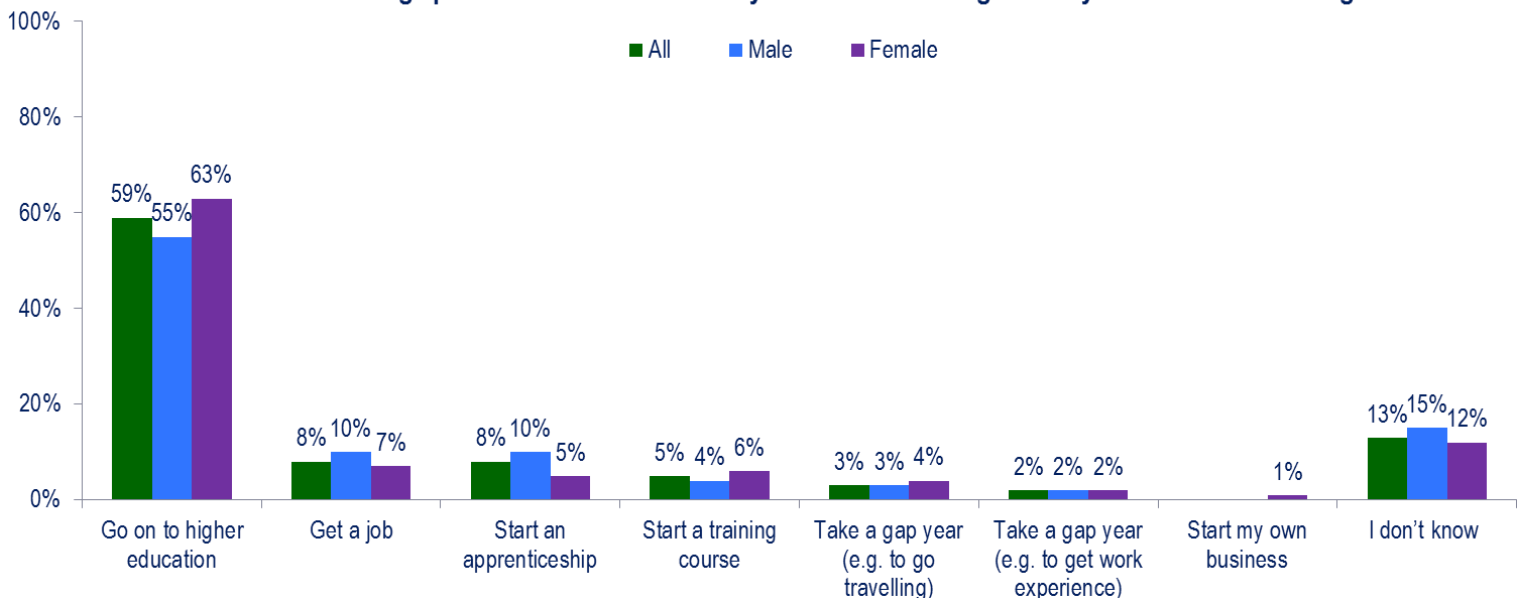
## AWARENESS OF AND SENTIMENT TOWARDS POST-18 OPTIONS

- Young women (63%) are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education than young men (55%).
- Whilst 78% of young people studying in a Private School state that they would like to progress to higher education straight after school or college, three in five (62%) State School students and only three in ten (31%) College students say the same.
- Social grade is a key factor in whether or not learners say that they want to progress to higher education. Two thirds (65%) of young men from social grades AB say that they would like to progress to higher education compared to half of those from other social grades (50% C1, 49% C2, 48% DE).

### Pathways straight after school

Three in five (59%) young people say that they want to go on to higher education straight after they leave school or college. Young men are less likely (55%) to say this than young women (63%), but are more likely to say that they want to get a job or start an apprenticeship (10% for both) than their female counterparts (7% and 5% respectively). This could be, in part, due to apprenticeships often being identified as a post-18 option for men, rather than women and the qualitative research indicates that young women could lack the information, advice and guidance needed to make informed decisions about whether or not apprenticeships could be an option available to them.

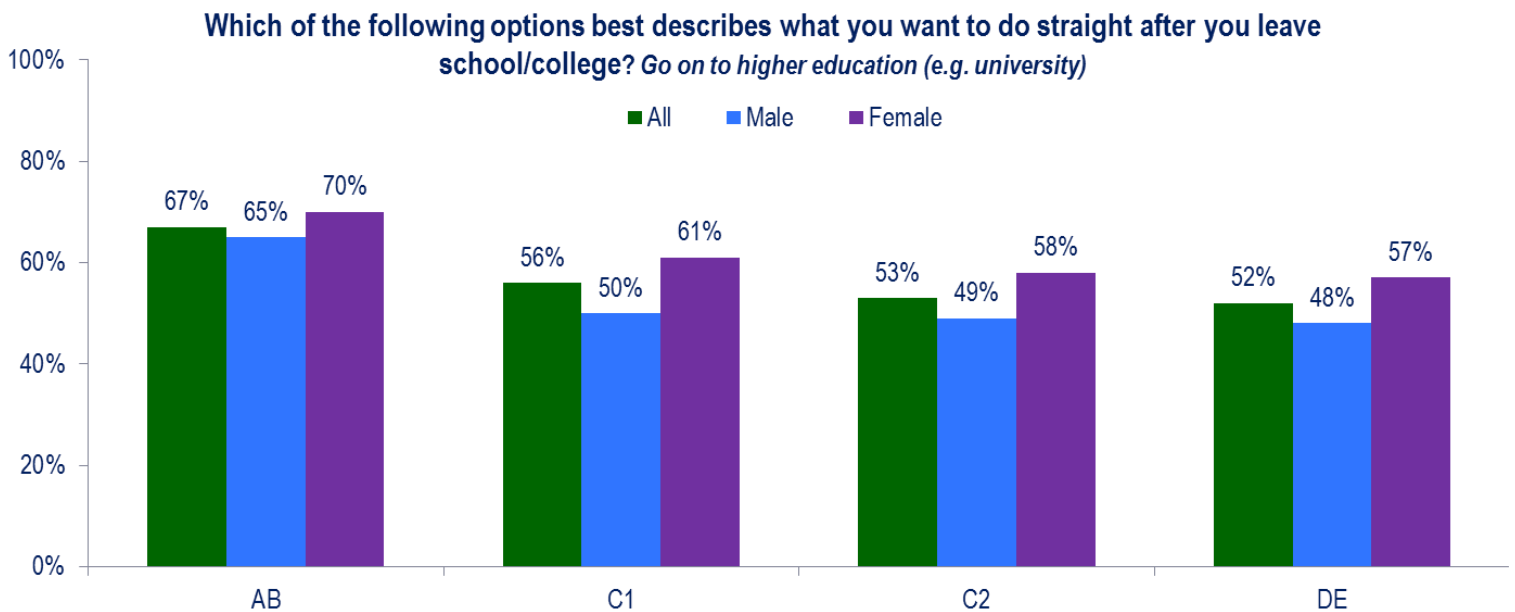
#### Which of the following options best describes what you want to do straight after you leave school/college?



**Figure 1.** Variable base: All respondents: (n=1179-n=8); All young men (n=549-n=2); All young women (n=630-n=6)

Those from higher social grades are more likely than those from all other social grades to say that they plan to go on to higher education when they leave school or college. More than two thirds (67%) of those from social grades AB say that they plan to go on to higher education, however this decreases to just half (52%) of those from social grades DE, for instance.

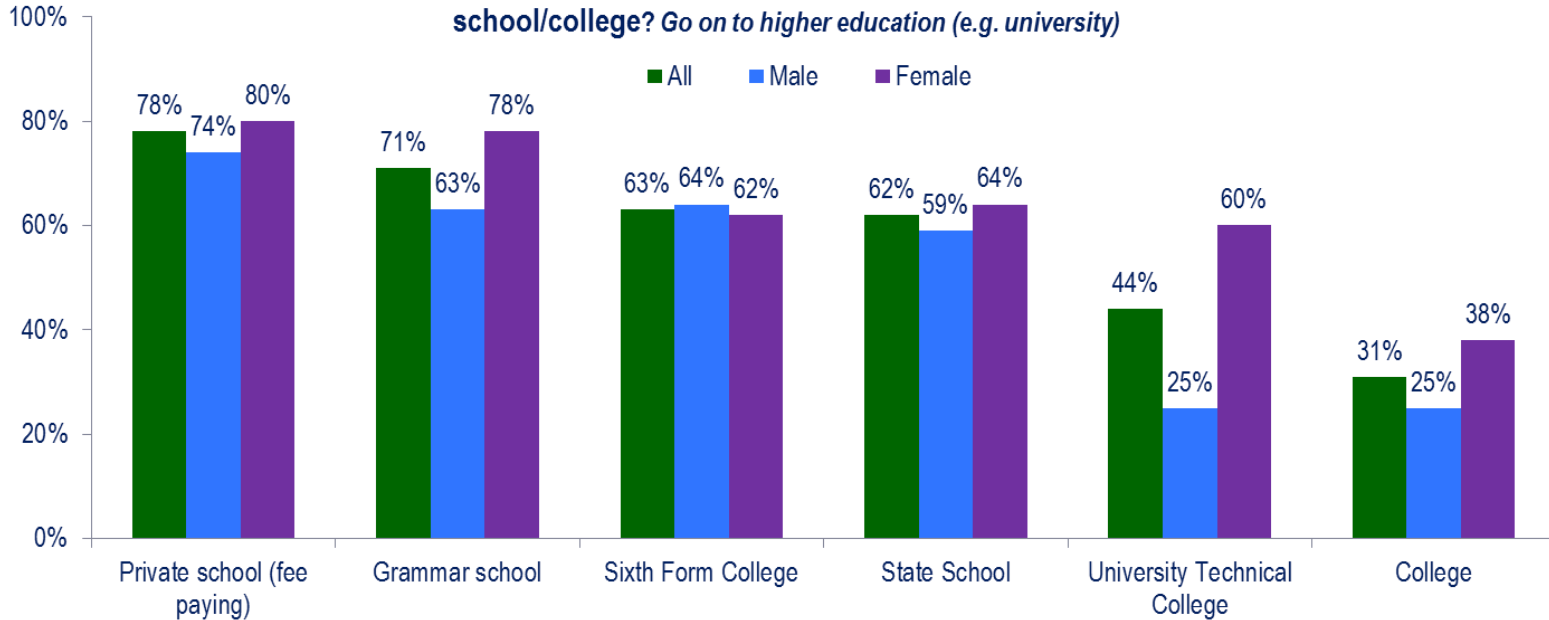
Social grade is a key factor when considering those who want to go on to higher education. In line with the finding that young people overall from social grade AB are more likely than those from other social grades to go on to higher education, this is likely to be a key factor for young men. Two thirds (65%) of young men from social grade AB say that they want to go on to higher education after school or college, compared to half of those from other social grades (50% C1, 49% C2, 48% DE). This difference is more pronounced for young men; two thirds (65%) of young men who are from social grades AB say that they want to go on to higher education straight after school or college, compared to just 48% of those from social grade DE. In comparison, seven in ten young women (70%) from social grade AB say that they want to go on to higher education compared to 57% of those from social grade DE.



**Figure 2.** Base: All respondents who want to go on to higher education straight after school/college: (n=1179); Young men (n=549); Young women (n=630)

Young men who attend Sixth Form College (64%), Private School (74%), or Grammar School (63%) are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education straight after school than those who attend State Schools (59%), University Technical Colleges (25%) and College (25%). Young women who attend Private School and Grammar School are more likely than young women from other school types to want to go on to higher education.

**Which of the following options best describes what you want to do straight after you leave school/college? Go on to higher education (e.g. university)**



**Figure 3.** Base: All respondents who want to go on to higher education straight after school/college: (n=1179); Young men (n=549); Young women (n=630)

\*Please note that the base sizes for Private School, Grammar School and University Technical College are small and should be analysed as indicative data

Younger learners aged 13 and 14 are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education when they leave school or college than those who are 16-17 years old. Two thirds of 13 and 14 year olds (64% for both) report wanting to go on to higher education straight after school or college, compared to half of those aged 16 or 17 (53% and 55% respectively). This indicates that younger students have good intentions about going on to higher education, but that opinion changes with age. The decline in desire to progress to higher education across those aged 13 and those aged 17 is steeper for young women (12 percentage points) than for young men (5 percentage points).

Overall, more young women say that they want to go on to higher education when they leave school than young men; however the gender difference is significantly reduced by age 17. For those who plan to go on to higher education, the attractiveness of progressing to higher education directly after school varies by social grade for young men and young women. Those in social group AB are more likely to describe this prospect as attractive (86%) than those in social grade DE (79%).

Learners who are in full-time education and do not work are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education than those who work part time and those who attend school part-time. Three in five (61%) of those in full-time education say that they want to go on to higher education, compared to two in five of those who work for eleven hours or more per week (43%) and a third of those in part-time education (37%). Amongst learners who plan to progress to higher education, young women (53%) are

more likely to see part-time study as attractive than young men (45%). This suggests that further exploration of the relationship between desire to progress to higher education and financial stability pre-university is needed.

Desire to go on to higher education either straight after school or later in life is particularly low among young people in the East Midlands (60%). In comparison, those from Scotland (74%), Northern Ireland (80%), and London (77%) are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education at some point in their lives.

Although the quantitative data suggests higher education is top of the agenda for young people directly after school or college, the qualitative research suggests that the front of mind perceptions of young people differ by gender when asked what they would like to do post-18. Young women often use the word 'university' in their responses, whereas their male counterparts tend to say they have decided on a career path suited to the subject areas that they enjoy. Young men tend to be predominantly focussed on the ultimate outcome of a specific career, rather than the 'next steps' of progressing through school to higher education or training opportunities.

*"I want to go into medical science like becoming a doctor or scientist because I always find out something new and enjoy the tasks given to me in school related to the subject."* – Young male, aged 14, State School

Some young people do not have a clear idea about what they would like to do when they leave school or college, and some hold on to 'dream' careers that echo those that they would have liked when they were children. In the online qualitative communities, young men seem to be slightly more inclined than young women to say that they wanted to achieve these dream careers.

*"I want to become a magician because it is a dream of mine for a while and I want to make it happen for me."* – Young man, aged 15, State School

*"I really have no idea what I'd like to do. I want to continue education and then get a good job that I don't hate. I'd love to explore the world and travel and so I want a job that permits that."* – Young man aged 17, Sixth Form College

Conversely, young women tend to have a more coherent overall picture of how they will progress after leaving school. Some say that they are aware of different options, such as apprenticeships, gap years, and working straight after school, and tend to take the approach of becoming fully informed before making a decision.

*"When I leave school I would like to own my own business in the catering industry as I have paid for tests and recently passed my catering exam, I enjoy cooking and can make things look decorative when on a plate."* – Young woman, aged 15, State School

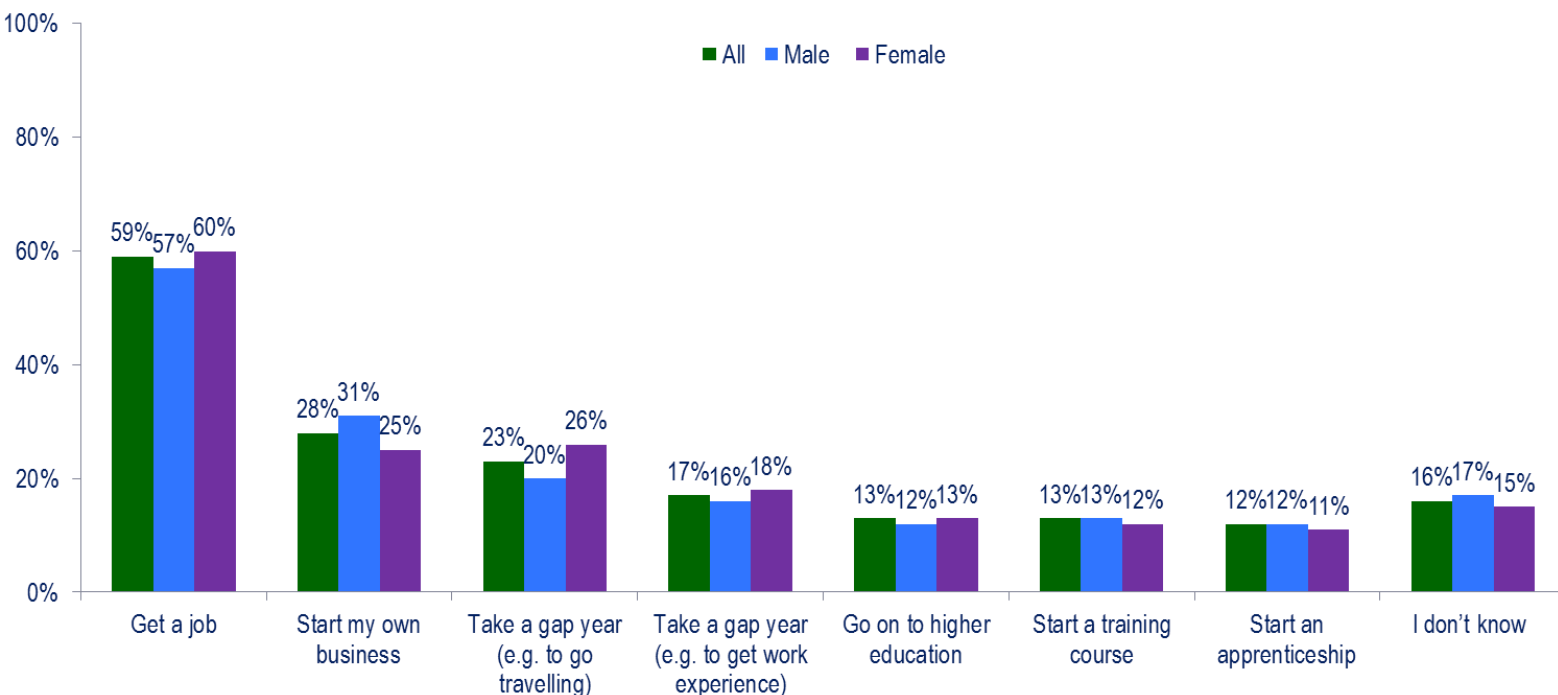
Those who say that they don't know what they want to do after they leave school or college are more likely to be male (15%) than female (12%). Young people who rate their academic performance as

average (22% for young men, 19% for young women) or bad (36% for young men, 32% for young women) are more likely to say that they don't know what they want to do after they leave school or college, than those who say that they perform well academically (12% for young men, 10% for young women). This indicates that pupils who perceive themselves to perform less well at school are more likely to formulate decisions against going on to higher education. Targeting those who have average or low perceived academic performance to inform them of the options available to them post-18 could increase awareness of higher education and decrease perceived barriers to access.

It is interesting to note that in line with wider findings in the field, this research highlights that the distribution of young people studying towards A and AS level qualifications decreases across social grades AB to DE. A quarter (26%) of young people from social grades AB say that they are studying A level qualifications, compared to 19% of those in social grade DE. Conversely, the overall incidence of study of vocational qualifications increases across social grades AB to DE. For example, 7% of learners from social grades DE are studying for a BTEC Level 2 qualification, compared to 0% of those from social grade AB. There is a need for coordinated work to signpost vocational pathways to higher education to young people and to promote these pathways via the sources of advice that they use.

## Pathways later in life

Which of the following options do you plan to do after you leave school/college? *Later in life*



**Figure 4.** Base: All respondents (n=2006); All young men (n=1001); All young women (n=1005)

Later in life, the priority for the majority of learners is to get a job, with three in five (59%) of learners selecting this as a priority for them. Entrepreneurship is more appealing to young men than young women. Young men are more likely than young women to say that they want to start their own business (31% of young men, compared to 25% of young women). Highlighting the opportunities available to young women by starting their own businesses could encourage more young women to perceive this as a possible option for them. Just 13% of young people say that going on to higher education is something that they want to do later on in life, which suggests that there could be low appetite or awareness of alternative pathways to higher education, and that higher education is predominantly seen as available to young people directly after finishing school or college.

### Priorities after school/college

When asked what their priorities are after school, 55% of young men say that they plan to go to university, despite them having less of an idea of their final goal or career. Starting an apprenticeship or getting a job (10% respectively) are identified as the next most popular choices. Those who want to pursue more vocational career paths tend to say that finding a job is a priority.

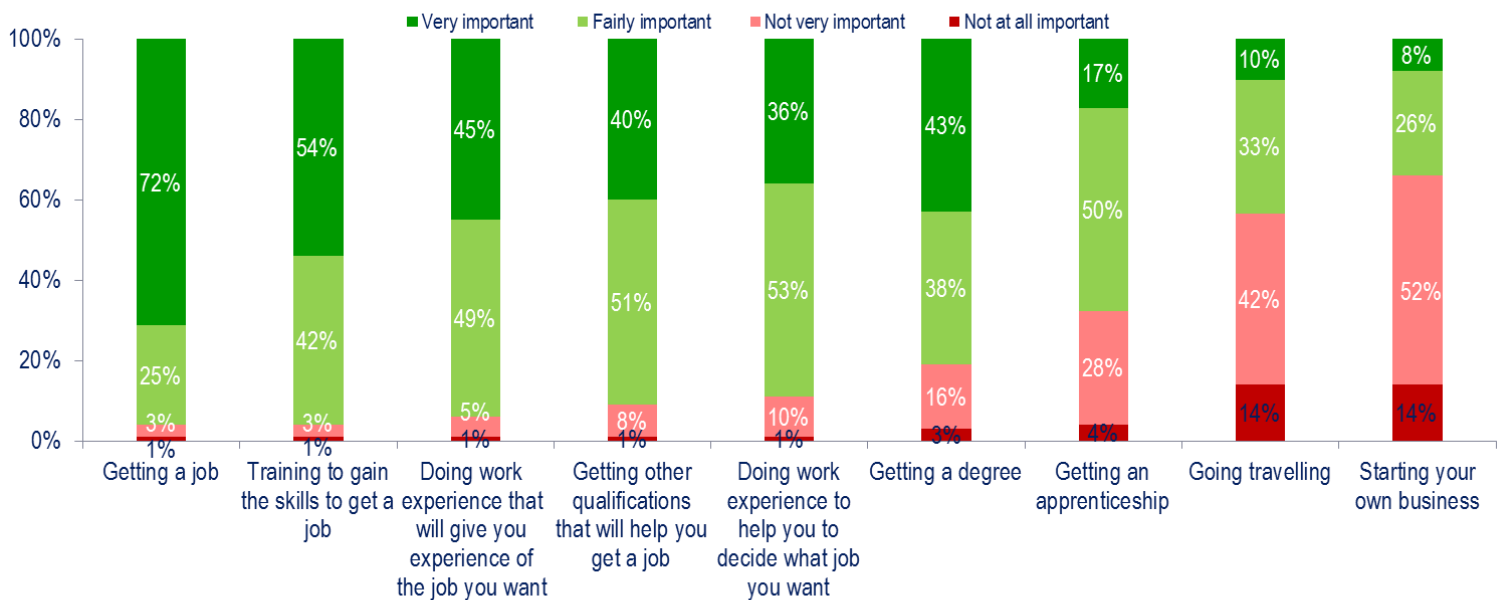
*“Not quite sure yet exactly what I need to be doing, but I’m sure I will go to College first then maybe a uni. I would prefer to learn on the job, but I been [sic] to do more research into different types of jobs as art is such a big area and I’m not sure which route I’ll take yet.” – Young man, aged 14, State School*

Young women tend to prioritise university and jobs as important post-18 pathways overall, and some perceive that they may progress to higher education after a gap year.

*“I also think going to university and travelling are my main priorities as once I am qualified I will have plenty of options and careers available. Also having time to travel in my gap year will be a priority as once I see how much is out in the world and have some experience of discovering what the world has to offer independently (without my parents) I think it will prepare and excite me for the future ahead.” – Young woman, aged 13, State School*

*“I would like to do lots of things after leaving school such as travelling and going to university because I think they help me with my education, building my personality and overall a great experience. I have always wanted to do something with babies so I would love to be a neonatologist or a midwife... I have always loved musical theatre so I will keep that going on the side and also carry on with my own songs and the piano. I would also love to get married and have children.” – Young woman, aged 13, State School*

**Thinking about when people leave school/college, how important or otherwise do you think the following things are?**



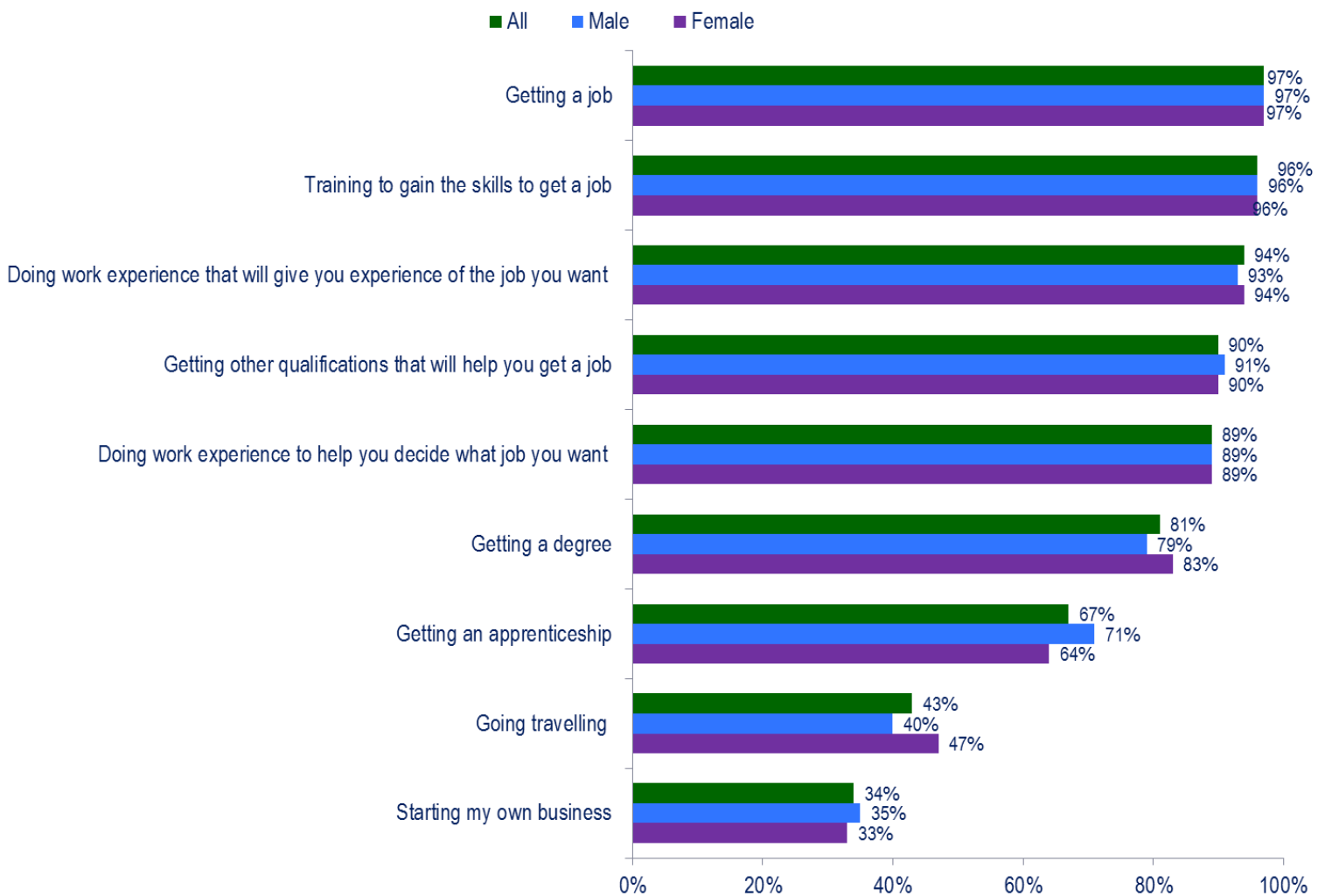
**Figure 5.** Base: All respondents (n=2006)

After school or college, learners perceive a job to be of most importance for them. In line with the qualitative online community findings, this is the ‘ultimate goal’ for most young people. Training to gain the skills to get a job is of second-most importance, followed by doing work experience that will give you



experience of the job you want. One young man in the online community noted that university does not always provide students with applicable skills that can be used in the workplace. Many students have concerns about job availability after university – two in five (40%) young people who do not want to progress to higher education say that this is because it does not necessarily guarantee a job after graduating, therefore this suggests an emphasis on the value of skills gained in higher education may be key to increased uptake.

**Thinking about when people leave school/college, how important or otherwise do you think the following things are?**



**Figure 6.** Base: All respondents (n=2006); All young men (n=1001); All young women (n=1005)

Getting a degree is perceived to be marginally more important to young women (83%) than young men (79%), whereas the reverse is true for getting an apprenticeship (71% important for young men, compared to 64% for young women). Those who attend State School are more likely (82%) than those



who attend either College (66%) or University Technical College (61%) to say that getting a degree is important. Getting a degree is deemed most important by those attending Private (93%) and Grammar (90%) Schools.

Responses to priorities after school or college also vary by social grade. Those from social grades C1 (79%), C2 and DE (both 78%) are less likely to state that getting a degree is important than their counterparts from social grade AB (86%).

In terms of the importance of doing work experience to gain experience of the job they want, overall perceptions of this are consistent among demographic groups (94% say that this is important overall). Young people attending Private Schools (89%) are slightly less likely to state that doing work experience to gain relevant experience of the job that they want is important, compared to those attending College (95%) or State Schools (94%).

Half (53%) of young men who do not want to go on to higher education either straight after school or later in life say that getting a degree is important, whereas just less than half (47%) say that it is not important. This is in line with young women; around half (56%) of young women who do not want to go on to higher education either straight after school or later in life say that getting a degree is important, compared to two in five (44%) who say that it is not important. The gap between perceived importance of going on to higher education and likelihood of doing so indicates that young people may perceive gaining a degree to be useful, but not necessarily an option for themselves.

**How likely or otherwise do you think it is that you are going to do the following things after you leave school?**

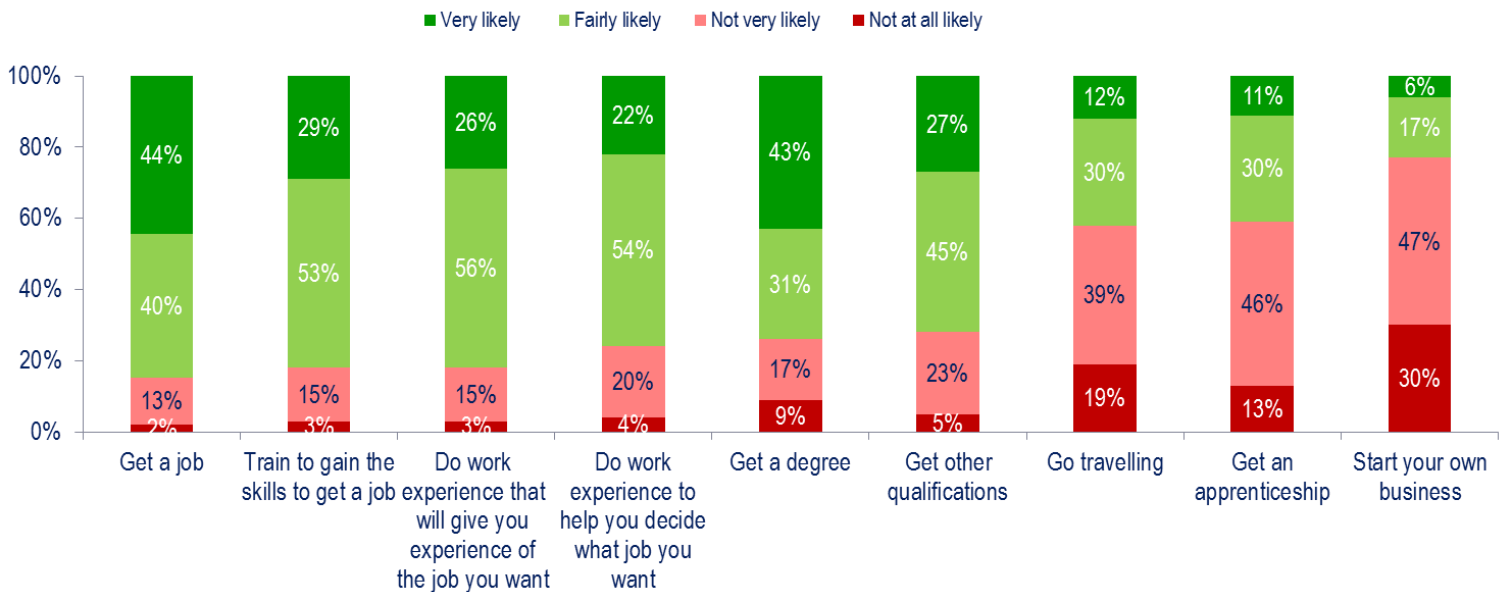
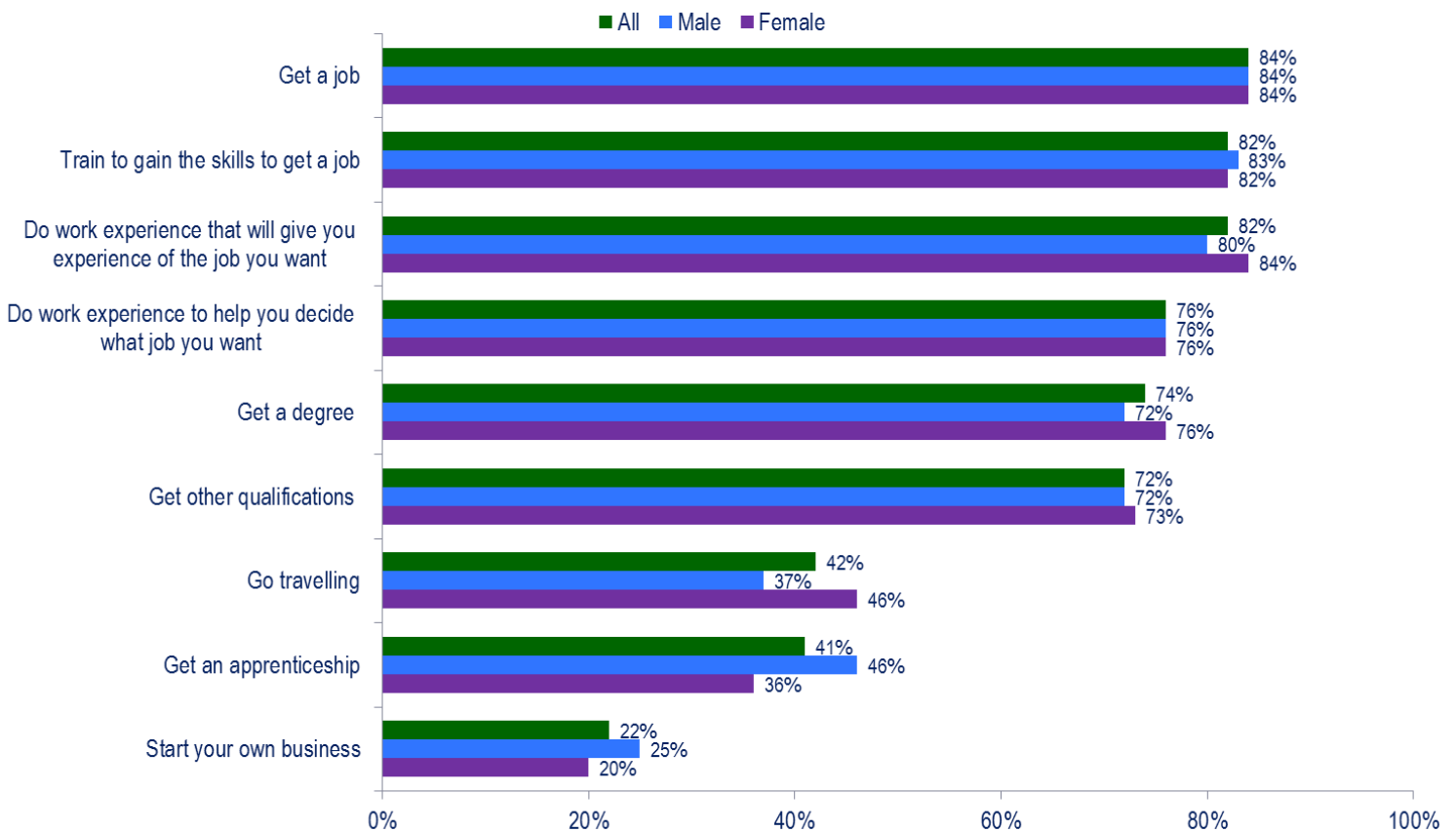


Figure 7. Base: All respondents (n=2006)

The next steps after school or college that learners say they are likely to take are broadly similar to those that they say are important. Again, getting a job is perceived to be the most likely option, although it is possible that for some this is an 'end goal' rather than their next immediate step after leaving school or college.

**How likely or otherwise do you think it is that you are going to do the following things after you leave school? (NET: likely)**



**Figure 8.** Base: All respondents (n=2006); All young men (n=1001); All young women (n=1005)

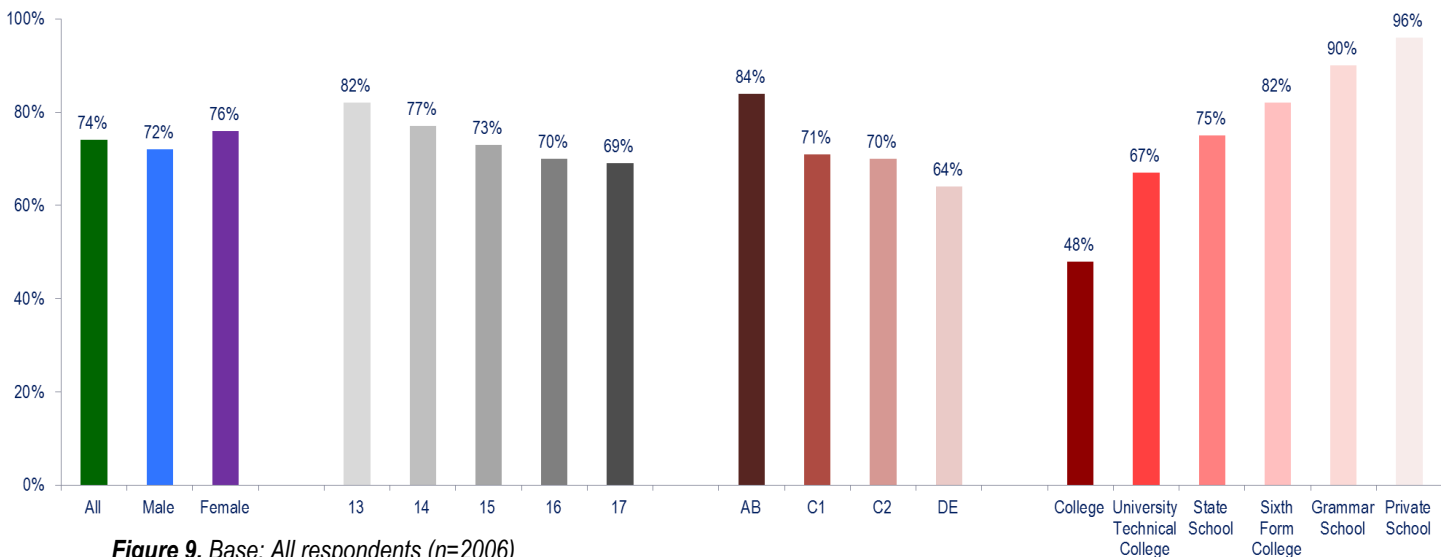
Young women are more inclined (76%) than their male counterparts (72%) to say that it is likely that they will get a degree after they leave school. Younger students are more inclined than older students to say this; four in five (82%) of 13 year olds and more than three quarters (77%) of 14 year olds say that it is likely they will get a degree after leaving school or college, compared to around seven in ten 15, 16 and 17 year olds (73%, 70% and 69% respectively) who say the same. Again, social grade has an impact on those who are inclined to say that they are likely to get a degree after they leave school. More than four in five (84%) of those in social grades AB say that this is likely for them, compared to just two thirds (64%) of those in social grades DE.

Young men are more inclined (46%) than their female counterparts (36%) to say that it is likely that they will start an apprenticeship when they leave school. In contrast to those who say it is likely that they will get a degree, the perceived likelihood of gaining an apprenticeship increases as social grade decreases. Three in ten (29%) of those in social grades AB say that it is likely that they will get an apprenticeship when they leave school, compared to half (51%) of those in social grades DE.

The fact that fewer young women than young men say that it is likely that they will start an apprenticeship could be due to a lack of information, advice and guidance. Although numerous young people felt informed about UCAS applications in the online community, fewer felt that they knew anything about apprenticeships.

*“I’ve no idea to be honest. I’m constantly being barraged with “ucas” and university things but I’m told nothing of apprenticeships and how to get them etc. which I’m interested in. At the moment I’m considering university but also thinking of trying for a full time job.” – Young woman, 17, College*

**How likely or otherwise do you think it is that you are going to do get a degree when you leave school/college? (NET: likely)**



**Figure 9.** Base: All respondents (n=2006)

A third (32%) of young men who say that they do not want to go on to higher education either straight after school or later in life say that it is likely that they will get a degree, and a similar proportion (36%) of young women who say that they do not want to go on to higher education say the same. This finding indicates that young people may say that they do not intend to go on to higher education, but they are keeping their options open, or perceive that going on to higher education is inevitable for them.

## PERCEPTIONS OF POST-18 OPTIONS

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- The widely accepted ‘traditional’ method of studying at higher education (studying a full time course, straight after school) is the most commonly cited option for young people.
- Young women are more likely than young men to say that studying part time is an attractive option, whereas young men are more likely than their female counterparts to say that sponsorship by their employer is an attractive option.
- Social grade influences perceptions of which methods of studying are perceived to be attractive. Those from lower social grades are more likely than those from social grade AB to say that part time courses and flexible study are attractive to them.

### Awareness of education and training options available post-18

After school or college, young people tend to categorise their options as university or college, jobs, and apprenticeships, and to a lesser extent, on-the-job training. There is limited unprompted awareness of different education and training courses outside of these options. This tends to be true of both young men and young women, indicating that despite young women being more informed about career pathways, they are not more informed about different access courses more broadly.

*“6th form, universities, apprenticeships, volunteering. I won't get an apprenticeship because becoming a mathematician isn't relevant to anything which you can get a scholarship for. I will go through college and university, to get a Mathematics Degree, and I will volunteer in a charity shop because it seems fun and will boost my CV. It also helps the charity.”* – Young man, aged 14, State School

*“My school is very good at letting me know about opportunities in college, uni and also in the working world. We are told about apprenticeships constantly and they are very good at letting me know more about these opportunities outside of school.”* – Young woman, aged 16, State School

Overall, young people tend to associate university with being more ‘academic’ – including a greater volume of work and more difficult work. Apprenticeships or college are perceived to be less academic and more suited to vocational or practical career paths. Young people tend to value each of these qualifications, depending on their desired career paths. They note that university and apprenticeships equip young people with different skill sets, and overall are as valuable as one another. This is true of both young women and young men.

*“University is generally academic, with subjects being Mathematics, Physics etc. Apprenticeships are for more practical minded people like mechanics, plumbers, electricians etc.”* – Young man, aged 13, State School

## Desired education and training post-18

The online communities indicate that for many, going to university is a top priority after school, for both young men and women. For most young men, further study is a feature of their plans, for example art college or an apprenticeship. Young men in particular tend to note that having a job, and specifically earning money can be a tempting option.

*“Some of my friends are thinking about going to uni, [but I’m] not sure if it’s for the education or the fact that they’ll have an excuse to be away from home! If they’re honest, they would probably want to go college then get a job. Money is the thing which they would want.”* – Young man, aged 14, State School

Young women tend to be more likely to say that they will try out different careers, and may gain work experience before studying at university. Others say that they have always had a particular passion for a career, or have had a course recommended to them that they would like to take.

*“Most likely [I’ll go to] university however I may take an extra year out working as a teaching assistant abroad to gain experience before studying teaching full time. However this can be costly so I am unsure, it all depends on my AS results to be honest.”* – Young woman, aged 17, State School

Young people tend to say that the various education and training options they mention (specifically university, college or apprenticeships) are available to them, indicating that they feel that the education and training options they are aware of are those that are within their reach. This could indicate that they have an awareness of barriers to participation in post-18 education and training – either financial, or achievement thus far – and therefore make choices about their post-18 options based on what they perceive to be feasible for them.

*“I would consider the higher apprenticeship as I like the idea of earning money at the same time as gaining a degree.”* – Young man, aged 16, State School

*“I think that all options are open to me but it is up to me to find them. Also I would have to receive funding for anything more I do in education as I will be over 18 at the start of the next academic year.”* – Young woman, aged 17, College

*“I initially wanted to do photography for 2 A Levels at college but I don’t think I will get in as you need 4 A-C grades one in English and one in Maths. I missed the first part of my [E]nglish exam so I won’t get a C for that and I am rubbish at Maths so that’s out as well. That’s why I will take up the post at another college as you don’t need any GCSE’s for the course.”* – Young man, aged 16, College

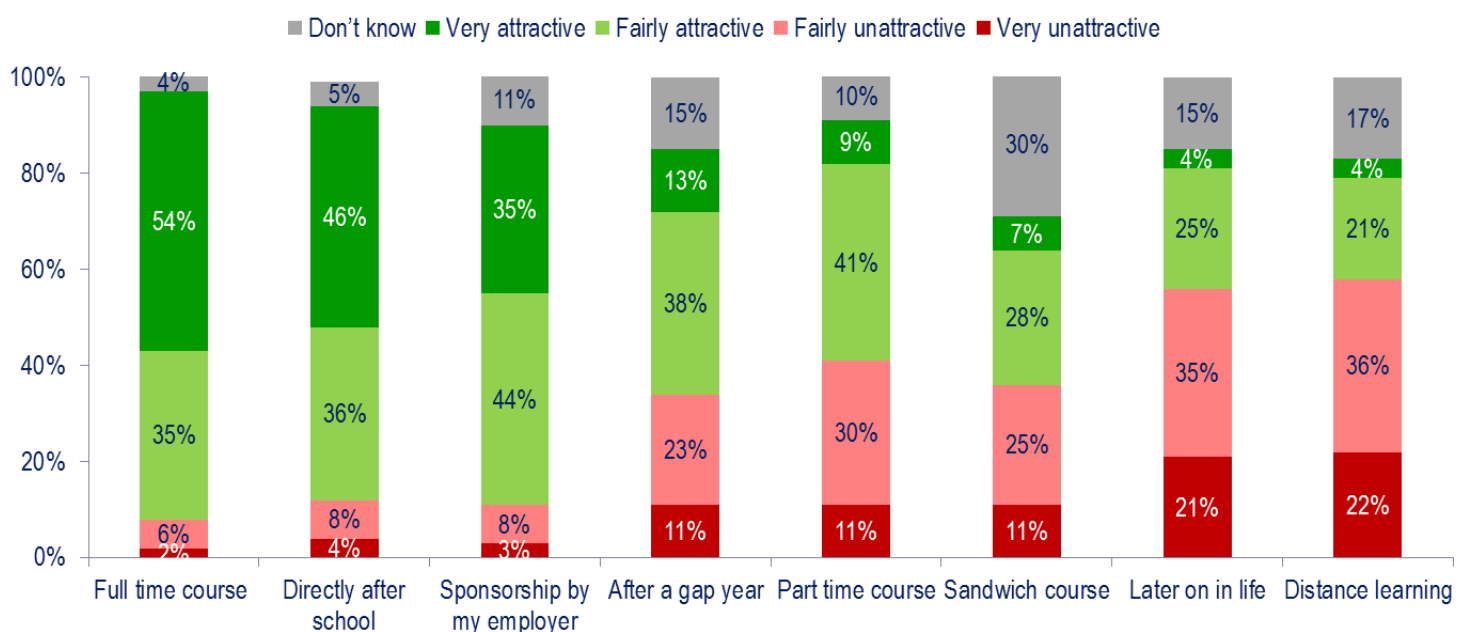
The above quote highlights a case where a young person feels that they have received information, advice and guidance, however this advice has not supported this young man to pursue his primary intentions. For example, he appears to be unaware that he could re-take his qualifications which will allow him to study photography. Young people who say that they are well informed about the options available

to them are not necessarily correct; they could be receiving flawed information, advice and guidance which will affect their post-18 options.

## Attractiveness of ways of studying at higher education

Studying a full time course and studying straight after school are perceived to be the most attractive way of studying at higher education; nine in ten (88%) of learners say that a full time course is attractive, and eight in ten (83%) learners say studying straight after school is attractive.

### How attractive or unattractive do you find each of the following ways of studying at higher education (e.g. university)?

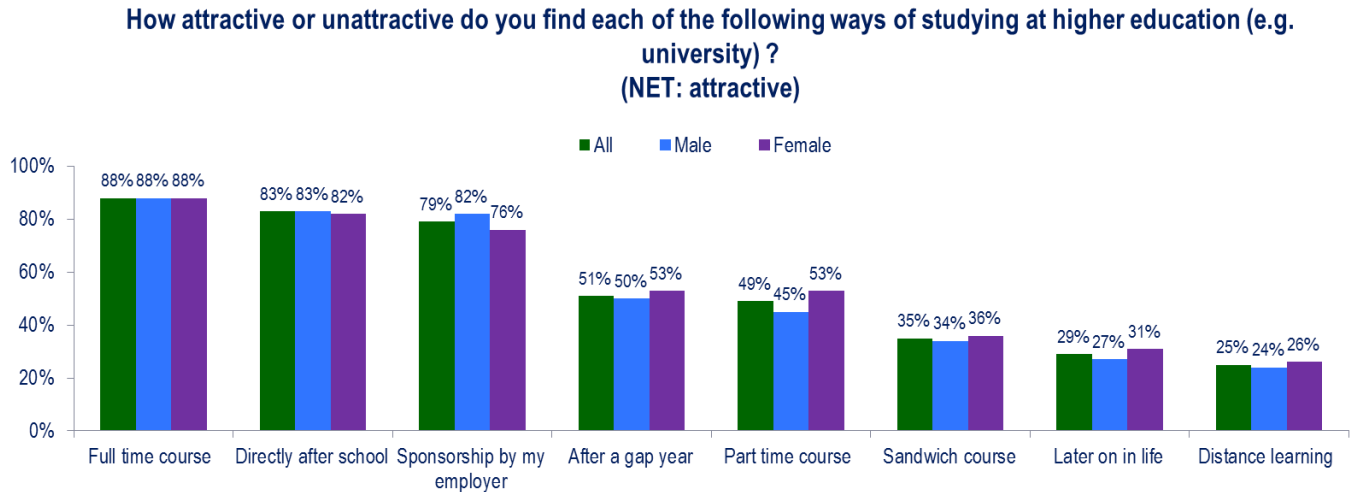


**Figure 10.** Base: All respondents (n=2006)

Despite getting a job being perceived to be of high importance among young people, many of the ways of studying at higher education that offer the flexibility of maintaining a paid job as part of a programme of study, such as a part time course or distance learning, are seen to be less attractive options than directly after school or full time courses. Between 11% and 30% of young people say that they 'don't know' how attractive or unattractive other options of studying at higher education are, aside from a full time course or directly after school, which indicates that there is a lack of awareness or understanding about the different way of studying post-18.

Eight in ten (79%) learners say that sponsorship by their employer is an attractive option for them, indicating that this is a preferred method of learning to studying later on in life (29% attractive), potentially after paid work. This high attractiveness score to sponsorship by an employer signals a preference for the financial responsibility for higher education fee payment to be borne by the employer rather than the individual.

Young men are marginally more likely than young women to say that sponsorship by their employer is an attractive option for studying at higher education (82% compared to 76%), however young women are more likely (53%) to say that they find a part time course an attractive option for studying at higher education than young men (45%).



**Figure 11.** Base: All respondents (n=2006); All young men (n=1001); All young women (n=1005)

Beyond the most attractive ways of studying at higher education (full time course, directly after school and employer sponsored), there is a difference by social grade of attractiveness of ways of studying. In particular, part time courses are perceived to be more attractive to those from lower social grades; just two in five (40%) of those from social grades AB consider this to be an attractive option, compared to more than half of those from social grades C1, C2 and DE (54%, 57% and 54% respectively). The opposite is true of studying after a gap year, which is perceived to be more attractive by those from social grades AB (54%), C1 (51%) and C2 (54%) than those from social grade DE (41%). To a lesser extent, this broad trend of flexible studying as being more appealing to those from lower social grades can be seen in the attractiveness of studying later on in life and studying through distance learning, which indicates that funding higher education study is a key concern of those in lower social grades.

How attractive or unattractive do you find each of the following ways of studying at higher education (e.g. university)?  
(NET: attractive)

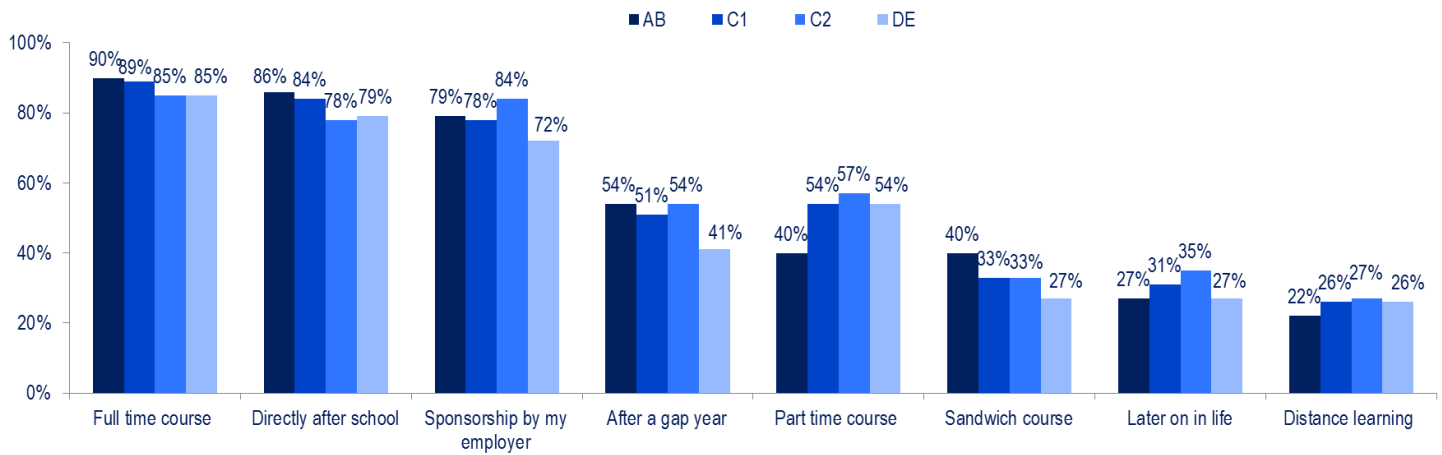


Figure 12. Base: All respondents (n=2006); All young men (n=1001); All young women (n=1005)



## INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

- 16% of young people attending a State School said that they had received no advice or guidance about the options available to them when they leave school. Overall, 12% of young people have received no advice or guidance.
- Specifically for young males, trusted sources of information, such as family or teachers play a vital role in influencing their desired options post-18.
- 60% of young people say that they have not spoken to a careers advisor; three quarters of young people say that they have not visited a university or college (75%) and two thirds say that they have not attended an open day at a university (69%). Furthermore, nine in ten (90%) say that they have never spoken to a business professional. Just 38% say that they have accessed information on the internet.
- Contact with universities is key in the decision making process. Young people are receptive to visits from a university or college and open days at a university or college.

### The decision-making process

Young men are likely to choose their post-18 pathway as a result of somewhat limited exposure to their subject choice. In the online community, factors affecting decisions mentioned include visiting a university, enjoying a subject and wanting to pursue it further or doing particularly well at a subject at school and wanting to continue with that subject.

*“[A] few months ago we went on a school trip to the [U]niversity of the [W]est of England where they talked to us about what we can do with science and engineering when we left school. [O]ne of the medical scientists there said that science could take you across the whole world so from there on I wanted to go into science.”* – Young man, aged 14, State School

*“I am not 100% sure what I what to do but something involving physics and maths would interest me.”* – Young man, aged 17, Sixth Form College

They tend to be open to advice and guidance from trusted sources, such as local careers centres, teachers or family, but often rely on one source of information rather than multiple sources.

*“[There] was a jokey comment made by a family member during a jokey argument at a gathering. At the time I didn't know what I wanted to do, looked into it [studying law] and found it to be rather interesting, thus it became what I wanted to do.”* – Young man, aged 17, College

*“I want to do what my Uncle does because he's a good role model to me.”* – Young man, aged 13, male, State School

Those who say that they do not know what to do when they leave school tend to hope that they will stumble across a career path, or obtain some form of advice or guidance from a trusted source. Sources mentioned include school advice or recommendations from family members.

*"I don't know yet, they haven't told us. I want to see what subjects will help me gain different sorts of jobs."* – Young man, aged 13, State School

*"My sister studies fashion marketing at Manchester Metropolitan and is currently on a work placement with a fashion label in London. She loves the independence and night life and meeting new people and recommends it to me highly."* – Young man, aged 16, State School

*"My uncle, who's now 29, went to uni. He was one of the very few in my family who did. I think he took business studies or something along those lines, but he is struggling to find a job at the moment. When I see him he advises me not to go because of the situation he's in."* – Young man, aged 14, State School

Conversely, young women tend to have a more coherent picture of what they want to do after school. They tend to source multiple suggestions on potential careers, rather than focussing on university courses. Sources of information that they use include careers advice from schools and parents.

*"We've had people from local businesses [sic], employers and managers from companies in the capital [sic], we've had university students and the people who look at course entries, and UCAS representatives."* – Young woman, aged 17, Sixth Form College

*"Through doing quiz[z]es online to determin[e] what jobs you might be suited to; by seeing what other people with similar interest who are going through/have gone through; meetings with a form tutor/teacher; a short assembly on options, but it is still quite early to make these decisions, so not much has been done."* – Young woman, aged 13, State School

Those who have not decided what they would like to do as a career either feel that it is early for them to be doing so, or say that they will try out various options and gain knowledge about what they might like to do.

*"As I haven't made the decision of what I want to do when I leave I believe I'll make the decision by actually trying different things until I find the right job role for me."* – Young woman, aged 17, College

*"I think the option booklets were the most useful, as they provided links to websites to find out more information, but the meeting I had was only with my form tutor, who wouldn't really know much about careers apart from something similar to what she had to do to become a teacher."* – Young woman, aged 13, State School

The variance in perceptions between young men and women could be due to the difference in specific advice and guidance that they have received. In the online community, young men talk about a limited range of specific advice and guidance that they have received about their futures. This tends to be limited to surveys provided at school to identify appropriate careers, and key figures in their lives such as

teachers or family members. They tend to source fewer types of advice or guidance, and as a result many have a narrower view of the options available to them. Rather than challenge advice given to them by an information source, they tend to trust that they would be suited to the career suggested to them.

*"[A] couple of years ago in school we were given a survey that asked us questions on our grades and then told us our advised job." – Young man, aged 14, State School*

*"My grandfather always used to say, if you do the job you love the most then it won't be a job because its [sic] something you want to do everyday [sic]." – Young man, aged 16, State School*

*"I've spoken to a guidance counsellor who suggested economics or directing, both of which I wouldn't mind, but I've never solidified anything as a path I'd like to take." – Young man, aged 17, Sixth Form College*

## **Information, advice and guidance received**

Two thirds (67%) of young people say that they have received advice or guidance from their family about post-18 options. Half (46%) of young people say that they have received group advice by a teacher at their school or college, and two in five (39%) say that they have had a talk by the local career office or careers advisor at their school or college.

To support young people into outcomes which maximise their potential, it is recognised that each young person should receive a range of information, advice and guidance about their post-18 options by age 17, however the findings of this research indicate that 60% of learners say that they have not spoken to a careers advisor, three quarters of learners say that they have not visited a university or college (75%) and two thirds say that they have not attended an open day at a university (69%). Furthermore, nine in ten (90%) say that they have never spoken to a business professional. Just 38% say that they have accessed information on the internet. It is clear that young people are more likely to have received advice and guidance from family members than any other form, two thirds (67%) say that they have received this. These findings suggest that the current information, advice and guidance model requires an overhaul.

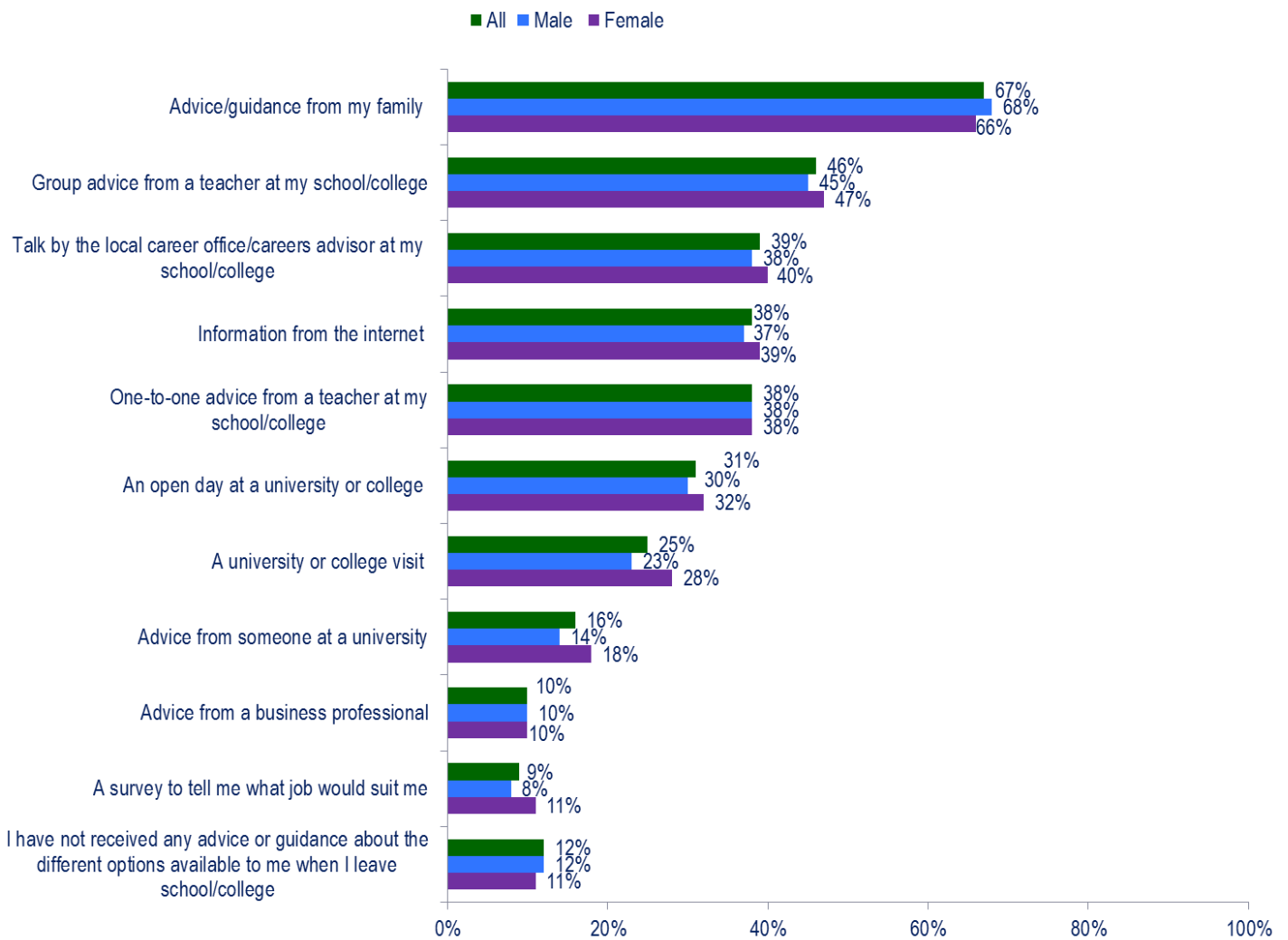
In the qualitative online communities, some of the young men say that they do not know anyone who has been to university, and are therefore unable to draw upon the experiences of people that they know. Others have family members who have been to university, some at different life stages. However, they do not tend to talk about 'success stories'; many mention people who did not have a great experience at university. Some experiences they talk about include a brother who preferred college to university, enjoying university but being left in debt or studying for a career which was less enjoyable than hoped.

*"My brother went to Northampton Uni to do a BA in Performing Arts. He did not enjoy it as much as college because his acting friends he made there did not go on to Uni so he found it hard to not have the same team spirit. He did 2 years and then gave up." – Young man, aged 16, College*

Conversely, young women tend to talk more positively about the university experiences of people they know. Most of them know someone who has been to university and tend to say it was positive overall, despite some being homesick, or stressed.

*“My grandfather went to Uni to study humanities in his late thirties! He said it was an amazing experience, but I’m not sure if he ever actually finished his degree, because he found a pathway elsewhere, and ended up a carpenter and a musician. He loved the subject, but the work was never for him.” – Young woman, aged 17, Sixth Form College*

**What advice/guidance, if any, have you received about the different options available to you when you leave school/college?**



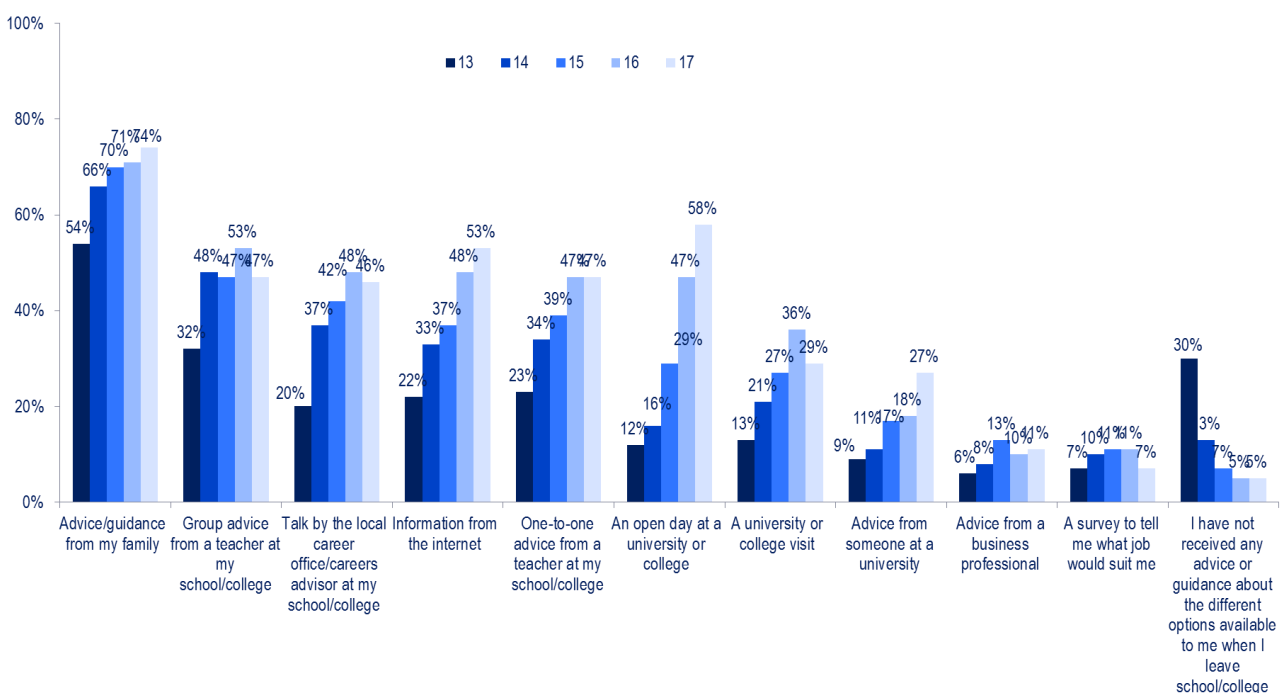
**Figure 13.** Base: All respondents (n=2006); All young men (n=1001); All young women (n=1005)

Young men use a more limited range of sources of information than young women, as identified in the qualitative online communities. There are no significant differences in advice or guidance received by young people by gender, although young women are slightly more likely to have had a visit to a university

or college (28% of young women compared to 23% of young men) or advice from someone at a university (18% of young women compared to 14% of young men).

Age is more likely to be a factor in the types of advice or guidance that young people say that they have received. Unsurprisingly, younger people are less likely to have received advice or guidance than learners who are older. Three in ten (30%) of those aged 13 say that they have not received any advice or guidance about the different options available to them when they leave school or college, compared to 12% of young people overall.

**What advice/guidance, if any, have you received about the different options available to you when you leave school/college?**

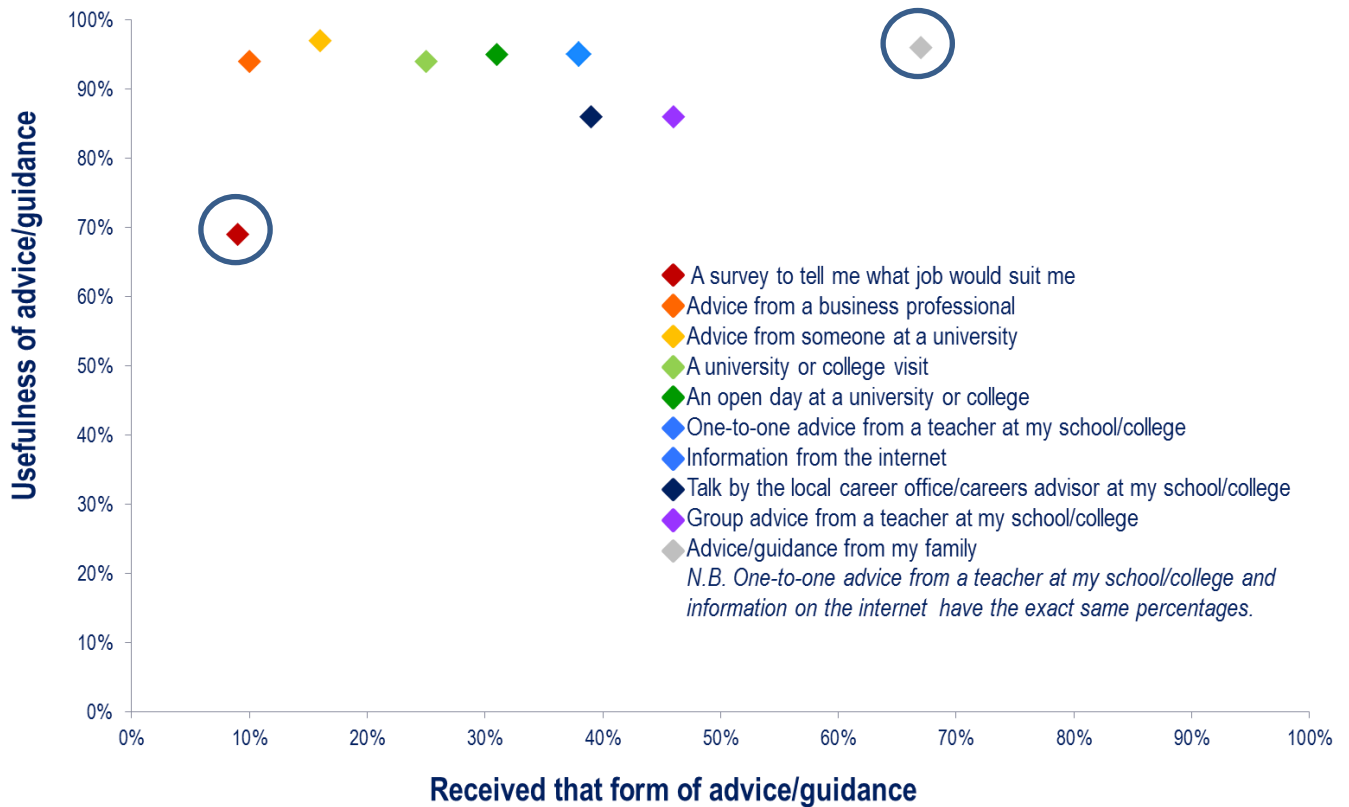


**Figure 14.** Base: All respondents (n=2006)

These findings indicate that broadly, advice and guidance about higher education and other post-18 options increases at age 14, and continues to increase year on year. This is consistent with learners' own responses with regard to when schools should be talking to students about post-18 options.

In terms of face to face advice, many learners have yet to experience any of the options tested. Just 38% of young people say that they have received one-to-one advice from a teacher at their school or college, 16% say that they have received advice from someone at a university and only one in ten (10%) say that they have received advice from a business professional. In light of this, it is useful to look at those who have received each form of advice or guidance, and how useful they say that this form of advice or guidance is. Some of most useful forms of advice and guidance are those that the least learners have experienced. For example, just 10% have had advice from a business professional, but more than half of those who have (55%) say that this was very useful, and 39% say that this was fairly useful. Business

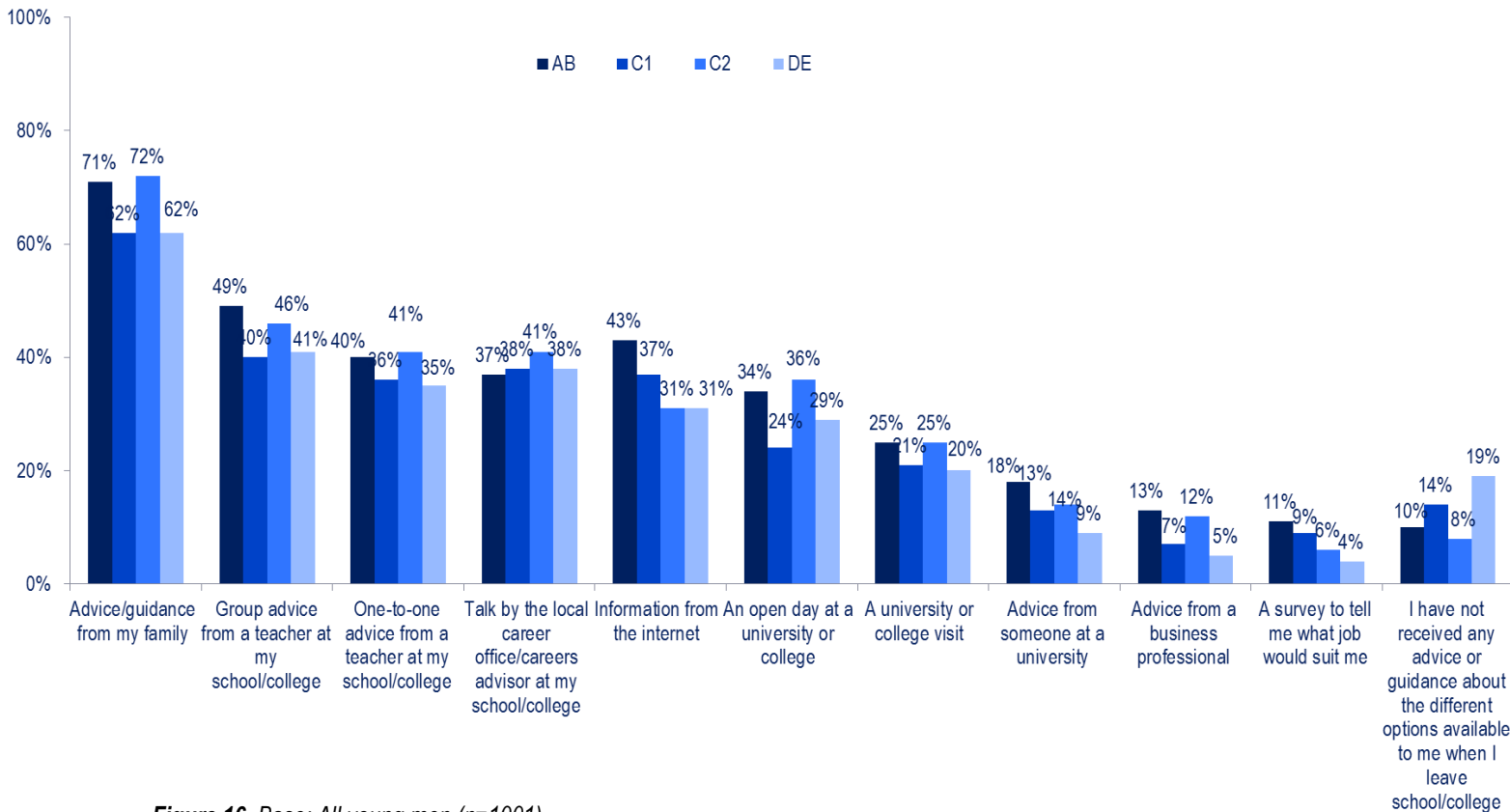
professionals should be encouraged to speak to learners about higher education options as this is likely to be useful to decision making for young people in the future.



**Figure 15.** Base: All respondents (n=2006); Base: all respondents who have received advice/guidance (n=1345)

The chart above shows the proportion of learners that have received each type of information, advice and guidance tested, in relation to how useful they found that type of information, advice and guidance. Two interesting points to note are circled: *a survey to tell me what job would suit me* and *advice/guidance from my family*. Advice or guidance from family members is the source used by most learners, and is perceived to be useful – however, this advice and guidance is likely to be limited by family members’ own experiences of education. With this research indicating that tailored information, advice and guidance is most useful, it is interesting to note responses for a survey to tell learners what job would suit them, which is not used by a large number, however around seven in ten say that this is useful. This indicates that even generic information, advice and guidance is perceived by young people to be useful – thus any information is seen to be good information. To ensure the best information is passed to young people about the options available to them post-18, it is important that key influence agents, including parents, are targeted so that they are better informed about the options available to young people post-18.

**What advice/guidance, if any, have you received about the different options available to you when you leave school/college?**



**Figure 16.** Base: All young men (n=1001)

The amount of information that young people receive about their post-18 options are greatly affected by the education institution that they attend. Those who have received no advice or guidance are most likely to attend State School (16%). More than one in ten (13%) of those who have not received any advice or guidance say that they want to go on to higher education either straight after school or later in life, and a similar proportion (11%) of those who say that they have not received any advice or guidance say that they do not want to go on to higher education at any point. Therefore, effective information, advice and guidance is necessary for all young people.

Young people who attend College (55% for young men, 54% for young women) or Sixth Form College (57% for young men, 55% for young women) are more likely than those who attend other types of school or college to say that they have been to an open day at a university or college. Young people who attend Sixth Form College (40% for young men, 41% for young women) are more likely to say that they have had a university or college visit than those who attend any other types of school or college.



What advice/guidance, if any, have you received about the different options available to you when you leave school/college?

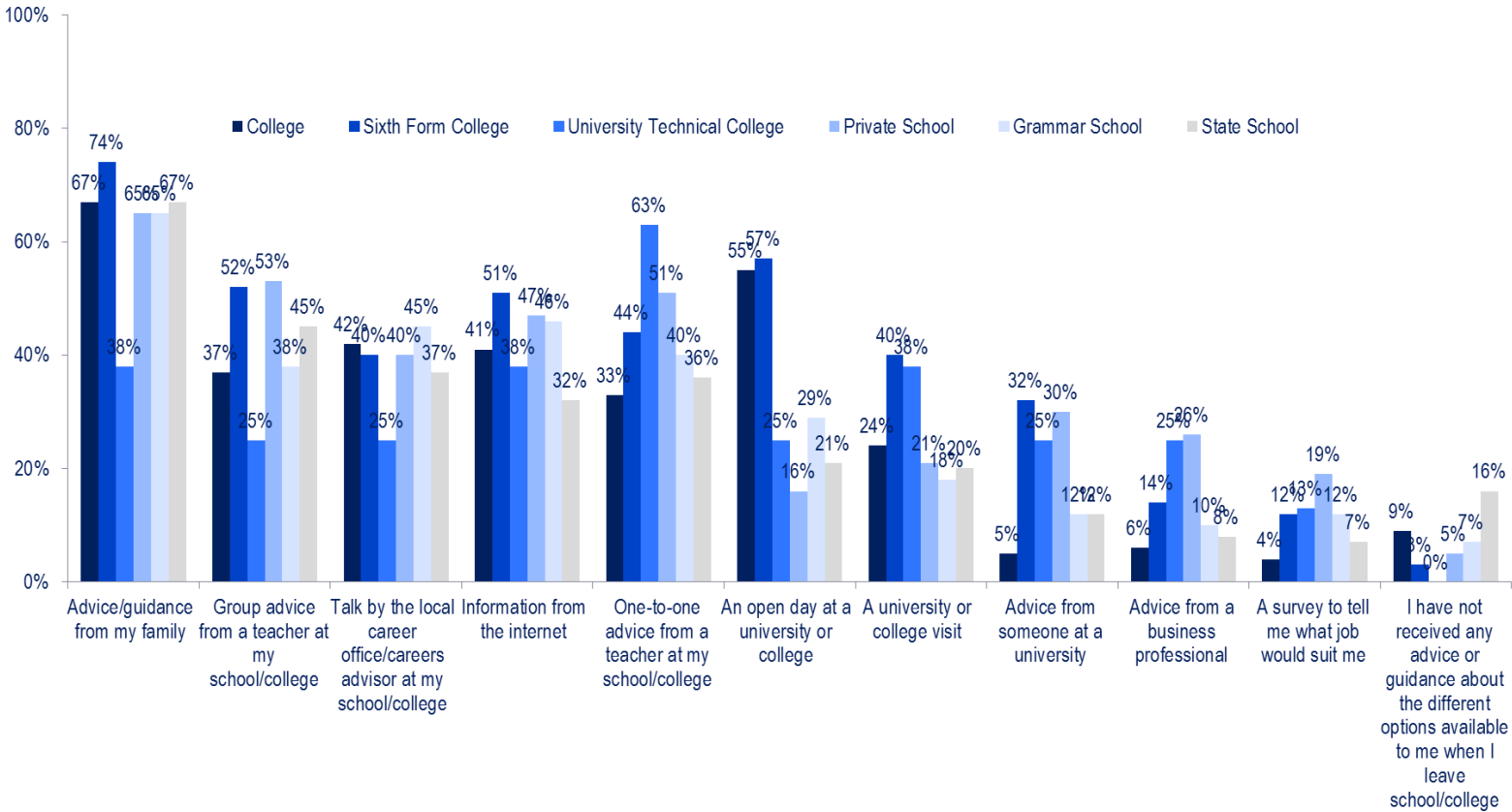


Figure 17. Base: All young men (n=1001)

More than half (55%) of learners say that young people should first get advice about different opportunities available after school or college between 12-14 years old, and two in five (39%) say that 15-16 years old is the right age. Students aged 13 years are most likely to say that 12-14 years is the right age to speak to young people about post-18 options, so it is of high importance that engagement activities with higher education organisations focus on this age bracket. Young men are more likely (42%) than young women (36%) to say that 15-16 years old is the right time to receive advice about opportunities available after school and college. This indicates that there is a difference in perception by gender, and young men may feel that they would prefer to receive advice later on in their education. This could indicate that young people may not be aware of the importance of receiving information, advice and guidance about post-18 options from a young age. As such, perhaps by the time they are exploring their options they have more limited pathways for immediate progression.



When do you think is the right age for people to first get advice about the different opportunities available after they leave school/college?

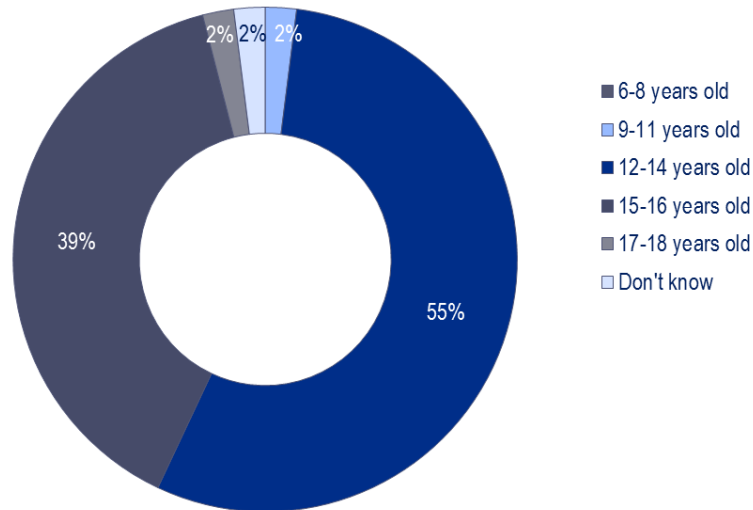
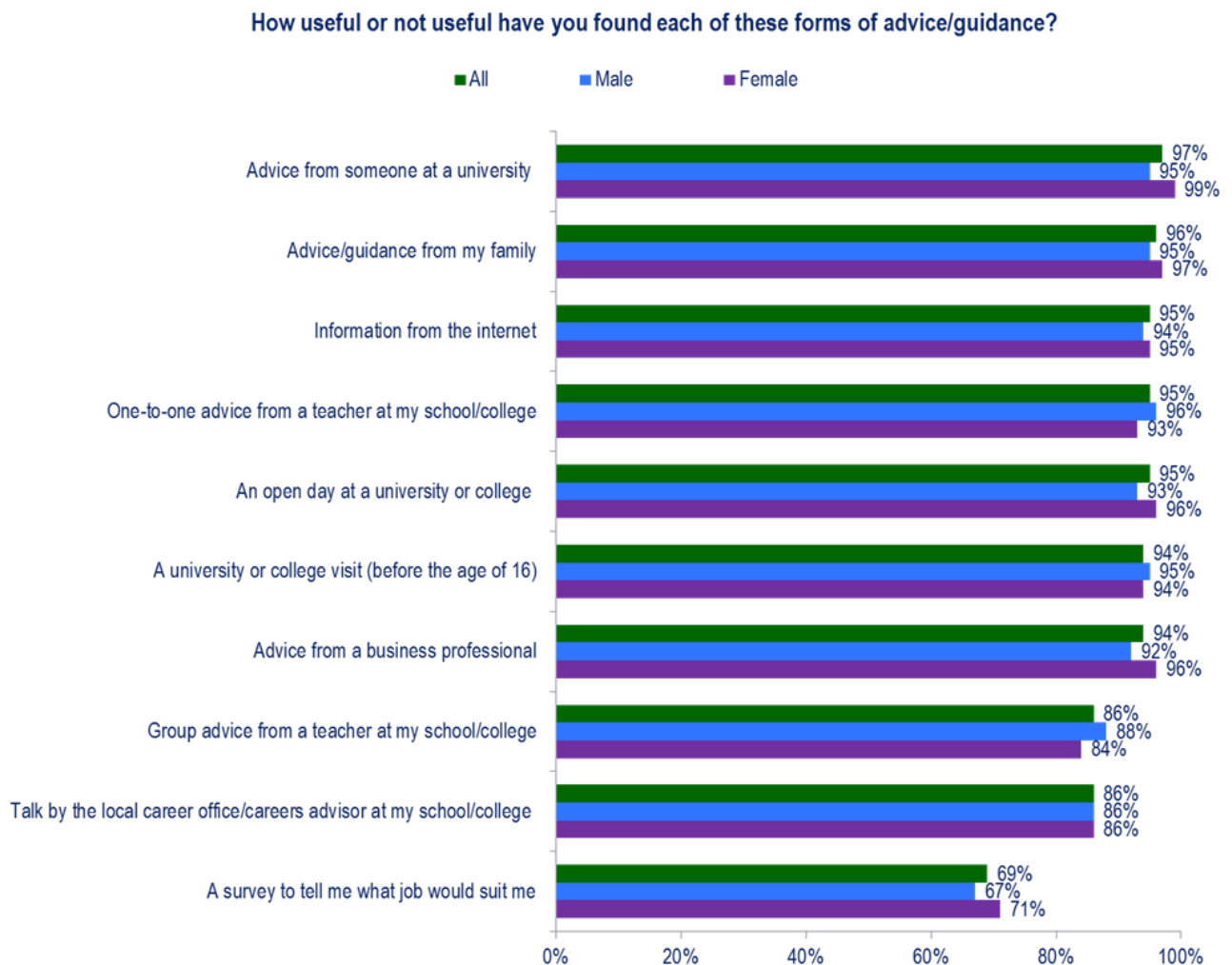


Figure 18. Base: All respondents (n=2006)

## Usefulness of advice and guidance

Despite just a third (31%) of young people saying that they have been to an open day at a university or college, 95% of those who have attended say that they found this useful, and more than two in five learners say that this was very useful (45%). This is of crucial importance to encourage young people to attend higher education; first-hand experience of universities or colleges is likely to have a significant impact on young people's desire to progress to higher education. In addition to this, one-to-one advice from a teacher at school or college is perceived to be extremely useful; half (49%) of learners who have received one-to-one advice say that this is very useful. Where possible, tailored advice is more likely to be useful to young people than generic group advice – a finding reflected in the qualitative research.



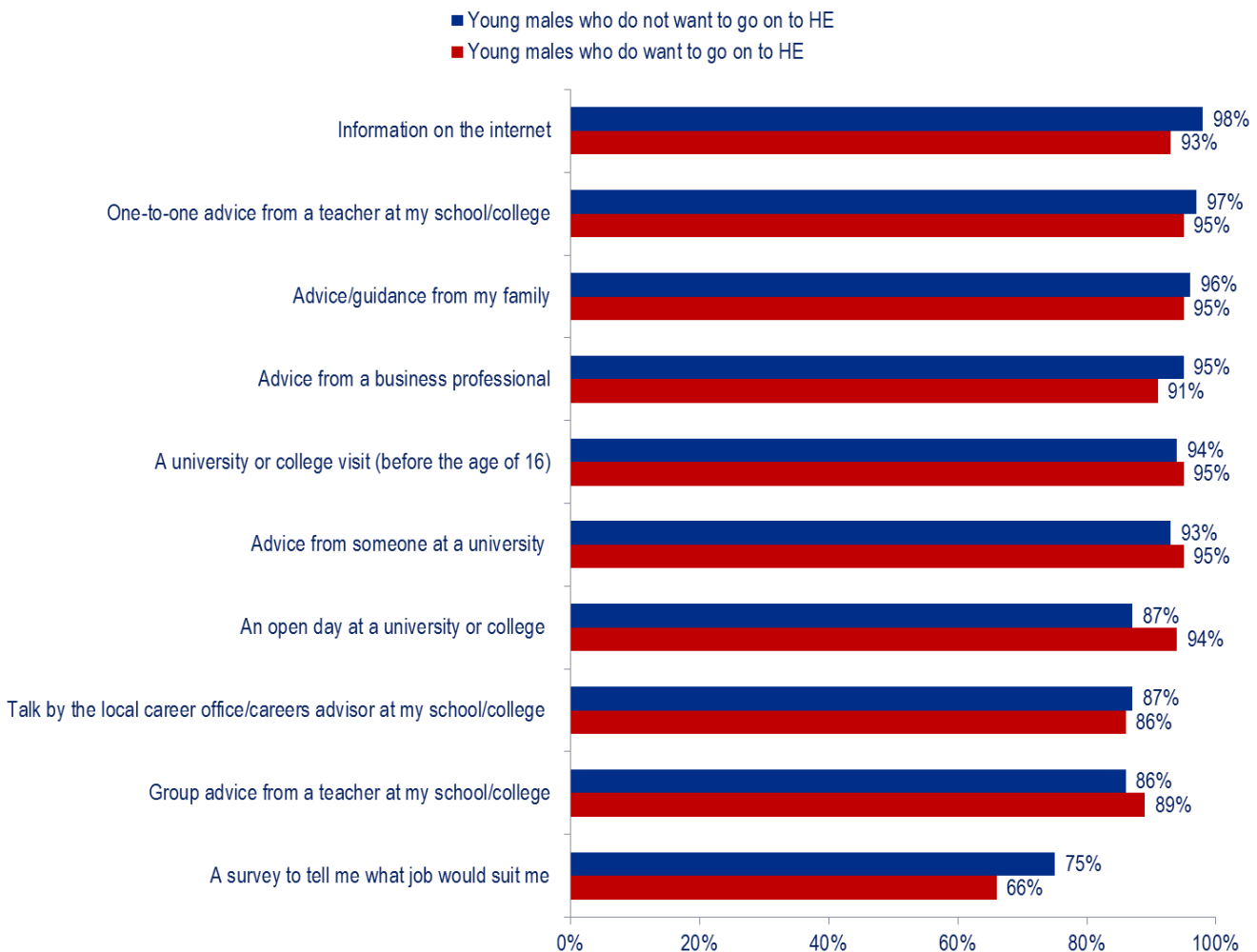
**Figure 19.** Variable base: All respondents who have received that form of advice/guidance (n=188 – n=1345)

Young people surveyed tend to say that advice or guidance from their school or college has been useful, which is in line with the qualitative online community finding. Nine in ten (88%) young men say that group advice by a teacher at their school or college has been useful, and 84% of young women say the same. Almost all (96%) young men say that one-to-one advice by a teacher at their school or college has been useful and 93% of young women say the same.

The perceptions of young men about the usefulness of advice and guidance they have received tend to vary depending on whether or not they want to go on to higher education. Those who do not want to go on to higher education tend to say that information on the internet (98%), one-to-one advice from a teacher from their school or college (97%) and advice or guidance from their family (96%) has been most useful to them. In comparison, those who do want to go on to higher education say that advice from someone at a university, advice or guidance from their family, one-to-one advice from a teacher at their school or college and a university or college visit (95% for all) have been most useful to them. University contact, specifically an open day at a university or college, is key for young people when making

decisions about their post-18 options. Young men who do want to go on to higher education are more likely (94%) than those who do not (87%) to say that this was useful for them, indicating that contact with a university can play a key part in the decision making process. The fact that a majority of those who do not intend to go on to higher education say that attending an open day at a university or college is useful indicates that this is a crucial way in which higher education organisations can engage with young people and inform their decisions of the post-18 options they undertake. In particular, it could be beneficial for universities and colleges to highlight the different ways in which students can study at higher education on open days and at outreach events for those who do not intend to go on to higher education, which could increase the uptake of courses studied in a ‘non-traditional’ (i.e. not straight after school, full time) way.

**How useful or not useful have you found each of these forms of advice/guidance?**



**Figure 20.** Base: All young men (n=1001)

How useful or otherwise do you think each of the following types of advice/guidance about your options after you leave school/college would be to you?

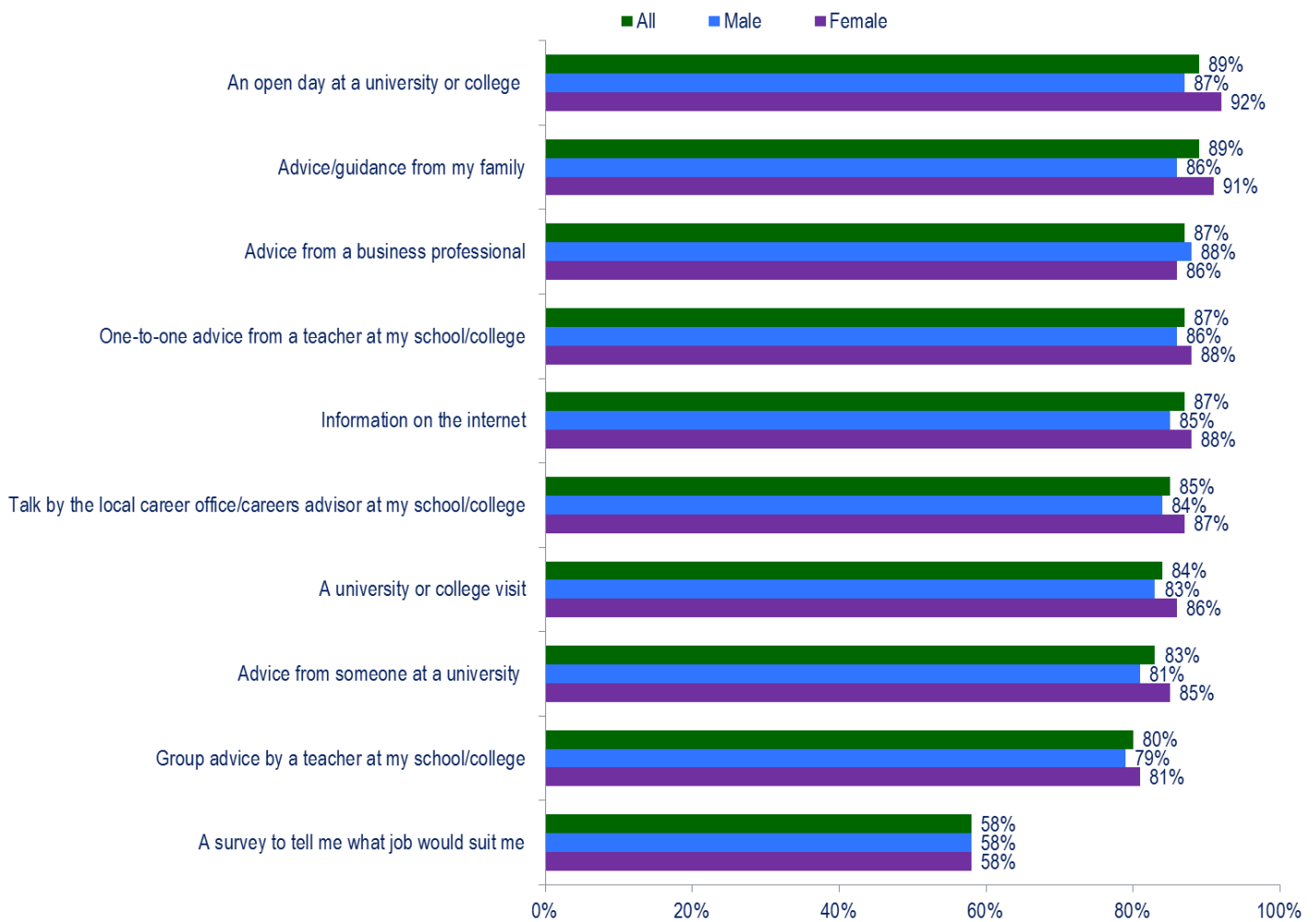


Figure 21. Variable base: All respondents who have not received that form of advice/guidance (n=661 – n=1818)

## PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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- Obtaining good qualifications is a key driver for young people to go on to higher education, and the biggest attraction of higher education for those who do not want to go on to higher education.
- Barriers to higher education are that it does not necessarily guarantee a job after graduating, and both the expense and debt of a degree. These are the most significant barriers for both those who plan to go on to higher education and those who do not.
- Four in five (78%) young people say that universities would consider A level qualifications for entrance to higher education, but beyond this, young people tend to have far less certainty about other access routes into higher education.
- 14% of young men who say that they can't go on to higher education because they don't have the right qualifications, compared to less than one in ten (8%) of young women.

### Perceptions of university

When asked what words and phrases spring to mind when thinking about university, young people tend to think about money and hard work. To a lesser extent, they perceive university to offer the possibility of independence, which has a mixed reaction; some say that they are looking forward to an independent lifestyle, whereas others say that they are concerned that they may have to move away from their friends and family. Many young people perceive university to offer them an enjoyable life experience, and feel that they may meet new friends.

*“Independence: getting to live alone and manage study and spare time by yourself. Interest: getting to study a subject of your choice in great depth. Fun: uni isn't all about study, and the student life is something I'm looking forward to.”* – Young man, aged 17, College

*“Money- how much will I be paying off and for how long? Home- would I have to leave home for the course that is best for me? Future- will this help me or be just more education for very little return?”* – Young woman, aged 17, College

### Perceptions of the 'type' of person that goes to university

Young men tend to say that the subjects that people who go to university are likely to study include those that they are good at, those that they enjoy, or those that they need to get a well-paid job. In their spare time, they tend to think that university students either study or do things that they enjoy, such as socialise or play football. There is a difference in opinion across the group about whether or not university students are similar to themselves, some say that the person they have described is just like them, whereas others say that the person they have described is not at all like them. Most of the young men say that they are

similar to the person they describe, but caveat this with some concerns that they probably spend more time pursuing hobbies or study less than the type of person that they think goes to university.

*“1. A subject they're passionate about and interested in 2. Something they do to relax and take their mind off study 3. I'm like that, I enjoy the subjects I study and in my spare time relax and enjoy extra curricular activities.”* – Young man, aged 17, College

Young women tend to say that the subjects that people who go to university are likely to study gain them access to career pathways (e.g. business), the subjects they need for their career, or the subjects that interest them. In their spare time, they tend to say that university students would participate in a hobby or study – some feel that spare time may be limited because of the pressures of their workloads. The majority of the young women say that they are very similar to the person that they have described.

*“1. Whatever subjects they would need to get the job they want, or subjects that they want to study. 2. I don't think they would have much free time; if they did, it would probably be spent sleeping, trying to study more, going on the internet, or if they're lucky and worked hard, things they like to do (hobbies, exercise, socialising etc) 3. I think I am quite similar to the person I have described because I do the things I mentioned in Q.2 and I study the subjects I would need to get a good job.”* – Young woman, aged 13, State School

Although both young men and young women have concerns about the workload at university, young men tend to be more cautious about identifying themselves with the type of person that they think goes to university than young women, and have concerns that they may not enjoy the academic side of university life because they would want to spend more time pursuing hobbies than their workload might allow.

## **Perceived drivers and barriers to university**

Young people perceive the drivers of going on to higher education to be the money and dream job that someone may gain after graduating. Both young men and women feel that this is a particular benefit of going to university.

*“You can take a step into independence and live away from your parents (if they want to leave home).I would also tell them that in the UK, university graduates earn over £15,000 per year on average than somebody who stops education after doing their A Levels.”* – Young man, aged 13, State School

Barriers to going to university are predominantly the debt and financial burden. Young people are concerned that attending university costs a lot of money, and have concerns about the implication of this on their future.

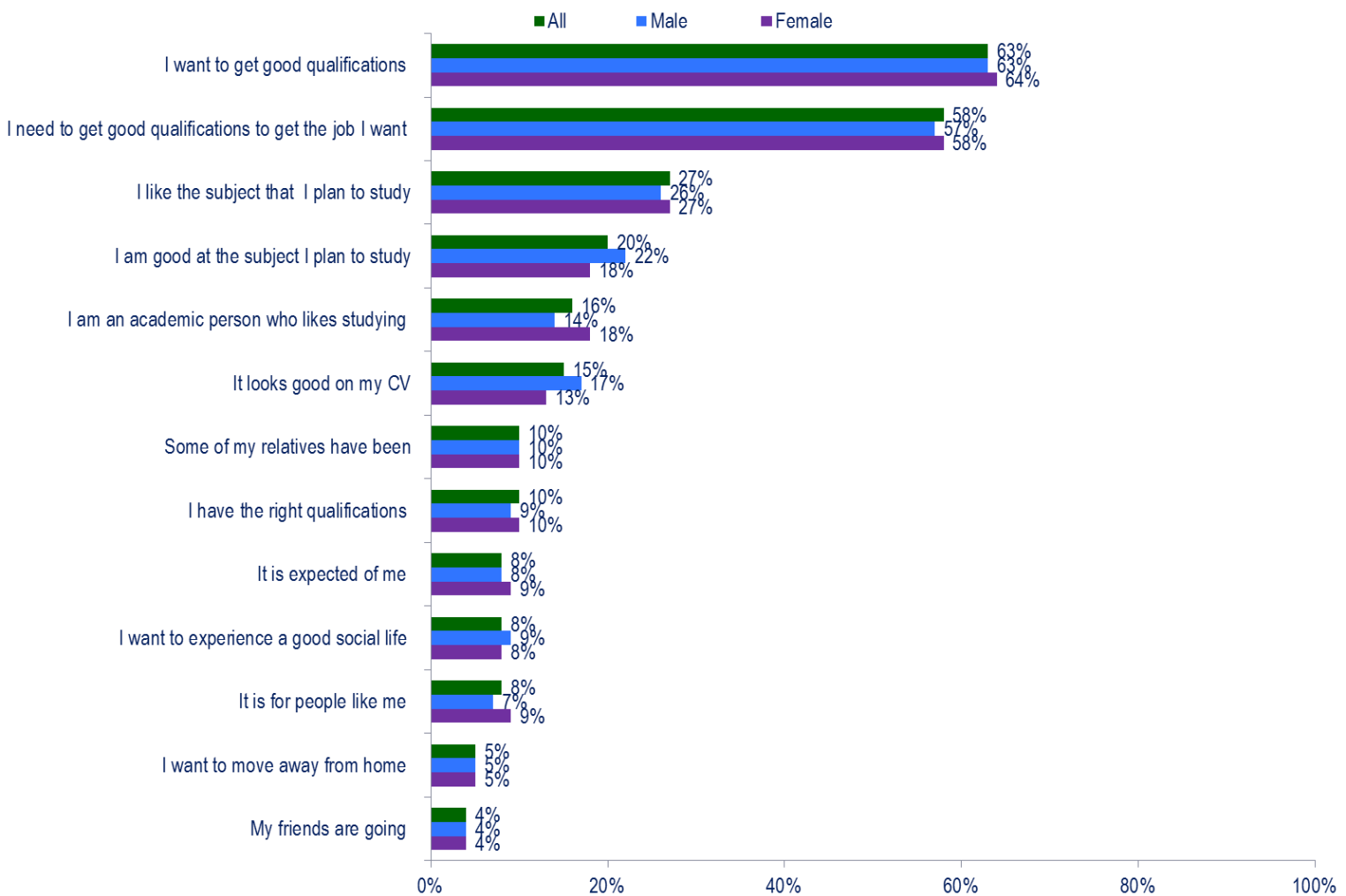
*“When I was a lot younger I believed that only the most clever people would go to a university. I also believed that only really rich people went their [sic] as they were the only people who could pay for it. My thoughts on university have changed as I have become [sic] more informed on what university is like”* – Young man, aged 17, Sixth Form College

“When I was younger, I did know about university and I think that I wanted to go more THEN than now. It sounds strange, but no one tainted my view back then; I really thought any one could go uni. I don’t think that now. It’s more for people from rich families who can afford the fees, the people seem snobby and not as hard working as other people” – Young man, aged 14, State School

“After all of that, you aren’t guaranteed a job. It would also be very expensive, and you, and your family, would be likely to have to take out a loan to pay it, which might result in debt.” – Young woman, aged 13, State School

“I am scared of being in debt in the future. It seems so much of our country suffers it and I want to look after myself like my parents looked after themselves.” – Young woman, aged 14, Private School

**Earlier you said that you might want to/definitely want to go on to higher education (e.g. university) when you leave school/college. For which, if any, of the following reasons did you say this?**

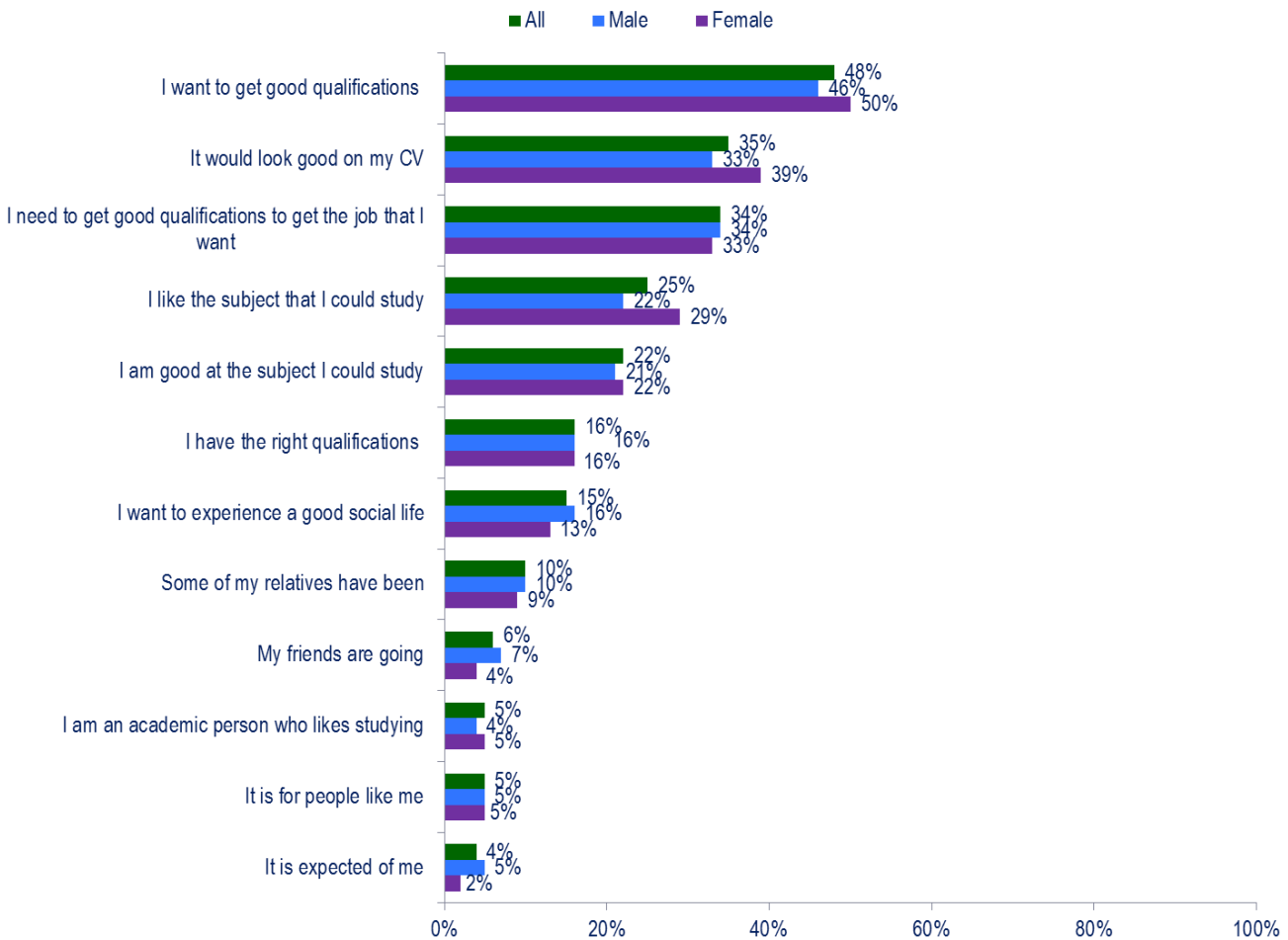


**Figure 22.** Base: All respondents who might go on to higher education (n=1690)

Overall, learners say that they want to go on to higher education when they leave school because they want to get good qualifications (63%), because they need to get good qualifications to get the job that they want (58%) and because they like the subject that they plan to study (27%). For these top three drivers there is very little difference in perception between genders.

There is greater difference in perception by gender, however, for mid-level drivers for going on to higher education. As indicated in the qualitative online communities, young men (22%) are more likely than young women (18%) to say that they want to go on to higher education because they are good at the subject they plan to study. Similarly, young men are more likely to say that they want to go on to higher education because it looks good on their CV (17%) than young women (13%). In comparison, young women are more likely to say that they are an academic person who likes studying (18%) than young men (14%). These findings are broadly consistent across other demographics, indicating that gender is a greater determinant of these drivers for going to university than any other demographic factors.

**Even though you have said that you don't want to go to higher education when you leave school/college, which, if any, of the following reasons for going on to higher education (e.g. university) appeal to you?**



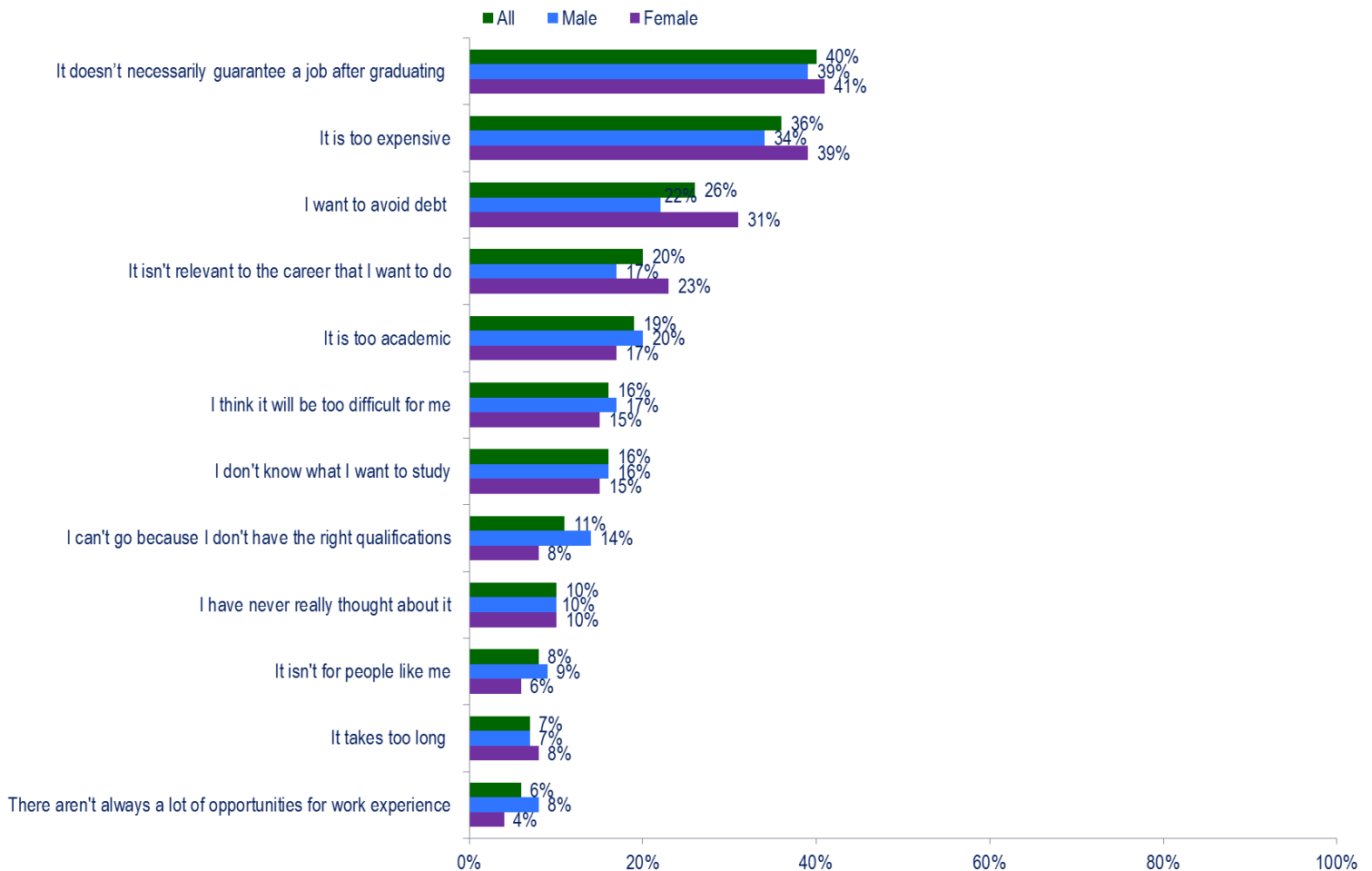
**Figure 23.** Base: All respondents who might not go on to higher education (n=316)

For those who do not intend to go on to higher education, the desire to gain good qualifications is the



most appealing aspect of going on to higher education (48%). Second to this is going on to higher education looking good on their CV (35%), which is seen to be more appealing by young women than young men (39% compared to 33%). Overall, the factors of higher education that are perceived to be appealing for those who do not plan on going on to higher education are broadly consistent between genders. Although not a statistically significant finding, the data indicates that young men are marginally more likely to say that they are influenced by their friends and their social lives than young women; 7% of young men say that higher education is appealing because their friends are going, compared to just 4% of young women, and 16% of young men say that they want to experience a good social life compared to 13% of their female counterparts. Just one in ten (11%) of those who do not want to go on to higher education say that this is because they do not have the right qualifications.

**Earlier you said that you don't want to go on to higher education (e.g. university). For which, if any, of the following reasons did you say this?**



**Figure 24.** Base: All respondents who might not go on to higher education (n=316)

Learners who do not plan on attending higher education say that the barriers to them doing so are because higher education does not necessarily guarantee a job after graduating (40%), that it is too expensive (36%) and they want to avoid debt (26%). Young women are more likely than young men to say that cost is a barrier to them going on to higher education; two in five (39%) young women say that

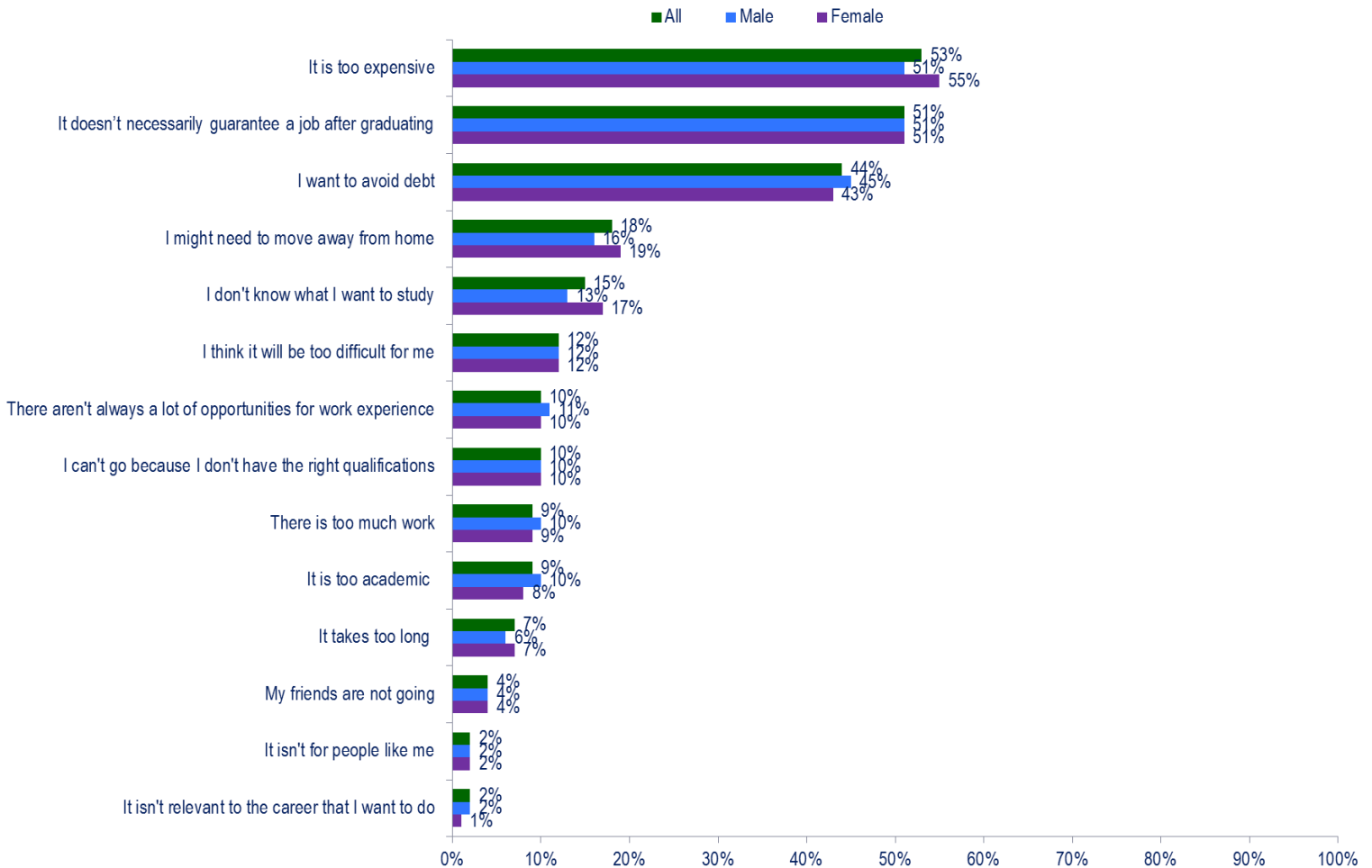
higher education is too expensive compared to a third (34%) of young men, and three in ten (31%) young women say that they want to avoid debt compared one in five (22%) young men. This could indicate that if financial concerns about higher education were removed, there could be increased uptake of higher education among young people.

The data indicates that young men are marginally more likely than young women to say that they want to avoid debt increasingly as they get older; 15% of 13 year old males who do not want to go on to higher education say this, compared to a third (32%) of those aged 17, although these differences are not statistically significant. Young women are concerned about debt, and this is consistent across age groups with the exception of those aged 16 years old who are more likely to say this (43%) than those of other ages. Debt is therefore likely to be a barrier to higher education for young men at the time at which they are making the decisions about their post-18 options.

Young men who have a part-time job for 11 hours or more per week are more likely than those who attend school or college full time to say that they want to avoid debt; two thirds (67%) of those who work 11 or more hours a week say that the expense of university is a barrier to higher education for them, compared to just a third (33%) of those who go to school or college full time.

Young men are more likely than young women to say that the academic aspect of higher education is a barrier to them, with the most significant difference by gender being 14% of young men who say that they can't go on to higher education because they don't have the right qualifications, compared to less than one in ten (8%) young women.

Even though you have said that you might want to/definitely want to go on to higher education (e.g. university) when you leave school/college, which, if any, of the following concerns do you have about higher education?



**Figure 25.** Base: All respondents who might go on to higher education (n=1690)

Those who intend to go on to higher education say that they have the same concerns as those who do not intend to; the expense, lack of guarantee of a job after graduating, and avoiding debt. There is little significant difference by gender for perceived barriers of going to university overall, indicating that concerns about higher education are widespread across the UK among young people. The exception to this is for those who plan to go on to higher education in Scotland, who are less likely to say that they are concerned that higher education is too expensive (25%) than young people who plan to go on to higher education overall (53%). This is likely to be because of the difference in the funding of higher education in Scotland compared to that in the rest of the UK.

## Perceived accepted qualifications for university

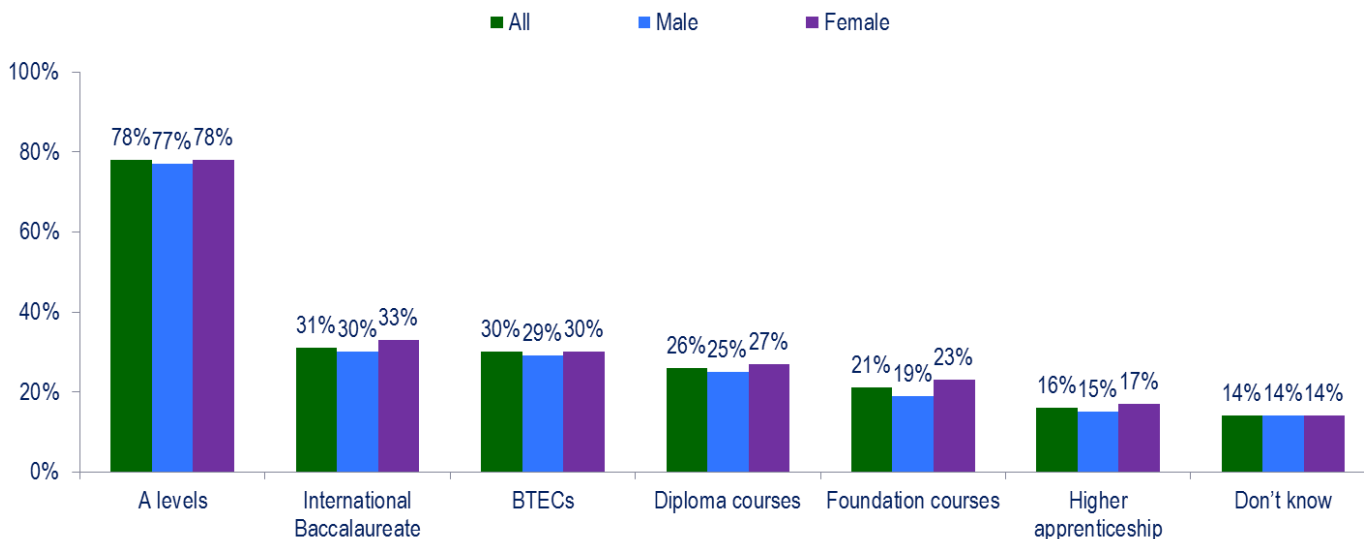
Four in five (78%) young people say that universities would consider A level qualifications when looking at applicants for courses, but beyond this, young people tend to have far less certainty about other access routes into higher education. Those who have already set their mind to a vocational pathway note that attending university would not necessarily be the best route for their chosen career paths.

*“I would love to learn from someone who has good knowledge and experience in their job; I think you might not always be better off in university but to learn from people who have experience in that field.” – Young man, aged 14, State School*

*“Going down that route would cost too much money to study in uni so it may not be a great option for me. I would rather learn on the job, maybe an apprenticeship because I can earn as I learn!” – Young man, aged 14, State School*

*“University is a lesser priority but a priority none the less; I’m constantly hearing that degrees are important for getting a job and then hearing other arguments that sometimes you can be over qualified for jobs or having a degree doesn’t matter.” – Young woman, 17, College*

**Which of the following qualifications, if any, do you think that a university would consider when looking at applicants?**



**Figure 26.** Base: All respondents (n=2006)

Overall, there is little difference in awareness of accepted qualifications by universities, although young women are very slightly more likely to choose each of the qualifications tested. These results suggest that learners are selecting courses without a clear understanding of whether or not they will be accepted as university entrance qualifications.

Which of the following qualifications, if any, do you think that a university would consider when looking at applicants?

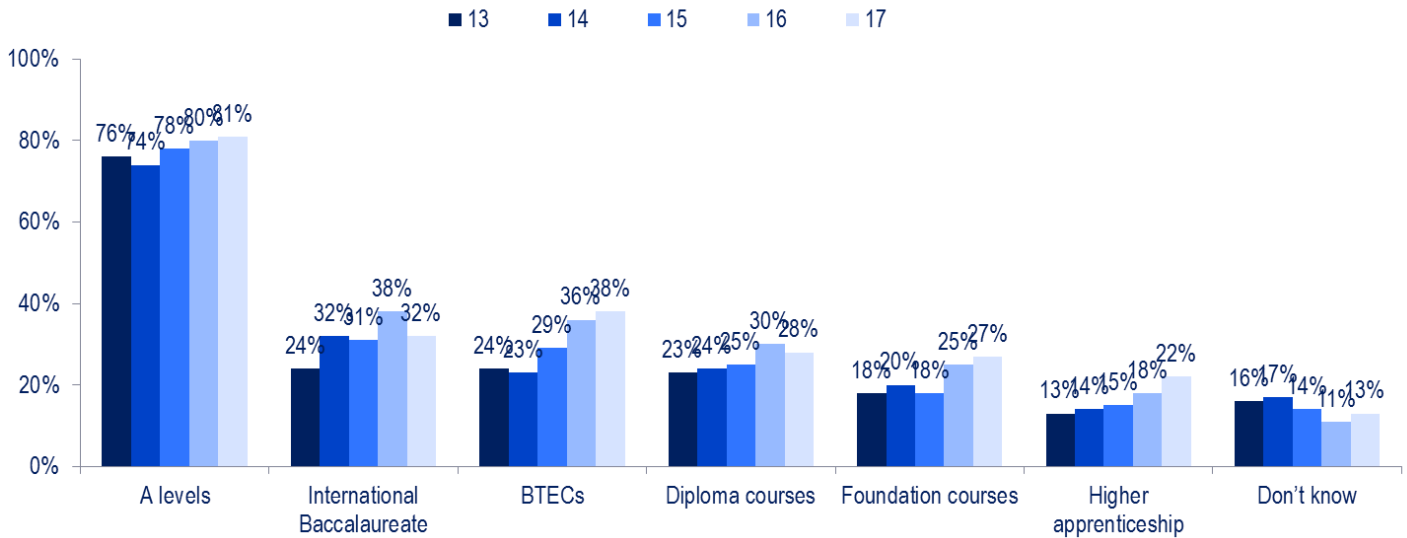


Figure 27. Base: All respondents (n=2006)

In line with wider findings in the field, the distribution of young people studying towards A and AS level qualifications decreases across social grades AB to DE. A quarter (26%) of young people from social grades AB say that they are studying A level qualifications, compared to 19% of those in social grade DE. Conversely, the overall incidence of study of vocational qualifications increases across social grades AB to DE. This casts doubt for the eight in ten (81%) social grade DE students *not* working towards A level qualifications. Despite the majority of students from this social grade not studying A levels, it is these qualifications that they think will be accepted by university. On the whole, younger learners are less likely to select each of the qualifications than older learners, which indicates that they have less awareness of the qualifications considered by universities. This is a significant area of concern, as younger learners are at the stage where they are choosing their qualifications, and thus determining their options later on in life. These findings are an indication that information, advice and guidance (IAG) needs to be strengthened so that learners understand the options that will be available to them according to the qualifications they study.

## PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL AND CAREERS

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Subjects are a key driver of whether young men like school. In the online community, subjects that appear to be popular include maths, sciences and physical education.

The reasons young men state for liking specific subjects tend to be either because they feel that they are good at it, and therefore it is less challenging for them, or because they find it fun or interesting.

*"I enjoy the subjects I'm good at like Maths, Chemistry and Physics."* – Young man, aged 16, State School

*"I feel I am good at these [subjects] and get good grades for them."* – Young man, aged 14, State School

*"I enjoy learning new and interesting things about how things work."* – Young man, aged 15, State School

Young men tend to say that they enjoy the practical application of knowledge in subjects such as Maths, Art and Design Technology. Subjects tend to be perceived as 'boring' when young men are not improving their skill set. By improving their skill set, young men tend to mean learning new practical skills that they can use in the world or apply to specific tasks.

*"I've learnt some great shading techniques to use in self portraits and not to draw hard lines; things in everyday life aren't made up of lines so shouldn't be drawn in that way. It has really improved my art."* - Young man, aged 14, State School

*"I've always liked maths [sic], I'm kinda good at it too. The problem solving aspect of it is fun in my opinion. As a subject, it's like a series of puzzles."* – Young man, aged 17, Sixth Form College

Young men tend to say that they dislike language and literature based subjects, and in particular History. Interestingly, Maths features as one of the subjects that is disliked, indicating that this could be a divisive subject.

Young men tend to say that they they dislike subjects because they find them boring or difficult. These are the two main reasons they give in the online qualitative community for not enjoying a particular subject, which reinforces the finding that young men are more likely to say that they enjoy practical or scientific subjects, where they learn new skills.

*"I took history [sic] as an option this year and hated it just because of how boring it is."* – Young man, aged 16, State School

*"I do not like German because I find it difficult to remember the word order and I find History boring as at the moment we are studying mills."* – Young man, aged 14, State School



Young women are less likely to draw upon specific subjects as key drivers for whether or not they like school. Instead, young women are more likely to talk about the overall school experience and their perceptions of their teachers as having an impact on their perceptions towards school or college.

## CAREERS

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### Desired careers

The online communities indicate that there are numerous careers that young people are considering, however these tend to be fairly 'traditional', rather than new careers. Many of the careers suggested by young men align with the school subjects that they enjoy: specifically science or maths based careers. Other career choices appear to be difficult to achieve, such as sports professionals. Young women tend to have a few options that they are considering, rather than having settled on a definite career path. Some say that they have 'dream' careers that they know are difficult to achieve, such as music careers, and have an alternative or 'achievable' option. This is the main difference between young men and women – the online community indicates that young women have a greater sense of achievable and 'dream' careers, whereas young men are hopeful that their career may be attainable.

### Pathways to a desired career

This difference by gender is reinforced by the knowledge of access routes to their chosen careers; young women tend to have a more informed view of how to access their careers, compared to young men. This tends to be particularly true of young men who have not decided on a specific career; those who have a clearer idea of their future job, for example, a lawyer, are informed about how to reach that career. Despite this, even those informed about the pathway to their ideal job are often less aware than their female counterparts about alternative education or training options available to them.

*"The minimum I would need to go into the police is intermediate 2's but I have asked if they would like me to have more results behind me and they have said that a HNC/HND, degree or higher's [sic]. To become a sports coach the minimum requirement is a HNC in a sports coaching course and I can go onto to do a HND and then possible a degree at university." – Young woman, aged 16, State School*

*"Their [sic] are many pathways due to the fact that design has endless possibilities, but you could take the path through higher education and get a degree or it also depends on how you look at things and the way you interpret modern day designs and structures." – Young man, aged 16, Sixth Form College*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- The role of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) should be strengthened so that it can set relevant targets for the higher education sector. OFFA should add males and learners with vocational Level 3 qualifications to its list of target groups and include these in its annual guidance to the sector. OFFA should assess the extent to which institutions signpost vocational routes into HE.
- Universities and colleges should develop their engagement strategies with pre-university students, and in particular with students attending State Schools, Colleges and University Technical Colleges to ensure that every young person has engagement with a higher education provider. Universities should collaborate in regionalised networks to facilitate this.
- The careers education model requires a complete overhaul and must be revised and strengthened to ensure that all pupils receive good quality, independent and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG). Young people must have access to a quality IAG offer regardless of their school or college type.
- Young people with average or low perceived academic performance should be targeted to increase awareness of the range of options for higher education participation. Communication about the range of qualifications suitable for higher education progression must be improved. There is a need for further research including qualitative studies to explore learner journeys and decision-making processes.
- The financial support mechanisms for post-16 and higher education students must be reviewed in relation to the extent to which they adequately support students from widening participation backgrounds to progress to higher education.
- There is a need to review how gender and class interact in the compulsory education sector. In addition, government should review and publish international examples of efforts to improve male participation in higher education.
- Continue communicating with young people throughout the 12-18 age group, using a variety of different engagement techniques. Later on, talks by business professionals and direct contact with universities via open days and visits to specific universities is likely to be a positive experience for young people. All communications should continually emphasise career opportunities and practical skills learnt for each course, to reassure young people that the benefits of studying at higher education are valuable and can support progression to a successful career. When engaging with young men specifically, focussing on practical skills and skills that are transferrable to careers that can be learnt at university is likely to gain a positive reaction.



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