



Department
for Education

User insight research into post-16 choices

**A report by CFE Research with Dr
Deirdre Hughes OBE**

December 2017

Contents

List of figures	4
List of tables	6
Summary	7
Objectives of this study	7
Overview of our approach	7
Key findings	7
Conclusions: Implications for policy	10
Glossary of terms	13
Introduction	14
Background and context	14
Aims and objectives of the research	15
Approach	16
Learner survey	16
Follow-up interviews	18
About this report	18
Making decisions about post-16 choices	20
Decision-making theory	20
When young people decide which course(s) to undertake	23
Sources of support	27
Individuals	27
Tools and resources	32
Wider sources	38
Types of information sought in support of decision-making	42
Ease of decision-making	47
Summary	50
Application systems and advice	53
Application routes	53
Satisfaction with current course(s)	56
Preferences for IAG	57
Summary	62

Conclusions: Implications for policy	64
Annex 1: Sample characteristics	66
Annex 2: Supporting graphs	73

List of figures

Figure 1: Relationship between soft and hard sociological and institutional influences ...	22
Figure 2: Which individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	27
Figure 3: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	31
Figure 4: Which tools and resources young people used in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	33
Figure 5: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13	37
Figure 6: Which wider sources young people use in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	38
Figure 7: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13	40
Figure 8: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making	43
Figure 9: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making	46
Figure 10: How easy or difficult young people found it to decide on which course/s to apply for by route	48
Figure 11: How young people applied for their current course.....	53
Figure 12: How easy or difficult young people found it to apply for their current course/s by route.....	55
Figure 13: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training	59
Figure 14: Which individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year11/13 by route.....	73
Figure 15: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (FE Academic)	74
Figure 16: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (HE Academic).....	75
Figure 17: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (Technical FE/HE).....	76
Figure 18: Which tools and resources young people used in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route.....	77

Figure 19: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (FE Academic).....	78
Figure 20: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (HE Academic)	79
Figure 21: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (Technical FE/HE).....	80
Figure 22: Which wider sources young people use in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route.....	81
Figure 23: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (FE Academic).....	82
Figure 24: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (HE Academic)	82
Figure 25: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (Technical FE/HE)	83
Figure 26: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (FE Academic)	84
Figure 27: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (HE Academic).....	85
Figure 28: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (Technical FE/HE)	86
Figure 29: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (FE Academic).....	87
Figure 30: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (HE Academic).....	88
Figure 31: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (Technical FE/HE)	89
Figure 32: How young people applied for their current course by route.....	90
Figure 33: How satisfied young people are with their current educational choice by route	91
Figure 34: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (FE Academic).....	92
Figure 35: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (HE Academic).....	93
Figure 36: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (Technical FE/HE)	94

List of tables

Table 1: Route through post-16 education.....	19
Table 2: When young people <i>first started thinking</i> about what to do after Year 11/13.....	23
Table 3: When young people made the <i>final decision</i> to do the course they are doing now	24
Table 4: Timeline of decision making.....	26
Table 5: Number of individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	29
Table 6: Number of tools and resources young people viewed in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13.....	35
Table 7: How easy or difficult young people found it to decide on which course/s to apply for	47
Table 8: How easy or difficult young people found it to apply for their current course/s ..	54
Table 9: How satisfied young people are with their current educational choice	56
Table 10: Proportion of respondents who strongly disagree with statements about IAG by route	60
Table 11: Gender.....	66
Table 12: Ethnicity	66
Table 12: Age on 31 st August 2017.....	66
Table 14: Self-reported disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition	67
Table 14: Whether respondent has ever received or been eligible to receive free school meals and/or 16-19 Bursary.....	67
Table 16: Parental education	67
Table 17: Highest qualification currently held	68
Table 17: Type of school <i>last</i> attended	68
Table 18: Main location of <i>current</i> studies	69
Table 19: Main subject <i>currently</i> studying.....	70
Table 20: Learner characteristics by route.....	71

Summary

Objectives of this study

This research set out to test the hypothesis: given the current complexity of the post-16 educational landscape, learners can experience difficulties making fully-informed choices and navigating technical education routes in particular.

The aim was to assess how young people make educational choices post-16 and what information they use. The objectives were as follows:

- To explore which sources of information are used, and how they are used, when learners (aged 16-19) are making educational choices and how this differs by type of learner, institution, and destination.
- To understand how advice and guidance and application systems interact with these choices.
- To explore potential advantages of a centralised digital course and application system in supporting effective choices.

For each of these objectives, the research sought to identify any differences in the perceptions and experiences of learners following technical and academic routes. The findings are designed to inform government policy on improving the decision-making and application process for learners following *all* transition routes.

Overview of our approach

The focus for the research is young people aged 16-19 who are currently engaged in the post-16 sector in England. In this context, 'post-16' encompasses School/Academy Sixth Forms, University Technical Colleges (UTCs), Sixth Form Colleges, FE Colleges (FECs) (including general, land-based and specialist institutions), apprenticeships and higher education (HE). As the focus for the research is on the decisions made at key transition points at age 16 and 18, the sample of HE students is limited to those in their first year of undergraduate study only. A mixed-methods approach was adopted which combined a large-scale survey and semi-structured interviews with current learners aged 16 - 19.

Key findings

When decisions are made:

- Although a small proportion of young people start thinking about their post-16 choices as early as primary school, it is most common for them to begin this process in earnest during Year 11.

- Grammar school pupils, learners on academic pathways, young people with a least one parent with a university education, and those with Special Educational Needs (SEN)¹ start thinking about their post-16 options earlier than other groups. Young people typically leave the final decision until the final year of study prior to making a transition – Year 11 for those progressing into some form of FE and Year 13 for those progressing into HE. However, those on academic routes are more likely to make a *final* decision earlier than those on a technical pathway.

Individual sources of help

- The vast majority of young people consult with at least one individual for help and support with decision-making and, on average, consult with three sources.
- Young people most commonly turn to ‘informal sources’ including parents/carers, teachers and friends. Although more limited use is made of careers advisers and local employers, those who do consult them find them useful.
- Those who consulted staff during an open day or a direct visit to an educational institution regard them as the most useful source of help. Although learners on academic and technical routes consult similar individuals, those on technical pathways typically rate the help they receive as less useful than those on academic routes, with the exception of parents/carers and staff at open days.

Tools and resources

- There are a plethora of tools and resources available to support young people with their decision-making. Factor analysis reveals that there are five groups of resources that young people typically use: university focused; mentoring focused; vocationally focused; careers focused and STEM focused. These resources are often tailored to specific audiences, and this is broadly reflected in the groups that use them.
- On average, young people access two resources. However, a substantial minority do not use any; this is more prevalent amongst those on technical than academic routes. Learning providers’ websites are rated as the most useful of the tools and resources young people use, followed by comparison sites.

Wider resources

- Although less use is made of wider sources of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), those who use them find the most useful source of help with decision-making when compared with individuals and tools and resources.
- Work experience/internships and extra-curricular activities are regarded as particularly helpful. Young people from lower socio-economic groups often lack the

¹ Defined as a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition

social capital and networks that help to facilitate access to these opportunities, and it is notable that use is more prominent amongst more advantaged survey respondents, such as those who attended independent schools, those whose parents are university educated and those who do not qualify for Free School Meals (FSM).

Type of information sought and ease of access

- The types of information young people seek fall into four categories: costs involved in studying; outcomes of studying; course approach; and wider knowledge of course.
- Young people most commonly seek information on the qualifications and grades they need to get on a course and information on what they will learn. Those in HE are more concerned than those in FE to obtain information about the jobs and earnings of people who have studied the course they are considering and the financial support that is available. Learners who are currently eligible or in receipt of FSM and/or the 16-19 Bursary are also more likely to seek information on financial support and course costs.
- Although the information that young people most commonly seek is easy to find, accessing information, such as what learners do and earn after the course, dropout rates and the financial support available, is perceived to be more difficult, particularly for learners with special educational needs (SEN).
- The majority of young people find it easy to decide which post-16/post-18 course to apply for. Learners on academic routes (FE and HE) are more likely to find it difficult to make a decision than learners on technical routes. Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people along with those with SEN are also more likely to find decision-making difficult. Help to choose the right course and subsequent guidance and support with applications are key.

Application systems

- Young people overall find it easy to apply for post-16/post-18 pathways. Despite the apparent ease of academic routes and the relative complexity of technical pathways, technical learners are less likely to report that they found it difficult to apply for their current course than those on academic routes. However, young people from BAME groups are more likely to find it difficult to apply than White young people.
- The reasons learners gave for finding the application process difficult include that they were 'unsure which course or institution to apply to' and they 'did not know who to ask' and/or 'where to go' for help with their decision-making. Others found the process complex and time consuming. Some technical learners experienced difficulties with the system or difficulties when dealing directly with the individual provider or employer.

Satisfaction with current choice

- Almost nine out of ten young people are satisfied or very satisfied with their current course choice. Aspects of course delivery and the suitability of the course are the main sources of dissatisfaction. A minority of dissatisfied young people perceive that they have been channelled down a route that others believed was suitable for them, rather than the route they themselves wanted to follow.

Preferences for IAG

- Although most young people are willing to access information online, there is strong preference for face-to-face help and support with decision-making. The findings suggest that more needs to be done to raise awareness amongst young people, particularly those with SEN, to help with their decision-making and to encourage those from lower socio-economic groups to make use of careers information, advice and guidance (IAG).

The role of a centralised system in an enhanced careers IAG offer

- Most young people are able to find the information they believe they need to make fully informed decisions about post-16 education. However, a substantial minority, particularly Academic (FE and HE) students, do not know which of the myriad of information sources they can trust. Three-fifths of respondents agree that the decision-making process would be easier if all the information about courses and how to apply was in one place. Technical (FE/HE) learners were more likely to strongly agree compared with Academic (FE and HE) learners.
- There does not appear to be a correlation between those who found it difficult to apply for their current course and those who agree they would have found it easier to make a decision if all the information had been in one place.
- Respondents during the qualitative interviews welcomed the idea of a new system which improved the quality and depth of course information available to students as well as provided information on specialist student support services, destinations, and student career trajectories.

Conclusions: Implications for policy

A new careers strategy in England provides an ideal opportunity to consider the findings from this report. Young people's career decision-making styles, processes and strategies vary considerably. Their preferences for support are mixed, with some preferring to simply use internet search engines to find the information they need and others preferring a combination of formal face-to-face and online careers support.

- Although most young people perceive that they have access to the information they need to make informed decisions, there are calls for improvements in the careers support they and their peers receive. There is evidence that for some,

access to impartial and independent IAG is limited and, as a result, young people turn to informal sources including parents, friends and class teachers who try to do their best for students but who may have limited knowledge and experience of the full range of options.

- The concept of institutional habitus, or the ways in which an institution (e.g. schools, colleges, employers and training providers) exhibits expectations of who and what its students are expected to be, is also an important influence on post-16 choices and decision-making. There were reports of some schools withholding FE and apprenticeship information, particularly to academically-able students, and of young people who aspired to HE being channelled down technical routes. Some young people indicated their peers, who had limited social or cultural capital, did not have adequate careers IAG to help them make the most of their talents and abilities.
- Overall, the majority of respondents highlighted a desire for improvements in the quality and depth of course information available, as well as information about specialist student support services, destinations and career trajectories. Having all of this information in one place, communicated well to young people, teachers, parents, employers, careers professionals and others, could help more young people to be aware of the full range of options available to them.
- The findings in this report offer some opportunities and challenges for policymakers seeking to identify interventions to help support young people to progress in their chosen pathways. The intersectionality between factors means that it is impossible to determine the extent and relative influence of the range of factors affecting a young person at a given point in time with any certainty. Therefore, potential interventions which look to increase effective post-16 choices and decision-making are likely to be most effective if developed within a coherent careers IAG framework. Such a framework would look to incorporate both 'push and pull' interventions, addressing barriers while simultaneously promoting the benefits for different groups of individuals. Factors that would create improved careers support for learners include:
 - Understanding that different young people will have different requirements at different times in their lives and that support should be personalised and tailored accordingly.
 - Focusing on the needs of particular groups of learners who experience difficulty in course choice and decision making such as BAME groups and learners with SEN.
 - Raising awareness of the full range of opportunities amongst young people and their informal and formal support networks, particularly from Year 9 onwards.
 - Supporting young people to access and make effective use of IAG in order for them (and their families) to have meaningful *careers dialogue* that supports their education and career decisions.

- Empowering young people and equipping them to have greater access to student destinations, labour market intelligence/information (LMI) and 21st century career trajectories.
- Recognising that strategic leadership is essential, particularly in schools and colleges, to ensure all young people from an early age have the right level of support through to the point at which key decisions post-16 options are made.

While further research is needed to evaluate specific approaches to support young people's career decision-making over time e.g. more longitudinal tracking and analysis, the report shows there is a greater chance that an individual will, irrespective of their gender, socioeconomic status or ethnicity, progress if the right careers IAG is in place. It is crucial to recognise that the steps a disadvantaged young person has to take in order to participate in post-16 course choice and decision-making can be quite profound, compared to more advantaged young people. The voices of young people who took part in this research show they are keen to see improvements in careers IAG for themselves and the next generation coming through England's schooling system.

Glossary of terms

A number of phrases and short-hand abbreviated terms are used in the report. The table below describes their meaning.

Term	Description
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
CATI	Computer assisted telephone interviewing
IAG	Information, advice and guidance.
DfE	Department for Education
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
FSM	Free School Meals
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ILR	Individual Learner Record
IPTE	Independent Panel on Technical Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs – used to describe anyone with a self-reported disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition.
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UTC	University Technical College

Introduction

This report has been produced by CFE Research and Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE for the Department for Education (DfE). It summarises key findings from user insight research into how young people in England, who have transitioned from school into further education (FE), apprenticeships and higher education (HE), make decisions about their post-16 education and training and the issues and challenges they face when navigating the qualifications and applications system.

Background and context

It is vital to ensure that every young person in England, regardless of their personal circumstance, is fully aware of all pathways open to them at key transition points throughout their schooling. Failure to do so means wasting their talent and missing out on what they have to offer all sectors in the UK economy and wider society. However, evidence suggests that in England (and other parts of the UK) the range of courses and qualifications, particularly in FE and Apprenticeships, can be confusing for many 16-19 year olds (IPTE, 2016)². A recent report by the Social Mobility Commission (2017)³ found that “nearly half of people (48%) believe that where you end up in society today is mainly determined by your background and who your parents are. This compares with 32% who believe everyone has a fair chance to get on regardless of their background” (p.6). It is generally acknowledged that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (and certain other groups) face particular barriers and are less likely to benefit from support to make informed decisions. Clearly, this is a problem for social mobility.

The Post-16 Skills Plan⁴ highlighted the Government’s intention to empower students, parents and employers by making more information available about what students go on to do and how much they earn after taking particular routes, and how the performance of colleges and other providers influences students’ performance in working life. Clearly, this information needs to be easy to access and understand so that young people can use it to compare different education and career options and make confident and informed choices. This forms part of a proposed new careers strategy in England.⁵ The

² Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education, April 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

³ Social Mobility Commission (2017) Social Mobility Barometer: Public Attitudes to Social Mobility in the UK, London, June 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618627/Social_Mobility_Barometer.pdf

⁴ BIS/DFE (2016) Post-16 Skills Plan, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education, July 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536043/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf

⁵ Op cit para.6.5, p. 37

Green Paper 'Building our Industrial Strategy'⁶ and subsequent Chancellor's Budget (Spring 2017) highlighted plans to deliver 3 million apprenticeships by 2020, and establish 15 new technical education routes, as well as the need to ensure holistic support for all young people to make well-informed decisions. The Green Paper also highlighted a requirement for more effective information and set out a proposal to support those wishing to pursue routes through technical education:

“People choosing apprenticeships or courses in colleges currently face significant complexity when selecting and applying for a course... We will therefore explore how to give technical education students clear information and better support throughout the application process, with a similar platform to UCAS, which will also make it easier for students to compare options in technical education and higher education”.⁷

In order to understand the demand for and inform the development of any new system, it is important to first understand what tools and resources young people currently use, how they use them and what their experiences are, in addition to identifying any gaps in current information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision, particularly for learners on technical routes. Listening to the voices and experiences of young people was a key driver underpinning this study.

Aims and objectives of the research

This research was commissioned to test the hypothesis that given the current complexity of the post-16 educational landscape, learners can experience difficulties making fully-informed choices and navigating technical education routes in particular. In testing this hypothesis, the research set out to explore whether the provision of a new centralised digital course and application system could help to overcome these difficulties and improve the experience for young people as they negotiate their way through the myriad of opportunities.

In order to address the research aims, the following objectives were set:

- To understand which sources of information, advice and guidance young people use and when to help with decision-making, which sources young people find most useful, and how the different sources interact to shape and influence young people's choices.

⁶ HMG (2017) Building our Industrial Strategy: Green Paper, London: Her Majesty's Government, January 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/611705/building-our-industrial-strategy-green-paper.pdf

⁷ *ibid* p.43

- To assess how easy or difficult young people find it to navigate the current qualifications and applications system and to identify key challenges.
- To explore the role that a centralised digital course and application system could fulfil in supporting well-informed and effective choices.

For each of these objectives, the research sought to identify any differences in the perceptions and experiences of learners following different routes through post-16 education. In order to ensure that future policy effectively drives social mobility, the research paid particular attention to the experiences of and challenges faced by particular groups of learners – including BAME groups, lower socio-economic groups and learners with special educational needs (SEN)⁸. The findings are designed to inform government policy on improving the decision-making and application process for learners following *all* transition routes and the potential value of a national system.

Approach

The focus for the research is young people aged 16-19 who are currently engaged in the post-16 sector in England. In this context, ‘post-16’ encompasses School/Academy Sixth Forms, University Technical Colleges (UTCs), Sixth Form Colleges, FE Colleges (FECs) (including general, land-based and specialist institutions), apprenticeships and HE. As the focus for the research is on the decisions made at key transition points at age 16 and 18, the sample of HE students is limited to those in their first year of study only. The research was commissioned on 7th March. Interim findings were required by 11th May and a first draft report by 5th June. Given the limited timescale, a pragmatic, mixed-methods approach was developed which combined a large-scale mixed mode survey and semi-structured interviews with current learners.

Learner survey

In the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, the survey was administered via an existing online panel⁹ and by computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI)¹⁰ to a sample drawn from the Individual Learner Record (ILR). A single questionnaire instrument was developed which was adapted for the different survey modes and administered to all participants. All respondents were screened by home nation, age and current course to ensure that they were eligible to take part. Learners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were screened out, along with those who would still be age 16 on 31st August 2017 and those who were *only* resitting GCSEs. The survey was piloted to

⁸ Defined as a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition

⁹ The online panel used is managed by YouthSight: www.youthsight.com

¹⁰ The CATI interviews were conducted by Qa Research: www.qaresearch.co.uk

check the wording, structure and routing in a real data capture setting. Key questions were mandatory (in that respondents could not progress through the survey until they had answered them) to facilitate routing and ensure a high base count for statistical analysis. The questionnaire consisted primarily of pre-coded, closed-ended questions and where appropriate, the order of the questions was randomised to account for response bias. Open-ended questions were kept to a minimum. Emerging issues were explored in more depth during a series of follow-up interviews.

We were careful to ensure our research complied with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct¹¹ and British Educational Research Associations' Ethical Guidelines (2011)¹². All participants in our study were fully apprised, in advance, of the aims of the research and how the findings would be used and reported. No duress was placed on any individuals to participate, and at each stage, participants were made aware they could withdraw if they so wished. We stressed to all participants that the information they provided would be treated in strictest confidence and that no use would be made of real names in any research reports, journal articles or presentations.

The primary population of interest was learners progressing through technical routes who were more likely to have experienced qualification and applications systems other than the well-established UCAS. Disproportionate quotas were, therefore, set to ensure these groups were adequately represented in the sample and a minimum number of responses was achieved to enable analysis at the level of the sub-group. Respondents' characteristics were also monitored to ensure the sample was broadly representative of the wider population of learners. A total of 2017 responses was achieved against a target of 1600:

- **1,667** FE learners and 1st year undergraduates via the **online panel**
- **350** apprentices via **CATI**

The final sample includes respondents located across all nine regions in England¹³. It is well-balanced in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and disability as well as place and subject of study. A full breakdown of the sample characteristics is provided in Annex 1.

¹¹ See: https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/code_of_conduct/

¹² See also: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf>

¹³ These include: South East, South West, London, East of England, West Midlands, East Midlands, North West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Follow-up interviews

A recall question was included in the learner survey to aid the recruitment for the follow-up interviews. A total of **24 semi-structured telephone interviews** with a sub-sample of survey respondents was conducted by CFE. The sample comprises:

- seven FEC learners
- five Sixth Form College/School Sixth Form learners
- five first year undergraduates
- seven Apprentices

The telephone interviews explored learners' experiences of choosing and applying for courses, including any issues or challenges they experienced as a result of current systems for IAG, qualifications and applications. The perceived advantages and potential key features of a centralised digital system were also explored to help inform future policy decisions. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes. With respondents' consent, the interviews were digitally recorded for quality assurance purposes and to enable full transcription for coding and analysis.

About this report

This report presents the findings from the learner survey, illustrated with quotations from the interview data which add qualitative depth. The survey findings are presented in aggregate for the sample as a whole. Differences in the perceptions and experiences of learners by route are explored, along with any differences by learner characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability and level of parental education. All differences have been tested for statistical significance and only those that are statistically significant at the 5% level are reported in the main report. Multivariate analysis was also undertaken with information about the nature of the tests performed provided in footnotes. The characteristics of the respondents in each sub-group are provided in Annex 1 (Table 20). The three routes through post-16 education are categorised as in Table 1 overleaf and form the basis of our analysis. Commentary about any differences observed on the basis of route is included in the main body of the report with supporting graphs in Annex 2¹⁴.

¹⁴ It is important to note that not all findings summarised in the supporting graphs are statistically significant. Please refer to the main report for statistically significant differences by route.

Table 1: Route through post-16 education

Route	No.	%
FE (Academic) defined as learners studying A levels	561	27.8%
HE (Academic) defined as learners studying an undergraduate degree	530	26.3%
Technical (FE & HE) defined as learners studying technical and vocational courses such as apprenticeships, national diplomas and NVQs at Levels 2 to 5	926	45.9%

Base=2,017

Following this introduction, the report is presented in 3 sections:

Making decisions about post-16 choices

This section draws on relevant decision-making literature and individuals' responses to the survey and telephone interviews to assess *how* young people make educational choices post-16. It examines *when* young people start to make decisions about their post-16 education, the current sources of IAG young people use and how useful they find them, and the type of information young people seek and how easy it is to access. We consider how individuals exercise 'agency' in their response to choice and to external influences linked to their individual orientations, preferences and dispositions.

Application systems and advice

This section examines how information, advice and guidance and application systems interact to shape and influence young people's post-16 choices. We examine whether and how young people applied for their current course and how easy or difficult they found the process. We then consider how satisfied young people are with their current choice of course and their reasons. We conclude this section by examining young people's preferences for IAG – face-to-face, online and by text or telephone – and consider perceived advantages and key challenges in creating centralised digital course and application system to support young people's post-16 choices and decisions.

Conclusions: Implications for policy

The report concludes by considering the implications of the research findings for policy and identifies a number of key areas for more detailed consideration by DfE and its key partners.

Making decisions about post-16 choices

In this section we first draw on relevant decision-making literature and individuals' responses to the survey and telephone interviews to assess how young people make educational choices post-16 to inform policies supporting the decision and application process for post-16 learner choices.

Decision-making theory

Within the available academic literature, there is a significant body of research examining young people's styles, processes, and strategies in relation to career decision-making. For example, Harren¹⁵ identified three decision-making styles: *rational*, *avoidant*, and *dependent*. The sample on which this typology was derived was restricted to college students and was conducted nearly four decades ago. The *rational* style is often perceived as an active and planned approach to decision-making. The *avoidant* style is characterised by failure to attain and process information and the postponement of career decisions. The *dependent* style involves transferring responsibility for decisions to external sources, such as significant others. The rational decision-making style is often viewed as a systematic approach that yields information relevant to supporting decisions. This has been found to be associated with career maturity¹⁶, cognitive information processing¹⁷, career decidedness¹⁸, and problem-solving efficacy¹⁹. However, there is no conclusive evidence that the rational style is associated with superior decision-making outcomes, nor is this common behaviour. Some argue that a young person's mindset will shape their choice behaviour. For example, in a study of the decision-making of 14-year olds, different mindsets were identified, including: *determined realist*, *indecisive worrier*, *comfort seeker* and *unrealistic dreamer*.²⁰ Gati and Amir²¹ suggest that individuals may be described more accurately as using a combination of approaches in career decision-making and it may be more informative to consider a broad set of decision dimensions

¹⁵ Harren, V. A. (1979). A model of career decision-making for college students, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 14 (2), pp.119-133

¹⁶ Janeiro, J. N., & Marques, J. F. (2010). Career coping styles: Differences in career attitudes among secondary school students. *International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance*, pp.10, 35-48. doi:10.1007/s10775-009-9170-3

¹⁷ Sampson, J. P., Lenz, J. G., Reardon, R. C., & Peterson, G. W. (1999). A cognitive information processing approach to employment problem solving and decision making. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 48, pp. 3–18

¹⁸ Ferrari, L.; Nota, L., & Salvatore, S. (2012) Evaluation of an Intervention to Foster Time Perspective and Career Decidedness in a Group of Italian Adolescents, *Career Development Quarterly*. March 2012, Vol. 60 Issue 1, pp.82-96

¹⁹ Bullock-Yowell, E., Katz, S.P., Reardon, R.C., & Peterson, G.W. (2012) The Role of Negative Career Thinking and Career Problem Solving Efficacy in Career Exploratory Behaviour, *Professional Counselor*, 2 (2) pp.102-114

²⁰ Blenkinsop, S., T. McCrone, P. Wade, and M. Morris. 2006. *How do young people make choices at 14 and 16? (Research Report 773)*. London: Department for Education and Skills

²¹ Gati, I., & Amir, T. (2010). Applying a systemic procedure to locate career decision-making difficulties. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 58, pp.301–320

than to focus on broad styles. Instead, Gati *et al*²² suggest using the profiles of 11 different decision dimensions as follows:

1. Information gathering reflects the degree of involvement in the collection and organisation of information
2. Information processing refers to the extent of analysis of career information
3. Locus of control is the degree of one's perceived control over career opportunities²³
4. Effort invested in the process reflects the time and effort devoted to career decision making
5. Procrastination is the delay in involvement in decision-making tasks
6. Speed of making the final decision reflects the time needed to make a final career decision
7. Consulting with others refers to the extent to which help is sought from other people during the decision-making process
8. Dependence on others is the extent of reliance on others for making the career decision
9. Desire to please others reflects attempts to satisfy the expectations of others
10. Aspiration of an ideal occupation is the desire to find a perfect occupation
11. Willingness to compromise refers to flexibility in one's career aspirations.

Schlossberg's transition theory²⁴ discusses education transitions in terms of four S's: *situation*, *self*, *strategies*, and *support*. *Situation* factors are elements such as timing, duration of transition, and one's experience with similar transitions. *Self* factors describe the person experiencing the transition. These can include demographic characteristics such as age, race, or gender, and psychological characteristics, such as optimism or self-efficacy. *Strategies* refer to ways in which individuals cope with the transition. *Support* refers to people, organisations, or institutions the person turns to for help with the transition. Sociological research suggests that "racial minorities, particularly low-income minorities, have access to job contacts, but may be unable to effectively make use of their contacts' social capital for a job search".²⁵ It is not uncommon among low-income minorities to switch off a career pathway because of barriers associated with poverty (limited transportation or unstable housing, for example), or a lack of awareness of opportunity structures (such as higher education, apprenticeships, STEM options, for

²² Gati, I., Gadassi, R., & Mashiah-Cohen, R. (2012). Career decision-making profiles vs. styles: Convergent and incremental validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81, pp.2–16

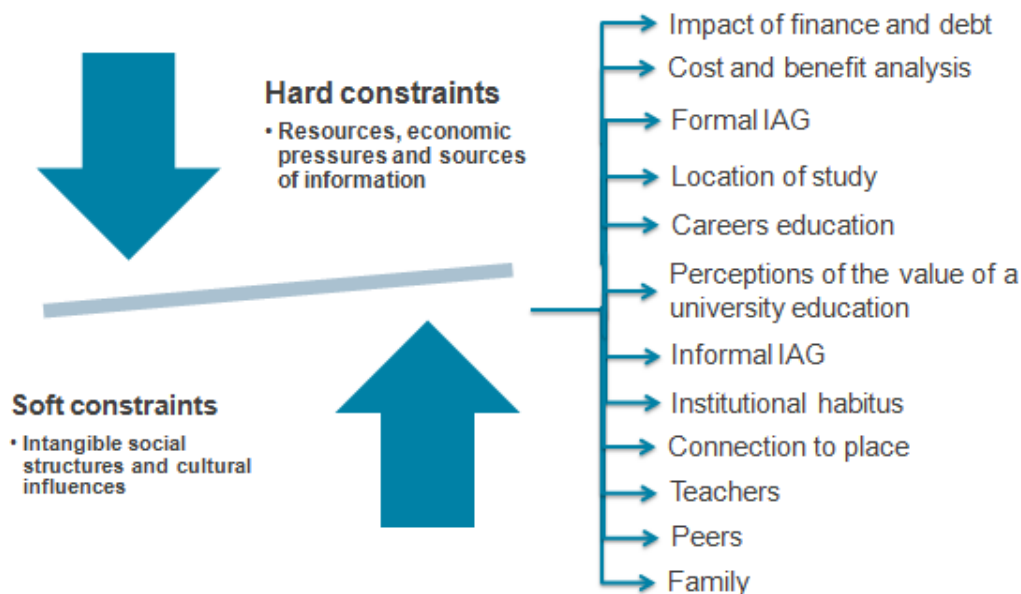
²³ It is argued that students with an internal locus of control are less oriented to the opinions of others and therefore less likely to delay the process of gathering and analysing career information, and less likely to report general decision difficulty

²⁴ Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), pp.159-162

²⁵ MacDonald, S., Lin, N. and Ao, D. (2009) Networks of opportunity: gender, race and job leads, *Social Problems*, Vol. 56 (3) pp. 385–402

example). Raffo and Reeves²⁶ emphasise that the process of developing social capital through ‘trustworthy reciprocal relations with individualised networks’ is crucial, along with ‘everyday practical knowledge created through interaction, dialogue, action and reflection on action within individualised and situated social contexts’. Social reproduction theorists argue that the patterns identified in young people’s choices and career trajectories reflect the differentiated levels of social, cultural and economic capital possessed by the different social classes²⁷. Figure 1 provides a conceptual view showing in practice the relationship between these factors is more fluid. Furthermore, although termed hard and soft ‘constraints’ these factors have the potential to both *open up* and *close off* opportunities for young people as choices come into and out of focus.

Figure 1: Relationship between soft and hard sociological and institutional influences



Source: CFE Research (2015) Understanding progression into higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups. BIS Research Paper Number 229

Other empirical research suggests many people experience happenstance events in their career development that impact significantly on their career decision-making^{28 29}. In contrast, it is argued that emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision-making need to be fully considered³⁰.

²⁶ Raffo, C. and Reeves, M. (2000). Youth transitions and social exclusion: Developments in social capital theory. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3(2), 147-166

²⁷ Bourdieu, P. 1986. The forms of capital. In *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, ed. J. Richardson, pp. 241–58. New York, NY: Greenwood

²⁸ Bright, J. E. H., Pryor, R. G. L., Chan, E. W. M., & Rijanto, J. (2009). Chance events in career development: Influence, control and multiplicity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75, pp.14–25

²⁹ Hirschi, A., & Herrmann, A. (2013). Assessing difficulties in career decision making among Swiss adolescents with the German My Vocational Situation Scale. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 72, pp.33–42

³⁰ Saka, N., Gati, I., & Kelly, K.R. (2008). Emotional and personality-related aspects of career decision making difficulties. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16 (4), pp. 403-424

When young people decide which course(s) to undertake

Traditionally, subject and/or educational choices take place at key transition points in Years 9 (GCSE subject choices), 11 (post-16 choices) and 13 (post-18 choices), and this is reflected in the survey responses. At 31%, just under one-third of young people first started thinking about what they wanted to do after their GCSEs (for those in Year 11) or Year 13 (for those in HE) during Year 11. One-fifth (21%) considered their post-16 choices when deciding on their GCSE options in Year 9 whilst more than one in ten young people thought about their future education choices in Years 7 or 8 (8%) and primary school (7%). For those young people in HE, twice as many first thought about what they wanted to do post-18 during Year 12 (22%) when compared to Year 13 (10%) (Table 2).

Table 2: When young people first started thinking about what to do after Year 11/13

Year	%
In primary school	7%
In Year 7 or 8	8%
When I had to decide on my GCSE options in Year 9	21%
During Year 10	16%
During Year 11	31%
During Year 12*	22%
During Year 13*	10%
I'm not sure	7%

Base=2,017 (For options with an * the base=620)

Analysis of the findings by study route indicates that young people on academic pathways first start to think about their post-16 choices earlier than their counterparts on technical courses. Whilst 8% of participants in HE (Academic) reported that they first considered their future education choices in Years 7 or 8, only 2% of HE (Technical) learners did so.

Moreover, young people are more likely to first think about their post-16 choices earlier if:

- Either of their parents went to university – 11% first thought about their post-16 choices in Year 7 or 8 compared to 6% for those whose parents did not;
- They were grammar school educated – 16% reported thinking about choices in Year 7 or 8 compared to 7% for maintained schools; and

- They report a special educational need – 8% of learners with SEN thought about their choices in primary school compared to 7% for those who do not.

When it comes to the timing of young people making their *final* decision about which courses to pursue, Year 11 (51%) was most commonly cited (Table 3). For those in HE, half made their decision in Year 13 (50%) although just under one-third (31%) decided in Year 12.

Table 3: When young people made the *final decision* to do the course they are doing now

Year	%
In Year 7 or 8	1%
When I had to decide on my GCSE options in Year 9	5%
During Year 10	6%
During Year 11	51%
During Year 12*	31%
During Year 13*	50%
I'm not sure	12%

Base=2,017 (For options with an * the base is 620)

Our in-depth telephone interviews provided more detailed accounts of when young people decide which course(s) to follow and some insights into the reasons for the timing of the decisions:

“I chose Law because I did it at GCSE and A level. I enjoyed it, and I was quite good at it. I did some work experience before I studied, but that was what I wanted to go into.” (HE student)

“I actually decided on it [joining the police] about midway through Year 11. It’s because I wanted to do a different course before, but it was just too different, and I wasn’t sure it would suit me.” (FEC student)

Young people on academic routes can recall their career decision-making more precisely than learners on technical routes. Whilst only 7% of FE (Academic) learners were unsure when they made their final decision about what to study after Year 11, the equivalent figure for FE (Technical) routes is 21%. This accounts for the difference observed in the proportions making their final decision in Year 11, which stands at 81% for FE (Academic) learners compared to 62% of FE (Technical) learners.

“I seem to remember when I first decided I wanted to do a Zoology course, I just looked up some of the best unis that provided this... Sheffield was one of the first ones

I looked at. Then I looked at the description of the course...ordered a prospectus and then...went to visit on an open day. I really liked everything, so ended up doing that as my first choice in the end.” (HE student)

“Well, I’ve applied to university this year through UCAS. So, I have an offer from Cambridge to study music next year. So, assuming I make the grades, that’s where I’ll end up. I’ve definitely always wanted to work in the Arts.” (Sixth Form College student)

“When I was younger I always thought I would go [to HE], just because that’s what everybody does...I just felt, like, it wouldn’t really get me anywhere...So I just thought I’m not going to bother applying for something that I don’t want to do, and I had a lot of people question me on it.” (Apprentice)

“I felt confident that an apprenticeship route was the best option for me. My predicted grades were high and I could have gone to uni but I decided to focus on getting practical experience and earning some money. I researched company information and I spoke to lots of different people about the pros and cons of this route.” (Apprentice)

“When I was making my choices I just like can’t remember what year I made them in, but I only really decided last minute.” (Apprentice)

When considering choices after *Year 13*, those on academic HE pathways made their final decision earlier than those on technical HE pathways: 33% during Year 12 and 47% during Year 13 for HE (Academic) compared to 19% and 63% respectively for HE (Technical) learners on higher level apprenticeships.

“I completed a Level 3 BTEC in business administration last year...I also completed one year of AS study, as well, at a Sixth Form College before going on to the Apprenticeship. I did three AS levels...I, sort of, gave up half way though. I wasn’t very motivated at the Sixth Form College I was at, and I started to look at options for Apprenticeships then.” (Apprentice)

Table 4 outlines the timeline for and the process of decision-making about post-16 course choices and decisions drawn from previous qualitative research conducted by CFE Research on behalf of BIS which explored the decision-making journeys of 43 young people from disadvantaged groups who had followed different routes through post-16 education, training and employment.³¹

³¹ Adaptation from earlier CFE research ‘Understanding progression into higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups – Research Report No. 229’ published by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), London, November 2015. Retrieved from:

Table 4: Timeline of decision making

Timeframe	Decision making process
Pre-14 years old	Even by Year 9 (up to 13 years old), young people were already engaging with ideas about their chosen career path. At this point, participants recalled that motivations and aspirations associated with education and careers took the form of expressing enjoyment or an aspiration to explore an area of particular interest in more detail.
At School (14+ and 16+ choices)	At school, and when making choices about their 14+ and 16+ options, participants had moved from concepts of interest and enjoyment into potential educational and career opportunities. The majority reported making key decisions at age 16. Those individuals with strong career aspirations and self-motivation (early deciders) reported the signposting to higher education easy to understand compared to FE and apprenticeship options. For the majority of respondents, finance and transport issues came into sharp focus at this stage.
Sixth Form or FEC	By this stage, the majority of young people had formulated general or, in some cases, very specific views about their plans for when they left formal education. This does not necessarily mean that an individual will follow this pathway, but it is the point where key decisions about whether to participate in higher education or to follow other options such as apprenticeships became more apparent.
Final year of College or Sixth form	Employability and financial security often came into sharp focus for young people at this stage when a final choice about next stage plans needed to be made. Those who might be considered more 'risk averse' or without a specific career plan in mind were most likely to either drift into continued education (drifters) or change route (switchers) at this point with a view to moving into a new programme of study and/or employment. In some cases, respondents remained unclear about their future career pathways (the undecided).

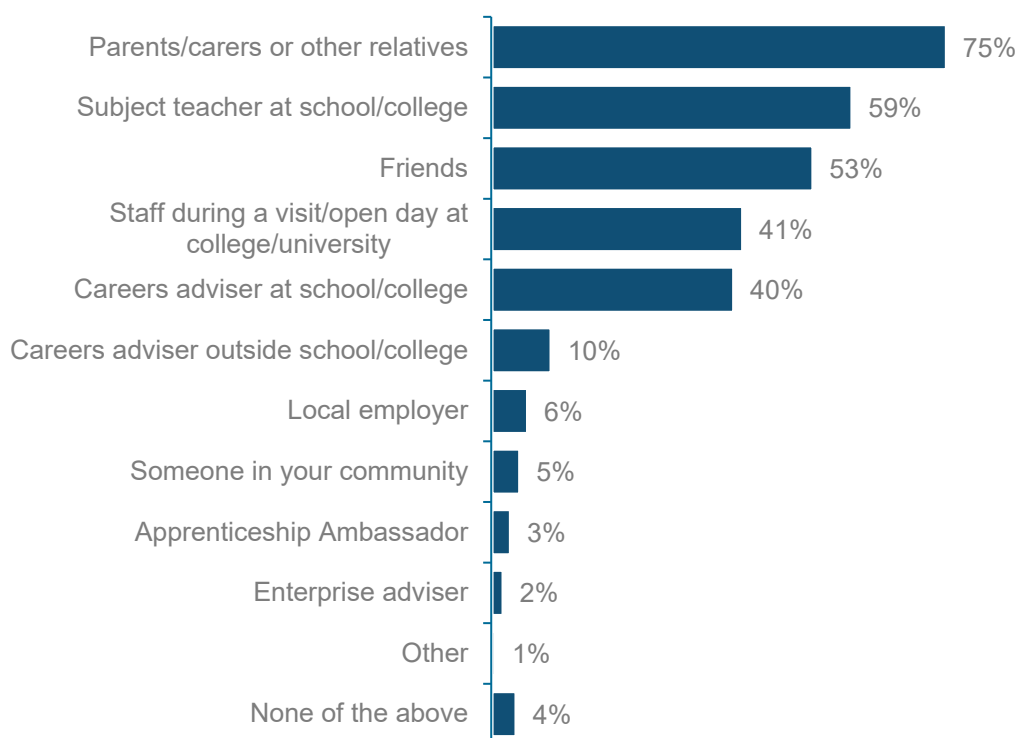
Sources of support

Next we examine the sources of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) – individuals, tools and resources, and wider experiences – young people draw on to help them with their decisions about post-16 choices, and how individuals exercise ‘agency’ in their response to choices and to external influences linked to their individual orientations, preferences, and dispositions.

Individuals

Figure 2 indicates which significant others young people speak to in order to help them to make decisions about their choices after Year 11/13. As demonstrated in the quantitative data, informal sources of information, advice and guidance are widespread, with 75% of all participants having spoken to their parents/carers, followed by subject teachers at school/college (59%) and friends (53%). Two-fifths (41%) consulted staff during a visit/open day at college/university. The research findings indicate that a proportion engaged careers advisers; however, these are more likely to be within the school/college attended by the young person (41%) rather than outside (10%).³² Only a small minority (4%) did not speak to any of these individuals to help inform their choices.

Figure 2: Which individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13



³² This is not surprising given the current remit of careers advisers is to work more directly to support schools and colleges rather than directly deliver careers advice to post-16 students

Base=2,017

Academic learners in FE and HE are more likely than young people pursuing technical routes (across FE and HE) to have sought information from the following individuals:

- **Subject teachers at school/college** – 69% for HE (Academic) and 68% for FE (Academic) compared to 48% for technical (FE/HE) learners.
- **Friends** – 61% for FE (Academic) and 59% for HE (Academic) compared to 45% for technical (FE/HE) learners.
- **Staff during a visit/open day at a college/university** – 52% for HE (Academic) compared to 40% for FE (Academic) and 36% for technical (FE/HE) learners.

Similar differences can be observed when considering the characteristics of learners:

- **Parents/carers** – Young people who were not eligible to receive Free School Meals (FSM) or the 16-19 Bursary are more likely to have consulted parents (77% compared to 70% of those who were eligible to receive FSM) as are those individuals whose parents attended university (80% compared to 73% of those whose parents did not attend university).
- **Subject teachers at school/college** – A higher proportion of participants who attended an independent school (74%) consulted these compared to maintained schools (58%). Individuals whose parents attended university (63%) were also more likely to engage subject teachers at school/college compared to 57% of those with parents who were not university educated.
- **Friends** – A higher proportion of learners who attended grammar school (68%) consulted friends compared to those who attended maintained schools (52%).
- **Careers adviser outside school/college** – Young people who were more likely to have consulted careers advisers outside school include those who attended a maintained school (11%) when compared to grammar schools (3%), and those who were eligible for FSM or the 16-19 Bursary (15% compared to 8%).
- **Local employer** – Learners who were not eligible to receive FSM or the 16-19 Bursary (7% compared to 4%) and whose parents did not attend university (7% compared to 5%) were more likely to have consulted local employers.

Participants on average consulted three individuals to help them make decisions. Table 5 indicates that more than one-third spoke to four or more people to support decision-making.

Table 5: Number of individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13

Number of individuals consulted	%
0	4%
1	15%
2	21%
3	25%
4	20%
5	12%
6 and above	3%

Base=2,017

The qualitative findings provide insights into the reasons why young people turn to these individuals for help and support. On the whole, young people turn to individuals who they trust, are known to them and who they perceive have knowledge and/or experience of the route or career they are interested in pursuing. These include family members, teachers, family friends who work in industries of interest and current undergraduates:

“My mum’s a university lecturer, so I was quite well-informed about different university types and options.” (FEC student)

“My friend who does not have supportive parents – her mum has mental health issues and dad is never around – only had teachers to turn to at school.” (FEC student)

“I got a lot of help from teachers, particularly my Head of Sixth Form. They were very on top of balancing advertising from universities and apprenticeships, and they seemed to know a lot about them. My sister did an apprenticeship and ended up going to university, so she told me how they compared.” (FEC student)

“I did speak to one of my dad’s friends who works in software engineering, and he actually studied mechanical engineering and then switched to software. He gave me quite a bit of insight as to what it’s about, and what sort of people it will suit.” (FEC student)

“It was really interesting speaking to current students and actually seeing how they were finding the course, what they were doing for their research projects, and what they were going to do after they graduated. Also, just general things about the uni and the city that they were in. Things like that.” (HE student)

Young people who had consulted with individuals were asked to indicate how helpful they were in supporting their decision-making (Figure 3). When considering the proportion who stated either 'Helpful' or 'Very helpful', staff during a visit/open day at college/university were rated highest at 90% followed by subject teachers at school/college (84%), and parents/carers (84%). At 84%, local employers were also rated positively amongst the minority of young people who accessed them.

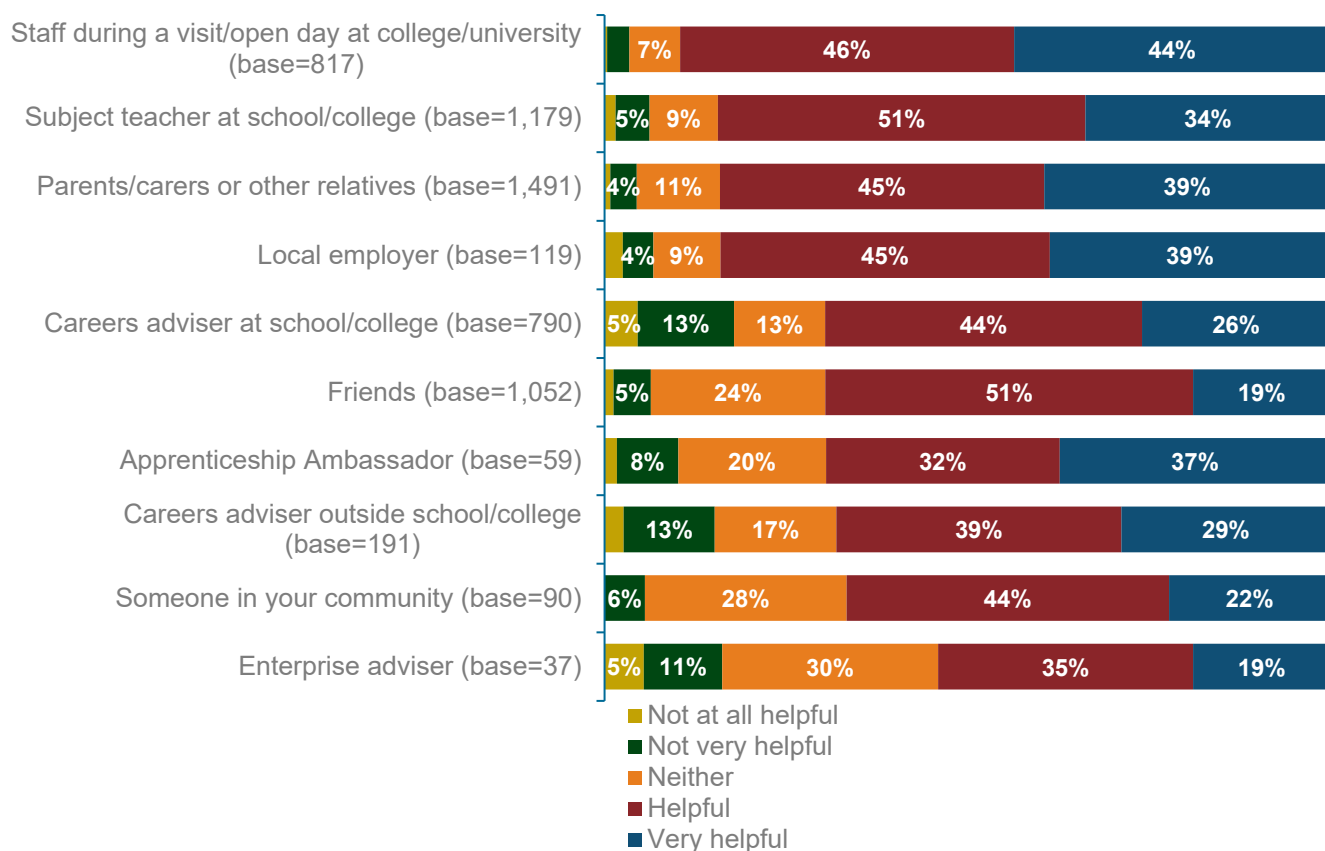
"I'm not really interested that much in just fixing cars, I'm more interested in producing and getting involved with making future products. Therefore, I got interested in engineering and, on open days in the school, Nissan came to our school and we talked about engineering and that just got me more interested."
(FEC student moving to an apprenticeship)

Careers advisers in school/college were deemed marginally more helpful (70%) than those outside of school/college settings (68%). The interviews with young people reveal that young people find it particularly helpful to discuss the different options available to them with a careers adviser.

"The careers adviser in school was very helpful. We talked about various options and listed the pros and cons. I then realised I would need to be flexible when applying for an apprenticeship and not just expect to find one close to home." (Apprentice)

"Every now and again we had careers lessons, and they were pretty much useless in my opinion, but we had a compulsory visit to the careers officer in Year 11, and at this point, I wasn't too sure about my A levels. She didn't really tell me anything new, but it really helped me decide and understand what I wanted to get out of school. I found that really useful, which surprised me." (Sixth Form student)

Figure 3: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13



Base=variable

Interviewees often stated that they had attended open days and visits to colleges and universities and in general they found talking to staff very helpful.

“I attended seven open days and these were really helpful. This really inspired me whilst I was at college. So, I felt, yes, haematology seems much more interesting than what I originally wanted to do.” (HE student)

In some cases, however, respondents indicated that they were slightly wary of staff promoting their course so they used a variety of sources to gain a balanced view.

“I met with employers at a school fair, I spoke with my teachers and then had an interview with a careers adviser to think through my ideas – all of this was really helpful.” (Apprentice)

A small number of differences were observed based on route. A higher proportion of those in HE (Academic) (41%) reported that subject teachers at school/college were ‘Very helpful’ when compared to those young people on technical (FE/HE) (34%) routes. A higher proportion of FE (Academic) (53%) learners stated that staff during a visit/open day at college/university were ‘Helpful’ compared to those on technical (FE /HE) (41%)

routes. The in-depth telephone interviews highlighted subject teachers were highly influential when it came to decisions on post-16 choices.

“My support came from an academic tutor - it was more advice on how to apply and how to find your choices. I have never had any support around making choices from a careers adviser. It was offered at school to other pupils - I think it was because I knew what course I wanted to do. I didn't really feel I needed to.” (HE student)

“I'm planning on going in for an apprenticeship because all of the teachers in the engineering department all went through apprenticeships. They said that it's the best option to do rather than university because you're working and learning at the same time.” (FEC student)

Young people on technical pathways were more likely to rate the support provided by parents/carers and friends as helpful in supporting their decision-making:

- 43% of technical (FE/HE) learners rated parents/carers as 'Very helpful' compared to only 35% of those in FE (Academic).
- 22% of technical (FE/HE) learners rated friends as 'Very helpful' compared to only 15% of those in FE (Academic).

Learners with a SEN are more likely to indicate that friends are 'Very helpful' (26% compared to 18%) whilst parents/carers are 'Not very helpful' (8% compared to 3%). One respondent from the in-depth telephone interviews stated:

“I've been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, which is on the autism spectrum. So, I had a lot of support from my friends and the special educational needs unit that was at my former secondary school. They assisted me with finding out information on my options.” (Apprentice)

Tools and resources

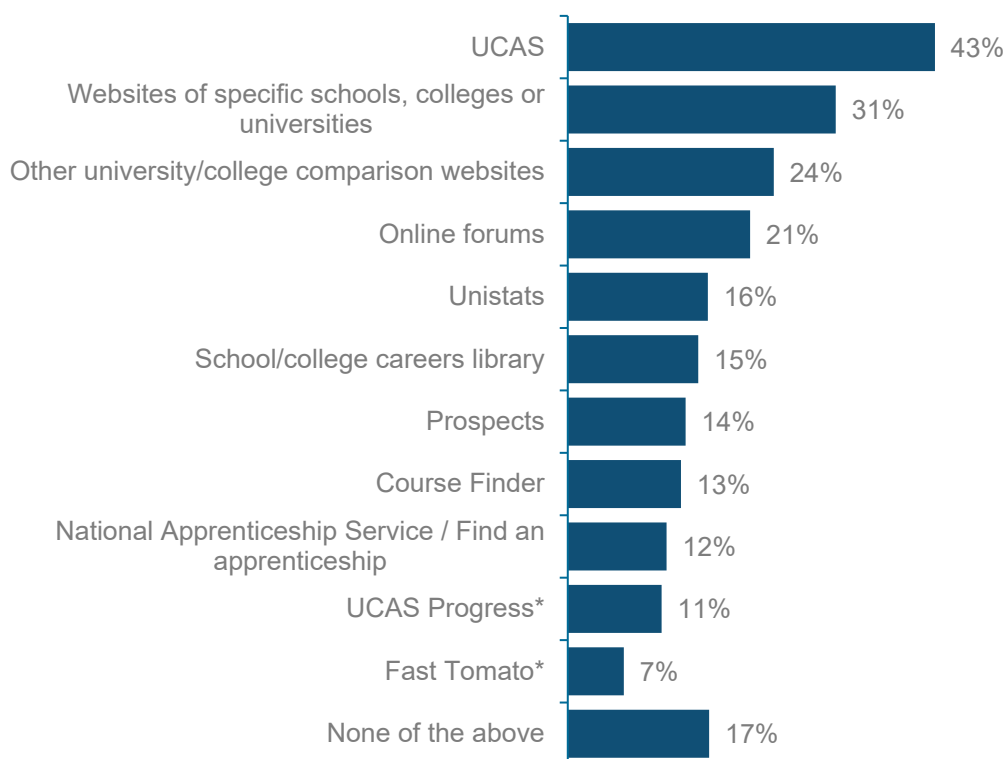
Next we explore which of the myriad of existing tools and resources young people use to help them in their decision-making.

Figure 4 indicates that young people draw upon a range of tools and resources to support their decision-making about what to do after Year 11/13³³. At 43%, UCAS is the most popular followed by the websites of specific schools/colleges/universities (31%) and

³³ Participants were asked to indicate whether they had used up to 22 different tools and resources. Only tools and resources cited by over 5% of the sample are discussed. Respondents in the first year of their degree programme were not given the option to select UCAS Progress and Fast Tomato as these are primarily targeted at younger decision-makers. Course Finder (previously known as the National Course Directory) is accessed via the National Careers Service.

other university/college comparison sites (24%). Just over one in ten (11%) young people in FE had used UCAS Progress. Crucially, 17% had accessed none of the above.

Figure 4: Which tools and resources young people used in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13



Base=2,017 (For options with an * the base=1,397)

Differences were found in the use of resources by route and a variety of other learner characteristics. The former largely reflect the primary audience for the tool. Importantly, whilst only 4% of young people in HE (Academic) had not consulted any of the tools and resources referenced in the survey, the equivalent figure stood at 23% for FE (Academic) and 20% for technical (FE/HE) learners. Differences related to:

- 22% of technical (FE/HE) learners used the National Apprenticeship Service compared to 2% for FE (Academic) and 3% for HE (Academic). Moreover, those who parents had not attended university featured more prominently in this group (14% compared to 9%).
- 78% of young people in HE (Academic) had consulted UCAS compared to 38% of learners in FE (Academic) and 27% of those on technical (FE/HE) pathways³⁴. Those in independent (54%) and grammar (53%) schools featured more

³⁴ A statistically significant difference was also observed between FE (Academic) and Technical (FE/HE) learners

prominently amongst users of UCAS when compared to maintained schools (41%), and those whose parents did not attend university (47% compared to 41%).

- 32% of HE (Academic) students had used Unistats compared to 16% for FE (Academic) and 8% for technical (FE/HE) learners³⁵. Learners from grammar schools (30%) made more use of Unistats when compared to students from maintained schools (15%), as well as those whose parents had attended university (19% compared to 15%).
- 45% of HE (Academic) learners viewed websites of specific schools/colleges/universities compared to 26% of technical (FE/HE) and 27% of FE (Academic) learners. A higher proportion of young people from grammar schools (41%) when compared to maintained schools (30%), and those whose parents attended university (35% compared to 30%) made use of these.
- 45% of young people in HE (Academic) consulted university/college comparison websites compared to 21% for FE (Academic) and 14% for technical (FE/HE)³⁶. Learners from independent (36%) and grammar (35%) schools made more use of these when compared to students from maintained schools (22%), as well as those whose parents had attended university (29% compared to 22%).
- 30% of HE (Academic) learners engaged in online forums compared to 19% for FE (Academic) and 17% for technical (FE/HE).
- 18% of HE (Academic) learners used Course Finder compared to 12% for technical (FE/HE) and 10% for FE (Academic).

Examination of the characteristics of those learners who obtained information from UCAS Progress indicates that 56% are on technical (FE/HE) pathways followed by 44% for FE (Academic). The overwhelming majority (90%) of learners attended maintained schools (either 11-16 or 11-18) with only 5% of those educated at an independent school and 3% at grammar schools making use of the resource. The highest level of qualification for most of those who used UCAS Progress was Level 2 (56%) followed by Level 3 (42%). Almost two-fifths (39%) of learners were eligible for FSM or the 16-19 Bursary. Only one in ten (10%) have SEN. Males are under-represented amongst users of UCAS Progress (39% compared to 61%). The majority (73%) are White followed by Asian (16%), Black (6%), and mixed (1%).

³⁵ A statistically significant difference was also observed between FE (Academic) and Technical (FE/HE) learners

³⁶ A statistically significant difference was also observed between FE (Academic) and Technical (FE/HE) learners

The majority of interviewees indicated they were well aware of UCAS but unclear about UCAS Progress. There were mixed views on the user-friendliness of the UCAS application process, for example:

“UCAS is a lot easier than just applying directly to five universities. Bad thing, filling out half of the stuff like, the student finance option, I was literally at that for about two days, just so that I could actually understand what was actually asked, because it was like a load of codes you had to do, so that was a little bit confusing. I was asking people at work, what they put down, just so I know roughly.” (Sixth Form student)

“It just sucks to be stuck within it. It’s great that you can apply to all of these universities from visiting a website, but then the unis have as much time as they want. At the same time being sat around for months and months waiting for someone to actually reply to your thing which you sent in November, can be frustrating. Ultimately, it’s for a good reason – I think!” (HE student)

Young people on average consulted two of the tools and resources referenced. At 26%, one-quarter of participants consulted used only one of the options listed (Table 6).

Table 6: Number of tools and resources young people viewed in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13

Number of tools and resources consulted	%
0	17%
1	26%
2	20%
3	15%
4	10%
5	6%
6 and above	6%

Base=2,017

Additional analysis was undertaken to explore the type of tools young people used and to identify if any of the tools are highly correlated and could be measuring the same

'factor'.³⁷ Through the analysis we identified five key categories of resources which individual groups of young people are likely to use simultaneously.

University focused	Mentoring focused	Vocational	Careers focused	STEM
Other university/college comparison websites UCAS Unistats	MyKindaFuture Future First (Alumni) Inspiring Women	National Apprenticeship Service/Find an apprenticeship Young Enterprise	Kudos Plotr Brightside Online Mentoring	Science, technology, engineering & mathematics (STEM) ambassador Engineering UK Websites of specific schools, colleges or universities (<i>less likely to state these</i>)

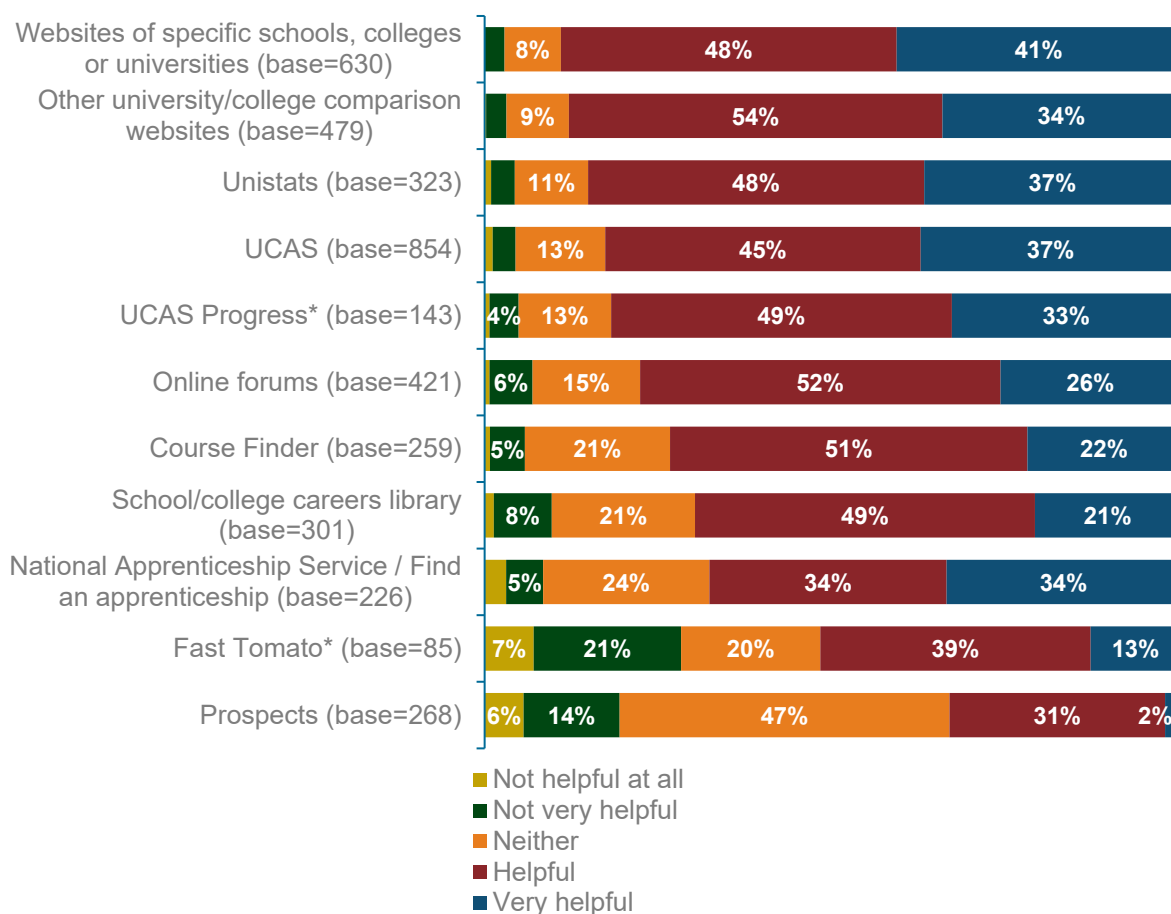
The in-depth telephone interviews revealed that young people are aware of a range of sources and their strengths and limitations. This level of understanding demonstrates why young people are likely to access more than one tool or resource.

“I used The Student Room and multiple other websites, because it’s just basically a chatroom where current students can post about their experience in things like accommodation, or the course, or the university. So, it was just another tool to find people’s opinions in the specific area I was looking at.” (HE student)

Young people were then asked to indicate which of the tools and resources were helpful in their decision-making. At 89%, the websites of specific schools/colleges/universities were considered most helpful (including ‘Helpful’ and ‘Very helpful’), particularly by learners with a SEN who are significantly more likely to rate this resource as ‘Very helpful’ (49% compared to 38% of those without a SEN). Other college/university comparison sites (88%) and Unistats (85%) were also regarded as helpful by the vast majority of respondents. (Figure 5).

³⁷ Principal component analysis

Figure 5: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13



Base=variable

UCAS was similarly rated positively (82%). Unsurprisingly, young people in HE (Academic) rated UCAS more highly than technical (FE/HE) learners: 50% considered it ‘Helpful’ compared to 39%. The same is applicable to the National Course Directory at 63% and 43% respectively. Whilst only a small proportion of participants had accessed UCAS Progress, it scored favourably, with 82% of those who had used considering it to be either ‘Helpful’ or ‘Very helpful’ in supporting their decision-making

Interviewees highlighted a range of other tools and resources that they found ‘Useful’ or ‘Very useful’ such as: national newspapers to obtain league table university data, NHS Health Careers, Job Finding sites e.g. ‘GetMyFirstJob’, and Student Fora e.g. The Student Room:

“The school that I go to, was very keen on getting us involved in course decisions quite early on, so end of Year 12 after exams, they all made us start these accounts on this - essentially it’s like a university comparison website - it was a thing called Unifrog. The idea was you put in what subjects you wanted to do, what your grades were that you were predicted to get at A level, and then you could filter through courses, through a bunch of different things like how far away they were, or whether they were in a Russell Group. All this kind of thing.” (Sixth Form student)

“I did a variety of things. I looked at the government apprenticeship schemes, I looked on the actual business websites, websites such as ‘GetMyFirstJob’, teachers, presentations. Anything I could find, I’d use, write down key information and assess what I really wanted to do. It was extremely difficult. I always knew I wanted to be in banking, so it was just finding something I wanted to do within banking.” (Apprentice)

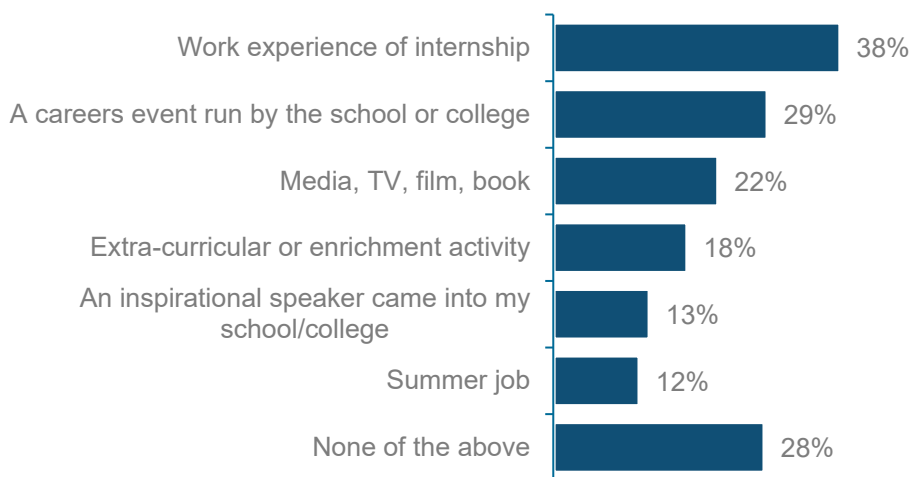
“The first thing that I probably went to look for was students who have done it in the past - their experience. That was a bit tricky with this apprenticeship, as it’s the first time it’s ever actually run. Definitely, just speaking to the course providers and finding out what the course would entail...I just wanted to speak to as big a mix of people as I could, from the staff that were employing at the firm, to the staff that work in the team that I would be working with, to students that were already at [the company]. Basically just as many people as I could, I guess, to get that variety of opinion.” (Apprentice)

“I just Googled ‘costume course’ and took it from there.’ (HE student)

Wider sources

A variety of additional activities were undertaken by young people which contributed to their decision-making. Over two-thirds (38%) indicated that work experience or an internship had informed their decisions about what to do after they finished Year 11/13, whilst 29% cited a careers event run by their school/college. For one-fifth (22%) media, TV, film and books had impacted on their decision (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Which wider sources young people use in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13



Base=2,017

Differences between FE (Academic) and technical (FE/HE) learners are apparent:

- 13% of technical (FE/HE) learners were influenced by a summer job compared to 8% for FE (Academic).
- 21% of those on an FE (Academic) pathway reported that extra-curricular or enrichment activity impacted on their decisions compared to 15% for technical (FE/HE) learners.
- 15% of technical (FE/HE) learners were influenced by an influential speaker who came into their school/college compared to 11% for FE (Academic).

In many instances, respondents to the in-depth telephone interviews indicated they had attended careers events and had come into contact with inspirational speakers and both of these had contributed to their wider understanding of post-16 options and their decision-making. However, there was a clear preference stated for this to begin earlier than in Year 11. For example:

“It was only in Year 11 for us that people would come into our school and give us a talk. I think it should happen about half way through Year 10 or even the start of Year 10 so that you actually get two years to plan...I have many friends that actually just picked a random course just because it was available. They didn't plan it before and, so, many courses, if there's too many people, they can't take any more so they have to choose another course without knowing what's best for them.” (FE student)

The majority spoke with enthusiasm about meeting inspirational speakers in school/college and attending at careers events. For example:

“At school, when I was asking about whether I should go to college or not a professional costume designer came in, and she went to uni. Everyone she works with has been to uni, so she recommended that, and being in the industry, I took that on board.” (FE student)

“At college we would have motivational speakers come in. My college was linked to a football club, so we had football players and the manager come and speak to us, and that helped a lot.” (Apprentice)

“I've recommended going to a careers fair to so many people. They have guest speakers, people who are doing apprenticeships, and how they've been doing...general career advice, interview advice and application advice...they reviewed my CV, and gave me tips and pointers and useful stuff.” (Apprentice)

Extra-curricular or enrichment activity is more prominent amongst those who attended an independent school (29% compared to 17% for maintained schools) and whose parents are university educated (22% compared to 16%). The situation with work experience is similar; however, young people ineligible for FSM or the 16-19 Bursary are also more likely to report that this has informed their decisions about their post-16 choices (41%

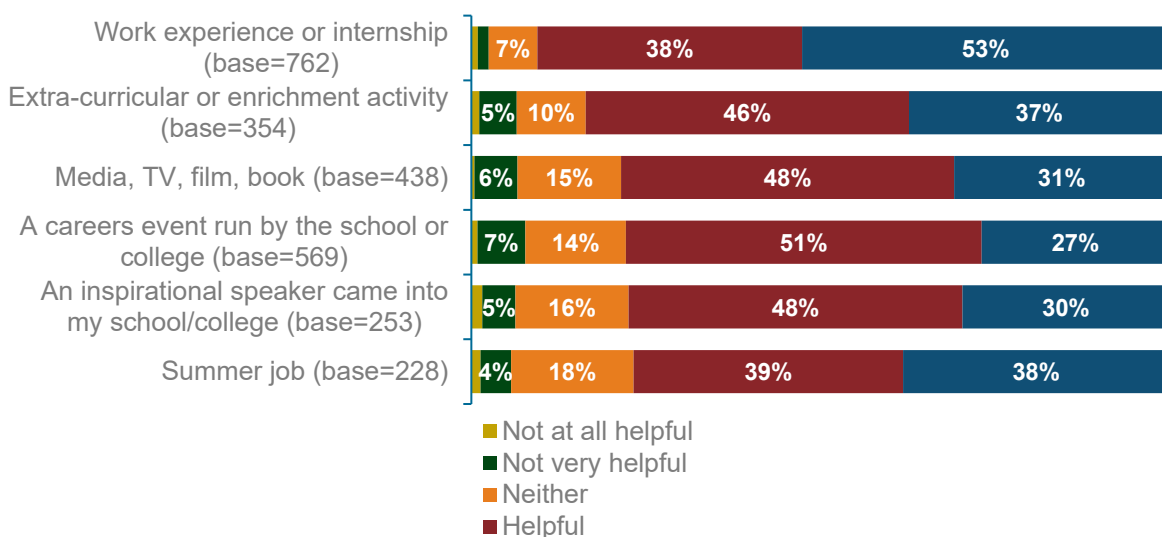
compared to 35%). 54.4% of those who attended an independent school and 49% of those who attended a grammar school undertook extra-curricular or enrichment activity compared to 36.5% for maintained schools. This echoes earlier research findings on employer engagement with independent schools which concluded:

High performing independent schools are skilful in exploiting existing social networks to identify relevant workplace opportunities for pupils. To access employers, high performing independent schools make extensive use of networks of alumni, parents, governors and teachers. Pupils commonly approach employers directly themselves. Intermediary, or brokerage, organisations are rarely used.³⁸

Two-fifths (41.4%) of survey respondents who undertook work experience or an internship had parents who attended university (compared to 36% of those who did not). A higher proportion of young people eligible for FSM or 16-19 Bursary report that an inspirational speaker informed their decision-making (15% compared to 11%).

Young people who accessed the additional opportunities were then asked to rate how helpful they were in terms of supporting decision-making (Figure 7). Work experience or internships were deemed most helpful to young people who had undertaken these activities (91% for either 'Helpful' or 'Very helpful') followed by extra-curricular or enrichment activity (83%). Careers events run by the school/college were rated favourably at 78%, although young people were more modest in their assessment when compared to the other sources of IAG.

Figure 7: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13



³⁸ Huddleston, P., Mann, A., & Dawkins, J. (2012) *Employer Engagement in English Independent Schools*. Education and Employers Research, London, July 2012, p5

Base=variable

At 63%, a higher proportion of those young people in HE (Academic) found a careers event run by school/college to be 'Helpful' when compared to FE (Academic) (49%) and technical (FE/HE) (46%) routes. Extra-curricular or enrichment activity is more 'Helpful' for those in HE (Academic) compared to technical (FE/HE) learners at 60% and 37% respectively. Amongst academic learners, media, TV, film and books are more likely to be 'Very helpful' to those in FE (41%) when compared to their counterparts in HE (25%).

Learners eligible for FSM or the 16-19 Bursary were more likely to report that they found a careers event run by their school/college to be 'Very helpful' (35% compared to 23%). Moreover, a higher proportion of those whose parents had attended university indicated that extra-curricular or enrichment activity was 'Very helpful' (44% compared to 33%).

In the in-depth telephone interviews, specific reference was made to the added value of talking to people from industry and careers fairs. These events give young people the opportunity to expand their effective personal networks, allowing them access to larger numbers of people with more varied types of experience.^{39 40} They provide young people with the chance to access 'non-redundant, trusted information' about the availability of certain careers and the suitability of an individual for a potential careers – a form of social capital.⁴¹ For example:

"Careers fairs - I've recommended it to so many people. I just think, they had guest speakers as well, so they did talks that were about - they had people who were doing apprenticeships, and how they've been doing. Speakers just on, like, general career advice, interview advice and application advice. Then there was CV clinic there, which really helped me. So I could go to there, and they reviewed my CV, and gave me tips and pointers and stuff." (Apprentice)

"I found Careers fairs quite useful - lots of very reputable employers there to talk to. There were some from the forces as well, which particularly interested me. We've also had Sixth Form organise guest speakers to come in every now and again, and some of them try and preach about apprenticeships or what sort of degree you want to do. Loads from universities as well, trying to sell the university." (Sixth Form student)

"I like talking to someone who actually works there. So, you can actually talk to them about what they do, or how they started off, or where they are now. So that you get a

³⁹ Raffo, C. and Reeves, M. (2000). Youth transitions and social exclusion: developments in social capital theory. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3:2, 147-166

⁴⁰ Stanley, J., and Mann, A. (2014). A theoretical framework for employer engagement. In Mann, A., Stanley, J. and Archer, L. (Eds.) *Understanding Employer Engagement in Education: Theories and Evidence*. London: Routledge, pp.36-52

⁴¹ Granovetter, M. (1995). *Getting a Job – A Study of Contacts and Careers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

proper idea. You actually know what's going to happen and then you can build your way up. Then you're prepared." (FEC student)

"We had a representative from [Training Provider] at our Sixth Form College to explain what they did and, sort of, the options that they provided, really, and from that I contacted them and got some more information." (Apprentice)

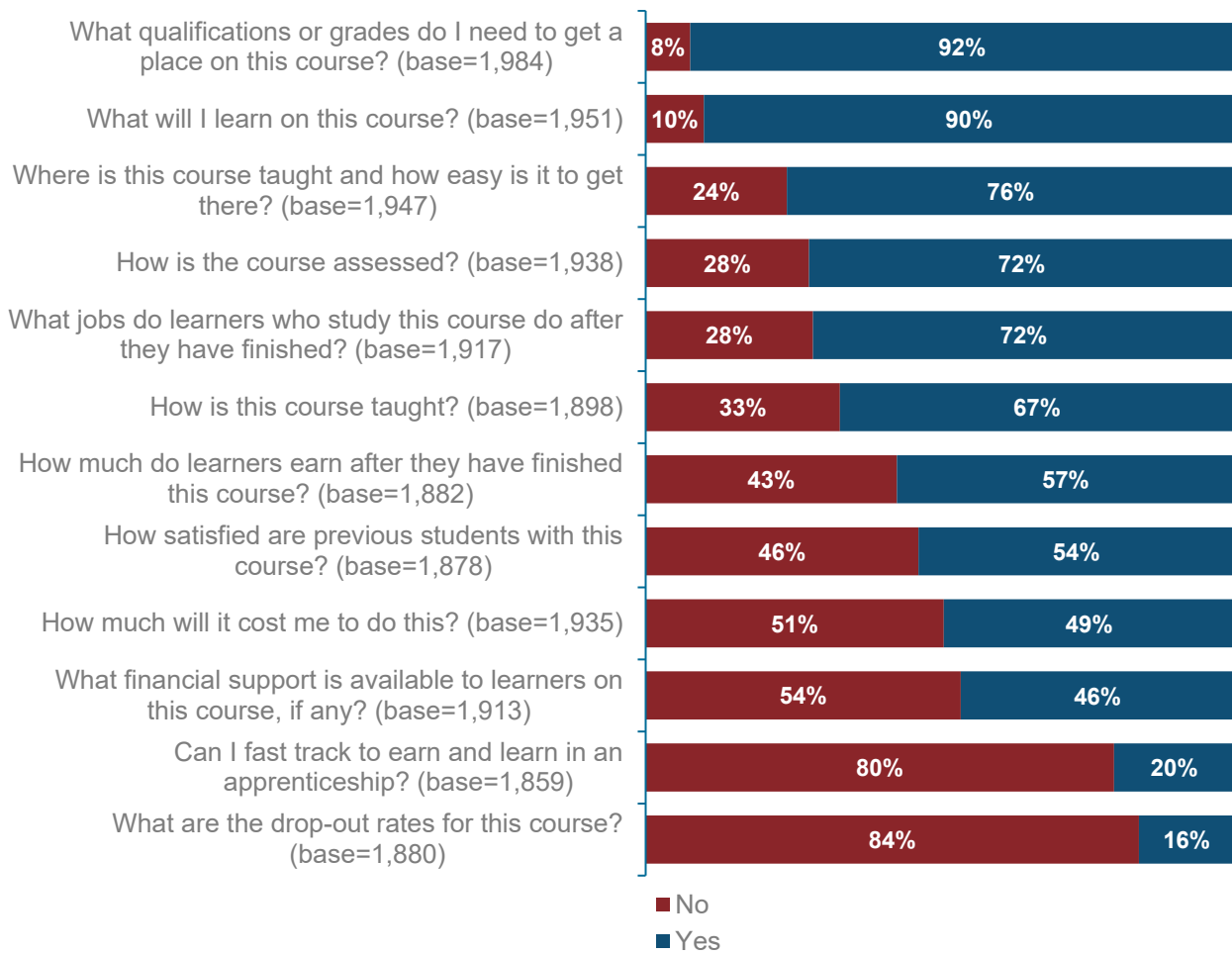
Overall, the majority of young people were using multiple tactics to help support their decision making, for example:

"I looked at different courses and the actual course content to find out about final qualifications and where that will be get me after I've completed it. I would visit the college itself to see if it was suitable because some of them don't give you as good opportunities as well e.g. extra-curricular activities. I've done an EPQ qualification...I've also taken part in college competitions against other colleges e.g. Worldskills IT support technician. I was speaking with my careers adviser back at my high school and getting advice seeing what they thought would be the best options. I looked at like UCAS and Connexions and what sort of route would be best. I found info on the college website." (FEC student)

Types of information sought in support of decision-making

Young people were asked to indicate whether they sought information in relation to question areas when deciding on their current course. Figure 8 indicates that the vast majority sought information about the qualifications or grades that they need to obtain a place on the course (92%) followed by information about what they would learn (90%). Almost two-thirds sought information in relation to where the course is taught (76%), how they would be assessed (72%), and what jobs learners who study on the course do after they had finished (72%). Only a small proportion asked for information about whether they could fast track to earn and learn in an apprenticeship (20%) and the drop-out rates for the course (16%).

Figure 8: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making



Participants indicating ‘Can’t recall’ are not included. Base=variable

There are some statistically significant differences in the types of information sought by young people following difference routes through the post-16 sector. HE (Academic) learners are more likely to have sought information about what qualifications or grades are required to obtain a place on the course; what jobs learners who have studied the course do afterwards; how satisfied previous students are with the course; how much learners earn on completion of the course⁴²; how much the course will cost and what financial support is available, than those on technical (FE/HE) and FE (Academic) pathways. Conversely, technical (FE/HE) learners are more likely to have requested information about where the course is taught and how easy it is to get there; how the course is assessed; and whether students can fast-track to earn and learn in an apprenticeship than those on FE (Academic) and HE (Academic routes) routes (See Appendix 2 Figures 26; 27; 28).

⁴² A statistically significant difference was also observed between Technical (FE/HE) and FE (Academic) learners

Alongside these findings, the research suggests that those young people eligible for FSM and the 16-19 Bursary are more likely to seek information about the financial aspects of the course, from how much it costs (55% compared to 47%) and what financial support is available (61% compared to 39%), through to what learners who study this course do after they have finished (76% compared to 71%).

Additional analysis was undertaken to explore the type of information that young people look for to support their decision-making. This examined whether any of the measures were highly correlated and therefore measure the same 'factor'.⁴³ Four key factors were identified (where learners rated the information types similarly):

The costs involved in studying	Outcome driven searching	Course approach	Wider knowledge of the course
How much will it cost me to do this? What financial support is available to learners on this course, if any? Can I fast track to earn and learn in an apprenticeship?	How satisfied are previous students with this course? What jobs do learners who study this course do after they have finished? How much do learners earn after they have finished this course?	How is this course taught? (e.g. the balance between classroom time and independent study, work-based learning) How is the course assessed? (e.g. the balance between exams and coursework)	What will I learn on this course? Where is this course taught and how easy is it to get there? What qualifications or grades do I need to get a place on this course?

A wide variety of learner characteristics were found to influence the whether a student sought information on the "costs involved in studying", in particular application route, course type, socio-economic status and ethnicity:

- Students who applied for their current course through UCAS are less likely to have searched for information on costs compared with those who applied through other mechanisms: students who applied through their employer, through 'Find an Apprenticeship', who did not need to apply for their course, who applied through 'another route' and who applied direct to the school, college, university or training provider all provided lower scores than those who applied through UCAS.
- Apprentices are more likely to have searched for information on costs compared with those studying A Levels: students on a Level 2 Apprenticeship, a Level 3 Apprenticeship and a Higher Degree Apprenticeship provided higher scores than those studying A Levels.

⁴³ Principal component analysis

- Those who received FSM or a 16-19 Bursary and Asian/Asian British students were more likely to search for information on costs than those who were not in receipt of financial support and White students.

Cost is more of an influence on decision-making for disadvantaged students and those who follow technical routes, perhaps suggesting that the cost of HE can act as a deterrent for these groups who are subsequently attracted to pathways, such as apprenticeships, which offer the opportunity to 'earn and learn'.

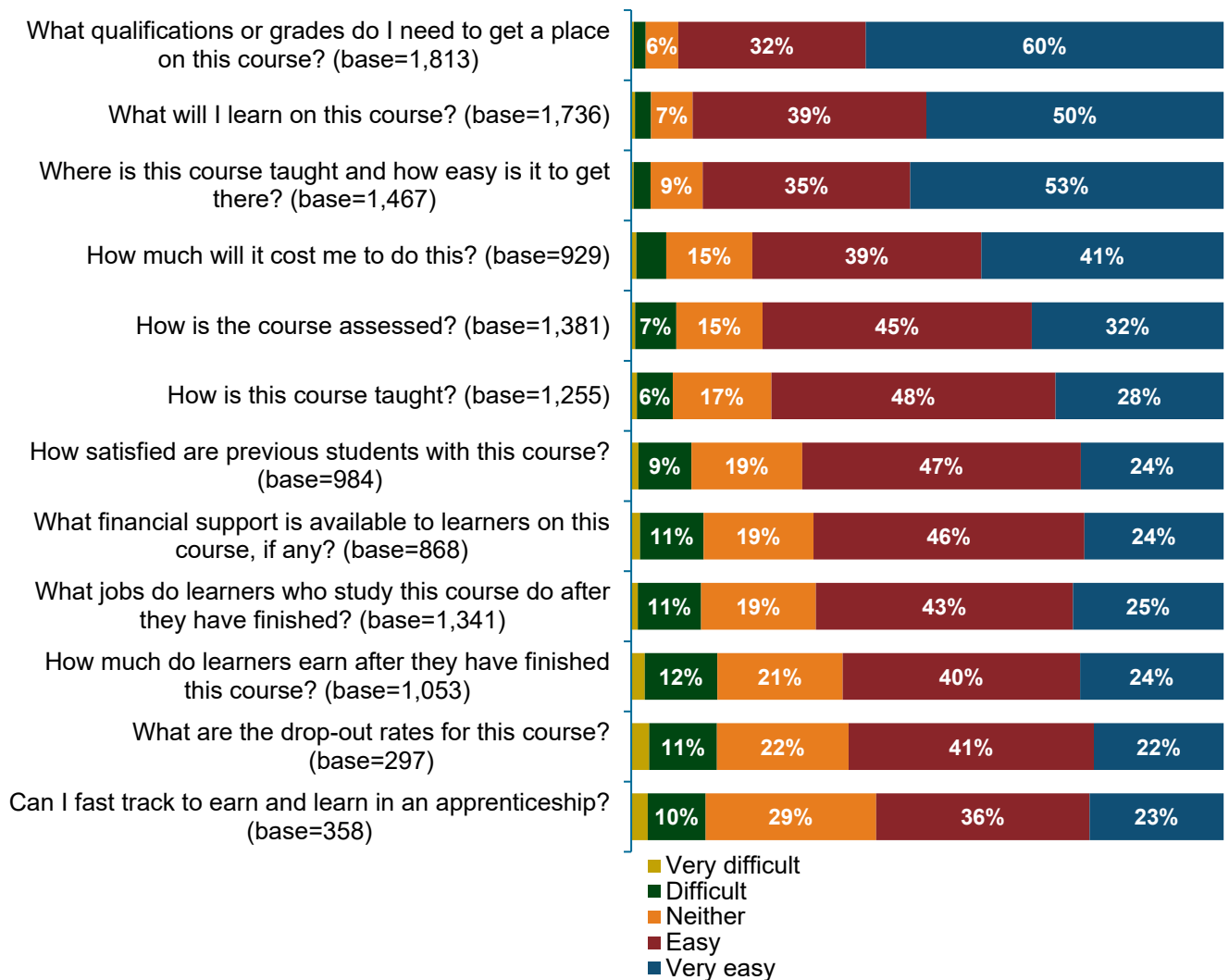
From the in-depth telephone interviews, some young people found out about available bursaries from their school/college, training provider and/or careers adviser; others discovered the information through chance encounters. For example:

"Next year I will be down in Wales at university studying adult nursing. Well, I didn't realise, but they do still offer the NHS bursary... I just went down for an open day at Cardiff University because my grandparents live down there, and they mentioned that. I mean, it's not like I wouldn't be able to go to uni if I didn't have that bursary. It just seems like, you know, a sensible option to get the help that's there." (FEC student)

"I decided I was doing sport. Then I changed my mind suddenly, because what else is there to do? I just, sort of, thought, well, you are more likely to have a higher paid job with a degree, and there are bursaries on offer." (Sixth Form student)

Participants were asked to rate how easy or difficult it was to find the information they required to inform their decision-making. Whilst the research findings indicate that across all question areas the majority of young people found it 'Easy' or 'Very easy', notable differences are apparent. Encouragingly, those question areas that scored highest in terms of ease of obtaining information reflect those most sought by young people: the qualifications or grades required to obtain a place on the course (92%), what they will learn on the course (89%), and where the course is taught (88%). The question areas which survey respondents found most difficult to obtain information on included how much learners earn after they have finished (15%), the drop-out rate for the course (14%), whether they could fast-track to earn and learn in an apprenticeship (13%), what jobs learners who study the course do afterwards (12%), and what financial support is available (12%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making



Base=variable

The research findings indicate a number of differences based on route:

- A higher proportion of HE (Academic) (52%) learners found it 'Easy' to obtain **information about how the course is taught** compared to technical (FE/HE) (44%).
- Technical (FE/HE) learners were more likely to indicate that it was 'Very easy' (35%) to obtain information about **how the course is assessed** compared to HE (Academic) at 26%.
- Over half (54%) of HE (Academic) learners considered it 'Easy' to get information about **drop-out rates** compared to 26% for FE (Academic).
- 60% of HE (Academic) learners described it as 'Easy' to determine **how satisfied previous students were with the course** compared to 43% for FE (Academic) and 38% for technical (FE/HE).
- One-third (32%) of technical (FE/HE) learners found it 'Very easy' to get information about **what jobs people who have finished the course get** compared to 21% for

FE (Academic) and 19% for HE (Academic). A similar picture is evident in relation to **how much learners earn** after they have finished the course at 31% for technical (FE/HE), 17% for FE (Academic) and 20% for HE (Academic).

- HE (Academic) learners were more likely to state that obtaining information about **how much the course will cost** is 'Very easy' (48%) when compared to FE (Academic) (35%) and technical (FE/HE) learners (38%).

Young people eligible for FSM or the 16-19 Bursary were more likely to report that they found it 'Very easy' to obtain information about what financial support is available to learners on the course (29% compared to 22%). A higher proportion of those with a SEN indicated that they found it 'Difficult' to obtain information about what jobs learners do after they have finished the course (16% compared to 10%) as well as how much learners earn (21% compared to 11%) on completion of their qualification.

Ease of decision-making

Young people were asked how easy or difficult it was for them to decide on which course or courses to apply for. Table 7 indicates that 61% of all young people found it 'Easy' or 'Very easy' compared to 22% who reported difficulties when deciding on their current choice.

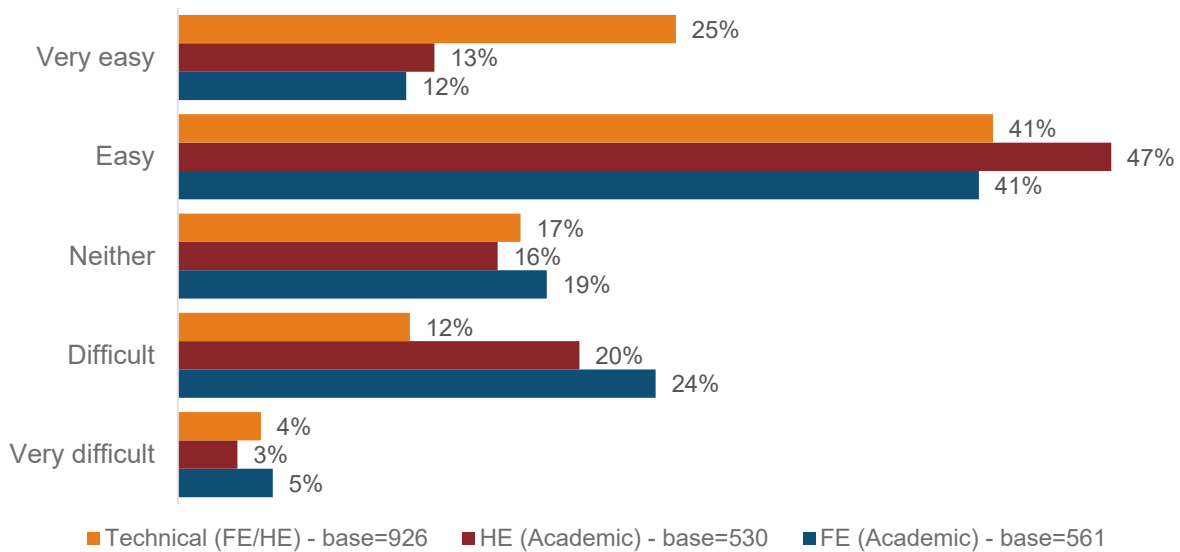
Table 7: How easy or difficult young people found it to decide on which course/s to apply for

Ease of deciding on course/s	%
Very difficult	4%
Difficult	18%
Neither	17%
Easy	43%
Very easy	18%

Base=2,017

Analysis by route reveals that a higher proportion of those on Technical (FE/HE) (25%) routes found it very easy to decide which course to apply to compare with those on academic routes (13% and 12%). Conversely, a higher proportion of those on FE (Academic) routes (29%) reported that they found it difficult or very difficult to decide compared with those on HE (Academic) (23%) and Technical (FE/HE) (16%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: How easy or difficult young people found it to decide on which course/s to apply for by route



Base=variable

Further analysis was undertaken to explore how easy learners found it to decide on which course/courses to apply for.⁴⁴ The analysis confirms that those undertaking Technical routes, including Level 2 and 3 Apprenticeships and Other Level 3 programmes, found it easier to make a decision than those studying A Levels. Of the respondents who found decision-making difficult, the analysis reveals that Asian/Asian British students and those who reported a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition found it more difficult than White students and those who did not report a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition. These findings highlight that route as well as ethnicity and SEN influence how easy or difficult it is for someone to decide on the course they want to study.

Findings from the in-depth telephone interviews further highlighted young people’s concerns about schools’ expectations for them and how it affected their decision making:

“Most people push you go to university. So we had an hour a week in Sixth Form, which we called tutorial, where we would have lessons, and sometimes it would be lessons on things like politics, but when we got to Year 13, it was just solely, like, applying for what you’re going to do next. Me and one another person were the only people who didn’t apply to university, because everyone just, sort of, felt you had to.” (Apprentice)

⁴⁴ Multiple regression

In some cases, young people described apprenticeship information as 'too vague' and not sufficiently detailed to support the decision-making process. There was a demand for more information on course switching options, for example:

"I was quite concerned about the day-to-day job because a lot of apprenticeships, I know the one I'm doing especially, are really vague in their descriptions...it, sort of, makes you not trust them...am I actually going to do proper work, or am I going to be treated differently, sort of, thing... I liked quite a few which had quotes from people who already do the apprenticeship...I used Not Going To Uni...All About School Leavers and I used the National Apprenticeship Service website."
(Apprentice)

"I think there should be more information on switching courses - having information in there about if you decide to switch courses, how do you do that and what could you do with your degree in a different but related area." (Sixth Form student)

"If I was going into HR, and I think HR would be great, say halfway through the course at uni, I'm like 'don't really want to go into HR' ...I would want to see more information available on websites about switching courses." (FE student)

Transport costs, journey times and proximity to an educational institution were raised as major issues that influence young people's post-16 course(s) and decision-making. Although some were prepared to make long journeys and/or relocate, with support from their parents:

"Distance wasn't necessarily an issue for me. I live in Eastbourne and travel up to Crawley every day (1 hour 20 minutes each way) as part of my apprenticeship."
(Apprentice)

"So I was looking at distance, reputation, word of mouth, who I'd heard of. I then looked at the transport to London and which colleges were the most convenient for me. I knew I was going to be living at home...my parents help with my travel costs which are quite expensive." (HE student)

"I was definitely trying to find something that meant that I didn't have to move that far, but it was pretty rare to find what I wanted to do. So in the end, I applied for what I'm doing now. It is about 300 miles away from where I'm from." (Apprentice)

For others, these factors were barriers and lead young people to switch institutions and/or courses:

"I chose this college because it was more convenient, closer to home... At first I was doing a cadetship...then I realised that I couldn't do that because I live in the Wigan area and they wanted me to go to Worcester." (FEC student)

“For me travel to study was a big issue, there are limited choices if you want to stay in Grimsby, and I certainly can’t afford high travel costs. I don’t need more careers information, because I already know what’s on offer locally. I’m planning to go to uni, and I have an unconditional offer to study Computing and Forensics course.” (FEC student)

“Before I started college I applied for an apprenticeship. We had to go to the [FE College], and it took me one-and-a-half hours to get there and another one-and-a-half hours to get back. So, it was too much of a hassle for me. I found out in my local college that they were basically learning exactly the same things, so, I just gave up and went to the local college instead.” (FEC student)

Summary

When decisions are made:

- Although a small proportion of young people start thinking about their post-16 choices as early as primary school, it is most common for them to begin this process in earnest during Year 11.
- Grammar school pupils, learners on academic pathways, young people with a least one parent with a university education, and those with SEN start thinking about their post-16 options earlier than other groups. Young people typically leave the final decision until the final year of study prior to making a transition – Year 11 for those progressing into some form of FE and Year 13 for those progressing into HE. However, those on academic routes are more likely to make a final decision earlier than those on a technical pathway.

Individual sources of help

- The vast majority of young people consult with at least one individual for help and support with decision-making and, on average, consult with three sources.
- Young people most commonly turn to ‘informal sources’ including parents/carers, teachers and friends. Although more limited use is made of careers advisers and local employers, those who do consult them find them useful.
- Those who consulted staff during an open day or a direct visit to an educational institution regard them as the most useful source of help. Although learners on academic and technical routes consult similar individuals, those on technical pathways typically rate the help they receive as less useful than those on academic routes, with the exception of parents/carers and staff at open days.

Tools and resources

- There are a plethora of tools and resources available to support young people with their decision-making. Factor analysis reveals that there are five groups of

resources that young people typically use: university focused; mentoring focused; vocationally focused; careers focused and STEM focused. These resources are often tailored to specific audiences, and this is broadly reflected in the groups that use them.

- On average, young people access two resources. However, a substantial minority do not use any; this is more prevalent amongst those on technical than academic routes. Learning providers' websites are rated as the most useful of the tools and resources young people use, followed by comparison sites.

Wider resources

- Although less use is made of wider sources of IAG, those that use them find them the most useful source of help with decision-making when compared with individuals and tools and resources.
- Work experience/internships and extra-curricular activities are regarded as particularly helpful. Young people from lower socio-economic groups often lack the social capital and networks that help to facilitate access to these opportunities⁴⁵, and it is notable that use is more prominent amongst more advantaged survey respondents such as those who attended independent schools, those whose parents are university educated and those who do not qualify for FSM.

Type of information sought and ease of access

- The types of information young people seek fall into four categories: costs involved in studying, outcomes of studying, course approach, and wider knowledge of course.
- Young people most commonly seek information on the qualifications and grades they need to get on a course and information on what they will learn to inform their decision-making. Those in HE are more concerned than those in FE to obtain information about the jobs and earnings of people who have studied the course they are considering and the financial support that is available. Learners who are currently eligible or in receipt of FSM and/or the 16-19 Bursary are also more likely to seek information on financial support and course costs.
- Although the information that young people most commonly seek is easy to find, accessing information, such as what learners do and earn after the course, dropout rates and the financial support available, is perceived to be more difficult, particularly for learners with SEN.

⁴⁵ Mann, A., and Percy, C. (2013). Employer engagement in British secondary education: wage earning outcomes experienced by young adults. *Journal of Education and Work*, 27(5), 496-523

- The majority of young people find it easy to decide which post-16/post-18 course to apply for. Learners on academic routes (FE and HE) are more likely to find it difficult to make a decision than learners on technical routes. BAME young people along with those with a SEN are also more likely to find decision-making difficult. Help to choose the right course and subsequent guidance and support with applications are key.

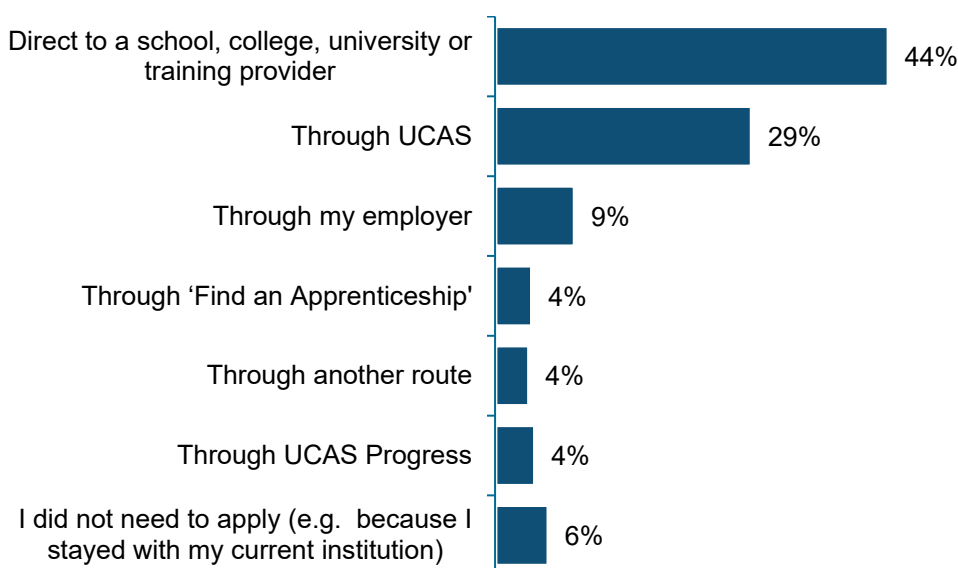
Application systems and advice

In this section we examine how IAG and application systems interact to shape and influence young people's post-16 choices. We examine whether and how young people applied for their current course and how easy or difficult they found the process. We then consider how satisfied young people are with their current choice of course and their reasons. We conclude this section by examining young people's preferences for IAG – face-to-face, online line and by text or telephone – and consider the perceived advantages and key challenges in creating centralised digital course and application system to support young people's post-16 choices and decisions.

Application routes

Participants were asked to indicate how they applied for their current course. At 44%, over two-fifths of young people applied directly to a provider followed by UCAS (29%). Only a small proportion applied through other channels including their employer (9%), 'Find an Apprenticeship' (4%) and UCAS Progress (4%) (Figure 10).

Figure 11: How young people applied for their current course



Base=1,849

Just under two-thirds (60%) of FE (Academic) learners applied directly to a provider compared to 51% for technical (FE/HE) and 2% for HE (Academic)⁴⁶. Moreover, a higher proportion of young people on FE (Academic) routes did not need to apply: 15% compared to 3% for technical (FE/HE) and 0.3% for HE (Academic)⁴⁷. At 90%, a higher

⁴⁶ A statistically significant difference was also observed between Technical (FE/HE) and FE (Academic) learners

⁴⁷ A statistically significant difference was also observed between Technical (FE/HE) and HE (Academic) learners

proportion of HE (Academic) learners applied through UCAS compared to 19% for those in FE (Academic) and 11% for those on technical (FE/HE) courses⁴⁸.

Table 8 indicates how easy young people found it to apply for the course they are on at the moment. The overwhelming majority 86% of all participants indicated that they found it 'Easy' or 'Very easy' compared to only 5% who found it 'Very difficult' or 'Difficult'.

Table 8: How easy or difficult young people found it to apply for their current course/s

Ease of applying for current course/s	%
Very difficult	1%
Difficult	4%
Neither	10%
Easy	50%
Very easy	36%

Base=1,739

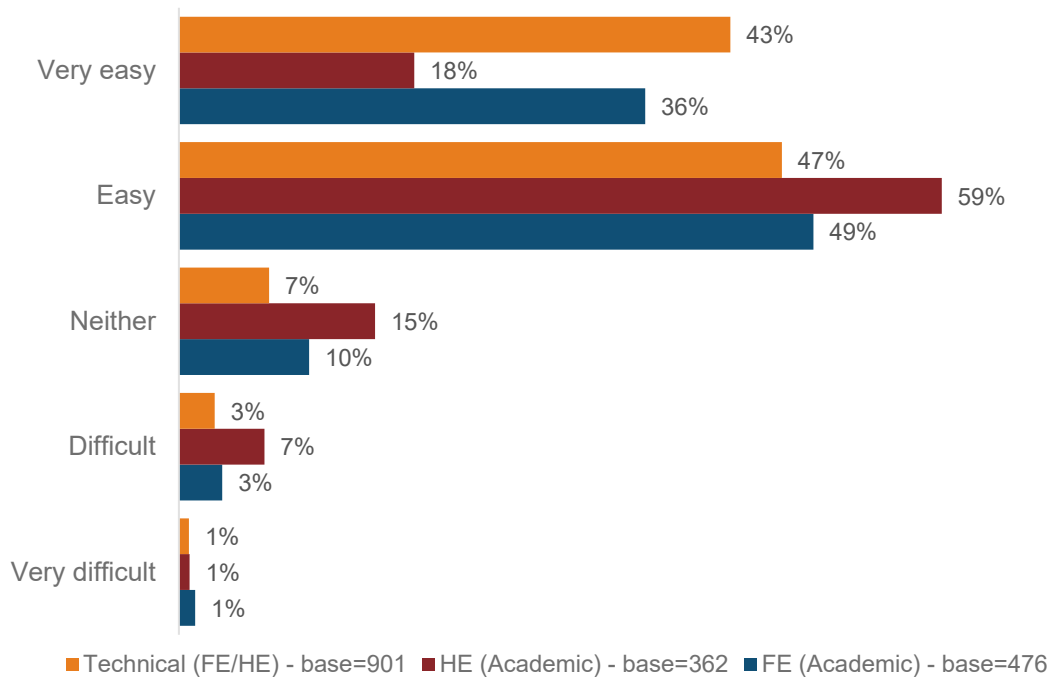
Further analysis by route highlights that the majority of young people, irrespective of their pathway, found it easy or very easy to apply for their current course (Figure 12).

However, a higher proportion of young people on technical pathways (43%) reported that they found it very easy to apply for their current course compared to FE (Academic) (36%) and HE (Academic) (18%) (Figure 12).

A higher proportion of young people who were eligible to receive FSM or 16-19 Bursary (20%) and with SEN (26%) reported that they found it 'Difficult' to apply for their current educational course compared to those who were not eligible for financial support (15%) and without SEN (16%).

⁴⁸ A statistically significant difference was also observed between FE (Academic) and Technical (FE/HE) learners

Figure 12: How easy or difficult young people found it to apply for their current course/s by route



Base=1,739

Further analysis was undertaken to explore if learner characteristics influence how easy or difficult an individual found it to apply for the course they are currently studying.⁴⁹ The analysis reveals that ethnicity, application route and qualification type, significantly influence how easy or difficult students found it to apply: when compared to White students, those from an ‘Other’ ethnic group, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British students and Asian/Asian British students found it more difficult to apply; students who applied direct to the school, college, university or training provider and who applied through their employer found it easier to apply compared to those who applied through UCAS; and those on a Level 3 Apprenticeship and a Level 2 Apprenticeship found it easier to apply compared to students doing A levels. These findings reflect the trend for how easy or difficult students found it to decide which course to apply for.

When asked why they found it difficult to apply, survey respondents most commonly reported that they found the application process “time consuming” and “lengthy” and/or “complicated” and “confusing”. Similar factors were highlighted in the in-depth telephone interviews i.e. a reluctance to engage in “too much form filling”. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings also suggest that some learners found the process difficult because they were “unsure which course or institution to apply to”. This situation is exacerbated for some who report that they “did not know who to ask” and/or “where to go” for help with their decision-making. In some instances learners found it difficult to find the

⁴⁹ Multiple regression

information they required to make their decision, for example, which subjects or qualifications they needed to be eligible to apply for a particular course. One interviewee stated:

“Most teachers are well rehearsed in what to do when it comes to applying to uni, but few really know about apprenticeships and work opportunities. If you’re going to uni that’s fine, but what about everyone else? I had to be strong and stay determined with my decision not to follow everyone else.” (Apprentice)

In a minority of cases, technical learners experienced difficulties with the application system and/or difficulties when dealing directly with the individual provider or employer.

Amongst those survey respondents who found it easy to apply, approximately one in ten had remained with their current institution and, although they were still required to for their course, this helped to ensure the transition was a smooth one. Even amongst those who changed institution, the majority report that they found the process “simple and straight forward”. In contrast to the minority who found the application process difficult, those who found it easy commonly report that they received the “help, guidance and support” they needed to complete their application, including from the institution they were applying to.

Satisfaction with current course(s)

Table 9 indicates how satisfied young people are with their current educational choice. Encouragingly, only a small minority (6%) are either ‘Very unsatisfied’ or ‘Unsatisfied’ compared to the 88% who report that they are ‘Satisfied’ or ‘Very satisfied’.

Table 9: How satisfied young people are with their current educational choice

Satisfaction with current educational choice	%
Very unsatisfied	2%
Unsatisfied	4%
Neither	6%
Satisfied	40%
Very satisfied	48%

Participants indicating ‘Too early to say’ are not included. Base=1,981

The findings reveal that young people on technical courses are more satisfied with their choice: 55% of technical (FE/HE) learners report that they are ‘Very satisfied’ compared to 44% for HE (Academic) and 40% for FE (Academic).

Survey respondents commonly attributed their dissatisfaction to aspects of the course itself, in particular, the quality of the teaching, level of contact hours, assessment methods and disruptions to delivery including staff turnover, staff shortages, cancelled lessons, and a lack of resources. A similar proportion of survey respondents' report that they are dissatisfied with their current choice because the course is "no longer right for them", is "not what they expected" and/or is "not relevant to their future career aspirations" which perhaps reflects a lack of effective IAG.

"I wasted time studying a course for one year that didn't really suit me. I had no-one to talk to except my sister's friend and I didn't really know her very well." (FEC student interviewee)

Some are simply not enjoying the course and report finding it 'boring'. Worryingly, a small minority of survey respondents report that they were discouraged from applying for the course that they really wanted to do.

"I wanted to do something sports-related as a career. It was assumed I wouldn't get the grades I needed so I went in another direction, but I actually got the grades I needed for my preferred option." (Sixth Form College student, survey respondent)

"The Hair and Beauty course is enjoyable. However, I wanted to take A Levels for a better chance at University." (Apprentice, survey respondent)

Preferences for IAG

Participants were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with a series of statements regarding decisions about their education and training and preferences for receiving and using IAG.

In terms of young people's preferences for IAG, the majority (58%) indicated that they preferred to speak to someone face-to-face to get help with decision-making; a finding reinforced by the 55% who disagreed that they prefer to speak with someone by phone or text. Young people are, however, more willing to receive help with decision-making online, with only 31% disagreeing with this statement. Further analysis reveals some differences in the preferences of young people by pathway:

- **I prefer to speak to someone face-to-face** to get help with decision-making – 22% for technical (FE/HE) compared to 14% for FE (Academic) and 11% for HE (Academic).
- **I prefer to speak to someone by phone or text** to get help with decision-making – 6% for technical (FE/HE) compared to 2% for FE (Academic) and 2% for HE (Academic).

Examination of how learners responded to questions relating to their preferences for both face-to-face and telephone support indicates that 33% prefer face-to-face support rather than by phone or text. A further 3% prefer phone or text as opposed to face-to-face help whilst 11% wish to receive both and 11% neither.

The in-depth telephone interviews reflect this mixture of preferences; some interviewees reported that they preferred to 'self-manage' when it comes to making decisions while others called for a combination of face-to-face and online careers support. For example:

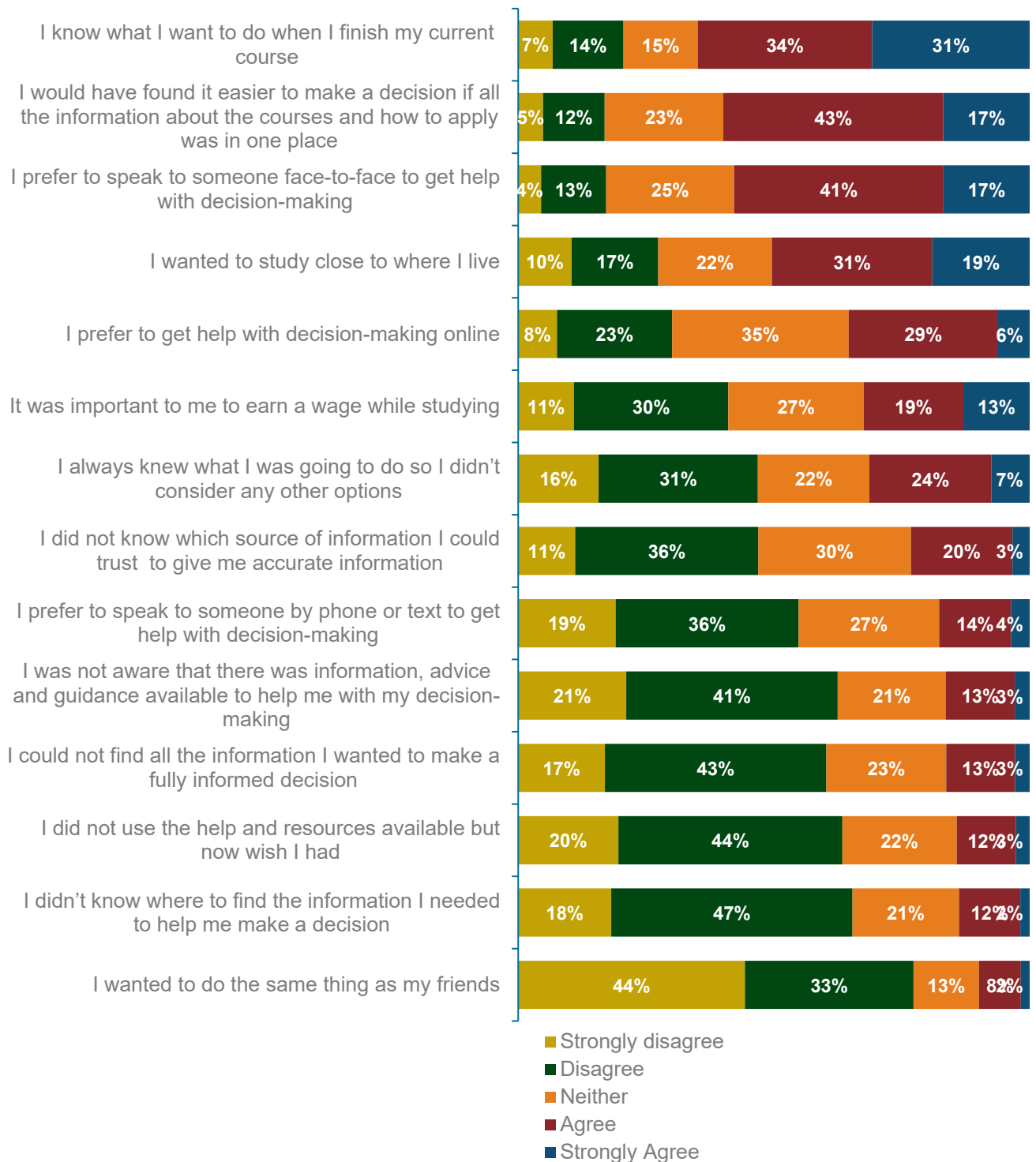
"Careers advice can be very useful but I like to make my own decisions." (HE student)

"I'm dyslexic so having a mix of careers advice online and offline was helpful. I visited the careers office in school and found this useful." (FEC student)

"I spoke to a careers adviser in school... Before we started meeting each other I did have a rough idea of what I'd like to do. I think with her it was mainly looking at, is it really the best option for me.... Yes, it was helpful - good to talk to someone rather than just looking at a website or other people's opinion and other people's writing online." (Apprentice)

It is interesting that three-fifths (60%) of survey respondents would have found it easier to make a decision if all of the information about the courses and how to apply was in one place (including both 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree') despite only a small proportion reporting that they could not find all the information they needed to make a fully informed decision (16%); that they were not aware of the IAG available to help with decision-making (16%); and that they did not use the help and resources available but now wished they had (15%). However, young people do not always know which source of information to trust to give them accurate information (23% of survey respondents agreed with this statement). This suggests that it is the proliferation of information sources, rather than a lack of information itself, that causes complexity for some young people when making decisions (Figure 11).

Figure 13: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training



Base=2,017

Further analysis reveals some differences in the perceptions and experiences of young people on different routes. A higher proportion of technical (FE/HE) learners 'Strongly disagree' with a number of statements when compared to both FE (Academic) and HE (Academic) as summarised in Table 10

Table 10: Proportion of respondents who strongly disagree with statements about IAG by route

	Technical (FE/HE)	FE (Academic)	HE (Academic)
I didn't know where to find the information I needed to help me make a decision	25%	13%	12%
I was not aware that there was information, advice and guidance available to help me with my decision-making	24%	19%	18%
I did not know which source of information I could trust to give me accurate information	16%	8%	5%
I did not use the help and resources available but now wish I had	26%	13%	14%
I could not find all the information I wanted to make a fully informed decision	21%	14%	13%
I wanted to do the same thing as my friends	54%	33%	39%
I would have found it easier to make a decision if all the information about the courses and how to apply was in one place ⁵⁰	8%	3%	2%

In contrast, technical (FE/HE) learners were more likely to 'strongly agree':

- I wanted to **study close to where I live** – 25% for technical (FE/HE) compared to 18% for FE (Academic) and 9% for HE (Academic)⁵¹.
- It was important to **earn a wage whilst studying** – 23% for technical (FE/HE) compared to 6% for FE (Academic) and 3% for HE (Academic).

⁵⁰ A higher proportion of technical (FE/HE) (21%) learners also indicated 'Strongly agree' when compared to 14% for FE (Academic) and 13% for HE (Academic).

⁵¹ A statistically significant difference was also observed between FE (Academic) and HE (academic) learners

Young people with SEN are more likely than those without to 'Agree' that they did not know where to find the information needed to help them make a decision (19% compared to 11%). Young people who were more likely to 'Agree' that they would have found it easier to make a decision if all the information was in place include those who had a parent that had attended university (18% compared to 16%) and report having a SEN (22% compared to 16%).

The overwhelming majority (86%) of those young people who 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree' that they would have found it easier to make a decision if all the information about the courses and how to apply was in one place reported that they found it 'Very easy' or 'Easy' to apply for their current course. The majority (51%) of these individuals were aged 19 (20% were aged 16 and 29% aged 17). Just under one-third (31%) were eligible for a FSM or the 16-19 Bursary, whilst 13% had a learning difficulty or disability. They were more likely to have a parent that attended university (37%) than undertaken an apprenticeship (14%). The majority were White (78%) whilst 11% were Asian/Asian British.

Young people's views on and preferences for centralised digital course and application system were explored during the telephone interviews. The majority of interviewees were broadly in favour of a system. For example:

"Yes, I think it would be good to have all that information straight on hand because, obviously, college has only got a limited amount. If you've got all of it on hand then it's just going to be a lot easier. You don't have to go looking at different places and you could just look in one area. So, yes, I think that would be good." (Apprentice)

"Yes, I would definitely love that source of information. I think particularly finance, entry requirements, and personal feedback, that would be a really good addition, because I've not really seen that anywhere. I guess you have the statistics, but actual people's opinions would be good, a range of people working in the industry seeing it from different perspectives. I just think the more information available to young people, the better." (FEC student)

However, there were some questions raised, for example:

"There is a lot of information so it's how you categorise it into different sections. People are overwhelmed with a lot of choice...Having a centralised system would mean that not all the information will be there. So, the way I'm seeing it...people will still go to Google....I feel it would be important to just start to differentiate it from Unistats or whatnot. You'll find that if you've got the same information, people are just going to go to the other one." (FEC student)

"Is there not something already like that? Is that not where, like, all the apprenticeships go on the .gov website?" (Apprentice)

“I’m actually fifty/fifty on that. If it’s information on stuff on the other side of the country, I wouldn’t be interested. What am I supposed to do if I live on the other side of the country? If it’s near where I live, maybe on the outskirts of my city, then I’d be pretty interested. If I find out due to the data that these places are really good for teaching and benefitting everything, I’d be interested, I’d go through that pathway. If there’s too much text to read that might put some people off” (FEC student)

Summary

Application systems

- Young people overall find it easy to apply for post-16/post-18 pathways. Despite the apparent ease of academic routes and the relative complexity of technical pathways, technical learners are less likely to report that they found it difficult to apply for their current course than those on academic routes. However, young people from BAME groups are more likely to find it difficult to apply than White young people.
- The reasons learners gave for finding the application process difficult include that they were ‘unsure which course or institution to apply to’ and they ‘did not know who to ask’ and/or ‘where to go’ for help with their decision-making. Others found the process complex and time consuming. Some technical learners experienced difficulties with the system or difficulties when dealing directly with the individual provider or employer.

Satisfaction with current choice

- Almost nine out of ten young people are ‘Satisfied’ or ‘Very satisfied’ with their current course choice. Aspects of course delivery and the suitability of the course are the main sources of dissatisfaction. A minority of dissatisfied young people perceive that they have been channelled down a route that others believed was suitable for them, rather than the route they themselves wanted to follow.

Preferences for IAG

- Although most young people are willing to access information online, there is strong preference for face-to-face help and support with decision-making. The findings suggest that more needs to be done to raise awareness amongst young people, particularly those with SEN, to help with their decision-making and to encourage those from lower socio-economic groups to make use of careers information, advice and guidance.

The role of centralised information in an enhanced careers IAG offer

- Most young people are able to find the information they believe they need to make fully informed decisions about post-16 education. However, substantial minority do not know which of the myriad of information sources they can trust and most agree that the decision-making process would be easier if all the information about courses and how to apply was in one place.
- There does not appear to be a correlation between those who found it difficult to apply for their current course and those who agree they would have found it easier to make a decision if all the information had been in one place.
- Respondents during the qualitative interviews welcomed the idea of a new system which improved the quality and depth of course information available to students (e.g. course content, where students study (on campus, online, etc.), hours of study, and assessment approaches) as well as provided information on specialist student support services, destinations, and student career trajectories.

Conclusions: Implications for policy

In this final section, we discuss the implications of the findings for policy and identify key areas for more detailed consideration. A new careers strategy in England provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on the key findings from this report.

Young people's career decision-making styles, processes and strategies vary considerably. Their preferences for support are mixed, with some preferring to simply use a search engine to find the information they need and others preferring a combination of formal face-to-face and online careers support. Although most young people perceive that they have access to the information they need to make informed decisions, there are calls for improvements in the careers support they and their peers receive. There is evidence from the interviews that for some, access to impartial and independent IAG is limited. Young people are most likely to turn to informal sources including parents, friends and class teachers for help with decision-making, who may have limited knowledge and experience of the full range of options.

The concept of institutional habitus, or the ways in which an institution (e.g. schools, colleges, employers and training providers) exhibits expectations of who and what its students are expected to be, is also an important influence on post-16 choices and decision-making. For the majority of participants in the research, the school or college they attended gave them a sense of what might be expected of them. While some institutions were perceived to exhibit little in the way of expectations for their young people post-16, others were perceived to view university attendance as an expectation for most pupils and the academically able in particular. There were reports of some schools withholding information about FE and apprenticeships, particularly to academically-able students, and of young people who aspired to HE being channelled down technical routes. Others indicated their peers who had limited social capital did not have adequate careers IAG to help them make the most of their talents and abilities.

There was, therefore, widespread agreement that careers IAG could be improved to help more young people to manage their transitions effectively. While the notion of creating a national application system for all education routes may be worthy of further exploration, respondents were more likely to highlight a desire for assistance with the decision-making process including improvements in the quality and depth of course information, and information on specialist student support services, destinations, and career trajectories. A system backed by government and communicated well to young people, teachers, parents, employers, careers professionals, and others could, therefore, help more young people to be aware of the full range of options available to them.

However, it is important to recognise that other factors, in addition to the availability of IAG, shape and influence young people's choices. There was evidence of strong family ties, habitus and practical and situational factors impacting on post-16 choices and decisions. For example, travel to study and the time and costs associated with this, were

highlighted, particularly by disadvantaged young people, as restricting choice. Some students cannot afford to travel outside of their immediate area and many 16 to 18 year olds do not wish to move away from their families.

The findings in this report offer some opportunities and challenges for policymakers seeking to identify interventions to help support young people to progress in their chosen pathways. The intersectionality between factors means that it is impossible to determine the extent and relative influence of the range of factors affecting a young person at a given point in time with any certainty. Therefore, potential interventions which look to increase effective post-16 choices and decision-making are likely to be most effective if developed within a coherent careers IAG framework or programme. Such a framework would look to incorporate both 'push and pull' interventions, addressing barriers while simultaneously promoting the benefits for different groups of individuals. This can be achieved by:

- understanding that different young people will have different requirements at different times in their lives and that support should be personalised and tailored accordingly,
- focusing on the needs of particular groups of learners who experience difficulty in course choice and decision making such as BAME groups and learners with SEN
- raising awareness of the full range of opportunities amongst young people and their informal and formal support networks, particularly from Year 9 onwards,
- supporting young people to access and make effective use of IAG in order for them (and their families) to have meaningful *careers dialogue* that supports their education and career decisions.
- empowering young people and equipping them to have greater access to student destinations, labour market intelligence/information (LMI) and 21st century career trajectories, and
- recognising that strategic leadership is essential, particularly in schools and colleges, to ensure all young people from an early age have the right level of support through to the point at which key decisions post-16 options are made.

While further research is needed to evaluate specific approaches to young people's career decision-making over time, such as more longitudinal tracking and analysis, this report shows there is a greater chance that an individual will, irrespective of their gender, socioeconomic status or ethnicity, progress if the right careers IAG is in place. It is crucial to recognise that the steps a disadvantaged young person has to take in order to participate in post-16 course choice and decision-making can often be quite profound, compared to more advantaged young people. The voices of young people who took part in this research show they are keen to see improvements in careers IAG guidance for themselves and the next generation coming through England's schooling system.

Annex 1: Sample characteristics

Table 11: Gender

	No.	%
Male	938	46.5%
Female	1,079	53.5%

Base=2,017

Table 12: Ethnicity

	No.	%
Asian/Asian British	247	12.2%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	95	4.7%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	71	3.5%
White	1,550	76.8%
Other ethnic group	28	1.4%
Prefer not to say	26	1.3%

Base=2,017

Table 13: Age on 31st August 2017

	No.	%
17	175	8.7%
18	919	45.6%
19	923	45.8%

Base=2,017

Table 14: Self-reported disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition

	No.	%
Yes	259	12.8%
No	1,685	83.5%
Prefer not to say	73	3.6%

Base=2,017

Table 15: Whether respondent has ever received or been eligible to receive free school meals and/or 16-19 Bursary

	No.	%
Yes	522	29.5%
No	1,246	70.5%

Base=1,768

Table 16: Parental education

	Yes		No		I don't know	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Did either of your parents do an apprenticeship?	252	12.5%	1,600	79.3%	165	8.2%
Did either of your parents go to university?	734	36.4%	1,209	59.9%	74	3.7%

Base=2,017

Table 17: Highest qualification currently held

	No.	%
No qualification	6	0.3%
Level 1	67	3.3%
Level 2	836	41.1%
Level 3	1,074	53%
Level 4 or above	14	0.7%
I'm not sure	20	1.0%

Base=2,017**Table 18: Type of school *last* attended**

	No.	%
Maintained school, academy or free school	1,647	82.8%
Independent	125	6.3%
Grammar School	147	7.4%
Other type of school	56	2.8%
I don't know	14	0.8%

Base=1,990

Table 19: Main location of *current* studies

	No.	%
Further Education College	371	18.4%
School Sixth Form	464	23.0%
Sixth Form College	322	16.0%
Independent Training Provider	90	4.5%
Higher Education Institution	568	28.2%
At my employer	185	9.2%
Other	14	0.7%

Base=2,014

Table 20: Main subject *currently* studying

	%
Science and mathematics	26.7%
Business, Administration, Finance and Law	18.6%
Arts, Media and Publishing	17.1%
Health, public services and care	15.5%
Social Sciences	15.3%
Languages, Literature and Culture	11.4%
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	10.1%
History, Philosophy and Theology	7.4%
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	6.9%
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	4.7%
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	3.0%
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	2.9%
Education and Training	2.0%
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	1.5%
Hair and Beauty Therapy	0.8%
PE/Sports/Sports Science	0.8%
Other subject	0.3%
Forensics/Forensic Science	0.2%
Preparation for Life and Work	0.1%

Base=2,017 (Percentages do not add up to 100% because some respondents are studying courses in more than one subject area)

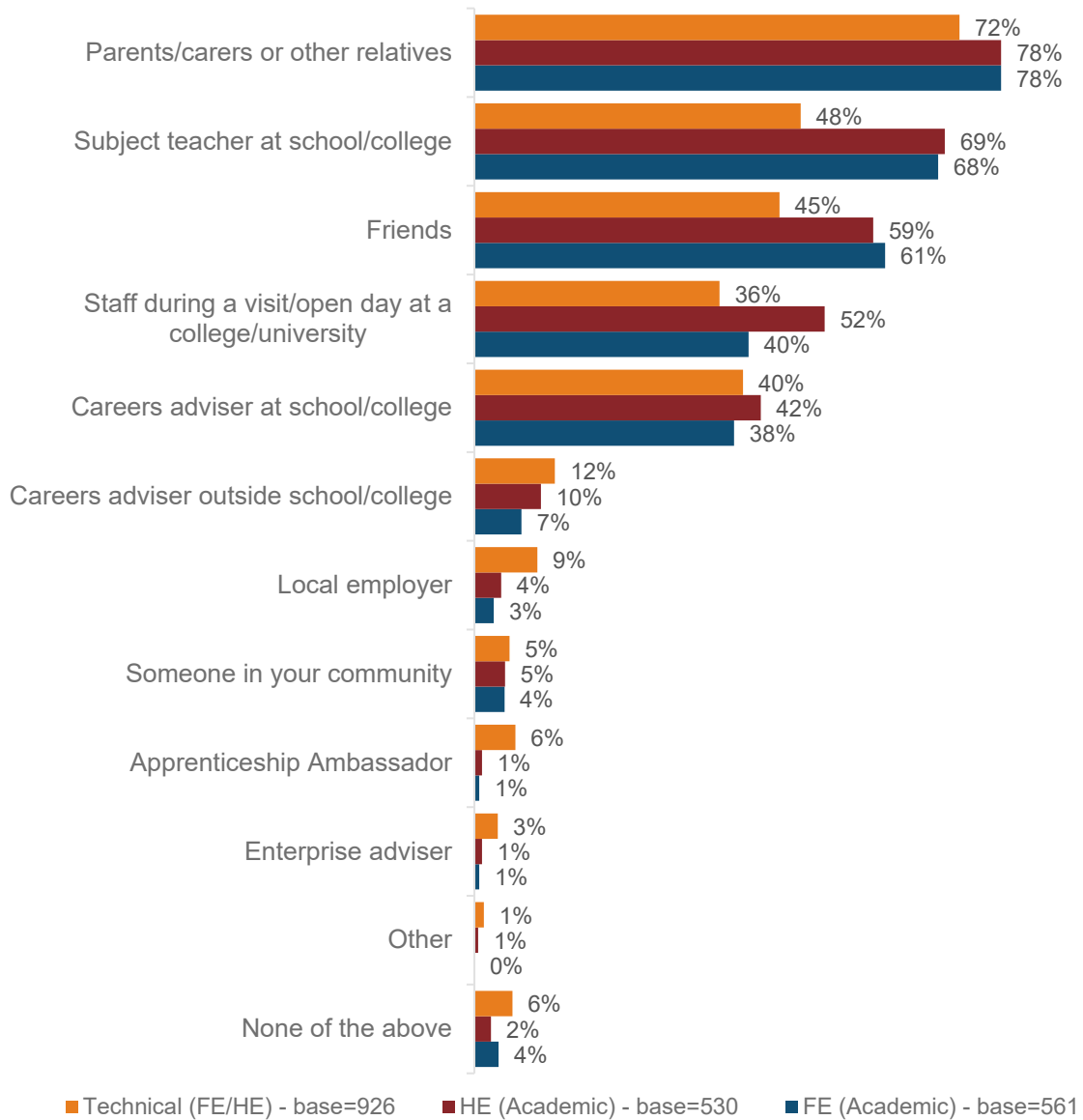
Table 21: Learner characteristics by route

		FE (academic)	HE (academic)	Technical (FE/HE)
Type of school attended	Maintained school	83.4%	74.3%	87.1%
	Independent	7.1%	10.2%	3.6%
	Grammar School	7.7%	11.4%	5.0%
	Other type of school	0.9%	3.3%	3.7%
	Don't know	0.9%	0.8%	0.7%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>560</i>	<i>510</i>	<i>920</i>
Highest level of qualification held	No qualifications	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%
	Level 1	2.1%	0.0%	5.9%
	Level 2	68.8%	1.7%	47.6%
	Level 3	27.3%	96.4%	44.3%
	Level 4 or above	0.5%	1.3%	0.4%
	I'm not sure	1.1%	0.4%	1.3%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>926</i>
FSM or 16-19 Bursary	Yes	25.9%	20.7%	36.8%
	No	74.1%	79.3%	63.2%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>491</i>	<i>468</i>	<i>809</i>
Learner has a disability, learning difficulty or long-term physical or mental health condition	Yes	11.9%	12.3%	13.7%
	No	83.6%	84.2%	83.2%
	Prefer not to say	4.5%	3.6%	3.1%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>926</i>
If parents go to university	Yes	41.0%	45.1%	28.6%
	No	57.4%	52.6%	65.7%
	I don't know	1.6%	2.3%	5.7%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>926</i>
If parents did an apprenticeship	Yes	10.2%	9.6%	15.6%
	No	82.9%	84.0%	74.5%
	I don't know	7.0%	6.4%	9.9%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>926</i>
Gender	Male	43.5%	59.6%	40.8%
	Female	56.5%	40.4%	59.2%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>926</i>
Ethnicity	Asian/Asian British	13.7%	14.2%	10.3%
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3.6%	2.3%	6.8%
	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	3.9%	3.4%	3.3%
	White	76.5%	77.7%	76.6%
	Other ethnic group	1.4%	1.3%	1.4%
	Prefer not to say	0.9%	1.1%	1.6%
	<i>Base</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>530</i>	<i>926</i>

Base=2,017

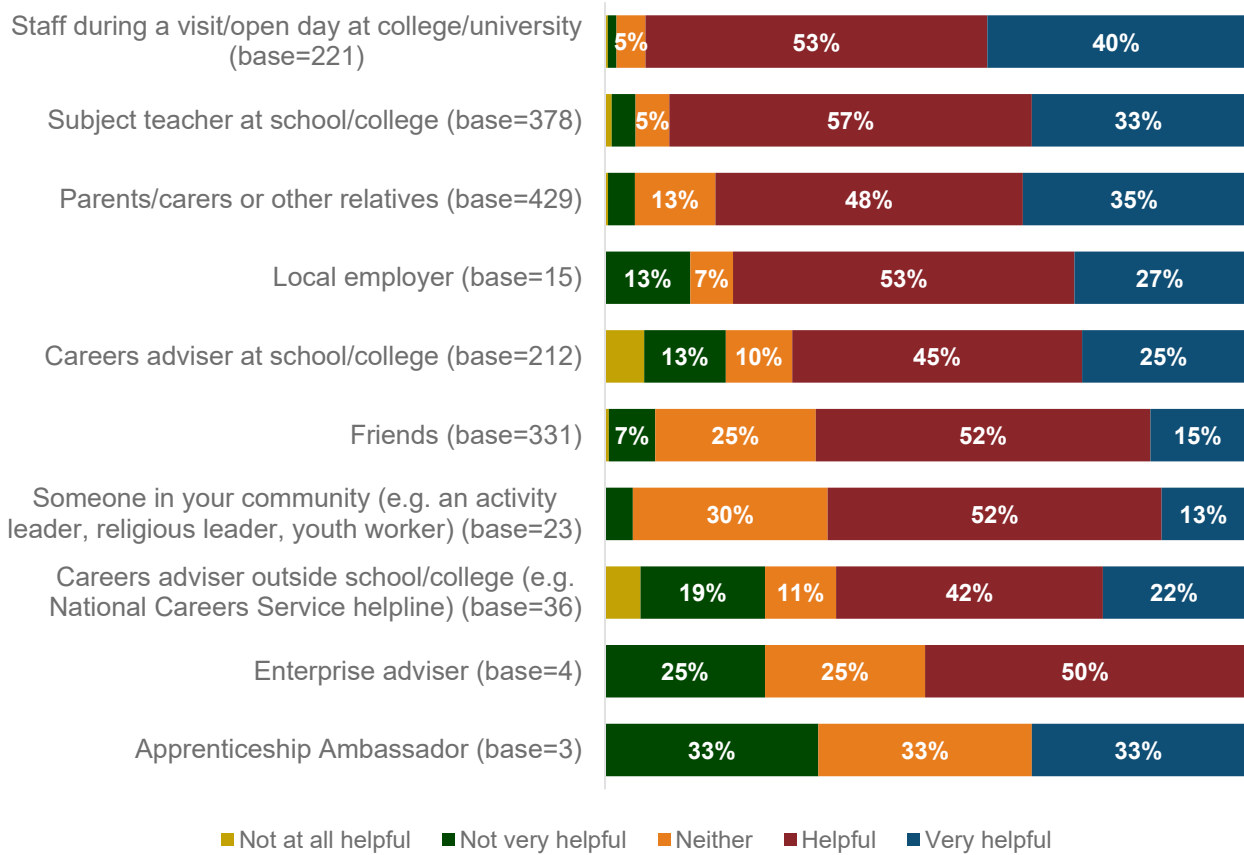
Annex 2: Supporting graphs

Figure 14: Which individuals young people spoke to in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year11/13 by route



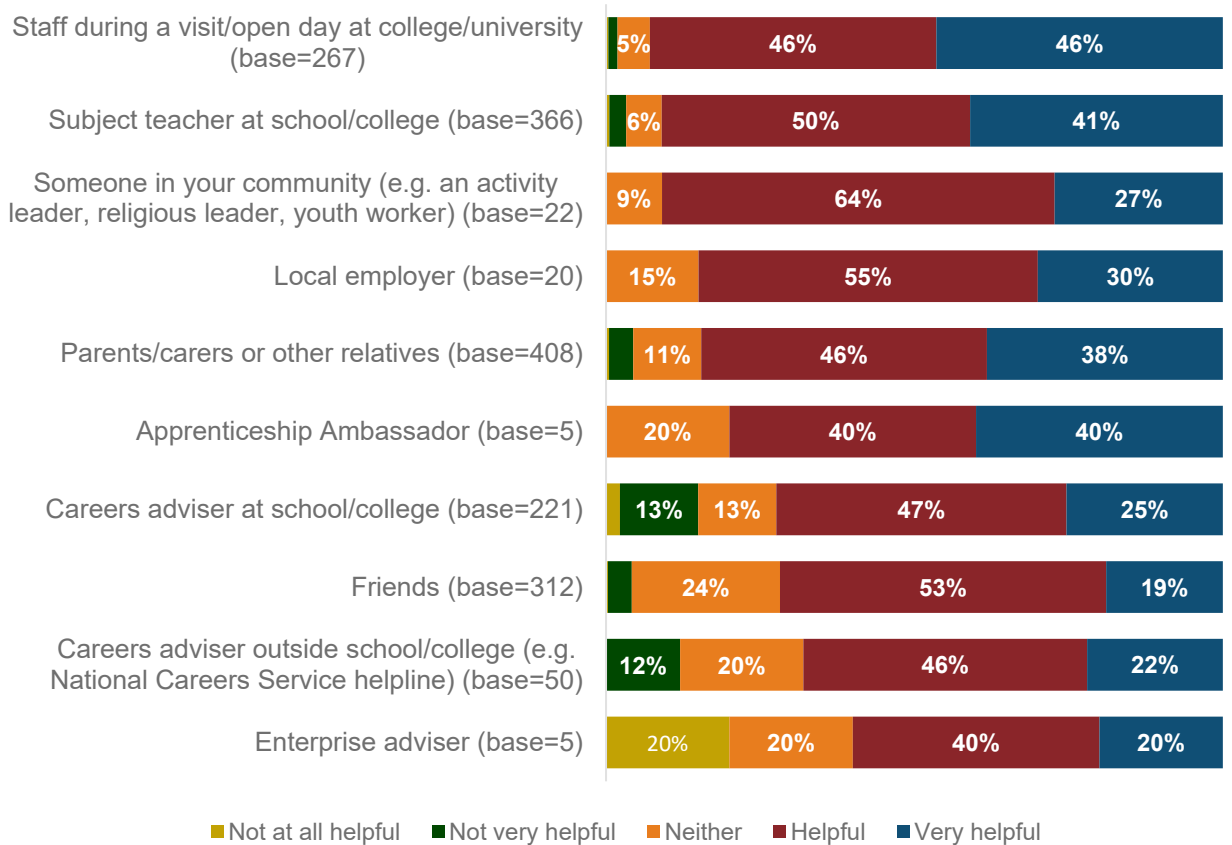
Base=variable

Figure 15: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (FE Academic)



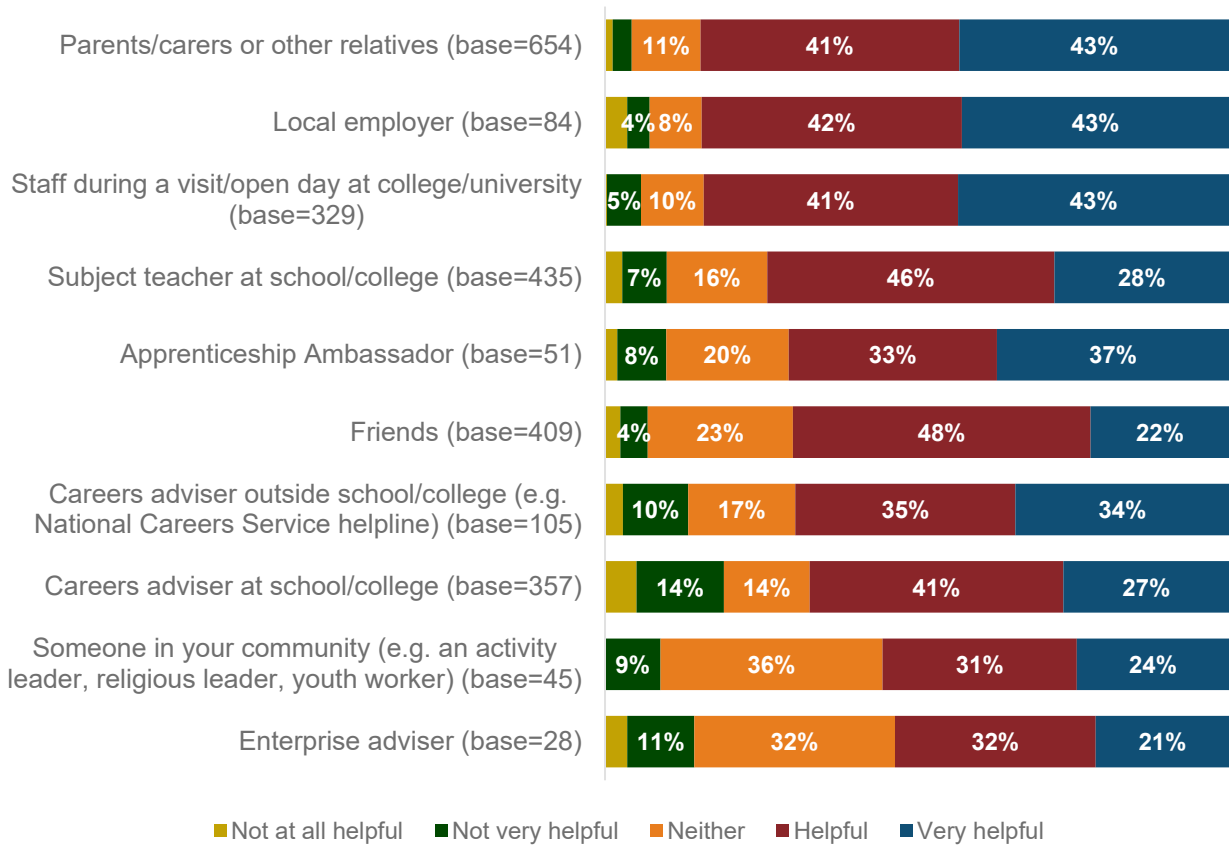
Base=variable

Figure 16: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (HE Academic)



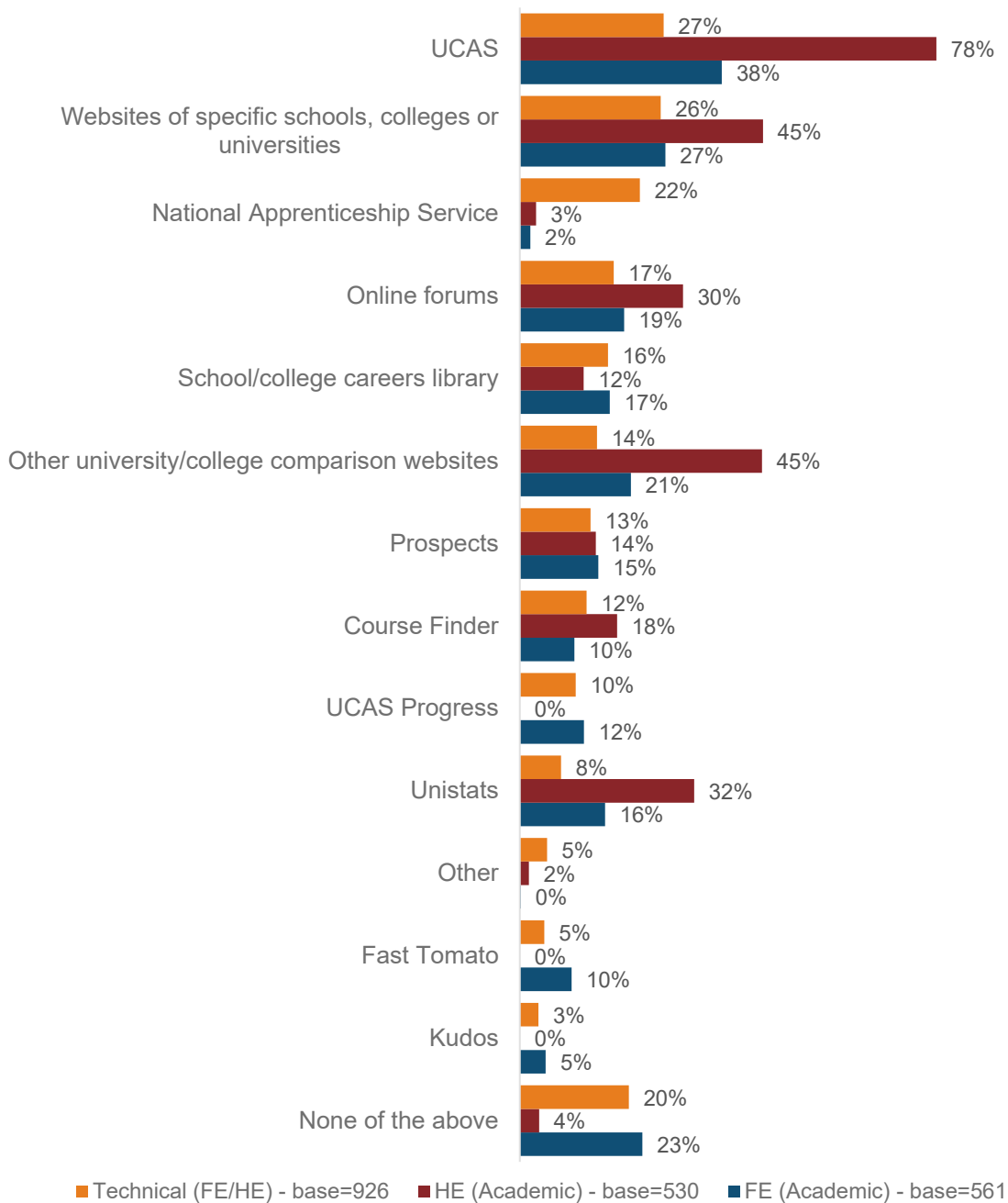
Base=variable

Figure 17: Helpfulness of individuals in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (Technical FE/HE)



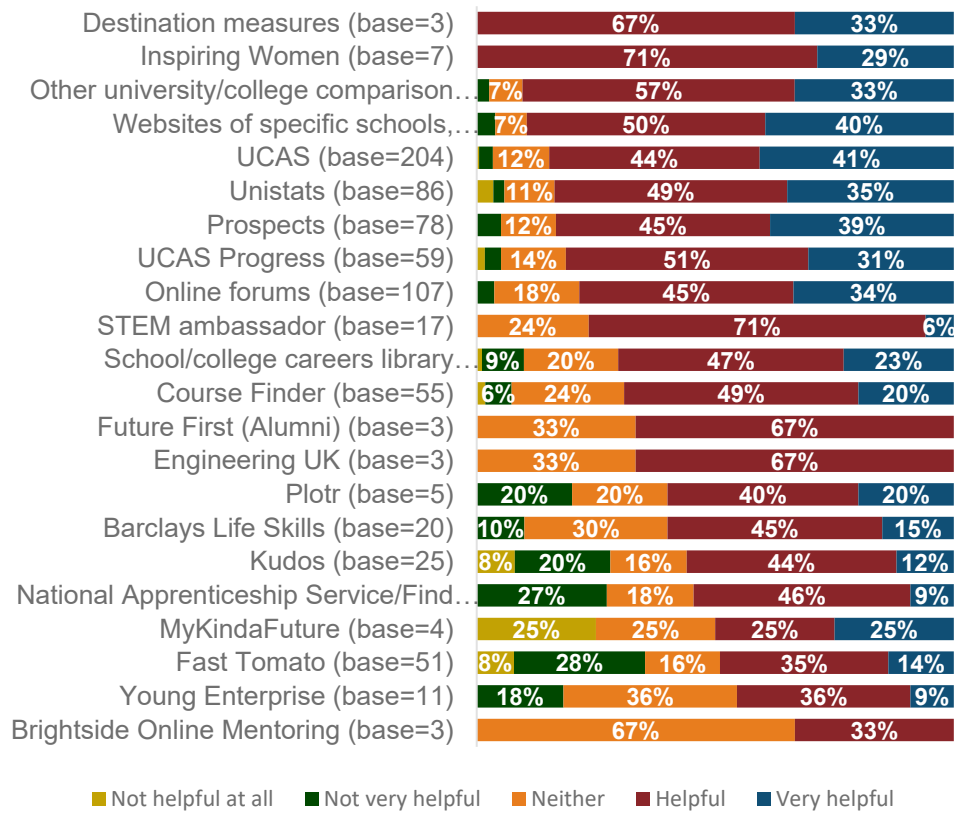
Base=variable

Figure 18: Which tools and resources young people used in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route



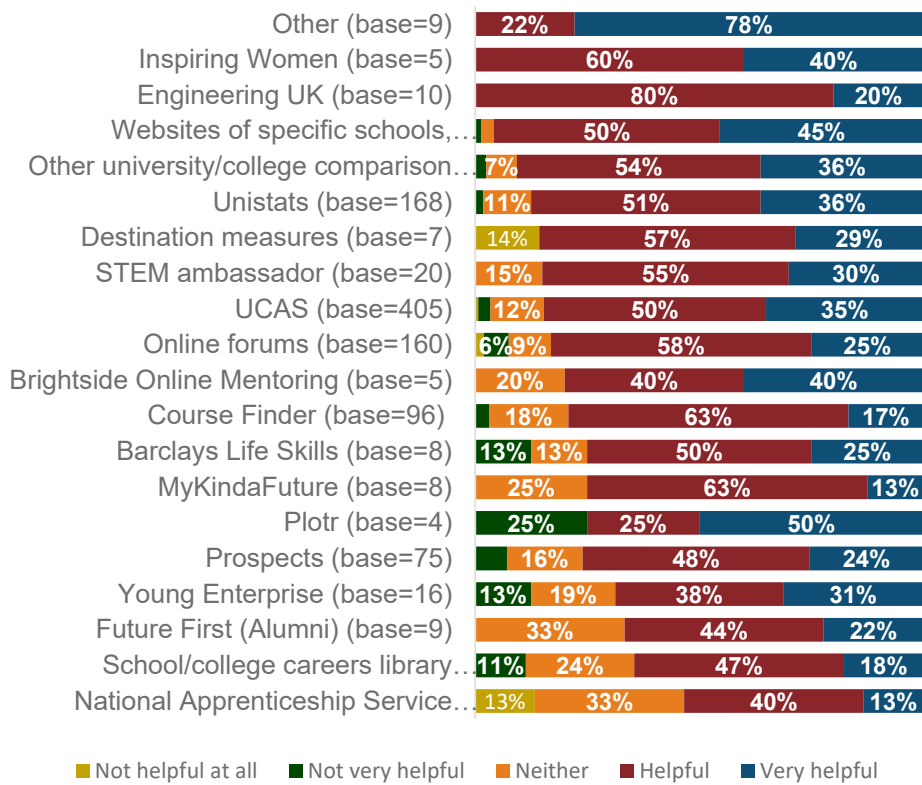
Base=variable

Figure 19: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (FE Academic)



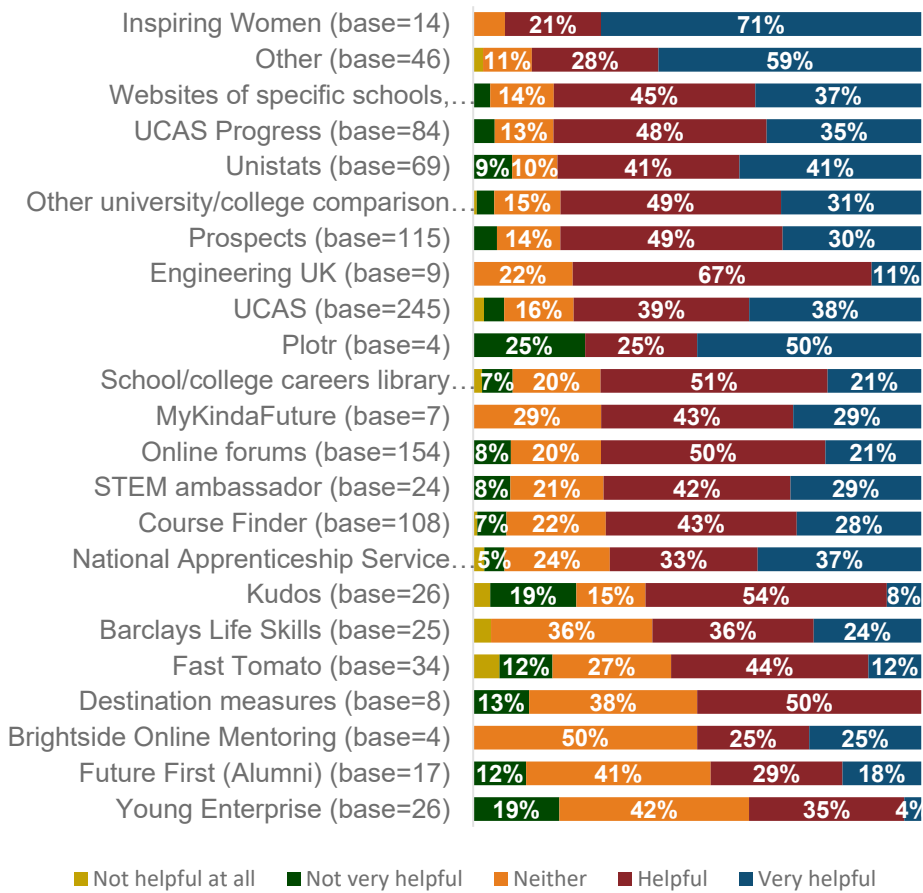
Base=variable

Figure 20: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (HE Academic)



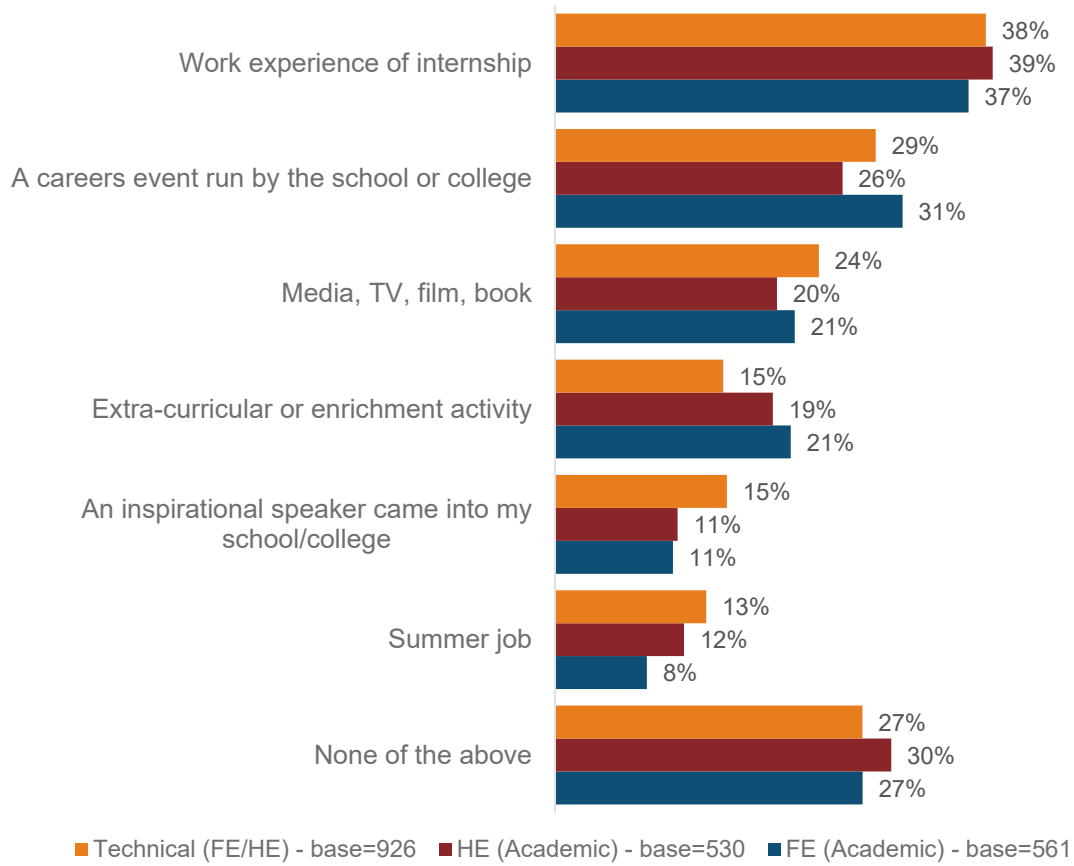
Base=variable

Figure 21: Helpfulness of tools and resources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (Technical FE/HE)



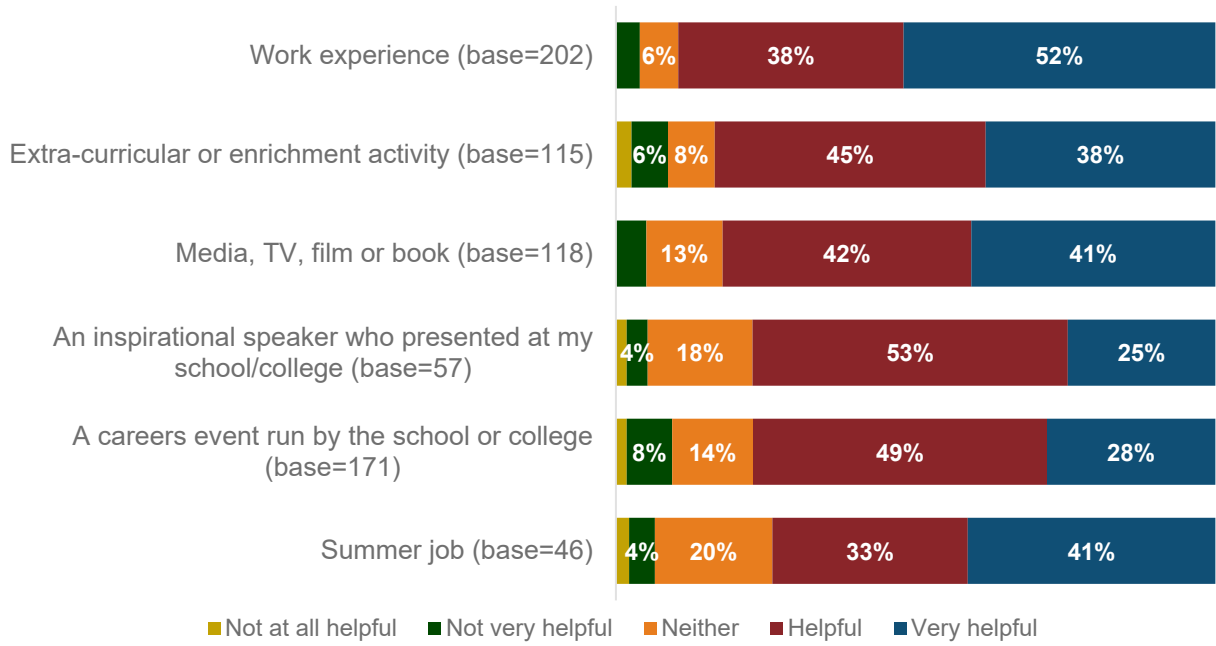
Base=variable

Figure 22: Which wider sources young people use in order to help make decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route



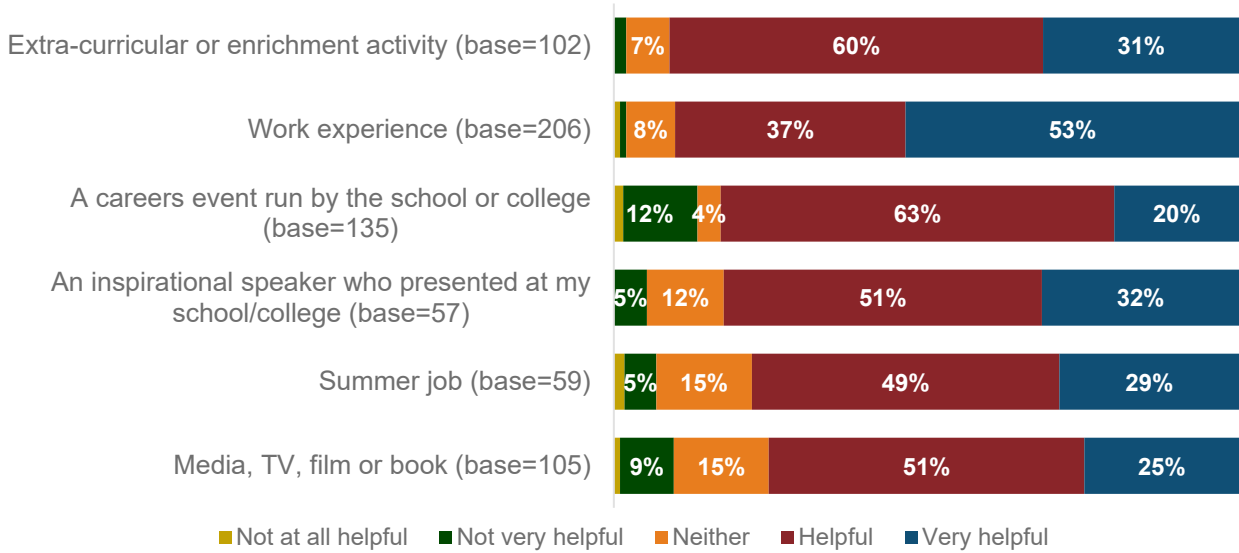
Base=variable

Figure 23: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (FE Academic)



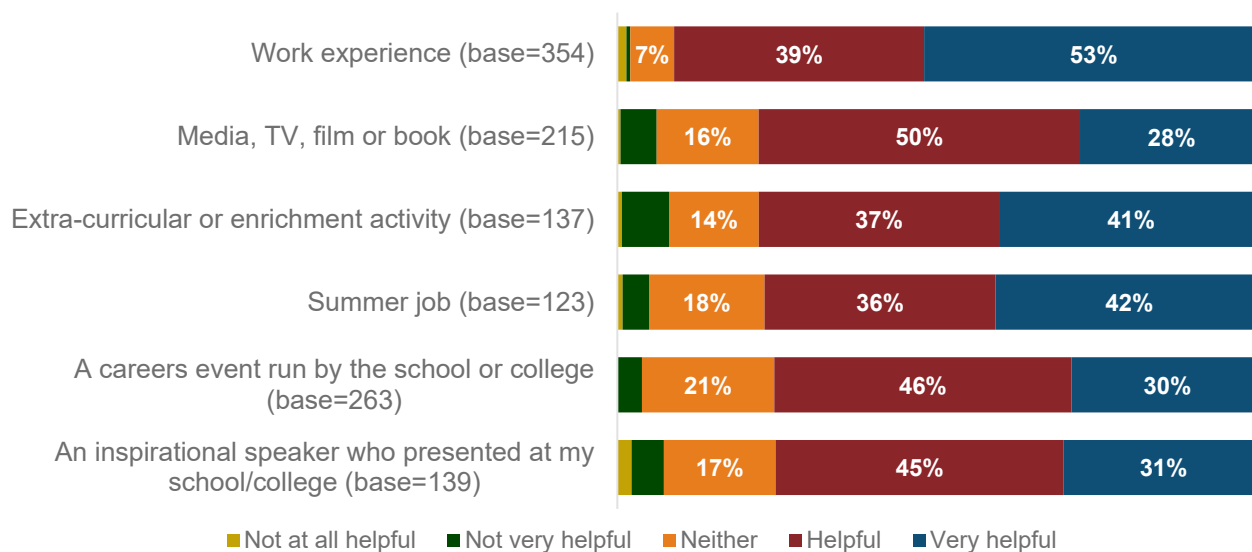
Base=variable

Figure 24: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (HE Academic)



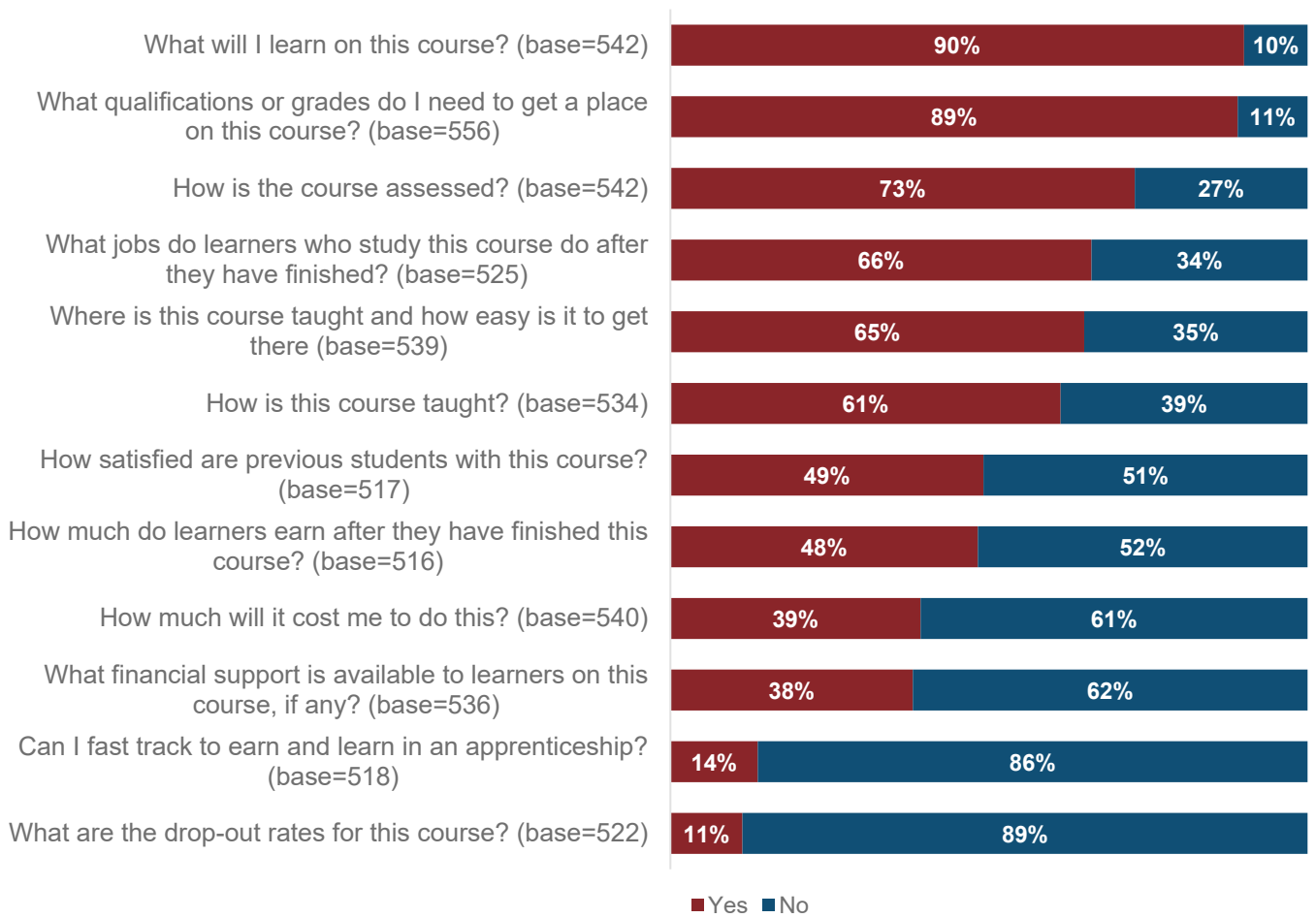
Base=variable

Figure 25: Helpfulness of wider sources in supporting decisions about what to do after Year 11/13 by route (Technical FE/HE)



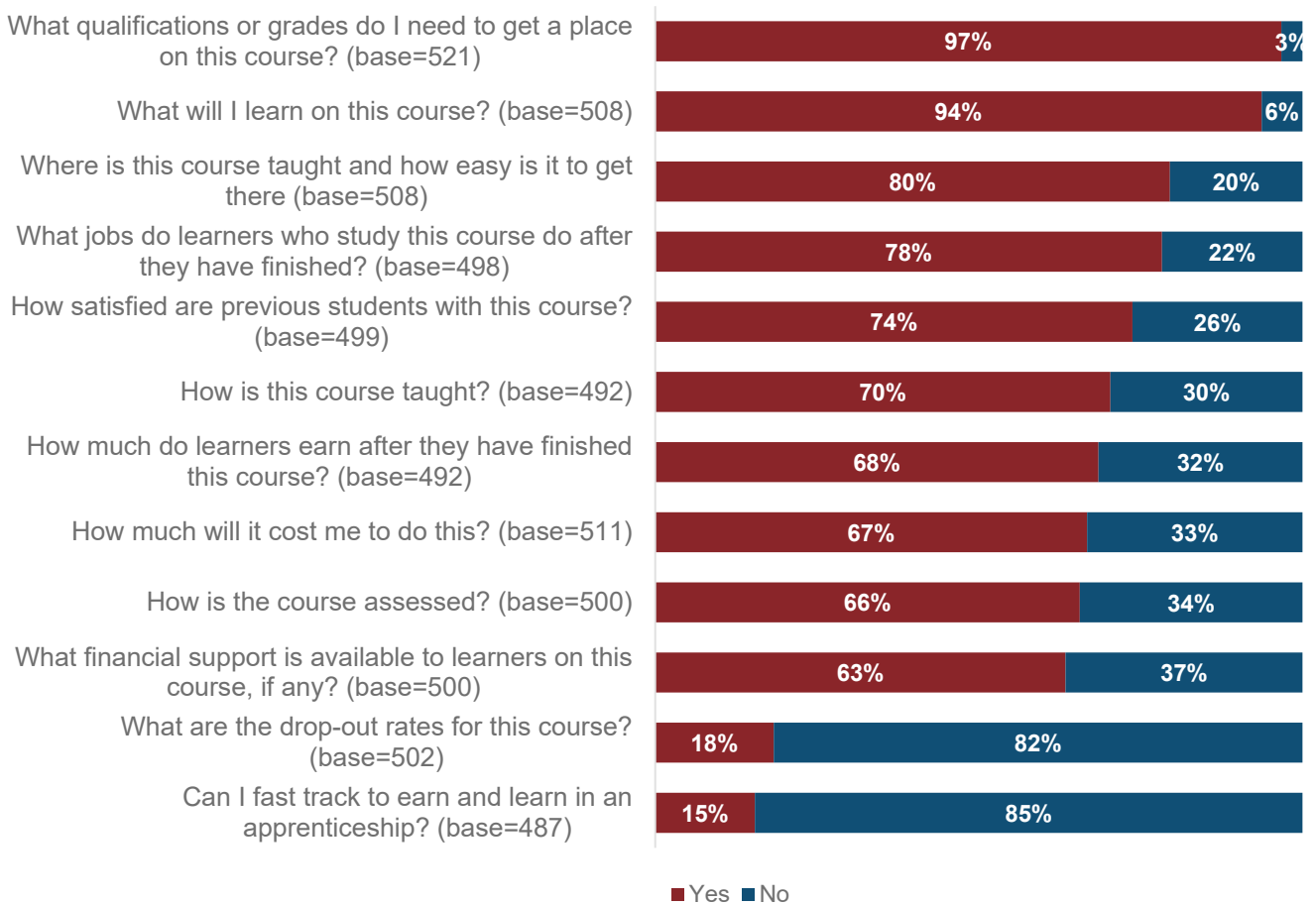
Base=variable

Figure 26: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (FE Academic)



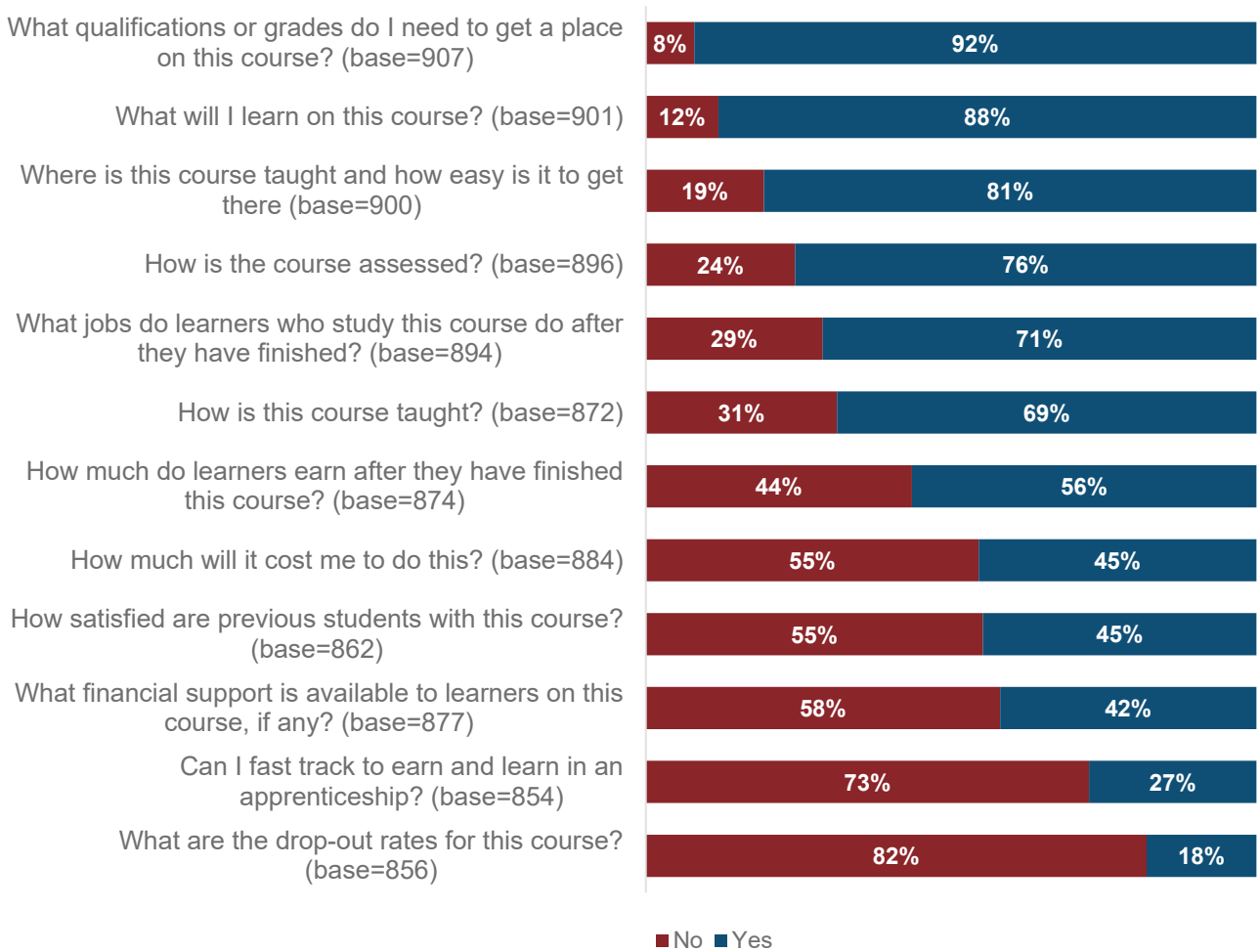
Base=variable

Figure 27: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (HE Academic)



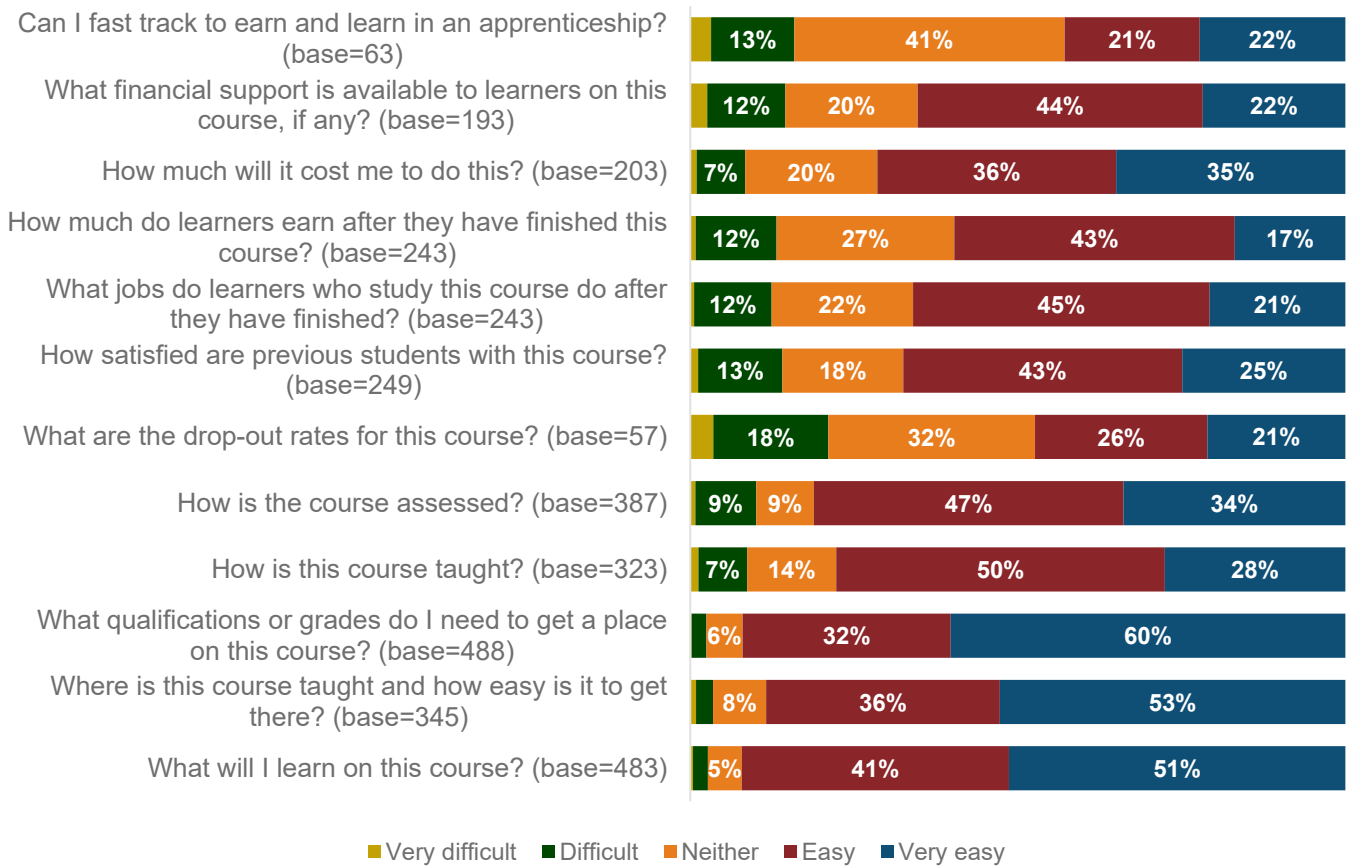
Base=variable

Figure 28: Whether sought information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (Technical FE/HE)



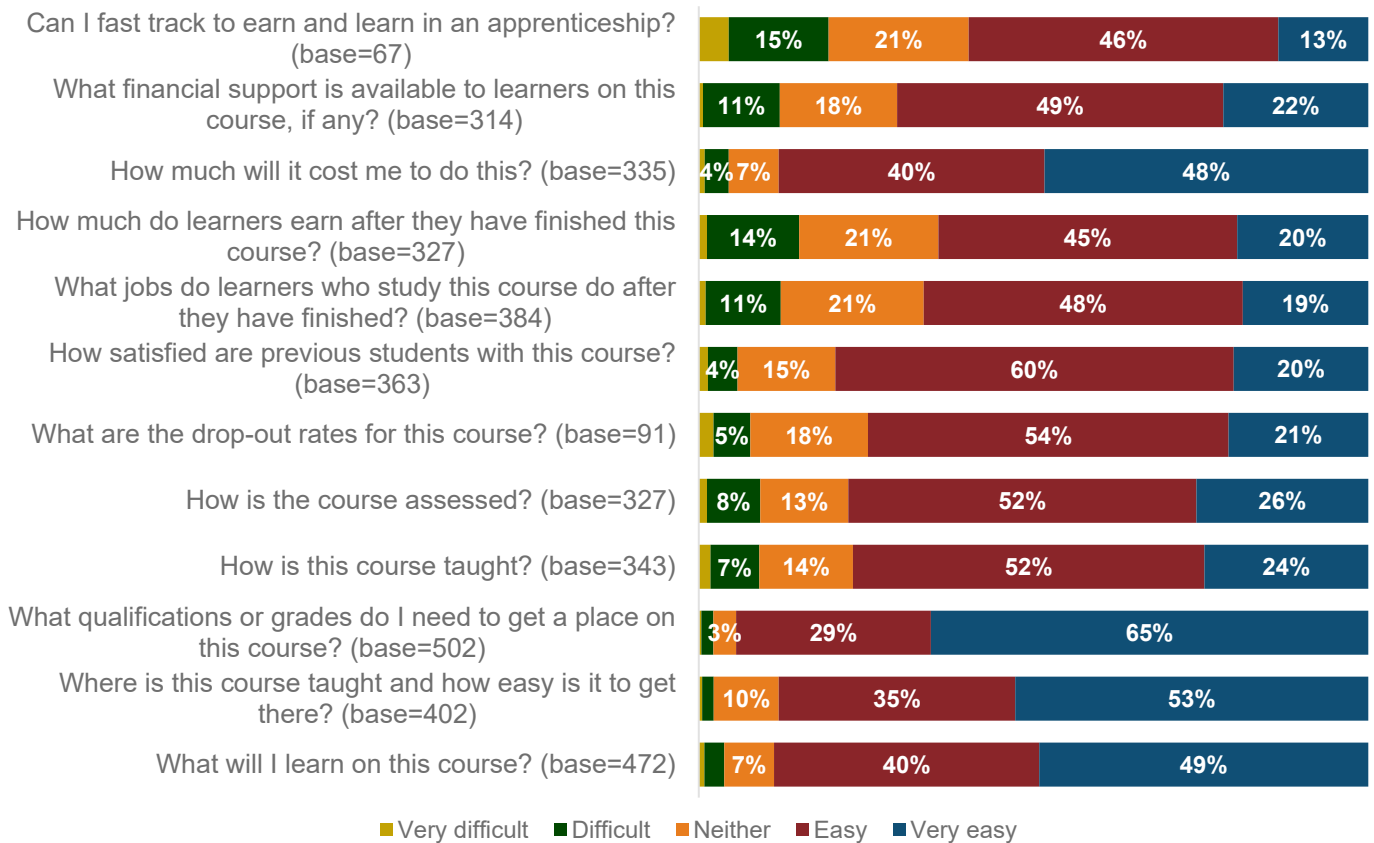
Base=variable

Figure 29: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (FE Academic)



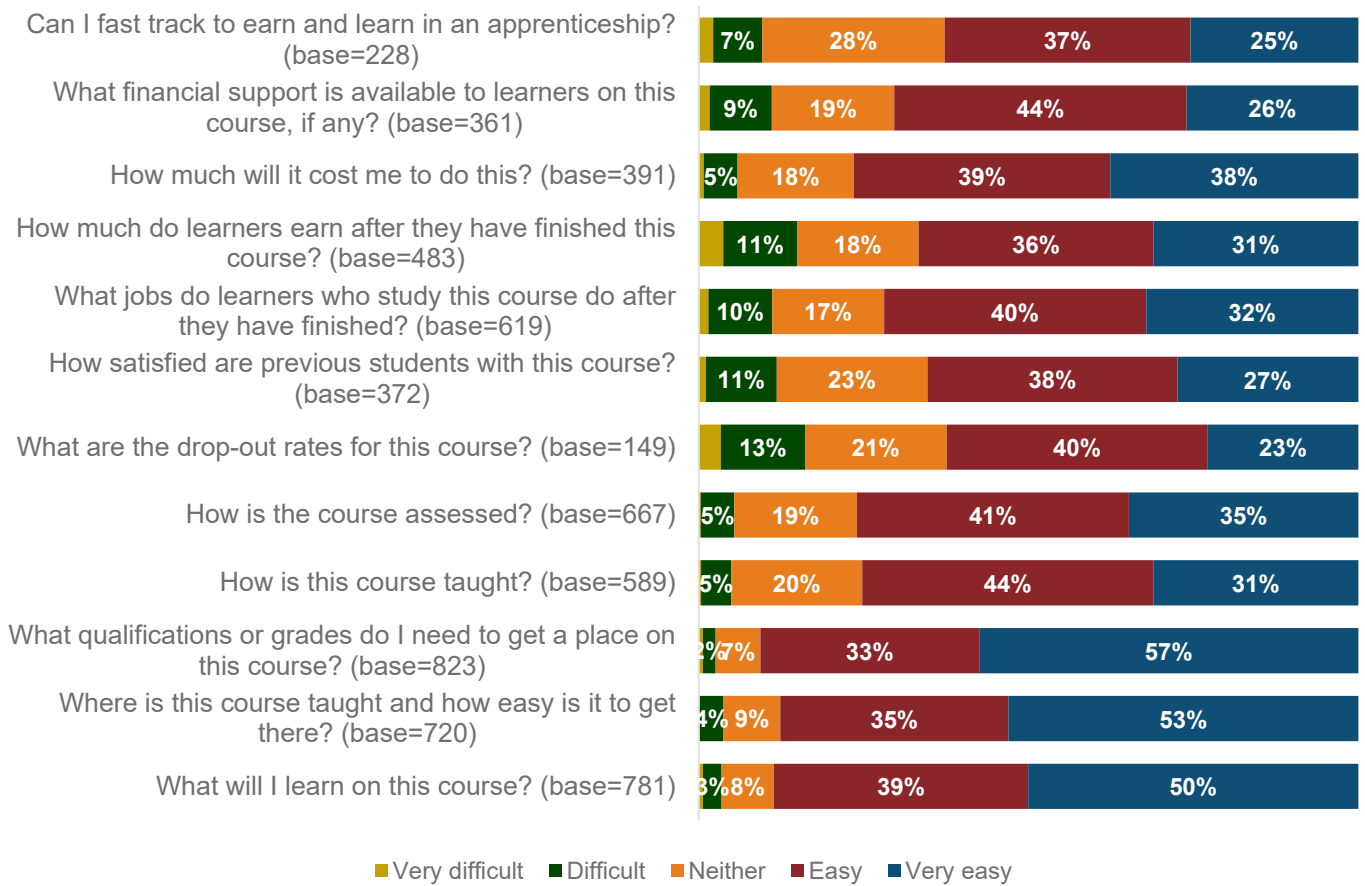
Base=variable

Figure 30: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (HE Academic)



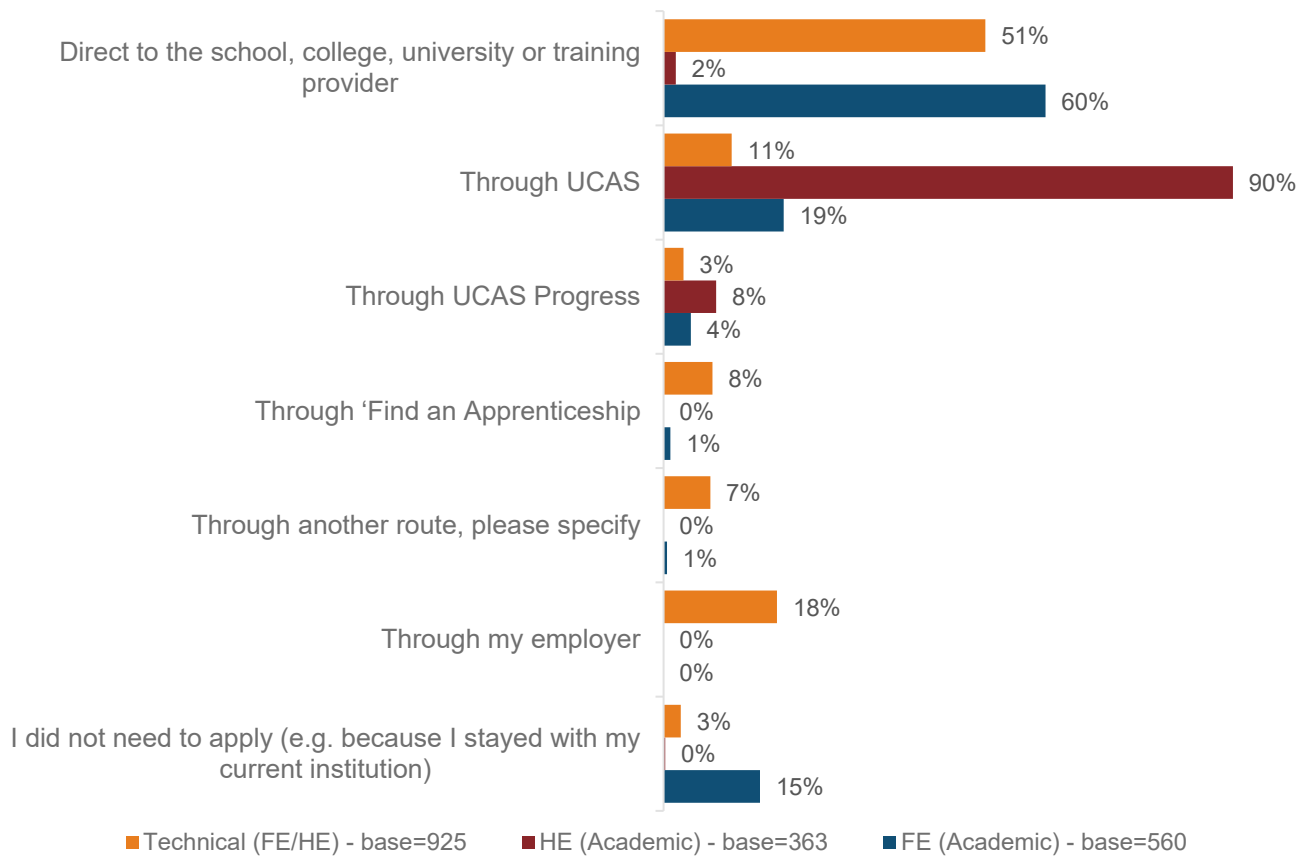
Base=variable

Figure 31: Ease of obtaining information in relation to questions when deciding on current course to help inform decision-making by route (Technical FE/HE)



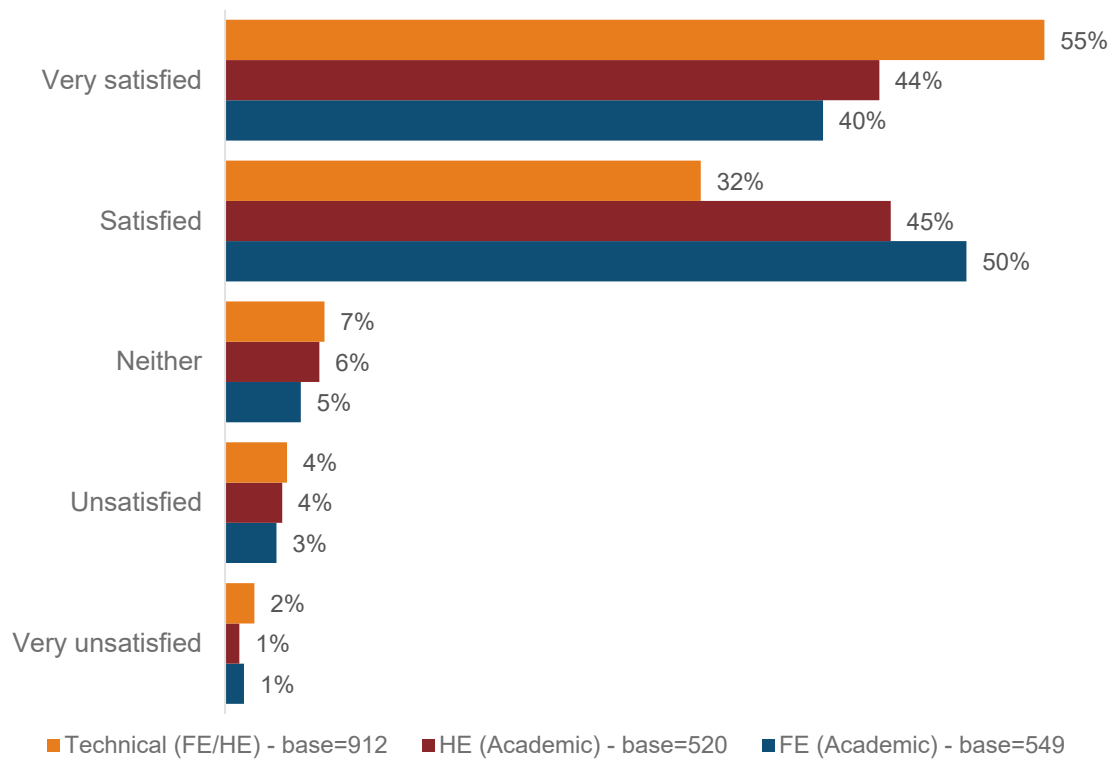
Base=variable

Figure 32: How young people applied for their current course by route



Base=variable

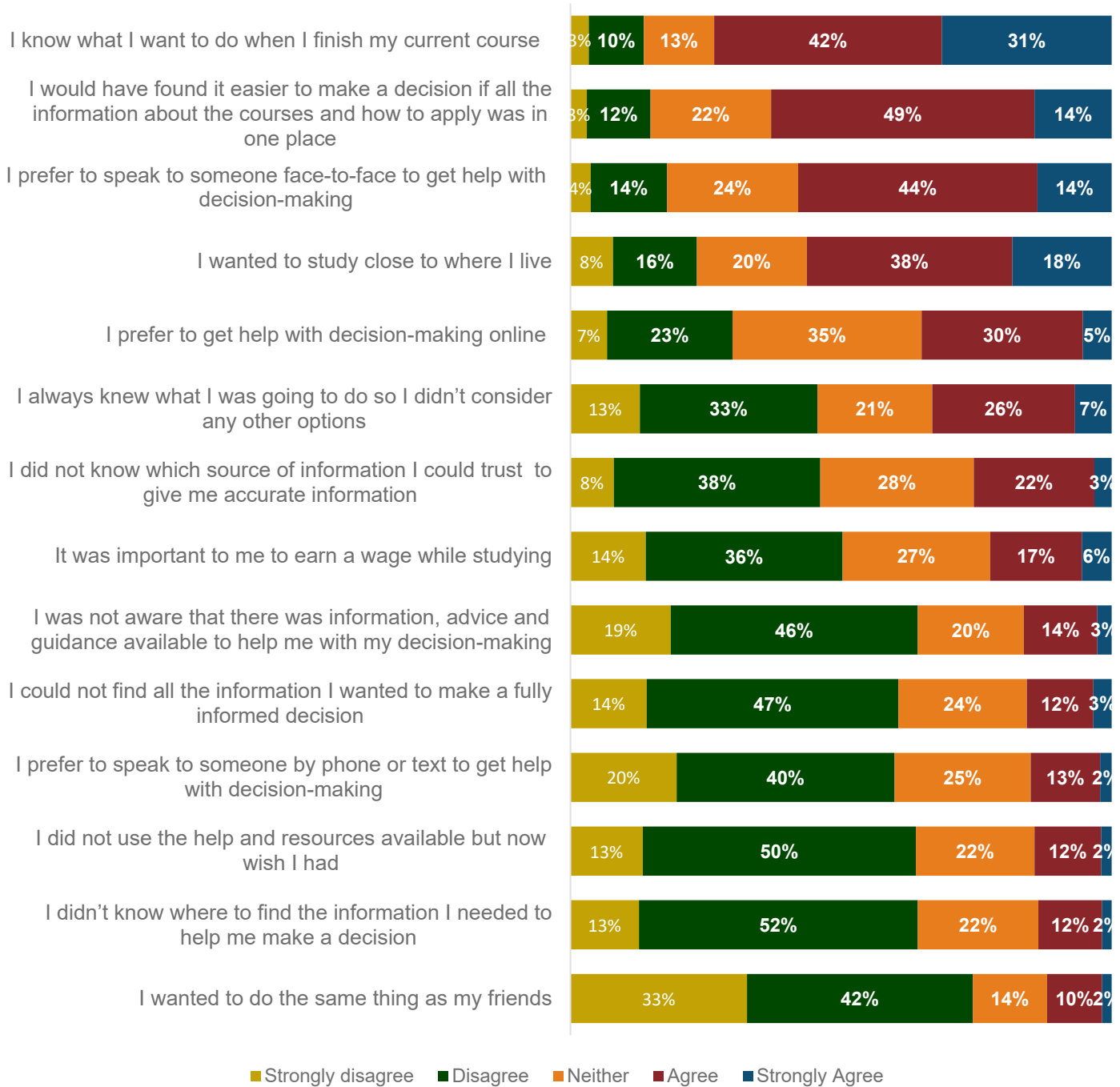
Figure 33: How satisfied young people are with their current educational choice by route



Base=variable

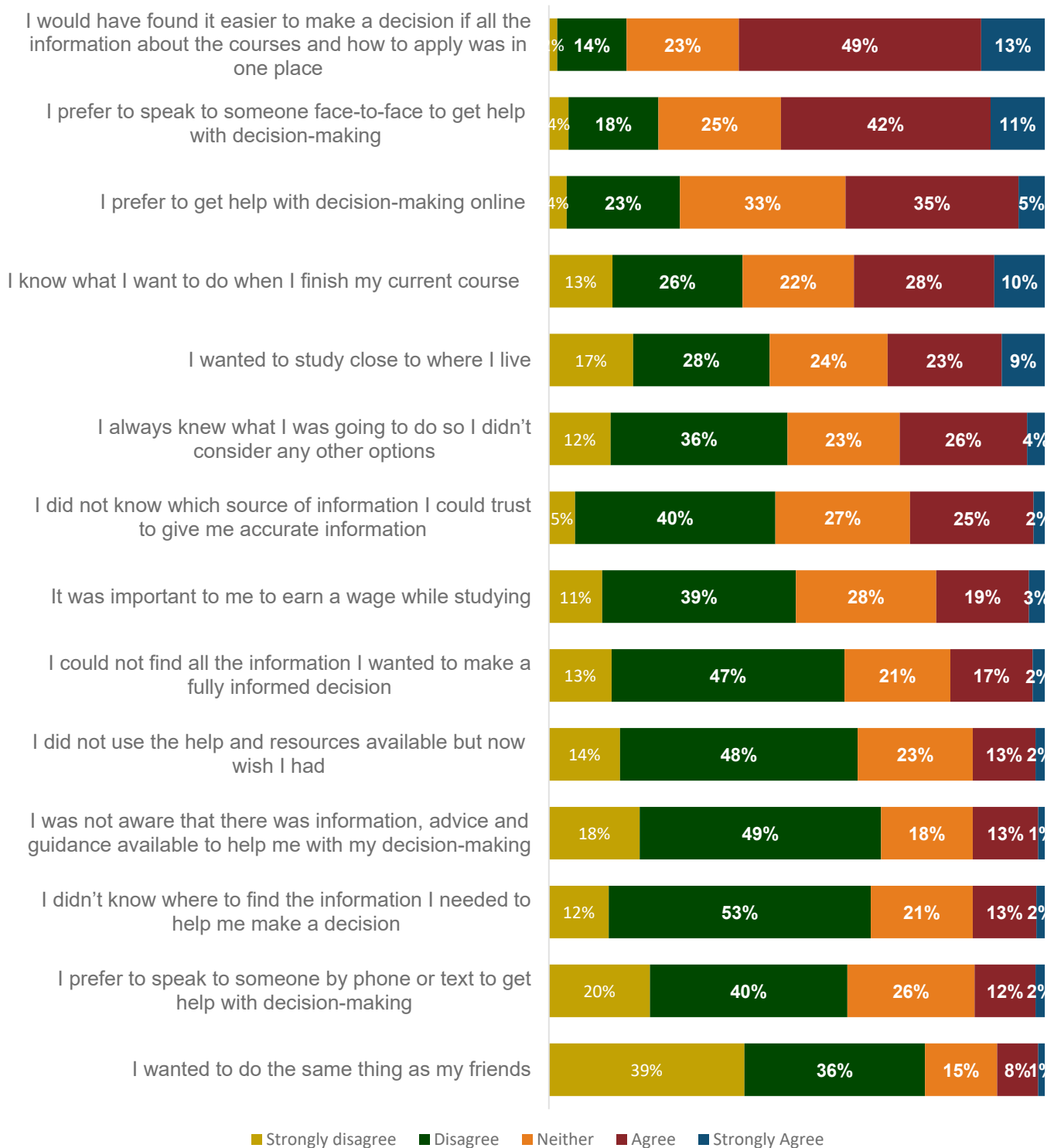
Participants indicating 'Too early to say' are not included

Figure 34: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (FE Academic)



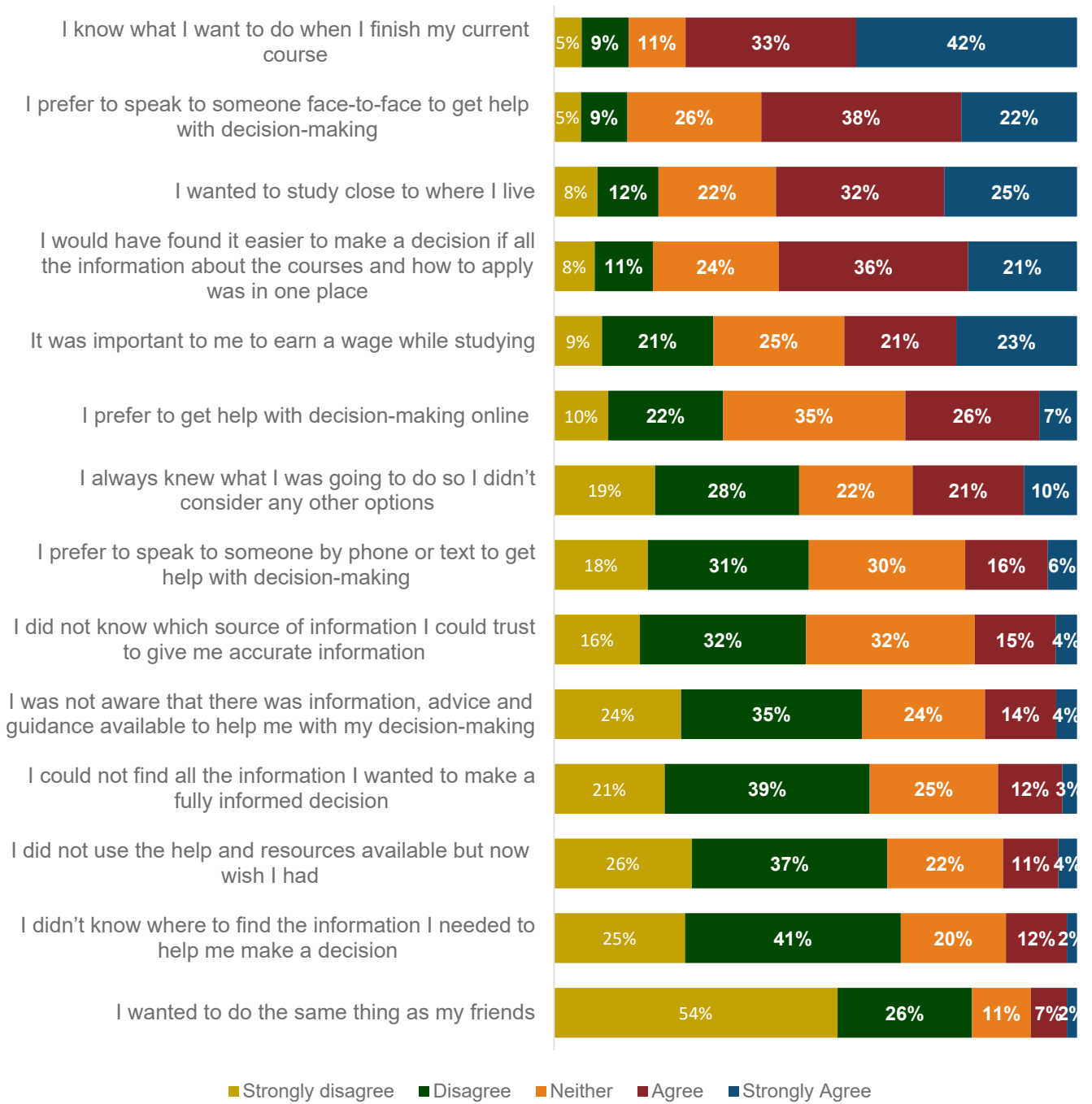
Base=561

Figure 35: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (HE Academic)



Base=530

Figure 36: Extent to which agree with statements in relation to making decisions about education and training by route (Technical FE/HE)



Base=926



Department
for Education

© Crown copyright

Reference: DFE- RR741

ISBN: 978-1-78105-843-5

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

vikki.mcauley@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications