Skills Development Scotland

Capturing the Voice of Young People & Apprentices

Dr Rebecca McCartan and Georgina Southern

SDS Evaluation & Research Team

March 2025

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency for Scotland

Goals

Industry-focused Skills

People develop skills and competencies that drive productive businesses and regions, and help create a fairer, more equal society

Inclusive Talent Pool

Talent is diverse and resilient, with people who can all adapt and thrive in the changing world of work

Invested Employers

Employers invest in Scotland's workforce through job opportunities, skills development, and fair work

Intelligence-led System

An agile, responsive, resilient, and inclusive skills ecosystem consistently delivers the skills the Scottish economy needs

Impactful Organisation

Team SDS maximises return on investment, collaborating to deliver better outcomes and experiences for our customers, colleagues, and the economy

Careers Information, Advice & Guidance (CIAG)

Apprenticeships

Employers

Evaluation & Research

SDS Evaluation & Research gather insight from young people through a series of research programmes:

Our research with young people

JUNIOR PHASE
Pupil Voice
(S1-S3)

SENIOR PHASE
Pupil Voice
(S4-S6)

SCHOOL LEAVERS
Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA)

Our research with apprentices

IN TRAINING
Six months after they start

LEAVERS
Three months after they leave

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES
Fifteen months after they leave

Understanding the Voice of Young People:
SDS Young People Research Programme

Understanding the voice of young people

S1-S3

“Pupil Voice: S1-S3”

- Explores the choices, influences and motivations of young people in school between S1 and S3.
- Launches in Spring 2025.

S4-S6

“Pupil Voice: S4-S6”

- Views of young people between S4 and S6.
- Explores their experiences of accessing CIAG support and how this has influenced their career pathways.
- **11,000 responses in 2024**

School Leavers

“Young People’s Career Ambitions” (YPCA)

- Views of recent school leavers.
- Explores their choices, influences and motivations one year after they leave school.
- **3,000 responses in 2024.**

What the young people research programme covers

Service recall	Finding out about services	Career Management Skills	Foundation Apprenticeships
Views on SDS service offer	Plans to leave or stay on at school	KPIs	Skills for future career
Views on services received	Reasons for leaving or staying at school	Ideal job and sector	Employability activities
Reasons for non-engagement	Plans after school	Key influencers	Extracurricular activities

Equality analysis & Change over time

Collaborative approach to young people research

CIAG

External partners

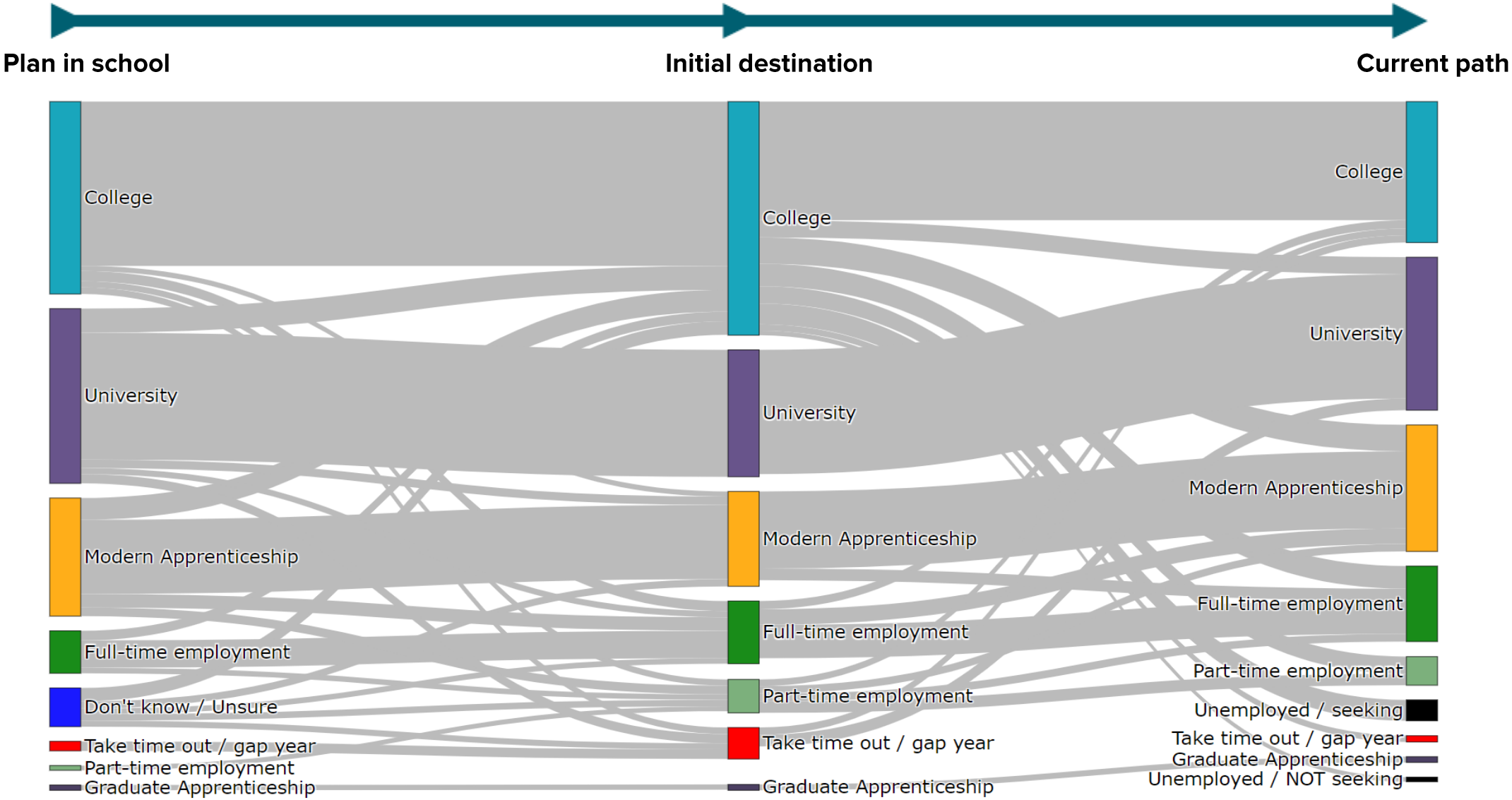
- Scottish Government
- Youthlink
- Education Scotland
- SQA
- Developing Young Workforce
- Scottish Funding Council
- Open University
- MCR Pathways
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Young Scot
- College Development Network
- ADES

Key findings from our Young People research

Mapping post-school trajectories of young people

Source: Young People's Career Ambitions Research 2024

Mapping post-school trajectories of young people



Source: Young People's Career Ambitions Research 2024

Medical, Creative, STEM and Teaching sectors are popular

Sectors	All %
Medicine and Health	18
Creative Industries (e.g. Art & Design, Music, Acting)	17
Engineering	16
Science	12
Teaching	12
Computing and ICT	11
Sport	10
Armed Forces, Policing or Security	9
Caring (e.g. childcare, social care)	9
Banking and Finance	8
Construction	8
Law	8
Hospitality (e.g. working in hotels, bars, restaurants)	5
Tourism	5
Energy	3
Housing / Property	3

Source: Pupil Voice 2024 Research

Medical, Creative, STEM and Teaching sectors are popular

Sectors	All %	Female %	Male %
Medicine and Health	18	26	9
Creative Industries (e.g. Art & Design, Music, Acting)	17	18	13
Engineering	16	6	28
Science	12	13	10
Teaching	12	17	6
Computing and ICT	11	5	17
Sport	10	7	14
Armed Forces, Policing or Security	9	7	13
Caring (e.g. childcare, social care)	9	15	3
Banking and Finance	8	6	11
Construction	8	2	16
Law	8	10	6
Hospitality (e.g. working in hotels, bars, restaurants)	5	6	4
Tourism	5	6	3
Energy	3	1	5
Housing / Property	3	2	3

Source: Pupil Voice 2024 Research

Young people's career decisions are influenced by their interests, qualifications, and the need to earn money

Key Influencers - Factors	All %
The need to earn money	76
My interests / hobbies	75
The qualifications i achieved in school	66
Education / training opportunities available to me	61
Job / career opportunities available to me	61
The subject choice available to me in school	55
Opportunities available within my local area	44
Work experience in school or part-time job	41
Social media (tiktok, instagram, etc)	35
Online careers websites (for example: my world of work)	31

Source: Pupil Voice 2024 Research

Parents & Carers most influential on career decisions

Key Influencers - People	All %
Parent(s) / carer(s)	79
Careers adviser	53
Other family member	52
Friend(s)	50
Teacher(s)	49
Guidance teacher	44
An employer or training provider coming in to my school to talk about careers	31
A university or college representative coming in to my school to talk about careers	28
Youth worker / community worker	16

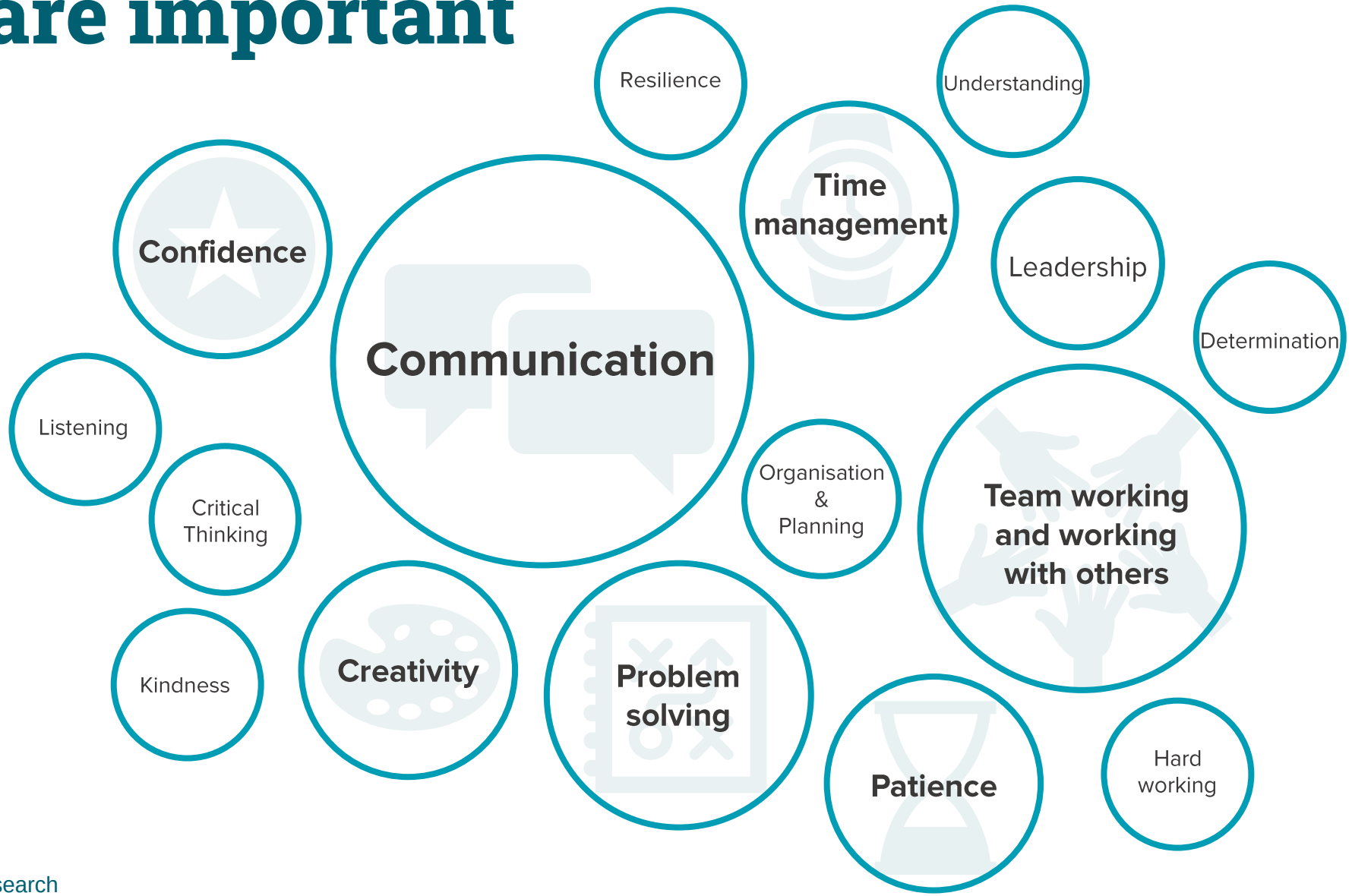
Source: Young People's Career Ambitions 2024 Research

Parents & Carers most influential on career decisions

Key Influencers - People	All %	20% most deprived areas (%)	20% least deprived areas (%)
Parent(s) / carer(s)	79	75	80
Careers adviser	53	63	42
Other family member	52	53	54
Friend(s)	50	50	46
Teacher(s)	49	49	52
Guidance teacher	44	48	42
An employer or training provider coming in to my school to talk about careers	31	34	29
A university or college representative coming in to my school to talk about careers	28	34	30
Youth worker / community worker	16	24	12

Source: Young People's Career Ambitions 2024 Research

Pupils say communication and team working skills are important



Source: Pupil Voice 2024 Research

Key Messages

SDS gathers insight on a range of topics from young people through **a suite of projects** in the young people research programme. **Collaboration is a key element** of this to ensure its use and impact across a range of policy contexts.

Young people's post school trajectories can be mapped through SDS research and differ **depending young people's initial plans.**

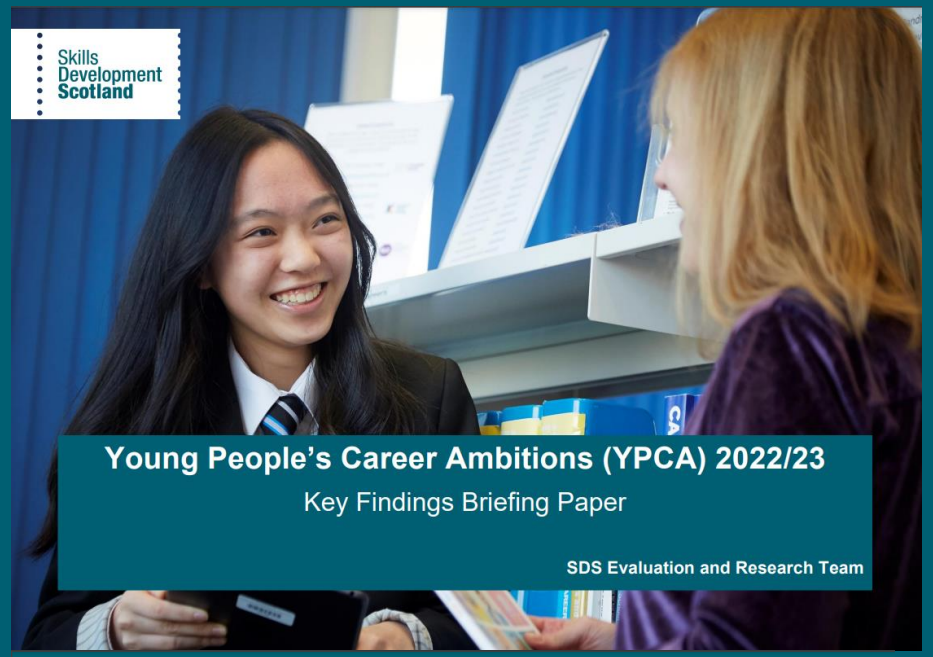
Medical, Creative, STEM and **teaching careers** are popular career choices for young people.

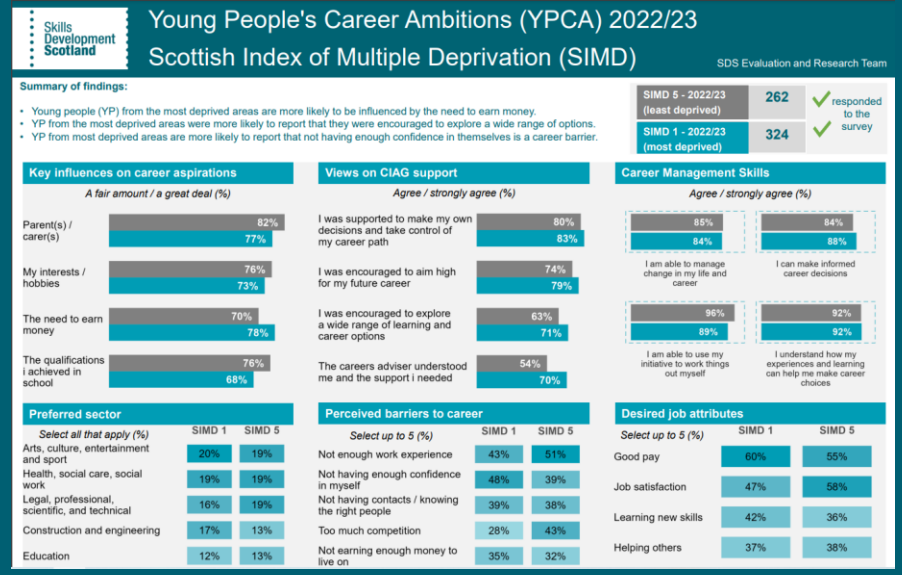
Parents and Carers and Careers Advisers are most influential on young people's career decisions. Young people also consider factors such as the **need to earn money**, **their interests** and **qualifications**.

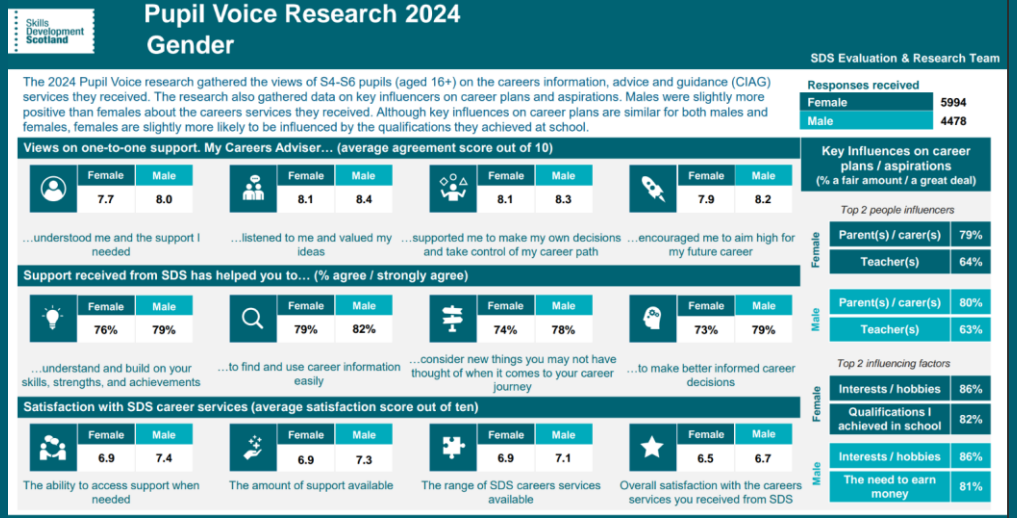
Young people think a range of skills are important for their future career, but particularly **communication** and **team working skills.**

Outputs and impact of our Young People research

SDS Research Outputs







Contact us: Evaluation&Research@sds.co.uk

Sharing and dissemination

Scottish Government | Youthlink | Education Scotland
SQA | Developing Young Workforce | Scottish Funding Council
Open University | MCR Pathways | Edinburgh Napier University
Young Scot | College Development Network | ADES

stv News

The Herald

NHS Education for Scotland
A skilled and sustainable workforce for a healthier Scotland

BBC RADIO Scotland

Understanding the Voice of Apprentices:
SDS Apprentice Voice Research

Apprentice Voice

Previous approach

- Individual anonymous surveys sent to specific cohorts
- Different questions by stage/ programme
- Snapshots only
- Inconsistent measures

New approach

- Using existing Management Information System (FIPS)
- Survey links sent automatically by email based on triggers
- Unique FIPS ID embedded in the survey link

Young people focus

- Incentives, streamlined emails & question wording
- Smartphone friendly access/ layout
- No need to ask Questions on personal characteristics/ training details

Apprentice Voice

All apprentices on SDS' Management system (FIPS) are automatically given the opportunity to provide feedback on their apprenticeship at three key stages:

IN TRAINING
Six months after they start their apprenticeship

LEAVERS
Three months after they leave (whether they complete or not)

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES
Fifteen months after they leave (whether they complete or not)

Since the system went live in 2022, nearly **35,000 responses** from apprentices have been received. This puts apprentice voice at the heart of the Scottish system.

Apprentice Voice

Putting the apprentice voice at the heart of the system. An improved evidence base, in real time, to inform decision making.

Using new data tools and techniques to accelerate analysis and sharing of insight, including **PowerBI**, **Reproducible Analytical Pipelines and AI.**

An inclusive approach coordinated across the apprenticeship family. Efficiently providing **consistent and comparable** measures of outcomes, and benefits.

Developing a longitudinal dataset to support tracking individuals over time and through different apprenticeships.

Making better use of management information to complement feedback. **Providing richer data to support deeper insight.**

Generating actionable insight through deep-dive analyses and more qualitative research across key customer groups.

Apprentice Voice

The following results are based on responses received in the 2024 calendar year. They represent the views of:

IN TRAINING

Almost 6,000 MAs

LEAVERS

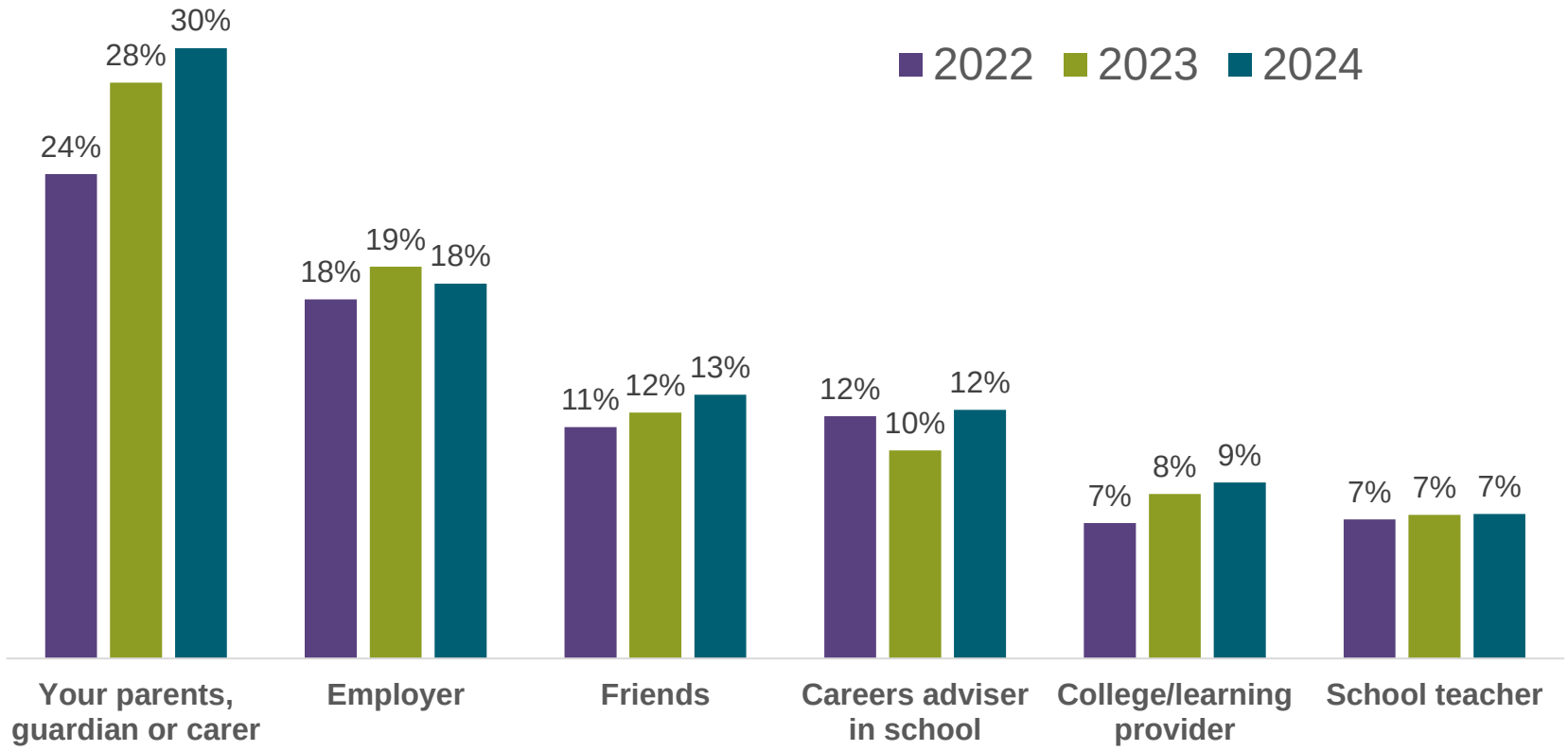
Over 4,000 MAs

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES

Over 2,500 MAs

Apprentice Voice: Influences

How new Modern Apprentices found out about their apprenticeship



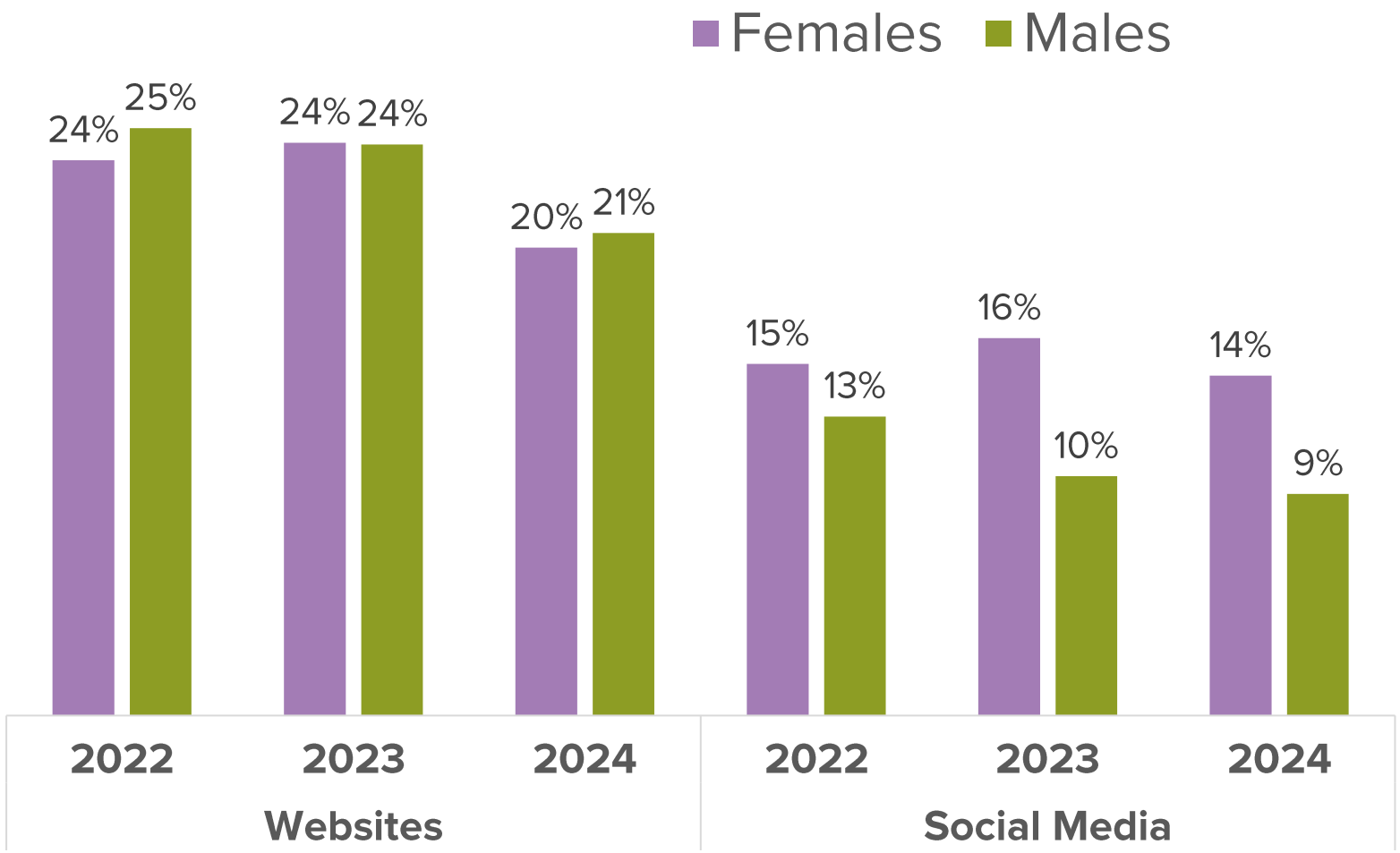
Parents & carers are the main route for MAs finding out

Individual contacts are growing in importance

Source:
Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey
Direct MA recruits aged 16 to 19

Apprentice Voice: Influences

How new Modern Apprentices found out about their apprenticeship



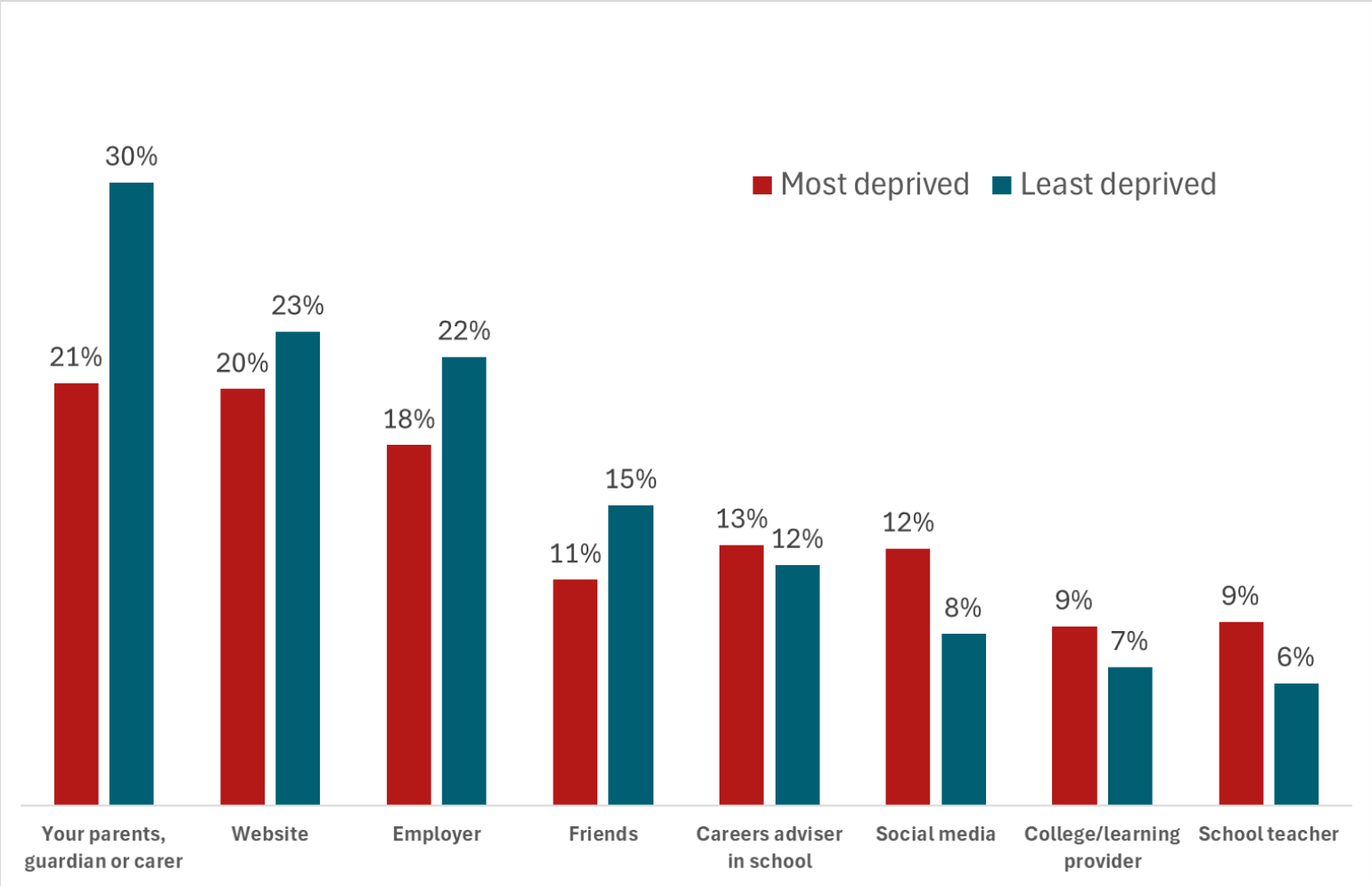
Online sources and social media have decreased in importance as a source of information

Social media is used more by females

Source:
Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey
Direct MA recruits aged 16 to 19

Apprentice Voice: Influences

How new Modern Apprentices found out about their apprenticeship

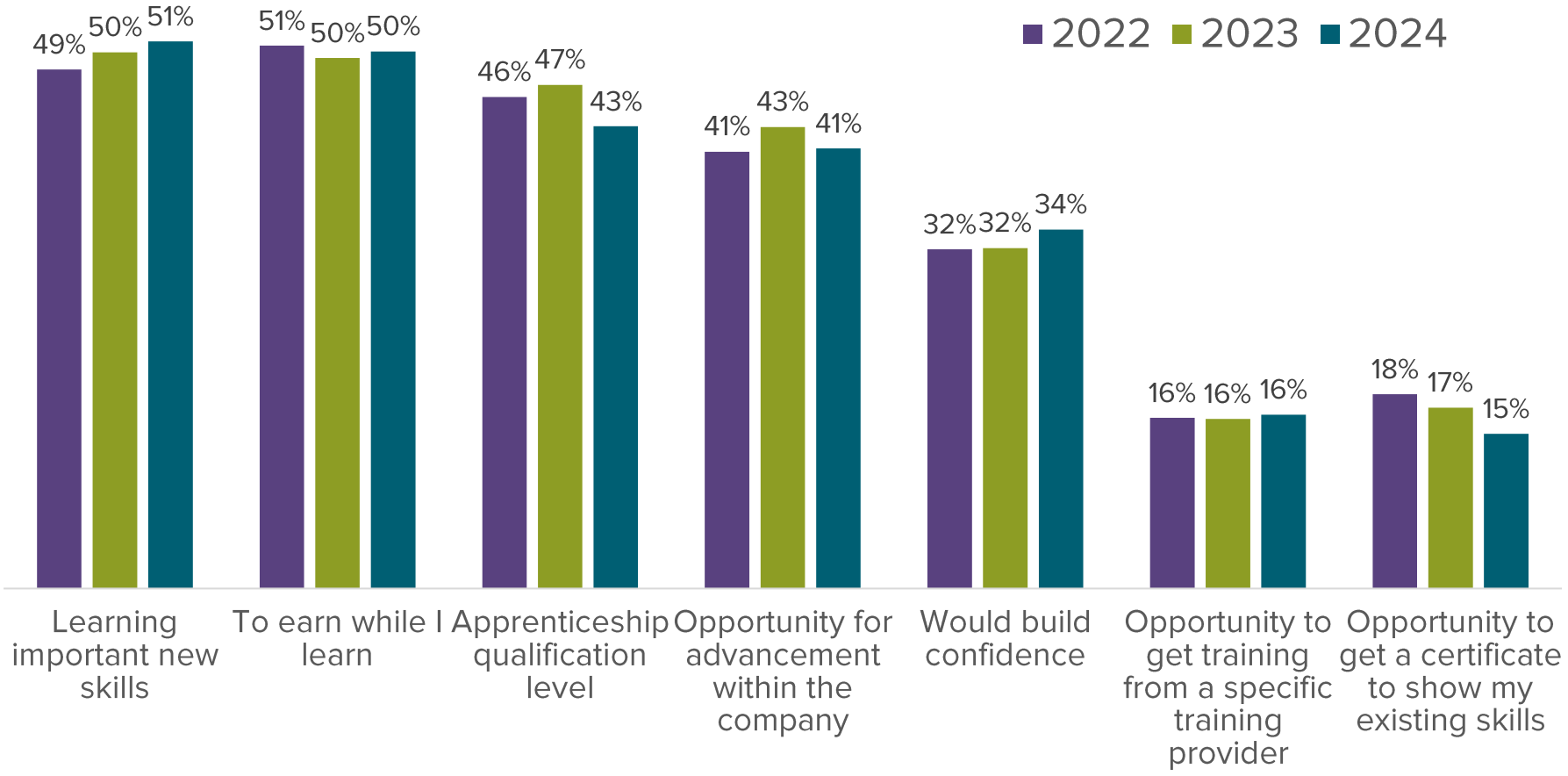


Young people from disadvantaged areas are more likely to find out from Careers Advisers, Learning Providers & Teachers

Source:
Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey
Direct MA recruits aged 16 to 19

Apprentice Voice: Motivations

What was important to you when selecting your Modern Apprenticeship?

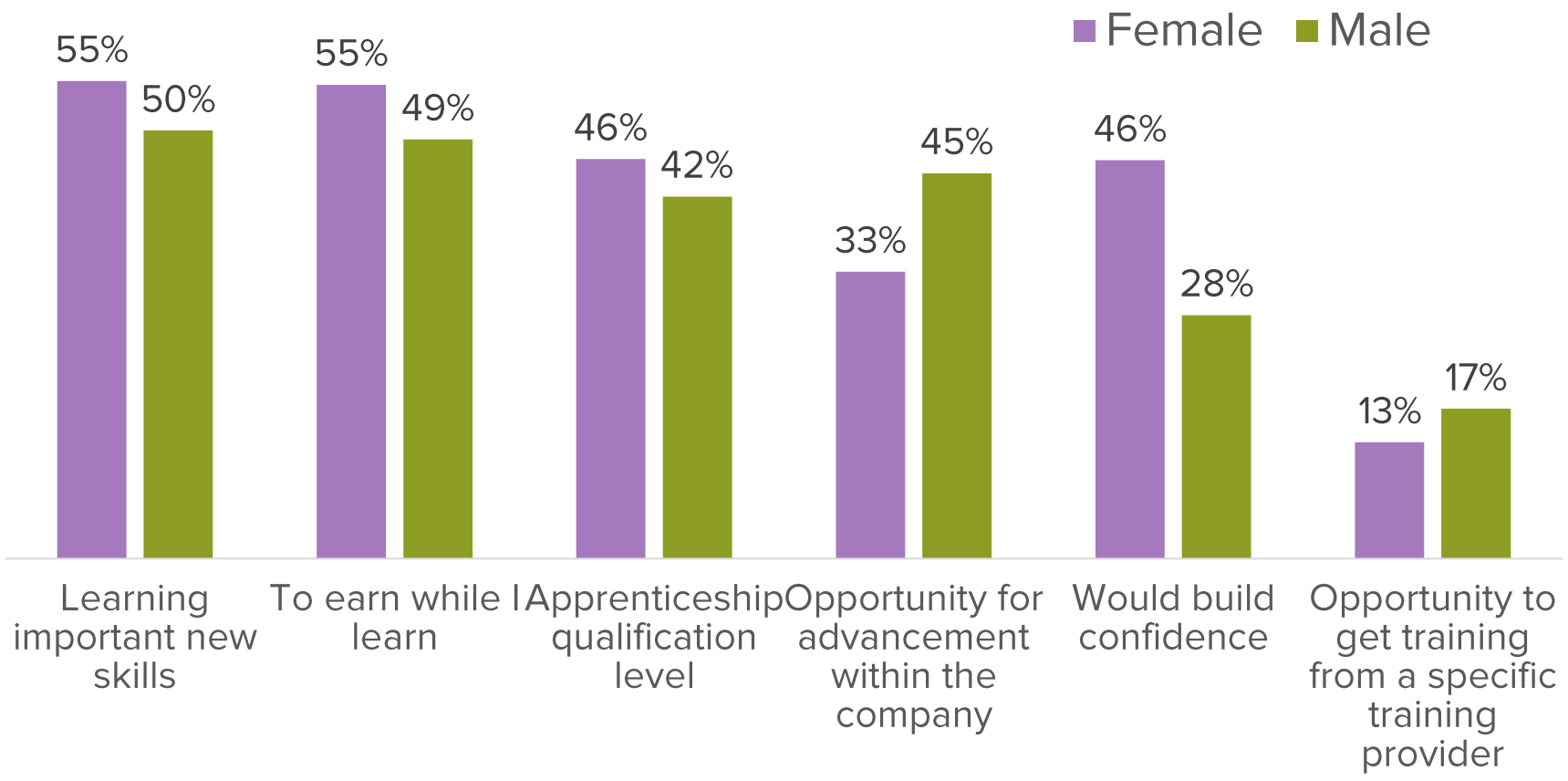


Learning new skills and **earning while learning** are the two most important reasons for choosing an MA

Source:
Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey
Direct MA recruits aged 16 to 19

Apprentice Voice: Motivations

What was important to you when selecting your Modern Apprenticeship?



Learning new skills, earning while learning and **Building confidence** were more important for females

Career advancement was more important among males

Source:
Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey
Direct MA recruits aged 16 to 19

Apprentice Voice: Experiences

What respondents value most about their Modern Apprenticeship

Learning new skills

Qualifications & opportunities

It's a good way to transition from school to work and it gives experience and skills as well as a qualification

People & Support

The support and guidance I have been given has been exceptional. This has given me the confidence to develop my skills and knowledge further in relation to the job

Learning while working

Earning while learning

It is great to learn and work at the same time, I can have a stable living on a full-time wage and also learn and not have to worry about being short on money or student debt

Source: Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey

Apprentice Voice: Experiences

Modern Apprentices are highly satisfied with their experience

8.9
Most Deprived

8.6
Least Deprived

Overall, how satisfied are you with your Modern Apprenticeship?

8.8
All Direct MA recruits 16-19

8.9
Females

8.7
Males

It just gave me a massive boost in confidence and a clear idea of what I want for my future in my role at work

Source: Apprentice Voice: In Training Survey

Apprentice Voice: Outcomes

Most Modern Apprentices are still working in the same sector, 3 months after completing

91%
Most Deprived

87%
Least Deprived

Are you working in a job in the same sector as your Modern Apprenticeship?

93%
Females

92%
Males

92%
All aged 16-19 at start

Source:
Apprentice Voice: Leavers' Survey
Completers aged 16 to 19 at start

Apprentice Voice: Outcomes

Most Modern Apprentices are still with the same employer, 3 months after completing

76%
Most Deprived

82%
Least Deprived

Are you still working with the same employer you started your Modern Apprenticeship with?

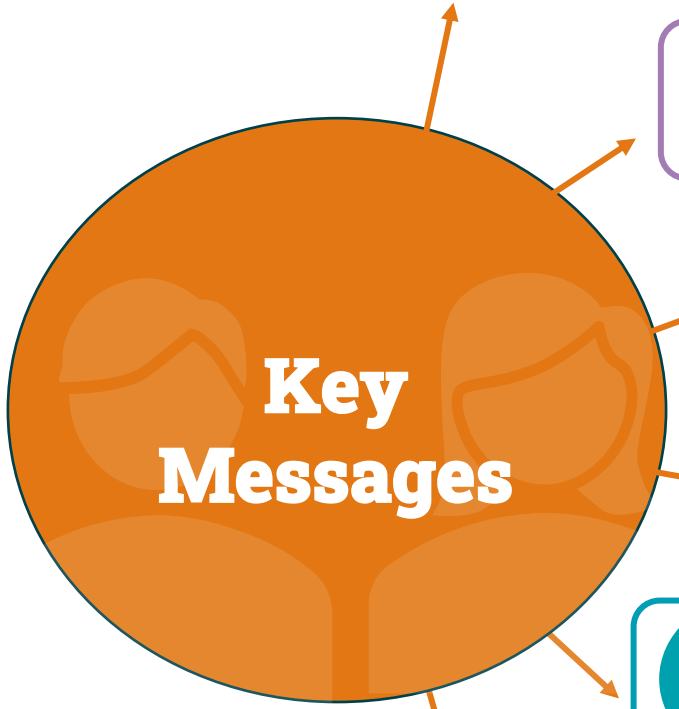
78%
Females

83%
Males

81%
All aged 16-19 at start

Source:
Apprentice Voice: Leavers' Survey
Completers aged 16 to 19 at start

Apprentice Voice: Key Messages



We have gathered more than 35,000 responses from apprentices in Scotland about their experiences. This gives us unprecedented levels of insight.

People & relationships are becoming more important in helping young people to decide on an apprenticeship. Careers Advisers and Teachers play a greater role among disadvantaged groups.

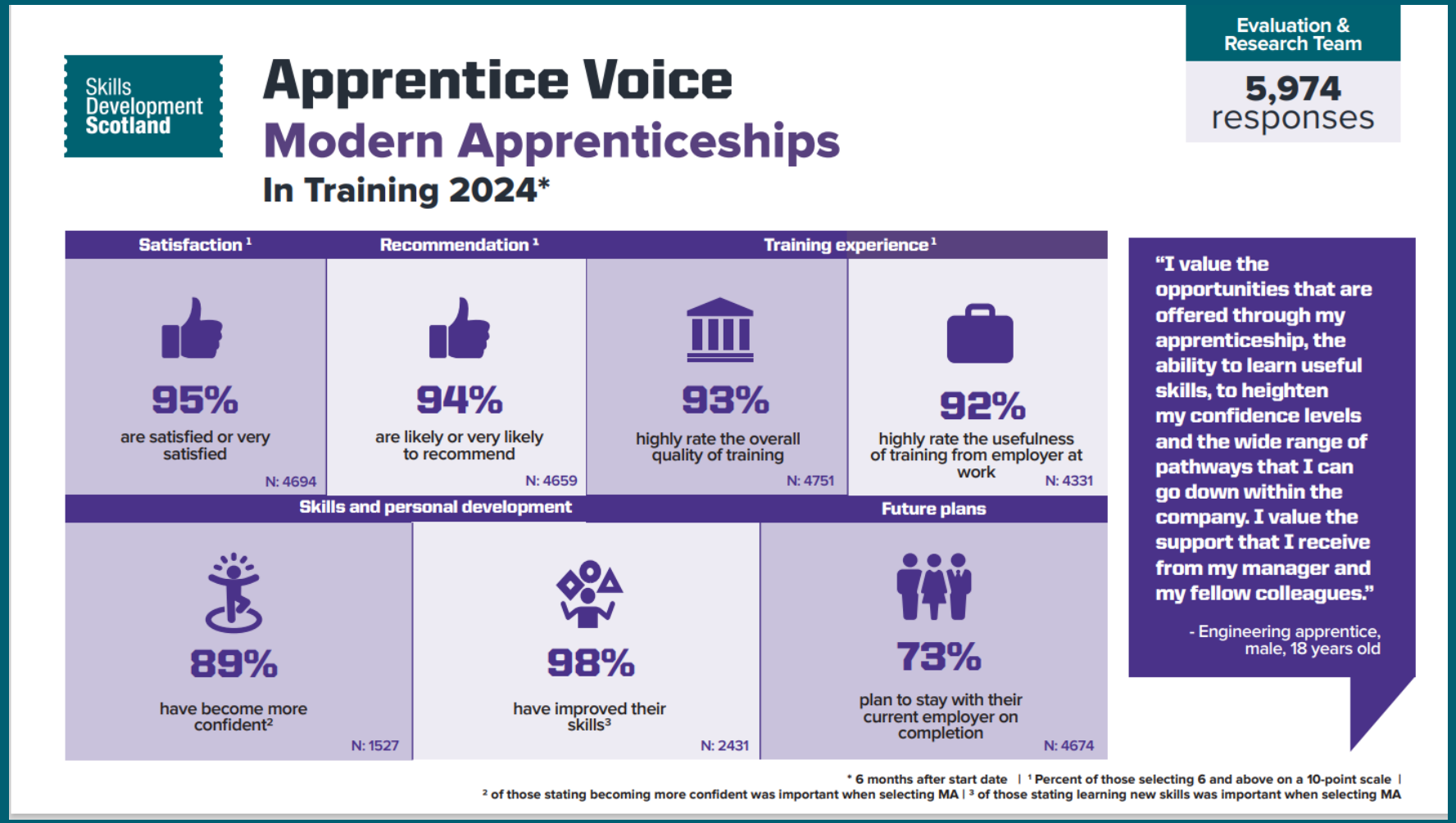
Online information sources are generally becoming less important for young people finding out about apprenticeships.

Learning new skills and earning while learning are the most common motivating factors for new apprentices. Males more likely to be motivated by career advancement.

Satisfaction rates are extremely high among apprentices in-training. This is particularly so among female apprentices and those from more deprived communities

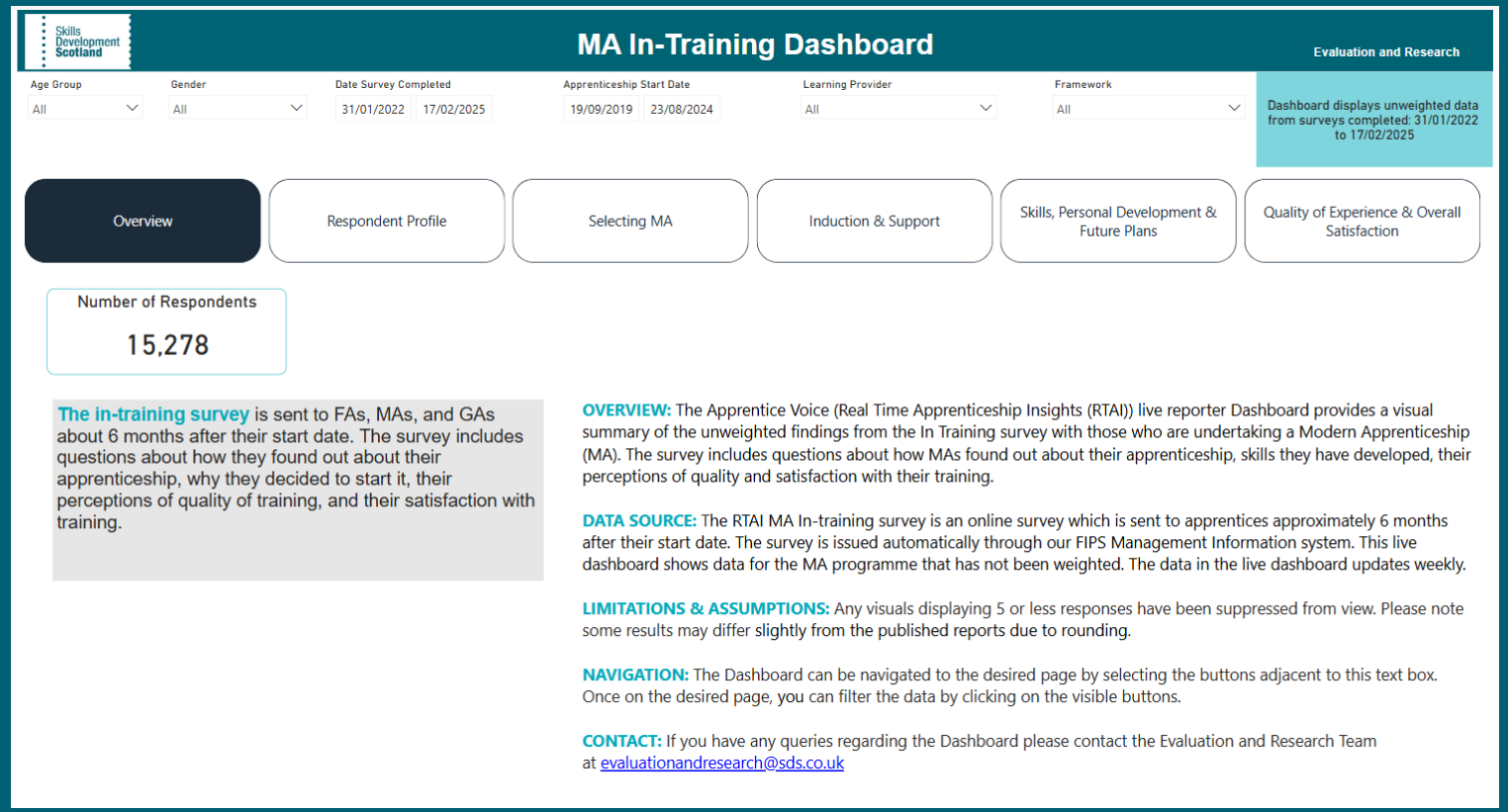
After leaving, most apprentices are still working within the same sector and a high level are still working for the same employer

SDS Research Outputs



Contact us: Evaluation&Research@sds.co.uk

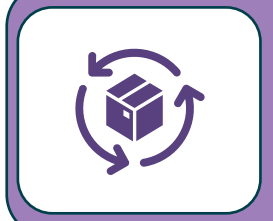
Sharing and dissemination



Contact us: Evaluation&Research@sds.co.uk

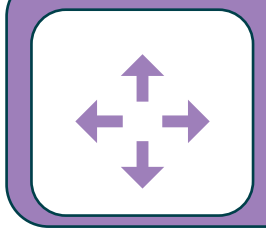
Impact and Influence

Voice of young people
Strengthened the voice of young people in influencing service provision/the system



Change and improvement
Evidence based decision-making in-service design and delivery

Meaningful collaboration
Common evidence base & measurement framework
Insights with mutual interest



Policy impact
Reform of school, post-school education and skills systems

Summary & Next Steps

Together, the young people research programme and the Apprentice Voice programme at SDS

capture the voice of the young person

and ensure an

evidence-based approach

to policy and practice in CIAG and apprenticeship delivery.

Look out for:

Young People Research Outputs on the SDS website - Young People's Career Ambitions Research 2024 results soon to be published.

Apprentice Voice outputs on the SDS website.

Contact us:

Evaluation&Research@sds.co.uk