

DIVERSITY SNAPSHOT

PROJECT NEXT GENERATION FOCUS ON NEURODIVERSITY

UCAS



INTRODUCTION

Students are mapping out their future pathways earlier than ever. But younger audiences often lack the guidance they need to make informed choices.

Welcome back to [Project Next Generation](#).

This follow up to our [Early Careers and Apprenticeships](#) report dives deeper into the data through the lens of distinct diverse groups.

We uncover what young people aged 13 – 17 are thinking and feeling about the here and now and their future. In this snapshot, we look at how **neurodiverse individuals** make decisions and what influences them.



THE HEADLINES

This group consists of individuals who identify as neurodiverse or have been assessed as such. Individuals in this group have said they have autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, or any other form of neurodiversity.

This group accounted for around 1 in 4 of the 1,000 people surveyed.



ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE?

69%

OF NEURODIVERSE
STUDENTS

87%

OF NON-NEURODIVERSE
STUDENTS

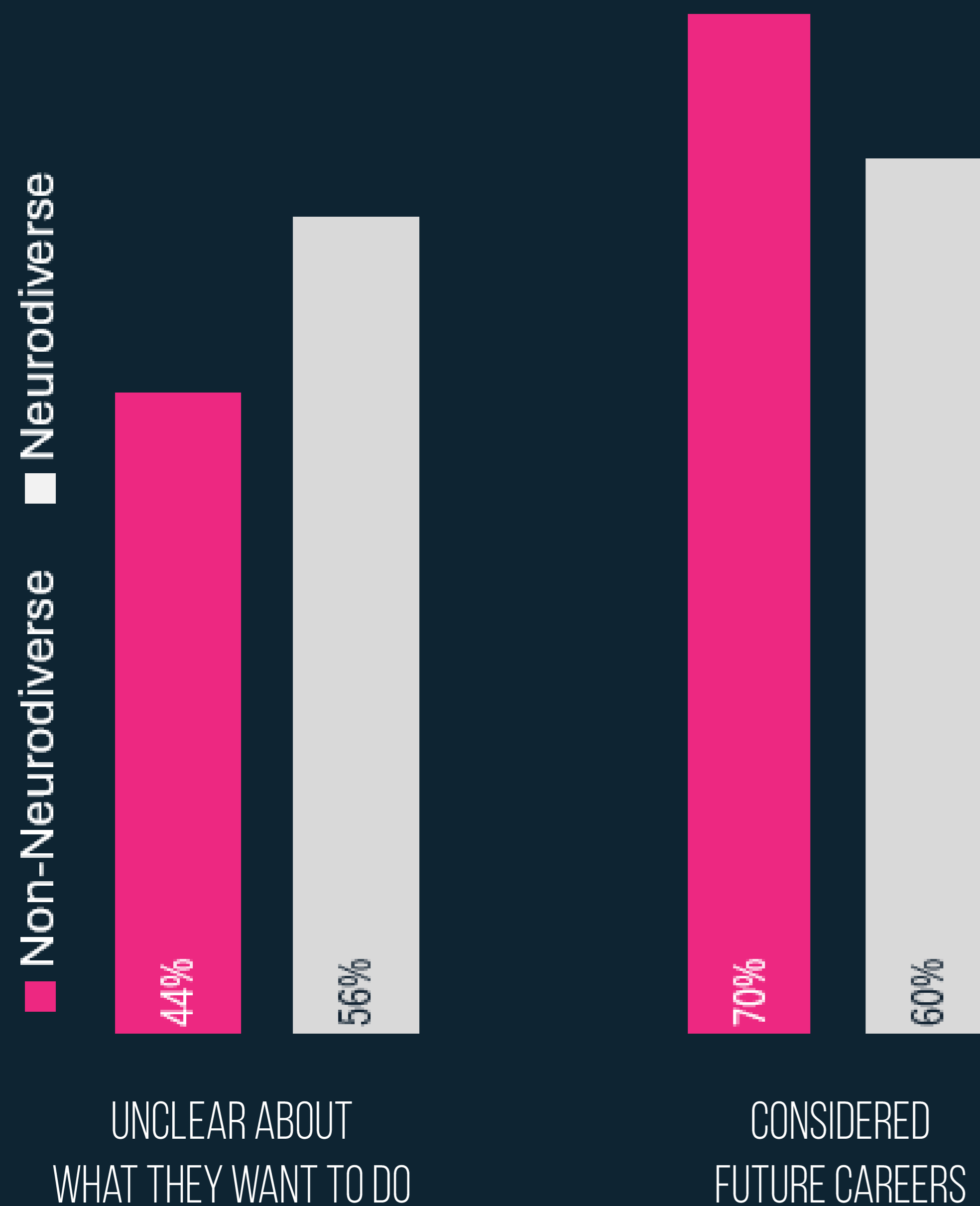
Those who consider themselves to be neurodiverse are especially uncertain about their futures and how to make the best choices.

This group are more likely to be looking at apprenticeships, or going directly into the workplace, rather than university. They are less likely to have a clearly planned out and defined career path.

They are more inclined to have additional concerns around health, and feeling isolated and lonely, which will factor into their choice of future workplace.

Neurodiverse individuals told us they need reassurance around their ability to cope with apprenticeships and want to know what support is available for them. Information around the types of assessment they will undertake may provide further reassurance. They also said they'd like to have a clear idea of the practicalities such as travel time and workplace protocols.

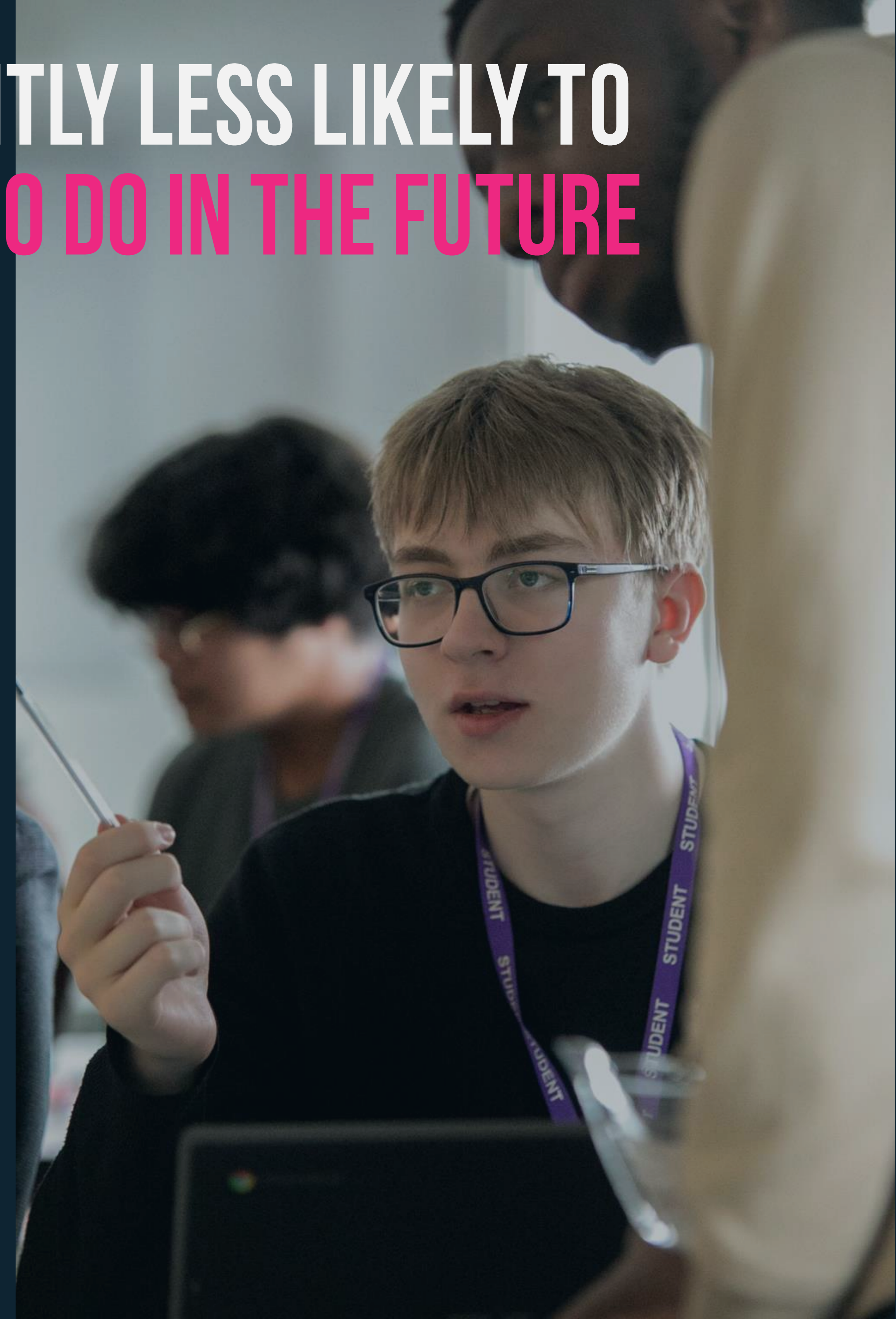
NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS LIKELY TO HAVE CLEAR IDEAS OF WHAT THEY WANT TO DO IN THE FUTURE



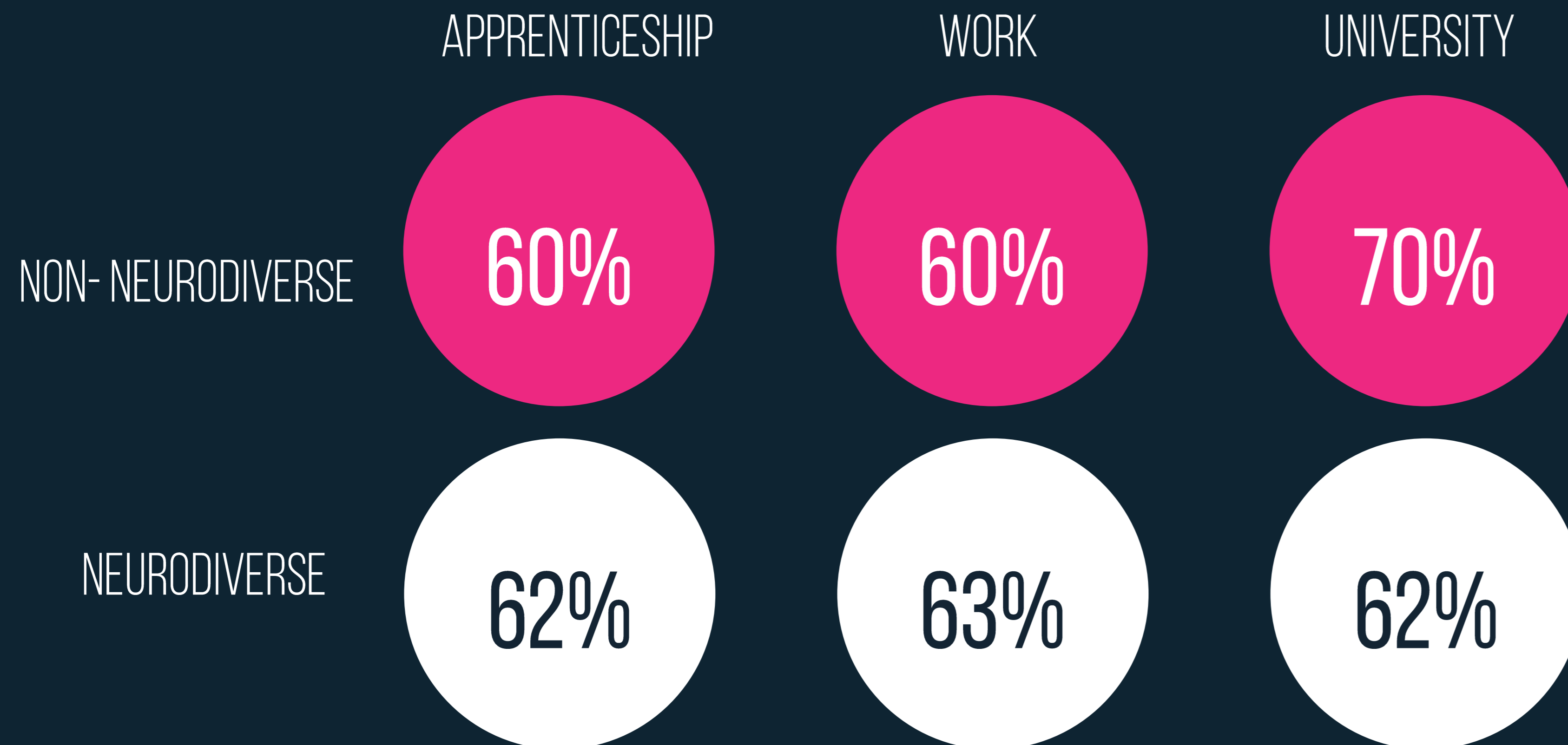
When asked how much consideration they had given to future careers, 60% of neurodiverse students stated they had given a lot, or a bit, of thought to it as opposed to 70% of students who are not neurodiverse.

56% of neurodiverse students said that they had no idea what career they wanted in the future, compared to only 44% of non-neurodiverse students who were unclear.

This reflects that the neurodiverse group are significantly less certain, less confident, and less excited about the routes they are considering and will need more reassurance and support than non-neurodiverse young people.



NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS ARE LESS LIKELY TO CONSIDER UNIVERSITY THAN THEIR PEERS



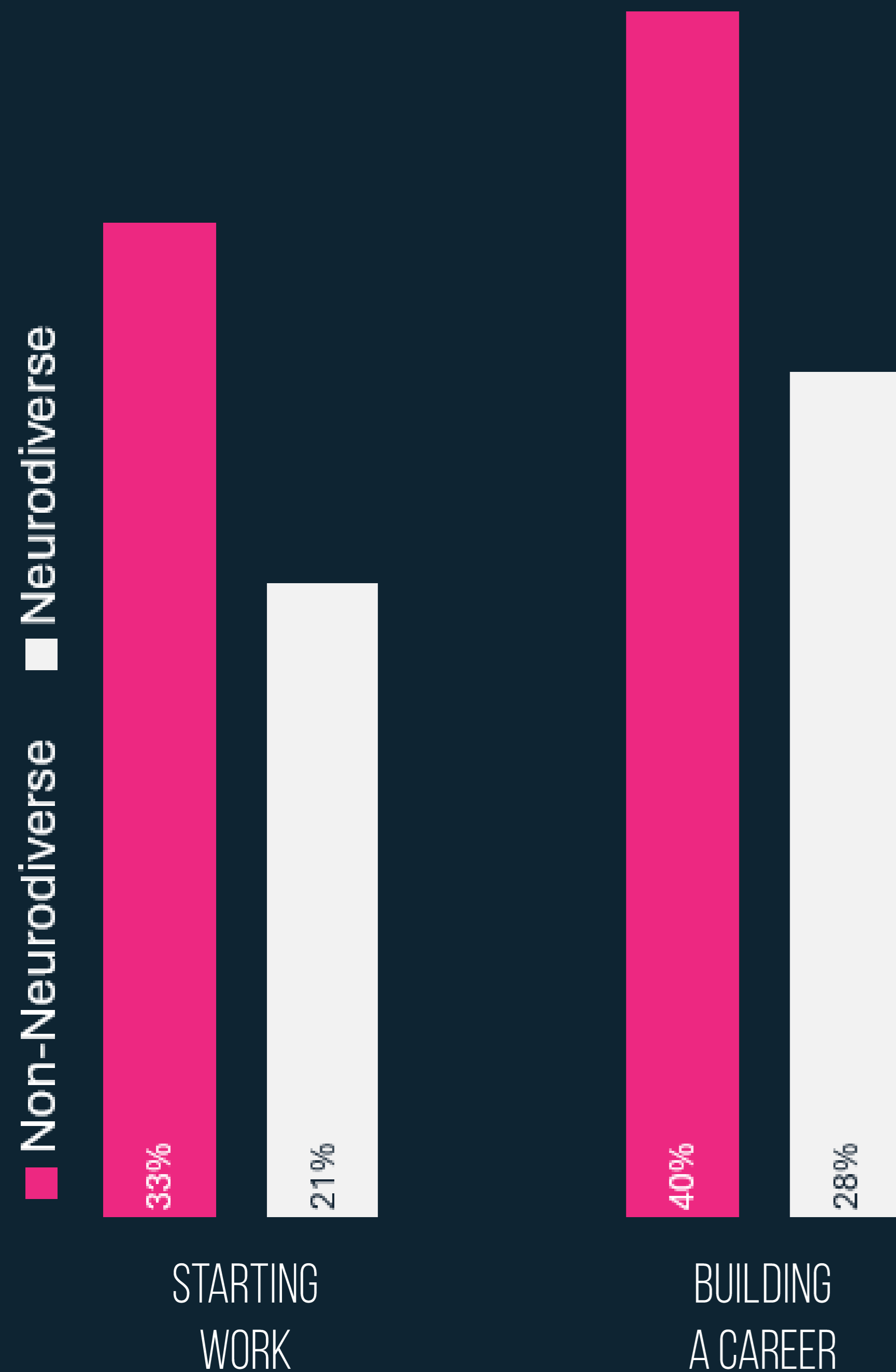
62% of neurodiverse students confirmed that they were considering university as an option, compared to 70% of non-neurodiverse students.

Whilst the percentage difference in both groups when considering apprenticeships or working as their next step was smaller, neurodiverse students were in the majority for both options.

Neurodiverse students reported that moving away from home would be a challenge and university could be a lot to cope with. They were also less likely to see university as a way of opening careers opportunities or progression pathways in their chosen career.



NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS WERE LESS EXCITED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL TO 'BUILD A CAREER' OR ABOUT 'STARTING WORK'

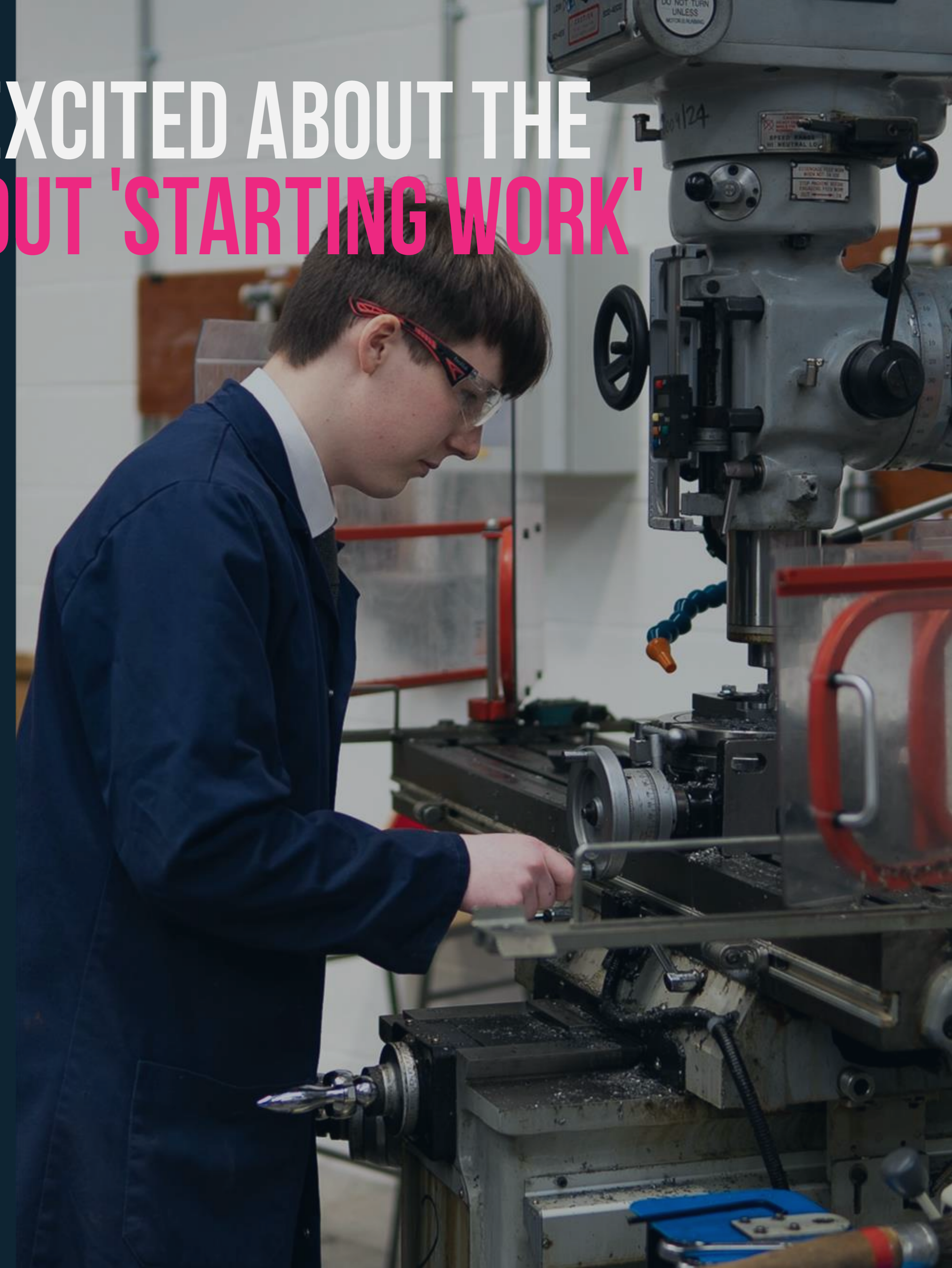


When asked what excites them about their future only 28% of neurodiverse students reported they were looking forward to building a career, as opposed to 40% of non-neurodiverse students, which may reflect the lack of clarity over their future career choices.

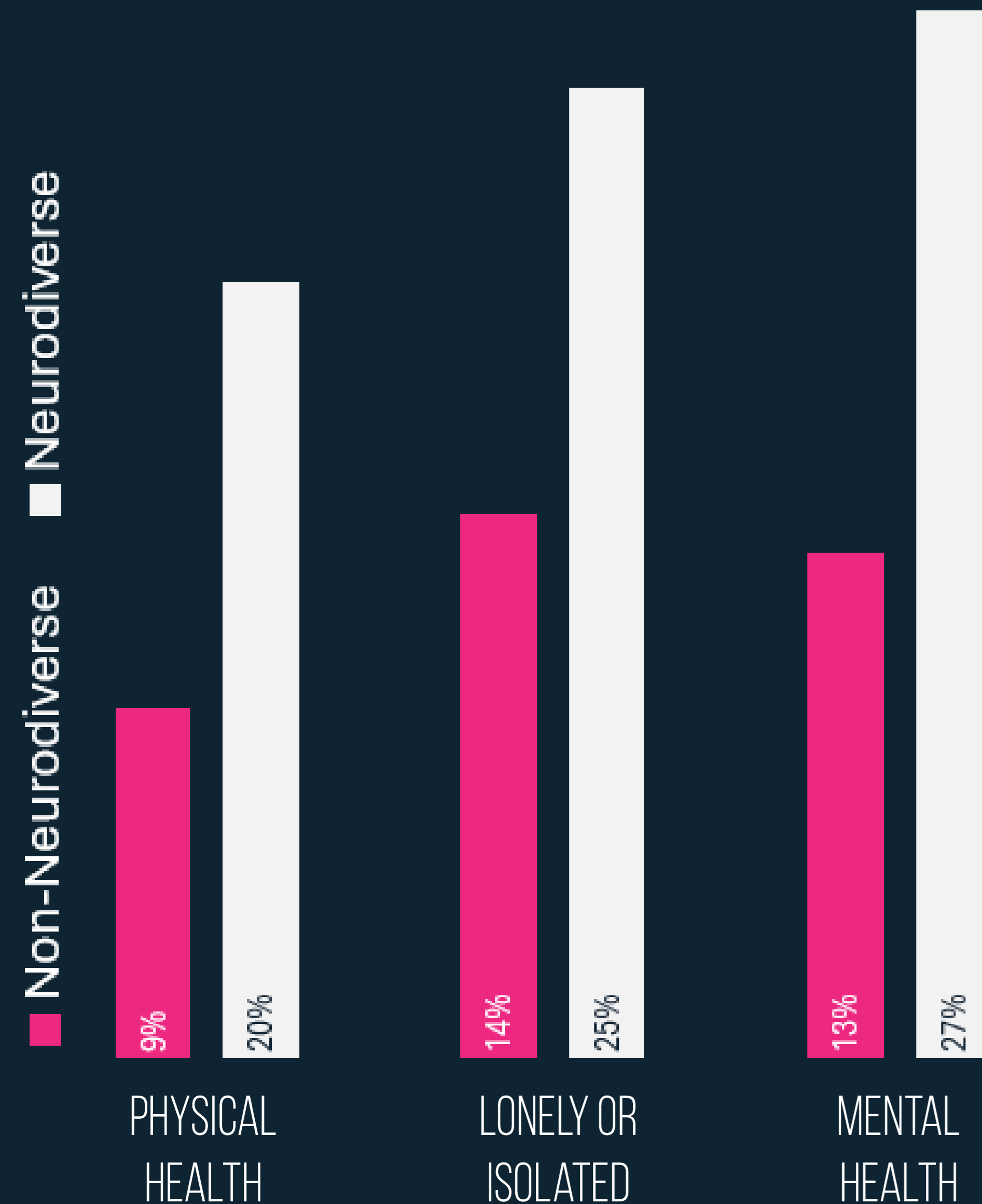
While 33% of students who are not neurodiverse said they are looking forward to starting work, only 21% of neurodiverse students felt the same way.

36% of neurodiverse students said they were looking forward to no more exams, this figure was lower with non-neurodiverse students, at 28%.

The area of biggest excitement for both groups, by more than 25% points in both instances, was the ability to earn their own money.



NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO WORRY ABOUT FUTURE HEALTH AND FEELING LONELY OR ISOLATED



When asked what worries them for their future, there were three clear concerns that stood out the most for neurodiverse students, when compared to their non-neurodiverse peers.

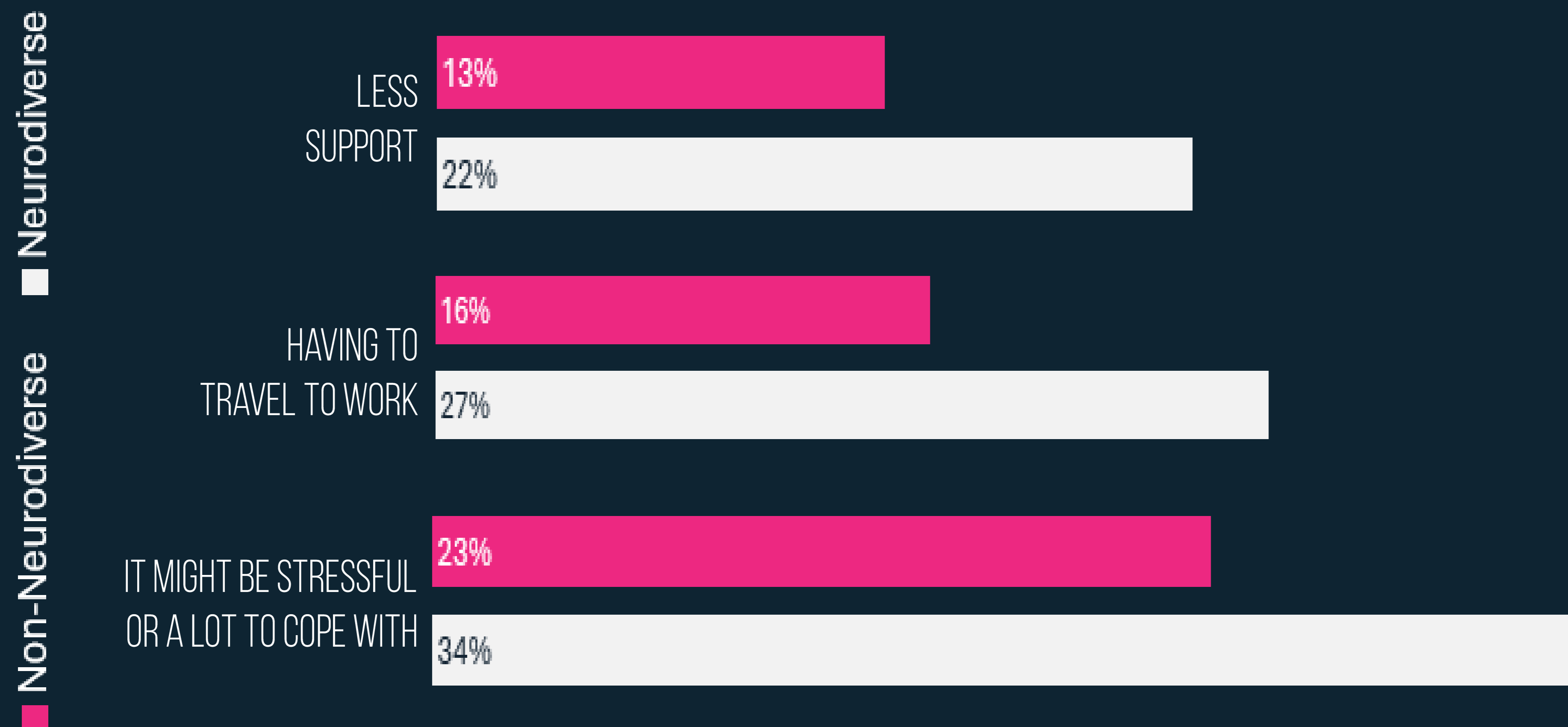
- 20% reported concerns about physical health
- 25% reported concerns of feeling lonely or isolated
- 27% reported concerns about mental health.

There were stark differences between those that are neurodiverse and those that are not when it comes to mental and physical health and wellbeing worries.

Ensuring clear, accessible support and a sense of belonging and community are likely to be important considerations for neurodiverse students when considering future work.



NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO CONSIDER STRESS, TRAVEL AND LACK OF SUPPORT AS CHALLENGES



When thinking about the disadvantages of an apprenticeship, students who are neurodiverse showed greater levels of concern about the support available when compared to their non-neurodiverse peers.

They were also more likely to be worried about the complexities of travelling to work and concerned that an apprenticeship might be stressful or a lot to cope with.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS FOR ATTRACTION, RECRUITMENT, AND DELIVERY OF APPRENTICESHIPS



INCLUSIVE
MESSAGING



REASSURANCE
AND SUPPORT



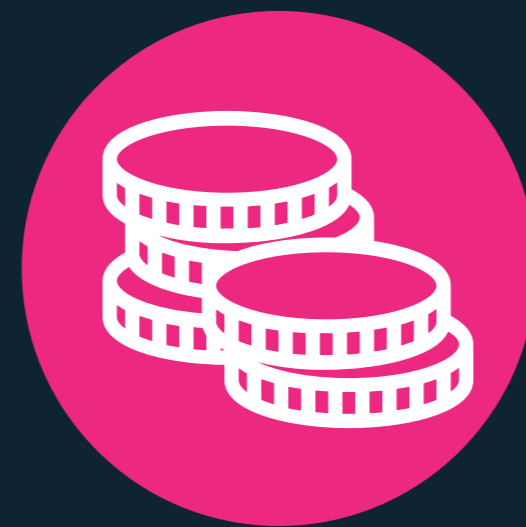
CLEAR
EXPECTATIONS



TRANSPARENT
PROCESS



EARLY
INFORMATION



FINANCIAL
CLARITY



PRACTICAL
GUIDANCE



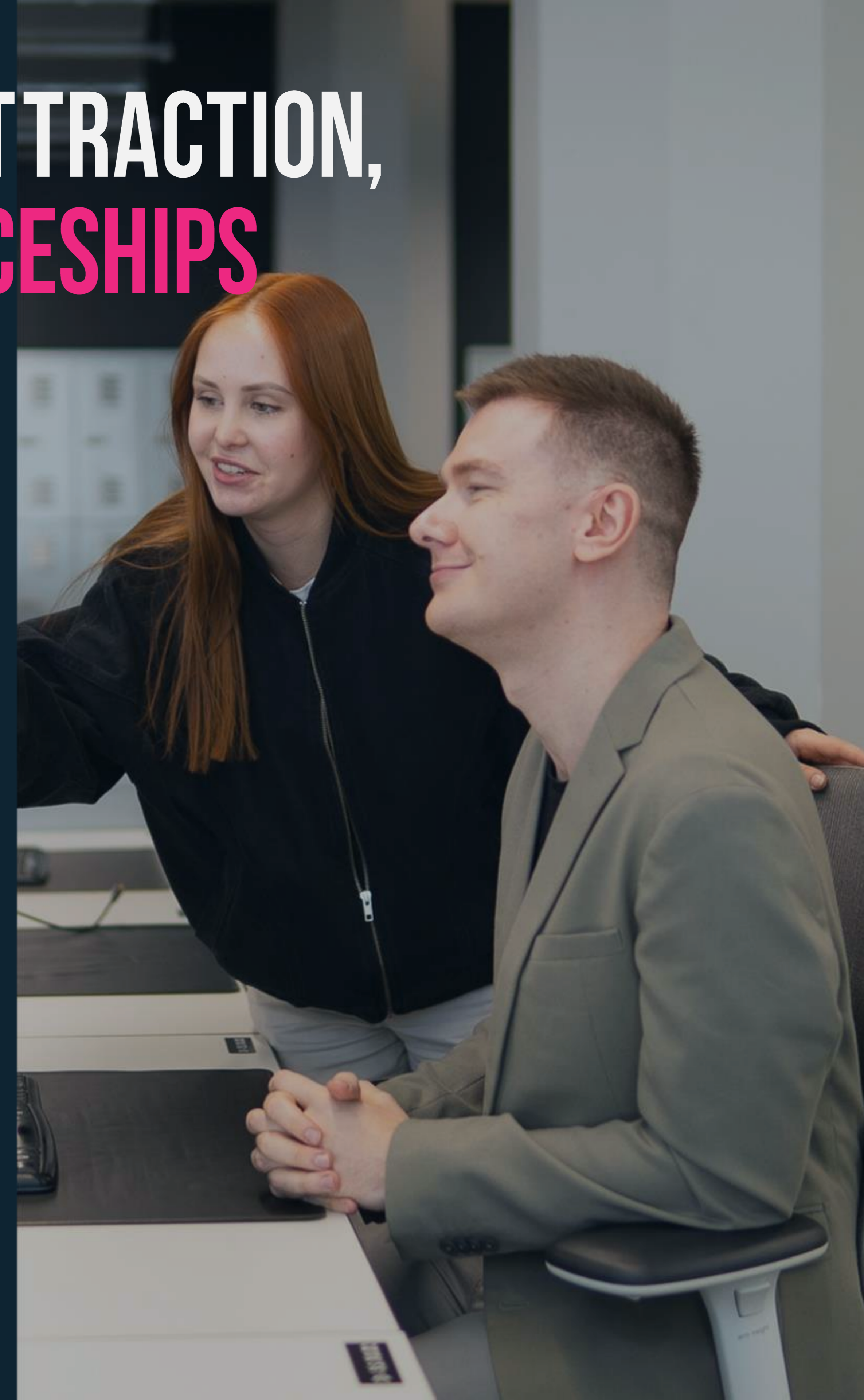
EMPLOYER
FAMILIARITY



MENTORSHIP
PROGRAMME

The potential apprentice is the best person who knows what works for them and how they like to be supported.

Wherever possible, talk openly about reasonable adjustments and how support can be provided for them as an individual.



CLOSING COMMENT FROM UCAS

It is positive to see so many students feeling comfortable to share information about neurodiversity. This is a strong indication that messaging around the benefits of sharing individual needs are reaching students as we continue to work towards a culture of positive disclosure.

We want all students to holistically research the right options for them, understand the benefits of sharing their support needs, and feel confident they will get the support they need to succeed in their education and careers.

To support neurodiverse students effectively, employers and providers must recognize the unique challenges they face in decision-making.

By fostering an inclusive environment, offering reassurance, and providing clear expectations, we can help alleviate concerns around health, logistics, and the stress of navigating opportunities.

Practical guidance and mentorship will empower these students, enabling them to explore their potential with confidence and enthusiasm.

RESOURCES FOR NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS

Find targeted information & support for under-represented students on ucas.com

- Student facing information and advice – for students who are, or think they may be neurodiverse, including diagnosing your neurodiversity, sharing information about your neurodiversity and reasonable adjustments.
- Student facing information and advice – for students with individual needs applying to university, including accommodation, financial support and researching your choices.
- Applying to HE with individual needs - information and advice for a range of circumstances and support needs.
- Mental health and wellbeing support - information and advice for all students.
- Teacher and Adviser Toolkit – supporting students with individual needs.



UCAS EARLY CAREERS

Whether you want to drive applications to your apprenticeship or graduate programmes or look at raising awareness with future talent, UCAS has the attention of those considering their future.

We'll work with you to craft a campaign plan with the right audience and channel mix to maximise your budget and meet your ambitions – whatever these might be.

REACH YOUR FUTURE TALENT WITH UCAS

CONTACT US:



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This research surveyed 1,000 students aged 13–17 through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Of the 1000 students, 1 in 4 identified as neurodiverse and this included autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, or any other form of neurodiversity.

The fieldwork was conducted between May and July 2023, and this snapshot was published in March 2025.

