

DIVERSITY SNAPSHOT

**PROJECT NEXT  
GENERATION  
FOCUS ON  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
BACKGROUND**

**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 the impact their **socio-economic background** has on how they make decisions and what influences them.



# THE HEADLINES

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds face significant challenges in planning their futures. Immediate financial concerns, particularly around the cost of education and fear of debt, are major influences shaping their decisions.

These students are more likely to consider apprenticeships or entering the workforce directly, as they perceive these options to be more financially viable compared to university.

However, concerns remain about upfront costs, travel, and long-term financial stability. Access to structured career guidance is limited, further contributing to a lack of confidence and certainty about future pathways.



## IS GOING TO UNIVERSITY SOMETHING YOU MIGHT CONSIDER?

**56%**

OF THOSE FROM THE  
MOST  
DISADVANTAGED  
BACKGROUNDS

**75%**

OF THOSE FROM THE  
LEAST  
DISADVANTAGED  
BACKGROUNDS

This group is also less likely to receive tailored advice from teachers, making it harder for them to connect school learning to career outcomes.

Their planning is often delayed, with a stronger focus on immediate realities rather than long-term career goals.

Notably, there are parallels with the neurodiverse group—both demonstrate a need for clear, accessible information and greater reassurance about career choices.

Addressing these gaps and offering targeted support could significantly enhance their ability to make informed, confident decisions about their futures.

# DEFINITIONS

Throughout this Snapshot various graphs are presented to show the impact socio-economic background has on student decision making.

For the purposes of this research students have been grouped using their NRS Social Grade.

The NRS (National Readership Survey) social grade is a UK-based socio-economic classification system that categorises individuals based on the occupation of the head of the household.

Respondents from A, B and C1 households (ABC1) represent those from more advantaged backgrounds.

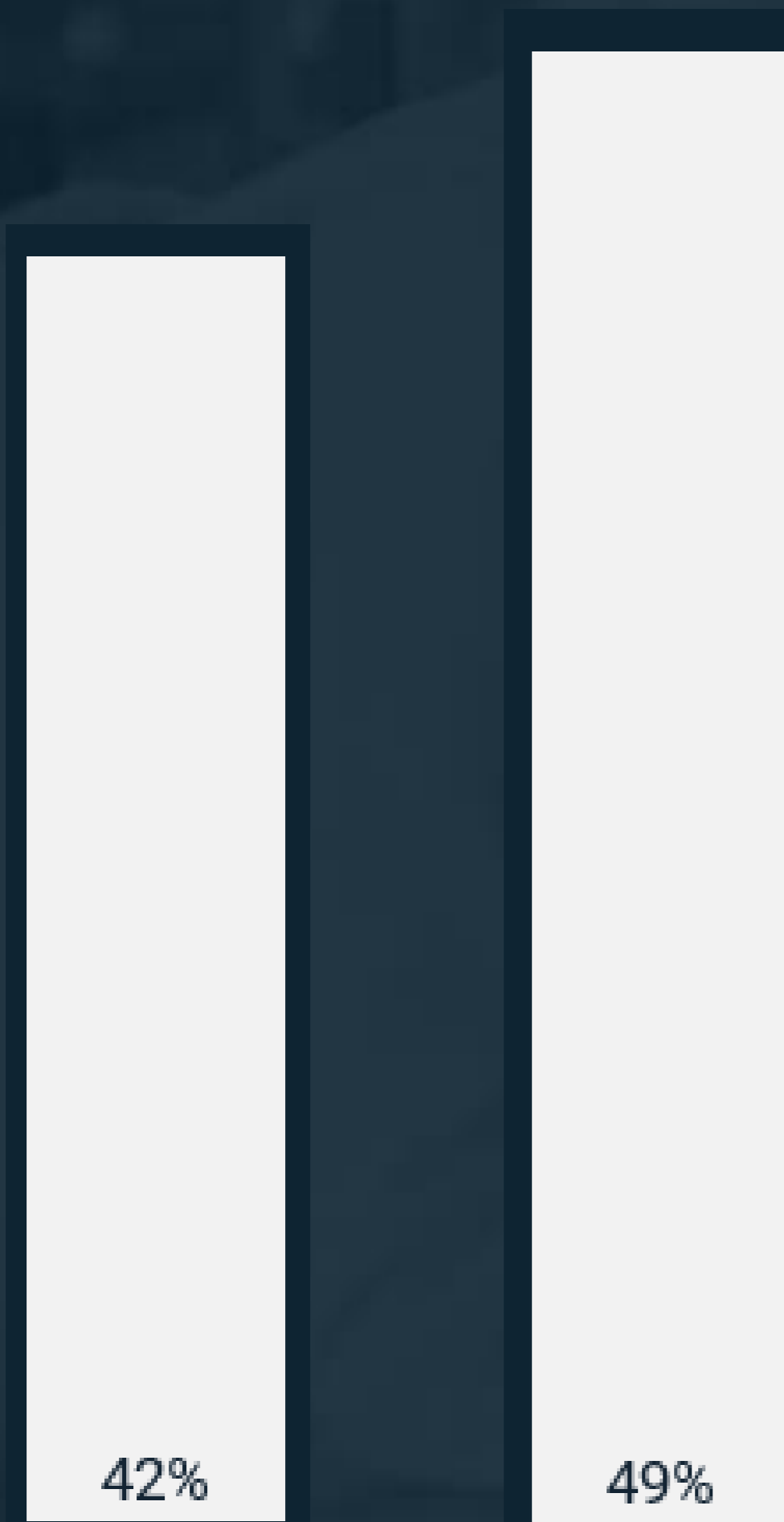
Those from C2, D and E households (C2DE) represent those from less advantaged / lower socio-economic backgrounds and are the focus of this document.



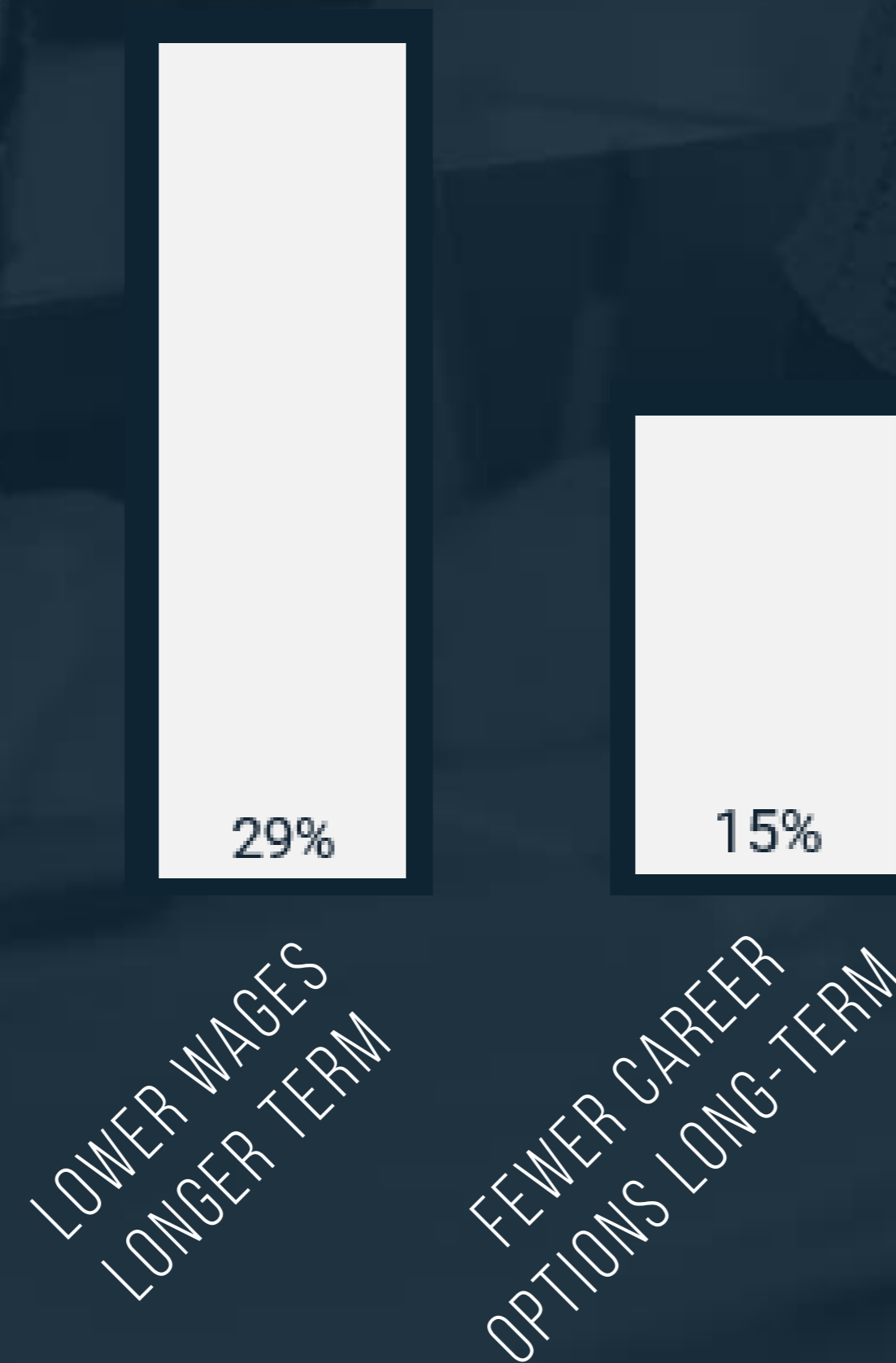
# STUDENTS FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS WORRY ABOUT IMMEDIATE COSTS MORE THAN FUTURE POTENTIAL

WHAT ARE THE MAIN DISADVANTAGES OF APPRENTICESHIPS?

IMMEDIATE CONCERNS



LONG-TERM CONCERNS



Financial concerns are a major influence on decision-making for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds regardless of the pathway through education that they are considering.

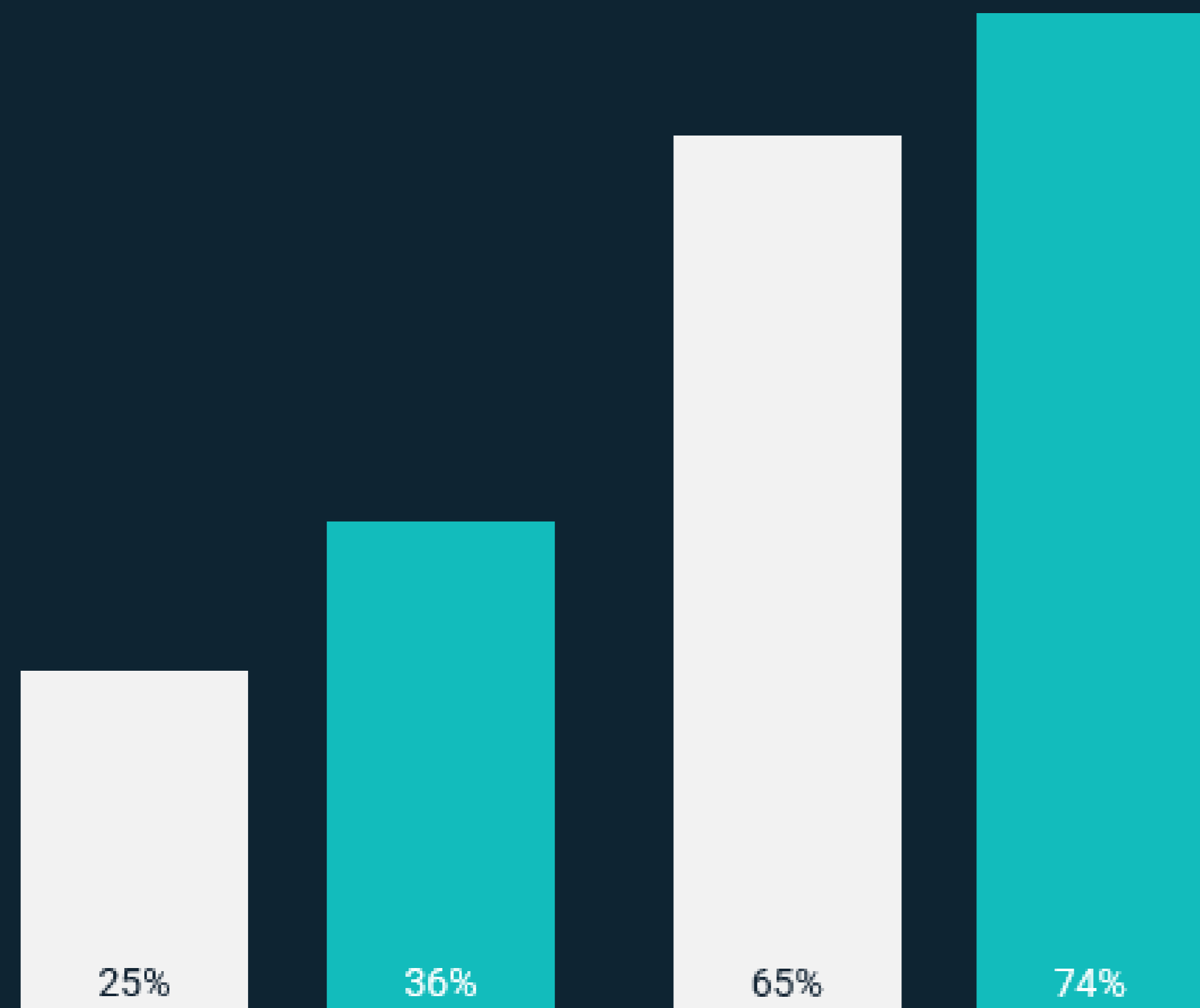
The immediate worry about affording the cost of education, sees 36% of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds citing that they can't afford to go [to university]. The costs significantly deter them from considering it as a pathway.

Concerns about accumulating debt are prevalent, leading to uncertainty about whether the long-term benefits of higher education outweighing the financial risks.

When it comes to considering apprenticeships, the worries are about hidden costs, and this creates an urgent need for clear information on financial support options.

# STUDENTS FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE ACCESS TO CAREER GUIDANCE

■ C2DE ■ ABC1



HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH SPECIALIST CAREER GUIDANCE TEACHERS

TEACHERS HELP THEM UNDERSTAND HOW LEARNING LINKS TO CAREERS

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have received structured, personalised career guidance.

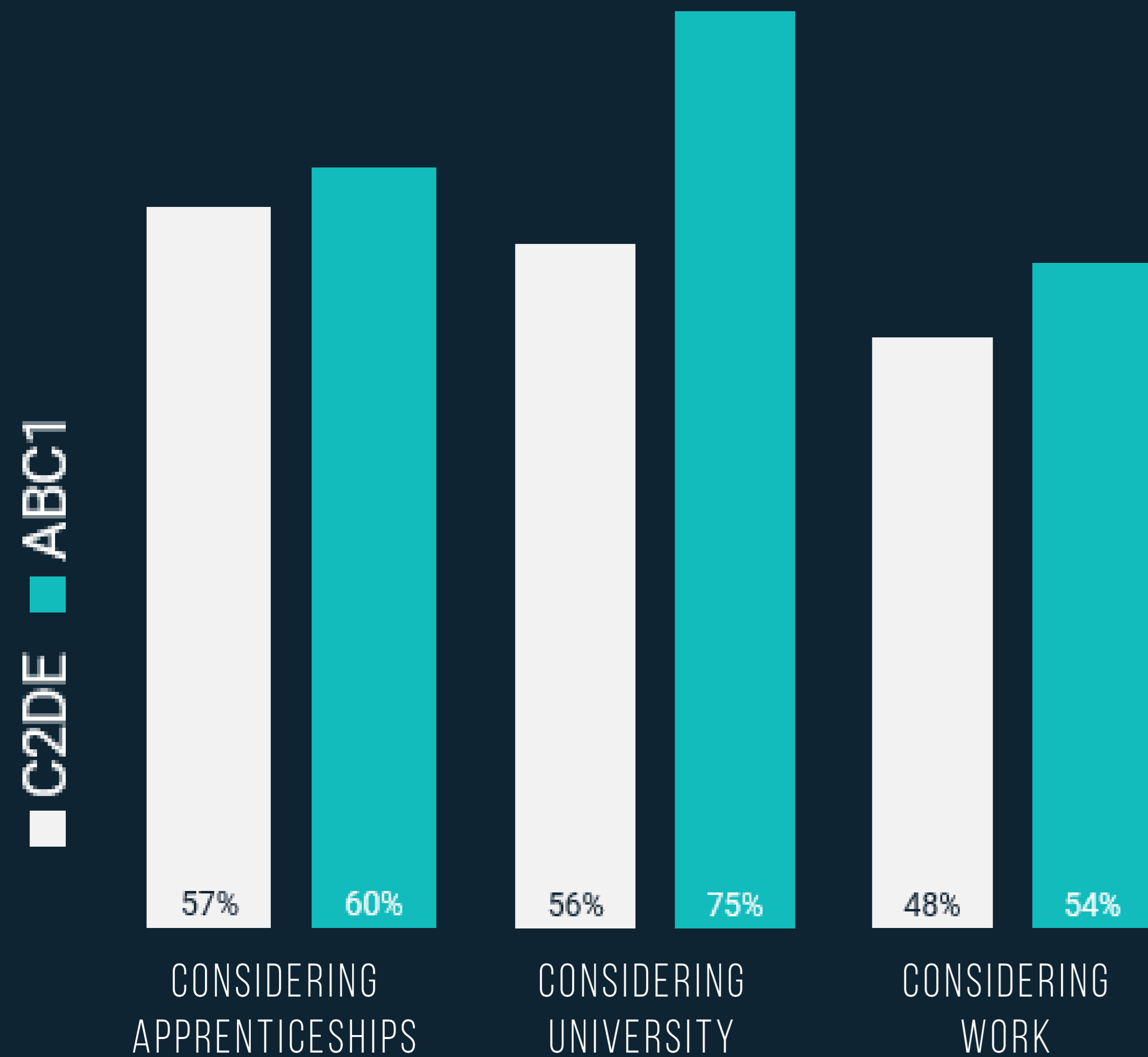
This limited access contributes to uncertainty about available career pathways and a lack of confidence in decision-making.

They are also less likely to have been shown how their current learning can link to future career options.

This highlights the importance of engaging with schools to ensure equitable access to information and opportunities.



# STUDENTS FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO CONSIDER APPRENTICESHIPS THAN OTHER OPTIONS



Apprenticeships are seen as a practical option, seen as appealing due to the opportunity to earn while learning.

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to perceive apprenticeships as limiting to their long-term career prospects.

However, they do have immediate concerns about the hidden costs of apprenticeships.

Providing reassurance and clear information about financial support, wages, and progression opportunities is crucial to encouraging engagement with apprenticeships.



# STUDENTS FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS ARE MORE LIKELY TO RECOGNISE THE BENEFITS OF APPRENTICESHIPS

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds recognise the benefits of apprenticeships more than their more advantaged peers and see the top three benefits of this pathway as:

1

Being paid to work / earning a wage is considered the top advantage of apprenticeships by 44% of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

2

Learning new skills is considered to be an advantage by 36% of students from lower-socio economic backgrounds.

3

Gaining hands on and practical learning experiences are considered beneficial by 28% of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.





# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS TO ATTRACT, RECRUIT, AND RETAIN STUDENTS FROM LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS



FINANCIAL  
SUPPORT



CAREER  
GUIDANCE



SUCCESS  
STORIES



VALUE  
PROPOSITION



EARLY  
ENGAGEMENT



PRACTICAL  
REASSURANCE

## **Financial Support:**

Provide clear information on apprenticeship wages, available financial assistance, and cost expectations.

## **Career Guidance:**

Strengthen partnerships with schools to improve early and accessible career advice.

## **Success Stories:**

Share relatable, real-life examples of apprenticeship success to inspire confidence.

## **Value Proposition:**

Highlight long-term benefits and progression opportunities within apprenticeship pathways.

## **Early Engagement:**

Engage with students at earlier education stages to ensure they have the information required to make the right choice for them.

## **Practical Reassurance:**

Offer transparent details about logistical factors like travel, support networks, and workplace expectations.

# CLOSING COMMENT FROM UCAS

Supporting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is not just about offering options but ensuring those options feel **accessible, achievable, and valuable**.

This research highlights the unique challenges these students face, especially around financial concerns, limited career guidance, and uncertainty about long-term benefits. Addressing these barriers requires employers, educators, and organisations like UCAS to **work collaboratively** in providing clear, practical information and fostering confidence in future choices.

By sharing real-life success stories, improving early access to career guidance, and offering transparent details about financial and logistical realities, we can help level the playing field.

**Empowering** these students is essential not only for their individual futures but for creating a diverse and skilled future workforce.

Together, we can bridge the gaps and ensure that no student feels left behind when considering their next steps.

# RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS AND INFLUENCERS

Find targeted information & support for careers on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

- [UCAS Careers Quiz | Discover Your Future](#) – match your ideal job or career with your personality type.
- [Ultimate Guides – Traditional Degrees Vs Degree Apprenticeships](#) – a guide to next steps.
- [Learn About Apprenticeships And Find The Right One For You](#) –resources, hints and tips and apprenticeship vacancies.
- [Industry guides | UCAS](#) – find out what industries might be a good fit for you.
- [Employer Profiles](#) - explore employers and apprenticeship providers.
- [Apprenticeship Application Guides | UCAS](#) - tailored guides and top tips from employers and existing apprentices to guide you through the application process.
- [Parent and guardian guide to apprenticeships | UCAS](#) – what you need to know when supporting someone to apply for an apprenticeship.
- [Teachers and advisers: Talking about apprenticeships | UCAS](#) – what you need to know when talking to students about apprenticeships.



# 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:



[EarlyCareers@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:EarlyCareers@ucas.ac.uk)



[ucas.com/recruit-apprentices](https://ucas.com/recruit-apprentices)



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UCAS  
Rosehill  
New Barn Lane  
Cheltenham  
GL52 3LZ



01242 544 881

This research surveyed 1,000 students aged 13–17 through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Total 1000 of which ABC1 (581), C2DE (419)

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

