

UCAS

# STUDENT MINDSET CONFERENCE

2023

**Project Next Generation**

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Sponsored by



Project **Next Generation** took an integrated quant/qual approach to understand **what** students are planning for their future and **how** they choose subjects of interest and career pathways, carried out across May-July 2023.

### Stage 1: Quantitative study

- Online survey with 1000 young people from across the UK in Years 9-12 (aged 13-17)

### Stage 2: Qualitative study

- Online forum with 25 young people and their parents across years 9-12

## 6 key themes were identified

- 1 Inspiration/Discovery
- 2 Feelings/Happiness
- 3 Experience
- 4 Confidence
- 5 Independence/Empowerment
- 6 Control

# Inspiration / Discovery

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Defined as 'discovering options for their future and the need to be inspired'.

*Don't leave aspiration up to the imagination*

Inspiration/Discovery is at the forefront of their decision-making.



# Many feel they know little about what options are available post-18

| %                   | ...continuing your studies | ...getting an apprenticeship | ...different jobs/ careers |
|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A lot               | 12%                        | 12%                          | 12%                        |
| A reasonable amount | 30%                        | 26%                          | 29%                        |
| A little bit        | 32%                        | 33%                          | 36%                        |
| Very little         | 18%                        | 21%                          | 17%                        |
| Nothing at all      | 6%                         | 8%                           | 5%                         |
| Prefer not to say   | 2%                         | 1%                           | 1%                         |

*We haven't been offered much support/advice, but we were given a booklet which contained some useful advice about post-career options by our head of year. We were also given a few PowerPoints (also from our head of year) but it contained limited information. In addition, our school offered a careers meeting with a careers advisor, but spaces were limited so not everyone could receive this information*

**Young people need inspiration and encouragement to discover available options, and to help them have more certainty about the future**

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# Feelings / Happiness

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Defined as 'current enjoyment and future happiness'.

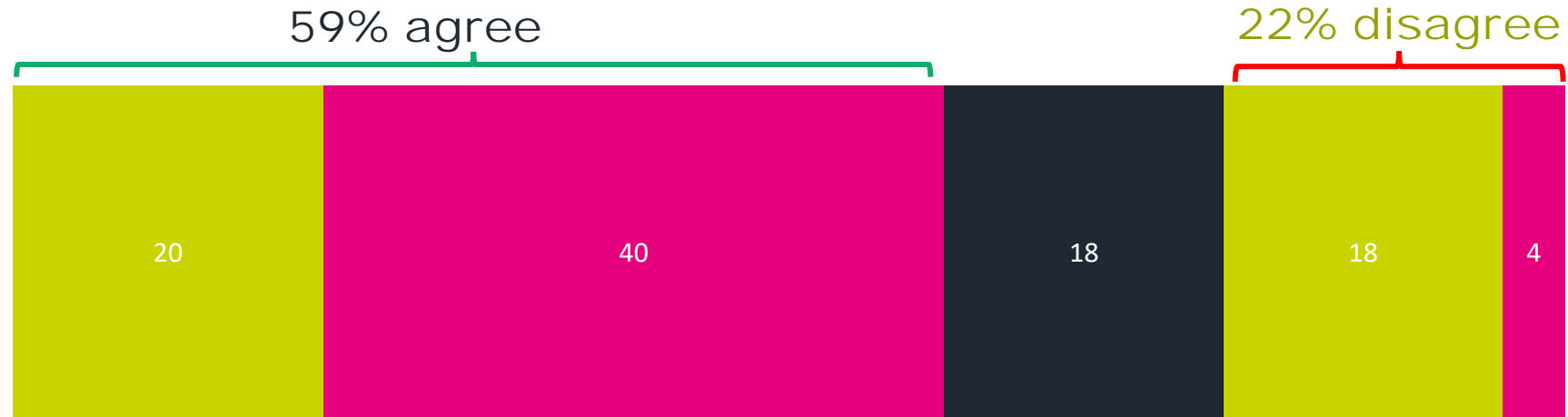
*Living in the moment and planning for the future*

What happiness looks like and how universities can demonstrate how their courses can help them achieve this.



# A key strategy is focussing on what they enjoy and trust that good things will follow

I'M NOT TRYING TO MAP OUT MY FUTURE – I'M STICKING TO WHAT I ENJOY / WHAT I AM GOOD AT AND THE REST WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF



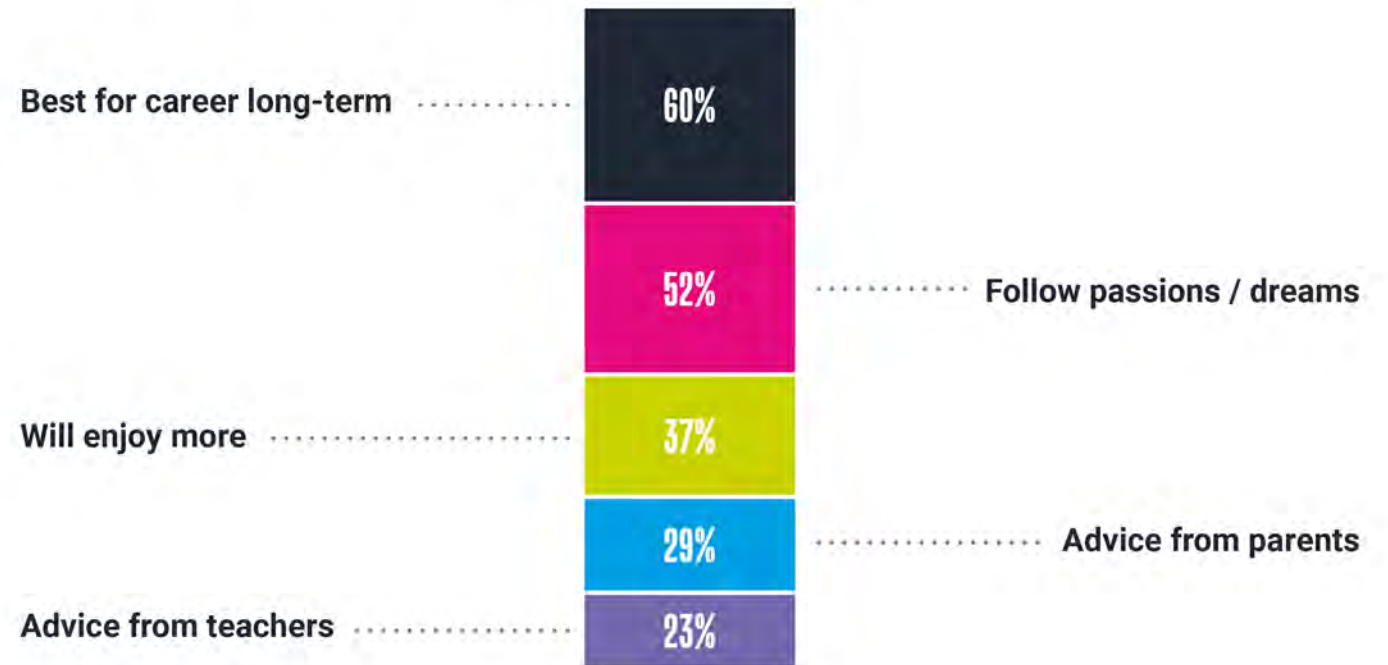
# Enjoyment and happiness are key drivers of choice



The starting point is finding a career they will be happy in, and they need inspiration to find this

**47%** chose 'Enjoying my job' as the number one factor when thinking about the job they want in the future

Main reasons for being most likely to apply to university:





# Young people think about what will fulfill current enjoyment, but also future happiness

*It is very important for me to enjoy the subjects I study because then I am more motivated to revise, and I am more interested. If I didn't enjoy a subject then it would put me off further study of that particular subject - 16*



## CURRENT ENJOYMENT

Passions & interests  
Subject/course/career enjoyment



## FUTURE HAPPINESS

Stable career & financial situation  
Career progression  
Opportunities to explore/travel/independence

*I want to have a job that I can really enjoy and earn good money from, so I can have fun and be happy at work - 15*

# UNIVERSITIES NEED TO COMMUNICATE THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF HAPPINESS



University is linked to enjoyment (37%) and following passions & dreams (52%)



As well as long-term career (60%) and a career with higher wages (39%)



But could do more to highlight future happiness, such as opportunities to travel, opportunities for more career independence (e.g. own business), and especially myth busting around financial instability

# Experience

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Defined as direct, indirect, and past experiences.

*Using experience to empower choices*

How experiences shape their thinking, and how they are important to help with their future and choices.



# Experience in the decision-making process can be defined in three ways



## Direct experience

Work experience, placement years etc.

Hands on, practical & employability skills development



## Indirect experience

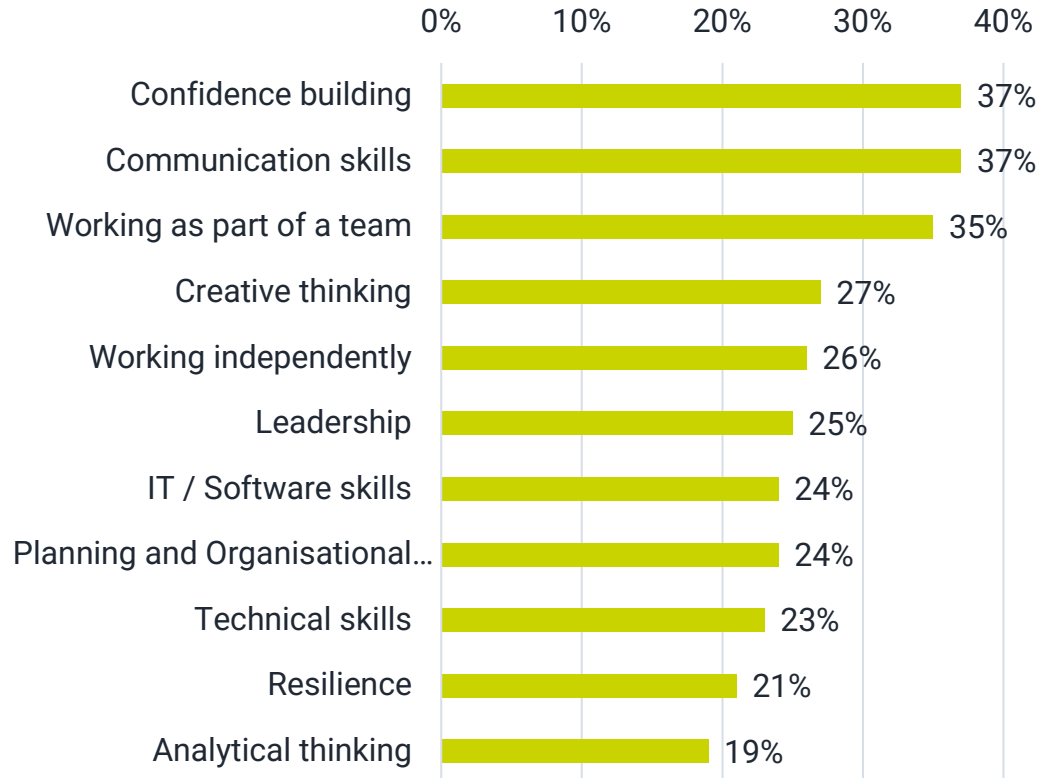
Engagement with mentors, employers, or people who have taken a particular pathway



## Drawing on past experiences

Experiences of parents/family friends that have influenced their thoughts/exposure & experience of particular careers or pathways

# There is also a need for experience in developing broader employability skills

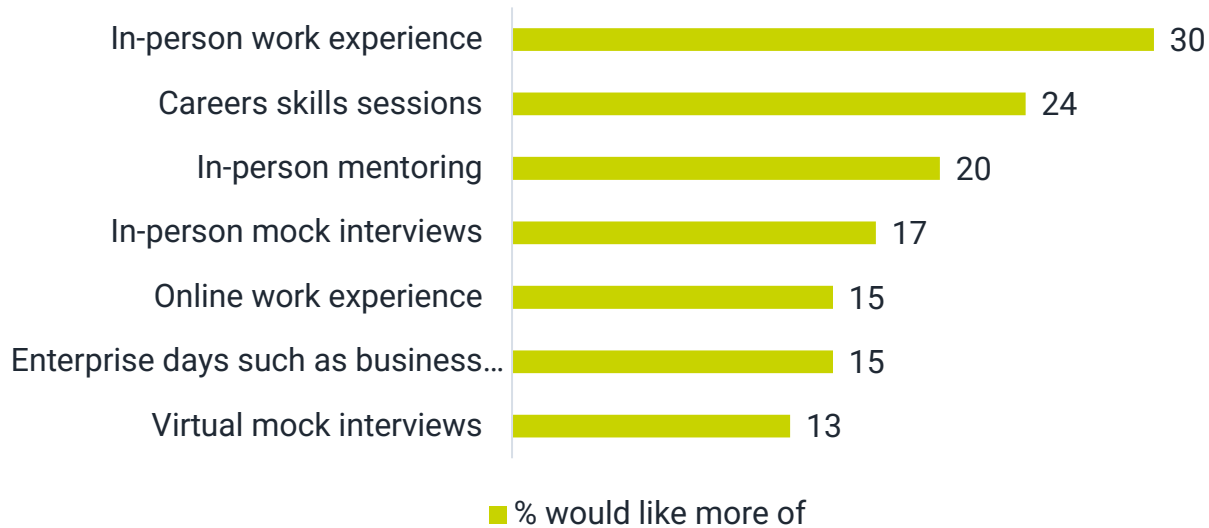


**91%**  
Would like help in  
developing at least one of  
these skills

Offer resources to develop these skills, e.g. life coach/mentoring YouTube videos about confidence, what is meant by 'communication skills' in employment, suggestions of schemes/volunteering positions as an alternative to work experience

# There is a need for more experience, whether direct or indirect

## Direct experience



*There are lots of people out there and not many good jobs about, it's harder to find one. Most companies are looking for people with experience or certain qualifications. - 16*

## Indirect experience



*Teacher's advice has been not so helpful, it doesn't always answer the questions I have. The advice is basic, and I feel as if when I reach out to the teacher, I receive a standard response. - 15*

# There is disparity in the levels of support young people receive from parents

Those with parents in 'careers' or who know how the system works have more support in general for entry into careers, as parents can act as career coaches.

*"I helped with work experience on one path so he could try it. He loved it...All the questions he has I have been able to get people from the industry for him to speak to. So he can hear it from some one who's worked in the industry so it's good honest truth." – Parent (of 14 yrs)*



**For those without this support, there is a need to fill the gap**



**Universities and education providers need to be providing targeted and more substantial advice/mentoring for those individuals lacking parental knowledge/experience**

# Universities can tailor their outreach according to these experience needs

## Direct experience

- Work experience
- Placement years/years abroad
- Hands on, practical & employability skills development

## Indirect experience

- Engagement with mentors/employers
- Engagement with current students
- Case studies
- Social media content

## Drawing on past experiences

- Providing guidance to parents, including information to challenge stereotypes



# Confidence

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Defined as 'knowledge/experience & level of support/reassurance received'.

*Where knowledge is, confidence follows*

What they need to be confident in decision making.  
The confidence they feel/what impacts their confidence.



# Confidence is informed by experience, knowledge and reassurance



Need experience & knowledge of what they're going into

59% feel they have a lot/reasonable knowledge, but only 47% feel comfortable with their level of knowledge



Need reassurance that they're not expected to be perfect

*"I have a lack in confidence, so I would like help developing my confidence as it would benefit many areas of my life and help with my future career plans..." (16)*

Universities can give them the confidence they lack for going into employment

# Confidence is needed in terms of ability, and in the choices they are making



## Confidence in ability

To do the job/pathway



Links to experience and enjoyment



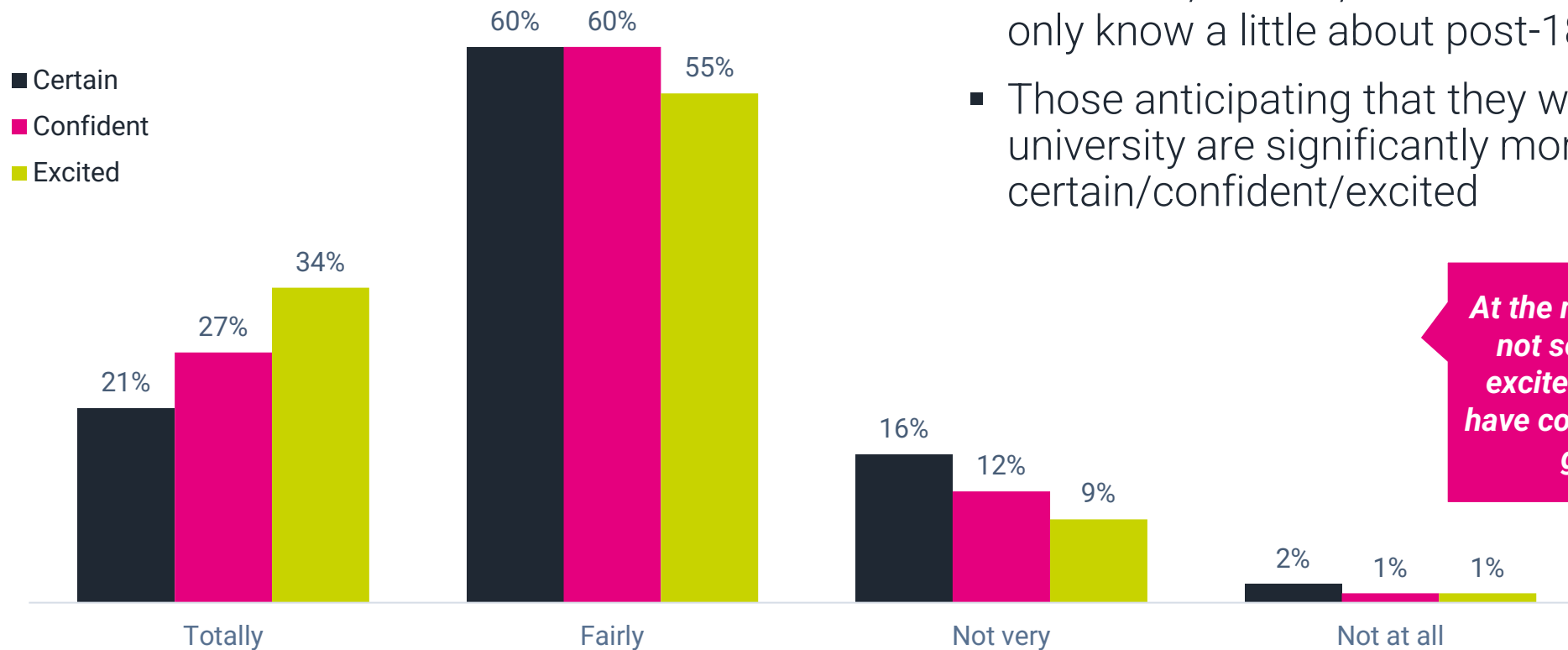
## Confidence in it being the right decision

And will get them to where they want to be



Links to empowerment and inspiration

# Young people are fairly confident about their future, but only know a little about post-18 options



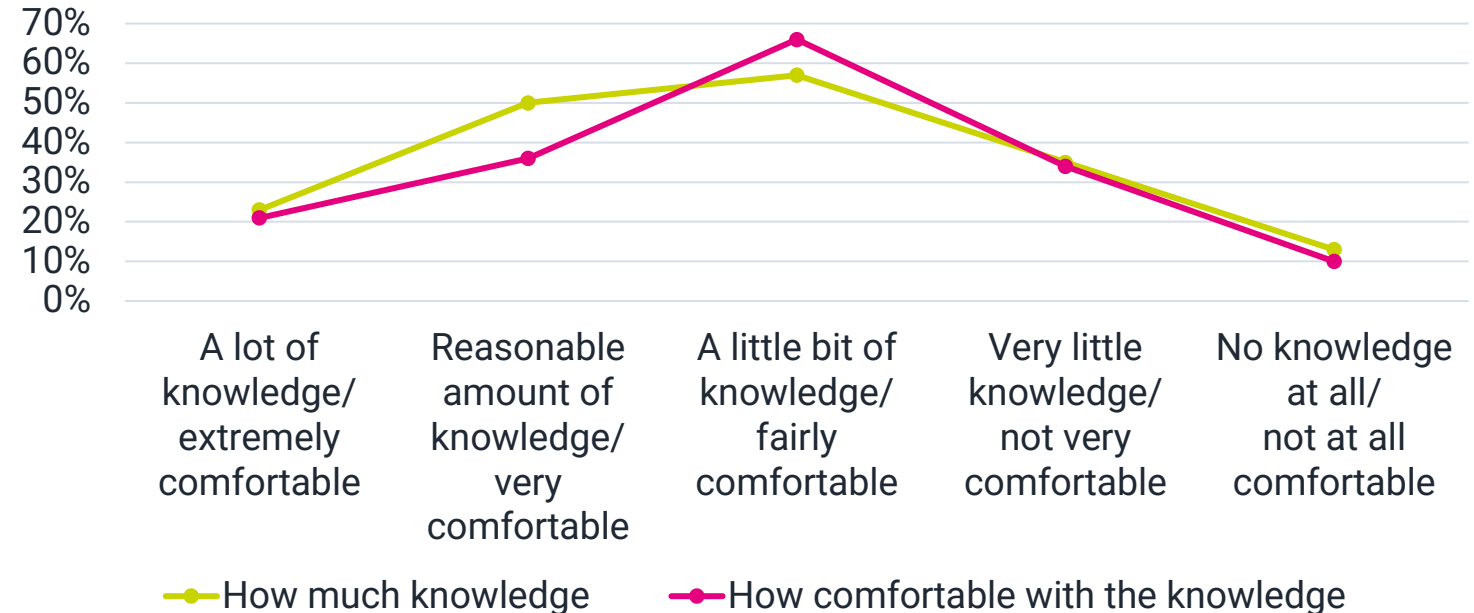
- Confident/excited/certain about future but 57% only know a little about post-18 choices
- Those anticipating that they will most likely go to university are significantly more certain/confident/excited

*At the moment I would say I'm not so certain confident or excited about university as I have concerns over whether I'll get into any. (15)*

# To maintain confidence throughout decision-making, knowledge about future options is needed

- The more they know they more comfortable they are
- This is especially the case for alternative to university options

Correlation between level of knowledge and comfort with level of knowledge



# Young people want to choose a pathway that will get them a good job

For this, they need confidence in their ability and confidence that the pathway they choose will lead to this - *experience, knowledge, and reassurance*

***A good quality career means doing something I enjoy which I am paid well for. It would include being treated well and most importantly being happy in and with my career choice. - 16***



- Communicate that university is not only about following a passion and good career but also that it *can* help prepare for employment and give valuable skills.
- Highlight opportunities for employment preparation and practical skill development.

# Independence / Empowerment

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Defined as 'the ability to make own decisions & take responsibility for own future'

*Stepping boldly into their own decisions*

How it is important and how universities can show how choosing this pathway increases their independence/being empowered



# Independence is closely linked to confidence and experience

Independence can be looked at in two ways:



## **Making decisions & trusting their choices**

Impacted by:  
Pressure from parents, confidence & experience



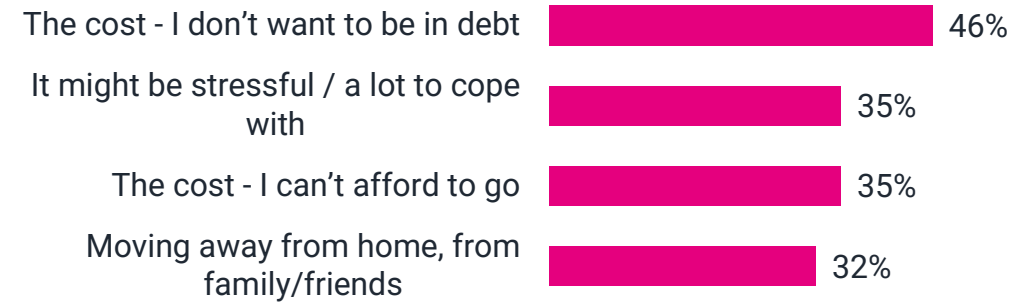
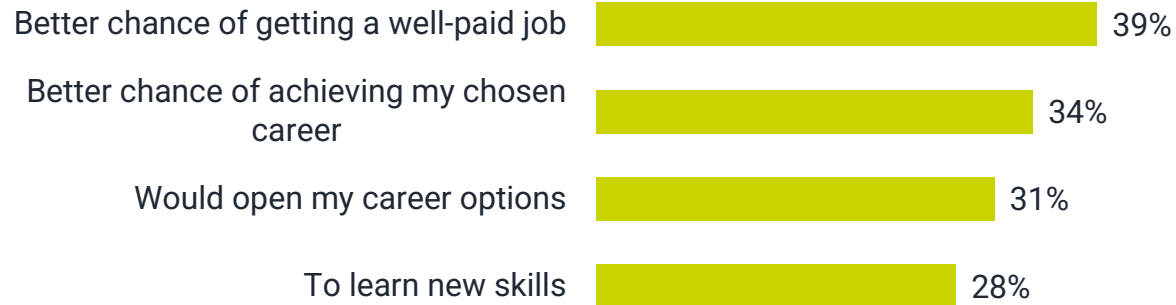
## **Feeling ready to be responsible for their lives**

Impacted by:  
Strained finances, no experience living independently, confidence



# Financial independence is a big concern

The main draw of university is future financial position, but the main drawbacks are also money related



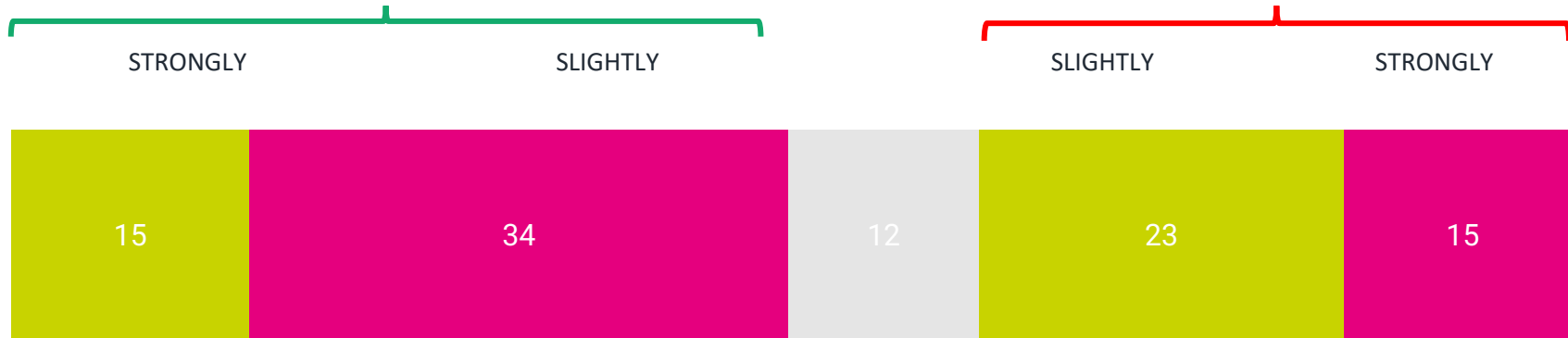
Provide resources about finances and awareness of available support to alleviate money concerns- e.g. myth busting, bursaries, accommodation options, budgeting & independent living

# Parental pressure impacts their feelings of independence

48% agree

38% disagree

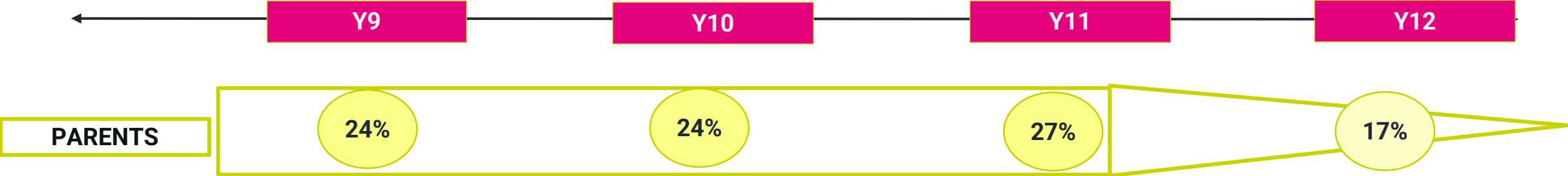
I FEEL QUITE A BIT OF PRESSURE FROM MY PARENTS TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS ABOUT MY FUTURE EDUCATION/CAREERS



*My mum tells me I won't get a good job if I don't go to university, I want to study engineering science and I'm hoping I can get good qualifications and get a good job. (14)*

# Young people need to feel confident in their independence by Y12

A reliance on parents seems to fall away in Yr 12, so they need to feel confident in their independence by this point



Parents are key knowledge providers until Y11 but drops off at Y12

# Support and reassurance can empower young people to be independent in their decision-making



**Knowledge & reassurance/support** can empower YP to take control of their future.

- This is even more important Y11 onwards, as they need confirmation they are making right choice but also knowledge that there are other options if things don't go to plan

From teachers, careers advisers, parents



**Empowerment** from being able to engage with and hear real life examples.

Peer mentors, those who have done this path AND from people in a position they want to be in who took an alternative route to get there – especially important

# Control

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Defined as 'preparedness and certainty/confidence for the future'.

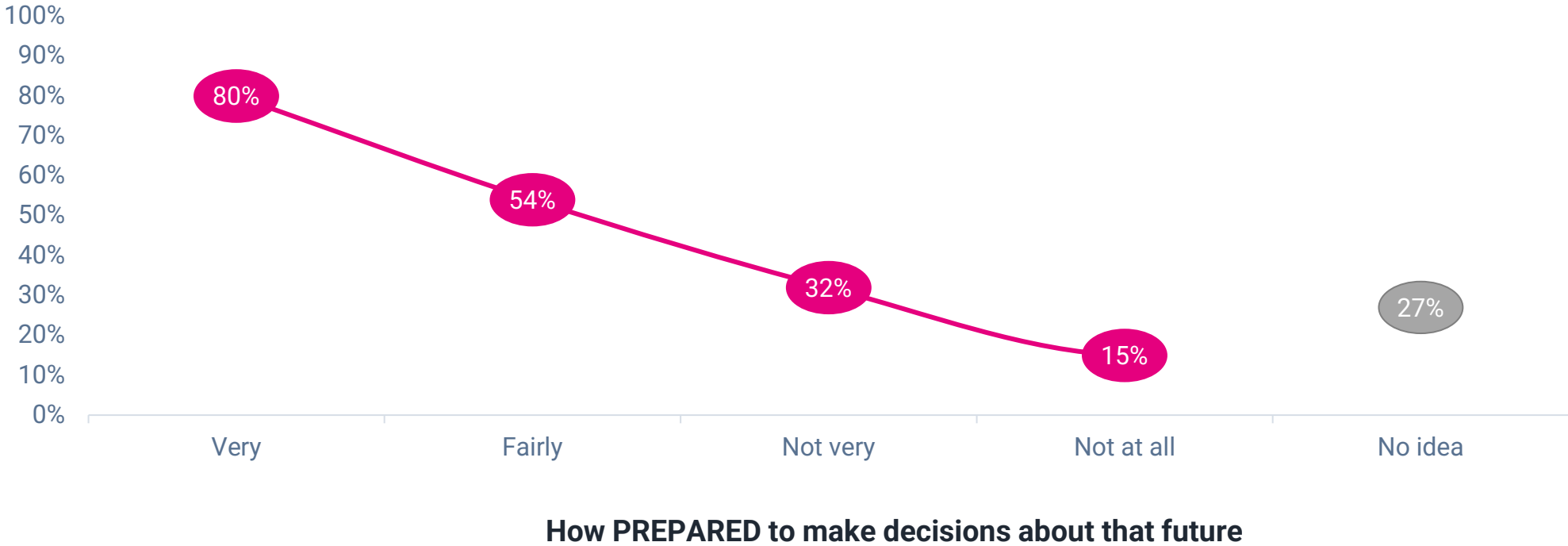
*Confidence is a fast track to control*

The importance of having control of their future and finances

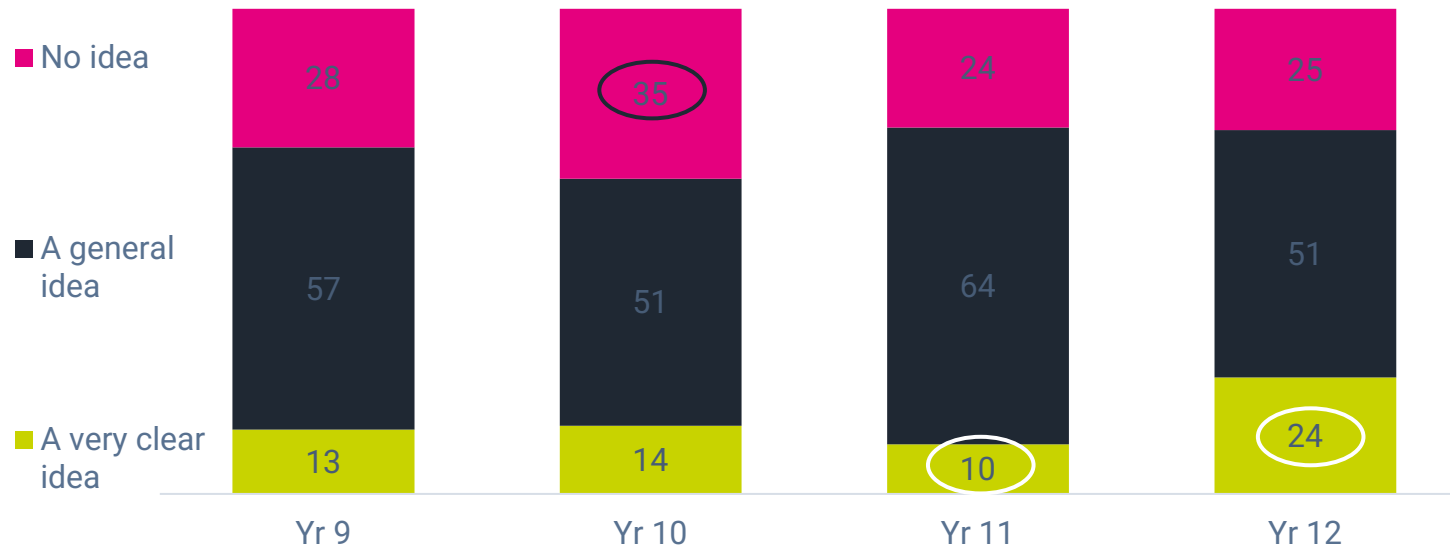


# Control in terms of preparedness is key for feeling optimistic about the future

% Extremely/very positive about the future



# But there is a great deal of uncertainty about final jobs and careers across all year groups

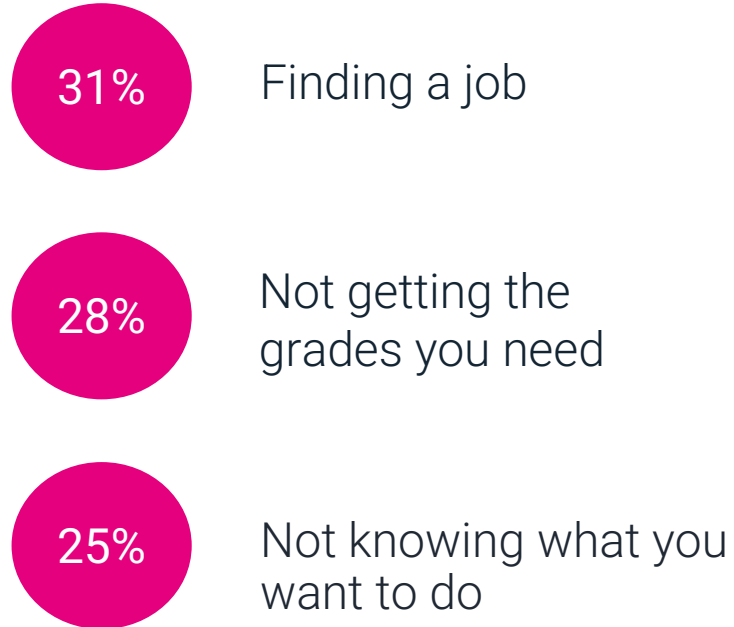


- For some, a general sense of direction develops into Year 11 and crystalises in Year 12.
- HOWEVER, even in Year 12, 3 in 4 have only a general idea or no idea at all what it is that they will eventually go on to do for a living

*"I'm concerned about the unknown because I don't know what might happen in the future, but this also excites me" (15)*

# Causes of concern are often in their control

Concerned about...



*This worries me as it can determine my future and how easy it will be to find a job and what kind of money I can earn (16)*



Young people need to understand it's ok not to know exactly where they are going and to get guidance about how to make decisions when they don't know their exact end destination.



# Financial control is also a big concern for the future



48%

agree choices are restricted by not having enough money

23%

are concerned about their family's financial situation

*[University] is only available to people who can afford it –(15)*

# Being in control of their future can be linked to experience and independence



- **Experience** in terms of preparedness, knowledge and exposure – feeling *ready* for their future



- **Independence and empowerment** in terms of finances and choices they make

# 6 key themes when producing strategies for post-18 decisions

Understand how the themes influence each other, as well as the decisions of young people, to ensure they are well-equipped for making choices for their future

