

Parental Influence: the key role played by parents in their children's decisions about routes and pathways post-18

July 2015

Prepared by Chris Phillips, GTI Media Research

How, why and when parents influence their children's choices; how they access the information needed to advise them; what they think of the information/guidance available to them and the information/guidance being given to their children at school.



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Chris Phillips, UK Information and Research Director, GTI Media

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I would like to thank everyone who has supported us in this research project:

Our two partners: Inspiring Futures and Careers England

Our supporters who have provided advice and input into the design of the questionnaire: AccessHE; National Citizen Service (NCS) and CDI (Career Development Institute)

EY, for their generous sponsorship which has allowed us to undertake this project.

YouGov for conducting the parents' survey on our behalf and ensuring a representative sample. AGCAS for their work on parental influence in 2014 that inspired this study.

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Dan Richards, Recruiting Leader, UK and Ireland, EY

This new piece of research highlights that the amount and quality of information available for the parents of today's school leavers is not sufficient for the majority to be able to help their children make informed career decisions post-18. It is clear that the right time for parents to have this information is much earlier than employers like ourselves had previously anticipated, with over 50% of the opinion that GCSE choices in Year 9 is when careers advice and information would be best delivered, and of most value. Without this guidance it would seem many of today's school leavers are left unsure as to what they should do after completing formal education, a clear action point for anyone working with, and seeking to encourage them to pursue a career path leading to their particular sector or profession. What's also striking is that university is still very much seen as the default option by parents, and that although the reasons for this are valid, many of these reasons also apply to the huge range of alternatives available including school leaver programmes, apprenticeships and other vocational qualifications. As an employer committed to helping school leavers make the right career decision for them, this research offers a great opportunity for everyone to work together to deliver this message to every young person entering the workplace in years to come.



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Key findings from the research

Parents' views about careers advice and information children receive at school or college

Narrative

Despite the fact that the majority of parents believed that their children were not getting enough careers advice and information, and that they didn't have a very high opinion of its quality, they wanted their children to have one-to-one careers advice at school and they wanted school to be mainly responsible for providing careers advice and information.

Across all the sample groups, the vast majority of parents (65% overall) believed that the school or college should have the most responsibility for providing careers advice and information, regardless of social grade, region or previous attendance at university.

Overall, a quarter of parents were not aware of any careers advice given to their child at school, and over half stated 'some but not enough'.

Parents of children at independent schools were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the amount of careers advice their children had received (30% v. 16% overall).

The majority of parents (55% overall) felt that the best time for their child to receive careers advice and information was when they 'make their GCSE choices at 14', regardless of the type of school their children attend.

Overall, 40% of parents thought the careers advice and information that their children received was 'poor'.

Parents of children at independent schools were significantly more likely to state the career advice their child receives was 'good', compared with parents whose children went to other types of school.

The majority of parents felt that a 'one-to-one careers advice discussion with your child' was the most important aspect of careers advice and information (60% overall), closely followed by 'information about subject choices at KS4 and KS5/S2 and S3' and 'information about how school subjects relate to career or job areas'.

For ABC1 parents, those who had attended university and for respondents in Scotland, 'information about how school subjects relate to career or job' was the most important aspect.

Careers advice and information that parents give to their children

Narrative

Parents were sure that they were their children's main influencers and, in the main, felt confident about giving careers advice. They would be more confident, however, if there was a parent-specific online resource to give them the necessary information they lacked.

Over half of parents (58% overall) were asked by their children for careers advice.

Parents in the C2DE social grade were significantly less likely to get asked for advice than their ABC1 counterparts (53% v. 62%).

79% of parents felt that their child did not have a clear idea of what they wanted to do after finishing education.

Parents with children at independent schools and FE colleges were more likely to think that their children had 'a very clear idea' compared to all other groups (26% and 27% v. 22% overall).

All sample groups felt that they, as parents, had the biggest influence over their child's important education and career decisions.

Parents who attended university were significantly more likely to feel this way (60% v. 53% overall).

Parents in the C2DE social group and parents who hadn't been to university were least likely to perceive themselves as key influencers.

The majority of parents (69% overall) felt confident giving their child careers advice and information.

Parents in the C2DE social grade were significantly less likely to feel confident.

The three groups most confident about giving their children advice and information were: those who had attended university, Scottish parents and parents from ABC1 social groups.

More than half the parents (64% overall) would feel more confident giving their child career advice if there was 'a dedicated website for parents, explaining the various study and employment choices available to them'.

Skills for work

Narrative

Parents were supportive of out-of-school activities and their role in developing skills. In their view, schools do develop core communication and teamwork skills in children but all parent groups suggested that leadership skills were not as obviously developed.

Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the effects of extra-curricular activities. Over three quarters of parents stated that 'what their child does outside school is as important to their development as formal education'.

Parents with children at independent schools were significantly more likely to feel that their child was developing key work-related skills when compared with parents whose children were at other types of schools.

For all groups, leadership was the skill least developed at school.

60% of parents' children did not have a paid part-time job or work as a volunteer.

Children from independent schools were significantly more likely to do voluntary work when compared with the other sample groups. (26% v. 11% overall).

Choices after 18: university and the alternatives

Narrative

University does appear to be the default route for parents to suggest to their children, but awareness of non-university routes is very low. Schools, too, promoted universities more than other routes. It is not surprising therefore that only 5% of parents actively encouraged their children to choose a non-university route post-18.

All the parent sample groups had significantly more knowledge of university degrees (87% overall) than the other career routes available to their children, especially 'school leaver programmes' where 28% said they had 'some knowledge'.

Parents who went to university were, unsurprisingly, significantly more likely to know about university degrees.

Perceived awareness of non-university routes was low, with 1% of parents saying they knew 'a lot' about school leaver programmes, 6% about vocational FE courses and 9% about apprenticeships/higher apprenticeships.

All parent groups believed their children to have much more knowledge about the university route compared to the other listed routes.

Parents with children at independent schools were significantly more likely to feel that their child was

confident in their knowledge of university degrees or employer-sponsored degrees compared to parents in all other sample groups.

Regardless of the type of school children attended, parents received significantly more information on university degrees (59% overall believed they 'knew something') than the other career options available to their child/children.

Parents whose children went to an independent school were significantly more likely to receive information about university degrees (83% v. 59%). When asked about the information and help they received about ALL the other routes to a job or career, fewer than 5% of parents said they received 'a lot'.

Just under half the parents said they did talk to their children about alternatives to university.

Around the same number did not talk to their children about alternatives to university:

- 26% of parents overall didn't know enough about the alternatives to university and therefore didn't feel confident giving advice.
- 20% of parents were convinced that university was the best choice and so didn't talk about alternatives.

Overall, only 5% of parents encouraged their children NOT to go to university.

Parents were more likely to encourage their child to go to university as they thought it was in their child/children's best interest for their long-term career prospects (49% overall).

The top three reasons parents gave for encouraging their children to go to university rather than do something else were:

- Because I feel it's better for their long-term career prospects than going straight into work/an apprenticeship/school leaver programme
- Because they need a degree for the career they have chosen
- Because I want my children to have a more successful career and opportunities for progression than I had.

Parents would most expect to find information about the alternatives to university 'from teachers and careers advisers at their children's school/college' (57% overall), followed by 'careers events at school/college run by employers where I can meet trainees who chose not to go to university' and 'Google or other search engines'.

Half of parents overall said that the best way for them to find information about alternatives to university would be through a publication or a website. This was twice as popular an answer as 'from briefings/discussions with careers advisers/teachers at school'.

Only 7% said they didn't want or need any more information about alternatives to university.

The university route was perceived by parents to be the most promoted route by schools with 37% of parents feeling that their child's school 'promotes the university route as the best route to take', with 67% of parents with children at independent schools and 63% with children at grammar schools feeling this to be the case.

In contrast, only 5% of parents believed their children's school promoted the work route as the best route to take.

25% of parents thought their children's school didn't promote one route over another.

Rationale and methodology

Rationale

In 2014, GTI Media and AGCAS, with support from AGR, HELOA and EY, conducted research into parental influence, specifically as it affected undergraduates. We undertook this study as we had become aware that parents were becoming increasingly viewed as key influencers and advisers when it came to helping their children make important educational and career decisions. The results of the survey were unambiguous: parents were key influencers, especially when it came to advising their school-age children about the choices post-18. And the students we surveyed were very happy to receive advice and help from their parents.

The survey report 'Parental influence in children's academic and employment choices' can be downloaded free of charge from the GTI Media site: gtimedia.co.uk/expertise/research-reports.

In 2015, we decided to explore parents' role in giving careers advice and information to school-age children, their knowledge of the available routes post-18 and their views and experience of the careers advice and information available to their children at school.

There are reasons why parents are exerting more influence than previously:

- The void left in schools careers provision by the disappearance of the Connexions service
- The increasing costs of higher education and therefore the greater imperative parents have to ensure that their money is well spent
- The fact that, as each generation goes by, the proportion of parents who have been to university, and are therefore comfortable advising their children about it, grows – along with its flipside: the lack of awareness and knowledge of the alternatives to university.

What's clear from the research is the need for all parties (schools, teachers, careers advisers, university admissions and outreach) to respond to the growing influence of parents, especially parents who haven't been to university themselves and/or come from less advantaged backgrounds.

Universities need to engage with parents to have the best chance of recruiting their children onto the most appropriate courses. Employers, especially those with higher apprenticeship or school leaver programmes, need to raise the awareness of the alternatives to university with parents as well as students. And careers teachers and advisers at school need to be aware of the influence of parents and the need to involve them, educate them and value their input in the complex business of choosing the right routes post-18 for their children.

The process

We worked closely with two partners – Careers England and Inspiring Futures – to focus the project primarily around the choice facing school children about whether to go to university or to pursue other routes to their chosen career. It's clear from our research in 2014 that university is a default choice for many and the alternatives are not well known and often not as well regarded. We also received valuable support from CDI, AccessHE and NCS (National Citizen Service) in refining the questionnaire. We are grateful for the continuing support of sponsors EY for helping to fund the research and contributing to its dissemination.

Schools, teachers and students have been surveyed a lot, so it made sense to build on the parental influence work we did last year to focus on finding out more about how, why and when parents influence their (school) children's choices. We also wanted to examine how they access the information needed to advise them, what they think of the information/guidance available to them and what they think about the information/guidance being given to their children at school in relation to this issue.

Methodology

With our partners and supporters, we devised a detailed questionnaire that was completed by 1,018 parents in a three-week period in May 2015. The survey was hosted by YouGov in order to ensure that the demographic of the sample was diverse enough to make meaningful conclusions and explore differences between parent groups. See page 32 for breakdown of groups.

Later in 2015, we will conduct a follow-up survey of selected parents to create more qualitative information to complement the findings of this report.

Terminology

After much discussion, we have used the phrase 'careers advice and information' throughout the report in place of the more accurate but less accessible 'careers education, information, advice and guidance'. This is partly because it made questions easier to scan, but also because it was felt to be a more commonly understood description for parents.

Section 1. Parents' views on the careers advice and information children receive at school or college

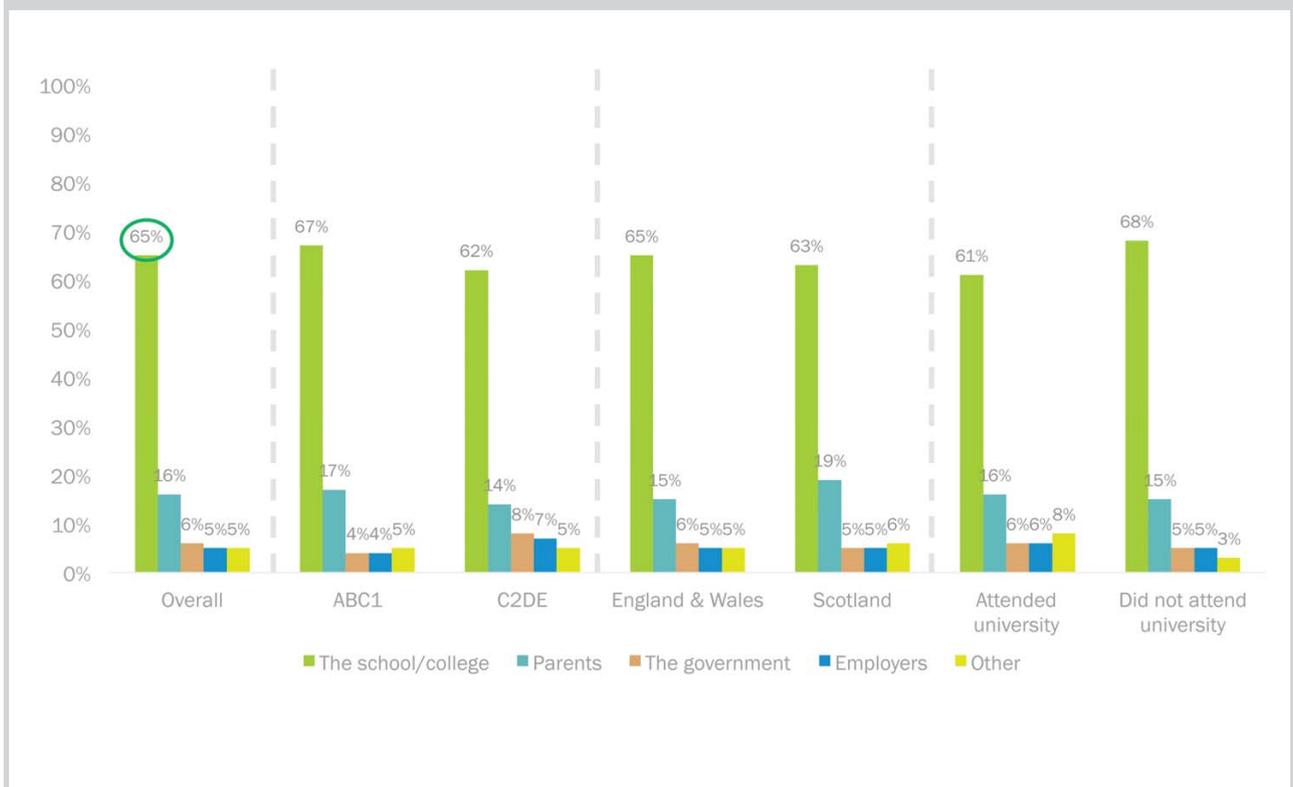
Who should have the main responsibility for providing careers advice and information to parents' children?

Across all the sample groups, the vast majority of parents (65% overall) believed that the school or college should have the most responsibility for providing careers advice and information, regardless of social grade, region or previous attendance at university.

Outside school, parents thought parents should have the most responsibility (16% overall).

Scottish parents believed slightly more than all other groups that parents should have the main responsibility (19% v. 16%).

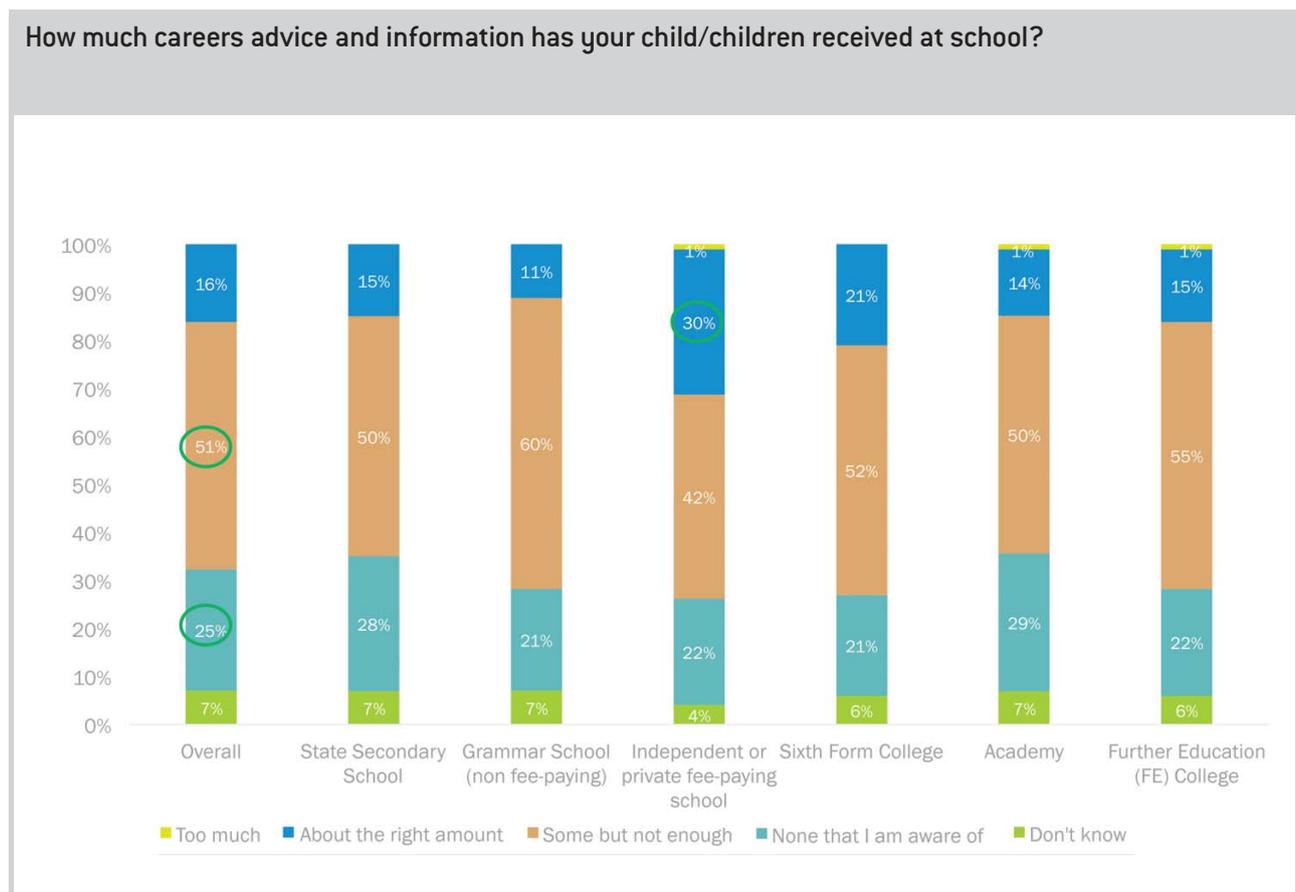
In your opinion, who should be mainly responsible for providing careers advice and information to your child?



Parents' satisfaction with the amount of careers advice and information provided by the school

Overall, a quarter of parents were not aware of any career advice given to their child at school, and over half stated 'some but not enough'.

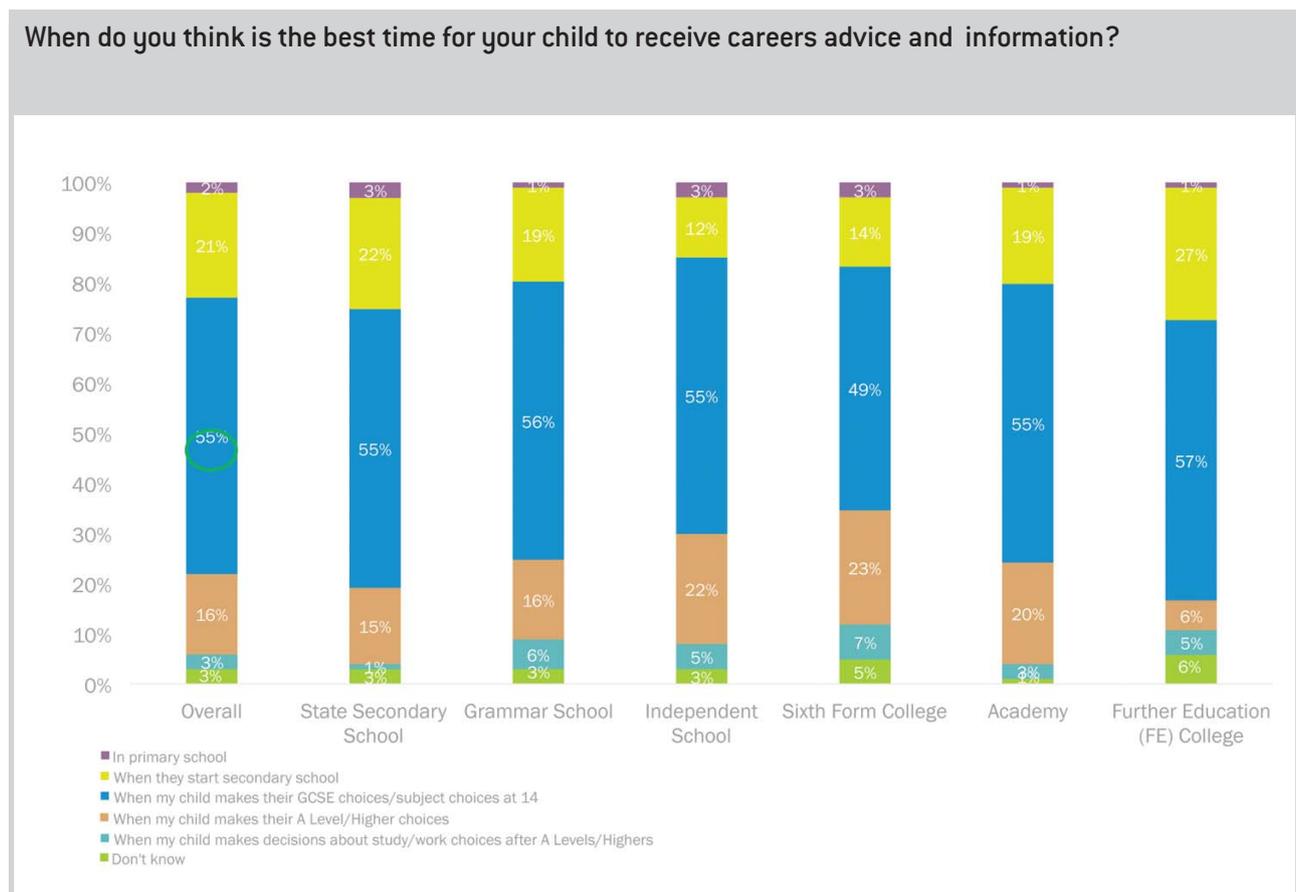
Parents of children at independent schools were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the amount of careers advice their children had received (30% v. 16% overall).



The best time for children to receive careers advice and information

The majority of parents (55% overall) felt that the best time for their child to receive careers advice and information was when they 'make their GCSE choices at 14', regardless of the type of school their children attended.

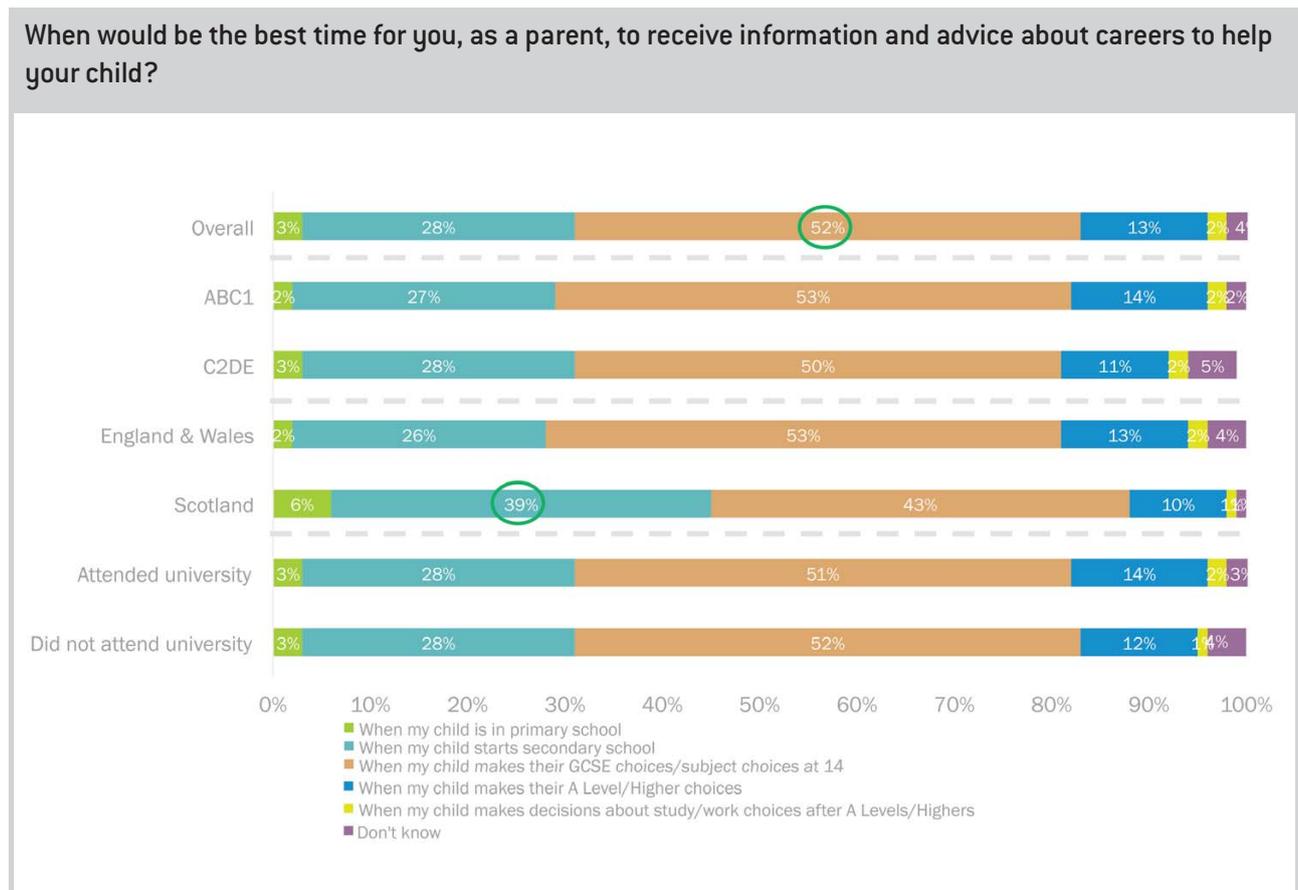
There is little enthusiasm among parents for very early delivery of careers advice, with only 2% suggesting 'primary school', although a significant number (21% overall) wanted it 'when they started secondary school'.



The best time for parents to receive careers information and advice to help their children

Over half of parents (52% overall) felt the best time for them to receive careers information and advice to help their children was when their child 'makes their GCSE choices at 14'.

But significantly more parents in Scotland felt that they should receive this information when their 'child starts secondary school'.



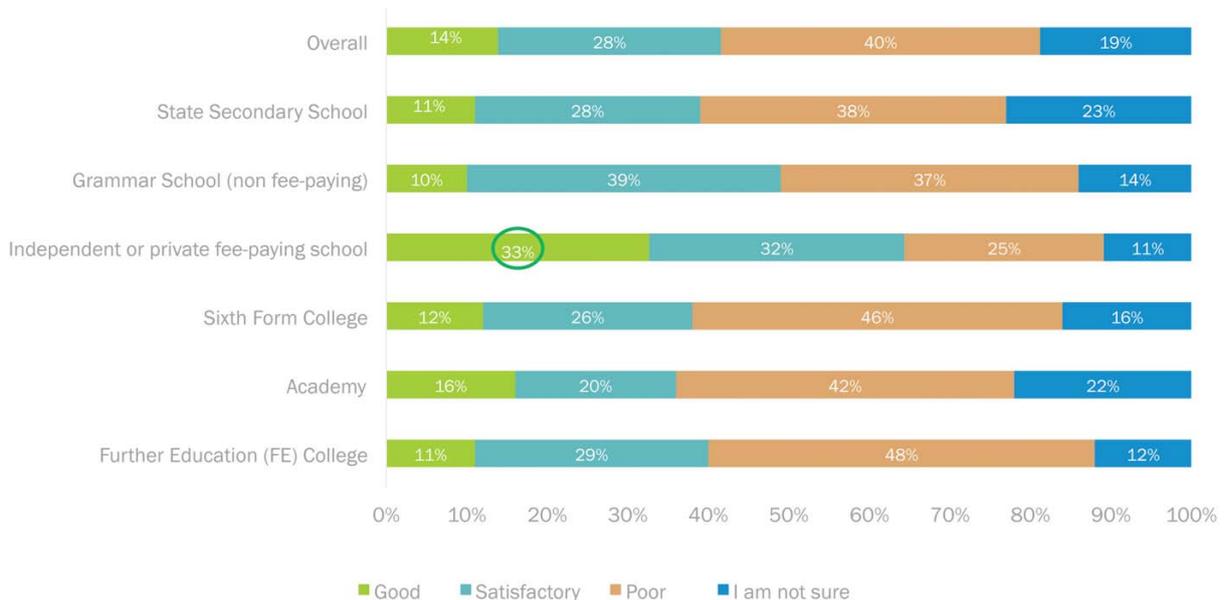
Satisfaction with the careers advice and information children receive at school

Overall, 40% of parents thought the careers advice and information that their children received was 'poor'.

Parents of children at independent schools were significantly more likely to state the career advice their child received was 'good' (33%), compared with parents whose children went to other types of school.

Parents with children at FE Colleges had the lowest opinion of careers advice and information received by their children.

How would you rate the quality of the careers advice and information that your child/children is receiving or has received at school?



Comparing the importance of different aspects of careers advice and information

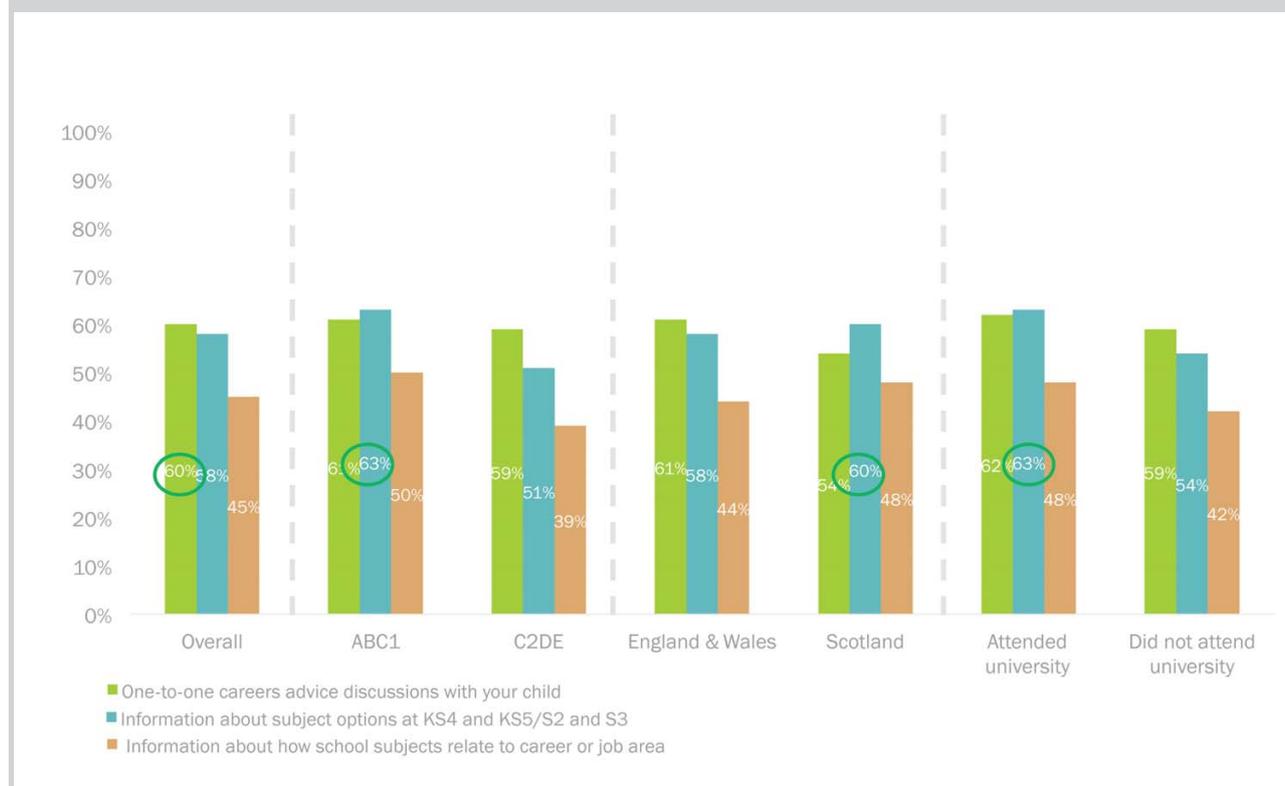
The majority of parents felt that a 'one-to-one careers advice discussion with your child' was the most important aspect of careers advice and information (60% overall), closely followed by 'information about subject choices at KS4 and KS5/S2 and S3' (58% overall), and 'information about how school subjects relate to career or job areas' (45% overall).

For ABC1 parents, those that who had attended university and for respondents in Scotland, 'information about how school subjects relate to career or job' was the most important aspect.

This is the complete list, in order of perceived importance by parents, of all aspects listed:

1. One-to-one careers advice discussion
2. Information about subject choices at KS4 and KS5/S2 and S3
3. Information about how school subjects relate to career or job areas
4. Classroom lessons in careers education
5. Work experience
6. Practical workshops delivered by employers to develop skills for work
7. Information about the current job market
8. Careers fairs or visits from employers to school
9. Psychometric assessments and interest guides
10. Visits to universities and colleges
11. Visits to employers

Rank these aspects of careers advice and information in order of how important you feel they are to your child. Rank top 5 in order with 1 being the most important.



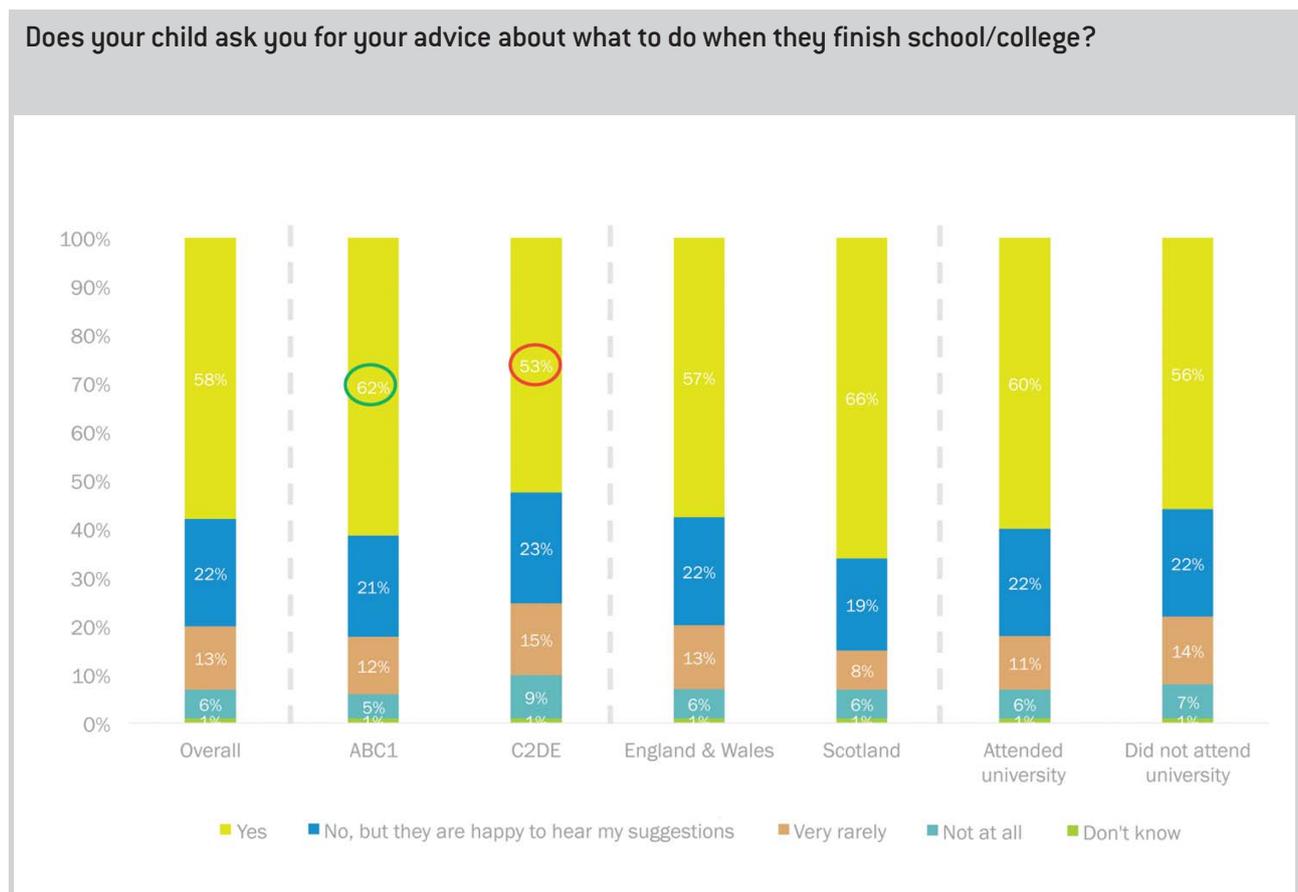
Section 2. Careers advice and information that parents give to their children

Children asking their parents for careers advice and information

Over half of parents (58% overall) were asked by their children for careers advice.

Parents in the C2DE social grade were significantly less likely to get asked for advice than their ABC1 counterparts (53% v. 62%).

Scottish parents were asked for careers advice and information the most of all groups.

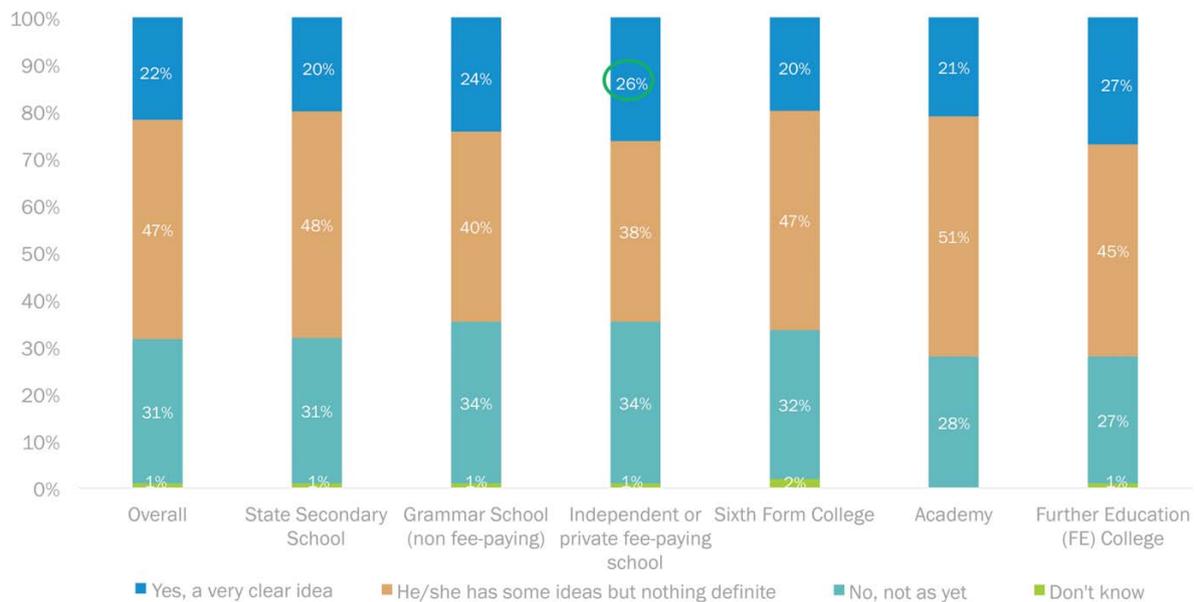


Children's career goals after school, college or university

79% of parents felt that their child did not have a clear idea of what they wanted to do after finishing education ('he/she has some ideas but nothing definite', 'no, not as yet' or 'don't know').

Parents with children at independent schools and FE colleges were more likely to think that their children had 'a very clear idea' compared to all other groups [26% and 27% v. 22% overall].

Do you think that your child has a clear idea about what he/she wants to do when they leave school, college or university?



The influences on children’s key education and career decisions

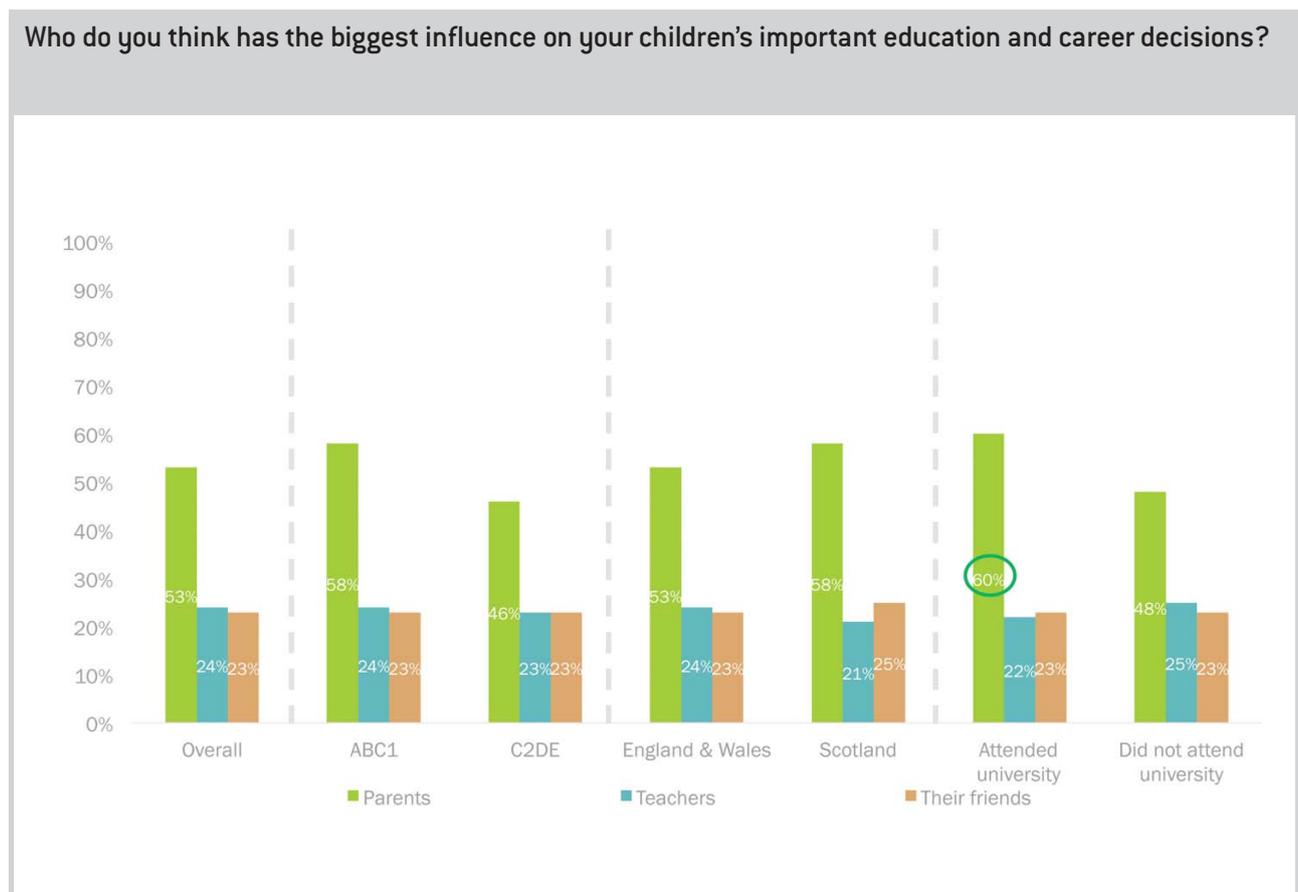
All sample groups felt that they, as parents, had the biggest influence over their child’s important education and career decisions.

Parents who attended university were significantly more likely to feel this way (60% v. 53% overall).

Parents in the C2DE social group and parents who hadn’t been to university were less likely to perceive themselves as key influencers (46% and 48% v. 53% overall).

The complete list of influencers considered by parents are ranked here in descending importance:

- Parents (53%)
- Teachers (24%)
- Friends (23%)
- Careers advisers at school (21%)
- Celebrities/role models (19%)
- The media (12%)
- Employers (12%)

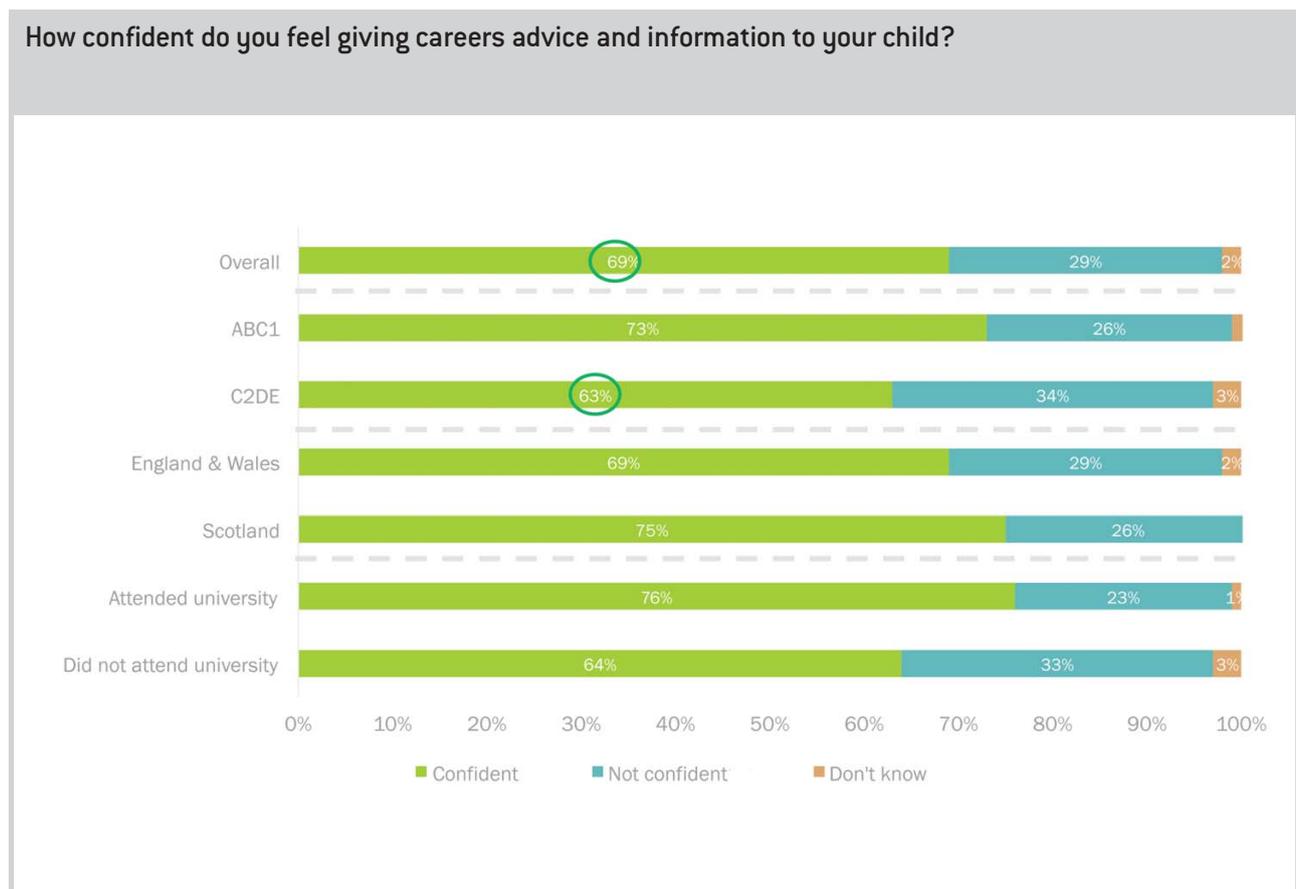


Parents' confidence in giving careers advice and information to their children

The majority of parents (69% overall) felt confident ('very' or 'fairly') giving their child careers advice and information.

Parents in the C2DE social grade were significantly less likely to feel so (63% v. 69%).

The three groups most confident about giving their children advice and information were: those who had attended university (76%), Scottish parents (75%) and parents from ABC1 social groups (73%).



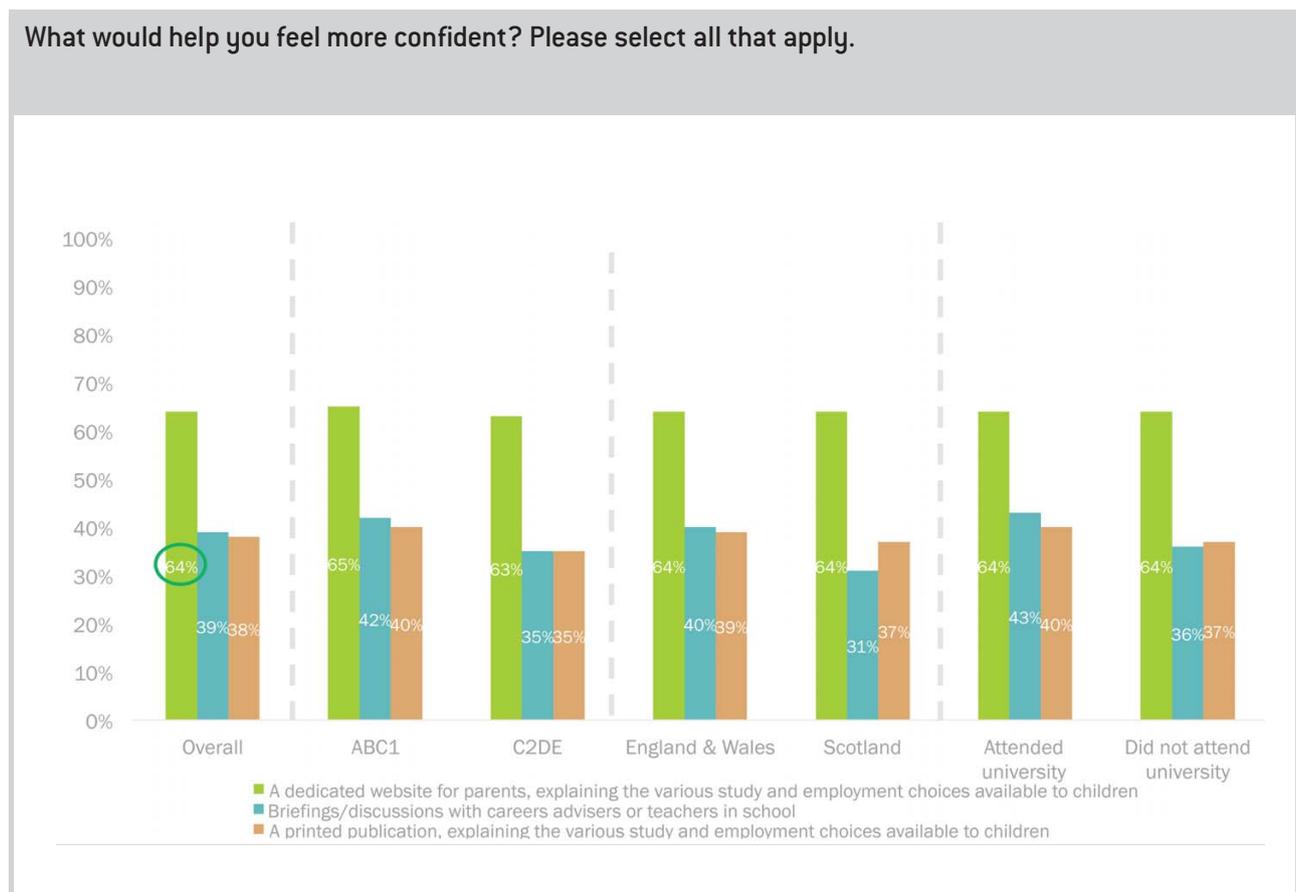
Careers resources to help parents become more confident in giving advice and information

More than half the parents (64% overall) would feel more confident giving their child careers advice if there was 'a dedicated website for parents, explaining the various study and employment choices available to them'.

The three most favoured resources to help parents become more confident were:

- a dedicated website for parents
- briefings/discussions with careers advisers/teachers at school
- a printed careers publication for parents.

14% of parents favoured a national helpline for careers help.

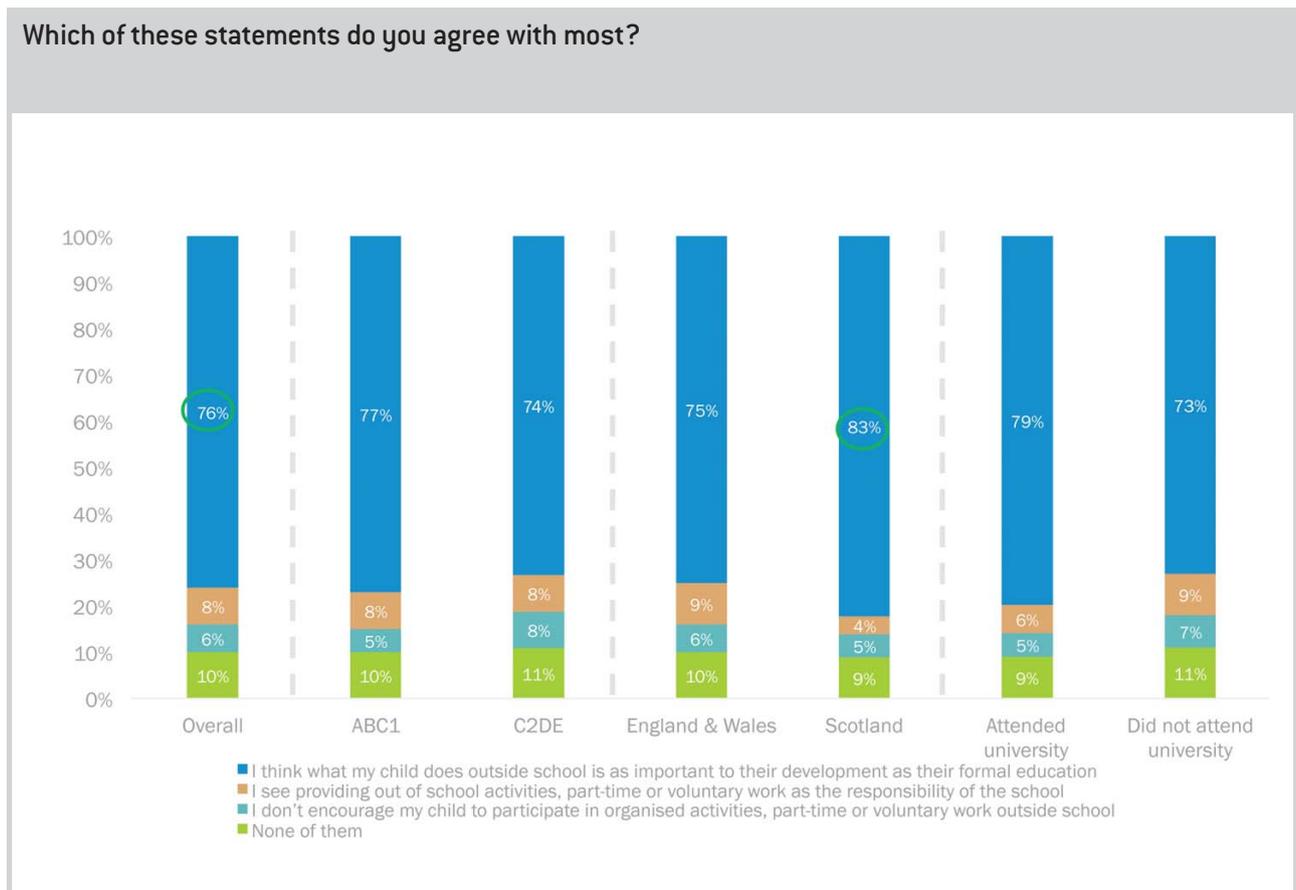


Section 3. Skills for work

Parents' attitudes to out-of-school activities

Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the effects of extra-curricular activities. Over three quarter of parents (76% overall) stated that 'what their child does outside school is as important to their development as formal education'.

Scottish parents were more likely to think this (83% in Scotland v. 76% overall).

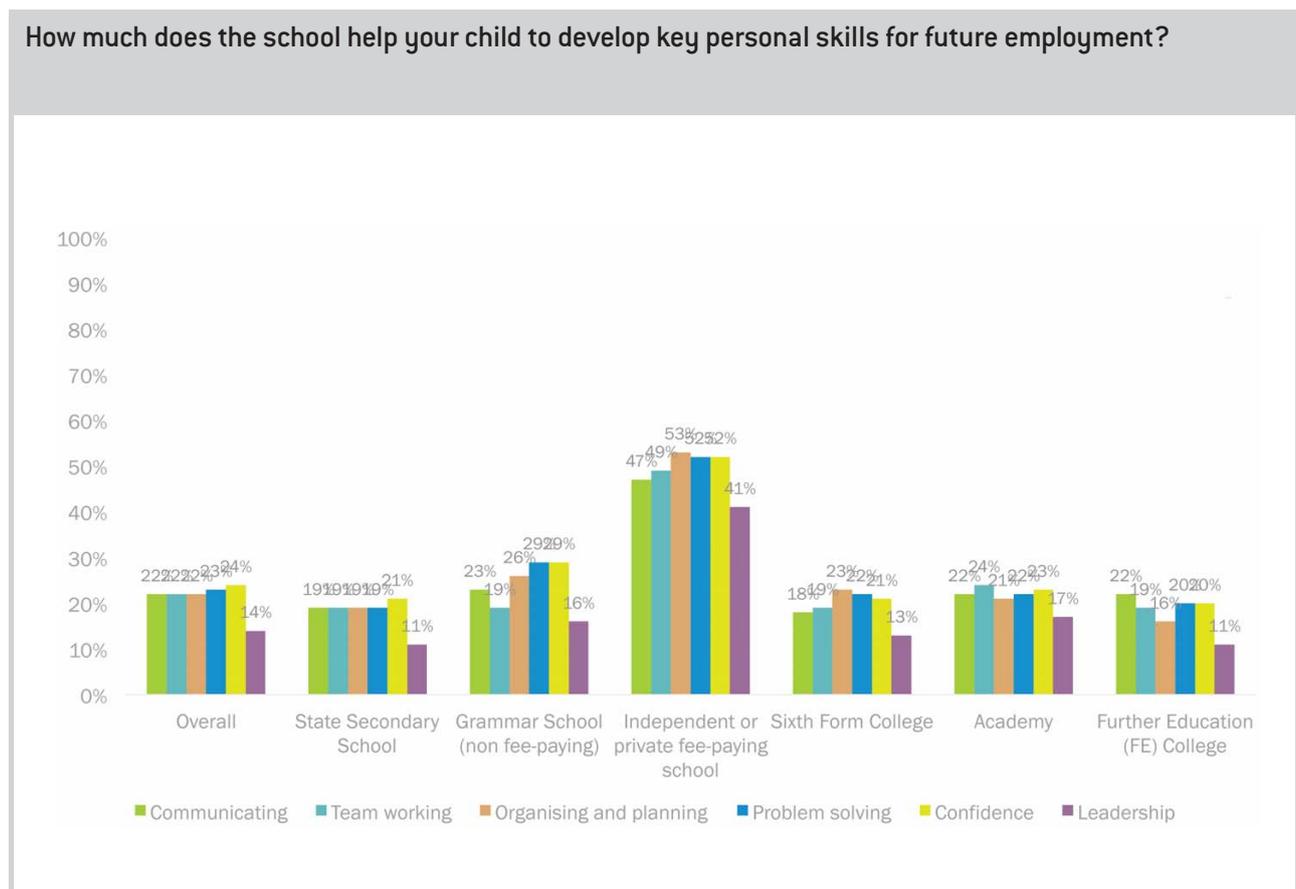


The development of key work skills at school/college

Parents were asked how much school helped their children to acquire key skills for employment. The answers in the chart below are for the response 'a lot'.

Parents with children at independent schools were significantly more likely to feel that their child was developing all the skills mentioned when compared with parents whose children were at other type of schools.

For all groups, leadership was the skill least developed at school.

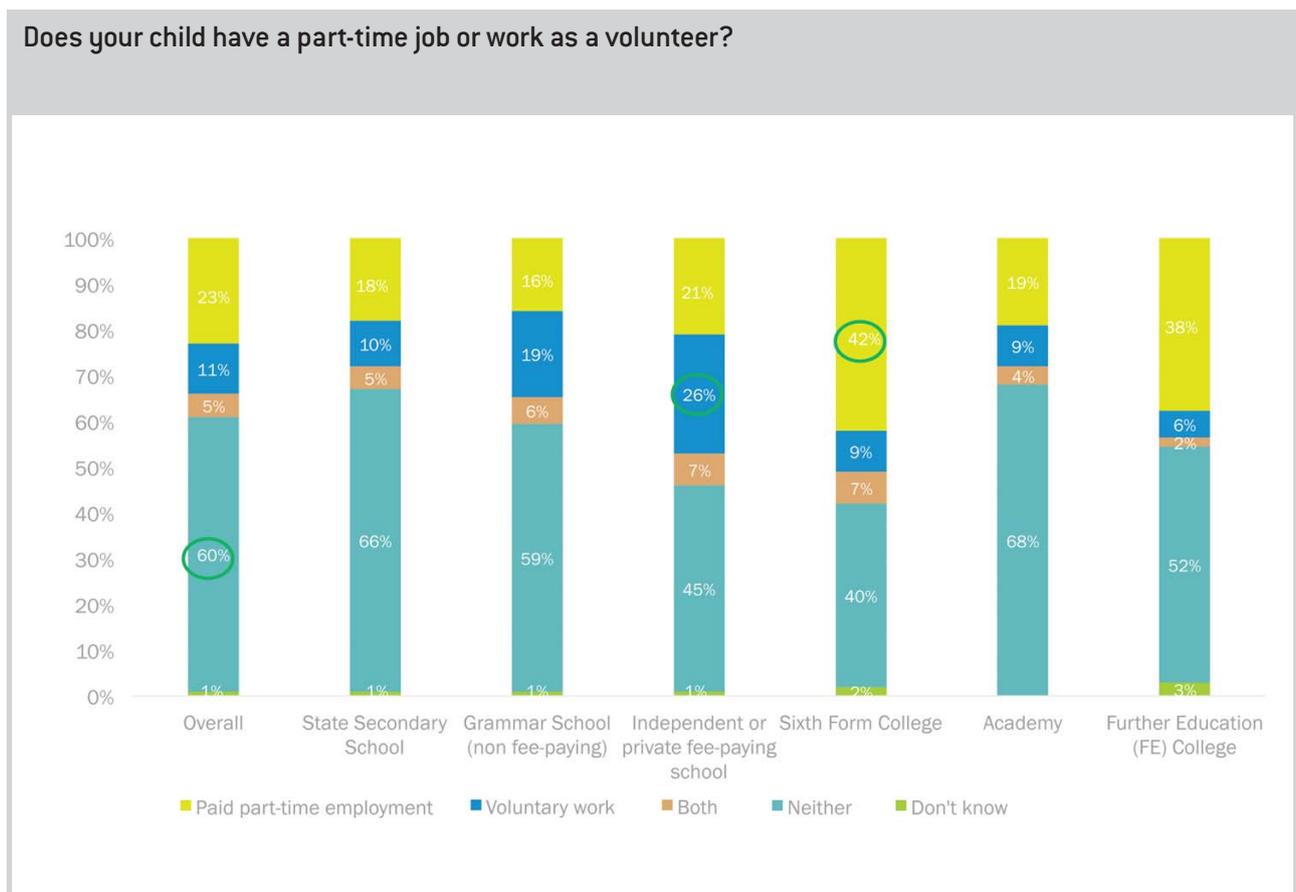


Part-time work and volunteering while at school/college

60% of parents' children did not have a paid part-time job or work as a volunteer.

Children from independent schools were significantly more likely to do voluntary work when compared with the other sample groups (26% v. 11% overall).

Sixth form college children and FE college students were more likely to be in 'paid part-time employment' than other groups.



Section 4. Choices after 18: university and the alternatives

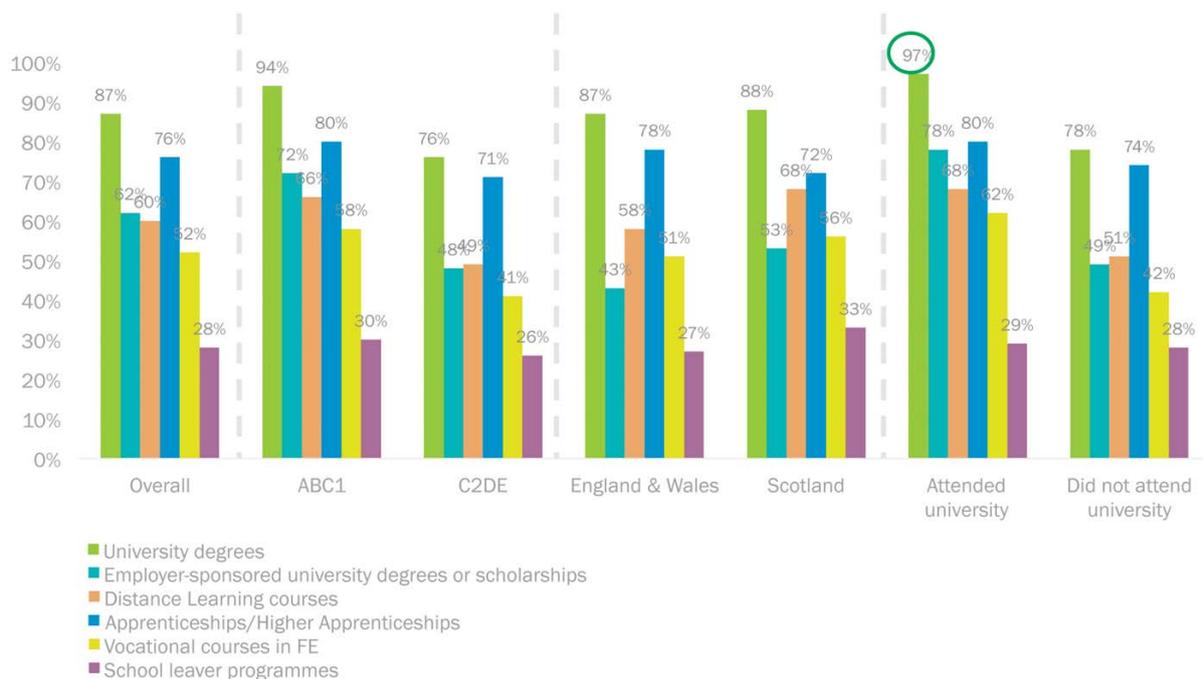
Parents' knowledge of pathways and routes to a job or a career

All the parent sample groups had significantly more knowledge of university degrees (87% overall) than the other career routes available to their children, especially 'school leaver programmes' (overall 28% said they had 'some knowledge').

Parents who went to university were, unsurprisingly, significantly more likely to know about university degrees (97% v. 87%).

Perceived awareness of non-university routes was low, with 1% of parents saying they knew 'a lot' about 'school leaver programmes', 6% 'vocational FE courses' and 9% 'apprenticeships/higher apprenticeships'.

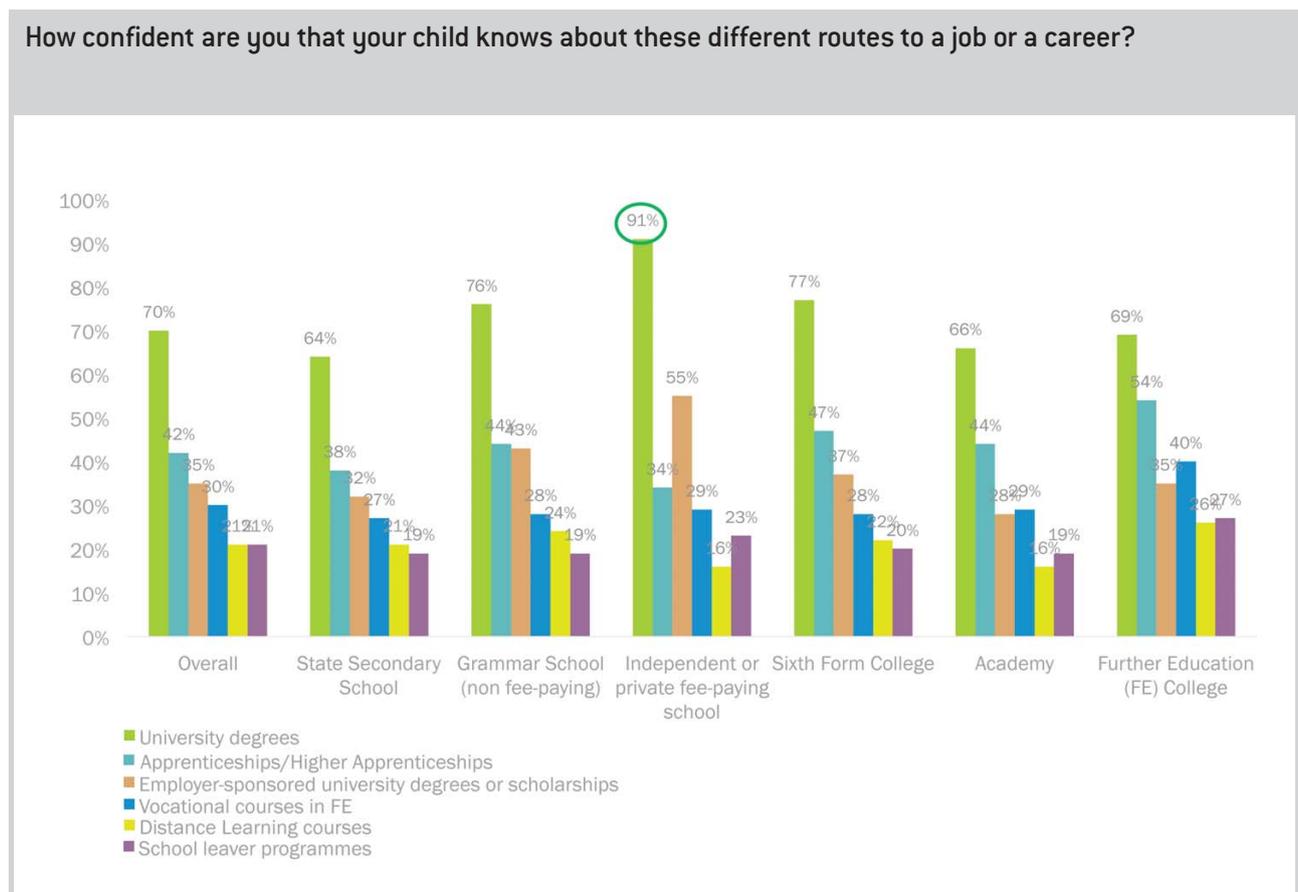
How much do you know about these different routes to a job or a career?



Parents' views on what their children know about the different pathways and routes to a job or a career

All parent groups believed their children to have much more knowledge about the university route compared to the other listed routes.

Parents with children at independent schools were significantly more likely to feel that their child was confident in their knowledge of 'university degrees' (91%) or 'employer-sponsored degrees' (55%), compared to parents in all other sample groups.



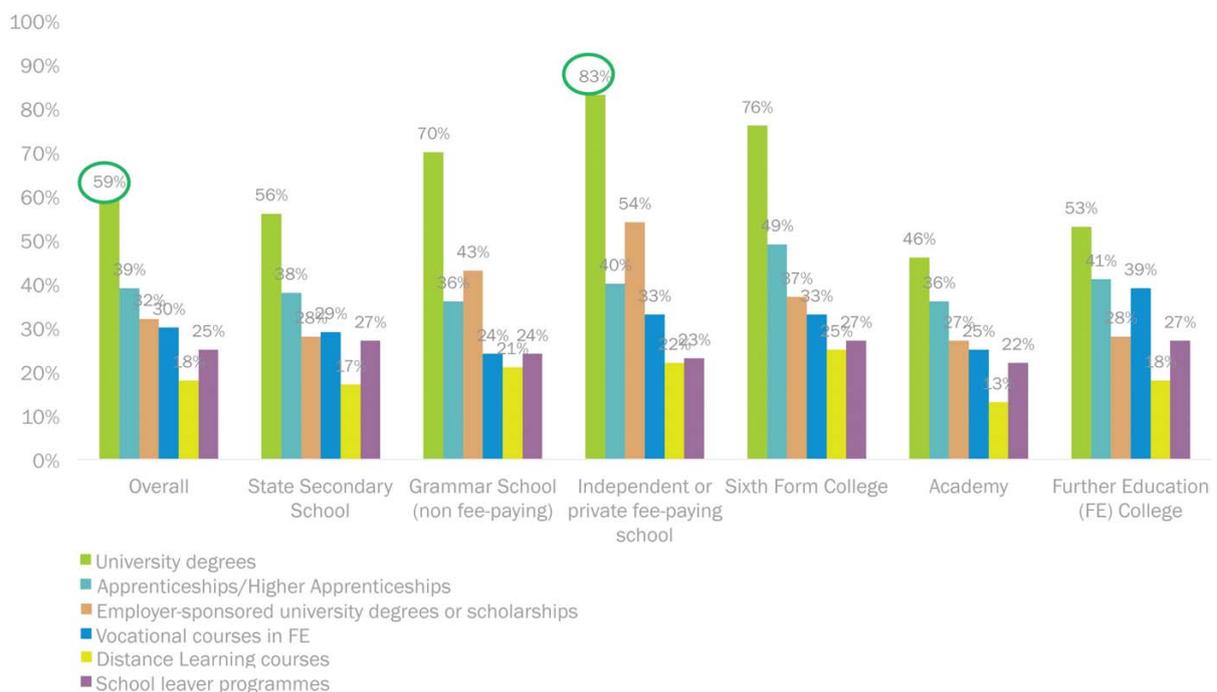
The information, help and advice parents receive from school about the different pathways and routes to a job or a career available to their children

Regardless of the type of school children attend, parents received significantly more information on university degrees (59% overall believed they 'knew something') than the other career options available to their child/children.

Parents whose children went to an independent school were significantly more likely to receive information about university degrees (83% v. 59%).

When asked about the information and help they received about ALL the other routes to a job or a career, fewer than 5% of parents said they received 'a lot'.

How much information, help and advice do you get from the school about these different routes to a job or a career?



Talking to children about the alternatives to university

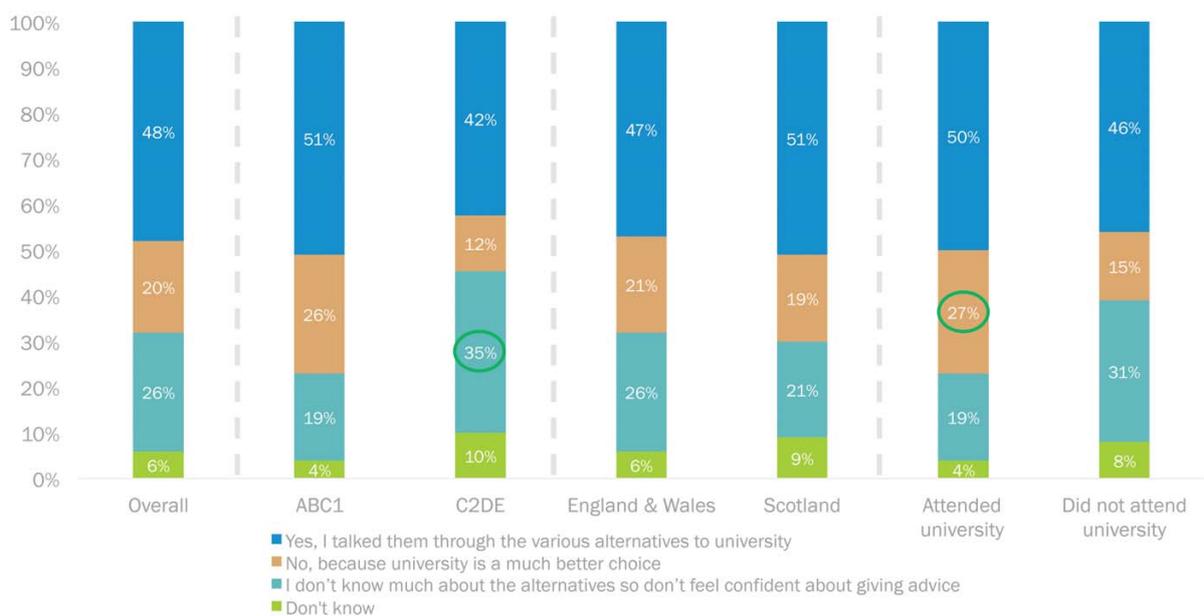
Just under half the parents (48%) said they did talk to their children about alternatives to university.

Around the same number (46%) did not talk to their children about alternatives to university:

- 26% of parents overall didn't know enough about the alternatives to university and therefore didn't feel confident giving advice.
- 20% of parents were convinced that university was the best choice and so didn't talk about alternatives.

C2DE parents were significantly more likely not to know about alternatives and not to feel confident about giving advice (35% v. 26%).

Have you talked to your children about the alternatives to university, eg school leaver programmes, apprenticeships, jobs, vocational training?



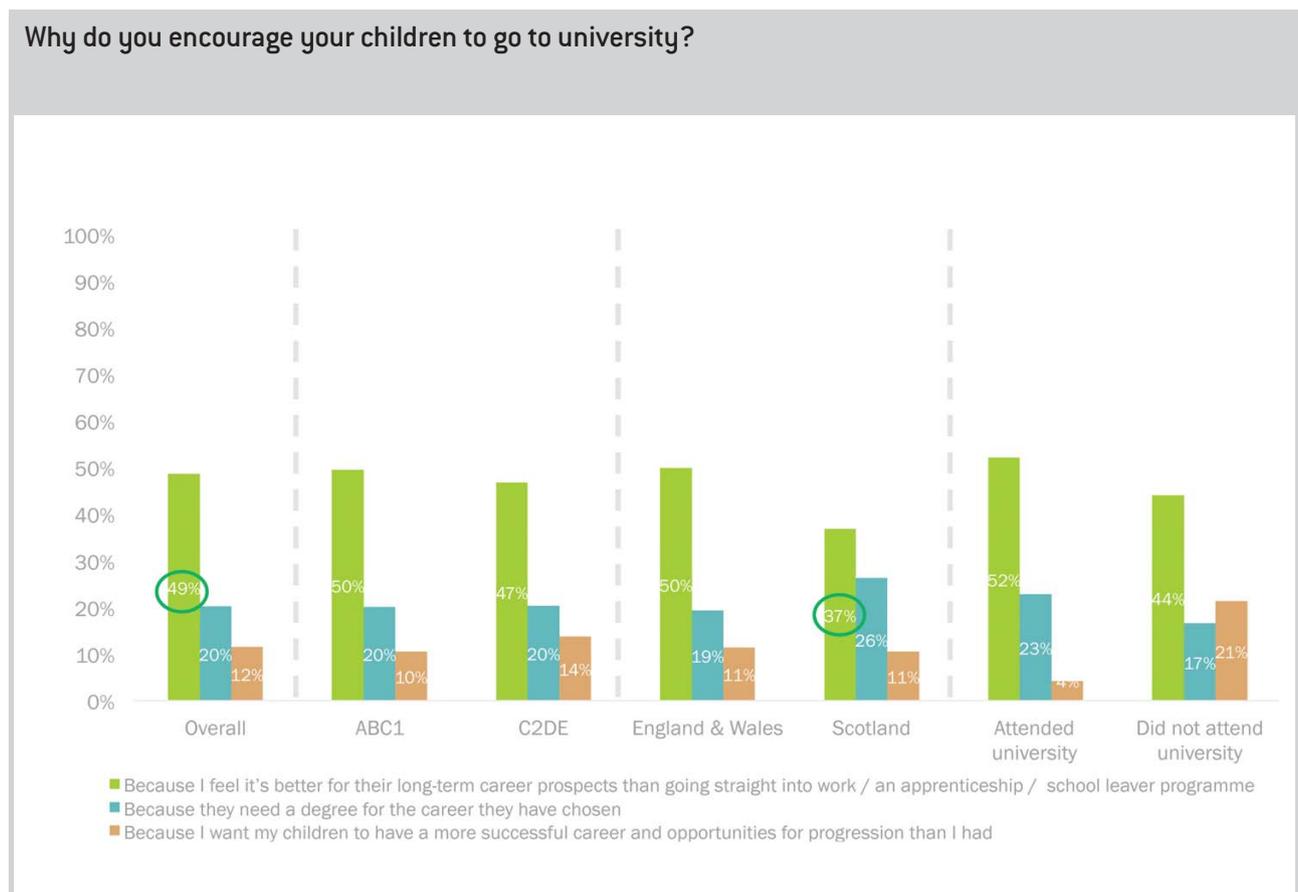
Why parents encourage their children to go to university

Overall, only 5% of parents encouraged their children NOT to go to university.

Parents were more likely to encourage their child to go to university as they thought it was in their children's best interest for their long-term career prospects (49% overall).

The top three reasons parents gave for encouraging their children to go to university rather than do something else in were:

- Because I feel it's better for their long-term career prospects than going straight into work/an apprenticeship/school leaver programme
- Because they need a degree for the career they have chosen
- Because I want my children to have a more successful career and opportunities for progression than I had.

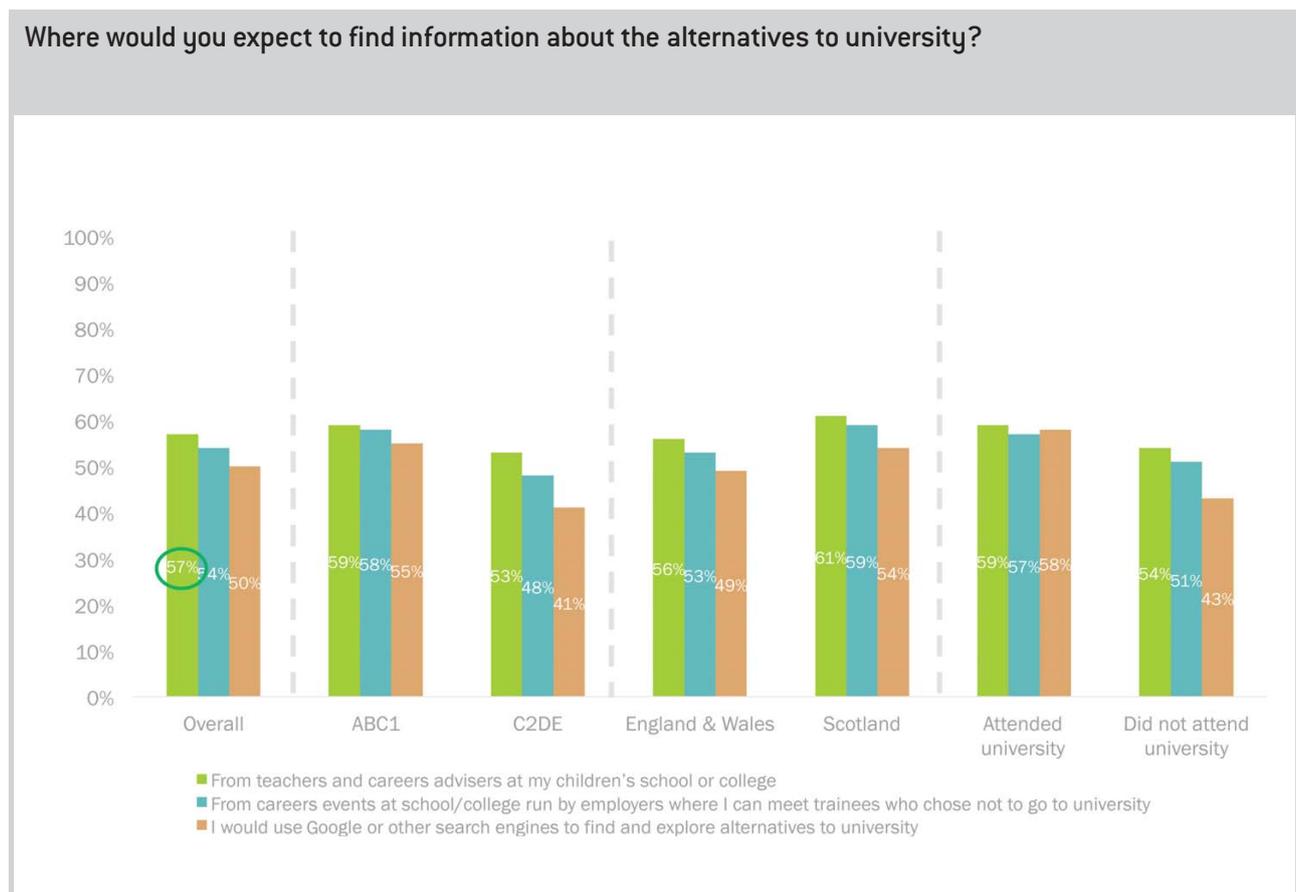


Where parents expected to find information about the alternatives to university

Parents would most expect to find information about the alternatives to university 'from teachers and careers advisers at their children's school/college' (57% overall), followed by 'careers events at school/college run by employers where I can meet trainees who chose not to go to university' (54%) and 'Google or other search engines' (50%).

These were followed by:

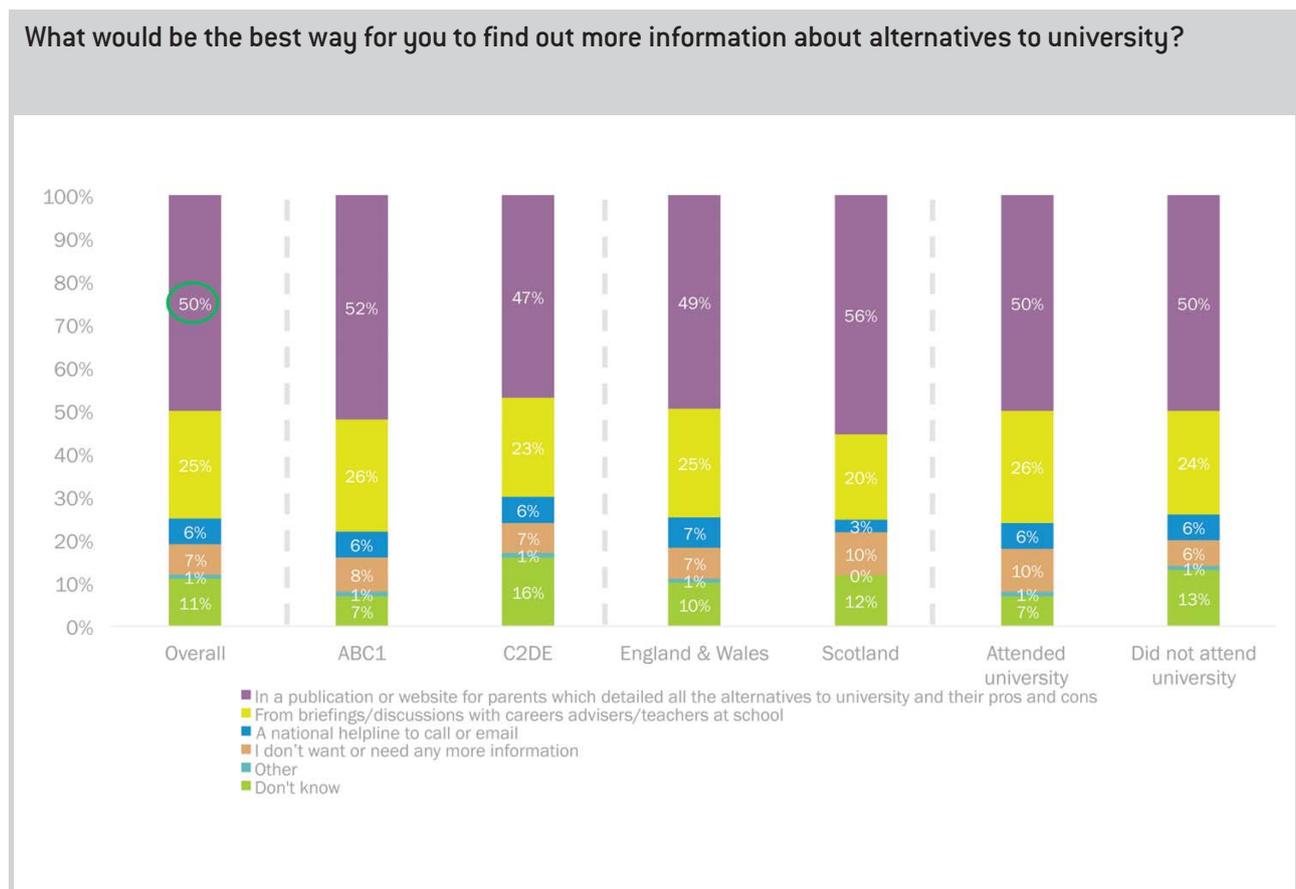
- From internet sites (49%)
- From the websites of employers who offer work to school leavers (43%)
- From talking to family/friends/colleagues in the area of work my child is looking into (35%)



The best places for parents to find information about the alternatives to university

50% of parents overall said that the best way for them to find information about alternatives to university would be through a publication or a website. This was twice as popular an answer as 'from briefings/discussions with careers advisers/teachers at school'.

Only 7% said they didn't want or need any more information about alternatives to university.



Parents' views on how the school promotes different routes post-18

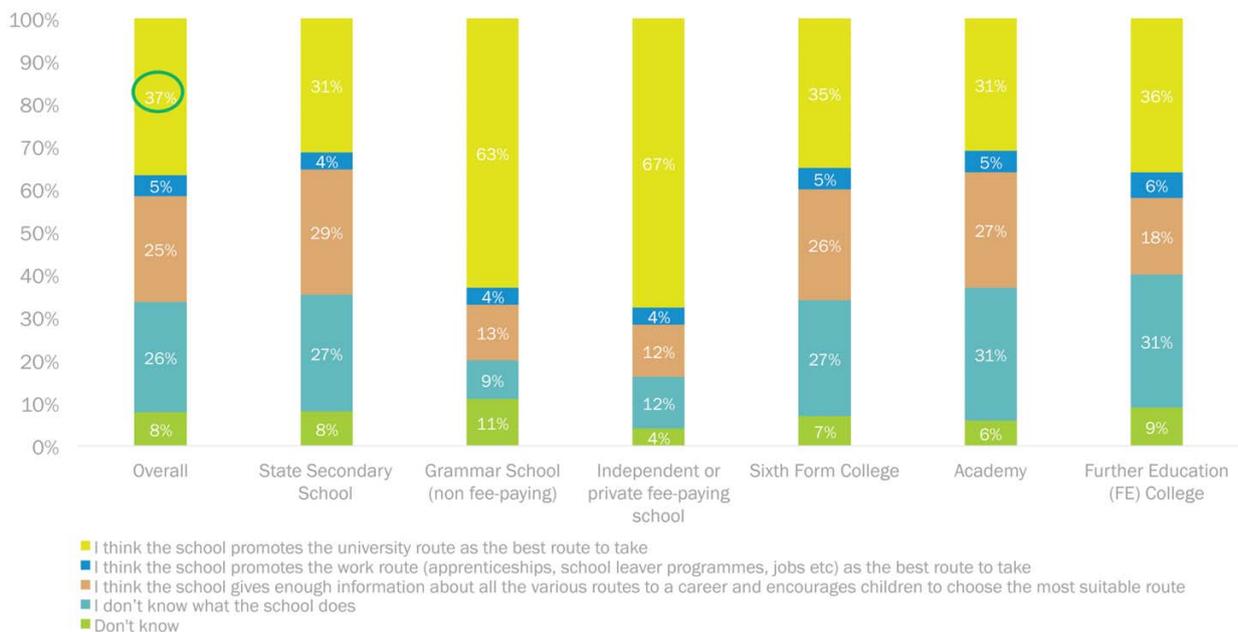
The university route was perceived by parents to be the most promoted route by schools, with 37% of parents feeling that their child's school 'promotes the university route as the best route to take' and 67% of parents with children at independent schools and 63% with children at grammar schools feeling this to be the case.

In contrast, only 5% of parents believed their children's school promoted the work route as the best route to take.

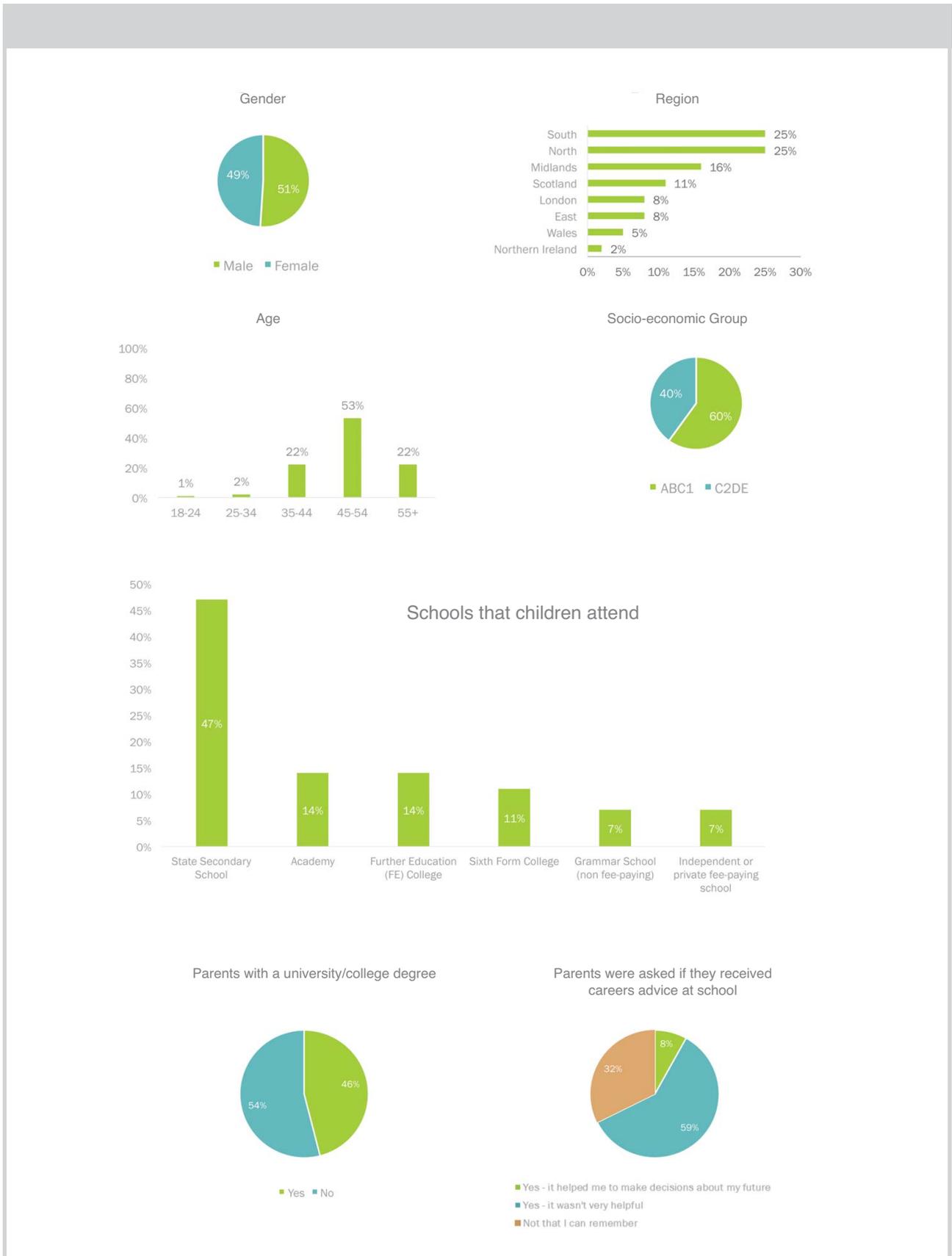
25% of parents thought their children's school didn't promote one route over another.

26% of parents didn't know what routes the school promoted.

Select the statement below that you believe to be the most true.



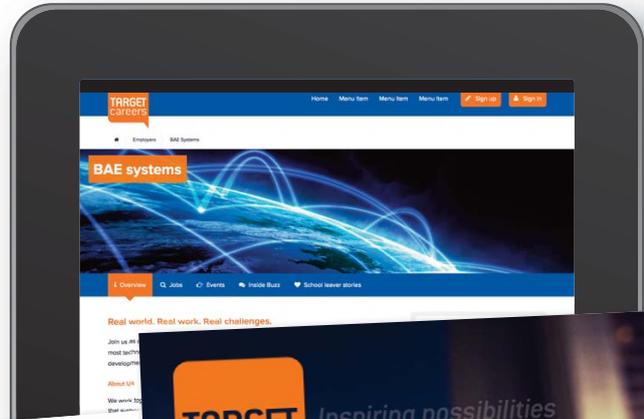
Demography of the sample



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- What career should I choose? What are my options?
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- Where are these employers based in the UK and what careers are they offering?
- Which university and course is best for my career choice?



PLUS

The 100 Most Popular Employers for School Leavers

Including the UK's top 20 universities, as voted by 7,000 school and further education students in years 10 to 13.



TARGETcareers Construction, Engineering & Property

The only print and digital careers product focused on construction and engineering careers students aged 14–19.



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A competition for school or sixth form students in years 12 and 13 to take part in fun online exercises that look at the kind of skills and attributes associated with successful people, to win cash prizes and to meet potential employers.



Research carried out on behalf of GTI Media by YouGov

