

UCAS

# FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

Reimagining  
apprenticeships through  
the lens of diversity and  
inclusion.

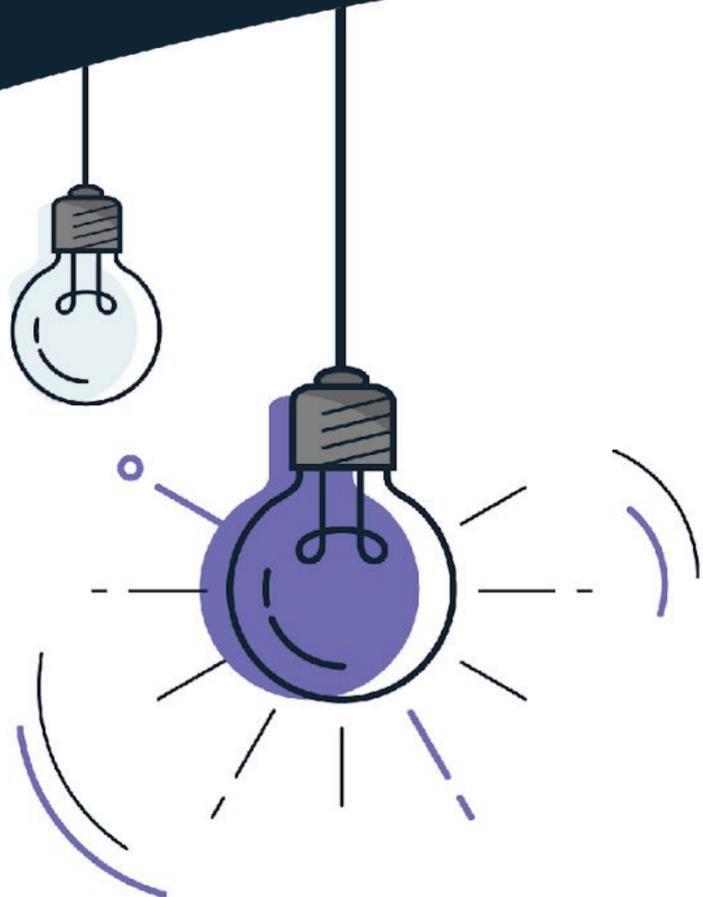
November 2025



Public

# WHAT ONE FACTOR MOST LIMITS DIVERSITY IN APPRENTICESHIPS TODAY?

**UCAS is known worldwide as the UK's shared admissions service for everyone looking to start higher education.**



But we do a lot more than just helping students to go to university.

As an independent charity, we are committed to providing **information, advice and guidance** to young people exploring their future options, whether through **higher education, apprenticeships or employment**.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

**We know students better than anyone.**

# EVERY YEAR OVER 1 MILLION STUDENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE REGISTER WITH UCAS TO EXPLORE THEIR OPTIONS



Over 21M active users on UCAS.com annually



155k attendees at 40 Discovery Events across the country



Around 40% of registered users are interested in apprenticeships

# WE ARE TRUSTED PARTNERS WITH THE VAST MAJORITY OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS, 6TH FORMS, UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES ACROSS THE UK



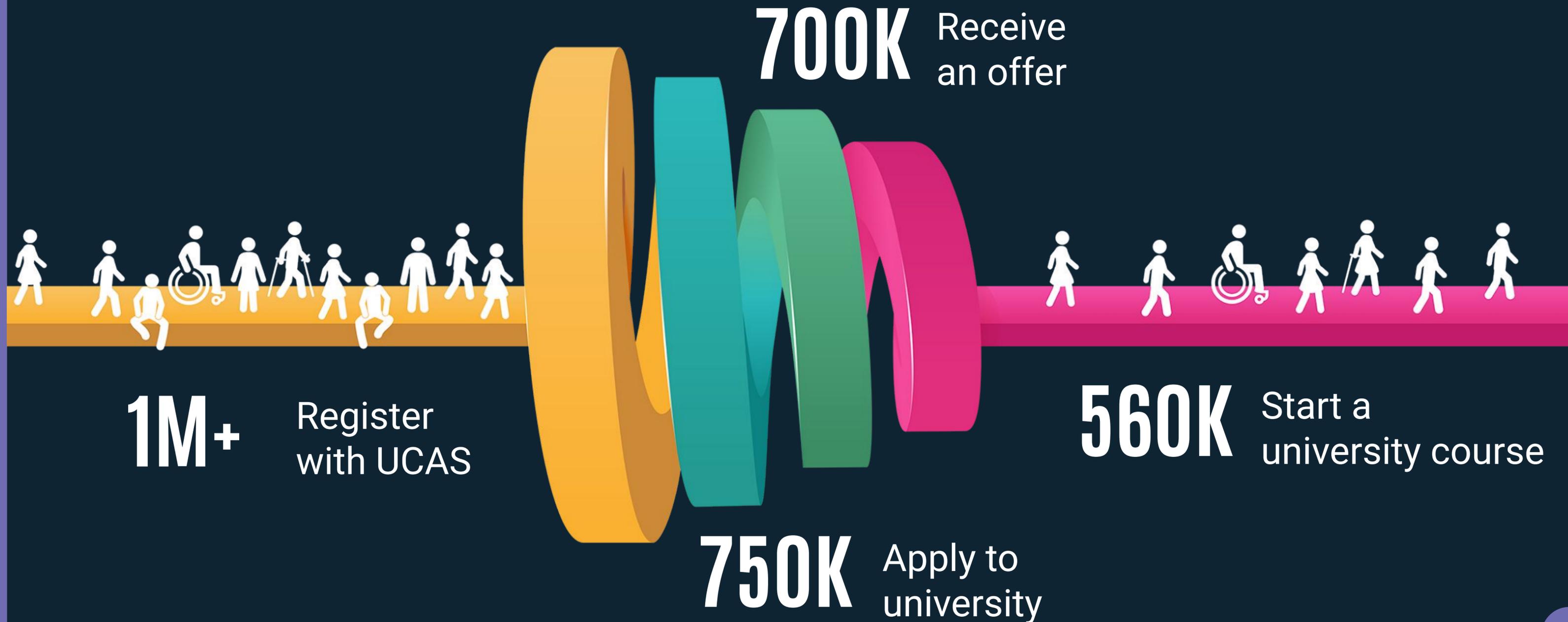
Over 380  
universities  
and colleges



Over 4,500  
schools and  
colleges

# SO, WHAT DOES THE UNDERGRADUATE DATA TELL US?

# DIFFERENT INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE MATTERS AT DIFFERENT POINTS OF THEIR JOURNEY



# CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH 2025:

*Students looking to start university in Sept 2026 and registered on UCAS Hub. Based on 1,692 responses, 30% men, 67% women*

28%

would be the first generation in their family to enter higher education

3%

have unpaid caring responsibilities (not including parenting)

18%

have a physical and/or mental health condition, long-term illness or learning difference

43%

had none of UCAS' standard widening participation characteristics

17%

currently receiving free school meals, or received free school meals between the ages of 11 to 18

# KEY INSIGHTS:

72%

Were committed to university, although over a quarter weren't and primarily looked at apprenticeships



Respondents associated a **university's 'industry links'** primarily with graduate employment opportunities or work placements

95%

Felt **future employability was important** in course choice and 87% thought it important in university choice



**Industry input 'baked in'** to the course content and practical elements were the **most appealing employability features** of a future university course.

91%

Felt **work placement opportunities** were most likely to be considered **very or quite important** when researching universities



When considering enhancing their own appeal to employers, respondents were most likely to consider **work experience opportunities important**.

# TOP SECTORS OF INTEREST:

Question:

## Top Sectors of Interest were Health, Science, Law, Education and Business

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Health and Social Care              | 31% |
| Science and Pharmaceuticals         | 24% |
| Law                                 | 19% |
| Teacher, Education and Childcare    | 18% |
| Business, Consulting and Management | 18% |
| Accountancy, Banking and Finance    | 17% |
| Creative Arts and Design            | 16% |
| Engineering and Manufacturing       | 16% |
| Media and Internet, Journalism      | 14% |
| Digital                             | 11% |
| Charity and Voluntary Work          | 11% |

Those **less clear of their future path** were open to/ considering on average twice as many sectors as those who had a **clear career plan** or **knew the field they wanted to work in**.

40% of those who **knew what they wanted to be and had a clear career plan** were considering **Health or Social Care**.

**Science and Pharma (24%)** and **Law (19%)** were the next most popular options for these students.

# PROJECT NEXT GENERATION

# INSIGHT INTO THE NEXT GENERATION

- UCAS' Project Next Generation research is an in-depth study of a 1,000 13-17-year-olds exploring their education and career choices.
- Their motivations and barriers for different pathways into early careers.
- And if they're the same or different for some historically under-served groups.



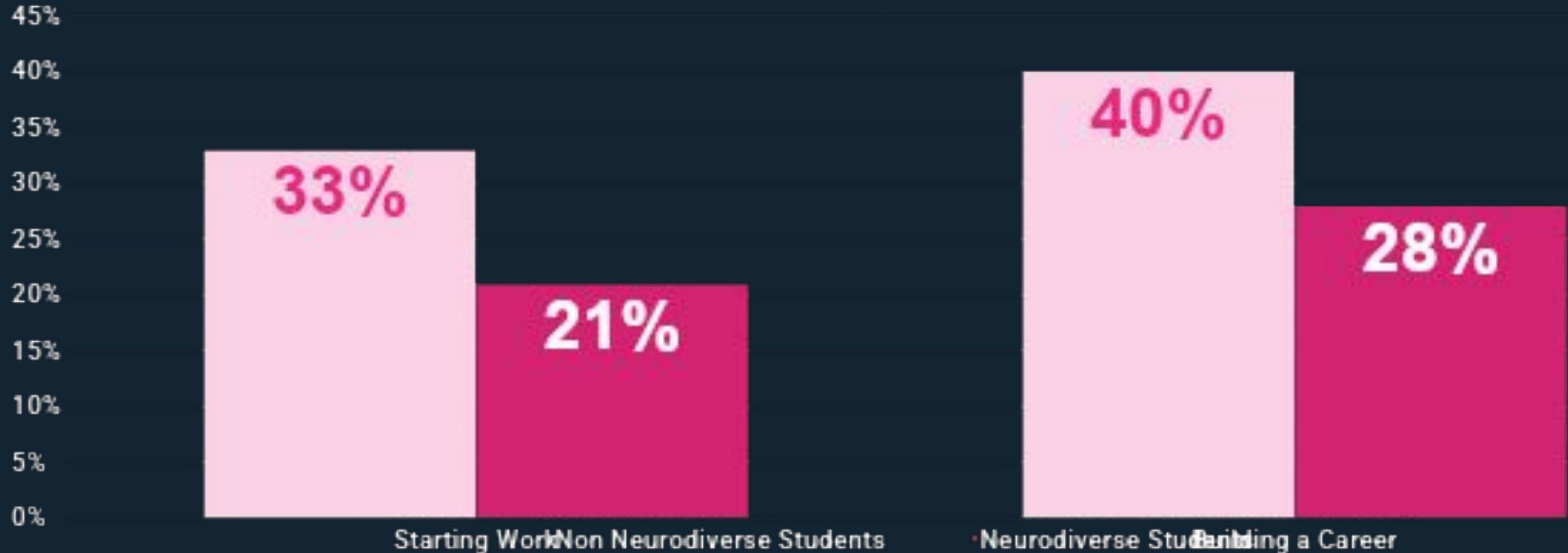
# NEURODIVERSITY



Around 12-15% of the population is diagnosed with a neurodiverse condition. And still more are undiagnosed.

Neurodiverse people often find it harder to thrive in secondary school, for many complex reasons, and this can limit their horizons, expectations and hope for future careers.

Student Excitement for Future Career and Work



# NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS ARE...



18% less likely to feel optimistic about their future.



12% less clear on what they wanted to do in the future.



8% less likely to consider university.



10% more likely to be worried about loneliness, mental health and physical health in their future.

# THEREFORE, PROVIDERS & EMPLOYERS SHOULD...



Highlight networks such as mentorship programs for apprentices.



Engage influencers with targeted information on support available.



Highlight progression and development opportunities.



Detail adjustments and support available during recruitment and the apprenticeship.

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Social mobility is still a problem in the UK.

Students from more disadvantaged SEGs (C2DE) have less optimistic ambitions and expectations.

And often receive less support from other influencers, including teachers and parents.

Perceived Disadvantages of an Apprenticeship for Students from a Lower Socio-Economic Background



# STUDENTS FROM A LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND ARE...



19% less likely  
to consider  
going to  
university.



More  
concerned  
about the  
immediate  
costs of an  
apprenticeship  
than the long  
term.



The top three advantages of an  
apprenticeship, perceived by students  
from a lower socio-economic  
background:

1. earning a wage
2. learning new skills
3. practical learning experiences

# THEREFORE, PROVIDERS & EMPLOYERS SHOULD...



Provide clear information on apprenticeship wages, financial assistance, and costs.



Ensure useful apprenticeship resources on how to make high quality applications.



Early engagement with schools to inspire future decision-making processes and raise aspirations.

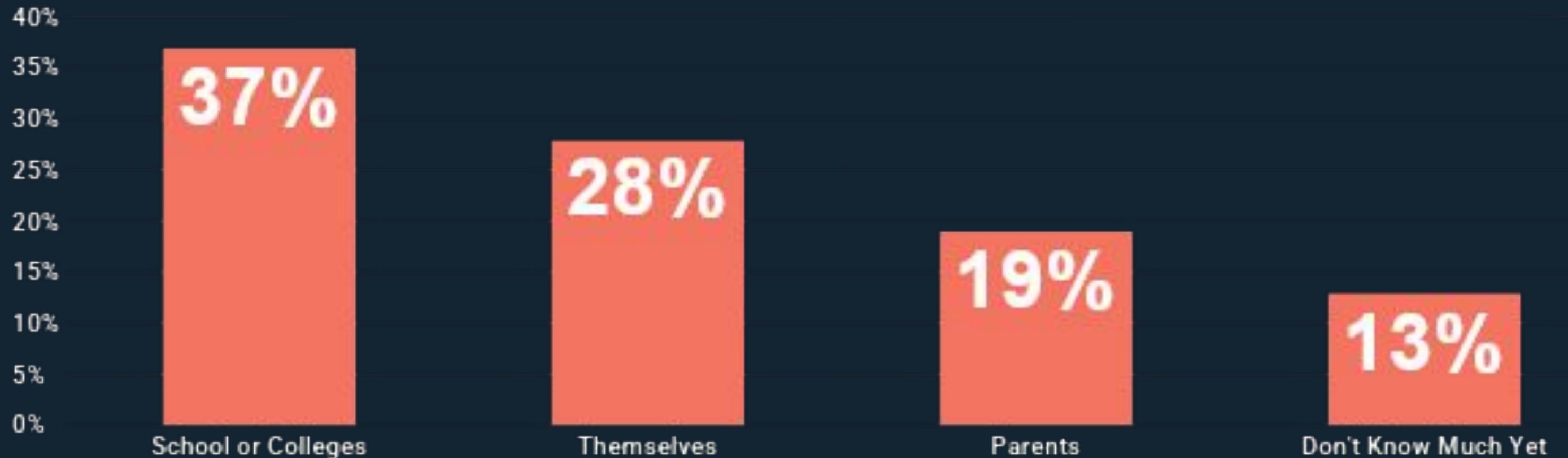


Information for factors such as travel, support networks, accommodation and workplace expectations.

# WOMEN IN STEM

The research reveals key insights into the factors shaping young women's decisions around STEM careers, highlighting the influence of education, family support, and misconceptions about alternative pathways.

Sources of post 18 choices information for women interested in STEM



# WOMEN INTERESTED IN STEM ARE...



more likely to be concerned about low wages during and after an apprenticeship.



10% less likely to find discussing career options with their parents or carers extremely useful.

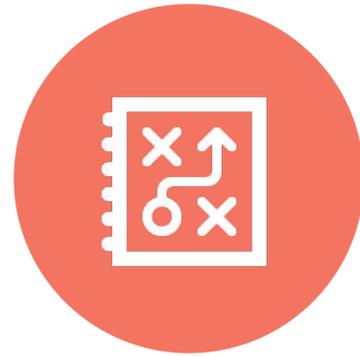


17% less likely to consider apprenticeship as a pathway.

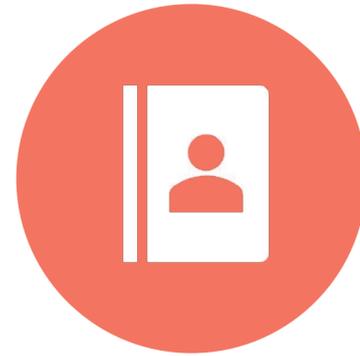


40% of women interested in STEM careers do not have family members in the sector.

# THEREFORE, PROVIDERS & EMPLOYERS SHOULD...



Challenge misconceptions for apprenticeships like academic rigor, career progression and salary potential.



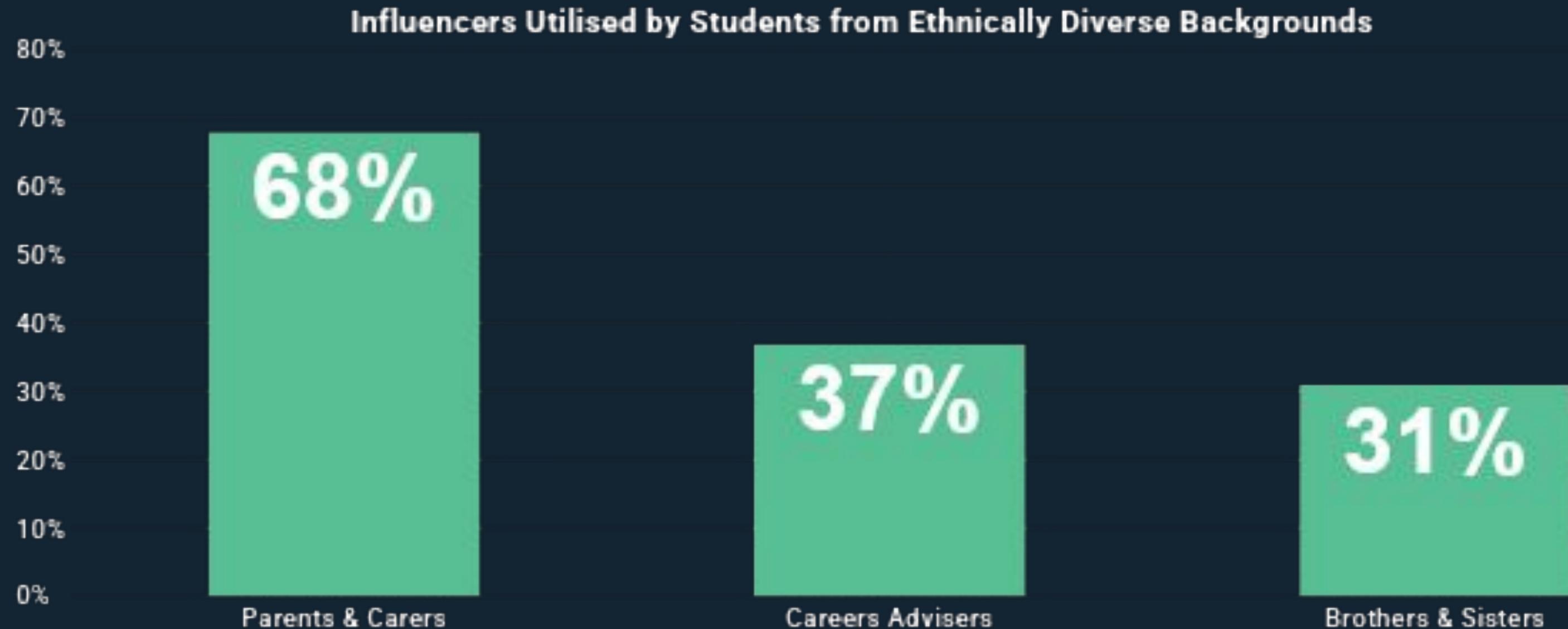
Provide parents/carers with targeted information and myth-busting resources on apprenticeships.



Showcase STEM careers with female role models to help shift perceptions.

# ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Students from ethnically diverse backgrounds are more likely to seek advice from a wider pool of influencers.



# STUDENTS FROM ETHNICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS ARE...



12% more likely to consider university than those from white ethnicities (77% and 65%).



18% more likely to feel pressure from parents to make good career and education choices.

# THEREFORE, PROVIDERS & EMPLOYERS SHOULD...



Convey apprenticeship realities like academic study, role responsibilities, career progression and salary potential.



Engage parents/carers with targeted information and myth-busting resources on apprenticeships.



Showcase diverse role models to help build aspirations from a range of careers.

**IF YOU COULD REDESIGN YOUR  
APPRENTICESHIP PROVISION  
FROM SCRATCH, WHAT WOULD THE  
ONE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE YOU  
WOULD MAKE?**

# IN CONVERSATION WITH ...



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**FOLLOW US** 

