Department for Education

Post-16 Pathways: Analysis of outcomes at age 19 to 20

Research report

September 2025

Andy Ross, Kathryn Duckworth and Carrie Harding: Verian

Government Social Research

Contents

List of figures

List of tables

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Longitudinal Studies Team at the Department for Education; Michael Dale, Megan Arnot, Rushda Khandker and David Bayliss for their input and advice throughout the research undertaken as part of this project, as well as Damon Morris and Steven McIntosh for invaluable advice relating to methods used in this analysis.

We are grateful to all the young people and parents who have generously given their time to take part in the surveys.

Glossary and Acronyms

Table 1: Glossary and Acronyms

Term	Acronym	Definition
Non-HE cohort / Non-immediate HE cohort		The cohort of young people in this report who do not go straight into university after completing Year 13 at school. Individuals in this group might enter university later, but do not follow the 'traditional', standard, linear academic route into Higher Education: GCSEs at the end of KS4 in the school system, A-levels for two years at a school sixth-form or other FE college and then immediate participation in a degree course at an HE institution.
Eligible for free school meals	FSM	Children and young people in the UK are usually eligible for free school meals if their parents or carers are on a low income or in receipt of certain benefits. Our measure of FSM was measured in Spring 2014 and indicates whether, up to that point (age 13/14), the young person had been eligible for free school meals within the last six years.
Further Education	FE	The term FE refers to post-compulsory or pre-university education in the UK and is also used to refer to FE colleges with the power to award certificates at Level 3 or below for people over the age of 16.
Full-time Education	FTED	The abbreviation used in the current report to refer to full-time education.
Higher Education	HE	HE is a non-compulsory level of education that refers to a set of institutions with degree awarding powers, namely at Level 4 and above. Level 4 includes the first year of a Higher Level NVQ, a Foundation Degree, an Undergraduate Degree or a Level 4 BTEC qualification.
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index	IDACI	The IDACI measures socioeconomic circumstances at the local area level.
Individualised Learner Record	ILR	The Individualised Learner Record is the primary data collection capturing further education and work-based learning in England.
Key Stage 2	KS2	Key Stage 2 is the term for the four years of schooling in maintained schools in England and Wales normally known as Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6, when the pupils are aged between 7 and 11 years.

Term	Acronym	Definition
Key Stage 4	KS4	Key Stage 4 is the term for the two years of school education which incorporate GCSEs, and other examinations, in maintained schools in England normally known as Year 10 and Year 11, when pupils are aged between 14 and 16 by August 31.
Longitudinal Study of Young People in England 2	LSYPE2	The LSYPE2 is a large-scale panel study which follows young people who were aged 13/14 in 2013 on an annual basis.
Not in Education, Employment or Training	NEET	Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training
National Pupil Database	NPD	The National Pupil Database is a database controlled by the Department for Education in England, based on multiple data collections from individuals aged 2-21 in state funded education. Data are matched using pupil names, dates of birth and other personal and school characteristics. Personal details are linked to pupils' attainment and exam results over a lifetime school attendance.
Raising of the Participation Age	RPA	The Education and Skills Act 2008 legislated to increase the age of compulsory participation in education or training to age 18 by 2015 for those born after 1 September 2017, and with an interim leaving age of 17 from 2013.
Young Person	YP	Abbreviation used to refer to young people.

Executive Summary

This report is the second of two reports examining the post-16 pathways of young people in England. The primary aim of our first study was to use the unique, monthly activity data of LSYPE2 to capture and describe the typical pathways that young people followed between age 16/17 and 19/20, with a particular focus on the various routes and outcomes that are not the standard 'A levels to university' pathway. The full report can be found here: electronic link.

The immediate post-16 years represent a very significant phase in young people's lives, one that largely determines their future employment and financial trajectories. This period also a has a bearing on their wellbeing and mental health at the individual level, as well as their long term contribution to the economy at the societal level.

The current Government is further prioritising post-16 pathways in developing a skills system that is fit for the future and aligned to a forthcoming Industrial Strategy. This is seen as essential to delivering all five of the Government's missions: growing the economy, securing an NHS fit for the future, creating safer streets, breaking down barriers to opportunity, and making Britain a clean energy superpower.

The post-16 pathways examined within this report run from September 2015 through to August 2019 and therefore predates both the Covid pandemic and the current administration. Predating the former was critical to ensuring the pathways described within reflect more 'normal' times. However, it is plausible that more recent policy changes may have already altered some of the trends examined here.

To aid with the reading of this report, a summary of the pathways identified in report 1 are presented in the box below.

Summary of Report 1: Post-16 Pathways: Analysis of routes and groups

At age 19/20, one third (34%) of the LSYPE2 cohort had spent two years in sustained Higher Education (HE) studying for a first degree following a conventional A levels post-16 route (September 2015 – October 2019). The remaining two thirds took various different pathways over the same period. Using detailed analysis of the month-to-month activities of young people, nine distinct typical pathways were identified. These are outlined below, from largest to smallest, but are described in greater detail in Pathways Report I (Duckworth et al., 2025):

1. **Full-time Education (FTED) into Employment**
   - 18% of young people (n = 915)
   - Transitions marked, predominantly, by two years of full-time, non-HE education followed by consistent employment.
   - Some individual pathways in this cluster include periods of NEET, Other transitions, part-time work / part-time college, but all end the four-year period in sustained employment.

2. **Delayed University Entrants**
   - 12% of young people (n = 723)
   - Young people who started a first degree at age 19, one year later than the Direct to University group.
   - Within this pathway, three clear sub-groups were evident:
     - "Probable Retakers": three years FTED (non-HE), then university.
     - "Work First": two years FTED (non-HE), one year of employment, followed by university.
     - "Gap Year": two years FTED (non-HE), one year of 'other' activities[1], then university.

3. **Apprenticeships & Training**
   - 12% of young people (n = 663)
   - Individuals who spent a minimum of six continuous months enrolled on an apprenticeship or training programme/course during the four-year window, in combination with FTED (non-HE) and/or employment.

4. **Extended FTED (non-Degree)**
   - 10% of young people (n = 633)
   - Young people who spent the majority of their time in full-time non-university / Further Education (FE), either all four years or three years consecutive FTED (non-HE), followed by a year of work or 'other' activities.

5. **FTED into Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)**
   - 5% of young people (n = 248)
   - Transitions are marked by one, two, or three years in FTED: non-HE, followed by consistent and prolonged periods of being NEET and looking for work, or a course, making up the remainder of the four-year window.

6. **University Non-Completers**
    - 4% of young people (n = 262)
    - Young people who started a first degree at age 18 but withdrew within the first eight months
    - Young people who started a first degree at age 19 but withdrew within the first six months.
    - Young people who started a first degree at age 18, withdrew in the first eight months, but then returned to university the following year.

7. **At Home**
    - 2% of young people (n = 90)
    - Young people who moved from FTED: non-HE into consistent and prolonged episodes of reporting being at home with caring responsibilities, or were ill or disabled, some via periods of being NEET and looking for work.

8. **Other NEET**
    - 1% of young people (n = 47)
    - Transitions marked by two years FTED, followed by two consistent years occupying 'other' activity states, such as waiting for results, travelling, or taking a break from work or study.
    - These young people differ from those categorised as NEET in that they report not being in education, employment or training, but do not indicate actively seeking work or educational opportunities.

9. **Returners**
    - 1% of young people (n = 68)
    - Similar to Group 4 (Extended FTED (non-Degree) group), Returners' transitions are marked by lengthy periods in full-time FE, followed by a period of six months or more typically in employment or training activities, before returning to full-time non-HE education.

Note that the names given to each pathway are meant to capture and make it easier to refer to the overarching transition across the four-year, post-16 period. They are not static, definitive or deterministic, or value judgement based but rather broadly descriptive of the different post-16 pathways observed.

In addition to identifying the nine pathway clusters described above, report one also examined the characteristics of young people on these pathways, and the factors which were most predictive of being on them.

What is the relationship between young people's post-16 pathways and outcomes measured at age 19/20?

Our second report picks up where the first report ends, exploring similarities and differences in young people's outcomes at age 19/20 across the pathway clusters. We looked at four broad areas: young people's **progression**, in terms of their economic activity, attainment level, and attainment type; their **material circumstances**, including their living arrangements, personal debt, parental financial support, and state benefits; their **wellbeing and mental health**, which includes the ONS4[1] wellbeing measures, mental health, health behaviours; and **employment[2]**, covering young people's employment contract, hours, pay, occupational position, training, and their own subjective evaluations of work.

To get a better understanding of the link between the pathways young people were on and their outcomes, estimates were also adjusted for gender, free school meal eligibility (FSM), parental education, and the young person's Key Stage 4 attainment. Statistical differences are estimated in relation to the largest pathway group, those on fulltime non-HE education into employment pathways. Young people on an immediate A-Level to university pathway, the 'Direct to University' group, were also included for comparative purposes.

Sustained, work focused tracks

Two of the largest pathway clusters consist of young people on what appears to be sustained, fairly smooth, work focused tracks: **Young people on FTED into Employment** (FE), and **Apprenticeship & Training** (AT) pathways. At age 19/20, 96% of young people on FTED into Employment pathways were in paid work, along with 56% of those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways, with most of the remainder (39%) on an apprenticeship or in training. 51% of young people on Apprenticeship & Training pathways had achieved L3 attainment[3], and most of the remainder had achieved L2 (34%). Equivalent figures for those on FTED into Employment pathways were: L3, 42% and L2, 37%. Young people on Apprenticeship & Training pathways were also more likely to have L2 in both maths and English (FE: 64%; AT: 78%), and was a pathway on which young people were far more likely to gain this qualification if they had not already done so at Key Stage 4 (KS4).

The material circumstances of young people on both pathways illustrate a greater level of independence. Slightly more of them had left the parental home (FE: 13%; AT: 9%) and

[1] Office for National Statistics (ONS) wellbeing scales (0-10) include: 1) Life satisfaction, 2) the extent to which young people felt the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, 3) self-rated happiness, and 4) self-rated anxiety.
[2] Due to small sample sizes, we were only able to examine the employment experiences of those on FTED into Employment, Extended FTED (non-degree), Apprenticeship & Training, and University Non-Completer pathways. This captures the large majority of those in paid work, however.
[3] Level 3 (L3): A levels or equivalent; Level 2 (L2): 5+ GCSEs grades 9-4 or equivalent.

had higher household incomes (FE: £16.2k; AT: 14.4k) if they had done so, with more than one quarter of these who had left home already on the housing ladder (28%). They were among those most likely to have personal debt (FE: 40%; AT: 45%), but least likely to report difficulty keeping up with payments (FE: 13%; AT: 10%), suggesting this signalled affordability rather than financial difficulty. They were also far less likely than others to receive parental financial support (FE: 32%; AT: 26%) or government benefits (FE: 4%; AT: 5%).

The wellbeing and mental health of young people on FTED into Employment pathways was typical for those their age, with average scores for Life Satisfaction (6.9 out of 10), feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (6.9) and self-reported happiness (6.8). In contrast young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways were the standout group with equivalent scores of 7.5, 7.7, and 7.5 respectively[4]. Overall, one in three young people reported a level of psychological distress considered clinically significant, suggesting that extra support or a service, such as counselling, might be appropriate[5], reflecting a concerning trend which has been reported elsewhere (Collishaw, 2015; Liubertiene et al., 2025; McGorry, Gunasiri, Mei, Rice, & Gao, 2025). The prevalence was much lower among those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways, although still represents 1 in 5 young people (FE: 33%; AT: 22%). The health behaviours of young people on both pathways (frequency of binge drinking, cannabis and other drug use) were also average for their age group.

Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways also did better in terms of their employment. This includes having a permanent contract (89%), contracted hours (89%), more weekly hours (38hrs p/w), and higher average wages (£17k)[6]. At this early stage in their careers, most young people were working in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations, however, the figure was far lower for those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways (35%). They were also slightly more likely to work in higher professional or managerial roles (23%), suggesting a more direct route into these types of occupation. Equivalent figures for those on FTED into Employment pathways were: permanent contract (82%), contracted hours (79%), weekly hours (36), wages (£15.7), semi-skilled or unskilled occupations (48%), and professional or managerial roles (17%). Those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways also gave higher personal ratings for both the extrinsic (FE: 5.9; AT: 6.5 out of 9) and intrinsic benefits (FE: 6.1; AT: 6.6) of their

[4] On a scale from 0 – 10 the differences between the two sets of scores are seemingly small, however the scale on which individuals actually respond is far narrower (from 5 – 9), meaning these small differences have greater significance (see footnote 40 on page 59 for further detail).
[5] It is important to note that whilst GHQ-12 can be used as a screening tool to identify a probable mental health problem, a proper diagnosis can only be carried out by a trained professional.
[6] Whilst the data suggests they also received a slightly higher hourly wage this was not statistically significant.

employment[7]. Young people in paid work across the pathways gave similar ratings for the sense of belonging it gave them (7.0).

Delayed tracks

Delayed University Entrants (12%) delay the start of university by a year, either to improve their grades (i.e., remain in full-time non-HE education), work, or take a break from studying. The transitions of **Other NEETs** (1%) are marked by two years FTED, followed by two consistent years occupying 'other' activity states, such as waiting for results, travelling, or taking a break from work or study. These young people, who differ from others categorised as NEET in that they are economically inactive but do not report looking for work, have caring responsibilities or illness/disabilities, might also be on slightly delayed tracks. A group, whose circumstances may be far from ideal, but who appeared less vulnerable and potentially at risk than our two other NEET pathways.

At age 19/20, practically all **Delayed University Entrants** (DE) remained in university studying for a degree (99%), and they had the highest prevalence of L3 attainment of the non-immediate HE pathways (just behind the Direct to University (DU) pathway) (DE: 92%; DU: 96%). Slightly fewer of them had a L2 in both English and maths at age 16, but the gap was significantly reduced over the subsequent two years. They were also a little more likely to have studied vocational qualifications compared to those Direct to University pathways (DE: 30%; DU: 15%).

In terms of their material circumstances and mental health/wellbeing, Delayed University Entrants were very similar to those on Direct to University pathways. They were less likely to have left the parental home (5%) (at least permanently) and had lower household incomes (£7.5k) if they had. Many of them had debt (38%) (mostly overdraft debt: 25%), which one in five of them had difficulty managing (21%). They were also far more likely to receive parental financial support (56%).

Like those on Direct to University tracks, they had slightly higher life satisfaction (7.2 out of 10) and self-reported happiness (7.0) and were a little more likely to feel that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (7.3). At the same time, more of them were psychologically distressed (38%). Their higher anxiety/psychological stressed was linked with being higher attainers and having parents with higher expectations. They were a little more likely to binge drink (16%) than their non-university peers and had used cannabis (13%) as frequently as those on FTED into Employment pathways[8].

[7] Extrinsic benefits include, for example: 'I see my job as part of a career' and 'I'm pleased with the promotion prospects'; Intrinsic benefits include, for example 'my job is interesting' and 'my job makes a contribution to society'.
[8] Percentages for binge drinking relate to those 'getting really drunk' once a week or more, whereas percentages for cannabis or other drugs relate to those using these drugs once or more in the last four weeks.

Other NEETs (1%) appear quite different from the two other categories of NEET youth and may require different kinds of support to ensure they are able to reach their full potential. This is a very small pathway cluster, which equates to a small sample size, and therefore we are less confident in the differences observed, many of which were not statistically significant[9].

At age 19/20, Other NEETs continued to remain behind others in terms of their attainment (L3: 33%; L2: 39%). More of them appeared to have left the parental home (17% n/s), although fewer had any personal debt (31% n/s), and they were more likely to receive parental financial help (44% n/s). They were also more likely to receive benefits from the government (19%), although this was far lower than for other NEET pathways.

They reported slightly higher life satisfaction (7.1 out of 10 n/s), were more likely to feel the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (7.2 n/s) and reported identical levels of happiness (7.4 n/s) to those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways, all of which were non-significant, however. Furthermore, they reported the lowest levels of anxiety (2.9 n/s) and the second lowest prevalence of psychological distress (24% n/s). They were also far less likely to frequently binge drink (3%) or use cannabis (6%) or other drugs (2%), than other young people, all of which were statistically significant.

Trying, but possibly in need of greater support

This group of pathway clusters includes young people who discontinued their higher education (**University Non-Completers** (4%)), or whose pathways may have become a little protracted (**Extended FTED (non-degree)** (10%)) or otherwise disjointed (**Returners** (1%)). In many cases this may not be cause for concern. Some young people may have changed their mind, or taken longer to achieve the grades they required, or decided to return to education to improve their opportunities once they had experienced the world of work. There should always be scope within the education system to allow for each of these situations, supporting young people in achieving their long-term objectives. Of course, in some cases young people may also be struggling and in need of additional support.

At age 19/20, the large majority of those on **Extended FTED (non-degree)** pathways were in paid work (42%) or remained in fulltime (non-degree) education (41%). They were also the highest attaining group outside the university pathways (L3: 56%; L2: 31%) (most holding vocational qualifications (62%)) and had the joint largest increase in young people with a L2 in both English and maths post age 16, although the absolute number remained relatively low (60%).

[9] Statistical significance is a function of both the size of the difference and the sample size (and for continuous measures, the variance in scores). Smaller pathway clusters require larger differences for them to reach statistical significance. Where the sample size for a pathway cluster is particularly small, for transparency we note and indicate where differences were non-significant (n/s).

They were less likely to have left the parental home (6%), and more likely to have lower household incomes (£10.8k) had they done so. They were also less likely to have any personal debt (25%) and were more able to manage this if they did. More than half of them received parental financial support (52%), and a small but not insignificant number received government benefits (10%), including disability benefits (4%).

Their level of wellbeing and mental health were very similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways: life satisfaction (6.8 out of 10); happiness (6.8); feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (7.0); anxiety (3.5); and psychologically distressed (32%). The numbers reporting a longstanding physical or mental health condition were also very similar (22%), however they were less likely to frequently binge drink (8%) or use drugs (Cannabis: 12% Other Drugs: 6%).

Those who had moved into paid work were similar to young people on FTED into Employment pathways in terms of having a permanent contract (81%) and contracted hours (80%), but were a little more likely to be in semi-routine or routine occupations (54%) and far less likely to be in higher professional or managerial roles (8%). They also worked less hours on average (34hrs p/w) and received lower wages (£14.5k). Whilst their ratings for both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of their employment were slightly lower, the difference was non-significant, and they were just as likely to feel a sense of belonging at work.

University Non-Completers was the most mixed pathway in terms of their economic activity at age 19/20. Most were in paid work (59%), and some had returned to university (9%), with the remainder distributed across most of the remaining activities. They had very high levels of attainment (L3: 82%; L2: 14%), although a little lower than Delayed University Entrants, and were far more likely to have studied vocational qualifications (43%), a factor previously associated with a higher rate of drop out (Dilnot, Macmillan, & Wyness, 2023).

They were just as likely to have left the parental home (11%) as those on FTED into Employment pathways and had relatively similar (higher) levels of household incomes (£14k), if they had. They were also as likely to have personal debt (40%), but were more likely to report difficulty in managing this (20%). Many also continued to receive parental financial support (46%), but few were in receipt of government benefits (9%).

Their life satisfaction (6.7 out of 10 n/s), happiness (6.7 n/s), extent to which they felt the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (6.8 n/s), reported anxiety (3.7 n/s) and prevalence of psychological distress (38% n/s) were all slightly poorer, although none of these differences were statistically significant, owing at least in part to its relatively small sample size. They were also more likely to report a long-standing physical or mental health condition (27%) but were otherwise similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways in their frequency of binge drinking (14%) and cannabis use (15%).

Many of those who had dropped out of university had moved into paid employment (59%), however the small sample size of this subgroup means that some observed differences were non-significant. University Non-Completers were less likely to have a permanent contract (72%), and contracted hours (69% n/s), worked fewer hours on average (34hrs p/w) and had lower wages (14k). Although slightly more worked in semi-routine or routine occupations (54% n/s), similar numbers also worked in professional or managerial roles (16%) compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways. They gave the lowest ratings for the extrinsic benefits (5.5 n/s) of their employment but similar in their ratings for its intrinsic benefits (6.0) and were just as likely to feel a sense of belonging at work (7.0). These findings point towards a pathway more in flux. Many of these young people may have taken employment as a temporary, and possibly necessary, stop gap whilst they worked out their next steps.

Like Other NEETs, **Returners** were a particularly small pathway cluster (1%), which means there is far less we can say about them with confidence. At age 19/20, they were predominantly either in paid work (42%) or fulltime (non-degree) education (55%), and were between Extended FTED (non-degree) and Apprenticeship & Training pathways in terms of attainment (L3: 54%; L2: 32%). Very few had left the parental home (7% n/s), however they were also less likely to receive parental financial support (33%, n/s), and the least likely to have personal debt (18%). A plausible although untested hypothesis is that Returners may have wanted (or needed) to build financial security prior to their return to education. Although some of them received government benefits (11% n/s), this was primarily in the form of disability benefits (9%).

Their life satisfaction was relatively low (6.6 out of 10 n/s), but they were otherwise average in terms of their happiness (6.8 n/s), feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (7.1 n/s), and the prevalence of psychological distress (36% n/s). Whilst they were also average in terms of having a longstanding physical or mental health condition, their higher-than-average receipt of disability benefits suggest these may have been more debilitating. They were a little less likely to regularly binge drink (11% n/s), but similar in their use of cannabis (20% n/s) and other drugs (11% n/s) to those on FTED into Employment pathways.

Potentially vulnerable/at-risk groups

One in fourteen young people were on pathways that place them at a much greater risk of poorer outcomes, both at age 19/20 as we demonstrate here, but also potentially in the longer term. At age 19/20, the majority of those on **FTED into NEET** (FN) pathways remained unemployed looking for work or training (79%), whilst those **At Home** (AH) were mostly looking after the family or home (55%), or ill or disabled and unable to work (35%). These young people had much lower levels of attainment (L1 or below: FN: 50%; AH: 56%) and were those least likely to have achieved a L2 in both English and maths (FN: 38%; AH: 35%).

At Home young people were far more likely to have left the parental home at age 19/20 (35%), with many of them having already become parents themselves (49%). Those who had left home were more likely to live in council or housing association accommodation (56%) and have lower household incomes (£10.4k). Whilst young people on both pathways were less likely to have any personal debt (FN: 28%; AH 28% n/s), those who did were far more likely to struggle with their repayments (FN: 38%; AH 32%). Positively, both were more likely to receive parental financial support, especially those on FTED into NEET pathways (FN: 60%; AH 47%), but they were also far more likely to receive government benefits, especially those At Home (FN: 29%; AH 63%).

The disadvantage experienced by these young people was especially evident in their mental health and wellbeing. They had the lowest life satisfaction (FN: 5.7; AH 6.2 out of 10), and happiness scores (FN: 6.1; AH 5.9), and the highest scores for anxiety (FN: 4.1; AH 4.1 n/s). However, whilst those on FTED into NEET pathways were the least likely to feel the things they were doing their lives were worthwhile (6.2), the score for those At Home was identical to that for university students (7.2 n/s). Whilst only speculative, this may be linked to the fact that half of these young people were parents. They had the highest prevalence of psychological distress (FN: 52%; AH 46%) across the pathway clusters and were those most likely to have a longstanding physical or mental health condition (FN: 29%; AH 44%). However, frequent binge drinking (FN: 9%; AH 5%) was far lower than among young people on other pathways, suggesting that potential assumptions about alcohol misuse in these groups is unlikely to be accurate (Thern, Ramstedt, & Svensson, 2020). Whilst they appeared less likely to use cannabis (FN: 16%; AH 15%) and other drugs (FN: 9%; AH 8%) also, these differences were smaller and non-significant.

Conclusion

Taken together our findings from both reports suggest that the educational system is working effectively for the large majority of young people. Around one-third of the LSYPE2 cohort transitioned directly into university, while most of those following alternative routes into early adulthood appeared to be on sustained and seemingly progressive pathways. Only a minority followed routes that could be considered precarious or associated with greater vulnerability – a narrative also echoed in their outcomes at age 19/20.

It is also clear from our analysis carried out across both reports the importance of socioeconomic background in influencing young people's post-16 pathways. For example, young people on both direct and delayed paths into university generally came from more advantaged backgrounds, whereas Non-University Completers were notably less advantaged (although more advantaged than those not following university pathways). These young people were far more likely to be first generation graduate students and therefore lacked the support of having parents who had been there themselves. They were also more likely to live in single parent families, have been

eligible for free school meals, and live in less advantaged areas. At the other end of the scale, young people on our two most at-risk pathways (FTED into NEET and At Home) came from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, the relationship is far from deterministic. Some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds follow typically more advantaged pathways, and vice versa, although the numbers are far fewer. Other factors too are also critically important, such as young people's (and their parent's) attitudes, aspirations and behaviours, how engaged they are with their schoolwork, the extent to which they believe their hard work will result in success, and of course their level of achieved attainment. At the same time, we must recognise that these things are to some extent also aligned. Young people from more advantaged backgrounds tend to have a greater sense of agency over their lives, better attitudes to school, long-term expectations and aspirations, and higher attainment, which as we have shown, are associated with better pathways with better outcomes.

We have also shown pathways with more mixed demographics that also represent very positive and sustained routes into early adulthood, and in some cases exceeding the outcomes of traditionally more advantaged pathways. Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways, were by far the standout group, for example. Along with those on FTED into Employment pathways, they had better material circumstances and demonstrated evidence of a growing independence. Furthermore, those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways had far better wellbeing and mental health outcomes across a broad range of measures, and among those who had moved into paid work, better employment experiences (both objective and subjective) also. In terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds, they were very similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways. Only their (and their parents) aspirations to do an apprenticeship in Year 10, set them apart in multivariate analysis of differences[10].

The success of these young people leads us to consider whether an apprenticeship might also be beneficial to more young people. To select just one group, some University Non-Completers, who were more likely to study vocational qualifications on their path to university, might have been better suited taking an apprenticeship. Whilst we cannot be certain that they would have had better outcomes, is at least plausible. However, for those who wish to pursue an academic degree, it remains important to ensure that the support is there, particularly for first time graduates, which many of these young people were.

Receipt of SEN provision featured across all the pathway clusters but was especially evident among young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) (39%) and FTED into NEET (48%) pathways, and those At Home (37%). Of course, the specific SEN type or level of provision young people received may well have been critical to the pathways they

[10] Results from a regression model that included individual characteristics, socioeconomic background, attitudes, aspirations, experiences, behaviours, as well as parental attitudes and aspirations, and Key Stage 4 attainment (Duckworth, Ross, & Harding, 2025a).

were following. However, if it were possible to support more young people with SEN onto extended fulltime (non-degree) education pathways, evidence suggests this could very well be beneficial.

In summary, our research shows that there are many pathways into early adulthood and that not all of these are perfect, some are prolonged or disjointed, some face momentary setbacks, and yet others are delayed. What is important, however, is ensuring that there is enough flexibility within the education and training system to allow for these different and sometimes difficult circumstances, and to ensure there is enough information and support for young people, in both the short and longer term, for them to thrive.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Over recent years, there has been increasing recognition that post-16 opportunities and related outcomes need to improve for young people who are not immediately bound for A-Levels and university (Williamson, 2020). Accordingly the previous government introduced reforms to Apprenticeships including the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017 and off the job training requirements (for more detail see, English Apprenticeships: our 2020 vision) and The Skills for Jobs White Paper (2021) which focuses on post-16 skills and giving individuals opportunities to progress in their careers.

The current Government is further prioritising post-16 pathways in developing a skills system that is fit for the future and aligned to a forthcoming Industrial Strategy. This is seen as essential to delivering all five of the Government's missions: growing the economy, securing an NHS fit for the future, creating safer streets, breaking down barriers to opportunity, and making Britain a clean energy superpower.

Research concerning post-16 pathways highlights that alongside certain socioeconomic characteristics, prior achievement remains the biggest predictor of post-16 tracks (Dickerson, Morris, & McDool, 2020; Duckworth et al., 2025a) and that, those with the lowest levels of attainment are more likely to be on the most at-risk pathways, further compounding their disadvantage. Lower attainers, for example, are more likely to struggle to establish a foothold in the labour market, are at much greater risk of being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (Lupton, Thomson, Velthuis, & Unwin, 2021), and, once there, are more likely to remain so (Dorsett & Lucchino, 2015).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further compounded the difficulties for 'lower attaining' young people[11] as job and apprenticeship opportunities contract (Lupton et al., 2021). As such, ensuring successful post-16 transitions for all young people, lower as well as higher GCSE attainers, but also understanding what 'successful' looks like need to become much higher policy priorities.

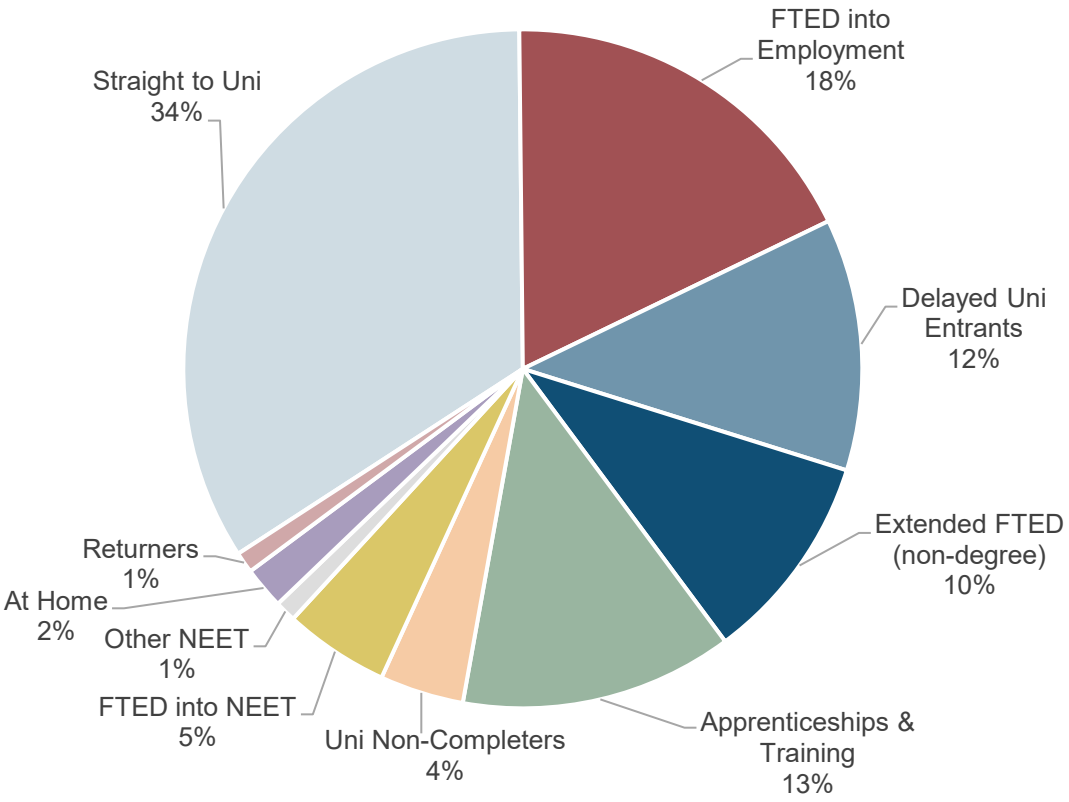
Background

Our previous report (Duckworth et al., 2025a) used monthly activity data in the LSYPE2 and identified nine typical pathways that are alternatives to the 'straight to university' track. This 'non-immediate HE group' constituted two thirds (66%) of the LSYPE2 cohort at age 19/20, with the other third (34%) of young people classified as the group who were immediately bound for university after completing Year 13.[12]

[11] 'Lower attaining' here refers to the two in five young people who each year miss the grade 4 (formerly grade C) benchmark in English and maths.
[12] For comparison, destination data for 16 to 18 year olds for the same period indicates that 34.8% of young people moved to a UK higher education institution.

Amongst the non-immediate HE cohort, four big groups emerged to dominate the overall classification[13]: the largest single group was those on **full-time education into employment pathways (18%)**, followed by those on **apprenticeships & training pathways (13%)**, those **delaying the start of university by a year (12%)**, and those spending **extended periods in non-degree further education routes (10%)**. When combined with one of the smaller pathways, **returners (1%)**,young people who came back into non-degree further education after a period in employment or training, alongside those on university paths, the vast majority of the cohort appear to be experiencing largely positive routes out of compulsory schooling, with around seven in every eight young people (88%) engaged in education, employment or training activities.[14]

Figure 1: Post-16 pathway groupings in the LSYPE2



Source: LSYPE2: waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Of concern, however, are the remaining one in eight (12%) young people identified as being on potentially less advantageous, or at-risk, pathways: those who have **left**

[13] These proportions relate to the full LSYPE2 sample at age 19/20, including both the immediate and non-immediate cohorts. In relation to the non-immediate HE group only (as per the figures given in Report 1), the proportions are as follows: FTED into Employment (28%); Delayed Uni Entrants (18%); Extended FTED: Non-HE (16%); Apprenticeships & Training (19%); Returners (2%); Uni Non-Completers (6%); FTED into NEET (8%); Other NEET (1%); At Home (2%).

[14] It is difficult to directly compare the size of these clusters with official statistics since our analyses looks at transitions over a four-year period.

university before completing a course (4%), those who have experienced significant periods of **unemployment (5%)** or **waiting for an opportunity to arise (1%)**, and those mainly **at home (2%)** looking after family at a young age or managing an illness or disability.

Non-immediate HE pathways were shown to be associated with socioeconomic background, certain individual characteristics, experiences and behaviours, as well as prior attainment, with groups previously identified in the literature emerging – employment-dominated groups, NEET-dominated routes, and delayed university starters – alongside newly emerging ones, such as university non-completers.

This second report extends on our earlier analysis to examine the outcomes of young people (educational, material, employment, and mental health and wellbeing) across the different pathways identified to better resolve questions about how well young people on different post-16 routes fare.

Existing Evidence

Evidence on the nature of, and factors associated with, different types of post-16 pathways, is relatively scarce[15], but there is even less evidence on the relative outcomes of different post-16 routes, with much of the research to date focussing primarily on those of the 'straight to university' group. Moreover, where comparisons are made, they are often in relation to all other young people, i.e. non-graduates, and in so doing fail to recognise the considerable heterogeneity within this large group.

We begin our review of the existing literature by outlining some of the complexity within these 'non-straight to university' routes and so highlight the need to consider their influence on outcomes separately.

Understanding the heterogeneity in post-16 pathways

Lupton et al. (2021) explored the characteristics and post-16 transitions of 'low attainers', that is, young people who miss the grade 4 benchmark in English and maths. Using data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Individual Learner Records (ILR), the authors find that the routes taken by this group tend to be more complex and difficult than their higher achieving peers, who move relatively smoothly to A-Levels. For example, fewer than a fifth of lower attainers go to school sixth forms, compared with more than half of their higher achieving peers, requiring a change in institution, a far wider array of course and qualification options from a range of different providers, in different areas, and with different entry requirements.

[15] See Pathways Report I for a review of the literature on post-16 transitions and activity histories (Chapter 1), as well as the characteristics associated with the different pathways taken (Chapter 5).

Other recent work by the Department for Education using their Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data identifies six different pathways through post-16 education and their transitions to work (measured at age 25), focussing on those who leave education at Level 3 or below (DfE, 2020). These fall into two broad groups – difficult transitions into work and successful transitions into work:

- *Difficult transitions* refer to around a third (30%) of young people who leave education at Level 3 and below, and are marked by those who leave education and struggle to find sustained employment: mainly NEET (15%); benefit cycling (7%), and employment cycling (8%).
- Conversely, *successful transitions* – 70% of this group – are characterised by a smooth transition into work: mainly employment (19%); education to employment (35%); and extended education to employment (17%) and are far more common amongst those who leave education with a full Level 2 or full Level 3 than those at below Level 2. In addition, those with apprenticeships are more likely to fall into this group compared with young people who achieve technical courses in the classroom.

The authors also demonstrate that more difficult post-16 routes are associated with lower employment and earnings outcomes in the future, while young people on more successful post-16 tracks are faring much better. Moreover, these analyses show that outcomes vary within the different tracks identified: in the difficult transitions group, the employment cycling pathways has better outcomes – higher earning and greater levels of sustained employment – than the mainly NEET and benefit cycling pathways; outcomes for pathways within the successful transitions group are, however, broadly comparable.

So, what about other outcomes for young people on different tracks? Is there evidence to suggest differences in the educational, as well as the economic, outcomes of young people on different post-16 pathways? Could there also be differences in terms of their mental health and wellbeing?

How do different post-16 pathways influence later outcomes?

Our analyses cover three broad outcome areas: educational qualifications and progression; material circumstances; and mental health and wellbeing.

Educational Qualifications and Progression

There are large differences in the achievement profiles of young people across the different pathway groups identified in our earlier report (Duckworth et al., 2025a) in terms of Key Stage 4 attainment, those on delayed university paths score the highest (average 'Best 8' total points score of 357, compared to an average across the non-immediate HE cohort of 296, and 77.7% achieving A* – C grades in both English and mathematics, compared to an average of 50.9%), followed by university non-completers (330 and 65.7%, respectively), and then young people returning to education after a period (309

and 59.6%) and those on apprenticeships & training pathways (303 and 52.9%). Those on extended full-time non-degree pathways (261 and 35.7%), the long-term NEET group (214 and 23.1%) and those predominantly at home (219 and 28.0%) had the lowest attainment scores.

Evidence also shows clear variation in the progression profiles of young people on different post-16 routes. For example, other analyses of the DfE's LEO (DfE, 2018) data finds that students who achieved five good GCSEs (a full Level 2) and an academic Level 3 tended to go on to achieve level 6 (L6) (degree level) or higher by age 25, whereas those who did not achieve a full level 2 (L2) at 16 typically reached level 3 (L3) at best: just 8% of those without five good GCSEs achieved level 4 (L4) (sub-degree higher level education) or higher by age 25, compared with 75% of those with five good GCSEs and an academic L3 went on to achieve a L6 or higher.

Lupton et al. (2021) similarly find that even by age 19, lower attainers are still a long way behind higher GCSE attainers. For example, while many achieve L2 and L3 qualifications between ages 16 and 19, for the 2015 GCSE cohort, around 12 per cent had not achieved a L1 qualification in the post-16 phase; a quarter had not achieved a L2 qualification and around two fifths had not achieved a L3 qualification (see also De Coulon, Hedges, Nafilyan, & Speckesser, 2017; Hupkau, McNally, Ruiz-Valenzuela, & Ventura, 2017).

These authors go on to highlight that, like our extended full-time education group, some lower attainers spend three years or more in the post-16 phase with a quarter of them starting their post-16 phase at L1 or below, considerably more than would be expected given levels of achievement at the end of KS4. They argue that while dropping back a level may be appropriate when starting a completely new area of study such as a vocational course, it may actually serve to constrain the progress that can be made by age 19.

Material Circumstances

A large literature exists on the returns to education documenting how those with higher level of education have better labour market outcomes and higher earnings (Card, 1999; Harmon, Oosterbeek, & Walker, 2000) but again, much of it focuses largely on the higher education group and the returns observed for them compared with all other non-graduates. However, evidence using LEO data, reviewed above, which demonstrates within group differences, particularly amongst those who experience more difficult transition post-16, indicates that such a simple dichotomy is likely to mask nuances amongst those who veer from the 'straight to university' track.

More recent analysis of the LEO data across the full cohort, not just those who leave education with below L3 qualifications, again highlights the sheer diversity of post-16 routes and demonstrates that across all the main pathways identified, higher levels of education lead to better labour market outcomes (average earnings; proportions claiming

out of work benefits; Anderson & Nelson, 2021). This is also the case when looking within the different groups identified, even when controlling for certain background characteristics. [16]

Dickerson et al. (2020) used a very similar methodology to analyse the earlier born LSYPE1 cohort as we did in our earlier study (Duckworth et al., 2025a) identifying the pathway groups explored here. Using sequence analysis of the monthly post-16 pathways and linking them to labour market outcomes observed in early adulthood, the authors find that, unsurprisingly, the straight to university group (A-levels to HE track) is associated with a significantly higher overall weekly income and higher hourly wage at age 25 than all other pathways, including the group identified as "Vocational Level 3 into HE" which attains the same RQF[17] level. However, once background characteristics and prior attainment are controlled for, these differences are substantially attenuated.

Interestingly, they also find that once prior achievement is controlled for, the average hourly wages of those on apprenticeship-dominated pathways are actually higher at age 25 than those following the A-level into HE route. They are cautious to note, however, that the measure used in their study is wages at age 25 and is not indicative of lifetime earnings. Their findings also demonstrate that those on NEET-dominated pathways face the largest penalty in relation to income and wages.

In terms of later employment, the likelihood of being in work at age 25 does not significantly differ between the A-level to HE, Employment-dominated, Apprenticeship or Vocational Level 3 pathways. However, those who undertook low-level vocational education post-16 or were predominantly NEET in the initial years after school are less likely to be employed at age 25.

Work by McIntosh and Morris (2018) focuses specifically on the economic outcomes of apprenticeships and similarly reports significant economic benefits for these individuals (see also Buscha, Urwin, Thomson, & Bibby, 2013). The authors also note that the returns to apprenticeships are considerably higher for younger individuals – those who started their apprenticeship between the ages of 19 and 24 – relative to those who failed to complete, as well as those who began their apprenticeship when aged 25 plus.

Young people on Traineeships have also been shown to have positive outcomes in terms of the increased likelihood of being in any positive destination (apprenticeship, further learning or employment) 12 months after starting the programme (Dorsett, Gray, Speckesser, & Stokes, 2019).

We have not found literature on the relationship between the different post-16 pathways young people take and other aspects of material circumstances (living arrangements,

[16] Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility and parental education.
[17] RQF: Regulated Qualifications Framework. Enables comparison of different qualifications (academic and vocational) according to their level from Entry Level 1 through to Level 8.

housing tenure) or financial outcomes (debt) and so this report will add to our understanding in these areas.

Wellbeing

In terms of young people's mental health and wellbeing, the evidence is also limited. While rates of common mental disorder, such as depression and anxiety, have been shown to be rising among young people, particularly in girls and young women (Lessof, Ross, Brind, Bell, & Newton, 2016; Pitchforth et al., 2019), much of the extant research focuses on how the presence of mental health issues or engagement in risky behaviours predict certain activity destinations, not the other way around. That is, the factors that may contribute to a young person becoming NEET, for example, rather than the impact of being NEET on the likelihood or experiencing depression or subsequent drinking behaviours.

However, taking a more holistic view of the relationship between post-16 pathways and wider wellbeing outcomes is an important step in understanding how to support all young people to achieve their full potential, and so we touch briefly on some of the evidence suggesting the links that may exist.

Lewis, Lewis, McCloud, and Callender (2021), for example compared the mental health of young people who attended HE and those who did not, using the two LSYPE cohorts (LSYPE1: outcomes assessed at age 25; LSYPE2: outcomes at age 19). Their analyses show that for young people in the later born LSYPE2, symptoms of common mental disorder were higher among 19 year olds in their first year of university who started university straight after completing A-levels, compared with those who did not (immediately) attend HE. Interestingly, in LSYPE1 they found no such difference between those who had and had not attended HE, although outcomes were assessed later

In terms of risky behaviours and other indicators of wellbeing, research has shown that heavy alcohol consumption in adolescence is associated with lower enrolment in post-secondary education, potentially reduced earnings and heightened job instability (Alderson & Lingam, 2022; Sadler, Akister, & Burch, 2015) but cannot speak to the relationship in reverse. von Soest, Luhmann, and Gerstorf (2020) examined the development of loneliness in young adulthood and its correlates and midlife outcomes but again, not how different post-16 routes might predict it.

One particular post-16 pathway that has received more attention in relation to later outcomes, is that of the NEET group: being NEET has been associated with a range of poor health outcomes including anxiety and depression (Basta et al., 2019), particularly amongst teenage mothers (Bynner & Parsons, 2002); smoking (Basta et al., 2019); and lower health and life satisfaction (Klug, Drobnič, & Brockmann, 2019). In an exception to the directionality of post-16 pathways and their influence on subsequent outcomes, Manhica et al. (2022) used a national cohort comprising nearly 750,000 young people born between 1984 and 1990 and found that being NEET during emerging adulthood (17

– 24 years) is associated with later drug use disorders (measured between the ages of 25 and 33 years old) amongst both males and females, even after adjusting for background and genetic factors. However, the study, like many others, is not based on UK data – rather Swedish – and so may be limited in the extent to which it is generalisable to the UK context.

Given the paucity of research exploring the associations between the many and diverse routes available to young people at age 16 and a broad range of outcomes, this report aims to add substantially to the literature on post-16 pathways into work and what they mean for young people by age 19/20.

Chapter 2 Data and Methods

Overview of the LSYPE2

Data for this study comes from the second cohort of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE2). LSYPE2 is a large-scale panel study which follows a sample of young people born in 1998/9 from when they were aged 13/14, in Year 9 (academic year 2012/13), across schools in England. In wave 1, LSYPE2 achieved a response rate of 71 per cent, representing an achieved sample of 13,100 young people (Baker, Dawson, Thair and Youngs, 2014). To date, nine waves[18] of data have been collected annually, including a reduced non-face-to-face data collection during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The most recent, wave 9, was in 2020/21, when the cohort were aged 21/22 and in "Year 17" (see Table 2 below).

Young people in the LSYPE2 turned 16 and took their GCSEs at the end of wave 3, the academic year 2014/15. Our analysis concerns post-16 decisions, and the transitions made after GCSEs[19] including their early outcomes at age 19/20, which covers the following four years of data. By design we have restricted our analysis to the period prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a very significant impact on young people's lives, at least in the short term (Blundell, Cribb, McNally, Warwick, & Xu, 2021), and therefore findings related to this period could be considered to be less applicable to 'normal times'. Table 2 provides an overview of timings in the LSYPE2, detailing the age, calendar, and academic year of the cohort, by wave.

Table 2: Age and timing of the LSYPE2 cohort

Wave	Academic Year	Actual Age (Years)	School Year and Equivalent
4	2015/16	16 / 17	Year 12
5	2016/17	17 / 18	Year 13
6	2017/18	18 / 19	"Year 14" / Uni Year 1 for immediate HE group
7	2018/19	19 / 20	"Year 15" / Uni Year 2 for immediate HE group
8	2019/20	20 / 21	"Year 16" / Uni Year 3 for immediate HE group
9	2020/21	21 / 22	"Year 17"

[18] A short Keeping In Touch (KIT) online survey was conducted in 2023 to keep in contact with respondents, keep contact details up to date, as well as ask a few topical questions of interest to DfE.
[19] It is possible that some young people within the LSYPE2 cohort took some of their GCSEs earlier than the academic year 2014/15 or repeated/took additional GCSEs later, however our primary focus is on post-16 decisions made after this core round of GCSE examinations were completed.

Data collected as part of the LSYPE2 are very rich and has enabled us to examine a range of factors that influence both the choices young people make and the destinations they pursue, as well as a broad range of early outcomes. More so than many other datasets, the LSYPE2 allows an unprecedented look at the post-16 transitions being made by the current generation of young people first subjected to changes heralded by the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation. [20]

Data collected through individual interviews in the LSYPE2 are also further supplemented by linkage to the National Pupil Database (NPD), providing information on attainment at GCSE and indicators such as free school meal eligibility (FSM) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) status. Additional data on family background was taken from interviews conducted with the cohort member's main parent or guardian.

Methodology

Analytical strategy

Young people's outcomes at age 19/20[21] were assessed across four broad domains, which capture their level of progression, material circumstances, mental health and wellbeing, and experiences in employment. Progression was measured according to the young person's main activity (whether they were engaged in study or in training, had already made the transition into work, or were somewhere in between), and their education (including their highest attainment at age 19/20, whether this was an academic or vocational qualification, and whether and at what age they had attained a L2 qualification in both English and maths).

The material circumstances of young people were measured in terms of their living arrangements (whether they had left the parental home, as well as the tenancy arrangements and household income among those who had), debt (including the types of debt they held and how easy they found keeping up with payments), and financial support (whether they received support from their parents, and/or government benefits, including the type of benefits they received)

Young people's wellbeing includes self reported life satisfaction, whether they felt the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, their happiness, and level of anxiety. It also includes results of a screening tool (GHQ-12) designed to detect minor psychiatric morbidity, which includes mild to moderate depression and/or anxiety. We also examined the presence (or absence) of a longstanding illness or disability, and

[20] The Education and Skills Act 2008 legislated to increase the age of compulsory participation in education or training to age 18 by 2015 for those born after 1 September 2017, and with an interim leaving age of 17 from 2013.

[21] Throughout the report we refer to outcomes at age 19/20. This is because the outcomes of the LSYPE2 cohort, who are were originally drawn from the population of young people in England in Year 13 (2012/13) were measured between spring and late summer in 2019, when most but not all of them will have reached their 20th birthday.

young people's health related behaviours, which includes their alcohol use and drug taking.

Finally, for those who were in paid employment at ages 19/20, we examined work related measures, including type of employment contract, work hours, pay, occupational position, and in work training and education. We also examined young people's own, subjective evaluations of their employment. Further detail on all the measures examined are presented in Appendix A.

Method

Differences in the outcomes of young people across the pathway clusters were assessed using multivariate regression analysis. This enables us to adjust for other factors that might otherwise explain some of the differences found. Two regression models were estimated for each outcome. The first adjusted for differences in the distribution of gender, and the second further adjusted for differences in socioeconomic background (including free school meal eligibility and parental education)[22], and Key Stage 4 attainment.

A person's gender predicts the pathways they are more likely to follow as well as many of the outcomes we looked at. For example, young women are far more likely to report poor wellbeing than young men (Collishaw, 2015; West & Sweeting, 2003). Without adjusting for gender, we might assume a that pathway is associated with poor mental health outcomes, when it is in fact because the pathway is disproportionately female. By adjusting for gender, we remove its effect and estimate the average association (between pathways and outcomes) across young men and women.

Free school meal eligibility, parental education, and the young person's Key Stage 4 attainment were all strong predictors of the pathways that young people follow (Duckworth et al., 2025a). We therefore adjust for these factors for the same reason. However, we do this in a second step, because knowing the extent to which they can account for any differences we find, is also of interest itself. If the differences in an outcome remain unchanged after adjustment, it suggests these have more to do with the different pathways young people follow than any prior differences in their socioeconomic background and/or attainment[23]. Where there is a significant change (e.g. differences substantially reduce), it suggests that some (or all) of differences observed in an outcome were a consequence of prior differences in social background and/or attainment, which predict both the pathways that young people are likely to follow as well as the outcome in question.

[22] Measured when the young person was in Year 9.
[23] With observational data we can never be certain that a relationship causal (there may be other factors that accounts for the relationship that we did not, or were unable to adjust for in our model), however we can be fairly confident that those factors we did adjust for were not driving the relationship.

For ease of interpretation, results are presented as marginal means or proportions (instead of coefficients or odds ratios). These are calculated directly from the results of our regression models, which were adjusted for the other factors in the same model (gender etc.). Results were considered statistically significant when the probability of a difference occurring by chance was less than 5% ($p < .05$). All analysis including the estimation of marginal means or proportions were carried out in STATA 18 (StataCorp, 2025).

Missing data

Attrition

All analyses were weighted to take account of sample attrition (the loss of sample members between survey waves). Using information on the characteristics of non-responders collected earlier in the study, the data was recalibrated to ensure it continues to represent the characteristics of the original sample (Kantar Public, unpublished technical report).

Multiple imputation

Multiple Imputation using Chained Equations in STATA (MICE) (White, Royston, & Wood, 2011) was used to account for missingness on covariates. Multiple imputation involves estimating a set of plausible values for those missing data based on associations between all of the measures in the model, whilst also allowing for an appropriate level of uncertainty (Azur, Stuart, Frangakis, & Leaf, 2011). As a rule of thumb, the number of imputed datasets should equal the percentage of incomplete cases (White et al., 2011). Subsequent analyses are estimated separately for each dataset (automated using STATA) and the results combined using Rubin's rule (Rubin, 2004).

Chapter 3 What is the relationship between young people's post-16 pathways and outcomes measured at age 19/20?

Introduction

This Chapter compares young people's outcomes at age 19/20 across the post-16 pathway clusters identified in report one and described Chapter 1. Outcomes were examined in relation to four overarching domains: young people's progression, material circumstances, mental health and wellbeing, and employment.

All estimates, except those relating to main activity, were adjusted for gender (model 1), and then further adjusted for socioeconomic background (free school meal eligibility and parental education) and Key Stage 4 attainment (model 2). Where there was little or no change in the estimates between models 1 and 2, we present only the fully adjusted results (model 2). Otherwise, we present both sets of results and discuss the substantive meaning of any change.

Differences in the outcomes of young people on different pathways are assessed in comparison to the FTED into Employment pathway. FTED into Employment was selected because of its large size (it is the largest of the non-immediate university pathways) and because it represents a very useful comparison. By and large, young people following this pathway completed two years of full-time education as prescribed by the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation and then made stable transitions into the world of work. Whilst they are quite different from those on an immediate university track, they are arguably still very successful in their post-16 routes having. Understanding how other groups compare to this alternate version of post-16 success is an important part of ensuring that all young people are afforded the best chances to reach their full potential. Young people who went directly to university at age 18 are not a focus of our study, nevertheless we have included them for the purpose of comparison.

Reported statistical differences are significant at $p < 0.05$. Where feasible, estimated mean scores or prevalence are presented along with 95% confidence intervals[24]. Percentages presented alongside the pathway labels in the figures that follow represent the size of each pathway as a percentage of all young people in our study, unless otherwise stated. Further detail on the analytical plan and methods used in this Chapter are provided in Chapter 2.

[24] 95% confidence intervals – depicted by the vertical error bars – present the degree of uncertainty around the estimated mean score or prevalence. If we selected one hundred samples at random from the same population, in 95 cases out of 100, our estimates would fall within these confidence intervals, which means we can be almost certain that the population mean will also fall within these intervals.

Results

Progression

Main activity

Figure 2 presents the reported main activity of young people at age 19/20 across ten[25] pathway clusters, using the same eight categories of activity that were used to construct the pathways clusters in report one: full-time education non-degree; full-time education studying for a first degree; working[26]; part working/part college; apprenticeship or training[27]; unemployed/looking for work[28]; looking after the family/home; other activities [29].

Table 3 provides a further breakdown of young people's main activity using all seventeen categories used in the LSYPE survey and is particularly useful for understanding the prevalence of activities within more opaque categories such as 'other'.

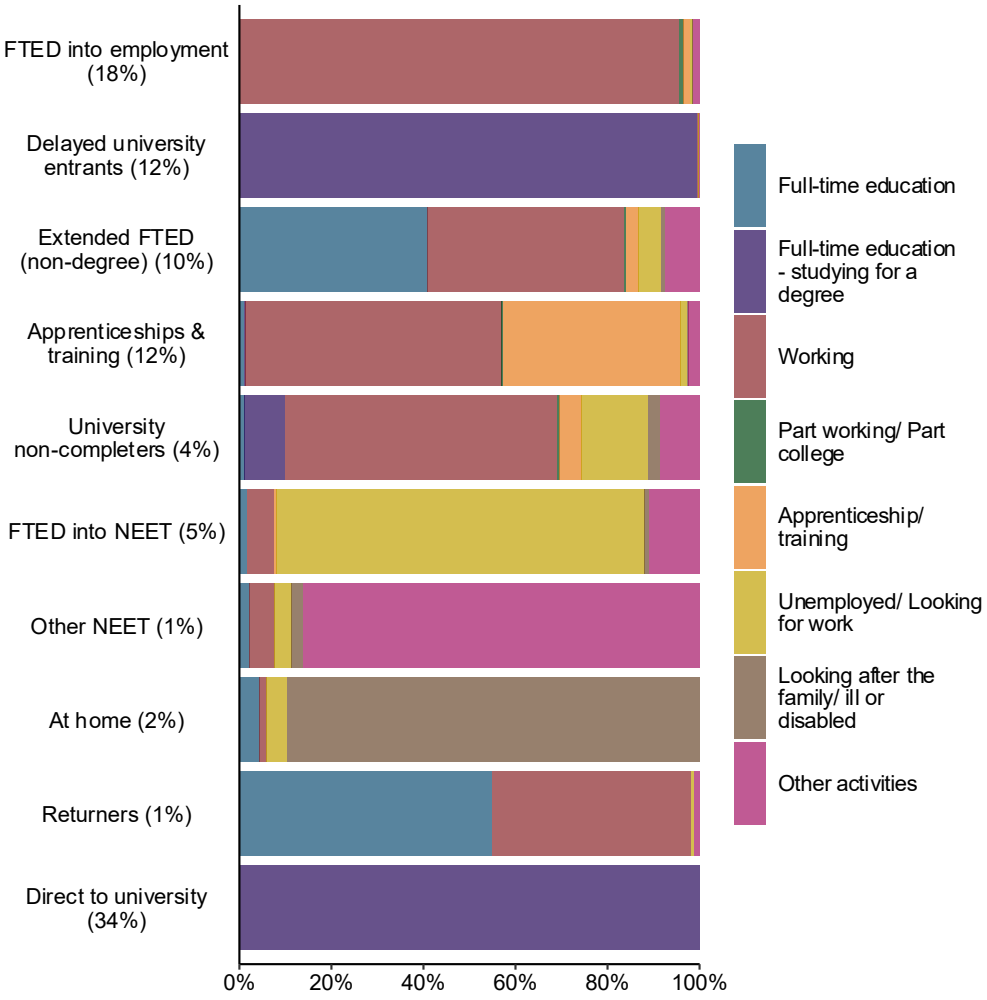
Nearly all young people on a FTED into Employment pathway were working by age 19/20 (95.6%). Nevertheless, a very small number of young people were on an apprenticeship or in training (1.5%), 'other' (1.4%) (the majority of whom were waiting for a course or job to start (0.9%)), in part work/part college (0.9%), unemployed, and looking for work (0.6%), or were ill or disabled and unable to work (0.1%).

Delayed University Entrants were, as their namesake suggests, studying fulltime for a first degree (99.4%), with very few engaged in other activities (working: 0.3%; looking for a training course: 0.2%; waiting for a course or job to start: 0.1%).

The activities of young people on an Extended Fulltime Education, Non-Degree pathways were more mixed. The majority were either in work (42.7%) at age 19/20, or in fulltime non-degree education (40.9%), or were otherwise waiting for a course or job to start (5.6%). Beyond this, the activities of young people were very broad, and included being unemployed looking for work (4.0%); waiting to hear the results of a job application (0.2%); being on an apprenticeship or training course (2.8%); in part work/part college (0.4%); looking for a training course (0.7%); waiting for exam or course results (0.3%); taking a break (1.5%), looking after the family or home (0.5%); or travelling (0.2%).

[25] Nine pathway clusters were estimated using young people's monthly activity data in pathways report I. An additional tenth 'Direct to University' pathway cluster of young people who went directly to university at age 18 is included solely for comparative reasons.
[26] Working includes 'in paid work' and 'doing voluntary work'.
[27] Apprenticeship/training includes 'doing an apprenticeship', 'on a training course', and 'doing a traineeship'.
[28] Unemployed/looking for work includes 'unemployed looking for work', 'waiting to hear the result of a job application', and 'looking for a training course'.
[29] Other activities include 'waiting for a course or job to start', 'waiting for exam/course results', 'travelling', and 'taking a break from work and study'.

Figure 2: Main economic activity at age 19/20 (8 categories), by pathway cluster



Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

The majority of those on the Apprenticeships & Training pathway were working by the time they were aged 19/20 (55.7%), although a large minority remained on an apprenticeship (31.1%), a training course (5.7%) or were doing a traineeship (1.7%). Otherwise, a few were in education (1.3%), waiting for a course or job to start (1.9%), in part work/part college (0.3%), unemployed waiting for work (1.5%), looking after the family and home (0.3%), taking a break (0.4%), or travelling (0.2%).

University Non-Completers was by far the most mixed pathway cluster in terms of their main activity at age 19/20, reflecting the broad range of directions young people take following university drop out. Some had returned to university to study a degree (8.9%), but most had moved into employment (59.1%). Others had moved (or were moving) into other forms of study or training (education non-degree:1.1%, an apprenticeship, training or traineeship: 4.8%, part work/part college: 0.5%, waiting for a course or job to start: 6.4%, looking for a training course: 5.1%). The remainder were either unemployed and looking for work (9.3%), ill or disabled and unable to work (2%), looking after the family and home (0.6%), or were taking a break (2.2%).

Table 3: Main economic activity at age 19/20 (17 categories), by pathway cluster

	FTED into Employment (18%)	Delayed Uni Entrants (12%)	Extended FTED (non-degree) (10%)	Apprenticeships & Training (12%)	Uni Non-Completers (4%)	FTED into NEET (5%)	Other NEET (1%)	At Home (2%)	Returners (1%)	Direct to University (34%)
In education	-	-	40.9%	1.0%	1.1%	1.7%	2.3%	4.4%	54.9%	-
In education: Degree study	-	99.4%	-	0.3%	8.9%	-	-	-	-	100%
In paid work	94.0%	0.3%	41.6%	55.2%	59.1%	4.7%	5.5%	1.5%	41.8%	-
On a training course	0.6%	-	0.8%	5.7%	1.1%	-	-	-	-	-
Doing an apprenticeship	0.9%	-	2.0%	31.1%	3.4%	0.6%	-	-	-	-
Waiting for a course/job to start	0.9%	0.1%	5.6%	1.9%	6.4%	7.7%	58.6%	-	1.2%	-
Looking after the family/ home	-	-	0.5%	0.3%	0.6%	0.9%	2.4%	55.2%	-	-
Unemployed and looking for work	0.6%	-	4.0%	1.5%	9.3%	66.1%	3.7%	3.7%	-	-
Part work/Part college	0.9%	-	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	-	-	-	-	-
Doing voluntary work	1.6%	-	1.1%	0.5%	-	1.0%	-	-	1.4%	-
Travelling	0.1%	-	0.2%	0.2%	-	1.4%	-	-	-	-
Taking a break	0.3%	-	1.5%	0.4%	2.2%	1.9%	27.6%	-	-	-
Ill or disabled and unable to work	0.1%	-	0.4%	-	2.0%	-	-	34.5%	-	-
Waiting for exam/course results	0.1%	-	0.3%	-	0.0%	-	-	-	-	-
Doing a traineeship	-	-	-	1.7%	0.4%	-	-	-	-	-
Waiting to hear result of job app	-	-	0.2%	-	-	1.5%	-	-	-	-
Looking for a training course	-	0.2%	0.7%	-	5.1%	12.4%	-	0.7%	0.6%	-
n	**915**	**723**	**633**	**663**	**262**	**248**	**47**	**90**	**68**	**2,286**

Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

At age 19/20, most young people in the FTED into NEET pathway cluster were unemployed and looking for work (66.1%), looking for a training course (12.4%). However, some had made the transition into work (5.7%), or education (1.7%), or were doing an apprenticeship (0.6%), or waiting for a course or job to start (7.7%). A small remainder were either waiting to hear the result of a job application (1.5%), looking after the family and home (0.9%), taking a break (1.9%), or travelling (1.4%).

Most young people classified as Other NEETs, (a very small pathway cluster: 1%) were waiting for a course or job to start (58.6%), with a few having already made the transition into education (2.3%) or work (5.5%). Otherwise, these young people were 'taking a break' (27.6%), unemployed looking for work (3.7%), or looking after the family and home (2.4%).

For the most part, those At Home were either looking after the family and home (55.2%) or were ill or disabled and unable to work (34.5%). The remainder were either in education (4.4%) or work (1.5%), unemployed and looking for work (3.7%), or on a training course (0.7%).

Returners, another very small pathway cluster, were predominantly in education (54.9%) or work (43.2%), with the remainder waiting for a course or job to start (1.2%) or looking for a training course (0.6%).

Those on Direct to University pathways were all at university studying for a first degree.

Highest Qualification: Below Level 1 to Level 3

Higher qualifications are associated with a broad range of positive outcomes, most of all with more secure and better paid work (Hodge, Little, & Weldon, 2021; Watts, 2020), but other factors also, including better health for example (Le-Scherban, Roux, Li, & Morgenstern, 2014; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2005). The first few years post Key Stage 4 are especially important for further education and training. Given the different types of activities that underlie the different pathway clusters it is not surprising to find very significant gaps in attainment by age 19/20.

Figures 3 and 4 present the highest level of attainment achieved by young people within each pathway cluster by age 19/20. Figure 3 adjusts for differences in gender, and Figure 4 further adjusts for FSM eligibility, parental education, and Key stage 4 attainment. Results are presented in order of highest achievement.

The three university pathways had the highest levels of attainment overall. In order of prevalence of Level 3 attainment (L3), Direct to University (96%) were top, followed by Delayed University Entrants (91.6%), and University Non-Completers (82.3%)[30]. There is

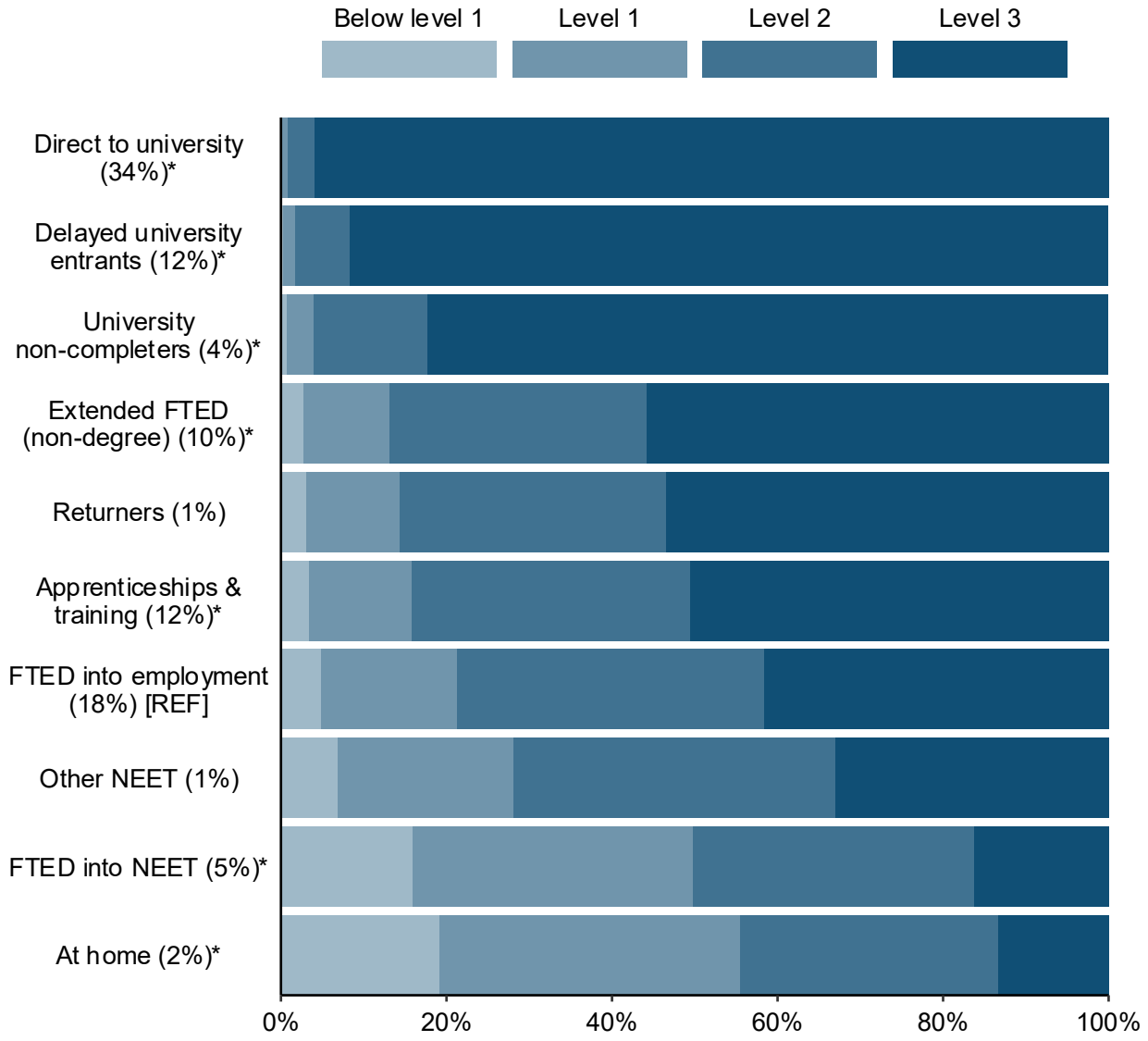
[30] A very small number of University Non-Completers reported below level 1 qualifications (4% n=11) despite also reporting they were studying for a first degree. It is likely that this is a measurement error. Similar cases were evident for Direct to University (0.8% n=12) and Delayed University Entrants (1.7% n=5).

a notable drop in prevalence of L3 attainment for the other three education or training pathways, in the order of Extended FTED (non-degree) (55.8%), Returners (53.5%), and Apprenticeships & Training (50.6%). Nevertheless, a further third of them had attained Level 2 (L2) qualifications, and one in ten a Level 1 (L1), with very few achieving below this.

A smaller decline in levels of attainment was evident among young people on FTED into Employment pathways: 41.7% achieved L3, 37.1% L2, and 16.4% L1, with just 4.9% achieving below this, followed by a further small decline in attainment levels among Other NEETs: 33% achieved L3, 38.9% L2, and 21.2% Level 1, with 6.9% achieving below this.

Young people on FTED into NEET pathways and those At Home had significantly lower levels of attainment. Nevertheless, more than one sixth FTED into NEET young people had achieved L3 attainment (16.2%), and a further third L2 (33.9%). However, a further third (34%), and one sixth (15.9%) had achieved L1, and below L1, respectively. Results were similar, although a little worse for those At Home. Whilst almost an eighth had achieved L3 (13.3%), and a further third a L2 (31.1%), these young people were more likely to have L1 attainment (36.4%) or below (19.2%). Estimated differences in attainment compared to the FTED into Employment pathway were all statistically significant, except for the two smallest pathways (Returners and Other NEET), owing to their small sample sizes. It also worth noting that many of these young people were still in education or training at age 19/20, so these figures were likely to change.

Figure 3: Highest NVQ Level at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



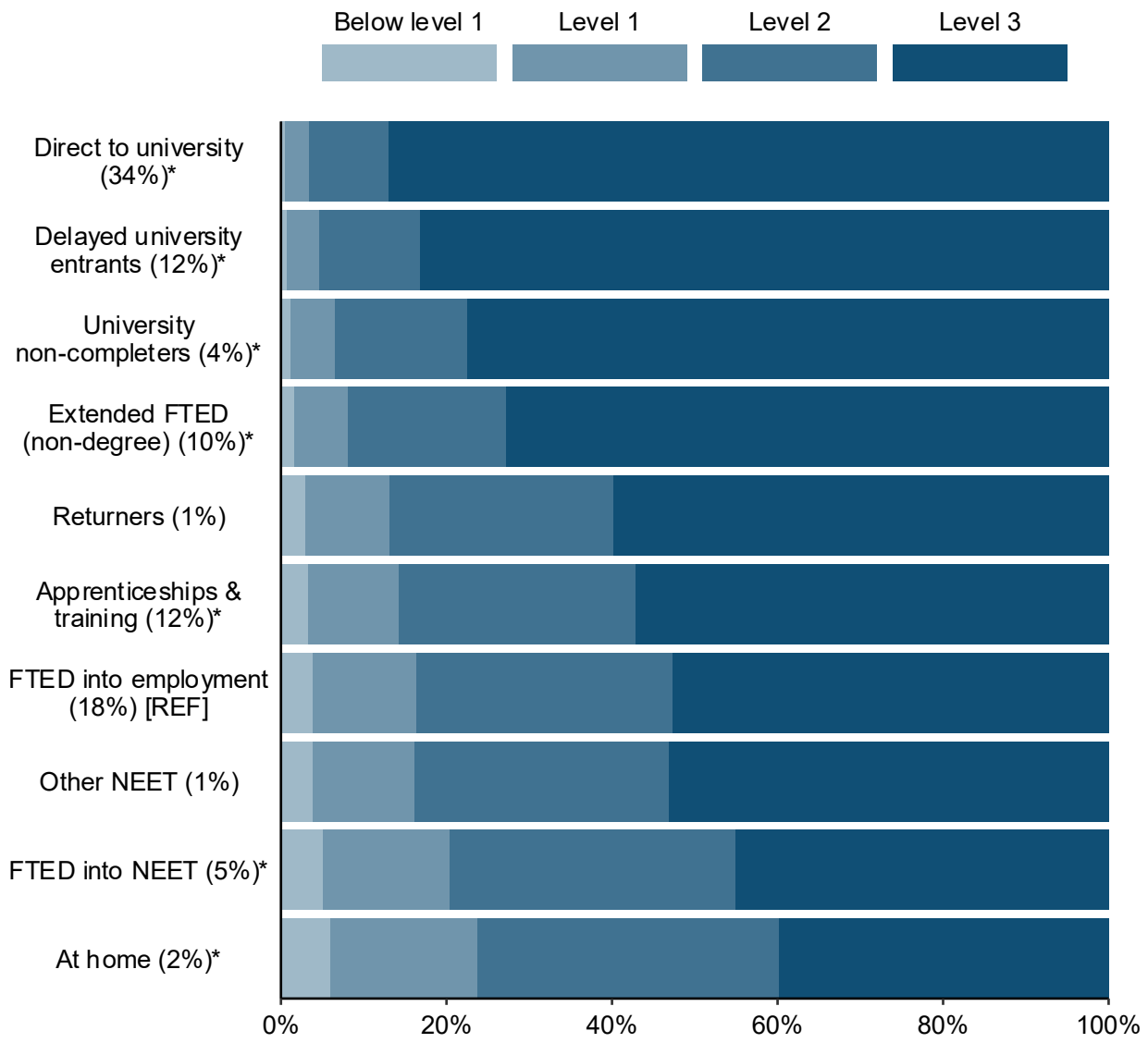
Notes: "REF" = Reference group; * = Significant. Adjusted for gender.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Figure 4 shows estimated levels of attainment further adjusted FSM eligibility, parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Whilst the relative order of the pathways, in terms of the prevalence of high attainment, remains unchanged, differences in the levels of attainment are substantially reduced. This is predominantly the consequence of adjusting for Key Stage 4 attainment, which is both a strong predictor of the pathways young people followed and accounts the initial differences in attainment gained at age16 (Duckworth et al., 2025a). In effect, the differences in attainment that remain represent differences in the *progress* young people made following their GCSEs.

Whilst these are much smaller, they remain sizeable and statistically significant. Some of this will be to do with differences in the learning skills developed throughout the course of their education (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2006), but much of the

difference is a result of the different pathways young people were on and the opportunities they offer for further attainment.

Figure 4: Highest Qualification Level, by age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; * = Significant. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Highest Qualification type (academic; vocational; apprenticeship; combined)

Figures 5 and 6 present the highest *type* of qualification young people had achieved by age 19/20. Again, Figure 5 adjusts for gender alone, and Figure 6 further adjusts for FSM eligibility, parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. For ease of interpretation, we have retained the order of the pathway clusters from Figures 3 and 4.

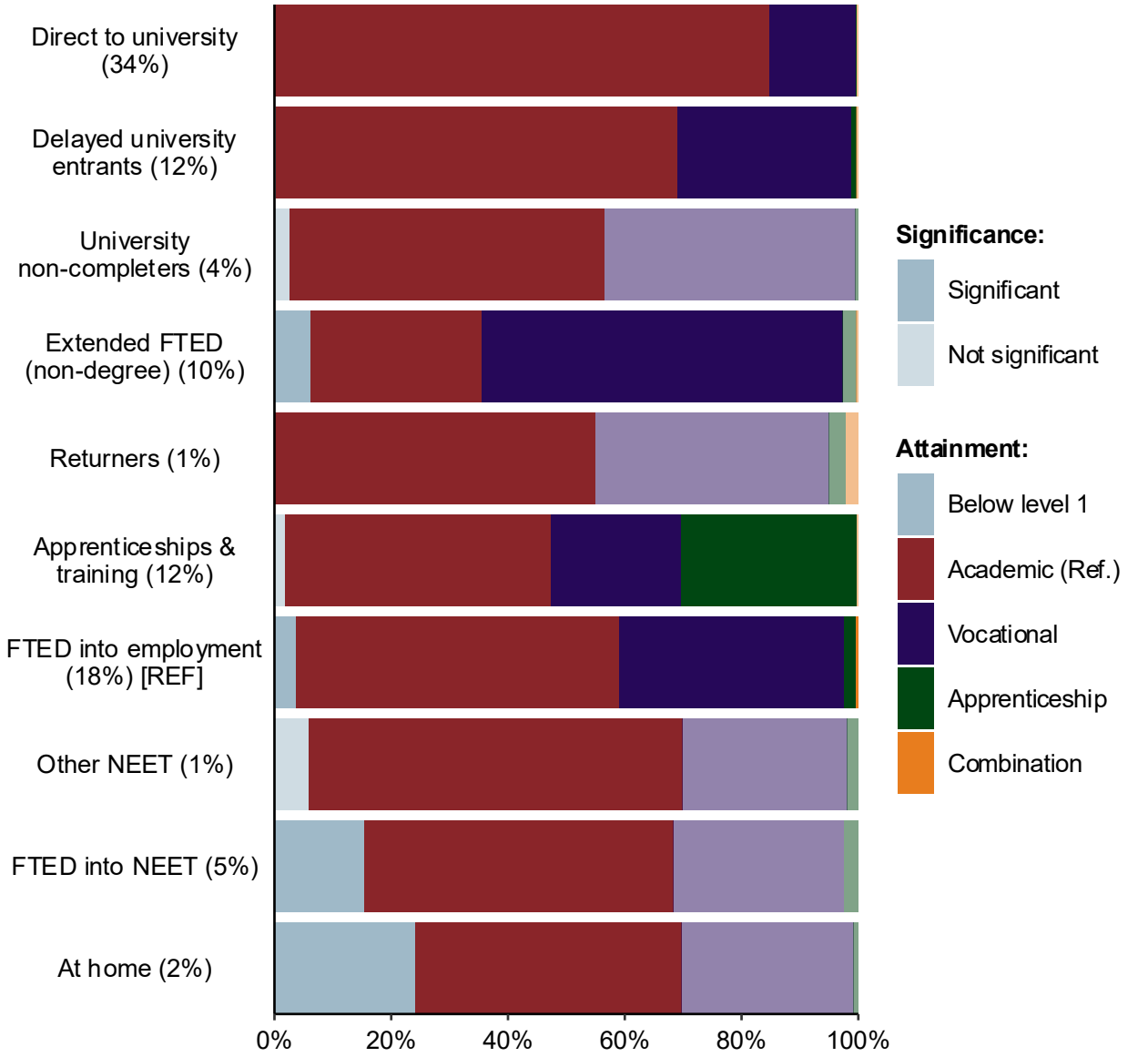
There is a notable gradient in the uptake of vocational type qualifications across the first four pathways: Direct to University (14.8%), Delayed University Entrants (29.8%), University Non-Completers (42.9%), and Extended FTED (non-degree) (61.8%). Whilst

we do not look at the individual courses young people were studying, differences in prevalence of those following vocational rather than academic routes into university were very large, particularly for University Non-Completers. Notably, prior research has found that young people who followed a vocational route into university were twice as likely to drop out of in their second year compared to those who had followed an A-Level route (Dilnot et al., 2023). Young people in extended education who were not studying for a degree (Extended FTED (non-degree)) were those most likely to have followed a vocational pathway overall: academic (29.3%), vocational (61.8%); whereas the educational paths of those returning to education (Returners) were more mixed: with 54.9% followed an academic pathway compared to 40.1% who followed a vocational pathway.

As expected, young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways were those most likely to have an apprenticeship by age 19/20 (30.1%). Nevertheless, there were minorities of young people with apprenticeships within other pathways clusters also, most notably Returners (2.9%), FTED into NEET (2.5%), and Extended FTED (non-degree) (2.4%). It is also worth noting that this is a snapshot of young people's attainment at age 19/20, and that many of these young people were still in training or education. Almost one third (31.1%) of young people within the Apprenticeships & Training pathway cluster were still studying for their apprenticeship, for example. Similarly, as young people continued along their respective pathways, the type of highest qualification for some might also change.

In the remaining four pathway clusters, fewer young people had engaged in further study or training beyond compulsory schooling. Consequently, many had academic rather than vocational qualifications: FTED into Employment (55.2% vs 38.6%), Other NEET (64% vs 28.2%), FTED into NEET (52.9% vs 29.2%), and At Home (45.5% vs 29.5%). In our two most disadvantaged pathway clusters (FTED into NEET and At Home) some had below L1 – for which we have no information on qualification type – or no qualifications at all.

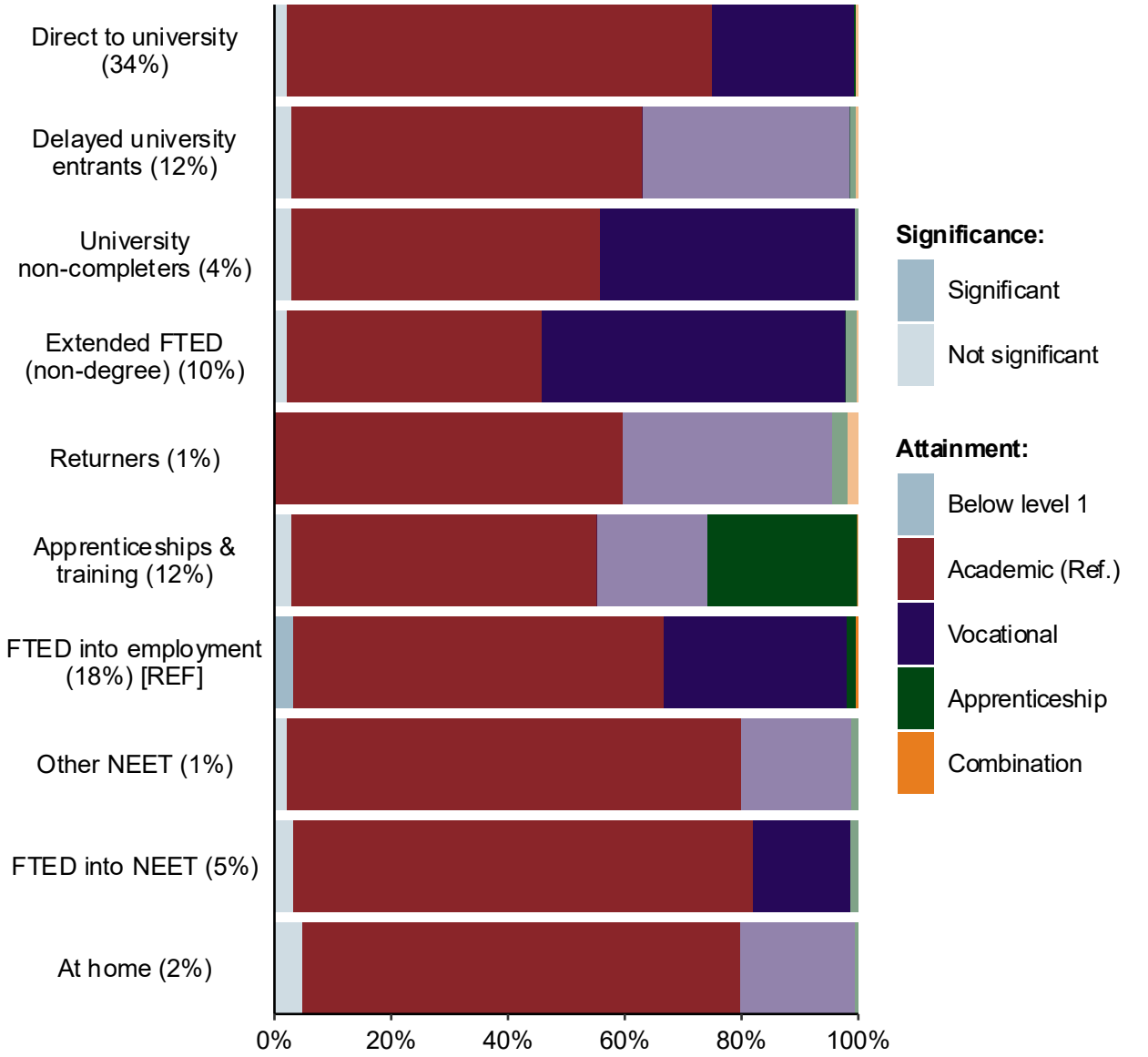
Figure 5: Highest Qualification Type by age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; "Ref." = Reference category. Adjusted for gender.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment had a significant effect on our estimates (Figure 6). Young people with higher attainment at Key Stage 4 were more likely to follow academic routes, adjustment for this measure therefore reduced differences in the distribution of academic and vocational qualifications across the pathways. Having a parent with a degree level qualification also reduced the likelihood that a young person would pursue vocational qualifications. Nevertheless, clear differences in the types of qualifications young people pursued depending on the pathway they were on remained as we might expect.

Figure 6: Highest Qualification Type by age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; "Ref." = Reference category. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Achievement of Level 2 in both English and maths (academic or functional)

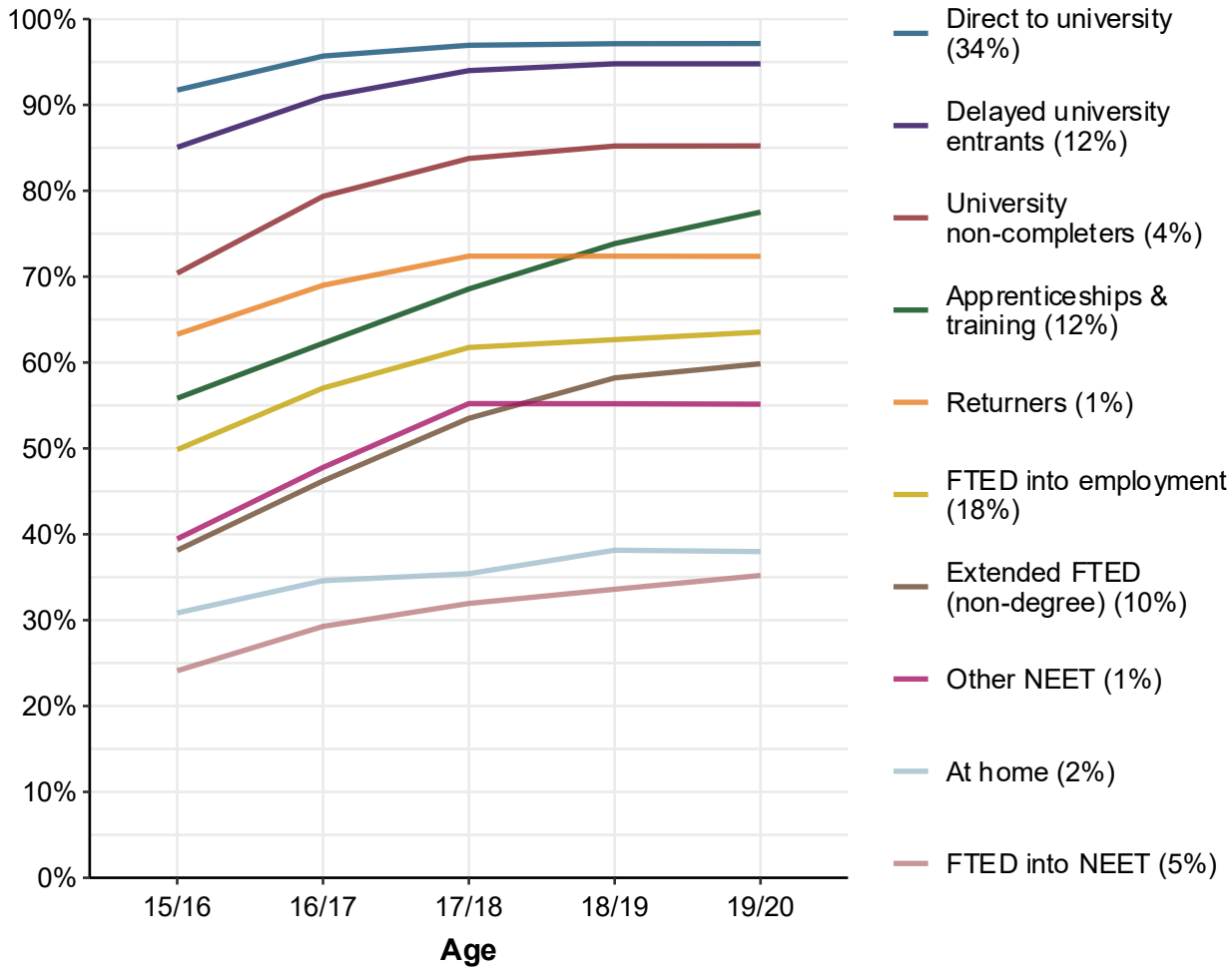
Figures 7 and 8 provide a different perspective on young people's attainment, showing the percentage of young people who had achieved L2 in both English and maths (academic or functional) within each pathway, *over time*. Proficiency in maths and English provide the basis for further learning and is critical for improving employment prospects and other related outcomes, including young people's wellbeing, and is a key policy aim of the Department for Education (English and maths funding). Figure 7 adjusts for gender alone, and Figure 8 further adjusts for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment. The pathways are by ordered of prevalence of those who had already achieved this milestone by age 19/20.

As we would expect, young people on Direct to University pathways were those most likely to have achieved a L2 in both English and maths by the end of Key Stage 4 (91.7%), with nearly all having attained this milestone by age 18/19 (97.1%) (Figure 7Figure 7). Delayed University Entrants were slightly less likely to have achieved this by age 16 (85.1%) but had almost entirely caught up by the time they were 18/19 (94.8%). Those who would become University Non-Completers were much further behind at age 16 (70.4%), and whilst many more had achieved this milestone by age 18/19, reducing the gap by half, more of these young people remained without this qualification at age 19/20 (85.2%).

On most pathways, the greatest increase occurred in the first two years following Key Stage 4, the period in which most young people were still in education and training. However, gains were evident across the full period for those on Apprenticeships & Training and Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways. Although young people on an Apprenticeships & Training pathway were more likely to have achieved this milestone at Key Stage 4 than Extended FTED (non-degree) (55.8% compared to 38.1%), a further fifth of young people on both pathways had obtained this qualification by age 19/20 (77.5% and 59.9%, respectively). Notably, from 2014/15 the Government made it mandatory for all apprentices to continue studying towards a Level 2 qualification in both English and maths where an apprenticeship did not already meet this requirement (SFA, 2014). This was no longer mandatory from 2022/23 (Powell, 2019).

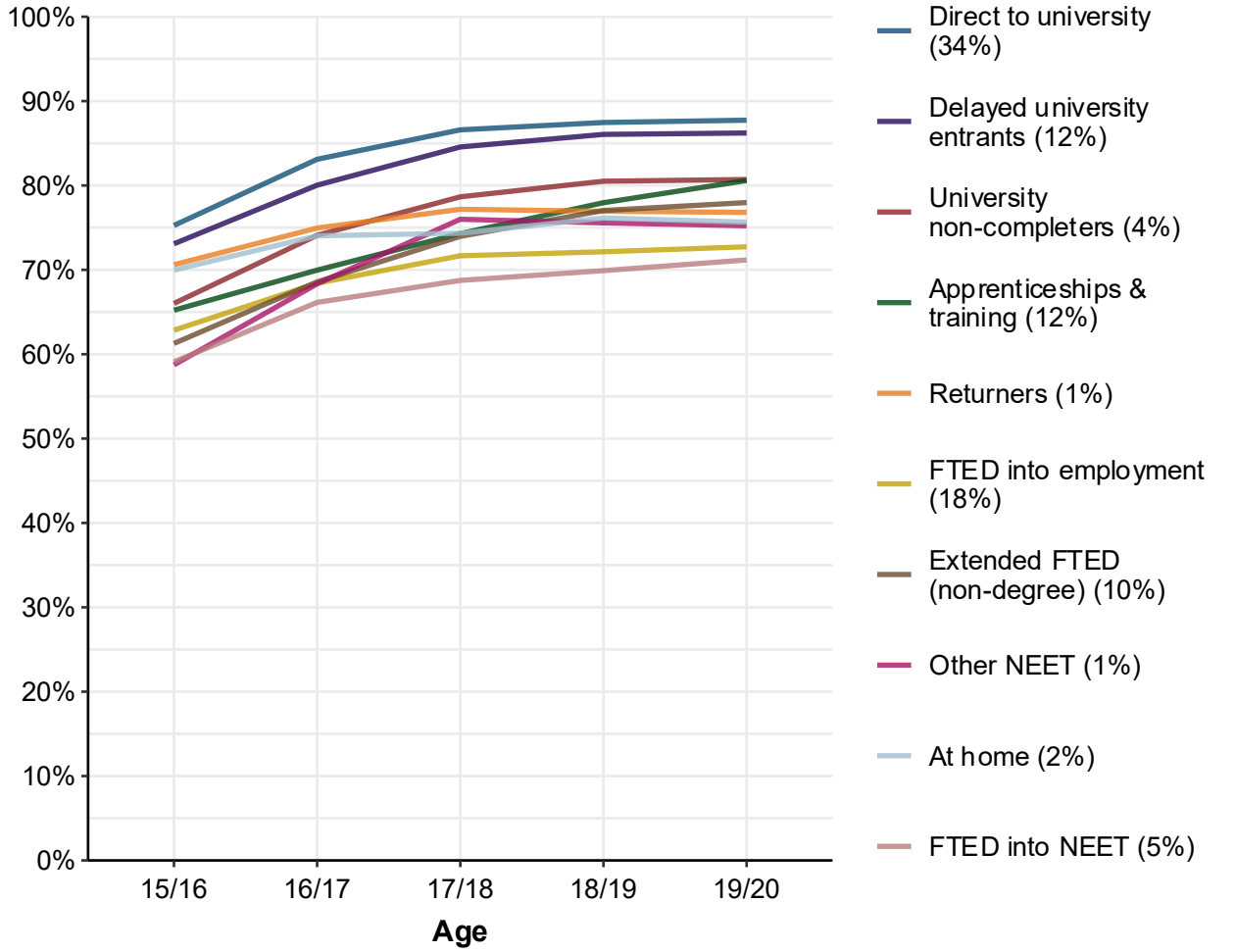
The picture was quite different for those on more at risk or disadvantaged pathways. Less than one third of young people At Home (30.8%) and a quarter of those on FTED into NEET (24.1%) pathways, had achieved L2 in both English and maths at Key Stage 4. However, even here, some young people were able to continue to improve their numeracy and literacy. By age 19/20, 38.1% and 33.6%, respectively, of young people on these pathways had achieved this benchmark.

Figure 7: Age achieved Level 2 English and maths, by pathway cluster



Notes: Adjusted for gender. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Figure 8: Age achieved Level 2 English and maths, by pathway cluster



Notes: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted)

Unsurprisingly, adjusting for Key Stage 4 attainment, and to some extent, adjusting for parental education and FSM eligibility, had a very significant effect on our estimates (Figure 8). Most of the vertical differences in achievement disappeared, illustrating that most of the differences in terms of this milestone had already occurred at Key Stage 4. Nevertheless, evidence of varying trends remains, which are the result of the different pathways that young people were on.

We also carried out some additional analysis, assessing differences in the probability of achieving L2 in both English and maths among young people *who had not achieved this milestone at Key Stage 4.* Young people currently at university (Direct to University and Delayed university entrants) were once again those most likely to have achieved this aim by age 19/20 (65%) if they had not already done so at Key Stage 4, closely followed by University Non-Completers (50.1%). However, the figure for those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways (49%) was similarly high. Young people were also more likely to have achieved L2 in both English and maths during this period if they were on Extended FTED (non-degree) (35%) pathways (compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways:

27.2%), whereas those on FTED into NEET (14.4%) pathways, and At Home (10.5%), were far less likely to have done so.

After we adjusted for differences in socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment, in effect, comparing young people with similar levels of prior attainment across the pathway clusters, those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways (44.1%) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (41%), were far more similar, or in some cases more likely to achieve L2 in both English and maths by age 19/20, compared to those on university pathways: Direct to University (46.7%); Delayed university entrants (51%); University Non-Completers (41.2%). The full results of this analysis are presented in Appendix B.

Material circumstances

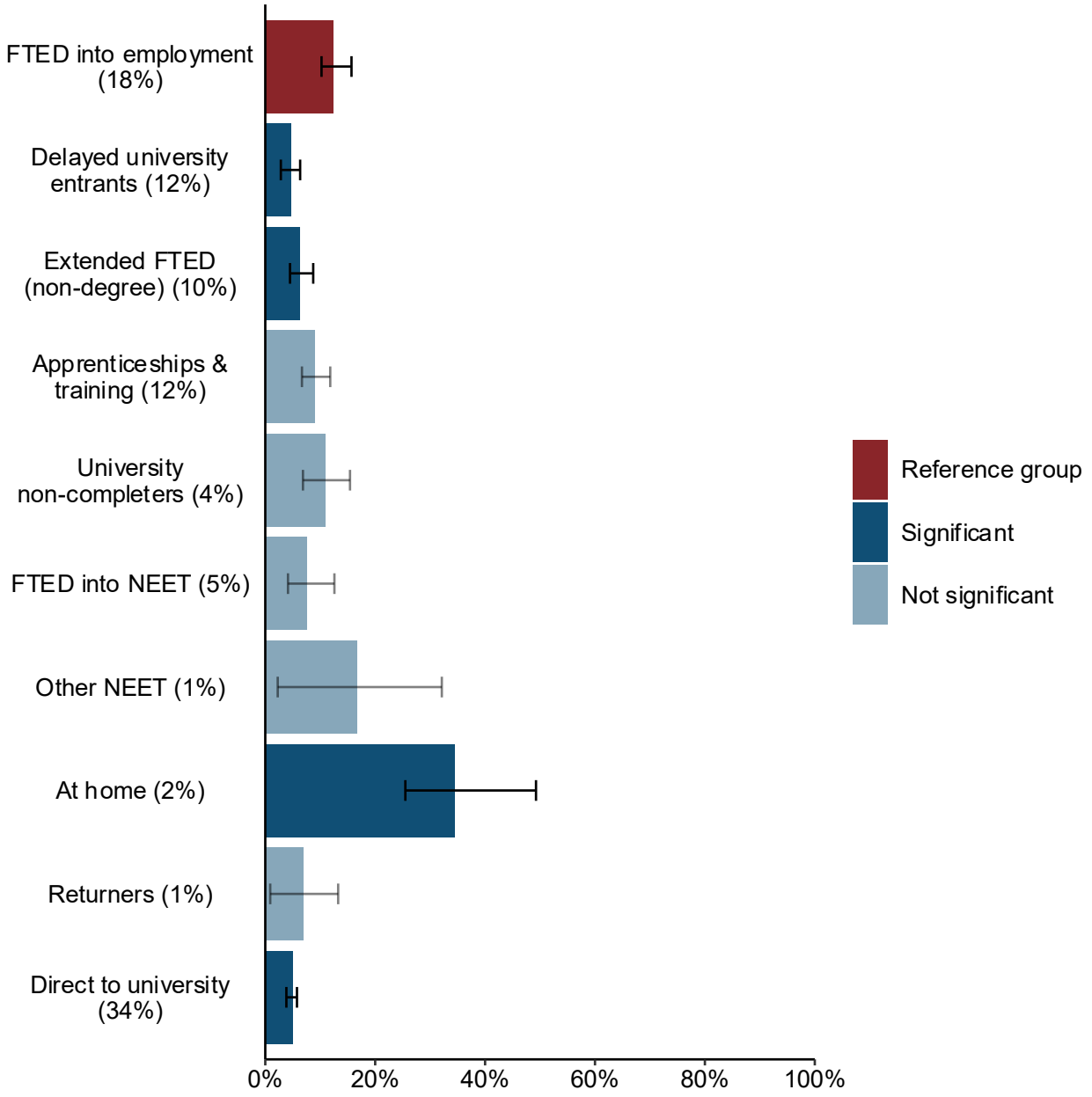
Not living in the parental home

Aside from those who had left home temporarily for the purpose of their studies, most young people remained in the parental home at age 19/20. This can provide young people with a secure base from which to navigate further study or training or establishing themselves in the world of work. Others had already made the transition to independent living, maybe through a planned move or because their circumstances (e.g. a difficult parental or sibling relationship, or the birth their own child) encouraged it. Other factors, such as the market costs of moving out of home, can also play an important role (Acharya & Broome, 2024).

Figure 9 shows the percentages of young people who were living outside of the parental home[31] at age 19/20, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment.[32]

[31] Living arrangements were derived from the young person's household address. If they lived somewhere different during term time, they were asked to provide the address they lived at when term finished. Therefore, we assume that unless this represented a more permanent move, young people living away from the parental home during term time were recorded as living with a parent or guardian.
[32] Adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates (there was an absolute reduction in prevalence for those At Home of 2.8%) therefore only the fully adjusted results are presented.

Figure 9: Does not live with a parent or guardian at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

One in eight young people (12.5%) on an FTED into Employment pathway lived outside of the parental home at age 19/20. This compares to nearly three in eight (34.6%) young people At Home, who were those most likely to have left the parental home. [33] As discussed in report one, many of these young people also had a child of their own to care for (48.8%). Aside from Other NEETs, the result for which was also non-significant, other young people appeared less likely to have left the parental home, with statistically

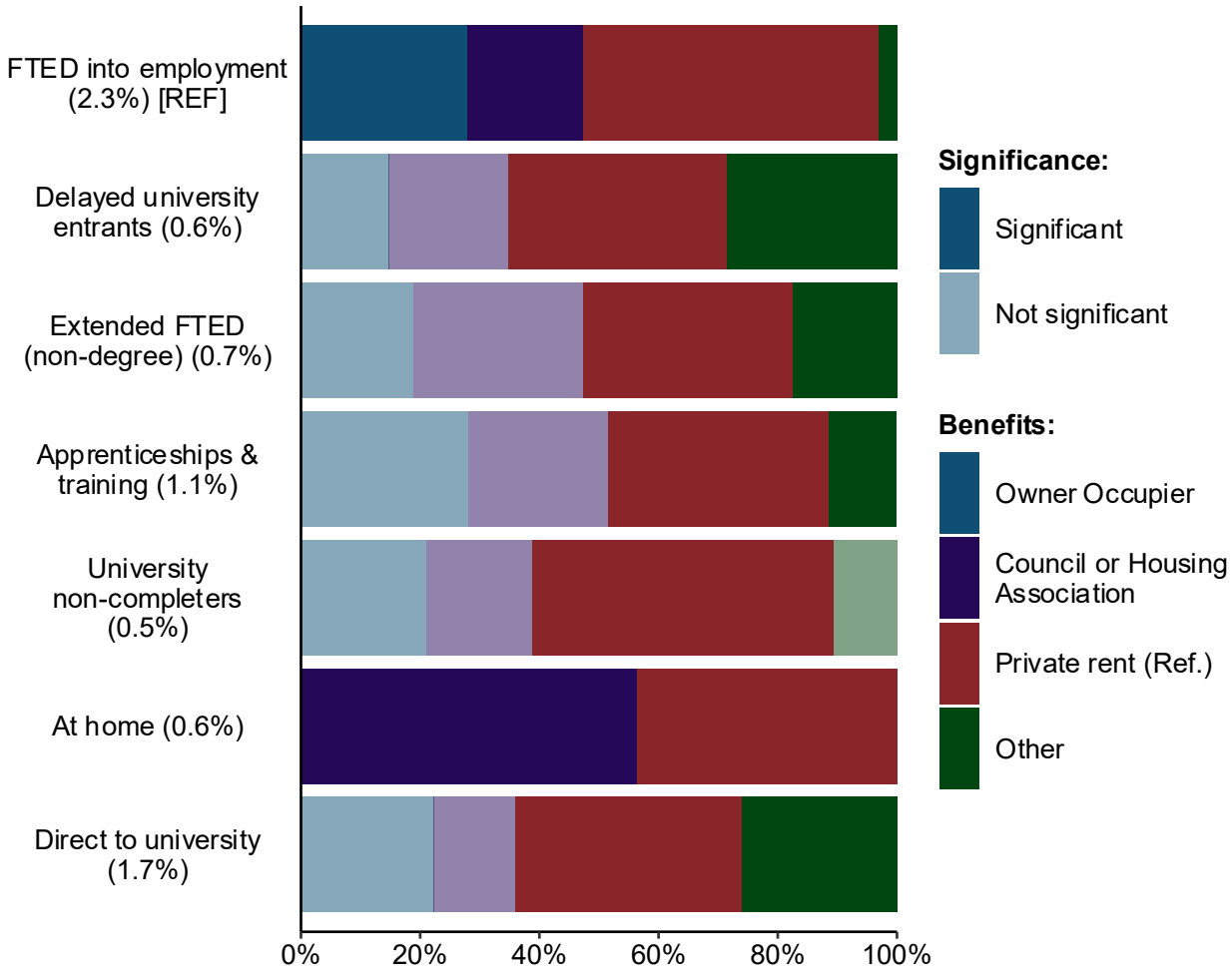
[33] The pathway title 'At Home' captures the fact that most young people on this pathway were at home as opposed to being at work or in education, for example. However, this was not necessarily the parental home, as the results clearly demonstrate.

significant differences between FTED into Employment and Delayed University Entrants (4.8%), Extended FTED (non-degree) (6.3%), and Direct to University (5.1%).

Tenure (not living in the parental home)

Figure 10 shows the tenancy arrangements of young people who were living outside of the parental home, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment.

Figure 10: Housing tenure at age 19/20 (YP not living in the parental home), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; "Ref." = Reference category. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Percentages in brackets are the prevalence of young people in each group who had left the parental home as a percentage of all young people. FTED into NEET; Other NEET; and Returners are excluded due to small sample sizes.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Although there are notable differences in the tenancy arrangements of young people living outside the parental home, very few of these were statistically significant, owing to small sample sizes (because very few young people had left the parental home at this

age). Nevertheless, a notable and significant difference was found for those At Home, who were far more likely to be living in council or housing association property (56.4%) compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways (19.5%). Furthermore, none of the At Home group lived in owner occupier housing, compared to 27.9% for FTED into Employment.

Delayed University Entrants (28.6%), young people on Direct to University (26%), Extended FTED (non-degree) (17.5%) and Apprenticeships & Training (11.4%) pathways were more likely to live in 'other' accommodation (which include armed forces residences, college or other education residences, employer's residences, or hotel, boarding house or hostel) than those on FTED into Employment (3.1%) pathways, our comparative pathway cluster.

Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment explained some (one tenth) of the association between being At Home and living in a council or housing association property (unadjusted results not shown).

Approximate total household income (not living in the parental home)

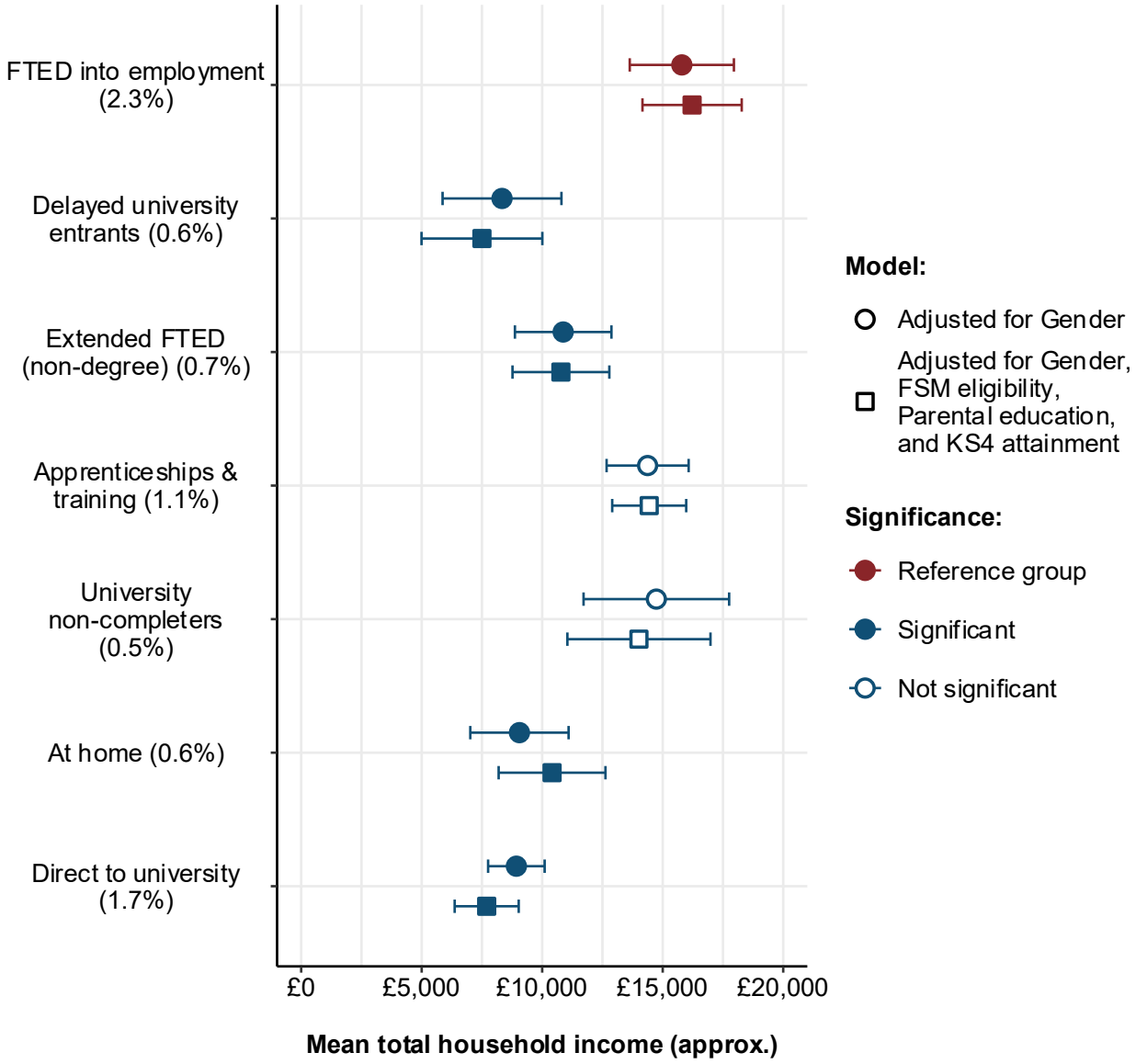
Figure 11 presents approximate[34] mean total household income across the pathway clusters for those who had left the parental home, adjusted for gender, and then further adjusted for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment.

Whilst estimates are only approximate, the results suggest large differences in household income. Young people on FTED into Employment (approx. £15.8k), Apprenticeships & Training (approx. £14.4k) pathways, and University Non-Completers (approx. £14.7k) had higher incomes on average than those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (approx. £10.9k) pathways, those At Home (approx. £9.1k), and both Delayed University Entrants (approx. £8.3k) and those on Direct to University pathways (approx. £8.9k).

Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment *increased* the difference in average incomes between FTED into Employment (approx. £16.2) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (£10.8k), Delayed University Entrants (£7.5k) and Direct to University (£7.7k), and *decreased* the difference in average income for young people At Home (£10.4k). This was the consequence of adjusting for differences in the distribution of young people with degree level parents and higher Key Stage 4 attainment across the pathway clusters, both of which were associated with higher incomes.

[34] Household income was recorded using pre-defined income bands. An overall average was then constructed from the middle value for each band.

Figure 11: Mean total household income (approx.) (YP not living in the parental home), by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. Percentages in brackets are the prevalence of young people in each group who had left the parental home as a percentage of all young people. FTED into NEET; Other NEET; and Returners are excluded due to small sample sizes.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

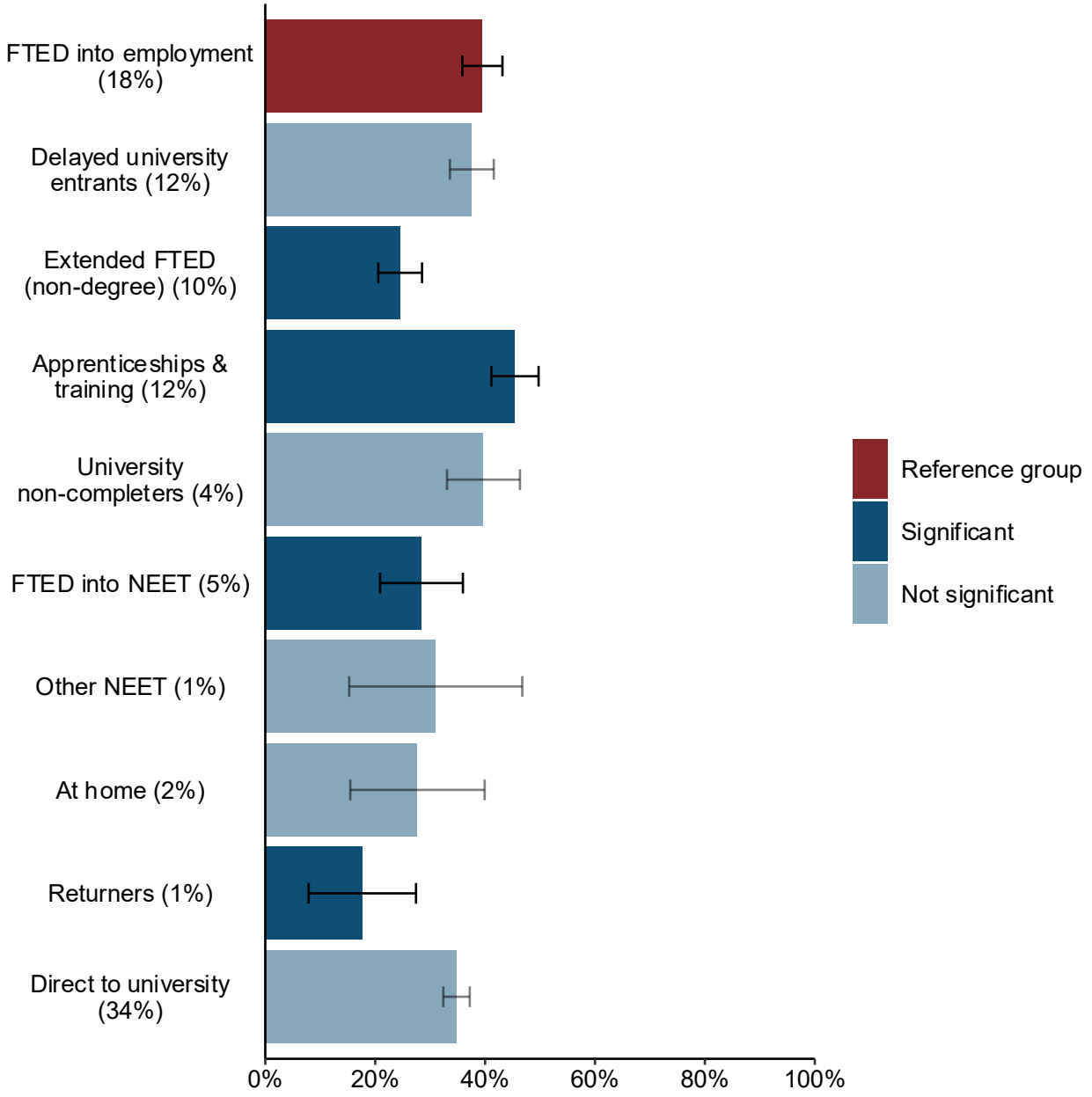
Percentage with Any Type of Debt (excluding mortgage and student loans)

Figure 12 shows the percentage of young people with any form of personal debt at age 19/20 (excluding mortgages or student loans), adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment.[35] It is important to note that estimates

[35] Further adjustment for differences in socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment increased absolute differences in prevalence between FTED into Employment and the Direct to University pathway clusters by 2.2% but otherwise made little difference to the estimates.

represent the presence (or absence) of debt only. Unfortunately, the survey does not collect information on the amount of debt young people held.

Figure 12: Has some form of personal debt at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

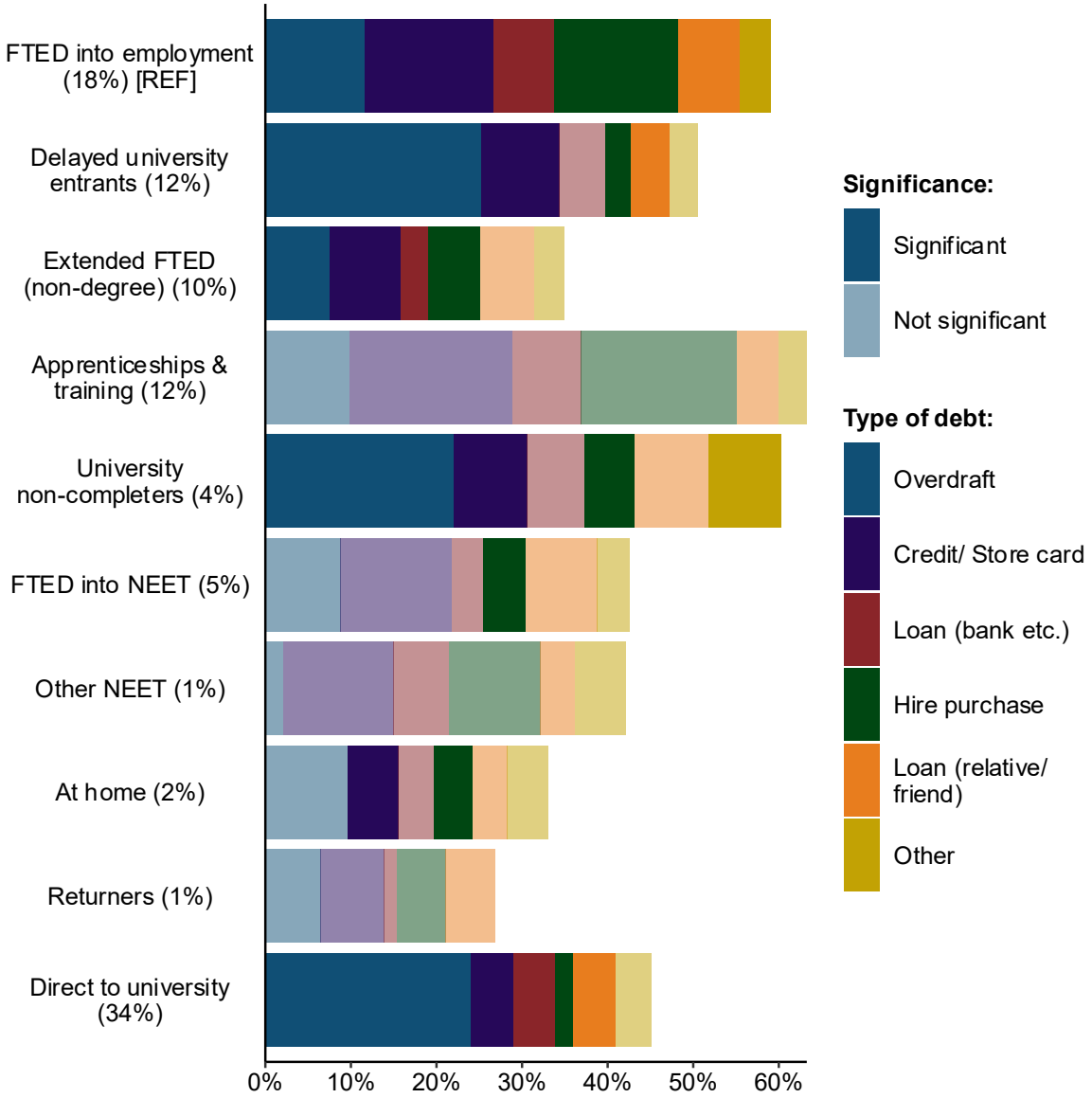
Many young people had some form of debt by age 19/20. Young people on Apprenticeships and Training (45.4%) and FTED into Employment (39.5%) pathways, as well as Delayed University Entrants (37.9%), University Non-Completers (39.7%), and to some extent, also those on Direct to University (34.8%) pathways, were more likely to have debt. Those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (24.5%), and FTED into NEET (28.4%) pathways, and Returners (17.7%), were less likely to have some form of debt. Although Other NEETs and those At Home also appeared less likely to have debt,

compared to FTED into Employment, this was not statistically significant. In general, findings suggest that those with more stable and higher incomes were better placed to take on personal debt, alongside university students for whom overdraft debt is generally interest free.

Types of Debt

Figure 13 shows the (potentially multiple) forms of debt young people held (overdraft, credit/store card, loan from friend/relative, other) across the pathway clusters, adjusting for differences in gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment[36].

Figure 13: Types of debt held at age 19/20 (multiple response), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

[36] Adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates, therefore only the fully adjusted results are presented.

Young people on university pathways were more likely to have overdraft debt than other young people: Delayed University Entrants (25.2%), Direct to University (24.1%), and University Non-Completers (22%), compared to FTED into Employment (11.7%). As noted above, overdrafts are generally interest free to university students and are often also extended to those who had recently left a university course.

Credit card or store card debt is usually a very expensive form of debt, depending on whether the debtor is able to clear the balance in full each month (data unrecorded). Credit or store card debt was more prevalent among young people on FTED into Employment (15.1%) and Apprenticeships & Training (19%) pathways, i.e. those more likely to have stable and/or higher levels of income, compared to Delayed University Entrants (9.2%), Extended FTED (non-degree) (8.3%), University Non-Completers (8.5%), those At Home (5.9%), and in the Direct to University (4.9%) group. However, the prevalence of credit or store card debt was also relatively high among FTED into NEET (13%), and Other NEETs (12.9%), who were, for the most part, not in paid employment.

Both formal loans and hire purchase accounts were more prevalent among those on FTED into Employment (7% and 14.5%, respectively) and Apprenticeships & Training (8.1% and 18.2%, respectively) pathways, particularly hire purchase accounts. The latter was far lower among Delayed University Entrants (3%), those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (6.1%), University Non-Completers (5.9%), FTED into NEET (4.9%), At Home (4.5%), and those on Direct to University (2.2%) pathways. However, these were again higher among Other NEETs (10.7%) than we might have otherwise expected given their activity status.

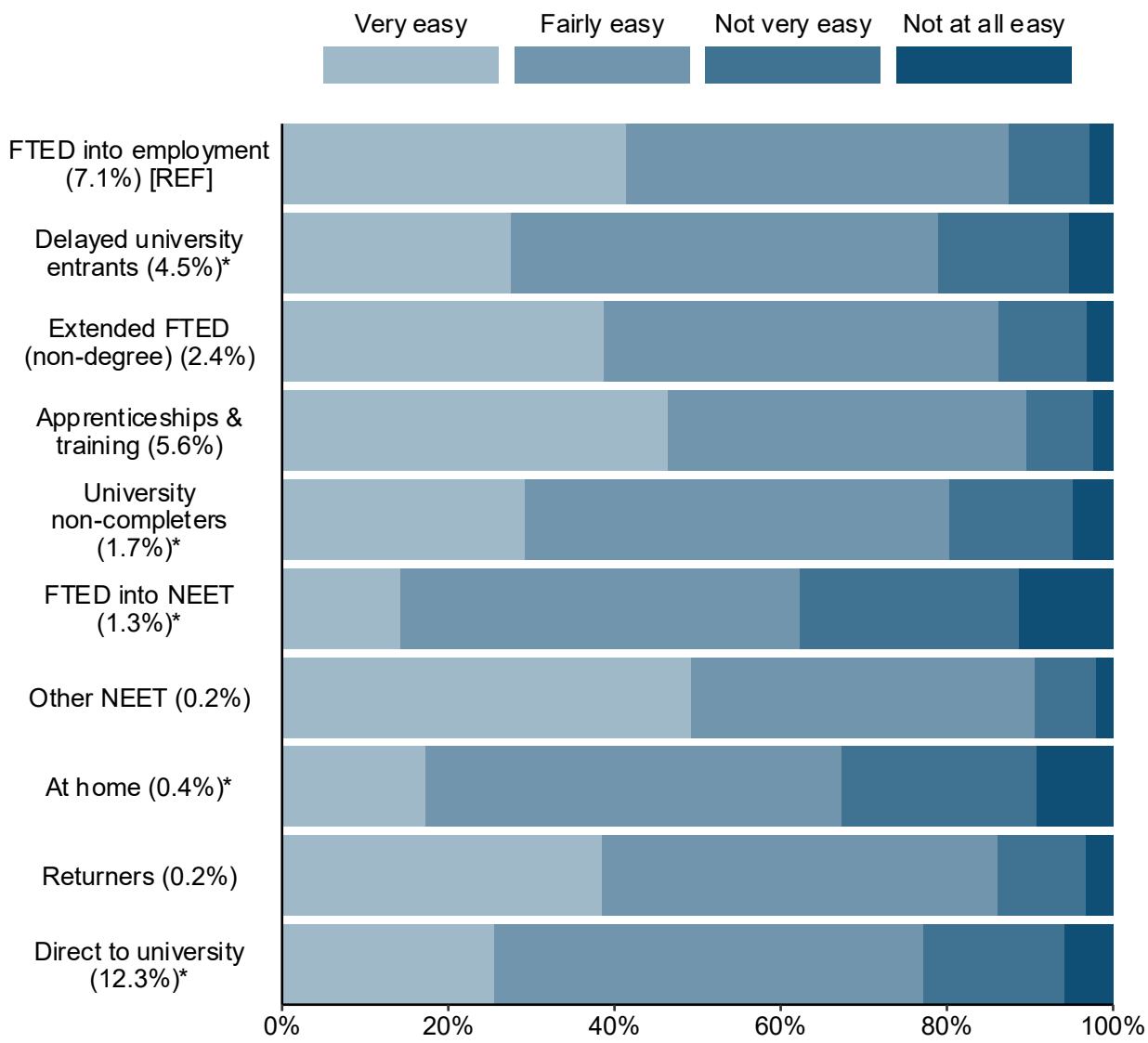
There were few (significant) differences in the prevalence of informal loans from friends or relatives, although these were notably lower among those at university: Delayed University Entrants (4.5%), and Direct to University (4.9%) young people compared to those on FTED into Employment (7.1%) pathways. This is likely because other forms of affordable debt (student loans, student overdrafts and in some cases, student grants) were available to them.

Keeping up with debt payments

LSYPE2 does not record the extent of young people's debt, however it does measure how easy (or difficult) they found managing their debt. Figure 14 presents the findings across the pathway clusters, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment[37].

[37] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates, therefore only the fully adjusted results are presented.

Figure 14: How easy is it to keep up with debt payments at age 19/20 (YP has some form of personal debt), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; * = Significant. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Percentages in brackets are the prevalence of young people in each group who had some form of personal debt as a percentage of all young people. Other NEET and Returners are excluded due to small sample size. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Whilst they were more likely to have debt, young people on FTED into Employment and Apprenticeships & Training pathways, were more likely to find it easy to manage. Just 12.5% and 10.4%, respectively, reported finding it 'not very easy', or 'not at all easy' to keep up with payments. This compares to Delayed University Entrants (21.1%), University Non-Completers (19.7%), and those on Direct to University (22.8%) pathways who were more likely to report finding it difficult. Whilst young people on FTED into NEET pathways (37.7%) and those At Home (32.6%) were less likely to have any debt, they were nevertheless more likely to find it difficult managing this debt.

Our findings, which suggest significant financial difficulties among some of those on the two most disadvantaged pathways, are very concerning. It is also concerning that significant numbers of young people at university were also facing financial hardship. Both the prevalence and diversity of debt was also high among University Non-Completers. Whilst we do not investigate this any further, it is certainly plausible that financial stress may have contributed to some young people dropping out of university (Sanders, 2023).

Financial Support from Parents

Many young people continue to receive financial support from their parents, or guardians, at this age. This can be a protective factor, helping young people navigate the financial demands of late adolescence and early adulthood (Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2013). Figure 15 shows the percentage of young people who had received parental financial support in the last 12 months, across the pathway clusters.

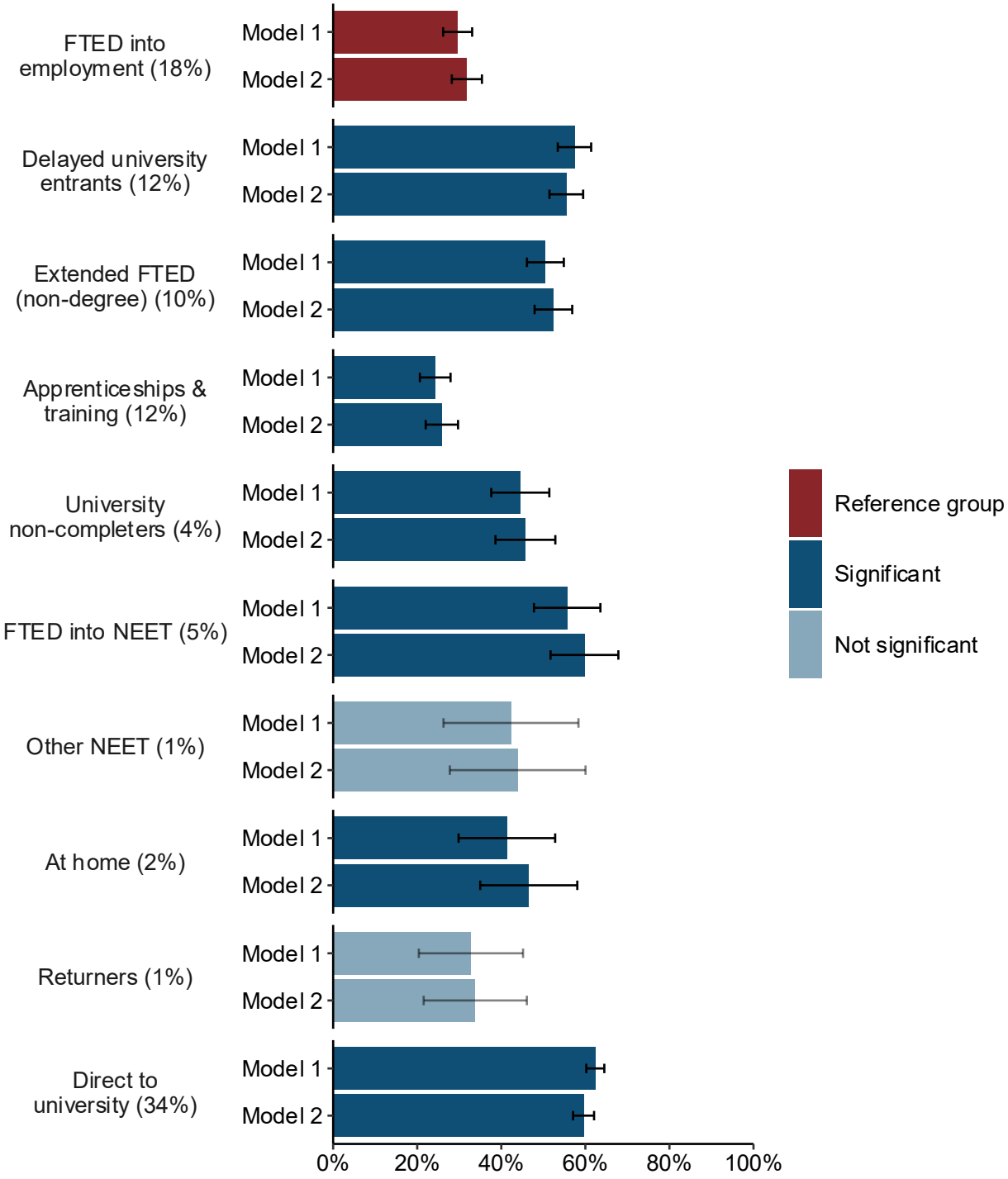
Young people on FTED into Employment (29.6%) and Apprenticeships & Training (24.3%) pathways were less likely to receive parental financial support, suggesting a greater level of financial independence. In contrast, young people on college or university pathways were far more likely to receive financial support: Delayed University Entrants (57.4%), Extended FTED (non-degree) (50.5%), and Direct to University (62.4%).

Those who had left university early (University Non-Completers), were a little less likely to receive support (44.5%), which may be attributable to the fact that many of them had moved into paid employment (59.1%). The number of those on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways in work was substantially lower (42.7%). This could explain why they were more likely to receive parental financial support (50.5%).

Young people on the two most disadvantaged pathways were also more likely to receive parental financial support, particularly those on FTED into NEET (55.7%) pathways, but also those At Home (41.3%). In contrast, the prevalence of financial support for Returners (32.8%), was very similar to FTED into Employment, which may indicate a preference or need to gain financial independence and security prior to returning to education.

In addition to the young person's need for financial support, this will also depend on whether a parent or guardian can afford it. We were able to take some account of the of this by adjusting for the young person's socioeconomic background. This resulted in a slight decline in the prevalence of financial support for Delayed and Direct to University pathway clusters, and a slight increase in prevalence for all other pathways, particularly the two most disadvantaged pathway clusters, for FTED into NEET and At Home. Having a degree educated parent, which was a predictor of university pathways, increased the likelihood that a young person would receive parental financial support, whereas being eligible for free school meals, a predictor of the disadvantaged pathways, decreased it.

Figure 15: Received financial support from parent or guardian (at age 19/20), by pathway cluster

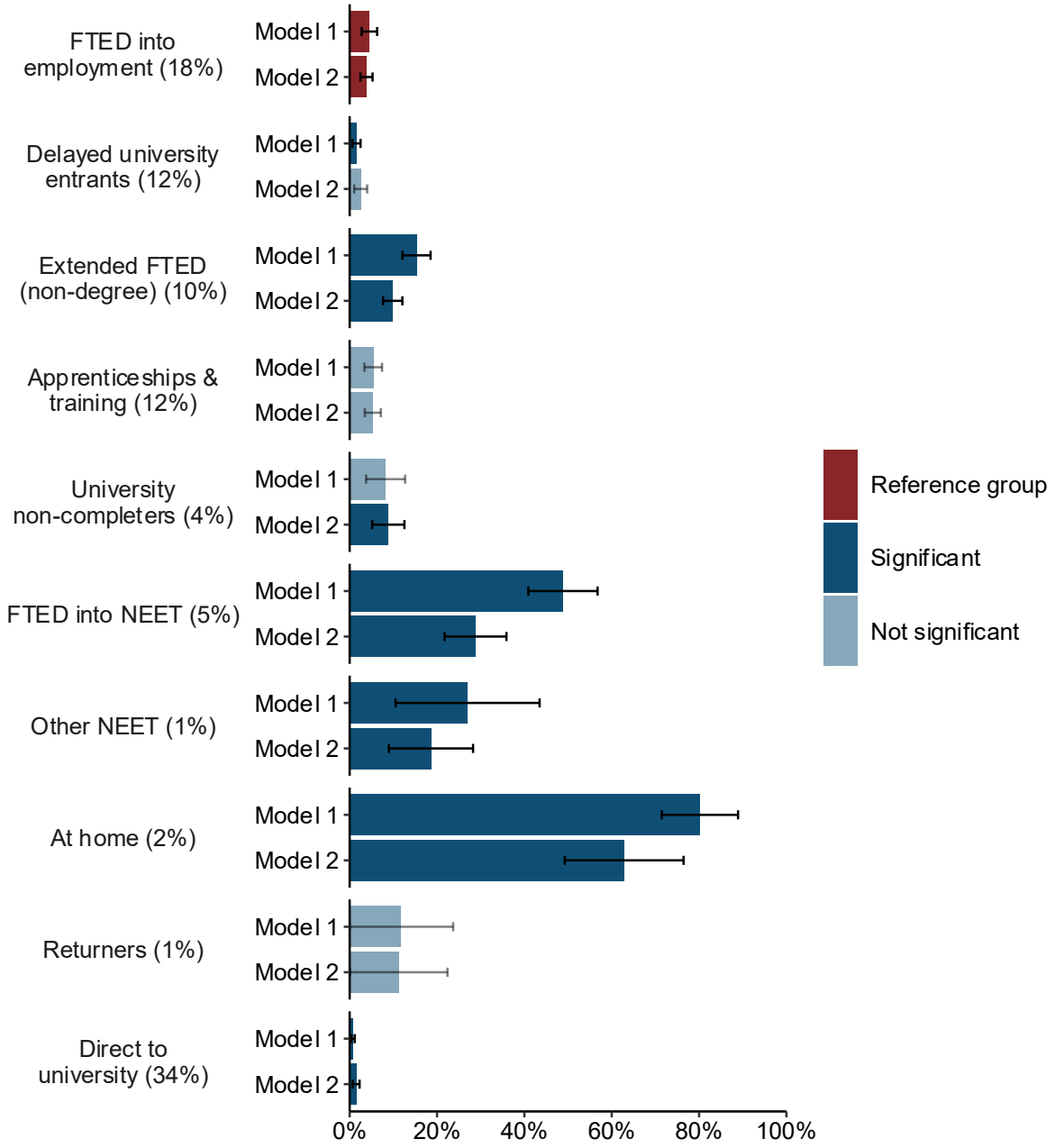


Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Model 1: Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Benefit receipt

Figure 16 shows the prevalence of benefit receipt across the pathway clusters. Benefits include Universal Credit and its legacy benefits, disability benefits, and child and maternity benefits[38].

Figure 16: In receipt of benefits at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. "REF" = Reference group
Model 1: Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

[38] The full list includes Universal Credit, Jobseeker's allowance, Income support, Employment and support allowance, Working tax credit, Housing benefit, Child tax credit, and Carer's allowance, Personal independence allowance, Disability Living allowance, Severe disablement allowance, Incapacity benefit, Industrial injuries disablement, Child benefit, Guardian's allowance, and Maternity allowance.

The prevalence of benefit receipt varied considerably across the pathway clusters. It was highest by far for those At Home (80.2%), or on FTED into NEET (48.8%) pathways, but was also higher among Other NEETs (27%), and to some extent, young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) (15.3%) pathways, compared to FTED into Employment (4.5%). It was a little higher among University Non-Completers (8.2% n/s) and Returners (11.6% n/s), but the difference with FTED into Employment was not statistically significant.

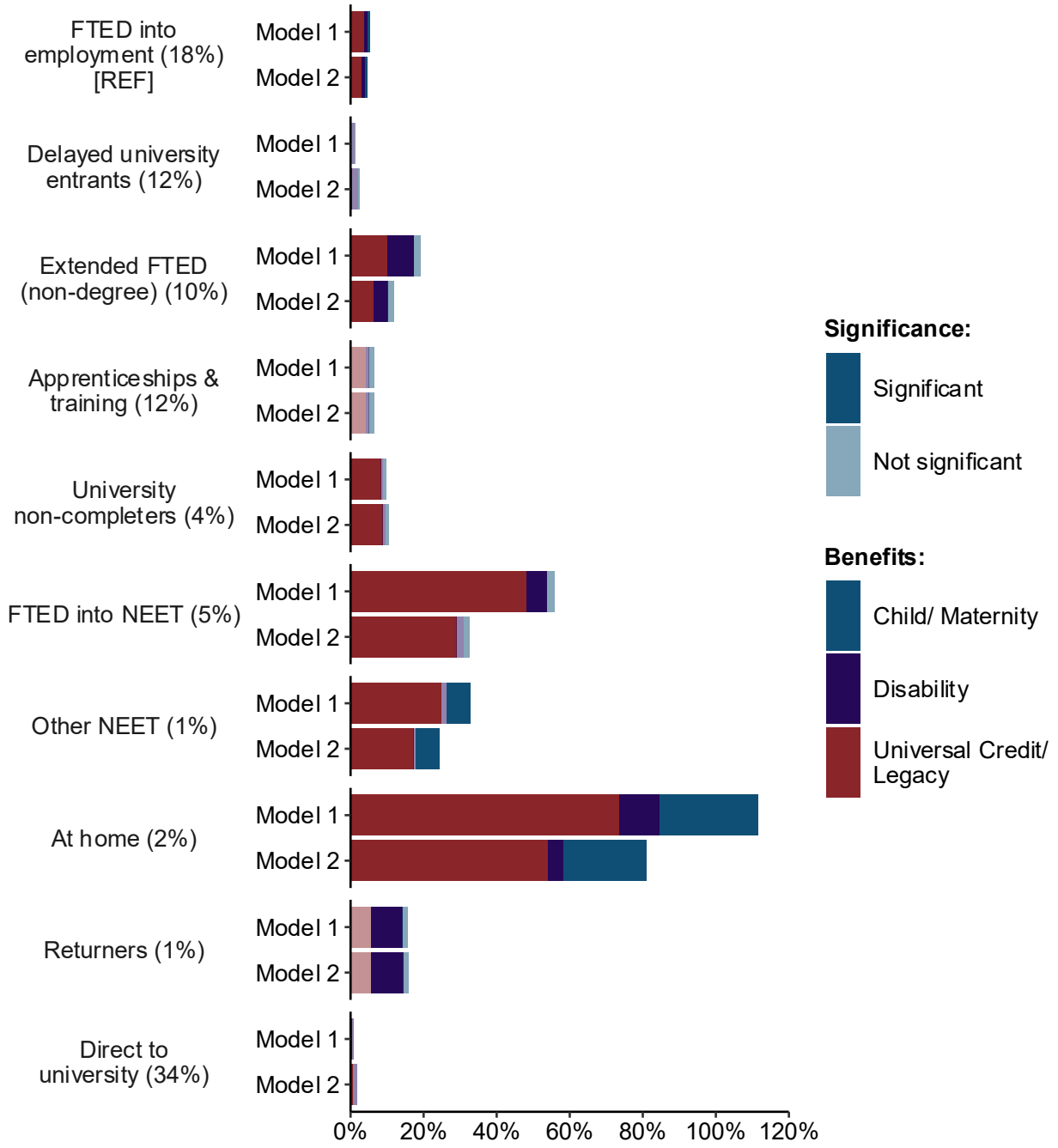
Benefit receipt was far lower among those on FTED into Employment (4.5%) and Apprenticeships & Training (5.4%) pathways, and lower still for Delayed University Entrants (1.6%), and those on Direct to University (0.8%) pathways. Young people at university are generally ineligible for benefit receipt as they have access to other forms of financial support.

Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment had a significant effect on our estimates. The prevalence of benefit receipt declined by two fifths for young people on FTED into NEET (28.8%) pathways, by one fifth for those At Home (62.8%), and by one third for both Other NEETs (18.6%) and those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (9.9%) pathways. Young people on these pathways were more likely to have a parent(s) or guardian(s) with none or low-level qualifications, have lower attainment themselves, and have been eligible for free school meals, all of which were associated with subsequent benefit receipt This suggests a direct association between childhood disadvantage, low attainment, and subsequent benefit receipt. As the pathway clusters remain strongly associated with benefit receipt after adjustment, it also illustrates the pathways themselves were an important mechanism through which young people's subsequent disadvantage/advantage occurred.

Types of benefit received (universal credit/legacy benefits; disability; child/maternity)

Figure 17 presents the prevalence of the different types of benefits received across the pathway clusters, distinguishing between Universal Credit and its legacy benefits, disability benefits, and child/maternity benefits.

Figure 17: Type of benefits received at age 19/20 (multiple response), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group. Model 1: Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Those in receipt of benefits were most likely to be claiming Universal Credit or one of its legacy benefits.[39] The receipt of these types of benefit was again highest for those At Home (73.6%) or on FTED into NEET (48.3%) pathways, but was also higher among Other NEETs (24.8%), and those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (10.2%) pathways compared to FTED into Employment (3.7%). It was slightly higher among University Non-

[39] Universal Credit legacy benefits include Jobseeker's allowance, Income support, Employment and support allowance, Working tax credit, Housing benefit, Child tax credit, and Carer's allowance.

Completers (8.3%), but also low among those on Apprenticeships & Training (4.2%) pathways, and Returners (5.6%).

Again, further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment had a significant effect on the estimates. Prevalences declined for those At Home (54.2%), FTED in NEET (29%), Other NEETs (17.2%), and Extended FTED (non-degree) (6.4%). This is because young people on these pathways were more likely to have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage, and have lower Key Stage 4 attainment, which accounted for some of the original association.

The receipt of disability benefits was higher among young people At Home (11.1%), those on FTED into NEET (5.4%) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (7.1%) pathways, and Returners (8.6%), compared to those on FTED into Employment (0.9%) pathways. Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment, reduced the prevalence by more than half for those At Home (4%) and on FTED into NEET (2.1% n/s) pathways, and by almost half for those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (3.9%) pathways. Disability was higher among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and is associated with lower attainment (Duckworth et al., 2025a), which accounts for a lot of the original differences.

Very few young people were pregnant or had a child at this age and therefore receipt of child and/or maternity benefits was very low overall. It was highest among young people At Home (26.9%), who were those most likely be parents (48.8%) at this age but was also a little higher among Other NEETs (6.4%). Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment slightly reduced the prevalence among young people At Home (22.7%), which highlights the link between social disadvantage, low attainment, and early parenthood.

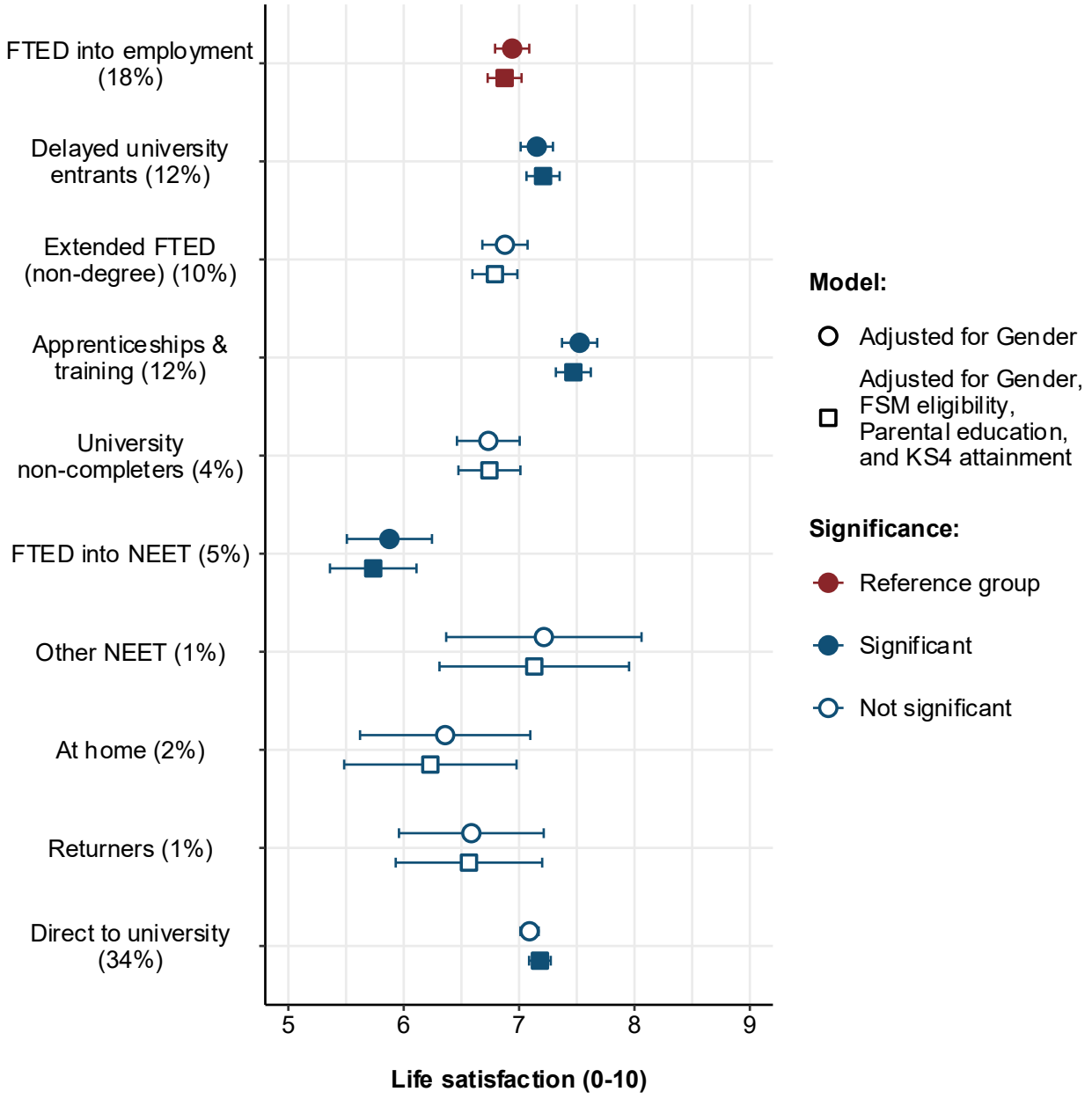
Wellbeing and mental health

LSYPE2 has a very broad range of measures for assessing young people's wellbeing and mental health. We examined three areas in particular: Young people's mental health and wellbeing; longstanding illnesses or disability, and health related behaviours.

ONS4

ONS4 is a set of four personal wellbeing measures put together by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the purpose of developing 'an accepted and trusted' set of statistics that help us to understand and monitor wellbeing across social surveys. Young people were asked to report on a scale of 0 – 10, their (1) life satisfaction, (2) whether they felt that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, (3) level of happiness, and (4) level of anxiety. Figure 18 to 21 present the mean score for each measure across the pathway clusters.

Figure 18: Life Satisfaction at age 19/20, by pathway cluster

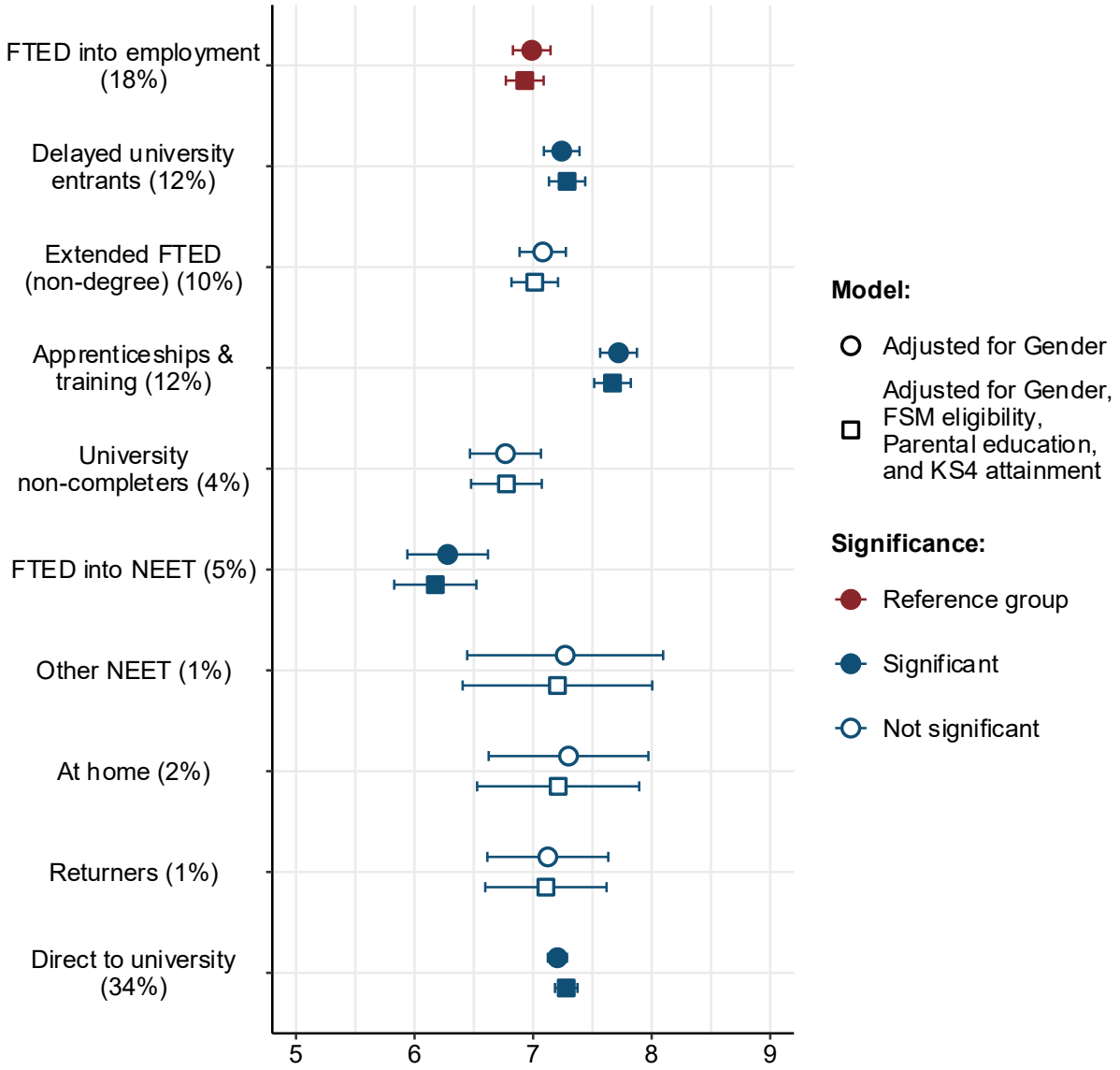


Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 5 and finishes at 9.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Common patterns of findings were evident across all four measures of wellbeing. Looking at the fully adjusted estimates, average wellbeing was close to 7 across all wellbeing measures, except anxiety (3.7), where higher scores represent a greater level of anxiety. Young people at university (both Delayed University Entrants and Direct to University) had slightly greater wellbeing compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways: In terms of their life satisfaction: Delayed Uni Entrants: 7.2, Direct to University: 7.2, and FTED into Employment: 6.9; on feeling the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile: 7.3, 7.3, and 6.9, respectively; and on happiness: 7.1, 7.0, and 6.8. Nevertheless, those at university were more likely to report higher anxiety: 3.8, 4.0, and

3.6, respectively[40]. Previous research has demonstrated an association between high levels of attainment and anxiety, which might be attributable to the pressures some young people feel around academic achievement (Lessof et al., 2018).

Figure 19: Response to the statement "The things you do in your life are worthwhile" at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



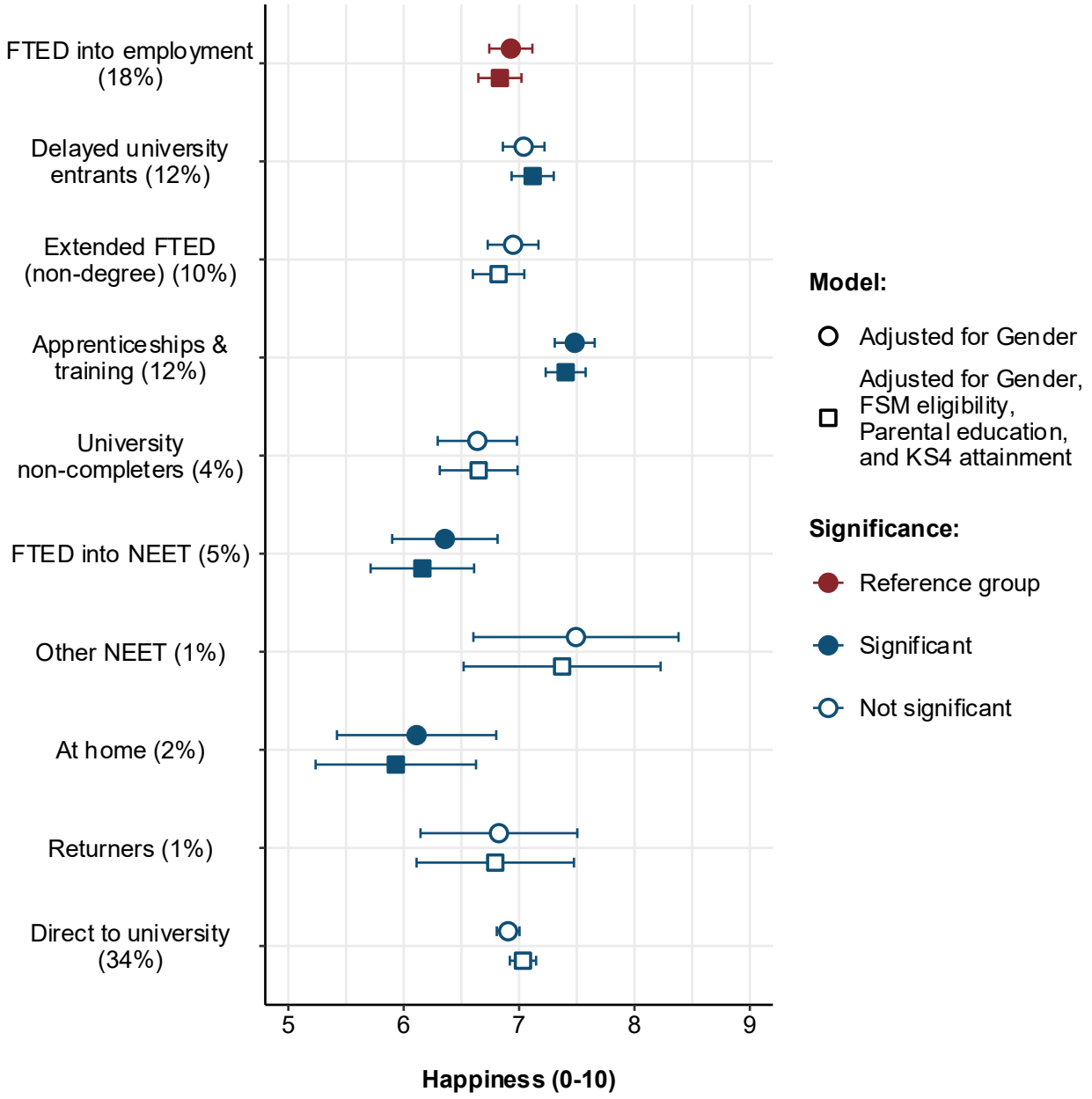
Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 5 and finishes at 9.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

[40] On a scale from 0 – 10 these differences are seemingly small, however the scale on which individuals generally respond is far narrower, which lends small differences greater significance. The standard deviation for life satisfaction, a measure of the actual spread of scores, was 2.0 for our sample. Under the laws of probability, more than two thirds of young people scored within 1 standard deviation above and below the mean score, meaning the majority responded with scores between 5 and 9. Scores outside of this range represent exceptionally high or low life satisfaction. The equivalent range for the other measures of wellbeing were: Feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile: between 5 and 7; Happiness: between 4 and 9; and Anxiety: 1 to 7.

Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways had the highest wellbeing scores overall across all four measures: On life satisfaction: (7.5); on feeling the things they were doing in their life are worthwhile: (7.7); on happiness: (7.4); and on anxiety: (3.2). Although reported anxiety among Other NEETs (2.9) was lower still, the difference, compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways, was not statistically significant.

At the other end of the scale, in most instances, young people on FTED into NEET pathways had the lowest scores overall: They had the lowest scores for life satisfaction (5.7) and feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (6.2), second lowest for happiness (6.2), and joint highest for anxiety (4.1). Average reported anxiety was similarly high for young people At Home (4.1 n/s) and Returners (4.1 n/s), however, the difference compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways was not statistically significant. This is at least in part due to small sample sizes for those pathway clusters.

Figure 20: Happiness at age 19/20, by pathway cluster

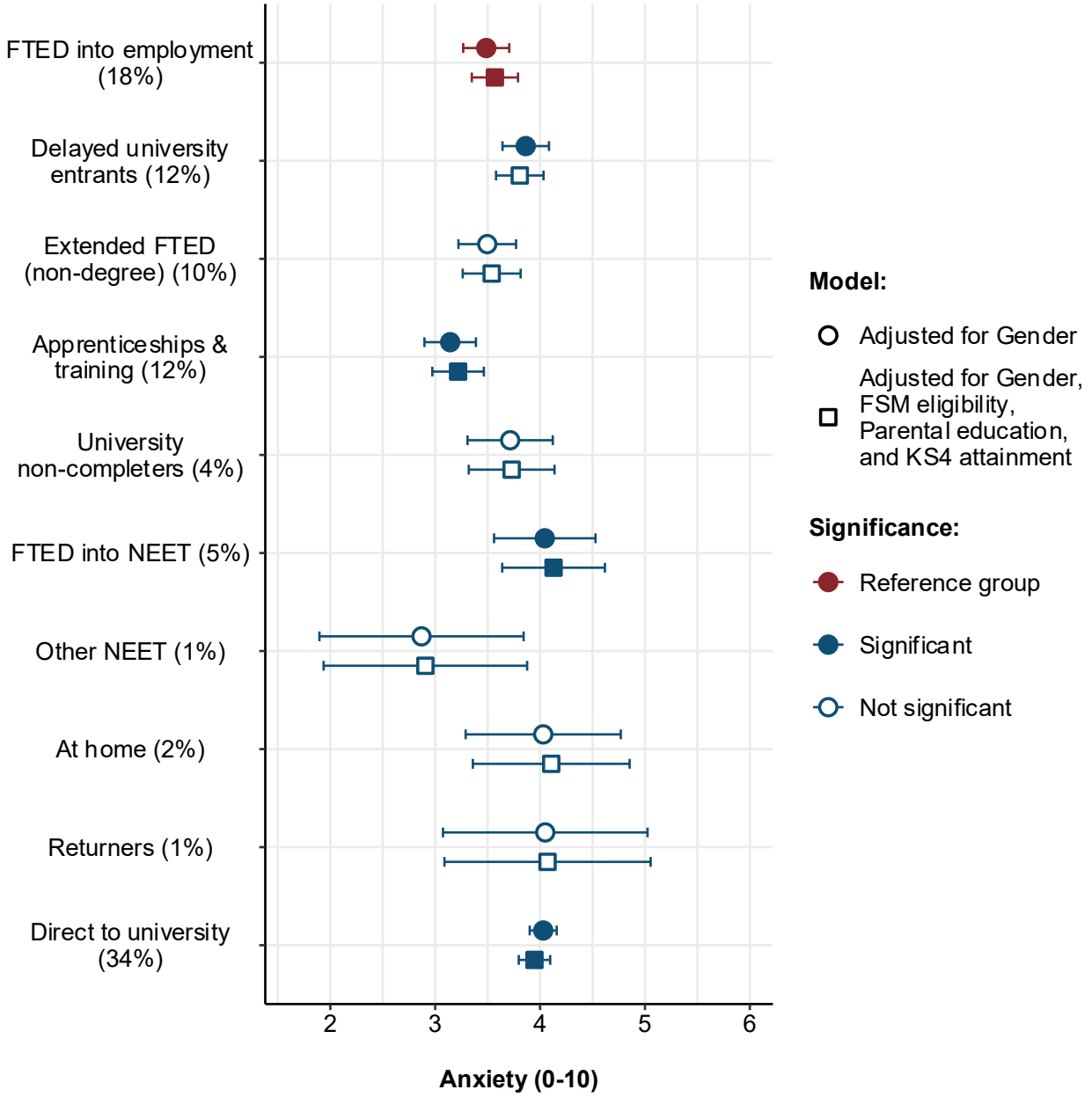


Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 5 and finishes at 9.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Young people At Home also fared poorly across the wellbeing measures, however many of the estimated differences compared to FTED into Employment were non-significant owing to the small sample size of this group. Those At Home had the second lowest life satisfaction (6.2, n/s), lowest happiness (5.9), and the joint highest anxiety (4.1 n/s). Nevertheless, likely to feel that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile (7.2, n/s), with an average score similar to those attending university, although again. A plausible, although untested hypothesis relates to the fact that many of those At Home were young parents (48.8%). The struggles of being a parent, particularly at a young age, might have impacted their life satisfaction and happiness in a negative way, and

increased their level of anxiety (Action for Children, 2017). However, being parent may still feel a very worthwhile thing to do[41].

Figure 21: Anxiety at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 2 and finishes at 6.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Aside from slightly lower levels of life satisfaction (6.7 n/s) and happiness (6.6 n/s) for University Non-Completers, neither of which was statistically significant, the results for other pathways were similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways.

[41] The At Home pathway clusters also includes many young people (34.5%) who were ill or disabled and unable to work.

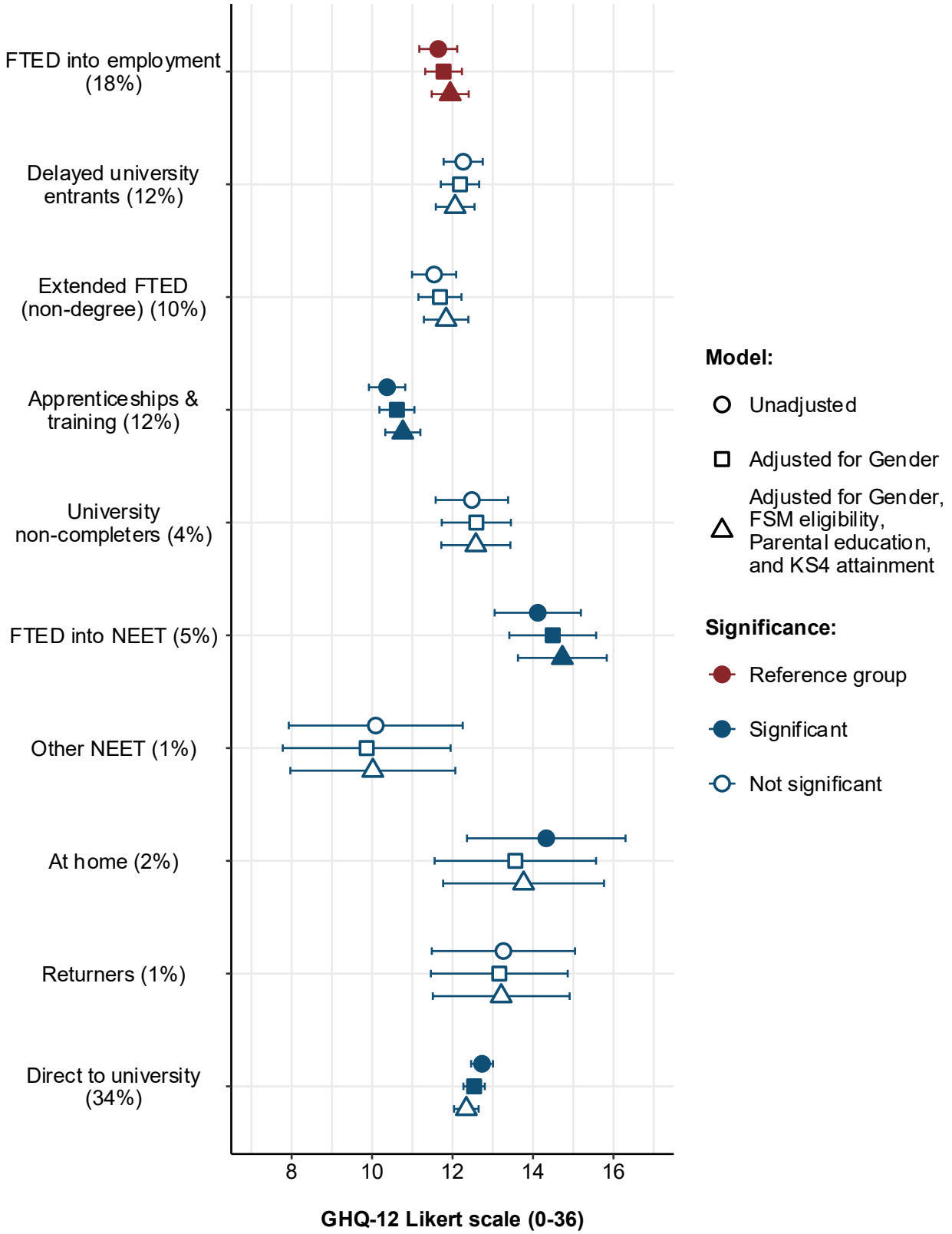
Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment resulted in small changes to our estimates, which were replicated across the wellbeing measures. The estimated wellbeing of young people on both the Delayed and Direct to University pathways improved slightly, relative to those on FTED into Work pathways. High attainment, which was more common among university students, was associated with lower life satisfaction and a lower feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile. This seemingly contradictory finding is related to an association high attainment and higher expectations (Clark & Oswald, 1994; Donovan, Halpern, & Sargeant, 2002). Average reported anxiety among young people Delayed and Direct to University pathways also declined slightly. Having degree educated parents, which was more common among university students, is associated with higher reported anxiety, which might relate to higher parental expectations (Curran & Hill, 2022; Smyth, 2020).

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12)

Figure 22 presents mean scores for the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) across the pathway clusters. In this instant we present three models: (1) unadjusted, (2) adjusted for gender, and (3) further adjusted for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment.

GHQ-12 measures the presence and frequency of set of twelve psychological and somatic symptoms and considered to indicate psychological distress. It was first developed as a screening instrument for capturing mild to moderate psychiatric morbidity (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Young people's responses are converted to a scale, from 0-36, with high scores indicating higher levels of psychological distress. In addition, a dichotomous measure of clinical caseness was derived from the total count of symptoms, with three or more symptoms considered to indicate potential mental health problems.

Figure 22: GHQ-12 Likert Scale at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 8 and finishes at 16.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Results for GHQ-12 mean scores showed similar patterns to those for self-reported anxiety. Examining the fully adjusted estimates, the mean score for young people on

FTED into Employment pathways (11.9) was very close to the overall average[42]. Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways (10.8) reported lower scores on average, and those on FTED into NEET pathways (14.7) reported the highest scores overall. Although young people on Other NEET pathways reported the lowest scores overall (10 n/s), the difference was not statistically significant owing to its small sample size.

At Home (13.8 n/s) young people and Returners (13.2 n/s) also reported higher levels of psychological distress on average, although the differences, compared to FTED into Employment, were also non-significant. The scores for the remaining pathway clusters were smaller and non-significant.

Figure 22 demonstrates the importance of gender, and socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment in explaining some of the initial differences in psychological distress. An initially higher average for those At Home (14.3 compared to 11.6 for those on FTED into Work pathways) was explained by the predominance of young women on this pathway (76.5% were female compared to 45.1% of those on FTED into Work pathways), who are more likely to report psychological distress than young men. This was the same reason for similar, although smaller, declines in the average for Delayed University Entrants, Other NEETs, and Direct to University pathways.

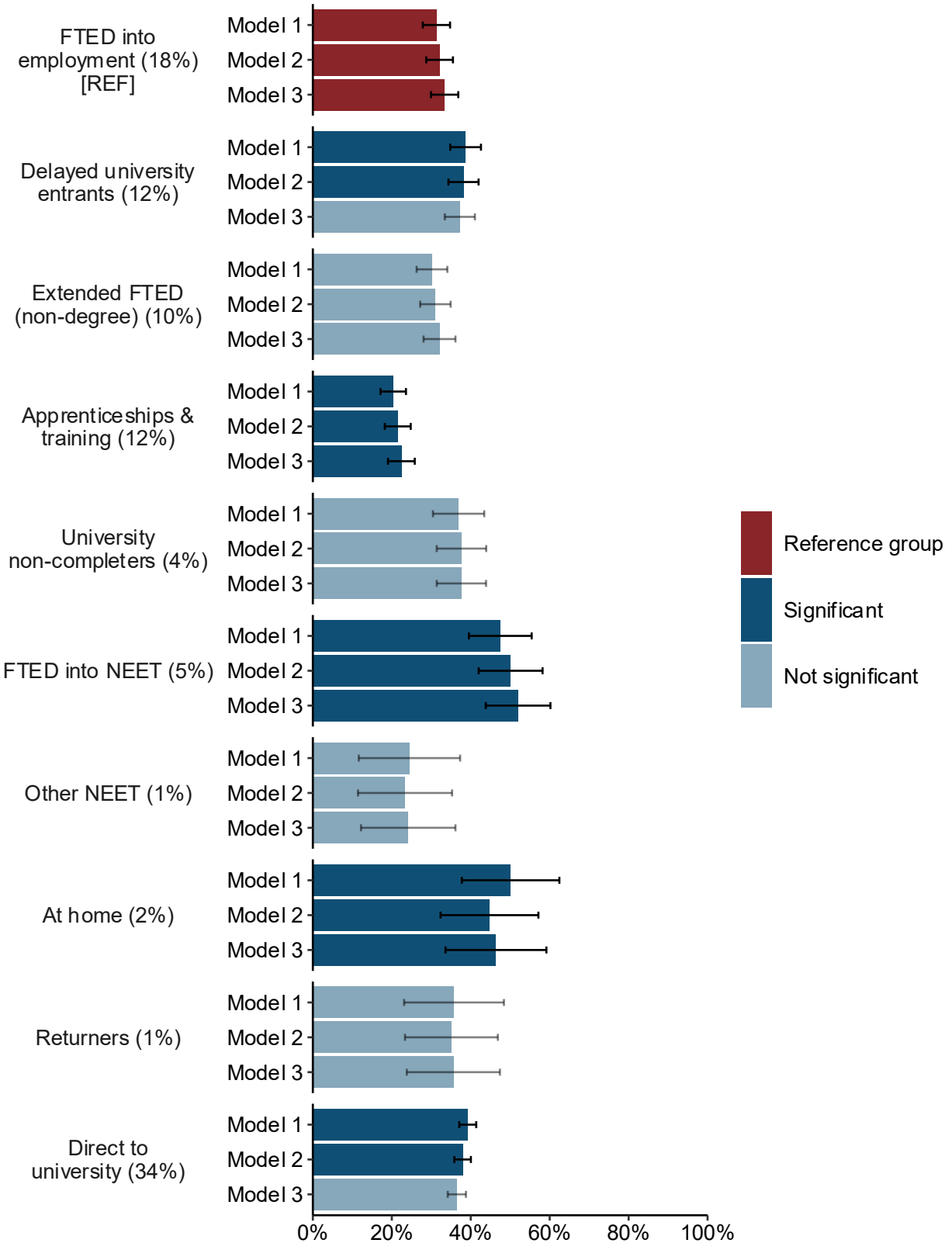
Additional adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment resulted in further, small declines in the average for Delayed and Direct to University pathways, with the difference for the latter becoming non-significant. Higher Key Stage 4 attainment and having a parent with a degree level education, which were both more common among young people on university pathways, were associated with higher psychological distress.

GHQ-12 Caseness

Figure 23 presents the prevalence of those in each pathway cluster reporting three or more psychological or somatic symptoms, which is considered of clinical significance, meaning that some kind of intervention such as counselling might be appropriate[43] (Friedrich, Alexandrowicz, Benda, Cerny, & Wancata, 2011). Again, (1) unadjusted estimates, (2) estimates adjusted for gender, and (3) those further adjusted for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment are presented.

[42] The overall mean and standard deviation for GHQ-12 were 12.1 and 6.4 respectively, which tells us that more than two thirds of young people scored between 6 and 19 on the original scale (see footnote 40 for further details).
[43] It is important to note that whilst GHQ-12 can be used as a screening tool to identify a probable mental health problem, a proper diagnosis can only be carried out by a trained professional.

Figure 23: GHQ-12 Caseness (of clinical significance) at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

First and foremost, a substantial number of young people reported levels of psychological distress considered clinically significant, which is cause for concern. Overall, one in three young people reported experiencing three or more, out of a possible twelve symptoms within the last four weeks. Significant levels of poor mental health among young people have been reported elsewhere, with evidence pointing to a decline in mental health among young people over time (Collishaw, 2015; Liubertiene et al., 2025; McGorry et al., 2025).

There was also significant variation in young people's psychological health depending on the pathway they followed. Examining the fully adjusted estimates, one third of young people on FTED into Employment (33.4%) pathways were psychologically distressed. This figure was much higher among those on FTED into NEET (52%) pathways and those At Home (46.4%), where approximately one half of young people were psychologically distressed. Again, those on Apprenticeships & Training (22.4%) pathways seemed to fare much better, although one in five is still relatively high. Results for all other pathways were similar to FTED into Employment, except for Other NEETs (24.2% n/s), however the difference was non-significant.

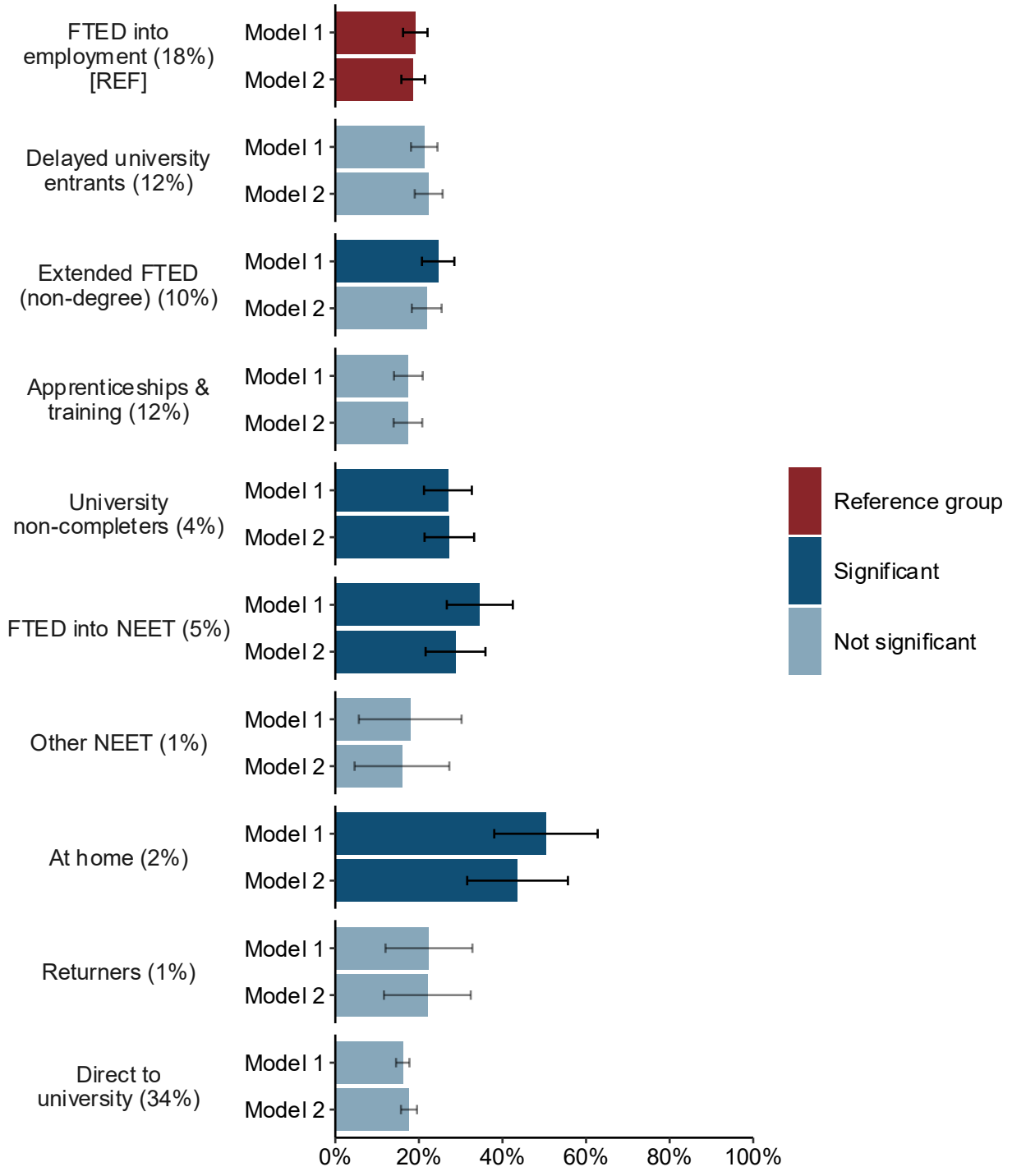
Adjustment for gender, and then socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment resulted in similar changes to those seen in our analysis of GHQ-12 mean score, except that the prevalence of psychological distress for young people At Home remained significantly higher throughout. Whereas a higher prevalence for those on Direct to University pathways became non-significant.

In a final assessment we also adjusted for prior psychological health, using their GHQ-12 scores measured in Year 10. There was very little change in our estimates, the largest of which was a small reduction in the absolute prevalence for those At Home (by 1.6%). This means the differences psychological health that we identified were unlikely to be the consequence of the young person's prior susceptibility to poor mental health, as measured in Year 10.

Physical or mental health conditions expected to last 12+ months

Figure 24 shows the percentage of young people who reported having a physical or mental health condition at age 19/20, lasting, or expecting to last, for 12 months or more, across the pathway clusters.

Figure 24: Has long standing physical or mental health condition at age 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Model 1: Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Around one in five young people reported having a longstanding physical or mental health condition at age 19/20. This figure was much higher for those At Home (50.4%), a pathway cluster that includes a large number of young people who spent long periods unable to work because of an illness or disability. However, it was also higher among

those on FTED into NEET (34.6%) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (24.6%) pathways, and University Non-Completers (26.9%) compared to young people on FTED into Employment (19.1%) pathways.

Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment reduced the estimated prevalence for young people At Home (43.6%), and those on FTED into NEET (28.8%) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (21.9%) pathways. Low Key Stage 4 attainment, eligibility for free school meals, and having parents with low or no qualifications, which were all more common for these pathways, were associated with an increased likelihood of having a physical or mental health condition, accounting for some of the initial differences. The prevalence among University Non-Completers remained relatively unchanged, suggesting this may have been a cause or consequence of them dropping out of university[44].

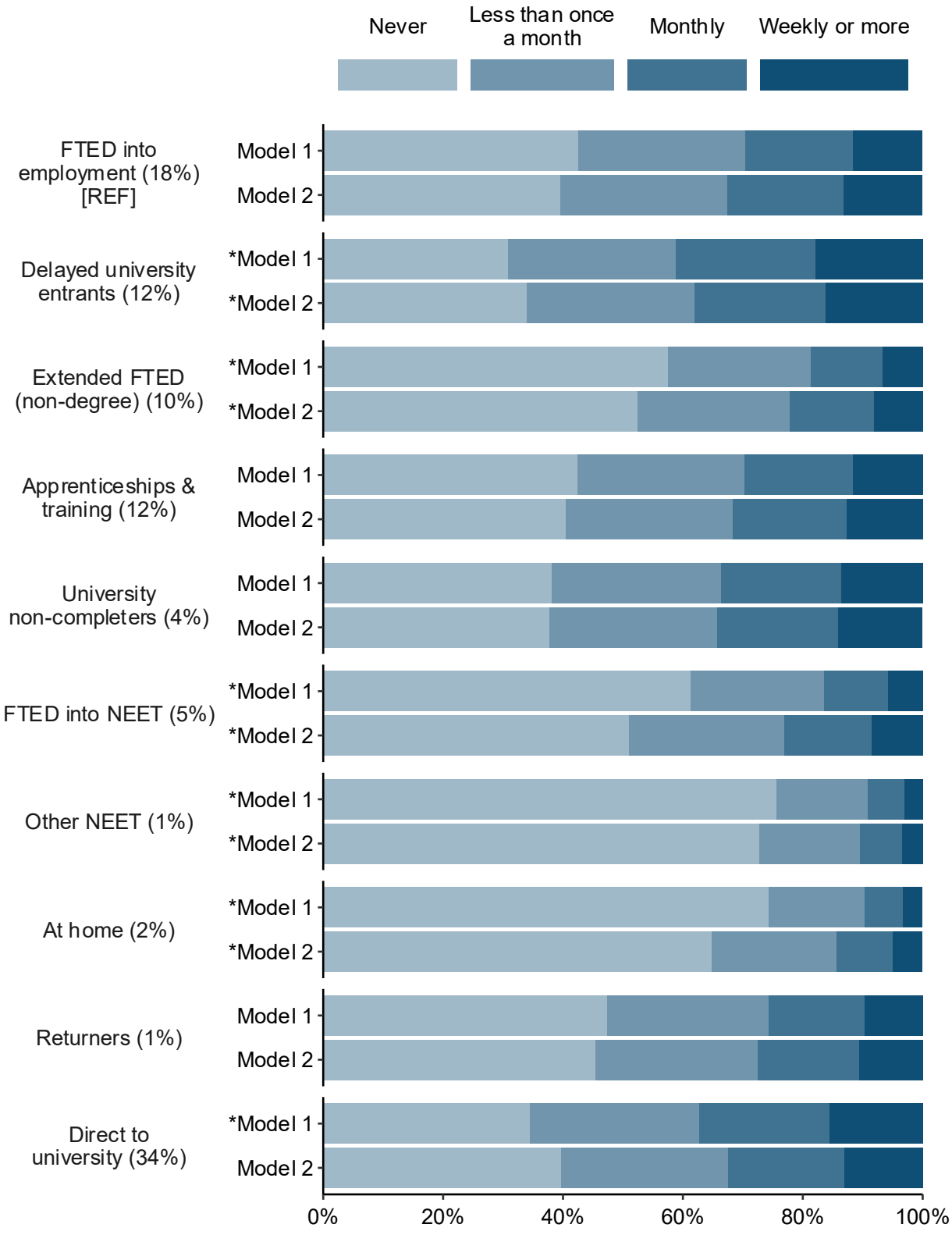
In a final step we adjusted for whether young people were reported as having an illness or disability in Year 9 that was expected to last at least until they were aged 16. However, there was very little change to our estimates, suggesting that the differences reported at age 19/20 were not a consequence of any prior condition, measured in Year 9, which selected young people into following one particular pathway over another.

Alcohol

Many young people drank alcohol at this age, and many will also do so with the intention of getting drunk. However, alcohol drinking has been in decline among more recent born cohorts (Oldham, Holmes, Whitaker, Fairbrother, & Curtis, 2018). Almost one in eight (12.6%) young people reported binge drinking (defined as ‘getting really drunk’) once a week or more in the previous 12 months. Figure 25 presents the frequency of binge drinking across the pathway clusters.

[44] Of course, there may be other unmeasured factors that explain this relationship, which we do not or were unable to adjust for here.

Figure 25: Frequency of binge drinking at age 19/20 (last 12 months), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; * Significant. Model 1: Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

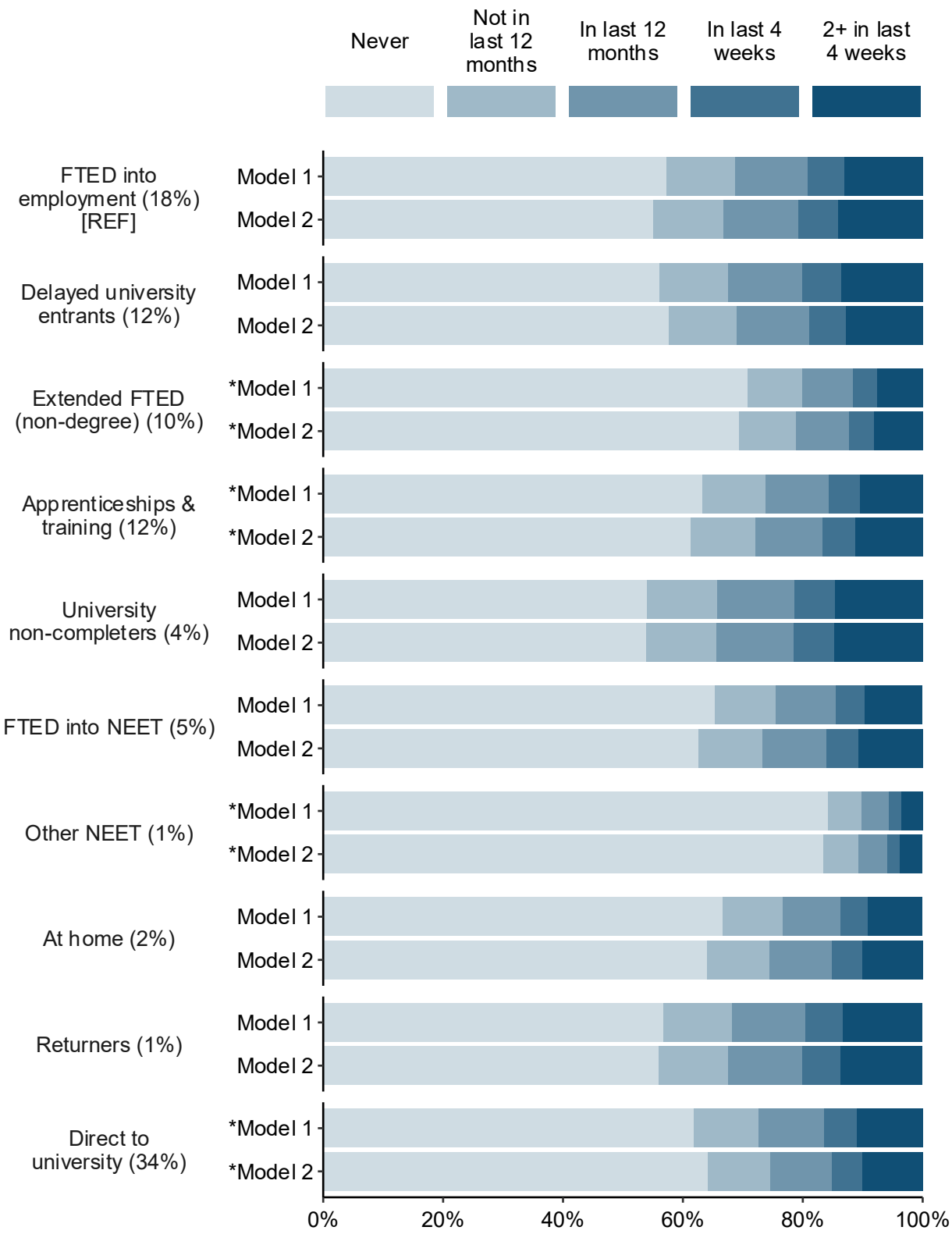
Young people on Delayed (17.9%) and Direct to University (15.6%) pathways were more likely to binge drink once a week or more than those on FTED into Employment (11.6%) pathways. Whereas those on FTED into NEET (5.8%) pathways, Other NEETs (3.0%), and those At Home (3.2%), were far less likely to frequently binge drink. This may reflect an affordability issue, but it also counteracts an idea that young people outside of the labour force spent a significant amount of their time misusing alcohol (Thern et al., 2020). Young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) (6.7%) pathways were also less likely to frequently binge drink.

Further adjustment, for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment, reduced the differences in binge drinking among those on Delayed (16.2%) and Direct to University (13.1% n/s) pathways relative to FTED into Employment (13.1%). High Key Stage 4 attainment and/or having a parent with a higher level of education, both of which were more common among university students, were associated with a greater frequency of binge drinking. In contrast, there was a slight increase in the estimated prevalence of weekly binge drinking among those on FTED into NEET pathways (8.5%). FSM eligibility, which was more common among young people on this pathway, was associated with a lower frequency of binge drinking.

Drugs: Cannabis use

Figure 26 shows the average frequency of cannabis use among young people across the pathway clusters. More than half of young people had at least tried cannabis by the time they were aged 19/20, and around one in five reported using cannabis in the previous four weeks.

Figure 26: Frequency of cannabis use at age 19/20 (last 12 months), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; * Significant. Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

The reported frequency of cannabis use was similar among young people on FTED into Employment pathways (19.2% had used cannabis at least once the last four weeks), Delayed University Entrants (20%), University Non-Completers (21.4%) and Returners (19.5%). Whereas those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (11.6%), Apprenticeships & Training (15.6%), and Direct to University (16.4%) pathways, were less likely to frequently use cannabis. This was particularly the case for Other NEETs (5.6%).

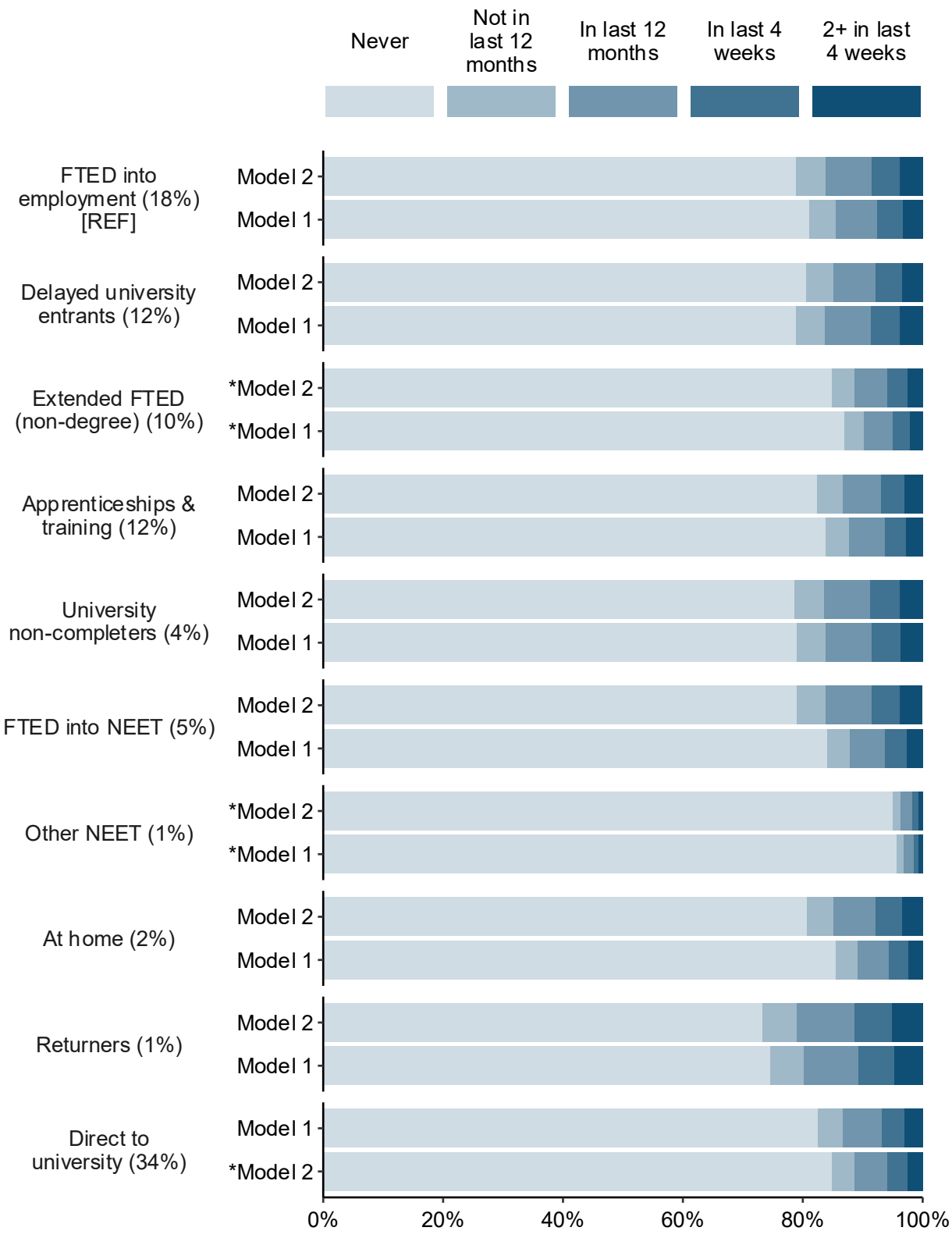
Similar to our findings for binge drinking, there was a lower frequency of cannabis use among young people on FTED into NEET (14.5% n/s) pathways, and those At Home (13.7% n/s), however the differences, compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways, were not statistically significant.

Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and KS4 attainment made very small differences to our estimates. There was a decrease in the frequency of Cannabis use for both Delayed University Entrants and those on Direct to University pathways relative to all other pathways. Having a degree educated parent(s), which was more common among university students, was associated with more frequent cannabis use.

Drugs: Other drug use

Figure 27 presents the frequency of ‘other’ drug use among young people across the pathway clusters, which includes cocaine, LSD, ecstasy, heroin, crack, speed etc.

Figure 27: Frequency of Other drug use at age 19/20 (last 12 months), by pathway cluster



Notes: “REF” = Reference group; * Significant. Model 1: Adjusted for gender. Model 2: Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

In contrast to our findings for cannabis use, the large majority (82.4%) of young people reported that they had never tried other drugs at age 19/20. However, those who had were more likely to have done so in the last four weeks.

Differences in the frequency of other drug use were also much smaller. Frequency of drug use was lower among young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) (5.0% had used other drugs in the last four weeks), Other NEET (1.5%), and those on Direct to University (6.9%) pathways, compared to those on FTED into Employment (7.5%) pathways. Whilst it was a little higher among Returners (10.6%, n/s), this was non-significant.

Again, further adjustment for socioeconomic background and KS4 attainment led to a small reduction in the frequency of other drug use for both Delayed University Entrants and those on Direct to University pathways relative to others. Having a degree educated parent(s) was also associated with a more frequent use of other drugs.

Young people in paid work

Around one third of young people were in paid employment (31.7%)[45] at age 19/20. This varied considerably across the pathway groups (for reference see Table 3). Paid employment was highest among those on FTED into Employment (94%) pathways but also higher among those on Apprenticeships & Training (55.2%), Extended FTED (non-degree) (41.6%), University Non-Completers (59.1%), and Returners (41.8%) pathways. The figure was less than 6% for the remaining pathway clusters.

Using the wealth of employment measures available in LSYPE2, we examined similarities and differences in young people's work experiences across four pathway clusters. Unfortunately, due to its small sample size, we were unable to analyse the employment experiences of Returners.

Figure 28 and Figure 29 present differences in the employment contracts of young people in paid work, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment.[46]

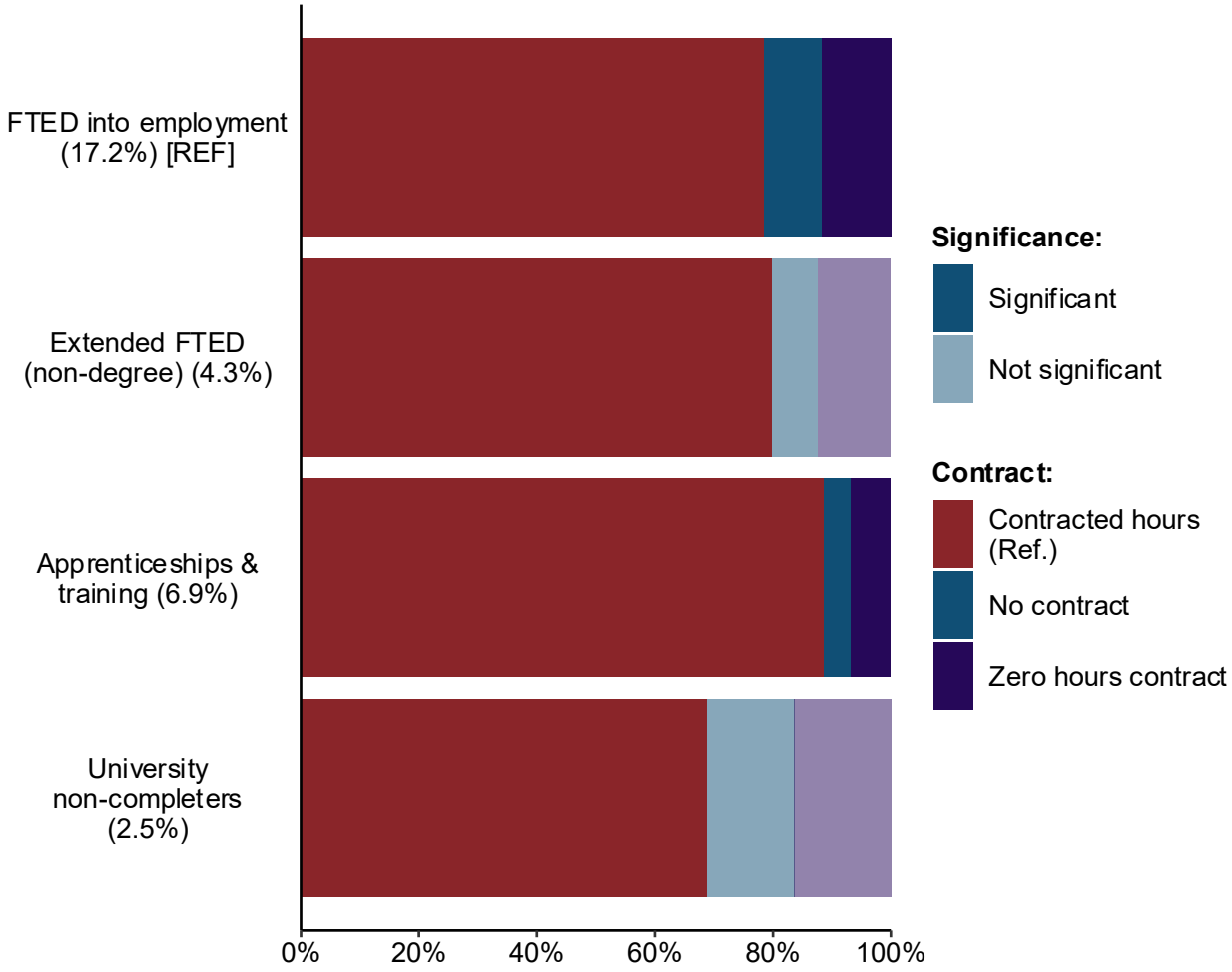
Contracted hours

The large majority of young people in paid work had contracted hours (81.2%) (Figure 28). One in ten were working zero hours contacts (10.7%), and the remainder reported having no work contract (8.1%). Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways were those least likely to work zero-hour contracts (6.7%) or have no contract (4.7%), compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways (11.8% and 9.7%, respectively). Those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (12.3% and 7.8%) pathways were similar to

[45] This figure increases to 58.4% if we excluded those currently at University (Delay University Entrants and Direct to University pathways).
[46] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates and therefore only fully adjusted results are presented.

FTED into Employment, whereas University Non-Completers appeared to have less stable working contracts (16.4% worked zero-hour contracts; 14.8% had no contract), however, these differences were non-significant[47].

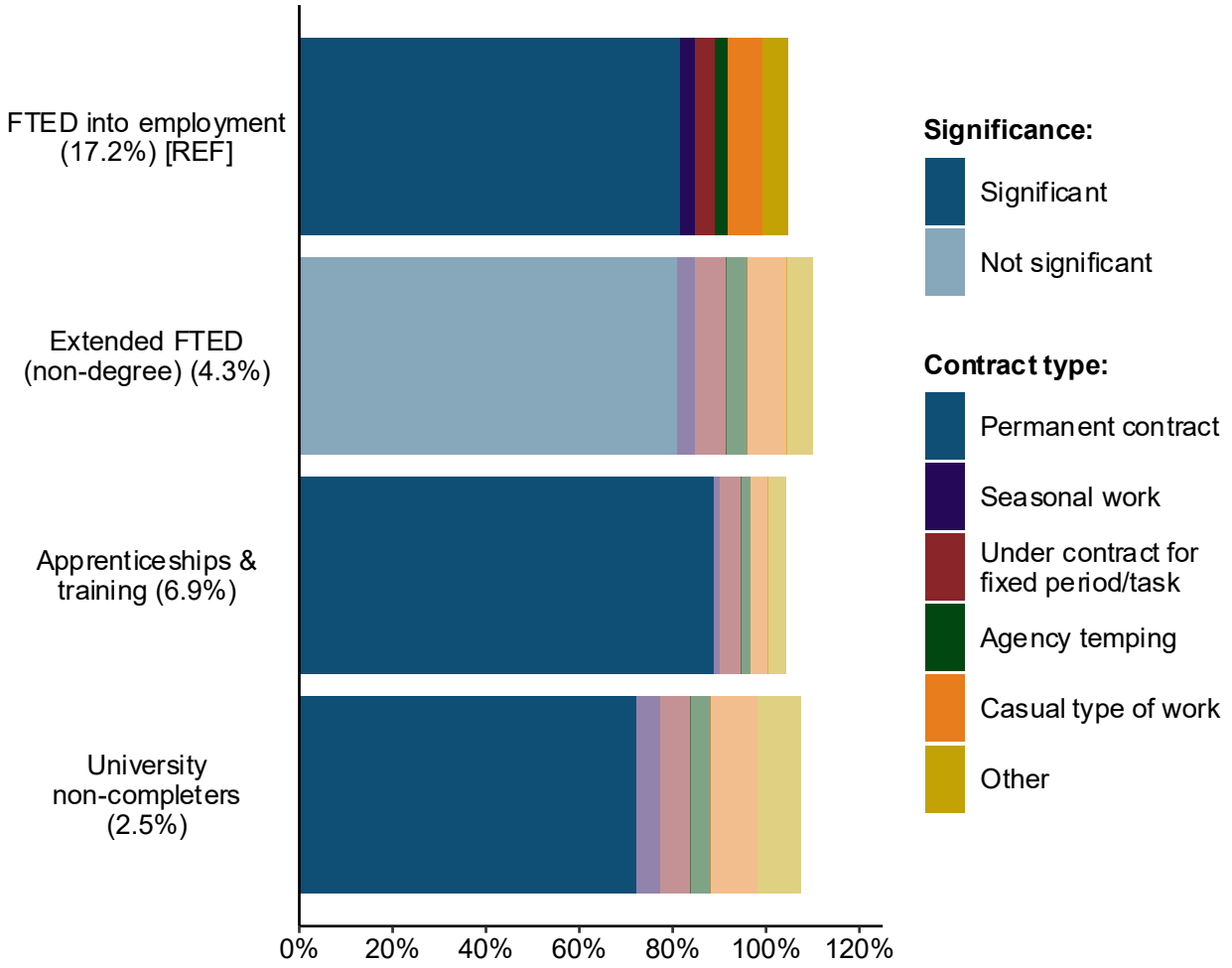
Figure 28: Employment contract at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; "Ref." = Reference category. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education and Key Stage 4 attainment. Percentages in brackets are the prevalence of young people in each group who were in paid work, as a percentage of all young people.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

[47] The sample size of University Non-Completers in paid work is much smaller, which means larger differences were required for them to be statistically significant.

Figure 29: Contract type at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Percentages in brackets are the prevalence of young people in each group who were in paid work, as a percentage of all young people. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Contract type

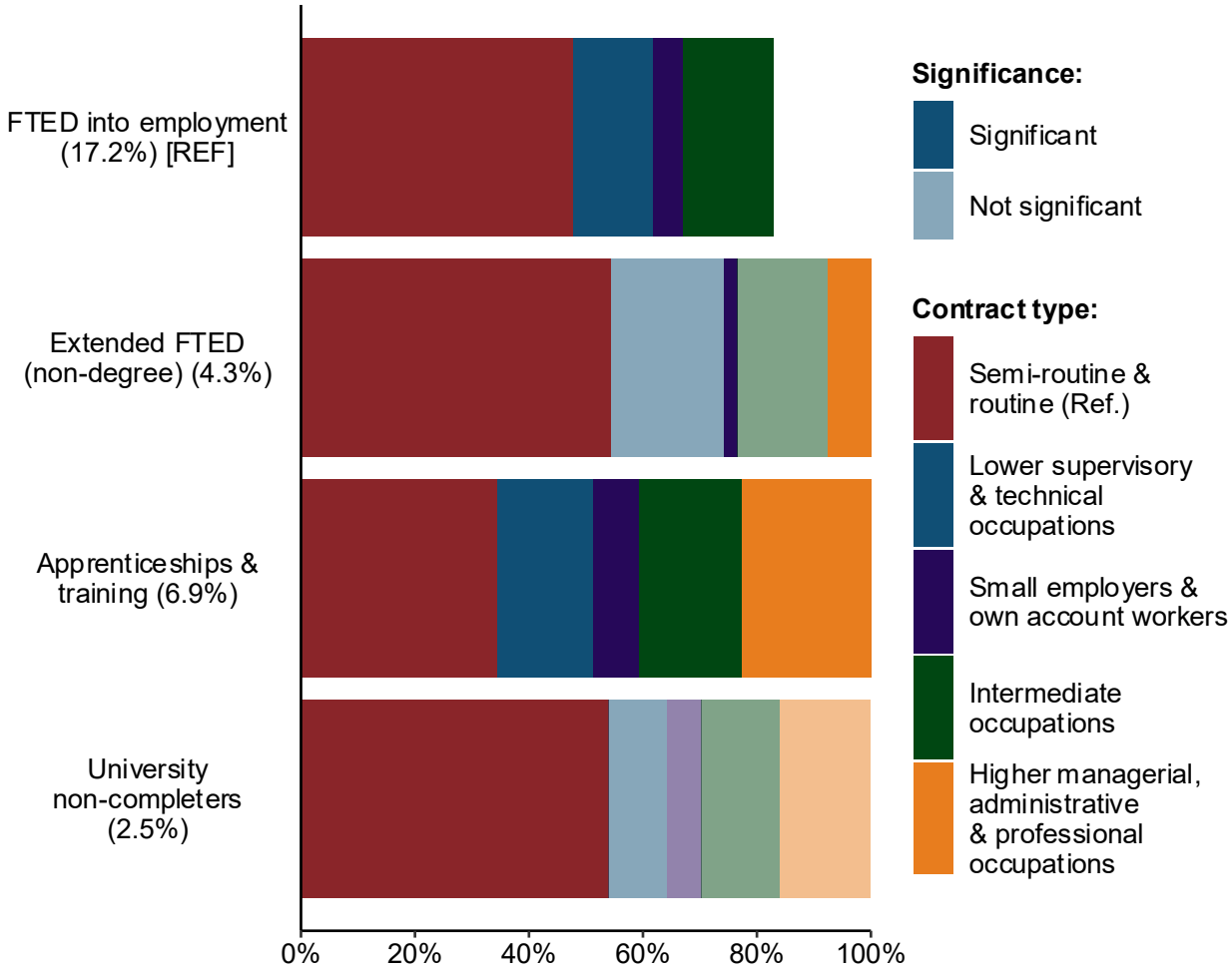
Most young people in paid work also had a permanent contract (81.3%) (Figure 29). Again, the figure was highest for young people on Apprenticeships & Training (88.8%), similar for those on FTED into Employment (81.0%), Extended FTED (non-degree) (80.0%) pathways, and lowest for University Non-Completers (72.3%).

Young people without a permanent contract were asked which other types of contracts they worked, which included seasonal, fixed period or task contracts, agency or temping, causal, and 'other' types of contracts. Although our results suggest there were differences in the types of contracts young people worked across the pathway clusters, none of these were statistically significant owing to very small prevalences, and consequently small sample sizes. Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment also made little difference to the estimates.

Occupational position (NS-SEC)

On examining young people's occupational position at age 19/20, it is worth noting that they were at the very beginning of their working lives, and that their occupational position was therefore likely to change. Nevertheless, there are notable differences across the pathway clusters in terms of their first steps, as shown in Figure 30. Estimates were adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment[48].

Figure 30: Occupational position (NS-SEC5) at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; "Ref." = Reference category. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Percentages in brackets are the prevalence of young people in each group who were in paid work, as a percentage of all young people.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Most young people in paid work at age 19/20 were employed in semi-routine or routine occupations. However, the figure was a little higher for those on Extended FTED (non-degree) (54.3%) pathways and University Non-Completers (54% n/s) compared to FTED into Employment (47.8%), and far lower for those on Apprenticeships & Training (34.6%)

[48] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates and therefore only fully adjusted results are presented.

pathways. At the other end of the scale, young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways were more likely to be in higher managerial, administrative and professional (22.6%), intermediate (18.1%), small employer and own account (8%), and lower supervisory (16.7%) occupations, compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways for which the respective figures were 17.2%,15.8%, 5.2%, and 14.1%. This points towards Apprenticeships & Training pathways offering more direct pathways into higher level occupations.

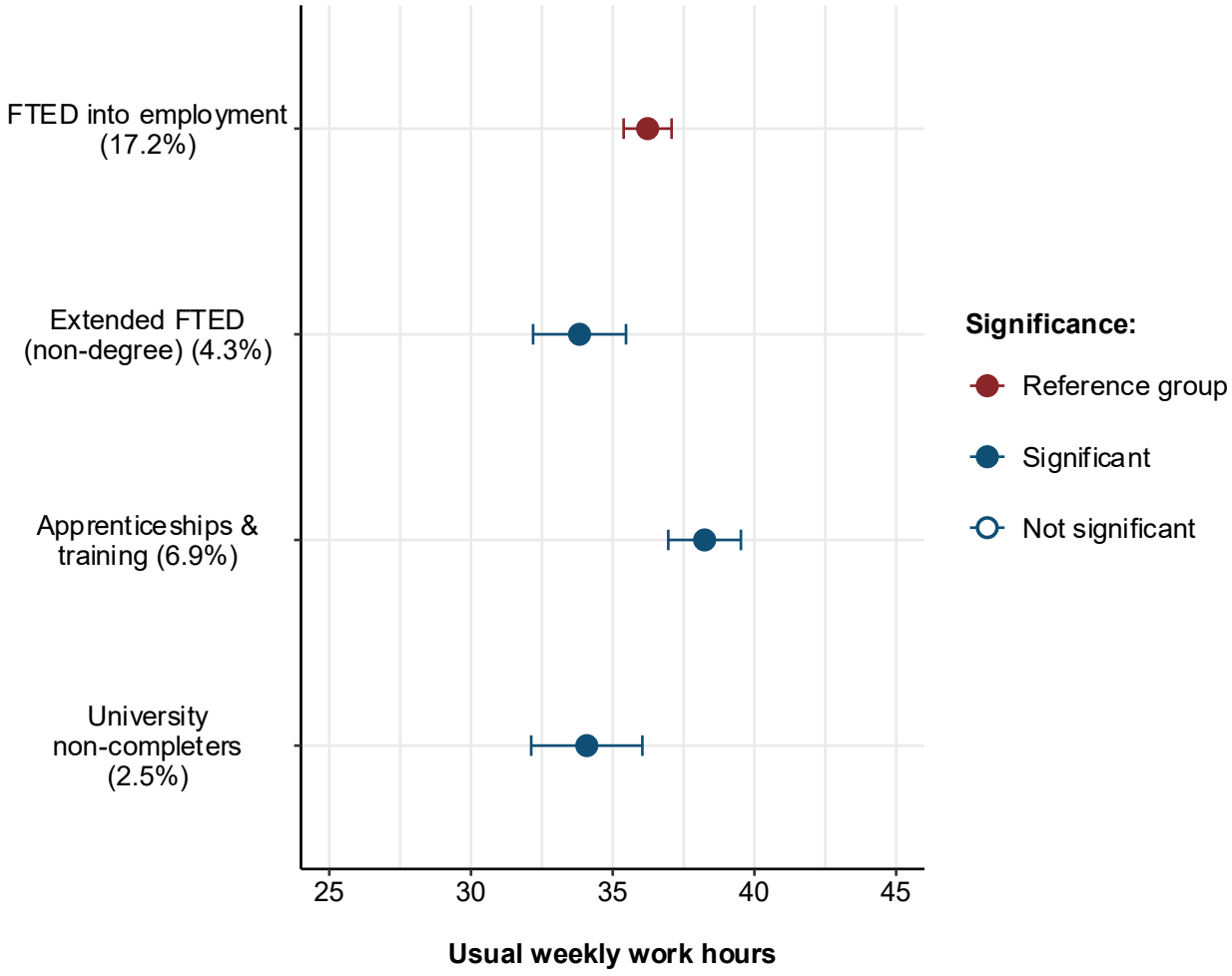
In contrast, young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways were far less likely to be in a higher managerial, administrative and professional (7.6%) or employer and own account (2.3%) occupation compared to FTED into Work. These young people had spent less time in paid employment, which is a plausible although unexamined explanation for these differences. It is also plausible (although untested), given their further investment in education, that some may catch up, or even overtake, their peers on FTED into Employment pathways later. Again, further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to our estimates.

Usual work hours

Figure 31 shows the average weekly working hours of young people within each pathway cluster, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment[49]. This average includes young people working part-time as well those in fulltime time work, so the overall range is relatively broad. Most young people (68.6%) worked 35 or more hours a week, however.

[49] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates and therefore only fully adjusted results are presented.

Figure 31: Usual weekly work hours at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

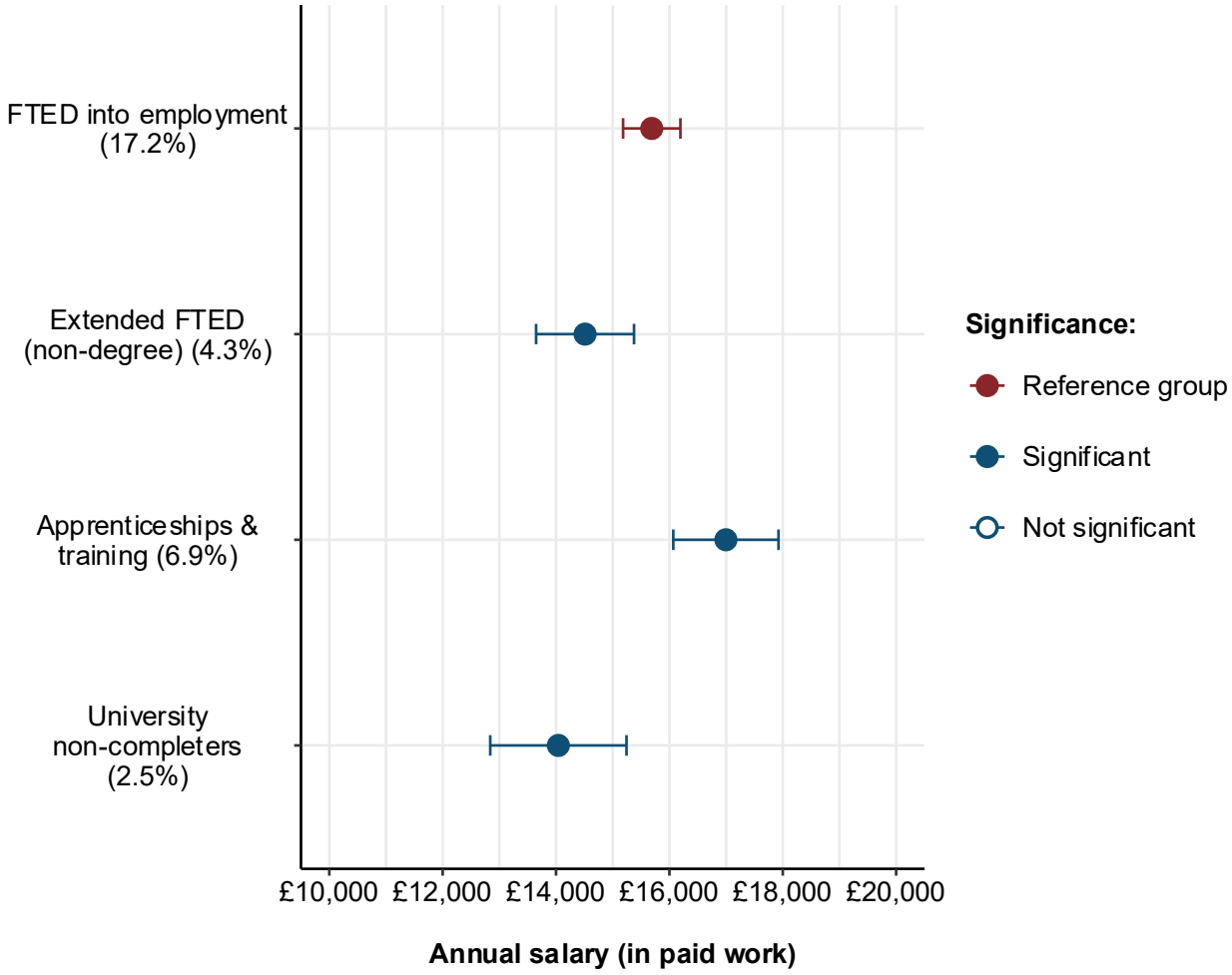
Young people on FTED into Employment pathways worked 36.2 hours a week, on average. This was slightly fewer hours than those on Apprenticeships & Training (38.2) pathways, but a little more than those on Extend FTED (non-degree) (33.8) pathways, and University Non-Completers (34.1).

Wages

Figure 32 and Figure 33, below, present young people's average pay[50] across the pathway clusters, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment[51].

[50] Depending on how young people responded, wages were either calculated from their reported hourly rate or take-home pay. Hourly rate was recorded as gross, whereas take-home pay was recorded as net, however a sensitivity analysis, which included a measure for response type, found almost identical results.
[51] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates and therefore only fully adjusted results are presented.

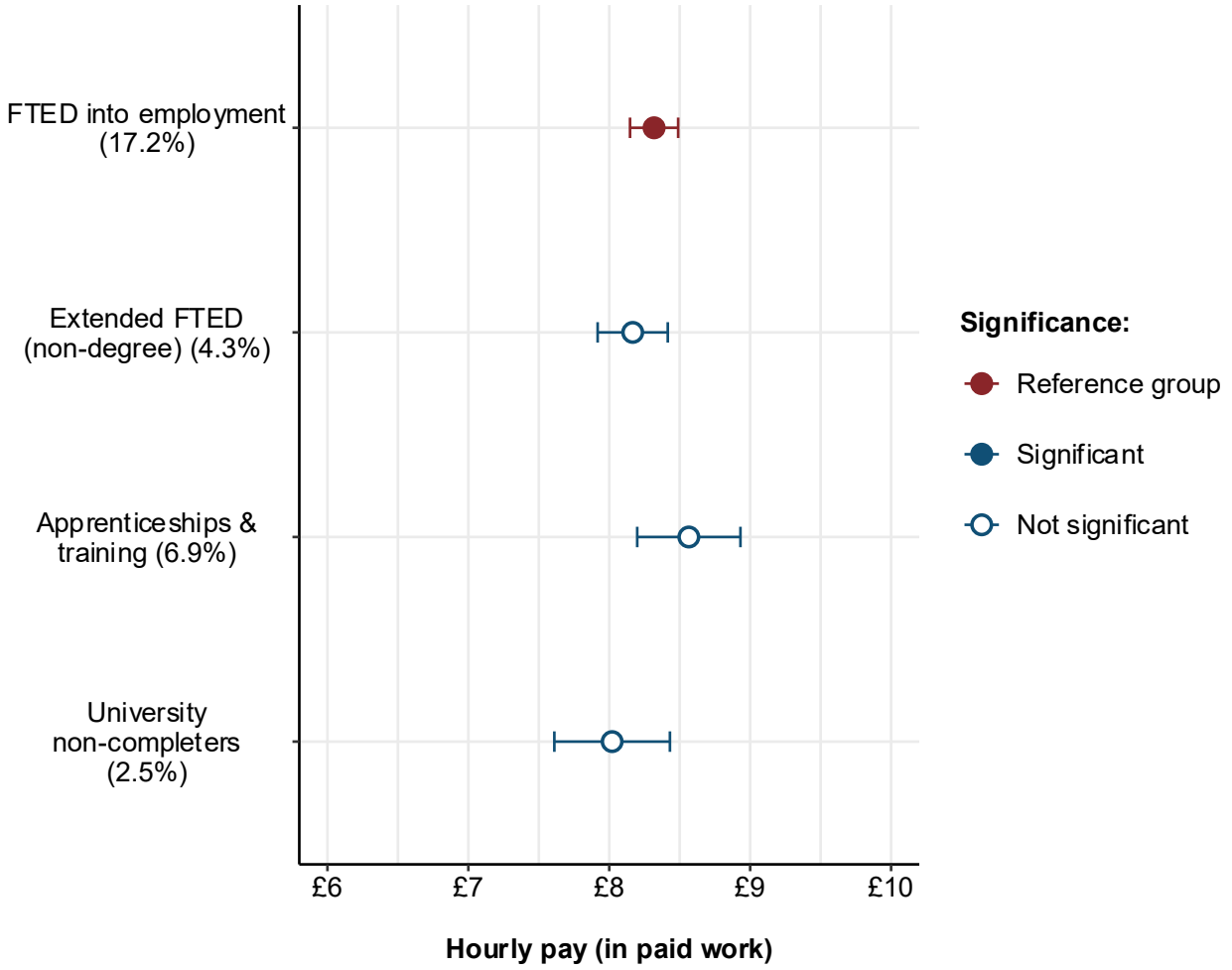
Figure 32: Annual salary at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Wages followed a very similar pattern to hours worked. Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways had the highest salaries on average (£17k pa), followed by those on FTED into Employment (15.7k pa) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (£14.5k pa) pathways, and University Non-Completers (£14k). To some extent, differences in pay reflected the differences seen in the number of hours young people worked in Figure 31. This point is illustrated in Figure 33, which show the differences in hourly pay.

Figure 33: Hourly pay at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

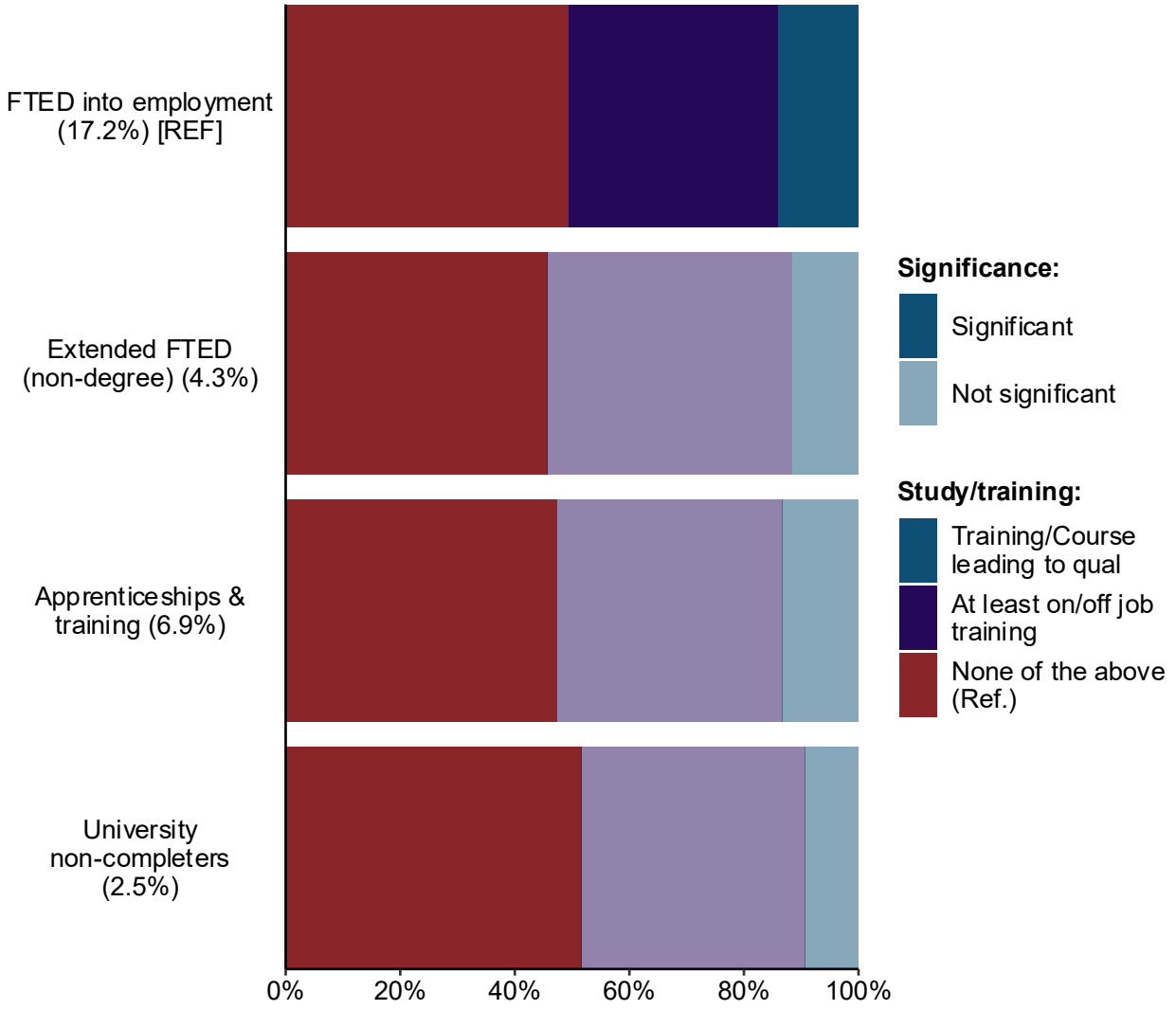
Whilst the pattern of findings was similar; young people on Apprenticeships & Training (£8.56 per hour) pathways had the highest hourly pay, followed by those on FTED into Employment (£8.32) and Extended FTED (non-degree) (£8.17) pathways, and University Non-Completers (£8.02), the differences were smaller and no longer statistically significant, suggesting that most of the evident difference in wages was tied up with differences in young people's working hours

Education and Training

Young people in paid work were also asked about the type of education or training they had received, which included whether they were doing a course(s) that led to a qualification, or any on or off the job training. Figure 34 presents the differences in

education and training across the pathway clusters, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment[52].

Figure 34: Education and Training at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: "REF" = Reference group; "Ref." = Reference category. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Differences in education and training between pathway clusters were very small. One in seven (13.9%) young people on FTED into Employment pathways were doing a course leading to a qualification, and more than one third of them (36.7%) had at least done on or off the job training within the last four weeks. This compares to 11.6% and 42.7%, respectively, for those on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways, 13.2% and 39.3% for those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways, and 9.3% and 39%, for University Non-Completers. None of the differences were statistically significant.

[52] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates and therefore only fully adjusted results are presented.

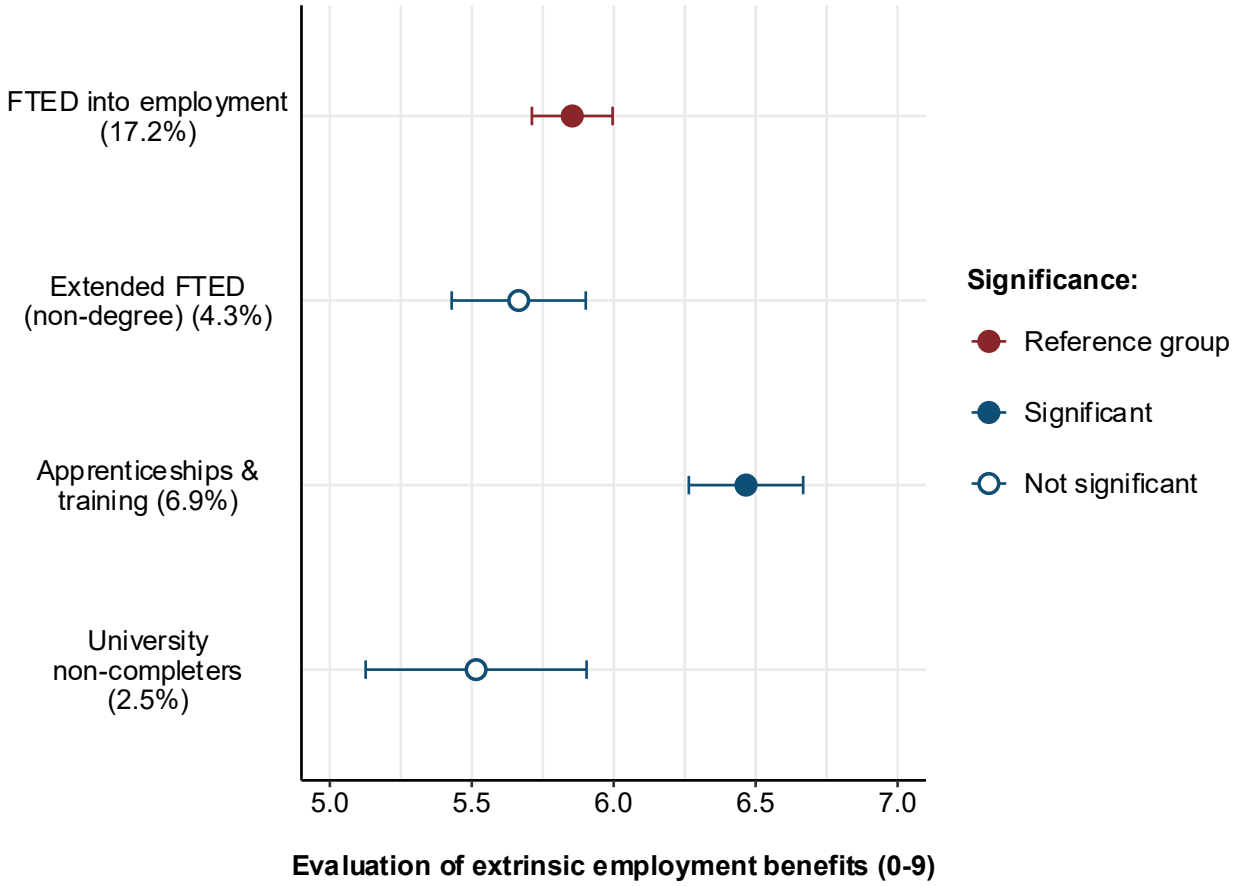
Subjective evaluations of employment

In a final set of analyses, we examined young people's own, subjective, evaluations of their employment. Young people were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements relating to different aspects of their employment, for example, 'I am pleased with the promotion prospects available to me in this job', 'my job is important and makes me feel worthwhile', and 'I get on well with my colleagues'. Using factor analysis (Kim & Mueller, 1978), we identified three separate factors capturing how well young people rated the 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' benefits of their employment, as well as 'the sense of belonging' it gave them[53].

Figure 35 to Figure 37 present the mean scores for each domain across the pathway clusters, adjusted for gender, socioeconomic background, and Key Stage 4 attainment[54]. Each measure is scored on a scale from 0 – 9, with higher scores indicating a more positive evaluation. [55]

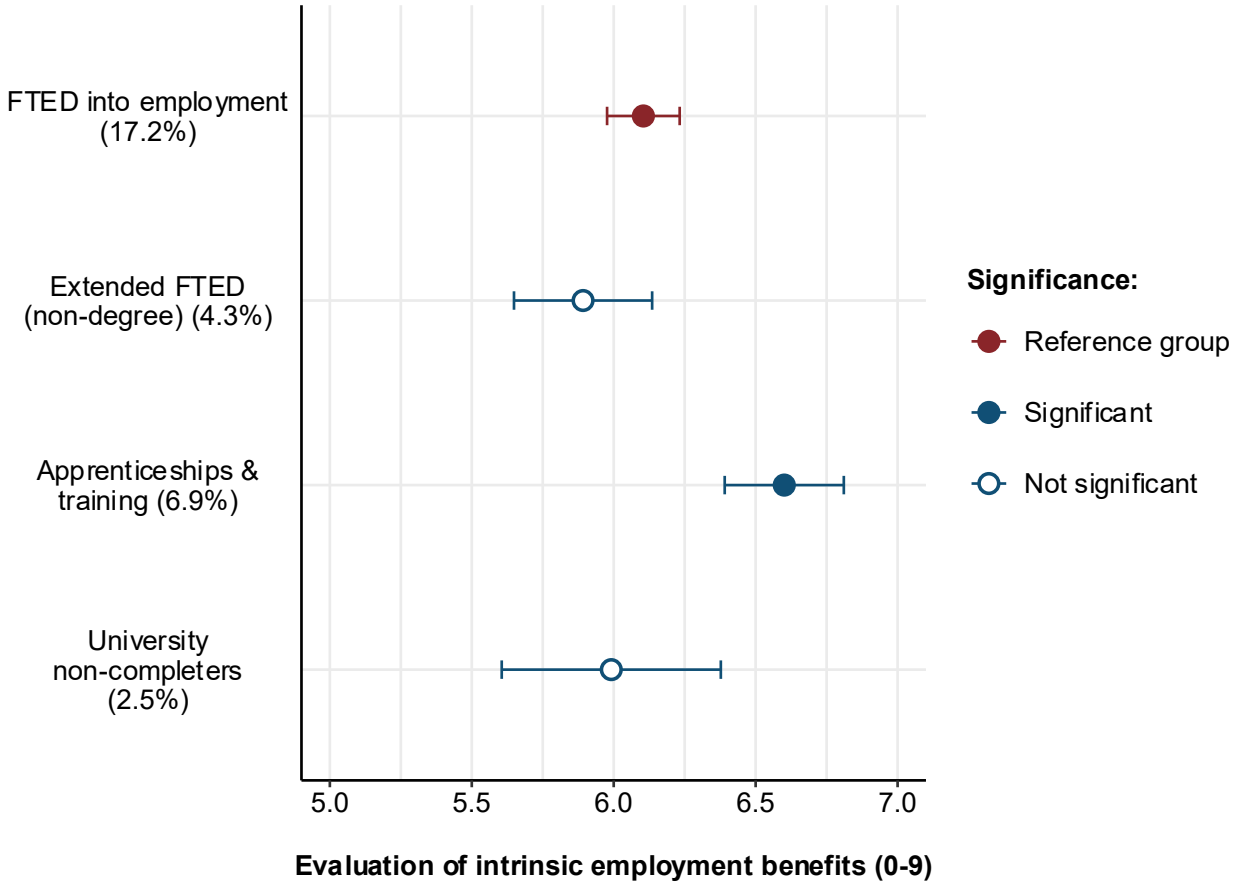
[53] The results of the factor analysis are presented in Appendix C along with the full list of statements.
[54] Further adjustment for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the estimates and therefore only fully adjusted results are presented.
[55] The overall mean and standard deviation for the evaluation of Extrinsic benefits was 5.9 and 1.9 respectively, which tells us that most young people (more than two thirds) scored between 4 and 8. Equivalent figures for the evaluation of Intrinsic benefits were mean: 6.2, standard deviation: 1.8, range: between 4 and 8, and for the evaluation of the sense of belonging work gave them were, mean: 7.0, standard deviation: 1.5, range between 5 and 9 (see footnote 40 for further details).

Figure 35: Evaluation of extrinsic employment benefits at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



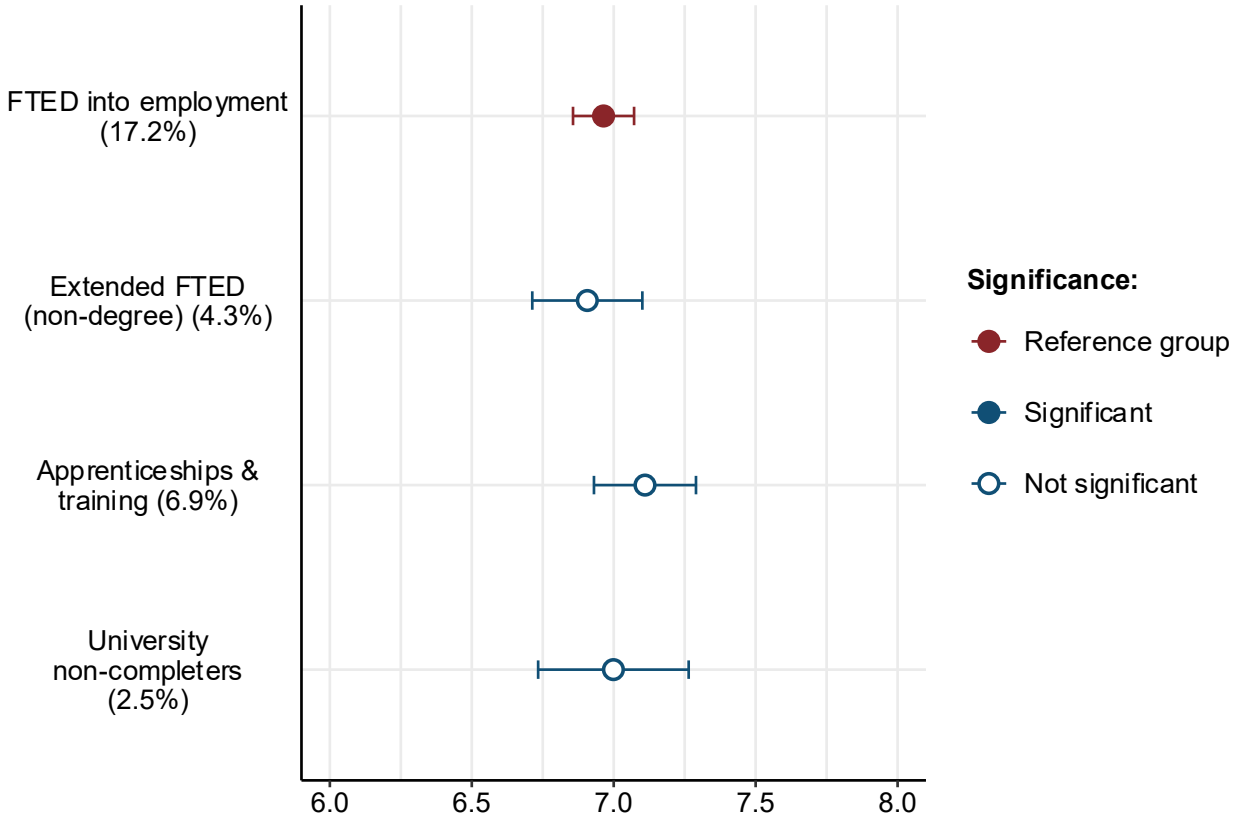
Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 5 and finishes at 7.
Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Figure 36: Evaluation of intrinsic employment benefits at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 5 and finishes at 7. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Figure 37: Evaluation of the sense of belonging work gives them at age 19/20 (YP in paid work), by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows means and 95% Confidence Intervals. X-axis starts at 6 and finishes at 8. Adjusted for gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education, and Key Stage 4 attainment.
Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

The results follow a similar pattern to those found for objective work outcomes. The highest evaluations of both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of their employment were those reported by young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways (extrinsic: 6.5; Intrinsic 6.6). This compares to 5.9 and 6.1, respectively, for those on FTED into Employment pathways. The evaluations of those on Extended: FTED (non-degree) pathways (extrinsic 5.7; intrinsic 5.9), and University Non-Completers (extrinsic 5.5; intrinsic 6.0), were a little lower on average, however the differences were non-significant. Differences relating to the sense of belonging young people felt at work were smaller and non-significant.

Further adjustment for socio-economic background and Key Stage 4 attainment made little difference to the results. However, the difference in the evaluation of the extrinsic benefits of their employment between University Non-Completers (5.4) and those on FTED into Employment pathways (5.9) was slightly larger, and statistically significant prior to adjustment. Higher Key Stage 4 attainment, which was more common among University Non-Completers, was associated with lower evaluations for both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of their employment. This is likely a consequence of the association

between high attainment and higher expectations (Clark & Oswald, 1994; Donovan et al., 2002). Once adjusted for, the evaluations of University Non-Completers improved slightly.

Summary and Discussion

In *Post 16 Pathways: analysis of routes and groups* (Duckworth et al., 2025a) we identified and described nine typical pathways that young people followed post 16 compulsory education to ages 19/20, alternative to the direct to university route (A levels followed by a university degree). We also described the profiles of young people that followed each pathway, as well as the factors and characteristics that predict them.

Post 16 Pathways: analysis of outcomes at age 19/20 picks up where the first report ends, examining the similarities and differences in young people's outcomes across the pathway clusters in early adulthood. This includes outcomes related to their progression, in terms of their attainment and economic activities, their material circumstances, mental health and wellbeing, and for those in paid work, also their experiences of employment.

The results of these analyses are presented above. Here we summarise the findings in the round, reminding the reader what we already know about each of the pathway clusters and the young people who followed them from the first report. As we did in report one, the pathways are summarised in relation to four broad groupings:

- Sustained, work focussed tracks
- Delayed tracks
- Trying, but possibly in need of greater support
- Potentially vulnerable/at-risk groups

Sustained, work focussed tracks

Two of the largest pathway clusters consist of young people on what appears to be sustained, fairly smooth, work focused tracks. Young people on full-time education **(FTED) into Employment** pathways (18%), with transitions marked, predominantly, by two years of full-time education followed by two years of consistent employment, and those **on Apprenticeships & Training** pathways (12%), who spent a minimum of six continuous months[56] either enrolled on an apprenticeship or other training programmes during the four-year window, in combination with FTED and/or employment.

Young people on these two pathways were remarkably similar in terms of their socioeconomic background, experiences and behaviours, and levels of prior achievement. They were more likely to be male but were relatively average in terms of

[56] We recognise that most apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds during this period would have been for a minimum of 12 months. Indeed, the majority of young people in this pathway cluster (85.7%) did spend at least 12 months in apprenticeships, but this lower limit allows for those engaged in other forms of continuous training to be included here.

other background factors (parental education, FSM eligibility, single parenthood, neighbourhood deprivation, longstanding illnesses or disability, and SEN provision). Young people on both pathways were a little more likely to have had a paid job in Year 9 compared to the average for the non-HE cohort. Where they differed from one another is in terms of their attitudes and aspirations. Young people on Apprenticeship & Training pathways were more likely to have aspirations to do an apprenticeship from an early age (both the young people themselves and their parents' plans for them) and were a little more engaged with school (they had slightly more positive attitudes towards school and were less likely to truant). Interestingly, they were also little more likely to equate hard work with success and have a greater locus of control, suggesting they felt greater agency over their lives. Young people on both pathways had relatively average attainment at Key Stage 4, with those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways achieving slightly higher.

By age 19/20 nearly all those on FTED into Employment pathways were in paid work, along with more half of those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways, with most of the remainder on an apprenticeship or in some type of training. Roughly four separate tiers of attainment were evident in Figure 3, a university tier with the very highest levels of attainment at age 19/20, consisting of Direct to University, Delayed University Entrants and University non-completers, followed by a second tier consisting of those on other educational and training pathways. Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways were part of this second tier alongside those on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways and Returners. More than half of them had a L3 qualification and the remainder mostly a L2. Young people on FTED into Employment pathways were then a little further below in a third tier, which also included Other NEETs, but nevertheless with relatively good levels of attainment (two fifths had L3, and more than one third L2).

Young people on Apprenticeship & Training pathways were little more likely to have a L2 in both English and maths at the end of Key Stage 4, with many more young people on both pathways continuing to reach this milestone by age 18. After age 18 the gap widens, with the prevalence for those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways continuing to increase on a level matching those on university pathways. This may be a direct result of a 2014/15 directive making it mandatory for all apprentices to continue studying towards a Level 2 qualification in both English and maths where an apprentice did not already meet this requirement (SFA, 2014)[57].

The material circumstances of young people on both pathways illustrates a higher level of financial independence compared to other young people. Approximately one in ten young people on both pathways had left the parental home (slightly higher than average), and they had the highest levels of household incomes amongst those who had done so. Furthermore, more than a quarter of those who had left home were also already on the housing ladder. They were among those most likely to have some personal debt, including both credit card and hire purchase debt, but reported far less difficulty than

[57] This was no longer mandatory from 2022/23 (Powell, 2019).

others in managing this, suggesting this signalled affordability rather than financial difficulty. Furthermore, they were far less likely to receive parental financial support or government benefits[58].

The wellbeing and mental health of those on FTED into Employment pathways was typical for young people their age, with average scores for Life Satisfaction, feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, and self-reported happiness. In terms of their mental health, our findings raise a general concern about levels of, and trends in, young people's mental health problems as also reported elsewhere (Collishaw, 2015; Liubertiene et al., 2025; McGorry et al., 2025). Overall, one in three young people reported three or more psychological, or somatic, symptoms, which indicates a level of psychological distress considered clinically significant, and suggests some kind of intervention, such as counselling, might be appropriate[59].

In contrast those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways reported the highest levels of wellbeing (and lowest levels of psychological distress) across the board. They had the highest life satisfaction and happiness scores, were those most likely to feel the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile and least likely to report symptoms of psychological distress. It is worth noting, however, that one in five still reported three or more symptoms. We also found no evidence to suggest this was a consequence of mentally healthy young people being more likely to follow this pathway (a selection effect). In terms of their health behaviours, young people on both pathways were average on frequency of binge drinking, and use of cannabis and other drugs, both of which remained relatively low overall.

Young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways did better in terms of their employment outcomes too. The large majority of those in paid work had a permanent employment contract, and regular contractual hours. However, both were slightly higher among those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways. At this early stage in their careers, most young people worked in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations, nevertheless, some worked in other roles, including higher professional or managerial roles. Again, this was more so for those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways, for whom there were most likely direct routes into these types of roles. These young people were also likely to work more hours, and receive more pay on average[60]. In terms of their own evaluations of their employment, young people on Apprenticeship & Training pathways gave higher ratings for both the extrinsic (e.g. 'I see my job as part of a career', 'I'm pleased with the promotions prospects' etc.) and intrinsic benefits (e.g. 'my job is interesting', 'my job makes a contribution to society' etc.) benefits of their employment. In general, scores across all employment outcomes were a little lower for young people on FTED into

[58] The comparison excludes university students who were ineligible to receive Universal Credit because of their status.
[59] It is important to note that whilst GHQ-12 can be used as a screening tool to identify a probable mental health problem, a proper diagnosis can only be carried out by a trained professional.
[60] The data also suggests they received a slightly higher hourly wage, however this was not statistically significant.

Employment pathways, which in turn were slightly higher than for University Non-Completers and those on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways, although the latter differences were not always statistically significant.

Delayed tracks

Around one in eight (15%) of the non-immediate HE cohort delayed starting university by a year, either to improve their grades, i.e. remain in full-time non-HE education, work or take a break from studying. The transitions of Other NEETs (1%) are marked by two years FTED, followed by two consistent years occupying “other” activity states, such as waiting for results, travelling, or taking a break from work or study. These young people, who differ from others categorised as NEET in that they are economically inactive but do not report looking for work, have caring responsibilities or illness/disabilities, might also be on slightly delayed tracks.

Delayed university entrants had the most advantaged backgrounds of the non-immediate HE cohort. They were far more likely to have a degree educated parent and live in an advantaged neighbourhood, and far less likely to live in a single parent family or have been eligible for free school meals. They were also less likely to have had a longstanding illness or disability at school or receive SEN provision.

To some extent, this translates into their much higher aspirations, both to remain in sixth form and to apply to university, which is a track they had considered for a long time (they were the least likely to report that RPA had affected their plans). They had the most positive attitudes to school and were those least likely to truant or engage in any risky behaviours. They were those most likely to equate hard work with success and have a high locus of control, signalling a greater sense of agency over their lives. In addition, their parents also had the highest aspirations for them and the joint highest rating for the schools they attended, which suggests a positive relationship with the school, although it could also indicate better schools. They also had the highest attainment at Key Stage 4.

At age 19/20 practically all Delayed University Entrants remained in university studying for a degree, and they had the highest attainment of the non-immediate HE pathways, just behind those on Direct to University pathways. Slightly fewer of them had a L2 in both English and maths at age 16, but this gap was significantly reduced during the subsequent two years. They were also a little more likely to have studied vocational qualifications than those on Direct to University pathways.

In terms of their material circumstances, mental health and wellbeing, Delayed University Entrants were very similar to those on Direct to University pathways. They were less likely to have left the parental home (at least permanently) and had lower household incomes if they had done so. More of them had debt (mostly overdraft debt), which one in five found it difficult to manage. However, they were also far more likely to receive parental financial support.

Like those on Direct to University tracks, they had slightly higher life satisfaction than those on FTED into Employment pathways and were a little more likely to feel that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, and were slightly happier also. At the same time, they reported higher rates of anxiety and more of them were psychologically distressed (almost two in five). Their higher anxiety/psychological stressed was linked with being higher attainers and having parents with higher expectations for them. As we might suspect, they were also a little more likely to binge drink than their non-university peers, and were as likely to use cannabis as those on FTED into Employment pathways. In both instances, this appeared to be a little more frequent than those on Direct to University pathways, who would have been in their second year at university.

Other NEETs appear quite different from the two other categories of NEET youth and may require different kinds of support to ensure they are able to reach their full potential. It may also be that this small but important subgroup simply needs more time and support to embark on their post-school phase. In many ways, they also appeared less vulnerable or at-risk that our two other NEET groups (FTED into NEET, and At Home).

As a particularly small pathway cluster, we are far less confident in the differences we observed, many of which were not statistically significant[61]. Other NEETs were more likely female but otherwise relatively similar those on FTED into Employment pathways in terms their backgrounds, although more of them were eligible for free school meals (n/s), and they were more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods. They had slightly better attitudes to school (n/s), were less likely to truant (n/s), and were those least likely to engage in risky behaviours. They were also as likely to recognise the importance of working hard for their success as Delayed University Entrants (n/s). Nevertheless, they had lower attainment than those on FTED into Employment pathways at Key Stage 4.

At age 19/20, they continued to remain behind in terms of their attainment. Compared to those on FTED into Employment pathways, more appeared to have left the parental home (n/s), but fewer had any personal debt (n/s), and they were more likely to receive parental financial help (n/s). They were also more likely to receive benefits from the government, although at a figure far lower than our two other NEET pathways.

Again, none of the differences relating to mental health and wellbeing were statistically significant and we cannot therefore be confident of our findings. They reported higher life satisfaction (n/s), were more likely to feel the things they are doing in their lives were worthwhile (n/s) and reported identical levels of happiness to those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways (n/s). Furthermore, they report the lowest levels of anxiety across the pathway clusters (n/s) and second lowest prevalence of psychological distress (n/s). In

[61] Statistical significance is a function of both the size of the difference and the sample size (and for continuous measures, the variance in scores). Smaller pathway clusters require larger differences for them to reach statistical significance. Where the sample size for a pathway cluster is particularly small, for transparency we note and indicate where differences were non-significant (n/s).

terms of their health behaviours, they were far less likely to frequently binge drink or use cannabis or other drugs than other young people, which were statistically significant.

These results fit with our understanding of Other NEETs as a potentially delayed group, whose circumstances may be far from ideal, but who appeared less vulnerable and potentially at-risk as our two other NEET pathways (see further below). A group of young people who might need more time, and potentially more support, in finding and achieving a path that is right for them.

Trying, but possibly in need of greater support

This group of pathway clusters includes young people who discontinued their higher education (**University Non-Completers** (4%)), or whose pathways may have become a little protracted (**Extended FTED (non-degree)** (10%)) or otherwise disjointed (**Returners** (1%)). In many cases this may not be cause for concern. Some young people may have simply changed their mind, taken longer to achieve the grades they required, or decided to return to education to improve their opportunities once they had experienced the world of work. There should always be scope within the education system to allow for these situations in support of young people to achieve their objectives. Of course, in some cases they may well be struggling and in need of additional support.

Young people on **Extended FTED (non-degree)** pathways were more likely male, summer born, had the joint highest rate of longstanding illness or disabilities, and second highest rate of SEN provision, which is likely to underpin their more protracted non-HE educational pathways. They were very similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways in terms of parental education, and living in single parent families, but more were eligible for free school meals, and lived in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Although their aspirations, equating of hard work with success, and locus of control were similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways, they had slightly better aspirations, and they were less likely to engage in risky behaviours. Nevertheless, they had much lower levels of attainment at Key Stage 4.

At age 19/20, the large majority were either in paid work or remained in fulltime (non-degree) education. The extended period spent in education had paid off for many of them as they were now the highest attaining group among the non-university educational and training pathways, with most of them having vocational qualifications. Furthermore, they also had the joint largest increase in L2 qualifications in both English and maths post age 16, although the overall number who had achieved this milestone remained comparatively low.

Young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) were less likely to have left home, and had lower household incomes, had they done so. They were also less likely to have personal debt, but similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways, very able to

manage this if they did. More than half of them received parental financial support, and a small but not insignificant number received government benefits, including benefits for disabilities.

Their wellbeing and mental health was average for the cohort and very similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways. They were also similar in regard to having a longstanding physical or mental health condition, but were one of those least likely to frequently binge drink or use any drugs.

Two in five young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways had moved into paid work at age 19/20, and similar numbers to those on FTED into Employment pathways had a permanent contract and contracted hours. However, they were more likely to be in semi-routine or routine occupations and far less likely to be in higher professional or managerial roles. This may be the result of spending less time in employment, although this may well be other explanations for this. They also tended to work less hours and received lower incomes. Their own evaluations of both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of their employment were also slightly lower than average, but the differences were not statistically significant. However, they were just as likely to feel a sense of belonging at work.

University non-completers embarked on a university degree course at age 18, or 19, but for some reason did not complete their course. They were slightly more male, were those most likely to be summer born, and included twice the number of young people in receipt of SEN provision compared to Delayed University Entrants. Notably two markers suggesting that they were more likely to struggle academically. They were more likely to have a degree educated parent than those not on university pathways, however, this was far fewer than Delayed University Entrants, for example. Otherwise, they were very similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways of in terms of their socioeconomic background.

On their attitudes to school, truancy, and engagement in risky behaviours, they were between Delayed University Entrants and those on FTED in Employment pathways, however their aspirations to go to university were much closer to those of the former. University Non-Completers also had comparatively raised levels of psychological distress in Year 10, which could be considered a risk factor for subsequently dropping out. Prior research has shown that young people from less advantaged backgrounds with high aspirations are more likely to experience stress. This is often due to the combination of facing systemic barriers and the pressure to succeed in environments that may not fully support their needs (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). The aspirations of University Non-completer's parents were only slightly below those of Delayed University Entrants, and they had the second highest level of attainment at Key Stage 4 attainment, again trailing only slightly behind Delayed University Entrants.

University Non-Completers was the most mixed pathway in terms of their economic activity at age 19/20. Most were in paid work (59%), some had returned to university

(9%), with the remainder distributed across most of the remaining activities. They had much higher levels of attainment than young people on other pathways, although a little lower than Delayed University Entrants. They were far more likely to have studied vocational qualifications compared to those on other university pathways, which is another factor that has been previously associated with a higher rate of drop out (Dilnot et al., 2023).

They were just as likely to have left the parental home as those on FTED into Employment pathways and had relatively similar (higher) levels of household incomes, if they had done so. Whilst they were also as likely to have any personal debt, they were more likely to find this difficult to manage (to a similar extent to those on other university pathways, but not to the extent of our two at-risk NEET groups). Many of these young people also continued to receive parental financial support, although this was fewer than those who remained at university, and in line with the fact that many had moved into paid work. Receipt of government benefits was also very low for this group.

The wellbeing of University Non-Completers, including their life satisfaction, the extent to which they felt the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, levels of happiness and anxiety, were all slightly below average (or above in the case of anxiety), however none of the differences were statistically significant. Slightly more of them were also psychologically distress, although again this was non-significant. Given our earlier point, that less advantaged young people on university pathways were at risk of greater stress, we may have expected this to be higher. However, it is also plausible that their distress may have subsided once they had exited university.

They were more likely to report a long-standing physical or mental health condition, although not to the extent of those in our two at-risk NEET groups. However, they were similar in their frequency of binge drinking and cannabis to those on FTED into Employment pathways.

Many of those who had dropped out of university were in paid employment (59%) at age 19/20. However, the small sample size of this subgroup means that some of the observed differences in employment outcomes were non-significant, and we must therefore remain cautious in our interpretations. University non-completers were less likely to have a permanent contract or contracted hours (n/s), worked fewer hours, and also had lower wages. While slightly more of them were worked in semi-routine or routine occupations (n/s), similar numbers worked in professional or managerial roles to those on FTED into Employment pathways. They gave the lowest ratings for the extrinsic benefits (n/s) of their employment but similar ratings for its intrinsic benefits and were just as likely to feel a sense of belonging at work. Overall, these findings point towards a pathway somewhat more in flux. Many of them may have taken employment as a temporary, and maybe necessary, stop gap whilst they worked out their next steps.

Returner's transitions were marked by lengthy periods in full-time further education, followed by a period of six months or more in typically employment or training activities,

before returning to full-time (non-degree) education. Like Other NEETs, Returners is a particularly small pathway cluster, which means there is less we can say about them with confidence. They were equally male and female but were more likely to have a longstanding illness or disability. Like University Non-Completers, they were more likely to have a parent with a degree level education, but otherwise they were similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways in terms of their background. Whilst they were similar to University Non-Completers in terms of their post 16 aspirations, fewer of them had aspirations for university.

Compared to young people on FTED into Employment pathways, Returners had slightly more positive attitudes to school (n/s) and were those least likely to truant (by far). However, they were those least likely to equate hard work with success (n/s) and had the second lowest locus of control, suggesting a much lower sense of agency over their lives. The aspirations of their parents were average for the cohort, nevertheless they achieved well at Key Stage 4, at a level just below University Non-Completers and above those on Apprenticeship & Training pathways.

At age 19/20, Returners were mostly in paid work or fulltime (non-degree) education and were between those on Extended FTED (non-degree) and Apprenticeship & Training pathways in terms of their level of attainment. Few had left the parental home (n/s), hey were those least likely to have any personal debt, and like those on FTED into Employment pathways, were also less likely to receive parental financial support. A plausible although untested hypothesis is that Returners may have desired (or were required) to build some financial security prior to their return to education. Whilst they were a little more likely to receive government benefit (n/s), this was predominantly in the form of disability benefits.

The life satisfaction of Returners was relatively low (n/s) (just above those At Home), however they had average happiness, feeling that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile, and prevalence of psychological distress. Although they had similar levels of having a longstanding physical or mental health condition as other young people, a much higher receipt of disability benefits suggest these were more likely debilitating conditions. They were a little less likely to frequently of binge drink (n/s) but were similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways in terms of their drug use.

Potentially vulnerable/at-risk groups

One in fourteen young people were on pathways that placed them at a much greater risk of poor outcomes, both at age 19/20 as we demonstrate here, but potentially also in the longer term. Those on **FTED into NEET** (5%) pathways, with transitions marked by one, two, or three years in fulltime education (non-degree), followed by consistent and prolonged periods of being NEET and looking for work, or a course, making up the remainder of the four-year window, and those **At Home** (2%), consisting of young people who moved from fulltime education (non-degree) into consistent and prolonged episodes

of being at home with caring responsibilities, or who were ill or disabled some via periods of being NEET and looking for work.

They are the most gendered of the pathway clusters. FTED into NEET pathway is significantly more male and At Home significantly more female. Otherwise, both come from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds. FTED into NEET had the joint highest prevalence of young people with a long-term illness or disability in Year 10, and the highest prevalence of those in receipt of SEN provision (almost half of them), as well as many young people who were summer born. Nearly half the young people At Home were already mothers, and significant numbers had a long-term condition and/or were in receipt of SEN provision. Although these figures were lower than those on FTED into NEET pathways, it is plausible that these were more debilitating conditions, given that many had reported being unable to work post 16.

Parental attainment was far lower among young people on both pathways, particularly for those At Home. Almost half of them lived in a single parent family, and more than half were eligible for free school meals. Young people At Home lived in more disadvantaged areas and had the youngest mothers on average, the latter illustrating a generational pattern associated with teenage parenthood (Kahn & Anderson, 1992; Lehti et al., 2012).

Their post 16 aspirations were not particularly low compared to other young people. The large majority of them aspired to attend 6th form or a college, with very few reporting that they want to leave or do something else, although it was a little higher than for other groups. Young people At Home were just as likely to expect to apply to university as University Non-Completers, as were more than half of those on FTED into NEET pathways, which could suggest a mismatch between expectations and attainment.

Those on FTED into NEET pathways had the poorest attitudes to school and were the most likely to both truant and engage in risky behaviours. They were also those least likely to have had a paid job whilst at school. Whilst young people on FTED into NEET pathways were the most likely to report that RPA had affected their future plans, those At Home, were one of the least likely to report being affected, which suggests their subsequent experiences may have come as more of a surprise. At Home young people were similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways in terms of their school engagement, however they were, by far, those most likely to have been bullied, (two in three), which has been linked previously with poor attainment (Green, Collingwood, & Ross, 2010) and other poor outcomes (Olweus, 1994). It is perhaps unsurprising therefore to also find they had the highest psychological distress score, and a lower locus of control (n/s). Young people on FTED into NEET pathways were just as likely to equate working hard with success as those on FTED into Employment pathways, however they also had the lowest locus of control score. Our results suggest both groups of young people lacked a sense of agency over their lives.

Most parents wanted their children to continue in full time education at age 16, and this was no different for young people who ended up on more ‘at risk’ pathways. The large

majority of FTED into NEET parents wanted them to remain fulltime education or apply for an apprenticeship, and the number of parents of those At Home who wanted them to remain in education was also one of the highest. However, young people on both pathways had far lower attainment at Key Stage 4. To some degree, this reflects the large number of young people with SEN provision on both pathways, who tend to have much lower levels of attainment (Duckworth, Ross, & Harding, 2025b), but it also highlights a link between social disadvantage and poor Key Stage 4 outcomes (Farquharson, McNally, & Tahir, 2022).

Disadvantage and poor attainment translate into less sustainable and more at-risk pathways, which together and in turn leads to poorer outcomes. Young people on both pathways had far lower levels of attainment at age 19/20 compared to those on other pathways, residing in lowest (fourth) tier in our figure for attainment (Figure 3). Nevertheless, half of those on FTED into NEET pathways, and almost half of young people At Home had at least a L2 qualification. Many also had below a L1 or no qualifications, however. They were least likely to have achieved L2 in both English and maths, and whilst more of them had reached this milestone by age 19/20, the gap with other pathways increased over this period.

Young people on FTED into NEET pathways were a little less likely to have left the parental home (although this was non-significant), whilst young people At Home were those most likely to have left, by far. Many of them were parents themselves and may have left to start their own households. Having left home, they were then more likely than others to live in council or housing association accommodation and have lower household incomes. Whilst young people on both pathways were less likely to have any personal debt, overall (At Home n/s), those on FTED into NEET pathways were as likely to have credit card debt – a potentially far more expensive form of debt - as those on FTED into Employment pathways. Furthermore, those with debt on both pathways, were far more likely to struggle with repayments.

Positively, young people on both pathways were more likely to receive parental financial support, especially young people on FTED into NEET pathways, who were just as likely to receive support as those at university. At the same time, young people on both pathways were far more likely to receive government benefits. This was particularly the case for those At Home, who were more likely to receive child and disability benefits as in addition to Universal Credit.

The disadvantage of these young people was especially evident in their wellbeing and mental health. Young people on FTED into NEET pathways had the lowest life satisfaction overall and were those least likely to feel that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile. They also had the second lowest happiness, the highest anxiety scores, and were more likely to report three or more symptoms of psychological distress. The picture was very similar for those At Home, with similarly low life satisfaction (n/s), the lowest happiness overall, similar levels of anxiety (n/s), and a high

prevalence of young people who were psychologically distressed. Nevertheless, young people At Home were as likely to feel that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile as those currently at university (n/s), which may be linked to the fact that many of them were also parents. Those on both pathways were also more likely to report a longstanding mental or physical health condition at age 19/20.

Additional analyses, adjusting for the presence of a prior longstanding condition at age 14/15 (and adjusting for prior psychological distress at age 14/15 in our analysis of young people's mental health) did not account for their higher prevalence at age 19/20, suggesting that the pathways themselves were more likely to be a contributing factor.

In terms of their health behaviours, the frequency of binge drinking of young people was far lower than among those on other pathways, suggesting that any assumptions about alcohol misuse in these groups is unlikely to be accurate (ref.). Whilst they also appeared less likely to use cannabis and other drugs, these differences were smaller and non-significant.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Across our two reports – Post 16 Pathways report one: analysis of routes and groups, and Post 16 Pathways: analysis of outcomes as age 19/20 – we examine the pathways of young people who do not enter university immediately upon finishing school or college at 17/18. Using information from monthly activity data, we identified nine typical pathways that are alternatives to the 'direct to university' (A levels to degree) track. The value of our focus on alternative versions of post-16 transitions, and in using our wide-ranging outcome measures, is in revealing a complicated, imperfect, but largely functional pre-pandemic transitions ecology. We demonstrate that post-16 routes vary, how and for whom, and shine a light on areas where more support could or should be provided. This comprehensive, comparative analysis provides an evidenced narrative that is broader and more nuanced than the "forgotten middle" characterisation.

In report one we describe these transitions in detail, outlining the profiles of young people who typically follow them, as well as identifying the most important characteristics and factors for predicting them. Our second report picks up where the first ends, examining the outcomes of these same young people when they were aged 19/20, across four important domains: how far they had progressed in terms of their attainment and economic activity, their material circumstances, mental health and well-being, and health-related behaviours. Among those who had moved into paid work, we also examine their objective and subjective experiences of employment.

Taken together our findings suggest that the educational system is helping to put the vast majority on a positive post-16 starting position. A third of the overall LSYPE2 cohort moved straight into university, and of those who do not, most are on sustained and seemingly progressive tracks. Those on potentially riskier and/or more vulnerable pathways are in the minority. This narrative is also echoed in their outcomes.

Most young people remained in education or training or had made the successful transition into paid work. Many also continued to improve their skills and qualifications post age 16. For the most part, the material circumstances of young people either illustrated their growing independence or their 'in between' status as they furthered their education or training. Most also remained in the parental home and continued to receive parental financial support. However, a significant minority, particularly those on pathways we deemed more vulnerable or at-risk, were more likely to struggle with personal debt and be in receipt of benefits.

Young people's wellbeing also echoed their material circumstances. The life satisfaction, happiness, and extent to which young people felt the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile was either average or significantly higher for young people their age. Generally, the mental health of young people is of particular concern. One third of young people reported three of more symptoms of psychological distress, which is considered clinically significant, meaning that some kind of intervention such as counselling might be appropriate. These findings support those reported elsewhere, with evidence indicating a

significant decline over time (Collishaw, 2015; Liubertiene et al., 2025; McGorry et al., 2025). The prevalence of psychological distress also varied across the pathway clusters, with the minority of young people on the at-risk NEET pathways faring worse. These young people were also more likely to have poorer outcomes across all the wellbeing measures.

The general story is positive for young people who had made the transition into paid work, also[62]. Most had a permanent contract and contracted hours, and whilst most young people at this age worked in semi-routine or routine roles, significant numbers were also working in professional or managerial positions. Furthermore, the ratings young people gave for both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of their employment, as well as the sense of belonging it gave them, were also high.

Socioeconomic background

It is clear from our analysis across both reports, the importance of young people's socioeconomic background for influencing and supporting the pathways into early adulthood. Those on both direct and delayed paths into university came from more advantaged backgrounds, whereas University Non-completers were notably less advantaged (although more advantaged than those not on university pathways). University Non-completers were more likely to be first generation graduate students and therefore lacked the support of parents who had 'been there and done it themselves. These young people were also more likely to live in single parent families, have been eligible for free school meals, and live in less advantaged areas.

At the other end of the scale, young people on FTED into NEET pathways and those At Home (our two potentially most vulnerable pathways) came from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. They were far more likely to have parents with low or no qualifications, have been eligible for free school meals, lived in a single parent family, and in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. As our analyses shows, these advantages or disadvantages are then in turn carried through to young people's outcomes.

The material circumstances of those at university are difficult to assess because they remained in education and their circumstances therefore reflect this. Nevertheless, a significant number of university students reported difficulties in managing debt, which is of concern. Young people on more vulnerable and potentially at-risk pathways (FTED into NEET and At Home) were less likely to have any debt, nevertheless many had credit card debt, and were far more likely to struggle with repayments. At Home young people were far more likely to have left the parental home, with many having already become parents themselves. Sometimes termed 'fast track' transitions into adulthood, these young people were far more likely to face financial hardship and other poor outcomes (Jones, 2002). Having left the parental home, many had moved into council or housing

[62] Given small sample sizes, we were only able to examine the employment experiences of young people on four of our pathway clusters, however this accounts for the large majority of those in paid work.

association accommodation, and had lower household incomes. Along with young people on FTED into NEET pathways, these young people were far more likely to also receive state support.

Differences were also evident in young people's mental health and wellbeing. Those on university tracks were generally more satisfied with their lives and felt that the things they were doing were worthwhile, whilst those on FTED into NEET pathways and those At Home, had the lowest levels of wellbeing and the highest prevalence of young people who were psychologically distressed. Whilst young people at university were also more likely to have raised psychological distress, this was not to the same extent and for different reasons.

Despite the clear association between socioeconomic background and disadvantaged outcomes outlined above, the relationship is far from deterministic, as our analysis also showed. Some young people from disadvantaged backgrounds followed typically more advantaged pathways, and vice versa, with those from more advantaged backgrounds also evident on more at-risk pathways, although the overall numbers were far fewer. Other factors too are critically important, such as young people's (and their parent's) attitudes, aspirations and behaviours. How engaged they are with schoolwork, the extent to which they believe their hard work will result success, and of course their level of achieved attainment. However, we must recognise that these things are to some extent also aligned. In general, young people from more advantaged backgrounds have a greater sense of agency, better attitudes to school, long-term expectations and aspirations, and attainment, which as we have shown, are also associated with better pathways with better outcomes.

Apprenticeships & Training

We have also shown pathways with more mixed demographics that also represent positive and sustained routes into early adulthood, and in some cases exceeding the outcomes of traditionally more advantaged pathways. For example, young people on more vocational and direct pathways into employment had better material circumstances and demonstrated evidence of their growing independence. These young people were a little more likely to have left the parental home and had higher household incomes had they done so. Whilst more of them had personal debt, they were far more able to manage this, suggesting it was a matter of affordability and not financial difficulty. They were also less likely to receive parental financial support and far less likely to be in receipt of government benefits.

In terms of their wellbeing and mental health, young people on Apprenticeships & Training pathways were by far the standout group. They had the highest life satisfaction and happiness and were those most likely to feel that the things they were doing in their lives were worthwhile. They also had the lowest prevalence of psychological distress across the pathway clusters. In work too, they were more likely to have a permanent

contract and contracted hours, work in higher level occupations, work more hours, and receive higher wages. Furthermore, they gave the highest ratings for both the extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of their employment. In terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds, these young people were very similar to those on FTED into Employment pathways. In an analysis inclusive of all the measures we examined, they only differed in terms of their (and their parents) aspirations to do an apprenticeship from an early age.

The success of young people on this pathway also raises another important question. Is there more that can be done to encourage and/or support other young people to follow more 'successful' pathways. Of course, we cannot be certain from our analysis that young people would have had better outcomes if they had followed a different pathway, but it is certainly plausible. For example, in our analysis we found that University Non-Completers were more likely to study vocational qualifications on their route to university. Not only has this been previously associated with a higher rate of university drop out (Dilnot et al., 2023) it may also indicate that an apprenticeship may have been more suitable. However, for those wishing to pursue an academic degree, it remains important to ensure the support is there, particularly for first time graduates, which many of these young people were.

SEND Young people

Receipt of SEN provision featured across all the pathway clusters but was especially evident among young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) pathways (39%), and our two most at-risk pathways: FTED into NEET (48%), and At Home (37%). Unfortunately, we were unable to examine the specific SEN type or level of SEN provision young people received owing to small sample sizes, which could be critical to the pathways they followed, and worth investigating further. However, if it were possible to support more young people with SEN onto an extended fulltime education (non-degree) pathway, our evidence suggests this could very well be beneficial.

Final remarks

Generally speaking, both reports indicate that the education system and labour market can be said to be working well because, for the most part, they either give young people direct routes to their destination of choice or the time and opportunity to find their way more indirectly. Further consideration should be given to supporting those taking longer to find their way: those on extended FE (non-degree) pathways (10%), university non-completers (4%), and Returners (1%). Here more guided and direct routes to more suitable destinations might save debt, help with wellbeing, and raise sustained employment sooner. However, young people in the more at-risk pathways (with high levels of unemployment 5% and mostly staying at home 2%) are likely to require more intense intervention to improve their circumstances and reduce long term requirement for state support.

What our research also clearly demonstrates is that there are many ways into early adulthood and that few pathways are straightforward routes affecting positive outcomes. Some are prolonged or disjointed, some face momentary failure, and others are delayed. What is important, however, is ensuring that there is enough flexibility within the education and training system to allow for this, and to ensure there is enough information and support for young people to become, in both the short and longer term, for them to thrive.

Limitations

When exploring the level of detail inherent in four years' worth of monthly activity histories across a non-HE cohort no one solution is going to be perfect. Our approach extensively explored the descriptive patterns across the sequences and used elements of a purely computational, data-driven clustering of the underlying groups to inform a manual classification of the data. Others have used alternative methods and there are pros and cons to each.

The methodology adopted here attempts to yield the most parsimonious grouping of similar sequences, whilst allowing for differences to emerge, maximising within group variation and ensuring clusters do not become too small. In addition, we wanted the different types of pathways identified to have real world meaning and policy relevance. We also used additional detail to try and correct apparent contradictions in the young person's reports about primary activities. However, despite our best attempts, there will always be some level of misclassification and other groupings could have been pulled out, for example, different types of Delayed University Entrants groups (extended period of FE study; those in work for a year; those taking a break before starting HE) or a finer grained account of the At Home group (those with caring responsibilities vs. those young people who are unable to work or study due to illness and/or disability). Moreover, considerable time and effort was taken to iterate these analyses and produce clean, well defined pathway types and we are confident that they will hold up to scrutiny.[63]

The LSYPE2 contains a wide range of measures associated with educational achievement and individual development. From these we selected a narrow, but nevertheless comprehensive set of characteristics known to play a role in young people's transitions and have attempted to balance these across individual and family level characteristics. However, due to additional limits placed on the resulting sample sizes, we did not, for example, control for additional school-level factors which may also influence the post-16 tracks young people choose. Similarly, from the wide range of outcome measures that are available in LSYPE2, we tried to select measures that were relevant across all the pathways examined. In some cases, this will mean we have missed the opportunity to examine interesting outcomes that are pathway specific.

[63] All details of the steps taken, and the grouping procedures are available from the authors on request.

Furthermore, given the status of young people on some of our pathways, certain outcomes, notably those relating to material circumstances, may be less relevant.

It is also important to emphasise that our analysis cannot prove causality in the relationships observed and it is clear that some of the observable characteristics do go hand-in-hand, but that many of our findings confirm and build on the existing body of research gives strength to there being meaningful differences for the newly observed pathways too.

Our analysis of young people's outcomes comes at a relatively early stage in their lives, when many remained in education or training. This was a consequence of the available data at the time, and the fact that in the following two years (2020 and 2021) young people's lives were severely disrupted by the Covid 19 pandemic, and therefore less reflective of 'normal' times. It would nevertheless be very informative to revisit these young people when they were a little older, perhaps at age 25. At this point, most will have completed their studies, many more of them will have moved out of the parental home, and more of them will have started families of their own. We would expect to see further disparities between the outcomes of young people on university, apprenticeship and training, and more direct to employment pathways. It would also be useful to understand for whom extended periods spent in non-degree education was most beneficial, and for whom it was less so. To get a better understanding of the experiences of University Non-Completers as they attempt to get their lives back on track, and to examine whether Other NEETs were successful in moving on from their 'in-between' status. Furthermore, it would be especially insightful to follow up the histories of those of our two most disadvantaged pathways and understand more about the factors that helped or hindered their movement into employment, or a return to education.

Finally, we note that longitudinal surveys, despite their richness, are not completely representative of the population they seek to assess. Statistical techniques such as weighting procedures go some way to addressing imbalances due to the under-representation of certain groups - for example, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, certain ethnic groups, young people in the care system, or those in special schools – but ultimately caution must be taken when generalising findings to the broader population.

Appendix A Full list of outcome measures

Progression

Main Activity (8 categories): Fulltime education non-degree; fulltime education studying for a first degree; working; part working/part college; apprenticeship or training; unemployed/looking for work; looking after the family/home; other activities

Main activity (17 categories): Fulltime education non-degree; fulltime education studying for a degree; In paid work; On a training course; Doing an apprenticeship; Waiting for a course or job to start; Looking after the family and home; Unemployed and looking for work; Part work/part college; Doing voluntary work; Travelling; Taking a break; Ill or disabled and unable to work; Waiting for exam or course results; Doing a traineeship; Waiting to hear result of job application; Looking for a training course

Highest Qualification: Below Level 1; Level 1; Level 2; Level 3

Type of Highest Qualification: Academic; Vocational; Apprenticeship; Combination; Below Level 1

Achieved Level 2 in both English and maths (Academic or Functional): Yes; No

Material circumstances

Not living in the parental home: Yes; No

Housing Tenure (those not living in parental home): Owner Occupier; Council or Housing Association; Private rent; Other

Total Household income (those not living in parental home)

Whether young person has any form of debt (excludes mortgages and student loans): Yes; No

Whether young person has any of the following forms of debt (multiple response)**:** Overdraft; Credit/store card; Loan; HP; Loan from friend/relative; Other: Yes; No

How easy is it to keep up with payments (young people with debt): Very easy; Fairly easy; Not very easy; No at all easy

Receives financial support from parents: Yes; No

Receives State benefits: Yes; No

Receives Universal Credit or one of its legacy benefits (multiple response) (Jobseeker's allowance, Income support, Employment and support allowance, Working tax credit, Housing benefit, Child tax credit, and Carer's allowance): Yes; No

Receives disability benefits (multiple response) (Personal independence allowance, Disability Living allowance, Severe disablement allowance, Incapacity benefit, Industrial injuries disablement): Yes; No

Receives child or maternity benefits (multiple response) (Child benefit, Guardian's allowance, Maternity allowance): Yes; No

Wellbeing

Life Satisfaction: Self report on a scale from 0 to 10

The things you do in your life are worthwhile: Self report on a scale from 0 to 10

Happiness: Self report on a scale from 0 to 10

Anxiety: Self report on a scale from 0 to 10

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12): Likert scale from 0 – 36 measuring the presence and frequency of set of 12 psychological or somatic symptoms considered to indicate psychological distress

GHQ Caseness: 3 or more symptoms out of a possible 12

Longstanding illness or disability: Yes; No

Frequency of binge drinking (got 'very drunk'): Never; Less than once a month; Monthly; Weekly or more

Frequency of Cannabis use: Never; Not in last 12 months; In last 12 months; Once in the last 4 weeks; Two or more times in the last 4 weeks

Frequency of Other drug use: Never; Not in last 12 months; In last 12 months; Once in the last 4 weeks; Two or more times in the last 4 weeks

Young people in paid work

Contracted hours: Contracted 3 or more hours a week; Zero hours contract; No contract

Permanent contract: Yes; No

Other contract types (multiple response): Seasonal work; under contract for fixed period/task; Agency temping; Casual type of work; Other: Yes; No

Occupational position (NS-SEC5): Higher Managerial & Professional; Intermediate occupations; Small employer & Own account; Lower supervisory and technical; Semi-routine & routine occupations

Usual weekly hours

Annual wages

Hourly pay

Education and training: Training/Course leading to a qualification; At least on/off the job training in the last 4 weeks; None of the above

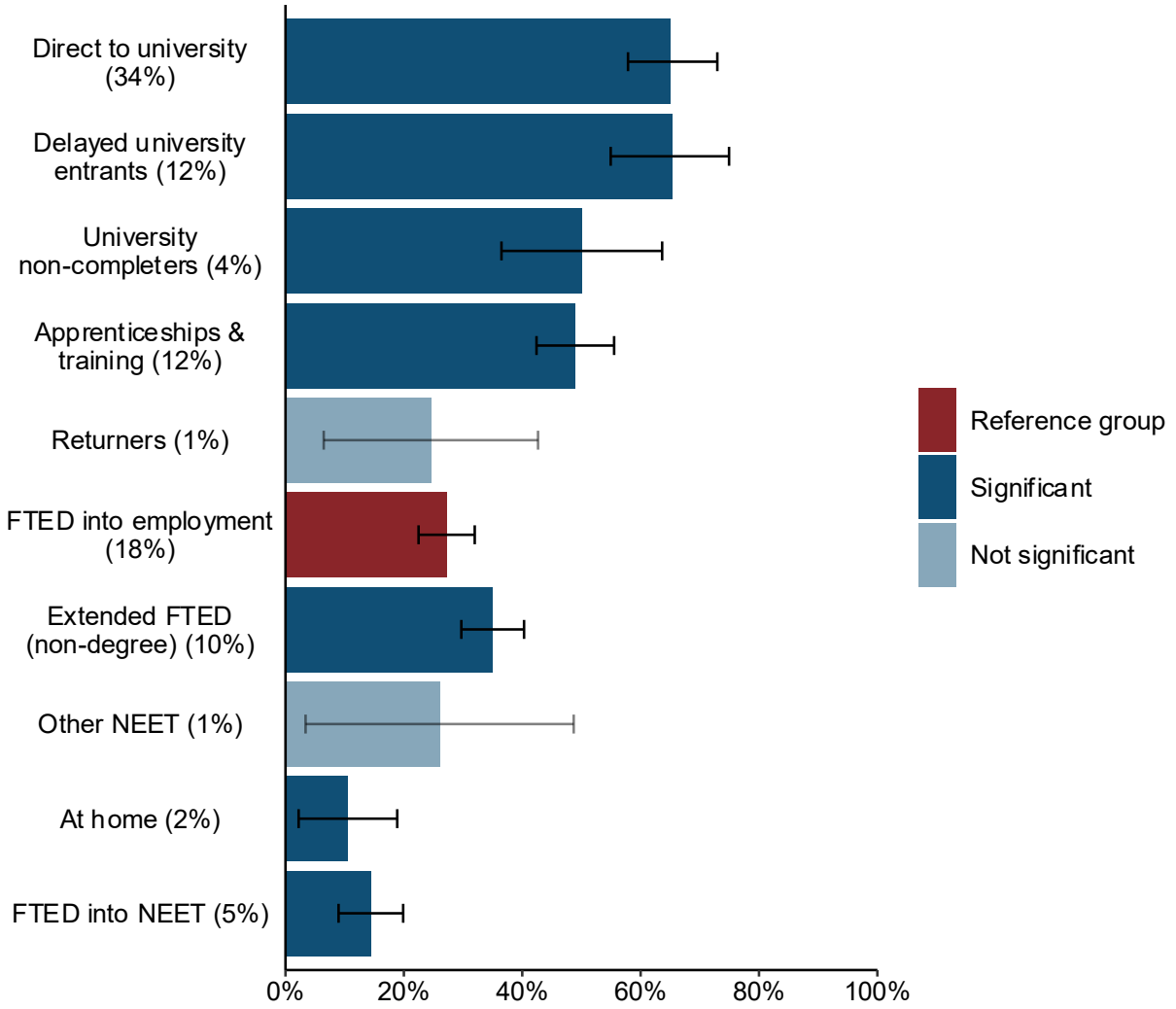
Subjective job evaluation: Extrinsic benefits; Intrinsic benefits; Sense of belonging all measured on a scale from 0 to 9[64]

[64] See Appendix C for further details.

Appendix B Achievement of L2 in both English and maths by age 19/20 among young people who had not achieved this at KS4

Figure B1 shows the percentages of young people who had achieved L2 in both English and maths at age 19/20 from the subgroup of those who did not achieve this milestone at Key Stage 4, adjusted for gender.

Figure B1: Percentage of young people who achieved L2 in English and Maths between ages 16/17 and 19/20, by pathway cluster

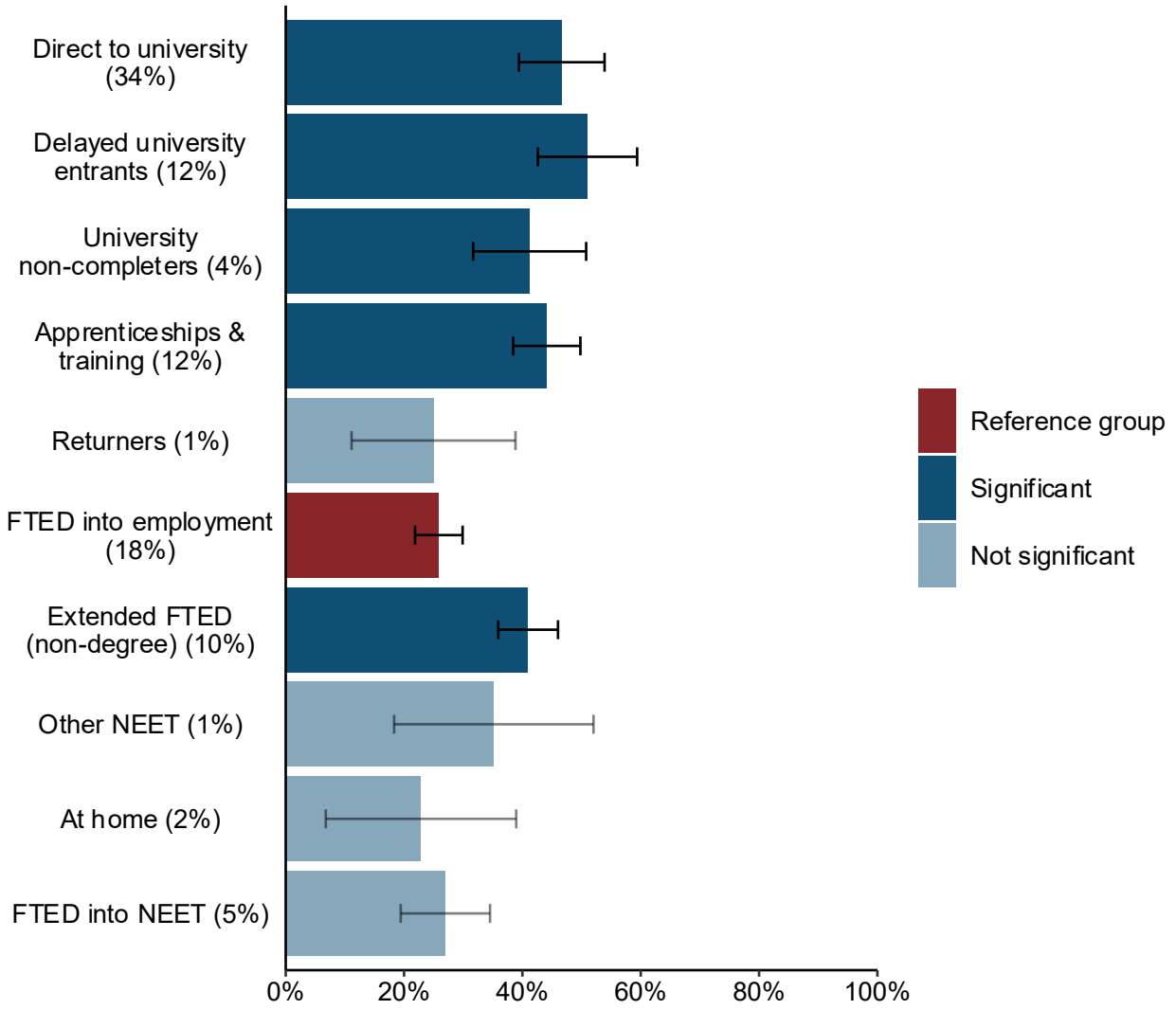


Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted for gender. Sample: YP who had not already achieved this milestone at Key Stage 4. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Young people currently at university (65%) were those most likely to have achieved a L2 in both English and maths by age 19/20 had they not already done so at Key Stage 4. They were closely followed by University Non-Completers (50.1%) and those on Apprenticeships & Training (49.1%) pathways. Young people on Extended FTED (non-degree) (35%) pathways were also more likely to have achieved this milestone by age

19/20 compared to those on FTED into Employment (27.2%) pathways, whereas young people on FTED into NEET (14.4%) pathways and those At Home (10.5%), were far less likely to have done so.

Figure B2: Percentage of young people who achieved L2 in English and Maths between ages 16/17 and 19/20, by pathway cluster



Notes: Chart shows prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals. Adjusted: for Gender, FSM eligibility, Parental education; KS4 attainment. Sample: YP who had not already achieved this milestone at Key Stage 4. Source: LSYPE2: Waves 4 to 7 (weighted).

Figure B2 shows the same percentages further adjusted for socioeconomic background and Key Stage 4 attainment.

Once we adjusted for differences in Key Stage 4 attainment and were, in effect, comparing young people across the pathways with similar levels of prior attainment, we find that those on Apprenticeships & Training pathways (44.1%) or Extended FTED (non-degree) (41%), were as likely to achieve this milestone by age 19/20 as those on university pathways: Direct to University (46.7%); Delayed university entrants (51%); University Non-Completers (41.2%).

Appendix C Young people's subjective evaluation of their employment

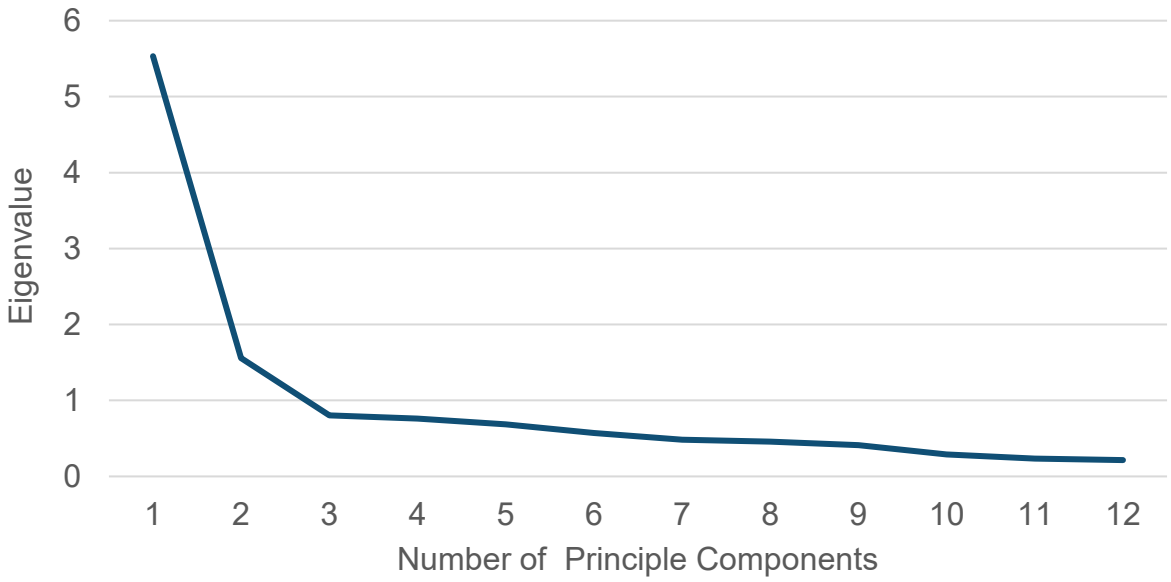
In wave 7 of the LSYPE2 survey, young people were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements regarding their main paid job:

- I see my present job as part of a career
- I see my job as a stepping stone, to provide me with worthwhile experience for my future career
- I am pleased with the promotion prospects available to me in this job
- My job is important, and it makes me feel worthwhile
- My job is interesting
- My job makes a contribution to society
- All things considered, I am satisfied with the level of pay
- I get on well with my colleagues
- I get on well with my boss
- My job is secure
- My qualifications from my education and training are relevant to this job
- I need more qualifications or training before I can get the job I really want
- My job requires that I keep learning new things

Using exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) we identified three factors, which captured young people's evaluations of the 'extrinsic benefits', 'intrinsic benefits', and 'sense of belonging at work'. Factor analysis (Kim & Mueller, 1978) is a statistical technique that enables us to assess whether, and to what extent, young people's responses to these thirteen statements reflected common, underlying, constructs (also known as factors).

Initial assessment of the polychoric correlations between the statements suggested that the twelfth statement – 'I need more qualifications or training before I can get the job I really want' – had little in common (statistically) with the other twelve and was therefore dropped from the analysis.

Figure C1: Scree plot



Source: LSYPE2: Wave 7 (weighted).

Figure C1 is called a scree plot, which shows the total variance (Eigenvalue) that can be explained with each additional principle component (the name given to factors prior to their extraction from the data). The objective is to explain most of the variance with as few principle components as possible. Each statement has a total variance of one, so the total available variance is twelve. In this case two or three components explained most of the overall variance (very little additional variance is explained by additional components). Another rule of thumb is to select the number of factors that have Eigenvalues above one. Components 1 and 2 are clearly above one, however 3 and 4 are very close to one, and are therefore worthy of further investigation.

After further investigation examining the factor loadings (the correlation between each statement and each factor) and residual variances (the variance for each statement that remained unexplained by the factors) across a number of different extractions (with one, two, three, and four factors, and some variations to the statements included), three factors, incorporating ten of the remaining twelve statements, was considered optimal. The two statements that were dropped were:

- All things considered, I am satisfied with the level of pay
- My qualifications from my education and training are relevant to this job

Again, our analysis suggests these statements had less in common with the other ten. Results of a confirmatory factor analysis assessing our final model, including factor loadings (in brackets) and model fit, are presented below:

Extrinsic benefits

- I see my present job as part of a career **(0.85)**
- I see my job as a stepping stone, to provide me with worthwhile experience for my future career **(0.59)**
- I am pleased with the promotion prospects available to me in this job **(0.79)**
- My job requires that I keep learning new things **(0.75)**

Intrinsic benefits

- My job is important, and it makes me feel worthwhile **(0.90)**
- My job is interesting **(0.82)**
- My job makes a contribution to society **(0.65)**

Sense of belonging

- I get on well with my colleagues **(0.75)**
- I get on well with my boss **(0.84)**
- My job is secure **(0.70)**

Model fit (confirmatory factor analysis)

RMSEA: 0.046; CFI: 0.995

All of the above analysis was carried out in Mplus 8.6 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017).

References

Acharya, I., & Broome, M. (2024). *Housing hurdles: The changing housing circumstances of young people in Britain*. Resolution Foundation UK.

Alderson, H., & Lingam, R. (2022). Just a Bottle in the Park: Alcohol Use in Vulnerable Children. In *Understanding Safeguarding for Children and Their Educational Experiences: A Guide for Students, ECTs and School Support Staff* (pp. 119-127): Emerald Publishing Limited.

Anderson, O., & Nelson, M. (2021). *Post 16 education and labour market activities, pathways and outcomes (LEO)* (DFE-RR1125). Department for Education.

Azur, M. J., Stuart, E. A., Frangakis, C., & Leaf, P. J. (2011). Multiple imputation by chained equations: what is it and how does it work? *International journal of methods in psychiatric research, 20*(1), 40-49.

Basta, M., Karakonstantis, S., Koutra, K., Dafermos, V., Papargiris, A., Drakaki, M., . . . Papadakis, N. (2019). NEET status among young Greeks: association with mental health and substance use. *Journal of affective disorders, 253*, 210-217.

Blundell, R., Cribb, J., McNally, S., Warwick, R., & Xu, X. (2021). *Inequalities in education, skills, and incomes in the UK: The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic*. Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Buscha, F., Urwin, P., Thomson, D., & Bibby, D. (2013). *Estimating the labour market returns from qualifications gained in English further education using the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)*. Department for Business Innovation and Skills

Bynner, J., & Parsons, S. (2002). Social exclusion and the transition from school to work: The case of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). *Journal of vocational behavior, 60*(2), 289-309.

Card, D. (1999). The causal effect of education on earnings. *Handbook of labor economics, 3*, 1801-1863.

Clark, A. E., & Oswald, A. J. (1994). Unhappiness and Unemployment. *Economic Journal, 104*(424), 648-659.

Collishaw, S. (2015). Annual Research Review: Secular trends in child and adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 56*(3), 370-393.

Crenna-Jennings, W. (2018). *Key drivers of the disadvantage gap: Literature review*. Education in England Annual Report. Education Policy Institute.

Cunha, F., Heckman, J., Lochner, L., & Masterov, D. (2006). Chapter 12 Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation. *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, 1 (06), 697–812. In.

Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2022). Young People's Perceptions of Their Parents' Expectations and Criticism Are Increasing Over Time: Implications for Perfectionism. *Psychological Bulletin*. doi:10.1037/bu10000347

De Coulon, A., Hedges, S., Nafilyan, V., & Speckesser, S. (2017). *Young people in low level vocational education: characteristics, trajectories and labour market outcomes*. Centre for Vocational Education Research Discussion Paper, 4.

Department for Education. (2018). *Post-16 education: highest level of achievement by age 25* (DFE-RR815). Department for Education.

Department for Education (2020). *Ad-hoc Notice: Post-16 pathways at level 3 and below. Experimental statistics on young people's transitions from education to work in England* (DFE-RR1125). Department for Education.

Dickerson, A., Morris, D., & McDool, E. (2020). *Post-Compulsory Education Pathways and Labour Market Outcomes*. Research Discussion Paper 026 Centre for Vocational Education Research

Dilnot, C., Macmillan, L., & Wyness, G. (2023). The path increasingly travelled: Vocational entry qualifications, socioeconomic status and university outcomes. *British Educational Research Journal, 49*(6), 1142-1160.

Donovan, N., Halpern, D., & Sargeant, R. (2002). *Life satisfaction: The state of knowledge and implications for government*: Cabinet Office, Strategy Unit.

Dorsett, R., Gray, H., Speckesser, S., & Stokes, L. (2019). *Estimating the impact of Traineeships.* (DFE- RR919) Department for Education.

Dorsett, R., & Lucchino, P. (2015). *The school-to work transition: An overview of two recent studies.* Discussion Paper No, 445. National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

Duckworth, K., Ross, A., & Harding, C. (2025a). *Post-16 Pathways: Analysis of routes and groups.* Department for Education UK.

Duckworth, K., Ross, A., & Harding, C. (2025b). *Young Adult Outcomes for Pupils with SEN.* (RR1486) Department for Education.

Farquharson, C., McNally, S., & Tahir, I. (2022). *Education inequalities.* IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities, *16*. Institute for Fiscal Studies

Friedrich, F., Alexandrowicz, R., Benda, N., Cerny, G., & Wancata, J. (2011). The criterion validity of different versions of the General Health Questionnaire among non-psychiatric inpatients. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol, 46*(7), 635-641. doi:10.1007/s00127-010-0229-8

Goldberg, D. P., & Williams, P. (1988). *A user's guide to the General Health Questionnaire*. Nfer-Nelson, Windsor.

Green, R., Collingwood, A., & Ross, A. (2010). *Characteristics of bullying victims in schools*. (DFE-RR001) Department for Education

Harmon, C., Oosterbeek, H., & Walker, I. (2000). *The returns to education: a review of evidence, issues and deficiencies in the literature*: Centre for the Economics of Education, London School of Economics

Hodge, L., Little, A., & Weldon, M. (2021). *GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings.* (DFE-RR1131) Department for Education

Hupkau, C., McNally, S., Ruiz-Valenzuela, J., & Ventura, G. (2017). Post-compulsory education in England: choices and implications. *National Institute Economic Review, 240*(1), R42-R57.

Jones, G. (2002). *The youth divide: diverging paths to adulthood*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. York.

Kahn, J. R., & Anderson, K. E. (1992). Intergenerational patterns of teenage fertility. *Demography, 29*(1), 39-57.

Kim, J.-O., & Mueller, C. W. (1978). *Introduction to factor analysis: What it is and how to do it* (Vol. 13): Sage. Beverly Hills Calif.

Kirkpatrick Johnson, M. (2013). Parental financial assistance and young adults' relationships with parents and well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 75*(3), 713-733.

Klug, K., Drobnič, S., & Brockmann, H. (2019). Trajectories of insecurity: Young adults' employment entry, health and well-being. *Journal of vocational behavior, 115*, 103308.

Le-Scherban, F., Roux, A. V. D., Li, Y., & Morgenstern, H. (2014). Does academic achievement during childhood and adolescence benefit later health? *Annals of Epidemiology, 24*(5), 344-355.

Lehti, V., Niemela, S., Heinze, M., Sillanmaki, L., Helenius, H., Piha, J., . . . Sourander, A. (2012). Childhood predictors of becoming a teenage mother among Finnish girls. *Acta Obstetricia Et Gynecologica Scandinavica, 91*(11), 1319-1325.

Lessof, C., Ross, A., Brind, R., Bell, E., & Newton, S. (2016). *Longitudinal Study of Young People in England cohort 2: health and wellbeing at wave 2*. (DFE-RR501) Department for Education.

Lessof, C., Ross, A., Brind, R., Harding, C., Bell, E., & Kyriakopoulos, G. (2018). *Understanding KS4 attainment and progress: evidence from LSYPE2*. (DFE-RR831) Department for Education

Lewis, G., Lewis, G., McCloud, T., & Callender, C. (2021). *Higher education and mental health: Analyses of the LSYPE cohorts.* (RR1142) Department for Education.

Liubertiene, G., Sloman, A., Morris, S., Bhavsar, V., Clark, C., Das-Munshi, J., . . . Wessely, S. (2025). *Common mental health conditions*. NHS England:

Lupton, R., Thomson, S., Velthuis, S., & Unwin, L. (2021). *Moving on from initial GCSE 'failure': Post-16 transitions for 'lower attainers' and why the English education system must do better.* Nuffield Foundation.

Manhica, H., Yacaman-Mendez, D., Sjöqvist, H., Lundin, A., Agardh, E., & Danielsson, A.-K. (2022). Trajectories of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, and Training) in emerging adulthood, and later drug use disorder-a national cohort study. *Drug and alcohol dependence, 233*, 109350.

Marmot, M., & Wilkinson, R. (2005). *Social determinants of health*: Oup Oxford.

McGorry, P., Gunasiri, H., Mei, C. S. A., Rice, S., & Gao, C. X. (2025). The youth mental health crisis: analysis and solutions. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 15*.

McIntosh, S., & Morris, D. (2018). *Labour market outcomes of older versus younger apprentices: A comparison of earnings differentials.* Centre for Vocational Education Research Discussion Paper, 16.

Muthén, L.K. and Muthén, B.O. (1998-2017). Mplus User's Guide. Eighth Edition. Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén

Oldham, M., Holmes, J., Whitaker, V., Fairbrother, H., & Curtis, P. (2018). *Youth drinking in decline*. Report. University of Sheffield , Sheffield.

Olweus, D. (1994). Bullying at School. In L. R. Huesmann (Ed.), *Aggressive Behavior: Current Perspectives* (pp. 97-130). Boston, MA: Springer US.

Pitchforth, J., Fahy, K., Ford, T., Wolpert, M., Viner, R. M., & Hargreaves, D. S. (2019). Mental health and well-being trends among children and young people in the UK, 1995–2014: analysis of repeated cross-sectional national health surveys. *Psychological medicine, 49*(8), 1275-1285.

Powell, A. (2019). *Apprenticeships and skills policy in England.* House of Commons Briefing Paper, 3052.

Rubin, D. (2004). *Multiple Imputation for Nonresponse in Surveys (Vol. 81)*. John Wiley & Sons. London.

Sadler, K., Akister, J., & Burch, S. (2015). Who are the young people who are not in education, employment or training? An application of the risk factors to a rural area in the UK. *International Social Work, 58*(4), 508-520.

Sanders, M. (2023). *Student mental health in 2023: Who is struggling and how the situation is changing.* Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education.

SFA. (2014). *Funding Rules 2014 to 2015* (DFE-RR815).

Smyth, E. (2020). Shaping educational expectations: the perspectives of 13-year-olds and their parents. *Educational Review, 72*(2), 173-195.

StataCorp. (2025). *Stata Statistical Software: Release 18.* StataCorp LLC. College Station, TX

Thern, E., Ramstedt, M., & Svensson, J. (2020). The associations between unemployment at a young age and binge drinking and alcohol-related problems. *European Journal of Public Health, 30*(2), 368-373.

von Soest, T., Luhmann, M., & Gerstorf, D. (2020). The Development of Loneliness Through Adolescence and Young Adulthood: Its Nature, Correlates, and Midlife Outcomes. *Developmental Psychology, 56*(10), 1919-1934.

Watts, T. W. (2020). Academic Achievement and Economic Attainment: Reexamining Associations Between Test Scores and Long-Run Earnings. *Aera Open, 6*(2).

West, P., & Sweeting, H. (2003). Fifteen, female and stressed: changing patterns of psychological distress over time. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry, 44*(3), 399-411.

White, I. R., Royston, P., & Wood, A. M. (2011). Multiple imputation using chained equations: issues and guidance for practice. *Statistics in medicine, 30*(4), 377-399.

Williamson (2020) Education Secretary FE speech with Social Market Foundation. Available at: Education Secretary FE speech with Social Market Foundation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Department for Education

Reference: RR1564

ISBN: 978-1-83870-684-5

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications