



Course Choice in Senior Phase - Young People in Scotland Survey 2019



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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1. Key Findings

This report presents data from Ipsos MORI's Young People in Scotland Survey 2019 on the choices young people make about their subjects/courses within school. The report shows that when making choices with regard to Senior Phase, enjoying a subject was the most common factor for young people. However, factors influencing course choice varies by socio-economic background. For example, young people from more deprived areas are more likely to be influenced by parents and teachers, than young people from less deprived areas; whereas young people from less deprived areas are more likely to say that they are influenced by what subjects they enjoy and what they need for college or university. Females are more likely to choose courses based on going to college or university than males, conversely males are more likely to choose subjects based on parental advice than females. Young people are unlikely to list friends as an important factor when making course choices.

2. Introduction

The purpose of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is to provide young people with the skills, knowledge and experiences that will prepare them for their life beyond school, and provide them with the best possible opportunity to fulfil their potential. In the Senior Phase curriculum (S4-S6), young people have the opportunity to deepen their learning through different types of qualifications and other learning experiences, such as work placements or volunteering. It supports them in moving on to their next stage, including college, employment, training or university.

In the course of their Senior Phase, young people are able to acquire a range of qualifications and awards over that three year period. There have been no preconceived notions about which qualifications are to be taken at which stage of the Senior Phase; the guiding principle has been that qualifications are taken at the appropriate stage for the individual young person over the three years of the Senior Phase.

The Young People in Scotland Survey collected data from a representative sample of young people aged 11-18 years and was self-completed by young people in classrooms in school. From 16th September 2019 to 26th November 2019, 1,731 young people from 50 publicly funded secondary schools took part. The data was collected by Ipsos MORI and the Scottish Government commissioned questions to be asked on course choice in the Senior Phase, to discover more about the factors that influence young people's decisions. This report summarises their responses. Data was weighted by year groups, gender, urban-rural classification and SIMD classification¹. Differences highlighted in the report between groups of young people were statistically significant, at the 95% level.

¹ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way. It ranks small areas (data zones) from most

There are no statistically significant differences between young people living in urban or rural areas; the responses are statistically similar. Therefore, analysis of urban/rural data has not been included in this report, however the data tables can be found in the Annex.

3. Reasons for Choosing Subjects/Courses

Young people were asked a range of questions on the reasons that influence their choice of subjects/courses. This chapter looks at these reasons based on stage, SIMD and gender.

3.1 What reasons do you think will be most important for you in choosing your subjects/courses for the Senior Phase? (All)

The above question is framed in the future tense, and asks respondents to think about what 'will be' the most important reason in choosing their subjects/courses. As young people in S1 and S2 have no experience of this process, their response will not reflect their lived experiences, but rather what they think will influence them, whilst those in S4-S6 will have based their answers on their own lived experience.

Young people were asked to choose the three most important factors to them in choosing their subjects/courses. They were able to choose from the following responses:

- Enjoying a subject
- Needing to do a subject to get into college or university
- Needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want
- Needing to do a subject for what I want to study further up in school
- My parents advising me to study a subject
- Teachers advising me to study a subject
- Liking teachers for a subject
- To fit my timetable/other subject(s) did not fit my timetable
- Friends choosing this subject
- It being different from the subjects I've done before in school
- Other
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Out of all the options given, the most commonly reported factor was enjoying the subject, which was 39% of all respondents. Young people from the least deprived areas are more likely to choose a subject because they enjoy it (45%, compared to 31% for young people from the most deprived areas).

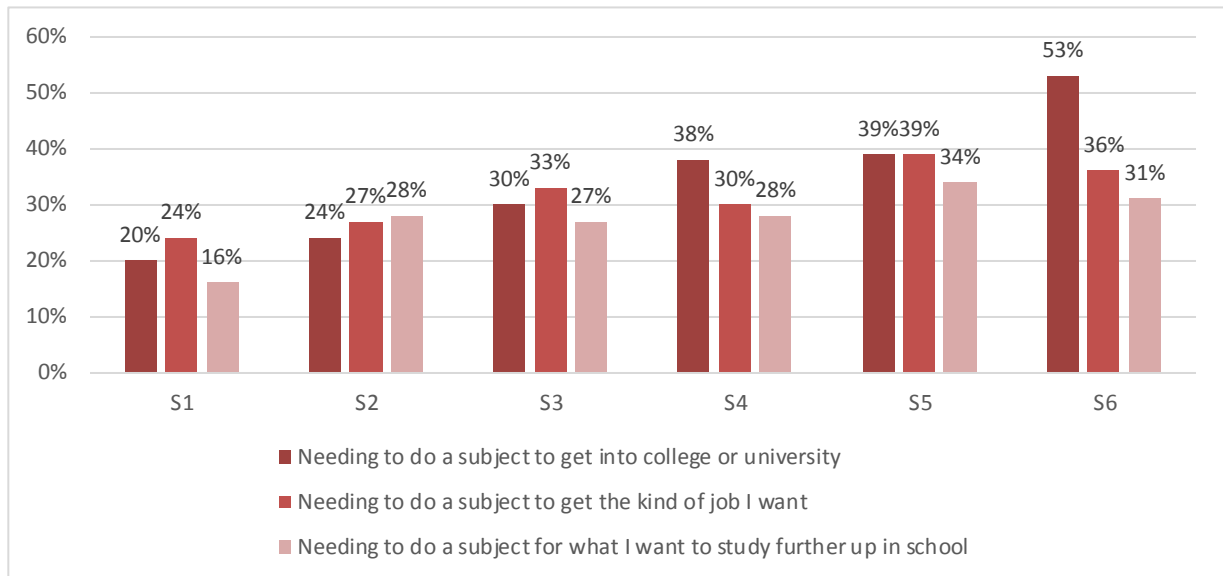
The most common responses have been grouped together into the following categories:

deprived to least deprived. SIMD quintiles are bands containing 20% of data zones, from most deprived (SIMD1) to least deprived (SIMD5).

1. Future Thinking – responses based on further study in school, going to college/university and getting a job, and;
2. Outside Influences – responses based on liking the subject teacher and teacher/parental advice and guidance.

Results for all categories are provided in the Annex.

Figure 1.1 Factors influencing course choice – Percentage of young people citing future thinking by stage

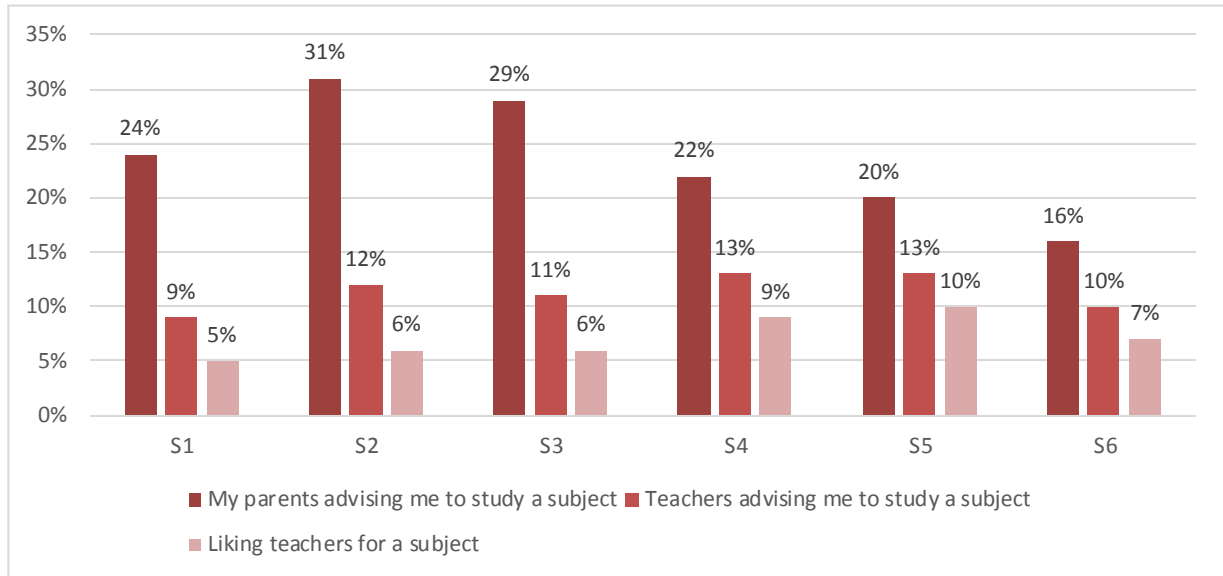


Base: 1,731²

Responses from S1 to S6 suggest that young people think about their future more when they are older. Young people in S6 prioritise ‘needing to do a subject to get into college or university’ (53%) over ‘needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want’ (36%). For young people in S1 these figures are much lower (20% and 24% respectively). This is most likely due to young people in the lower end of secondary school not being in a position to choose courses yet.

² Percentage responses within a stage may exceed 100%, as pupils could choose up to three options.

Figure 1.2 Factors influencing course choice – Percentage of young people citing outside influences by stage



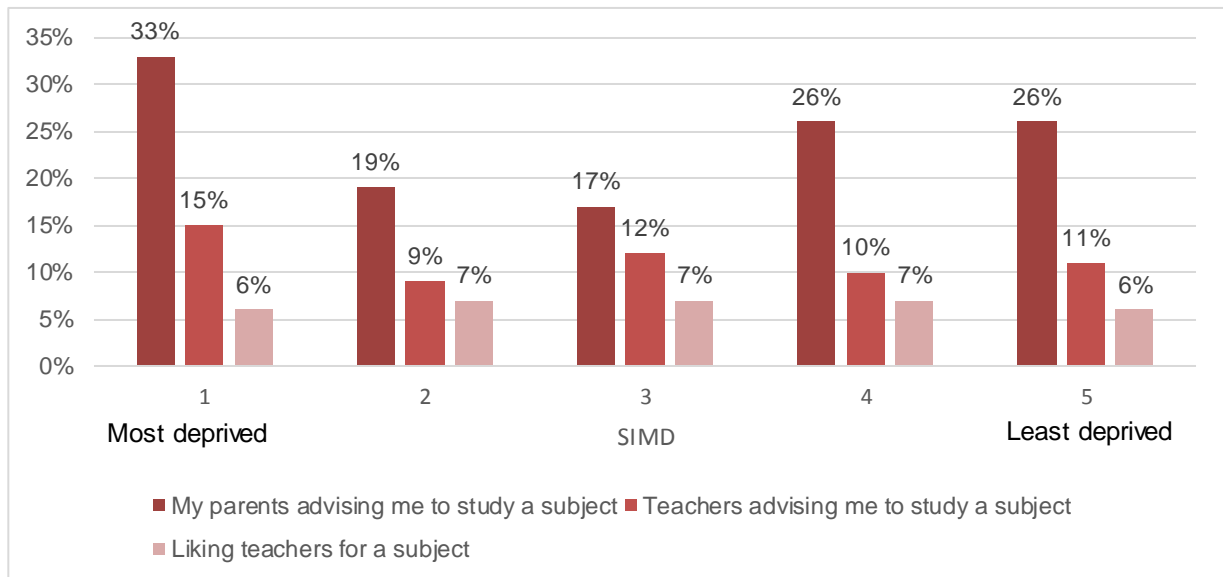
Base: 1,731³

Influence from parents in course choice declines from S2 to S6, however parents are still reported as the most common outside influence in course choice (31% to 16%).

Young people in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are more likely to choose subjects based on parent (33%) or teacher advice (15%) compared to young people in the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) (26% and 11% respectively).

³ Percentage responses within a stage may exceed 100%, as pupils could choose up to three options.

Figure 1.3 Factors influencing pupil course choice – Percentage of young people citing outside influences by SIMD



Base: 1,731

Young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are influenced more by their parents (33%) than young people from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) (26%).

Females are most likely to choose subjects because they enjoy them (40% compared to 39% for males). Females are more likely to choose subjects based on future thinking (41% to get into college/university and 35% to get the job they want compared to 24% and 26% for males). Males are more likely than females to choose subjects based on outside influences (26% from parents advice and 14% from teachers advice compared to 23% and 10% for females). Both males and females are unlikely to choose subjects based on what their peers are choosing (<10%)⁴.

4. Guidance

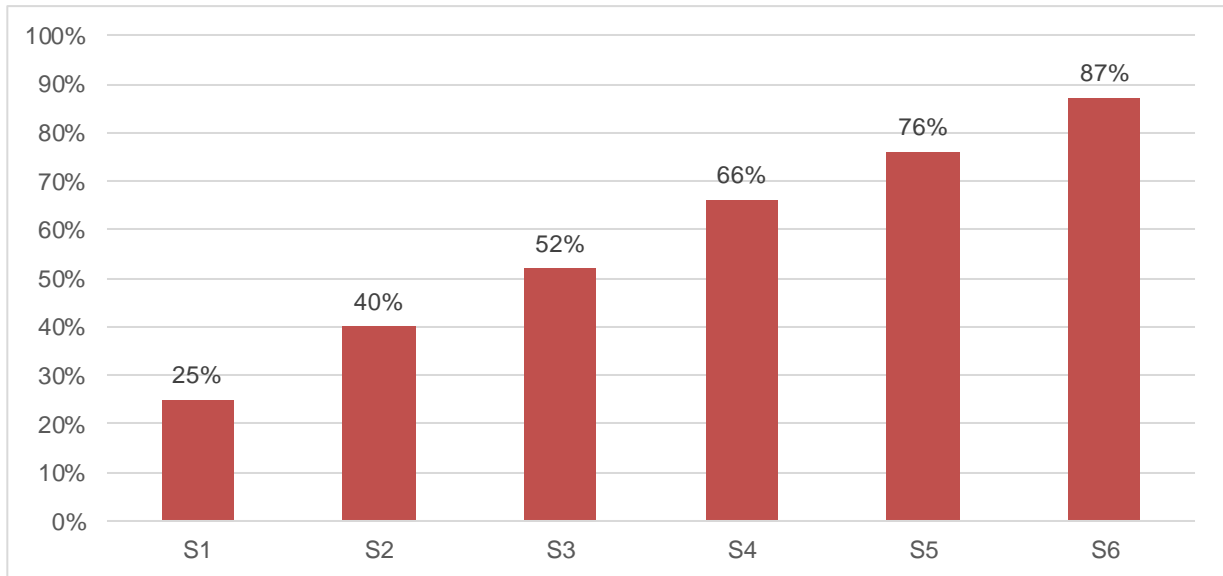
Young people were asked a range of questions on the guidance they received in school when considering their course/subject choice. This chapter looks at what guidance was received by stage, SIMD and gender.

4.1 What guidance, if any, have you received in selecting your courses/subjects for the Senior Phase? (All)

Young people were asked about what guidance they received from different places (both inside school and their own research). Below are details of the guidance young people have received.

⁴ Gender categories include 'male', 'female', 'in another way' and 'prefer not to say'. The number of responses from 'in another way' and 'prefer not to say' are very low, these are presented in the data tables in the Annex and are subject to disclosure control.

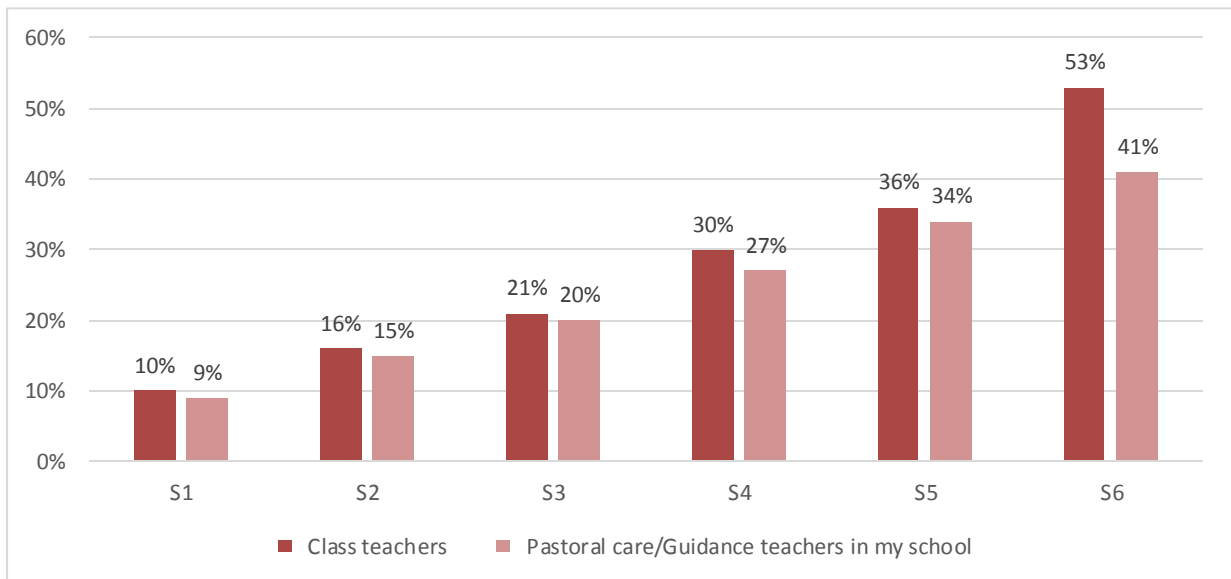
Figure 2.1 Guidance received regarding course choice – Percentage of young people citing they have received any guidance on course choice by stage



Base: 1,731

More pupils in S6 report receiving guidance in choosing their courses than those younger than them (87% compared to 25% in S1). This is likely because younger pupils are not yet in a position to choose their courses.

Figure 2.2 Guidance received regarding course choice – Percentage of young people citing they received guidance on course choice from class teachers by stage



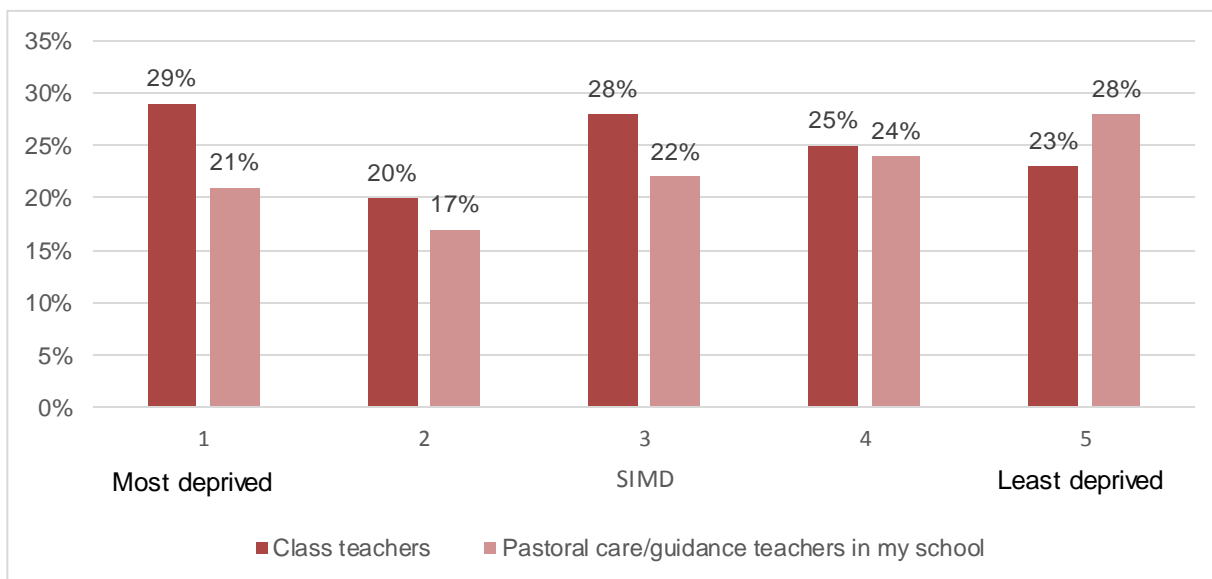
Base: 1,731

Young people report that class teachers are the most common source of guidance regarding course/subject choice. The proportion of young people reporting that they have received guidance from class teachers increases from 10% in S1 to 53% in

S6. Young people also report that pastoral care/guidance teachers provide guidance on course choice, as they are the next most common source. The proportion of young people reporting that they have received guidance from pastoral care/guidance teachers increases from 9% in S1 to 41% in S6.

The majority of young people from all SIMD areas report having received guidance, however the rate is lowest for young people in SIMD 2 (44%) and highest for young people in SIMD 4 (61%).

Figure 2.3 Guidance received regarding course choice – Percentage of young people citing guidance on course choice from class and guidance teachers by SIMD



Base: 1,731

Members of school staff (class teachers and pastoral care/guidance teachers) play an important role in providing guidance to young people. Young people in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) report class teachers as the most common source of guidance (29%). For young people in the least deprived areas (SIMD 5), pastoral care/guidance teachers are reported as the most common source of guidance (28%).

Class teachers are the most common source of guidance for both males and females (23% and 28% respectively).

5. Curriculum Design

The following table shows questions that focus on curriculum design. Respondents were asked a number of questions on how happy they were with how the curriculum was designed and the courses they were able to choose. Responses have been analysed based on stage, SIMD and gender.

Response options:

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

For the purposes of this analysis, 'strongly agree' and 'tend to agree' have been grouped together as 'agree', and 'strongly disagree' and 'tend to disagree' have been grouped together as 'disagree'. The options of 'not applicable', 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say' have not been included, therefore figures below may not sum to 100%.

Table 1: Curriculum Design Responses

	Pupils have a say in how the curriculum for this year has been designed in my school		The guidance I received from my school this year on choosing subjects was helpful		I feel happy with the courses that I was able to select this year		The courses that I am taking will help lead me to learning or a career that I want to pursue in the future	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
S1	36%	9%	32%	5%	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*
S2	32%	18%	35%	10%	31%	3%	32%	2%
S3	25%	27%	36%	17%	58%	10%	56%	6%
S4	28%	30%	40%	20%	66%	8%	61%	6%
S5	24%	45%	38%	24%	67%	12%	72%	7%
S6	18%	52%	43%	21%	69%	11%	71%	8%
SIMD 1 (most deprived)	37%	20%	42%	14%	58%	11%	57%	9%
SIMD 2	28%	23%	37%	11%	44%	8%	47%	4%
SIMD 3	25%	29%	33%	16%	61%	7%	63%	5%
SIMD 4	25%	38%	35%	20%	54%	9%	55%	6%
SIMD 5 (least deprived)	26%	29%	36%	16%	65%	6%	62%	4%
Males	33%	25%	40%	13%	57%	8%	56%	5%
Females	24%	31%	34%	17%	56%	9%	58%	6%

* Young people in this year group were not asked these questions

5.1 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your experience in school this year?: *Pupils have a say in how the curriculum for this year has been designed in my school (All)*

Young people in S1 are more likely to agree with the above statement (36%) than those in S6 (18%). Young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are more likely to agree with the above statement than those from all other areas (37% compared to 28% - SIMD 2, 25% - SIMD 3 and 4 and 26% - SIMD 5). Males are more likely to agree with this statement than females (33% vs 24%).

5.2 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your experience in school this year?: *The guidance I received from my school this year on choosing subjects was helpful (All)*

Young people in S6 are more likely to agree with the above statement (43%) than those in S1 (32%). Sixty-four per cent of young people in S6 provided a response compared to 37% in S1. Young people in S1 are not yet in a position to choose courses, and therefore less likely to require guidance and less likely to have a positive or negative opinion. Young people from the most disadvantaged areas (SIMD 1) are more likely to agree with the above statement (42%), compared to 36% of young people from the least disadvantaged areas (SIMD 5). Males are more likely to agree with this statement than females (40% vs 34%).

5.3 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your experience in school this year?: *I feel happy with the courses that I was able to select this year (S2-S6)*

This statement was given to those in S2-S6. Young people in S6 are more likely to agree with this statement than those in S2 (69% compared to 31%). However, as was mentioned before in regards to S1 pupils, young people in S2 are less likely to have a say on course choice and may be less likely to engage with the question as a result. Young people in SIMD 5 are the most likely to report feeling happy with the courses they were able to choose (65%), followed closely by young people in SIMD 3 (61%). Young people in SIMD 2 are the least likely to report feeling happy with the courses they were able to choose (44%). Young people in the most disadvantaged areas (SIMD 1) reported receiving helpful guidance, however they are less likely to report feeling happy with the courses they were able to select. Most males and females agree with this statement (57% and 56% respectively).

5.4 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your experience in school this year?: *The courses that I am taking will help lead me to learning or a career that I want to pursue in the future (S2-6)*

This statement was given to those in S2-S6. As young people move through school they agree more with the above statement (32% in S2 and 71% in S6). Young people in S2 are most likely of the year groups to say they didn't know (32%). This is likely because they are not yet in a position to choose courses that will influence their future careers. Young people from the least deprived backgrounds (SIMD 5)

are more likely to agree with the above statement (62%) than those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) (57%), however young people in SIMD 3 are most likely to agree (63%). Young people from SIMD 2 are the least likely to agree with the above statement (47%). Most males and females agree with this statement (56% and 58% respectively).

6. Conclusions

- There are a multitude of factors that influence young people when they are considering their course choices, and these tend not to be based on what their peers are doing.
- Young people report that class/guidance teachers are the most common source of guidance for choosing courses.
- Most young people are happy with the courses they are able to choose for their Senior Phase.
- Females are more likely to choose subjects based on future thinking (e.g. going to university), whereas males are more likely to choose subjects based on outside influences (such as parents).
- Young people from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5) report that pastoral care/guidance teachers are the most common source of guidance, whereas it is class teachers for young people from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1).

7. Annex

7.1 What reasons do you think will be most important for you in choosing your subjects/courses for the Senior Phase? (All)

Table A.1 – Reasons for Course Choice by All Pupils

Response	Total from All Pupils
Enjoying a subject	39%
Needing to do a subject to get into college or university	32%
Needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want	30%
Needing to do a subject for what I want to study further up in school	26%
My parents advising me to study a subject	24%
Teachers advising me to study a subject	11%
Liking teachers for a subject	7%
To fit my timetable / other subject(s) did not fit timetable	6%
Friends choosing this subject	4%
It being different from the subjects I've done before in school	2%
Other	3%
Don't know	19%
Prefer not to say	5%

Table A.2 – Reasons for Course Choices by Stage

Stage	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Enjoying a subject	29%	28%	38%	41%	53%	59%
Needing to do a subject to get into college or university	20%	24%	30%	38%	39%	53%
Needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want	24%	27%	33%	30%	39%	36%
Needing to do a subject for what I want to study further up in school	16%	28%	27%	28%	34%	31%
My parents advising me to study a subject	24%	31%	29%	22%	20%	16%
Teachers advising me to study a subject	9%	12%	11%	13%	13%	10%

Liking teachers for a subject	5%	6%	6%	9%	10%	7%
To fit my timetable / other subject(s) did not fit timetable	3%	3%	*	6%	15%	12%
Friends choosing this subject	5%	2%	4%	3%	4%	6%
It being different from the subjects I've done before in school	2%	*	*	2%	*	4%
Other	3%	*	*	2%	*	*
Don't know	31%	26%	23%	13%	7%	7%
Prefer not to say	7%	4%	4%	5%	*	*

* denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5

Table A.3 – Reasons for Course Choice by Urban/Rural

Urban/Rural	Urban	Rural
Enjoying a subject	38%	43%
Needing to do a subject to get into college or university	32%	34%
Needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want	30%	31%
Needing to do a subject for what I want to study further up in school	26%	26%
My parents advising me to study a subject	25%	21%
Teachers advising me to study a subject	12%	11%
Liking teachers for a subject	7%	8%
To fit my timetable / other subject(s) did not fit timetable	6%	7%
Friends choosing this subject	4%	4%
It being different from the subjects I've done before in school	2%	2%
Other	1%	2%
Don't know	19%	20%

Prefer not to say	5%	5%
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Table A.4 – Reasons for Course Choice by SIMD

SIMD	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (least deprived)
Enjoying a subject	31%	31%	44%	43%	45%
Needing to do a subject to get into college or university	25%	26%	36%	39%	34%
Needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want	26%	26%	33%	38%	28%
Needing to do a subject for what I want to study further up in school	22%	22%	28%	34%	26%
My parents advising me to study a subject	33%	19%	17%	26%	26%
Teachers advising me to study a subject	15%	9%	12%	10%	11%
Liking teachers for a subject	6%	7%	7%	7%	6%
To fit my timetable / other subject(s) did not fit timetable	4%	5%	7%	8%	5%
Friends choosing this subject	4%	2%	6%	4%	2%
It being different from the subjects I've done before in school	*	*	3%	2%	1%
Other	*	*	2%	*	*
Don't know	21%	27%	15%	*	*
Prefer not to say	4%	7%	5%	4%	3%

* denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5

Table A.5 – Reasons for Course Choice by Gender

Gender	Male	Female	In another way	Prefer not to say
Enjoying a subject	39%	40%	*	*
Needing to do a subject to get into college or university	24%	41%	*	*
Needing to do a subject to get the kind of job I want	26%	35%	20%	21%
Needing to do a subject for what I want to study further up in school	21%	33%	*	*
My parents advising me to study a subject	26%	23%	*	*
Teachers advising me to study a subject	14%	10%	*	*
Liking teachers for a subject	6%	7%	*	*
To fit my timetable / other subject(s) did not fit timetable	5%	6%	*	*
Friends choosing this subject	5%	3%	*	*
It being different from the subjects I've done before in school	2%	2%	*	*
Other	2%	1%	*	*
Don't know	20%	18%	21%	25%
Prefer not to say	5%	*	*	41%

* denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5

7.2 What guidance, if any, have you received in selecting your courses/subjects for the Senior Phase?

Table A.6 – Guidance Received by All Pupils

Response	Total from All Pupils
Any guidance	54%
Class teachers	25%
Pastoral care/Guidance teachers in my school	22%
My own research (e.g. googling, social media)	14%
Career Advisers	14%
Personal Social Education at school	14%
My World of Work website	10%
Option assembly at school	9%
Careers Evening at my school	7%
A mentor in my school	4%
Attending careers fairs	4%
Employer presentation	2%
Other websites	2%
Other	3%
I have not received any guidance	10%
Don't know	30%

Prefer not to say	6%
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Table A.7 – Guidance Received by Stage

Stage	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Any guidance	25%	40%	52%	66%	76%	87%
Class teachers	10%	16%	21%	30%	36%	53%
Pastoral care/Guidance teachers in my school	9%	15%	20%	27%	34%	41%
My own research (e.g. googling, social media)	4%	9%	11%	18%	22%	34%
Career Advisers	4%	9%	11%	21%	21%	21%
Personal Social Education at school	7%	8%	13%	15%	15%	30%
My World of Work website	4%	7%	11%	16%	14%	12%
Option assembly at school	3%	5%	9%	12%	11%	21%
Careers Evening at my school	*	*	5%	9%	10%	18%
A mentor in my school	*	*	4%	4%	5%	6%
Attending careers fairs	*	*	5%	2%	6%	8%
Employer presentation	2%	2%	2%	2%	*	*
Other websites	*	2%	3%	2%	2%	*
Other	2%	4%	4%	2%	*	*
I have not received any guidance	18%	14%	10%	6%	4%	5%
Don't know	48%	42%	31%	22%	16%	7%
Prefer not to say	8%	5%	7%	6%	*	*

** denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5*

Table A.8 – Guidance Received by Urban/Rural

Urban/Rural	Urban	Rural
Any guidance	55%	53%
Class teachers	25%	25%
Pastoral care/Guidance teachers in my school	23%	20%
My own research (e.g. googling, social media)	14%	17%
Career Advisers	13%	15%
Personal Social Education at school	14%	13%
My World of Work website	10%	13%
Option assembly at school	9%	9%
Careers Evening at my school	7%	8%
A mentor in my school	4%	3%
Attending careers fairs	3%	5%
Employer presentation	2%	3%
Other websites	*	*
Other	*	*
I have not received any guidance	10%	12%
Don't know	30%	29%
Prefer not to say	6%	5%

** denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5*

Table A.9 – Guidance Received by SIMD

SIMD	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (least deprived)
Any guidance	53%	44%	58%	61%	55%
Class teachers	29%	20%	28%	25%	23%
Pastoral care/Guidance teachers in my school	21%	17%	22%	24%	28%
My own research (e.g. googling, social media)	10%	12%	17%	15%	17%
Career Advisers	10%	8%	16%	17%	18%
Personal Social Education at school	9%	10%	14%	17%	17%
My World of Work website	7%	7%	16%	10%	12%
Option assembly at school	8%	7%	12%	10%	8%
Careers Evening at my school	6%	5%	8%	7%	8%
A mentor in my school	7%	4%	4%	4%	2%
Attending careers fairs	2%	2%	5%	4%	5%
Employer presentation	*	*	4%	2%	2%
Other websites	*	*	3%	*	*
Other	3%	3%	2%	*	*
I have not received any guidance	11%	9%	9%	12%	9%
Don't know	30%	38%	27%	22%	30%
Prefer not to say	6%	8%	5%	5%	6%

** denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5*

Table A.10 – Guidance Received by Gender

Gender	Male	Female	In another way	Prefer not to say
Any guidance	53%	57%	*	*
Class teachers	23%	28%	*	*
Pastoral care/Guidance teachers in my school	22%	24%	*	*
My own research (e.g. googling, social media)	14%	15%	*	*
Career Advisers	13%	15%	*	*
Personal Social Education at school	13%	14%	*	*
My World of Work website	10%	12%	*	*
Option assembly at school	9%	10%	*	*
Careers Evening at my school	6%	7%	*	*
A mentor in my school	4%	4%	24%	
Attending careers fairs	4%	4%	2%	
Employer presentation	2%	2%		
Other websites	2%	2%		
Other	2%	3%	*	*
I have not received any guidance	10%	10%	*	*
Don't know	30%	28%	28%	46%
Prefer not to say	7%	4%	*	*

* denotes where the number of pupils is between 1 and 4 inclusive or where if shown, it would be possible to calculate other values to be less than 5



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