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Research and analysis

# Graduate route evaluation

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## Executive summary

The Graduate route was launched in July 2021. The route is open to international students who have recently graduated from a UK university and were previously Student visa holders. Between July 2021 and March 2024, 276,000 applications for extensions of stay were granted to Graduate main applicants.

This research aims to improve the evidence base around the economic activity of Graduate route users and their dependants in the UK, and inform ongoing policy development by providing deeper insights about the motivations and intentions of Graduate route users.

The evaluation of the Graduate route included an online quantitative survey of 2,951 route users, and 30 follow-up qualitative interviews with main route users. The research took place between April and July 2024.

## **Why do people stay in the UK as graduates?**

Over two-fifths (44%) of Graduate route users had heard about the Graduate route before coming to the UK to study, and most applicants first heard about the Graduate route via online searching (37%) or word of mouth (24%).

Most (69%) Graduate route users would not have sought to remain in the UK if the Graduate route did not exist.

A quarter (28%) of Graduate route users had considered moving to another country after graduating (most commonly the US, Canada, or Australia), and a further quarter (24%) considered moving to their home country.

Graduate route users cited work-related factors, including work opportunities in the UK (85%) and gaining work experience (65%), as the most important criteria in deciding to remain in the UK post-study.

## **How did Graduate route users find the application process?**

Most (67%) Graduate route users found the application process easy, although the proportion varied by nationality and presence of a dependant.

The digital application process was welcomed as quick, accessible and proportionate for most Graduate route users. Most Graduate route users found the application process easier than the Student visa application process. Very few needed external support.

Almost all Graduate route users found the application fee and Immigration Health Surcharge expensive, particularly for applicants who left the UK before the end of their leave period, but had factored these into the cost of staying in the UK.

# What do Graduate route users do in the UK?

Over three-quarters (76%) of Graduate route users were working, and a further fifth (21%) were actively looking for work.

Graduate route users in their thirties, and later in their leave period, were more likely to be employed. There were also some differences in employment rates by nationality, likely linked to age and level of qualification studied.

Two-thirds (65%) of Graduate route users were working in occupations related to their studies, with some differences by demographic characteristics. Graduate route users were most commonly employed in Professional or Associate Professional occupations (48%).

Most (67%) working Graduate route users earned under £30,000 per year. One in 5 (20%) earned between £30,000 and £40,000 and one in 10 (11%) earned over £40,000. These findings are in line with the findings from the recently published HOAI report on Graduate route users' earnings based on National Insurance Numbers, as well as HESA data on earnings for UK-domiciled graduates. Doctoral Graduate route users and those aged 30 and over were more likely to earn £40,000 or more.

Graduate route users mentioned a wide range of barriers to applying for jobs, many of which were interlinked. These included: employers' unfamiliarity with the visa and Graduate leave system; employers' unwillingness to sponsor visas for junior positions; strong job market competition; and relatively short leave periods. Three quarters found applying for jobs difficult, and half found it very difficult. Several commented that younger Graduate route users who had not worked before their studies in the UK tended not to have much relevant work experience, meaning they faced wider job market competition unrelated to their visa or leave status.

## Who are Graduate route users' dependants?

The majority (98%) of Graduate route users did not have dependants on their entitlement to stay. One in 50 (2%) had dependants in the UK, and a further 4% had a partner and/or children living outside the UK. Nigerian Graduate route users were most likely to have dependants in the UK (7%), reflecting the older age profile of this group.

Over half (53%) of those with dependants would not have chosen to remain in the

UK if the Graduate route did not allow dependants.

The majority of dependant partners were employed (80%) – almost all full time – with small proportions self-employed (4%), studying (2%) or looking after the home (1%). Partners' occupations varied, with most working in Caring or Service occupations, and earning £20,000 to £30,000 per year.

Most Graduate route users felt they and their dependants had integrated well into life in the UK. Most (83%) Graduate route users could speak English very well/fluent, as could three-quarters (73%) of partners.

## **What future plans do Graduate route users have?**

Graduate route users generally intended to stay in the UK for at least the length of their current visa (26%), or longer than the duration of their current visa (51%). Work opportunities were the most important factor when considering remaining in the UK post-Graduate route.

Graduate route users were considering a wide range of visa routes to enable them to remain in the UK, but generally did not expect employer support for their next visa, even if they were currently working.

## **1. Introduction**

The Graduate route was launched in July 2021. The route is open to international students who have recently graduated from a UK university and were previously Student visa holders. It provides such students with the opportunity to stay in the UK to work or search for work, unsponsored and at any skill level, after graduation for 2 years (or 3 years for PhD students).

Between July 2021 and March 2024, 276,000 applications for extensions of stay were granted to Graduate route main applicants. Indian nationals typically represent the largest group of students granted leave to remain on the Graduate route, representing almost half (46%) of grants of Graduate route extensions to main applicants in the year to March 2024.

In November 2021, the Managed Migration Research team, in collaboration with IFF

Research, conducted primary research with an [early cohort of Graduate route users](#) (50 in total). This research builds on the earlier small-scale study and explores the themes emerging from that research in more detail.

## 1.1 Research aims

This research aims to:

- improve the evidence base surrounding the economic activity of Graduate route users and their dependants in the UK
- inform ongoing policy development by providing deeper insights about the motivations and intentions of Graduate route users
- address evidence gaps identified in earlier work (such as data on skills and earnings)
- improve the evidence on how Graduate route users and their dependants use public services

The main research questions are:

- what motivates Graduates to stay in the UK after completing their studies in higher education; how do Graduate route users view life in the UK, and how does this factor into their long-term planning and intentions for future work and settlement?
- what are the economic activities of Graduate route users and their adult dependants; what are their earnings and skill levels, and how does this vary by characteristics such as nationality, sector, and profession?
- what impacts, if any, do Graduate route users and their dependants have on the UK; how does this vary in terms of level of integration, English language proficiency, and use of public services?

The research also considers Graduate route users' application experiences, and areas for improvement in operational delivery of the route.

## 1.2 Methodology

The evaluation of the Graduate route included an online quantitative survey of 2,951

Graduate route users, and 30 follow-up qualitative interviews.

## **Survey**

The online survey was carried out between 25th April and 14th May 2024.

The survey covered:

- details of studies completed (level of study, subject, university, level of English)
- motivations for staying in the UK after study
- the influence of the Graduate route in deciding to stay in the UK
- economic activity of Graduate route users (occupation and earnings)
- details about and economic activity of dependants
- use of public services (by main applicant and dependants)
- level of integration (by main applicant and dependants)
- Graduate route users' plans for the future

The sample of Graduate route users invited to take part in the survey was selected to match the overall population profile of those granted Graduate extensions of stay between November 2021 and December 2023 by age and nationality. All those with dependants on their extension of stay were invited to participate to ensure a high enough base size for robust analysis.

The Home Office provided contact details for 80,000 Graduate route users, and 2,951 completed the survey. Screener questions at the start of the survey ensured respondents were currently living in the UK with unexpired Graduate leave of stay, and up to 4 targeted reminder emails were sent to maximise responses.

Responses were weighted to match the population profile based on nationality by age (aged 29 and under, and 30 and over), and whether the main applicant had dependants in the UK (rim weights applied). The gender profile matched that of the general population of 51% male and 49% female.

## **Depth interviews**

For the qualitative stage, 30 survey respondents who had agreed to recontact were selected to provide a spread of profiles and experience based on employment status and occupation type, level of study, salary level, nationality, whether or not they had dependants on their visa, and their future intentions after the end of their Graduate extension of stay.

Topics covered in the interviews included motivations for staying in the UK post-

study, views on the visa application process, current economic activity, details of dependants and their current activity, levels of integration in the UK, and plans for the future.

### **Interpreting the findings**

Figures and percentages throughout the report refer to the (weighted) characteristics of Graduate route users that responded to the survey.

All differences reported are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise stated, that is, statistically we can be confident that 95% of the time, the differences are 'real' differences and not a result of findings being based on a sample of Graduate route users (those that responded to the survey) rather than a census of all Graduate route users.

Throughout, the report makes comparisons between different subgroups, as well as between a subgroup and the overall the average for all Graduate route users. This is usually referred to as 'X being more likely to Y than average'. The average refers to the average for all Graduate route users who were asked that question.

Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, percentages may not total to exactly 100%.

## **2. Who are Graduate route users?**

This chapter provides an overview of Graduate route users, including different profiles by nationality, what they studied, at what level, and where.

### **2.1 Profile by nationality**

There are distinct groups within the Graduate route user population:

Indian nationals are the largest group (42%). Three-fifths (62%) are male, and they are more likely than average to have studied for a Masters-level qualification. Their age profile is slightly younger than that of all Graduate route users, with 58% of Indian Graduate route users aged 25 to 29.

Nigerian Graduate route users tend to be aged 30 or over (52%) and three-fifths

(58%) are male. They are more likely than average to have children as dependants on their visa.

Chinese Graduate route users tend to be young (85% are 29 or younger), female (75%), and significantly less likely than average to have dependants on their visa. Around two-thirds (63%) studied at a Russell Group University.

Pakistani Graduate route users are slightly older than average and predominantly male (83%). Nine in 10 (92%) studied at a non-Russell Group University. One in 10 (9%) have a partner and/or children outside the UK. They are more likely than average to be living with family or friends in the UK (16%).

## **2.2 University type and level of qualification**

The majority of Graduate route users had completed a Masters degree (85%) in the UK. Just over one in 10 (12%) had finished an Undergraduate degree, and 3% had completed a Doctorate. Those who completed a Doctorate were more likely to have done so at a Russell Group institution (65% of Doctorate graduates), reflecting the overall proportion of Doctorates issued by institution type. By nationality, Indian nationals were most likely to have completed a Masters degree (93%) and Chinese nationals were more likely than average to have studied a PhD (9%). People from countries other than the most common 4 (India, China, Nigeria, and Pakistan) among Graduate route users were more likely to only have completed an Undergraduate degree (22%).

The majority of Graduate route users graduated from a non-Russell Group university (72%), while a quarter (26%) graduated from a Russell Group university. Chinese Graduate route users were much more likely to have attended a Russell Group institution, with almost two-thirds of them doing so (63%), while Nigerian and Pakistani Graduate route users were more likely to have graduated from a non-Russell Group university (92% each). Women were also more likely than men to have gone to a Russell Group institution (35% compared to 18%).

Almost two-thirds of those who had studied a Masters degree had studied a taught Masters, almost a third said that it was a combination of taught and research (31%) and 5% studied a fully research-based Masters, while 3% were not sure either way. Chinese Masters Graduate route users were most likely to have completed a taught Masters (82%).



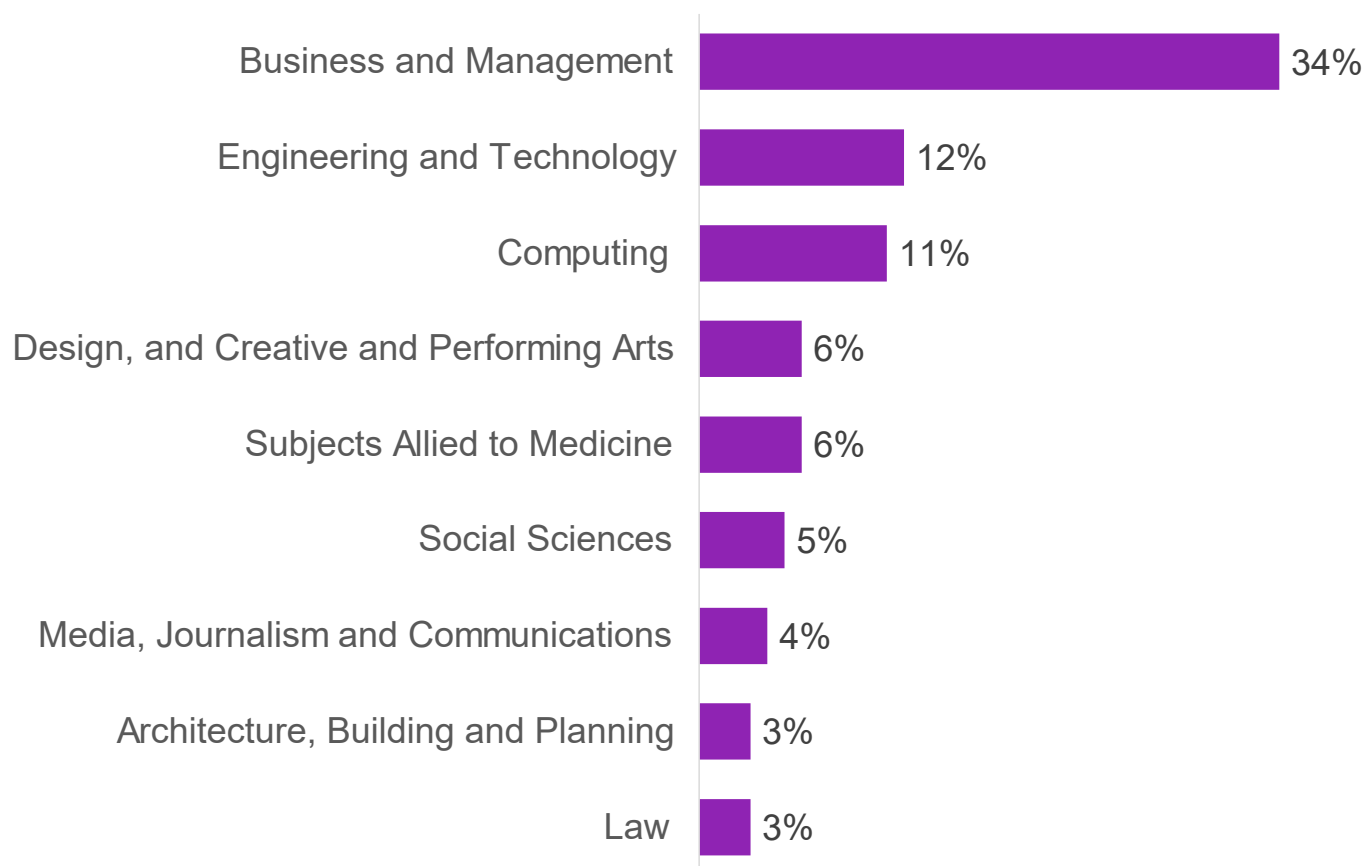
## 2.3 What did Graduate route users study?

Graduate route users provided the name of their programme of study, and these were coded to official HESA Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) codes (see Figure 1). This showed that just over a third of all Graduate route users had studied Business and Management (34%). Graduate route users from Pakistan (46%), India (40%) and Nigeria (38%) were more likely to have studied Business and Management than Graduate route users from China (23%) or from other countries (25%).

The next most common subjects of study among Graduate route users were Engineering and Technology (12%) and Computing (11%), each studied by just over one in 10 route users. Graduate route users from India were more likely than average to have studied each of these subjects (15% and 13% respectively), and Nigerian Graduate route users were more likely than average to have studied Computing (15%).

Other more commonly studied subjects included Design, and Creative and Performing Arts (6%), Subjects Allied to Medicine (6%), Social Sciences (5%), and Media, Journalism and Communications (4%). Nigerian Graduate route users were much more likely than any other nationalities to have studied Medicine related subjects (10%). Chinese Graduate route users were more likely to have studied Design, and Creative and Performing Arts (13%), Media, Journalism and Communications (7%), Architecture, Building and Planning (6%) and Education and Teaching (7% compared to 2% overall).

**Figure 1: HESA CAH subjects studied by Graduate route users in their most recent studies**



**Base:** A5. All Graduate route users (2,951). Subjects studied by less than 3% of Graduate route users not represented in the chart.

In terms of broad subject of study, just over a third of Graduate route users studied a STEM subject (34%), and two-thirds (65%) a non-STEM subject. Indian and Nigerian route users were more likely to have studied a STEM subject (40% each), while Chinese students and those from other countries were more likely to have studied non-STEM subjects (73% and 71% respectively).

This differed slightly from Graduate route users' own interpretation of whether the subject of their study was STEM or non-STEM. Just over 2 in 5 (42%) of Graduate route users considered they studied a STEM subject, just under half considered they studied a non-STEM subject (46%), and just over a tenth (12%) were not sure how to categorise their subject.

Throughout this report, comparisons between STEM and non-STEM subjects are based on the HESA CAH coding rather than the self-identified categories.

### 3. Graduate route users' motivations for

# staying in the UK

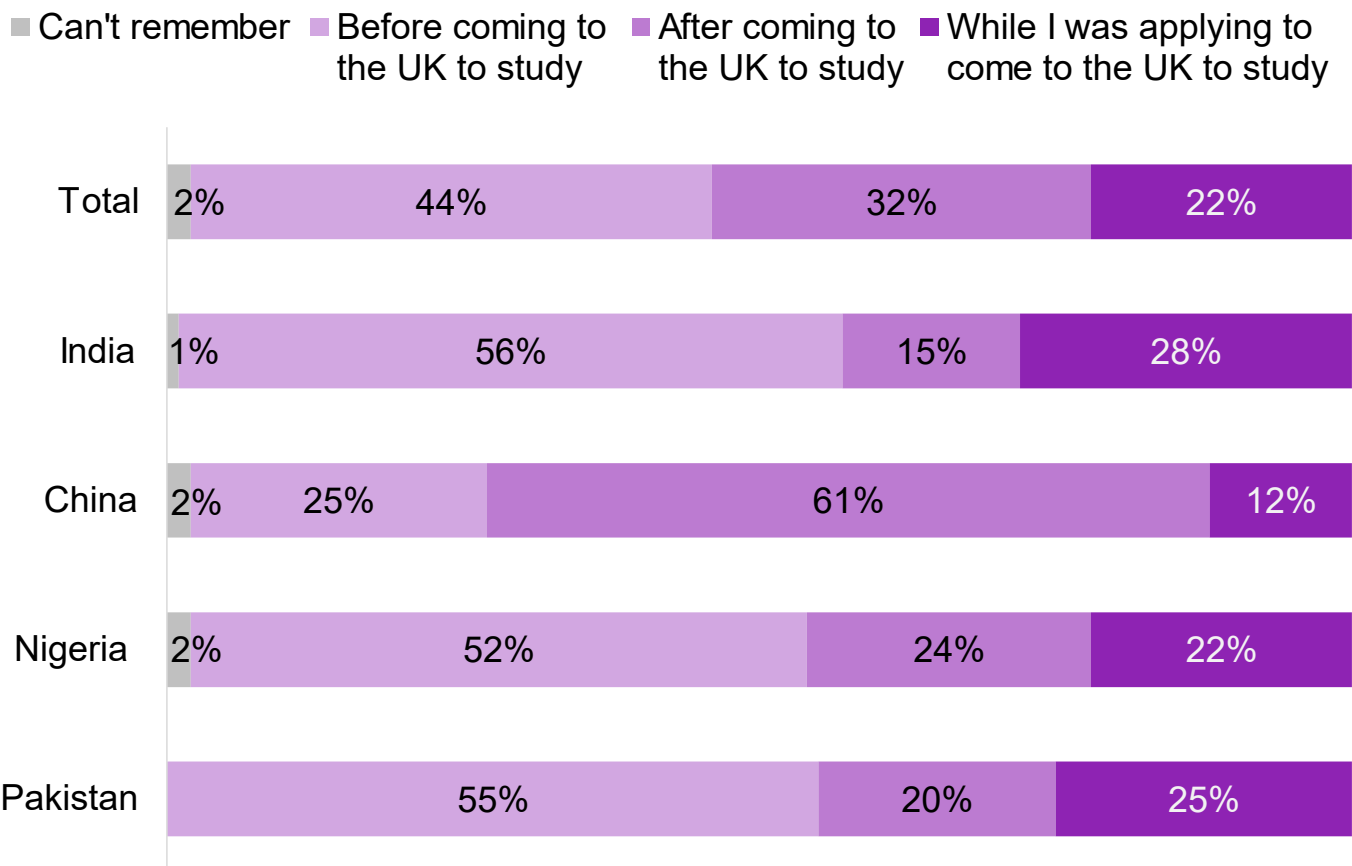
This chapter explores Graduate route users' motivations for applying for the Graduate route. This includes when route users first considered the UK as a destination, how they heard about the route, alternative options they had considered, and reasons for deciding to remain in the UK.

## 3.1 When Graduate route users considered the Graduate route

Just under half (44%) of Graduate route users first heard about the Graduate route before coming to the UK to study (see Figure 2).

Awareness of the route varied by nationality, with respondents from India (56%), Nigeria (52%), and Pakistan (55%) being significantly more likely to have known about the Graduate route before coming to the UK as students. Chinese Graduate route users were less likely to have known about the existence of the route before coming to the UK, and were more likely to say they heard about the visa after they had applied to study in the UK (61%).

**Figure 2: When route users first heard about the UK's Graduate visa route**

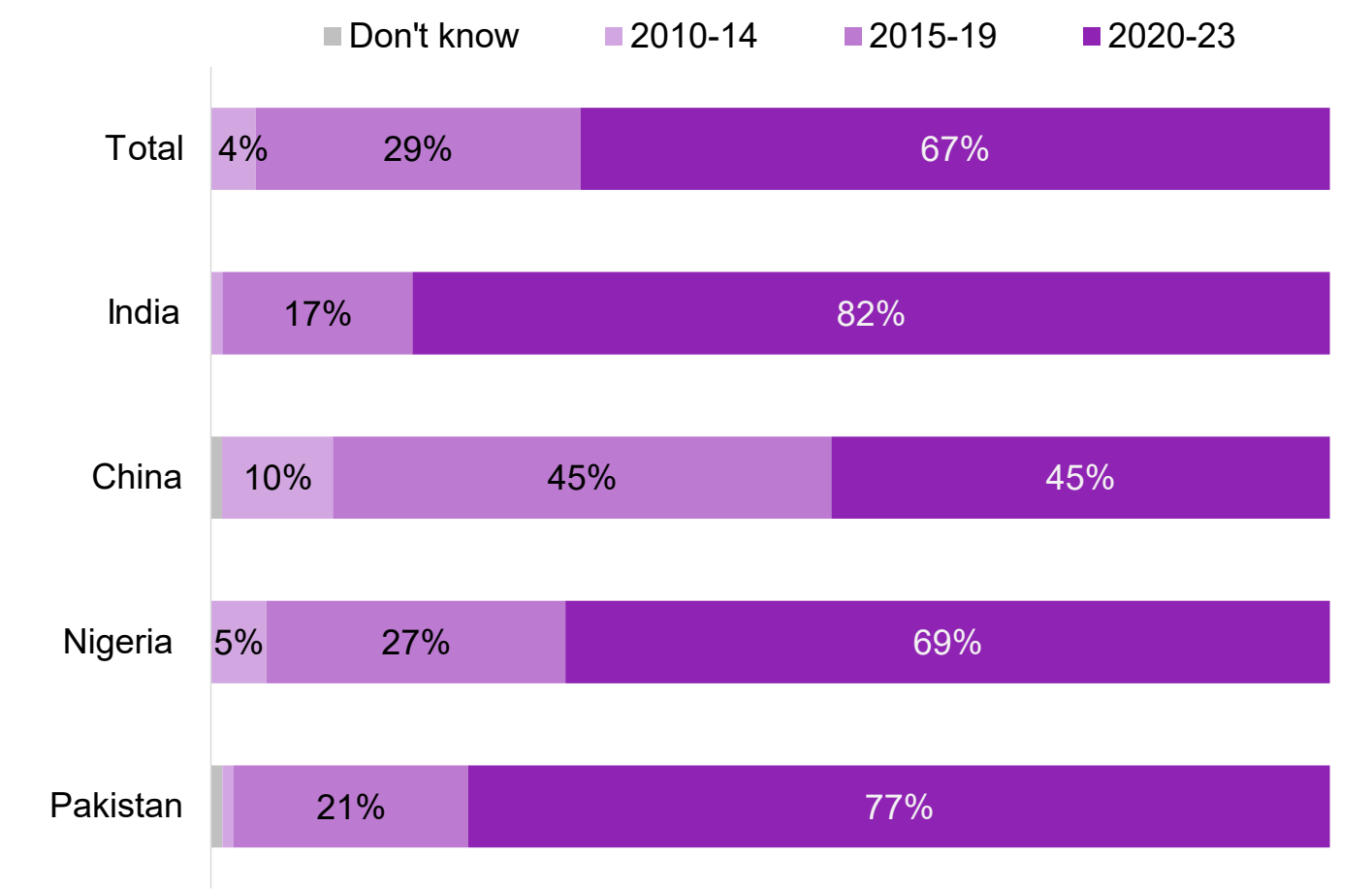


**Base:** B2, All Graduate route users (2,951).

As shown in Figure 3, most Graduate route users (67%) first considered the UK as a study destination between 2020 to 2023, just under a third (29%) said they considered studying in the UK between 2015 to 2019, and fewer than one in 20 (4%) said they considered it between 2010 to 2014. This reflects the length of degree programmes and suggests that route users applied to study in the UK relatively shortly after first considering it as a study destination. Postgraduate-level route users, who largely studied a one-year Masters course, were more likely than average (75% compared to 67%) to have considered the UK as a destination more recently (2020-2023), whilst undergraduate-level route users were more likely to say that they first considered the UK longer ago, between 2015 to 2019 (66% compared to 29% on average), before their 3 or 4 year-long degree.

Both Pakistani (77%) and Indian (82%) route users were more likely to say they started considering the UK in recent years (2020 to 2023) than average. Chinese nationals were more likely to say they started considering the UK between 2015 to 2019 (45%). The majority of Chinese Graduate route users have completed a Masters (80%), so their consideration of the UK between 2015 to 2019 or even earlier could indicate that they had also completed their undergraduate degree in the UK.

**Figure 3: When Graduate route users started considering the UK as a study destination**



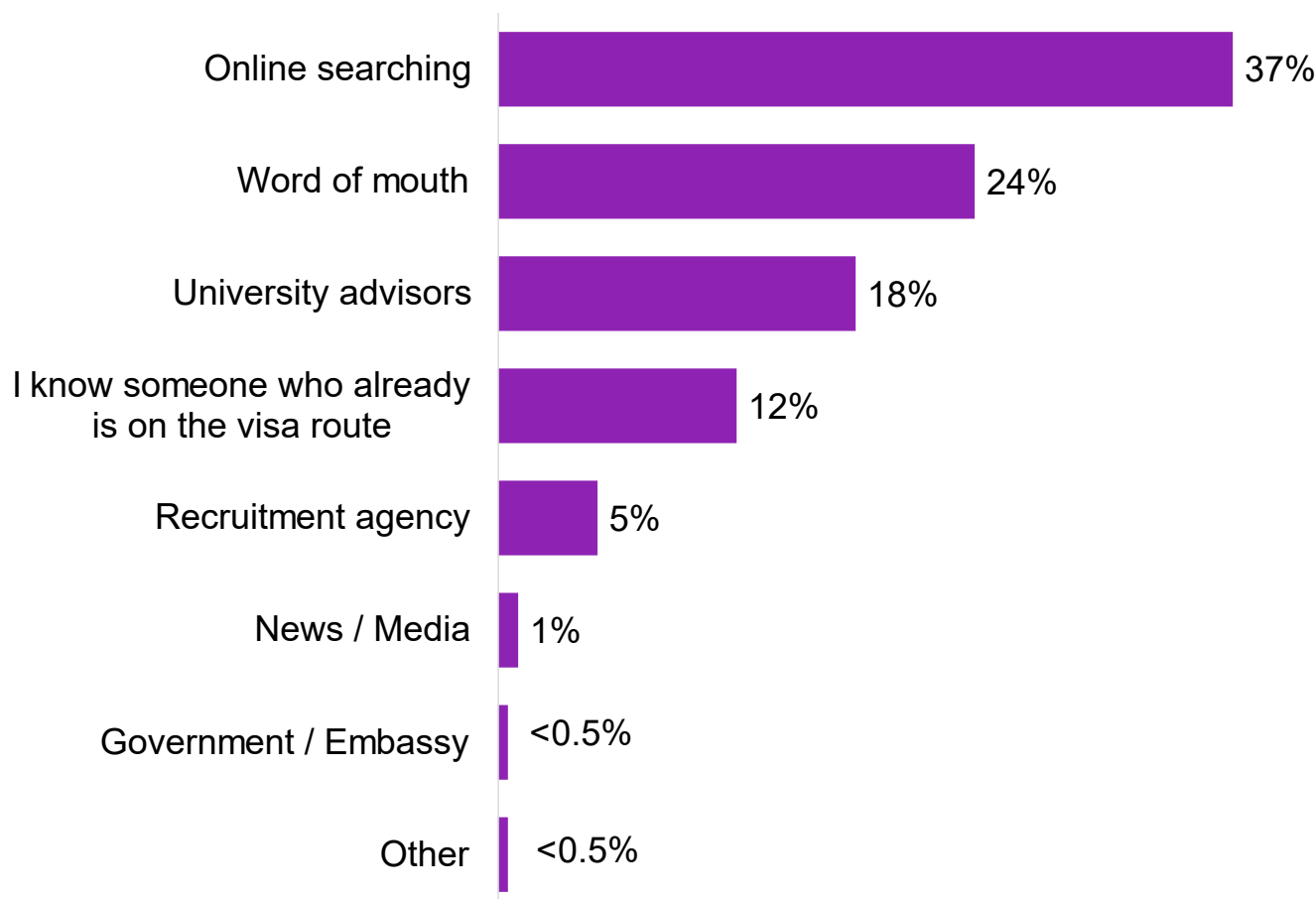
**Base:** B1, All Graduate route users (2,951).

### 3.2 How Graduate route users heard about the route

The most common ways that Graduate route users heard about the Graduate route, as shown in Figure 4, were via online searching (37%), followed by word of mouth (24%) and from university advisors (18%).

Chinese Graduate route users (30%) were more likely than average (24%) to say that they heard about the route via word of mouth, whilst Indian Graduate route users (9%) were more likely than average (5%) to have first heard about it via a recruitment agency.

**Figure 4: How Graduate route users first found out about the UK Graduate route**



**Base:** B3, All Graduate route users (2,951).

Several Graduate route users mentioned in the qualitative interviews that they heard about the route through university communications such as webinars, their application interviews, as well as from their university classmates. A few also mentioned they had heard about the Graduate route from recruitment or education agents in their home countries, before they had applied for a Student visa:

“My course colleagues introduced me to the Graduate visa programme [and] in the university induction, I attended a careers webinar.”

Graduate route user, Egypt, Masters, no dependants

“I spoke to a university representative ... about the visa, and they said it was a good opportunity for looking to work permanently in the UK.”

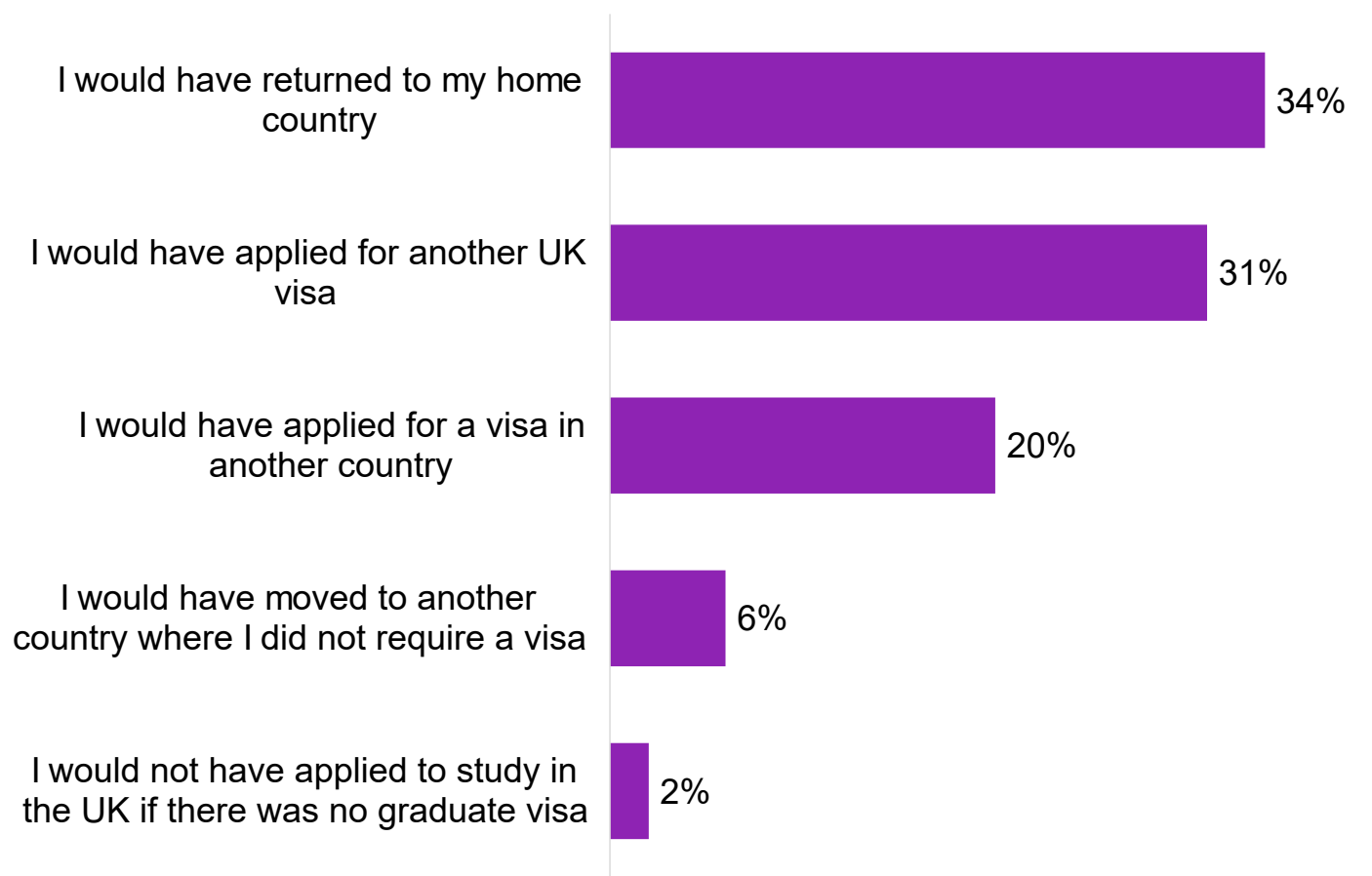
Graduate route user, Vietnam, Masters, no dependants

### 3.3 Alternative options

If the UK Graduate route was not available, around a third (34%) of Graduate route users said that they would have returned to their home country, with just under a third (31%) saying they would have tried to remain in the UK (on another visa route), and one in 5 (20%) said they would have moved to another country.

Chinese Graduate route users were more likely than average to say they would have applied to stay in the UK (41%), whilst Indian Graduate route users were less likely (24%). Nigerian (26%) and Indian (22%) Graduate route users were more likely than average to have said that they would have applied for a visa in another country (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: What Graduate route users would have done if the Graduate route was not available**

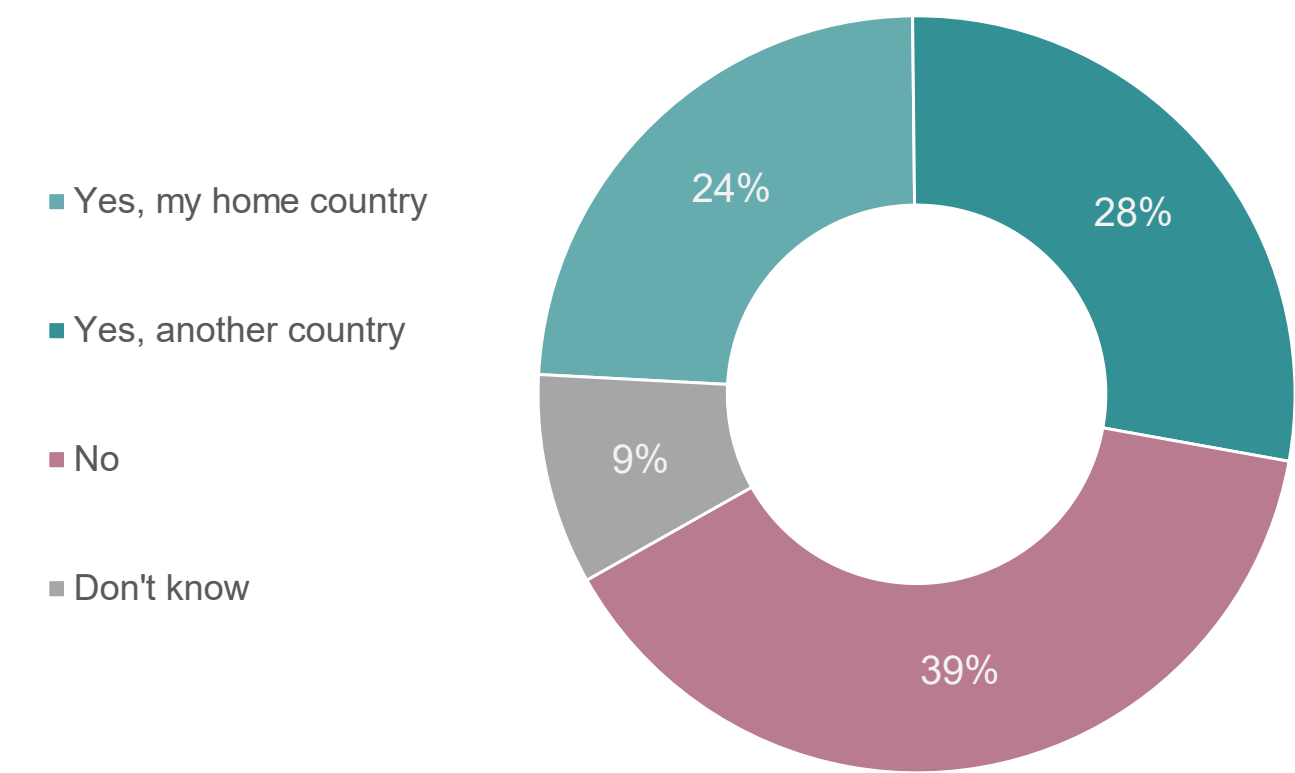


**Base:** B6, All Graduate route users (2,951).

Over half of Graduate route users (52%) said they had considered moving to another country after graduation. Around a quarter (24%) said they considered

moving to their home country, whilst a similar proportion (28%) said they considered moving to another country.

**Figure 6: Whether Graduate route users considered moving to any other countries after graduation**

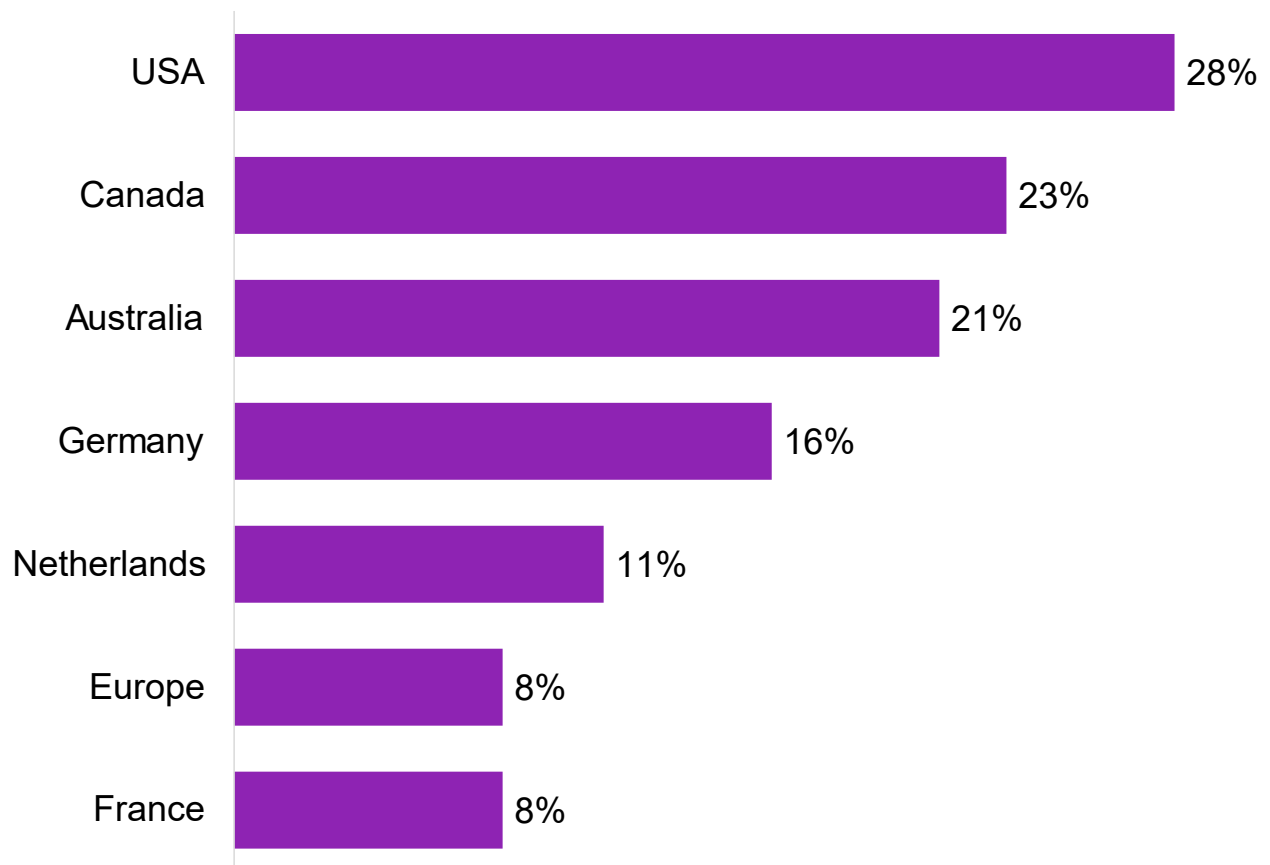


**Base:** B9, All Graduate route users (2,951).

The other countries that Graduate route users most commonly considered moving to after graduation were the USA (28%), Canada (23%), and Australia (21%). Those who have dependants on their visa were more likely to consider Canada (53% compared to 23% of those with no dependants) as an alternative, whereas those without dependants were more likely to consider countries in Europe, like Germany (16% compared to 5% with dependants), the Netherlands (11% compared to 3% with dependants) and France (9% compared to 1% with dependants).

**Figure 7: Other countries considered as potential destinations post-graduation**





**Base:** B10, Graduate route users who considered moving to other countries (828).

It was mentioned in the qualitative interviews that this was largely due to those countries being English-speaking, as, for example, 2 route users noted:

“I initially focused on Spain, but living there you need to know Spanish, which was also a language barrier.”

Graduate route user, Egypt, Masters, no dependants

“I was only considering [countries] like the US or the UK – pretty much English-speaking countries.”

Graduate route user, India, Undergraduate, no dependants

Graduate route users also cited other countries such as Canada for reasons such as flexibility in being able to stay after graduating, as well as it being perceived as a friendlier place for foreign students:

“I had considered Canada because they had a guarantee that you could stay after [graduating]; it was easier and friendlier in terms of immigration. So, you were allowed to stay, as long as you had a certificate or degree from a Canadian university.”

Graduate route user, Kenya, Undergraduate, no dependants

In the qualitative interviews, Graduate route users also talked about their initial decision-making process for coming to the UK to study in the first place. It was mentioned that tuition fees, distance from their home country and its associated time-difference were detractors when considering countries in North America and Australia.

“Although [the UK] is quite expensive, compared to like US, Canada, Australia, it’s just much better. They are definitely more supportive for students.”

Graduate route user, China, Undergraduate, no dependants

“From my parents’ point of view, in case any of emergency or in case anything happened for me, then the distance would be a barrier, so the preference was Europe.”

Graduate route user, Egypt, Masters, no dependants

Graduate route users also said that applying for a UK visa was an easier experience and process compared to other English-speaking countries such as Australia and Canada:

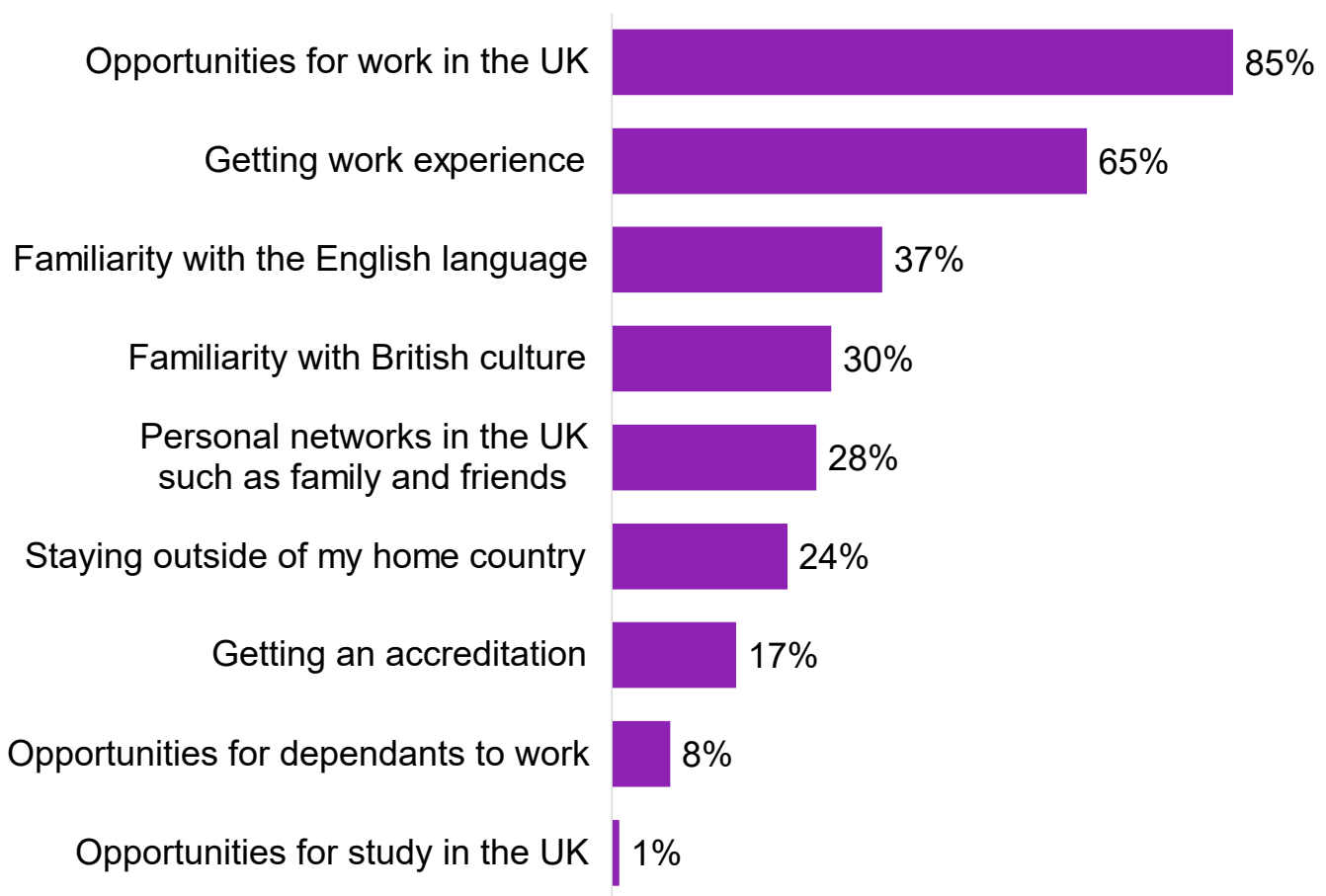
“They have a less hard visa process in England [...] rather than going in Australia and waiting for a long time for [...] maybe 9 months to getting my visa done, I decided to go rather England than going in Australia.”

Graduate route user, Pakistan, Undergraduate, no dependants

### 3.4 Reasons for remaining in the UK

A large majority (85%) of Graduate route users cited opportunities for work when considering remaining in the UK after their studies, followed by specifically getting work experience (65%), and familiarity with the English language (37%). Nigerian and Chinese Graduate route users were more likely to cite personal networks as important factors for remaining in the UK (36% and 33%) compared to Indian and Pakistani Graduate route users (16% and 18%). Graduate route users who said they were employed (29%) were more likely than those who were unemployed (23%) to mention ‘personal networks’ as a reason for remaining in the UK.

**Figure 8: Important factors when considering remaining in the UK after graduating**



**Base:** B4, All Graduate route users (2,951).

These factors were also reflected in the qualitative interviews. Graduate route users talked about how there were better work opportunities in the UK compared to their home countries, particularly in terms of finding jobs that were more specialised and

related to their degree:

“I wanted to pursue my career here [in the UK ...] because career prospects back home are not that good in terms of the technology market, and so it's much better in the UK use my skills here and get some experience [...].”

Graduate route user, Pakistan, Masters, no dependants

Several respondents also said that they had specifically come to study in the UK with the intention to remain in the UK on the Graduate route after their studies had finished, so that they could build a career in the UK; and some mentioned that this gave them flexibility in terms of being able to spend time in the UK while applying for jobs.

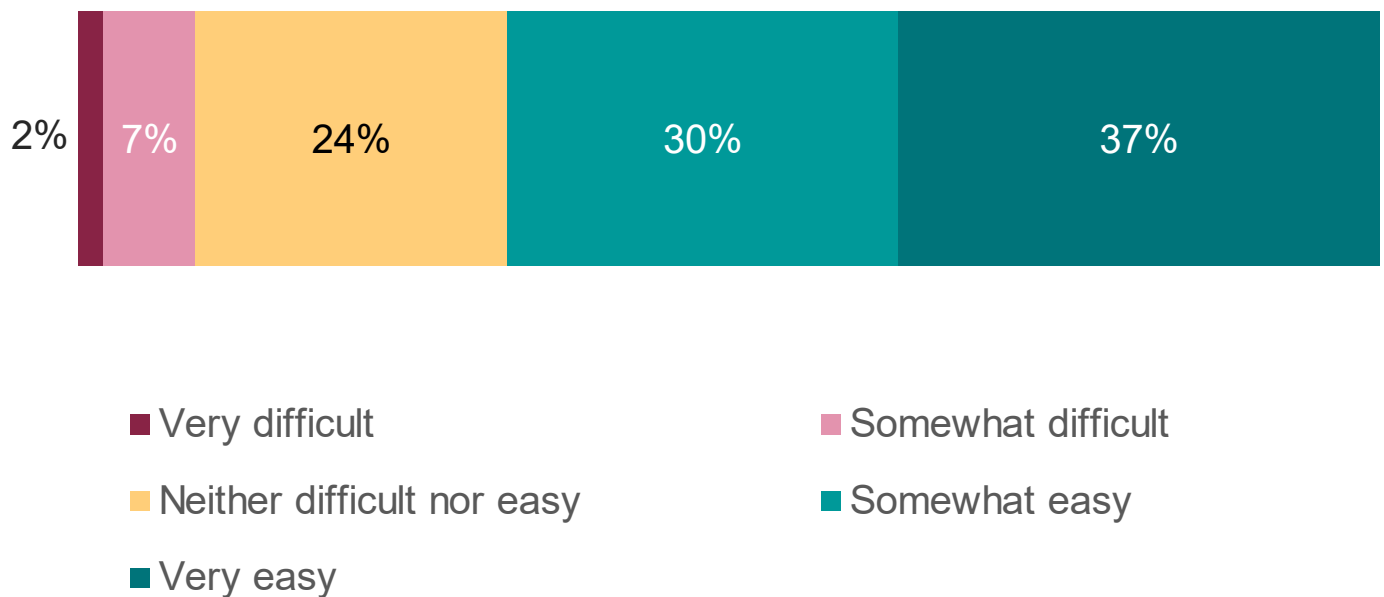
## 4. Graduate route application experience

This chapter explores how Graduate route users found the application process, how it compared to the Student visa application process, and their views on the Graduate route application fee and Immigration Health surcharge.

### 4.1 Ease of the application process

Most Graduate route users found the application process easy, although the proportion varied by nationality and presence of a dependant. Around two-thirds (67%) of Graduate route users found the application process easy, whilst 9% found it difficult. Almost 4 in 10 (37%) of Graduate route users found it ‘very easy’, whilst a third (30%) ‘somewhat easy’. Just over a fifth (24%) found it neither difficult nor easy, and less than a tenth (7%) found it somewhat difficult, with only a small percentage (2%) finding it very difficult.

**Figure 9: How easy or difficult Graduate route users found the application process**



**Base:** B7, All Graduate route users (2,951).

There were some differences by nationality in terms of how easy Graduate route users found the application process. Graduate route users from Nigeria and Pakistan were most likely out of all nationalities to find it easy (73%), whilst Chinese route users were the least likely (60%). Graduate route users who did a STEM course were more likely to have found the application process easy (70%) compared to those who did a non-STEM course (65%). Those with solely children as dependants on their visa were more likely to find it difficult (21%) than average (9%).

When asked what changes they would like to see to the application process, many Graduate route users suggested lower fees with more transparency, wider advertisement of the route to raise awareness of its existence to applicants and employers, and updates on the progress of their application.

“If possible, providing from time-to-time updates, even if you know the information update is going to be in 2 weeks... so just in terms of you when we’re going to hear from the Home Office.”

Graduate route user, Brazil, Masters, has dependants

## 4.2 Comparing the Graduate route application process to the Student visa application process

Graduate route users found the application process easier than the Student Visa application process. The digital application process for the Graduate route was welcomed as quick, accessible and proportionate for most route users and Graduate route users reported they were able to complete the application in a few hours via the app, online guidance was clear, and decisions were made quickly.

Some of the main positives cited for the Graduate route application process were not needing to provide biometric data, being able to complete the application via the app, as well as being more familiar with the process than when applying for the initial Student visa. From the qualitative interviews, respondents agreed that the application process ‘self-explanatory’, and the website was generally reported to be very comprehensive with helpful, easy to understand instructions.

“It was easy ... easier than the study visa. Maybe because when I applied for the study visa it was my first time to make an application and it was hard to pay money but [with the Graduate visa] I was familiar with the process and payment and was really easier.”

Graduate route user, Iran, Masters, has dependants

“Very simple. And the procedure is on the app on the website, so I just followed it step by step, and completed it like in one or 2 hours for all of our family members.”

Graduate route user, China, Masters, has dependants

“I was surprised that it was so easy - I didn’t have to book an appointment. I didn’t have to attend to submit my biometrics. It was all from the mobile app, so it was completely easy.”

During the qualitative interviews, very few Graduate route users said they had support from education agencies during the application process, with the majority submitting their applications independently. This compares to half (50%) of all Student visa holders who had said they had used an education agent to help with their application.[\[footnote 1\]](#) However, it is important to note that these findings for the Graduate route came from a small number of qualitative interviews, whereas those for the Student visa came from a survey question with a large sample.

## 4.3 Graduate route fee and Immigration Health surcharge

When asked about the Graduate route fee and Immigration Health surcharge, Graduate route users initially tended to consider the 2 charges together, and felt they were expensive, particularly for applicants who left the UK before the end of their leave period. However, most Graduate route users were aware of the fee and surcharge in advance and had saved up or been given or lent money by family to cover the costs.

The Immigration Health surcharge was highlighted throughout the qualitative interviews as expensive, and some respondents felt that the cost was disproportionate to their use of the NHS, and service quality. In addition, some employed respondents argued that were paying tax to support the NHS, so felt as if they were 'paying twice'. Graduate route users with young children or long-term health conditions felt they were making use of NHS services almost immediately and regularly, so were satisfied with the cost. On the other hand, those who had not used NHS services frequently were less positive.

"We see the services being provided by the NHS, which in our case with kids, you can imagine, in the first or second month we are already making use of."

Graduate route user, Brazil, Masters, has dependants

"I think the health charge is unreasonable considering the long wait for

medical appointments in the UK.”

Graduate route user, Vietnam, Masters, no dependants

Some Graduate route users also criticised the Graduate route fee for being an expensive part of the process, perceiving it as very high cost for an administrative process, especially for those with dependants who had to pay the fee for multiple people during the application process. Nonetheless, many Graduate route users were accepting of the cost as they were aware of it prior to applying for the route, so they could save up for it in advance.

Some Graduate route users also mentioned that the fee information was not given at the start of the process, so they were not aware of the cost until they were already completing the application.

“I do think it is a bit crazy to be paying £800 for just sending in an application.”

Graduate route user, Pakistan, Undergraduate, no dependants

Some Graduate route users said rising fees are not accessible for future route applicants. However, the majority said there was no financial impact on their day-to-day life from paying these fees because they had budgeted for the fees prior to applying for their extension of stay.

During the qualitative interviews, a small number of Graduate route users said that they would be willing to pay slightly more than the £822 application fee they paid, and one individual called it a ‘good investment’.

## **5. What do Graduate route users do in the UK?**

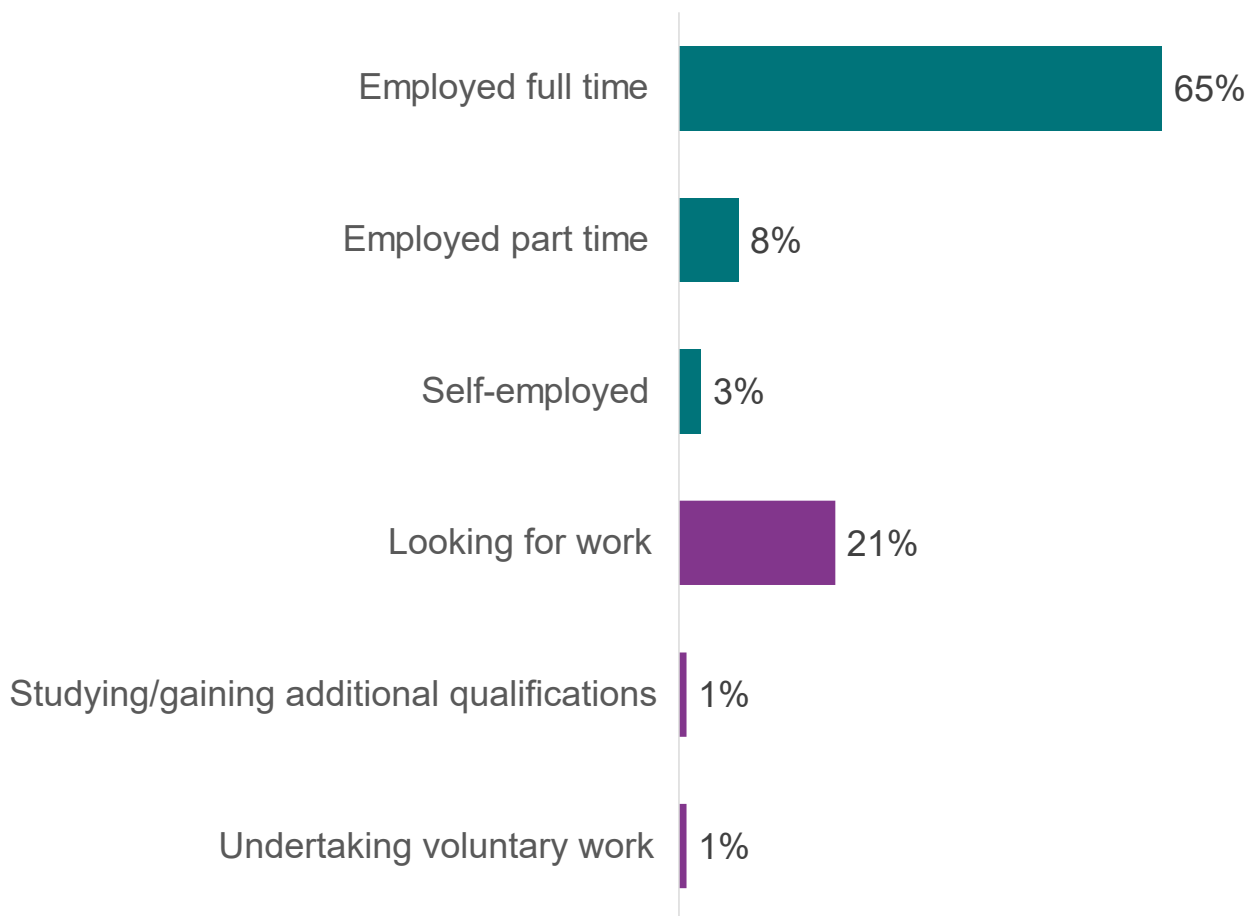
This chapter covers the main activities of Graduate route users while on the Graduate route, their level of employment, income, as well as their experience of applying for jobs and finding employment in the UK.



## 5.1 Current economic activities of Graduate route users

Over three-quarters (76%) of Graduate route users were working, with two-thirds (65%) employed full time. A further fifth (21%) were actively looking for work. Almost none of the Graduate route users (less than 0.5%) were unemployed and not looking for work. These findings are broadly in line with outputs from HESA's [Graduate Outcomes Survey](#) where of UK-domiciled graduates, 72% were in full-time or part-time employment.

**Figure 10: Current economic situation of Graduate route users**



**Base:** C1, All Graduate route users (2,951).

By age, Graduate route users in their early twenties were less likely than average to be working (70%), and especially to be working full time (56%). Instead, they were more likely to be looking for work (27%) or self-employed (6%). Graduate route users in their thirties were more likely than average to be employed, and especially to be employed full time (71% for those aged 30 to 34 and 67% for those aged 35 to 39), indicating a possible correlation between prior work experience and employability.

Graduate route users who completed an undergraduate degree were less likely than average to be in work (68%) and more likely to be looking for work (26%), whereas postgraduate degree holders were more likely to be in work (77% of Masters graduates and 84% of Doctorate holders).

There are some differences in employment rates by nationality, with Nigerian Graduate route users more likely to be in work (82%). This may be linked to age and level of qualification studied: Nigerian Graduate route users were more likely to be 30 or over (62%), with 13% aged 40 and over, suggesting they also had previous work experience. In contrast, the majority of Indian and Chinese Graduate route users were in their mid to late twenties (aged 25 to 29) (58% and 62% respectively). Almost 9 in 10 (88%) Nigerian Graduate route users studied at Masters level, compared to 80% of Graduate route users. Chinese (54%) and Pakistani (58%) Graduate route users were less likely than average (65%) to be employed full-time.

The likelihood of being employed also increased with time since graduation. Almost all Graduate route users who were granted their extension of stay in 2021 were in work (95%) whereas only three-quarters (75%) of those who were granted their extension of stay in 2023 were in work. The 2023 Graduate route users were instead more likely than average to be employed part time (9%). This is in keeping with qualitative findings from Graduate route users, who mentioned the process of finding a graduate job was lengthy, taking at least a few months and up to a year, and meanwhile they tended to find intermediary, often part time, job.

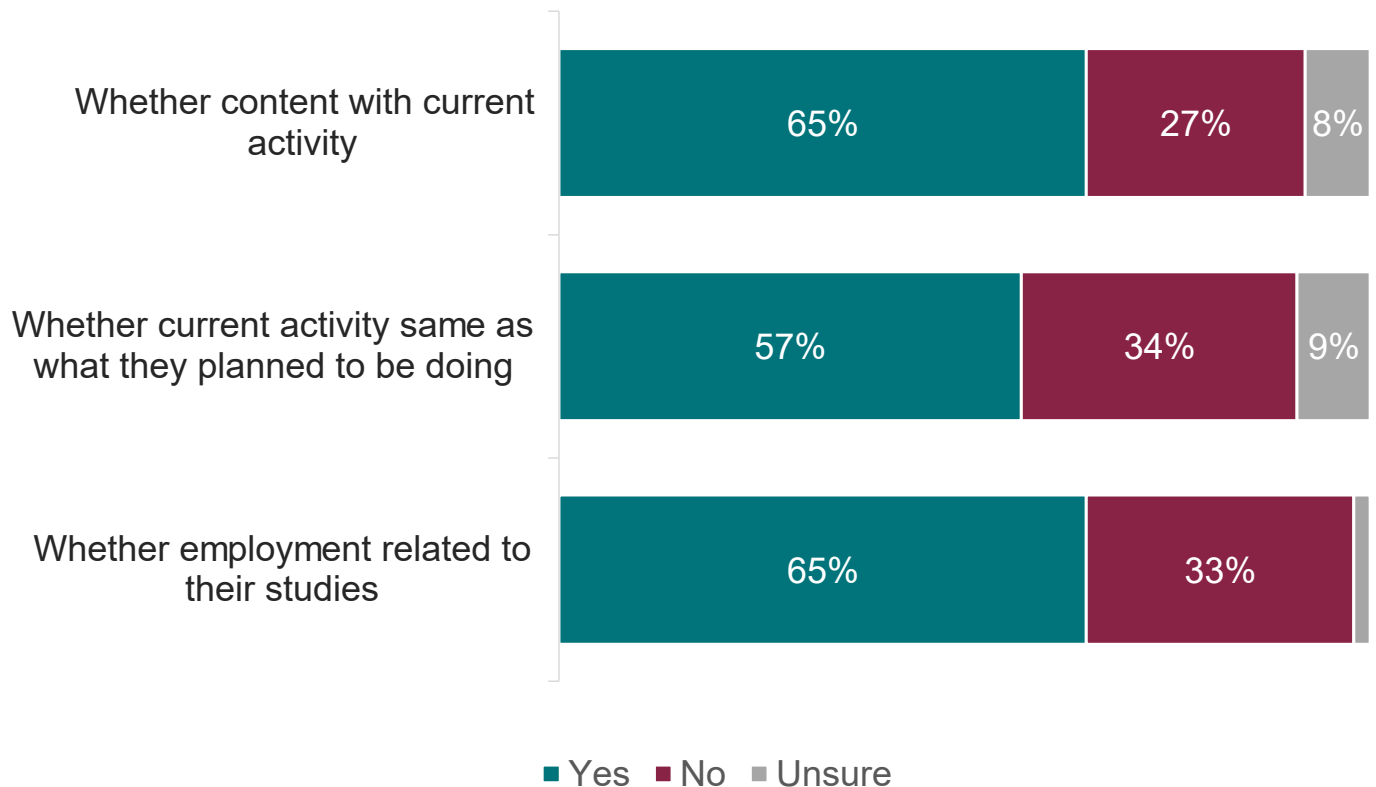
## **5.2 Relevance of employment to subject of study**

Two-thirds of Graduate route users were working in occupations related to their studies, with some differences by demographic characteristics. This is comparable to the findings from [HESA's Graduate Outcomes survey](#), where 69% of UK-domiciled graduates agreed they were using what they learnt while studying.

Two-thirds (65%) of employed Graduate route users were in employment related to their studies, and two-thirds (65%) were content with their current activity. However, nearly 3 in 5 (57%) Graduate route users were not doing what they had planned when they applied for their visa (this was broadly defined, and Graduate route users could interpret it as their current activity in general, or the specific sector or job role they were in if working). In some qualitative interviews, respondents had found it more challenging to get their desired job role than expected, which they attributed to being on a visa as well as, for some younger respondents, a lack of work

experience.

**Figure 11: Alignment of current employment with original plan for graduate employment**



**Base:** C2, All Graduate route users currently in employment (2,255), C6, All Graduate route users (2,951); C8, all Graduate route users not looking for work (2,399).

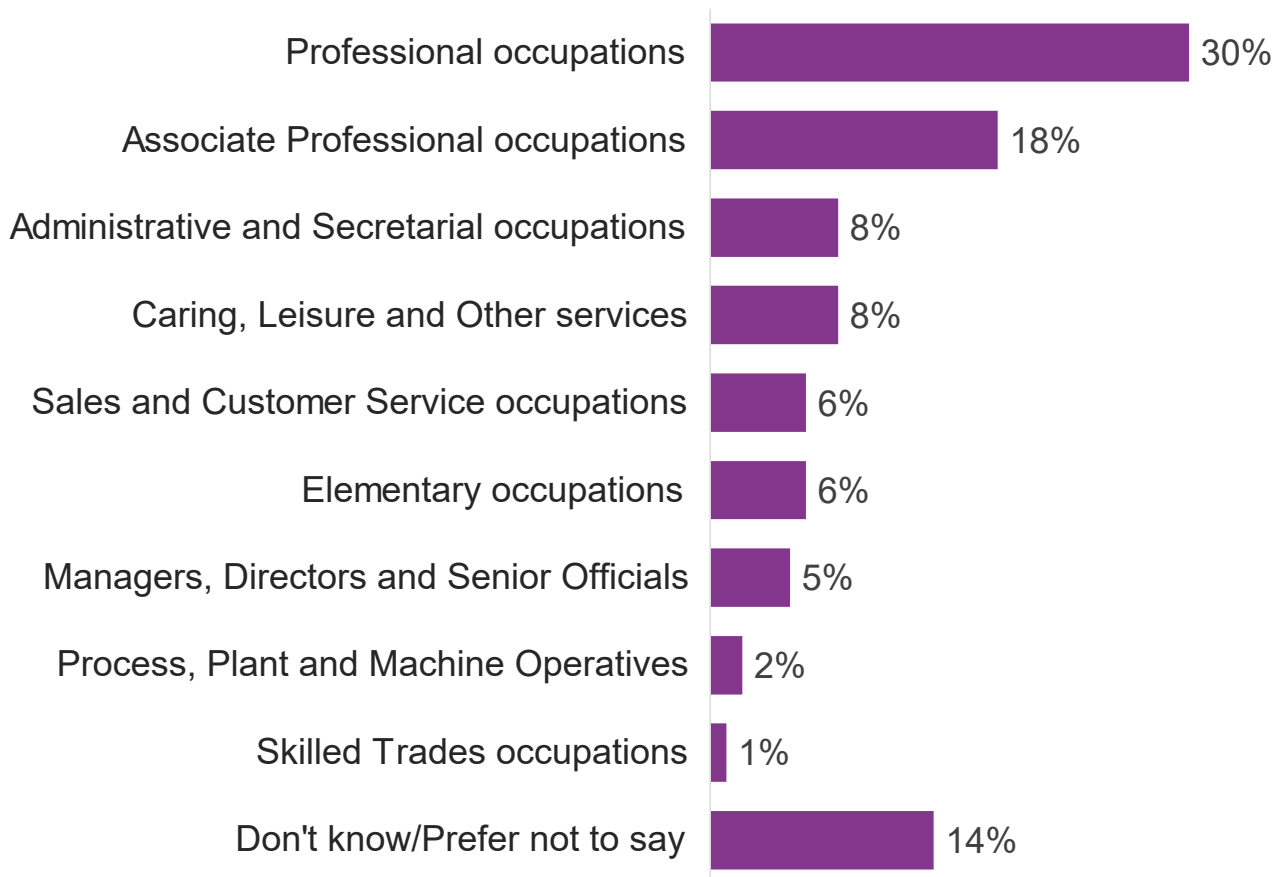
The groups which were more likely than average to work in a field related to what they studied included women (68% compared to 62% of men), PhD Graduate route users (87%), those with no dependants (65% versus 54% with dependants), Russell Group graduates (72%), and those who studied STEM subjects (69% versus 63% non-STEM).

Some of the same groups were also more likely to be doing what they originally planned to be doing on the Graduate route, namely PhD graduates (71%), Graduate route users from Russell Group HEIs (63%) and women (60%). European (75%) and Chinese (65%) Graduate route users were also more likely to be doing what they had originally planned.

## 5.3 Graduate route user occupational profile

Graduate route users were working in a wide range of occupations, though were most commonly employed in Professional or Associate Professional occupations (reflecting their qualification profile).

**Figure 12: Occupations of those currently employed**



**Base:** C4, All Graduate route users currently in employment (2,292).

There were few occupational patterns by nationality. Graduate route users from Pakistan were more likely to be employed in Administrative, Skilled Trade, and Elementary occupations, and Nigerian Graduate route users were much more likely to be working in Caring, Leisure and Other service occupations (reflecting the patterns in proportions studying subjects allied to medicine). Graduate route users with PhDs were also more likely to be employed in Professional occupations (80%).

Over 240 individual occupations were coded to a 4-digit SOC code out of the job descriptions given in survey responses, most held by less than 0.5% of employed Graduate route users. The most common individual occupations were Care workers

and home carers (3%), Customer service occupations (3%), Programmers and software development professionals (3%), and Nursing auxiliaries and assistants (2%).

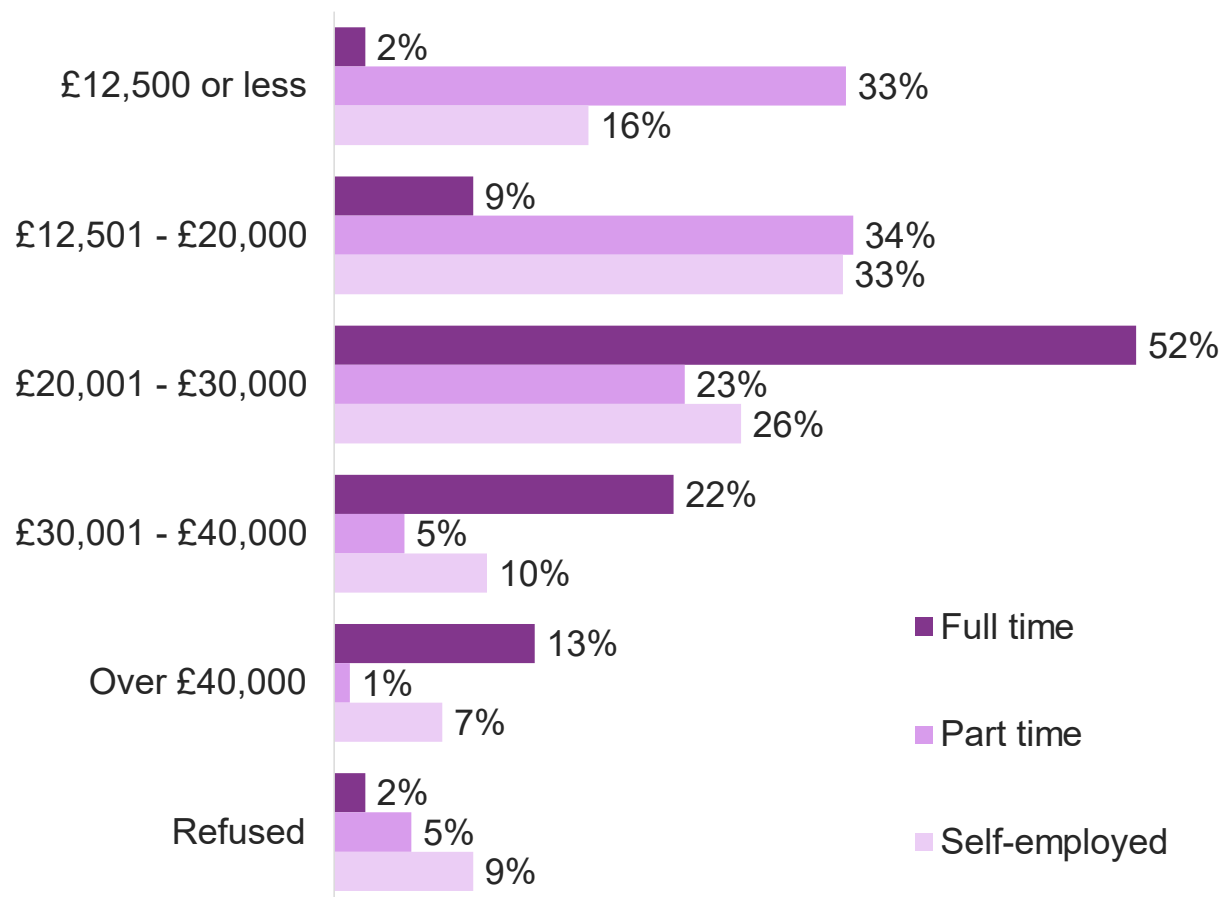
Nigerian Graduate route users were more likely to work in caring occupations (23% compared 8% on average), such as Care workers and home carers (14% of Nigerian Graduate route users) and Nursing auxiliaries and assistants (6% of Nigerian Graduate route users).

## 5.4 Earnings levels of employed Graduate route users

Most working Graduate route users earned under £30,000 per year. One in 5 (20%) earned between £30,000 and £40,000 and one in 10 earned over £40,000 (11%).

**Figure 13: Breakdown of income by salary band**





**Base:** C10, All Graduate route users who are currently in work (2,255). Figures are earnings before tax and deductions.

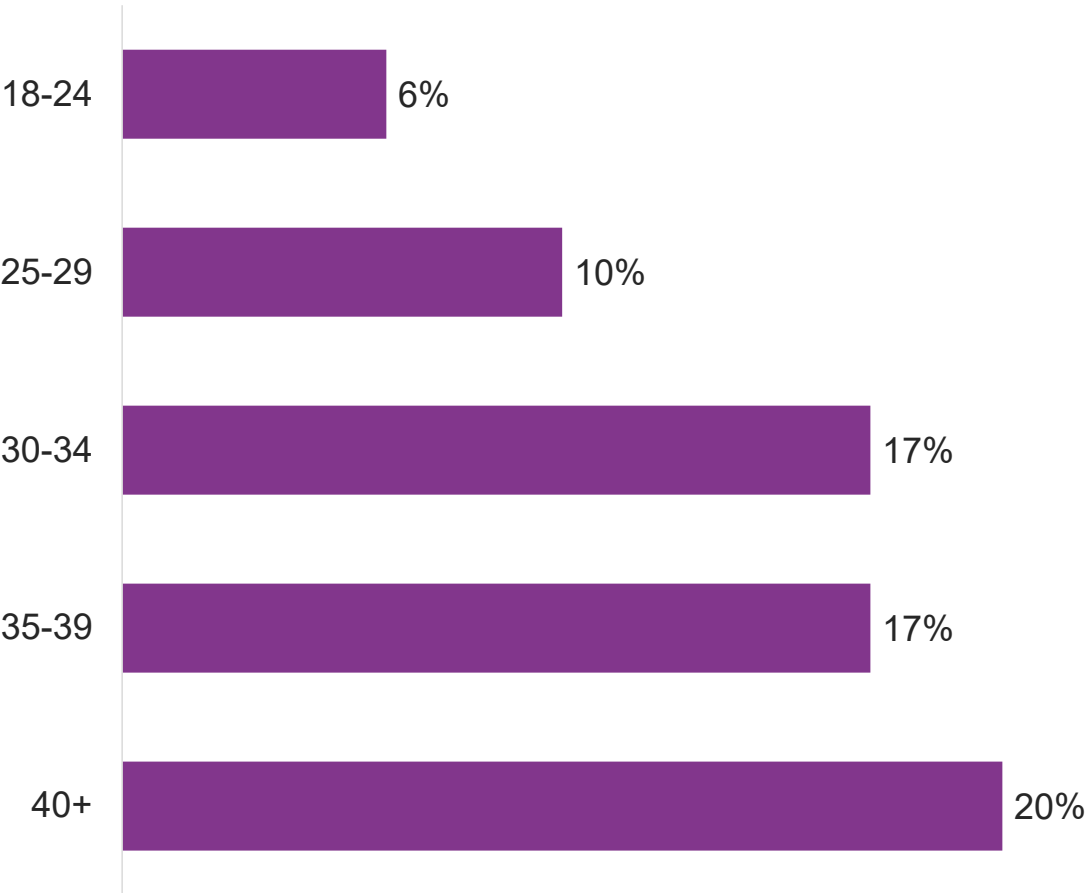
These findings are in line with the findings from the recently published Home Office Analysis & Insight (HOAI) report on Graduate route user earnings based on linking visa records with HMRC PAYE records<sup>[footnote 2]</sup> for the financial year from April 2022 to March 2023. That report found that the median annual earning for Graduate route users who were in employment for at least one month in the financial year ending 2023 was £17,815, whereas for those who were in employment across the entire year it was £26,460. When banding the incomes to match the banding in this survey, the picture for those with earning over the whole year were similar to the annual equivalent income self-reported in the survey. Just under half of graduates (48% for this survey and 46% in the HOAI report) earned between £20,000 to £30,000 from employment per year, with a further fifth (20% in this survey and 23% in the HOAI report) earning £30,000 to £40,000). HESA's [Graduate Outcomes survey data](#) shows that, for UK-domiciled graduates, median earnings for those in full-time employment were £27,500, with 45% of graduates earning between £21,000 and £29,999.

Graduate route users reported a relatively wide range of salaries. Graduate route users who were employed full-time tended to earn the most, while self-employed Graduate route users tended to earn more than part-time but less than full-time

employees. The majority (52%) of Graduate route users in full-time employment earned between £20,000 and £30,000 annually, and a further 22% earned £30,000 to 40,000, while 13% earned £40,000 or above. The annual earnings for those employed part time were mostly under £20,000 per year (67%), with a further 23% earning £20,000 to £30,000. There was a bit more variation in income among the self-employed, though it remained lower than for the full-time employed Graduate route users. About half of self-employed Graduate route users earned under £20,000, just over a quarter (26%) earned £20,000 to £30,000, one in 10 (10%) earned £30,000 to £40,000, and only 6% earned £40,000 and above.

There were no significant differences by gender, but Graduate route users from Pakistan were over-represented in the lower income bands, again reflecting the findings of the HOAI report, and the proportions in this survey who reported being employed in elementary occupations.

**Figure 14: Profile of Graduate route users earning at least £40K/year, by age band**



**Base:** C10, All Graduate route users who are currently in work (2,255).

Higher earners, particularly those earning over £40,000 a year, tended to be older and hold higher qualifications. The likelihood of respondents earning £40,000 or above, therefore with potential to meet the minimum salary requirement to qualify for

a Skilled Worker visa, was below a third overall (31%), but it increased with age (as shown in Figure 14) and level of study. It also varied by subject and institution type, with STEM and Russell Group graduates more likely to earn £40,000 or more.

By age, less than a tenth of Graduate route users in their 20s (9%) earned over £40,000 a year, whereas this proportion almost doubled for people in their thirties (17%), and more than doubled for those aged 40 years old and over, a fifth (20%) of whom reported earning over £40,000 a year.

By level of study, a third of PhD holders earned over £40,000 (32%), compared to 5% of Undergraduate and 11% of Masters Graduate route users. By institution type, Russell Group graduates were more likely to earn above £40,000 (20%) than non-Russell Group graduates (8%). Those who studied STEM subjects were more likely than non-STEM graduates to earn over £40,000 (15% compared 9%).

The jobs most commonly held by those earning £40,000 or more were:

- programmers and software development professionals (13%)
- management consultants and business analysts (7%)
- data analysts (5%)
- higher education teaching professionals (4%)
- business and related research professionals (3%)
- business sales executives (3%)
- sales accounts and business development managers (3%)
- cyber security professionals (3%)
- business and financial project management professionals (3%)

This suggests higher salaries were concentrated in IT/software, business and finance-related sectors.

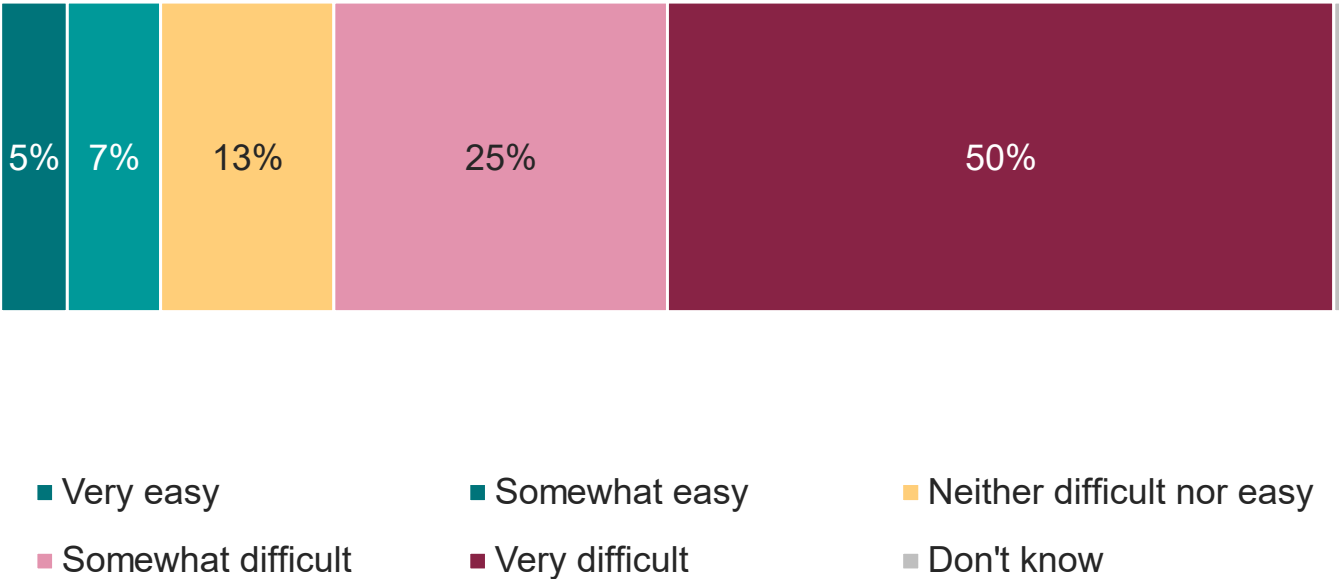
## **5.5 Experience of applying for jobs**

The majority of Graduate route users said it was challenging to find work. Three quarters of Graduate route users found applying for jobs difficult (75%), and half found it very difficult (50%). Graduate route users attributed this difficulty to employers' reluctance to invest in graduates who may not have significant work experience, to recruit a member of staff who may not be able to stay in the UK



longer-term and, even for higher earners, to sponsor a Skilled Worker visa for a junior employee.

**Figure 15: Perceived difficulty of finding a job among graduates**



**Base:** C11, All Graduate route users (2,951).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority of Graduate route users who were still looking for a job said they were finding it difficult (91%). By nationality, Indian (80%) and Pakistani (79%) Graduate route users were more likely to report that applying for jobs was difficult. Men were also more likely than women to find the job searching process difficult (78% compared to 71%). A quarter (25%) of Indian Graduate route users reported they were still looking for work, compared to 21% overall, as were one in 5 (22%) men.

Graduate route users mentioned a wide range of barriers to applying for jobs in the qualitative interviews, many of which were interlinked. Several commented that younger Graduate route users who had not worked before their studies in the UK tended not to have much relevant work experience, meaning they faced wider job market competition unrelated to their visa status.

“Because I think for the Skilled Worker visa, they say you have to have the

job already. You have to have the job already. And you have to have the experience already, and nobody's ready to ask [employ] someone without experience."

Graduate route user, Nigeria, Masters, no dependants

Graduate route users also reported that some of the difficulty they experienced when applying for graduate jobs was at least in part due to employers not wanting to hire graduates who are not going to be able to stay longer term, being reluctant to hire those on time-limited visas or leave periods, and employers being unfamiliar with the route.

"During the whole of my Masters period, I was applying for jobs. But it was so difficult. Like, oh so difficult. Every day, every day, I applied for 4 or 5 positions at least. The managers and the companies were not familiar with this (kind of) visa. But lately I feel like the number of companies with this visa has increased because you know even people from EU need this visa now."

Graduate route user, Iran, Masters, has dependants

They also felt visa sponsorship was not appealing to employers given the cost involved. Some respondents commented that work experience can be as or more important than qualifications for many jobs, so that even after one to 2 years of experience as a Graduate route user, employers may be unwilling to bear the costs of sponsoring a Skilled Worker visa.

"It was very difficult, every time I tell them that I'm an international student on a PSW [Post Study Work visa], they were like, 'sorry we cannot sponsor you later', and the conversation ends right there."

Graduate route user, India, Masters, no dependants

Overall, the main challenges identified by Graduate route users to getting a relevant job were: employers' unfamiliarity with the visa system and Graduate route, employers' unwillingness to sponsor visas for junior positions, strong job market competition, their relatively limited leave durations, and (for a very small number) language barriers.

## 6. Graduate route users' dependants

This chapter explores whether Graduate route users had dependants on their visas (partners, children or both), what Graduate route users would do had dependants not been allowed on their visa and what dependants are doing while in the UK.

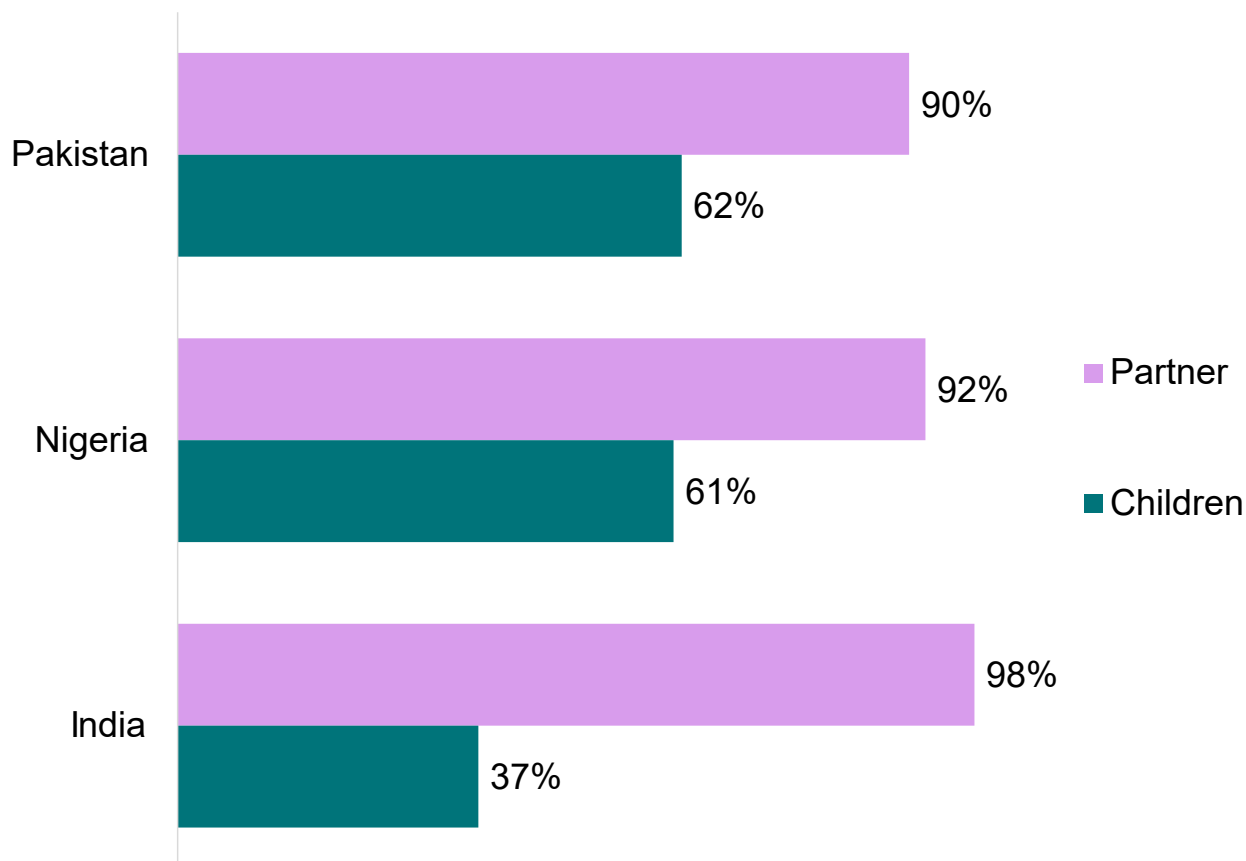
### 6.1 Characteristics of Graduate route users with dependants

Only a very small minority (2%) of Graduate route users had a dependant associated with their extension of stay, whether a partner or a child. Of these, over 9 in 10 (93%) had a partner as a dependant and half (50%) had a child or children.

Likelihood of having dependants and the number of dependants were associated with route user age (and level of study). The older a respondent was, the more likely they were to have dependants (1% of 25 to 29 year olds had dependants, as did 3% of 30 to 34 year olds, 7% of 35 to 39 year olds and 11% of those aged 40 or older).

Nigerian route users, who were on average older than Graduate route users of other nationalities, were more likely to have dependants on their visa (7%), whereas almost no Chinese Graduate route users had dependants (less than 0.5%). Chinese Graduate route users tended to be younger, with 85% aged 29 and under.

**Figure 16: Percentage of Graduate route users with dependants who have a partner or children on their visa, by nationality**



**Base:** D2, All Graduate route users who have dependants on their visa (575). China not shown due to base being too small.

## 6.2 Partners

Indian Graduate route users were significantly more likely to have partners as dependants (98%) compared to average (93%) and to the other top countries (as shown in Figure 16). There were also differences by gender, with men more likely to have partners as dependants than women (96% compared to 90%), and by type of institution, with graduates from non-Russell Group institutions more likely to have their partner as a dependant (94%) than those who had studied at Russell Group HEIs (79%).

## 6.3 Children

While overall 50% of Graduate route users with dependants had their child(ren) as dependants on their Graduate extension of stay, this rose to 61% of Nigerian

Graduate route users and 62% of Pakistani Graduate route users, compared to just under two-fifths of Indian Graduate route users with dependants (37%).

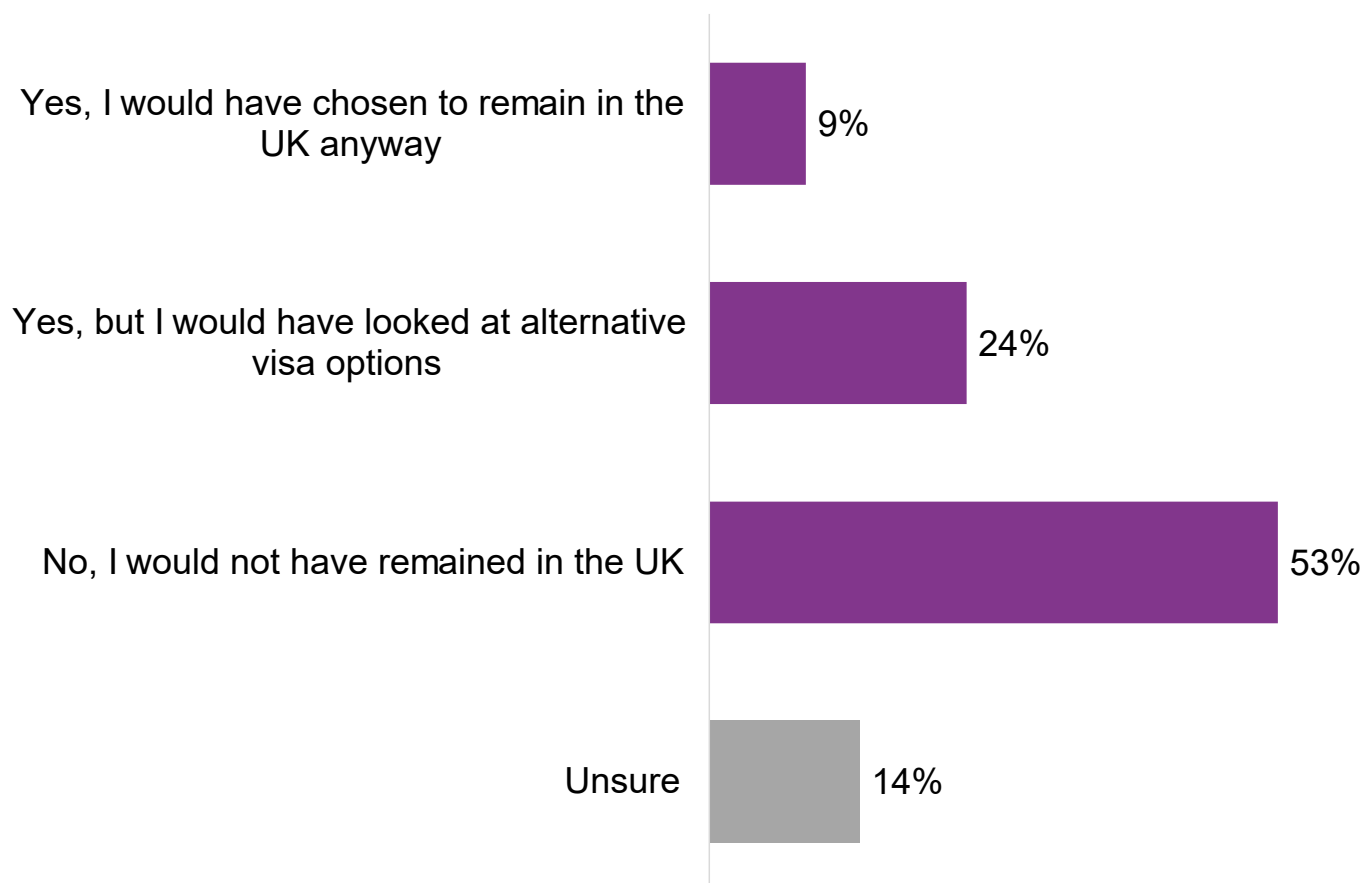
Where Graduate route users had children as dependants, the majority had more than one dependent child (56%). Two-fifths had one dependent child (41%), just over a quarter (27%) had 2 children, and 28% had 3 children or more.

Indian Graduate route users were significantly more likely to have only one child as a dependant (54%), compared to the total. Conversely, Nigerian Graduate route users were more likely to have 2 children as dependants (38%).

## **6.4 What Graduate route users would have done if dependants were not allowed**

The ability to have dependants on the Graduate route was very important for route users with dependants in the UK. Only 9% of Graduate route users with dependants on their extension of stay would have stayed in the UK if their dependants were not able to remain. A quarter (24%) said they would have looked for an alternative UK visa that allowed dependants. Over half (53%) said that they would not have remained in the UK. The remaining 14% were unsure what they would have done if their Graduate route had not allowed dependants.

**Figure 17: Whether Graduate route users would still have chosen to remain in the UK if the route did not allow dependants**



**Base:** D4, All Graduate route users who have dependants on their visa (575).

There were some differences by nationality as to whether Graduate route users would have remained in the UK without dependants. Nigerian Graduate route users were significantly less likely to say they would have remained in the UK compared to the total (6% compared to 9%), whereas Indian Graduate route users were more likely to say they would have remained in the UK anyway (15%). There were no significant differences by gender.

The importance of being able to have dependants (both partners and children) as a Graduate route user was highlighted throughout the depth interviews by Graduate route users across several countries. Older Graduate route users highlighted the importance of keeping their family as a unit, noting they didn't want to miss out on significant chunks of their children's lives, and younger Graduate route users wanted to start a new chapter of their lives together with their partner.

"As a married person, I want to study here or if I want to go to any country, definitely I would love to bring my wife and my family along with me."

Graduate route user, Bangladesh, Masters, has dependants

The moral support offered by their partner was a big motivator for people throughout their studies and their new careers as graduates. The vast majority of Graduate route users with dependants in the qualitative interviews said they would have taken a different path if their family members were not able to stay in the UK.

“It was one hundred percent important for me because I could not move to the UK without my husband... If my husband had not got a visa to come with me, I would never have applied for this country.”

Graduate route user, Iran, Masters, has dependants

“This was a really, really big factor... I would not have been able to achieve what I always wanted to do in my life.”

Graduate route user, Pakistan, Masters, has dependants

## 6.5 Partners' employment experience

Partners who were dependants on the Graduate route were generally economically active, and 84% were in work (69% were employed full-time, 11% employed part time, and 4% self-employed). A further one in 10 (11%) were looking for work.

Partners' occupations varied, with a quarter working in Caring, leisure and other service occupations (24%), followed by Elementary occupations (13%), Professional occupations (12%) and Sales and customer service occupations (9%). There were differences in occupational patterns by nationality. Partners of Nigerian Graduate route users were much more likely than average to be employed in Caring, Leisure or other Service occupations (39%), partners of Pakistani and Indian Graduate route users were more likely to be employed in Elementary occupations (27% and 22% respectively) (although the base size for Pakistani dependants is low, so this should be seen as indicative).

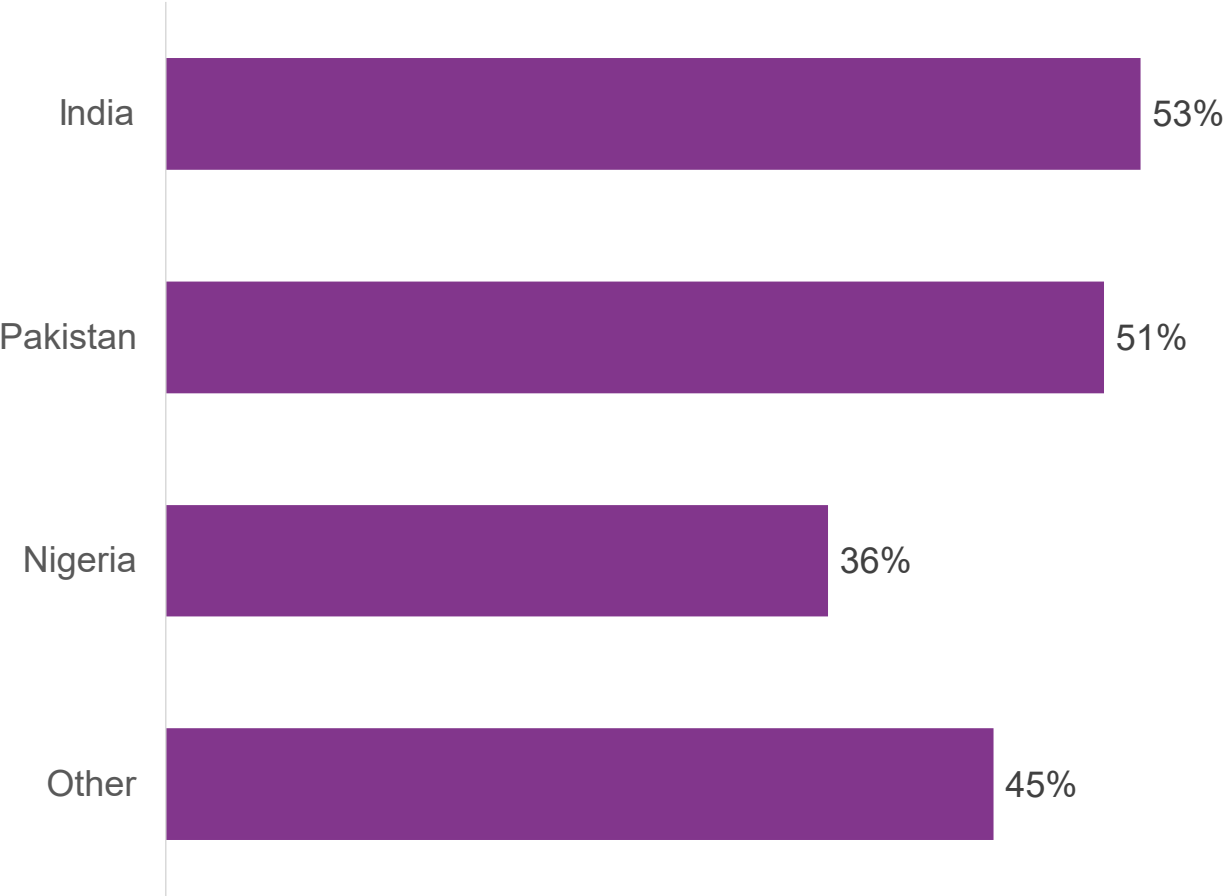
In terms of income, the majority (56%) of working dependants were earning between £20,000 and £30,000 (gross) per year, with a little over a tenth earning just below or above that (14% earned between £12,500 and £20,000, and 13% earned between

£30,000 and £40,000). Only 7% of working dependants earned more than £40,000 per year.

When asked about their partners’ experience of finding a job in the UK as a dependant, more than 4 in 10 (44%) respondents said that their partner found it difficult applying for a job as a dependant. Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) said that their partner had found it easy applying for a job as a dependant.

Graduate route users from India were significantly more likely to say their partner found applying for jobs difficult (53% compared to 44% for all route users). On the other hand, Graduate route users from Nigeria were significantly more likely to say their partner found applying for jobs easy (32% compared to 26% overall) and significantly less likely to say that they found it difficult (36% compared to 44%).

**Figure 18: Proportion of dependant partners that have found applying for jobs difficult, by nationality of main applicant.**



**Base:** D9, All Graduate route users whose dependant partner is in work or looking for work (501).

During depth interviews, some Graduate route users mentioned that their partners had found difficulty finding a job in the industry they were qualified in or for which they hold a relevant academic qualification. Some respondents also mentioned that



both they and their dependant had been told that their qualifications were not recognised in the UK. Subsequently, some respondents and their partners had to find employment in fields that were not directly relevant to their qualifications or experience.

“He tried to find some [civil engineering] jobs here but as his qualification is not from the UK, I think he couldn’t find any jobs related to his major and background.”

Graduate route user, Iran, Masters, has dependants

Language skills were also a barrier for partners finding employment in some cases, more so than for main Graduate route users.

“Yeah, she had a bigger challenge than me. Her English skills were not at the same level as mine. So she took some lessons and even so she was not that confident in her skills to go and present herself as a candidate for working.”

Graduate route user, Brazil, Masters, has dependants

“The main barrier to my wife finding a job in the area that she is skilled in was the language.”

Graduate route user, Brazil, Masters, has dependants

## 7. Integration and use of public services

This chapter looks at how Graduate route users and their dependants are adjusting to life in the UK after their studies. It includes their views on how they are integrating in society and their local community, their level of fluency in English, as well as their use of public services.

## 7.1 Integration

Most Graduate route users felt that they and their partners had integrated well. This was also the case for most Graduate route users with children as dependants. Integration was generally associated with feeling comfortable in the area they live in, being settled into a career, having a partner being settled into their career and finding childcare or schooling for their children.

“I kind of have a social circle here and then apart from that I know the system”

Graduate route user, Sri Lanka, Masters, has dependants

Some respondents also commented on experiencing culture shock when they first moved to the UK, but most felt that they were integrating reasonably well and adjusting to life in the UK. Several had strong friendship networks from their studies or had met people through religious or social groups. There was also mention of having strong ties to their local community and children being at school – for parents, this was an important factor in feeling settled in their area.

For some respondents, integration was not as easy as they had hoped, and it had taken longer than originally anticipated. However, such respondents were generally positive about their future in the UK and felt that they were now adjusting to life well.

“In terms of like [adapting to] a full-time job, that was difficult because I’ve not had it before. Getting into the grind, getting into the lifestyle... I’d say I’m still not fully adjusted, but I am getting there!”

Graduate route user, India, Masters, no dependants

However, some Graduate route users and dependants had struggled to adjust to live in the UK. This was linked to partners having difficulty getting their own visa (so they would not need to continue to be dependants in the future), partners and/or children struggling to make friends or not wanting to move with the family, and their partners not being able to find employment in a field relevant to their qualification and/or interest.

“My husband misses Sri Lanka but he’s doing ok... He struggles with the English language and has few friends here.”

Graduate route user, Sri Lanka, Masters, has dependants

Some Graduate route users expressed anxiety and worry around being able to stay in the UK after their current visas expire, which had an impact on how well integrated they felt. One respondent from India said that the only issue they have in adjusting is concern around having to leave once their Graduate leave period expires.

“The visa is constantly on my mind... It does annoy you that you’ve established a life for the last 4 years, you’ve got a partner and friends and you could be deported in 4 months...”

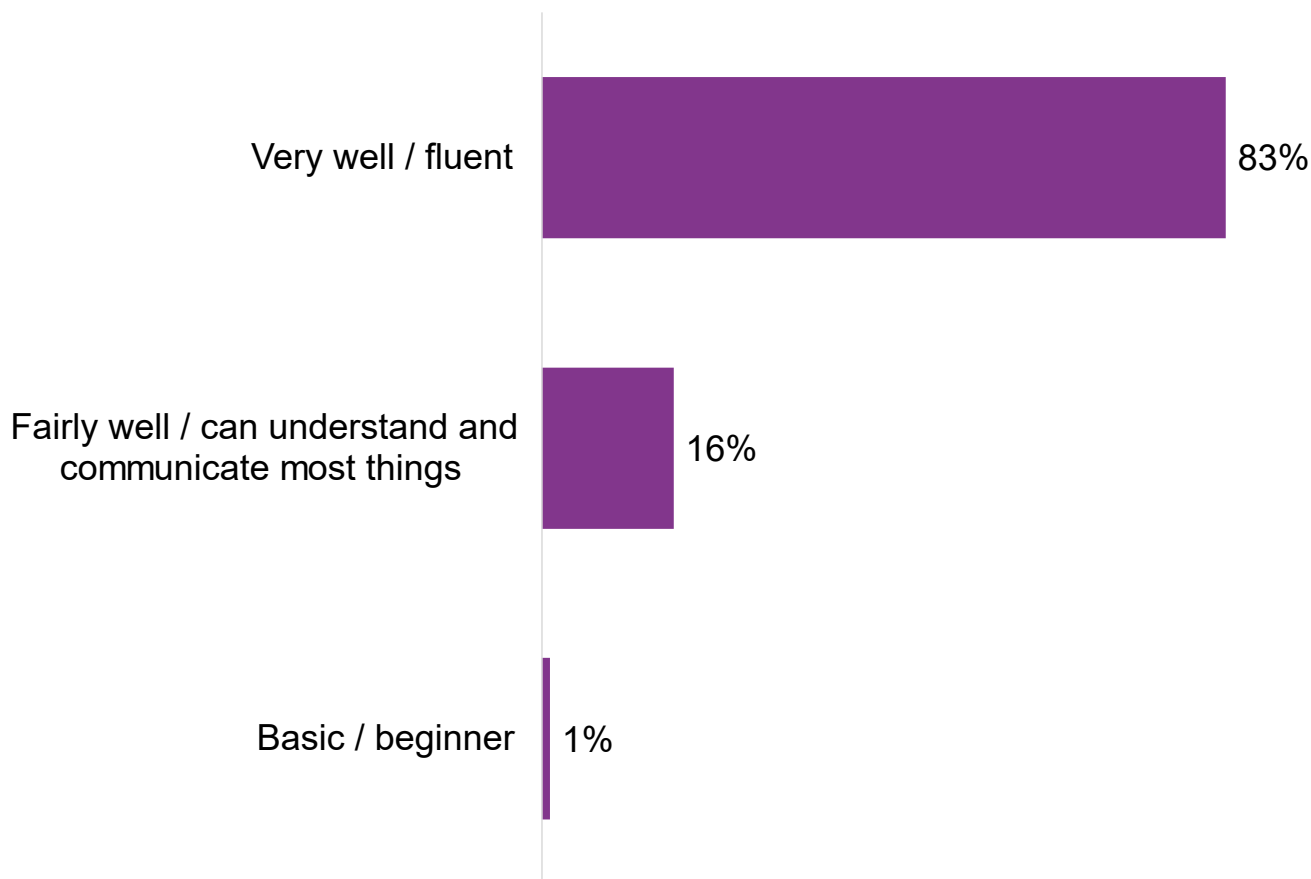
Graduate route user, India, Masters, no dependants

## 7.2 Level of English

Almost all Graduate route users, partners, and dependent children could speak English, with the majority speaking it very well or fluently. There were significant differences by route user nationality for how well partners (but not route users) could speak English. As mentioned above, language skills were sometimes cited as a barrier to integration to life in the UK.

More than 8 in 10 (83%) Graduate route users said that they felt they could speak English very well or fluently. Just over one in 10 (16%) said that they felt they could speak English fairly well, that they could understand and communicate most things, and less than 1% said they could only speak English at basic or beginner level.

**Figure 19: How well Graduate route users felt they could speak English**



**Base:** F1, All Graduate route users (2,951).

Graduate route users from China and Pakistan were more likely to say they could speak English fairly well, rather than very well or fluently. Chinese Graduate route users were less likely to say they could speak English very well or fluently (57%) compared to the overall average (83%), as were Pakistani Graduate route users (78%). Instead, these 2 nationalities were more likely to say that they can speak English fairly well and can understand and communicate most things (41% for China and 22% for Pakistan). On the other hand, almost all Nigerian Graduate route users said that they could speak English very well or fluently (97%).

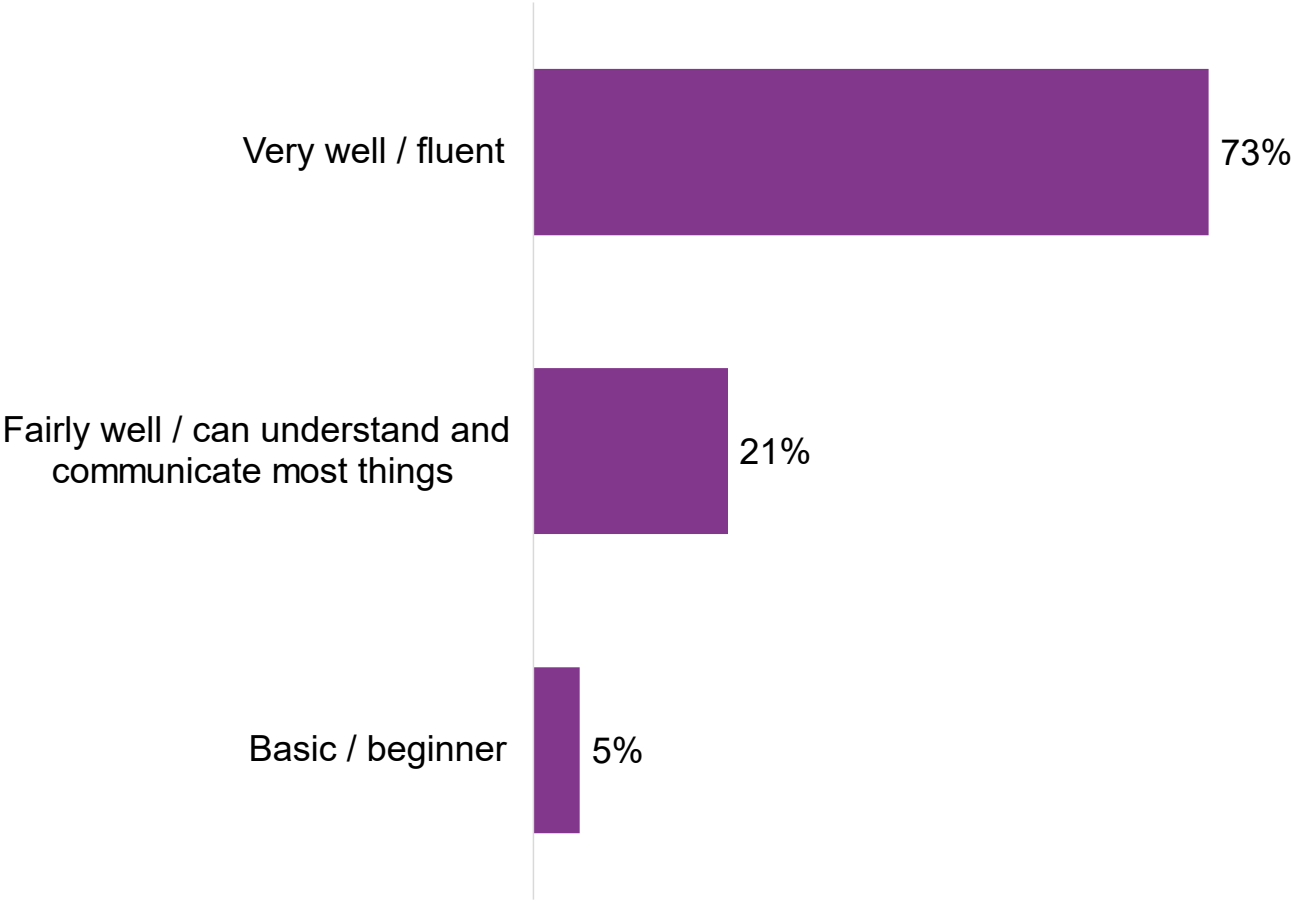
Male Graduate route users were significantly less likely to say that they could speak English very well or fluently than women (81% compared to 85%).

A very high level of English was associated with finding it easier to apply for jobs as a Graduate route user for many. Women were more likely to say they can speak English very well or fluently (85%) and were also more likely to have found applying for a job easy (14%, compared to an average of 12%). However, men were less likely to say they can speak English very well (81%) and more likely to say applying for jobs has been difficult (78%, compared to 75% on average).

More than 7 in 10 Graduate route users with partners as dependants (73%) said that

their partner could speak English very well or fluently and over a fifth (21%) said that their partner could speak English fairly well and could understand and communicate most things. Only 5% of respondents said their partner could speak English at a basic or beginner level.

**Figure 20: How well Graduate route users felt that their partner could speak English**



**Base:** F2, Graduate route users with partners as dependants (532).

Graduate route users from Nigeria were significantly more likely than average to say their partner could speak English very well or fluently (94%). Conversely, Graduate route users from India and Pakistan were both less likely than average to say their partner could speak English very well or fluently (53% and 57% respectively). Graduate route users from India were also more likely than average to say their partner could only speak English at a basic or beginner level.

Men were significantly more likely than women to say their partner could speak English very well or fluently (79% compared to 73% of women).

Several Graduate route users mentioned lower levels of English ability had a negative impact on their ability to integrate. Some mentioned dependant partners experiencing the same struggle. One Graduate route user spoke about the

perceived importance of being able to speak fluent English in getting a job:

“If you’re fluent in English it removes half the barriers anyway because people don’t have a hard time communicating with you. People give you a job easier because they know you can talk to customers... That’s important.”

Graduate route user, India, Masters, no dependants

Respondents also suggested a link between how integrated Graduate route users and their partners felt and how well they could speak English.

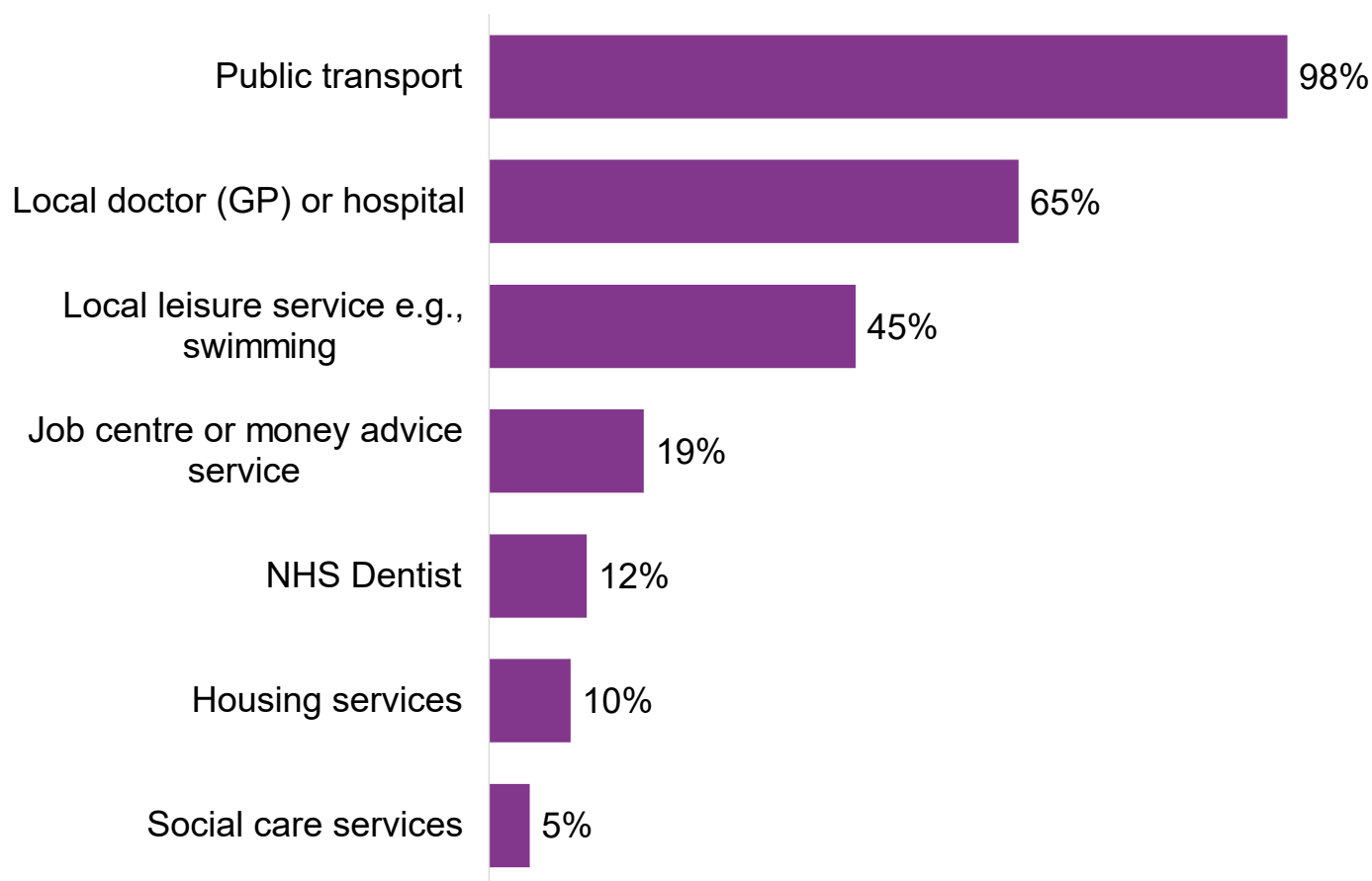
“My wife loves living in the UK... She loves the freedom and has a good handle on English... She [my wife] speaks English language better than me!”

Graduate route user, Iran, Masters, has dependants

## 7.3 Use of public services

Almost all Graduate route users and their dependants used some form of public service. The most commonly used public services were public transport (used by 98% of Graduate route users) and health services (used by 65% of Graduate route users), with some significant differences by nationality for individual services. For example, just 57% of Indian Graduate route users had used local health services, and 58% of Nigerian Graduate route users had used local leisure facilities.

**Figure 21: Public services used by Graduate route users in the past 12 months**



**Base:** E3, All Graduate route users (2,951).

Some respondents mentioned negative experiences with local health services, especially in reference to long waiting lists. Long waiting times and sometimes seemingly rushed for service once they do get an appointment left some Graduate route users frustrated, particularly considering the Health Surcharge they had to pay, in addition to National Insurance contributions for those in work.

“I had a horrible experience with the NHS that led me later on to go to a private doctor and pay again. So it was, I felt, completely useless the money that I paid for the NHS.”

Graduate route user, Egypt, Masters, no dependants

Graduate route users' partners had a similar pattern of public service use to Graduate route users, although fewer used public transport (86%). Four fifths (78%) used health services such as their local doctor (GP) or hospital (78%). Just under a quarter (23%) of partners had used local leisure services such as swimming pools, fitness classes or the library at least once over the past 12 months.

“We go with the kids... There are some good leisure centres around and we also make use of the library as well.”

Graduate route user, Brazil, Masters, has dependants

## 8. Graduate route users' future plans and intentions

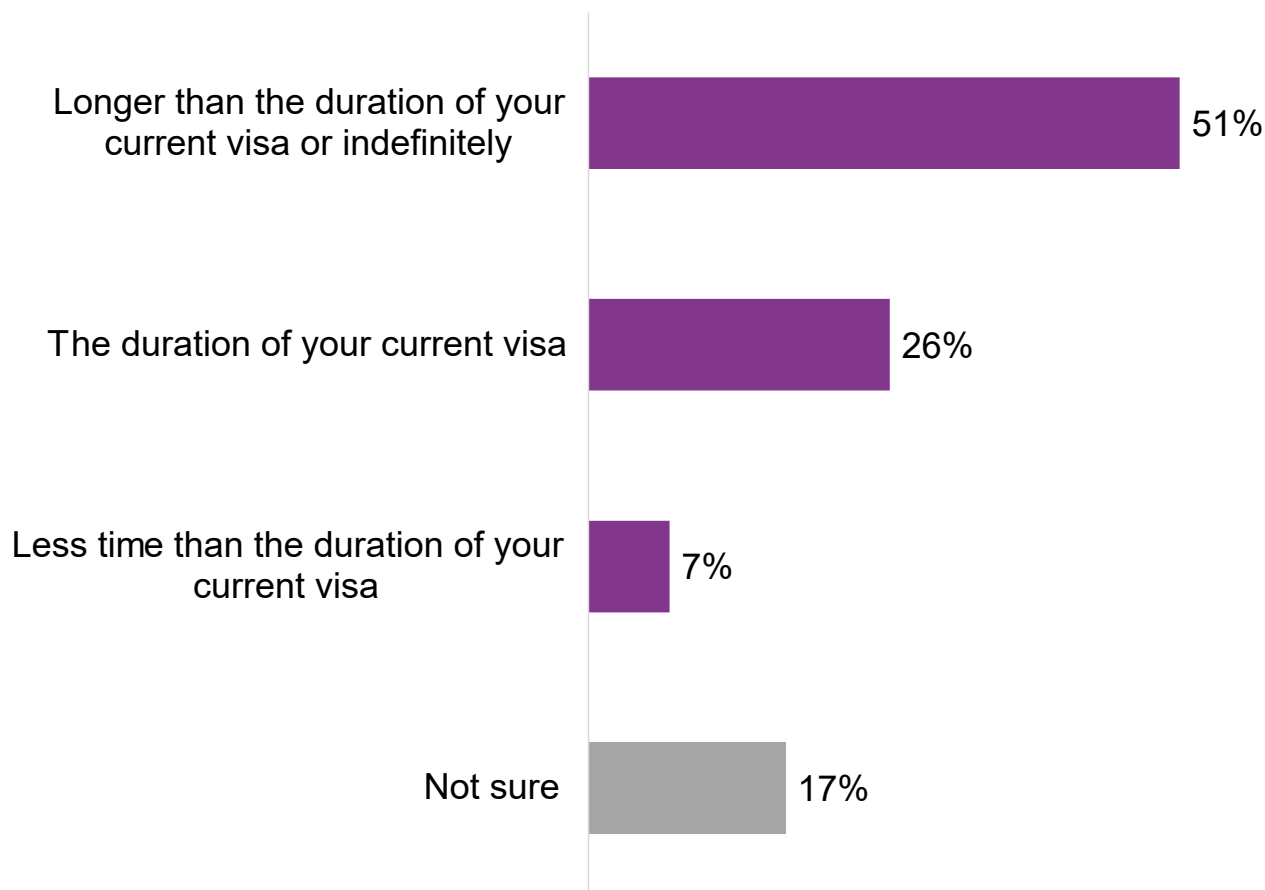
This chapter explores Graduate route users' future plans and intentions, including if they plan to stay in the UK, important factors influencing their thinking, which visa routes they are considering, and expectations for employer support or sponsorship.

### 8.1 Graduate route users' intentions to stay in the UK

Over half (51%) of Graduate route users intended to stay in the UK longer than the duration of their current leave period or indefinitely. A quarter (26%) were only planning to stay for the duration of their current extension of stay, while a few (7%) planned to leave earlier. A further 17% were yet undecided. Qualitative interviews suggested that some Graduate route users who only planned to stay for the duration of their current leave period were influenced by uncertainty about being able to qualify for a further visa.

**Figure 22: How long Graduate route users intended to stay in the UK**





**Base:** F5, All Graduate route users (2,951).

There were some differences in plans by nationality, with Nigerian (61%) and Chinese (59%) Graduate route users being more likely to say they planned to stay for longer than the duration of their current visa or indefinitely, whilst Pakistani (39%) and Indian (34%) Graduate route users were most likely to intend to stay for the duration of their current visa only.

Women were more likely than men to intend to remain in the UK in the longer term (57% and 46% respectively), whilst men were more likely than women to want to stay only until their current visa expires (30% and 22% respectively).

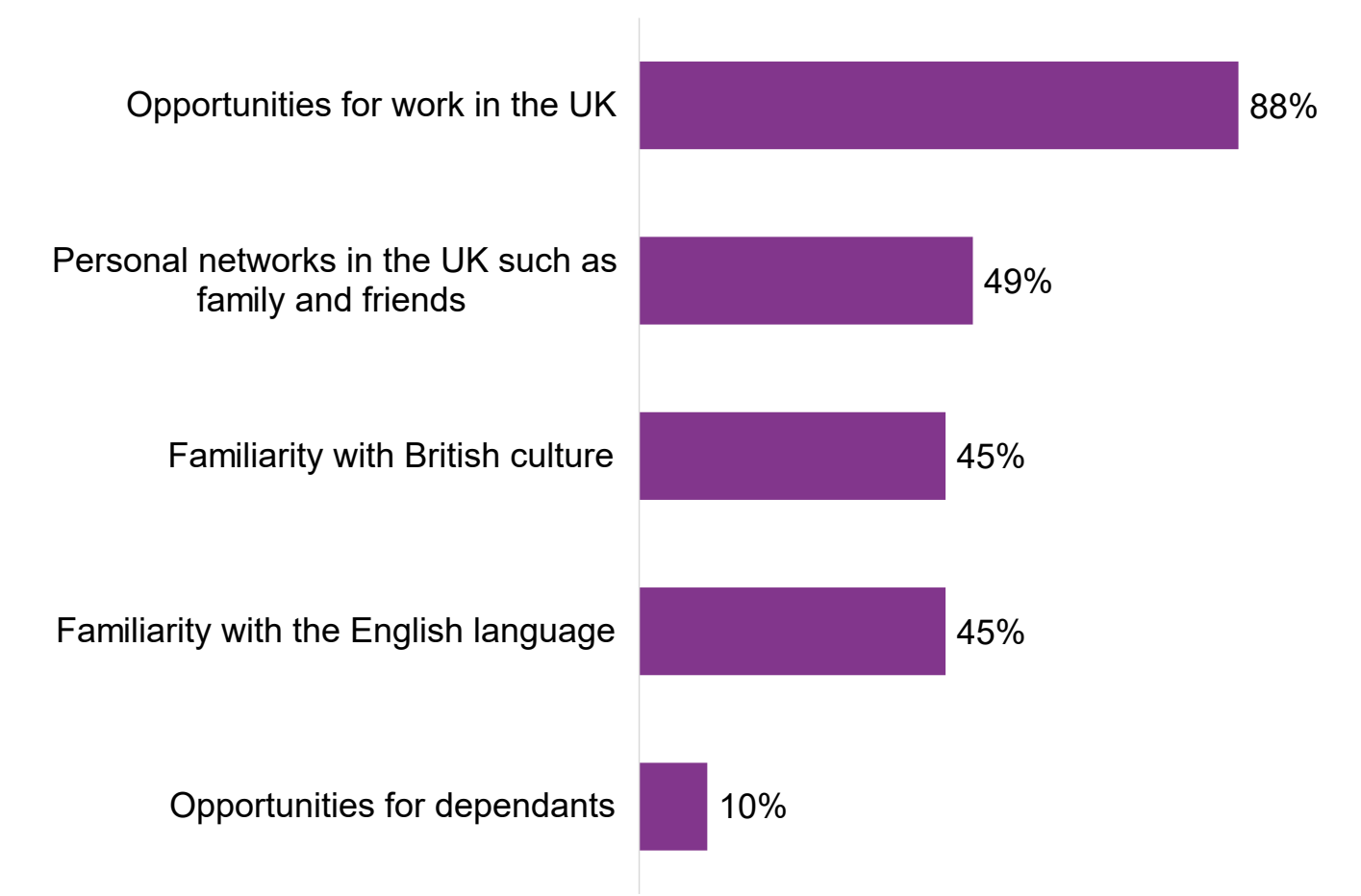
Graduate route users with a Doctoral degree were most likely to want to stay longer than the duration of their current leave period or indefinitely (70%) compared to those with an undergraduate (58%) or Masters degree (49%).

## 8.2 Important factors when considering remaining in the UK

In the qualitative interviews, a reoccurring factor that influenced Graduate route users’ decision-making were visa rules and whether they could find employment that aligned with visa requirements. Plans to stay in the UK often depended on how likely graduates thought they were to get visa sponsorship or a role that meets the (Skilled Worker) visa income threshold requirements before their current extension of stay expires.

Work opportunities were the most important factor when considering remaining in the UK post-Graduate route.

**Figure 23: Important factors when considering remaining in the UK**



**Base:** F9, All Graduate route users who intend to apply for a further visa (1,553).

Nigerian Graduate route users were most likely to say opportunities for work in the UK (92%) were an important factor. Men were more likely than female Graduate route users to be attracted to work opportunities in the UK (92% compared to 84%), but women were more likely to cite personal networks in the UK (56%) than male Graduate route users (42%). In the qualitative interviews, getting work experience in a globalised country was a primary reason that attracted Graduate route users, although some mentioned that if they were to get better job opportunities elsewhere that could change their decision.

Almost half (49%) of the Graduate route users intending to stay in the UK said that personal networks in the UK such as family and friends attracted them to staying in the UK, and just under half (45%) said that familiarity with British culture or the English language were a factor.

Indian (34%) and Pakistani (39%) Graduate route users were less likely than all other nationalities to have personal networks in the UK attracting them to staying, whilst Chinese Graduate route users were the most likely (56%) to cite such networks as a factor in considering whether or not to stay in the UK. Younger Graduate route users (aged 18 to 24) were more likely to be influenced by having personal networks in the UK (59%), whilst Graduate route users aged 35 to 39, who were more likely to have their own family and dependants, were the least likely (38%).

In the qualitative interviews, UK work culture was thought to offer a better work-life balance than some other countries, and the standard of living was seen as being better than in some respondents' home countries. The geographical location of the UK making it easy to travel around Europe was also frequently mentioned in the qualitative interviews as influential.

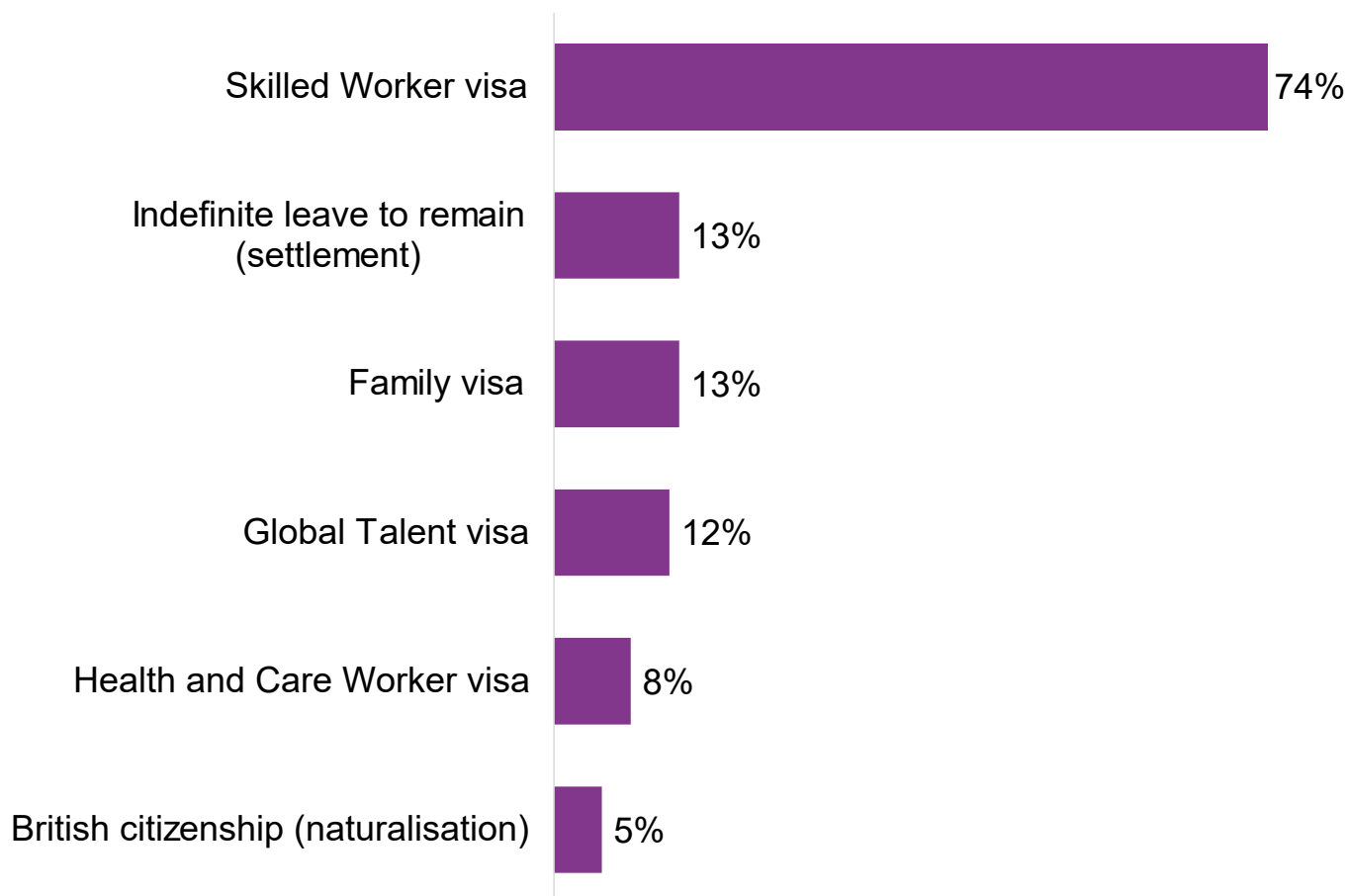
Opportunities for dependants to work was most attractive to Nigerian (16%) and Pakistani (18%) Graduate route users. A majority (65%) of Graduate route users with dependants intended to apply for a further visa because of opportunities for dependants in the UK.

Furthermore, educational opportunities for their children, and stability and consistency for children already enrolled in schools in the UK were other influential factors mentioned by those with dependants in the qualitative interviews.

## **8.3 Visa routes being considered next**

Graduate route users were considering a wide range of visa routes to enable them to remain in the UK. Half (51%) of Graduate route users planned to apply for a further visa, and almost three-quarters of these planned to apply for a Skilled Worker visa. However, as most Graduate route users earned under £30,000 a year (67%), many may require alternative employment to meet the eligibility criteria for the Skilled Worker visa.

**Figure 24: UK visa routes considered for after the end of the Graduate route**



**Base:** F7, All Graduate route users who intend to apply for a further visa (1,553).

Indian (81%) and Pakistani (84%) Graduate route users were more likely to say they plan to apply for a Skilled Worker visa, whilst Chinese Graduate route users were more likely to plan to apply for a Family visa (19%) than any other nationality. Nigerian Graduate route users were more likely to plan to apply for a Global Talent visa (22%) or Health and Care worker visa (18%) compared to any other nationality.

Men were more likely than women to plan to apply for a Skilled Worker visa (81% compared to 67%), whilst women were more likely to plan to apply for a Family visa compared to men (19% and 6% respectively). Graduate route users with dependants were more likely than those without to plan to apply for a Skilled Worker visa (81% compared to 74%) as well as Global Talent visa (19% compared to 12%).

Graduate route users with a Masters were more likely than any other level of study to plan to apply for a Skilled Worker visa (76%). Those with a doctorate level degree were more likely to plan to apply for indefinite leave to remain (46%) compared to average (13%).

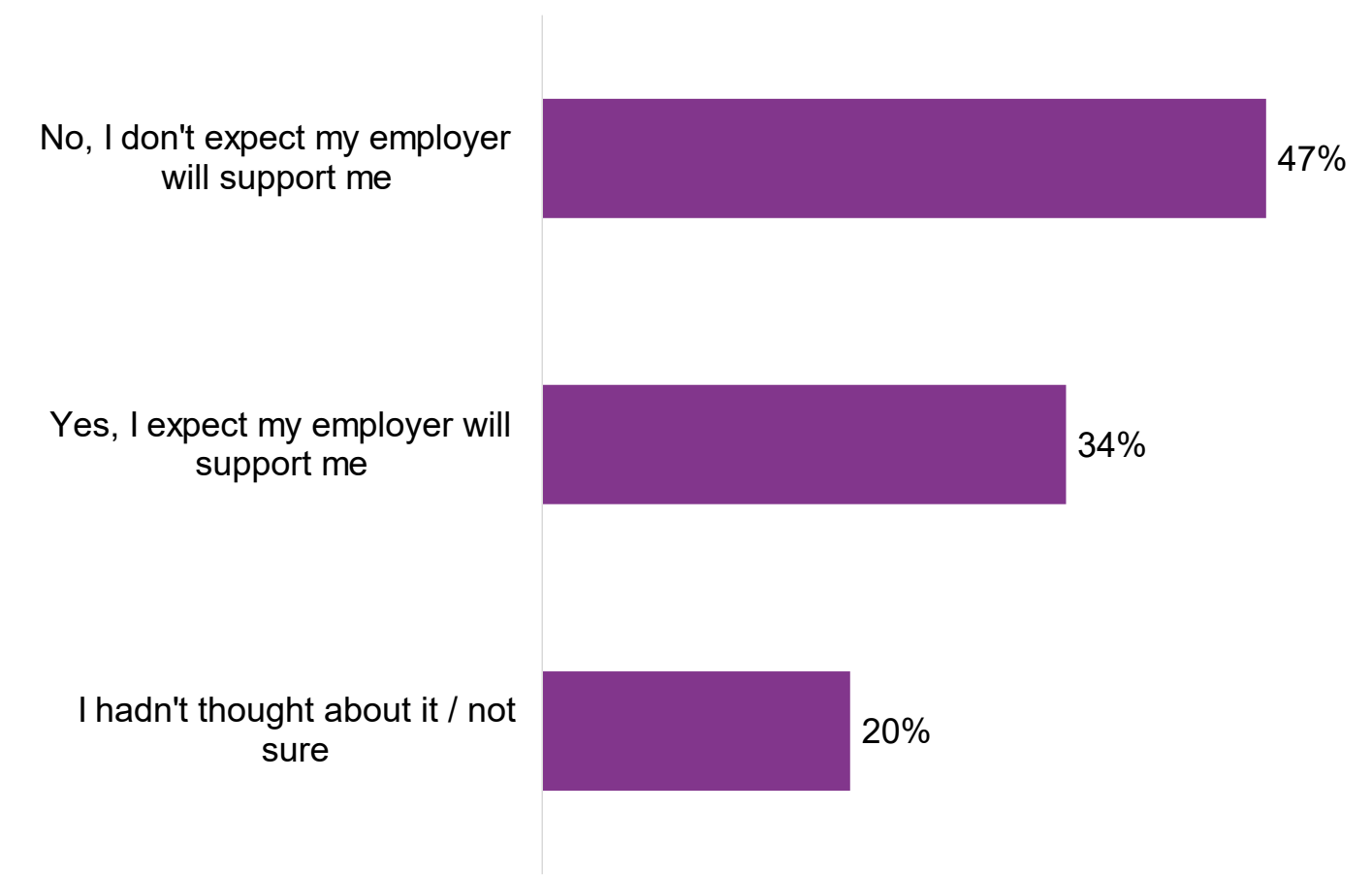
Graduate route users aged 30 to 34 were more likely (20%) than those aged 24 to 29 (9%) and than the average (12%) to plan to apply for a Global Talent visa; this may be due to the visa's requirements for applicants to be endorsed as a leader or

potential leader in the arts, sciences or digital technology, which may require some work experience to demonstrate.

## 8.4 Employer support and sponsorship

Almost half (47%) of Graduate route users currently in work and intending to apply for a further visa did not expect their employer to support them in moving to an alternative visa once their current leave period expires, although around a third (34%) expected they would, and 20% had not thought about it or were not sure.

**Figure 25: Expectations of current employers' support with moving to an alternative visa route after the end of their current leave period**



**Base:** F8, All Graduate route users currently in work and who intend to apply for further visas (158).

Many Graduate route users expressed in the qualitative interviews that they had the initial plan to stay in the UK, but as their leave period expiration date drew closer, they were struggling to find appropriate employment in the UK so may be forced to return to their home country. Some said they were widening their job search to

different roles to find a job that offers sponsorship.

“They’re not offering very much to international students... There’s no way to live here unless you have a proper work visa or a sponsorship job which is really hard to get. Sponsorship is just maybe for engineers, or maybe you’re a civil engineer, or maybe you’re a doctor. Then maybe you get a chance... If I’m not getting either, then I think I’m going back.”

Graduate route user, Pakistan, Masters, no dependants

“Currently, I’m focusing on just doing really well at the job. They are aware of my situation, and I do think they have the license to sponsor, so once I’ve pushed the value (of work) and if they think I’m worth it, I’ll ask if they can sponsor me. I do have 2 years left. If they say a no, I’ll use the second year to try and find something else”.

Graduate route user, India, Masters, has dependants

# Annex 1: Survey respondent demographics

The number of completed surveys by age, nationality and if the respondents had dependants are presented in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 below. Responses were weighted back to the main population profile based on nationality by age (29 and under, and 30 and over), and whether the main applicant had dependants on their visa (rim weights applied).

**Table 1: Survey respondents by age band**

Age band	Total	% (unweighted)
18-24	451	15
25-29	1292	44

<b>30-34</b>	645	22
<b>35-39</b>	324	11
<b>40 and over</b>	239	8

**Source:** Graduate route user survey, IFF Research

**Table 2: Survey respondents by nationality**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% (unweighted)</b>
<b>India</b>	704	24
<b>China</b>	386	13
<b>Nigeria</b>	859	29
<b>Pakistan</b>	359	12
<b>Other nationality not listed above</b>	643	22

**Source:** Graduate route user survey, IFF Research

**Table 3: Survey respondents with dependants**

<b>Dependants associated with visa</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% (unweighted)</b>
<b>Yes</b>	575	19
<b>No</b>	2,376	81

**Source:** Graduate route user survey, IFF Research

Roughly half (51%) of survey respondents were male, and half were female (49%). The majority qualified for the Graduate visa after completing a Masters-level qualification. Around a third had studied a STEM subject (as defined by HESA's Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH)), as illustrated in Table 4 and Table 5.

**Table 4: Survey respondents by qualification level**

Qualification level	Total	% (unweighted)
Undergraduate	291	10
Masters	2,537	86
Doctorate	107	4
Other	2	0

**Source:** Graduate route user survey, IFF Research

**Table 5: Survey respondents by subject type**

Subject type	Total	% (unweighted)
STEM	987	34
Non-STEM	1,940	66

**Source:** Graduate route user survey, IFF Research

The majority (98%) of Graduate route users did not have dependants on their visa. One in 50 (2%) had dependants in the UK, and a further 4% had a partner and/or children living outside the UK.

1. [Student visa: Views of students and higher education institutions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) ↵
2. [Analysis of migrants' use of the Graduate route - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) ↵

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