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for Education

Growing Up in the 2020s: first survey of young people and their families at age 12 and 13

Research report

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Glossary

Term	Definition
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
ANOVA	Analysis of variance; a statistical test used to compare means across three or more groups.
AOEG	Any other ethnic group (a broad category used in some analyses).
CI	Confidence interval; a range that indicates statistical uncertainty around an estimate.
Cohort study	A study that follows the same group of participants over time to measure change and identify predictors of later outcomes.
Cognitive assessment (Matrix Reasoning)	A non-verbal reasoning task used in this study to measure abstract problem-solving (fluid intelligence).
DfE	Department for Education.
Disparities	Differences in experiences or outcomes between groups (for example by FSM eligibility, SEN status, sex, ethnicity, or region).
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions.
EAL	English as an additional language.
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation.
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan; a statutory plan for children and young people with more complex special educational needs.
EOPS	Education and Outcomes Pathways Studies; a suite of Department for Education - commissioned cohort studies.
EOPS Early Years	The early years cohort in the EOPS programme (also referred to as <i>Children of the 2020s</i>).
EOPS Primary	The primary school cohort in the EOPS programme (also referred to as <i>Five to Twelve</i>).
EOPS Secondary	The secondary school cohort in the EOPS programme (also referred to as <i>Growing Up in the 2020s</i>).

FSM	Free school meals; in this report used as a proxy indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage based on administrative eligibility records.
GAD-2	Generalised Anxiety Disorder 2-item scale; a brief screening measure for anxiety symptoms.
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education; a qualification typically taken at age 15/16 in England.
HBSC	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study; an international survey programme used for national comparisons in some contexts.
HMRC	His Majesty's Revenue and Customs.
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index; an area-based deprivation measure (higher deciles indicate greater disadvantage).
KS2	Key Stage 2; end-of-primary assessments (typically at age 10-11 years old).
Longitudinal	Collected from the same participants repeatedly over time.
n or n=	Refers to sample size for a given analysis, or the number of participants.
NHS	National Health Service.
NHS Digital	The organisation that produces (among other outputs) national statistical reports such as the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England series.
NPD	National Pupil Database; administrative education records used for sampling, linkage, and analysis (for example FSM, SEN, attendance, and attainment).
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification; an occupational classification used to describe socioeconomic position.
OECD modified equivalence scale	A standard method to adjust household income for household size and composition (used to compute equivalised income).
ONS	Office for National Statistics.
Oversampling	Sampling approach that selects a higher proportion of a subgroup (for example FSM-

	eligible pupils) to ensure sufficient numbers for analysis.
Parent A / main parent or carer	The primary parent/carers who completed the household interview (defined in the methodology section).
Parent B	An additional resident parent/carers who completed the follow-up web survey where applicable.
Persistent absence	Missing 10% or more of possible school sessions over a period (DfE definition).
PHQ-8	Patient Health Questionnaire 8-item scale; a measure of depressive symptoms.
RQF	Regulated Qualifications Framework; a system for comparing levels of qualifications in England.
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; a screening tool covering emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer problems, and prosocial behaviour.
SEN	Special educational needs; in this report based on NPD records of SEN support (with or without an EHCP), alongside parent-reported information in some sections.
t-test	A statistical test used to compare average values (means) between two groups.
Universal Credit	A means-tested benefit; eligibility is related to entitlement to some support measures and can be linked to FSM eligibility rules.
Weighting	A statistical adjustment applied so the achieved sample better reflects the target population (for example year 8 pupils in England).

Executive Summary

This report presents the first findings from *Growing Up in the 2020s* (EOPS Secondary), a new national longitudinal study following young people in England from age 12 and 13 through secondary school and into early adulthood. The study is part of the Department for Education's wider programme of Education Outcome Pathway Studies, which include also EOPS Early Years (Children of the 2020s) and EOPS Primary (Five to Twelve). The first year of data collection (wave 1) establishes a nationally representative baseline of young people's lives in year 8 of secondary school. Drawing on information from nearly 8,000 young people, their parents/carers and teachers, alongside cognitive assessments and linked administrative records, it provides one of the most comprehensive contemporary pictures of year 8 pupils currently available in England. The study captures multiple aspects of young people's lives, including physical and mental health, family relationships, peer experiences, school engagement, cognitive development, enrichment activities and digital lives. It documents early inequalities in experiences and outcomes across key groups (including free school meal (FSM) eligibility, special educational needs (SEN) provision, sex, ethnicity, parental education and region).

This evidence is particularly important because today's adolescents are growing up in a markedly different context from previous generations. The COVID-19 pandemic, rapid technological change, the increasing role of social media in everyday life, and growing concerns about young people's mental health have all altered the landscape of adolescence. *Growing Up in the 2020s* provides an opportunity to understand how young people are navigating these challenges and opportunities, and how inequalities develop and change over time.

Wave 1 fieldwork (January-June 2025) collected data from young people, parents/carers and teachers, combined with cognitive assessment and linkage to administrative education records. The cohort closely reflects the national year 8 population, showing close alignment with national population benchmarks across key demographic characteristics such as age, sex, ethnicity, region and SEN status and SEN provision. Survey weights were also applied to account for the study design and differential response rates, ensuring that findings are representative of year 8 pupils in England in 2025.

The study also provides robust population estimates across a number of domains where contemporary evidence is limited, including mental health, school belonging, attendance, sleep, physical activity, peer relationships and digital engagement. For some topics, these findings represent the most up-to-date evidence currently available for this age group; for others, they provide insight into emerging aspects of young people's lives that have rarely been measured at population level.

Key findings

Most young people reported positive relationships with family and friends, generally high life satisfaction, good sleep duration and positive experiences of school. Most also reported settling into secondary school successfully. Specifically:

- 94% felt neutral or happy with life overall
- 98% felt neutral or happy with their family relationships
- 95% felt neutral or happy with their friendships
- 90% reported getting at least eight hours of sleep on a typical weekday
- 71% agreed or strongly agreed that they keep trying when they find something difficult

However, the findings also highlight a number of important challenges and inequalities, such as:

- around one in four young people (25%) met criteria for a probable mental health disorder
- nearly one in five (19%) met the threshold for persistent absence from school
- around one-third (37%) did not agree that they felt a sense of belonging at school
- only 17% met the recommended guideline of at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day
- daily online contact with friends was more common than daily in-person contact (28% compared with 12%)
- only around one-third (31%) of young people who experienced bullying were confident that school staff were aware of it

The study also identified clear and consistent inequalities across multiple domains. Young people eligible for FSM and those receiving SEN provision consistently reported less favourable experiences and outcomes across health, wellbeing, family circumstances, peer relationships and education. For example:

- 36% of FSM-eligible young people met criteria for a probable mental health disorder, compared with 20% of their peers
- 54% of young people receiving SEN provision met criteria for a probable mental health disorder, compared with 17% of those without SEN
- 34% of FSM-eligible pupils met the threshold for persistent absence, compared with 13% of non-FSM pupils

- young people eligible for FSM and those receiving SEN provision were also less likely to report strong school belonging, participated in fewer enrichment activities, experienced higher levels of bullying, and reported poorer physical health and wellbeing

These disparities were evident not only in young people's own reports but also in teacher assessments, parental reports, cognitive assessments and administrative records. Differences linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, SEN and prior attainment were visible across home, school and wider social environments.

Implications

The findings suggest that many of the inequalities that shape young people's lives are already well established by the start of secondary school. Differences in mental health, cognitive development, family resources, peer relationships, school engagement and attendance are not isolated issues but often cluster together, creating cumulative advantages and disadvantages for different groups of young people.

At the same time, the findings provide a nuanced picture of adolescent life; while concerns about mental health, attendance and disadvantage are well founded, most young people report positive relationships, good wellbeing and successful adjustment to secondary school. Understanding both strengths and challenges is essential for supporting young people effectively.

Going forward

These Wave 1 results provide a baseline against which future waves can identify change and help distinguish whether gaps widen, narrow or persist. The additional value of Growing Up in the 2020s will emerge through future waves of data collection, which will allow the study to track how young people's experiences evolve across adolescence and into early adulthood.

Future waves will help identify whether inequalities widen, narrow or remain stable over time, and will provide new evidence about how family circumstances, school experiences, peer relationships, health and digital lives interact to shape educational progress, wellbeing and longer-term outcomes. Together, these findings will provide an important evidence base for policymakers, practitioners and researchers seeking to improve young people's lives and reduce inequalities.

Introduction

Background

Rationale for the Growing Up in the 2020s study

Growing Up in the 2020s is the first comprehensive cohort study of secondary school-aged children in England since the Covid-19 pandemic. It is part of a suite of cohort studies commissioned by DfE known as the Education Outcome Pathway Studies (EOPS). Growing Up in the 2020s is the secondary school cohort in this suite. The secondary school years mark a significant period of educational, social and emotional development and a time in which young people have to navigate a range of physical and environment changes, not least of these, the transition into adolescence. At this age, alongside the biological changes that accompany adolescence, young people's social relationships with friends begin to take more prominence, and their relationship to their educational progression also changes as they begin to take increasing responsibility for their own learning within and outside of school. As such adolescence has long been recognised as a period of change and increasing autonomy for young people. However, recent years have also introduced a range of new factors that will shape young people's personal experiences and their outcomes during this period.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed many aspects of childhood and adolescence. As a result, young people growing up in the 2020s may experience and navigate adolescence differently from previous generations. Young people involved in the Growing Up in the 2020s study were in Year 3 (aged 7-8 years) when the pandemic began. Many experienced substantial disruption to their education through school closures, remote learning and periods of isolation, alongside fundamental changes to how learning was delivered and supported. Investigation of how this cohort navigates this period of development, and their outcomes during secondary school and beyond, is therefore timely.

There have also been rapid changes to young people's social worlds in recent years, with the increasing sophistication of social media platforms and the widespread availability of smartphones meaning that online interaction now forms a central part of many adolescents' daily lives. While this is an emerging area of learning, studies have pointed to both helpful and challenging aspects of the time young people spend online (Singh et al., 2026). What is beginning to emerge is a more nuanced picture where not all time spent online is harmful but an association between problematic or more intensive/compulsive use of social media and poor mental health and wellbeing is becoming more evident. Again, many current studies are limited in terms of the insight they can provide due to limitations in the measurement of online behaviours.

These limitations include reliance on solely self-reported time spent online without means to corroborate the accuracy of these reports, which are often very broad measures of time spent online, and a reliance on cross sectional data with a lack of longitudinal follow up. Additional limitations include challenges with measuring problematic use of phones and social media related to a lack of consensus in the concept, and limited measures that are validated for use in children and young people.

Alongside these changes to young people's social interactions in the digital world, there is the growing presence and ubiquity of artificial intelligence (AI). Currently the picture is still emerging, the coming years will be a critical period in which to understand how such technologies are encountered, used and experienced by young people, and how they interact with existing educational and social inequalities.

Finally, the last 10 years have marked a period of rapid escalation in the prevalence of mental health problems in children and young people. Prior to 2017 it was estimated that around 1 in 10 children and young people experienced mental health problems. However, from most recent reports, the estimated figures for those who experience probable mental disorder is much closer to 1 in 5 (NHS Digital, 2023a). While a range of potential explanations have been proposed – the pandemic, the presence of social media, increasing academic pressures, reductions in youth services and global events (Pierce et al., 2025) – it remains a challenge to delineate the contribution of these factors to young people's mental health. Insights around the continuing trend in adolescent mental health and wellbeing and its drivers is, therefore, a pressing priority.

Taken together, these changes suggest that young people growing up in the 2020s are navigating adolescence under markedly different conditions from previous cohorts. Adolescence is a key developmental period in which patterns of engagement with education, wellbeing, relationships and aspirations become more established and begin to shape longer-term pathways into further education, employment and adult health (Kessler et al., 2005; Patel et al., 2007). A central concern for policy is that these early differences are not evenly distributed across the population. Socioeconomic disadvantage, SEN and other forms of inequality are consistently associated with differences in educational progress, wellbeing and longer-term life chances (Bukodi, Goldthorpe and Zhao, 2021; Nieuwenhuis, Kleinepier and van Ham, 2021; Schoon, Burger and Cook, 2021). Understanding how these inequalities emerge and develop over time is therefore a core purpose of longitudinal research. Previous studies such as the Longitudinal Studies of Young People in England (LSYPE, LSYPE2) and the Millennium Cohort Study have provided valuable insights; however, they reflect earlier contexts. There is a clear need for contemporary evidence that captures the experiences of young people

growing up in the post-pandemic, digitally connected and economically changing landscape of the 2020s.

Growing Up in the 2020s is well positioned to respond to this gap, with a central focus on understanding how disadvantage shapes young people's experiences and outcomes. The study is explicitly structured to examine differences by socioeconomic background, SEN and other characteristics, recognising that inequalities in resources, relationships and opportunities are closely linked to educational attainment and wellbeing, and often widen over time. Through its longitudinal design, following the same cohort of young people across their secondary school years and into early adulthood. This approach enables the study to capture change over time, identify emerging patterns and disentangle how experiences at different stages of adolescence shape later outcomes with a particular focus on how these processes differ for groups experiencing disadvantage.

A key strength of the study lies in its integrated design, bringing together information from multiple informants (young people, parents and carers and teachers) alongside cognitive assessments, linkage to administrative records around attendance and attainment, and even 'deep dives' with a subset of young people exploring online behaviour. To minimise participant burden, data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) were used wherever possible (e.g. prior attainment, absence and exclusion), with self-report items included to supplement and enrich these data – for example, by capturing reasons for absence. This multi-informant, multi-method approach allows for a rich and reliable understanding of young people's development during this period.

The breadth of topics incorporated further strengthens the study's capacity to inform policy and practice. Data spanning school experiences, family circumstances and relationships, mental health and wellbeing, and educational engagement using the most robust and widely used measures available will enable analysis of how different aspects of young people's lives interact to influence trajectories over time and, where possible, compare these to corresponding data from previous cohorts.

The inclusion of objective measures also strengthens the approach. Cognitive assessments provide an important opportunity to understand the relationship between cognitive abilities and academic experiences and outcomes, and how these relationships vary by socio-economic background.

The nationally representative sample ensures that findings will reflect the experiences of young people across England and allow for the exploration of inequalities in experience and outcomes for specific groups of young people. Taken together, these features position Growing Up in the 2020s as a key source of contemporary evidence for understanding adolescence in the current decade and for informing future research, policy and practice.

Study aims and objectives

The primary aim of the study is to generate robust longitudinal evidence on how adolescents' environments and lived experiences during the secondary school years shape their educational pathways and wellbeing in both the short and longer term.

The study has a number of objectives:

- to follow the same cohort of young people from age 12 and 13 years old and their families over several years in order to understand developmental change and continuity from early adolescence into young adulthood
- to integrate perspectives from multiple informants, including young people, their families and teachers, in order to develop a comprehensive picture of young people's everyday lives and contexts across home and school settings
- to create a high-quality longitudinal dataset that serves as a rich learning resource, available to researchers and analysts both within the Department for Education and to the wider research community, to support ongoing evidence generation, policy development and academic research
- specifically, it will be able to deliver insights around:
 - how young people's experiences of school, home life, the digital world, and peer and adult relationships during adolescence influence their educational engagement, attainment and wellbeing outcomes
 - the critical transition from compulsory education into post-16 destinations, including further education, training, employment or other pathways, and to explore young people's trajectories during this period
- the mechanisms underlying the relationship between socio-economic and educational disadvantage, enabled by oversampling young people who are socio-economically disadvantaged (defined by free school meal (FSM) eligibility) to ensure sufficient statistical power for analysis

This study sits within a wider suite of Education and Outcome Pathways Studies (EOPS) spanning the years from birth into early adulthood. This suite of studies was commissioned by the Department for Education to develop and to strengthen the evidence base regarding children's development, learning and wellbeing ([Education and outcomes pathways studies \(EOPS\) - GOV.UK](#)). Three studies to date comprise the EOPS programme:

- [Children of the 2020s](#), or EOPS Early Years, covering the first five years of child development

- [Five to Twelve](#), or EOPS Primary, covering the primary school years and the transition to secondary school
- and the current study – [Growing Up in the 2020s](#), also known as EOPS Secondary, which covers secondary school and the transition into the post 16 years

Report outline and structure

The aim of this report is to provide the first overview of findings from Wave 1 of Growing Up in the 2020s. It establishes an initial picture of young people's lives at the start of secondary school and creates a baseline that future waves of the study will build on to track change over time, identify emerging trends, and understand how early behaviours and experiences relate to later education and wellbeing outcomes. Specifically, this report:

- sets out what the study tells us so far about young people's behaviours and experiences that are important to their future outcomes, including their school engagement and experiences, mental health and wellbeing, family life, peer relationships, use of digital technology, and early indicators of learning and development. This provides a starting point for understanding how these areas may shape outcomes as the cohort gets older.
- highlights where experiences and outcomes differ between different groups of young people, for example by sex, ethnicity and socio-economic circumstances, helping to identify emerging inequalities and areas where additional support may be needed.
- showcases the breadth and richness of the information collected through the study, demonstrating how the dataset can be used to explore how different aspects of young people's lives connect to one another and to future trajectories. Future waves will build on this by enabling analysis of how these experiences change over time and how they influence later attainment, wellbeing and transitions beyond school.
- identifies priority areas for further investigation as the study progresses, highlighting how future data collections will deepen understanding of young people's development and experiences and support more detailed longitudinal analysis.

The report begins by providing an overview of how the study was carried out at Wave 1 and how it will continue in future waves (with signposting to the technical report for readers who require more detailed methodological information). It also

describes who took part in the study at Wave 1, including key demographic characteristics such as sex, ethnicity and indicators of disadvantage, to provide context for interpreting the findings and understanding how they reflect the wider population of young people in England.

This report is informed by ecological perspectives on child development (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasise that young people's development is shaped by interactions within and across the different social contexts in which they live. These include immediate settings such as family, peers and school, as well as wider context and influences, and the connections between these contexts, which may also change over time.

In this report, this perspective is used primarily as a way to organise the wide range of experiences and outcomes captured in Growing Up in the 2020s, rather than to provide a detailed application of ecological theory. Ecological approaches offer a more extensive framework for understanding how different contexts interact and jointly influence development. Exploring these processes in depth is beyond the scope of this baseline report but will be revisited in future analyses as longitudinal data become available.

To support clarity, findings are grouped into four broad themes that reflect key areas of young people's lives: 1) the young person, 2) family and peers, 3) school and education, and 4) wider context and influences. This structure provides a practical framework for presenting the baseline findings, while recognising that these domains are interconnected and jointly shape young people's development and outcomes.

The report is structured around the layered conceptual framework described earlier, with chapters organised according to different domains of young people's lives (for example, individual development, family and peers, school, and wider context and influences). As a result, findings relating to a particular aspect of young people's experiences or educational outcomes may be distributed across multiple chapters rather than presented in a single section. For example, issues relating to learning and engagement appear across school experiences, family resources and support, digital engagement, attendance, and wellbeing. This structure reflects the interconnected nature of the influences shaping young people's development and educational trajectories.

The report is structured as follows:

[Chapter 1](#) (this Chapter) has introduced the study, conceptual framework and methodology, including information on the sample, data collection, weighting and analytical approach.

[Chapter 2](#) presents the baseline descriptive profile of the cohort, including demographic characteristics, socioeconomic circumstances and educational needs.

[Chapter 3](#) focuses on the young person, including physical health, mental health and wellbeing, health-related behaviours, and cognitive development.

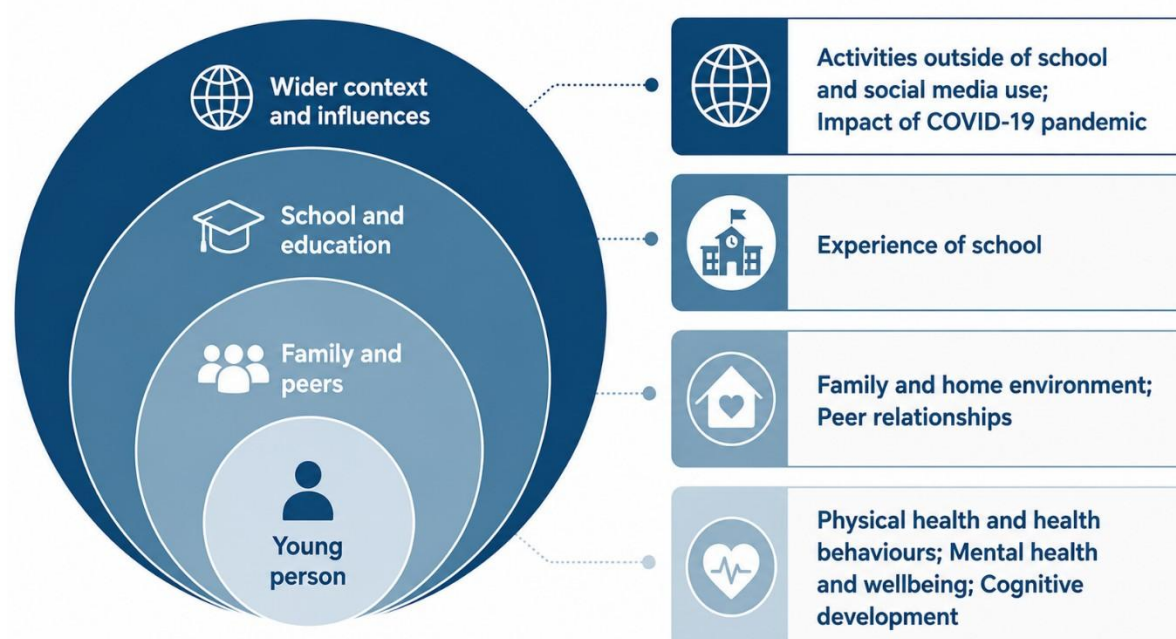
[Chapter 4](#) examines family and peer relationships, including family context, parental wellbeing, peer support and bullying.

[Chapter 5](#) explores young people's experiences of school and education, including school belonging, engagement, attendance, exclusion and aspirations.

[Chapter 6](#) considers wider context and influences, including extracurricular activities, self-reported social media use and the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Chapter 7](#) discusses the overall findings, strengths and limitations of the study, and implications for future waves of Growing Up in the 2020s.

Figure 1: An ecological framework for Growing Up in the 2020s



Based on these thematic areas. The report is structured as follows:

Baseline description of the cohort

[Chapter 2](#) provides an overview of the key characteristics of cohort members prior to exploring the main thematic findings of the report. It describes the composition of the sample and, where possible, compares these characteristics to national figures to

speak to the representativeness of the sample. The baseline description is split into two sections: one describing characteristics relating specifically to the young person and one describing characteristics relating to the family, or household.

Findings chapters

Consistent with the layered conceptual framework, the main findings chapters are organised thematically across four broad domains of young people's lives:

[Chapter 3: Young person](#)

- physical health and health behaviours – including physical health; health conditions; sleep; physical activity; alcohol use, smoking and vaping; and physical activity
- mental health and wellbeing – including life satisfaction, resilience and mental health
- cognitive development – including results from the cognitive assessment (matrix reasoning) completed by young people

[Chapter 4: Family and peers](#)

- family and home environment – including family relationships (parent-child and inter-parental); parental monitoring and awareness; parental physical health, mental health, and health behaviours; parental work-life balance; parental involvement in education and resources and support for home-based learning
- peer relationships – including friendships, peer relationships, contact with friends; peer acceptance; prosocial behaviour; teacher-rated peer relationships and bullying

[Chapter 5: School and education](#)

- experience of school – including school wellbeing, safety and belonging; school experience and engagement; academic challenge, homework, behaviour disruption, punctuality; absence; exclusion; relationships with teachers, experience of transition; academic aspirations; academic attainment; and school policies and ethos

[Chapter 6: Wider context and influences](#)

- activities outside of school and social media use– including engagement in term time activities, reading for enjoyment, and self-reported social media use

- impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – including school attendance during lockdowns and impact of the pandemic on academic progress, wellbeing or social relationships

Whilst the scope for ‘wider context and influences’ is limited in this first wave and reflects interactions with other layers of the framework; it is anticipated that this will be broadened in future waves of the study.

The report is not intended to give an exhaustive account of every study variable, but instead it presents a descriptive account of key variables within each theme, which have been prioritised on the basis of their centrality to educational, mental health and wellbeing outcomes and their policy relevance. Full details of Wave 1 measures and variable coverage will be available separately through the study documentation and technical materials.

Each subsection within the findings section will include the cross-cutting theme of disparities. This means that, where relevant and appropriate, variables will be cut by a range of potential subgroups, described in more detail in the next section:

- FSM eligibility
- parental education level
- SEN provision in school
- ethnicity
- sex
- prior attainment
- geographical region

Overview of wave 1 methodology and reporting

Growing Up in the 2020s follows a random sample of young people attending a state school (or alternative state provision) who were in year 8 in the academic year 2024 to 2025. The sample for Wave 1 was drawn from the National Pupil Database (NPD). The main stage fieldwork for Wave 1 took place between January and June 2025. High-level details are included here but full technical details of the methodology applied can be found in the [Technical Report](#).

Wave 1 fieldwork

Wave 1 fieldwork incorporated the following components:

- a 20-minute face-to-face interview with the young person's main parent/carer to collect household information. The interview was carried out with a parent/carer who the child lived with at least 50 per cent of the time and was knowledgeable about the child's school life, health and development. Where more than one parent or carer met these criteria, the main parent/carer was the person available to complete the household survey. This parent is referred to in this report as the main parent/carer (also known as 'Parent A'). During the interview, these parents/carers were asked to give their consent for the interviewer to ask the cohort young person to participate in an interview, and for them and the young person to take part in other aspects of the study.
- a 20-minute web survey with up to two parents/carers living with the participating young person. The web surveys were completed by the main parent/carer and – where applicable – their co-resident partner.
- a 30-minute face-to-face interview with the participating young person, of which a number of subsections with questions of a more sensitive nature (e.g., mental health) were offered for self-completion, not mediated by the interviewer.
- subject to consent, the interview also included completion of a standardised cognitive assessment by the young person, known as the Matrix Reasoning Test.
- subject to consent, young people also provided the name of their form tutor (or an equivalent teacher) who were later invited to complete a 15-20-minute web survey.
- a sub-set of participating young people (and the relevant parent) were asked to give their consent for the child to take part in the Internet Use Sub-study, in which young people were asked to download an app to their mobile phone, which monitored all their internet activity. They were asked to leave the app running for 28 days. The data from the Internet Use Sub-study is not presented in this report; rather, in-depth analysis will be undertaken in the first themed report.
- participating parents were also informed that administrative records held about them and their child by the DfE would be linked to their survey answers unless they opted out of this data linkage. Only the child's DfE records are included in the current report.
- parents were also asked for consent for administrative records about them held by NHS England, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be linked to their answers. These additional administrative records are not included in the current report.

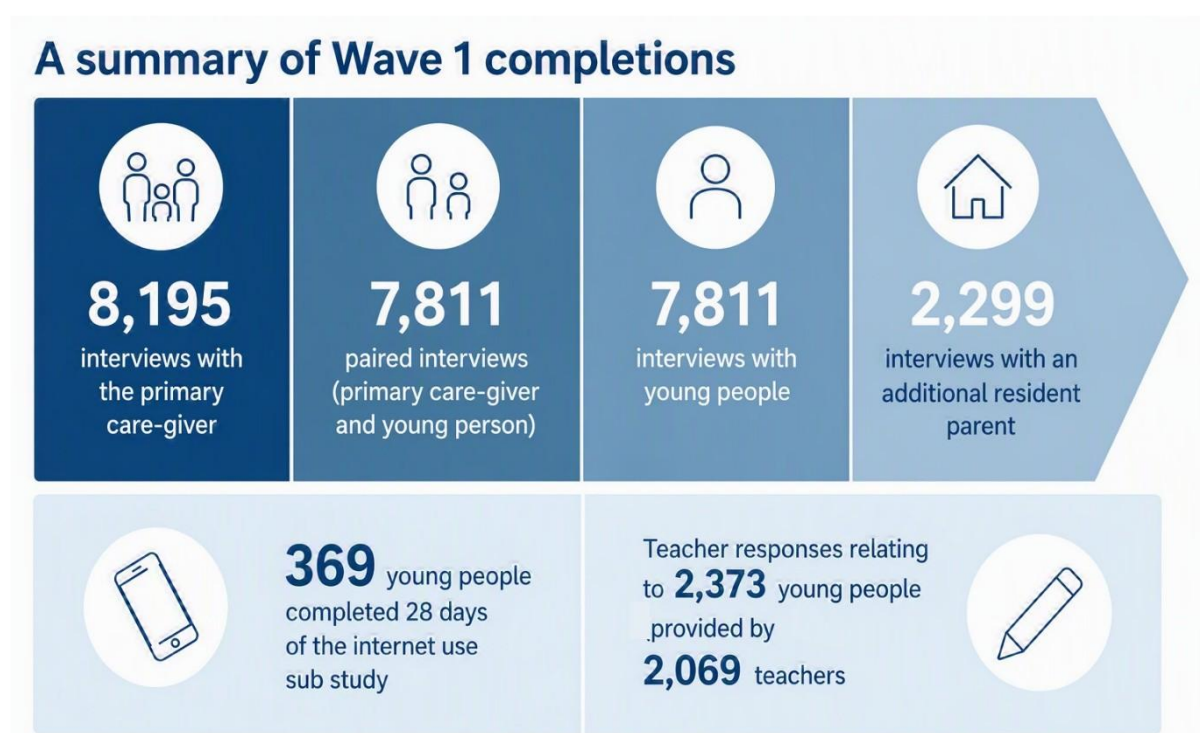
The sample was intentionally boosted to ensure sufficient representation of socio-economically disadvantaged young people by over-sampling young people eligible for FSM. However, weights have been applied for the current report to reflect a nationally representative cohort in terms of both the paired parent and young person responses, and the teacher responses.

Wave 1 fieldwork resulted in:

- 8,195 interviews with the main parent/carer (Parent A)
- 2,299 interviews with an additional resident parent (Parent B)
- 7,811 interviews with young people
- a total sample of 7,811 paired interviews were completed (main parent/carer and young person both completing surveys)
- a total of 2,069 teachers took part in Wave 1, commenting on the progress of 2,373 cohort young people
- the Internet Use Sub-study collected data for the full 28-day period from 369 cohort young people, and from a further 100 participated for less than 28 days

For the purposes of this report responses for the main parent/carer are only included if there is a paired young person interview (i.e., 7,811 parents). this report prioritises the YP data but does include parent and teacher insights where relevant. This report prioritises Parent A data; Parent B data is not included but will provide valuable insights for secondary in-depth analysis.

Figure 2: A summary of Wave 1 completions



All fieldwork was carried out between January and October 2025 (see Table 1 and see [Technical Report](#) for full details). Household interviews spanned January to May; the Internet Use Sub-study spanned March to September, and the teacher surveys spanned May to October 2025.

Table 1: Timeline of Wave 1 fieldwork

Wave 1 fieldwork	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Household interviews*										
Internet use sub study										
Teacher surveys										

Note. Includes parents/carers and the young person.

Approach to measurement

As with any cohort study Growing Up in the 2020s has sought to strike a balance between breadth and depth; covering the wide range of factors that shape adolescent development – and are consistent with study aims – while also collecting robust, high-quality information in key areas. The study therefore combines established, standardised measures with targeted individual questions to build a rounded picture of young people's lives.

Standardised measures are used in areas where reliable, well-tested tools exist, such as mental health and cognitive development. These allow us to summarise responses in a consistent way and compare findings with other research. Alongside

these, the study includes carefully selected single questions on important experiences (for example, feelings of belonging or experiences within relationships) where brief, direct measures are often the most appropriate and least burdensome for participants.

Where possible, surveys draw on questions and measures that have already been used in major national and international studies. This helps ensure that the data collected are credible and comparable, allowing findings from Growing Up in the 2020s to be interpreted alongside other research and strengthening their value for policy and practice over time. In addition, in some instances, it has been necessary to create or adapt new questionnaire items where existing measures were not already developed and tested.

Seven core measures are used throughout this report to examine disparities in educational and wellbeing outcomes, a central aim of Growing Up in the 2020s. Two measures capture household socioeconomic circumstances – eligibility for FSM and parental education – while three reflect demographic characteristics: sex, ethnicity and region. The remaining two focus on educational factors: SEN and Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment, which provide insight into prior achievement and the persistence of disadvantage over time.

Eligibility for FSM

Eligibility for FSM is commonly used as a proxy indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage, as it is directly linked to receipt of means-tested benefits and to thresholds for low household income. Research and official statistics consistently show associations between FSM eligibility and lower educational attainment (Sylva et al, 2014; Shaw et al, 2017; Classick et al, 2021; House of Commons Library, 2025), higher rates of exclusion (Department for Education 2025e), and increased absence (Department for Education, 2026), including greater levels of unauthorised absence after controlling for other factors (Department for Education 2023b; van Poortvliet, 2026). Its strengths lie in its national coverage, and availability across cohorts and time. However, as a binary indicator, FSM masks variation in the circumstances of eligible households and those close to the eligibility threshold, and does not capture the full socioeconomic gradient. FSM has been found to be a better proxy for disadvantage in some geographical areas, such as areas that incorporate automation into the process rather than requiring parents to actively register their eligibility (Campbell and Cooper, 2025). For these reasons, the study draws on a range of other more differentiated measures of socioeconomic disadvantage including parental education, which is also used as a cross-cutting measure (described in more detail below), as well as household income, parental occupation, subjective financial circumstances, financial strain, and local area deprivation (described in more detail in the baseline profile section).

The FSM variable used in this report is current eligibility, as recorded in the Department for Education's NPD summer census of academic year 2024 to 2025, which is concurrent with the wave 1 data collection when participants were in year 8. To minimise missingness, cases with missing data on FSM eligibility in the 2025 summer census substituted data from the 2024 summer census if available. This measure includes pupils who are currently eligible for FSM as well as those who qualified under earlier criteria and remain protected. From April 2018, eligibility rules were revised to introduce an earnings cap alongside receipt of certain means-tested benefits. However, pupils who were eligible under the benefits-based criteria retained their entitlement regardless of subsequent changes in household circumstances, including increases in income. These transitional protections, which were introduced alongside the rollout of Universal Credit to provide stability for families, are in place until the end of the 2025/26 academic year. The proportion of year 8 students recorded as FSM-eligible has risen from 16.1% in 2018/19 to 29.2% in 2024 to 2025 (Department for Education, 2025f). This increase likely reflects both changes to eligibility criteria and wider economic factors, the relative contributions of which cannot be readily disentangled. As a result, the FSM-eligible group may now include some families whose financial circumstances have improved since first qualifying. For this reason, the baseline profile examines FSM eligibility alongside other sociodemographic measures - such as income, parental education, deprivation and family structure - to assess the degree of overlap between these indicators.

Parental education

Among the range of socioeconomic indicators linked to young people's attainment and broader educational outcomes, parental education is often the strongest predictor, including of GCSE performance, mathematics achievement, and reduced likelihood of being NEET (Bukodi, Goldthorpe and Zhao, 2021; Sylva et al., 2014; Evans and Field, 2020; Nieuwenhuis, Kleinepier, and van Ham, 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2014). It is also one of the most notable factors associated with school absence (Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2020; Shaw and Morris, 2020).

Throughout this report, parental education is measured as the highest academic or vocational qualification held by the child's main parent or carer, mapped onto the Regulated Qualifications Framework, following the approach used in the Five to Twelve study. A three-category variable distinguishes between a high level of parental education (degree-level or higher, RQF levels 6, 7 and 8), a medium level (equivalent to GCSE or A-levels, RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5) and a low level of parental education (level 1, entry level, no qualifications or other qualifications including overseas).

Sex

Sex is associated with attainment, with girls typically achieving higher grades than boys (Sammons et al., 2014; Sylva et al., 2014). Over the longer term, girls consistently outperform boys at GCSE, though the attainment gap has narrowed in recent years, declining from 6.6 percentage points in 2018/19 to 3.1 percentage points in 2024 to 2025. Boys are more likely to be identified with SEN and to experience suspension or exclusion. On the other hand, girls tend to experience higher levels of mental health difficulties and lower well-being than boys, with the gap widening in late adolescence (NHS Digital, 2023a; Chollet, Fédia, and O'Neill, 2025). Girls are also more likely than boys to be absent for unauthorised reasons after controlling for other factors (Department for Education 2023b; van Poortvliet, 2026).

Throughout this report, sex is measured using the NPD indicator recorded by schools, drawn from the summer 2023 to 2024 census when the sample was selected¹. For the small number of pupils who opted out of NPD linkage (n=14), parent-reported sex at birth was used. In addition, the study collects self-reported gender identity from young people (see baseline cohort profile for further detail).

Ethnicity

Ethnic differences are evident across several indicators of school engagement and attainment. In 2024 to 2025, Asian students were substantially more likely to achieve grade 5 or above in English and mathematics (57%) than White (44%), Black (43%), Mixed (47%), or other ethnic background students (45%) (Department for Education, 2025f). Aspirations may partly contribute to these gaps, as research shows that those from ethnic minority backgrounds are over-represented among students with higher aspirations (McCulloch, 2017). After controlling for other risk factors, White students are more likely than students from all other ethnic groups to be absent for unauthorised reasons (Department for Education 2023b). However, suspension and permanent exclusion rates are higher among some ethnic groups, notably Gypsy/Roma and Irish Travellers, followed by White and Black Caribbean students, while rates are lowest among Chinese students. In this report, ethnicity is measured using the NPD indicator from the summer 2024 to 2025 census (substituting 2023 to 2024 where necessary), with five main categories (Asian, Black, Mixed, White, and other) used as a cross-cutting measure.

¹ The 2023 to 2024 data were used to minimise missingness, as there were no missing cases. This differs from our approach for FSM, SEN and ethnicity, where we used the most recent NPD data (2024 to 2025), as these characteristics either change over time or we would expect the latest information to be most accurate. For sex, there was no clear advantage to using the more recent data given the presence of missing values in the NPD 2024 to 2025 data.

Region

Educational outcomes also vary across regions of England, underlining the importance of place in shaping educational trajectories and the potential for geographically targeted policy responses. A notable example is London, which has consistently performed above the national average since the early 2000s, despite comparatively high levels of disadvantage (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2019; Cardim-Dias and Sibieta, 2022; Education Endowment Foundation, 2015). This difference is particularly evident among disadvantaged pupils, who achieved higher GCSE scores than their peers elsewhere (Macleod et al., 2015). London's relatively strong performance is shown to have persisted following the COVID-19 pandemic (Hayes and Vincent, 2025). However, this pattern is not uniform across all indicators of educational engagement; for example, students in London are more likely than those in the North East and North West to be absent for unauthorised reasons after controlling for other factors (Department for Education 2023b). In this report, region is measured in relation to the nine Government Office Regions of England: the North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, London, South East and the South West.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Official statistics and prior research demonstrate substantial disparities in educational outcomes for pupils with SEN. By age 16, secondary-age pupils with SEN are, on average, more than two years behind their peers without SEN (Hutchinson et al., 2019). In 2024 to 2025, just 7% of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 23% of those receiving SEN support without an EHCP achieved grade 5 or above in GCSE English and mathematics, compared with 45% of all pupils (Department for Education, 2025f). Pupils receiving SEN provision at school are also over four times more likely to be suspended and more than six times more likely to be permanently excluded than those without identified SEN (Department for Education, 2025e). Furthermore, van Poortvliet (2026) found students receiving SEN support with or without an EHCP to have higher levels of absence after controlling for other factors, although those with an EHCP are more likely to be absent for authorised reasons compared to children with no identified SEN.

Throughout the report, SEN is measured using the NPD indicator of whether a pupil is recorded as receiving SEN support, with or without an EHCP. As with FSM eligibility, data are drawn from the summer 2024 to 2025 census (substituting 2023 to 2024 where necessary). In addition to the NPD data, the main parent or carer is asked whether their child has been formally diagnosed with SEN or is believed to have SEN, the type of need identified, the support currently provided by the school,

and whether they consider additional support to be necessary (see the baseline cohort profile for further detail).

Prior Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment

Evidence indicates that primary school attainment is linked to later educational outcomes, with attainment at KS2 one of the strongest predictors of secondary Key Stage 4 outcomes. For example, Sutherland, Ilie, and Vignoles (2015) found that KS2 attainment explained 44% or more of the variance in GCSE results, while Sammons et al. (2015) reported that it accounted for 62% of the variance in GCSE mathematics and 52% in English. There is also evidence of lower prior attainment being related to higher levels of unauthorised absence at secondary school after controlling for other factors (van Poortvliet, 2026).

Throughout this report, KS2 attainment is measured using the NPD measure of attainment at Key Stage 2 in the combined subjects of Reading, Writing and Maths – specifically whether a pupil *meets the expected standard* across all three subjects (reading, writing and maths combined). This combined measure is widely used in official statistics and performance tables to indicate whether pupils have achieved the expected level of proficiency across the core KS2 subjects. Pupils are counted in this measure only if they meet the expected standard in all three individual subjects.

Reporting conventions

This report is focused on providing a clear, accessible snapshot of what young people's lives look like at the start of the study, rather than to test and explore in depth why differences occur. The emphasis at this stage is on describing patterns and highlighting where experiences vary between groups, so that readers can understand the overall picture and identify areas of interest. More in-depth statistical analysis will follow in later reports.

Therefore, the report will primarily focus on reporting distributions, percentages and raw numbers. Statistical tests were used to assess whether observed patterns or differences in the data by subgroups were unlikely to have occurred by chance; these included chi square tests for variation in response distributions, t-tests for pairwise comparisons of means, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) for comparisons across multiple subgroups. Where statistical tests indicated meaningful differences by subgroups, confidence intervals were used to interpret the results, with non-overlapping intervals taken as evidence that response options or subgroups were clearly distinct. Accompanying tables are provided in the [Technical Appendix](#).

The report is designed to describe patterns in the data rather than to make strong claims about why these patterns occur or to predict future outcomes, so inferential statistics and modelling are not a central focus. Such analysis will primarily be for

subsequent themed reports and may feature in future annual research reports where change over time might be investigated. Please note that throughout this report, all associations observed and differences noted have been tested for statistical significance; however, not all statistically significant findings are discussed in the text. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As indicated, sample sizes vary across different data sources. Data from the household survey and the young person survey are available for all 7,811 participating young people, while NPD data are available for all bar a small number who opted out of the NPD data linkage (n=7,797). Data from the follow-up online survey of main parents/carers are available only for the 6,781 who completed this survey. The data from the teacher survey relates to 2,069 participating teachers and 2,373 young people.

Any unweighted bases smaller than these sample sizes indicate the presence of missing data or, in some cases, that the variable was subject to routing as they were not relevant to all respondents. All figures presented in the report are weighted to account for the complex survey design and differential non-response, ensuring that estimates are representative of the year 8 population (aged 12-13 in 2024 to 2025). Full details of the sample design, response rates and weighting for each element of the study are provided in the [Technical Report](#).

Baseline descriptive profile of cohort

Section overview

- This chapter presents a detailed baseline profile of the young people participating in Growing Up in the 2020s and their families and assesses how closely the cohort reflects the national population.
- Drawing on multiple data sources – including NPD records, the young person questionnaire, the household survey and follow-up parent survey – it compares key characteristics with national statistics.

Cohort profile

- Cohort participants had a mean age of 13.1 years, with roughly equal proportions of males (51%) and females (49%). Most identified as boys (52%) or girls (48%), and the sample was predominantly White (71%), with 29% were from other ethnic backgrounds. Most young people were born in the UK (89%), and one in five spoke a language other than English at home. Two-thirds lived with two biological parents (66%), while around a quarter lived in lone-parent families (24%). The average household size was 4.3 people, and around one in five young people received special educational needs (SEN) provision at school (21%). Main parents/carers were predominantly female (80%) and biological parents (97%).

Education and support needs

- According to NPD records, 21% of young people were identified as having SEN, including 7% with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Parent-reported SEN was slightly higher (22%), with social, emotional and mental health needs and autistic spectrum conditions most commonly reported.
- Most parents of children with SEN had discussed their child's needs with the school, and three-quarters reported that support was in place. However, many also felt more support would be beneficial, particularly relating to teaching assistant support and mental health provision.
- Around 1% of participants were identified as young carers and 4% were receiving social care support.

Economic circumstances

- Over half responding parents or carers held degree-level qualifications and most were in paid employment, with 52% working in managerial or professional occupations.
- Nonetheless, financial strain was evident for a sizeable minority of families. Around 40% had household incomes below £35,000, one quarter reported

just about getting by financially, and notable proportions reported difficulties such as missing bill payments, reducing meals, or being unable to afford school-related items.

- Families were distributed relatively evenly across area-level deprivation deciles, although there was a slight concentration in more disadvantaged areas.
- Young people's own perceptions broadly reflected these patterns: most considered their family to be financially similar to their peers, though around one in ten perceived their family as poorer and a notable minority reported worrying about money.
- FSM eligibility was strongly and consistently associated with a range of indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage, including lower household income, lower parental education, less advantaged occupational class, higher levels of financial strain, and greater exposure to adverse economic events. FSM-eligible young people were also substantially more likely to live in lone-parent or step-parent households, and less likely to live with two biological parents, indicating a clear clustering of economic disadvantage and family structure.

Conclusions

- Overall, the cohort appears highly representative of year 8 young people in England, with age, sex, ethnicity, and regional distributions closely aligned with national population estimates from the ONS Census and related administrative statistics.
- The findings provide a robust baseline for future longitudinal analyses of how educational and wellbeing inequalities develop across adolescence in the context of young people's family circumstances, school experiences, and wider social environments.

This chapter provides an overview of the key demographic characteristics of participants and their families. It describes the composition of the sample and, where possible, compares participants' characteristics to the most up-to-date or relevant national figures for this age group (i.e. 12 to 13-year-olds) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to assess the representativeness of the sample.

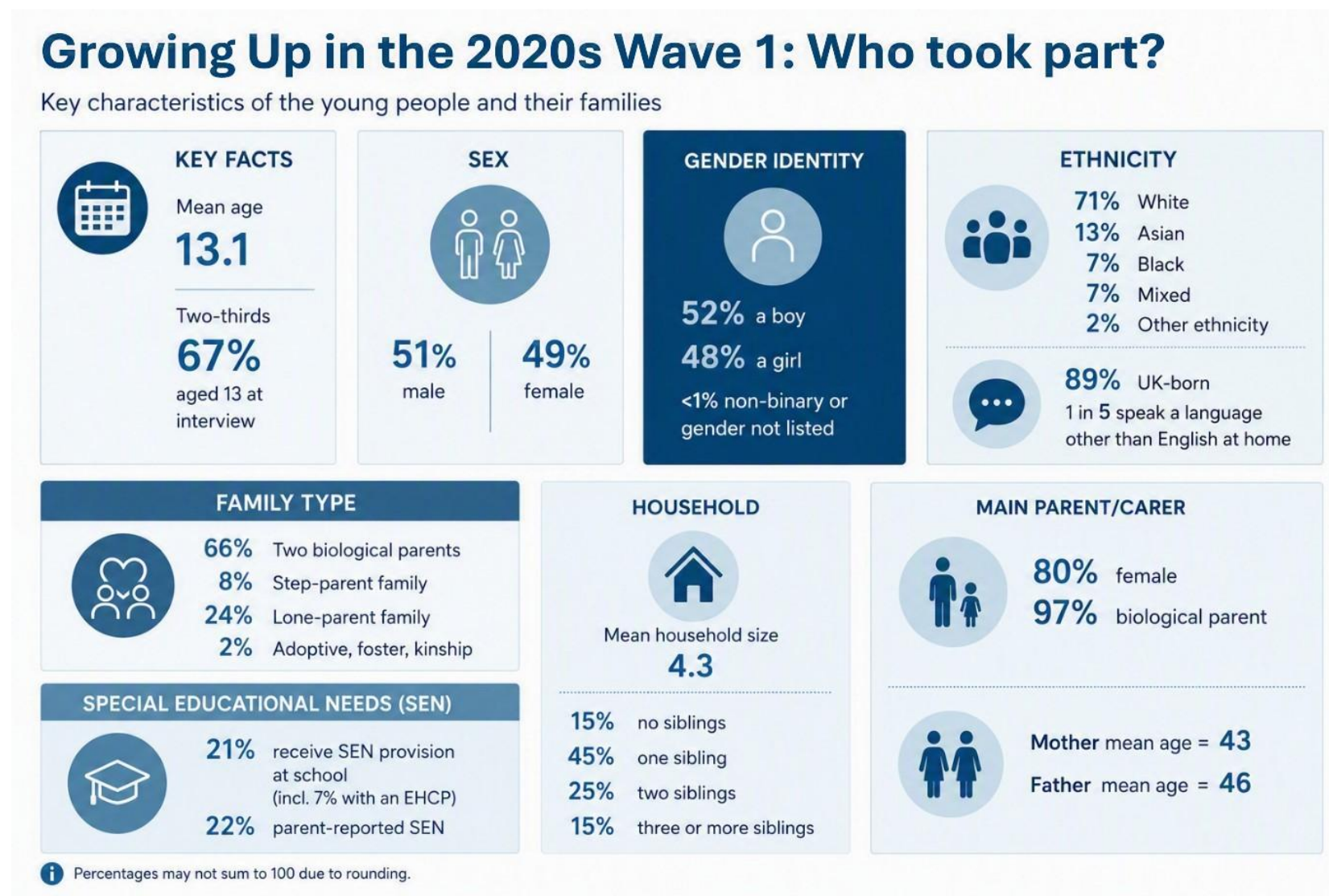
Where relevant - and where measures were collected in a comparable way – findings are also compared with Wave 1 of the Children of the 2020s and Five to Twelve cohorts, with these comparisons presented primarily in footnotes. The purpose of these comparisons is to provide broader developmental context and to explore how child and family circumstances may differ across stages of childhood and early adolescence within the EOPS programme. The comparison cohorts were surveyed when children were aged 9 months (2022) and 5-6 years (2023 to 2024),

respectively. As the baseline surveys for the different EOPS cohorts were conducted in different years, observed differences may reflect period effects as well as developmental differences or age-related differences between the cohorts.

The chapter draws on multiple data sources, with the source for each measure indicated in a note beneath the relevant chart or table. Most information, including household composition and socioeconomic circumstances, is from the household questionnaire completed by the main parent or carer, although some socioeconomic variables are drawn from the follow-up online survey completed by the same parent or carer. National Pupil Database (NPD) records (relating to the 2024 to 2025 academic year if available, or 2023 to 2024 if not) are also used to analyse key sociodemographic characteristics, including the young person's sex, ethnicity, eligibility for free school meals, SEN status and whether English is an additional language (EAL). A small number of measures, such as the young person's gender identity, are drawn from the young person questionnaire.

The chapter starts with the young person who is the focus of the study and then moves on to examine household characteristics.

Figure 3: Summary of cohort profile



Young person demographics

Sex and gender identity

Fifty-one per cent of the young people were male and 49% were female. This matches the proportions of this age group in the population (i.e. 51% male and 49% female aged 11-12 in 2024 – Office for National Statistics, Mid-Year Population Estimates, England, June 2024). In relation to gender identity, 52% described themselves as a boy, 48% as a girl and less than 1% said they were non-binary or that their gender was not listed.

Age

The majority of the young people were born between 1 September 2011 and 31 August 2012, with approximately equal proportions (8-9%) of participants born in each month, and a very small proportion (0.3%) older than is typical for year 8. Just over two in five young people (42%) were ‘summer born’ (born between April and August)².

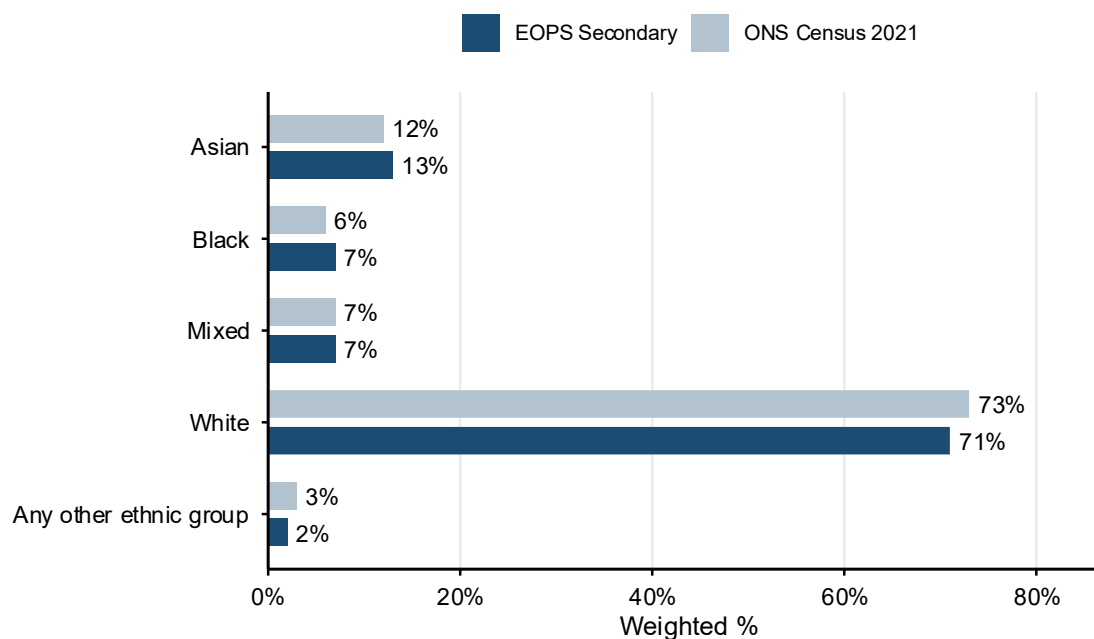
As the fieldwork period ran from January to July 2025, the majority of interviews (67%) were conducted when the young people were aged 13 (mean age = 13.14 years).

Ethnicity

Seventy-one per cent of young people were White, 13% were Asian, 7% were Black, and 7% were of Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, with 2% belonging to another ethnic group. This closely matches the Census statistics proportions of this age group in the population (i.e. aged 8-9 in 2021 - Office for National Statistics, Ethnic group by age, England, 2021). See the [Technical Appendix](#) for a full list of ethnicities for the young people.

Figure 4: Ethnic groups of young people in the sample

² This is similar to the Five to Twelve cohort, where 41% of the children were ‘summer born’ (Allen et al., 2026).



EOPS Secondary: Unweighted base = 7,654
 ONS Census 2021: Unweighted base = 1,380,585

Language

According to NPD records, just over four in five young people (81%) spoke only English at home, while about one in five (19%) were recorded as speaking another language in addition to English. Separately, the main parent/carers was asked to report the specific languages spoken at home; a full list of these languages is provided in the [Technical Appendix](#). Based on parent/carers reports, English was the most commonly spoken language at home (80%), followed by Polish (2%), Urdu (2%), Punjabi (1%), Arabic (1%), Bengali (<1%), Romanian (<1%) and Portuguese (<1%).

Table 2: Languages spoken by young people in the sample

Languages spoken at home	Percentage (%)
English	81
Other than English	19
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7,618</i>

Source: NPD, 2025, weighted percentages

Country of birth

Almost nine in ten young people (89%) were born in the UK, while about one in ten (11%) were born outside of the UK.

Table 3: Country of birth of young people in the sample

Country of birth	Percentage (%)
UK	89
Outside of the UK	11
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7,804</i>

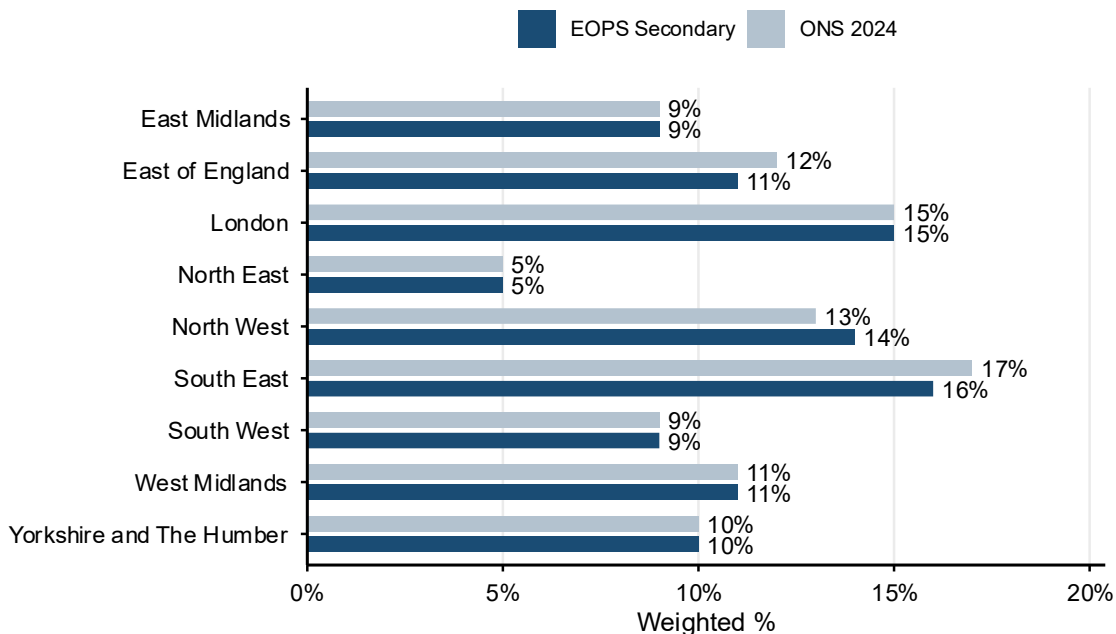
Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

This compares to 70% of main parents/carers³ who were born in the UK, and 30% who were born outside of the UK. Based on information about both the young person and their main biological parent⁴ (i.e. not taking into account the country of birth of a second parent), approximately 10% of young people were first-generation migrants, 20% were second-generation migrants, 1% were born outside the UK while their main parent was UK-born, and 69% were born in the UK to a UK-born main parent. See the [Technical Appendix](#) for details.

Region

The proportions of cohort children living in different regions of England are shown below. These closely match the proportions living in different regions for this age group in the population (i.e. aged 11-12 in 2024 – Office for National Statistics, Mid-Year Population Estimates, England, June 2024).

Figure 5: Region of residence of young people



EOPS Secondary: Unweighted base = 7,654
ONS 2024: Unweighted base = 1,380,585

³ As the country of birth question of main parents/carers was asked only in the online survey, this analysis is restricted to those who responded to the online survey.

⁴ Analysis of migration status was further restricted to biological parents. The small number of other types of main parent/carers were excluded because their country of birth does not clearly indicate the child's migration status.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

According to NPD records, approximately four-fifths of young people (79%) had no identified special educational needs (SEN), while 7% received SEN support with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 15% received SEN support without an EHCP. These figures are consistent with official national statistics for children aged 12–13 in England (Department for Education, Special educational needs, England, June 2025).

Table 4: SEN provision received at school

Special educational provision at school	Percentage (%)
No identified SEN	79
SEN support without EHCP	15
SEN support with EHCP	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7,797</i>

Source: NPD, 2025, weighted percentages

In addition to the NPD data, the main parent/carer was asked whether they considered their child to have a special educational need, regardless of whether there was an official diagnosis. Around a quarter reported that their child had a special educational need (22%) or said they were unsure (4%). Comparing Growing Up in the 2020s to the Five to Twelve study showed higher levels of SEN reported by parents of 12- and 13-year-olds than parents of five- and six-year-olds⁵.

Table 5: Parent-reported SEN

Parent-reported SEN	Percentage (%)
Yes	22
No	74
Not sure	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7,720</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Parents/carers who considered their child to have SEN were asked whether their child had a formal diagnosis from a trained professional. Just over one-third (35%) said that their child had a diagnosis for all their needs, around a fifth (21%) said there was a diagnosis for some of their needs, while 44% did not have a diagnosis.

⁵ In the Five to Twelve study, 16% of parents reported that their child had a special educational need, 4% were not sure and 81% said no (Allen et al., 2026).

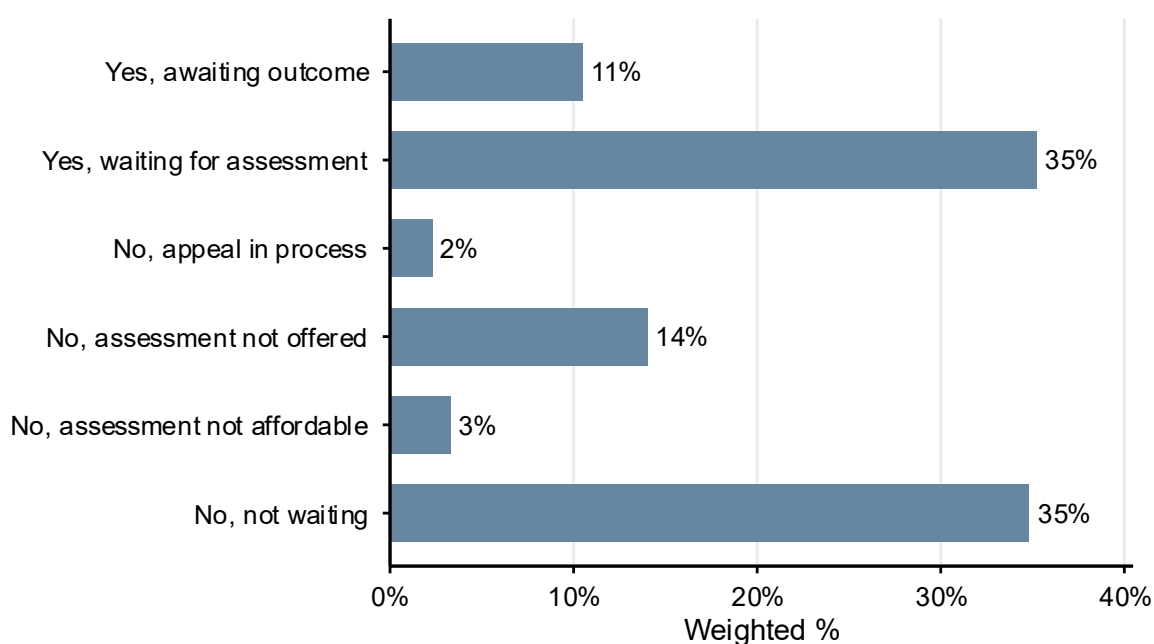
Table 6: Parent-reported SEN diagnosis

SEN diagnosis	Percentage (%)
Diagnosis for all their needs	35
Diagnosis for some of their needs	21
No diagnosis	44
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2,107</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Where a diagnosis had not been received for all needs, parents/carers were asked whether they were awaiting a diagnosis assessment. Around one-third reported that they were waiting for an assessment (35%), while a similar proportion were not (35%). A further 14% said they had not been offered an assessment, and 11% were awaiting the outcome of one. Smaller proportions indicated an assessment was not affordable (3%) or that they were in the process of appealing a SEN decision (2%).

Figure 6: Parent-reported assessment status for undiagnosed needs



Unweighted base = 1,417

Parents/carers who reported that their child had SEN, or who were unsure, were asked which categories best described their child's needs. Table 7 presents the distribution of different types of needs in this age group. The most commonly reported needs were social, emotional and mental health needs (15%) followed by an autistic spectrum condition (13%), specific learning difficulties (8%), moderate learning difficulties (6%), and speech, language and communication needs (5%).

Compared with parents/carers of five- and six-year-olds in the Five to Twelve study, parents of 12 and 13-year-olds were more likely to report specific or moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health issues, and autistic spectrum conditions. In contrast, two categories—speech, language and communication needs and severe learning difficulties—were more prevalent in the younger cohort⁶.

Table 7: Parent-reported SEN categories

SEN type	Percentage (%)
No SEN	74
Social, emotional and mental health issues, including attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD)	15
Autistic spectrum condition	13
Specific learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia)	8
Moderate learning difficulties (incl. basic literacy and numeracy skills, speech and language delay, problems concentrating, under-developed social, emotional and personal skills)	6
Speech, language and communication needs	5
Physical disability (e.g. issues with movement or other functions that impact on day-to-day life, cerebral palsy)	2
Visual impairment or blindness	1
Multi-sensory impairment (i.e. hearing and visual impairment)	<1
Hearing impairment or deafness	<1
Severe learning difficulties (incl. having little or no speech, needing support with daily activities, needing life-long support)	<1
Profound and multiple learning difficulties	<1
Something else	<1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7,720</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages. Note percentages do not add to 100% as the main parent/carer were instructed to select all that apply.

Parents/carers who said their child had a special educational need were asked whether an EHCP was in place. Just under half reported that their child did not have an EHCP (47%), while one-third said that they did (34%). A further 8% were in the process of assessment, 9% were unsure, and 1% were appealing against a refusal.

⁶ In the Five to Twelve study, 81% of parents of 5 to 6-year-olds reported no SEN, 9% reported an autistic spectrum condition, 9% reported social, emotional and mental health issues (including ADHD), 8% reported speech and language needs, 4% reported moderate learning difficulties, 2% reported a specific learning difficulty and 2% severe learning difficulties (Allen et al., 2026).

Table 8: Parent-reported Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) status

EHCP	Percentage (%)
No, young person does not have an EHC Plan	47
Yes, young person has an EHC plan	34
Not sure	9
Young person is currently being assessed or planning to be assessed	8
Currently appealing against a refusal to issue EHC plan	1
Other	1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1,751</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Parents/carers were also asked whether they had discussed their child's special educational needs with the school. The vast majority reported that they had done so (93%), while 7% had not. Despite the lower levels of parent-identified SEN at the start of primary school noted above, the proportion of parents of children with SEN who reported discussing their child's needs with the school was almost identical across the two studies⁷.

Table 9: Whether parents have discussed SEN with school

Whether SEN discussed with school	Percentage (%)
Yes	93
No	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1,679</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Among parents/carers who had discussed their child's needs with the school, three-quarters (75%) reported that their child received some form of support at school - such as from a teaching assistant or a special educational needs coordinator - while a quarter (25%) said that their child did not receive such support. Parents of year 8 children were more likely than parents in the Five to Twelve study to report that SEN support was being provided where discussions with the school had taken place⁸.

⁷ In the Five to Twelve study, 94% of parents who reported that their child had SEN, said they had discussed their child's needs with the school (Allen et al., 2026).

⁸ In the Five to Twelve study, 65% of parents who had talked to the school about their child's needs reported that their child received support for SEN at school (Allen et al., 2026).

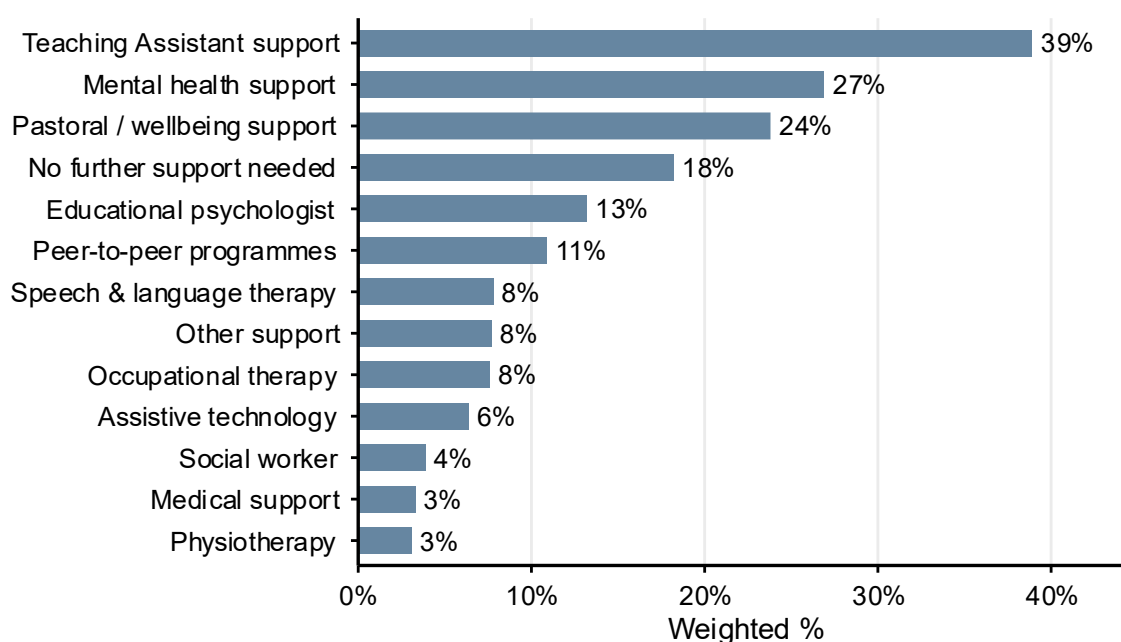
Table 10: Parent-reported school support for SEN

Support for SEN received at school	Percentage (%)
Yes	75
No	25
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1,463</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Finally, parents/carers who reported that their child has, or might have, a special educational need were asked what additional support their child would benefit from beyond what they currently receive. The most commonly identified forms of support were help from a teaching assistant or learning support assistant (39%), mental health support (27%), and pastoral or wellbeing support (24%). Smaller proportions felt their child would benefit from support from an educational psychologist (13%) or from structured peer-to-peer programmes (11%), speech and language therapy (8%) or occupational therapy (8%).

Figure 7: Parent-reported types of additional support child would benefit from



Unweighted base = 2,114

Young carer status

The vast majority of participants (99%) were not identified as young carers in NPD records, while around 1.3% were recorded in the NPD as young carers based on information reported either by parents/guardians or by schools. These figures are in line with Census statistics, where 1.4% of children aged 5 to 17 are estimated to be acting in unpaid carer roles in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, Age-

specific percentages of unpaid carers and non-carers by sex and age, England and Wales, 2021).

Table 11: Young people identified as young carer in NPD records

Identified as a young carer	Percentage (%)
Not identified as young carer	99
Identified as young carer by parent/guardian	<1
Identified as young carer by school	<1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	7661

Source: NPD, 2025, weighted percentages

Support from social care

The main parent/carer was asked whether the young person was supported by social care or a social worker; 4% of the sample were. This figure is consistent with children's social care statistics, which show that 3.3% of children aged 0 to 17 were identified as children in need and 0.4% were subject to a child protection plan in 2025 (Department for Education, Children in need in England, 2025).

Table 12: Young people supported by social care

Supported by social care	Percentage (%)
Yes	4
No	96
<i>Unweighted base</i>	7713

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Household demographics

Main parent or carer

Relationship to participant

As outlined in the [overview of the wave 1 methodology](#), the main parent or carer was defined as a parent or guardian who lived with the child at least 50% of the time and was available to complete the household survey.

The majority of main parents/carers were biological parents (97%), while the remaining 3% were adoptive-, foster- or step-parents, kinship carers or looking after the child in a residential home. About 1% of participants were living in foster or residential care, which is consistent with national estimates indicating that around 0.7% of children are looked after by local authorities (Department for Education, Children looked after in England including adoptions, 2025).

Table 13: Main parent/carer's relationship to the young person

Relationship between main parent / primary caregiver and participant	Percentage (%)
Biological parent	97
Adoptive parent	0.7
Foster parent / special guardian	0.5
Step-parent	0.7
Grandparent	0.7
Aunt / uncle	<0.5
Sibling	<0.5
Other relative	<0.5
Other non-relative	<0.5
Looking after young person in residential home	<0.5
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7809</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Sex and gender identity

The main parent/carer was asked about their sex recorded at birth and their gender identity. For both measures, 80% were female and 20% were male, with less than 0.5% reporting a non-binary gender identity.

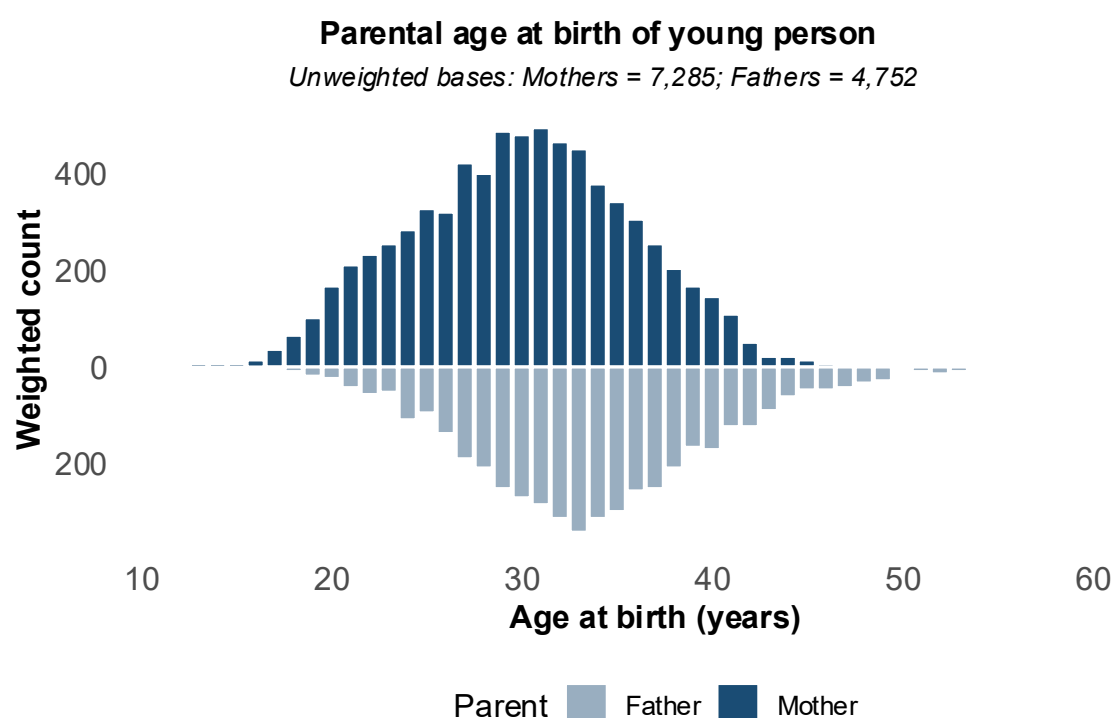
Age

Mean maternal age at the time of interview (when the young person was aged 12-13) was 43 years and mean paternal age was 46 years. This compares as expected with an average age of 32 years among primary caregivers (93% of whom were mothers) in the first wave of Children of the 2020s study, when the children were aged 9 months (Department for Education, 2023a).

Figure 8 also shows the distribution of maternal and paternal age at the birth of the participant⁹. Overall, 3% of mothers and less than 1% of fathers were teenagers at the time of the participant's birth, rising to 8% of mothers and 2% of fathers among those eligible for FSM. At the older end of the distribution, 5% of mothers and 18% of fathers were aged 40 or older at the participant's birth. A slightly higher proportion of mothers were teenagers at the participant's birth compared with the Five to Twelve study (2% - Allen et al., 2026), which may reflect the long-term decline in teenage pregnancies in England during the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Public Health England, 2023).

⁹ This analysis is restricted to biological parents only. NB Parental age is only collected for the main parent/carer and their co-resident partner so parental age is missing if the young person has a biological parent living elsewhere.

Figure 8: Parental age in years at birth of the young person



Family composition

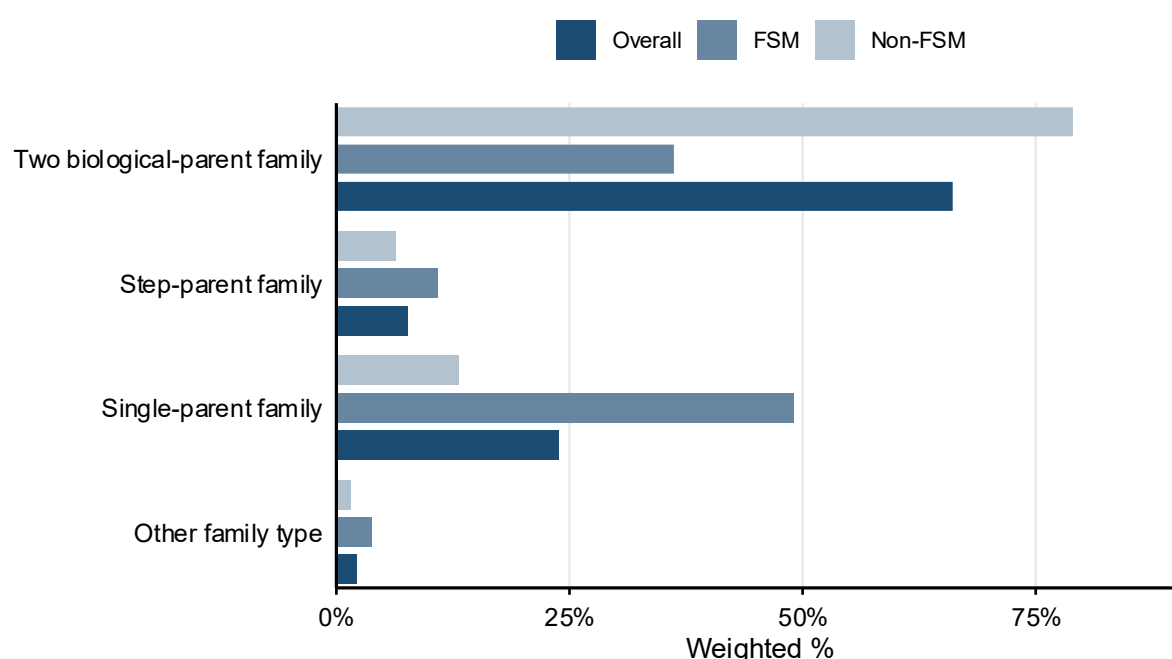
Approximately two-thirds (66%) of young people were living with two biological parents, while just under a quarter (24%) were living in a lone-parent household¹⁰, 8% were living with in a step-parent household¹¹, and 2% in another household type¹². These figures are in line with the Census statistics for dependent children living in step-, non-step- and lone-parent-families (Office for National Statistics, Children in families in England and Wales, Census 2021). As illustrated in Figure 9, young people in FSM-eligible households were substantially more likely than those in non-eligible households to be living in a lone-parent family (49% compared to 13%), a step-parent family (11% compared to 6%) or another family type (4% compared to 2%), and less likely to live in a two biological parent family (36% compared to 79%).

¹⁰ A lone-parent household was defined as one in which the cohort child lived with one biological parent who does not have a co-resident partner.

¹¹ A stepparent household was defined as one in which the cohort child lived with one biological parent and one step-, adoptive- or foster-parent.

¹² This included living with adoptive or foster parent(s) and in kinship care

Figure 9: Household composition overall, and by FSM and non-FSM household



Overall: Unweighted base = 7,811
 FSM: Unweighted base = 3,630
 Non-FSM: Unweighted base = 4,167

Where only one biological or adoptive parent lived in the main household, the main parent/carer was asked whether the young person had another biological or legal parent living elsewhere (also referred to as an ‘own household parent’). Over a quarter of participants (28%) had a parent living elsewhere; among these young people, 82% had had contact with this parent in the previous year and saw them for an average of seven days per month during term time.

In the Five to Twelve study, which asked the same set of questions, a smaller proportion of five and six-year-olds (19%) had a parent residing elsewhere, consistent with population evidence that the prevalence of non-resident parents increases as children get older (Office for National Statistics, Children in families in England and Wales, Census 2021). The proportion who had seen their non-resident parent in the previous year was similar in Five to Twelve (83%); however, the younger cohort were less likely to have ever lived with this parent (60%) and also to stay overnight with them during term time (57%) (Allen et al., 2026).

Table 14: Young people in the sample with a parent living elsewhere

Parent living elsewhere	Percentage (%)
Another parent living elsewhere	28
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7531</i>
Contact with parent living elsewhere in previous 12 months	82
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2251</i>
Participant ever lived with parent living elsewhere	67
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2394</i>
Participant stays overnight with parent living elsewhere during term time	68
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1324</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

In a small proportion of households (1%), the main parent was in a relationship with the young person's other parent but did not live in the same household, while in fewer than 1% of households, the main parent and the other biological parent lived together but were not partners.

Most young people lived with one sibling (45%) or two siblings (25%), while 15% had three or more siblings, and a further 15% did not live with any siblings. There were notable differences by FSM eligibility with young people in eligible households substantially more likely to have three or more siblings (27% compared to 9%). The mean household size was 4.3 people, which is almost twice the size of the average household in the UK (Office for National Statistics, Families and Households in the UK, 2024), but typical of families with dependent children. Five percent of households comprised just the young person and their parent/carer, while 18% were three-person households, 41% were four-person households, and 36% contained five or more people.

Family socioeconomic circumstances

Main parent or carer's highest equivalent qualification level

The main parent/carer was asked about their academic and vocational qualifications, which were equivalised to determine the highest qualification across both types and mapped onto the Regulated Qualifications Framework. These proportions are broadly in line with those reported in the Five to Twelve study, which measured parental qualifications in a comparable way¹³.

¹³ The only notable difference was that Five to Twelve had a lower proportion of both mothers and fathers (6%) with no qualifications (Allen et al., 2026).

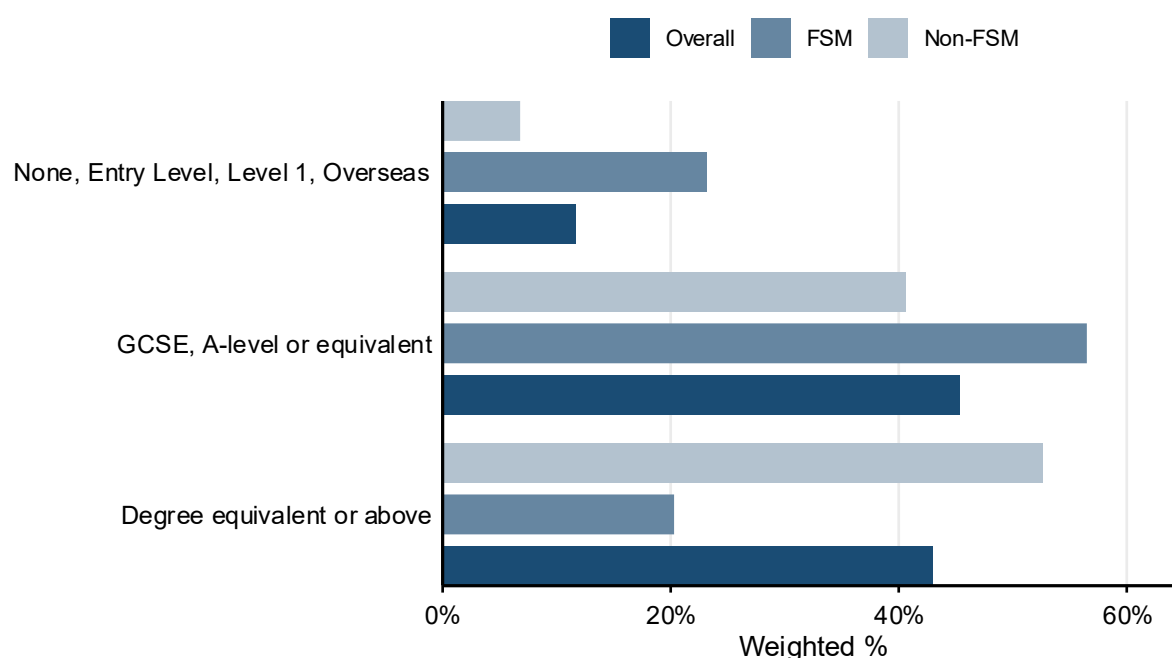
Table 15: Main parent/carers's highest equivalent qualification

Highest level of qualification	Percentage (%)
No qualifications	9
Entry level, Level 1 and other qualifications (incl. overseas)	3
GCSE or equivalent	18
A Levels or equivalent	20
Higher education or equivalent (below degree)	7
Degree equivalent or above	43
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7597</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

There were clear differences in parental education by FSM eligibility. Main parent/carers in the FSM-eligible group were more than three times as likely to have no qualifications as those not eligible (23% compared to 7%), and less than half as likely to have a degree level qualification (20% compared to 53%).

Figure 10: Main parent or carer's highest equivalent qualification level overall and by FSM/non-FSM



Overall: Unweighted base = 7,597
 FSM: Unweighted base = 3,507
 Non-FSM: Unweighted base = 4,076

Main parent or carer's economic activity

The main parent/carer was asked to indicate their primary economic activity; over three-quarters were in paid work (67% employed, 9% self-employed, <1% on a paid apprenticeship scheme), while 14% were looking after family, with smaller proportions not in paid work for health (4%) or other (2%) reasons, or because they were looking for (<0.5%) or about to start a job (2%). These patterns are broadly similar to those observed in the Children of the 2020s study, which used the same question, although, as expected, fewer parent/carers of secondary-school children were caring for family, and a higher proportion were in paid employment compared with parents of 9-month-old children¹⁴ (Department for Education, 2023a). Table 16 shows marked differences in economic activity by FSM-eligibility. Those eligible were around four times more likely than those not eligible to be looking after family (29% compared with 7%) and around half as likely to be employed (39% compared with 79%).

Table 16: Main parent/carer's economic activity overall and by FSM/non-FSM

Main parent/carer's economic activity	Percentage (%) Overall	Percentage (%) FSM	Percentage (%) Non-FSM
Employee	67	39	79
Self-employed	9	8	10
On paid apprenticeship scheme	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5
Looking after family	14	29	7
Found a job, waiting to start	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5
Out of work and looking for a job	2	3	<1
In unpaid voluntary work	<0.5	<1	<0.5
Retired from paid work	<1	<1	<1
Not in paid work, reasons of poor health	4	12	<1
Not in paid work for some other reason	2	5	<1
Full-time student	<1	2	<0.5
Part-time student	<1	<1	<0.5
On unpaid traineeship / government training	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5
<i>Unweighted base</i>	7783		

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

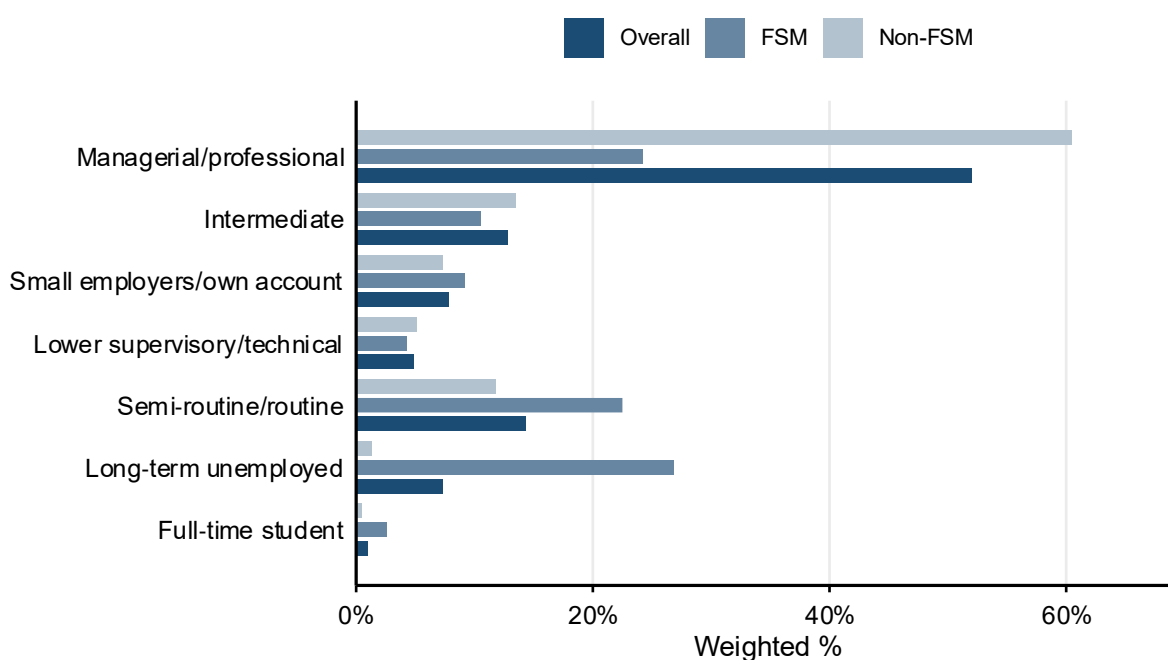
¹⁴ In Children of the 2020s 64% of primary caregivers were employed – comprised of 34% working and 30% on parental leave – and 21% were looking after family (Department for Education, 2023).

Main parent/carer's occupational socio-economic classification

The main parent/carer's occupation was classified using the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). Over half (52%) were in managerial, administrative, or professional roles, while 14% were in semi-routine or routine occupations and 13% in intermediate occupations. Smaller proportions were small employers or own-account workers (8%), long-term unemployed or never worked (7%), or in lower supervisory and technical roles (5%). Comparisons with the Children of the 2020s study indicate that parents of secondary-school-aged children were more likely to hold managerial, administrative, or professional occupations and less likely to be in intermediate, semi-routine, or routine roles, reflecting their older average age (Department for Education, 2023a)¹⁵.

Figure 11 illustrates substantial differences in parental occupation by FSM eligibility. Less than a quarter (24%) of those eligible for FSM were in managerial and professional occupations, and just over a quarter (27%) were long term unemployed; the corresponding figures for those not eligible were over 60% and around 1%, respectively.

Figure 11: Main parent/carer's occupation overall and by FSM/non-FSM



Overall: Unweighted base = 6,133
 FSM: Unweighted base = 2,371
 Non-FSM: Unweighted base = 3,749

¹⁵ In the Children of the 2020s study, 43% were in managerial, administrative, or professional roles, 18% in intermediate occupations, 5% were small employers or own-account workers, 3% in lower supervisory and technical roles, 25% in semi-routine or routine occupations and 5% were long-term unemployed or never worked (Department for Education, 2023).

Net household income

The main parent/carer reported their net income from all sources, or, if living with a partner, their combined net income (after deductions such as income tax or National Insurance). Table 17 shows the distribution of this measure over five income bands, condensed from the original twenty response categories to approximate income quintiles. About a fifth of households (19%) had an income of less than £23,000, while two-fifths (40%) had an income of less than £35,000. For comparison, median household income before housing costs in the UK was around £37,500 per year in 2025, with a mean of approximately £45,000; although UK households with children were more likely to experience relative poverty (defined as 60% of median income), with around 21% of children living in such households compared with 16% of individuals overall (Department of Work and Pensions, Households Below Average Income, UK, 2026).

As expected, eligibility for FSM had a clear association with income, with 45% of participants eligible for FSM in the lowest income band and 34% in the second lowest, compared to just 2% in the highest and 4% in the second highest income band.

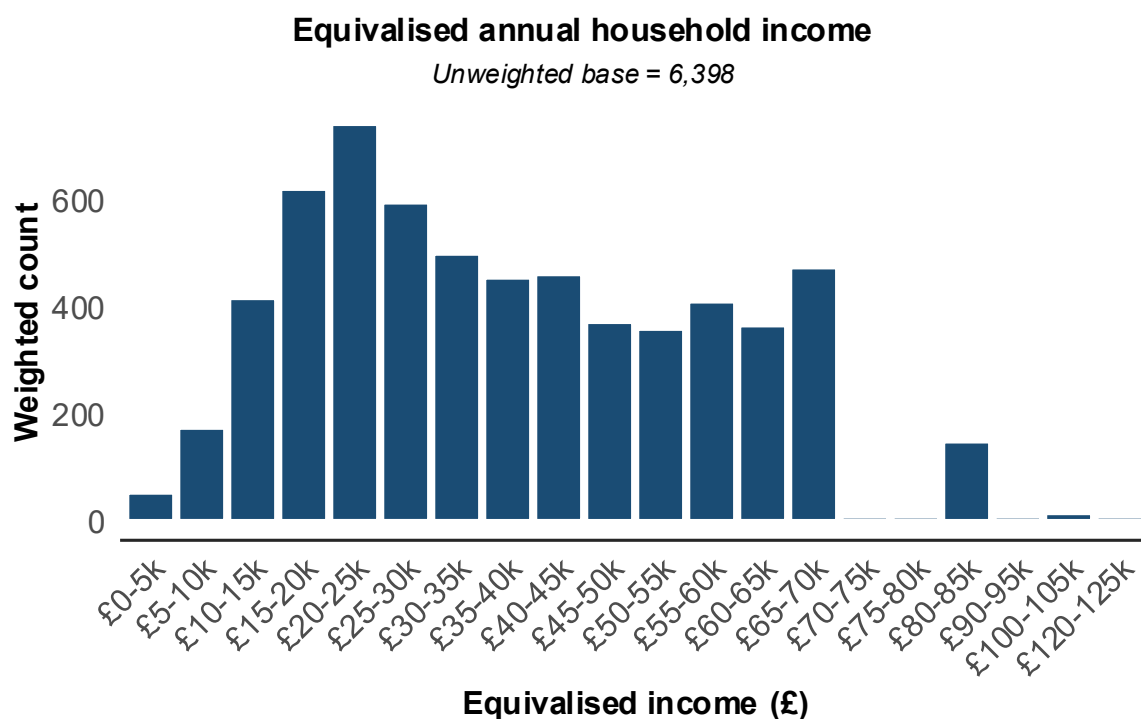
Table 17: Main household income quintiles overall and by FSM/non-FSM

Household income (annual)	Overall (%)	FSM (%)	Non-FSM (%)
£0 - £22,999	19	45	8
£23,000 - £34,999	21	34	15
£35,000 - £51,499	22	16	24
£51,500 - £74,999	20	4	26
£75,000+	19	2	26
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7802</i>	<i>2841</i>	<i>3556</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

In addition, to account for the size and composition of the household, income was equivalised using the Modified OECD scale.

Figure 12: Distribution of main household income (equivalised)



Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1

Benefits and eligibility for Free School Meals

The household survey asked the main parent/carer about the sources of income received by themselves and, where applicable, their cohabiting partner. The vast majority (86%) reported earnings from paid employment, 71% received Child Benefit, and 36% received Universal Credit. Smaller proportions received Disability Living Allowance (10%), Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support (7%), Personal Independence Payment (6%) or child maintenance (6%).

Table 18: Sources of income in the main household

Sources of income	Percentage (%)
Earnings from employment or self-employment	86
Child Benefit	71
Universal Credit	36
Disability Living Allowance	10
Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support	7
Personal Independence Payment	6
Child maintenance from a former husband/ wife/ partner (including Child Support Agency grant)	6
Interest from savings and investments (e.g. stocks and shares)	3
Private or state pension	2
Child Tax Credit	2
Other kinds of regular allowance from outside your household	2
Employment and Support Allowance	1
Carer's allowance	1
Working Tax Credit	<1
Jobseeker's Allowance	<1
Income Support	<1
Incapacity Benefit	<1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7804</i>

Source: Household survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

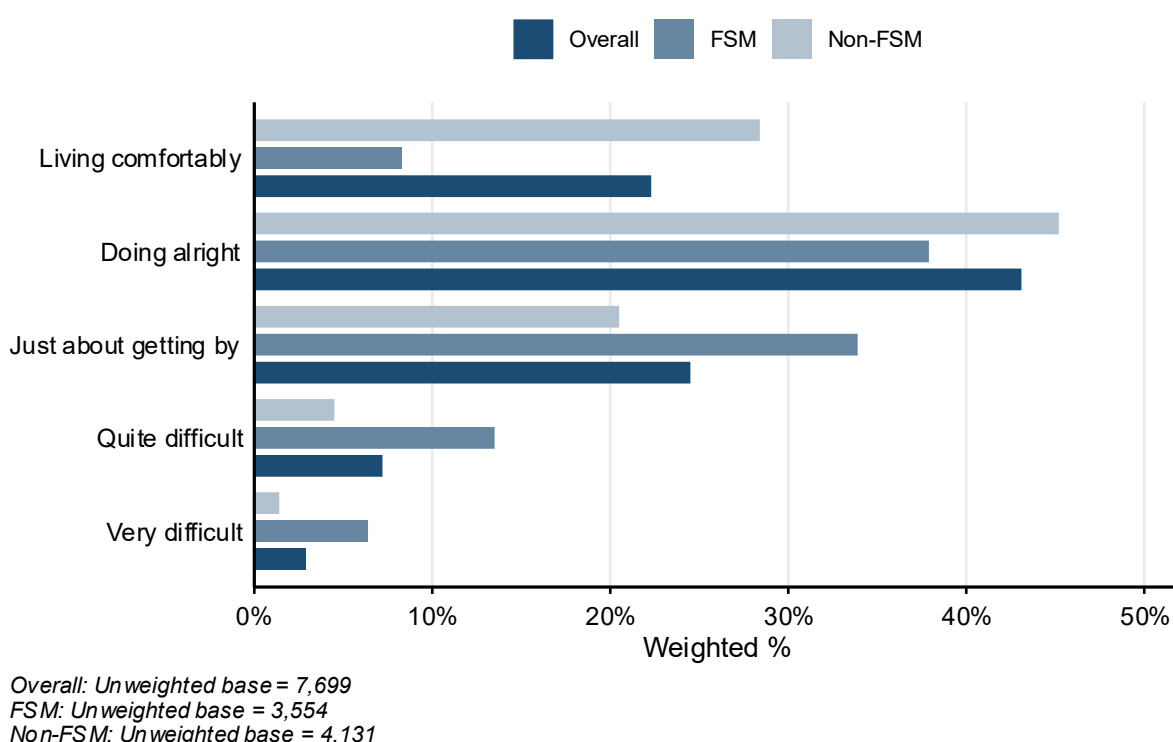
FSM eligibility - used throughout the report as a key measure of disadvantage - is linked to receipt of several means-tested benefits, including Universal Credit, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Child Tax Credit. As described in the Technical Report, FSM eligibility recorded in the NPD was used in the weighted sampling design to boost the representation of disadvantaged young people, such that approximately 50% of the issued sample was FSM-eligible compared with 28% in the national year 8 population. Reflecting this design, 47% of the unweighted achieved sample was FSM-eligible. After weighting, however, the figures align more closely with the national profile, with 30% of the sample eligible for free school meals, and 70% not eligible.

Subjective financial circumstances

The main parent/carers was asked how they felt about their financial circumstances. The majority said they were either doing alright (43%) or were living comfortably (22%); however, a quarter (25%) were just about getting by, and 10% were finding it difficult. The patterns were broadly similar in the Five to Twelve study albeit with a larger proportion living comfortably and smaller proportion just about getting by

(Allen et al., 2026)¹⁶. As expected, there was a clear association with FSM eligibility: main parents/carers eligible for FSM were more than three times as likely to report finding things quite difficult (13.5% compared to 4.5%) or very difficult (6% compared to 1%) and correspondingly less likely to report living comfortably (8% compared to 28%).

Figure 13: Weighted percentage of main parent/carer-reported financial circumstances overall and by FSM/non-FSM



Financial strain

Main parents/carers were also asked about financial strain over the previous 12 months. Around a fifth (21%) were unable to afford essential school items such as school uniform, PE kit, shoes, school bags, stationery, or packed lunches, 17% reported struggling to keep up with bills or debt repayments, and 13% had to reduce the size of their meals or skip meals. These figures were somewhat lower in the Five to Twelve study, where 15% could not afford school items, and 10% had difficulty paying bills or cutting meals (Allen et al., 2026).

These indicators of financial strain showed substantial overlap with FSM eligibility. Main parents/carers eligible for FSM were four times as likely to have skipped meals (28% compared to 7%), more than three times as likely to have missed bill repayments (36% compared to 10%), and more than twice as likely to have been

¹⁶ In Five to Twelve, 28% reported living comfortably, 44% doing alright, 19% just about getting by and 9% either finding it quite difficult or very difficult (Allen et al., 2026).

unable to afford essential school items (38% compared to 14%), The perceived ability to afford school items is further explored in the [Family and Home Environment](#) sub-section, which includes how this varies by parental education and region.

Table 19 : Main parent/carer-reported financial strain overall and by FSM/non-FSM

	Overall (%)	FSM (%)	Non-FSM (%)
Missed bills, rent/mortgage, repayments in past 12 months			
Yes, often	4	11	2
Yes, occasionally	13	25	8
No	83	65	91
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6728</i>	<i>3151</i>	<i>3563</i>
Skipped meals / cut size of meals in past 12 months			
Yes, often	3	8	1
Yes, occasionally	10	20	6
No	87	72	93
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6729</i>	<i>3154</i>	<i>3561</i>
Could not afford essential items for school in past 12 months			
Yes, often	4	9	2
Yes, occasionally	17	29	12
No	80	63	86
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6592</i>	<i>3046</i>	<i>3532</i>

Source: Parent online survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Additionally, 16% of main parents/carers reported a major reduction in household income or difficulty keeping their home adequately warm, while smaller proportions had lost a job (4-5%) or been forced to move (1%). These adverse experiences were strongly associated with FSM eligibility: FSM-eligible households were around three times as likely to report difficulty keeping their home warm or experiencing forced eviction or homelessness, and around twice as likely to report a major reduction in household income or the loss of a job or business.

Table 20: Main parent/carer-reported adverse event overall and by FSM/non-FSM

Adverse events in past 12 months	Overall (%)	FSM (%)	Non-FSM (%)
Lost job or business	5	8	4
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6736</i>	<i>3159</i>	<i>3565</i>
Partner lost job or business	4	8	3
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>4572</i>	<i>1485</i>	<i>3076</i>
Major reduction in household income	16	24	13
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6719</i>	<i>3151</i>	<i>3556</i>
Struggled to keep home warm	16	31	10
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6728</i>	<i>3153</i>	<i>3563</i>
Forced to move or became homeless	1	3	<1
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>6736</i>	<i>3160</i>	<i>3564</i>

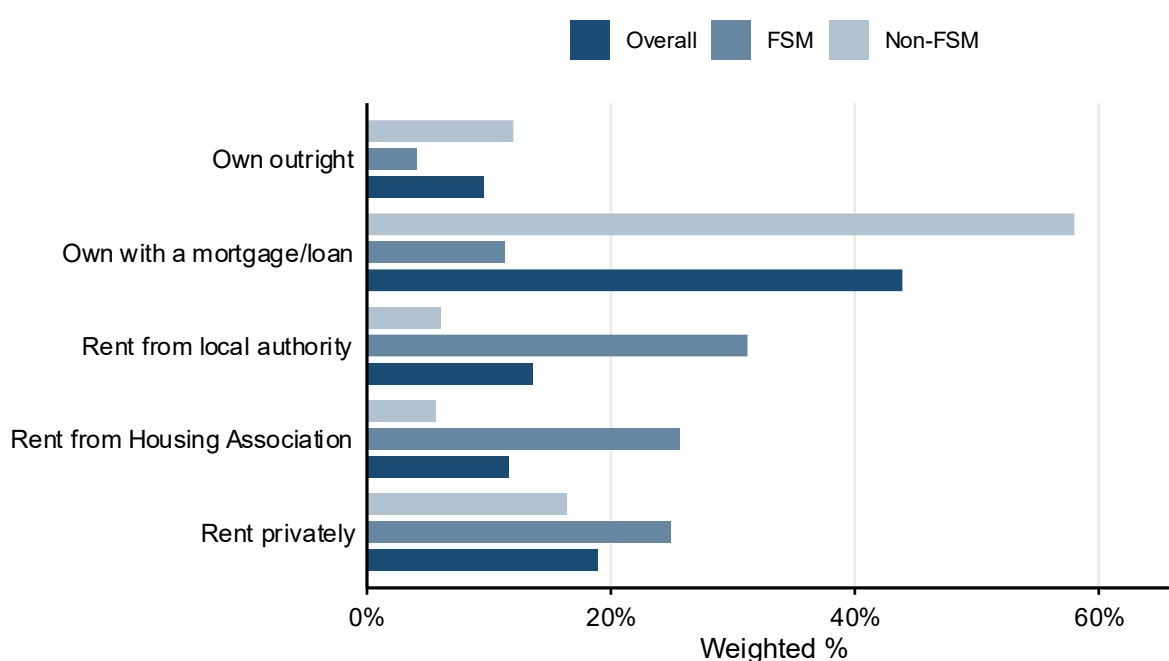
Source: Parent online survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Housing tenure

More than half of participating families owned their home, either with a mortgage (44%) or outright (10%), while just under half rented, either from a private landlord (19%), the local authority (14%), or a housing association (12%). Patterns of housing tenure were broadly similar across the Children of the 2020s and Five to Twelve cohorts, although as expected, outright home ownership was more common among families in the older cohort, while private renting was less prevalent (Allen et al., 2026; Department for Education, 2023)¹⁷. Housing tenure was strongly associated with FSM eligibility. FSM-eligible households were more than four times as likely to rent from the local authority or a housing association (57% compared to 12%), and correspondingly much less likely to own their home, either outright or with a mortgage (15% compared to 70%).

¹⁷ In Five to Twelve, 6% owned outright, 48% owned with a mortgage, 10% rented from the local authority, 10% rented from a Housing Association and 22% rented privately. In Children of the 2020s, 3% owned outright, 47% owned with a mortgage, 10% rented from the local authority, 8% rented from a Housing Association and 24% rented privately.

Figure 14: Housing tenure overall and by FSM/non-FSM



Note. Shared equity, living with parents, living rent free, friends/hostel/temporary accommodation, and other were excluded because subgroup proportions corresponded to $n < 10$.

Young person report of financial circumstances

Young people were also asked how they perceived their family's financial situation compared with their friends'. Most felt their family was about the same (77%) or better off (14%), while around one in ten (9%) felt poorer.

Table 21: Young people's perceptions of family wealth

Compared to your friends, is your family financially richer, poorer or about the same?	Percentage (%)
Richer	14
Poorer	9
About the same	77
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7504</i>

Source: Young person survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Regarding money to spend on themselves, just over half (51%) of young people felt they had about the same as their friends, while similar proportions felt they had a bit (18%) or a lot more (5%) as those who felt they had a bit (19%) or a lot less (7%).

Table 22: Young people's spending money compared to friends

Compared to your friends, (on average) how much money do you usually have to spend for yourself?	Percentage (%)
A lot more than my friends	5
A bit more than my friends	18
About the same as my friends	51
A bit less than my friends	19
A lot less than my friends	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7526</i>

Source: Young person survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

More than half of young people (56%) never worried about their family's finances, while over one-third (35%) sometimes worried, 6% often worried, and 2% always worried.

Table 23: Young people's worries about family finances

How often do you worry about how much money your family has?	Percentage (%)
Never	56
Sometimes	35
Often	6
Always	2
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>7671</i>

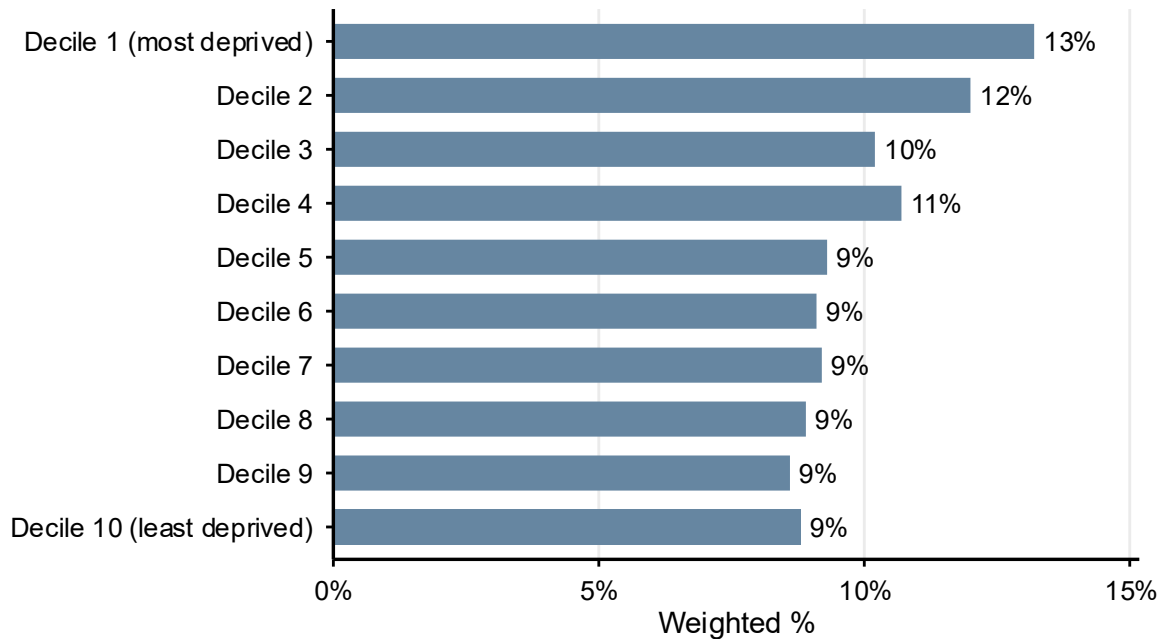
Source: Young person survey, Growing Up in the 2020s, wave 1, weighted percentages

Local area deprivation

Deprivation can also be captured using area-based indicators such as the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which measures the proportion of children in a small area living in income-deprived families, with higher deciles representing greater disadvantage. Although area-level deprivation overlaps with individual measures such as FSM eligibility, the two approaches are distinctive. As noted by Campbell and Cooper (2025), FSM registration is lower than expected in some highly deprived areas based on IDACI scores, and is also lower amongst some ethnic groups, despite ethnic minority children being overrepresented in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Area-based measures, therefore, provide important complementary information about disadvantage.

In this study, participants were approximately evenly distributed across IDACI deciles, with slightly higher proportions living in the four most deprived deciles (10–13% in each) and around 9% in each of the six least deprived deciles. Mean IDACI scores were substantially higher among FSM-eligible participants than those not eligible (0.25 compared to 0.14), and also for young people from Black (0.25), Asian (0.20), Mixed (0.19) and Other ethnic backgrounds (0.24) than for White young people (0.16), indicating greater exposure to neighbourhood disadvantage among these groups.

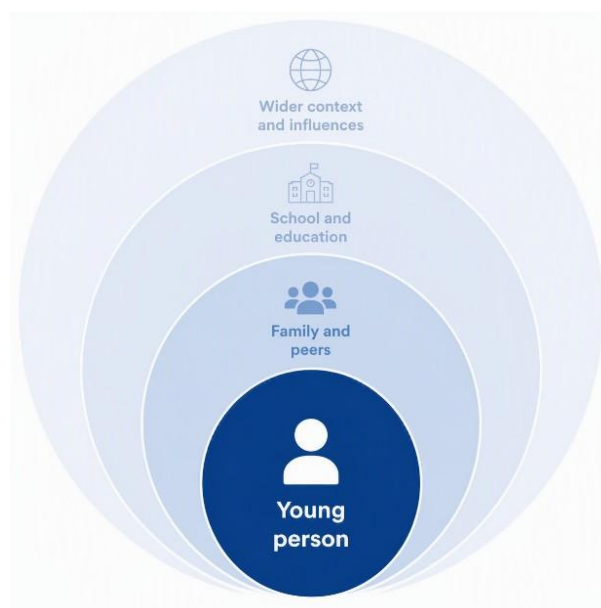
Figure 15: Weighted percentages of IDACI deciles



Unweighted base = 7,661

Young person

Having established the overall profile of the cohort, the report now turns to the main analytical findings. This chapter examines the individual level of the framework, focusing on young people's own self-reported physical and health behaviours, mental health and wellbeing and cognitive development, providing the foundation for later sections that examine family, school, and wider context and influences. Throughout, findings are disaggregated by key sociodemographic characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, whether a pupil is recorded as receiving special education needs (SEN) support, with or without an EHCP, parental education, and region to identify patterns of inequality and inform policy and practice.



Physical and health behaviours

Section overview

- This section presents findings on young people's physical health and health related behaviours. The analysis explores the prevalence of physical health, key health behaviours such as sleep, physical activity, alcohol consumption and smoking/vaping.
- Sleep and physical activity are fundamental to physical health, emotional wellbeing, and cognitive functioning during adolescence, while alcohol use, smoking, and vaping are health risk behaviours that typically emerge during this period and are associated with poorer outcomes over time, particularly when initiated early (Lozano et al., 2021).
- Shaped by wider family, school, and social contexts, examining these behaviours at the individual level provides a foundation for understanding inequalities in young people's health. Accordingly, disparities are examined across sex, ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, special educational (SEN) status, parental education, and region, where sample sizes allow.

Longstanding conditions and illnesses

- Parents/carers reported that overall, around one in four (24%) young people had a condition or illness affecting at least one area of daily functioning.

- Prevalence was higher among young people with SEN (58%) compared to those without SEN (14%), reflecting the strong overlap with longstanding illness and related conditions.
- Marked disparities were evident by socioeconomic status, with higher prevalence among those eligible for FSM (with FSM 33% vs without FSM 20%) and among White young people (27%) compared with Asian and Black young people (12% each).
- Regional variation was observed, ranging from 18% in London to 29% in the North East.

Sleep

- Most young people achieve recommended sleep duration on an average weekday, with nine in ten reporting to get at least eight hours of sleep.
- Sleep quality was more variable: 28% reported a good night's sleep on all seven nights, while 12% reported this on only two nights or fewer per week.
- Though fairly similar, boys generally reported more favourable sleep outcomes than girls, both for getting eight or more hours of sleep (92% vs 88%) and for good sleep every night (31% vs 26%).
- Socioeconomic inequalities were observed, with young people eligible for FSM less likely to get eight or more hours of sleep (86% vs 92%) and more likely to report no good night's sleep (7% vs 3%).
- Young people whose parents had the lowest level of education were more likely to report good sleep every night (37%), compared with 28% among those whose parents had the highest level of education.

Physical activity

- Physical activity levels fell short of the recommended guidelines of at least 60 minutes per day for most young people: young people reported at least 60 minutes of activity on an average of 3.91 days per week, and only 17% met the guideline of being active for at least 60 minutes on all seven days of the week.
- Inequalities were observed where boys were more active than girls (4.23 vs 3.57 days), while lower activity was reported among young people eligible for FSM (3.69 vs 4.00 days), those with SEN (3.54 vs 4.01 days), and those with lower parental education (3.56 vs 4.14 days).
- Regional variation was evident, with average activity ranging from 3.73 days in the East Midlands to 4.23 days in the North East.

Health-risk behaviours

- Around one in ten young people (11%) reported having tried alcohol, a substantially lower proportion than reported among similar aged young people in comparable national studies.

- Alcohol use was more common among White young people (14%) and those with SEN (13% vs 10%), and least common among Asian (2%) and Black (3%) young people.
- Among those who had tried alcohol, most reported infrequent consumption: 65% reported drinking only a few times a year, and 21% reported that they do not drink currently.
- Cigarette smoking was rare, with 98% reporting that they had never smoked and only 0.2% reporting that they currently smoked.
- Vaping was more prevalent than smoking but remained uncommon overall: 91% had never vaped, while any current or past use was notably higher among young people eligible for FSM (15% vs 6%) and those with SEN (13% vs 8%).

Conclusions

- Overall, many young people were getting at least eight hours of sleep on an average weekday (90%) and reported low levels of alcohol use (11%), smoking (0.2% current use), and vaping (91% never), but physical activity was well below recommended levels, with an average of 3.91 active days per week and only 17% meeting the seven-day guideline.
- Inequalities were observed across multiple domains. Young people with SEN and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds had poorer outcomes for longstanding conditions, sleep, physical activity, and some health-risk behaviours, while boys generally reported more favourable sleep and physical activity outcomes than girls.
- Taken together, these findings show that health behaviours in early adolescence are generally favourable in some areas, but important inequalities are already starting to emerge and may contribute to later differences in wellbeing.

Long standing illness

Health during childhood and adolescence is fundamental to young people's development, with implications for educational attainment, social participation, and longer-term wellbeing (Suhrccke and de Paz Nieves, 2011). Health conditions and illnesses that affect daily functioning can have direct impacts on school attendance, concentration, and engagement with learning (Maslow et al., 2011). Research indicates that chronic health conditions during adolescence are associated with lower academic achievement and reduced educational progression, with effects often mediated through increased school absence and fatigue (Champaloux and Young, 2015). Parent/carers reported that overall, around one in four young people have a condition or illness affecting at least one area of daily function (24%).

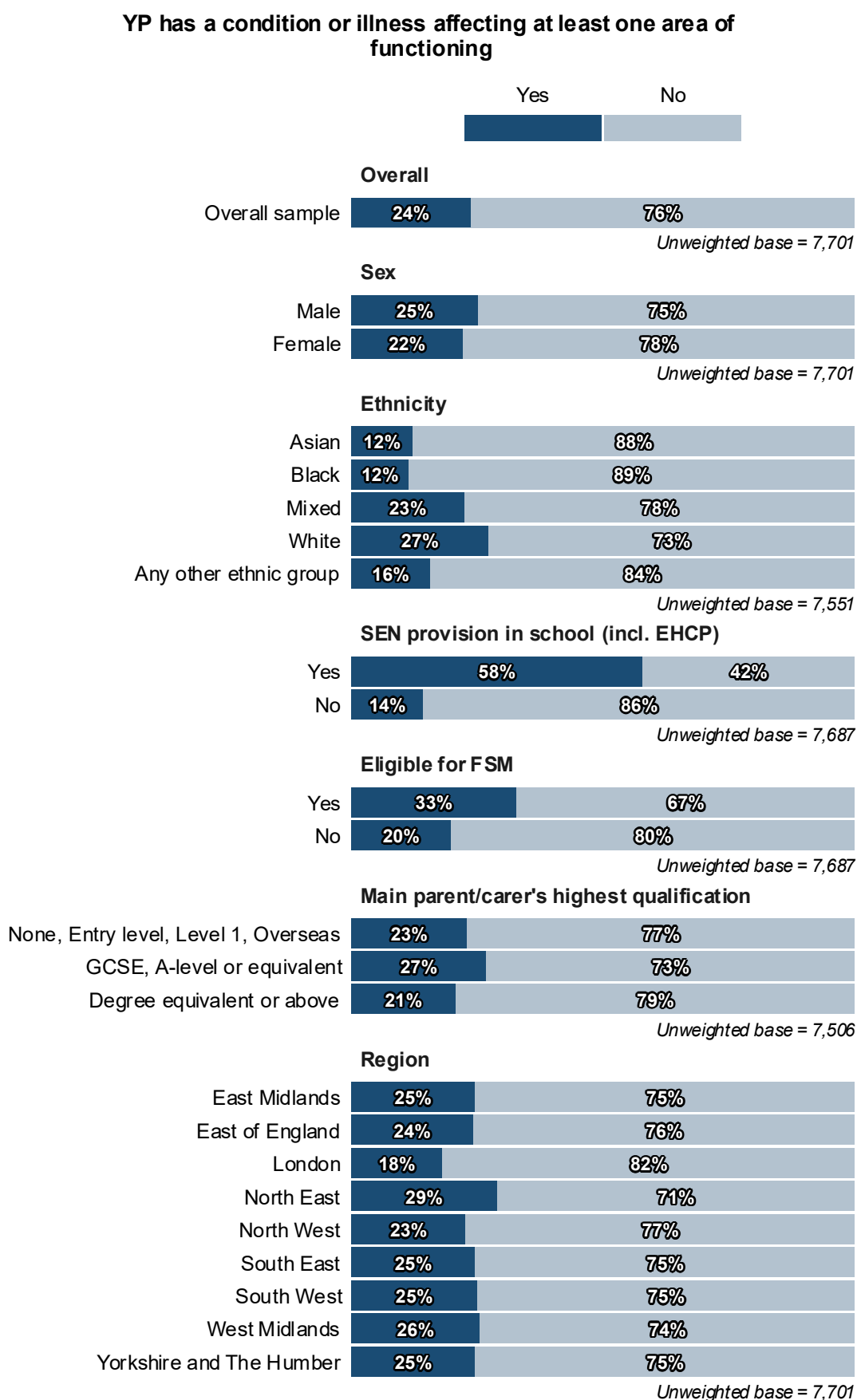
Conditions included any difficulties in the following areas: vision (e.g. blindness or partial sight), hearing (e.g. deafness or partial hearing), mobility (e.g. walking short distances or climbing stairs), dexterity (e.g. lifting and carrying objects, using a keyboard), learning or understanding or concentrating, memory, mental health, stamina or breathing or fatigue, socially or behaviourally (e.g. associated with autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)), or other specified conditions.

Boys were slightly more likely than girls to have a condition reported (25% versus 22%). Marked differences were observed by ethnicity. Conditions were more commonly reported among White young people (27%) and those from Mixed ethnic backgrounds (23%) than among Asian (12%) and Black (12%) young people. Socioeconomic disparities were also evident. Young people eligible for FSM were more likely to have a reported condition than those not eligible (33% vs 20% respectively). The proportion of young people reported to have a condition or illness was highest among those whose parent/carer had GCSE, A-level or equivalent qualifications (27%), compared with lower rates among those with degree-level qualifications (21%) and those with entry-level or no qualifications (23%).¹⁸

Differences were particularly pronounced by SEN status. More than half of young people with identified SEN were reported to have a condition affecting them (58%), compared with 14% of those without SEN. With regards to regional variation, prevalence ranged from 18% in London to 29% in the North East.

¹⁸ Academic and vocational qualifications were equivalised onto a single scale ranging from no qualification to Level 5. This scale was then grouped into three categories: entry level, Level 1 or no qualifications (including overseas qualifications), GCSE to A-level or equivalent (RQF Levels 2–5), and degree-level or above (RQF Levels 6–8).

Figure 16: Young person condition or illness affecting at least one area of daily functioning



Sleep

NHS guidelines state that children aged 6 to 12 should get between 9 and 12 hours of sleep per night, while those aged 13 to 18 should aim for 8 to 10 hours (NHS, 2024). Adequate sleep is fundamental to cognitive performance and academic achievement during childhood and adolescence. Insufficient sleep among children and adolescents is associated with problems with attention, memory, and problem-solving, as well as emotional and behavioural issues that can negatively impact academic performance (Dewald et al., 2010). Young people's self-reported bedtimes and wake-up times were used to estimate whether they achieved at least 8 hours of sleep per night. Moreover, they were asked to report how many nights per week they experienced a good night's sleep.

Overall, the vast majority of young people were estimated to have sufficient sleep duration, with 90% getting eight or more hours of sleep on an average weekday. However, despite having high levels of adequate sleep duration, young people reported mixed reviews on sleep quality. Just 28% of young people reported having a good night's sleep on all seven nights of the week, while 32% reported good sleep on five to six nights. At the other end of the distribution, 12% reported good sleep on two nights or fewer per week, including 4% who reported no good nights of sleep.

Differences by sex were evident. Boys were more likely than girls to achieve eight or more hours of sleep (92% vs 88%) and to report good sleep every night (31% vs 26%).

Patterns also varied by ethnicity. Asian young people were more likely to achieve eight or more hours of sleep (92%). Asian and Black young people were also more likely to report good sleep every night (39%, 41% respectively). In contrast, White young people were less likely to report good sleep every night (25%), despite similar levels of sleep duration (90%).

Socioeconomic differences were observed. Young people eligible for FSM were less likely to achieve eight or more hours of sleep (86%) compared with those not eligible (92%), and were also less likely to report good sleep on most nights. Those eligible for FSM were more than twice as likely to report no good night sleep (7% vs 3%). A similar pattern was observed by parental education, with young people whose parent/carer had a degree or higher being most likely to achieve eight or more hours of sleep (92%), compared with those with GCSE/A-level qualifications (89%) and those with entry-level or no qualifications (87%). However, young people whose parents had the lowest level of education were more likely to report good sleep every night (37%), compared with 28% among those whose parents had the highest level of education.

Young people with SEN were more likely to experience poorer sleep. 10% of young people with SEND reported 8 hours or more sleep compared with 12% of young people without SEN.

Regional differences were modest, with proportions achieving sufficient sleep ranging from 87% in the North West to 93% in London, and the proportion reporting good sleep every night ranging from 24% in the East Midlands and South West to 35% in London.

Figure 17: Young people getting 8+ hours of sleep on an average weekday

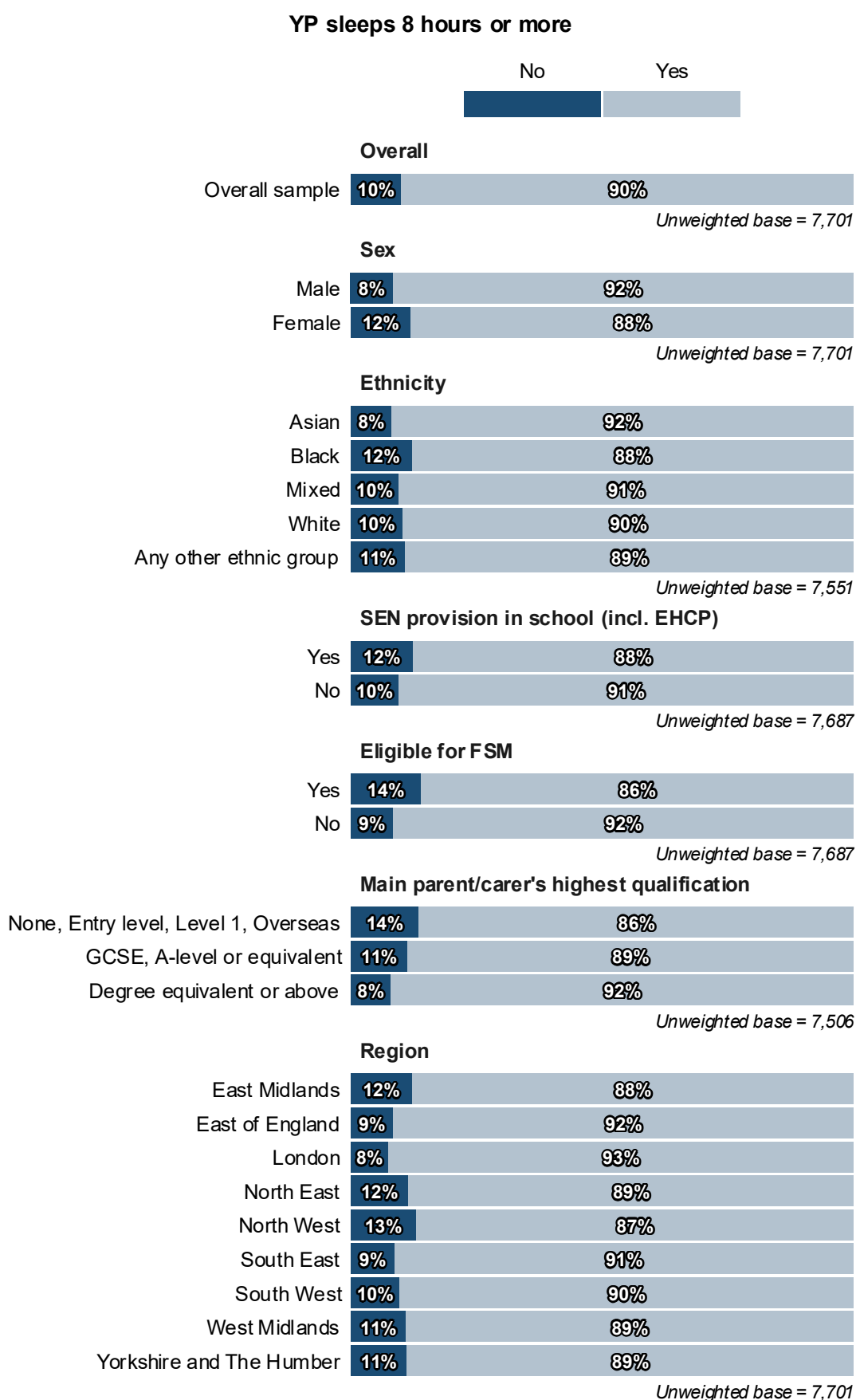
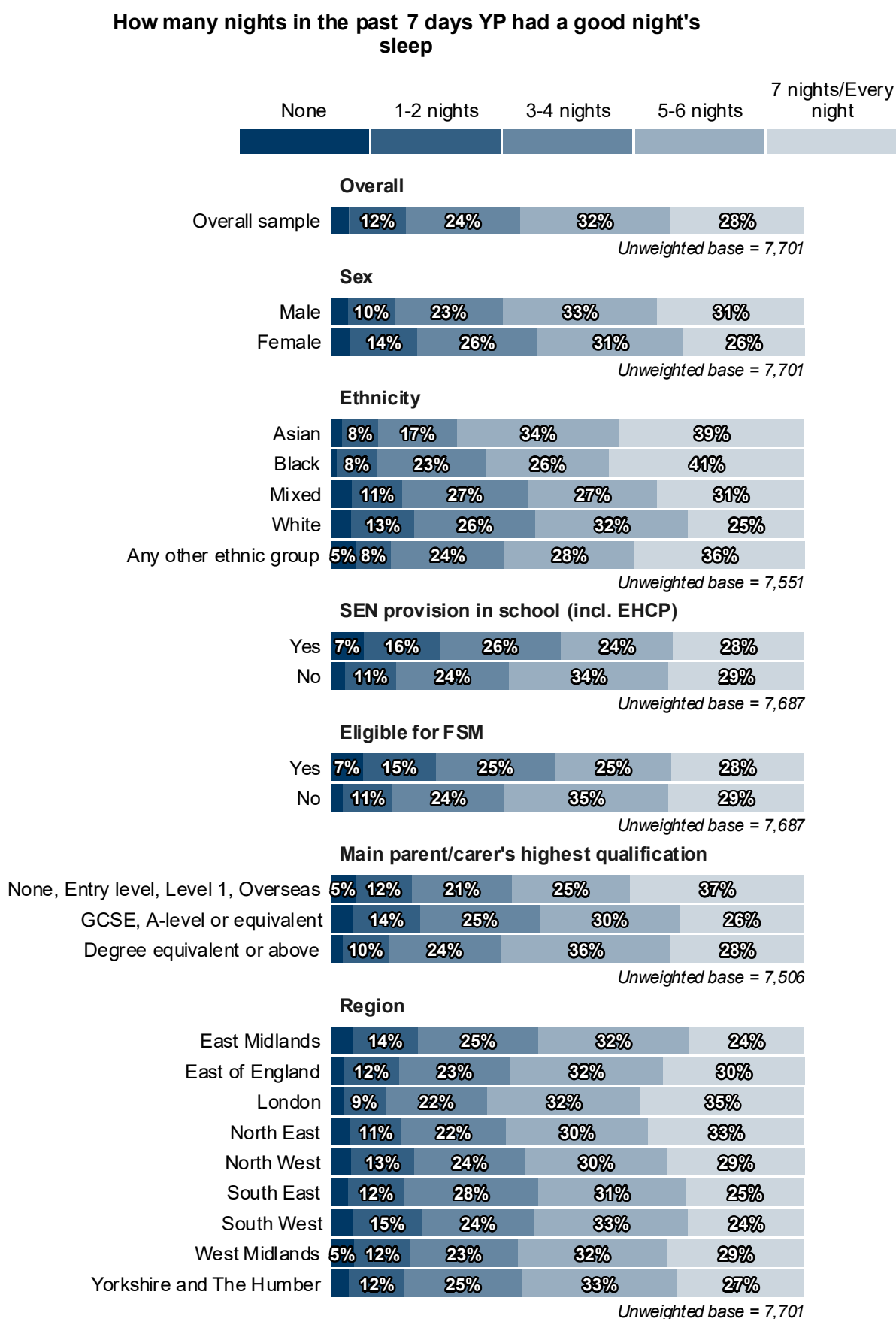


Figure 18: Number of nights per week young people experienced a good night's sleep



Physical activity

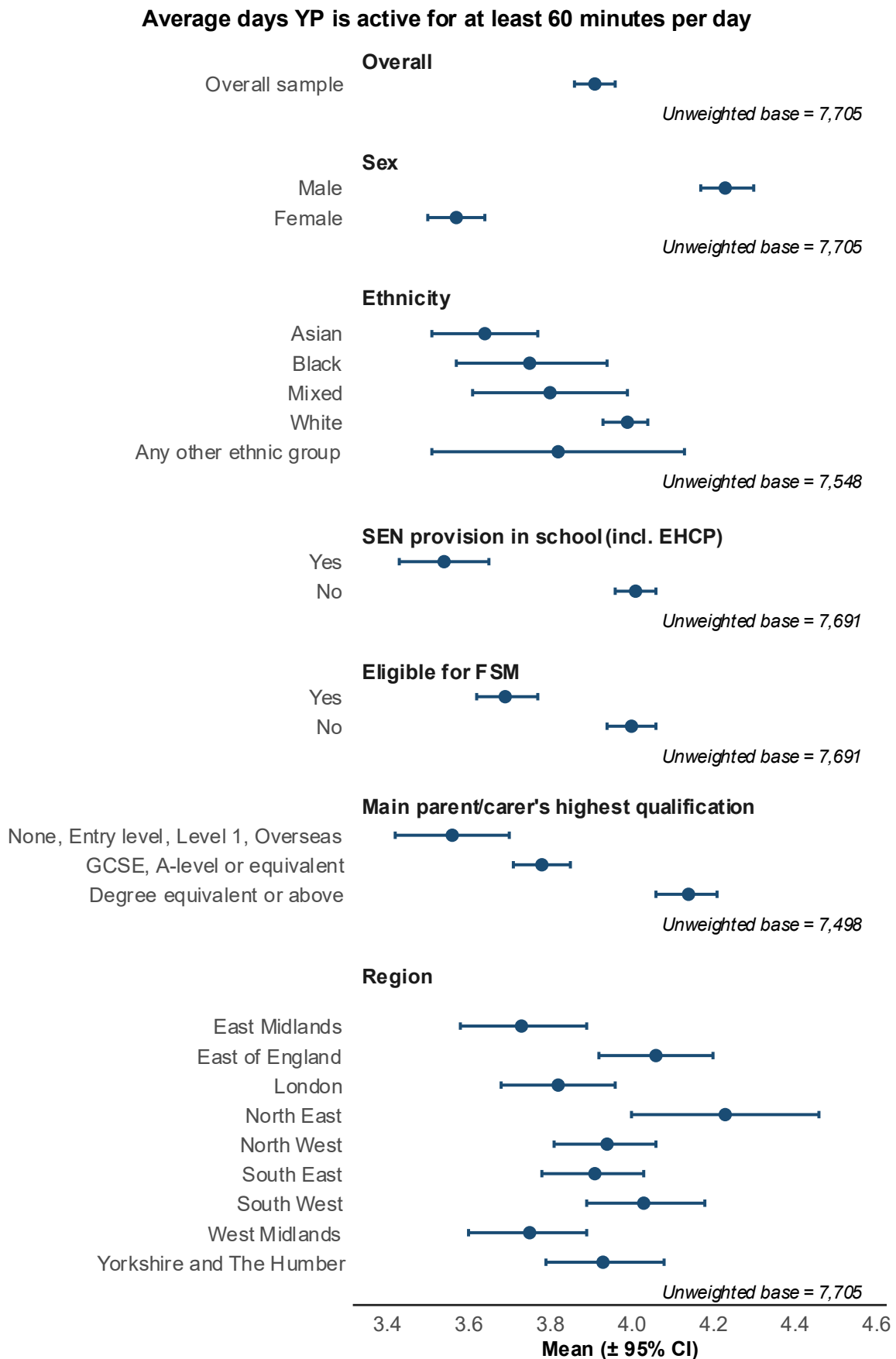
Department of Health and Social Care (2019) and current NHS guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily for children and young people aged 5 to 18, with a minimum of 20 minutes daily recommended for those with disabilities (NHS, 2024). Young people in this study reported being physically active for at least 60 minutes on an average of 3.91 days per week. Overall, a relatively small proportion of young people met the recommended level of being active for at least 60 minutes on all seven days (17%).

On average, boys were active more frequently than girls, reporting 4.23 days per week compared with 3.57 days among girls. Differences by ethnicity were modest, with average activity levels ranging from 3.63 days among Asian young people to 3.99 days among White young people.

Socioeconomic gradients were evident. Young people eligible for FSM reported fewer active days on average (3.69 days) than those not eligible (4.00 days). Similarly, activity levels were lower among young people with SEN, who reported an average of 3.54 active days per week, compared with 4.01 days among those without SEN. A similar pattern was observed by parental education, with average days of at least 60 minutes of activity increasing alongside qualification level (3.56 days for entry-level or no qualifications, 3.78 for GCSE/A-level, and 4.14 for degree-level or above).

Regional variation was also observed. Average days of physical activity ranged from 3.73 days in the East Midlands to 4.23 days on the North East, with most regions clustering around four active days per week.

Figure 19: Number of days young people are active for at least 60 minutes per day



Alcohol use

Young people's alcohol consumption is a key health behaviour that typically emerges during early adolescence and is linked to a range of short- and long-term health and social outcomes (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2012).

Overall, 11% reported having tried alcohol, with similar rates between boys and girls. This proportion is lower than estimates from NHS Digital, which reported that 31% of young people aged 13 had tried alcohol in 2023 (NHS Digital, 2024a). Rates varied considerably across ethnic groups, being lowest among Asian (2%) and Black (3%) young people, and highest among White (14%) young people. Young people with SEN reported slightly higher rates (13%) than those without SEN (10%). Differences were also observed by parental education, with young people whose parent/carer had GCSE/A-level qualifications most likely to report ever having had an alcoholic drink (13%), compared with those with degree-level qualifications (10%) and those with entry-level or no qualifications (7%). Regional variation was notable, with highest prevalence in the South West (18%) and the lowest in London (4%).

Among those who reported drinking, frequency varied. Overall, most young people drank only a few times a year (65%), with a much smaller proportions drinking about once a month (9%) or several times a month (5%). One fifth (21%) reported that they never drink alcohol now. Patterns were similar across sex with 21% boys and 20% of girls reporting they never drink currently. Young people from Asian backgrounds (50%) were more likely to report never drinking compared with White young people (19%). Socioeconomic differences persisted in drinking frequency. Young people with SEN also had higher proportion drinking several times a month (10%) than those without SEN (3%).

Figure 20 : Young people who ever had an alcoholic drink

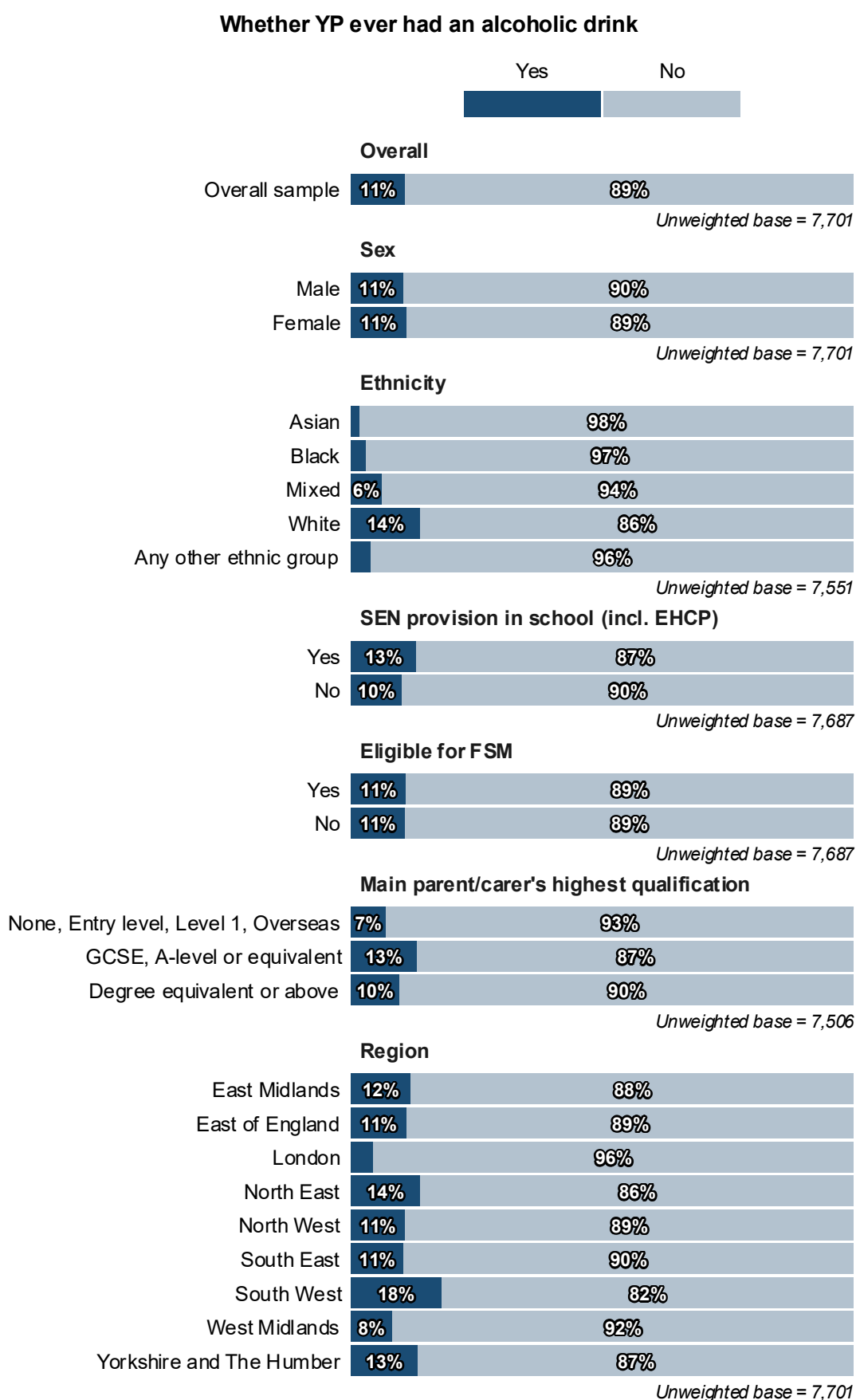
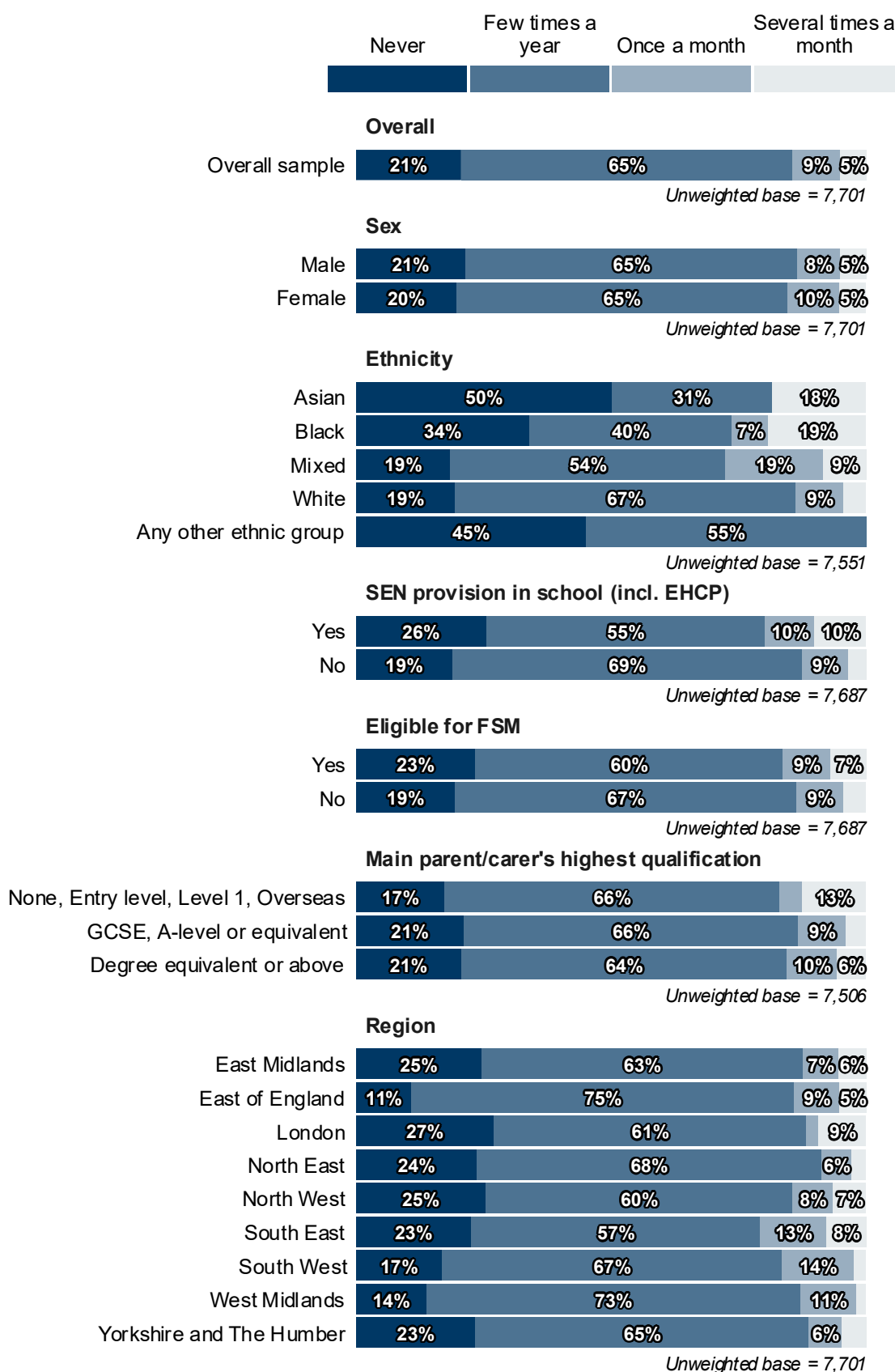


Figure 21: Young person reported frequency of consuming alcoholic drinks

YP's frequency of consuming alcoholic drinks



Cigarette smoking and vaping/e-cigarette use

Similar to alcohol use, cigarette smoking and vaping use are important adolescent health behaviours, as early initiation is linked to long-term health risks and may act as a gateway to other substance use (Golder et al., 2025).

Use of cigarettes among young people were low overall. The majority of young people reported that they had never smoked cigarettes (98%), with very small proportions reporting that they have only tried once (1%), used to smoke but no longer do (0.4%), or currently smoked (0.2%). This represents a lower prevalence than that reported by NHS Digital, where 9% of young people aged 13 were reported to have ever smoked in 2023 (NHS Digital, 2024b). Patterns were broadly consistent across sex and ethnicity, although the proportion who had ever smoked was slightly higher among young people eligible for FSM (4%) and those with SEN (5%).

Vaping or e-cigarette use was somewhat more common, though still minimal. Most young people reported never having vaped/used e-cigarette (91%), indicating lower prevalence than the 76% reported by NHS Digital for 13-year-olds in 2023 (NHS Digital, 2024c). A small proportion had either vaped/used an e-cigarette but had not continued to do so (7%), had used one occasionally (1%), or vaped/used e-cigarettes daily (0.7%). Boys were slightly less likely to have ever vaped than girls (92% vs 90%). Similar to smoking, use was slightly higher among those eligible for FSM (15% any current or past use) and young people with SEN (13%) compared to those without eligibility to FSM (6%) and those without SEN (8%).

Table 24: Young people's smoking and vaping status

Category	Proportion % (weighted)	Lower CI	Upper CI	Un-weighted N
YP's smoking status				
Never smoke	98.0	97.7	98.3	6841
Tried it once	1.4	1.1	1.6	7744
Used to smoke	0.4	0.3	0.6	7744
Smoke now	0.2	0.1	0.4	7744
YP's vaping status				
I have never vaped / used an e-cigarette	91.2	90.5	91.8	7741
I have vaped / used an e-cigarette but don't at all now	6.7	6.1	7.3	7741
I now vape / use an e-cigarette occasionally but not every day	1.3	1.3	1.7	7741
I vape / use an e-cigarette every day	0.5	0.6	0.9	7741

Mental health and wellbeing

Section overview

- This section examines young people's mental health and wellbeing, drawing primarily on young people's own reports to provide a descriptive overview of life satisfaction, resilience and mental health.

Mental health was measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), a well-established measure of child mental health, Measures of probable mental health difficulties, derived from the SDQ also incorporate parent-reported data.

- A consistent focus on inequalities is applied throughout, with findings explored by sex, ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, whether a pupil is recorded as receiving special education needs (SEN) support, with or without an EHCP, parental education and region. Together, these measures provide insight into both protective factors and areas of vulnerability during early adolescence.

Life satisfaction

- Overall, young people were mostly neutral or satisfied with their lives across domains, particularly for family relationships (98%), friendships (95%), and life as a whole (94%).
- The proportion who were neutral or satisfied was lower for appearance and school (both 86%), and boys reported more favourable ratings than girls across all five domains, including appearance (91% vs 82%) and school (89% vs 83%). However, the proportion who were neutral or satisfied with their school experience was lower among young people eligible for FSM (80% vs 89%) and those with SEN provision (80% vs 88%).

Resilience

- Most young people perceived themselves as resilient, with 71% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they keep trying when they find something difficult (23% strongly agree; 48% agree).
- Boys reported higher perceived persistence than girls, with more boys strongly agreeing (26% vs 20%) and agreeing (51% vs 45%).
- Lower resilience was more evident among disadvantaged groups such as young people eligible for FSM and those with SEN were more likely to strongly disagree that they keep trying when things are difficult (3% and 4%, respectively, vs 1% among peers).

Mental health difficulties

- Using the combined parent- and young person-reported SDQ algorithm, 25% of young people met criteria for a probable mental health disorder and a further 14% were classified as possible.
- Probable disorder was more common among girls than boys (28% vs 23%) and markedly higher among White young people (29%) than Asian (11%) and Black (16%) young people.
- Socioeconomic and educational inequalities were pronounced with probable disorder being reported for 36% of FSM-eligible young people versus 20% of non-eligible peers, and for 54% of young people with SEN versus 17% of those without SEN.
- Across the different mental health domains, hyperactivity was the most commonly reported difficulty (29%), followed by total difficulties (17%), emotional difficulties (14%), conduct difficulties (13%), and peer difficulties (6%).
- Girls were more likely than boys to report high emotional difficulties (22% vs 6%), hyperactivity (31% vs 27%), and total difficulties (21% vs 13%).
- Difficulties were also more common among White young people, those eligible for FSM, and those with SEN. For example, high hyperactivity was reported by 36% of FSM-eligible young people versus 26% of non-eligible peers, and by 43% of young people with SEN versus 25% of those without SEN.

Conclusions

- Overall, most young people reported positive wellbeing and resilience, with high life satisfaction across key domains and 71% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they persist when faced with difficulties.
- At the same time, mental health difficulties were common, particularly hyperactivity (29%), and one in four young people (25%) met criteria for a probable mental health disorder. Findings suggest that levels of probable mental health disorder are high within this contemporary, representative cohort of young people. Comparisons with other datasets, presented later in chapter, should be interpreted cautiously due to methodological differences. However, the findings highlight the ongoing need for mental health support and prevention efforts.
- The strongest inequalities were by FSM eligibility and SEN status, indicating that mental health difficulties in early adolescence may already be socially patterned.

Life satisfaction across key domains

Young people's own assessments of their wellbeing provide valuable insights that may differ from adult observations or objective measures of functioning. Life satisfaction (a subjective evaluation of quality of life) is an important predictor of mental health, academic outcomes, and resilience during adolescence (Proctor, Linley and Maltby, 2009; Suldo and Huebner, 2004). Young people's life satisfaction was measured across five domains using a 7-point scale: satisfaction with family relationships, friendships, life as a whole, appearance, and school. Across domains, responses were generally skewed towards the positive end of the scale, with relatively smaller proportions selecting the midpoint or lower values. Responses were categorised using a cut-off below the midpoint of the scale (score of 4), with scores below 4 classified as 'unhappy' and scores of 4 or above classified as 'neutral/happy'.

Young people generally reported positive levels of life satisfaction across all five domains assessed. Satisfaction was highest for family relationships, with 98% of young people reporting feeling neutral or happy, followed by friendships (95%) and life as a whole (94%). Slightly lower proportions reported feeling neutral or happy about their appearance (86%) and the school they attend (86%).

Across all five domains, boys reported higher satisfaction than girls. The largest differences were observed for appearance, where 91% of boys reported feeling neutral or happy compared with 82% of girls. Similarly, 89% of boys felt neutral or happy about their school compared with 83% of girls. The pattern was consistent but less pronounced for life as a whole (boys: 97%; girls: 91%). Differences were smaller for family relationships and friendships, but the same overall pattern was evident across domains.

Life satisfaction varied modestly by ethnic group. Young people from Asian and Black backgrounds reported higher satisfaction with appearance (91% and 88% feeling neutral or happy, respectively) compared with White young people and those from Mixed ethnic backgrounds (both 85%). Satisfaction with friendships was highest among Asian young people (97% neutral or happy) and lowest among those from Black backgrounds (94%). Satisfaction with family was high across all ethnic groups, with between 96% and 98% reporting feeling neutral or happy.

Young people eligible for FSM reported slightly lower satisfaction with school, with 80% feeling neutral or happy compared with 89% of those not eligible for FSM. The gap was smaller for life as a whole (FSM eligible: 92%; not eligible: 95%) and friendships (FSM eligible: 94%; not eligible: 96%). Satisfaction with family was high and broadly comparable across both groups (FSM eligible: 97%; not eligible: 98%).

Young people with SEN provision reported levels of satisfaction broadly similar to those of their peers without SEN across most domains. For life as a whole, 90% of young people with SEN reported feeling neutral or happy compared with 95% of those without SEN. The largest difference was observed for school satisfaction,

where 80% of young people with SEN felt neutral or happy compared with 88% of those without SEN.

Regional variation was modest overall, although some differences were evident. Positive feelings about school ranged from 82% in Yorkshire and the Humber to 90% in London. Other domains showed relatively consistent patterns across regions, with family relationships remaining the most positively rated throughout.

Figure 22: Young person reported 'How do you feel about the way you look?'

YP reported - How do you feel about the way you look?

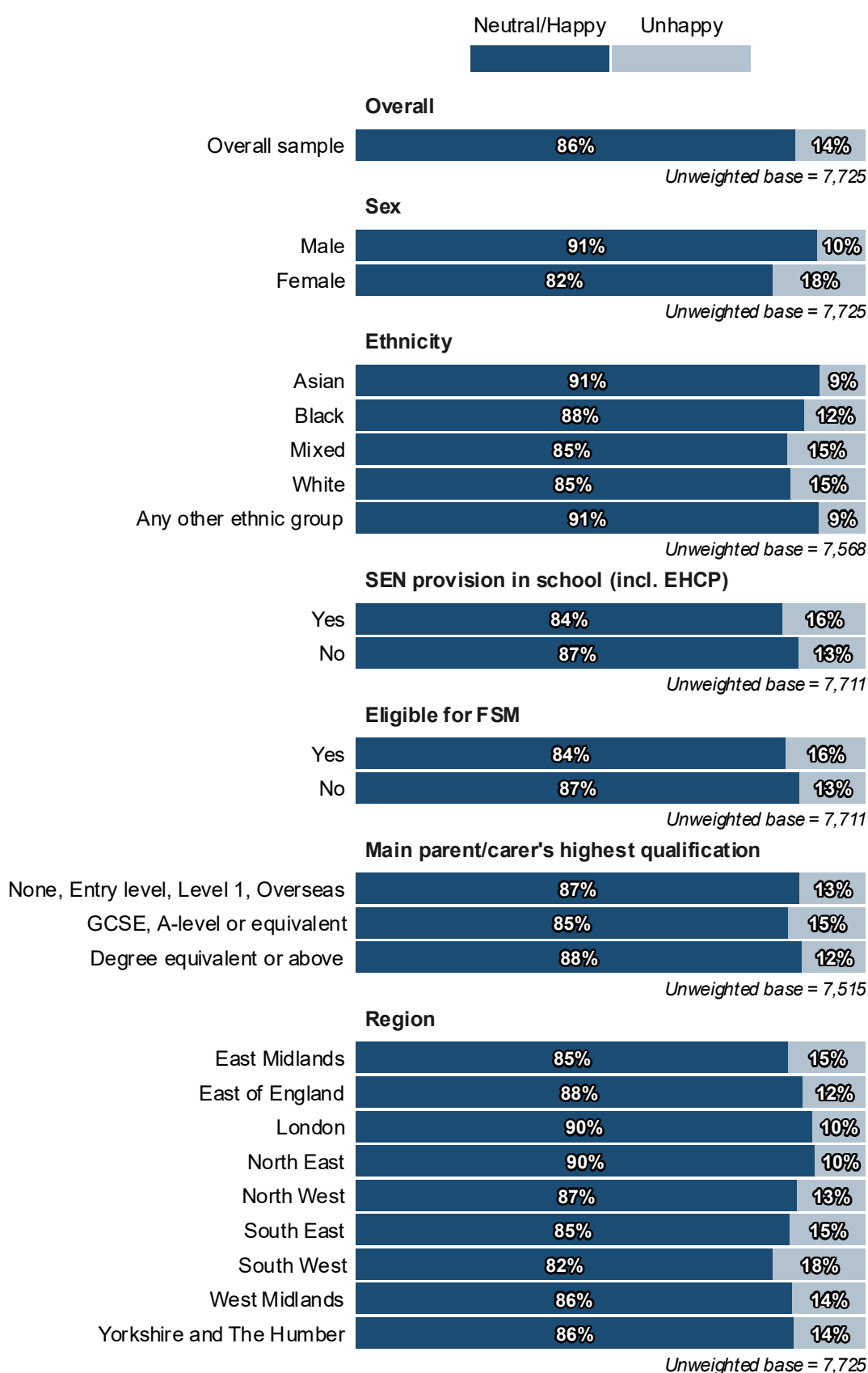


Figure 23: Young person reported 'How do you feel about your family?'

YP reported - How do you feel about your family?

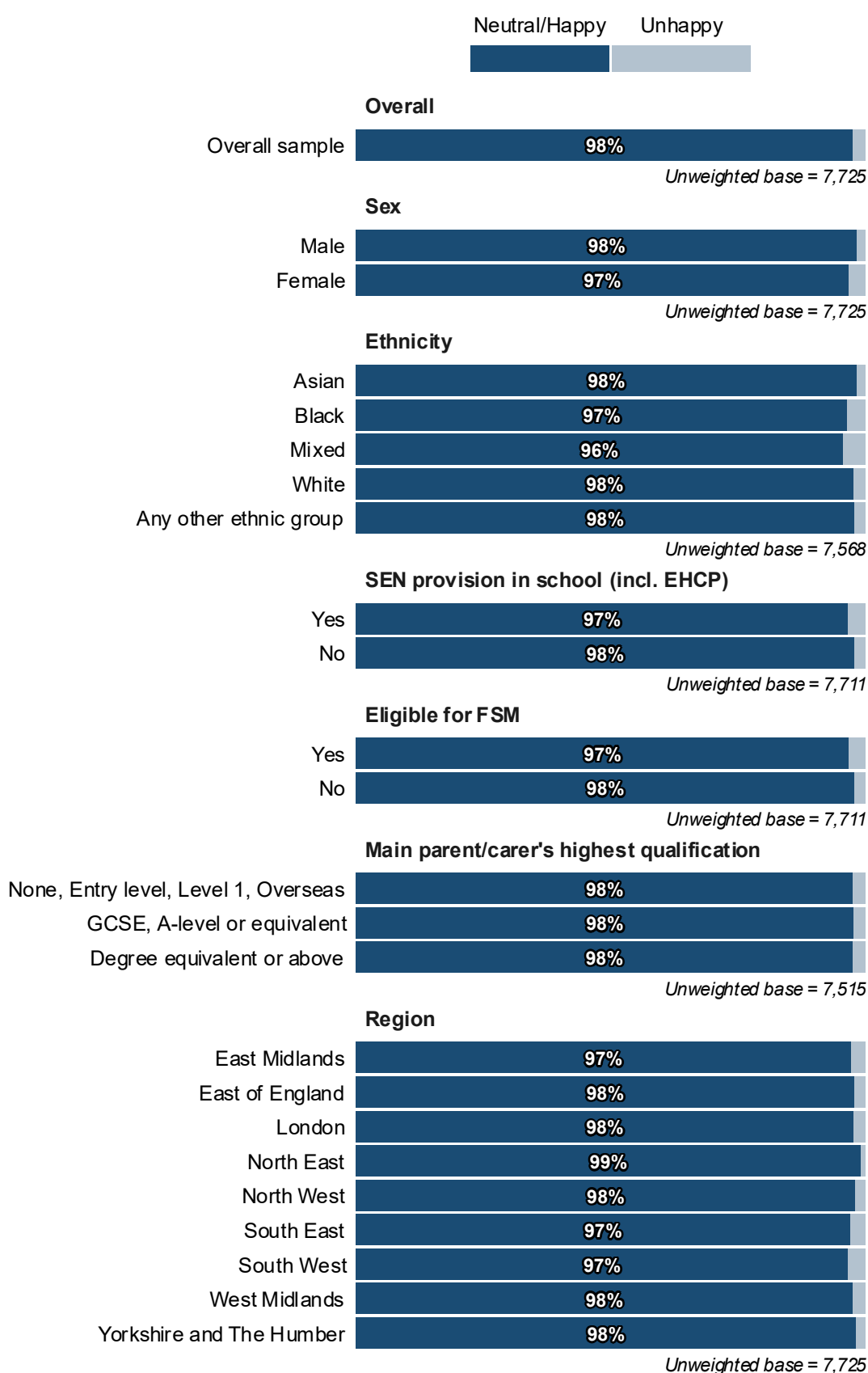


Figure 24: Young person reported 'How do you feel about your friends?'

YP reported - How do you feel about your friends ?

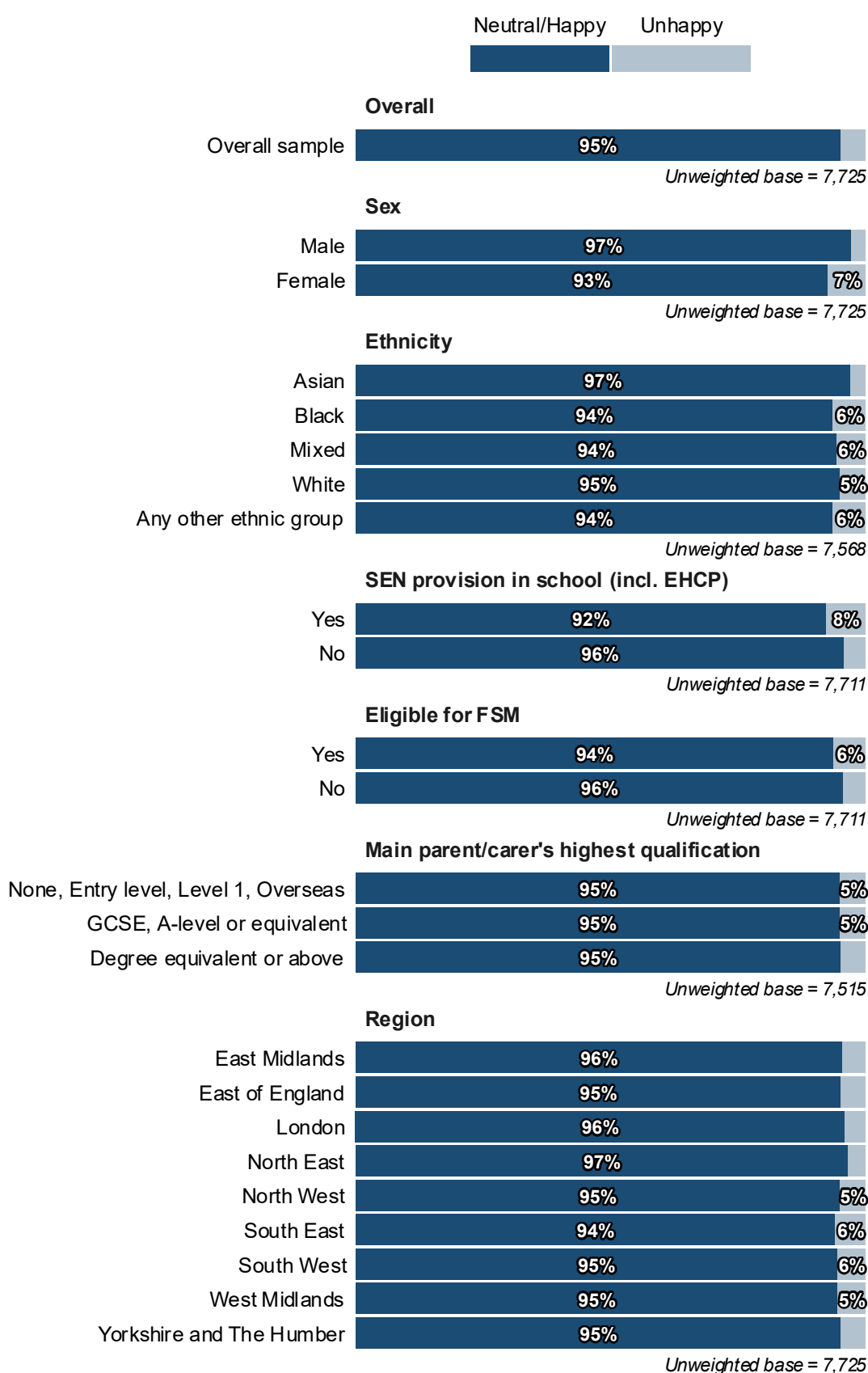


Figure 25: Young person reported 'How do you feel about the school you go to?'

YP reported - How do you feel about the school you go to ?

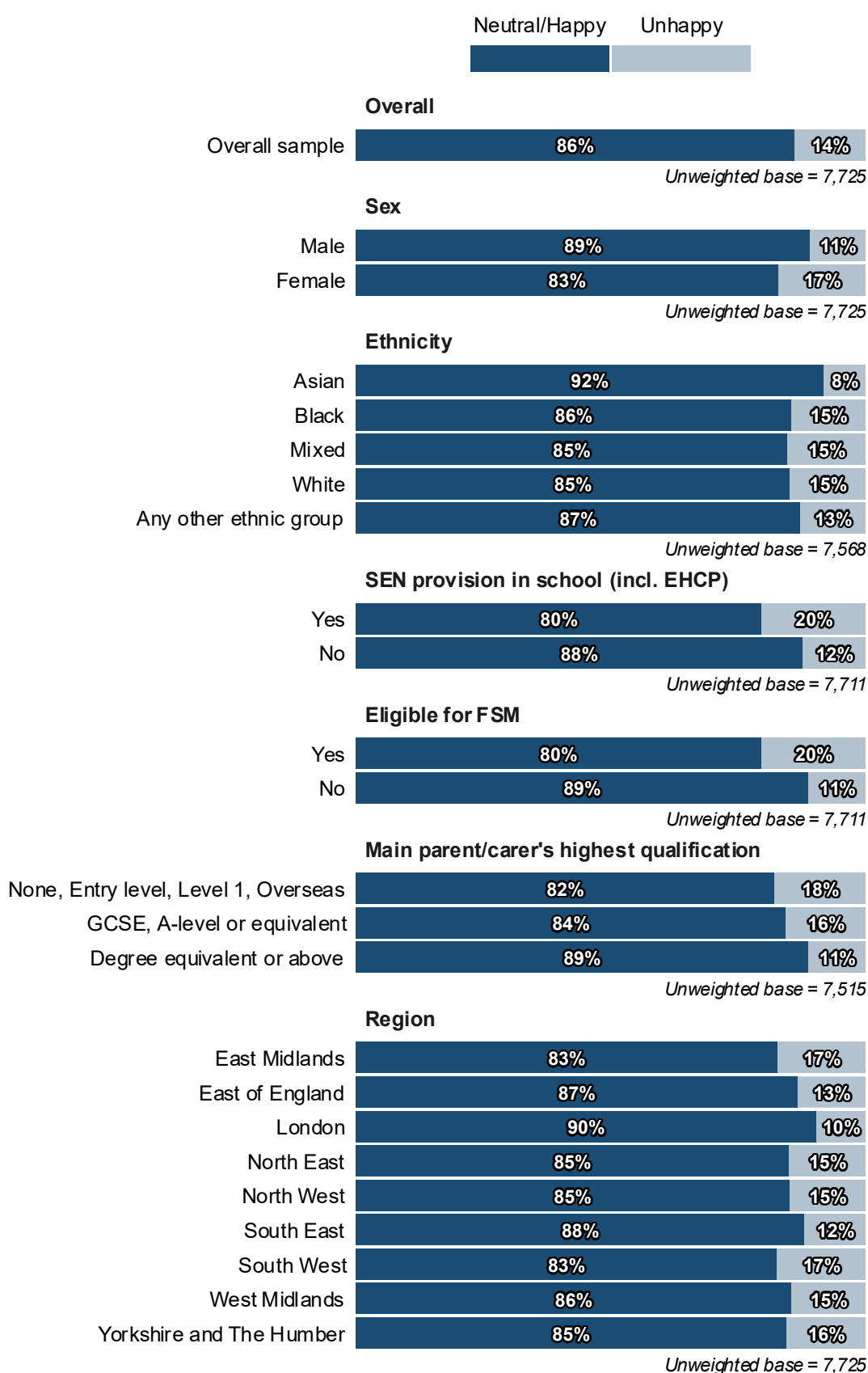
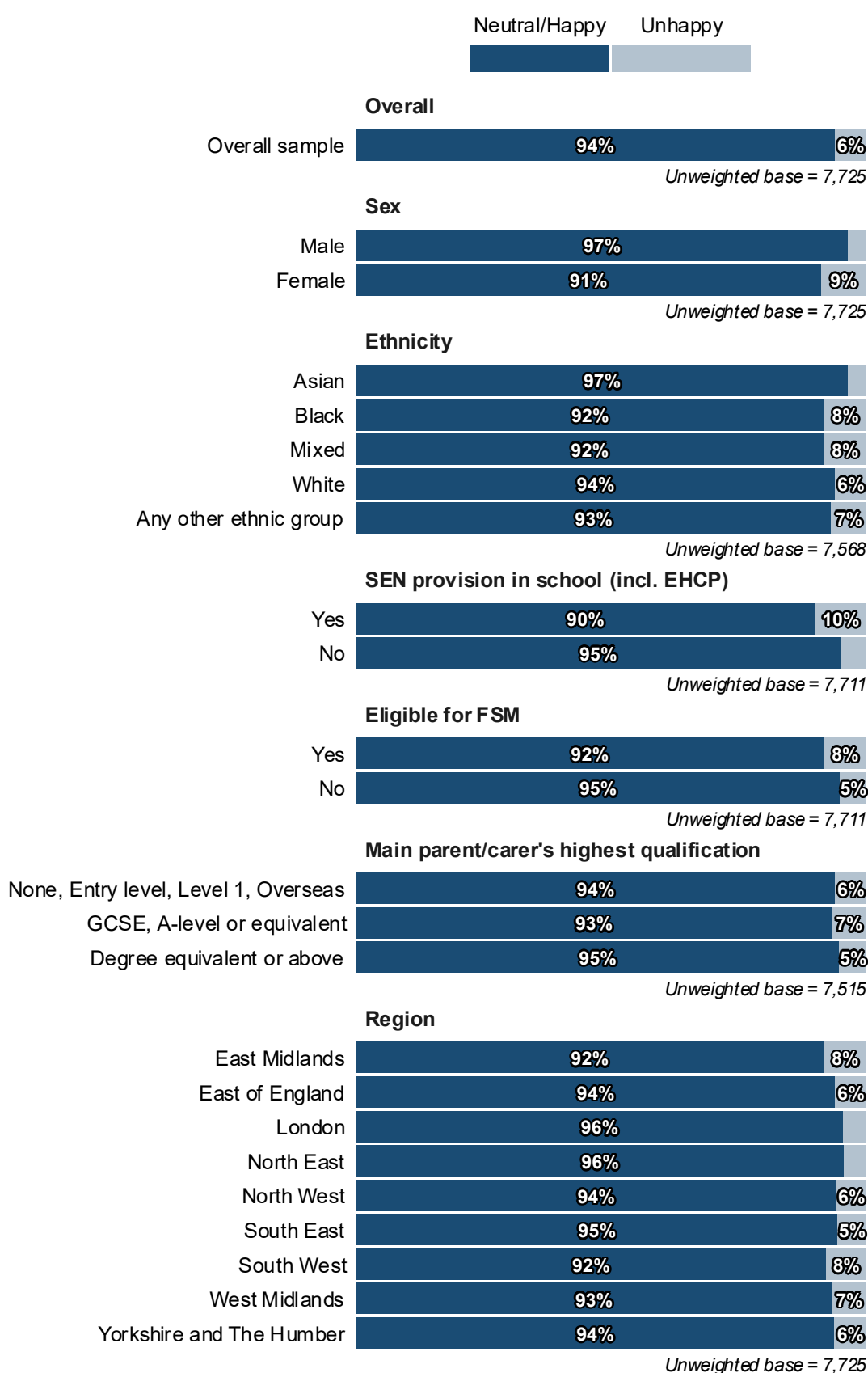


Figure 26: Young person reported 'How do you feel about your life as a whole?'

YP reported - How do you feel about your life as a whole?



Resilience

Resilience represents a key protective factor that can buffer against adversity and support positive adaptation during adolescence (Masten, 2014). Research demonstrates that resilient young people experience better mental health outcomes, stronger social relationships, and improved academic achievement, even when facing challenging circumstances (Dray et al., 2017; Ungar, 2019). Persistence (the capacity to continue trying when faced with difficulties) is a core component of resilience and an important indicator of young people's ability to cope with setbacks and challenges. Examining young people's self-reported persistence therefore provides valuable insight into this protective resource.

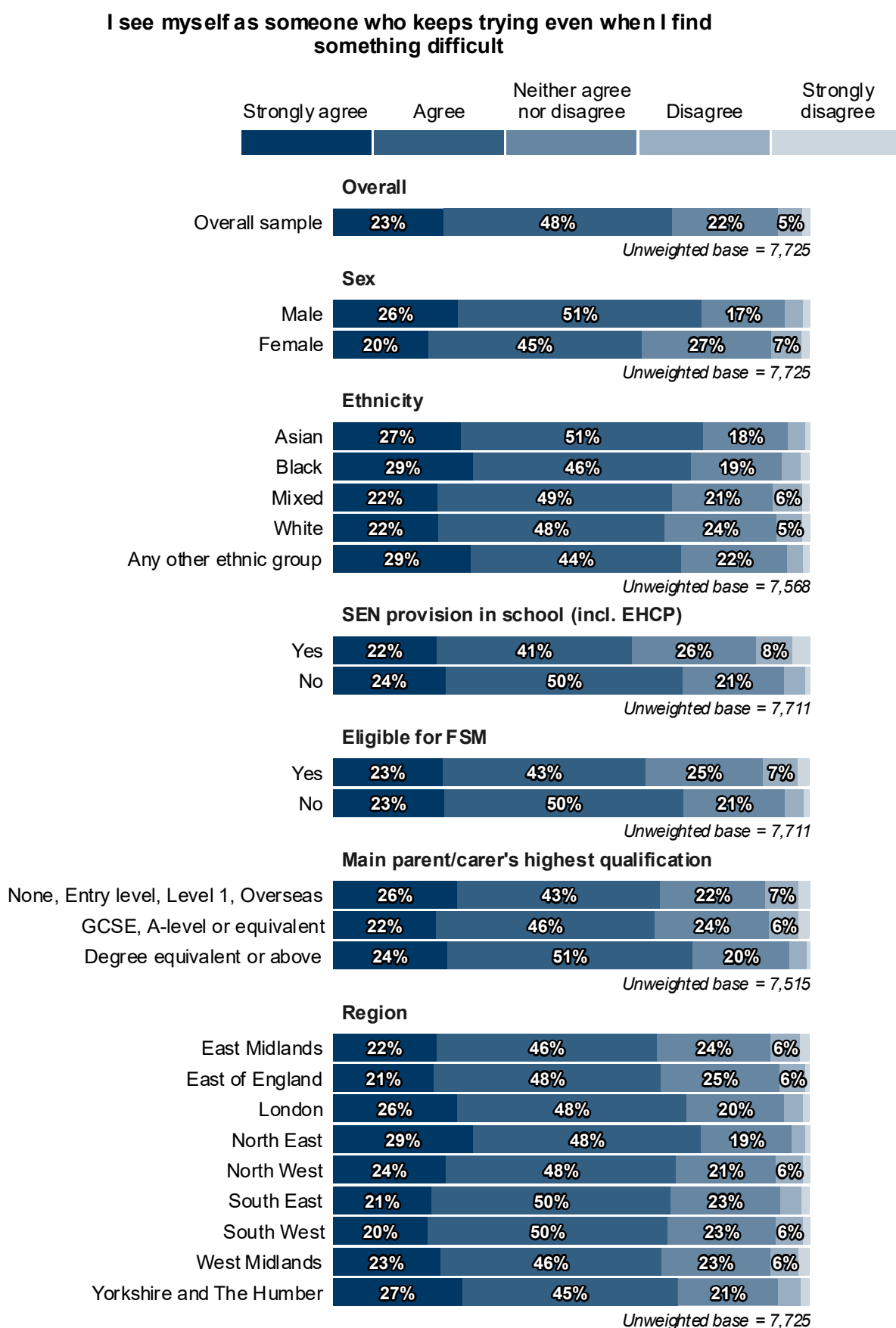
Young people were asked to what extent they see themselves as persistent, continuing to try even when faced with difficulties. Overall, 23% strongly agreed, and 48% agreed, indicating that most young people perceive themselves as resilient in the face of challenges. Around 22% neither agreed nor disagreed, with only small proportions of young people disagreeing (5%) or strongly disagreeing (2%).

There were some differences by sex, with boys more likely than girls to strongly agree (26% vs 20%) and agree (51% vs 45%), while girls were more likely to report neither agree nor disagree (27% vs 17%). Patterns were broadly consistent across ethnic groups, though young people identifying as Black or AOEG reported slightly higher levels of strong agreement (both 29%).

Those eligible for free school meals were more likely to strongly disagree (3%) compared with non-eligible peers (1%). Similarly, those with SEN were more likely to strongly disagree (4%) compared with peers who do not have SEN (1%). Differences by parental education level were minimal,

Regional differences were modest, with strong agreement ranging from 20% in the South West to 29% in the North East.

Figure 27: Young person responses to 'I see myself as someone who keeps trying even when I find something difficult'



Mental health

Mental health is a key determinant of young people's overall wellbeing, academic engagement, and social development (Patel et al., 2007). Adolescence represents a particularly vulnerable period, with most mental health conditions first emerging before age 14 (Kessler et al., 2005). Mental health difficulties during this developmental stage are associated with increased risk of educational disengagement, social isolation, and poorer health outcomes in adulthood (Copeland et al., 2015). Understanding the prevalence and nature of mental health difficulties among young people is therefore essential for informing preventive interventions and support services.

In this section, young people's mental health was assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), a widely used screening tool that captures multiple domains of mental health. SDQ data were collected from young people, parents, and teachers. For descriptive analyses of total difficulties and subscale severity categories, only the young person-reported SDQ data are used. The SDQ comprises five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour¹⁹. Participants rate each item on a 3-point scale ('not true', 'somewhat true', or 'certainly true'). Each subscale includes five items, producing scores ranging from 0 to 10, where lower scores indicate fewer difficulties. A total difficulties score was calculated by summing the four problem subscales, ranging from 0 to 40. The prosocial behaviour subscale is not used to calculate mental health difficulties and so is described later in this report where social and peer relationships are described.

Following standard SDQ cut-offs (Goodman, 1997), scores were categorised as normal, borderline, or abnormal/high for each subscale and for total difficulties. Results based on the newer four-band classification (close to average; slightly raised; high; very high) are also presented in the Appendix (Goodman, 2016). To enable comparability with NHS Digital analyses (NHS Digital, 2023), a variable indicating probable mental health disorder was derived using parent and young person reported data. To integrate information across informants, computerised algorithms developed by Goodman, Renfrew, and Mullick, (2000) were applied. These algorithms combine symptom and impact scores from multiple respondents to classify each child as having an "unlikely", "possible", or "probable" mental health disorder.

For the full distribution of SDQ scores across normal, borderline, and high categories, see Figures 28-31. Overall, 14% of young people had high levels of emotional difficulties. This was slightly higher than estimates from the Understanding Society Study where 12% of 13-year-olds in Wave 15 (data collected in 2023-2024) reported having high levels of emotional difficulties. In the current study, 22% of girls reported high emotional difficulties compared to 6% of boys. Differences by ethnic grouping were also observed, White young people were more likely to report high emotional difficulties (16%) than Asian and Black young people (7% and 10%,

¹⁹ Findings relating to prosocial behaviour are reported within the peer relationships section.

respectively). Young people eligible for FSM and those with SEN were more likely to report high levels of emotional difficulties (FSM: 18%; SEN: 18%) compared with their peers (Non-FSM: 12%; No SEN: 13%).

Overall, 13% of young people reported having high levels of behavioural difficulties. This was similar to estimates from Wave 15 of the Understanding Society Study for 13-year-olds where 14% of young people reported having high levels of behavioural difficulties. Similar proportions of boys and girls reported having high levels of behavioural difficulties (14% vs 13%). Differences by ethnic group showed higher prevalence among White young people (14%) and Black young people (15%) relative to Asian young people (7%). FSM-eligible young people also had higher levels (21%) compared with non-eligible peers (10%). Rates were also markedly higher for young people receiving SEN support (24%) than those without (10%).

Overall, 6% of young people reported high levels of peer difficulties, the lowest proportion across all SDQ domains. This was comparable to data from Understanding Society Study where 7% of young people reported high levels of peer difficulties. In the current data, similar proportions of boys and girls reported having high levels of peer difficulties (5% vs 7%). High levels of peer difficulties were more frequently reported among FSM-eligible young people (9%) than non-eligible peers (5%), and among those receiving SEN support (13% vs 4%).

Hyperactivity scores were higher overall than those observed for the other SDQ subscales. 29% of young people reported high levels of hyperactivity which was comparable to the Understanding Society Study where 26% of young people reported high levels of hyperactivity. Girls reported slightly higher rates (31%) compared to boys (27%). White young people reported the highest rates (34%) followed by young people with mixed ethnicity (23%). Only 12% of Asian young people reported high level of hyperactivity. High levels were more frequently reported among FSM-eligible young people (36% vs 26%) and those receiving SEN support (43% vs 25%).

Looking across all four of the 'problem subscales of the SDQ (emotional problems, peer problems, conduct problems and hyperactivity/inattention) allow for a calculation of 'total difficulties', which is a measure of overall mental health difficulties. 17% of young people had high levels of overall mental health difficulties which was similar to 18% of 13-year-olds from the Understanding Society Study. Girls were substantially more likely than boys to report high overall mental health difficulties (21% vs 13%), 30% of young people with SEND and 25% of those eligible for FSM reported high overall mental health difficulties compared with peers without SEN (14%) or not eligible for FSM (13%).

Similar to the most recent NHS Digital Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey, mental health status was classified using computerised algorithms that combine symptom and impact scores on the SDQ across multiple informants to categorise each child as having an "unlikely", "possible", or "probable" mental health disorder (NHS Digital, 2023a). This particular approach combines young person and parent reports. Based on these calculations, around one in four young people (25%) in the Growing Up in the 2020s sample met criteria for a

probable mental disorder, with a further 14% showing possible difficulties. This is slightly higher than the most recent estimates based on NHS digital data, indicating 21% of 13-year-olds had a probable mental disorder and a further 11% of young people had possible difficulties (NHS Digital, 2023b).

Clear differences were observed by sex, with girls more likely than boys to be classified as probable disorder (28% vs 23%), while rates of possible disorder were similar (15% vs 13%). This pattern differs from findings from 13-year-olds in NHS Digital findings, where boys were more likely than girls to meet criteria for a probable disorder (24% vs 18%), and rates of possible disorder were the same for boys and girls (11% each). Marked differences were also evident by ethnicity. Young people from White backgrounds had the highest proportion classified as probable disorder (29%), compared with lower proportions among Asian (11%), Black (16%), and Mixed (25%) groups. Patterns for possible disorder were less pronounced but followed a similar direction.

Socioeconomic differences were substantial. Young people eligible for FSM were considerably more likely to be classified as probable disorder (36%) compared with those not eligible (20%), and also slightly more likely to be classified as possible disorder (17% vs 13%). This is consistent with findings for 13-year-olds in NHS Digital data, which also show higher rates among FSM-eligible young people (probable: 31% vs 17%; possible: 20% vs 9%). A similar pattern was observed for SEN status, with 54% of young people with SEN classified as having probable disorder compared with 17% of those without SEN. Again, this aligns with NHS Digital estimates for 13-year-olds, although at a slightly lower level (probable: 45% vs 15%; possible: 17% vs 10%).

The proportion classified as probable disorder was highest among young people whose parent/carer had entry-level or no qualifications (32%), compared with GCSE/A-level (19%) and degree-level qualifications (25%). Rates of possible disorder were also higher in the lowest education group (18%) compared with the middle (15%) and highest groups (12%).

Regional variation was present but less pronounced than for socioeconomic indicators, with the proportion classified as probable disorder ranging from around 19% in the East Midlands to 30% in the North East.

Figure 28: Histogram of SDQ young person reported emotional difficulties

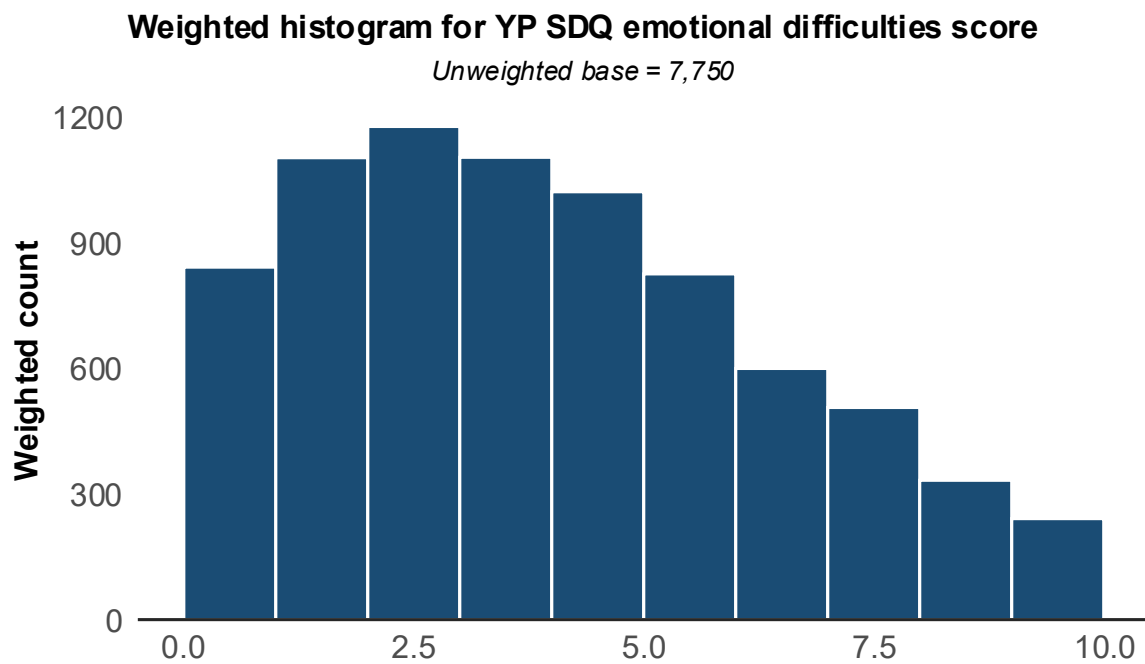


Figure 29: Histogram of SDQ young person reported conduct difficulties

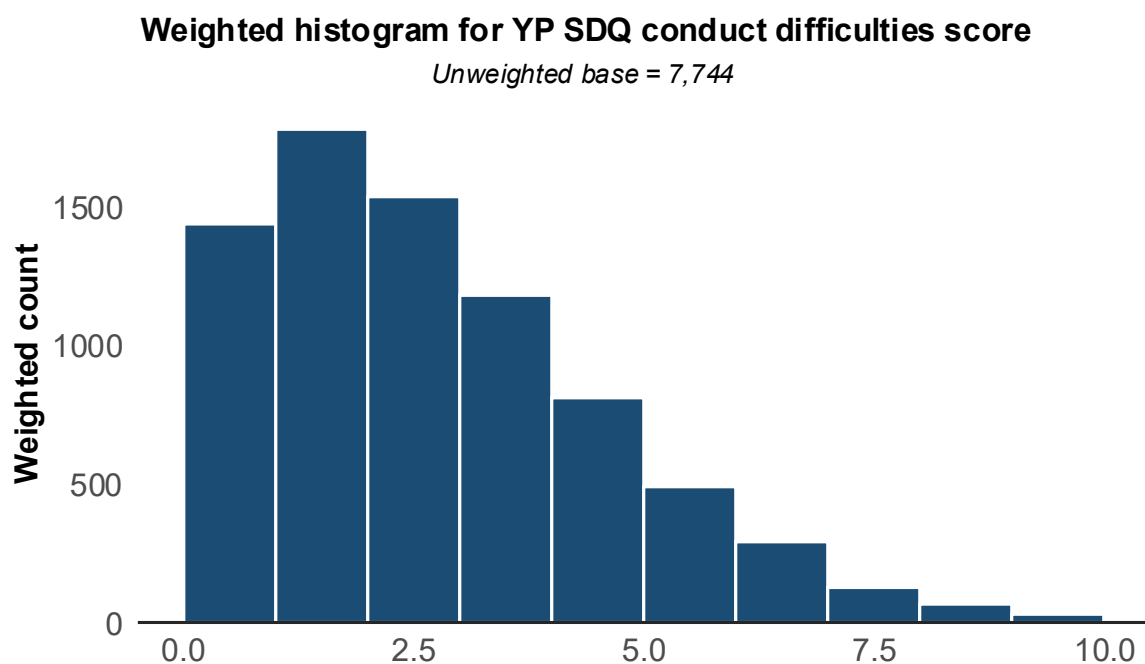


Figure 30: Histogram of SDQ young person peer problems

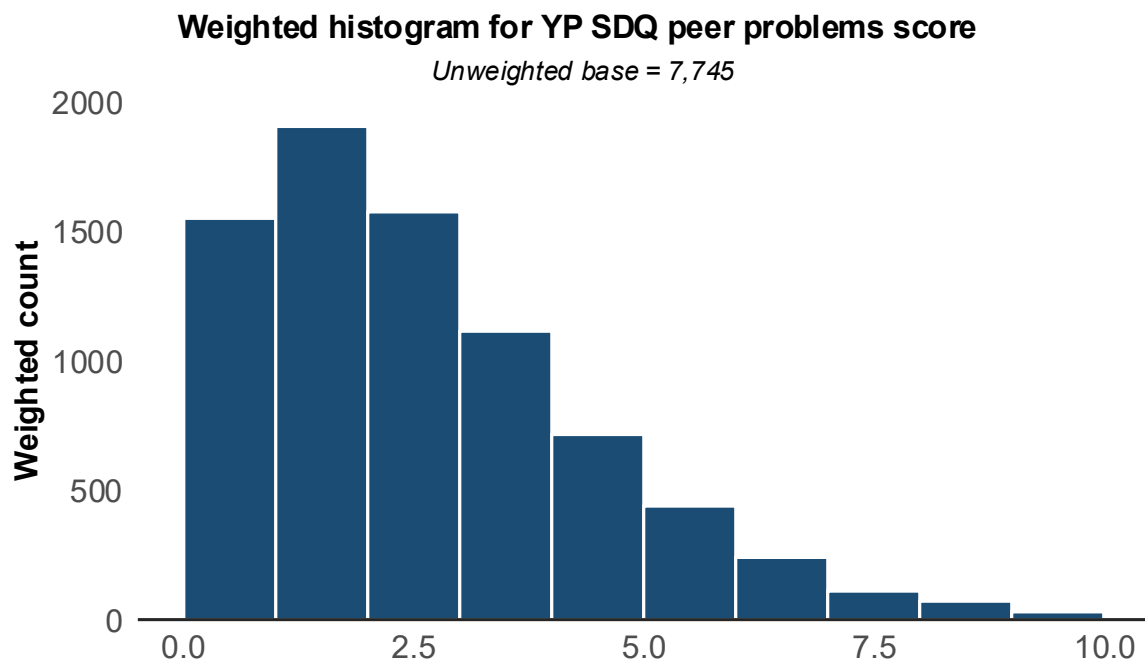


Figure 31: Histogram of SDQ young person reported hyperactivity/inattention

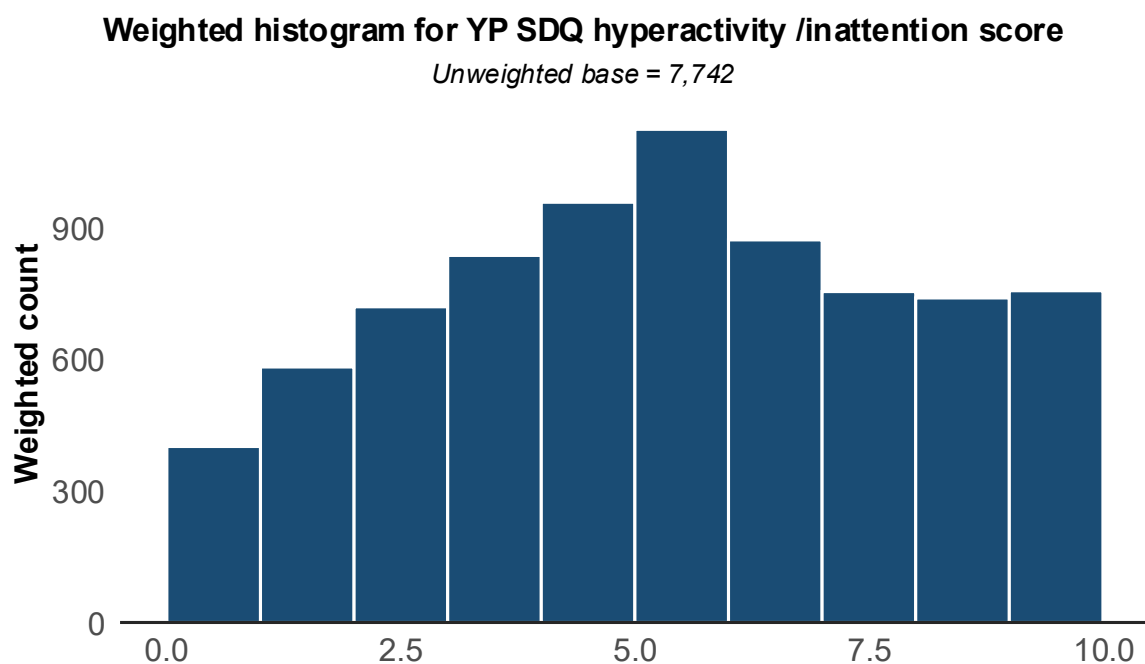


Figure 32: SDQ young person reported emotional difficulties (3 bands)

SDQ YP reported emotional difficulties 3-band categorical

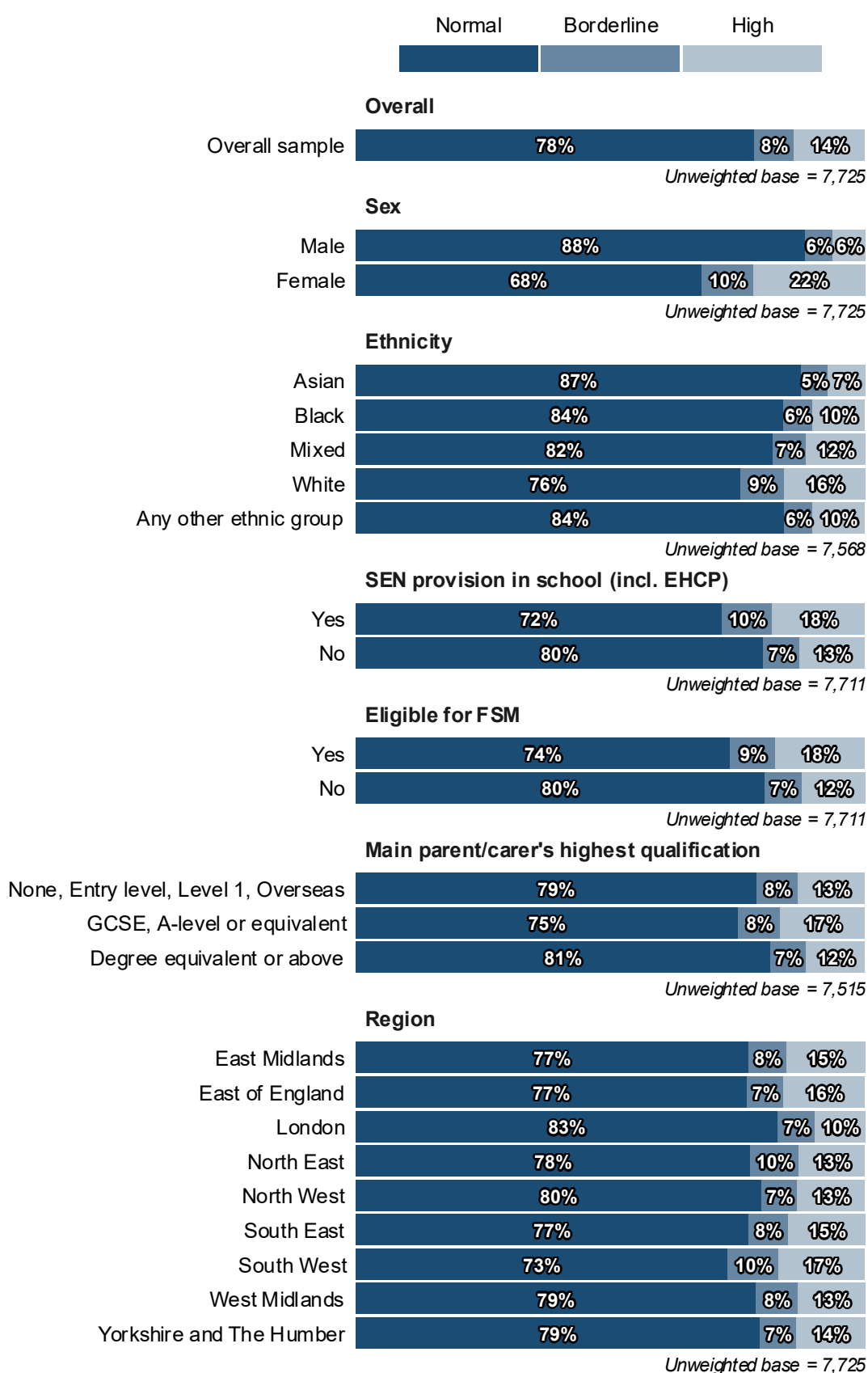


Figure 33: SDQ young person-reported conduct difficulties (3 bands)

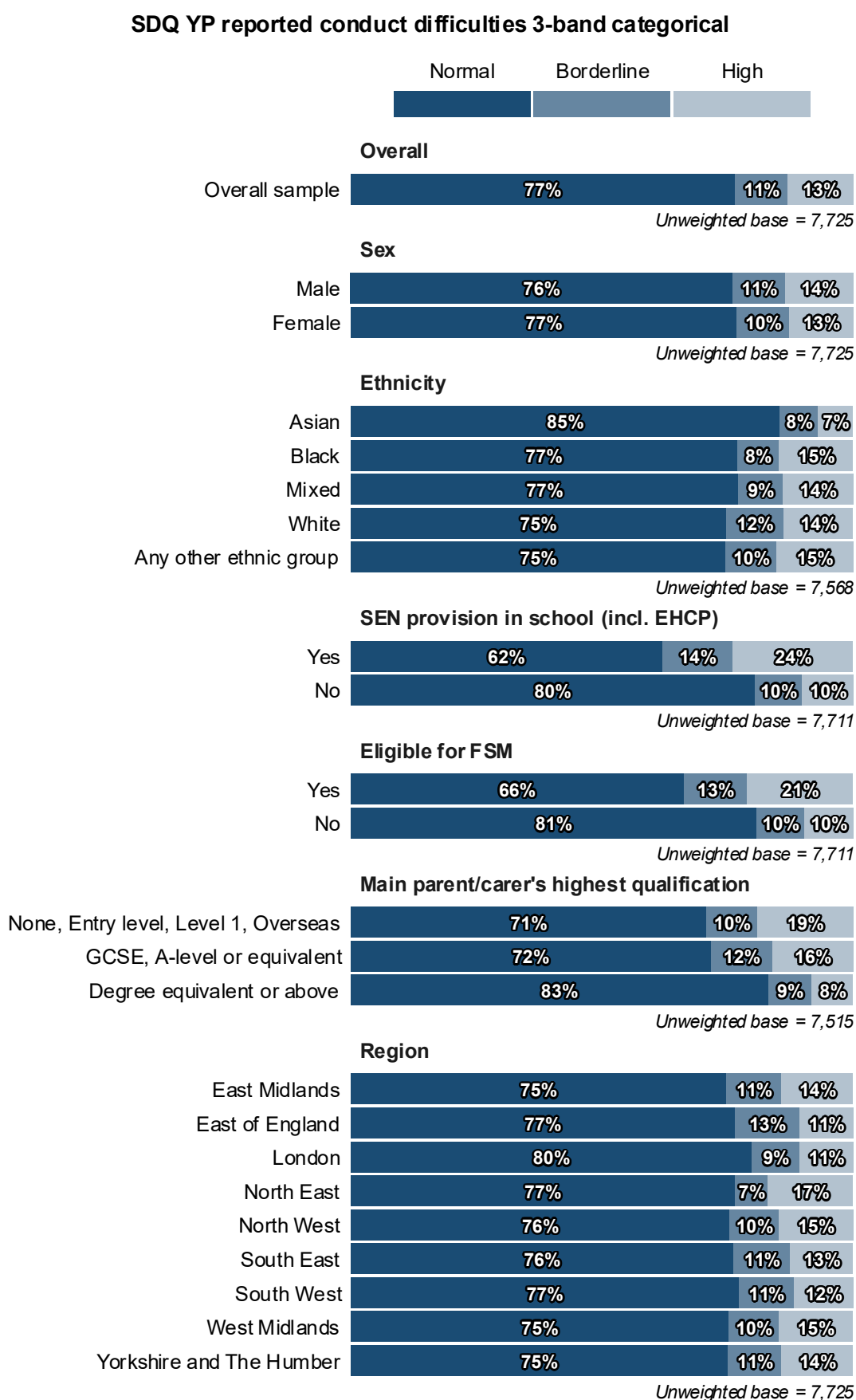


Figure 34: SDQ young person-reported peer difficulties (3 bands)

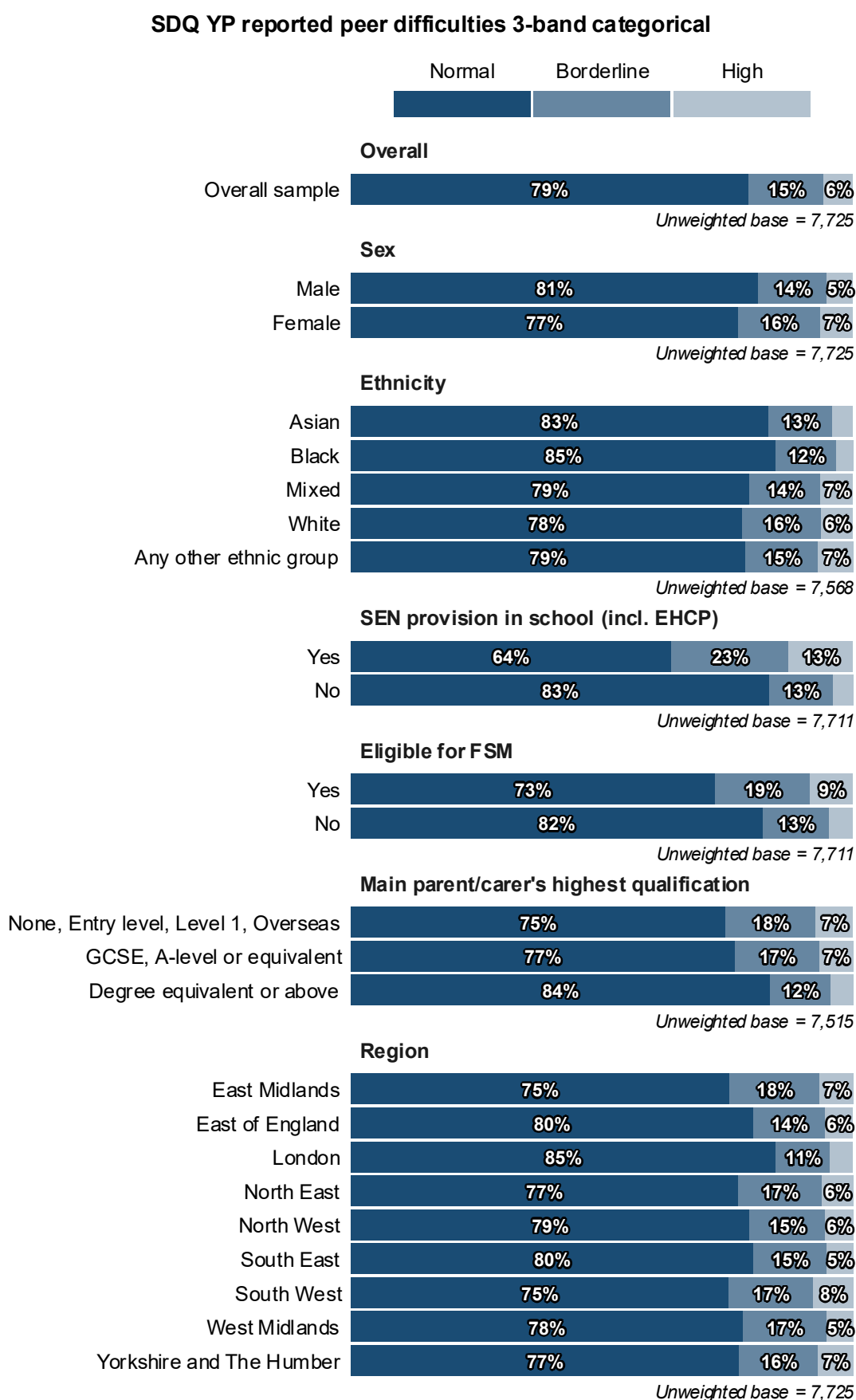


Figure 35: SDQ young person-reported hyperactivity and inattention (3 bands)

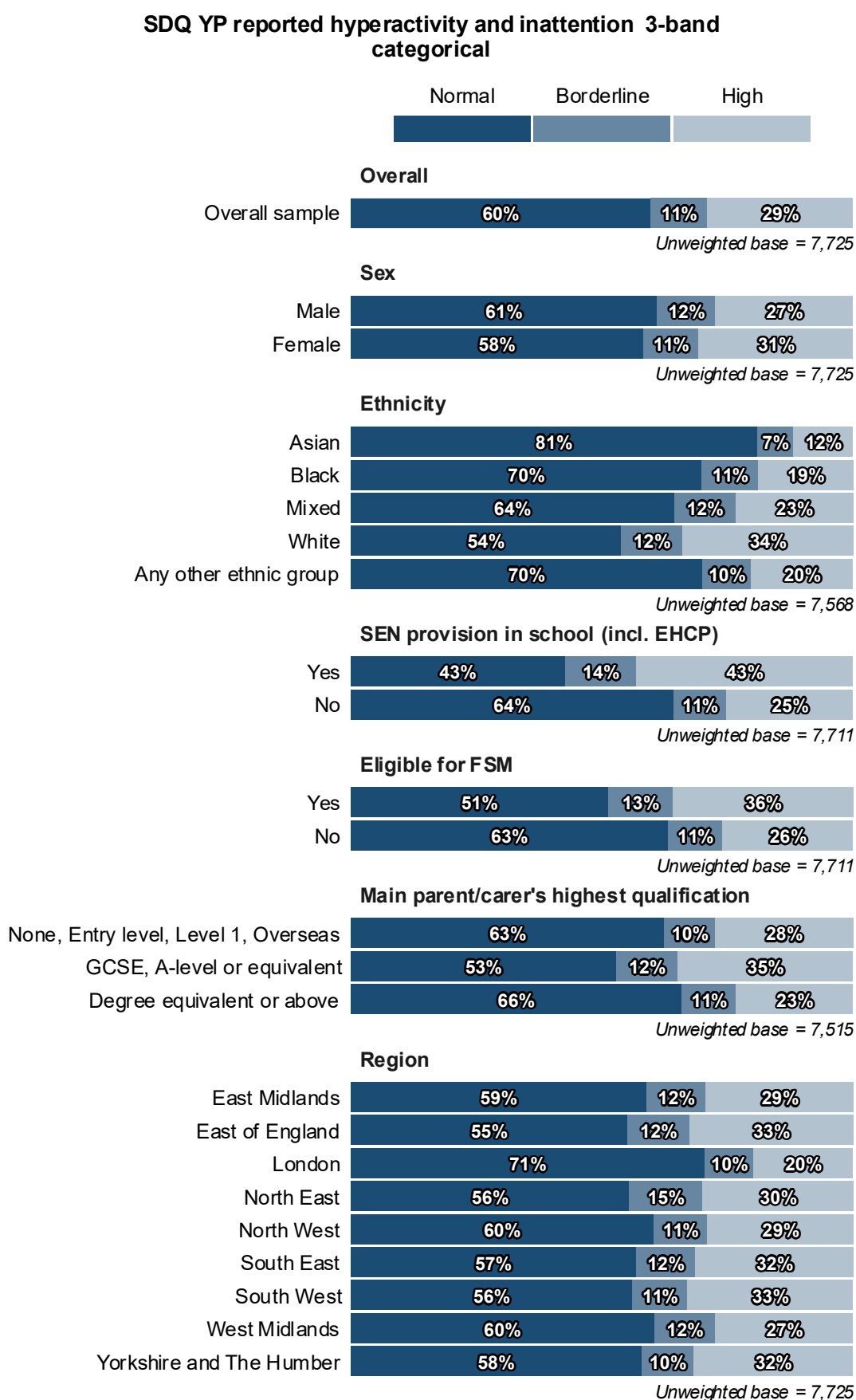


Figure 36: SDQ young person-reported total difficulties (3 bands)

SDQ YP reported total difficulties 3-band categorical

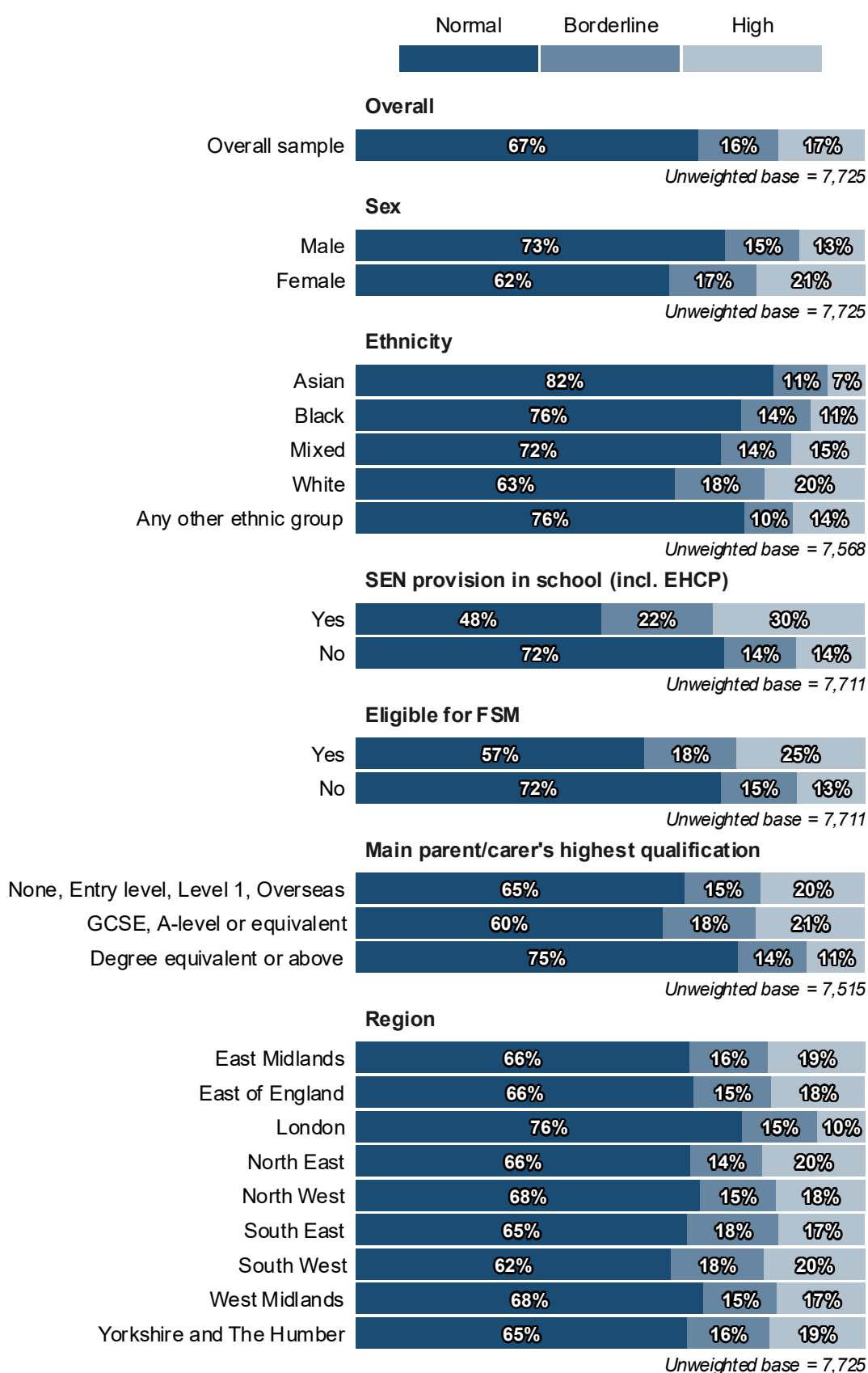
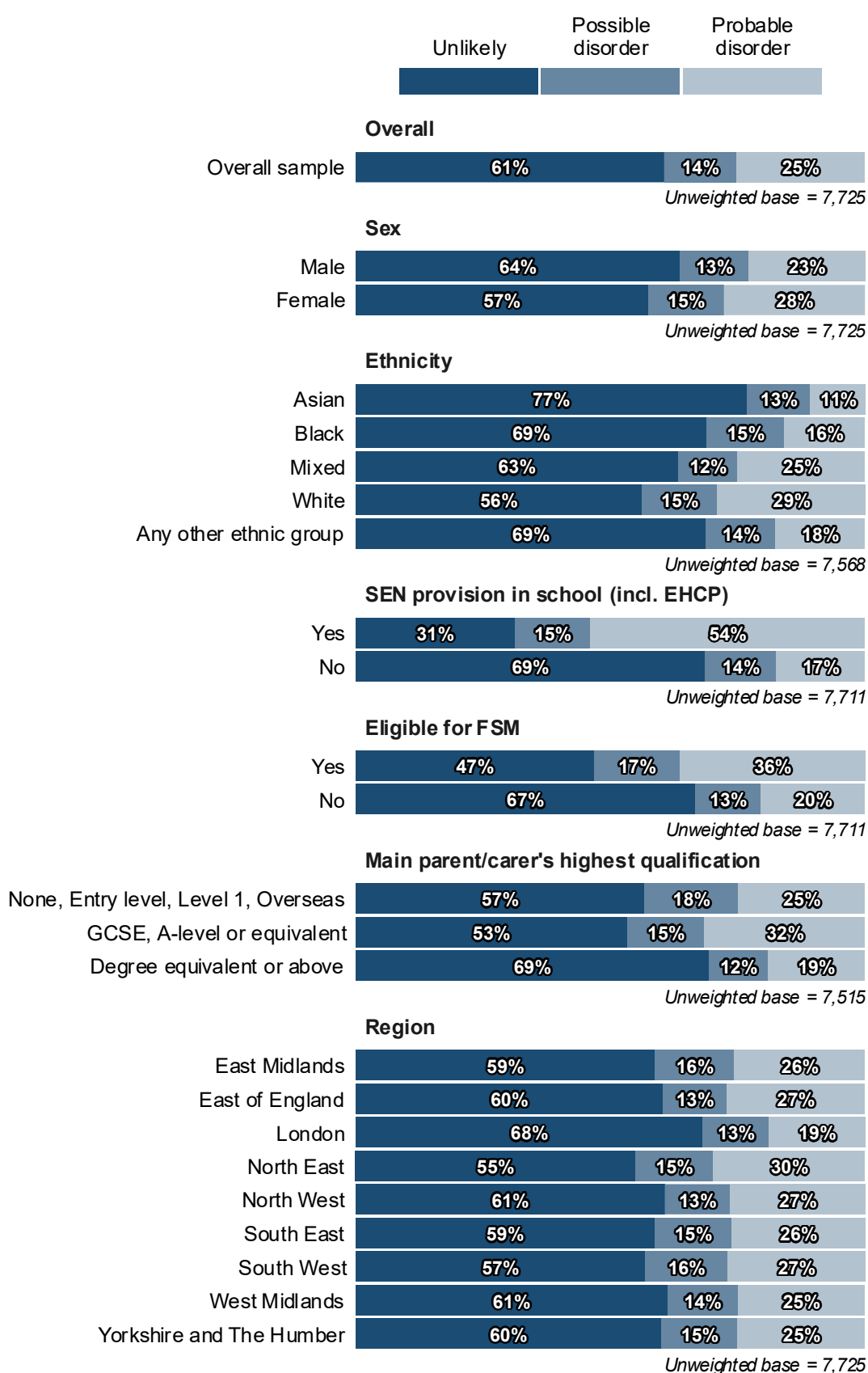


Figure 37: SDQ prediction of any psychiatric disorder

NHS Digital prediction of any psychiatric disorder



Cognitive development

Section overview

- This section examines young people's cognitive functioning at the start of secondary school, using an objective assessment of non-verbal reasoning as a baseline indicator of general cognitive ability. Performance on the Matrix Reasoning task is used to capture aspects of fluid intelligence, including pattern recognition and problem-solving, providing a complementary perspective to prior attainment measures such as Key Stage 2 (KS2) outcomes.
- The mean accuracy score across the cohort was 62%. Findings show clear differences in average scores across socioeconomic and prior attainment groups, with lower average scores among FSM-eligible young people (56% compared with 65% among non-FSM young people), those with lower parental education (58% compared with 66% among those with higher parental education), and those who had not reached expected KS2 levels (53% compared with 68% among those meeting the expected level).
- The data presented in this report represent the most comprehensive and up-to-date evidence currently available for this age group in England. While this cohort is representative of year 8 children in England, there are no established national norms for this measure at this age. Moreover, it is unlikely that any external standardisation sample would exceed the size and representativeness of the current cohort. Consequently, any differences observed relative to other samples are more appropriately interpreted as reflecting cohort, contextual or methodological differences rather than limitations in sample representativeness.
- These findings establish an important baseline for future longitudinal analysis, enabling the study to track how cognitive development relates to later educational trajectories and whether early differences widen, narrow, or remain stable over time.

This section examines young people's cognitive function and the differences that are observable by the second year of secondary school. Non-verbal or abstract reasoning was measured at Wave 1 using the Test My Brain Matrix Reasoning task, a widely used indicator of fluid intelligence and general cognitive ability (Passell et al, 2019). This form of reasoning provides a valuable counterpoint to measures of acquired knowledge, such as end-of-primary-school KS2 assessments, by capturing pattern recognition, problem-solving and abstract reasoning. In doing so, it allows for the identification of young people whose underlying cognitive potential may not be fully reflected in prior attainment, highlighting cases where ability and educational

performance are not closely aligned and where potential may be under-recognised within the school context. It is important to note, however, that performance on this measure is understood to reflect environmental as well as heritable influences and should not be interpreted as a wholly fixed or innate indicator of intelligence (e.g. Weiss and Saklofske, 2020).

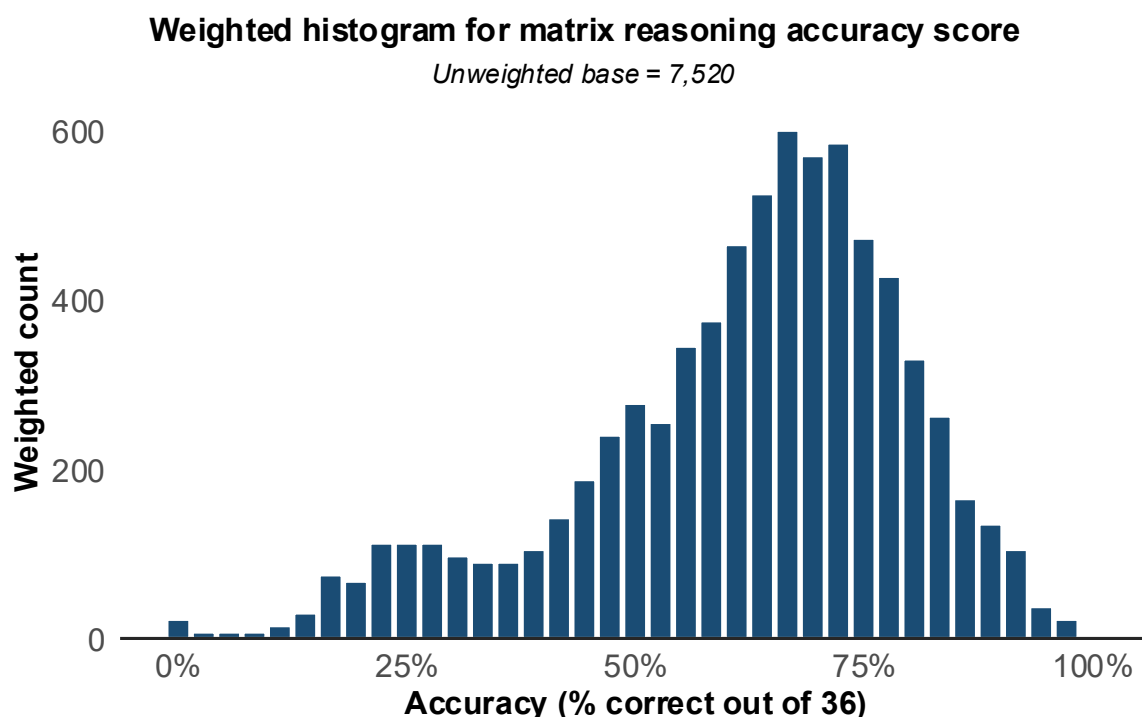
Assessing cognitive function early in the study at age 12 and 13 establishes a crucial baseline for analyses of later educational and developmental outcomes. It helps reduce omitted variable bias in models of factors associated with educational attainment and allows examination of how associations between cognitive ability and attainment vary across individuals and socio-economic contexts. Evidence highlights the importance of cognitive ability for academic development: for example, O’Connell and Marks (2022) found that a composite measure of verbal and non-verbal reasoning was the strongest correlate of GCSE results when controlling for other factors, highlighting its key role in educational attainment between ages 7 and 16.

The Matrix Reasoning task is a well-established measure suitable for diverse samples of adolescents. Participants are presented with up to 36 multiple-choice items that increase progressively in difficulty, each requiring them to complete a 2 x 2 or 3 x 3 visual matrix by selecting the missing element. To identify the correct response, participants must infer abstract relationships between shapes that vary in features such as colour, size, position, and orientation (see [Technical Report](#) for further detail). The task captures core aspects of abstract and relational reasoning and has an estimated duration of approximately 7.5 minutes. A stopping rule is applied, whereby the task ends automatically if a participant provides three consecutive incorrect responses. Participants can also choose to exit the task early.

Accuracy and response time for correct responses were recorded for each item. Following established practice in studies using matrix reasoning tasks with adolescents, the analysis focuses on accuracy-based measures rather than speed of response (e.g. Tsigaridis, 2024; Donati, Meaburn and Dumontheil, 2019). The key outcome is the accuracy score, defined as the proportion of correct responses, with a maximum of 100% if all 36 items are answered correctly. This section presents the distribution of accuracy scores across the cohort and examines differences by socioeconomic indicators such as FSM eligibility and parental education, as well as prior attainment at KS2.

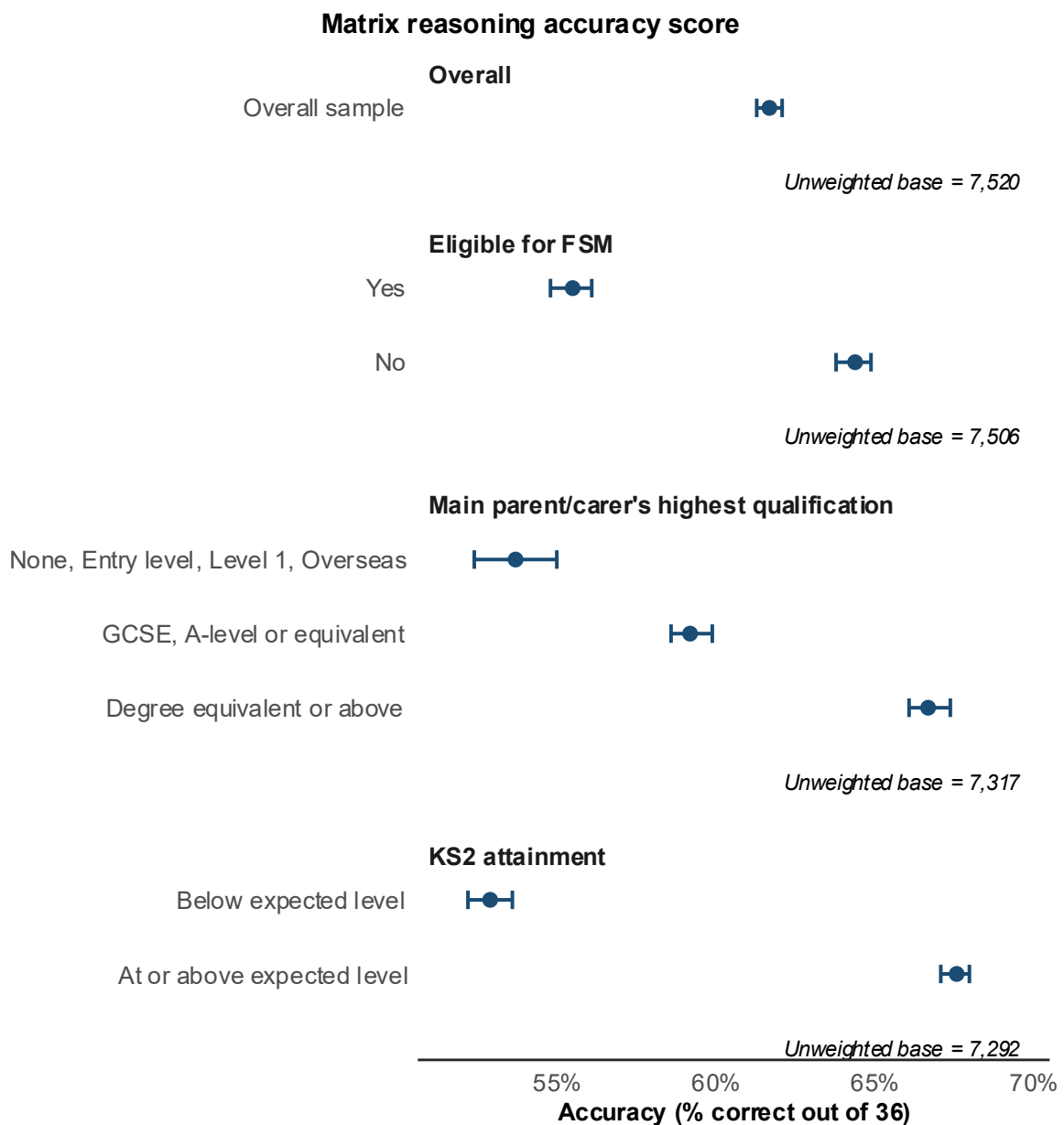
Figure 38 displays the distribution of accuracy scores (proportion correct out of 36). The measure includes participants who did not complete the full task; for the 37 participants who exited the task early, the accuracy score should be considered a lower-bound estimate.

Figure 38: Weighted distribution of matrix reasoning accuracy scores



The figure below shows how the accuracy score varied by FSM eligibility, parental education and prior (KS2) attainment. On average, participants eligible for FSM scored 9 percentage points lower on the accuracy score (56%) than those not eligible for FSM (65%), and those whose parents had lower qualifications scored 8 points lower (58%) than those with higher education qualifications (66%). In terms of attainment at KS2, participants reaching the expected level scored 15 percentage points higher on average (68%) than those who did not meet the expected level (53%).

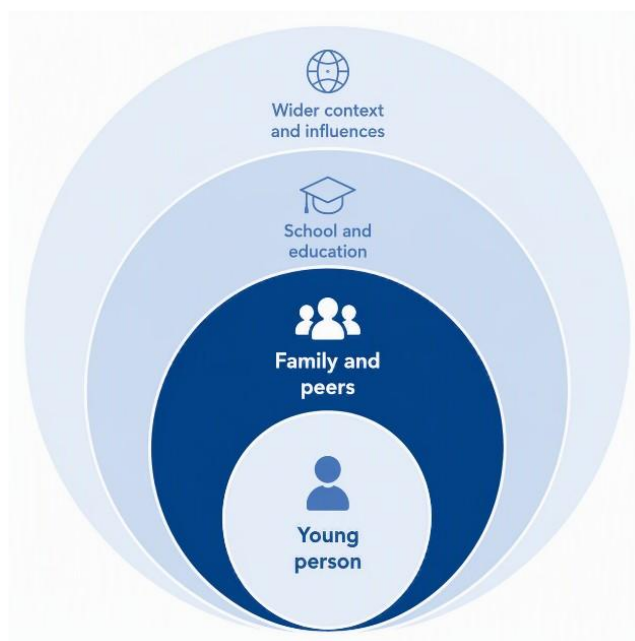
Figure 39: Matrix reasoning accuracy weighted mean score



Family and peers

The second layer of the framework represents the young person's immediate environment and relationships – family and peers – which shape the young person's experiences and outcomes.

The first part covers findings relating to the family and home environment. It draws on reports from both young people and their main parent or primary carer, with findings disaggregated where relevant by sex, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, parental education, and region.



The second part focuses on young people's peer relationships. It covers young people's reports of perceived support, time spent with friends, prosocial behaviour and bullying, as well as teacher reports of peer relationships. Findings are disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, FSM eligibility, special educational need (SEN) provision and parental education, allowing assessment of both overall levels of peer functioning and how these are distributed across groups.

Family and home environment

Section overview

- This section presents findings on parent-child relationships, inter-parental relationships, and parental monitoring and awareness. It also covers parental physical health, mental health, health behaviours, and work-life balance. Parental involvement in the young person's education, and resources and support for home-based learning, are also addressed.
- Strong family relationships are central to adolescent outcomes, with supportive parent-child interactions promoting wellbeing (Banerjee, 2025; Huang, Wu & Yang, 2024; Tan, Cheung & Lee, 2025), while interparental conflict and parental mental or physical health difficulties undermine parenting and increase risks to young people (Harold et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2020; Chen, 2017; Kuppens et al., 2020).
- This section draws on reports from both young people and their main parent or primary carer. Where relevant, findings are disaggregated by sex, free

school meal (FSM) eligibility, parental education, and region.

Family relationships

- Parent–child relationships were mostly positive, though girls and FSM-eligible young people reported slightly more conflict; those with lower-educated parents reported slightly less conflict but were more likely to feel not listened to.
- Interparental relationships were generally positive, though a minority reported dissatisfaction or frequent disagreement; 12% of main parents/carers had ever felt afraid of a partner, with higher rates in FSM households. Relationships with non-resident parents were more variable.
- Parental monitoring was high overall, but young people in FSM-eligible and lower-educated-parent households were less likely to say parents knew all or most of their friends.

Parental characteristics

- Parental physical and mental health were mostly positive, but FSM-eligible and lower-educated-parent households had higher rates of long-term conditions, more depression and anxiety symptoms, higher rates of smoking/vaping, alongside lower alcohol use.
- Work–life balance strain was moderate overall: around a quarter of parents never experienced work-related pressures, while roughly one third did sometimes and 12–18% did often or always.

The role of family and home in education

- Parental engagement in education was strong, with 73% of young people saying parents were always interested in their learning and had frequent school-related conversations reported at home.
- Home learning resources showed clear inequalities: FSM-eligible young people and those with less-educated parents were less likely to have a quiet study space (29% vs. 40% strongly agreeing) or a personal digital device (65% vs. 74%).
- Additional tuition was accessed by 16% of young people, with higher rates among those below expected KS2 levels, those with SEN support, and especially in London (26%).

Conclusion

- While most young people experience supportive family environments, socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with systematic differences in parental health, family resources, parental monitoring, aspects of family relationships and engagement in learning. These disparities may have

implications for educational and wellbeing trajectories as young people progress through secondary school.

Parent-child relationships

Supportive and involved parent child relationships strongly shape adolescents' educational and wellbeing outcomes (Banerjee, 2025; Huang, Wu and Yang, 2024; Tan, Cheung and Lee, 2025).

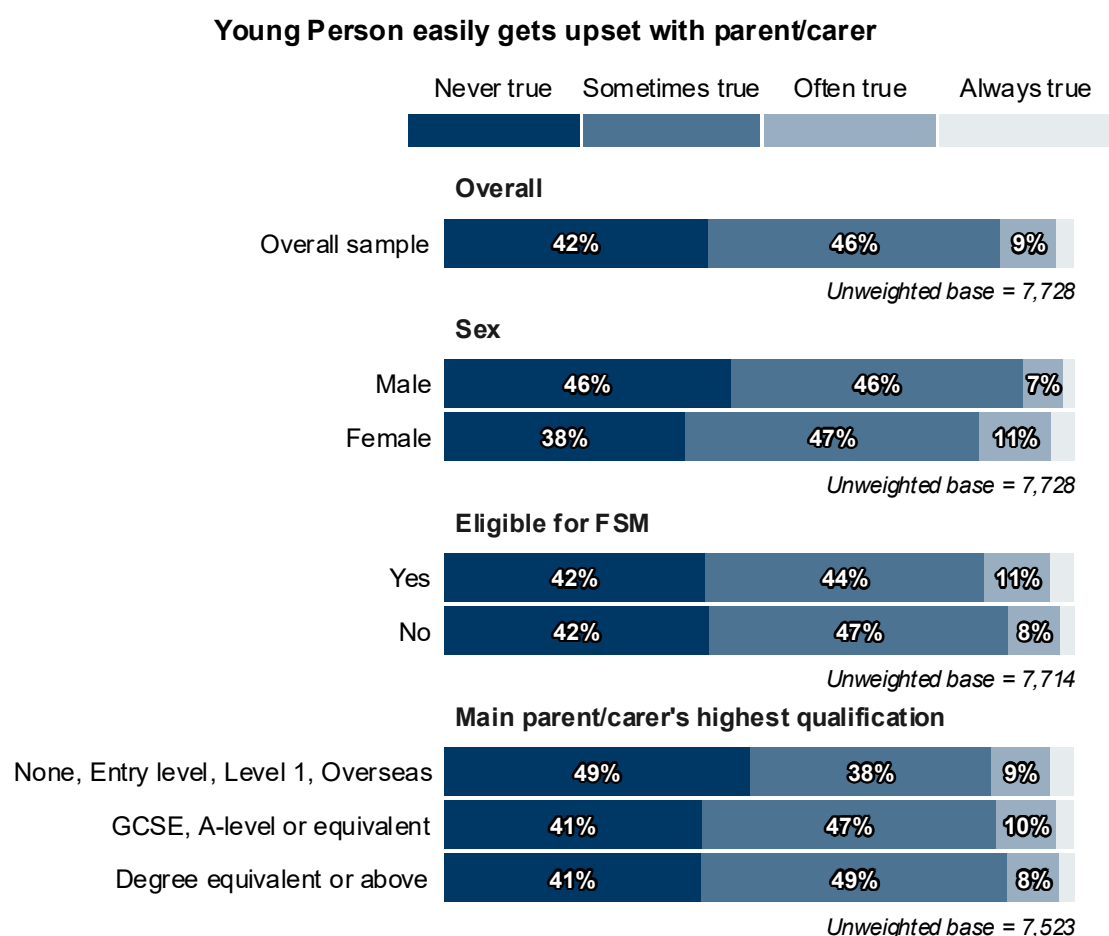
Main parent or carers generally reported positive and engaged relationships with their children. Most said they talked about things that matter to their child every day or almost every day (71%), and the majority felt extremely (56%) or very close (37%) to them. Disagreements were usually limited, with most parents saying they argued not at all (11%), a little (36%), or sometimes (43%).

Across a range of parenting behaviours, parents described themselves as responsive and attuned: most said they always or often listen to what their child has to say (77% and 21%, respectively), can always or often tell when their child is upset (71% and 25%), would always or often ask about something bothering their child (85% and 13%), and always or often pay attention to their child even when busy (47% and 44%). Parents also commonly reported that their child shares thoughts and feelings with them (40% always, 41% often) and talks to them when they have a problem (43% always, 40% often).

Young people were asked about their relationships with parents, such as whether they get upset with their main parent/carers, and whether they feel listened to. These variables were subdivided by sex, FSM eligibility and parental education. Most young people reported that getting upset with parents or carers was only occasional, with 42% saying it was never true and 46% sometimes true, while smaller proportions said it was often (9%) or always true (3%). Boys were more likely than girls to say they never got upset (46% vs. 38%), while girls were more likely to report this happened often (11% vs. 7%) or always (4% vs 2%).

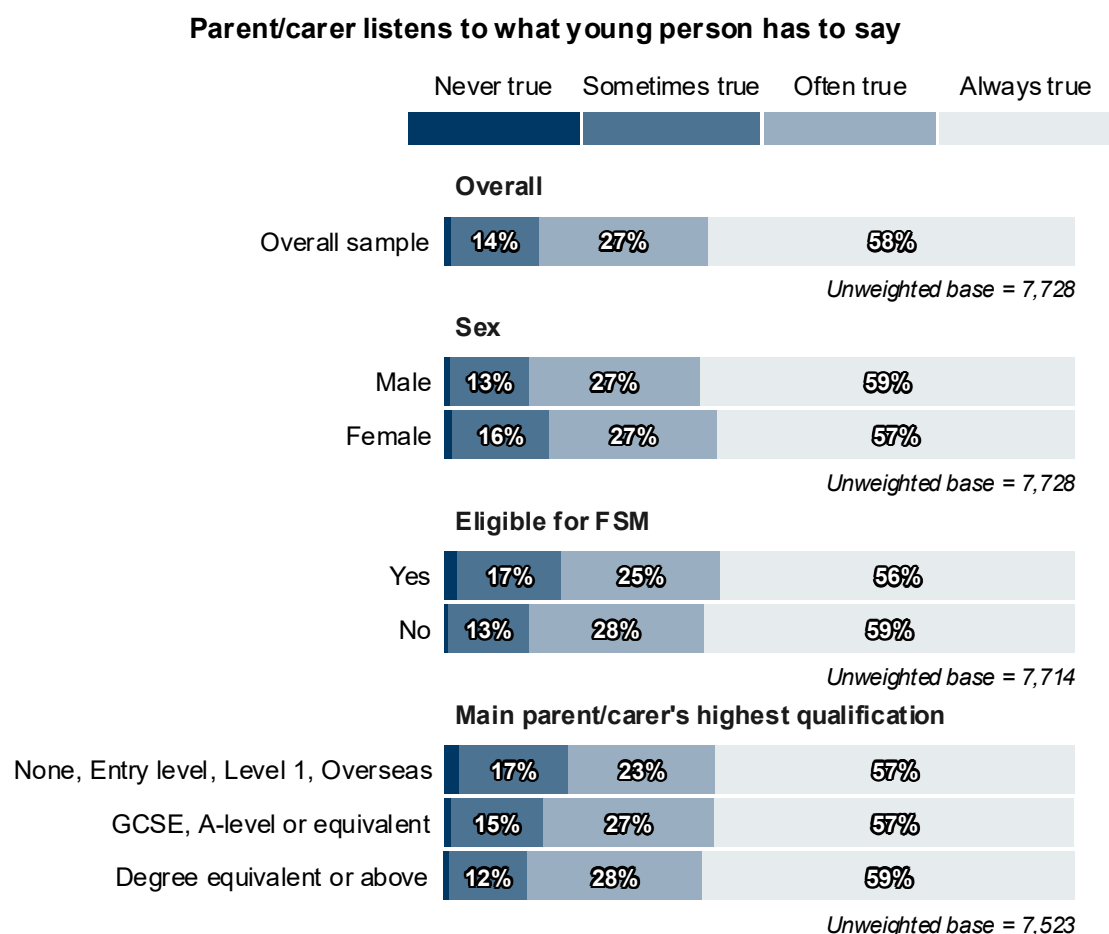
Some groups showed slightly higher levels of conflict: there were differences between those eligible and not eligible for FSM with reporting sometimes true (47% vs. 44%), often true (8% vs. 11%) and always true (2% vs. 4%). Young people with parents who had no/entry level qualifications were more likely to say never true (49%) and less likely to say sometimes true (38%) compared to young people with parents/carers with GCSE/A-level qualifications (never true = 41%, sometimes true = 47%) or degree-equivalent qualifications (never true = 41%, sometimes true = 49%).

Figure 40: Young person report of whether they get upset with their main parent/carers



When asked whether their parents listen to what they have to say, young people's responses were generally positive. Nearly six in ten (58%) young people said it was 'always true' that parents listened, with a further 27% reporting this was the case often, 14% sometimes and just 1% said never. Boys and girls gave similar answers, although girls were more likely to answer 'sometimes true' (16%) compared to boys (13%). Young people eligible for FSM were slightly more likely to say this was 'sometimes true' (17% vs. 13%) and 'never true' (2% vs. 1%) compared to those who are not eligible. Furthermore, young people with parents or carers who had with no/entry level qualifications were more likely to say never true (2%) and sometimes true (17%) compared to young people whose parents or carers had degree-equivalent qualifications (never true = 1%, sometimes true = 12%).

Figure 41: Young-person report of whether they feel listened to by their main parent/carer



Interparental relationships

Interparental conflict predicts children's emotional, behavioural, academic, and social difficulties through its effects on parenting quality and children's emotional security (Harold et al., 2016).

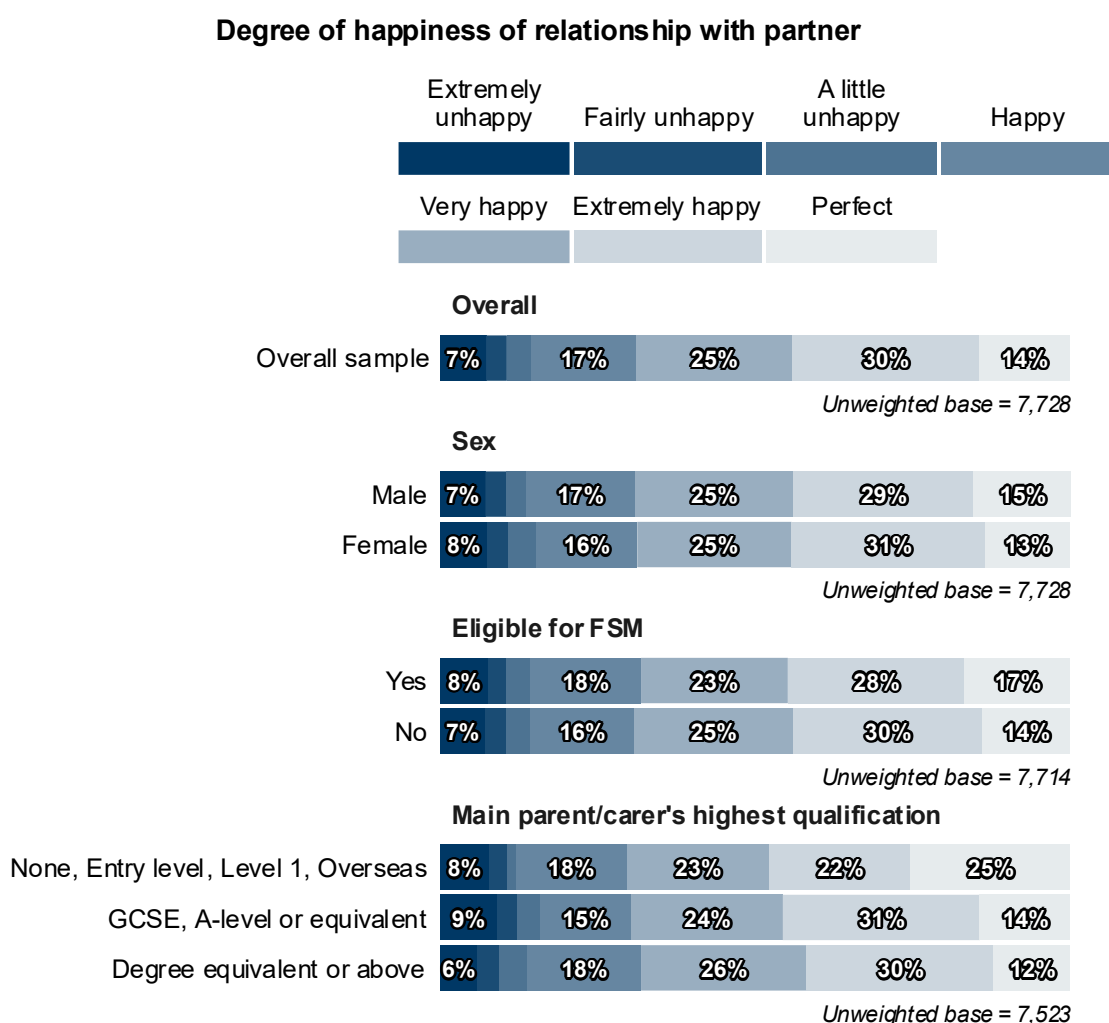
Main parents or carers were asked about the quality of their relationship with their co-resident partners (if applicable) and the frequency of disagreements over raising the young person. Co-resident partners were defined as partners living with the main parent or carer, who may or may not have been the young person's biological parent. The main parent or carer was also asked whether a current or previous partner has ever made them afraid based on their words or their actions. Where relevant, the main parent/carer was asked about their relationship with the parent who lives elsewhere.

Of those who reported living with someone in the household as a couple (75% of the sample), most main parents/carers reported being happy with their partner. Around one in six (17%) described themselves as happy, while larger proportions reported being very happy (25%) or extremely happy (30%). Around 14% of main parents/carers reported their relationship with their partner as perfect. At the other

end of the scale, about 7% said they were extremely unhappy, with smaller proportions reporting being fairly unhappy (3%) or a little unhappy (4%).

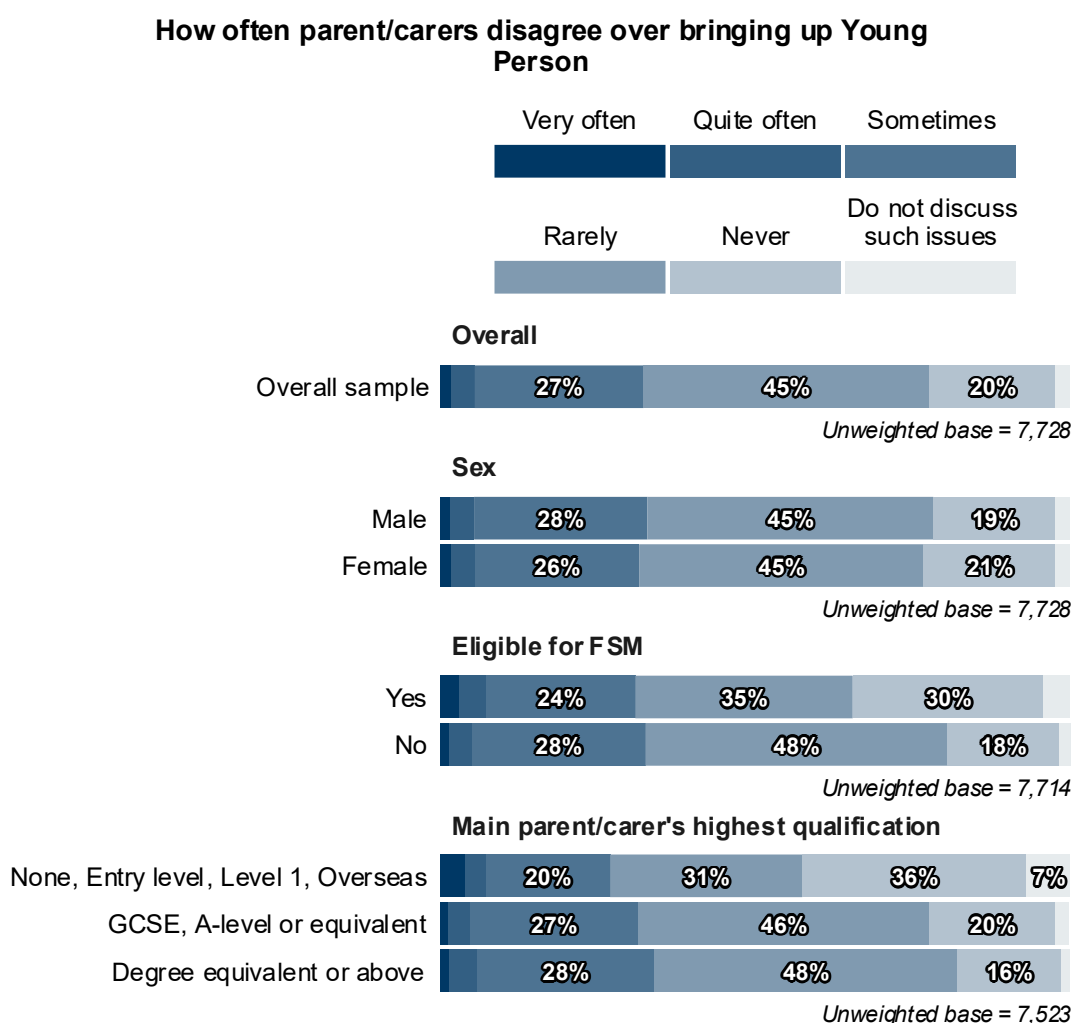
Parents/carers with no/entry level qualifications were less likely to report their relationship as a little unhappy (1%) compared to those with degree-equivalent qualifications (5%). They were also less likely to report their relationship as extremely happy (22%) compared to parents/carers with GCSE/A-level (31%) or degree-equivalent (30%) qualifications. Furthermore, parents/carers with no/entry level qualifications were more likely to describe their relationship as perfect (25%) compared to those with GCSE/A-level (14%) and degree-equivalent qualifications (12%).

Figure 42: Parent-reported relationship satisfaction



Most main parents/carers reported that disagreements over raising the young person were infrequent. Just 2% said disagreements happened very often, 4% quite often, and 27% sometimes, while nearly half (45%) said disagreements were rare and one in five (20%) said they never disagreed. Furthermore, 2% of households said that they do not discuss issues related to bringing up the young person. FSM-eligible households were more likely to say that disagreements happened very often (3% vs. 1%), never (30% vs. 18%) and that they do not discuss issues (4% vs. 2%), and less likely to report disagreements happening rarely (35% vs. 48%). Main parents/carers with no/entry level qualifications were more likely to choose responses on the extreme ends of the scale. For example, these parents are more likely to say that disagreements happened very often (4% vs. GCSE/A-Level 1% and degree-equivalent qualifications 2%) and never (36% vs. GCSE/A-Level 20% and degree-equivalent 16%), along with responding that they do not discuss such issues (7% vs. GCSE/A-Level 2% and degree-equivalent 1%).

Figure 43: Parent-reported disagreements about raising the young person



Main parents/carers were asked whether in the time since the young person was born, a current or previous partner had made the parent afraid of them based on their words or their actions. Around one in nine main parents/carers (12%) reported experiencing this, while the majority (81%) said they had not. A small proportion said they did not know or could not remember (2%) or preferred not to answer (6%). FSM-eligible households were more than twice as likely to report ever feeling afraid of a partner (20% vs. 8% among non-FSM). Main parents/carers with a GCSE/A-level qualification were more likely to report experiencing feeling afraid of a partner (14% vs. 9% no/entry level and 10% degree-equivalent), and this experience was also more common among female main parents/carers (13% vs. 5% male).

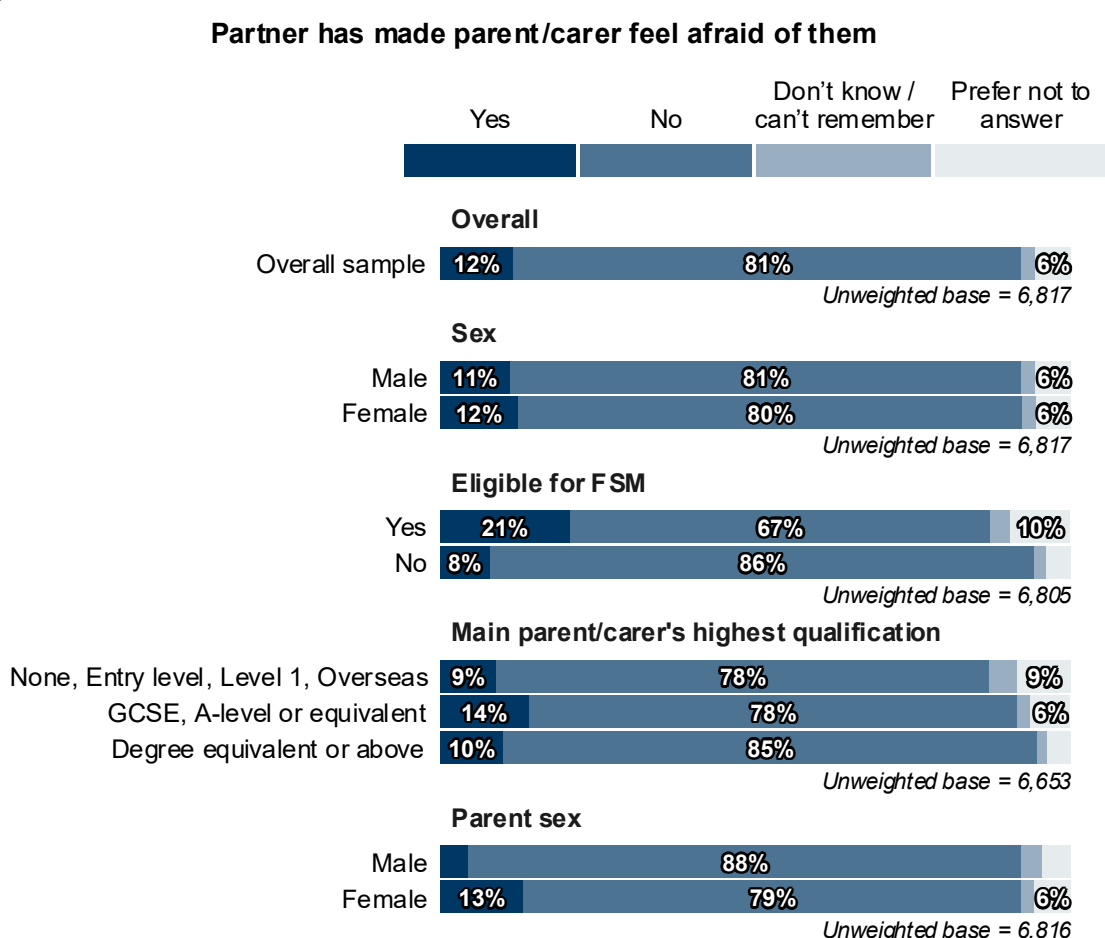
In terms of main parents/carers' relationships with a parent who lives elsewhere (which applies to 32% of the sample of young people), main parents/carers generally reported mixed but a mostly positive relationship. Around one-third described this relationship as very good (32%) and a further quarter as fairly good (25%), while most of the remainder rated it as neither good nor bad (29%). Patterns of co-parenting with a non-resident parent varied: disagreements about bringing up the

young person ranged from 6% saying they happened very often to 20% saying they never happened, with 12% reporting that they did not discuss these issues at all.

Frequency of discussions about major decisions relating to the child varied too, with 17% saying they never or almost never discussed such decisions, 17% doing so sometimes, and 36% always or almost always.

There were also differences in financial support: in the past year, 43% of parents living elsewhere made regular maintenance payments, 14% made irregular payments, and 43% made none.

Figure 44: Parent-reported experiences of ever feeling afraid of a current or previous partner



Parental monitoring and awareness of young people's social worlds

Young people were asked about parental awareness of friendships, and parents/carers were asked about knowledge of the young person's whereabouts and free time activities.

Just over half of young people (55%) said that at least one parent or carer knew all or most of their friends, while around two in five (40%) said parents knew only a few. Very few reported that parents knew none (2%) or were unsure (3%). Girls were more likely than boys to say parents knew all or most of their friends (61% vs. 50%), while boys were more likely to report that their parents knew a few of their friends (45% vs. 35%). FSM-eligible young people and those with no/entry level qualifications were less likely to report that parents knew all or most of their friends (48% FSM vs. 58% non-FSM; 44% no/entry level vs. 56% GCSE/A-level and 58% degree-equivalent qualifications). Regional variation was evident: In the North East, 64% of young people said at least one parent or carer knew all or most of their friends, while in London, the figure was 50%.

Parents themselves reported high levels of awareness of who their child was with when not at home. Around seven in ten (70%) said they knew all the time, and a further quarter (26%) said they knew most of the time. Small proportions reported knowing only some of the time (3%) or hardly ever/never (<1%). Girls' parents were slightly more likely than boys' parents to say they knew all the time (74% vs. 67%), while boys' parents were more likely to say most of the time (29% vs. 23%).

Main parents/carers from FSM-eligible households and those with no/entry level and GCSE/A-level qualifications were more likely to say they knew who their child was with all of the time (74%/73%) compared with 69% of non-FSM households and 66% of parents/carers with degree-equivalent qualifications. Regional differences were modest, with the highest proportion reporting "all of the time" in London (75%) and the lowest in the South West (65%).

Parents also reported strong awareness of what their child does in their free time. Around six in ten (60%) said they knew all of the time, and a further four in ten (37%) said most of the time. Small proportions reported knowing only some of the time (3%) or hardly ever/never (<1%). There were no differences in terms of the young person's sex. Main parents/carers from FSM-eligible households and those with lower qualifications were more likely to say they knew what their child does in their free time all of the time (around 64%), compared with 57% of non-FSM households and 55% of higher-educated parents. There was some regional variation, with the highest proportion reporting "all of the time" in the East Midlands (63%) and the lowest in the South West (55%).

Figure 45: Young-person reported how many friends parent(s) knows

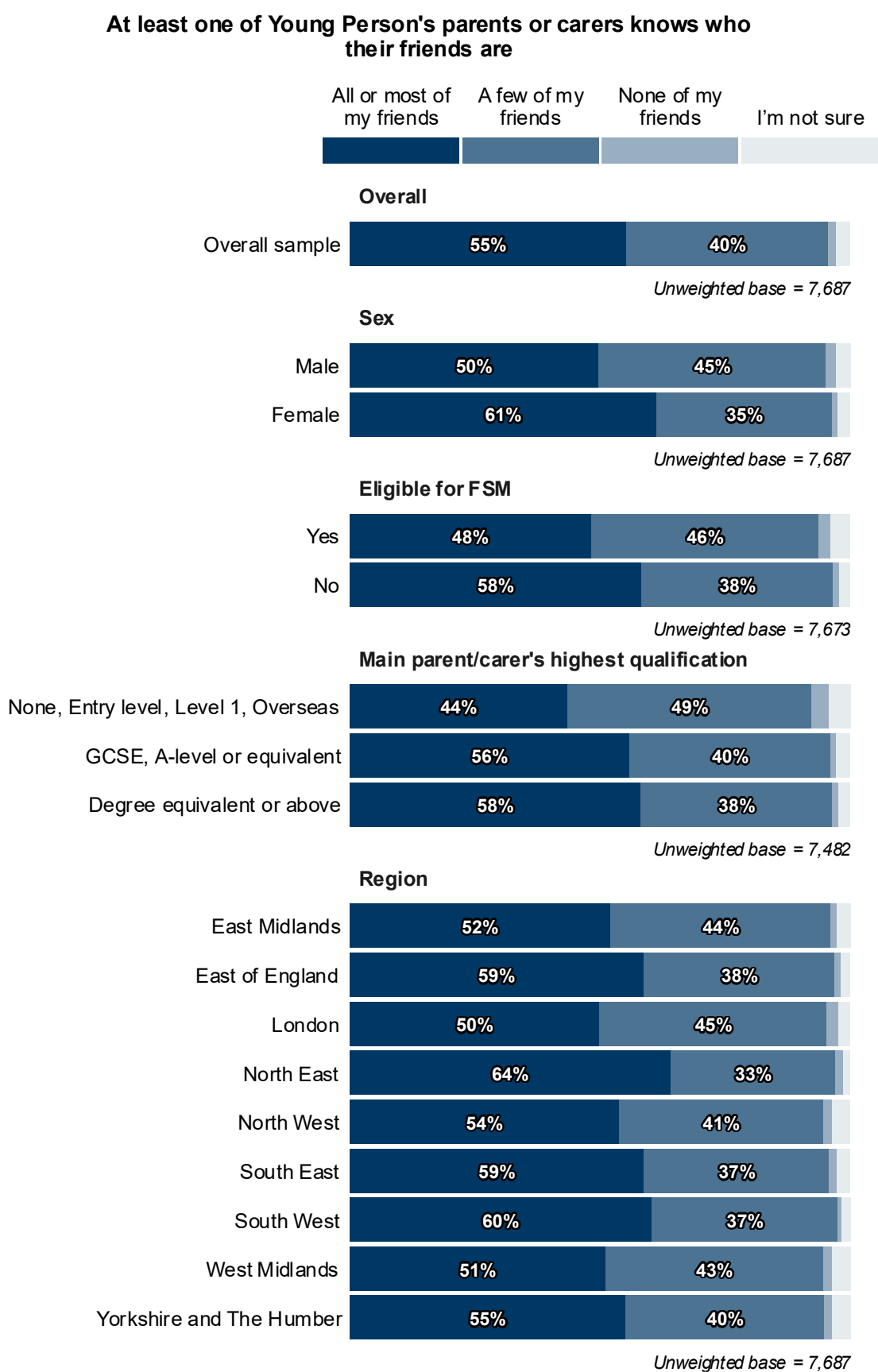


Figure 46: Extent to which parent reports knowing who young person is with when not at home

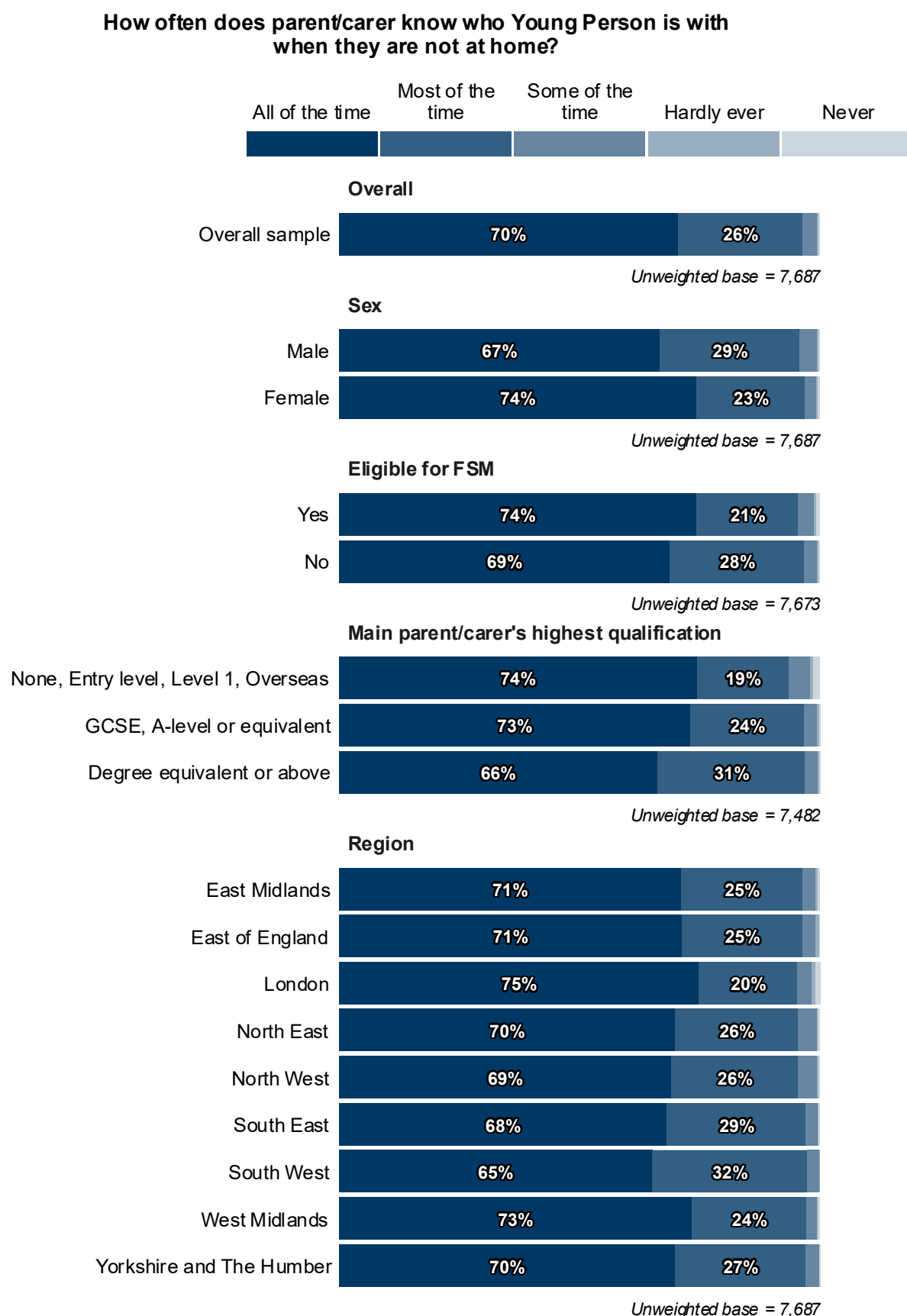
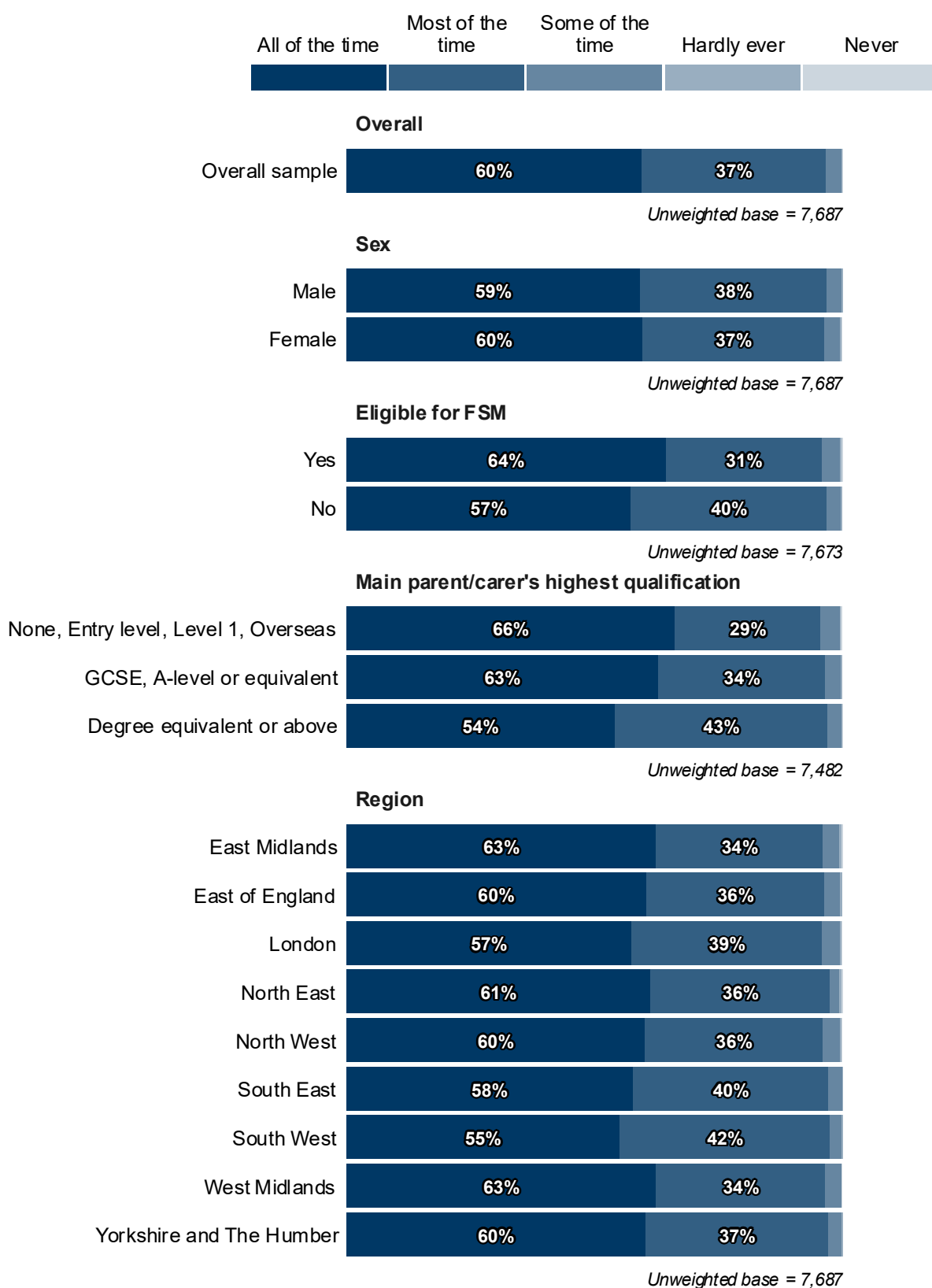


Figure 47: Extent to which parent reports knowing what young person does in their free time

How often does parent/carer know what Young Person does with their free time?



Parental physical health, mental health, and health behaviours

Parental mental health problems, chronic illness, and harmful health behaviours further elevate risks to young people's outcomes by disrupting parenting and the home environment (Goodman et al., 2020; Chen, 2017; Kuppens et al., 2020).

Around three in ten main parent/carers (29%) reported having a physical or mental health condition lasting, or expected to last, 12 months or more. Rates were higher among certain groups: 44% of those in FSM-eligible households compared with 23% in non-FSM households, and 34% of those with GCSE/A-Level qualifications or 30% with no/entry level qualifications, compared with 24% of those with degree-equivalent qualifications or above. Regional variation was present, with the lowest prevalence in London (24%) and the highest in the West Midlands (35%).

One-third of main parents/carers (34%) said they never drank alcohol, while most others reported drinking occasionally: 28% once a month or less, 20% two to four times per month, and smaller proportions drank more frequently (14% two to three times per week, 3% four or more times per week). Main parents/carers from FSM-eligible households were more likely to report never drinking (53% vs. 27% of non-FSM) and less likely to drink regularly (e.g. 4 time or more per week: 1% vs. 4%). Parents with no/entry level qualifications were more likely to report never drinking alcohol (66% vs. GCSE/A-Level 32% and degree-equivalent 27%) and were less likely to report frequent drinking compared to those with degree-equivalent qualifications or above (e.g. 4 time or more per week: 1% vs. 5%).

Among those who drank, nearly half (49%) consumed only 0-2 units on a typical day, while one-third (34%) consumed 3-4 units. Smaller proportions reported 5-6 units (12%), 7-9 units (4%), or 10+ units (2%). NHS guidelines recommend keeping intake below 14 units per week and spreading drinking across several days (NHS, 2025); therefore, lower daily amounts such as 0-4 units are more likely to fall within the low-risk bracket if drinking occurs infrequently, while higher daily amounts such as 5 or more units are more likely to exceed low-risk levels depending on how often individuals drink. Parents/carers who had no/entry level qualifications were more likely to report drinking 0-2 units compared to those with GCSE/A-Level qualifications (56% vs. 45%) and were less likely to report drinking 7-9 units (0.2% vs. GCSE/A-Level 4% and degree-equivalent 4%). Differences by FSM eligibility were not statistically significant. In terms of reports of drinking 10 or more units of alcohol drink on a typical day, this was lowest in the East of England (0.5%) and highest in Yorkshire and the Humber (4%).

Around one in eight main parents/carers (13%) reported currently smoking cigarettes, and a similar proportion (14%) use e-cigarettes or vaping devices. This is slightly higher than 2024 figures from the ONS, which found that 11% of UK adults

smoked and 10% used e-cigarettes (ONS, 2024), however, this sample includes a broader age range of adults compared to the current sample. In the current sample, around 35% of main parents/carers who reported smoking also reported vaping or using e-cigarettes, and a similar proportion of e-cigarette/vape users also smoking. Smoking and vaping were more prevalent among parents in FSM-eligible households, with 24% smoking compared to 8% of non-FSM households, and 21% using e-cigarettes compared to 11%. Parents with no/entry level and GCSE/A-Level qualifications also reported higher rates of both smoking (21%/18% vs. 5%) and vaping (15%/19% vs. 8%) compared to those with degree-equivalent qualifications or above. Regional variation was modest, with London showing the lowest prevalence of smoking (10%) and vaping (7%).

Parents' mental health was assessed using standardised, robust tools: the PHQ-8 (Patient Health Questionnaire; Kroenke, Spitzer and Williams, 2001) to measure depressive symptoms and the GAD-2 (Generalised Anxiety Disorder scale, Kroenke et al., 2007) to measure anxiety symptoms. Scores range from 0-21 on the PHQ-8 and 0-6 on the GAD-2, with higher scores reflecting greater symptom severity. For scores on the PHQ-8, clinical thresholds were applied to categorise parents into none/minimal, mild, moderate, moderately severe, and severe depression, as specified by the scale developer (Kroenke et al., 2001). For the GAD-2, scores of 3 or above were used to indicate clinically significant anxiety symptoms, as specified by the scale developer (Kroenke et al., 2007).

The average PHQ score was 4.05, with most main parents/carers (68%) falling in the none-to-minimal depression range. Around one in five (19%) met criteria for mild depression, and smaller proportions reported moderate (7%), moderately severe (4%), or severe depression (2%). According to the latest PHQ-9-based national figures from the Office for National Statistics (Sept-Oct 2022), 16% of UK adults reported moderate or severe depressive symptoms. In comparison, 13% of parents/carers in our sample fell into the moderate-to-severe range, indicating a slightly lower prevalence than the most recent UK benchmark (Office for National Statistics, 2022). However, the ONS benchmark is based on adults across the full age range, whereas our sample consists mainly of parents/carers typically in mid-adulthood. Differences in prevalence between these samples may, therefore, potentially be explained by this difference in age range between the two studies. Main parents/carers in FSM-eligible households reported a higher level of depressive symptoms compared to non-FSM-eligible households (6.09 vs 3.20), and parents with no/entry level or GCSE/A-Level qualifications were more likely to report higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to those with degree-equivalent or above qualifications (4.50/4.78 vs 3.19).

The average GAD score was 1.00, and most parents (88%) scored below the clinical threshold of 3, with 12% scoring above it. Patterns in mean scores aligned closely

with these thresholds: FSM-eligible households not only had higher average anxiety (1.46 vs 0.81) but were also more than twice as likely to score above threshold (21% vs 8%). Parents with GCSE/A-Level qualifications reported both higher mean anxiety compared to no/entry level and degree-equivalent qualifications (1.18 vs 0.99/0.82) and those with no/entry level and GCSE/A-Level qualifications had a greater likelihood of exceeding the threshold (14%/15% vs 8%). Regional variation was limited, with London showing the lowest mean scores in both the PHQ-8 (3.4) and GAD-2 (0.8).

Figure 48: Parent-reported whether parent has a physical or mental health condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more

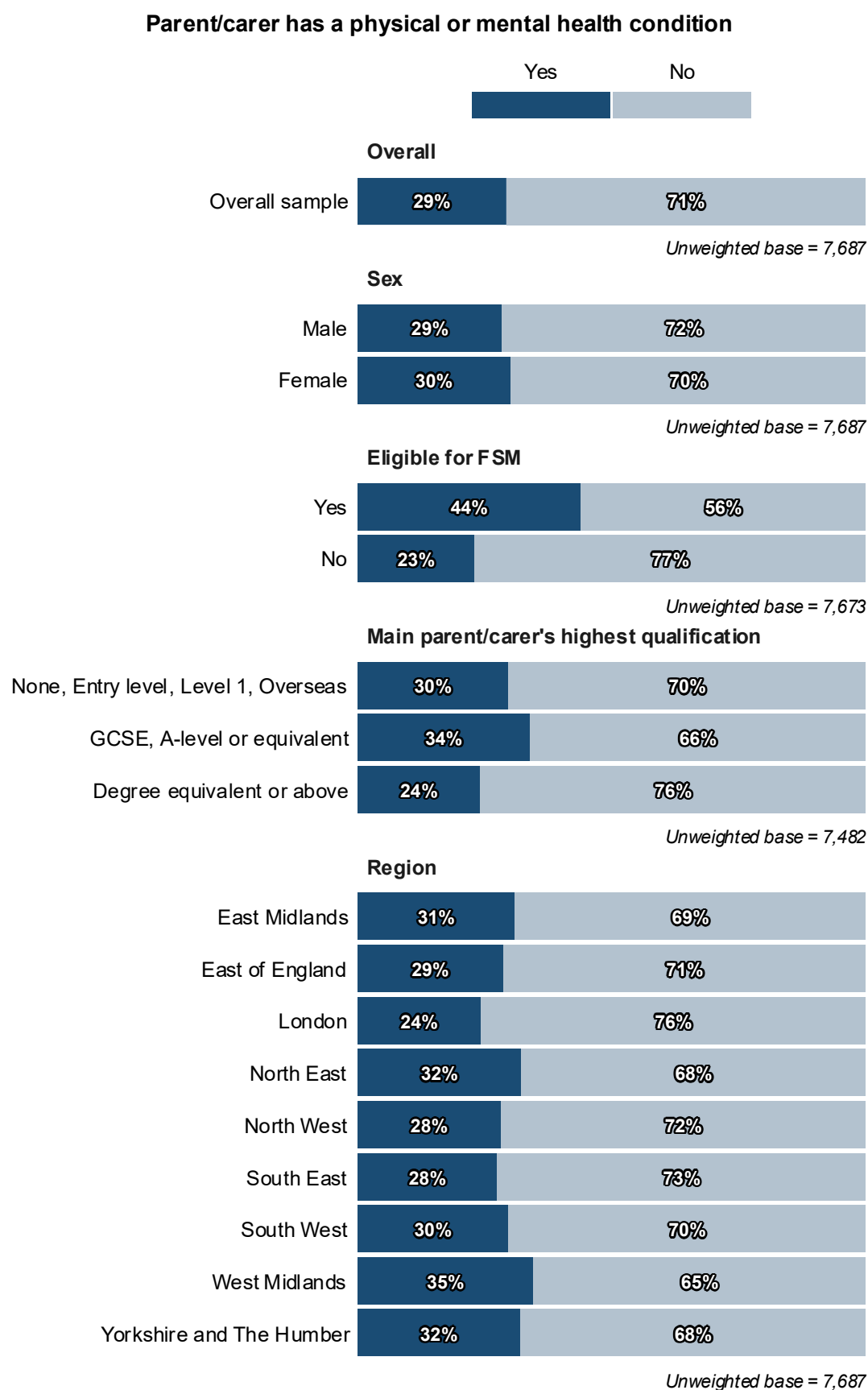


Figure 49: Parent-reported frequency of alcohol consumption

How often parent/carer has a drink containing alcohol

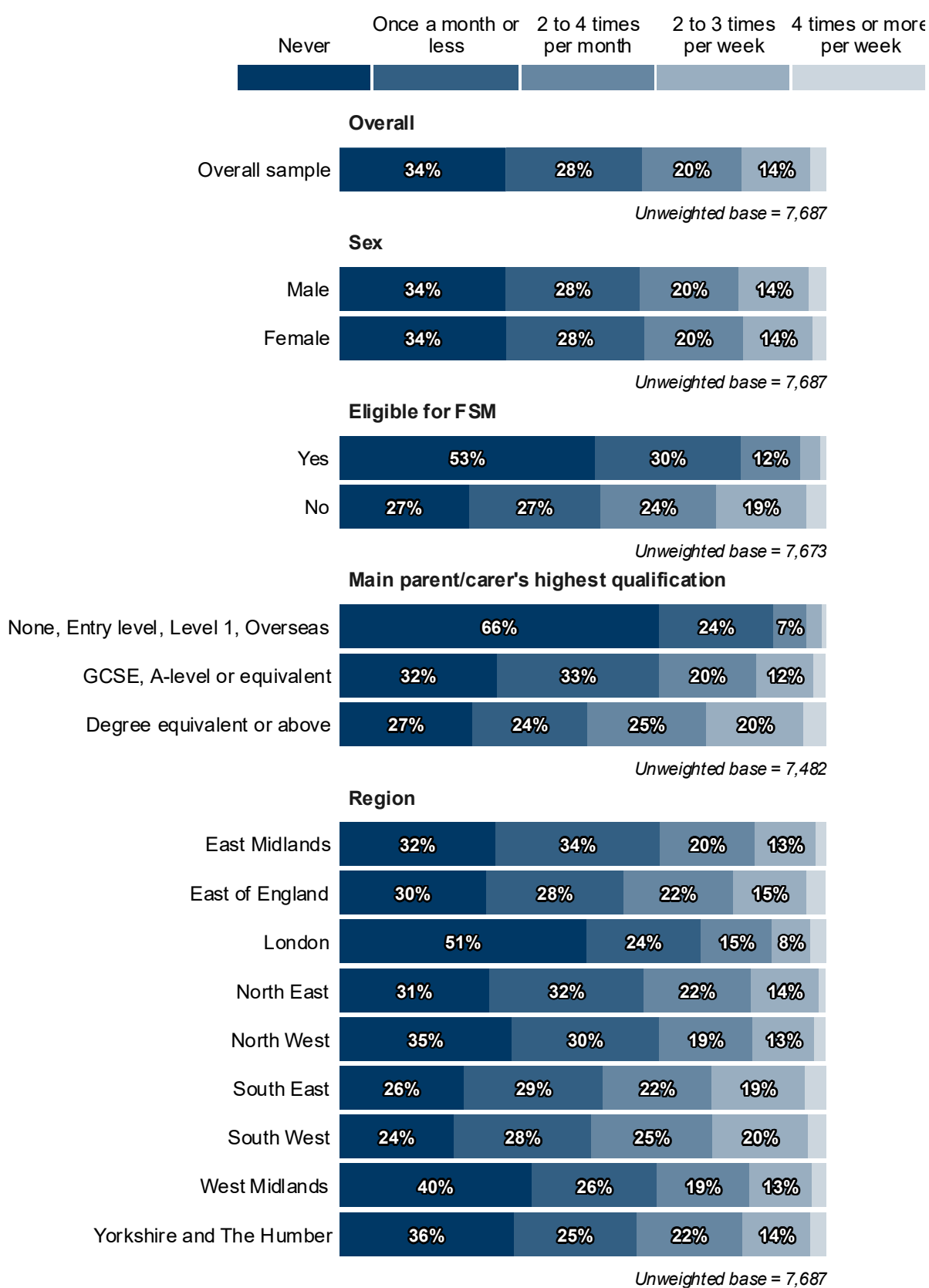


Figure 50: Parent reported units of alcohol consumption

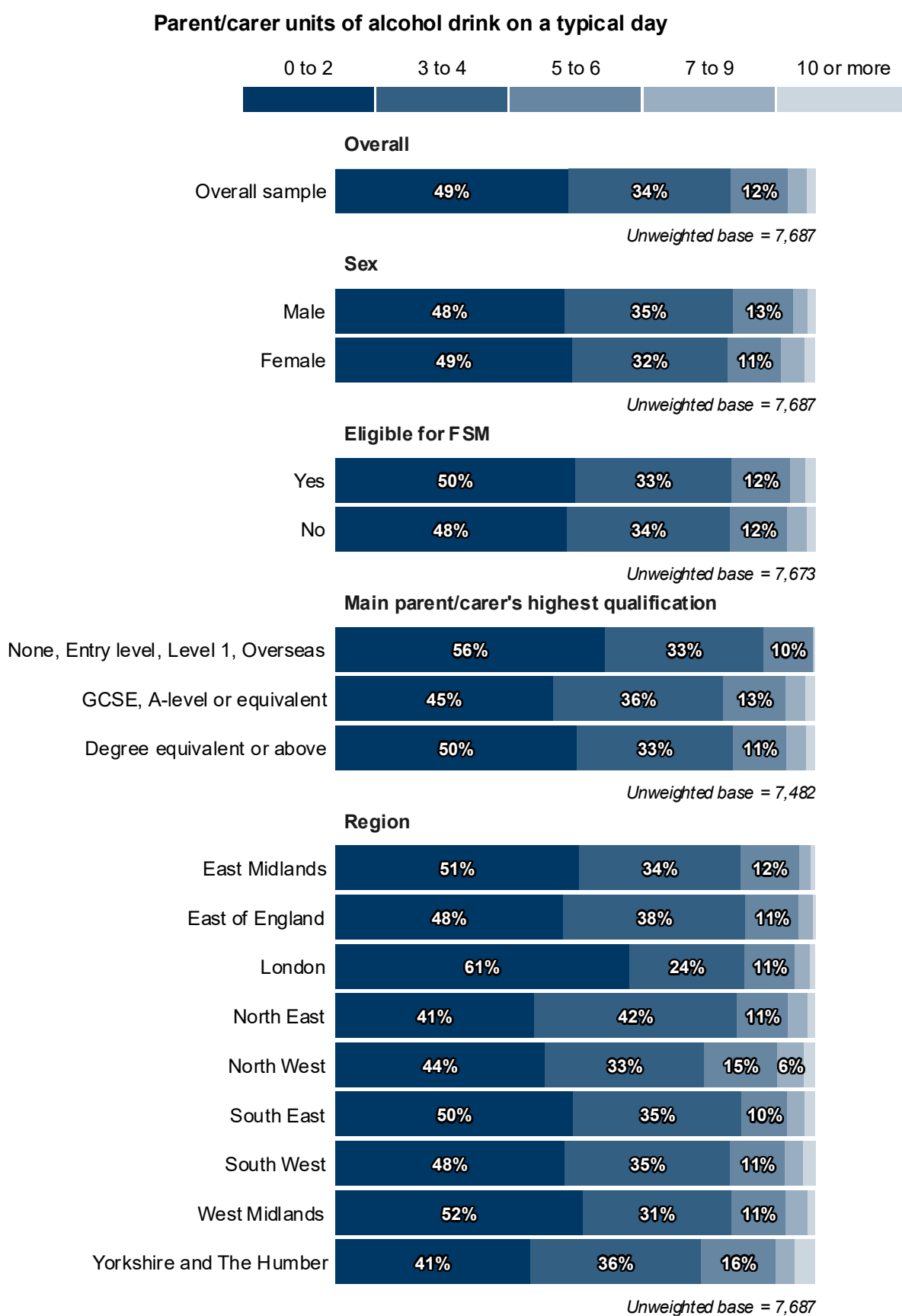


Figure 51: Parent-reported parent smoking

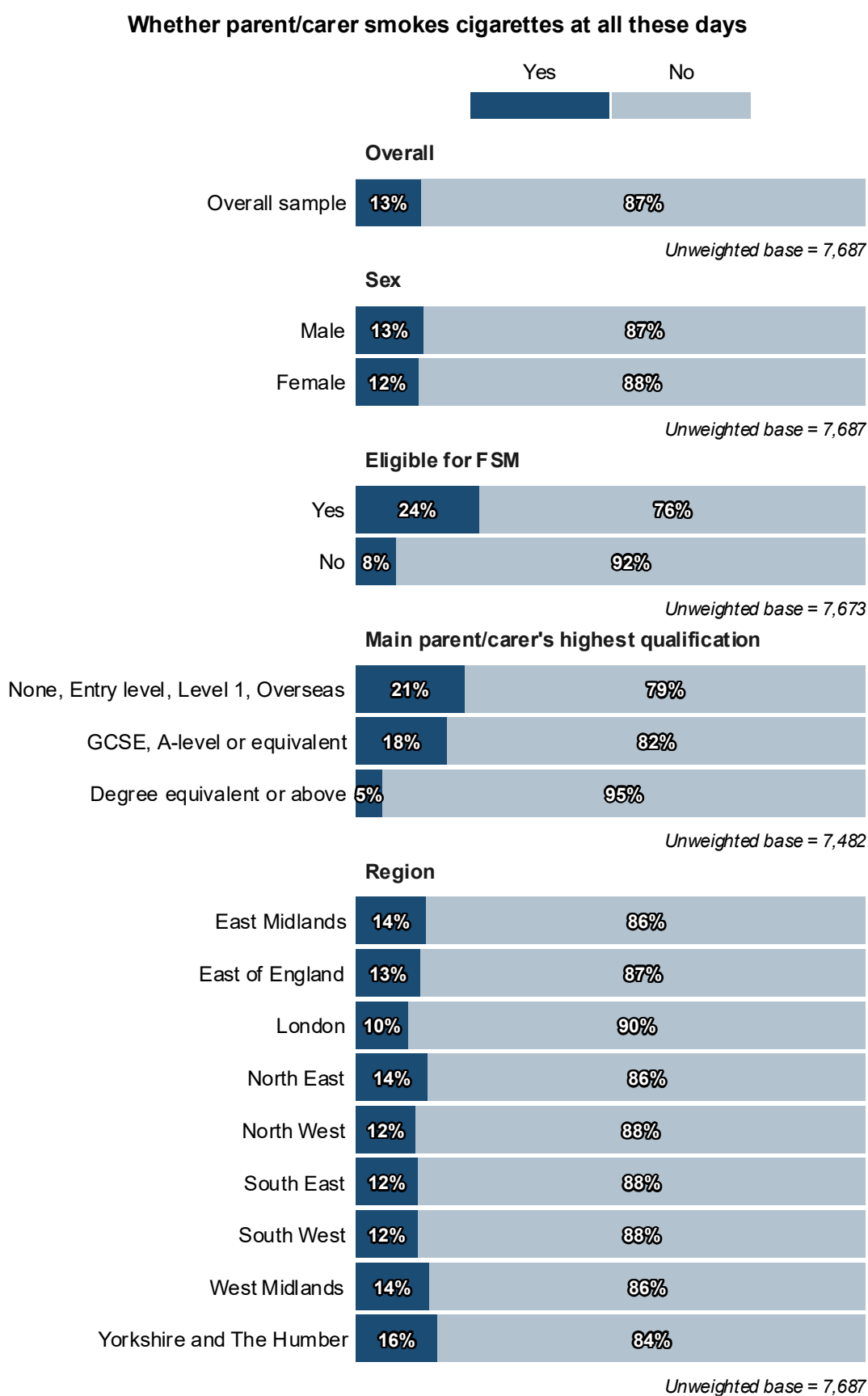


Figure 52: Parent-reported parent vaping

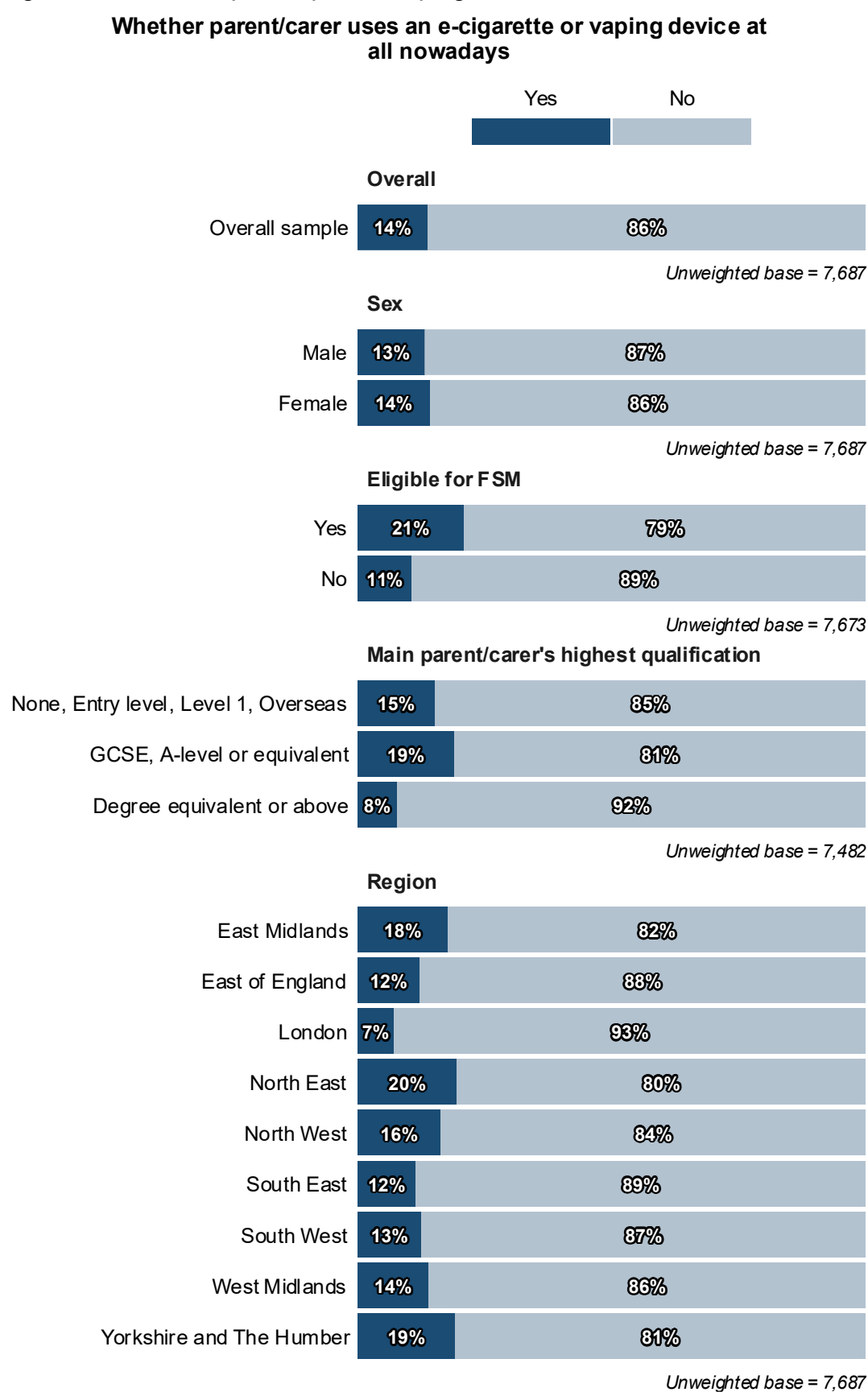


Figure 53: Weighted mean of parent levels of depression, as measured by the PHQ-8 total score

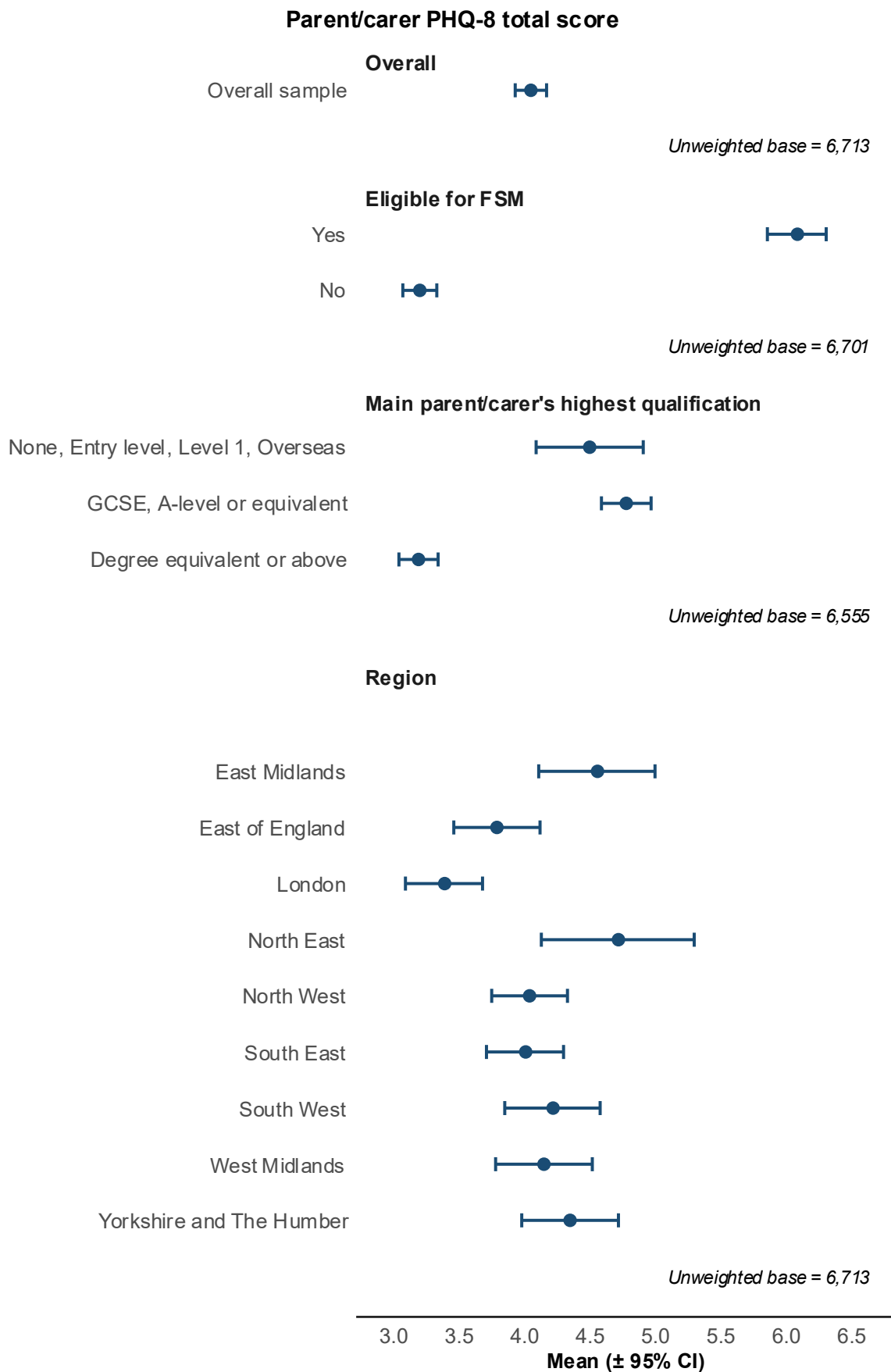


Figure 54: Parent levels of depression, as measured by the PHQ-8 thresholds

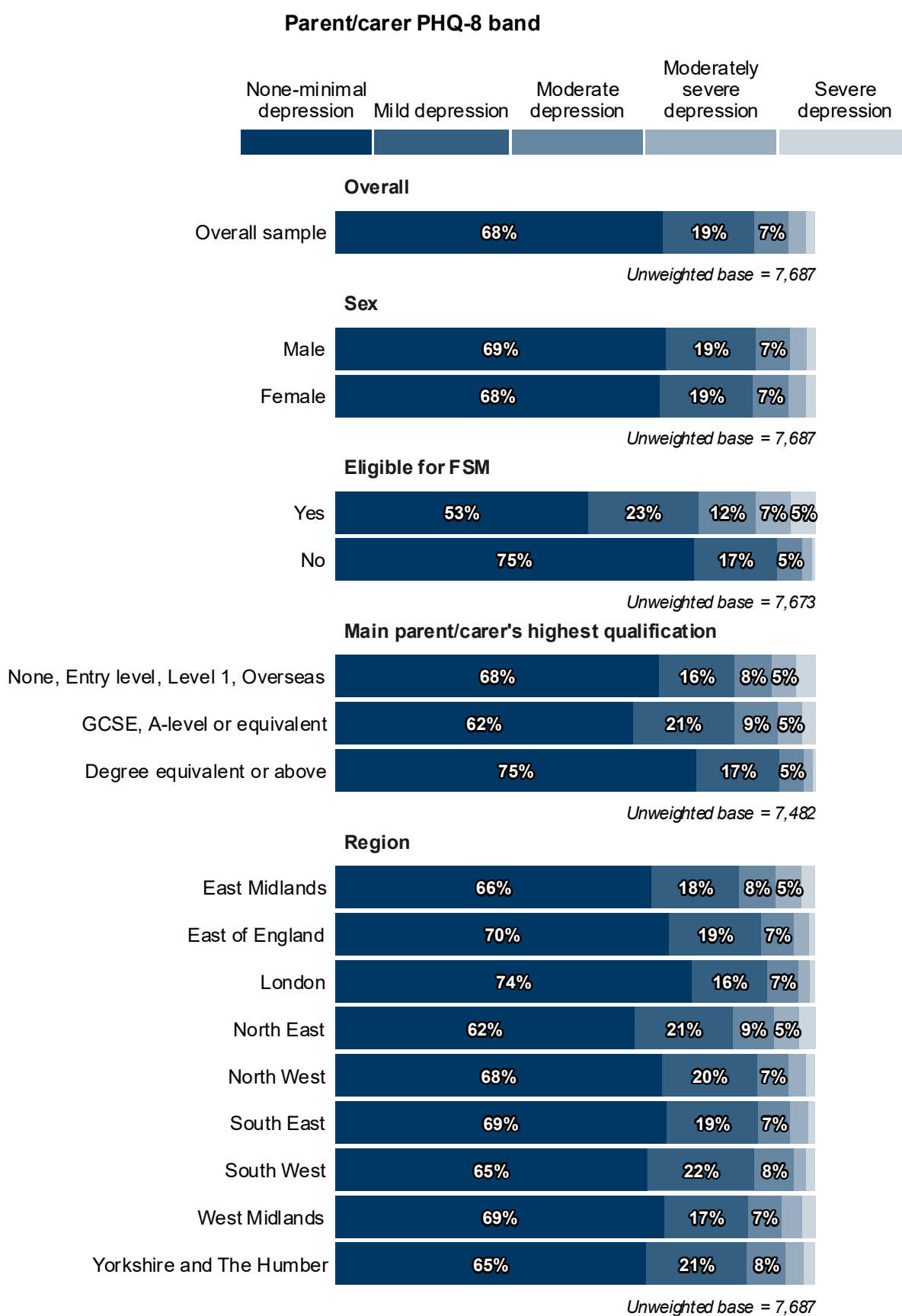


Figure 55: Weighted mean of parent levels of anxiety, as measured by the GAD-2 total score

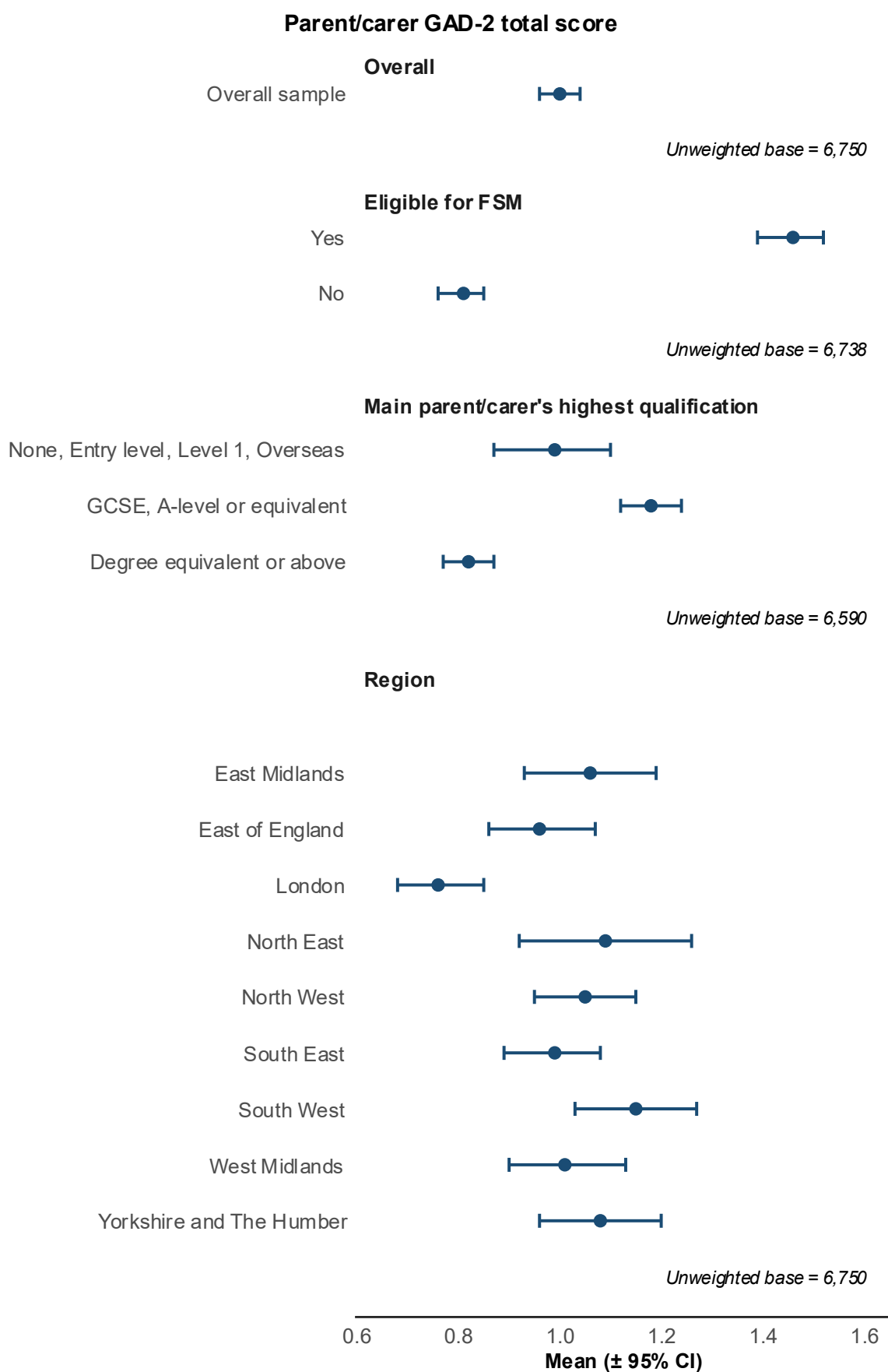
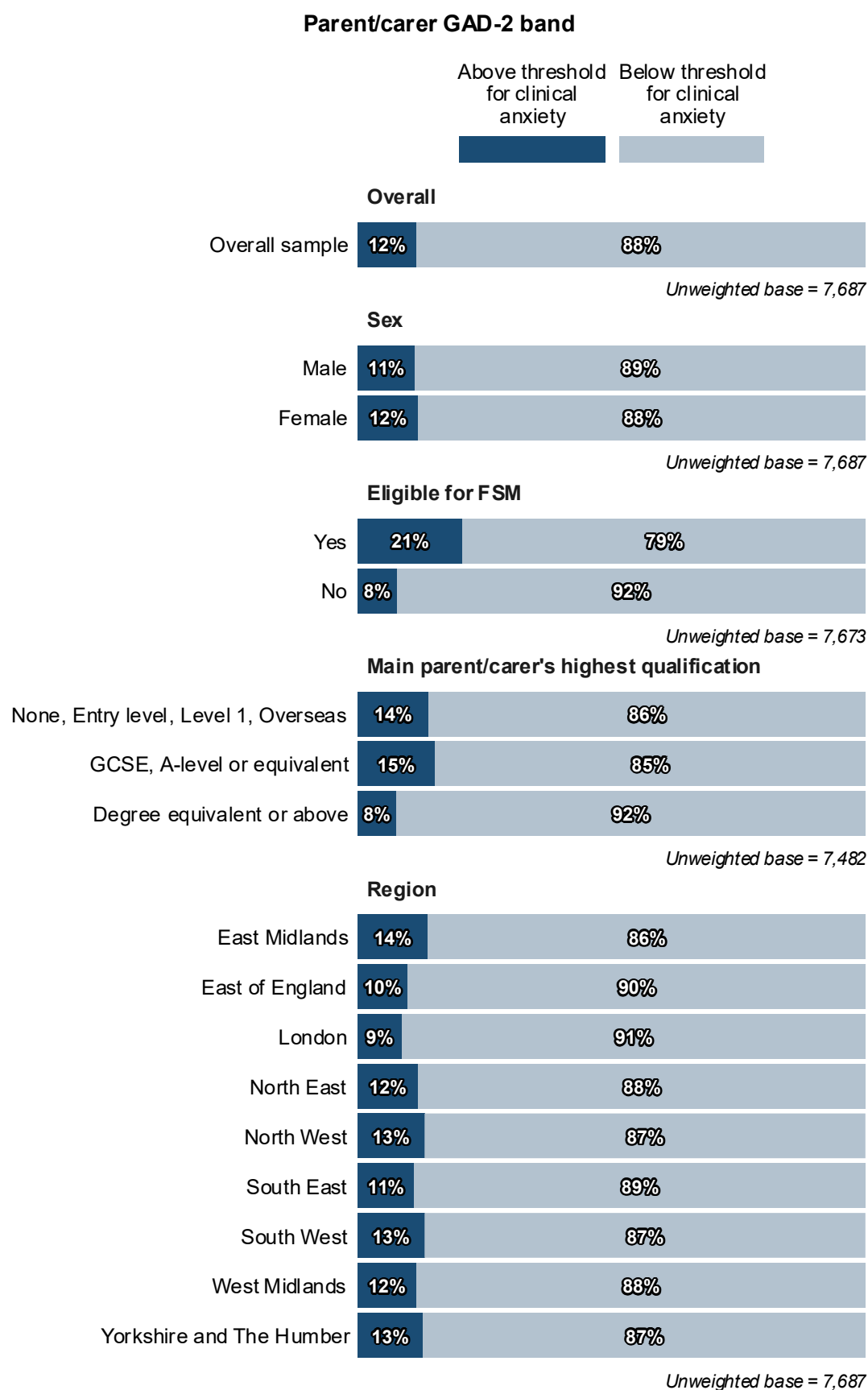


Figure 56: Parent levels of anxiety, as measured by the GAD-2 thresholds (scores of 3 or above were used to indicate clinically significant anxiety symptoms)



Parent work-life balance

Main parents/carers reported moderate work-life balance strain. Around 27% never worried about work outside work hours, 18% never felt too tired after work to enjoy home life, and 32% said work never prevented family time; a further 25-26% experienced these issues rarely. However, sizeable proportions reported them sometimes (32% worrying about work, 39% feeling too tired, 30% limited family time). Between 12-18% said these pressures occurred often or always. Together, the findings suggest that while many parents manage work demands well, a substantial minority experience recurring pressures that affect home and family life.

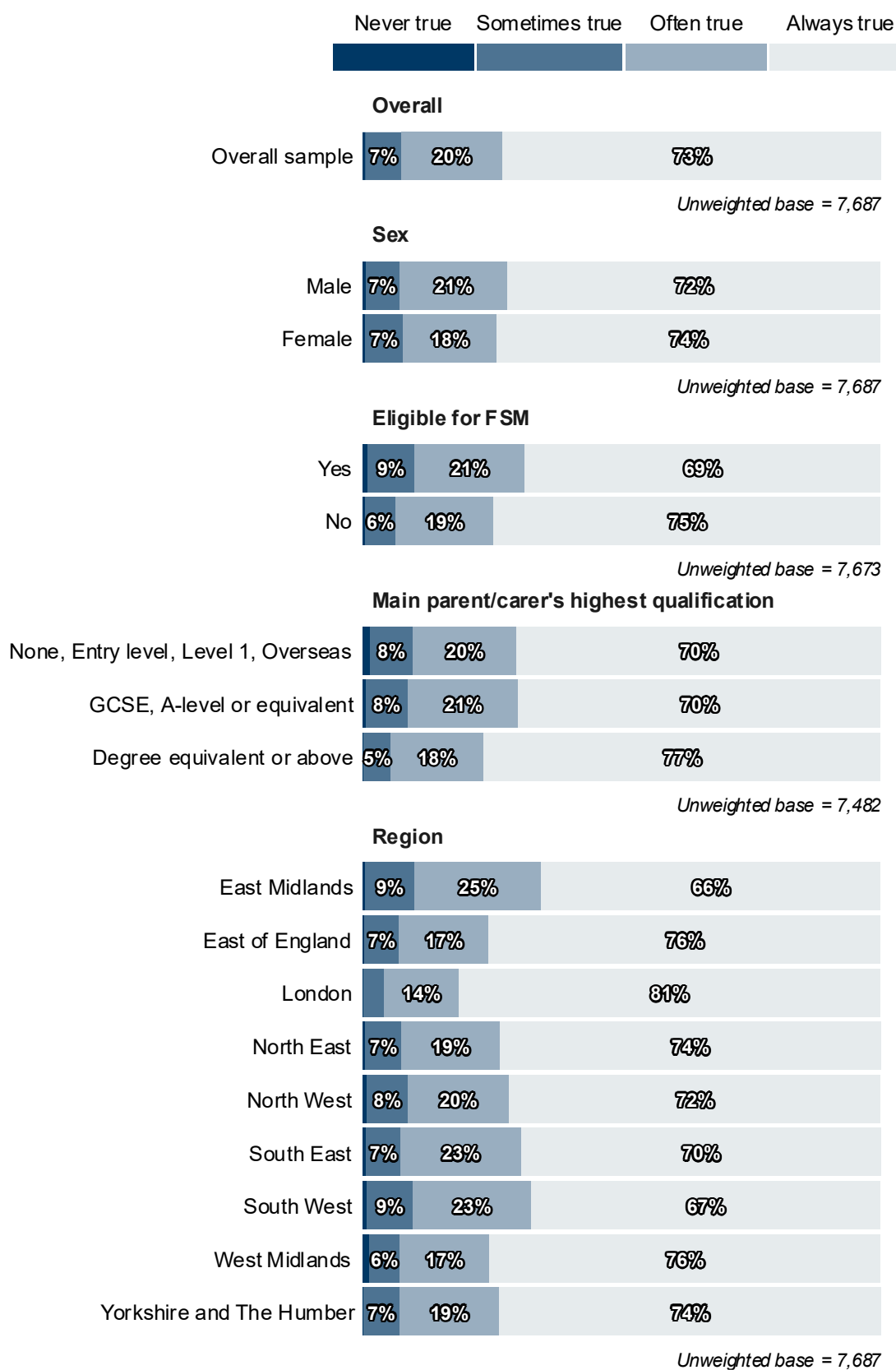
Parental involvement in education and support for learning

The vast majority of young people (73%) said it was always true that parents show an interest in their learning. A further 20% said often true, while smaller proportions reporting this was sometimes true (7%) or never true (0.6%). Boys and girls reported very similar levels of parental interest, with around 72-74% saying always true. FSM-eligible young people were slightly less likely to say the statement was “always true” (69% vs. 75%) and they were also more likely to say it was “sometimes true” (9% vs. 6%) compared to non-FSM-eligible young people. In terms of parental qualifications, those with no/entry level or GCSE/A-Level qualifications were less likely to say “always true” compared to those with degree-equivalent or above qualifications (70% vs. 77%) and more likely to say sometimes true (8% vs. 5%). In terms of regional variation, reports of always true ranged from 66% in the East Midlands to 81% in London.

Parents also described high awareness of their child’s school life: 32% felt very aware and 50% fairly aware of schoolwork, and awareness of social life at school was similarly high (45% very aware, 48% fairly aware). Conversations about school were frequent, with 82% of parents and young people talking about schoolwork or activities daily and a further 14% a few times a week. Parents’ direct involvement in homework varied more widely: 9% helped every day or almost every day, 20% a few days a week, 25% about once a week, and others helped less often (14% monthly, 18% less than monthly), while 11% never helped and 4% said their child did not have homework.

Figure 57: Young person-reported parent interest in learning

Parent/carers shows interest in education and learning



Resources and support for home-based learning

Most young people said they had a quiet place to study when they are not at school, with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Around 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, while smaller proportions disagreed (5%) or strongly disagreed (2%). Young people eligible for FSM were less likely to strongly agree that they had such a space (29%) compared with non-FSM young people (40%) and were more likely to express uncertainty (18% vs. 11%) or to disagree/strongly disagree (12% vs. 5%). A similar pattern was seen by parental education: pupils whose parents had no/entry level or GCSE/A-Level qualifications were less likely to strongly agree (34%/32%) than those with parents with degree-equivalent qualifications (42%), and were more likely to neither agree nor disagree (13%/16% vs 10%) or strongly disagree (3% vs 1%). In terms of regional variation, agreement was highest in the North West (43% strongly agree) and lowest in the East Midlands (32 strongly agree).

Most main parents/carers said their child had access to a laptop, tablet or other computer for completing schoolwork. Around 72% reported a personal device, 22% a shared device, and 4% a school-provided device, while 7% said no device was available. Girls were more likely than boys to have their own device (75% vs. 69%). FSM-eligible young people were less likely to have a personal device (65 vs. 74%) and there was a similar pattern for young people from families with no/entry level parental qualifications compared to those with GCSE/A-Level and degree-equivalent qualifications (65% vs. 71%/74%). FSM-eligible people were also more likely to report no device access (14% vs. 4%); and there were differences in terms of parent/carer qualifications (no/entry level 16%, GCSE/A-Level 8%, degree-equivalent 3%). In terms of region, personal device access was highest in the North East (77%) and lowest in the South West (62%).

Nearly all parents (99%) reported that their child had internet access at home, with very little variation by sex, socioeconomic background, or region.

Around one in six young people (16%) were reported to receive additional tuition²⁰. Among those receiving support, the most common subjects were Maths (71%) and English (57%), with smaller proportions receiving tuition in science (22%), Languages (8%), Humanities (5%) or other subjects (11%). Tuition was usually privately arranged outside school (62%), though some accessed school-organised provision (11%) or booster and catch-up clubs (23%). Tuition rates did not differ significantly by sex or FSM eligibility. Young people who were working below expected level at KS2 were more likely to be receiving tuition compared to those at or above the expected level (19% vs. 13%). Furthermore, young people with SEN

²⁰ Item wording: "Now thinking about the last 12 months, has (*young person*) received tutoring in academic subjects? Please think of private tuition {or tutoring organised by the school outside of normal lessons}. Please do not include music tuition, such as learning an instrument."

support (19% vs 13%) were more likely to receive tutoring. Those with parents/carers with no/entry level qualifications and degree-equivalent qualifications were more likely to receive tutoring (both 17%) compared to those with parents/carers with GCSE/A-Level qualifications (14%). Regional variation was more pronounced: tuition was most common in London (26%) and least common in the East Midlands, South West, and Yorkshire and the Humber (10-11%).

Most parents (80%) said they had not struggled to afford school resources in the past year. Around 17% said occasionally, and 4% often. FSM-eligible households were more likely to report difficulties: 9% of FSM parents said often compared with 2% of non-FSM households. Furthermore, parents/carers with no/entry level and GCSE/A-Level qualifications were more likely to say often (both 5% vs. 2%) and occasionally (18%/20% vs. 13%) compared to parents/carers with degree-equivalent qualifications or above. In terms of region, affordability challenges were most common in the South West (5% often) and least common in the East of England (3% often).

Figure 58: Young-person reported quiet place to study when not at school

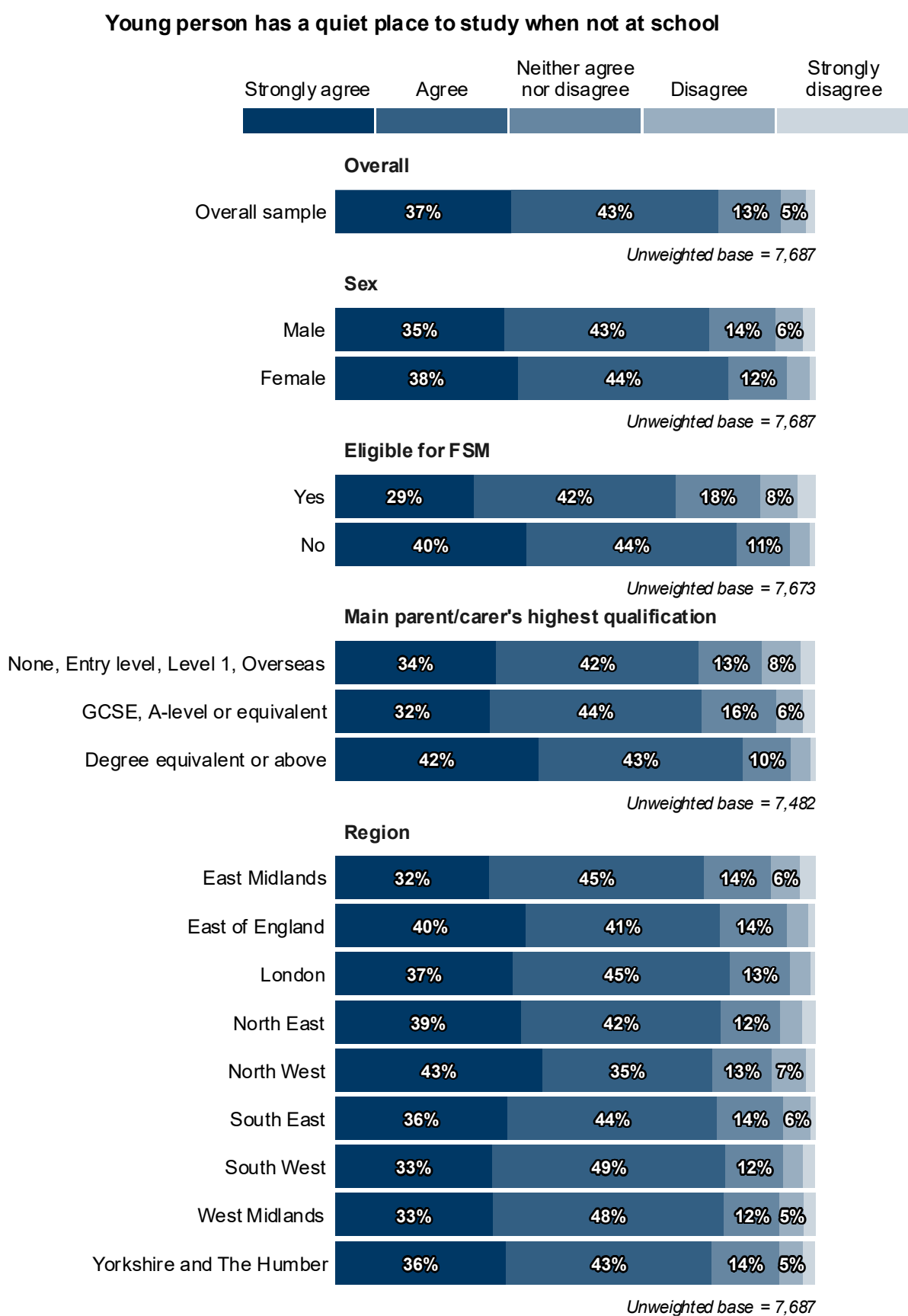


Figure 59: Parent-reported young person has own device for schoolwork

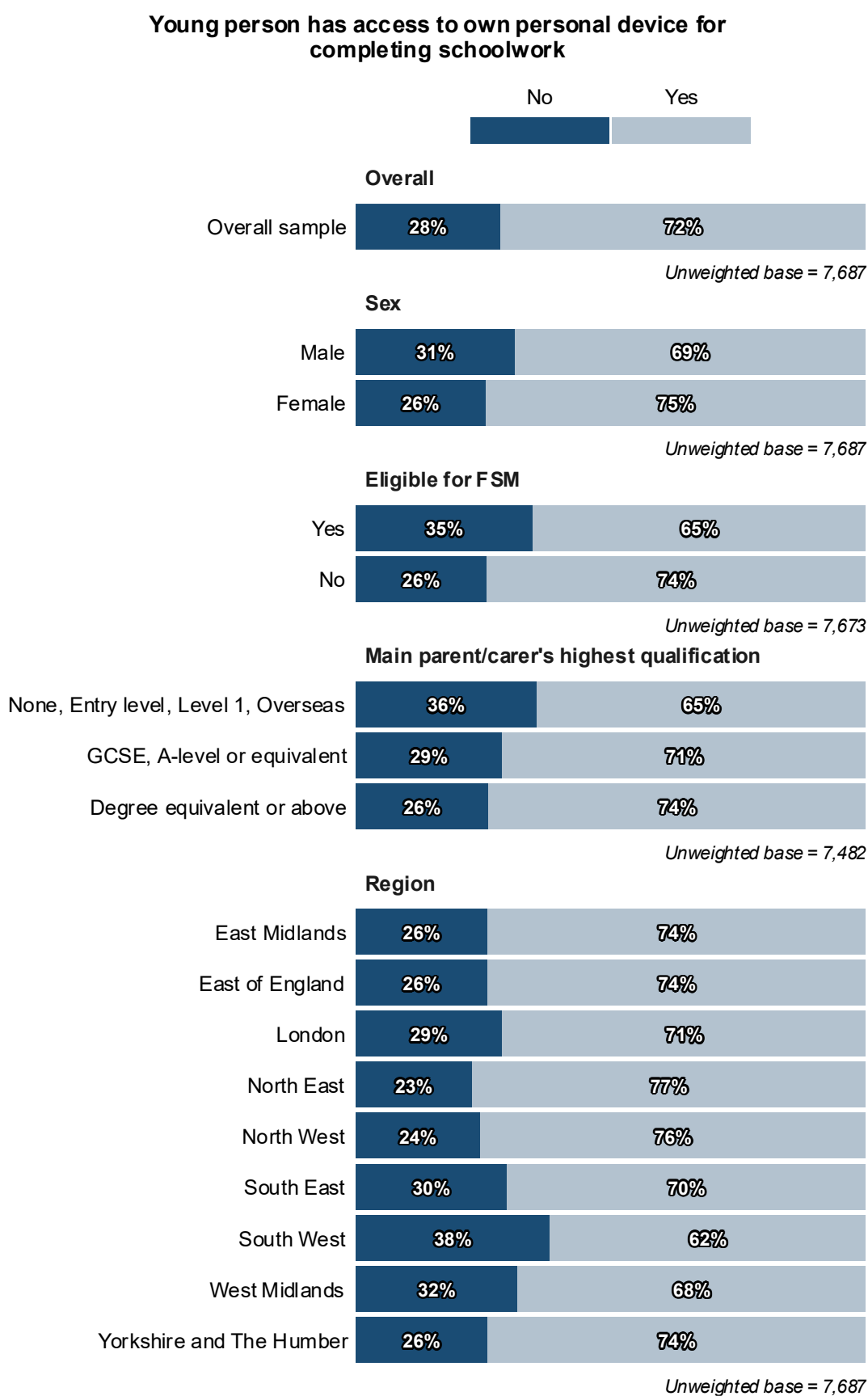


Figure 60: Parent-reported tuition (private tuition or tutoring organised by school outside of normal lessons) for young person

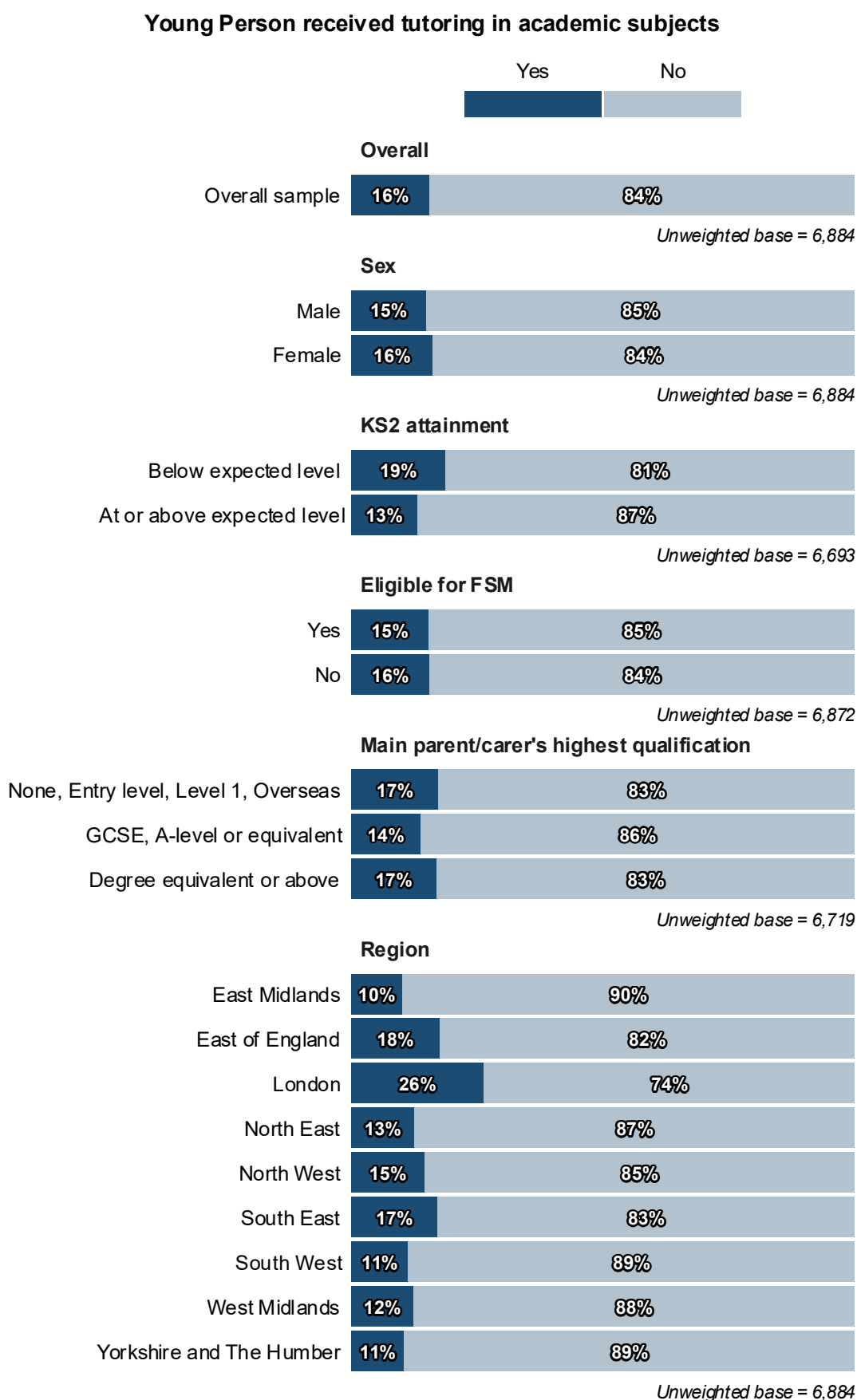
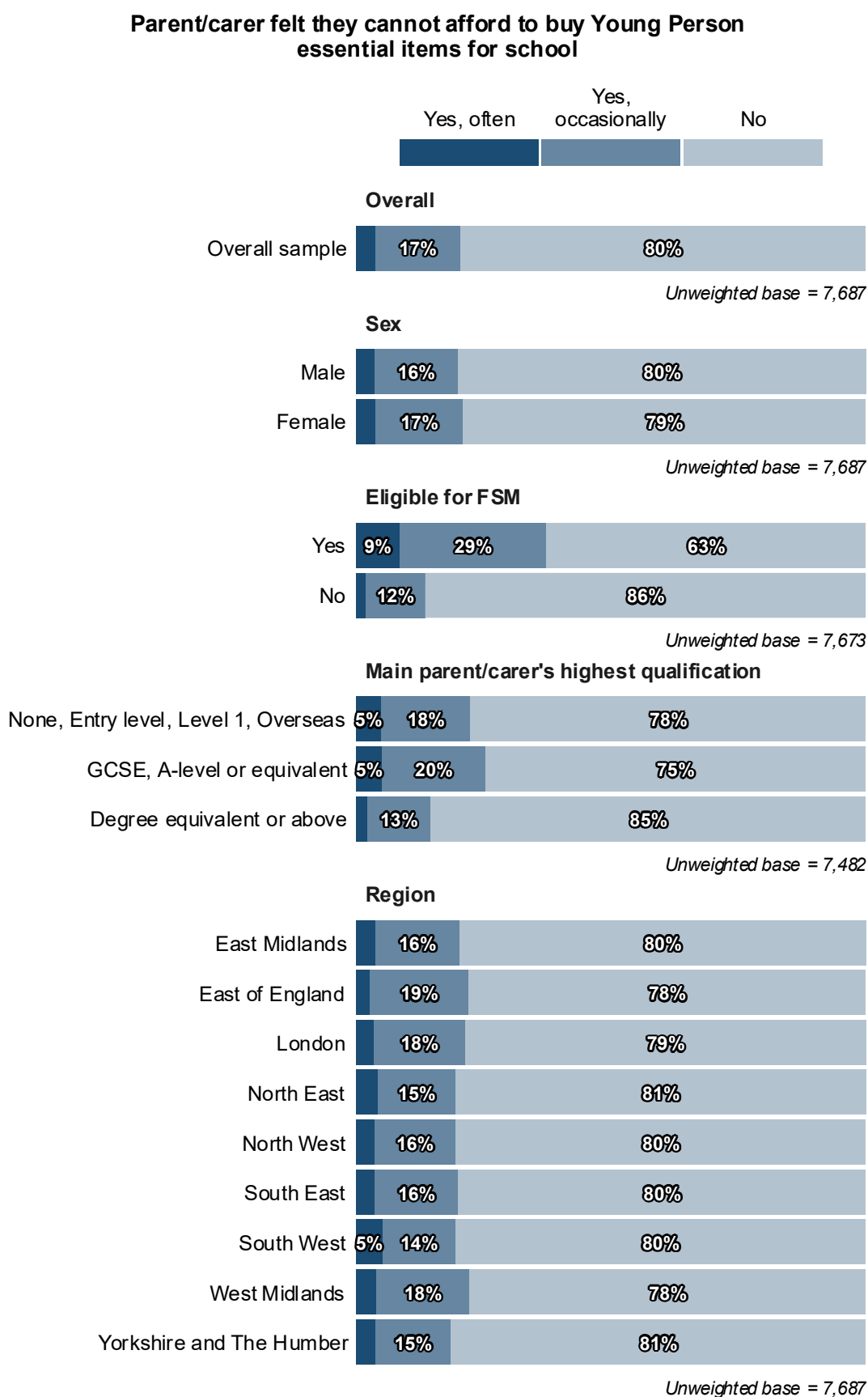


Figure 61: Parent-reported extent to which they have struggled to afford school resources



Peer relationships

Section overview

- This section examines young people's peer relationships. It explores perceived support from friends, frequency of social contact (both in person and online), feelings of peer acceptance, prosocial behaviour, experiences of bullying as well as teacher-reported peer experiences.
- Peer support, friendships and bullying are well-established predictors of children's academic and wellbeing outcomes. Positive peer relationships promote life satisfaction and academic achievement, while bullying consistently harms both wellbeing and academic performance (Healy, Scott and Thomas, 2024; Ozyildirim and Karadağ, 2024; Țepordei et al., 2023).
- Data presented in this section includes reports from both the young person and their teacher. Findings are disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, special educational need (SEN) provision and parental education.

Friendships and peer relationships

- Perceived support from friends was generally high (average score of 5.16 out of 7), but lower for FSM-eligible young people, those with SEN provision, and those with lower-educated parents.
- Online contact with peers was more common than in-person contact (28% vs. 12% daily). FSM-eligible and lower-parent-education groups showed more polarised patterns, with higher rates of both daily and no contact.
- Peer acceptance was high overall (48% agree; 22% strongly agree). Girls were less likely than boys to strongly agree that they felt accepted (18% vs. 25%), while FSM-eligible and SEN-supported young people were more likely to disagree.
- Prosocial behaviour was high overall. Lower prosocial scores were more common among boys, young people with SEN provision, those eligible for FSM, and those with lower-educated parents.
- Teacher-rated peer relationships were positive for most (88% liked by peers; 70% make friends easily), but ratings were less favourable for young people eligible for FSM, with SEN provision, or with parents/carers with lower educational levels.

Bullying

- Most young people reporting no physical (80%), relational (61%) or cyberbullying (86%).

- Girls experienced more relational and cyberbullying, while boys experienced more physical bullying and were more likely to report no bullying.
- Bullying rates were lower than national HBSC estimates for similar-aged pupils, both for overall bullying (27% girls; 23% boys) and cyberbullying (12% girls; 10% boys).
- Inequalities were clear: being bullied was more common among FSM-eligible, SEN provision and lower-parental-education young people, while Asian young people reported the lowest bullying rates across all forms of bullying.
- Only 31% of young people who were bullied said that school staff were aware of it.

Conclusion

- Most young people reported positive peer relationships.
- Online peer contact was more common than in-person contact, and most young people showed typical levels of prosocial behaviour.
- Experiences of being bullied overall was generally low, though patterns varied in terms of the type of bullying and who experienced it.
- Clear inequalities were evident: young people who were FSM-eligible, had SEN provision, or had lower-educated parents reported weaker peer relationships, more bullying, lower prosocial behaviour and more polarised patterns of in-person social contact.
- Only around one third of bullied young people felt school staff were aware of bullying, indicating a gap between experiences and perceived adult recognition.

Friendships and peer relationships

Perceived support from friends

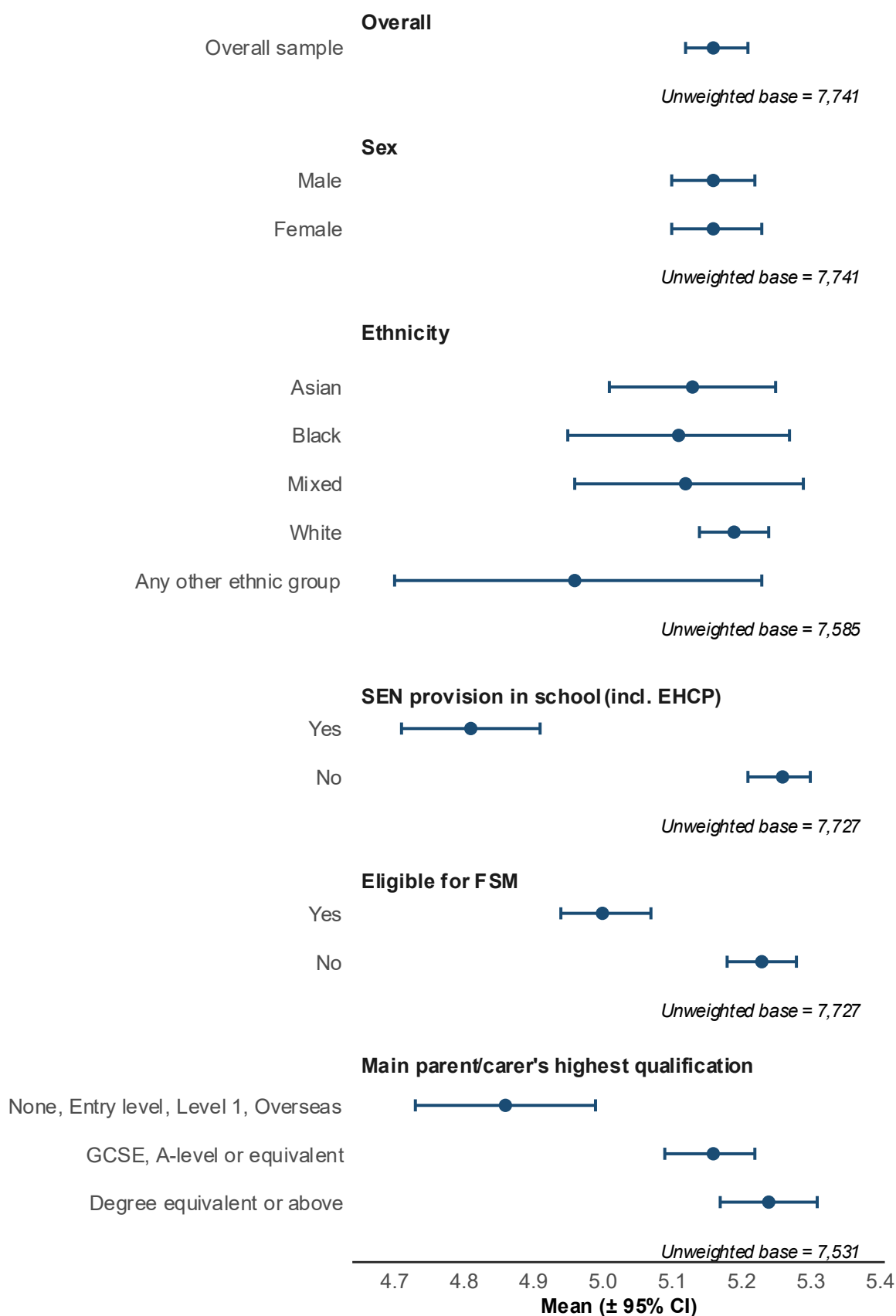
Young people were asked to reflect on whether they could count on their friends when things go wrong. Responses were collected on a seven-point scale, where 1 = very strongly disagree and 7 = very strongly agree. For this report, the option “I don’t have any friends” (n = 57) was recoded as missing and scores were calculated as weighted means, with higher values indicating stronger agreement.

Across the sample, the overall mean score was 5.16 indicating that, on average, young people agreed that they felt able to rely on their friends when facing difficulties. Patterns by sex and ethnicity were similar; there were no meaningful differences between groups. Young people eligible for FSM had a lower mean score

(5.00 vs. 5.23). This was also the case for young people receiving SEN provision (4.81 vs. 5.26) and young people whose parents or carers had no/entry level qualifications (4.89 vs. 5.16/5.24).

Figure 62: Young person reported 'I can count on my friends when things go wrong'

Young person can count on friends when things go wrong



Contact with friends

Young people were asked how often they get together with friends, both in person and online, in a typical week outside of school (if applicable). Response options ranged from 'never' to 'every day or almost every day'. Across the sample, patterns showed that online contact was more frequent than face-to-face interactions, but inequalities in social connection were evident across both in person and online domains.

Across the sample, young people were significantly more likely to report connecting with friends online every day or almost every day (28%) compared to in person (12%). Contact in person was typically less frequent: 27% met friends in person once a week compared with 17% online, and 25% met in person less often compared to 14% online. The proportion reporting never seeing friends did not differ significantly between in person and online compared with 28% who connected online daily.

Patterns by sex showed consistent differences. Boys were more likely than girls to report daily contact with friends both in person (14% boys vs. 10% girls) and online (31% vs. 25%). Girls were more likely to report weekly or less frequent contact in both domains, and slightly more likely to report never connecting online (15% girls vs. 9% boys). Differences by ethnicity highlighted distinct experiences. Asian participants were least likely to report daily contact, both in person (9%) and online (19%), and most likely to report never seeing friends (20% in person; 15% online). White participants were most likely to report daily contact (13% in person; 30% online) and least likely to report never having contact with friends (8% in person; 10% online). Young people with SEN provision were more likely to report daily contact in person (15% vs 11%) but also more likely to report never having contact (16% vs 9%) compared with those without SEN provision.

Young people eligible for FSM were more likely to meet friends in person every day or almost every day than those not eligible (15% vs 11%) and were also more likely to never meet friends in person (14% vs 9%). In contrast, young people not eligible for FSM were more likely to meet friends about once a week (29% vs 23%). For online contact, there were no statistically supported differences between FSM groups. Young people whose parents or carers had no/entry level qualifications were more likely to meet friends in person every day or almost every day compared to those with degree-equivalent qualifications (14% vs 11%) but also more likely to report never meeting friends in person (16% vs. 9%). Furthermore, these young people were more likely to report never meeting friends online (16% vs. 11%).

Figure 63: Young person reported frequency of contact with friends in person

How often Young Person gets together with friends in person

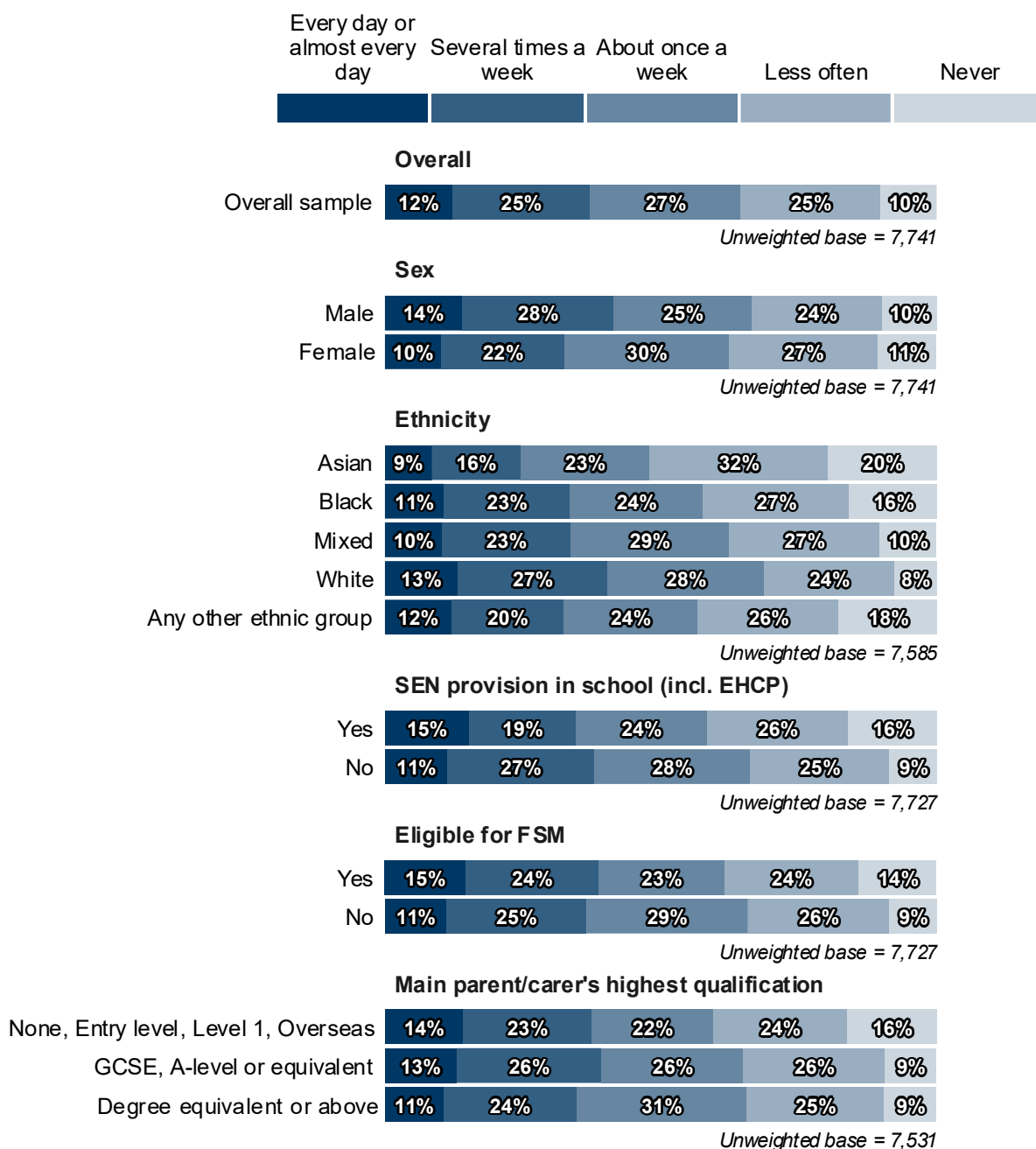
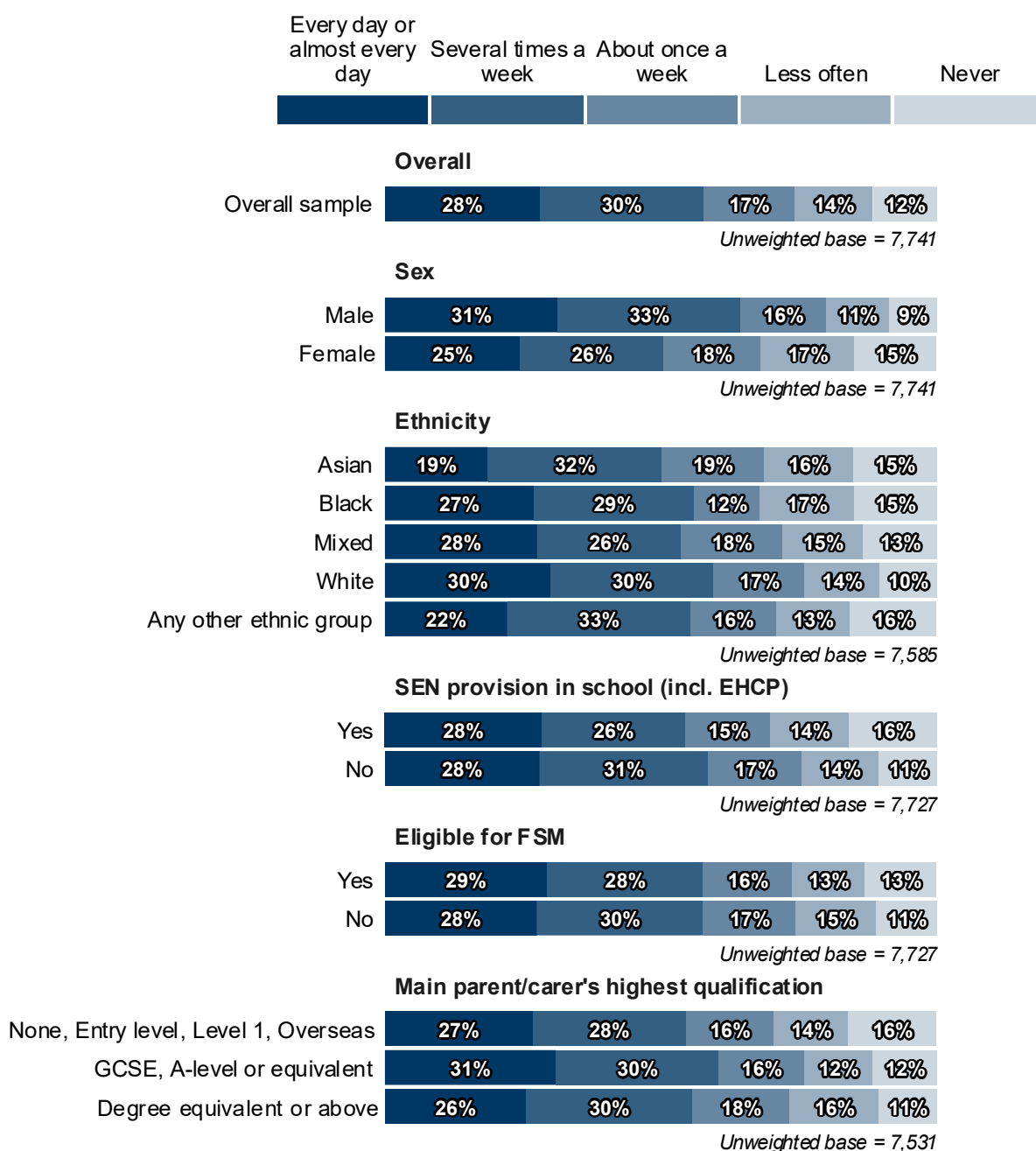


Figure 64: Young person reported frequency of contact with friends online

How often Young Person gets together with friends online



Peer acceptance

Young people were asked whether they felt accepted by other students. Around half of the sample (48%) agreed that they were accepted, while about one in five (22%) strongly agreed. Neutral responses were also common (22%), with fewer reporting disagreement (7%) or strong disagreement with feeling accepted (2%). Patterns by sex showed differences. Boys were more likely to agree (51%) or strongly agree (25%) that they felt accepted by other students compared with girls (44% agree; 18% strongly agree). Girls were more likely to select neutral (26% vs. 17%) or disagree (9% vs. 5%).

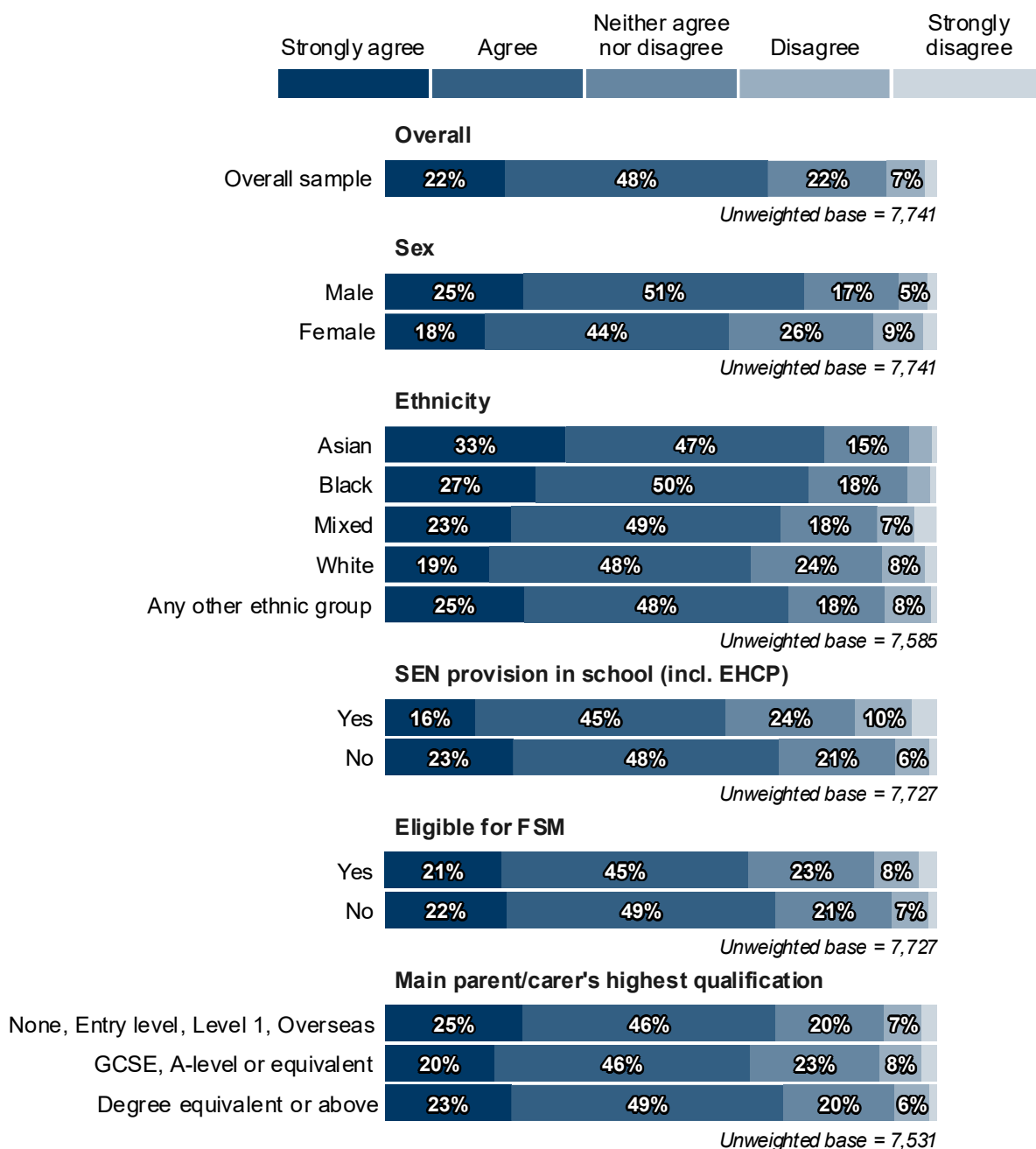
Variation by ethnicity was notable. Asian participants were most likely to report strong agreement with feeling accepted (33%) and least likely to disagree (4%). Black participants also reported relatively high levels of agreement with feeling accepted (50% agree; 27% strongly agree). White participants were less likely to strongly agree (19%) and more likely to select neutral (24%) or disagree (8%). Mixed and “any other ethnic group” participants reported intermediate patterns, with some variation reflecting smaller sample sizes.

Some indicators of disadvantage were associated with less positive perceptions. FSM-eligible young people were slightly less likely to agree that they felt accepted by other students (45%) and were more likely strongly disagree (3%) compared with non-FSM young people (49% agree; 2% strongly disagree). Similarly, SEN provision was linked to less positive responses: young people with SEN provision were less likely to strongly agree to feeling accepted (16%) and more likely to disagree (10%) or strongly disagree (5%) compared with those without SEN provision (23% strongly agree; 6% disagree; 1% strongly disagree).

Parental education was also associated with differences in responses. Young people whose parents or carers had GCSE/A level qualifications were less likely to strongly agree that they felt accepted (20%) compared to those with parents with no/entry level (25%) or degree-equivalent qualifications (23%). However, they were more likely to endorse the opposite side of the spectrum: both 3% of those with no/entry level and GCSE/A level parental qualifications reported that they strongly disagreed, compared to 1% of those with degree-equivalent parental qualifications.

Figure 65: Young person reported acceptance by other students

Other students accept Young Person as they are



Prosocial behaviour

Prosocial behaviour refers to positive, socially oriented behaviours that reflect consideration for others, helping, sharing and kindness. It is a key component of positive social development during childhood and adolescence (Eisenberg, Spinrad and Knafo-Noam, 2015) and has been associated with better peer relationships, academic adjustment and overall wellbeing (Caprara et al., 2000; Layous et al., 2012).

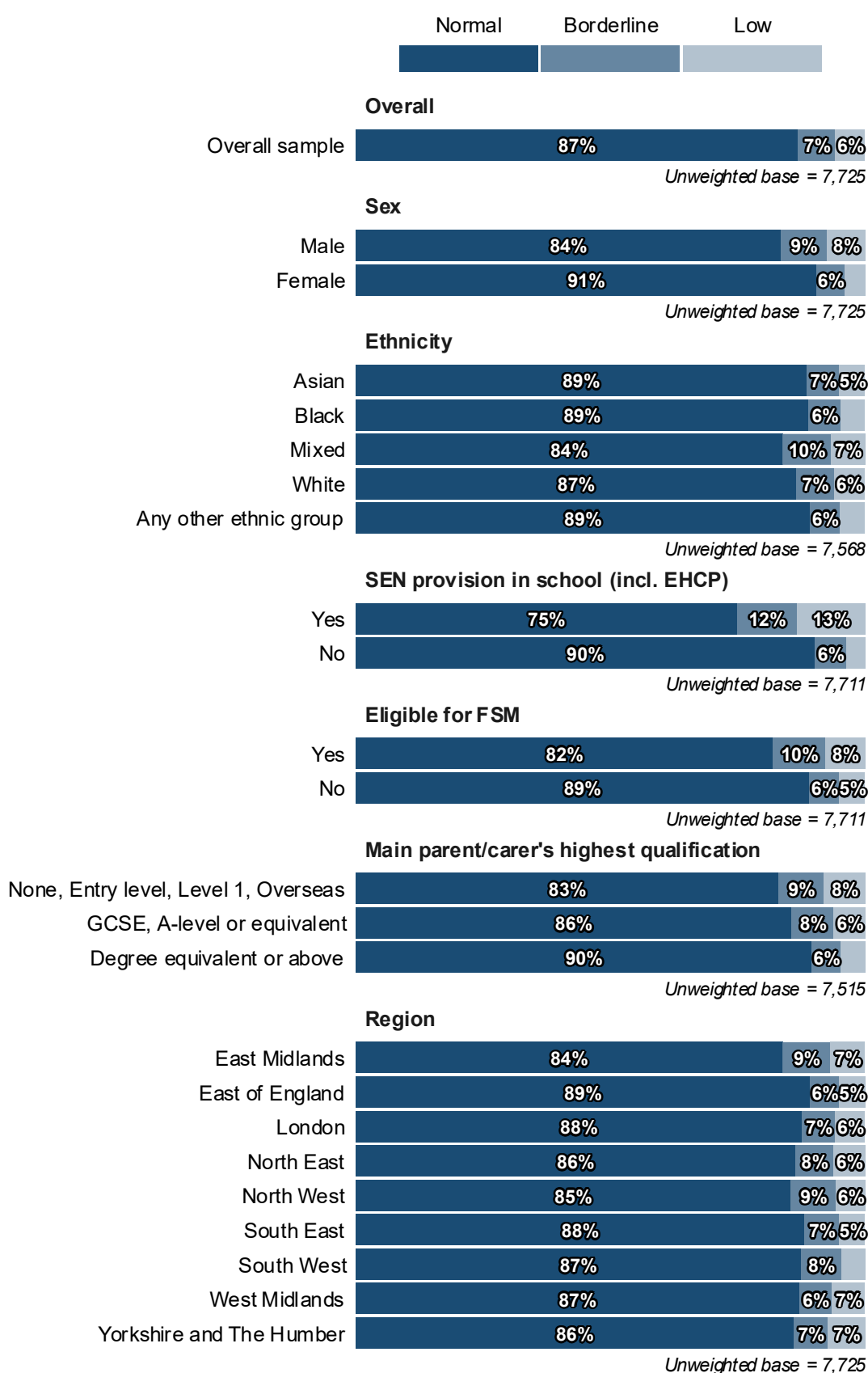
Prosocial behaviour was measured with the SDQ's prosocial behaviour 5-item subscale. For a description of the SDQ measure, please see the [Mental health](#) section. Participants rate each item on a 3-point scale ('not true', 'somewhat true', or 'certainly true'), producing scores ranging from 0–10, where higher scores indicate fewer difficulties. Following standard SDQ cut-offs (Goodman, 1997), scores were categorised as normal, borderline or abnormal/low.

Overall, 87% of young people were in the normal range for prosocial behaviour, 7% were borderline and 6% were in the low range (scoring below the 'abnormal' cut off). Girls were more likely than boys to be in the normal range (91% vs 84%) and less likely to be in the low range (4% vs 8%). Young people from mixed ethnic backgrounds were less likely to be in the normal range (84%) compared with Asian (89%) and Black (89%) young people.

Young people with SEN provision in school were substantially less likely to be in the normal range for prosocial behaviour (75% vs 90%) and more likely to be in the low range (13% vs 4%) than those not receiving SEN support. Those eligible for FSM were less likely to be in the normal range (82% vs 89%) and more likely to be in the low range (8% vs 5%) than their non-eligible peers. Young people whose parents or carers had degree-equivalent qualifications were more likely to be in the normal range (90% vs 83% no/entry level/86% GCSE/A level) and less likely to be in the low range (5% vs 8% no/entry level). There were no consistent regional differences, with overlapping confidence intervals across regions.

Figure 66: Young person reported prosocial behaviour, as measured by the SDQ

SDQ YP reported prosocial behaviour 3-band categorical



Teacher-rated peer relationships

The following sub-section describes data from teachers on young people's peer relationships (see section [Overview of Wave 1 fieldwork](#) for more information on the teacher sample, which represents a smaller subset of the overall Wave 1 sample).

Teachers were asked to reflect on three aspects of young people's peer relationships: whether they are liked by other students, whether they make friends easily and whether they are often left out. Teachers generally reported positive peer relationships among young people. Nearly nine in ten were described as liked by their peers (88% agreed or strongly agreed), around seven in ten were said to make friends easily (70% agreed or strongly agreed), and three quarters were reported as not often left out (74% disagreed or strongly disagreed). Differences by sex and ethnicity were small.

Measures of disadvantage were consistently linked to less favourable ratings. Teachers were less likely to describe FSM-eligible young people as liked (30% vs. 41% strongly agreed), less likely to describe them as able to make friends easily (17% vs. 25% strongly agreed) and less likely to disagree that they are often left out (20% vs. 28% strongly disagree), compared with non-FSM young people.

Young people with SEN provision were less positively rated. Teachers were less likely to describe young people with SEN provision as liked (26% strongly agreed and 50% agreed, compared with 41% and 50% for young people without SEN provision). They were also more often described as left out (13% agree vs. 4%).

There was also variation by parental education: children with more highly educated parents and carers were more likely to be described as liked (45% vs. 31% no/entry level and 34% GCSE/A level strongly agree), more likely to be described as making friends easily (26% vs. 16% no/entry level strongly agree), and less likely to be described as left out (31% vs. 16% no/entry level and 24% GCSE/A level strongly disagree).

Figure 67: Teacher-reported young person seems to be liked by other students

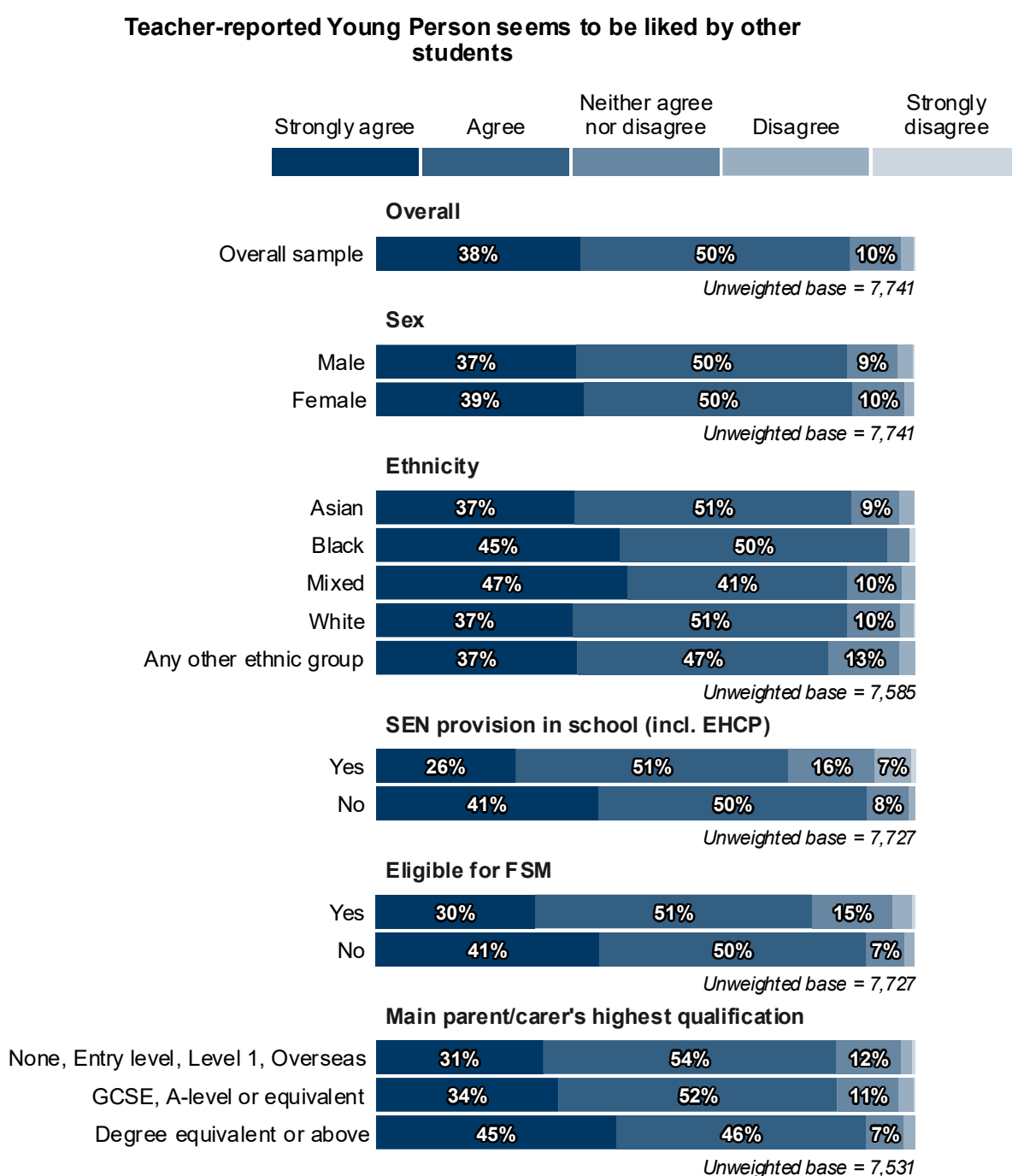


Figure 68: Teacher-reported young person makes friends easily at school

Teacher-reported Young Person makes friends easily at school

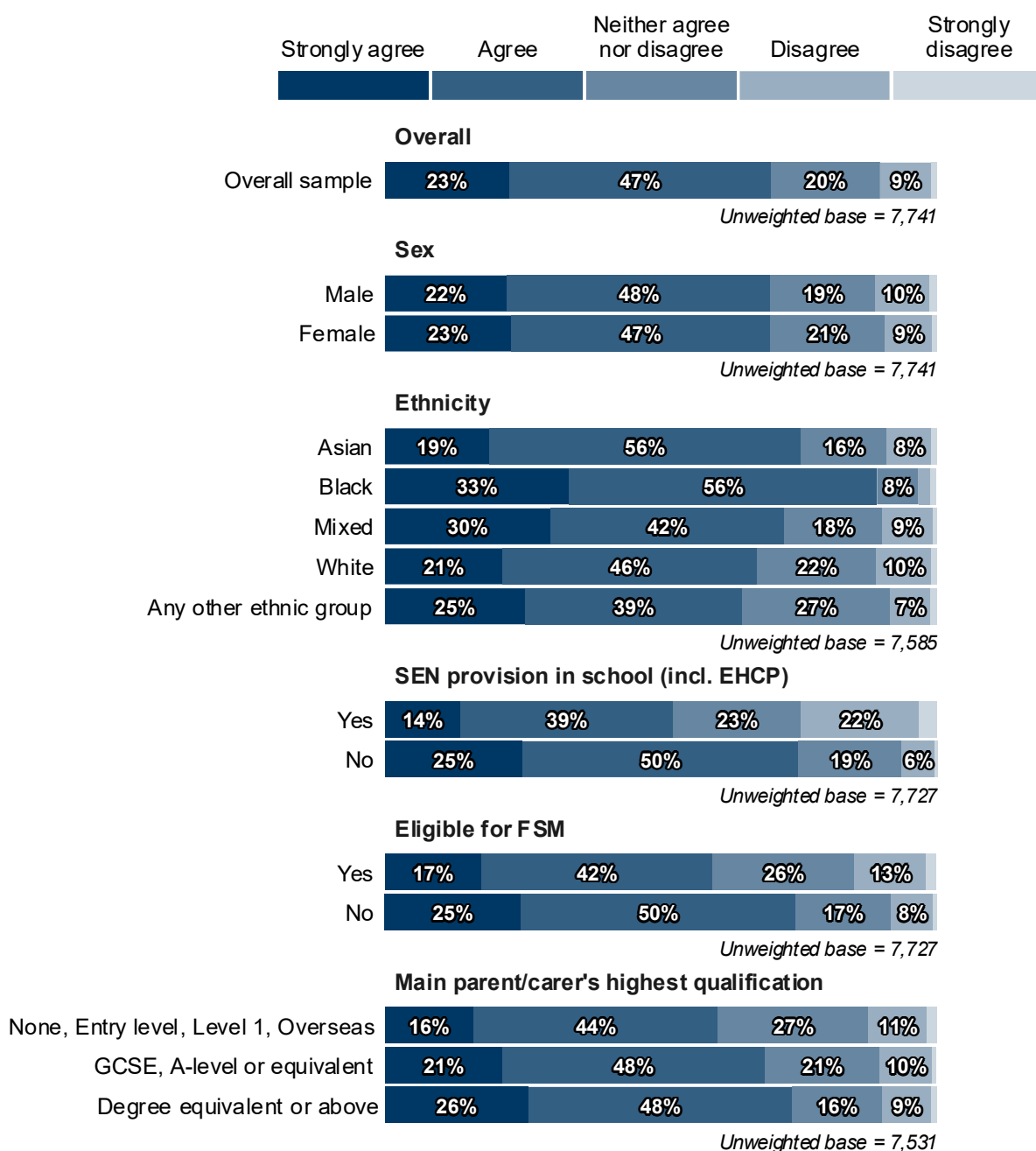
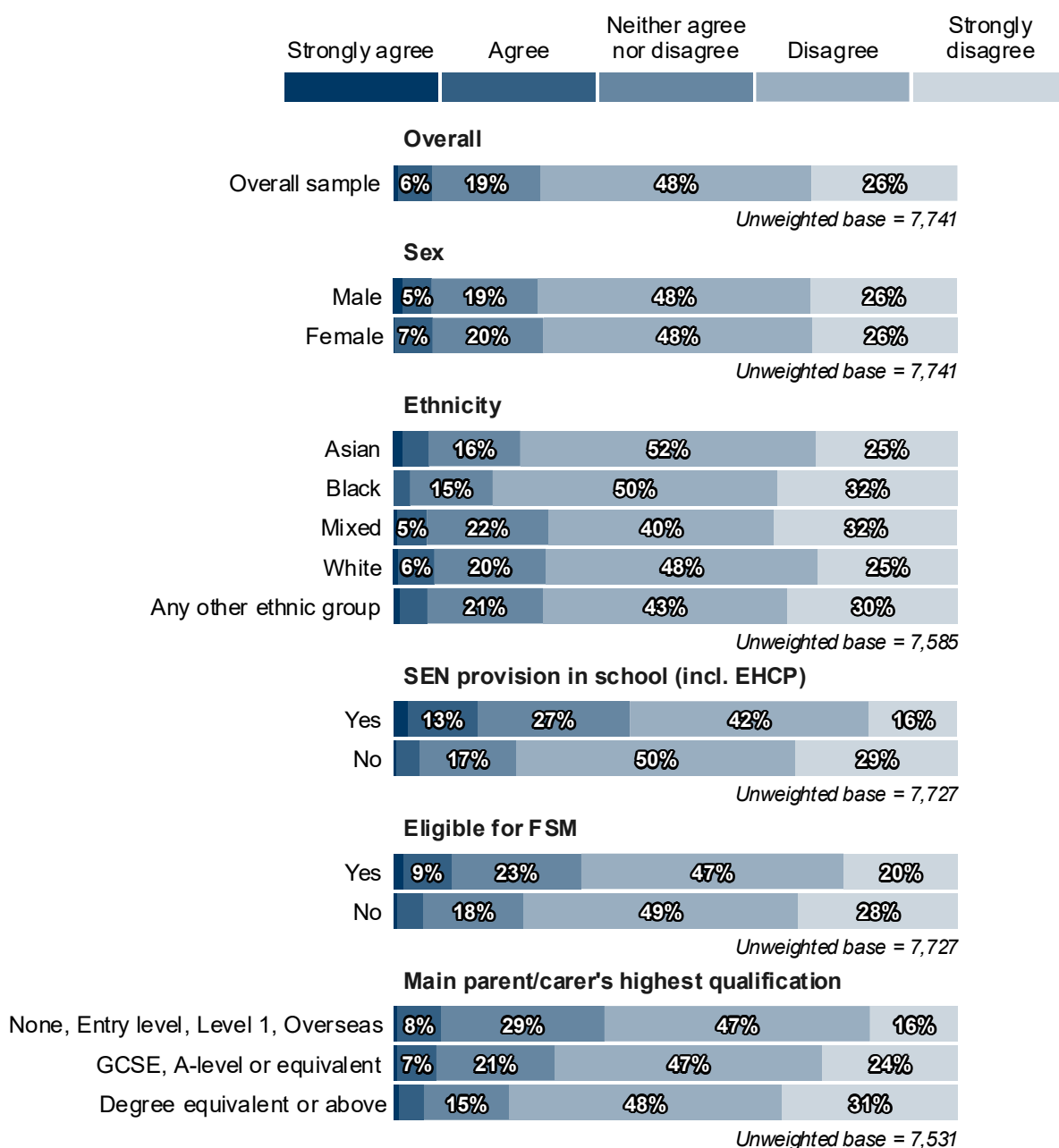


Figure 69: Teacher-reported young person is often left out of things at school

Teacher-reported Young Person is often left out of things at school



Bullying

Young people were asked three items about their experiences of bullying. These included:

- being physically bullied in person
- being bullied in other ways (e.g., being called names, being excluded from things, or having nasty stories spread about them on purpose; i.e., relational bullying)
- being cyberbullied (e.g., being sent hurtful instant messages, other people making hurtful social media posts).

Across all domains, most reported either no or only occasional experiences of bullying, though patterns varied across demographic and contextual groups.

Overall, 80% of young people reported never being physically bullied and 11% reported this taking place less often than once a month, with smaller proportions reporting more frequent bullying (less than once a week: 4%; once or twice a week: 3%; every day or almost every day: 2%). The proportion of young people not being physically bullied is higher in Growing Up in the 2020s compared to Five to Twelve. In Five to Twelve, 71% of teachers said children were never purposefully hurt or picked on.

Cyberbullying was less common: 86% reported not being bullied online, with 9% reporting this taking place less often than once a month, 3% less than once a week, and 1% each for once or twice a week and every day or almost every day.

Young people reported being bullied in other ways (e.g., name-calling) more frequently. 18% reported this occurring less often than once a month, 8% less than once a week and once or twice a week, and 5% every day, with the most common response still being never (61%).

For physical bullying, boys reported higher rates than girls at moderate and low frequencies: 5% of boys vs 3% of girls were bullied about monthly, and 13% of boys vs 10% of girls were bullied less often than monthly. Girls, in turn, were more likely to say they were never physically bullied (83% vs 77%). There was little difference between boys and girls when it came to experiencing or relational bullying (such as name-calling or exclusion) frequently. However, girls were more likely to experience it at some point. Girls were more likely to report experiencing relational bullying monthly (9% vs. 7%) or less often than monthly (20% vs. 16%) compared to boys. Boys were more likely to report never experiencing relational bullying (65% vs 58%).

Cyberbullying shows a similar pattern: 3% of girls vs 2% of boys report monthly cyberbullying, and 11% of girls vs 7% of boys report it less often than monthly, while boys are more likely to say they are never cyberbullied (89% vs 84%).

Across all three bullying measures, Asian pupils consistently reported the lowest rates of bullying, with non-overlapping confidence intervals showing they were less likely to be physically bullied (1% vs 2–3%) and less likely to be bullied in other ways (3% vs 5–9%) than White and mixed-ethnicity pupils. For cyberbullying, Asian pupils again had lower daily or weekly bullying (1% vs 2–3%) and higher rates of never being cyberbullied (91% vs 84–86%),

Young people eligible for FSM reported experiencing more frequent bullying across all forms. For physical bullying, FSM-eligible young people are more likely to be bullied every day or almost every day (4% vs 1%) and once or twice a week (4% vs 3%), and they are less likely to say they are never physically bullied (75% vs 81%). For relational bullying, FSM-eligible young people again show higher rates at the most frequent levels, with 7% vs 4% reporting daily bullying and 9% vs 7% reporting weekly bullying, while fewer report never being bullied in this way (59% vs 62%). For cyberbullying, FSM-eligible young people are more likely to experience it daily (1.2% vs 0.3%), weekly (2% vs 1%) and monthly (4% vs 2%), and they are less likely to say they are never cyberbullied (83% vs 89%).

Young people with SEN provision were more likely to be physically bullied daily or weekly (11% vs 4%), more likely to be bullied in other ways (20% vs 10%) and more likely to be cyberbullied weekly or monthly (5% vs 3%). They were also less likely to report never being bullied in all forms, for example, 70% reported never experiencing physical bullying (vs 82% of those without SEN provision) and 82% reported never being cyberbullied (vs 88% of those without SEN provision).

Young people whose parents and carers have lower levels of education experience more frequent bullying across all forms. Those with parents educated to no/entry level are more likely to be physically bullied every day (4% vs 1%) or weekly (6% vs 2%) than those whose parents hold degree-equivalent qualifications. They are also less likely to report never being physically bullied (78% vs 85%). A similar pattern appears for relational bullying: daily bullying is more common among young people with no/entry level-educated parents (4% vs 3%), and the proportion who are never bullied in this way is lower (60% vs 89%). Cyberbullying also shows a clear gradient, with higher daily (1% vs 0.2%), weekly (3% vs 1%) and monthly (4% vs 2%) rates among young people whose parents have no/entry level qualifications, and a lower proportion reporting never being cyberbullied (81% vs 89%).

Of those who did report instances of bullying, we also asked whether school staff were aware of the bullying. Of the 3375 young people, 3281 responded. Only 31% of

young people said staff were aware of the bullying, while 33% said staff were not aware, and 36% were not sure.

Figure 70: Young person reported frequency of being physically bullied

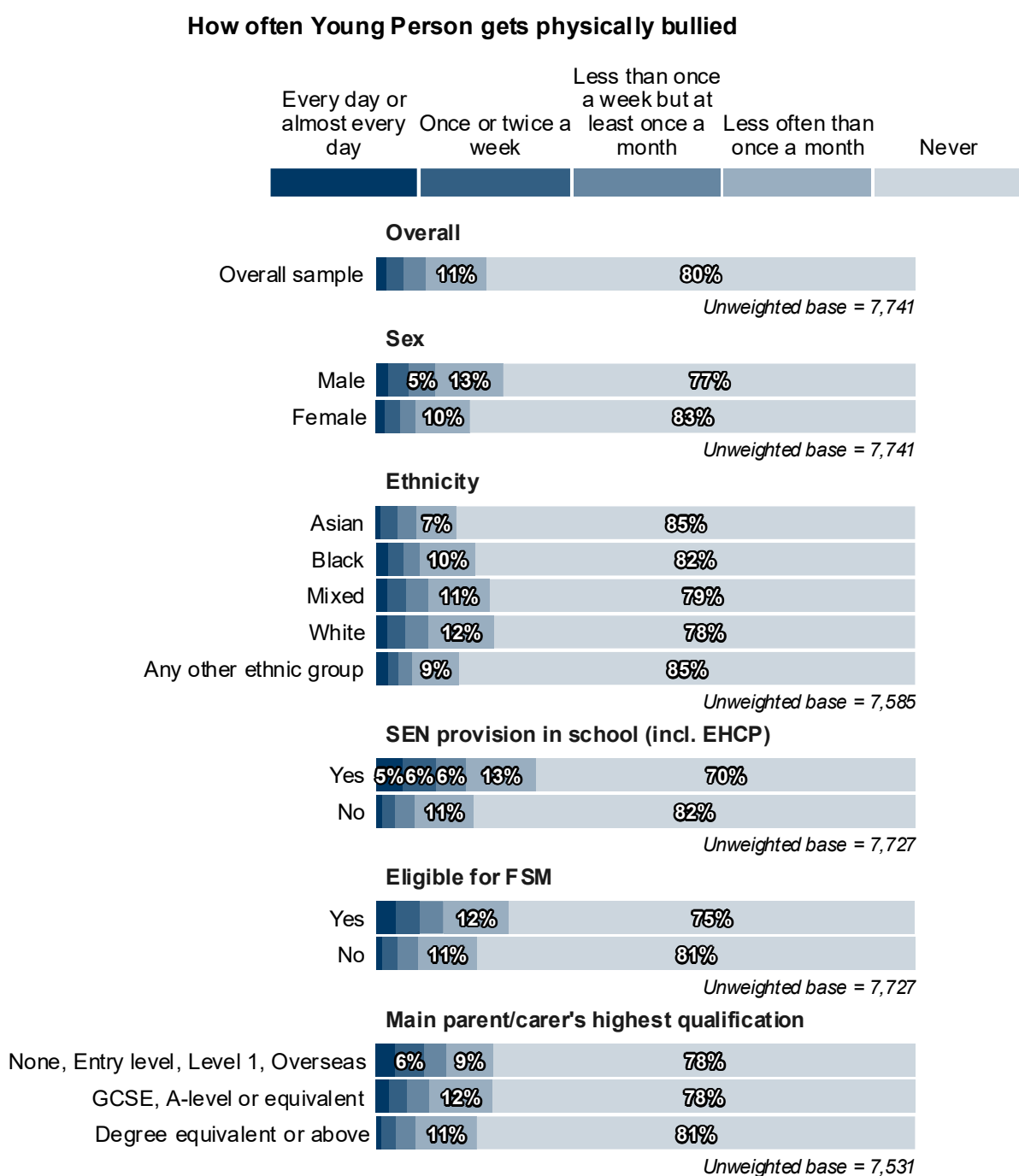


Figure 71: Young person reported frequency of being bullied in other ways (e.g., being called names, being excluded from things, or having nasty stories spread about them on purpose; i.e. relational bullying)

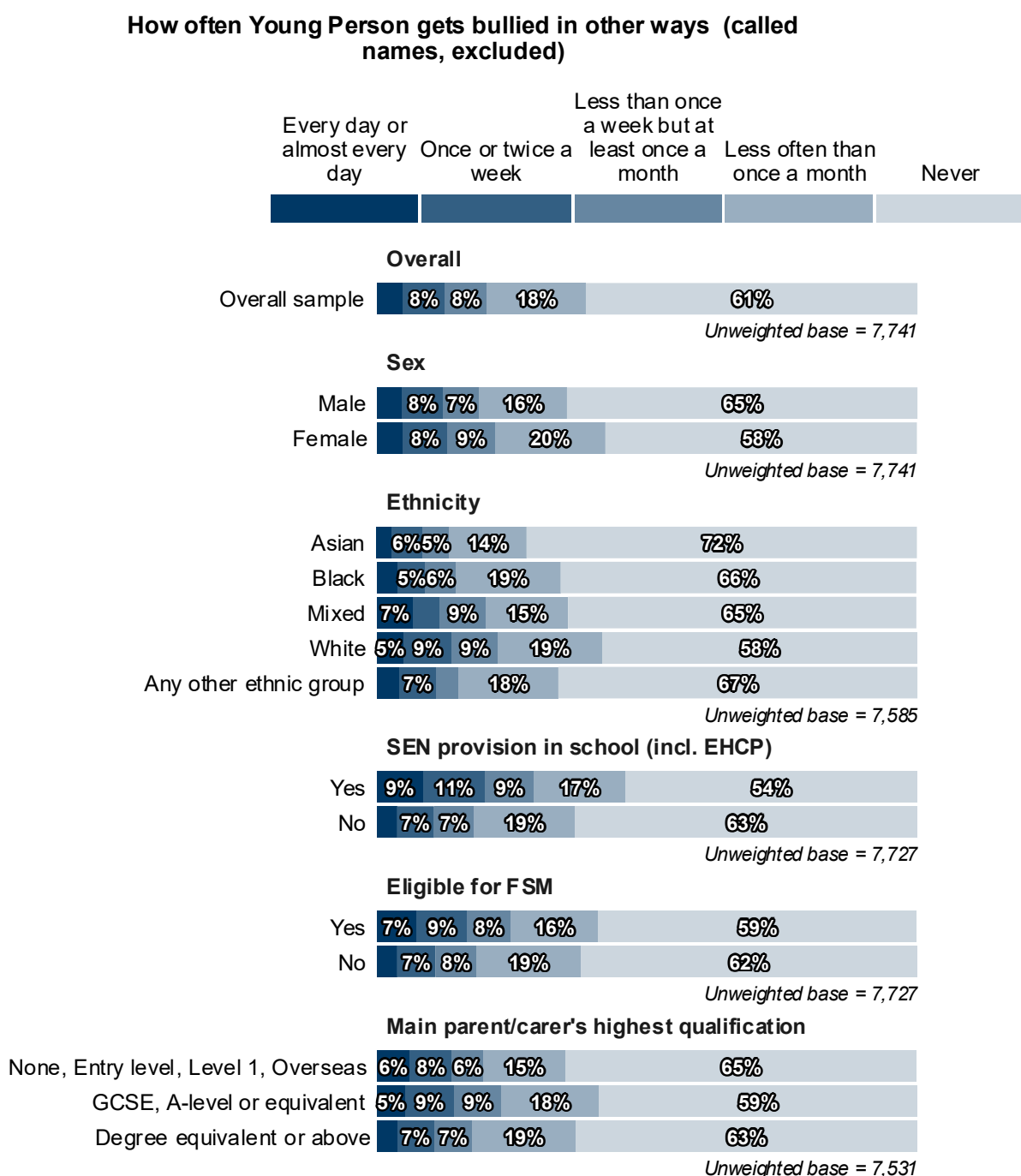
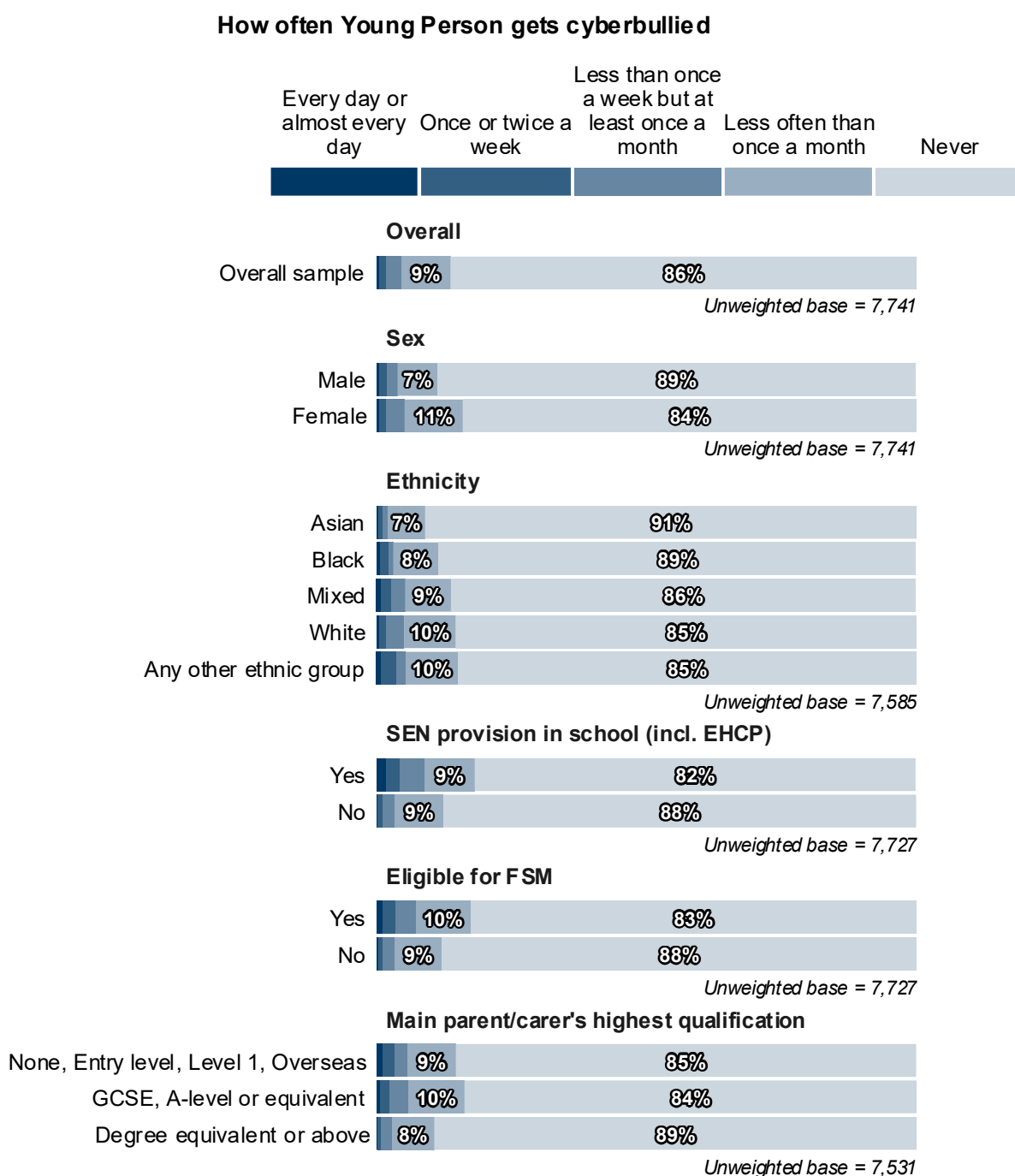


Figure 72: Young person reported frequency of being cyberbullied



School

This section examines the third layer of the framework, focusing on the school environment, through young people's experiences, engagement and academic aspirations. The literature review conducted for Growing Up in the 2020s (Harland et al, 2024) identified several factors linked to attainment that are captured in the Wave 1 data: teacher, peer, and parent–school relationships; the behavioural and learning climate; transition to secondary school; aspirations and engagement with learning; and attendance. The review also highlighted clear sociodemographic inequalities across these areas.

Accordingly, this section applies a cross-cutting lens to investigate disparities by disaggregating findings by sex, ethnicity, parental education, free school meal (FSM) eligibility and receipt of special educational needs (SEN) support.

This section draws on multiple data sources. Most school questions analysed come from the young person's questionnaire and were asked of all those attending school on a full-time (n=7,649) or part-time basis (n=49), but not those who were being home-schooled (n=81) or were out of school for some other reason (n=26). A small number of questions about post-16 pathways were asked of parents in the follow-up online survey (completed by 6,781). National Pupil Database records for the Autumn term of 2024 were used to analyse absence and lateness, as data for the full 2024 to 2025 academic year were not yet available and the Autumn term aligned most closely with the self-report reference period (i.e. the term before young people were interviewed from January to July 2025). In contrast, exclusion was analysed using data for the full 2023 to 2024 academic year, since its low prevalence meant that using a single term would have resulted in small numbers (requiring suppression). NPD data are available for all participating young people except a small number who opted out of the NPD data linkage (n=7,797). To minimise participant burden, data already available through the NPD were used wherever possible, with self-report questions included only to capture information not recorded in the NPD, such as reasons for absence.

Additionally, participants were asked to nominate a form tutor, head of year, or another teacher to complete a short 15 to 20-minute survey on the young person's progress, behaviour, and well-being. Teachers were also asked about school policies – including about the implementation of rewards/sanctions in their school – which will be analysed alongside parallel questions asked of young person in wave 2 of the study. The data from the teacher survey relates to 2,069 participating teachers and 2,373 young people (304 teachers provided information on two different young people). Further details on the teacher survey are provided in the [Technical Report](#).



Section overview

- This section examines key aspects of young people's experiences of secondary school, including school belonging and wellbeing, engagement with learning, relationships with teachers and parents, aspirations, attendance, punctuality, and exclusion.
- These dimensions are associated with variations in educational outcomes and reflect factors identified in the literature review as important for attainment (Harland et al., 2024). Findings are examined through a cross-cutting lens of inequality, with comparisons by sex, ethnicity, parental education, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, special educational needs (SEN) provision, and prior attainment.
- Analyses draw on data from young people, parents, teachers, and linked administrative National Pupil Database (NPD) records.

School wellbeing, belonging and engagement

- Young people's experiences of school were mixed. 63% felt they belonged at school, 74% felt safe, and most reported settling into secondary school either very well (33%) or quite well (53%).
- However, enjoyment of school and engagement with learning were more mixed. Just over one-third often or always looked forward to school (36%), while 12% never did. Classroom disruption was also common, with 17% reporting disruption in all lessons, often affecting their concentration.
- Clear and recurring inequalities were evident across these measures. Lower school belonging was reported by girls compared with boys (57% vs. 69%), young people receiving SEN provision (54% vs. 66%), those with lower KS2 attainment (57% vs. 67%), and White young people (61%) compared with Asian young people (74%).
- These same groups were also more likely to report difficulty with core subjects. Girls more frequently reported Maths (22% vs. 14%) and Science (35% vs. 27%) as too difficult, while young people eligible for FSM were more likely to report difficulties in Maths (36% vs. 29%) and Science (24% vs. 15%). Young people receiving SEN provision were around twice as likely as their peers to report Maths (30% vs. 14%) and English (26% vs. 13%) as too difficult.
- Young people receiving SEN provision were three times as likely as their peers to report never enjoying learning (15% vs. 5%), while those with lower KS2 attainment were more than twice as likely to do so (12% vs. 5%).
- Time spent on homework also varied systematically across groups. Young people receiving SEN provision spent less time on homework than their

peers (1.5 vs. 2.1 hours), as did FSM-eligible young people (1.6 vs. 2.2 hours). White young people also reported less homework time on average than Asian and Mixed young people (1.9 vs. 2.3 hours).

Teacher and parental perspectives

- Teacher- and parent-reported measures reinforced these patterns. Overall, teachers' assessments of classroom engagement, pro-social contribution, and academic ability were broadly positive, but consistently less favourable for disadvantaged groups.
- Young people receiving SEN provision were substantially more likely to receive negative teacher evaluations. For example, 25% were described as not having a positive attitude towards learning (compared with 8% of peers), 32% as not actively participating in class (vs. 16%), and 14% as unlikely to listen to instructions (vs. 4%).
- Young people receiving SEN provision, those with lower KS2 attainment, and those eligible for FSM were also less likely to be described as role models, with around half receiving this assessment compared with approximately three-quarters of their peers.
- Girls were more likely than boys to be viewed positively by teachers in several areas, including making a positive classroom contribution (60% vs. 53%) and being considered a role model (73% vs. 63%). Black young people were most frequently described as making a positive contribution in class (68%).
- Parental aspirations and awareness of educational pathways reflected an additional layer of inequality. While three-quarters of parents expected their child to attend university, this fell to 47% among parents of children receiving SEN provision and 56% among those with lower KS2 attainment. Awareness of post-16 educational routes was also lower among more disadvantaged families.

Absence, punctuality and exclusion

- In Autumn 2024, young people were late to an average of 3.2 sessions. Rates of lateness were substantially higher among FSM-eligible pupils (5.0 vs. 2.3 sessions for non-FSM pupils), as well as among those receiving SEN provision, those with lower KS2 attainment, and those with lower parental education.
- Persistent absence was also common: 19% of young people missed at least 10% of sessions, while 11% missed 15% or more. Strong socioeconomic gradients were evident, with 34% of FSM-eligible pupils meeting the 10% persistent absence threshold compared with 13% of non-

FSM pupils. Higher absence rates were also observed among young people receiving SEN provision and those with lower prior attainment.

- Self-reported reasons for absence most commonly related to illness, although disadvantaged groups were more likely to report anxiety or mental health difficulties, bullying, disengagement from school, and unmet support needs.
- Exclusions were comparatively uncommon but were unevenly distributed across groups. Overall, 6% of young people had been suspended at least once in 2023 to 2024, rising to 14% among those receiving SEN provision and 12% among FSM-eligible pupils.

Conclusions

- Overall, the findings show consistent inequalities in young people's experiences of school, engagement with learning, and patterns of attendance and exclusion. Disparities were evident across multiple domains and data sources, including young people's own reports, teacher assessments, parental perspectives, and administrative records.
- Girls, young people receiving SEN provision, those with lower prior attainment at KS2, and those eligible for FSM generally reported lower school belonging, greater academic difficulty, lower engagement with learning, and poorer attendance outcomes.
- By contrast, Asian young people and, on several measures, Black young people reported more positive experiences (for example, higher belonging and enjoyment of learning), and outcomes were often more favourable in London than in several other regions.
- These findings establish an important baseline for understanding how inequalities in school engagement and educational experiences evolve over time.

School wellbeing, safety and belonging

School belonging

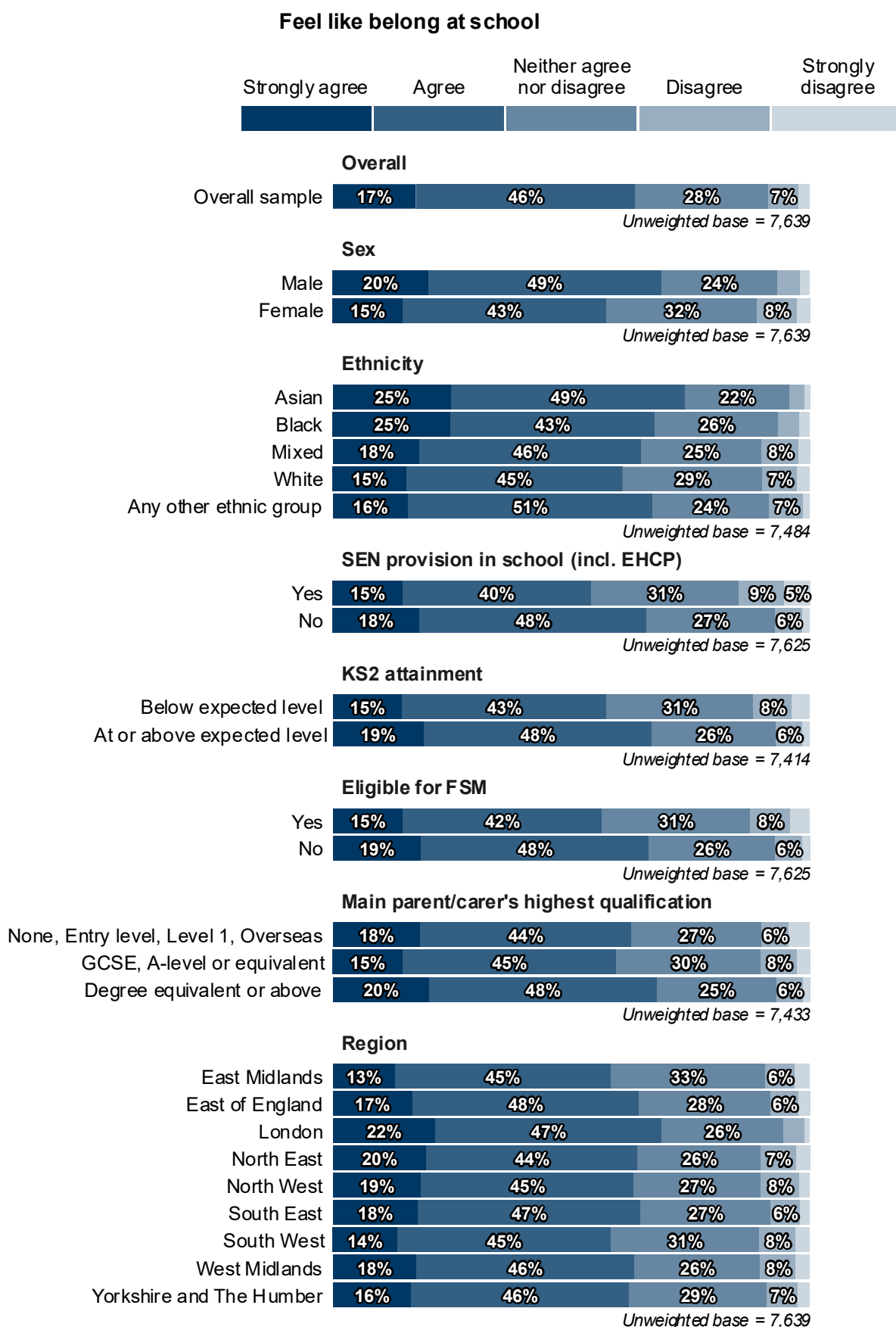
School belonging is associated with higher attainment, motivation and engagement with school (Craggs and Kelly, 2018; Hagenauer, 2020; Korpershoek et al, 2020). A widely cited definition conceptualises belonging as the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment (Goodenow and Grady, 1993). Smith and Culbert (2024) identify multiple related factors, including relationships with teachers, parents and peers; school climate and safety; participation in extracurricular activities; aspirations; geographic context; and individual characteristics. However, conceptual and measurement challenges remain, with ongoing debate about the extent to which

these factors capture belonging itself, related constructs, antecedents or outcomes of belonging.

Wave 1 included a direct measure of belonging, asking young people how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement: 'I feel like I belong in my school'. This measure is planned for every wave of the study to enable analysis of trajectories as young people move through secondary school. In addition, Wave 2 includes more detailed measures to help disentangle how related factors map onto belonging itself and to distinguish between components, antecedents and outcomes.

Almost two-thirds (63%) agreed that they belong in their school, while 28% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 9% disagreed. Belonging was lower among girls than boys (57% vs. 69%), young people receiving SEN provision (54% vs. 66%) and those with lower KS2 attainment (57% vs. 67%). By ethnicity, belonging was highest among Asian young people (74%), followed by Black (68%) and other ethnic backgrounds (67%), and lowest among Mixed (65%) and White (61%) young people. Regional differences were evident, with the highest rates in London (69%) and the lowest in the East Midlands and South West (both 58%). Socioeconomic disparities were also observed: belonging was lower among young people eligible for free school meals (57% vs. 66%) and those with lower levels of parental education (63% low, 59% medium vs. 68% high).

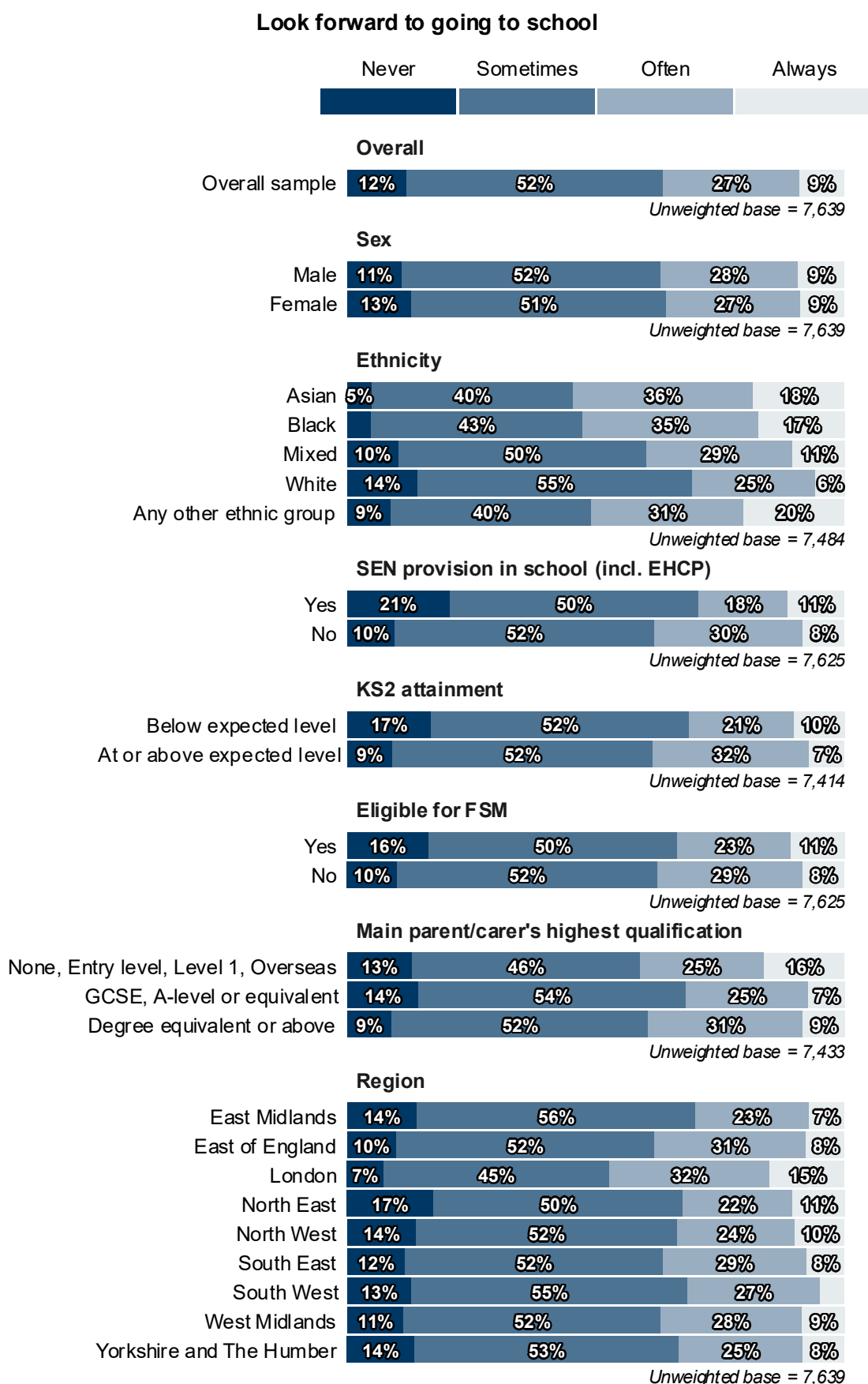
Figure 73: Young person reported school belonging



Looking forward to school

Young people were asked how often they look forward to going to school, a measure of school-related wellbeing, which has been associated with attainment and other outcomes (Putwain et al., 2020). Just over half of young people (52%) reported that they sometimes look forward to school, while 27% said they often do, 9% always do, and 12% never do. There were no differences between boys and girls, but disparities emerged across other groups. Young people receiving SEN provision at school were twice as likely as their peers to never look forward to school (21% vs. 10%), as were those below the expected level of attainment at KS2 (17% vs. 9%). By ethnicity, Asian young people were most likely to often or always look forward to school (55%), compared with 31% of White young people. Regional differences were evident: 47% of young people in London reported often or always looking forward to school, compared with 30% in the East Midlands, and 32% in the North East and South West. Smaller socioeconomic differences were observed, with lower rates among young people eligible for free school meals (34% vs. 37%) and those with intermediate levels of parental education (41% low, 32% medium vs. 40% high).

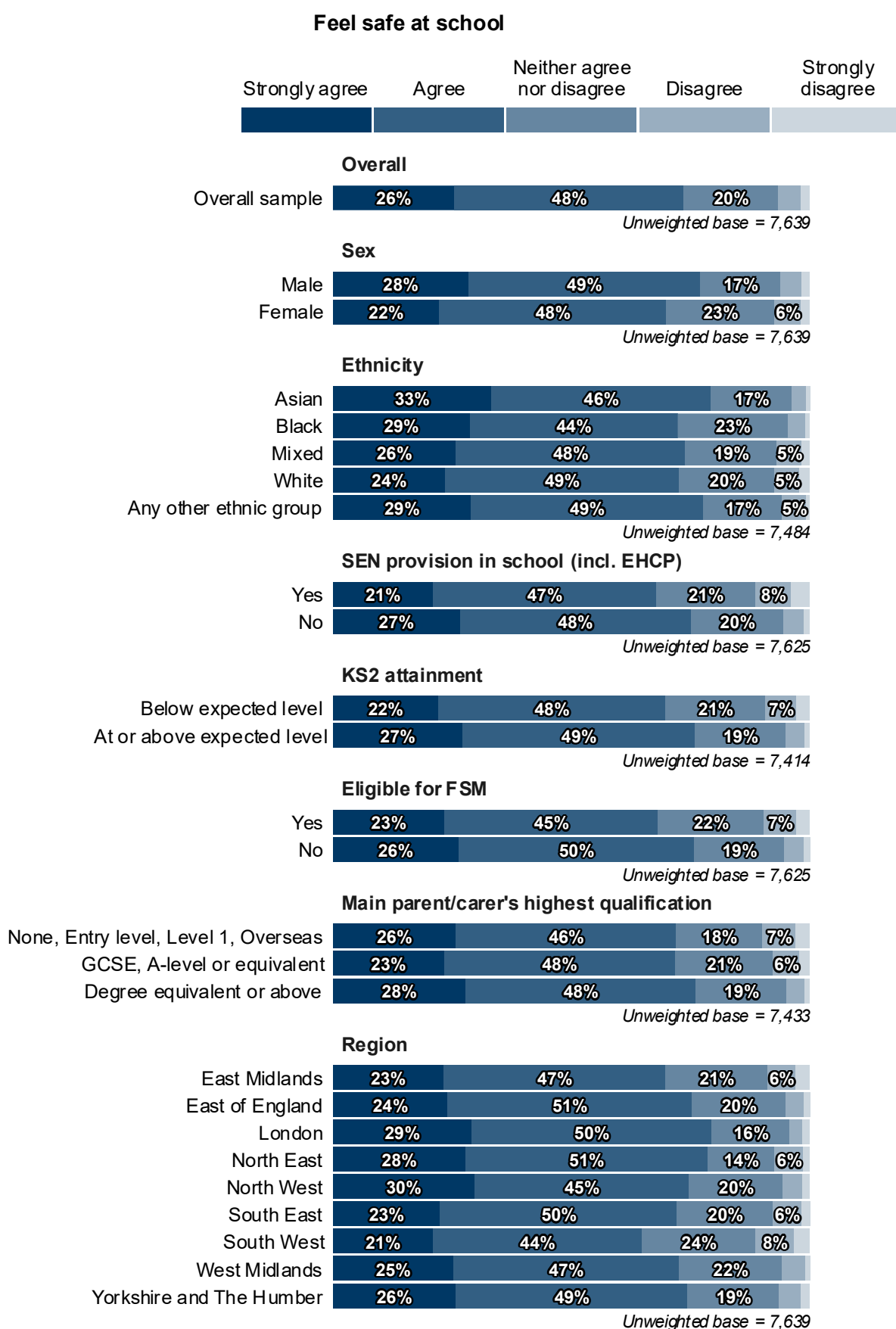
Figure 74: Young person reported looking forward to school



Feeling safe at school

Perceived safety – an important dimension of the broader school climate linked to belonging (Smith and Culbert, 2024) and attainment (Demirtas-Zorbaz, Akin-Arikan and Terzi, 2021) – was reported by most young people, with three quarters (74%) agreeing that they feel safe at school. However, there were notable disparities across subgroups. Young people receiving SEN provision at school were more than twice as likely as their peers to feel unsafe (12% vs. 5%), with gaps for those eligible for free school meals (10% vs. 5%) and those with lower KS2 attainment (9% vs. 5%). Regional variation was marked, with young people living in the South West nearly three times as likely as those in London to report feeling unsafe (11% vs. 4%). Ethnic group differences were smaller but present, ranging from 80% of Asian young people reporting feeling safe to 72% of Black young people.

Figure 75: Young person reported feeling safe at school

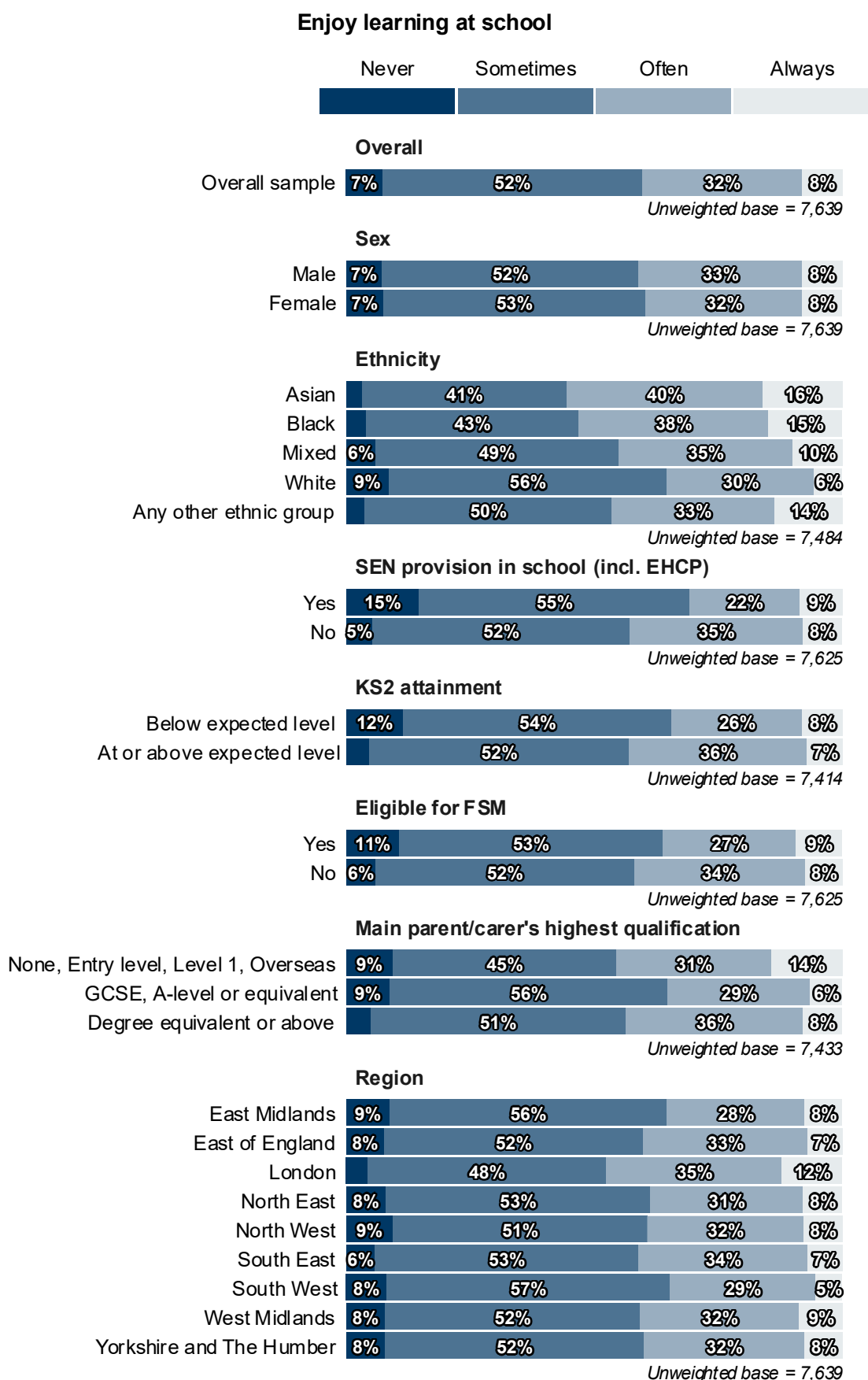


School experience and engagement

Enjoying learning at school

Young people's engagement with school – often shown to decline during the secondary years – reflects the quality of their relationships with teachers, amongst other factors, and is positively associated with attainment (Roorda et al, 2017). While most young people (52%) reported at least sometimes enjoying learning, disparities were pronounced for several sociodemographic factors. Young people receiving SEN provision at school were three times as likely as their peers to never enjoy learning (15% vs. 5%), and those with lower KS2 attainment were more than twice as likely (12% vs. 5%). Marked ethnic differences were also evident: 55% of Asian young people reported often or always enjoying learning, compared with 36% of White young people. Enjoyment of learning was highest in London (47% often or always) and lowest in the East Midlands and South West (both 35%).

Figure 76: Young person reported how often enjoy learning at school



Classroom engagement and learning

Teachers' reports of young people's classroom engagement and learning behaviours reveal generally positive experiences alongside a consistent pattern of inequality. Just over half of young people were described as definitely having a positive attitude to learning (53%), 41% as definitely actively participating in group activities, and 62% as very likely to listen to instructions. However, across all three measures, young people receiving SEN provision at school were substantially more likely to be rated negatively – for example, 25% were described as not having a positive attitude (vs. 8% of peers), 32% as not actively participating (vs. 16%), and 14% as unlikely to listen to instructions (vs. 4%). Similar, though slightly smaller, gaps were observed for those with lower KS2 attainment and those eligible for FSM. Differences by sex, parental education, ethnicity and region were comparatively modest, although Black young people were most frequently rated positively overall.

Figure 77: Teacher-reported young person positive attitude to learning

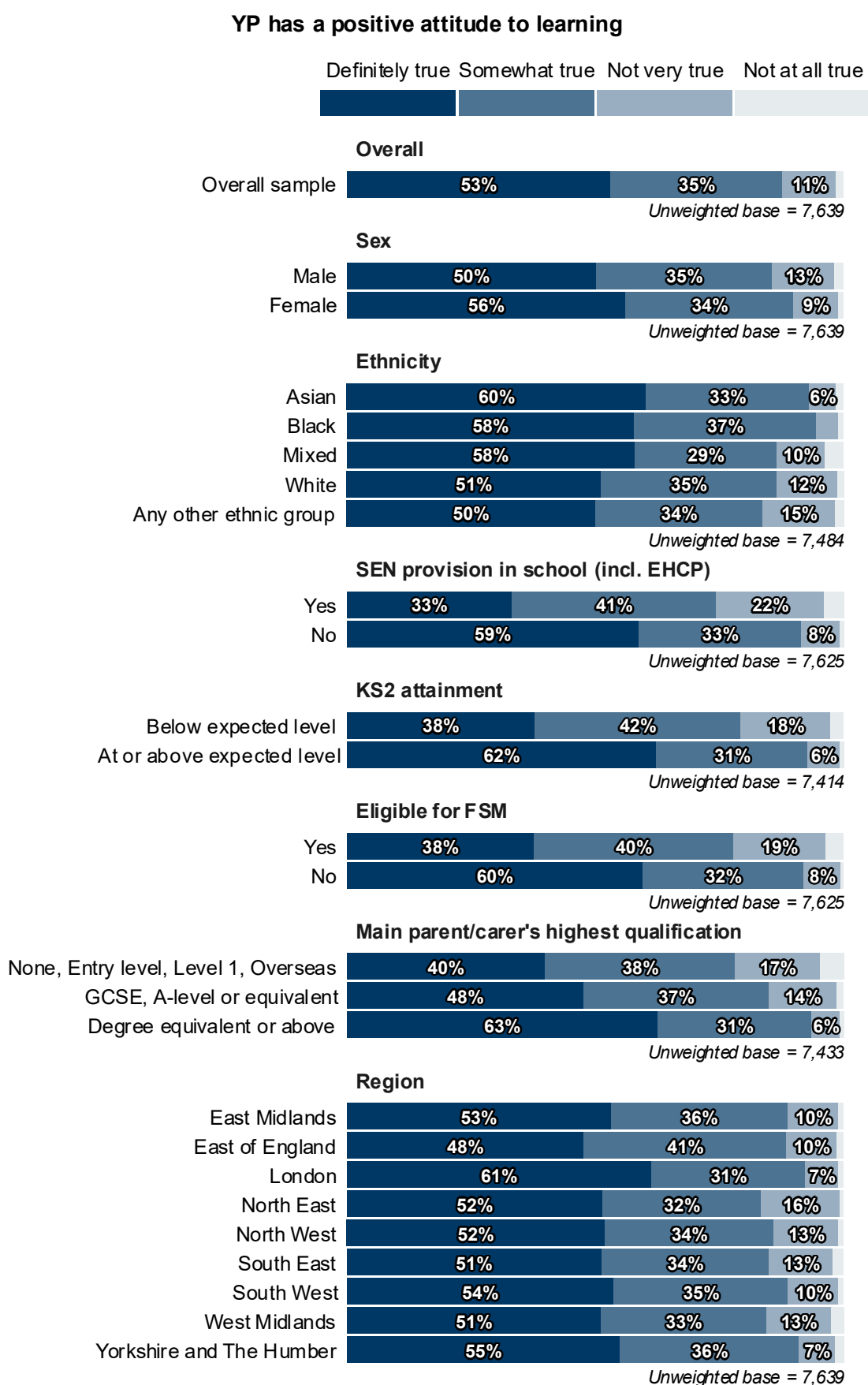


Figure 78: Teacher-reported young person actively participates in group activities

YP actively participates in group activities in lessons or form time

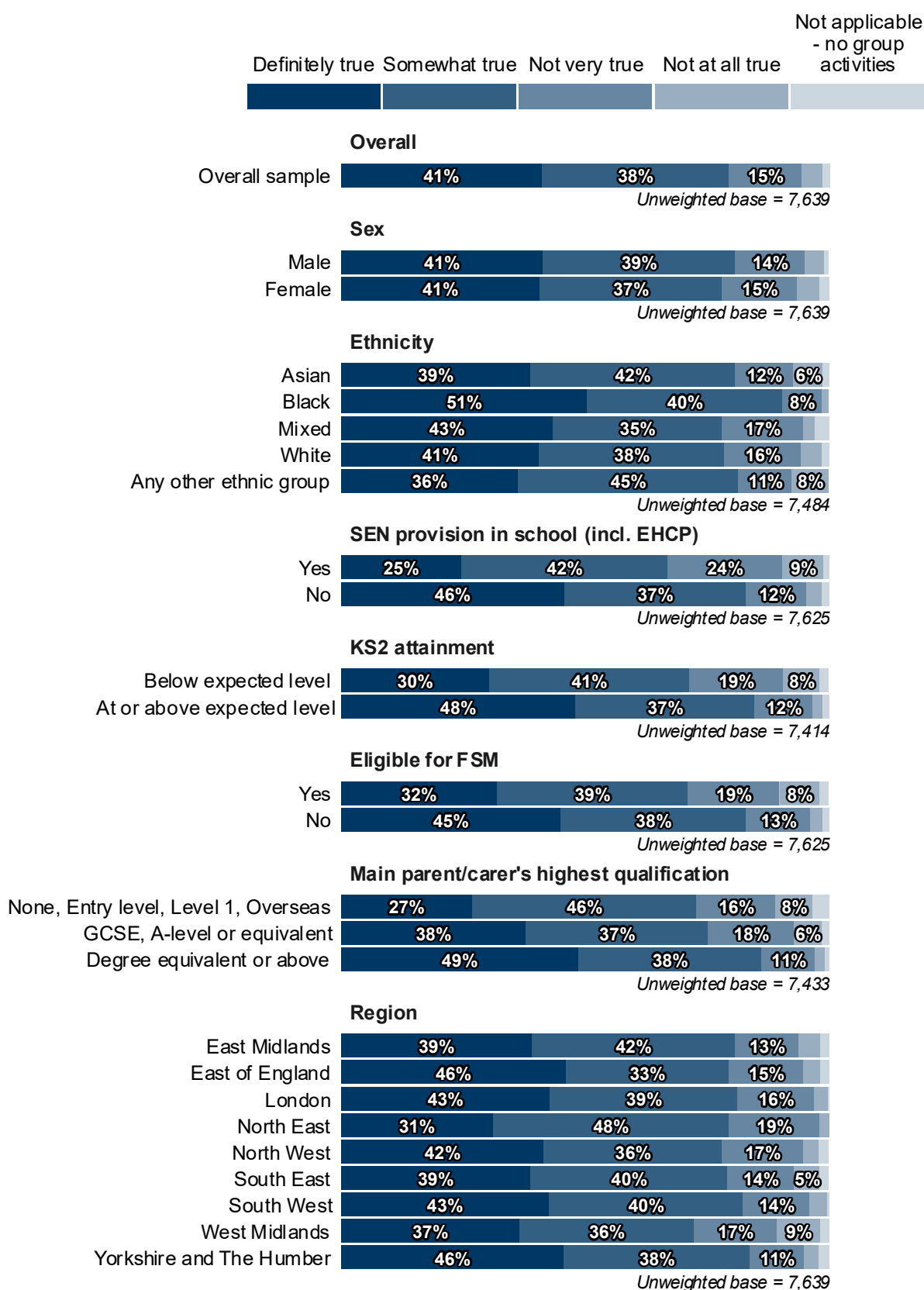
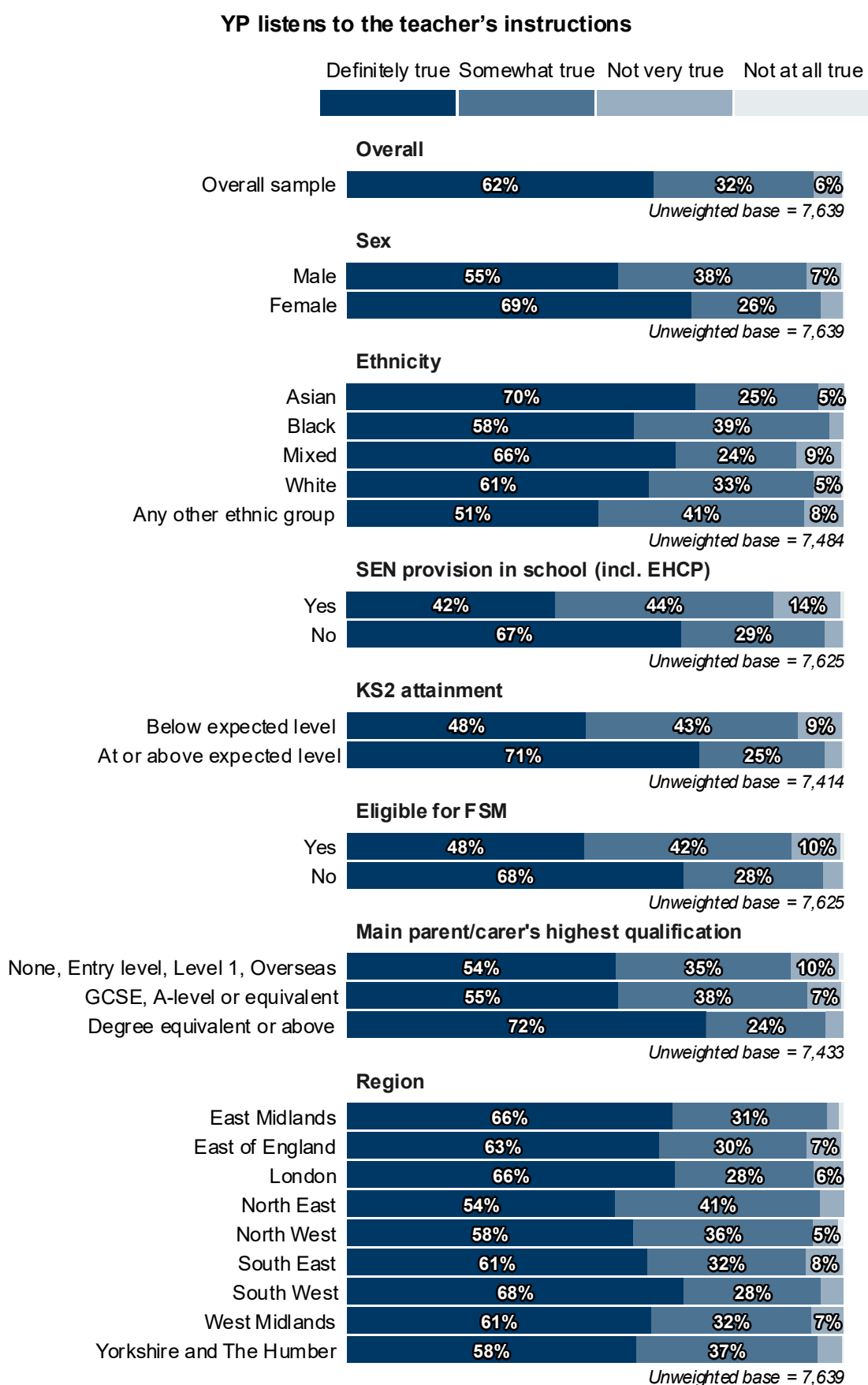


Figure 79: Teacher-reported young person listens to instructions



Positive contribution to school

Pro-social school-related behaviours, which reflect the school climate and quality of relationships with teachers and peers, have been shown to be associated with enhanced engagement, self-regulation, attainment and post-16 outcomes (Sylva et al, 2014). In wave 1, positive contribution to school was measured using two teacher-reported items: teachers felt that over half of young people (56%) contributed to making the school a better place, and that more than two-thirds (68%) were positive role models. However, there were pronounced sociodemographic disparities. Young people receiving SEN support, those with lower KS2 attainment, and those eligible for FSM were consistently less likely to be perceived positively – for example, only around half were considered to be role models, compared with roughly three-quarters of their peers. Smaller differences were seen by sex and parental education, with girls and those with higher educated parents more frequently regarded as making a positive contribution or being a role model. Black young people were most often felt to make a positive contribution (68%), but there were no other ethnic group differences.

Figure 80: Teacher-reported extent to which the young person contributes to making the school a better place for others

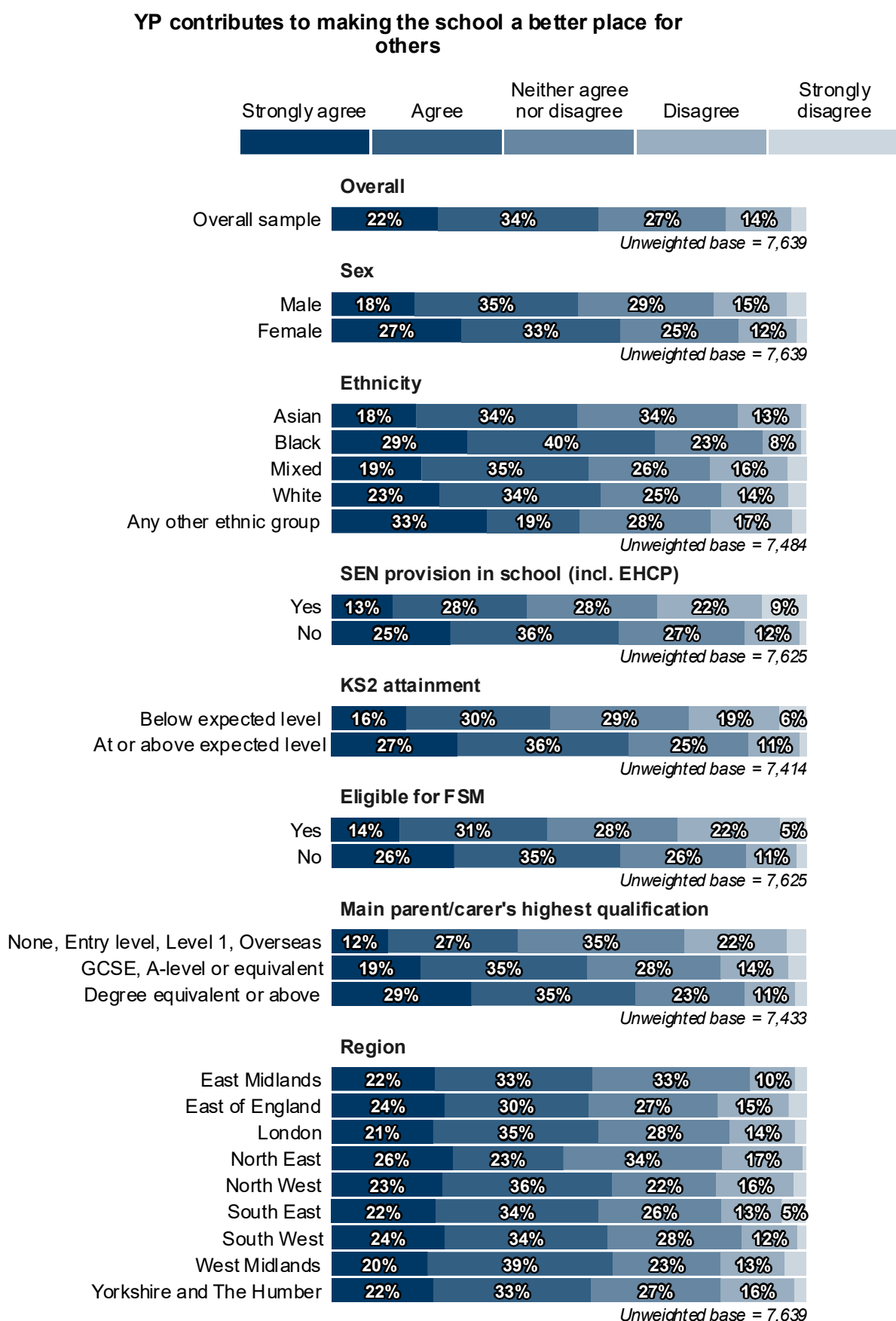
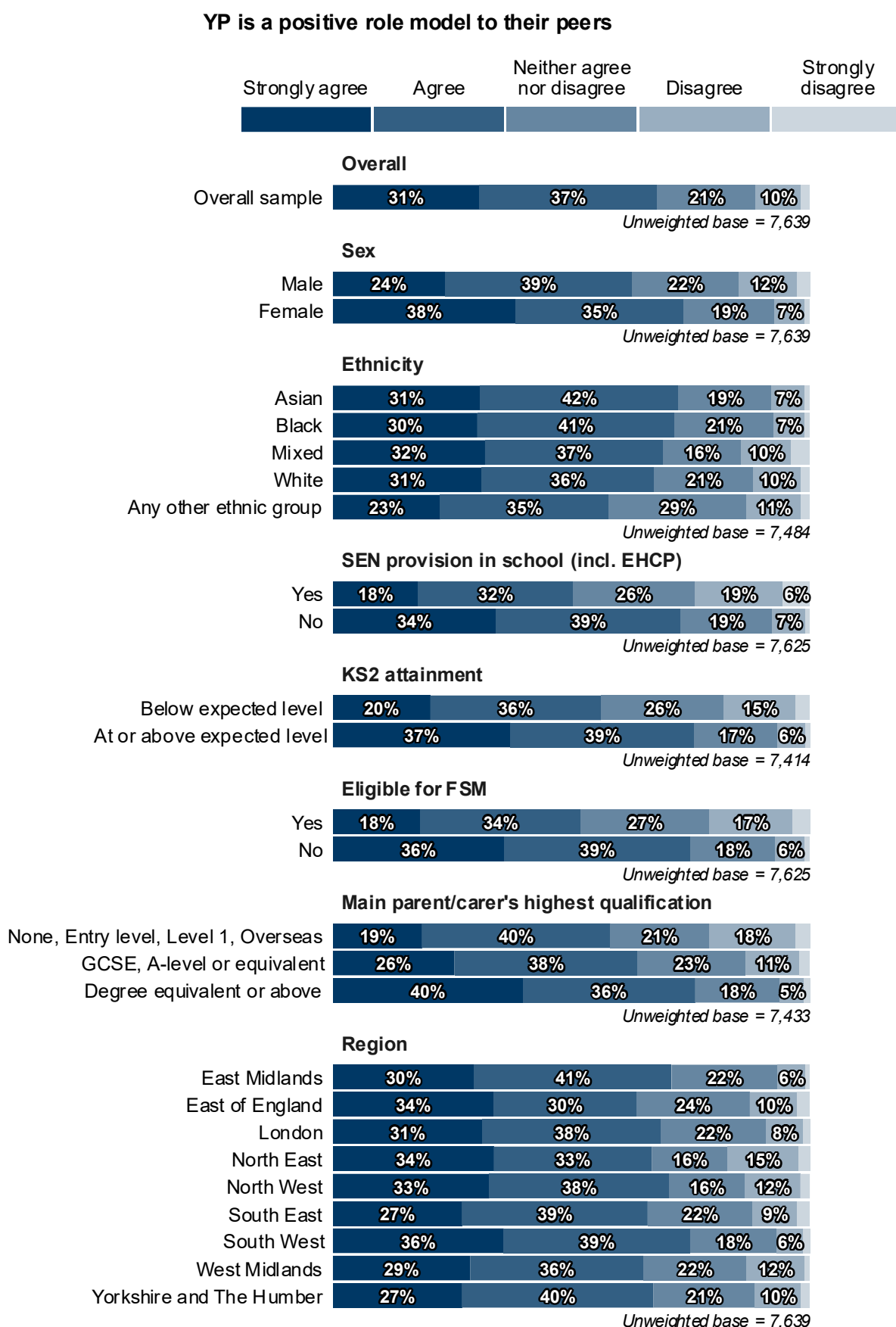


Figure 81: Teacher-reported extent to which young person is a positive role model to their peers



Perceived difficulty of core subjects

Perceiving classwork as overly difficult can undermine students' competence and engagement, leading to lower academic performance (Patall, Cooper, and Robinson, 2018). While most described Maths (64%) and English (57%) as neither too hard nor too easy, nearly one third (31%) said Science was too hard, compared with 18% for Maths and 16% for English. Young people's perceptions of subject difficulty varied markedly across groups. Girls were more likely than boys to find Maths (22% vs. 14%) and Science (35% vs. 27%) too hard, but less likely to find English too hard (14% vs. 17%). Ethnic group differences were also evident: Asian and Black young people were consistently the least likely to report subjects as too hard (around 10-11% for Maths and English, 25-26% for Science), while White young people were the most likely to report subjects as too hard (20% for Maths, 18% for English and 32% for Science).

Young people receiving SEN provision at school were around twice as likely as their peers to report Maths (30% vs. 14%) and English (26% vs. 13%) as too hard, with a smaller difference for Science (33% vs. 30%). A similarly strong gradient was evident by prior attainment: young people below the expected level at KS2 were more than twice as likely to find Maths difficult (27% vs. 12%) and substantially more likely to report difficulty in English (23% vs. 11%) and Science (35% vs. 28%). Socioeconomic disadvantage showed a comparable pattern, particularly in Maths and Science: young people eligible for FSM were notably more likely to report difficulty in Maths (24% vs. 15%) and Science (36% vs. 29%).

Figure 82: Young person reported perceived difficulty of Maths work

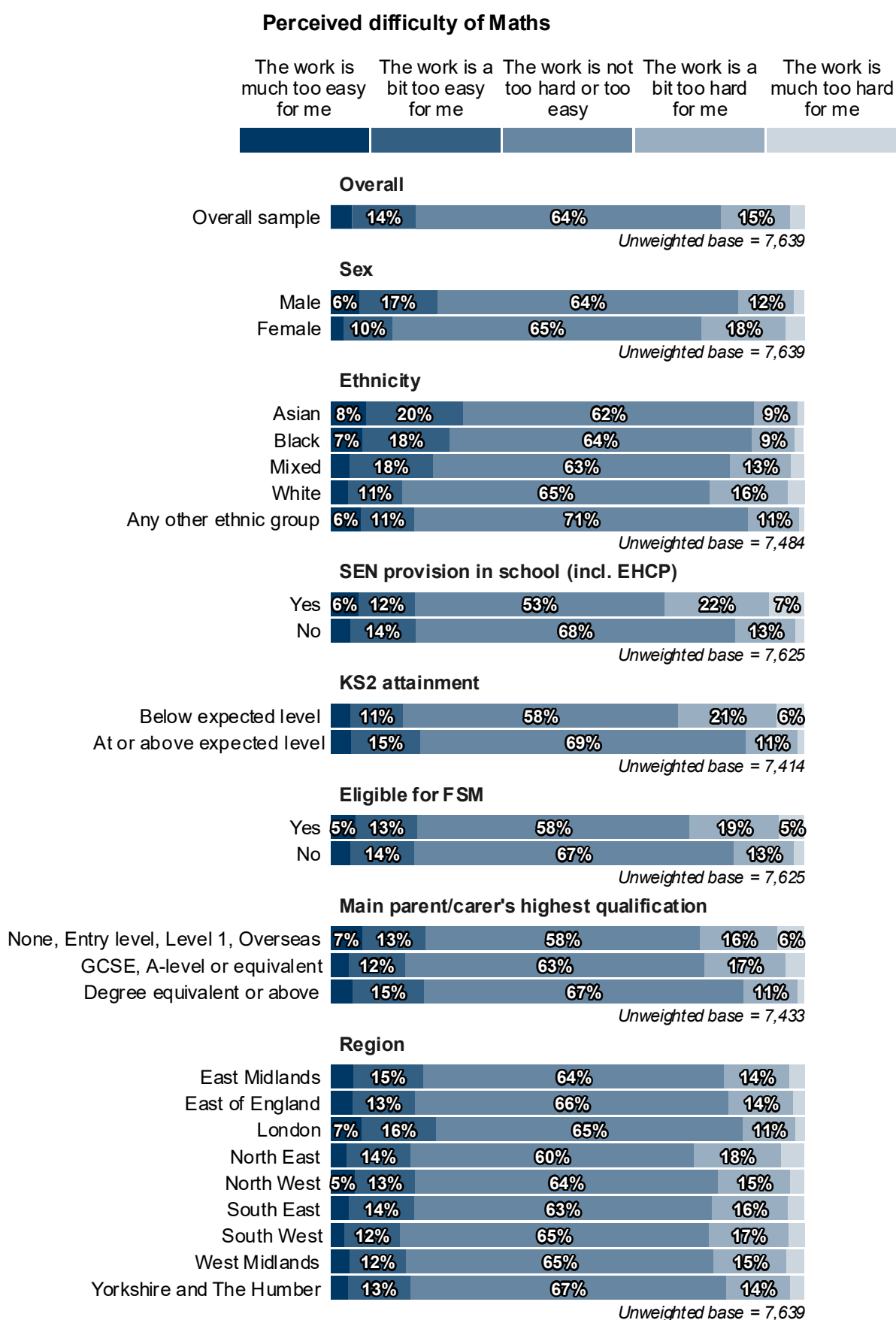


Figure 83: Young person reported perceived difficulty of English work

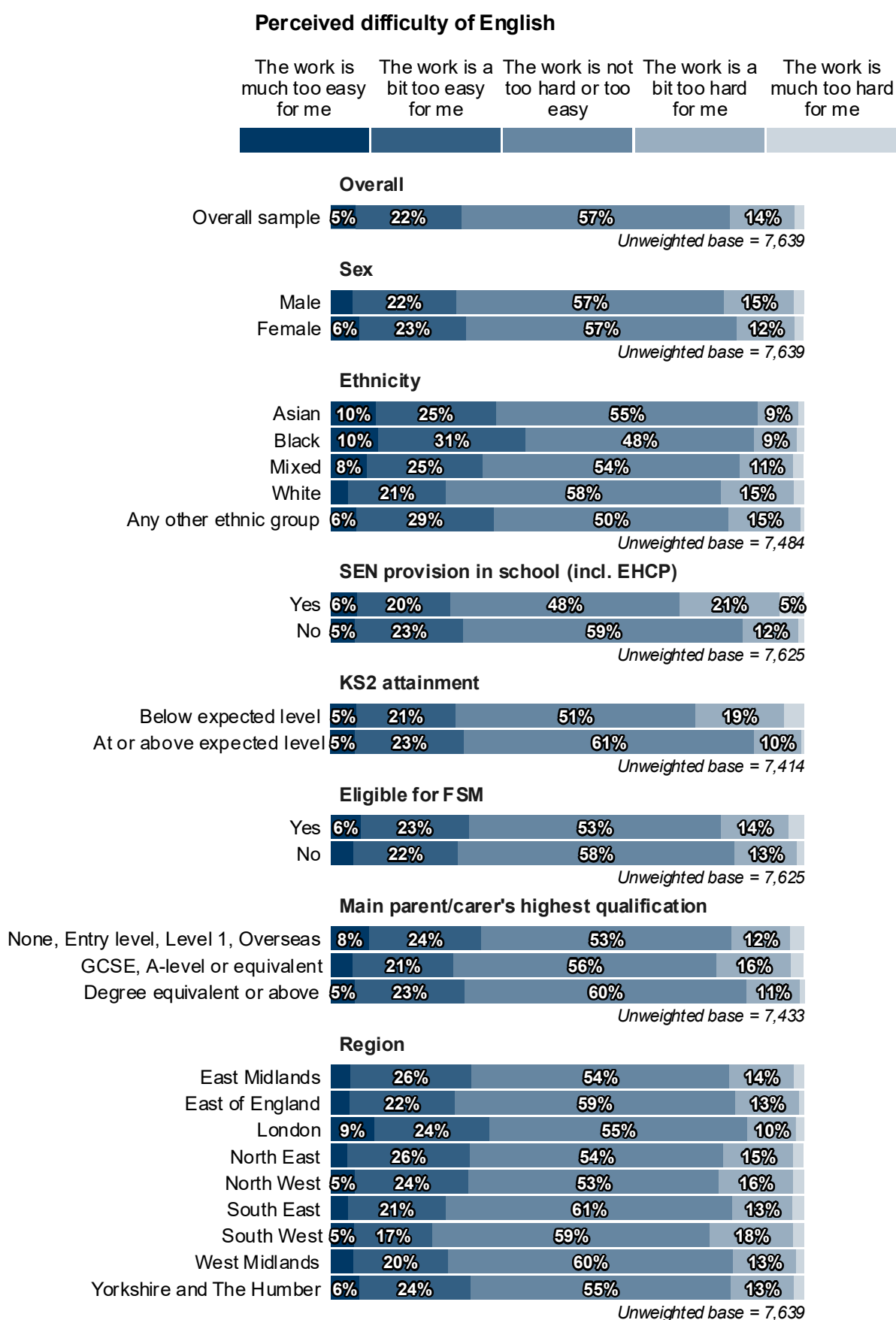
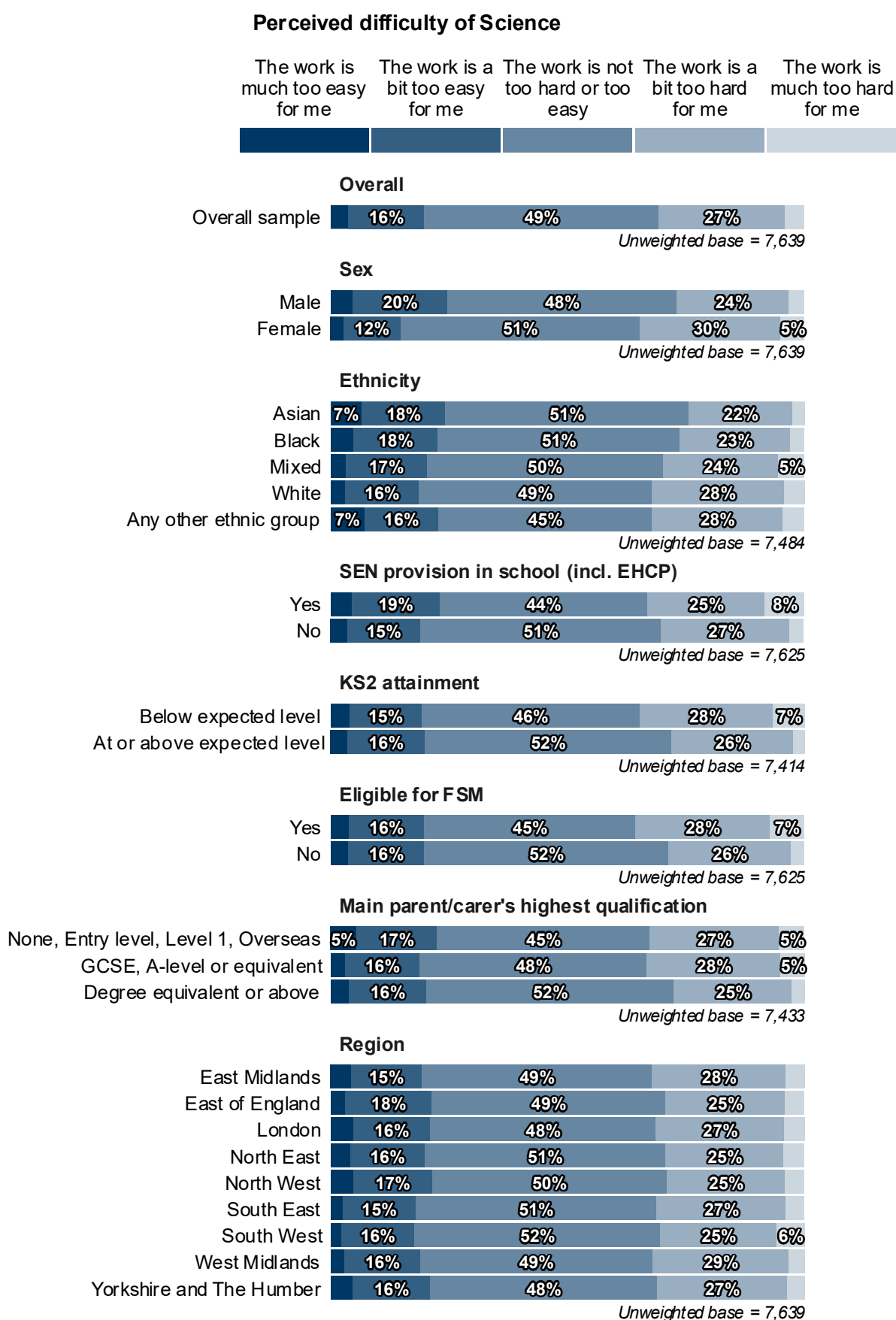


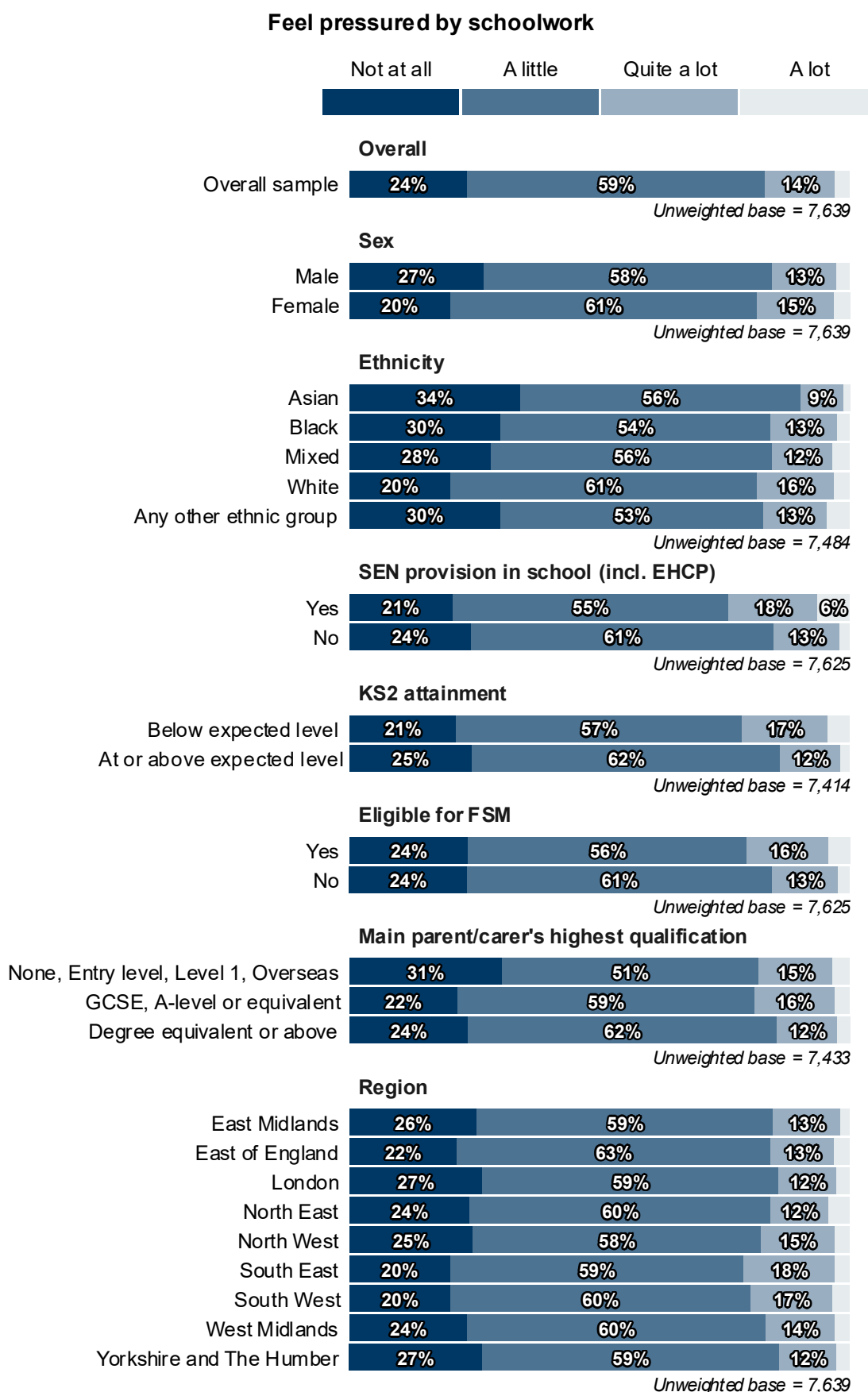
Figure 84: Young person reported perceived difficulty of science work



Academic pressure

Academic pressure and stress can negatively affect students' engagement, wellbeing, and academic achievement, partly through their effects on motivation and self-perceptions of competence (Pascoe et al., 2020). Most young people (59%) reported feeling at least a little pressured by the schoolwork their teachers set them, though higher levels of feeling pressured were concentrated among some sociodemographic groups. Boys were more likely to report feeling no pressure (27% vs. 20%), whereas young people receiving SEN provision at school (24% vs. 15%) and those with lower KS2 attainment (22% vs. 14%) were more likely to feel quite a lot or a lot of pressure. White young people were almost twice as likely as Asian young people to report high pressure (19% vs. 10%). Socioeconomic gaps were smaller but evident, with young people eligible for free school meals more likely to report high pressure (21% vs. 16%).

Figure 85: Young person reported pressure from schoolwork



Homework

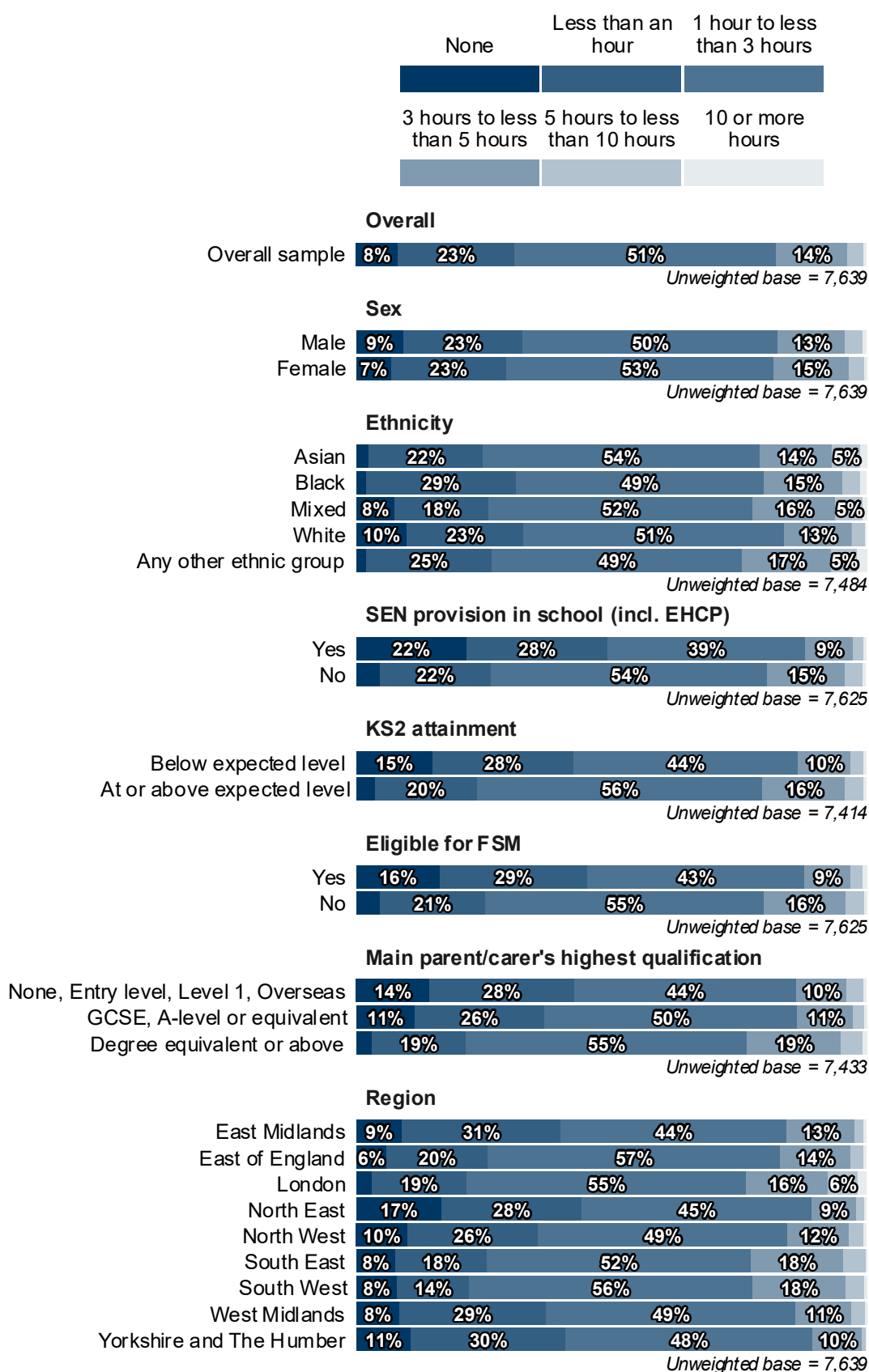
Spending more time on homework has been consistently associated with higher attainment, including for disadvantaged students, although advantaged pupils tend to spend more time on homework (Sylva et al., 2014; Ozyildirim, 2021; Sammons, Toth and Sylva, 2015; Education Endowment Foundation, 2021). Conversely, parental help with homework shows little consistent impact, possibly because it is provided to those who are struggling and because secondary-school-aged students increasingly work independently (Kim and Hill, 2015; Kim, 2022; Shaw and Morris, 2020).

In Growing Up in the 2020s, young people reported spending an average of 2.0 hours per week on homework²¹, though almost a quarter (23%) spent less than one hour and 8% spent no time on homework. Young people receiving SEN provision at school were four times as likely as their peers to spend no time on their homework (22% vs. 5%), similar to those with lower prior attainment (15% vs. 4%), and those from disadvantaged backgrounds as indicated by FSM eligibility (16% vs. 5%) or lower versus high parental education (14% low and 11% medium vs. 3% high). Ethnic and regional differences were also apparent, with White young people most likely to spend no time on homework (10%), Black and Asian young people least likely (2% and 3%), and young people in London considerably less likely to spend no time on homework than those in the North East (3% vs. 17%).

²¹ Time spent on homework had a categorical response scale to make the question straightforward for young people to answer. To calculate average time spent on homework, the midpoint of each response category was used and a conservative estimate of 10 hours for the highest category (10 hours or more) applied.

Figure 86: Young person reported hours spent doing homework

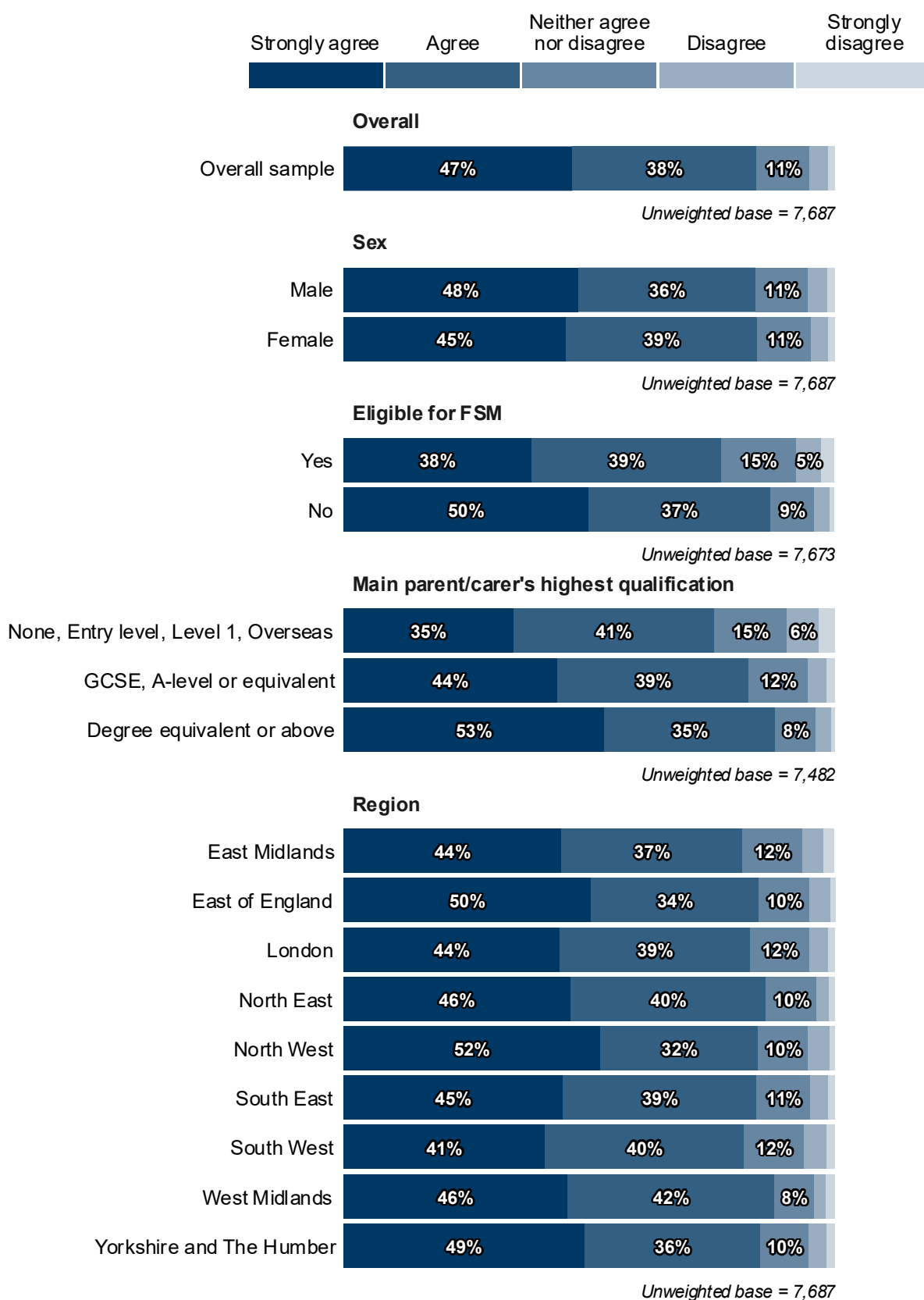
YP-reported time spent on homework (categorical)



Most young people said someone at home could help with homework, with 47% strongly agreeing and 38% agreeing, 11% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, while only a small minority (5%) disagreed. Young people eligible for FSM were less likely to strongly agree (38% vs. 50%) and more likely to neither agree nor disagree (15% vs. 9%), disagree (5% vs. 3%), or strongly disagree (3% vs. 1%). A similar pattern emerged for parental education: those with parents with no/entry level qualifications were less likely to strongly agree (35% vs. 44% GCSE/A-level and 53% degree equivalent) and more likely to disagree (6% vs. 4% and 3%), or strongly disagree (3% vs. 2% and 1%). Regional variation for reports of 'strongly agree' ranged from 41% in the South West to 52% in the North West.

Figure 87: Young person reported whether someone at home can help with homework

Young person has help at home if have an issue with homework



Disruptiveness of other students

Effective classroom management is linked to higher attainment, particularly for pupils with lower prior attainment, while disorganised lessons and frequent use of supply teachers increase risks for disadvantaged pupils (Ingram et al., 2020; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2013). In *Growing Up in the 2020s*, classroom disruption was widespread and had a notable impact on participants' ability to concentrate. While most (96%) young people reported some disruption in lessons, 17% said it occurred in all lessons. Over half of those experiencing disruption (51%) found it difficult to concentrate in at least some lessons.

Disparities were most pronounced for young people receiving SEN provision at school, almost a quarter of whom experienced disruption in all lessons (24% vs. 15% of peers), and a third found it difficult to concentrate in most or all lessons as a result (33% vs. 21%). Girls were more likely than boys to report disruption in all lessons, while young people with lower KS2 attainment, those eligible for FSM or with lower parental education also reported experiencing higher disruption. Ethnic and regional differences were smaller but notable: Asian young people were the least likely to report disruption in all lessons (12%), while White and Mixed young people were the most likely (18%). Regionally, rates were highest in the East Midlands and the North East (20%) and lowest in London (14%).

Figure 88: Young person reported how often other students misbehave

Other students misbehave or cause trouble in lessons

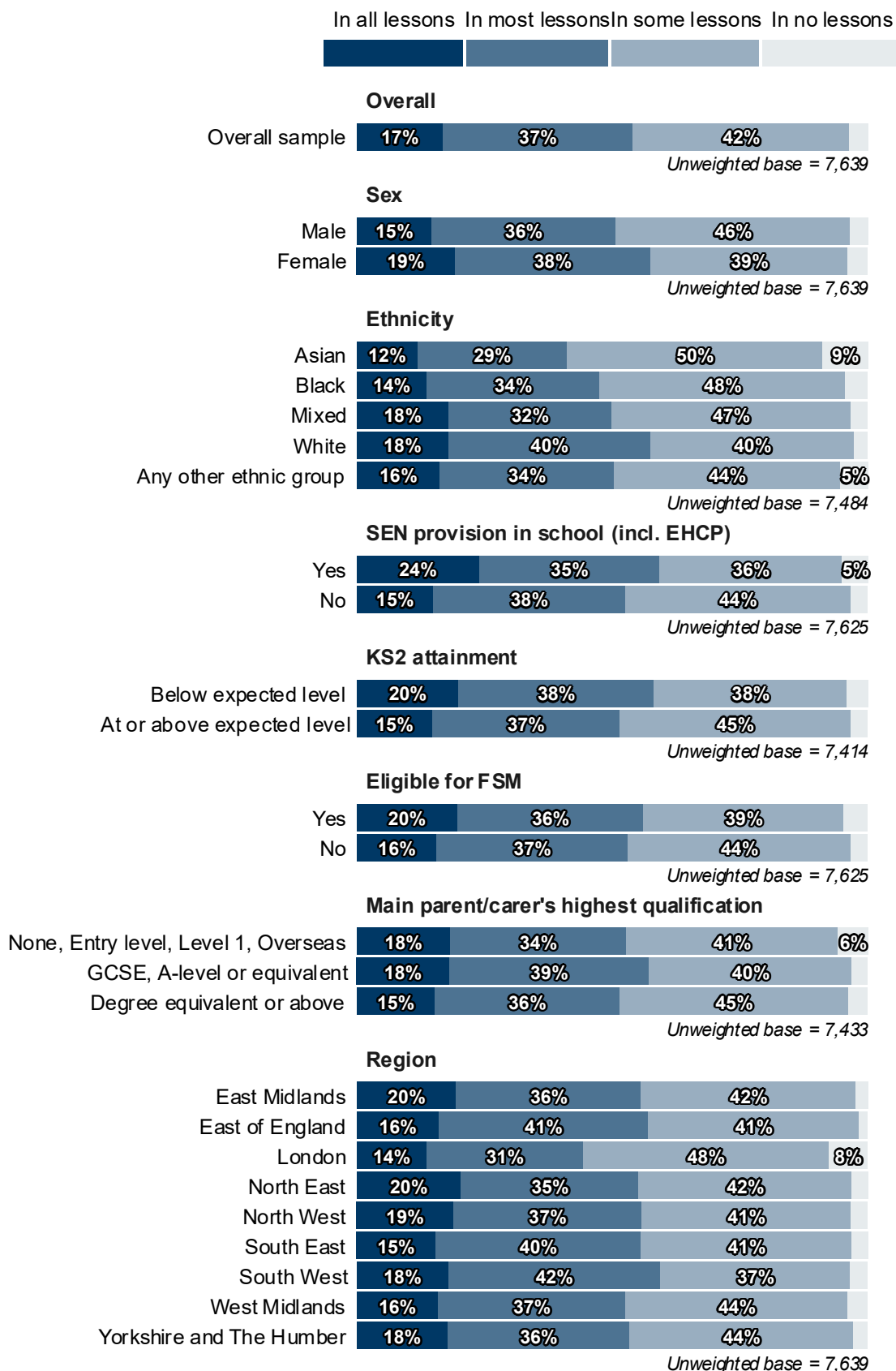
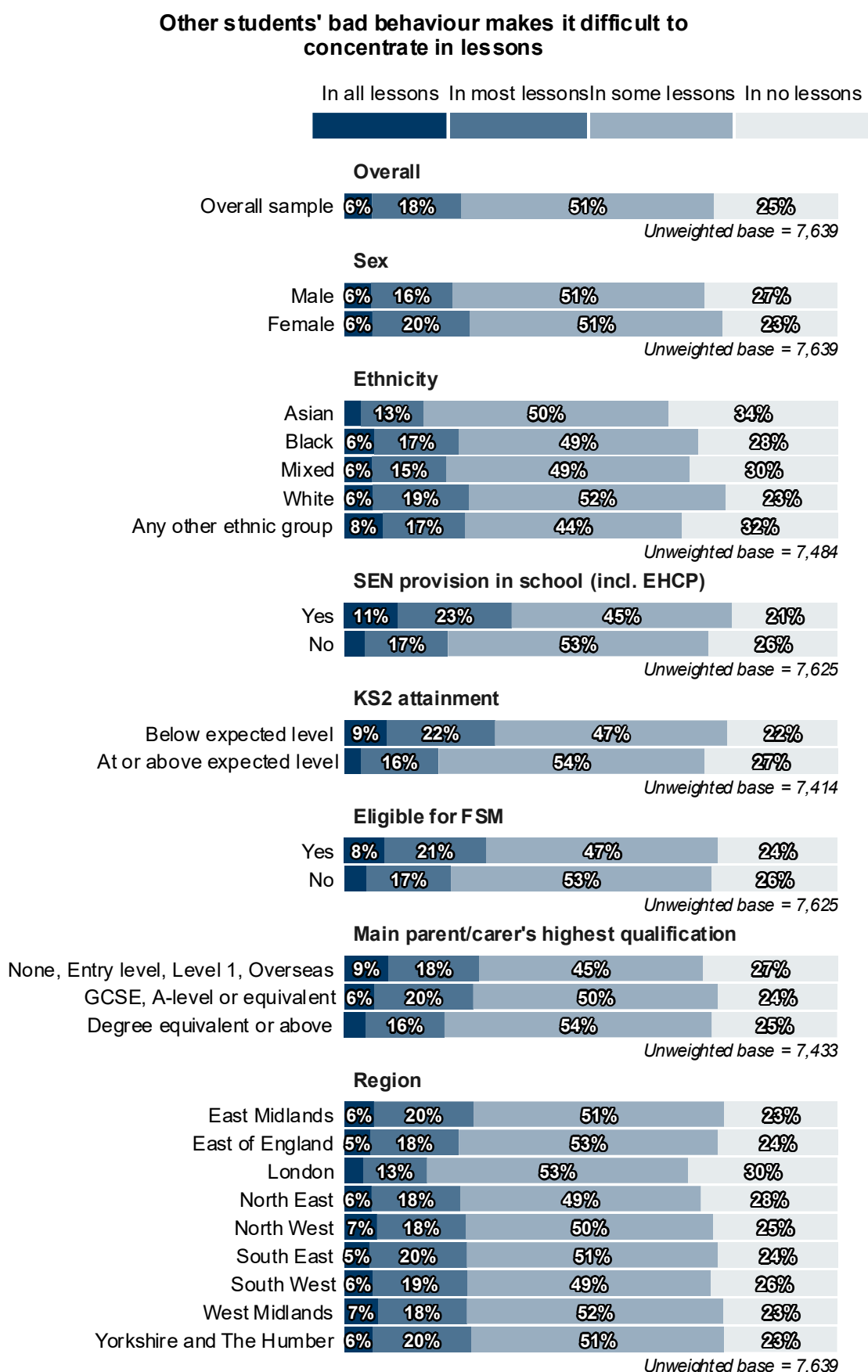


Figure 89: Young person reported how often disruptive behaviour by students makes it difficult to concentrate in lessons



Punctuality

In the NPD, attendance is recorded twice per day – morning and afternoon – and lateness is logged both before and after registers close. Combining both measures of lateness, young people in the study were late to an average of 3.2 sessions in the Autumn term of 2024²². Ethnic group differences were observed in punctuality, with Black young people arriving late most frequently (4.6 sessions) and Asian young people least frequently (2.6 sessions). The largest gaps were associated with socioeconomic disadvantage: pupils eligible for FSM averaged 5.1 late sessions, more than double the rate of their peers (2.3). Higher rates of lateness were also observed among those with lower KS2 attainment (4.3 vs. 2.4), those receiving SEN provision at school (4.3 sessions vs. 2.8 sessions), and those with lower parental education (4.5 sessions low, 3.6 sessions medium, vs. 2.3 sessions high).

Teachers were also asked how often the young person arrived late to their classes in the previous two weeks of school. The majority (70%) of young people had not been late, just under a fifth (19%) were late once or twice, 6% were late three or four times, and 5% were late five or more times. There were no differences by sex, ethnicity and region, but relatively large differences by the other sociodemographic variables. Young people eligible for FSM were more likely to have been late at least once (46% vs. 24%), as were those receiving SEN provision at school (43% vs. 27%), those with lower prior attainment (40% vs. 24%), and those with lower parental education (43% low, 37% medium, vs. 20% high).

²² As indicated in the introduction to this section, National Pupil Database records for the Autumn term of 2024 were used to analyse lateness, as data for the full 2024 to 2025 academic year were not yet available and the Autumn term aligned most closely with the self-report reference period (i.e. the term before young people were interviewed from January to July 2025).

Figure 90: Late sessions in Autumn term 2024 (NPD)

Weighted mean of late sessions in Autumn term 2024 (NPD)

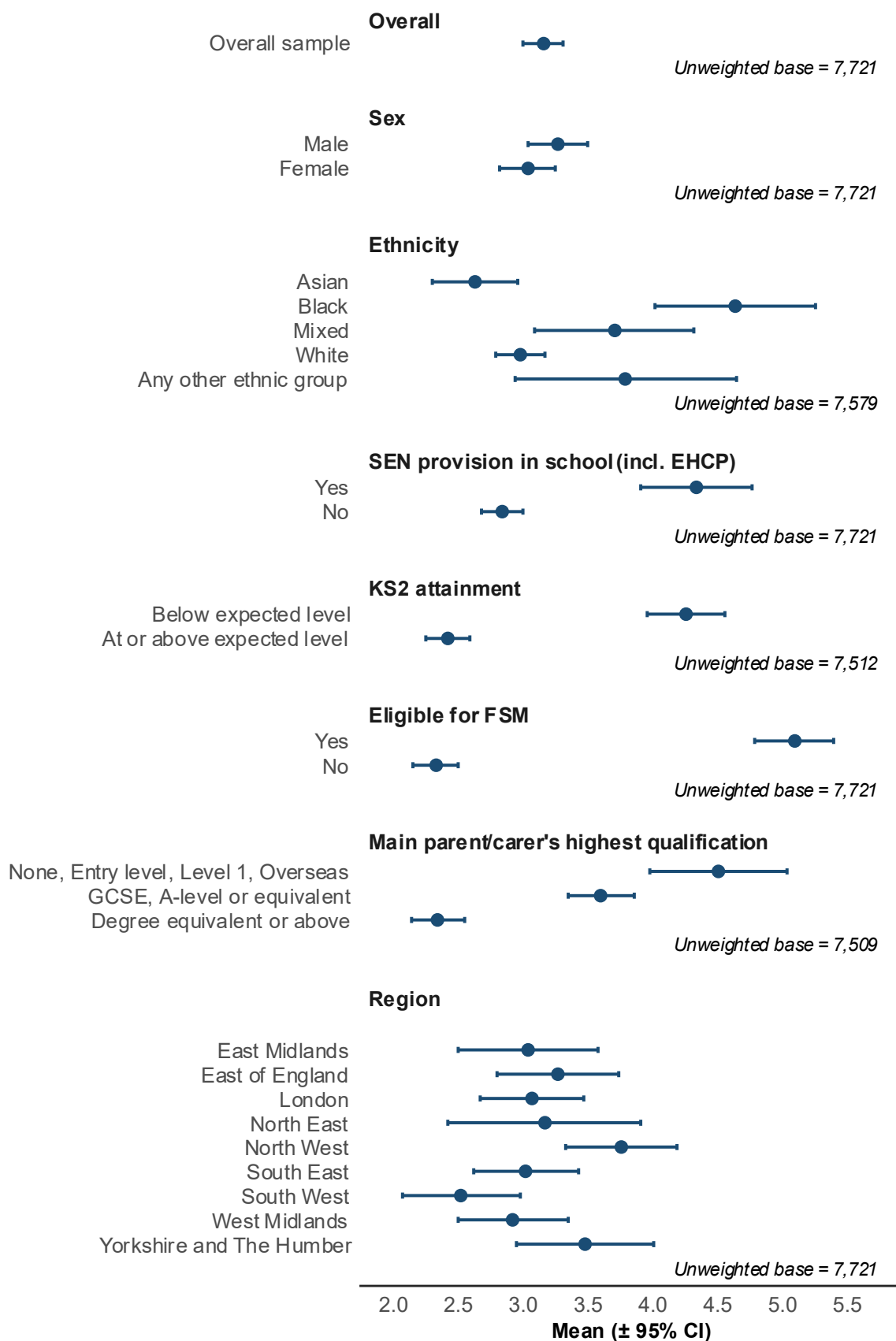
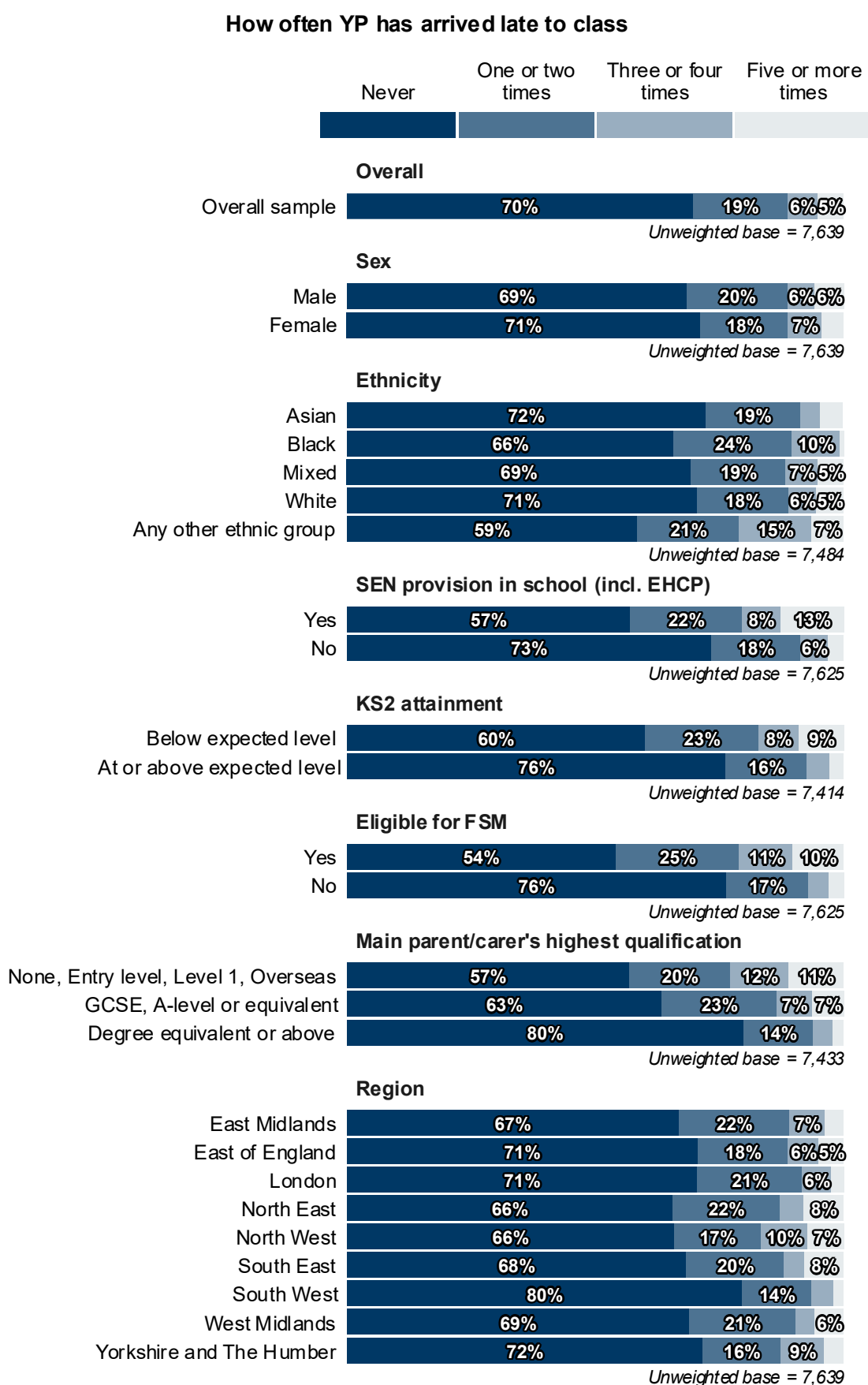


Figure 91: Teacher reported frequency of young person lateness in last two weeks



Absence

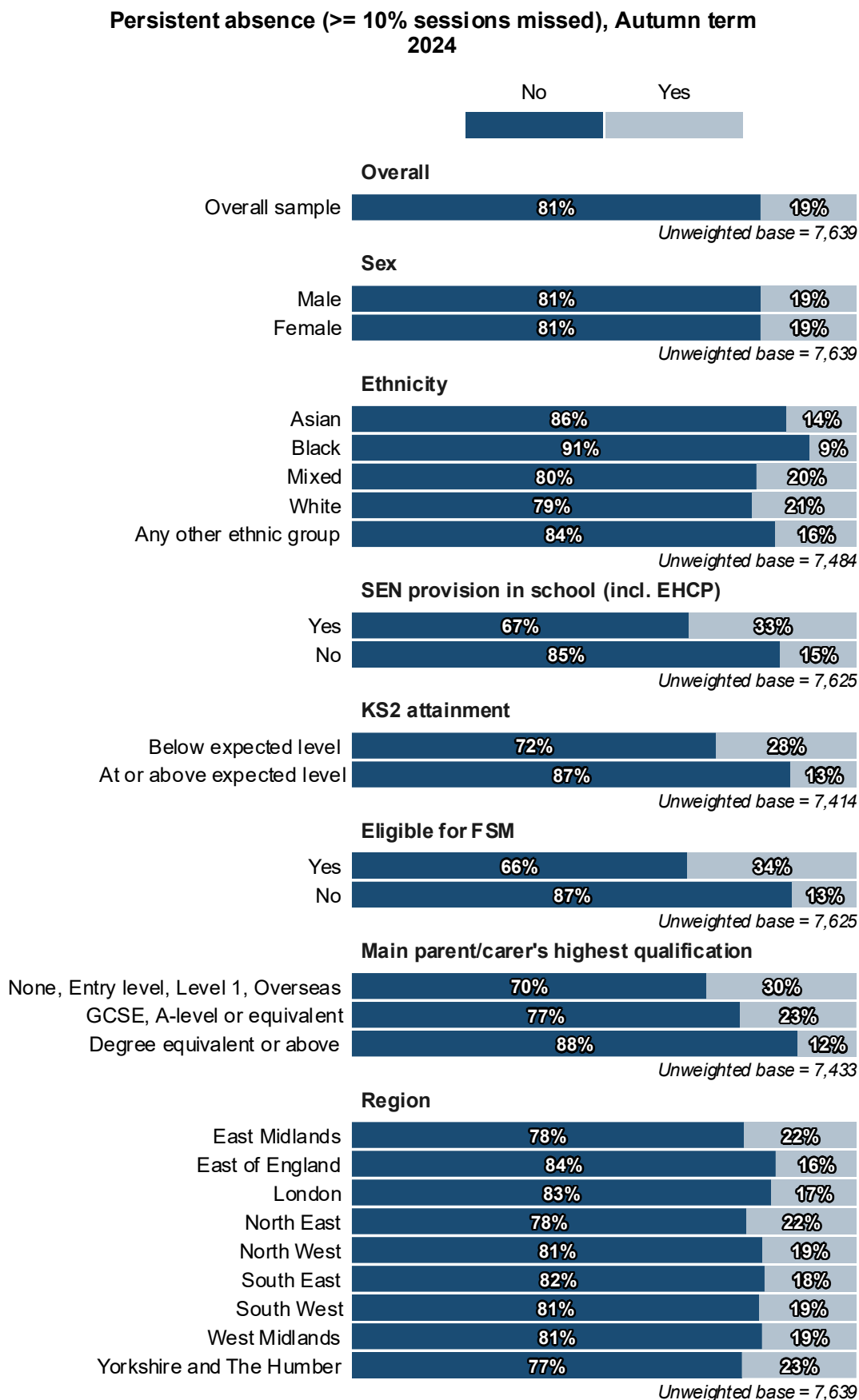
Absence in the early secondary years predicts lower attainment regardless of whether it is authorised or unauthorised (Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022), and is related to socio-economic disadvantage and widening gaps at this stage of schooling (Shaw and Morris, 2020). The Department for Education defines persistent absence as students missing 10% or more of their possible school sessions over a given period (each day counts as two sessions: morning and afternoon). NPD records indicated that, in the Autumn term of 2024²³, 19% of young people in our study missed 10% or more sessions, and 11% missed 15% or more sessions. Marked ethnic differences were evident in persistent absence. At the 10% threshold, White young people were most likely to be persistently absent (21%), while Black young people were least likely (9%). At the 15% threshold, rates were highest among Mixed young people (13%), and lowest among Black young people (6%).

Disparities were pronounced by socioeconomic disadvantage and prior attainment. Young people eligible for FSM were around three times as likely as their peers to be persistently absent (34% vs. 13% at the 10% threshold; 22% vs. 6% at the 15% threshold). Similarly large gaps were observed for those with lower KS2 attainment (28% vs. 13%; 18% vs. 6%), and those receiving SEN provision at school (33% vs. 15%; 23% vs. 8%), and those with lower levels of parental education (30% low, 23% medium vs. 12% high; 19% low, 14% medium vs. 6% high).

To enhance and contextualise the absence data drawn from the NPD, young people were asked whether they had missed school in the previous two months - with or without their parents' or carers' permission - and to report the reasons for their absence. Just over half (54%) reported no absence during the reference period, while 43% had missed school with parental permission and 3% without permission. Girls were more likely than boys to have missed school with permission (48% vs. 39%) but there were no sex differences in missing school without permission (3% vs. 4%). Differences in absence with parental permission were relatively small across the sociodemographic groups, but more pronounced for absence without parental permission. Young people receiving SEN provision at school (6% vs. 2%), those eligible for FSM (5% vs. 2%), those with lower prior attainment (4% vs. 2%), and those with lower levels of parental education (4% low, 4% medium vs. 2% high) were around twice as likely to report missing school without permission.

²³ As indicated in the introduction to this section, National Pupil Database records for the Autumn term of 2024 were used to analyse absence, as data for the full 2024 to 2025 academic year were not yet available and the Autumn term aligned most closely with the self-report reference period (i.e. the term before young people were interviewed from January to July 2025).

Figure 92: NPD data on whether young person missed 10% or more sessions in Autumn term 2024



Reasons for absence

Young people who reported missing school in the previous two months – whether with or without parental permission - were asked their reasons for absence, and could select multiple options. Physical illness was the most common explanation (73%), followed by holidays (21%), anxiety or another mental health problem (17%), and not feeling like going (14%), while 18% selected ‘other reason’. Girls were more likely than boys to miss school for anxiety and other mental health reasons (23% vs. 11%) bullying (6% vs. 4%) or because they did not feel like going (16% vs. 12%), but less likely due to exclusion or suspension (4% vs. 6%). White young people were more than three times more likely than Asian young people to be absent for anxiety or other mental health reasons (20% vs. 6%), and were most likely to report absence due to bullying (6%).

Disadvantaged groups were less likely to miss school due to physical illness but more likely to report other reasons. Young people receiving SEN provision at school, for example, were less likely to cite physical illness (59% vs. 77%), but more likely to miss school due to anxiety or other mental health reasons (28% vs. 14%), lack of support for their needs (13% vs. 2%), bullying (11% vs. 4%) exclusion/suspension (11% vs. 4%), travel costs or time (3% vs. 1%), or not feeling like going (19% vs. 13%). Similar patterns were observed for young people eligible for FSM, with elevated rates across the same non-illness reasons. There were similar but less pronounced patterns for those with lower KS2 attainment or lower parental education.

Although the NPD records only a limited range of reasons for absence, the category of ‘health or medical reasons’ provides additional insight. In the Autumn term of 2024²⁴, young people missed an average of 5.3 sessions for health or medical reasons. Girls were marginally more likely than boys to be absent for health reasons (5.5 vs. 5.0 sessions). Ethnic differences were marked, with White young people absent most frequently for health reasons (5.8 sessions) and Black young people least frequently (3.0 sessions). Higher rates of health-related absence were also observed among young people receiving SEN provision at school (7.4 vs. 4.7 sessions), those eligible for free school meals (6.5 vs. 4.8 sessions), those with lower KS2 attainment (6.4 vs. 4.6 sessions), and those with medium versus high levels of parental education (6.0 medium vs. 4.6 sessions high).

²⁴ As indicated in the introduction to this section, National Pupil Database records for the Autumn term of 2024 were used to analyse absence, as data for the full 2024 to 2025 academic year were not yet available and the Autumn term aligned most closely with the self-report reference period (i.e. the term before young people were interviewed from January to July 2025).

Figure 93: Reason for absence: physical illness

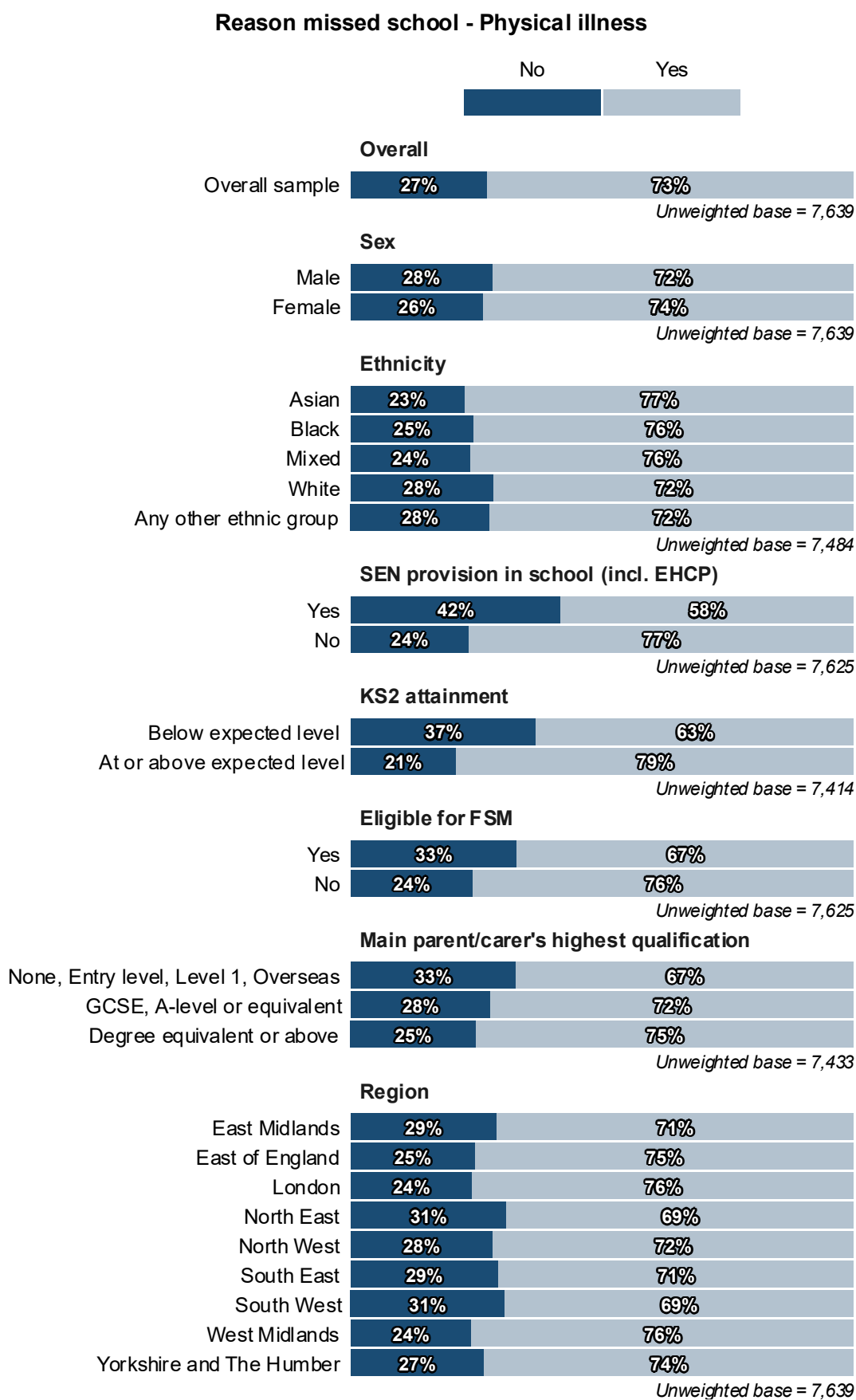


Figure 94: Reason for absence: anxiety or mental health

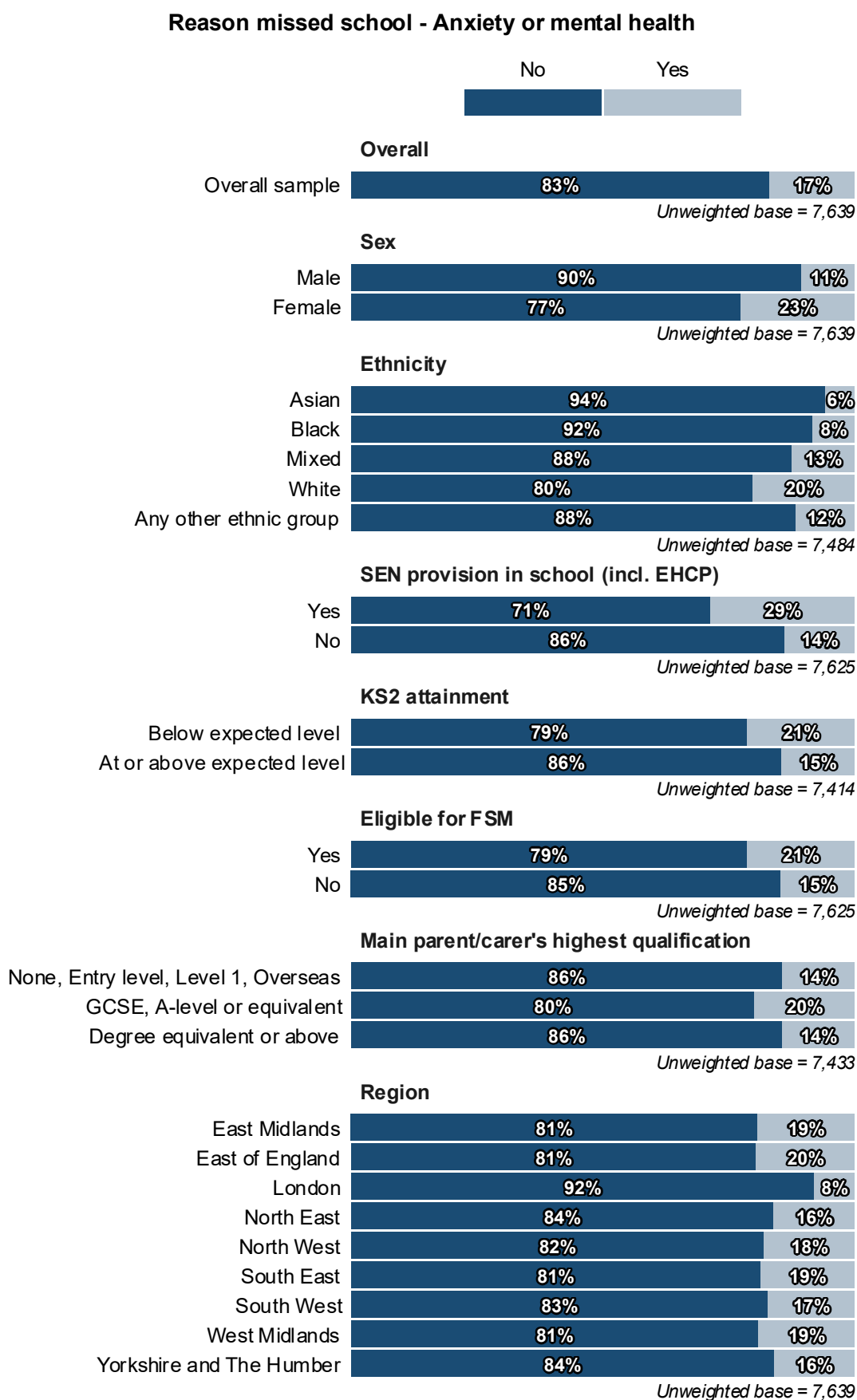


Figure 95: Reason for absence: lack of support for needs at school

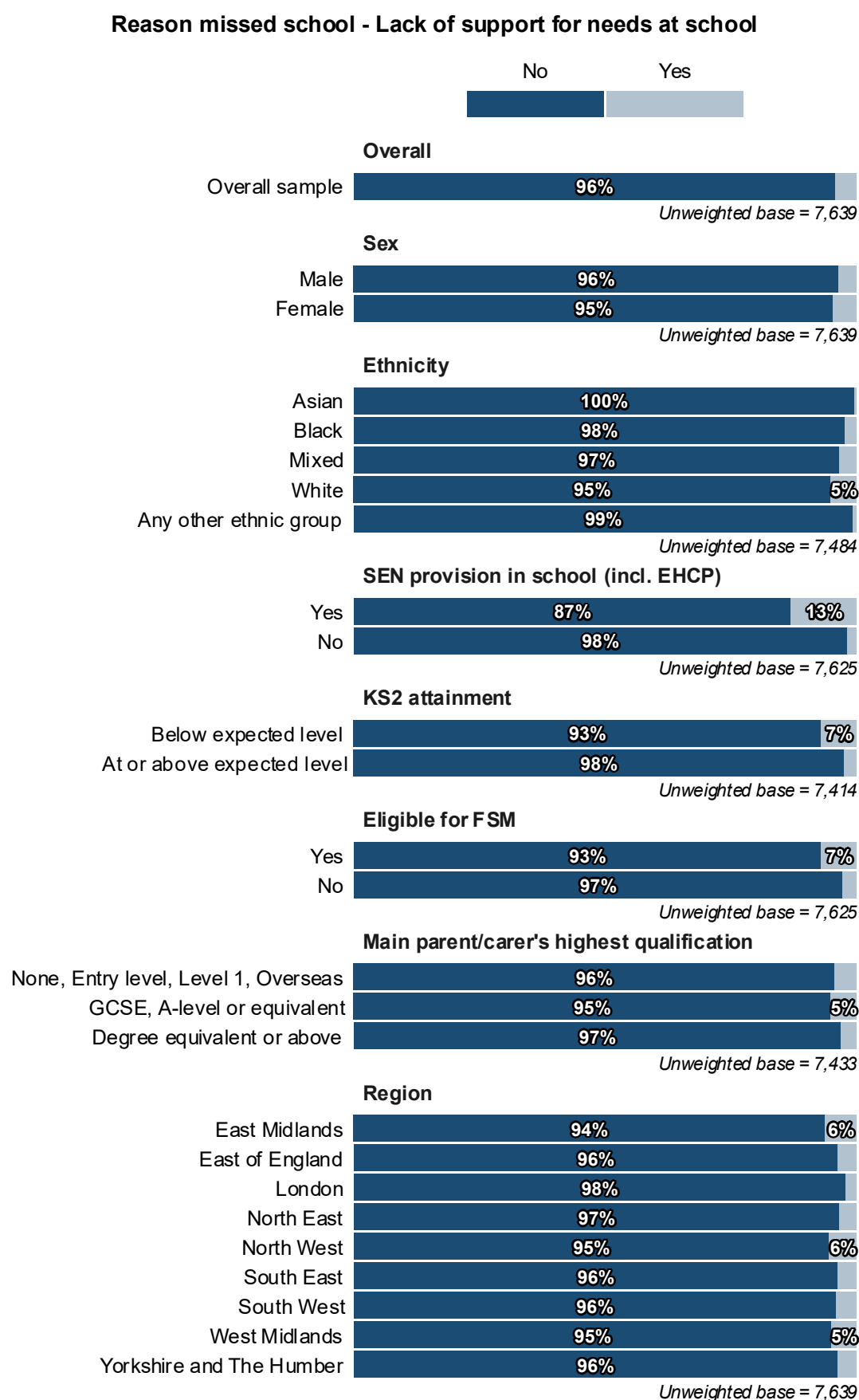


Figure 96: Reason for absence: travel cost or time

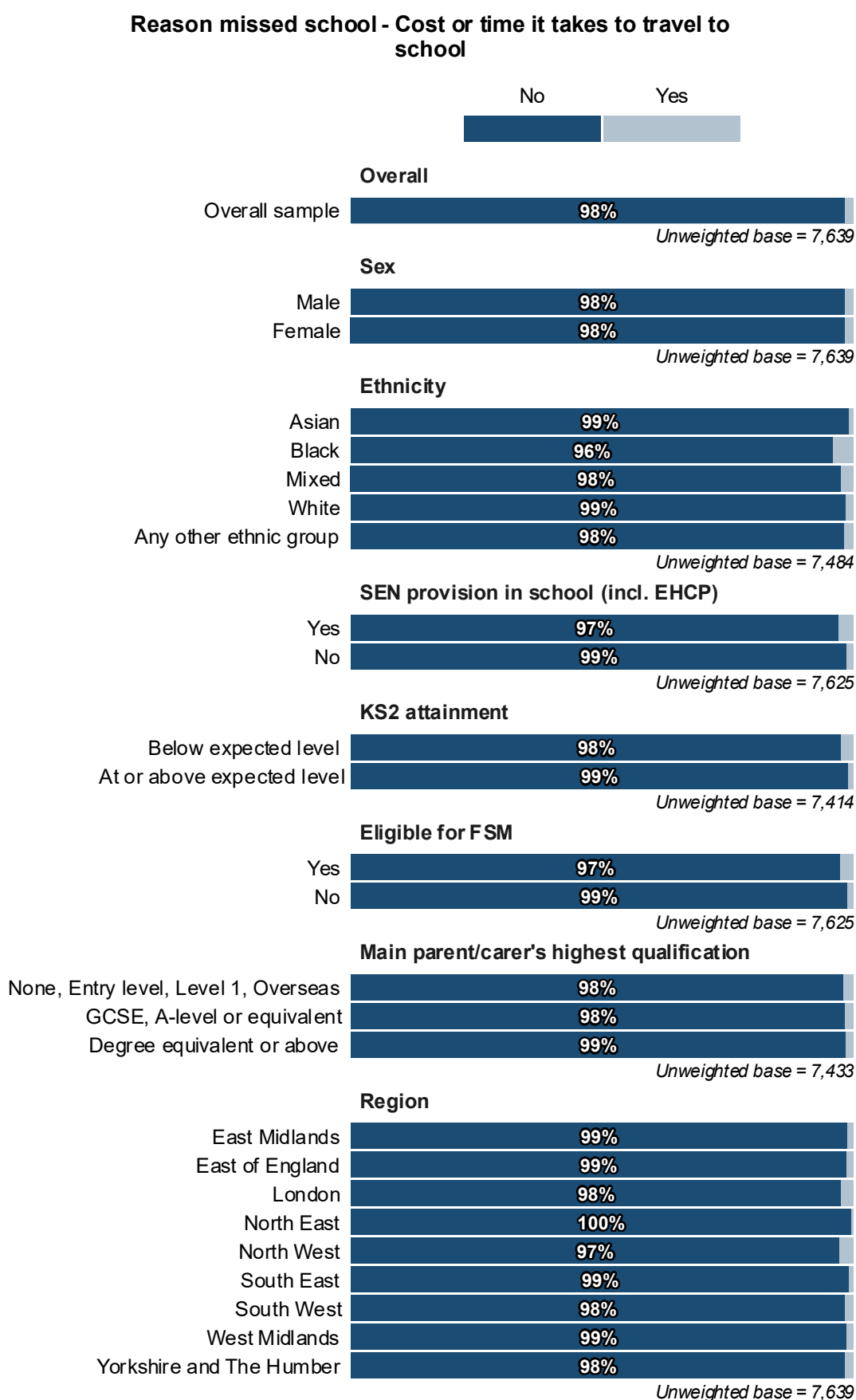


Figure 97: Reason for absence: bullying at school

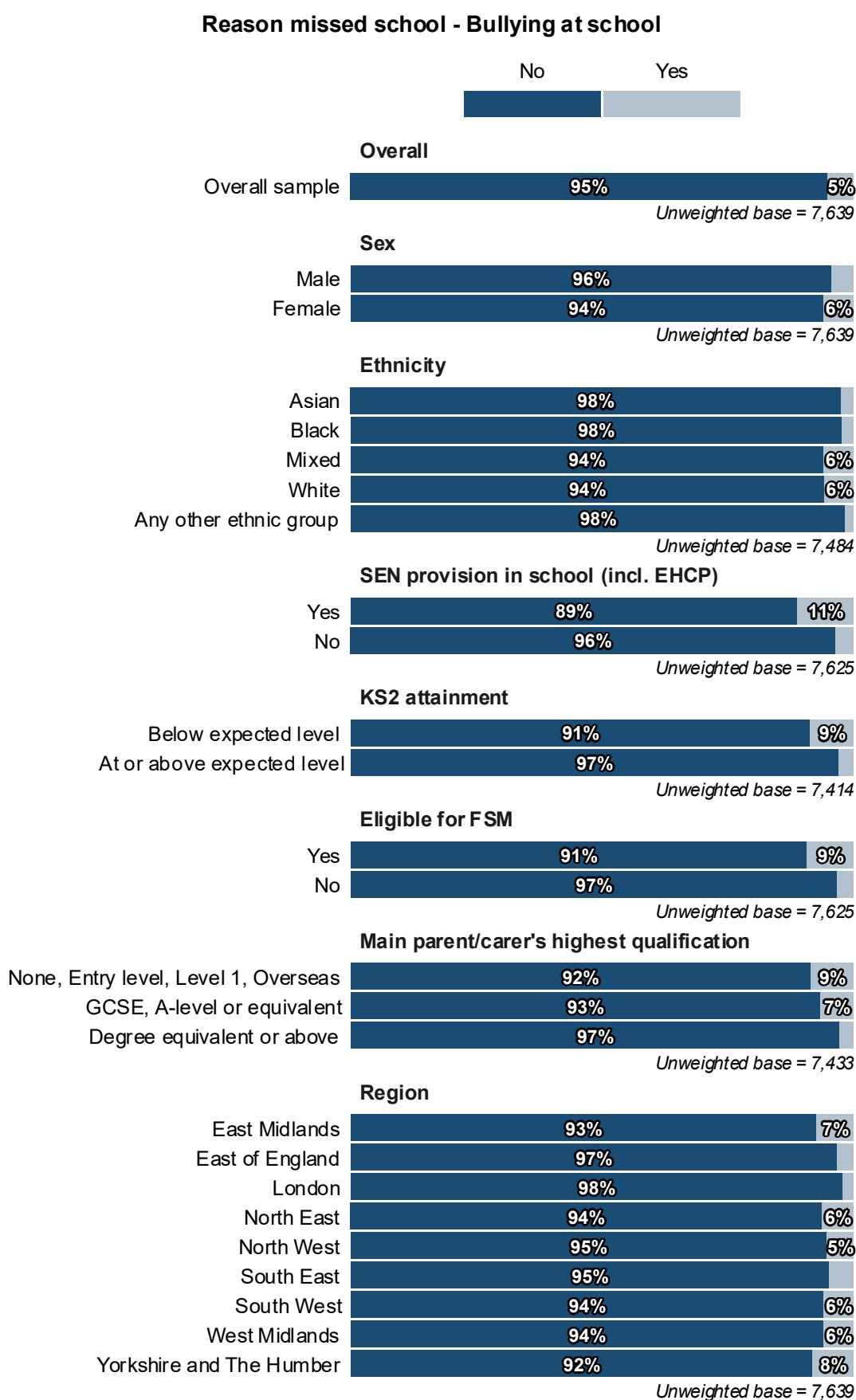


Figure 98: Reason for absence: holiday

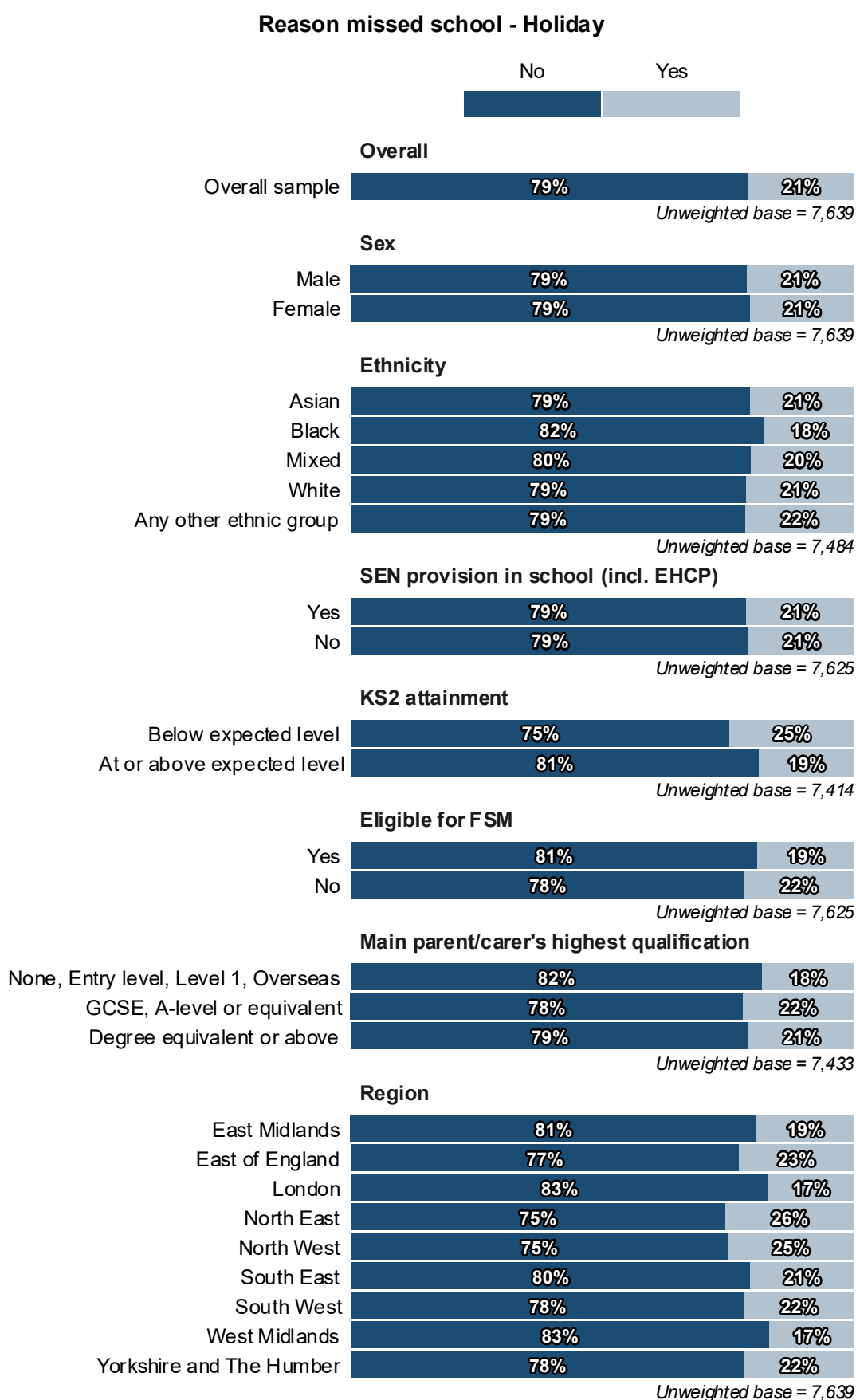


Figure 99: Reason for absence: suspension or exclusion

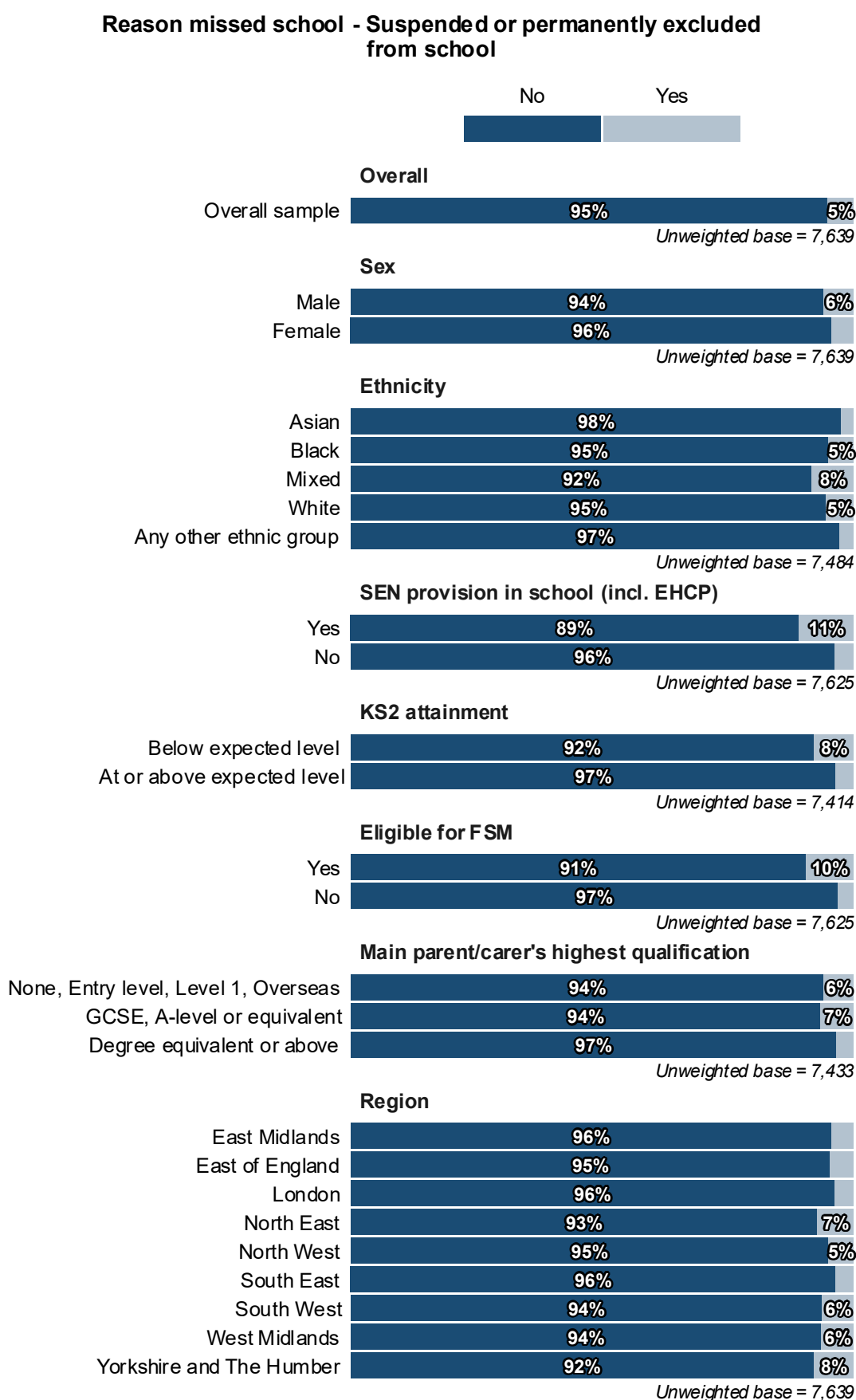
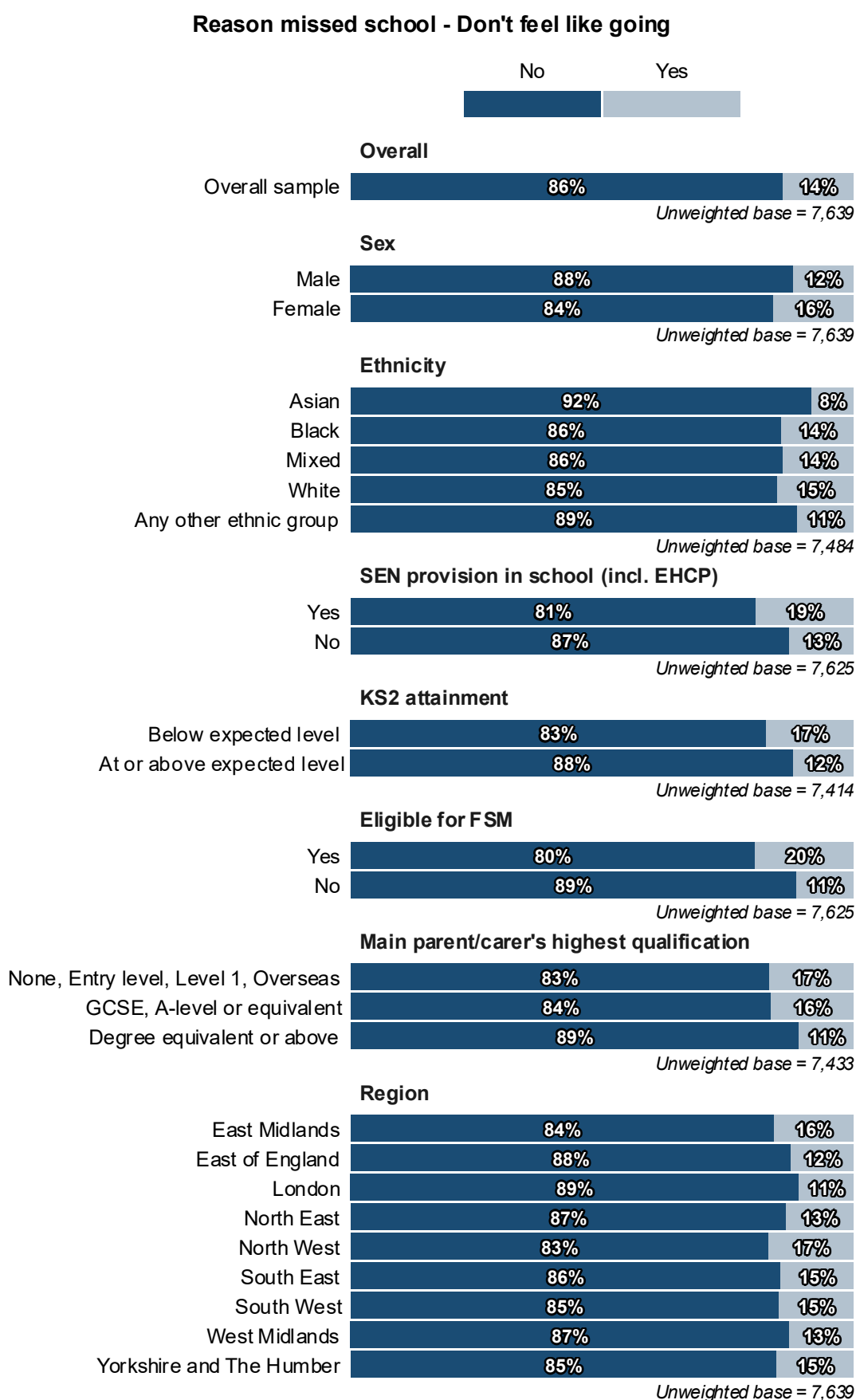


Figure 100: Reason for absence: did not feel like going



Exclusion

Evidence on the impact of exclusions on attainment is mixed (Hodgen et al., 2022; Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022), but there is consistent evidence that disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately likely to be excluded (Shaw and Morris, 2020). The NPD records the number of suspensions, the corresponding number of sessions missed (morning or afternoon), and permanent exclusions. In the 2023 to 2024 academic year²⁵, 6% of young people were suspended at least once, resulting in an average of 11.9 missed sessions among those suspended.

Suspension rates varied across all sociodemographic groups. Boys were more likely than girls to be suspended (8% vs. 4%). Rates were highest among Black young people (7%) and those from other ethnic groups (9%) and lowest among Asian young people (2%). Young people receiving SEN provision at school were more than three times as likely to be suspended as their peers (14% vs. 4%). Higher rates were also observed among those eligible for FSM (12% vs. 4%), those with lower KS2 attainment (10% vs. 3%), and those with lower parental education (12% low, 8% medium vs. 3% high). Regionally, rates were highest in the North East (11%) and lowest in London (5%). Permanent exclusions affected fewer than 1% of students. These low figures precluded subgroup analyses due to case suppression.

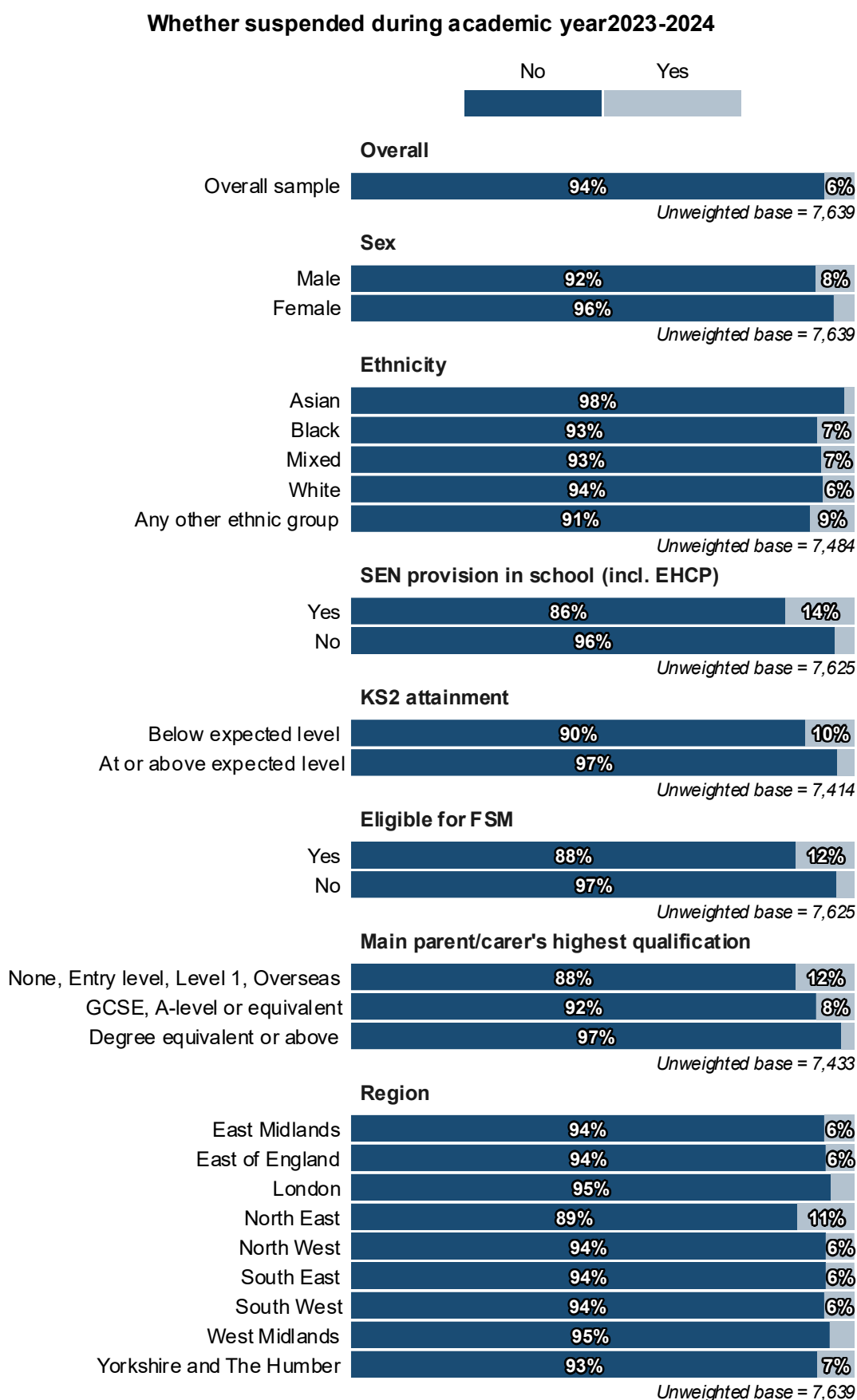
Table 25: Suspensions and numbers of sessions missed

	Percentage (%)	Lower CI	Upper CI	Unweighted N
Proportion suspended once or more, 2023 to 2024	5.9	5.4	6.5	7797
Total number of sessions missed for those suspended, 2023 to 2024	11.9	10.5	13.3	7797

Source: NPD, 2024, weighted percentages

²⁵ As indicated in the introduction to this section, exclusion was analysed using data for the full 2023/24 academic year, when the cohort were in Year 7, since its low prevalence meant that using data from a single term (Autumn 2024) would have resulted in small numbers (requiring suppression).

Figure 101: NPD data on whether the young person was suspended in the 2023 to 2024 academic year



Relationships with teachers

Evidence consistently links high-quality teaching and supportive teacher–student relationships – characterised by strong instructional focus, formative feedback, progress monitoring, and socio-emotional support – to higher pupil attainment, including for disadvantaged students (Roorda et al, 2017; Sylva et al, 2014; Sammons, Toth and Sylva, 2015). However, teaching practices may also reinforce inequalities, particularly where expectations are lower for disadvantaged pupils (Classick et al, 2021).

While around two-thirds of young people said that at least some of their teachers talked to them about how they were doing at school, more than a third (35%) reported that none or hardly any did. Girls were more likely than boys to report little or no discussion about their progress (38% vs. 32%). Young people from a mixed ethnic background were the most likely to report this (37%), while Asian young people were the least likely (31%).

Perceptions of fair treatment were more positive overall, with 94% reporting fair treatment from at least some teachers. However, reports of unfair treatment were notably higher among disadvantaged groups, including young people eligible for FSM (12% vs. 6%), those receiving SEN provision at school (11% vs. 7%) and those with lower KS2 attainment (11% vs. 6%). Black young people were more than twice as likely as Asian young people to report unfair treatment (9% vs. 4%).

Figure 102: Young person reported extent to which teachers talk to them about how they are doing at school

Teachers talk to YP about how they are doing at school

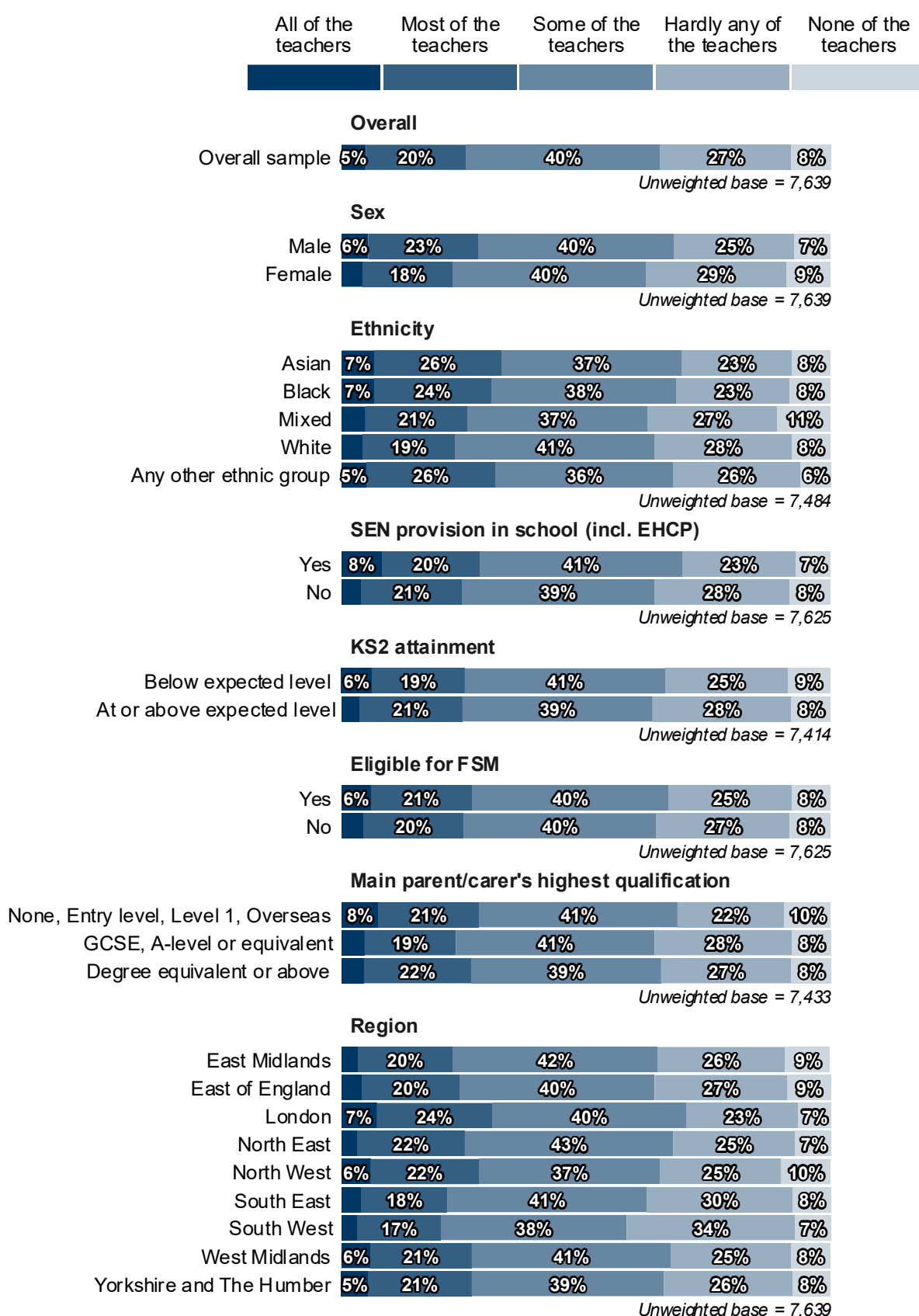
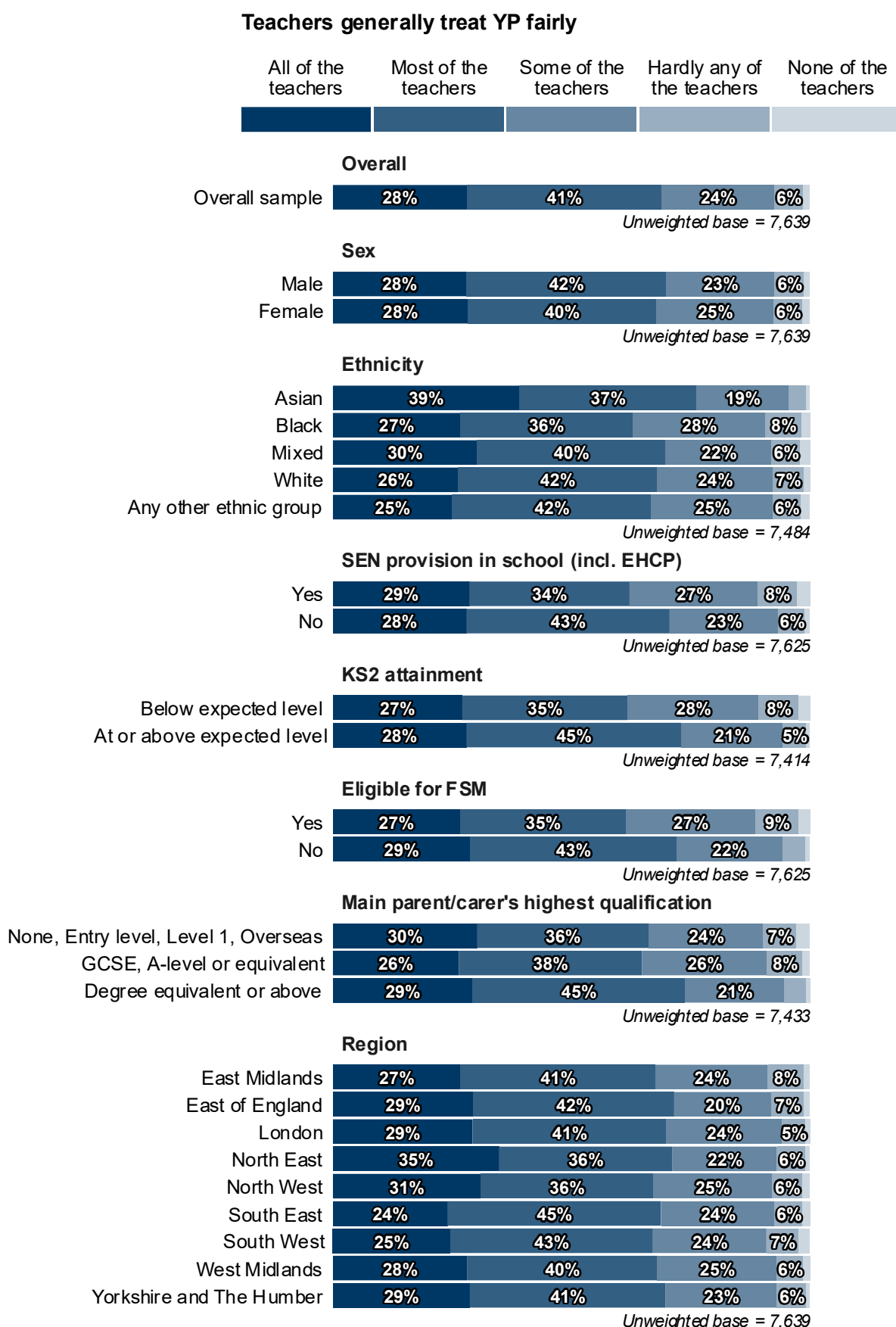


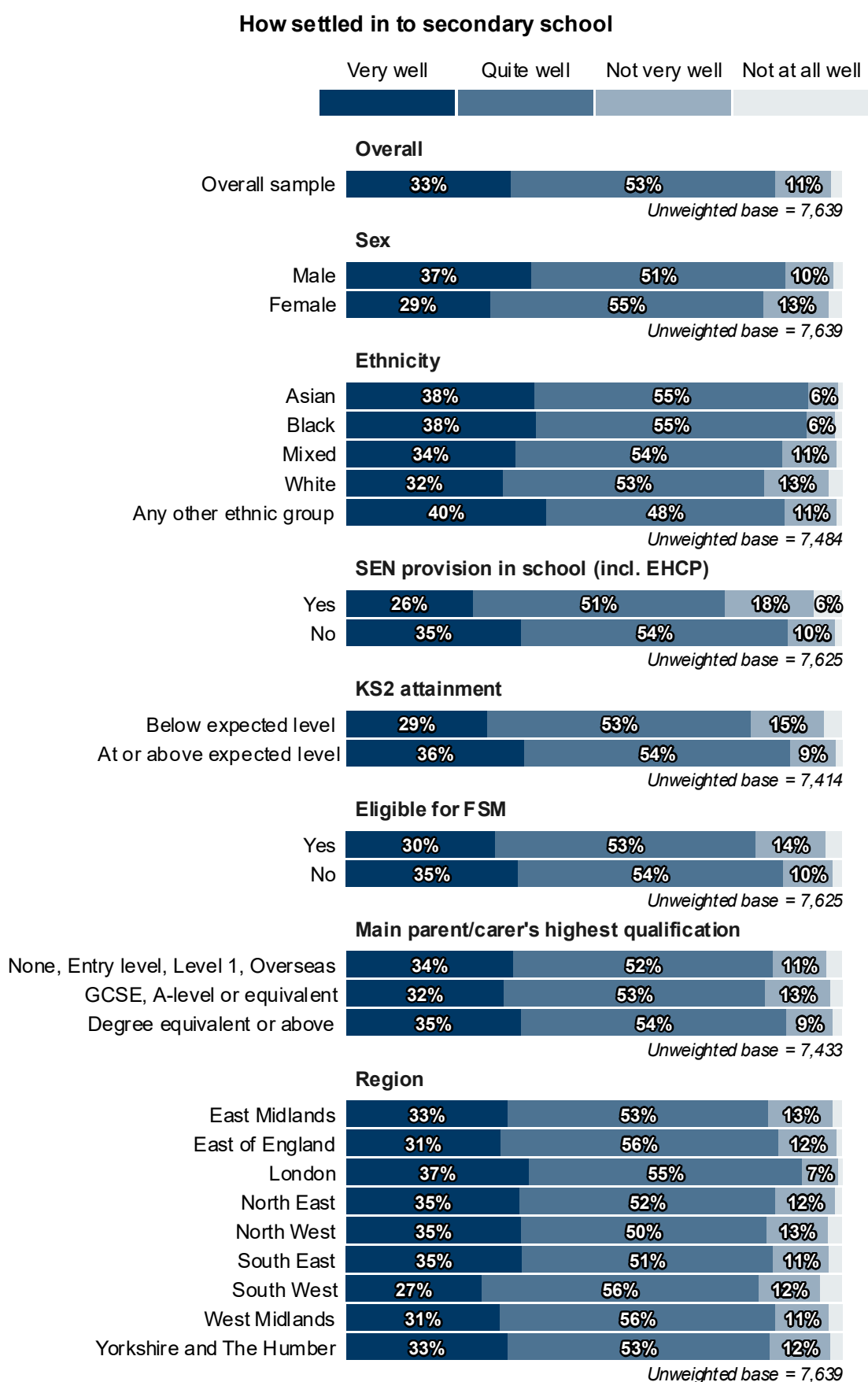
Figure 103: Young person reported extent to which teachers treat them fairly in general



Experience of transition to secondary school

Difficulties during the transition to secondary school are associated with poorer educational outcomes, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and pupils with SEN, who may lack tailored support and report lower social support and higher peer victimisation (Gilbert et al., 2021; Evangelou et al., 2008; Evans and Field, 2020; Shaw and Morris, 2020; Hughes, Banks and Terras, 2013). Most young people reported settling into secondary school either very well (33%) or quite well (53%), with 13% reporting that they had not settled well. Boys were more likely than girls to report settling well overall (89% vs. 84%). In contrast, young people receiving SEN provision at school (23% vs. 11%), those eligible for FSM (17% vs. 12%) and those with lower KS2 attainment (18% vs. 11%) were more likely to report difficulties. By ethnicity, Asian and Black young people were the most likely to report settling well (93%), while White young people were the least likely to do so (85%).

Figure 104: Young person reported how well they settled into secondary school

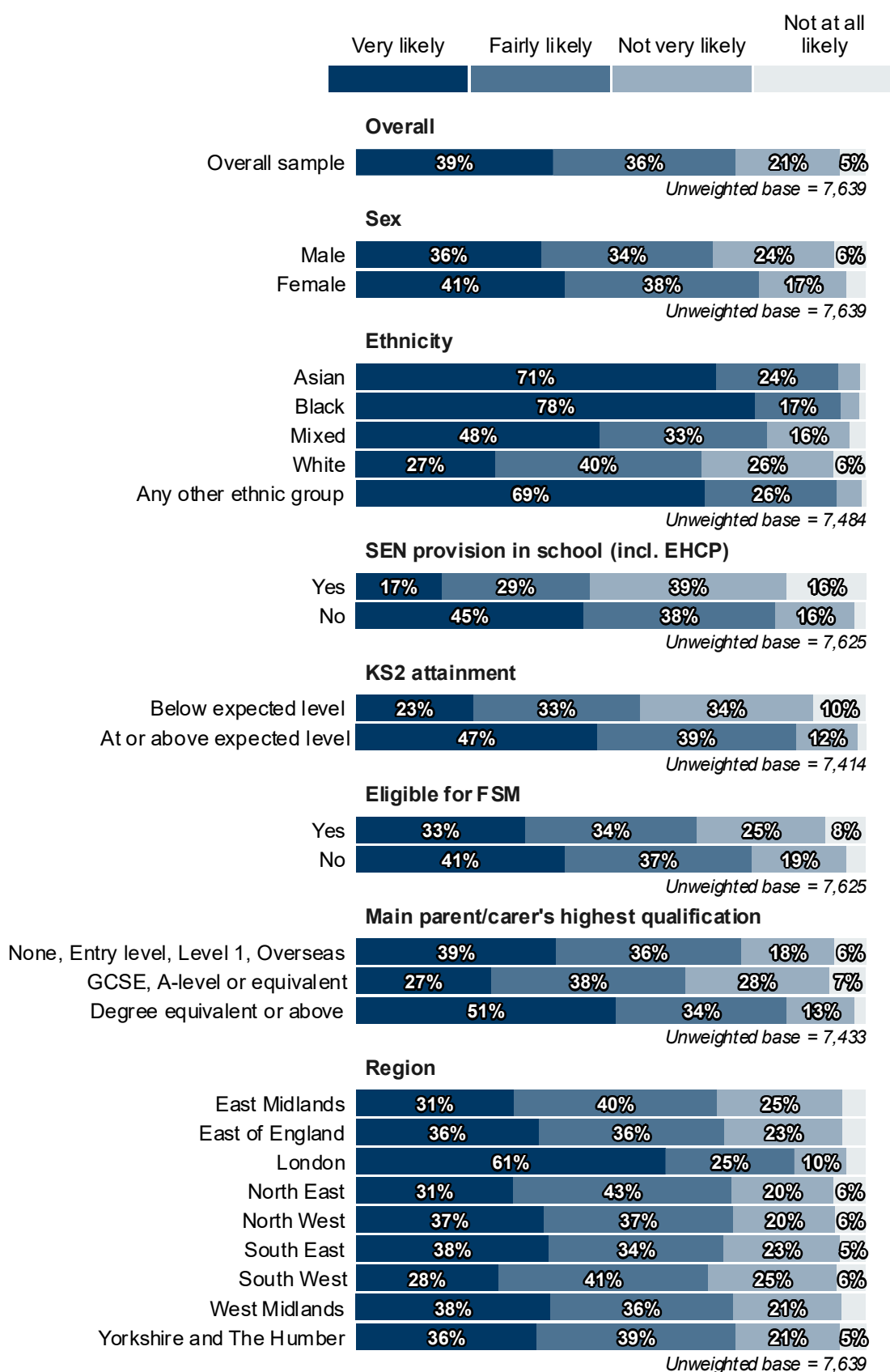


Academic aspirations

Parental aspirations – particularly among ethnic minority and disadvantaged families – emerge as a key protective factor, positively influencing both educational attainment and post-16 pathways, including university enrolment (Stokes et al., 2015; Schoon, Burger and Cook, 2021; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2013). While three-quarters of main parents/carers overall thought it was likely that their child would go to university (75%), this fell to less than half (47%) of those with a child receiving SEN provision at school, compared with 82% of their peers. Large gaps were also seen for young people with lower KS2 attainment (56% vs. 83%), lower parental education (76% low, 65% medium vs. 85% high) and FSM eligibility (68% vs. 78%). Regional and ethnic group differences were pronounced: university aspirations reached 95% among parents of Asian and Black young people and 86% in London, but were lowest among parents of White young people (68%) and in the South West (69%). Parents were also more likely to expect daughters than sons to attend university (79% vs. 70%).

Figure 105: Parent-reported how likely it is that young person will go to university

Parent-reported likelihood of YP attending university



In the follow-up online survey, the main parent/carer was also asked about their awareness of post-GCSE and National Qualifications. Overall, awareness was highest for A-levels (83%) and Apprenticeships (74%), but considerably lower for Traineeships (28%) and T-levels (21%). Significant disparities were evident: awareness of A-levels was lower among parents of children receiving SEN provision at school (70% vs. 87% of their peers), and those eligible for FSM, with lower KS2 attainment or lower parental education, who were more likely to report knowing nothing about post-16 options (10-19% vs. 4-6%). Awareness also varied by ethnicity, with parents of White children reporting the highest awareness of Apprenticeships (81%), Traineeships (31%), and T-levels (23%), while awareness of Apprenticeships (51%) and Traineeships (18%) was lowest among parents of Asian children, and awareness of T-levels lowest among parents of Black children (9%). Regional differences were notable as well, with London parents showing the lowest awareness across all routes (Apprenticeships 59%, Traineeships 20%, T-levels 12%), while awareness peaked for Apprenticeships in the North East (80%), and for Traineeships in Yorkshire and the Humber (33%).

Figure 106: Post-GCSE/National Qualification options awareness: Apprenticeships

Post-16 options main parent/carer aware of - Apprenticeships

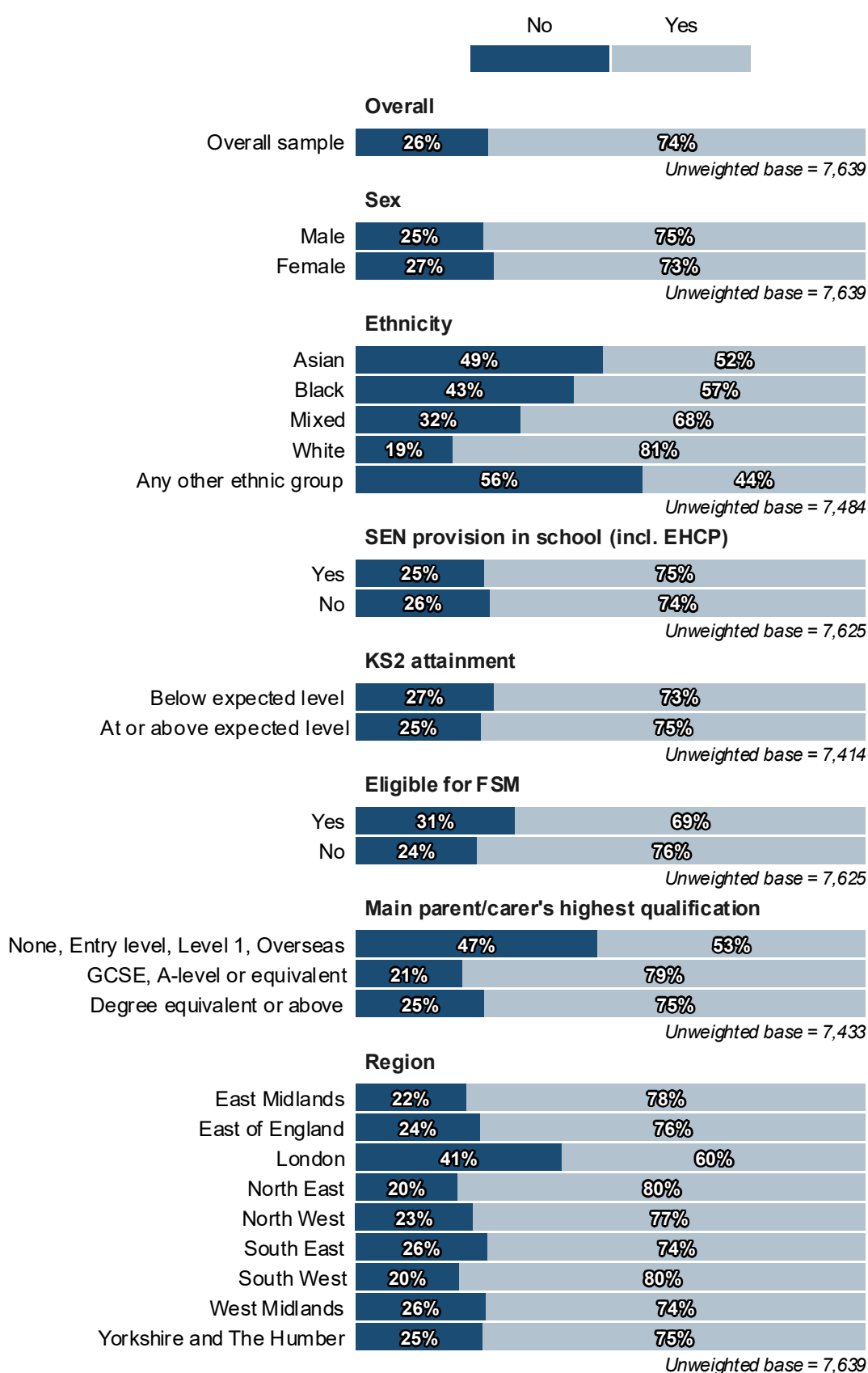


Figure 107: Post-GCSE/National Qualification options awareness: A-levels

Post-16 options main parent/carers aware of - A-levels

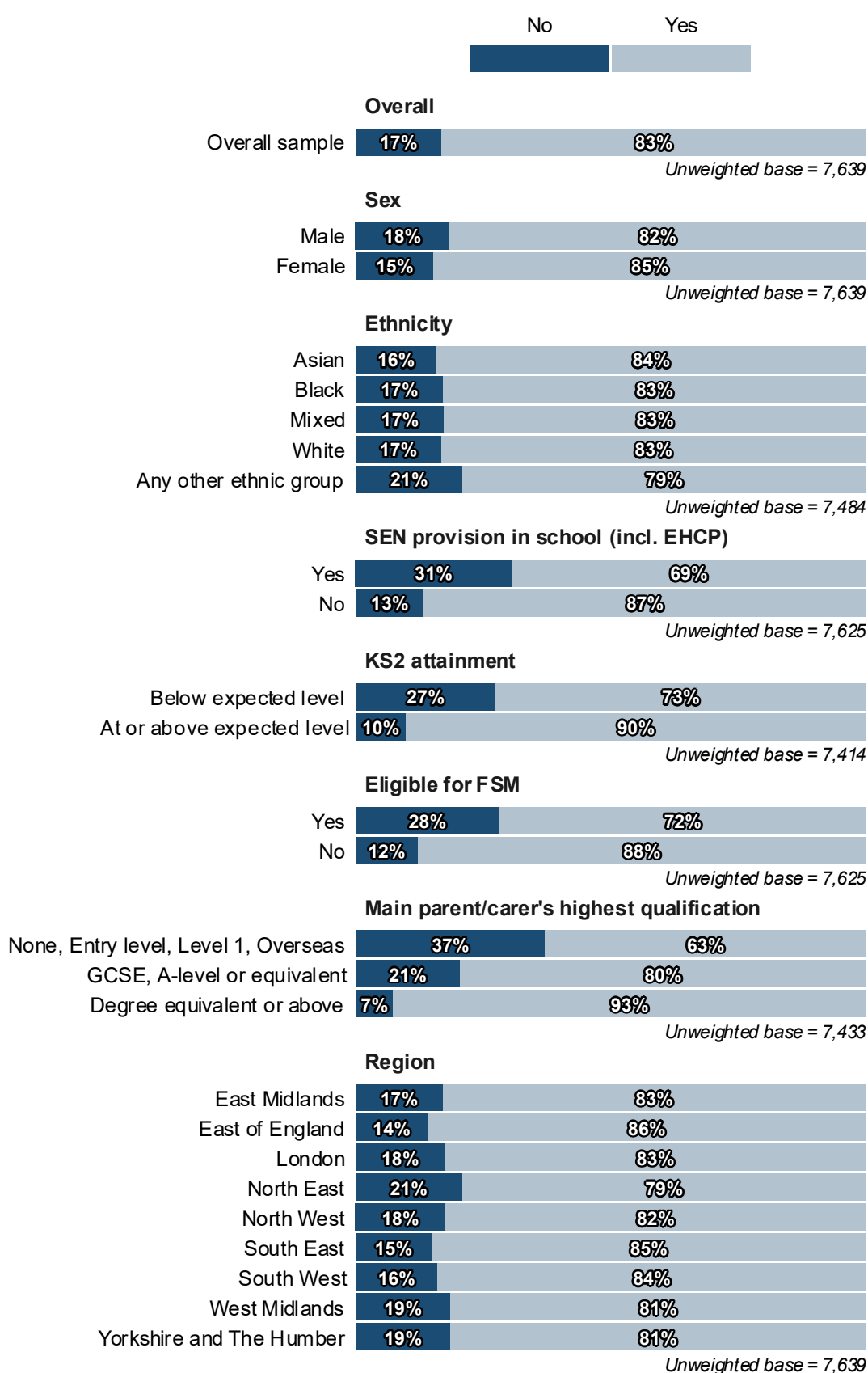


Figure 108: Post-GCSE/National Qualification options awareness: Traineeships

Post-16 options main parent/carers aware of - Traineeships

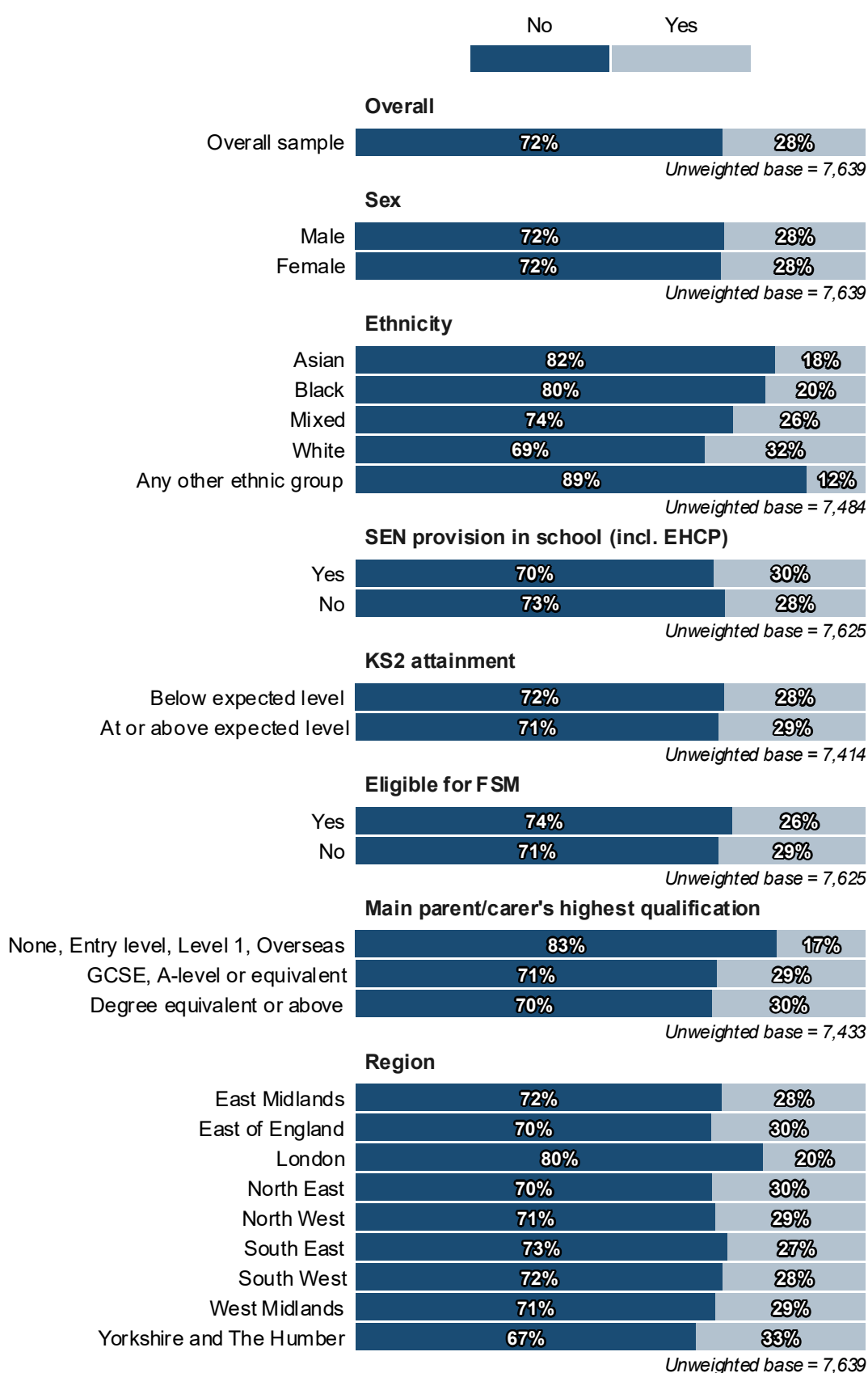


Figure 109: Post-GCSE/National Qualification options awareness: T-levels

Post-16 options main parent/carers aware of - T-levels

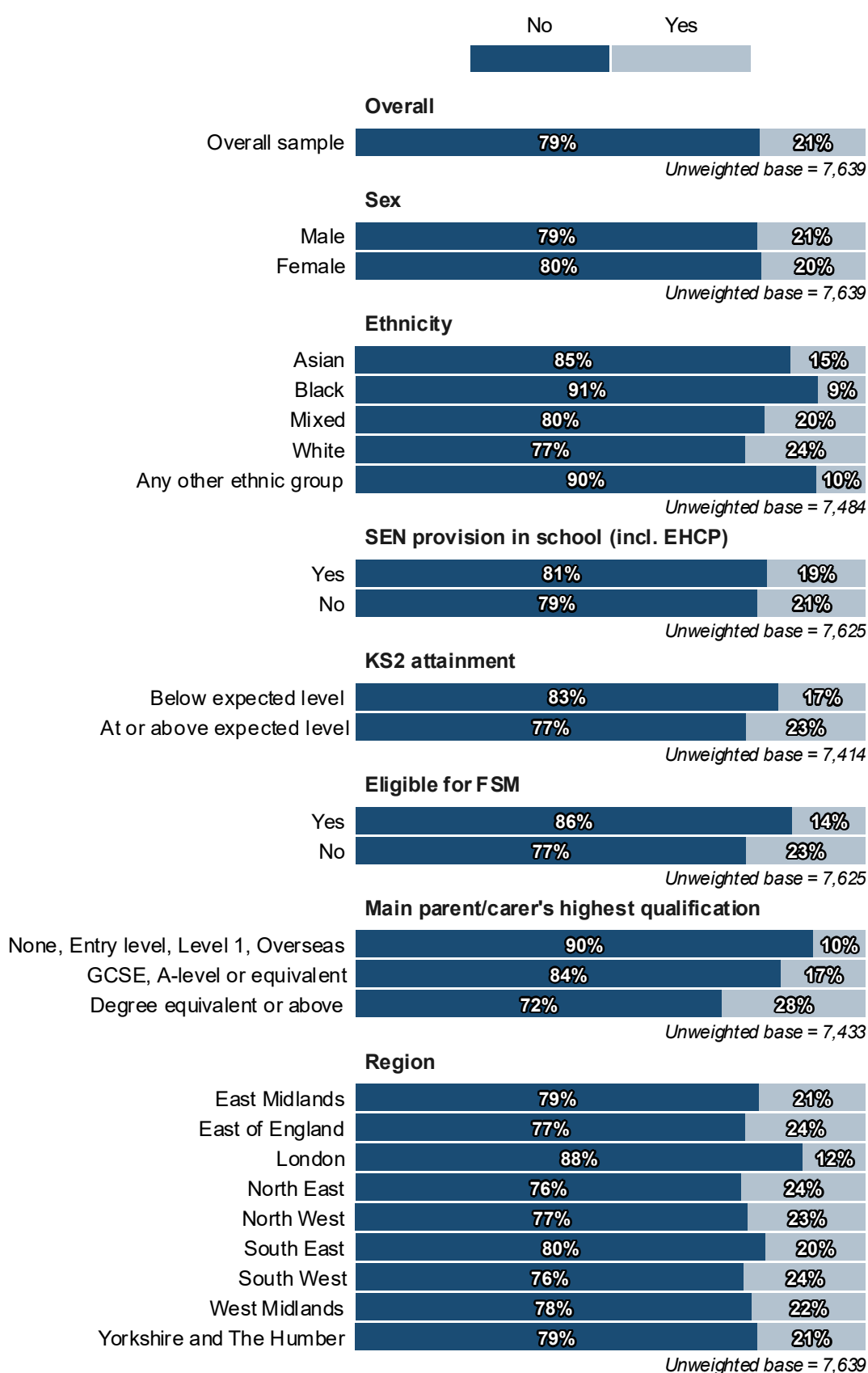


Figure 110: Post-GCSE/National Qualification options awareness: Other vocational routes such as BTEC

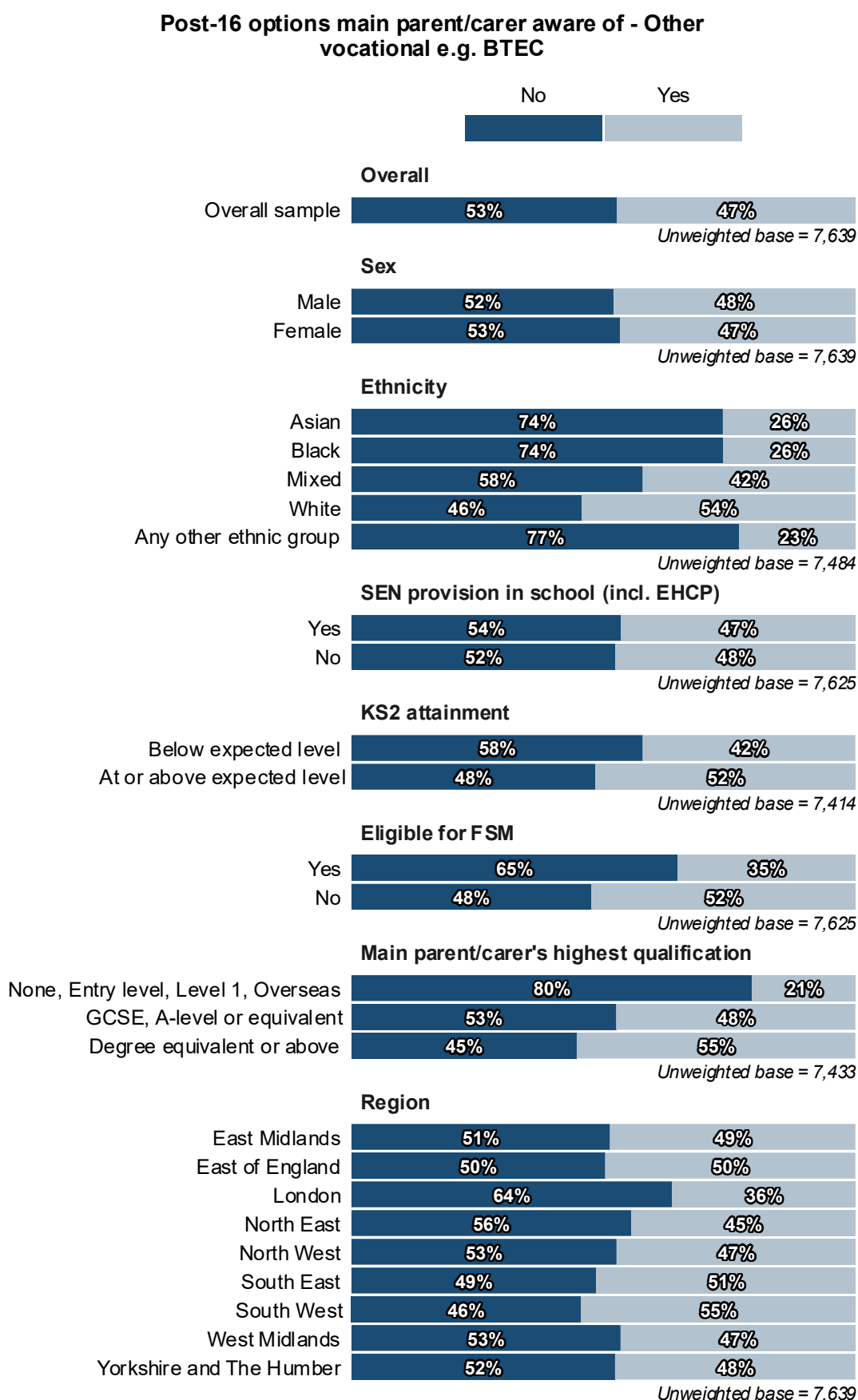
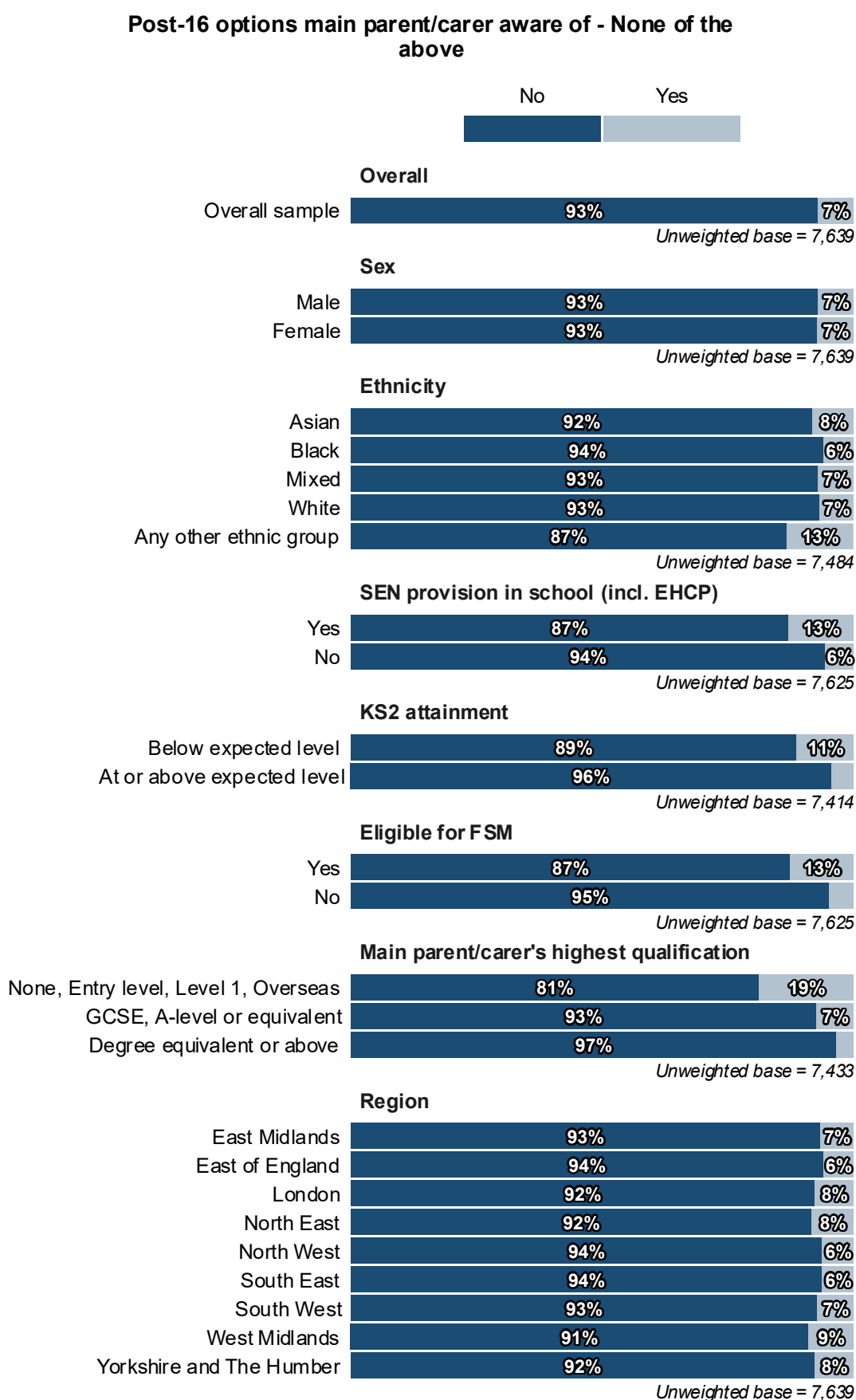


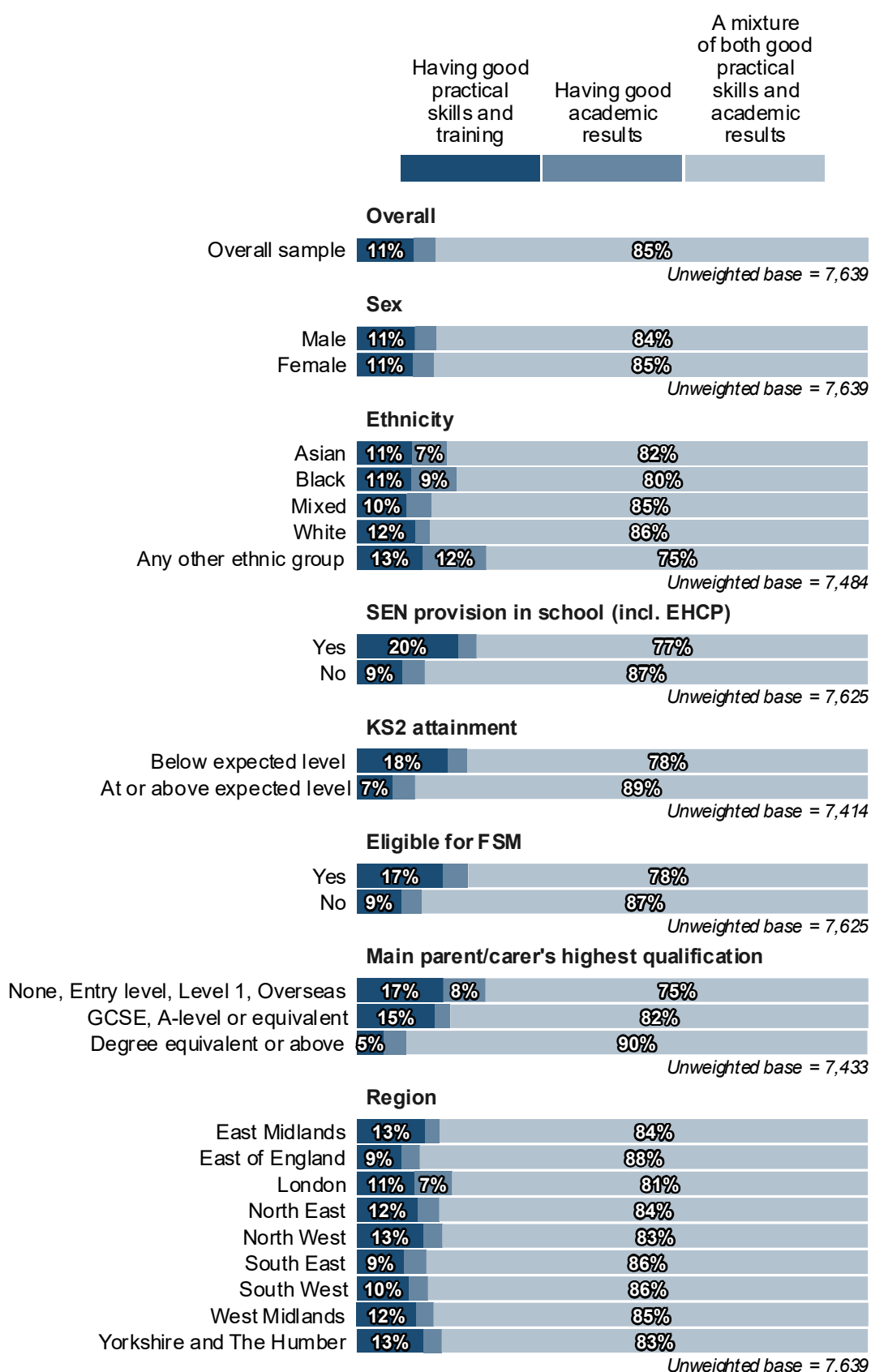
Figure 111: Post-GCSE/National Qualification options awareness: None of the above



In the follow-up online survey, the main parent/carer was asked whether practical skills or academic results provide better opportunities in life. Overall, most parents (85%) felt that a combination of practical skills and academic attainment offers the best opportunities, while smaller proportions favoured practical skills alone (11%) or academic results alone (4%). Notable differences emerged across groups: parents of Black children were three times as likely as parents of White children to prioritise academic results alone (9% vs. 3%), while parents of children receiving SEN provision at school (20% vs. 9%), those eligible for FSM (17% vs. 9%), with lower education levels (17% low, 15% medium vs. 6% high) and with lower attaining children at KS2 (18% vs. 7%) were more likely to prioritise practical skills alone.

Figure 112: Parent reports of 'In the long run, which do you think gives people more opportunities and choices in life?'

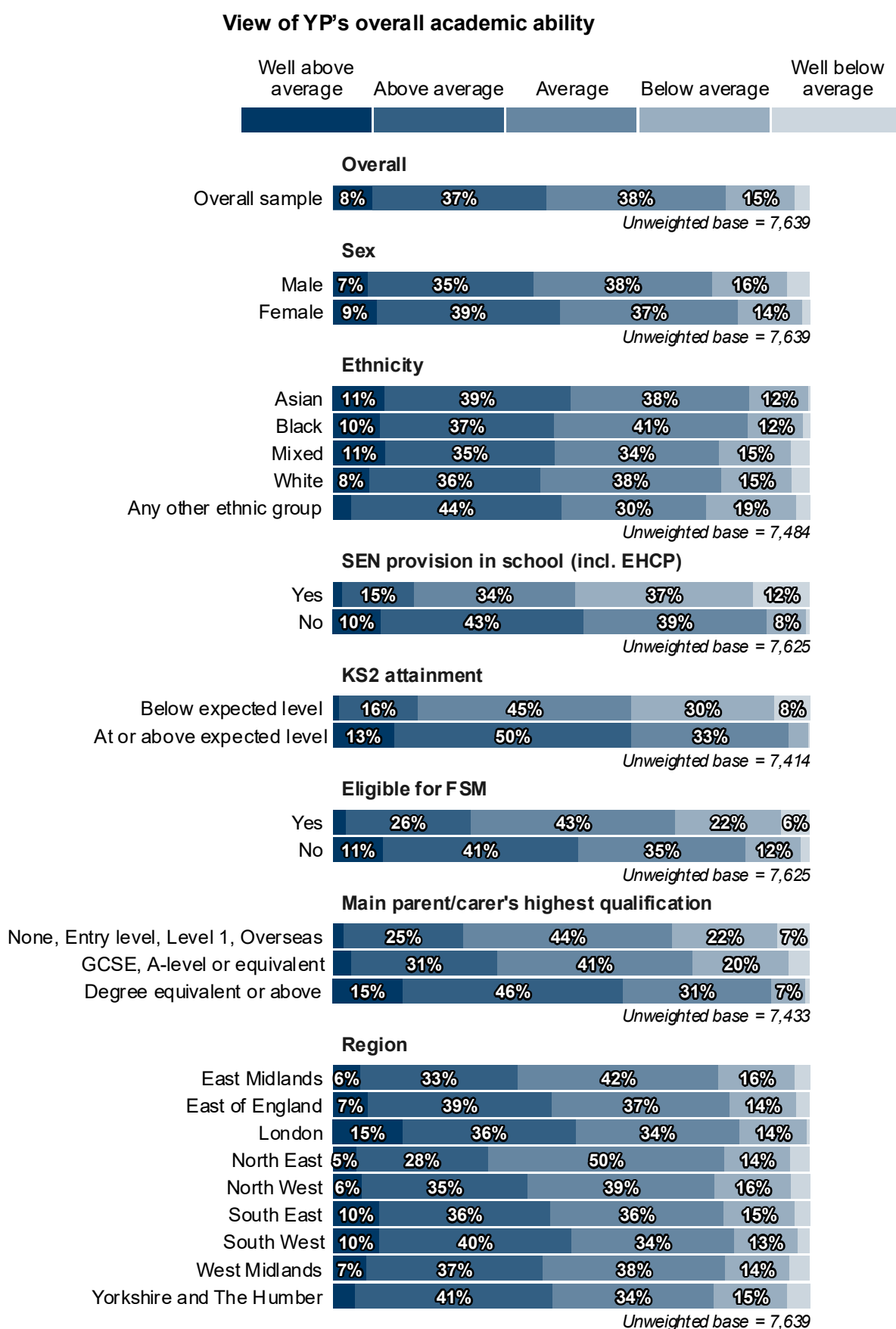
What gives people more opportunities and choices in life?



Ability and attainment

Teachers were asked to assess the young person's overall academic ability relative to others of the same age, enabling comparison across sociodemographic groups and analysis of attainment trajectories over time. Most were rated as average (38%) or above average (37%), with smaller proportions rated below average (15%), well below average (3%), or well above average (8%). Girls were more likely than boys to be rated as above average (48% vs. 42%) and Asian young people were most likely to receive above-average ratings (50%), while White young people were least likely (44%). Large disparities were evident by SEN, prior attainment and socioeconomic background: young people receiving SEN provision at school (17% vs. 53%), those with lower KS2 attainment (18% vs. 63%), those eligible for free school meals (29% vs. 52%), and those with lower-educated parents (27% low, 35% medium vs. 61%) were all substantially less likely to be rated above average.

Figure 113: Teacher-reported view of young person's overall academic ability



Wider context and influences

This section relates to the outer ring of the framework: wider context and influences that play a role in the young person's development. Wave 1 of the study collected data on two areas that relate to this fourth area of influence: activities outside of school and self-reported social media use and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Activities outside of school and self-reported social media use

Section overview

- This section examines young people's out-of-school activities and self-reported social media use.
- Extracurricular participation is linked to positive long-term outcomes, including education, employment, and social-emotional development (Education Policy Institute, 2024; Department for Education, 2020). Evidence on self-reported social media use is mixed: excessive or problematic use is associated with poorer mental health and sleep (Boer et al., 2020; Marengo et al., 2022; Orben et al., 2025), whereas moderate, non-problematic use is linked to benefits such as social connection, identity development, and creativity (Goodyear et al., 2021; Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Singh et al., 2026).
- The section draws on survey data, and analyses consider variation by sex, ethnicity, FSM eligibility, SEN provision, parental education, and region.

Engagement in activities

- Sports (69%) and gaming (63%) were the most common weekly activities, followed by arts (40%) and hobby/interest activities (33%); only 10% took part in academic clubs.
- Boys were more likely to do sports (80% vs. 58%) and gaming (86% vs. 40%), while girls were far more likely to take part in arts (56% vs. 24%).
- FSM-eligible and SEN-supported young people participated less across most activities, including sports and arts. Young people with degree-educated parents participated more across almost all activities (e.g., sports 75% vs. 62% for no/entry-level parental qualifications).

- Reading for enjoyment was polarised: 22% read most days, while 25% never did. Frequent reading was more common among girls, Asian young people, and those with degree-educated parents (30% vs. 18% with no/entry-level qualifications), and less common among FSM-eligible and SEN-supported young people.

Self-reported social media use

- Self-reported weekday social media use averaged 2.3 hours, with girls reporting more use than boys (2.7 vs. 1.9 hours). Reported use was lowest among Asian young people (1.5 hours) and highest among Black young people (2.6 hours).
- Disadvantaged groups reported higher use: FSM-eligible young people (2.8 vs. 2.1 hours), those with SEN provision (2.5 vs. 2.2 hours), and those with lower-educated parents (2.4–2.6 vs. 1.9 hours).

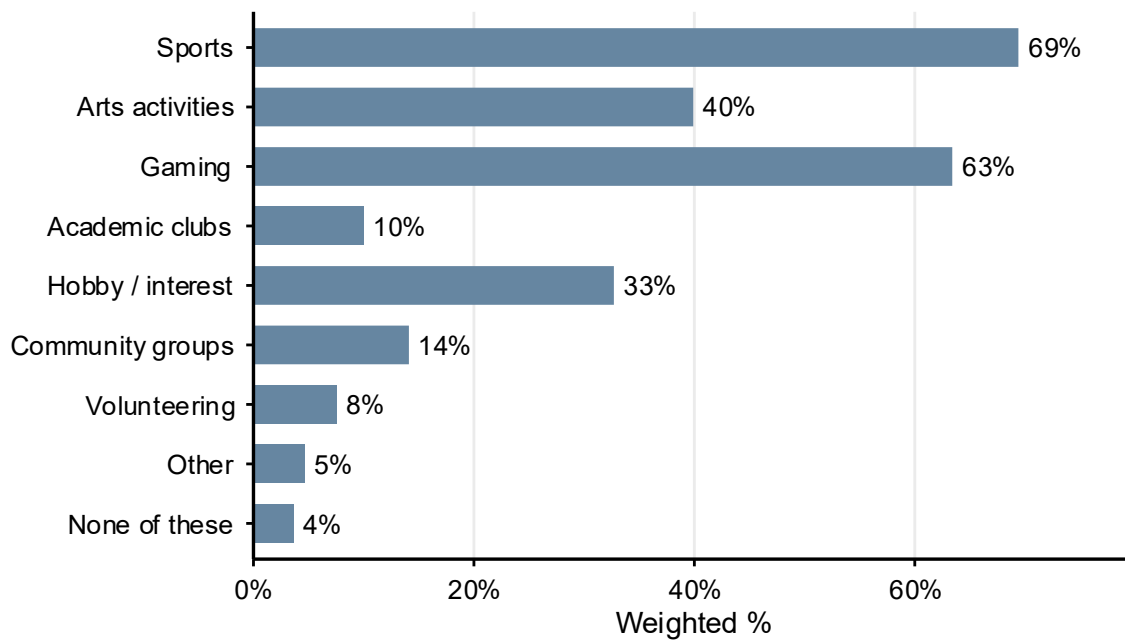
Conclusions

- Most young people took part in at least one regular activity, with sports and gaming the most common. Participation differed by sex, with boys more involved in sports and gaming and girls more involved in arts.
- FSM-eligible and SEN-supported young people taking part in fewer enrichment activities and reading for enjoyment less often.
- Average weekday self-reported social media use was around 2–2.5 hours, with higher use among girls, FSM eligible young people, and those with lower educated parents. Asian young people reported the lowest use.
- The findings show that time use and enrichment opportunities vary systematically across demographic and socioeconomic groups, shaping young people's everyday experiences in early adolescence.

Engagement in activities

Young people were asked about which activities they regularly (i.e. around once a week), do during term time, in schools or out of school, but not in lessons. The most common term time activities reported were sports (69%) and gaming (63%), followed by arts activities (40%) and hobby/interest activities (e.g. board games, trading cards) (33%). Participation in academic clubs was less common (10%). Smaller proportions reported involvement in community groups (14%), volunteering (8%), or other activities, while only 4% said none of these.

Figure 114: Young person reported activities during term time.



Unweighted base = 7,811

Boys were more likely to report participating in sports (80% vs. 58%), gaming (86% vs. 40%), academic clubs (11% vs. 9%), and hobby/interest activities (35% vs. 31%). Girls were more likely to report participating in arts activities (56% vs. 24%). Girls were also more likely to say they did none of the listed activities (7% vs. 1% of boys).

Participation in sports was high across all ethnic groups (68-75%), and Black young people showed significantly higher participation (75%) compared to both Asian (68%) and White young people (69%). Arts activity participation ranged from 32% to 42%, but there were no meaningful differences between ethnic groups. Gaming was consistently popular among all young people (59-65%), though Asian young people showed slightly lower levels (59%) compared to White young people (64%).

Academic clubs were more common among Black and Asian young people (14-15%) compared with White young people (9%). Furthermore, Asian young people had significantly higher participation in hobby/interest activities (39%) compared to Black (29%) and White (32%) young people. White young people were more likely to participate in community groups (15%) compared to Asian young people (10%).

FSM-eligible young people were less likely to report participation in sports (63% vs. 72%), arts activities (37% vs. 41%), hobby/interest activities (29% vs. 34%), academic clubs (9% vs. 11%), and community groups (10% vs. 16%) compared with non-FSM peers, but gaming participation was similar. Young people with SEN provision were less likely to report participation in sports (61% vs. 72%), arts activities (35% vs. 41%), academic clubs (6% vs. 11%), and volunteering (5% vs. 8%) but slightly more likely to report gaming (68% vs. 62%).

Young people with parents educated to degree-equivalent or above were more likely to report participation in sports compared to parents with no/entry level and GCSE/A-Level qualifications (75% vs. 62%/66%), arts (44% vs. 35%/38%), hobby/interest activities (38% vs. 26%/30%), academic clubs (13% vs. 8%/8%), community groups (20% vs. 7%/11%), and volunteering (9% vs. 6% for no/entry level qualifications).

In terms of regional variability, sports participation was broadly consistent (67-71%). Participation in arts activities ranged from 35% in London to 42% in the North West, South East and West Midlands. Gaming was consistently popular across regions (60-67%). Academic clubs were most common in London (12%) and least common in the East Midlands (8%). Hobby/interest participation ranged from 27% in Yorkshire and the Humber to 35% in the South West. Community group participation was highest in the North West (21%) and lowest in London (10%). Volunteering rates ranged from 6% in the East Midlands to 11% in the North West.

Figure 115: Young person reported participation in sports during term time

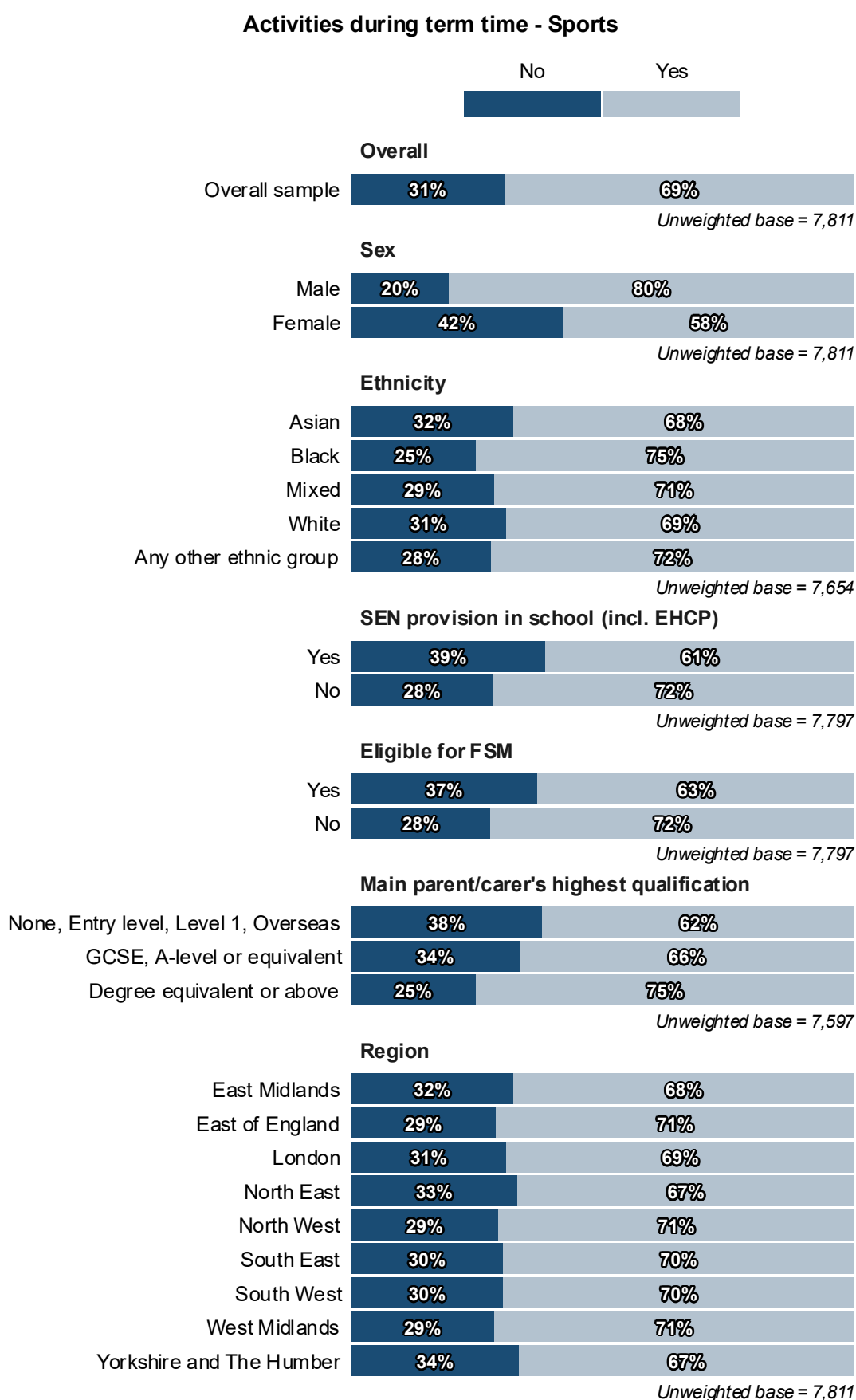


Figure 116: Young person reported participation in arts activities during term time

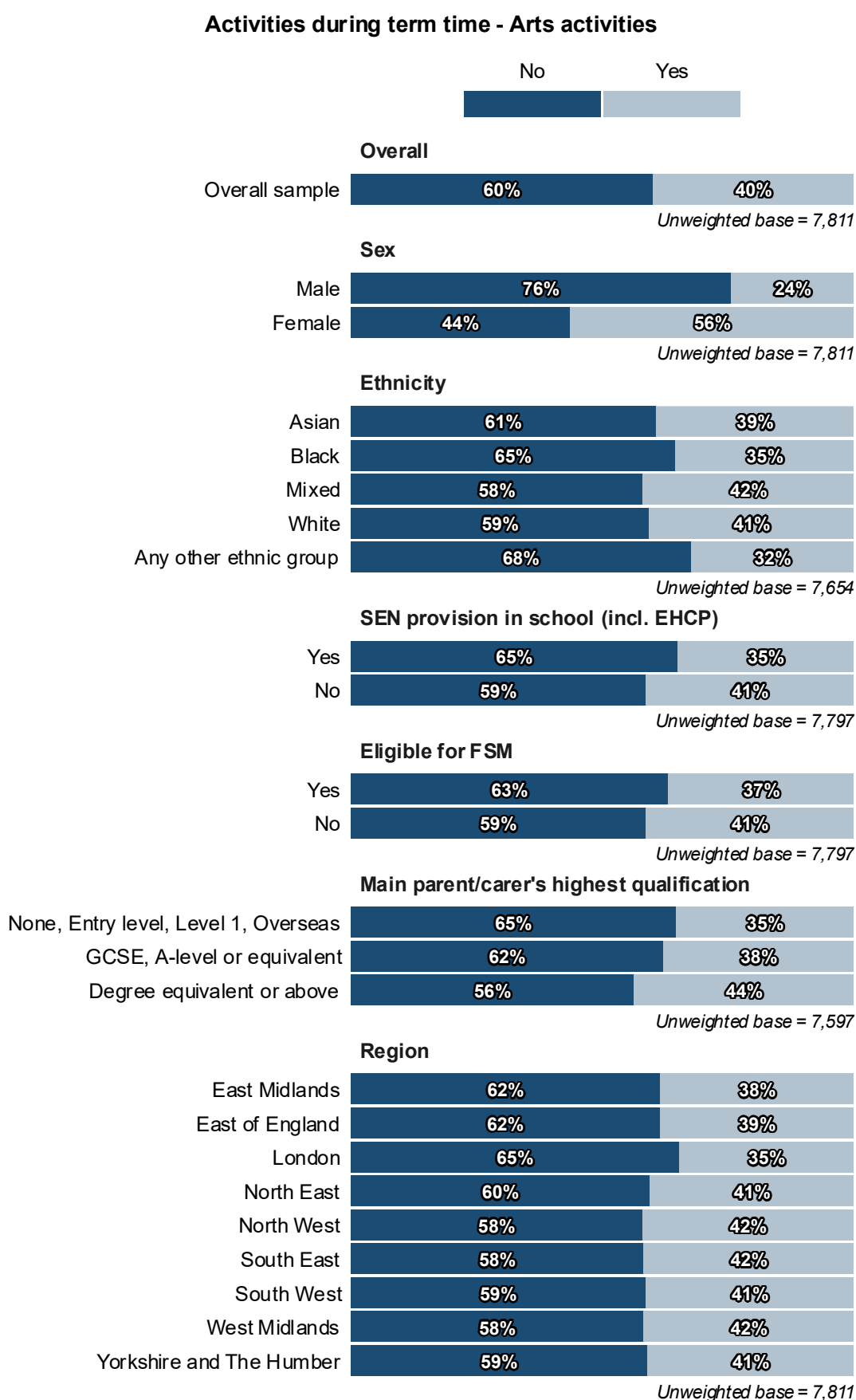


Figure 117: Young person reported participation in gaming during term time

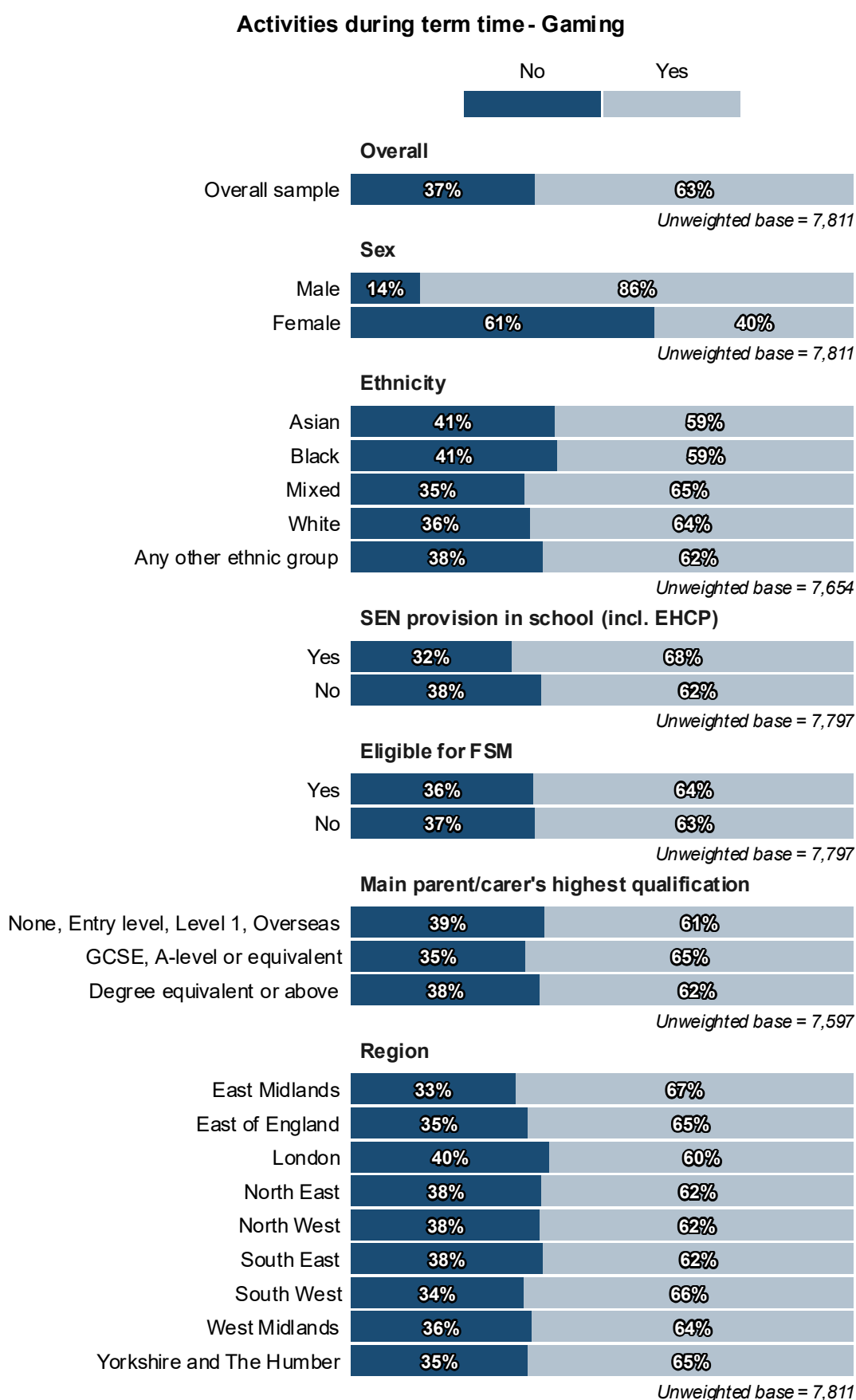


Figure 118: Young person reported participation in academic clubs during term time

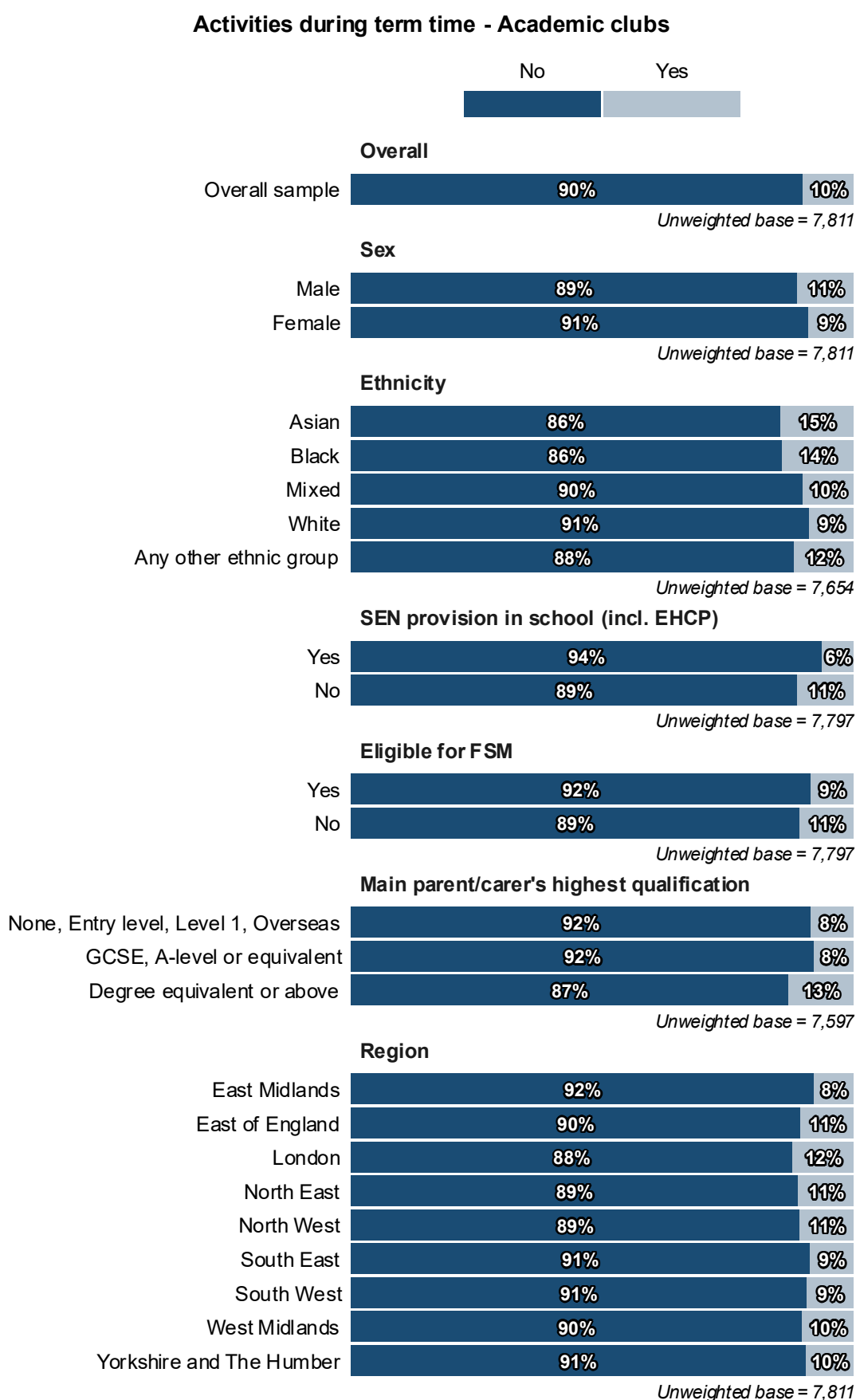


Figure 119: Young person reported participation in hobby or interest activities during term time

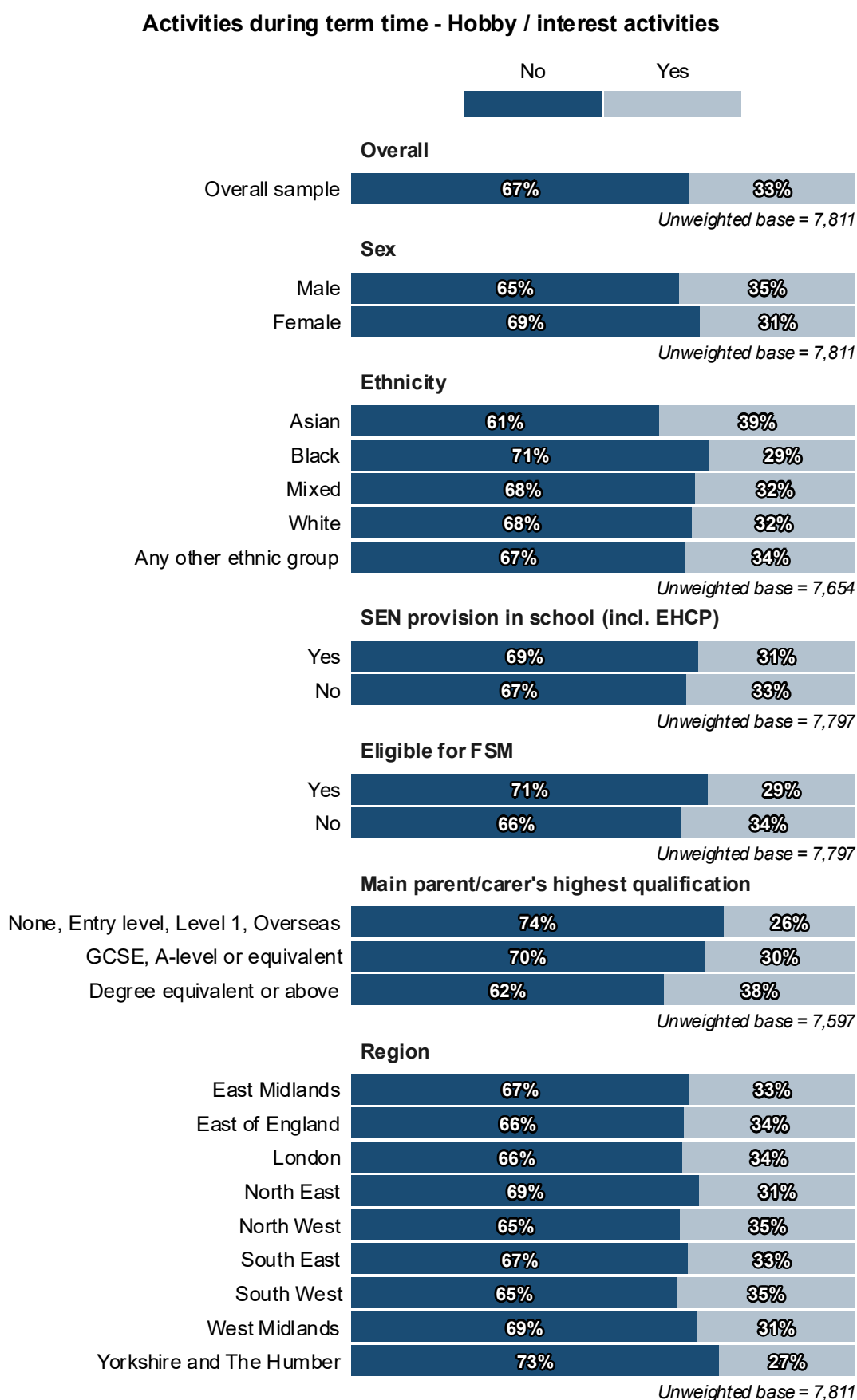


Figure 120: Young person reported participation in community groups during term time

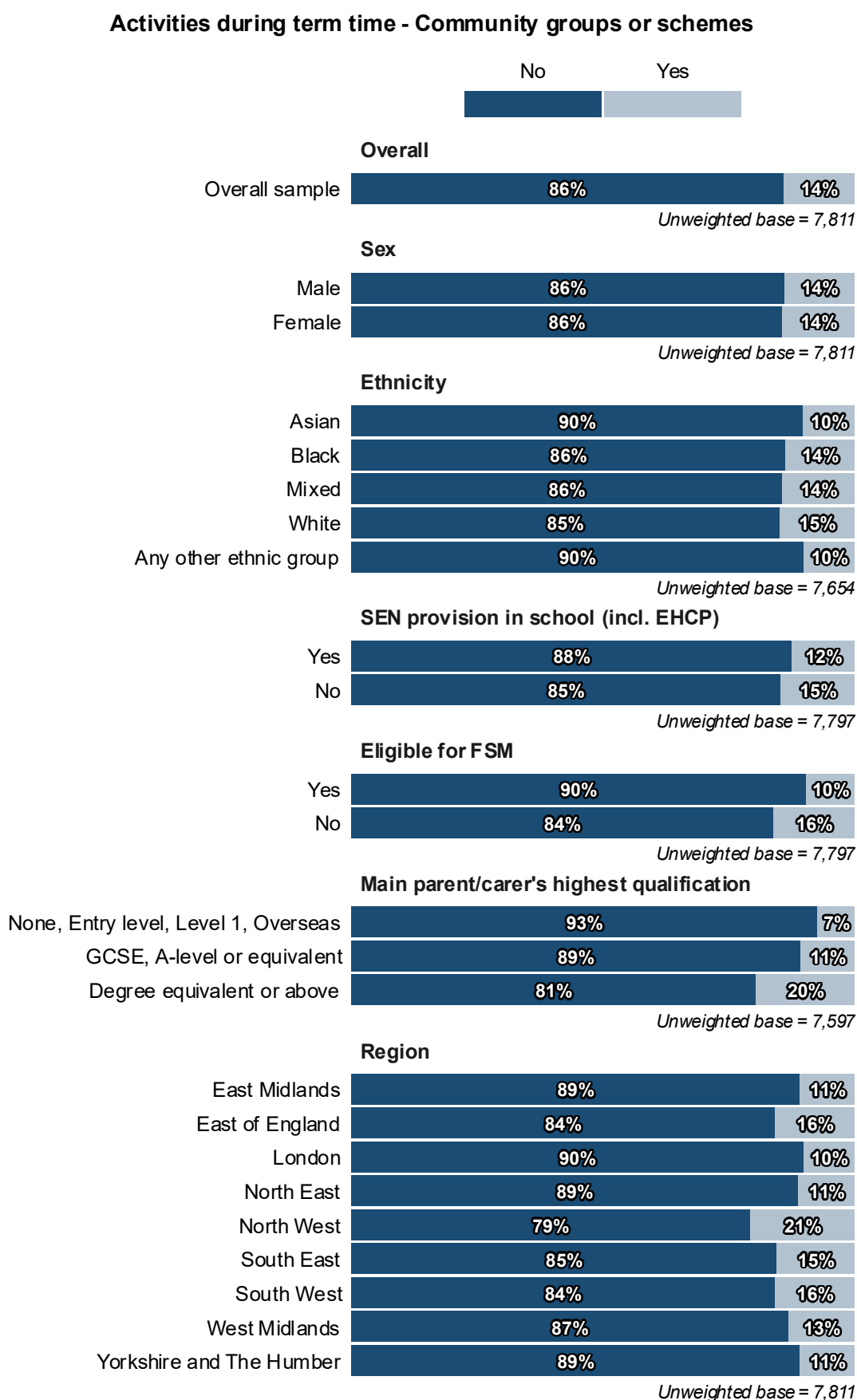
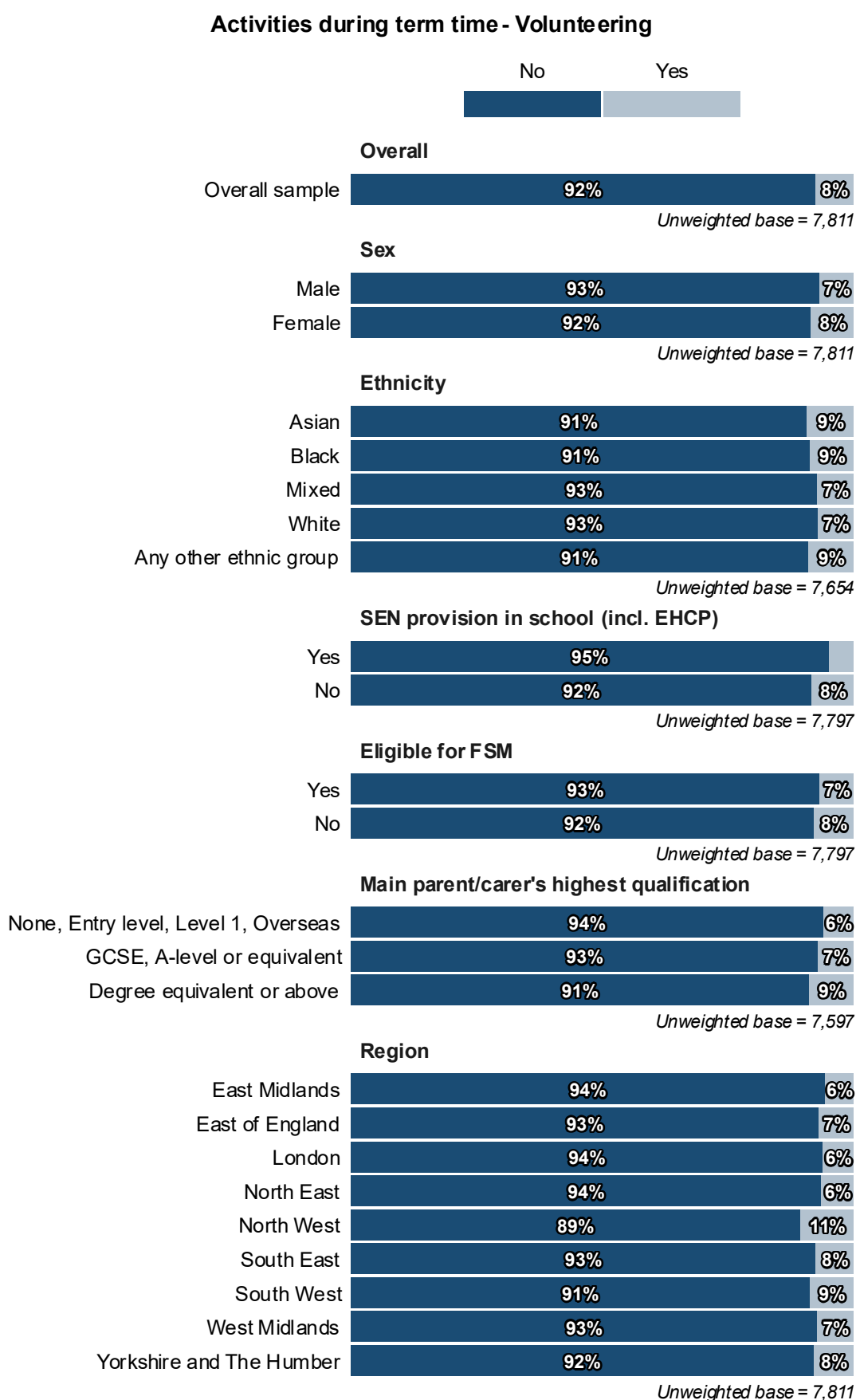


Figure 121: Young person reported participation in volunteering during term time

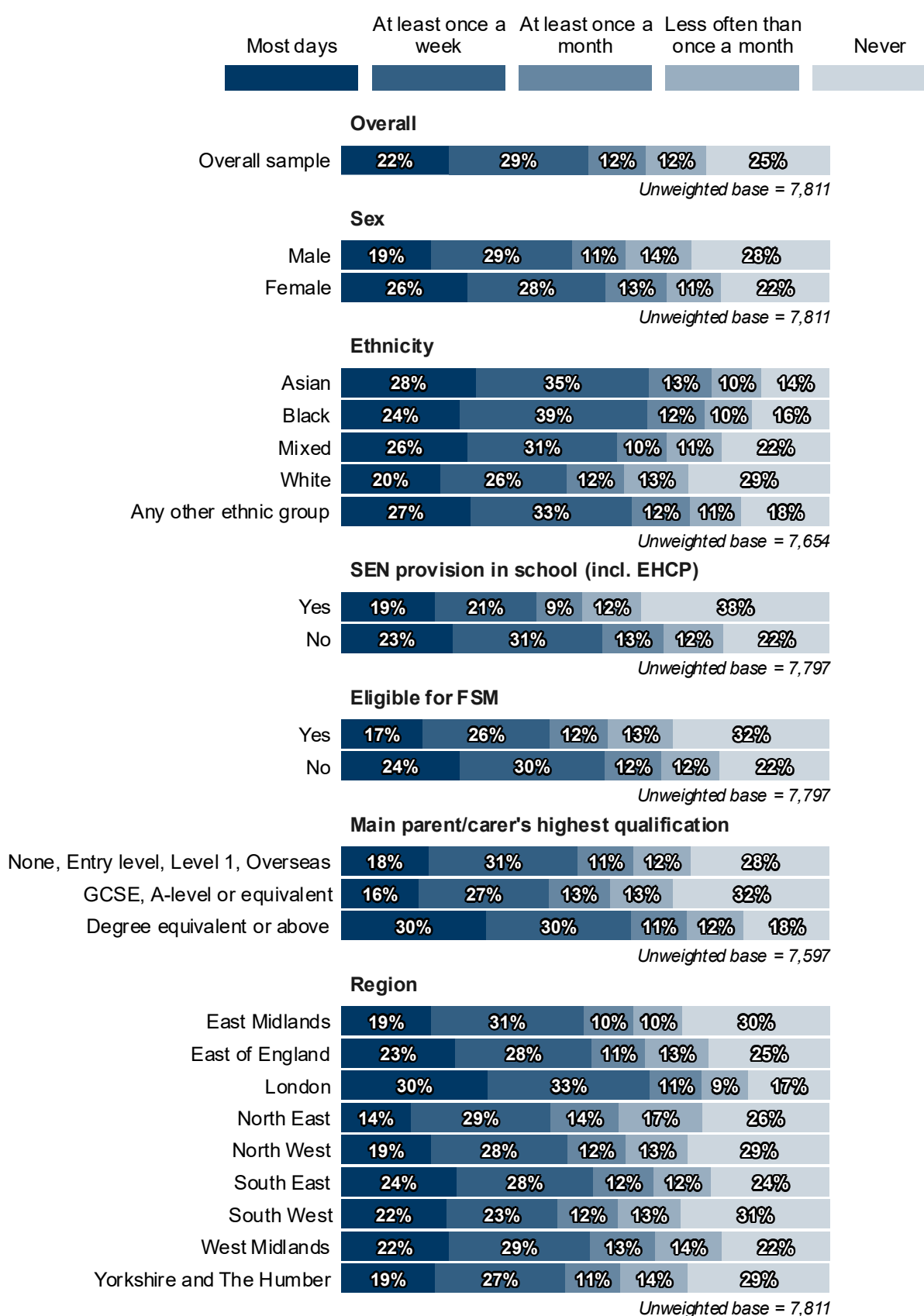


Reading for enjoyment

Alongside participation in termtime activities, young people were asked how often they read for enjoyment. Around one in five (22%) said they read most days, while a similar proportion (25%) said they never read for enjoyment. There were subgroup differences: girls were more likely than boys to report reading most days (26% vs 19%), and young people from Asian (28%) and Mixed (26%) backgrounds also reported higher rates of frequent reading than their White peers (21%). Those with parents educated to degree-equivalent or above were similarly more likely to read most days compared to those with parents with no/entry level and GCSE/A-Level qualifications (30% vs 18%/16%). In contrast, FSM-eligible young people (17% vs 24%) and those with SEN provision (19% vs 23%) were less likely to read most days. Rates of reading for enjoyment 'most days' ranged from 14% in the North East to 30% in London.

Figure 122: Young person reported frequency of reading for enjoyment

How often does Young Person read for enjoyment ?



Self-reported social media usage

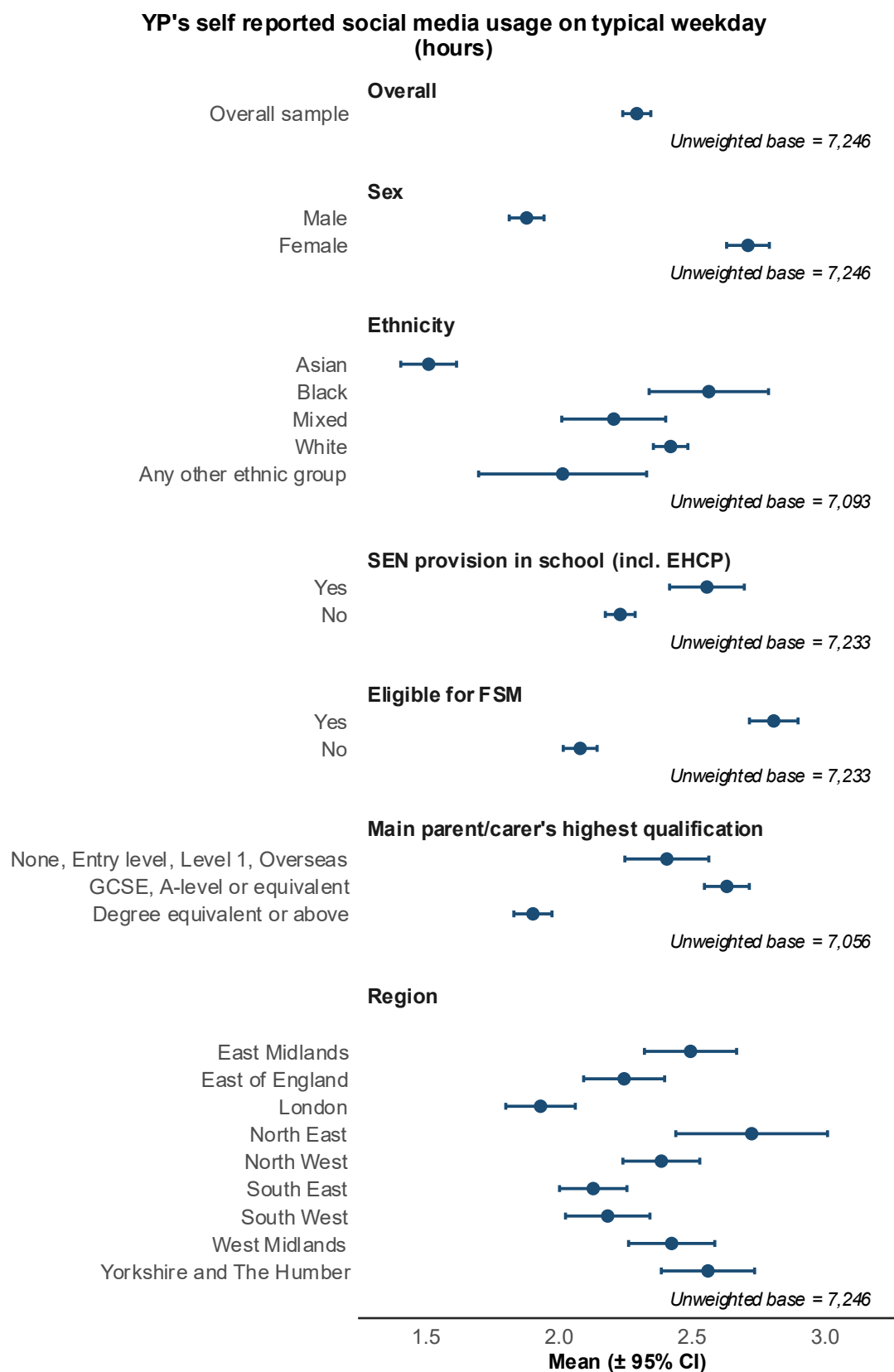
Young people's social media time on their mobile phone on a typical weekday was derived by calculating the midpoint of categories from the social media use question (*"On a normal weekday, how many hours spent on social networking or messaging sites or apps on the internet such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat?"*) and then weighting this value according to how much of that use young people reported taking place on a mobile device (*"How much of this time is on mobile phone (as opposed to a laptop, PC or tablet for example)?"*).

Young people reported spending an average of 2.3 hours per weekday on social media on their mobile phone. Girls reported higher use (2.7 hours) compared with boys (1.9 hours). In terms of ethnicity, reported use was lowest among Asian young people (1.5 hours) and highest among Black young people (2.6 hours). White young people averaged 2.4 hours, with Mixed and young people from 'any other ethnic group' in between (around 2.0-2.2 hours).

FSM-eligible young people reported higher use (2.8 hours) compared with non-FSM peers (2.1 hours). Young people with SEN provision also reported higher use (2.5 hours) compared with those without SEN provision (2.2 hours). Young people with parents with no/entry level and GCSE/A-Level qualifications reported more time spent (2.4/2.6 hours) than those with parents with degree-equivalent qualifications or above (1.9 hours). Regional variation was modest but noticeable. Average use ranged from 1.9 hours in London (lowest) to 2.7 hours in the North East (highest). Other regions clustered between 2.1-2.5 hours.

The first themed report for Growing Up in the 2020s will be dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the Internet Use Sub-study (IUS), which also occurred during wave 1. In the IUS, a subset of young people in the sample were asked to download an app to their mobile phone, which monitored all their internet activity for 28 days. Tracking data from the IUS is a novel element and the first themed report will analyse how internet use relates to young people's experiences and outcomes.

Figure 123: Young person self-reported social media usage on a typical weekday



Impact of COVID-19

Section overview

- The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented disruption to children's everyday lives, with wide-ranging implications for learning, wellbeing, and social development (Viner et al., 2022).
- Evidence suggests that pandemic-related disruptions such as school closures, social isolation, and reduced access to support services had particularly profound effects on children and young people's mental health and educational attainment (Royal Society, 2023).
- Understanding how these impacts have persisted into early adolescence remains an important focus for policy and practice (Office for National Statistics, 2023).
- In this section, parents were asked to reflect on how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their child across three key areas of their lives: academic progress, wellbeing, and social relationships.

Academic progress

- Parents most often reported either mild or no impact on academic progress: 39% said their child had suffered a bit and 39% said there had been no impact.
- A substantial minority were reported to have experienced more serious disruption, with 14% said to have suffered a lot.
- Greater disruption was reported for young people eligible for FSM (23% vs 11% suffered a lot) and especially for those with SEN (34% vs 9%).

Wellbeing

- For wellbeing, parents again most often reported mild or no impact: 34% said their child had suffered a bit and 49% said there had been no impact.
- Around one in ten young people were reported to have suffered a lot in their wellbeing (10%).
- More negative impacts were reported among young people eligible for FSM (14% vs 9% suffered a lot) and among those with SEN (22% vs 7%).

Social relationships

- For social relationships, just over half of parents reported no impact (52%), while 31% said their child had suffered a bit.

- A smaller but notable minority were reported to have suffered a lot in this domain (11%).
- Again, disruption was greater among young people eligible for FSM (16% vs 10% suffered a lot) and among those with SEN (23% vs 9%).

Conclusions

- Overall, parents most often reported that their child experienced either mild or no impact from the pandemic across academic progress, wellbeing, and social relationships.
- However, a substantial minority were perceived to have experienced negative effects, particularly in relation to academic progress, where 14% were reported to have suffered a lot.
- On the other hand, from an inequalities perspective, greater negative impacts were reported for children eligible for FSM and especially for those with SEN, suggesting that the pandemic may have reinforced existing disadvantage.

Across all domains, most parents reported either mild or no impact, but experiences varied across demographic and contextual groups. According to parents, around one in seven young people (14%) had suffered a lot in their overall academic progress, and two-fifths (39%) had suffered a bit. Roughly 39% were reported as not being impacted, while a small proportion were described as having improved (4% improved a bit and 4% improved a lot). With regards to wellbeing, about 10% of children were reported as having suffered a lot, 34% had suffered a bit, and nearly half (49%) were described as not impacted. Small proportions were reported to have improved (3% improved a bit; 3% improved a lot). For social relationships, 11% of children were reported to have suffered a lot, 31% suffered a bit, and 52% were reported as not being impacted. Small proportions were reported as improved (3% improved a bit and 3% improved a lot). Patterns were broadly similar for boys and girls.

Ethnic differences were observed where Asian and Mixed children followed the overall pattern, White children were slightly more likely to be reported by their parent's as mildly negatively impacted on their overall academic progress and wellbeing, but they mirrored the overall sample for social relationship impacts. Parents of young people from Black ethnic backgrounds were consistently more likely to report that COVID-19 had improved the young person's experience a lot compared to White young people in terms of their academic progress (17% vs 2%), wellbeing (16% vs 4%), and social relationships (13% vs 3%). Disadvantage and additional needs were associated with greater perceived

disruption. According to parents, children eligible for FSM were more likely to have suffered a lot (overall academic progress: 23% vs 11%; wellbeing: 14% vs 9%; social relationship: 16% vs 10%). Similarly, based on parent report, young people with SEN were most affected (overall academic progress: 34% vs 9%; wellbeing: 22% vs 7%; social relationship: 23% vs 9%).

Figure 124: Extent to which young person's academic progress affected COVID-19

Extent YP's academic progress been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

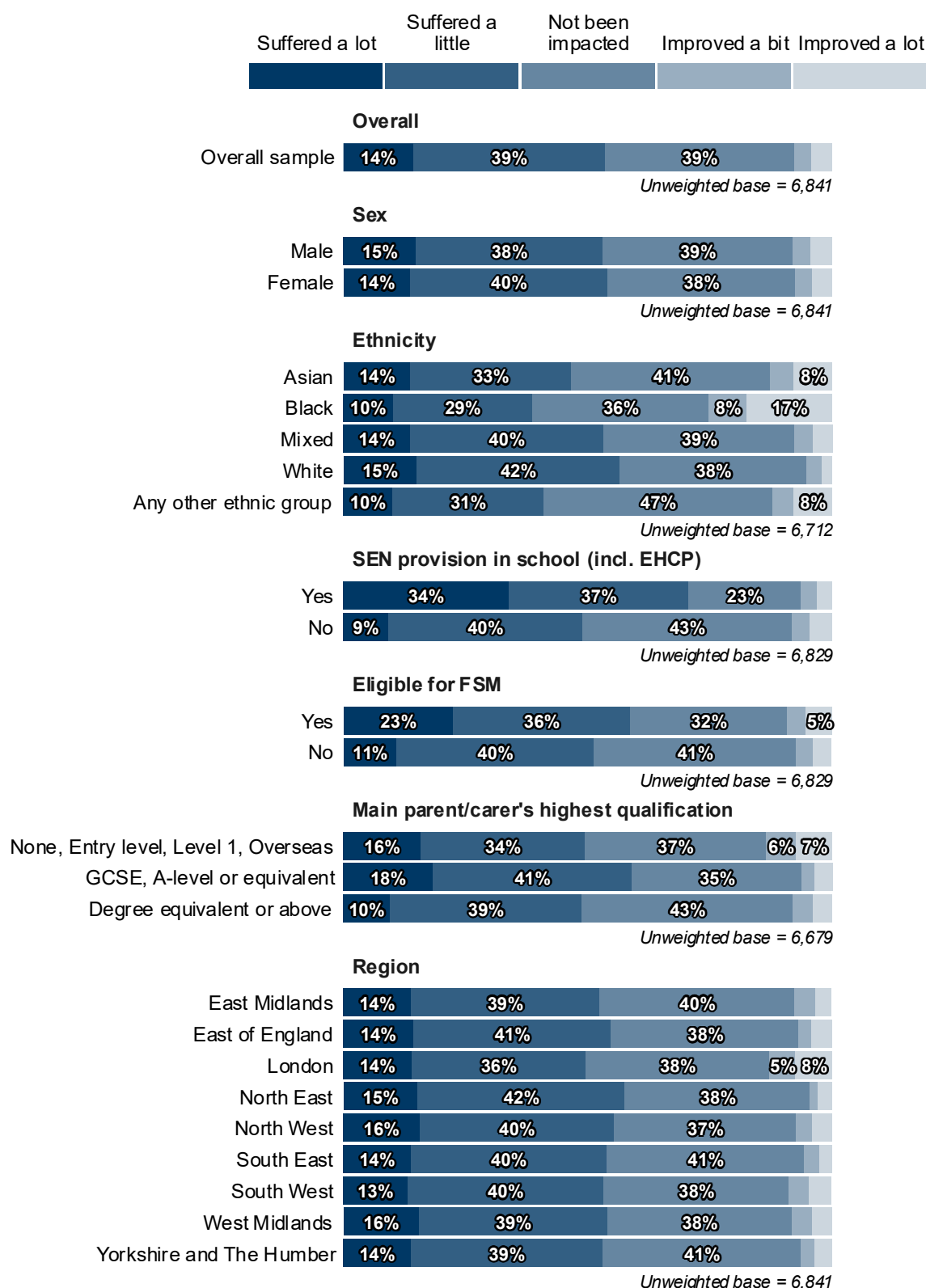


Figure 125: Extent to which young person's wellbeing affected by COVID-19

Extent YP's wellbeing been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

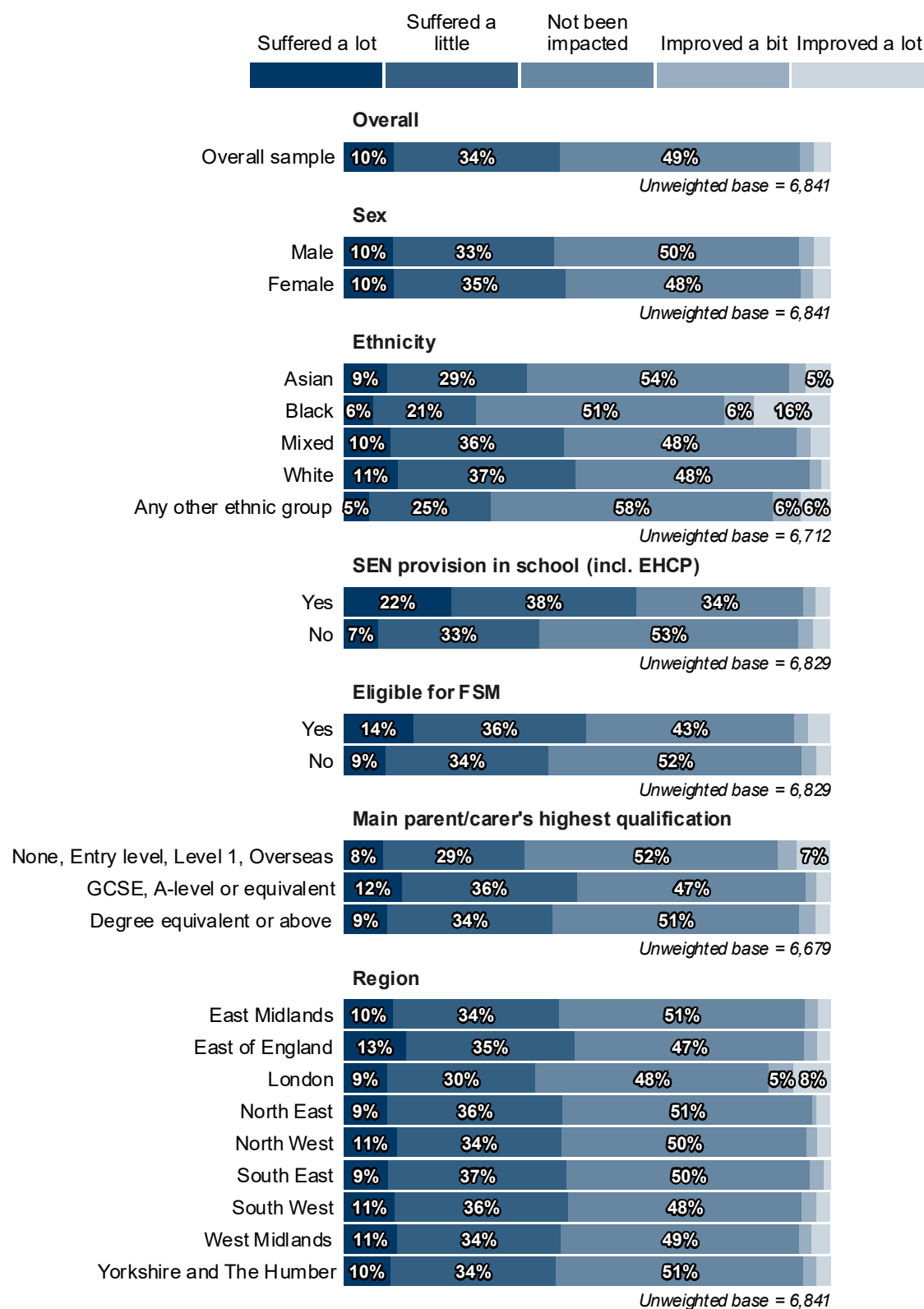
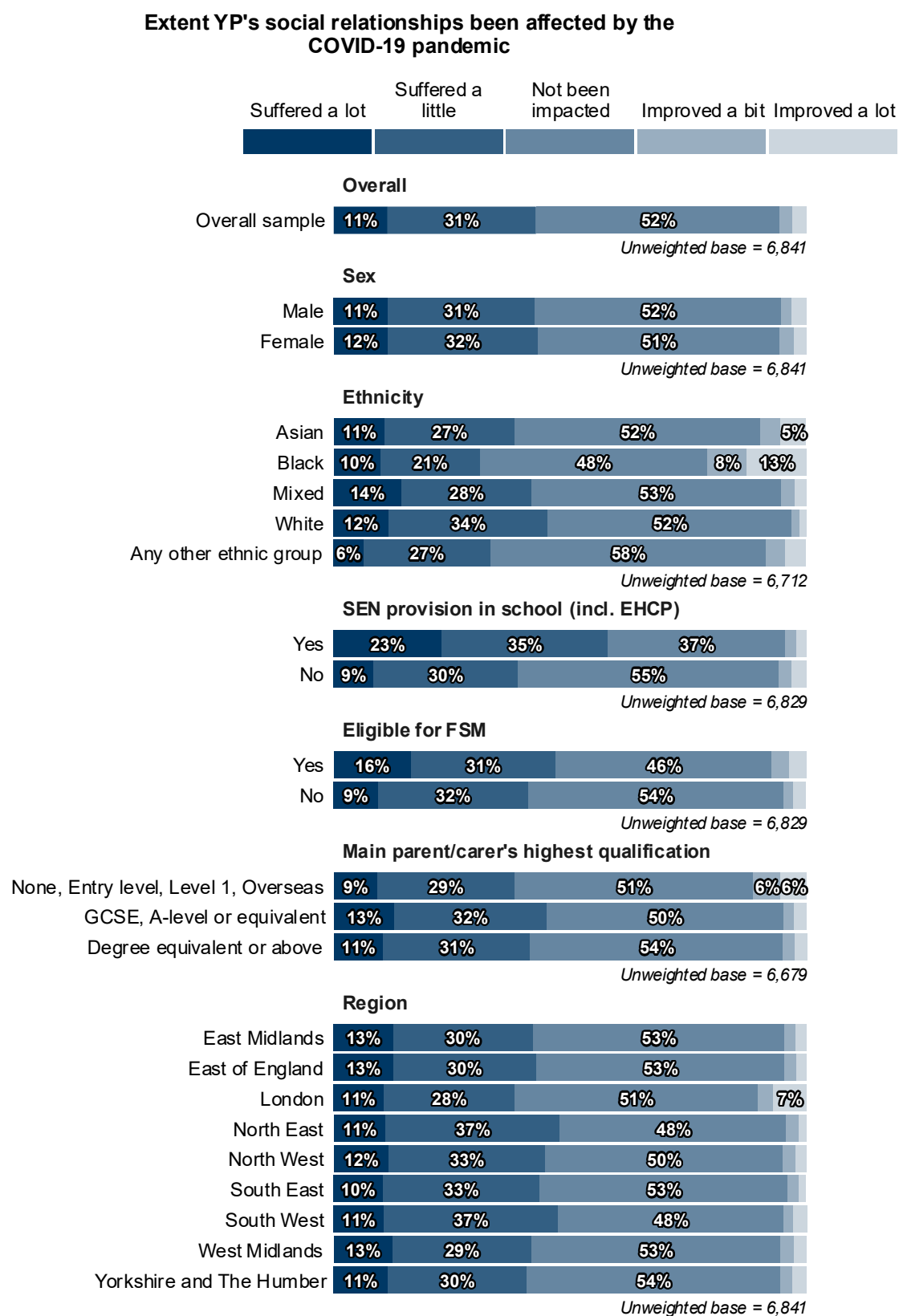


Figure 126: Extent to which young person's social relationships affected by COVID-19



Discussion

Section overview

- Wave 1 of Growing Up in the 2020s establishes a nationally representative baseline of young people at the start of secondary school in England. The cohort reflects the demographic profile of year 8 pupils (aged 12-13 years) while intentional oversampling for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) strengthens the ability to examine how disadvantage shapes experiences and outcomes over time. The sample captures a wide range of family, socioeconomic and educational contexts, providing a robust foundation for longitudinal analysis. Most young people report good relationships with family and peers, positive engagement with school, and typical levels of physical health and prosocial behaviour. However, clear and consistent inequalities are already evident. Differences linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, SEN and prior attainment appear across multiple areas, including mental health, cognitive development, access to resources, school belonging, attendance and peer relationships. These disparities span across home, school and wider environments.
- At the individual level, variation is evident in mental health, physical health behaviours and cognitive functioning. Around one in four young people meet the criteria for a probable mental disorder, with particularly marked for girls, young people with SEN and those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Baseline cognitive assessments also show clear differences by socioeconomic background and prior attainment, providing an important reference point for future learning trajectories. Family and peer contexts remain highly influential. While most young people report supportive family relationships and friendships, disadvantage is associated with greater financial strain, poorer parental mental health, weaker peer support and higher exposure to bullying. Patterns of peer interaction also vary, including differences in in-person and online contact.
- In the school context, most young people report feeling safe and engaged, but disadvantaged pupils, those with SEN and those with lower prior attainment are less likely to report strong belonging and more likely to experience academic difficulty and absence.
- Participation in enrichment activities varies across groups, with disadvantaged young people less likely to access opportunities such as sports or academic clubs. Self-reported social media use is also a key part of daily life, with clear differences by gender, socioeconomic background and SEN status. A minority

of young people continue to experience negative effects of pandemic-related disruption, particularly those already facing disadvantage.

- As a descriptive baseline, this report provides a comprehensive picture of young people's lives at this stage and provides new population estimates. The findings highlight that inequalities are already well established by early adolescence. The longitudinal design of Growing Up in the 2020s is therefore critical: future waves will track how these differences evolve, whether gaps widen or narrow, and which factors support more positive trajectories. In doing so, the study will provide valuable evidence on how educational, family and social contexts interact to shape outcomes across adolescence and into early adulthood.

Key findings

Overview of representativeness and cohort descriptives

A key aim of Wave 1 was to establish a cohort that reflects the diversity of young people entering secondary school in England and is well positioned to examine how experiences and outcomes unfold over time. Overall, the sample closely mirrors the national population across a range of demographic characteristics. The sample included for analysis in this report has a broadly even split of male (51%) and female (49%) young people, consistent with the national population (Office for National Statistics, 2025a). Asking young people to self-describe their gender identity resulted in only a very small shift with 52% identifying as boys, 48% as girls and less than 1% as non-binary or another gender not listed. As expected for a year 8 cohort for the 2024 to 2025 academic year, the vast majority of the cohort were born between 1 September 2011 and 31 August. The ethnic composition of the sample closely matched national census data with 71% being White British, 13% Asian, 7% Black, 7% Mixed/Multiple ethnicity and 2% belonged to another ethnic group. Just over four-fifths (81%) of cohort young people spoke only English at home, and 89% of cohort young people were born in the UK. The cohort had good, proportionate representation of all regions of England (according to ONS data for 2024). Twenty-one percent of young people had identified SEN either with (7%) or without an EHCP (14%). This is slightly higher than the prevalence of SEN within secondary schools nationally of 16.5% but is similar to that for 12-13-year-olds at 20% (Department for Education, 2025d). The study oversampled for free school meal (FSM) eligible young people (47%); however, it is important to note that this oversampling was intentional to ensure that the study is sufficiently powered through in this baseline year and subsequent waves to fully investigate the role of

socioeconomic disadvantage in young people's experiences and outcomes. All analyses presented in the report apply survey weights to account for the intentional oversampling of some groups and differences in response rates across groups, ensuring that findings are representative of the year 8 population in England. The weighting brings this FSM proportion back to 30%, consistent with FSM for this age group (29.2%; Department for Education, 2025f).

Family composition in the study is also broadly in line with national patterns, with 66% of young people living with both biological parents, 24% in lone-parent households, and a smaller proportion in stepfamilies. Taken together, these characteristics indicate that the cohort provides a strong foundation for understanding the varied contexts in which young people are growing up at the start of secondary school.

Importantly, this baseline composition has implications for what the study will be able to achieve in future waves. The combination of national coverage and the intentional inclusion of higher numbers of disadvantaged young people means the study is well positioned to examine how inequalities emerge and develop over time. It will allow robust analysis of how socio-economic circumstances, special educational needs (SEN), family context and other characteristics interact with school experiences, wellbeing and attainment as young people move through adolescence. As the study progresses, this will support a clearer understanding of which early experiences matter most for later outcomes, for whom, and at what stages.

Overview of research findings

Several important patterns emerge from this first wave of Growing Up in the 2020s. First, while many young people report generally positive health, relationships and engagement with school, there are already clear and consistent differences linked to socio-economic disadvantage, SEN, prior attainment and, in some areas, sex and ethnicity. These differences are evident across multiple domains, including physical health, sleep, mental health, access to learning resources, school belonging, attendance, and parental health and financial strain. Findings, therefore, suggest that inequalities are not confined to single aspects of young people's lives but span home, school and wider environments. A significant minority of families also reported experiences of financial strain, including difficulty affording essentials or worries about household finances, reinforcing the extent of socioeconomic variation captured within the cohort.

Young person

At the level of the individual, variation was evident in mental health and wellbeing, physical health behaviours and cognitive development. Differences by socioeconomic background were already apparent, suggesting that disparities in wellbeing and learning-related capabilities are present at the point of entry into secondary education. Of particular note were findings relating to young people's mental health difficulties where analyses suggest that around one in four young people (25%) met criteria for a probable mental disorder. This represents a substantial proportion of young people experiencing significant levels of difficulty and is slightly higher than recent national prevalence estimates for children of a similar age in England, which suggested rates of just over one in five among young people of equivalent age (aged 13; NHS Digital, 2023b). While this aged comparison sample is quite small compared to EOPS, the wider age group involved in this previous study of 11-16-year-olds also showed a prevalence of around one in five for probable mental disorder so the EOPS figure of one in four represents a substantively greater prevalence than previously estimated. While comparisons between studies should be interpreted cautiously because of differences in methodology and sampling, the large Growing Up in the 2020s cohort provides particularly strong baseline estimates for this specific age group at the start of secondary school. As noted in the recent interim report for the independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism (Department of Health and Social Care, 2026), a range of prevalence studies have noted increasing rates of young people scoring above established thresholds on measures such as the SDQ and these do speak to an escalation of psychological distress in young people over an extended period of time (approximately 20 years). These findings highlight the substantial proportion of adolescents experiencing mental health difficulties. Disparities were also observed across a range of characteristics; with prevalence rates higher among girls, young people with SEN, White young people, those with eligible or FSM, and those from lower parental education backgrounds.

This first wave also provided a useful baseline in terms of cognitive development, establishing a profile of cognitive ability at baseline provides an important reference point for understanding how young people's learning and development unfold over time. It allows future waves of the study to examine how early differences relate to later educational attainment, engagement with school, subject choices and progression through educational stages. It also makes it possible to explore how cognitive development interacts with other aspects of young people's lives, such as mental health, motivation and attendance. Because at this baseline stage, differences are already evident by socioeconomic background and prior attainment, the study is well

positioned to investigate whether these gaps widen, narrow or remain stable as young people move through secondary school, and what factors may help to mitigate them.

Family and peers

The findings relating to family life highlight the central role of the family environment, even at this stage of development where young people develop more autonomy, and peers begin to become a more important social reference point. Most young people reported supportive family relationships, but there were clear differences linked to socioeconomic circumstances. Financial strain, parental mental health challenges and lower levels of parental education were more common in disadvantaged households, and these factors were associated with differences in young people's wellbeing, sleep and access to learning resources.

Focusing on mental health specifically, most parents and carers in the cohort were not experiencing high levels of depression or anxiety, and overall levels appear slightly higher than EOPS Primary prevalence rates (albeit on slightly different measures) but slightly lower than other recent UK benchmarks for adults. Similar to EOPS Primary, findings show clear social gradients, with parents in financially disadvantaged households and those with lower levels of education report poorer mental health on average. This indicates that inequalities in parental mental health and wellbeing are present well before the start of secondary school. Because parental mental health is closely linked to children's emotional wellbeing, engagement with school and longer-term outcomes (Kamis, 2021), it is one of many mechanisms through which disparities in outcomes may be conveyed to young people.

Peer relationships were also an important feature of young people's experiences, with most reporting positive friendships, but a minority describing difficulties such as social exclusion or bullying. Again, disparities in experiences of peers were observed, with young people eligible for FSM, those with SEN and those from households with lower parental education reporting lower perceived peer support and acceptance on average. They were also more likely to report experiences of bullying or social exclusion and more likely to report more polarised social contact, with higher rates of both daily and no contact. Differences were also visible by gender and ethnicity in the nature of peer interaction, including patterns of online versus face-to-face contact.

School and education

Young people's experiences of school were generally positive, with many reporting a sense of belonging, safety and engagement with learning. However, differences were

already evident at the start of secondary school. Disadvantaged young people, those with SEN and those with lower prior attainment were less likely to report strong school belonging and were more likely to report absence, perceived academic difficulty and lower access to study resources at home. Teacher-reported indicators and attainment-related measures reflected similar disparities.

These patterns, consistent with EOPS Primary findings, suggest that variation in engagement and opportunity is already present from the outset of secondary education and likely before – during the primary school years. However, subsequent waves will be able to shed further light on how these experiences change and potentially diverge over the secondary school years.

Wider context and influences

Young people's experiences outside school, including activities, self-reported social media use and broader socioeconomic conditions, also differed across groups. Financial insecurity, access to opportunities beyond school and the continuing influence of pandemic-related disruption formed part of the wider context shaping development. These broader conditions interact with family and school environments, contributing to cumulative advantage or disadvantage over time.

Patterns in young people's activities point to clear differences in opportunity and experience. Participation in sports, academic clubs and reading for enjoyment was lower among young people with SEN and those eligible for FSM, while gaming was similar or higher.

Social media use formed a substantial part of young people's daily lives. Average self-reported social media use was around 2.3 hours per weekday, with higher use among girls, young people with SEN, those eligible for FSM, Black young people and those with parents with lower levels of education. Together, these findings indicate high levels of engagement in leisure activities alongside clear variation by gender, socioeconomic background, SEN status and ethnicity.

In terms of experience of the pandemic, parents reported that while most young people experienced limited lasting effects from the pandemic, a notable minority continued to show negative impacts on learning, wellbeing and relationships. These effects were more common among socioeconomically disadvantaged young people and those with SEN.

Taken together, the baseline findings for these wider spheres of experience highlight inequalities in access to enrichment opportunities, patterns of self-reported social media use and the ongoing effects of pandemic disruption. As the study progresses, these factors will be important for understanding how experiences outside school interact with family and school contexts to shape engagement, wellbeing and educational trajectories over time.

Study strengths and considerations for future waves

Growing Up in the 2020s builds on previous large scale longitudinal research on young people in England (e.g., LSYPE, LSYPE2 and the Millennium Cohort Study), and responds to a need for updated evidence for young people growing up in the 2020s. Adolescence in the 2020s is unfolding in a markedly different context from even a decade ago, shaped by rising mental health need, widespread social media use, rapid technological advances and the longer-term consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study therefore provides a timely baseline for understanding how this generation is navigating secondary school and how experiences at this stage may shape later outcomes.

The study has several notable strengths. It has recruited a large cohort of nearly 8,000 young people and their families, enabling robust subgroup analysis and detailed examination of inequalities. The sample is nationally representative and was intentionally designed to support robust analysis of socioeconomic disadvantage through the oversampling of young people eligible for FSM. The cohort also includes strong representation of young people with SEN, placing the study in a strong position to examine how disadvantage and educational need shape experiences and trajectories over time. Weighting has been applied to ensure that baseline estimates are representative of the year 8 population in England.

A further strength is the multi-informant design, which combines perspectives from young people, parents and teachers. This provides a more rounded picture of adolescents' lives across home and school contexts and reduces reliance on any single source of information and is further strengthened by the linkage to the National Pupil Database (NPD) for administrative records around pupil characteristics, attendance, exclusion and academic attainment.

Importantly, Wave 1 also provides robust contemporary population estimates across a wide range of domains, including mental health, sleep, self-reported social media use, school experiences and family context, many of which are not routinely available together within a single nationally representative dataset for this age group. Establishing

this descriptive baseline is a central purpose of the study and provides an important reference point against which future developmental trajectories and changes over time can be examined.

There are, however, important limitations to acknowledge. Teacher survey data are also available for a smaller subset of the cohort, which may limit comparability across informants and reduce precision for some teacher-reported analyses at baseline. As future waves are collected, maintaining participation across different respondent groups will remain an important consideration for preserving representativeness and analytical power.

As with all self-reported data, responses may be affected by recall error, social desirability and under-reporting, particularly for sensitive topics such as substance use and mental health difficulties. However, the study design partially mitigates this through the use of multiple informants, linkage to administrative data, and objective measures in selected domains.

Interpreting comparisons to other data sources

Throughout this report, comparisons have been made with other major datasets on young people in England such as NHS Digital surveys, Understanding Society and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study. These comparisons are intended to help situate the Growing Up in the 2020s baseline within the wider evidence base and to provide context for interpreting levels and patterns observed in the data.

However, such comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Differences in study design, sampling strategies, timing of data collection and measurement instruments can all influence observed estimates. In particular, variation in question wording, response options, data collection modes and the broader context in which data were collected (including pre- and post-pandemic periods) may affect how findings align across studies. In addition, some comparator datasets also involve smaller samples or differ in representativeness and weighting procedures, which may further limit direct comparability.

For these reasons, comparisons presented throughout this report are intended primarily to identify broad consistencies or divergences rather than precise differences in prevalence or magnitude. They should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of change over time unless supported by harmonised measures and closely aligned methodologies.

Implications for future waves

The first wave of Growing Up in the 2020s sets out a detailed starting point for tracking this cohort through the remainder of their secondary education. As additional waves are collected, the study will be able to move beyond description to examine how trajectories in wellbeing, attainment, engagement and aspirations evolve, and how these are shaped by experiences at home, in school and in wider social contexts. The design is particularly well suited to exploring how disadvantage operates over time, including the ways in which financial strain, SEN, family circumstances and school environments interact to influence outcomes.

The longitudinal nature of the study will allow examination of differential trajectories (i.e., whether early differences widen, stabilise or diminish) and of the factors that support resilience and positive development. The robust representation of FSM-eligible young people provides a solid basis for analysing socioeconomic inequalities, though ongoing participation and retention will be important to maintaining this strength.

Linkage to administrative records, including attainment and attendance data, will become more important in the longer term as survey data can be linked to attendance and attainment in the GCSE years. Over time, this will enable deeper investigation of the patterns identified in this baseline report, specifically those relating to disadvantage, school engagement and wellbeing, and how they relate to later educational and life trajectories.

Conclusions

The first wave of Growing Up in the 2020s provides a detailed and contemporary snapshot of young people's lives at the start of secondary school in England. Young people's experiences across family life, peer relationships and school were varied. Although many reported positive experiences, clear inequalities were already evident across wellbeing, mental health, school engagement and access to resources, particularly for young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and those with SEN. The study provides robust contemporary estimates across a range of domains that are not routinely captured together within a single nationally representative dataset for this age group.

Next steps

The first themed report will be dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the Internet Use Sub-study (IUS), which occurred during wave 1. In the IUS, a subset of young people in the sample were asked to download an app to their mobile phone, which monitored all their internet activity for 28 days. Tracking data from the IUS is a novel element and the first themed report will analyse how internet use relates to young people's experiences and outcomes.

The next steps for this study are the collection of Wave 2 data while the cohort young people are in Year 9, and the planning of the subsequent waves of data collection for Waves 3 and 4. A full breakdown of planned activity against waves is provided in Table 26.

Table 26: Planned waves

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Waveless year	Wave 3	Wave 4
Age of young person	12-13 years	13-14 years	14-15 years	15-16 years	16-17 years
School year	8	9	10	11	12
Participants involved	YP Parent A (Main parent/carer) Parent B Teacher	YP Parent A	None	YP Parent A Teacher	YP Parent A Parent B
Mode	Face-to-face	Online (telephone follow-up)	None	Online (telephone follow-up)	Online Face-to-face follow up

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Appendix

SDQ YP reported total difficulties 4-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7775	62.3	61.2	63.5	13.4	12.6	14.2	7.4	6.8	8.0	16.9	16.1	17.8
Sex: Male	3965	67.9	66.4	69.5	12.6	11.6	13.8	6.7	5.9	7.5	12.8	11.7	13.9
Sex: Female	3810	56.5	54.8	58.1	14.2	13.0	15.4	8.1	7.2	9.0	21.3	20.0	22.7
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	77.9	75.2	80.4	11.0	9.1	13.1	3.8	2.8	5.1	7.3	5.9	9.1
Ethnicity: Black	605	72.4	68.3	76.0	10.5	8.1	13.4	6.5	4.6	8.9	10.7	8.4	13.7
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	66.5	62.2	70.6	14.0	11.2	17.5	4.9	3.4	7.1	14.5	11.6	17.9
Ethnicity: White	5149	57.6	56.2	59.1	14.2	13.2	15.3	8.5	7.7	9.3	19.6	18.5	20.8
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	69.9	63.1	75.9	10.2	6.7	15.3	5.9	3.4	9.9	14.0	9.8	19.6
SEND Status: Yes	1741	41.9	39.4	44.5	17.3	15.5	19.4	10.9	9.4	12.6	29.8	27.6	32.2
SEND Status: No	6020	67.8	66.5	69.0	12.3	11.5	13.2	6.4	5.8	7.1	13.5	12.6	14.4
FSM: Yes	3601	51.5	49.8	53.2	14.2	13.1	15.5	8.9	8.0	9.9	25.3	23.9	26.8
FSM: No	4160	66.9	65.4	68.3	13.0	12.0	14.1	6.7	6.0	7.5	13.4	12.3	14.5
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1073	60.2	57.0	63.4	10.8	8.9	13.0	8.6	6.9	10.5	20.4	18.0	23.1
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	55.3	53.6	57.1	14.9	13.7	16.2	8.4	7.5	9.4	21.4	20.0	22.9
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	70.4	68.7	72.1	12.2	11.0	13.5	6.0	5.2	6.9	11.4	10.2	12.6
Region: East Midlands	703	59.2	55.3	63.0	14.4	11.9	17.5	7.2	5.4	9.6	19.1	16.2	22.3
Region: East of England	811	61.4	57.8	64.9	13.6	11.3	16.3	6.6	5.0	8.6	18.4	15.8	21.3
Region: London	1086	70.5	67.5	73.4	14.4	12.2	16.9	5.6	4.4	7.3	9.5	7.7	11.5

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
Region: North East	361	60.7	55.3	65.9	12.0	8.9	16.0	7.0	4.8	10.3	20.2	16.2	24.9
Region: North West	1154	62.6	59.5	65.5	13.1	11.1	15.3	6.9	5.5	8.7	17.5	15.3	19.9
Region: South East	1113	61.3	58.2	64.3	13.5	11.5	15.8	8.2	6.7	10.1	16.9	14.7	19.4
Region: South West	733	55.9	52.1	59.7	14.9	12.4	17.8	9.3	7.3	11.8	19.9	17.0	23.1
Region: West Midlands	930	63.3	60.0	66.6	11.5	9.5	13.9	7.9	6.2	10.0	17.3	14.9	20.0
Region: Yorkshire	884	61.2	57.8	64.6	12.3	10.2	14.7	7.7	6.1	9.7	18.8	16.2	21.6

SDQ YP reported emotional difficulties 4-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7777	67.6	66.5	68.7	10.7	10.0	11.4	7.8	7.2	8.4	13.9	13.1	14.8
Sex: Male	3967	78.9	77.5	80.2	9.3	8.4	10.3	5.5	4.8	6.3	6.4	5.6	7.2
Sex: Female	3810	55.8	54.1	57.5	12.1	11.0	13.3	10.2	9.2	11.3	21.9	20.5	23.3
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	78.2	75.5	80.7	9.2	7.5	11.2	5.3	4.1	6.9	7.3	5.8	9.1
Ethnicity: Black	605	74.7	70.8	78.3	9.2	7.0	12.0	5.8	4.0	8.3	10.3	8.0	13.2
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	72.8	68.6	76.6	9.0	6.8	11.9	6.5	4.6	9.0	11.7	9.1	15.0
Ethnicity: White	5151	64.1	62.7	65.5	11.4	10.5	12.3	8.7	7.9	9.5	15.9	14.9	16.9
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	75.7	69.3	81.2	8.5	5.5	12.9	5.5	3.1	9.5	10.3	6.7	15.5
SEND Status: Yes	1743	59.2	56.7	61.7	12.6	11.0	14.4	9.9	8.5	11.5	18.2	16.4	20.3
SEND Status: No	6020	69.9	68.6	71.1	10.1	9.4	11.0	7.2	6.5	7.9	12.8	11.9	13.7
FSM: Yes	3603	61.5	59.8	63.1	12.0	10.9	13.1	8.9	8.0	9.9	17.6	16.4	18.9
FSM: No	4160	70.2	68.8	71.6	10.1	9.2	11.1	7.3	6.5	8.1	12.4	11.4	13.5
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1075	67.4	64.3	70.4	11.3	9.3	13.6	8.2	6.6	10.1	13.1	11.2	15.4

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	64.0	62.3	65.7	11.0	10.0	12.2	8.3	7.4	9.3	16.6	15.3	18.0
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	71.3	69.5	72.9	10.2	9.1	11.4	7.1	6.2	8.1	11.5	10.3	12.8
Region: East Midlands	703	65.3	61.5	68.9	11.8	9.5	14.6	7.5	5.7	9.8	15.4	12.8	18.4
Region: East of England	811	65.8	62.2	69.1	11.1	9.0	13.5	7.2	5.6	9.2	16.0	13.5	18.9
Region: London	1086	73.7	70.8	76.5	9.1	7.4	11.2	7.3	5.8	9.1	9.9	8.1	11.9
Region: North East	361	66.0	60.7	71.0	11.4	8.5	15.3	9.5	6.8	13.2	13.0	9.7	17.3
Region: North West	1156	69.7	66.8	72.4	10.1	8.4	12.1	7.0	5.6	8.8	13.3	11.4	15.5
Region: South East	1113	66.3	63.3	69.2	10.8	9.0	12.8	7.8	6.3	9.6	15.2	13.1	17.5
Region: South West	733	62.4	58.6	66.0	10.7	8.6	13.3	10.0	7.9	12.6	16.9	14.2	20.0
Region: West Midlands	930	67.9	64.6	71.0	10.7	8.8	13.0	8.2	6.5	10.3	13.3	11.2	15.7
Region: Yorkshire	884	67.6	64.2	70.8	11.8	9.8	14.2	7.1	5.4	9.1	13.5	11.3	16.1

SDQ YP reported conduct difficulties 4-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7777	76.5	75.4	77.4	10.5	9.8	11.2	6.4	5.8	7.0	6.7	6.1	7.3
Sex: Male	3967	76.0	74.6	77.4	10.5	9.5	11.6	6.7	5.9	7.6	6.8	6.0	7.6
Sex: Female	3810	76.9	75.5	78.3	10.4	9.4	11.5	6.0	5.3	6.9	6.6	5.9	7.5
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	85.4	83.0	87.5	7.7	6.1	9.5	3.9	2.9	5.3	3.0	2.1	4.3
Ethnicity: Black	605	76.9	73.1	80.4	8.4	6.3	11.1	7.0	5.1	9.6	7.6	5.6	10.3
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	77.2	73.3	80.7	8.8	6.6	11.7	7.9	5.9	10.6	6.1	4.3	8.6
Ethnicity: White	5151	74.7	73.4	75.9	11.5	10.6	12.4	6.5	5.9	7.3	7.3	6.6	8.0
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	74.7	68.2	80.3	10.0	6.6	14.8	8.2	5.1	12.9	7.2	4.3	11.8
SEND Status: Yes	1743	62.0	59.5	64.4	14.1	12.4	16.0	10.5	9.1	12.1	13.4	11.8	15.2

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
SEND Status: No	6020	80.4	79.3	81.4	9.5	8.7	10.3	5.3	4.7	5.9	4.9	4.4	5.5
FSM: Yes	3603	66.3	64.7	67.9	12.6	11.5	13.8	10.5	9.5	11.7	10.5	9.5	11.6
FSM: No	4160	80.8	79.5	82.0	9.5	8.6	10.5	4.6	4.0	5.3	5.1	4.4	5.8
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1075	70.9	67.9	73.8	10.0	8.2	12.0	9.6	7.9	11.7	9.5	7.7	11.5
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	71.7	70.1	73.2	12.2	11.1	13.4	7.7	6.8	8.7	8.4	7.5	9.4
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	83.1	81.6	84.4	8.7	7.7	9.8	4.1	3.4	4.9	4.1	3.5	5.0
Region: East Midlands	703	74.8	71.3	78.0	11.0	8.7	13.8	6.9	5.2	9.1	7.3	5.6	9.5
Region: East of England	811	76.5	73.4	79.4	12.8	10.5	15.4	5.4	4.0	7.2	5.3	4.0	7.1
Region: London	1086	79.9	77.2	82.3	9.4	7.7	11.5	6.2	4.8	8.0	4.4	3.3	5.9
Region: North East	361	76.5	71.6	80.8	6.6	4.4	9.9	5.8	3.8	8.8	11.1	8.1	15.0
Region: North West	1156	75.5	72.8	78.0	9.7	8.0	11.7	6.6	5.3	8.2	8.2	6.7	10.0
Region: South East	1113	76.2	73.5	78.7	11.3	9.5	13.4	5.9	4.6	7.5	6.6	5.2	8.3
Region: South West	733	77.3	74.0	80.3	10.9	8.7	13.5	5.5	4.0	7.4	6.3	4.7	8.4
Region: West Midlands	930	75.3	72.3	78.1	9.9	8.1	12.2	7.5	5.9	9.5	7.2	5.7	9.2
Region: Yorkshire	884	75.1	72.0	78.0	10.7	8.7	13.0	7.5	5.9	9.6	6.7	5.2	8.6

SDQ YP reported hyperactivity and inattention 4-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7776	59.7	58.5	60.8	11.3	10.6	12.1	9.7	9.0	10.4	19.3	18.4	20.2
Sex: Male	3966	61.0	59.4	62.6	11.6	10.5	12.7	9.7	8.7	10.7	17.7	16.5	19.0
Sex: Female	3810	58.2	56.6	59.9	11.1	10.1	12.2	9.7	8.8	10.8	21.0	19.6	22.4

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	80.9	78.4	83.2	7.2	5.7	8.9	6.4	5.1	8.1	5.5	4.3	7.0
Ethnicity: Black	605	69.9	65.8	73.7	11.2	8.8	14.2	7.2	5.2	9.8	11.7	9.2	14.8
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	64.4	60.0	68.6	12.2	9.5	15.5	6.3	4.4	8.9	17.1	14.0	20.6
Ethnicity: White	5150	53.8	52.4	55.3	12.2	11.3	13.2	11.0	10.1	11.9	23.0	21.8	24.2
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	70.0	63.2	75.9	9.7	6.3	14.6	6.8	4.0	11.4	13.5	9.6	18.8
SEND Status: Yes	1742	42.7	40.2	45.3	14.2	12.5	16.1	11.2	9.7	12.9	31.8	29.5	34.2
SEND Status: No	6020	64.2	62.9	65.5	10.6	9.8	11.4	9.3	8.5	10.1	15.9	15.0	16.9
FSM: Yes	3602	51.3	49.6	53.0	12.8	11.7	13.9	11.0	10.0	12.2	24.9	23.5	26.4
FSM: No	4160	63.2	61.7	64.7	10.8	9.8	11.7	9.1	8.3	10.1	16.9	15.8	18.1
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1074	62.5	59.4	65.6	10.0	8.2	12.0	9.7	8.0	11.8	17.8	15.5	20.4
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	52.9	51.2	54.7	12.2	11.1	13.4	10.7	9.7	11.9	24.1	22.6	25.6
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	65.9	64.1	67.7	10.8	9.7	12.0	8.7	7.7	9.8	14.6	13.3	16.0
Region: East Midlands	703	58.9	55.0	62.7	11.8	9.5	14.6	12.2	9.8	15.0	17.2	14.5	20.3
Region: East of England	811	55.1	51.5	58.7	12.3	10.1	14.9	9.5	7.5	11.8	23.1	20.2	26.3
Region: London	1086	70.5	67.5	73.4	9.7	8.0	11.7	7.9	6.3	9.9	11.8	9.9	14.1
Region: North East	361	55.5	50.0	60.8	14.5	11.0	18.8	9.7	6.9	13.5	20.3	16.3	25.0
Region: North West	1155	60.3	57.2	63.2	10.7	8.9	12.7	9.0	7.4	11.0	20.0	17.7	22.6
Region: South East	1113	56.8	53.7	59.8	11.8	9.9	13.9	10.7	8.9	12.7	20.8	18.4	23.4
Region: South West	733	56.1	52.3	59.9	10.9	8.7	13.5	10.7	8.6	13.3	22.3	19.3	25.6
Region: West Midlands	930	60.4	57.0	63.7	12.2	10.1	14.6	8.5	6.8	10.6	18.9	16.3	21.7
Region: Yorkshire	884	57.9	54.4	61.4	10.4	8.5	12.7	10.2	8.3	12.5	21.4	18.7	24.5

SDQ YP reported peer difficulties 4-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7776	64.8	63.7	65.9	14.4	13.5	15.2	9.3	8.6	10.0	11.5	10.8	12.3
Sex: Male	3966	66.9	65.3	68.5	14.2	13.1	15.4	8.7	7.8	9.7	10.2	9.2	11.2
Sex: Female	3810	62.6	60.9	64.2	14.5	13.4	15.8	9.9	8.9	10.9	13.0	11.9	14.1
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	69.8	66.8	72.7	13.3	11.2	15.6	7.4	5.9	9.3	9.5	7.8	11.5
Ethnicity: Black	605	72.7	68.7	76.4	11.8	9.4	14.9	6.5	4.7	9.0	8.9	6.7	11.8
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	68.6	64.3	72.7	10.7	8.2	13.9	8.8	6.7	11.6	11.8	9.1	15.2
Ethnicity: White	5150	62.8	61.4	64.2	15.1	14.1	16.2	10.0	9.2	10.9	12.1	11.2	13.1
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	62.0	54.8	68.8	16.5	11.7	22.7	10.4	6.7	15.8	11.0	7.2	16.4
SEND Status: Yes	1742	46.3	43.8	48.9	17.5	15.7	19.5	13.8	12.1	15.7	22.4	20.3	24.5
SEND Status: No	6020	69.8	68.5	71.0	13.5	12.6	14.5	8.1	7.4	8.8	8.6	7.9	9.4
FSM: Yes	3602	57.0	55.3	58.7	15.6	14.4	16.9	10.7	9.7	11.8	16.7	15.5	18.1
FSM: No	4160	68.1	66.6	69.5	13.9	12.8	15.0	8.7	7.9	9.6	9.3	8.4	10.3
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1074	59.8	56.5	62.9	14.8	12.6	17.4	11.9	9.9	14.3	13.5	11.5	15.8
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	60.4	58.7	62.1	16.1	14.8	17.4	10.4	9.4	11.5	13.1	12.0	14.3
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	71.0	69.3	72.7	12.5	11.3	13.8	7.1	6.2	8.2	9.4	8.3	10.5
Region: East Midlands	703	62.1	58.2	65.8	13.3	10.8	16.2	10.5	8.3	13.2	14.2	11.6	17.2
Region: East of England	811	68.0	64.6	71.3	12.0	9.9	14.6	8.5	6.7	10.7	11.4	9.3	13.9
Region: London	1086	69.8	66.8	72.7	14.8	12.6	17.3	6.4	5.0	8.2	9.0	7.3	11.0
Region: North East	361	64.7	59.3	69.8	12.4	9.2	16.4	10.4	7.5	14.4	12.5	9.3	16.5
Region: North West	1155	64.2	61.1	67.1	15.2	13.1	17.6	8.5	6.9	10.4	12.1	10.3	14.2

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Close to average			Slightly raised			High			Very high		
Region: South East	1113	64.0	61.0	66.9	16.3	14.1	18.7	9.4	7.8	11.4	10.3	8.6	12.3
Region: South West	733	60.4	56.7	64.1	14.9	12.4	17.8	11.3	9.1	14.0	13.3	11.0	16.1
Region: West Midlands	930	62.1	58.8	65.4	16.0	13.6	18.7	10.7	8.8	13.0	11.2	9.2	13.5
Region: Yorkshire	884	65.7	62.3	69.0	11.7	9.6	14.1	10.1	8.1	12.4	12.6	10.5	15.0

SDQ YP reported total difficulties 3-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7775	67.3	66.2	68.4	15.8	14.9	16.7	16.9	16.1	17.8
Sex: Male	3965	72.6	71.1	74.1	14.6	13.5	15.8	12.8	11.7	13.9
Sex: Female	3810	61.7	60.0	63.3	17.0	15.8	18.3	21.3	20.0	22.7
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	82.1	79.6	84.4	10.6	8.8	12.6	7.3	5.9	9.1
Ethnicity: Black	605	75.8	71.9	79.3	13.5	10.8	16.7	10.7	8.4	13.7
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	71.7	67.4	75.5	13.9	11.1	17.3	14.5	11.6	17.9
Ethnicity: White	5149	62.8	61.4	64.2	17.5	16.5	18.7	19.6	18.5	20.8
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	76.4	70.1	81.8	9.5	6.3	14.1	14.0	9.8	19.6
SEND Status: Yes	1741	48.2	45.7	50.8	22.0	19.9	24.1	29.8	27.6	32.2
SEND Status: No	6020	72.4	71.2	73.6	14.1	13.2	15.1	13.5	12.6	14.4
FSM: Yes	3601	56.7	55.0	58.3	18.0	16.7	19.4	25.3	23.9	26.8
FSM: No	4160	71.8	70.3	73.1	14.9	13.8	16.0	13.4	12.3	14.5
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1073	64.6	61.5	67.6	15.0	12.8	17.4	20.4	18.0	23.1
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	60.3	58.6	62.1	18.3	16.9	19.7	21.4	20.0	22.9
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	75.1	73.5	76.7	13.5	12.2	14.8	11.4	10.2	12.6
Region: East Midlands	703	65.5	61.6	69.1	15.5	12.8	18.6	19.1	16.2	22.3
Region: East of England	811	66.4	63.0	69.8	15.2	12.8	18.0	18.4	15.8	21.3
Region: London	1086	75.9	73.0	78.5	14.7	12.5	17.1	9.5	7.7	11.5
Region: North East	361	65.7	60.3	70.6	14.1	10.8	18.3	20.2	16.2	24.9
Region: North West	1154	67.7	64.7	70.5	14.8	12.7	17.2	17.5	15.3	19.9
Region: South East	1113	65.1	62.1	68.0	18.0	15.7	20.5	16.9	14.7	19.4

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
Region: South West	733	61.9	58.1	65.5	18.2	15.5	21.4	19.9	17.0	23.1
Region: West Midlands	930	68.3	65.0	71.3	14.5	12.2	17.0	17.3	14.9	20.0
Region: Yorkshire	884	65.1	61.7	68.3	16.1	13.8	18.9	18.8	16.2	21.6

SDQ YP reported emotional difficulties 3-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7777	78.3	77.3	79.3	7.8	7.2	8.4	13.9	13.1	14.8
Sex: Male	3967	88.2	87.1	89.2	5.5	4.8	6.3	6.4	5.6	7.2
Sex: Female	3810	67.9	66.3	69.5	10.2	9.2	11.3	21.9	20.5	23.3
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	87.4	85.1	89.3	5.3	4.1	6.9	7.3	5.8	9.1
Ethnicity: Black	605	83.9	80.5	86.9	5.8	4.0	8.3	10.3	8.0	13.2
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	81.9	78.1	85.1	6.5	4.6	9.0	11.7	9.1	15.0
Ethnicity: White	5151	75.5	74.2	76.7	8.7	7.9	9.5	15.9	14.9	16.9
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	84.2	78.4	88.7	5.5	3.1	9.5	10.3	6.7	15.5
SEND Status: Yes	1743	71.9	69.5	74.1	9.9	8.5	11.5	18.2	16.4	20.3
SEND Status: No	6020	80.0	78.9	81.0	7.2	6.5	7.9	12.8	11.9	13.7
FSM: Yes	3603	73.5	71.9	74.9	8.9	8.0	9.9	17.6	16.4	18.9
FSM: No	4160	80.3	79.1	81.5	7.3	6.5	8.1	12.4	11.4	13.5
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1075	78.7	76.0	81.2	8.2	6.6	10.1	13.1	11.2	15.4
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	75.1	73.5	76.6	8.3	7.4	9.3	16.6	15.3	18.0
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	81.4	79.9	82.9	7.1	6.2	8.1	11.5	10.3	12.8
Region: East Midlands	703	77.1	73.7	80.2	7.5	5.7	9.8	15.4	12.8	18.4
Region: East of England	811	76.8	73.6	79.7	7.2	5.6	9.2	16.0	13.5	18.9
Region: London	1086	82.9	80.3	85.1	7.3	5.8	9.1	9.9	8.1	11.9

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
Region: North East	361	77.5	72.5	81.7	9.5	6.8	13.2	13.0	9.7	17.3
Region: North West	1156	79.7	77.1	82.1	7.0	5.6	8.8	13.3	11.4	15.5
Region: South East	1113	77.1	74.4	79.6	7.8	6.3	9.6	15.2	13.1	17.5
Region: South West	733	73.1	69.6	76.3	10.0	7.9	12.6	16.9	14.2	20.0
Region: West Midlands	930	78.6	75.7	81.2	8.2	6.5	10.3	13.3	11.2	15.7
Region: Yorkshire	884	79.4	76.4	82.1	7.1	5.4	9.1	13.5	11.3	16.1

SDQ YP reported conduct difficulties 3-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7777	76.5	75.4	77.4	10.5	9.8	11.2	13.1	12.3	13.9
Sex: Male	3967	76.0	74.6	77.4	10.5	9.5	11.6	13.5	12.4	14.6
Sex: Female	3810	76.9	75.5	78.3	10.4	9.4	11.5	12.7	11.6	13.8
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	85.4	83.0	87.5	7.7	6.1	9.5	6.9	5.5	8.7
Ethnicity: Black	605	76.9	73.1	80.4	8.4	6.3	11.1	14.7	11.8	18.0
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	77.2	73.3	80.7	8.8	6.6	11.7	14.0	11.3	17.3
Ethnicity: White	5151	74.7	73.4	75.9	11.5	10.6	12.4	13.8	12.9	14.8
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	74.7	68.2	80.3	10.0	6.6	14.8	15.3	10.9	21.1
SEND Status: Yes	1743	62.0	59.5	64.4	14.1	12.4	16.0	23.9	21.8	26.1
SEND Status: No	6020	80.4	79.3	81.4	9.5	8.7	10.3	10.2	9.4	11.0
FSM: Yes	3603	66.3	64.7	67.9	12.6	11.5	13.8	21.1	19.7	22.5
FSM: No	4160	80.8	79.5	82.0	9.5	8.6	10.5	9.7	8.8	10.6
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1075	70.9	67.9	73.8	10.0	8.2	12.0	19.1	16.7	21.8
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	71.7	70.1	73.2	12.2	11.1	13.4	16.1	14.9	17.4
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	83.1	81.6	84.4	8.7	7.7	9.8	8.2	7.2	9.3

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
Region: East Midlands	703	74.8	71.3	78.0	11.0	8.7	13.8	14.2	11.8	17.1
Region: East of England	811	76.5	73.4	79.4	12.8	10.5	15.4	10.7	8.8	13.0
Region: London	1086	79.9	77.2	82.3	9.4	7.7	11.5	10.7	8.8	12.9
Region: North East	361	76.5	71.6	80.8	6.6	4.4	9.9	16.9	13.2	21.3
Region: North West	1156	75.5	72.8	78.0	9.7	8.0	11.7	14.8	12.8	17.0
Region: South East	1113	76.2	73.5	78.7	11.3	9.5	13.4	12.5	10.6	14.7
Region: South West	733	77.3	74.0	80.3	10.9	8.7	13.5	11.8	9.6	14.5
Region: West Midlands	930	75.3	72.3	78.1	9.9	8.1	12.2	14.7	12.5	17.3
Region: Yorkshire	884	75.1	72.0	78.0	10.7	8.7	13.0	14.2	12.0	16.8

SDQ YP reported hyperactivity and inattention 3-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI
Overall	7776	59.7	58.5	60.8	11.3	10.6	12.1	29.0	27.9	30.1
Sex: Male	3966	61.0	59.4	62.6	11.6	10.5	12.7	27.4	26.0	28.9
Sex: Female	3810	58.2	56.6	59.9	11.1	10.1	12.2	30.7	29.1	32.3
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	80.9	78.4	83.2	7.2	5.7	8.9	11.9	10.1	14.1
Ethnicity: Black	605	69.9	65.8	73.7	11.2	8.8	14.2	18.9	15.7	22.6
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	64.4	60.0	68.6	12.2	9.5	15.5	23.4	19.8	27.3
Ethnicity: White	5150	53.8	52.4	55.3	12.2	11.3	13.2	34.0	32.6	35.3
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	70.0	63.2	75.9	9.7	6.3	14.6	20.3	15.3	26.4
SEND Status: Yes	1742	42.7	40.2	45.3	14.2	12.5	16.1	43.0	40.5	45.6
SEND Status: No	6020	64.2	62.9	65.5	10.6	9.8	11.4	25.2	24.1	26.4
FSM: Yes	3602	51.3	49.6	53.0	12.8	11.7	13.9	36.0	34.4	37.6
FSM: No	4160	63.2	61.7	64.7	10.8	9.8	11.7	26.0	24.7	27.4
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1074	62.5	59.4	65.6	10.0	8.2	12.0	27.5	24.7	30.5

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal		
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	52.9	51.2	54.7	12.2	11.1	13.4	34.8	33.2	36.5
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	65.9	64.1	67.7	10.8	9.7	12.0	23.3	21.8	25.0
Region: East Midlands	703	58.9	55.0	62.7	11.8	9.5	14.6	29.4	25.9	33.0
Region: East of England	811	55.1	51.5	58.7	12.3	10.1	14.9	32.6	29.3	36.1
Region: London	1086	70.5	67.5	73.4	9.7	8.0	11.7	19.7	17.3	22.5
Region: North East	361	55.5	50.0	60.8	14.5	11.0	18.8	30.1	25.3	35.3
Region: North West	1155	60.3	57.2	63.2	10.7	8.9	12.7	29.1	26.4	31.9
Region: South East	1113	56.8	53.7	59.8	11.8	9.9	13.9	31.5	28.7	34.4
Region: South West	733	56.1	52.3	59.9	10.9	8.7	13.5	33.0	29.5	36.7
Region: West Midlands	930	60.4	57.0	63.7	12.2	10.1	14.6	27.4	24.5	30.6
Region: Yorkshire	884	57.9	54.4	61.4	10.4	8.5	12.7	31.6	28.5	35.0

SDQ YP reported peer difficulties 3-band categorical

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal	
		Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI	High CI	Weighted %	Low CI
Overall	7776	79.2	78.2	80.1	15.0	14.2	15.8	5.8	5.3
Sex: Male	3966	81.1	79.8	82.4	13.7	12.6	14.9	5.2	4.5
Sex: Female	3810	77.1	75.7	78.5	16.4	15.1	17.7	6.5	5.7
Ethnicity: Asian	1106	83.1	80.6	85.4	12.8	10.8	15.1	4.1	3.1
Ethnicity: Black	605	84.6	81.1	87.5	12.1	9.5	15.2	3.4	2.1
Ethnicity: Mixed	539	79.4	75.5	82.8	14.1	11.3	17.5	6.5	4.5
Ethnicity: White	5150	77.9	76.7	79.1	15.8	14.8	16.9	6.3	5.6
Ethnicity: AOEG	219	78.6	72.0	83.9	14.5	10.1	20.2	7.0	3.9
SEND Status: Yes	1742	63.8	61.3	66.2	23.4	21.3	25.6	12.8	11.2
SEND Status: No	6020	83.3	82.3	84.3	12.7	11.9	13.6	4.0	3.5
FSM: Yes	3602	72.6	71.0	74.1	18.9	17.6	20.3	8.5	7.6

Grouping Variable	Valid N	Normal			Borderline			Abnormal	
FSM: No	4160	82.0	80.7	83.1	13.3	12.3	14.4	4.7	4.1
Parental Education: Entry level / Level 1 / other (incl. overseas) and no qualifications	1074	74.6	71.6	77.3	18.0	15.6	20.6	7.4	5.9
Parental Education: GCSE, A-level or equivalent (RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)	3574	76.5	75.0	77.9	16.8	15.5	18.2	6.7	5.9
Parental Education: Degree equivalent or above (RQF levels 6, 7 and 8)	2918	83.5	82.0	84.8	12.0	10.8	13.3	4.6	3.8
Region: East Midlands	703	75.4	71.8	78.6	18.0	15.1	21.2	6.7	5.0
Region: East of England	811	80.1	77.1	82.8	14.4	12.1	17.2	5.5	4.1
Region: London	1086	84.6	82.1	86.9	10.8	9.0	13.1	4.5	3.3
Region: North East	361	77.1	72.1	81.4	16.7	13.0	21.2	6.2	4.1
Region: North West	1155	79.4	76.8	81.7	15.0	12.9	17.3	5.7	4.5
Region: South East	1113	80.2	77.7	82.6	14.5	12.4	16.8	5.3	4.1
Region: South West	733	75.3	71.9	78.4	16.7	14.1	19.7	8.0	6.2
Region: West Midlands	930	78.1	75.2	80.8	16.6	14.2	19.3	5.3	4.0
Region: Yorkshire	884	77.4	74.3	80.2	15.6	13.3	18.4	7.0	5.5

Main parent/carer qualifications

In this report, parental education is measured as the highest academic or vocational qualification held by the child's main parent or carer, mapped onto the Regulated Qualifications Framework, following the approach used in the Five to Twelve study. A three-category variable distinguishes between a high level parental education (degree-level or higher, RQF levels 6, 7 and 8), a medium level (equivalent to GCSE or A-levels, RQF levels 2, 3, 4 and 5) and a low level of parental education (level 1, entry level, no qualifications or other qualifications including overseas).

Qualification and equivalised qualification level

Qualification: academic	Level
Academic	
University Higher Degree – Doctorate (PhD)	5
University Higher Degree – Masters Degree (MA, MSc, MPhil)	5
Degree (e.g. BA, BSc)	5
Foundation degree	4
Other degree level qualifications such as graduate membership of professional institutes	5
PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate of Education) or equivalent	5
Other teaching qualification	5
Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma / Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) / Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)	3
A Level / A2 Level (GCE Advanced Level)	3
AS Level (not completed A Level)	3
Certificate of Sixth Year Studies	3
Advanced Highers	3
Highers	3
GCSE / iGCSE	2
Credit Standard Grade / National 5 / Intermediate 2	2
General Standard Grade / National 4 / Intermediate 1	1
Foundation Standard Grade / National 3 / Access	1
Other academic qualification	1
None of these	0
Qualification: vocational	Level
Professional qualifications at degree level e.g. graduate member of professional institute, chartered accountant or surveyor	5
Nursing or other medical qualifications (below degree level)	4
NVQ or SVQ - Level 4 or 5	4
NVQ or SVQ - Level 3	3
NVQ or SVQ - Level 2	2
NVQ or SVQ - Level 1	1
GNVQ – Advanced	3

Qualification: academic	Level
GNVQ – Intermediate	2
GNVQ - Level 3	3
GNVQ - Level 2	2
GNVQ - Foundation	1
City & Guilds - Advanced craft, Part III	3
City & Guilds - Craft, Part II	2
City & Guilds - Craft, Part I / d.	1
City & Guilds - Level 3	3
City & Guilds - Level 2	2
City & Guilds - Level 1	1
RSA - Advanced Diploma	3
RSA - Higher Diploma	4
RSA - RSA Diploma	2
RSA - RSA Stage I, II, III	1
BTEC - Higher Level	4
BTEC - National	3
BTEC - First	2
SCOTVEC - National Certificate	3
SCOTVEC - First or general diploma	2
SCOTVEC - General diploma / d.	1
SCOTVEC - Modules	1
HND or HNC	4
OND or ONCM	3
Junior certificate	1
Other vocational qualifications (including some overseas)	1
None of these qualifications	0



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