

Young people's perceptions of careers in the pharmaceutical industry

*"I don't know whether they wear
suits or lab coats"*

July 2024



Contents

Foreword	3	Where is the opportunity for the biggest impact?	30
Executive summary	4	Emphasising existing strengths	30
Key facts	6	Combatting commonly held misconceptions	30
Recommendations and commitments	7	Addressing public perceptions of the industry more broadly	30
What drives the career choices of young people?	8	Methodology note	31
How do young people perceive the pharmaceutical industry and how does this compare to other industries?	12	About this research	32
What challenges does the industry face when accessing young talent?	19	About the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI)	33
What can be done to navigate these challenges?	23	About Public First	33
Improving awareness of the variety of roles within the industry	23	Endnotes	34
Celebrating existing diversity within the sector	27		
How to promote careers in the industry to young people	29		

Foreword

The UK's pharmaceutical industry is a national success story. It supports 126,000 high-quality jobs across the country, generates £17.6 billion in economic output and develops transformative medicines and vaccines to improve patient care and enhance the lives of millions of people around the world.

In the coming years there is a huge opportunity to drive further growth, investment and impact by making the UK the best place in the world to research, develop and use the medicines and vaccines of the future.

An essential part of achieving this will be ensuring the industry is able to access the skills it needs. While recent ABPI research shows progress has been made in addressing skills gaps within the industry, other challenges remain particularly in recruiting people with scientific, mathematical and digital skills.¹

Wider research on the reputation of the sector highlights that while there is work to be done to raise awareness of the work of the industry, trust and favourability remain high following the COVID-19 pandemic.²

Understanding how awareness of the industry contributes to recruitment is key to enabling ABPI members to develop and promote opportunities that are attractive to people with the skills needed for the sector to succeed both now and in the future.



Andrew Croydon,
Director,
Education and Examination
Policy & Partnerships,
ABPI



Jill Percy,
Director Reputation,
ABPI



Executive summary



Attracting the next generation of workers into the pharmaceutical industry is a critical part of building the pipeline of skills it needs to succeed.

Polling shows the public has a generally favourable opinion of the industry and that this was boosted to some extent by its role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, we know less about how it is perceived by prospective employees, especially young people.³ The current project was conducted to explore this issue. It set out to understand the following research questions:

- what drives the career choices of young people?
- how is the pharmaceutical industry perceived by young people and how does it compare to other industries seeking the same talent?
- what more could the pharmaceutical industry do to be more attractive to this group of young people?

Through polling and focus groups conducted with young people – including those who have started careers in the industry and those with skills it particularly needs to recruit – we have found that:

1. Salary is the main driver of career attractiveness for young people. Job security, progression, and work-life balance are also key, while purpose appears to be less important than might have been expected.
2. Young people have positive perceptions of the pharmaceutical industry and think it has a particularly positive impact on the UK.
3. Jobs in the pharmaceutical industry are seen as offering many of the factors that most drive young people's career choices. They are attractive to people from a range of backgrounds but have the most appeal for those from STEM backgrounds.
4. The pharmaceutical industry is considered to be relatively well paid and secure compared to other competitor industries. Jobs in the industry are considered to offer a positive work-life balance and make a particularly positive difference to society.
5. Despite this, there is a general lack of awareness about the diversity of roles available in the industry. This lack of awareness means young people may feel the industry is not for them or struggle to navigate it.
6. The industry is also perceived to have a relatively narrow academic pathway to entry, which drives a view that its workforce lacks diversity.

The reported focus on financial benefits is not necessarily surprising given research took place during a cost-of-living crisis that has hit young people particularly hard, and was mentioned consistently in focus groups, even by those working in relatively well-paid roles.

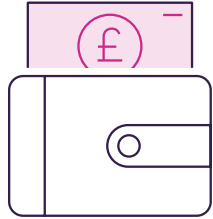
The report highlights where more work can be done to support the recruitment of high quality, diverse talent from across the UK. This includes:

- building on existing outreach programmes to improve young people's understanding of the variety of roles available and different pathways into the industry
- continuing to celebrate the existing diversity in the industry as well as developing and expanding programmes that support diverse talent to enter, be supported in and succeed in the industry

This research found that the industry has a number of strengths that align with the priorities of target recruitment groups. However, more can be done to emphasise existing strengths, combat common misconceptions and develop the reputation of the industry more broadly.



Key facts



50% of respondents consider **good earnings to be the most important factor** when looking for roles



"I'm just going to be squeezed financially to the point where I actually have to take a new role somewhere else. And in that case, I'm not going to care whether I'm learning the skills, it's just going to be who's going to pay more money."

Chemistry graduate, working in fintech



63% of respondents said they imagined people who work in the industry **would be university graduates**, the most commonly cited attribute for our industry and **58%** thought they would have **studied sciences at school**



"I know the options available to me with my degree... and my experience, but I think it does seem very intimidating. I think, for me personally, even the roles that aren't science based, and the industry itself seems very intimidating to me."

Biomedical science graduate, working in tech



"I don't really know much about it... showing some things that they [pharmaceutical companies] may have been working on, like new releases and stuff to show how it's helped in the world and how it's made a difference."

Product design and engineering student

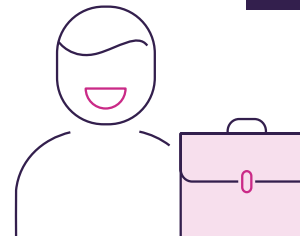


73% of young people consider the **pharmaceutical industry to be important for the UK**



"I think it's definitely something I would consider, especially as the market is predicted to grow. I think that's kind of reassuring in terms of job security, because there's a lot of jobs now where [the market is] ...actually depreciating."

Biomedical science graduate, working in tech



78% of young people feel that **jobs in the industry offer good job security**, interesting work and a career they could be proud of



Recommendations and commitments

Based on these findings, we suggest the following practical recommendations for ABPI members to consider when looking at how they attract talent:

Member recommendations

1. Salary and benefits in job adverts and workplace descriptions should be transparent from the outset. Our research makes clear that understanding the salary and benefits on offer, is essential for many young people to even consider roles in the industry.
2. Do not assume that young people know anything about the industry.⁴ One of the main findings from our focus groups was that young people were unaware about the roles available and impact of the industry. Providing information about the industry for context may make roles more attractive.
3. Be clear about the actual requirements to do the job.⁵ Perceived academic and experience barriers to entry were shared as putting many participants off the industry. Including a specific articulation of what is required from candidates may help diversify the candidate pool.
4. Focus on the impact on society and more specifically patients.⁶ Many of the young people we spoke to shared that they were keen to be involved with organisations that impact society being explicit about your impact is essential.
5. Highlight the projected growth of the sector.⁷ A better understanding of job stability and projected growth of the industry may help attract young people to roles in the industry.
6. Think about how you're advertising your roles and promoting the industry.⁸ Many participants spoke about the role of social media in shaping their perceptions of careers in different industries as well as common misconceptions about most roles being based in the lab. Utilising different platforms to promote the industry could help effectively influence this population.

In order to support members to access high quality talent, the ABPI will:

ABPI commitments

1. Continue to highlight the value of apprenticeships in securing fulfilling careers across the industry and to advocate for policies that maximise the potential of apprenticeships for both apprentices and industry.
2. Work with, and on behalf of, the pharmaceutical industry to showcase the breadth of roles, STEM and non-STEM, across the industry to support informed career choices, through a variety of approaches, including working closely with STEM Learning UK to support its flagship STEM ambassador programme.
3. Support STEM education across the UK, from primary school to university level, particularly focusing on 'cold spots' where the pharmaceutical industry has less presence, by way of supporting first-class specialist teaching to inspire the next generation of scientists.
4. Continue to forge relationships with academia, building on existing support for industry placements and course development, alongside working with university careers services to better equip graduates from a wide range of disciplines with an understanding of opportunities across the industry.

What drives the career choices of young people?



Salary stands out as the main driver of job attractiveness.

The most important aspect for young people when looking for work is good earnings. Fifty per cent of respondents selected this from a long list of employment attributes well ahead of others, such as work-life balance (28%), doing interesting work (23%) and job security (20%).

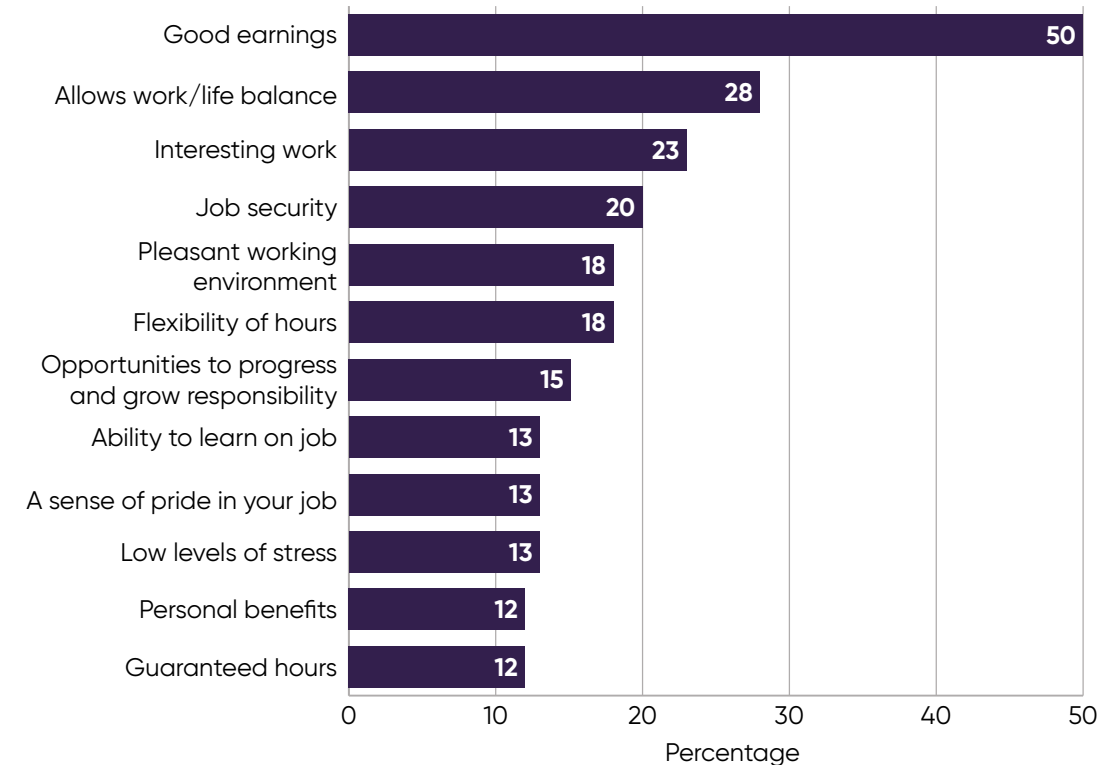


Figure 1: "When looking for work, which of the following aspects are most important to you? Please select up to three."²



When asked how important different aspects of a role are when considering a job, young people were again more likely to identify salary than any other factor. Ninety-four per cent said it was very important (57%) or important (37%) with only 5% considering it unimportant.

This focus on financial benefits may not be surprising given that our research took place during a cost-of-living crisis that has hit young people particularly hard. The pressure facing young people was mentioned consistently in our focus groups, even by those working in relatively well-paid roles.

However, it is notable that salary specifically was a much stronger driver of attraction than other employment benefits, such as healthcare, entitlements, sick leave or holiday.

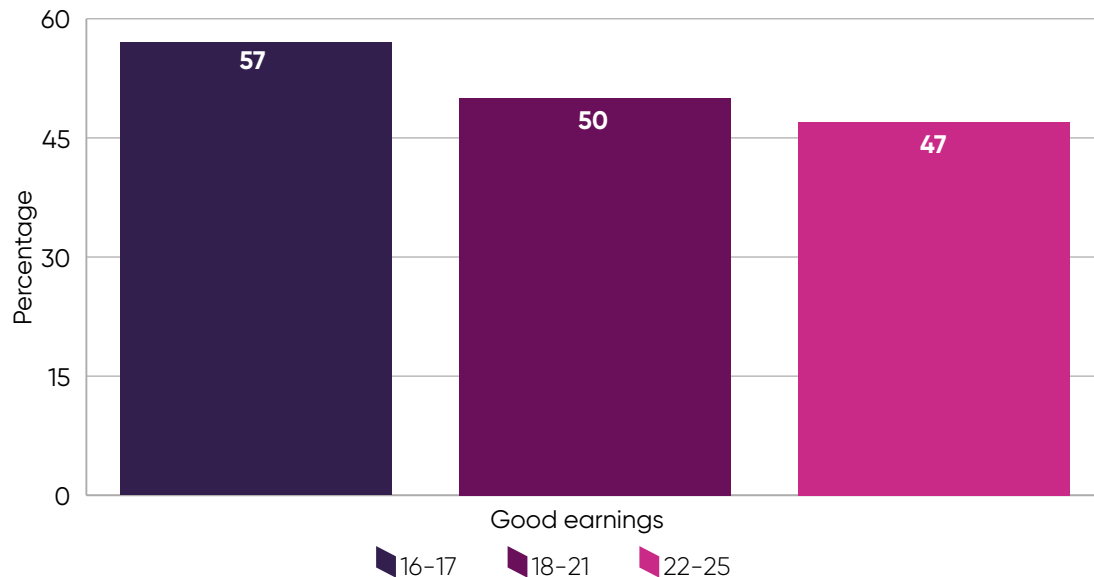


Figure 2: "When looking for work, which of the following aspects are most important to you? Please select up to three." by age.¹⁰

"I'm just going to be squeezed financially to the point where I actually have to take a new role somewhere else. And in that case, I'm not going to care whether I'm learning the skills, it's just going to be who's going to pay more money." **Male, 25, chemistry graduate, currently working in fintech**

Good earnings also seem particularly important for how younger respondents see the job market. Fifty-seven per cent of 16 to 17 year olds chose this as important when considering work, the percentage drops to 50% of 18 to 21 year olds and drops further to 47% of 22 to 25 year.

Job security, progression, work life balance and work being interesting are also key

Good earnings are the most important driver of attractiveness but our research found that young people are often 'weighing up' different elements of a role alongside this.

Respondents consistently highlighted job security, opportunities to progress their career, work-life balance and how interesting their work would be, as important considerations.

"You need to have both an environment that you feel happy in at work, but you also need to have the money and that progression as well within it. If you're missing one then ultimately it's going to be difficult to move forward." **Female, 21, pharmacy student, Russell Group university**

"I think as well as the opportunities, it's also about the people that you're going to be working with. I'd really like to be in an environment that's going to help nurture me towards the direction of career that I'd like to focus on." **Female, 23, product design and engineering student, non-Russell Group university**

When asked what they consider when looking for work generally, work life balance (28%), interesting work (23%) and job security (20%) were the aspects young people were most likely to select after salary.

When considering aspects of a new job other than salary, young people were most likely to say that opportunities to progress their career (50%), job security (47%) and work that is interesting (44%) were 'very important' to them.

The importance of these factors is consistent with other research, which has found that 'having a good work-life balance' was the top trait young people admire in their peers, and their top consideration when choosing a new employer.¹¹

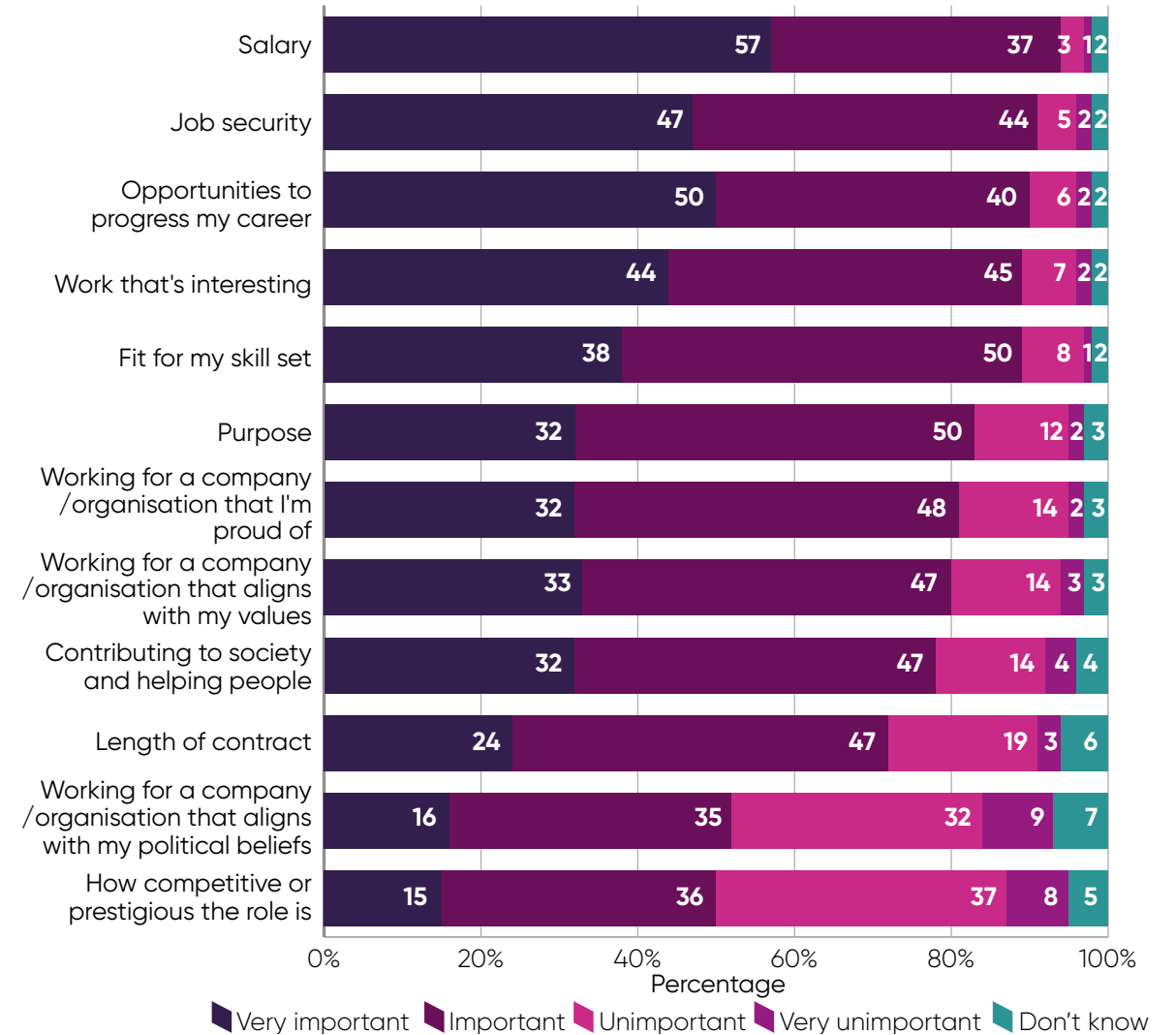


Figure 3: "How important or unimportant are these aspects when considering what job you want?"¹²

Purpose is less important than sometimes assumed

Though a sense of purpose is often described as particularly important for younger generations of workers, our research found this ranked below other considerations.

Only around a third of respondents to our poll said that 'purpose' or aspects of a role linked to it, such as 'working for a company or organisation that aligns with my values', 'working for a company or organisation I am proud of' or 'contributing to society and helping people', were very important when considering what job they want around half the level who said that salary is very important.

This mirrors other research on young people's attitudes towards work, which shows that purpose is a less significant driver of interest in jobs than more practical considerations, such as salary, opportunities for progression and job security.

There is little demographic variation in what makes careers attractive

One striking feature of our research was the consistency across factors that motivate young people 25 years old and younger.

Regardless of their gender, age, education, or level of financial comfort, respondents all selected earnings as the most important factor in their career decisions.

Work-life balance, job security and work being interesting work were also consistently identified as other important considerations across different demographic groups.

It is notable that young people with a STEM background are a critical group for the pharmaceutical industry given skill requirements did not give significantly different responses to others, which suggests the industry does not particularly need to tailor its messaging to them.



How do young people perceive the pharmaceutical industry and how does this compare to other industries?

"I did give a fair bit of thought to whether I want to work in the tech industry or not. And to be fair, the most advantage of pharma over tech was the work-life balance and stability. Of course, you see these waves of layoffs in tech companies, and everybody has heard about how they have to work this crazy overtime. I think that put me off a little bit. But on the other hand, even though pharma has a pretty competitive salary package, overall, it's still a bit less than tech companies are offering. So there's a little bit of a trade off."

Data science and AI graduate, Early Careers workshop

Young people think the pharmaceutical industry makes a positive difference to the UK

Our survey found that young people value the pharmaceutical industry across a range of indicators. The industry is seen as particularly important for public health though clear majorities also think it has an important role for jobs, the economy and the UK's role in the world.



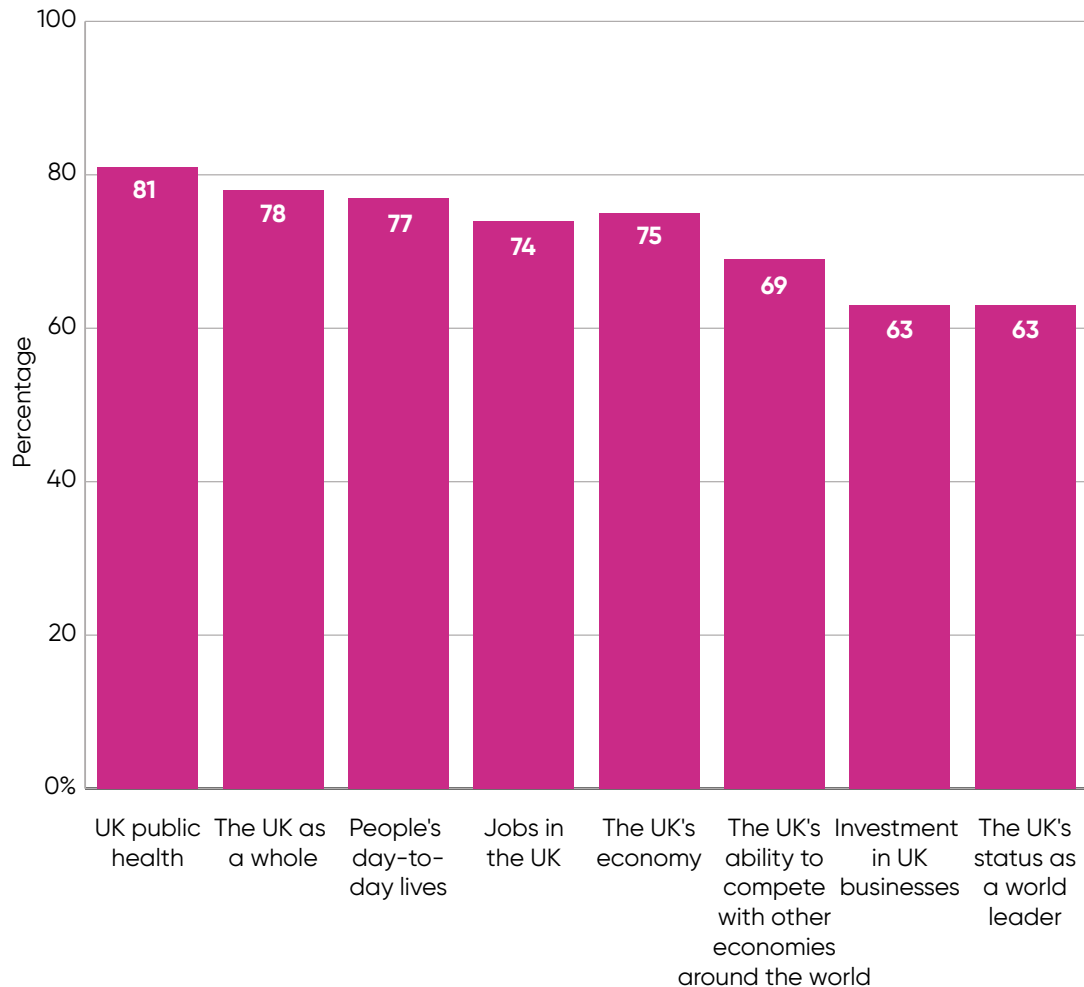


Figure 4: "How important or unimportant do you think the UK's pharmaceutical industry is for ...?" Total importance (%).¹³

When asked what they think of the UK pharmaceutical industry, young people were more likely to see it as innovative and modern (50%), socially responsible (55%), reliable (60%), ethical (54%), and environmentally responsible (47%).

These sentiments are relatively consistent across young people as a whole, though respondents from STEM backgrounds had consistently more positive views of the industry than their non-STEM counterparts.

When comparing the pharmaceutical industry with others, 73% of young people said that it is important for the UK, slightly behind healthcare (76%), education (78%) and energy (76%) but in line with finance (74%) and ahead of others such as manufacturing (68%).

In line with the findings of other research, the industry's role in the COVID-19 pandemic has improved how it is seen by young people.¹⁴ Forty-nine per cent of respondents said they felt more positive about the industry since the outbreak of the pandemic, of which 20% felt much more positive. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly noticeable impact among those with a STEM background, graduates and those who are financially comfortable.

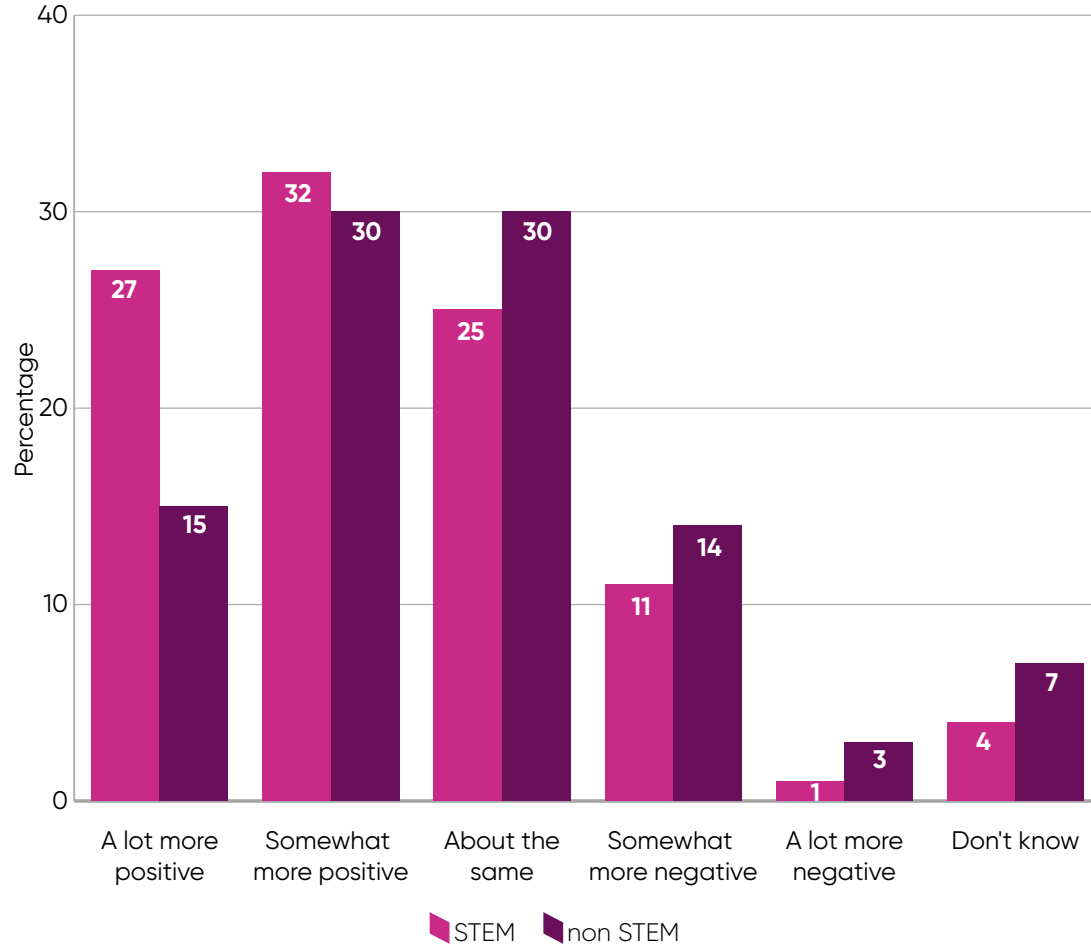


Figure 5: "How has your opinion of the UK pharmaceutical industry changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?"¹⁵

This sense that the pharmaceutical industry makes a positive contribution to society is a significant asset, given that purpose is an important though potentially not decisive element of what drives career choices for young people.

The young people working in the industry that we spoke to were particularly aware of this strength and felt it should be communicated more prominently.

"I think a big thing for me that I maybe didn't realise before I started in a role in pharma was how connected it is to the NHS, and how so many of the projects that I've done, and now I'm in a customer facing role, everything I do, is kind of related to the NHS or revolves around the NHS."

Early Careers workshop

"Showing more about what goes on, because I don't really know much about it... showing some things that they [pharmaceutical companies] may have been working on, and new releases and stuff to show how it's helped in the world and how it's made a difference."

Female, 23, product design with engineering student, non-Russell Group university

Jobs in the pharmaceutical industry are attractive to a range of young people but hold most appeal to those from STEM backgrounds

When asked about jobs in a range of industries, 37% of young people agreed that there were jobs in the pharmaceutical industry that would interest them. This was slightly above the energy sector (33%) but below others, such as healthcare (44%) and tech (42%).

Looking in more depth at those who expressed this interest, the pharmaceutical industry does not see a significant difference between the responses of men and women, unlike other industries such as tech and energy, which evidence shows women are much less likely to be interested in. There is also less of a gap in interest between non-graduates (42%) and graduates (49%) than seen in other industries.

However, interest in the pharmaceutical industry is split along other lines. While we might anticipate a gap, it is striking that young people with a STEM background are almost twice as likely (52%) to agree there are jobs that would interest them compared to those with a non-STEM background.

Jobs in the pharmaceutical industry are seen as offering many of the factors that most drive young people's career choices

When asked what jobs in the pharmaceutical industry offer, young people are most likely to say that they contribute to society and help people (88%), followed by being well paid (81%), and providing a sense of purpose (81%).

Seventy-eight per cent of young people feel that jobs in the industry offer good job security, interesting work and a career they could be proud of.

This aligns well with the factors that motivate young people's career choices generally, potentially putting the industry in a strong position to attract them.

However, the fact that only fifty-one per cent of young people feel that these jobs 'fit my skill set' is a potential concern, as it could limit the range of young people who feel these opportunities are relevant to them (this is explored in more depth below).



Jobs in the pharmaceutical industry compare favourably to rival sectors

For this research we also tested young people's perceptions of a number of 'talent competitor industries' specifically finance, tech, healthcare and energy that also need individuals with similar skills to those identified in the ABPI Skills Gap report 2023,¹⁶ in particular data and digital skills.

When asked about the attributes of jobs in these different industries, young people give broadly similar responses. Jobs in the pharmaceutical industry score higher than those in the energy industry across every measure. Compared to tech, pharmaceutical industry jobs are seen as slightly more likely to offer job security, a career that people can be proud of, and a sense of purpose, and are just as likely to offer opportunities for progression and interesting work.

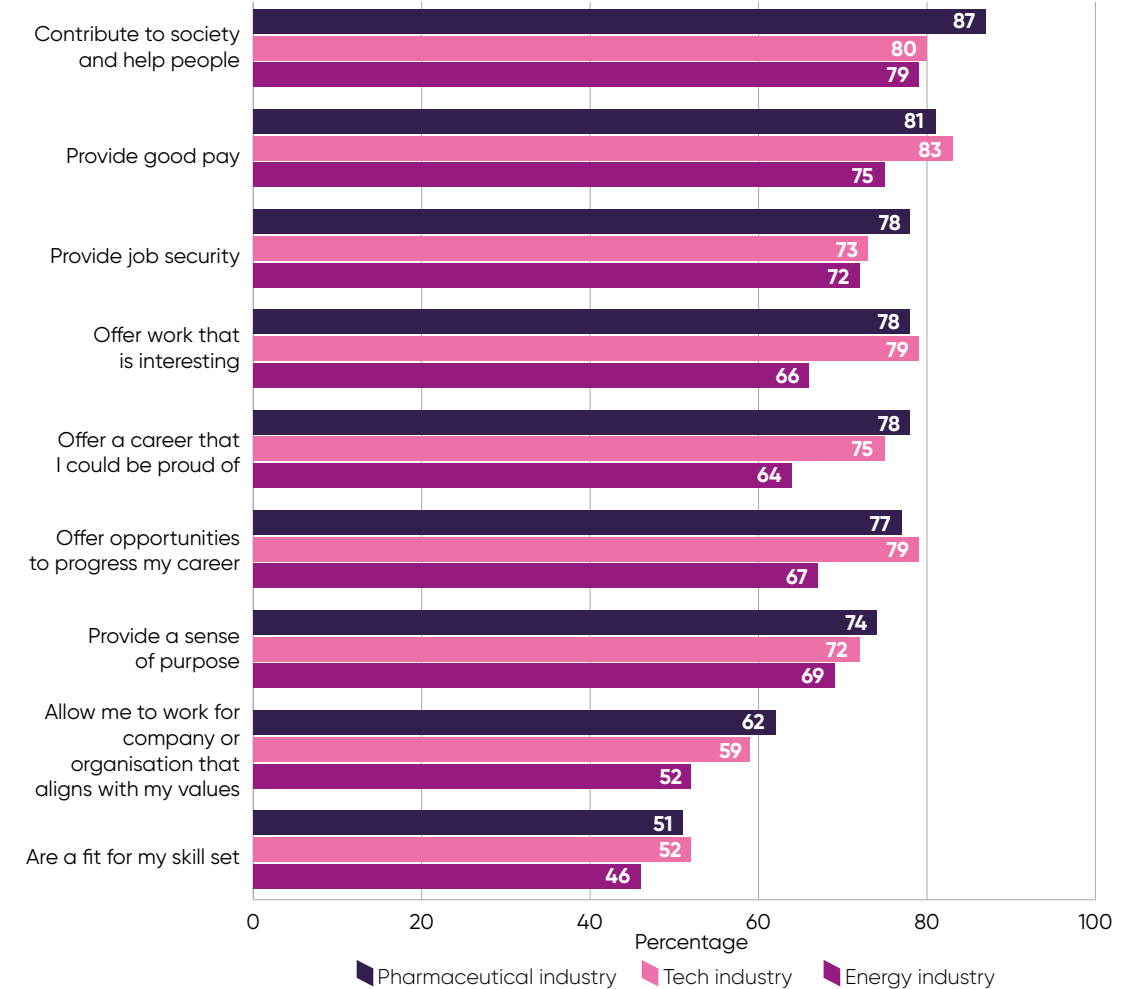


Figure 6: Comparison of perceived attributes of roles across the pharmaceutical and competitor industries: "When you think about jobs in the [pharmaceutical/tech/energy] industry, including the various roles from engineering and research to legal and marketing, do you think that jobs in that industry...?"¹⁷

However, when asked to compare jobs in the pharmaceutical industry directly to others, we see a more distinct set of advantages and disadvantages across the issues that drive young people's career choices.

On pay, young people think jobs in the pharmaceutical industry are better paid than those in energy, education, and healthcare, but not better paid than tech or finance. Only 26% thought pharmaceutical jobs were better paid than tech, with 48% thinking tech pays better.

Which of these two sectors do you think offers better paying jobs?



Figure 7: "Which of these two sectors do you think offers better paying jobs?" – Response options in each question set the pharmaceutical industry against other industries.¹⁸

When comparing how much sector jobs benefit society, young people are more than twice as likely to say jobs in the pharmaceutical industry have a positive impact than those in tech (54% vs 23%), finance (53% vs 25%), or energy (53% vs 20%).

Though our poll did not directly compare industries on work-life balance, our focus groups highlighted that this was an area where young people consider this advantageous to a job. Those working in pharmaceutical roles felt their work patterns compared favourably to both academia and other industries, such as tech.

"When I thought of the pharma industry I thought it was more like work-life balance, which it is because since I'm kind of doing R&D. The other comparison is a PhD, where it is widely assumed you have to stay up until 2am Sundays. So I always thought the industry is more stable, even long term."

Early Careers workshop

Participants also felt the industry offered good job security. Those working in the pharmaceutical industry saw it as a relatively stable career path compared to other options, such as further study or working in tech, which were perceived to be more volatile.

"Because if you go to academia, you just finish a PhD, then you have to apply to another role, then you finish a postdoc, you have to apply to another role. For me industry was more like having stability... you don't want to have to get jobs and jobs and jobs or funding for doing your postdocs."

Early Careers workshop

"I did give a fair bit of thought to whether I want to work in the tech industry or not. And to be fair, the most advantage of pharma over tech was the work life balance and stability. Of course, you see these waves of layoffs in tech companies, and everybody has heard about how they have to work this crazy overtime." **Early careers workshop**

In the open responses at the end of our poll, many people specifically referenced that the pharmaceutical industry and therefore, the jobs in it, were likely more secure than other sectors because of the consistent need this industry addresses.

While most focus group participants who did not already work in the pharmaceutical industry were unaware of its rapid growth the global health and life science industries are predicted to grow by 10% per year over the next decade¹⁹ they responded extremely positively to being told about this.



What challenges does the industry face when accessing young talent?

"I just thought that pharma was in the lab, just research roles, maybe more medically based roles... I guess I didn't really understand what market access was, you know, how the different commercial functions work, and what sort of activities are involved with those particular roles." **Early Careers workshop**

There is a general lack of awareness about the roles on offer in the industry

Despite the pharmaceutical industry supporting 126,000 high-quality jobs across the country, generating £17.6 billion in economic output and developing transformative medicines and vaccines for the public, patients and the NHS, there is limited public awareness of the role and impact of the industry.²⁰ Previous research for the ABPI has found that the public awareness of the pharmaceutical industry is low, with only 22% of people saying they know a lot or a fair amount about it.²¹

Our findings show there is also a lack of awareness among young people specifically, since they have a weak understanding of the roles available within the industry, alongside a number of common misconceptions that continue to exist.



"I mainly think of a sort of drug sales rep or scientist in a white coat with a Bunsen burner. Those are the two main images that are popping into my head." **Male, 25, chemistry graduate, currently working in fintech**

When asked to pick from a list the roles they thought would be commonly employed within the pharmaceutical industry, young people were most likely to identify technical or laboratory-based roles such as medical doctor (53%), laboratory researcher (47%) and laboratory technician (45%), and were more than twice as likely to identify these than non-lab based roles, such as computer programmer (17%), PR manager (16%), sustainability manager/advisor (15%) and process engineer (15%).

It is interesting to note, however, that data scientist (44%) was also a popular response, perhaps suggesting some awareness of how technology is becoming ever more important within the industry.

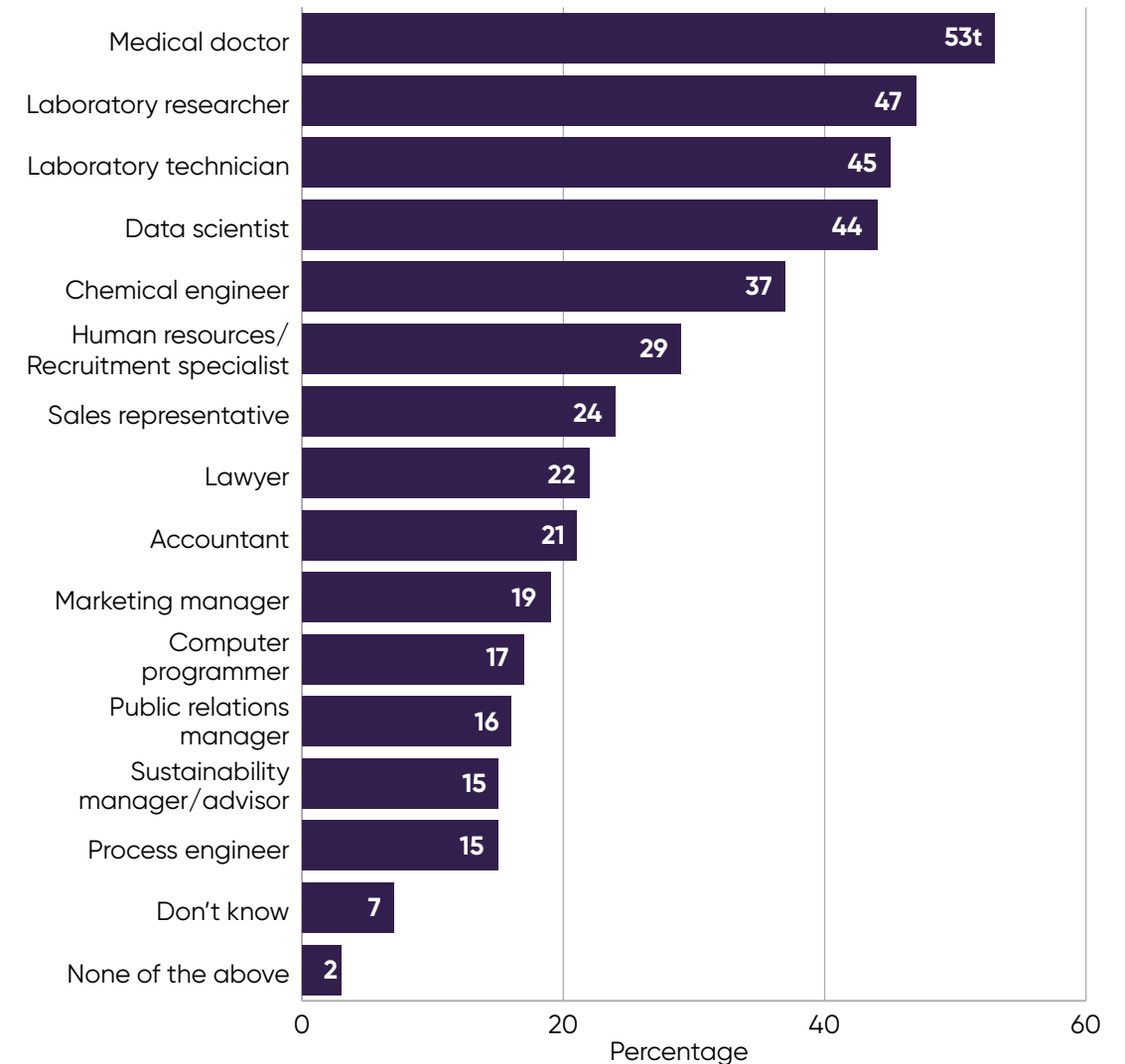


Figure 8: "Which of the roles listed below would you expect to be commonly employed in the pharmaceutical industry?"²²



This lack of awareness means young people may feel the industry is not for them or may struggle to navigate it.

Matching their skill set to a potential job is an important issue for young people, with 88% saying that this is an important or very important consideration for them when considering a new role.

However, only just over half (51%) of young people think there are pharmaceutical jobs that fit their skill set. Among those with a STEM background, only around two thirds (64%) believe this, and it's fewer than half for those with a non-STEM background (45%).

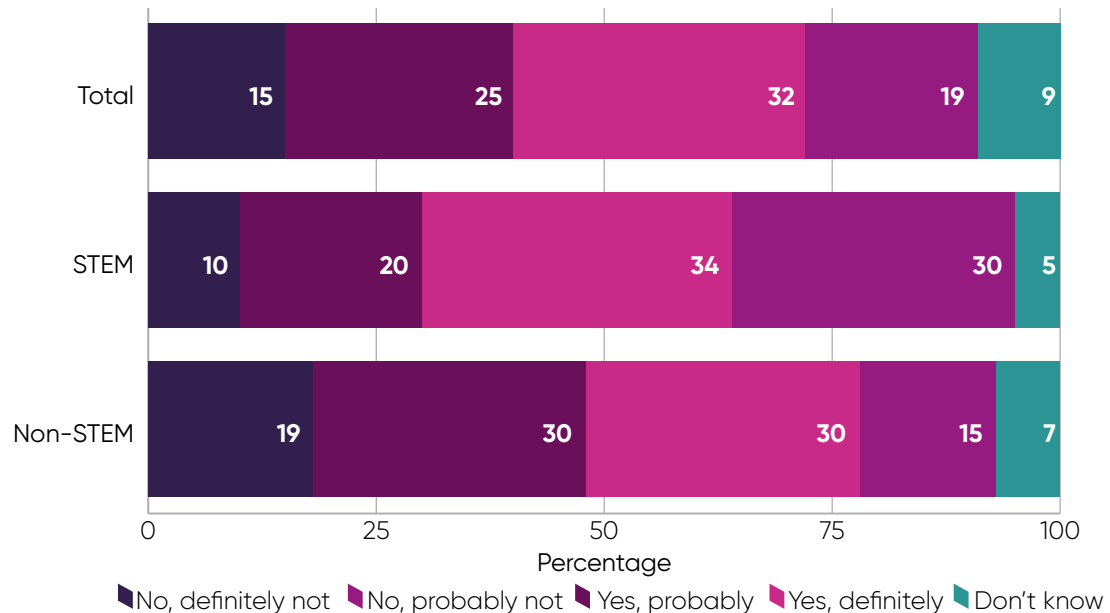


Figure 9. "When you think about jobs in the pharmaceutical sector, do you think that jobs in that industry: Fit my skill set?"²³

This is likely to be driven by young people's relatively weak understanding of roles available in the industry and the misconception that jobs with a technical or laboratory focus are much more common.

As a result, there is a risk that some may not consider the industry, as they do not feel there is a role for them an issue we picked up in some of our focus groups:

"I know the options available to me with my degree... and my experience, but I think it does seem very intimidating. I think, for me personally, even the roles that aren't science based, and the industry itself seems very intimidating to me." **Female, 24, biomedical science graduate, working in tech**

Even those following a pathway into the industry sometimes said they lacked visibility of the full range of roles available:

"If I'm being totally honest... I didn't really feel like they [the university] told me a lot about the pharmaceutical industry, the different roles there were, how to get into a pharma company, sort of preparing for interviews and assessment centres and things like I didn't feel massively majorly supported, but that I kind of had to be quite proactive in myself and do sort of a little bit of digging." **Early Careers workshop**

While lab roles were attractive to some, others were keen to be made aware of a wider range of options:

"I feel like if you're kind of in the business side of things, there might be scope for kind of becoming manager or head of operations or whatever. But when in a lab, you're quite limited. That's my view on it. I'm not sure if that's the truth. But I could imagine you're quite limited." **Female, 21, pharmacy student, Russell Group university**

"I wanted to work in the labs, and work in the research side. And I did struggle actually to find a uni course that suited exactly what I wanted to do. And this degree apprenticeship worked really well in that sense."

Early Careers workshop

"They [universities] teach you a lot of kind of the lab-based skills, but they don't really kind of like open your mind as like what other roles there can be in industry."

Early Careers workshop

The industry is considered to draw from a relatively narrow range of backgrounds

When asked what sort of person they think works in the pharmaceutical industry, young people were most likely to say someone who went to university (63%) and studied sciences at school (58%).

Very few people imagine that people in the industry live outside of cities (6%), are from a low-income background (4%), from the North of the UK (4%), or did not go to university (2%).

When asked to compare the pharmaceutical industry to others, respondents were around twice as likely to say that tech, education and healthcare contain more people like them and slightly more likely to say the same of finance. Of those tested, the pharmaceutical industry only compared favourably with the energy industry on this measure.

Our poll found no evidence that this is due to the industry being seen as exclusionary. However, it may reflect a sense that it is **exclusive**, with the perception that it draws largely from a narrow, academic elite potentially acting as a barrier for some.

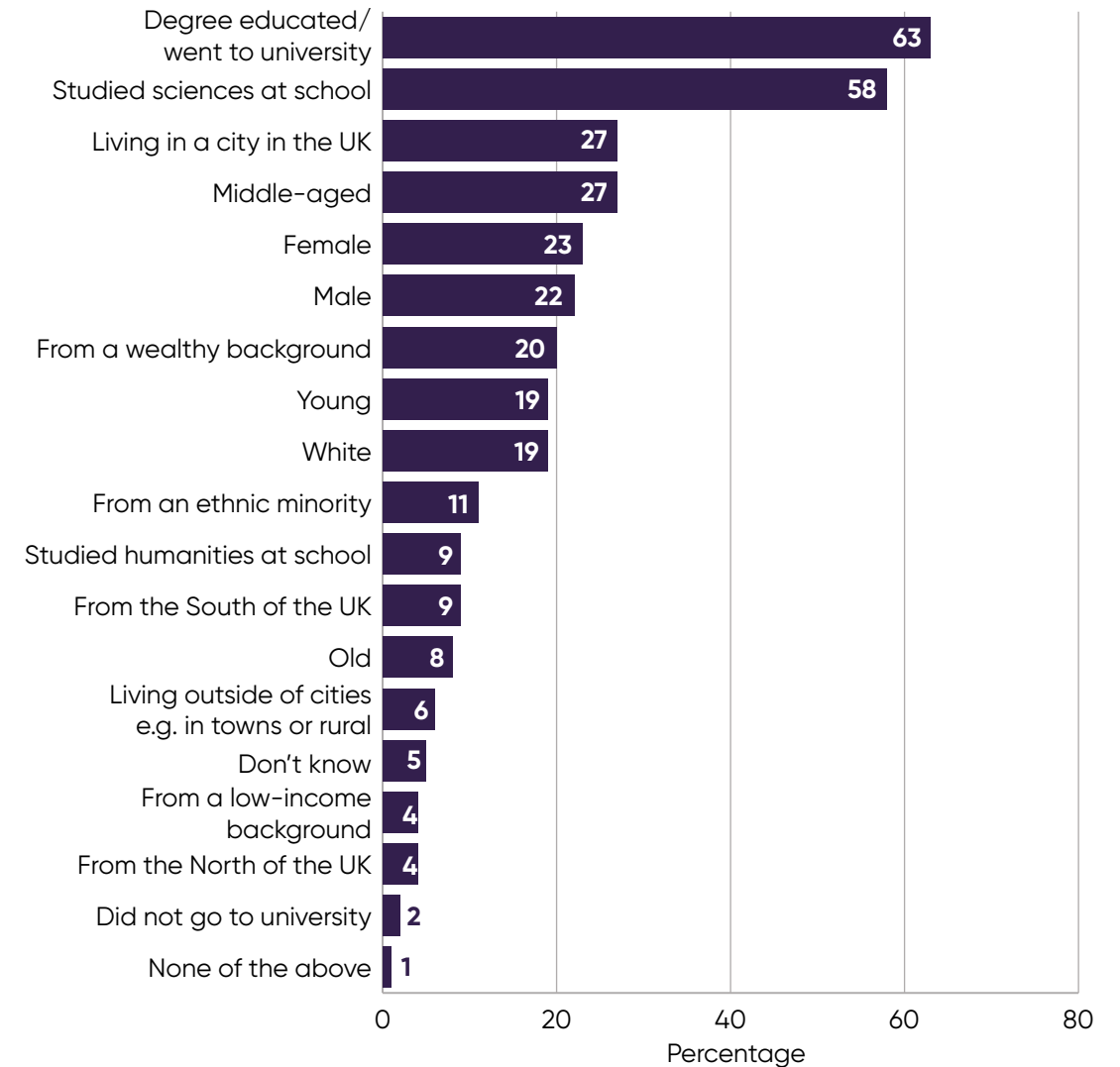


Figure 10: "When you picture the typical sort of person who works in these jobs in the pharmaceutical industry, what do you picture them to be like? Please select any which apply."²⁴

What can be done to navigate these challenges?



Improving awareness of the variety of roles within the industry

Further promotion of the vast array of roles on offer within the industry could help address the identified lack of awareness. Research suggests that perceptions of the suitability of different sectors and career paths are embedded in the minds of children from an early age, with the Careers and Enterprise Company suggesting that children should be exposed to career-related learning from as young as five years old.²⁵



© UCB

Case study: Outreach and community engagement

UCB and Talent Spaces inspiring the next generation of scientists

In 2021 UCB was the first pharmaceutical company to partner with social enterprise Talent Spaces – formerly UpSkill Me – to inspire and support young people from underprivileged and underrepresented backgrounds with aspirations of a career in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Despite more women participating in these subjects in higher education, they are still under-represented in these disciplines in both the workplace and academia.²⁶ The same is true for ethnic minorities who are also underrepresented in the STEM workforce.²⁷

For UCB and Talent Spaces it is imperative that we work to improve this to ensure equality of opportunity, and a pipeline of talented and enthusiastic scientists. This is why we have supported hundreds of young people to build the skills, connections, and knowledge they need to thrive in the future through three key programmes.

Case study: Outreach and community engagement

Empowered Females in STEM

The Empowered Females in STEM programme – an immersive, six-month blended mentoring programme designed to educate, inspire, and empower, 16–17-year-old female and non-binary students to pursue fulfilling STEM careers.

"I wasn't sure if I was capable of pursuing a career in STEM. After this programme, I have learnt that I am capable and just need to believe that I can do it." Empowered Females in STEM participant 2023.

Insights Day

One-day, immersive work experience opportunity at our Slough campus, Insights Day, allow A-Level students, studying at least one STEM subject to see what life is like in a pharmaceutical company.

"The day fuelled my passion for a career in the pharmaceutical industry, gave me real insights into what working in the industry is like whilst allowing me to develop soft skills such as confidence, teamwork, communication and problem solving." Insights Day participant 2024.

Work in Science Week

Work in Science Week offers a week-long, immersive work experience opportunity at our UK research hub for A-Level students studying one or more STEM subject.

More than 400 young people have passed through our Slough laboratories since it began a decade ago and in 2023, we partnered with Talent Spaces for the first time to deliver the project, attracting even more hard to reach students.

"This work experience week has opened my eyes to new opportunities available. I have developed a much more positive attitude towards apprenticeships." Work in Science Week participant, 2023.

Case study: Outreach and community engagement

Swedish Orphan Biovitrum Ltd – UK & Republic of Ireland Work placements

Getting a foot in the door within the world of work can be a challenge, especially for the younger generation. This can be due to several factors, such as lack of work experience, skills gaps or lack of career awareness and guidance.

Employers often seek candidates with relevant skills and experience, but without prior work exposure, it's difficult for young people to compete.

"At Sobi, we want to help change this. Even if we can only support a small number of individuals, every little helps in making a difference. By enabling these opportunities, we are helping to develop our future stars." Krista Austin, Associate Director HR

Sobi (Sobi – UK & Republic of Ireland)

In 2023, we opened our doors to welcome a college student from Cambridge Regional College, for two days a week throughout the college year until June 2024. He is studying for a BTEC in business, so has an interest in understanding the variety of roles and functions that make up a successful organisation while learning more about the pharmaceutical industry.

"I am fortunate enough to be doing my work experience at Sobi and exploring what certain areas of a pharmaceutical company do. I help with projects ranging from HR to finance and learn more about the products." Student participant

© UCB



Improving awareness of pathways into the industry

Highlighting the variety of educational and experiential pathways into the industry could help address perceived barriers to entry. Our research suggests that there is an assumption that there are limited non-degree pathways into the industry. Drawing attention to existing promotional materials and case studies of different pathways into the industry will be key overcoming this misconception.

Case study: Apprenticeships

The Clinical Pharmacology Scientist apprenticeship at King's College London

The Integrated MSc Apprenticeship in Clinical Pharmacology, developed in response to evidence of need, is being delivered by King's College London, where it builds upon their established and respected, full and part-time, postgraduate courses in pharmaceutical medicine – courses which have been developed and are taught by people experienced in the development and lifecycle management of medicines.

The apprenticeship is intended for practising Clinical Pharmacology Scientists currently working in one of the following settings: the NHS, academia, regulatory authorities, Clinical Research Facilities, Clinical Research Organisations and, of course, the pharmaceutical or biotechnology industries.

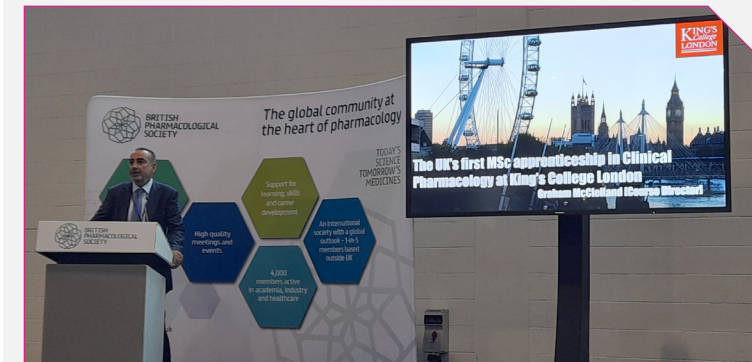
It is ideal for physicians, pharmacists, and scientists whose focus is developing and understanding new drug therapies and looking for formal training in clinical pharmacology and the design and execution of practical approaches to the mechanisms by which drugs act in the body.

The study programme for this 30 month course at King's is compliant with the European PharmaTrain initiative. Completion of the apprenticeship provides apprentices with a

- ◆ an MSc in Clinical Pharmacology from King's College London
- ◆ an apprenticeship as a Clinical Pharmacology Scientist
- ◆ eligibility for full membership of the British Pharmacological Society

Professor Graham McClelland
Centre for Pharmaceutical Medicine Research
Institute of Pharmaceutical Science
Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine
King's College London

"Being part of the Clinical Pharmacology Apprenticeship has been an invaluable journey. The mentorship provided has guided me towards new insights and skills, promoting both personal and professional growth. I'm confident that this experience has given me the tools for future career opportunities in the field of Clinical Pharmacology." Tharcila Moratori, apprentice with Kedrion Biopharma



© King's College London

Case study: Apprenticeships

CFSP Early Talent Strategy at IQVIA

At IQVIA, we are passionate about advancing patient health and improving patient outcomes. Delivering on this ambition requires the right connections between our capabilities, expertise, and experience. Core to this philosophy are our people, who help accelerate innovation across the business to drive and create a healthier world.

At IQVIA, we encourage employees to define and own their career by providing everyone with the opportunities to map their own career path and build a future that is aligned with their aspirations. Identifying and nurturing early talent is a key part of that commitment.

In 2023, as part of our people strategy, we entered a partnership with Kent University with the aim of implementing an apprenticeship program in the UK. This was key to encouraging emerging new talent to join IQVIA at the earliest opportunity, to a programme which facilitates practical skills development, in conjunction with a further education. We currently have three apprentices working within IQVIA as clinical trials specialists, two of which are part of our clinical functional service provider business unit (CFSP).

All our apprentices have now successfully completed their first year with IQVIA. What better way to bring the CFSP Early Talent Strategy to life than hearing from one of them. Hear what Zoila has to say:

"By embarking on the apprenticeship route, I have been able to develop myself in an area I am passionate about. I'm studying for a Bioscience degree and wanted to put this to good use, with the hope of putting my own stamp on the world and helping make a difference within life sciences. Working at IQVIA is an exciting environment where I can ask my colleagues in-depth questions about clinical trials and the science around them to assist me in my studies."

Currently as an apprentice at IQVIA, I am working as a Clinical Trials Assistant. This means I assist Clinical Trial Managers with the management of the Trial Master File, checking that documents from site staff have been completed and signed correctly, and requesting vendor access for site staff working on the trial.

Over the course of my apprenticeship, I am looking forward to seeing the wider parts of the business and being able to apply this to my studies. For example, we are planning a trip to our IQVIA laboratories in Scotland later this year, which will directly link to our first few University modules. I am also looking forward to developing more and more so that I can succeed in my studies and future career. I have been given a fantastic opportunity with IQVIA, coupled with the support I get from my management team, and University. I just know I will succeed and continue to grow a great career contributing to a healthier world."



Zoila, IQVIA apprentices

© IQVIA

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in this initiative and ensuring a successful implementation. A first for the UK and an important deliverable for IQVIA CFSP.



Celebrating existing diversity within the sector

Our research highlights that many young people do not consider the industry to be very diverse. Previous ABPI research²⁸ on equality, diversity and inclusion highlights that more can be done in the industry to "inspire future talent from a broader range of backgrounds."

In addition to celebrating existing diversity within the industry, organisations could develop and expand programmes which support diverse talent to enter, be supported and succeed in the industry, which may help navigate perceptions of diversity within the industry.

Case study: EDI

Sobi – UK & Republic of Ireland – DEI initiative

As a global company present in more than 30 countries, Sobi recognises that DEI is not a simple one-size-fits-all model. It's important to be sensitive to local needs and adjust activities accordingly for the best results possible.

We also know that DEI can only be successful if there is engagement across the organisation and on different levels, which is why we have developed a DEI toolbox. The aim is to enable all employees access to different resources to build awareness and knowledge, get inspired and enable action -- to contribute to a diverse, equitable and inclusive organisation.

The toolbox centres around three strategic focus areas: Great Leaders, An Inspiring Culture & Diverse Representation.

In the UK and Republic of Ireland team, we have an employee resource group in place and are running a series of workshops throughout the year on topics such as Inclusive Culture, Unconscious Bias & Diverse Leadership.

The workshops are a great way to pause and reflect whilst discussing important topics within a cross-functional team.

"Since joining Sobi I have had the opportunity to attend several diversity, equity and inclusion workshops. These workshops have been delivered by various facilitators, all of whom have led the sessions with an inclusive approach to learning styles, openness and an opportunity for respectful interaction. As well as wanting to learn more about DEI to support my colleagues and personal interactions, I believe this training will help ensure that my marketing campaigns are sensitive to the diverse needs of healthcare professionals and patients." Workshop attendee

We've also received some great feedback on our educational pieces, designed to provoke thought and boost awareness. We have covered a variety of topics such as men's health, International Women's Day, Maternal Mental Health, Menopause, Suicide Prevention, cultural events such as Ramadan, Pride, Black History Month, and many more.

Eighty-one per cent of our employees felt that Sobi hires people from a variety of different backgrounds, and we believe this is a key component in achieving a true DEI culture at Sobi.

Case study: EDI

Lilly and MSD Health Equity Hackathon

Lilly and MSD hosted a health equity hackathon, led by their employee groups focussed on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Health Equity Hackathon 2023 brought together 60 undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds to explore the causes of health disparities and develop solutions to real-life health equity challenges in ethnic minority communities.

The participants worked in teams and presented their ideas to a judging panel of leaders from Lilly and MSD. They presented implementable solutions focused on promoting community advocacy, eroding language and cultural barriers, and elevating education to address immediate challenges and foster long-term positive change. With the achievement of health equity a key concern for MSD and Lilly, these solutions could present the foundations for exciting future initiatives.

The hackathon allowed participants to work with a diverse group of people and learn more about the pharmaceutical industry. Following the event, participants had the opportunity to apply for a place on an early talent recruitment programme at MSD or Lilly and have their applications fast-tracked along the multistage application process.



How to promote careers in the industry to young people

What are the key messaging takeaways from this research?

- 1. Salary and benefits in job adverts and workplace descriptions should be transparent from the outset:** our research makes clear that understanding the salary and benefits on offer, is essential for many young people to even consider roles in the industry.
- 2. Do not assume that young people know anything about the industry:** one of the main findings from our focus groups was that young people were unaware about the roles available in and the impact of the industry. Providing information about the industry for context may make roles more attractive.
- 3. Be clear about the actual requirements to do the job:** perceived academic and experience barriers to entry were shared as putting many participants off the industry. Including a specific articulation of what is required from candidates may help diversify the candidate pool.
- 4. Focus on the impact on society and more specifically patients:** many of the young people we spoke to shared that they were keen to be involved with organisations which that impact society being explicit about your impact is essential.

5. Highlight the projected growth of the sector: a better understanding of job stability and projected growth of the industry may help attract young people to roles in the industry.

6. Think about how you're advertising your roles and promoting the industry: many participants spoke about the role of social media in shaping their perceptions of careers in different industries as well as common misconceptions about most roles being based in the lab. Utilising different platforms to promote the industry could help effectively influence this population.



Where is the opportunity for the biggest impact?



Emphasising existing strengths

This report highlights that the industry is in a broadly positive position with young people. Building on existing strengths such as being perceived to contribute significantly to society and pay well could help bolster interest in careers in the industry both now and in the future.



Combatting commonly held misconceptions

This research highlights that there are a number of commonly held misconceptions about careers in the industry such as the employees all being educated to postgraduate level, most roles requiring individuals to be good at maths and most roles being based in the lab.

Actively countering these commonly held misconceptions through clear and specific messaging about the pathways into and realities of working within the industry may help attract more diverse talent into the industry.



Addressing public perceptions of the industry more broadly

Research notes that young people are often unaware of the careers support on offer for them²⁹ and will in turn source careers advice and guidance from family and friends before turning to more formal avenues of support. Continuing to measure and understand broader public perceptions of the industry could be a way to help ensure that young people are encouraged to look at roles within the industry as appealing and accessible.



Methodology note

This research took a mixed methods approach to gaining a greater understanding of the factors influencing perceptions of careers in the pharmaceutical industry.

Three different strands of research were undertaken; a nationally representative poll of 16 – 25 year olds in the UK, two focus groups and two workshops with early-career-stage employees of ABPI member companies.

Polling:

Public First ran a nationally representative poll of 2037 adults between the 12th and 25th of March 2023. This included questions on drivers of career attractiveness, perceptions of the industry and perceptions of competitor industries. The results are weighted by interlocking age & gender, region, and social grade to Nationally Representative Proportions. Public First is a member of the British Polling Council, and company partners of the Market Research Society.

Full polling tables can be found on Public First's website. As with all opinion polls, there is a margin of error in the answers, and the margin of error is greater when sample sizes are smaller (when there are cross breaks of specific groups of people). The margin of error on the sample for this work is +/-3%. All polling numbers in this report should be read on this basis.

Focus Groups:

Public First undertook two independently recruited online focus groups. The first group was recruited to include young people aged 18 – 25 who were studying STEM subjects at university; these young people were recruited not knowing what they wanted to do next after university.

The second group was recruited to include young people aged 21–25 who were recent STEM graduates and were in employment outside of the pharmaceutical industry. The groups were recruited to have ethnic diversity, mixed gender and different social groups.

Early career workshops:

Facilitated by the ABPI, Public First ran two roundtables with employees of ABPI member companies in their early career. Each group was recruited to include a range of roles, demographics and size of member company.



About this research



Research for this report took place between March and April 2024 and included:

- poll of a nationally representative sample of 2,037 16 – 25 year olds in the UK;
- focus group of current undergraduates studying STEM subjects³⁰
- focus group of recent STEM graduates employed in industries other than the pharmaceutical industry, but open to changing careers and
- two workshops with early career stage employees of ABPI member companies³¹

Full tables for the poll fieldwork are available on request.

The ABPI acknowledges the help and support of its members in enabling their employees to engage in this research. The ABPI would also like to thank Public First for research delivery, poll analysis and report development.



About the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI)



The ABPI exists to make the UK the best place in the world to research, develop and access medicines and vaccines to improve patient care.

We represent companies of all sizes that invest in making and discovering medicines and vaccines to enhance and save the lives of millions of people around the world.

In England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we work in partnership with governments and the NHS so that patients can get new treatments faster and the NHS can plan how much it spends on medicines. Every day, our members partner with healthcare professionals, academics and patient organisations to find new solutions to unmet health needs.

www.abpi.org.uk



About Public First



Public First is a global strategic consultancy that works to help organisations better understand public opinion, analyse economic trends and craft new policy proposals.

It has worked directly with some of the world's biggest companies, government departments, top universities and major charities to produce bespoke, original policy proposals and reports derived from an evidence base of economic analysis and public opinion research.

Public First is a member of the British Polling Council and a company partners of the Market Research Society, to whose rules and guidelines it adheres.



Endnotes

- 1 ABPI, Evolution of an innovation-based biopharmaceutical industry: how skill requirements are changing, 8 June 2023, [available here](#)
- 2 ABPI, Strengthening reputation and trust in the UK pharmaceutical industry, 22 January 2024, [available here](#)
- 3 ABPI, Attitudes towards pharmaceutical companies in the UK, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 4 Pages 19 and 20
- 5 Page 22
- 6 Pages 12–14, 18
- 7 Page 18
- 8 Page 19–22
- 9 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 10 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 11 Deloitte, 2024 Gen Z and Millennial survey: Living and working with purpose in a transforming world, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 12 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 13 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 14 ABPI, General public, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 15 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 16 ABPI, Evolution of an innovation-based biopharmaceutical industry: how skill requirements are changing, 8 June 2023, [available here](#)
- 17 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 18 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 19 ABPI, Why work in the industry, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 20 ABPI manifesto for investment, health and growth, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 21 ABPI, Reinventing reputation: one of pharma’s biggest challenges, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 22 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 23 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 24 Public First poll of 2,037 16–25 year olds in the UK. Field work: 12–25 March 2024.
- 25 The Careers and Enterprise Company, What works? Career-related learning in primary schools, December 2018, [available here](#)
- 26 <https://www.un.org/en/observances/women-and-girls-in-science-day/> last accessed May 2024
- 27 <https://www.stem.org.uk/resources/elibrary/resource/26692/stem-choices-equality-and-diversity-ethnicity#&gid=undefined&pid=1> last accessed May 2024
- 28 ABPI, Equality, diversity and inclusion in the UK pharmaceutical workforce, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 29 FE News, New study reveals majority of UK’s young people unaware of careers advice on offer, (accessed April 2024) [available here](#)
- 30 Parliament UK, Definition of STEM, (accessed April 2024), [available here](#)
- 31 Demographics and job roles are not able to be shared for these sessions as it may make participants identifiable



The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry

A company limited by guarantee registered in
England & Wales number 09826787

Registered office 2nd Floor Goldings House,
Hay's Galleria, 2 Hay's Lane, London, SE1 2HB

RMI-0171-0524



www.abpi.org.uk

PUBLICFIRST

