Our Consulting Future:

Findings of the Young MCA Skills Survey

May 2016

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Chief Executive's Preface

As far as we know, this is the largest and most comprehensive survey of the educational backgrounds, skills and career plans of the UK's younger management consultants. Building on a smaller survey we conducted in 2011, it shines an invaluable spotlight on this key cohort of talent. It will be of great interest to consulting firms, policy-makers, educationalists and individual consultants.

The MCA's Young MCA Network is a vibrant asset for the consulting industry, bringing new opportunities to young consultants and providing an opportunity for the industry to tap into their views, skills and energy. Many thanks to the individual young consultants who helped design and promote this research.

Thanks as well go to the MCA Think Tank, particularly Paul Connolly and Luke Cummings, who guided and led this project.

The story this research tells is of a fast-moving industry which is able to attract many of the most skilled and talented young people in the country. The competition for that talent is changing. Consulting firms are broadening their search horizons (though too slowly for some). And business leaders are more conscious than ever of the need to provide challenging and engaging professional development opportunities.

These issues matter not just because consulting itself needs to retain a stream of skilled and ambitious young consultants. Consulting firms are also recruiting, training and managing the individual consultants who will play a crucial role over the next decades in improving the productivity of UK businesses, spreading digital technology, implementing innovative business processes and developing new products and services. The UK has an enormous vested interest in their talents. It makes sense to listen to their views and to learn from their experience.

In a few months, the MCA will launch our *Consulting Excellence* campaign. It is based on a new scheme for member firms that will highlight their commitment to quality service, ethical behaviour and the development of their consultants. This report is one of the building blocks of this scheme and the wider campaign. We plan to make a survey of this sort across the entire MCA consulting profession an annual fixture in the MCA and consulting industry calendar.

Alan Leaman, MCA Chief Executive

Introduction

As part of the Management Consultancies Association Year of Growth, and in preparation for the launch of our new *Consulting Excellence* initiative, the MCA Think Tank teamed up with the Young MCA to launch the largest ever survey of young consultants' skills.

A survey of young consultants was carried out in 2011. However, this was significantly narrower in scope than the current exercise. Despite the breadth of focus of this latest survey, nearly 400 young consultants took part in the survey or attended focus group sessions, far more than in 2011. The survey gives an extraordinarily detailed picture of the nationality, ethnicity, educational background, skills attainments, working lives and ambitions of young consultants. As such, it should be of interest to MCA members, especially the young consultants themselves, but also business leaders and HR functions. And as a sample of the perspectives of a large number of young professionals, it will be of value to other industries, as well as policy-makers and educationalists. The MCA will share the report with select target audiences. We also intend to place a summary version in the public domain. However, this full report is *an exclusive MCA member benefit*, available only through the Members' Area of the MCA website.

The more wide-ranging nature of this exercise compared to 2011 provides a new baseline. Nevertheless, where appropriate and possible, we will draw comparisons and contrasts between now and 2011, to note trends and progress. This current exercise will also be used as a basis for the future surveys of the wider profession that the MCA will conduct in support of *Consulting Excellence*. We have committed to survey consultants from across member firms annually, focusing particularly on the third pillar of the *Consulting Excellence* scheme, Professional Development. That survey will share many of the emphases of this current exercise targeting young consultants.

Acknowledgements

The MCA Think Tank team would like to acknowledge the invaluable input of Young MCA consultant volunteers. They helped develop the questionnaire, drive response numbers, and also conducted focus groups.

Our thanks go to:

Andrew Callaghan, CSC

Siya Radosova, CSC

Khilan Shah, CSC

Mary Scott, KPMG

Marcus Dowdeswell, Mott MacDonald

Julian Ng, Thales Cyber & Consulting

Methodology & conclusions

In December 2015, the Think Tank team worked with a selection of Young MCA volunteers on the development of a questionnaire. This was then made available for anonymous completion by Young MCA Network members between 02/03/2016 and 05/04/2016. In parallel, three focus groups were held, two at the MCA in February 2016, one at Mott MacDonald in March 2016.

This report sets out the findings of the survey in largely diagrammatic form. These are reasonably self-explanatory. The data raises questions that essentially concern the member firms themselves and that they will need to be mindful of or respond to. For this reason, unusually for Think Tank reports since 2013, we have decided to be relatively sparing in terms of commentary. The survey here is a starting point. The results point to an industry in good-health, with fine young consultants who are committed, motivated, skilled and already carrying out top-quality work. Any underlying issues and themes from the results will be for member firms to ponder, explore and action. Nevertheless, where general, cross-industry trends and issues are manifest, we have offered analysis and furnished explanations, caveated where appropriate.

A general undertaking was made at the outset of this exercise to provide bespoke findings for individual firms, where that was desired and as far as proved consistent with the paramount principle of anonymity. (Firms with small numbers of eligible Young MCA Network members, for example, might be able to identify respondents and their responses, compromising our ability to provide a bespoke version.) In practice, the numbers of respondents per member firm will make it challenging to furnish comprehensive readouts for each firm consistent with anonymity. Nevertheless, some of the findings are interesting for individual firms, and we will be informing them of specific issues where appropriate and compatible with confidentiality. We will also be able to provide outline and suitably tailored information on request. If your firm requires this, please contact Luke Cummings luke.cummings@mca.org.uk Furthermore, the analyses provided here are not the limit of the interrogation to which the data may be subjected. Should a firm need to understand the percentage of young female consultants from Eastern Europe with degrees in computer science working for audit forms who felt that their qualification prepared them for the world of consulting, we would be able to find that. Again, niche requests should be referred to Luke Cummings.

Please note that throughout the report pie charts representations of data will ordinarily add up to 100%. Where they do not, this is due to the removal of redundant data and/or rounding factors. In these cases, they will add up either to 99% or to just over 100% (for example Figure 91.).

Summary findings

The headline findings of the survey are:

Who

Just under 60% of respondents were men, just over 40% women.

The nationalities of respondents, predominately based in London and the South East, were diverse, with only 75.6% born in the UK and 75.2% having UK or dual UK nationality. The ethnicity of respondents shows a similar order of diversity.

Of respondents, only 14.9% are owner occupiers. An extraordinary 17.1% live with their parents, with the remainder in rented accommodation

Education

95% of respondents were educated to degree level or above. However, this is down from 99% in 2011. Of these, 5.9% are Oxbridge graduates, 67.6% Russell Group. This compares with 12.7% and 73.3% in 2011, significant evidence of a diversifying industry. The distributions of favoured universities are markedly different from 2011. Degree types tend to favour social sciences and business over science, with low numbers of computer scientists. Graduate degrees favour business and finance, with again only low numbers with qualifications in computer sciences.

Pure apprenticeships as the highest level of educational attainment remains a relatively rare case in consulting (around 1%). However, there is a marginally greater preponderance of them in the audit firms, where there is also a marginally greater tendency to recruit non-graduates than in other parts of the profession. However, apprenticeships were not felt by respondents to be a strong preparation for the world of work. Indeed the sense of preparedness rose with academic attainment.

Despite 58% saying that their education prepared them well or very well for the world of work, only 40% said that it prepared them well or very well for consulting. 26.2% felt their education left them little or very little prepared for consulting, while the remainder felt it had a broadly neutral impact. Respondents cited a range of extracurricular activities as particularly relevant workplace preparation, in particular charity and volunteering work (31%).

Vocational qualifications are slanted towards programme and project management, with only 7% of respondents with MBAs (though this at least compares favourably with 3% in 2011).

Work experience

Where respondents said they had undertaken an internship, most took place outside the consulting industry. There were marginally more consulting internships in audit and IT/service provider firms, with proportions of paid internships higher in the infrastructure firms.

20.1% of respondents had no job before their current consulting position. 27.6% had one, 22.5% had two, 13.3% had three, and 16.5% four and over. Among those with previous employment, 30% worked in retail, 19% in financial services, 11% in government and the public sector and 11% in the digital and technology sector.

Consulting Experience

69% of respondents have been working in consulting for less than 2 years, with the vast majority of the respondents having worked in consulting for a period of less than five years (the eligible Young MCA cohort), with no significant gender differences. Respondents from niche firms were least likely to have worked there under a year.

41% of respondents have been at their firm for less than one year.

In aggregate 24.2% chose their current firm for its culture, 18.3% because of its reputation and 8.8% owing to the benefits and salary packages. Benefits and salary mattered most with the audit firm respondents, while culture mattered most to niche providers and was a substantial consideration for the infrastructure firms.

Utilisation targets are high. 74.1% of respondents have a utilisation target, with men marginally more likely to have one than women. Targets are especially prevalent in the infrastructure firms, and are also common in the audit and IT/service provider firms, while 100% of niche respondents did not have a target. Of the majority that did have a target, 69% had a 90% utilisation target, while 29% had a 70% target. 77% of respondents achieved or exceeded their utilisation goals, 23% missing them, with slightly higher percentages missing targets in the audit firms.

Changes of role within firms are relatively frequent, with most changing their role within a year. There does not seem to be a meaningful pattern here by gender. However, role changes appear to be marginally more frequent in the audit firms.

68% were satisfied or very satisfied with the career path in their firm, with 11% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, the rest being neutral. Dissatisfaction was noticeably higher among women, and the firm-type breakdown indicated that there may be issues among some of the ICT/service provider and infrastructure firms.

The sector distributions in terms of young consultant activities do not marry precisely to the headline figures for the industry. There are higher proportions of young consultants working in government and public sector and digital and technology than might be expected, compared with financial services, the largest sector of MCA member firm activity. There are also significant gender discrepancies in sectorial activity, with proportionately more women working in the public sector than men and significantly fewer working in infrastructure. 54% of consultants were allocated their sector, 46% chose it, with slightly more choosing their sector on average in the audit firms.

Service-line breakdowns also do not correlate precisely to the activity patterns of MCA members. Consultants answered with multiple responses leading to high percentages for catch-all categories, such as business transformation (55%) and PPM (41%). Strategy also scored high (30%) and unsurprisingly digital (36%). However, despite evidence from wider reports that graduate recruitment has been substantially driven by the need to acquire digital skills, only 8% of respondents said they worked solely in the digital service line. Gender discrepancies here include women being less likely than men to work on transformation, operational consulting, strategy and finance, while more likely to work on change and digital. 51% of all respondents chose their service lines, 49% did not, with numbers selecting them a majority everywhere outside the pure consulting firms.

Training, development, wellbeing

57% of respondents are currently in a graduate scheme. 14% were previously in one at their current or a former firm, with female respondents marginally less likely to be in a graduate scheme than males.

The mean response figure for training allocation is *73 hours per year*. Training covers a range of areas, with core consulting (25%) and professional qualifications (21%) the largest shares. 79% said training equipped them for consulting from somewhat to a very large extent. 20% said it equipped them to a very limited extent or not at all. There were no significant gender differences, though satisfaction with training appears to be highest at pure consulting firms. 41% of those receiving training from their firm have acquired PRINCE2, 37.2% CIMA.

61% were satisfied or very satisfied with in-house training, 21% neutral, 16% dissatisfied to very dissatisfied, with the remainder N/A. Audit firms have marginally the highest levels of satisfaction. 53% of all respondents were satisfied to very satisfied with outsourced training, 20% satisfied to very dissatisfied, with 27% neutral, and the remainder N/A.

Digital ranks overwhelmingly as the skill respondents see as most in demand over the next three years. However, the areas of additional training respondents most sought were sales (39.6%), management (25.3%), with digital third (22%).

80.7% of respondents said their firms supported their wellbeing from to some extent to very much, while 19.3% suggested that they were supported from a small extent to not at all, with no significant gender differences.

79% of respondents felt supported in their career development, from somewhat to a very large extent, with the rest feeling only a little supported to not supported at all. Women felt marginally more supported than men, while responses were most positive in infrastructure firms.

Motivations and the future

While 29% of respondents are not considering leaving their firm, the remainder are open to it in some form, from market scanning to active search, with percentages not considering leaving their firms higher in audit firms and significantly higher in pure management consulting firms. Among those not wishing to leave their firm, the quality of opportunities is the main reason (22.1%) while among those wishing actively to leave 25.4% sought a better salary, as opposed to 19.4% looking for better opportunities. In turn, 29.1% of them would stay at their current firm for a better salary, while 27.6% would for better opportunities. Flexible working does not appear from the survey, as yet, to be a major issue for young consultants, though the focus groups conducted suggest some interest in this (and there are a range of related issues that especially impact women).

55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their firm offered clear promotion routes, with 16% neutral and the rest not agreeing. 54% agreed or strongly agreed, 23% were neutral and the rest did not agree that their firm offered distinct pathways on management and/or consulting specialisms.

Only 13% said that work/life balance was poor to very poor. This is a significant improvement on 2011. However, women experienced a marginally less positive work/life balance than men, with audit firms having the least positive work/life balance returns.

54.5% suggested that they would possibly remain in consulting for their entire working lives, 22.9% positively affirming that they would with 22.6% saying they would not. Women are marginally less likely to affirm that they would stay. Respondents most likely to affirm positively that they will stay in consulting are from infrastructure firms.

Among those saying that they might leave consulting in the future, 21.5% want to work in digital and technology, 19.8% in financial services and 15.4% in government and public services.

57.6% of respondents say that they anticipate changing jobs every 3-4 years, with higher proportions of men expecting to change jobs at that frequency. By firm type, respondents from niche specialist firms were substantially more likely to seek a change of job within 3-4 years, respondents from audit firms significantly less so.

43.1% of respondents say that they might possibly need to retrain completely in the future, 42.8% saying they would not, the remainder affirming that comprehensive retraining was very likely.

In two years, 27.8% of respondents want promotion, while 16.6% want to manage. Proportionately more seek management roles in pure consulting firms, and specialist roles in infrastructure and niche firms. Women are less likely to be seeking promotion in that time, marginally more likely to seek a management role, significantly more likely to want to work abroad and very much more likely to want marriage and/or a family.

In five years, 36% of respondents want to manage, while 15% want to work in industry. The managerial ambition is even more marked in infrastructure firms, though infrastructure respondents did not indicate a desire to work in wider industry. The desire to work in wider industry is most marked in audit firms and niche specialists, respondents from the latter also evincing a marked desire to work overseas.

Women are more likely to seek a management role, less likely to want to work in wider industry, and substantially more likely to want a family.

Educational background

We asked respondents about their educational background and their level of academic attainment. We also broke these down by firm type. They responded as set out in Figures 1 to 9 We also made comparisons between the educational backgrounds reported in 2011 and those reported in this exercise.

Fig. 1 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

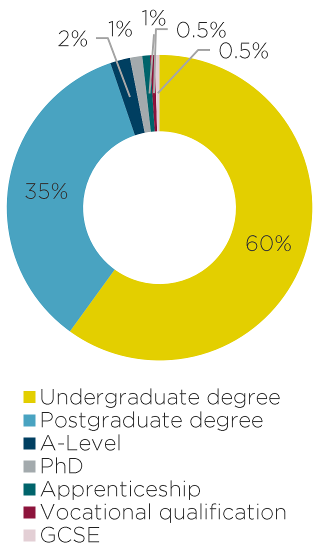


Fig. 2 What final grade were you awarded for your undergraduate degree?

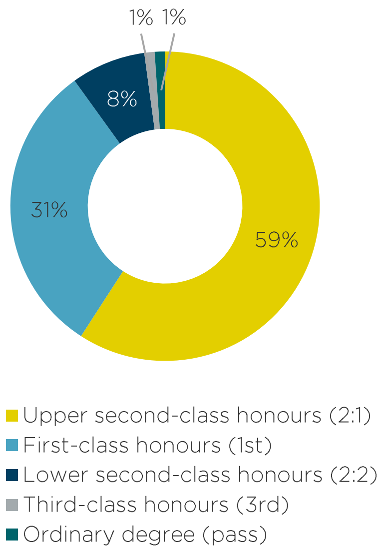


Fig. 3 With which discipline is your undergraduate degree associated?

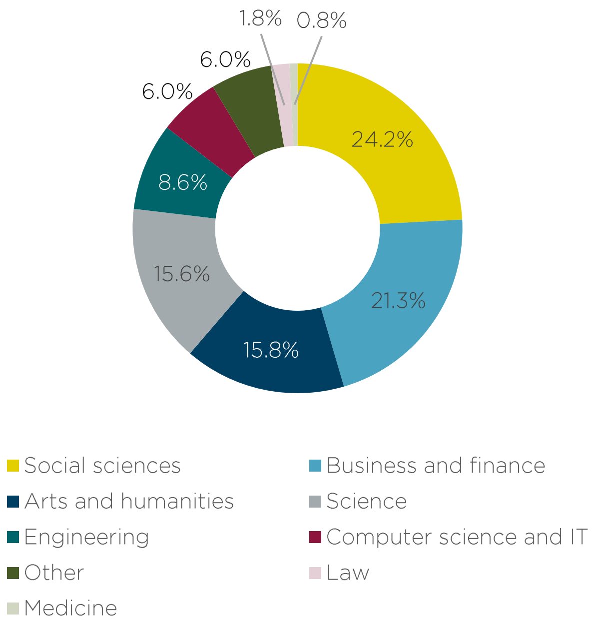


Fig. 4 If you have a postgraduate qualification or PhD, with which discipline is it associated?

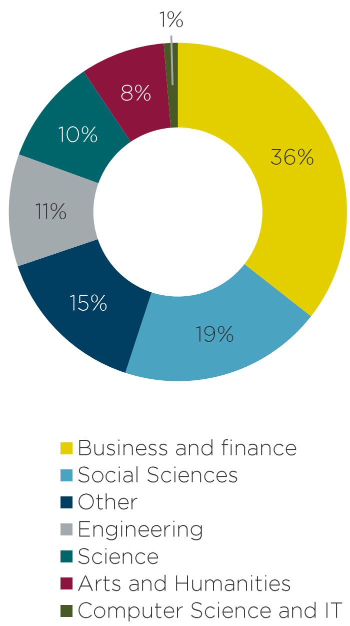


Fig. 5 What type of qualification was your postgraduate degree?

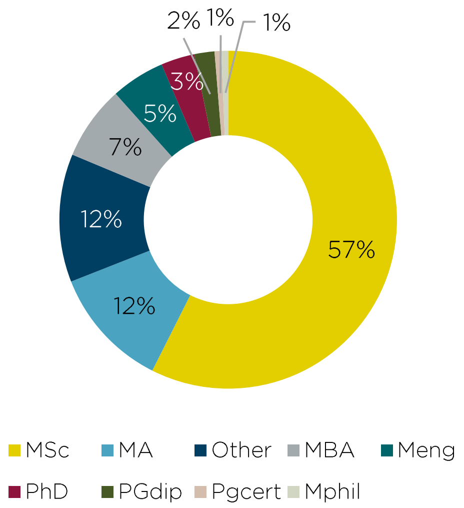


Fig. 6 How many additional languages do you speak to a professional / fluent level?

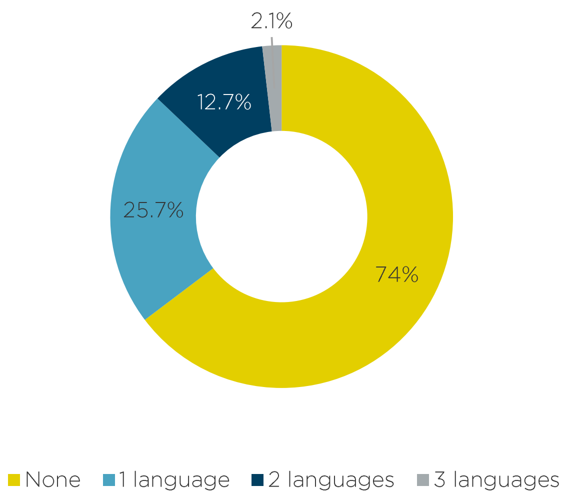


Fig. 7 With which discipline is your undergraduate degree associated? (2011 & 2016)

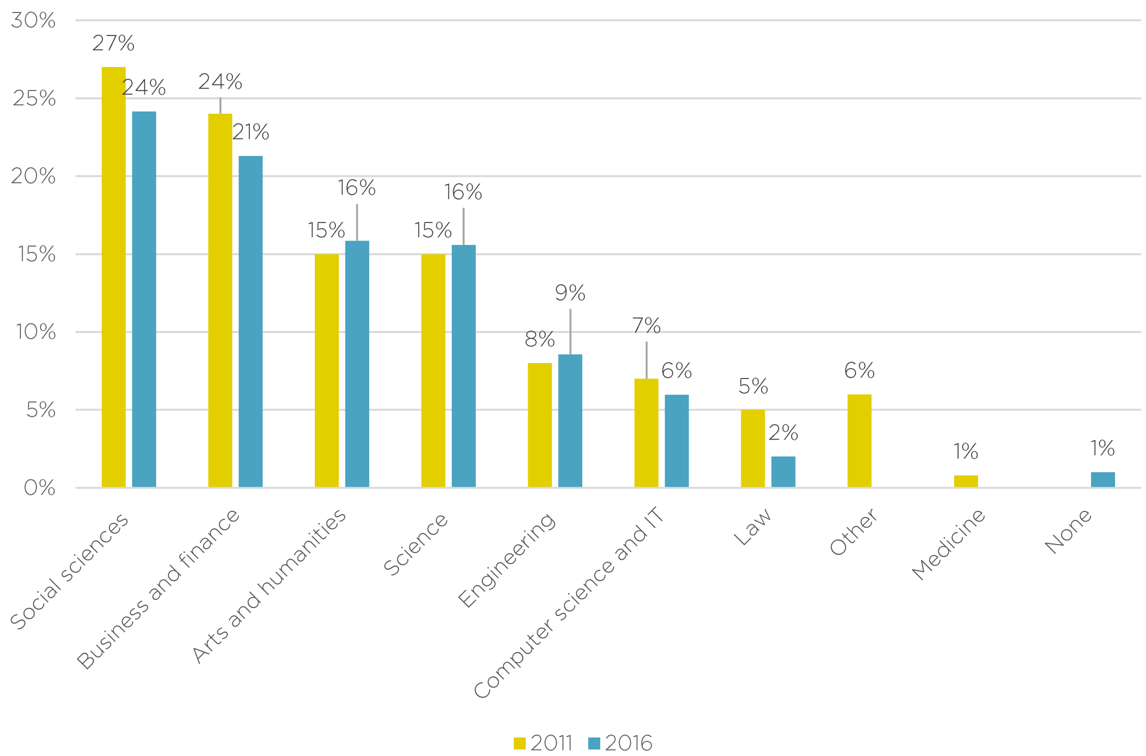
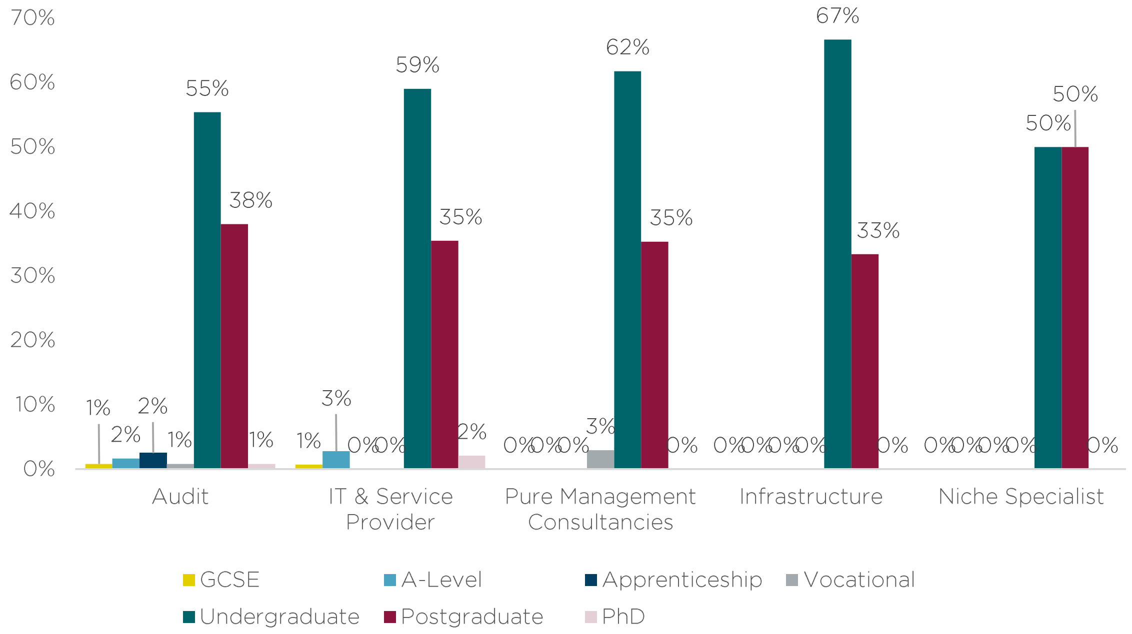


Fig. 8 Percentage of respondents attending the specified university

2011 Graduates		2016 Graduates	
University of Oxford	7%	University of Durham	7%
University of Bristol	6%	University of Nottingham	6%
University of Warwick	6%	University College London	4%
University College London	5%	University of Manchester	4%
University of Cambridge	5%	University of Oxford	4%
University of Manchester	5%	University of Birmingham	4%
University of Nottingham	5%	University of Southampton	3%
Imperial College London	4%	Imperial College London	3%
Durham University	3%	University of Bristol	3%
King's College London	3%	University of Leeds	3%
Russell Group	73.3%	Russell Group	67.6%
Oxbridge	12.7%	Oxbridge	5.9%

Fig.9 Education level and firm type



95% of respondents were educated to degree level or above. However, this is down from 99% in 2011. Of these, 5.9% are Oxbridge graduates, 67.6% Russell Group. This compares with 12.7% and 73.3% in 2011. Far from being evidence of the intellectual decline of our industry, this change confirms a healthy trend of diversification. A similar survey conducted 30 years ago would have revealed acute biases towards graduates and Oxbridge. Now business leaders, conscious of the need to enlarge their sources of insight, especially given the rise of digital and its associated challenges, are starting to spread their net more widely. Our focus groups also confirmed this tendency, with some participants, unbidden, speaking of the 'educational diversity' of consulting.

Nevertheless, we should avoid overstatement. To date the diversifying tendency is only marginal. The vast majority of young consultants responding to the survey are graduates. Indeed, among some firm types respondents were all graduates. In the focus groups we conducted alongside the survey exercise, some participants plainly still viewed having a degree as a formal or informal requirement for consulting success: 'a degree is a mark of intelligence, a benchmark or a way of proving yourself'. We anticipate greater moves towards educational diversification in coming years.

The distributions of respondents' universities differ markedly from 2011. Degree types tend to favour social sciences and business over science, with low numbers of computer scientists. Graduate degrees favour business and finance, with again only low numbers in computer sciences. This is significant. The Government's drives to promote STEM subject attainment have yet to feed through significantly into the pattern of consulting recruitment. Furthermore, despite signals from business leaderships and recruiters that there is a need for more digital specialists, there is little evidence here of substantial recruitment of, say, data scientists or experts in AI into the industry. However, we must treat this finding with caution. It is entirely possible that those with first degrees in social sciences, for example, have outstanding digital attainment. The volumes of data scientists that business leaders suggest are being recruited may simply not be on the radar of the Young MCA as yet. Indeed, though working in and around consulting, they may not yet be defined as consultants per se. On the whole, given the evidence we have from other sources, we are confident that the level of digital recruitment that we are seeing at junior level in our industry is high, rising, and understated here. Nevertheless, the patterns of attainment here, together with evidence later in this report on service line allocation, point to the predominant characteristic of the new consulting recruit as being a business all-rounder, rather than a specialist.

Pure apprenticeships as the highest level of educational attainment remains a relatively rare case in consulting (around 1%). Of course, the evolution of apprenticeships means they are becoming increasingly seen as a vocational qualification for graduates, not solely an alternative option to higher education. We will explore this more closely in future studies. However, there is a marginally greater preponderance of them in the audit firms, where there is also a marginally greater tendency to recruit non-graduates than in other parts of the profession.

Nevertheless, the pure apprenticeships here were not felt necessarily to be a strong preparation for the world of work by respondents. We asked respondents to indicate how far their education had prepared them for the world of work and ranked that by academic attainment. Figures 10 and 11.

Fig. 10 How well did your education prepare you for work in general?

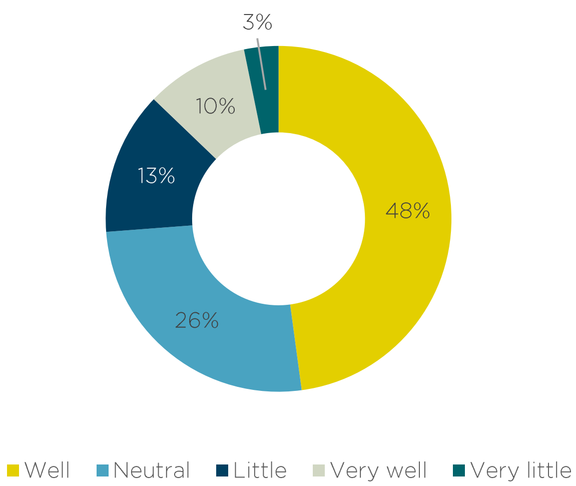
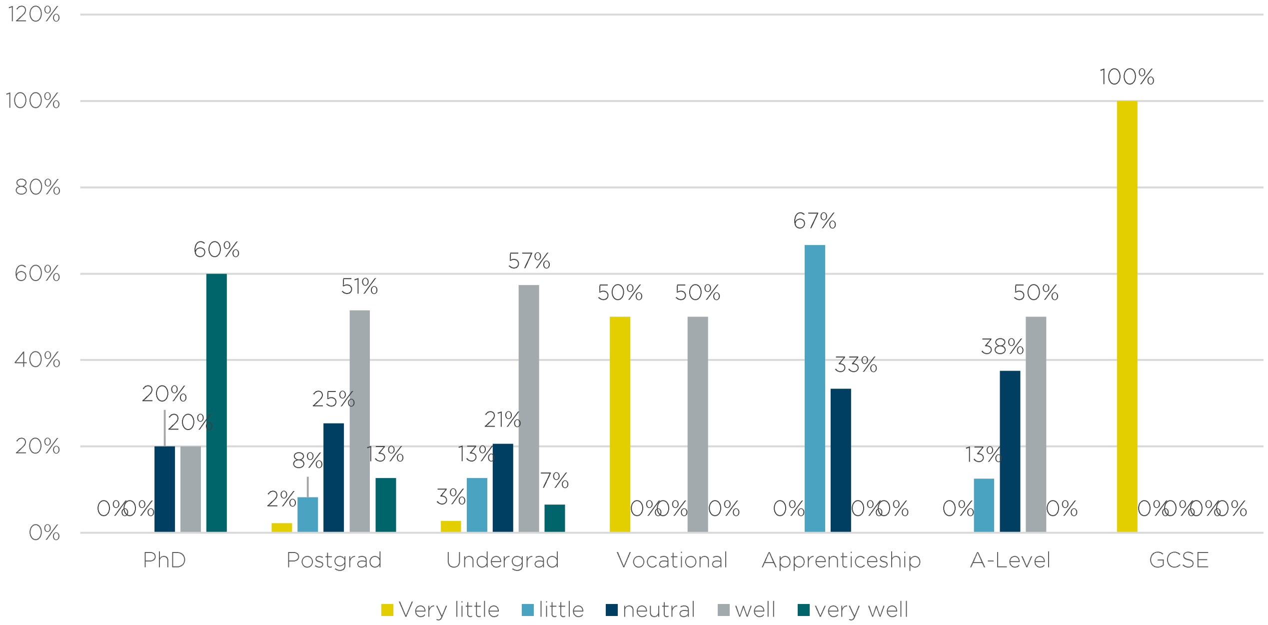


Fig. 11 **How did your education prepare you for work in general? (education level breakdown)**



The sense of preparedness for work seems to rise as a function of academic attainment. However, when we asked respondents how far their educational attainment had prepared them for consulting, a different picture emerged. Figures 12 and 13 below.

Fig. 12 **How well did your education prepare you for consulting specifically?**

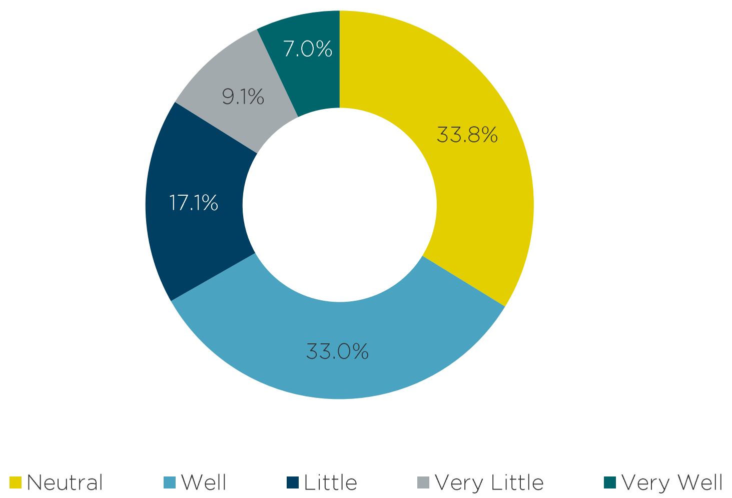
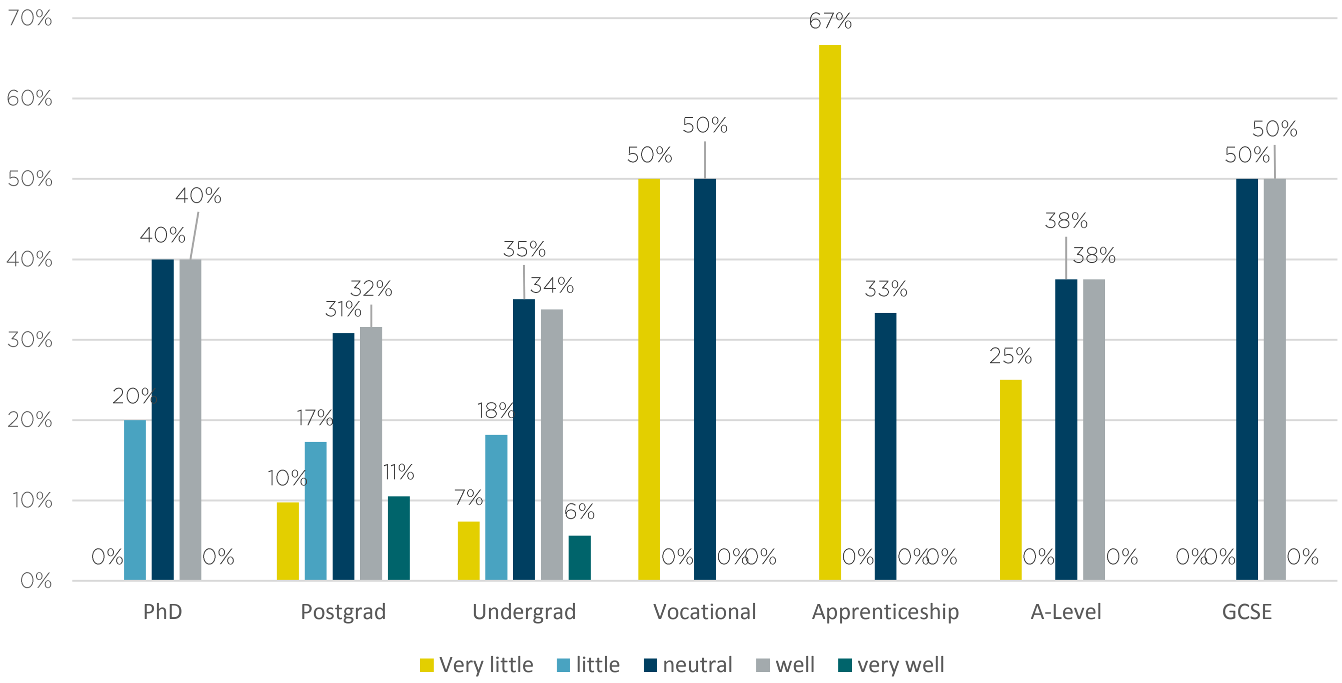
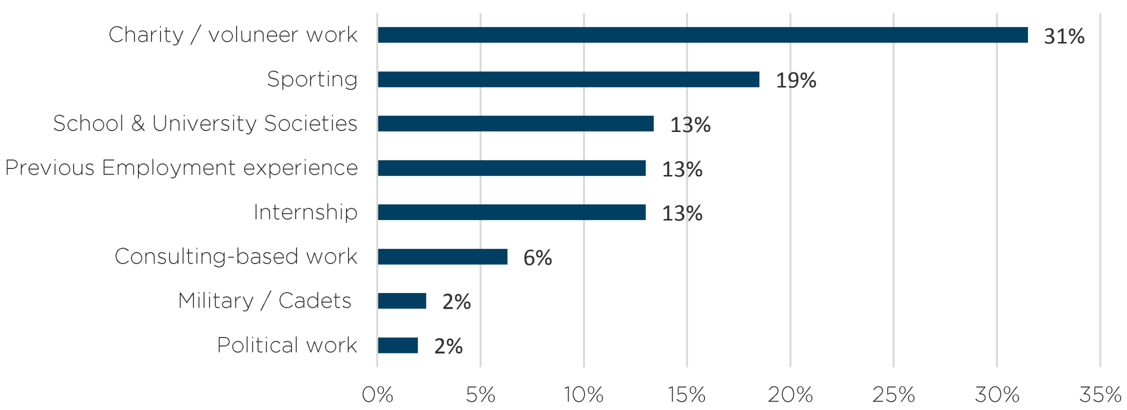


Fig. 13 **How well did your education prepare you for consulting specifically? (education level breakdown)**



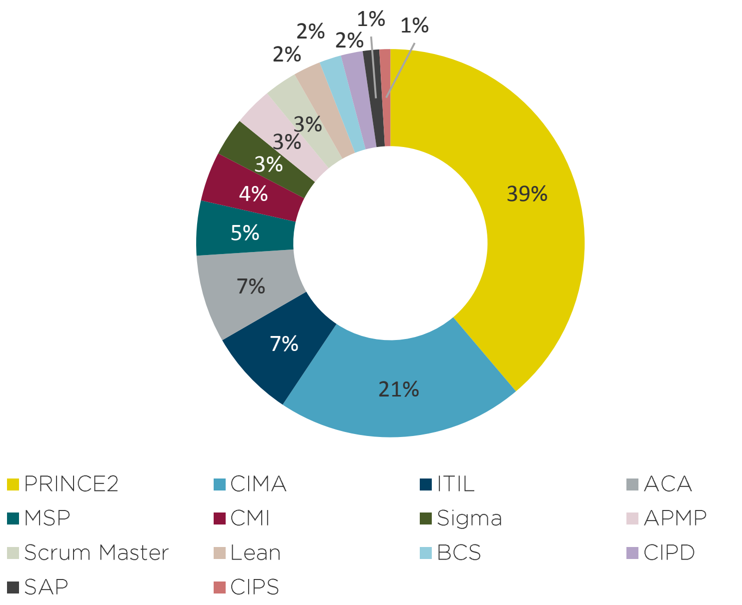
Despite 58% saying that their education prepared them well or very well for the world of work, only 40% said that it prepared them well or very well for consulting. 26.2% felt their education left them little or very little prepared for consulting, while the remainder felt it had a broadly neutral impact. Feedback in the focus groups on this point was mixed. While a degree was seen to provide research and analytic grounding of some relevance to consulting, some respondents suggested the skills acquired in extracurricular activity were at least as relevant to workplace preparation and to consulting specifically. Indeed respondents to the survey cited a range of extra curricular activities as particularly relevant workplace preparation, in particular charity and volunteering work (31%). Figure 14 below.

Fig. 14 **Have you gained any other experience outside of your formal education?**



Respondents were also asked about their attainment of vocational qualifications in general (ahead of specific questions on training and development with their firms, where numerous of these qualifications will have been acquired). The results are set out in Figure 15 below.

Fig. 15 Have you obtained any professional qualifications or accreditations?



Vocational qualifications are slanted towards programme and project management. Only 7% of respondents have MBAs. While this is higher than the 3% in 2011, given our young consultants' interest, manifest later in the report, in acquiring management skills and how relevant they see these to consulting, this may be a deficit.

Overall, responses to this section of questions evidenced the start of a welcome process of diversification of sources of recruits. Policymakers should be concerned however that this significant sample of young professionals, often dealing with technical and analytical questions, shows a lowish proportion of STEM graduates. There is less evidence here as yet of the wholesale search for digital specialists among graduates than we might have anticipated, though as mentioned this is potentially disguised. Moreover, the disconnection between the numbers who suggested that their education prepared them for work in general, and the lower numbers who suggested it prepared them for consulting specifically, together with the mixed picture on apprenticeships, would seem to point to the need for a new vocational qualification for our industry. This provides direct support to both our *Consulting Excellence* initiative in general and the Chartered Management Consultant award we are developing in partnership with CMI.

Work experience

Of course, mass recruitment of graduates/school-leavers for consulting purposes is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Thirty years ago, while such recruitment certainly took place, especially in the larger firms, there was a bias against the 'inexperienced consultant': someone without a background in industry. Plainly, this attracts counterarguments. Young consultants come into assignments without the freight of assumptions that business leaders in client organisations have. They are thus able to provide objective perspectives on what those clients need. Nevertheless, complete ignorance of the realities of the business environment and of what is required of consultants in dealings with clients is plainly debilitating. Mass graduate recruitment strengthens the case for vocational training and also makes the work experience of our young consultants a matter of interest.

We asked respondents about internships and broke the findings down by firm type. Figures 16 and 17.

Fig.16 Have you previously undertaken an internship?

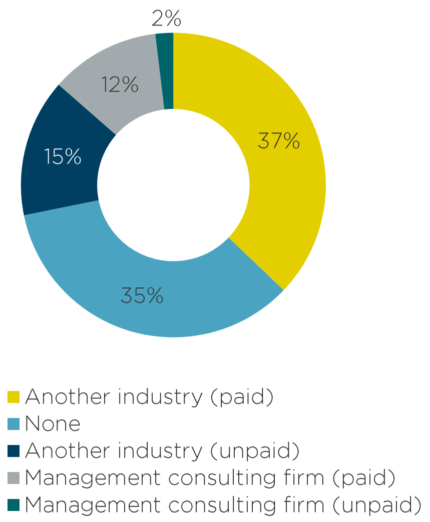
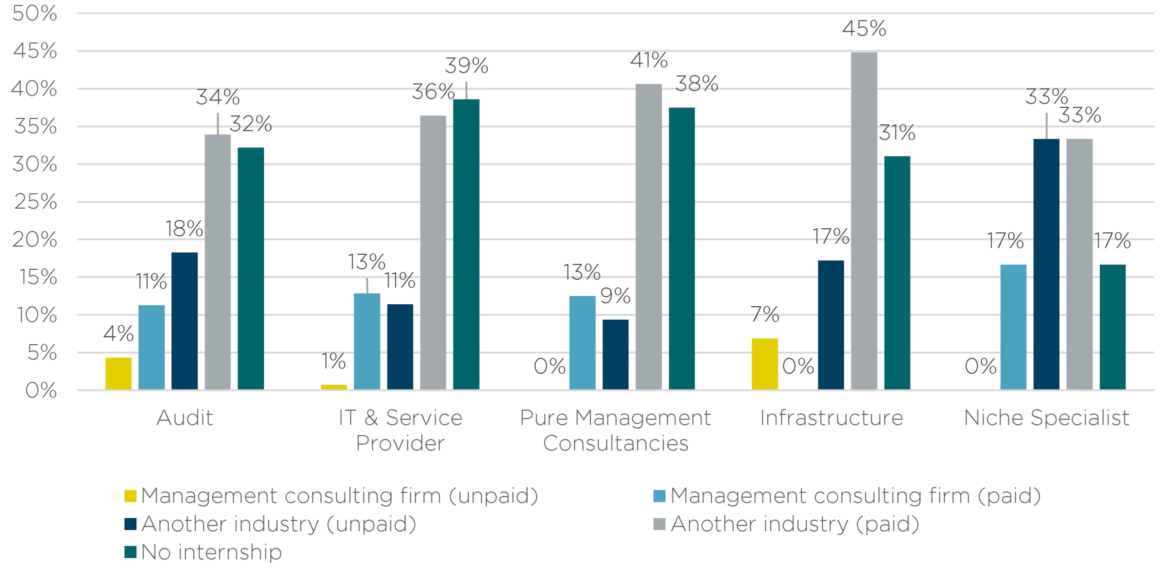


Fig. 17 Have you previously undertaken an internship? (firm type breakdown)



Among those who identified that they had undertaken an internship, most reported that these were outside the consulting industry itself. There were marginally more consulting internships in audit and IT/service provider firms, with proportions of paid internships higher in the infrastructure firms. It is obviously for MCA member firms to decide what they do with this information. But given the frequency with which our young consultants participate in internships, there may be a case for a significant expansion of the number of consulting internships made available, especially paid ones.

We asked about employment before consulting. Figures 18 and 19.

Fig. 18 How many jobs did you have before joining the consulting industry?

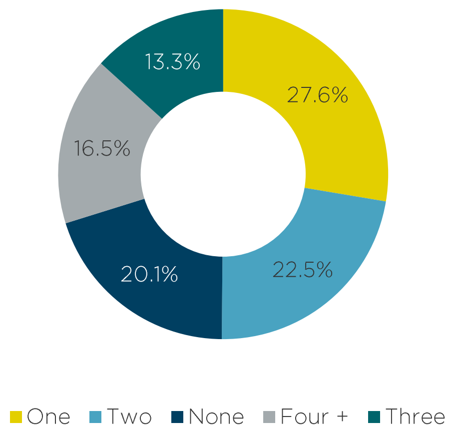
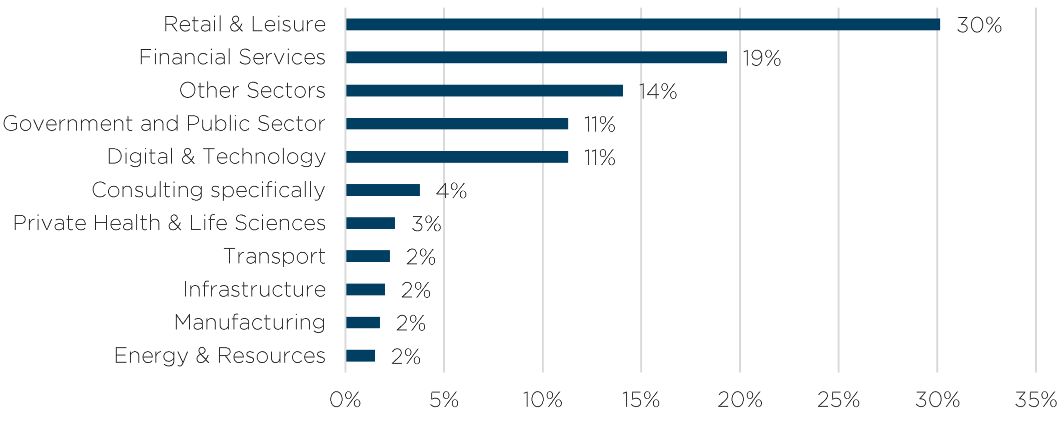


Fig. 19 Which sector(s) were you previously employed in?



20.1% of respondents had no job before their current consulting position. This relatively high number strengthens the case for vocational training and even for early secondments to other industries. 27.6% of respondents had had one job, 22.5% had two, 13.3% had three, and 16.5% four and over. Among those with previous employment, 30% worked in retail, 19% in financial services, 11% in government and the public sector and 11% in the digital and technology sector. The retail figure is the one most likely to include ‘holiday jobs’, of course. However, these sectors map well to the priority areas for consulting in general. As set out in our authoritative Annual Industry Reports, financial services and government are the two largest sectors in terms of consulting fee income. Retail is a centre of digital transformation, while the digital sector is growing as an area of strategically significant consulting input.

Given the importance to preparation for consulting some focus-group participants attached to volunteering and practical activity above academic attainment, it is certainly to be welcomed that a majority of young consultants have some workplace experience before consulting.

Consulting experience – and why consulting

We asked respondents how long they had been in consulting, and at their current firm, and broke the latter down by gender and firm type. Figures 20 to 23.

Fig. 20 How many years have you been working in the management consulting industry?

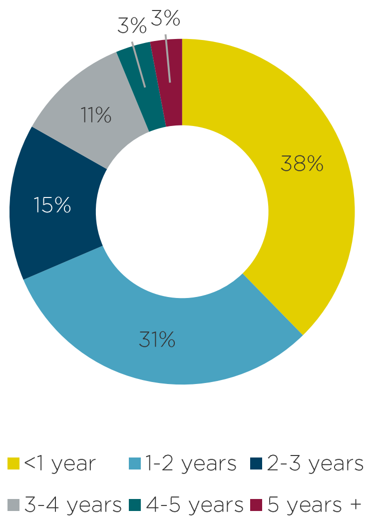


Fig. 21 How long have you been employed by your current firm?

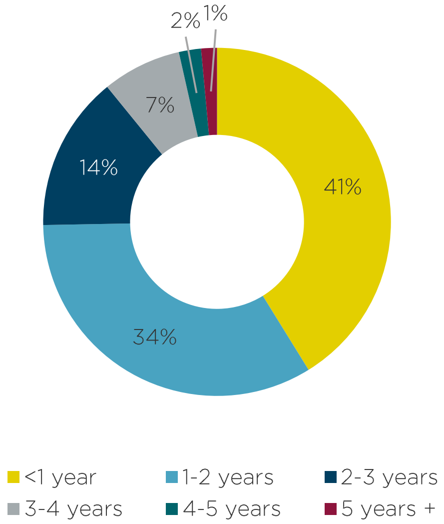


Fig. 22 How long have you been employed by your current firm? (gender breakdown)

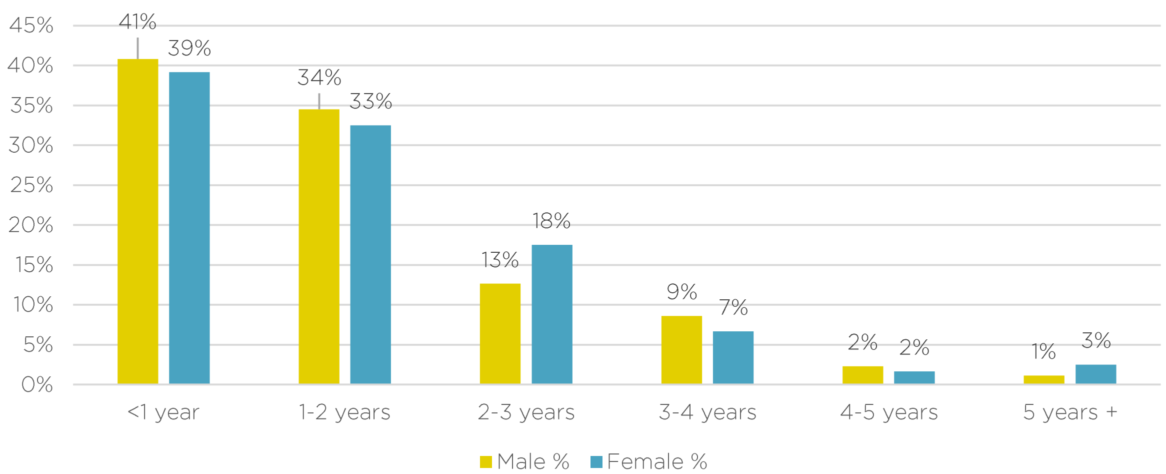
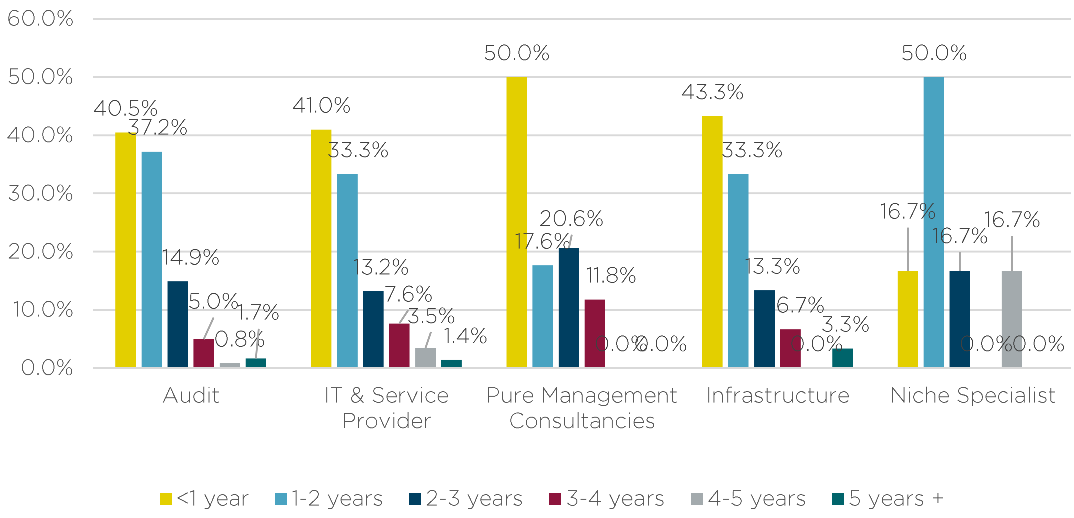


Fig. 23 **How long have you been employed by your current firm? (by firm type)**



The survey responses plainly skew significantly towards the newest consultants. 69% of respondents have been working in consulting for less than 2 years. 41% of respondents had been at their current firm less than one year. The principal eligible cohort for the exercise was the Young MCA Network, comprising those in consulting 0-5 years. So the vast majority of the respondents have worked in consulting for a period of less than five years (with a small number of outliers with 5+ years experience, whose returns have been retained, since they are mostly from respondents deducible as under 30). There were no significant gender differences. The breakdown across firm types evidences significant levels of recent recruitment, though survey respondents from niche specialist practices were the least likely to have been in the firm for less than one year.

Hence, when we asked people what had attracted them to their current firm, we were in effect asking many of them a question made explicit in the focus group sessions: what had attracted them to consulting.

We asked consultants what had attracted them to their current firm, broken down by firm type. Figures 24 and 25.

Fig. 24 **Why did you join your current employer?**

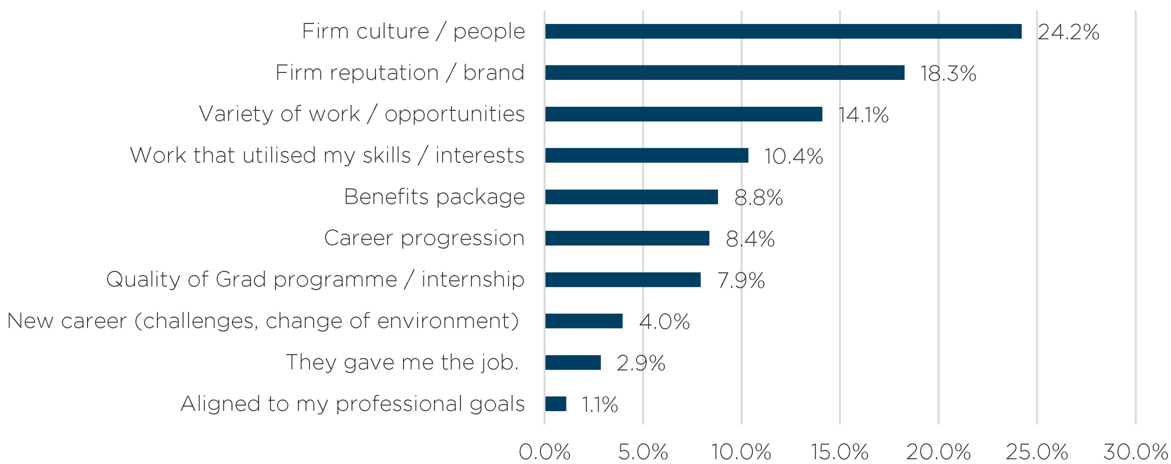
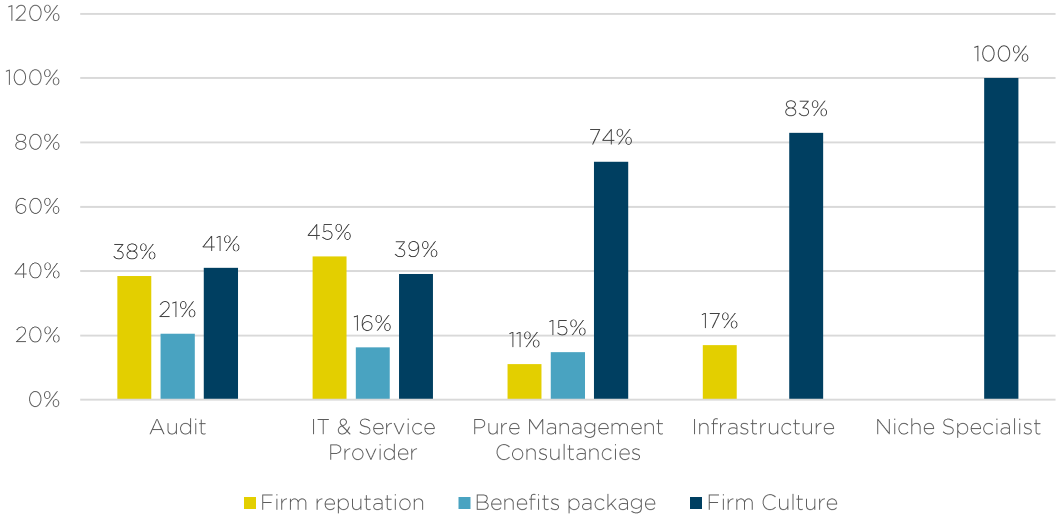


Fig. 25 Why did you choose your current employer? (firm type breakdown)



In aggregate 24.2% chose their firm on its culture, 18.3% due to its reputation and 8.8% owing to the benefits and salary packages. Benefits and salary mattered most with the audit firm respondents, while culture mattered most to niche providers and was a substantial consideration for the infrastructure firms.

What is striking about these findings is the lack of reference to consulting per se. For many respondents, their current firm will be their first consulting firm. So one might expect responses such as 'a real desire to work as a consultant'. Even among those for whom their current consulting firm was not their first, a wish to move in order to 'practice the sort of consulting I want' was not a common response. Of course, some of these responses may have been implied by selection on the basis of culture.

However, our focus groups suggested that culture on the whole meant 'softer' factors, such as promotion opportunities, diversity, sensitivity to staff, rather than the specific culture and praxis of consulting. The focus groups also reinforced the sense that the attractions of consulting as a profession were sometimes indirect ones. When asked in terms why they had chosen consulting as a profession, some focus group participants did point to the interest inherent in consulting work. Others however suggested that skills acquired in consulting were useful in that they allowed people to become 'chameleons' and would prove 'useful wherever one ended up'. Others were more explicit. The fact of working across sectors in consulting gives exposure to those sectors, and thus the prospect of transferring knowledgably to those portions of industry later in one's career.

This notion of consulting as an instant immersion in transferrable skills or as a shop-window to other industries has some recruitment positives. But it is less positive in terms of retention. The responses in this section confirm the determination of the MCA, manifest in *Consulting Excellence* and Chartered Management Consulting award, to raise the status of the profession. It will be interesting to see if the impact of those initiatives in a few years lifts the number of responses that are worded something like 'consulting is a great profession and I was convinced that this is one of the great firms' relative to those that said simply 'I needed the money'.

We asked respondents about utilisation. Figures 26 to 32.

Fig. 26 Do you have a utilisation target?

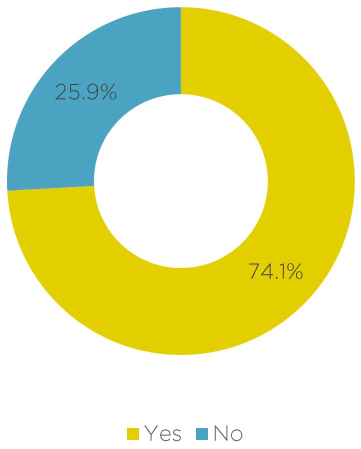


Fig. 27 What is your utilisation target?

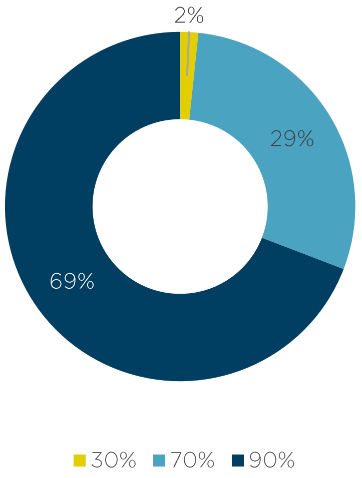


Fig. 28 Utilisation target achieved status

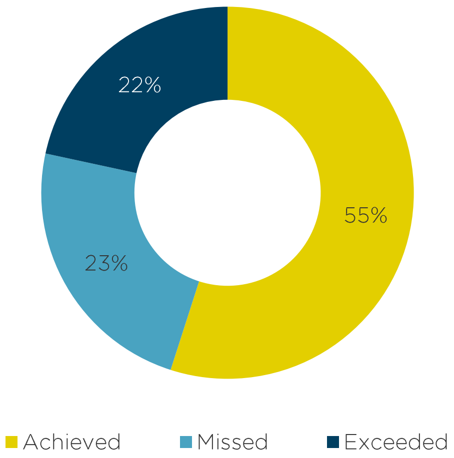


Fig. 29 Do you have a utilisation target (gender breakdown)

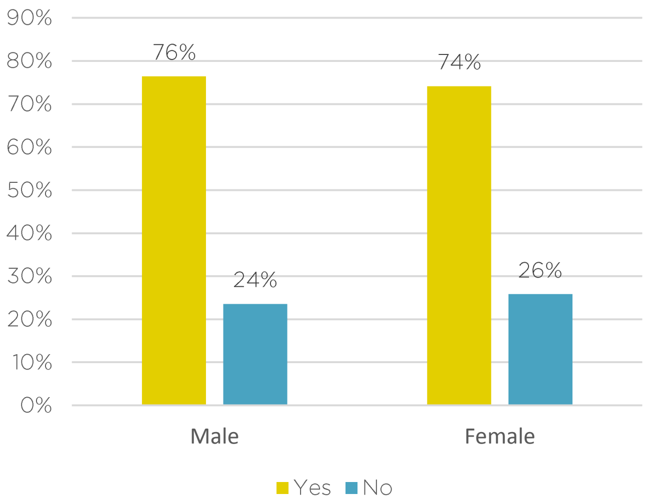


Fig. 30 Do you have a utilisation target? (firm type breakdown)

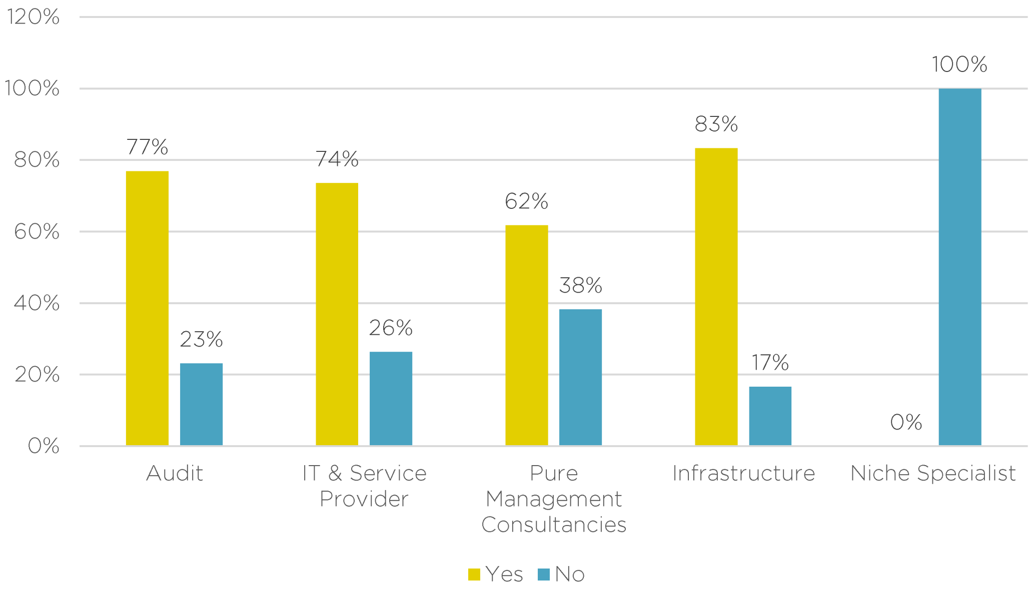


Fig. 31 Utilisation target and achieved status (gender breakdown)

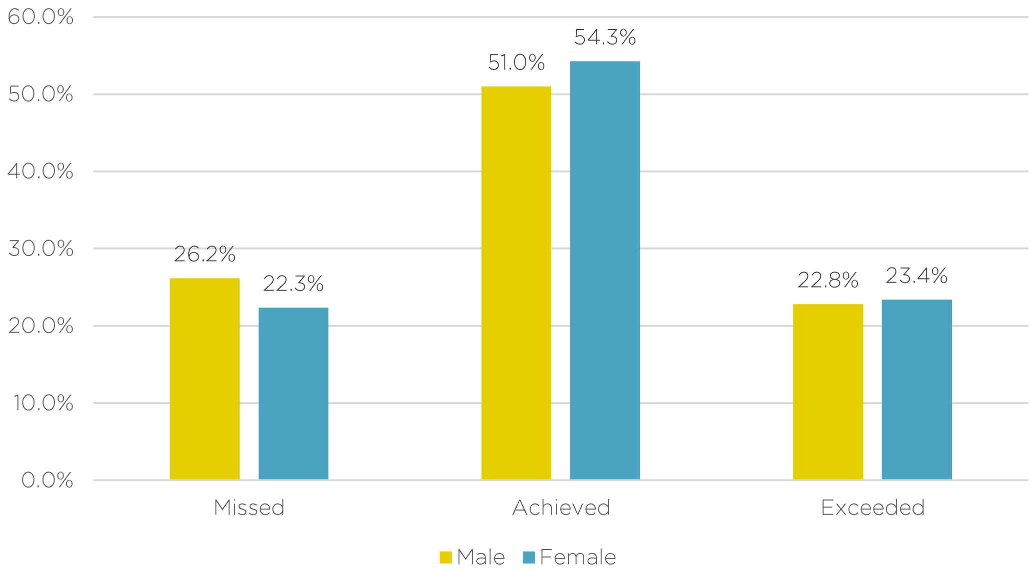
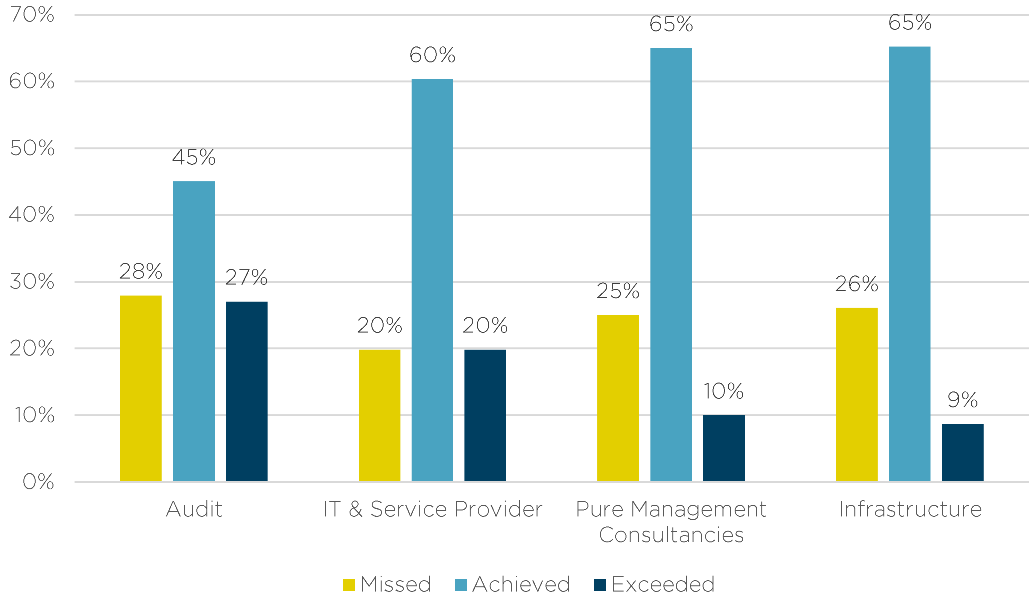


Fig. 32 Utilisation targets and achieved status (firm type breakdown)



Utilisation targets are widespread and high. 74.1% of respondents have a target, with men marginally more likely to have a target than women. Targets are especially prevalent in the infrastructure firms, and are also common in the audit and IT/service provider firms, while 100% of niche respondents did not have a target. Of the majority that did have one, 69% had a 90% utilisation target, while 29% had a 70% target. 77% of respondents achieved or exceeded their utilisation target, with 23% missing it, with slightly higher percentages missing their target in the audit firms.

There is longstanding debate across our industry about targets of this sort. At a crude level, they seem to focus on the negative economics of 'the bench' – that is, the group of consultants who are not in fee-earning work at any one time. Business leaders, Operations and Finance Directors, it is argued, hate the bench, and a utilisation target is a means of minimising it. Yet some modernising voices suggest this approach is antiquated. It mirrors a behaviour consultants find infuriating in clients – an obsession with day rates over value. And it can inhibit value-creation. If a financial-service digital specialist is not available because their utilisation target has led them to accept a PPM role on a public-sector assignment, then ultimately that is poor resource allocation. Certainly, some of the answers we shall see later on sector and service line dedication suggest tensions between short-term fee earning and the development of specialisms. To some extent this is inevitable and even desirable – junior staff must be prepared to muck in and a 'jack/jill-of-all-trades' early blooding and wide-ranging exposure could stand them in good stead. Yet it may not always be consistent with an outcome focus or the delivery of value. That outcome orientation was felt to be an area where consulting firms could do better among focus group participants, with some calling for a greater emphasis on productivity rather than worked time, and thus utilisation. It is not the business of the MCA to advise member firms on how they manage resource allocation. However, some firms will wish to reflect on this issue.

We asked respondents about the frequency with which they change roles within their firms, analysing this by gender and firm type. Figures 33 to 35.

Fig. 33 How frequently do you change roles in your firm? (E.g. consultant, project manager)

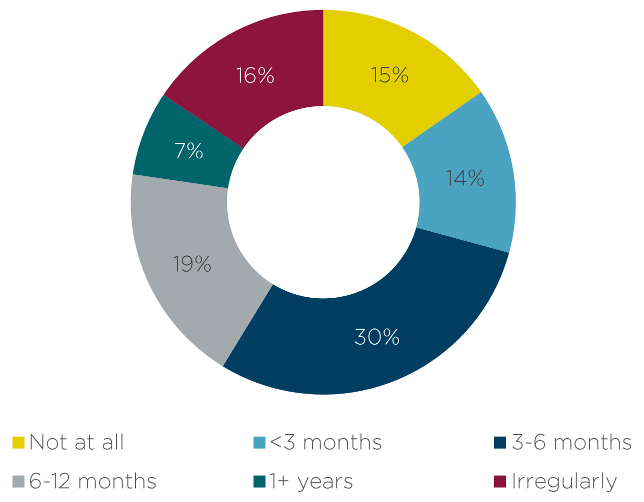


Fig. 34 How frequently do you change roles in your firm?

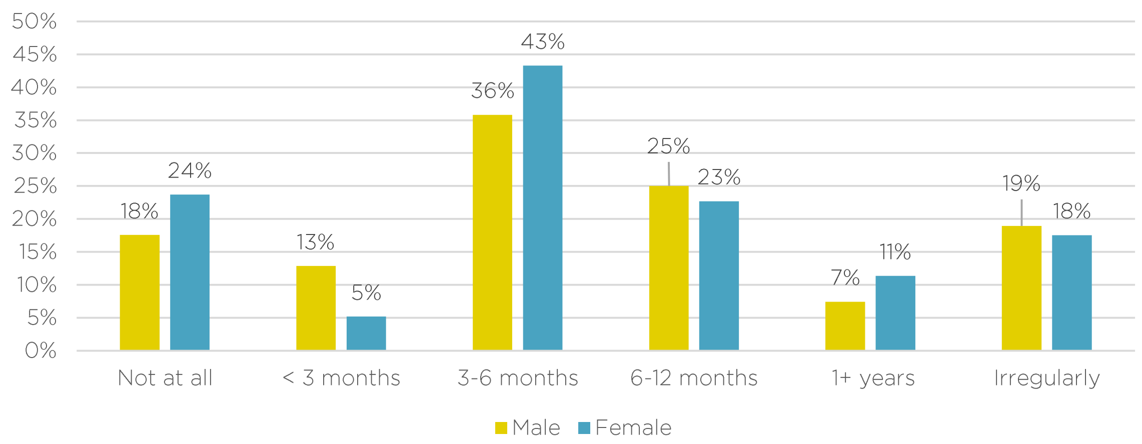
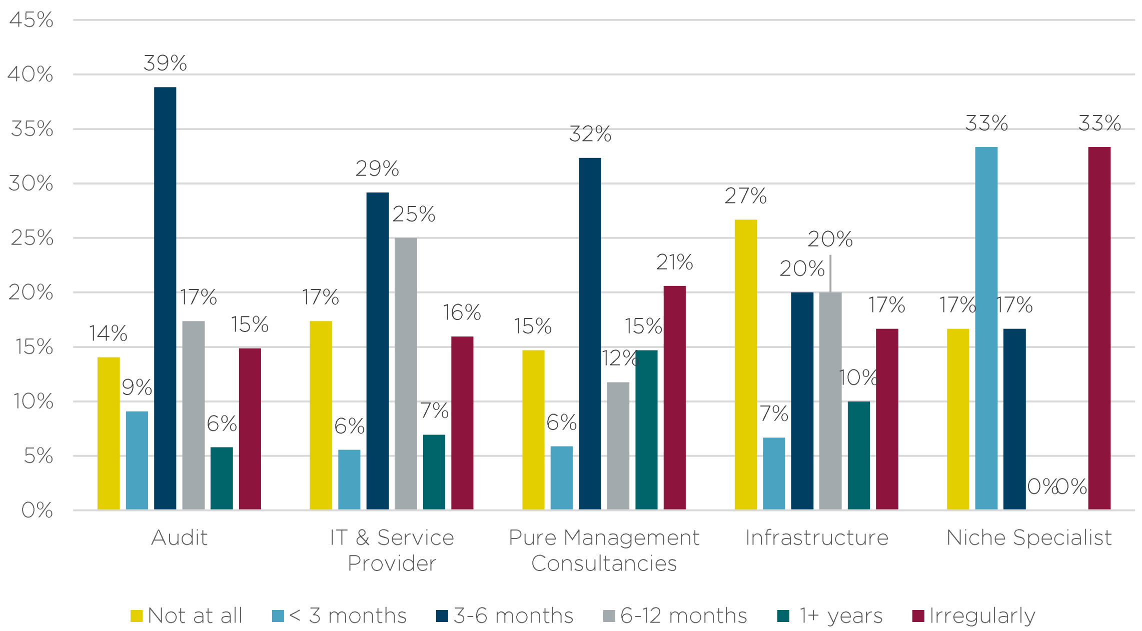


Fig. 35 How frequently do you change roles in your firm? (firm type breakdown)



Role changes within firms are relatively frequent, with most changing their role at least within a year. There does not seem to be a meaningful pattern here by gender. However, role changes appear to be marginally more frequent in the audit firms. None of this is surprising, given the nature of consulting work. Indeed, on the one hand, it is highly desirable. Some young consultants are attracted to consulting by its variety. Their needs are satisfied by this dynamic of shifting roles. Frequent role shifts also mirror the overall move towards shorter assignments (often in the context, nevertheless, of long-term business relationships) which characterises the new 'agile' dynamic of consulting in the Digital Age. Further, long-term allocation to a role is often characteristic of manpower substitution, the sort of activity into which consulting has been forced by excessive commoditisation in the past and from which it wishes to distinguish itself now. If anything, the collective ambition would be to see the time-horizons for shifting roles to shorten still further.

However, the caveat to the foregoing analysis is a restatement of the 'jack/jill-of-all-trades' point. Consultants recruited for digital skills may want their role to change in the sense of moving from client to client. They may be rather less impressed if they are required to morph into PPM specialists. We will explore this point further later in this section.

Respondents indicated whether they were satisfied with the career path offered by their firms. This was then analysed by gender and firm type. Figures 36 to 38.

Fig. 36 Rate your current firm on the career path it has offered you

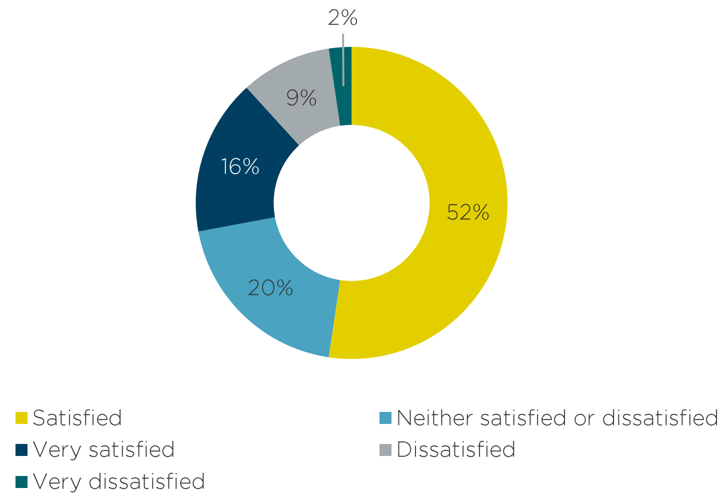


Fig. 37 Rate your current firm on the career path it has offered you (gender breakdown)

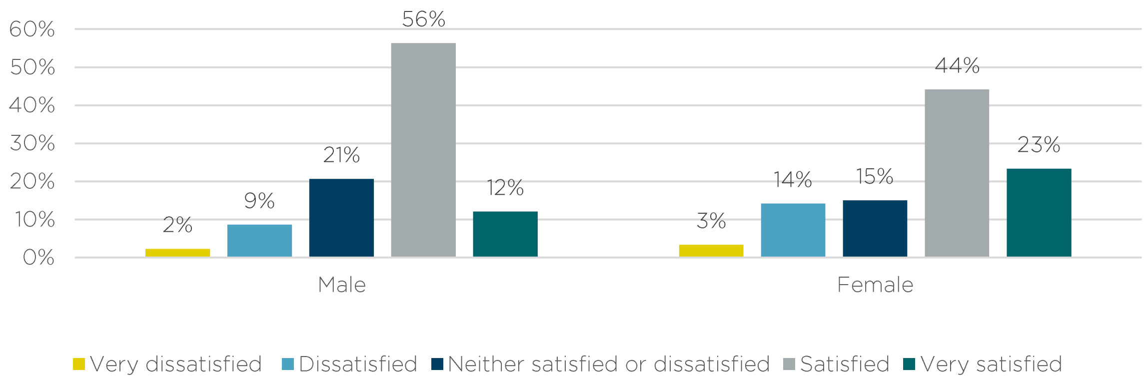
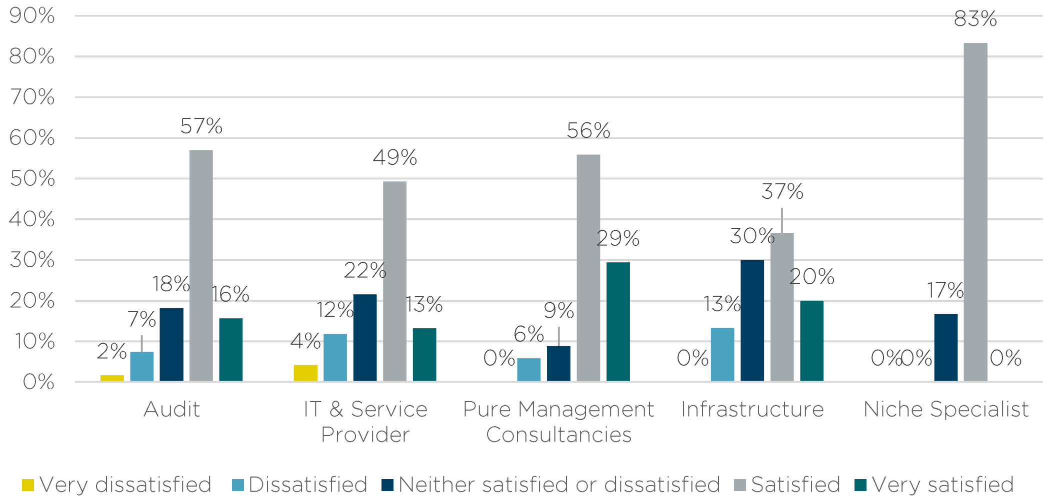


Fig. 38 **Rate your current firm on the career path it has offered you. (firm type breakdown)**



68% were satisfied or very satisfied with the career path in their firm, with 11% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, the rest being neutral. Dissatisfaction was noticeably higher among women (though more women were also very satisfied). This is a significant issue to which consulting leaders will need to give attention. The MCA has conducted a number of initiatives intended to examine the responsiveness of our industry to the needs of female recruits at all ages, notably recently the *She's Back* project. We will pose a similar question to this – and to others where there are marked gender discrepancies – to the whole MCA consulting community as part of our forthcoming *Consulting Excellence* exercise, surveying the entire MCA consulting population. We will also ask for more detailed feedback. Meanwhile, business leaders should seek to establish whether their young female consultants in particular feel they have an adequately mapped career trajectory within their firm. This may be especially incumbent on the leaders of ICT/service provider and infrastructure firms, where the issue of career trajectory appears (marginally) most vexatious.

We asked respondents to list the sectors in which they carry out their consulting work. Most listed one. We then analysed this by gender and firm type. We also asked them whether they chose their sectors or were they allocated them. Fiures 39 to 42.

Fig. 39 **Which sector do you currently work in?**

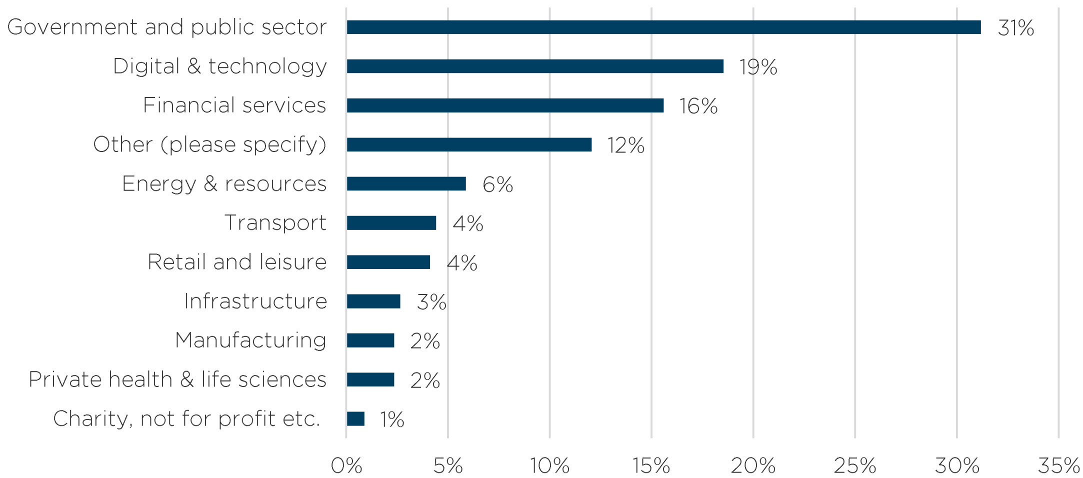


Fig. 40 Which sector do you work in? (gender breakdown)

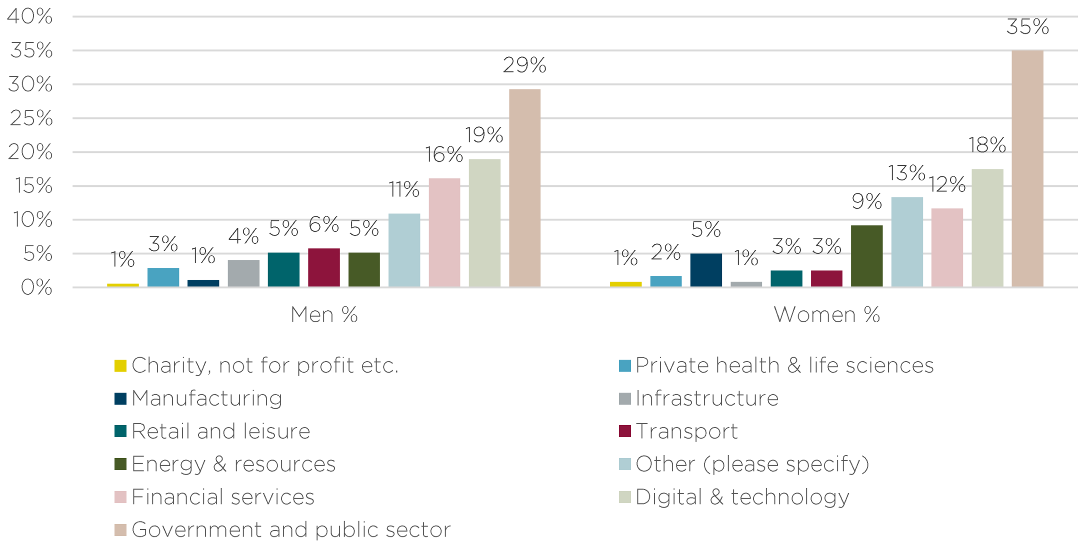


Fig. 41 Did you choose to work in the aforementioned sector, or were you allocated to it?

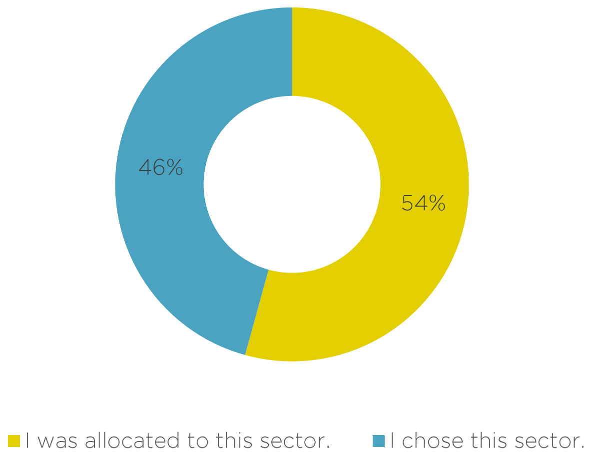
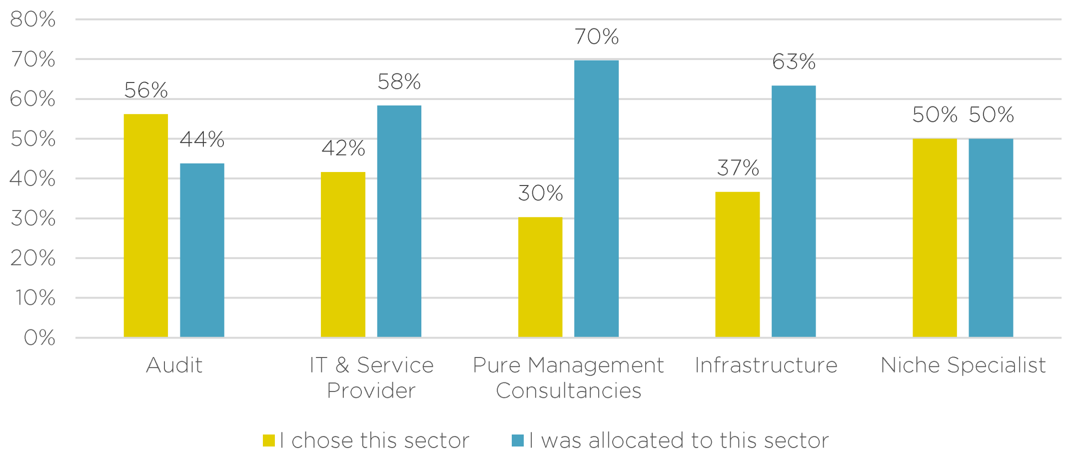


Fig. 42 Did you choose to work in the aforementioned sector, or were you allocated to it? (firm type breakdown)



The sector distributions in terms of young consultant activities do not marry precisely to the headline activity figures for the industry, based on fee income, as set out in our authoritative Annual Industry Reports. Of course, there is no reason why the correlations should be precise. However, the discrepancies here are noteworthy. Financial services, the largest sector of MCA member firm activity, has proportionately fewer young consultants working in it than fee income trends would suggest. By contrast, there are higher proportions of young consultants working in government and public sector, and digital and technology, than the trend positions would imply, especially in the latter. However, the comparative uplift in the digital and technology sector is in line with the growth trend of consulting activities in that sector and the degree to which business leaders have suggested that young consultants are important to it.

There are also significant gender differences in sectorial allocation, with proportionately more women working in the public sector than men and significantly fewer working in infrastructure. This is indicative of a phenomenon evident in consulting, one which is noticeable in the activities of the MCA. Many firms have good stories to tell in terms of aggregate gender balance. Those stories become less persuasive when factors such as seniority come into play. Furthermore, there are areas within consulting that have real diversity challenges. The first ever MCA Think Tank roundtable was on infrastructure. Not one single female consultant was sent to it to represent their firms. By contrast, discussions of marketing, aspects of digital and the public sector attract more female participation. Sector teams of course often reflect the historic composition of the industries they face off to. Nevertheless, the MCA would encourage notably male teams within member firms, as well as wider leaderships, to consider the implications of their composition.

54% of respondents indicated that they were allocated to their sector, 46% chose it, with slightly more choosing their sector on average in the audit firms.

This question of choice is probably of more importance in terms of setting expectations for young consultants where service line designation is concerned. Relatively few young joiners will have deep enough sectorial expertise to be in a position to have a sector ‘expectation’ – though some will of course. By contrast, the drive to recruit young consultants, according to business leaders, has frequently been characterised as the search for different perspectives, especially those inflected by digital knowhow. Accordingly, we asked young consultants for their service-line designations and broke them down by gender and firm type. Figures 43 to 46. Here, significantly more so than in the sector allocation question, we received multiple answers from many respondents.

Fig. 43 Which service line(s) do you work in?

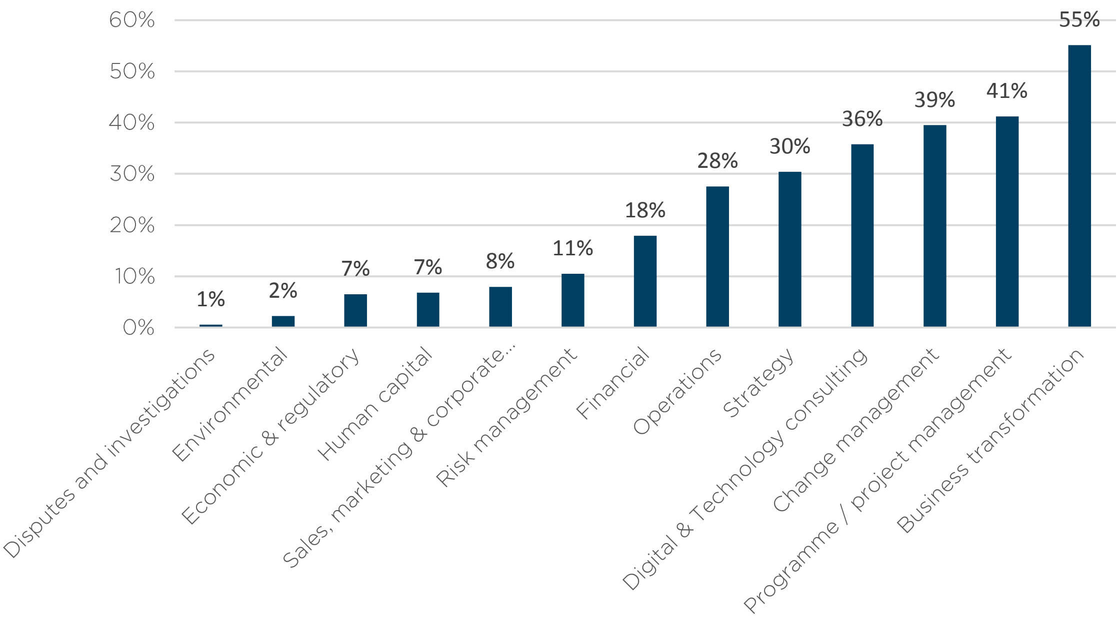


Fig. 44 Which service line(s) do you work in? (gender breakdown)

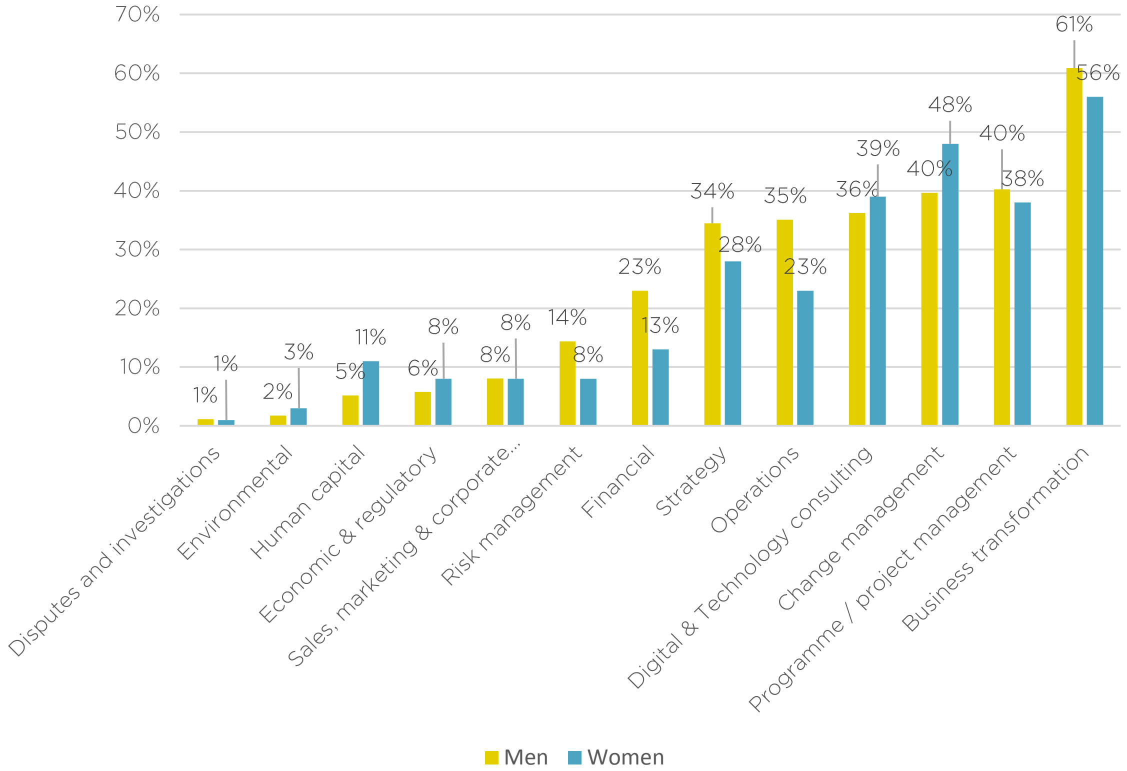


Fig. 45 Did you choose to work in this service line(s), or were you allocated to it?

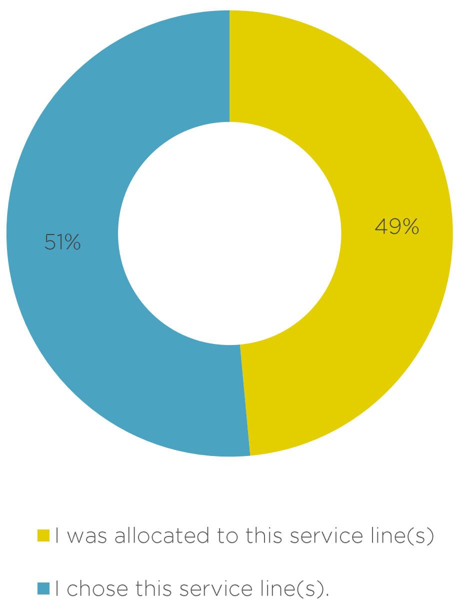
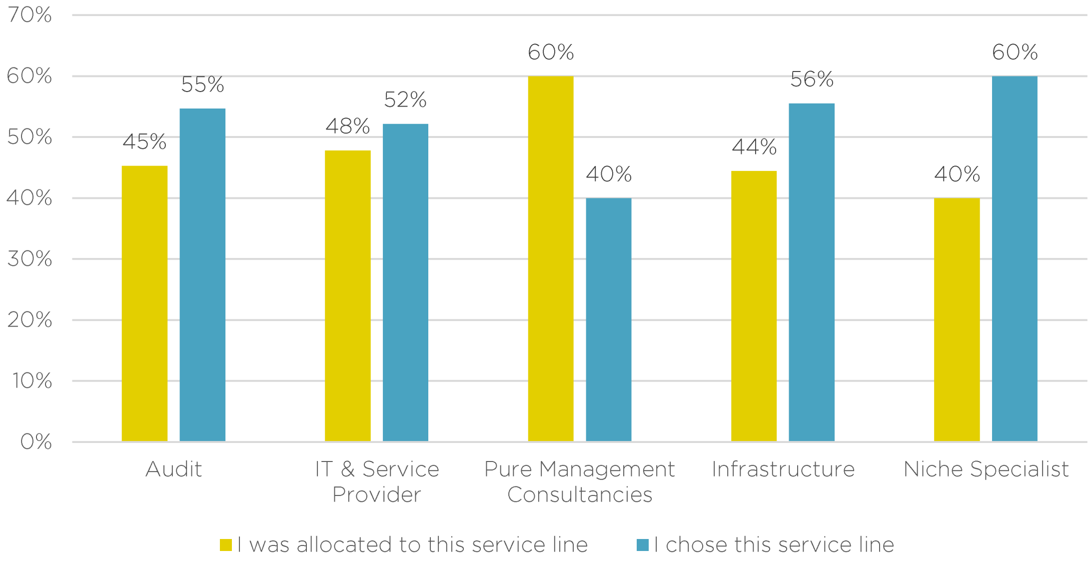


Fig. 46 Did you choose to work in your current service line or were you allocated to it? (firm type breakdown)



Gender discrepancies here include women being less likely than men to work on transformation, operational consulting, strategy and finance, while more likely to work on change and digital. 51% of respondents chose their service line, 49% did not, with numbers selecting a majority everywhere outside the pure consulting firms. And notably, once again service-line breakdowns also do not correlate precisely to the activity patterns of MCA member firms. Consultants answered with multiple responses leading to high percentages for catch-all categories, such as business transformation (55%) and PPM (41%). Strategy was also high (30%) and unsurprisingly digital (36%). As recent MCA Annual Industry Reports have shown, these last two service lines are growing across consulting, especially digital, which is often cited as a particular driver of the recruitment of young consultants. However, despite this, only 8% of respondents said they worked *solely* in the digital service line. With firms upping the ante on digital recruitment, we might have expected more people to be solely digital. Of course, many people with digital specialisms may be working on business transformation and strategy, but doing so from a largely digital angle. There is also the sense in which a new consultant will wish to self-identify as multiply capable, and that multifunctionality may be useful.

So on the one hand, these returns may be said to evidence further the varied, protean nature of what consultants are required to do. Nevertheless, the returns may also be driven by the utilisation culture within consulting firms, and the degree to which an ability to survive wherever one is allocated – not to be confused with real adaptability – is prized. Business leaders should consider seriously how far the narrative they are providing recruits – especially around digital opportunity – maps to what they do in practice. At a recent Young MCA event on digital, over 90% of consultants suggested that digital, and the associated opportunities, made consulting as a career more attractive. However a similar margin said that they were yet to deploy their digital capabilities to their full potential on assignments. The story of diverse and adaptable business advisory capabilities among young consultants may in part mask stories of thwarted specialisms. Business leaders should examine these issues within their own firms with care.

Training, development and wellbeing

Adaptation and specialisation; the ability to work in many arenas or become an expert in one; the choice between frontline expertise and management: these are all functions of training and development.

We asked respondents in some detail about the training they received from their firms. (The mean response figure for training allocation is *73 hours training per annum.*) First we asked them if they were in a graduate scheme, analysing findings by gender and firm type. Figures 47 to 49.

Fig. 47 Are you currently part of a graduate scheme?

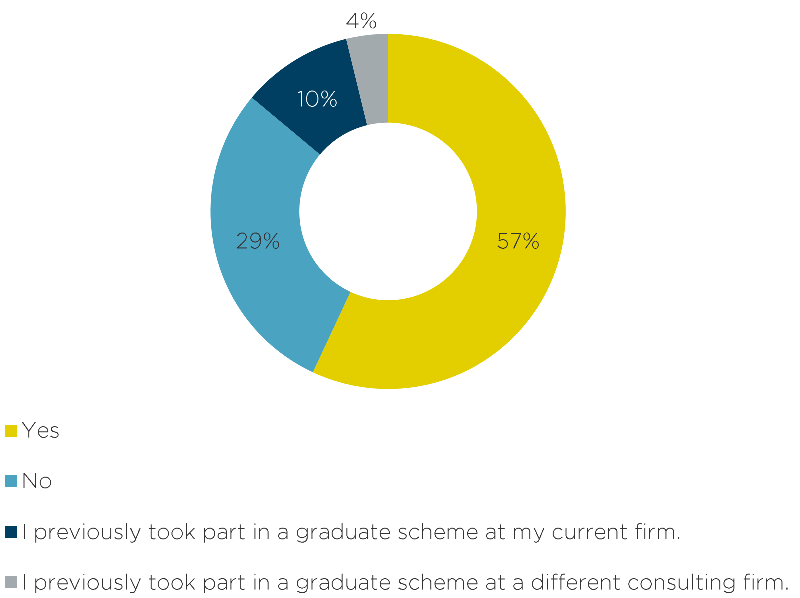


Fig. 48 Are you currently part of a graduate scheme? (gender breakdown)

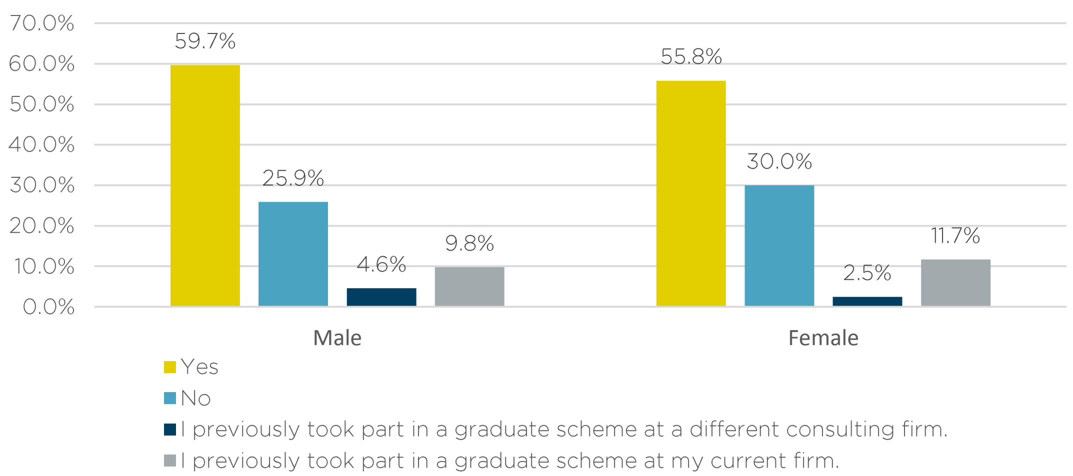
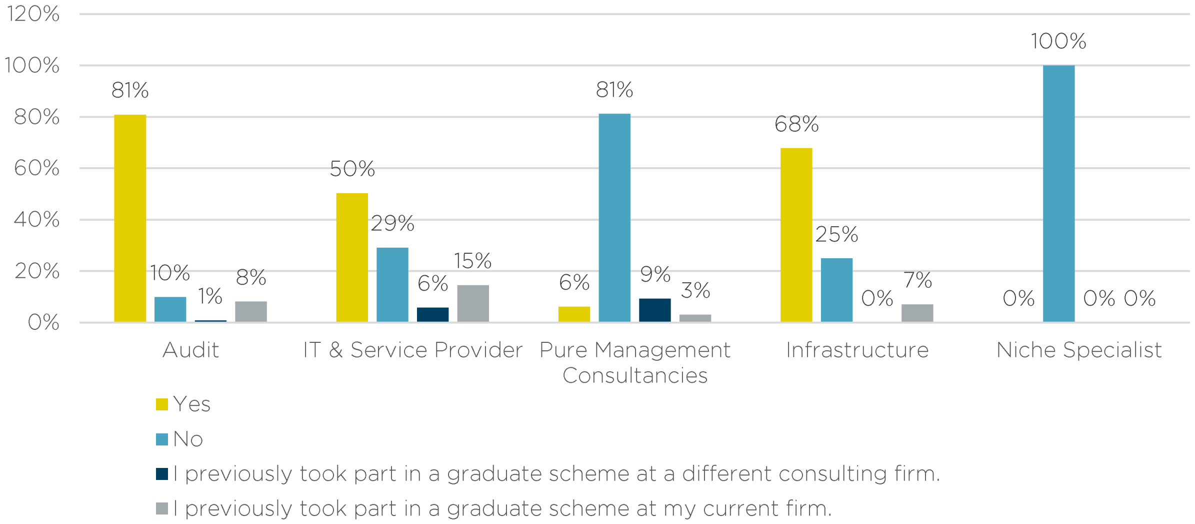


Fig. 49 Are you currently part of a graduate scheme? (firm type breakdown)



57% of respondents are *currently* in a graduate scheme. 14% were *previously* in one at their current or a former firm, with female respondents marginally less likely to be in a graduate scheme than males.

We asked respondents to describe the training they had received, what they had been trained in and how they rated it. We examined some of these returns by gender and firm type. Figures 50 to 57.

Fig. 50 What type of training have you received since you started working for your current firm?

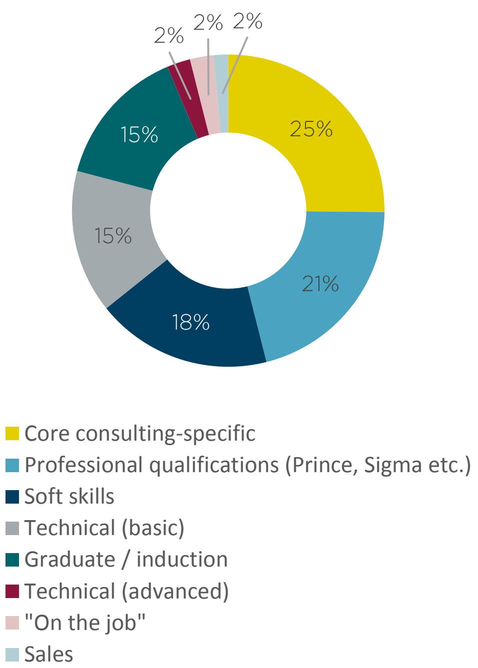


Fig. 51 To what extent did the training at your current firm equip you for consulting?

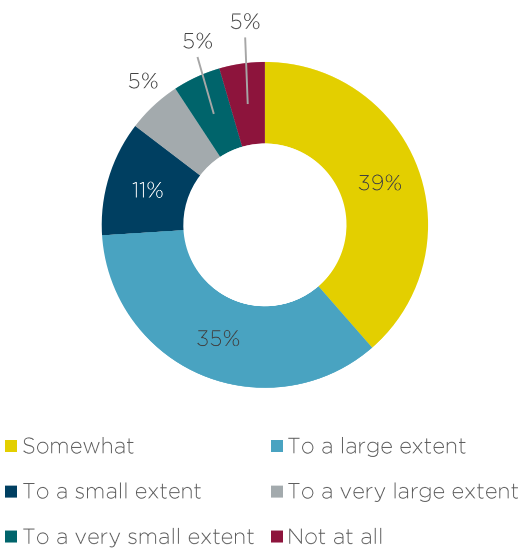


Fig. 52 To what extent did training at your current firm equip you for consulting (gender breakdown)

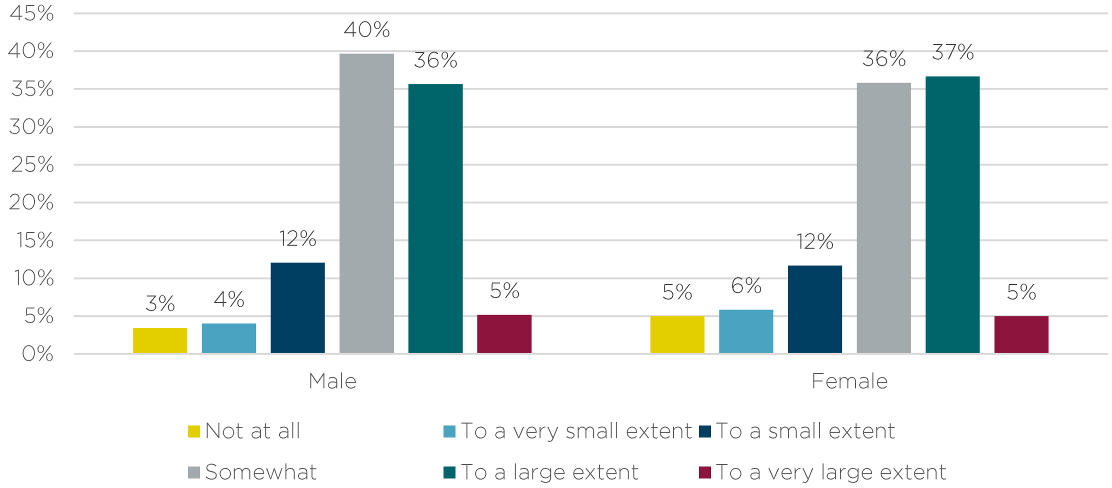


Fig. 53 To what extent did the training at your current firm equip you for consulting? (firm type breakdown)

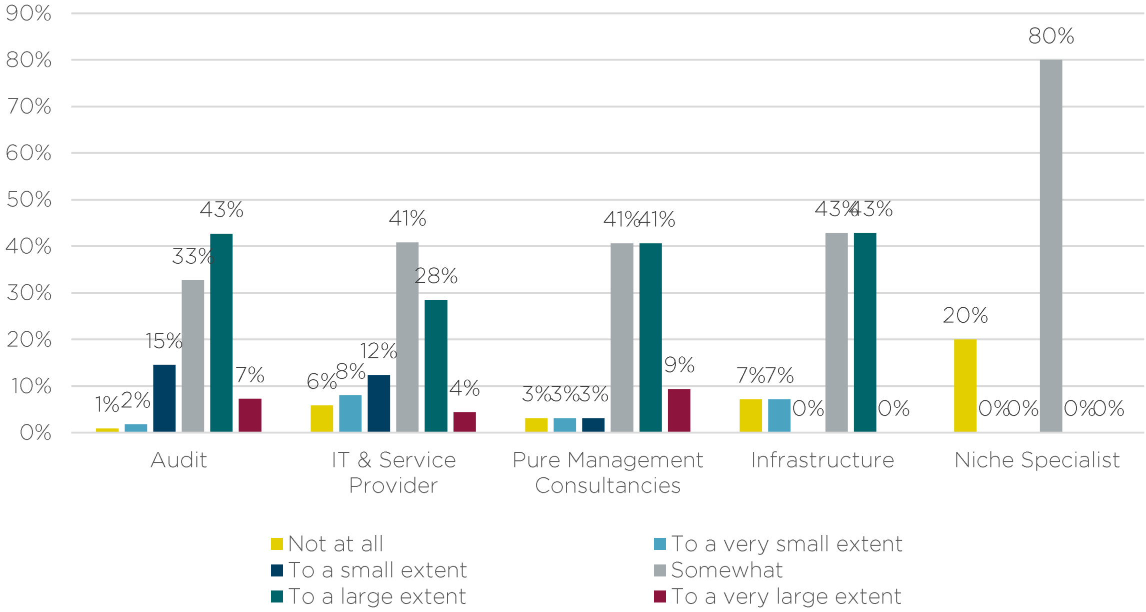


Fig. 54 **What qualifications or accreditations have you gained as part of your training at your current firm?**

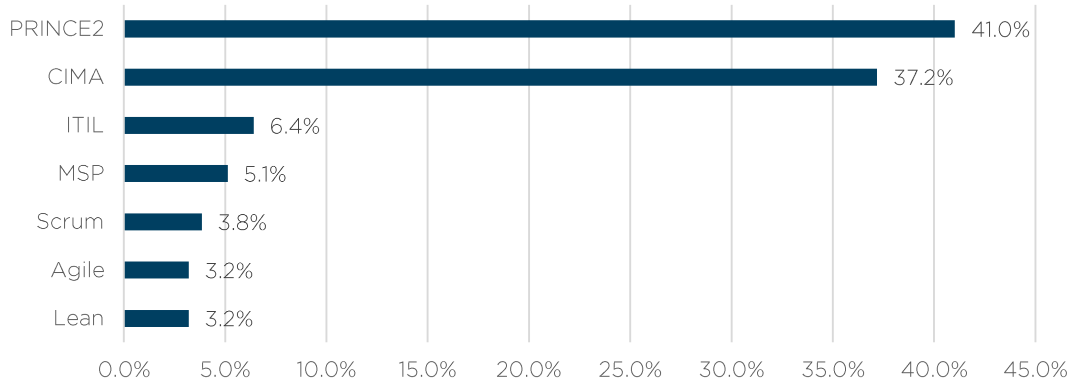


Fig. 55 **Rate your firm on the in-house training it has provided:**

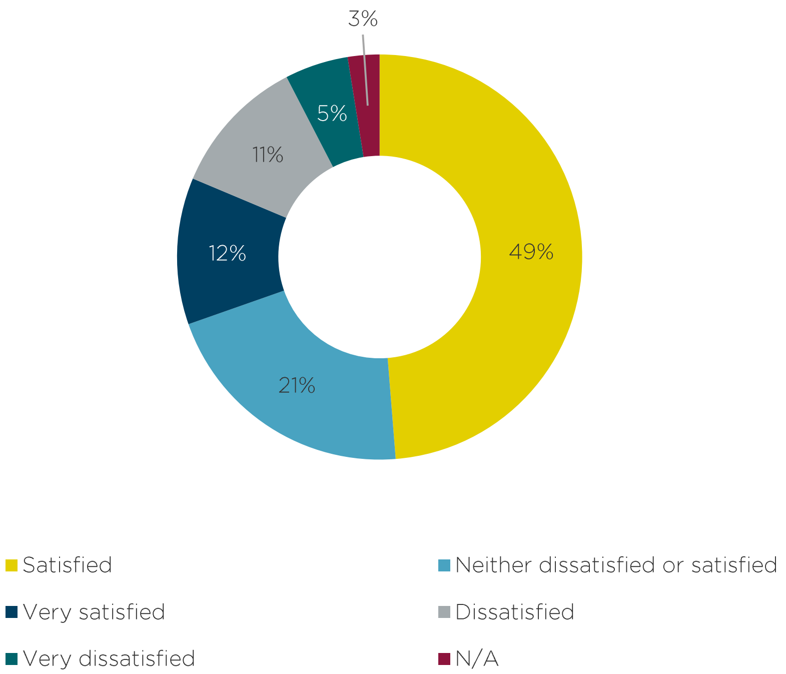


Fig. 56 Rate your firm on the in-house training it has provided (firm type breakdown)

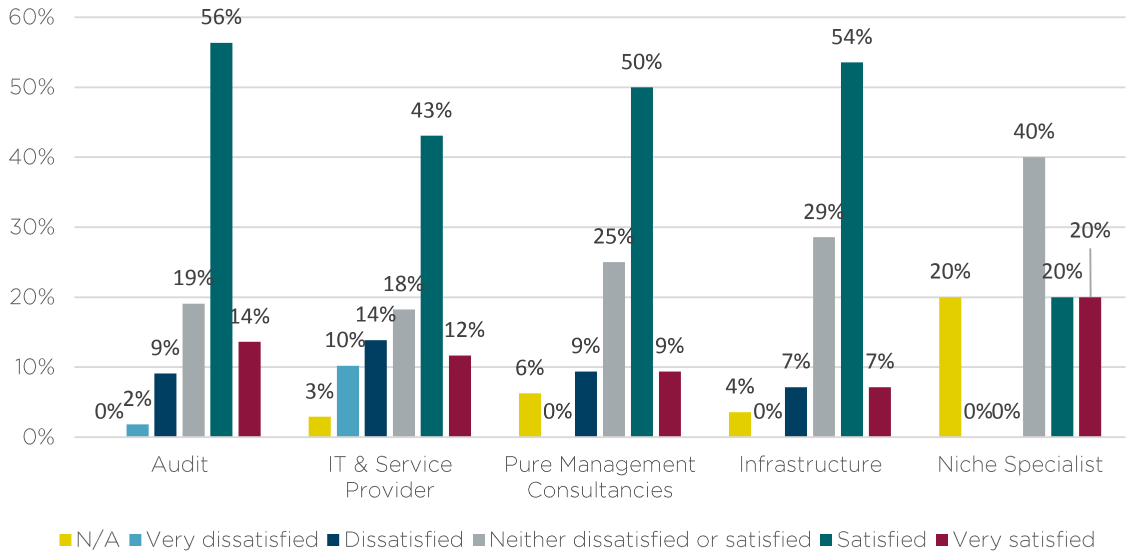
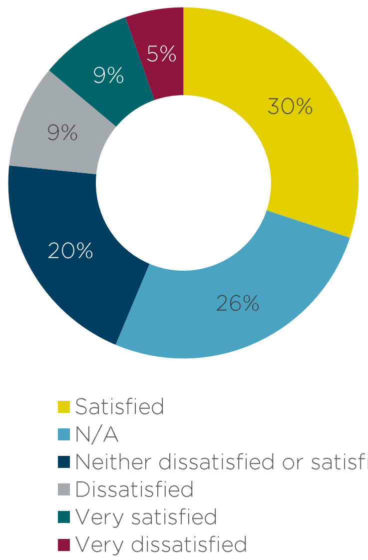


Fig. 57 Rate your firm on out-sourced / external training



The training reported by young consultants covers a range of areas, with core consulting (25%) and professional qualifications (21%) the largest shares. 41% of those receiving training from their firm have acquired PRINCE2, 37.2% CIMA. 79% said training equipped them for consulting from somewhat to a large extent. 20% said it equipped them to a very limited extent or not at all. There were no significant gender differences. Satisfaction with training appears to be highest at pure consulting firms. 61% of respondents overall were satisfied or very satisfied with in-house training, 16% dissatisfied to very dissatisfied, 21% neutral, with the remainder N/A. Audit firms respondents have marginally the highest levels of satisfaction with in-house training. 53% of all respondents were satisfied to very satisfied with outsourced training, 20% satisfied to very dissatisfied, with 27% neutral, with the remainder N/A.

The focus group sessions permitted some additional exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of the training received to date, allowing us to unpack these findings. Many agreed that training was excellent and surpassed their expectations. Some suggested however that the acquisition of skills such as PRINCE2 provide methods for doing work, but do not necessarily explain how to apply them in practice in real-life situations. Others suggested that the language of consulting is very important, but is not necessarily taught.

Accordingly, we asked respondents what they saw as the areas of most skills demand in coming years and also what additional training they might need from their firms. Figures 58 and 59.

Fig. 58 Which skills will be most in-demand by consulting clients over the next five years?

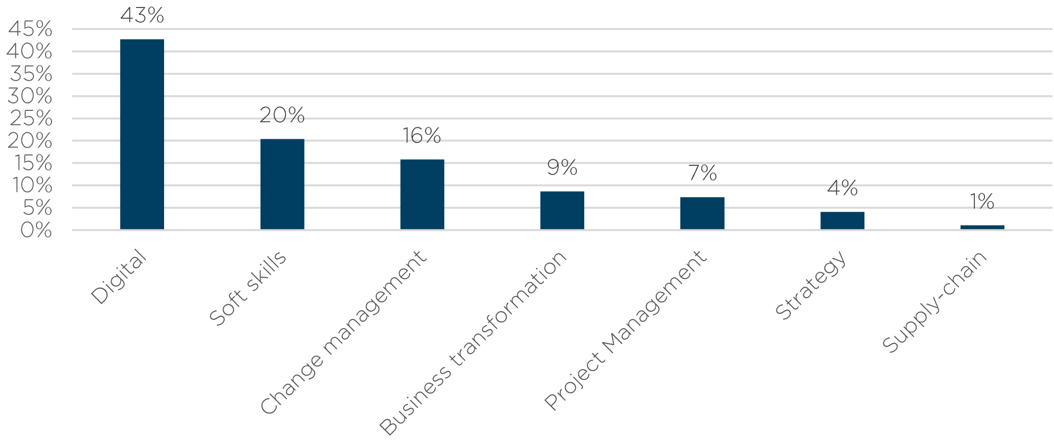
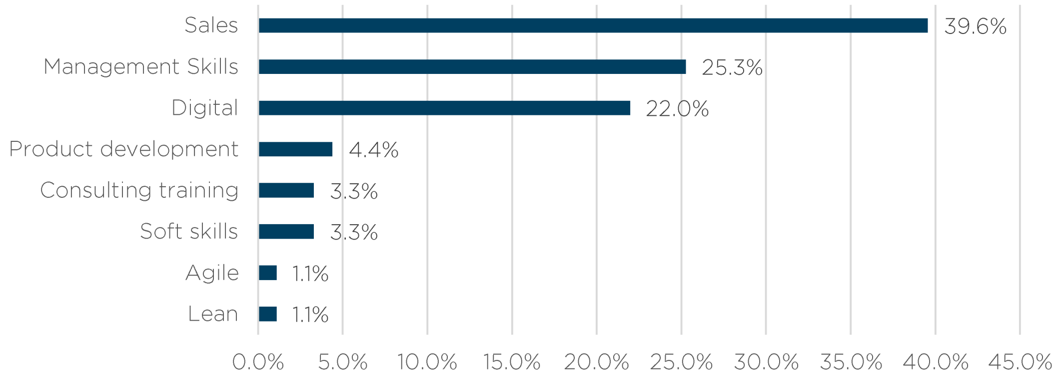


Fig. 59 Is there any type of training you would like your firm to provide?



Digital ranks overwhelmingly as the skill respondents believe will be most in demand over the next three years. However, the areas of additional training that respondents sought most were sales training (39.6%), management (25.3%), with digital third (22%). This is either because significant proportions believe they have acquired the relevant digital skills already, or because there is a disconnection between the training people expect to receive from their firms and digital training. To reinforce the former perspective, throughout the Year of Digital many member firms mentioned that their principal digital training challenges were with senior and middle management. Some had started reverse mentoring programmes in which young consultants train senior colleagues in the latest digital thinking and applications.

However, while reverse mentoring was mentioned in passing in the focus group sessions, it was not a major theme. Previously, in a guide for member firms on digital recruitment, the MCA has recommended digital skills audits and suitably adapted training programmes for all levels of consultants in their firms, with associated consciousness-raising about the importance of digital. We restate that suggestion here.

Further, the emphases on additional training needs found in the survey were replicated to some degree in the focus groups. Participants craved training in soft skills such as adaptability, resilience, the ability to manage difficult conversations, and resolve conflicts.

This is a complex picture of the state of consulting training. There is a fair degree of satisfaction overall and training is plainly taken very seriously by our firms. Yet some young consultants, while they value the skills provided through training, do not feel that this prepares them completely for the business of consulting. A surgeon may possess excellent technical abilities, say in the conduct of appendectomies. They may also have deplorable people skills. This combination may be suboptimal. But it will not *necessarily* debar them from surgical practice. That is plainly not the case in consulting. The sensitivity to understand when to listen to clients, when to challenge them, the subtleties of selling, the art of presentation, the necessity of both understanding and potentially undertaking management tasks: these are all people skills, quite different in kind from analytics or business modelling. Respondents believe more emphasis should be placed in training on these human and often emotional capabilities.

The comparative decline of the MBA, which reached something of a peak in the last decade, must be viewed in the light of these findings. MBAs are scarce among our respondents. They are also little offered by our member firms, not least because they are extremely expensive. As well as offering consulting training our industry should consider, perhaps as part of the Chartered Management Consultant initiative, whether courses in "consulting management" are worth developing.

There is plainly a link between this desire to see more teaching of "soft" skills and the necessity of modernising the industry. The more consulting firms employ digital capabilities, the more they embed these within their own training regimes, the more challenging, even countercultural their offers to clients will become. This will demand acute sensitivity in communications, presentation and diplomacy.

In short, the training within our member firms appears to be very good. But to make it outstanding, it must humanise and modernise.

We also asked consultants about wellbeing and the support offered on their career development. Figures 60 to 64.

Fig. 60 To what extent does your current firm offer support on your well-being?

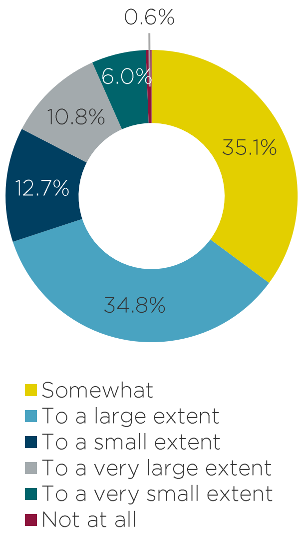


Fig. 61 To what extent does your firm offer support on career-direction?

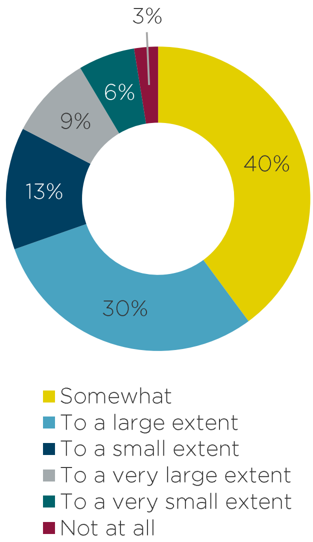


Fig. 62 **To what extent does your current firm offer support on your well-being? (gender breakdown)**

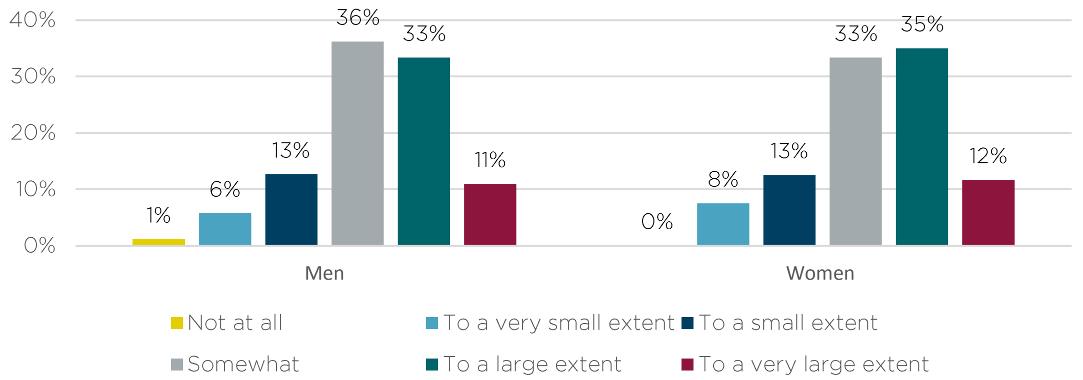


Fig. 63 **To what extent does your current firm offer support on career direction? (gender breakdown)**

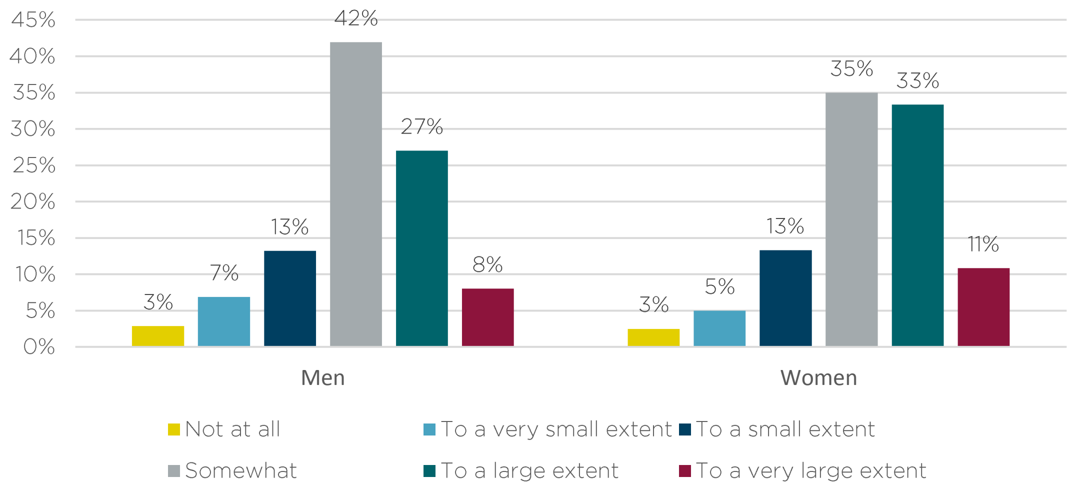
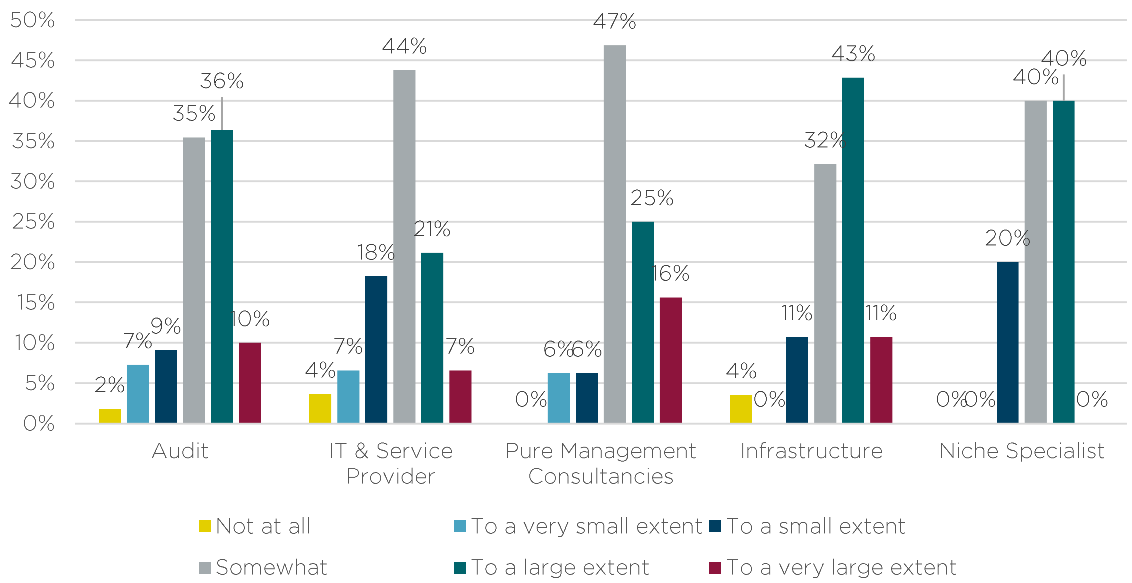


Fig. 64 **To what extent does your current firm offer support on career direction? (firm type breakdown)**



80.7% said their firms supported their wellbeing from to some extent to a very large extent, while 19.3% suggested that they were supported from a small extent to not at all, with no significant gender differences.

79% of respondents felt supported in their career development, from somewhat to a very large extent, with the rest feeling only a little supported or not supported at all. Responses were most positive in infrastructure firms. Significantly, and in contrast to their responses on career path, women felt marginally more supported than men. While this seems contradictory, the questions are in fact different in kind. The range of apparent career paths available in a firm may seem forbidding to someone, who nevertheless may feel well supported in their request for support in addressing the associated challenges. (The finding here may also accord partly with the higher female percentage responding as very satisfied to the career path question, alongside the noticeable higher response rates there on dissatisfaction.)

Motivations and the future

We asked respondents about whether they were content with their firm or considering leaving it. We asked what factors influenced those who were minded to stay, what led some to want to leave, and what might induce those minded to leave to stay. We then subjected these to firm-type analysis. Figures 65 to 70.

Fig. 65 What are your motivations to work for your current firm?

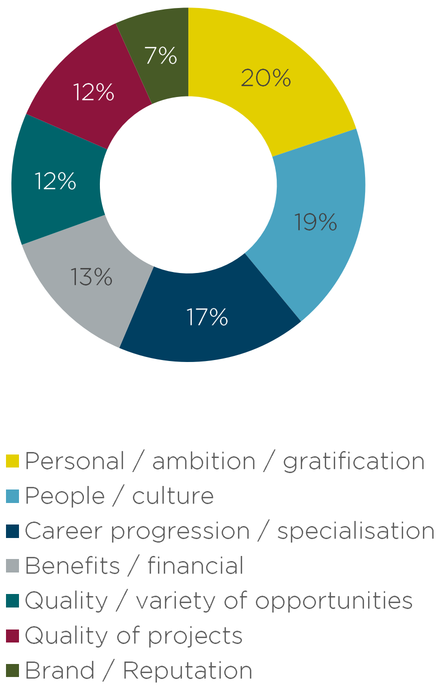


Fig. 66 To what extent are you considering new employment opportunities outside of your firm?

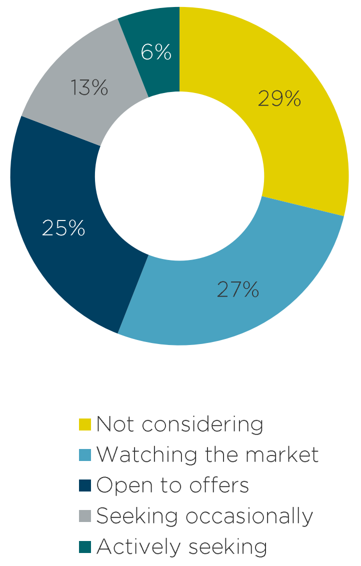


Fig. 67 **To what extent are you considering new employment opportunities outside of your firm? (firm type breakdown)**

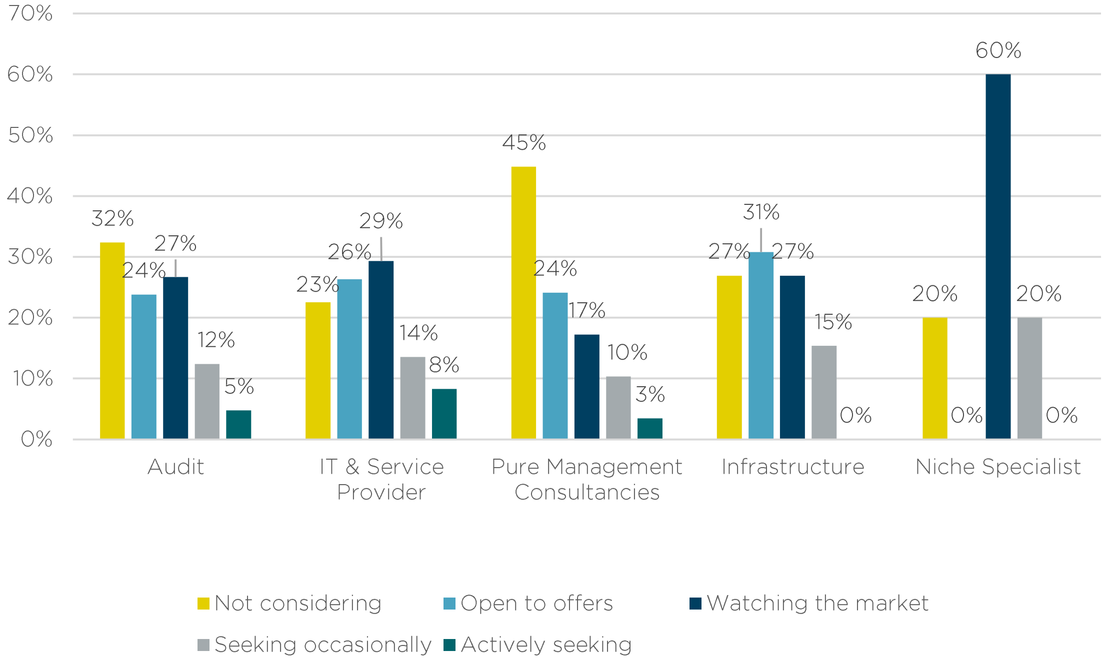


Fig. 68 **If you are not seeking new employment, why do you wish to stay at your current firm?**

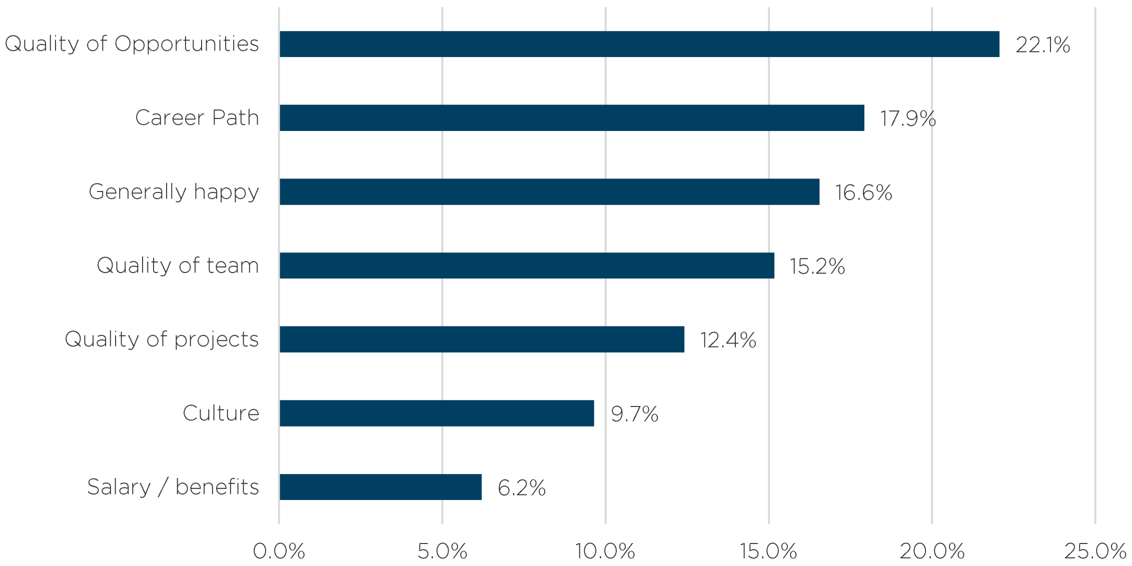


Fig. 69 **If you are seeking new employment, why do you wish to leave your current firm?**

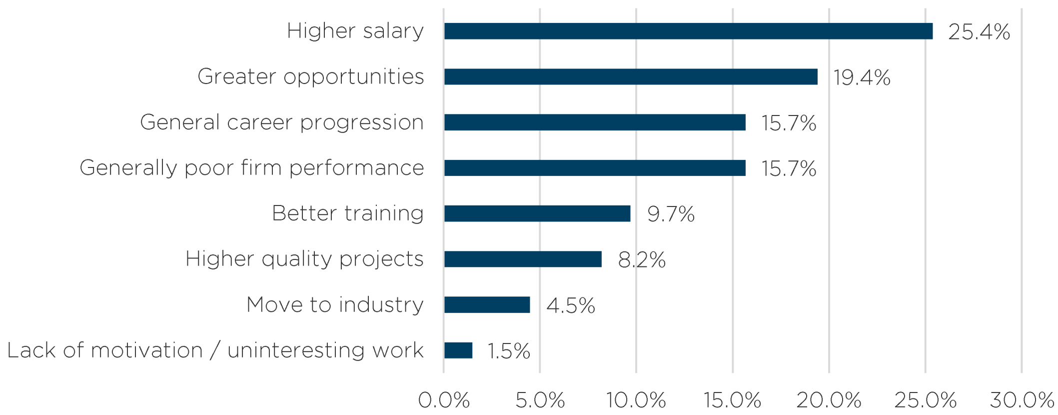
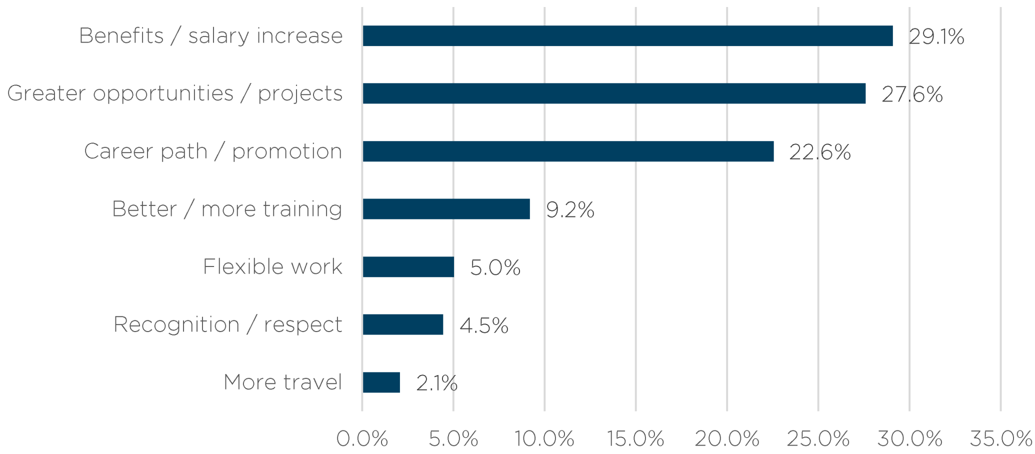


Fig. 70 **What could your firm offer to ensure they retain you as an employee?**



While 29% of respondents are not considering leaving their firm, the remainder are open to it in some form, from market scanning to active search, with percentages not considering leaving higher in audit firms and significantly higher in pure management consulting firms. While on the face of it this might seem an alarmingly high proportion of malcontents, it is not. Surveys reveal that younger workers expect to change jobs frequently, and as we shall see this sample is no exception to that. Indeed, consulting has been prepared for this for years. Our industry has always had a mobile workforce, with many senior consultants having worked for a number of different firms. Further, being open to offers is simply a combination of realism and what one of the Young MCA volunteers described as 'the LinkedIn culture'. Most people currently employed by MCA member firms will change jobs in the future. Admitting one is open to offers is probably closer to 'not considering leaving' than it appears.

If this attritional factor is a given of consulting, that does not mean however that the leaderships of individual firms will not try to manage retention issues to their advantage. The next responses give some significant clues as to how they might do so. Among those not wishing to leave a firm, the quality of opportunities comes out on top as the reason to stay (22.1%). This is consistent with the findings of our focus groups. However, among those wishing actively to leave 25.4% sought a better salary, as opposed to 19.4% looking for better opportunities. This is not in line with the findings of the focus group sessions. While none of our focus group denied that salary was important, and described it as being 'in the mix' of considerations that affected their motivation, especially in joining firms, it did not occupy a primary position. This is of course consistent with much external evidence, wherein correlations between remuneration and contentment – and performance – are scarcely binary.

However, one undeniable fact is that changes of employer have always been seen as a route to salary improvement. In the context of more frequent career changes, this can create wage inflation that some people, especially those with comparatively scarce and highly prized skills, may exploit. These dynamics may be evident in the answers from those looking to move. Significantly, 29.1% of those looking to move would stay at their current firm for a better salary, while 27.6% would for better opportunities.

Consulting business leaders, as well as the leaders of other professions, may need to think carefully about these issues. There is evidence that MCA members are doing so. Consulting after all is well rewarded. But is not the best rewarded profession. Those solely motivated by material gain may find better opportunities elsewhere. Some MCA business leaders are suggesting that while the ambition and restlessness of new workplace entrants are welcome, they may need to be tempered with patience. Frequent changes of firm may make for improved rewards. But they may not produce great consultants.

From this set of survey responses, flexible working does not appear as yet to be a major issue for young consultants. However, as we shall see reinforced in this section, there are specific issues affecting women to which firms need to be sensitive – and not just with this age group. Furthermore, the focus groups conducted suggested some interest in flexible working, especially in terms of home and remote working. Workplace visibility may be a route to career advancement through effective corporate politics. But it may have no connection whatsoever to the achievement of strong outcomes for clients, especially if the consulting input is desktop analysis. Our industry is starting to embrace this kind of flexibility, which is in turn connected to new understandings of value and productive output (discussed earlier in the report).

Respondents were asked about promotion routes within their firms, including whether these drew clear distinctions between the career paths of would-be specialist consultants and would-be managers. Figures 71 and 72.

Fig. 71 "Your firm offers clear opportunities for promotion" - To what extent do you agree with this statement?

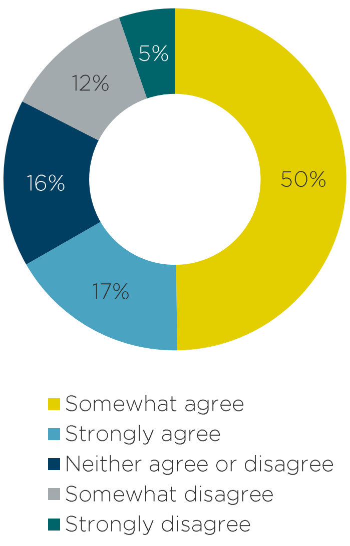
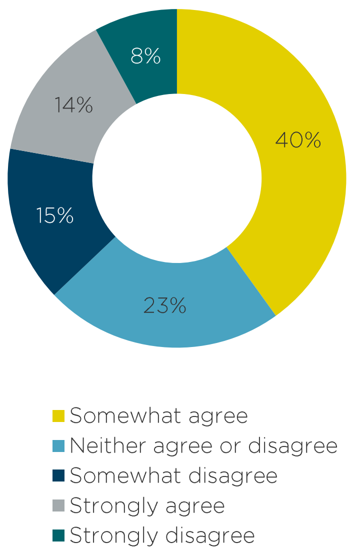


Fig. 72 "Your firm offers distinct opportunities to specialise and/or take a managerial promotion route" - to what extent do you agree with this statement?



67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their firm offered clear promotion routes, with 16% neutral and the rest not agreeing. 54% agreed or strongly agreed, 23% were neutral and the rest did not agree that their firm offered distinct pathways on management and/or consulting specialisms.

We asked about work/life balance and examined it by gender and firm type. Figures 73 to 76.

Fig. 73 How would you rate your work/life balance at your current firm?

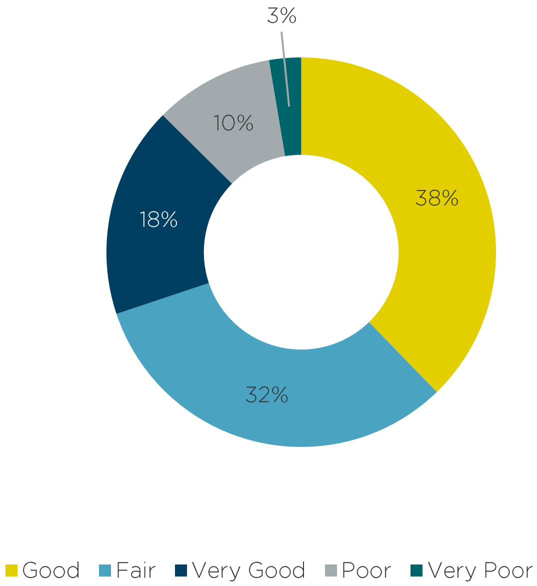


Fig. 74 How would you rate your work/life balance at your current firm? (2011 & 2016)

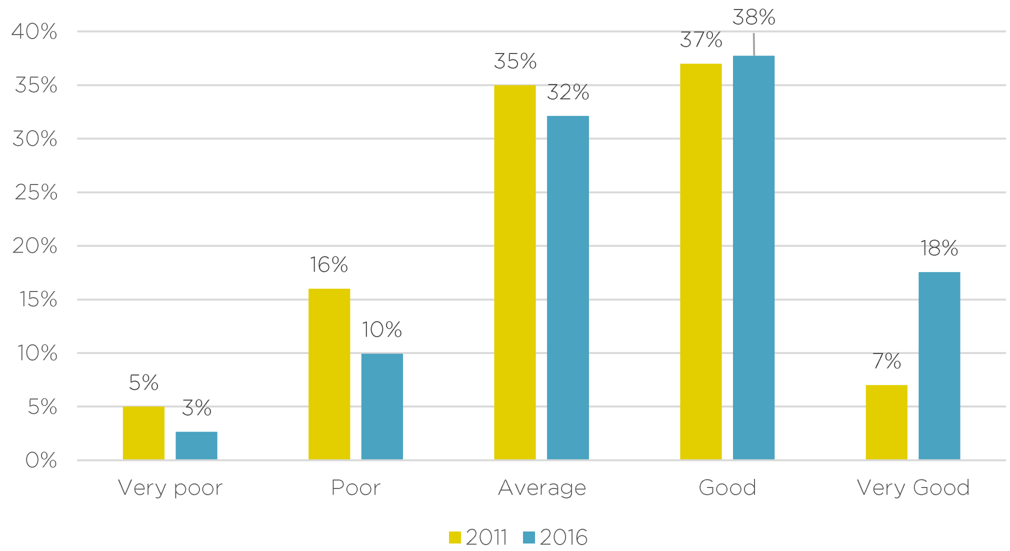


Fig. 75 How would you rate your work/life balance? (gender breakdown)

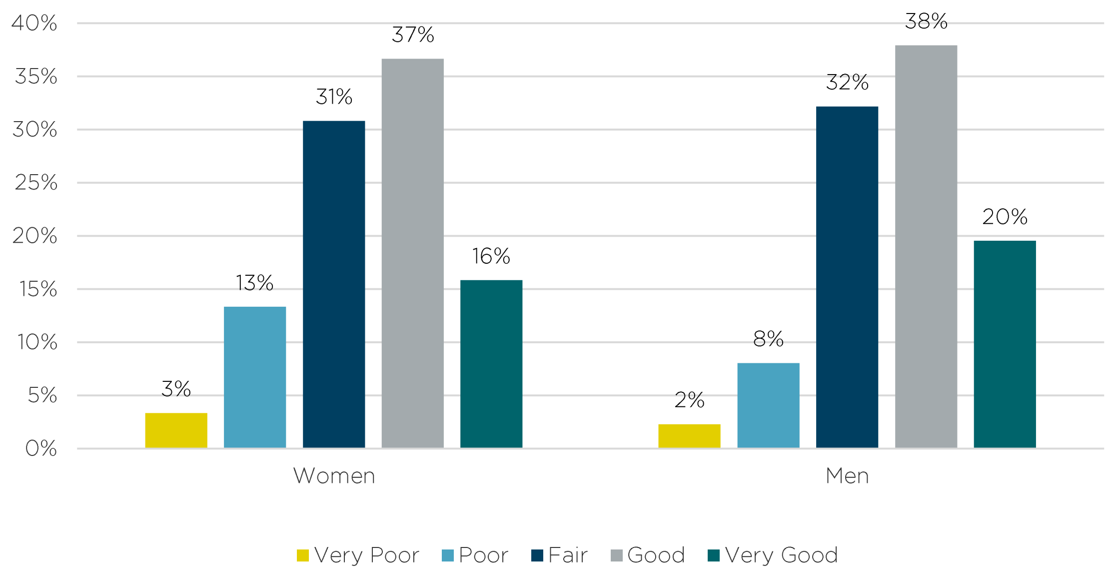
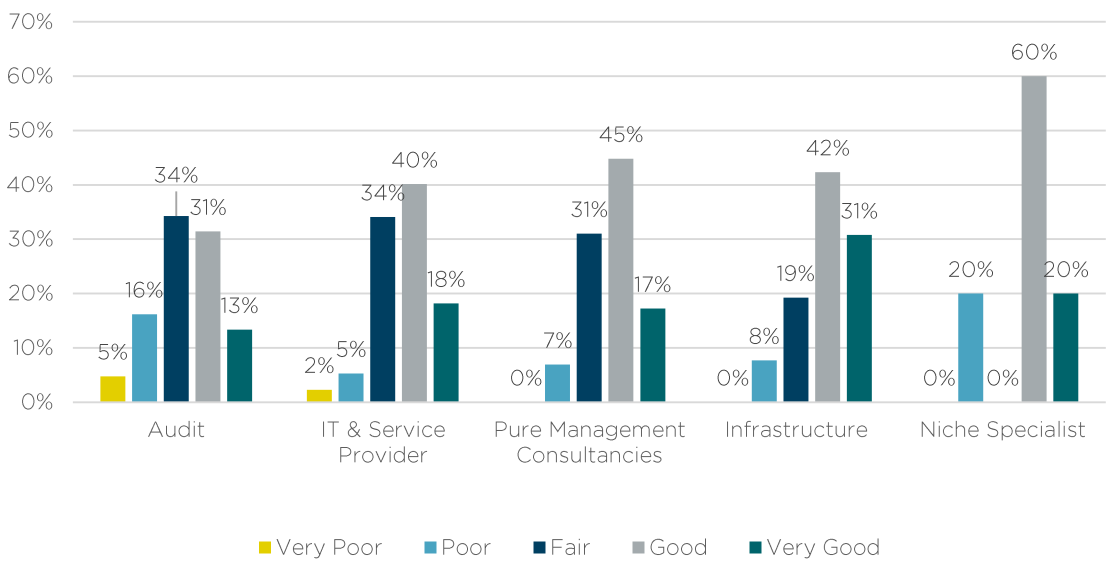


Fig. 76 How would you rate your work/life balance? (firm type breakdown)



Only 13% said that work/life balance was poor to very poor. This point was confirmed in the focus groups, where work/life balance was felt to be satisfactory. While audit firms had the least positive work/life balance results, there is overall improvement here on the 2011 position.

However, women experienced a marginally less positive work/life balance than men. The responses provided later by women about where they would like to be in two years and five years time evince an earlier consciousness of the demands of family life, which may be relevant to this response.

We asked people about whether they intended to remain in consulting throughout their working lives and broke this down by gender and firm type. We also asked them in which industry they hoped to work, if they intended to leave the profession. Figures 77 to 80.

Fig. 77 Do you expect to be working in the consulting industry for the majority of your working life?

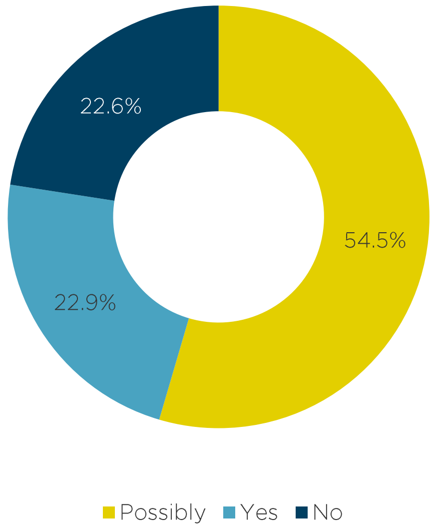


Fig. 78 Do you expect to be working in the consulting industry for the majority of your working life? (gender breakdown)

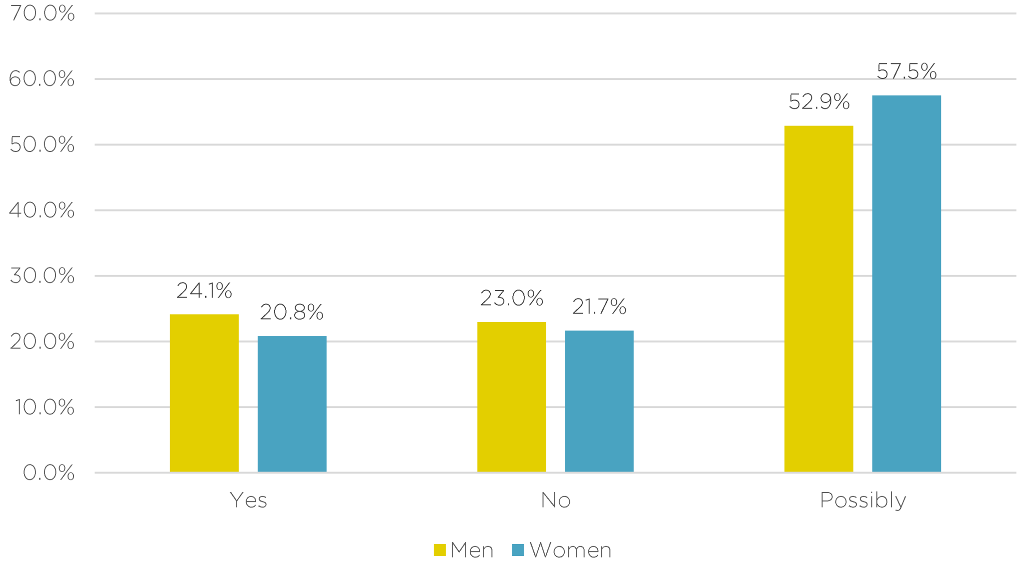


Fig. 79 Do you expect to be working in the consulting industry for the majority of your working life? (firm breakdown)

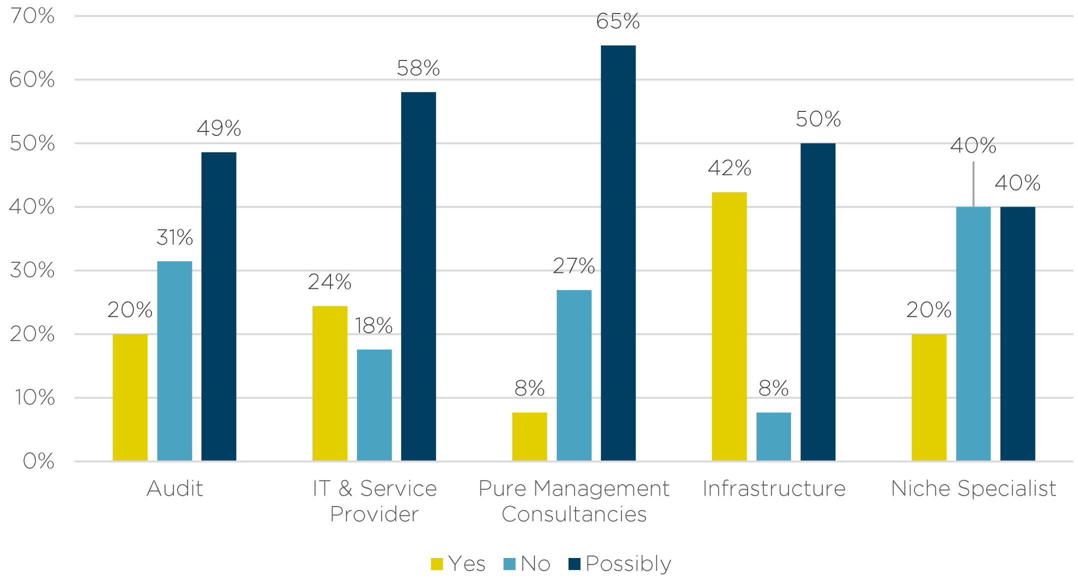
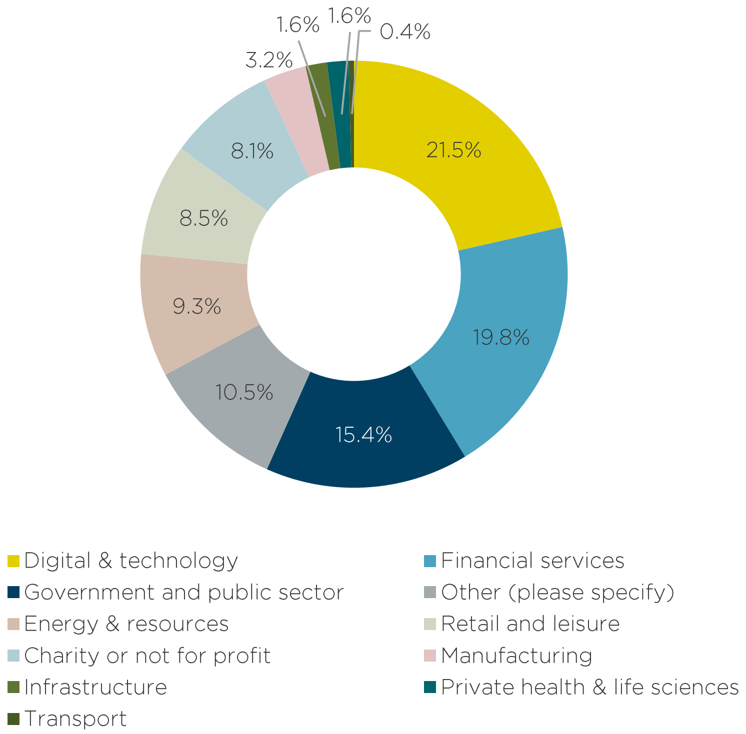


Fig. 80 If you expect to work outside of consulting in the future, which sector would you aim to seek employment in?



54.5% suggested that they would possibly remain in consulting for their working lives, 22.9% positively affirming that they would with 22.6% saying they would not. Women are marginally less likely to affirm that they would stay. Respondents most likely to affirm positively that they will stay in consulting are from infrastructure firms. Among those saying that they might leave consulting in the future, 21.5% want to work in digital and technology, 19.8% in financial services and 15.4% in government and public services. The numbers seeking to work in digital are significant. Business leaders increasingly see their competition for talent as comprising not only rival consulting firms, but digital agencies. Keeping digitally skilled consultants interested – which means keeping them on digital assignments and not being deflected from that intent by other considerations, such as utilisation targets – is thus an imperative issue for the industry.

We asked how frequently respondents anticipated changing jobs, breaking the responses down by firm type and gender. Figures 81 to 83.

Fig. 81 How frequently do you expect to change jobs/firms (inside or outside of consulting)?

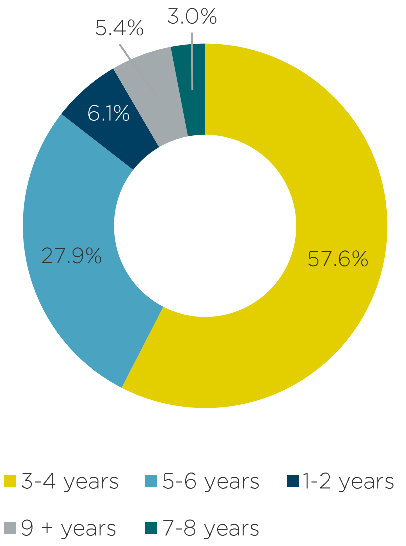


Fig. 82 How frequently do you expect to change jobs/firms (inside or outside of consulting)? (gender breakdown)

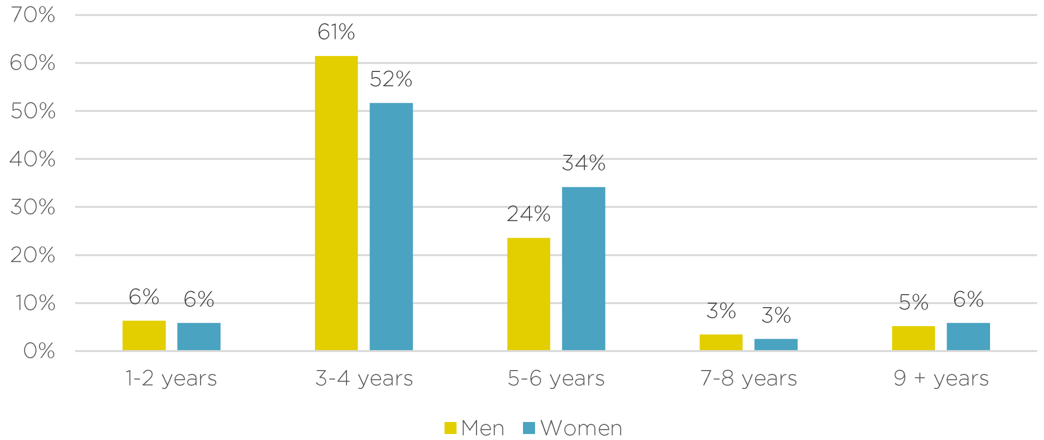
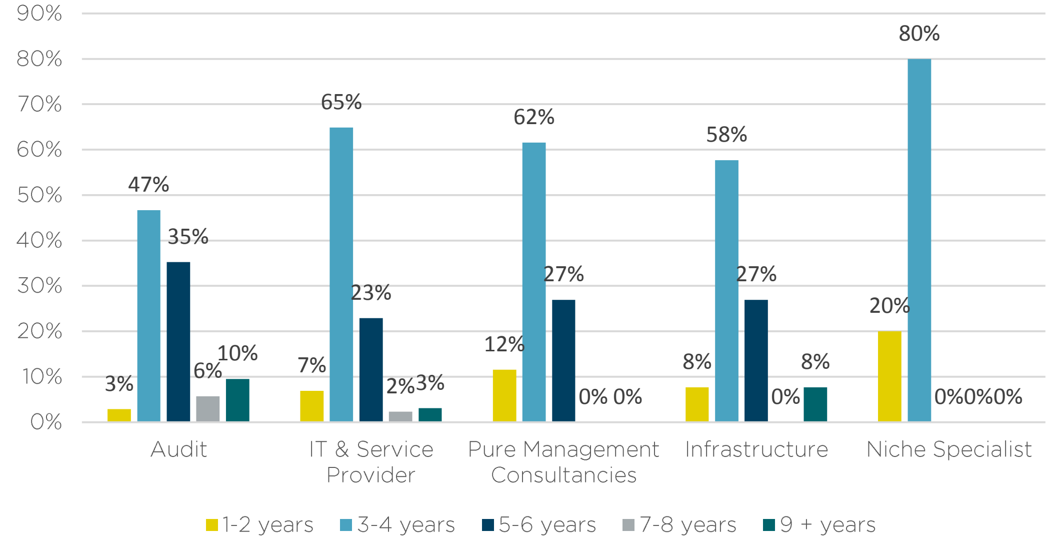


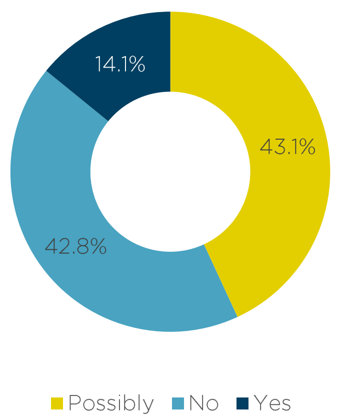
Fig. 83 **How frequently do you expect to change jobs/firms (inside or outside of consulting)? (firm type breakdown)**



Most significant here are the respondents saying they anticipate changing employment every 3-4 years: 57.6% in aggregate, with slightly higher proportions of men expecting to change jobs at that frequency. By firm type, respondents from niche specialist firms were substantially more likely to seek a change of job within 3-4 years, respondents from audit firms significantly less so. These figures are on trend with the wider economy for this age cohort – and increasingly for many in employment more generally. As indicated earlier, this level of churn has been something that consulting has coped with for years.

The questionnaire asked respondents whether they expected to retrain completely in the future. Figure 84.

Fig. 84 **Do you expect to re-train completely at some point during your career?**



43.1% of respondents said that they might possibly need to retrain completely in the future, 42.8% saying they would not, the remainder affirming that comprehensive retraining was very likely. Here, the report author would like to put in a plea. Would those saying that they do not anticipate retraining please wake up and smell the coffee? The author is considerably closer – though not, these days, sadly, all that close – to the end of his career than the respondents to the survey. If he is certain that he will need to retrain comprehensively at some point, then he is sure that with potentially up to 50 years left in their working lives the respondents to the survey will need to do so too. Our consulting future will be one in which digital, automation, AI and robotisation will play an increasing part. The need for comprehensive retraining is perhaps the one thing that is certain in all our futures. Without it, we will find ourselves disintermediated by technology.

We asked respondents to indicate where they anticipated they would like to be in their careers two years from now and five years from now, breaking this down by firm type and by gender. Figures 85 to 90.

Fig. 85 Where would you like to see yourself in two years?

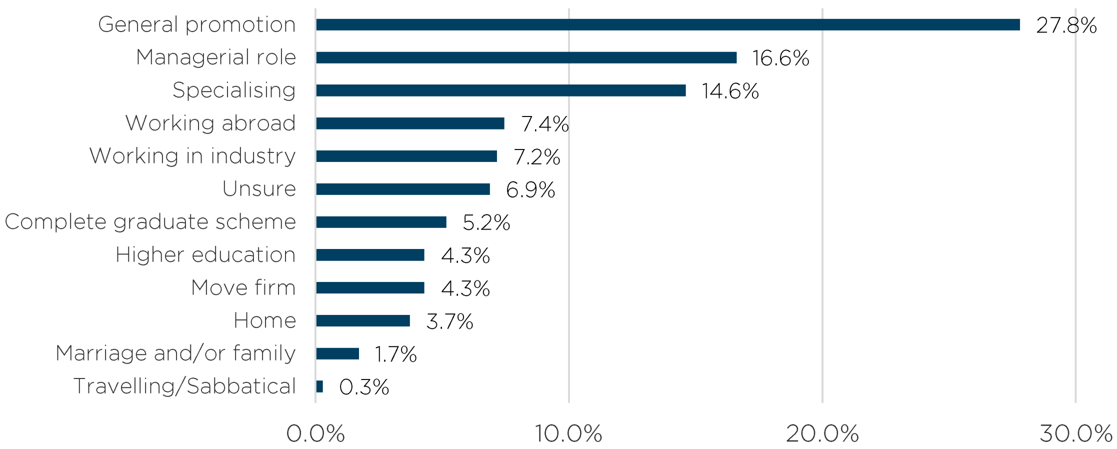


Fig. 86 Where would you like to see yourself in two years? (firm type breakdown)

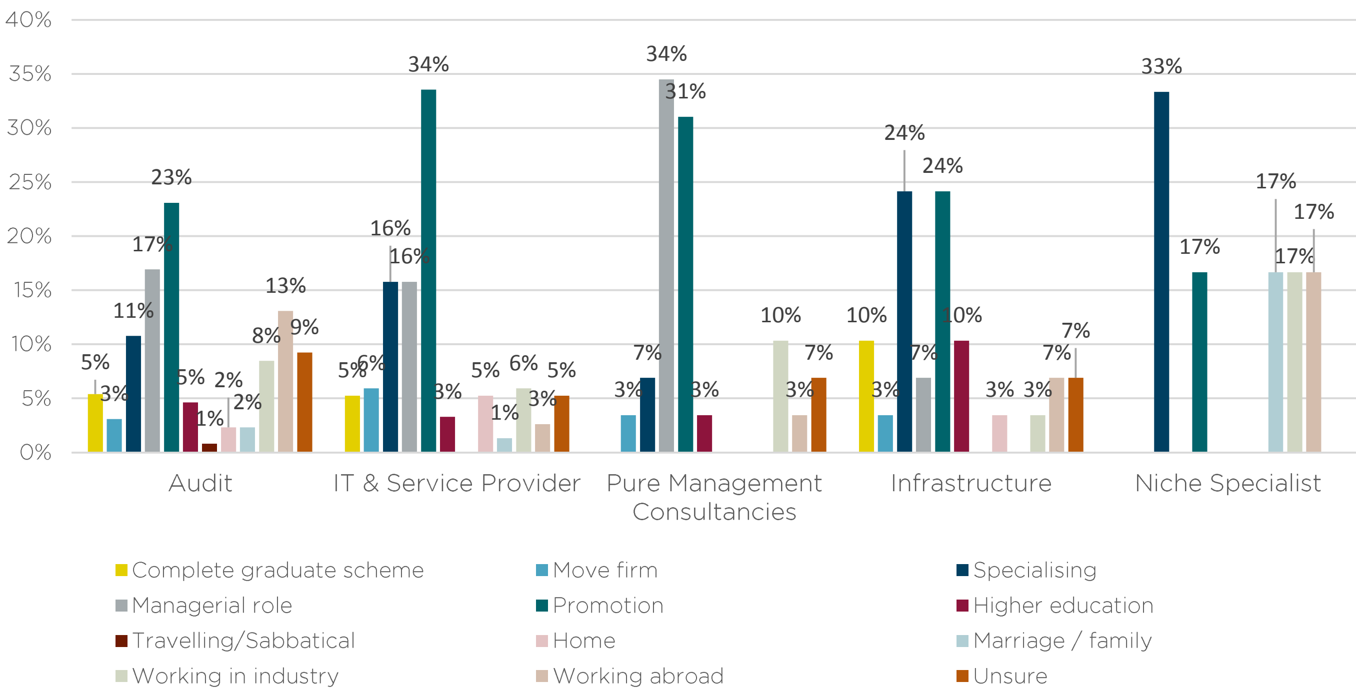


Fig. 87 **Where would you like to see yourself in two years? (gender breakdown)**

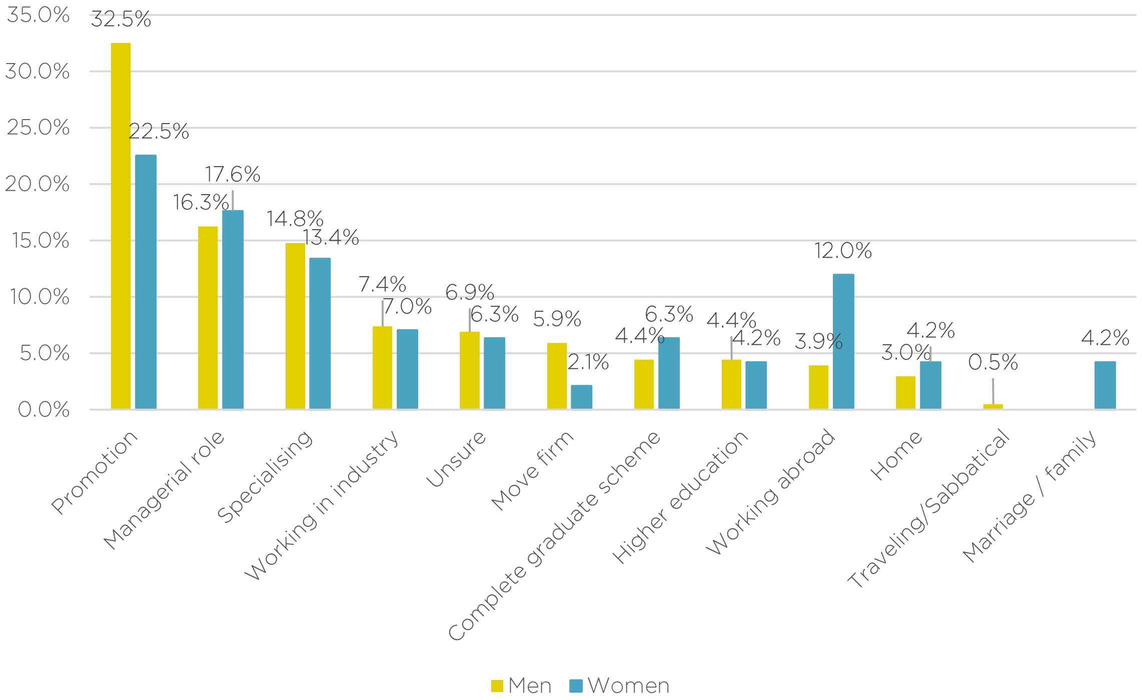


Fig. 88 **Where would you like to see yourself in five years time?**

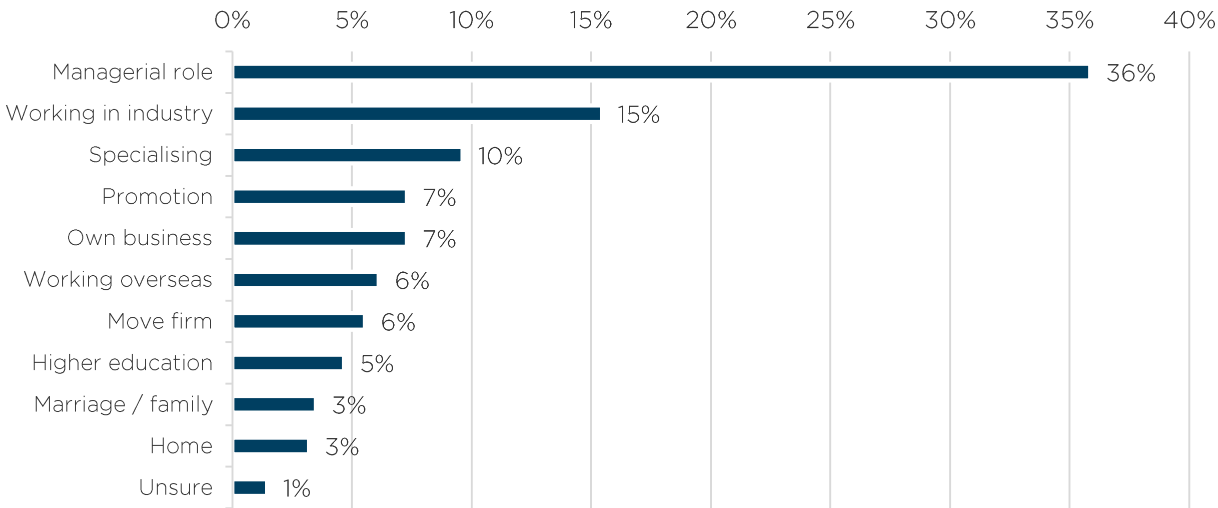


Fig. 89 Where would you like to see yourself in five years?

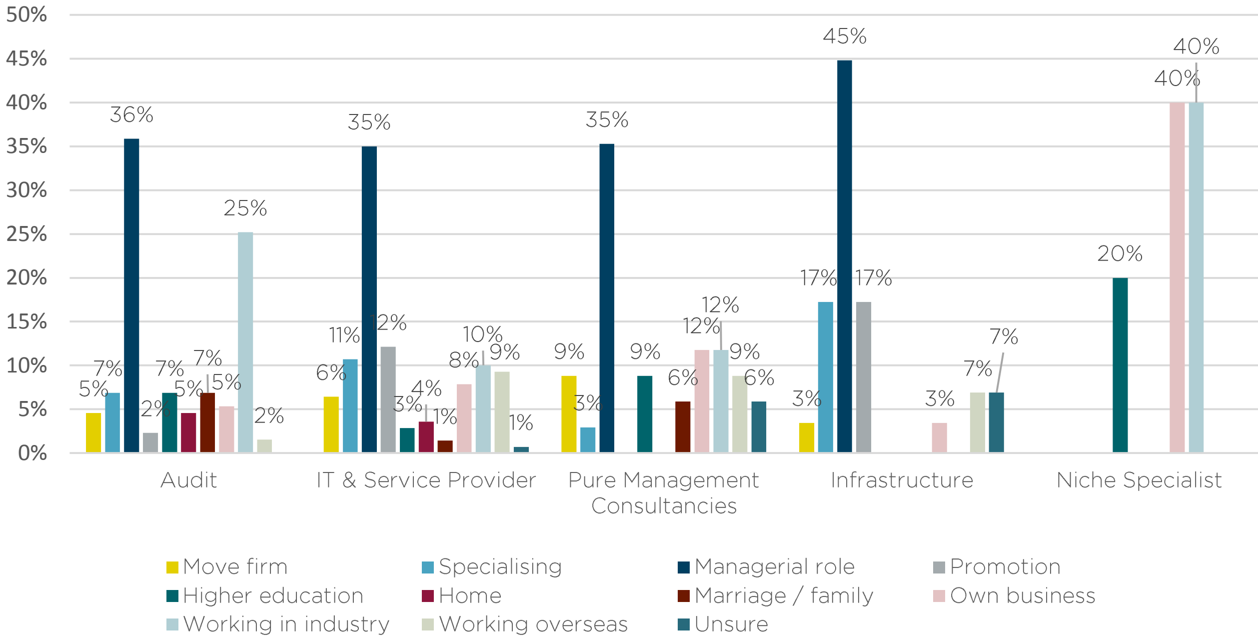
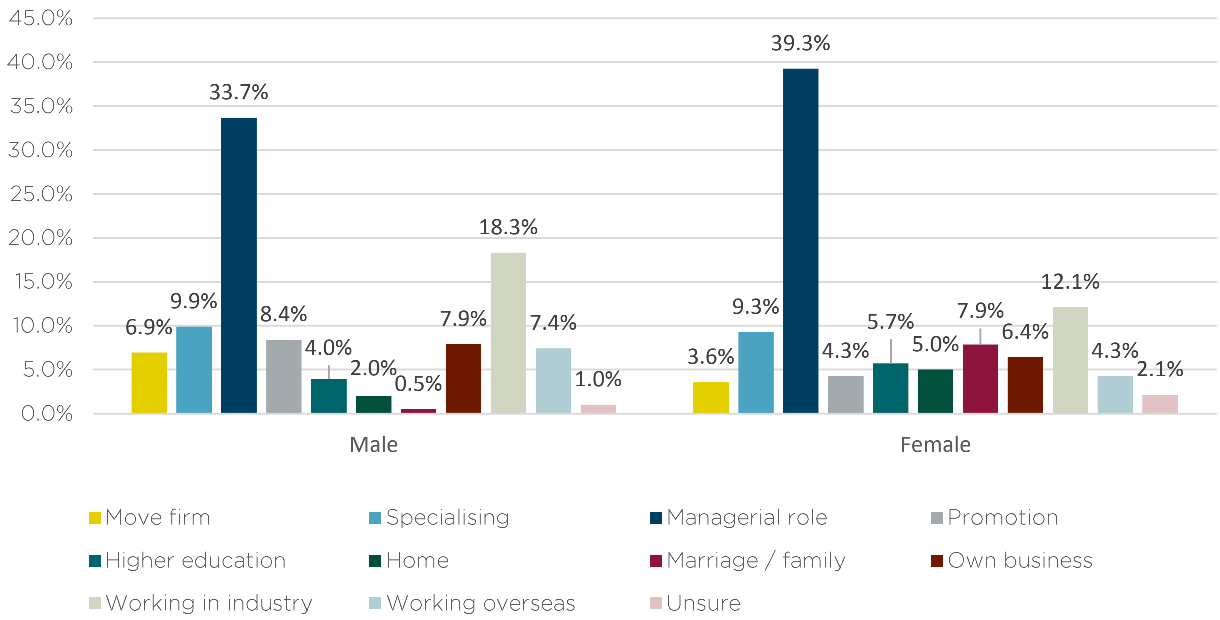


Fig. 90 Where would you like to see yourself in five years? (gender breakdown)



In two years, 27.8% of respondents would like to secure promotion, while 16.6% want to manage. Proportionately more seek management roles in pure consulting firms, and specialist roles in infrastructure and niche firms. Women are less likely to be seeking promotion in that time, though marginally more likely to seek a management role, significantly more likely to want to work abroad and very much more likely to want marriage and/or a family. Plainly this response connects with the work/life balance issues that women have identified to a greater degree than men.

The lack of MBAs across the industry and respondents' desire for management training are plainly relevant to these responses. This issue intensifies across the five-year time horizon. 36% of respondents want to secure a management role within five years, while 15% want to work in industry. This finding correlates to some degree with earlier findings about those who wish to move out of consulting at some point. It also addresses an earlier point. We mentioned in the section on education that the mass recruitment of graduates and school leavers was a comparatively new consulting phenomenon. In discussing this with business leaders across our industry, some of the more enlightened have defended graduate recruitment, by reference to the virtues of consulting as a vocation and the challenge to received wisdom that young consultants can provide. Yet they have also indicated that the profession draws strength from real-world experience. So, an interest in wider horizons, while it may be a challenge for retention issues, is one that, wisely managed, could reap rewards for firms, with consultants moving out to and back from industry throughout their careers.

The five-year managerial ambition is even more marked in infrastructure firms. By contrast infrastructure respondents did not indicate a desire to work in industry. That aspiration is most marked in audit firms and niche specialists, respondents from the latter also evincing a marked desire to work overseas. Women again are more likely to seek a management role, less likely to want to work in wider industry, and substantially more likely to want a family.

Who responded

Figures 91 to 97 show the gender, ethnicity, nationality and housing situation of the respondents to the survey. The categories in Figure 92 stem from government guidance and consultation with volunteers.

Fig. 91 Gender

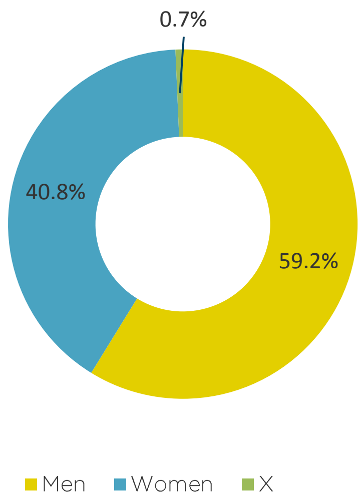


Fig. 92 Ethnicity (Skills Survey)

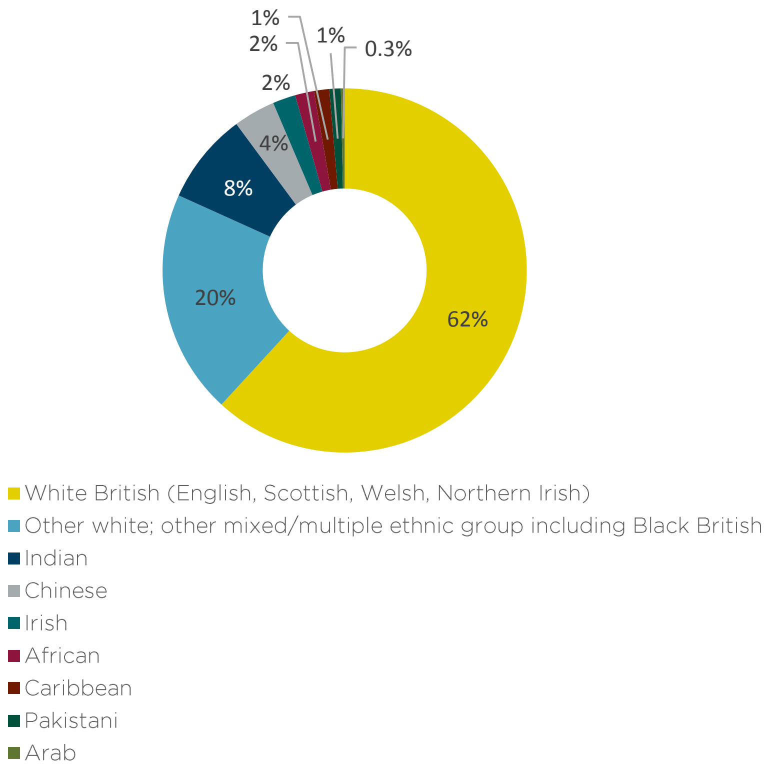


Fig. 93 UK population ethnicity (2011)

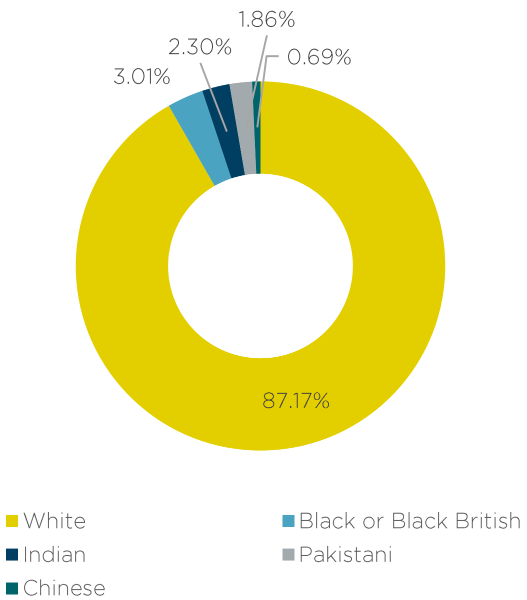


Fig. 94 London population ethnicity (2011)

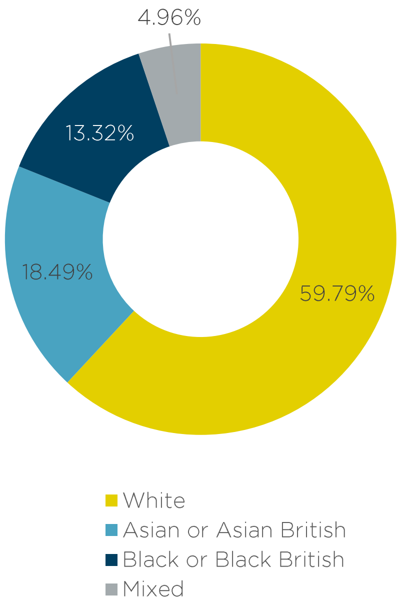


Fig. 95 **What country were you born in?**

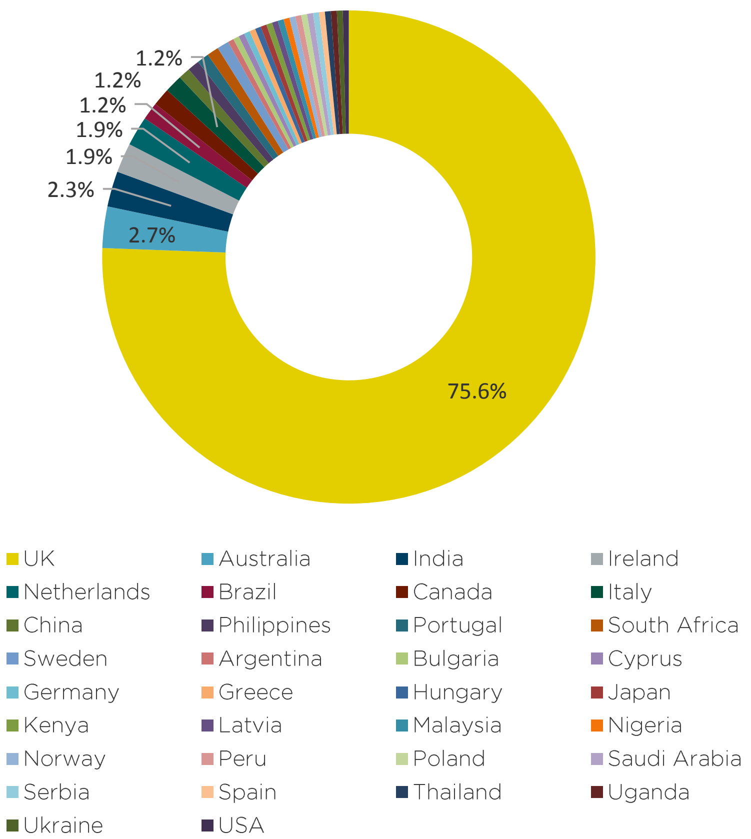


Fig. 96 **What is your nationality?**

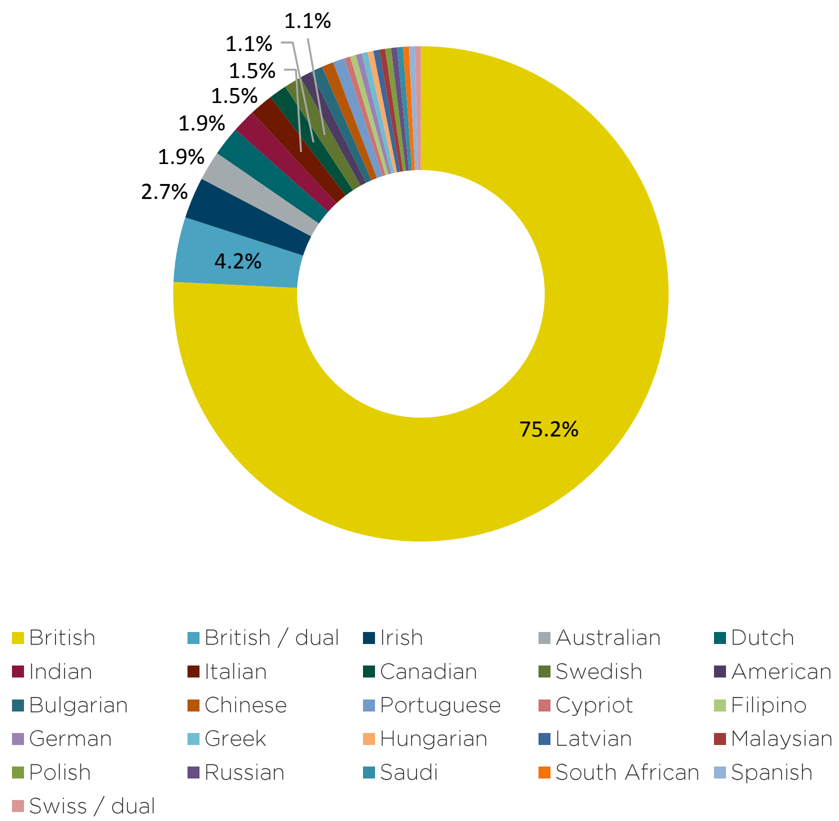
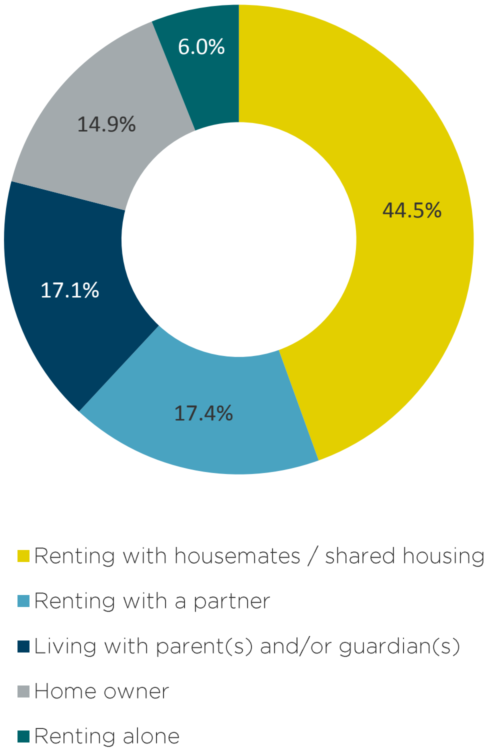


Fig. 97 **What is your accommodation situation?**



Just under 60% of respondents were men, just over 40% women. The vast majority are under 30.

We assume, given the shape of our industry and the composition of the Young MCA Network, that the bulk of respondents to the survey are based in London and the South East. Even allowing for the greater ethnic diversity and international quality of these geographies compared with much of the rest of the country, the picture here is startlingly varied. The ethic mix is largely richer than the UK averages, though the numbers of black British respondents appear lower than the London and South East trends. Moreover, only 75.6% of respondents born in the UK and only 75.2 have UK or dual UK nationality.

This international quality is at once a feature of the global importance of the UK consulting industry, affirmed in countless MCA reports, and also a necessity for its survival. The UK faces structural and probably ineradicable domestic skills shortages. These are not simply a function of our education and training systems. While more could be done to prepare young people for the labour market and to bring the economically inactive into work, even this additional capacity would be quite insufficient in many industries, including consulting, to meet the demand for labour. UK consulting firms work internationally and deploy a multinational workforce to do so. It is easy to deduce from this the perspectives of many interviewees for numerous MCA reports on issues of skills and border policy, and, latterly, their attitudes towards Brexit…

Policy makers should be concerned at the responses on housing tenure. Of respondents, only 14.9% are owner occupiers. Incredibly, 17.1% live with their parents, while the rest are in rented accommodation. As London is now a city with more renters than property owners, this is not surprising. And of course many young consultants will not yet want to own properties. Yet many will. That such a large proportion neither rent nor buy as yet, but depend on "hotel (and potentially bank) of mum and dad "is indicative of the prohibitive housing realities of the capital.

Conclusions: Consulting Excellence and Growth

Our young consultants are a diverse and international cadre. The lack of extremity in the responses here suggests a body of broadly constructive, contented though very ambitious young professionals. However, being predominately based in the South East and London, they face specific challenges. Policymakers should be alarmed at the very high proportion of ambitious young adults who are still living with mum and dad!

There are specific lessons on training and development, remote working, and on the provision of career paths by firm-type and gender that firms will need to take forward. There is an evident need to slant in-house and commissioned training towards sales, soft skills and management. It will be interesting to compare this feedback on training with the general survey of MCA consultants we will conduct annually as part of *Consulting Excellence.*

Indeed, already there are lessons here for *Consulting Excellence.* For the main area in which our industry must up its game is in the further consolidation of the image of consulting as a profession. The case for the *Consulting Excellence* and the Chartered Management Consultant award is overwhelming. Young consultants have been attracted to their firm, often their first, by its culture, reputation or benefits package. However there seems to be little evidence of a “vocational” consultant out there, with few responses suggesting a paramount motivation of wanting to be a consultant per se. Indeed, some respondents in the focus group sessions, while keen to acquire consulting skills and have interesting varied working lives, explicitly saw consulting as a route to other employment opportunities. Only 22.9% of respondents positively affirm that they expect to stay in consulting.

Where people expect to go is also striking: many would like to move into digital. Young consultants see the skills associated with this sector as the future and plainly should be equipped with them. Our business leaders also recognise the importance of digital. They contend, indeed, that graduate recruitment is slanted towards the acquisition of new digital specialists. There is less evidence of that in this survey than might have been expected, although young digital recruits, as we have suggested, may be masked in more ways than one, and we believe that the figures here understate the current position. However, what is evident is that young consultants, in terms of their chosen or often allocated service lines, are carrying out a wide range of tasks. This is consistent with the business generalist model. In a thoroughgoing digital transformation of our industry, we would have anticipated a larger number of respondents to indicate that they were solely digital practitioners.

Our industry must continue to raise its game in recruiting the best digital practitioners. But it must also ensure that consultants so recruited genuinely pursue digital career paths. The tension between that objective and other business issues, such as utilisation targets, should be explored. Otherwise the industry, which we believe has made great strides in digital recruitment, will fail to retain its digitally able people and lose them to other sectors.

What makes this especially important is the correlation with growth. The MCA recently launched its new Digital Network. This is intended to capture the enthusiasm and insight unleashed during our Year of Digital. To bridge that campaign and our current Year of Growth, we asked the Network to consider the correlation between digitisation and a growing economy. Their insights will be made available shortly. In summary, however, the Network suggested that it was probably too early to suggest a direct and sustainable correlation between digitisation and macroeconomic expansion. However, they confidently asserted that digital was now an essential component of business life. While adopting it wholesale would not necessarily guarantee a firm the growth-to-investment returns of the new digital insurgents and integrators, failure to do so would almost certainly be a recipe for decline. MCA members must accordingly build on the first wave of digitisation of their workforces, to help secure their clients' interests and future – and their own.

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