

In<sup>2</sup>science<sup>UK</sup>



In<sup>2</sup>research

# In2research Impact report 2023/24

November 2024

Brilliant Consulting





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## 1. Introduction

In2research is a one-year programme developed by In2scienceUK and UCL which aims to give people from low socioeconomic and underrepresented backgrounds the skills and experience they need to access postgraduate research degrees and career opportunities. In2research addresses three main barriers that people from low socioeconomic backgrounds face when accessing postgraduate research careers:

### 1. Knowledge and information:

- The programme aims to demystify research by providing information on the pathways to research careers

### 2. Lack of experience relevant to postgraduate careers:

- Postgraduate research study programmes often demand substantial research experience. In2research provides a paid 8-week research placement, including workshops on interview and networking skills.

### 3. Research culture and wellbeing:

- The programme recognises the significant unconscious and conscious biases that exist within institutions and provides tailored race and cultural literacy for all volunteers to promote a more inclusive and welcoming workplace.

The programme consists of four different elements:

- **Away Days:** in-person days in London where participants are able meet fellow participants, practice networking skills, and showcase their research.
- **Online Workshops:** to support professional and skills development, including academic CV writing, interview preparation, and communicating research.
- **Mentoring Sessions:** with a subject-specific researcher offering individual support for participants' career development.
- **Research Placement:** a full-time eight-week summer research placement at a top university or institution supported by a stipend.

University staff volunteer to deliver the programme; they act as mentors for participants and host research placements. In2scienceUK is hugely grateful to all the mentors and hosts who play a crucial role in helping them to deliver invaluable support to participants.

In2scienceUK received 500 participant applications for the 2023/24 In2research programme, with 121 participants taking part. This is a 15% increase from the number of participants supported in 2022/23, up from 105 participants. Further to that, 225 volunteer applications were received, with 74 mentors, 70 placement hosts, and 20 volunteers, that supported as mentors as well as placement hosts, joining the programme.

This impact report presents the findings for the 2023/24 programme, as well as the results of the follow-up survey for the 2022/23 cohort where 23 participants completed a survey one year after completing the programme to measure the longer term impact of the In2research programme.

## Data collection and analysis

Participant and volunteer data was collected via application forms as well as surveys that were distributed at key points during the programme. Participant impact data was collected at three stages: before the programme (pre-programme survey), after the first phase of the programme entailing mentoring sessions and workshops (mid-programme survey) and after the second phase of programme, entailing the eight-week summer research placement (post-programme survey). Volunteer impact data was collected before and after they participated on the programme.



### Participant data

pre-, mid- and post-programme survey



### Volunteer data

pre- and post-programme  
volunteer survey

Responses from each survey were matched with the participant/volunteer. For the impact analysis, respondents who attended the minimum requirements of the programme<sup>1</sup> and submitted all required surveys were included. Completing all surveys is considered a key part of participation in the programme. The final sample size included responses from 96 participants, 70 mentors and 69 hosts.

All reported percentage numbers are rounded. In some cases, this may cause numbers to not add up to 100%.

Throughout the pre- mid- and post-surveys questions were structured either as five point Likert scales statements (strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree and strongly disagree), yes/no statements or free text format. In this report, Likert scale statements have been summarised to only report on strongly agree and agree (this is not referred to throughout the text).

The analysis of the survey included quantitative and qualitative information, providing impact data for participants and volunteers, and giving insights into how participants felt about the programme in their own words.

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<sup>1</sup> The minimum requirements of the programme include 75% attendance for mentoring sessions and workshops, as well as attending the research placement.

## 1.1 Participant Demographics

The In2research programme supported 121 participants in 2023/24. The programme targets people who are from a low socioeconomic background, measured using the following criteria:

- Eligibility for Free School Meals while at school
- The occupation of the main earner for the household at age 14
- Eligibility for Pupil Premium, Education Maintenance Allowance or the 16-19 Bursary.

Overall, 100% of the participants met at least one and 39% met all three of the targeting criteria.



**Pupil Premium**

**59 %**  
(71/121)



**From a Low-Income Household**

**78 %**  
(90/116)



**Free School Meals**

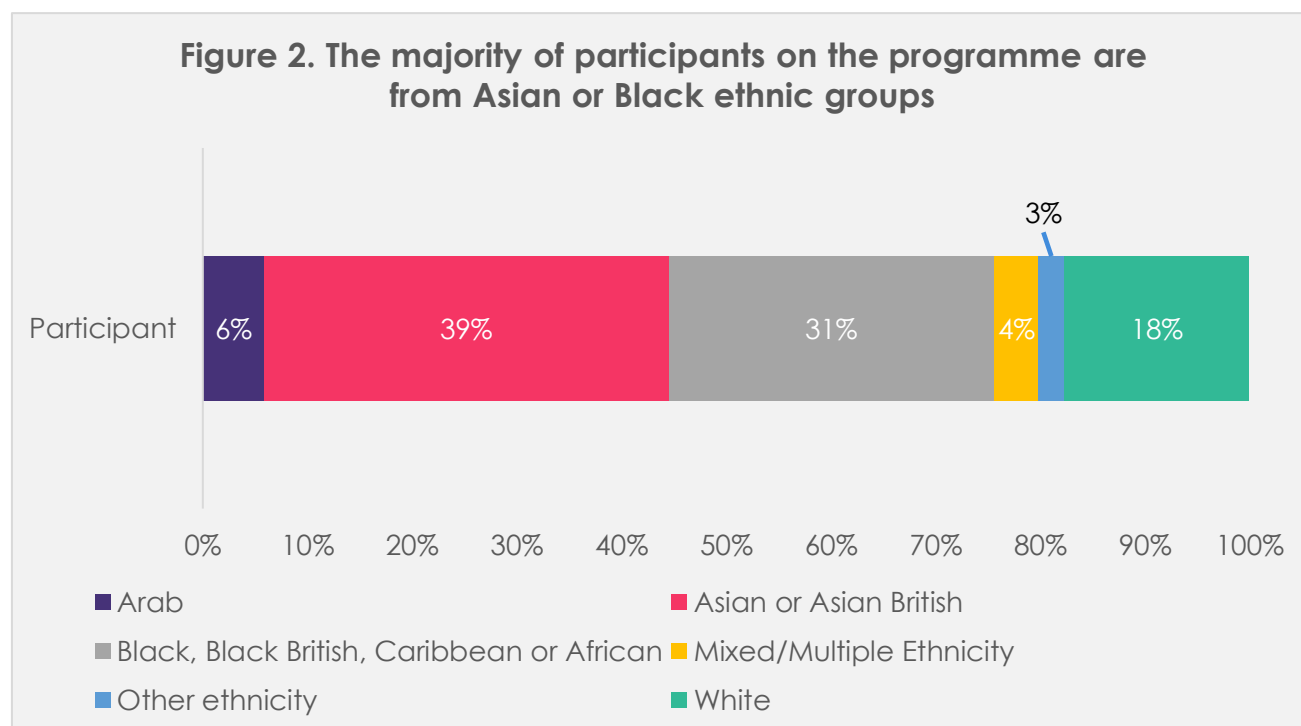
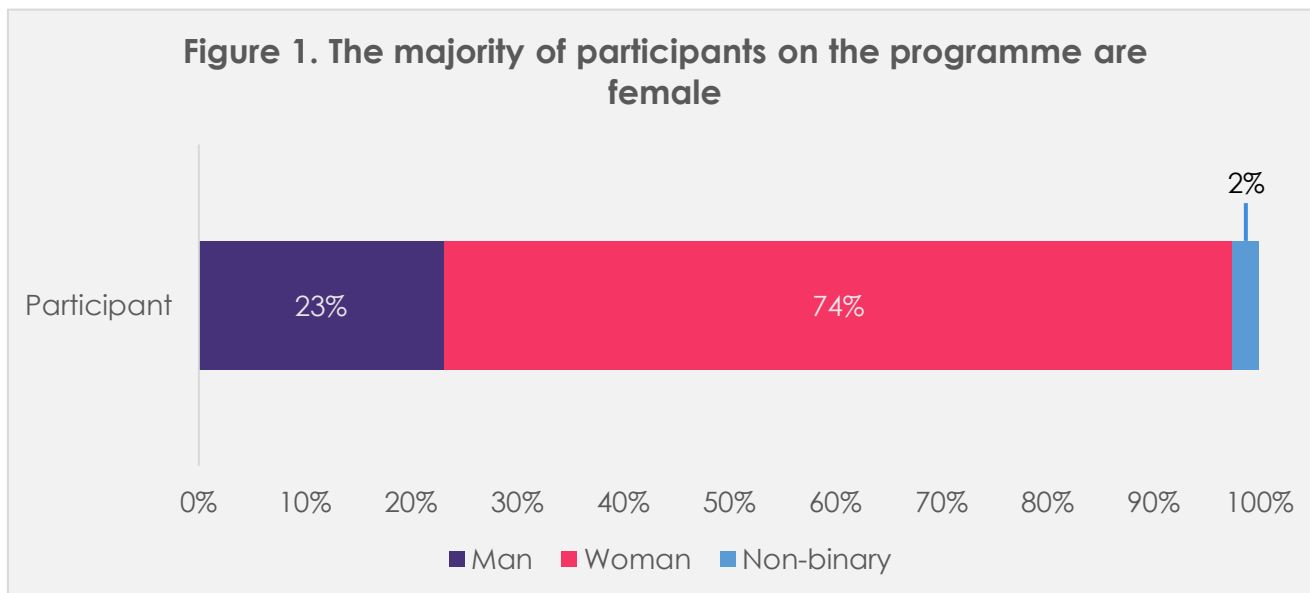
**77 %**  
(93/121)



**Participants meeting all 3 targeting criteria**

**39 %**  
(47/121)

Demographic information was collected at application stage. The majority of participants were female (74%) and nearly a quarter (23%) were male (Figure 1). In addition, 83% were from a Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. The most common ethnic group was Asian or Asian British (39%), followed by Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (31%) and White (18%) (Figure 2).



The demographics of In2research participants is significantly more racially diverse than the current postgraduation population, where over 75% in 2021 were White<sup>2</sup>. The diversity of In2research applicants (data not shown) is comparable to the diversity of In2research participants, suggesting that the selection process is conserving the diversity.

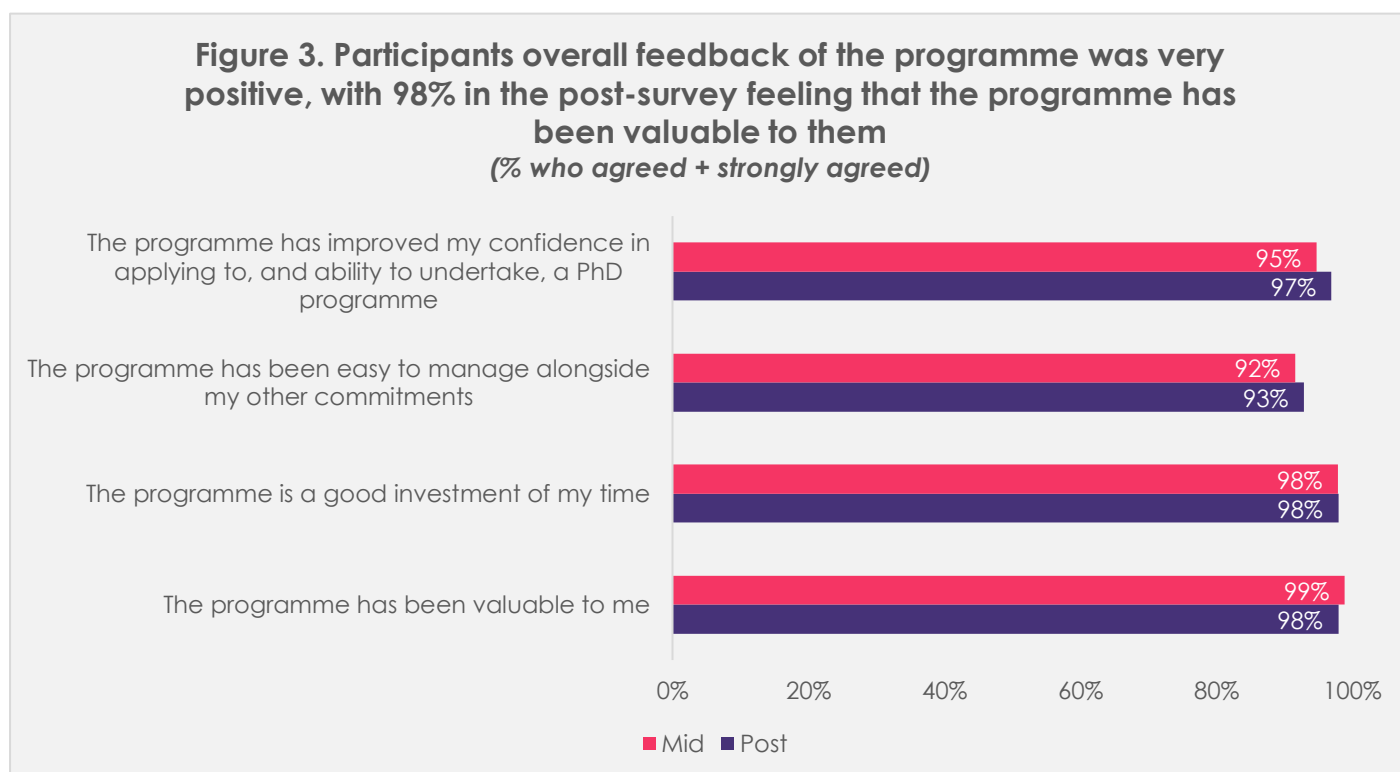
## 2. Programme Impact on Participants

### 2.1 Satisfaction with the Programme

The programme was received extremely well, with 99% in the mid-survey and 98% in the post-survey feeling that the programme had been valuable to them (Figure 3).

Specifically, feedback from participants showed that the programme had improved their confidence to apply and undertake a PhD (95% in the mid-survey, 97% in the post-survey). Participants also felt the programme had been easy to manage alongside other commitments (92% in the mid-survey, 93% in the post-survey).

Similarly, 98% in the mid- and post-survey felt the programme had been a good investment of their time. Participants also felt the programme had been valuable to them (99% in the mid-survey, 98% in the post-survey).



<sup>2</sup> [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2021/22 - Student numbers and characteristics \(HESA\)](#)

## 2.2 Postgraduate Knowledge

One of the main barriers that the programme aims to address is lack of knowledge and information. Hence, the programme aims to improve participants' understanding of what postgraduate research is like, and how to become a postgraduate researcher. This knowledge is a vital building block for participants who are curious about postgraduate research and helps them decide if this is the path they wish to take and empowers them to take it if so. Given the low socioeconomic and underrepresented backgrounds of the In2research participants, imparting this information is a key first step to improving access to postgraduate research.

The programme has significantly improved participants' knowledge of the postgraduate sector in all areas. The biggest improvement can be seen in participants' understanding of the day-to-day lives of postgraduate researchers, where only 16% of participants agreed they understood this in the pre-survey, rising to 93% participants agreeing in the post-survey, which is a 77 percentage point increase (Figure 4).

There was a 66 percentage point increase in participants being clear on the process of applying for funding for a postgraduate research degree. Initially, only 7% of participants agreed in the pre-survey, increasing to 84% of participants by the mid-survey, and 73% by the post-survey (Figure 4).

Participants' increase in knowledge of postgraduate research was echoed in the qualitative comments. When asked in the mid-survey (which participants fill in after they attended their mentoring sessions and workshops) about the best thing they had gained so far from the programme, the most common answers included:

- Gaining confidence to apply for a PhD
- Learning about the PhD process
- Getting support with PhD application
- Getting support with writing CVs

This increase in knowledge was also evident in the qualitative feedback about the online workshops. When asked whether the online workshops had been helpful, many participants had found that they had helped improve their CV writing skills and that they had learnt more about the process of the PhD journey. Many participants had also enjoyed hearing from different people about their personal experiences.



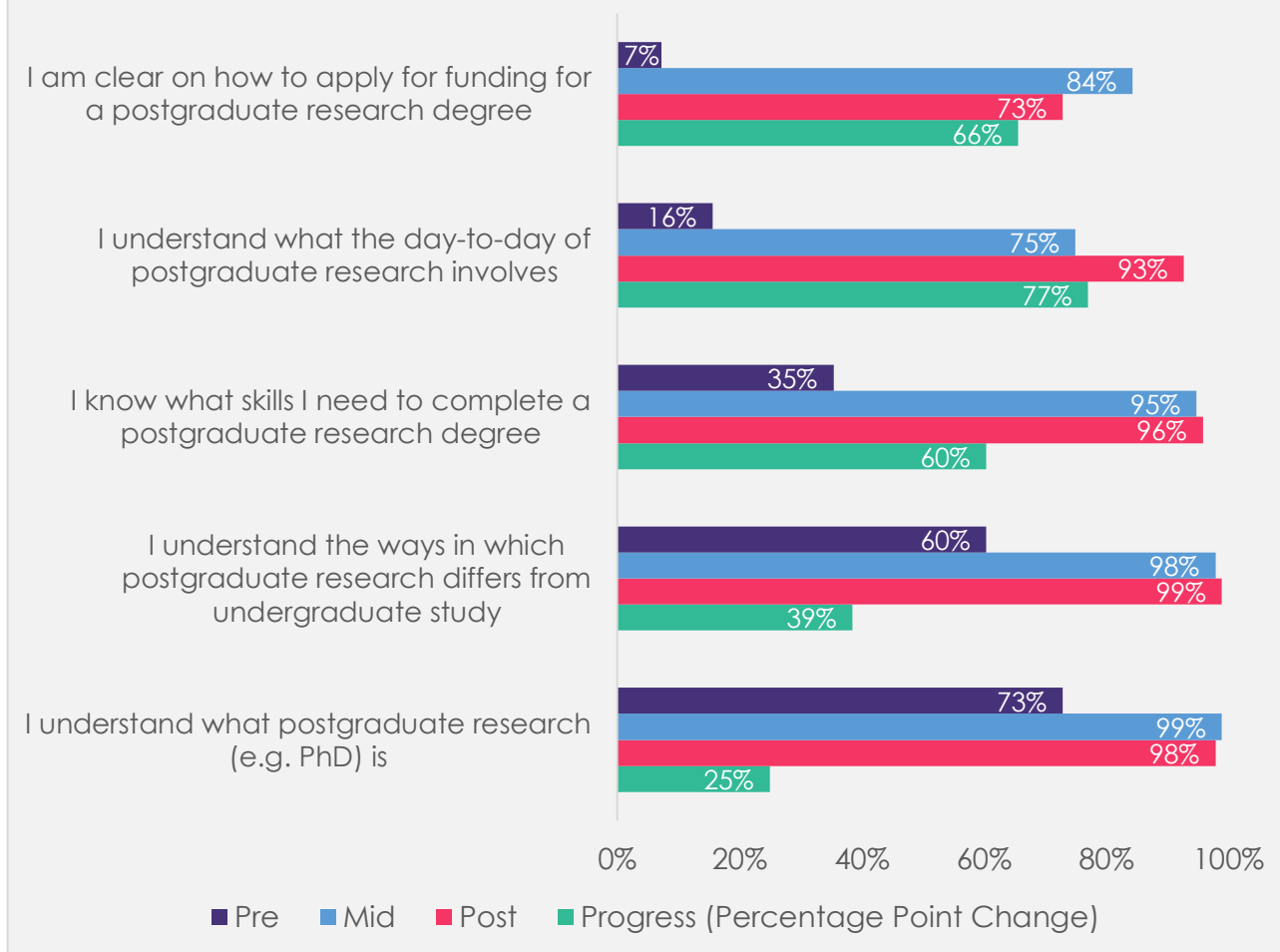
*"I have learnt so much about the PhD process, from the initial application process to the actual research components. I also really benefited from speaking to my mentor about what it is I want to do and how I can get there."*

**It is clear the programme has succeeded in its aim to improve the understanding the participants have in the world of postgraduate research, and how they can access it.**



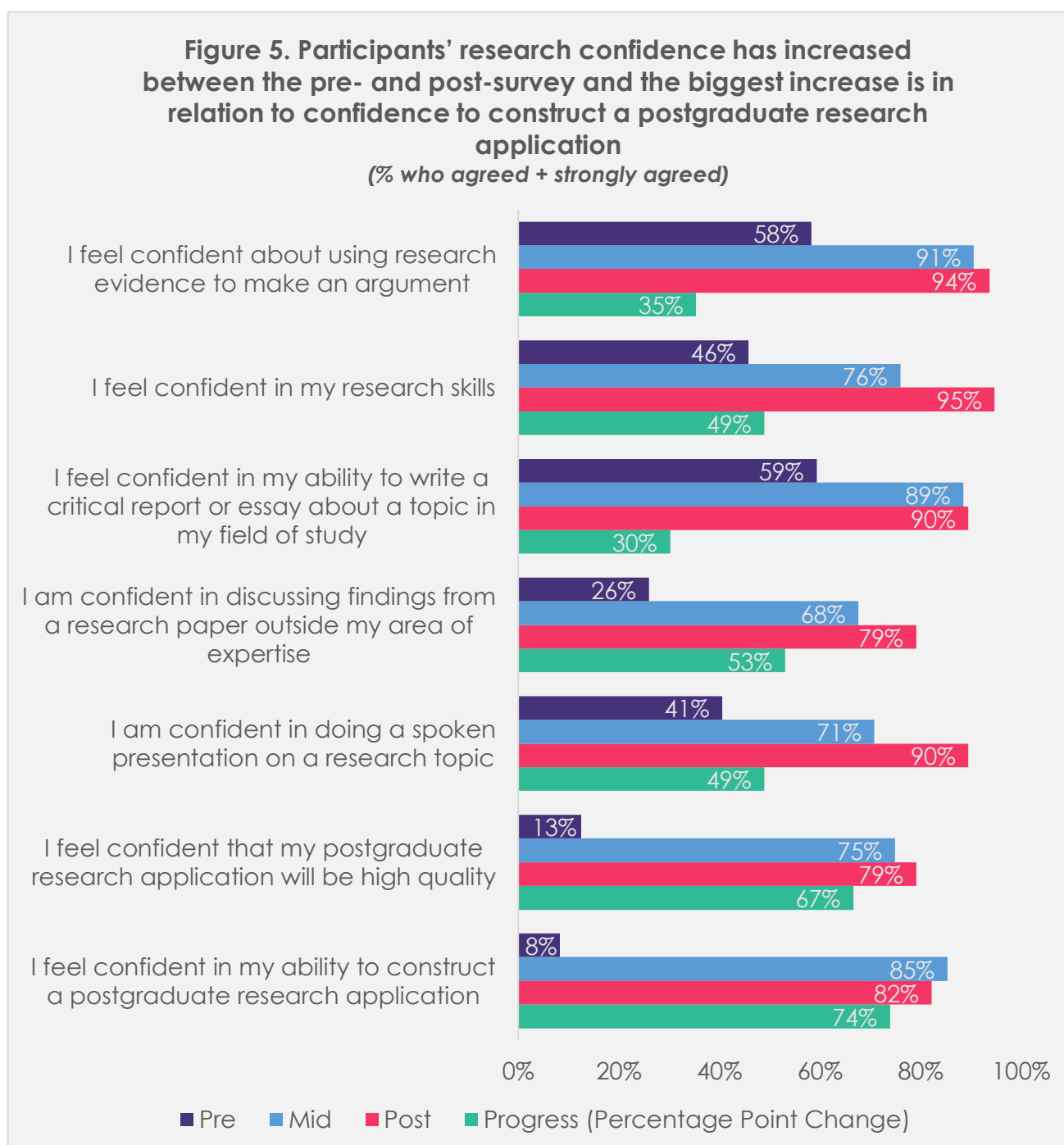
**Figure 4. Participants' postgraduate knowledge has increased between the pre- and post-survey and the biggest increase is in relation to understanding what the day-to-day of postgraduate research involves**

(% who agreed + strongly agreed)



## 2.3 Research Confidence

The programme aims to improve the confidence of participants in their own abilities to participate in postgraduate research. **The eight-week research placement has been a key element in improving research confidence**, as evidenced by the observed improvements in the post-survey (after the placement) compared to the mid-survey (before the placement) (Figure 5). Participants' confidence in their research skills had increased by 49 percentage points between the pre- and post-survey, and their confidence about using research evidence to make an argument had increased by 35 percentage points.





*"I think the best thing I have gained from the programme so far is confidence. By practicing my networking, interview, and presentation skills on the programme, I feel more prepared for when I may have to do these things in the future, and less apprehensive about them."*

## 2.4 Professional Confidence

### **Participants' professional confidence had improved throughout the programme.**

Participants felt more confident working with other professionals and/or researchers in their field of study, with a 50 percentage point increase between the pre- and post-survey. Participants' confidence of introducing themselves to a professional in their field in person had increased by 53 percentage points (40% in the pre-survey, to 80% in the mid-survey and 93% in the post-survey) (Figure 6).

Several participants in the qualitative comments praised their mentor and how they had helped improve their professional confidence, with one participant mentioning the application and interview feedback:



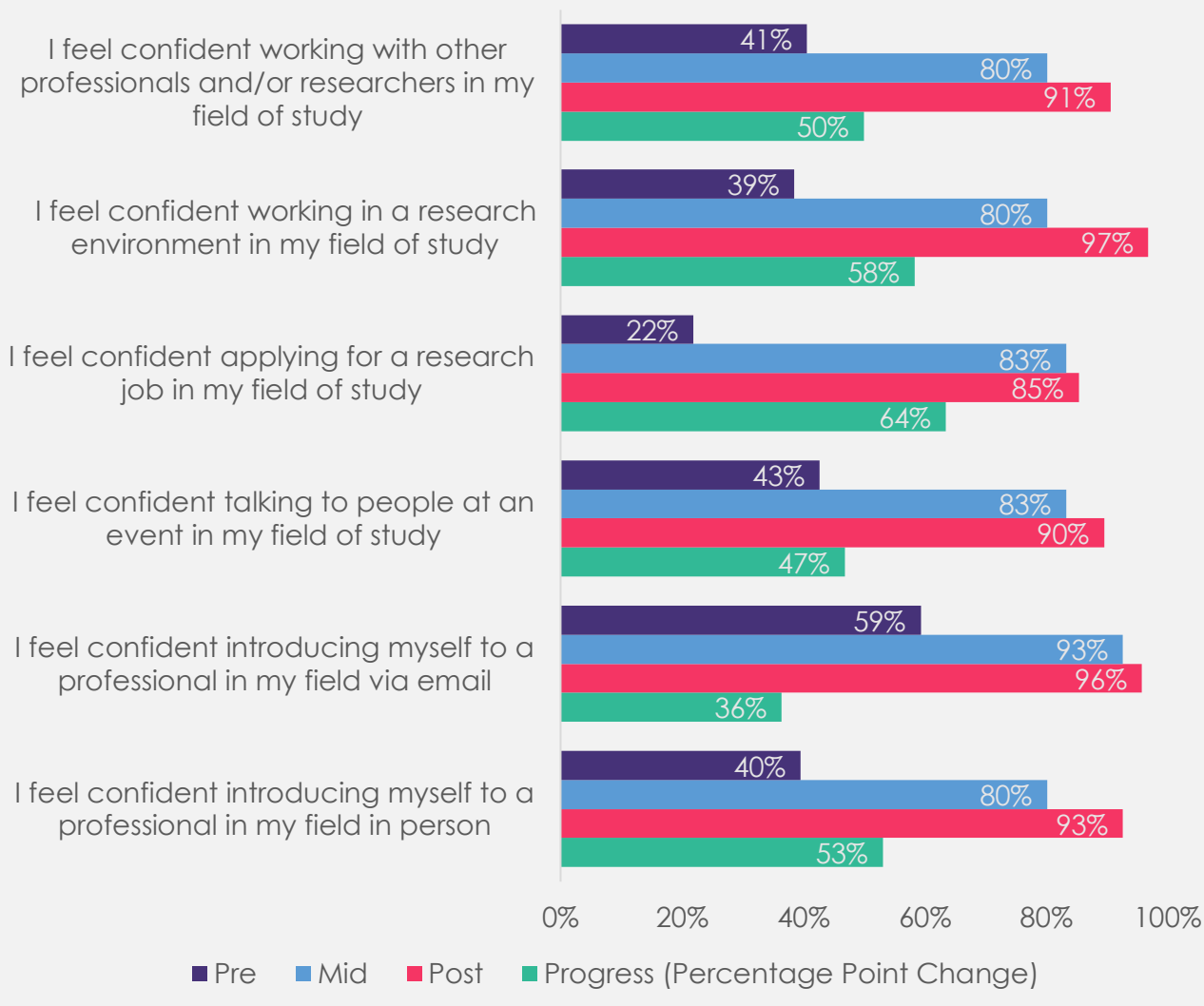
*"My mentor provided me excellent application and interview tips and feedback. I found their journey to a PhD inspiring and enjoyed hearing about their work. Their guidance in the sessions have made me confident in how to network with professors and PhD students in the placement."*

Several participants also found preparing the mock interview with their mentor helpful. Others mentioned that they had found it helpful that their mentor was in a field similar to their interests:



*"My mentor worked in a field I was interested in, so it was very useful to hear their experiences and advice. The size of my mentor group was very small so I was able to get tailored advice."*

**Figure 6. Participants' professional confidence has increased between the pre- and post-survey and the biggest increase is in relation to feeling confident working in a research environment**  
 (% who agreed + strongly agreed)



## 2.5 Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging has been identified as a significant roadblock in access to and success in Higher Education, and this trend has also been identified within postgraduate research specifically<sup>3</sup>. Increasing participants' sense of belonging is an important part of empowering them to enter postgraduate research and persist in their field.

**Participants' feelings of sense of belonging increased throughout the programme in all but one statement**, which remained unchanged (Figure 7). There was a 34 percentage point increase of participants who felt a sense of connection with academics in their field of study. The statement that did not see an increase in agreement but remained unchanged was 'I want to become a professional or researcher in my field of study'. In the pre-survey, 81% reported that they wanted to become a professional or researcher in their field of study, along with 86% in mid-survey and 83% in the post-survey. This may be due to there already being an interest among participants prior to starting the programme but who need support so they can achieve their goals.

Participants also felt more confident about their next career steps after attending the programme, with a 43 percentage point increase between the pre- and post-survey (Figure 10). This increase in confidence was also evident in the qualitative comments, with several mentioning that the programme had helped them decide whether the PhD journey was something they wanted to pursue further. Many had also enjoyed connecting with people who had similar interest to them.

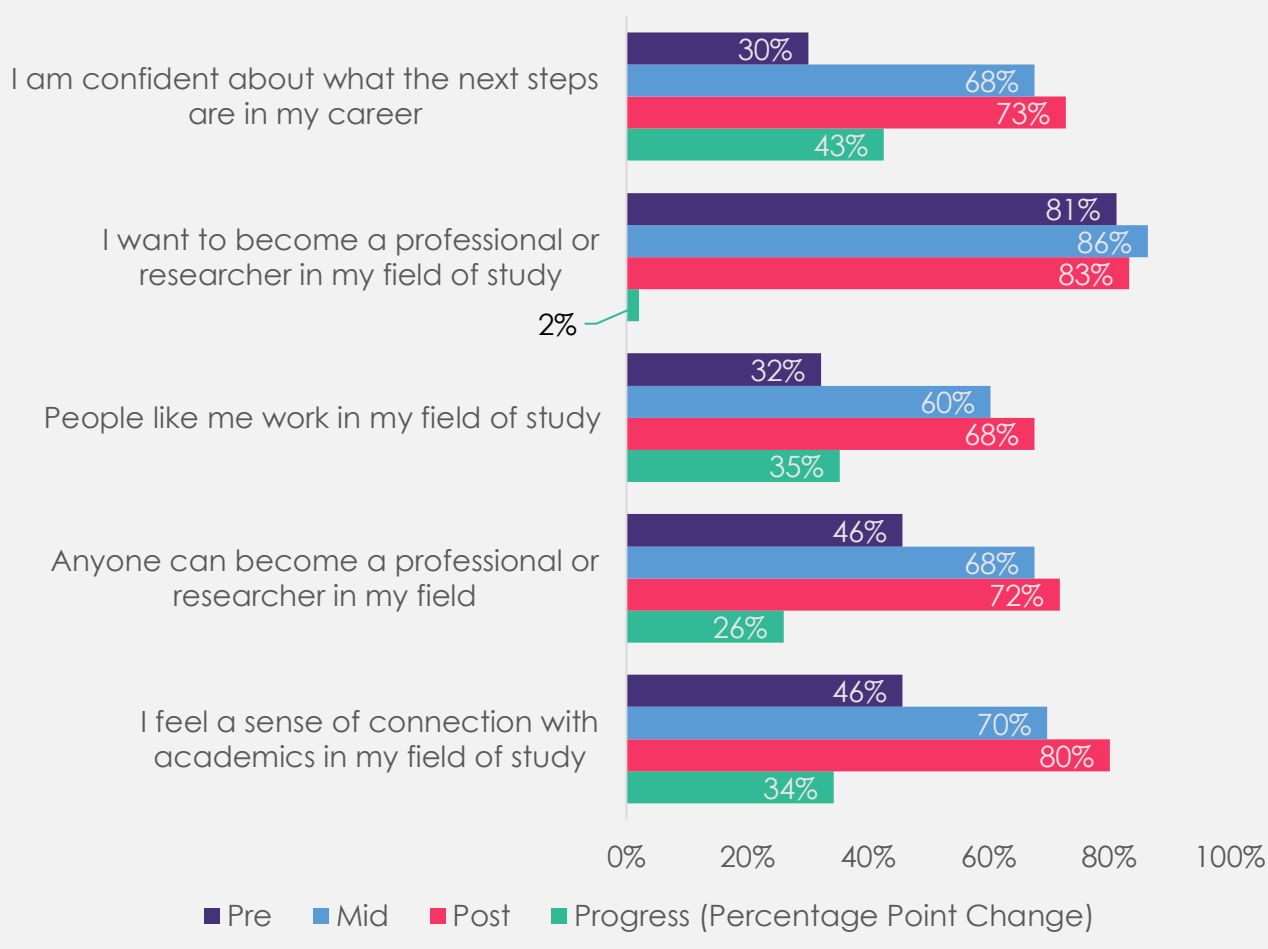


*"I think it was fun to meet people on the programme who shared similar experiences. I have learnt a lot more and I feel more confident in going into a research career."*

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<sup>3</sup> ["Peering through the window looking in": postgraduate experiences of non-belonging and belonging in relation to mental health and wellbeing \(Emerald Insight\)](#)

**Figure 7. Participants' feelings of sense of belonging has increased between the pre- and post-survey and the biggest increase is in relation to feeling confident about the next steps in their career**  
 (% who agreed + strongly agreed)



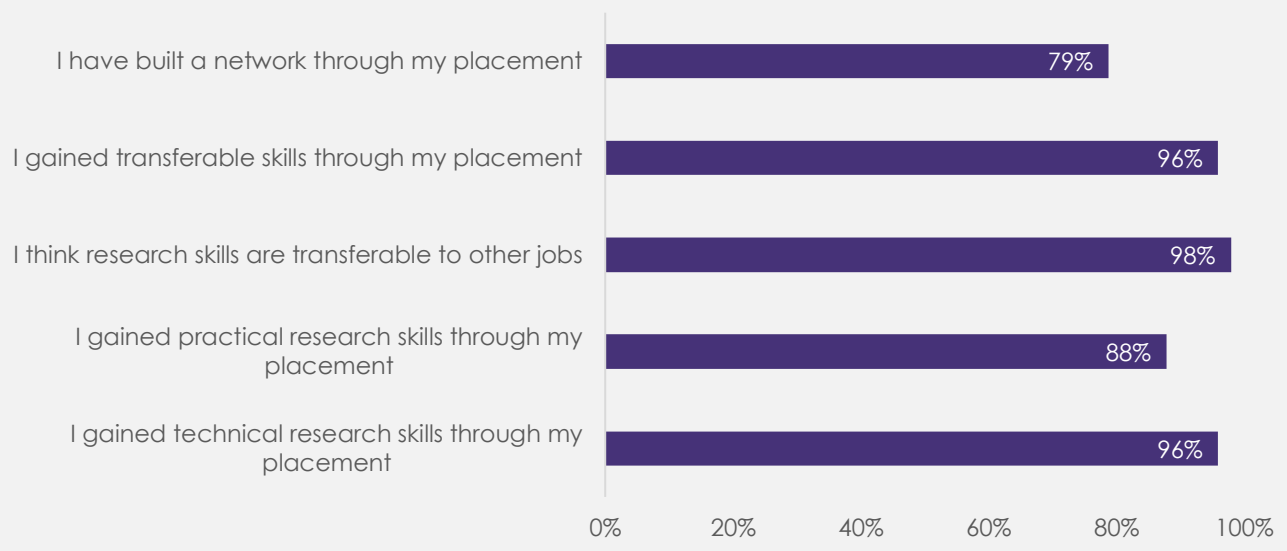
## 2.6 Impact on research experience

The workshops of the programme offered to participants were very well received. When asked to rate the usefulness of the workshops in the mid-survey, 82% of participants rated them 4 or 5 on a five point scale.

One of the key aims of the programme is to reduce barriers for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds regarding lack of experience relevant to postgraduate careers. The eight-week research placement has been designed to provide beneficiaries with substantial research experience.

In the post-survey, participants were asked how their placement has impacted their network and research skills. Figure 8 shows that the majority had built a network (79%) through their placement and gained practical as well as technical research skills (88% respectively 96%). Additionally, 98% thought that research skills were transferable and 96% agreed that they had gained transferable skills (Figure 8).

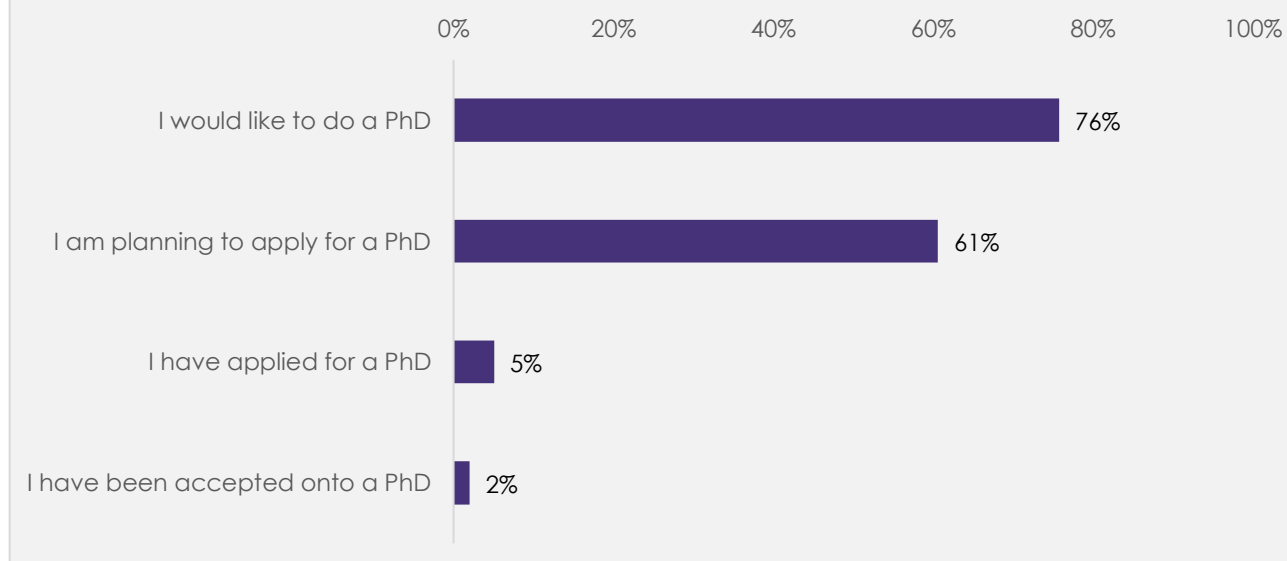
**Figure 8. Participants in the post-survey feel that their research skills has improved through their placements, and agree that these skills were transferable**  
 (% who agreed + strongly agreed)



### Future career plans

Participants were also asked about their thoughts/plans regarding applying for and completing a PhD degree. A large proportion (76%) of participants said they were interested in undertaking a PhD and 61% were planning to apply for one (Figure 9). A few participants had already applied for a PhD (5%) and 2% had been accepted, which is to

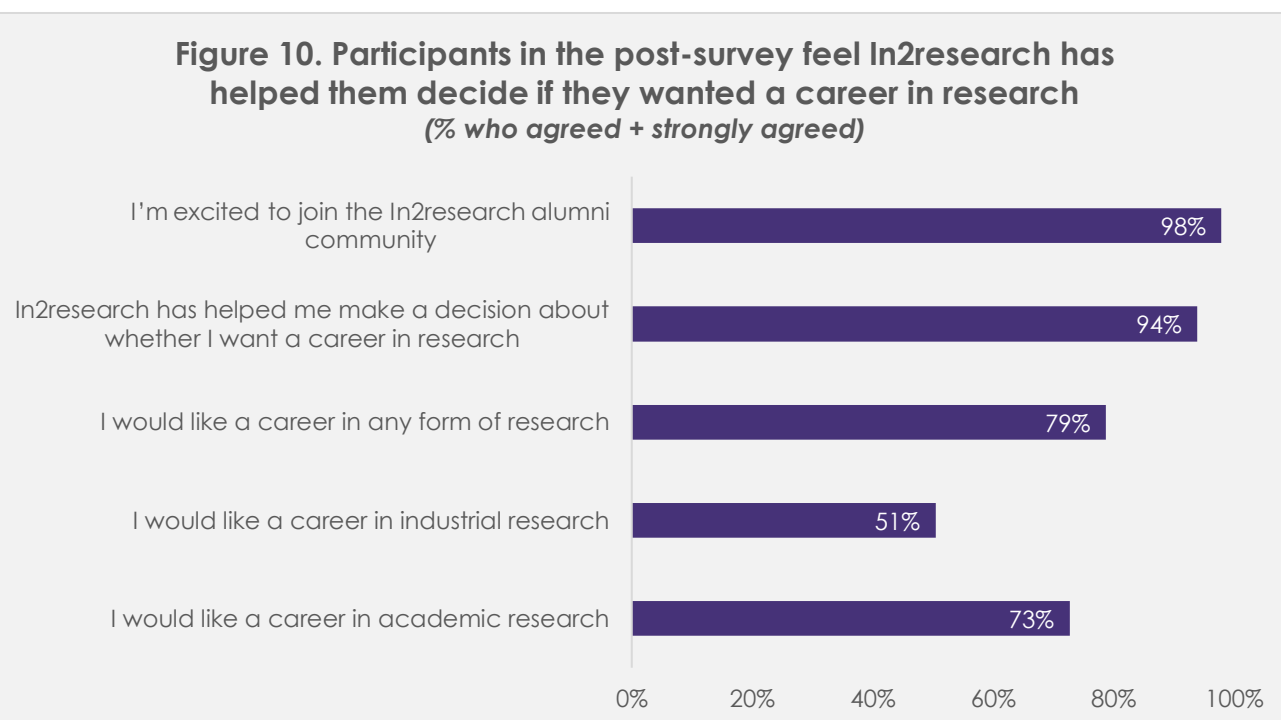
**Figure 9. Most participants would like to do a PhD, and are planning on applying. A small number have already applied and been accepted**  
 (% who responded yes)



be expected as 78% of participants had not yet completed their undergraduate degree at the time of the programme running, and this is a requirement for most PhDs.

Participants were also asked in the post-survey about their career prospects and whether the In2research programme has been helpful in their decision of wanting a career in research. Participants were keen for a career in any form of research (79%), with 73% being interested in a career in academic research (Figure 10). Half of respondents (51%) were interested in a career in industrial research. Furthermore, 94% of participants said that the programme was helpful in making a decision about a career in research. Most participants (98%) were excited to join the In2research alumni community, which further suggests that participants see the value in the programme.

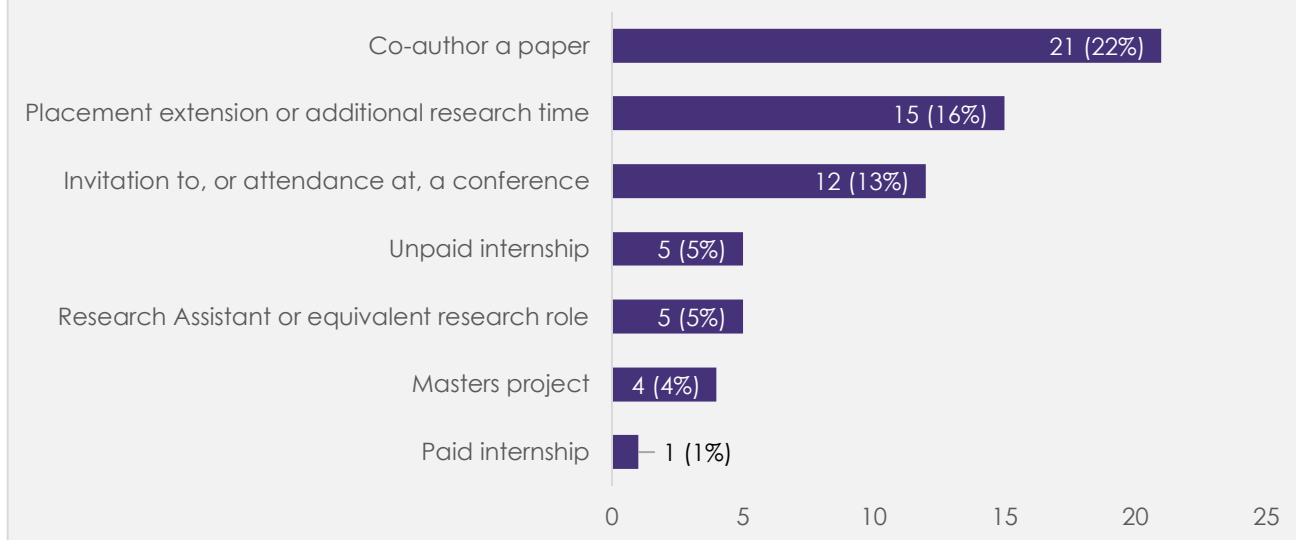
**Figure 10. Participants in the post-survey feel In2research has helped them decide if they wanted a career in research**  
 (% who agreed + strongly agreed)



Participants were asked in the post-survey whether they had been offered any opportunities following the programme, which 45% had. Just under a quarter of participants (22%) had been offered to co-author paper, and 16% had received a placement extension or additional research time (Figure 11). In addition, 13% had been invited to, or attended, a conference. A large proportion (85%) of participants said they would not have been offered this opportunity without the programme (data not shown).



**Figure 11. 45% in the post-survey has been offered opportunities following the programme, with the most common opportunity being co-authoring a paper**

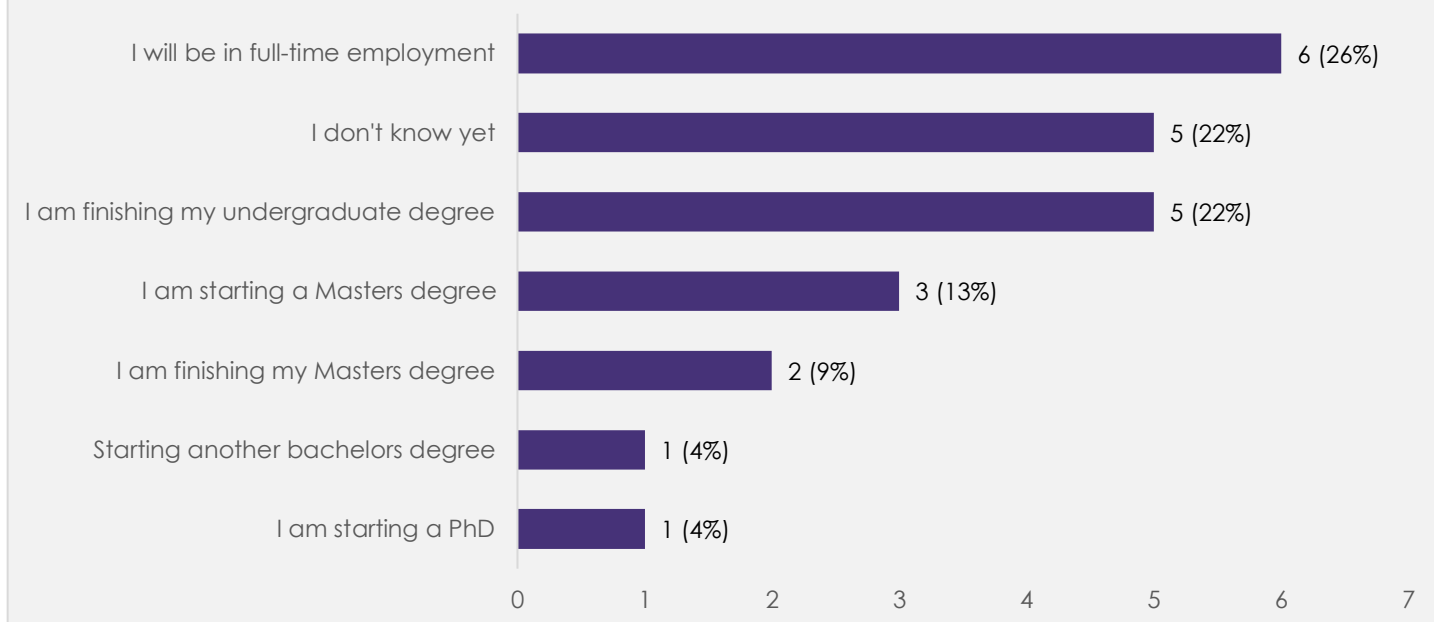


## 2.7 Longer-term impact of In2research: 2022-23 One Year on Follow up Survey

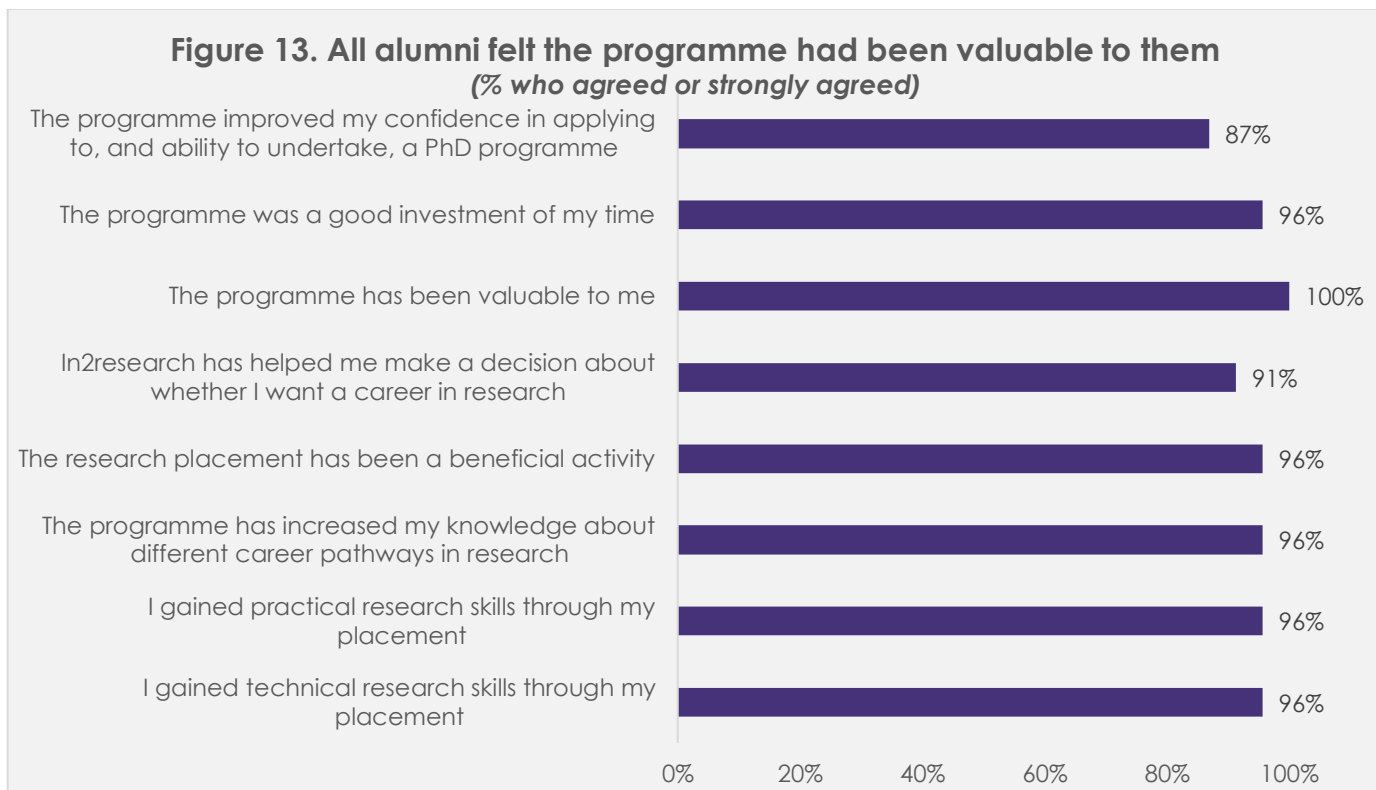
To assess the impact of the programme over a longer period of time, In2scienceUK conducted a follow up survey on In2research participants of the 2022/23 programme, asking them to reflect on the programme, and update on where they are in their academic and professional journeys. This survey was completed by alumni a year after the programme ended and there was a 26% response rate (23 respondents out of 87 survey recipients).

One year after the programme, alumni have advanced in their careers. Figure 12 shows that 52% are doing a degree during the 2024/25 academic year, with 26% doing a postgraduate degree.

**Figure 12. Alumni in the follow-up survey has various plans for the 2024/25 academic year, including full-time employment and finishing their undergraduate degree. Five alumni were not sure of their plans yet.**



Alumni in the follow up survey were very positive about the programme. **All respondents said that the programme had been valuable to them**, with 96% feeling that the programme was a good investment of their time (Figure 13). Most respondents (96%) had gained technical and practical research skills throughout their placement, and 96% also felt the programme had increased their knowledge about different career pathways in research. The majority (87%) felt the programme had helped improve their confidence in applying to, and undertake, a PhD programme (Figure 13).



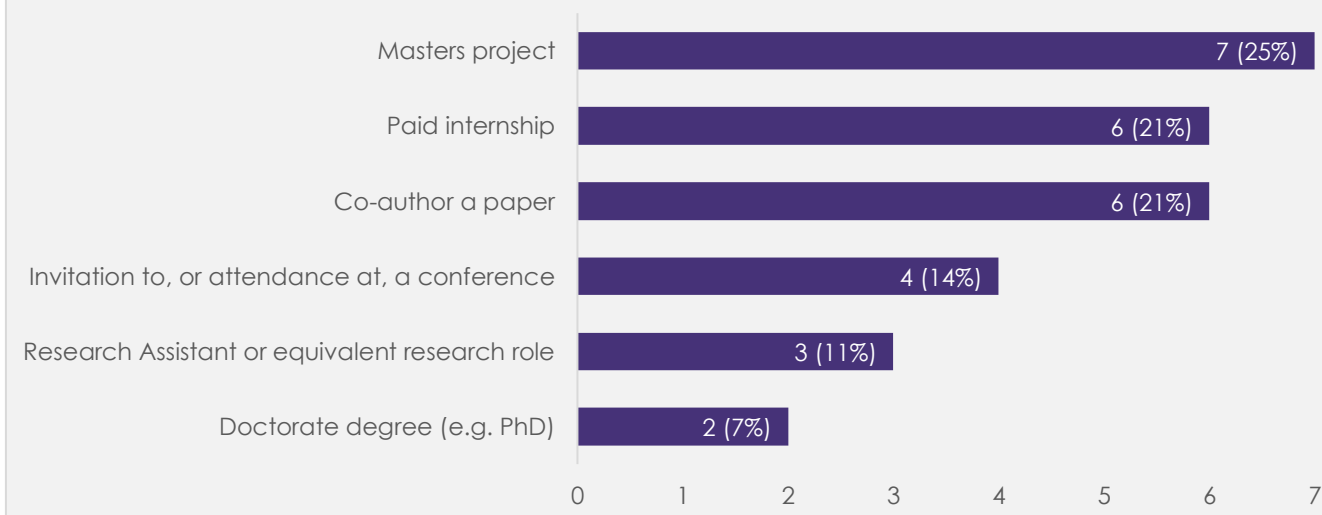
In the follow up survey, alumni were asked similar questions as in the post-survey to assess if the improvements observed directly after the programme are long lasting. All statements presented in Figure 14 had more than 90% of participants agreeing, with all respondents saying they understand what a PhD is, and the ways in which a PhD differs from undergraduate study. Furthermore, 83% of respondents said that the programme changed how they feel about applying for a PhD (data not shown). Alumni also felt confident introducing themselves to a science, technology, engineering or maths professional via email (96%) and in person (91%). In addition, 96% felt confident in their research skills (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Alumni in the follow up survey have maintained high levels of research and professional confidence. All alumni understand what a PhD is and how it differs from undergraduate study.**  
(% who agreed or strongly agreed)



Alumni in the follow up survey were asked whether they had been offered any new opportunities following the programme, with 70% saying they had. The most common opportunity offered was a master's project (25%) followed by undertaking a paid internship (21%) and co-authoring a paper (21%) (Figure 15). Additionally, 44% in the follow up survey agreed that they would not have received these opportunities without taking part in the In2research programme.

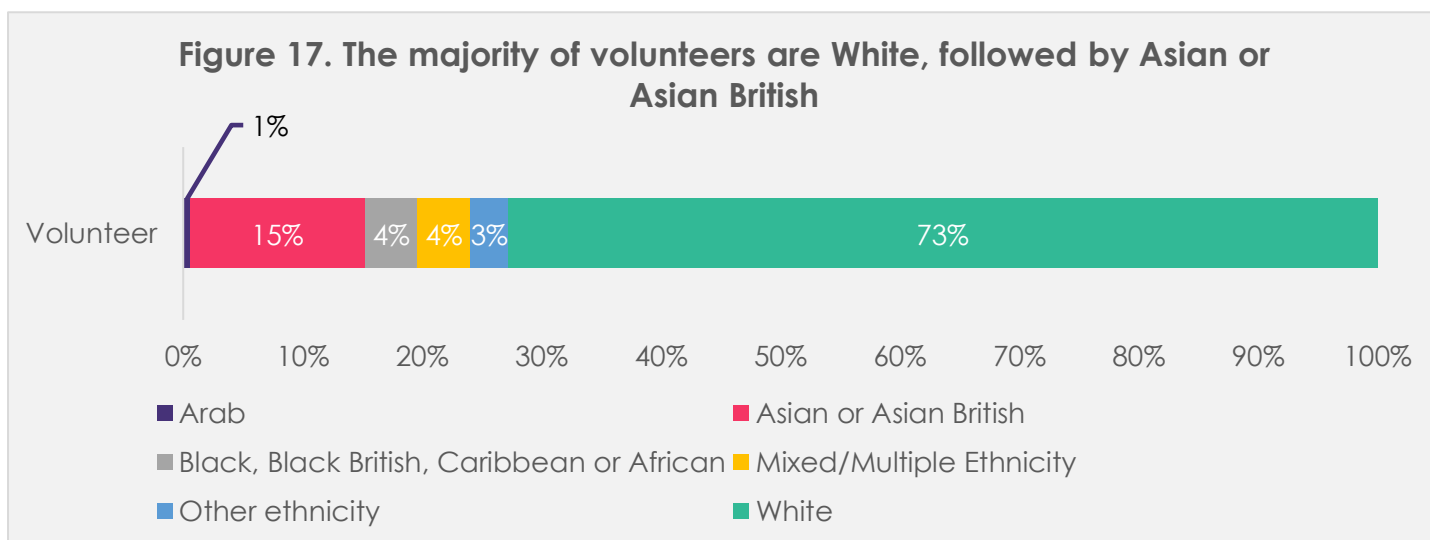
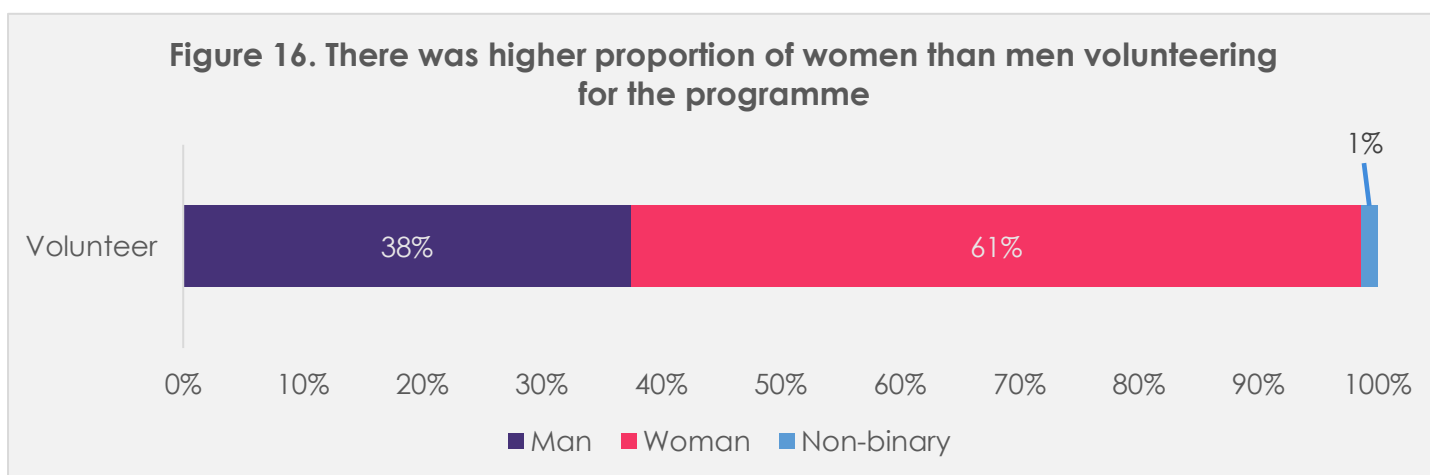
**Figure 15. 70% in the follow up survey has been offered opportunities following the programme, with the most common opportunity being a masters project**



### 3. Volunteer Data and Programme Impact

#### 3.1 Volunteer Demographics

Demographic information on gender and ethnic group was collected for volunteers at application stage. There was a higher proportion of women (61%) than men (38%) volunteering for the programme (Figure 16). The most common ethnic group among volunteers was White (73%) followed by Asian or Asian British (15%) (Figure 17).

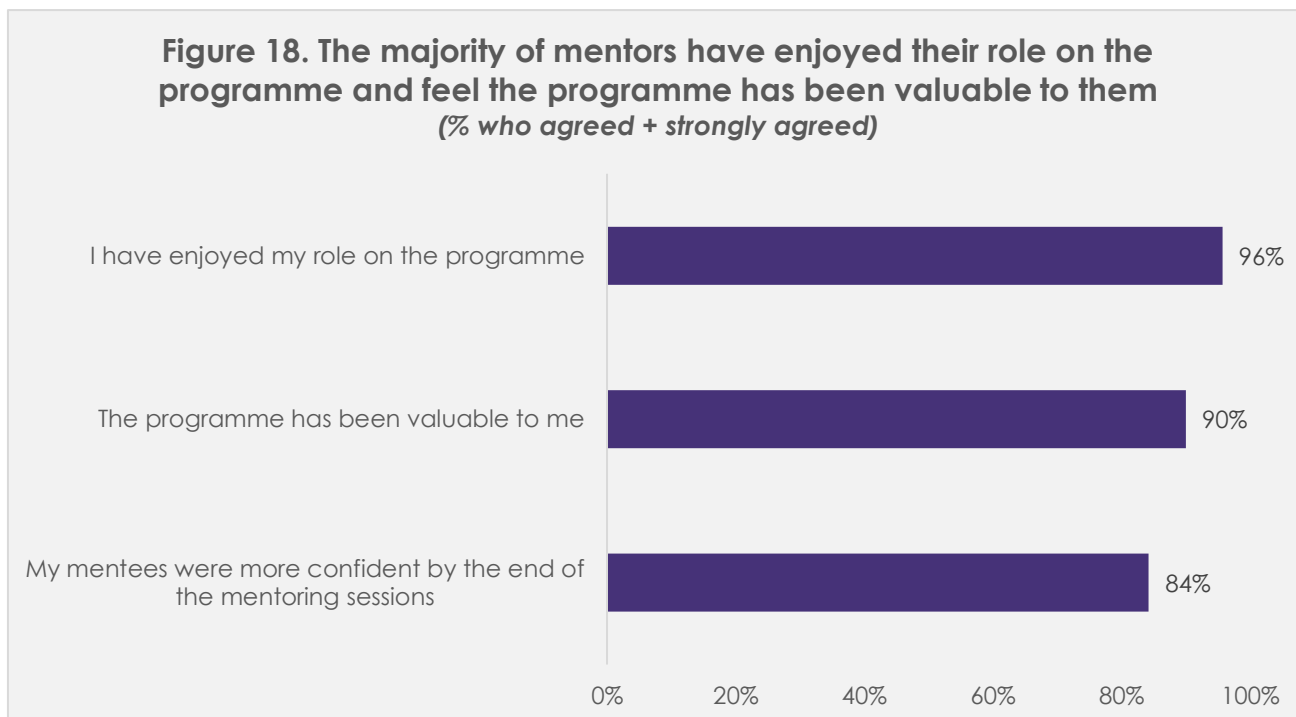


#### 3.2 Mentor feedback and programme impact

##### Programme feedback

Feedback from mentors showed that their experiences of volunteering on the programme were positive; 96% had enjoyed their role on the programme and 90% felt the programme had been valuable to them (Figure 18). A large proportion (84%) also felt their mentees were more confident by the end of the mentoring sessions.

**Figure 18. The majority of mentors have enjoyed their role on the programme and feel the programme has been valuable to them**  
 (% who agreed + strongly agreed)



### Programme impact

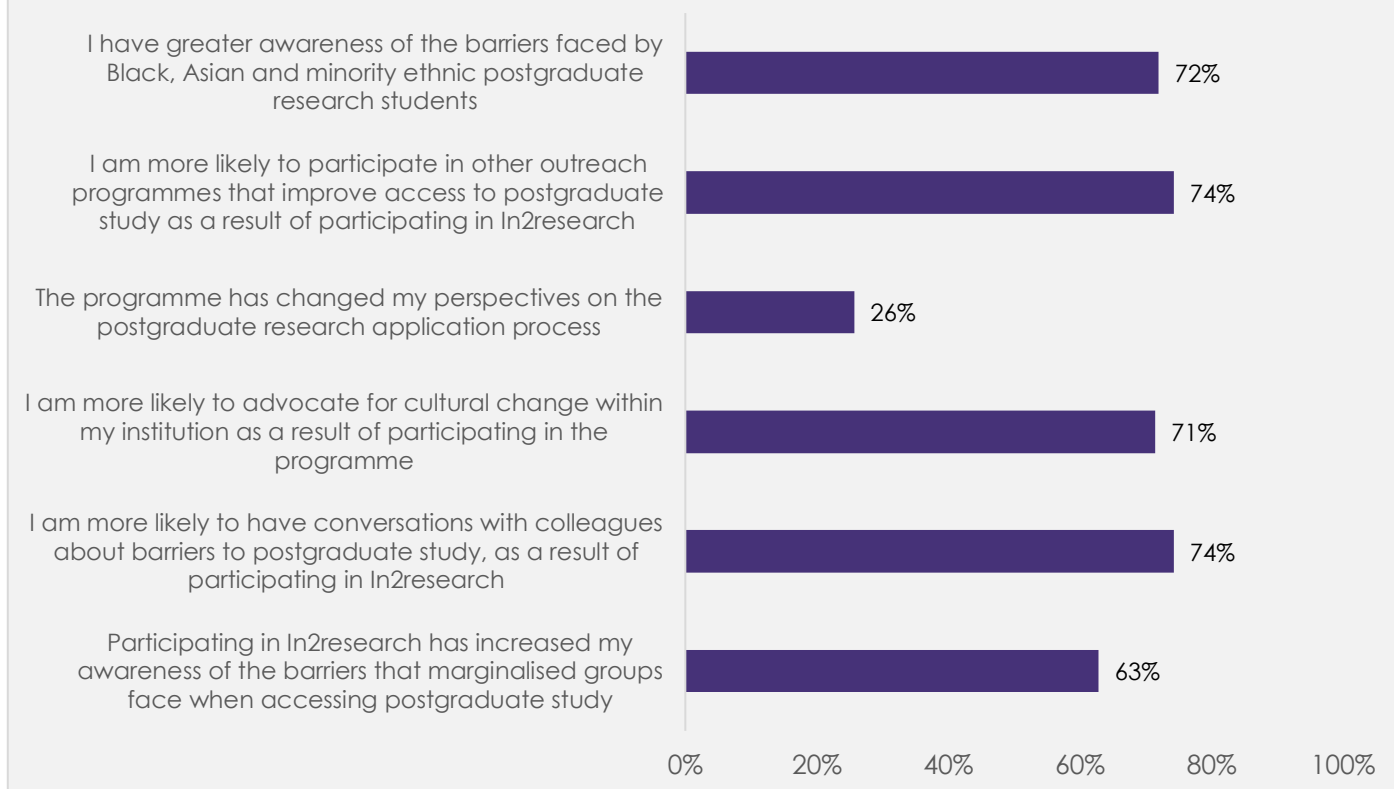
The third key aim of the programme is to reduce barriers by positively affecting research culture and wellbeing. The impact of the programme on research culture was assessed in the survey by asking mentors how they felt about barriers to postgraduate research for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, outreach programmes and their confidence in supervising people from underrepresented groups.

Mentors were more likely to advocate for cultural change within their institution as a result of participating in the programme (71%) (Figure 19). They were also more likely to have conversations with colleagues about barriers to postgraduate study (74%). Mentors also felt the programme had increased their awareness of the barriers that marginalised groups face when accessing postgraduate research study (63%).

The programme had also impacted their understanding of underrepresented groups, with 72% having a greater awareness of the barriers faced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic postgraduate research students (Figure 19)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The sample size for this question is 47 responses

**Figure 19. The majority of mentors are more likely to discuss barriers to postgraduate study, as well as being more likely to advocate for cultural change and participate in other outreach programmes**  
(% who agreed + strongly agreed)

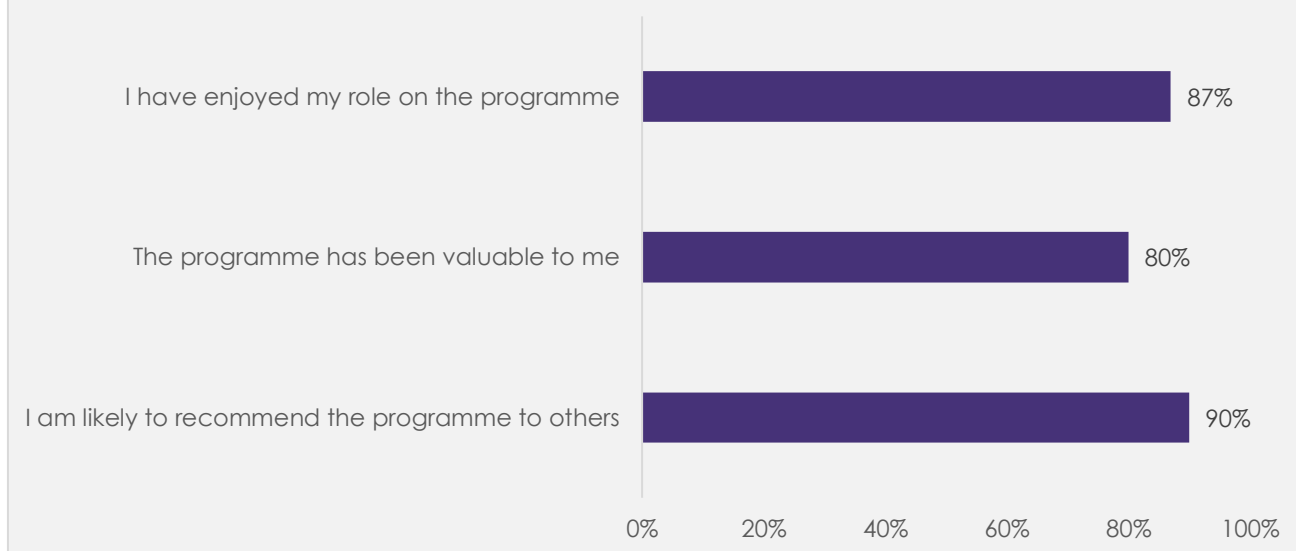


### 3.3 Hosts Feedback and Programme Impact

#### Programme feedback

Hosts had gained positive experiences volunteering on the programme, with 87% having enjoyed their role on the programme, 80% feeling that the programme had been valuable to them and 90% recommending the programme to others (Figure 20).

**Figure 20. The majority of hosts have enjoyed the programme and feel the programme has been valuable to them**  
 (% who agreed + strongly agreed)



### Programme impact

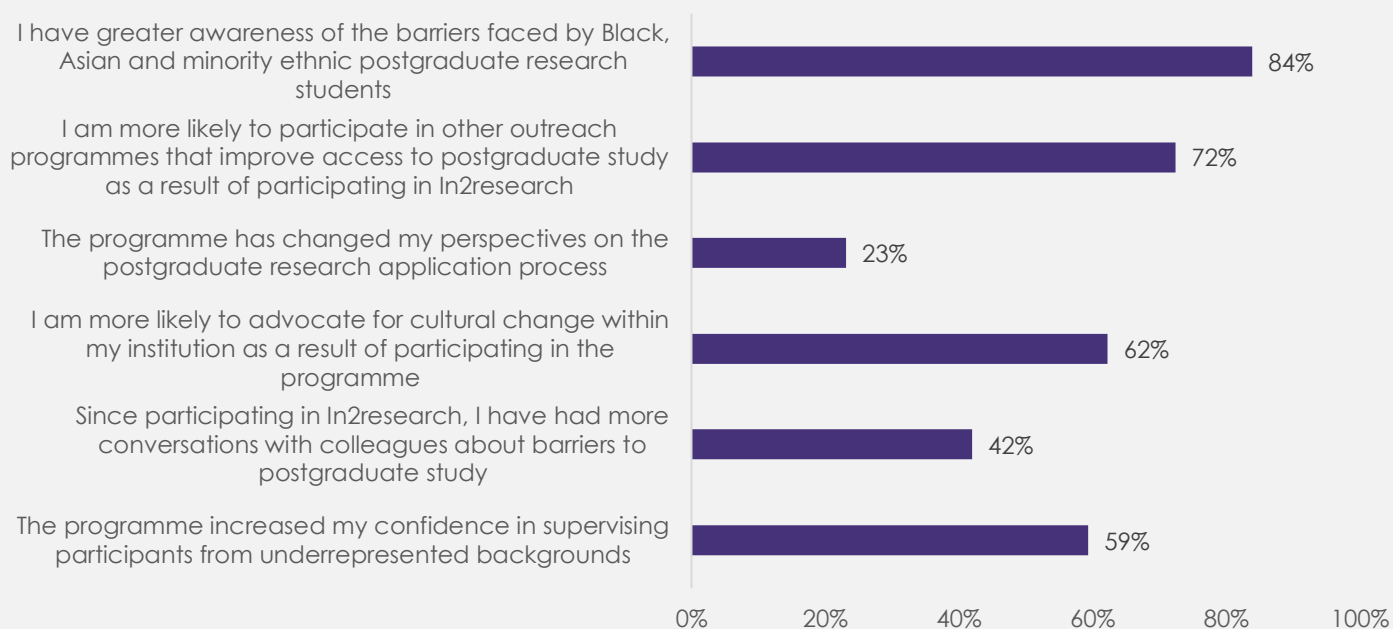
The impact of the programme on research culture was assessed in the survey by asking hosts how they felt about barriers to postgraduate research for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, outreach programmes and their confidence in supervising people from underrepresented groups. Hosts were also asked about their perspective on the postgraduate research application process, advocating for cultural change, and whether they would recommend the programme to other colleagues (Figure 21).

The majority of hosts (72%) were more likely to participate in other outreach programmes that improve access to postgraduate study, as a result of taking part in the In2research programme (Figure 21). Additionally, 62% were more likely to advocate for cultural change within their institution, and 59% felt the programme had increased their confidence in supervising participants from underrepresented backgrounds. A large proportion (84%) felt they had a greater awareness of the barriers faced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic postgraduate research students<sup>5</sup>,

<sup>5</sup> The sample size for this question is 38 responses.



**Figure 21. The majority of hosts are more likely to recommend the programme to colleagues, and advocate for cultural change at their institutions**  
(% who agreed + strongly agreed)



## 4. Conclusions

Findings from this impact report demonstrate that the In2research programme has met its aim of addressing three main barriers for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds accessing research careers.

### **Knowledge and information/Lack of experience relevant to postgraduate careers:**

The report provides evidence that participants gain postgraduate knowledge, research and professional confidence, professional, sense of belonging as well as essential research experience as a result of taking part in the programme.



*"I just really loved this programme. It was something I needed for my growth and development. I can say for sure that this experience has helped me become a more confident person and it has provided invaluable mentorship and experience, which will allow me to pursue a PhD"*

The report also provided evidence that the impact of the In2research programme persists longer term. Data showed that the 2022/23 cohort still has high levels of knowledge, confidence and sense of belonging one year after the end of the programme. Many participants were offered opportunities after the end of the programme that they would

not have received had they not been part of the In2research programme.

### **Research culture and wellbeing:**

The report demonstrates that volunteers taking part in the programme valued the experience supporting the programme and gained a better understanding of the barriers marginalised groups face when accessing postgraduate research study and how they are discussing them. The programme also positively affected their behaviour towards outreach programmes and cultural change.



*“The best thing I've gained from the programme so far has definitely been my connection with my mentor. Having a friendly face to talk with regarding my worries and concerns when it comes to pursuing a career in research has been extremely helpful.”*



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