

Employer Standards 2024/25

The business case for
engaging in careers
education



Current business challenges

Employers report persistent skills gaps which impact productivity

- **54% of employers say graduates lack self-awareness** and **46% cite low resilience**.
- Employers highlight concerns about **written and verbal communication** skills and the ability to apply them at work.
- 21 million working-age adults in the UK lack **at least one essential digital skill needed for work, limiting productivity across every sector**.

AI is reshaping skills demand

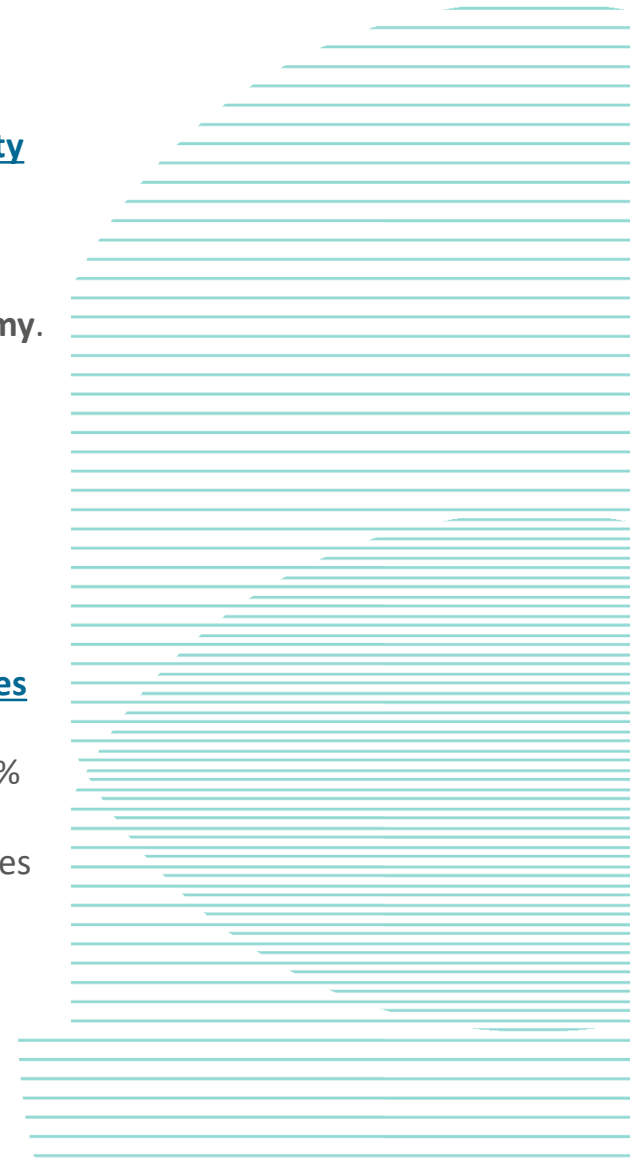
- Businesses are adopting AI rapidly, and **digital and data skills are now the most in-demand skills across the economy**.
- Employers expect higher baseline competence in digital skills among new starters.

Entry-level recruitment is shifting

- **Graduate vacancies had fallen by 8%** year on year, while **school- and college-leaver roles grew by 8%**.
- Competition for graduate roles reached a record **140 applications per vacancy**, the highest the ISE has recorded.

Business capacity is under pressure

- Employers report significant skills gaps in new starters, including in essential skills, **increasing the time and resources required for onboarding and early-careers development**.
- UK employers cut **training investment to lowest level in more than a decade** – staff development spending falls 10% in two years, reaching a 14-year low.
- A third of firms (34%) are worried about their business rates. Almost a quarter (23%) of firms planned to adjust prices due to business rates pressure.



Why this matters

- The UK has almost **1 million young people** Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET).
- A young person who has **four or more encounters with employers** is 86% less likely to be unemployed.
- Learners in the most disadvantaged schools that have the **highest quality careers provision** are 20% less likely to be NEET post-16 (saving Treasury £300m per annum).

“I was lucky to have an extremely high standard of careers education - one of the main reasons I have made it into a highly competitive apprenticeship, in a career that I love.

This opened my eyes to a large variety of career options and next steps.

Prior to that careers support, I often misbehaved and fell behind in lessons. However, having constant interactions with potential employers within the industry allowed me to visualise what I was working for and to stay motivated with my learning.”



Faris, Youth
Advisory Group
member

Employer Standards for Careers Education

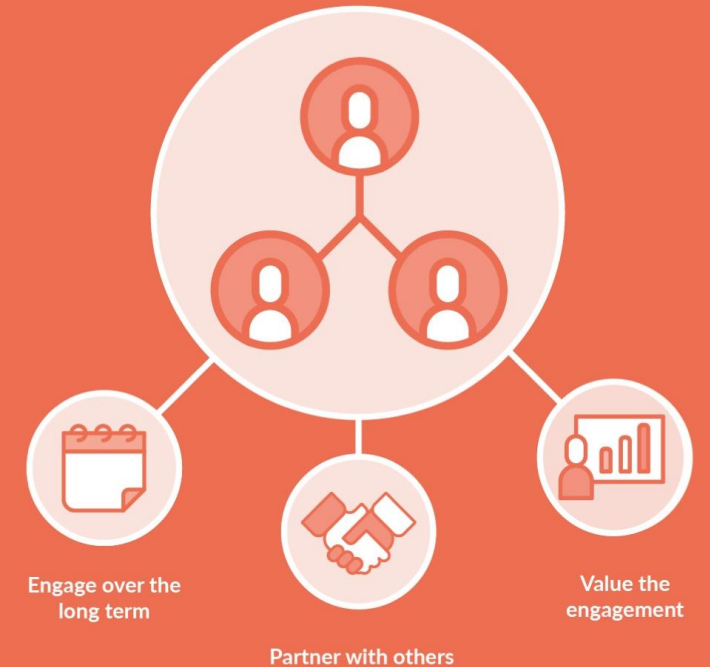
Inspire young people for their best next step



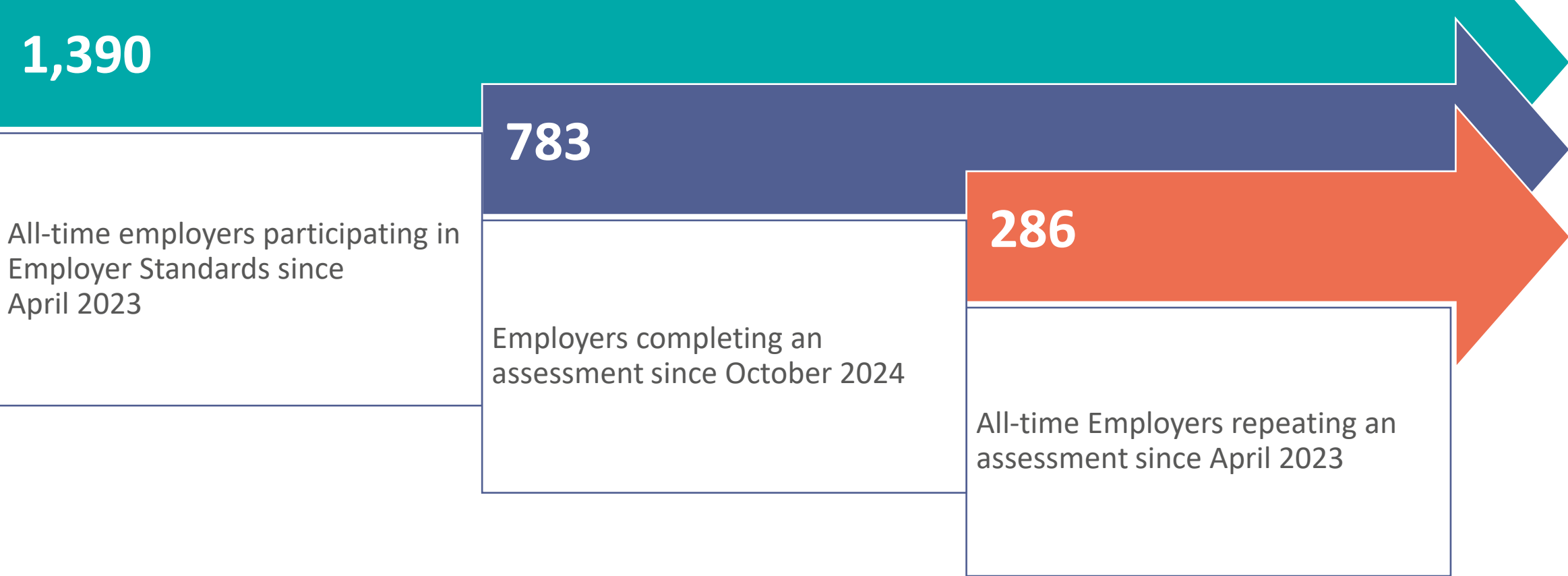
Prepare young people to be career ready



Collaborate for success



Employer Standards timeline



+9%pts

Average increase
across all Standards

October 2024 – September 2025 Sample

783

Employers completed a self-assessment - out of the 1,390 all-time assessments

236

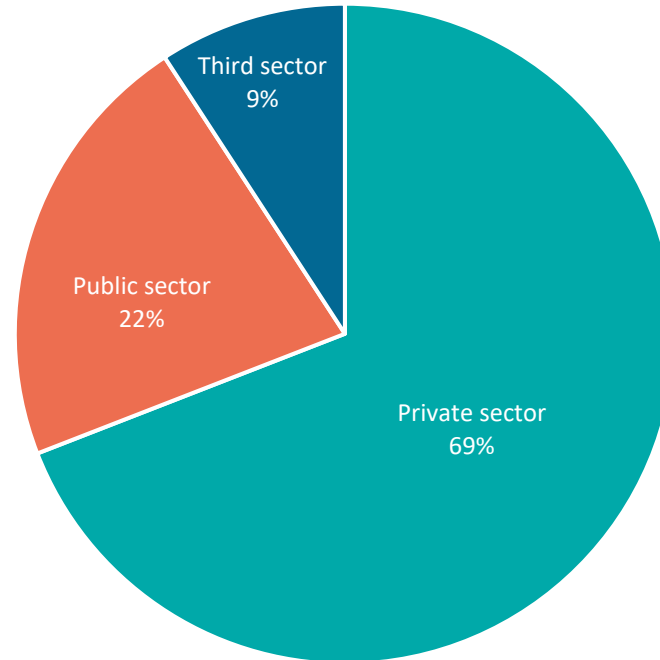
Cornerstone Employers

487

Worked with Careers Hubs

45%

Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs)



20

Industrial sectors represented

Repeated assessments since April 2023

286

Employers completed at least two self-assessments

202

Cornerstone Employers

247

Worked with Careers Hubs

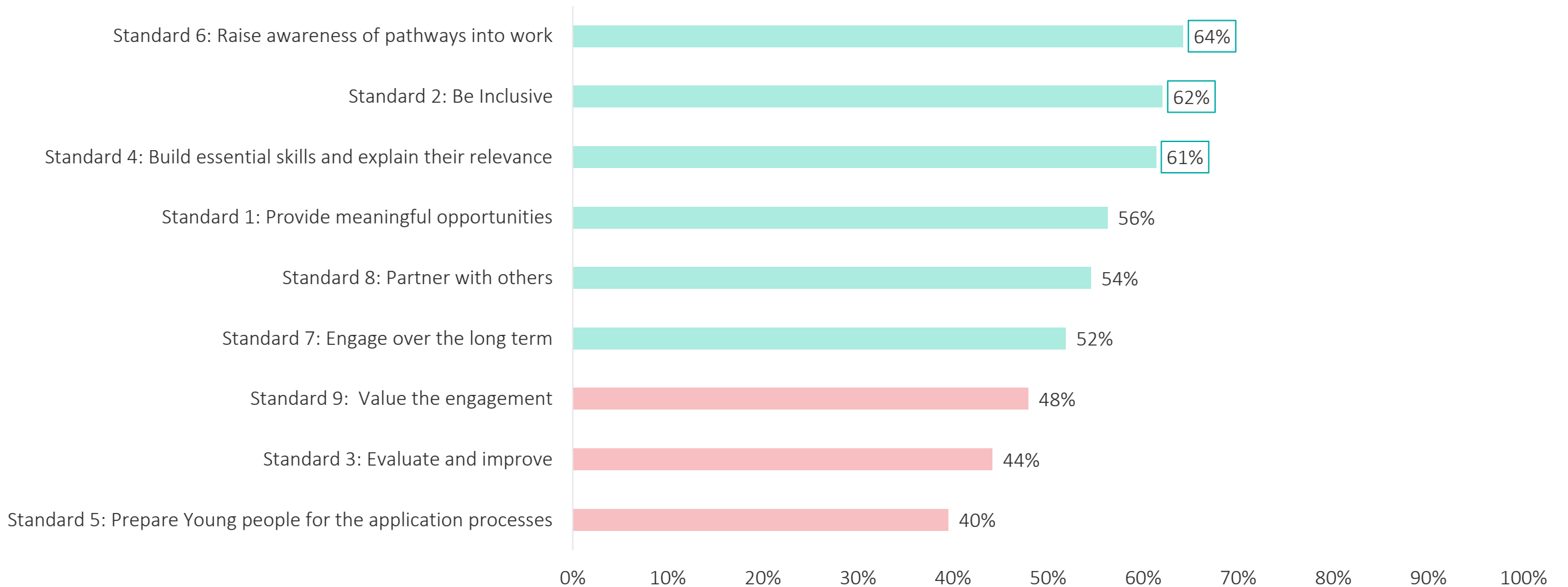
31%

Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Employer scores vary across the 9 Employer Standards

On average, employers perform best in raising awareness of pathways into work (Standard 6, 64%), inclusiveness (Standard 2, 62%), and promoting and building Essential Skills (Standard 4, 61%)

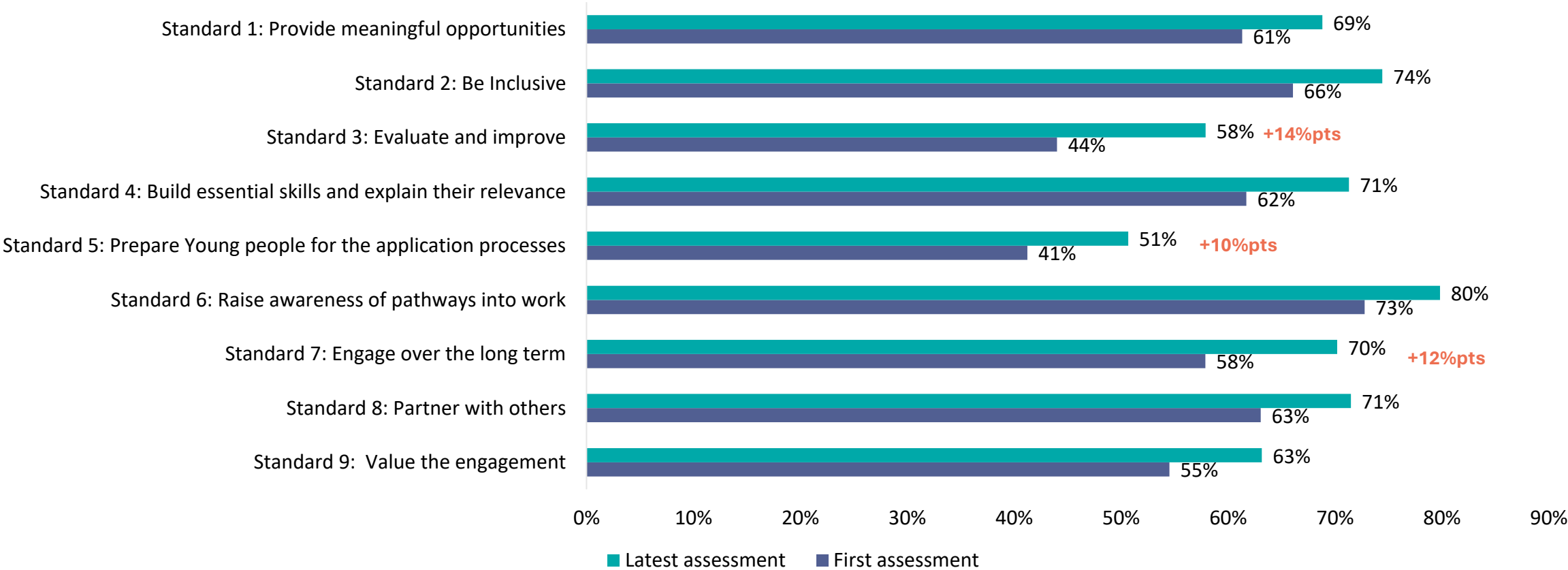
Average scores against each Standard (%)



Employers who repeat their assessments demonstrate improvement across all 9 Standards

Employers who repeated the Standards score particularly highly over time against Standard 3: Evaluate and improve (+14%pts), Standard 7: Engaging over the long term (+12%pts) and Standard 5: Prepare Young people for the application processes (+10%pts)

Average scores against each Standard by first and latest assessment (%)



Insights in this report

Insight 1

Engaging in careers education positively impacts recruitment, workforce diversity and talent pipelines

Insight 2

Focusing outreach on building essential skills is a cost-effective way of developing future talent

Insight 3

Adopting a strategic approach leads to scale and impact

Insight 1 – Engaging in careers education positively impacts recruitment, workforce diversity and talent pipelines

Employer challenge:

Employers see work experience as a route into early talent but many lack the internal alignment to make it effective

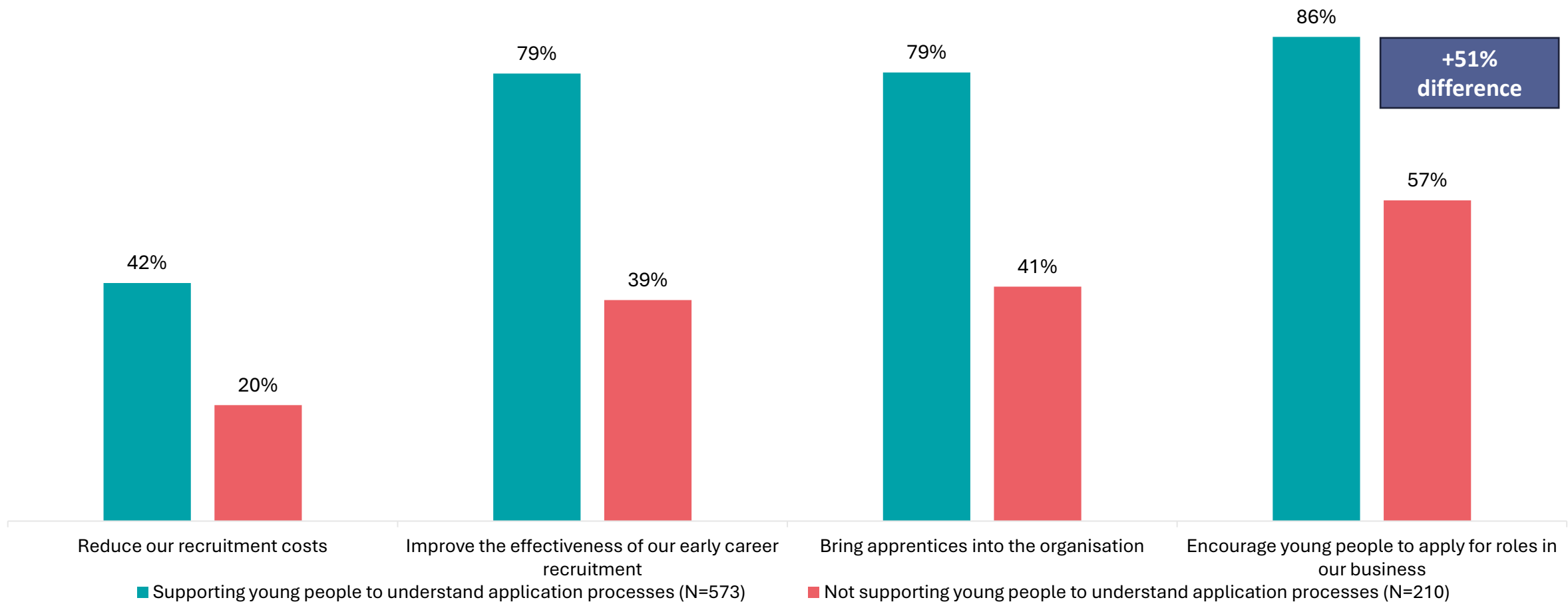
- **83%** of business owners/senior leaders say well-designed **work experience is an effective way to attract entry-level employees** (e.g. apprentices), yet
- **34%** cite a that their organisation **lacks the internal support needed to turn these experiences into long-term talent pipelines.**

Why it matters now:

At a time of increasing skills demands, treating outreach as a support to recruitment and aligning modern workplace experience provides a powerful, evidence-backed way to widen participation and build more diverse talent pipelines.

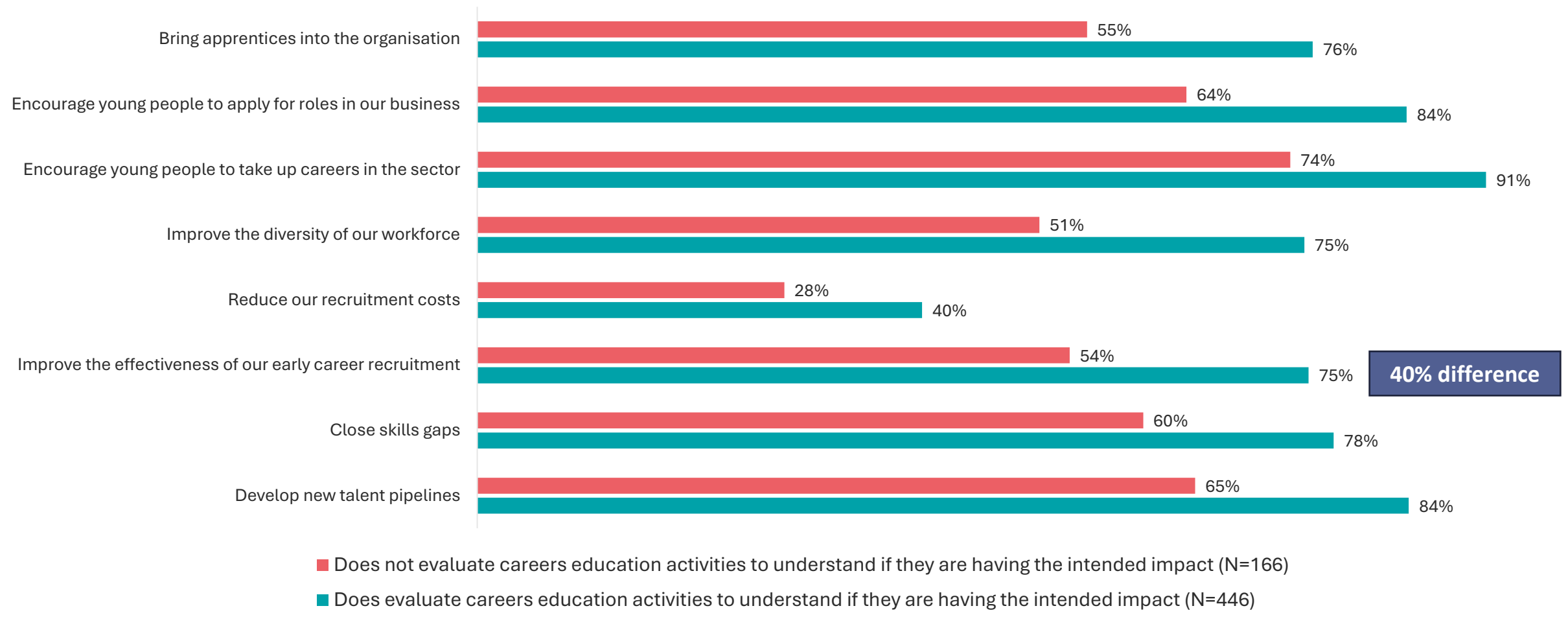
Employers who help young people understand and practise application processes are **51% more likely to report that outreach encourages young people to apply for roles in their business**

% of employers responding positively by whether they support young people to understand the application processes they use



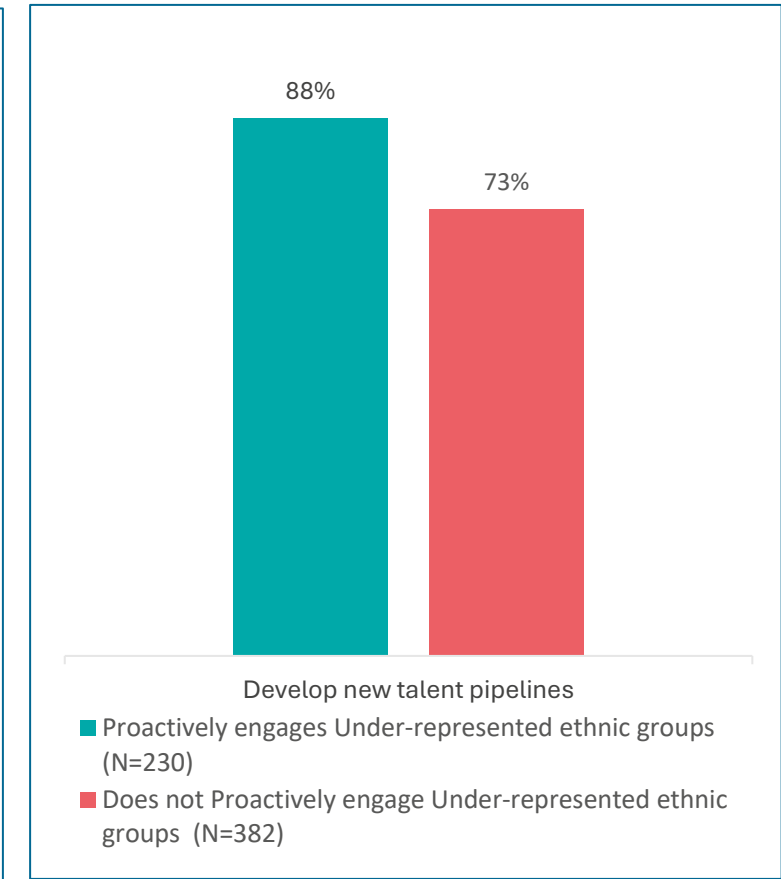
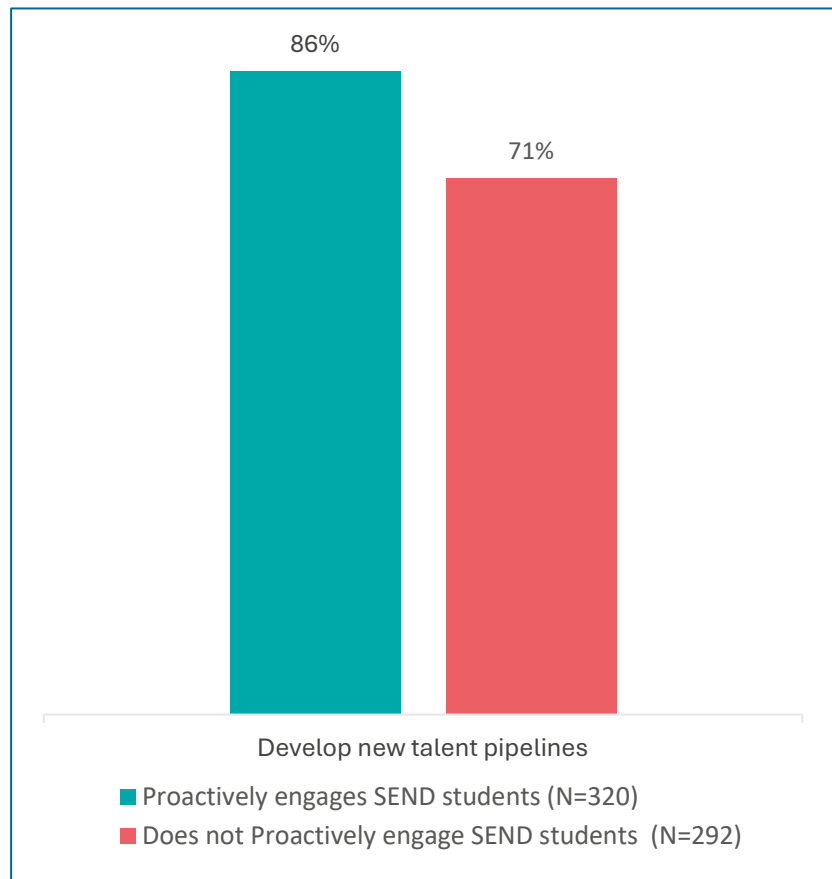
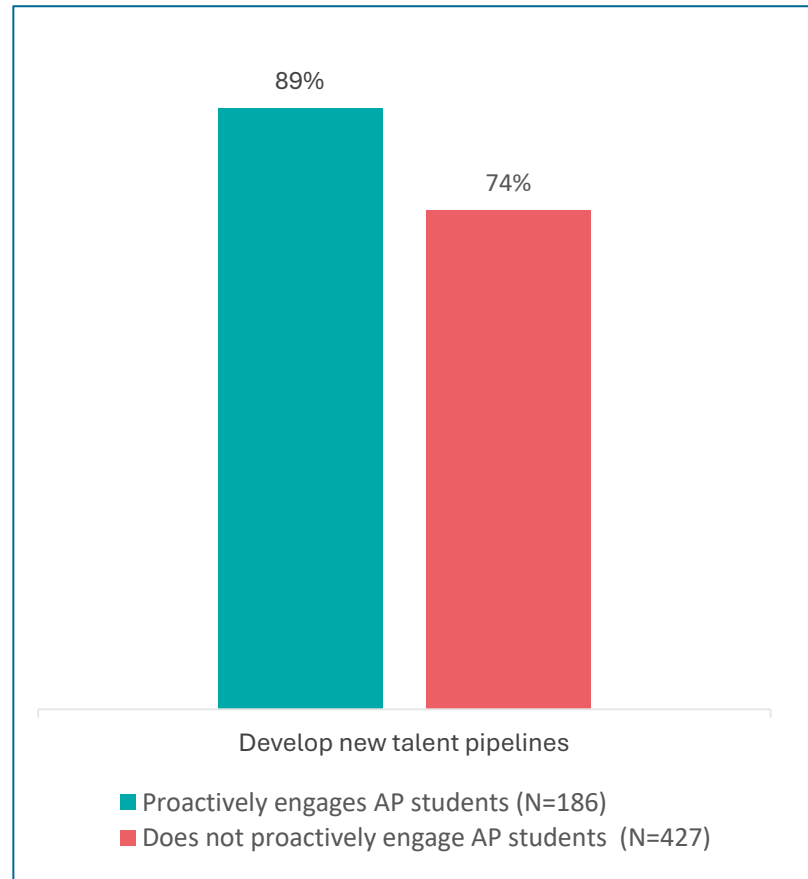
Employers who evaluate the activities they provide are 40% more likely to report improved effectiveness of early careers recruitment

% of employers responding positively by whether the employer achieved Standard 3 over time



Employers who proactively engage alternative provision or SEND learners or under-represented ethnic groups are, on average, 20% more likely to report their education investment is helping to develop new talent pipelines

% of employers who developed new talent pipelines by whether they proactively engaged AP young people or SEND young people, or underrepresented ethnic groups in the workforce



Insight 2 – Focusing outreach on building essential skills is a cost effective way of developing future talent

Employer challenge:

Employers want to offer skills-rich work experience, but operational constraints limit what they can deliver

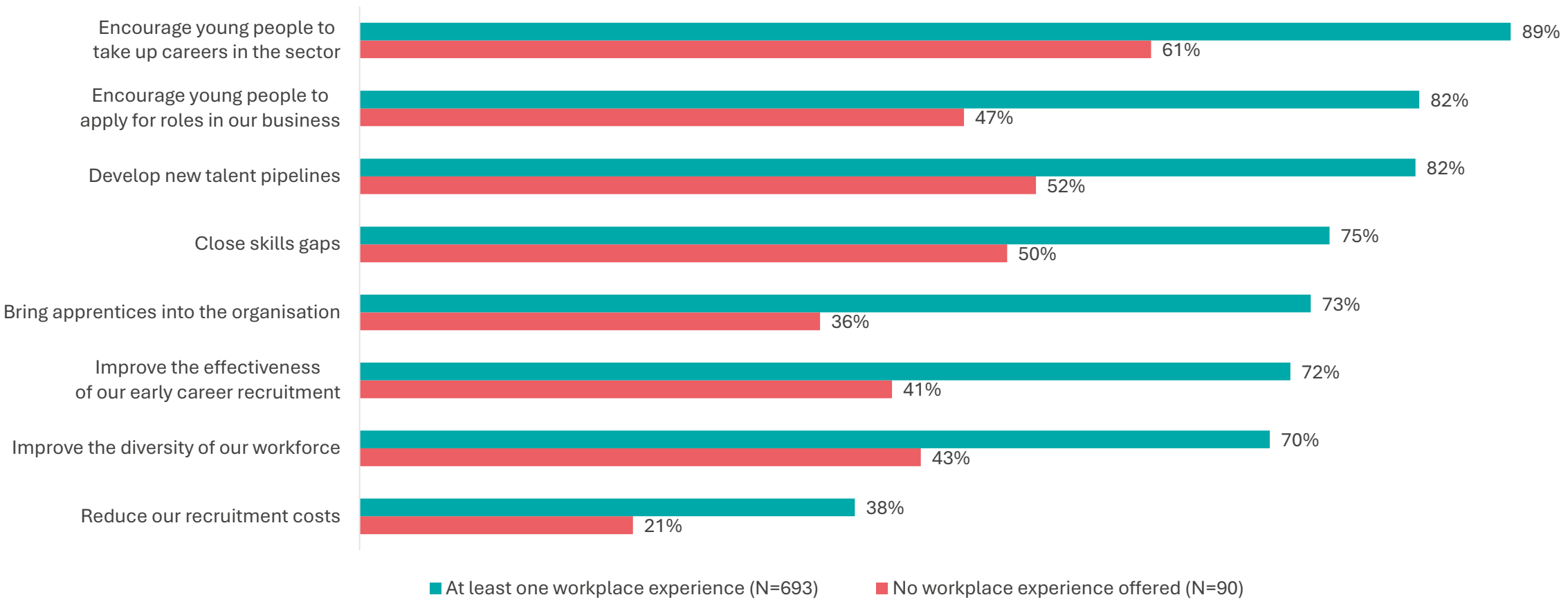
- 65% report a lack of capacity due to staff shortages, meaning they must maximise the value of any time they give to outreach.
- 75% would offer more workplace experience if it were easier to work with schools, and 59% say shorter, more flexible models would make delivery easier.*

Why it matters now:

When capacity is squeezed, modern work experience becomes a vital, efficient way to build essential skills and secure a stronger return on investment

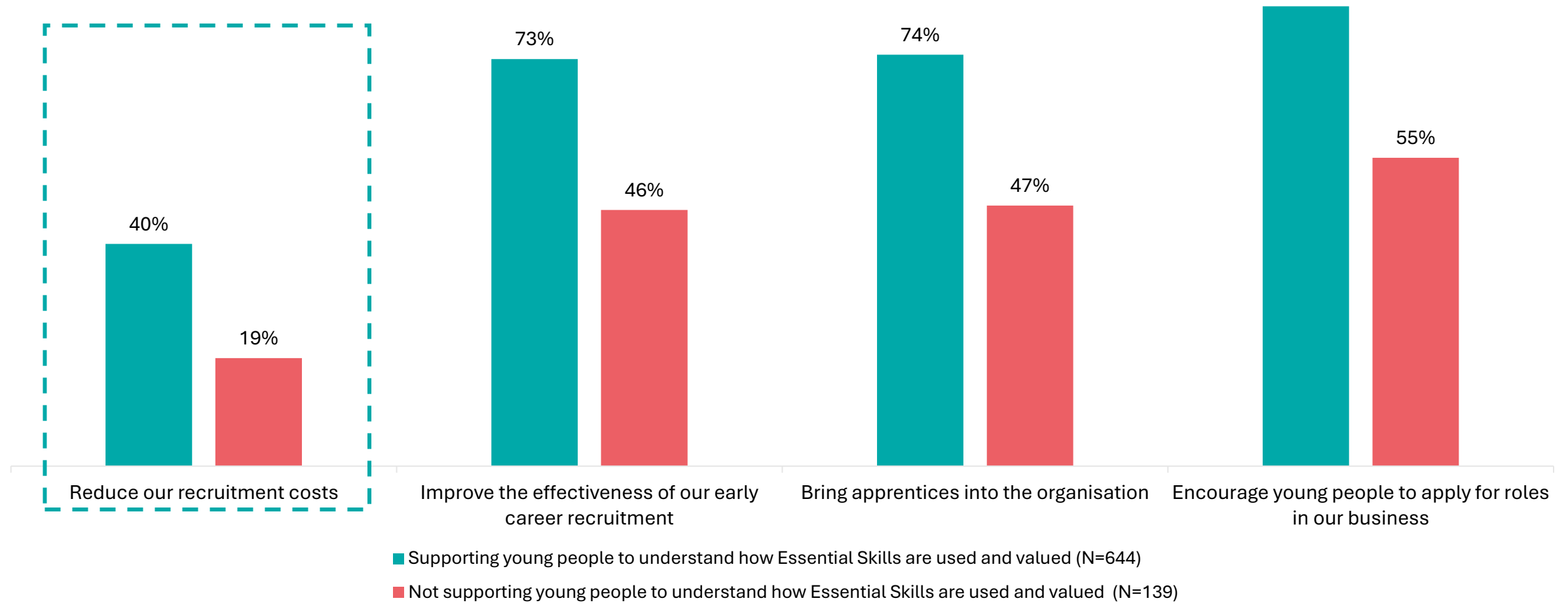
Employers who offer any type of workplace experience are, on average, **77% more likely to report business benefits** (including enhanced talent pipelines) than those who offer none

% of employers saying they had positive business outcomes by whether the employer offered Workplace visits



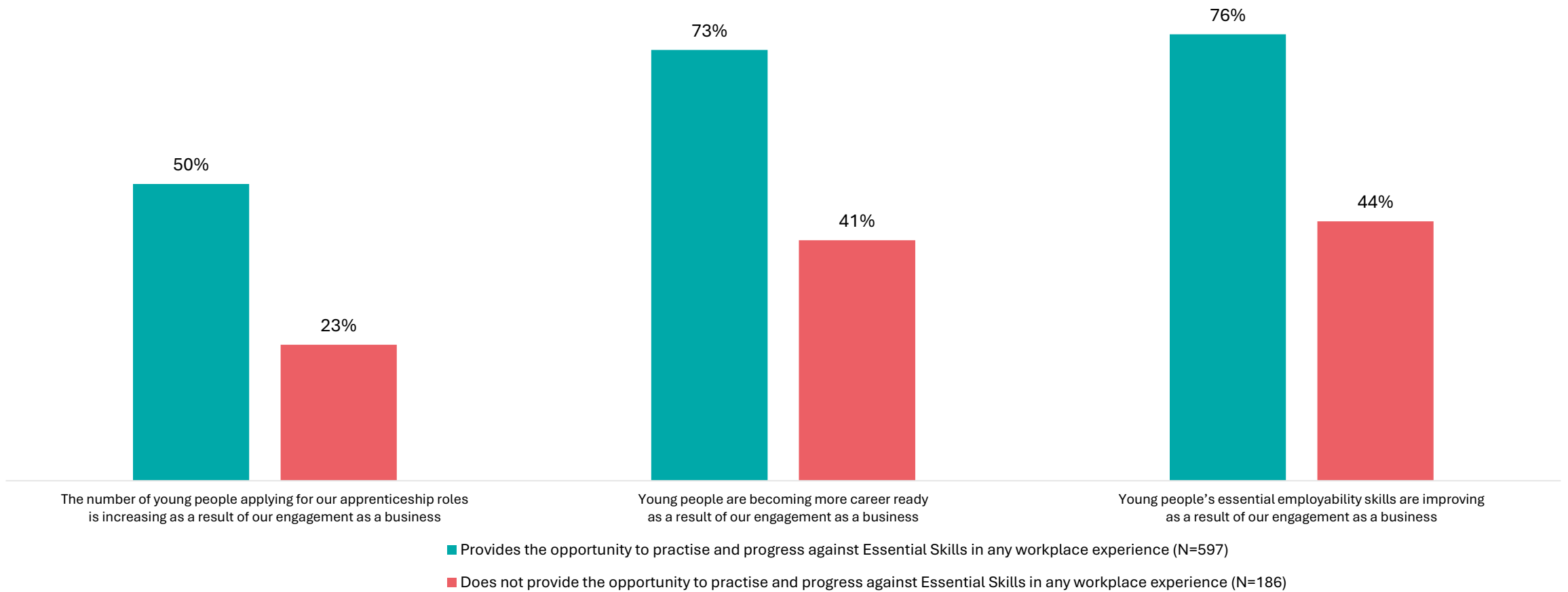
Employers who help young people understand how essential skills are used and valued in the world of work are more than twice as likely to report reduced recruitment costs

% of employers responding positively by whether they support young people to understand how Essential Skills are used and valued



Employers who provide young people with the **opportunity to practise and progress against essential skills** in workplace experiences are **72% more likely to say that young people’s employability skills are improving as a result of their engagement**

% of employers responding positively to the outcome of working with schools by whether they provide young people the opportunity to practise Essential Skills



Insight 3 – Adopting a strategic approach leads to scale and impact

Employer challenge:

Economic pressures are reducing employers' capacity to invest in careers education outreach, increasing the need for clear strategy and efficient partnerships

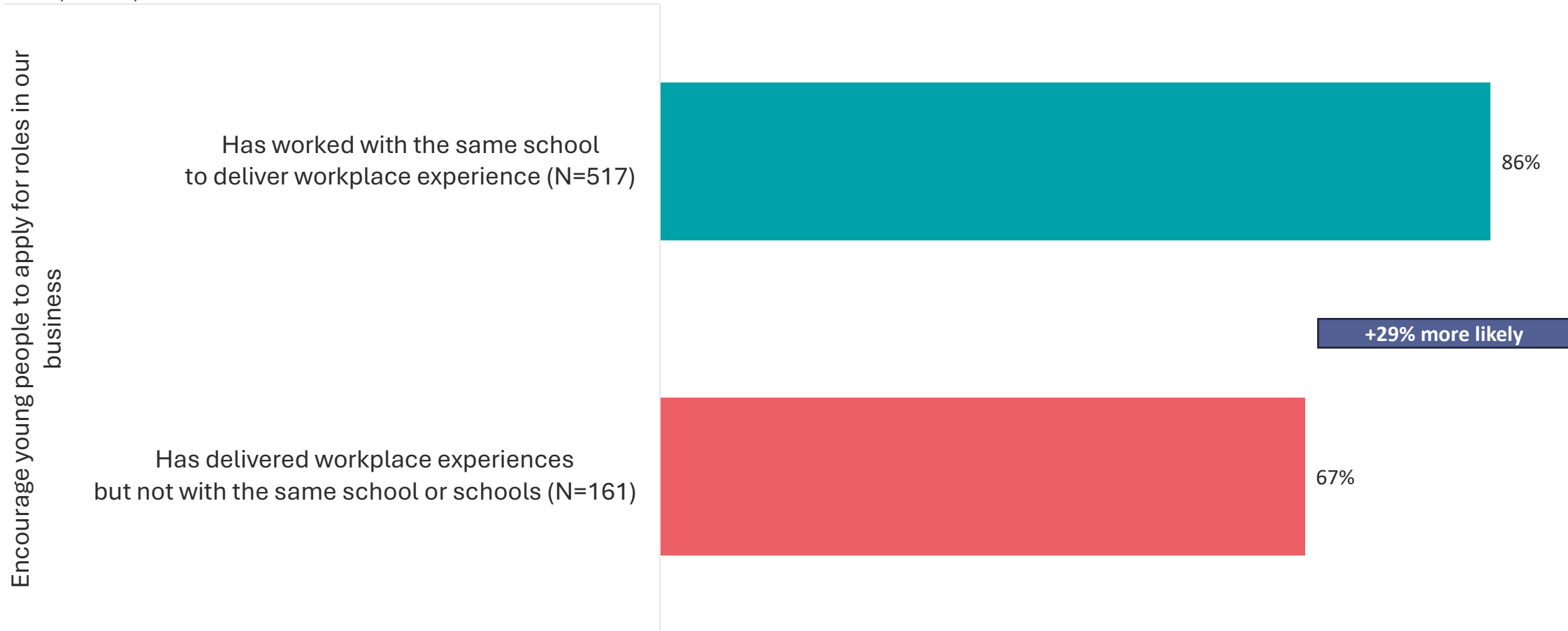
- More than half say rising costs now limit their ability to invest in outreach with young people.

Why it matters now:

- As capacity tightens, strengthening internal strategy and leveraging relationships through local Careers Hubs for efficient, high-quality engagement are effective ways to secure lasting business value.

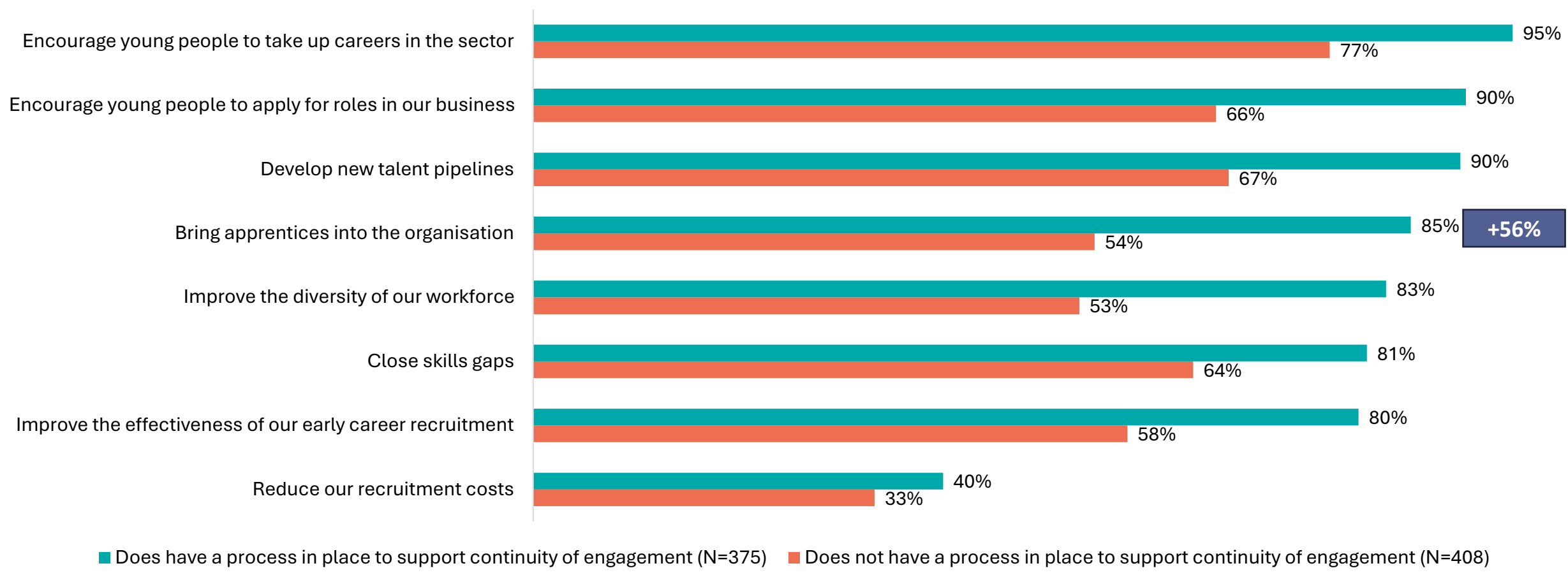
Long-term collaboration with the same schools, special schools, colleges or activity providers to deliver work experience makes employers 29% more likely to say their outreach is encouraging young people to apply for roles in their business

% of employers saying working with school helped to encourage young people to apply for roles in their business by whether the employers have worked with the same school to deliver workplace experience



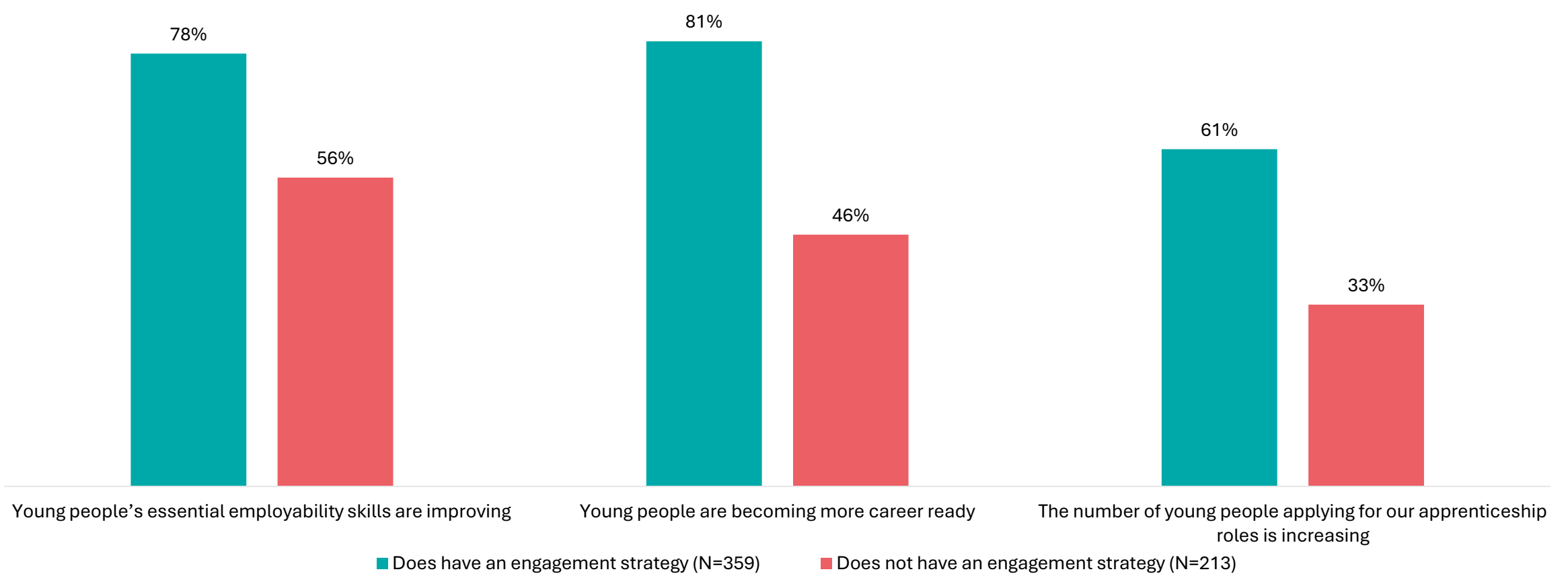
Employers who maintain a consistent engagement strategy are 56% more likely to report that their work is bringing apprentices into their business

% of employers responding positively to the outcome of working with schools by whether the employers have a process in place to support continuity of engagement



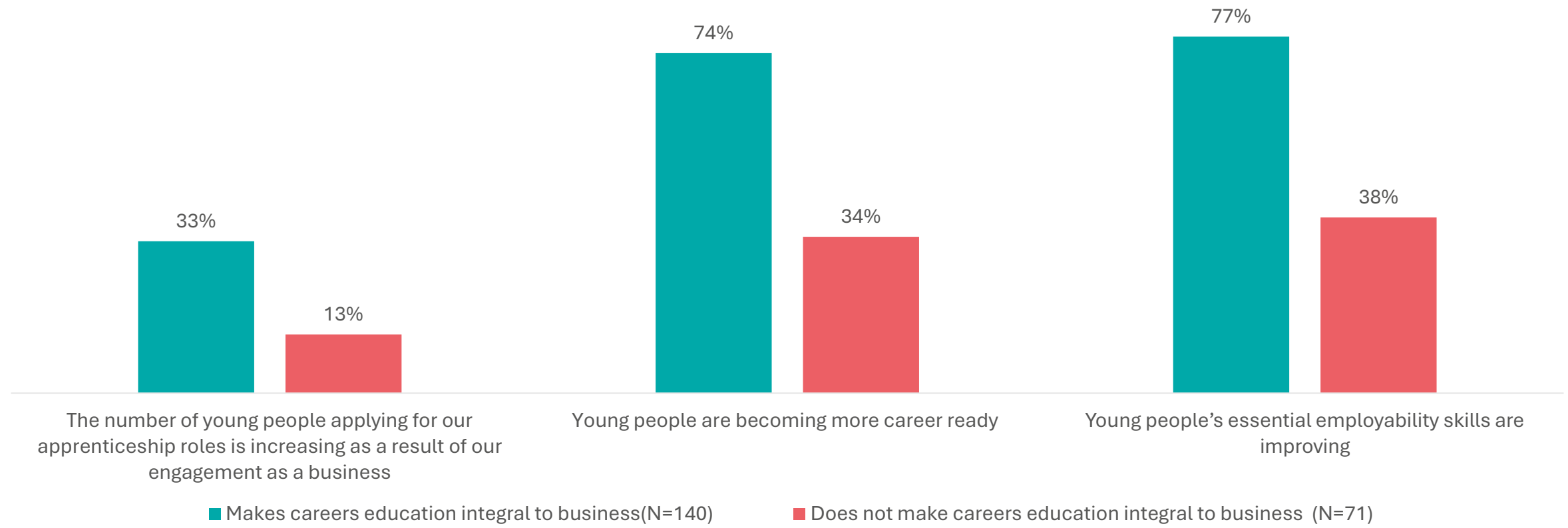
Medium and large employers with cross-organisational careers strategies are **77% more likely to say young people become more career ready as a result of their engagement**

% of medium-large employers saying that young people have improved employability skills and career readiness, and that they are receiving more applications for apprenticeship roles as a result of their engagement as a business by whether they have an engagement strategy in place



Small and Micro organisations that make careers education an integral part of business plans are **more than twice as likely to say young people become more career ready because of their engagement**

% of Small-micro employers saying that young people have improved employability skills and career readiness, and that they are receiving more applications for apprenticeship roles as a result of their engagement as a business by whether they support careers education for young people

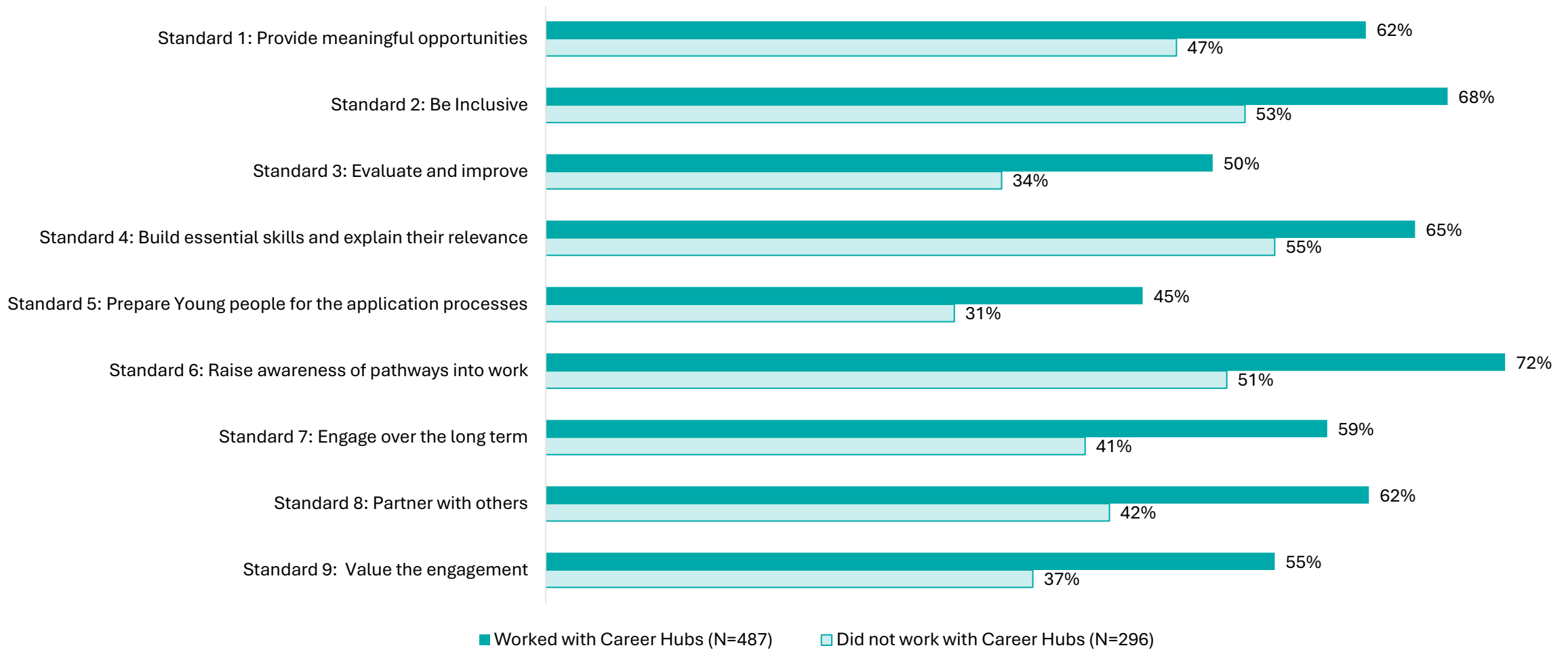


Employers working with Careers Hubs



Employers working with Careers Hubs perform better on average against all 9 Standards

Average scores against each Standard by whether the employer worked with Career Hubs (%)





Next steps

1. **Thursday 22nd January** – Insights report, slide deck & 9 Industry snapshots published (embargoed report sent today)
2. **Use insights to support the business case** for more employers to invest in outreach
3. **Advocate to others** about this evidence and how to get involved – use the [Employer Standards](#) and get support from our [Network of Careers Hubs](#) nationally.