



# SEA CADETS IMPACT REPORT 2023/2024

How we enhance young people's lives:  
A summary of the evidence

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**SEA  
CADETS**

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Safeguarding and complaints</b>	<b>24</b>
1.1	Context	3	4.1	Safeguarding	24
1.2	Key findings	3	4.2	Complaints	25
1.3	Validated scales	4			
<b>2</b>	<b>Cadet and volunteer background</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Volunteers' experience of Sea Cadets</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1	Socio-economic background	6	7.1	Volunteers' views of Sea Cadets	27
2.2	Looked-after children and carers	7	7.2	Improvements in the past year	28
2.3	Ethnicity	8	7.3	Training priorities for volunteers	29
2.4	Religion	8			
2.5	Disability and neurodivergence	9	<b>8</b>	<b>Satisfaction and trust</b>	<b>31</b>
2.6	Gender	9	8.1	Trust	31
2.7	Sexuality	10	8.2	Overall satisfaction	33
2.8	Changing experiences	10	8.3	Satisfaction differences by population and implications	33
2.9	Volunteer origins	10			
<b>3</b>	<b>Supportiveness of marginalised groups: 'deep dive'</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Sea Cadets Portal</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>14</b>	9.1	Portal satisfaction	35
3.1	Empowering cadets	15	9.2	Best thing about the Portal	35
3.2	The Sea Cadets Experience	15	9.3	What, if any, changes would you like to see to the Portal?	36
3.3	Customs and traditions	16	9.4	Practical and specific improvements that cadets would like to see to the Portal	36
3.4	Health, safety and wellbeing	16	9.5	Portal registrations	39
3.5	Formal education	17	9.6	Concluding thoughts and next steps for the Portal	39
3.6	Future prospects	18			
3.7	Social action	19	<b>Appendix 1:</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>40</b>
3.8	Values	20			
3.9	Personal development	21	<b>Endnotes</b>		<b>43</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Waiting list</b>	<b>23</b>			

# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 CONTEXT

Sea Cadets works for a world where every young person is launched for life. We are part of Marine Society & Sea Cadets (MSSC), the leading maritime charity for youth development and lifelong learning. We seek to inspire young people to achieve their potential through challenge and nautical adventure guided by the customs and traditions of today's Royal Navy.

It's important we understand the difference we make to continue improving our work and make the case for uniformed youth work in the wider world. This report is the latest iteration of Sea Cadets' regular impact survey, completed in the winter of 2023/24 by 2,324 cadets, 1,898 volunteers and 2,184 parents/carers.

## 1.2 KEY FINDINGS

In line with our previous impact surveys, our cadets, volunteers, and parents/carers continue to report that Sea Cadets have a wide range of positive impacts on their lives. In general, the results are consistent with our 22/23 Impact Survey.

'Everything, it's helped me make friends, helped me find new interests. I've made a lot of memories and learnt a lot, including what I want to do in the future: a naval career in the submarine service as a warfare officer. Loved it all.'

**Cadet Luke, 16-year-old Southern Area cadet answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

'Being part of the Royal Marines Cadets has helped me make life-long friends who I trust and know I can confide in. It has improved my confidence immensely as it has showed me how to lead, as well as how to listen, when dealing with problems. It has helped me grow my

comfort zone to limits I didn't know I could reach.'

**Cadet Alex, 17-year-old royal marines cadet from Eastern Area answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

## AREAS TO CELEBRATE

**Cadets, volunteers and parents/carers know Sea Cadets make a difference.** In line with prior years, cadets, volunteers and parents/carers report a high perceived impact of Sea Cadets.

**Cadets and parents/carers report a high level of satisfaction and trust in Sea Cadets.** Satisfaction among cadets and parents/carers remains very high, and there are signs of significant progress around the satisfaction of cadets from marginalised backgrounds who previously reported less satisfaction than their peers (LGBTQ+, Disabled/Neurodivergent cadets & Asian cadets). Similarly, levels of trust are high across these groups.

**Young people from traditionally marginalised backgrounds – such as young people from lower-income households, looked-after children and young carers – continue to be well represented in Sea Cadets.** In line with prior years, Sea Cadets continues to disproportionately reach out to marginalised groups (e.g. autistic young people) least likely to be engaged in youth work.

**In line with prior trends, questions around safeguarding showed overwhelming support:** As an area of particular importance to the youth sector, a continued trend of confidence in Sea Cadets' safeguarding system from all stakeholders is a highly positive finding.

## AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

**Volunteer satisfaction and trust has weakened from its peak in 2020, but remains above levels when first surveyed in 2017, with the largest shift for LGBTQ+ volunteers.**

Volunteer satisfaction has been an area of focus for the organisation for many years, with significant work undertaken to improve support. There was a

substantive improvement in volunteer satisfaction between 2017 and 2020, likely driven by the changes made in how volunteers are communicated with and supported. However, since 2020, levels of satisfaction and trust have fallen, albeit both remain higher than they did before the work between 2017 and 2020.

In general, volunteers' perception of the impact of Sea Cadets on young people has not declined, suggesting the decline in satisfaction and trust is likely due to their experience of engaging with the organisation itself, not the difference it makes to young people. However, volunteers have faced an increasingly complex environment since 2020. In addition to the difficulties of post-Covid youth delivery, the charity has faced significant financial headwinds resulting from inflation and reductions in the level of Grant-in-Aid.<sup>1</sup> This has included necessary material cuts in the Sea Cadets offer, and reduced financial support for uniforms, premises grants and volunteer allowances.

Considered together, this makes a decline in satisfaction unsurprising; the fact that it has still not dropped to levels seen in 2017 suggests volunteers retain a degree of confidence in the subsequent reforms and progress to enhance the volunteer experience. However, given that some of the likely causes of this decline in satisfaction (e.g. difficult financial environment) seem likely to persist for at least the medium term, further work is required to enhance volunteer satisfaction if the current trend is to be reversed.

Separately, LGBTQ+ volunteers – a group that already showed a lower level of satisfaction than their peers – show an accelerated decline, suggesting this may be an area where significant targeted work is needed. This is taking place during a period when there was already a significant organisational focus on equity, diversity and inclusion, which does suggest this is an area the organisation is already cognisant of and working to enhance.

**The Sea Cadets Portal, while continuing to grow its registered members, shows ongoing dissatisfaction from many of its users.** In line with trends across a number of years, Sea Cadets continues to report low levels of satisfaction with the portal, mainly focusing on issues around usability, navigating the system, or dealing with slow loading times. Over the same period, however, there has been a steady growth in registered users (e.g. up from 39% of cadets in Jan 2022 to 59% in December 2023). This level of engagement demonstrates a clear demand and need for the tool, but with further work required to enhance their experience.

## 1.3 VALIDATED SCALES

This report uses several ways to measure stakeholder experiences, including scales developed during previous Sea Cadets research, new in-house measures, and some validated scales.

Validated scales are externally recognised methods of recording people's experiences that have previously been tested elsewhere. They include:

**Net promoter score:** this measures overall levels of satisfaction, giving a score between -100 and +100. We use this to understand how positive people feel about their experience of Sea Cadets overall, and how likely they are to recommend us to others.

**Charity Commission trust scale:** this is a question the Charity Commission uses to measure the level of trust the general population feels in different organisations or types of individuals, such as charities or doctors. It's scored from 0 to 10.

**Indices of multiple deprivation:** this is a measure of socio-economic deprivation that matches postcodes with a government database that tracks a range of demographic and economic features.

You can read more about these validated scales and how they're calculated in Appendix 1.4.





# 2. Cadet and volunteer background

## 2.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

	What cadets told us	What parents told us	Recorded in Sea Cadets database (30/09/23)	General population
<b>Bottom 40% household income<sup>2</sup></b>	38%	35%	41%	40% <sup>3</sup>
<b>Bottom 20% household income</b>	19%	18%	21%	20%
<b>Live in a 'left behind' area<sup>4</sup></b>	38%	–	44% <sup>5</sup>	20%

Cadets come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. However, it's particularly positive that cadets from less well-off backgrounds are represented well in our organisation: 38% of cadets live in areas in the UK's bottom 40% of relative disadvantage, in line with 40% of people in the country as a whole living in these households. This is particularly important as we know many uniformed youth groups are over-represented by young people from more middle-class backgrounds, making Sea Cadets' representation from more working-class communities significant.

Research using both internal data and National Youth Census (NYA) 2023 data<sup>6</sup> suggests that 55% of Sea Cadets units are located within areas of relative economic disadvantage, compared to 33% for other

youth groups. Additionally, in a continuation from last year, sea cadets are around twice as likely to live in a left-behind area of the country compared to the general population. This means Sea Cadet units are likely to be heavily concentrated in areas with less provision/support for young people – making the support we offer even more valuable.

**'The opportunities it gives people of all backgrounds.'**

**Cadet Orla Megan, aged 13, a North West Area cadet answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

**Table: Place of education**

School	Cadets survey	General population
State school	69.8%	93%
Faith school	6.3%	
Sixth form college	6.2%	
Further education college	4.8%	
Other (please specify)	3.2%	
Home-schooled	2.4%	
Don't know	2.5%	
I don't go to school	0.8%	
Private school (including fee-paying public schools)	3.9%	6.5% <sup>7</sup>



‘That I can earn important qualifications and gain team working skills.’

**15-year-old female home-schooled cadet from South West Area answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

The schools cadets attend are broadly representative of the population as a whole, with slightly less private school representation, which is in line with what we understand about our high engagement with socio-economically disadvantaged cadets.

Many of the adventurous activities Sea Cadets provides – boating, for example – are generally seen as out-of-reach of young people from less privileged backgrounds. So, this strong representation of cadets who go to state schools and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is highly positive. Another positive is the strong representation of home-schooled young people, who are often excluded from organised youth activity.

**2.2 LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG CARERS**

	Cadets survey	General population
Looked-after children	8% (+2)	1.1% <sup>8</sup>
Young carers	8% (+1)	6% <sup>9</sup>

‘Gaining life and leadership skills and learning to help and nurture others to be the best they can be.’

**16-year-old male looked-after royal marines cadet from Northern Area on what’s best about Sea Cadets**

‘Sea Cadets is a place where I feel I can always express myself without being judged or ridiculed. I adore kayaking and I have found the amount of waterborne activities I do within cadets has greatly improved my physical health. I’m also

a member of my unit’s drill team, and doing armed guard is one of my favourite things and is one of the highlights of my sea cadet experience.’

**15-year-old female cadet young carer from South West Area on what is best about Sea Cadets**

In line with previous years, Sea Cadets units continue to disproportionately represent looked-after children and young carers, compared to the general UK population, despite them often seen as being harder to sustain engagement with due to their marginalisation limiting access to support. Both groups said Sea Cadets impacted their lives in line with other cadets.



## 2.3 ETHNICITY

	Cadets survey <sup>10</sup>	Volunteer survey	General population <sup>11</sup>
Total White	88.7%	97%	81.7%
White British	81.2%	94%	74.4%
White other	6.3%	3%	7.3%
Total racialised minority <sup>12</sup>	11.3%	3%	16.2%
Mixed	4.7%	1%	2.9%
Asian	3%	0.4%	9.3%
Black	2%	0.5%	4%
Latin/South/Central American	0.2%	0.1%	2.1%
Arab	0.2%	0.2%	
Other	1.3%	0.1%	

Sea Cadets draws young people from a wide variety of backgrounds. However, ethnic minorities are generally slightly underrepresented, while White British young people are overrepresented. In a continuation from 22/23, we have a higher percentage of mixed-race young people than the UK as a whole (our ongoing administrative data also shows this).

The relatively small number of young people in each of the non-White British categories limits the amount of quantitative analysis we can do, and qualitative analysis showed similar responses for racialised minority cadets as white cadets.

Volunteers are overwhelmingly from White British backgrounds, with minimal representation from racialised minority groups.

‘Learn something new every time and get lots of qualifications that are very useful for the future.’

**15-year-old female Arab cadet from Northern Area, answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

## 2.4 RELIGION

Religion	Cadets	Volunteers	National benchmark <sup>13</sup>
No religion	50%	34%	37%
Christianity	41%	60%	46.2%
Prefer not to say	4%	4%	6%
Other religion	2%	2%	0.6%
Hinduism	1%	0.20%	1.7%
Islam	1%	0.30%	6.5%
Buddhism	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%
Judaism	0.1%	0.30%	0.5%
Sikhism	0.2%	0.10%	0.9%

The vast majority of respondents, both cadets and volunteers, identified as either having no religion or being Christian. Broadly speaking, taking ages into account, this was within expected ratios (cadets more likely to be non-religious; volunteers more likely to be religious). However, there were significant signs of underrepresentation of minority religious communities, most significantly the relative lack of Muslim cadets or volunteers.

‘Everything!!! It gives us the wings for life!!! We get trained, guided, advised and it teaches us so many skills!’

**13-year-old male Muslim cadet, responding to being asked what is best about Sea Cadets**



## 2.5 DISABILITY AND NEURODIVERGENCE<sup>14</sup>

	Cadets survey	General population of under-18s	Volunteer survey
Disability	12%	11% <sup>15</sup>	14%
Autistic spectrum condition	6.2%	2% <sup>16</sup>	3%
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	5%	5%	3%

Sea cadets are approximately as likely to identify as Disabled or Neurodivergent as the general population of young people. This again suggests an effective model for reaching out to young people often excluded from mainstream youth work. The two most common impairments were ADHD and Autism, with the survey showing particularly promising engagement from cadets with an autistic spectrum condition – recorded as being over three times the national average for young people.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that there's an increasing assumption in the wider autistic community that the publicised figure of 2% is an undercount due to historical issues with diagnosis. So, this higher percentage reporting as autistic may indicate that Sea Cadets is a safe environment where young people feel comfortable disclosing their condition, rather than Sea Cadets is attracting more young people from this background.

In either case, it is a highly positive statistic, as autistic young people are often identified as being isolated from youth work. Similarly, while in the case of ADHD there is only a representative presence of young

people, this indicates our programme is accessible to a group where people often disengage from youth work.

30% of Disabled/Neurodivergent cadets reported their impairment was hidden; 20% that it was obvious; and half that some people noticed it. There was no sign that cadets with hidden impairments had a better or worse experience of Sea Cadets than cadets with visible impairments.

**‘The best thing in Sea Cadets is learning new skills and about things the Royal Navy do. The staff teach this very well on courses. In Sea Cadets itself the cadets are brilliant as you can talk to them if you need to and you are able to make friends in it too. It is really a lovely experience for people and I would 100% recommend it to anyone I could.’**

**Male 14-year-old autistic and ADHD cadet from Northern Area answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

## 2.6 GENDER

Gender	Cadets survey	Recorded in Sea Cadets database <sup>18</sup>	All volunteers	Volunteer survey
Male	59.5%	63%	60%	61.71%
Female	37.7%	37%	40%	38.02%
Agender	0.1%	-	-	-
Gender fluid	0.8%	-	-	-
Transgender male	0.8%	-	-	0.16%
Transgender female	0.2%	-	-	0.11%
Other	0.4%	-	-	-

Male and female cadets showed a broadly comparable levels of satisfaction and impact on their lives, a continued trend from the 22/23 survey. This suggests no significant difference in experience between male and female cadets.<sup>19</sup>

The survey itself was generally representative of the population of volunteers and cadets.

**‘The qualifications you can get.’**

**15-year-old non-binary cadet from London Area, answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

## 2.7 SEXUALITY<sup>20 21</sup>

Sexuality	Cadets survey	Volunteer survey
Asexual	1.1%	0.5%
Bisexual	9.5%	3.6%
Hetrosexual	82.7%	91.8%
Homosexual	4.6%	3.6%
Other	2.1%	0.4%

In a continuation from the 22/23 Impact Survey, a substantially higher percentage of cadets are non-heterosexual compared to the general population of the UK (3.16% of the general population compared to 17.3% of cadets over 12 – up from 13.6% in 22/23). The difference is still significant if we compare it with the sexual identity of Generation Z (the demographic – born c.1997-2012 – all current cadets are in), estimated to be around 7% non-heterosexual in the 2021 Census. These stats suggest substantial engagement in Sea Cadets among young LGBTQ+ people.

‘The best thing about Sea Cadets is the people you meet and the friends you make. The people at your unit can make or break your cadet experience and in my experience it has greatly improved it.’

**14-year-old female bisexual cadet, Eastern Area**

## 2.8 CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES

**Have you experienced any of the following?**

Feeling anxious or lonely	31.7%
Bullying or abuse	21.8%
Getting in trouble at school	17.3%
Getting in trouble with the police	1.8%

There have been slight increases since the 22/23 survey in cadets reporting feeling anxious or lonely, getting into trouble at school, and experiencing bullying or abuse. However, a significant minority continue to report these issues, suggesting that support targeting cadets with these experiences may be worthwhile.

In continuation of last year, 1.8% of cadets reported getting into trouble with the police (a 0.4% increase from last year). This cohort could be targeted for specific support.

## 2.9 VOLUNTEER ORIGINS

**Do you work for the Royal Navy?**

No	83.4%
This has been true in the past	14.1%
This is currently true	2.5%

Overwhelmingly, volunteers are not drawn from the Royal Navy, with just over eight in 10 volunteers having never worked for the Royal Navy. However, those who have make up a significant minority of just under 17% of volunteers. Given the current size of the Royal Navy (slightly over 35,000 personnel, including reserves,

making up a little under 0.1% of the U.K.'s adult population), it is clear that former and current Royal Navy employees are significantly more likely to engage with Sea Cadets than the general population.

**Do you work for the Royal Navy?**

No	85.57%
This has been true in the past	7.9%
This is currently true	6.5%

**Do you have a child at Sea Cadets?**

Yes	24.8%
I have in the past	24%
No	51.2%

Results were evenly split between those volunteers who have or currently have a child who is a sea cadet and those who do not (any difference is below levels of statistical significance).

Interestingly volunteers who had experience in either the maritime industry or the Royal Navy were just as likely to have a child/have had a child in Sea Cadets as the general population of volunteers (this was not a disproportionate source of volunteers who did not have children involved in Sea Cadets).

The number who have continued to volunteer once their child has ceased to be a cadet is interesting, with an almost equal number of parents of alumni as

parents of current cadets. This suggests recruiting parents of cadets provides a long-term source of volunteers, instead of them only staying as long as their child is engaged.

This also tells us that, if looking at how to diversify the make-up of volunteers, recruiting cadets from similar backgrounds (e.g. socio-economic status or ethnicity) is likely to meaningfully impact volunteer recruitment creating a virtuous circle.





# 3. Sea Cadets' supportiveness of marginalised groups: a deep dive

In part due to the trend in previous years of marginalised groups showing lower levels of satisfaction in Sea Cadets, this year, we asked to what degree respondents felt Sea Cadets supported different groups. We also looked to compare both general perspectives and the reality of the different groups.

In each case, respondents were asked to rate the level of supportiveness from 1 to 10.

While an in-depth breakdown is provided below, the general trend is that marginalised groups did feel Sea Cadets was welcoming and supportive of their identity. However, in most cases, there is a statistically significant difference between how the marginalised group and the general population rate this, with the general population of cadets perceiving Sea Cadets as more open and supportive than their marginalised peers.

## **TO WHAT DEGREE IS SEA CADETS WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE OF LGBTQ+ CADETS?**

Overall, LGBTQ+ cadets felt Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, and people of other minority sexual and gender identities. LGBTQ+ cadets had an average of 8.3 for this question on a scale of 1-10; this is a very positive finding. This scoring is in line with non-LGBTQ+ groups who scored an average of 8.5, a negligible difference to LGBTQ+ cadets scoring.

Many more respondents selected 'don't know' than is generally accepted for survey data, which can suggest the question was badly worded. Further inspection of the data shows that LGBTQ+ cadets were far less likely to select 'don't know', with non-LGBTQ+ groups far more likely to. This could suggest that the high proportion of 'don't knows' is non-LGBTQ+ cadets feeling that they do not have the lived experience or do not have LGBTQ+ cadets in their unit, so cannot

deem how supportive Sea Cadets is of this group. This theme continues throughout the following sections, but to avoid repetition is only summarised here.

## **TO WHAT DEGREE IS SEA CADETS WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE OF TRANS CADETS?**

Due to the very small Trans cadet sample in the survey, we use LGBTQ+ cadets, of which Trans people are a part, as a proxy to investigate views on how welcoming and supportive Sea Cadets is to Trans people specifically.

Overall, LGBTQ+ cadets felt that Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of Trans people specifically, with an average score of 7.3, compared to non-LGBTQ+ people of 8.1. Deviating from usual trends, around 30% of LGBTQ+ cadets put 'don't know' for this question, suggesting that there may be missing insight from using LGBTQ+ as a proxy for Trans people. LGBTQ+ cadets may have felt they could not accurately rate how supportive Sea Cadets is of Trans people specifically, due to lack of lived experience/interaction with Trans Sea Cadets.

## **TO WHAT DEGREE IS SEA CADETS WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE OF BLACK CADETS?**

Overall, Black cadets felt that Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of Black people, with an average of 8.2 on a 1-10 scale. Compared to non-Black people, who had an average score of 9.2, Black people were significantly less likely to feel supported and welcomed. Still, given their very high average score, this does not represent a concerning insight.

## **TO WHAT DEGREE IS SEA CADETS WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE OF ASIAN CADETS?**

Overall, Asian cadets felt that Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of Asian people, with an average score of 8.8, compared to non-Asian



people of 9.1. On a scale of 1-10, these scorings, particularly from Asian cadets, are very encouraging in suggesting Sea Cadets have a welcoming and supportive environment for ethnically marginalised cadets.

### **TO WHAT DEGREES IS SEA CADETS WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE OF DISABLED/NEURODIVERGENT CADETS?**

Overall, disabled cadets felt that Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of disabled people, with an average score of 7.9, compared to non-disabled people of 8.4. On a scale of 1-10, these scorings, particularly from disabled cadets, is very encouraging in suggesting Sea Cadets has a welcoming and supportive environment for disabled

cadets. Despite the difference between disabled and non-disabled cadets being significantly different, disabled cadets are still much more likely than not to feel that Sea Cadets is very welcoming and supportive to disabled people, with around 50% (when 'don't knows' are excluded) strongly agreeing.

Autistic cadets felt that Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of neurodivergent people, with an average score of 8.1, compared to non-autistic people of 8.6. Our autistic sample is quite large compared to other neurodivergent groupings, so to avoid skewness, we use all those with a disability as a proxy. Disabled cadets also felt that Sea Cadets was completely welcoming and supportive of neurodivergent people, with an average score of 8.2 on a scale of 1-10.



# 4. Impact

## TIME IT TAKES FOR IMPACT TO TAKE PLACE

Based on research in 22/23, we can say with a high degree of confidence that young people see a clear positive improvement within six months of becoming a Sea Cadet – in relation to teamwork, life skills and communication skills. This should be taken into account when considering the wider pattern of impact in this report.

- Overall themes remain consistent between the 22/23 and 23/24 surveys, with cadets, volunteers, and parents and carers reporting a generally high level of impact with no meaningful difference for different demographic groups large enough to be reasonably assessed.
- Generally, adults (volunteers, parents and carers) see a clearer long-term impact of Sea Cadets. Cadets are less clear on this, but instead identify strong impact from transferable skills that are likely to lead to long-term impact.
- There is minimal evidence of making an impact on avoiding trouble with the criminal justice system, but there are increasing signs that young people see this as an area of concern/need. This may, in part, be due to further work being needed.

‘Sea Cadets has given me opportunities to learn and try new things I didn't think I ever would.’

**A 16-year-old female cadet from our Southern Area on what's best about Sea Cadets**

## CONSENSUS ACROSS STAKEHOLDERS

As mentioned above, there was significant consensus among cadets, parents/carers and volunteers on most of the questions we asked during the survey. To avoid repetition in cases where there's only a small variance between the different groups (under 10%) this report gives only the figure for cadets (as they have the most direct lived experience), with a note of which groups it aligns with. We have included results in full where there is significant difference between the three groups.

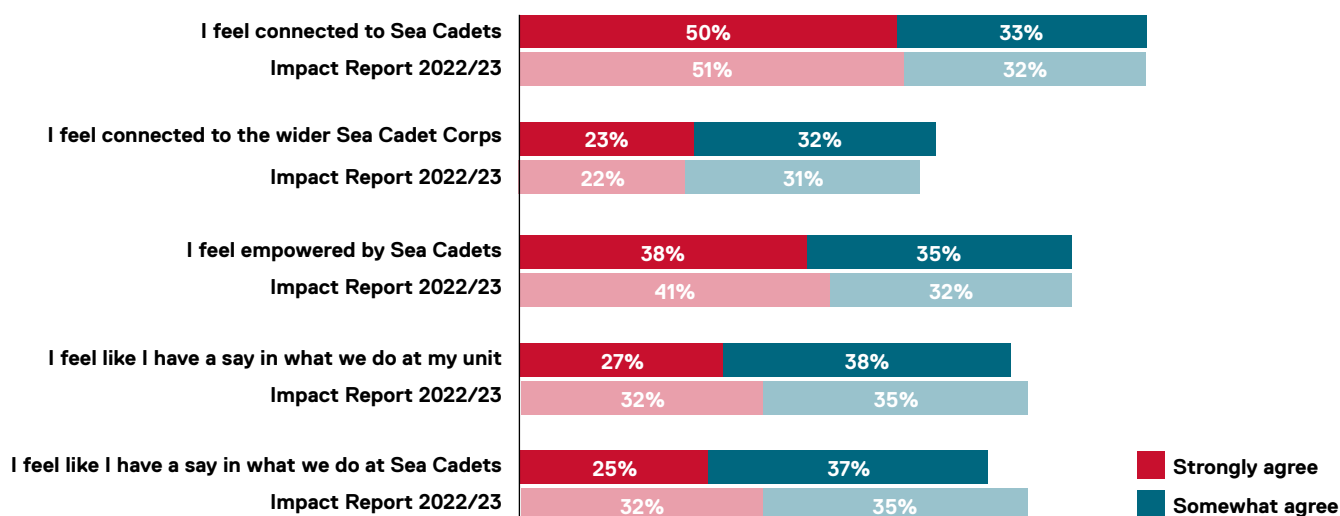




## 4.1 EMPOWERING CADETS

‘You get to have a say and it's just really fun to be with your friends. Everyone's just so supportive.’ ‘There is no worse thing about Sea Cadets!’

**Cadet Anil, aged 12, South West Area, on what is best and worst about Sea Cadets**

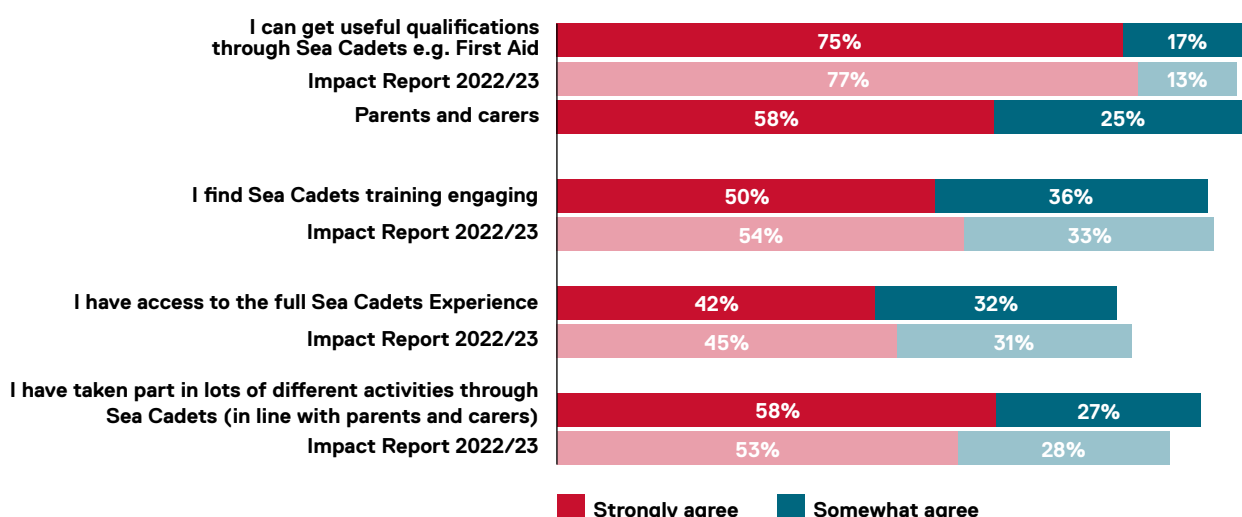


Cadets generally feel highly empowered by and connected to Sea Cadets, with negligible differences from the 22/23 survey.

## 4.2 THE SEA CADETS EXPERIENCE

‘The cadets themselves are so welcoming and it really feels like a community, like a family. You can go on courses and not know anybody and they will be extremely kind, and some of the staff too.’

**Cadet Alicia Mai, 14-year-old from North West Area explaining what she likes the most about Sea Cadets**



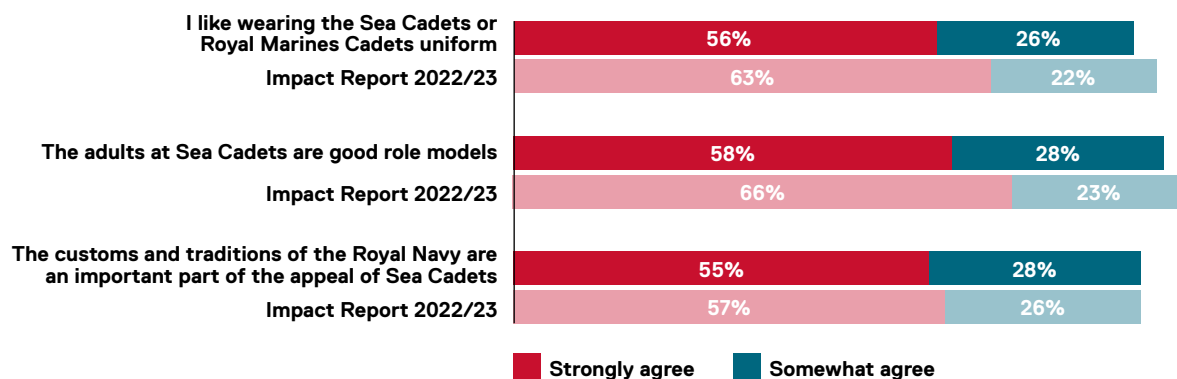
In continuation of the 22/23 survey, responses about cadets' experiences are overwhelmingly positive. Interestingly, this includes an overwhelming view among cadets and volunteers (and still a firm view among parents) that cadets gain useful qualifications, suggesting that Sea Cadets leads to useful skills for later life.

Compared to the 22/23 survey, there was no further decline (as shown in 22/23 compared to the 20/21 survey) in those feeling they had participated in many activities. This is likely (based on similar trends seen in other Sea Cadet projects, e.g. On The Water) to have been caused by things having now reset to a (still very high) baseline of activities, following a temporary post-Covid boost, whereby any activity on offer was seen as particularly positive due to the lack of opportunities available to young people at the time.

## 4.3 CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

'Learning new things at Sea Cadets and following Royal Navy and cadet traditions.'

**Cadet Jack, age 14, from Eastern Area, answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

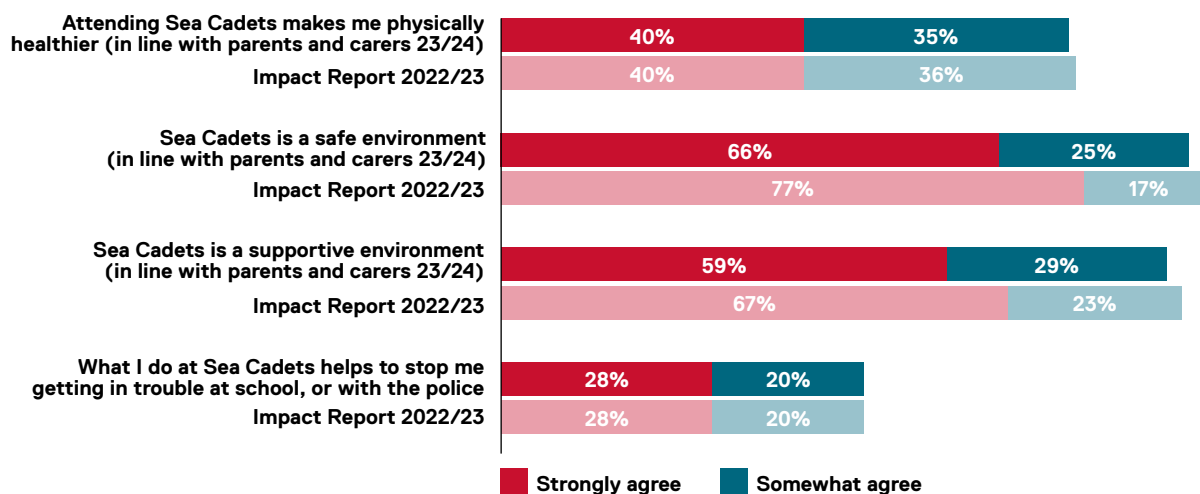


The customs and traditions of today's Royal Navy remain an important part of young people's experiences at Sea Cadets. This has been consistent through the 20/21, 22/23, and now 23/24 surveys, with negligible differences shown between 22/23 and 23/24.

## 4.4 HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

'Rowing and seeing my best friends that make me feel really happy.'

**Cadet Karen age 14 from our Eastern Area on what is best about Sea Cadets**



In a continuation of last year, cadets' and parents' perceptions of health and safety have remained consistently positive, with no significant increases or decreases compared to 20/21 and 22/23.

Interestingly, a majority of cadets did not believe what they did at Sea Cadets stopped them from getting into trouble at school or with the police, an overlooked trend shown across the 20/21, 22/23 and 23/24 surveys.

In our research around economic disadvantage in Sea Cadets, focus groups in units located in the most disadvantaged areas in the UK<sup>22</sup> demonstrated that crime, general anti-social behaviour and vaping amongst children were prevalent within their local communities, even some cadets acknowledging that their fellow cadets engage in this type of behaviour. Further statistical testing showed no difference between the most disadvantaged cadets and their peers in feeling the Sea Cadets stopped them from getting in trouble at school or with police.

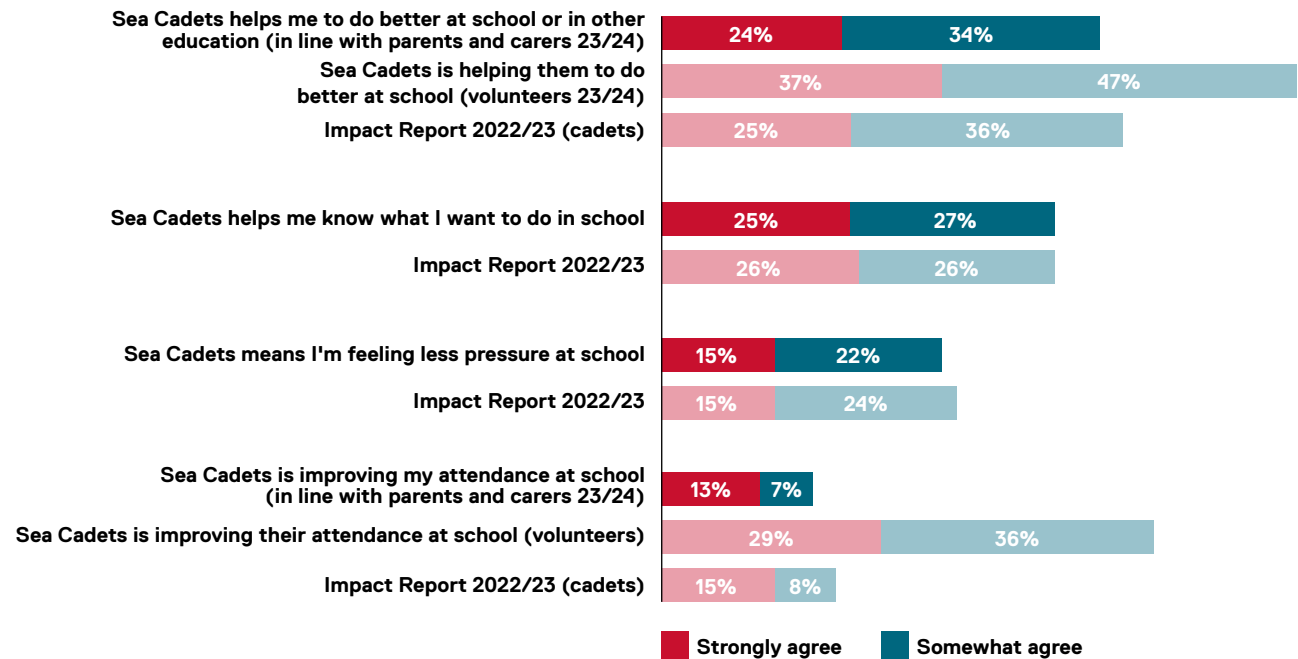
Additionally, there seems to be no difference in responses between those who had reported getting into trouble with police or school at some point in their life (around 20% of respondents) and those who did not. Of course,

we are not a crime prevention youth organisation, but it is a reality that we encounter and engage with nationally representative amounts of young people who live in areas of high crime and anti-social behaviour, and so could be more exposed to the conditions which facilitate getting into trouble at school or with police. Further research could be useful to decipher the extent to which our cadets get into trouble with the police or school, and if there is any more that can be done by Sea Cadets.

4.5 FORMAL EDUCATION<sup>23</sup>

‘Being able to try new things and gain more qualifications than someone who doesn’t do cadets, and making new friends and help them grow and develop to become a better person for themselves etc.’

Cadet Louise, aged 17, Eastern Area, on what’s best about Sea Cadets



In a continued trend from years past, cadets are much less likely to report an impact from Sea Cadets on their formal education than volunteers. Compared to the 22/23 survey, cadets' perception of Sea Cadets' impact on their formal education is consistent.

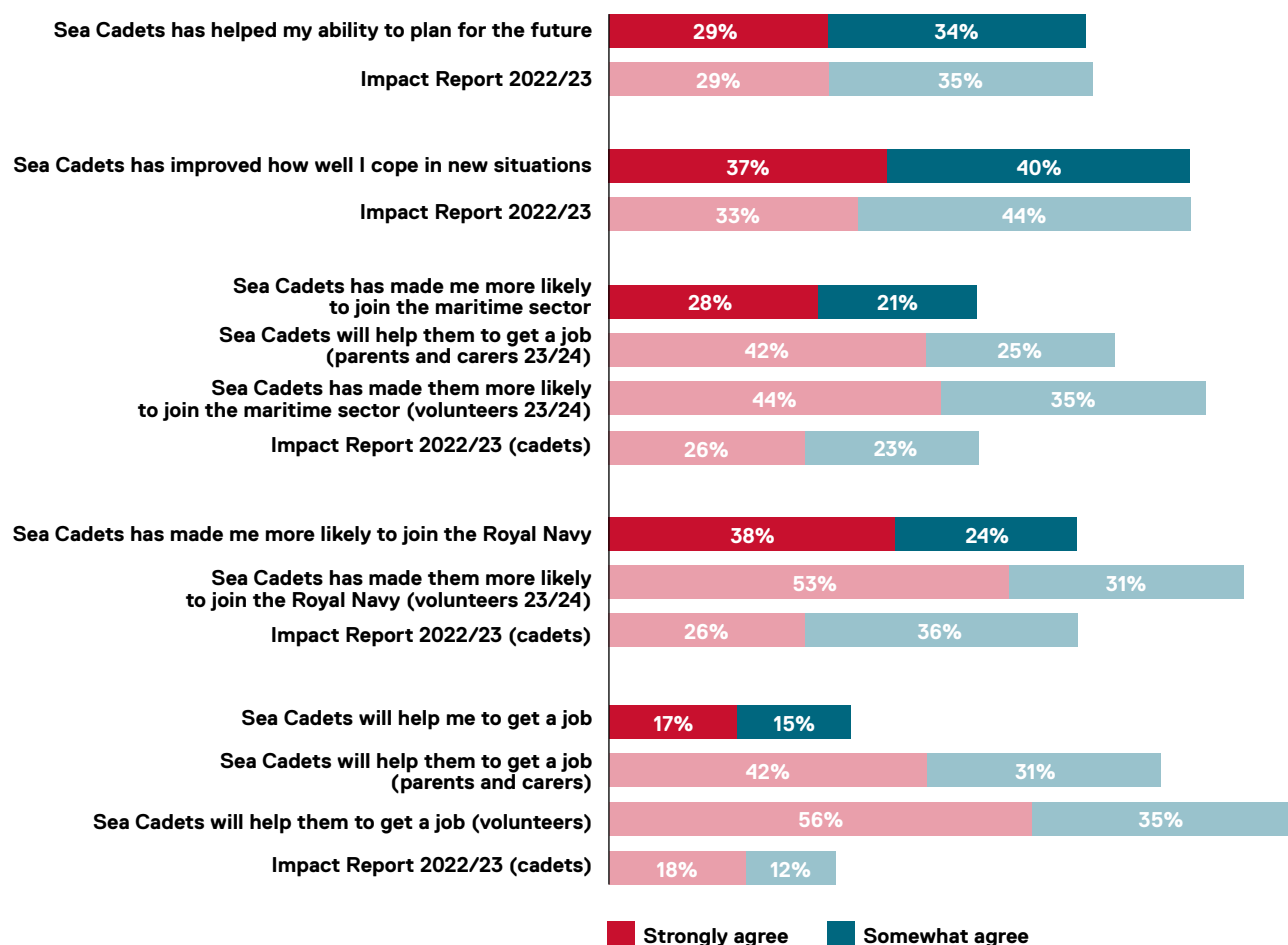




## 4.6 FUTURE PROSPECTS

‘Gives us opportunities to meet many new people from different backgrounds and lets us explore potential careers in the future.’

**Cadet Mila, aged 14, London Area, on what is best about Sea Cadets**



Results remained consistently positive in line with the 22/23 survey, with parents/carers and volunteers feeling more buoyant about cadets' future prospects than cadets themselves. Interestingly, in terms of helping cadets get jobs, the consistently low agreement among cadets is continued with 46% answering 'don't know' (last year 47%).

The high number of cadets who are unsure about the impact Sea Cadets has on their future prospects, especially in comparison to volunteers, may be a sign that cadets, given their age, do not yet know what will have an impact. In contrast, in many cases, volunteers will have seen the longer-term impact on young people and have examples to draw on. Similarly, parents may have the foresight to see that Sea Cadets could increase their child's job prospects.

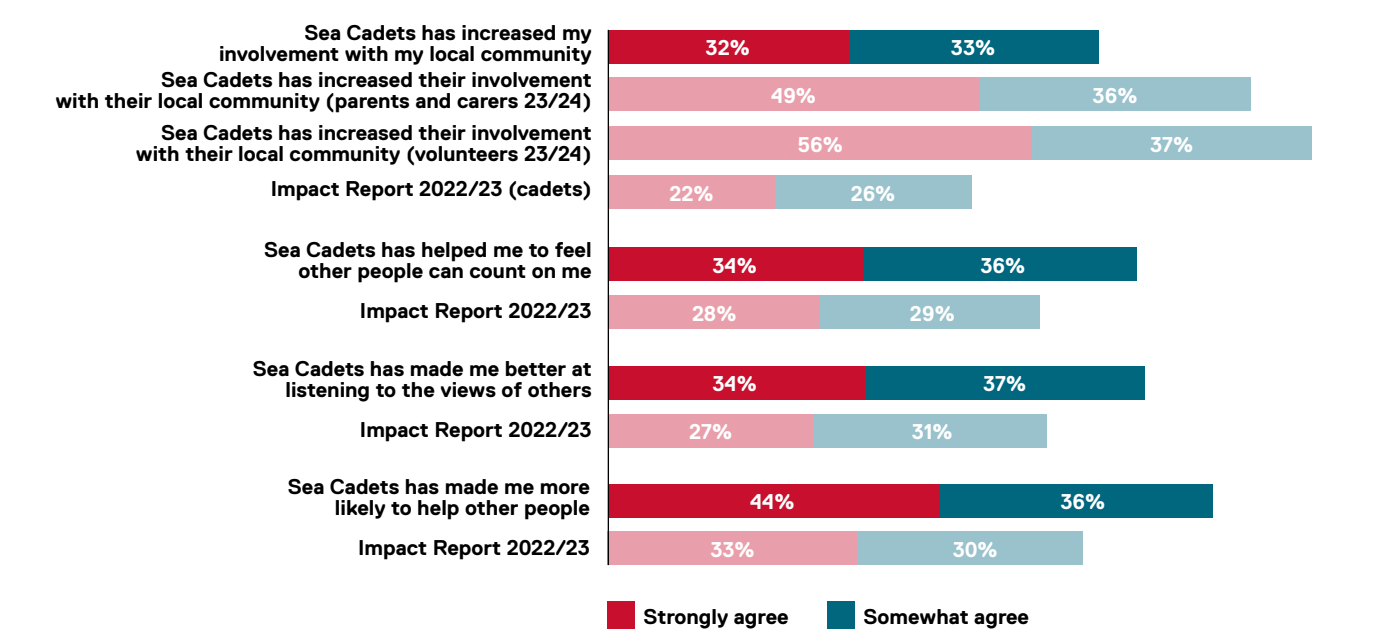
Additionally, in focus groups conducted with cadets in Port Talbot, Birmingham, and Southend, career opportunities or building up skills to aid their careers did not seem to be at the forefront of cadets' minds when asked what Sea Cadets does for them. An exception is those who expressed interest in joining the Royal Navy. Comparing results, those interested in the maritime sector and/or Royal Navy for future work were more likely to agree that Sea Cadets would help them to get a job. However, 'don't know' responses are just as high for those interested in maritime sector and/or Royal Navy careers as those who are not – still making up most of the responses (around 40%).

It's important to stress that this does not mean that Sea Cadets lacks a positive impact on young people's future job opportunities. We see that adults who see the impact of Sea Cadets, whether that's volunteers or parents, are clear in expressing the opinion that it does. Furthermore, research such as My LegaSea suggests that in the long term, cadet alumni also recognise it does. However, what it does tell us is that cadets do not see a tie between career opportunities and the skills they develop at Sea Cadets, and instead see it as a way to develop themselves more holistically.

### 4.7 SOCIAL ACTION

‘Opportunities; helping; watching the younger cadets develop and grow as they learn. And it is affordable.’

**Cadet Amy, aged 17, Southern Area, answering what is best about Sea Cadets**



Results have remained remarkably consistent compared to the 22/23 survey, with slight increases in how much young people think Sea Cadets supports them to get involved with their local community.

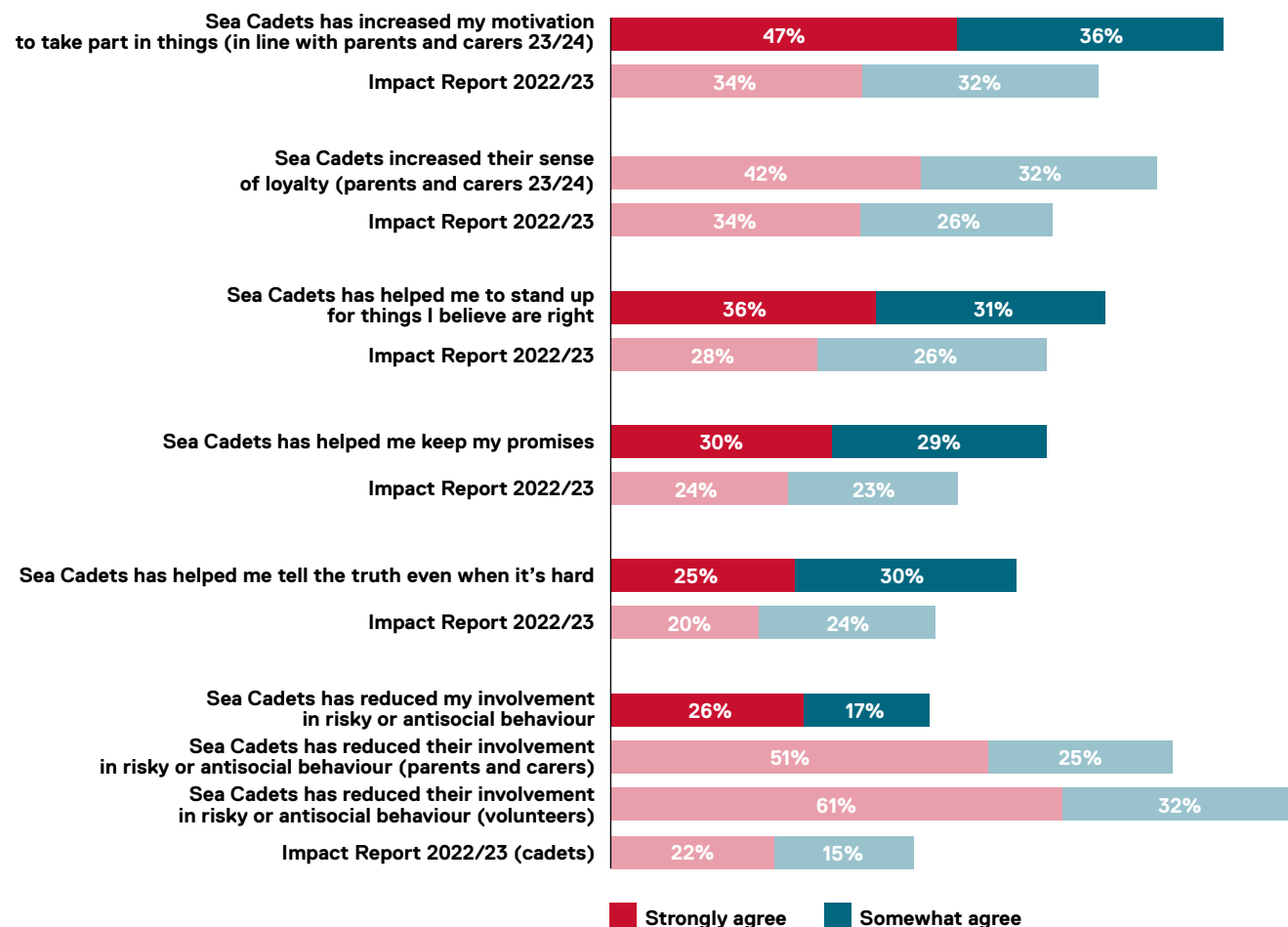
Volunteers and parents/carers generally have a stronger view of Sea Cadets' impact on improving young people's engagement in their local communities than cadets.



## 4.8 VALUES

‘The bond you make with people and the values you develop.’

**Cadet Rohan, aged 14, Southern Area, on what’s best about Sea Cadets**



Elsewhere, results for cadets were highly consistent across 22/23 and 23/24 surveys, with a majority of cadets agreeing that they have developed clear values at Sea Cadets.

In a continued trend spanning from the 20/21 to the 23/24 survey, volunteers, and to a lesser extent parents/carers, have a significantly increased view that Sea Cadets made young people less at risk of antisocial behaviour. By contrast, almost half of cadets do not agree with this statement.

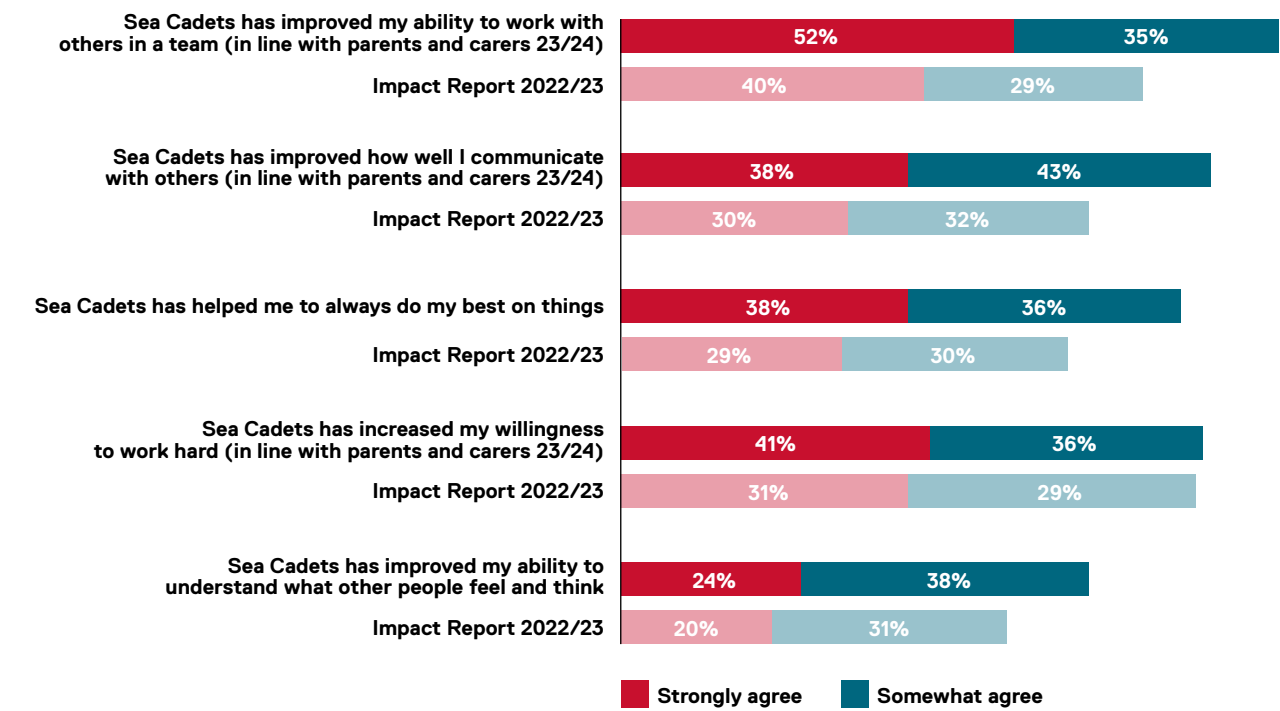
As explored previously with avoiding trouble with police or school (section 4.4, pages 16-17), there were no notable differences in response to the risky/anti-social behaviour question between those in Sea Cadets who reported being involved in such behaviour and those who didn't.



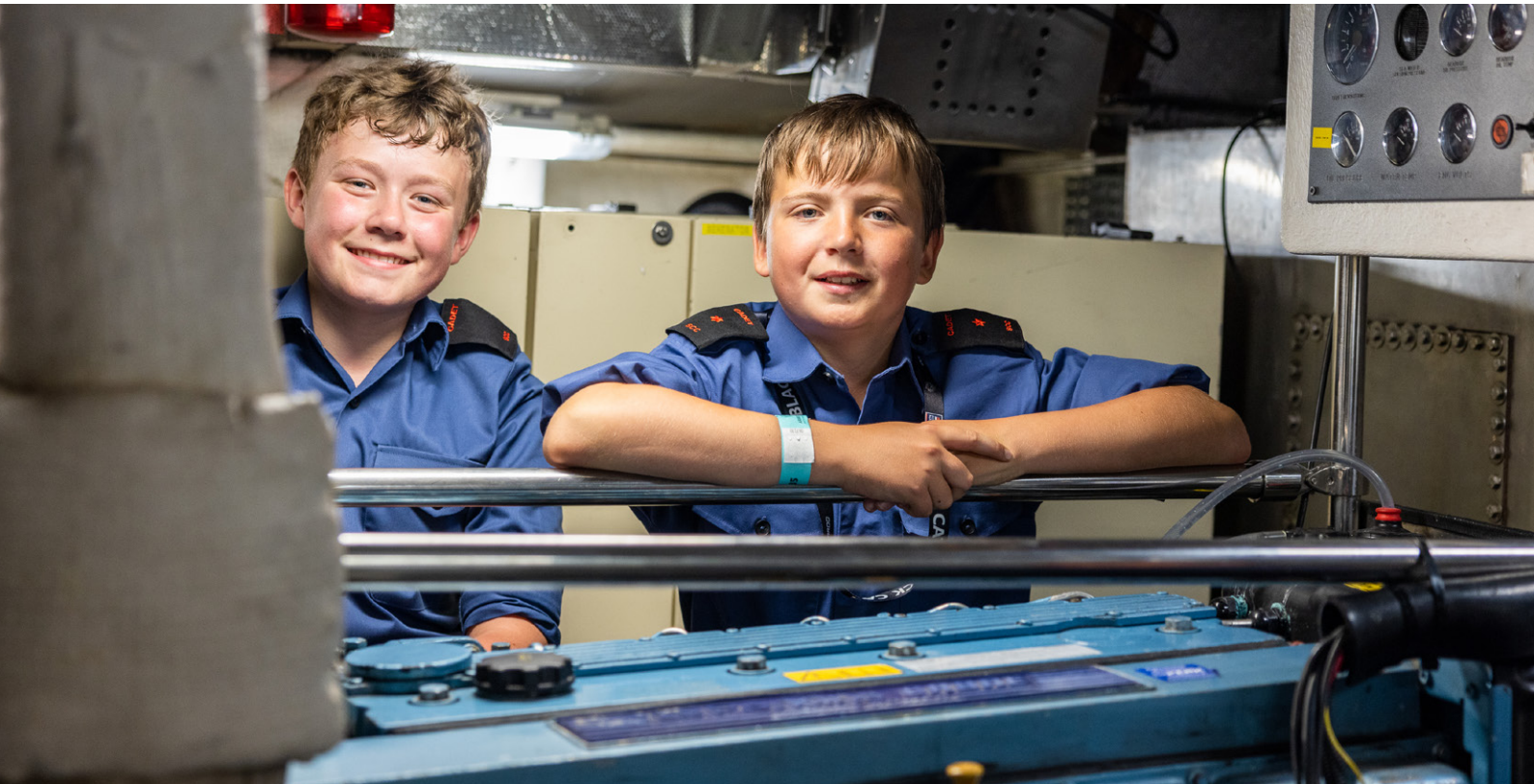
4.9 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

‘It has allowed me to find who I am as a person; it has encouraged self-growth and confidence. We are always given the most amazing opportunities despite who we were once. TS Royalist is definitely one of the best things about Sea Cadets as I have made so many memories there and have friends from all across the country. I love all the waterborne activities and drill competitions!’

Cadet Bracken, a 15-year-old from Eastern Area explains what is best about Sea Cadets.



Cadets’ positive view of how Sea Cadets helps with personal development was broadly consistent with 22/23 and was generally in line with the reported perspective of parents/carers.









# 5. Waiting list

This section covers the Sea Cadets waiting list numbers, which measures how many young people have expressed interest in joining a Sea Cadets unit but have been put onto a waiting list because the unit does not have the capabilities to induct them.

Overall, there has been an apparent slight decline in the waiting list from 2023, down from just below 3,500 to just below 3,000. However, it remains high number, compared to the 14,000 available places. It should be stressed that since this is only a sample, the marginal change is not necessarily statistically significant.

Not every unit has an official waiting list, which complicates the sample we achieved. Where a unit expressed that it does not have a waiting list due to a lack of admin skills, training or capacity, or having a different way of tracking young people who wanted to join, they were put into the same pool as non-respondents with an estimated waiting list. Around 60 of the 186 units who replied fit into this category, around 33% of our sample. This points to a potential issue around the tracking process of those interested in joining Sea Cadets, and the possible need for specific tools, further training or bespoke programmes to help units attract volunteers with the specialist skills needed to manage waiting lists.

	Estimated waiting list number (23/24)	Estimated waiting list number (22/23)	Waiting list expressed as an equivalent proportion of total cadet count
All cadets	2,968	3,487	21.1%
Junior	1,399	1,008	10%
Senior			
RMCD	1,563	2,479	11.1%

The decline in Senior waiting list numbers compared to the 22/23 survey could well reflect that we have recently been able to open up a number of new senior sections. The number of Junior waiting lists is up slightly from last year. In terms of type of cadet, Juniors are now the largest group on waiting lists, overtaking Seniors. This highlights a potential high demand from young people aged 9-12.

Overall, total waiting list numbers are still equivalent to 21% of our current cadet totals, indicating strong demand from young people to join units. This confirms our strategic intent to grow current capacity to accommodate more young people.



# 6. Safeguarding and complaints

## 6.1 SAFEGUARDING

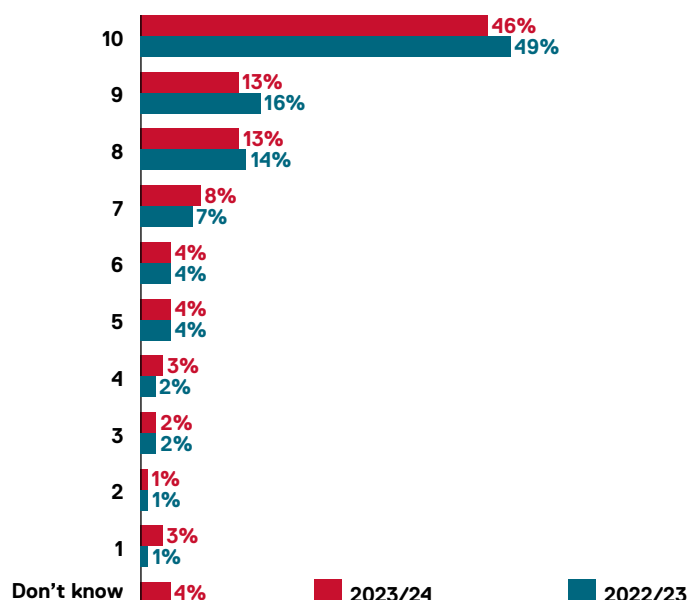
‘Being able to go and be in a nice, safe environment with my friends and knowing that I am part of something. I also like how all the staff are very friendly and welcoming seeing as I have only just started sea cadets.’

**Cadet Katie, aged 12, Eastern Area, talking about what is best about Sea Cadets**

Overall, cadets, volunteers and parents/carers strongly felt that Sea Cadets’ safeguarding team would appropriately resolve issues and that cadets and volunteers know who to approach if they need support. Whilst the results show a slight decrease on the scores from 22/23 survey, this is not a statistically significant change with the results being consistently positive across both years.

In line with the 22/23 survey, there remains a small but concerning minority of cadets who aren’t sure who to approach, which largely seems to be down to them having lower levels of trust in Sea Cadets than their peers.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is ‘would not be dealt with appropriately’ and 10 is ‘would definitely be dealt with appropriately’, how confident are you that if you had to raise an issue with the safeguarding team, the issue would be dealt with appropriately (volunteers)?**



**If you/a cadet or someone you knew at Sea Cadets was being hurt or abused by someone else at Sea Cadets, would you know who to go to in Sea Cadets for help?**

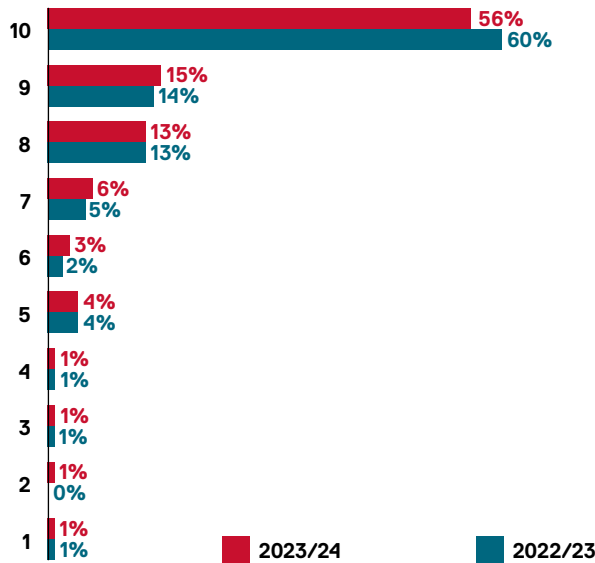
Responses	Cadets	Volunteers
Yes	92%	99%
No	5% (+1)	1%
Prefer not to say	4% (+1)	0%

Overwhelmingly, volunteers are confident they would know who to contact if a young person needed help, with 99% believing they would know what to do. This is consistent across volunteers of all backgrounds.

Cadets also clearly believe that they would know who to go to if they were hurt or abused by someone else at Sea Cadets. This, coupled with very high levels of trust in Sea Cadets, suggests that MSSC is a place where cadets feel relatively safe and know who to go to if needed.

Volunteers showed a very high level of confidence in the Sea Cadets safeguarding process, which was consistent with prior years.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is ‘would not be dealt with appropriately’ and 10 is ‘would definitely be dealt with appropriately’, how confident are you that if you had to raise an issue with the safeguarding team, the issue would be dealt with appropriately (parents/carers)?**



Parents/carers showed an even stronger level of confidence in the safeguarding system than volunteers and cadets, with 56% completely confident things would be appropriately resolved and 84% highly confident.

## 6.2 COMPLAINTS

Respondents’ views of Sea Cadets’ complaint system are broadly positive (although much less so than safeguarding). Parents/carers reported a much more positive perspective than volunteers.

There was no sign that any marginalised groups have a less positive experience of MSSC’s complaint system.

Sea Cadets has a transparent and effective process to handle complaints	Volunteers	Parents/carers
Strongly disagree	10%	3%
Somewhat disagree	13%	3%
Neither agree nor disagree	28%	43%
Somewhat agree	28%	19%
Strongly agree	22%	32%
Total agree	50%	51%

Perceptions of the complaints system were more mixed. Only 50% of both volunteers and parents/carers agree that the process was transparent and effective. There was a marked difference between the reported perception of volunteers and parents and carers in the numbers that actively disagreed. About one in four volunteers actively disagreed with this, and significantly higher numbers of people who neither agreed nor disagreed among parents/carers.

# 7. Volunteers' experience of Sea Cadets

Volunteers reported experience of Sea Cadet and priorities for training have remained fairly consistent with the 22/23 survey, with a slight worsening in their perception of different key elements of Sea Cadets and areas of improvement over the past year. Taken together, this may suggest a feeling of less progress, leading to erosion of satisfaction.

It must, however, be recognised that during the period of the survey volunteers were being consulted on proposals to make very significant cost savings in the light of a reduced level of Grant-in-Aid under the 'Refining our Offer' initiative that sought to make £3m in savings from the projected budget for the coming year FY24/25.

Volunteers had already experienced significant in-year reductions in available cadet activity and volunteer support, as a result of an unexpected £738k reduction in Grant-in-Aid in April 2023. This had involved temporarily taking one of the offshore ships out of

service; cancelling planned international exchange trips; suspending cadet and volunteer best uniform provision; and capping volunteer allowances, together with a significant reduction in unit grants.

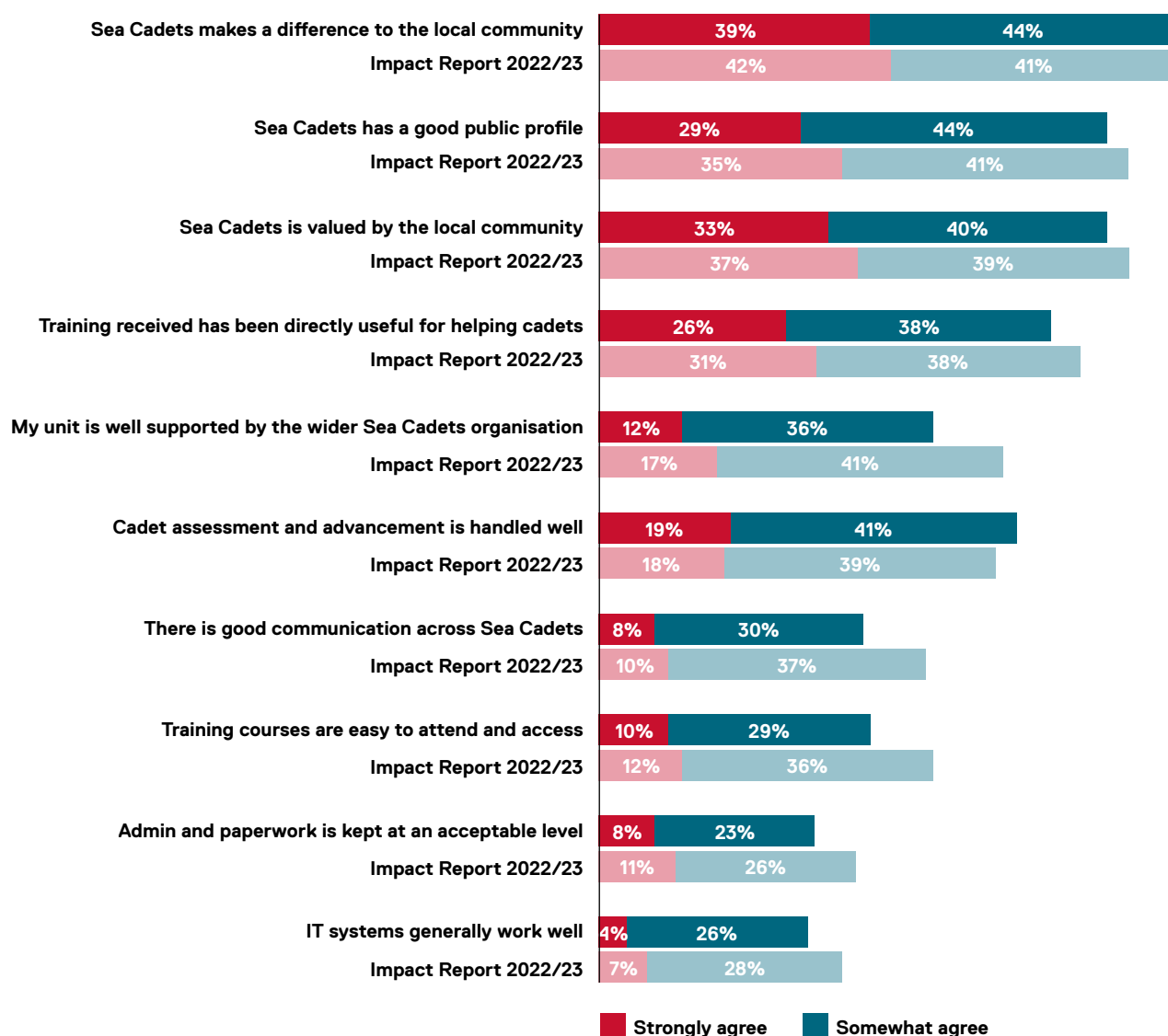
Furthermore, as directed by the MOD Youth & Cadets, we had introduced automatic suspension of volunteers for out-of-date clearances, removing a previous 'grace' period. While the reasons for these changes were clearly communicated (and placed in the context of the wider inflationary crisis across the UK and the need to continually improve our safe systems) it seems highly likely this led to disappointment and frustration centred on MSSC, which would help to explain the decline in satisfaction.

It is also important to note these results are still within the context of broadly positive results around volunteer experience, and constitute a significant improvement from when volunteers were first routinely surveyed (2017).





## 7.1 VOLUNTEERS' VIEWS OF SEA CADETS



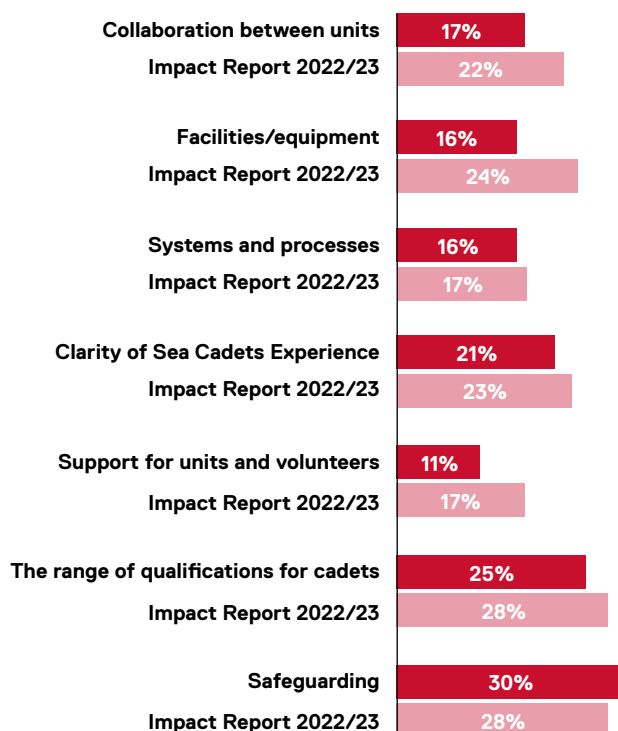
Volunteers' views on the overall experience of Sea Cadets have remained broadly consistent, with over 50% supporting most of the statements.

Areas that have remained below 50% from the 22/23 survey (in some cases much below) are the following: "there is good communication across Sea Cadets"; "training courses are easy to attend and access"; "IT systems work well"; and "admin and paperwork is kept to an appropriate level". Given the general trend towards a decline in satisfaction for volunteers in MSSC as a result of financial cuts, these may be areas worthy of particular focus.

There has been a significant dip (-10 percentage points) in agreement that their units are "well supported by the wider Sea Cadets", which means that a majority of respondents no longer agree with this statement. In the current climate, with unit grants, provision of uniforms etc., restricted during the period of survey this is to be expected.

Additionally, decreases of nine percentage points from the 22/23 survey have occurred for "training courses being easy to attend and access"; "there is good communication across Sea Cadets"; and "Sea Cadets has a good public profile". For both "training courses are easy to attend and access", and "there is good communication across Sea Cadets", agreement has declined from around 50% to around 40%. During 23/24, cadet forces have experienced significant reduction in access to MOD training estate, much of which has been last-minute, inevitably leading to volunteer frustration. In terms of the decline for "Sea Cadets has a good public profile", this is less concerning given three quarters of volunteers agree with the statement, and so this remains a very positive score.

## 7.2 IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PAST YEAR



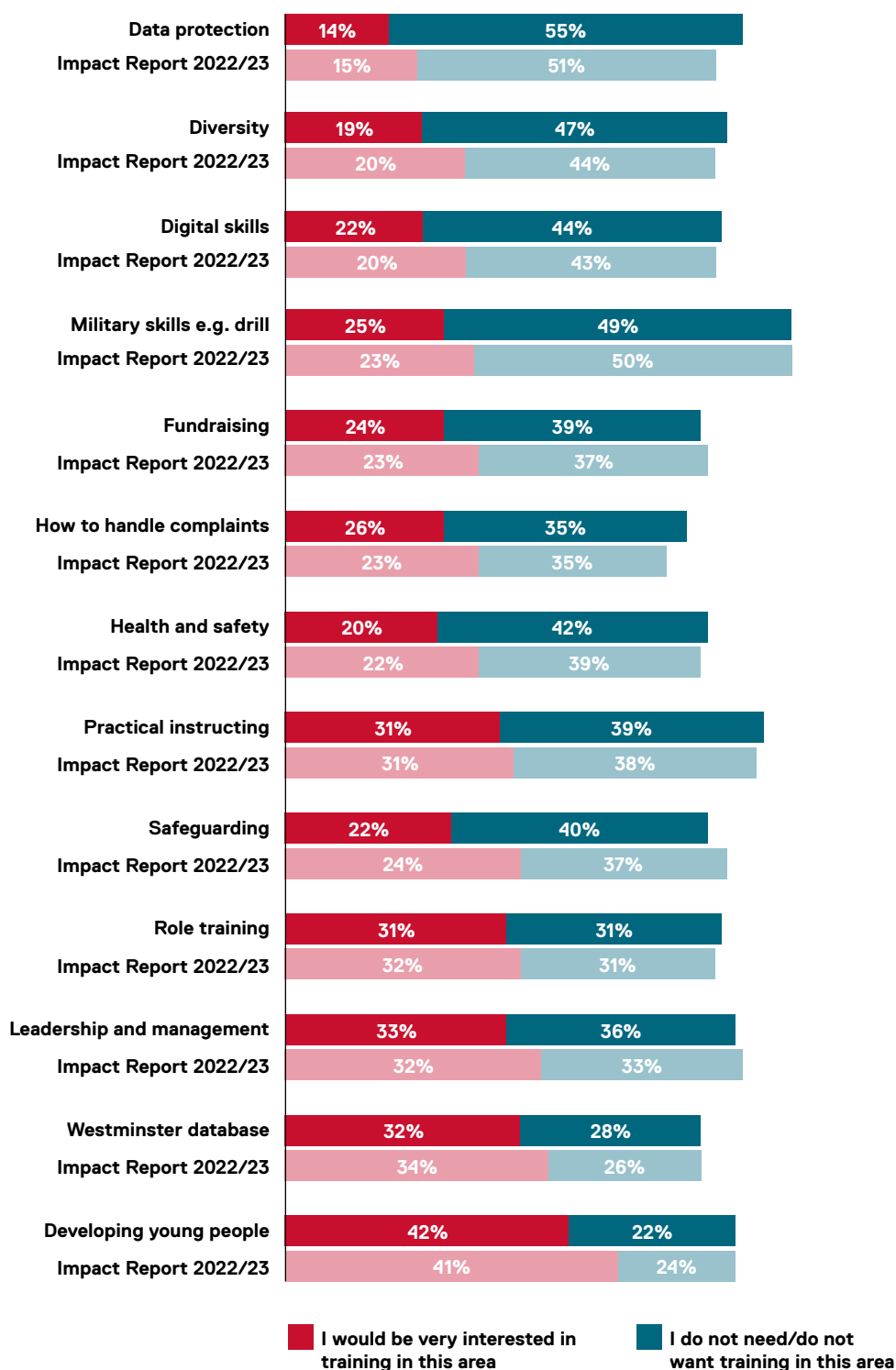
Volunteers were broadly consistent in their views toward improvements at MSSC, with mostly negligible differences shown compared to the 22/23 survey. Generally, volunteers were inclined to say that all of these topics had stayed the same, with responses ranging from 40% to 54%, making it the most popular response.

Although collaboration with units dropped by five percentage points from the 22/23 survey, fewer people (15%) said this had got worse with 54% feeling it had stayed the same, which makes this a less worrying insight. It is to be noted the survey was undertaken at the outset of a three-month all volunteer consultation on the 'Refining our Offer' initiative – on an unwelcome topic of making further financial savings.

Volunteers' agreement on whether support for units, volunteers, and facilities equipment had improved dropped the most from the 22/23 survey. These are areas where a third of volunteers were likely to say it had become worse. It is likely that this reflects those frustrated or negatively impacted by the aforementioned financial cuts and other changes.

In terms of systems and processes, although it did not significantly drop from the 22/23 survey, volunteers feeling this had got worse was one of the highest proportions, at 25%.

## 7.3 TRAINING PRIORITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS



Training priorities for volunteers remained broadly consistent from the 22/23 survey, where volunteers were generally more inclined to say they did not need/want training in most areas.

Volunteers continue to be least interested in training in data, digital skills, and diversity. And as in the 20/21 and 22/23 surveys, “developing young people” continues to be an area where volunteers are keen to train (42%). Westminster Database training no longer places in second highest (albeit only just in third, on 32%), with 33% of volunteers feeling “leadership and management” training would be useful for them.





# 8. Satisfaction and trust

## 8.1 TRUST

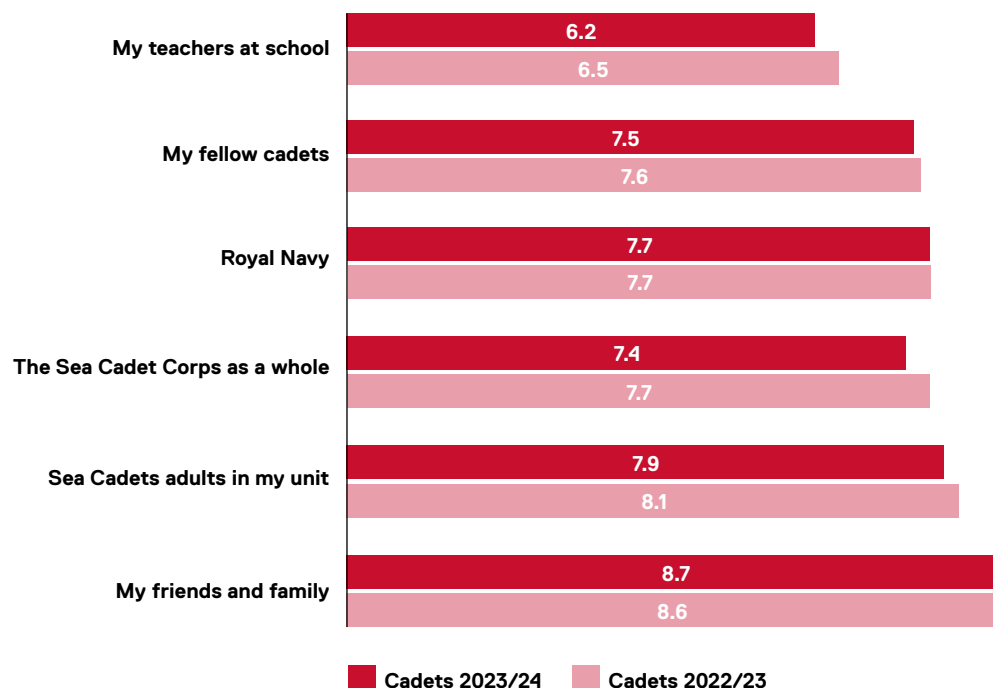
‘To me the best thing about Sea Cadets is that you make friends really easily, get to trust everyone and talk openly about everything and learn new life skills.’

**Cadet Jean, aged 12, from North West Area, talking about what is best about Sea Cadets**

Trust is very important for Sea Cadets. Cadets and parents need to trust the organisation to be able to commit their time and to share where they need help. Trust in volunteers also creates an effective working environment to support young people.

Higher levels of trust mean it is more likely that stakeholders will be honest about their experiences, increasing the validity of the results of this impact report and other projects.

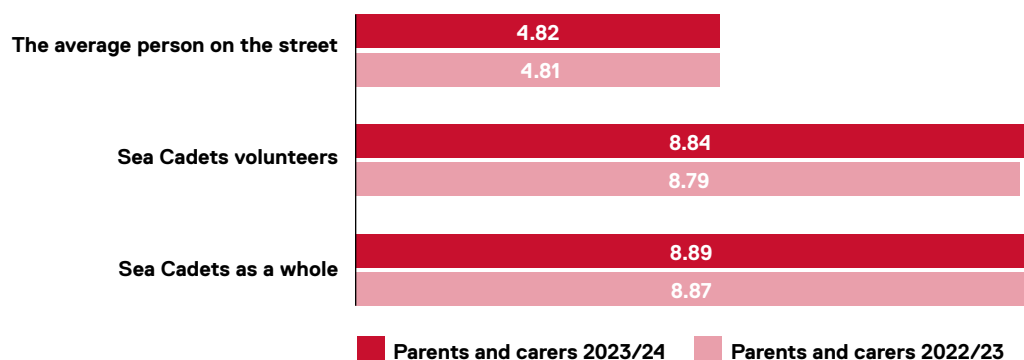
### Cadets' trust (10-point scale)



Cadets' level of trust in the organisation remains comparable to that in the 22/23 survey, with a slight (but below statistical relevance) decrease across the board. This is within the context of historically very high results and should be seen as a positive finding/overall trend.

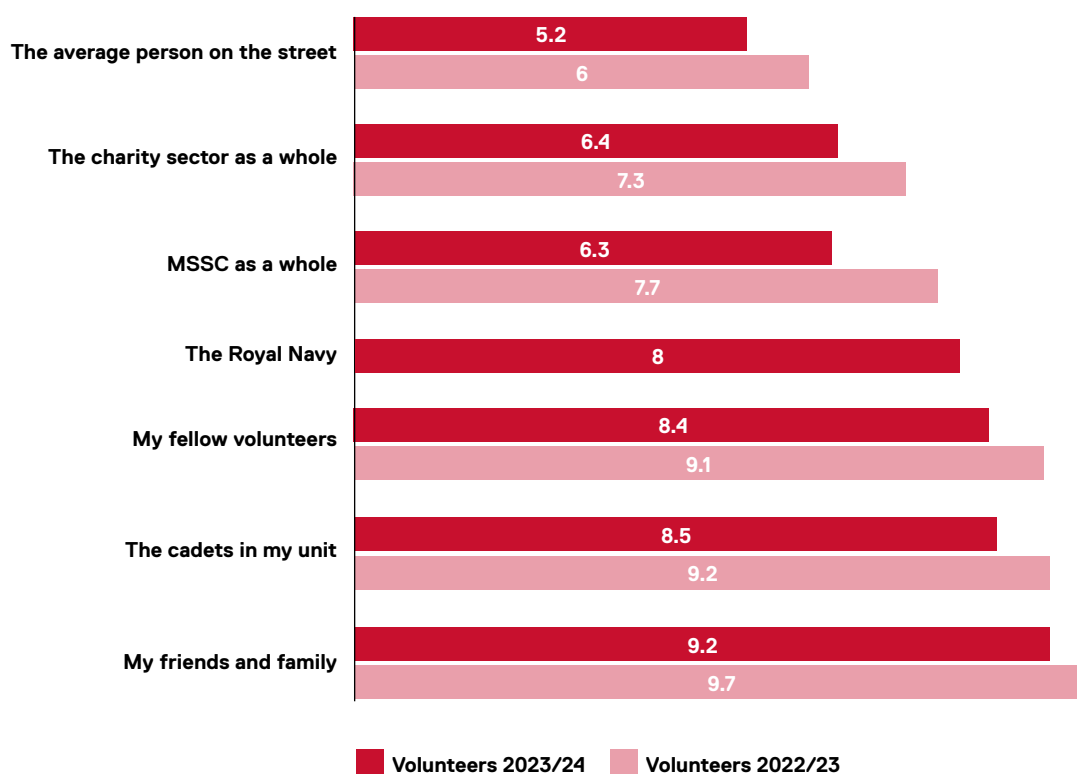
This has become an entrenched theme across multiple years of impact surveys, showing clear and sustained trust among adults and units, and among young people as a whole – where trust in others at Sea Cadets is meaningfully higher than their trust in teachers.

## Parents' and carers' trust (10-point scale)



Parents' and carers' level of trust in Sea Cadets remains very high, and in line with previous years. This strongly suggests that parents and carers are likely to trust Sea Cadets with their children and follow the advice the organisation gives.

## Volunteers' trust (10-point scale)



Across the board (excluding in the Royal Navy, as this is the first time the question has been asked), levels of trust by volunteers have solidly decreased; however, if we look at the benchmark elements of trust (categories such as their "friends and family" or "the average person on the street", that are not affected by their experiences of Sea Cadets), it appears there is a disproportionate decline in trust relating to Sea Cadets. Most significantly, trust in MSSC as a whole fell by 18% (compared to 12 or 13% for the charity sector as a whole or the average person on the street). This suggests there has been an overall and meaningful decline in the levels of trust volunteers hold in the organisation (although it remains generally positive). Given the level of change forced by the financial restrictions in place and being considered at the time of the 23/24 survey, this is perhaps unsurprising.



## 8.2 OVERALL SATISFACTION

‘Meeting new people and having fun.’

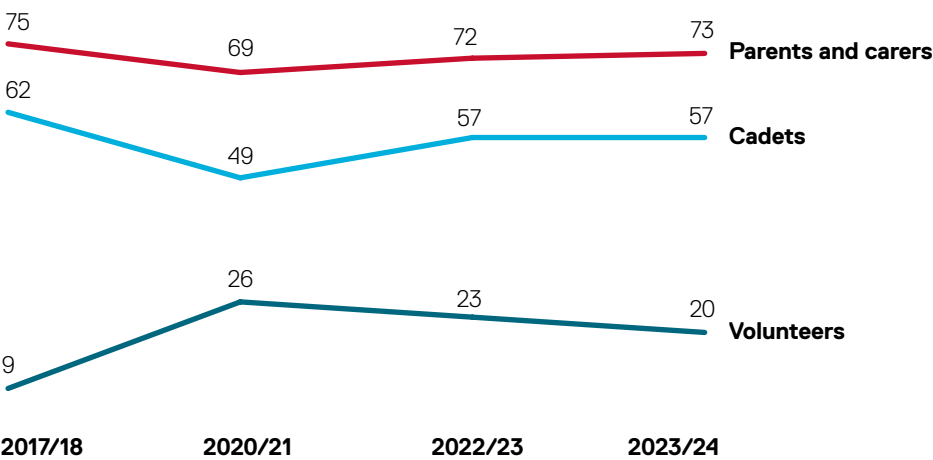
**Cadet Conner, aged 14, from South West Area, answering what is best about Sea Cadets**

Net promoter score (NPS) is the core measure we use to indicate satisfaction. This score quantifies how likely someone is to become an active champion of an activity or product. It is also seen as a strong way of defining overall satisfaction. It splits users into three categories:

- ‘Detractors’, who are likely to have had a negative experience and discuss this experience.
- ‘Passives’, who had a broadly okay experience.
- ‘Promoters’, who had a highly positive experience and are likely to tell others.

Based on this, a score between -100 and +100 is produced.

### Net promoter score (-100 – +100)



For 23/24 cadet satisfaction was static. Whilst the cadet score hasn't quite recovered to its peak pre-pandemic high of +62, at +57 it is still a high score and suggests young people generally have a good experience at Sea Cadets. At the same time, parents and carers have shown a small increase on the 22/23 survey, solidifying the trend of slow but steady improvement (from an already very strong base) since 20/21.

Overall, volunteer satisfaction figures fell slightly from 22/23. It was hard to tell if this was statistically significant, with the results from the 23/24 survey confirming a downward trend in overall satisfaction since 20/21. However, it is still important to put this in historical context. In 2017 (the first time this question was asked), volunteers had a net promoter score of just +9. This shows that despite the understandable recent fall, given the financial stresses of late, there has still been a substantial gain in volunteer satisfaction since 2017, in terms of the overall positive net promoter score.

## 8.3 SATISFACTION DIFFERENCES BY POPULATION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interestingly, if we look at specific communities some show a marked difference in satisfaction to others.

	Junior Cadets	Royal Marines Cadets	Sea Cadets
NPS	+77 (up 6ppts)	+36 <sup>24</sup>	+52 <sup>25</sup>

In line with prior years, Junior Sea Cadets showed a significantly higher positive experience than other groups, partly due to a very low number of detractors (only 4% of juniors). The results were previously extremely strong but have shown a substantial six percentage point (ppts) increase in the past year. While still overwhelmingly positive, the significant difference between Royal Marines Cadets and Sea Cadets is interesting, and predominantly caused by the lower rate of 'promoters'.

## LGBTQ+, DISABLED & NEURODIVERGENT, AND ASIAN SEA CADETS

In previous years LGBTQ+, Disabled & Neurodivergent, & Asian Sea Cadets showed lower rates of satisfaction than their peers. However, this has substantially narrowed in the 23/24 survey:

- Disabled and neurodivergent cadets have a net promoter score of +54 (up 6ppts) compared to their peers at +58, which while leaving a slight gap between the two, does show a significant narrowing.
- Interestingly, despite the significant overrepresentation of those reporting autistic conditions among Sea Cadets in comparison to the general population, autistic cadets reported a lower level of satisfaction than their peers (both disabled/neurodivergent and otherwise), with an average NPS of +50 (although it should be stressed this is still a positive result).
- LGBTQ+ cadets had a net promoter score of +45 (up 6ppts), compared to +47 for other cadets of the same age.<sup>26</sup> This is a sufficiently low margin that the difference between the two can no longer be seen as statistically significant.
- Asian cadets<sup>27</sup> showed a NPS of +53 (up 4ppts), compared to an average of +57, showing significant narrowing of the difference to that in the 22/23 survey.

Given the focus during this period on increased equity, diversity and inclusion work these are very promising results.

## DISABLED & NEURODIVERGENT VOLUNTEERS

The 22/23 survey noted both Disabled and Neurodivergent volunteers also showed lower levels of satisfaction and, unfortunately, there are fewer clear signs of improvement here.

Disabled and neurodivergent volunteers reported a NPS of +10 (up 1ppt), too marginal an increase on the 22/23 survey to be significant. Technically speaking, the difference between them and their peers narrowed, but only due to the overall decline in satisfaction of volunteers as a whole.

## LGBTQ+ VOLUNTEERS

LGBTQ+ volunteers had lower levels of satisfaction in the 22/23 survey and, unfortunately, this decline has continued and accelerated in the 23/24 survey, currently standing at -8 (down 12ppts). This is by far the most significant decline in the Sea Cadets Impact Survey. Set against the broadly positive results around inclusion elsewhere, it suggests this is an area in need of additional work – both within the organisation to enhance its work with these communities, and to better identify opportunities for change.



# 9. Sea Cadets Portal

The Sea Cadets Portal aims to empower cadets by giving direct access to relevant information and enabling them to engage more closely with the amazing opportunities Sea Cadets offers.

The 23/24 Impact Survey found links between increased satisfaction with the Sea Cadets Portal and increased satisfaction with the overall cadet experience. It also found that disadvantaged cadets are more likely to recommend and use the portal than their socio-economically advantaged peers.

## 9.1 PORTAL SATISFACTION

Overall satisfaction with the portal remains low, however, at NPS -8 (down 4.5ppts). This is particularly concerning as this ends the prior trend of improving satisfaction results (from -14 in 20/21 to +3.5 in 22/23). It is, however, still a material improvement on the 20/21 survey, just after launch of the portal.

In order to better understand the cause of these entrenched poor results we engaged in a qualitative deep dive looking at what those who like the portal (promoters) tended to highlight, and then what those who disliked the portal (detractors) tended to stress.

## 9.2 BEST THING ABOUT THE PORTAL

The main positive around the portal was in relation to navigation. Almost half of cadets (45%) felt the best thing about the portal is being able to see and find courses easily – often related to courses they were not told about by their unit. Cadets also reported appreciating being able to track their progression against the Cadet Training Programme – helping them to identify what activities need to be completed in order to achieve a promotion.

Best thing about the Sea Cadets Portal	Coded responses (264)
Seeing/finding a variety of courses / qualifications / activities / competitions / events	45% (140)
Progression – seeing what's needed to 'rank up' / reflecting and tracking current general progress	26% (80)
Updates you on local events, sea cadet-related news etc. / general updating	6% (17)
Easy/simple to use	6% (17)
Lots of useful information on your course bookings etc.	5% (16)
Quizzes/resources (for revision etc.)	3% (10)
Connecting with other cadets/seeing what friends are signed up to	3% (9)
Provides experiences /skills (speaking more so about how the portal facilitates this)	2% (6)
Make your own character / avatar	1% (4)
Help in booking and payment	1% (4)
Can see things in one place	1% (3)
Seeing friends' improvement	1% (3)



## 9.3 WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE TO THE PORTAL?

Coded responses	Proportion of total response
Make portal more accessible / user-friendly / less confusing / easier to use	16% (53)
Better layout / better interface / better navigation	14% (46)
Make it quicker / improve loading time	12% (40)
Show courses clearly / make sign-up easier	10% (33)
Make the portal an app	7% (25)

The overview table above shows that 42% of responses were based around wanting improvement to the usability of the portal, whether that be in its user-friendliness and ease of use; navigation and layout; or speed of loading time – with mention of all three coded responses given by some respondents.

10% of responses were based around making sign-up/booking easier and wanting improvement in showing courses more clearly – often claiming courses were advertised without full detail or clear instruction around who could attend.

The fifth highest requested improvement was making the portal an app and shifting away from the website platform that is currently used. This coded response was mostly given in isolation but was sometimes framed by an indication that cadets believed making the portal into an app would improve loading time, navigation and user-friendliness.

## 9.4 PRACTICAL AND SPECIFIC IMPROVEMENTS THAT CADETS WOULD LIKE TO SEE TO THE PORTAL

This section outlines the most popular themes that cadets mentioned when asked what improvements they would like to see to the portal, illustrated by quotes that flesh out specific and practical improvements they suggested.

### MAKING THE PORTAL MORE USER-FRIENDLY

Generally, cadets did not expand when stating that they wanted the portal to be more user-friendly and easier to use, for example:

“General improvements in service as well as being more user friendly, I’ve seen many cadets that struggle to use it.”

But some cadets did outline some tangible improvements to make the portal more user-friendly and easier to use without explicitly stating so, particularly around adding filters to make booking easier and show courses more clearly:

“A filter for courses based on where you are from (i.e. District, Area and National).”

“Easier to use course booking. Courses near me shown as soon as I open it, as I rarely go on courses anymore because I hate booking it through the portal.”

“The changes I would like to see would be an easier way to see and book on courses, especially being able to see what courses you are able to book on (like knowing if its open to your area or district etc.).”

### IMPROVING THE NAVIGATION AND LAYOUT OF THE PORTAL:

Generally, cadets would state without expansion that the portal’s layout and subsequent navigation needed improvement, often citing it made it hard and frustrating to use. There were some specific and more detailed responses:

“Less clunky. To get to one aspect of the site you have to navigate through possibly three other pages. A good homepage would have accessibility to 80% of the site one web page away from the homepage. Also, a website map so we don't have to scour every button and every page for a single feature.”

“How it works. It's awful on mobile devices. I can't book onto courses and I can't see my qualifications!”

“Being able to have a clearer home screen e.g. being able to see what courses are available for your age group and your qualifications in almost like a spond<sup>28</sup> format.”

“Easier layout to find courses that are available in your area. I keep getting courses for the Manchester and other northern regions, yet I'm in London Southern District. There are never any courses in my area that I can find on the portal.”

#### **IMPROVING SPEED AND LOADING TIME / ‘MAKE THE PORTAL AN APP’:**

Generally, cadets who expressed that loading time and general speed of navigating the portal needed to be improved would do so without expanding on these issues, or as part of a larger answer of unrelated improvements.

This was the same case for ‘making the portal an app’, where this would sometimes be mentioned with the implication that it would make the portal quicker and easier to navigate, or would make the portal work better on something like a mobile device.

#### **OTHERS MENTIONED IMPROVEMENTS OUTSIDE OF THE MOST POPULAR THEMES:**

“The ability to see when your CO has recognised your interest in a course. Access to packing lists and joining information from the main pages of courses. A way to filter courses by district and/or a way to get in touch with a member of staff in another district to contact them about courses, as my CO has previously said he can't book me on a course because it is in another district.”

“Be able to pin more than one message/notification on your profile. E.g. being able to pin that you have been accepted to two or more courses.”

“It would be cool if I could see who was on a course that I am doing, like a list of the cadets and staff.”

“Being more specific with showing what courses certain areas can book on, showing just area courses you can book on or even national ones.”

“Clearer tracking of progress towards promotions, and modules, so you can see what you need to achieve for the next promotion and what you have achieved. I would recommend putting this on the profile page in a list with ticks once a cadet has achieved their module, and a section saying 'next module' or words to that effect.”

“Keep a section for uniform like new kit or where to sew badges. Just a guide for uniform and also link the cadet shop to the portal as well. I'd also suggest a section where it tells you what you have completed in the entire syllabus. An example of this is that if you're a first class, you'll only know what you've done to get ordinary but a section to know what you've done to get able cadet would be nice. To include more variety in the avatar selection such as hair, colour of skin, etc. Finally, to add more language options because English is not fun to try and read and is a bit difficult for some cadets maybe.”

“An ‘I forgot my cadet number, please help me’ button. Along with any buttons for additional log in requirements. I've somehow managed to forget/lose my cadet number or password around five times now. I know it's probably my fault, but I can't help but wonder if there could be an easier way to get it back other than going to staff of course. Other than that, some server improvements could help.”

“Quicker to load. Easier access for parents. Search filters. Different sections for unit, area, district and nationals. Notifications for expressed interests, e.g. I am interested in first aid so when a course becomes available, I would get a notification on my news feed. More statistics about me”.

“Make an app and streamline the course selection process by dividing it by area and district (this could be done by a colour-coding system i.e. Green = Zulu Company, Red = Bravo Company). Ensure that courses whose closing date has passed are removed to prevent confusion and frustration (at the very

least, make it known that they've past their closing date). Make a library that can be accessed by all cadets; this can be divided by branch (Juniors, Sea Cadets and Royal Marines Cadets). Create a unit community page where cadets can receive updates from their unit's chain of command, [supporting] cadets who do not have reliable access to information coming from their units (i.e. parents not checking e-mails, no access to social media platforms like facebook due to safeguarding issues, etc). Produce a video tutorial for both new cadets and parents/guardians on how to use the Sea Cadets Portal, so as to reduce frustration and confusion.”

What, if any, changes would you like to see to the Sea Cadets Portal?	Coded responses (230)
Make portal more accessible / user-friendly / less confusing / easier to use	16% (53)
Better layout / better interface / better navigation	14% (46)
Make it quicker / improve loading time	12% (40)
Show courses more clearly / make sign-up easier	10% (33)
Make the portal an app	7% (25)
See courses that are near you / haven't took part in yet / upcoming courses	6% (20)
Make less glitchy and laggy / less prone to crashing	6% (19)
More information / more detail on courses	5% (18)
Show qualifications / badges / ranks correctly (general accuracy of information too)	4% (12)
Make requests to senior leadership quicker / be able to see whether CO has recognised interest / make requests to senior district level people	3% (11)
Add instructions for use / be shown how to use portal	3% (9)
Addition of a variety of features	2% (8)
Fewer irrelevant notifications	2% (7)
More variety of courses	2% (7)
Easier searching abilities/filters	2% (6)
Expand notification capabilities / be able to clear notifications	1% (5)
Clearer tracking of progress	1% (4)
Give the option to use it rather than being the only platform / go back to old system	1% (4)
Add section to manage payments / improve payment process	1% (4)
More features for avatar	1% (2)
List of all available courses	1% (2)
One portal for parents and young people to use	0.3% (1)
Time limit for updates staying on feed	0.3% (1)
More options for why you can't attend something	0.3% (1)
More Royal Marines Cadets representation	0.3% (1)



## 9.5 PORTAL REGISTRATIONS

There has been healthy growth in the number of cadets using the Sea Cadets Portal. Comparing January 2022 and December 2023, the proportion of sea cadets registered on the portal increased from 39% to 59%. This clearly demonstrates a steady and sustained growth in registrations.

## 9.6 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS FOR THE PORTAL

The current position of the Sea Cadets Portal is complex.

Often the most significant (and expensive) stage in successful digital transformation is driving adoption of a tool. In this the portal has been very effective, with particularly significant growth between the beginning of 2022 and late 2023. This suggests there is strong demand and enthusiasm for this type of tool and what it provides, and there is a user base already engaged with it that continues to be convinced of the need for platform. However, at the same time these users do not feel the portal is delivering all of the experience they need.

Coupled with the findings from the survey, this report also interviewed relevant staff stakeholders to help understand potential causes driving some of the issues. Fundamentally, whilst the functionality and content are in line with need, the Sea Cadets Portal doesn't seem to be delivering the experience that cadets expect. For most cadets, the general issues identified are ones of usability – whether that is successfully navigating the system, or dealing with slow loading times.

Interestingly, these concerns are very much about the core operation (e.g. ability to effectively navigate it) as opposed to a focus on frustration that it cannot deliver on its purpose or a fundamental wish for features it wasn't designed for.

Together, this suggests there is need for a greater degree of change to improve the experiences of portal users beyond slow and continuous improvement of business as usual.

Resources permitting, there is a clear case for further investigation into how to enhance the portal's practices, particularly more engagement with users on co-production/user-centred design. The aim should be to build on the solid foundation of a large existing user group in order to create a widely used tool that also provides a highly positive experience.



# Appendix 1: Methodology

This report draws primarily from three surveys conducted in winter 2023/24. We distributed surveys to all cadets as well as the cadets' primary contact (for parents/carers) and volunteers.

We distributed surveys by email with regular reminders. People could choose to complete it in their own time, although in some cases we also know people completed it as part of regulated activity.

## A 1.1 SURVEY DESIGN

We based the design on previous iterations of our impact survey, with edits made based on feedback from the previous (22/23) survey.

## A 1.2 ADDITIONAL DATA SOURCES

Alongside the three impact survey findings we have also analysed administrative data (e.g. from the Westminster database) and drawn on focus groups and spot interviews conducted by the Policy and Insight team.

## A 1.3 STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

When statistical significance is referred to, this relates to a test we conducted on the differences between the 20/21 and 22/23 Impact Reports. A statistically significant difference means we have a 95% or higher confidence that the difference recorded between the two surveys is true and not due to randomness.

## A 1.4 DISTRIBUTION METHOD AND RESPONSE RATES

We distributed all three surveys by email and sent regular reminders to respondents. As the sample was self-selecting rather than random it does need to be recognised there is some bias in that more engaged stakeholders were more likely to respond. Having said that, the broadly representative nature of the sample demographics (when compared with our organisation-wide administrative data) means this isn't a substantial concern.

	Responses <sup>29</sup>	Population	Confidence interval <sup>30</sup> (2024 results)
Cadets	2,324	14,095	95/1.859* 99/2.45
Volunteers	1,898	8,647	95/1.99 99/2.62
Parents and carers	2,184	10,067 <sup>31</sup>	95/1.859* 99/2.44

All three surveys showed a highly positive confidence interval which, coupled with the broadly representative nature of the sample demographics, means MSSC can have confidence in the validity of the results. This is especially the case for many of the impact findings where feedback from cadets, volunteers and parents/carers is broadly consistent. This shows not only a commonality in their views as to the impact of the specific outcome, but it's a way to check/validate the data against the perceptions of the other groups.

There is a trend of highly positive confidence intervals of the last three iterations of the survey, meaning we can be increasingly confident reporting on trends.

## A 1.5 VALIDATED SCALES

### NET PROMOTER SCORE

The core measure we use as an indicator of satisfaction is the net promoter score (NPS). This score quantifies how likely someone is to become an active champion of an activity or product, which is also seen as a strong way of defining overall satisfaction. Users were asked a single question:

*On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all likely and 10 extremely likely, how likely is it that you would recommend Sea Cadets/volunteering at Sea Cadets to a friend/friend or colleague (cadets, parents/carers, and volunteers)?*

It splits users into three categories:

- Detractors who are likely to have had a negative experience and discuss this experience (score of 0-6)
- Passives who have had a broadly okay experience but won't share their experience with others (score of 7-8)
- Promoters who have had a highly positive experience and are likely to tell others (score of 9-10).

The percentage of each group is calculated based on the total number of responses, then the percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters to give an overall net promoter score between -100 and +100.

For example, if 70% of a group reported they were promoters, 10% were passive and 20% were detractors, the final NPS score would be  $70 - 20 = +50$ .

This model gives a confident read of overall levels of satisfaction. Also, the higher the score, the more likely people are to recommend their experience to others, helping to drive recruitment/growth.

### ONS WELLBEING QUESTIONS

These are a set of questions on a 10-point scale developed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), each of which measures a different element of wellbeing (satisfaction, happiness or anxiety, for example):

*For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".*

- *How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?*
- *To what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?*
- *How happy did you feel yesterday?*

*On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?*

While the survey asked these questions, we couldn't find any general trends around the impact of Sea Cadets on wellbeing. This is in part as we saw the ebbs and flows expected in a young person growing up (for example, young girls in particular often see a decline in wellbeing in their teens). This made it impractical

to identify what causes changes. As such we haven't reported on this part of the assessment discussions in detail in this report.

### CHARITY COMMISSION TRUST SCALE

The question below was developed for the Charity Commission's regular trust in charities report:

*On a scale of 0-10, where 10 means you trust them completely and 0 means you don't trust them at all, how much trust and confidence do you have in the following?*

### INDICES OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

Indices of multiple deprivation is a tool the UK government developed to assess relative socio-economic disadvantage between different population groups in the UK. It uses postcodes to tie people to an overall score between one and 10, as what percentile of socio-economic deprivation they are compared to the rest of the UK.

## A 1.6 REDUCING ANALYTICAL BIAS

We developed this report in-house. As such, we recognise that there is some inherent potential bias as our researchers are themselves employees of MSSC.

Andrew Weston (Head of Policy and Insight) oversaw the analysis. He has a background in independent charity evaluation and therefore experience of how to both engage analysis and present data in a way that minimises bias.

The researchers/authors work in our Policy and Insight Team, which isn't directly involved in delivering any frontline services, reducing any personal investment in positive results.

The National Support Centre's Senior Management Team gave broad autonomy in setting the wording and structure of the survey, reducing any potential for bias.

Where possible, we based questions either on wording provided by prior independent analysis, for example the consultancy and think tank New Philanthropy Capital's work, or pre-existing validated scales, reducing any potential bias in wording.





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# Endnotes

1. The Grant-In-Aid is an unrestricted grant provided by the Royal Navy which makes up the largest source of funds for MSSC.
2. We surveyed 2,569 people, but this figure only includes 2,334 due to some postcodes being unidentifiable. For this section and the bottom 20% household income, we use indices of multiple deprivation, which is a reliable government indicator of socio-economic status.
3. The general population benchmark is slightly different to the 20/21 Impact Report due to using government rather than Experian Mosaic data. Overall, the cadet and parent results remain comparable to 20/21 despite the shift in data used.
4. A term coined by the Local Trust community funder to describe areas suffering from deprivation and lacking social infrastructure. The term was then adopted by the UK government's 'Levelling Up' initiative to support 'left behind' areas. Earlier Sea Cadets Impact Reports (prior to 22/23) used the Local Trust's 2019 report for comparison data; as with 2022/23, this report uses more up to date but comparable information from the UK government's list of areas in need of priority levelling up support.
5. Drawn from government data based on the Levelling Up Fund round two, which gave three levels of priority category (highest to lowest, 1-3) which are currently 'left behind' (excluding Northern Ireland). We had 1,822 eligible responses, where we could match the postcode to a Local Authority.
6. Based on postcode data provided to us from the National Youth Agency in July 2023. This contained 26,861 eligible units.
7. Independent school headcount 21-22 – Create your own tables, Table Tool – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK ([explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)).
8. 2020, UK figure, defined as children under 18 years old not living with their parents – estimated percentage of children aged under 18 by family type, UK, 2005 to 2020 – Office for National Statistics ([ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk)) (82,000 looked-after children).
9. Family Resources Survey 2020-21 – Family Resources Survey: financial year 20/21 – GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)).
10. In normal circumstances we would also compare with figures taken from Sea Cadets and volunteers as a whole (as opposed to just those who responded to the survey). This wasn't possible this year due to a change in how we report on ethnicity after the data was collected. However, it will be possible in future years. Based on benchmarking where the comparable statistics are available, we know the survey respondents were broadly representative of the ethnicities of cadets as a whole.
11. Drawing from the 2021 UK Census.
12. In line with best practice in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion, MSSC is largely moving away from using aggregated statistics in relation to ethnicity (for example, BAME or BIPOC). This is why we have included more detailed breakdowns than reported in earlier Impact Reports.
13. 2022 report on International religious freedoms: United Kingdom, US Department of State.
14. These figures also broadly aligned with figures reported by parents, further increasing our confidence about the validity of the data.
15. Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))
16. SEN\_2019\_Text.docx.pdf ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))
17. Unfortunately, the number of respondents was too small to do detailed analysis on satisfaction or perceived impact.
18. Male and female are the only two options available to be recorded in Westminster.
19. The total number of responses for young people who didn't identify as male or female is too small for quantitative analysis. However, examination of the qualitative questions suggests their experiences are broadly in line with the cadet population as a whole.
20. We only asked cadets aged 12+ this question.
21. Responses of 'don't know' have been excluded from the count.
22. Focus groups conducted in Port Talbot, Clacton-on-Sea and Birmingham (all within bottom 20% of neighbourhoods – i.e. relatively disadvantaged areas).
23. (NPC17)\* denotes that the question was an agree/disagree tick box in 2017 rather than a five-point scale.
24. First year separately reported
25. First year separately reported
26. Only cadets aged 12+ about the sexuality question, as such juniors are excluded from the result leading to the lower average score.
27. Asian cadets were assessed as most other racialised communities did not have a sufficient number of responses to calculate their NPS score. The only other racialised minority with sufficient responses were 'mixed' cadets, whose results were in line with cadets as a whole.
28. When this cadet refers to 'spond', we believe this is referring to the Spond App used by Cub Scouts.
29. Most questions could be skipped. As such, the precise number of responses per question varies slightly. However, if a respondent completed the first non-demographic question, they were likely to complete the survey. This is therefore used as the line for what counts as a response.
30. With a target of confidence level of 95 and confidence interval of no more than five (95% of the time can be confident the result is accurate to within five points).
31. This is an estimate based on the average number of parents per child in the UK (1.4).

