STEM Student Preferences for Military and Civilian Work

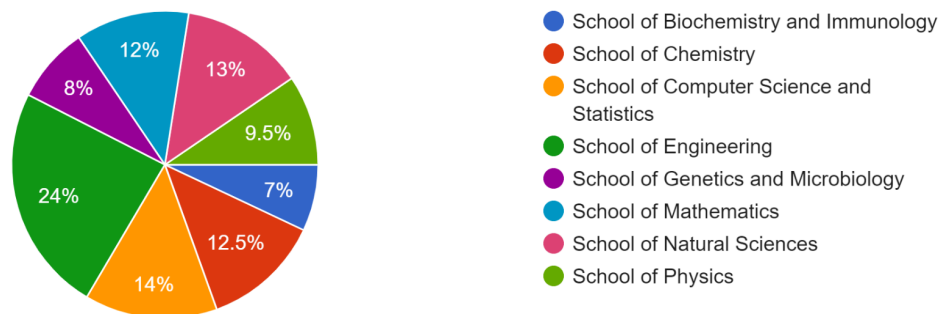## Table of Contents

Introduction

The data consists of responses from STEM students regarding their preferences for military versus civilian work. Here are the key fields in the dataset.

- Which School? - The school of the respondent within the university.
- Student Status - Whether the respondent is an undergraduate, graduate, etc.
- Gender - The gender of the respondent.
- Age - The age range of the respondent.
- Preference for military work - Whether the respondent would consider working in military-related fields.
- Preferred type of work - The respondent's preference between military and civilian work.
- Conditions for accepting military work if civilian work preferred - Various scenarios asking if respondents would accept military work under certain conditions.
- Impact of global events on work preference - How events like the war in Ukraine and the situation in Gaza affect their work preferences.
- Comfort with contributing to U.S arms exports - Comfort level with their work potentially supporting U.S. military activities through Ireland's Shannon Airport.
- Contact by recruiters - Whether they've been approached by recruiters for military or civilian work.
- National budgetary policies - Preferences for policies that could expand civilian employment opportunities.
- Open-ended comments - Any additional comments from respondents.

School

Which School?
200 responses

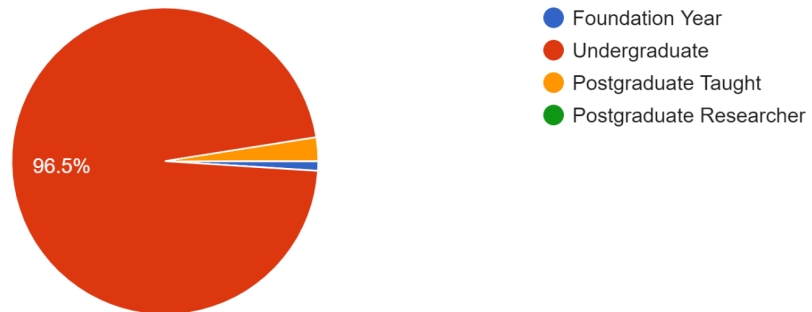- School of Biochemistry and Immunology
- School of Chemistry
- School of Computer Science and Statistics
- School of Engineering
- School of Genetics and Microbiology
- School of Mathematics
- School of Natural Sciences
- School of Physics

Student Status

Student Status

200 responses

- ● Foundation Year
- ● Undergraduate
- ● Postgraduate Taught
- ● Postgraduate Researcher

96.5%

Gender

Gender

200 responses

- ● Female
- ● Male
- ● Non-binary
- ● Prefer not to say

58.5%

35.5%

Age

Age

200 responses

- 18-26
- 26-35
- 35+
- Prefer not to say
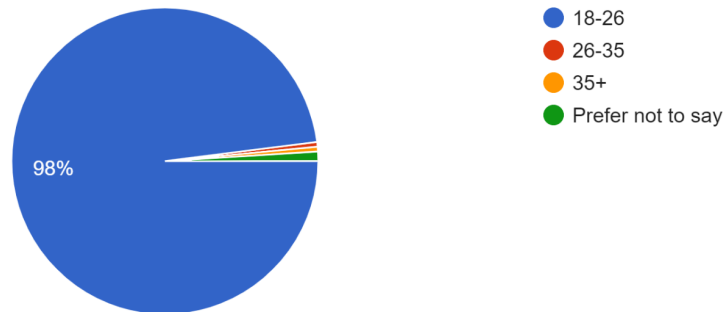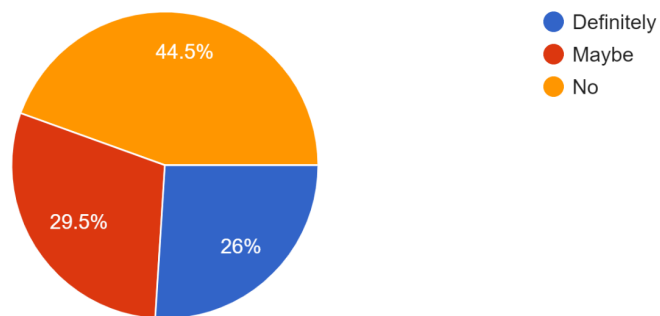
98%
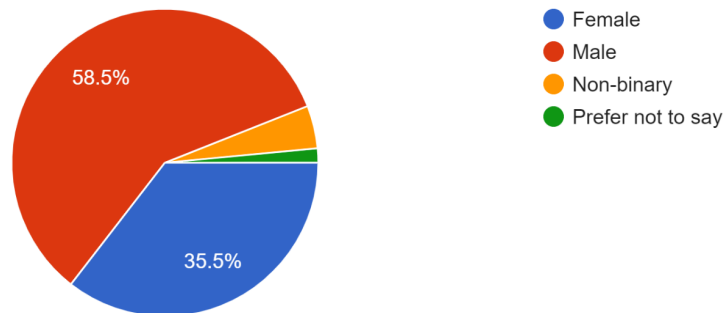
Preference for Military Work

Would you work for defence firms, military-serving laboratories, or engage in activities which directly promoted military research, innovation, or production? i.e. military work

200 responses

- Definitely
- Maybe
- No

44.5%

29.5%

26%

Preferred Type of Work

Assuming military work and civilian work were equally available to you, which type of work would you prefer?

200 responses

- Civilian work
- Military work
- No preference

12.5%

18.5%

69%
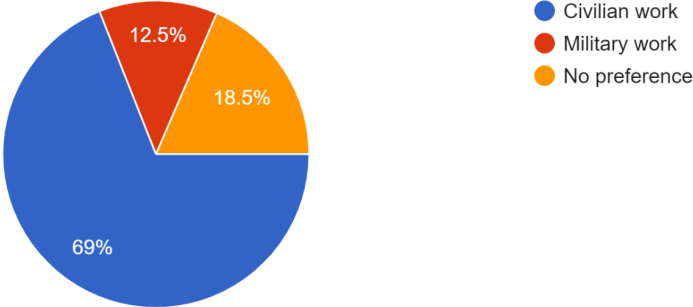
Conditions For Accepting Military Work if Civilian Work Is Preferred

If you preferred civilian work, would you take military work if you were neither able to find nor obtain civilian work?

138 responses

- Definitely
- Maybe
- No

28.3%

52.2%

19.6%

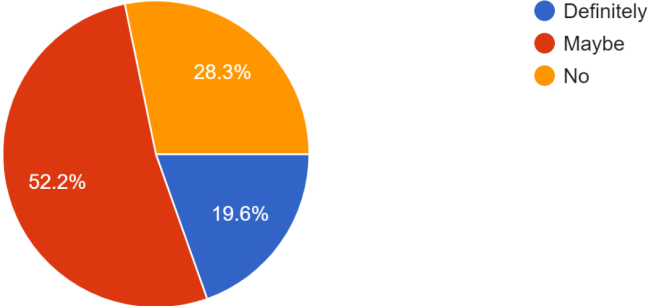If you preferred civilian work, would you take military work if military work paid more?
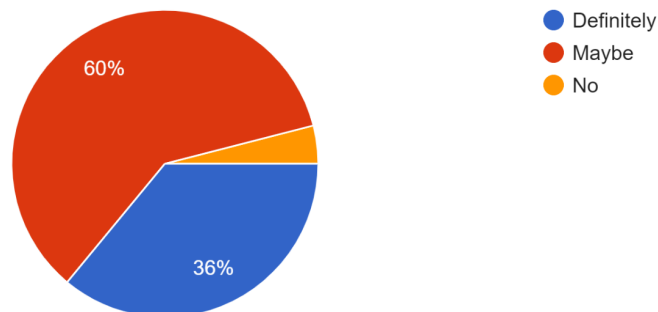
138 responses

- Definitely
- Maybe
- No

52.2%

41.3%
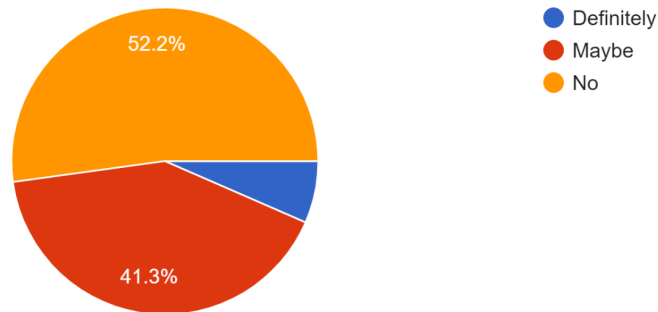
Conditions For Accepting Civilian Work if Military Work Is Preferred

If you preferred military work, would you take civilian work if it paid more?

25 responses

- Definitely
- Maybe
- No

60%

36%

Global Events Affecting Preferences

Has the war in Ukraine affected your preferences for military work?
200 responses
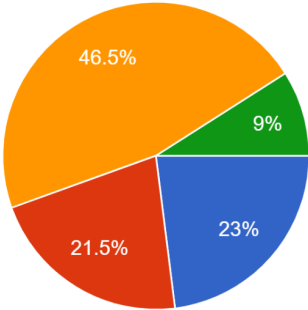
- It has made me less willing to do military work
- It has made me more willing to do military work
- It would make no difference and not affect my preferences
- Unsure

46.5% 9% 23% 21.5%

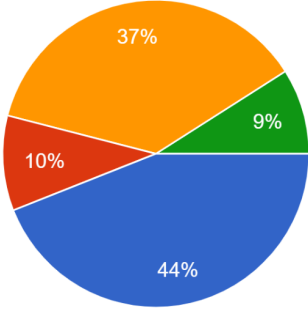## Have the events in Gaza affected your preferences for military work?
200 responses

- It has made me less willing to do military work
- It has made me more willing to do military work
- It would make no difference and not affect my preferences
- Unsure

37% 9% 10% 44%

Shannon Airport

Would you be comfortable being in Irish aviation or a related field if you knew your work was contributing to U.S arms exports and extraordinary renditions through Shannon Airport? *Extraordinary rendition is a euphemism for state-sponsored kidnapping in another jurisdiction and transfer to a third state, such as the U.S. taking people to Guantanamo Bay.*

200 responses

- Definitely
- Maybe
- No
- Prefer not to say

60.5%
19%
19%
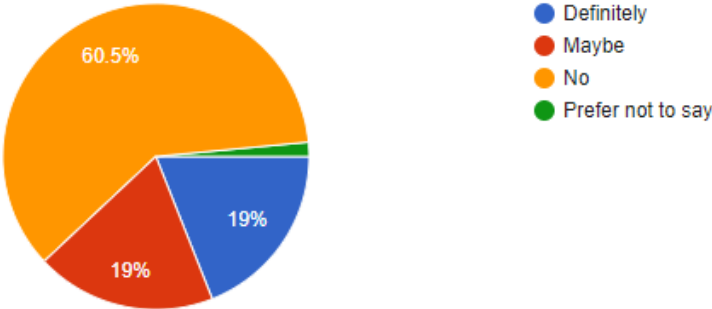
Military and Civilian Recruiters

Have you been approached by a recruiter or other individual about doing military work?
200 responses

- Yes
- No

92%
8%
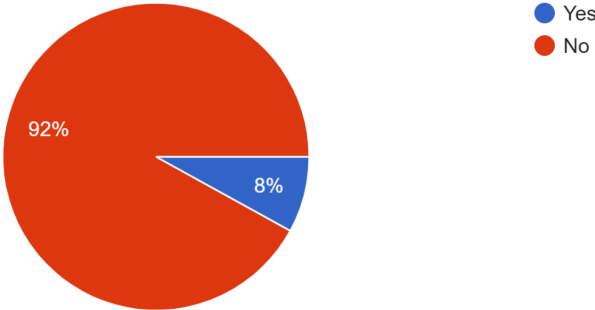
Have you been approached by anyone to work in the civilian or green sector?
200 responses

Yes
No

71%

29%
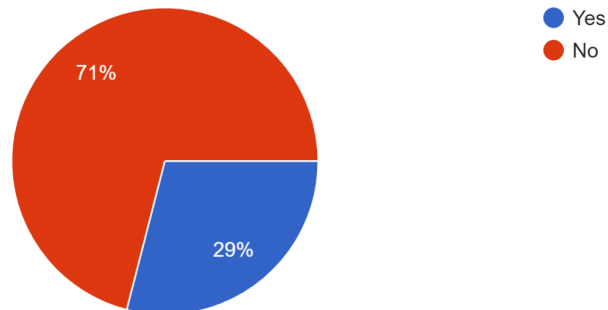
National Budgetary Policies

Would you favour national budgetary policies that would expand the civilian employment opportunities for persons like yourself to get a job?
200 responses

Definitely
Maybe
No

26.5%

7%

66.5%
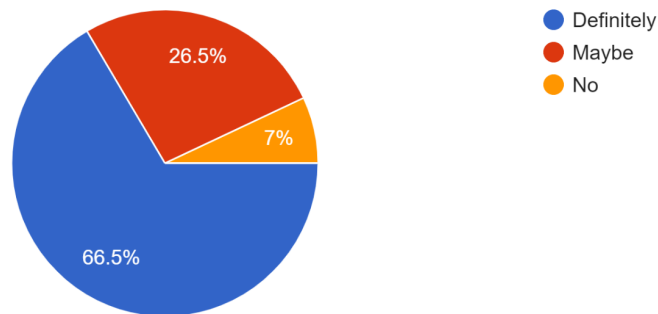
Open-Ended Commentary

"Defence salaries simply pay much higher and have a much higher chance to use my degree for interesting applications"

"I believe in furthering irish development in the military sector as I think we do not do enough when it comes to defence and global security "

"With the abysmal job market and cost of living crisis right now, morality and conscience takes a back seat in front of money."

"FREE PALESTINE"

"Don't know why SU care about this. Maybe actually solve something in Trinity."

"In this case, I mean military work in Ireland as in peacekeeping efforts."

"Not all military research is related to war. They also fund a lot of cancer research, as well as patient rehabilitation after major traumas such as amputation. This can advance medicine for non-military populations"

"Military force is essential to the functioning of any government with active involvement in global trade"

"I literally do not care what field I work in. I study maths and aim to pursue data analytics. This will almost undoubtedly result in me working in the financial sector but if the military were to offer me the same job I would have no qualms."

"It is my sincere personal belief that, as long as overtly hostile authoritarian nations that seek to undermine western democracies are arming themselves, then so must western nations, in order to deter aggression and protect their peace and their civilians. Modern history has taught us as much."

"No, but I don't trust the Irish government to have a back bone. But atleast we are net contributors. Or I would have abandoned this ugly rock."

"The Shannon Airport question was guided and oversimplified to make your own views come across as the right answer and it makes the survey less valid plus it alienated me from completing more surveys"

"The SU is overreaching here the world is unfortunately a more dangerous place weapons development and a strong defence is an insurance policy for anyone wanting to work in space the military is an essential part and I will allow an organisation that supposedly represents me attempt to discourage me"

"Would honestly work where the money is, sometimes government work or public service jobs are not as high a salary and with cost of living being so high, I would work where I could. I would never want my work/research to lead to the death of innocent civilians"

"I implore my fellow STEM students to stop developing technology that is advertised under the guise of scientific applications but will ultimately be bought out by defense companies, (I'm looking at you engineers)"

"being an accessory, e.g. working in Shannon Airport while those flights go is fine ig"

"Down with the military I industrial complex "

"Other engineering students I know (particularly those who are male) don't seem to have many moral issues with this idea but for me personally, I would stay away from this kind of work. I'm graduating this year and about to enter the workforce but I find many companies that are looking for engineers have morally questionable histories. It's much harder to leave a job after finding out the company you're working for is contributing to something morally unjust than taking that extra care to do research about the company's moral practices before even applying. But at the same time it does make finding work in an increasingly unforgiving job market even harder, so idk."

"One of the main reasons I came to Ireland to study engineering is so that I could find a job outside of the military industrial complex. I find it morally reprehensible that, despite Ireland's supposed neutrality, my passion and labour will still being exploited to feed the colonial warmachine."

"Very biased survey... "

"Whoever pays the most is all that matters"

"Military pays well"

"Free Gaza"

"free palestine"

"maybe if Oppenheimer took this survey the world would look a little different "

"Wars & military actions are decided upon through a democratic process. It's the job of engineers to ensure the military is properly equipped to achieve its goals. It's not for individuals to determine which weapons the military gets or how they are used, outside their capacity as a voter."

"Free Palestine"

"These questions are extremely leading"

"The SU misunderstands the defence industry. Not all of it is bombs and guns, currently a lot of research is going into technology that prevents civilian casualties and makes it easier to hold soldiers accountable for war crimes."

"I would happily do military work if I knew for certain it would not end up in the wrong hands."

"I definitely wouldn't say the two recent conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have had an impact on how I feel, other conflicts have happened and many are still happening in other areas of the world. I think the money is an allure for a lot of people going into military based work in particular in engineering, however I myself based on my field of engineering couldn't see myself going down the military route. "

"You have to work to live. I would work for the military if it was necessary to survive. I would rather avoid it if at all possible."

"I would most likely feel too guilty to do military work knowing my work was contributing to taking innocent lives like what is happening in gaza and ukraine currently."

"I will not be using my degree to make bombs for imperialist to murder civilians. I am not Oppenheimer. I am not become death."

"In the beginning I answered that I would take a job to do with the military if it paid more but then I was reminded of Gaza and Ukraine and now do not think that I would."

"I believe that Europe needs to invest more in defence in order to be self reliant and not dependent on the US/NATO. Competely boycotting military research/development with the belief of it promoting peace is completely naive and will only make Europe vulnerable."

"Get out of my job choices with your obviously leading questions. Useless student union bullshit out of touch with STEM students as usual"

"Would essentially take the job that pays the highest if it was not overly stressful or infringing on family/ free time."

"While I personally always avoid conflict and am a 100% against it on a larger scale, the worldwide political tension has been incredibly high on almost every continent. While I don't think Irish education should focus on the military sector, it still shouldn't discourage or restrain people willing to work in it for the sake of Europe's safety."

"As much as I hate US army policies, we need their support (maybe not ireland the most but Eastern and central Europe definitely)"

"At the end of the day the government are the ones deciding what they are doing with the weapons, thats a political issue and will happen whether or not im the person employed. I would

work for an agency if it is the highest paying option for me. These wars will happen regardless, they would just get someone else if i refused"

"I will not work in a military industry that shows support to U.S. imperialism in any way."

"Context is everything. From a geopolitical perspective, most innovation happened in pursuit of gaining an advantage over other geopolitical tribes. Without these paranoid forays into gaining the upper hand, we would not have progressed in communications and technology. Our primitive nature requires an existential threat to advance. "

"If I did military work I would like my work to contribute to the country that I am helping, not to any other partner of that country. Except maybe European countries in general which I would be fine if they shared it amongst themselfs"

"It is nice to oppose military here in Ireland, when your country would certainly be defended by the UK and the US if someone attacked you. Good luck explaining your position to people in Georgia, Ukraine, Israel."

Original Data

[Please consult the original dataset here.](#)

Analysis

The data has consistently shown that a majority of students are opposed to working in what they perceive as unethical fields. From the outset, 44.5% of respondents declared they would not work in the military field, while 69% showed a preference for civilian jobs over military roles. However, the influence of economic pressures is evident: 52.5% admitted they would consider military employment if unable to find civilian work. Despite this, when asked if a higher salary would tempt them to switch to military work from civilian jobs, 52% said they would not switch. This indicates that even with better pay, the military sector remains unattractive, affirming that moral and ethical considerations are significant in shaping the career decisions of STEM students. They prioritize ethical employment over higher earnings.

Of those students who did prefer military work, amounting to 12.5%, a notable 95% stated they might or would switch to civilian work if it offered better pay, reinforcing the view that the appeal of military work is largely due to financial reasons. This is especially relevant considering Ireland's ongoing cost-of-living and housing crises. This economic context was underscored again when 66.5% of respondents expressed a desire for national policies that expand civilian employment opportunities for STEM graduates.

Ethical concerns were further highlighted in responses to other questions: 44.5% of the students felt that the war in Gaza made them less inclined to engage in military work, and 60.5% were opposed to working in operations at Shannon Airport that support U.S. arms exports and extraordinary renditions. This shows a strong preference among STEM students for careers that align with their ethical standards.