

# Birmingham Design Annual Survey 2021

---

Results compiled Apr—Jul 2021



# Introduction

2020 saw our first survey of the creative industry in the West Midlands. Following its success and positive reception we've returned for 2021.

A big thank you if you took part, your answers will help to reflect and shape the future of the design industry in the region.

We've listened to feedback and amended questions where necessary – this has had an impact on some results but comparisons can still be made to last year's survey. You will see some additional questions this year – including the impact COVID-19 has had on our industry.

## Notes on the survey and results

Our goal, as always, is to be able to show a true snapshot of our industry. However, we are presenting these results with the caveat that due to our current reach we understand they may not be entirely representative. We are confident that they are valuable in showing a picture of those working in design in the West Midlands.

With this being our second year we can start to see trends amongst our results. We have included our own highlights of the statistics at the beginning of each section.

### Numbers of respondents

A total of 190 people filled out the survey, 29 of whom were students. For certain questions where we have cross-referenced data, the sample size is such that a meaningful representation has not been possible.

### Question setting

Questions have been chosen to provide a workable set of data that is valuable to those working both in and with the creative industry in the West Midlands. For some terminology and categories we have referred to guidelines from the ONS and UK Government Census.



# Survey results



# About you – section highlights

## Gender

Overall 5% more women than men took part in the survey. At a professional level this swings slightly in the opposite direction to 3% more men. 80% of students surveyed identified as female. In 2020 we saw 13% more men than women taking part in the survey and 70% of students identifying as female.

## Age

We are still a relatively young bunch, with 64% of respondents being under 35. This is a small increase (4%) on 2020.

## Ethnicity

We have seen a modest decrease from 2020 but our respondents are still majority white by a significant amount (81%). This could be due to survey audience reach but we can't assume that this is not a true representation of the industry.

We still have a way to go to be a true reflection of the diverse communities of the West Midlands.

## Health

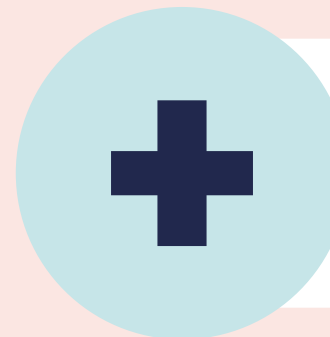
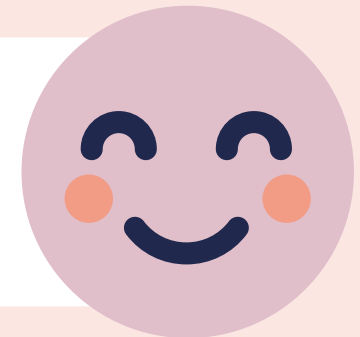
22% of respondents reported having a condition or illness that could affect their ability to work, this is a minor increase of 5% on 2020.

We have chosen to not disclose results but a significant number of respondents cited anxiety and/or depression as a condition – showing that this is a concern the industry should look to understand and support.



**5% MORE** respondents who identify as female took part in the survey

**Almost two-thirds** of people surveyed are **under 35**

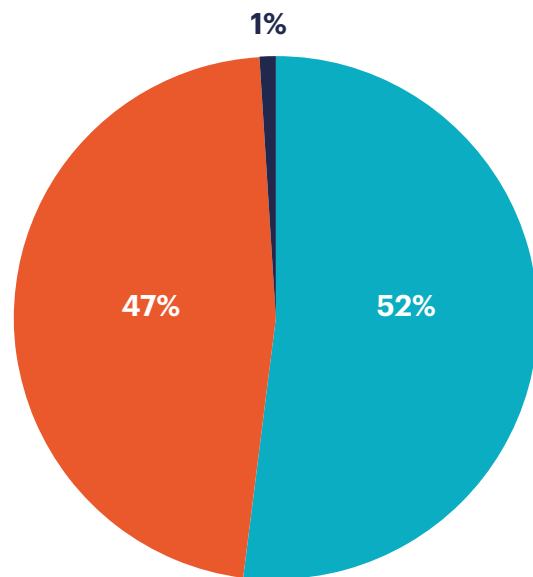


**22%** of respondents reported having a condition or illness that could affect work

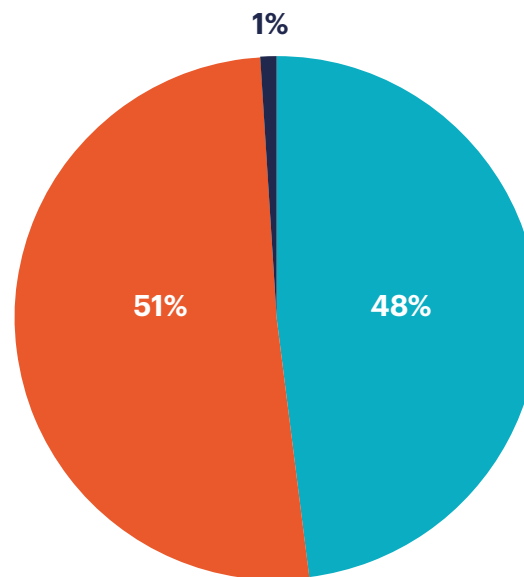
# Gender

## What gender do you identify as?

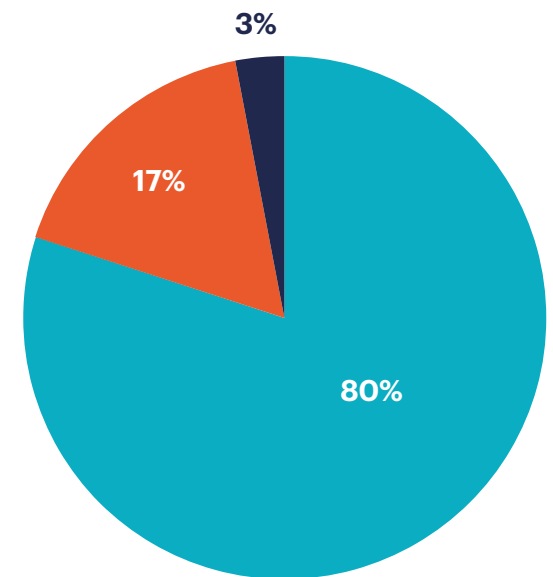
All respondents



All



Excluding students



Students only

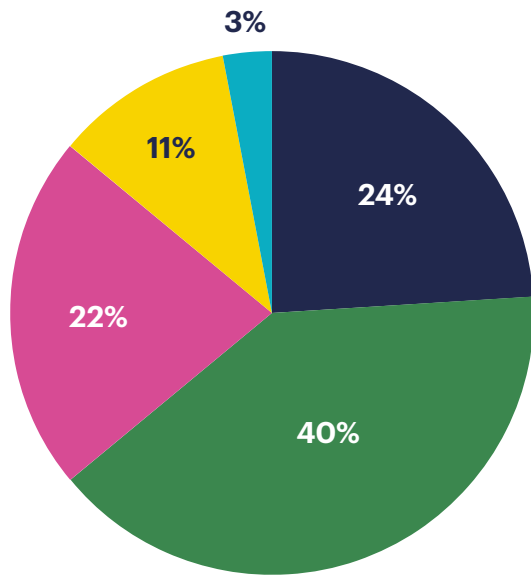


*In addition to the option to not disclose their gender, this question included the opportunity for respondents to add their own gender description.*

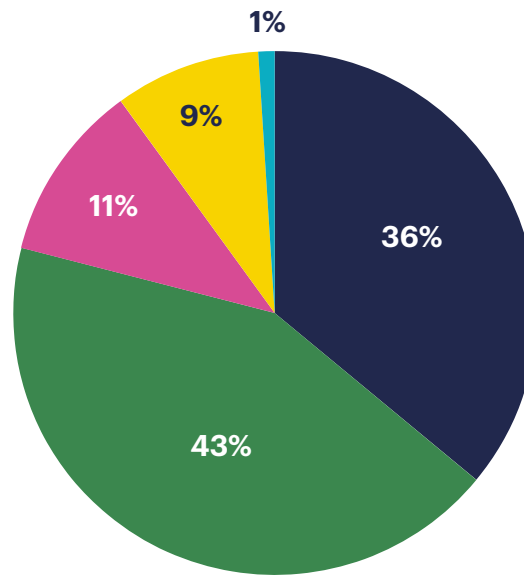
# Age

## How old are you?

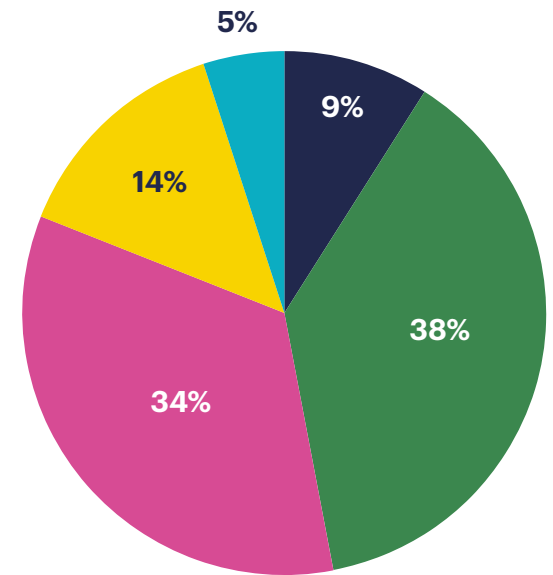
All respondents



All



Identify as female



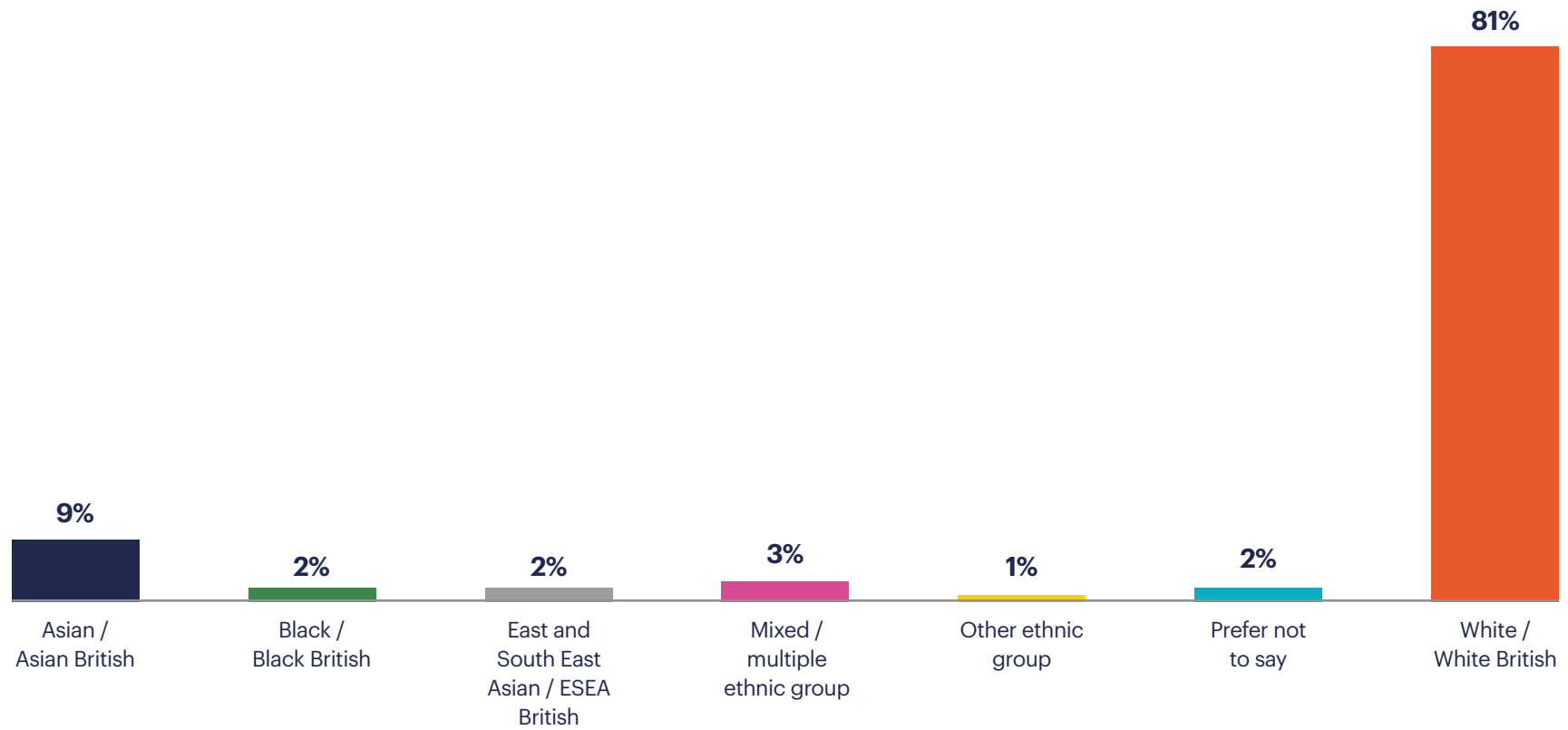
Identify as male



# Ethnicity

## What is your ethnicity?

All respondents

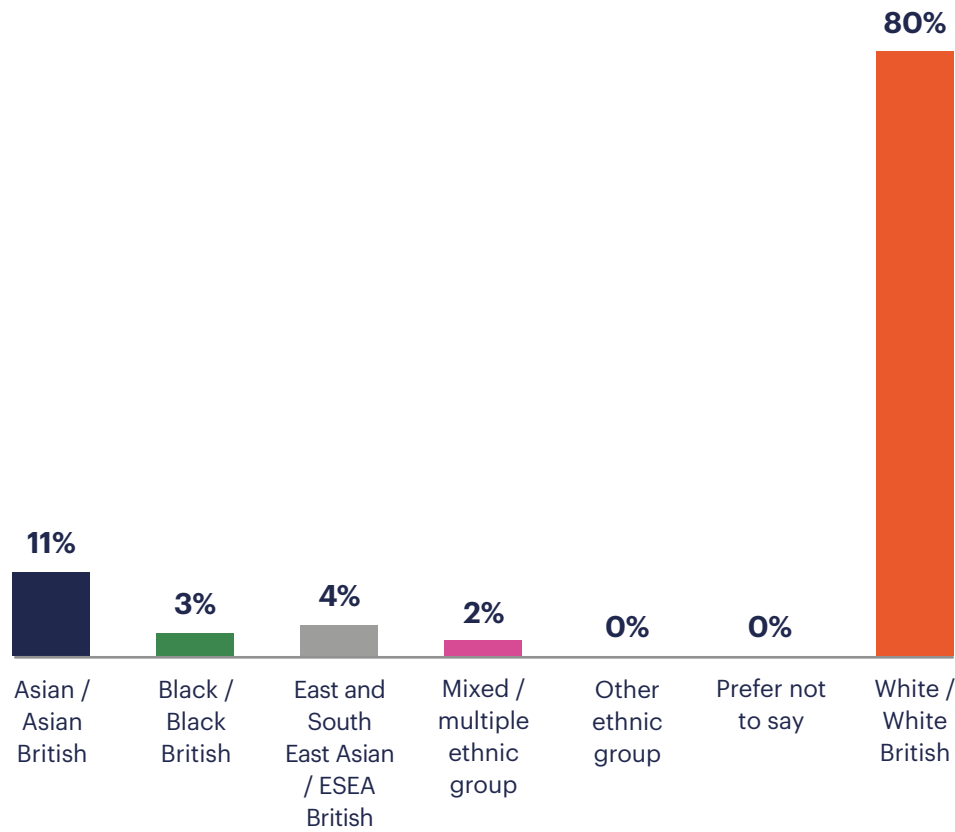


# Ethnicity

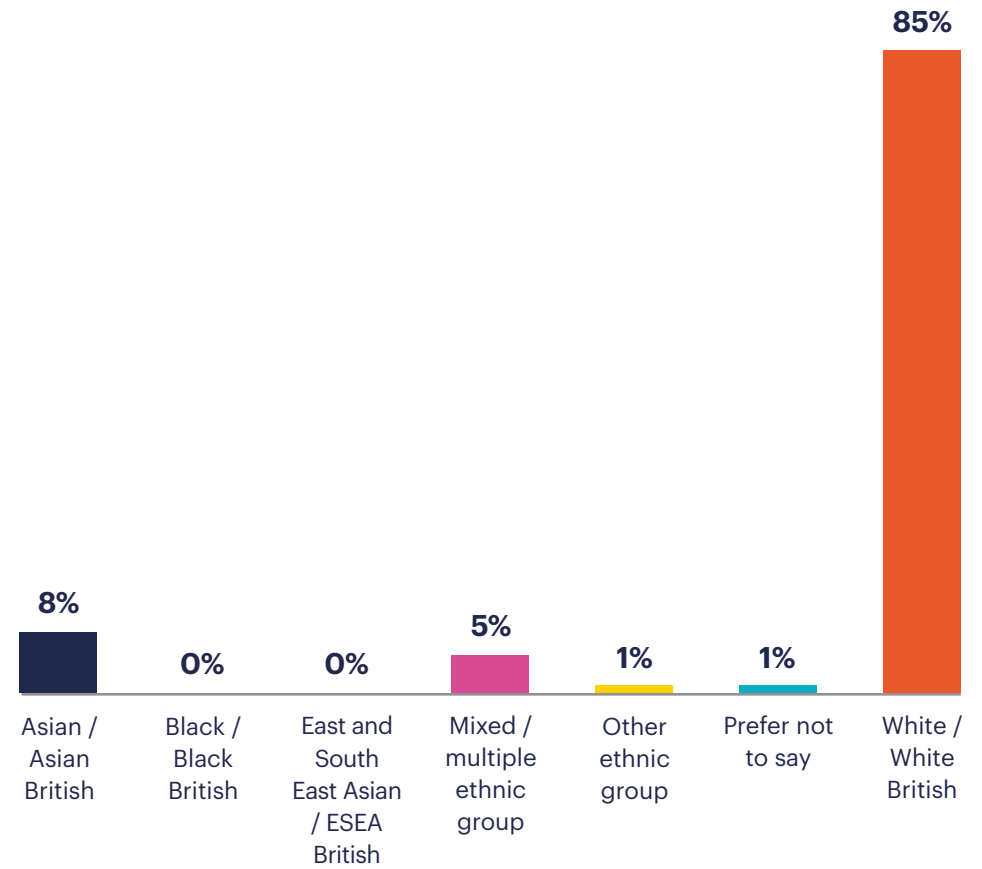
## What is your ethnicity? By gender.

All respondents

Identify as female



Identify as male

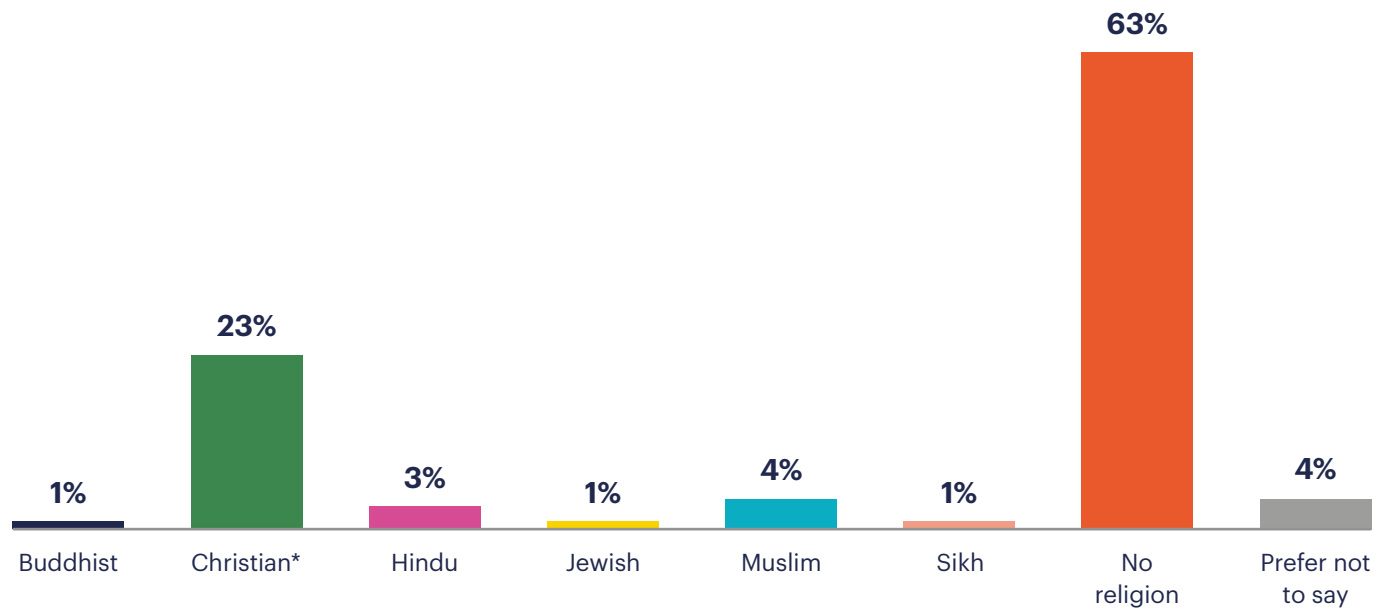




# Religion

What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?

All respondents



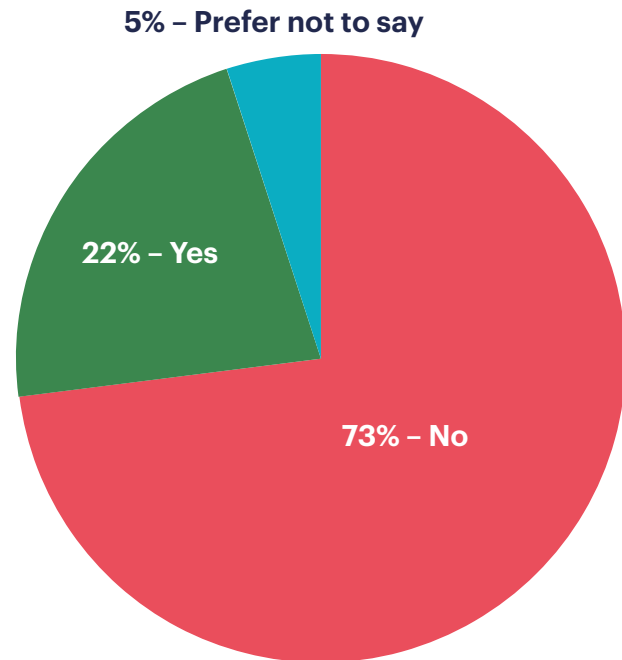
*\*Including CofE, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations*



# Health

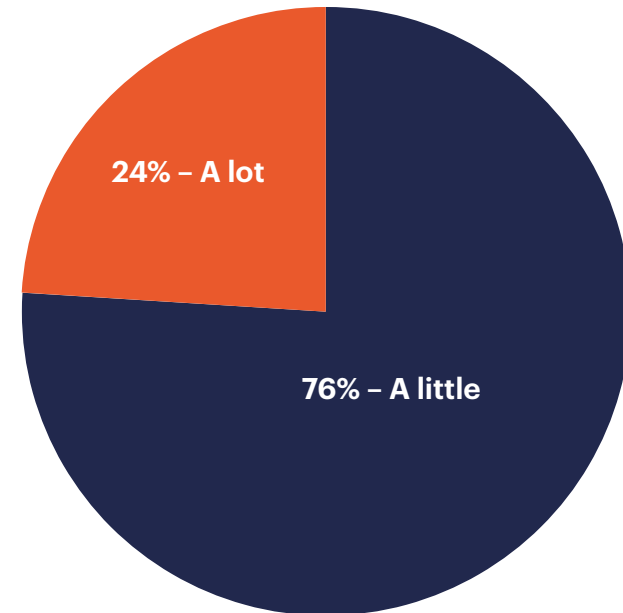
Do you have any diagnosed physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

All respondents



How much do any of your conditions or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

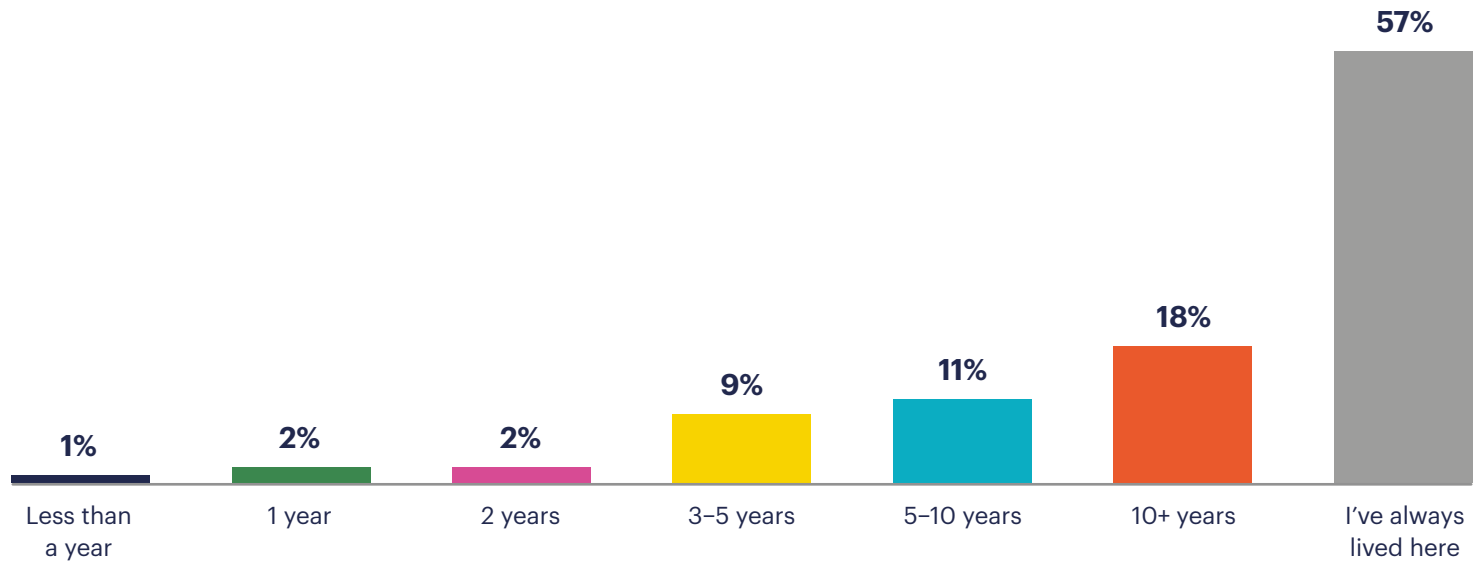
All respondents



# Location

## How long have you lived in the West Midlands?

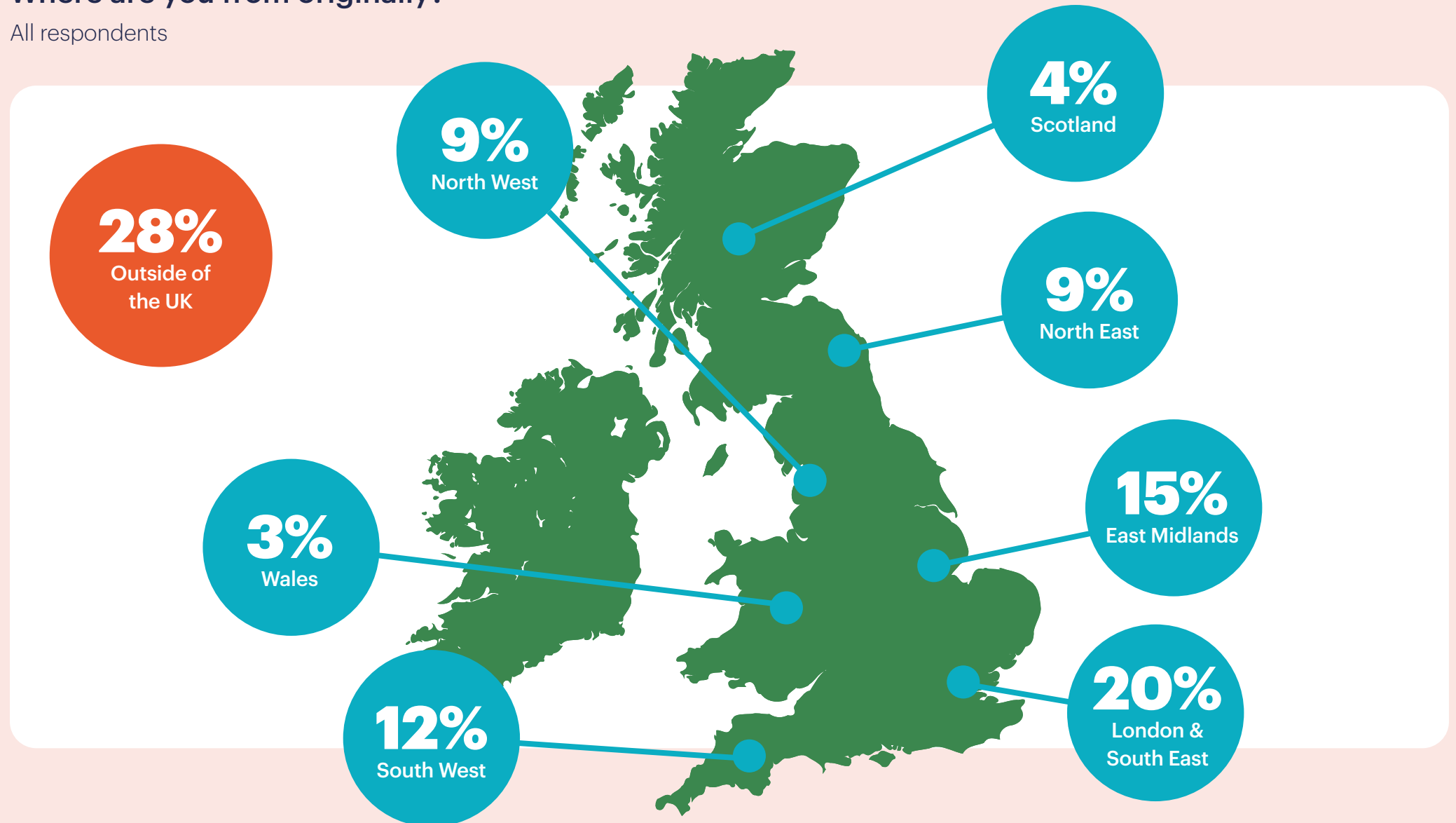
All respondents



# Location

## Where are you from originally?

All respondents



# Location

## What made you move to the area?

Opportunities, city life.	Love. (2)	For university. Also the creative scene is really large here and there a plenty of opportunities to pursue.
University. (18)	Personal circumstances.	Spouse is from here.
Work and relationship.	Uni & design crew.	Ma wife.
To be with my partner who is from the area.	Coventry University + friends.	Grew up here, moved away for studies, then moved back.
New job and partner.	My parents lived in West Midlands at the time I moved to the UK and moved in with them for a few months until I got a job locally.	Came to college.
Moved to be near my boyfriend (now husband) and for work.	Work connection.	Born in Sutton Coldfield, moved to Brighton then London at 21. Came back to Sutton at 34 for family.
Moved as a child.	Uni, from Leicester but originally from Kenya.	
Married to a Yam Yam. (2)	The unlimited opportunities for education and career pathways.	
Family. (8)	Born in the West Midlands but moved around in military family before coming back to the UK to complete my studies.	
Married a Birmingham born lad.	Partner's job. (2)	
My wife (MY WIFE).	I moved to Worcester when I was 2 and moved to Birmingham for university in 2019.	
Work. (10)	Work and family.	
Relationship.	University + partner.	
Opportunities. (4)	Just a change initially, but also better work opportunities. Didn't really have any idea about Birmingham.	
Return home after an extended period living abroad.		
Husband's job move.		
Study Master's in UK.		
I was a kid I didn't have a choice haha.		
Took over a retail business.		



# Working life – section highlights

## Salary

Salary expectation remains comparable with the national industry average and other regions outside of London. On average, salaries are £30,000–£40,000 (DOE) and we can expect a fairly regular increase in those salaries.

Our work / life balance also stays positive with a majority of us working a 30–40 hour week.

As with 2020, gender doesn't appear to affect pay – our results show that it is fairly equal between comparable roles.

## Position / role

A majority of us are still working in agencies or in-house but one of the notable swings in 2021 is the amount of people freelancing. This number has increased by 16% overall with the biggest growth being among the age brackets of 35–44 and 45–54 (increases of 21% and 22% respectively).

We added a new role category of Business Owner / Company Director this year. 17% of respondents have this role with a gender split of 16% female to 22% male.

As expected, age also seems to be a determining factor in roles as we see an increase of older respondents in senior positions.

When it comes to gender and senior positions we see more men. The gap between genders has closed however, with 10% more men taking roles of Design and Creative Directors compared to a 20% gap in 2020.

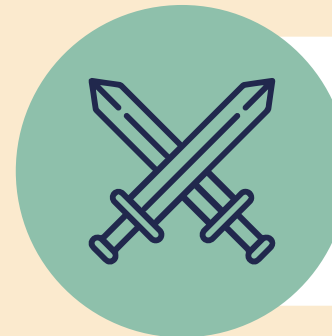
Non-design roles have also changed, from 11% more women in 2020 to 2% in 2021.



**Salaries** in the West Midlands **remain comparable** with the national industry average

**10% more women** surveyed have the role of Design or Creative Director compared to 2020

**10%  
MORE**



The number of **freelancers** **increased** by **16% overall** from 2020

# Working life – section highlights

## New hires and internships

**New for 2021.** It is encouraging to see 55% of respondents' companies have recruited in the last 12 months. This is especially promising when aligned with our COVID-19 results.

Internships appear to be not so promising, with only 21% of respondents' companies offering them with 44% of those being paid.

## Skills and sectors

Our skillset continues to be diverse – the West Midlands is still a powerhouse of talented folk. We've added an additional category this year of Marketing and PR.

The sectors we produce work for have increased in scope, from manufacturing and the built environment, to consumer goods and retail. It is clear that the design work we produce supports all aspects of society. Our work is not reserved for our region alone – many of us have clients at a national and international level.

55%

of respondents' companies have **recruited in the last 12 months**

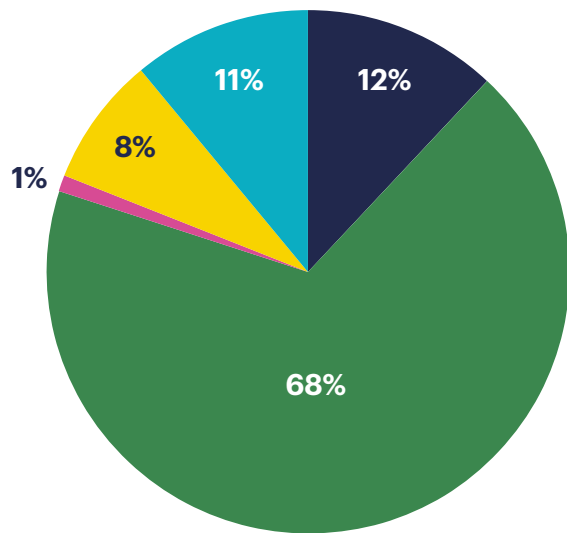
The **West Midlands** is still a **powerhouse** of talented, creative and skilled folk



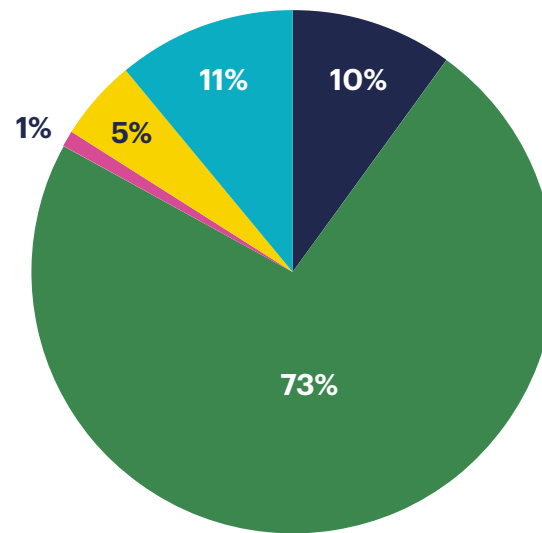
# Working life

Do you have a qualification that is relevant to the creative industry?

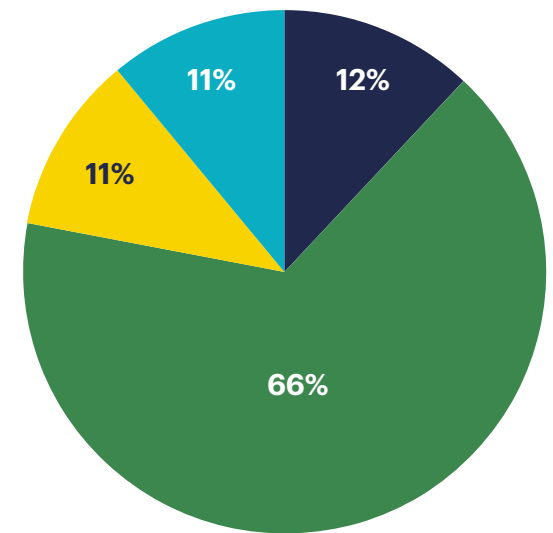
Excluding students



All



Identify as female



Identify as male

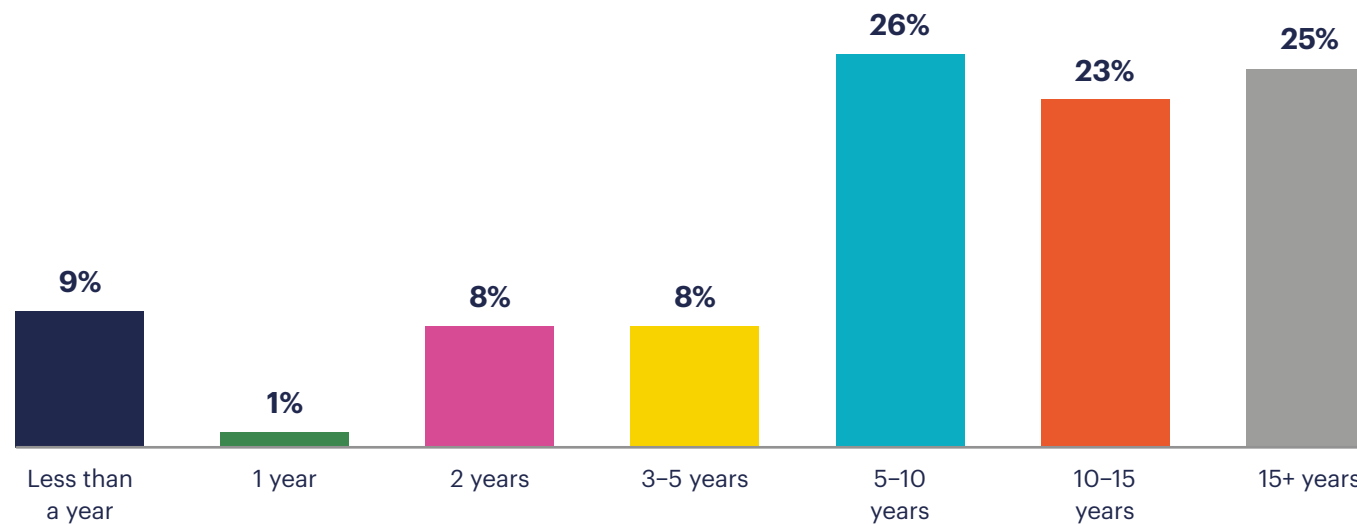




# Working life

## How long have you worked in the creative industry?

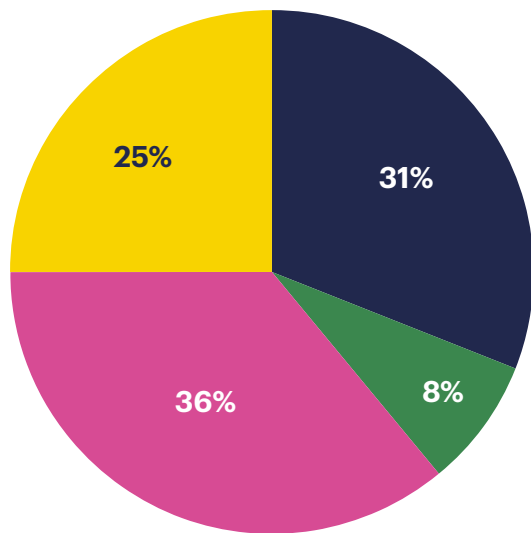
Excluding students



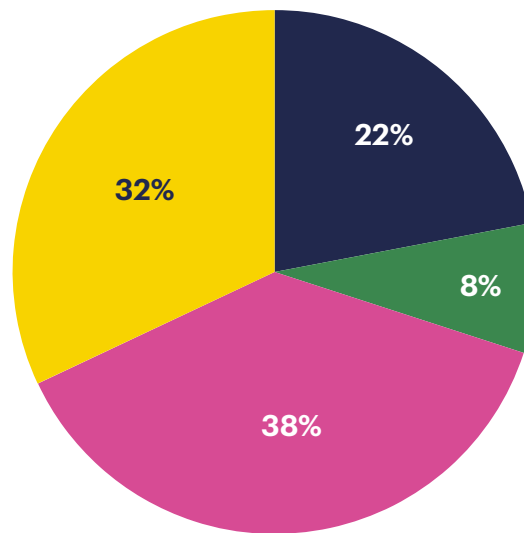
# Working life

## Where are you currently based? By gender.

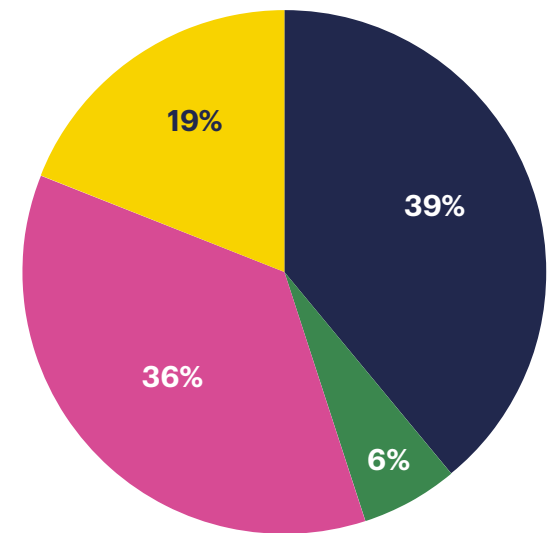
Excluding students



All



Identify as female



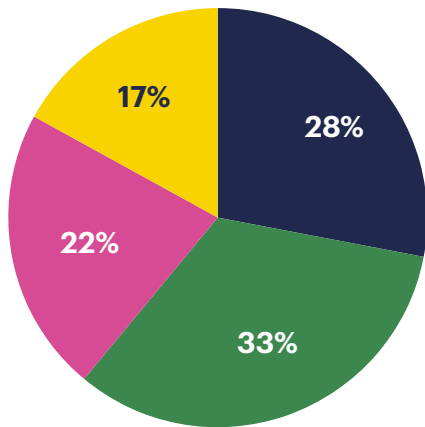
Identify as male



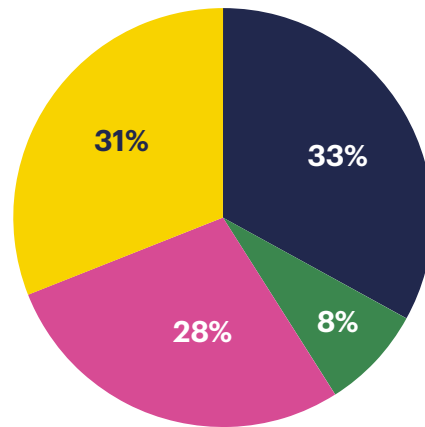
# Working life

## Where are you currently based? By age.

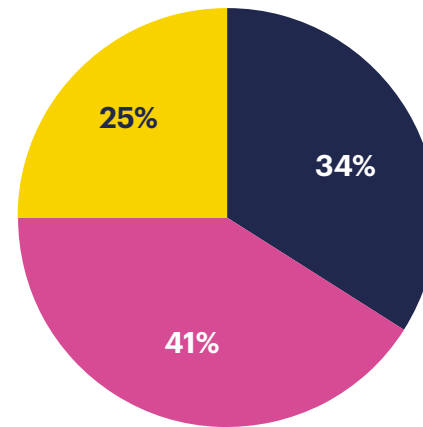
Excluding students



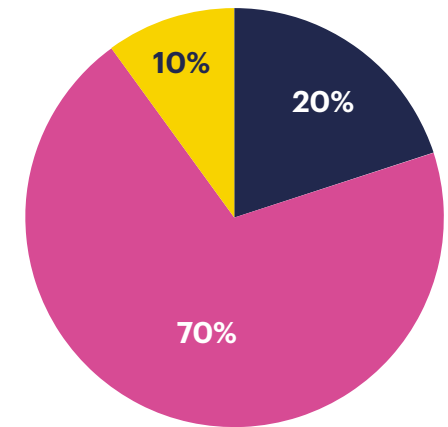
Age bracket 18-24



Age bracket 25-34



Age bracket 35-44



Age bracket 45-54\*

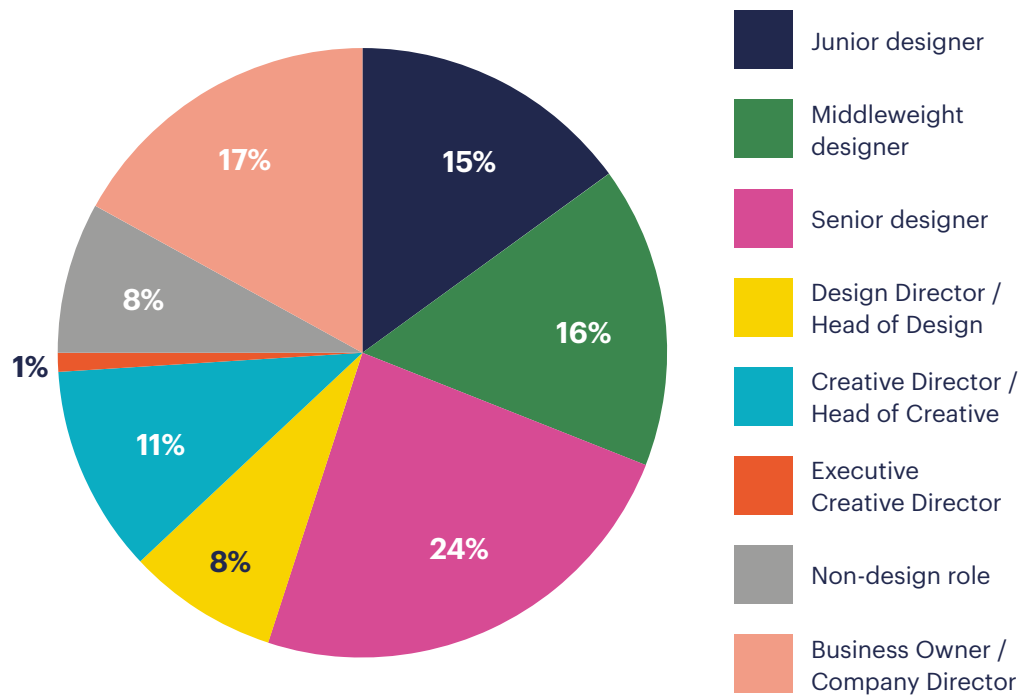


*\*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.  
55+ too small sample size.*

# Working life

## What is your current level?

Excluding students



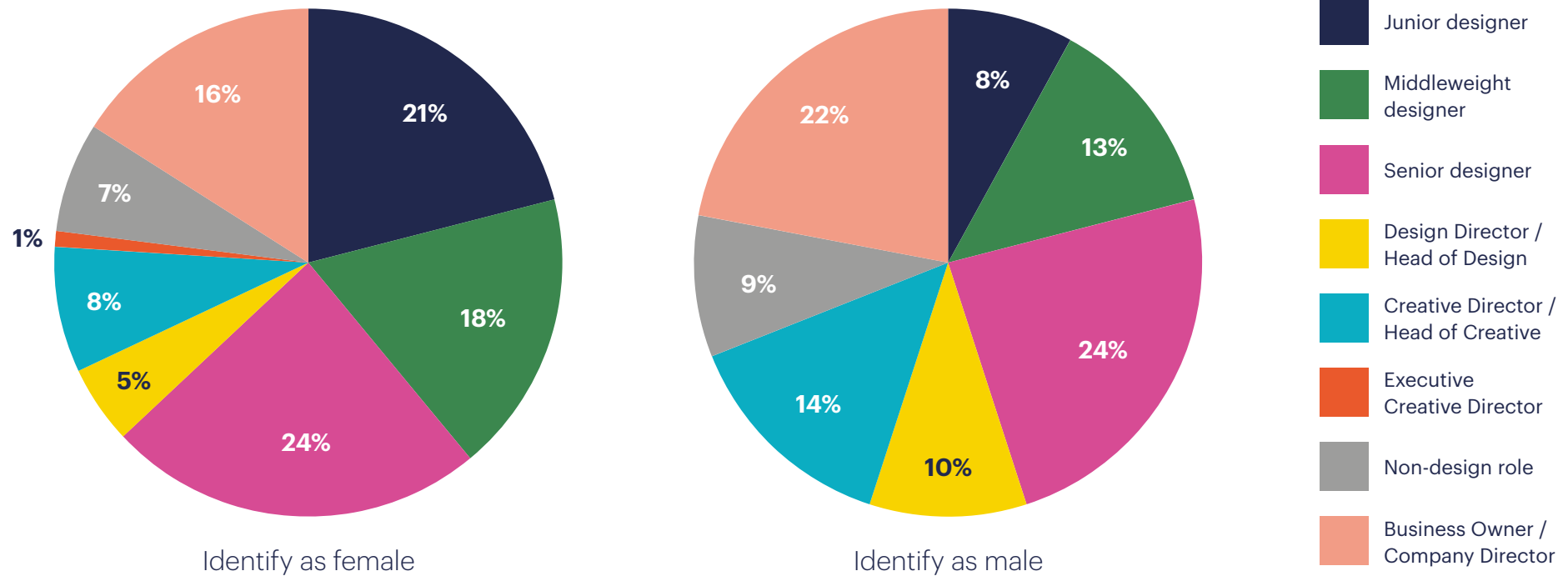
## Non-design roles. Verbatims.

Photography assistant/ freelancer
Account Management Team Lead
Head of Content
Marketing and content
Software engineer
Web Developer
Communications and digital
Senior Developer
Creative Project Manager
CGI Artist
Digital support and data lead
Project Manager

# Working life

## What is your current level? By gender.

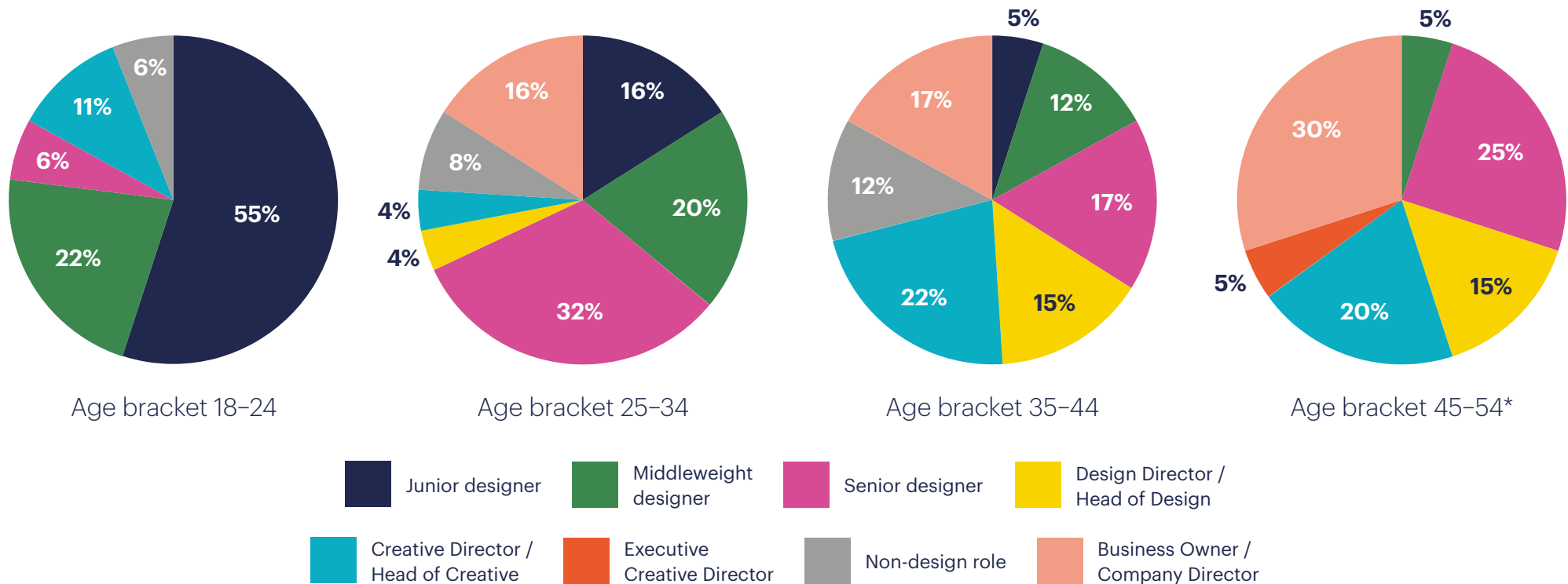
Excluding students



# Working life

## What is your current level? By age.

Excluding students

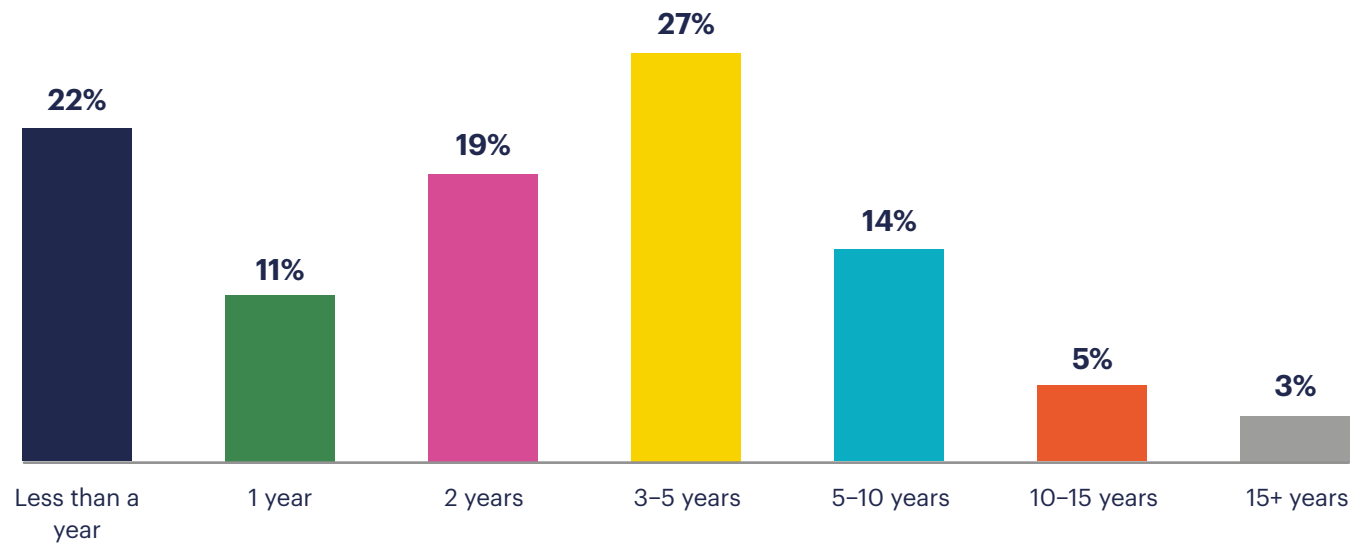


\*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.  
55+ too small sample size.

# Working life

## How long have you held this position?

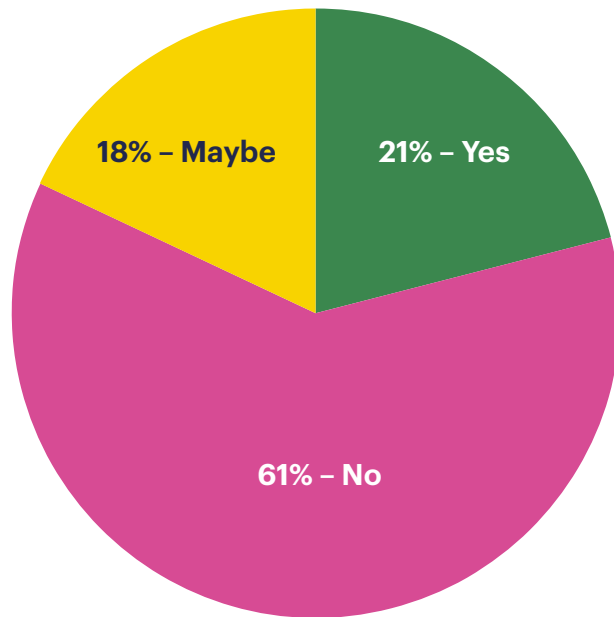
Excluding students and those looking for work



# Working life

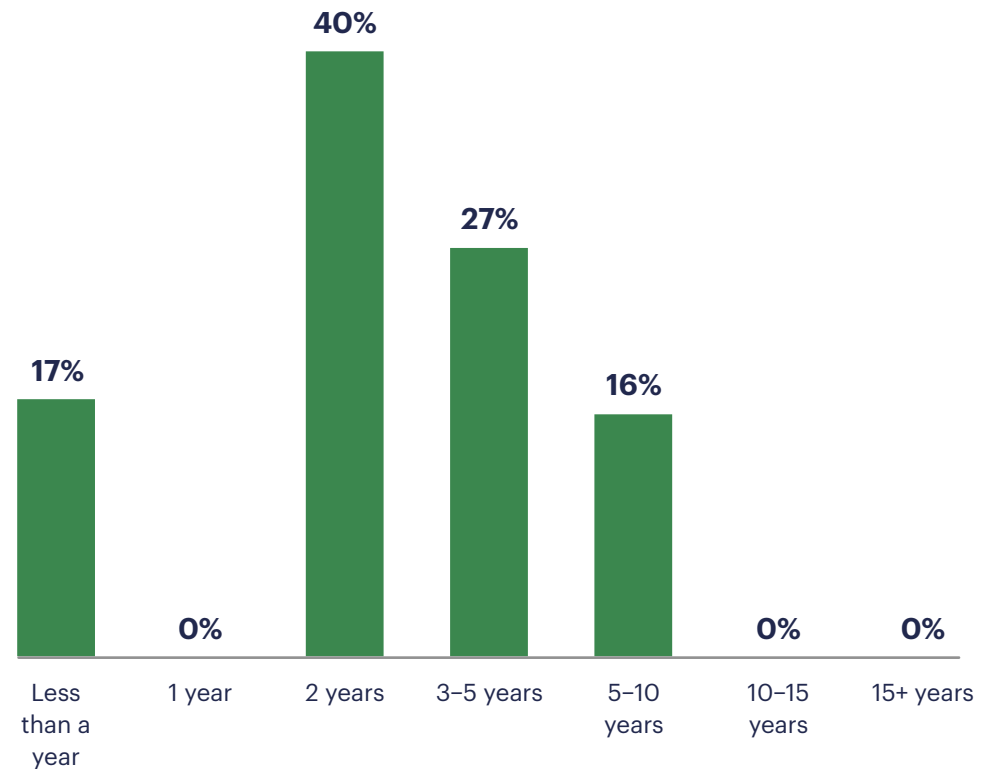
## Are you considering leaving this position within the next 12 months?

Excluding students and those looking for work



## How long have you held this position?

Those considering leaving in the next 12 months, excluding students and those looking for work

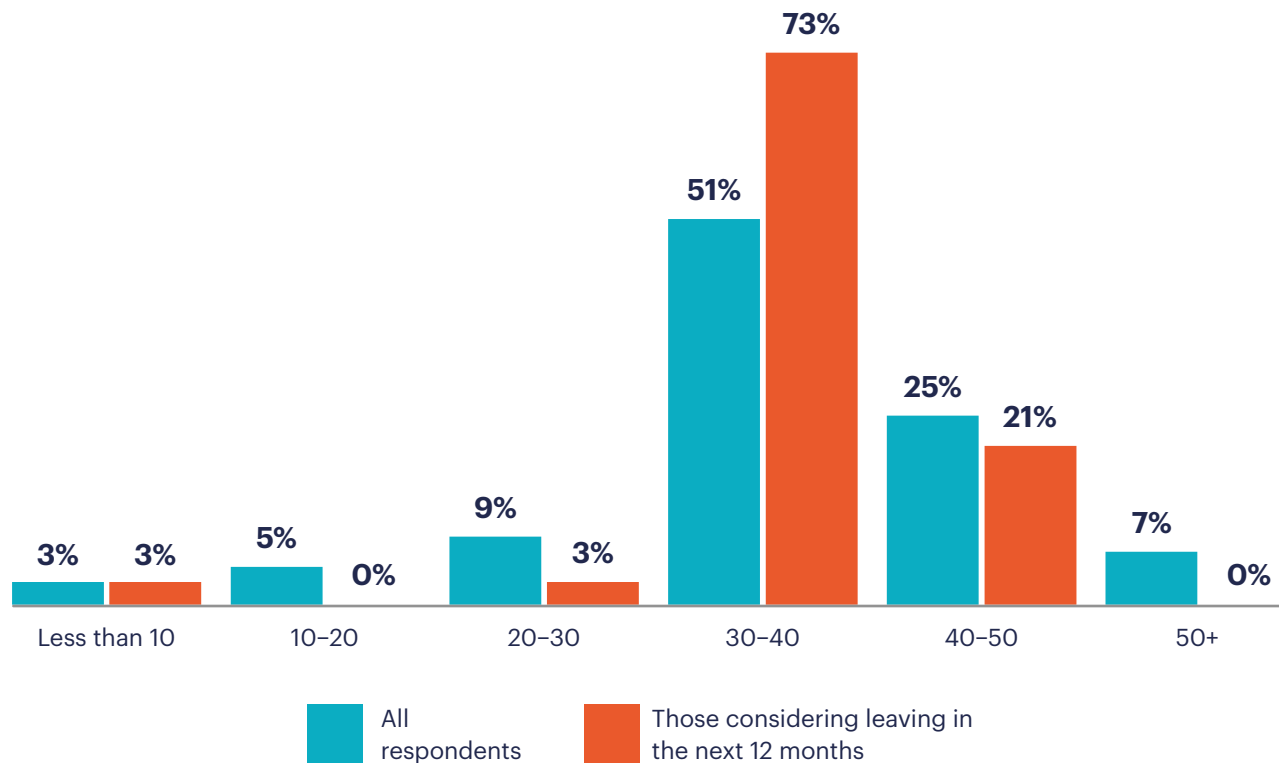




# Working life

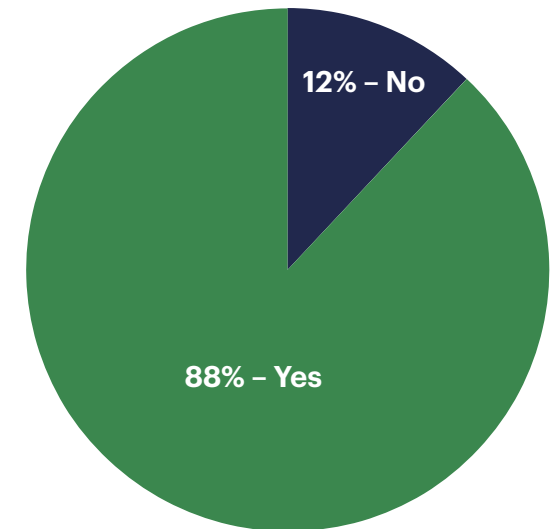
## On average, how many hours a week do you work?

Excluding students and those looking for work



## Is design / creative work your sole income?

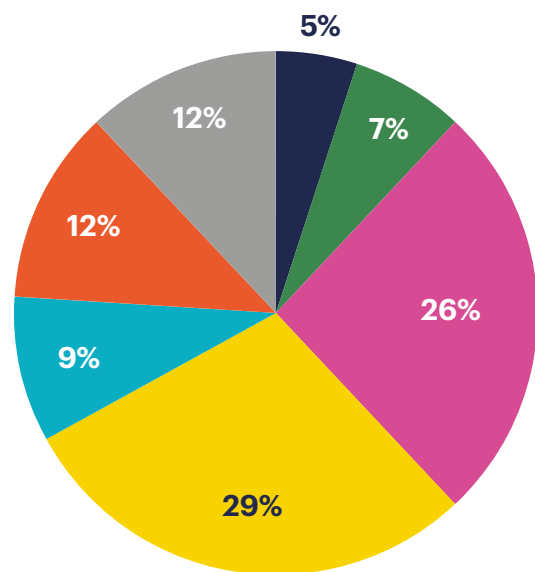
Excluding students and those looking for work



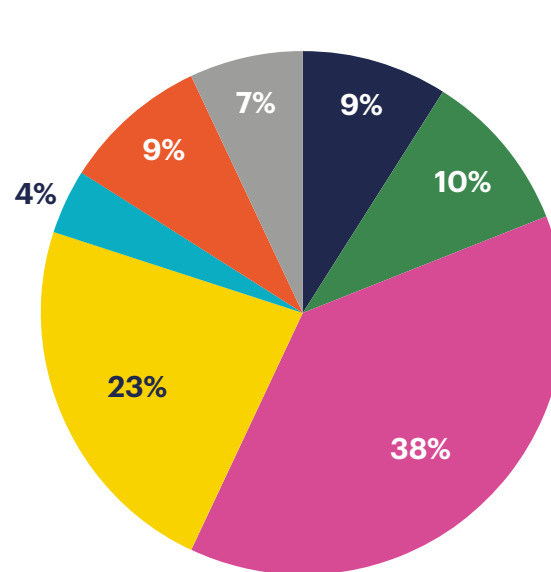
# Working life

## What is your current salary? By gender.

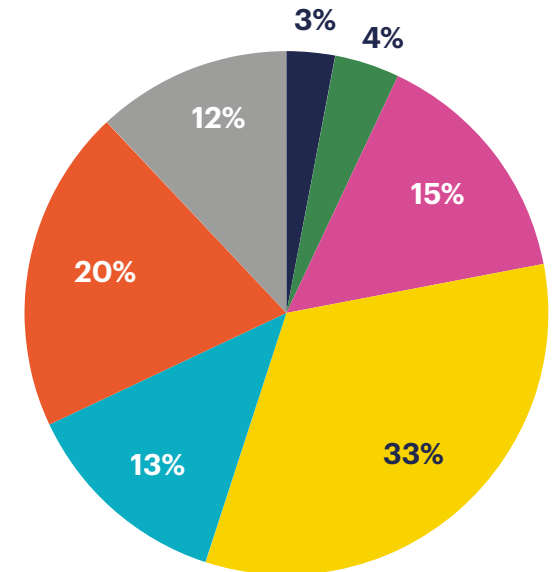
Excluding students and those looking for work



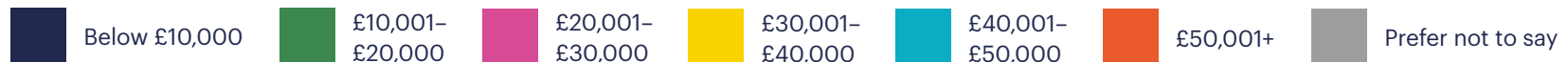
All



Identify as female



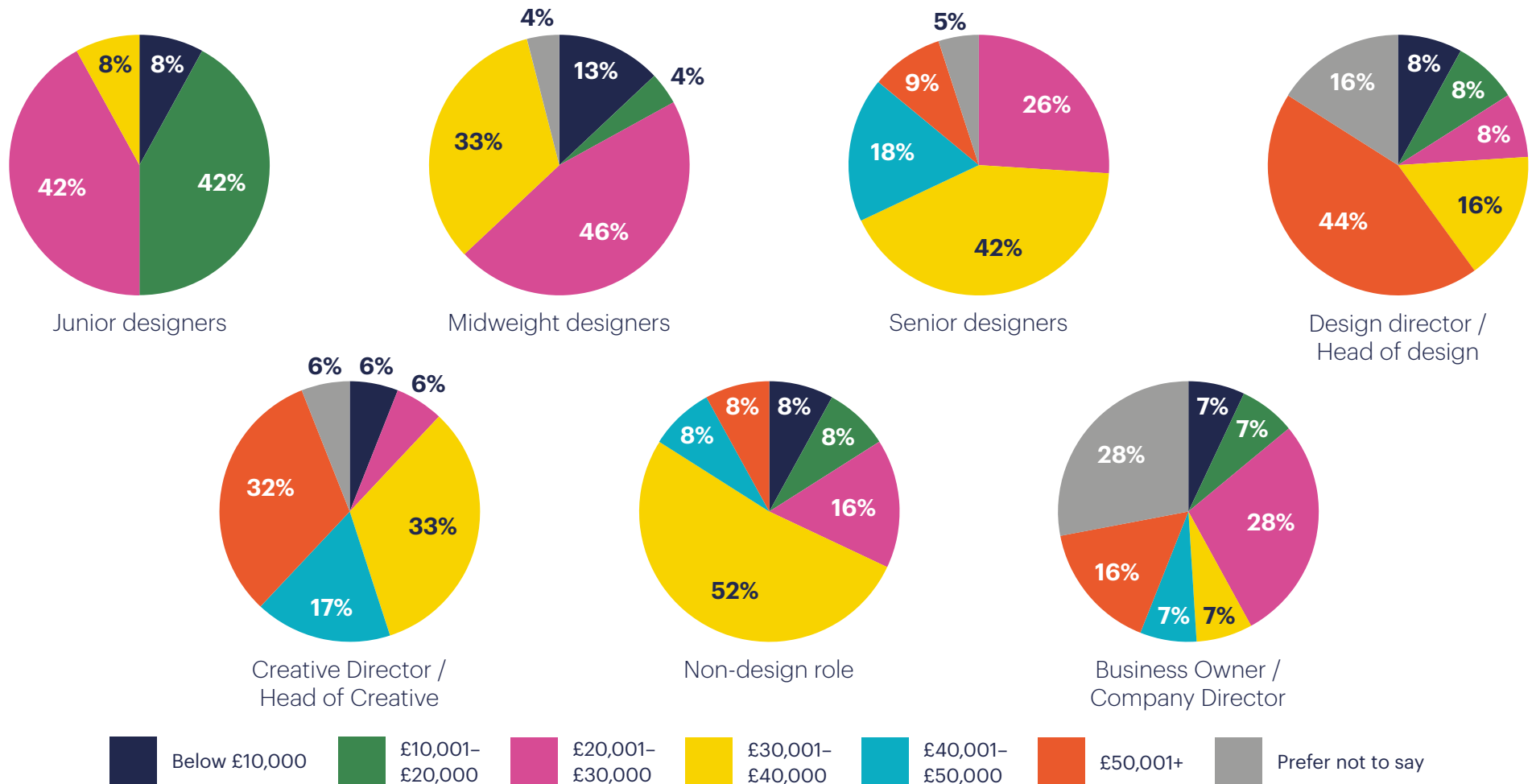
Identify as male



# Working life

## What is your current salary? By position.

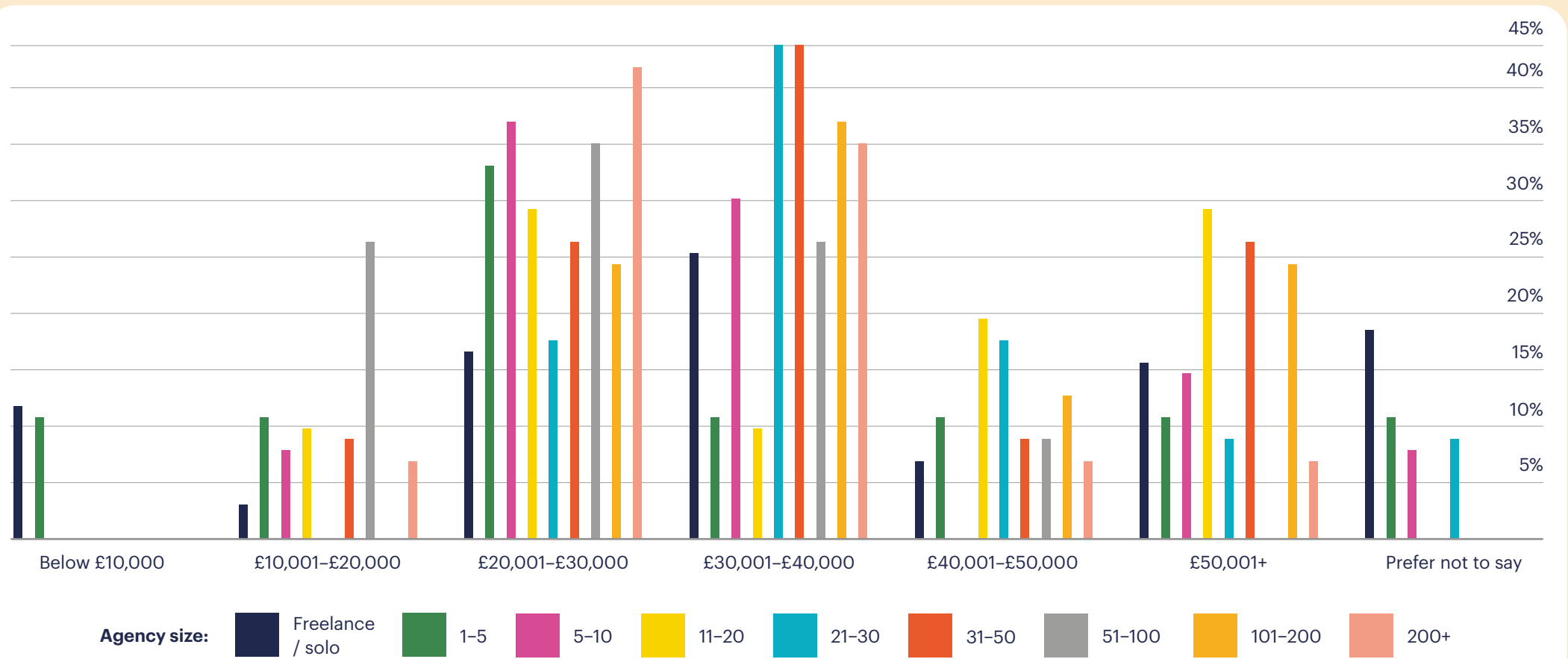
Excluding students and those looking for work



# Working life

## What is your current salary? By agency size.

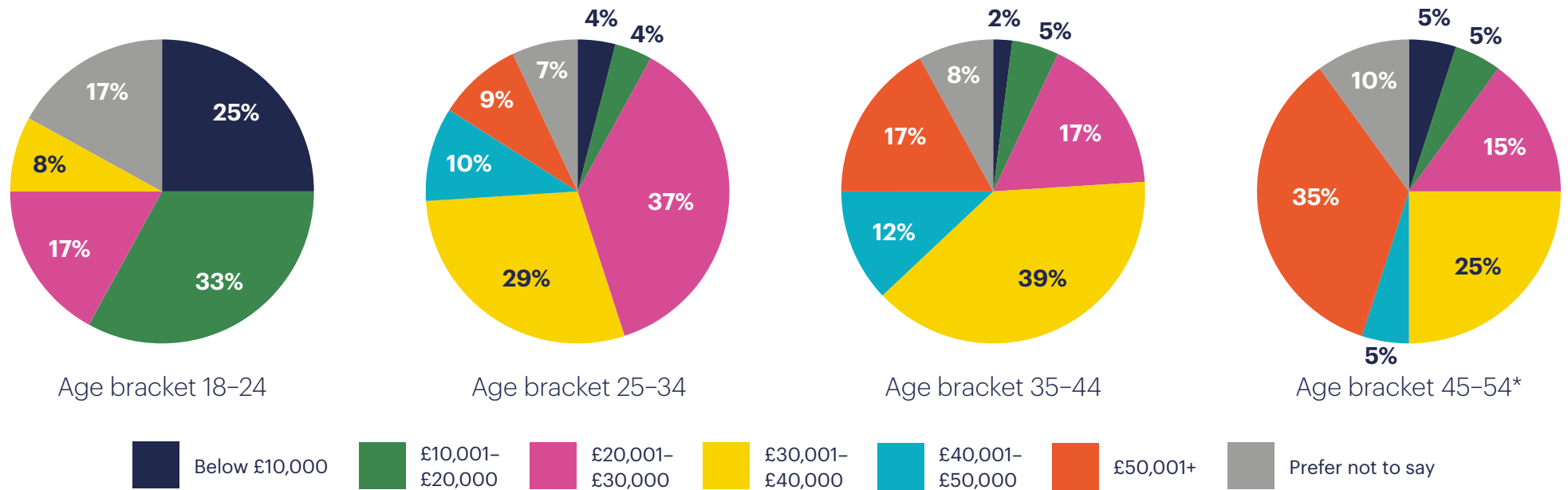
Excluding students and those looking for work



# Working life

## What is your current salary? By age.

Excluding students and those looking for work



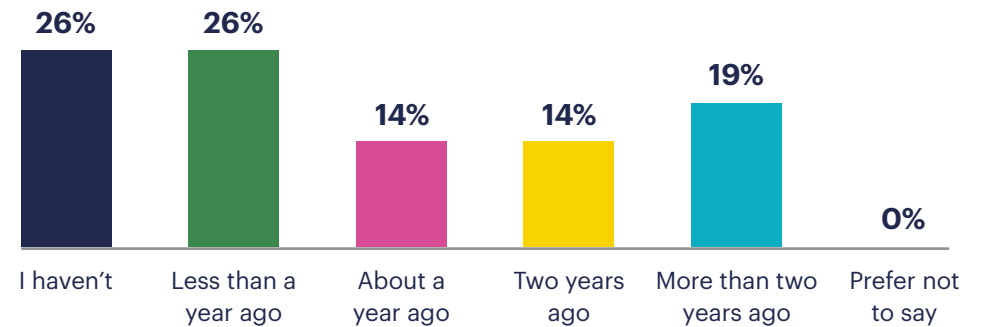
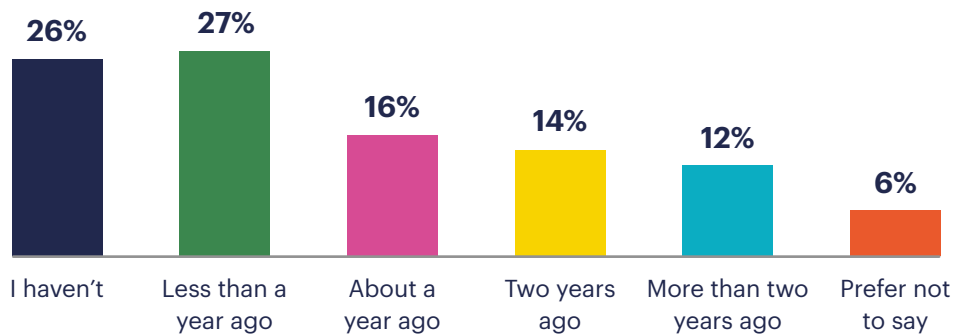
\*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.  
55+ too small sample size.

# Working life

## When did you last have a pay rise / increase your rates?

Excluding students and those looking for work

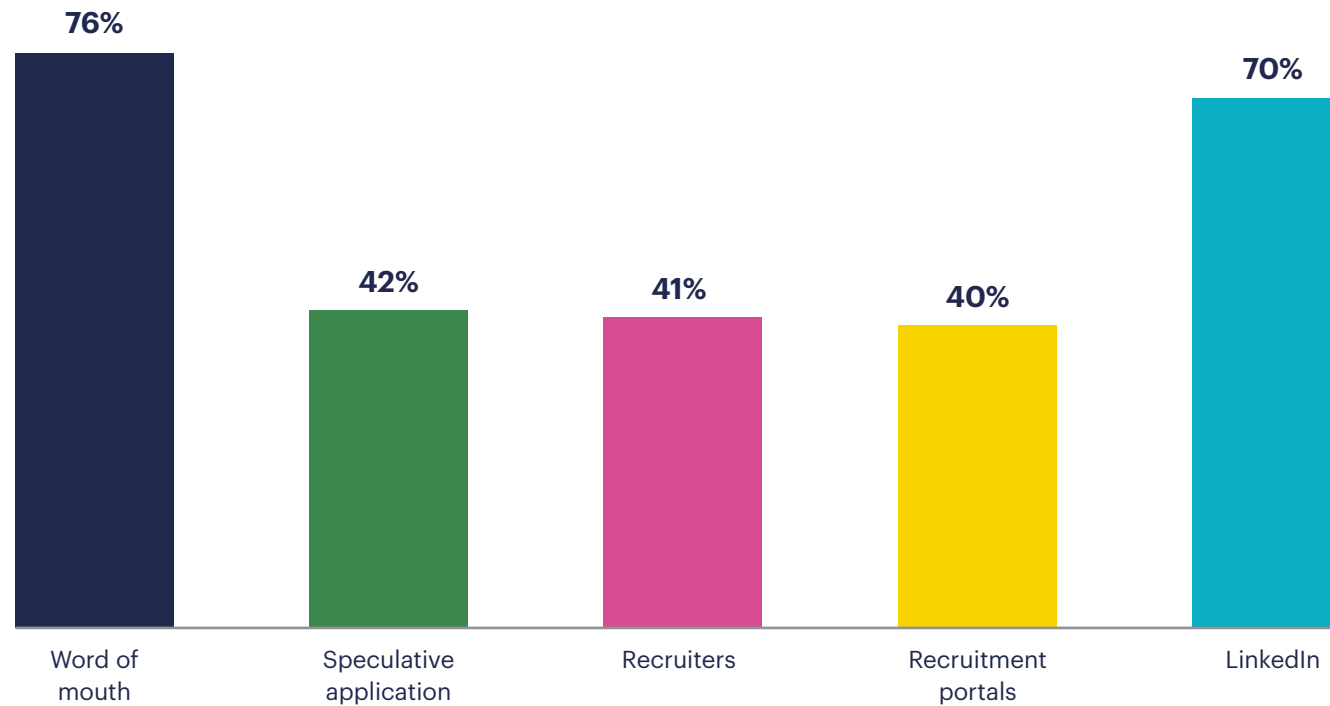
Those considering leaving in the next 12 months, excluding students and those looking for work



# Working life

When looking for a job, what method(s) do you rely on?

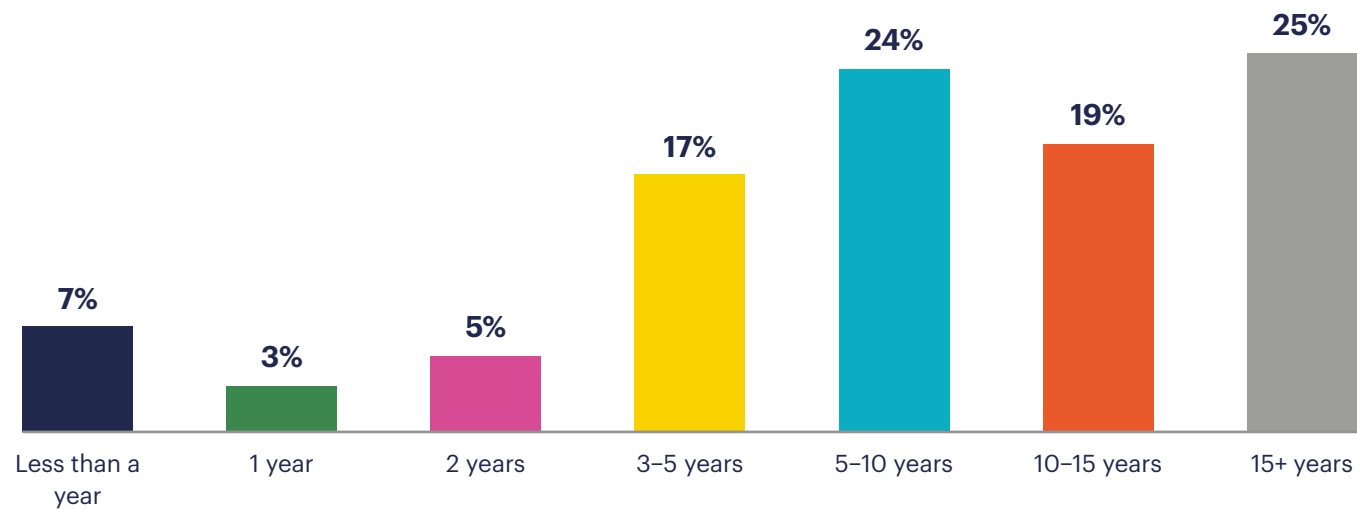
Excluding students



# Working life

## How long have you worked in the West Midlands?

Excluding students

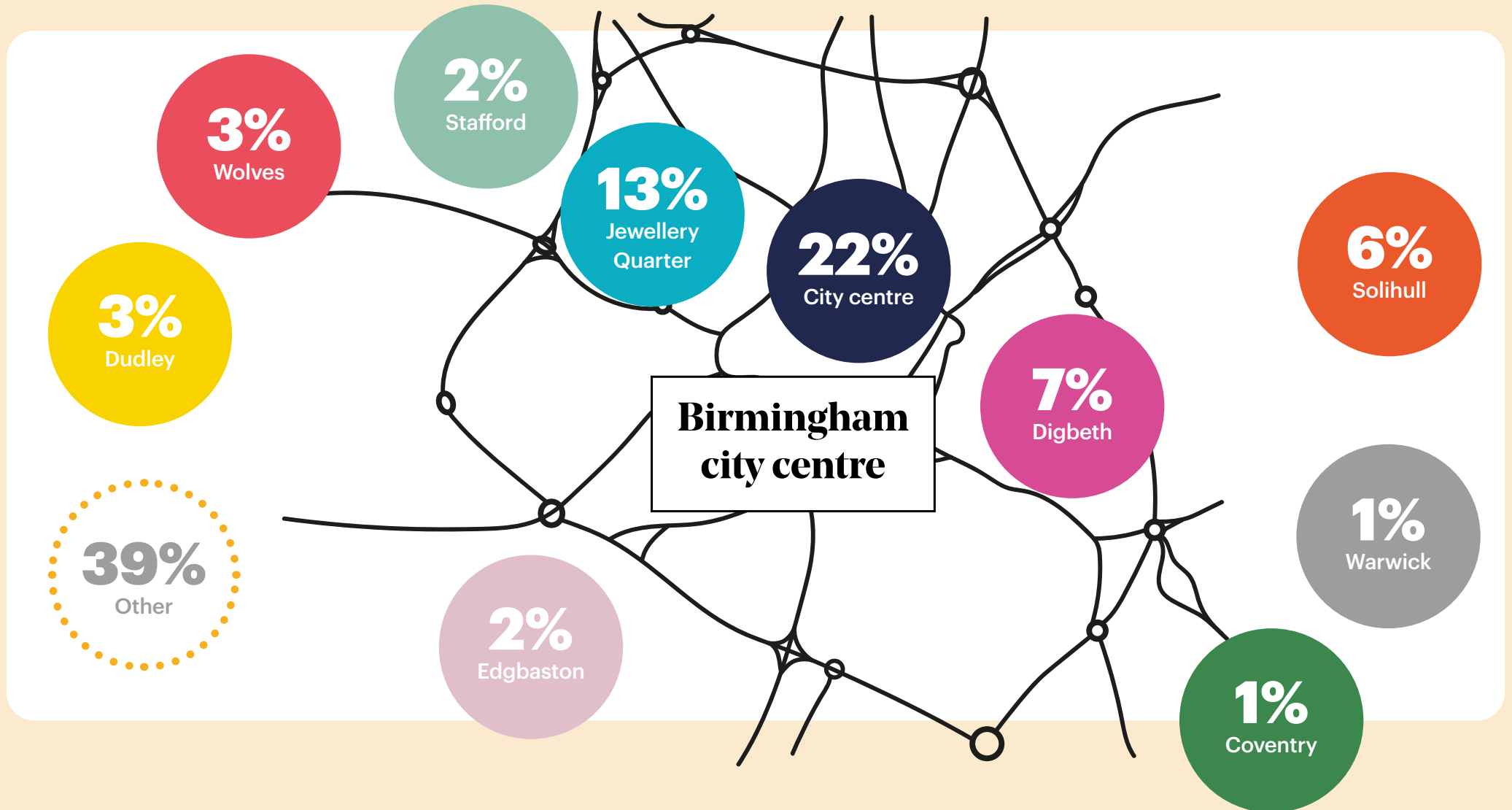




# Working life

## Where is your workplace located?

Excluding students and those looking for work.



# Working life

Other workplace location, please specify. Verbatims.

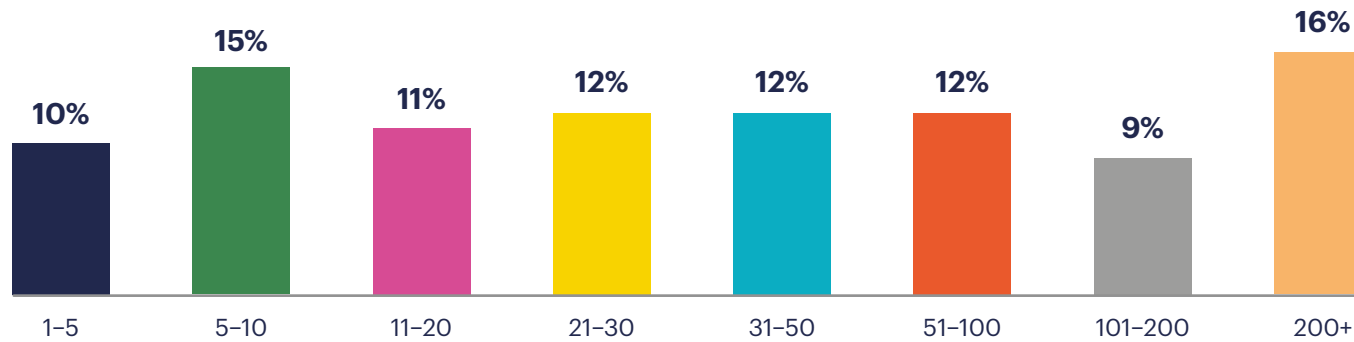
Lichfield (6)
South Birmingham
Birmingham, not City Centre
Derbyshire
Longbridge (2)
Sutton Coldfield (4)
Remote (2)
Erdington
Walsall
Stirchley (3)
WFH
Halesowen (3)
Shropshire
Oldbury
Tamworth (3)
Fort Dunlop (2)
Moseley (2)
Bournville
Kings Heath
Shrewsbury sometimes gets lumped-in with the West Mids...
Hall Green office, and client site Solihull and Home (Longbridge)
Birmingham (2)
Bearwood

Alcester
West Bromwich
Fully virtual
Home based, just north of Tamworth, but most of my work is in West Midlands
Bewdley
Leicestershire
Warwickshire
Castle Vale
Quinton
Stone, Staffordshire
Leamington Spa
London and I work from home
Gravelly Hill
Wednesbury

# Working life

## How many people work there?

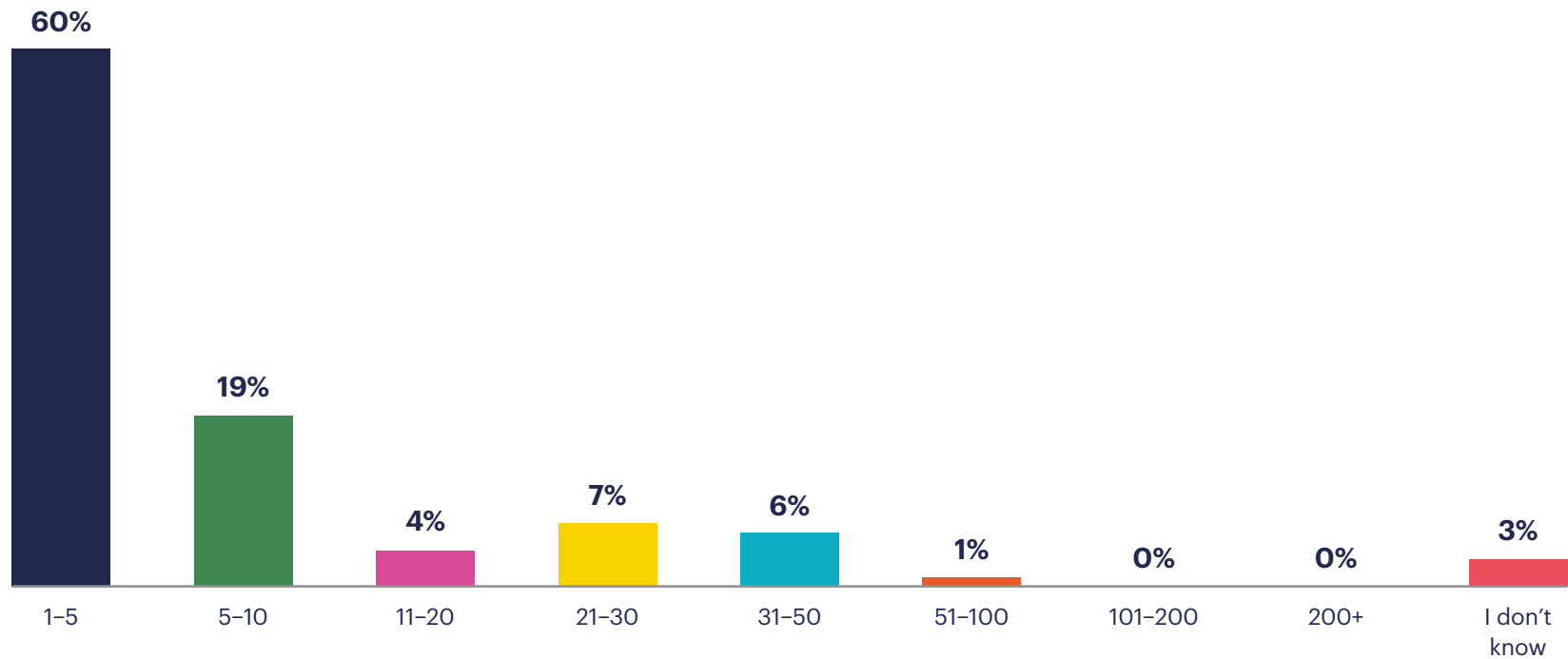
Excluding students, those looking for work and freelance/solo



# Working life

## Of those team members, how many of them are creatives?

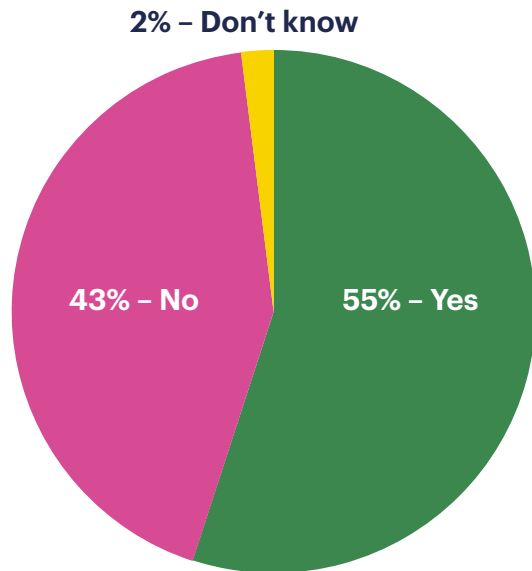
Excluding students, those looking for work and freelance/solo



# Working life

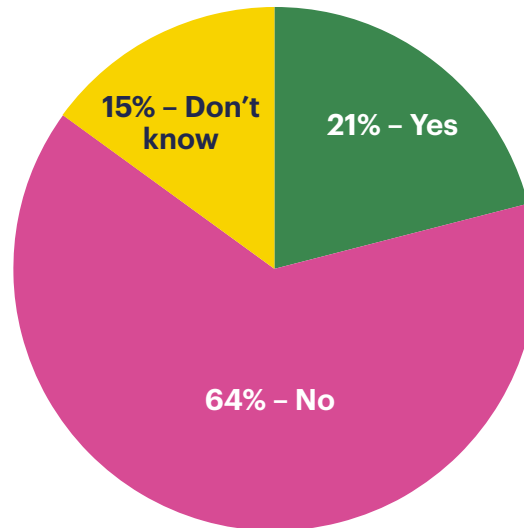
## Has your workplace hired new roles in the last 12 months?

Excluding students and those looking for work



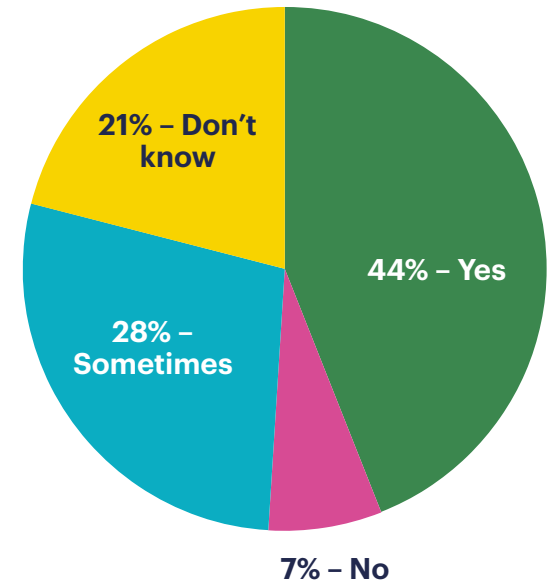
## Does your workplace offer internships?

Excluding students and those looking for work



## Are these paid?

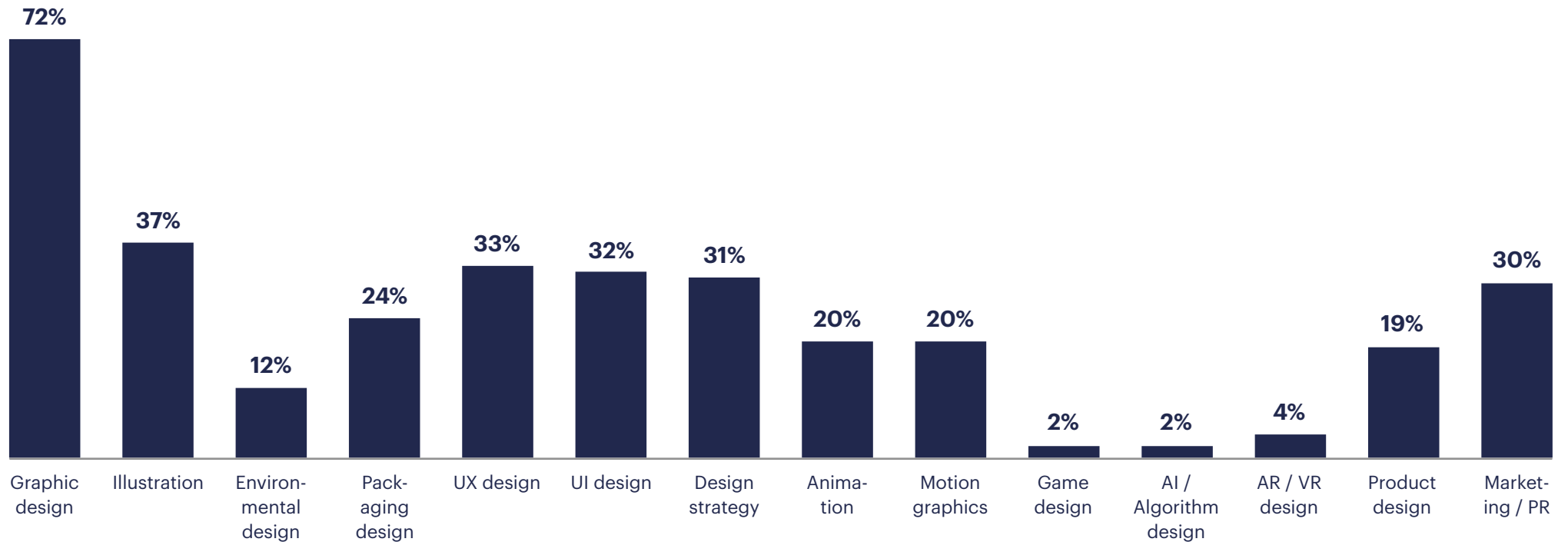
Excluding students and those looking for work



# Working life

## What area(s) of the industry do you work in?

Excluding students and those looking for work.



# Working life

Other areas of skills, please specify.

Architectural design
Art Direction
Brand Identity, Brand Management
Consultancy
Content Writing, ToV,
Ecommerce, Photo Manipulation, Retouch
Exhibitions & interiors
Fashion and consumer products
Fashion design/pattern & print
Interior Design (5)
3D visualisation
Architecture (2)
Jewellery design
Live scribing
Murals, Lettering
Photography (2)
Project management
Retouching, storyboards
Service & CX design
Service design (2)
Content Design
Set, Interior, events
Software engineering
Video (3)

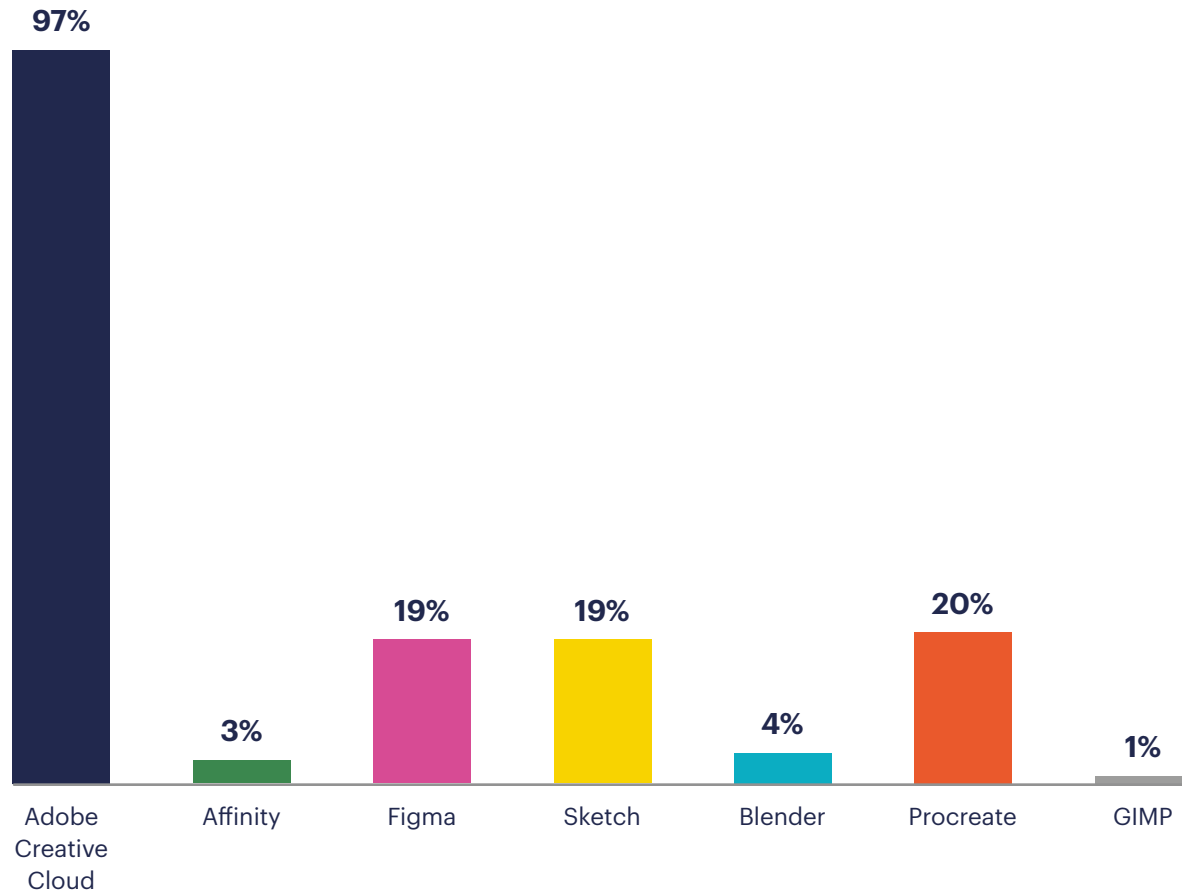
Visual artist / painter
Visualisation, 3d graphics, photogrammetry
Web Design, Development



# Working life

## What software do you use?

Excluding students and those looking for work.





# Working life

Other software, please specify.

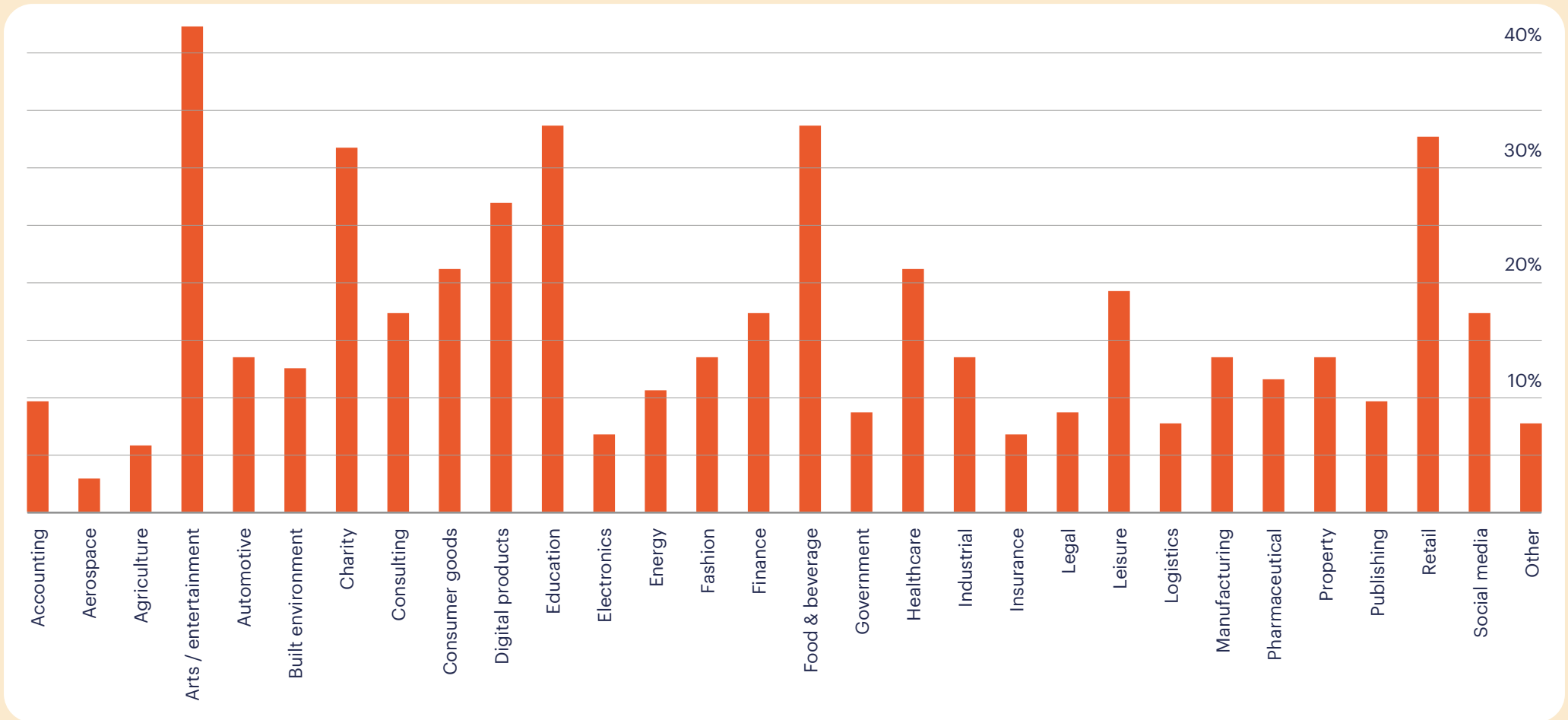
3ds max (2)
ArchiCAD
Rhino
Autodesk
Canva
Get response
Capture One
Vectorworks
Cinema 4D (8)
Octane
Sketchfab
Meshroom
Agisoft metashape
Gov.uk prototyping kit(HTML, CSS, JavaScript)
Madmapper
Reaper
Ableton
Pixelmator
Acorn
Revit (2)
Autocad (4)
Sketch up (2)
Unreal Engine
Visual Studio Code



# Working life

## What sector(s) do you work for?

Excluding students and those looking for work.



# Working life

Other sectors, please specify.

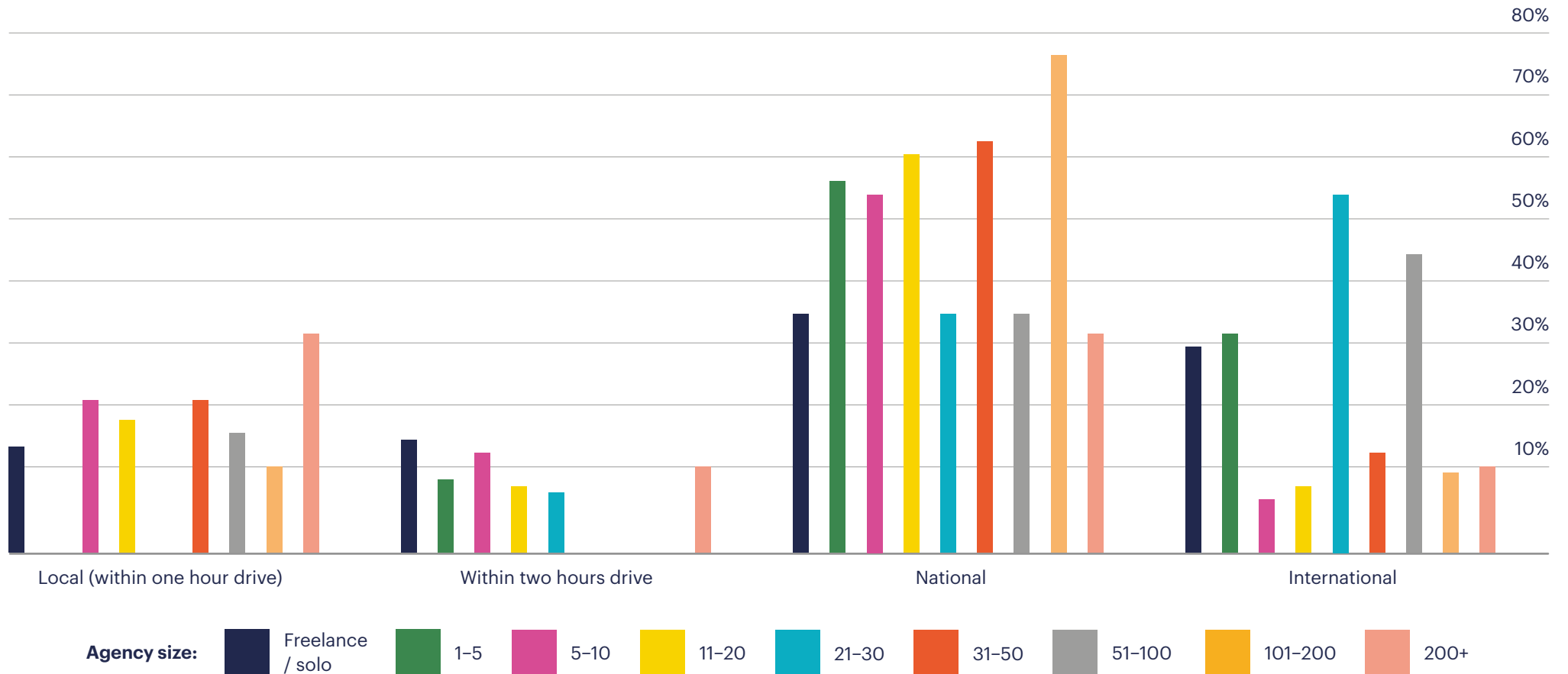
Commercial (2)
Infrastructure
Environment (2)
Community
Hospitality, events, festivals
Licensing
Non specific
Recruitment
Start-ups
Telecoms
Wellbeing, coaching



# Working life

## Where are most of your clients based?

Excluding students and those looking for work



# COVID-19 – section highlights

## We couldn't avoid discussing the impact of the pandemic on our industry.

Overall results indicate that the design industry in the West Midlands has not suffered as much as other industries. That is not to say that times haven't been extremely tough for many of us.

When it comes to workload, around a third cited a decrease overall as a result of the pandemic. However, we have received anecdotal reports that for many workload has since increased as we move towards the end of 2021.

A quarter of us were furloughed during the last 12 months and of those the majority (52%) were furloughed for less than 3 months.

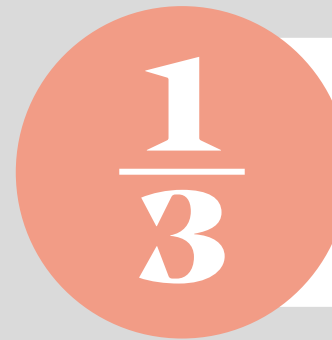
Our intention with this survey is to present the statistics without comment. However, in our opinion, the positive numbers displayed are the result of a combination of the resilience, adaptability and determination that we see daily in the creative industry.

This positivity is displayed further when asked about the future – 58% of us are feeling optimistic about what the next 12 months have in store. We know that the creative industries are invaluable when it comes to regeneration and bouncing-back the economy.

### Further reading

You can download the first annual report by the Creative UK Group at [www.wearecreative.uk](http://www.wearecreative.uk).

The Design Council's Economy 2021 report is producing valuable material about the importance of design to the economy, more information can be found at [www.designeconomy.co.uk](http://www.designeconomy.co.uk).



of respondents reported an **overall decrease** in workload due to the pandemic

During the last **12 months**, **only 25%** of those surveyed were **furloughed**

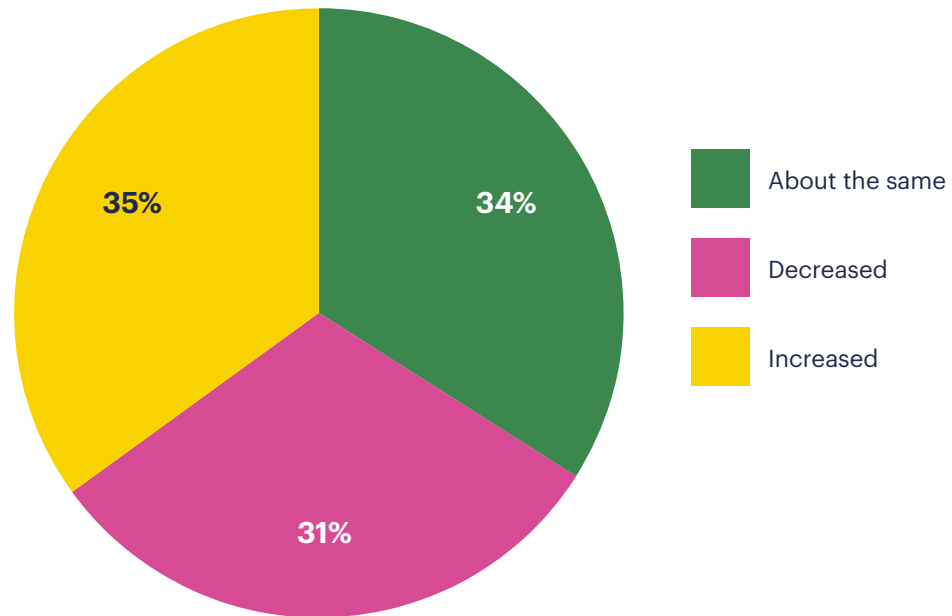


**Almost 60%** of people surveyed are **feeling optimistic** about the future

# COVID-19

## How has your workload been affected by C-19?

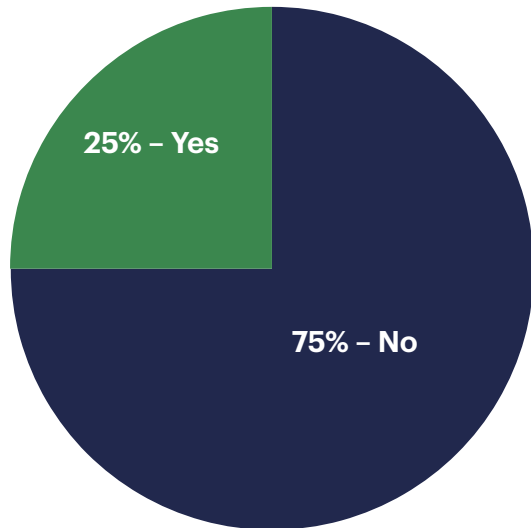
Excluding students and those looking for work



# COVID-19

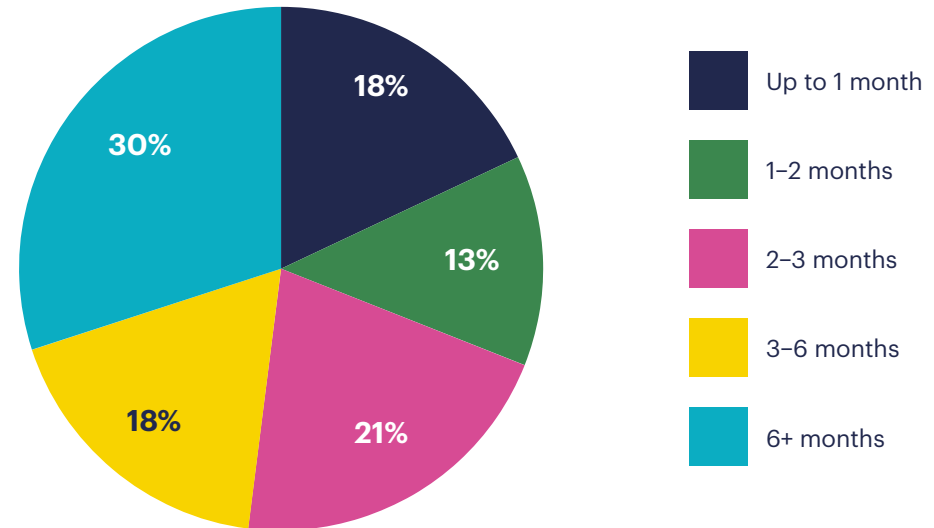
## Were you furloughed during the last 12 months?

Excluding students



## How long [were you furloughed] for?

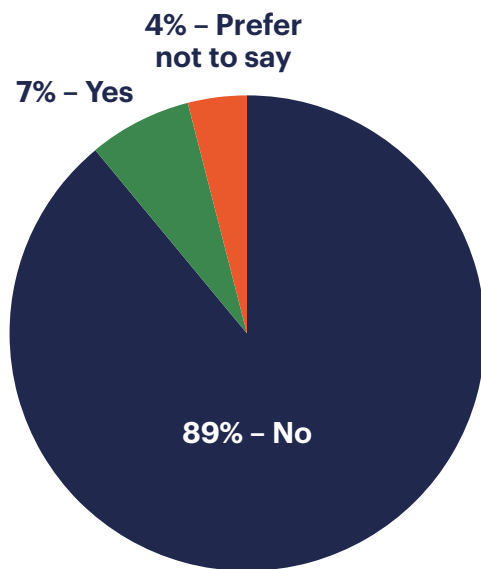
Excluding students



# COVID-19

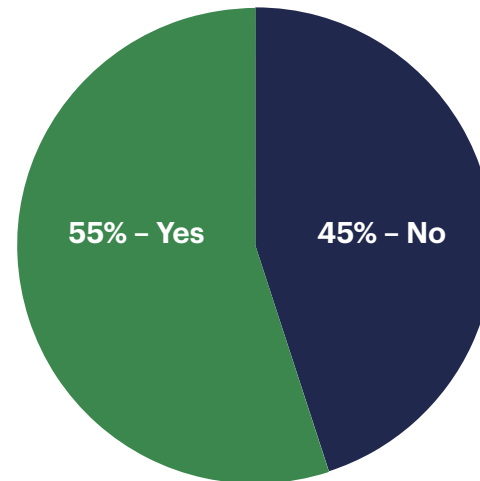
## Were you made redundant as a result of the pandemic?

Excluding students



## Have you since found employment in the design industry?

Excluding students

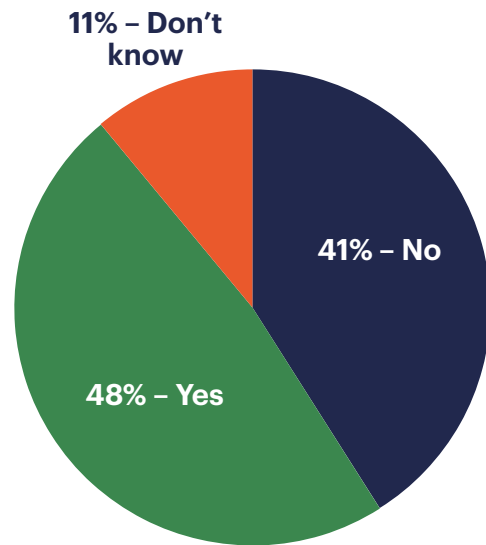




# COVID-19

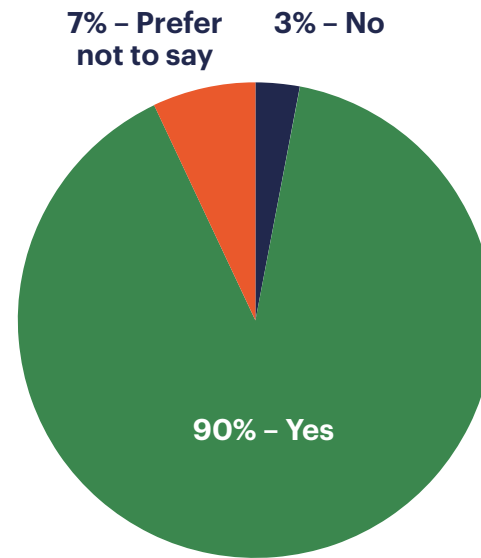
## Were you or your company eligible for government assistance?

Excluding students



## Did you receive it?

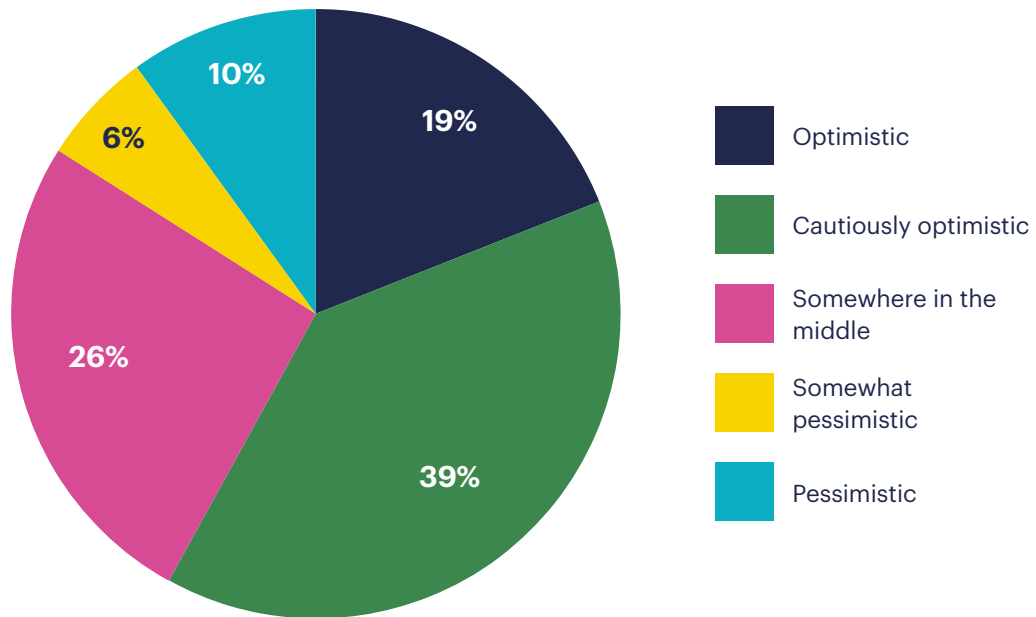
Excluding students



# COVID-19

## How do you feel about the next 12 months?

Excluding students



# Students – section highlights

## Combating the brain drain

Our mission to keep top talent within the region appears to be working as 90% of students surveyed stated they intend to remain in the West Midlands once they finish their studies.

## Highlighting the need for equipment

100% of respondents have access to their own computer, creative software and the internet for their design studies.

However, just 34% pay for the software themselves and in most cases universities are taking the responsibility to ensure students are able to afford access.

While these figures may appear positive, it highlights the costs of studying and how it can be out-of-reach for many people. Students are not expected to have their own equipment but when, as in this scenario, all students do it is easy to see how not having access could put you at a disadvantage.

Digital poverty or digital exclusion is an area of concern for many.

### Further reading

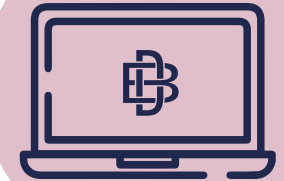
This article by the Office for Students highlights the risks of being left behind due to digital exclusion: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/digital-poverty-risks-leaving-students-behind/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/digital-poverty-risks-leaving-students-behind/)

University of Cambridge have been researching the issue of digital divide: [www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide](https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide).

90%

of students surveyed intend to **stay** in the West Midlands **after their studies**

**100%** of respondents have access to a computer, internet and creative software



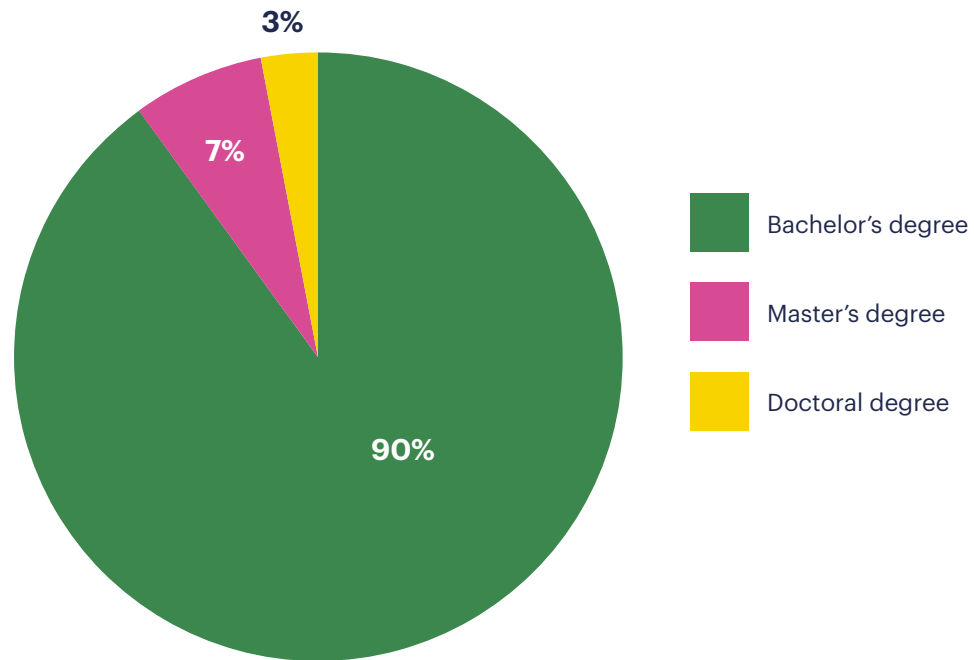
34%

of students pay for creative software themselves

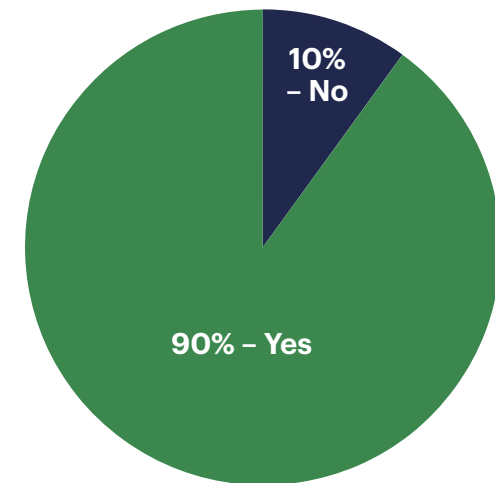


# Students

What qualification are you studying for?

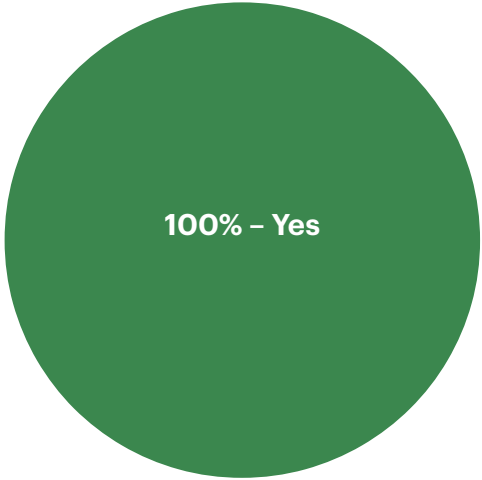


Do you intend to stay in the West Midlands after your studies?



# Students

Do you have access your own computer for design work?



100% - Yes

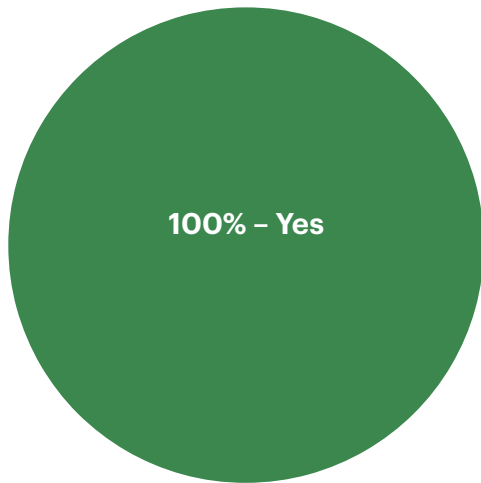
Do you have access to the internet at home?



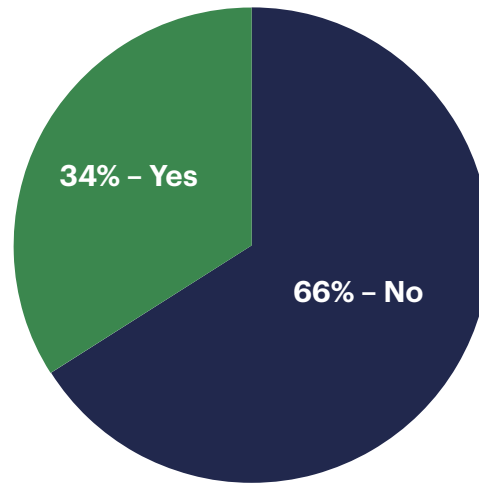
100% - Yes

# Students

Do you have access to creative software?



Do you pay for it [the creative software] yourself?



# Summary – outside work

## Passion projects

We're still keen to expand our knowledge outside of the working day, 71% of those surveyed take on side projects, with 31% of those being 'just for fun'.

## Get social

There hasn't been much opportunity to socialise in person for the last 12 months, however we have seen a slight increase (2%) in those meeting regularly with other designers.

There's still no getting away from the dominance of social media as a necessity to all. 98% of those surveyed have social media accounts, and 81% of those admit to spending more than 1 hour a day scrolling and liking.



**31%** of side projects are just for **fun!**

**Almost everyone** surveyed has at least one kind of social media account

**98%**



**81%** of those surveyed spend **more than 1 hour** a day on social media

# Outside work

## What design publications / blogs do you read regularly?

3x3
99 Percent Lifestyle
A List Apart
Aiga Eye on Design (8)
andychu.design
Archdaily
Architect Journal
Awwwards (3)
Baseline Magazine
Behance (7)
Birmingham Design (Festival) (2)
Booooooom
BP&O
Brand Identity (3)
Brand Master Academy
Brand New (9)
Breathe
Building Online Journal
Campaign (2)
Campaign Live
c4dcafe
cgpress.org
Creative Boom (25)
Creative Bloq (9)
Creative Champs
Creative Directory

Creative Lives in Progress / Lecture in Progress (5)
Creative Magazine
Creative Review (27)
Computer Arts
CSS Tricks
Design Blog
Designmilk
Design Observer
Design Week (14)
Designspiration (2)
Design Taxi (2)
Dezeen (10)
Dieline (4)
DOMO
Dribbble (2)
Drum
Dwell
The Economist
Eye Magazine (5)
Fastcompany
Flow
Foam Magazine
Fonts In Use
Frame (2)
Fukt Magazine
The Futur (3)





# Outside work

## What design publications / blogs do you read regularly?

FutureGov blog
GOV.UK Services in Government blog
Graphik (2)
HubSpot
Hypebeast
Icon (2)
iD (2)
Identity Designed
Inside Design
Instagram (3)
Interaction Design Foundation
It's nice that (30)
Logo Design Love
Made By Folk/ FormFiftyFive (3)
Marketing Week (2)
Medium (3)
Motionographer
Mix Interiors
Muzli (2)
mymodernmet
OMB
Propel
Proper Talk
Really Good Emails
Retail Design Blog (2)
RIBA Journal

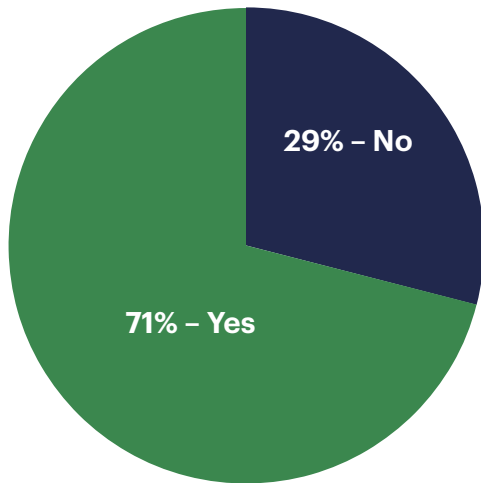
School of Motion
Siteinspire
Slanted (2)
Smashing Magazine (2)
Spine Magazine
Stacked Subscription
Stylist
Thunder Chunky
tiktok
Trend List
Typefont
u99
Under Consideration
UX Collective (4)
Varoom
Vice News
Visuelle
Vogue
Wallpaper (2)
Weekly Typographic
Why Now
Wrap
Yanko



# Outside work

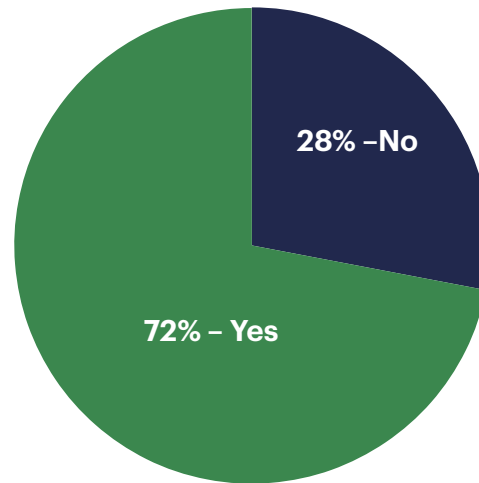
## Do you take on side projects?

All respondents



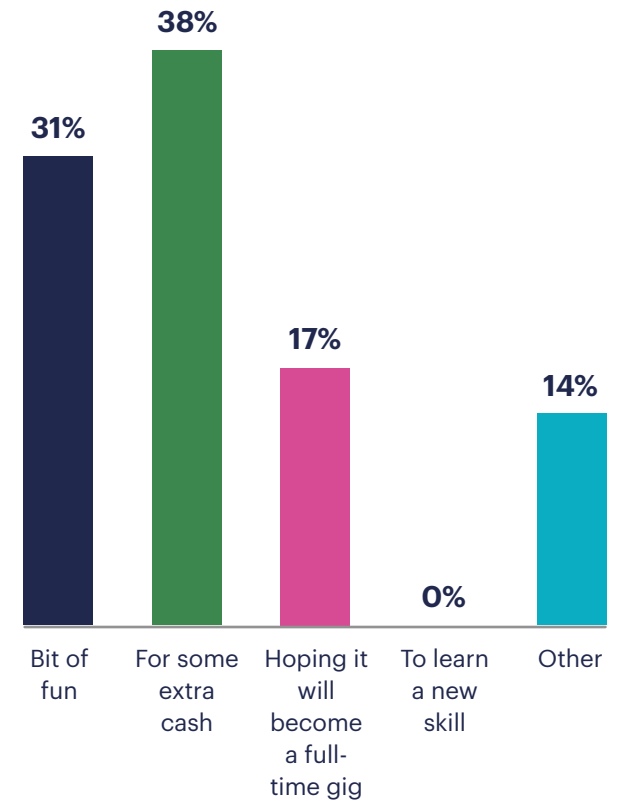
## Are these often paid?

All respondents



## What is your main reason for doing side projects?

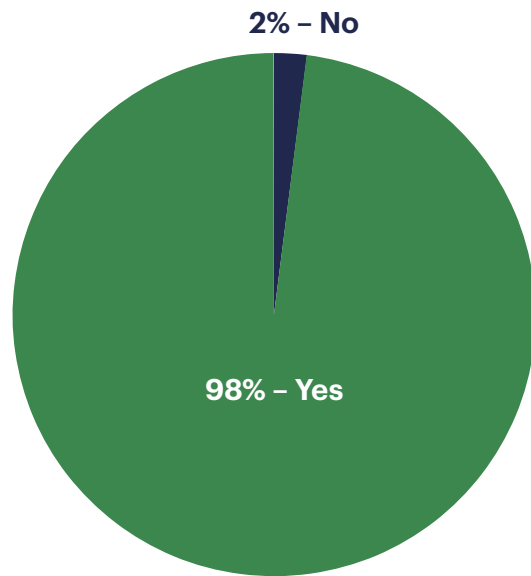
All respondents



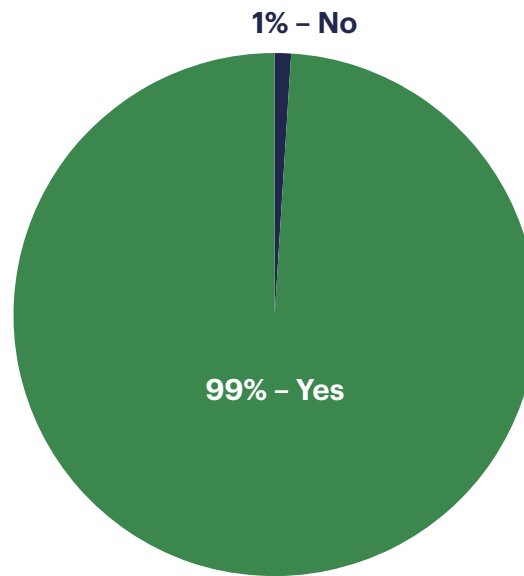
# Outside work

Do you have any social media account(s)? By gender.

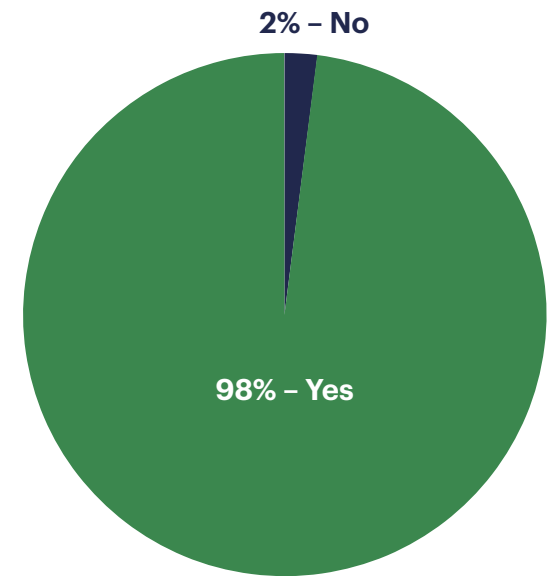
All respondents



All



Identify as female

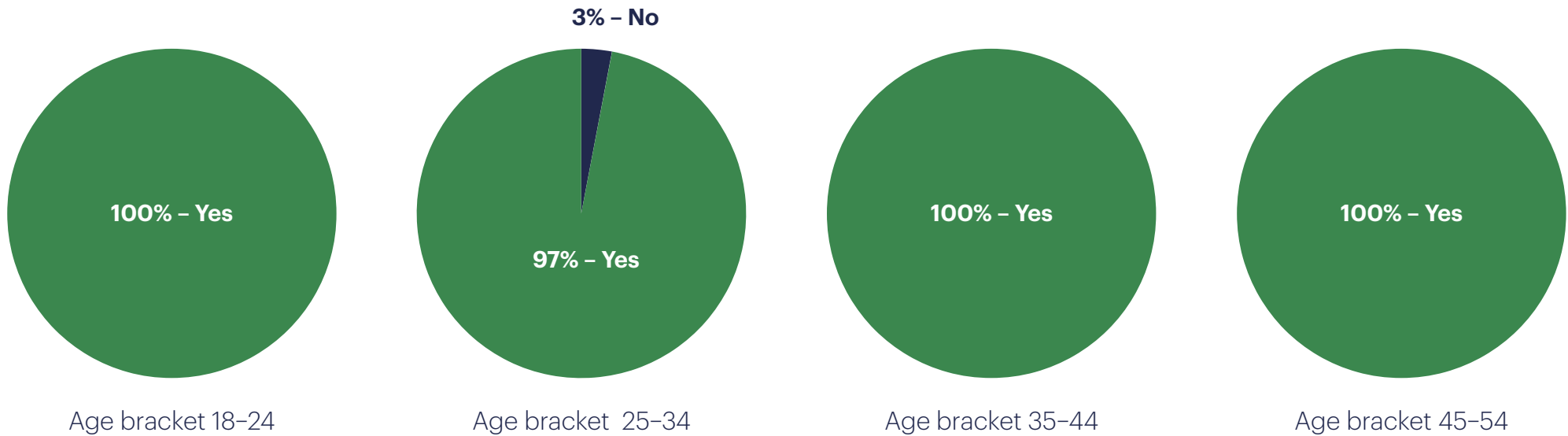


Identify as male

# Outside work

Do you have any social media account(s)? By age.

All respondents



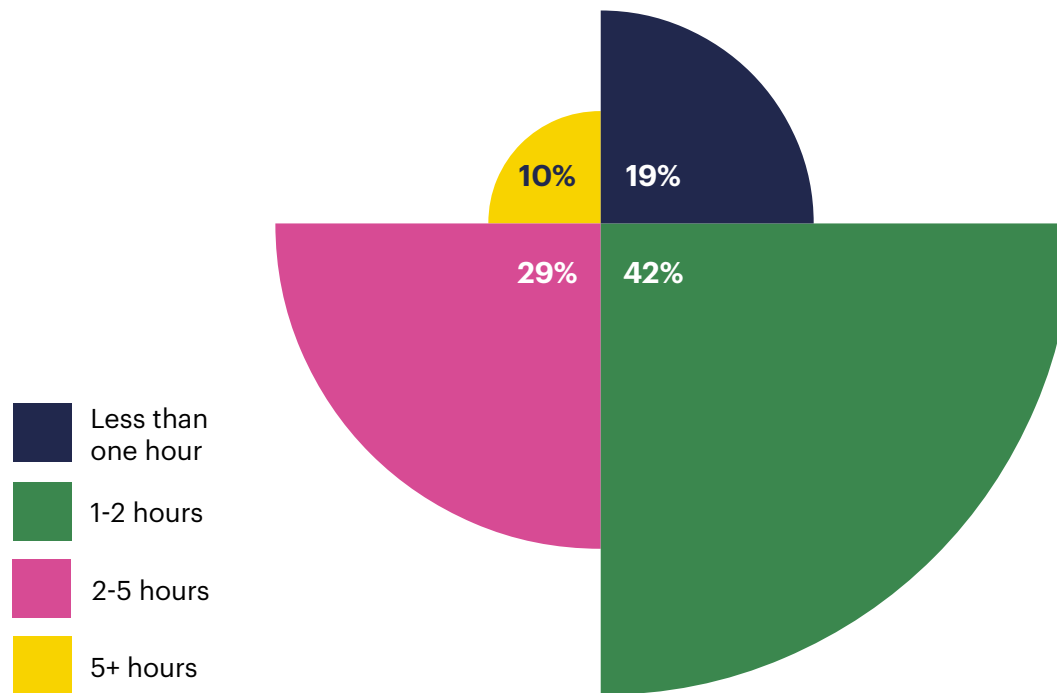
*\*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.  
55+ too small sample size.*



# Outside work

On average how many hours a day do you spend on social media?

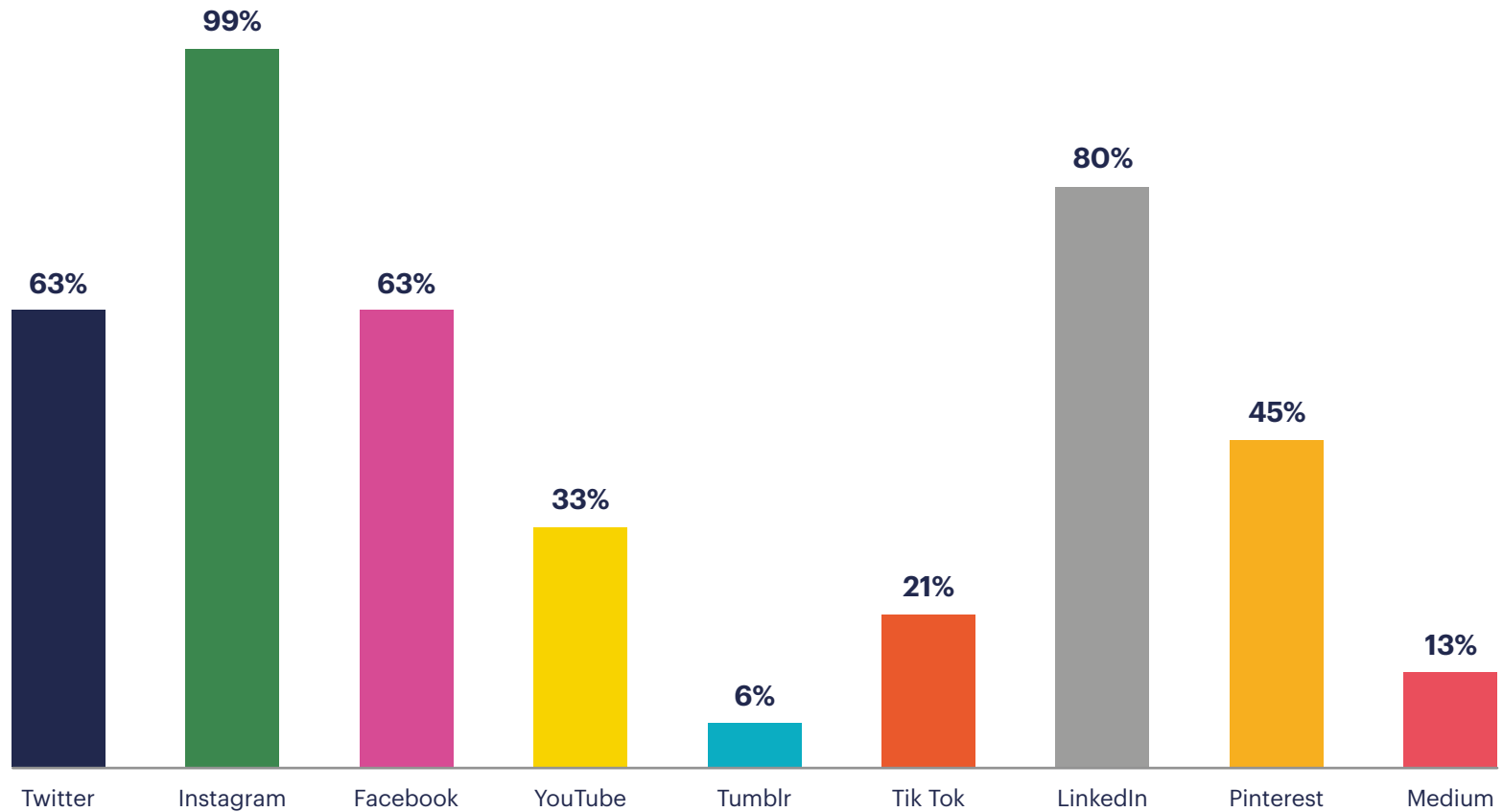
All respondents [answering yes to previous question]



# Outside work

Which of the following [social media accounts] do you have?

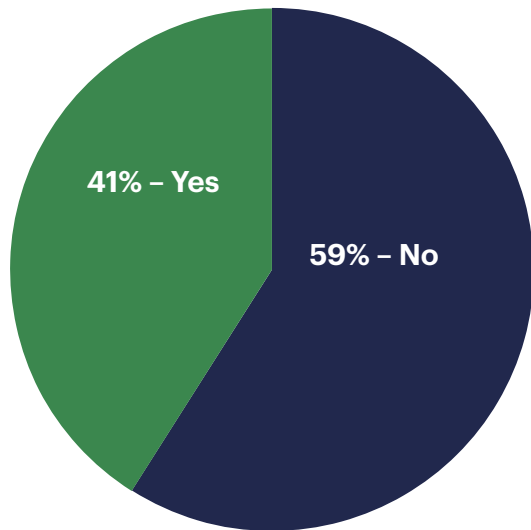
All respondents



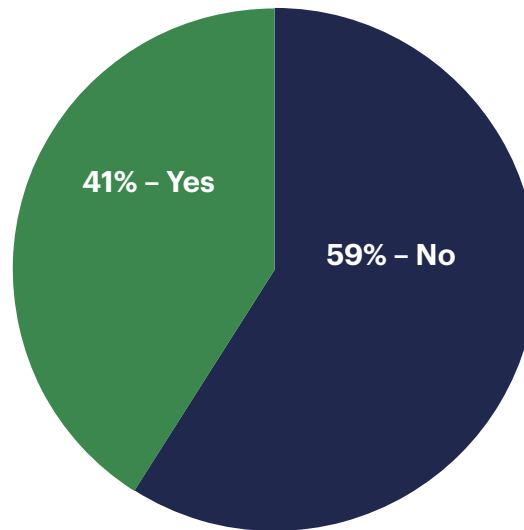
# Outside work

Do you meet up regularly with other designers outside of work? By gender.

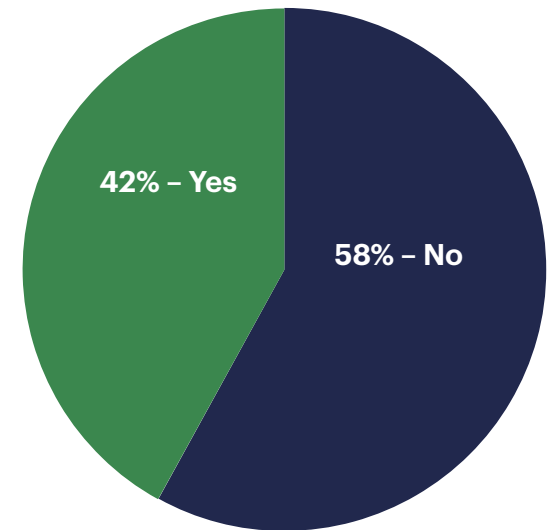
All respondents



All



Identify as female

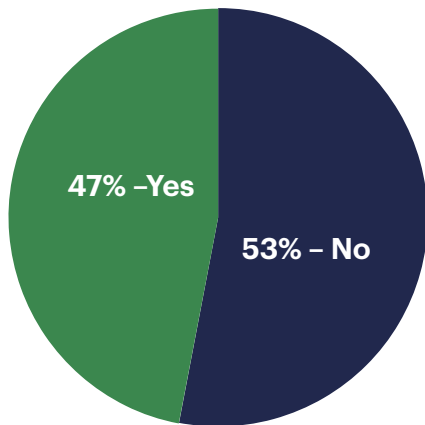


Identify as male

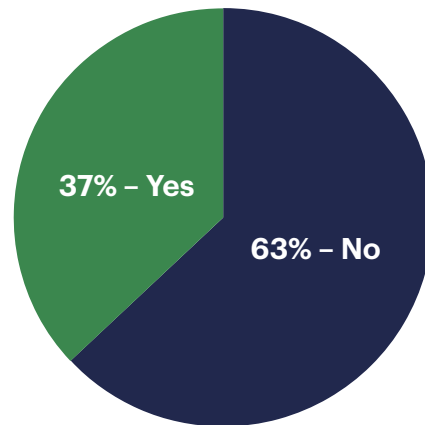
# Outside work

Do you meet up regularly with other designers outside of work? By age.

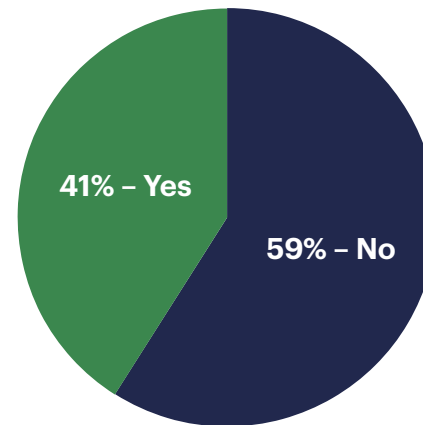
All respondents



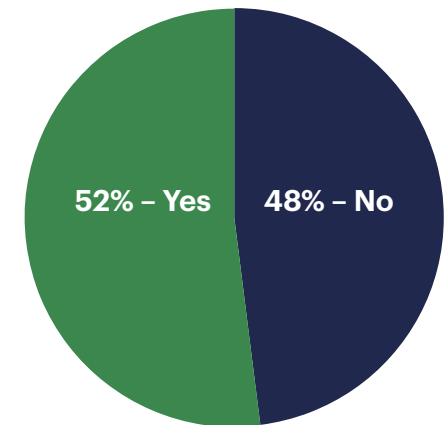
Age bracket 18-24



Age bracket 25-34



Age bracket 35-44



Age bracket 45-54\*

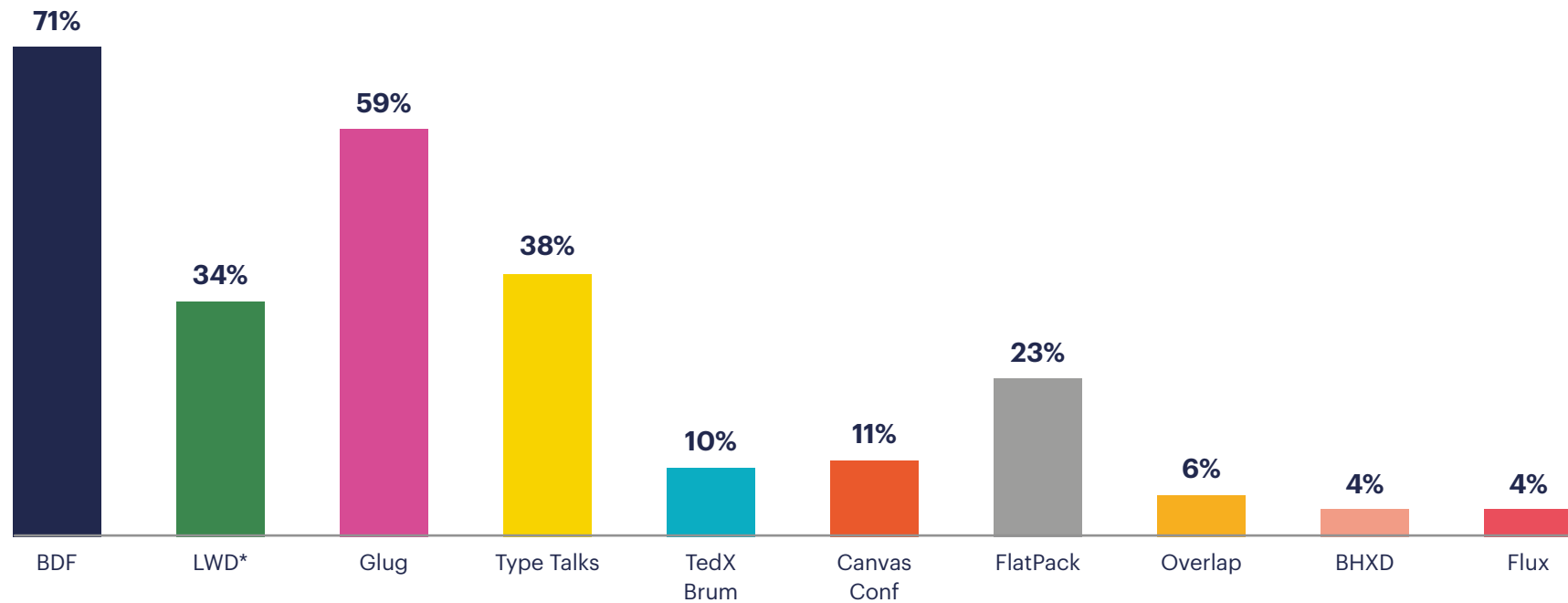
*\*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.  
55+ too small sample size.*



# Outside work

Which of the following events have you attended?

All respondents



*\*Percentage calculated from respondents who identify as female.*



# Get in touch

For more information or to give feedback, please contact

[hello@birminghamdesign.co.uk](mailto:hello@birminghamdesign.co.uk)  
[birminghamdesign.co.uk](http://birminghamdesign.co.uk)  
[@BhamDsgn](https://www.instagram.com/BhamDsgn)

