

Introduction

We're back again for our third annual survey, looking into the working lives of creatives in the West Midlands.

We'd like to thank all of you who took part, your answers will help to reflect and shape the future of the design industry in the region.

We've listened to feedback on last year's survey and amended questions where necessary – this has had an impact on some results but comparisons can still be made with last year's survey. You will see some new questions this year relating to remote working as this has become much more of a feature in our day-to-day lives.

An extra thank-you this year goes to the team at Beyond the Book who have kindly sponsored the survey. A Foreword from their Creative Development Director, Emma Head, follows this introduction.







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 remain confident that they are valuable in showing a picture of those working in design in the West Midlands.

Now we're in our third year we're able to comment with more certainty about trends with our results. Our analysis and highlights are presented over the following pages.

Numbers of respondents

A total of 134 people completed the survey, 19 of whom were students. With certain questions where we have cross-referenced data, the sample size is such that a meaningful representation has not been possible, these have been highlighted.

Question setting

Our questions provide a workable set of data with results that are aimed at those working both in and with the creative industry in the West Midlands. With respect to some terminology and categories we have referred to guidelines from the ONS and UK Government Census.

Snapshots of design

This year we asked our respondents for their own 'snapshots' of the design community in the West Midlands. You'll see a few of their quotes throughout the analysis section of the survey. Some are good, some not so but they are all honest.

Foreword

Being a creative in Birmingham, you can feel immense pride in the level of work being created across the design scene in the West Midlands.

It has grown and developed over the past few years into a creative community producing amazing work and supporting each other, which has been more important than ever in recent years.

We are in the privileged position at Beyond the Book as we see first -hand the fantastic creative talent that we have here in the West Midlands, which arguably produces some of the best design work to come out of the UK. The creative spirit we have here is now being recognised and is making noise in the wider UK and international design communities.

This spotlight on the West Midlands design scene is in no small part down to the hard work and effort that the team at Birmingham Design put in by tirelessly giving back to our community, creating the now world famous Birmingham Design Festival. Organising workshops and exhibitions, championing talent and in general nurturing the community are just some of the great things they do.

This annual survey is an invaluable tool to gain insight into the Midlands design community, and the results have certainly showcased the diversity of talent and skills. This echoes 2022 where there were many more creative job roles offered and also brand new roles created, many of those within digital creative and this looks set to continue into 2023.

The biggest step change across the whole industry is that hybrid working is thankfully set to stay. This has given creatives more flexibility and freedom to both have a better work life balance, but also time in the week to attend workshops, get involved with community projects or perhaps pursue that side hustle; making a happier creative community all round.

There is no doubt 2023 will see continued growth in the West Midlands design community. Last year saw a number of new agencies starting up and we are set to see more of the same in 2023 as well as big companies like the BBC setting up creative hubs in Birmingham, adding continued growth and investment in the West Midlands creative scene, which we all welcome.

I am sure that you will find the results of the Birmingham Design Annual Survey a real insight into our industry.

Thanks to all the team at Birmingham Design for their hard work and efforts in putting this survey together and we look forward to continuing working with them as well as supporting our creative community in the coming year.

Emma Head

Creative Development Director – Beyond the Book



Gender

Design is an industry known for having unfair representation of gender. This is changing however, and we are seeing some encouraging trends in our survey results.

Overall, 9% more women than men took part in the survey. At a professional level this remains slightly ahead at 5% more female respondents. This is the first year that we have seen a higher percentage of professional female respondents.

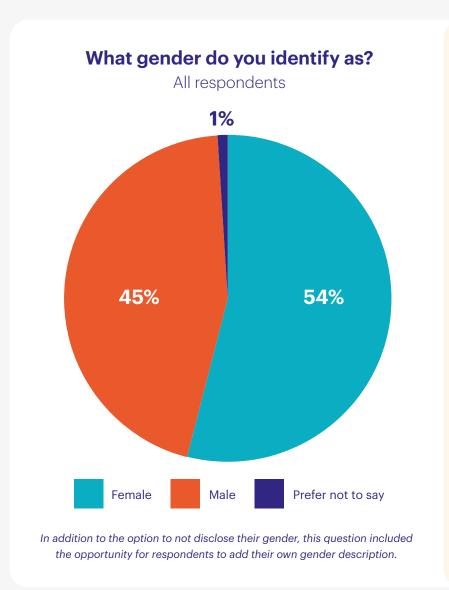
75% of students surveyed identified as female. This figure sits halfway between 2021 and 2022 where female respondents numbered 80% and 70% respectively.

As highlighted in our introduction, this could be due to our reach but we hope that it is an indication of steps towards a more diverse design industry in the West Midlands.

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Design is thriving in the West Midlands, there seems to be more design opportunities in the region as people value visual communication.





540 of respondents identify as female

Our survey results have consistently seen a fairly equal split between male and female respondents at a professional level. However, this split isn't translating to more senior roles (see page 9).

While again we see a higher number of female students than male, we're still not seeing them enter and remain in the industry – at least not in the West Midlands.

The good news is that this split is far more equal than the national industry average¹ of 77% male.

1. www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/ championing-the-value-of-design/ design-economy/

Age

Our respondents are a relatively young bunch, with 88% being under 44. This is consistent with our previous two surveys.

Just 4% of respondents are in the 55 and over categories, making them the least represented age group in the survey.

Age does have an effect on career; as can be expected we see more senior positions within older age groups. For example, 37% of 45–54 year olds have positions of Business Owner or Company Director – an increase of 7% on 2021.

In addition, salary also increases with age, most likely in-line with senior roles. 36% of the 45–54 year old age bracket are earning £50,000 and above compared with 25% of 35–44 year olds.

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It's continuing to gain maturity and momentum, as for us we have always played second fiddle to the mythical 'London'.





Ethnicity

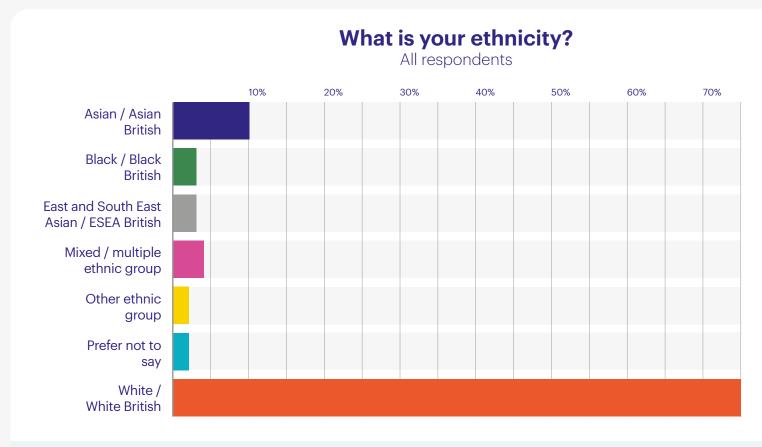
Again we have seen a modest decrease from our previous survey but our respondents are still majority white by a significant amount – 75% compared to 81% in 2021 and 86% in 2020. We could say that over the last three years the design industry in the West Midlands has become more diverse, albeit slowly. As with previous years, this could be due to survey audience reach but we can't assume that this is not a true representation of the industry in the West Midlands.

Our survey results are close to the design industry national average¹ but we know that Birmingham has a far more diverse population than most of the UK².



It's welcoming and I can see the efforts that are being made to make it more diverse.







Year on year we have recorded an increase in the percentage of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds.



^{1.} www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/championing-the-value-of-design/design-economy/

^{2.} The populations of Leicester, Luton and Birmingham are now greater than 50% black and minority ethnic – The Guardian, Tue 29 Nov 2022 – https://bit.ly/300TsCs

Health

20% of respondents reported having a condition or illness that could affect their ability to work, a minor decrease of 2% from 2021.

Of those reporting a condition, 19% state that their work can be affected 'a lot'. We have no data for how they or their employers are managing this.

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

Anxiety, depression, imposter syndrome and burnout are a few symptoms that people encounter through working in an industry that can be very demanding on our mental health. We encourage everyone to look for the signs in friends, family and colleagues – and for anyone who is affected by these symptoms to seek professional help.

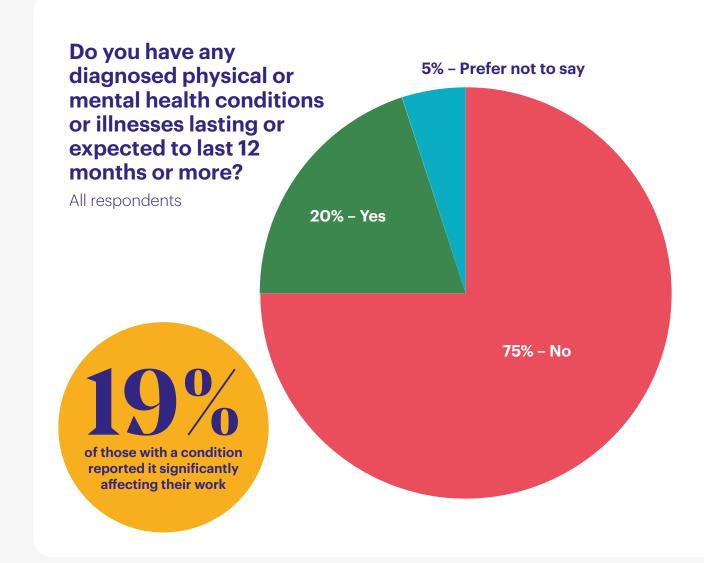
Further reading

AIGA Eye on Design have helpfully categorised all of their articles relating to Mental Health and design here: eyeondesign.aiga.org/category/design-plus/designmental-health/

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A very close-knit scene – everyone is aware of everyone.





Places and positions

The large swing towards freelance in 2021 has fallen back slightly by 6% this year. This percentage appears to have be re-distributed to agencies as a majority of us are working in agencies or in-house.

There are no notable differences between genders regarding where people are working, with the exception of agencies where we see 31% of female respondents working in agencies compared to 43% male.

It is in levels / job titles that we see the most divergence in terms of gender. A much larger percentage of women (28%) are in junior positions compared to men (9%).

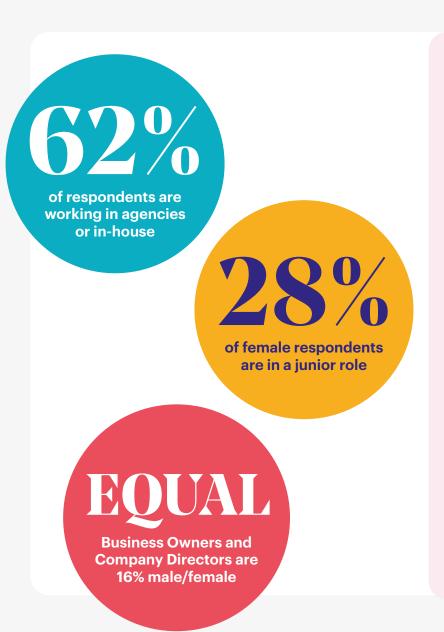
The gap between gender in senior roles has opened again, with 14% more men taking roles of Design and Creative Directors, compared to a 10% gap in 2021 and 20% in 2020. However, the category of Business Owner / Company Director sees an equal split of 16%. Non-design roles have also changed, from 11% more women in 2020 to 2% in 2021.

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

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There aren't enough digital designers for the roles available in the West Midlands and companies seem less willing to take on junior people.





What's in a title?

Roles and job titles are a complex area with many differing views. Any of us who've worked in the industry will understand that what is required of us day-to-day is varied.

Because these duties and responsibilities fluctuate, job titles are not always a true reflection of our experience or capabilities – and this survey's results should be viewed with this in mind. For example, a person may have the title of Senior Designer but may be the only designer in a company, making their role much closer to one of a Design or Creative Director. Alternatively a freelancer with minimal industry experience may choose to call themselves a Creative Director.

This variance is also reflected in salaries, which we've highlighted on the following page.

Salary

Salary expectation remains comparable with the national industry average and other regions outside of London. A majority of us (53%) are earning above £30,000 and 55% of respondents have received a pay rise in the last year.

This figure puts design salaries in the West Midlands on a par with the UK national average salary of £33,000.

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

More men are holding senior, and therefore better paid, positions. However, continuing the trend from 2020 and 2021, gender doesn't appear to affect pay within those roles – our results show that it is fairly equal between genders.

As with job titles / levels, we see a small percentage of respondents that sit outside of the expected ranges for experience and job title.



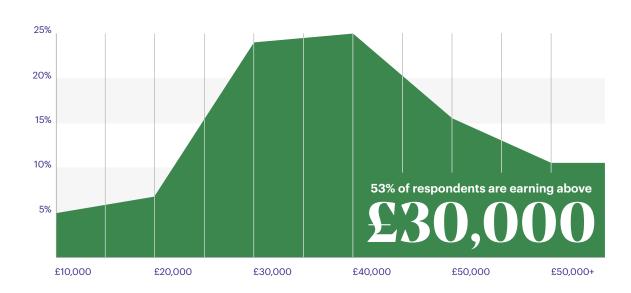
The West Midland's design community is tighter than ever and only getting stronger! Watch this space.



1. ONS, Employee earnings in the UK: 2022 - https://bit.ly/3u7ngRc

What is your salary?

All respondents



of respondents have a had a pay rise in the last 12 months

While the cost of living crisis had yet to hit its peak at the time of people taking part in the survey, it's encouraging to see both the figure to the left and the results above.

We understand that money isn't the only driving factor, as workplace culture is also extremely important, but being remunerated fairly and appropriately should be standard practice in any workplace. Paying freelancers promptly is also the right thing to do!



New hires and interns

One of the biggest changes this year is the number of respondents' companies that have recruited in the last 12 months – a bumper 89% compared to 55% in 2021. This could be a post-pandemic bounce, helping those who went freelance in 2021 to return to agencies.

We could say that what made those new roles enticing is flexible working. In a new question for 2022, 91% of respondents said their workplace offers flexible working and 92% of those take part in it.

Internships are improving, while still only 30% of respondents' companies offer them, this has risen from 21% in 2021. Of those companies offering internships, 75% are paid – not perfect but a definite change for the better from 44% in 2021.



As good as it's ever been. Didn't expect things to be so healthy coming out of the pandemic, but the whole place seems really vibrant.





Skills and sectors

Two consistent trends that we noticed are a varied skill-set and a diverse range of sectors. In the past the West Midlands made its name globally in design, innovation and creative ingenuity in many aspects of society, all down to the hard work and determination of talented folk.

In 2022 this shows no sign of slowing and the design industry in the region is as vibrant and diverse as it ever has been. This year's survey saw a few extra areas of skill added in brand identity and interior design as well as distinguishing digital product design from physical.

One new category of Hospitality has been added to our list of sectors this year. Arts and entertainment is the most worked in sector (31%) but is not a significant percentage ahead of the others. Overall the chart shows that we're varied and it's possible that many of us are choosing not to be sector specific with types of clients we work with.

Our work is not reserved for our region alone – many of us have clients at a national and international level – this is true for freelancers and companies of all sizes.

Although we've got a lot of talent to be proud of, some of our commenters suggest there's potential for improvement – that at times the design industry in the West Midlands can appear to be 'insular, close-minded and anti-innovation'.

Accounting
Aerospace
Agriculture
Arts & entertainment
Automotive

Built environment
Charity
Consulting
Consumer goods
Digital products

Education
Electronics
Energy
Fashion
Finance

Arts & entertainment

is our most worked in sector

Food & beverage
Government
Healthcare
Hospitality
Industrial

Insurance
Legal
Leisure
Logistics
Manufacturing

Pharmaceutical
Property
Publishing
Retail
Social media

Students

87% of respondents have access to their own computer, down from 100% in 2021. All of those 87% have access to creative software and the internet for their design studies. Just 7% pay for the software themselves, a large decrease from 2021's 34%. This can be seen as a positive as fewer students are having to pay for software that could be deemed essential to their studies, giving them the essential support that they need.

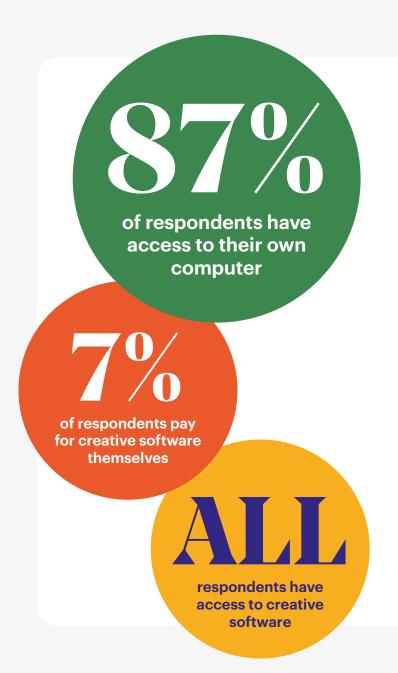
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The young and emerging student talent gives me hope for the industry in the region.



As with 2021, these figures highlight 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, a majority of students do it is easy to see how those without access could be at a disadvantage.

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



Back to the brain drain?

75% of students surveyed intend to remain in the West Midlands once they finish their studies

This figure indicates a slight fall in our mission to keep top talent within the region. 75% of students surveyed stated they intend to remain in the West Midlands once they finish their studies compared to 90% in 2021.

Understandably there are many reasons why people aren't staying in the region, such as family and finances. We hope that it's not because they feel there aren't any opportunities.

The team at Birmingham Design are proud of the talent that we see year after year from local students. We're ever grateful for the connection that we have and the engagement that we encounter.

Outside of work

We're still keen to expand our knowledge outside of the working day – 73% of those surveyed take on side projects, with half of those being 'just for fun'.

Spending all day with other designers is enough for most of us, 63% of respondents don't socialise with fellow designers outside of the workplace. This figure is highest in the 25–34 age bracket, rising to 70%.

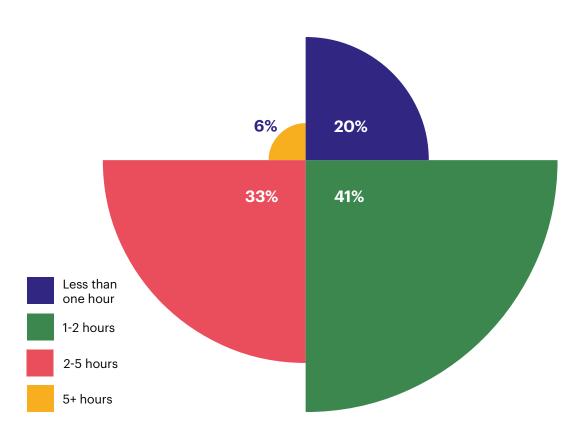
We have had feedback relating to work / design socials and drinking culture that needs to be addressed by all. A number of respondents reported either difficulty networking, or feeling excluded as they don't want to attend events in locations where alcohol is present.

Being social virtually shows little change from previous years. Despite Instagram's algorithms being all over the place and Twitter being what it currently is, social media is still viewed as a necessity to most. 96% of those surveyed have social media accounts, and 80% of those admit to spending more than one hour a day scrolling and liking. Although we suspect the actual amount of time people spend is much higher than they are prepared to admit!

Next year's survey may include a question about how many new social media platforms people have signed up to in the last 12 months.

Average hours a day spent on social media

All respondents with social media accounts



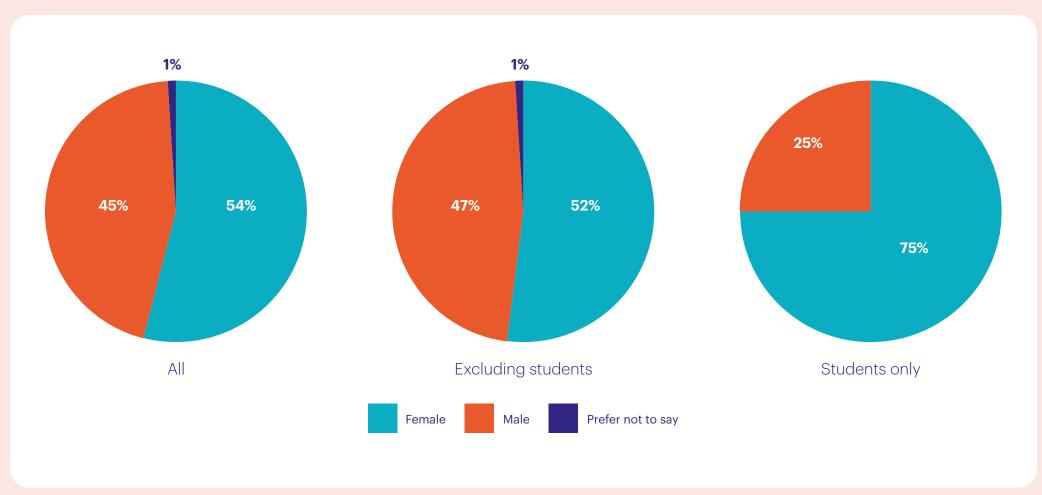
Appendix: Survey results graphs



Gender

What gender do you identify as?

All respondents

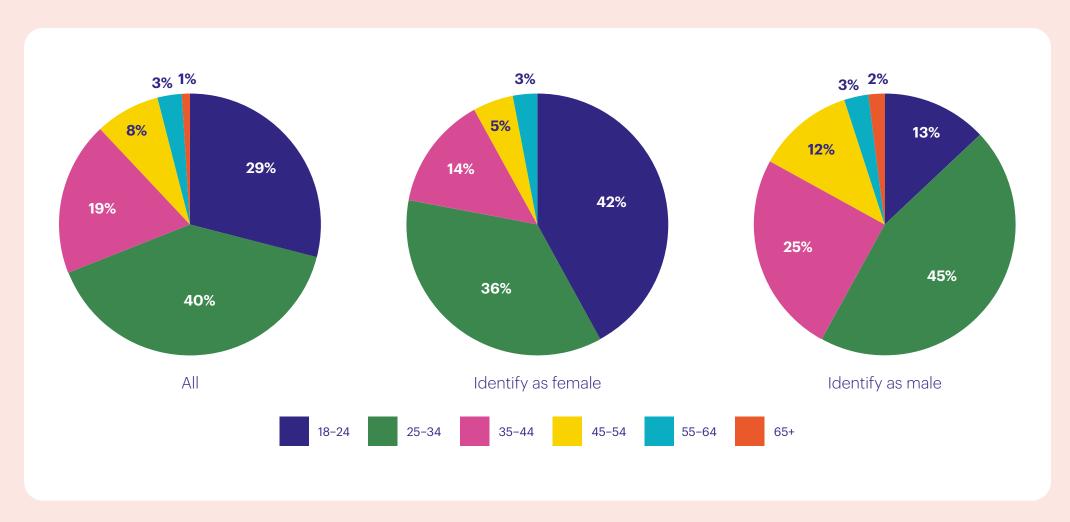


In addition to the option to not disclose their gender, this question included the opportunity for respondents to add their own gender description.



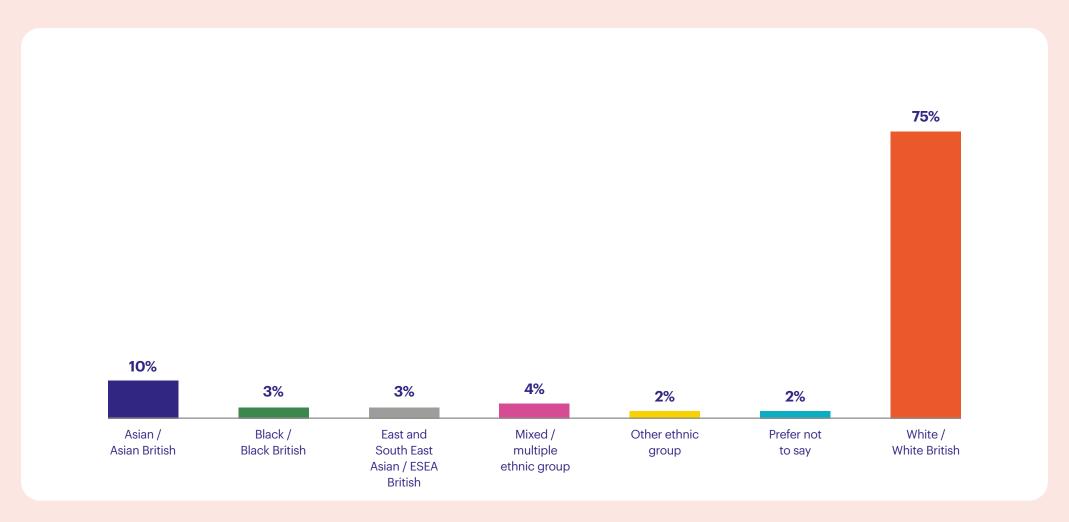
Age

How old are you?



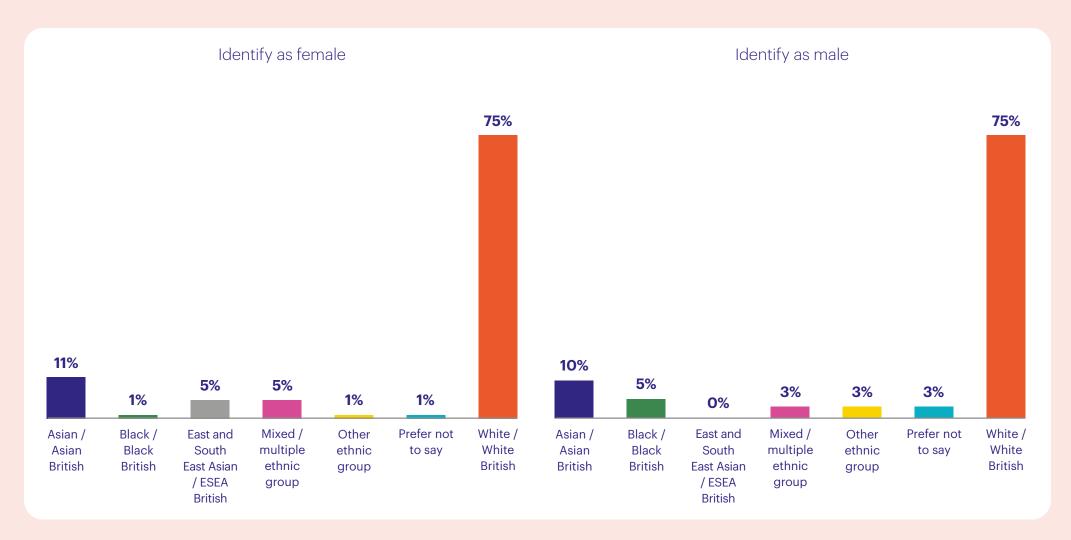
Ethnicity

What is your ethnicity?



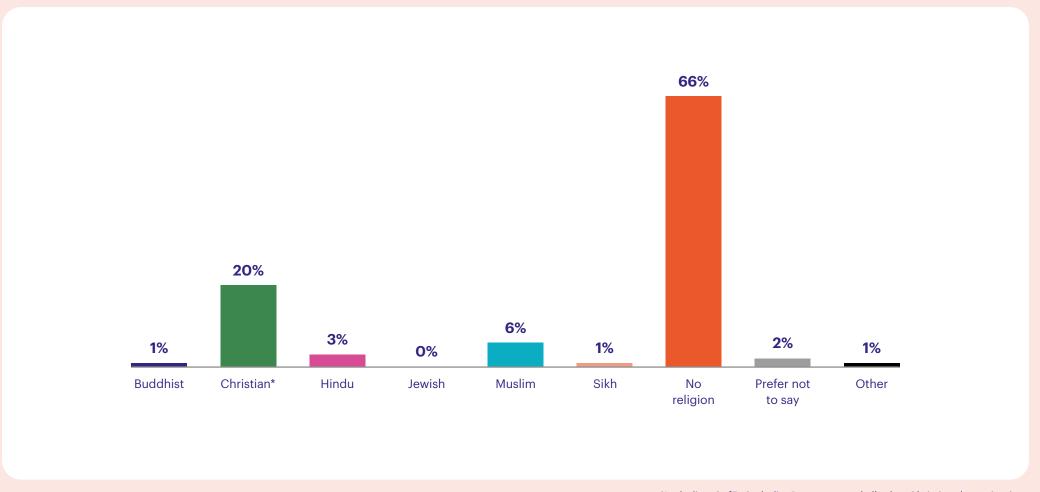
Ethnicity

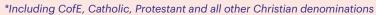
What is your ethnicity? By gender.



Religion

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

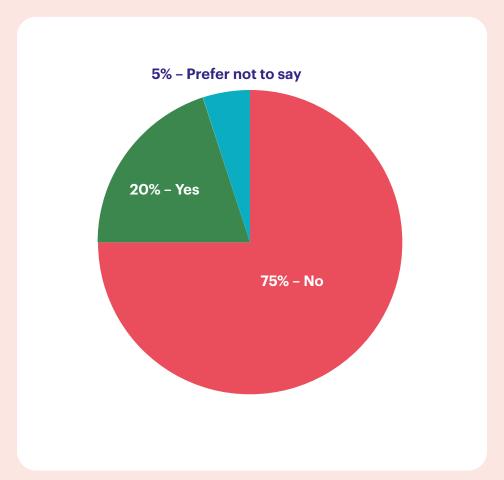




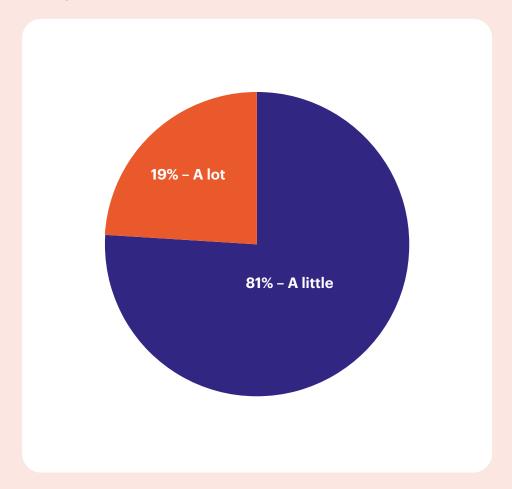
Health

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

All respondents

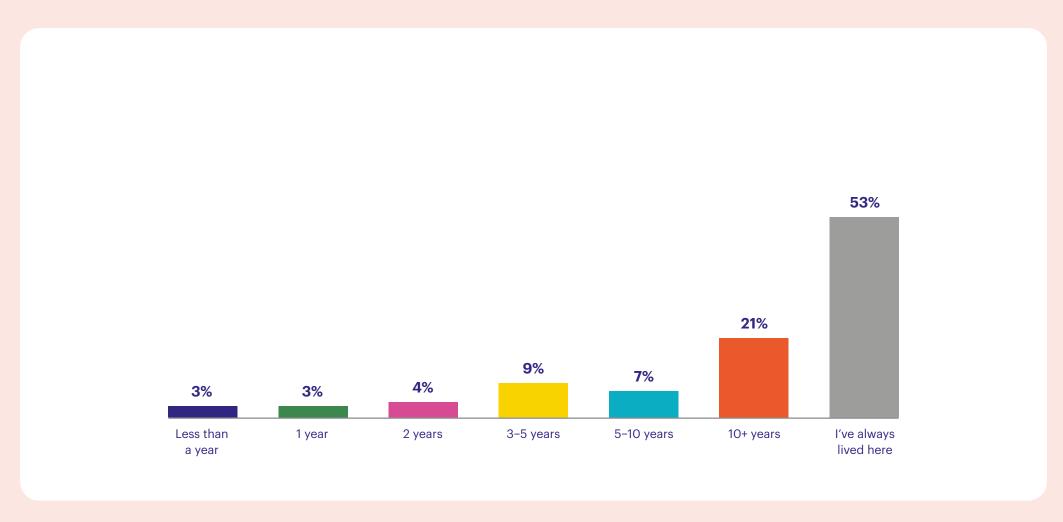


How much do any of your conditions or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

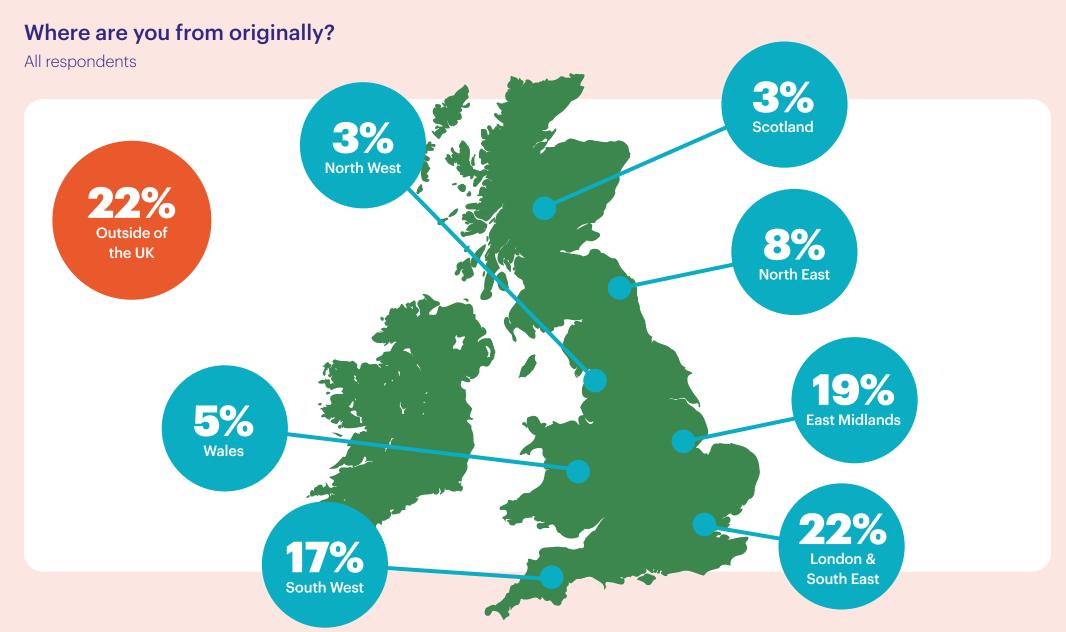


Location

How long have you lived in the West Midlands?



Location





Location

What made you move to the area?

University	education	(16)	١
Ullive Sity /	Cuucation	(IO)	,

I moved to central to be closer to design community and university otherwise I'm from Halesowen/West Midlands

Family (8)

Moved back to the Midlands after living in London for 20 years

I don't live here, I use to travel for uni and am currently seeking for a job in Birmingham

I don't live in Birmingham, however I've commuted to University for 3 years.

Work / career (13)

Relocation from London

The possibility of starting a business in an affordable area with a young population

Prices

My partner got a job in the West Midlands

Cheap school in a big city

Looking for better life conditions and had family working in Birmingham.

Went to university here, and ended up staying because of job opportunities

Try to get a creative job, my degree Product Design but never given the opportunity

Friends

Partner (5)

Met partner in London, moved here to start a family

Husband's job

Nearest job hub to my undergraduate university

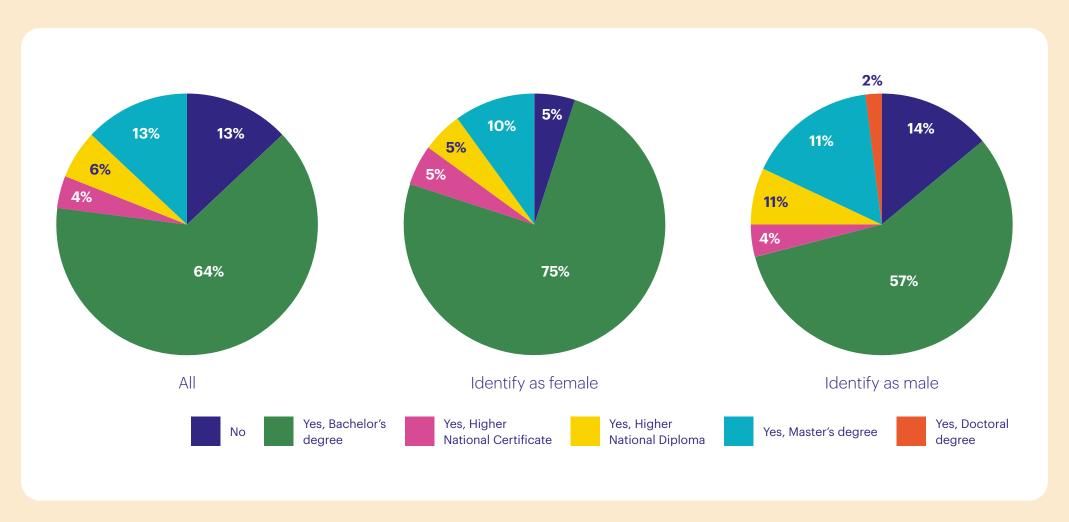
Dad's job

Moved away for university and work, moved back just before Covid-19

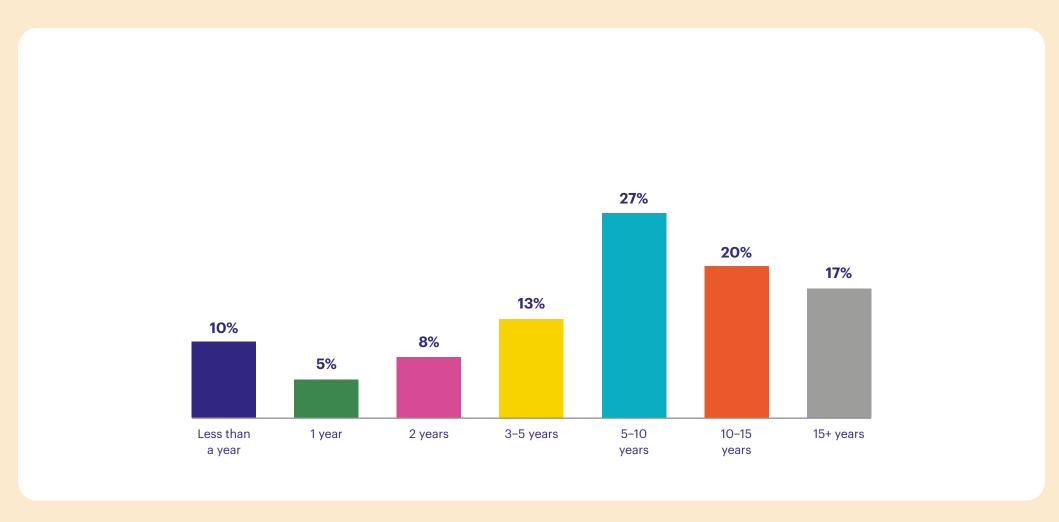
Originally from West Midlands, left for university and then moved back 10 years ago.



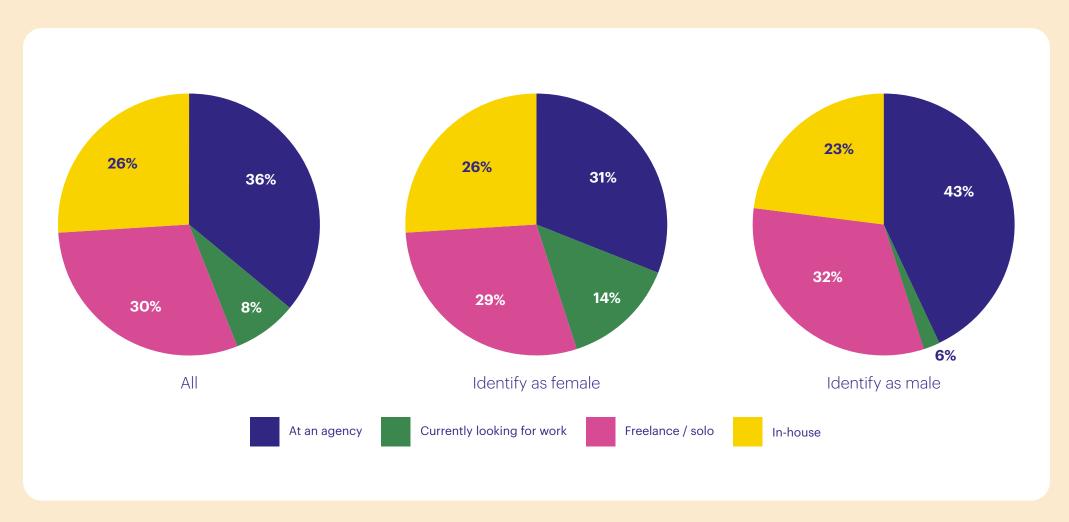
Do you have a qualification that is relevant to the creative industry?



How long have you worked in the creative industry?

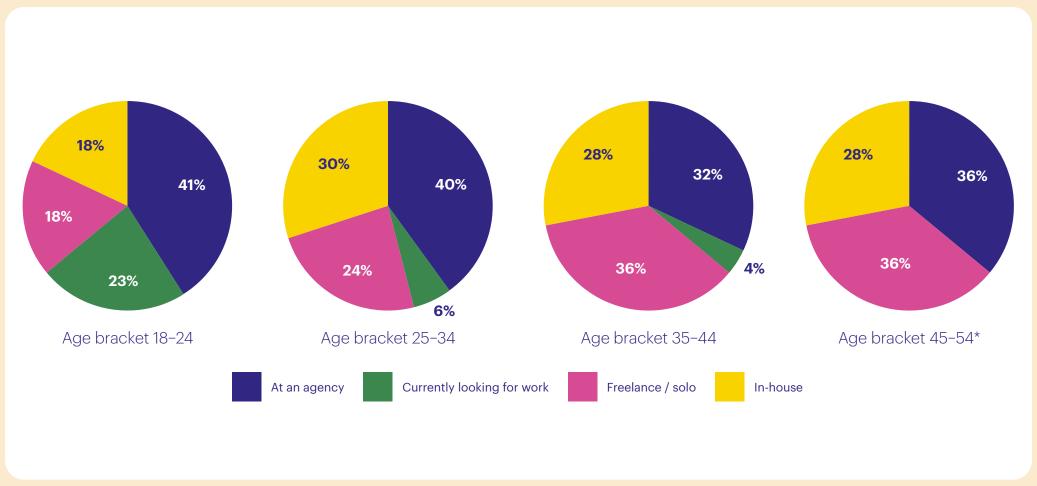


Where are you currently based? By gender.



Where are you currently based? By age.

Excluding students



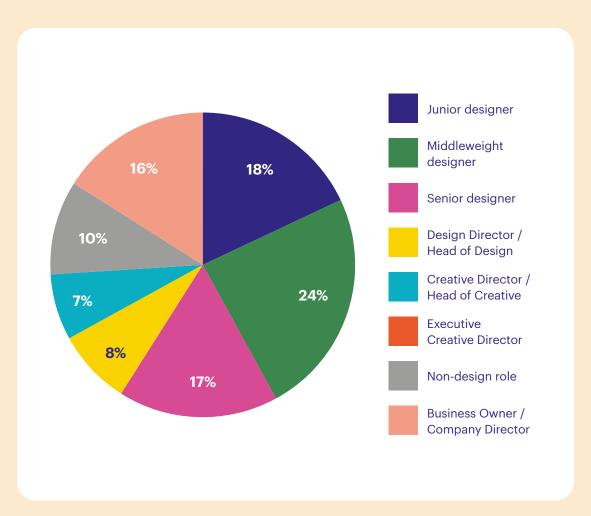
*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.

55+ too small sample size.



What is your current level?

Excluding students



Non-design roles. Verbatims.

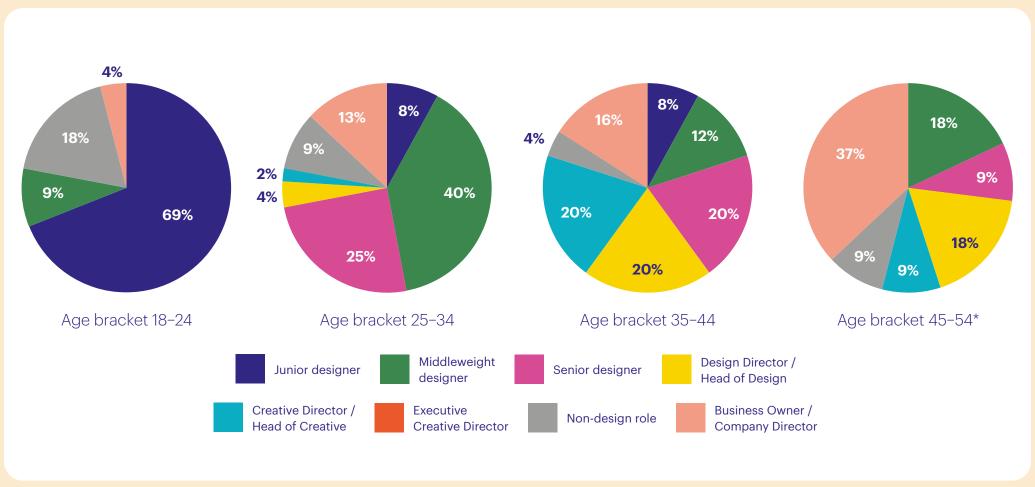
_	
٧	Vork in theatre
ı	work in a office yet freelance on the side.
F	reelance Illustrator
ι	Jser Researcher
A	Artist
P	Production (Props) Buyer
С	Data & Evaluation Coordinator
٧	/isitor Experience Team Member
С	Director
V	Veb developer
J	ungian Analytical Psychotherapist

What is your current level? By gender.



What is your current level? By age.

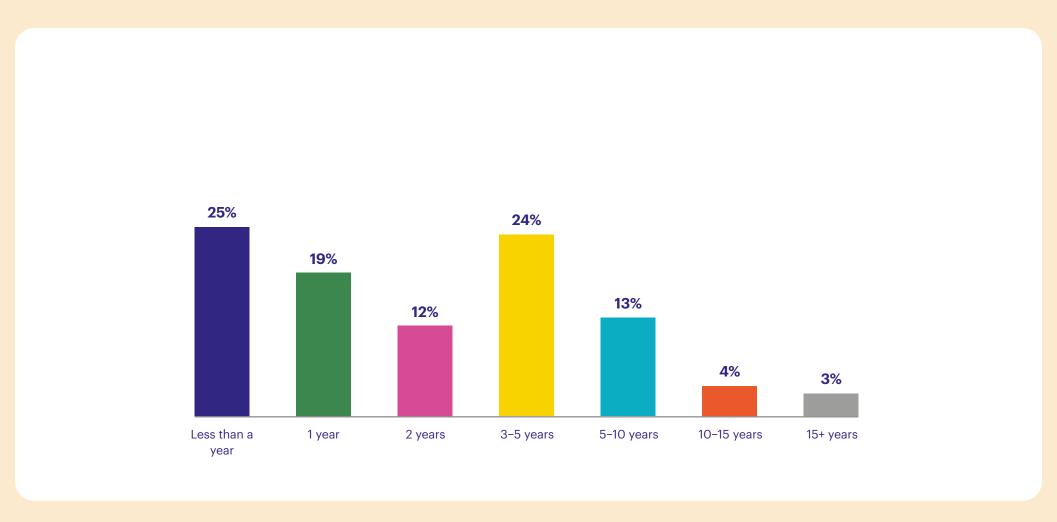
Excluding students



*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.

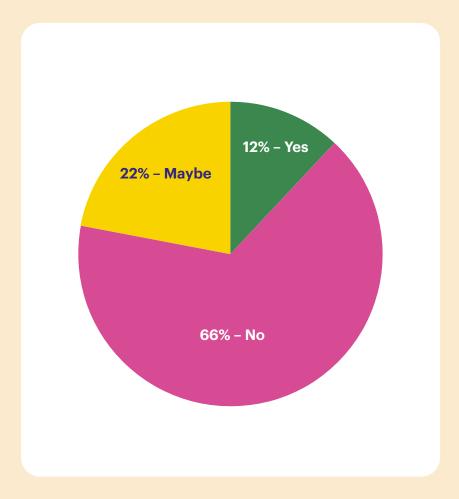
55+ too small sample size.

How long have you held this position?



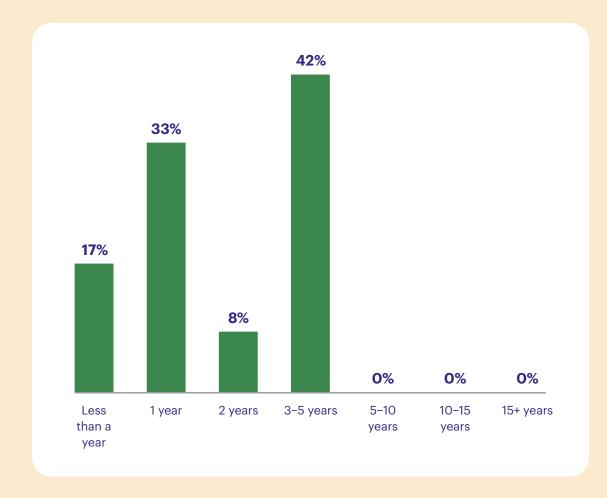
Are you considering leaving this position within the next 12 months?

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

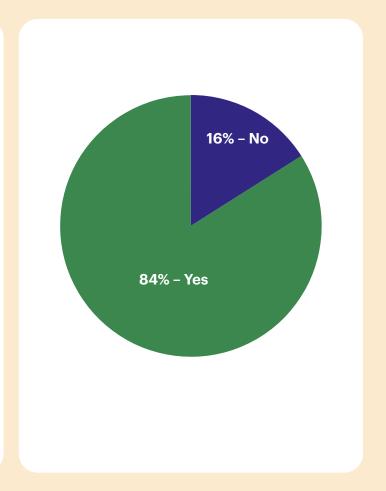


On average, how many hours a week do you work?

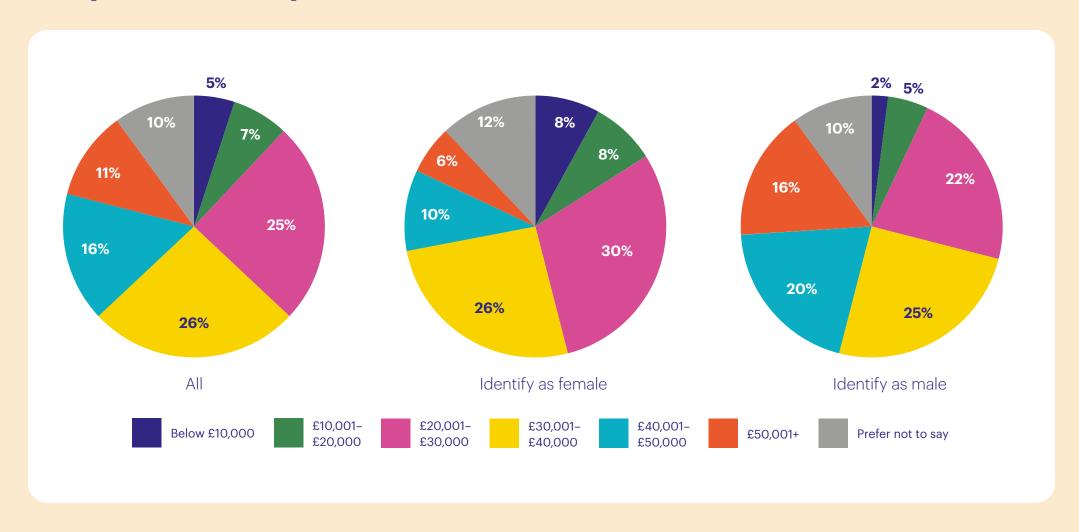
Excluding students and those looking for work

58% 57% **25**% 21% 9% 8% 8% **7**% 2% 0% 0% Less than 10 10-20 20-30 40-50 50+ 30-40 Those considering leaving in respondents the next 12 months

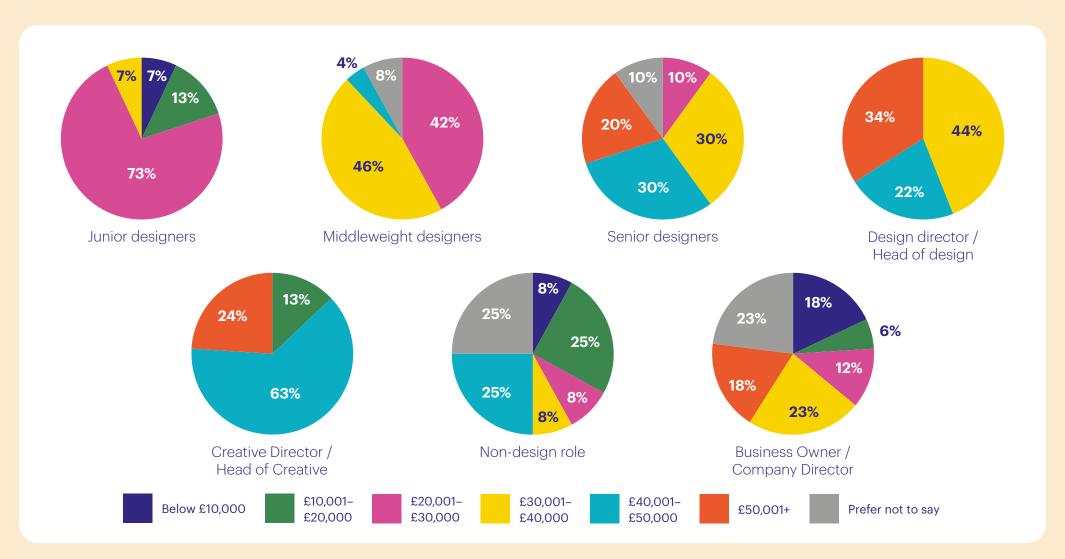
Is design / creative work your sole income?



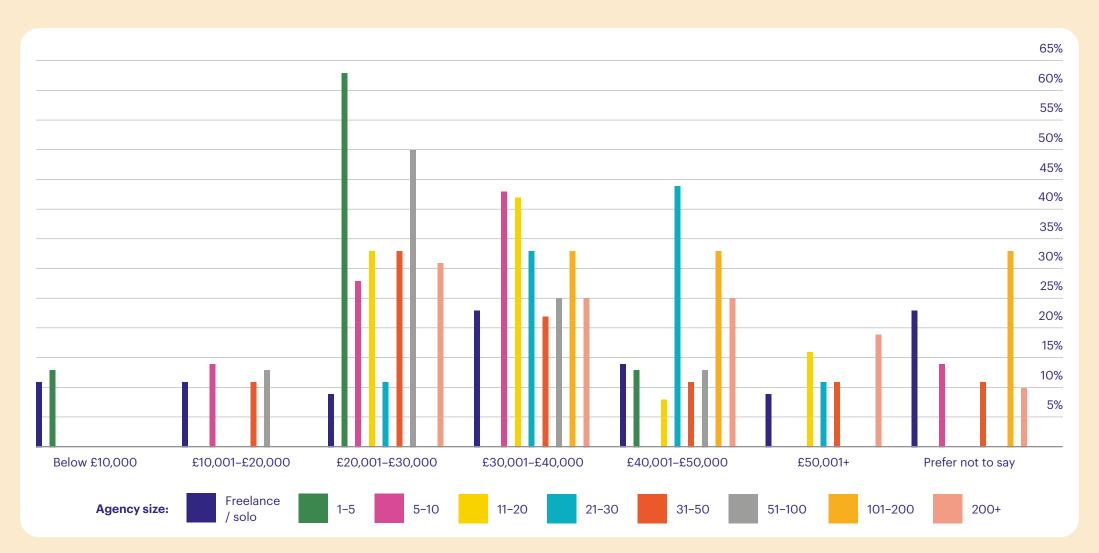
What is your current salary? By gender.



What is your current salary? By position.



What is your current salary? By agency size.



What is your current salary? By age.

Excluding students and those looking for work

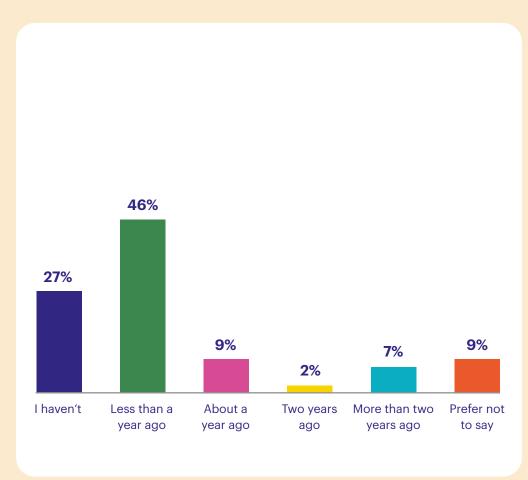


*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.

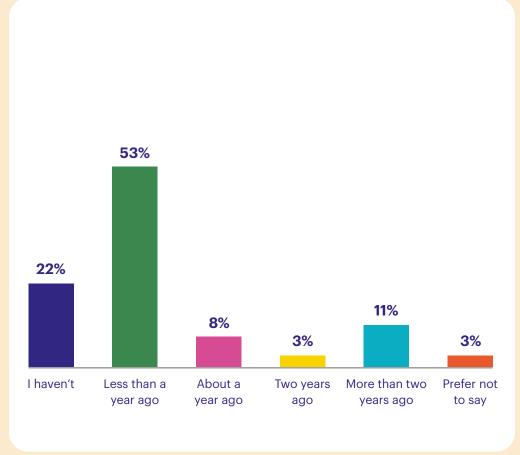
55+ too small sample size.

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

Excluding students and those looking for work

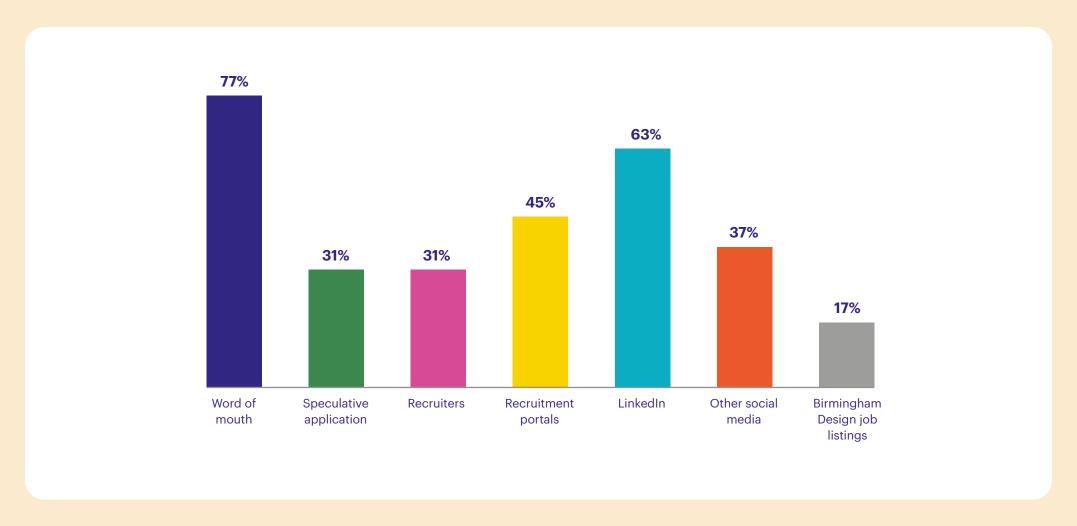


Those considering leaving in the next 12 months, excluding students and those looking for work



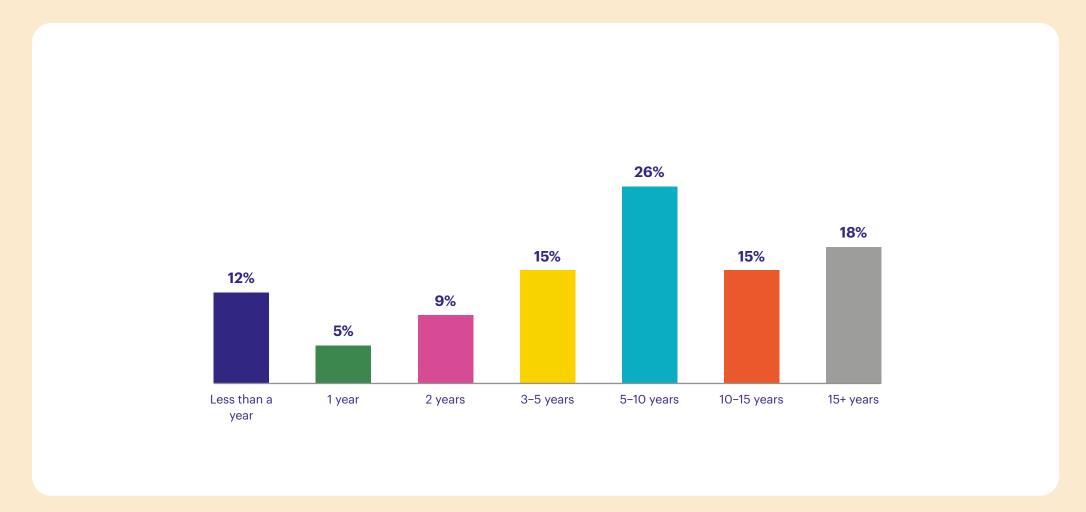
When looking for a job, what method(s) do you rely on?

Excluding students



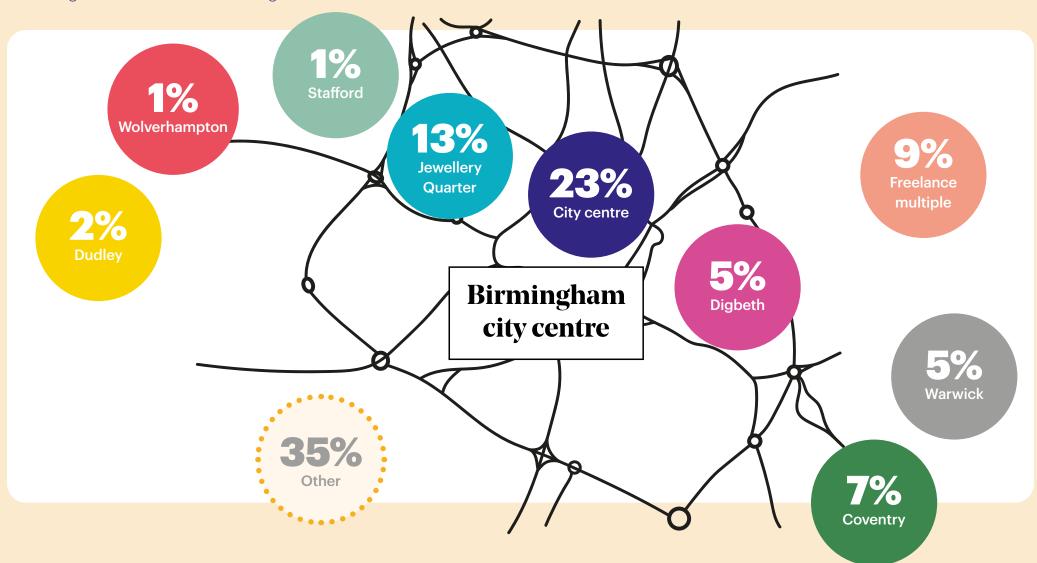
How long have you worked in the West Midlands?

Excluding students



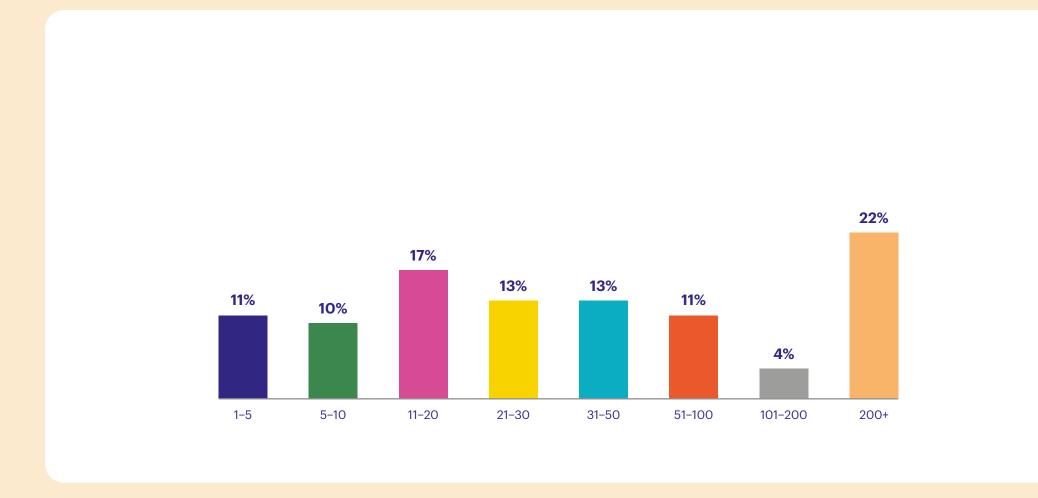
Where is your workplace located?

Excluding students and those looking for work.



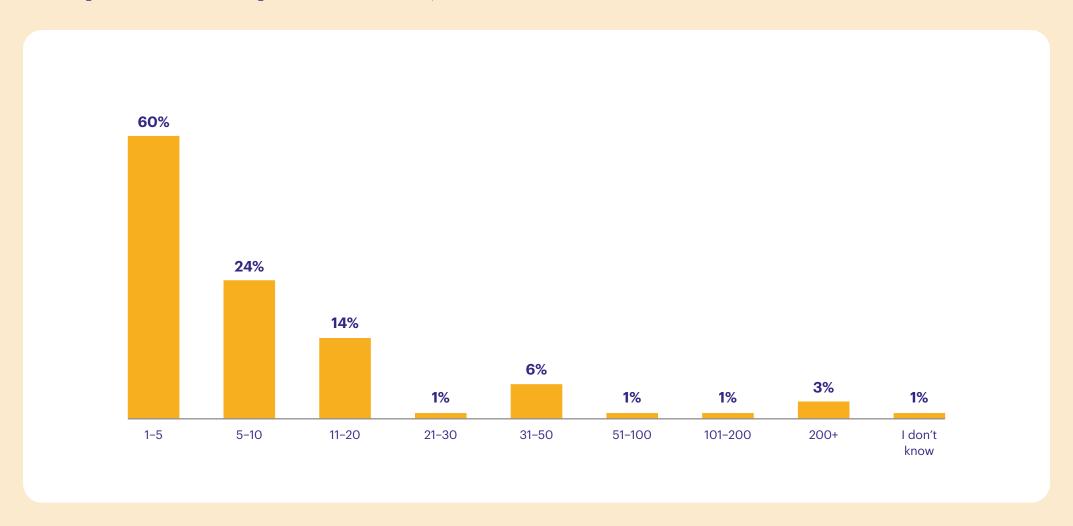
How many people work there?

Excluding students, those looking for work and freelance/solo



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

Excluding students, those looking for work and freelance/solo



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

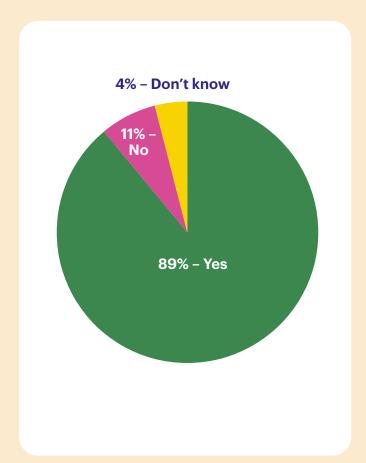
Excluding students and those looking for work

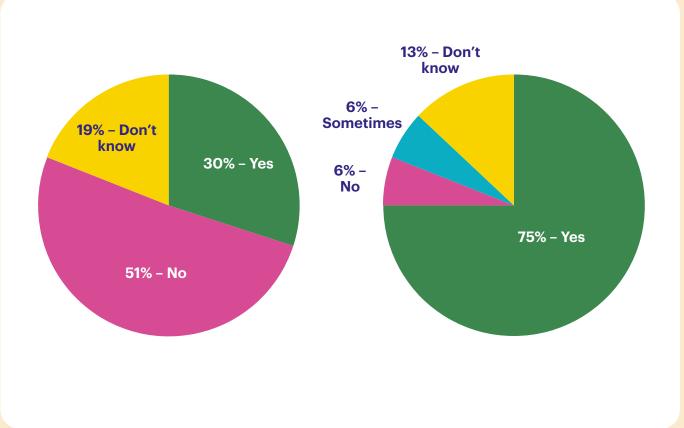
Does your workplace offer internships?

Excluding students and those looking for work

Are these paid?

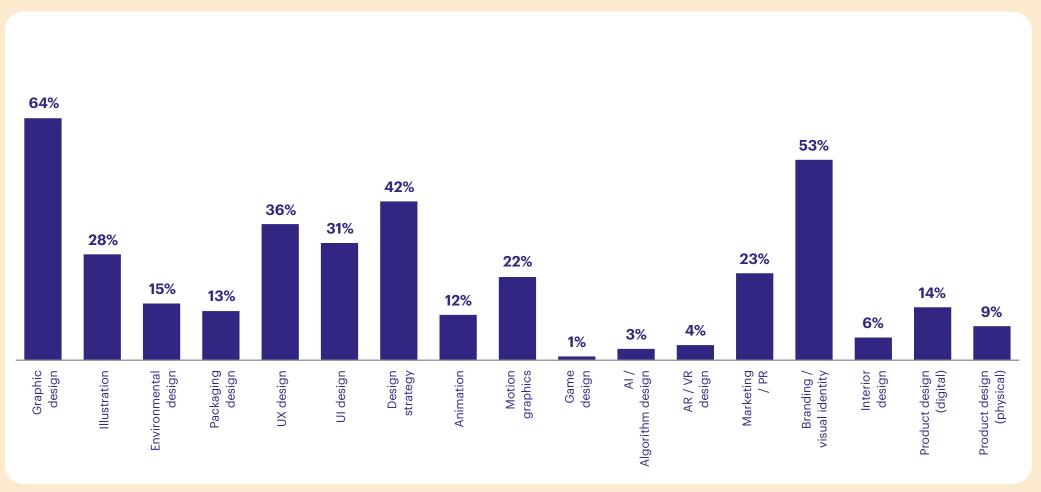
Excluding students and those looking for work





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

Excluding students and those looking for work.



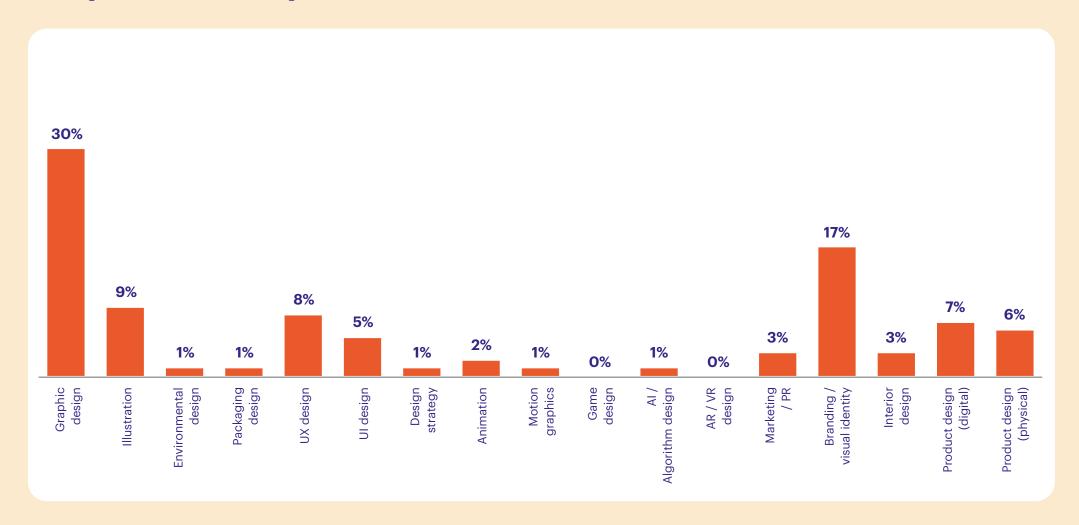
Respondents were able to pick all areas that apply to them.

The graph on the following page shows skill specialities.



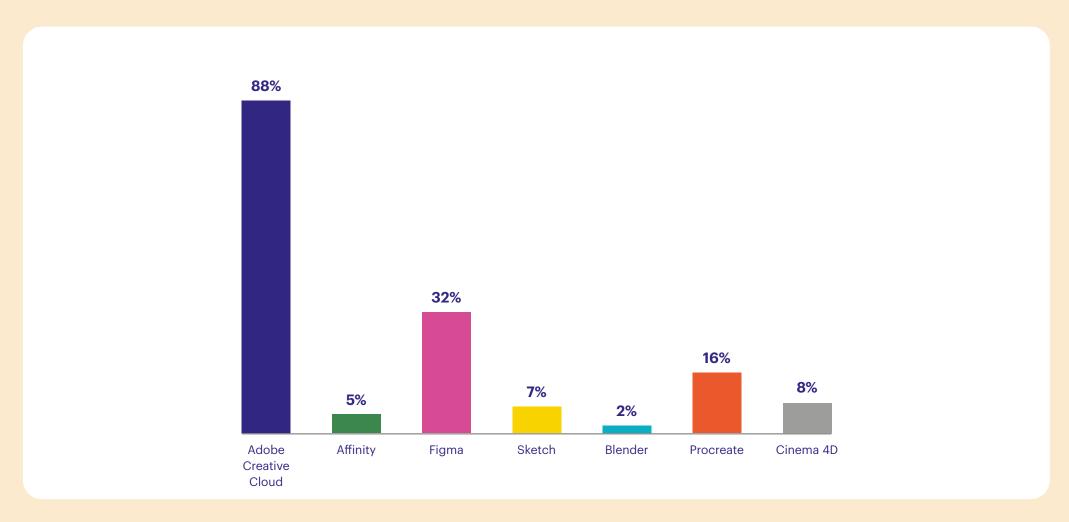
Of the skills selected, which would you consider as your speciality?

Excluding students and those looking for work.



What software do you use?

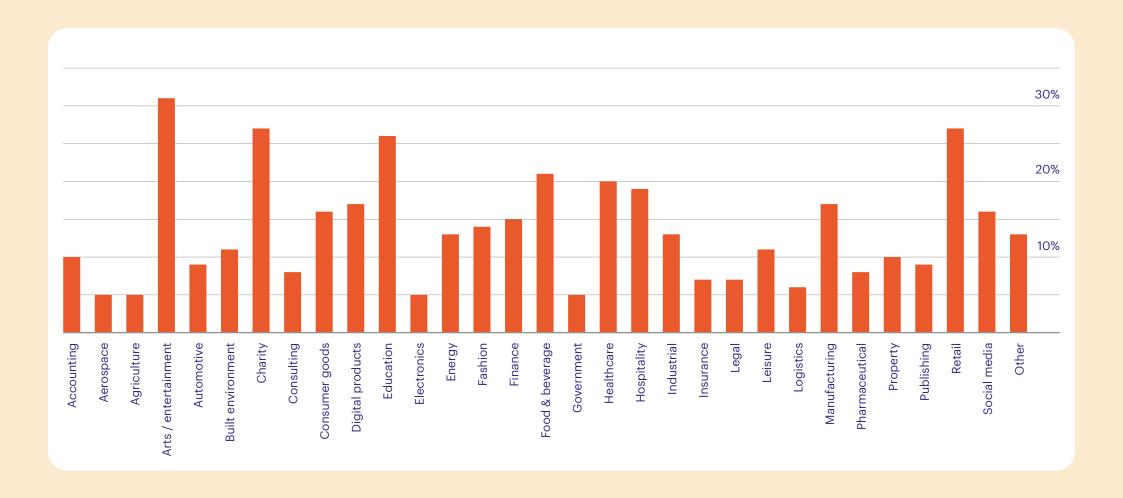
Excluding students and those looking for work.



Other software, please specify.

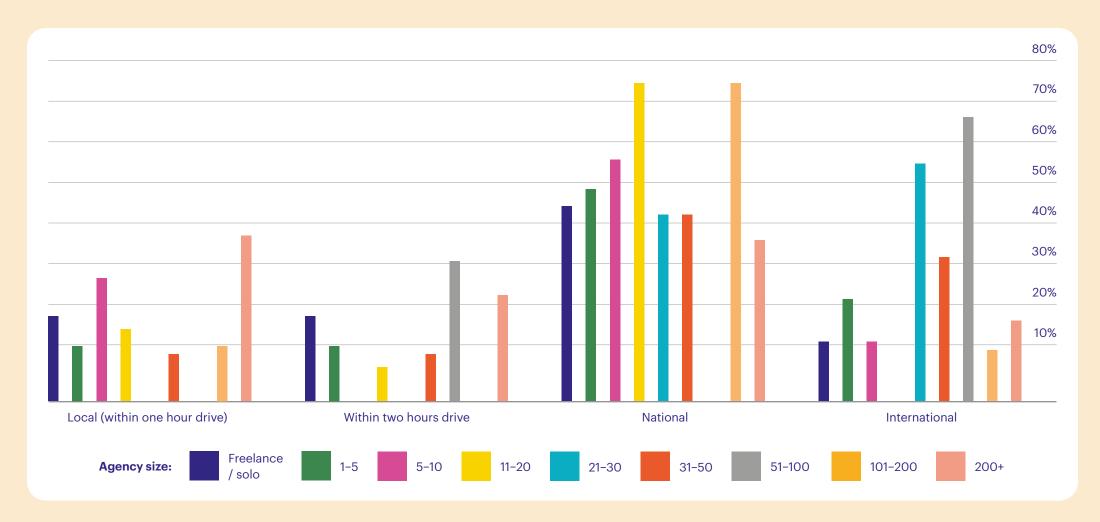
What sector(s) do you work for?

Excluding students and those looking for work.



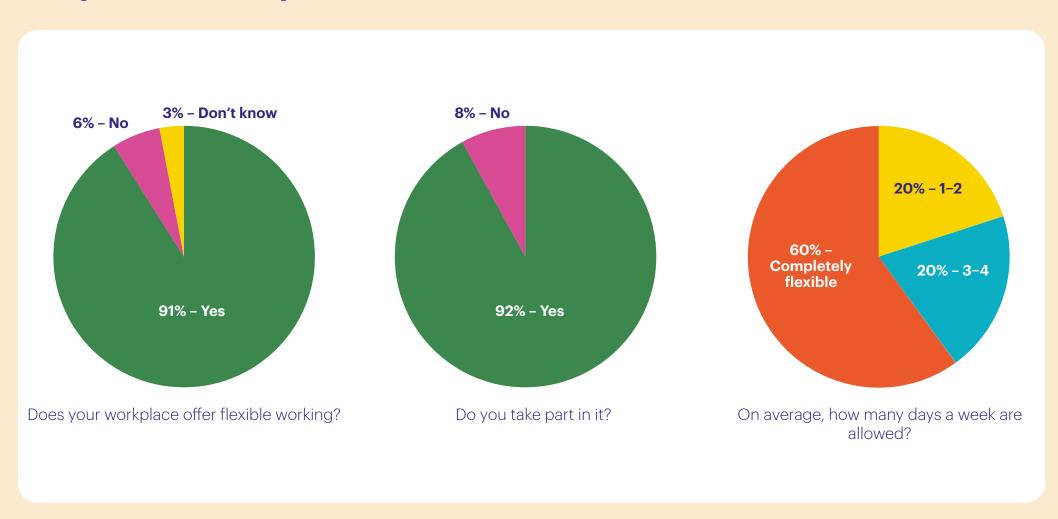
Where are most of your clients based?

Excluding students and those looking for work



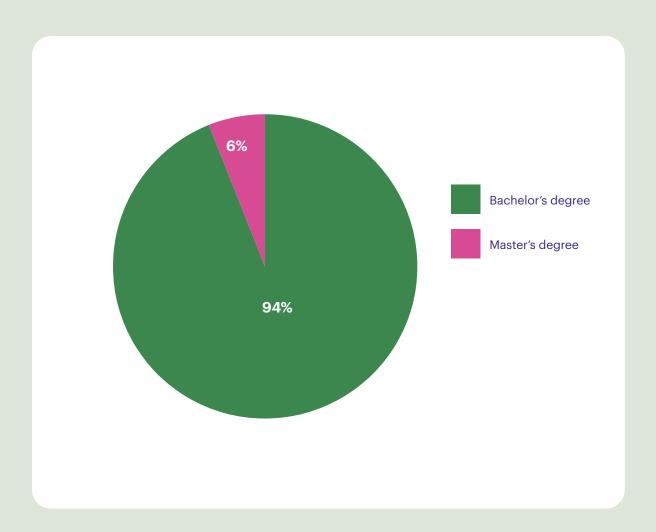
Flexible working

Excluding students and those looking for work

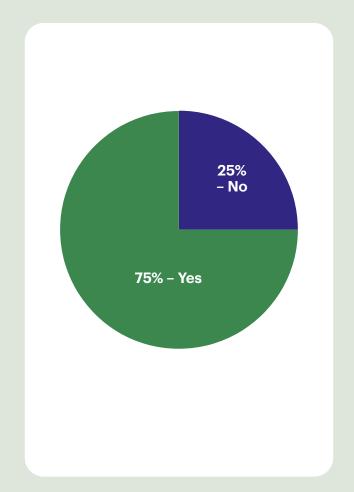


Students

What qualification are you studying for?



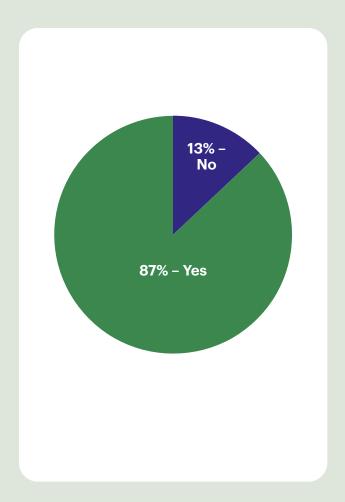
Do you intend to stay in the West Midlands after your studies?

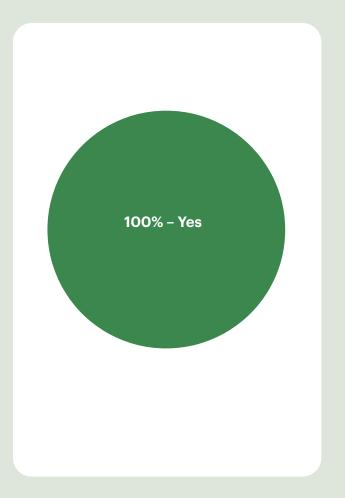


Students

Do you have access your own computer for design work?

Do you have access to the internet at home?

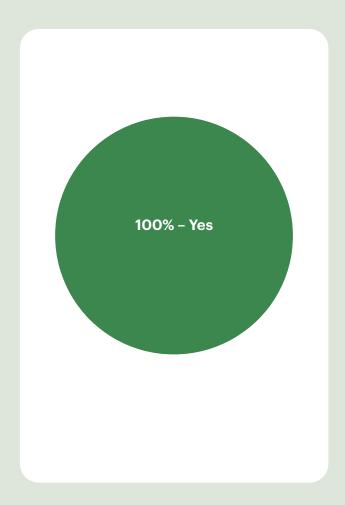


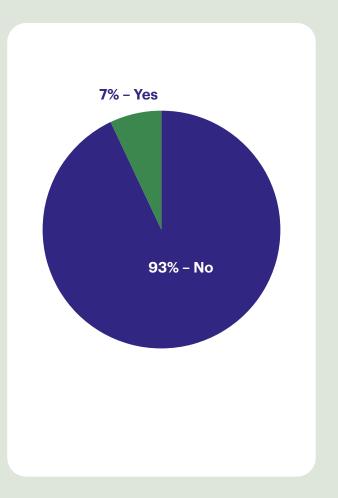


Students

Do you have access to creative software?

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





What design publications / blogs do you read regularly?

A-N
Ads of the world
AIGA Eye on Design (9)
Architect's Journal
Architectural Review
Baymard Institute
Birmingham Design / BDF (2)
Blueprint
BP&O (2)
The Brand Identity (2)
Brand New / Under Consideration (7)
Campaign
Counterpoint Magazine
Creative Bloq (3)
Creative Boom (19)
Creative Lives in Progress (5)
Creative Review (20)
Creativepool
Design Hacks Newsletter
Design Taxi (2)
Design Week (7)
Designboom
Designmilk
Develop 3D
Dezeen (7)
Dieline (3)

The DO Lectures
Dribbble (3)
Econsultancy
Eureka
Eye (3)
Figma updates
Foam Magazine
Fonts In Use
Fukt Magazine
The Futur (2)
Futurist
The Guardian (2)
Headless Greg
Hype Beast
It's Nice That (22)
Juxtapoz
Let's Talk Creative
Mad Over Marketing
Marketing Week
The Mash
Medium (3)
Muzli
New London Arcitecture
NNg
Retail design blog
Right Aligned



What design publications / blogs do you read regularly?

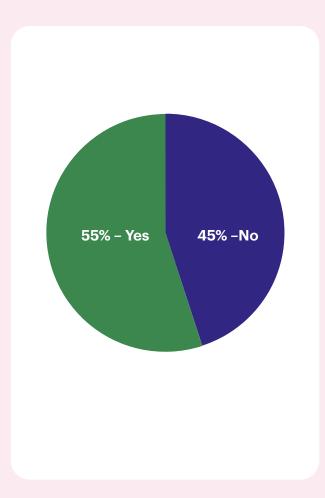
Do you take on side projects?

All respondents

27% - No 73% - Yes

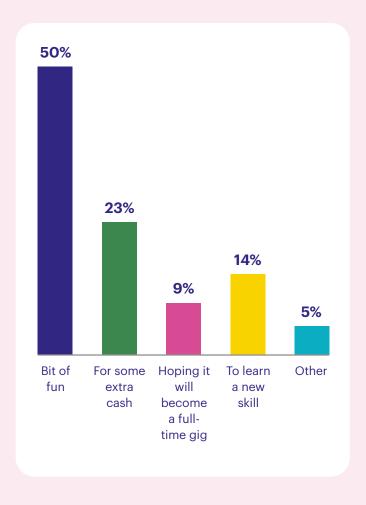
Are these often paid?

All respondents



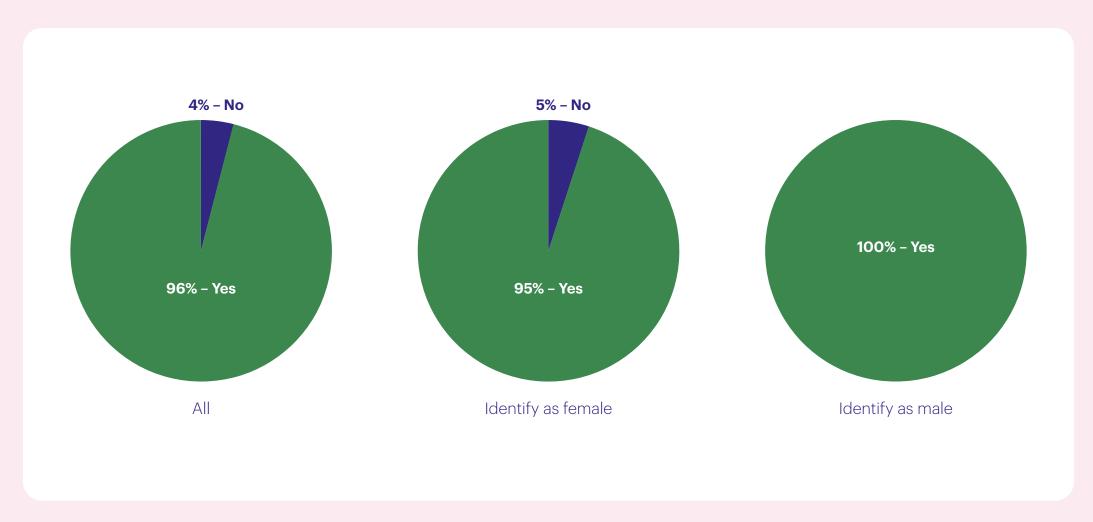
What is your main reason for doing side projects?

All respondents



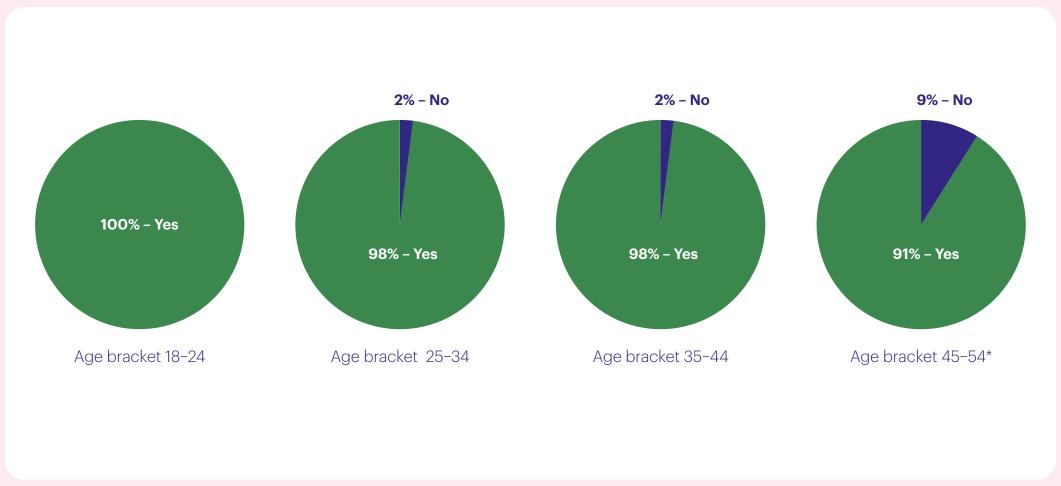
Do you have any social media account(s)? By gender.

All respondents



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

All respondents

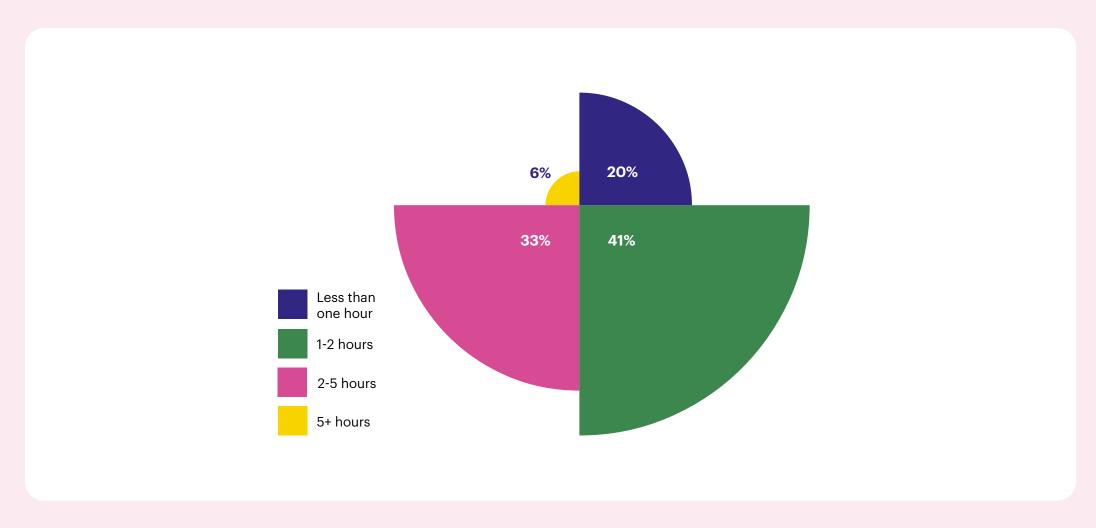


*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.

55+ too small sample size.

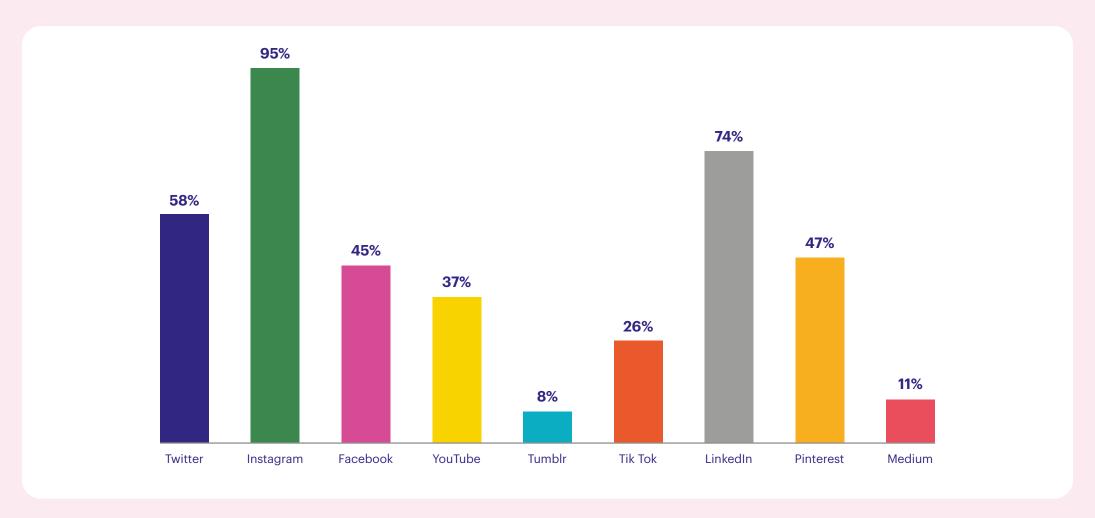
On average how many hours a day do you spend on social media?

All respondents [answering yes to previous question]



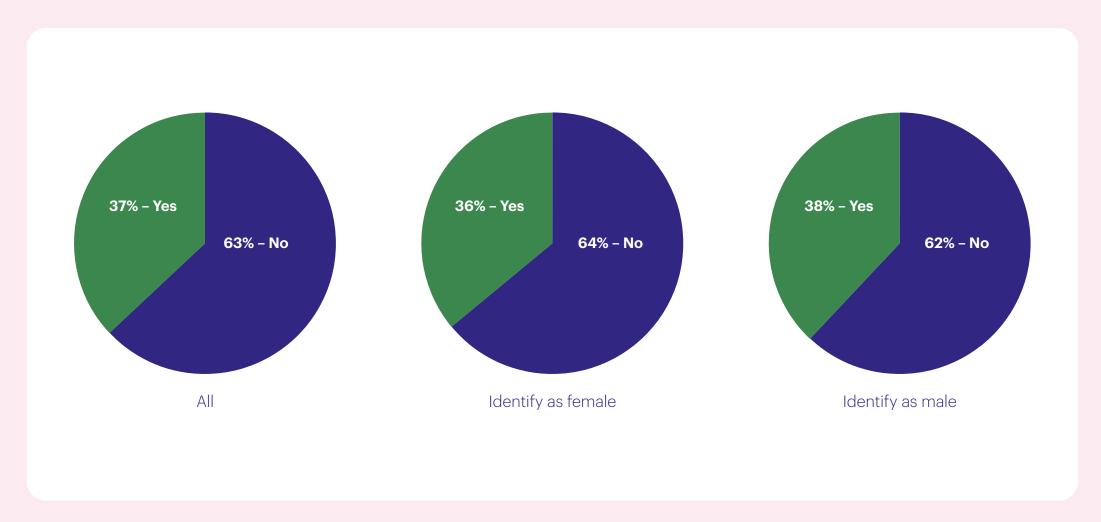
Which of the following [social media accounts] do you have?

All respondents



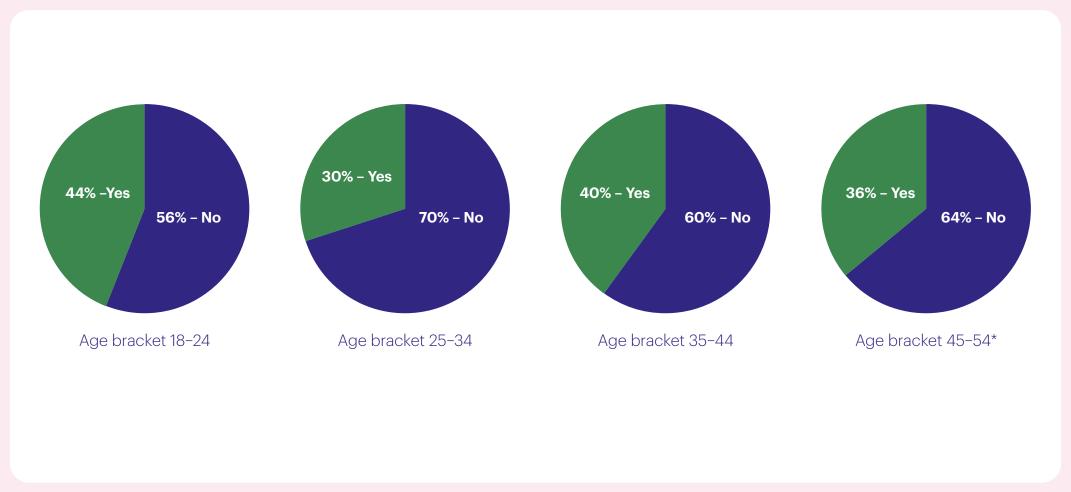
Do you meet up regularly with other designers outside of work? By gender.

All respondents



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

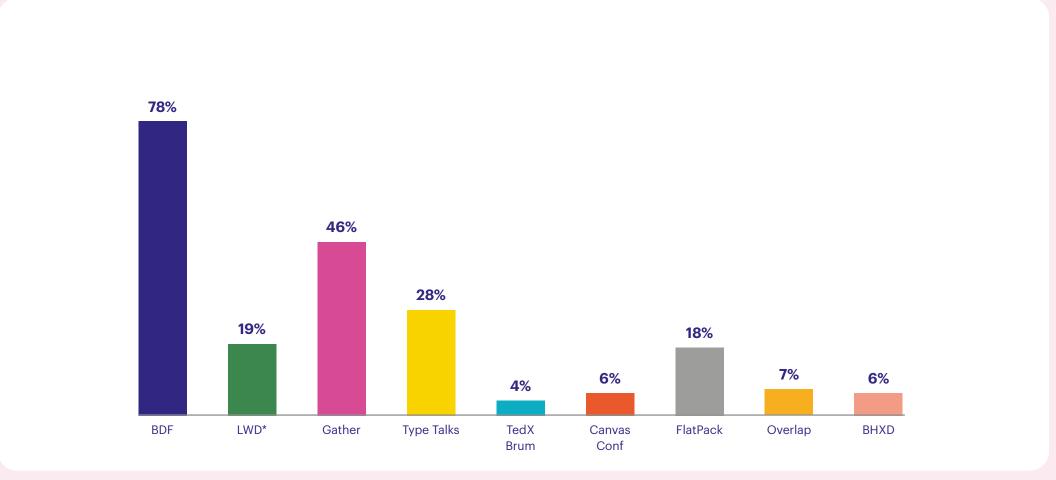
All respondents



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

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

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