



Birmingham Design Survey, 2023

Supported by:

beyond
the book



Introduction

Welcome to the results of our fourth survey, looking into the working lives of creatives in the West Midlands.

As always we'd like to thank everyone who took part, your answers will help to reflect and shape the future of the design industry in the region.

Based on our results from 2022 and feedback from respondents, we've both added and removed categories from a few questions.

Thanks once again goes to the team at Beyond the Book who have kindly sponsored the survey for a second time. 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 fourth year we're able to see more trends with our results. Our analysis and highlights are presented over the following pages.

Numbers of respondents

A total of 153 people completed the survey, 15 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.

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 part of the vibrant and growing creative community in Birmingham fills me with immense pride, especially witnessing the exceptional design work that is created in the West Midlands, the spotlight is well and truly on our region with all the exceptional design work that is being created by so many of you.

Over the past year, it has been a difficult market for many, especially in the freelance creative community. The compassion and support that I have witnessed is also a remarkable testament to the creative community here in the West Midlands, and with the help of the Birmingham Design community and all the wonderful events that they put on really help bring the community together to share ideas, highlight amazing work and inspire the design and creative community and I hear first-hand how it really makes a difference to each and everyone.

At Beyond the Book, we are fortunate to witness firsthand the exceptional creative talent in the West Midlands, arguably producing some of the finest design work in the UK.

This annual survey serves as a valuable tool, providing insights into the Midlands design community and it's interesting to see how the results change from year to year. The results consistently highlight the diversity of talent and skills, and how the design field is adapting to a lot of change, which we have, since Covid, seen a great deal of and we will inevitably see more of as AI develops.

Hybrid working has remained strong, although we have seen a number of brands and agencies change the amount of days onsite, and we ourselves at Beyond the Book have embraced a new norm of working mostly remotely with one onsite team day per month and this has led to myself working from various co-working spaces and getting to meet so many creatives whilst I am there and I see that many freelancers are choosing to do the same and it has made a positive impact on general wellbeing.

I hope that you enjoy the insights in this Birmingham Design Survey and I look forward to seeing you at the much anticipated upcoming Birmingham Design Festival in June.

Emma Head

Creative Development Director – Beyond the Book



Gender

Our survey results continued to see a fairly equal split between male and female respondents – with a drop in female respondents on 2022's results (5%). In terms of professional roles the results were mixed with only Senior Designers and Business Owners showing a relatively equal gender split.

Again we saw a higher number of female students than male and, as the comparison with professionals shows, we're still not seeing them enter and remain in the industry in the West Midlands.

Overall, 1% more men than women took part in the survey. At a professional level this increased to 8% more male respondents. This is a near reversal from 2022 which saw 6% more female respondents than male.

73% of students surveyed identify as female, this figure is a slight decrease from 2022's 75%. We consistently see female student respondents in the 70%–80% range.

For the first year we have seen non-binary respondents (1%).

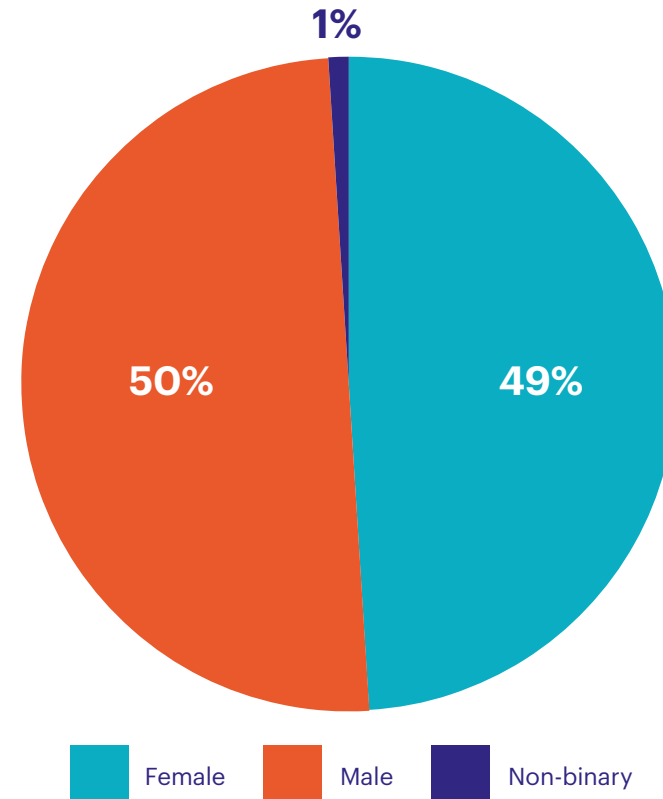


Year by year it seems the culture for design and creativity has grown. Currently it is very strong, everyone seems to know each other.



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.

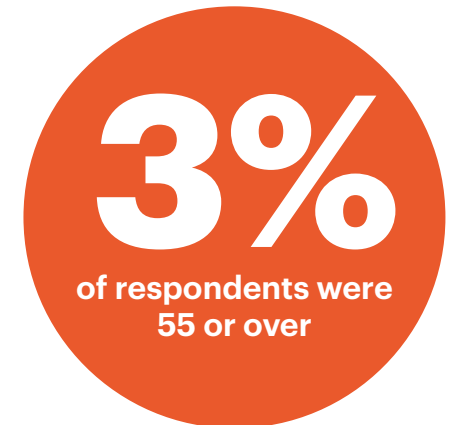
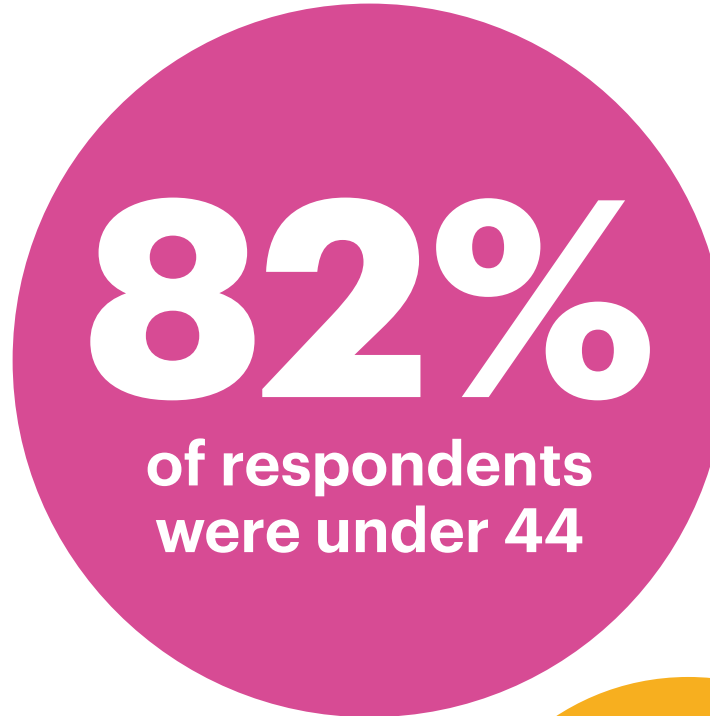
Age

Our respondents remain relatively young, with 82% being 44 or younger. This is a decrease of 6% from 2022 but is consistent with our previous three surveys.

3% of respondents were in the 55 and over categories, again making them the least represented age group in the survey. This is a drop of 1% from 2022.

As can be expected we see more senior positions held by older age groups. For example, 43% of 45–54 year olds had positions of Business Owner or Creative Director – a decrease of 3% on 2022.

In addition, salary also increases with age, most likely in-line with senior roles. 39% of the 45–54 year old age bracket were earning £50,000 and above compared with 26% of 35–44 year olds.



There's great designers with big ideas, that deserve to be seen further and wider.



Ethnicity

For the first year we have seen an increase in the number of white respondents on our previous year (75% in 2022 to 80% in 2023) but this is lower than previous results of 81% in 2021 and 86% in 2020. As with previous years, this could be due to survey audience reach.

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.

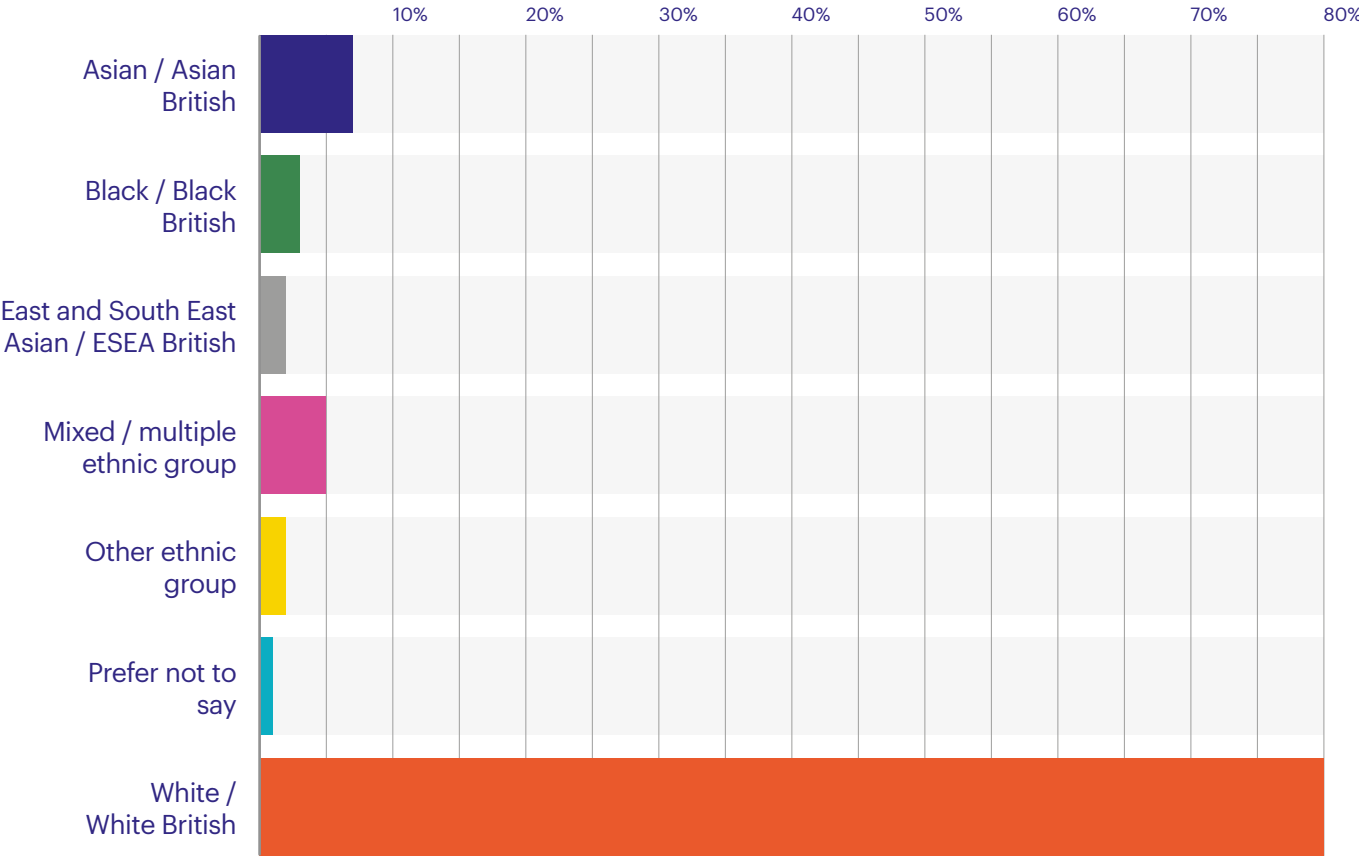


I think it is very diverse but I still feel there is a gap for ethnic minority communities especially those who are graduate students.



What is your ethnicity?

All respondents



1. <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/design-economy/>

2. ONS Census data 2021 – <https://bit.ly/49xV2Bm>

Health

17% of respondents reported having a condition or illness that could affect their ability to work, a minor decrease of 3% from 2022.

Of those reporting a condition, 12% stated that their work can be affected 'a lot' – a 7% decrease from 2022.

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

Anxiety, depression, imposter syndrome and burnout are a few symptoms that are prevalent in the creative industries. 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/design-mental-health/

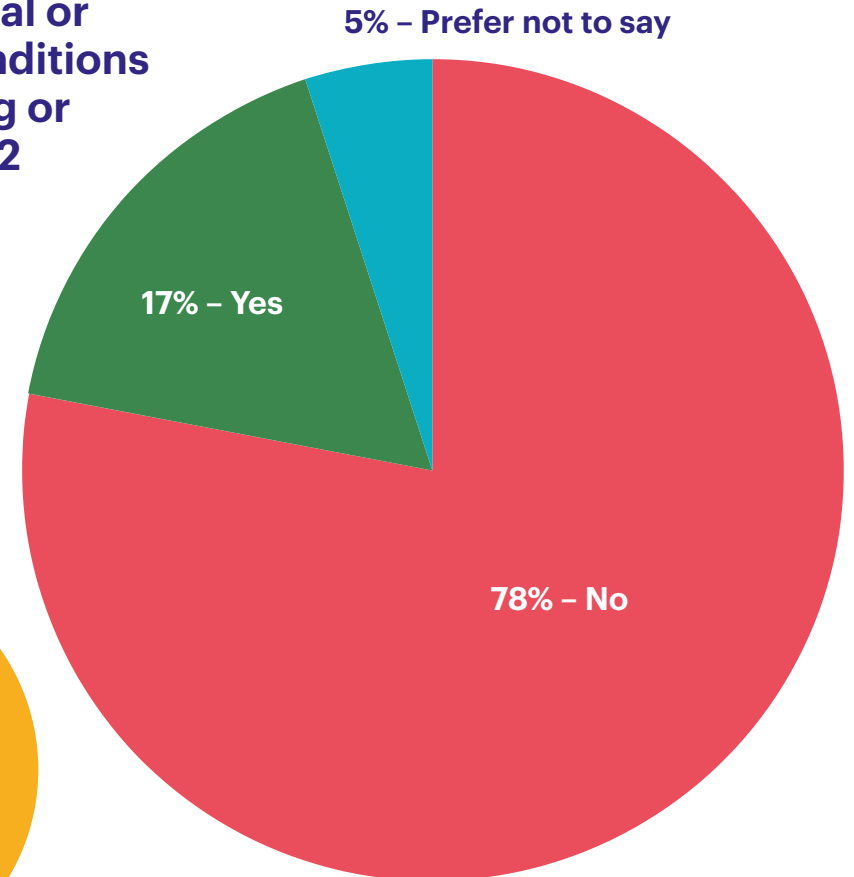


There is a good mix of talent within the West Midlands but its not always easy to find.



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

All respondents



12%

of those with a condition reported it significantly affecting their work

Places and positions

There were not any notable differences in where respondents work in comparison with 2022's results. However, the number of respondents looking for work had fallen from 8% to 4%, this drop is larger in those identifying as female (14% to 6%).

Again, agencies were the exception, results showed 41% of female respondents working in agencies compared to 30% male. It is in job titles that we see the most gender divergence. A much larger percentage of women (19%) were in junior positions compared to men (7%).

The gap between genders in senior roles remained open, with 10% more men taking roles of Design and Creative Directors, compared to a 14% gap in 2022 and 10% in 2021. However, the category of Business Owner / Company Director saw a relatively equal split with 1% difference.

Non-design roles had also changed to 5% more female respondents than male, down from 9% in 2022.

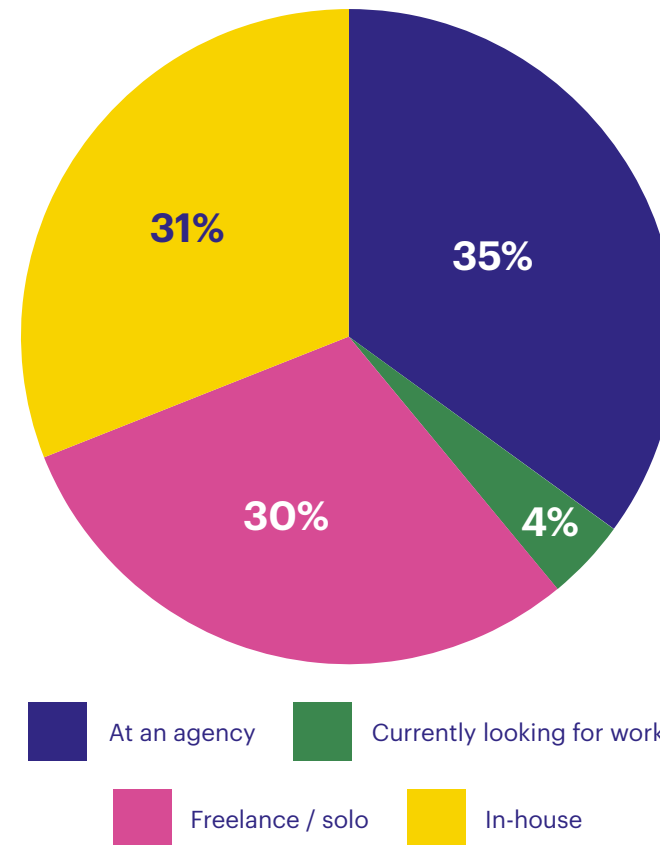
A note on job titles

Any of us who've worked in the industry will understand that what is required of us day-to-day is varied. Agency size, client type, team capabilities – all of these mean our roles and responsibilities are flexible.

Because of this fluctuation, 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.

Where are you currently based?

All respondents



Salary

Salary expectation remained comparable with the national industry average and other regions outside of London. A majority of us (61%) were earning above £30,000 – an 8% increase from 2022. 60% of respondents had received a pay rise/increased their rates in the last 12 months.

This figure put design salaries in the West Midlands on a par with the UK national average salary¹ of ~£35,000.

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

More men continued to hold senior, and therefore better paid, positions. Continuing the trend from the previous three surveys, gender doesn't appear to affect pay within those roles – our results showed that it is fairly equal between genders.



Its excellent but not celebrated enough. We need more visibility in the region and make it an attractive place for people to come and work.

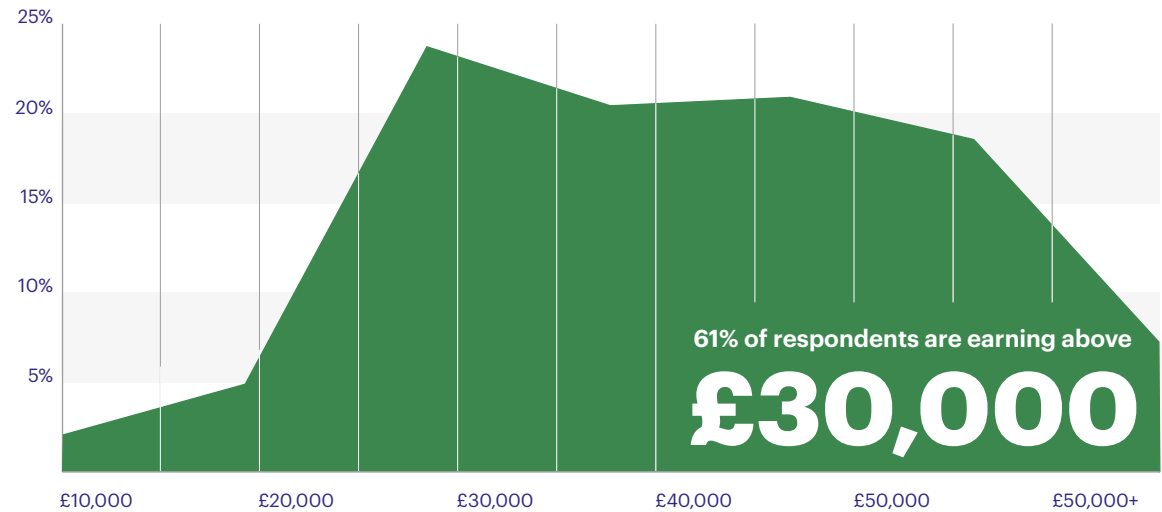


1. ONS, Employee earnings in the UK: 2023 – <https://bit.ly/442VvdD>



What is your salary?

All respondents



60%

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

As prices continue to rise it's encouraging to see the results around pay. Our survey shows that salary expectation in the West Midlands is favourable compared to the rest of the UK (outside London).

For an additional guide on salaries we recommend reading Beyond the Book's 2024 salary survey results. www.btbpeople.co.uk/blog/2024/03/salary-survey-2024-free-download

New hires and interns

The number of respondents' companies that had recruited in the last 12 months had fallen slightly too but remained high at 82% (89% in 2022, 55% in 2021).

Flexible working continued to be popular. 92% of respondents said their workplace offers flexible working and 90% of those take part in it.

Internships had fallen slightly, only 26% of respondents' companies offered them, compared to 30% in 2022. Of those companies offering internships, 44% were paid – a significant drop on 2022's 75%.



It's flourishing with young talent who are yearning for more agencies and design studios to settle in the region.



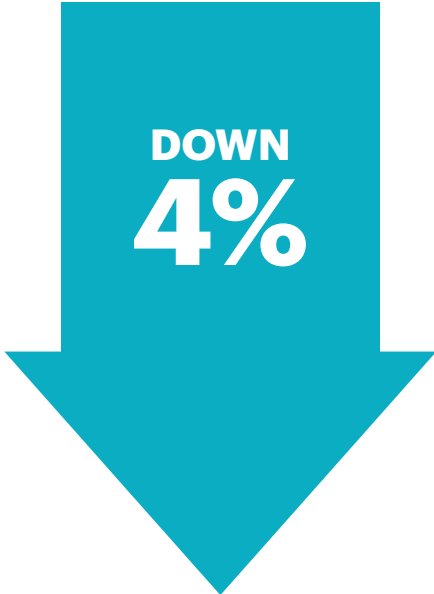
Workplaces recruiting in the last 12 months



82%
2023

(89% 2022)

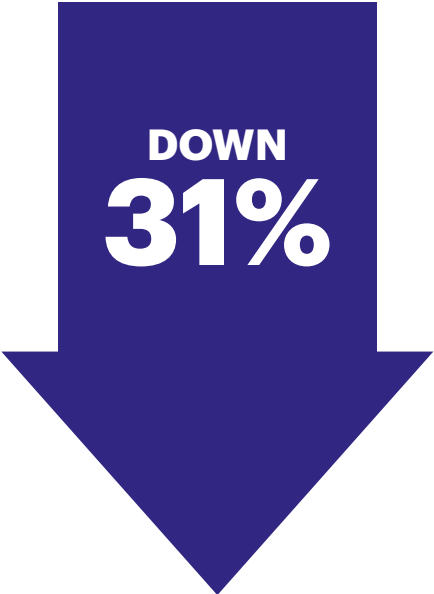
Workplaces offering internships



26%
2023

(30% 2022)

Internships that are paid



44%
2023

(75% 2022)

Skills and sectors

We maintained our varied skill-set and a diverse range of sectors, the West Midlands design community continues to add new skills to its repertoire. This year's survey saw a few additional areas of skill added in fashion, photography/ videography and service design.

Arts and entertainment remained one of the most worked in sectors, joined in 2023 by charity and education.

Our work was not reserved for our region alone, many of us have clients at a national and international level – with freelancer's results being equal across all categories.

Overall feedback from the community was positive relating to the level of talent and skills within the region. However, this was followed by phrases that we see time and again regarding how we market ourselves. 'Undervalued', 'under-appreciated' and 'unrecognised' are three words that appear often in our comments.

There is also a feeling that we are too Birmingham-centric, with not enough attention given to creatives in other areas.



Graphic design & illustration in the region are fantastic. Other creative fields eg. fashion, residential interiors are behind in growth.



Arts and entertainment

Charity

Education

Hospitality

Retail

Consumer goods

Healthcare

Digital products

Food & beverage

Social media

Leisure

Finance

Built environment

Energy

Automotive

Manufacturing

Property

Consulting

Industrial

Government

Publishing

Accounting

Electronics

Fashion

Pharmaceutical

Agriculture

Insurance

Legal

Logistics

Aerospace



Students

93% of respondents had access to their own computer, up from 87% in 2022. All of those 93% had access to creative software and the internet for their design studies. Just 8% paid for the software themselves, a slight increase from 2022's 7%. This can still be seen as a positive as a majority of students are being given free access to software that is crucial to their education.

86% of students surveyed stated they intend to remain in the West Midlands once they finish their studies compared to 75% in 2022.



Design in the West Midlands is growing, the scene in my opinion nurtured me and allowed me to go from a student to a junior designer.



93%

of respondents have access to their own computer

8%

of respondents pay for creative software themselves

86%

of respondents intend to stay in the West Midlands after their studies

ALL

respondents have access to creative software

Outside of work

We're getting more social as a design community, 44% of respondents socialised with fellow designers outside of the workplace, the same figure as 2022. This figure was highest in the 18-24 age bracket, rising to 53%.

Social media is still viewed as a necessity to most. 96% of those surveyed had social media accounts, and 97% of those were on Instagram, making it the most popular network amongst respondents.

Our habits hadn't changed either with 86% of those surveyed admitting to spending at least one hour a day 'connecting'.

A number of respondents reported either difficulty networking in person or wanting events at different times due to work and family commitments.

There is certainly an appetite for more and varied design events in the region.

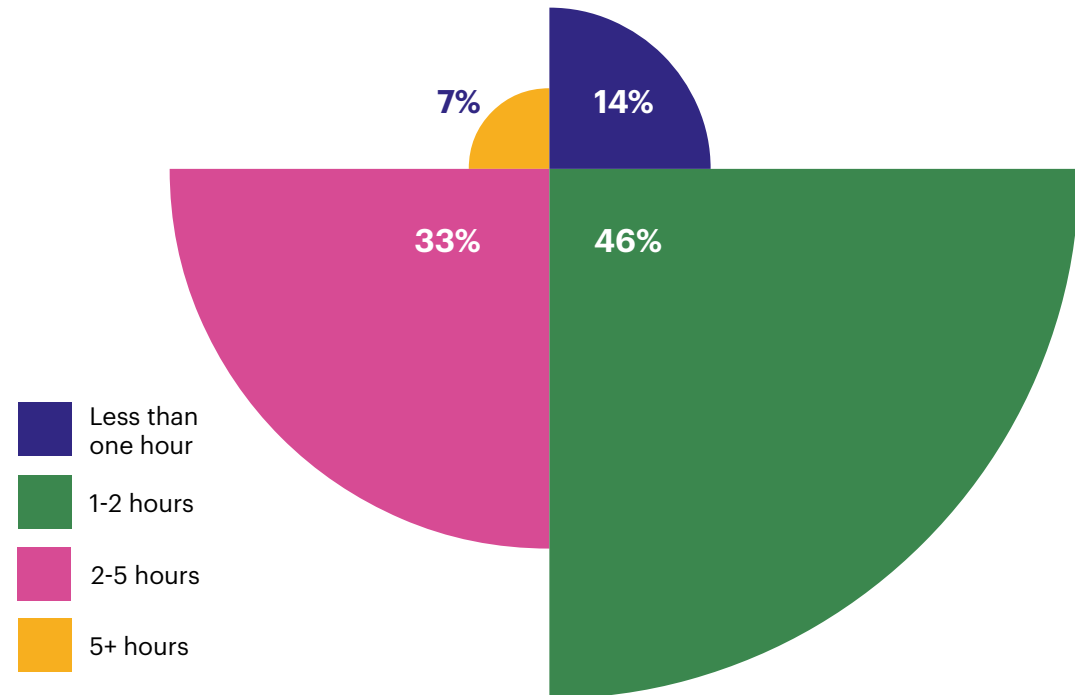


I think it's getting better, there are a lot more creative events happening and opportunities but getting in with the creative crowd is hard.



Average hours a day spent on social media

All respondents with social media accounts



Appendix:

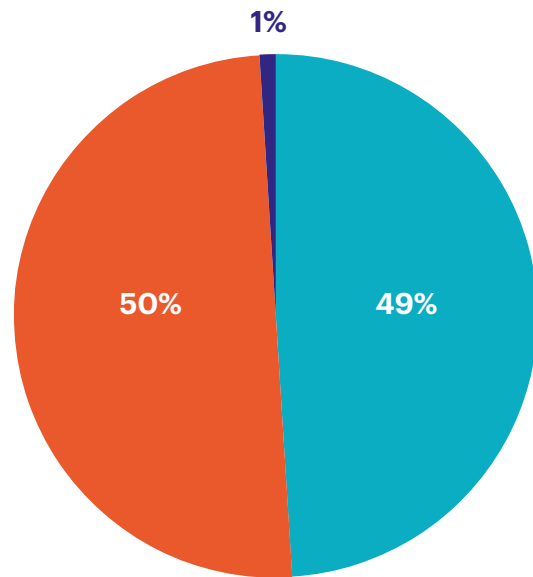
Survey results graphs



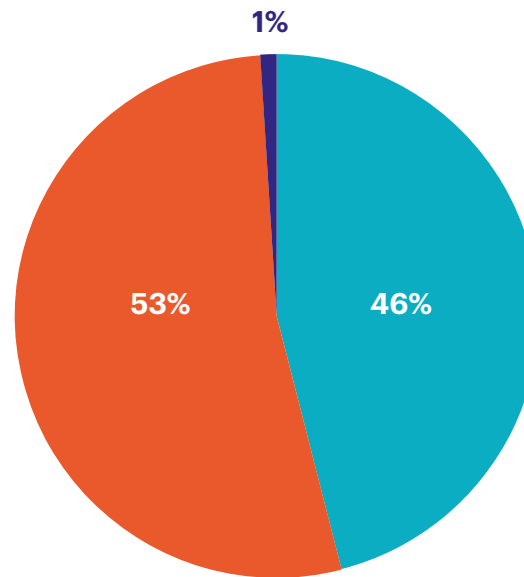
Gender

What gender do you identify as?

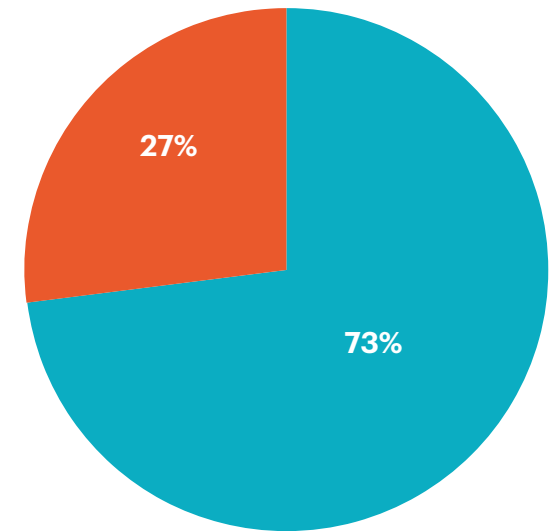
All respondents



All



Excluding students



Students only

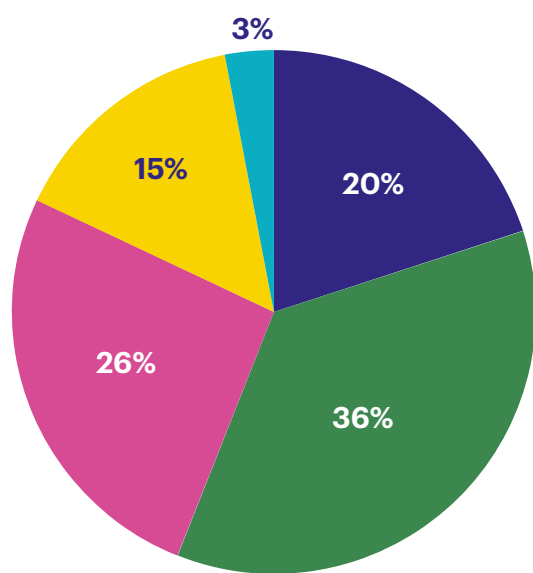


In addition to the option to not disclose their gender, this question included the opportunity for respondents to add their own gender description.

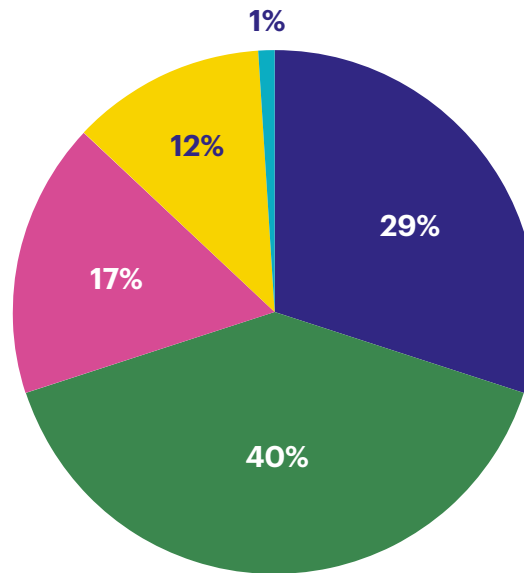
Age

How old are you?

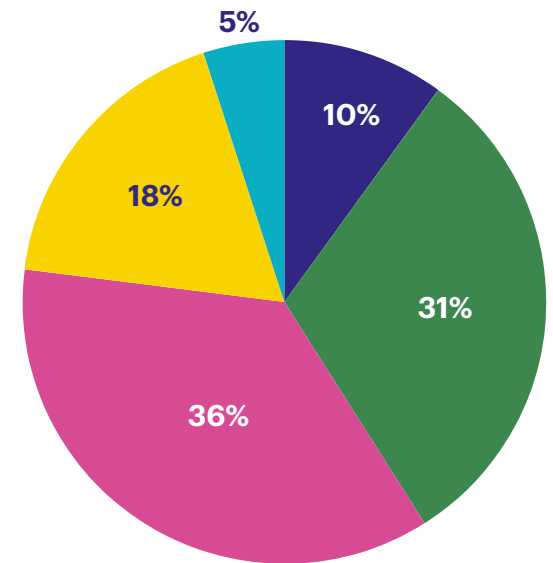
All respondents



All



Identify as female



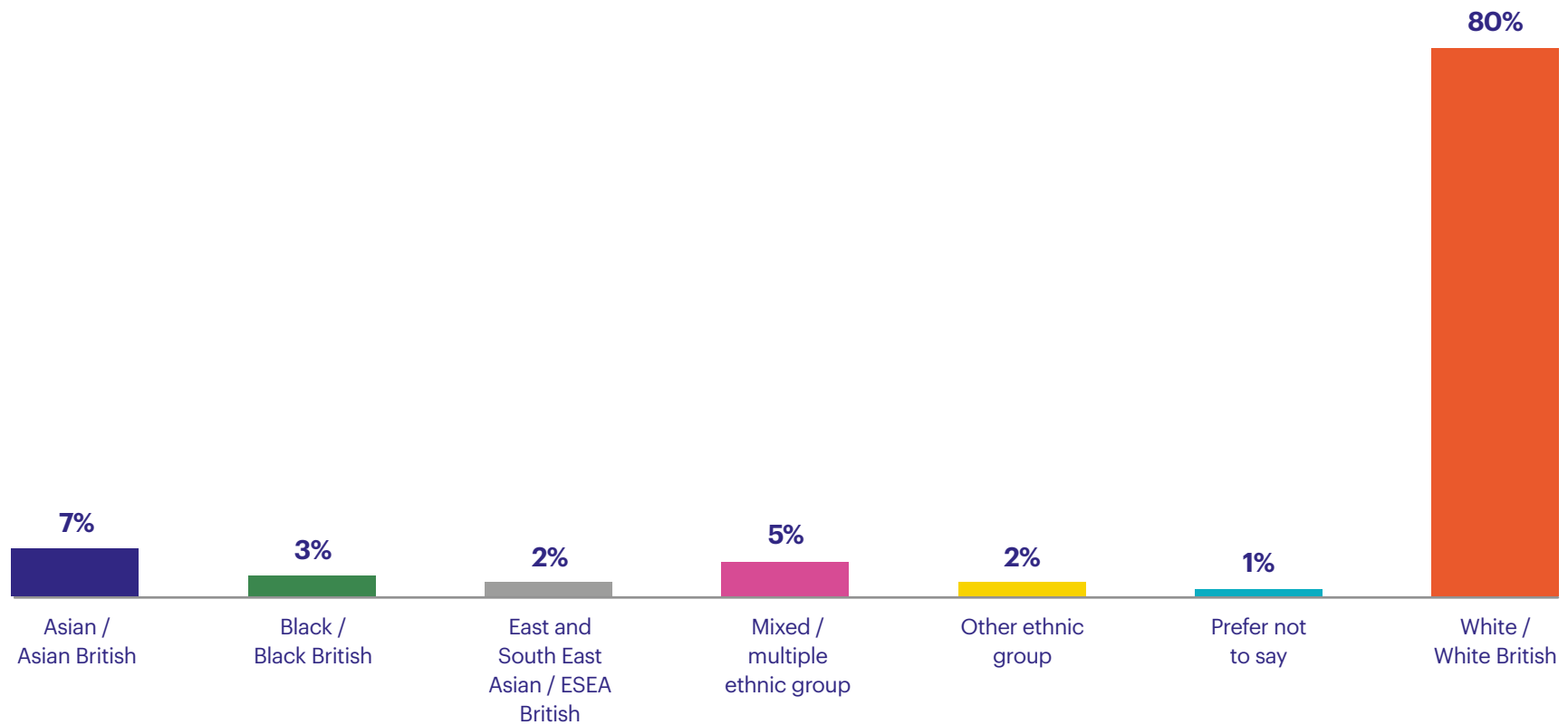
Identify as male



Ethnicity

What is your ethnicity?

All respondents

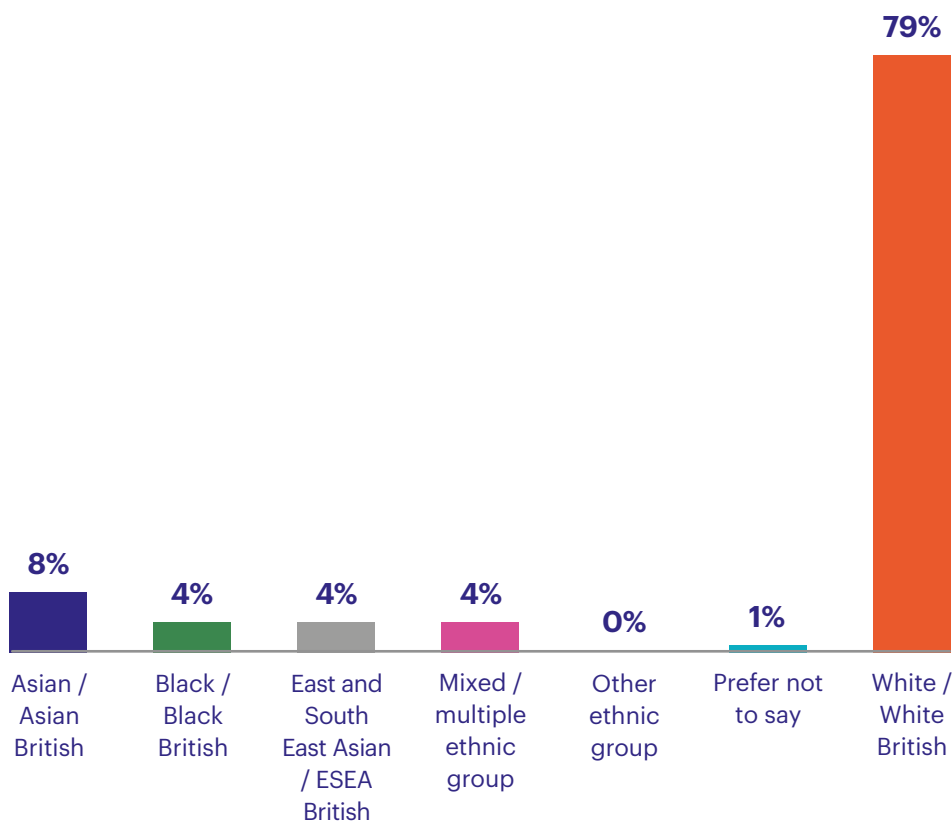


Ethnicity

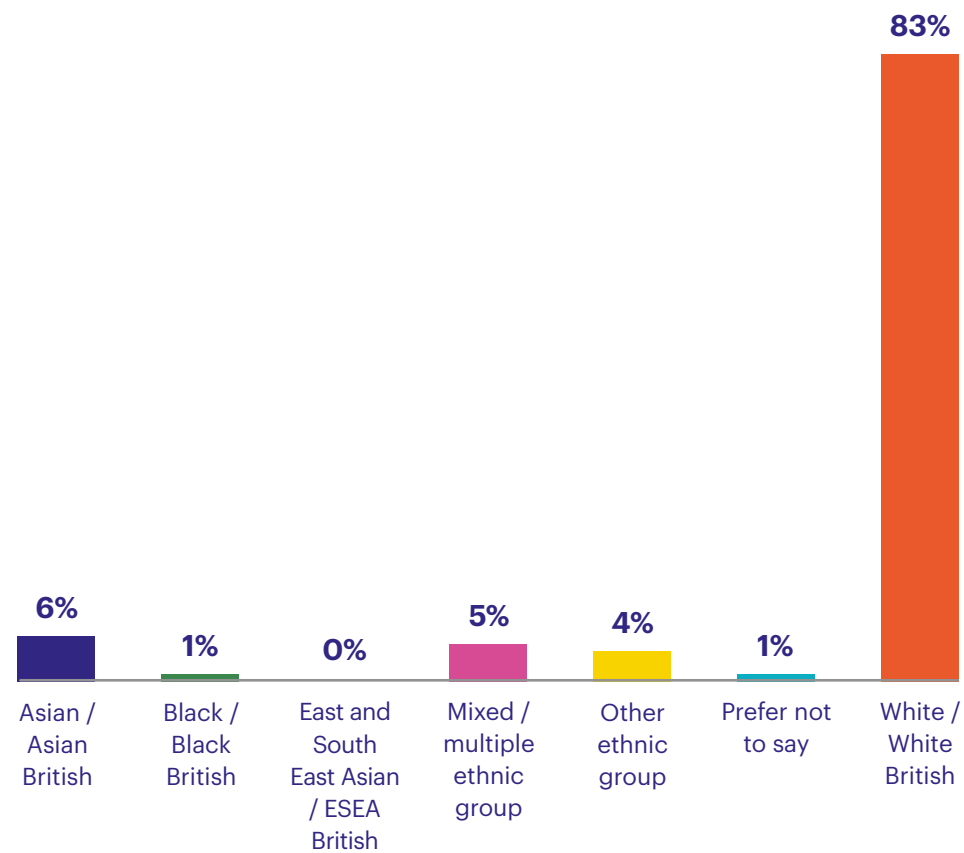
What is your ethnicity? By gender.

All respondents

Identify as female



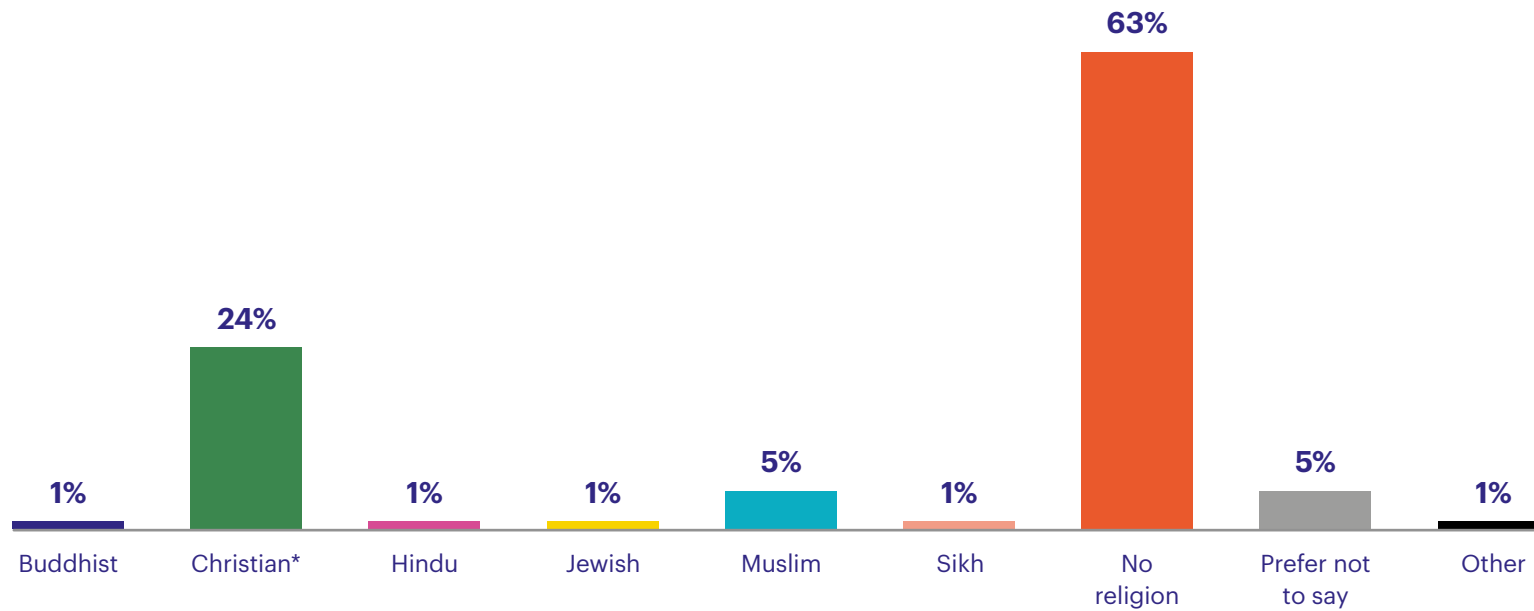
Identify as male



Religion

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

All respondents

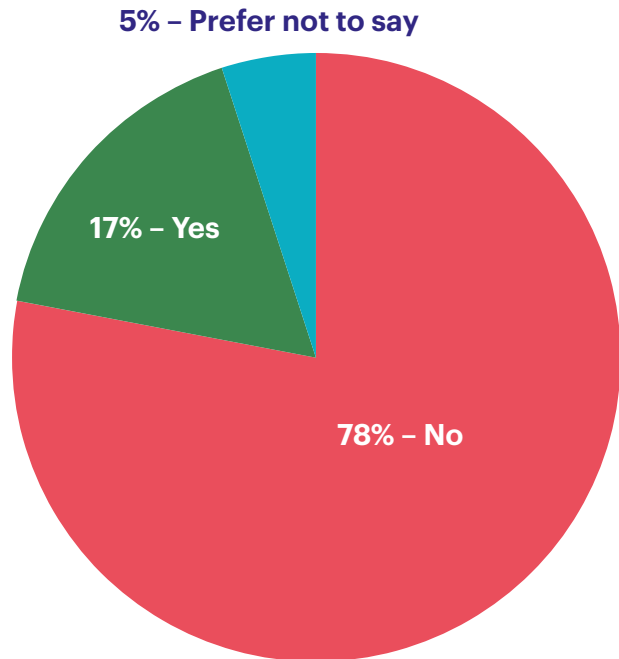


**Including CoFE, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations*

Health

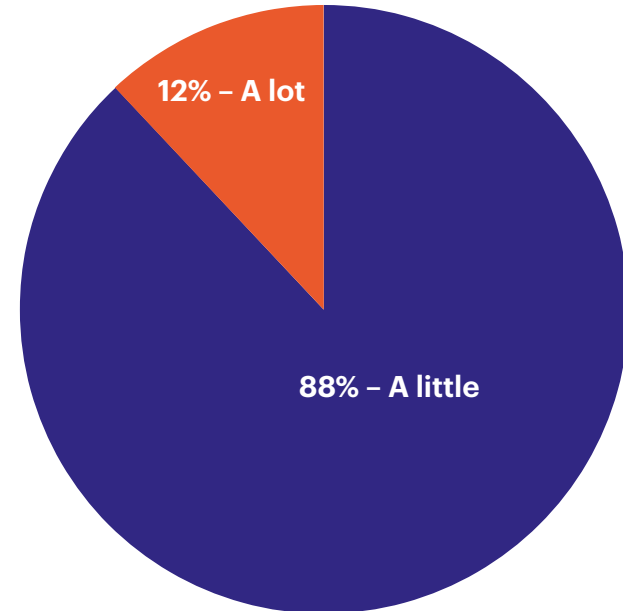
Do you have any diagnosed physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

All respondents



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

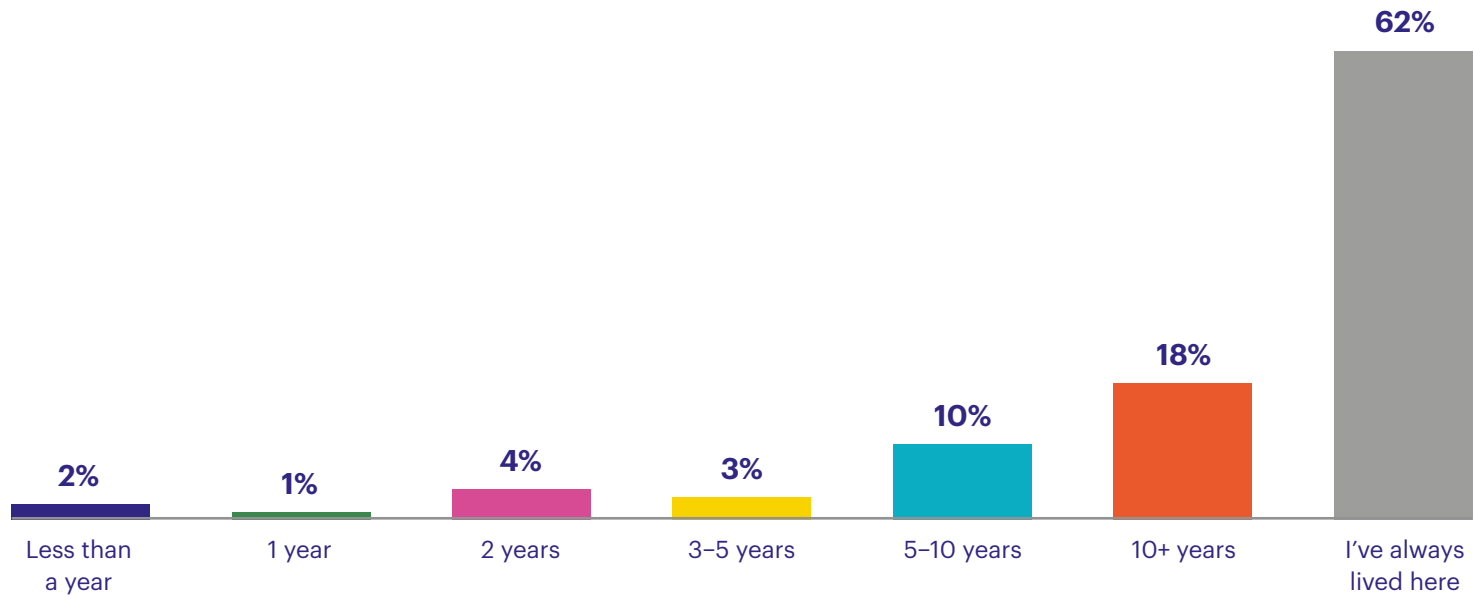
All respondents



Location

How long have you lived in the West Midlands?

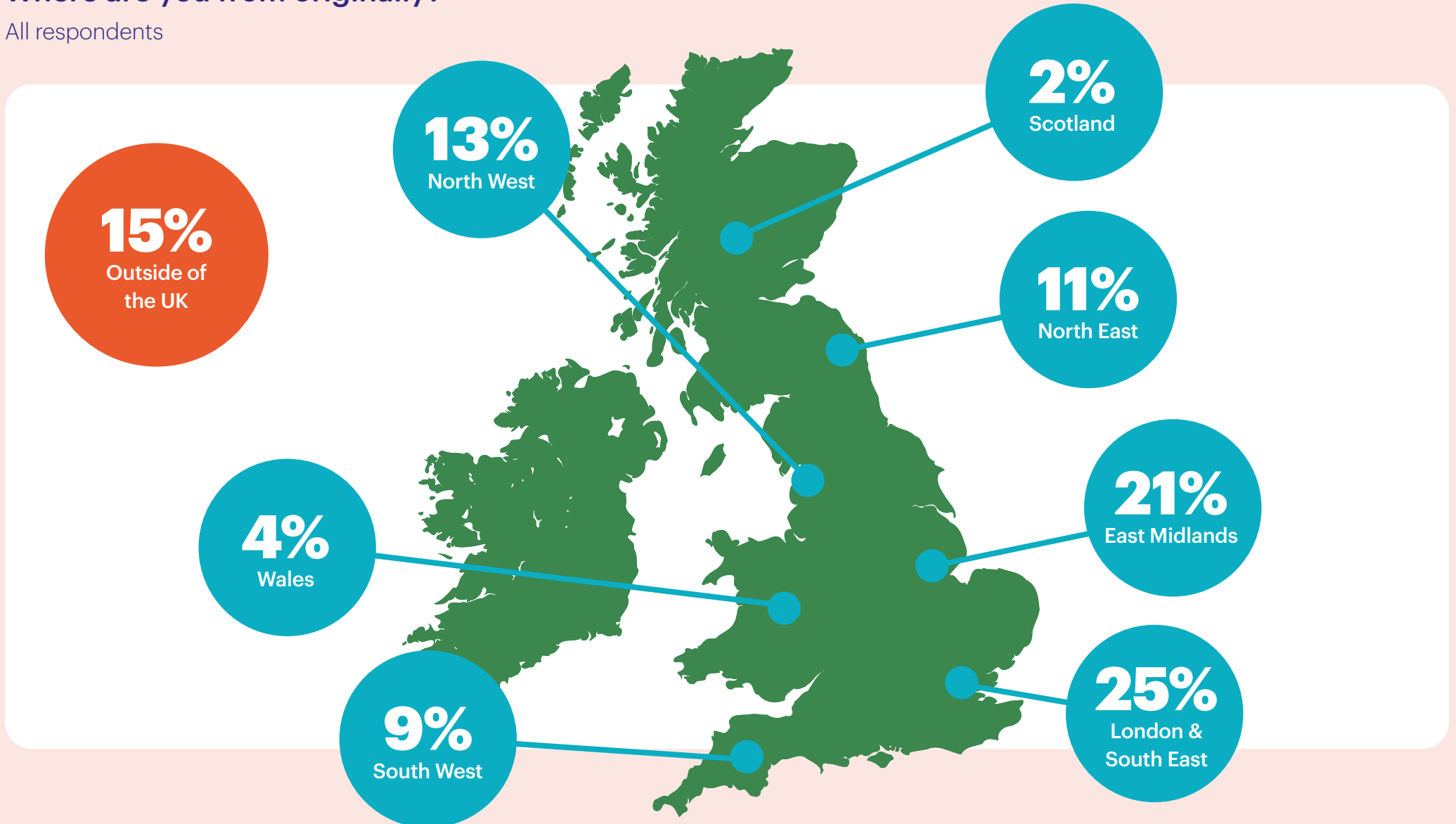
All respondents



Location

Where are you from originally?

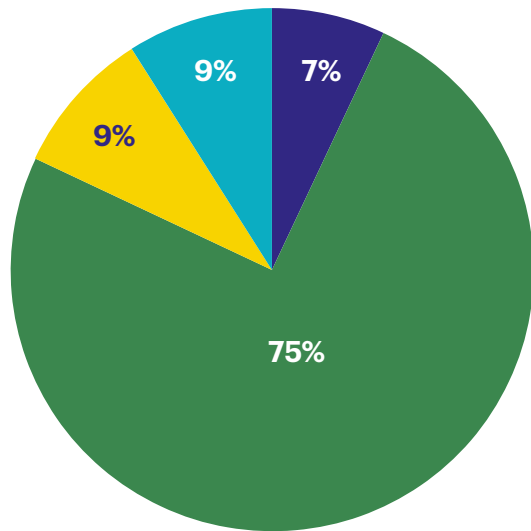
All respondents



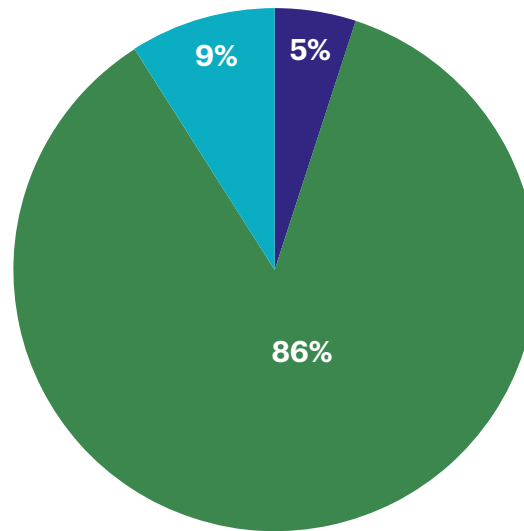
Working life

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

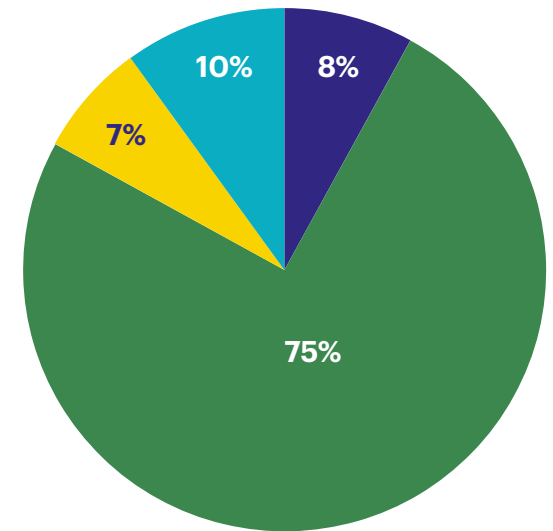
Excluding students



All



Identify as female



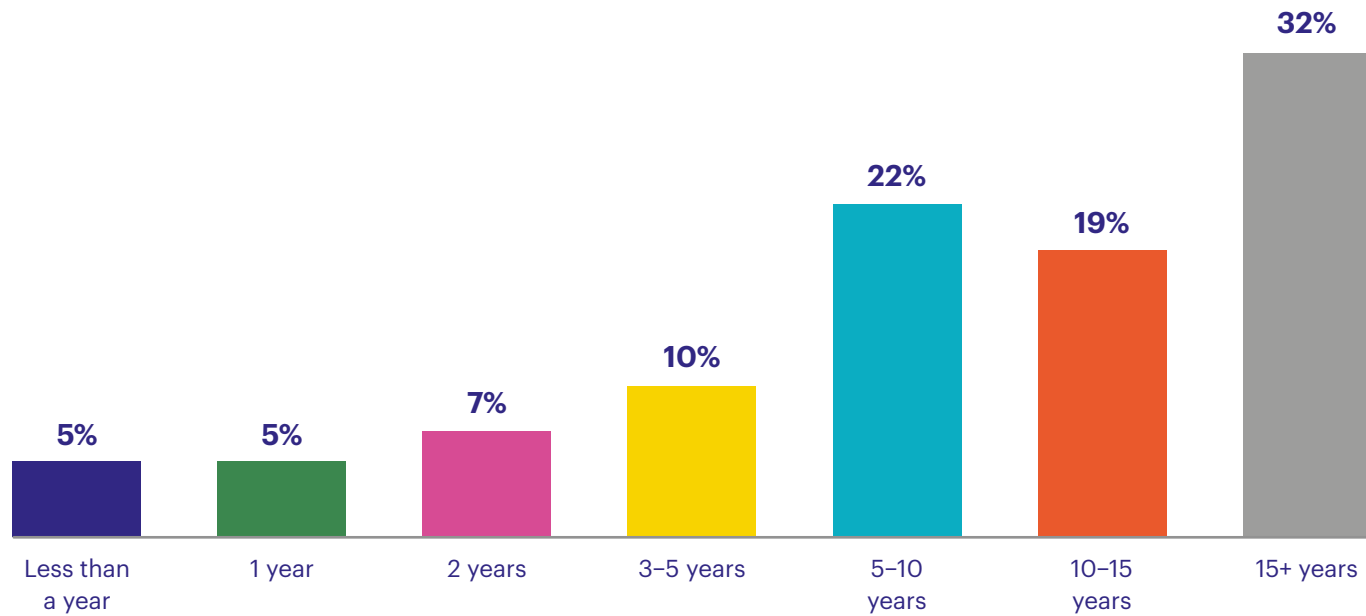
Identify as male



Working life

How long have you worked in the creative industry?

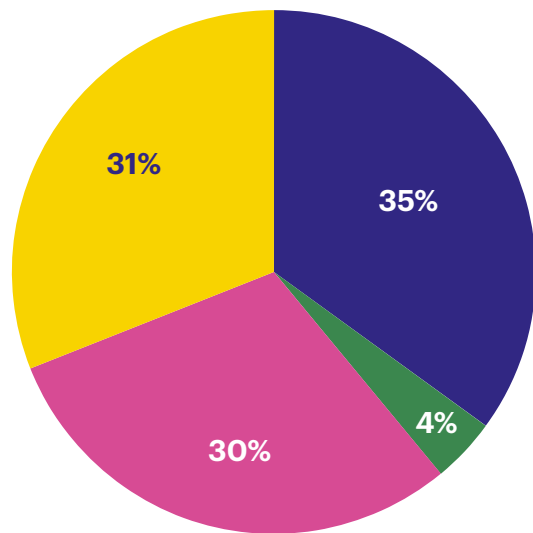
Excluding students



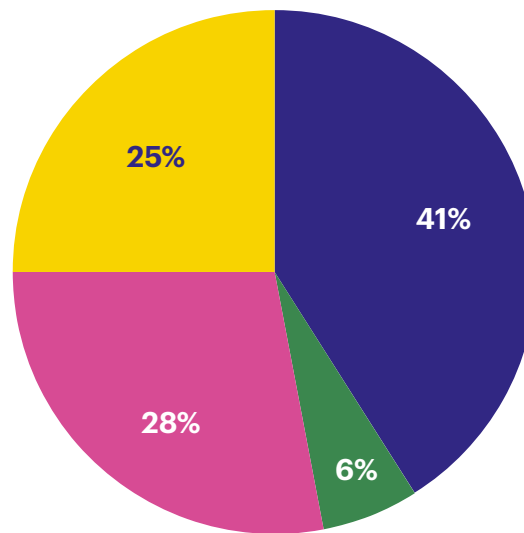
Working life

Where are you currently based? By gender.

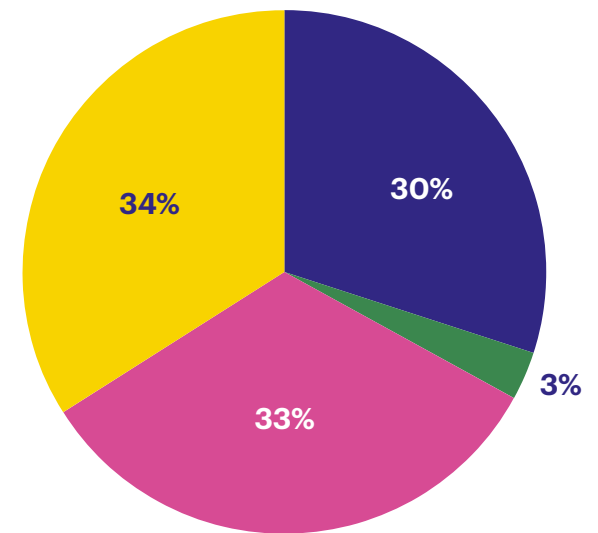
Excluding students



All



Identify as female



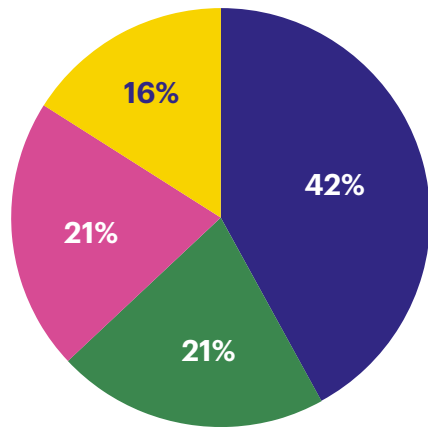
Identify as male



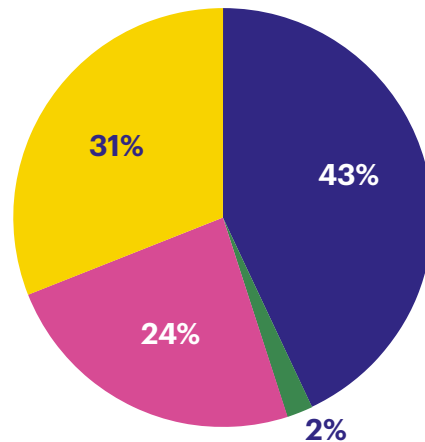
Working life

Where are you currently based? By age.

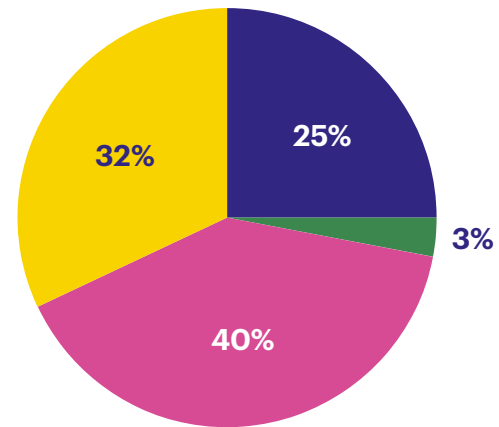
Excluding students



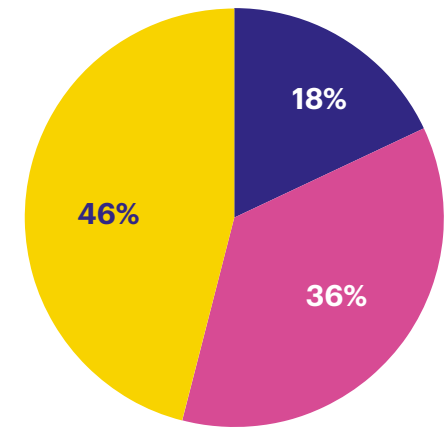
Age bracket 18-24



Age bracket 25-34



Age bracket 35-44



Age bracket 45-54*

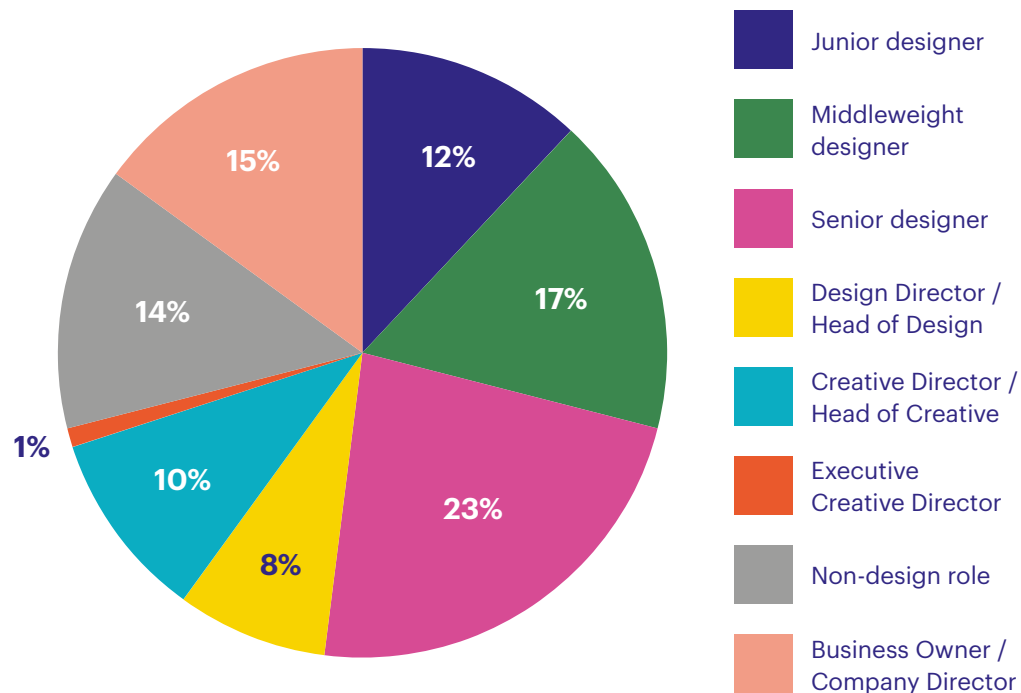


**Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.
55+ too small sample size.*

Working life

What is your current level?

Excluding students



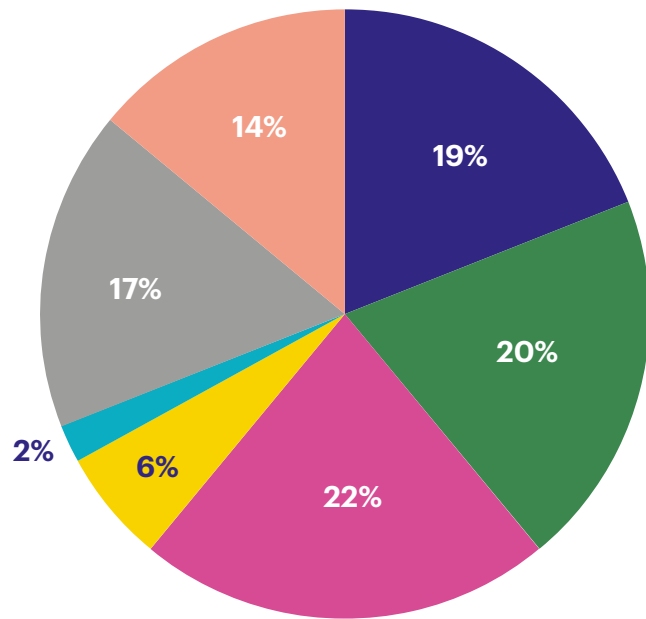
Non-design roles. Verbatims.

Design Engineering
Architectural & Design Consultant
Content Creator and Digital Marketing
Creative Producer
Data & Marketing Coordinator
Digital & Social Officer
Editor and Copywriter
Head of Marketing and Communications
Marketing Manager (previously in design roles)
Media Production
Ops
Retail Worker
Senior artworker / production

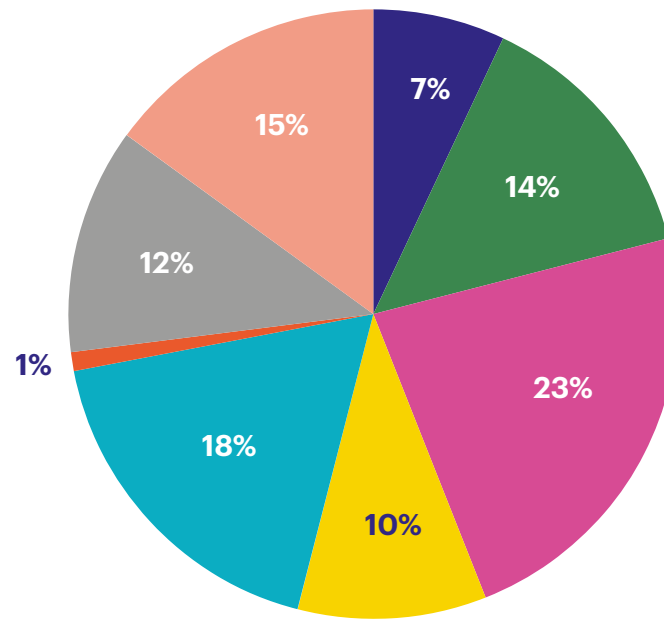
Working life

What is your current level? By gender.

Excluding students



Identify as female



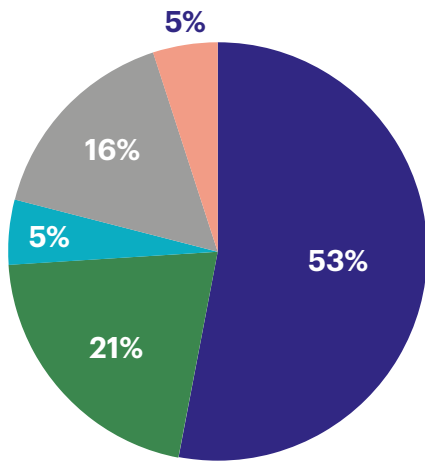
Identify as male



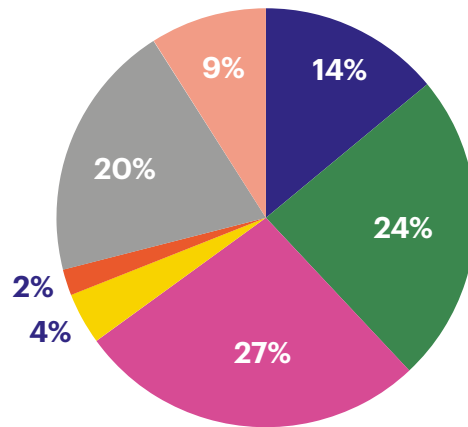
Working life

What is your current level? By age.

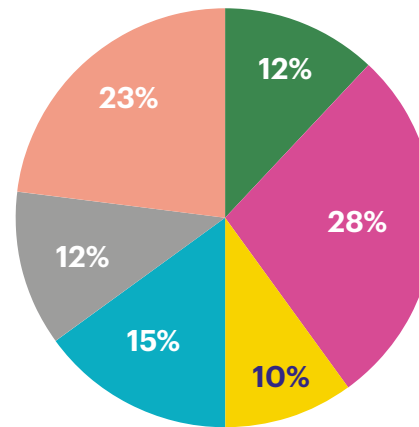
Excluding students



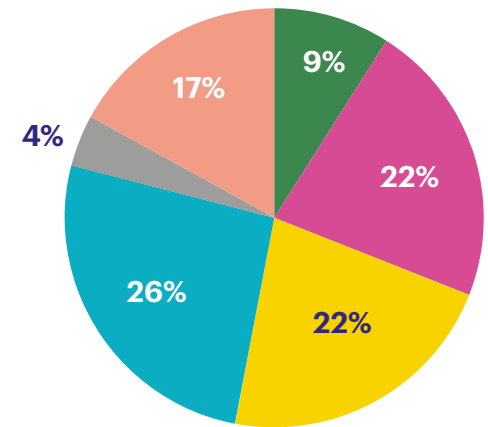
Age bracket 18-24



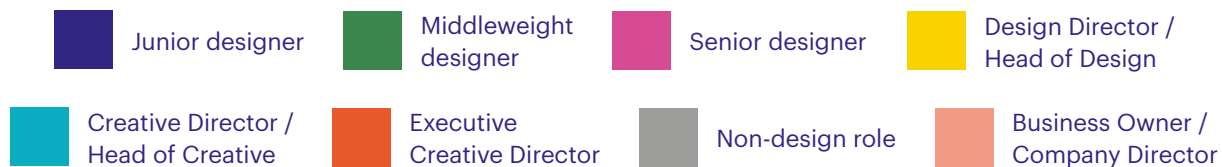
Age bracket 25-34



Age bracket 35-44



Age bracket 45-54*

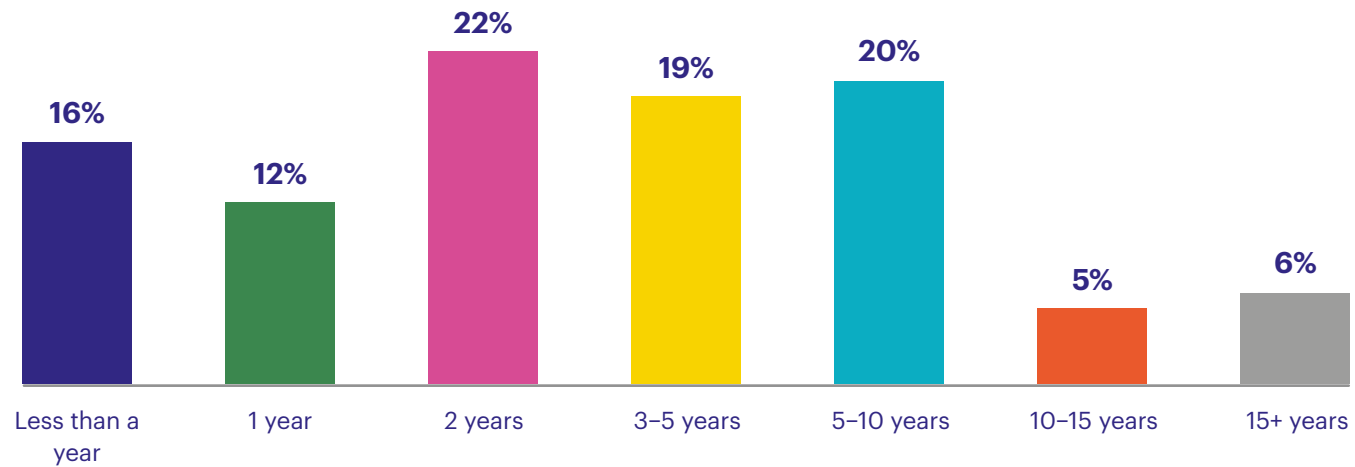


*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.
55+ too small sample size.

Working life

How long have you held this position?

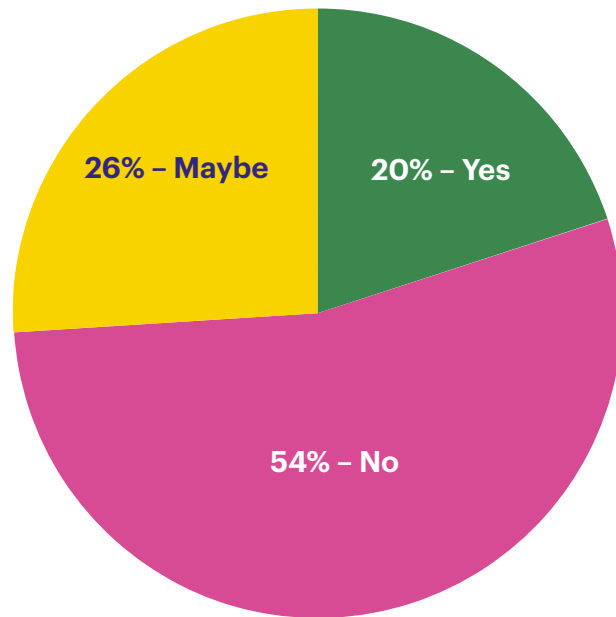
Excluding students and those looking for work



Working life

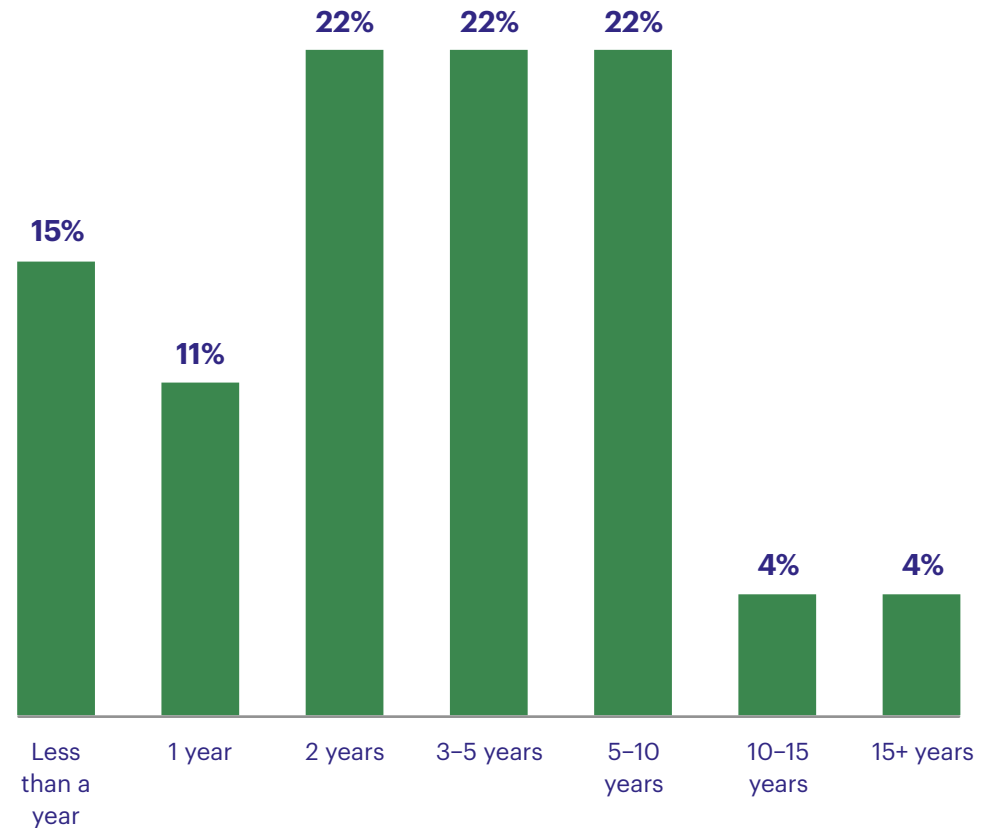
Are you considering leaving this position within the next 12 months?

Excluding students and those looking for work



How long have you held this position?

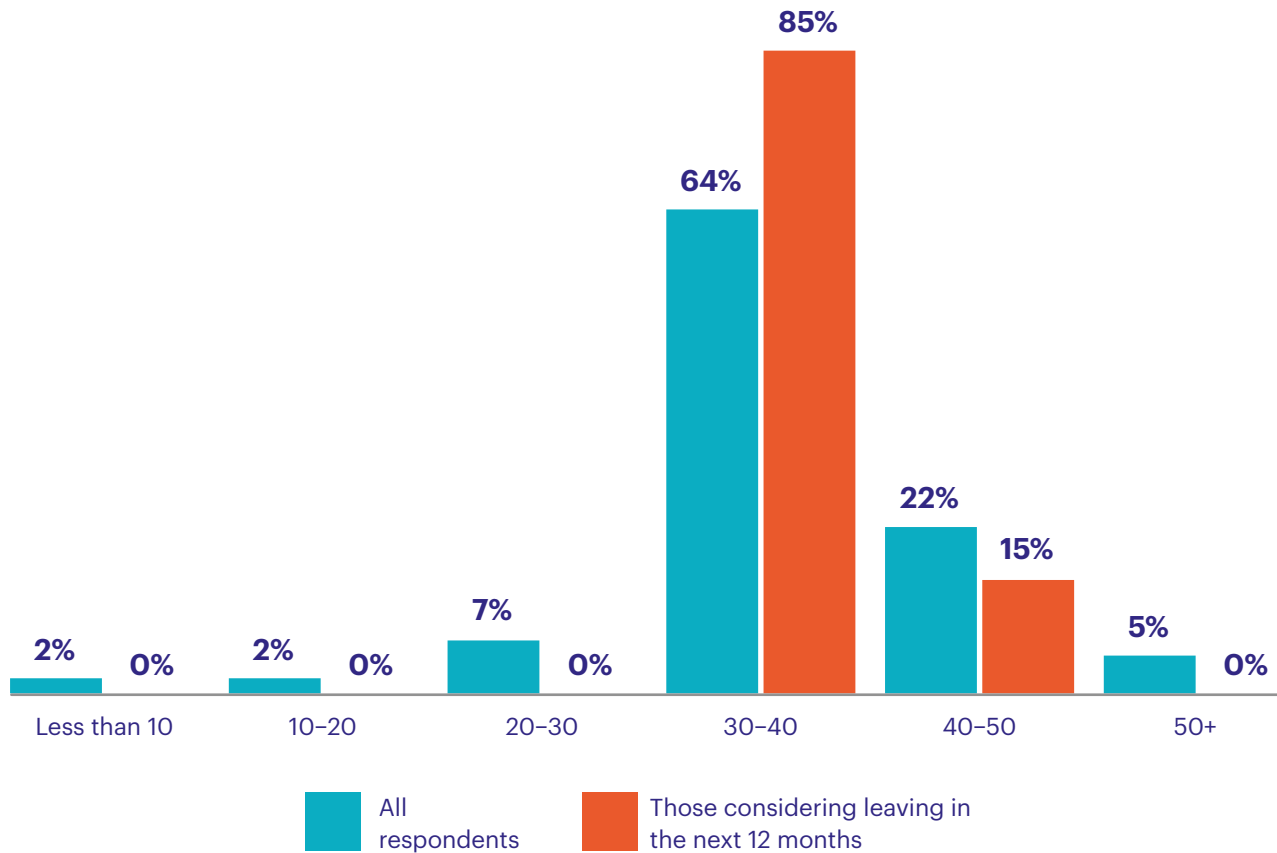
Those considering leaving in the next 12 months, excluding students and those looking for work



Working life

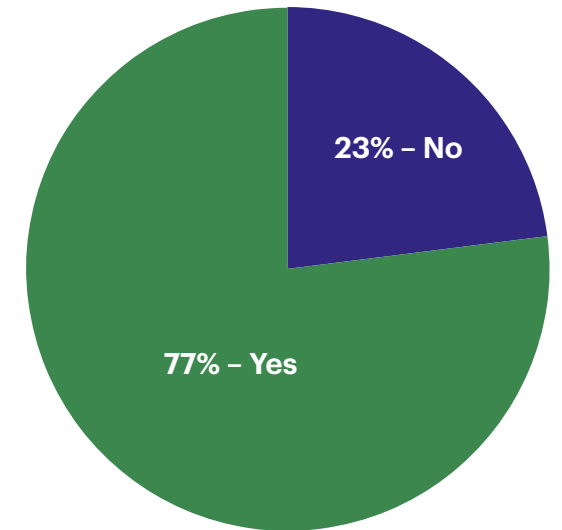
On average, how many hours a week do you work?

Excluding students and those looking for work



Is design / creative work your sole income?

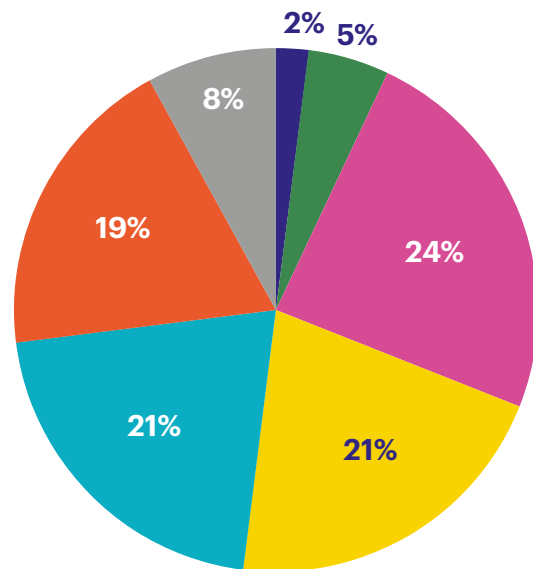
Excluding students and those looking for work



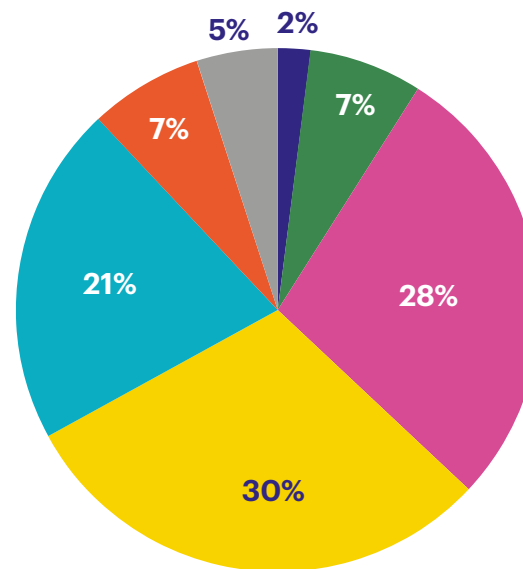
Working life

What is your current salary? By gender.

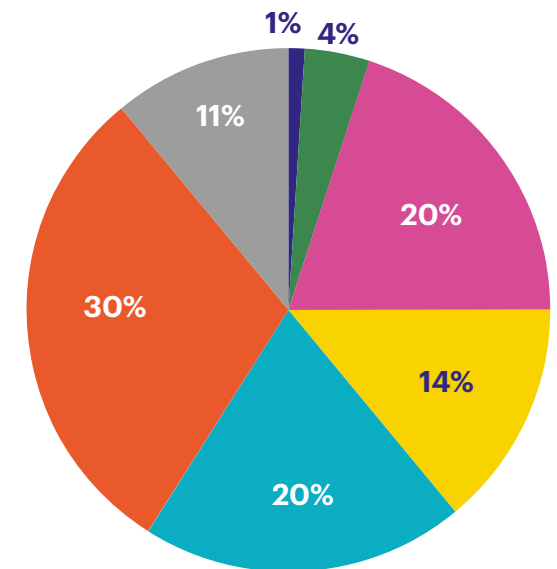
Excluding students and those looking for work



All



Identify as female



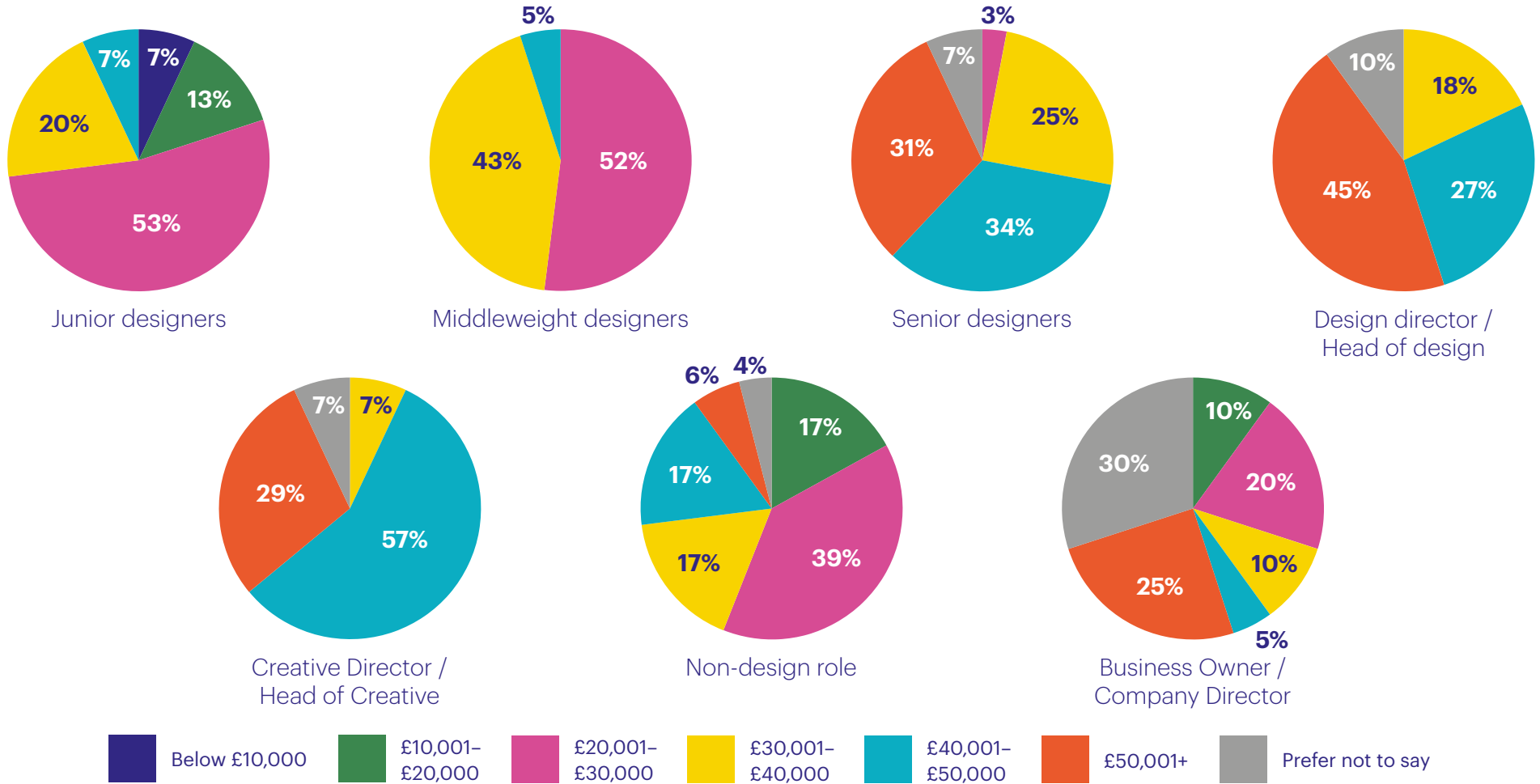
Identify as male



Working life

What is your current salary? By position.

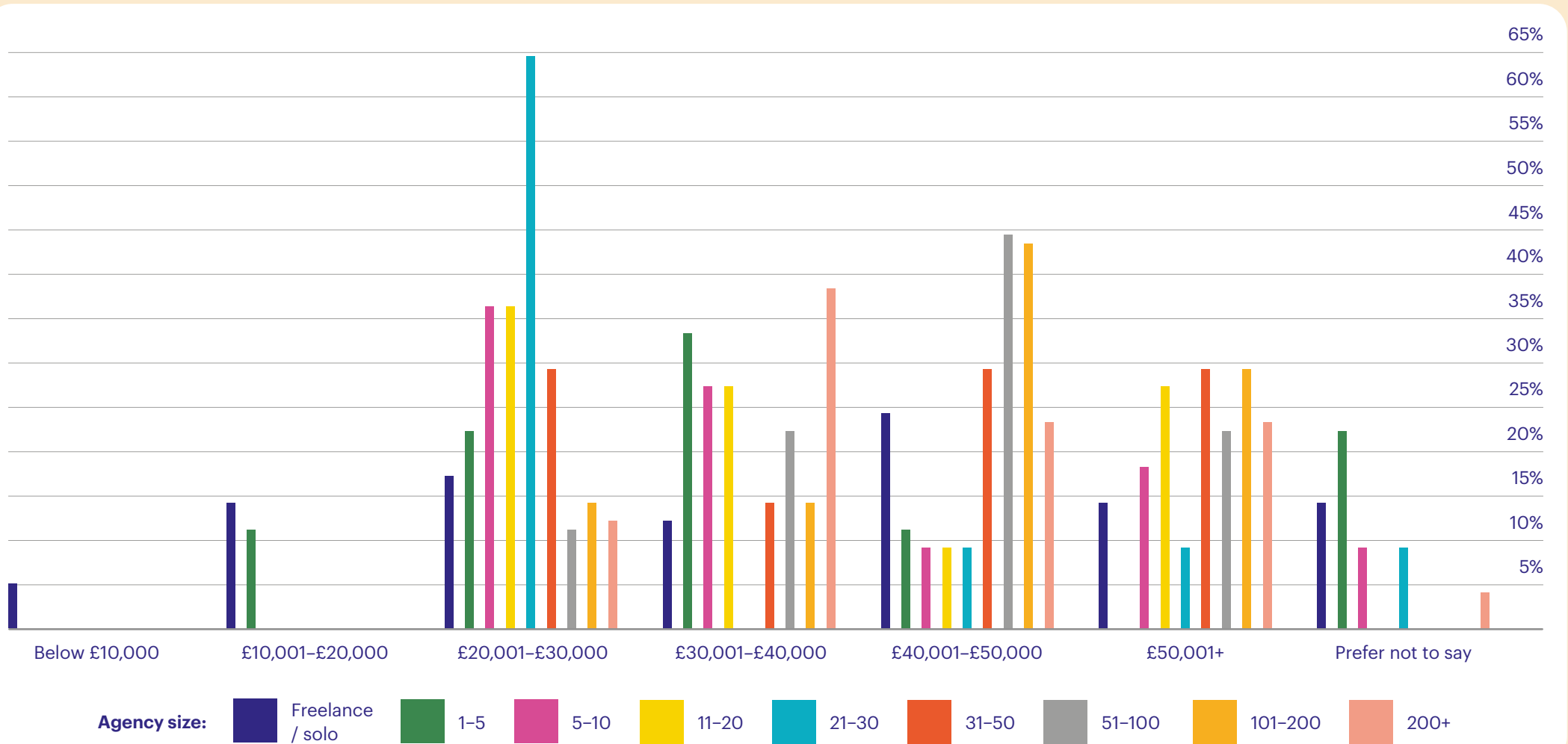
Excluding students and those looking for work



Working life

What is your current salary? By agency size.

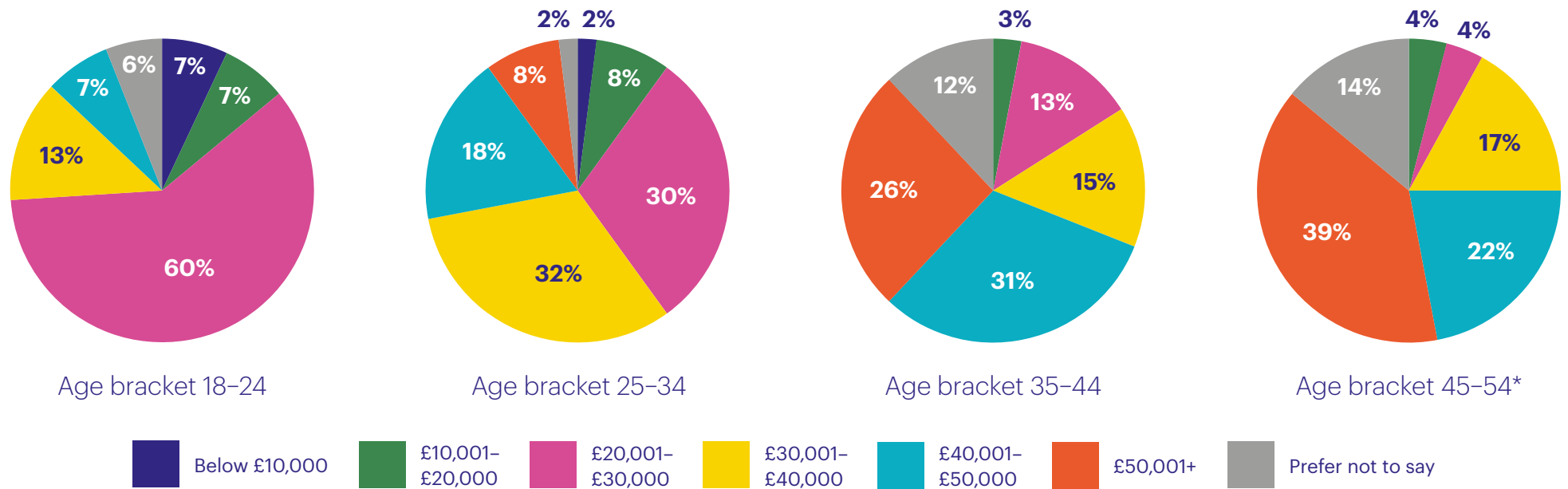
Excluding students and those looking for work



Working life

What is your current salary? By age.

Excluding students and those looking for work



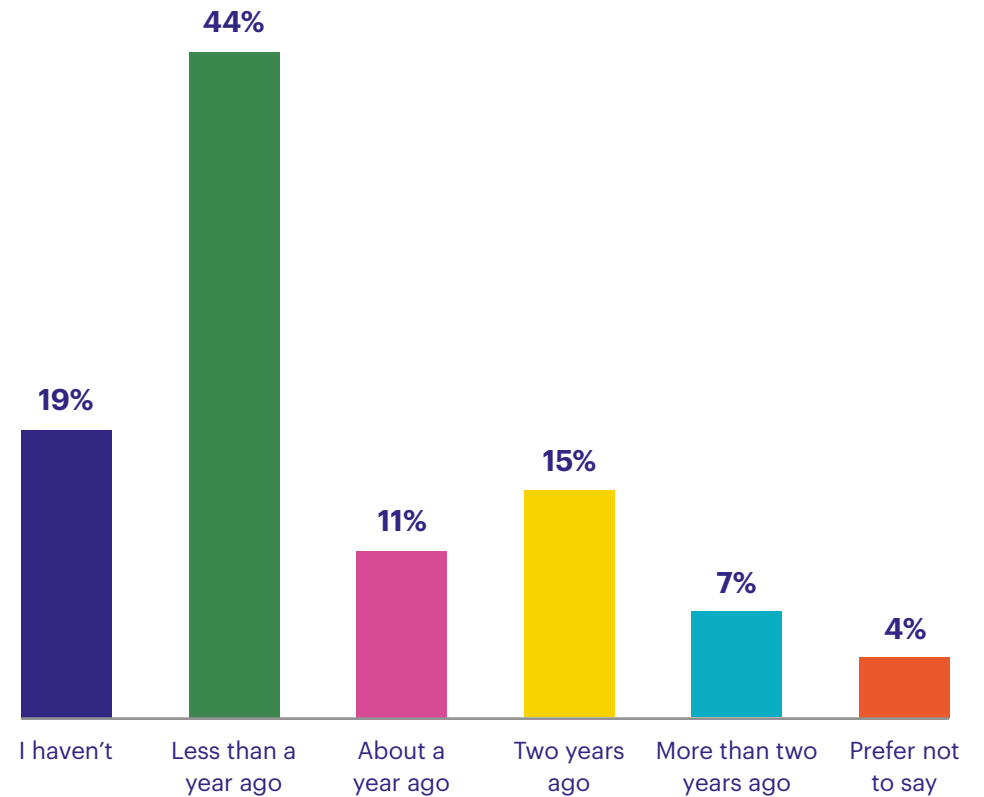
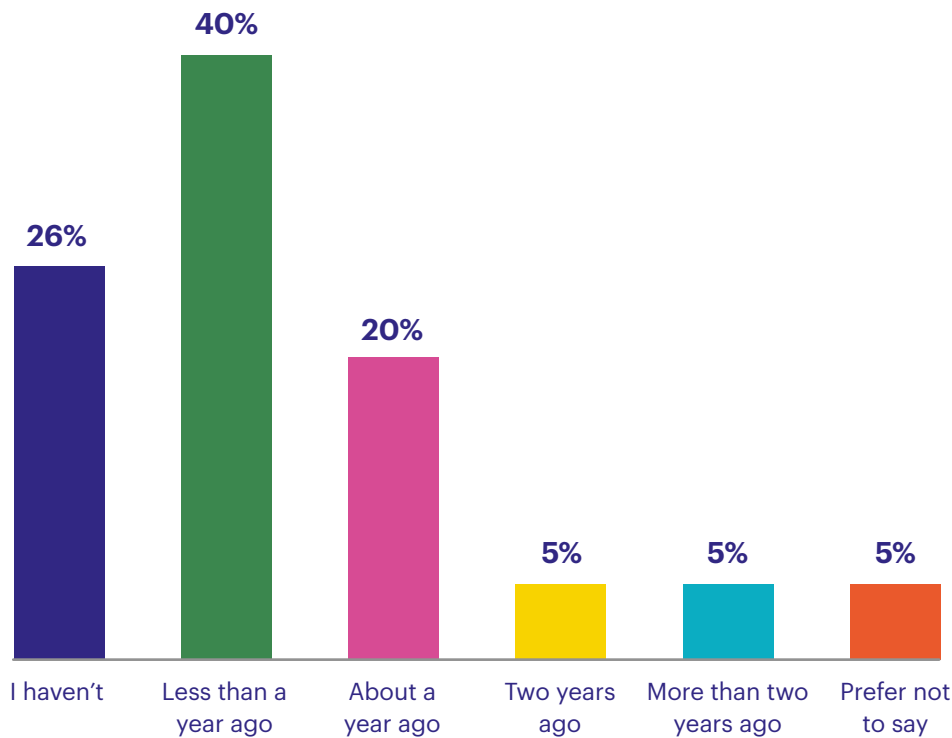
*Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.
55+ too small sample size.

Working life

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

Excluding students and those looking for work

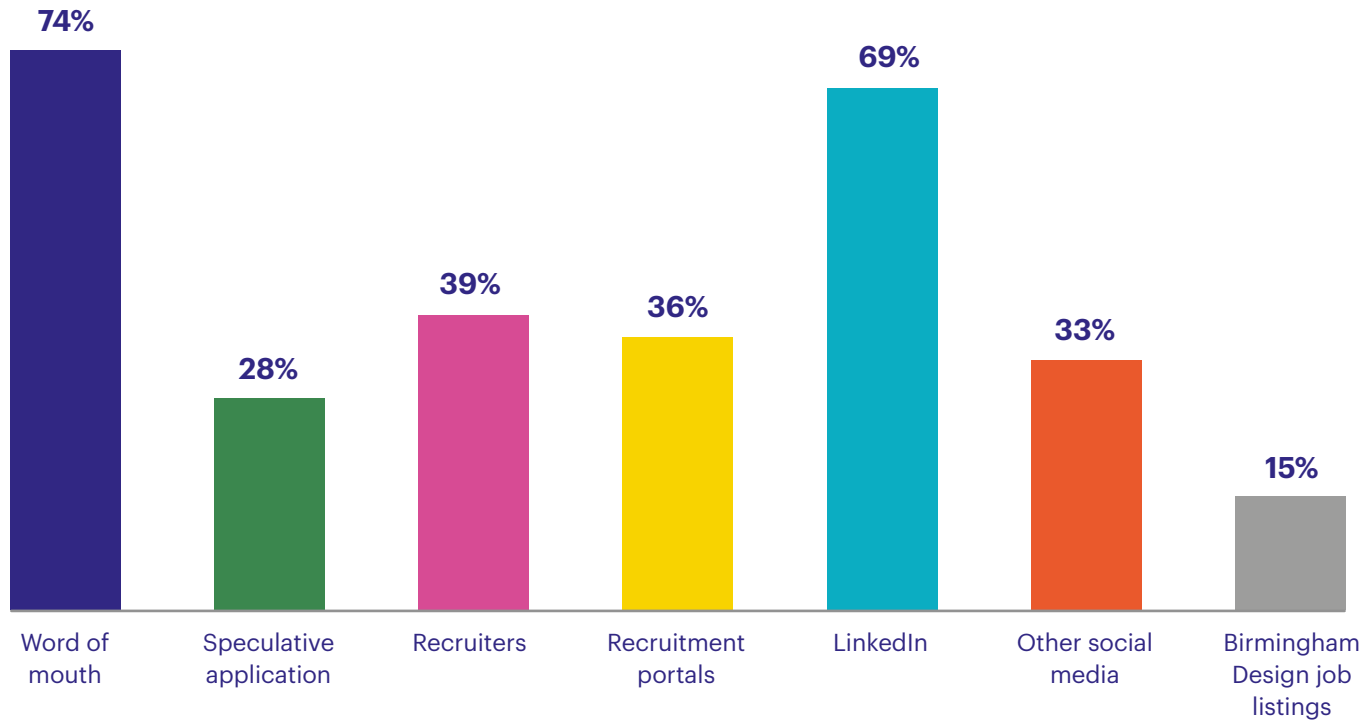
Those considering leaving in the next 12 months, excluding students and those looking for work



Working life

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

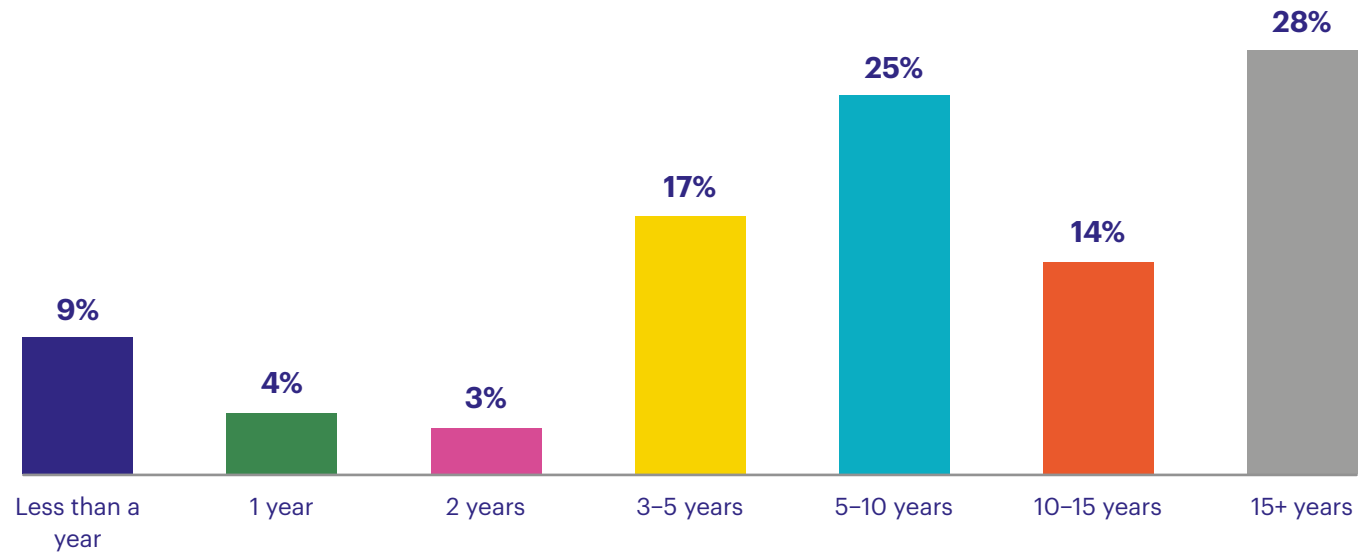
Excluding students



Working life

How long have you worked in the West Midlands?

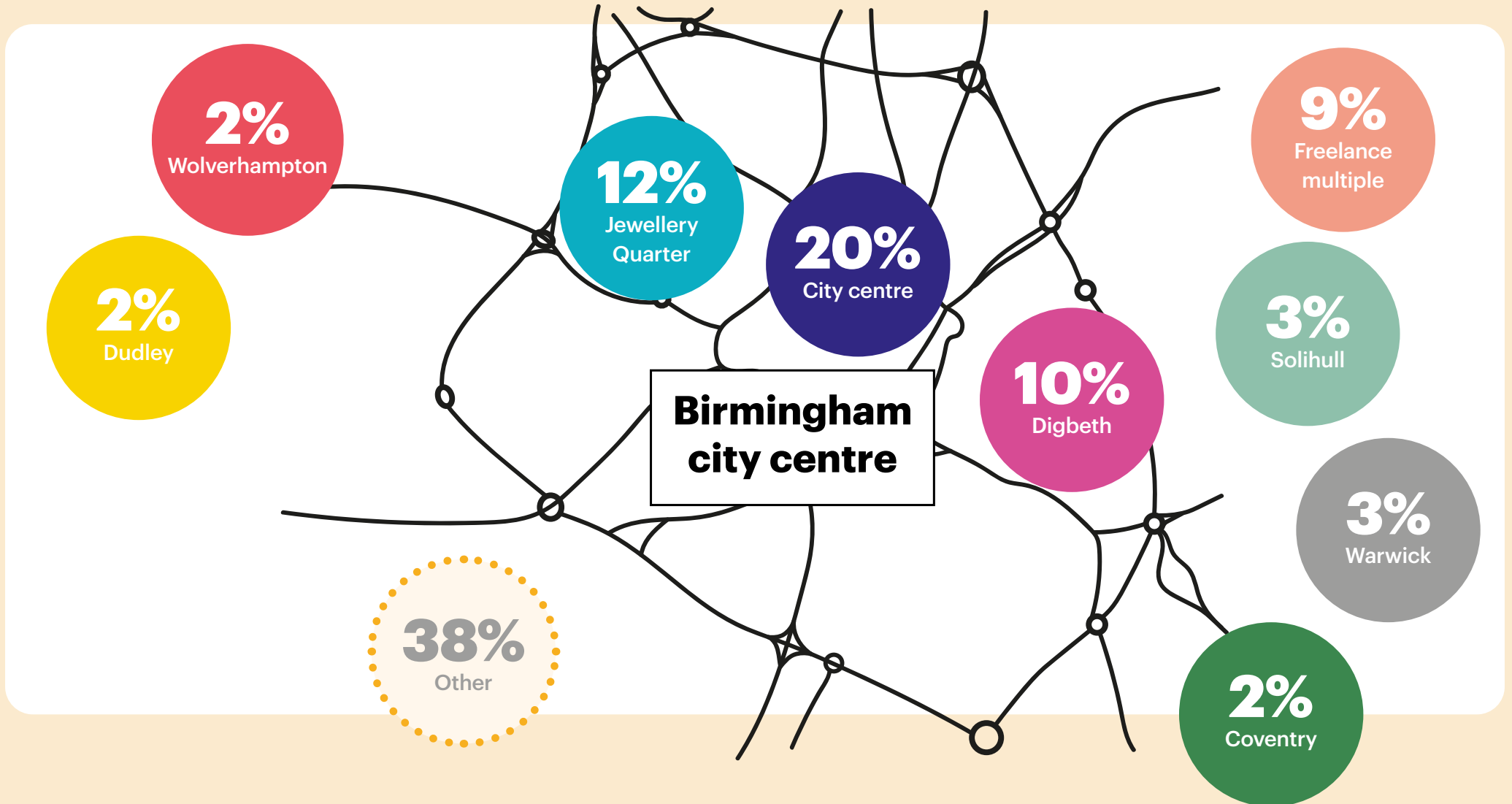
Excluding students



Working life

Where is your workplace located?

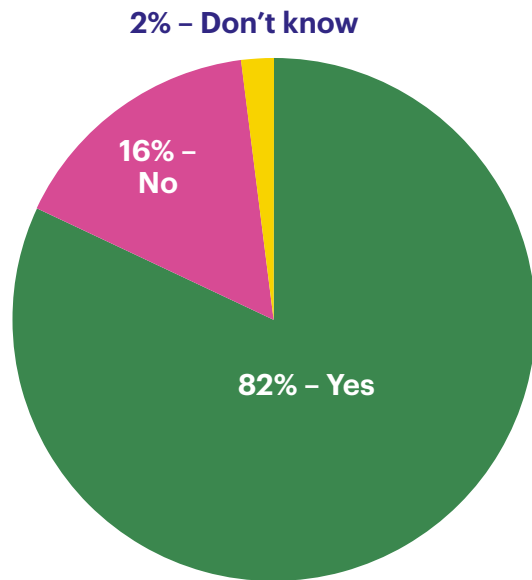
Excluding students and those looking for work.



Working life

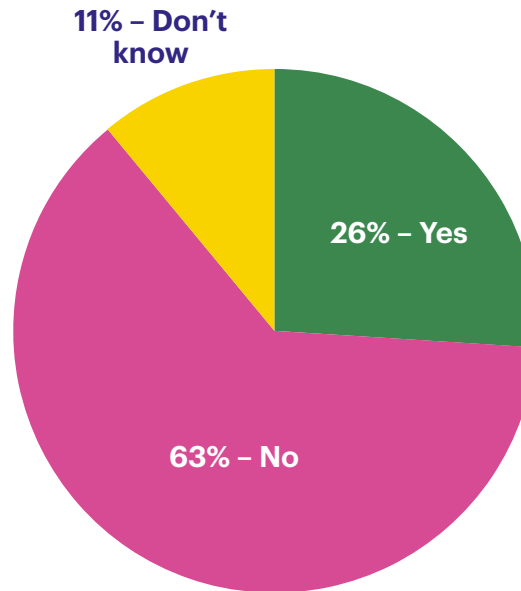
Has your workplace hired new roles in the last 12 months?

Excluding students, those looking for work and freelance



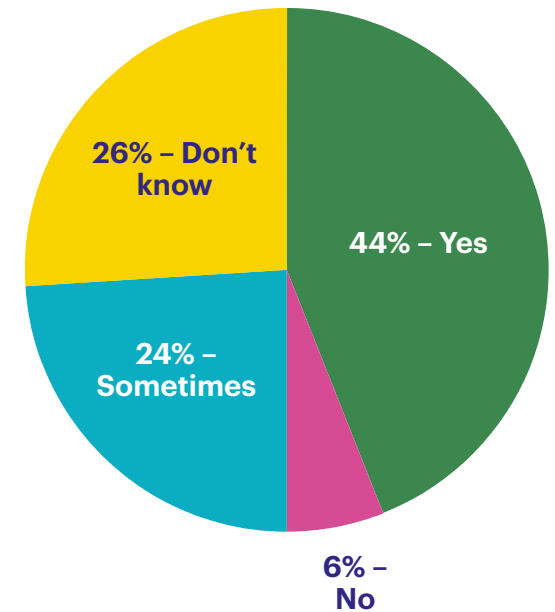
Does your workplace offer internships?

Excluding students and those looking for work



Are these paid?

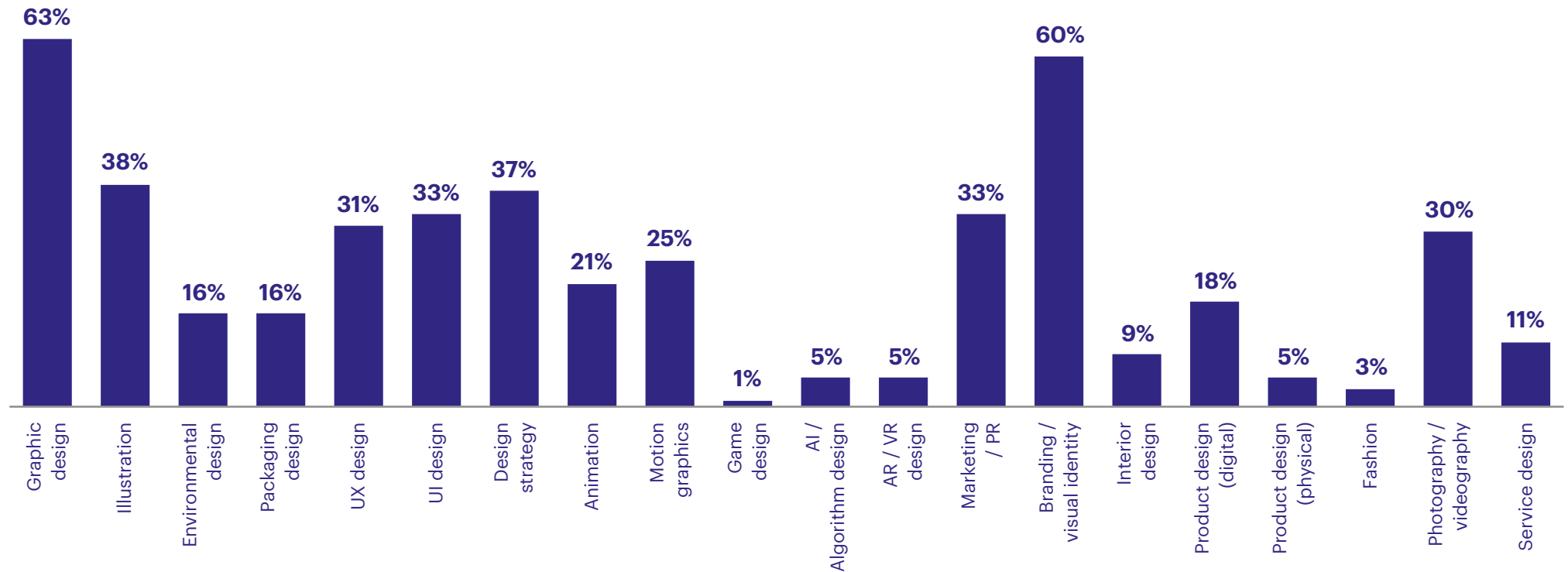
Excluding students and those looking for work



Working life

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

Excluding students and those looking for work.

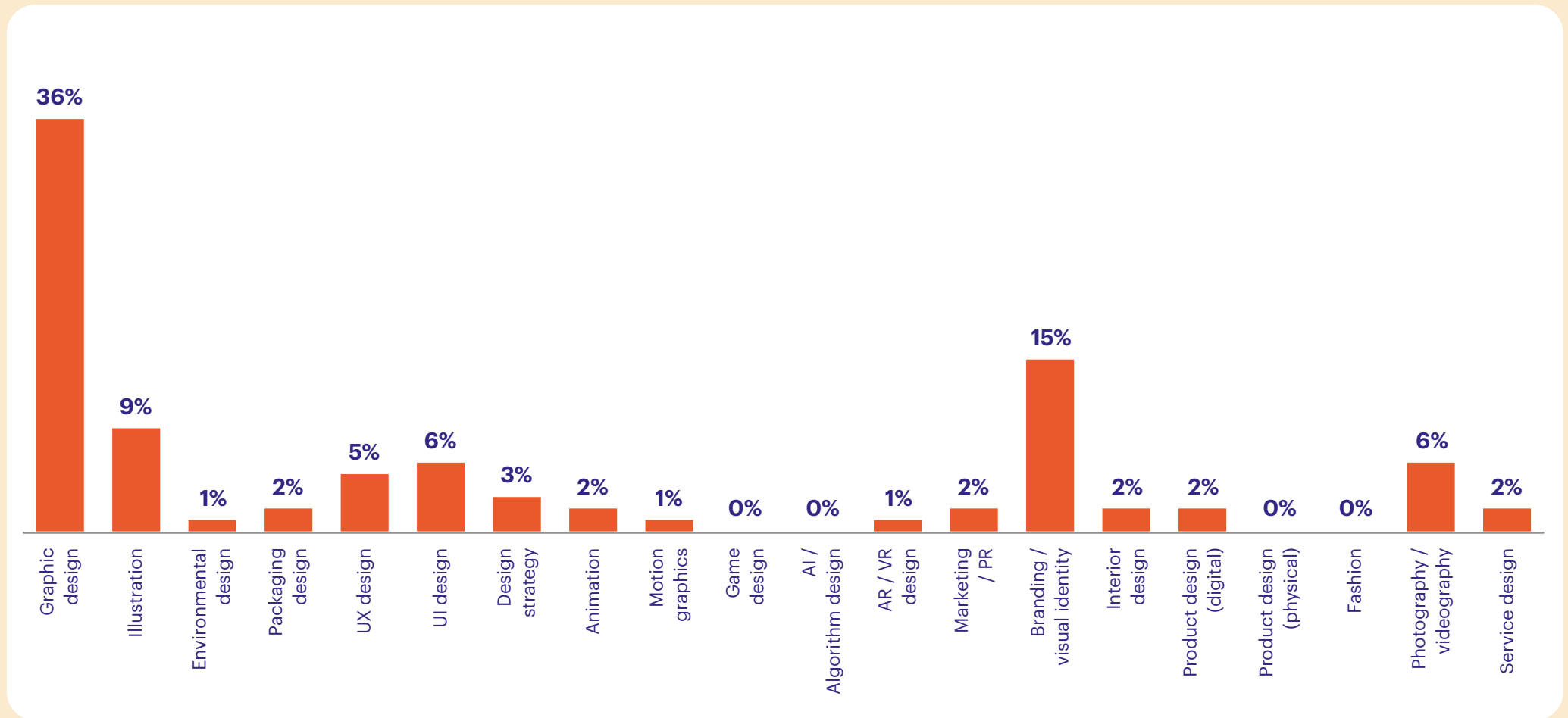


Respondents were able to pick all areas that apply to them.
The graph on the following page shows skill specialities.

Working life

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

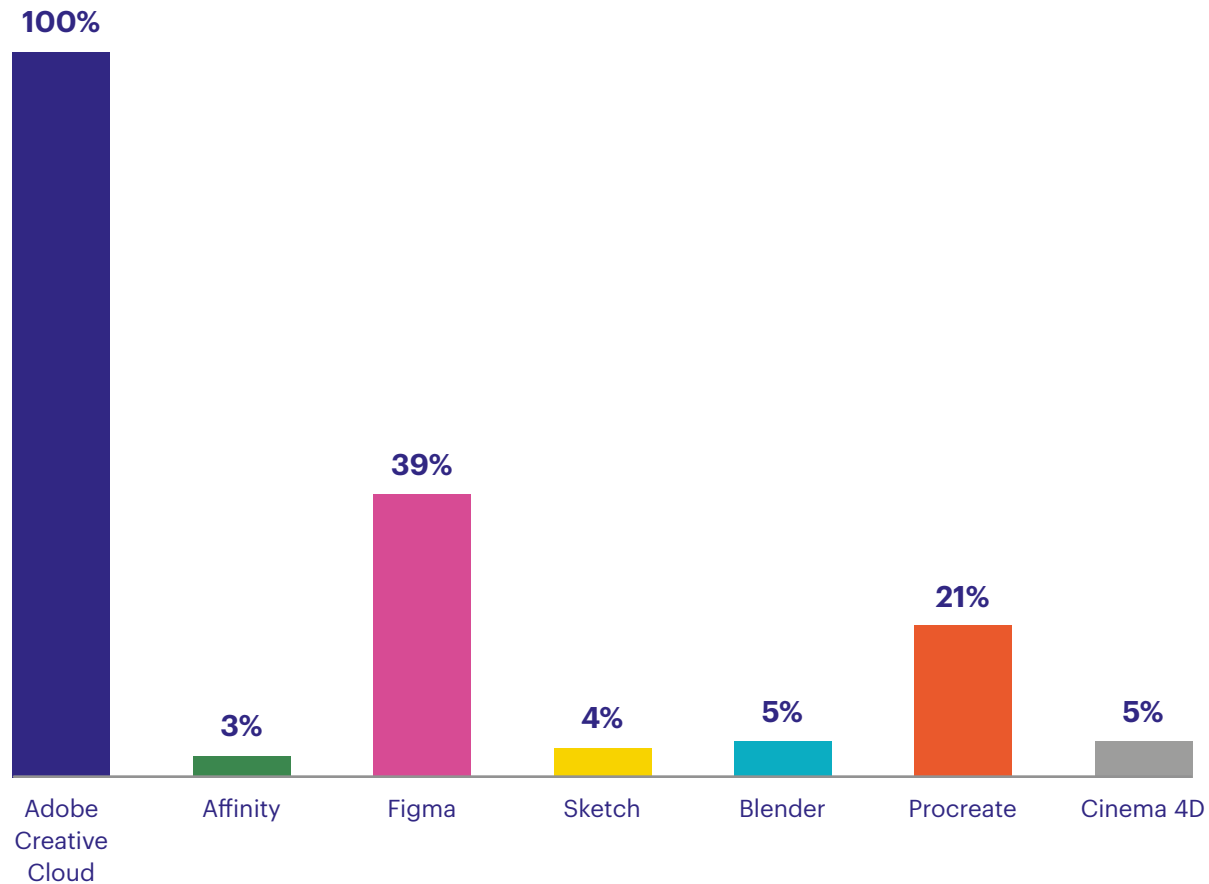
Excluding students and those looking for work.



Working life

What software do you use?

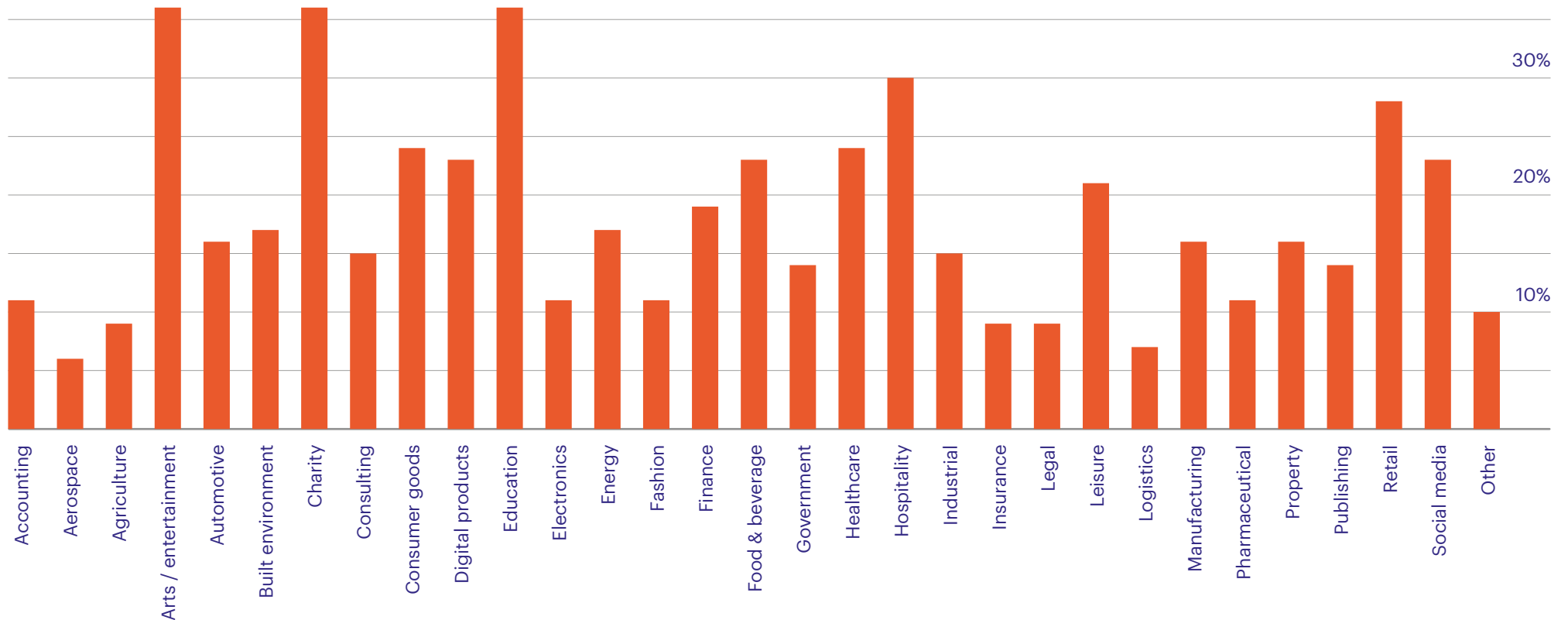
Excluding students and those looking for work.



Working life

What sector(s) do you work for?

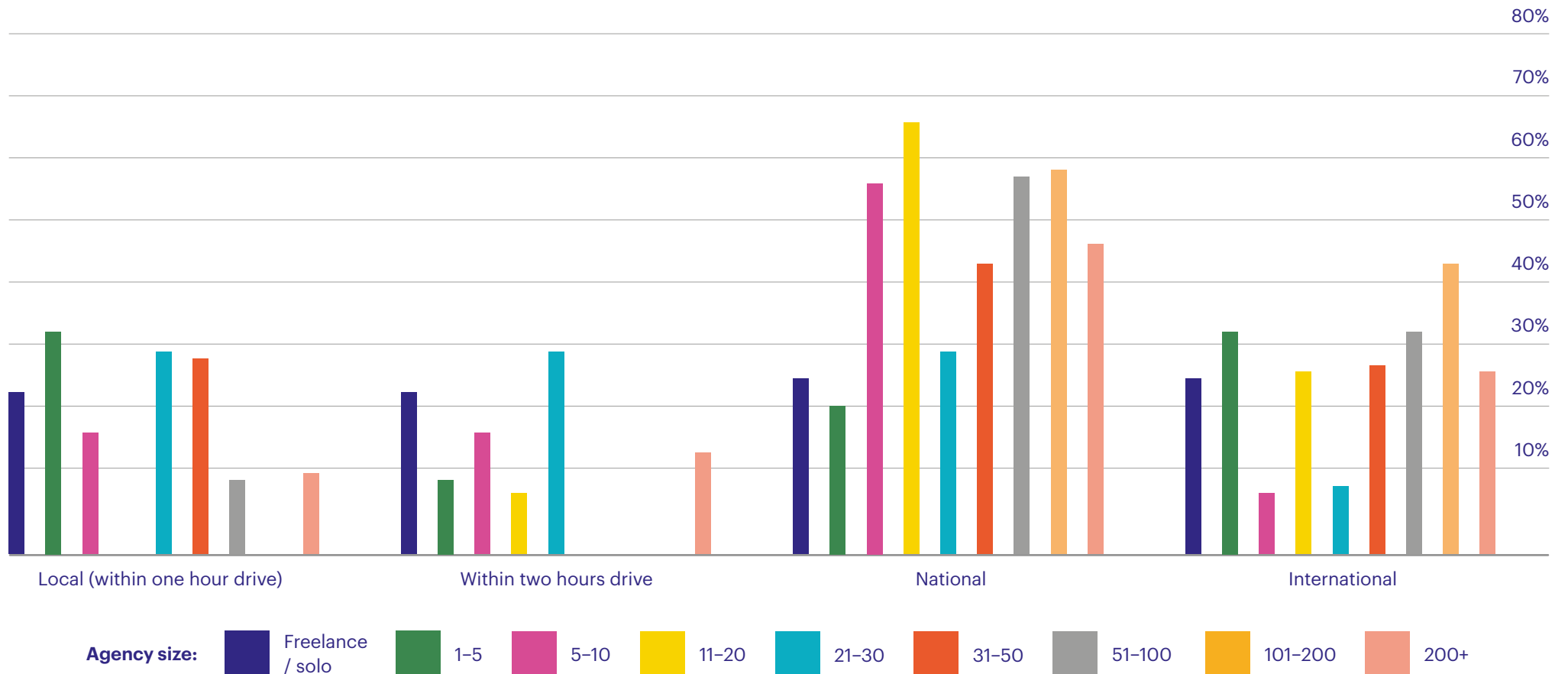
Excluding students and those looking for work.



Working life

Where are most of your clients based?

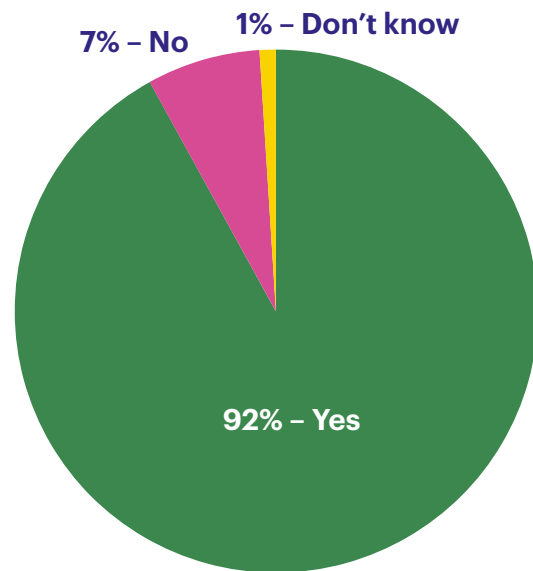
Excluding students and those looking for work



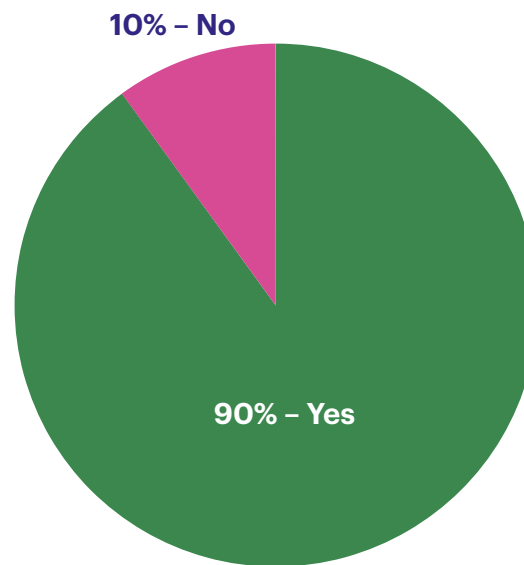
Working life

Flexible working

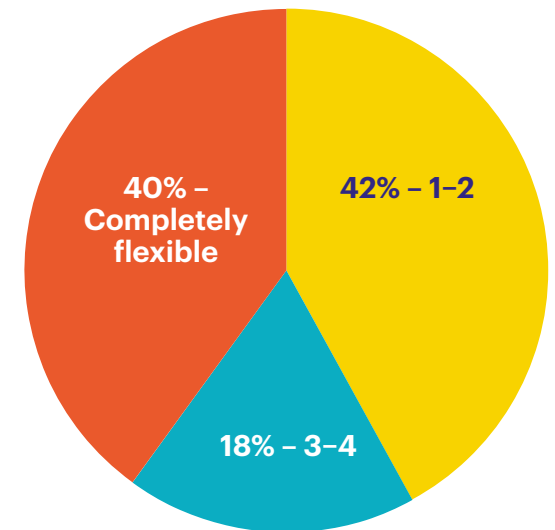
Excluding students, those looking for work and freelance / solo



Does your workplace offer flexible working?



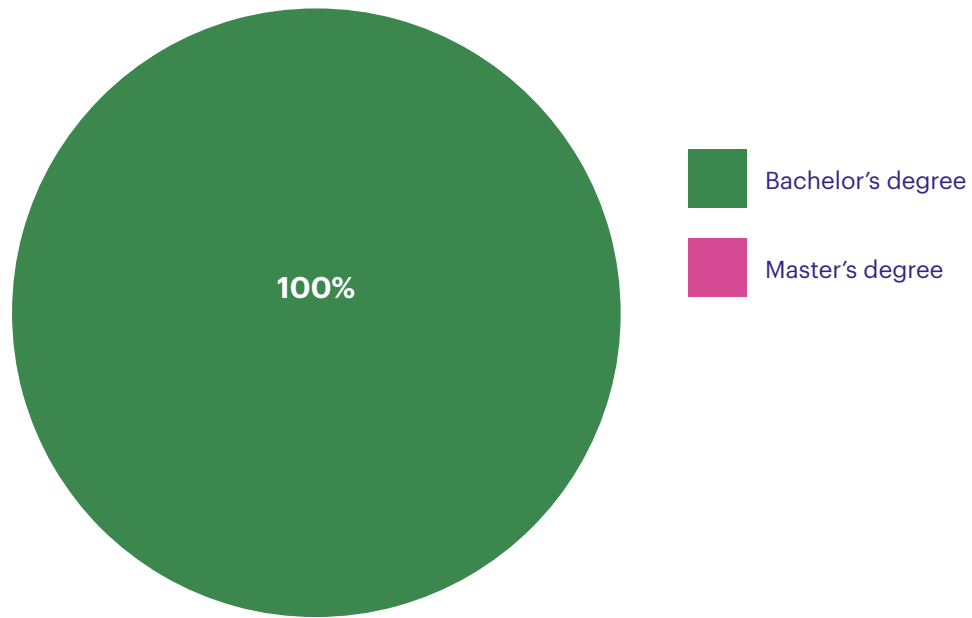
Do you take part in it?



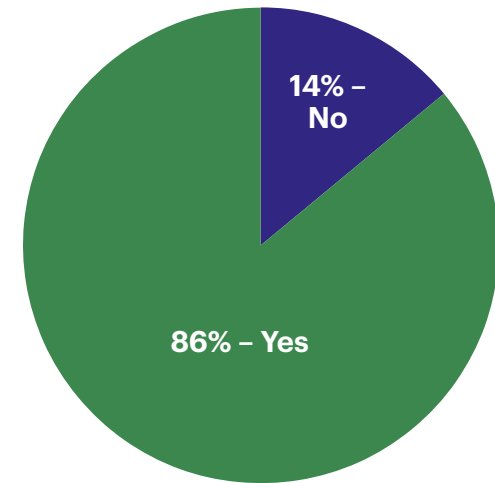
On average, how many days a week are allowed?

Students

What qualification are you studying for?

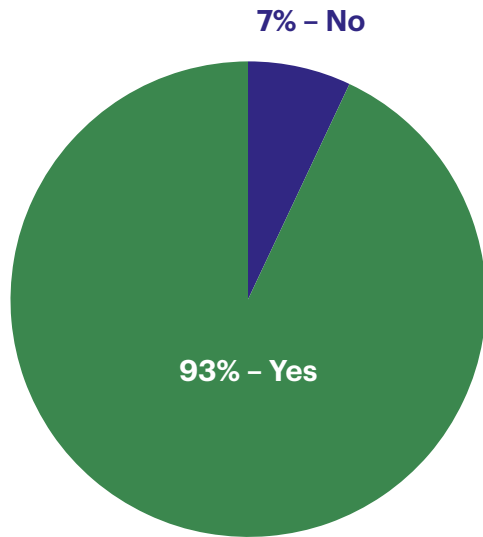


Do you intend to stay in the West Midlands after your studies?

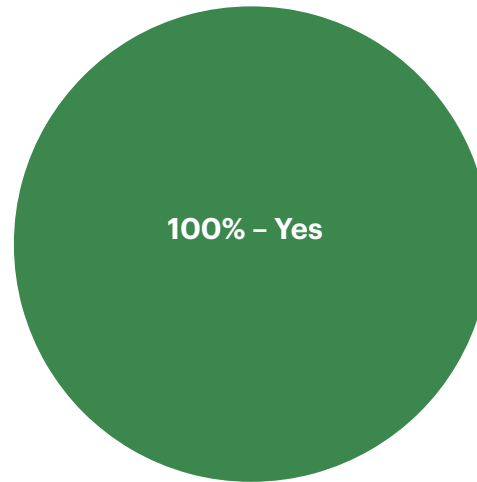


Students

Do you have access your own computer for design work?

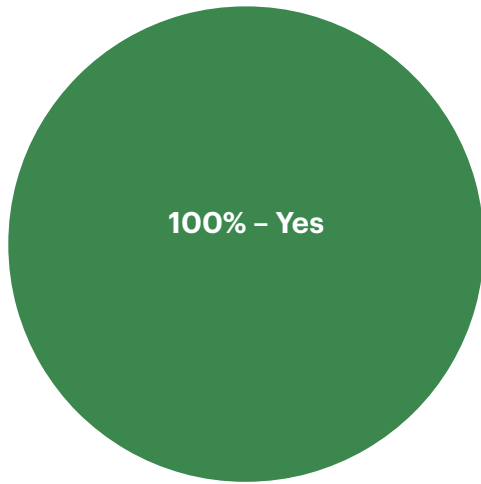


Do you have access to the internet at home?

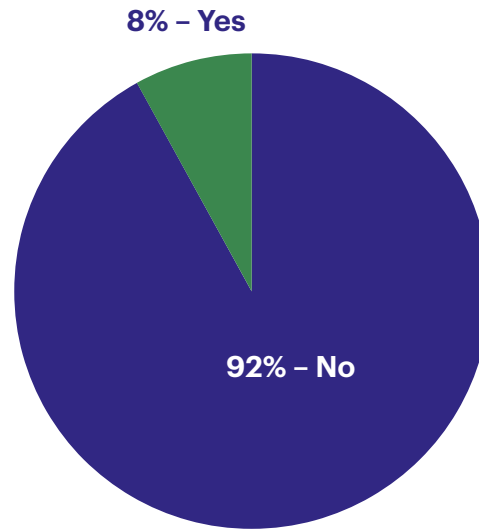


Students

Do you have access to creative software?



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



Outside work

What design publications / blogs do you read regularly?

46pgs
AD
Adham Dannaway
Aesthetic Magazine
AIGA (3)
Arch Daily (2)
Architects Journal
Are.na
Art Marketing
Awwwards
Behance
Birmingham Design (5)
Bookseller
BP&O (2)
The Brand Identity (3)
Brand New/Under Consideration (9)
Build Better Brands podcast
Campaign
Counterpoint
Creative Bloq (4)
Creative Boom (18)
Creative Lives in Progress (2)
Creative Review (17)
Cyber
D&AD
Dave Trott

Design By Women (3)
Design Taxi
Design Week (9)
Dezeen (5)
The Dieline (6)
Dribbble (2)
The Drum (3)
Elle Decor
Eye Magazine (2)
Fonts in Use (2)
Frame (3)
The Futur (2)
Good Moves
Identity Designed
Imagine FX
Imprint
Inside Design
The Interaction Design Foundation Blog
It's Nice That (29)
Jacky Winter Group
Kidscreen
LinkedIn (3)
Logo Archive
Logo Geek
Marketing Week
McKinsey



Outside work

What design publications / blogs do you read regularly?

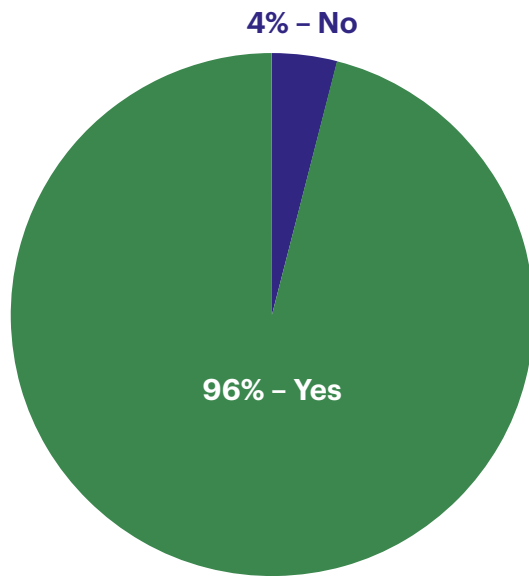
Medium (2)
MIT
Monocle
Monotype
Museums journal
Muzli
NN Group (3)
Punctuation!
Read Max
Retail Design Blog
Savee
Service Design Show
Shop drop
This Week In Design
Twitter
Type One
Typewolf
UK Government Design blogs
Typo
UX Insiders
Vogue (2)
Wallpaper
Wrap
Yatzer



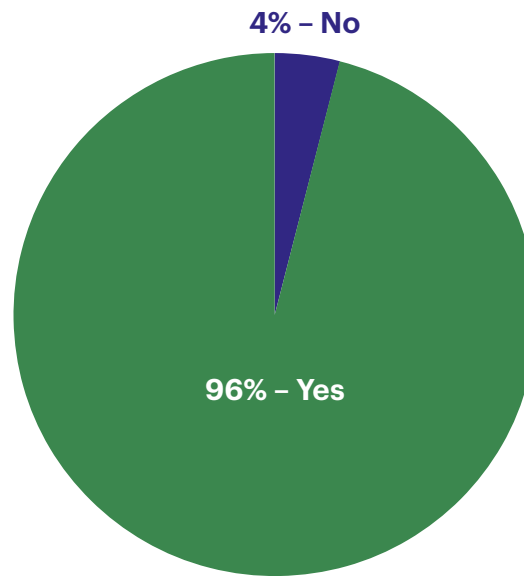
Outside work

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

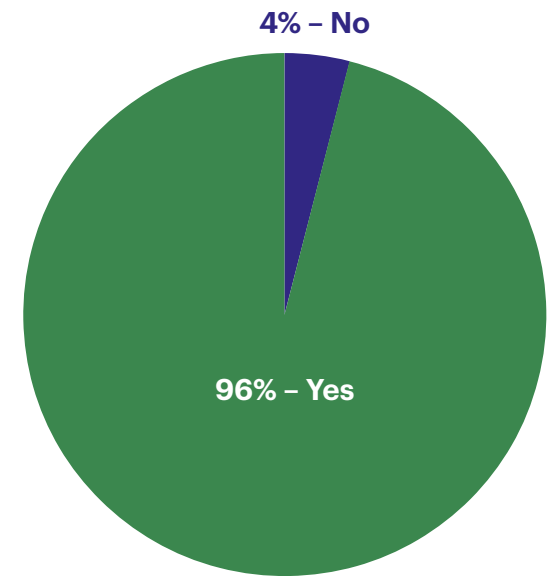
All respondents



All



Identify as female

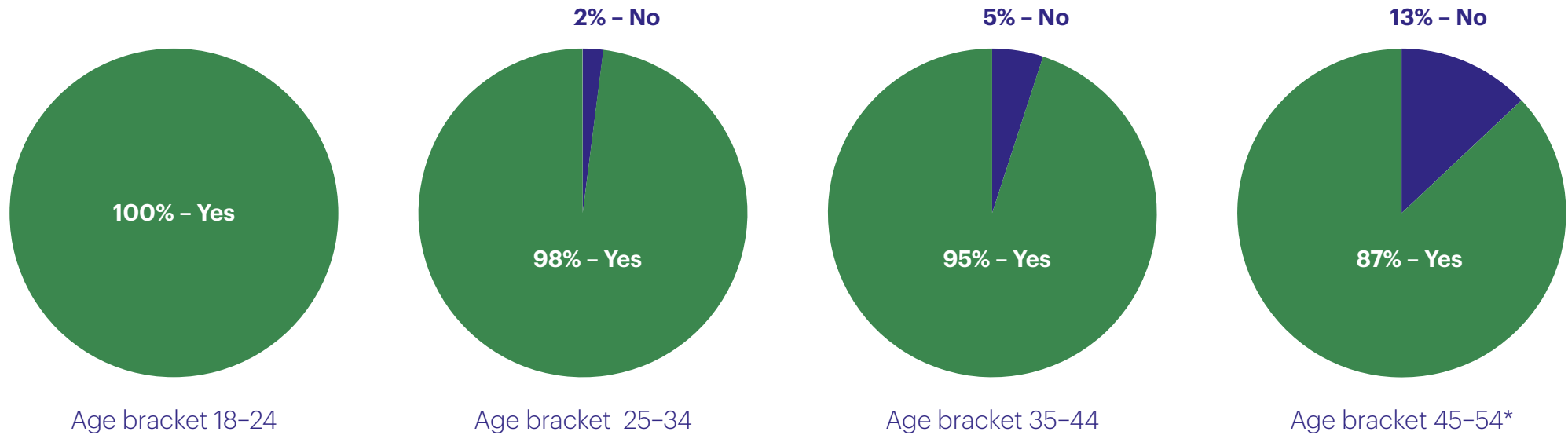


Identify as male

Outside work

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

All respondents



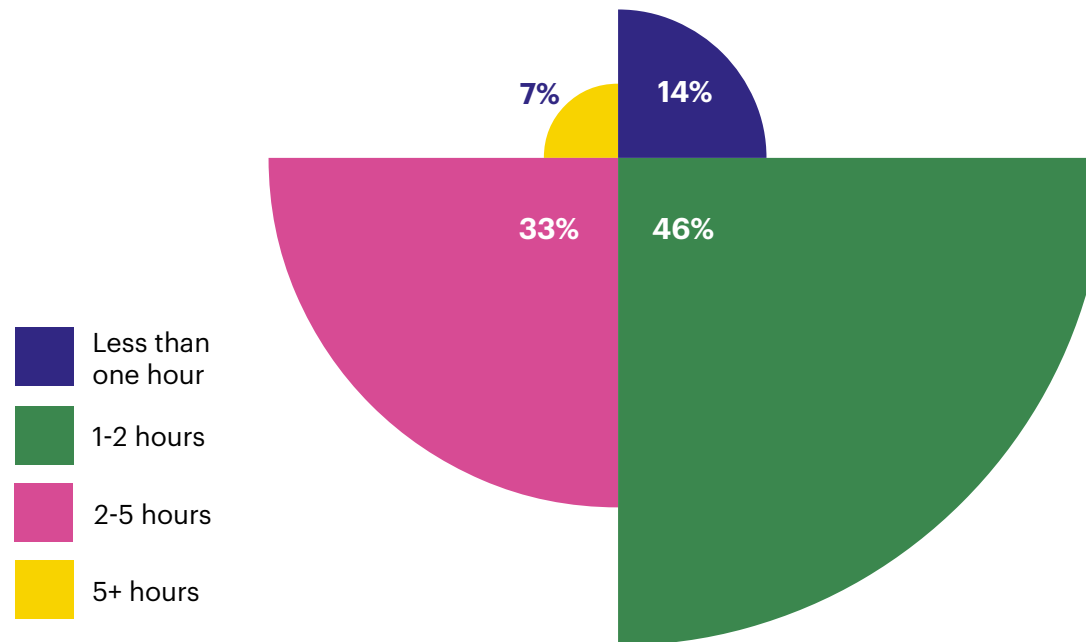
**Sample size small, so not a fair comparison with other age groups.
55+ too small sample size.*



Outside work

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

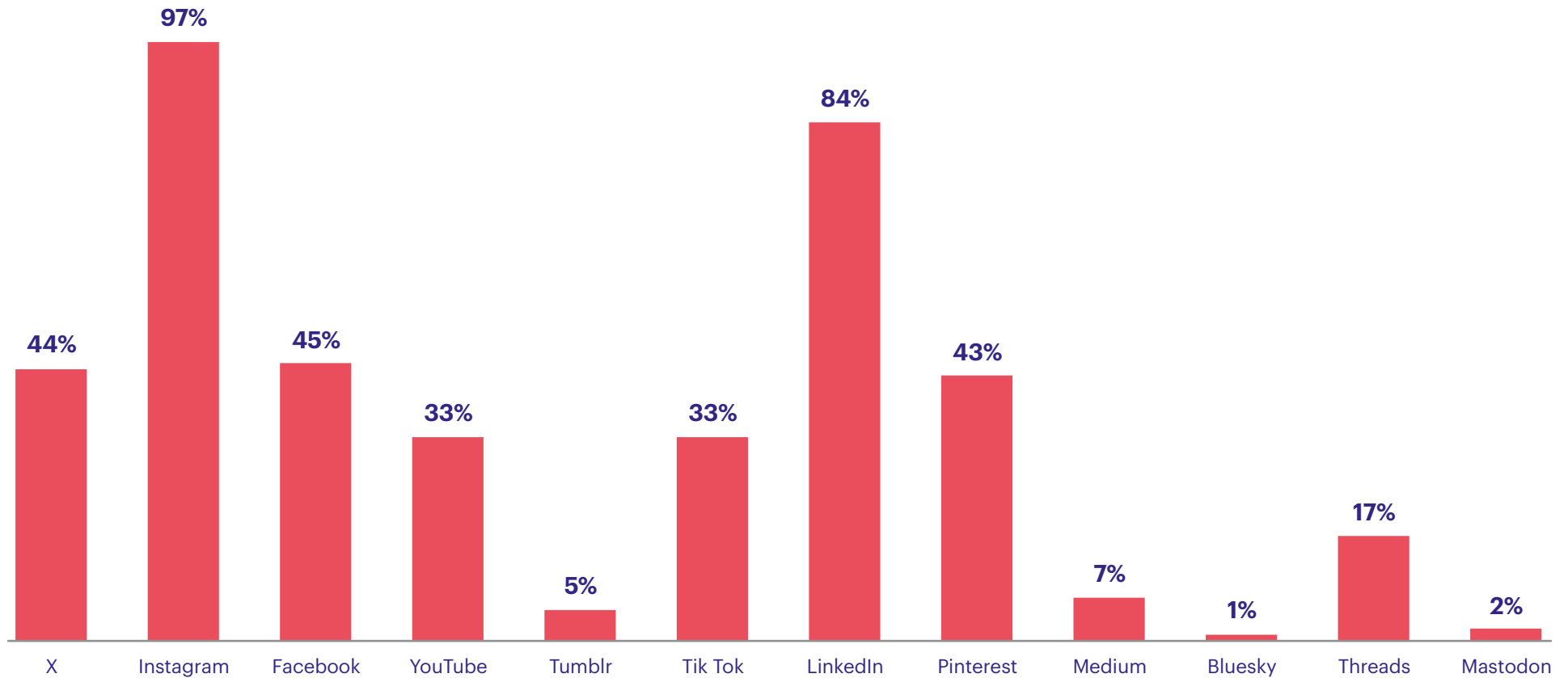
All respondents [answering yes to previous question]



Outside work

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

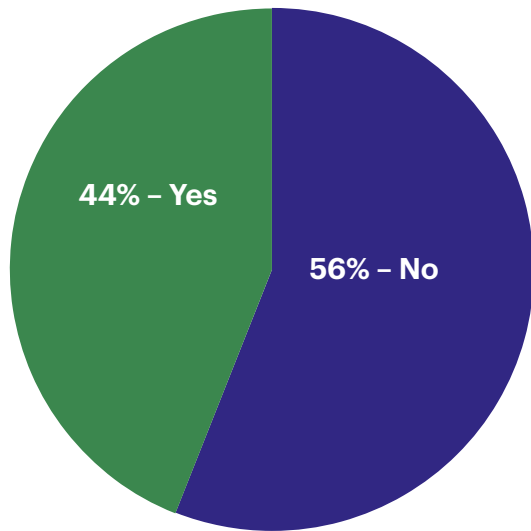
All respondents



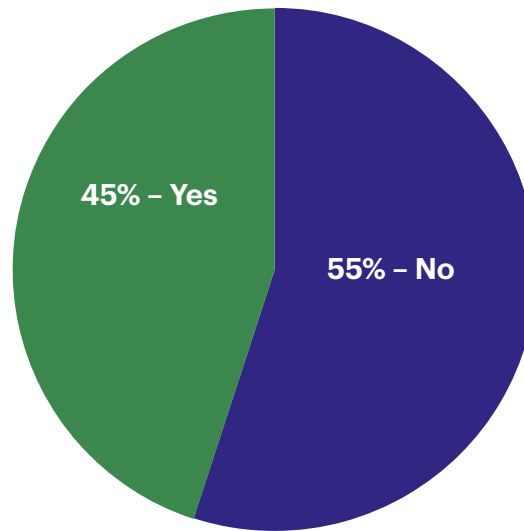
Outside work

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

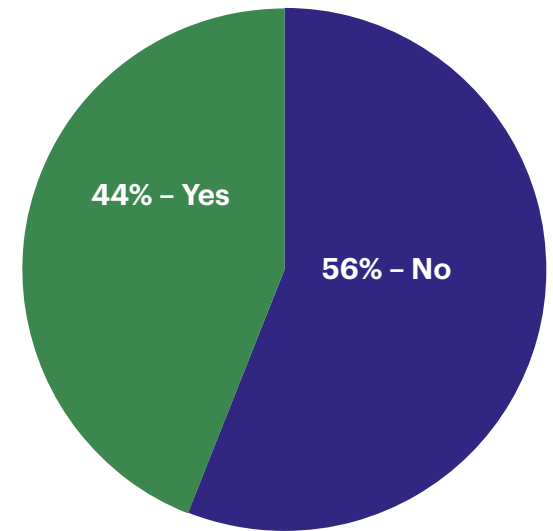
All respondents



All



Identify as female

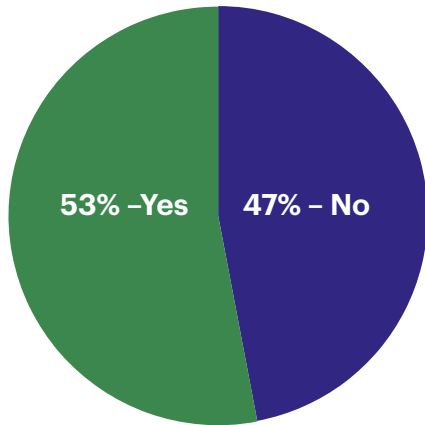


Identify as male

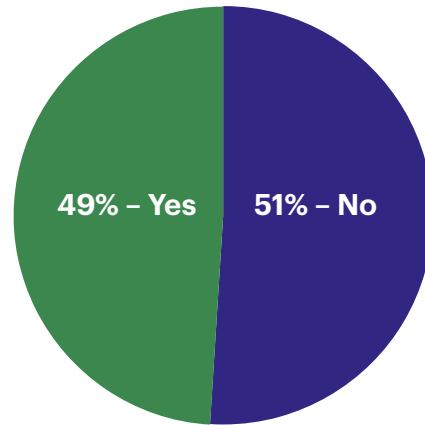
Outside work

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

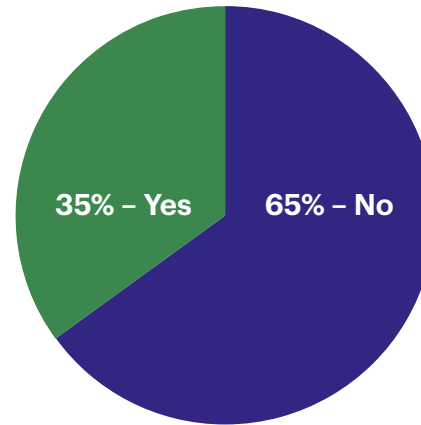
All respondents



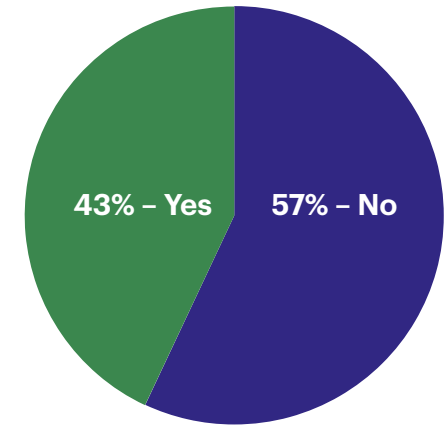
Age bracket 18-24



Age bracket 25-34



Age bracket 35-44



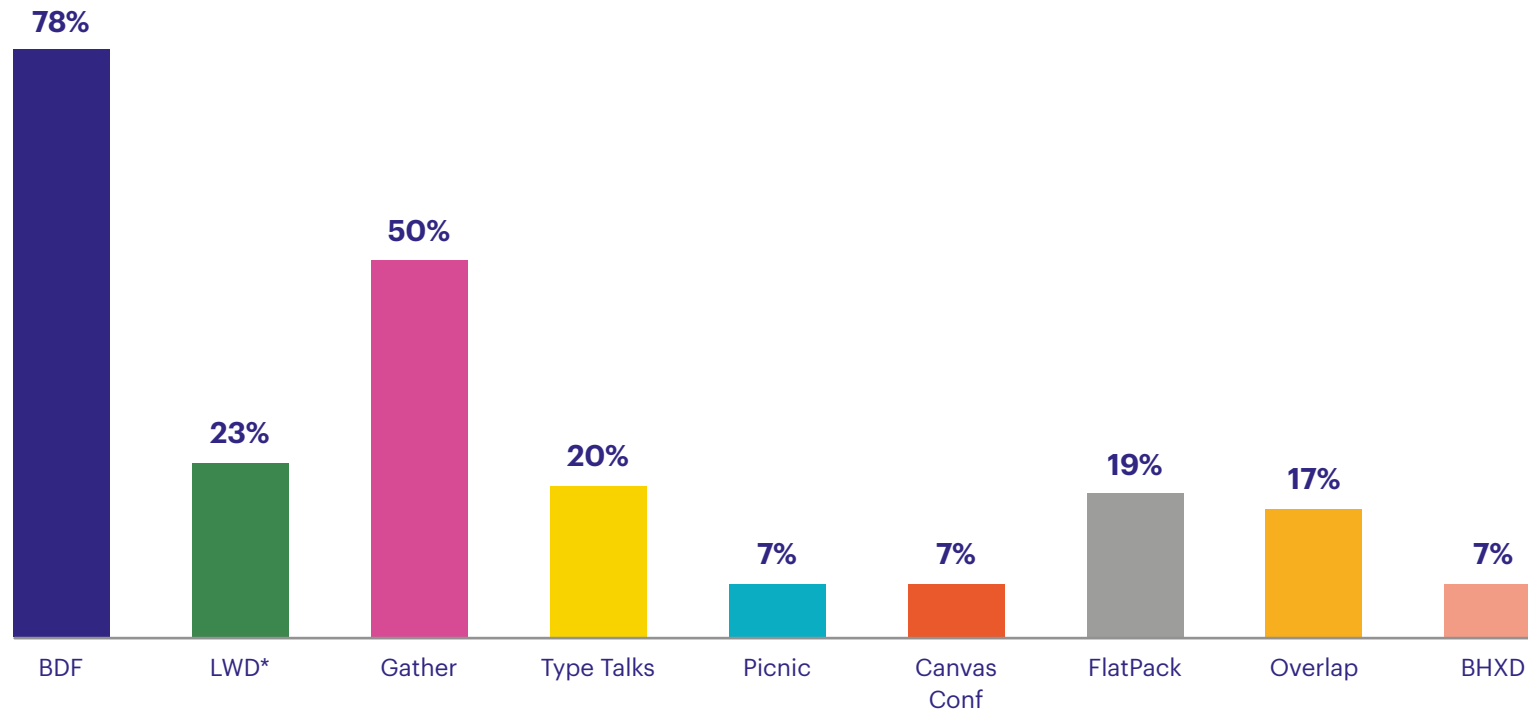
Age bracket 45-54*

**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

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