

AP Arts
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Arts Pay

Survey 2025

pulse 

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Produced by
Arts Professional and Baker Richards

Baker Richards Team

David Reece, *Chief Strategy Office*

Sarah Horner, *Associate Director, Consulting*

Jane Macpherson, *Associate*

Natalia Coe, *Administrator & Financial Controller*

Jon Lowther, *Group Business Assistant*

Arts Professional Team

Ruth Hogarth, *Editor*

Georgia Luckhurst, *News Editor*

Steering Group

With thanks to members of the Arts Pay 2025 Steering Group for their time, insight and challenge throughout the project, representing a diverse cross-section of cultural organisations, independent practitioners and sector networks

With special thanks

To the more than 1,200 artists, freelancers, technicians, producers, administrators, educators and leaders who shared their stories and data. This report is built from your voices and experiences

In *Gravity and Grace*, first published in 1948, Simone Weil wrote that “Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void.”

That tension between gravity and grace, between the weight of necessity and the lightness of imagination, runs through every page of this report, and through the lives of those who make up the arts and cultural workforce.

Working in the arts has always meant living close to both. The pull of gravity - bills, deadlines, rent, exhaustion - is constant, but so too is the presence of grace: the moments of connection, creativity, and shared purpose that remind us why we stay.

Arts Pay 2025 is a portrait of a sector that keeps creating beauty while carrying a growing weight.

As well as looking at the numbers, this year’s study was an attempt to also look at what lies beneath them to understand how it feels to make a life in the arts today.

We set out to listen widely and deeply, across disciplines and regions, from freelancers to salaried workers, from those just starting out to those who have dedicated decades to this work.

Over 1,200 people took part. They spoke with clarity and frustration, hope and fatigue, about the realities of their working lives, revealing both the fragility and resilience of a sector sustained by care and conviction, but stretched by systems that no longer serve it.

The findings sit within a wider landscape of austerity, cost-of-living pressures, and shifting expectations around what work and value mean. As traditional models of funding and employment strain under these pressures, Arts Pay 2025 shows us where we are, but also what we might become.

It’s easy, within our daily work, to see only fragments – a project here, a campaign there – and to forget the scale and diversity of experience that makes up the cultural sector, but when seen together, a pattern emerges: of deep commitment shadowed by

exhaustion, of creativity that continues despite constraint, of people trying to build meaning in systems that don’t always make space for it.

To everyone who took part – freelancers, administrators, artists, technicians, educators, leaders – thank you. This report is not only about you, it is built by you.

If there is a message that runs through all of this, it’s that the sector doesn’t lack imagination, what it often lacks are the conditions for imagination to thrive. The people who responded to this survey already know what needs to change; they already see the possibilities of something fairer, kinder, more human.

The work is collective: to align our systems with the values we claim to hold, and to build a sector that sustains the people who sustain culture itself. Grace, in the end, is not a gift that arrives from above, it’s something we make possible for one another.

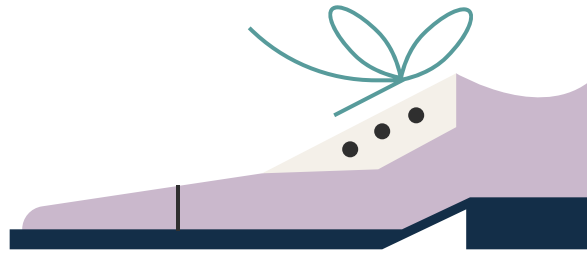
David Reece
Chief Strategy Officer, Baker Richards

Executive Summary

The *Arts Pay 2025 Report* presents a detailed picture of life and labour across the UK arts workforce.

Drawing on national survey data and hundreds of worker testimonies, it exposes a sector sustained by commitment but undermined by systemic inequity.

The findings reveal a workforce driven by purpose yet burdened by financial strain, emotional fatigue, and cultural gatekeeping that limits who can thrive, or even remain, in the arts.



Employment Reality

The sector's economic foundation rests on unstable ground. “**Passion exploitation**” remains endemic: 70% of full-time workers report **excessive hours**, 67% have undertaken **unpaid work**, and nearly half experience financial stress.

Freelancers earn a median of £28k, compared to £41k for full-time employees, and face chronic payment delays. This is not a temporary downturn but a structural dependence on unpaid labour and personal sacrifice, a system of “precarity by design.”



Access and Barriers

Routes into the arts continue to privilege the resourced and connected. 42% of respondents faced entry barriers, rising to 58% for working-class entrants.

Unpaid work and family connections remain common gateways, while class and cultural capital shape who feels entitled to belong.

Career advancement mirrors these patterns: class-based and intersectional barriers persist, with many workers forced to “fit in” to progress, revealing an “invisible ceiling” that rewards conformity.

The data confirm what workers have long known: the arts survive on commitment that outpaces care.

To sustain creativity, the sector must replace reliance on passion with investment in people.

A thriving cultural future depends not on endurance, but on equity, a shift from extraction to agency



Workplace Culture and Treatment

A culture of overwork has been normalised. 70% of workers report **high stress**, and fewer than one-third see leadership modelling healthy boundaries. **Burnout** is treated as proof of commitment.

At the same time, 34% of workers suppress aspects of their identity to be accepted professionally, and a similar proportion have experienced **discrimination**. “Code-switching for survival” remains a daily reality for many.



Pathways Forward

Despite exhaustion, hope persists. Workers articulate clear, practical solutions:

- **Fair pay and secure contracts** (51%)
- **Structural reform and transparency** (33%)
- **Community and collective connection** (34%)

Their visions for transformation converge around five priorities: economic restructuring, community accountability, democratic culture, accessibility, and work-life integration.

Key Recommendations

Where the Sector Stands

Since the first *Arts Pay* report in 2018, progress has been made. Fair-pay principles are now referenced in funder guidance; professional unions have introduced rates-of-pay tables; and new networks are strengthening the freelance voice.

But implementation remains uneven and largely voluntary. Structural reform of funding, contract security, and transparency in decision-making still lag.

The following recommendations highlight **where action is happening** and **where change must go further**.

Across the nations

While most evidence in this report reflects England-based respondents, public funders across the UK are embedding fair-pay safeguards.

In Wales, the Arts Council of Wales requires budgeting at or above industry minima (no less than the National Living Wage) and open recruitment for major fees. Its *Six Principles* (2023) and *Artist Fees* guidance embed fair pay and “Nurturing Talent”, underpinned by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

In Scotland, Creative Scotland’s Fair Work First criteria link funding to Real Living Wage, fair contracts and equality actions.

In Northern Ireland, ACNI issues Rates of Pay guidance and monitors delivery through its grant conditions. These policies signal a UK-wide shift toward clearer baselines for pay and conditions.



*5% of
respondents earn
under £25k*



What's Working

Funders now embed fair-pay expectations in guidance – from Arts Council England's principles to Creative Scotland's Fair Work First, the Arts Council of Wales' Artist Fees guidance, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Rates of Pay benchmarks



What's Missing

Enforcement is inconsistent; fair pay remains advisory, not guaranteed.

Short-term and zero-hours contracts continue to dominate creative employment.



What's Next

Move from guidance to requirement: adopt living-wage benchmarks and long-term contracting across funded organisations.



*67% reported
unpaid work in
their career*



What's Working

FRANK Fair Artist Pay, along with Arts Council Wales and Arts Council England guidance, now discourages unpaid labour.

Some funders include prompt-payment clauses – including ACW and ACE schemes



What's Missing

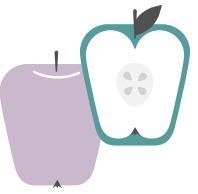
No sector-wide standard on payment times.

Informal expectations of “working for exposure” persist.



What's Next

Establish a clear No Unpaid Labour Code and a 30-day maximum payment standard across the arts.



*Only 18% know
what peers are
paid*



What's Working

Growing discussion of salary transparency and fair-work accreditation across the UK.

A few organisations now publish pay ranges on job adverts.



What's Missing

Commissioning and pay-band data rarely public.

No common accountability mechanism for workforce practice.



What's Next

Create a sector-wide transparency framework: publish pay bands, commissioning criteria, and annual workforce data.



41% cite lack of progression as a barrier



What's Working

ACE's Developing Your Creative Practice grants and mentoring schemes support entry and mid-career artists. Creative Scotland's Open Fund and ACW's Creative Steps and Training & Development strands also invest in regional talent development.



What's Missing

Fragmented, project-based support; few sustained progression routes.

Limited paid time for training or secondments.



What's Next

Build funded, paid progression pathways and cross-sector mobility schemes that reach freelancers as well as employees.



*71% struggle to
set **boundaries***



What's Working

Diversity commitments on race, gender and disability are now routine in UK funding frameworks.

Wellbeing and flexible-working pilots are emerging.



What's Missing

Class, caring responsibilities and regional disadvantage remain under-addressed.

Burnout and overwork remain endemic.



What's Next

Embed wellbeing and socio-economic inclusion as performance measures for funders and employers alike.



*62% feel they have
little or no say in
sector decisions*



What's Working

Artists' Union England, BECTU, the Scottish Artists Union and new freelancer networks are strengthening representation.

Growing advocacy for reform of commissioning and funding models.



What's Missing

No unified body coordinating fair-work standards.

Structural reform still at the pilot stage.



What's Next

Create a national Fair Work Forum bringing funders, unions and practitioners together to monitor progress and drive systemic reform.

A note on methodology

Arts Pay 2025 is the third national study of pay and conditions in the UK arts and cultural workforce, produced by *Arts Professional* with *Baker Richards* to track change since 2018 and 2022.

Fieldwork: 19 June – 22 July 2025.

Responses: 1,266 valid returns after data cleaning.

Who took part: Freelancers, employees, artists, producers, technicians, educators and leaders from across the UK's arts and culture sector.

Recruitment: Open call via Arts Professional networks and partner organisations; participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Data integrity: Responses were checked for completeness; open-text comments were coded thematically. No statistical weighting applied.

The survey covers several key areas:

- **Section 1:** Your current work and pay in the arts
- **Section 2:** Career pathways and sustainability
- **Section 3:** Resource distribution and equity
- **Section 4:** Workplace culture and wellbeing
- **Section 5:** Your vision for a better sector
- **Section 6:** Demographics

Median salary data are colour-coded according to response size:

- **n = <25** : don't show
- **n = 25-99** : Red (margin of error 19%-10%)
- **n = 100-249** : Amber (MoE 10%-5%)
- **n = 250+** : Green (MoE <5%)

All data reported in aggregate; no individuals or organisations identifiable.

Findings are indicative of sector trends, reflecting lived experience rather than a randomised sample.




Part 1: THE EMPLOYMENT REALITY



Chapter 1

Employment Patterns & Financial Foundations

Passion Exploitation



"I feel that in arts and culture we live by 'the show must go on' mantra and this needs to stop. We are an underpaid sector with a lot of 'free' overtime. It's what has become expected as we all love the arts."

Woman, 35-44, Not working class, Full-time, Senior level



The arts and cultural workforce continues to operate within a culture that normalises overwork, underpay, and emotional investment far beyond what is financially recognised. “Passion” – the motivation that draws people into creative work – is frequently leveraged to justify poor conditions. The result is a sector powered by deep personal commitment but sustained through chronic self-sacrifice.

Overwork and Underpay

Full-time employees routinely work beyond their contracted hours. In 2024-25, 70% of full-time staff reported working more than their contracted hours – nearly half by **10 hours or more each week**.

Yet these additional hours are rarely compensated. This unpaid labour becomes absorbed into organisational expectations, particularly where “the show must go on” attitudes persist. The median full-time salary of £41,000, while an improvement from 2022’s £33,000, remains out of step with comparable sectors considering overtime, inflation, and intensity of work.

Unpaid Labour as a Norm

Across employment types, 67% of respondents reported undertaking unpaid work – from voluntary board roles and unpaid overtime to “free” consultation and project work.

For freelancers, unpaid preparation, networking, and “trial” projects were widely accepted as unavoidable career costs.

Passion and Financial Stress

Alignment with “personal values and ethics” remains one of the most cited motivators (42%), yet this purpose-driven commitment masks deep financial exploitation.

This paradox of purpose tied to precarity underpins the emotional exhaustion many arts workers report.



"Increased income - but I know this isn't realistic. The arts are always lower paid - if we increased salaries, we'd have to increase ticket prices and people say they're too much already"

Woman, 45-54, Not working class, Part-time, Middle level

"The arts is still very inaccessible for working-class individuals. We aren't able to take unpaid work, but there is the expectation that we should work for free at the beginning of our career."

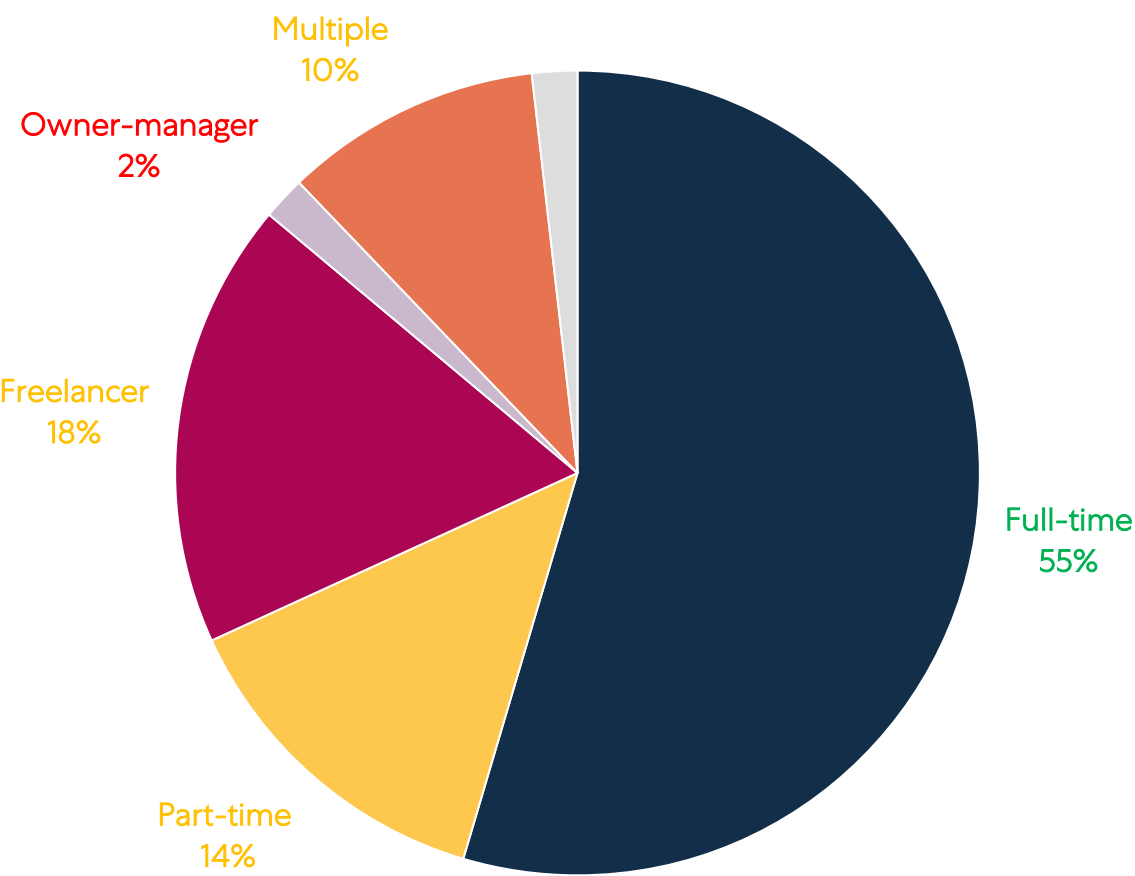
Woman, 25-34, Working class, Freelance, Entry level

"I'm fortunate to come from a well-off background. That's what allows me to stay in a relatively low-paid job for my skillset."

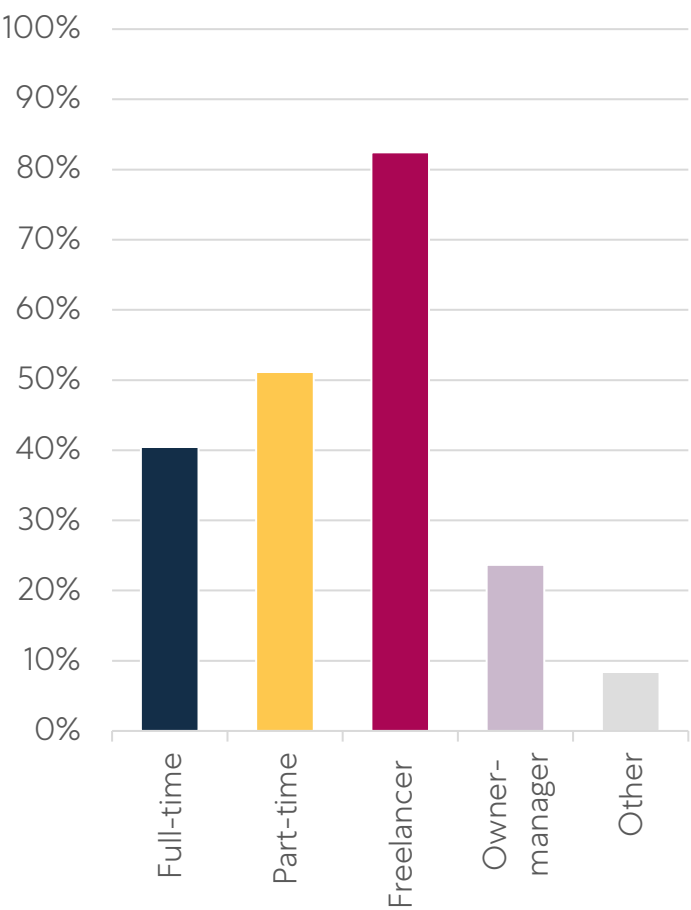
Man, 25-34, Full-time, Middle level

Employment Status

Which best describes your employment status in the arts in the 2024-25 financial year (April 2024 to March 2025)?



If multiple employment types selected:
(n=131)



Primary Artform or Discipline in 2024-25 (By employment status)

| | Total (n=1266) | Full-time (n=691) | Part-time (n=172) | Freelancer (n=227) |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Theatre | 32% | 34% | 23% | 29% |
| Music | 21% | 21% | 23% | 18% |
| Visual arts | 19% | 16% | 16% | 25% |
| Community arts | 19% | 13% | 20% | 28% |
| Cross-artform/Interdisciplinary | 17% | 14% | 18% | 24% |
| Heritage/Museums | 17% | 17% | 16% | 20% |
| Arts education | 15% | 12% | 20% | 17% |
| Dance | 12% | 12% | 12% | 10% |
| My work is not artform-specific | 10% | 8% | 10% | 18% |
| I work across multiple artforms equally | 7% | 6% | 8% | 9% |
| Film/Video | 6% | 4% | 5% | 8% |
| Literature/Writing | 4% | 2% | 8% | 7% |
| Crafts | 4% | 2% | 5% | 7% |
| Digital/New media arts | 4% | 2% | 5% | 7% |
| Libraries/Archives | 3% | 2% | 3% | 6% |
| Comedy | 2% | 2% | 2% | 1% |
| Other | 5% | 4% | 3% | 8% |
| Not applicable to my role | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% |

- The top artform amongst respondents were those who work in Theatre with 32%, with 21% following in Music
- Those who work in Comedy represent the smallest segment of responses (2%)

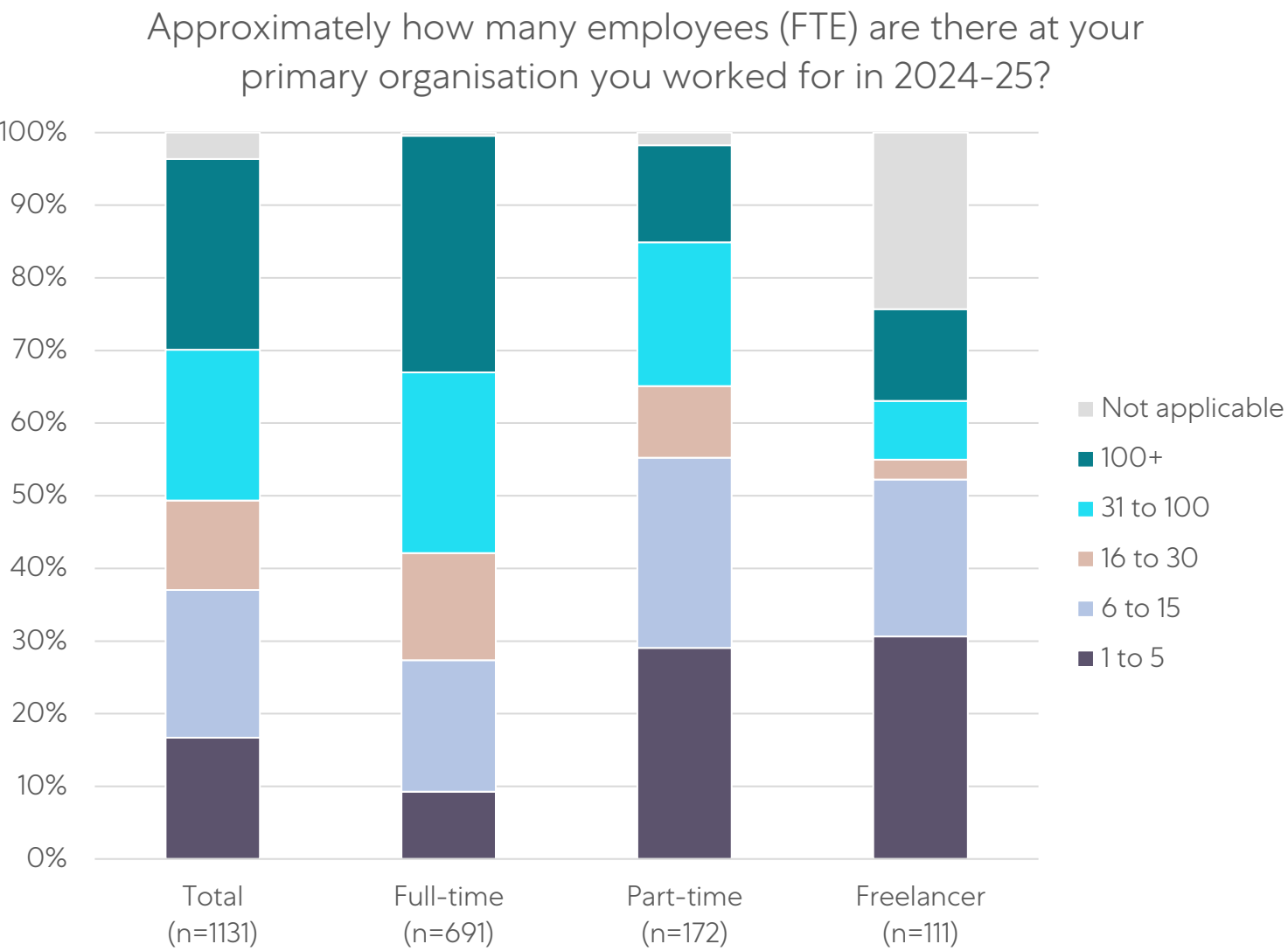
Most Regular Employment or Contract Type in 2024-25

(By employment status)

| | Total (n=1266) | Full-time (n=691) | Part-time (n=172) | Freelancer (n=227) |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Not-for-profit arts organisation (venue-based with box office) | 39% | 47% | 26% | 29% |
| Not-for-profit arts organisation (non-venue based) | 38% | 30% | 51% | 48% |
| Local authority or public body | 13% | 11% | 12% | 23% |
| I work independently / as a sole trader | 12% | 0% | 1% | 51% |
| Education provider (e.g. school, university) | 9% | 6% | 6% | 12% |
| Other: | 7% | 6% | 5% | 9% |
| Commercial creative business (non-venue based) | 6% | 4% | 2% | 12% |
| Commercial creative business (venue-based with box office) | 5% | 5% | 3% | 7% |

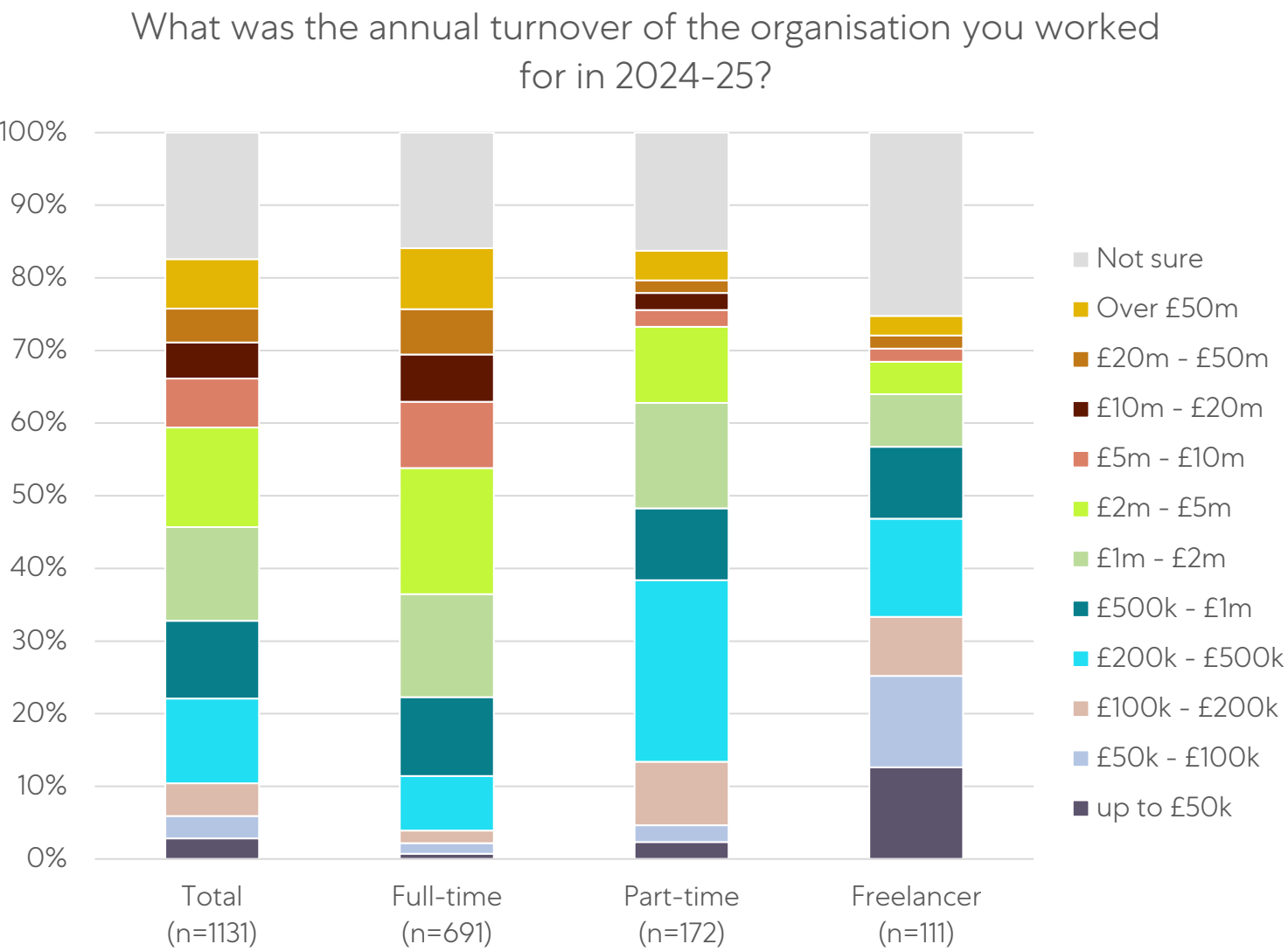
Employees at Primary Organisation

(By employment status)



Organisation Annual Turnover

(By employment status)

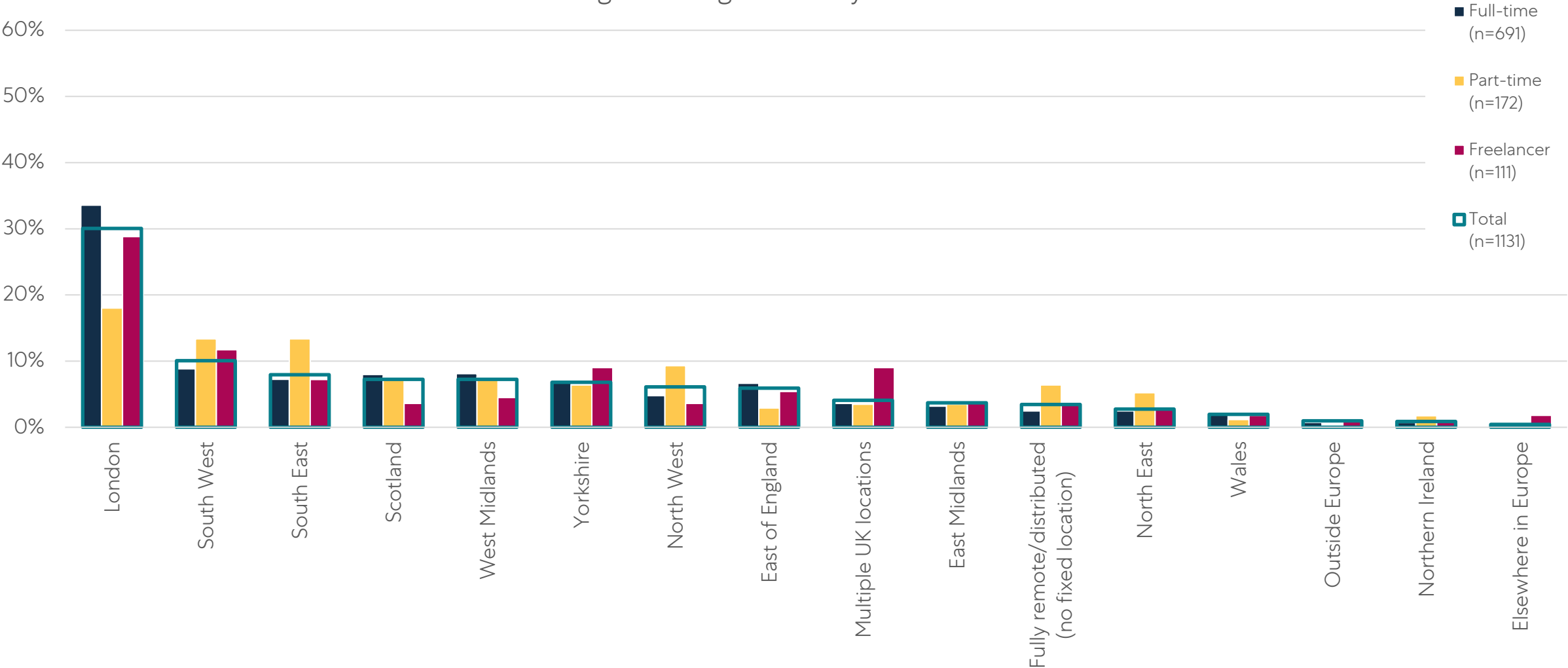


- Respondents are evenly distributed by organisational turnover with a third working for those under £1m, a third for those between £1m and £5m and a third over £5m
- Part-time workers and freelancers are more likely to work for smaller organisations

Location of Primary Organisation

(By employment status)

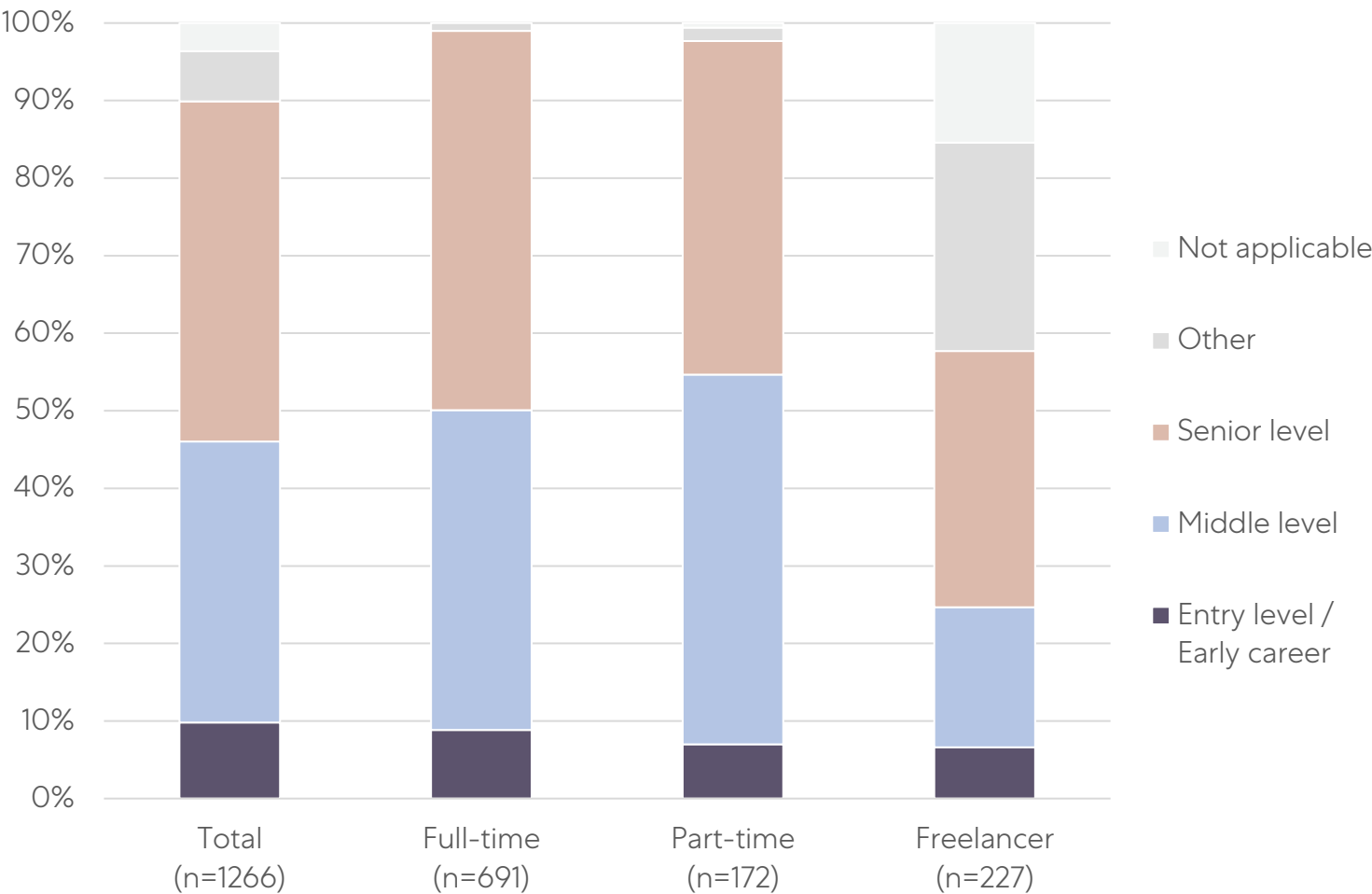
In which of the following is the organisation you worked for in 2024-25 based?



Level of Role

(By employment status)

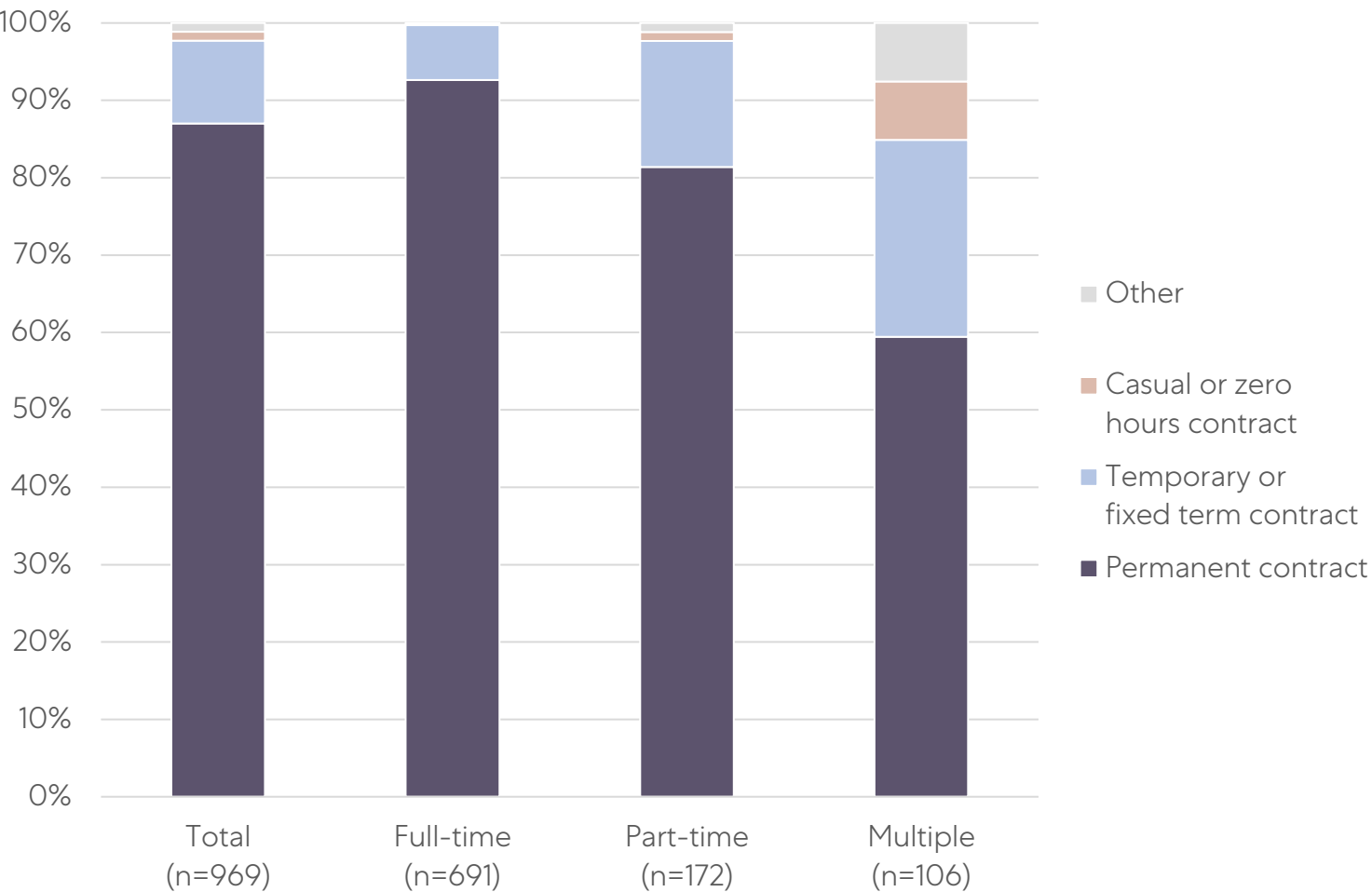
Which of the following best describes the level of your role in 2024-25? (tick one only)



Employment Contract

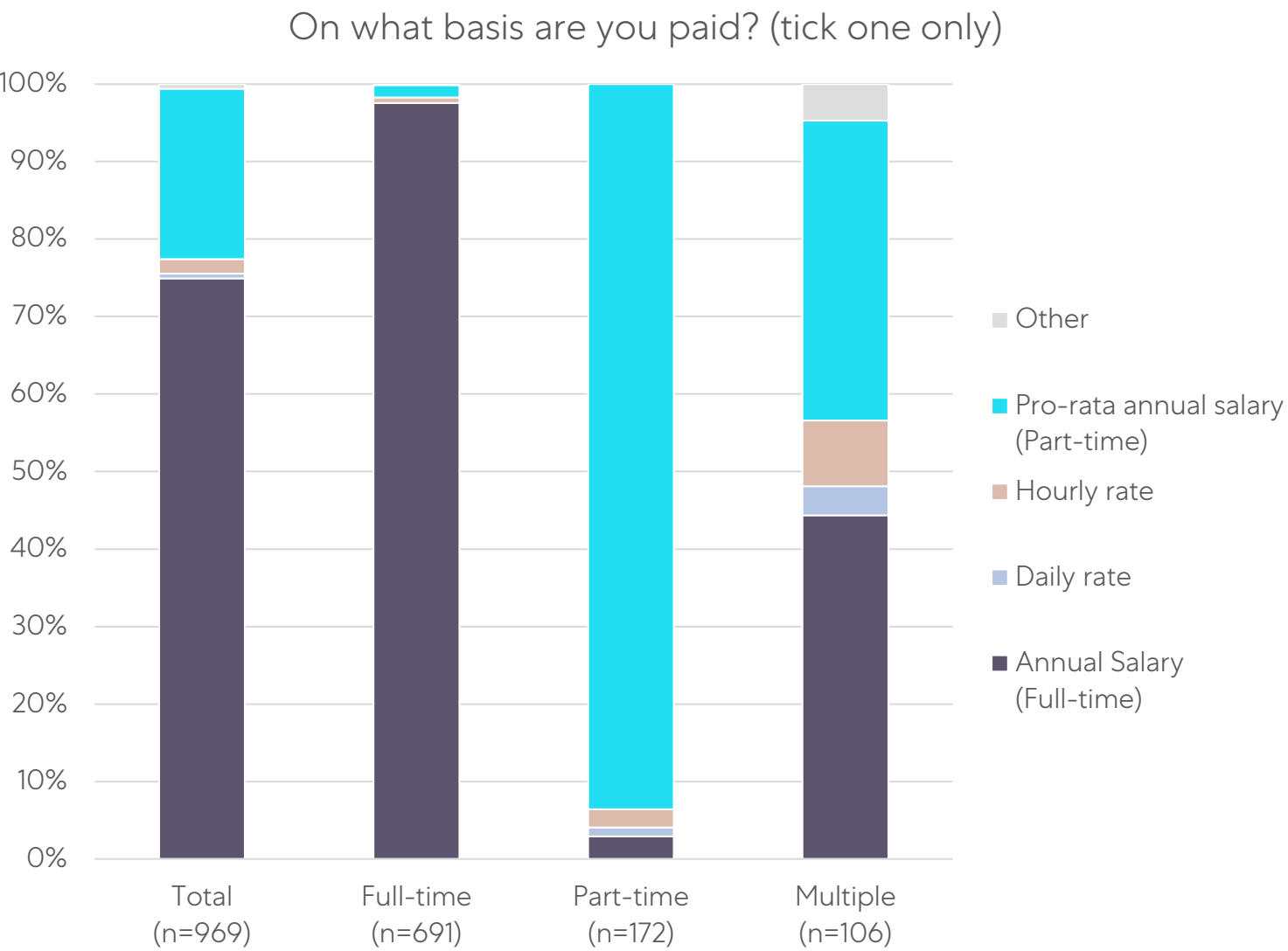
(By employment status)

Which of the following best describes your employment contract in 2024-25? (tick one only)

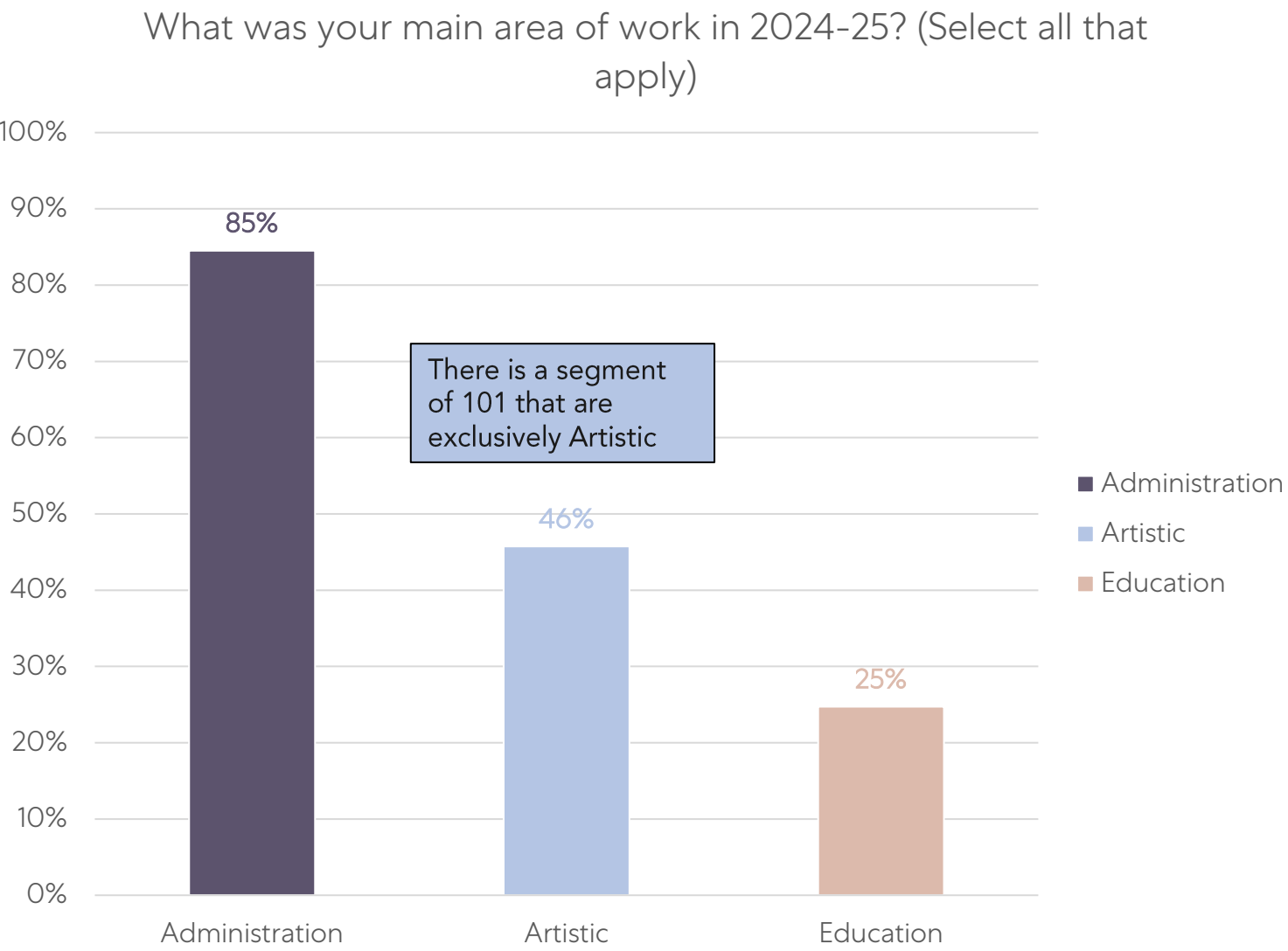


Payment Basis

(By employment status)

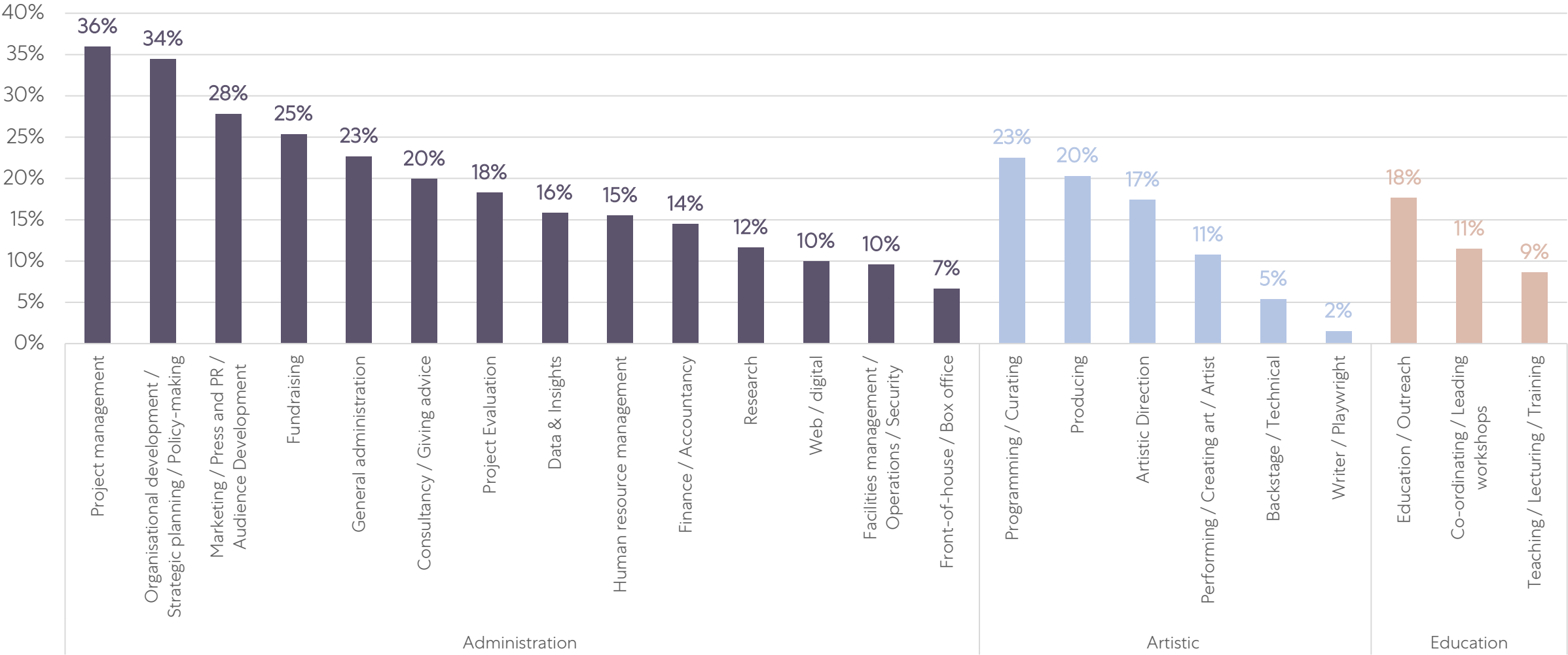


Main Area of Work



Main Area of Work (detailed)

What was your main area of work in 2024-25? (Select all that apply)



Main Area of Work

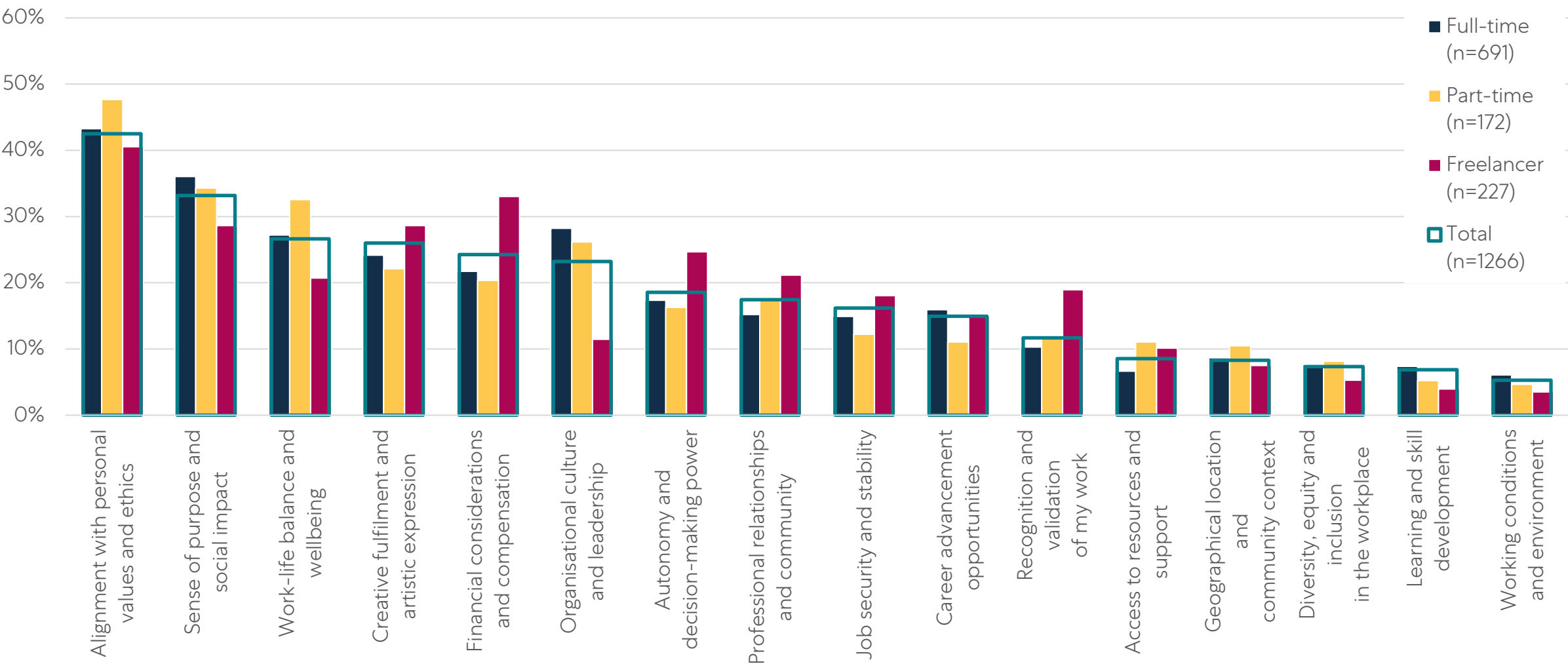
(By employment status)

| | | Total (n=1266) | Full-time (n=691) | Part-time (n=172) | Freelancer (n=227) | Owner-manager (n=22) |
|----------------|---|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Administration | Project management | 36% | 35% | 40% | 33% | 59% |
| | Organisational development / Strategic planning / Policy-making | 34% | 36% | 40% | 28% | 36% |
| | Marketing / Press and PR / Audience Development | 28% | 30% | 28% | 19% | 32% |
| | Fundraising | 25% | 26% | 33% | 17% | 23% |
| | General administration | 23% | 23% | 28% | 14% | 32% |
| | Consultancy / Giving advice | 20% | 10% | 16% | 45% | 45% |
| | Project Evaluation | 18% | 15% | 22% | 20% | 18% |
| | Data & Insights | 16% | 18% | 16% | 9% | 14% |
| | Human resource management | 15% | 18% | 24% | 4% | 18% |
| | Finance / Accountancy | 14% | 15% | 23% | 5% | 23% |
| | Research | 12% | 9% | 11% | 18% | 23% |
| | Web / digital | 10% | 11% | 10% | 6% | 9% |
| | Facilities management / Operations / Security | 10% | 13% | 10% | 1% | 9% |
| | Front-of-house / Box office | 7% | 8% | 8% | 2% | 0% |
| Artistic | Programming / Curating | 23% | 24% | 18% | 19% | 0% |
| | Producing | 20% | 18% | 19% | 23% | 23% |
| | Artistic Direction | 17% | 17% | 12% | 21% | 36% |
| | Performing / Creating art / Artist | 11% | 2% | 3% | 33% | 27% |
| | Backstage / Technical | 5% | 5% | 4% | 6% | 14% |
| | Writer / Playwright | 2% | 1% | 0% | 4% | 0% |
| Education | Education / Outreach | 18% | 12% | 23% | 21% | 36% |
| | Co-ordinating / Leading workshops | 11% | 7% | 10% | 21% | 14% |
| | Teaching / Lecturing / Training | 9% | 3% | 6% | 20% | 23% |

Reasons for Working in the Sector

(By employment status)

What factors most influence(d) your experience in the sector? (Select up to 3)



Reasons for Working in the Sector

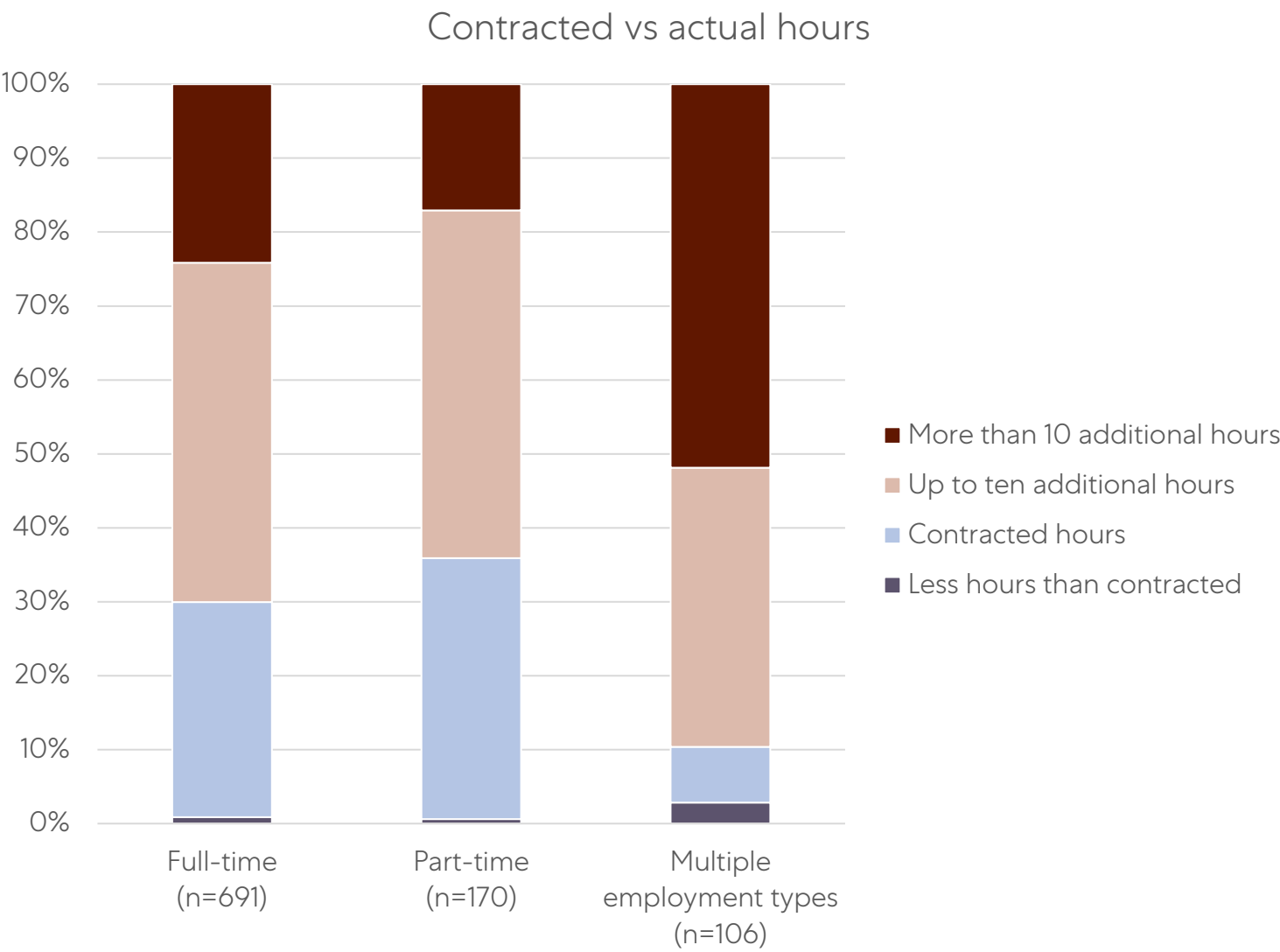
(By employment status)

| | Total (n=1266) | Full-time (n=691) | Part-time (n=172) | Freelancer (n=227) | Owner-manager (n=22) |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Alignment with personal values and ethics | 42% | 43% | 48% | 41% | 45% |
| Sense of purpose and social impact | 33% | 36% | 34% | 29% | 9% |
| Work-life balance and wellbeing | 27% | 27% | 33% | 21% | 27% |
| Creative fulfilment and artistic expression | 26% | 24% | 22% | 29% | 27% |
| Financial considerations and compensation | 24% | 22% | 20% | 33% | 27% |
| Organisational culture and leadership | 23% | 28% | 26% | 11% | 14% |
| Autonomy and decision-making power | 19% | 17% | 16% | 25% | 23% |
| Professional relationships and community | 17% | 15% | 17% | 21% | 27% |
| Job security and stability | 16% | 15% | 12% | 18% | 14% |
| Career advancement opportunities | 15% | 16% | 11% | 15% | 9% |
| Recognition and validation of my work | 12% | 10% | 12% | 19% | 18% |
| Access to resources and support | 9% | 7% | 11% | 10% | 23% |
| Geographical location and community context | 8% | 9% | 10% | 7% | 5% |
| Diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace | 7% | 8% | 8% | 5% | 5% |
| Learning and skill development | 7% | 7% | 5% | 4% | 9% |
| Working conditions and environment | 5% | 6% | 5% | 4% | 9% |

- The top reason for working in the sector is alignment with personal values and ethics (42%)
- Followed by sense of purpose and social impact (33%)
- At the other end, working conditions and environment is the lowest scoring reason (5%)

Actual Hours vs Contracted Hours

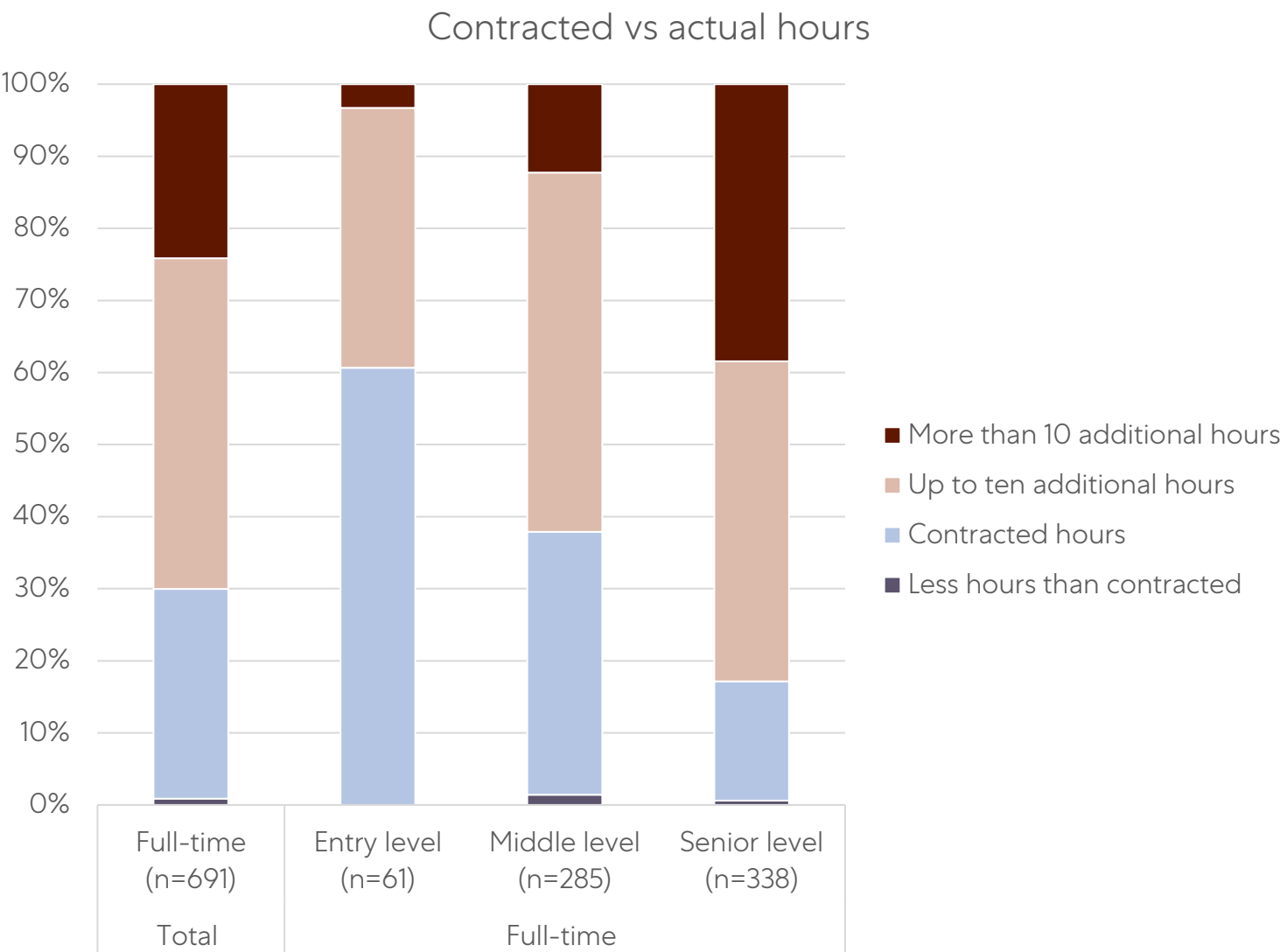
(By employment status)



- 70% of full-time workers work additional hours, increasing to 90% for those who have multiple employment types

Actual Hours vs Contracted Hours

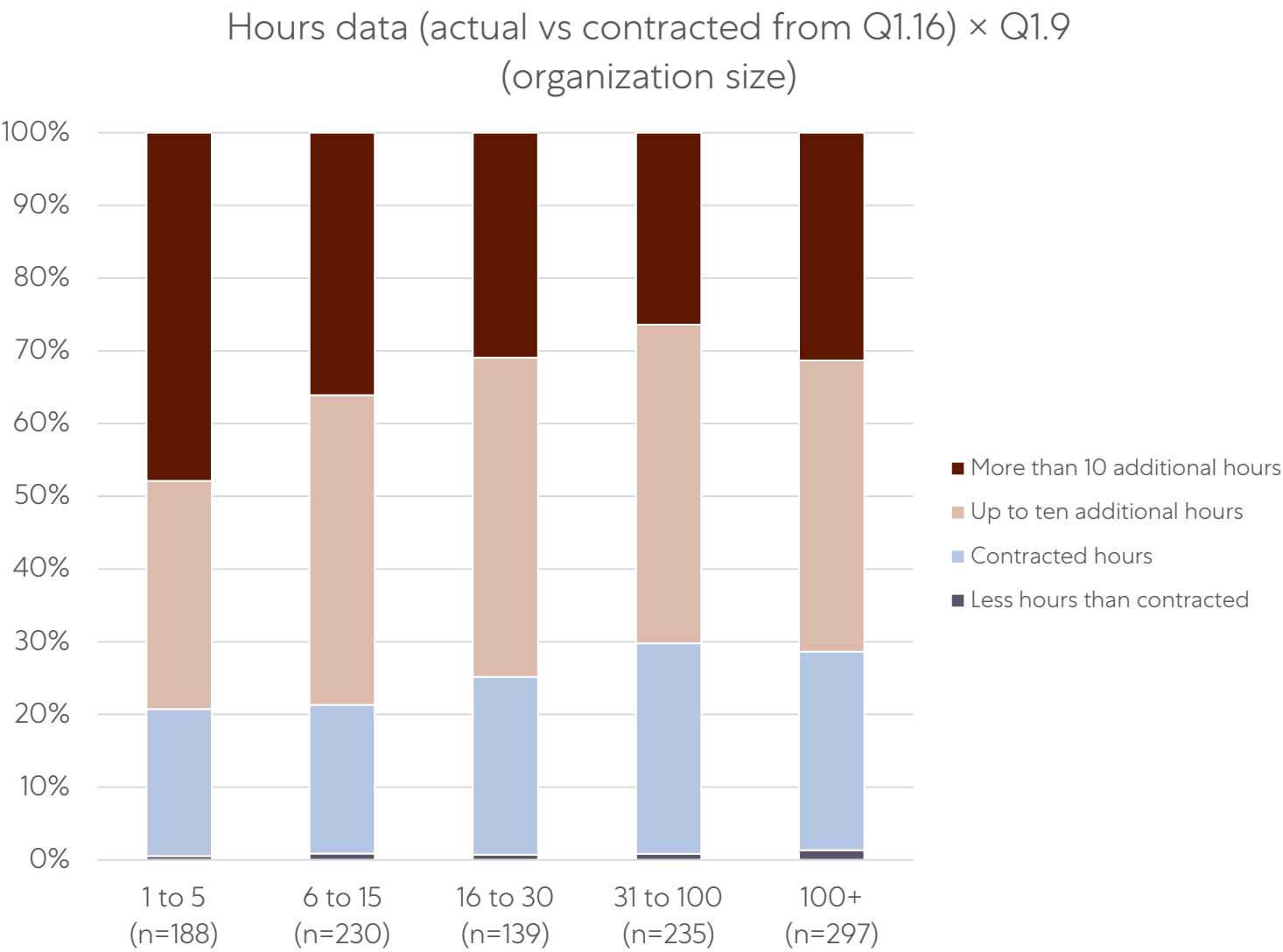
(By role level)



- Those who work additional hours are more likely to be in senior roles (82%)
- 38% of respondents in senior roles work more than 10 additional hours compared to their contracted hours
- Most entry level employees work their contacted hours (61%)

Actual Hours vs Contracted Hours

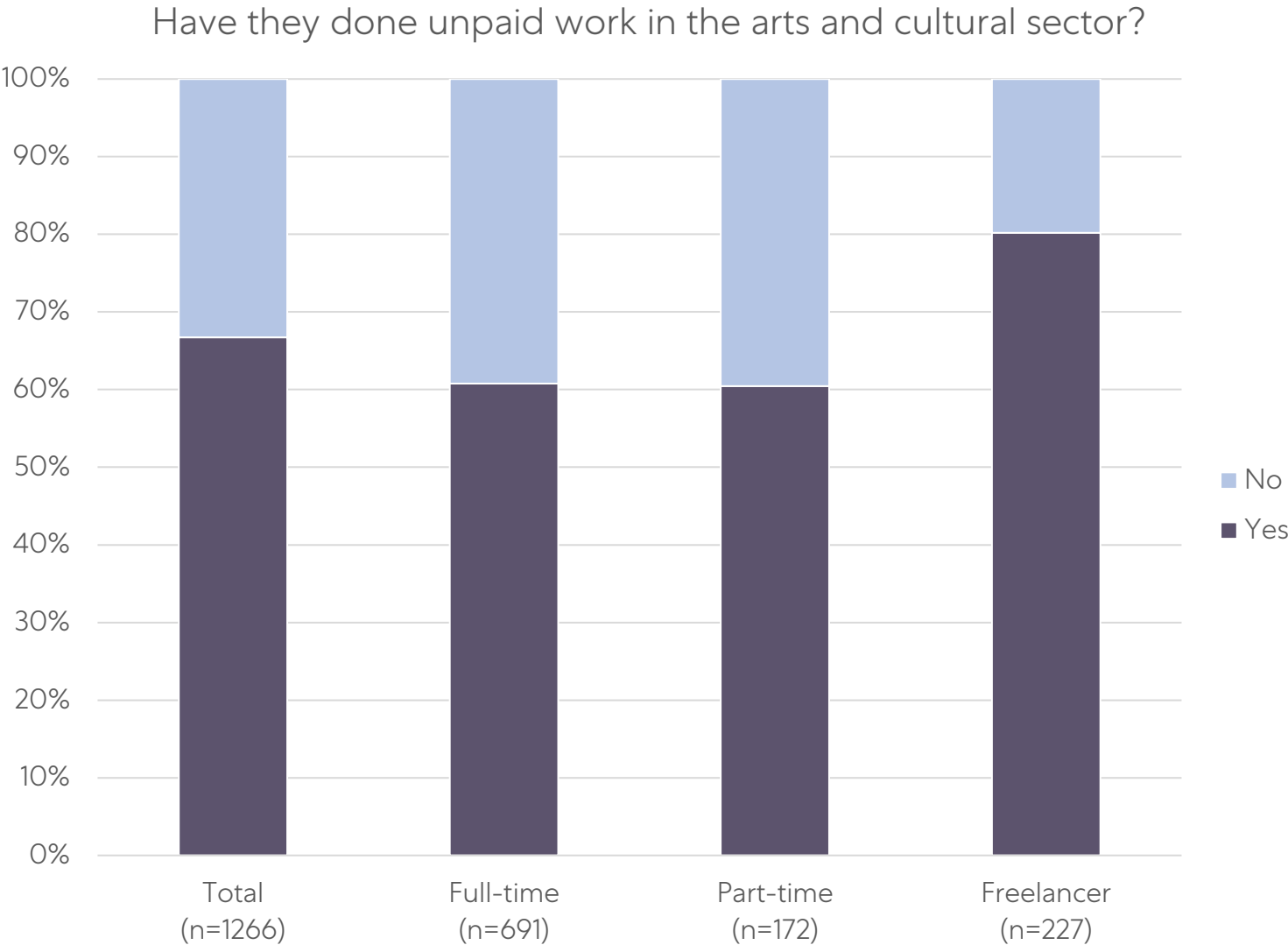
(By organisation size)



- Those who work in organisations with 1 to 5 employees are more likely to work more than 10 additional hours (48%)
- Respondents at organisations with 31 to 100 employees are most likely to work their contracted hours (29%)

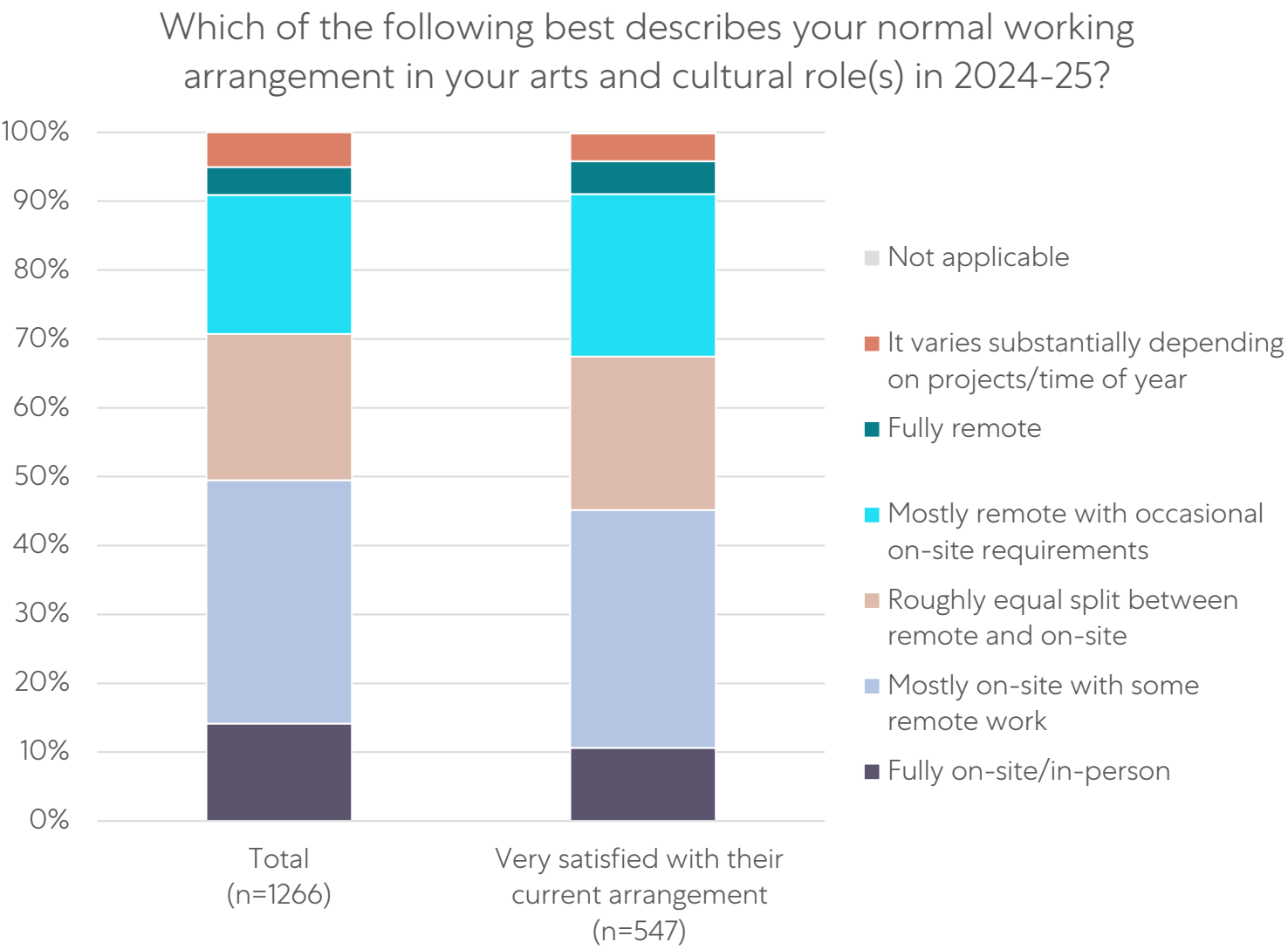
Unpaid Work in the Arts & Cultural Sector

(By employment status)



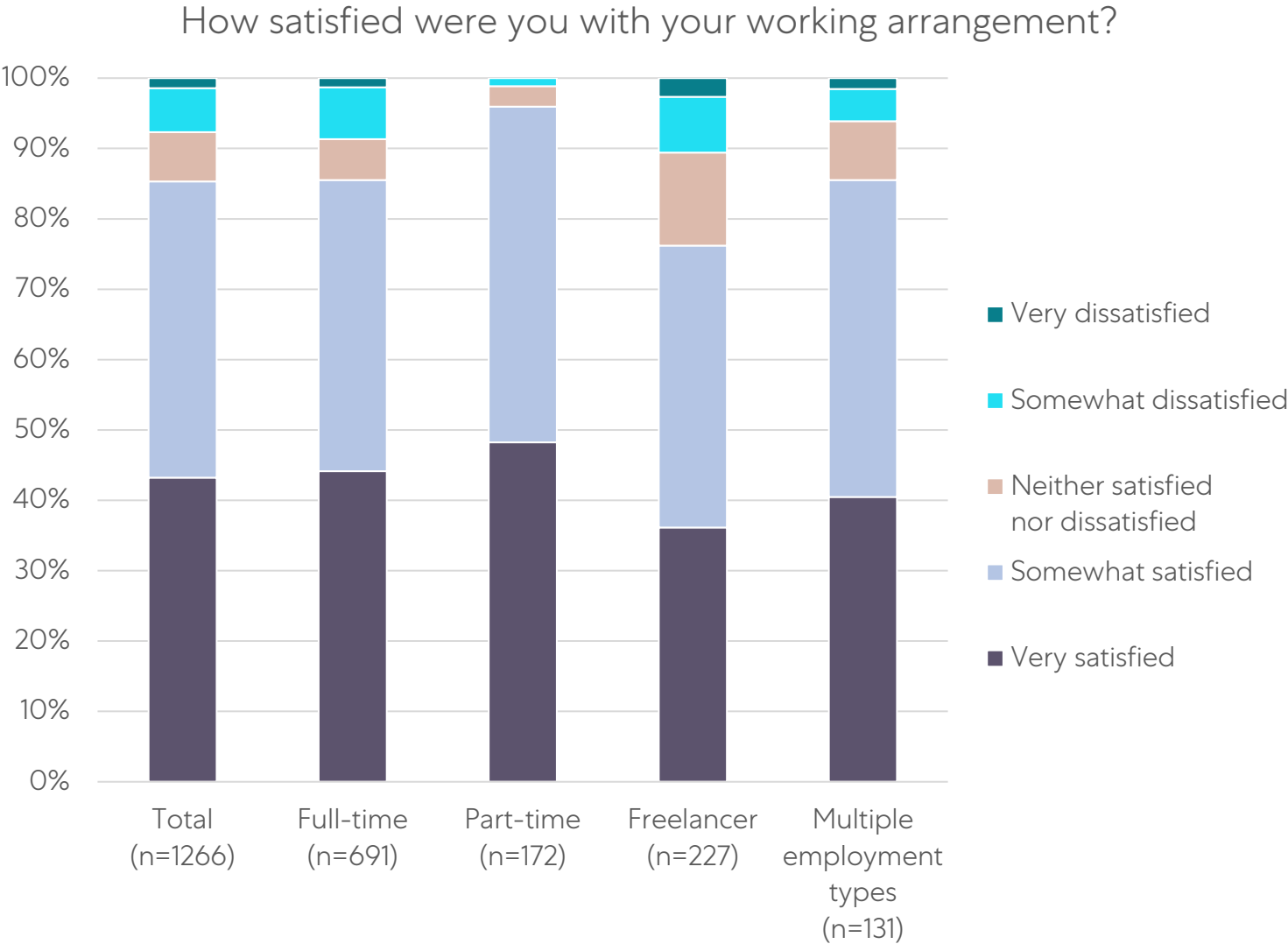
- 80% of freelancers have done unpaid work in the sector
- Respondents were less likely to have completed unpaid work as a full-time or part-time employee. However, 61% and 60% still answered “Yes”, respectively.

Working Arrangement in 2024-25



- 80% have some element of remote work in their working arrangement, increasing to 85% when looking at those who are very satisfied with their current arrangement
- 90% are required to be on-site in their working arrangement, increasing to 91% for those who are very satisfied with their current arrangement

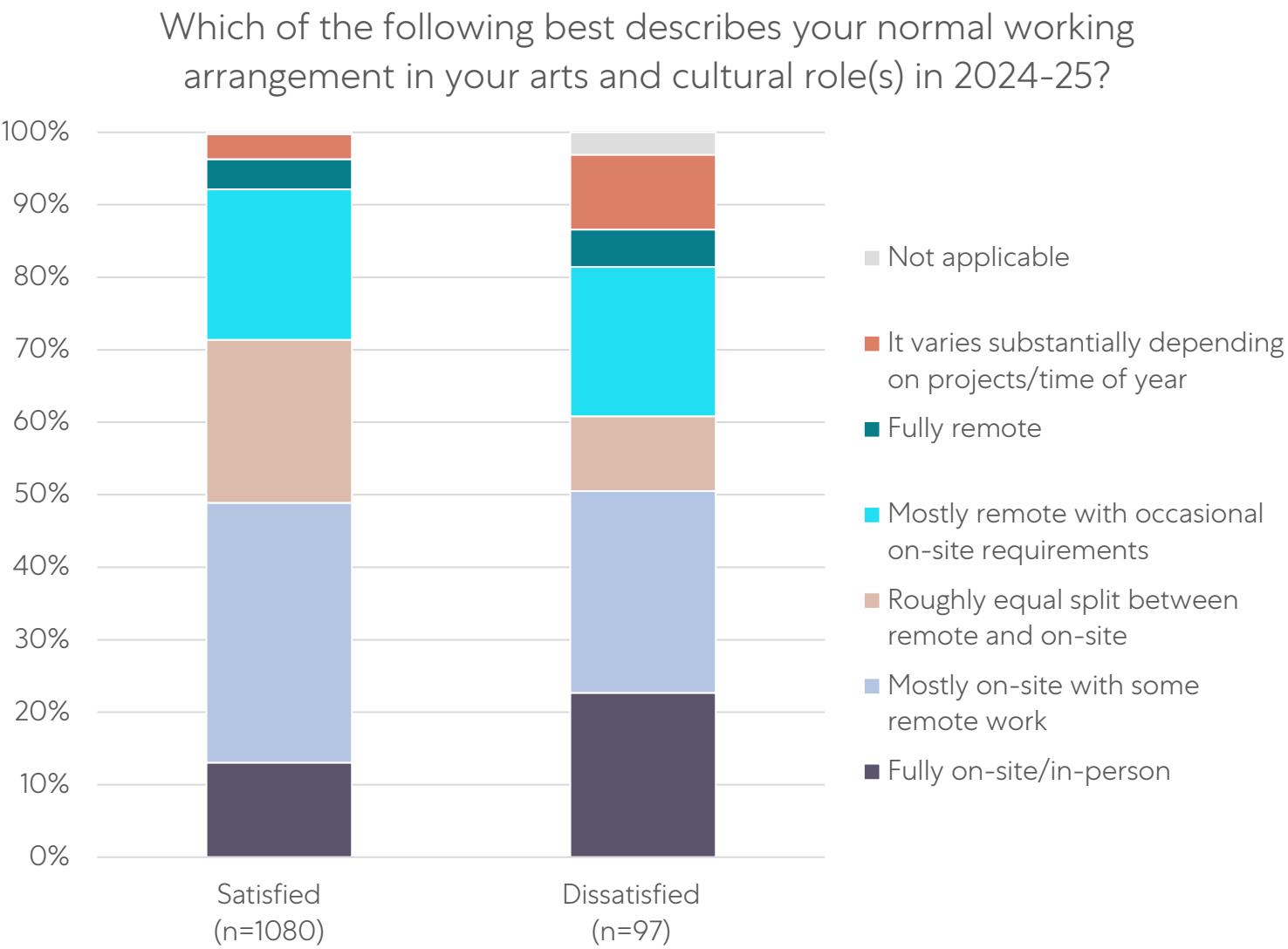
Satisfaction with Working Arrangement



- Part-time employees are the most satisfied with their working arrangement with 48% very satisfied
- Freelancers are the least satisfied with 11% displaying some level of dissatisfaction

Working Arrangement in 2024-25

(By satisfaction level)



- Those who work mostly on-site with some remote work divide opinion as it was the most popular with those who are satisfied with their current arrangement (36%) and for those who are dissatisfied (28%)



Chapter 2

Financial Sustainability Across Employment Types

Precarity by Design



"What support? You get on with it! No one gives a monkeys if you are freelance."

Woman, 45-54, Working class, Freelance, Middle level



The structure of arts employment continues to produce instability by default. Freelancers, part-timers, and even many full-time staff operate without the financial buffers, benefits, or predictability available in most sectors. This is not an individual failure but a systemic design, one that externalises organisational risk onto workers themselves

Unequal Stability

Median income differences remain stark. In 2024-25, full-time equivalent (FTE) median pay stood at £41,000, compared with £36,000 for part-time and £28,000 for freelancers. While these figures suggest modest improvement since 2022, income volatility persists: over a third of workers regularly struggle to cover basic expenses. This financial instability compounds across the sector, particularly impacting those without institutional support. Part-timers, often concentrated in education and administrative roles, face the dual challenge of lower pay and limited progression.

Payment Delays and Missing Safety Nets

Freelancers identified delayed or unpredictable payment as one of the most corrosive realities of creative work. Only 30% of freelancers are consistently paid on time.

Access to emergency funds is sharply divided: only 18% could cover an unexpected expense equal to one month's salary without difficulty, while 24% regularly struggle to cover basic costs.

Benefits Gap

Among salaried workers, access to benefits remains uneven. Only 46% reported flexible working arrangements, 29% had enhanced pension contributions, and 22% received paid sick leave beyond the statutory minimum.

These disparities reinforce a two-tier employment structure: those with institutional backing, and those navigating precarity alone.



The structure of arts employment continues to produce instability by default. Freelancers, part-timers, and even many full-time staff operate without the financial buffers, benefits, or predictability available in most sectors. This is not an individual failure but a systemic design, one that externalises organisational risk onto workers themselves

Dependency and Exit Pressure

The survey reveals dependence on partner income and family support, particularly for freelancers and carers.

Financial instability, lack of benefits, and geographic cost pressures combine to create a system that externalises organisational risk onto workers themselves, leaving many unable to build the financial security necessary for sustainable careers in the arts.



“Better pay. I can just about afford to work and live where I do, but if I wanted to change jobs that required a commute, it wouldn’t be worth it.”

Woman, 35-44, Working class, Full-time, Middle level

“Just received a contract after verbally agreeing a day rate — the contract made no mention of days or rate, just a flat project fee. And more tasks than discussed.”

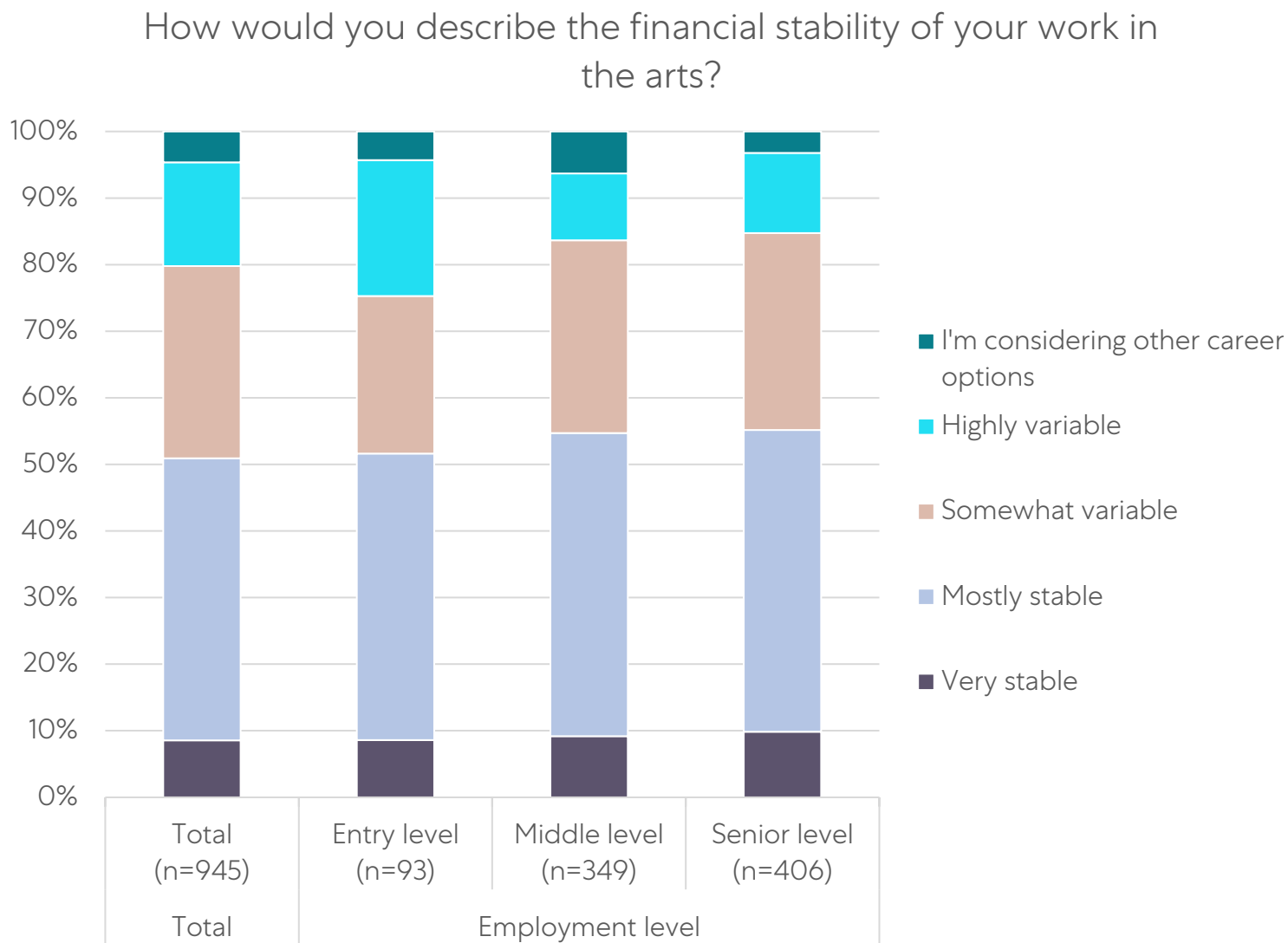
Woman, 45-54, Freelance, Middle level

“Lack of pension, money. Lack of real valued and acted upon engagement with the issues/barriers to accessing the arts.”

Woman, 45-54, Working class, Freelance, Middle level

Financial Stability of Arts Work

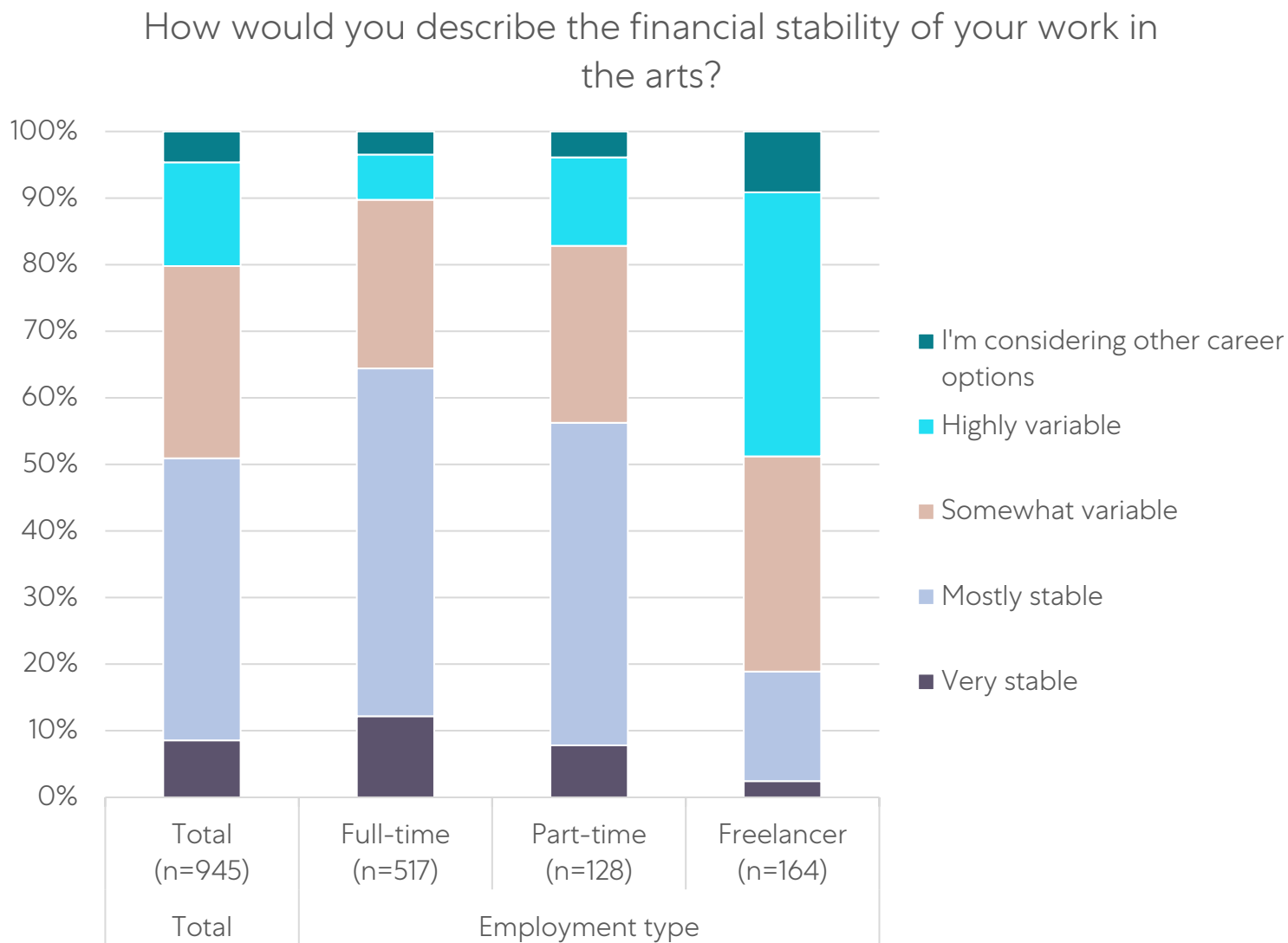
(By role level)



- 51% of workers consider the financial stability of their work to be stable, with those at a senior level experiencing more stability (55%)
- Entry level employees experience the most variability to their financial stability with 20% considering it highly variable
- 6% of middle level employees are considering other career options

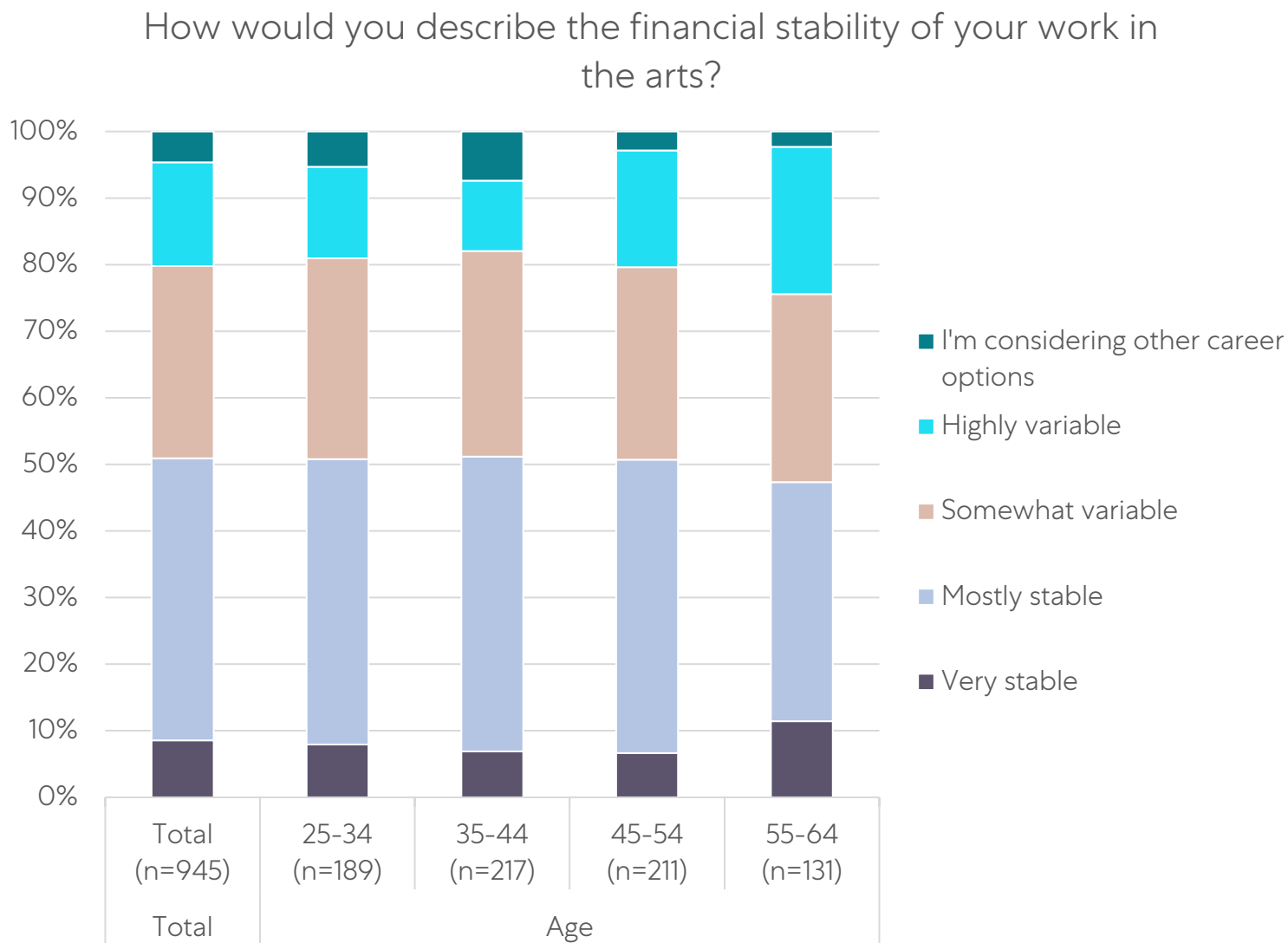
Financial Stability of Arts Work

(By employment status)



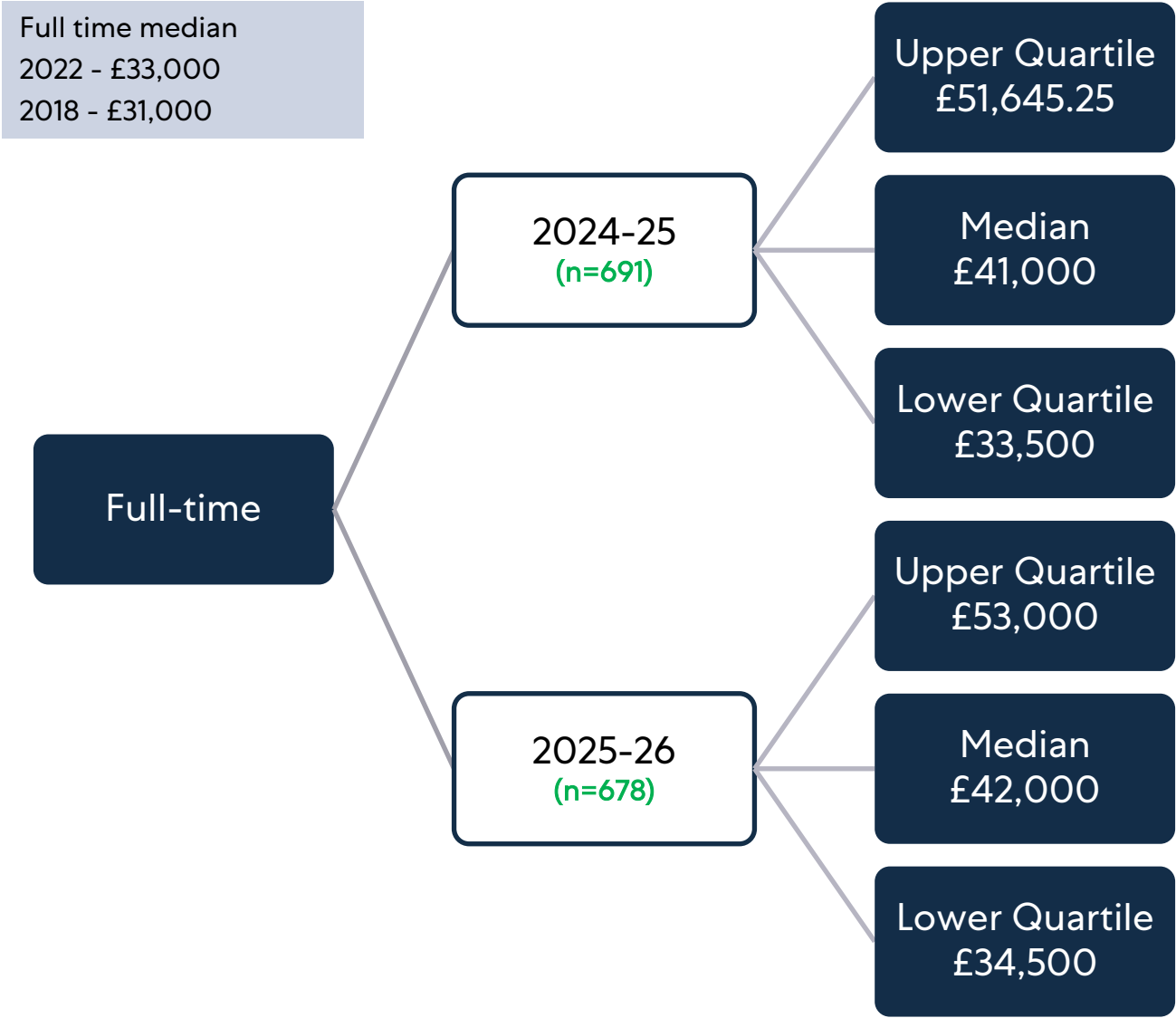
- 72% of freelancers describe the financial stability of their work variable, with 40% describing it as highly variable
- Full-time (64%) and part-time (54%) employees are more likely to describe their work as stable

Financial Stability of Arts Work (By age)



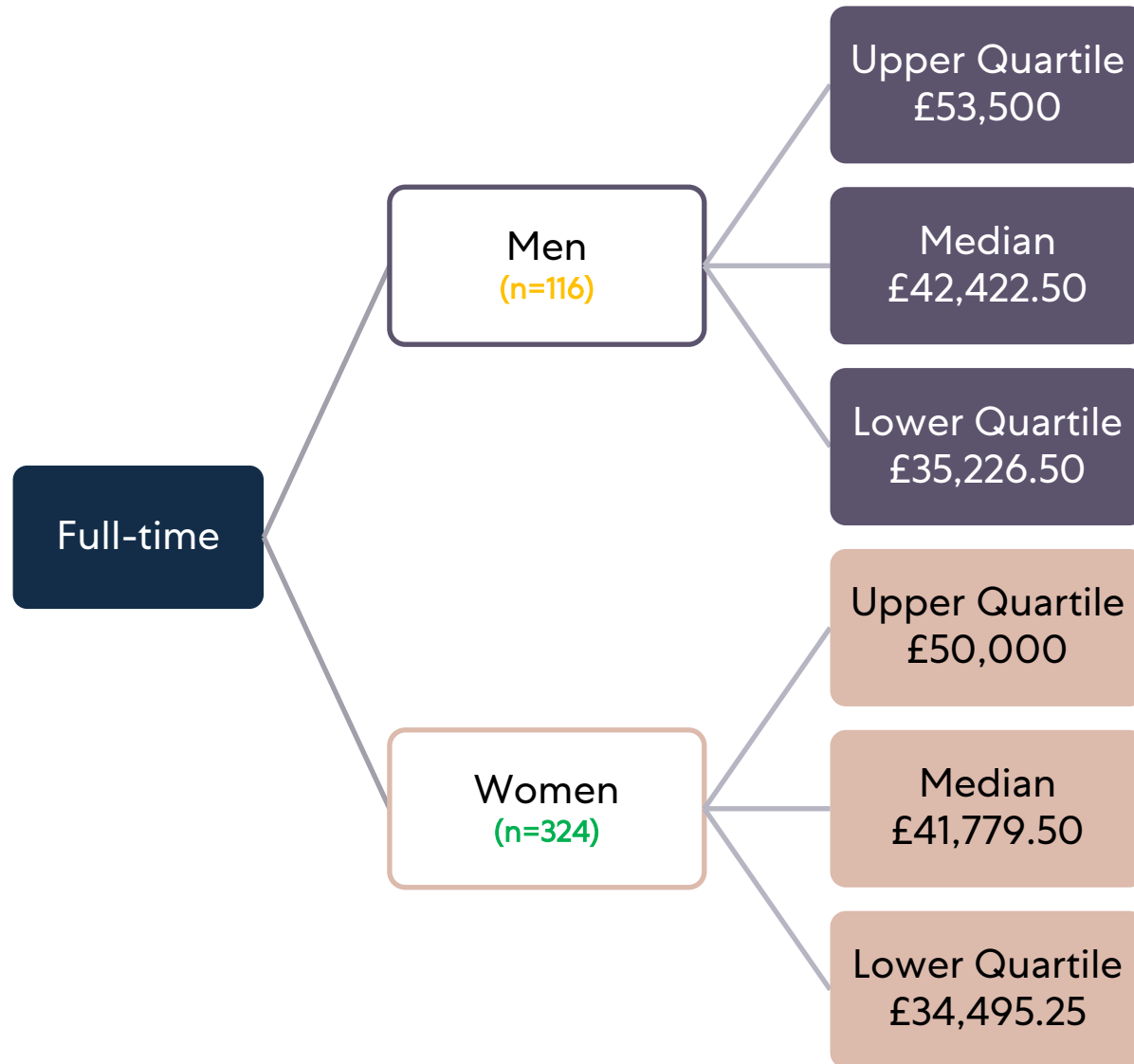
- Those aged 55-64 are most unsure about the financial stability of their work with 22% suggesting it is highly variable and 11% suggesting it is very stable
- 7% of those aged 35-44 are considering other career options

Full-time Median Salary



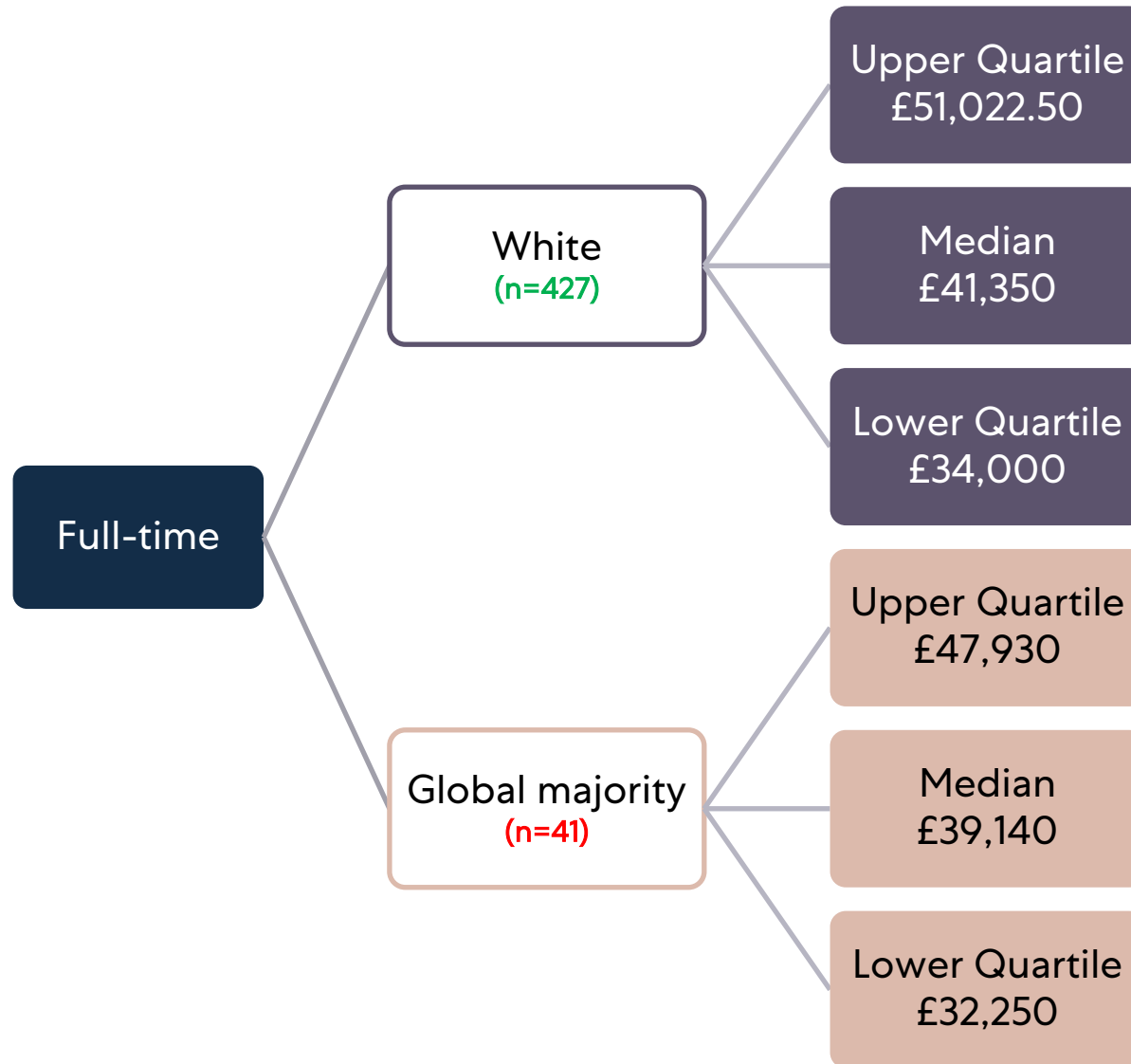
- The £11,000 increase from 2018 to 2025 is marginally ahead of inflation, resulting in a real-terms increase of £1,684
- The £1,000 increase from 2024 to 2025 is 2.4% which is slightly behind inflation at 3.5% in the period

Full-time Median Salary (By gender)



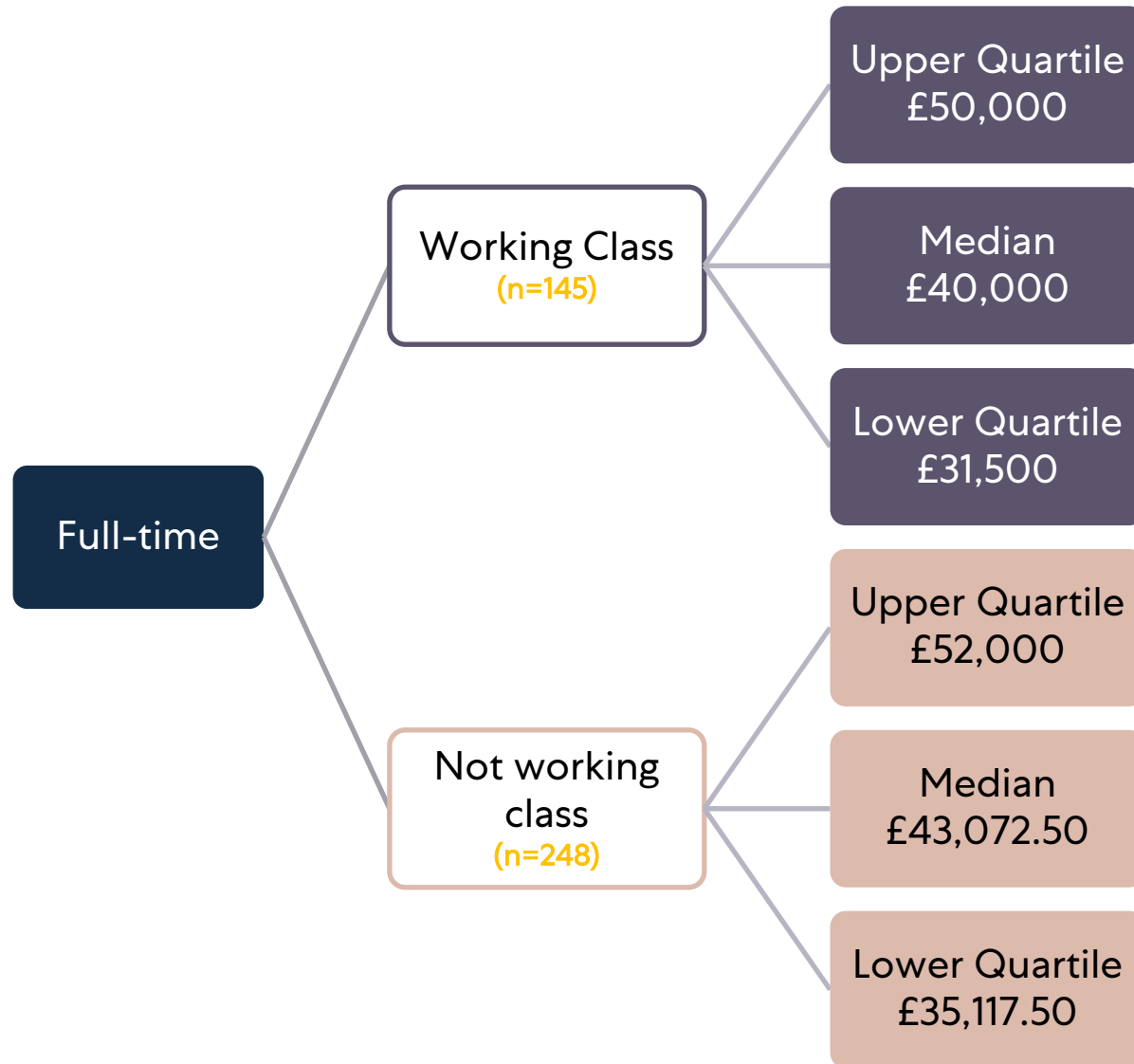
- The median gender pay gap between men and women is £643 higher for men (2%)
- At the upper quartile it increases to £3,500 (7%)

Full-time Median Salary (By ethnicity)



- The median pay gap between white and global majority is £2,120 (5%)

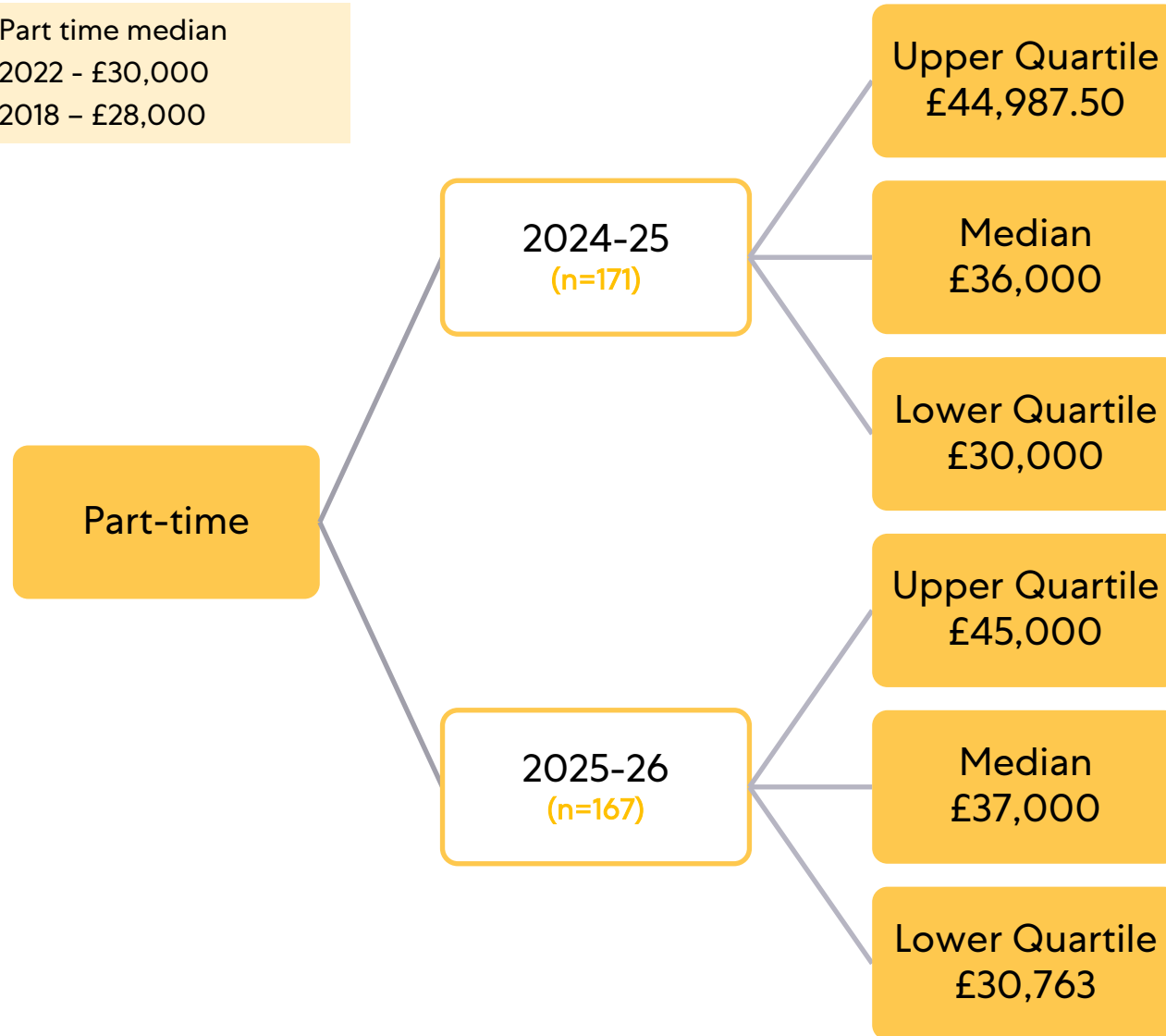
Full-time Median Salary (By class)



- The pay gap between median salaries among working class and not working class is £3,072.50 (7%)

Part-time Median Salary (Full-time equivalent)

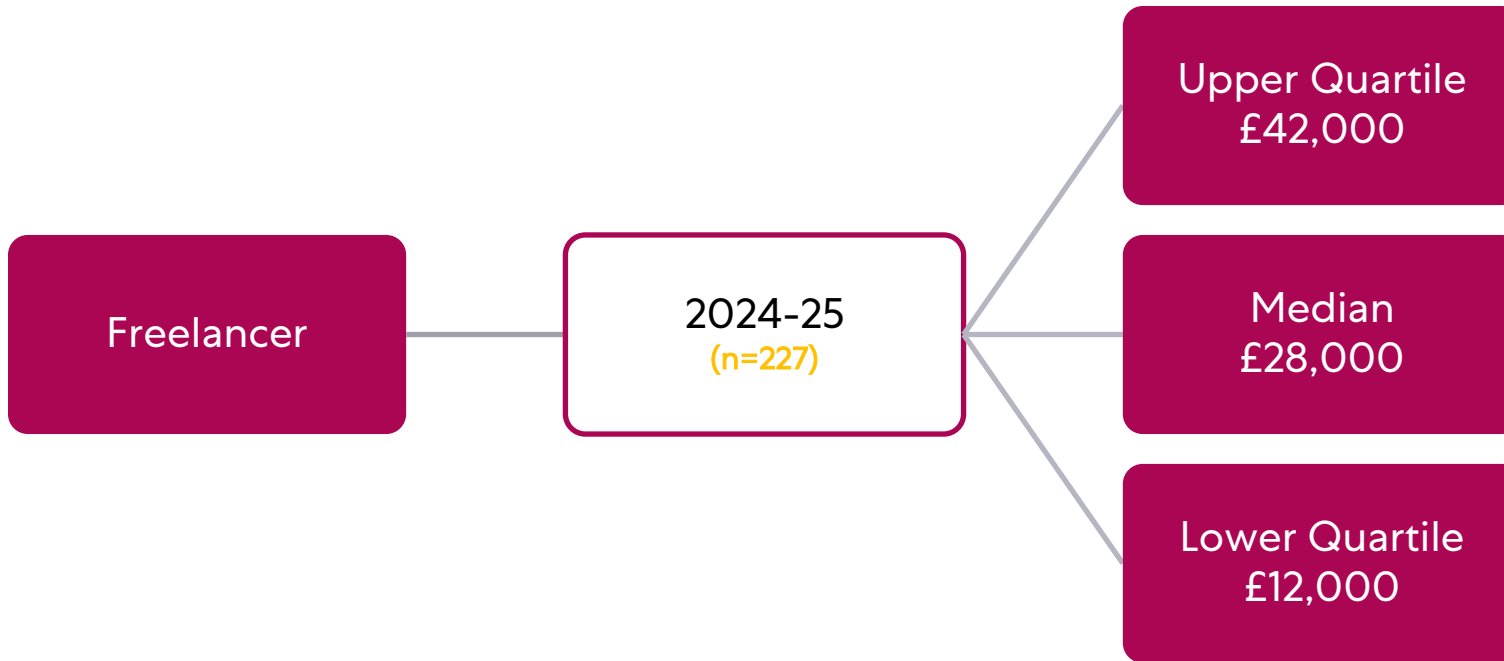
Part time median
2022 - £30,000
2018 – £28,000



- The part-time median pay has increased by a total of £9,000 (from £28,000 to £37,000 over seven years, which is a 32% rise in cash terms – ahead of inflation at 28.5%
- The most recent rise of £1,000 (3%) was slightly behind inflation

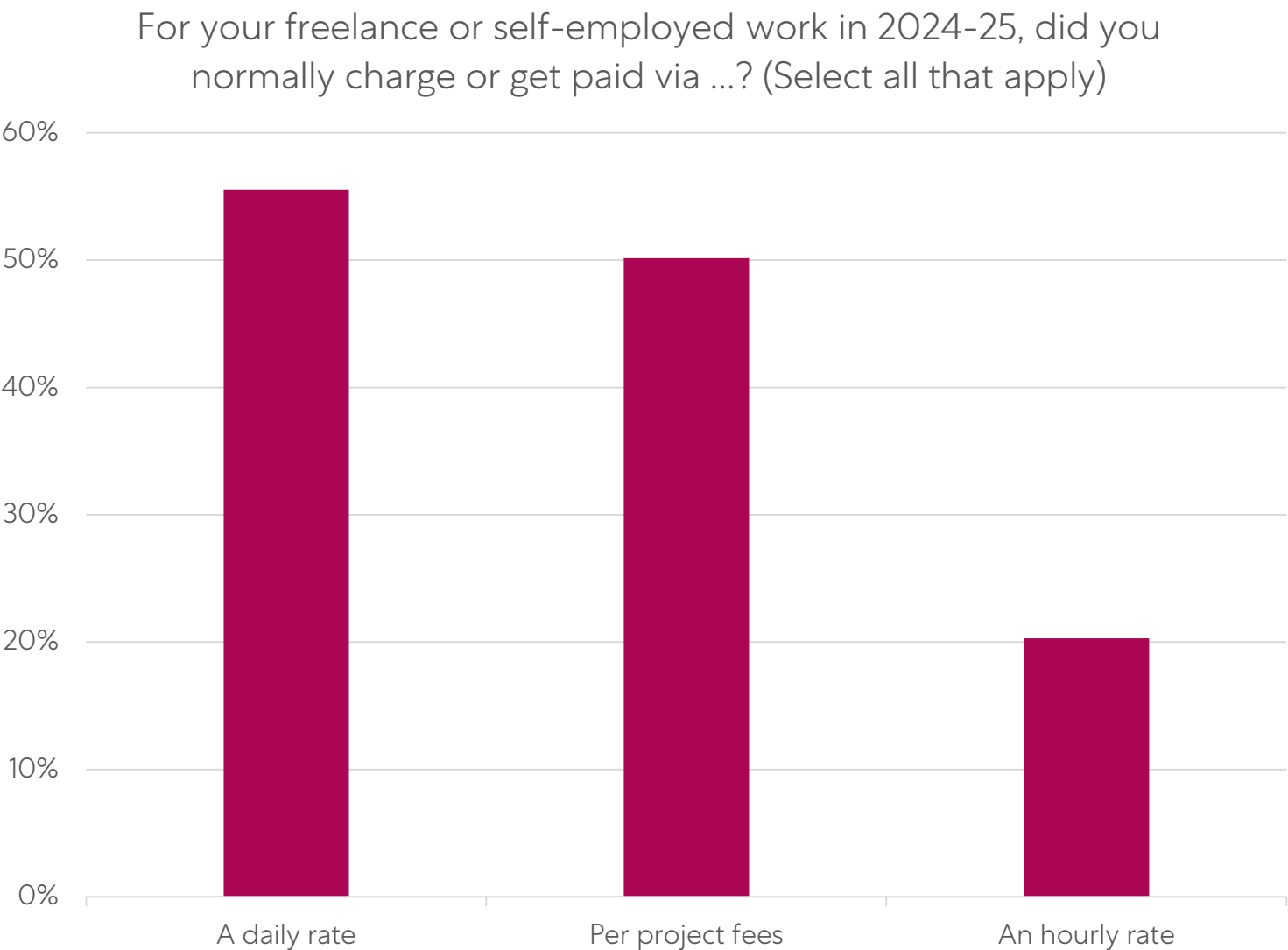
Freelancer Median Income

Freelance median income
2022 – £20,000
2018 – £16,000



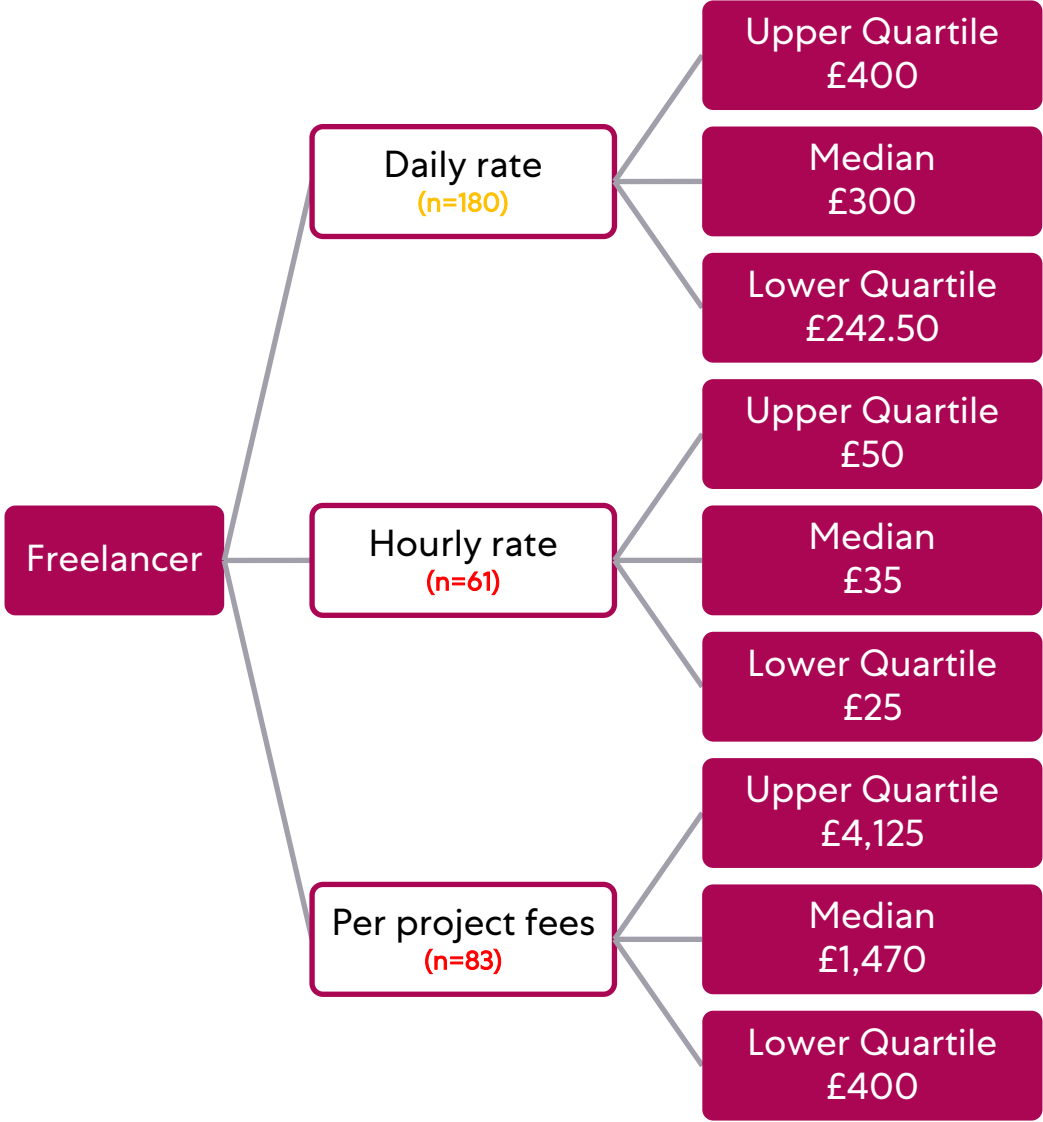
- The median freelance income in 2025 £28,000 is substantially behind both the full-time median £42,422.50 and the part-time median £37,000
- The Lower Quartile of freelancers earns only £12,000, which is less than a third of the lower quartile for full-time employees

Freelancer Payment Method



- A daily rate is the most common method of payment for freelancers with 56% normally getting paid this way
- An hourly rate is more uncommon with 20% of freelancers getting paid this way

Freelancer Median Fee/Rate (By method)



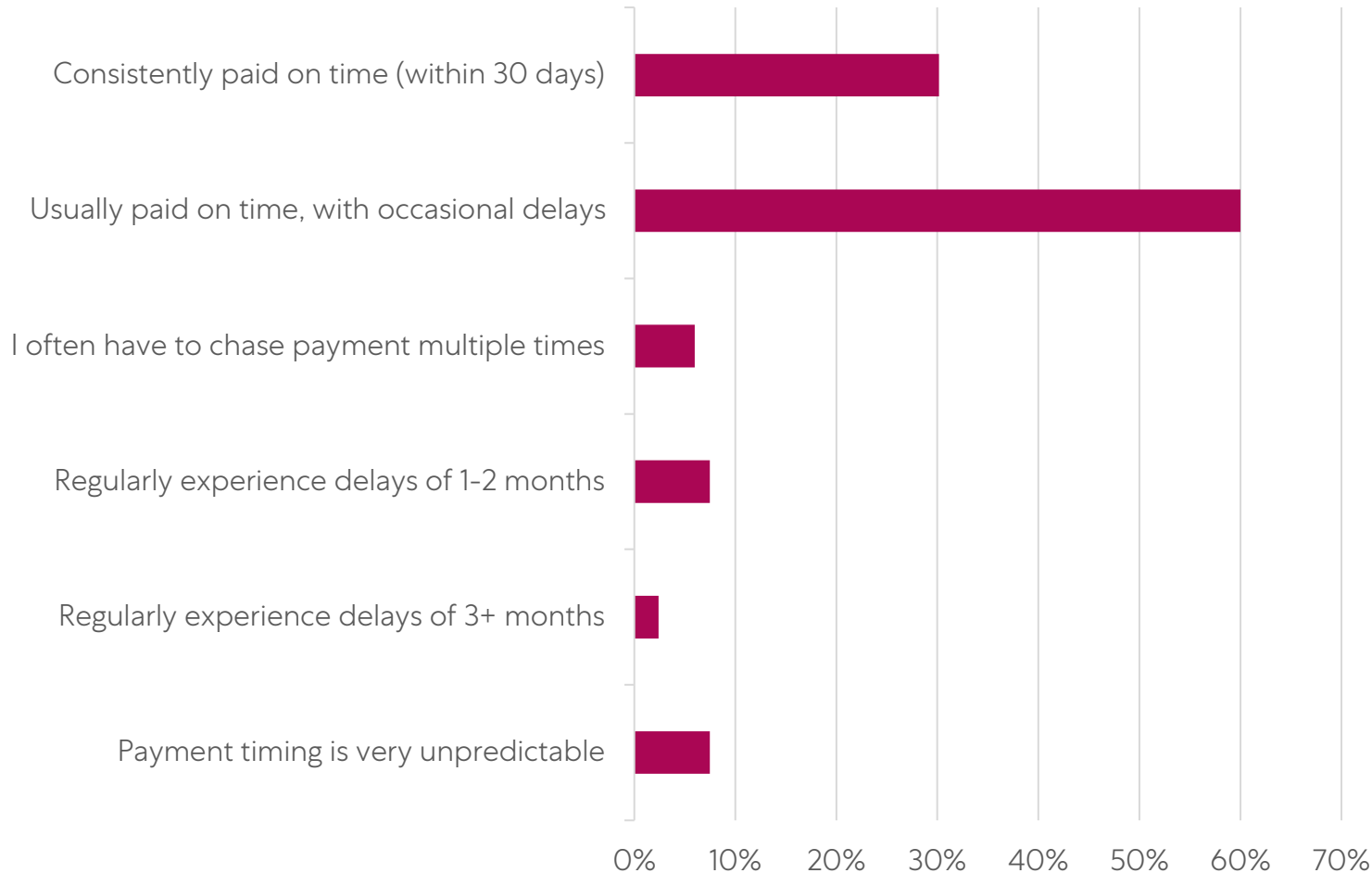
Freelancer Median Fee/Rate vs Payment (By method)

| | | Typical rate | Typically paid | % change |
|------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Freelancer | Daily rate (n=180) | Upper Quartile £400 | Upper Quartile £362.50 | -9% |
| | | Median £300 | Median £250 | -17% |
| | | Lower Quartile £275 | Lower Quartile £200 | -18% |
| | Hourly rate (n=61) | Upper Quartile £50 | Upper Quartile £50 | 0% |
| | | Median £35 | Median £35 | 0% |
| | | Lower Quartile £25 | Lower Quartile £20.63 | -18% |
| | Per project fees (n=83) | Upper Quartile £4,125 | Upper Quartile £3,500 | -15% |
| | | Median £1,470 | Median £1,000 | -32% |
| | | Lower Quartile £400 | Lower Quartile £325 | -19% |

- Freelancers are typically paid 15–30% less than their quoted rate

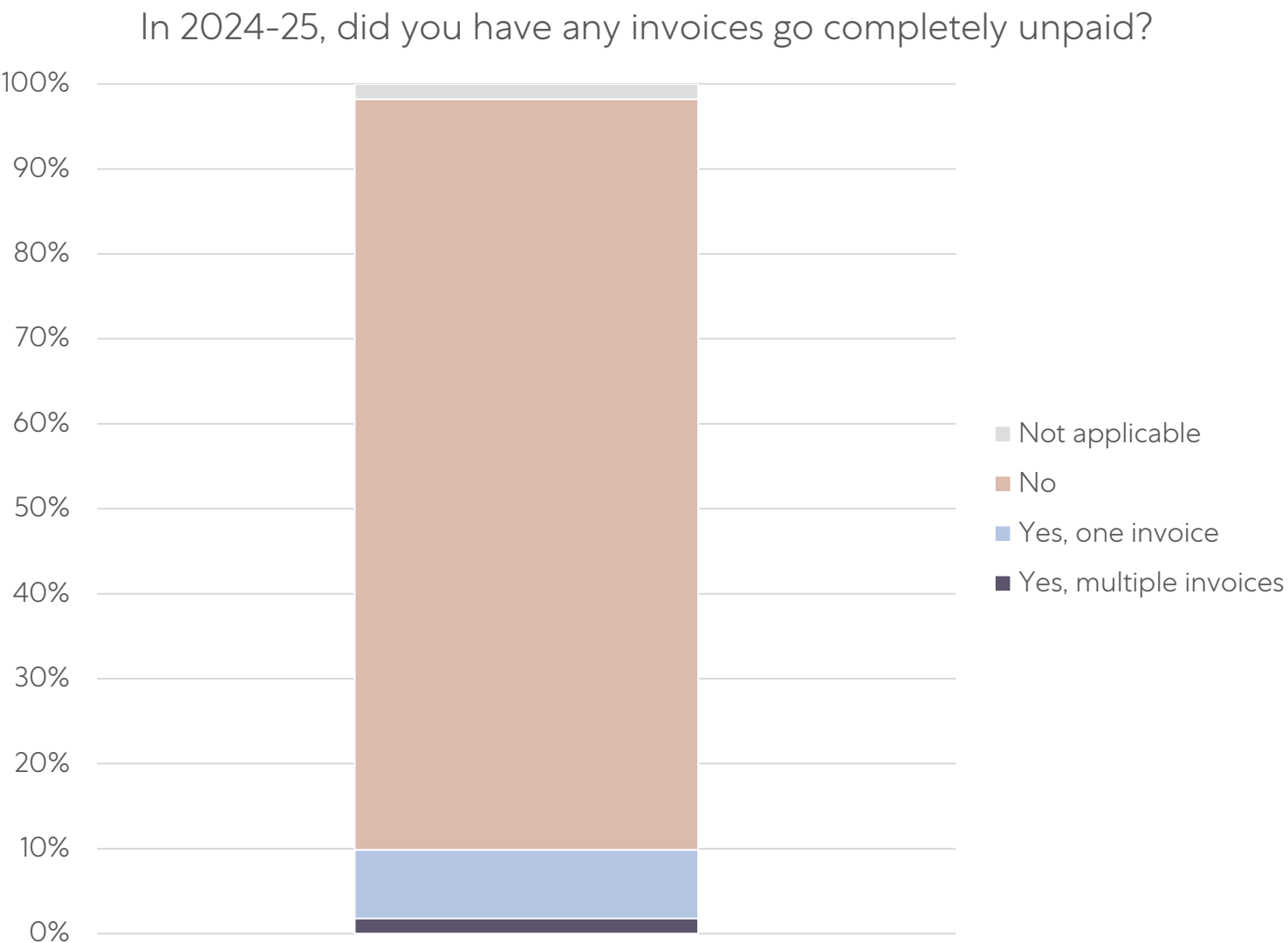
Payment Experience

How would you describe your typical experience with receiving payments? (Select all that apply)



- Just under a third (30%) of freelancers are consistently paid on time
- The majority (60%) are usually paid on time, with occasional delays

Unpaid Invoices

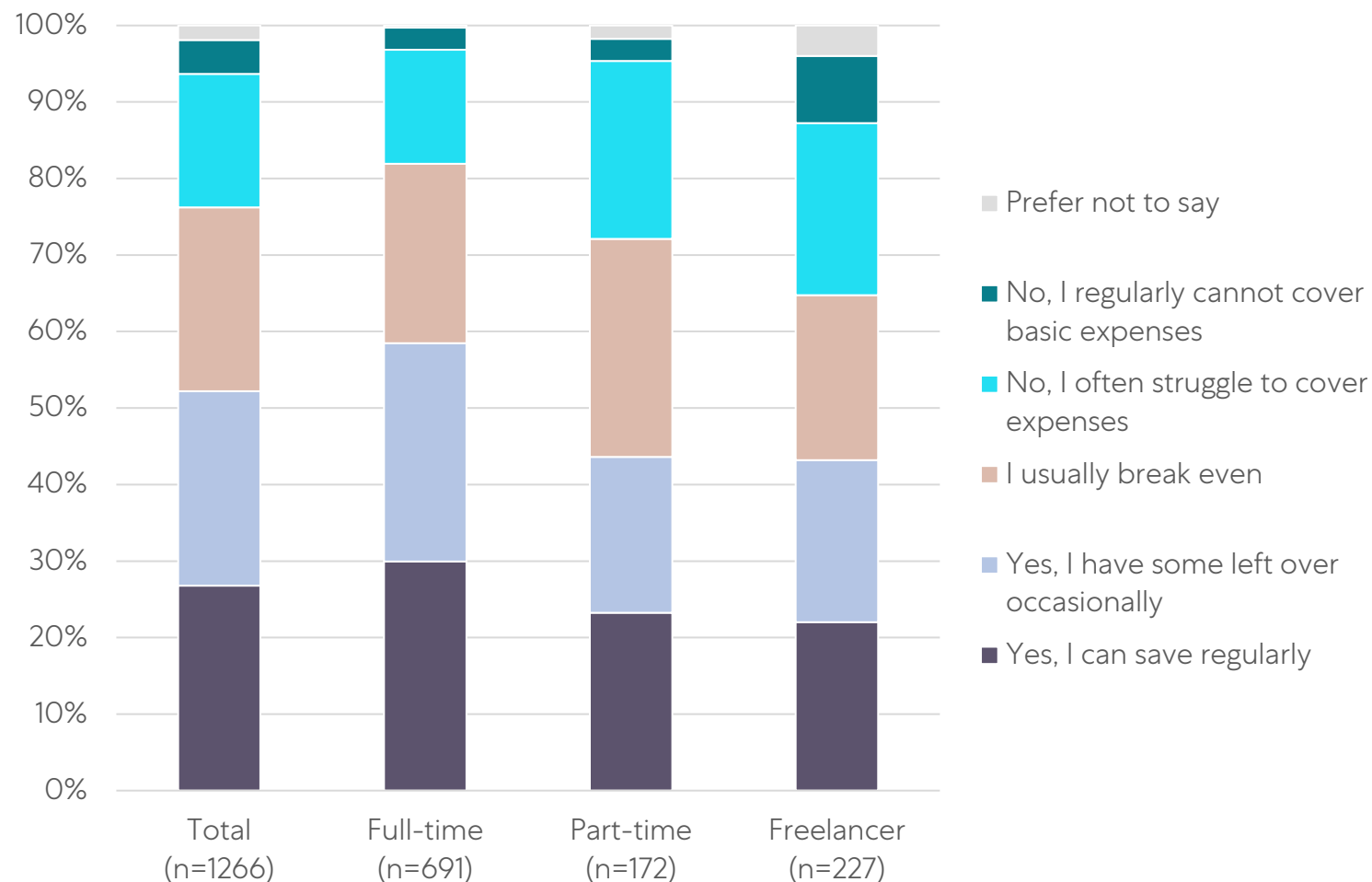


- 10% of freelancers have been left with at least one unpaid invoice

Money Left at End of Month

(By employment status)

Do / did you typically have money left at the end of each month?

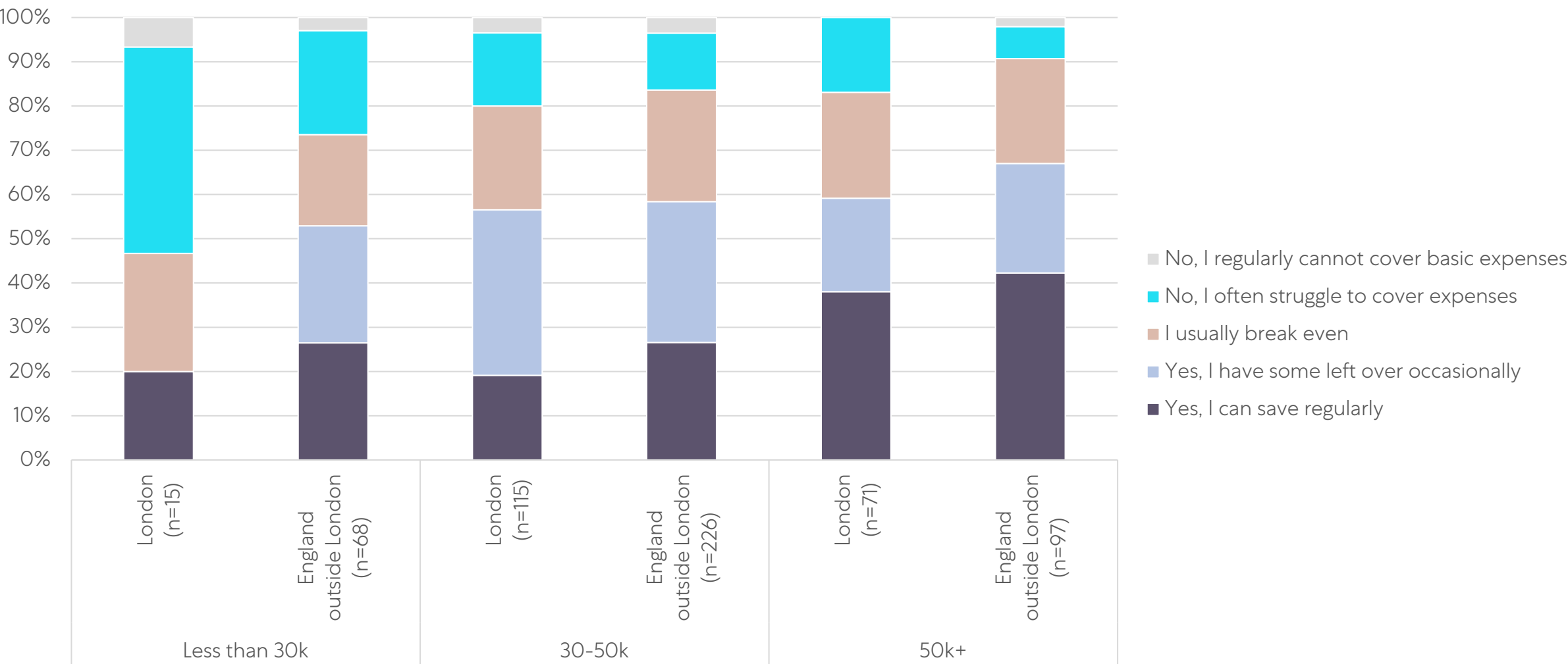


- 17% of workers struggle to cover with expenses with a further 4% regularly unable to cover them
- 31% of freelancers struggle to cover expenses or cannot cover them
- Full-time provides the most stability with 59% left with at least some money at the end of the month

Money Left at End of Month

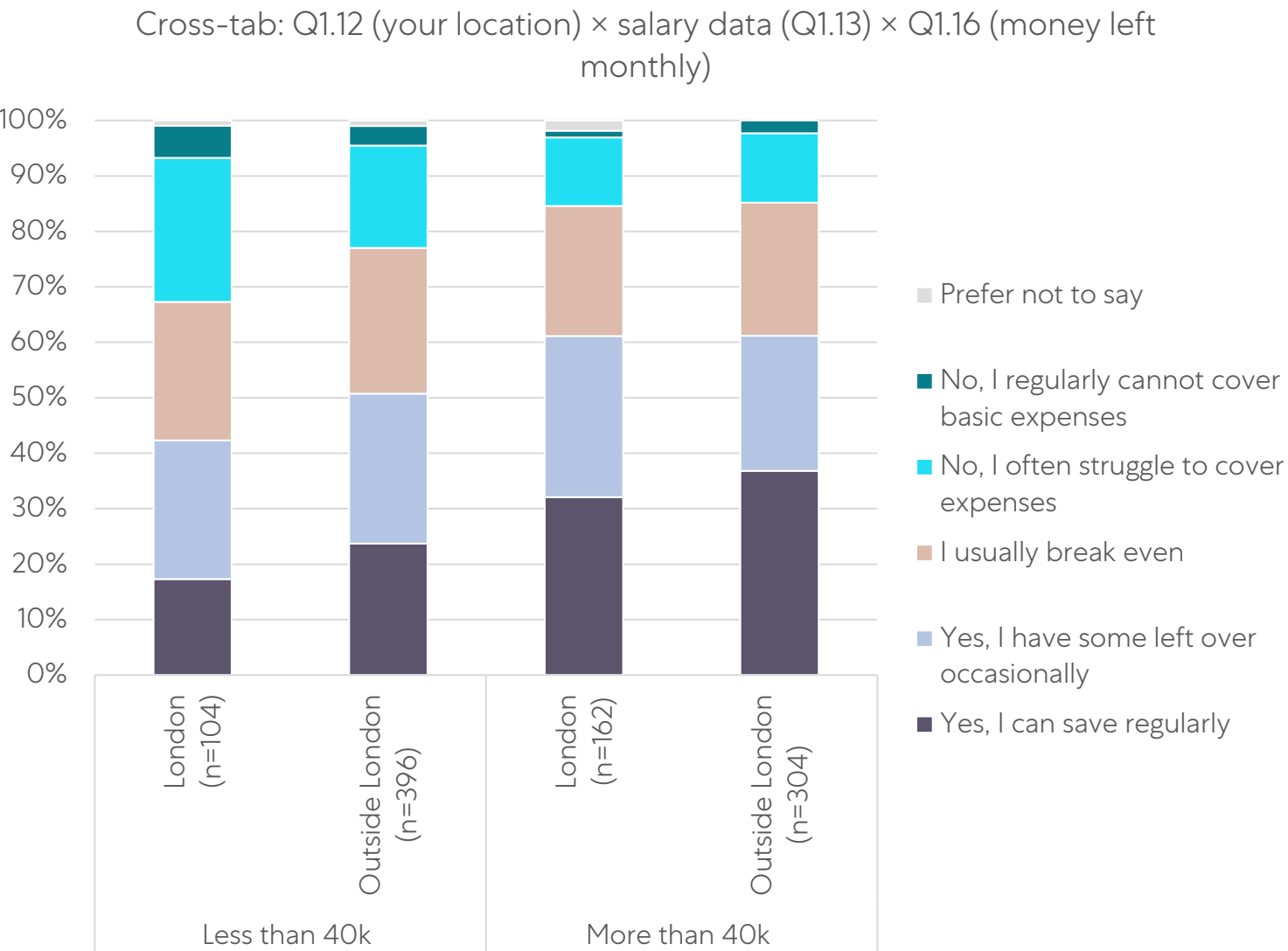
(By salary and location)

Cross-tab: Q1.12 (your location) × salary data (Q1.13) × Q1.16 (money left monthly)



Money Left at End of Month

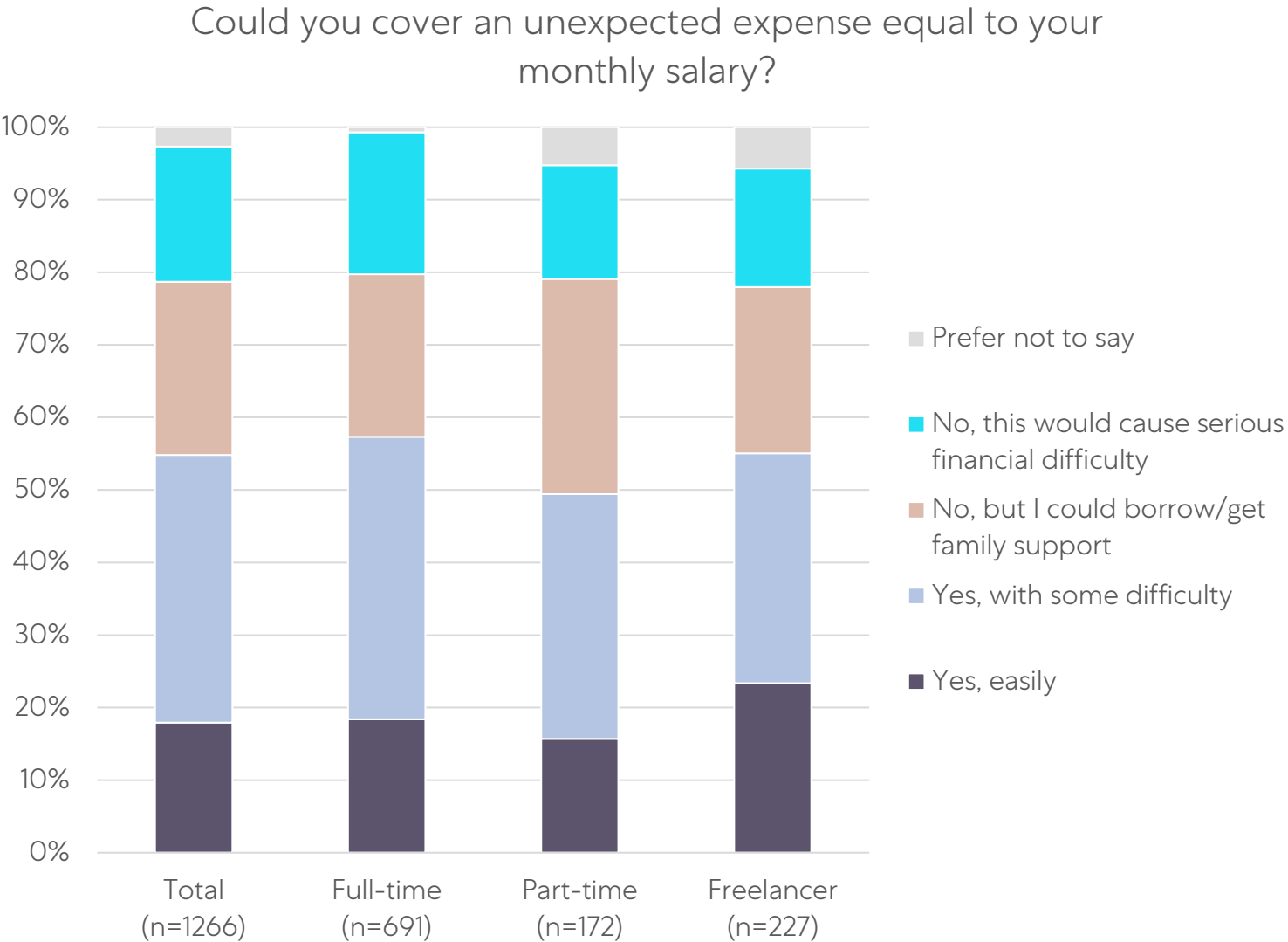
(By salary and location)



- For those earning less than 40k and living outside of London with 24% can save regularly. Whereas for those in London 26% struggle to cover expenses and 6% cannot cover them
- Those earning more than 40k both within and outside of London have a similar experience with 61% able to set money aside

Ability to Cover an Unexpected Expense

(By employment status)

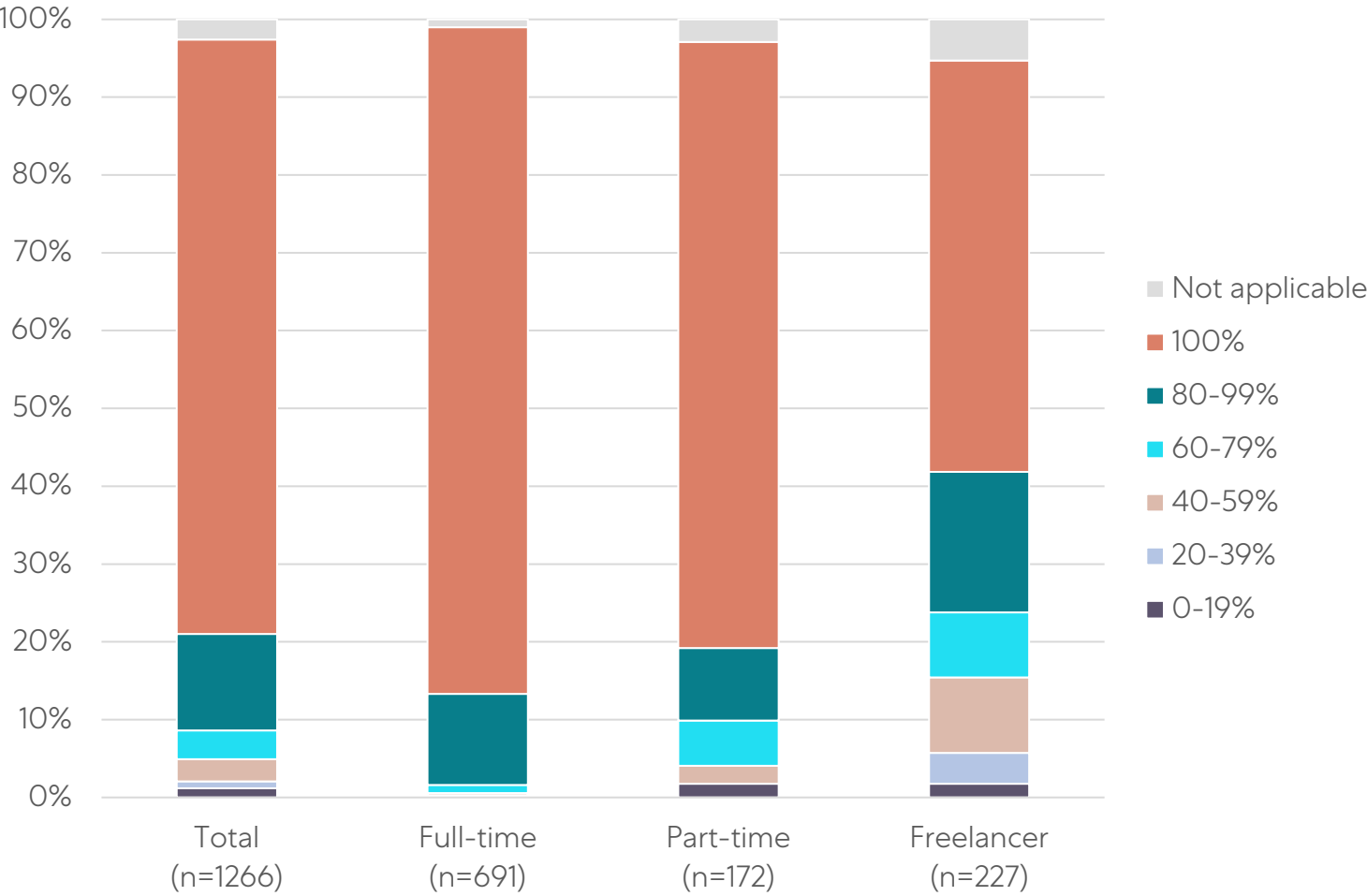


- 18% of respondents can easily cover and unexpected expense equal to one months salary
- This increases for freelancers (23%) but decreases for part-timers (16%)
- It would cause serious financial difficulty for 20% of full-time workers

Individual Income from Arts & Culture Work

(By employment status)

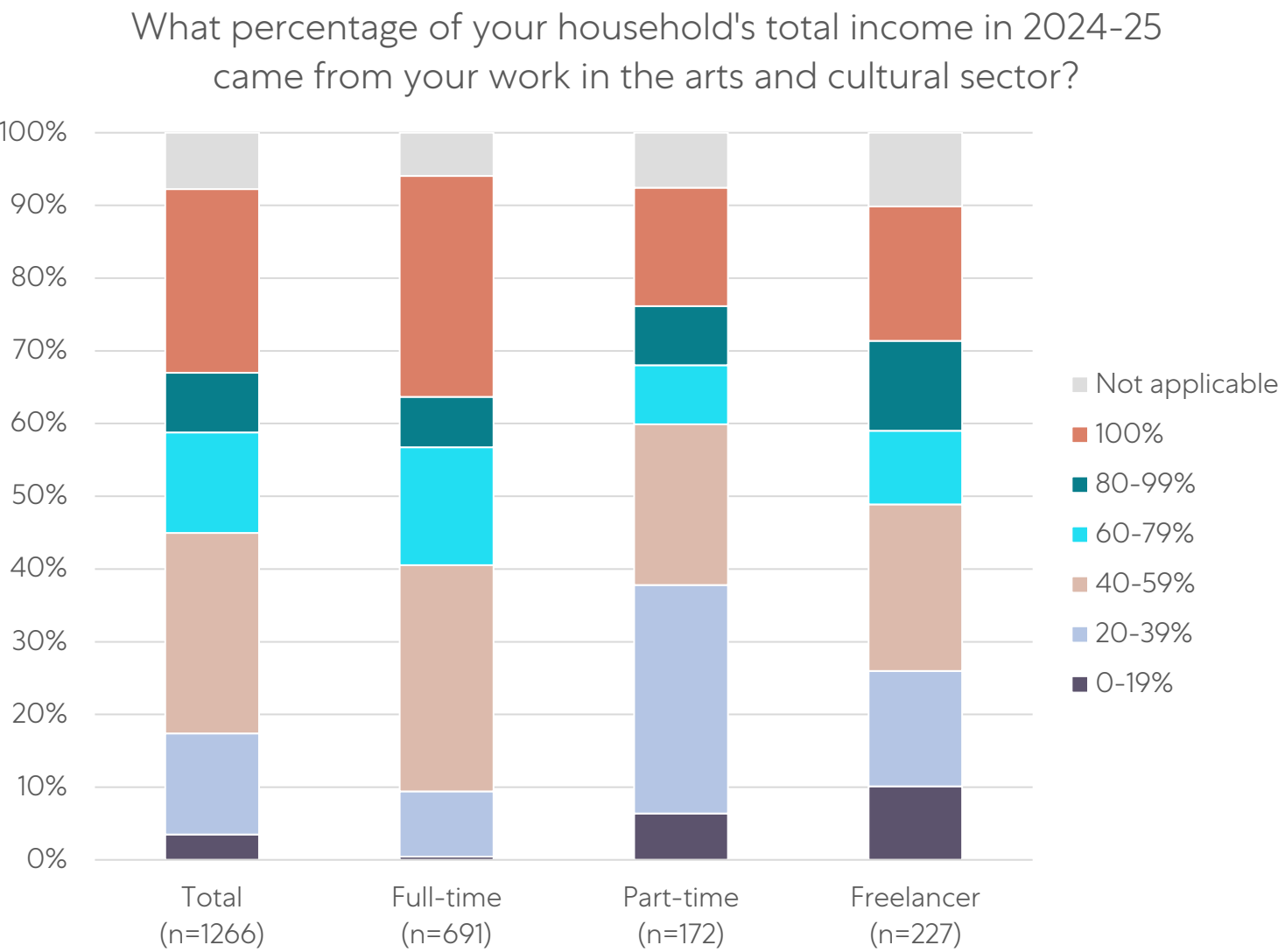
What percentage of your total income was from your work in the arts and culture sector in 2024-25?



- Freelancers have the most diverse income, with 53% exclusively earning from the arts.
- This increases to 86% for full-time arts and culture workers

Household Income from Arts & Culture Work

(By employment status)

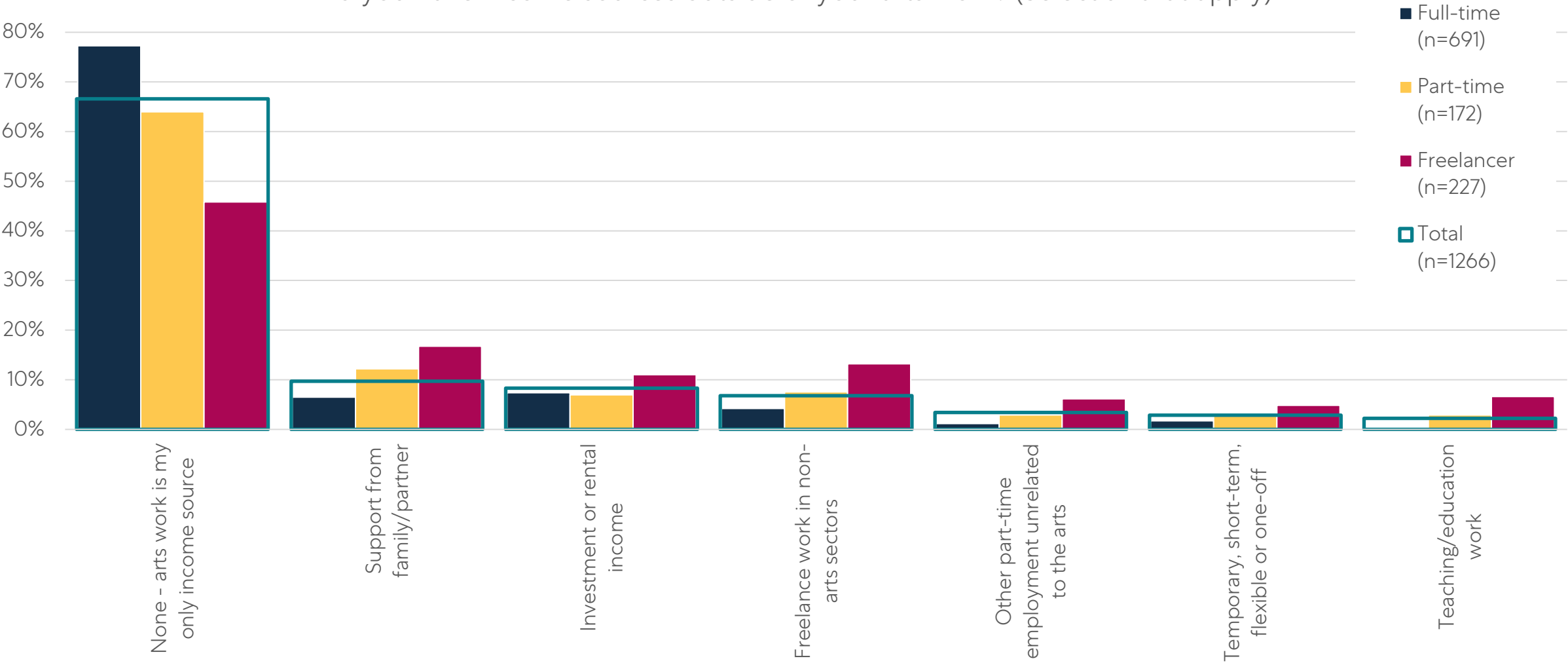


- A quarter of respondents make up 100% of their total household income
- This increases to 30% for full-time employees and decreases to 19% for freelancers

Income Sources Outside of Arts Work

(By employment status)

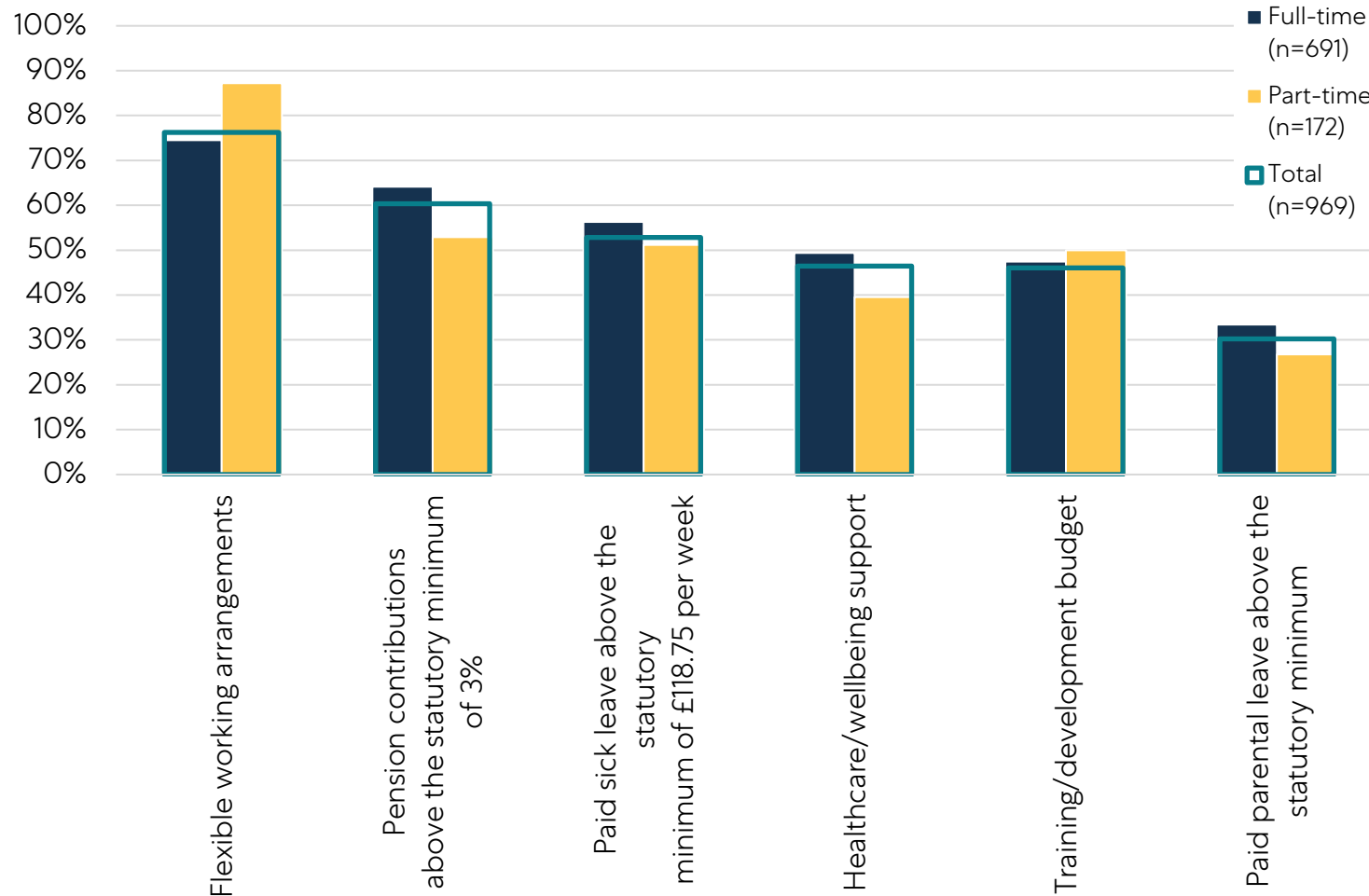
Did you have income sources outside of your arts work? (Select all that apply)



Employment Benefits

(By full-time & part-time)

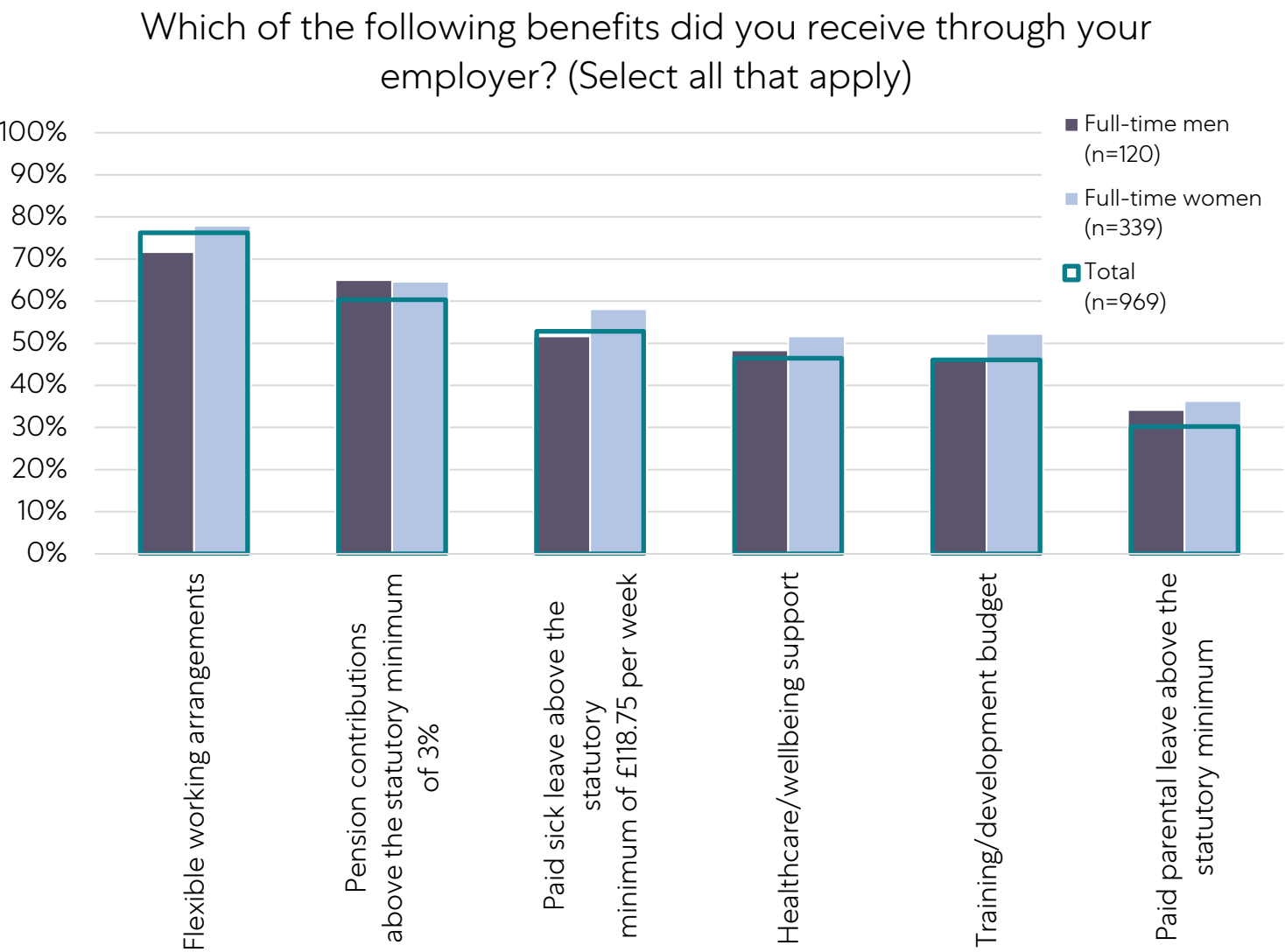
Which of the following benefits did you receive through your employer? (Select all that apply)



- More full-time employees are benefit from an enhanced pension contribution (64%) than part-time employees (53%)
- Part-time employees are more likely to benefits from flexible working arrangements (87%) and training/development budget (50%)

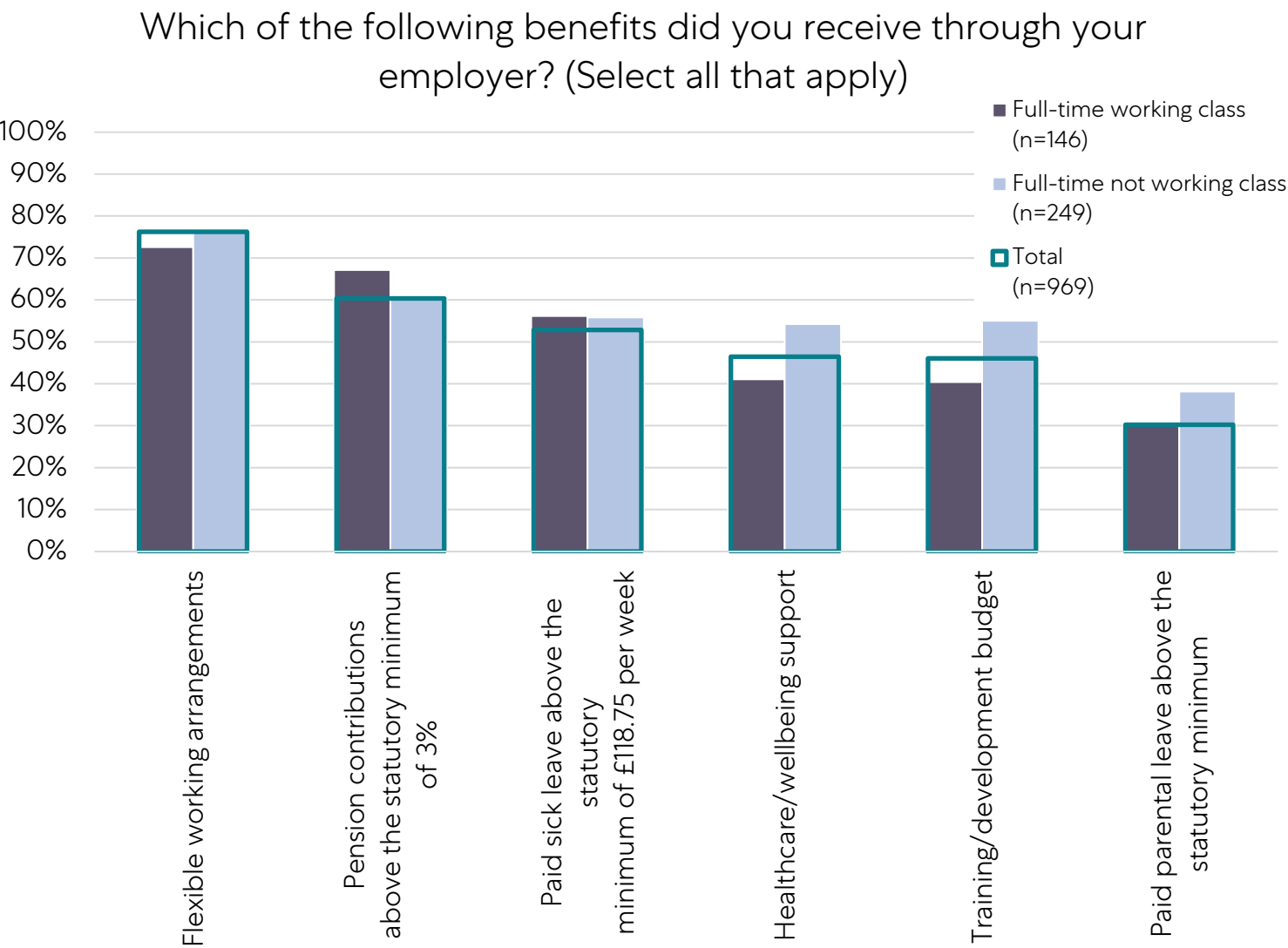
Employment Benefits

(By full-time & gender)



Employment Benefits

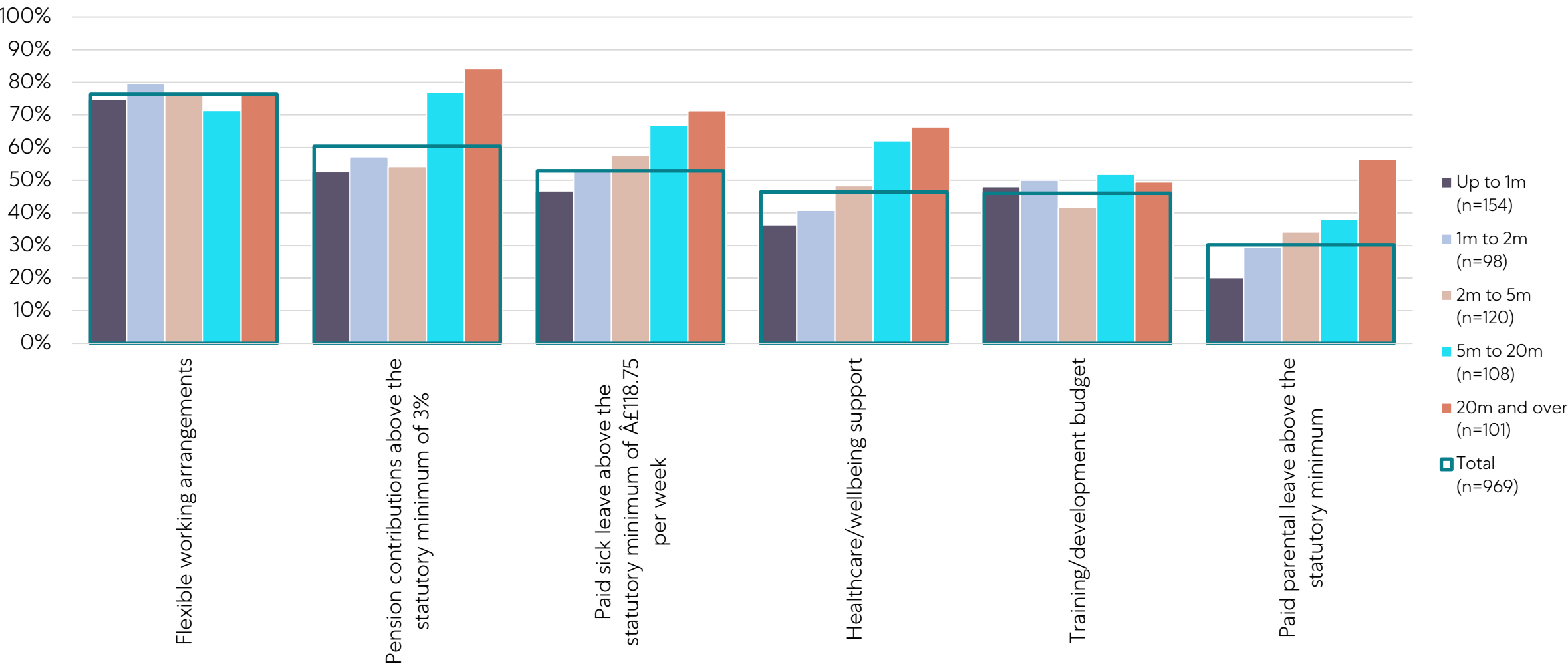
(By full-time & class)



Employment Benefits

(By organisation turnover)

Which of the following benefits did you receive through your employer? (Select all that apply)






Part 2: ACCESS & BARRIERS



Chapter 3

Entry Pathways & Early Career

Cultural Capital Gate-keeping



“I was born into a family that was highly involved in the arts.”

Woman, 35-44, Not working class, Full-time, Senior level



Entering the arts remains deeply shaped by class, geography, and access to cultural and financial capital. Success often depends less on talent than on who can afford to wait, volunteer, or network unpaid. The early-career landscape privileges those with inherited stability and familiarity with sector norms, while working-class entrants face structural exclusion masked as meritocracy.

Barriers at the Gate

Nearly 42% of respondents reported facing significant entry barriers, rising to **58% among those from working-class families**.

Financial constraints dominate: **74% of those who faced barriers cited money as the main obstacle**, with limited networks (56%) and few entry-level opportunities (49%) following closely.

For many, the early stages of an arts career demand resources: time, unpaid labour, family support, that working-class entrants cannot spare.

Unpaid Beginnings

Volunteering and unpaid internships continue to function as informal entry requirements. Around 37% of respondents said they had undertaken unpaid or voluntary work as a pathway into the sector, while 25% credited family support and 18% personal connections for their first opportunity.

This gate-keeping effect embeds social inequality into the sector's foundation and perpetuates the dominance of middle-class cultural norms.

Passion and Geographic and Social Capital Divide

London and other metropolitan centres remain the default entry hubs, but the cost of living there locks many out.

Those entering through universities or cultural networks benefit not only from credentials but also from confidence navigating arts institutions, a form of “cultural fluency” that many first-generation professionals must acquire on the job.



“As a female northerner from a comprehensive, non-arts background, my face hasn’t fitted with public-school, southern expectations.”

Woman, 45–54, Working class, Full-time, Senior level

“Whilst at uni I volunteered for the local theatre and when I left, I worked unpaid for a number of companies before finally getting a paid job.”

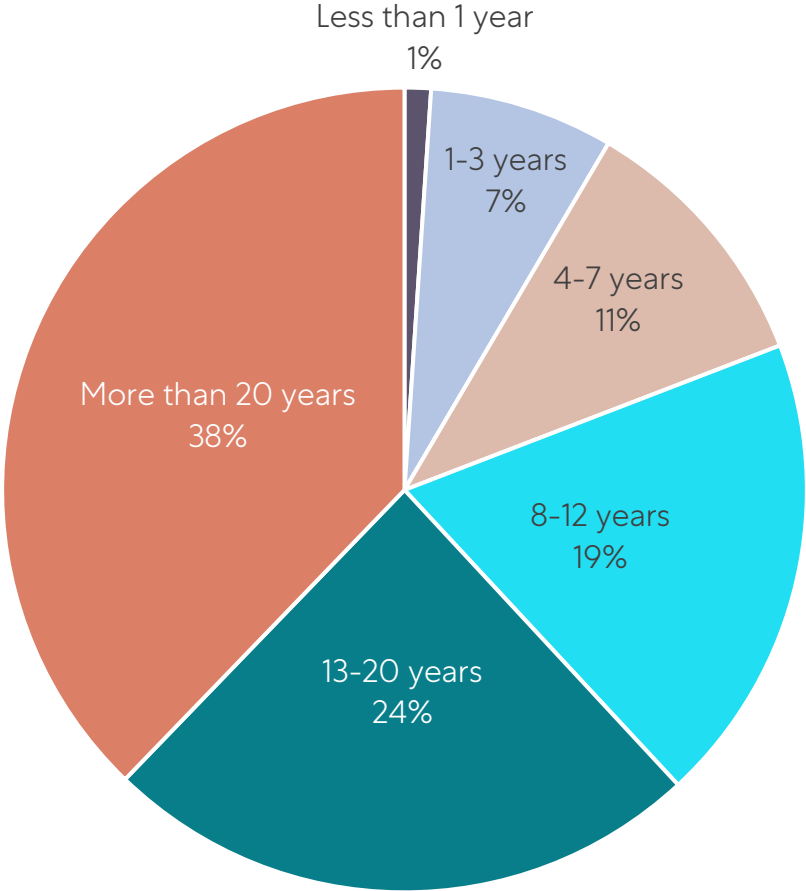
Woman, 25–34, Working class, Full-time, Middle level

“I luckily found an entry-level job I could commute to from my parents’ house. Without that safety net, I doubt I could have started in the arts.”

Man, 25–34, Working class, Full-time, Middle level

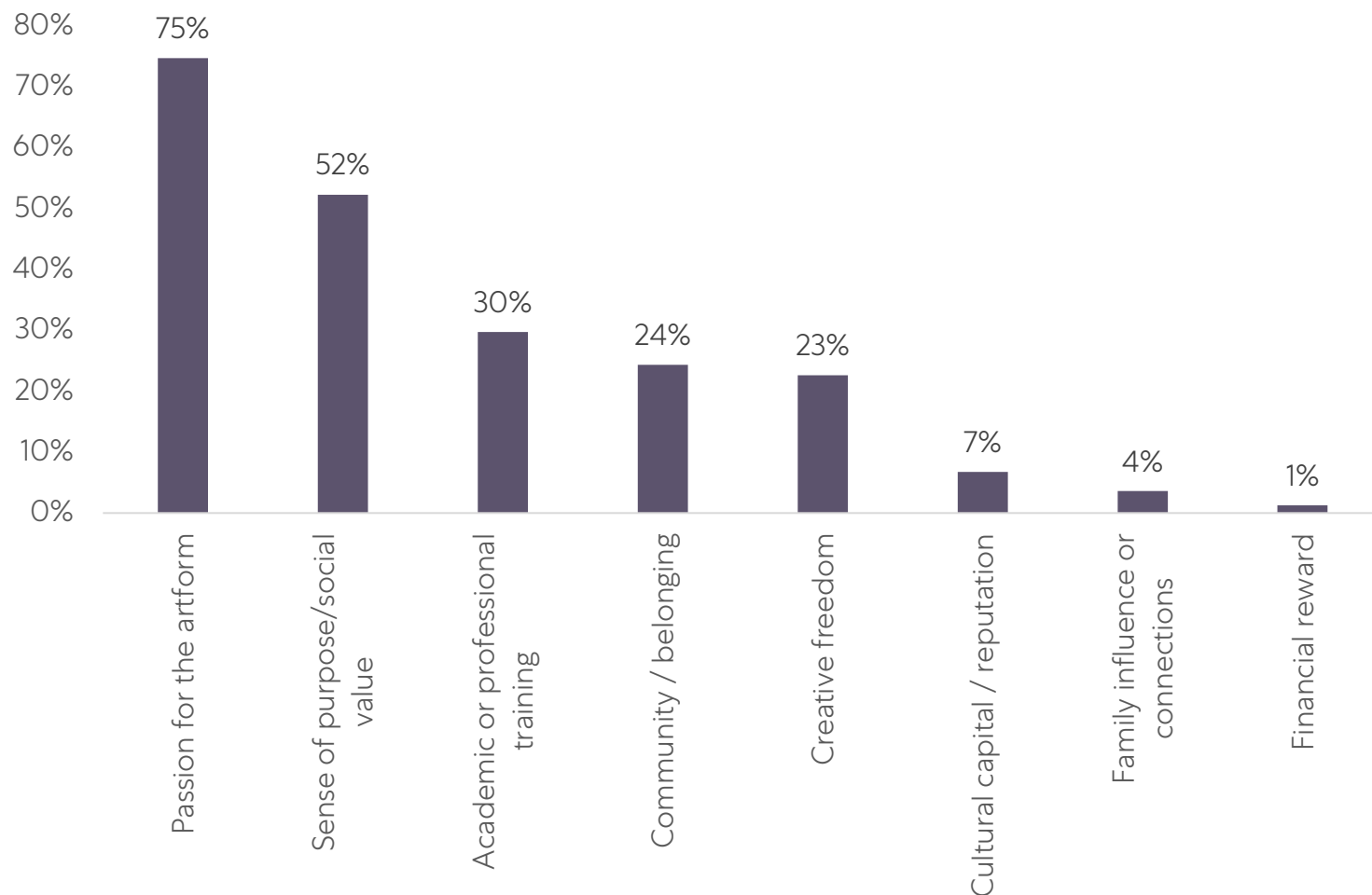
Time in Sector

How long have you been working / did you work in the arts and cultural sector?



Initial Draw to Arts & Cultural Work

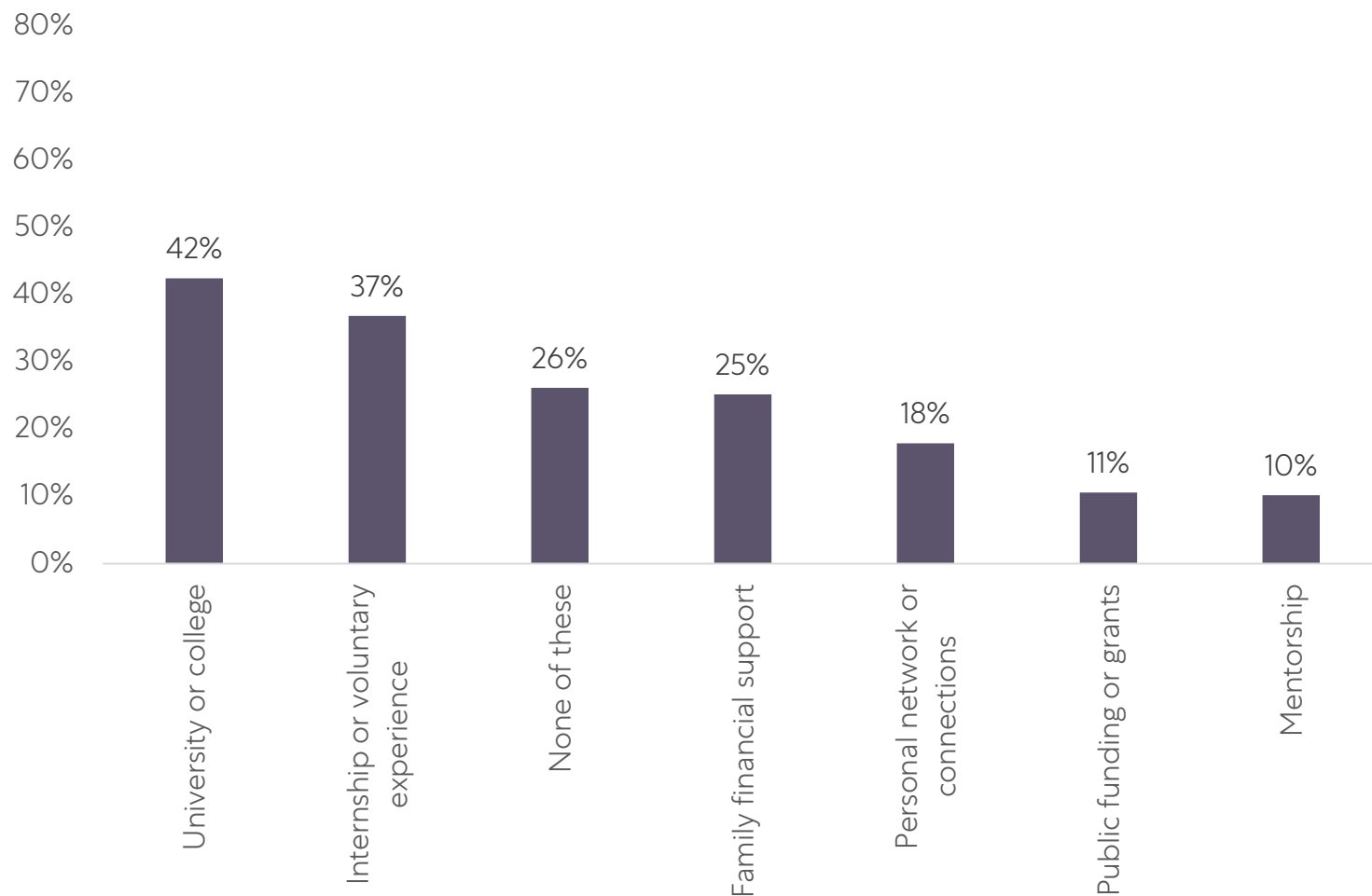
What initially drew you to work in the arts or cultural sector?
(select top 3)



- 75% of respondents were drawn to the arts and culture by a passion for the arts
- Only 1% entered the sector for the financial reward

Entry into the Arts Sector Support

Did any of following support your entry into the arts sector?
(Select all that apply)

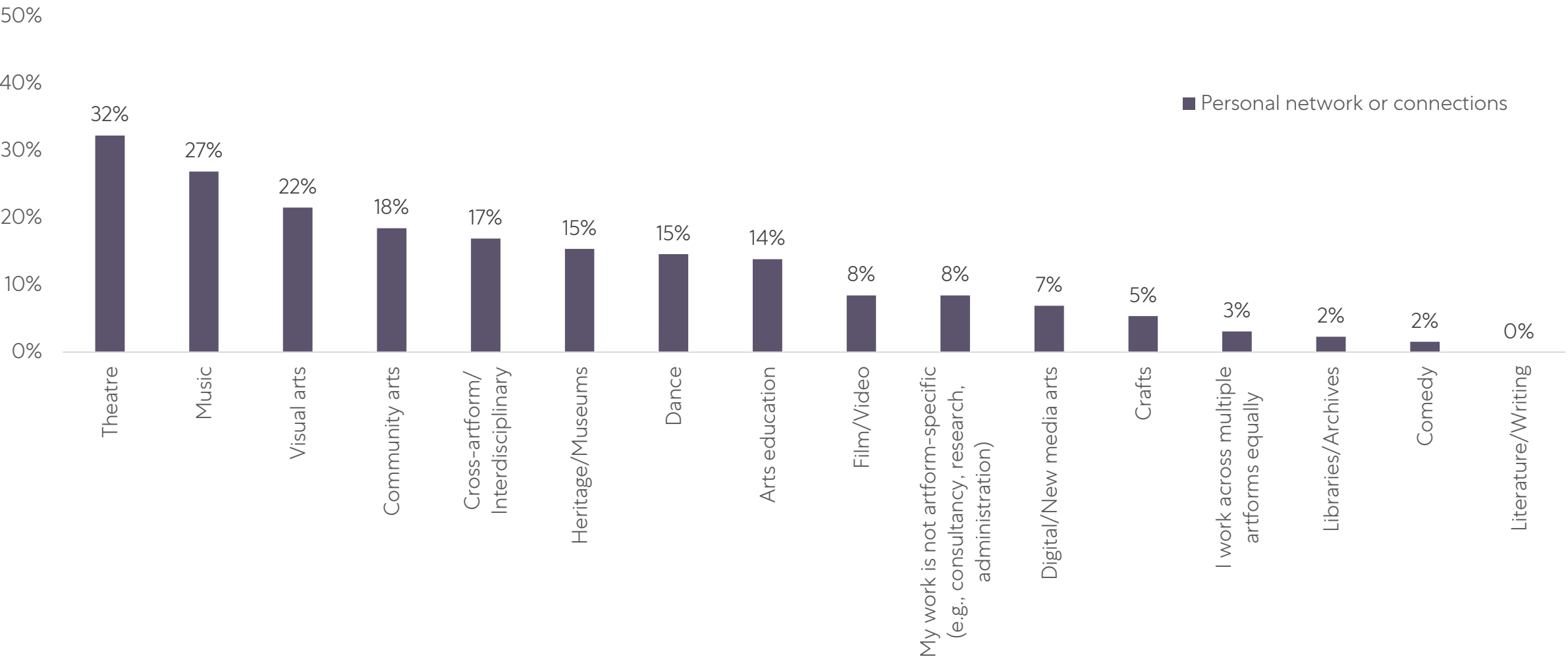


- 42% were supported by University or College when entering the sector
- 10% selected mentorship as a supporting factor

Importance of Person Network or Connections

(By artform/discipline)

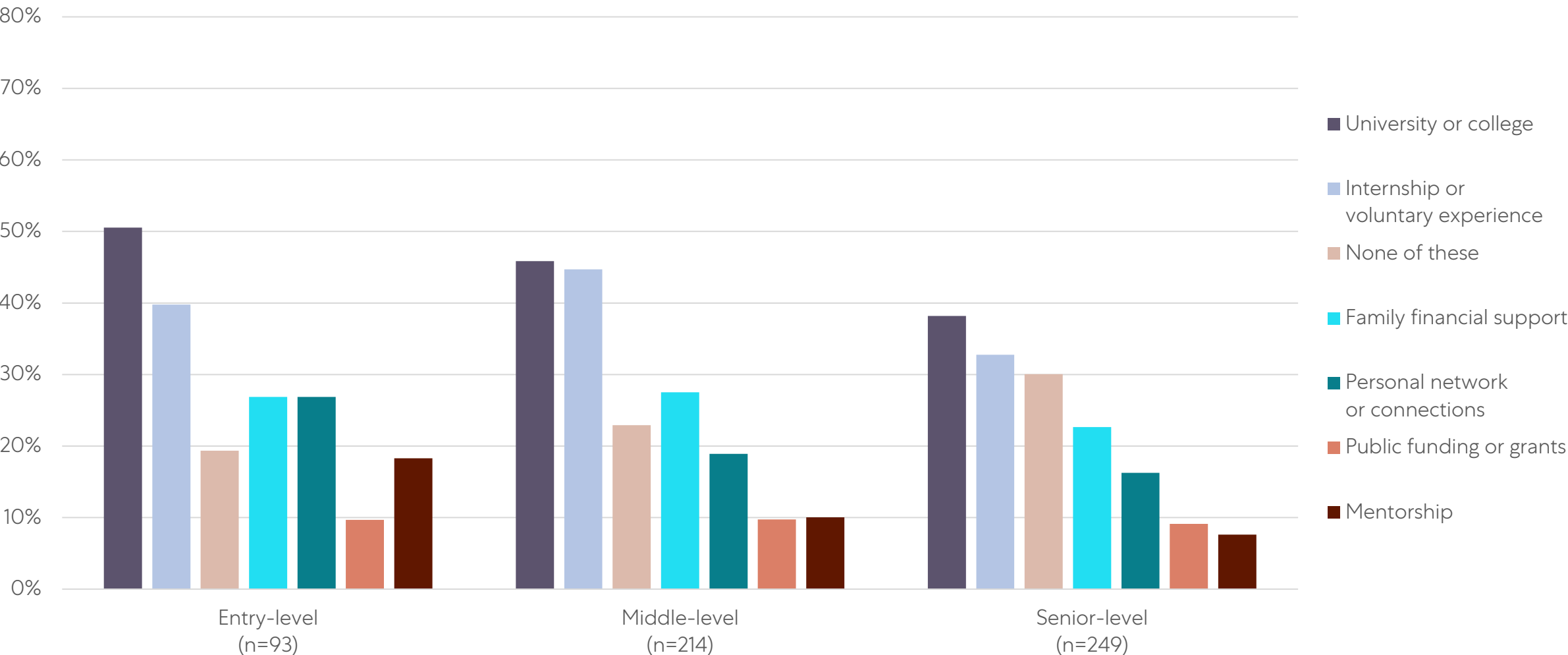
Q2.4 (personal connections importance) × Q1.7 artform



Entry Support Mechanisms

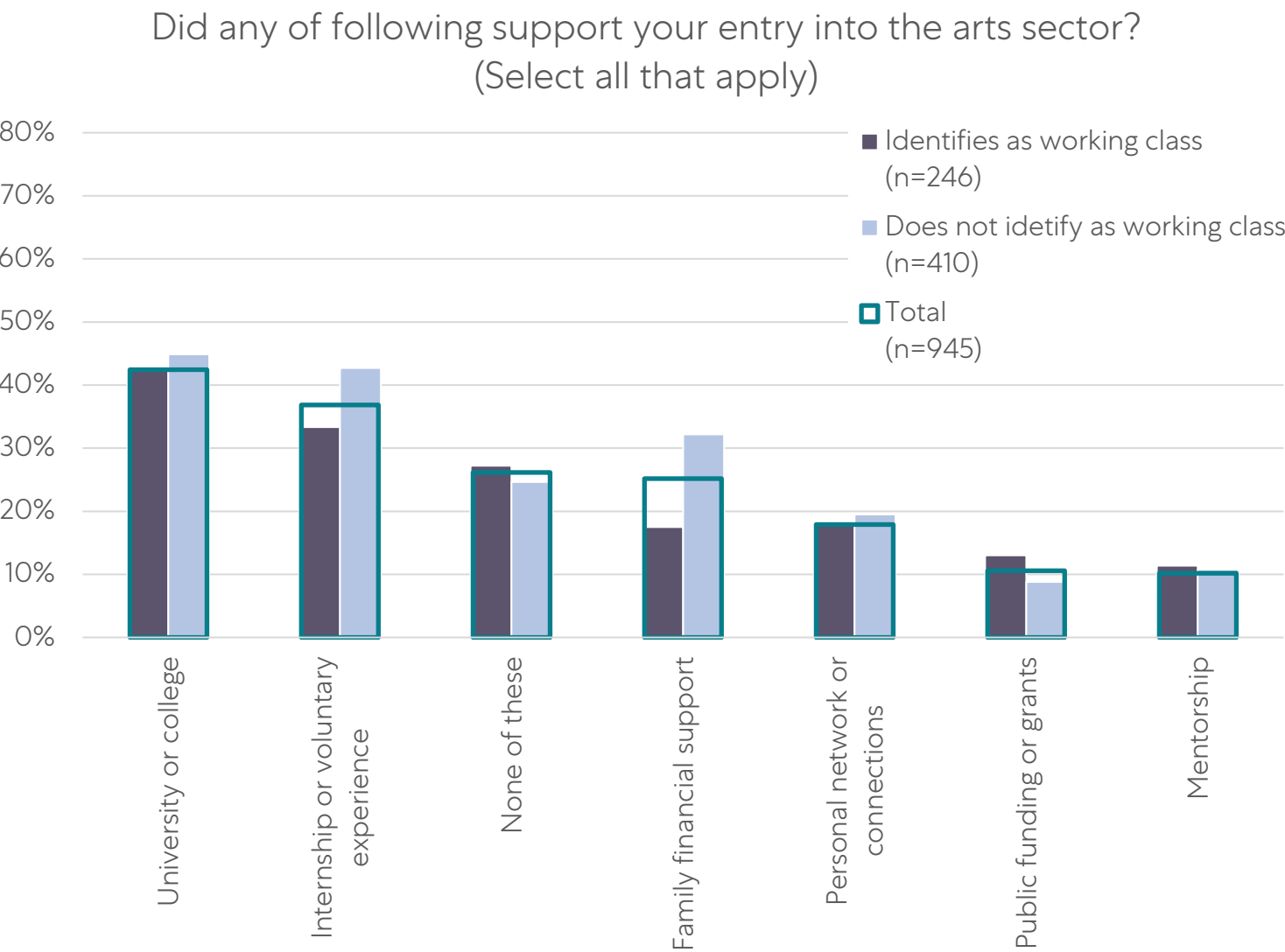
(By role level)

Q1.3 (role level) × Q1.1 (employment type) × Q2.2 entry support mechanisms



Entry into the Arts Sector Support

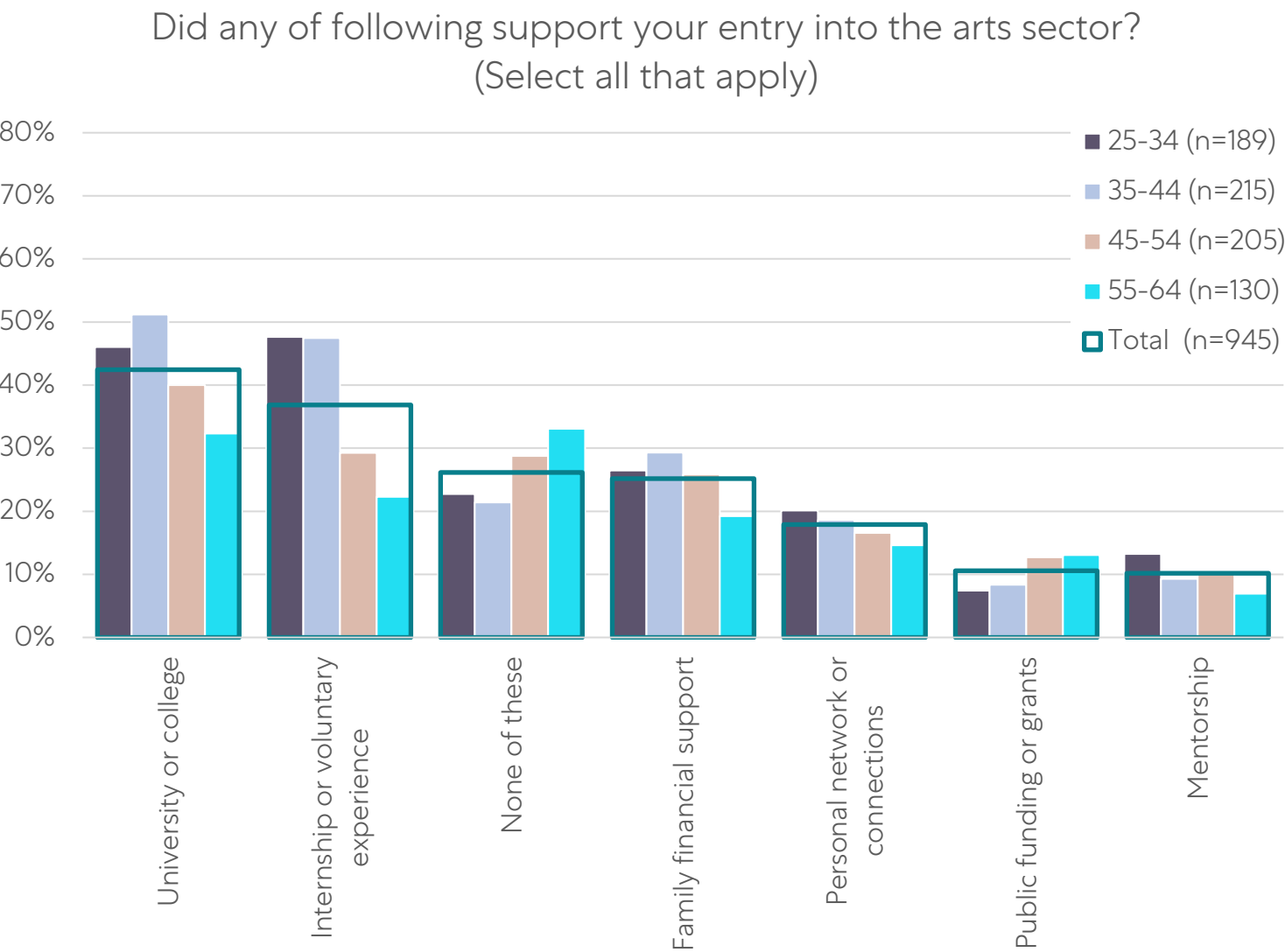
(By class)



- Those who are not working class are 10% more likely to have been supported by an snship or voluntary experience
- They are also 15% more likely to have benefitted from family financial support

Entry into the Arts Sector Support

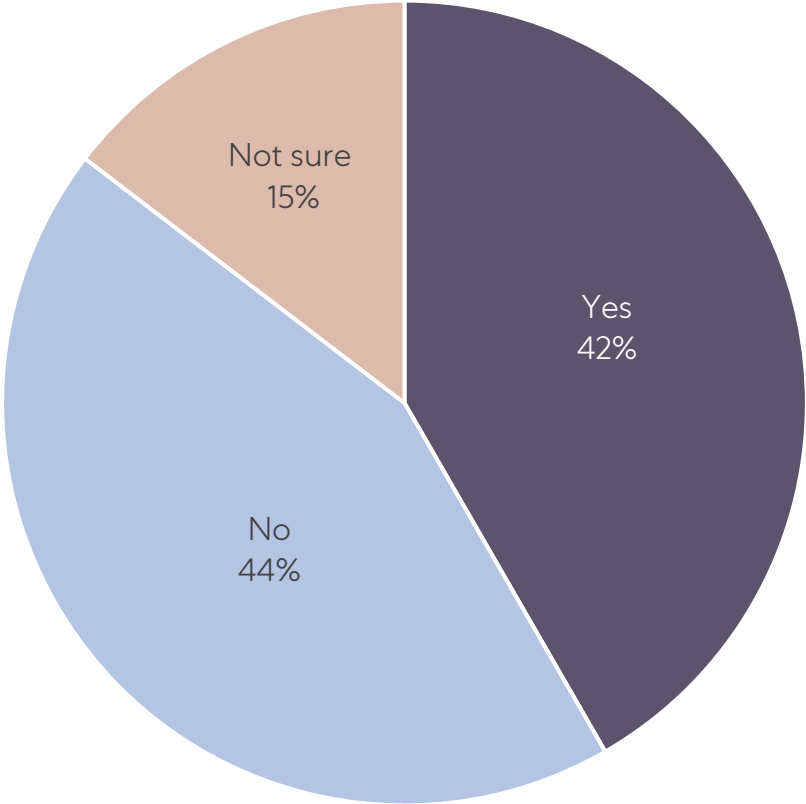
(By age)



- Those aged 35-44 are most likely to have been supported by University or college (51%), which is less important for older respondents with a third of those aged 55-64 were not supported by any of the factors

Entry Barriers

Were there any significant barriers you faced when entering the sector?

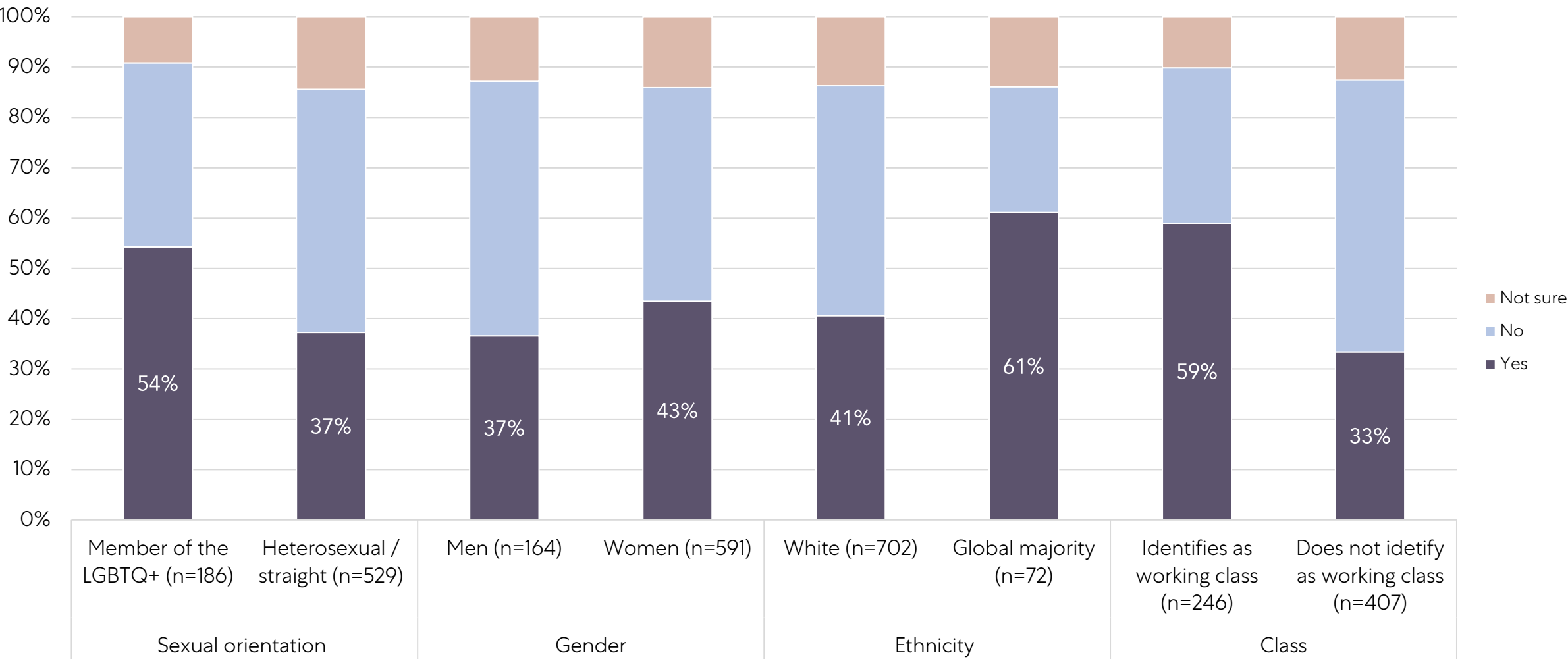


- 42% of the sector have faced significant barriers to entering the sector

Entry Barriers

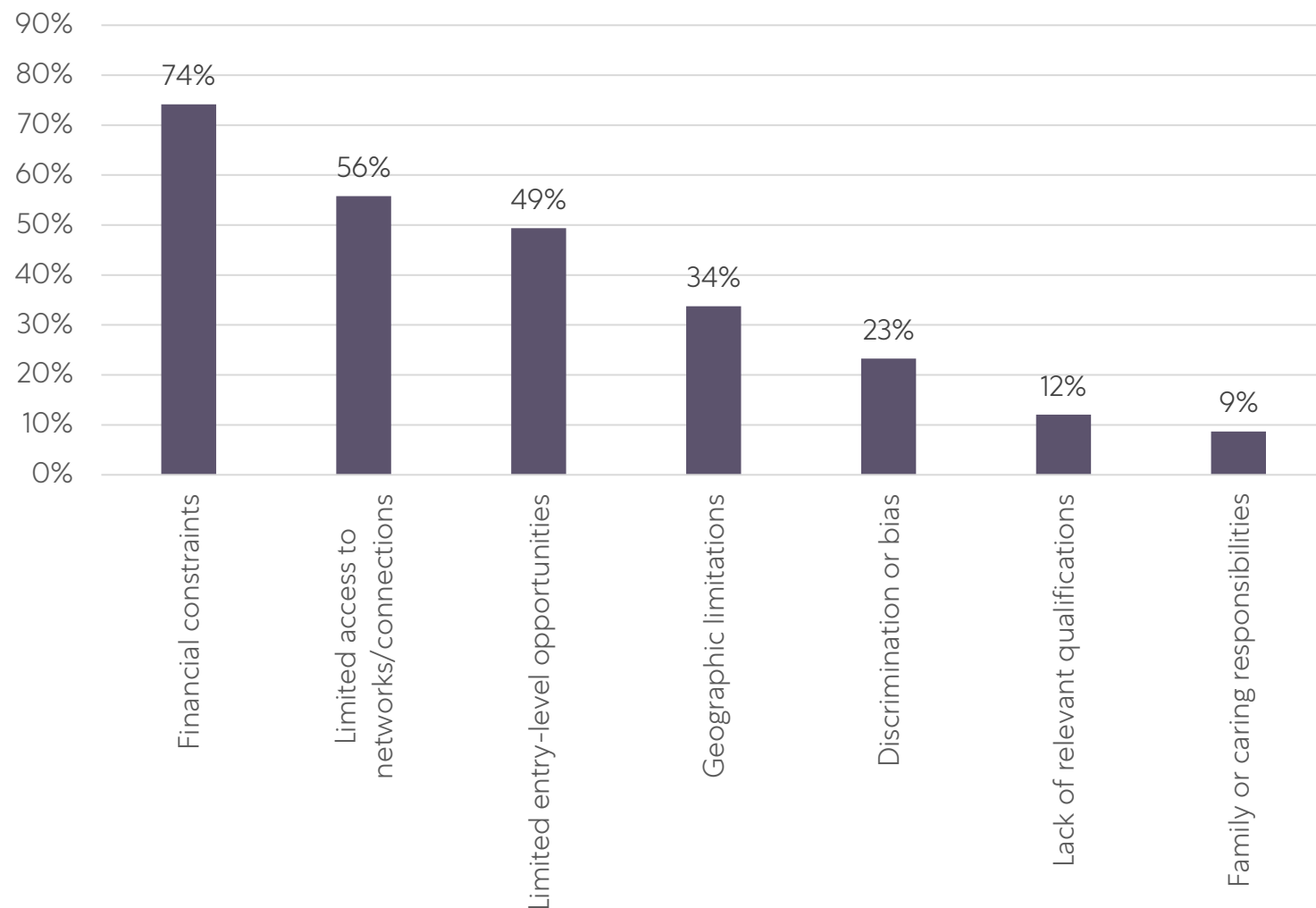
(By sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, class)

Were there any significant barriers you faced when entering the sector?



Types of Barrier

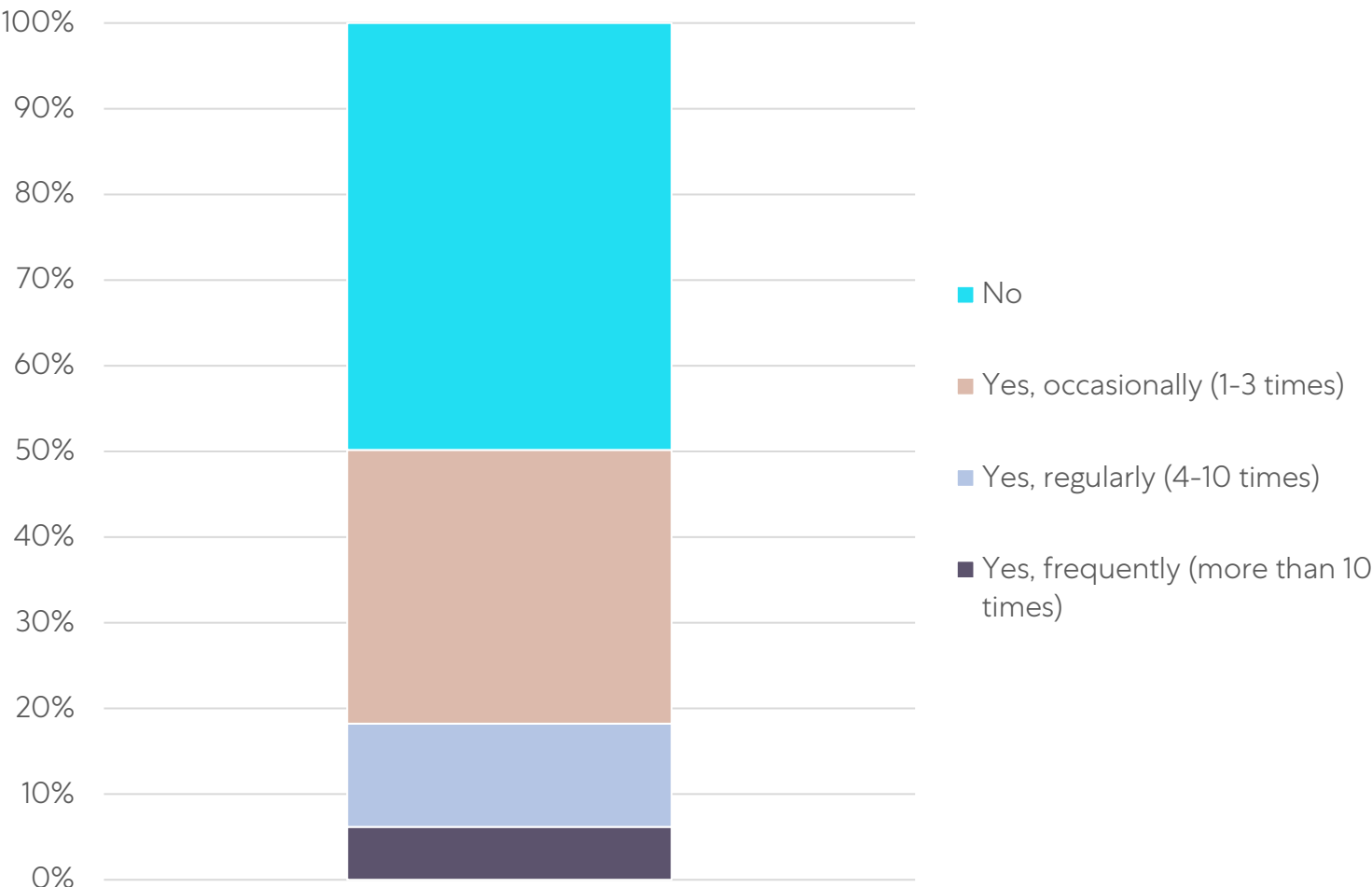
What barriers did you experience? (Select all that apply)



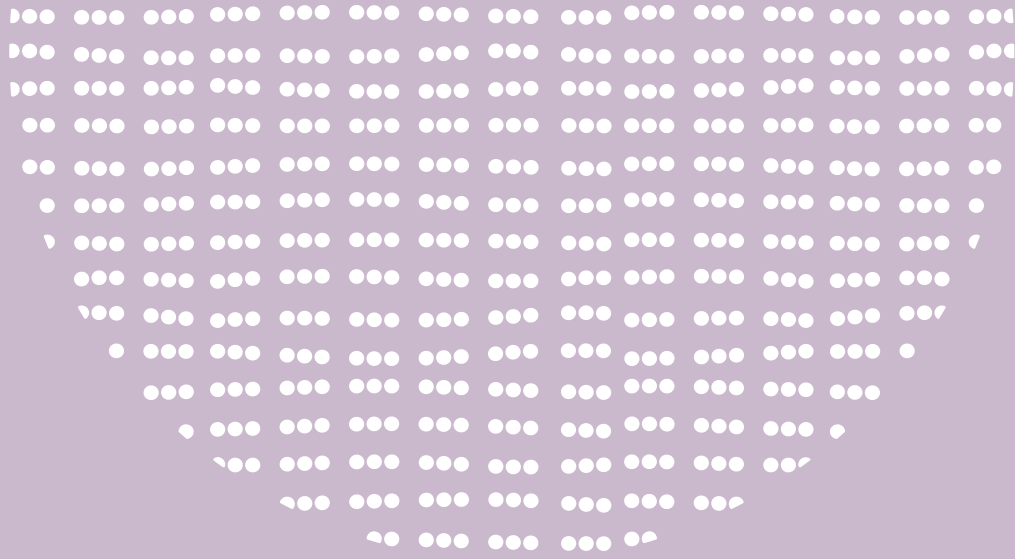
- Financial constraints is the most common barrier experience by those in the sector (74%)

Unpaid Work to Maintain Visibility in Last Year

In the past year, have you invested time in unpaid work to maintain visibility in the sector?



- 50% of the sector have invested time in unpaid work to maintain visibility
- 6% of respondents have done this more than 10 times



Chapter 4

Career Advancement & Professional Development

Invisible Ceiling

"I am middle class, White British, university educated and all of this helped. I felt I had a right to work in the sector."

Woman, 45-54, Not working class, Full-time, Senior level



Progression in the arts is rarely a transparent ladder; it's a maze of cultural adaptation, unspoken expectations, and uneven opportunities. Advancement often requires adopting middle-class norms of behaviour and communication - what many describe as "fitting in" rather than developing skills. For those from working-class or across intersecting identities, this invisible ceiling limits both access to senior roles and emotional safety within them.

Cultural Fit and Classed Expectations

Around 41% of workers report class-based barriers to progression. Overall, 71% have experienced barriers to career advancement in the arts, with many reporting multiple intersecting challenges linked to class, gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality.

Qualitative data shows persistent "cultural fit" assumptions - promotion and leadership opportunities often go to those who resemble existing decision-makers in manner and network, not necessarily in merit.

Unequal Access to Development

Only 47% of respondents described their access to professional development as good or excellent, and nearly half said progression paths were unclear.

Professional development pathways vary widely: less than one-third of respondents engaged in formal mentoring programmes, while self-funded training and volunteering emerged as the most common strategies for advancement. This pattern suggests workers must often finance their own development or rely on unpaid opportunities to progress.

Agency and Control

Despite this, many mid-career workers report learning to navigate opaque systems through persistence rather than institutional support. Yet, a majority (64%) describe only moderate to limited control over their career trajectory - signalling that advancement is often contingent on gatekeepers rather than personal agency.



“Working-class backgrounds leave you with little social capital, a limited understanding of how these worlds operate, and even now, two decades in, I still feel like a fish out of water.”

Man, 45–54, Working class, Full-time, Senior level

“I’m from a working-class background and feel as though this is looked down upon. I have an accent and haven’t had the network others have.”

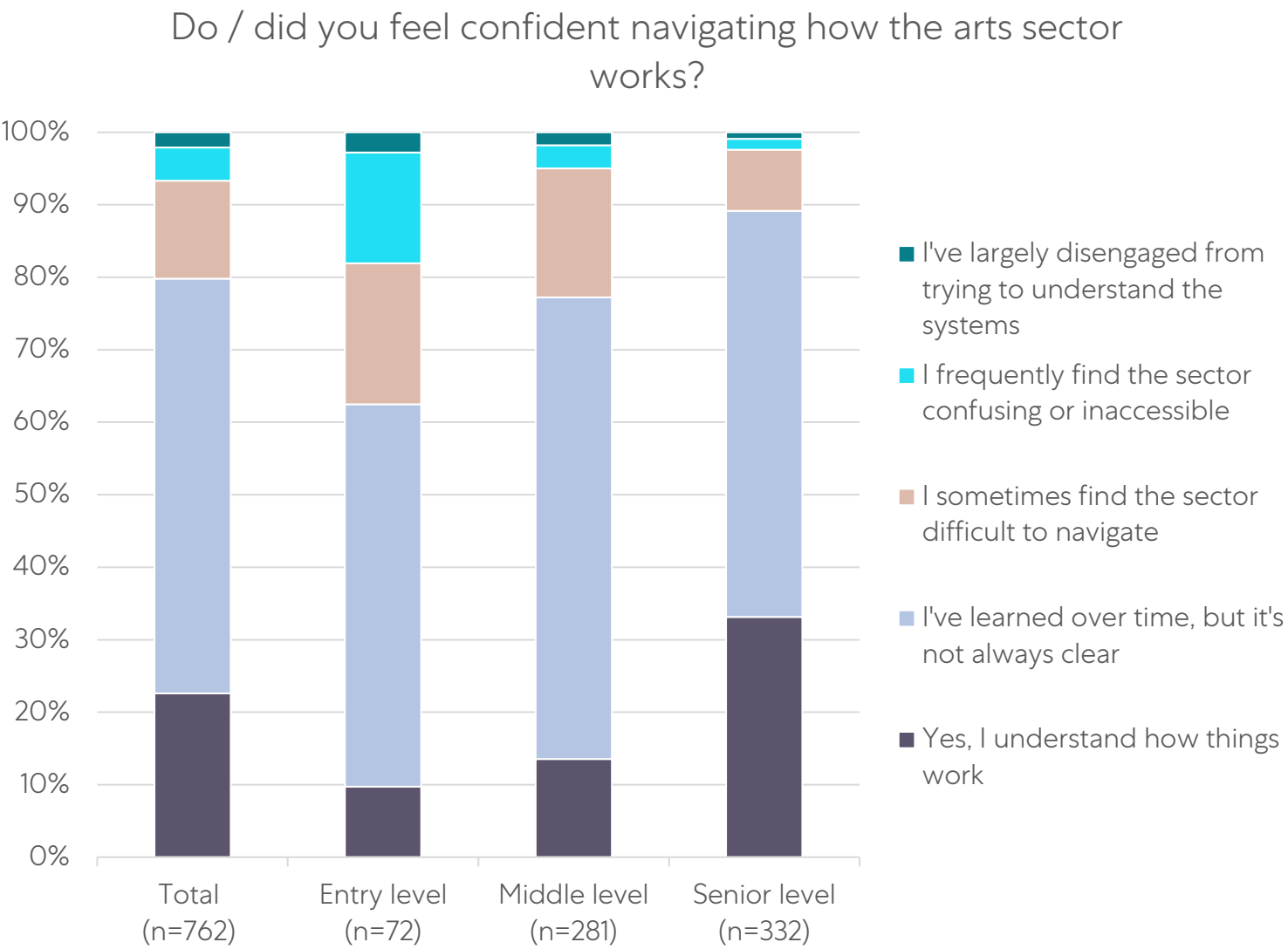
Woman, 35–44, Working class, Freelance, Middle level

“Gender: as a working-class woman in administration, you’re made to feel like the ‘girl’ in the office, not a professional.”

Woman, 35–44, Working class, Full-time, Middle level

Confidence Navigating the Arts Sector

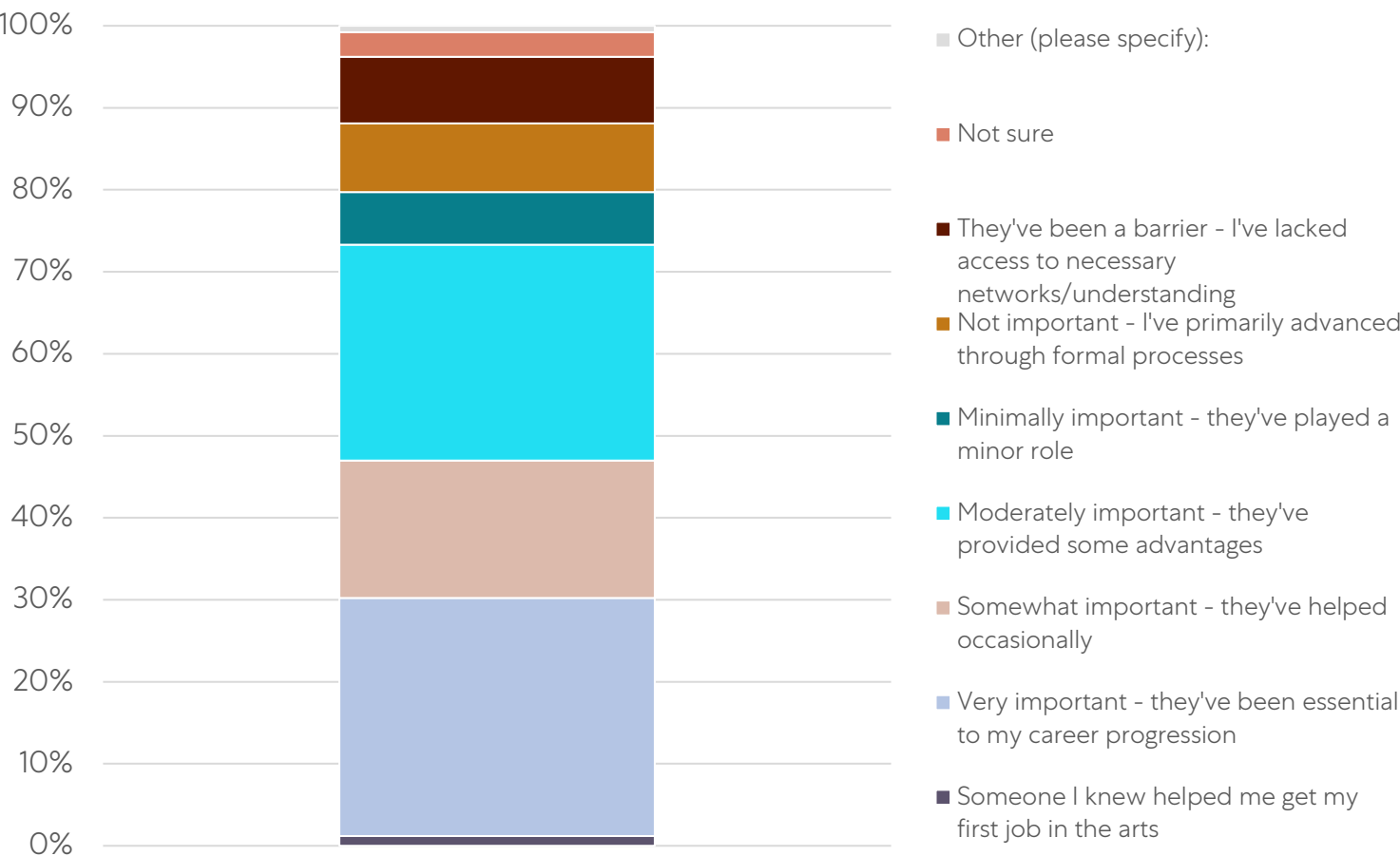
(By role level)



- Confidence navigating the sector increases with seniority with 10% at entry level understanding how things work, increasing to 33% at senior level

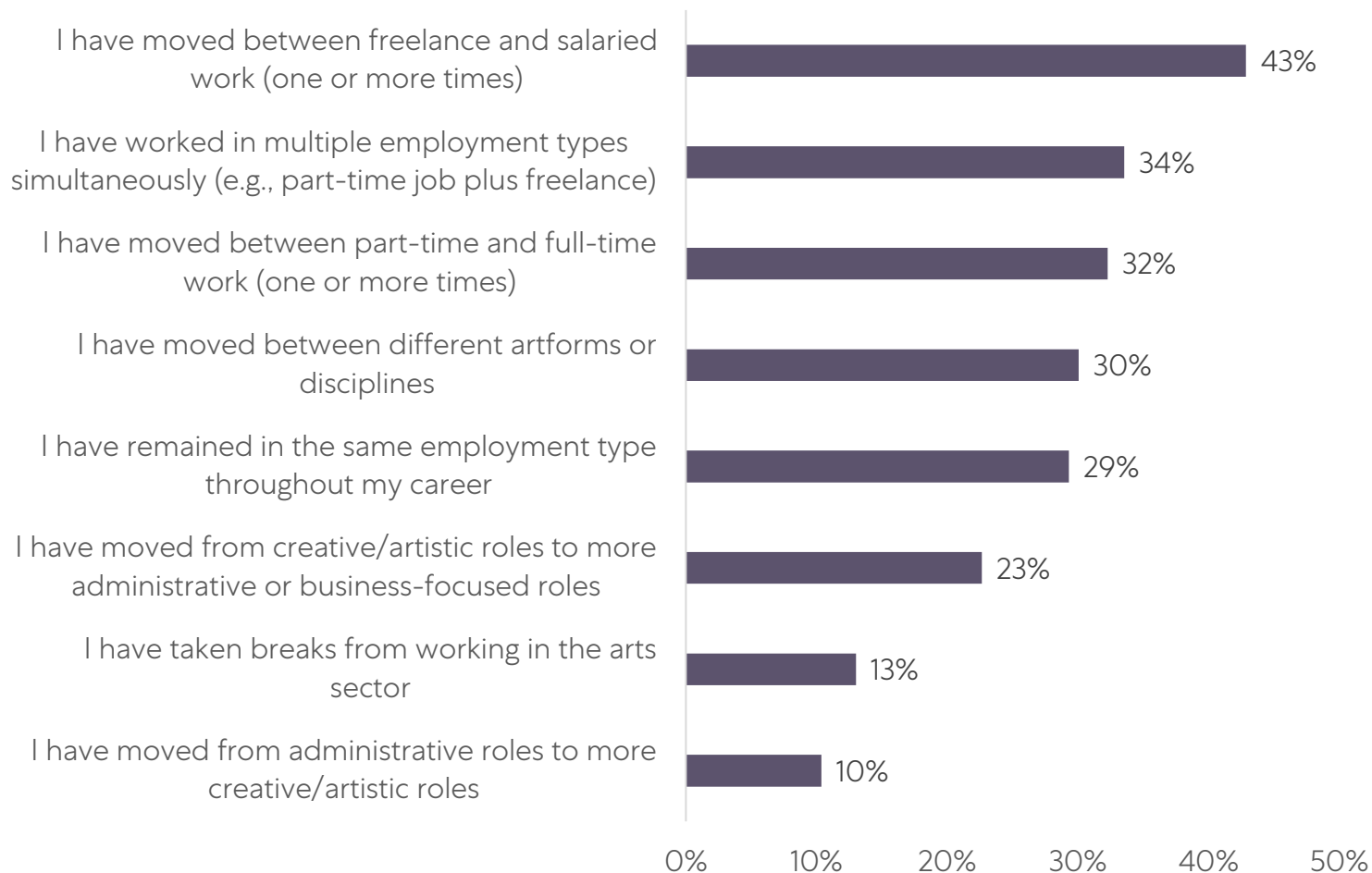
Importance of Personal Connections & Understanding Unwritten Cultural Norms

How important have personal connections and understanding unwritten cultural norms been in your access to opportunities in the arts?



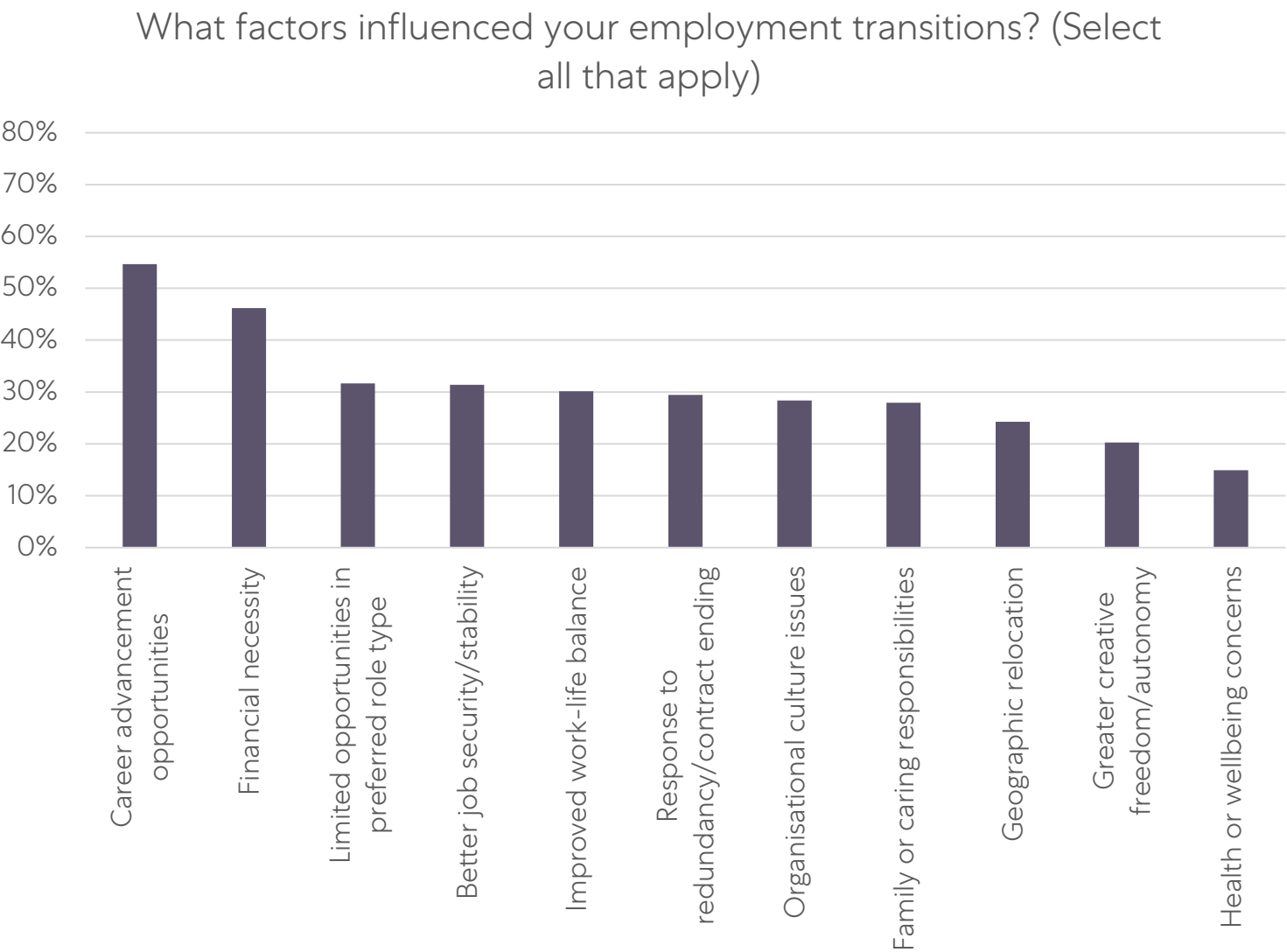
Employment Journey

Which of the following describes your employment journey in the arts? (Select all that apply)



- Just under half of respondents (43%) have moved between freelance and salaried work
- Only 29% have remained in the same employment type throughout their career

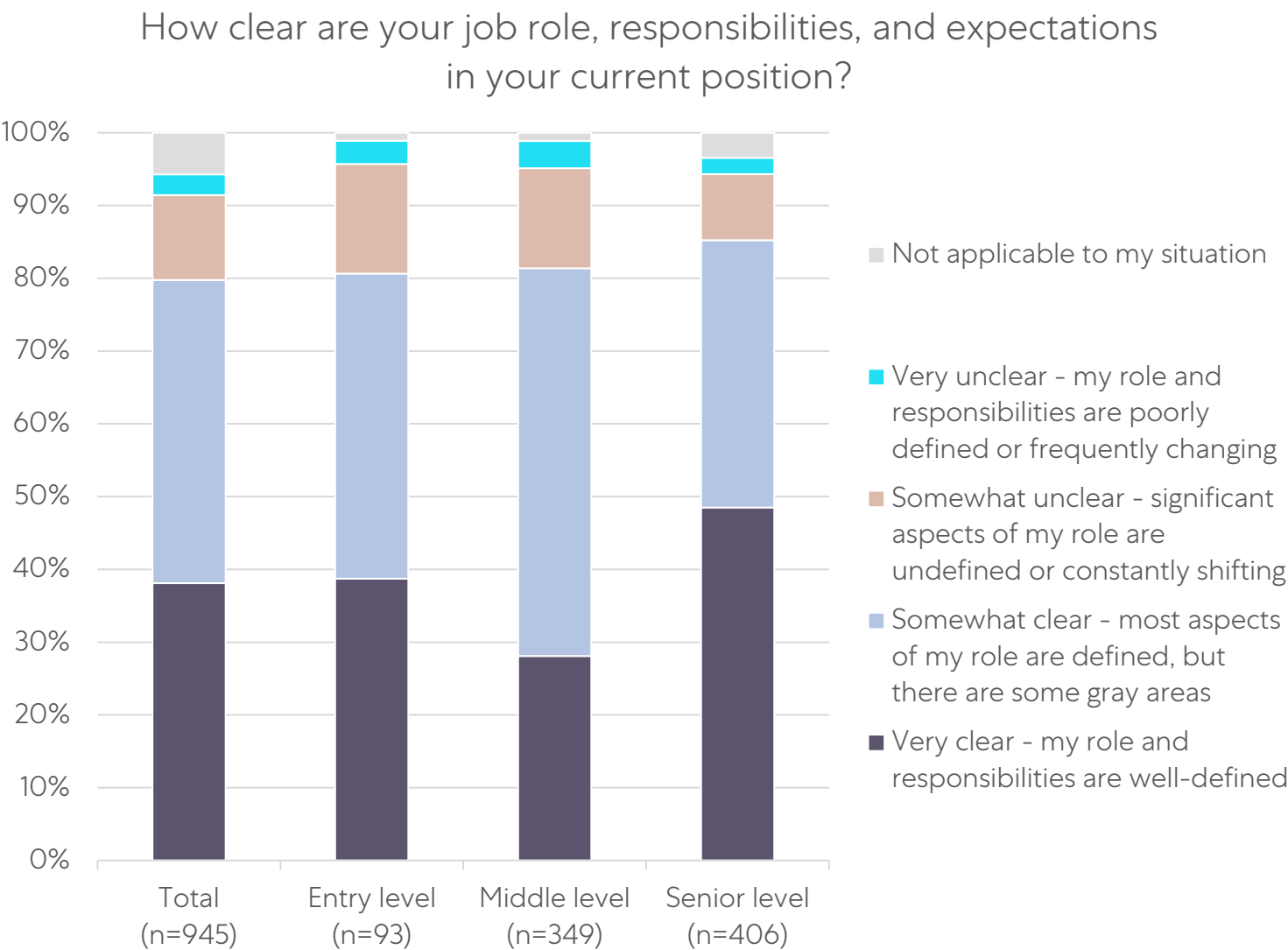
Influences on Employment Transitions



- Top reasons for employment transitions are either to advance career (55%) or out of financial necessity (46%)

Clarity of Role, Responsibilities & Expectations

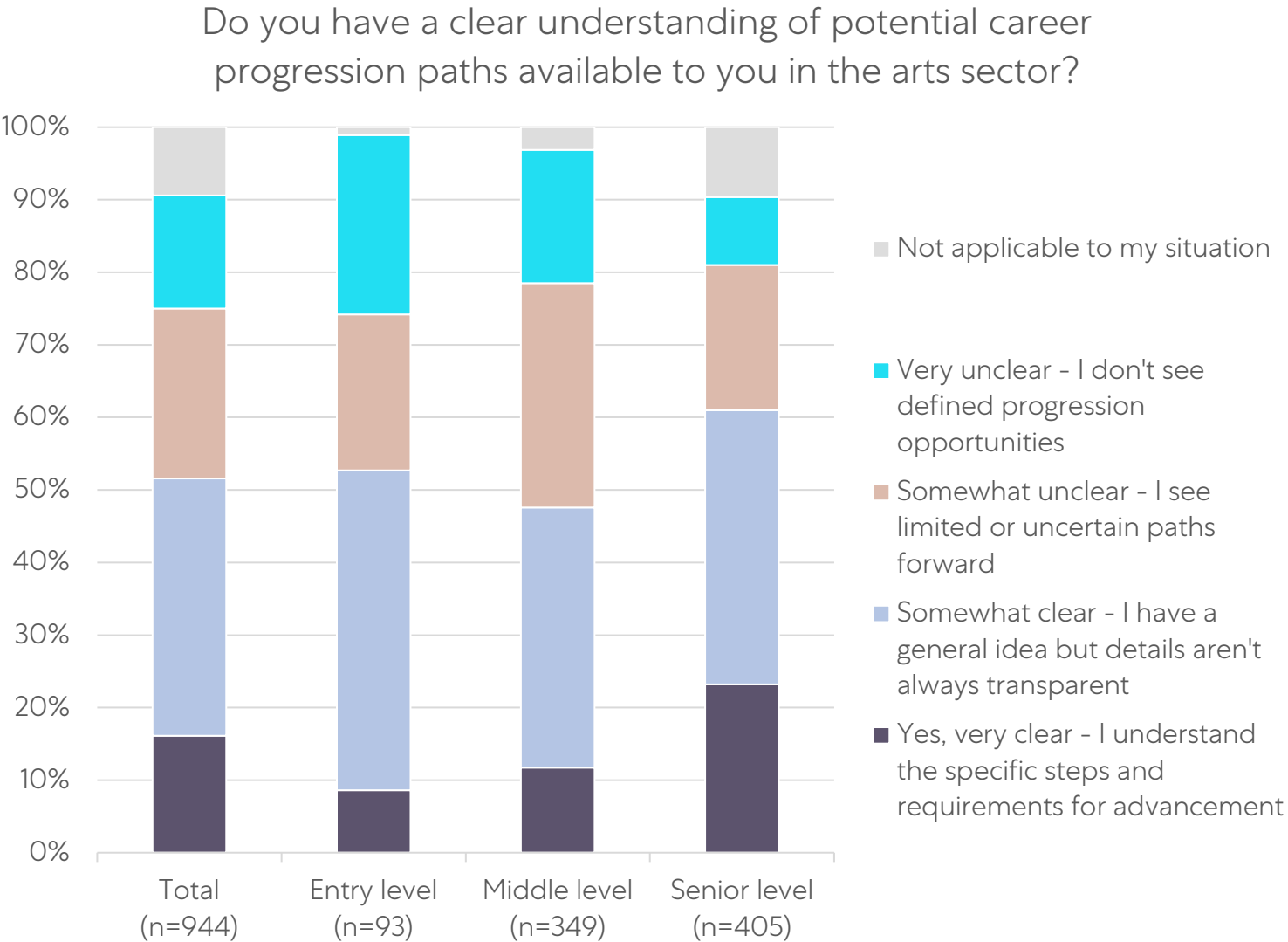
(By employment status)



- Only 38% of respondents describe their role and responsibilities as well defined

Clarity of Potential Career Progression Paths

(By employment status)

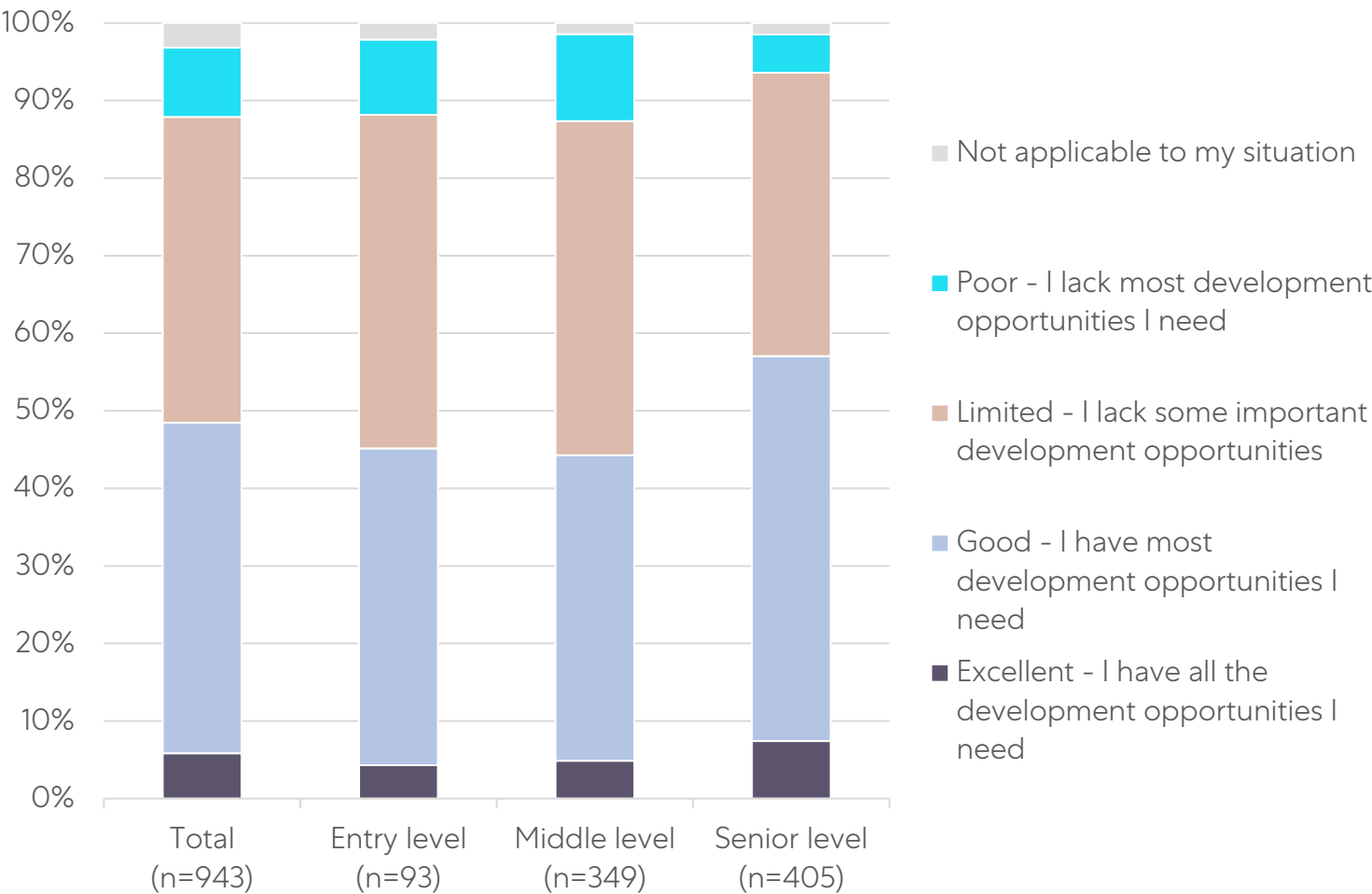


- Only 16% have a very clear understanding of the specific steps and requirements for career advancement

Access to Professional Development

(By employment status)

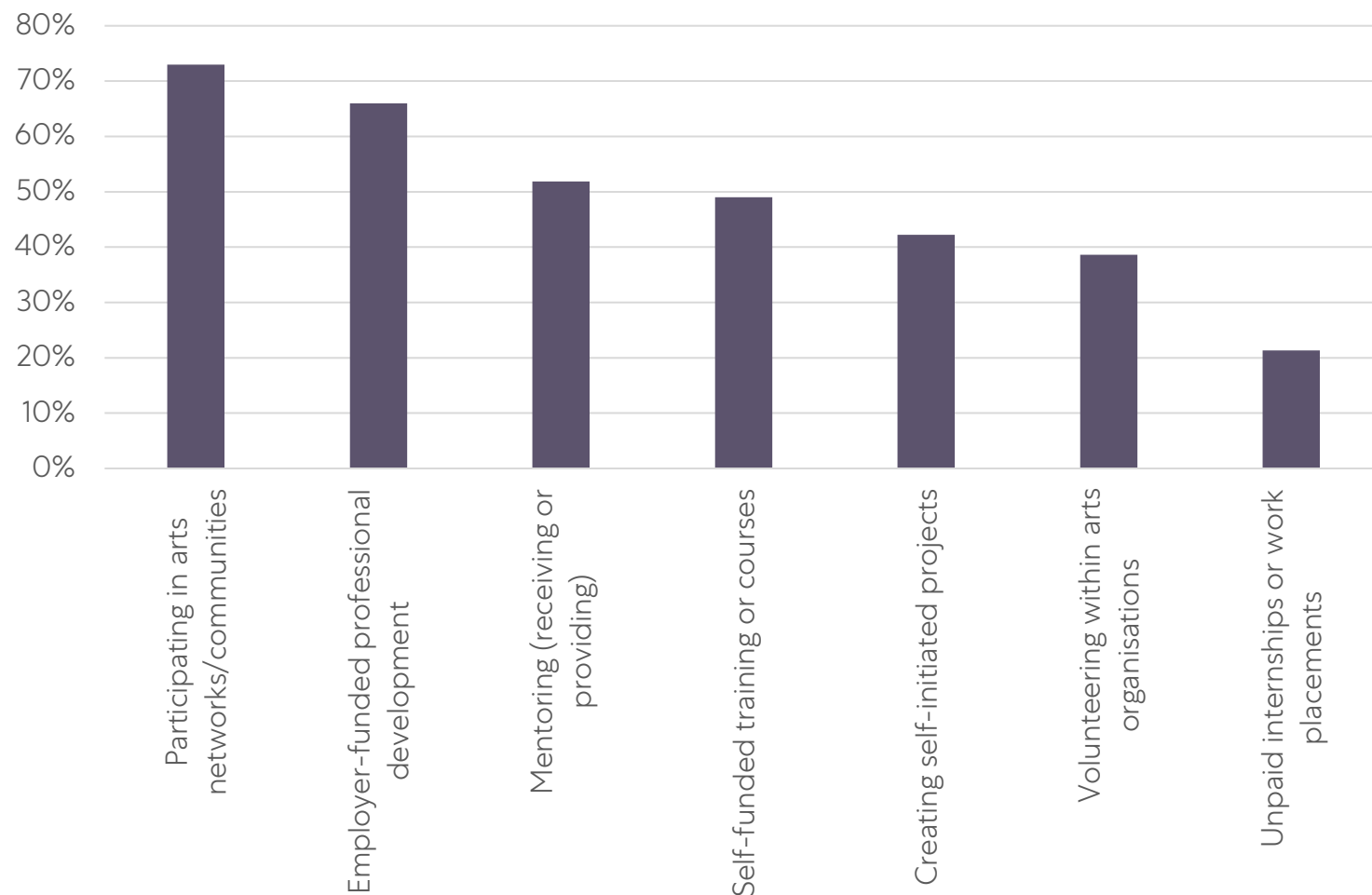
How would you describe your access to professional development in the arts sector?



- Less than 1 in 2 describe access to development as good

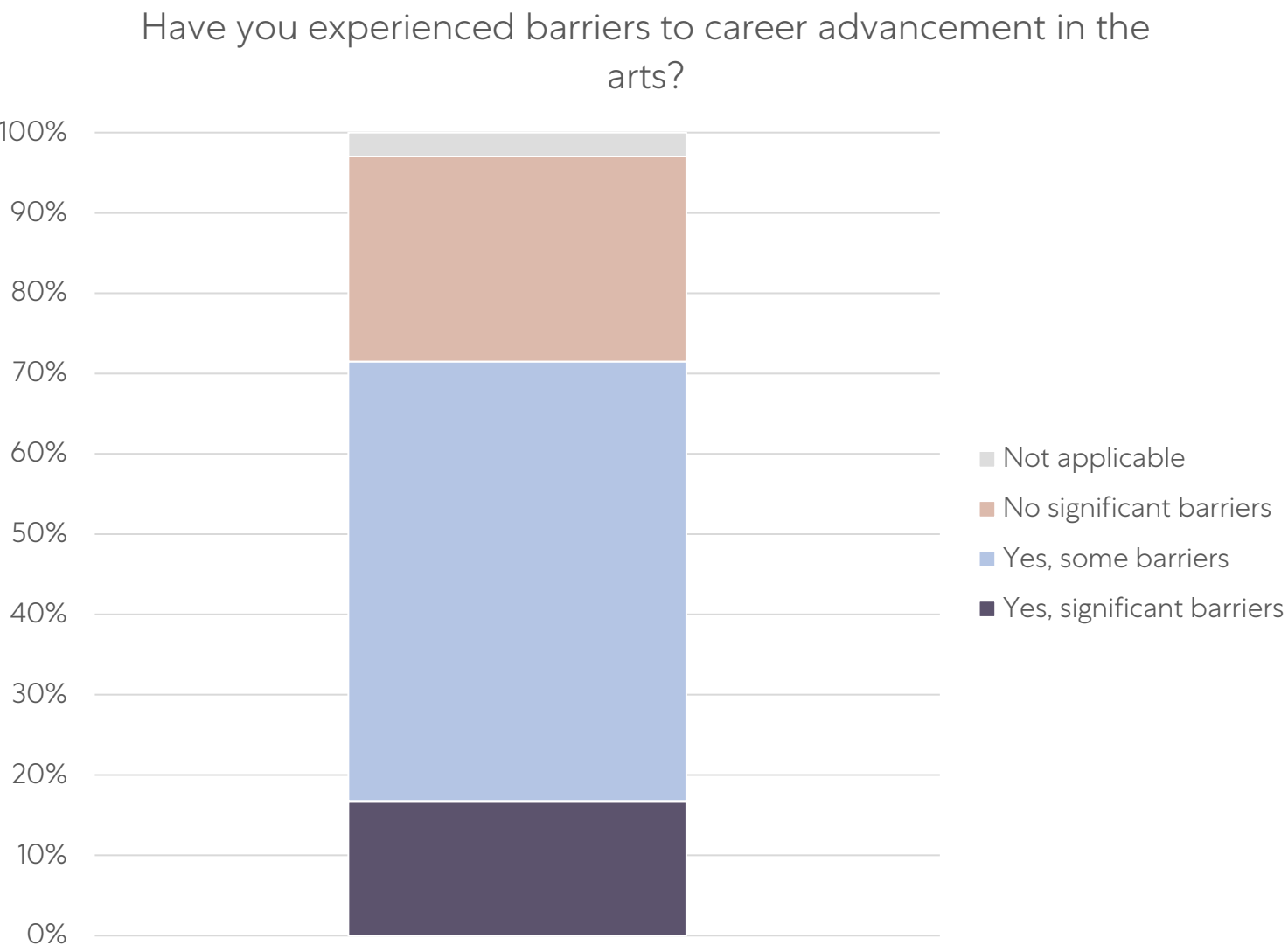
Types of Engagement to Develop Arts Career

Which of the following have you engaged in to develop your arts career? (Select all that apply)



- Participating in arts networks and communities (73%) remains the top type of engagement to develop careers

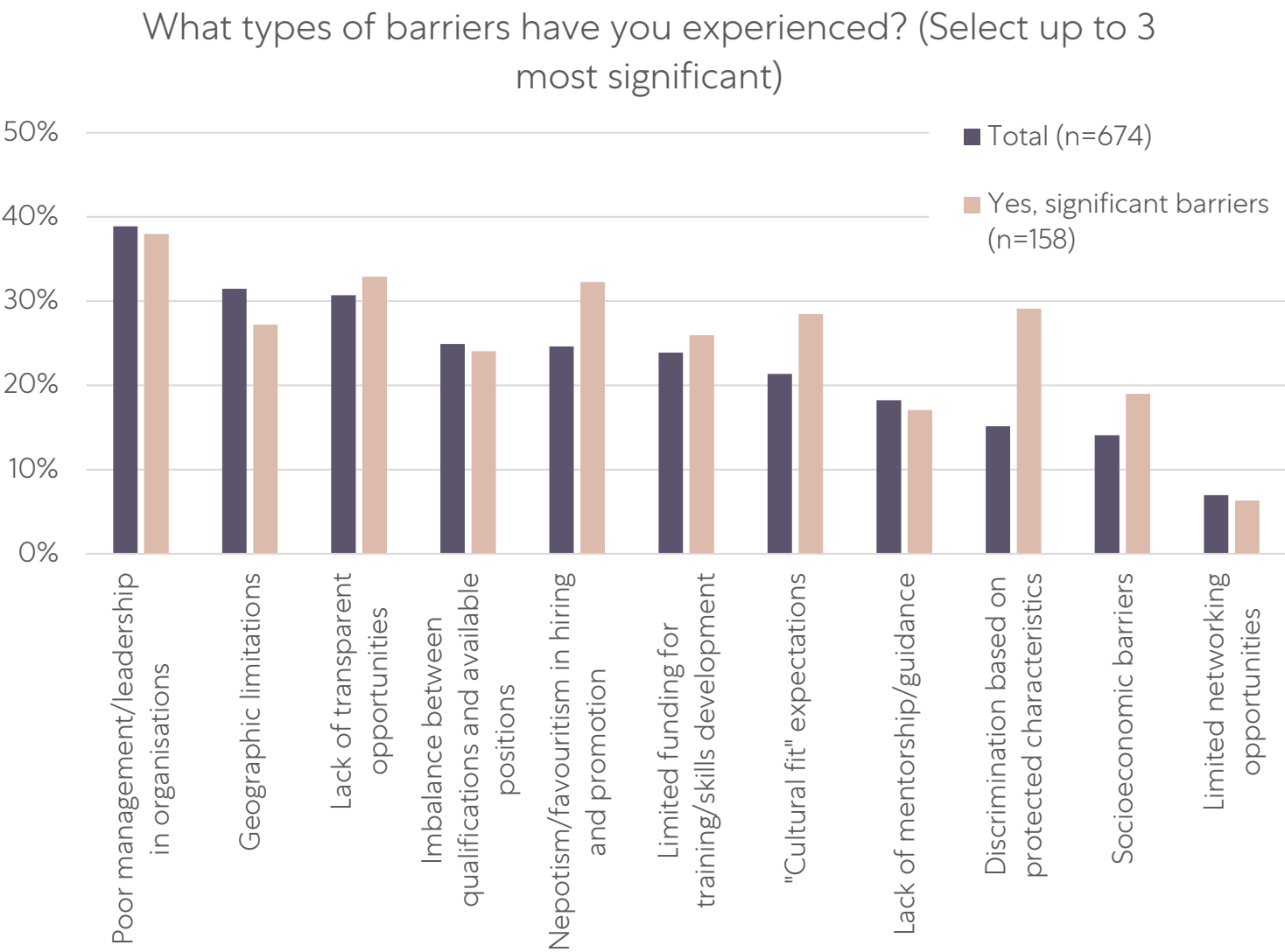
Experience of Barriers to Career Advancement



- Just over 70% have experience some barriers to career advancement with 17% experiencing significant barriers

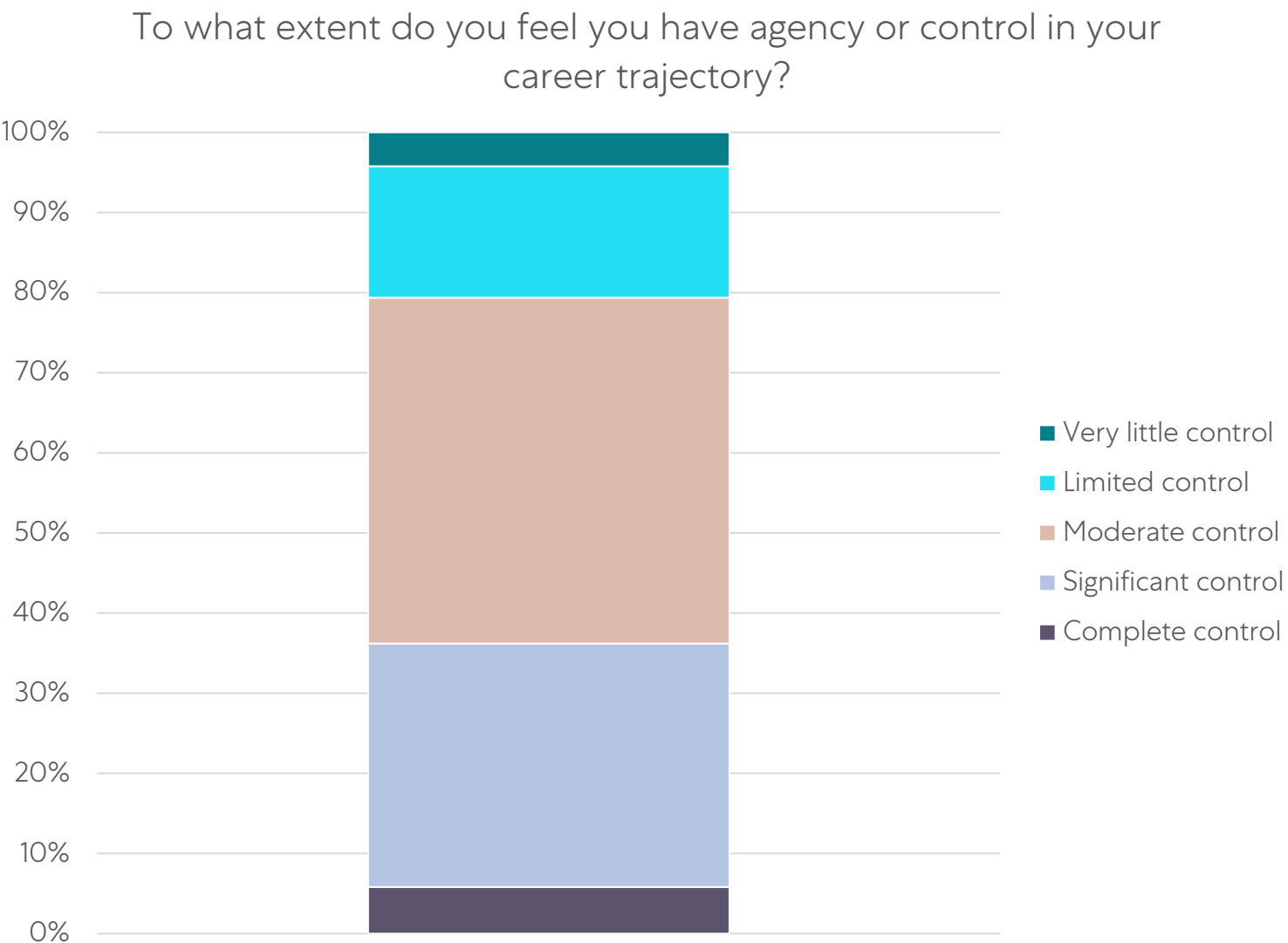
Types of Barrier Experienced

(By severity of barriers)



- Poor management/leadership is the top barrier (39%) followed by geographic limitations (31%) and lack of transparent opportunities (31%)

Agency or Control in Career Trajectory

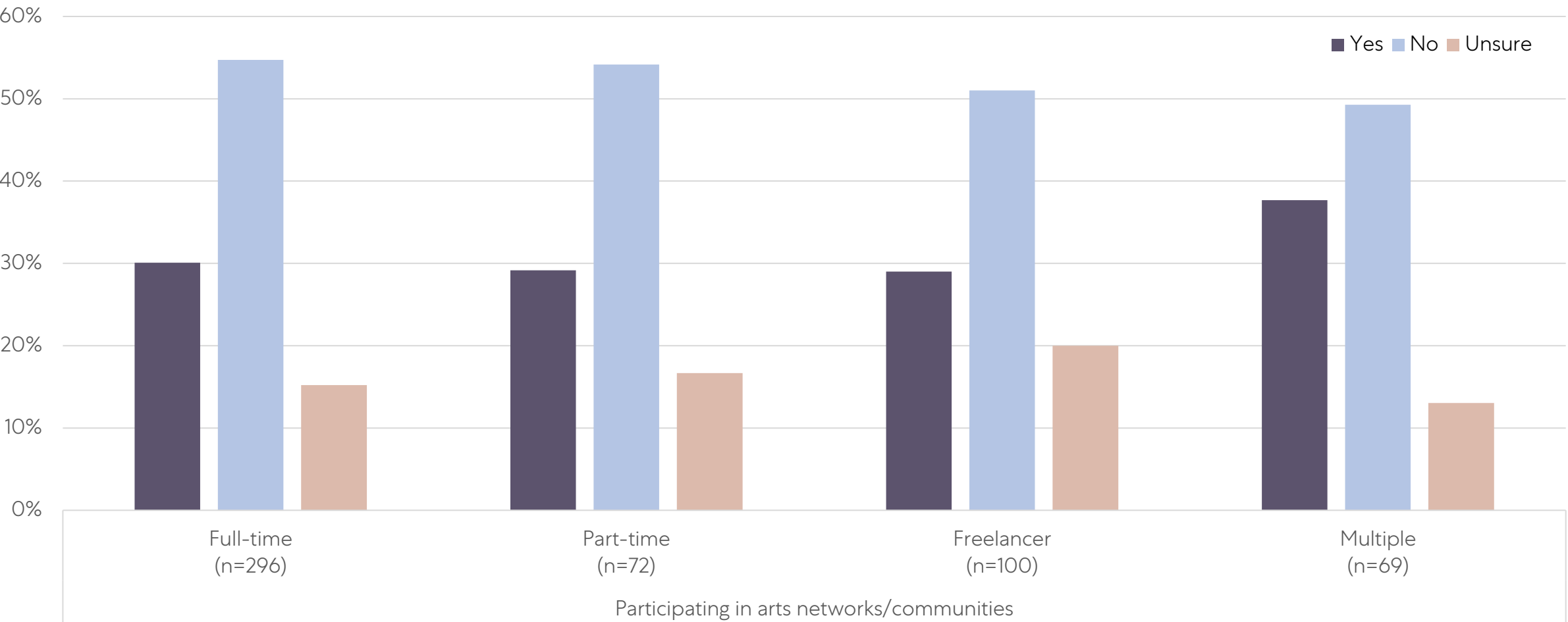


- About a third of respondents (36%) feel they have significant or complete agency or control in their career trajectory

Participation in Arts Networks/Communities

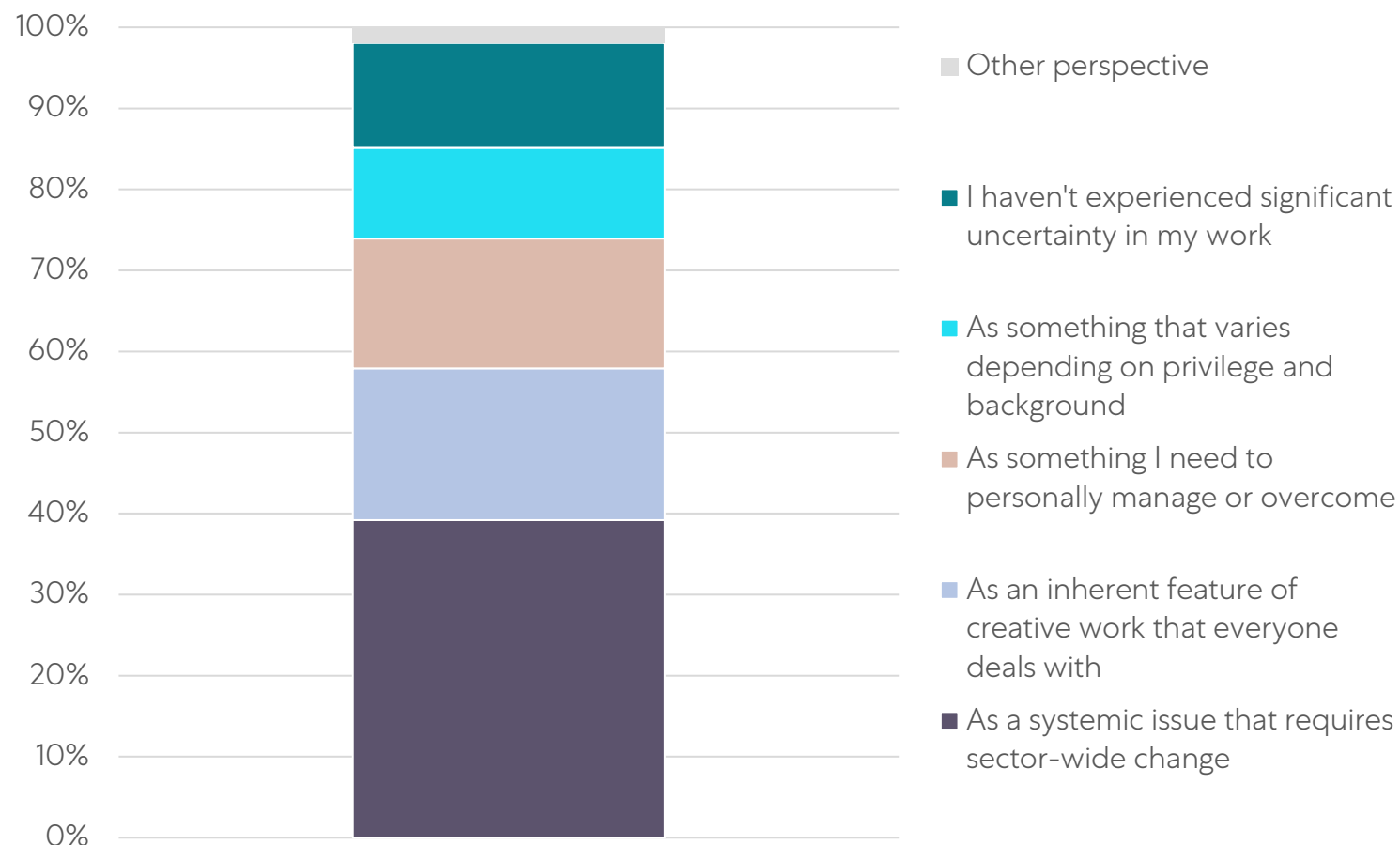
(By employment status and class)

Q2.4 "Participating in arts networks/communities" × Q1.1 "Employment status" × Q6 "Do you identify as working class?"



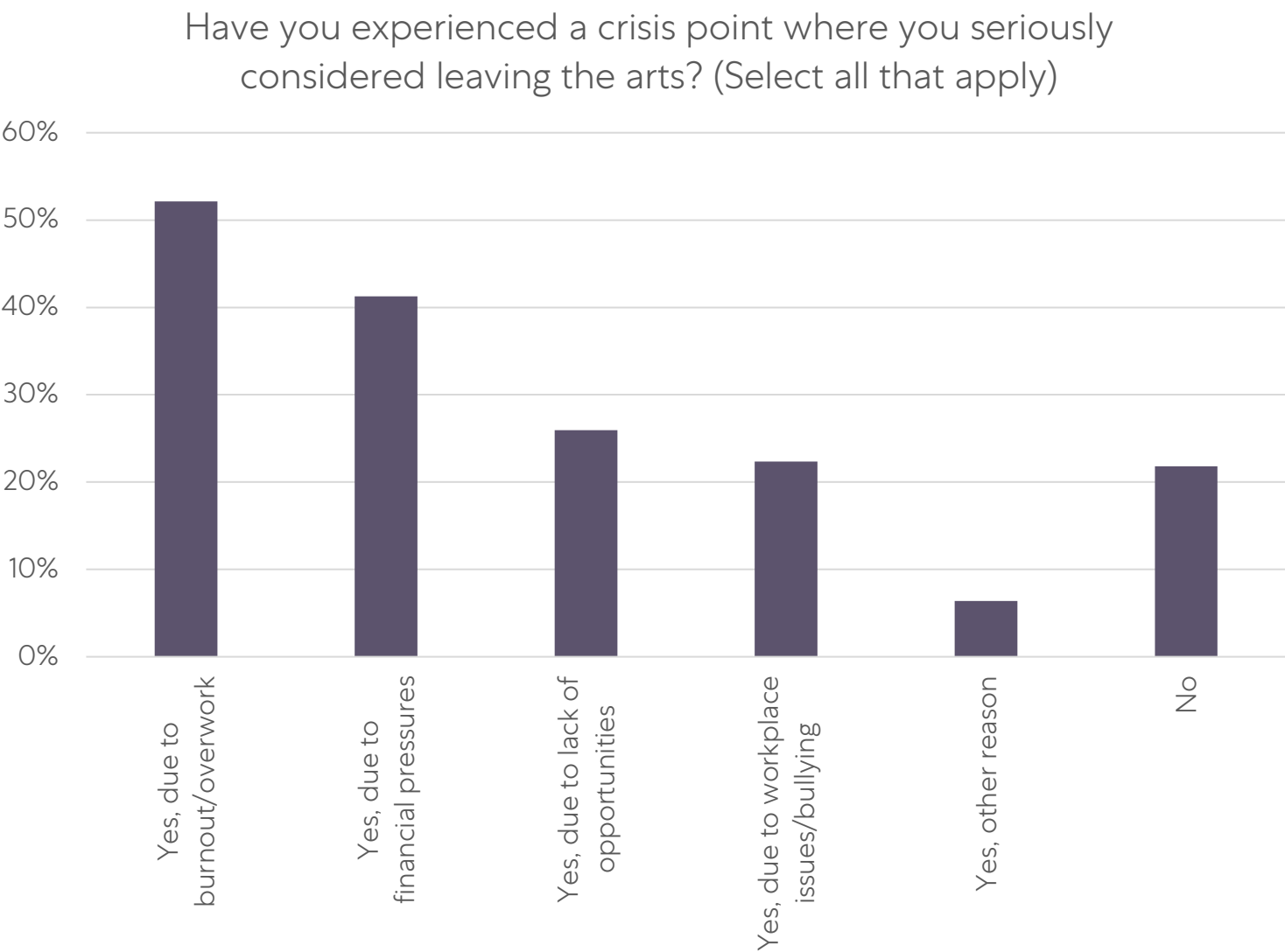
Experience of Work Uncertainty

When you experience work uncertainty in the arts (e.g., irregular income, short-term contracts, changing opportunities), how do you typically think about it?



- 39% see work uncertainty in the arts as a systemic issue that requires sector-wider change
- 19% see it as an inherent feature of creative work and 16% as something that needs to be personally managed or overcome
- Only 13% haven't experienced significant uncertainty in their work

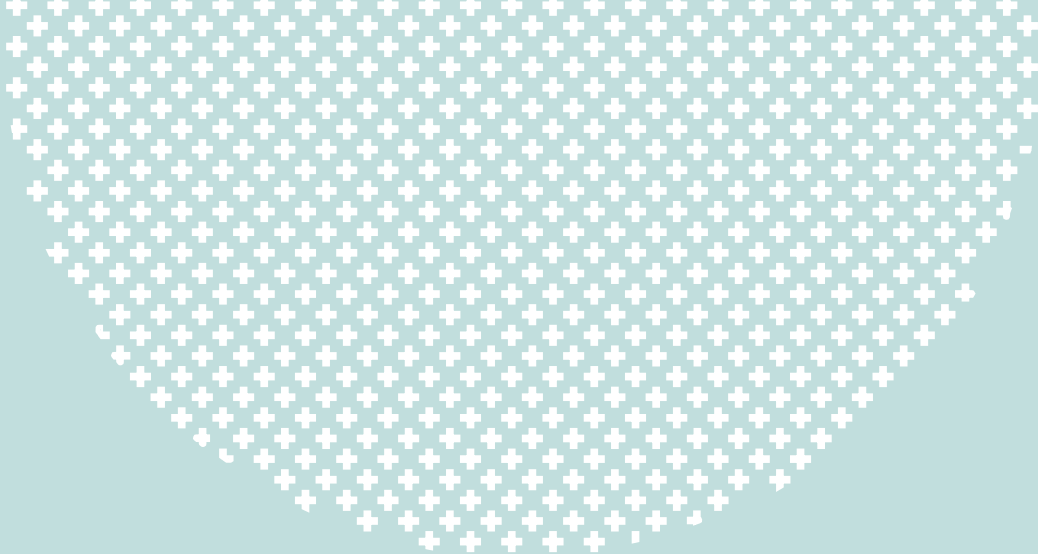
Crisis Point Experience



- Over half of respondents have experienced a crisis point where they seriously considered leaving the arts due to burnout/overwork
- Only 22% have never considered leaving the arts




Part 3: WORKPLACE CULTURE & TREATMENT



Chapter 5

Working Conditions & Wellbeing

Normalised Dysfunction



“I’ve worked in the arts for 25 years and found a distinct culture of burnout, tokenism, and abuse permeating the sector.”

Non-binary, 55–64, Working class, Full-time, Senior level



The culture
of work in
the arts too

often equates commitment with exhaustion. Burnout, unpaid overtime, and emotional overextension have become not just accepted but valorised, framed as proof of passion and professionalism. This “normalised dysfunction” has created a workforce that continues to produce at high creative levels while operating at the edge of personal sustainability.

Burnout as a Badge of Honour

In 2024–25, 72% of respondents reported sustained periods of high stress and 39% described poor work-life balance.

Workplace stress has been internalised as part of the job. For many, saying “no” to unrealistic workloads still carries stigma. The idea that “the show must go on” continues to rationalise chronic overwork and poor boundaries across employment types.

Boundaries and Leadership

While many workers attempt to set boundaries, leadership behaviour frequently undermines them. Only 35% said leadership consistently modelled healthy work-life balance, while 52% observed unsustainable practices from those in charge.

Where boundaries are respected, morale and retention improve, yet such examples remain the exception rather than the norm.

Mental Health and Emotional Labour

The arts sector's emotional intensity can be rewarding but also depleting. Workers described high personal investment, blurred professional-personal boundaries, and inconsistent access to wellbeing resources. Among salaried workers, access to healthcare and wellbeing support beyond statutory provision remains limited and unevenly distributed across organisations.

For freelancers, isolation compounds stress: many navigate crises without organisational infrastructure or peer safety nets.



"I have refused to install my work email on my personal phone. That's the boundary. It's not happening."

Woman, 35-44, Unsure class, Full-time, Middle Level

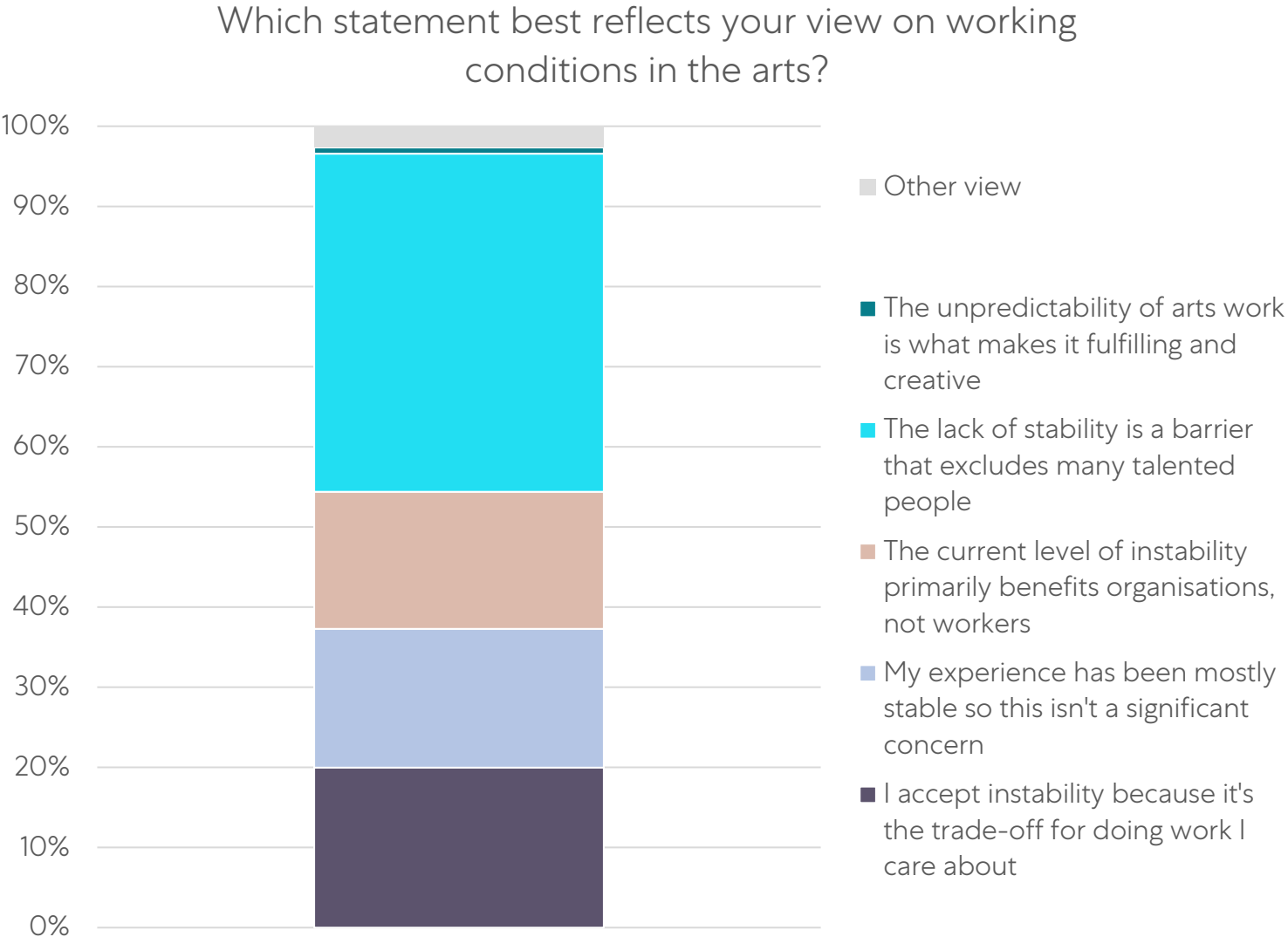
"Asked to make it standard that we should have a day off in lieu for a five-hour train journey working on a Saturday — declined."

Woman, 45-54, Full-time, Senior level

"The people really help — colleagues are warm and supportive. But events are programmed with no breaks. Burnout feels built into the calendar."

Woman, 35-44, Full-time, Middle level

Working Conditions in the Arts

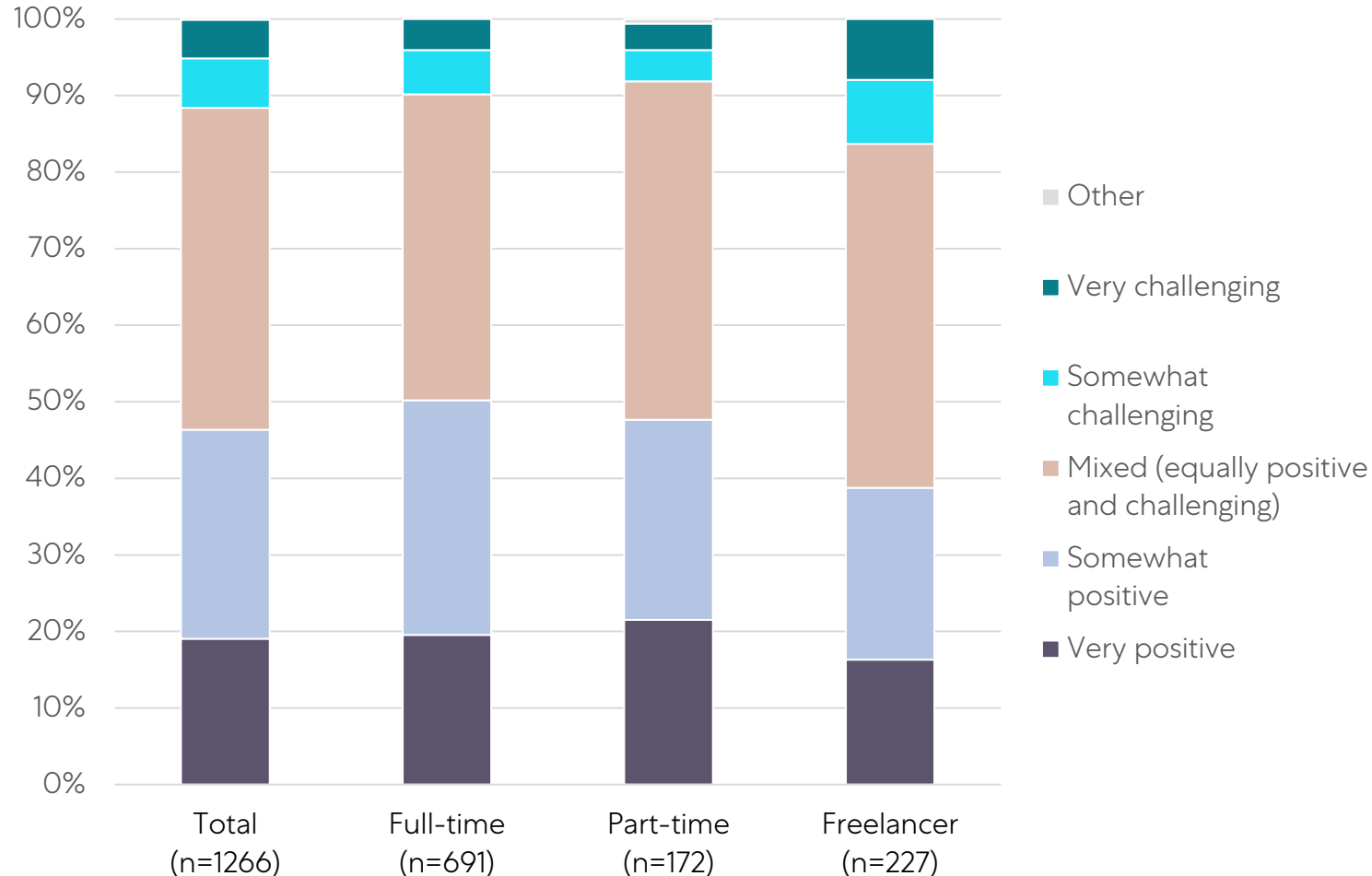


- 42% of respondents indicated that the lack of stability is a barrier is a barrier that excludes many talented people
- 20% accept that instability because it's the trade-off for doing work they care about
- While only 1% find the unpredictability fulfilling and creative

Overall Experience of Working in the Arts

(By employment status)

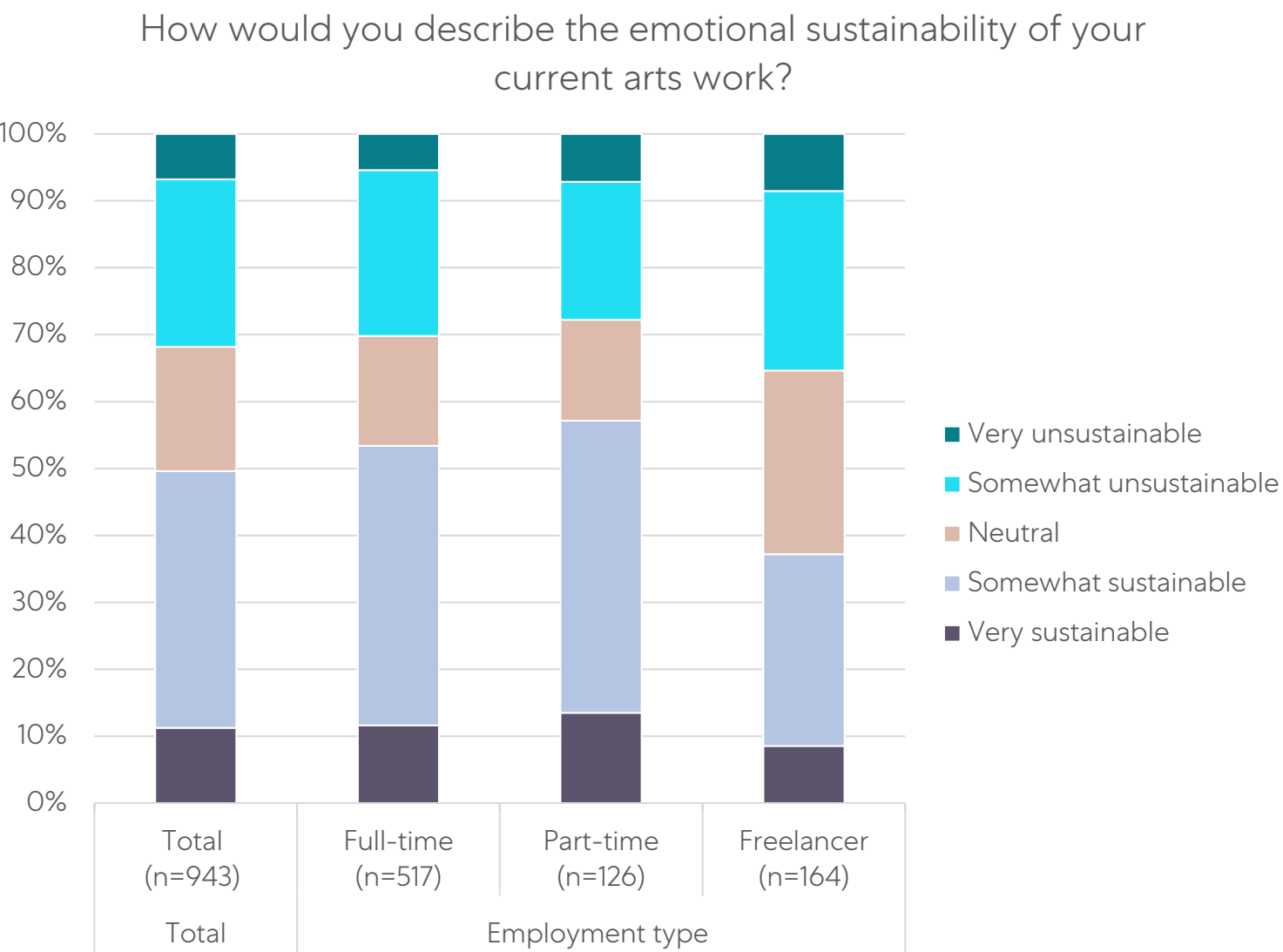
How would you describe your overall experience working in the arts and cultural sector?



- 46% of respondents report a somewhat positive or very positive experience of working in the arts
- This drops to 38% for Freelancers, who are more likely to report challenging experiences
- 42% say it is equally positive and challenging
- While 11% report that it is challenging or very challenging

Emotional Sustainability of Arts Work

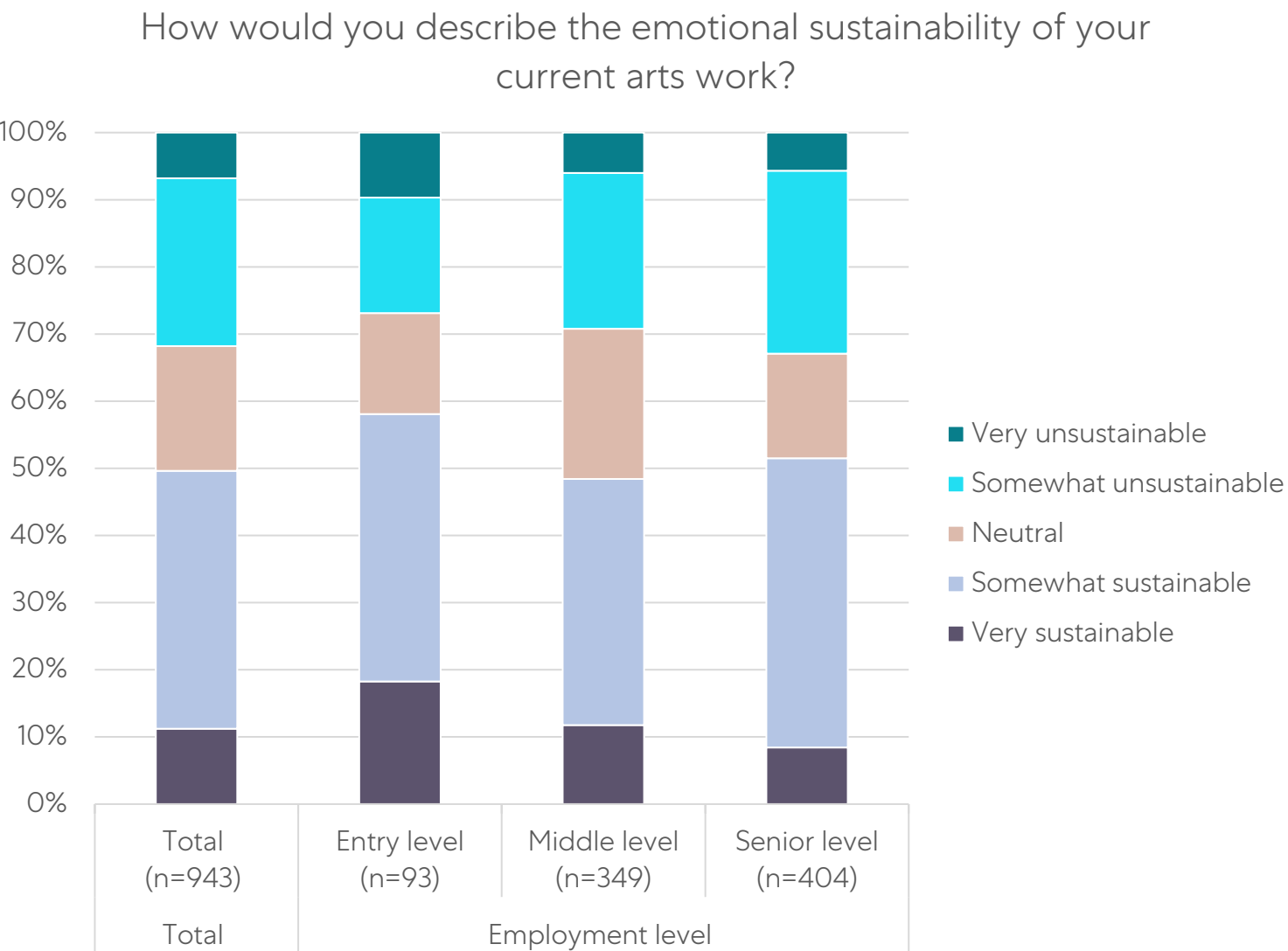
(By employment status)



- Freelancers report lowest emotional sustainability

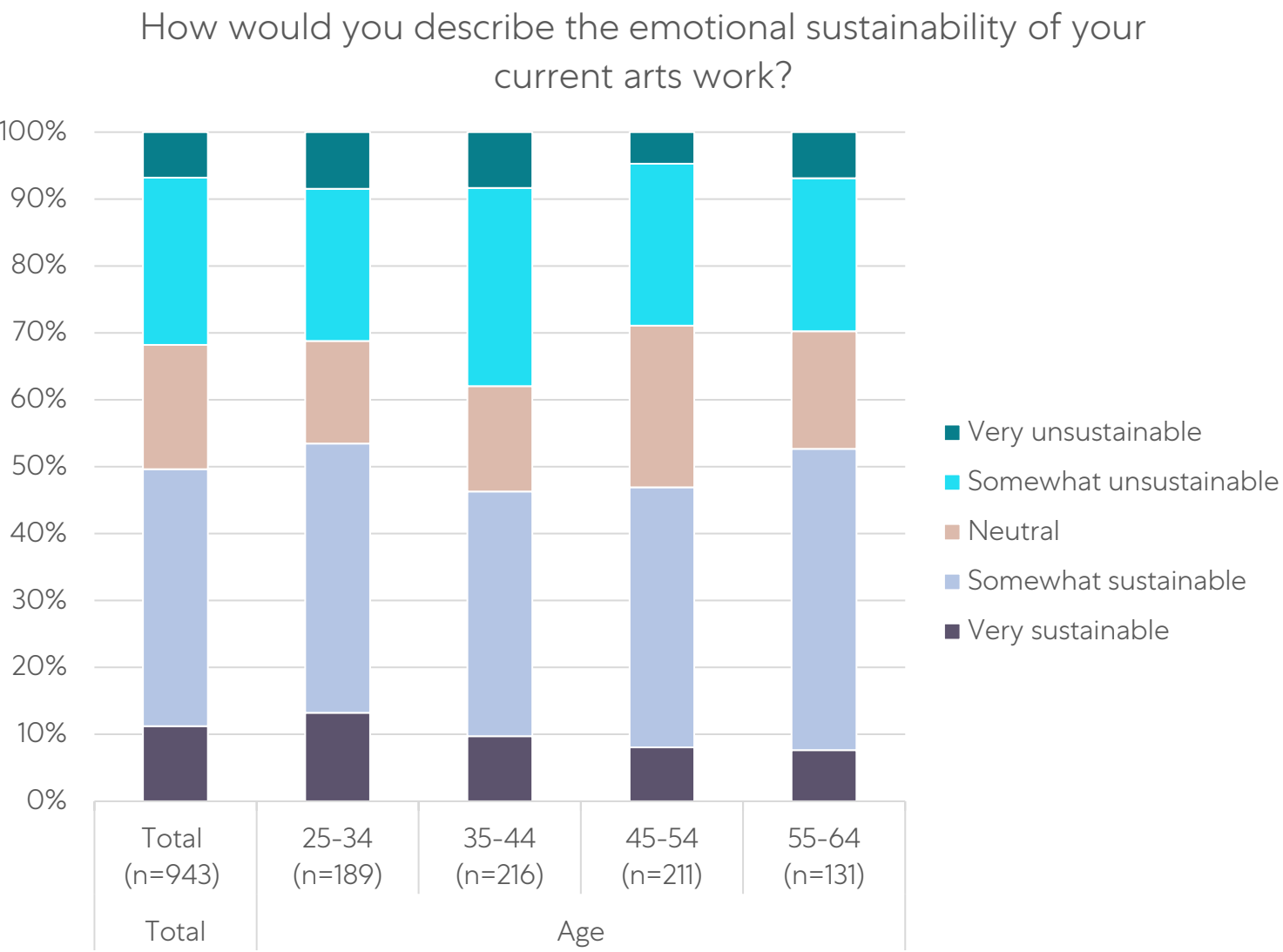
Emotional Sustainability of Arts Work

(By role level)



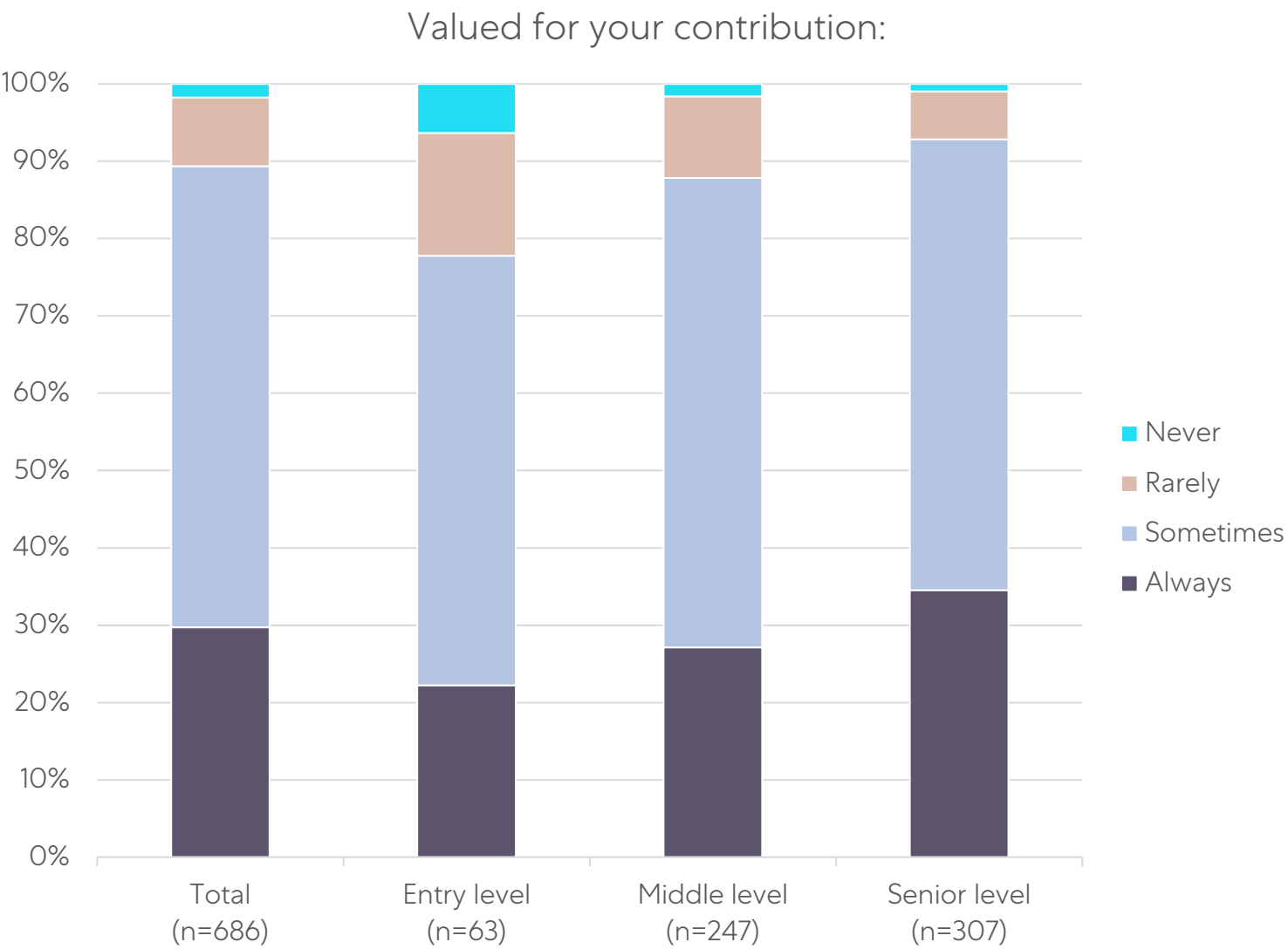
Emotional Sustainability of Arts Work

(By age)



Valued for Contribution

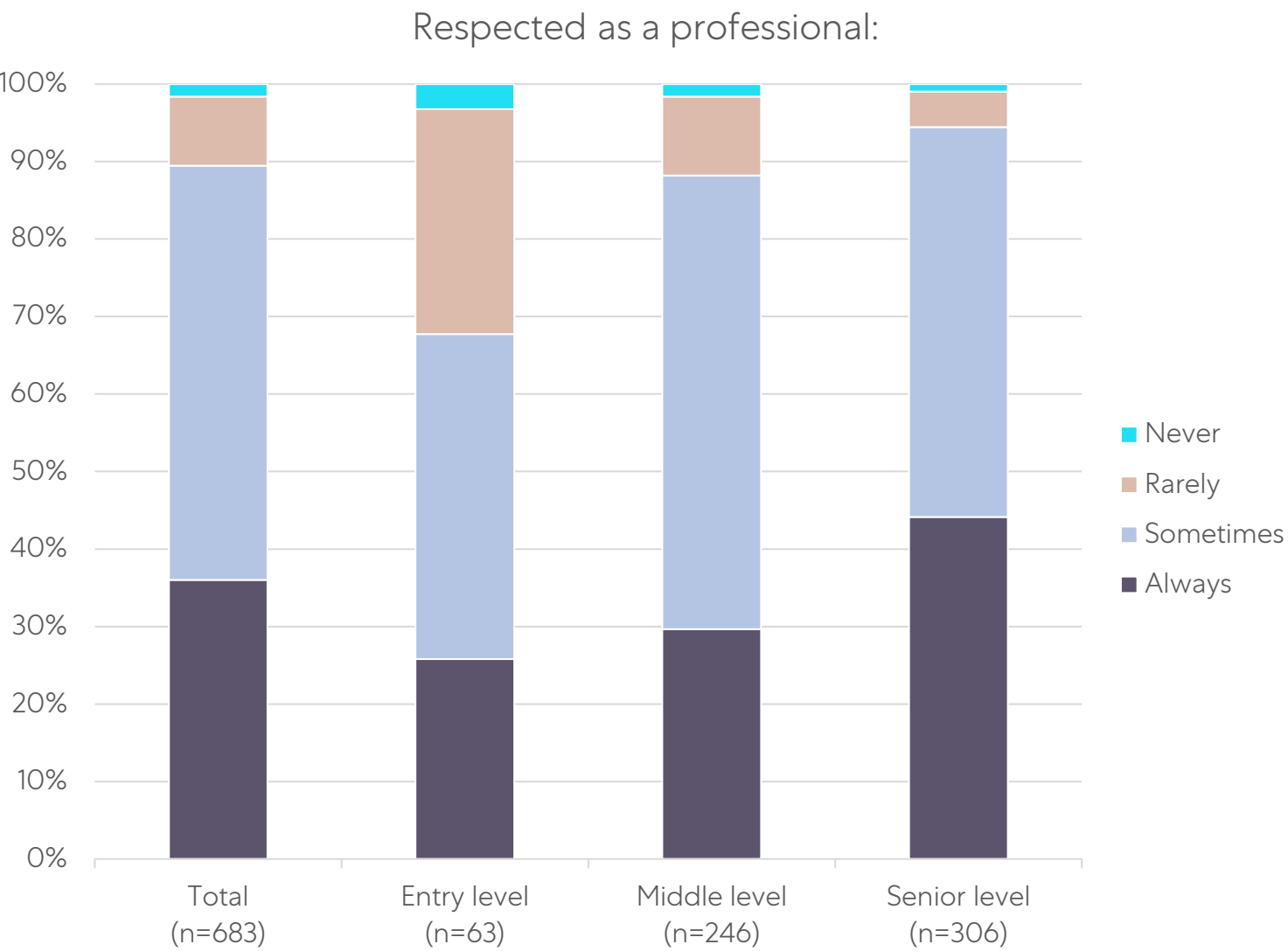
(By employment status)



- Just under a third (30%) say they always feel valued for their contribution, while the majority (60%) say sometimes
- Feeling valued increases with seniority

Respected as Professional

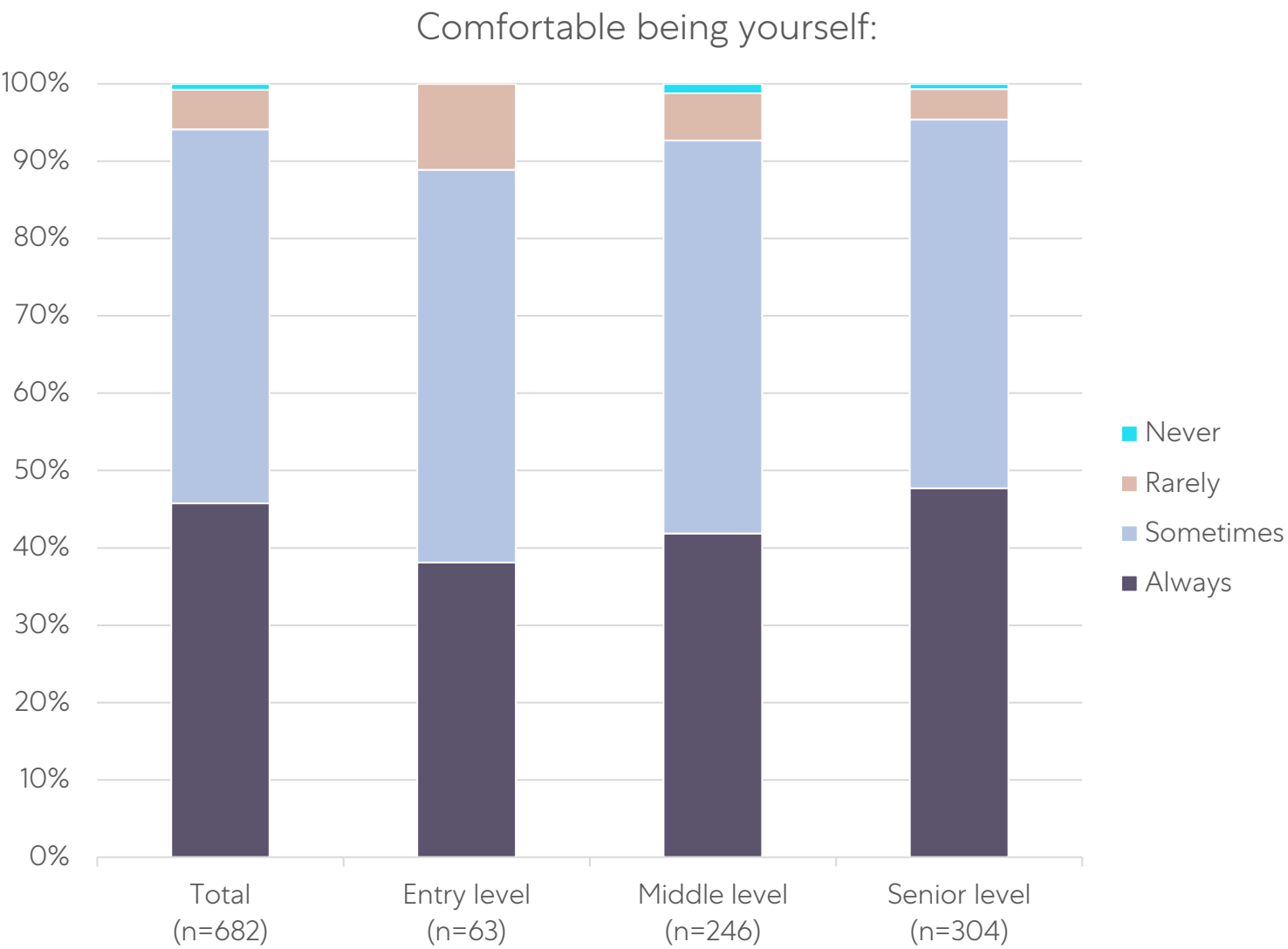
(By employment status)



- Just over a third (36%) always feel respected as a professional
- Entry level respondents are least likely to feel respected

Comfortable Being Yourself

(By employment status)

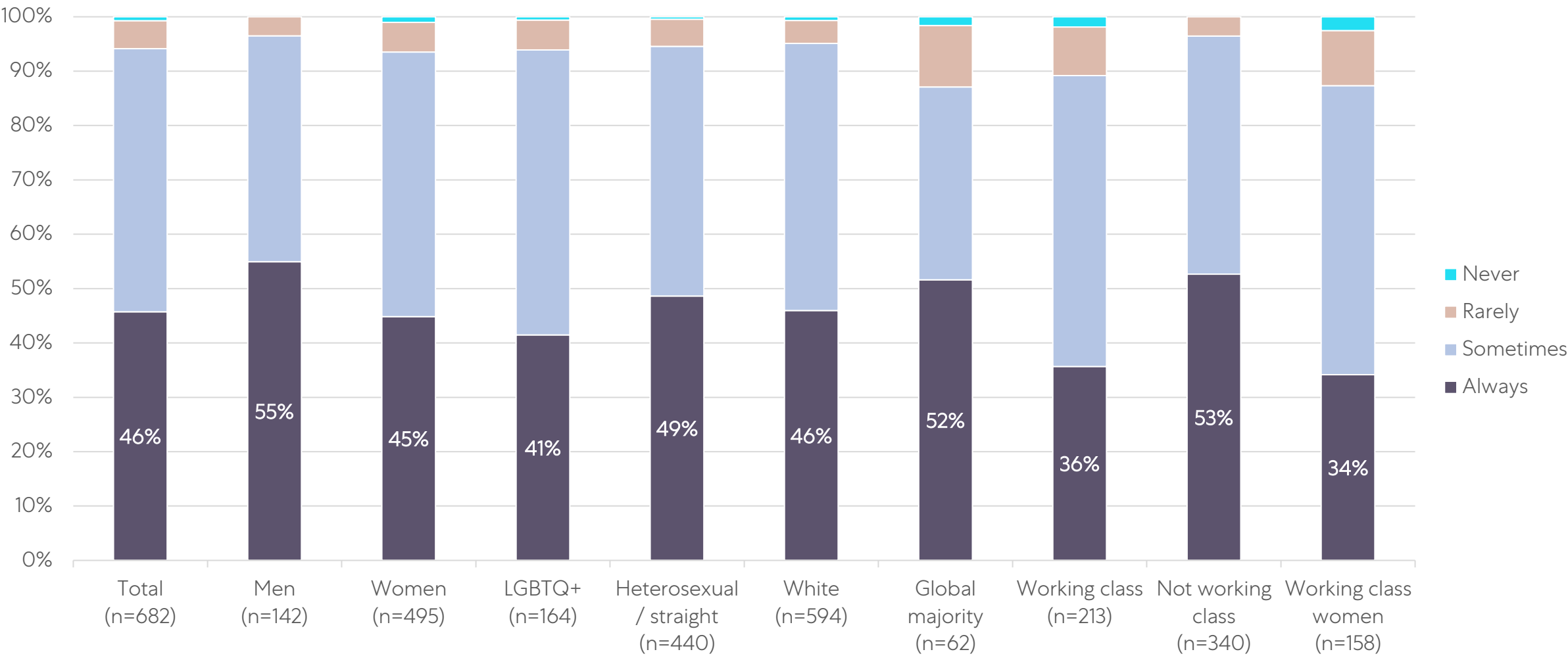


- Just under half (46%) feel comfortable being themselves
- This increases marginally with experience to 48% for senior level workers

Comfortable Being Yourself

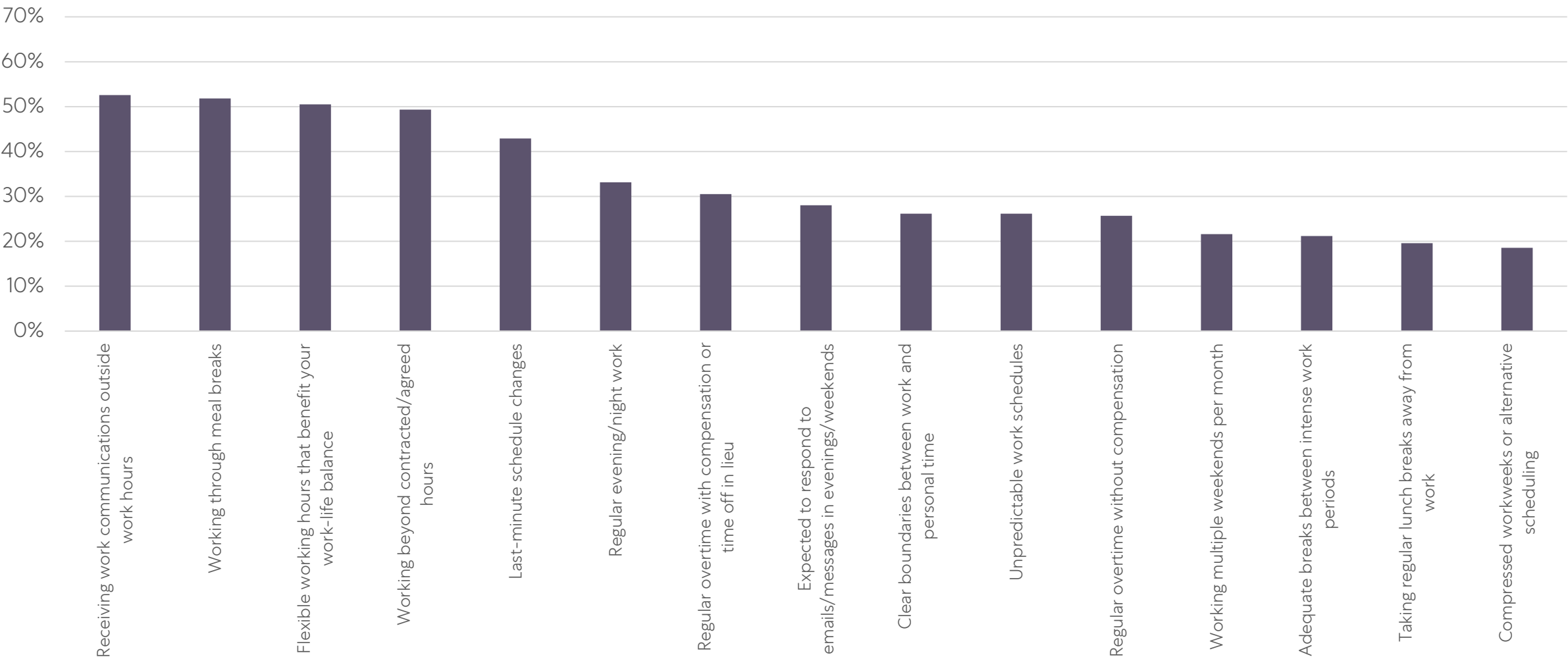
(By protected characteristic)

Comfortable being yourself:



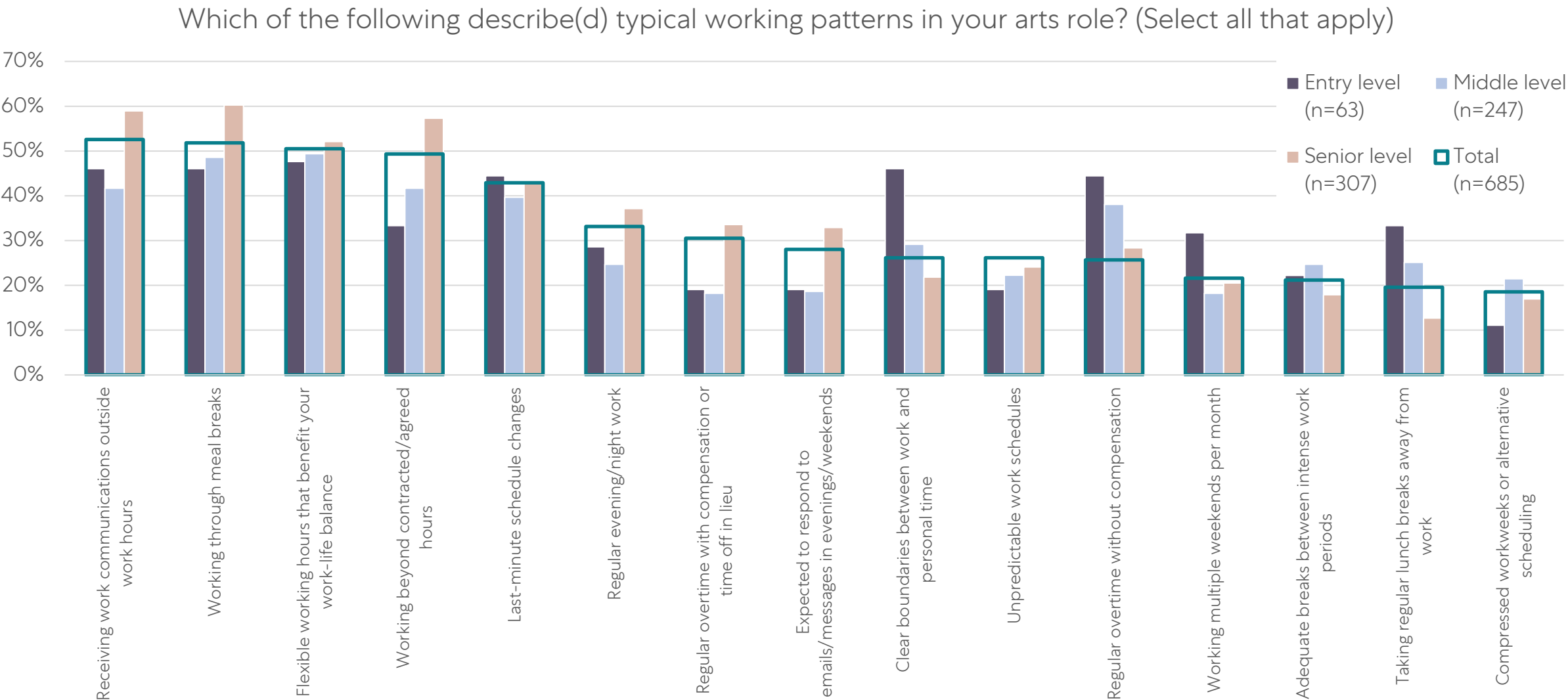
Working Patterns in Arts Role

Which of the following describe(d) typical working patterns in your arts role? (Select all that apply)



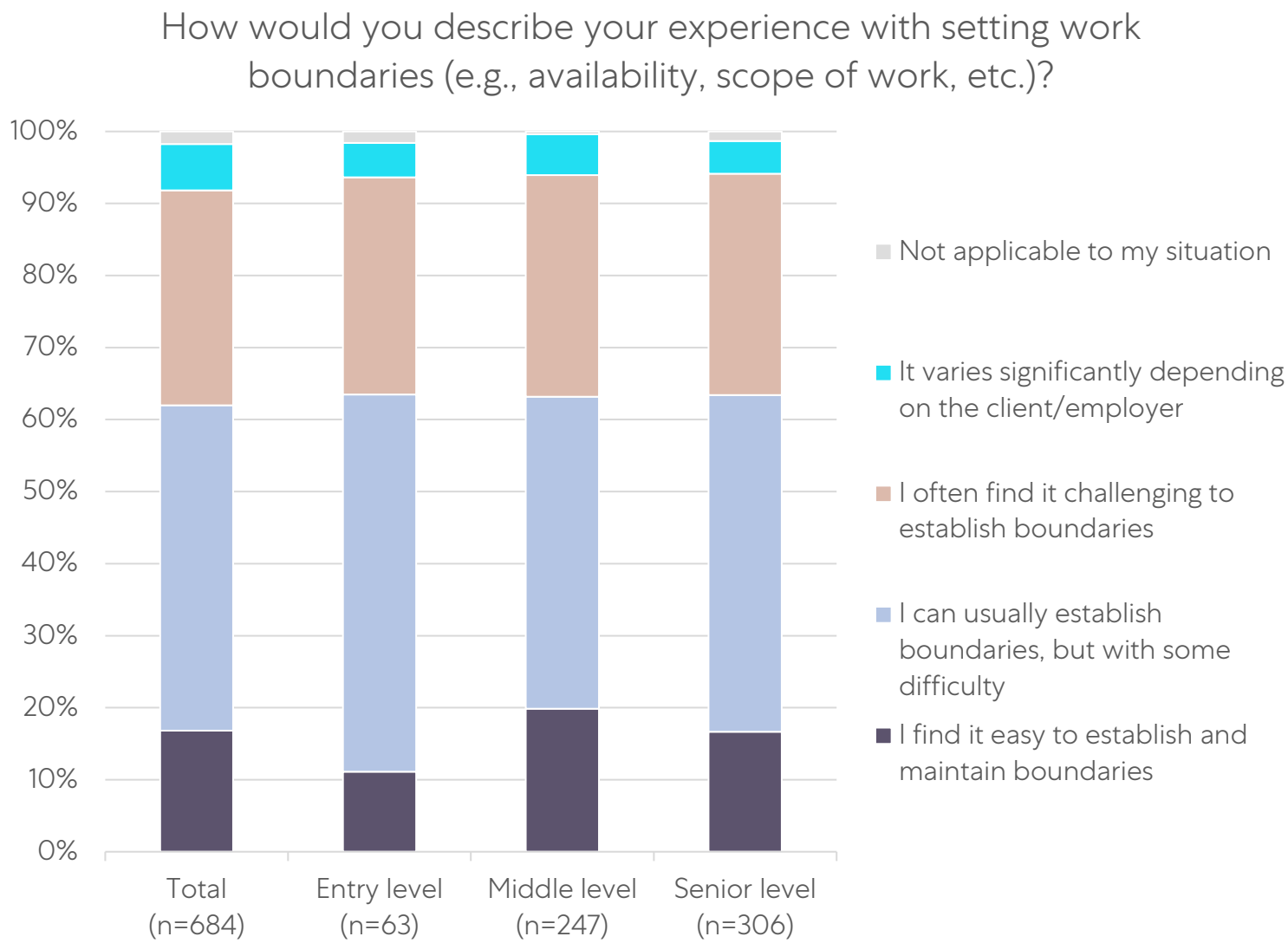
Working Patterns in Arts Role

(By role level)



Experience Setting Work Boundaries

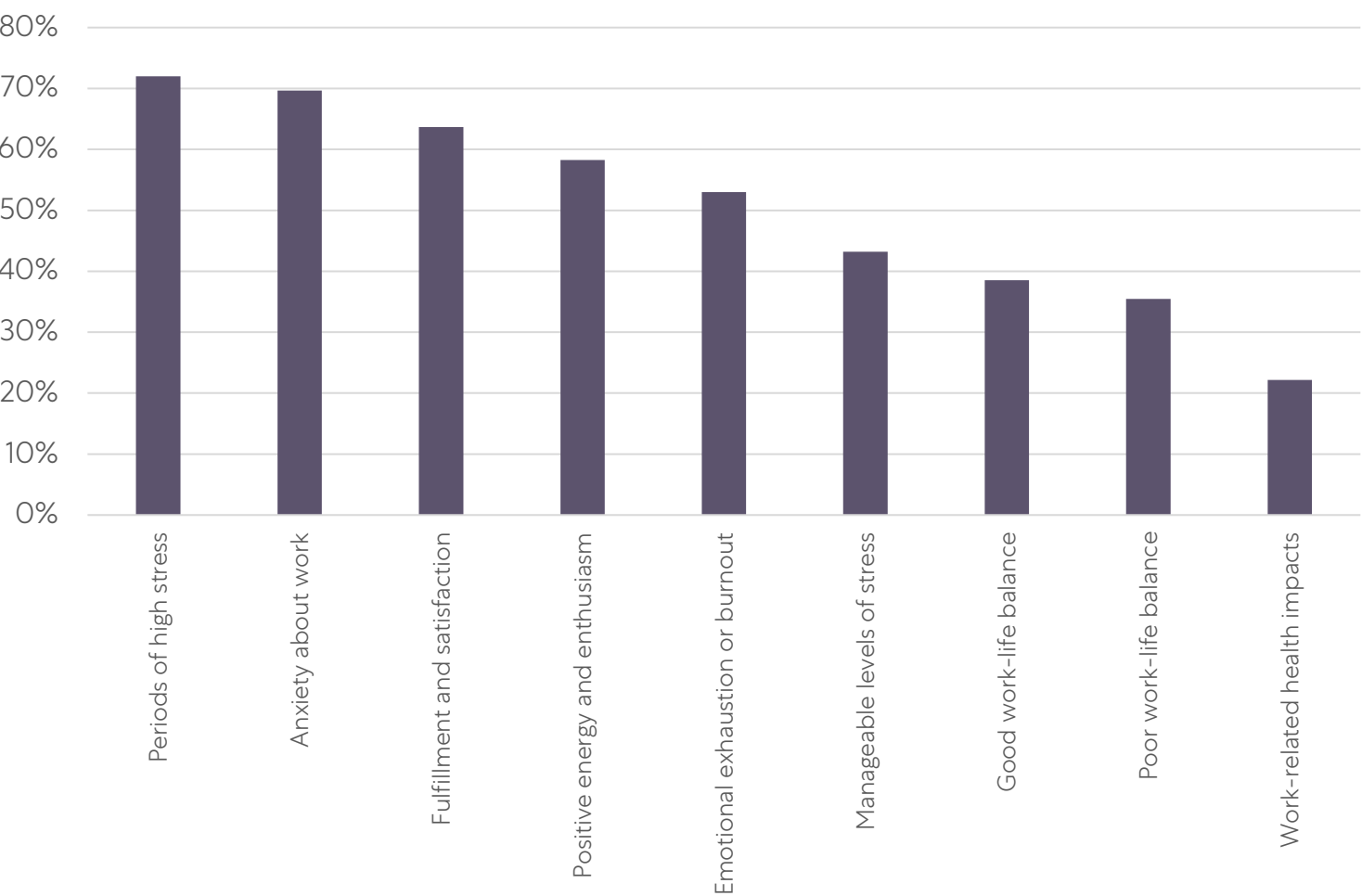
(By role level)



- The majority of workers have some difficulty in establishing boundaries

Experiences in Relation to Arts Work

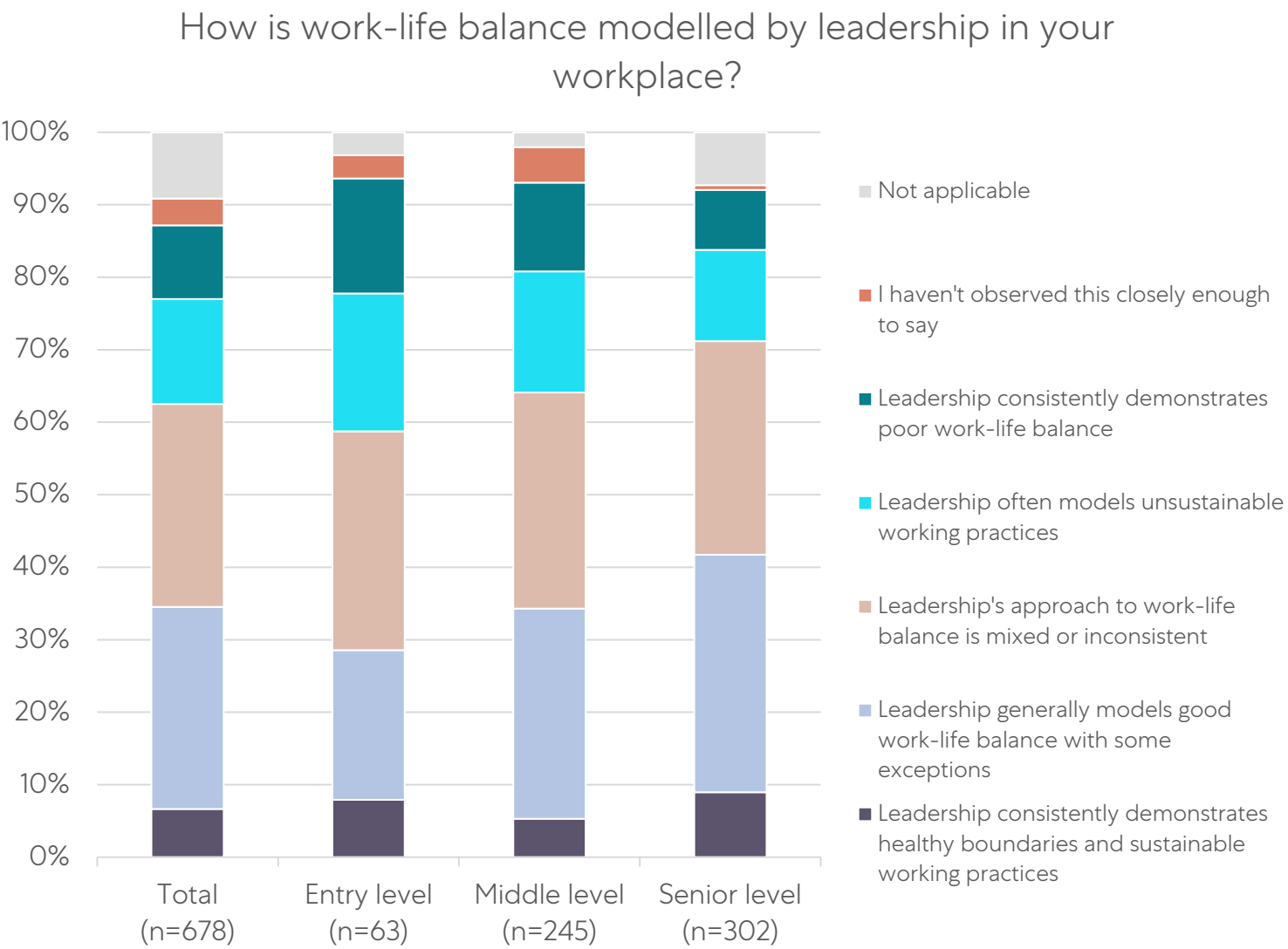
Which of the following have you experienced in relation to your arts work in the past year? (Select all that apply)



- 72% have experienced periods of high stress in the past year and 70% anxiety about work
- 64% have experienced fulfilment and satisfaction and 68% positive energy and enthusiasm

Work-life Modelling by Leadership

(By role level)



- About a third (35%) of respondents say that leadership generally or consistently models good work-life balance
- This increases to 41% among Senior level workers

Experience of Discussing Workplace Challenges






Chapter 6

Identity, Adaptation & Discrimination

Code-Switching for Survival



"I have recently decided to be who I am - use my original accent (Salford); dress in the way I want (appropriately, but colourfully!). I'm sure this gets in the way of getting work, but it's a lot better than feeling I'm twisting myself to try to fit in."

Woman, 45-54, Working class, Freelance, Senior level



Beneath the arts' progressive

image, many workers still adapt or suppress aspects of their identity to “fit in.” Class, region, accent, disability, and neurodivergence all shape experiences of belonging. “Code-switching”, modifying speech, behaviour, or self-presentation, has become an unspoken survival strategy in professional arts spaces.

Adapting to Belong

Around 62% of workers report adapting how they speak, dress, or behave to be accepted professionally. For many, this is not empowerment but exhaustion.

Those from working-class or regional backgrounds often described losing their accent or masking their roots to gain respect, while neurodivergent workers spoke of the toll of constant masking, particularly in leadership positions.

Discrimination and Visibility

34% of respondents experienced direct discrimination in their arts work, and 28% had witnessed it.

Class bias intersects with race, gender, and disability, creating layered exclusion. Leadership diversity remains limited: most respondents, especially from working-class, global majority, or LGBTQ+ backgrounds, rarely see people like themselves in senior roles.

The Cost of Fitting In

Adapting to institutional cultures may open doors but often at the expense of authenticity and wellbeing. Many participants described feeling “split” between personal identity and professional persona, a subtle but cumulative strain that contributes to disengagement and sector attrition.



“Had to lose my accent so people would respect me and believe what I said at work.”

Woman, 25–34, Working class, Full-time, Entry level

“As an autistic worker, I mask constantly. Even more at executive level — it’s toxic and exhausting.”

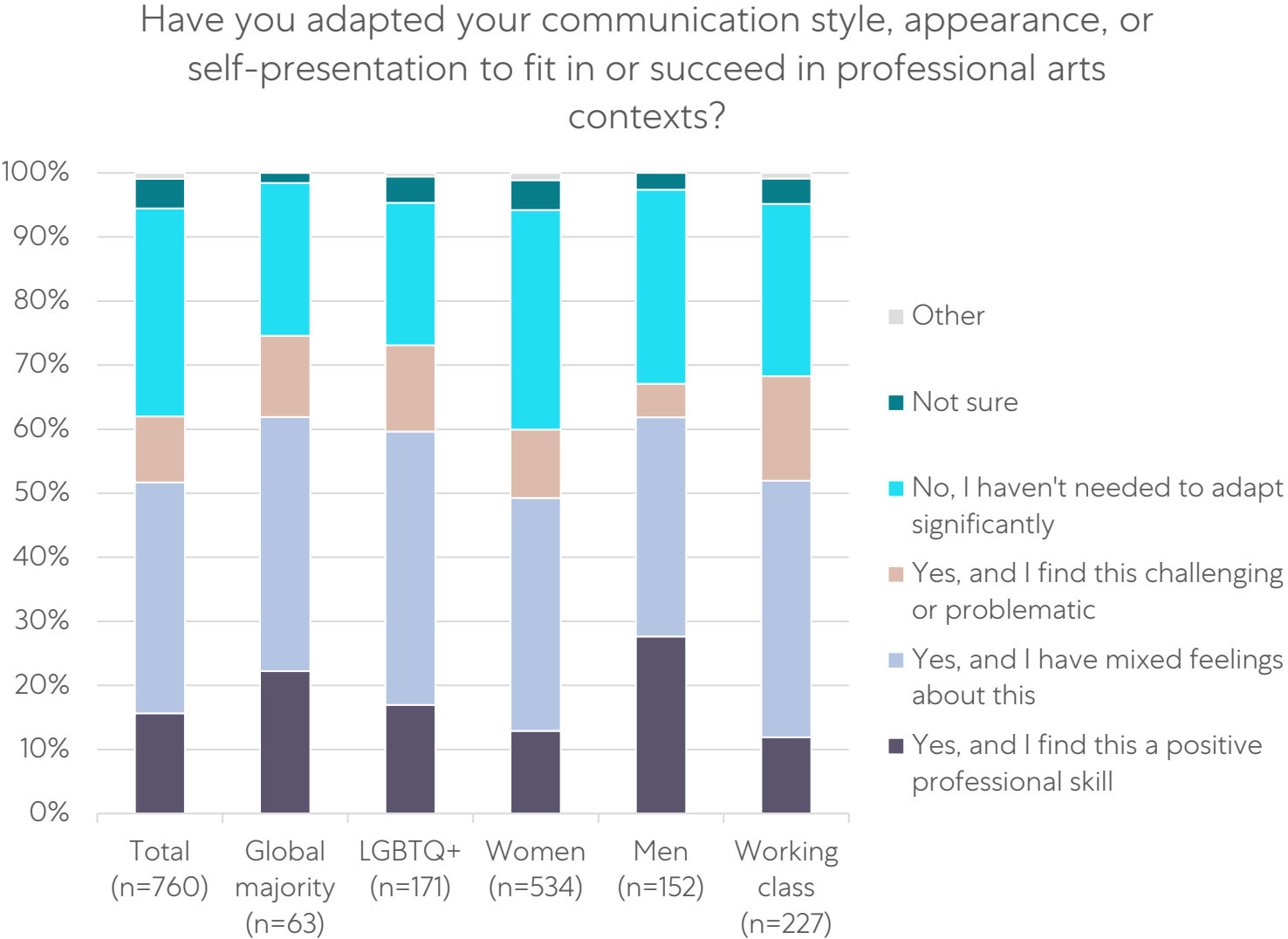
Non-binary, 45–54, Working class, Full-time, Senior level

“I’ve hidden that I’m LGBTQ+ and a single parent until after securing a job. I hide my accent at events.”

Woman, 45–54, Full-time, Senior level

Adapted Style, Appearance, Presentation

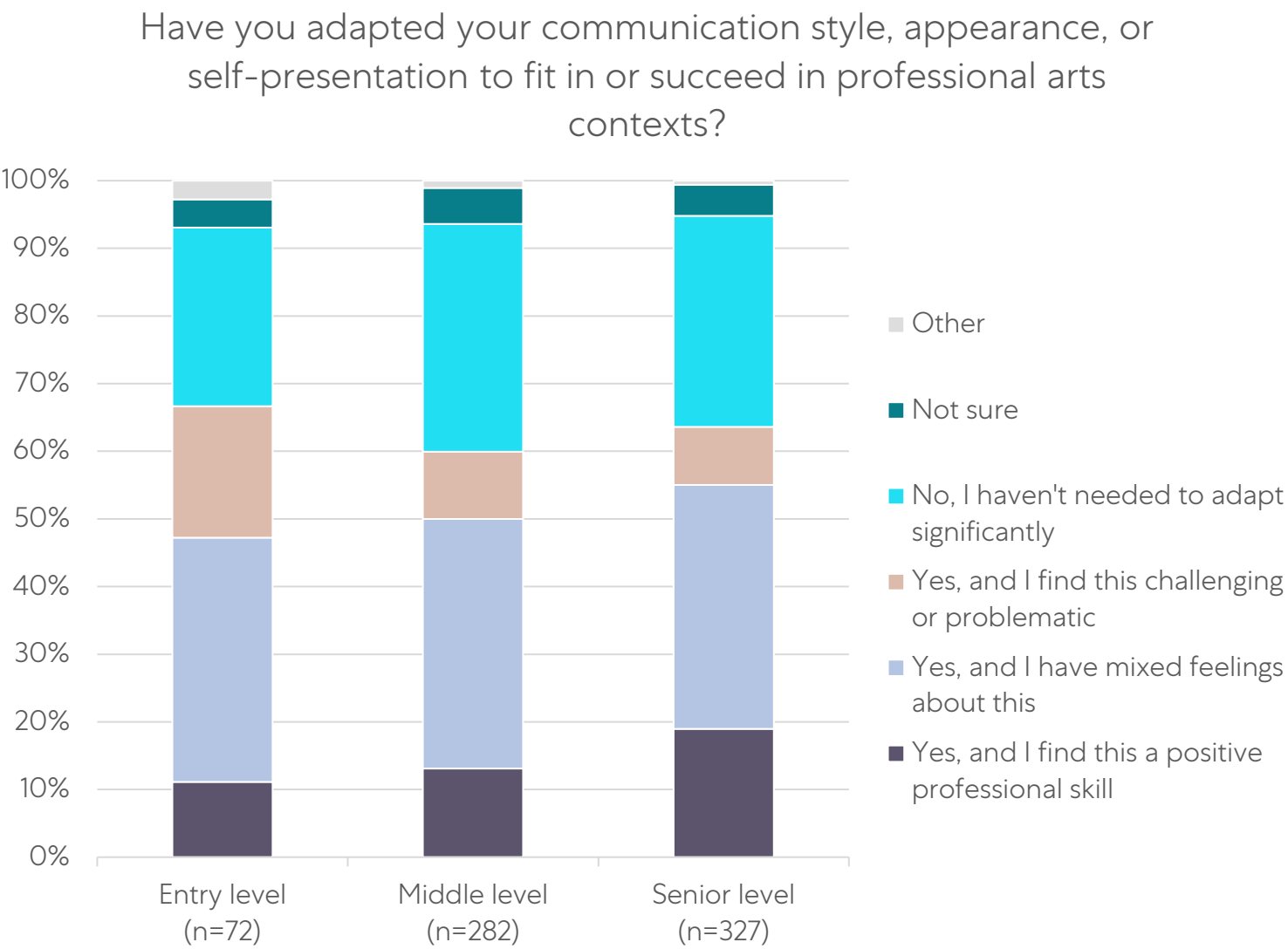
(By protected characteristic)



- Over 60% of respondents have adapted their communication style, appearance or presentation to fit in with 16% saying they find this a positive professional skill
- This rises to 74% for global majority, 72% for LGBTQ+, and 68% for working class respondents

Adapted Style, Appearance, Presentation

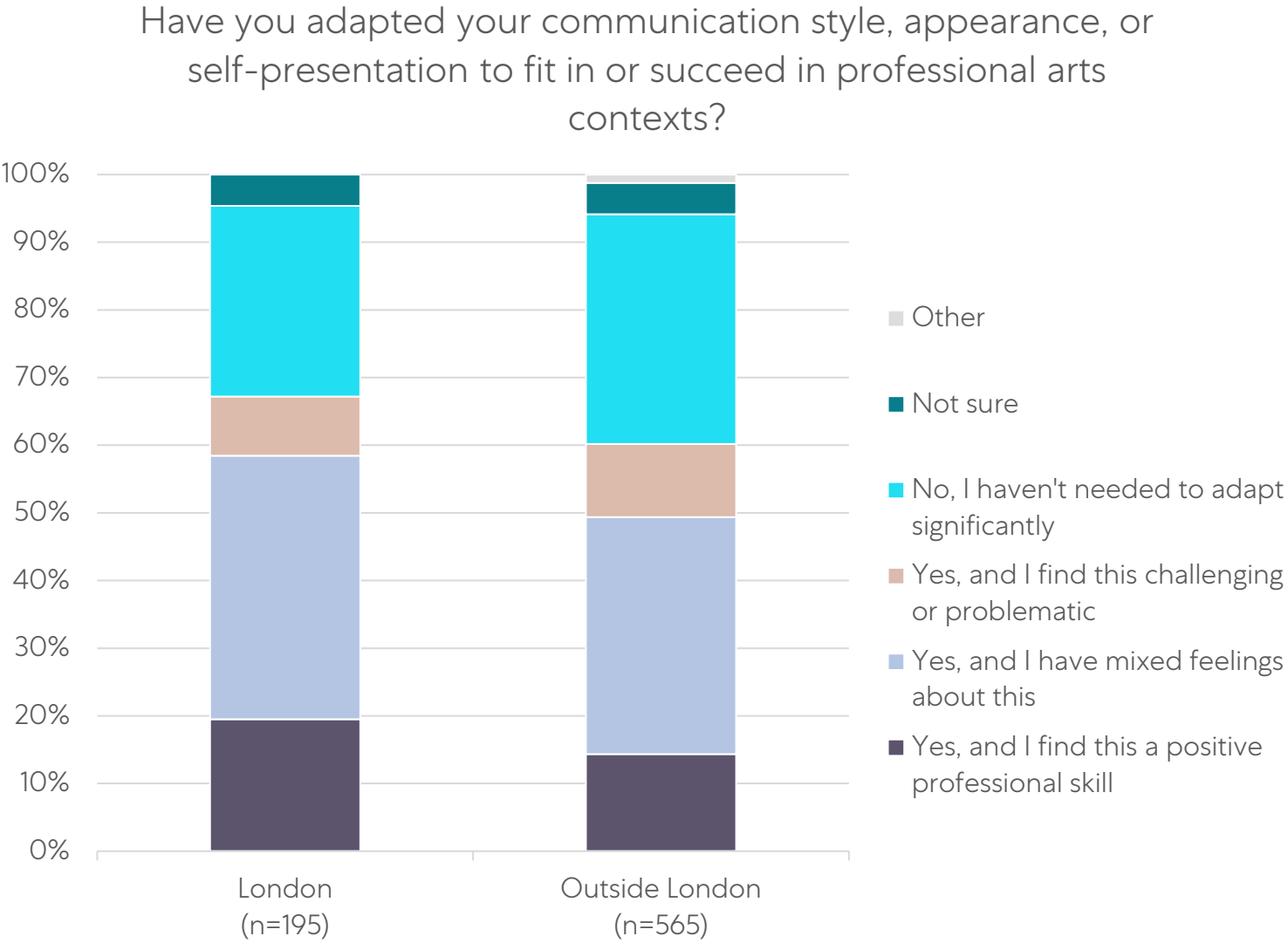
(By role level)



- Entry level respondents are more likely to find adapting to fit in challenging or problematic (19%) than middle and senior level respondents

Adapted Style, Appearance, Presentation

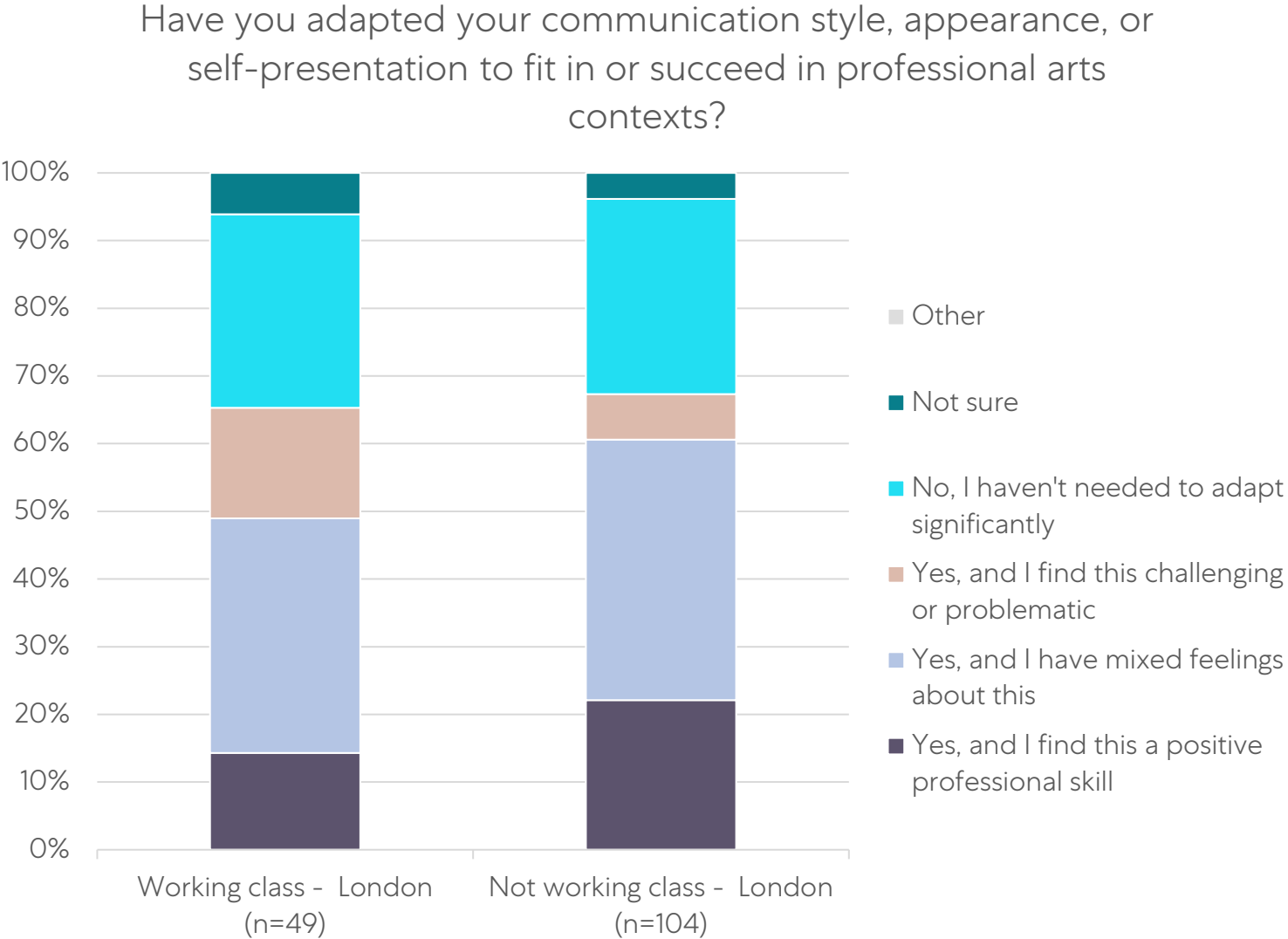
(By location)



- Within London, adapting to fit in is higher (68%) than outside (60%), but a higher proportion also see it as a positive skill (20% vs 14%)

Adapted Style, Appearance, Presentation

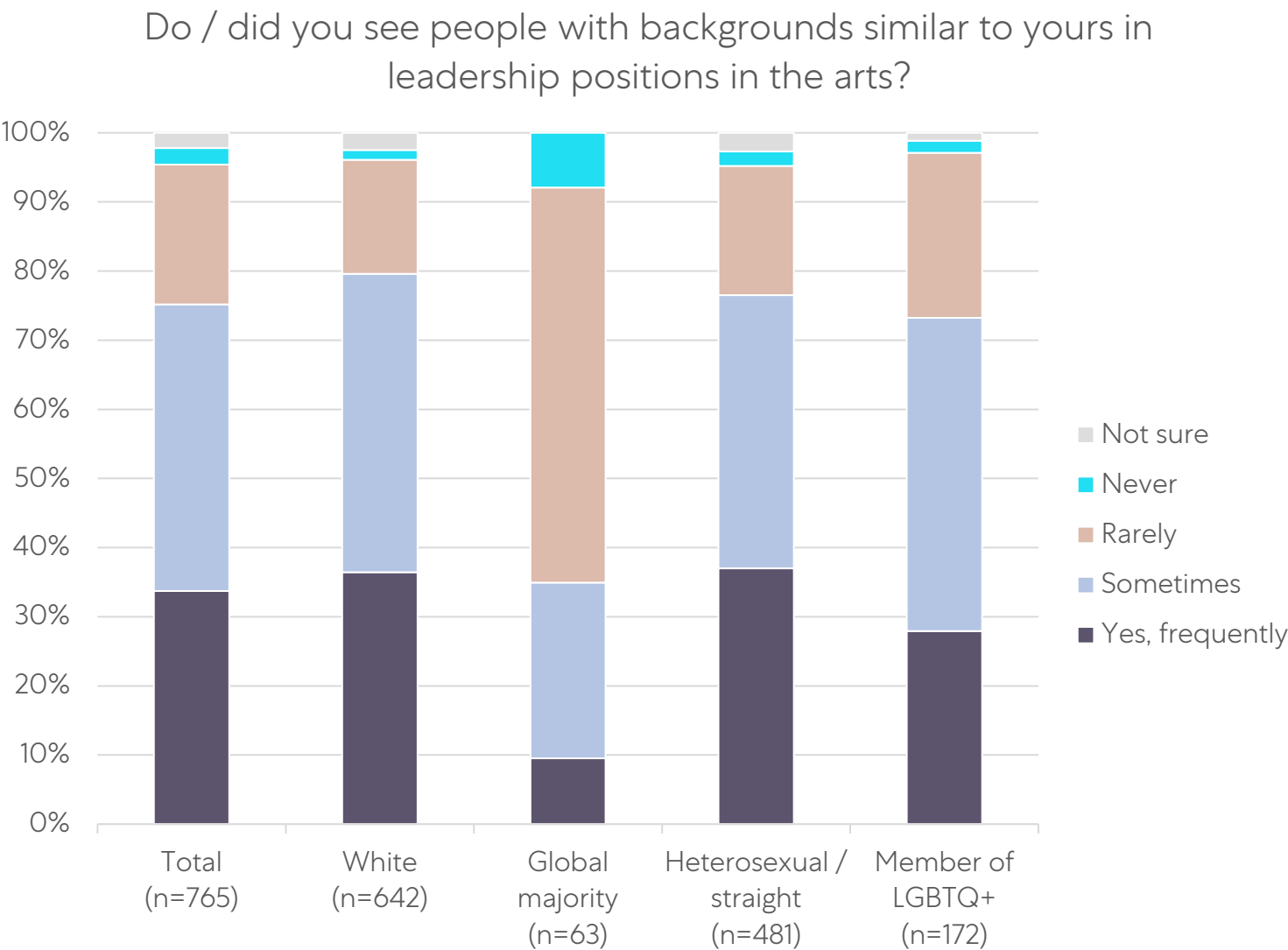
(By protected characteristic)



- Working class respondents in London are less likely to see adapting to fit as positive (14%) than non working class respondents (22%)

Similar Backgrounds in Leadership Positions

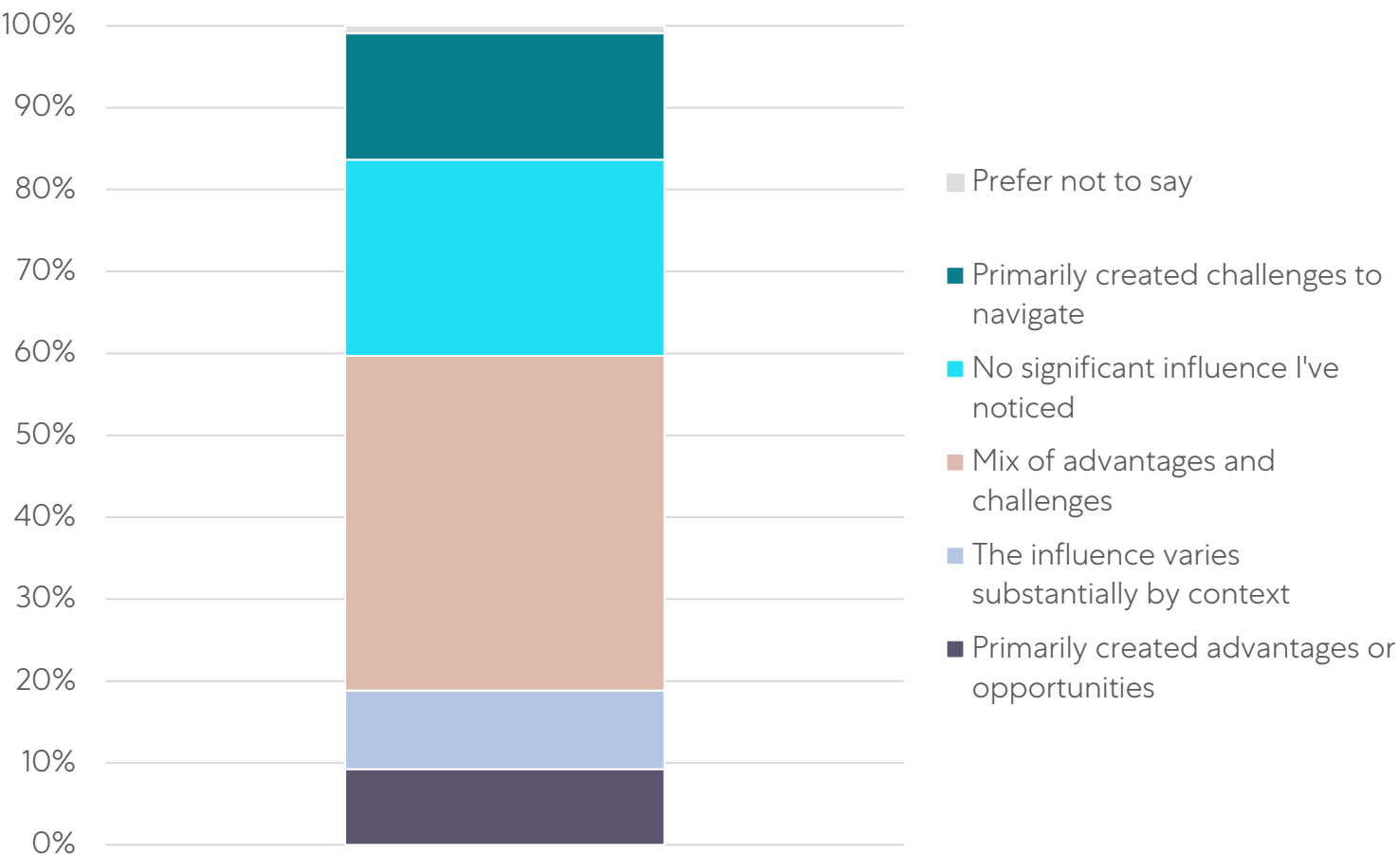
(By protected characteristic)



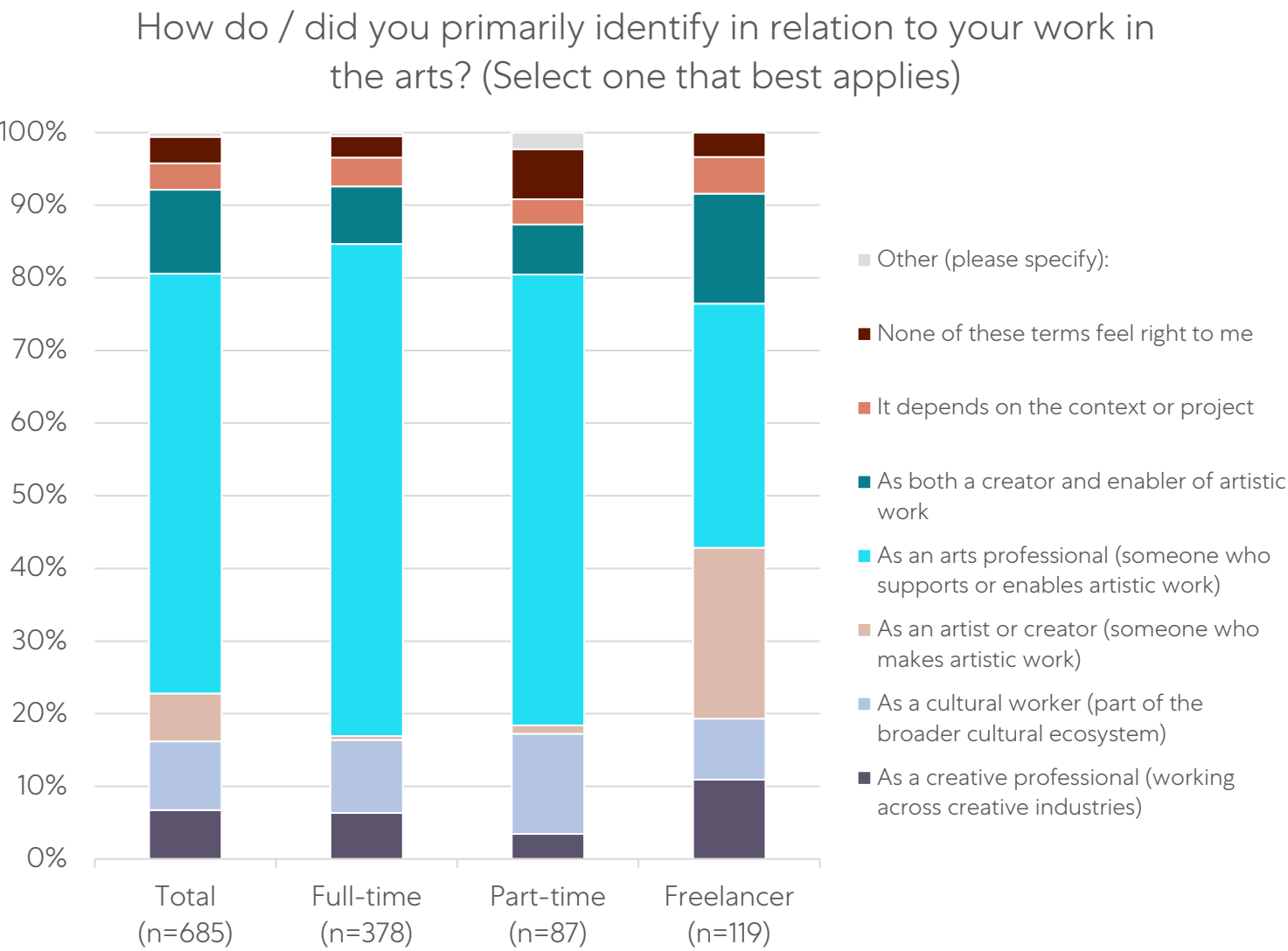
- Just over a third (34%) of respondents say they frequently see people with similar backgrounds as theirs in leadership positions, increasing to 36% and 37% for white and heterosexual respectively, falling to just 10% for those from global majority backgrounds

Influence of Aspects of Personal Identity on Career Trajectory

How have aspects of your personal identity (such as gender, ethnicity, class background, disability status, etc.) influenced your career trajectory in the arts?

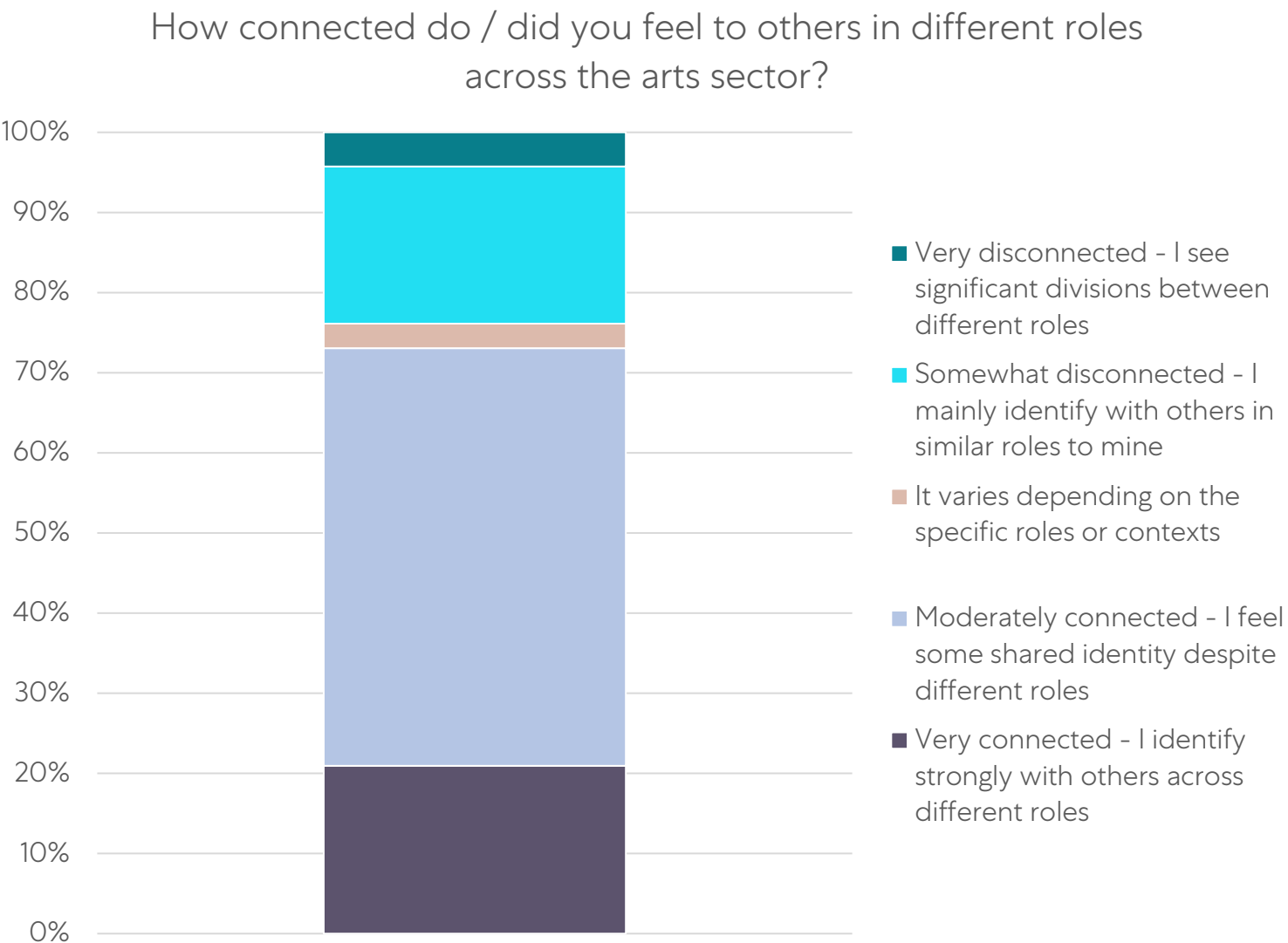


Primary Identification in Relation to Arts Work



- Over half (58%) of respondents identify as an arts professional

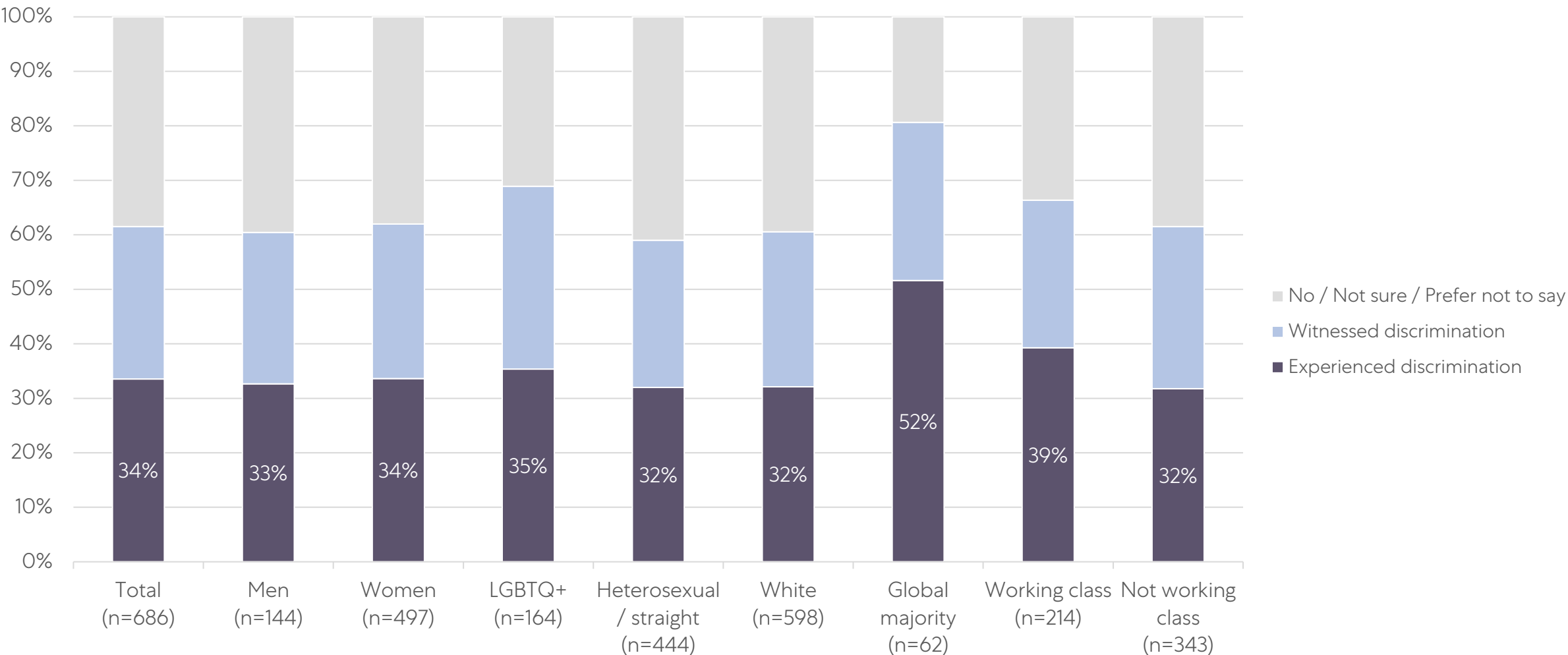
Connection to Others in Different Roles



Witnessed or Experienced Discrimination in Arts Work

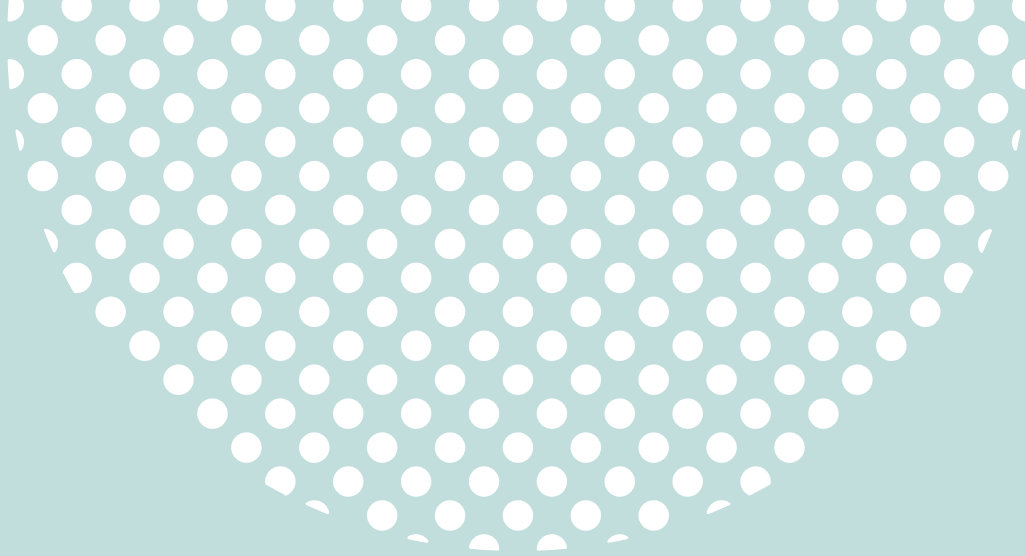
(By protected characteristic)

Have you witnessed or experienced discrimination in your arts work?






PART 4: PATHWAYS FORWARD



Chapter 7

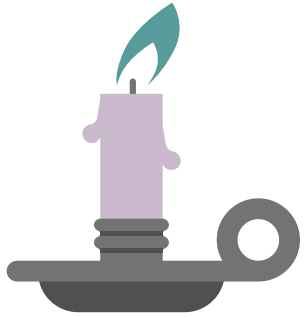
What Workers Want & What Works

Solutions from the Ground Up



"Better pay. I can just about afford to work and live where I do, but if I wanted to change jobs and work elsewhere (still in the arts) that required a commute, it wouldn't be worth it."

Woman, 35-44, Working class, Full-time, Middle level



After years of precariousness and passion-driven compromise, arts workers are articulating clear, practical visions for change. Their priorities are neither abstract nor utopian - they are pragmatic solutions drawn from lived experience. Pay fairness, manageable workloads, and collective agency consistently emerge as the foundation for sustainability.

Pay and Practical Stability

When asked what would keep them in the arts, over half (52%) prioritised increased financial compensation, with 46% citing better work-life balance and 37% seeking greater job security.

Financial stability remains the baseline from which every other improvement flows. Workers describe modest but vital aspirations - being paid for all hours worked, predictable income, and clarity in contracts - yet these fundamental needs remain unmet for many.

Systemic and Cultural Change

Beyond compensation, workers articulate visions for structural transformation: fairer funding models, transparent hiring practices, and regional investment that extends beyond London-centric structures.

Many emphasise the importance of community and connection, seeking workplaces that balance purpose with collective care. Successful organisations cited in open responses share common traits: clear communication, participatory decision-making, and leaders who model healthy boundaries.

Retention through Respect

These retention priorities - pay (52%), work-life balance (46%), and job security (37%) - reveal what workers need to sustain creative careers.

Yet workers report their compensation often fails to reflect the value of their work, skills, and responsibilities, while many take on additional duties beyond their formal roles without recognition or adjustment.

Transparency in pay scales, promotion criteria, and decision-making remains limited. Retention, therefore, depends as much on dignity and structural security as on financial metrics alone.



“Being compensated for the hours I actually work.”

Woman, 45–54, Working class, Full-time, Middle level

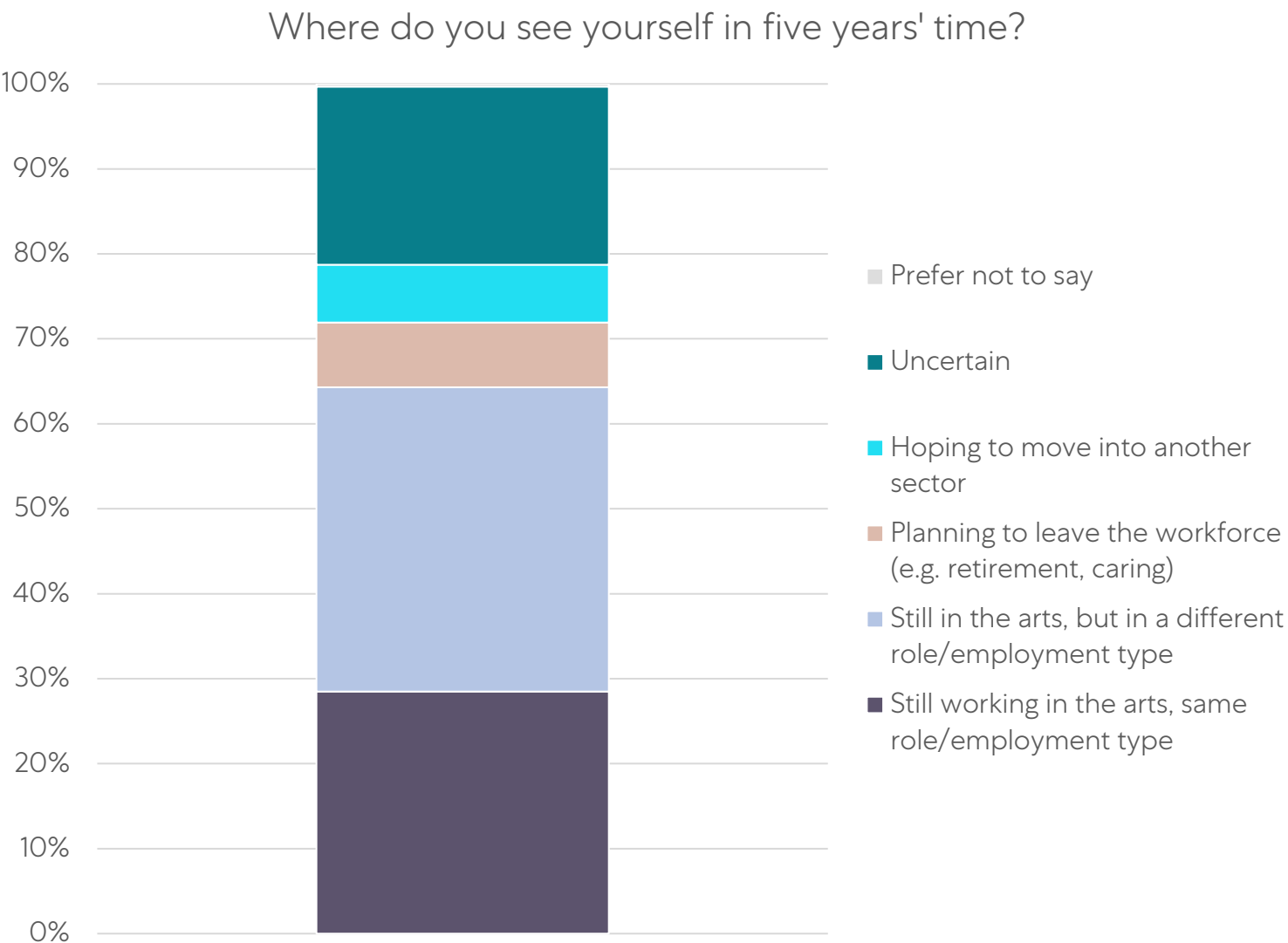
“Better representation and advocacy at local and regional government level — so much opportunity is lost where the arts aren’t visible in policy.”

Man, 35–44, Full-time, Middle level

“Coaching and new approaches to tackle issues have been transformative — it’s about feeling seen and supported.”

Woman, 35–44, Part-time, Middle level

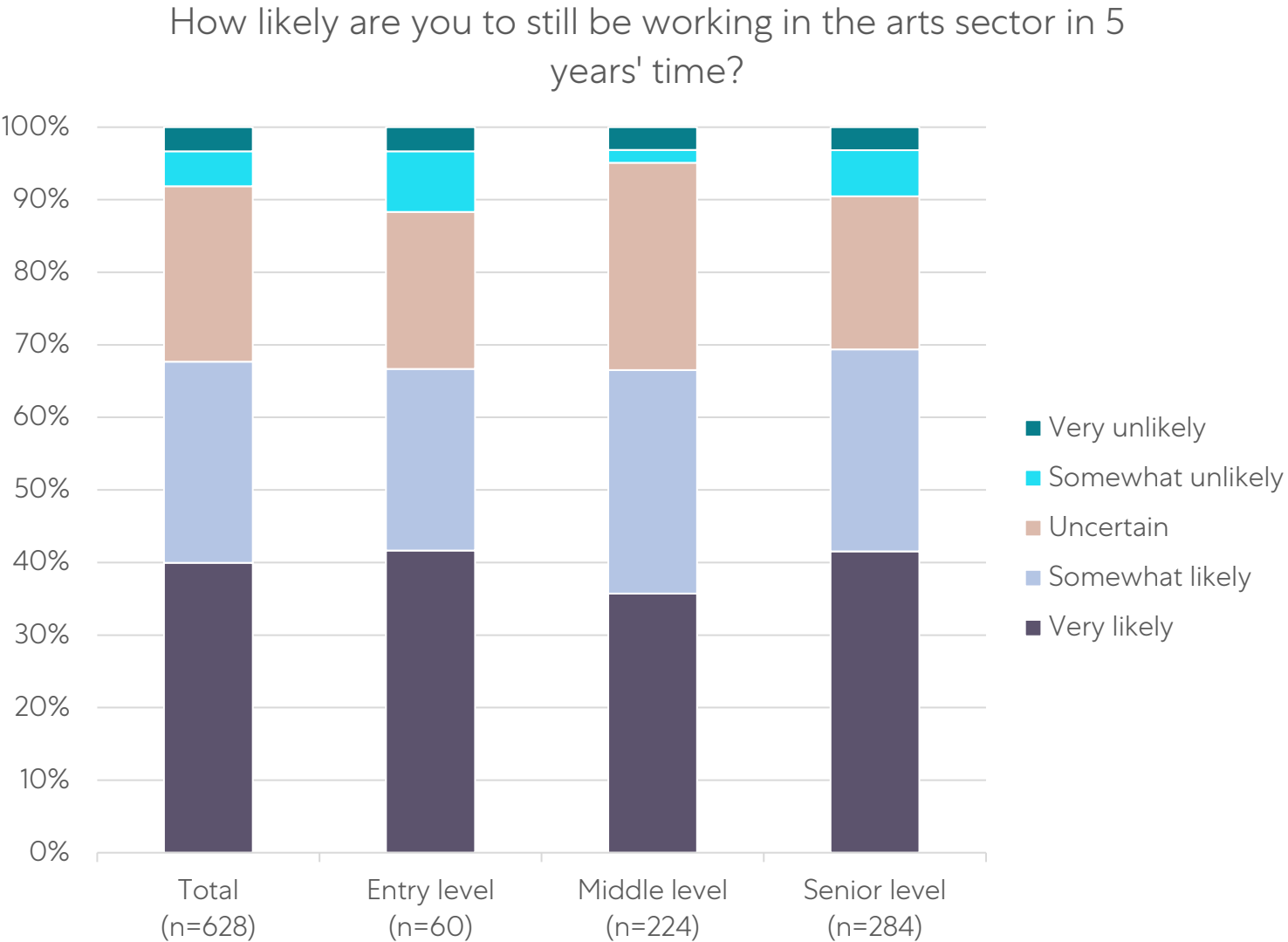
Five Years' Time



- Just under a third (64%) see themselves as still working in the arts in five years' time with 36% seeing themselves in a different role

Likelihood of Working in the Arts in 5 Years' Time

(By role level)

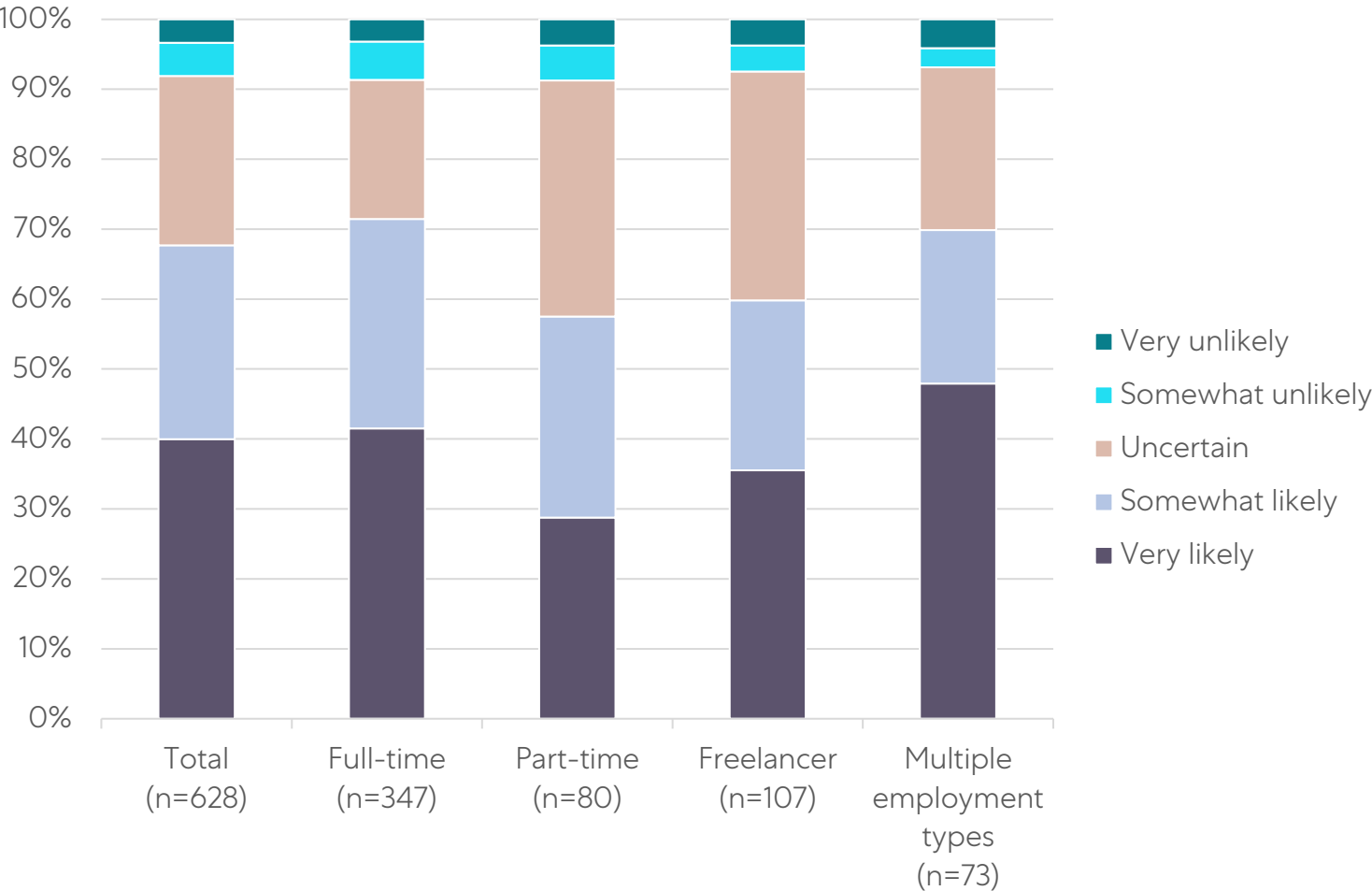


- 68% report that they are somewhat likely or very likely to still be working in the arts sector in 5 years' time
- 24% are uncertain and a further 8% are either somewhat unlikely or very unlikely

Likelihood of Working in the Arts in 5 Years' Time

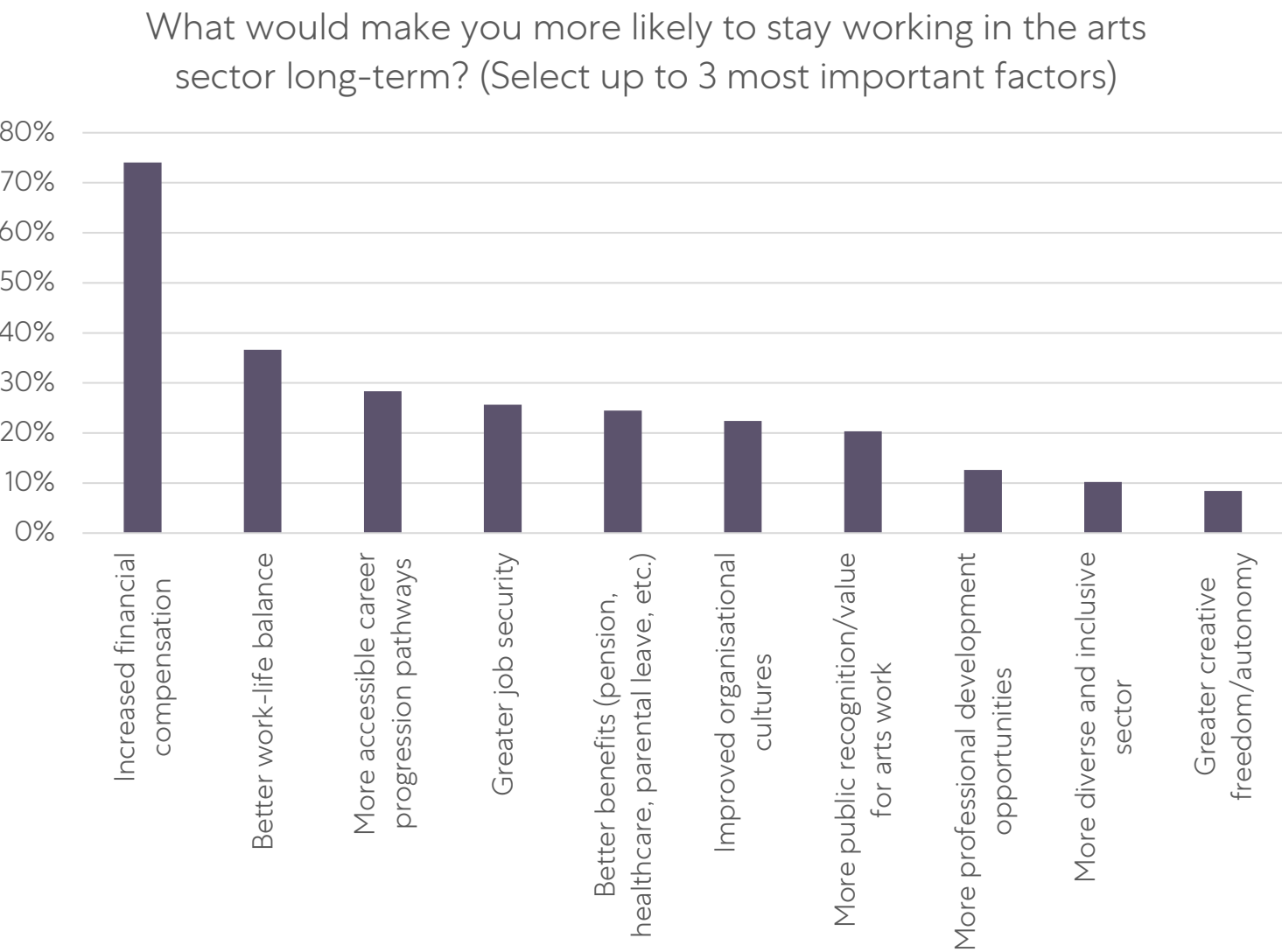
(By employment type)

How likely are you to still be working in the arts sector in 5 years' time?



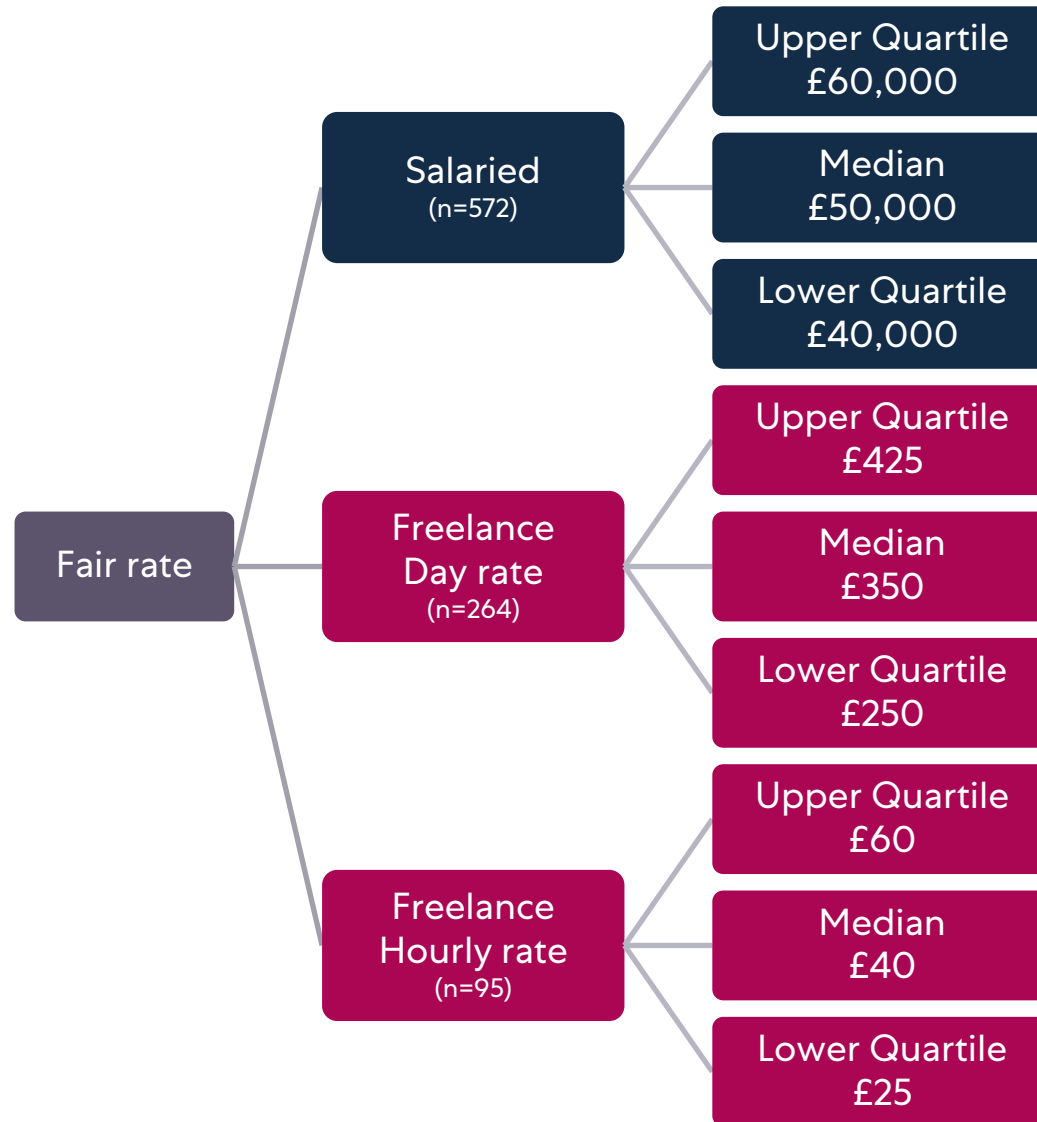
- Those working part-time are least likely (29%) to say they are very likely to be working in the arts sector in five years' time

More Likely to Stay in the Arts Sector Long-term



- Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents said that increased financial compensation was the factor most likely to encourage them to stay working in the arts sector long-term

Fair Rate of Pay

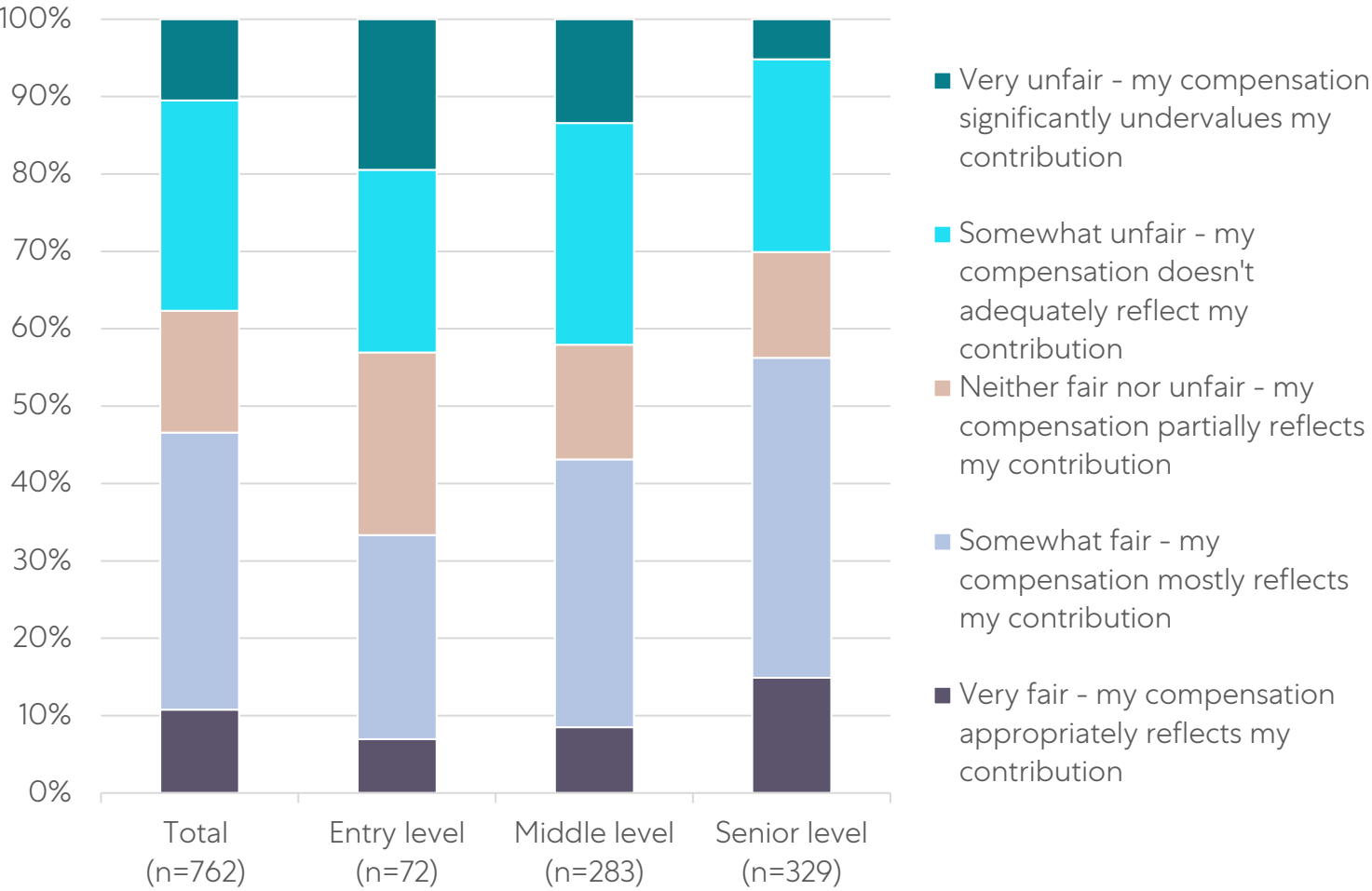


- Median salaried pay is currently £42,000 – a 19% drift from £50,000
- Freelance day rate is currently £300 and hourly rates £35 – 17% and 14% drift with the fair rate of pay

Extent to Which Pay Reflects Value of Work

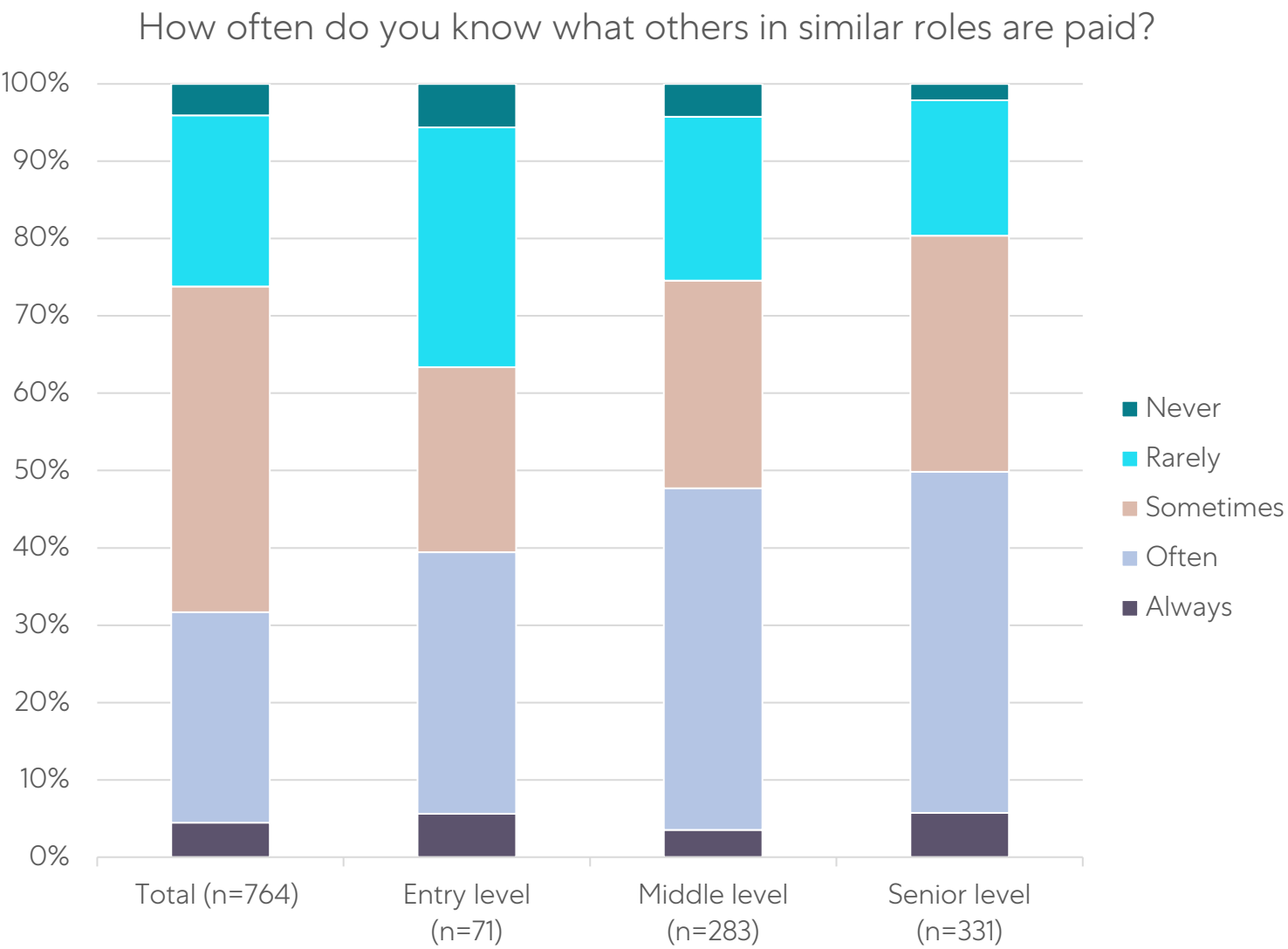
(By role level)

To what extent do you feel your pay reflects / reflected the value of your work, skills, experience, and responsibilities?



Knowledge of How Others in Similar Roles are Paid

(By role level)

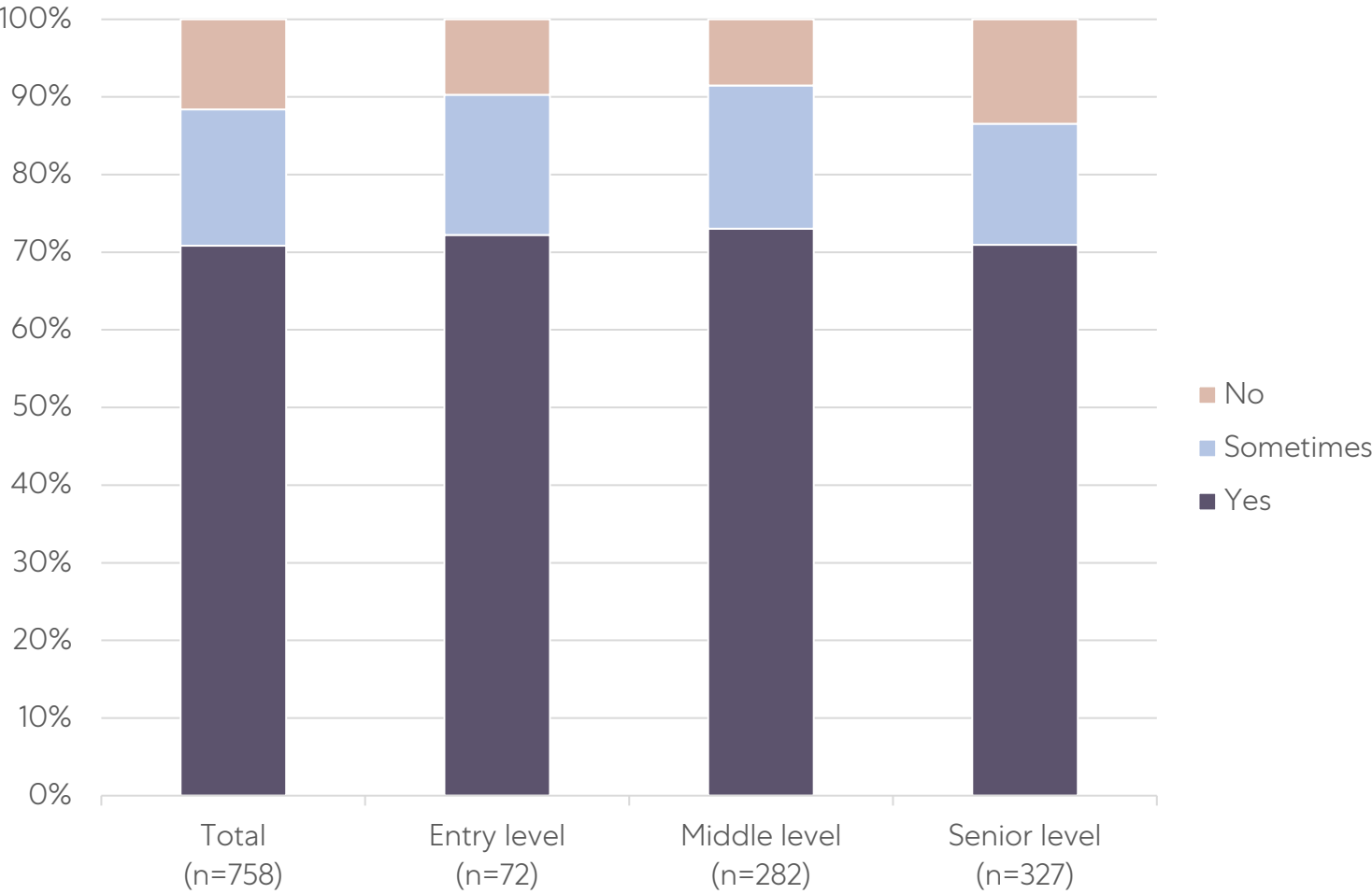


- Pay opacity remains common

Experience of Additional Responsibilities

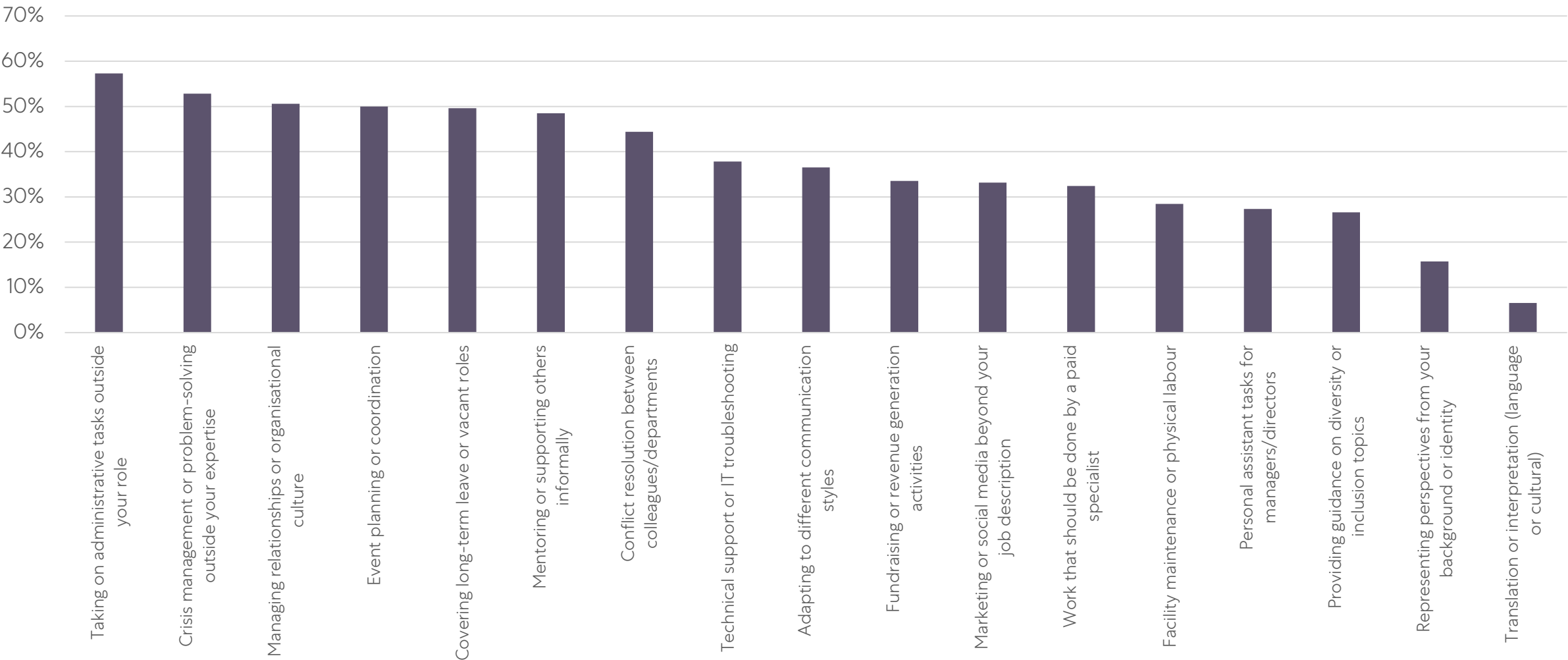
(By role level)

Have you experienced expectations to take on additional responsibilities beyond your formal role?



Types of Additional Responsibilities

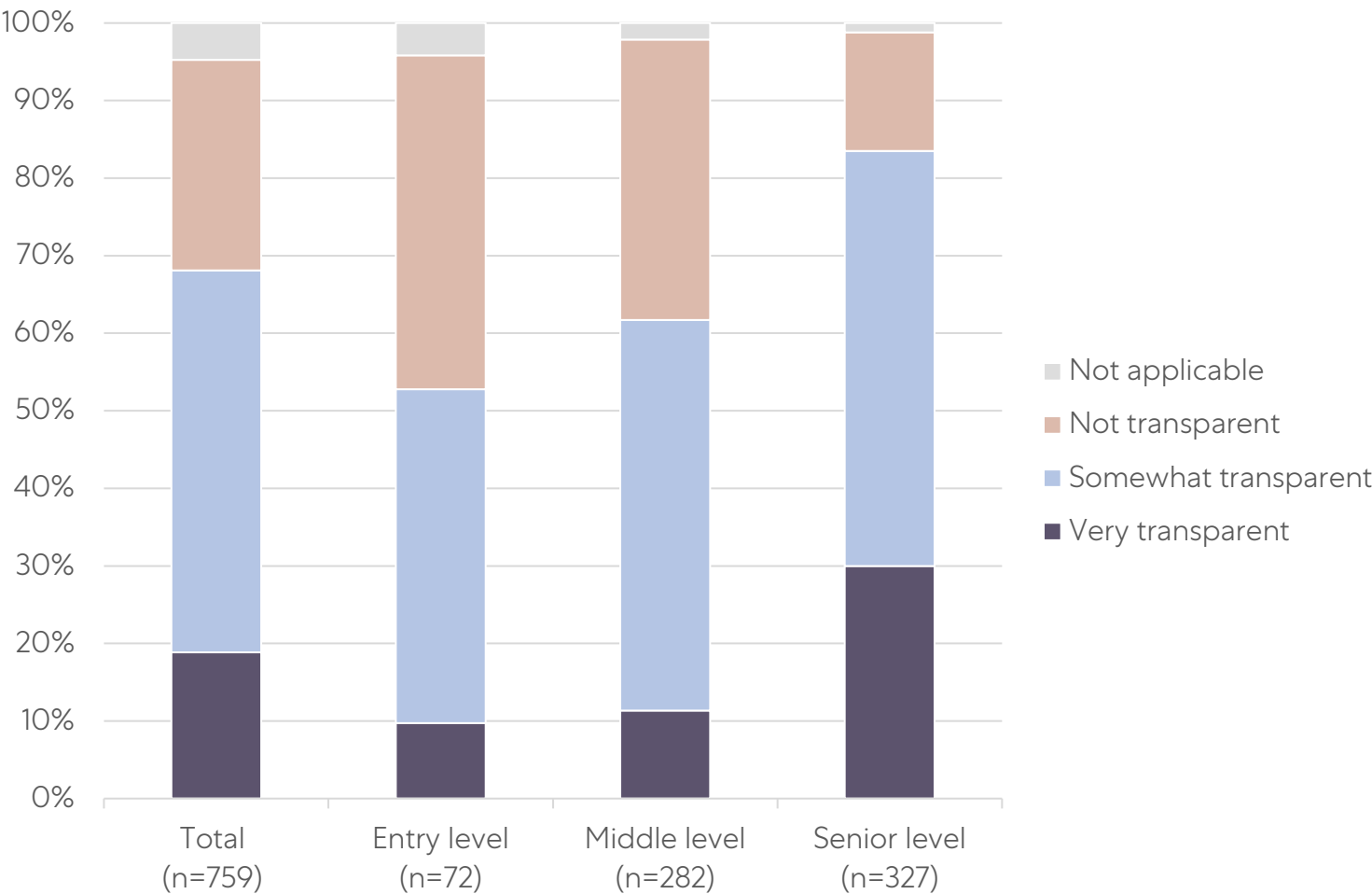
What types of additional responsibilities? (Select all that apply)



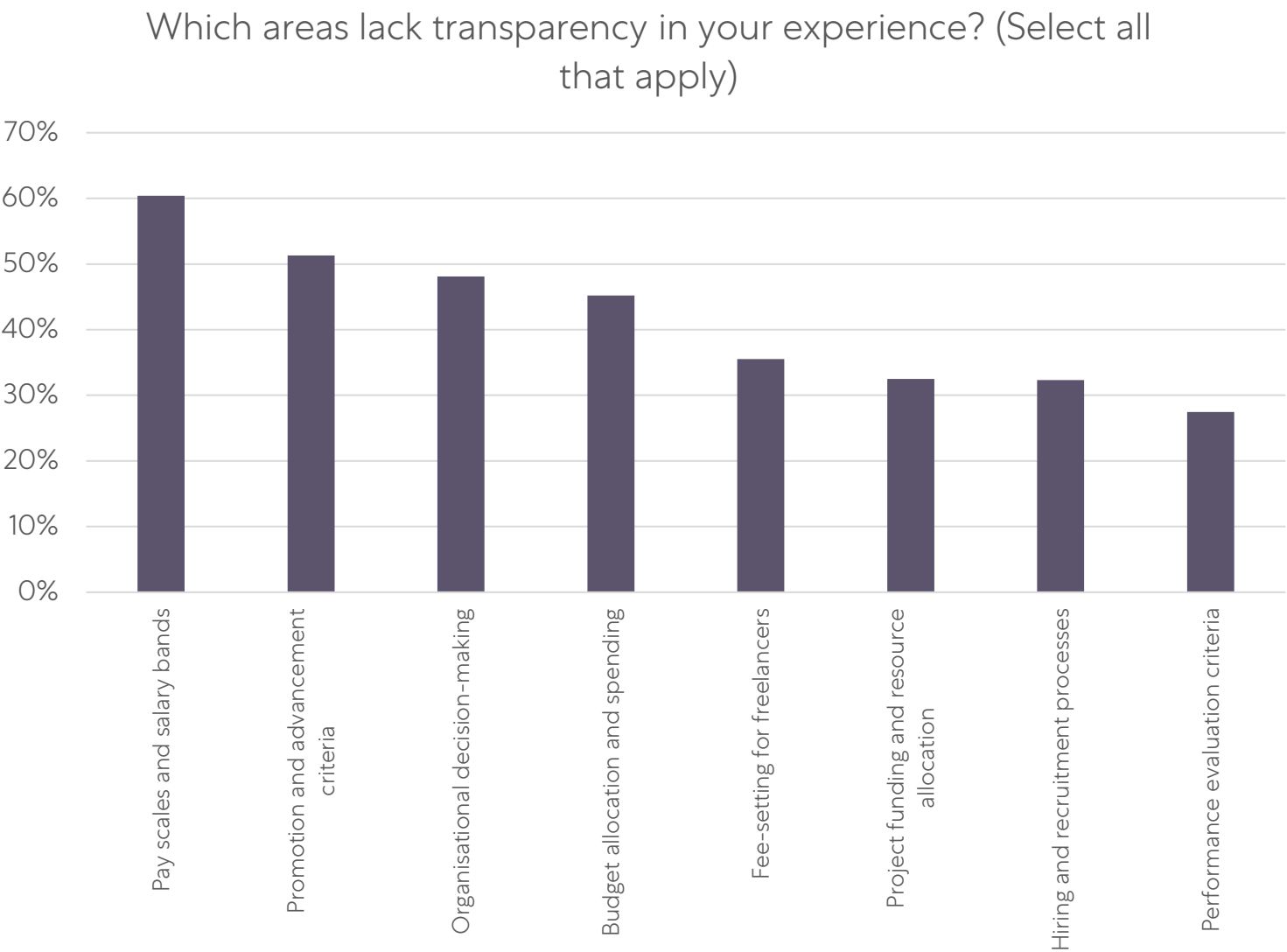
Transparency of Decision-Making

(By role level)

How transparent are / were decision-making processes in your organisation or contracts (e.g. budget, fees, hiring)?



Areas Lacking Transparency



- Pay and promotion top the transparency gap list



Chapter 8

Building a Sustainable Arts Ecology

Visions for Transformation

"One where the casual hour or entry level staff members are made to feel valued and integral to an organisation."

Woman, 45-54, Working class, Full-time, Middle level



Beyond individual workplaces, respondents imagine a re-engineered cultural system, one accountable to communities rather than prestige economies. Their proposals sketch a blueprint for a fairer, more democratic arts ecology built on shared power, transparency, and care.

Five Core Transformation Areas

From 364 detailed worker submissions, five interconnected priorities emerge:

1. Economic Restructuring (45 %): living wages, equitable funding, and financial transparency across the sector.

2. Community Accountability (29 %): organisations rooted in the communities they serve, reflecting local class and demographic realities.

3. Democratic Culture (31 %): inclusive governance, flatter hierarchies, and genuine worker participation in decision-making.

4. Accessibility (22 %):

comprehensive inclusion for disabled, neurodivergent, and working-class people across all roles.

5. Work-Life Integration

(18 %): structures that protect rest, caring responsibilities, and sustainable pacing of creative labour.

Redefining Value

Workers challenge the long-held belief that artistic value justifies poor economics. They call for new metrics of success that include wellbeing, equity, and community benefit. As one respondent noted, “Where professional skills are rewarded properly and organisations employ from the communities they serve.”

A Sector Worth Staying In

These visions are not only demands but declarations of belief that the arts can be rebuilt on fairness and collective imagination. They invite funders, policymakers, and leaders to align the sector’s ethics with its daily practice.

Economic Restructuring (45%)

Beyond Fair Pay: Economic Justice as Foundation

What It Looks Like in Practice

"Lack of pension, money. Lack of real valued and acted upon engagement with the issues/barriers to accessing the arts."

Woman, 45-54, Working class, Freelance, Middle level

Worker Vision

A sector where financial planning is possible, where taking on caring responsibilities doesn't mean career exit, where creativity isn't subsidised by personal debt or family wealth.



What Workers Envision

- Nearly half of all visions centred on economic transformation, not just modest pay rises but fundamental restructuring. Workers describe a sector where compensation reflects skill and experience, where payment is prompt and predictable, where benefits aren't luxuries tied to permanent contracts.
- They envision transparent rate-setting that prevents undercutting, collective bargaining power, and pension access for all. "Fair pay" isn't the ceiling of their ambition; it's the baseline for creative work to be economically viable across different life stages and circumstances.
- The most sophisticated economic visions connect individual financial security to sector-wide infrastructure: cooperative ownership models, shared-risk structures, and funding mechanisms that prioritise worker sustainability over institutional growth.

Democratic Culture (31%)

Power Shared, Not Hoarded

What It Looks Like in Practice

"Coaching and new approaches to tackle issues have been transformative—it's about feeling seen and supported."

Woman, 35-44, Part-time, Middle level

Worker Vision

Organisations where decisions aren't mysteries, where workers understand and shape strategy, where mistakes are learning opportunities rather than grounds for punishment.



What Workers Envision

- Workers imagine workplaces where power flows through structures, not personalities. They describe organisations with worker representation on boards, transparent financial decisions, and genuine consultation that shapes outcomes as opposed to tokenistic feedback gathered after decisions are made.
- Democratic visions include rotating leadership to prevent consolidation of power, consensus-building over command hierarchies, and 360-degree accountability where everyone, including senior leaders, receives structured feedback. Psychological safety is about being able to name problems without career consequences.
- The most transformative visions move beyond individual organisations to sector-wide democracy: collective standards, peer accountability networks, and shared learning about what works.

Community Accountability (29%)

Rooted in Place, Reflective of People

What It Looks Like in Practice

"Community arts organisations are the backbone—they meet real needs that larger venues fail to."

Man, 45-54, Full-time, Senior level

Worker Vision

Institutions that employ locally, invest regionally, share resources equitably, and are governed by the communities they exist to serve.



What Workers Envision

- Workers call for cultural institutions genuinely rooted in their communities. They describe organisations whose staff, governance, and artistic choices reflect the demographics and lived experiences of the people they serve.
- Community accountability means more than diverse recruitment: it's participatory budgeting, shared ownership, and measuring success by community benefit. It's regional investment that doesn't treat everywhere outside London as "the regions." It's acknowledging that community arts organisations, who are often precarious and underfunded, do the deep work that flagship institutions claim credit for.
- Visions emphasise proportional representation: if 60% of your audience is working-class, so should be your organisation, from board to stage to front-of-house.

Accessibility (22%)

Universal Design as Default

What It Looks Like in Practice

"As an autistic worker, I mask constantly. Even more at executive level—it's toxic and exhausting."

Non-binary, 45-54, Working class, Full-time, Senior level

Worker Vision

Workplaces where disabled and neurodivergent people don't have to mask, adapt, or justify their needs, where difference is designed for, not accommodated reluctantly.



What Workers Envision

- Workers move far beyond compliance. They describe workplaces designed from the start for all bodies and minds, where accessibility isn't an afterthought or individual accommodation but embedded infrastructure.
- Visions include neurodivergent-affirming policies that recognise diverse communication styles and work rhythms, not just accommodating difference but valuing it. Physical spaces designed for multiple mobility and sensory needs. Digital systems that work with screen readers and alternative input methods. Economic accessibility: childcare, transport support, flexible timing that acknowledges caring responsibilities.
- The framing shifts from burden to benefit: universal design makes everything better for everyone. Ramps help parents with buggies. Clear communication helps everyone. Flexible working benefits people across different life stages.

Work-Life Integration (18%)

Sustainable Pacing as Cultural Value

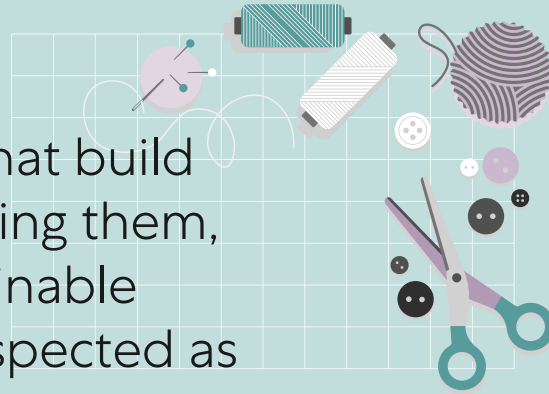
What It Looks Like in Practice

"The people really help—colleagues are warm and supportive. But events are programmed with no breaks. Burnout feels built into the calendar."

Woman, 35-44, Full-time, Middle level

Worker Vision

Workplaces that plan for rest, that build breaks into calendars before filling them, where leadership models sustainable practice and boundaries are respected as professional.



What Workers Envision

- Workers reject the false choice between passion and sustainability. They describe organisations where wellbeing is structural: four-day weeks, protected boundaries, realistic workloads that don't assume infinite capacity.
- Visions emphasise time: time to rest, time for caring responsibilities, time between intense projects. Mental-health support that's embedded infrastructure, not crisis response. Sabbaticals as standard after sustained periods of work. Career structures that accommodate different life stages, recognising that a sustainable creative career might span 40+ years with varying intensity.
- The most radical visions reframe productivity itself: what if "the show must go on" culture ended? What if saying "no" to overwork became professional strength, not weakness?

The Integrated Vision

What it looks like when all five priorities align

The most comprehensive worker visions integrate these priorities:

- **Economic restructuring** that pays fairly enables workers without family wealth to stay
- **Democratic culture** with shared power surfaces and solves problems collaboratively
- **Community accountability** ensures institutions reflect and serve their places
- **Universal accessibility** creates workplaces designed for human diversity
- **Sustainable integration** protects the long-term capacity to create

Towards a Liveable, Ethical Arts Sector

Together, these approaches describe something more than sector reform. They outline a fundamental shift: from arts organisations that extract value from passionate workers to creative ecosystems that sustain the people who sustain them.

These aren't utopian fantasies. Workers point to existing organisations, often small, often precariously funded, already implementing these approaches. The knowledge exists. The models work. What's missing is political will and equitable distribution of resources.

The Challenge

Moving from isolated experiments to sector-wide transformation requires courage, sustained commitment, and willingness to redistribute power and resources. It requires believing that fair work isn't the ceiling of ambition - it's the foundation everything else is built on.

Case Studies: Worker Perspectives

Across all identities, a shared thread emerges: commitment without protection. Workers remain motivated by purpose, but the structures around them fail to sustain that purpose equitably. Class, disability, gender, and geography do not just shape experience, they determine who can afford to stay.

The future of the arts depends on translating these testimonies into structural reform: fair pay, access, respect, and genuine shared power.

CASE STUDIES

- Working-class Workers
- Disabled and Neurodivergent Workers
- Global Majority Workers
- LGBTQ+ Workers
- Women in the Arts
- Freelancers
- Older Workers

Working-Class Workers

Talent Without Cushion

Key Stats

- Two-thirds undertook unpaid work early in their careers.
- Class-coded behaviours persist at senior levels, where authority is measured through presentation rather than performance.

Working-class talent sustains the arts but bears disproportionate cost. Inclusion must mean financial stability and cultural respect, not symbolic diversity

“ Had to lose my accent so people would respect me.

Woman, 25–34,
Working class,
Full-time

Disabled and Neurodivergent Workers

Accessibility Isn't Optional

Key Stats

- Fewer than one in five arts workers identify as disabled, yet many describe inaccessible workplaces and inconsistent support.
- Access support for freelancers is often unavailable or ad hoc.
- Many neurodivergent workers report daily “masking” to maintain credibility, which is emotionally and physically exhausting.

Accessibility is not an add-on; it is a measure of organisational integrity. To retain disabled and neurodivergent talent, the sector must normalise adaptation, not demand assimilation.

“As an autistic worker, I mask constantly. Even more at executive level – it’s toxic and exhausting.”

Non-binary, 45–54
Full-time

Global Majority Workers

Representation Without Power

Key Stats

- 29% identified race or ethnicity as a barrier to progression.
- 41% said they had witnessed discrimination.
- Global majority workers are overrepresented in entry-level roles but underrepresented in leadership.

Representation matters, but redistribution matters more. Until leadership and governance mirror the workforce and audiences, the arts risk perpetuating the hierarchies they claim to challenge.

“ I’m often brought in to talk about inclusion – but not to lead it.”

Woman, 35–44,
Freelance

LGBTQ+ Workers

Visibility and Vulnerability

Key Stats

- Most describe workplaces as inclusive, yet many still self-censor.
- Trans and non-binary workers' experiences vary sharply depending on leadership culture.
- Belonging flourishes where inclusive language and pronoun use are normalised

Progress has been made, but inclusion still relies on individual bravery rather than institutional consistency. Normalising openness - not exceptionalising it - is the next step toward genuine equity

“ I’ve hidden
that I’m
LGBTQ+ and a
single parent
until after
securing a job

Woman, 45–54,
Full-time,
Senior level


Women in the Arts

Commitment Without Parity

Key Stats

- Women make up the majority of the arts workforce, yet pay gaps persist at 12–15% at senior levels.
- Women report ‘glass cliff’ promotions and heavier emotional labour expectations.
- Middle managers, often women, report burnout as routine.

Women sustain the sector’s infrastructure while navigating gendered expectations of care and compliance. Structural parity, not individual resilience, is the marker of progress.



“As a working-class woman in admin, you’re made to feel like the ‘girl’ in the office, not a professional

Woman, 35–44,
Full-time,
Middle level

Freelancers

Freedom Without Security

Key Stats

- 31% face payment delays of one to two months.
- 24% struggle with basic expenses.
- Most have no access to sick pay or pension contributions.

Freelancing is not freedom when survival depends on unpaid hours and unpredictable income. A sustainable arts economy must guarantee fair contracts, prompt pay, and accountability.

“No one gives a monkeys if you are freelance. You just get on with it.”

Woman, 45–54,
Freelance,
Middle level


Older Workers

Experience at Risk

Key Stats

- Over 40% of older respondents reported feeling undervalued by their organisations.
- Age bias intersects with class and gender to limit opportunities.
- Older women and freelancers face compounded barriers to new contracts.

Retention of experienced professionals is critical to cultural continuity. Age diversity should be recognised as a creative asset, not an obstacle



“ After 30 years in the arts, I feel invisible - like my experience is seen as out of date.

Woman, 55–64,
Freelance

Carers and Regional Workers

The Geography of Exclusion

Key Stats

- 38% of carers turned down opportunities due to travel costs or scheduling.
- Regional workers outside London face compounded exclusion from lack of local infrastructure.
- Many juggle multiple jobs or long commutes to stay in the sector.

Geography and care remain invisible access barriers. A sustainable arts ecology must decentralise opportunity and integrate flexible, family-aware working models.



“ Better pay.
I can just about
afford to work and
live where I do, but if
I wanted to change
jobs that required a
commute, it
wouldn't be
worth it.

Woman, 35–44,
Working class,
Full-time