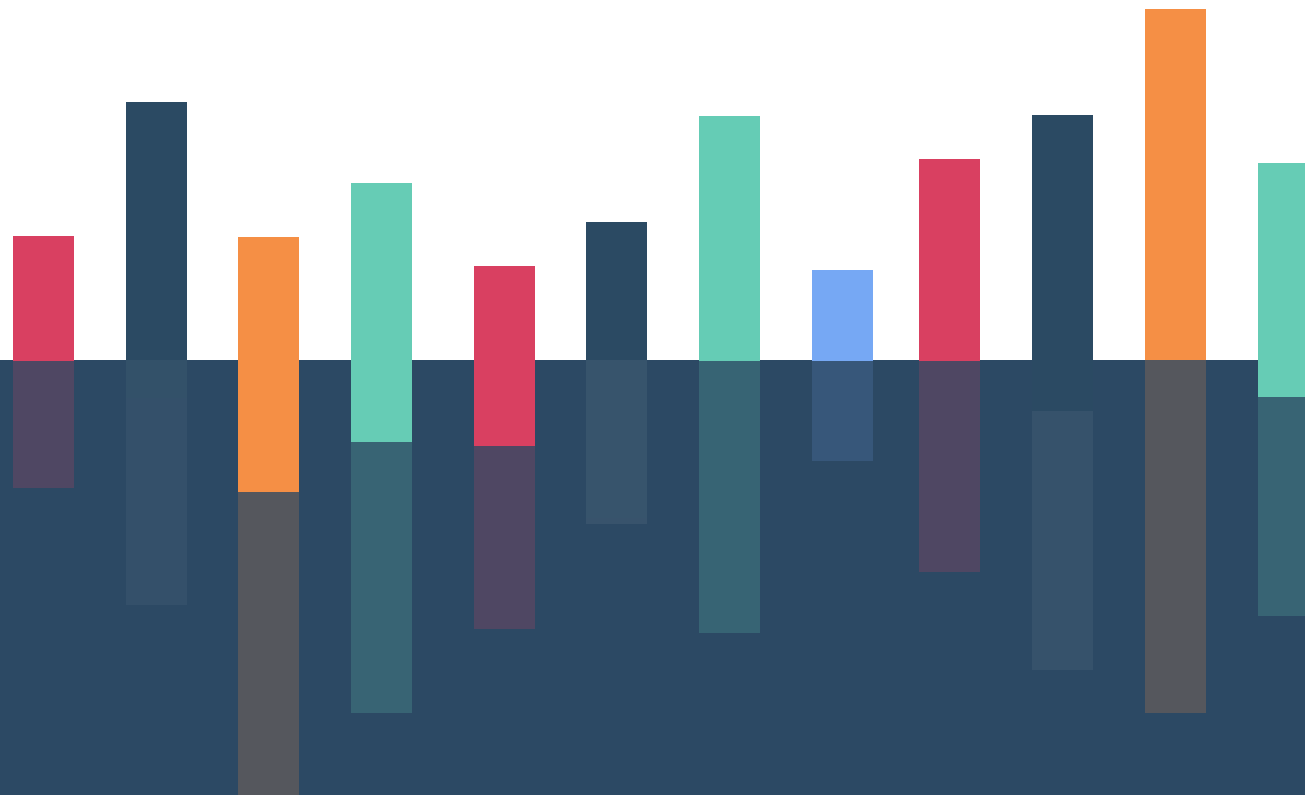


Building a new tomorrow

What do graduates want? 2021/22





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Foreword

At Bright Network, we believe that making the right career choice is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. Our mission is to connect the next generation with the opportunities, insights and advice to succeed as the workforce of tomorrow.

Research like this is vital to our work, especially with the challenges we've faced in the last year. Youth unemployment is high, graduates' career confidence is low and the future of the workplace is changing rapidly, making it essential that we adapt and improve our service to better connect employers with graduates.

This year, we focus on what really matters to graduates when it comes to their first job and employer in the “new normal”. We look at students' attitudes to wellbeing, diversity and how you can support them to achieve future career success. Discover how, as an employer, you can engage the next generation, while tailoring your offering to attract and retain the very best graduate talent in the coming recruitment cycle.

We hope you find the results insightful and helpful. We welcome your thoughts, feedback and questions.



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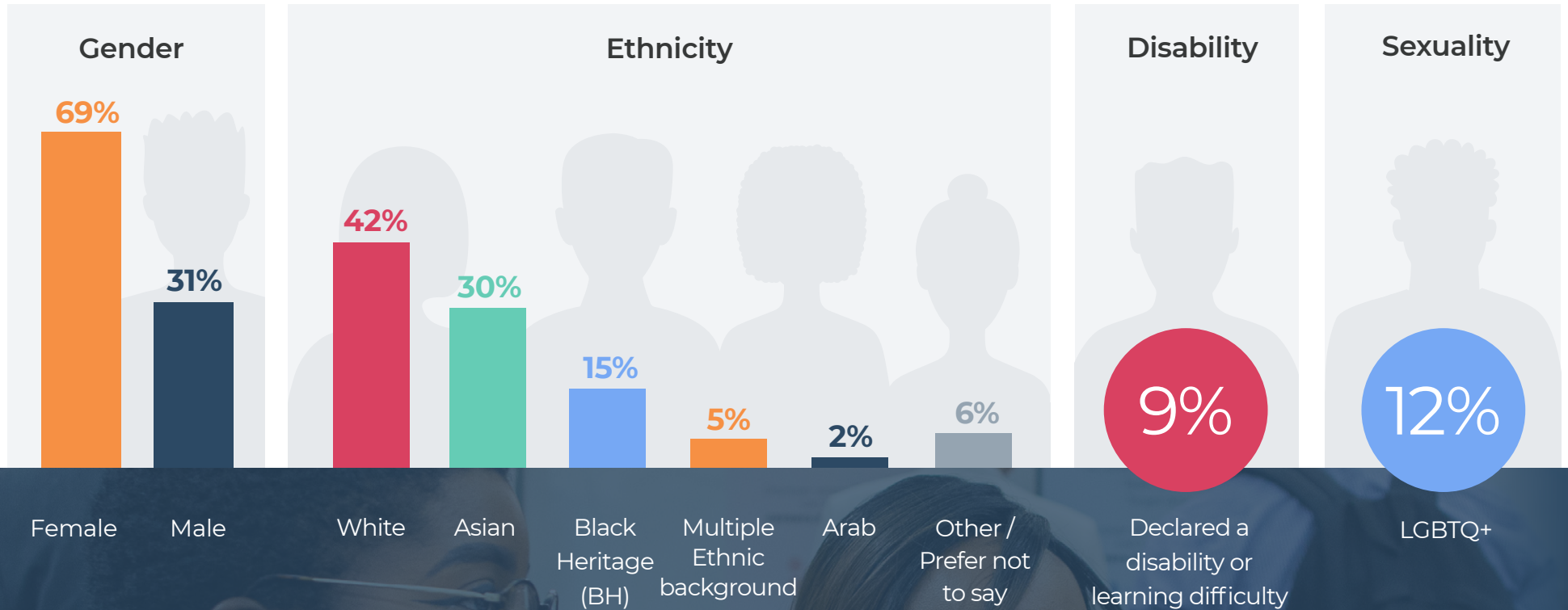
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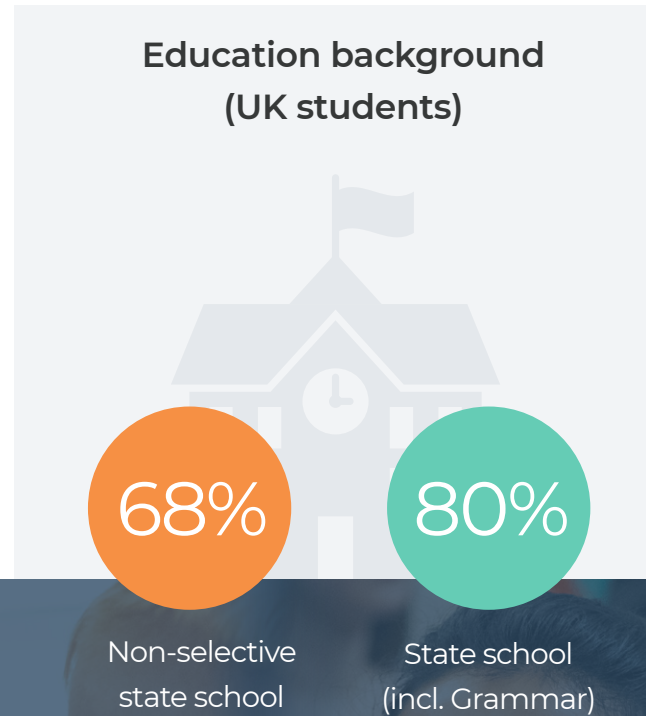
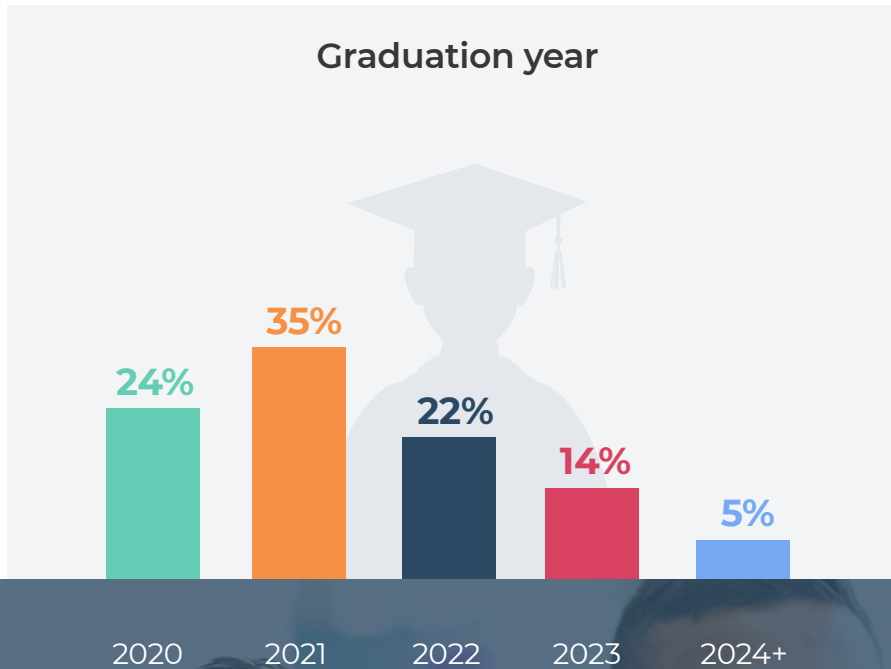
>> About the respondents

What do graduates want? seeks to understand the career preferences, concerns and ambitions of the next generation, offering exclusive insights into their current behaviours and attitudes. The results from 15,158 Bright Network members were collected through an online survey between 8th January and 2nd February 2021. We have broken down the findings by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, educational background and graduation year where necessary.

15,158
total responses



>> About the respondents (continued)



1. Confidence and what's impacting it

Section summary:



Confidence about **securing a graduate-level job** amongst members has dropped to **39%**, compared to **49%** in early 2020.



There is a significant gap between the confidence of **state-educated** university students (**32%**) and those who attended **private school** (**42%**).



23% of students now believe the **economy** is the biggest barrier to securing a graduate role, compared to **6%** in last year's research.

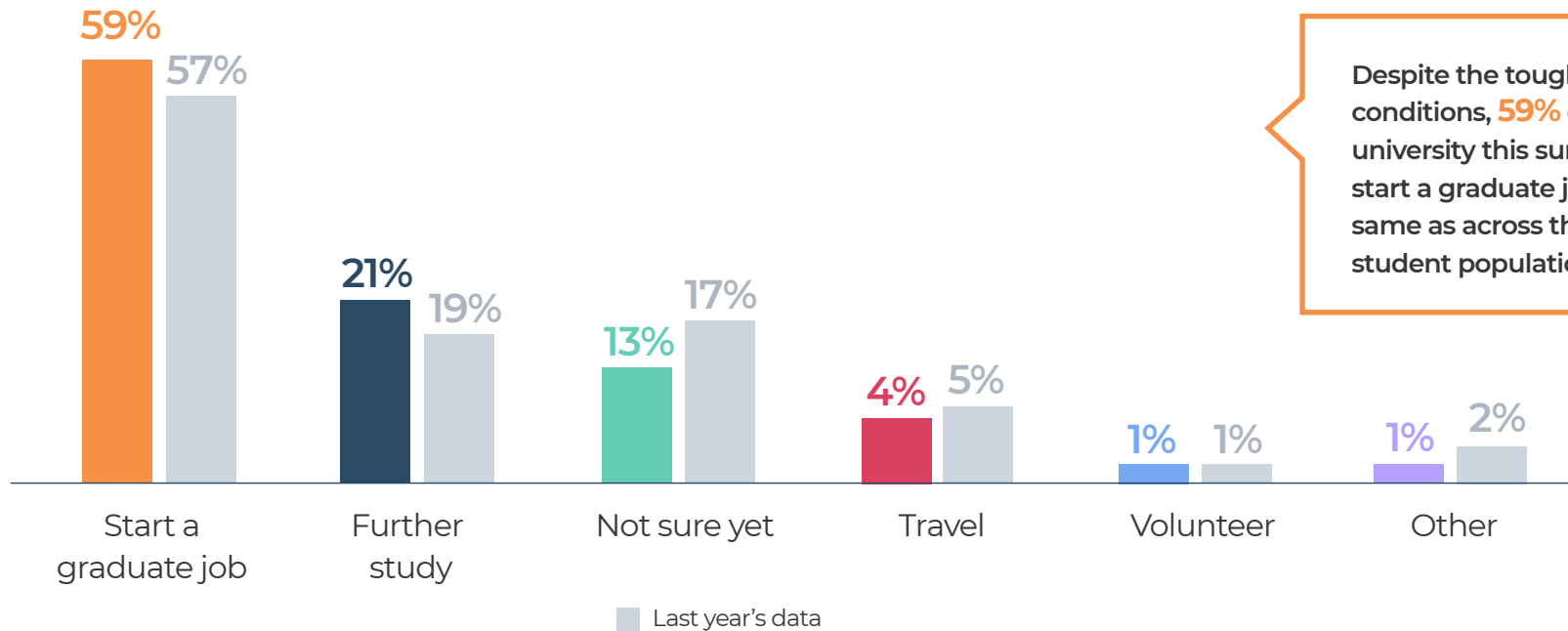


32% of members had an **application or role withdrawn/postponed** due to COVID-19 and **77%** have found it more difficult to connect with employers in the last year.



Future plans

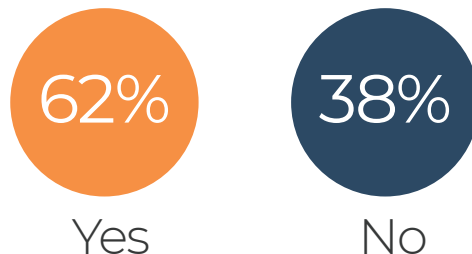
Q What do you plan to do straight after finishing university?



Despite the tough economic conditions, **59%** of those leaving university this summer want to start a graduate job – the same as across the whole student population.



Q Are you more likely to consider further study due to the impact of COVID-19 on the job market?

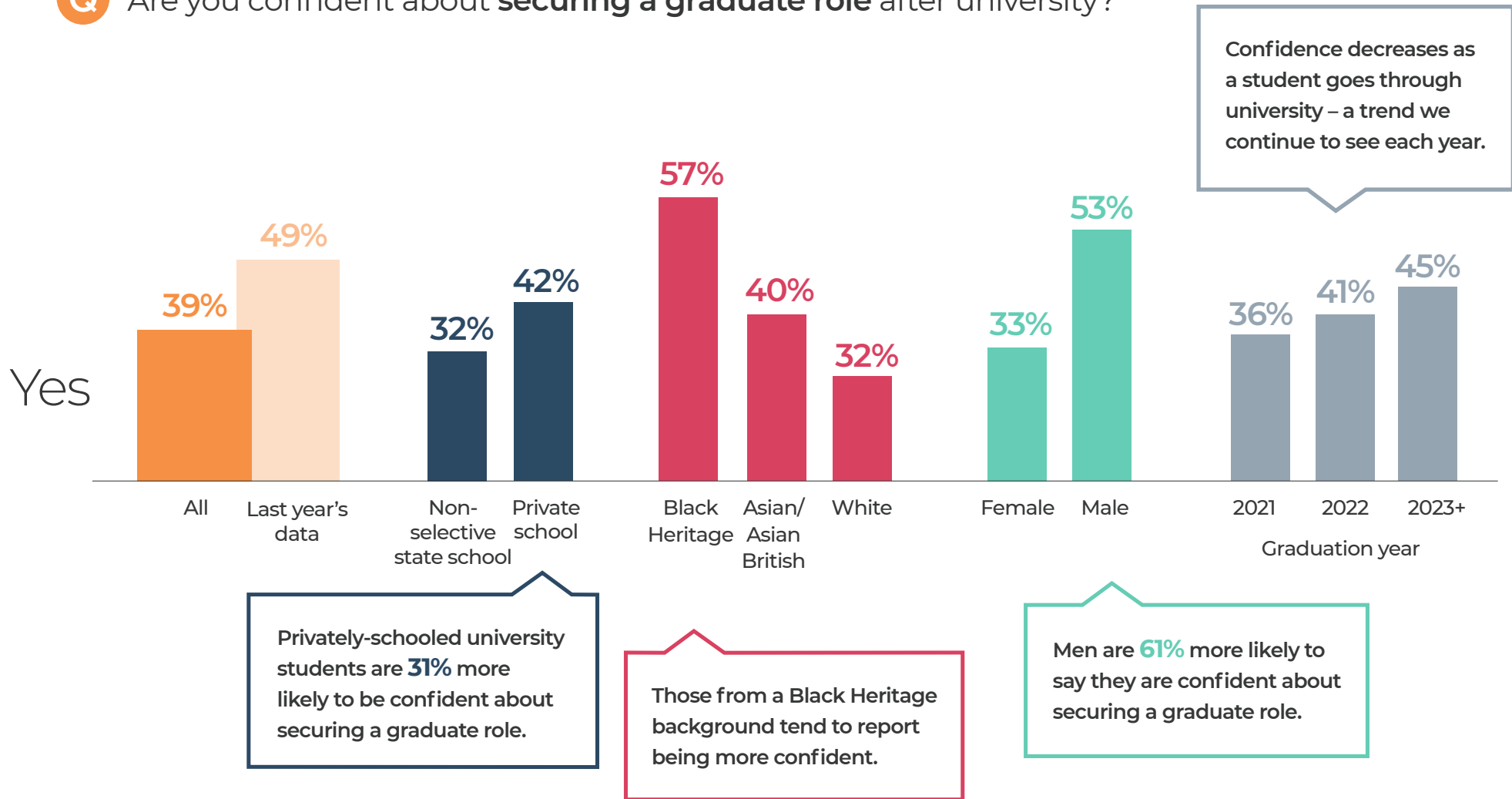


More students than ever are keen to start a graduate-level job after university, but **62%** are considering further study as a viable second option.

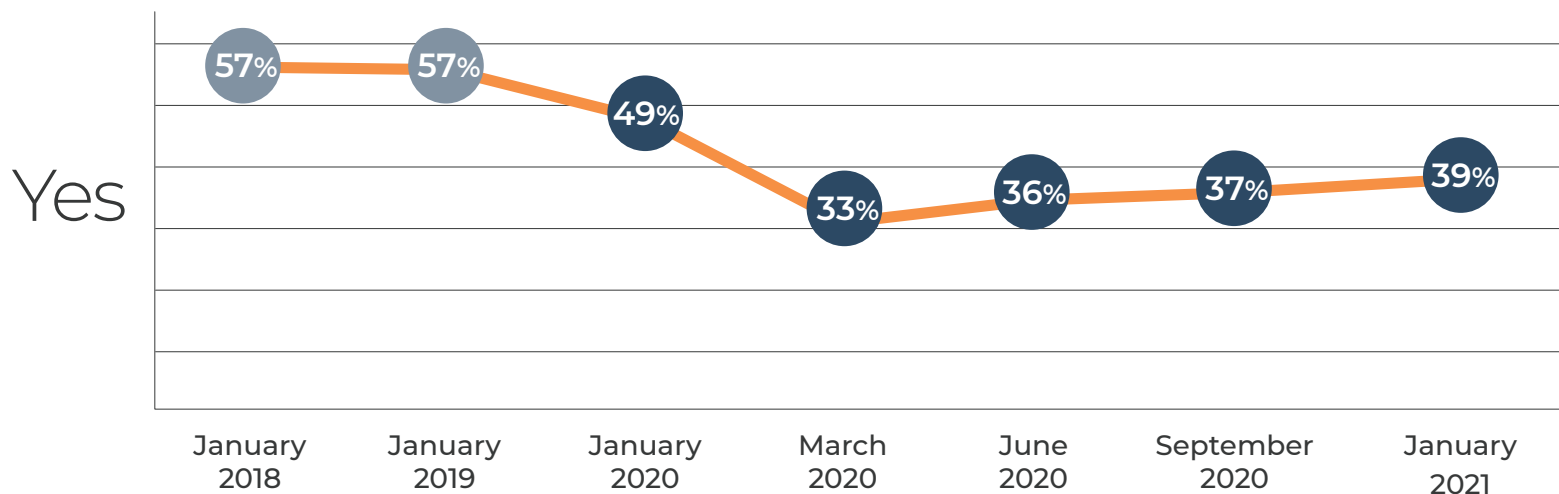


>> Confidence

Q Are you confident about **securing a graduate role** after university?

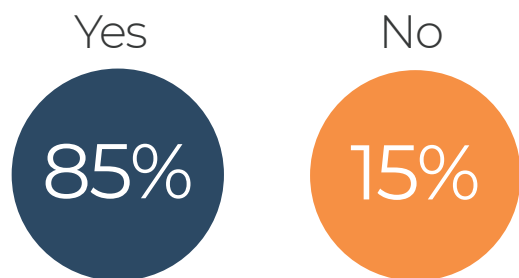


i Confidence over time (all members)



Confidence hit an all time low at the start of the pandemic (March 2020) and hasn't yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Q Have you felt under **more pressure around careers** due to the impact of COVID-19?



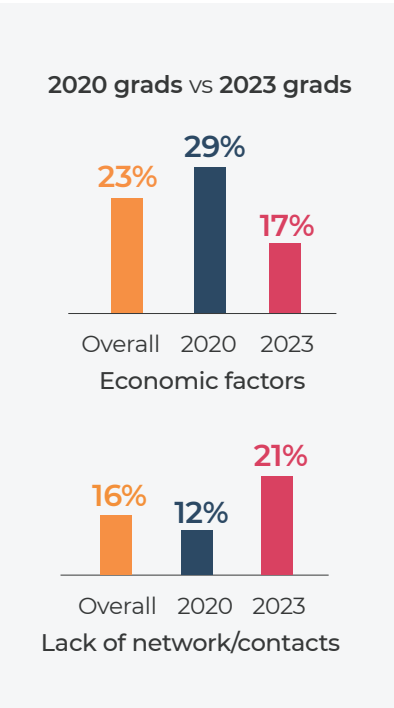
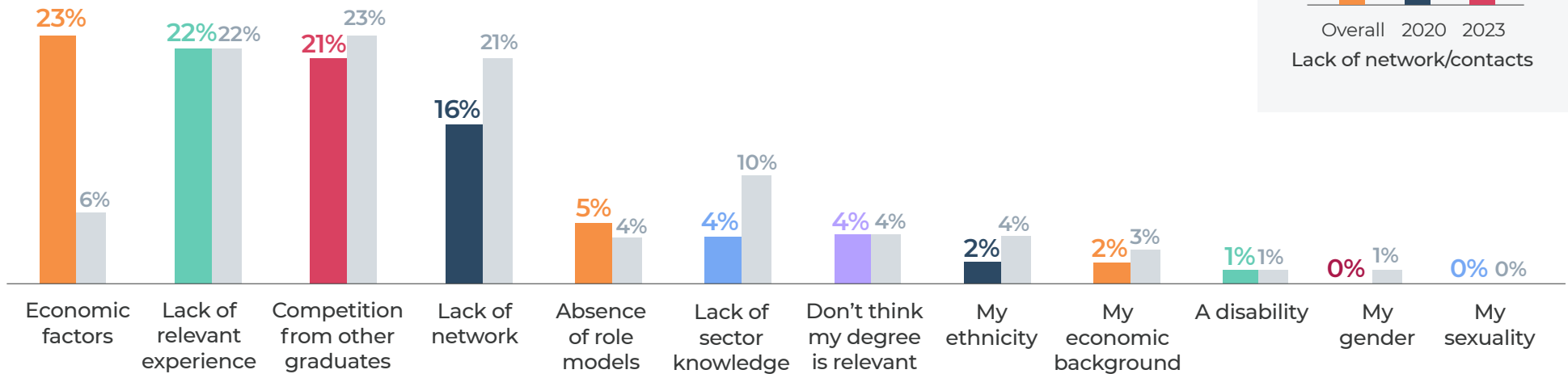
Researcher notes

Confidence levels have dropped across the student population. There continues to be a significant difference in confidence levels based on **educational background**, with those who attended a **non-selective state school** being most likely to say that they aren't confident about securing a graduate-level job.

>> What's impacting confidence

Q What are the **biggest barriers** to pursuing a career path you wish?

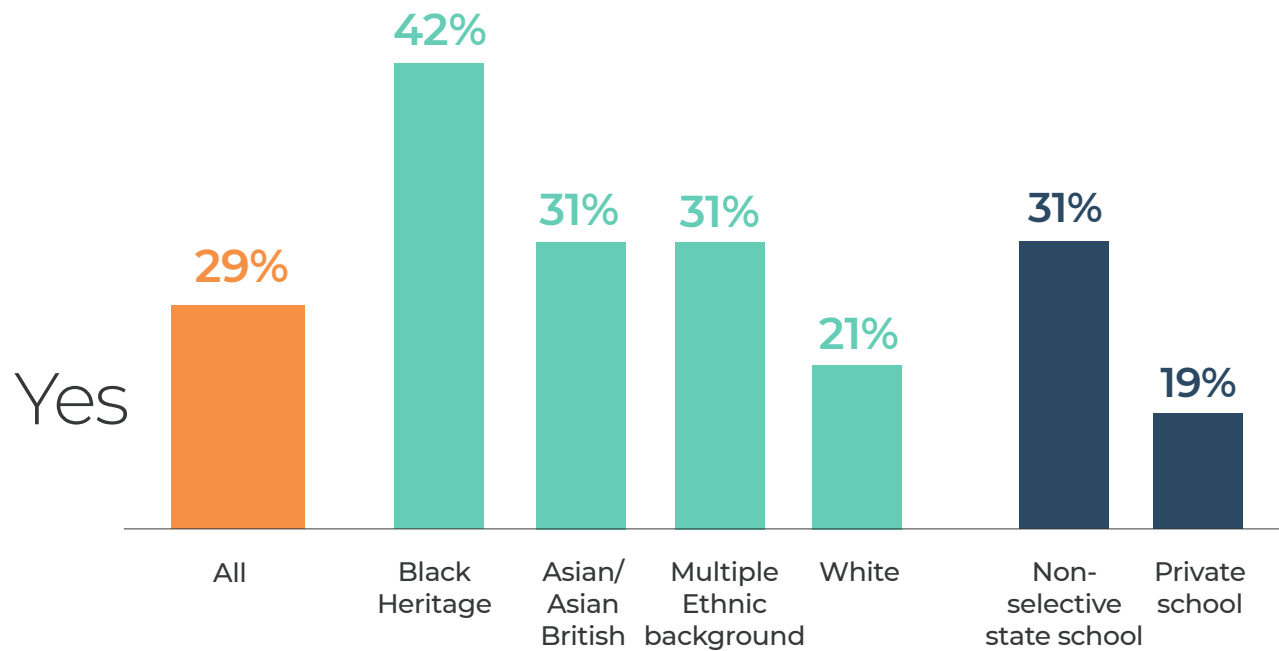
Younger students are less worried about the economic climate, suggesting there's confidence that the job market will rebound quickly.



Economic factors was the biggest worry for just **6%** of students in January 2020 – now it's seen as the biggest barrier by almost **1 in 4** members.

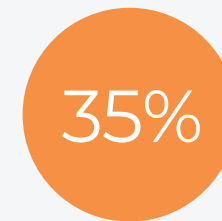
■ Last year's data

Q Have you ever felt your **background has hindered** you in an application process for work or academic study?

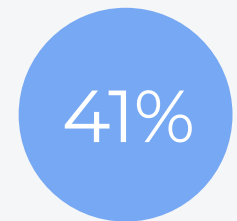


Q Are you confident about **securing** a graduate role after university?

Comparing confidence levels based on whether a respondent felt hindered during an application.



Belief that background **has** hindered them



Belief that background **hasn't** hindered them



Researcher notes

Despite **42%** of Black Heritage members believing their background has hindered at least one application, confidence amongst this group is high. However, the data shows that if a student has felt hindered by their background, they are more likely to lack confidence about securing a graduate-level job. This could lead to those students ruling themselves out of processes, or not even applying in the first place.



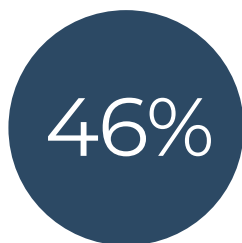
Q Are you **worried about COVID-19** impacting your graduate prospects?



Not worried at all



Slightly worried

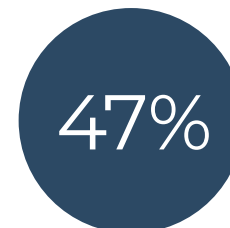


Very worried

Q Are you **worried about Brexit** impacting your graduate prospects?



Not worried at all



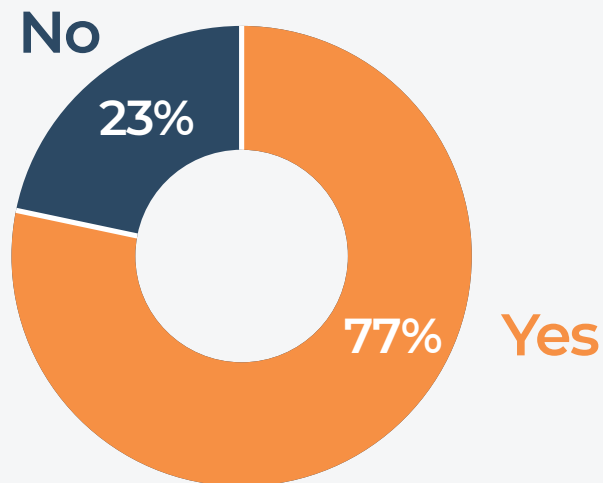
Slightly worried



Very worried

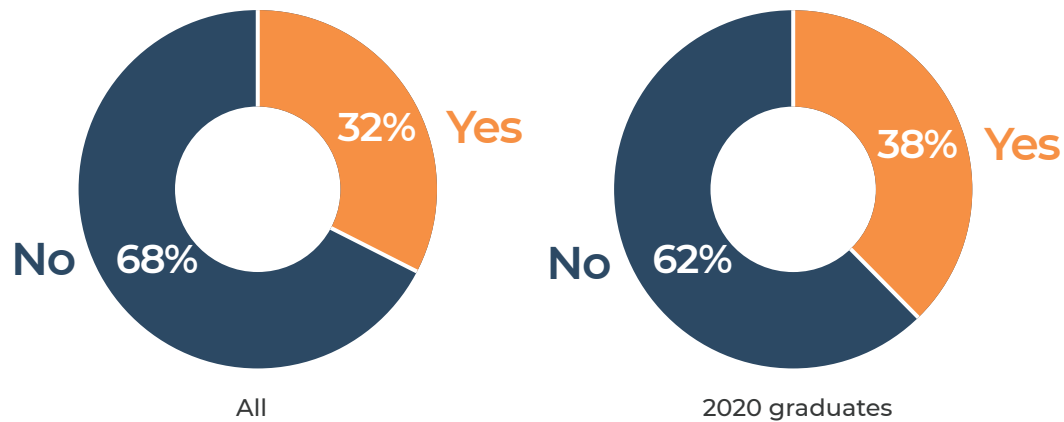
Within economic factors COVID-19 is the biggest worry, however the continuing uncertainty around Brexit is also playing on many students' minds.

Q Do you feel that you've **struggled to connect** with employers due to COVID-19 restrictions?



Most students feel they've missed out this year due to not being able to meet employers in person.

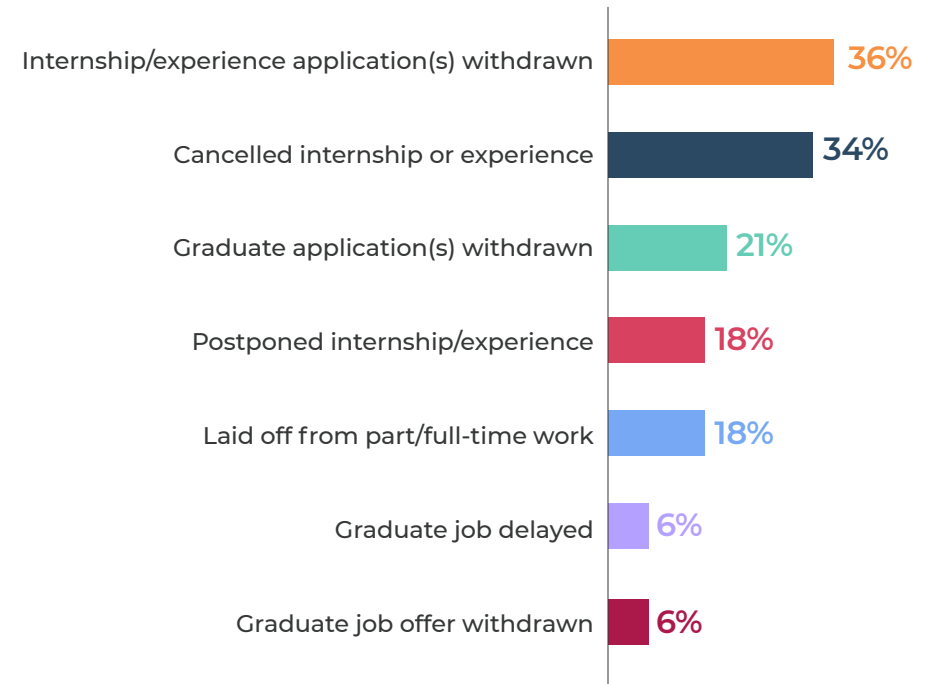
Q Did you have an **application or role cancelled/postponed** due to COVID-19?



Almost **1 in 3** members had an application or role withdrawn/postponed due to COVID-19, with **6%** of them having their graduate job offer withdrawn.

Q What did that look like?

Answers from the 32% who said yes to the question opposite.



Researcher notes

It's not a surprise that worries about the economy are denting confidence amongst the student population. However, there are factors in play which employers can be doing more to address.

Many believe their background is hindering them in application processes and there's evidence the pandemic has had a greater impact on university students who attended non-selective state schools when it comes to their job search.

Upskilling could hold the answer – both internally within recruitment teams to ensure the process is fair and also externally by offering students from under-represented groups support. Something we explore in the next chapter.

2. The impact of upskilling

Section summary:



81% of 2021 graduates have completed some form of **work experience, internship** or **part time job** during university.



95% of members want to be **upskilled** directly by employers, with **coding** and **commercial awareness** being the skills they want to work on most.



Students feel less **prepared to enter the world of work** than they did last year, with only **42%** saying they feel prepared.



Experience and skills gap

Q Have you gained any **work experience** while at university?

	All	2021 grads	NS state	Private	BH	Male	Female
Internship/Spring week	29%	19%	23%	35%	32%	30%	29%
Work placement as part of my course	14%	17%	16%	12%	16%	15%	14%
Open day	13%	14%	15%	12%	12%	11%	14%
Casual vacation work	23%	25%	22%	29%	21%	22%	23%
Part-time work during term time	42%	48%	47%	36%	40%	38%	44%
None of the above	25%	19%	25%	24%	26%	27%	25%

81% of members will have completed some form of work experience while at university.

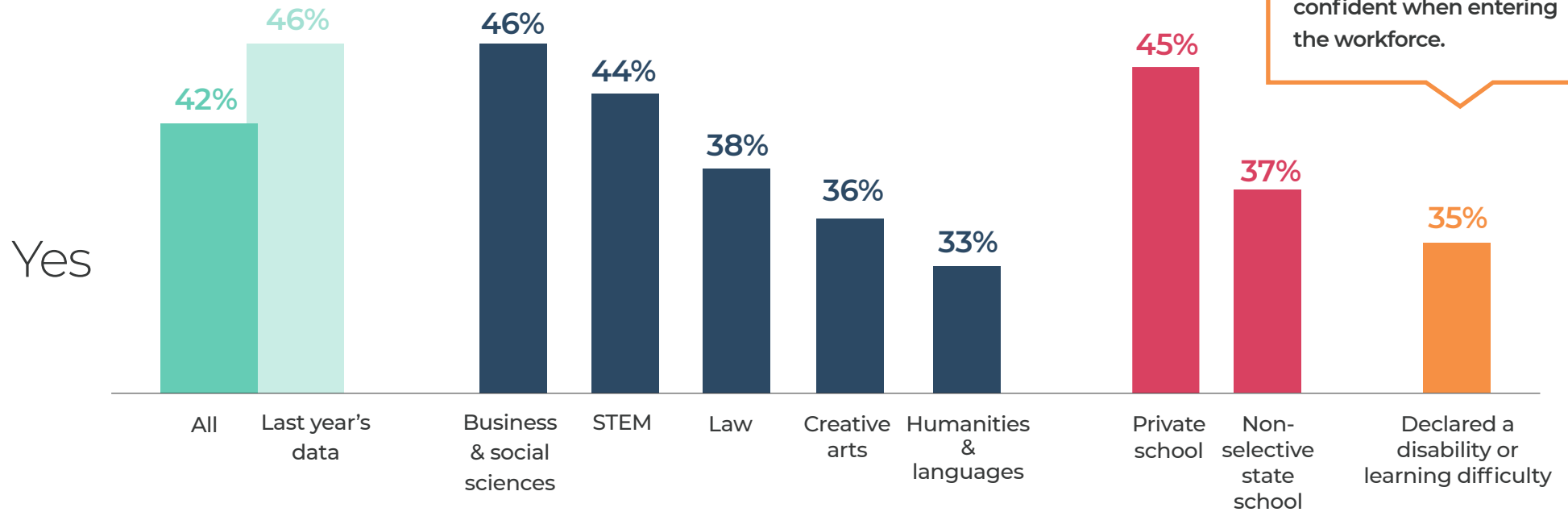


Privately-educated students are still much more likely to do formal internships in a chosen sector, whereas those who went to a state school are more likely to work during the term to earn money while studying.



Respondents selected all options which applied

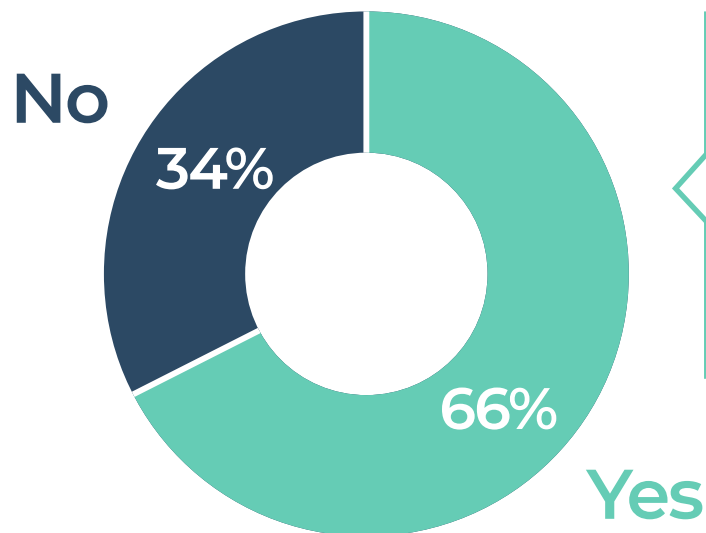
Q Do you feel prepared to enter the world of work?



There's still more that needs to be done to ensure that those with a disability or learning difficulty can feel confident when entering the workforce.

What a student is studying can have a big impact on how ready they feel about starting a graduate-level job. This also impacts confidence – amongst the 58% who don't feel prepared, only 18% said they were confident about securing a graduate role (compared to 39% overall).

Q Do you feel you have the required level of **digital skills** to enter the working world?



The workplace has changed rapidly in the last year and students are feeling less prepared to enter it. The research suggests that there is more to be done to educate students about the demands of the future of work.



Researcher notes

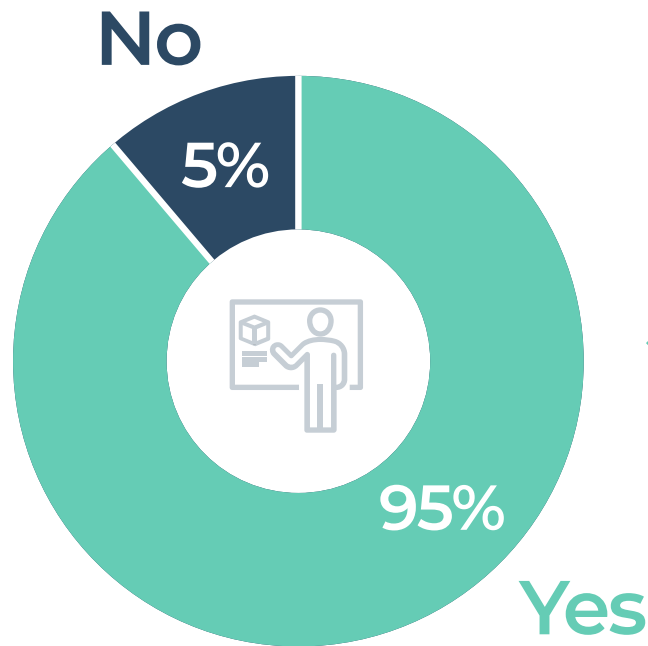
There are a number of factors which impact whether a graduate feels prepared. Employers that can tailor their processes to the needs of applicants will enable all to flourish during the application process and provide a more effective onboarding experience.





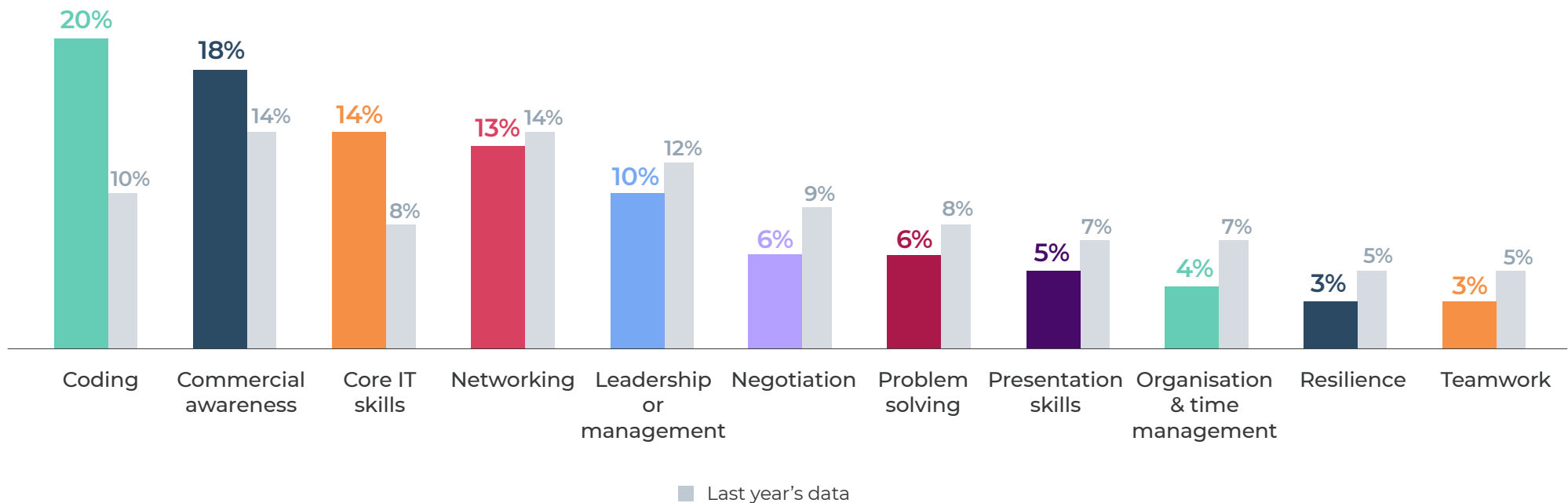
» Where employers can support

Q Should graduate employers be supporting the student population with **upskilling** during university?



“Yes” is up from **90%** in last year’s research.

Q Outside of your university course, what do you feel you **most need to learn or upskill** in before entering work?



Researcher notes

Students recognise the workplace is changing and believe they need better digital/coding skills to stand out to leading employers. In the last year, commercial awareness is also becoming more of a worry for students as they haven't had the same exposure to the business world that they normally would.

Today's students expect employers to be involved in their upskilling – to support them in becoming work-ready in the “new normal” will involve universities, employers and organisations like Bright Network to work together to ensure this is possible.

3. How employers and roles can look attractive to graduates

Section summary:



The average **salary expectation** in a graduate's first job has dropped from **£27,611** last year to **£25,315** this year.



The **firm's people and culture** continues to be the main factor in a graduate's decision when choosing their first role.



48% of graduate's will actively research a company's **commitment to diversity** before applying, with only **8%** saying it's something they don't consider at all.

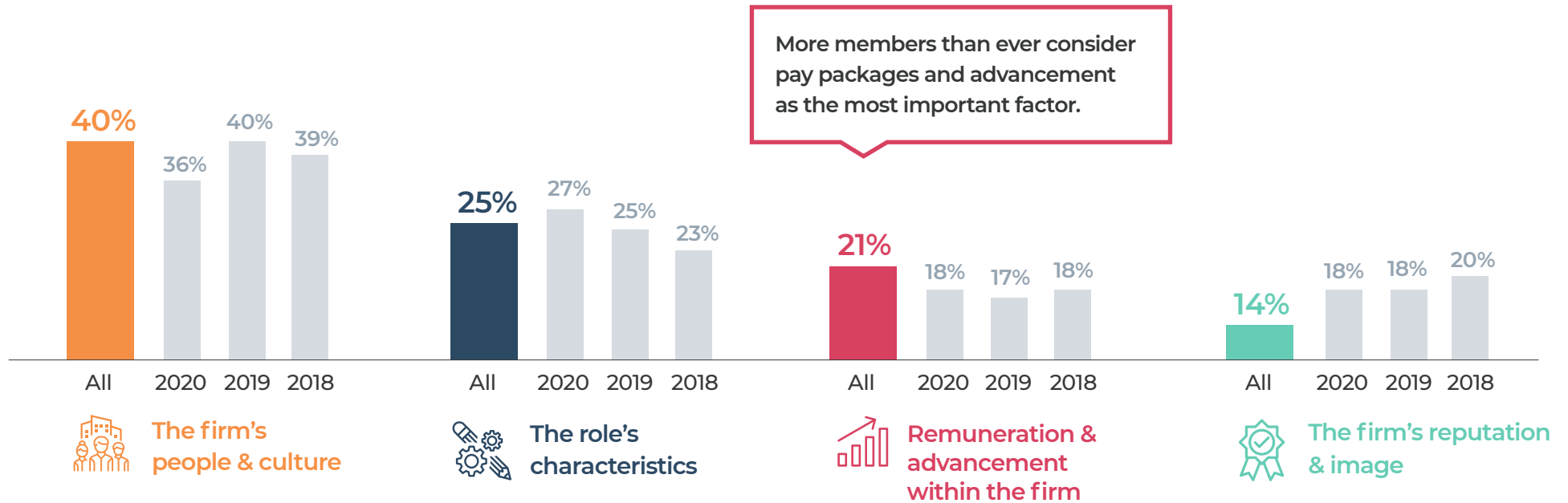


Banking & Finance, Law and Technology & Engineering are considered some of the **least inclusive sectors** by students.



» What's important to graduates?

Q What is **most important to you** when choosing a graduate role?



More members than ever consider pay packages and advancement as the most important factor.

People and culture continues to be the most important factor for **2 in 5** graduates.

A firm's reputation isn't as important as it used to be – Gen-Z is looking for positive interactions with an employer throughout university.

» What does an ideal graduate role look like in the “new normal”?

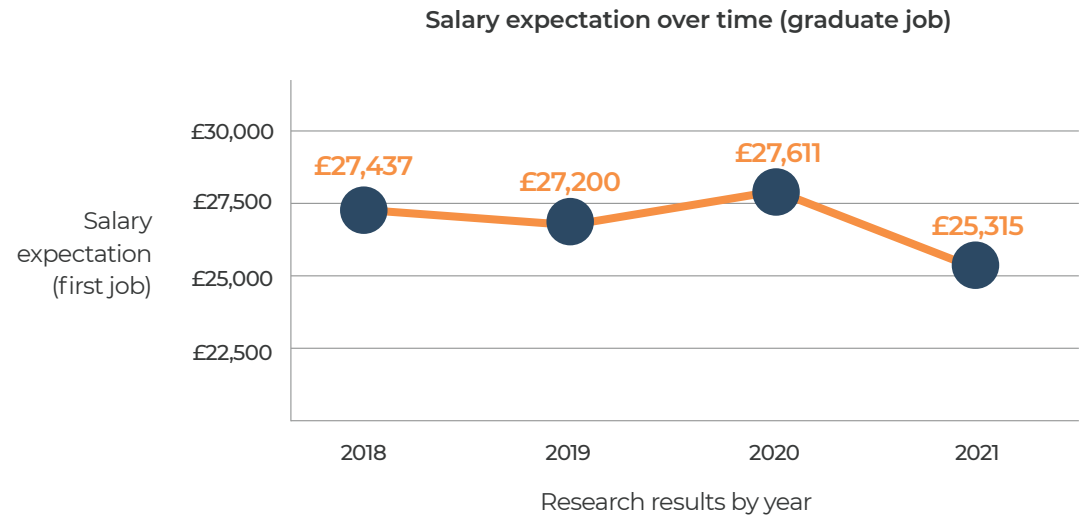
Q What is your expected **salary**?



Average salary expectation for graduate job



Average salary expectation after 5 years



Male graduates expect **8%** more in terms of salary than their female counterparts.



Male



Female



Non-selective state school

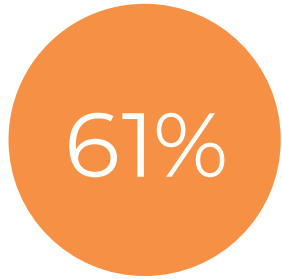


Private school

On average, privately-schooled graduates are looking for **13%** more as a starting graduate salary compared to those that attended a non-selective state school.

Respondents were asked to enter a figure for their expected salary. To calculate the respected averages, 10% of the highest and lowest answers were removed and the remaining figures were used to calculate the averages.

Q What's more **important to you** in your early career?



Having a good work-life balance

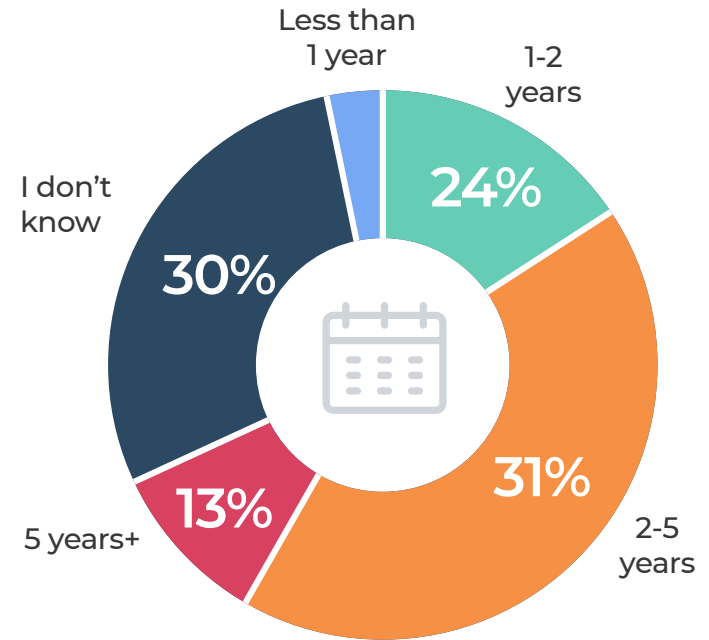
72%
Last year's data



Having a good salary

28%
Last year's data

Q How long do you **plan to stay** with your first/graduate employer?



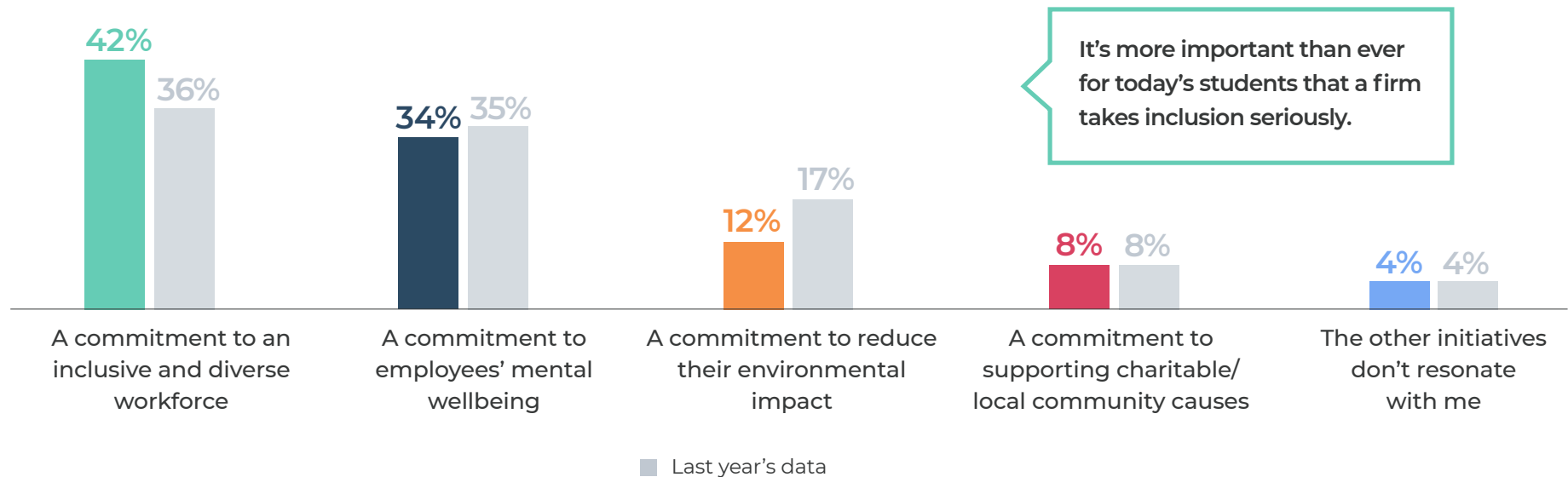
Researcher notes

Throughout this year's report, members have valued salary with increasing importance – in times of unfavourable economic conditions and rising unemployment, financial considerations do become front of mind.

Graduates on average expect £2,296 less as a starting salary compared to last year, with significant differences in expectation based on background.

» Selecting a sector or employer

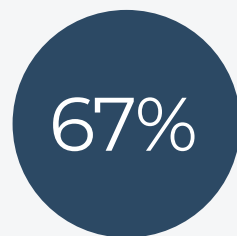
Q What do you **prefer to see** from a potential employer?



Q Do you think employers are doing **enough to support** their employees' mental wellbeing?



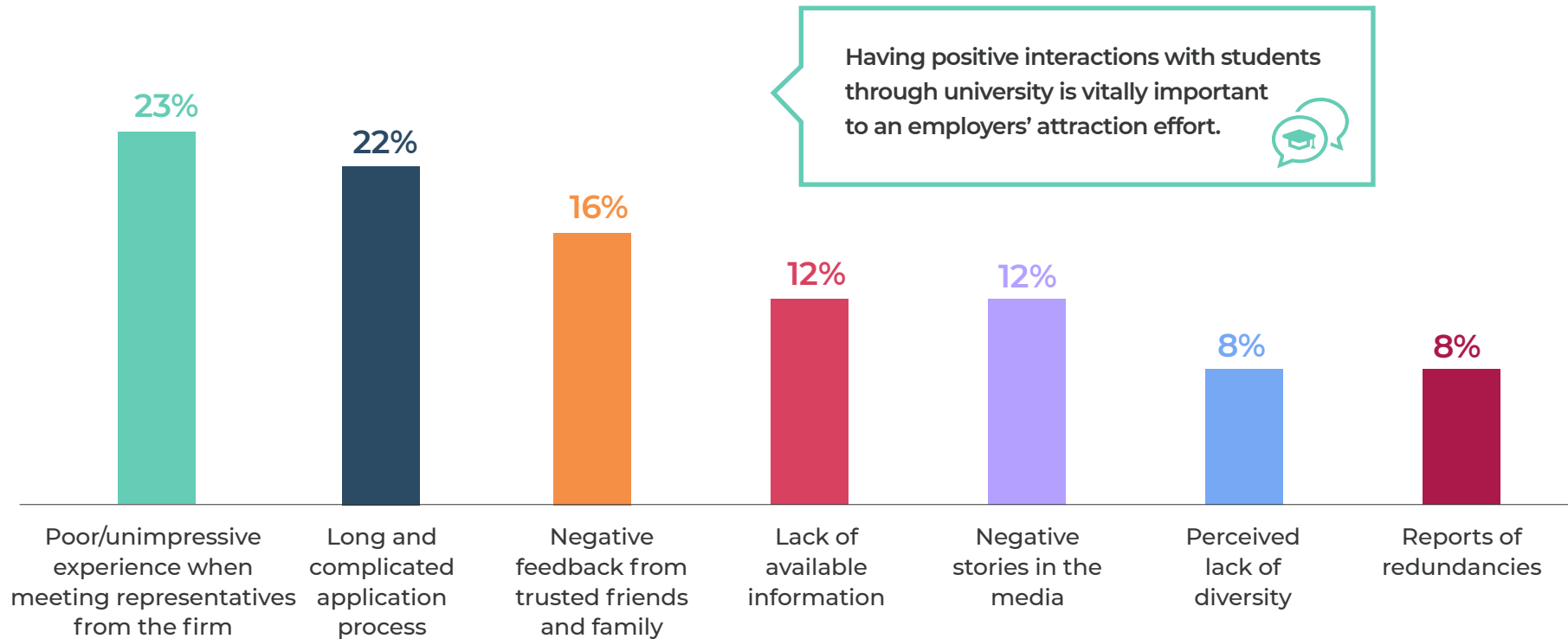
Yes



No

Seeing what an employer does to support wellbeing is important for graduates, but **2 in 3** don't perceive employers as currently doing enough.

Q What is most likely to **put you off applying** to an employer?



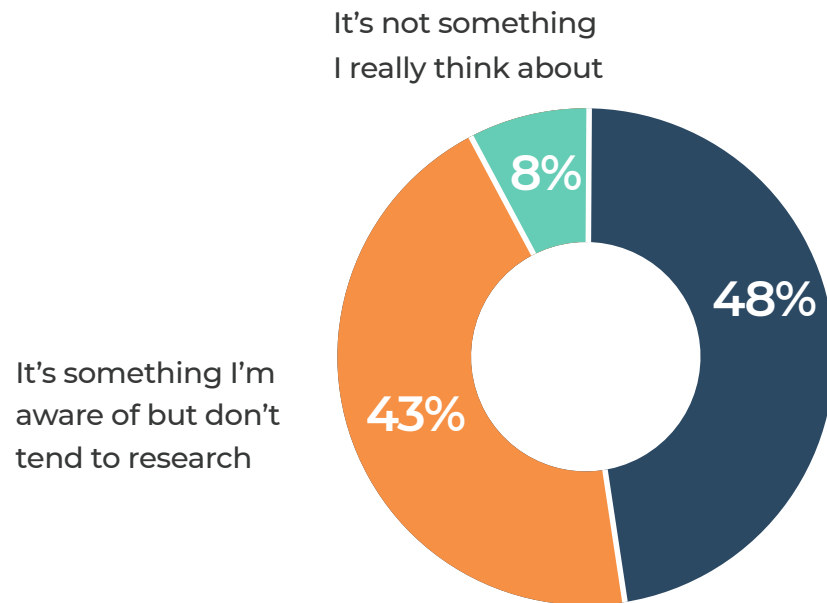
Having positive interactions with students through university is vitally important to an employers' attraction effort.



Being clear and up front with what is expected from students throughout the application process leads to higher conversion rates, but also more applications in the first place.

>> An employer's commitment to diversity

Q Before applying to a company, do you consider their commitment to **diversity and inclusion**?



92% of members will consider the diversity or inclusivity of an organisation before applying.

Always and it's something I actively research

It's something I'm aware of but don't tend to research

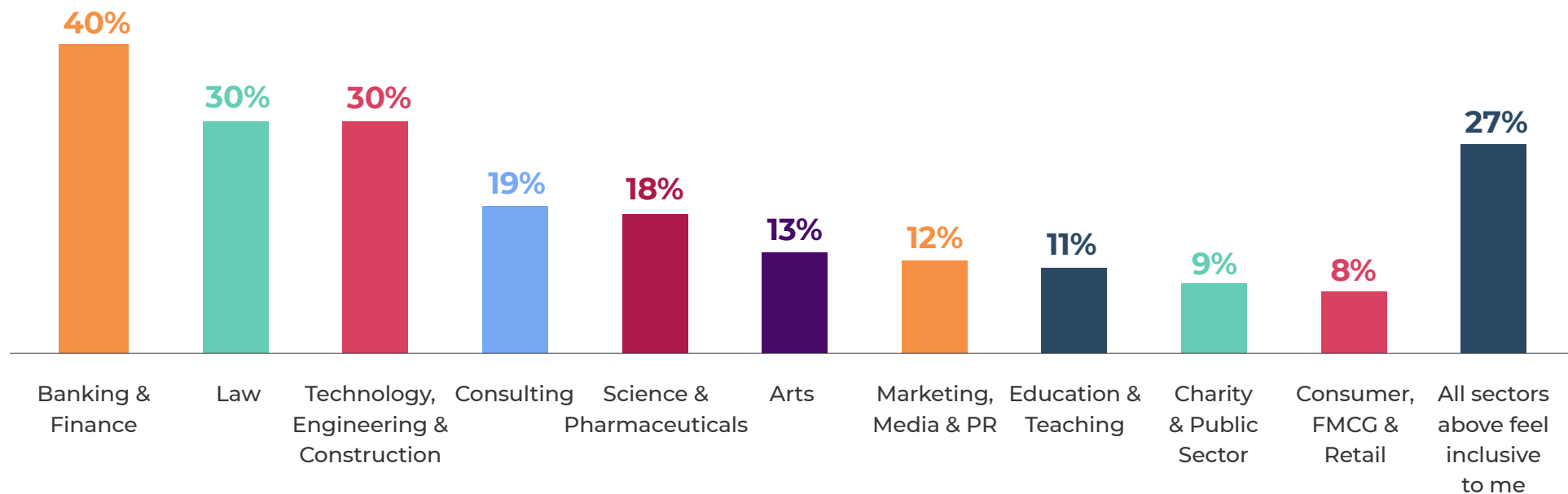
It's not something I really think about



Researcher notes

Seeing a positive attitude to diversity and inclusion is important for almost all members when considering where to apply for graduate roles. There's still a perception amongst the student population that some sectors lack diversity more than others, whether it be due to under-representation based on gender, ethnicity or social mobility.

Q Are there any sectors which you perceive as **lacking diversity and inclusivity**?



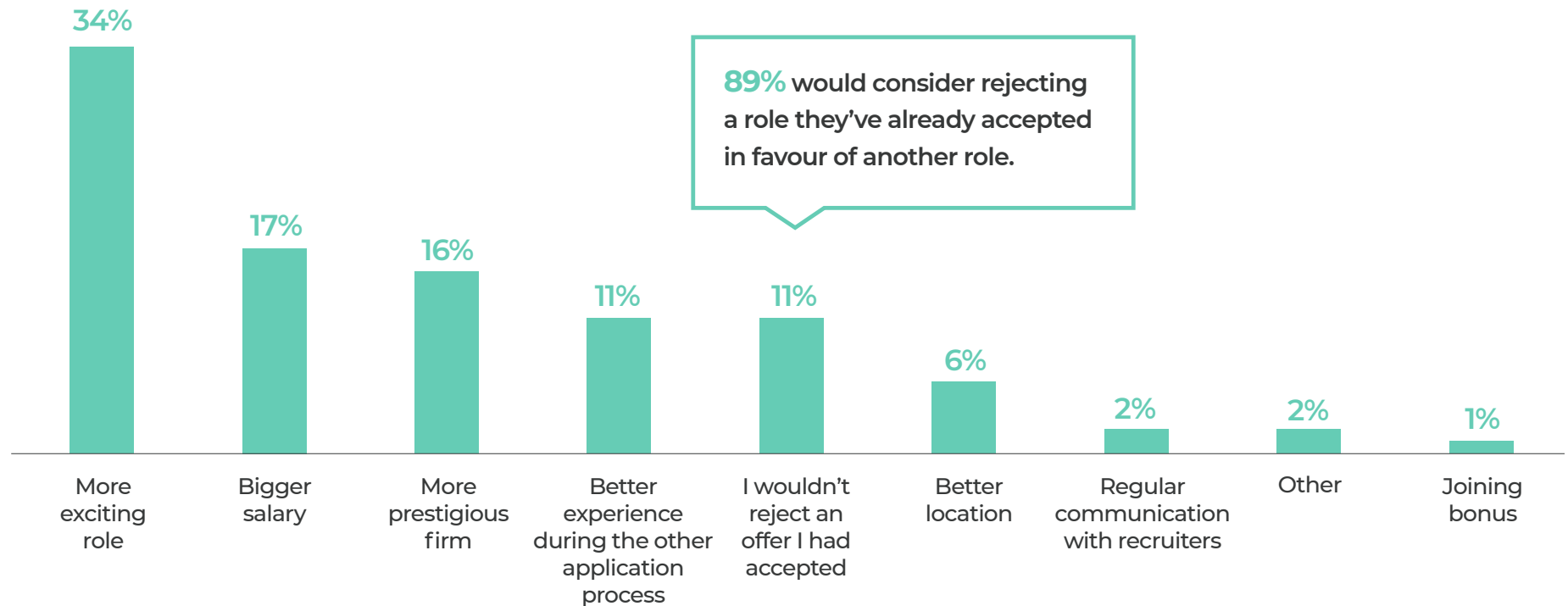
Banking and Finance is perceived as the sector that most lacks diversity, with **4 in 10** students having this perception.

For sector-focused reports and insights, contact Bright Network – research@brightnetwork.co.uk

Respondents ticked all the sectors they felt lacked diversity and inclusion

>> Keeping offered graduates warm

Q If you had already accepted an internship or graduate role offer, what would make you **reject this in favour** of another opportunity?



Researcher notes

After offering a graduate role, keeping in touch with candidates about the exciting work the team or department is doing will help you drive down renege rates. Connecting them to mentors already working in the graduate role they are going into is an effective way to do this.

4. How graduates are approaching applications

Section summary:



Applicants and graduate recruiters continue to have **differing views** on what is important when applying.



70% of students are **confident** about completing an application process virtually, but they feel least confident about interviews and psychometric tests.



40% of students believe an interview is going to be the most difficult part of an application process for them.



Attitudes towards applications

Q What do you think **graduate employers value most in candidates?**

Answers from students

	This year	Last year
Existing industry experience	1	2
A 2.1 or above in their degree	2	1
Communication skills	3	3
Passion for the business	4	4
Commercial awareness	5	6
Confidence	6	5
Problem-solving skills	7	7
Teamwork	8	8
Leadership skills	9	9
Resilience	10	11
Organisation & team management skills	11	10

Q What do you **value most in graduate candidates?**

Answers from employers

	This year	Last year
Communication skills	1	1
Passion for the business	2	2
Problem-solving skills	3	3
Resilience	4	4
Commercial awareness	5	5
Teamwork	6	7
A 2.1 or above in their degree	7	6
Leadership skills	8	8
Existing industry experience	9	11
Organisation & team management skills	10	9
Confidence	11	10

For the first time, existing industry experience is seen by students as what is valued most, which doesn't match what recruiters think.



Employers value transferrable skills above grades and industry experience.



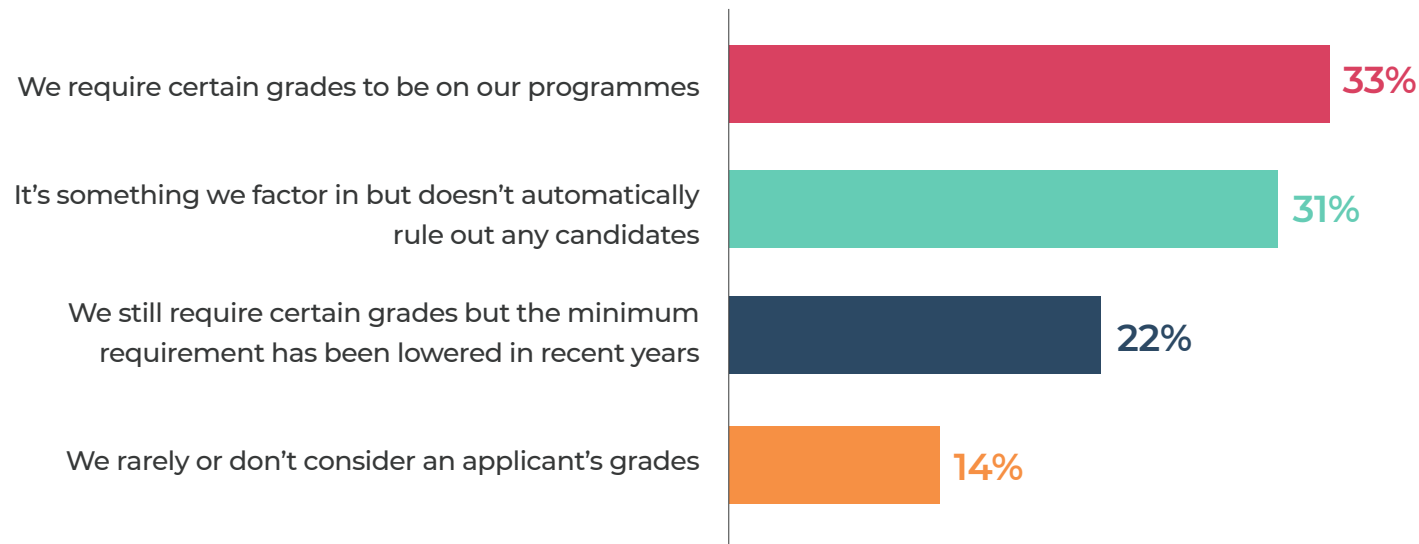
Graduate employers and survey respondents were asked to select their top three out of the eleven. The circles represent where there is considerable variance between answers from graduates and employers.

Q How important are **university and school grades** to your graduate recruitment process?

Answers from an employers survey of 93 leading graduate employers.



We asked graduate employers



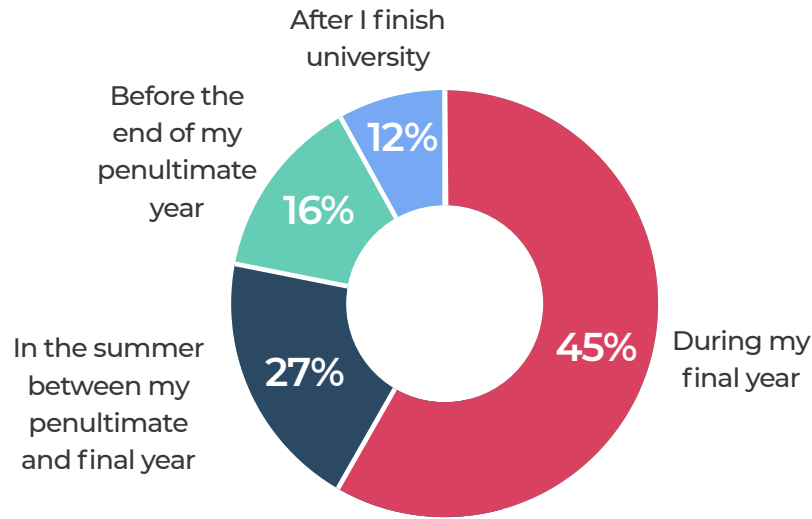
Researcher notes

There's a major disparity between what students think they need to be showing employers and what employers are actually looking for, especially when it comes to existing industry experience and grade requirements.

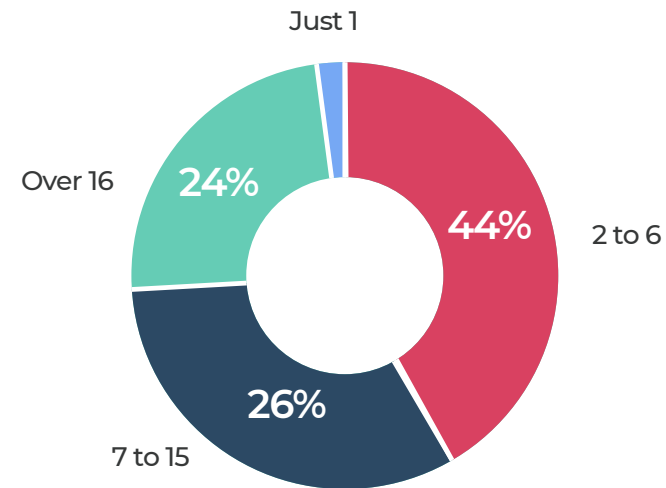
These are both viewed by members as a gateway into a graduate-level role, which could put off good quality applicants from even entering the process, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are less likely to have formal experience. Employers need to be doing more to encourage graduates who have the transferrable skills (communication, passion, problem solving and resilience) and potential to be great hires.



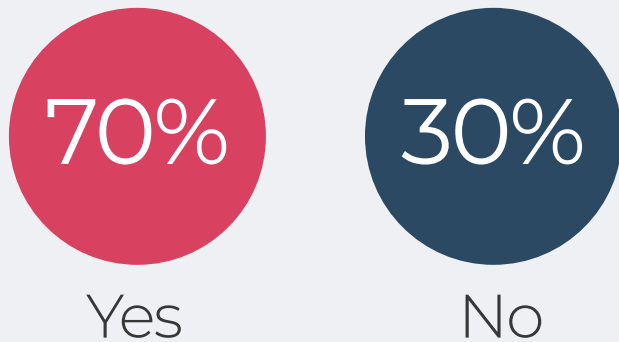
Q When do you plan to **start applying** for a graduate role?



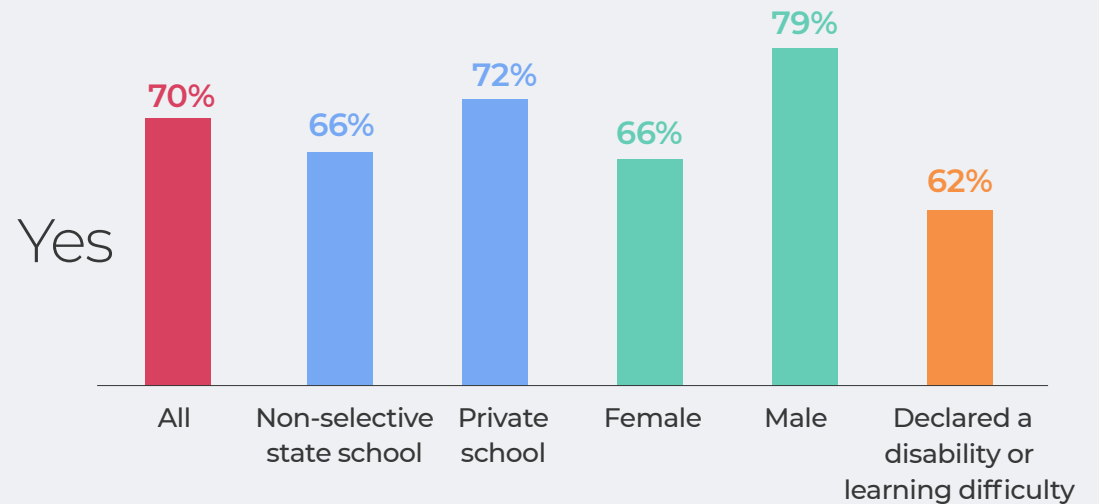
Q When applying for insight days, internships or graduate programmes, on average **how many applications** do you submit?



Q Are you confident completing a full **application process virtually**?





Percentage of "Yes" answers by group



Q Which part of an application process would **worry you most?**

	All	Female	Male	BH
Application form	8%	8%	10%	10%
Psychometric tests	20%	21%	17%	27%
Situational judgement tests	9%	8%	11%	13%
Automated video interview	20%	18%	23%	17%
Face-to-face interview	21%	22%	19%	19%
Case study task	6%	6%	6%	6%
A presentation	9%	9%	7%	5%
Group exercise	7%	8%	7%	4%

40% of Black Heritage students are most worried about a test, compared to just **29%** in the whole student population. 

Over **2 in 5** students believe an interview is going to be the most difficult part of the process for them. 

5. How to best engage Gen-Z in the “new normal”

Section summary:



Building a social media presence on **LinkedIn** is key, with **90%** of students saying they use it for their career.



Emails and **career websites** continue to be the most important channels for members to find out about opportunities.



90% of members believe that **virtual events** support their career.

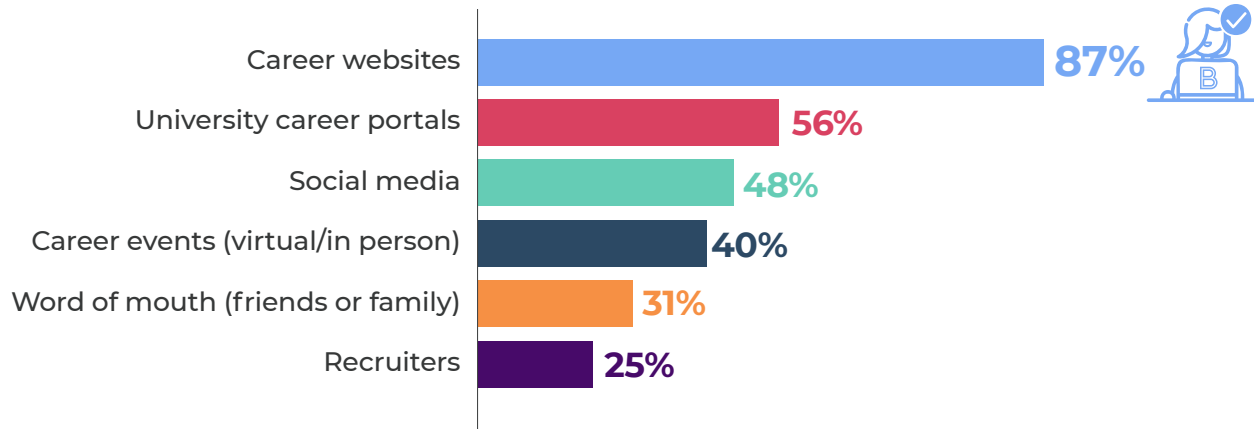


Only **6%** of students would prefer a **fully remote role**.

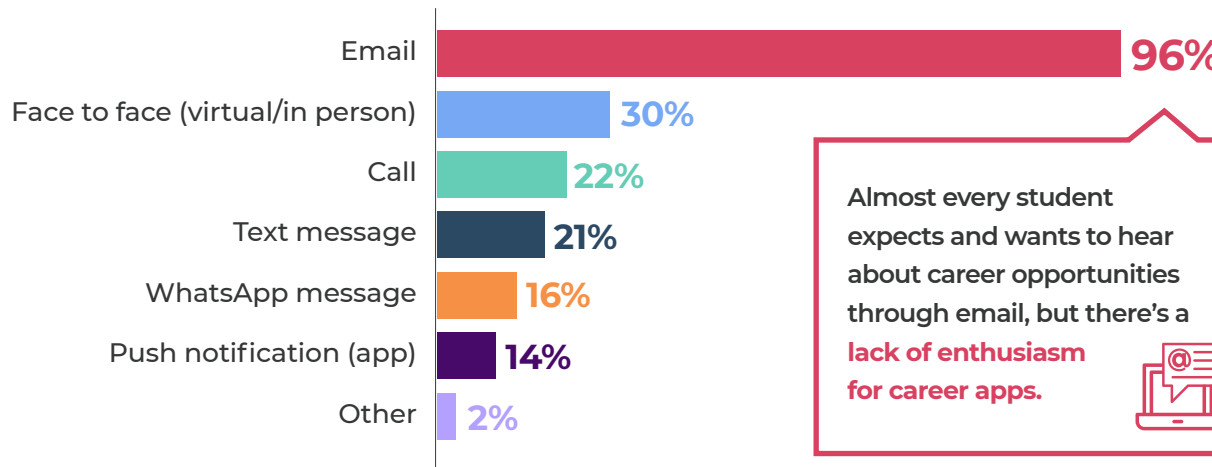


How to engage students

Q Where do you typically find/hear about **opportunities to apply** for?

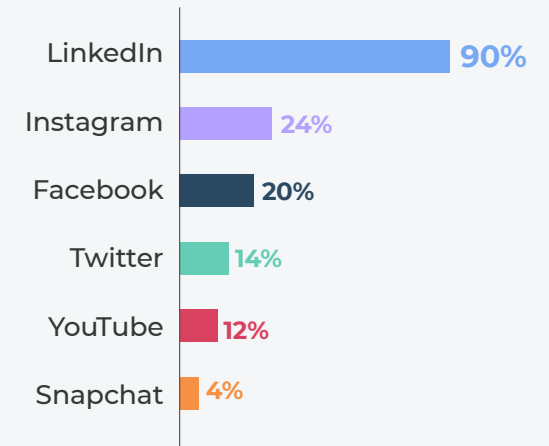


Q How do you like to be **contacted** about a relevant career opportunity?



Almost every student expects and wants to hear about career opportunities through email, but there's a **lack of enthusiasm for career apps.**

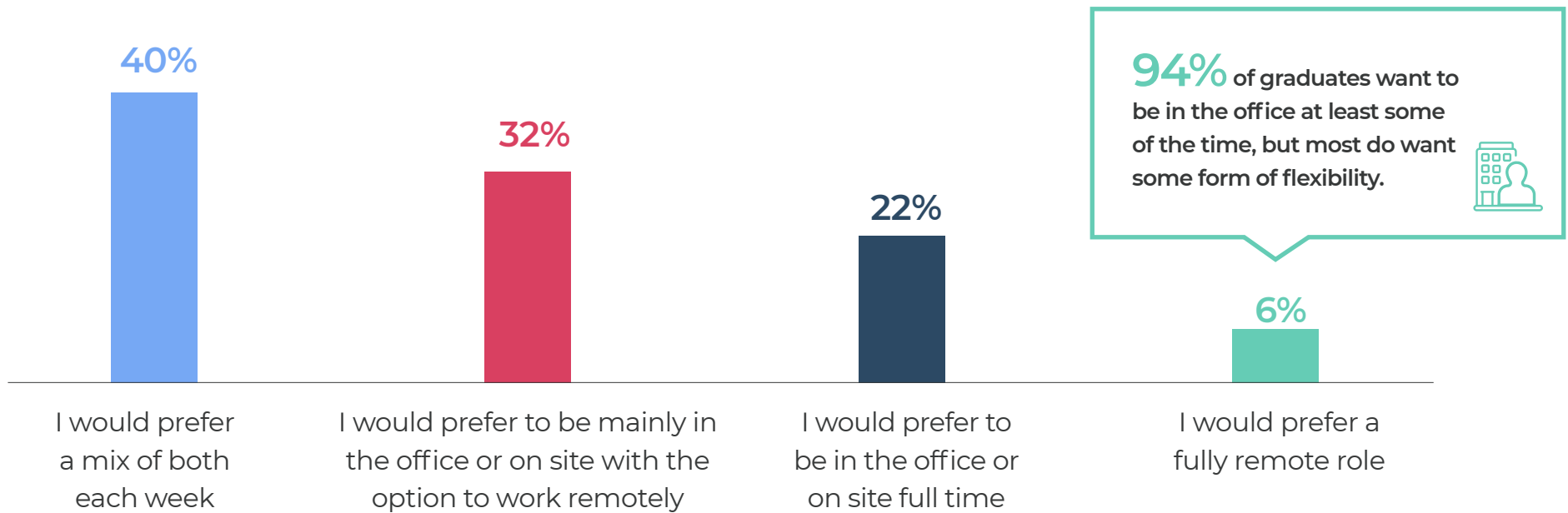
Q Which **social media channels** do you use for your career?



LinkedIn is a key channel – it's an opportunity for employers to encourage current employees to be ambassadors of graduate opportunities.

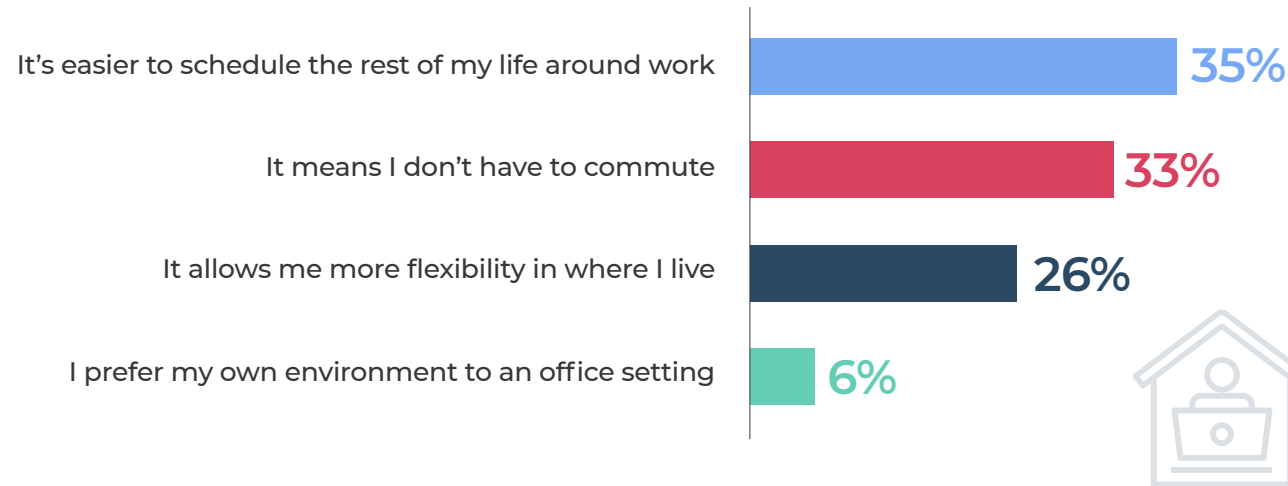
>> Connecting and working remotely

Q How do you feel about **working remotely** in your graduate role?



Q What do you see as the **main benefit** of working remotely?

Answers from the 78% who would like at least some opportunities to work remotely

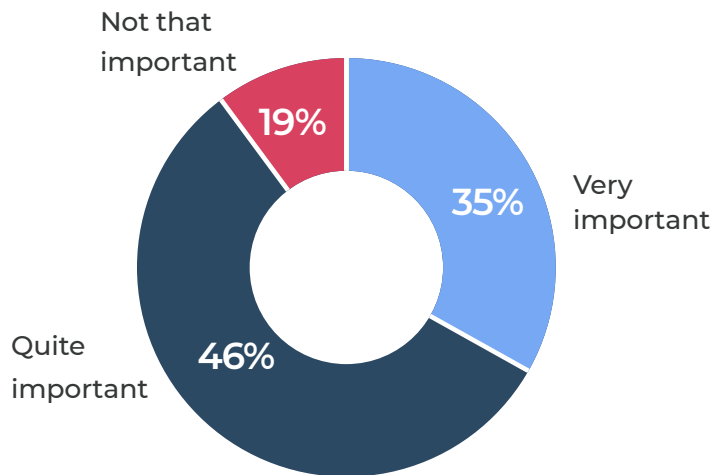


Researcher notes

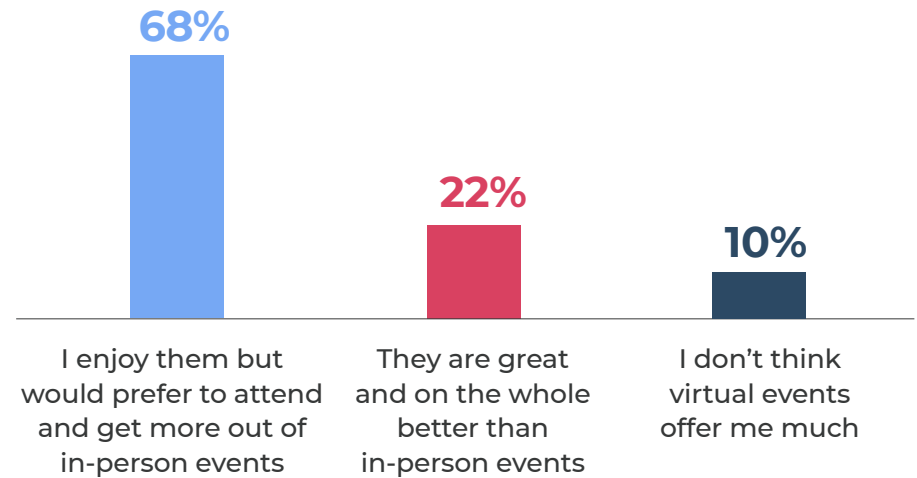
Many graduates worry about not gaining the same learning opportunities if they aren't in the office environment with more senior employees. Formal training sessions only make up some of the development for graduates and many lessons are learnt ad hoc by observing role models in a business setting. Something businesses with large graduate intakes need to consider when deciding what the office of the future looks like.



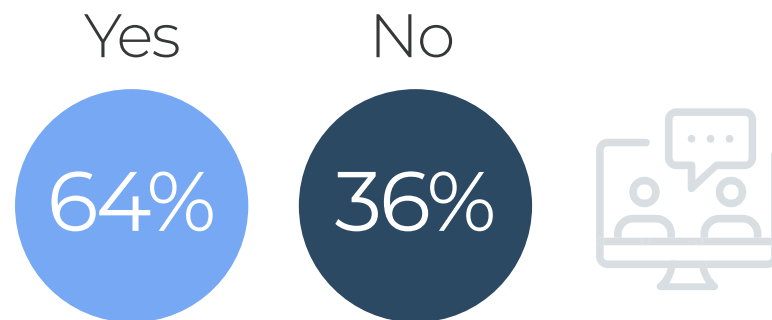
Q How important is it to **meet a firm's representatives** before applying for a role with them?



Q Do you **enjoy** virtual events?



Q Have you attended a **virtual careers event** in the last year?



Researcher notes

Virtual events are clearly popular with nearly **2 in 3** members attending them and **90%** believing they are useful. However it's clear students also wish to attend in-person events, with most believing they get more out of them.

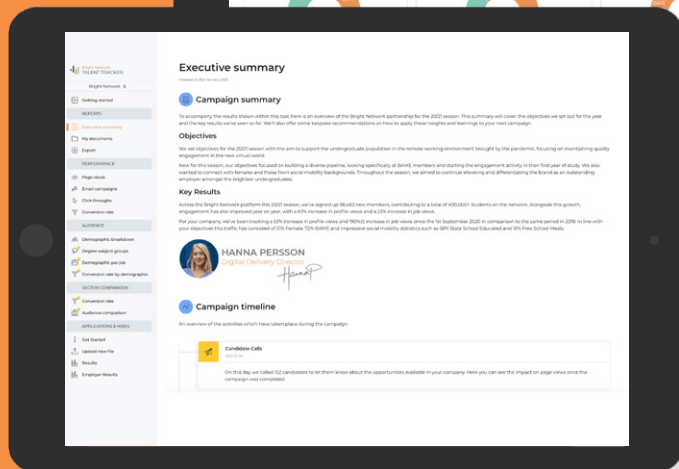
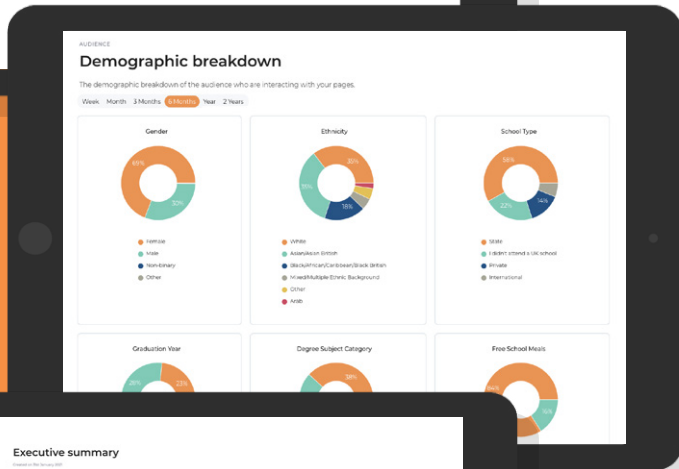
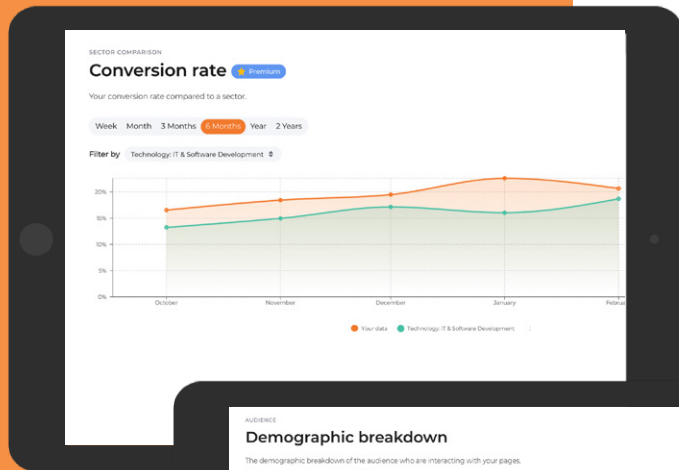
Moving forward, employers who take a mixed approach offering opportunities in-person and virtually are likely to see the best results.



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