

# What do graduates want? 2025/26

Turn insights into action:  
shaping employer brand  
for Gen Z talent



BRIGHT  
NETWORK

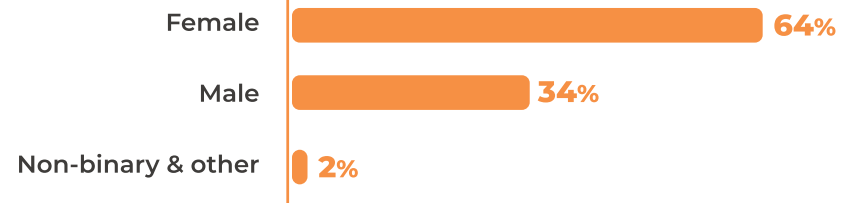


# About the respondents

## GENDER



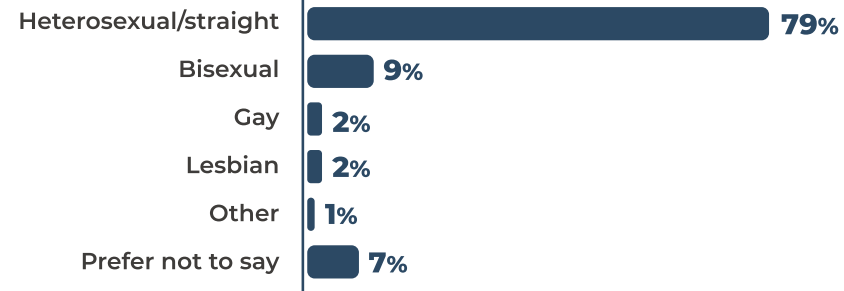
Q. Which of the following best describes your gender?



## SEXUALITY



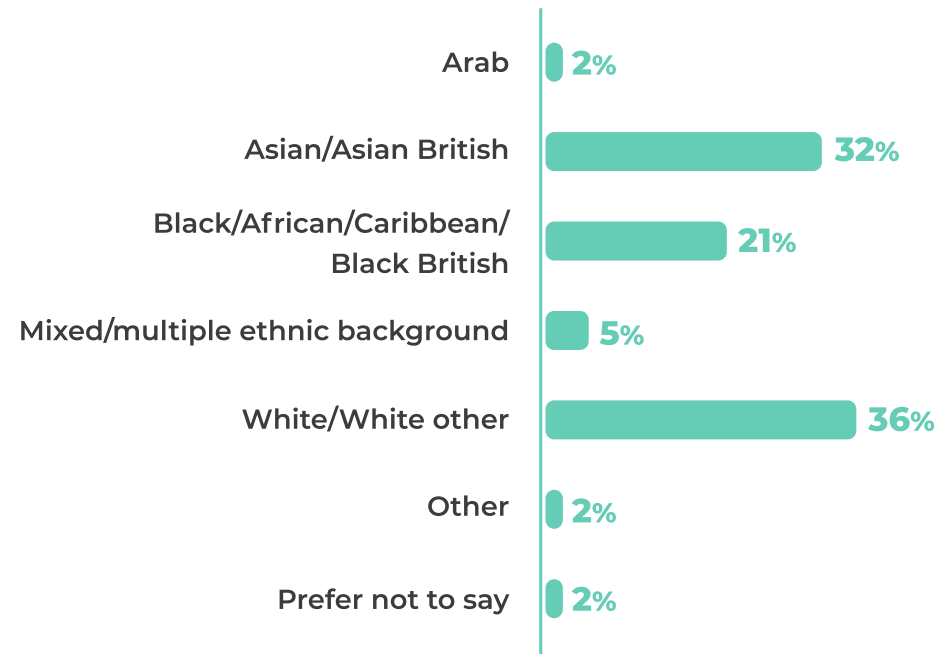
Q. Which of the following best describes your sexuality?



## ETHNICITY



Q. Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?

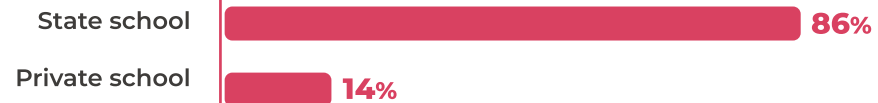




# About the respondents

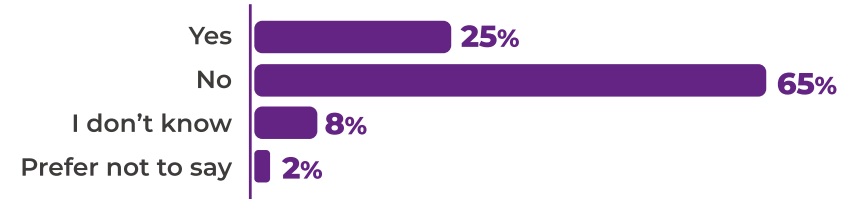
## SCHOOL

Q. Which type of school did you attend?



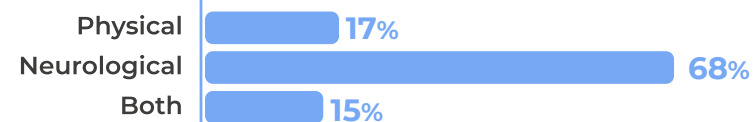
## FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Q. Were you eligible for free school meals at any point during your school years?



## DISABILITY

Q. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?





# About the respondents

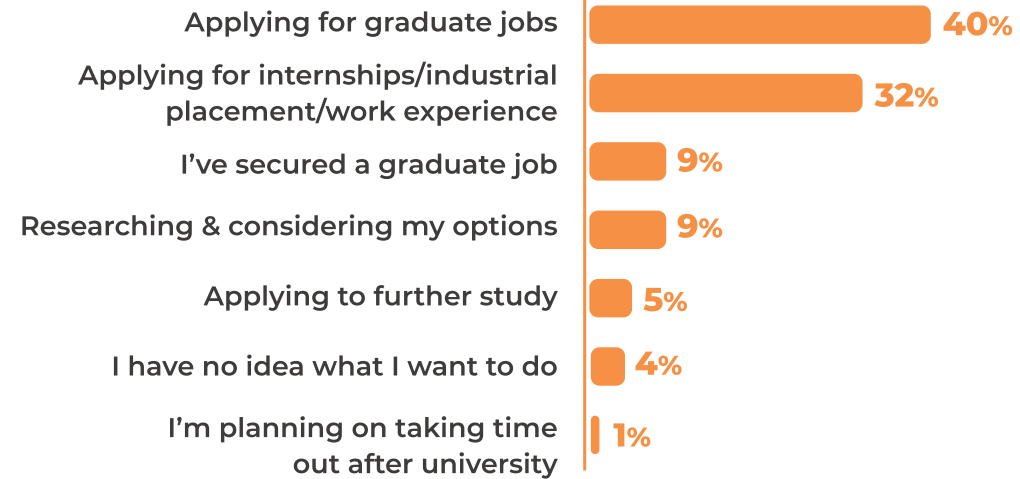
## GRADUATION YEAR

Q. What is your graduation year?



## FUTURE PLANS

Q. What stage are you at in your career?





# What we'll cover

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**1 Confidence**

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**2 Preparedness and skills**

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**3 Application volumes, renegees and retention**

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**4 Career journey and motivations**

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**5 Mental health support**

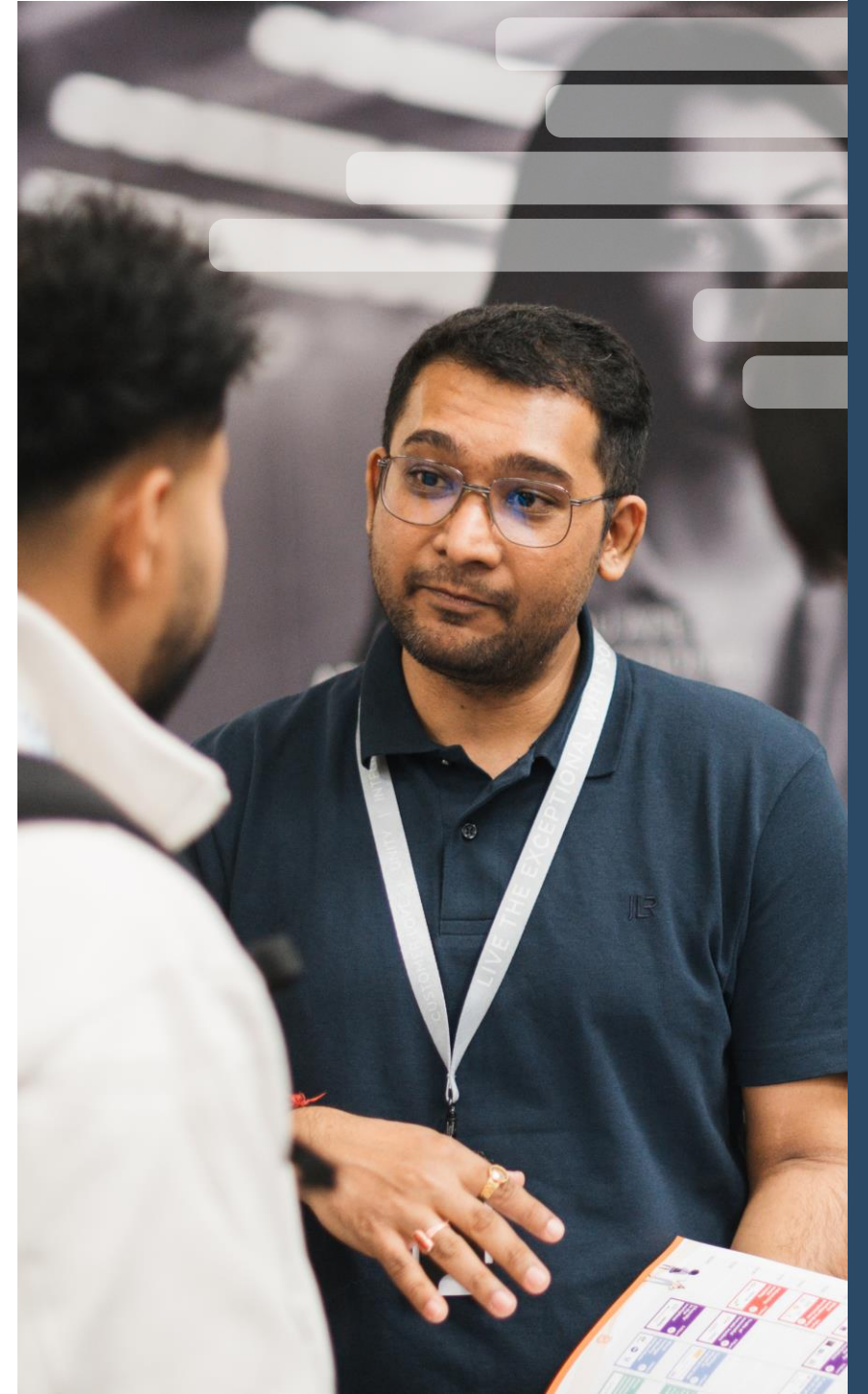
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**6 Expectations and flexibility**

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**7 Student panel Q&A**

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# Confidence

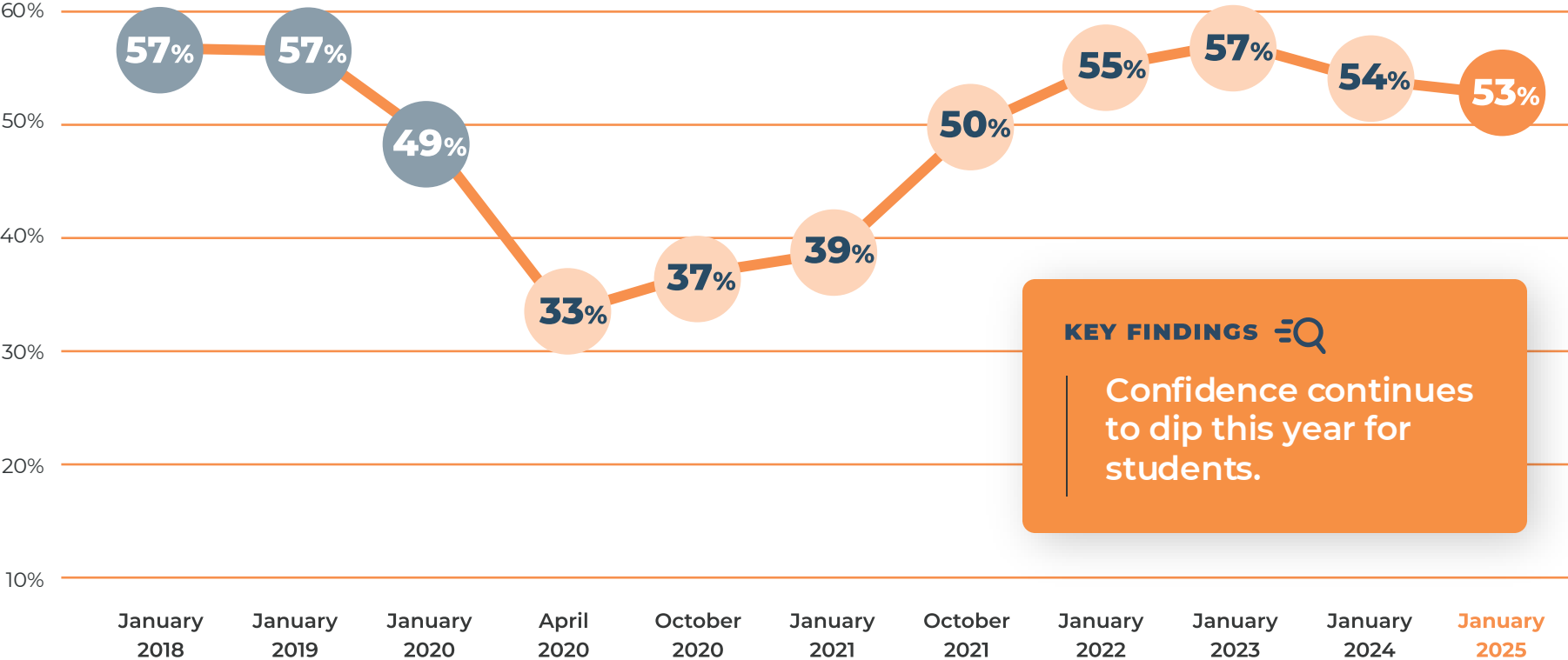




# Confidence in securing a role

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

'Yes' responses from all students over time

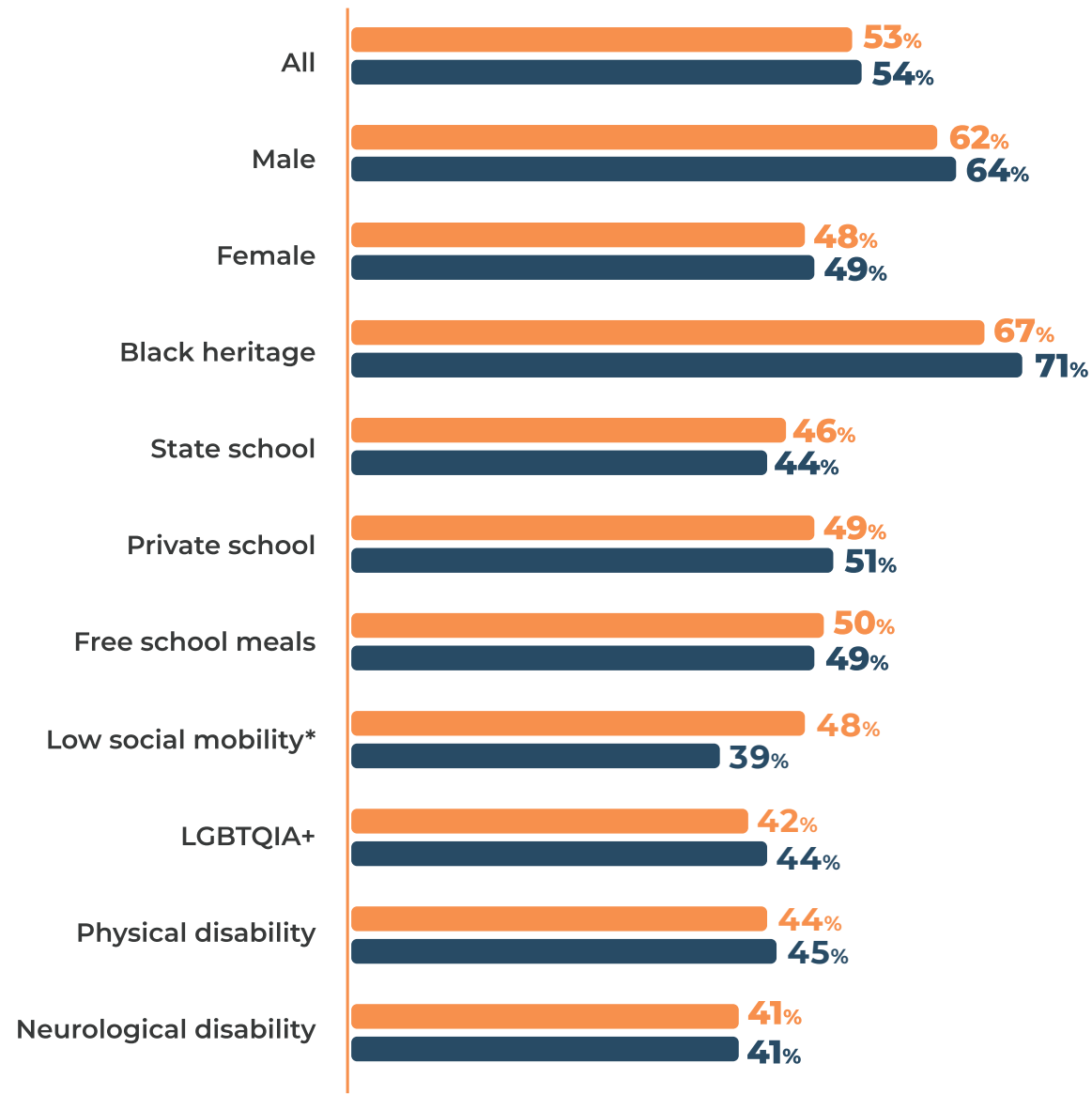




# Confidence in securing a role

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

'Yes' responses



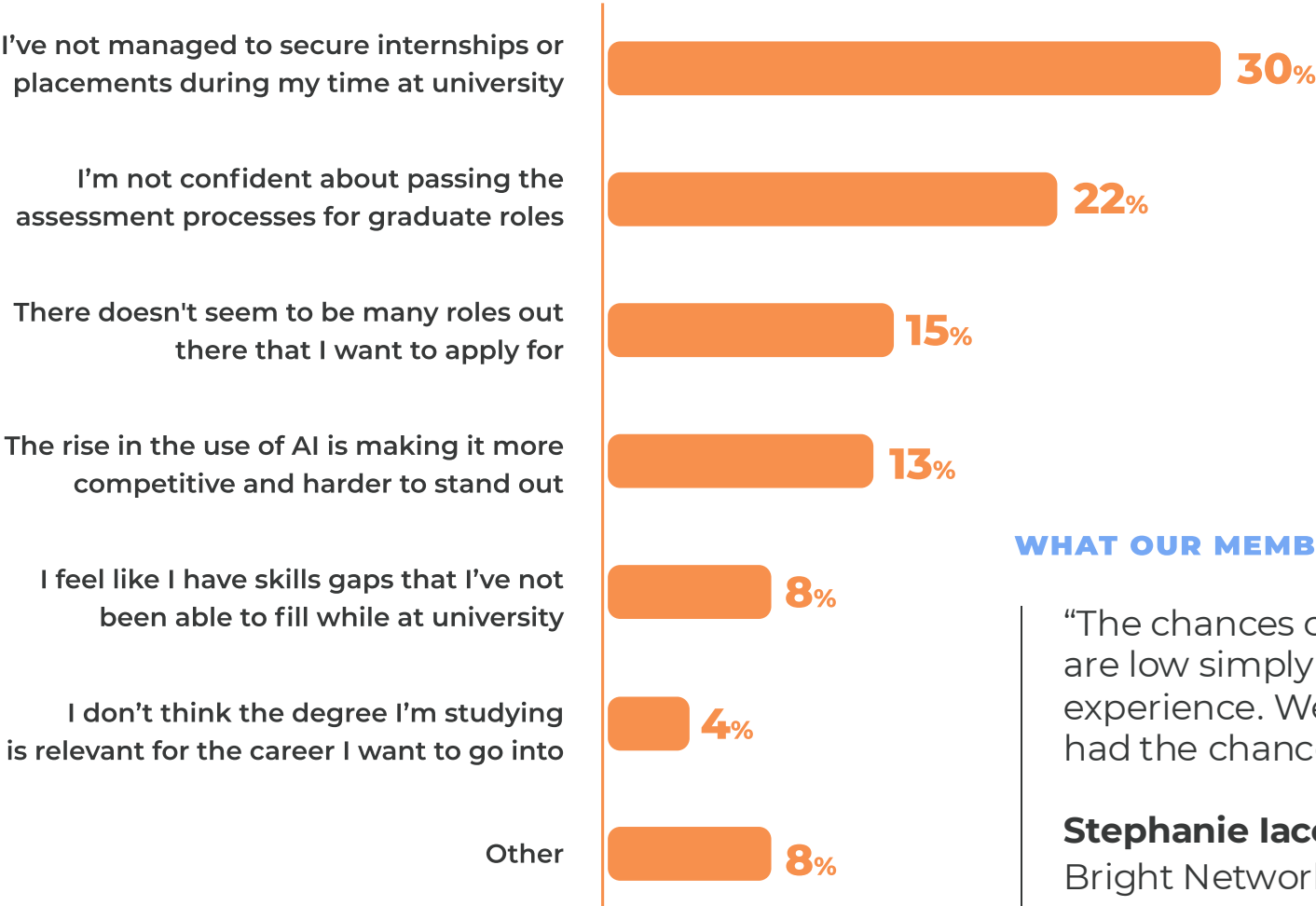
2025 data

2024 data



# Confidence in securing a role

Q. Which of the following reasons for a decline in confidence do you relate to most?



## WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE SAYING

“The chances of getting an interview are low simply due to limited experience. We all wish we at least had the chance to prove ourselves.”

**Stephanie Iacob**  
Bright Network member





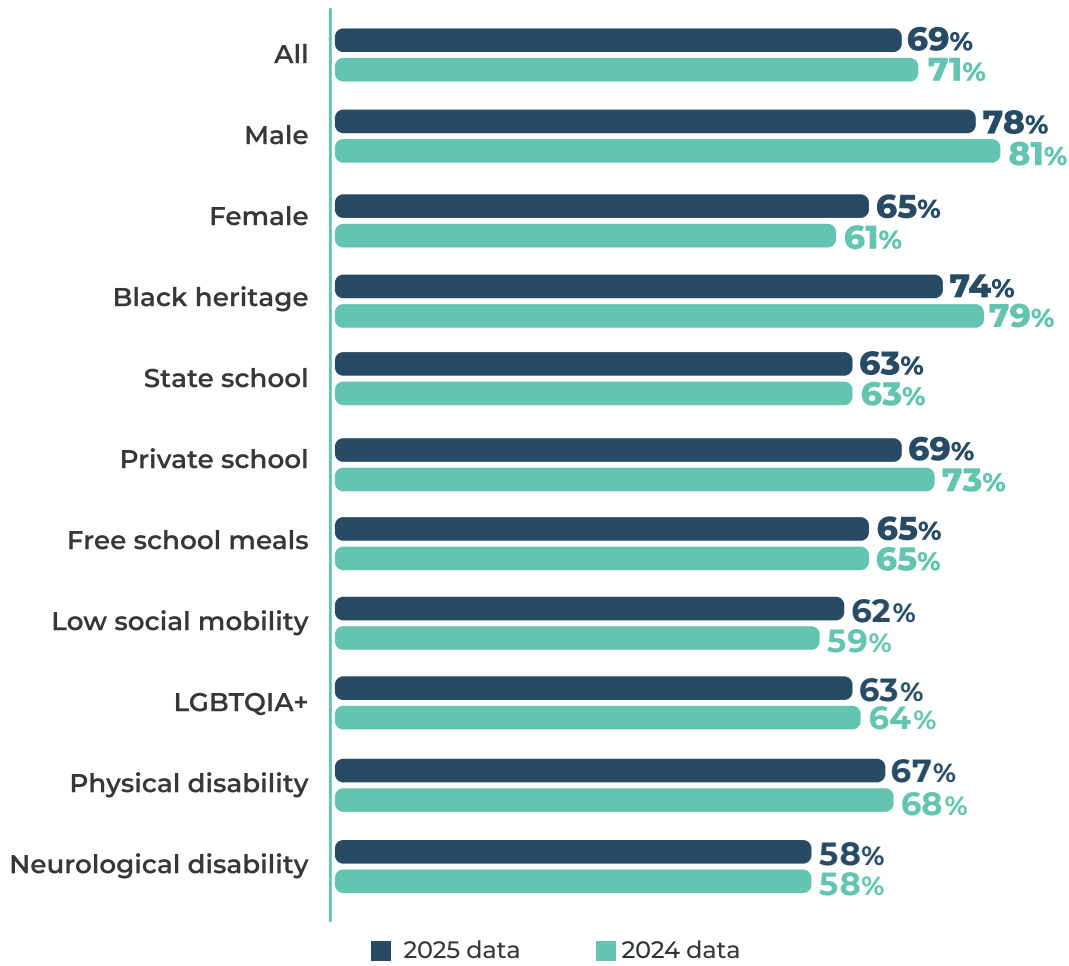
# Preparedness and skills





# Preparedness

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



Q. Are you confident of what is expected from you in the first six months with your graduate employer?

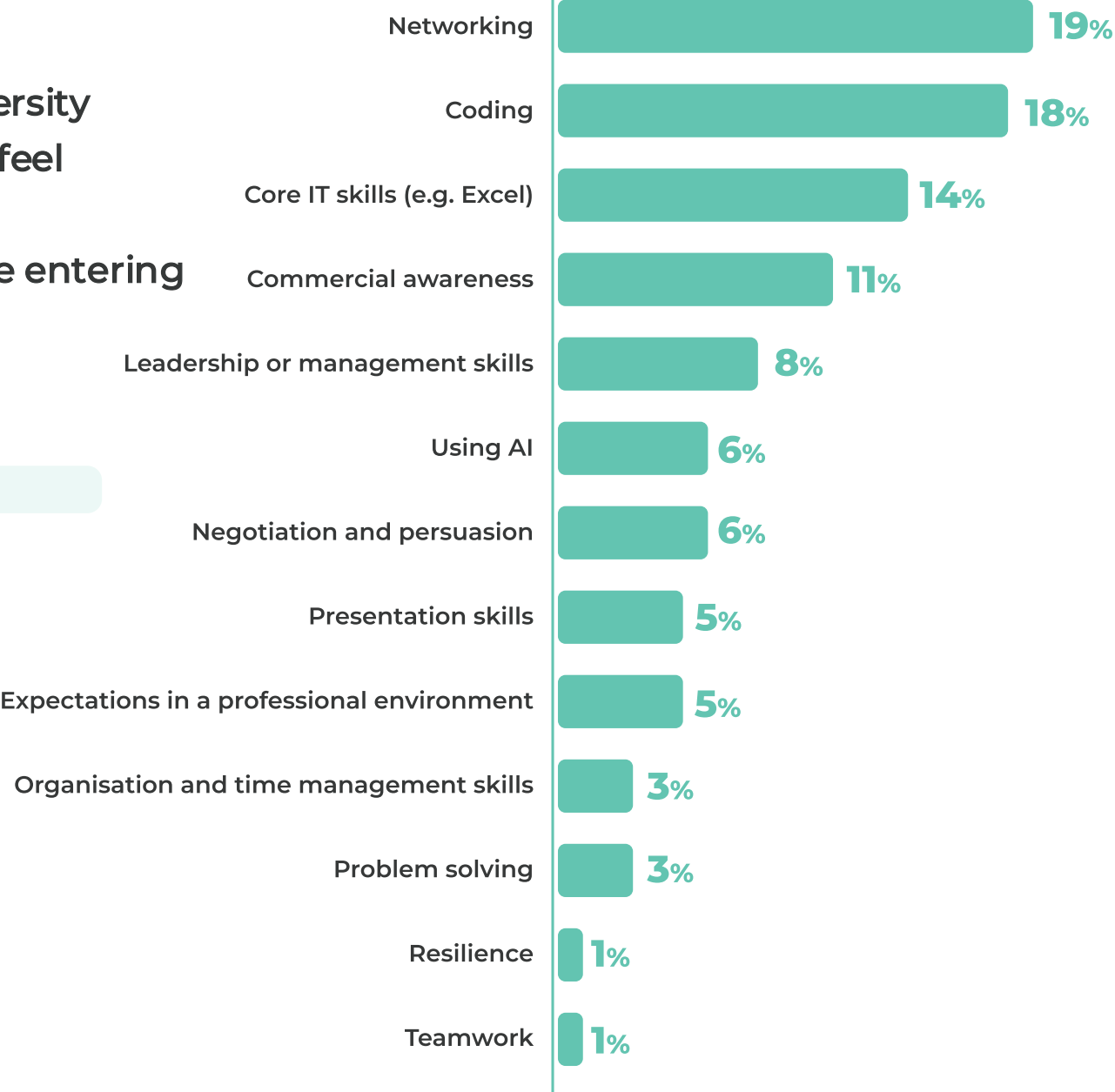
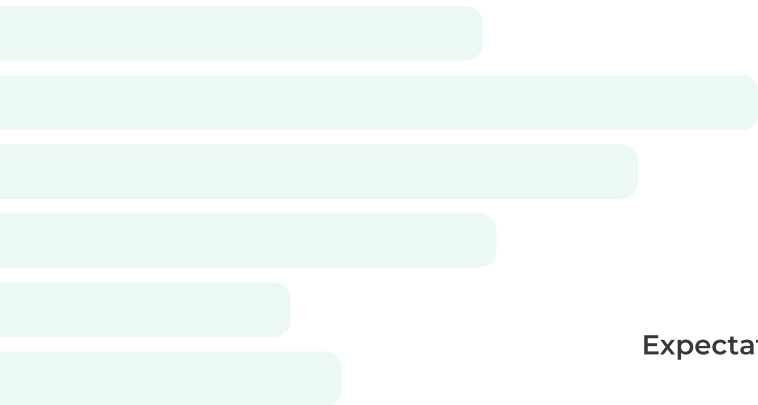
New  
for 2025

Yes **60%** No **40%**



# Skills

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





## Insights from students



**Q.** What do you think employers value most in graduates joining their scheme(s)?

Existing industry experience	1
A 2:1 or above	2
Communication skills	3
Passion for the business	4
Problem-solving skills	5
Confidence	6
Commercial awareness	7
Teamwork	8
Digital skills	9
Resilience	10
Organisation and time management	11
Leadership skills	12

## Insights from employers



**Q.** What do you value most in graduates joining your scheme(s)?

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Organisation and time management	10
Confidence	11
A 2:1 or above	12



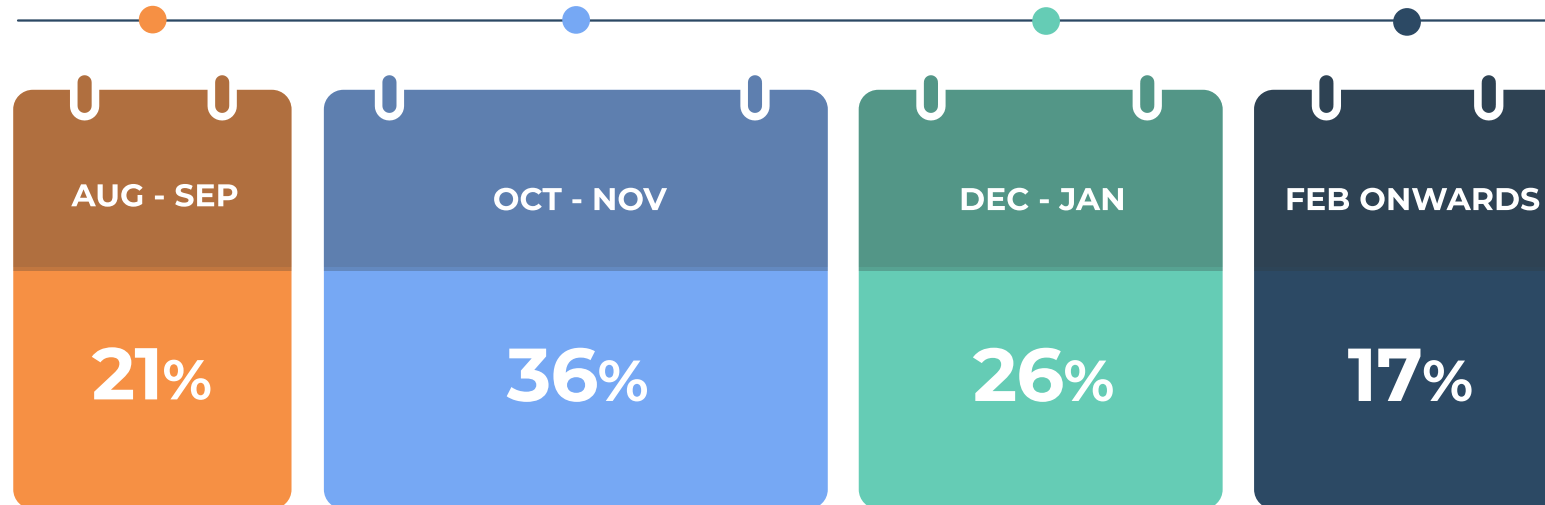
# Application behaviours





# Application behaviours

Q. At what time of year do you tend to make most applications?

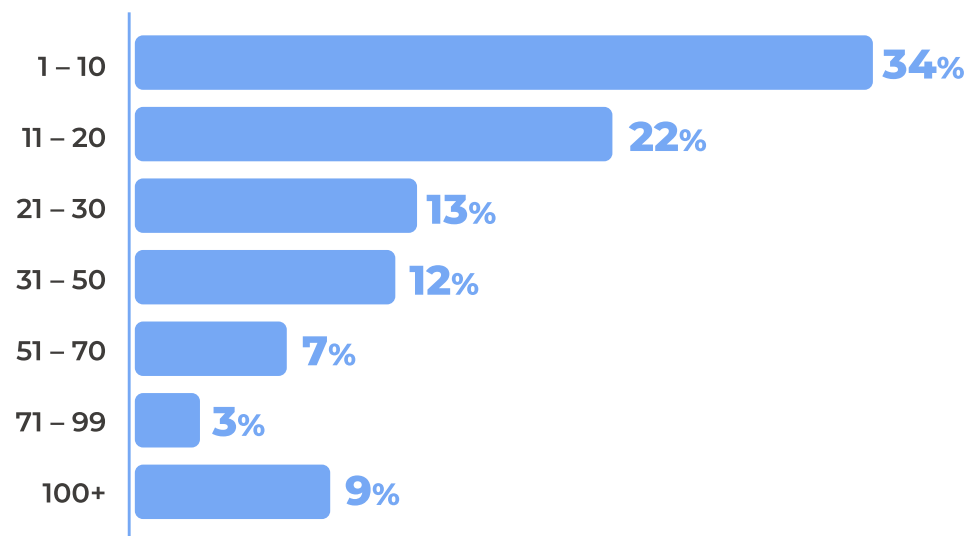




# Application behaviours

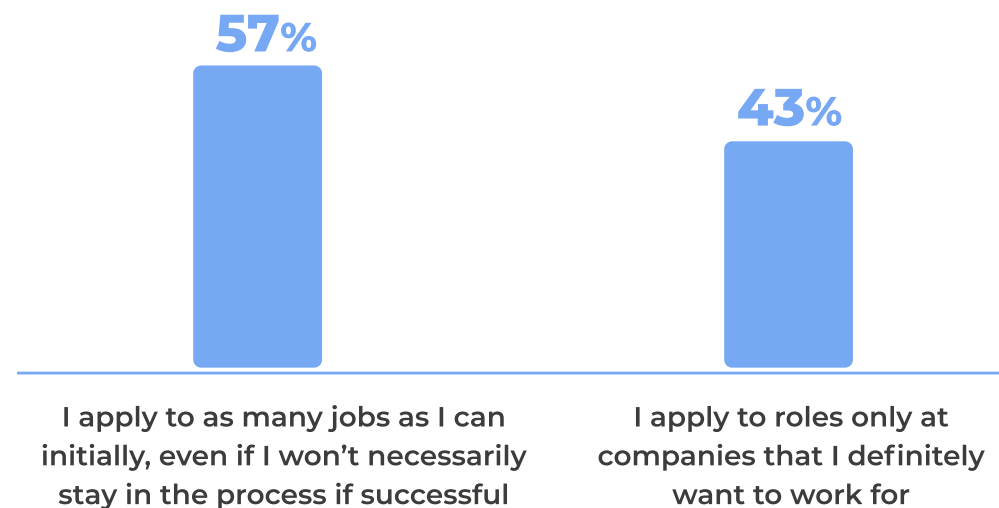
**Q.** How many applications have you started this year?

We asked those who told us they are actively applying



**Q.** When it comes to making job applications, which statement do you relate to the most?

We asked those who told us they are actively applying



## KEY FINDINGS 🔍

**Self-reported application volumes are up year-on-year**, although perhaps less than expected based on reports from employers. The number of students **making 11-30 applications is up 9** percentage points, **31-50 is up 3** and **51+ is up 5**.



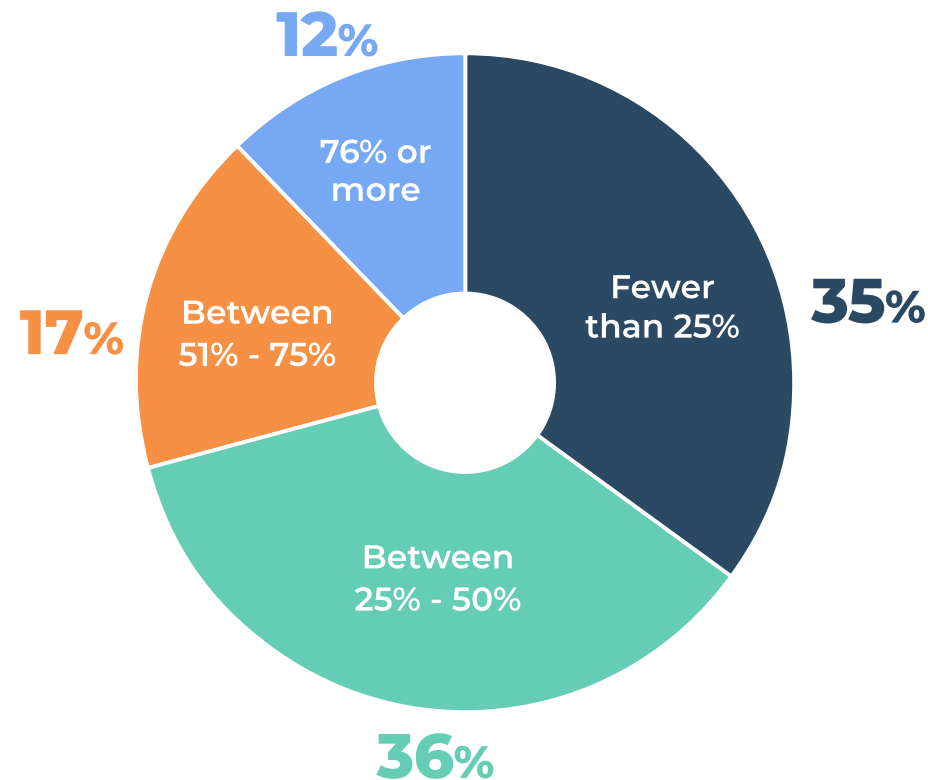
# AI and applications

**50%** of students use AI when making job applications



**Q.** For how many of the applications you've sent have you used AI for assistance?

We asked those who told us they are actively applying



## WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE SAYING

"I use it to assist my applications because not using it is like not using the internet and relying on books only. Times are changing and we should too."

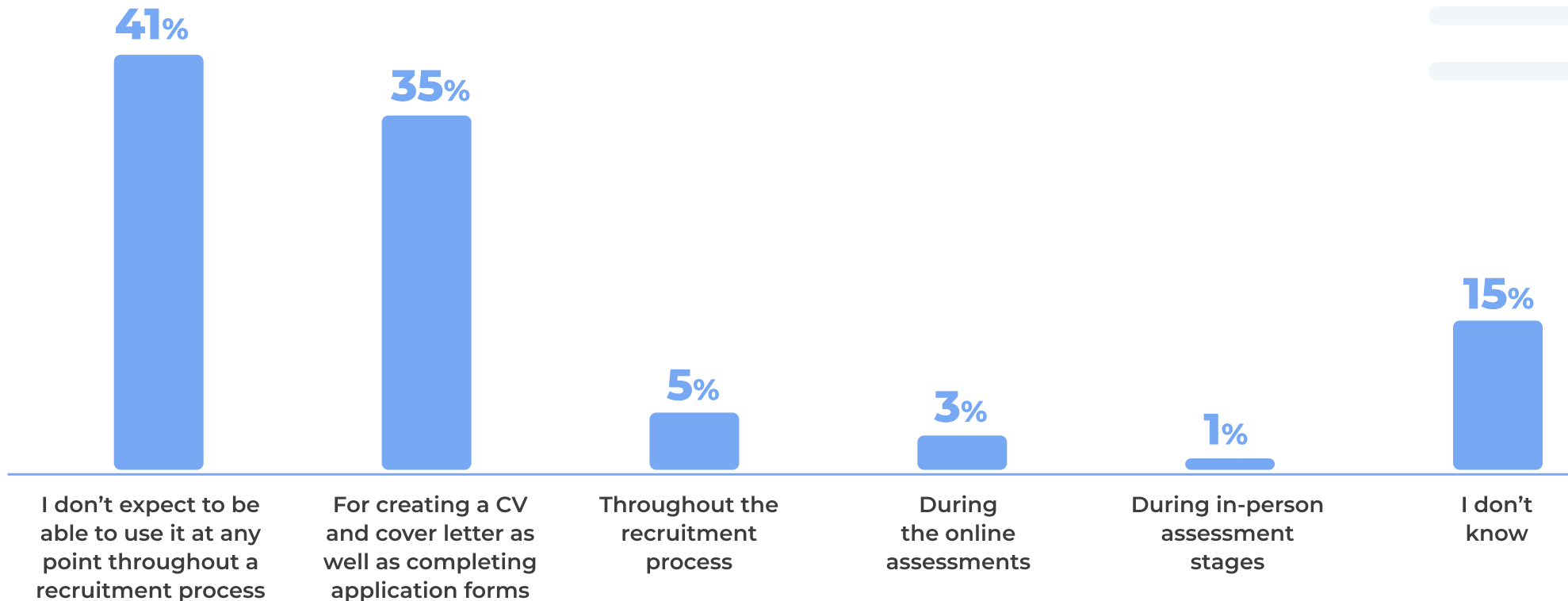
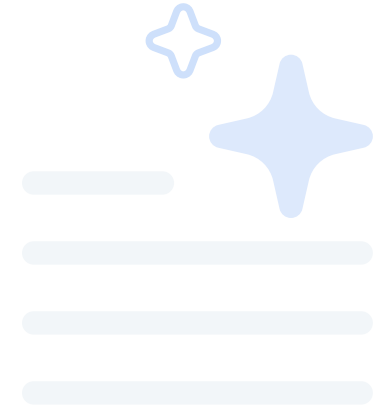
**Raghav Vijay**  
Bright Network member





# AI and applications

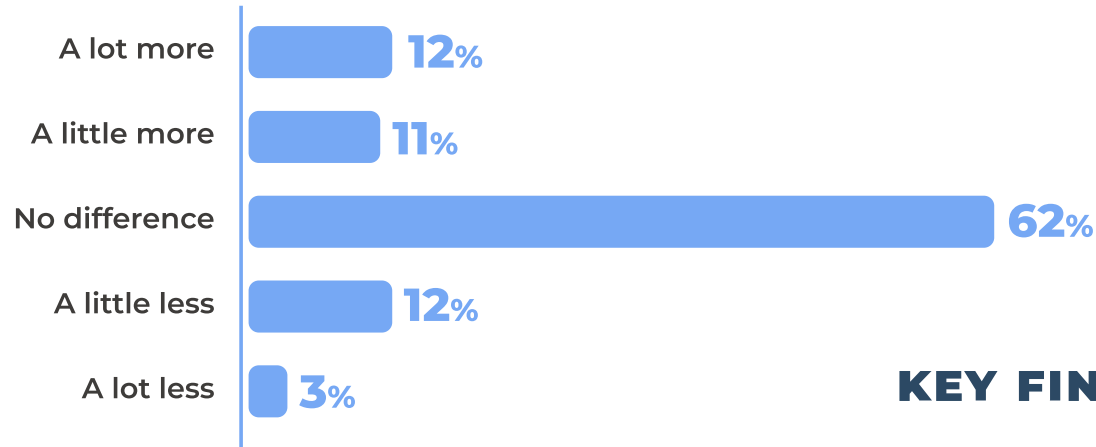
**Q.** How much do you expect to be allowed to use AI when going through recruitment processes?





# AI and applications

**Q.** If an employer said that they do not allow candidates to use AI during the recruitment process, would it make them more or less appealing?



## KEY FINDINGS 🔍

**40%** of you told us you'd still not set guidelines around AI usage in your processes, but **28%** of you will be setting them for the next recruitment season.

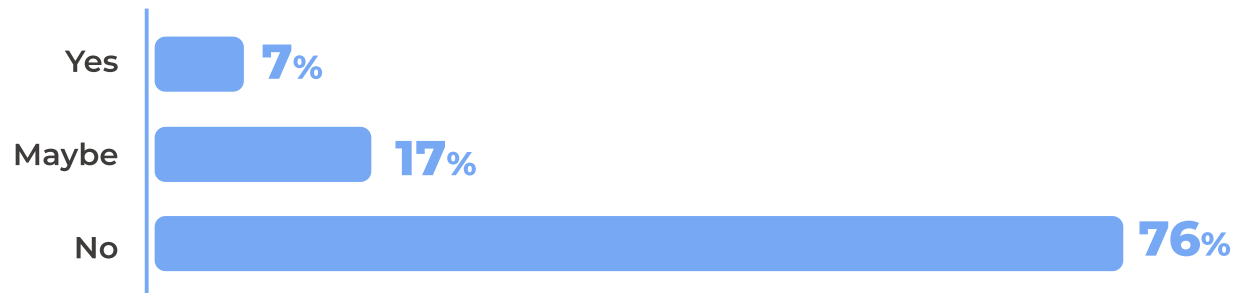
For those of you still yet to decide, here's what other employers are doing:

- **22%** allow candidates to use AI in some but not all stages
- **44%** don't allow candidates to use AI
- **34%** allow candidates to use AI at all stages



# AI and applications

**Q.** Would you still use AI during the recruitment process if an employer said that you weren't to use it?



## WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE SAYING

"I'd follow their rules, though I disagree with any view that AI shouldn't be used in helping structure how to present my CV or motivation – the experiences are still my own, as is the motivation."

**Aidan Cross**

Bright Network member





# Reneges and retention





# Attitudes towards reneging

**Q.** If you had already accepted an internship or graduate role offer, would you reject it for another?

We asked those who told us they are actively applying



## WHAT OUR MEMBERS ARE SAYING

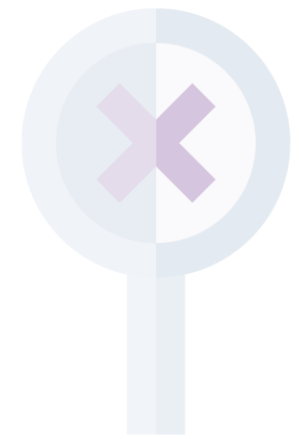
"I think at the beginning of your career it is important to prioritise yourself especially when you are building yourself professionally, so I would say this is not necessarily a bad thing."

**Sara Benbia**  
Bright Network member



**Q.** Before starting your graduate role, did you reject other role(s) you also had offers for?

We asked graduates

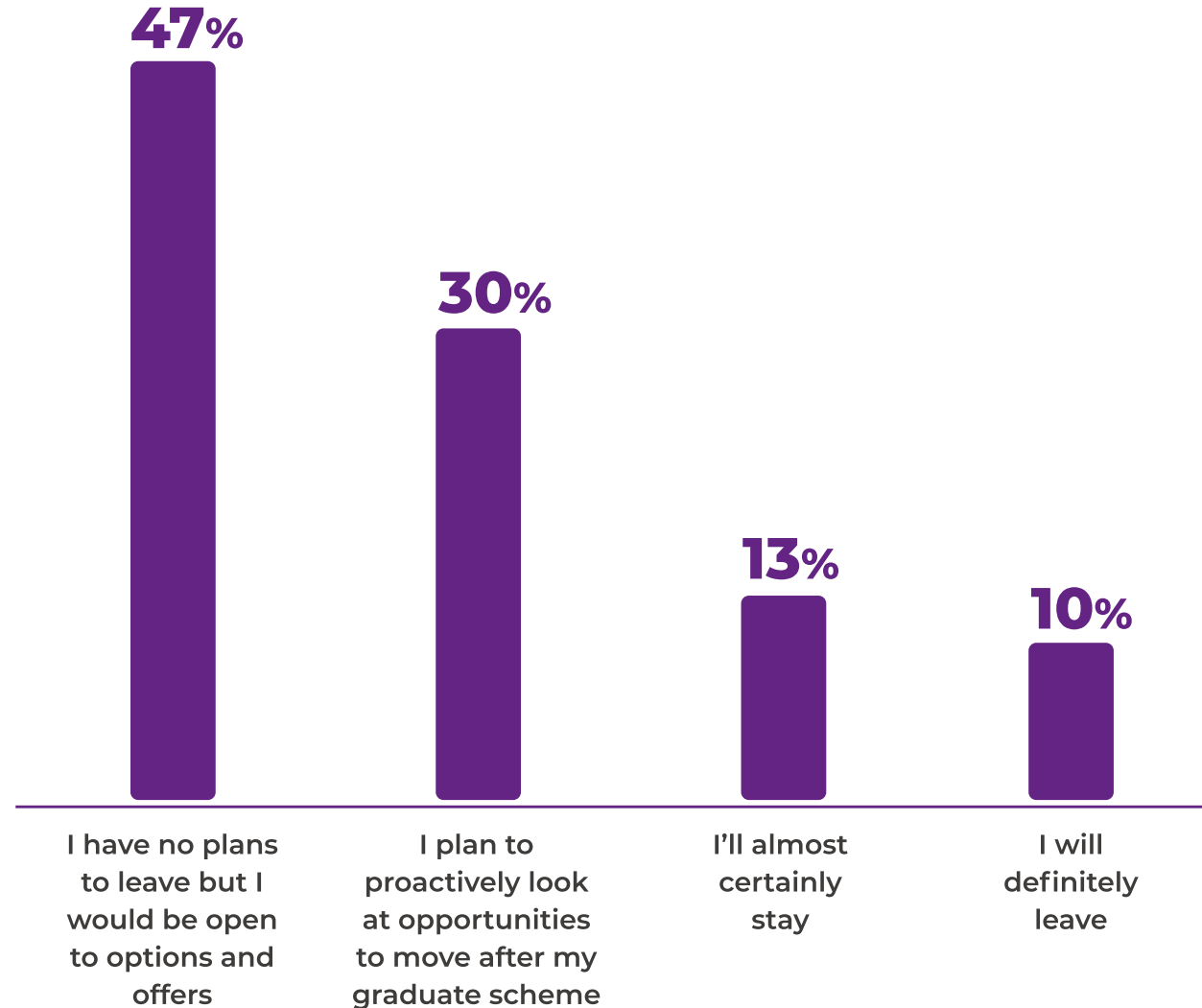




# Plans after the grad scheme

**Q.** Thinking about your current career plans, after you finish your graduate scheme, do you plan to stay with your current employer?

We asked graduates who told us they were on a graduate scheme





# Career journey and motivations



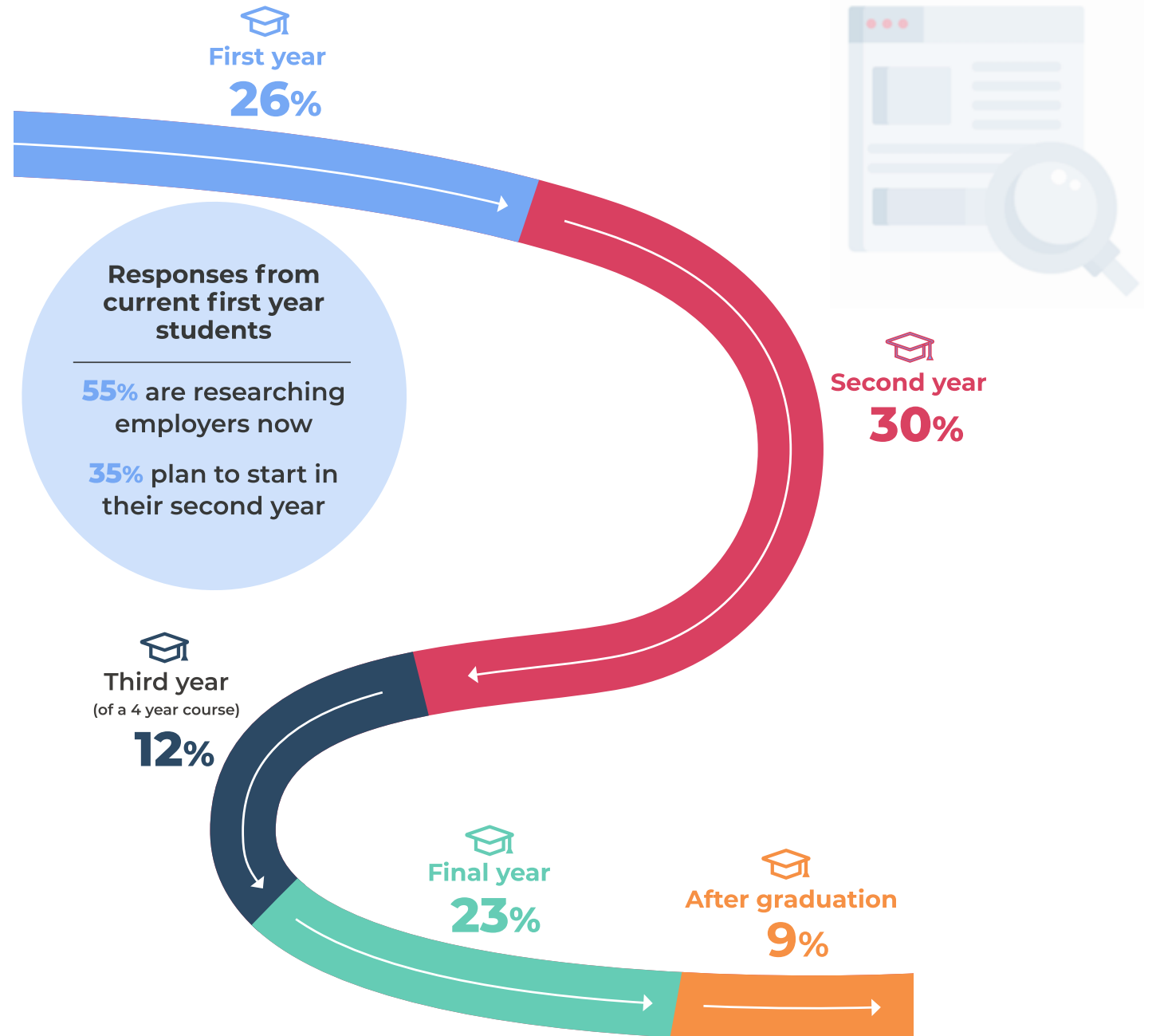


# Career journey

**Q.** When did you first start researching graduate careers and employers?

# 68%

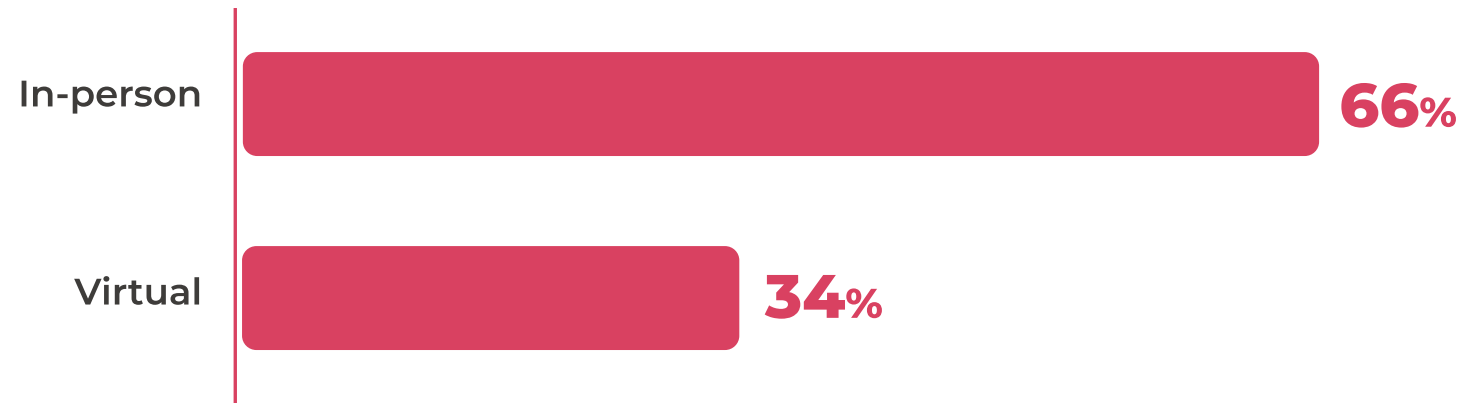
of students are researching graduate employers before their final year





# Events

**Q.** Do you prefer in-person or virtual events?



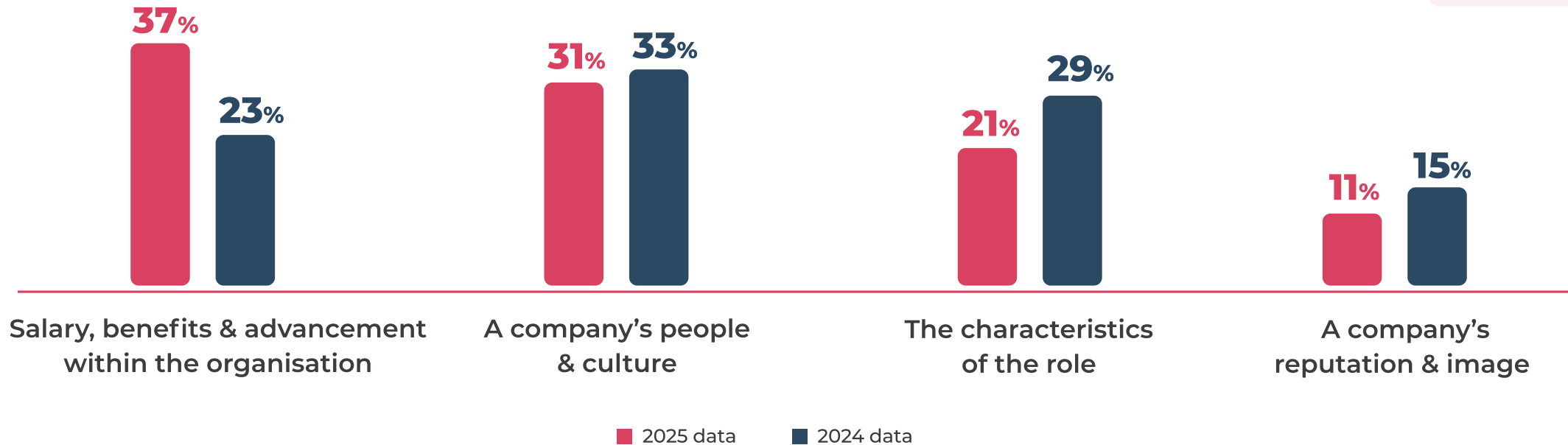
## KEY FINDINGS 🔍

Black heritage students selected virtual events at a higher rate than the overall student population.



# Motivations

**Q.** What's most important to you when choosing a graduate role?

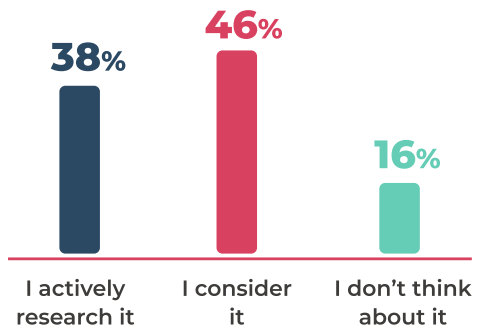




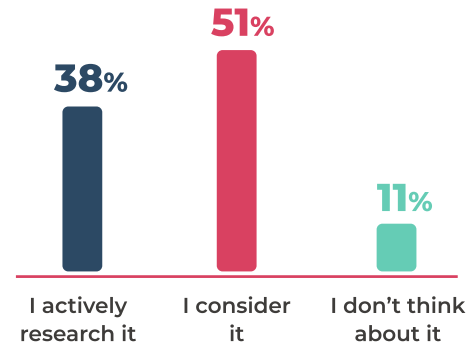
# Motivations

**Q.** Before applying to a company, do you consider its commitment to...

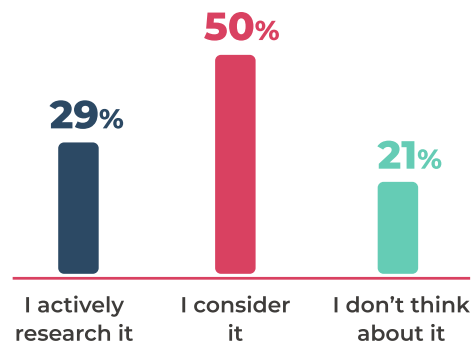
...diversity and inclusion



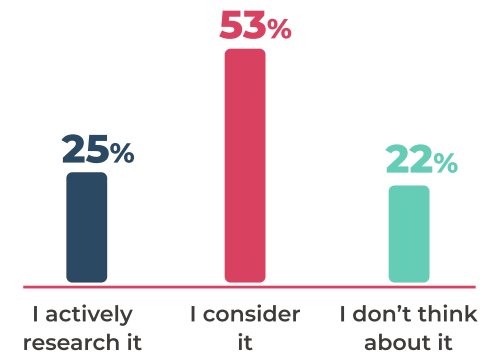
...employees' mental wellbeing



...reducing its environmental impact



...supporting charitable projects

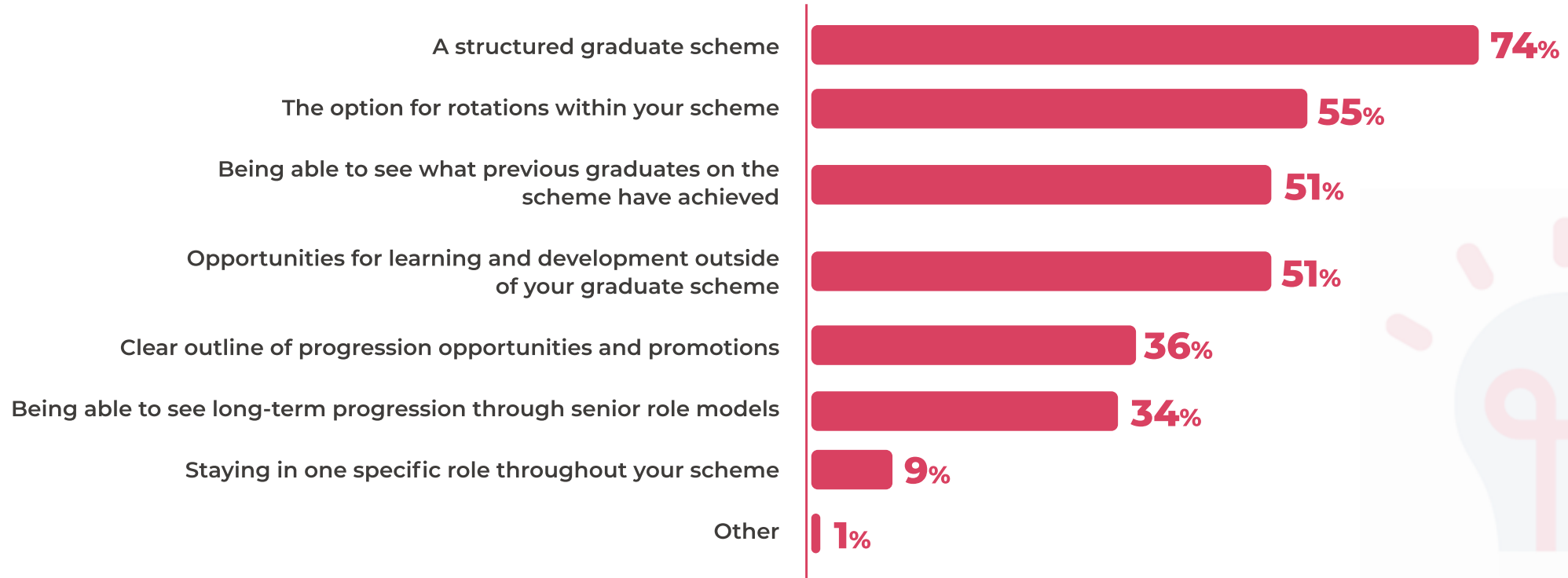




# Development

## Q. What do you want to see and hear from employers when it comes to development, upskilling and progression?

We asked those who told us they are actively applying





# Mental health support





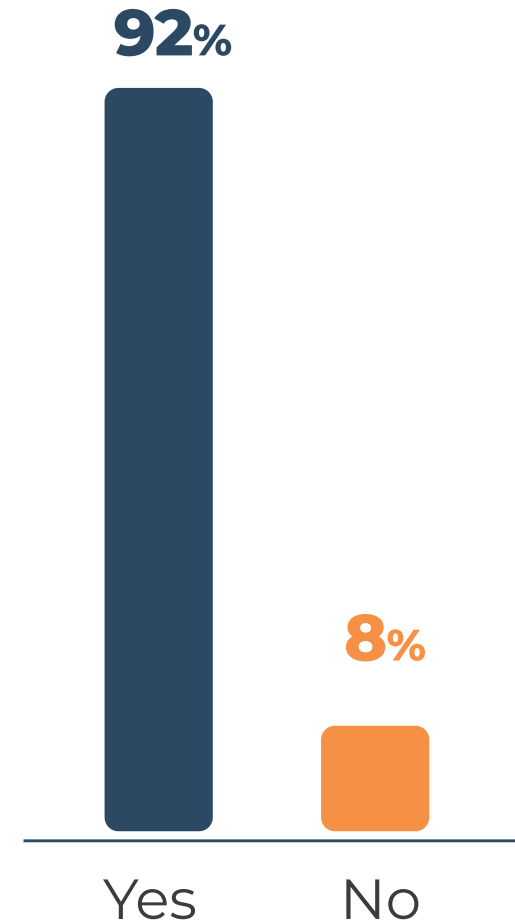
# Support during applications

**Q.** Do you expect employers to provide mental wellbeing support for candidates going through the application process?

Yes **52%**      No **48%**



**Q.** Do you expect employers to provide mental wellbeing support for their employees?





# Expectations and flexibility





# Location preferences

Q. In which region would you most like to work in your first graduate job?

**28%**

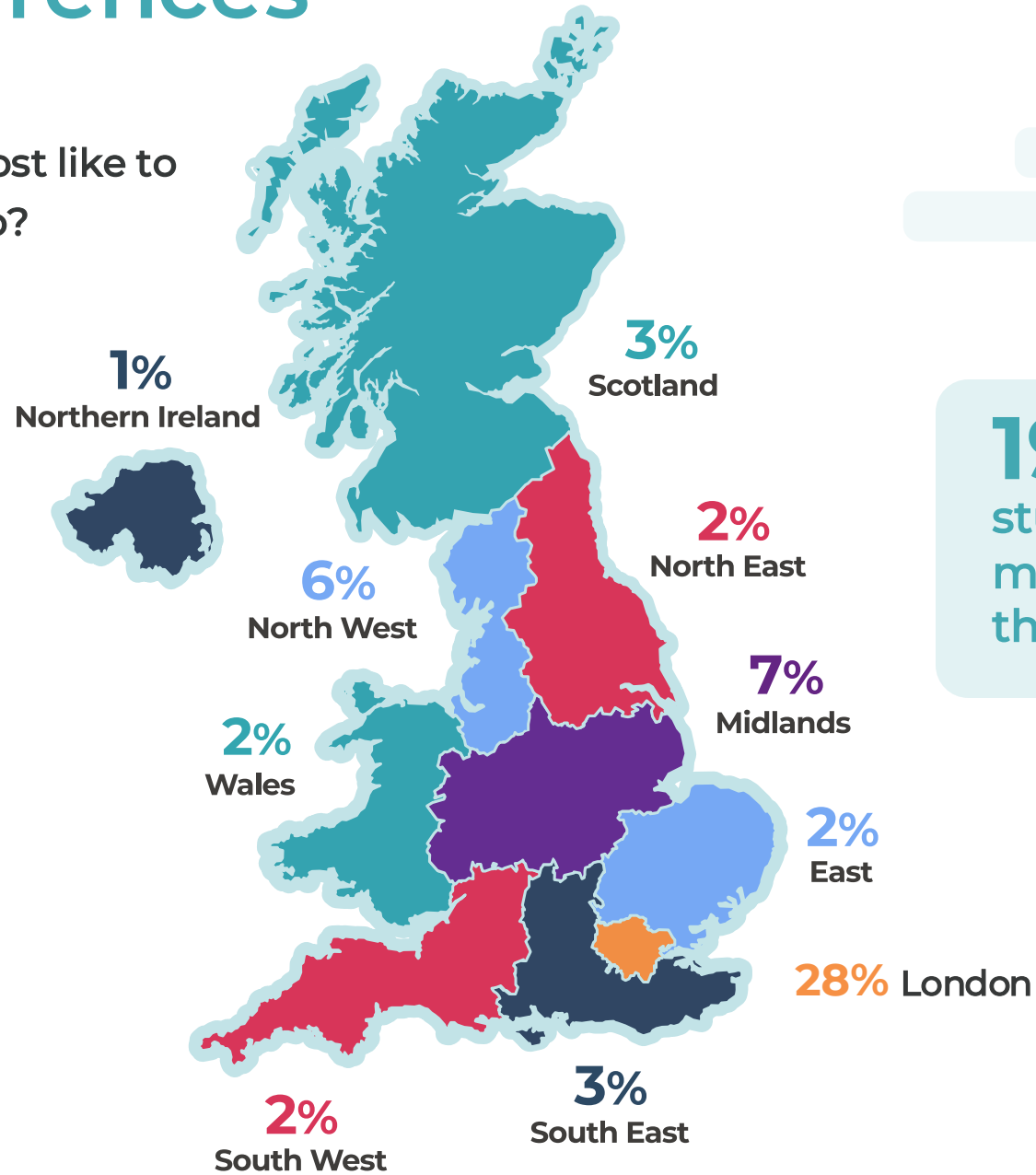
prefer to work outside of London

**2%**

want to work fully remotely

**4%**

want to work abroad

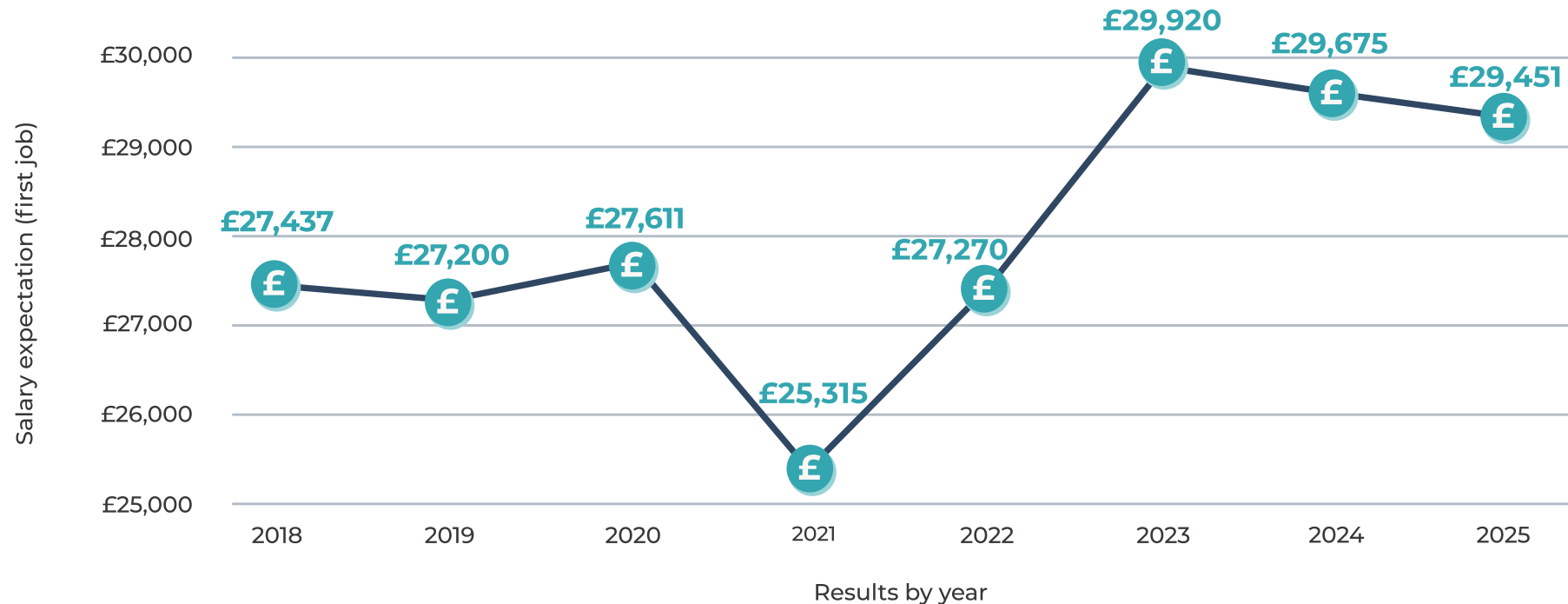


**19%** of students don't mind where they work



# Salary expectations

Q. What is your expected basic annual salary in your first job after graduating?

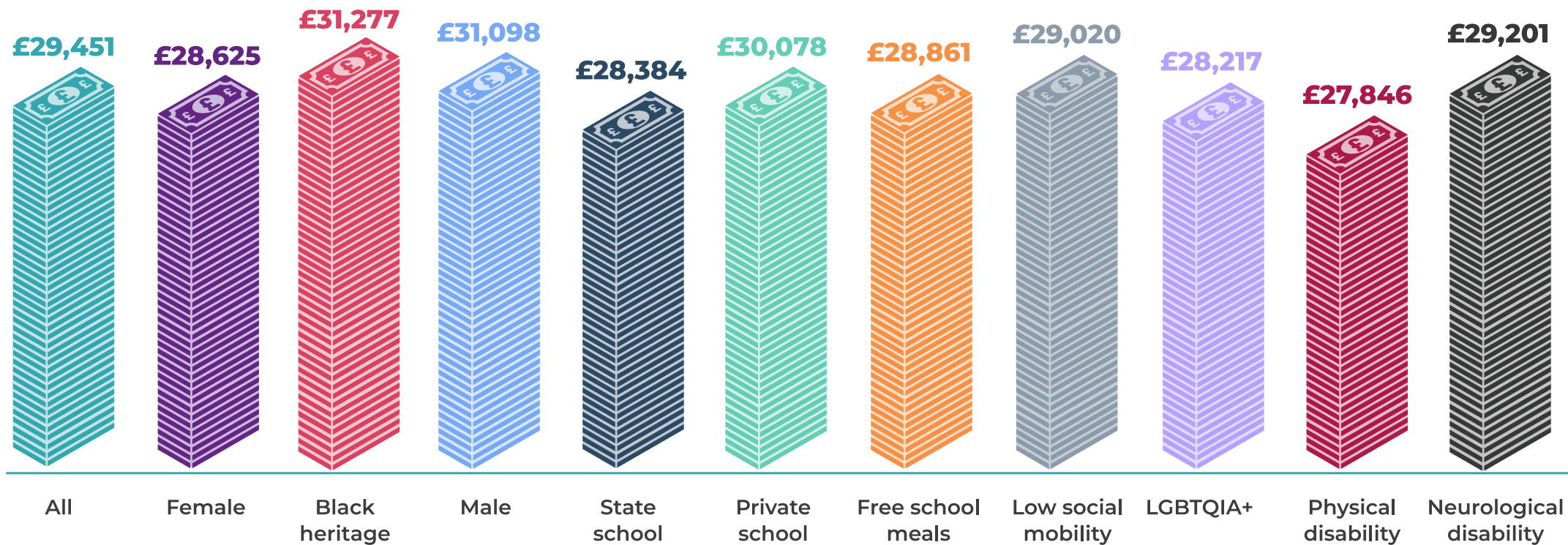




# Salary expectations



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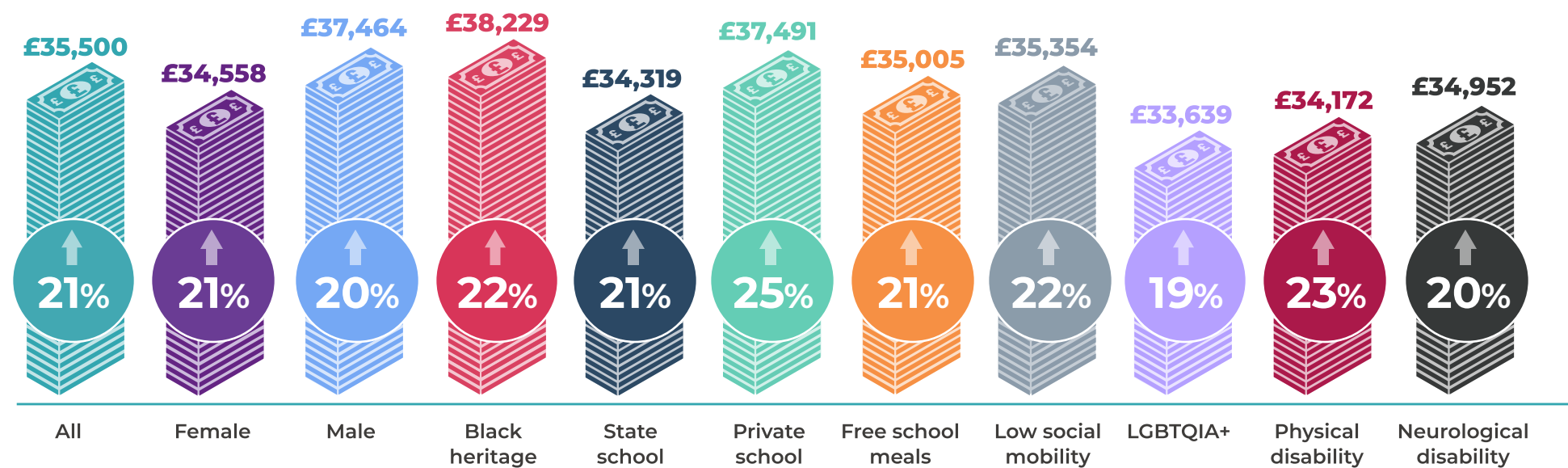




# Salary expectations

Q. What is your expected basic annual salary after you finish your graduate scheme?

New  
for 2025



Q. What is your expected basic annual salary five years after graduating?



Average salary expectation after five years is up by **1%** year-on-year

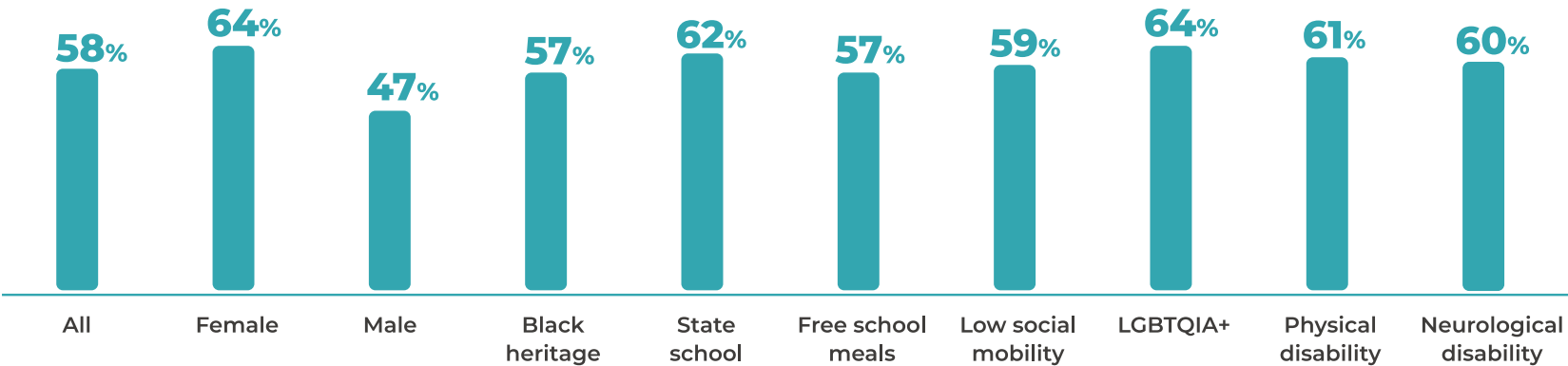


# Flexible working

Q. Do you expect to regularly work outside of your contracted hours?



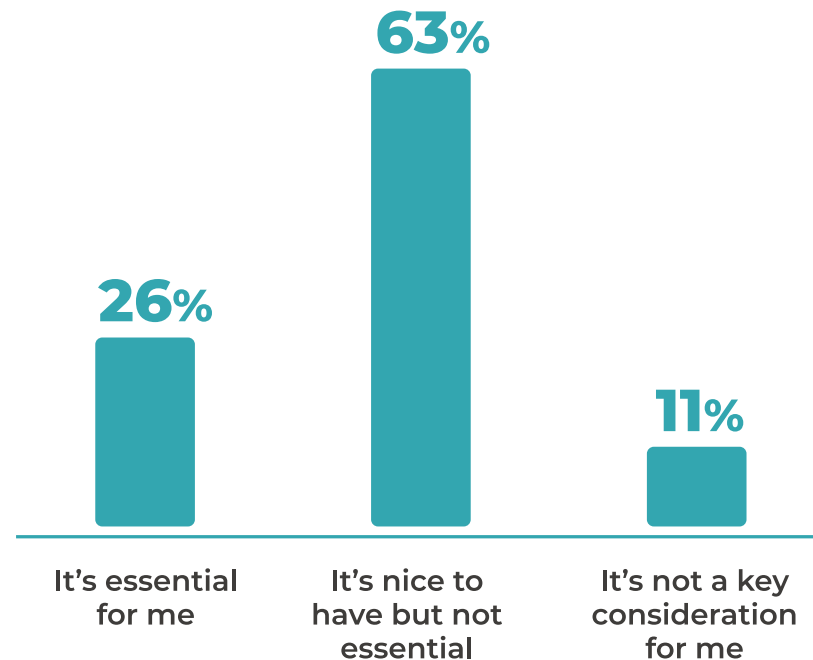
'No' responses



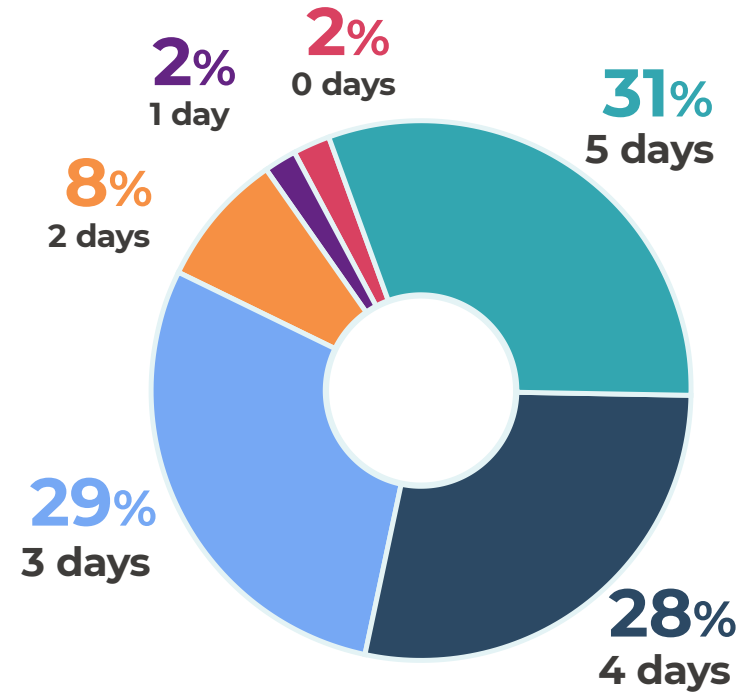


# Flexible working

Q. How important is flexible working for your first graduate job?



Q. How many days per week do you want to be in the office during your first graduate job?





# Flexible working

**Q.** What is most important for you when thinking about what you want to get out of your time in the office?

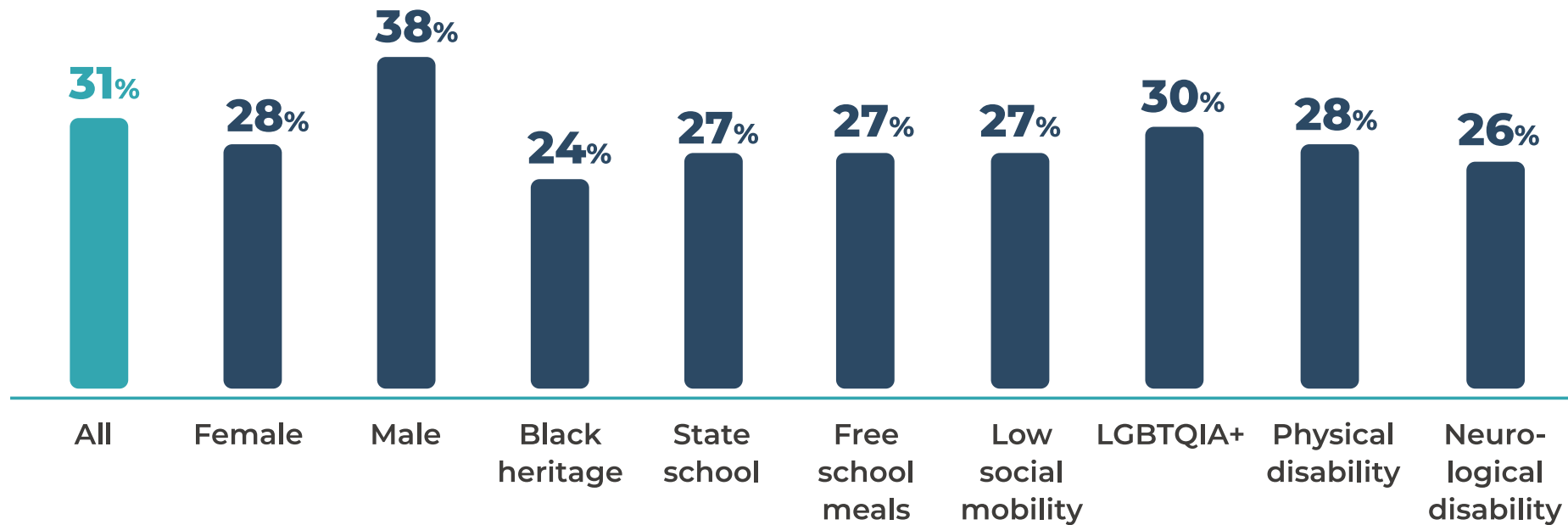




# Flexible working

**Q.** How many days per week do you want to be in the office during your first graduate job?

Those who selected five days a week





# Thank you

