

Stage Directors 2023 Census

*conducted by
Stage Directors UK*



stage
directors uk

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Introduction

A few words from SDUK's Executive Director Harold Finley

The journey of this census has been eventful. Have we asked every pertinent question? No. Pertinence has shifted throughout the process, and we have tried to adapt along the way.

SDUK (Stage Directors UK) began this journey with the desire to understand where the stage directing profession is in a nearly post-Covid 19 world. The participants included members of SDUK and non-members; this is not a survey of SDUK members but of the profession as a whole. The data we have gathered is an essential tool to help us understand the questions which need to be asked, the provocations which need to be launched, and the support which needs to be provided.

523 directors participated in the census. We would like to extend our gratitude to all who participated in the census, and we hope that the results will be a useful tool in creating a safer, more equitable and healthier U.K. theatre.

Harold Finley
Executive Director
Stage Directors UK

Age

"If you have not broken a glass ceiling by a certain age, opportunities are closed to you."

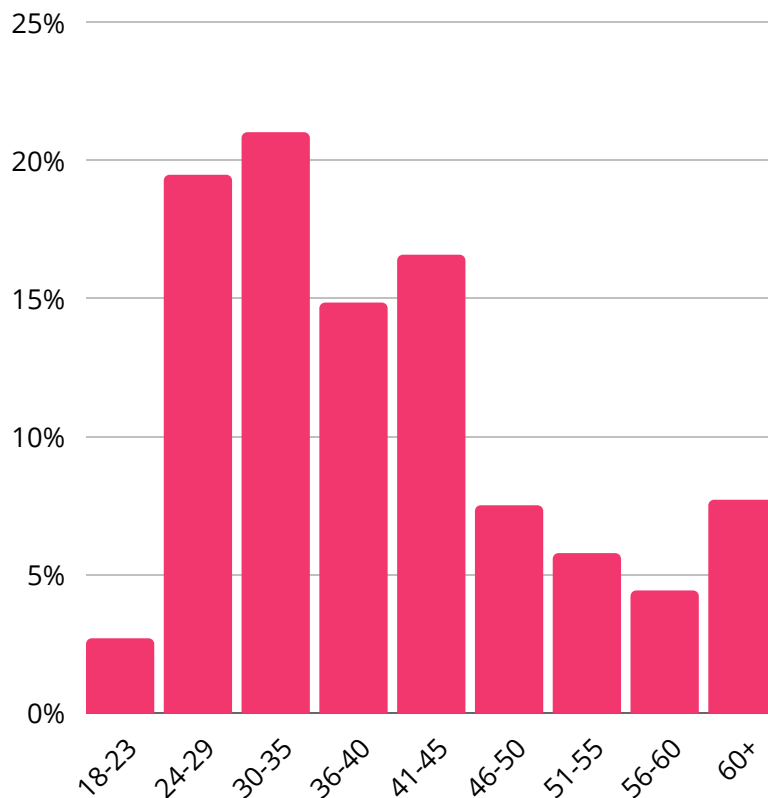


Figure 1. Respondents' Age

58% of our respondents are under 40 and 74.57% under 45. Our respondents skew younger than the general population as according to the 2021 census, 39% of adults were under 40 and 46% of adults were under 45. This figure could be indicative of the industry or just our respondents, however, looking at reasons people are considering leaving the profession may be instructive when looking at this figure.

Age

The responses to the question “How many years have you been working as a director?” is in line with the younger demographic of respondents:

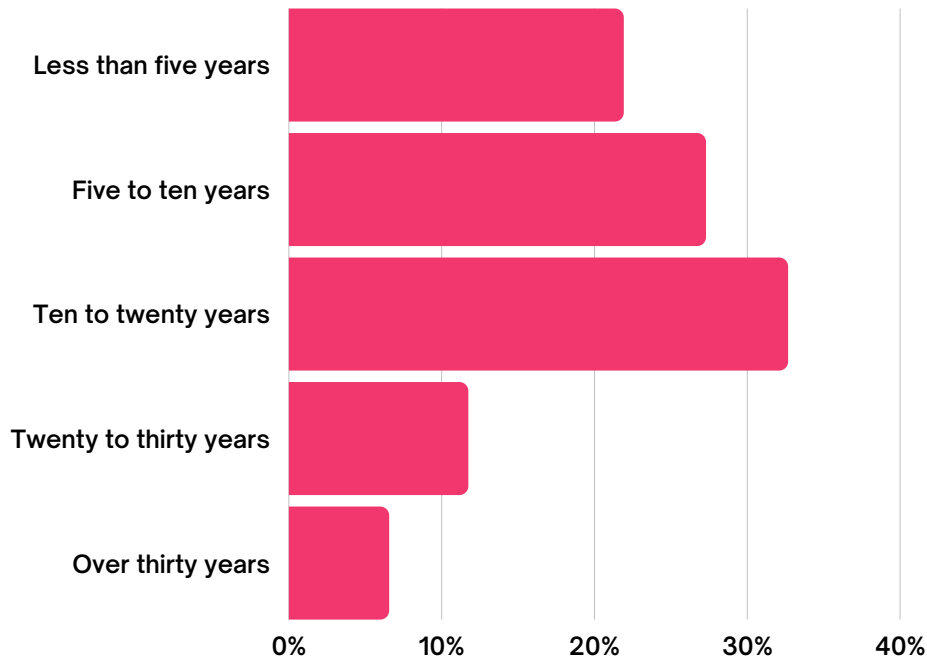


Figure 2. Years working as a director

49.14% have worked as a director for less than 10 years and 81.77% have worked as a director for less than 20 years. Either our respondents skew younger, or there may be a lack of longevity in directing as a profession, something that is supported by the testimonials left by our respondents.

Both older and younger respondents report feeling as if the Industry is stacked against them given their age: respondents report “The industry is ageist” and at the same time that there’s “limited work for young directors” and “few opportunities for emerging and mid-career makers”.

Gender

“Venues only appear to be interested when they have projects that sit at the intersection of all of my identities, but never when they just have random shows (that always seem to go to a cis white male director)”

SDUK published our findings on the gender split of directors in 2017. At the time, 54% of SDUK’s membership was made up of women, in line with the UK Theatre workforce review, which found that women made up 56% of the theatre workforce across all sectors. According to our latest survey, the percentage of women directors has increased:

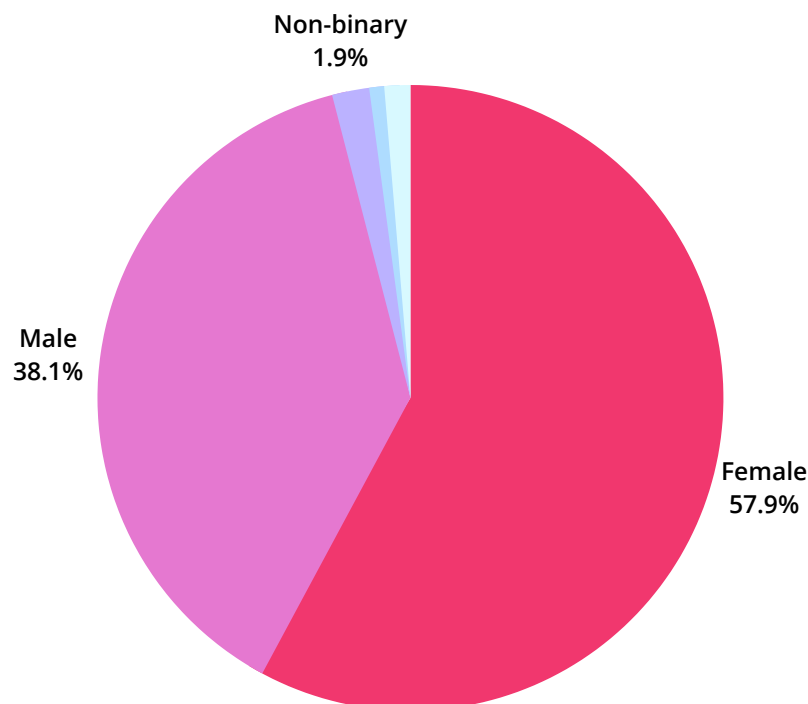


Figure 3. Respondents' Gender

Gender

While this may seemingly suggest gender parity, or in fact, a power imbalance towards women directors, the full picture is bleaker. The Women in Theatre Forum Report (2021) found 31% of Artistic Directors of NPO theatres were female and female Artistic Directors controlled 21% of funding. This suggests that not only are women underrepresented in positions of power, but that those who are in those positions are generally in organisations with less funding.

The December Group collected data showing men are overrepresented in positions of power across the theatre industry:

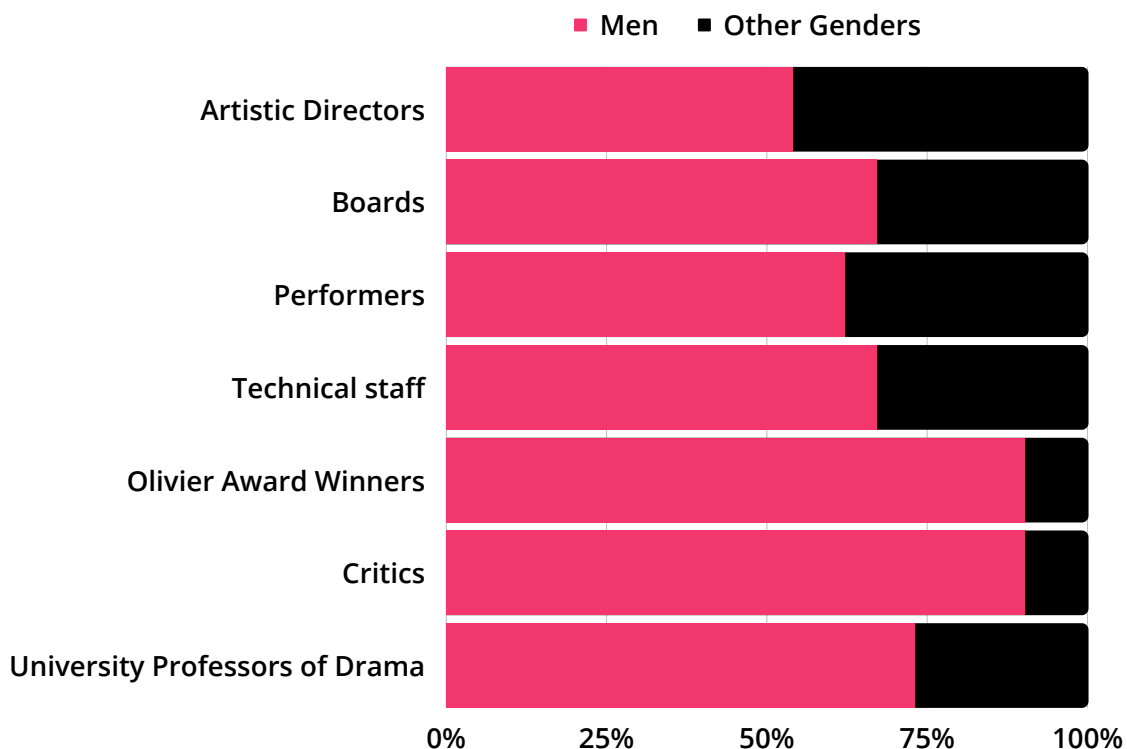


Figure 4. Male representation in the industry

While women make up the majority of our workforce, it is clear there is still inequity with regards to gender.

Gender

The percentage of respondents who did not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth was 2.88%:

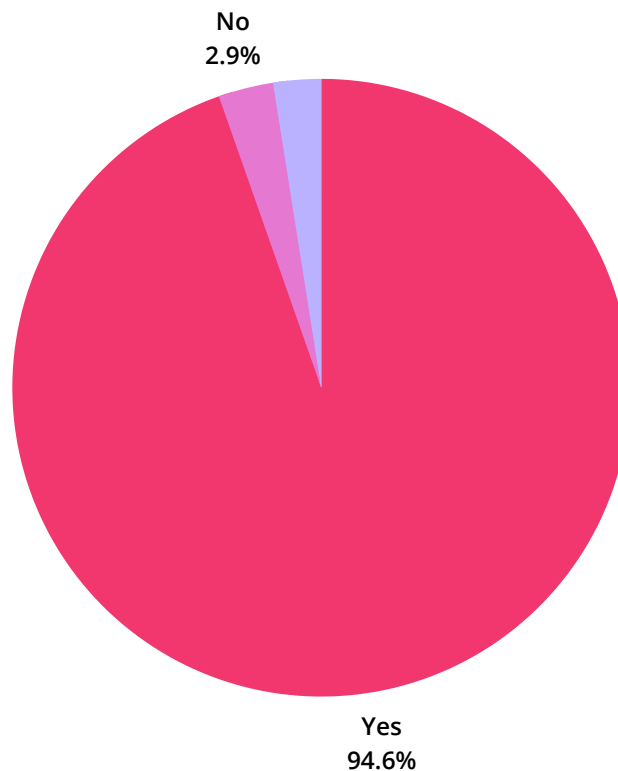


Figure 5. Whether respondents identified with the gender assigned at their birth

The UK government estimates that there are approximately 200,000-500,000 people who don't identify with the gender that was assigned at their birth in the UK as of 2018, leading to a percentage of between 0.3% to 0.7%.

Stonewall suggests a higher figure, estimating that 1%, or 600,000, people in the UK are trans or non-binary. Therefore, our respondents were at least over twice more likely to not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth than the general population.

Sexual Orientation

The figure that diverges most from the general population is our respondents' sexual orientation:

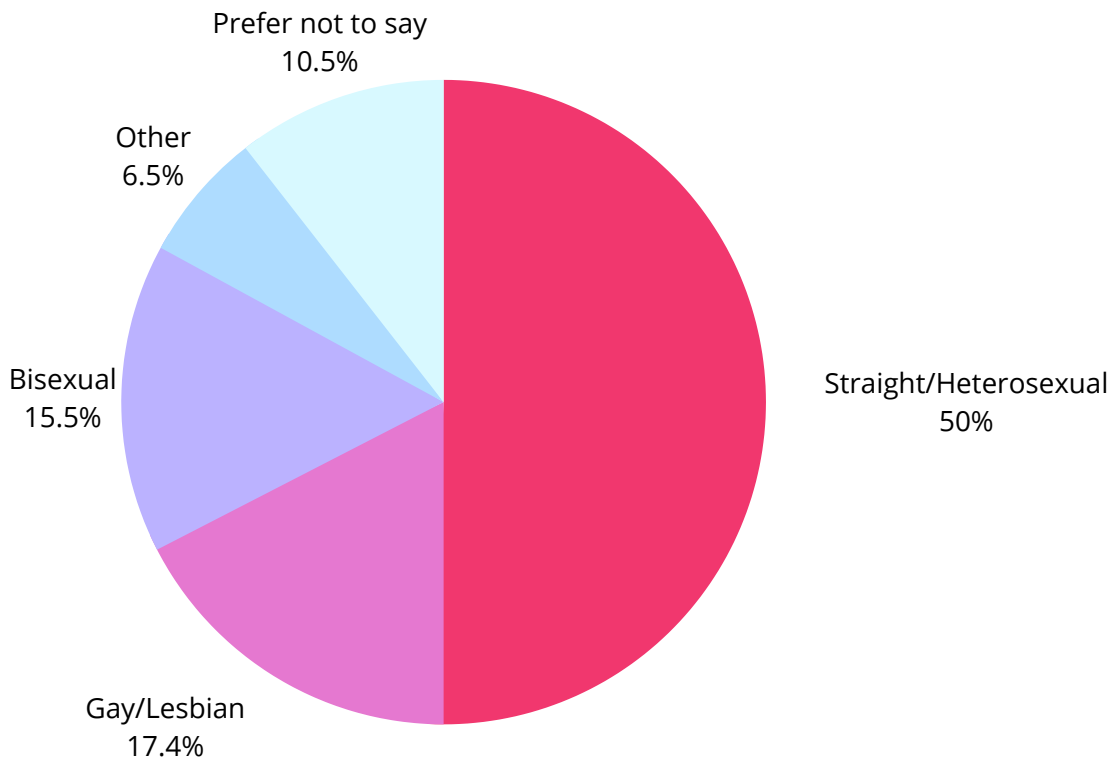


Figure 6. Sexual Orientation

Whereas 93.6% of the general population identified as Straight or Heterosexual in 2020, only 50% of our respondents identified this way. The Office for National Statistics estimated 3.1% of the UK population aged 16 years and over identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2020, compared to 32.95% of our respondents.

Caring

"I cannot see how my freelance role will be compatible with family life"

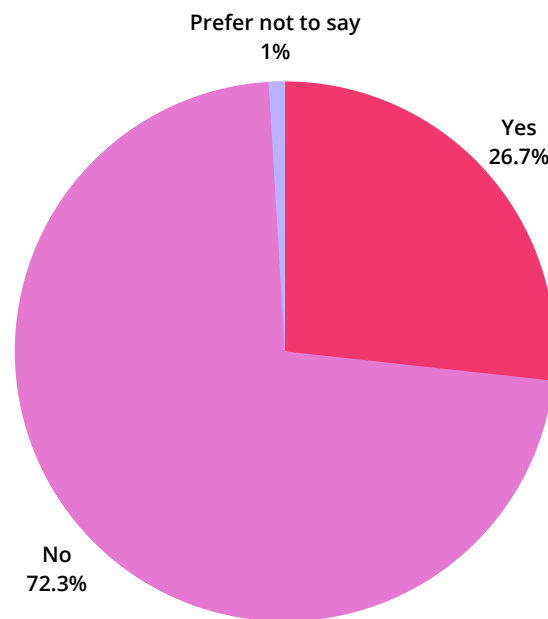


Figure 7. Respondents' Caring Responsibilities

PIPA's "Backstage Workforce Report" of Parents and Carers, found that a huge majority of theatre workforce who are also parents and carers experience poor working conditions. 79% of female respondents identified themselves as the primary caretaker in their household.

As such, women are almost three times as likely as men to have had to change jobs due to caring responsibilities. The report found that women were far more likely to be working in Freelance/Temp/Show/Zero roles than being part or full time employed, with 58% of women being in this less stable type of employment versus only 28% of men. 64% of women reported having to change their jobs due to caring responsibility versus only 23% of men.

Ethnic Origin

“I have had to create opportunities for myself, as a diverse theatre practitioner, to create work for non-traditional audiences.”

Perhaps the most challenging demographic survey to measure was that of ethnic origin:

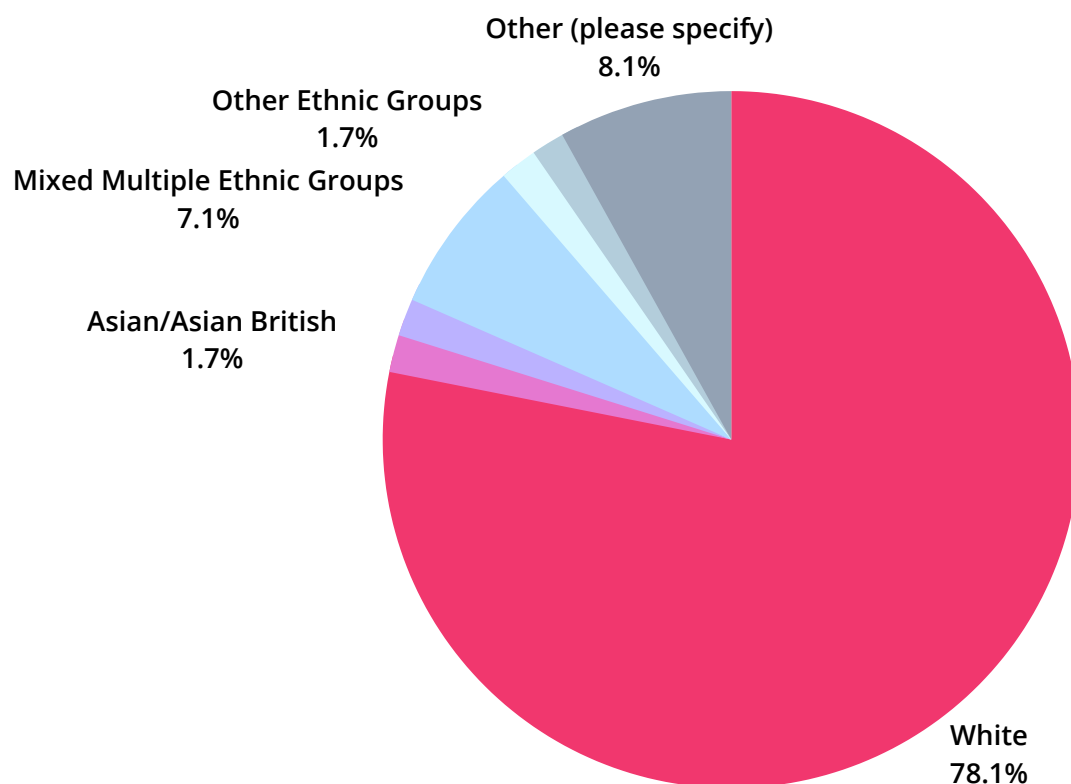


Figure 8. Respondents' Ethnic Origin

We did receive feedback that this may not be the best way to quantify ethnic origin, but following the metrics set out by the ONS allows us to most easily compare our data with the general population.

Ethnic Origin

In comparison to the general population, the ONS reports that as of 2019, the most common ethnic group in England and Wales was White (84.8%), which is similarly the most common ethnic group of our respondents. When you exclude White from the data, however, our respondents diverge quite significantly from the ONS data:

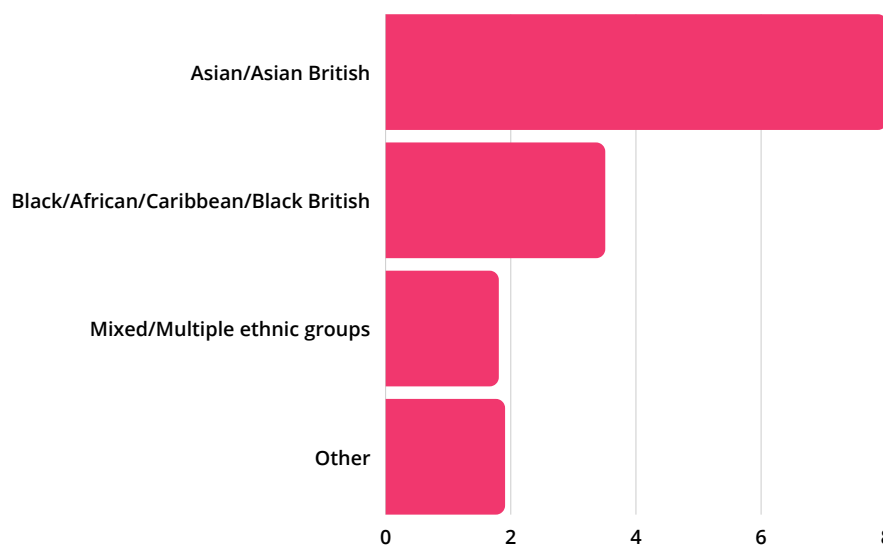


Figure 9. ONS ethnic group breakdown (excluding white)

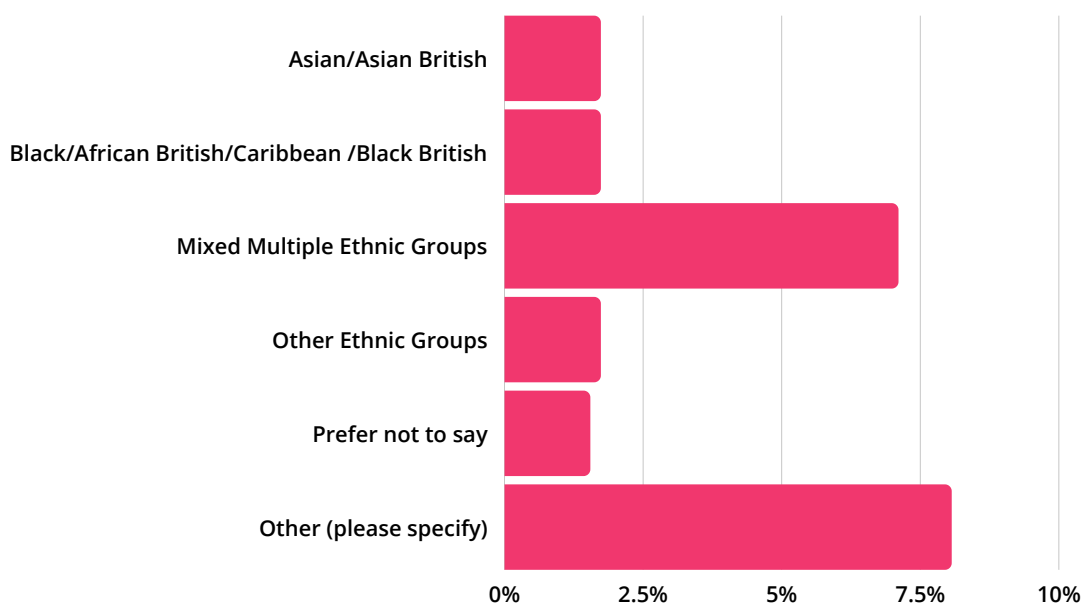


Figure 10. Our ethnic group breakdown (excluding white)

Ethnic Origin

Asian/Asian British Respondents and Black/African British make up only 1.73% of our respondents, while they make up 8% and 3.5%, respectively, of the population of England and Wales. In contrast, 7.1% of our respondents were from mixed / multiple ethnic groups, in comparison to 1.8% of the general population and 8.06% of our respondents identified as other compared to 1.9% of the general population.

Many of the respondents who chose "Other" specified an ethnic origin that the ONS would consider "White", with 1.54% of people identifying as White Irish and 1.15% identifying as White European. This brings the percentage of respondents identifying as "White" closer to the figure for the general population. Another notable demographic from those who identified as "Other" was the 2.11% of respondents who identified as "Jewish". The ONS does not include Jewish as an ethnic origin, but rather as a religious affiliation (which SDUK did not survey), and estimates they make up 0.6% of the UK's population. Other demographics who identified as "other" were Latin American/Latinx (1.15%) and Middle Eastern (0.77%).

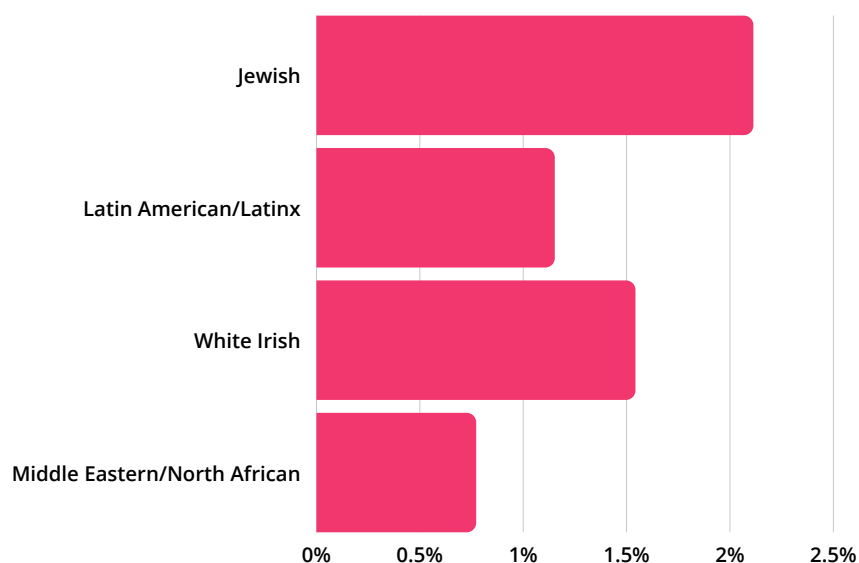


Figure 11. "Other" ethnic origin breakdown

Disability

“It’s unsustainable to be a working-class, disabled freelancer in the current climate”

15.7% of our respondents identified as being disabled or having a disability, compared to 22% of the general population and 21% of working age adults, as reported in the 2020/2021 Family Resource Survey. Our survey’s respondents are all in work however, and not all working age disabled people are employed. According to the UK government, the disability employment rate was 52.7% in Q2 2021, compared to 81.0% for non-disabled people. Therefore, our respondents were more likely to be disabled than the general population who are in employment.

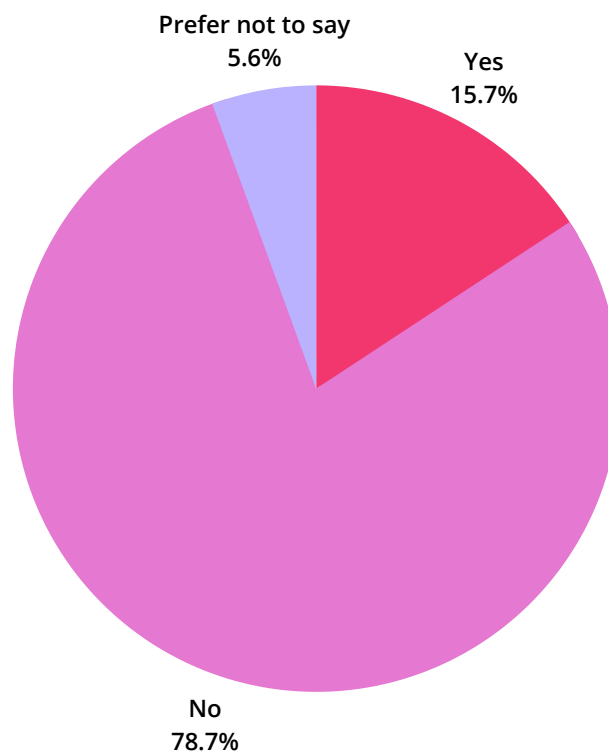


Figure 12. Respondents' Disability Status

Neurodivergence

Of those who identified as disabled or having a disability, the majority (57%), or 7% of total survey respondents, identified as neurodivergent. The UK government estimates that over 15% of the general population is neurodivergent. There is a high rate of unemployment in the neurodiverse population, with unemployment rates up to 30% to 40%, three times the rate for people with a disability.

Furthermore, half of people who are neurodiverse are unaware of it, so it seems likely that our respondents are more likely to be neurodiverse than the general working population.

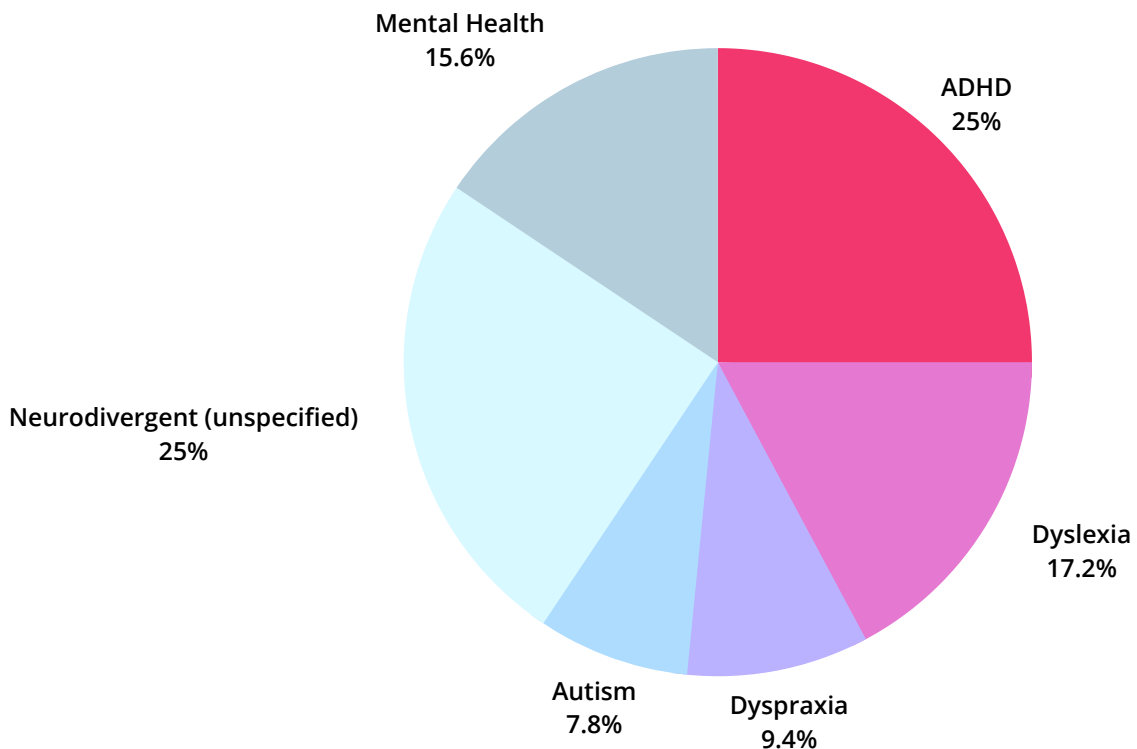


Figure 13. Respondents' most common disabilities

Location: Hometown

“Decades of access policies have failed to shift power.”

London is both our respondents’ most common hometown (75 of our 520 respondents, or 14%) and their most common current residence (215 of our 520 respondents, or 41%).

The breakdown of the most common hometowns and countries, excluding London, is as follows:

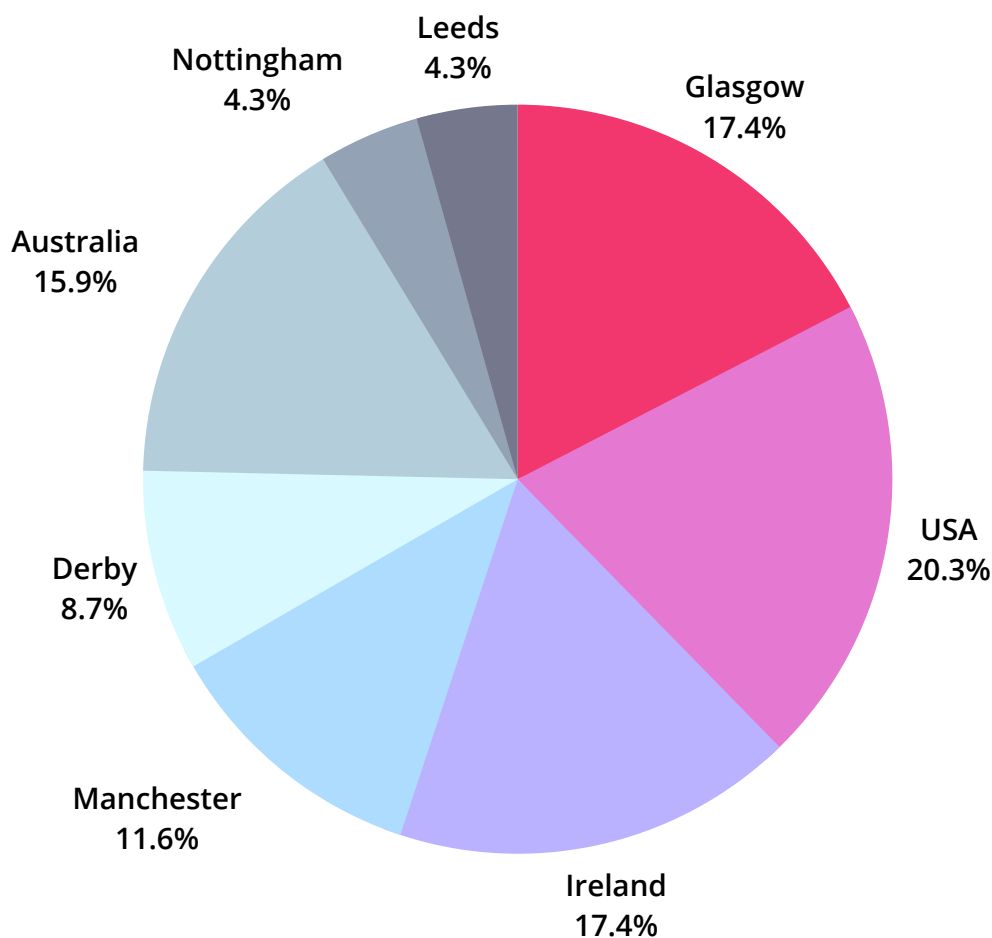


Figure 14. Respondents' hometowns excluding London

Location: Residence

The breakdown of the most common place of residence, excluding London:

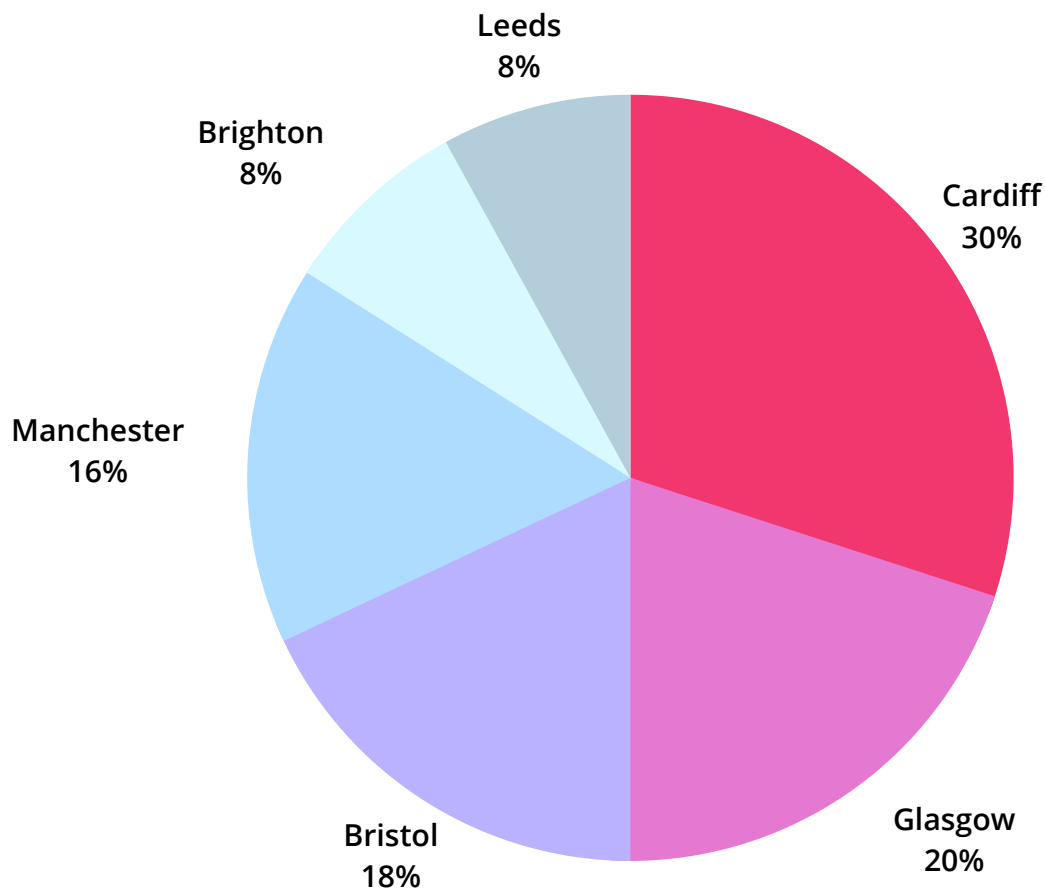


Figure 15. Respondents' current residence excluding London

You can view a world map of respondents hometowns and current residence here:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1g3GeAHnV1VRwRDC5L9xLZFBw-uuDJJE&usp=sharing>

Parents' Occupation

The far and away most common occupation of our respondents' parents was teacher, with 78, or 15% of our respondents listing teaching as one of their parents' occupations. The next most common answer was manager with 39 responses and nurse with 26 responses.

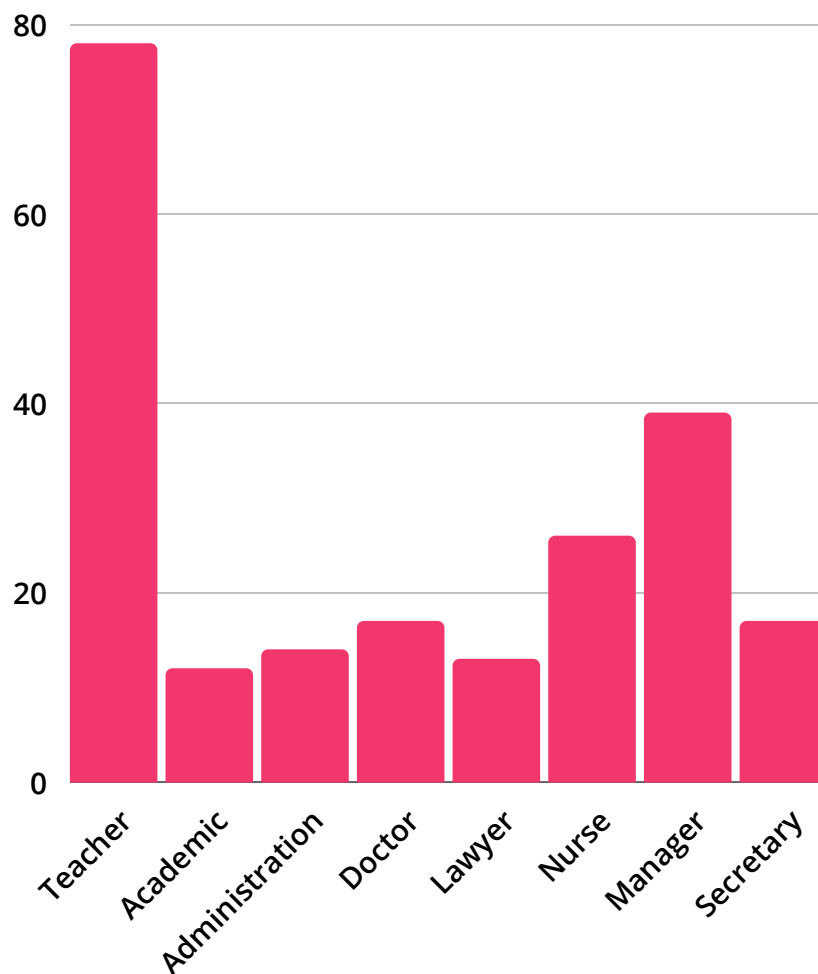


Figure 16. The eight most common parents' or primary caregivers' occupations

Education

91% of our respondents had a university degree and 47% of our respondents had an advanced degree. This is a much higher percentage than the general population, 57% of 25-34 year-olds had a post-secondary qualification in 2021 and about 35% of all people in the UK between 25 and 64 years old have a degree.

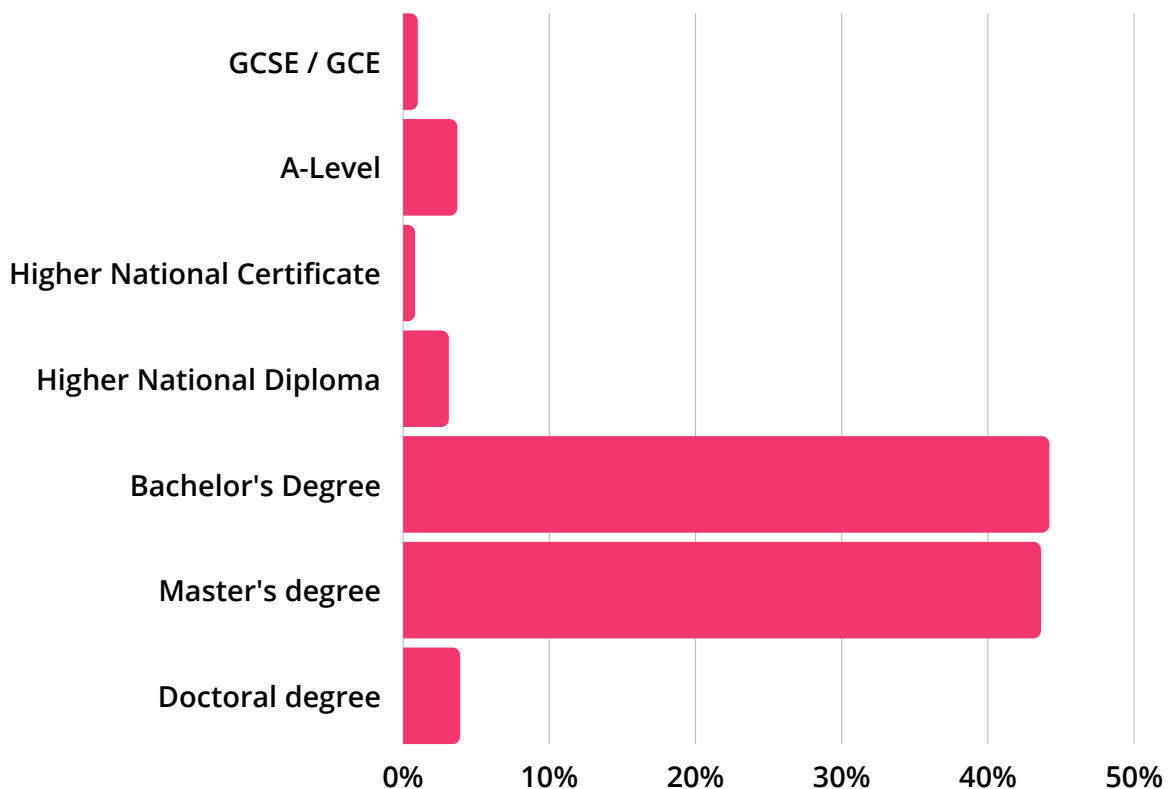


Figure 17. Our respondents' education history

NPO Announcement

“In the UK, there is the expectation to make work and pitch it to venues - but funders don't want to fund work that doesn't have venues attached - but venues don't want to program work that isn't already made - which requires funding.”

As the Arts Council's **National Portfolio** was announced during our analysis of the survey, we found it instructive to look at the equality analysis of the 2023-2026 investment programme to see how things may change over the next few years. The Arts Council defines organisations as “led” by a group when 51% or more of the organisation's Board and Senior Management are in that certain group. As shown in Figure 18, this does not necessarily mean the top leadership positions reflect this representation.

15% of 2023-2026 National Portfolio are Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse led organisations, a nearly threefold increase from the 2018-22 portfolio. The funding to these organisations makes up 8.4% of the portfolio investment, so these organisations receive less funding proportionally. This is proportionate to the percentage of Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse representation in leadership positions such as Artistic Director, Chief Executive Officer, Chair, and Executive Director (see Figure 18.).

There are 32 Disabled led organisations in the final portfolio, which is 3.2% of the portfolio. These organisations receive 2% of the total portfolio investment.

NPO Announcement

The biggest increase was in the amount of Female led organisations, which make up 60% of the current portfolio, compared to 40% of the 2018-22 portfolio. These organisations receive 62% of the portfolio investment. While, as per the arts council definition, this means that the majority of funded organisations have females representing 51% or more of the organisation's Board and Senior Management, this is not reflected in top leadership roles:

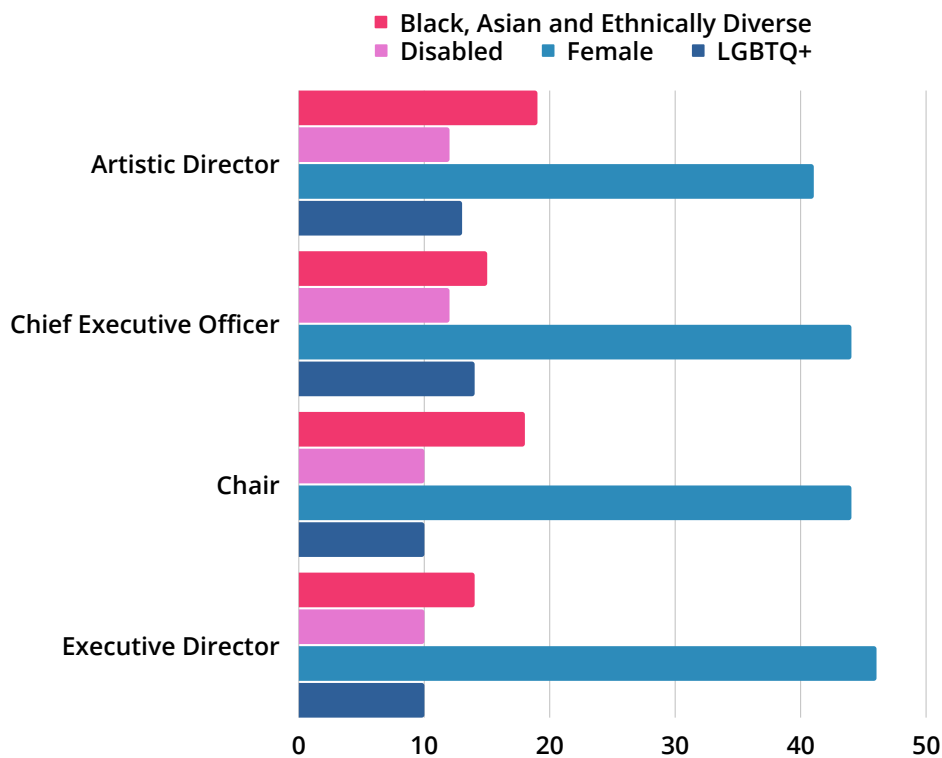


Figure 18. Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse, Disabled, Female and LGBTQ+ representation in Leadership Roles

Surprisingly, only 2%, or 20 LGBTQ+ led organisations are in the portfolio, in contrast to our findings about the sexual orientation of our respondents. These organisations receive 1% of the portfolio investment. This underrepresentation compared to our respondents was also reflected within top leadership roles.

Pay

“Theatre directing just doesn't pay a living wage”

The average pay of respondents' last directing job is £3,841.73. The highest amount of pay received was £50,000 and the lowest was unpaid work, which accounted for 11% of the jobs. The median amount of pay was £2,000 and the average pay was £3,151.75.

97% of jobs paid £10,000 or under, 77% of jobs paid under £4,000 or under, 52% of jobs paid £2,000 or under and 34% of jobs paid £1,000 or under. There is a large disparity in how much directing jobs are paid, but the most common fee appears to be between £1,000 and £5,000, with 55% of jobs falling within this range.

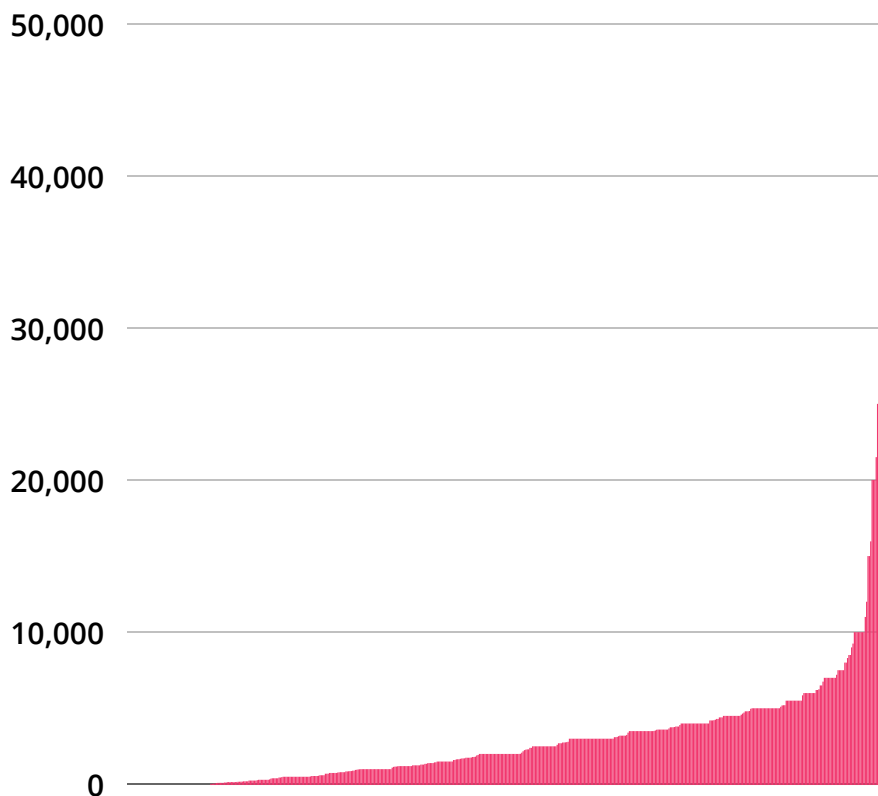


Figure 19. Fees of respondents' last 5 directing jobs

Pay

The maximum weekly hours worked was 48, but the most common answer, if rehearsals were part time, were between 10 and 20 hours per week.

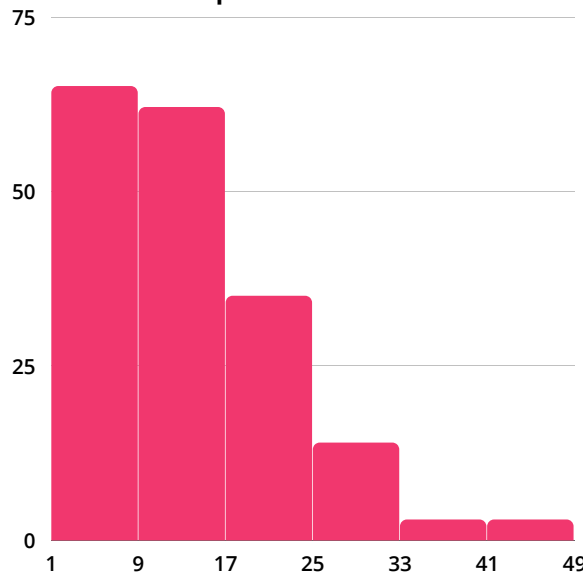


Figure 20. Weekly hours worked

The maximum pay as an assistant was £35,000, but assisting fees generally on par with the fees for directing, with a median pay of £2,300 and an average pay of £4,263.09:

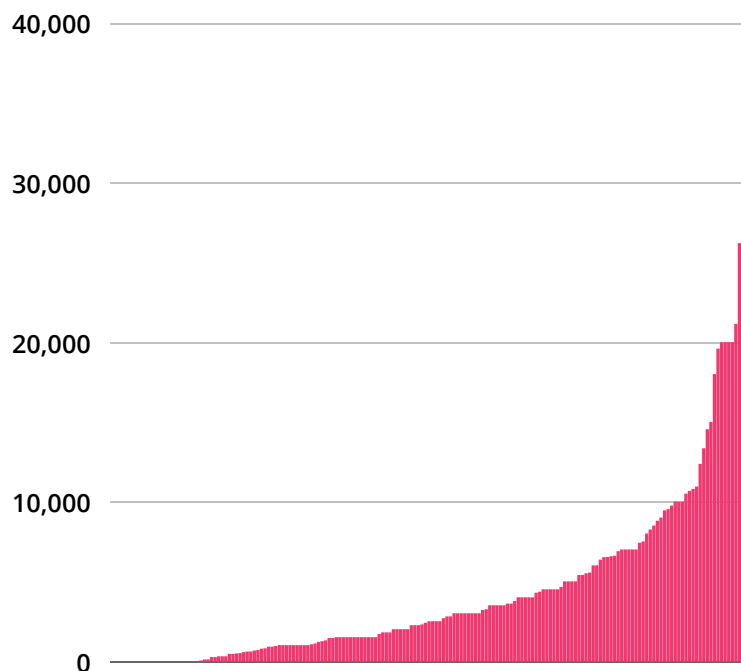


Figure 21. Assisting fees

Other Work

"I am a lot more excited about screen as a medium, and it also feels like it offers a viable financial future."

When asked if they combine directing with any other job in theatre, 20% of our respondents do so.

Of those respondents, 29% are writers, 16% are producers, 13% are actors, and 11% are dramaturgs.

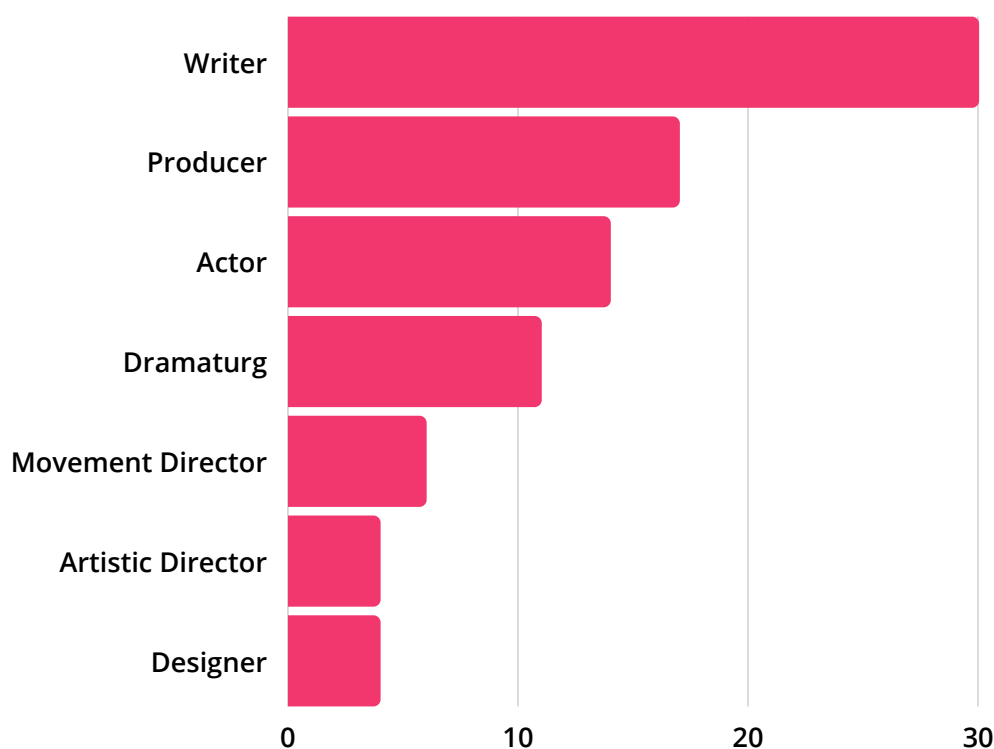


Figure 22. The seven most frequent other jobs in theatre in addition to directing

42 respondents (8%) worked in another medium aside from theatre. Of these, the majority (57%) worked in film. The "other" responses included Opera, Comedy, and Circus with the most frequent "other" answer being Audio.

Other Work

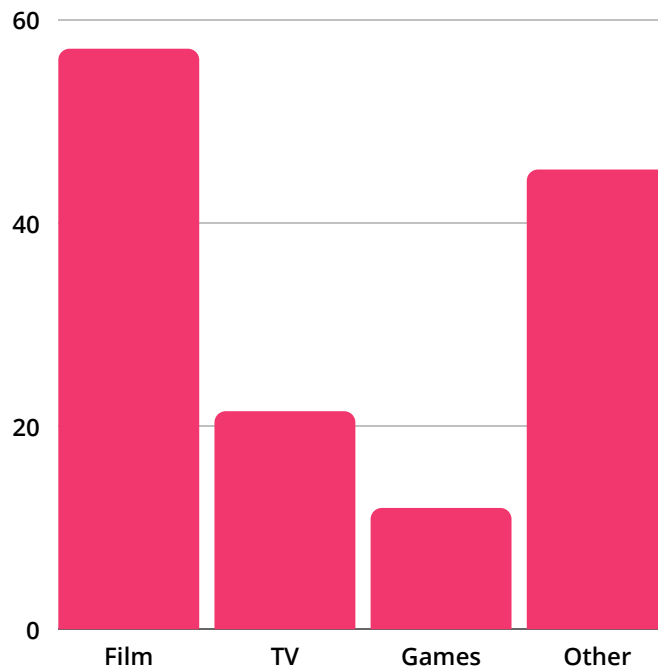


Figure 23. Work in a medium other than theatre

57 respondents (11%) said their work crossed into an academic setting other than directing productions. 13% of respondents said they had to take on additional work outside of theatre or academia in order to earn a living.

10% of respondents were interested in changing roles within theatre, and a whopping 70% of respondents are considering expanding their work into other fields, with many of those respondents expressing interest in getting into teaching, TV, Film, and Gaming. 28% of respondents were seriously considering leaving the theatre industry altogether.

*Thank you for reading, if you have any questions or would like more information, please contact us at:
info@stagedirectorsuk.com*

Appendix

28% of respondents were seriously considering leaving the industry. Here is a selection of reasons when asked the question 'why?':

“Because theatre directing just doesn't pay a living wage. It can only work if subsidised by other work, but it's hard to get work that both pays enough and fits round theatre, let alone have the time and energy to do all the hustle you have to do to keep meeting people and finding opportunities.”

“If you have not broken a glass ceiling by a certain age, opportunities are closed to you. The industry is ageist. There has been a (understandable) pendulum swing away from white males over a certain age (and a correction of the imbalance of representation.) It was always a struggle to find work, make work before the pandemic, but post it, my resilience to keep 'picking myself up' feels so beaten up. I feel a sense that there is no longer a place for me within the industry. I have begun exploring a totally different career.”

“Unsustainable to be a working-class, disabled freelancer in the current climate. Constantly worrying about stability, finances and where the next contract will come from.”

“The pay and hours are terrible....”

“Low fees, unethical practices. I had to go to hospital due to stress from working two back to back shows that expected results on extremely limited rehearsal time. Eg a 2 week rehearsal period for a massive show revival. Lack of breaks and lunches and fair working hours for directors and creatives.”

Appendix

“There's not enough opportunities for middle aged directors and too hard to break into the industry. I run a theatre company which has been the only way to get work but it's meant I've never worked more than one project per year or gained further experience and have never been successful in getting assisting work.”

“Having filled this in, it's obvious that financially I've made nothing in 5 years of doing this. It's actively cost me money, venues won't give me a chance, ACE won't fund me, and other people are abusive. Why would I want to stay doing this? I may as well do what several of my friends have and join an AmDram group, because at least there I won't spend more than about £50 a year - and I might actually get to be involved in some projects.”

“I am aware that I can no longer focus my work in theatre alone. I still want to make theatre, but increasingly there are fewer opportunities and, especially for directors who work outside of the main stream.”

“Opportunities are not fairly recruited for, there are not enough job roles and not enough paid roles. Theatre's are difficult to get your foot in the door at and everyone is too busy fighting fires to make meaningful change for directors.”

“My disability may dictate that I have to. At a time when I've only just possibly reached a position where it makes sense financially if I were my full self. But I'm not sure. I had to take a long break because I was the main carer to my parents. I have a few things left I want to do.”

Appendix

"It doesn't feel like theatre has a future right now. I am a lot more excited about screen as a medium, and it also feels like it offers a viable financial future."

"I have had to create opportunities for myself, as a diverse theatre practitioner, to create work for non-traditional audiences. This means, I have had to write/produce/direct etc. with the limited funds and partnerships available."

""The pandemic has made things doubly challenging, but I already was running into issues as a migrant, female, queer, neurodivergent director - venues only appear to be interested when they have projects that sit at the intersection of all of my identities, but never when they just have random shows (that always seem to go to a cis white male director). The other issue is that in the UK there is the expectation to make work and pitch it to venues - but funders don't want to fund work that doesn't have venues attached - but venues don't want to program work that isn't already made - which requires funding. This is a completely unsustainable and predatory model. Even public funding like ACE is completely and utterly inaccessible. I work in fundraising as my day job and still spend hours and hours of unpaid labour trying to make one funding app that is likely to get rejected! There seems to be no clear path to go from fringe to larger venues, and most assistant/associate schemes only seem to go to those with very good networking, or who can afford to take on assistant gigs that don't pay anything. I have taken on many gigs that don't pay, but had to fit them in around my paid work - and yet there are many gigs out there that pay terribly, or not at all, but refuse to be flexible with folks who have paid work."

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