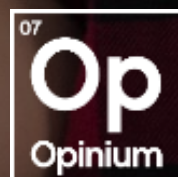




DCF

DIGITAL
CONNECTIVITY
FORUM

January 2023



What people think,
feel and do

About the Digital Connectivity Forum

The **Digital Connectivity Forum (DCF)** is the UK Government's primary advisory group on the provision of seamless digital connectivity.

DCF expertise spans the entire digital connectivity value chain.

First established in 2001 as the Broadband Stakeholder Group, today's DCF includes telecoms operators, equipment manufacturers, ISPs, mobile network operators, content producers, broadcasters, business groupings, central and local government, the devolved administrations, Ofcom and others.

Through this collaboration, evidence-building and research, we make recommendations to Government, regulators and industry.

About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award-winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on the pulse of what people **think**, **feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

www.opinium.com | [@OpiniumResearch](https://twitter.com/OpiniumResearch) | 0207 566 3190

Foreword

Background

The UK telecommunications sector, along with the wider tech sector, has traditionally held a reputation for not having a workforce which is representative of the full diversity of the nation. Limited publicly available information exists on the diversity of the telecoms workforce and that which is available for the wider sector indicates that telecommunications directors disproportionately consist of older males¹.

The benefits that diverse teams bring in terms of encouraging smarter, more innovative outcomes and driving improved business performance are now much better understood². With a labour market that is increasingly tightening and challenging, it has never been more important for the UK telecoms sector to ensure that it appeals to as broad a section of the national population as possible³.

Opinium research

Following a request from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (**DCMS**) the Digital Connectivity Forum commissioned the strategic insight agency Opinium to conduct a research project into levels of diversity across the UK telecoms workforce. The purpose of this research was to enable industry, government, the regulator and wider stakeholders to better understand the current make-up of the telecoms workforce; including current composition, attitudes and perceptions.

The research, which took place in late 2022, considered both quantitative and qualitative information. The quantitative research consisted of a survey of over 500 people who currently work in the UK telecommunications industry. It was not confined to DCF sponsor organisations. The qualitative part of the work featured in-depth video interviews with three participants working in the telecoms industry. It should be highlighted that, due to the nature of the research methods used, the quantitative results are slightly skewed towards managerial levels of the telecoms workforce. These results should therefore be judged as indicative rather than prescriptive to the entire sector.

The DCF intends for this research to be the inaugural publication in a regular series of reports, highlighting progress made by the sector in achieving a more diverse and representative workforce.

¹ <https://technation.io/insights/diversity-and-inclusion-in-uk-tech-companies/>

² <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>

³ <https://www.ft.com/content/2b8604d4-44d7-4842-bd81-19554283bb69>

The key findings

The snapshot provided by this research is powerful and revealing. It demonstrates that much work remains to be done to ensure a workforce that truly reflects the diversity of the UK. There is some more positive news. For example, two thirds of telecoms employees believe their companies are diverse. However, the following four findings particularly illustrate the work that remains:

- Gender diversity worsens by parental age, with 67% of those in the industry above the age of 35 being male.
- One in six of those working in the telecoms industry has a disability or long-term condition (16%), considerably lower than the proportion of those in the UK workforce who have a disability or condition (26%).
- Only one in three telecoms employees are aware of their organisations having an active diversity and inclusion culture.
- Three in ten telecoms employees have experienced discrimination in the industry.

Although there are many excellent ongoing initiatives across the telecoms sector and a great deal of progress has already been made, the research suggests a discouraging picture for the workforce and the levels of discrimination seen against those who are women, disabled and LGBTQ+. We believe that there is more that needs to be done by the industry, as in society more widely, to support those minorities.

This report is the first one in what we hope will become a regular part of the DCF's work to track and encourage levels of diversity across the telecommunications workforce. This work will include the establishing of a dedicated DCF work group on diversity and inclusion. We would also like to thank all those from the telecoms sector who have provided their input into this important project, including (but not limited to), DCMS, Ofcom, industry and other stakeholders. We look forward to working collaboratively to address the challenges outlined in this report.

Alex Mather
Head of Digital Connectivity Forum

About the Research

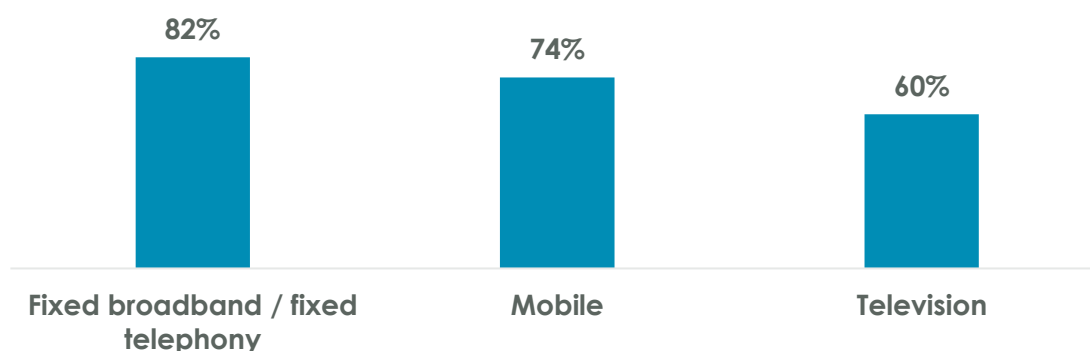
The Diversity in Telecoms 2022 research comprised of two stages: quantitative and qualitative.

The first stage – the quantitative research – was conducted between the 3 and 8 of August 2022 via an online survey with 504 employees working in the UK telecommunications industry. The survey was not confined to DCF sponsor organisations.

The telecoms sample was compared to nationally representative data for UK workers.⁴

Opinium took a natural fallout approach of sampling telecoms employees, meaning that working in telecoms was the only criteria for participating in the research, with other characteristics (such as department) falling out naturally. Those surveyed came from companies that offer a mix of services, with 8 in 10 offering fixed broadband / fixed telephony services. No quotas or minimum targets were placed on seniority, department or role.

Services the company offers

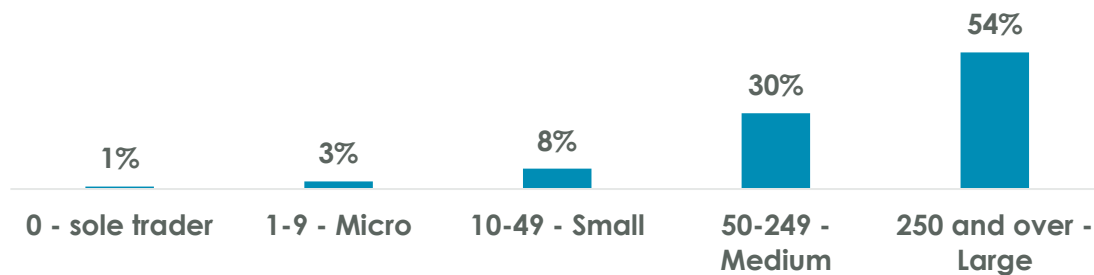


Question wording: **Which of the following services does your telecommunications company offer? Please select all apply.**

The majority (54%) of employees surveyed came from large businesses with 250 or more employees.

⁴ Figures for UK workers comparison data are from an Opinium Omnibus nationally representative study of 2,000 UK adults. The study took place 13th - 15th September 2022. The sample is weighted on age, gender, region, social grade and working status to match ONS population estimates.

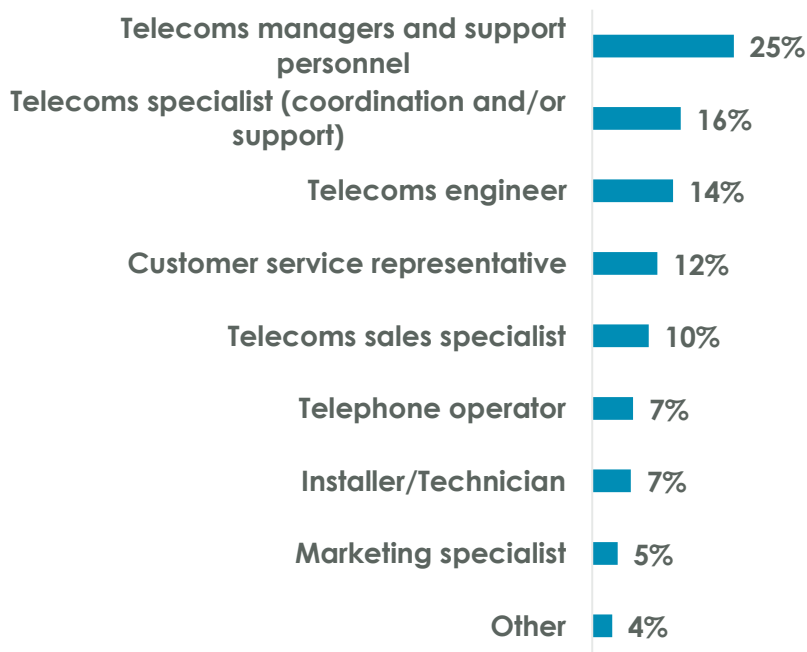
Number of employees in business



Question wording: **How many members of staff approximately [full time equivalents] does your business currently employ?**

Looking at job roles surveyed, the survey spoke to telecoms managers and support personnel, customer services representatives, engineers and specialists, among others:

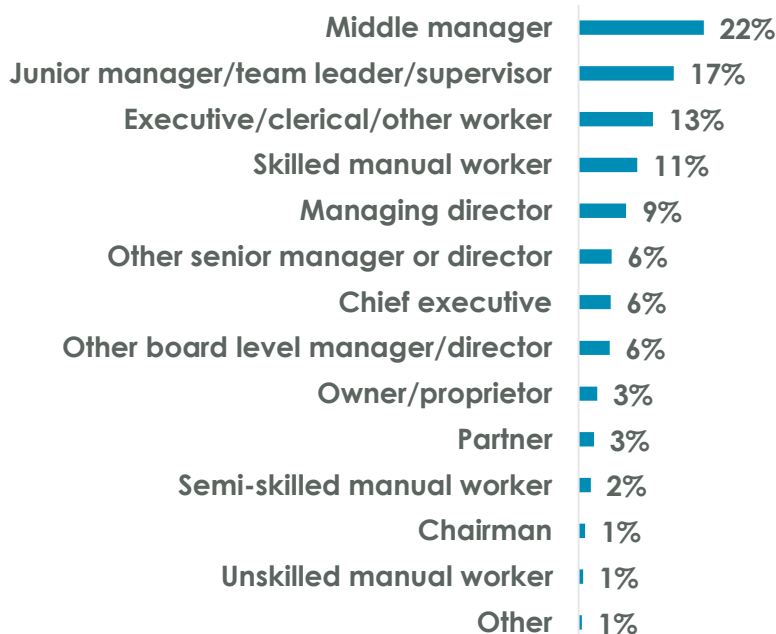
Job role



Question wording: **Which of the following best describes your position?**

Looking at seniority, the sample included a variety of levels, from manual workers to junior managers and C-suite.

Seniority



Question wording: **Which of the following best describes your level of seniority?**

As a result, it is important to caveat that the quantitative sample is unusually skewed to Manager+ levels and is not necessarily representative of the sector as a whole. The authors of the report advise treating the insights in this inaugural report as indicative rather than prescriptive to the sector.

This first stage of the research was followed by in-depth video-enabled interviews with 3 participants working in the telecoms industry. This second stage of the research took place between 2 and 7 November. The interviews then informed the three case studies included in this report. Please note that the names of the participants have been changed to keep the case studies anonymous.

Diversity in telecoms

Two thirds of telecoms employees see their companies as diverse

When telecoms employees were asked how diverse their whole company was, two thirds (66%) saw it as diverse or very diverse, with a quarter (27%) choosing to remain neutral, and only 5% seeing it as not diverse.

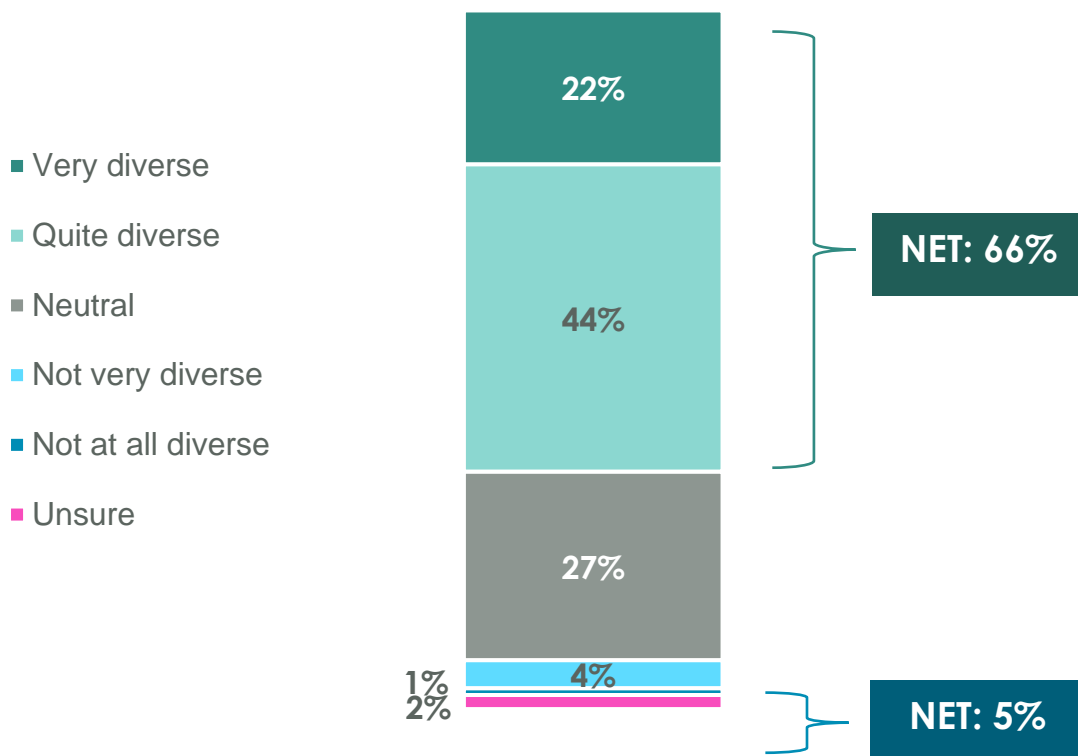
It is important to note that due to the skew to Manager+ levels in this report, the perceived levels of diversity may be inflated compared to the views of the sector as a whole.

Open-ended feedback from employees shows that this is due to the sense of increased effort from employers to create a diverse environment and alter their hiring practices.

“We make it a priority that our workspace is safe and diverse”

“Employ more different nationalities than other companies I have worked for”

Perceived diversity in the whole company



Question wording: **How diverse do you feel that your company is?** Here we would like you to think about the diversity of your company as a whole, rather than company leadership. When we talk about diversity

we mean showing variety in the makeup of employees in factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, ideologies, and individual life experiences.

Looking at the numbers of ethnic diversity, 86% of telecoms employees in this sample were White, with 14% being from an Ethnic Minority background. Comparing this to the UK working population numbers, this falls at 89% White and 11% Minority Ethnic.

Turning to sexual orientation, 85% of telecoms employees in this survey were Heterosexual / Straight, while 13% were Homosexual / Gay, Bisexual or Other. Just 2% preferred not to disclose. Comparing this to UK numbers, 91% were Heterosexual or Straight, and 8% were Homosexual / Gay, Bisexual or Other (1% preferred not to disclose).

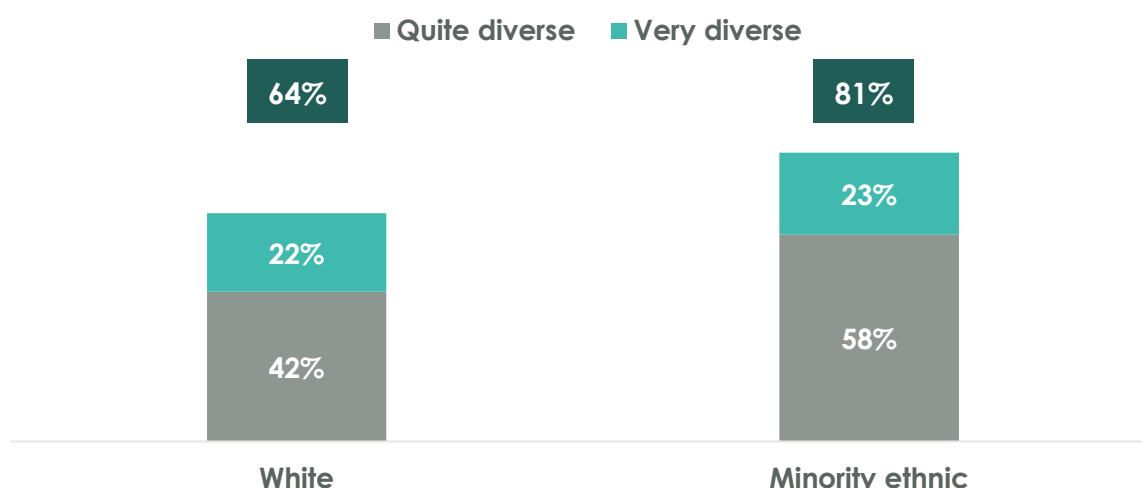
Meanwhile, looking at religion or belief, 50% of participants in the survey said they had no religion or belief, 36% were Christian and 20% were Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh or Other; 2% chose not to disclose. As a comparison, 44% of UK workers said they had no religion or belief, 42% were Christian and 10% were Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh or Other; 5% chose not to disclose.

Perceptions of diversity are a mirror, with those from diverse backgrounds seeing the companies they work at as more diverse

Looking at perceived diversity by different profiling groups, we see some differences.

First, looking at differences by ethnicity, we see that those from a minority ethnic background are more likely to perceive their company as diverse, with eight in ten saying so. This compares to just under two-thirds of White employees surveyed.

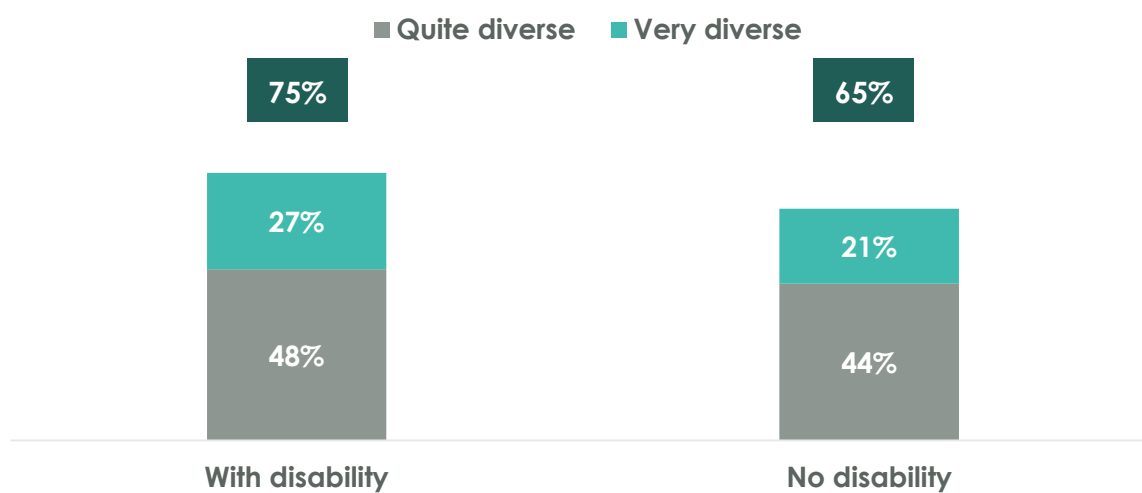
Perceived diversity in the whole company - by ethnicity



Question wording: **How diverse do you feel that your company is? Here we would like you to think about the diversity of your company as a whole, rather than company leadership. When we talk about diversity we mean showing variety in the makeup of employees in factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, ideologies, and individual life experiences.**

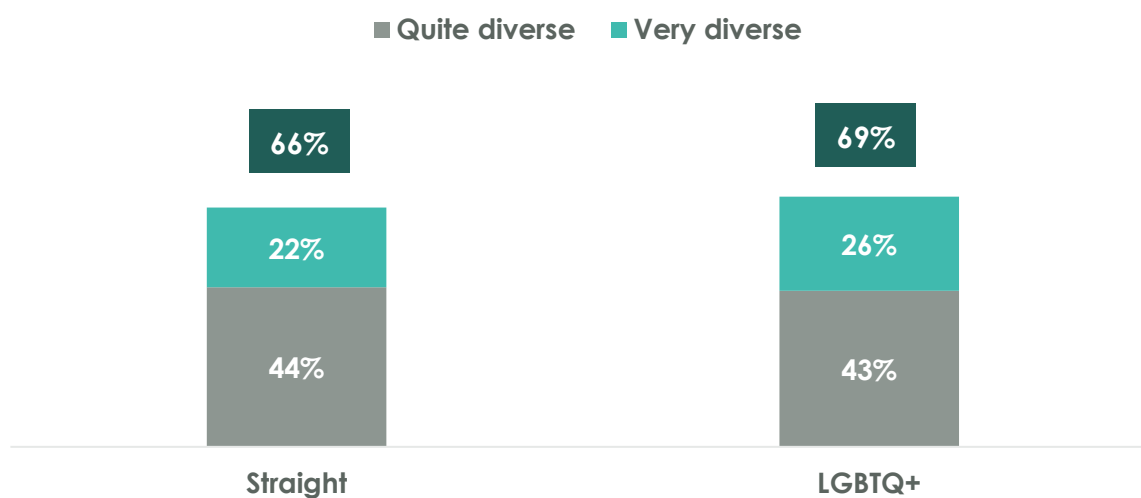
A similar pattern emerges when we look at differences by those who do and don't have a disability. Three-quarters of those who have a disability or a long-standing condition believe that their company is diverse. By comparison, this numbers drops to just under two-thirds among those who do not have a disability.

Perceived diversity in the whole company - by disability status



We also see some difference in perceived diversity by sexuality, albeit to a much smaller extent.

Perceived diversity in the whole company - by sexuality



What this data goes to show is that perceptions of diversity are in the eye of the beholder: those who come from more diverse backgrounds also perceive their company as being diverse. The sheer fact

of said diverse person working at their company makes that company more diverse. Meanwhile, those from a societal majority are likely surrounded by colleagues similar to them, therefore their perceptions of diversity are lower.

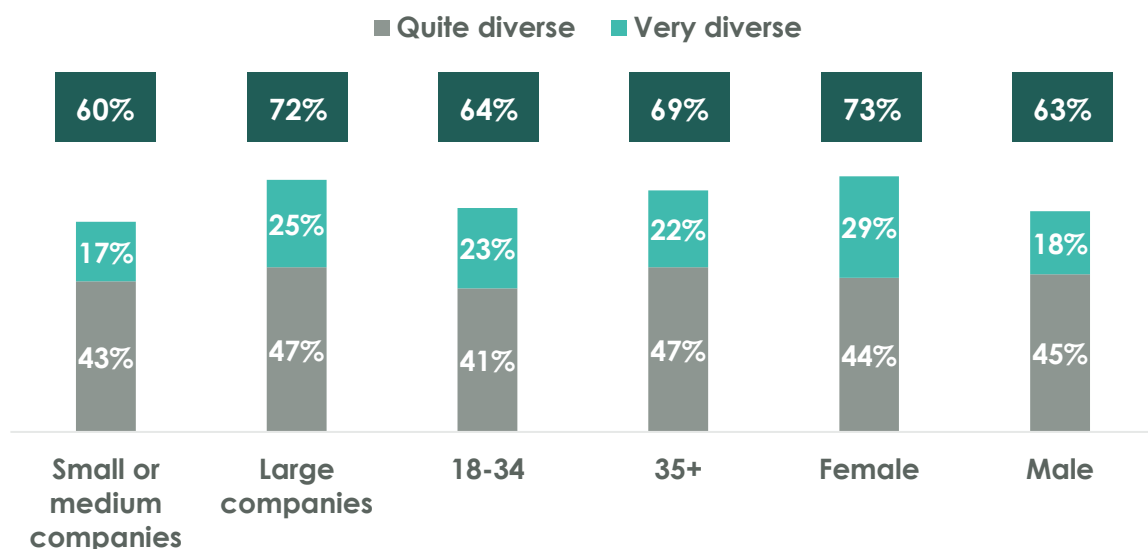
Perceived diversity also differs by company size and seniority

Levels of diversity were perceived as being higher in larger companies with 250 employees or more, with 72% agreeing they were diverse, compared to 60% of those working in small or medium companies.

“Because of our size, we are able to be more switched on to diversity. We are more finely tuned and aware of diversity issues”

Older employees are slightly more likely to think their company is diverse than those aged 18-34. Interestingly, female employees see more diversity than their male counterparts - possibly due to women being more likely to work in diverse companies in the first place, or simply being more aware of diversity.

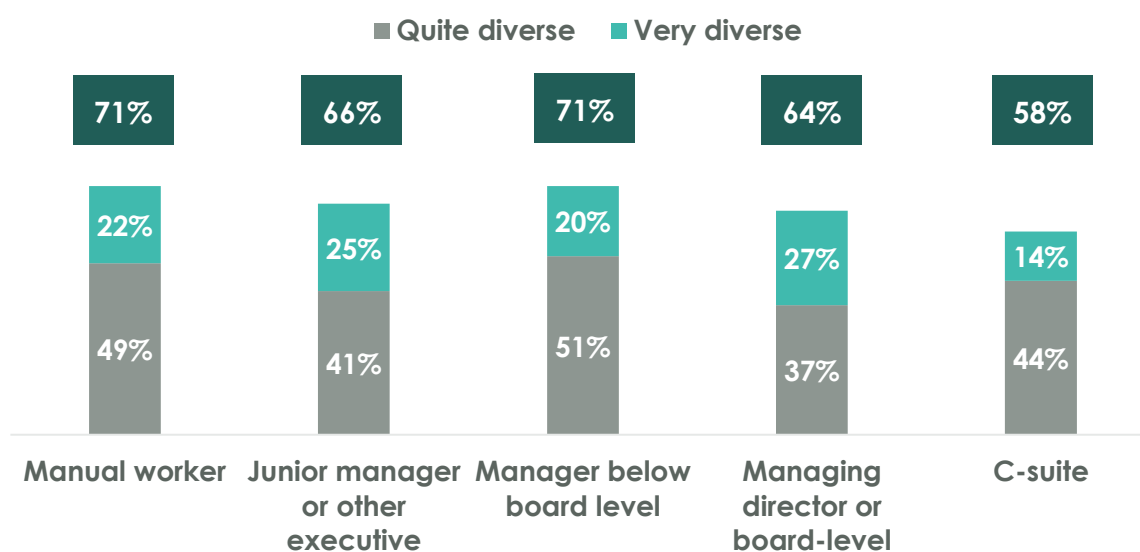
Perceived diversity in the whole company - by various profiling groups



Question wording: How diverse do you feel that your company is? Here we would like you to think about the diversity of your company as a whole, rather than company leadership. When we talk about diversity we mean showing variety in the makeup of employees in factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, ideologies, and individual life experiences.

Interestingly, there is a difference in perceived diversity when we look at it by level of seniority. Among those surveyed, manual workers were the most likely to say their company is diverse, with seven in ten believing that to be the case. This drops down to just 58% among the C-suite. It is worth noting that Manual workers include all who do not have managerial responsibilities.

Perceived diversity in the whole company - by seniority



Question wording: **How diverse do you feel that your company is? Here we would like you to think about the diversity of your company as a whole, rather than company leadership. When we talk about diversity we mean showing variety in the makeup of employees in factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, ideologies, and individual life experiences.**

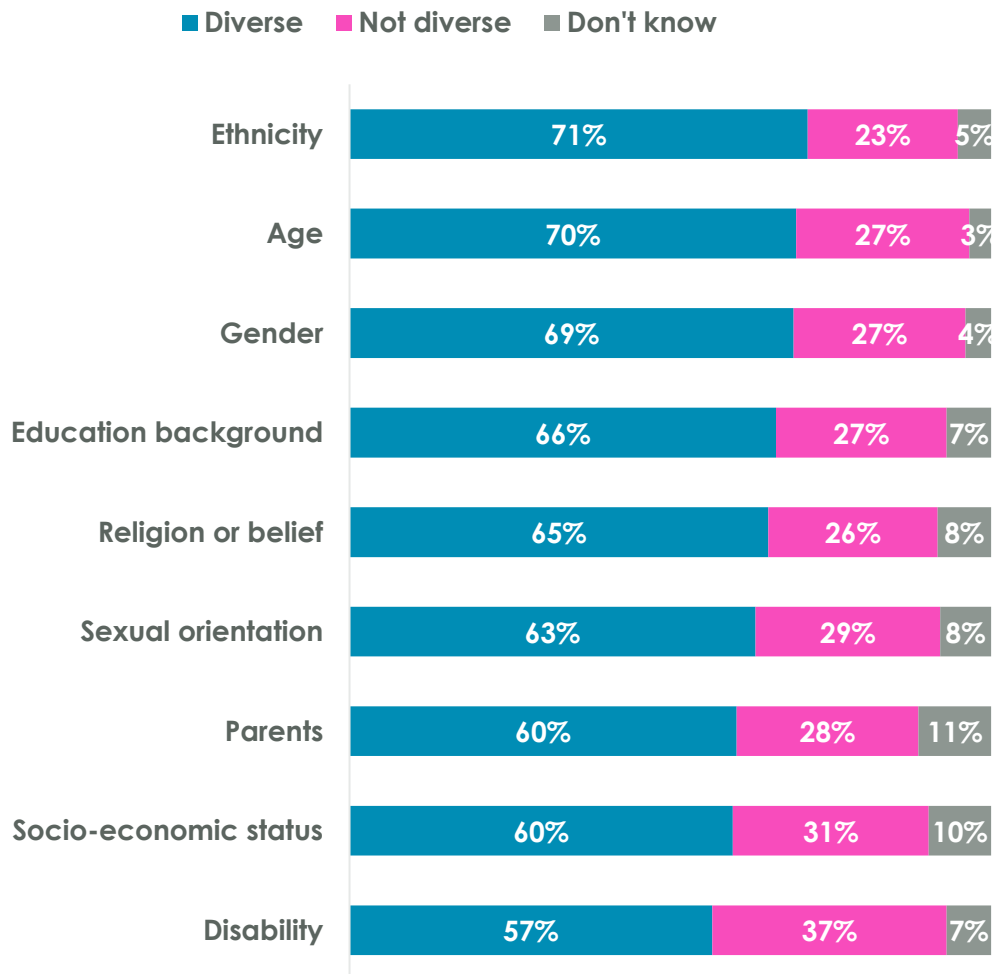
A potential explanation for this is that the C-suite may have greater oversight of the total levels of diversity in the company, something that manual workers may not be privy to, or have a lower bar for what counts as a 'diverse' workforce, seeing as this question did not prompt participants as to what diversity may include.

One in three feel that their company is not diverse when it comes to disability and socio-economic status

Perceptions of diversity among those surveyed are polarised; while the majority do feel that their company is diverse across most metrics, there is a sizable minority who do not.

The biggest causes for concern are diversity based on socio-economic status (31%) and disability, (37%). The lack of diversity on disability is particularly felt in small & medium companies, where 43% see it as not diverse on disability, compared to 32% in large companies.

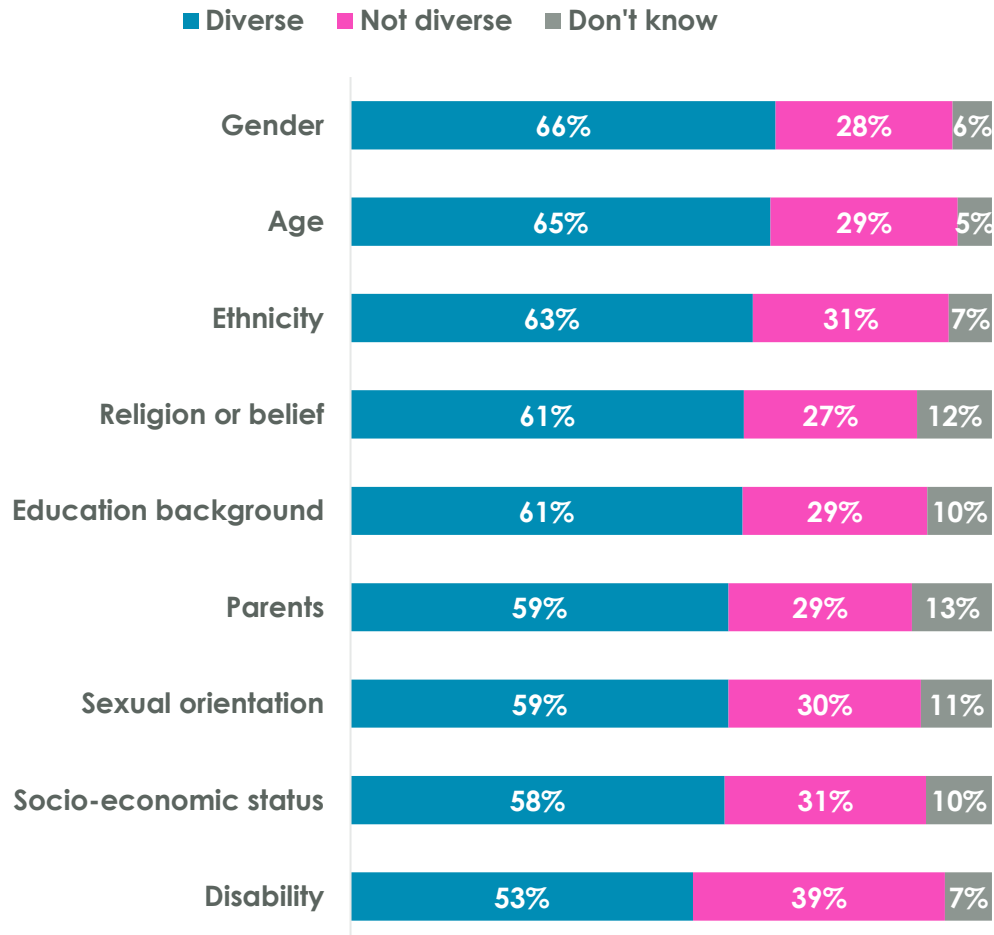
Diversity by group - whole company



Question wording: How diverse do you feel your company is at all levels on the following attributes?

Perceptions of diversity in telecoms senior leadership teams are also not clear-cut. Two in five feel that their company's senior leadership team is not diverse on the basis of disability (39%), and three in ten on the basis of ethnicity or socio-economic status (both 31%).

Diversity by group - senior leadership



Question wording: And how diverse do you feel the senior leadership is in your company on the following attributes?

Case study: Ashok

Ashok is a senior analyst working at a mobile telecoms company in the UK. He designs projects and solutions, communicates with vendors and looks after network stability and quality.

Ashok was born and grew up in India, graduating from university with a degree in electronics. He started off working as a graduate trainee at another telecoms company in India, who then transferred him to the UK when he was in his mid-twenties. He has now been at his current company for a few years.

Ashok feels his company is quite diverse. His immediate team has a mix of South American, Asian and European colleagues. His company is very ethnically diverse, and Ashok feels that they respect every religion and culture.

Diverse people in his company are not treated differently at all, Ashok says. When it comes to promotions, opportunities or generally being appreciated, everyone is treated equally.

In general, his company sees diversity as important and frequently promotes it. The company transparently talks about their gender pay gap and works to correct it.

There is an emphasis on mental health in Ashok's company, with open conversations taking place among colleagues and the company even offering

a free subscription to an app that provides mental wellbeing techniques. Mental health even features on employees' performance review forms. The office also has yoga corners and break rooms to provide a space for employees to take a break.

When it comes to working parents, he says it all depends on the manager. His own manager is a parent too, so is very understandable when, for instance, Ashok needs to take his child to a doctor's appointment during work hours or take a day off when his child is sick. Conversely, he mentions a colleague who works in a different team that is headed up by someone less understanding. If said colleague needs to take a day of leave, they need to give notice several months in advance which, as a parent, is not always feasible.

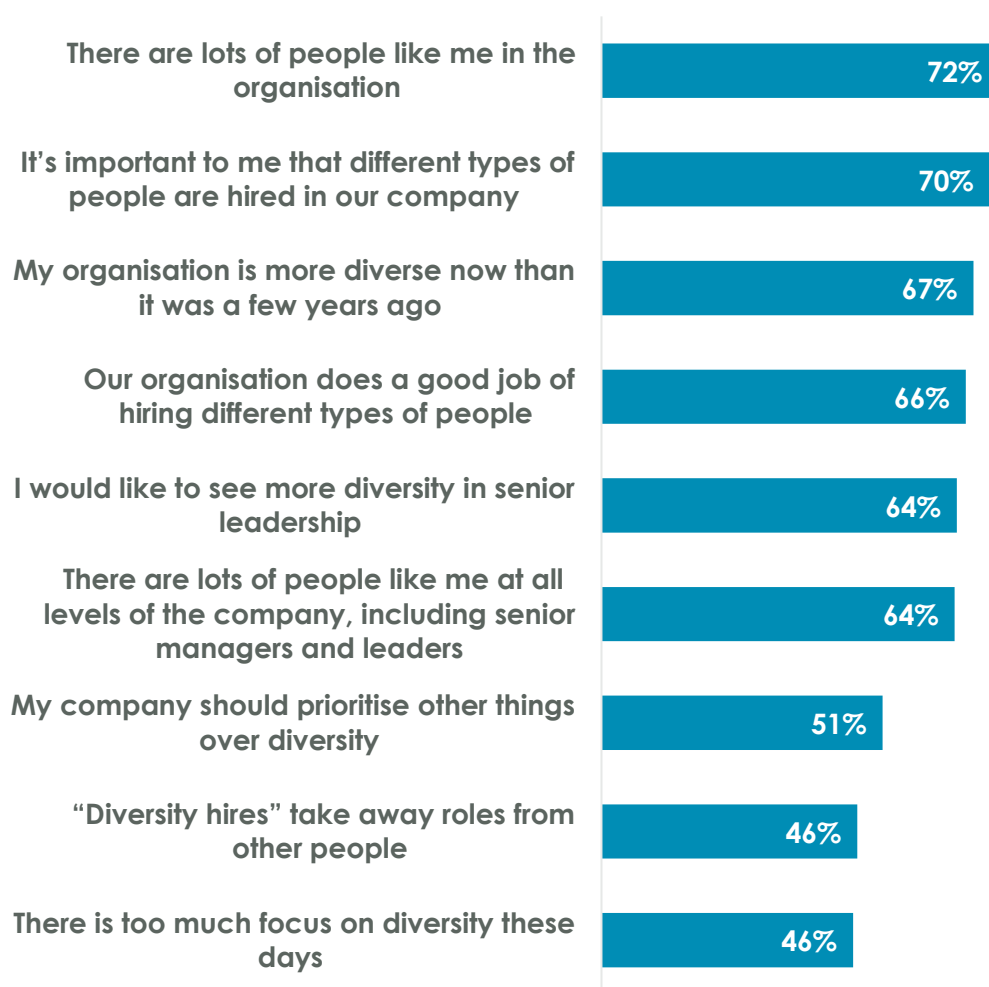
One aspect of his company Ashok would like to see improve is the paternity leave policy, which currently is not the most flexible. For example, paternity leave is only available to employees who have worked at the company for 6 months or more. Unlucky for Ashok, he joined the company just 5 months before his child was born – which meant he just missed out on his two weeks of paternity leave. Meanwhile, the company that his wife works at gives fathers 3 months of 'bonding leave' in addition to the standard paternity leave, and any new father is eligible for it, regardless of how recently they joined. Ashok would love to see something similar implemented at his company.

Telecoms employees agree that diversity is important and good for business – but half feel their company should prioritise other things

When it comes to the work that companies are actively doing to encourage increased diversity in the industry, perceptions are mixed. Only two thirds of employees feel that their organisation does a good job of hiring different types of people such as ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, disabled people etc. (66%), and a similar proportion feel that their organisation is more diverse now than it was a few years ago (67%).

Diversity attitudes

■ % agree



Question wording: **How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Ingrained perceptions of the importance of diversity vary among telecoms employees. While the majority do feel that having diversity in a company is good for business (75%) and feel that it is

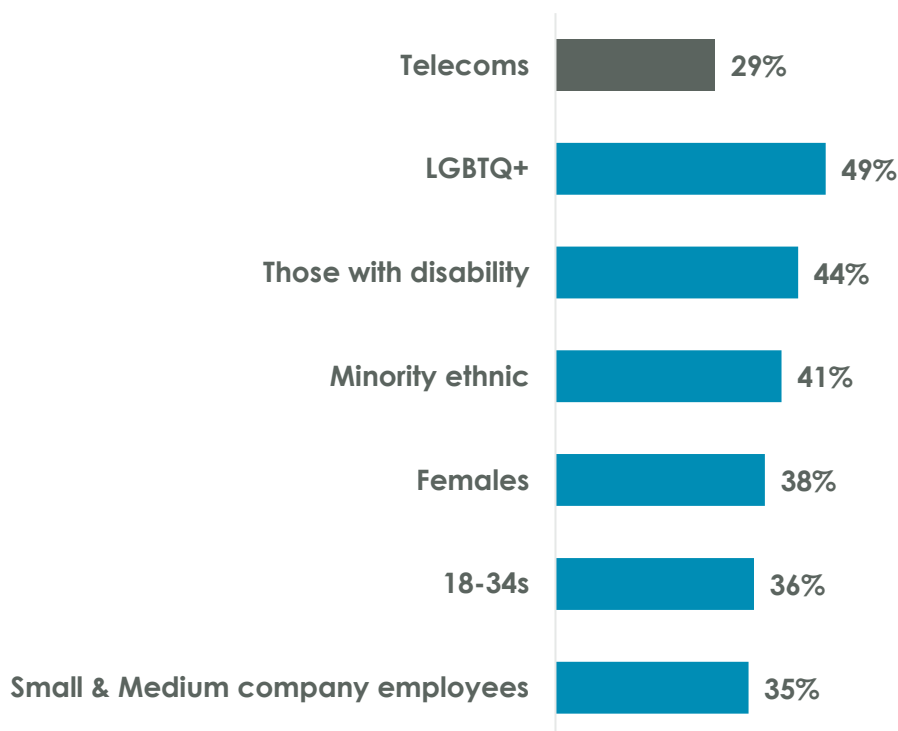
important to them that different types of people are hired in their company (70%), half feel that companies should prioritise other things over diversity (51%).

On top of this, telecoms employees are divided on their perceptions of how fair the hiring process is, with just under half who feel that “‘diversity hires’ take away roles from other people” (46%), and the same proportion feel that there is “too much focus on diversity these days” (46%). Therefore, while diversity is seen as a priority among telecoms employees, the reality of how it should be prioritised and implemented is not clear cut.

Three in ten have experienced discrimination in the industry

Discrimination is an issue which is present in the telecommunications industry. Just under three in ten have faced discrimination (29%), which rises to 35% in small & medium organisations. This is also higher among 18–34-year-olds (36%), women (38%), minority ethnic people (41%), LGBTQ+ (49%) and those with a disability (44%). Discrimination against those from minority backgrounds, who are LGBTQ+, who identify as disabled, or against women is disappointingly high and shows there is more to do in the industry to support those from minority backgrounds.

Have you faced discrimination in the industry, and if so, on what basis? (% 'yes')



Question wording: Have you faced discrimination in the industry, and if so, on what basis?

Not all employees feel that they could speak up if they felt that people were being discriminated against (72% net Agree). Discrimination is an issue faced by many within the industry, and care must be taken by organisations to ensure that all employees can feel confident in their employer's ability to eradicate all instances, but also to ensure that all employees are able to speak up about discrimination if instances do arise.

Furthermore, a third have previously felt uncomfortable in response to remarks made in the workplace (37%). This figure rises significantly among LGBTQ+ employees, 47% of whom have been made to feel uncomfortable in the workplace.

Not all of those working in the industry feel that companies are doing all that they can to eradicate these issues. While the majority feel that making discriminatory comments about others is not tolerated in their organisation (74%), this is not unanimously the case, with 17% who neither agree nor disagree with this statement and 9% who disagreed.

Case study: Jim

Jim works as a manager for a large telecoms company in the UK. He manages over 20 engineers, and is responsible for helping them work out any issues and priorities with customers.

Jim started out in the telecoms sector as an apprentice. Having grown up in a working-class family, he finished his education after completing his A-levels and spent a few years working in other industries. He ventured into telecoms as a way to carve out a career for himself. After joining his current company, he worked his way up to a managerial role.

Jim says that his company is probably one of the more diverse ones in the industry, with a good gender and ethnicity balance. One story of success Jim talks about is the increased female representation in engineering roles. He says that just a decade ago, the women working in his company would have only been seen in admin roles. But that's changing – nowadays, the balance between male and female engineers is fairly equal.

However, he points out that while engineering roles and the organisation as a whole are quite diverse, it stops at managerial roles, where most of the workforce are male and White. He attributes this to the company having been historically male-dominated and is not surprised that course-correcting can take time.

That being said, Jim often feels there is too much focus on diversity in the company – and it's because that focus feels inauthentic.

He says that his company publishes a lot of diversity-related material on the staff intranet; however, as this is quite frequent, he finds himself 'switching off'. He'd rather his company put in a concentrated effort and prove with actions rather than words that diversity in the company exists:

"It's just links and videos, all marketing and publicity. They're not achieving anything, in my opinion. The facts are in the employment – if it's very well-represented, then that's all you need."

Another aspect that Jim sees as being problematic within the company is the attitude towards mental health and workload. He often takes work home and spends time working at the weekends. While Jim acknowledges that part of the reason he does that is because he feels invested in his role, he sees a cultural and systemic issue within the company as well.

Jim says that these cultural issues come from the top. Part of the problem is the fact that those in the most senior positions are very far removed from the rest of the company – Jim says that his senior manager hasn't had a single meeting with his team since he started at the company a year ago.

Furthermore, depending on who is in senior management at the time, the

attitude towards people's mental wellbeing can vary wildly. He recalls a senior manager from a few years back who instigated a culture that Jim calls "horrible":

"We have waves of different senior managers come in – and the mindset changes. A few years ago, if you'd have asked me, there was a very horrible culture. It was very performance-driven. Managers would get sacked in the past [if] there was resistance."

Jim thinks that if he was to go to his manager with a problem, it would hamper his progress. And this isn't pure speculation – he recalls a few instances in the past where employees suffering from stress and burnout due to high workload would get pushed out of the business.

While his company has a lot of initiatives and support channels that are often published on the staff intranet, these tend to come across as perfunctory rather than actually aiming to help.

As an example, Jim mentions a stress assessment tool available to employees in his company. If you score above a certain threshold, the company is obligated to do something about it. He says that the tool is meant to help people – but colleagues have cautioned to think twice before using it:

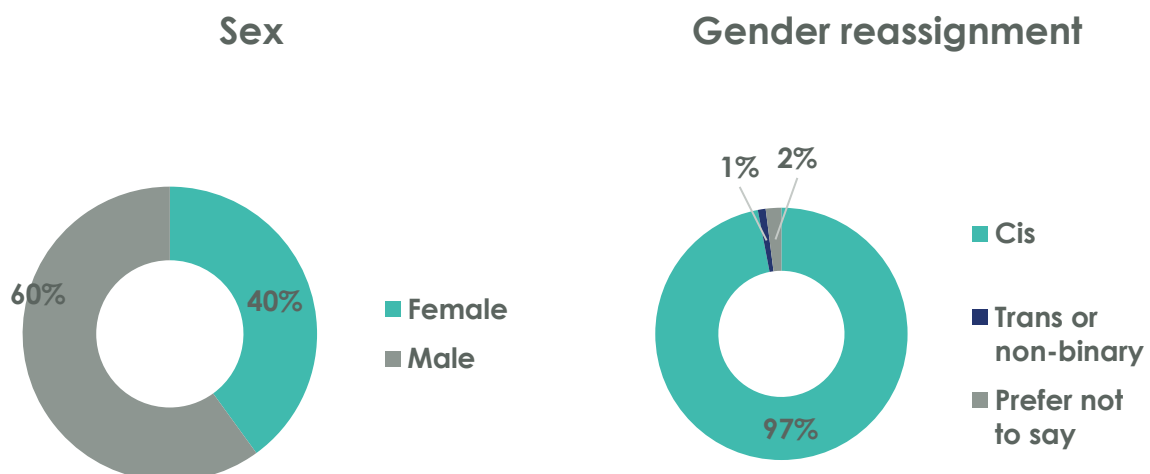
"I wouldn't want to test it – I'll put it that way."

Gender diversity

One in a hundred telecoms employees are trans or non-binary – in line with UK average

Three-fifths (60%) of telecoms employees surveyed were male at birth, with two-fifths (40%) being female. The proportion of women is statistically lower compared to all UK workers, where the split is more even (47% female and 52% male, with 1% preferring not to say).

Looking at gender identity, we see that one in a hundred (1%) telecoms employees identify as trans or non-binary, which is statistically in line with the average among all UK workers (2%).



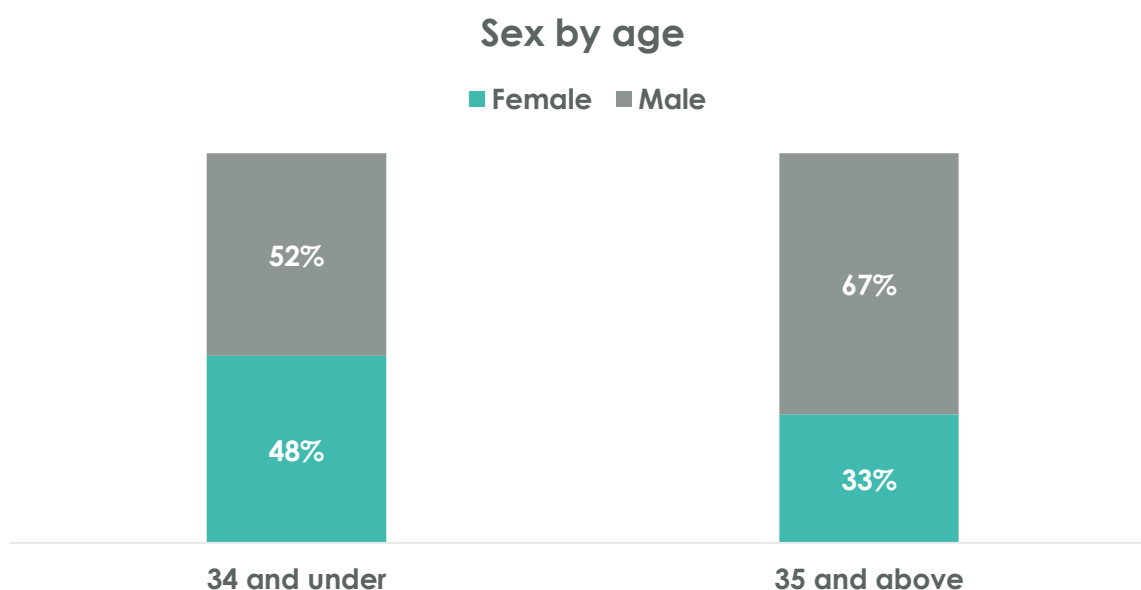
Sex at birth question wording: **What is your sex/ gender? Select either “Female” or “Male”.** By ‘sex/ gender’ we are referring to the question of your sex at birth. If you are one or more of non-binary, transgender, have variations of sex characteristics, sometimes also known as intersex, the answer you give can be different from what is on your birth certificate. If you’re not sure how to answer, use the sex registered on your official documents, such as passport or driving licence, or whichever answer best describes your sex. A later question gives the option to tell us if your gender is different from your sex registered at birth, and, if different, to record your gender.

Gender reassignment question wording: **Is your gender the same as the sex you were registered at birth? This question is voluntary, so you can leave it blank if you prefer. Select only one response. If your gender is not the same as the sex recorded on your birth certificate when you were born (for example, you are transgender or non-binary), tick “No”. If you answered no, please enter the term you use to describe your gender. This is also voluntary, so you please type in 'prefer not to say' if you prefer. If you would like to record that you have variations of sex characteristics, sometimes also known as intersex, you can use this write-in box. If you would like to, you can also write-in your gender (for example: ‘intersex, non-binary’).**

Gender diversity worsens by parental age in the telecoms sector, with fewer women above the age of 35 present in the industry

As we move from younger to older age groups of employees in the telecoms industry, we see that gender diversity worsens. At the point of likely entry into the telecoms industry, the gender split is relatively equal, at 48% female and 52% male among 18–34-year-olds. By the age point of 34, a third (33%) of employees are female with 67% male. This is not a phenomenon seen at the UK worker level: both before and after the age of 34, the proportional split of male and female workers remains the same.

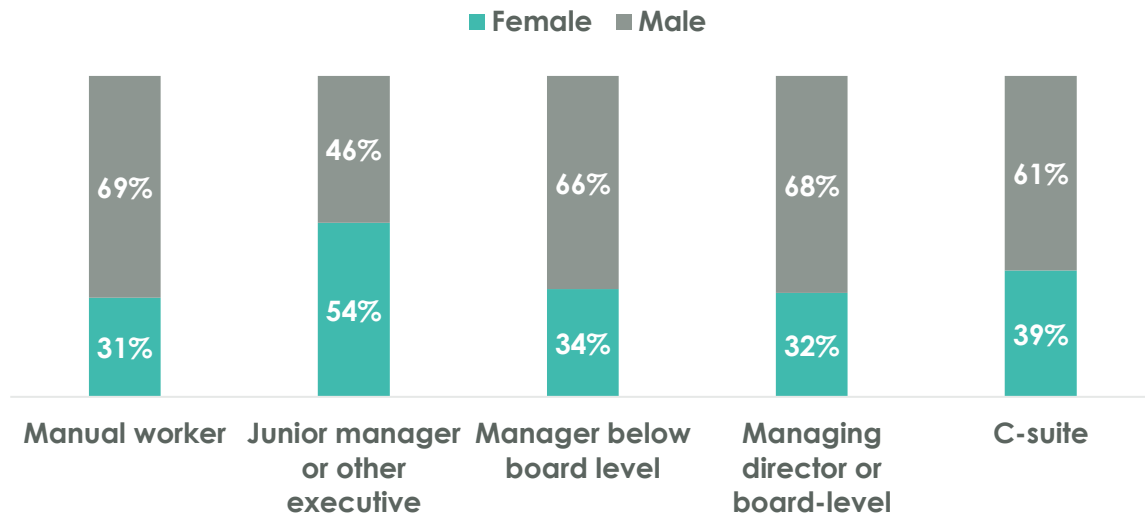
This suggests that there are more women in the industry at a junior level; however, within senior levels, the proportion of women falls significantly.



Sex question wording: **What is your sex/ gender? Select either “Female” or “Male”.** By ‘sex/ gender’ we are referring to the question of your sex at birth. If you are one or more of non-binary, transgender, have variations of sex characteristics, sometimes also known as intersex, the answer you give can be different from what is on your birth certificate. If you’re not sure how to answer, use the sex registered on your official documents, such as passport or driving licence, or whichever answer best describes your sex. A later question gives the option to tell us if your gender is different from your sex registered at birth, and, if different, to record your gender.

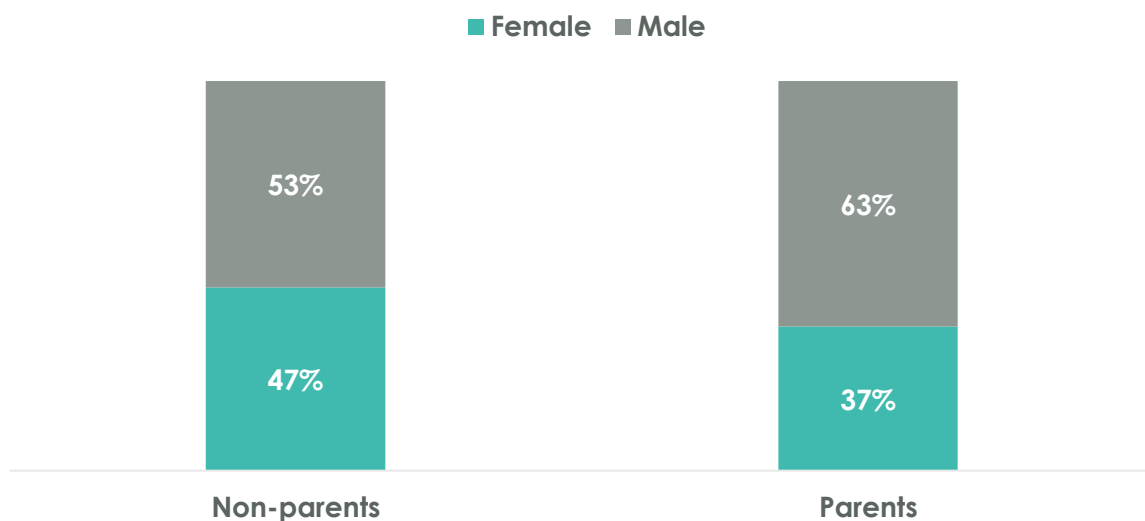
A similar phenomenon can be observed when we look at the male/female gender split by seniority. At a junior level, there is a relatively even split between male and female workers: junior managers and other executives are 54% female and 46% male. However, this balance does not endure with seniority: just a third at managing director or board level are female, and a similar proportion at C-Suite level. Similarly, when we look at Manual workers, the balance once again is tipped towards male colleagues.

Sex by seniority in company



While this will to an extent be a function of the skew towards more senior roles in this particular report, the significant imbalance of men and women in senior roles in the telecoms sector may also be correlated with them reaching the age at which they choose to have children. This is because the gender disparity is very prominent when looking at parents vs. non-parents. Among those who opted not to have children or have not reached that age yet, the gender split is fairly even (53% male vs. 47% female). However, when we look at parents, the gender split shifts to a third of women and two-thirds of men:

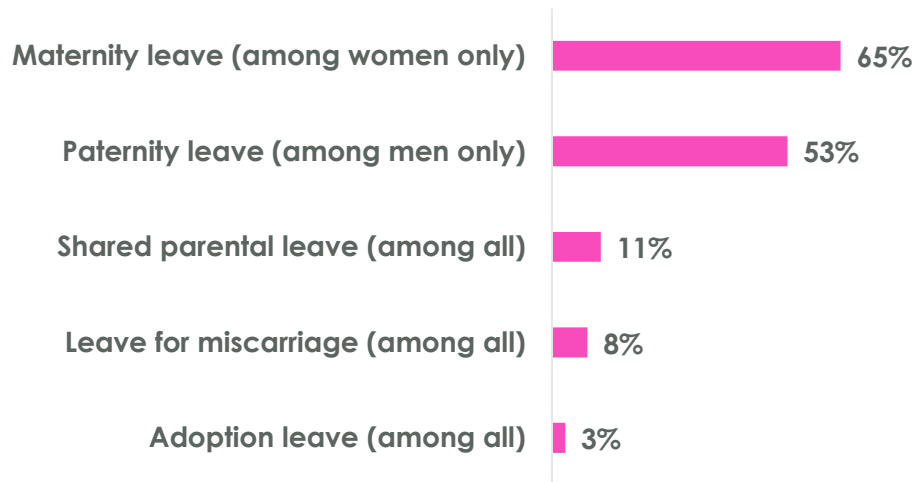
Sex by parental status



That being said, among women and men in telecoms, 65% and 53% have taken maternity or paternity leave, respectively. One in ten (11%) of telecoms employees have taken shared parental leave.

Just one in three telecoms employees feel that their organisation offers a competitive maternity or paternity package (35%).

Types of leave taken



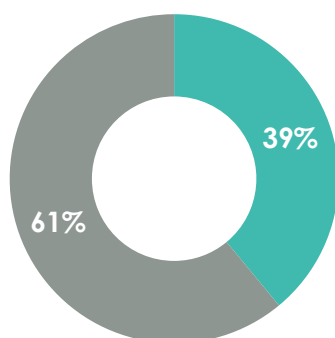
Question wording: **Have you taken...?**

Gender balance in the industry is more equal in minority groups

Of further interest is the prevalence of this gender disparity among White telecoms employees, with a more even split among Minority Ethnic workers. Among the former, 2 in 5 employees in the telecoms sector are female, and 3 in 5 are male. This is much more balanced among the Minority Ethnic group, where the gender split is almost exactly even.

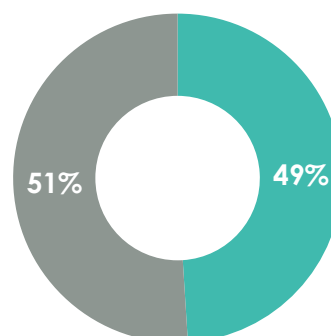
Sex by ethnicity
- **White**

■ Female ■ Male



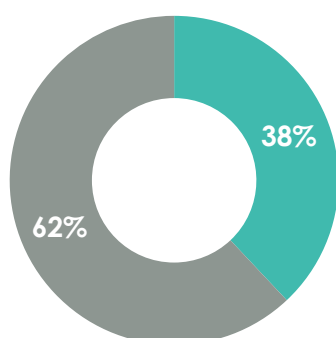
Sex by ethnicity - Minority ethnic

■ Female ■ Male



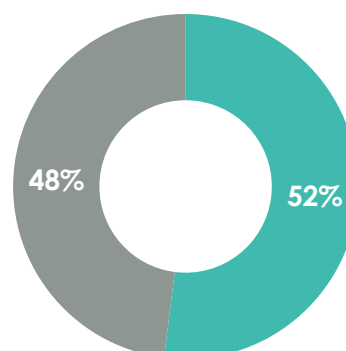
Sex by sexual orientation - Straight

■ Female ■ Male



Sex by sexual orientation - Gay/Lesbian/Bi

■ Female ■ Male



Sex question wording: **What is your sex/ gender? Select either “Female” or “Male”.** By ‘sex/ gender’ we are referring to the question of your sex at birth. If you are one or more of non-binary, transgender, have variations of sex characteristics, sometimes also known as intersex, the answer you give can be different from what is on your birth certificate. If you’re not sure how to answer, use the sex registered on your official documents, such as passport or driving licence, or whichever answer best describes your sex. A

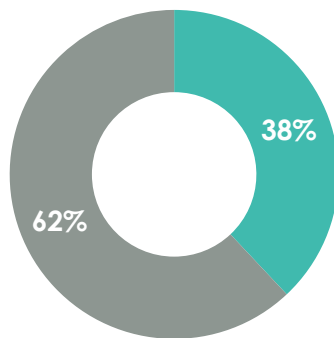
later question gives the option to tell us if your gender is different from your sex registered at birth, and, if different, to record your gender.

What is more, this gender disparity is seen by sexual orientation too, with the female/male split being roughly even among Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual telecoms workers.

Finally, we see the same trend when looking at those with and without disabilities:

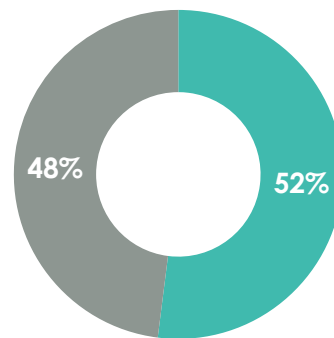
Sex by disability status - No disability

■ Female ■ Male



Sex by disability status - With a disability

■ Female ■ Male



Whilst there appears to be a correlation suggesting that improving diversity will also lead to a better gender balance further research is needed to understand what drives this correlation..

Case study: Sophie

Sophie works as a Project Manager for a large telecoms company. Her role involves working with project teams across the business to ensure successful implementation of changes to the customer.

After finishing her A-levels and working for a couple of years in retail, she wanted a change and applied for a role in a call centre in a big telecommunications company. She moved on to customer service work in the head office of another large telecoms company, where she has now been for more than ten years. During her time at this company, she has held various roles, from customer service to operations management to project management.

Sophie lives with her family in London. Her role is fully remote, except for going into the office for an occasional workshop.

Sophie says that the global senior leadership team at her organisation is reasonably diverse when it comes to gender, with a 50% split between men and women. However, she does not feel that this diversity trickles down to the rest of the company. For example, of the four managers in her team, only one is a woman. She also feels that the organisation lacks diversity when it comes to race and ethnicity.

Sophie feels that in recent years her organisation has made significant progress in their prioritisation of diversity.

She believes this was accelerated by attention being directed towards the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Her company took it seriously. Support groups and diversity and inclusion groups were set up, and the company reviewed language and terminology use of matters related to race and ethnicity. They also hosted sessions which were broadcast to the company allowing ethnic minorities to talk about their experiences of when they have felt different or discriminated against.

“I think [these sessions] really opened up people’s eyes to what it feels like to be Black.”

She believes that initiatives like these gave individuals courage and a platform to speak up about issues that they may have otherwise shied away from, and this continues to be a priority for her organisation.

This led to the organisation prioritising other areas of diversity, such as neurodiversity. There are channels on their intranet which provide support for a whole spectrum of neurodiverse conditions. Information is available to educate individuals on these conditions, with direction towards support if needed.

A particularly notable change towards the prioritisation of neurodiversity is one which has impacted Sophie directly. Sophie’s child has struggled with anxiety in the past, meaning she had to take him to regular appointments. In order to do this, Sophie would have to use her annual leave, despite having explained her circumstances to her manager.

However, now the organisation's policies have changed so that those who care for someone with a neurodiverse condition can take paid leave in these situations. Additionally, the company now offer private health cover for employees and their families. These changes have been facilitated by her company working with a charity who specialise in support for carers.

"It has taken away the fear of anyone being able to speak to their manager and say "look, I have this going on in my life, and I need your help"."

Sophie has also faced challenges as a mother in general. She doesn't feel that her managers have always empathised with her position. Soon after returning from maternity leave, Sophie was asked to go on an overnight offsite trip, which she found difficult, seeing as she had a new-born child at home. When she said no, Sophie was told to consider whether she was willing to continue in her role now that she is a mother – she found this questioning upsetting and unfair. Sophie reported this to human resources, who offered advice, but told her to speak to her senior manager, rather than stepping in themselves.

However, Sophie feels that things have changed, with the needs of all groups prioritised, including those of mothers. She does not feel that a new mother joining her organisation now would face the same challenges that she did a decade ago.

"People say "you have been there for many years, why don't you leave?" And I say I wouldn't because this company is so supportive"

Sophie believes that her company is making good efforts towards prioritising diversity; however, she would like to see results and evidence become more readily available. People in her organisation mostly work from home, with many calls taking place off-camera, so she has little view of how visibly diverse her workforce now is. She feels that it is therefore important for them to publish information on tangible results, as well as efforts, such as up to date statistics on how diverse the organisation is.

"I don't think they could be doing more, but I would like to see more results."

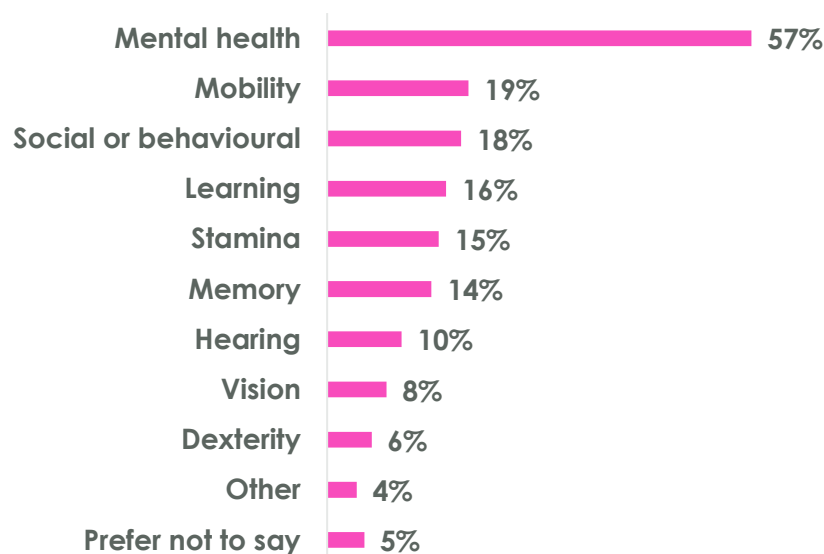
Disability

One in six of those working in the telecoms industry have a disability

One in six of those working in the telecoms industry have a long-standing disability or condition (16%), lower than the UK worker population (26%).

Of those who do have a disability, 85% find that it impacts their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, and 27% feel that it impacts their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a lot. The types of disabilities that are most commonly faced by those working in the telecoms industry are mental health (57%), mobility (19%), and social behavioural (18%).

Disability type (as a proportion of those who have a disability)



Question wording: **Do any of these conditions or illnesses affect you in any of the following areas?** Base: all those who have a disability or condition (79).

Mental health conditions being 'invisible' and not easily identifiable to employers means that extra care must be taken in proactively ensuring that support is in place for those with a mental health condition.

One in ten telecoms workers do not feel that their organisation is a psychologically and emotionally healthy place to work (10%) and the same proportion do not feel that they can be themselves at work (10%). Both of these are higher among those with a mental health condition (14%).

The physical alterations that companies offer to facilitate those with physical disabilities are outlined below.

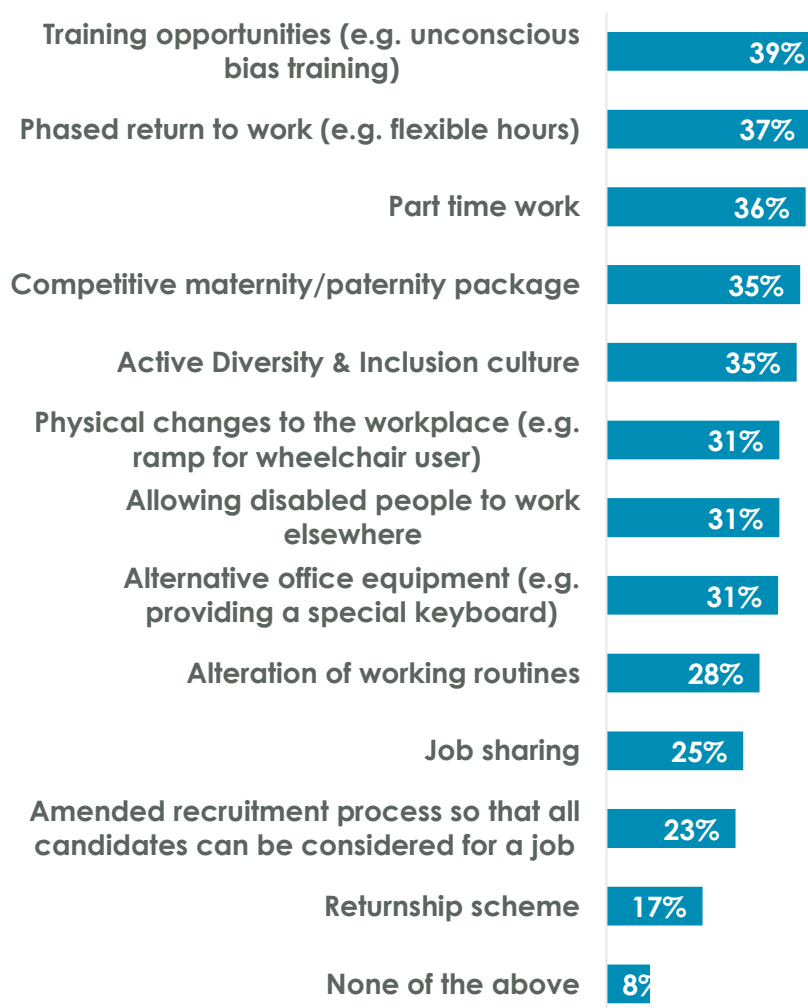
Initiatives

One in three telecoms employees aware of organisations having an active diversity and inclusion culture

Telecoms organisations promote diversity through a variety of initiatives. The most common ones that employees are aware of are training opportunities (39%), phased return to work (37%) and part time work (36%).

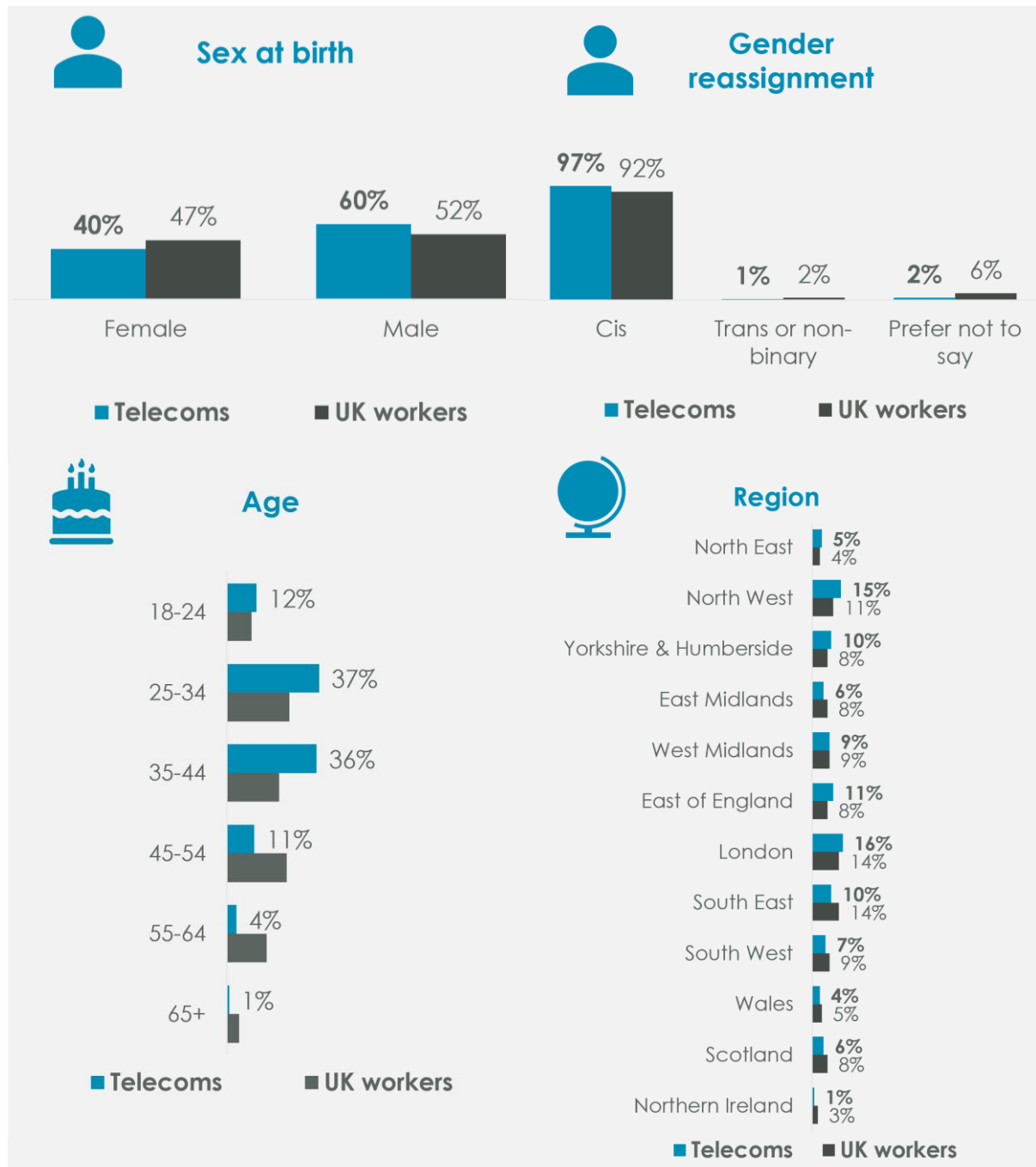
We know that many in the telecoms industry have disabilities; however, not all companies are currently offering them the support they need in the workplace, or awareness of them is low. Only 31% of telecoms employees say their organisations have physical changes to the workplace such as a ramp for wheelchair users, only 31% say they allow disabled people to work elsewhere, and 31% are aware that organisations have alternative office equipment for those with physical needs.

Awareness of initiatives offered by organisations



Question wording: Does your company currently offer any of the following initiatives to promote diversity?

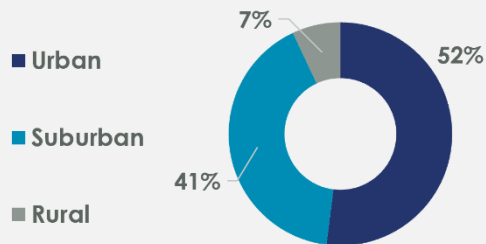
The diversity 'status quo'



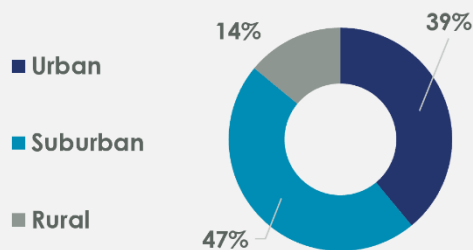


Area type living in

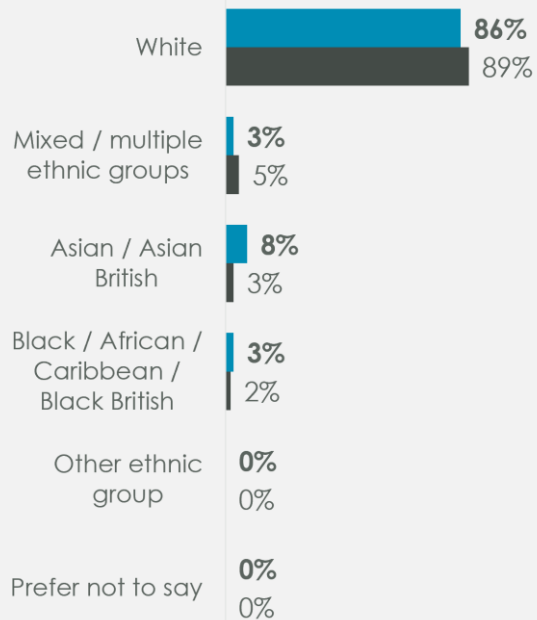
Telecoms



UK workers



Ethnicity

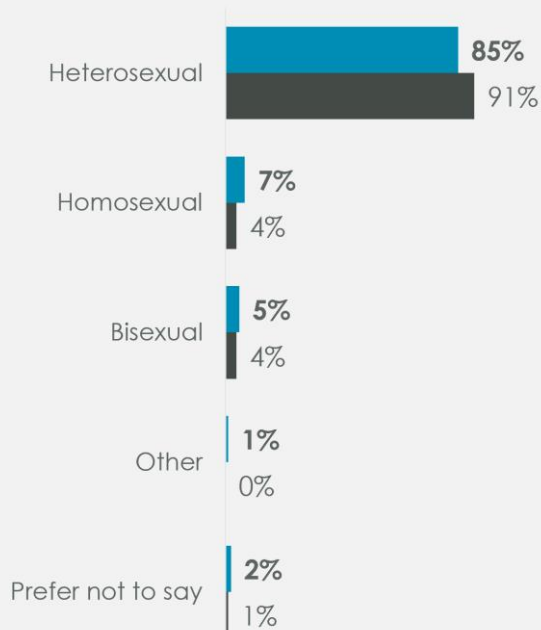


■ Telecoms

■ UK workers



Sexual orientation

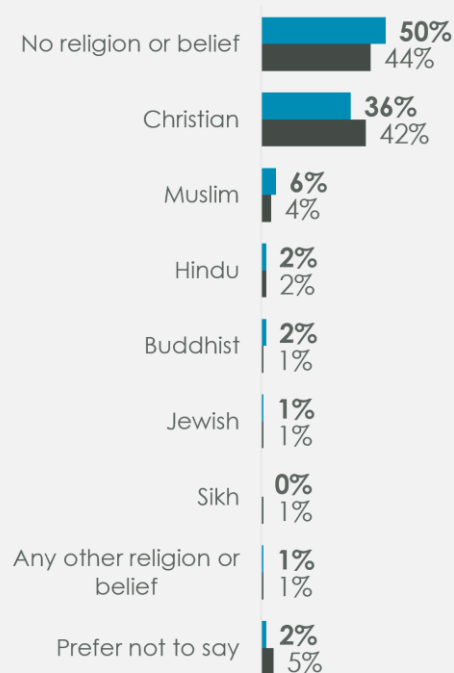


■ Telecoms

■ UK workers



Religion or belief



■ Telecoms

■ UK workers



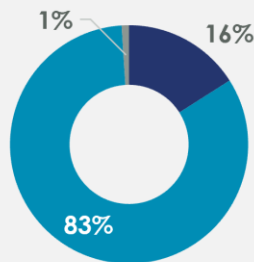
Disability or condition



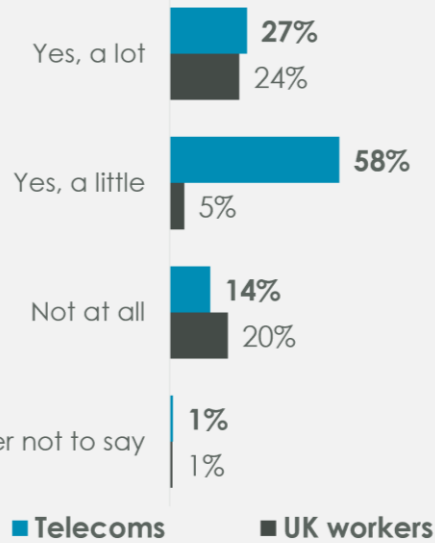
Disability effect

Telecoms

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

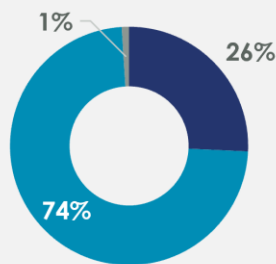


Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities in any way (for example bathing, walking, cooking, or grocery shopping)?

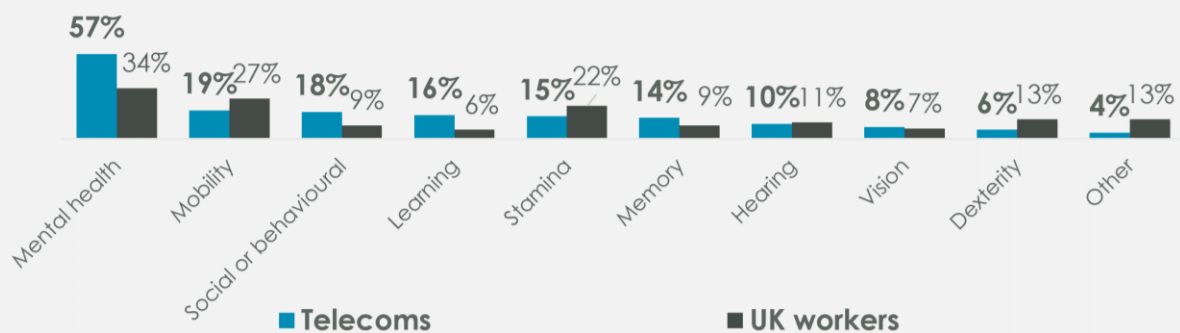


UK workers

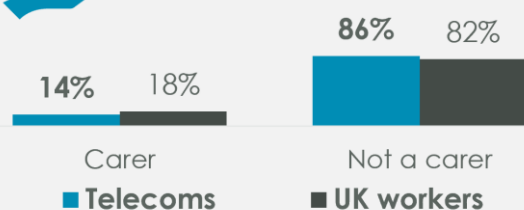
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

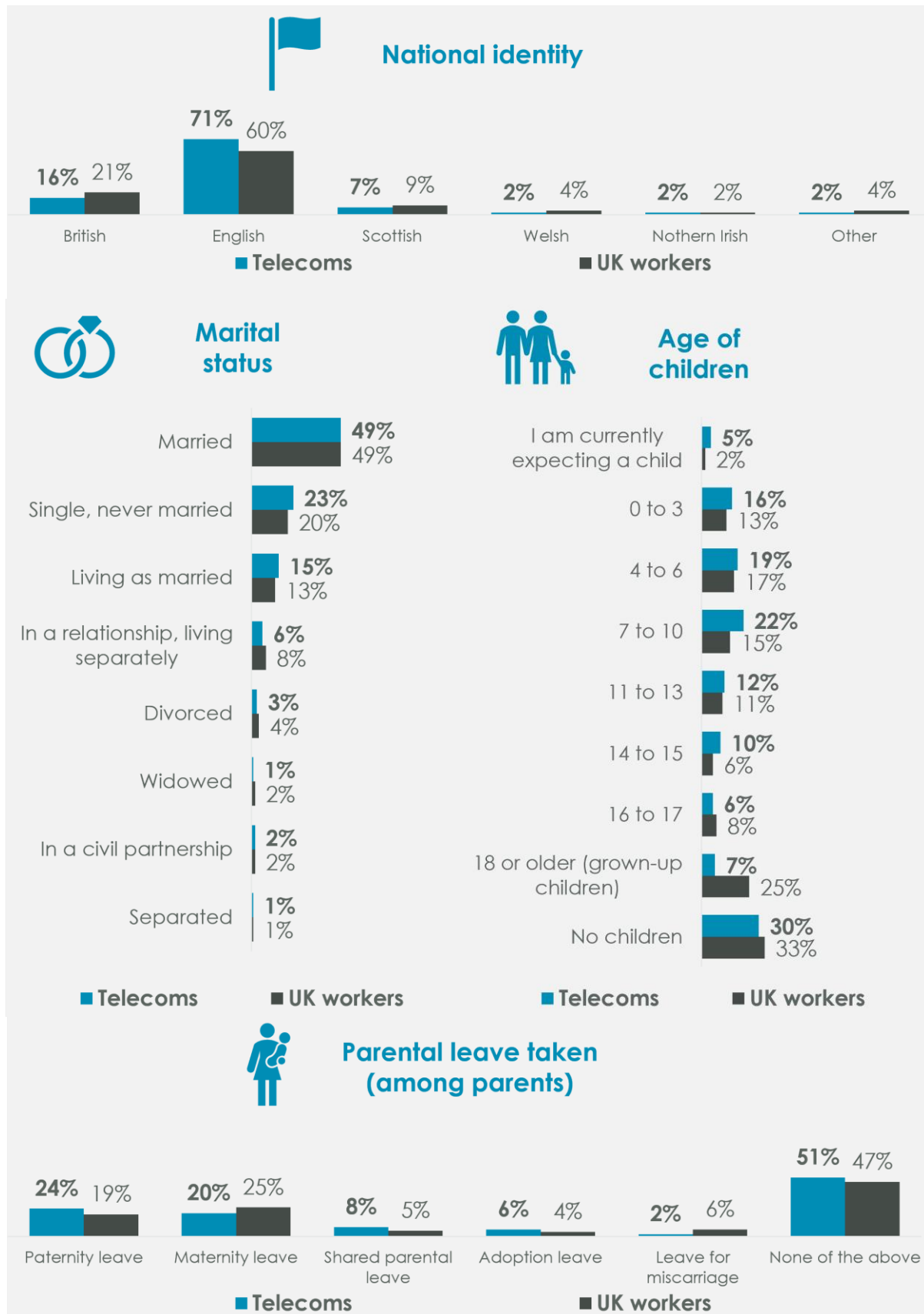


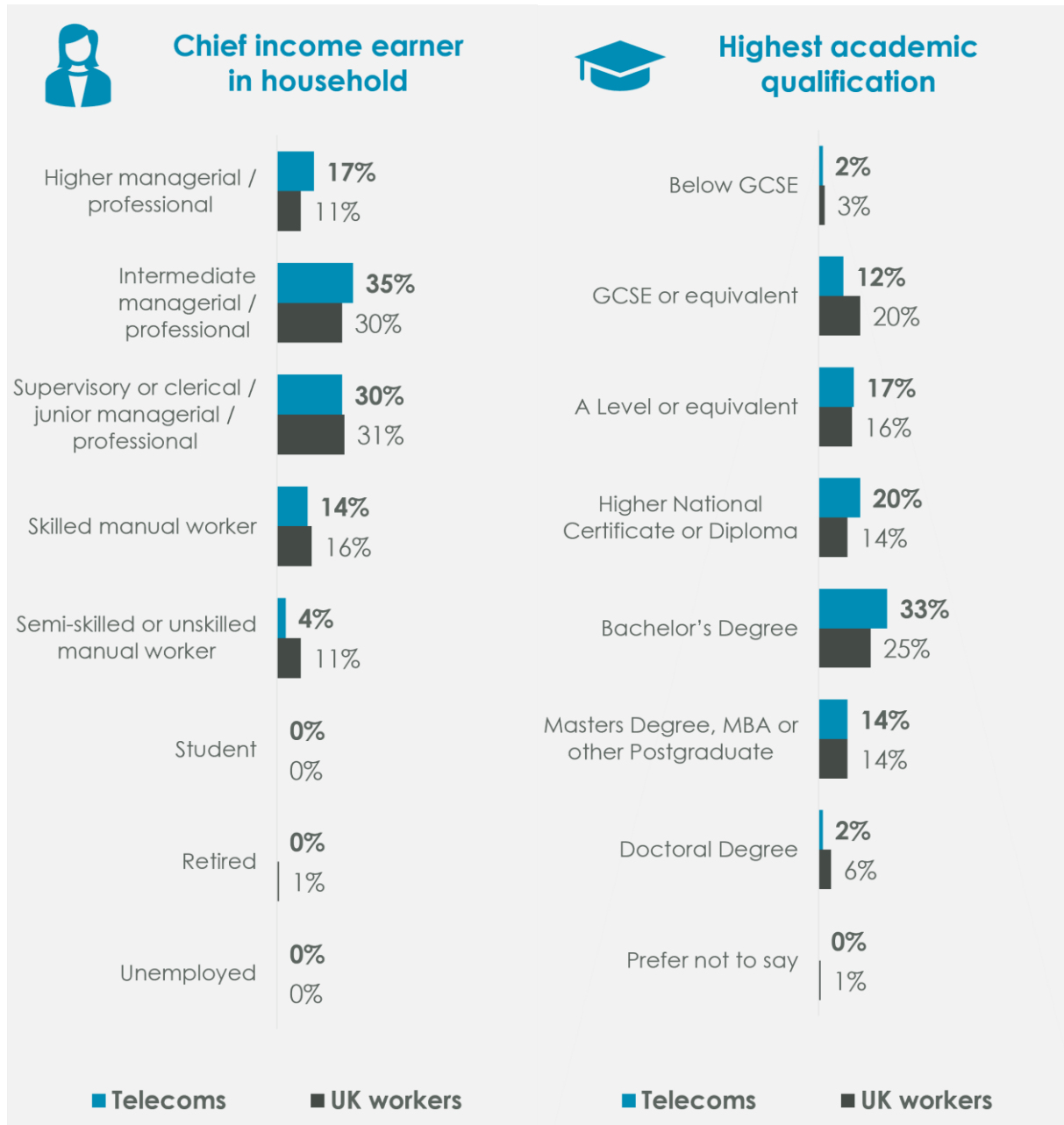
Disability type



Carer status







About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award-winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people **think, feel** and **do**. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

www.opinium.com | research@opinium.com | 0207 566 3190

Opinium Research is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Under these rules we are required, when requested, to make information available from survey results that have entered the public domain. These include, but are not limited to, the name of commissioning client, fieldwork dates, methodology, size and composition of sample, and data tables showing the text of the questions asked, the order in which they were asked and the answers given to them.