

EDI action plan for MS Society Research

Demographic data report 2022–2024



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Foreword

Scientific research has the power to change lives. For people with MS, research offers hope for better treatment and care. Diversity of experiences and opinions drives innovation, challenges conventional thinking and ensures research outcomes are relevant and impactful for everyone. And for us to achieve our goal of a future free from the effects of MS, the research workforce must reflect the diversity of the people it serves.

Systemic issues in the research sector have fostered a culture of discrimination and inequity. Rooted in historical biases and structural unfairness, these barriers continue to exclude and disadvantage people from marginalised groups. Resulting in a lack of diversity and opportunities at all stages of the research pipeline, from undergraduates to senior leadership.

This lack of diversity not only perpetuates inequality, but also limits creativity and innovation of research, and its ability to address the needs of the entire MS community. Addressing diversity is not just a matter of fairness, it's essential to advancing research that benefits everyone affected by MS.

As a research funder, we have a responsibility to shape the research ecosystem to better serve people with MS. We can influence who enters a career in research, who progresses within them, and whose voices are represented in the decisions shaping the future of MS research.

By addressing diversity in the research workforce, we aim to create an environment where talented people from all backgrounds can contribute their unique experiences and skills to help people affected by MS.

In 2021, we developed our first EDI action plan, which set out how we'll become more inclusive in our funding practices. It represents a commitment to dismantle the systematic barriers to make sure all researchers have an equal opportunity to contribute to MS research.

Our first step was to begin collecting data to understand who we fund, who sits on our advisory and governance panels. And, most importantly, who may be missing. We've been routinely collecting data since 2022 and have published the first two years of data in our [2022](#) and [2023](#) demographic data reports.



Over the past two years, we've made deliberate steps to change how we fund our research in response to our data. You can read more about these changes in our [2021-2024 progress report](#).

This report contains data collected across our 2022, 2023 and 2024 Award Rounds. We're pleased to see more applications from people from a minoritised ethnic group, equal success rates, regardless of people's ethnicity, and a near-equal gender representation across our applicants and governance members. However, we lag behind the academic sector when looking at the ethnicity of our researchers. Only 14% of our applicants and 13% of our funded researchers are from a minoritised ethnic group.

The data presented in this report is only a snapshot in time. It doesn't reflect all the inequalities that people from under-represented groups face and is

only one tool we're using from our wider action plan. Alongside our 2021-2024 progress report, this report provides an honest assessment of where we stand and acknowledges the work still to be done. We're working hard to address the inequities that persist and have developed a [renewed action plan for 2025-2029](#).

Change takes time. Therefore, we'll continue to collect data, but our next demographic data report will be in 2028. In the meantime, we're grateful to all our applicants and governance group members for providing their data.

Share your feedback

[Find out more](#) about what we're doing to create a fairer MS Society. If you want to provide us with feedback, or join our EDI Reference Group, email edi@mssociety.org.uk



Our methods

Since May 2022, we've routinely collected demographic data for our governance members and applicants to our Research Awards through a survey on our grants management system. The survey's optional and respondents must provide consent. To increase completion rates, people couldn't navigate to other areas of the platform until they provided data or opted out.

This report contains data for our governance members, lead and co-applicants, funded early career researchers (ECRs) and funded PhD students between May 2022 and December 2023. We present diversity data by age, disability status, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality and caring responsibility status.

Where possible, we compare our data with:

- The UK medical and biosciences academic staff populations published in the Equality in Higher Education staff statistical report 2024^[1].
- Cancer Research UK's 2023 diversity report^[2].
- The British Heart Foundation's 2020–2023 research funding diversity data report^[3].

We designed our questions (Appendix 1) using the Diversity and Inclusion Survey (DAISY) Question Guidance ^[4] and modelled them on the UK 2021 Census^[5].

We know our survey design may not fully capture people's individual background. We used the DAISY guidance and the

UK 2021 Census to allow us to compare our data with others in the charity and academic sectors to help us to draw meaningful conclusions.

When datasets contained fewer than 10 responses, it was necessary to combine smaller groups into larger categories. For example, where datasets are large enough, ethnicity is presented according to the UK 2021 Census list of ethnicity groups (Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, other ethnic group, White). Where we received a small number of responses, we combined multiple ethnicity groups into single ethnicity groups. We did this to make results reliable and to protect individuals' identities. As our dataset grows, we'll split up the data. This means we'll be able to identify and look at inequalities within individual ethnic groups with distinct identities and challenges.

Due to small sample sizes regarding gender identity, we've only included responses for those selecting male and female in this report. Additional gender categories including non-binary and prefer to self-describe are available within the survey.

We removed "prefer not to say" responses from our dataset as the Advance HE analysis does not include this category.

We'll continue to improve our survey based on feedback and new learnings. All diversity questions will be updated when new DAISY guidance is published.

Our data

This report contains data on:

- Our governance members across 2022, 2023 and 2024. Our governance members are researchers, clinicians, MS healthcare professionals and people affected by MS that sit on our advisory groups. These groups help us to set and review our research strategy. They also provide recommendations on funding decisions and advise us on the management of our larger research programmes.
- Lead and co-applicants to our 2022, 2023 and 2024 Research Award rounds.
- Our funded ECRs and PhD students across 2022, 2023 and 2024. This includes all ECRs funded through our ECR Fellowship Awards and Skills Development Award, and all PhD students supported through our PhD Fellowship Awards and Edinburgh and Cambridge Centres of Excellence.

We fund a broad range of Awards designed to support researchers at different stages of their careers in MS research. In 2022, 2023 and 2024, these included:

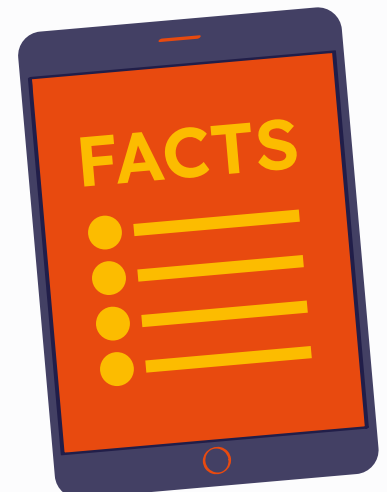
- General Research Awards — Project Awards, Data Discovery Awards and Catalyst Awards. We run two Catalyst Award rounds a year.
- Career Development Awards — PhD fellowships, Early Career Fellowships, ABN Clinical Research Training and Skills Development Awards. We run two Skills Development Awards a year.

- Commissioned funding calls — We ran two commissioned calls across 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- Strategic Collaborative Awards — We funded three projects through strategic collaborations in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

You can find out more about our Research Awards [on our website](#).

Lead applicants for our PhD fellowships are project supervisors, not the PhD students. Data regarding our PhD student diversity is included separately within the analysis of our funded ECRs.

Our Skills Development Awards are not traditional research projects. But they are instead designed to support ECRs in their careers and can be utilised for any career-related activity. Therefore, data regarding Skills Development Award recipients are only included within the analysis of our funded ECRs.



We removed duplicates in the dataset where applicants have applied for more than one award across the 2022, 2023 and 2024 Research Award Rounds. This was to avoid over-representing singular researchers in our analysis. In total 215 duplicates were removed from the analysis. However, duplicates were included in the analysis of governance members. This is because we want to consider every 'seat' on a governance group.

And an individual who has multiple roles is occupying multiple 'seats' that could be occupied by another person.

To account for the duplicates in the applicant and award holder datasets, we determined the average number of applications submitted per applicant. This average was used to calculate the success rates. The average number of applications submitted was 1.5 per applicant and 1.4 per lead applicant.

Duplicate responses

	Total number of responses	Number of duplicates	Average number of applications submitted per applicant	Total included in analysis
Applicants	642	215	1.5	427
Award Holders	228	45		183
Lead Applicants	147	42	1.4	105
Lead Award Holders	50	6		44
Early Career Researchers and PhD students	29	0	1	29
Governance Members	75	N/A		75

“Prefer not to say” responses aren’t included in this report. Therefore, sample size differs between each demographic characteristic reported against.

There are multiple reasons why people don’t want to disclose personal information. We’ve summarised the number of “prefer not to say” responses below.

Prefer not to say responses

	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Disability	Caring responsibilities
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Applicants	6/427 (1.4%)	0/427 (0%)	3/427 (0.6%)	8/427 (1.8%)	9/427 (2.1%)
Award Holders	2/183 (1.1%)	0/183 (0%)	0/183 (0%)	4/183 (2.2%)	4/183 (2.2%)
Lead Applicants	1/105 (0.95%)	0/105 (0%)	1/105 (0.95%)	2/105 (1.9%)	1/105 (0.95%)
Lead Award Holders	0/44 (0%)	0/44 (0%)	0/44 (0%)	0/44 (0%)	0/44 (0%)
Early Career Researchers and PhD students	0/29 (0%)	0/29 (0%)	0/29 (0%)	0/29 (0%)	0/29 (0%)
Governance Members	3/75 (4%)	2/75 (2.7%)	1/75 (1.3%)	2/75 (2.7%)	2/75 (2.7%)

Headline points

Our applicants and Award holders



14%

of our 2022, 2023 and 2024 applicants are from an ethnically minoritised background.



28%

success rate for our 2022, 2023 and 2024 applicants from an ethnically minoritised background compared to 29% for white applicants.



53%

of our applicants awarded funding in 2022, 2023 and 2024 identify as female.



7%

of our 2022, 2023 and 2024 applicants declared a disability.

Headline points

Our governance members

12%

of our governance members are from an ethnically minoritised background.

50%

of our governance members identify as female.

5%

of our governance members are under 40 years of age.

16%

of our governance members have declared a disability.

Demographic data of applicants and Award holders: Ethnicity

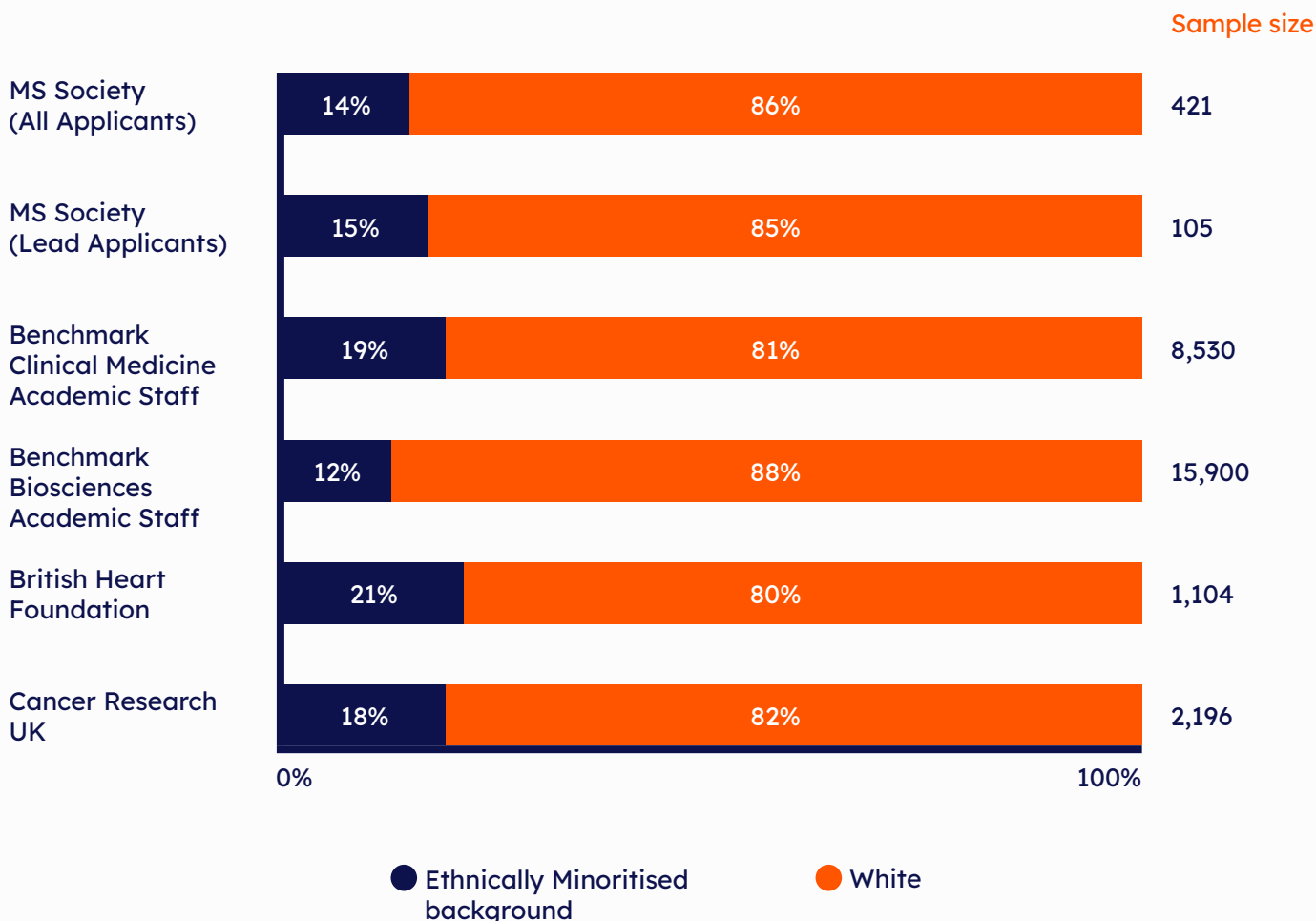
Ethnicity of applicants

The proportion of applicants from an ethnically minoritised background is lower than in the UK medical and academic sectors and other charities.

Key findings: 14% of our total pool of applicants and 15% of our lead applicants are from an ethnically minoritised background.

This is representative of the biosciences academic sector (12%). But is low compared to the medical academic sector (19%), Cancer Research UK (18%) and the British Heart Foundation (21%).

Ethnicity of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds



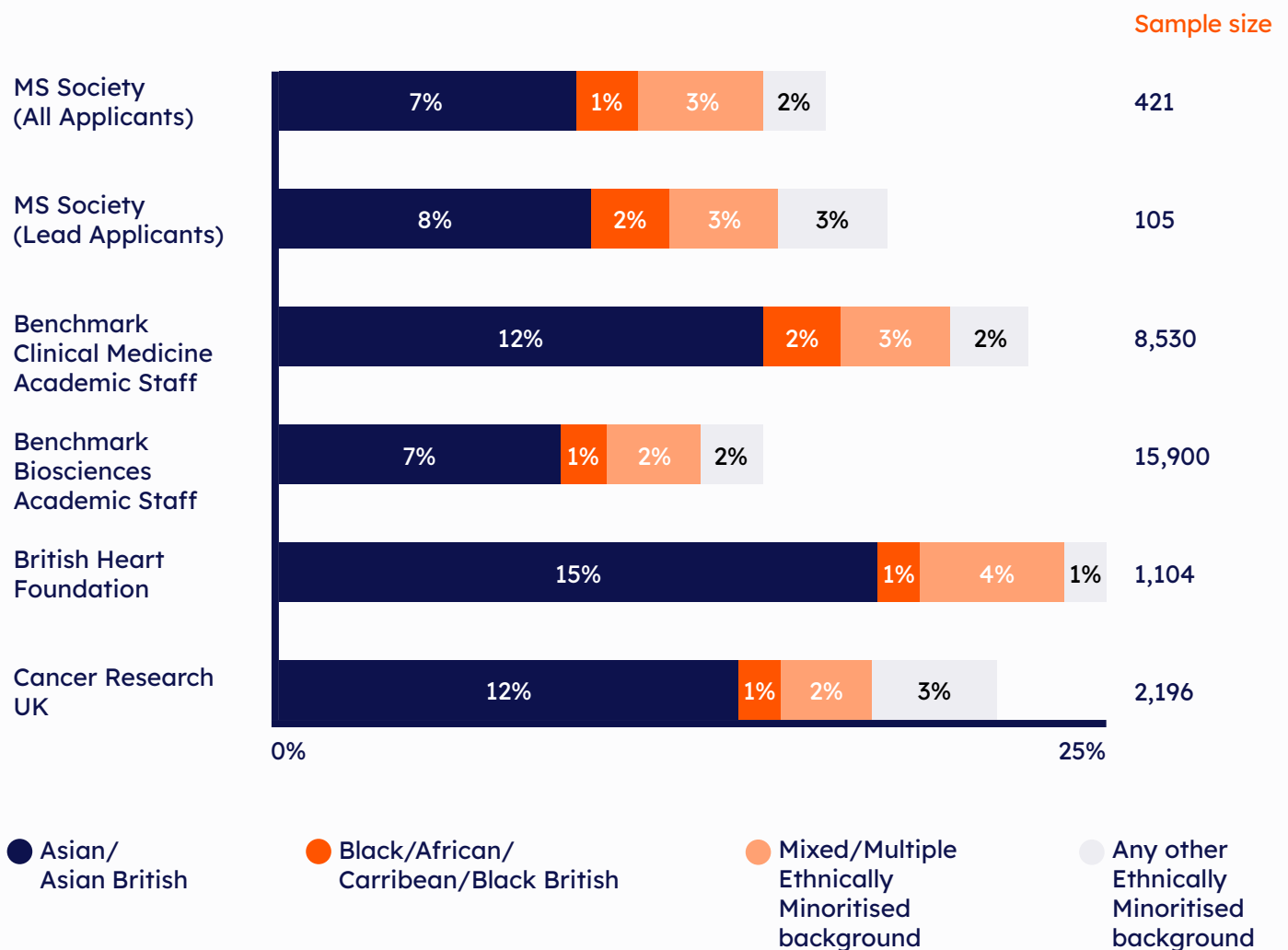
Ethnicity of applicants

Asian researchers are under-represented amongst our applicants.

Key findings: Researchers from Asian/Asian British backgrounds amongst our total pool of applicants has increased from 3% in 2022, to 9% in 2023 and 2024.

However, at 7% for all our applicants and 8% of lead applicants across the three years, this is still lower than the medical academic sector population, Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

Ethnicity of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds



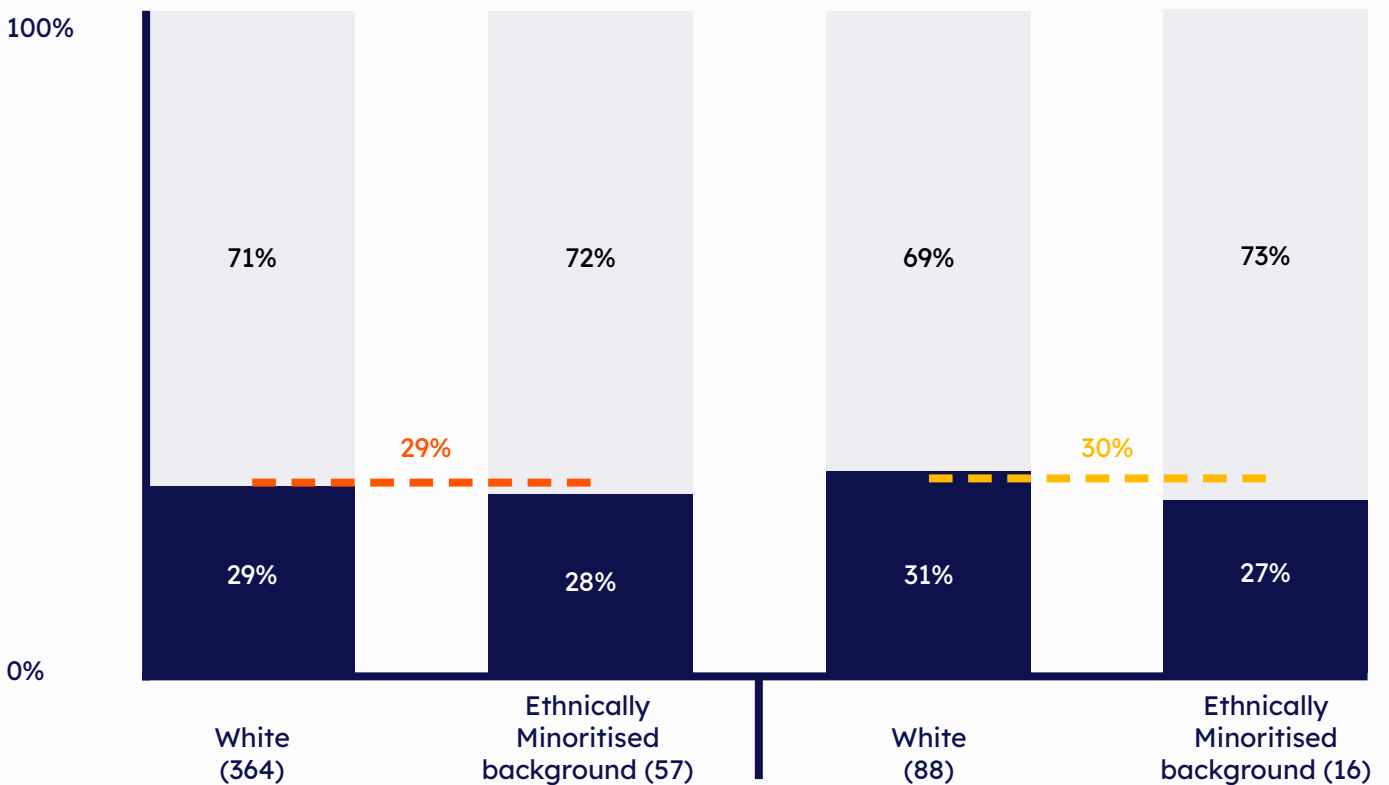
Success rates by ethnicity

The success rate for our 2022, 2023 and 2024 applicants from ethnically minoritised backgrounds is comparable to white applicants.

Key findings: Success rates for applicants are broadly equal regardless of ethnic background. Success rates

for our total pool of applicants were 28% for applicants from an ethnically minoritised group compared to 29% for white applicants. For lead applicants, success rates were 31% for white applicants and 27% for applicants from an ethnically minoritised group.

Success rate of applicants to our 2022-2025 Awards Rounds by ethnicity



Sample size

All Applicants (421)

Lead Applicants (104)

● Successful

● Unsuccessful

● Success rate (All Applicants)

● Success rate (Lead Applicants)

Ethnicity of Award holders

Researchers from ethnically minoritised backgrounds receive 13% of our Awards.

Key findings: Lead researchers from ethnically minoritised backgrounds receive 14% of awards. The proportion

of award holders from ethnically minoritised backgrounds (13%) is reflective of the total pool of applicants (14%). And the proportion of lead award holders from ethnically minoritised backgrounds (14%) is reflective of the pool of lead applicants (15%).

Ethnicity of our 2022–2025 Award Holders

Lead Applicants

Sample size



All Applicants

Sample size



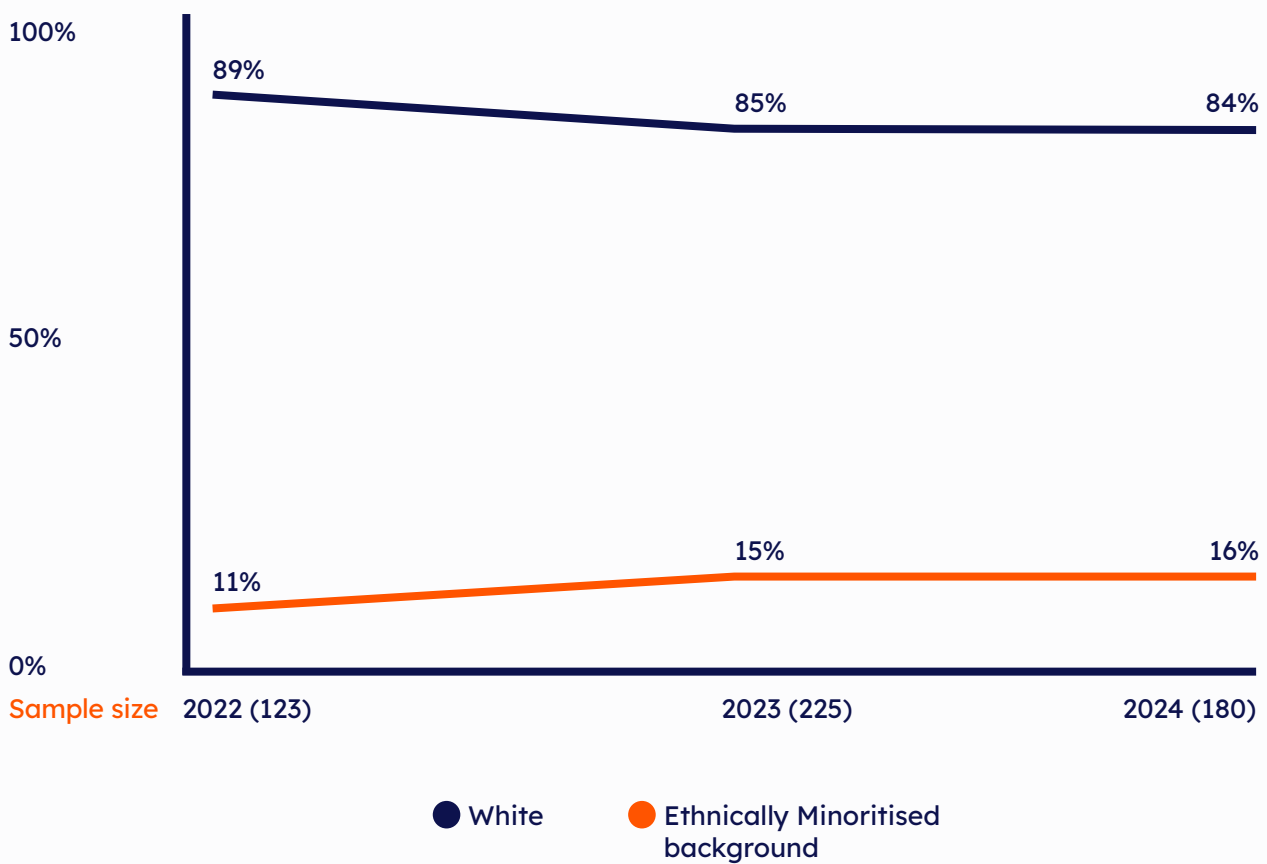
● Ethnically Minoritised background ● White

Ethnicity of applicants over time

Applications from researchers from ethnically minoritised backgrounds are increasing.

Key findings: The proportion of applications from researchers from ethnically minoritised backgrounds has increased from 11% in 2022 to 16% in 2024.

Ethnicity of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds over time



Demographic data of applicants and Award holders: Gender

Gender of applicants

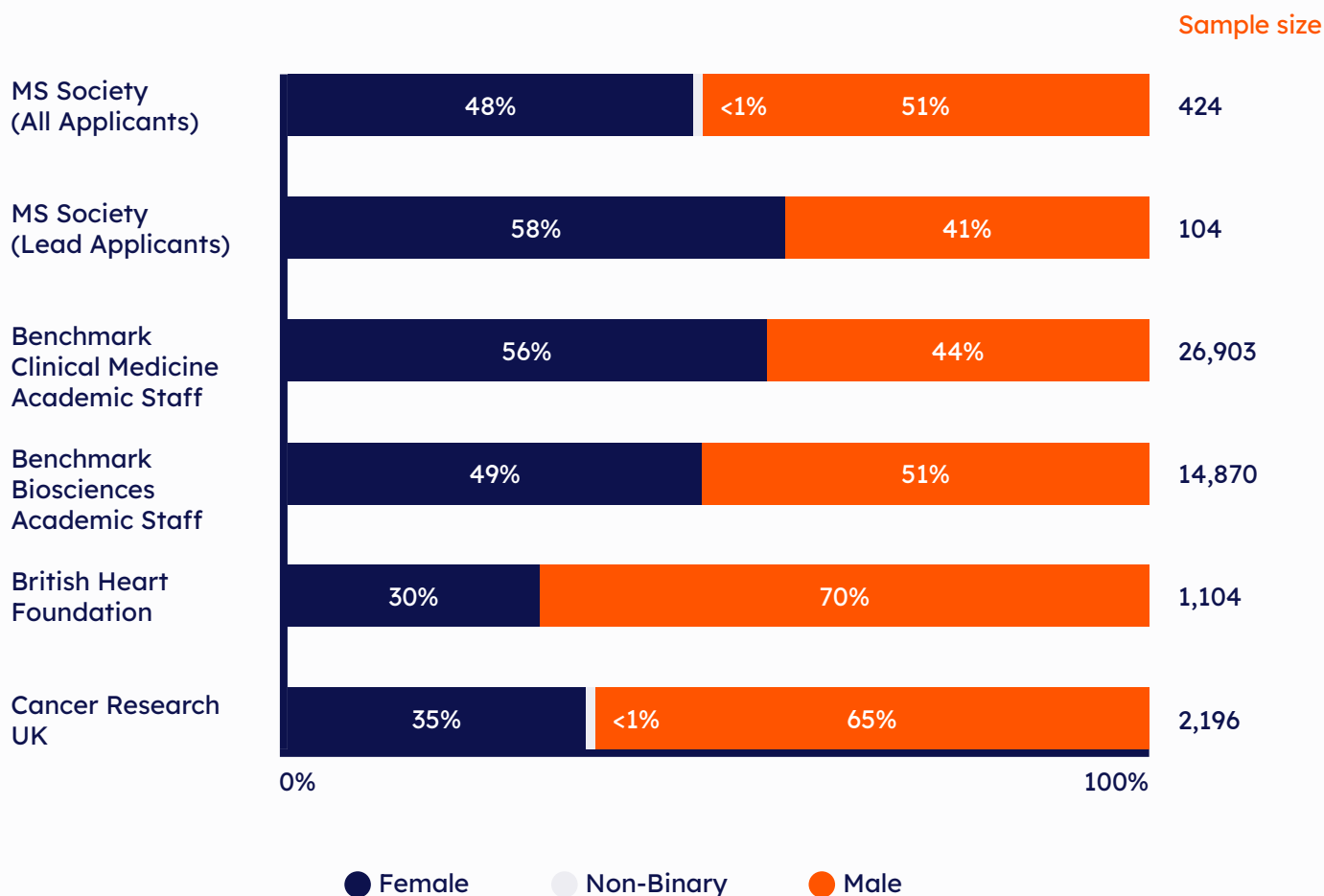
48% of our applicants in 2022, 2023 and 2024 identify as female.

Key findings: 48% of our applicants and 58% of our lead applicants identify as female. This is reflective of the academic sector populations. And is higher than the proportion of

applications submitted by female applicants to Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

Note: Additional questions were asked about gender identity, but the numbers aren't always large enough to allow reporting.

Gender identity of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds



Success rates by Gender

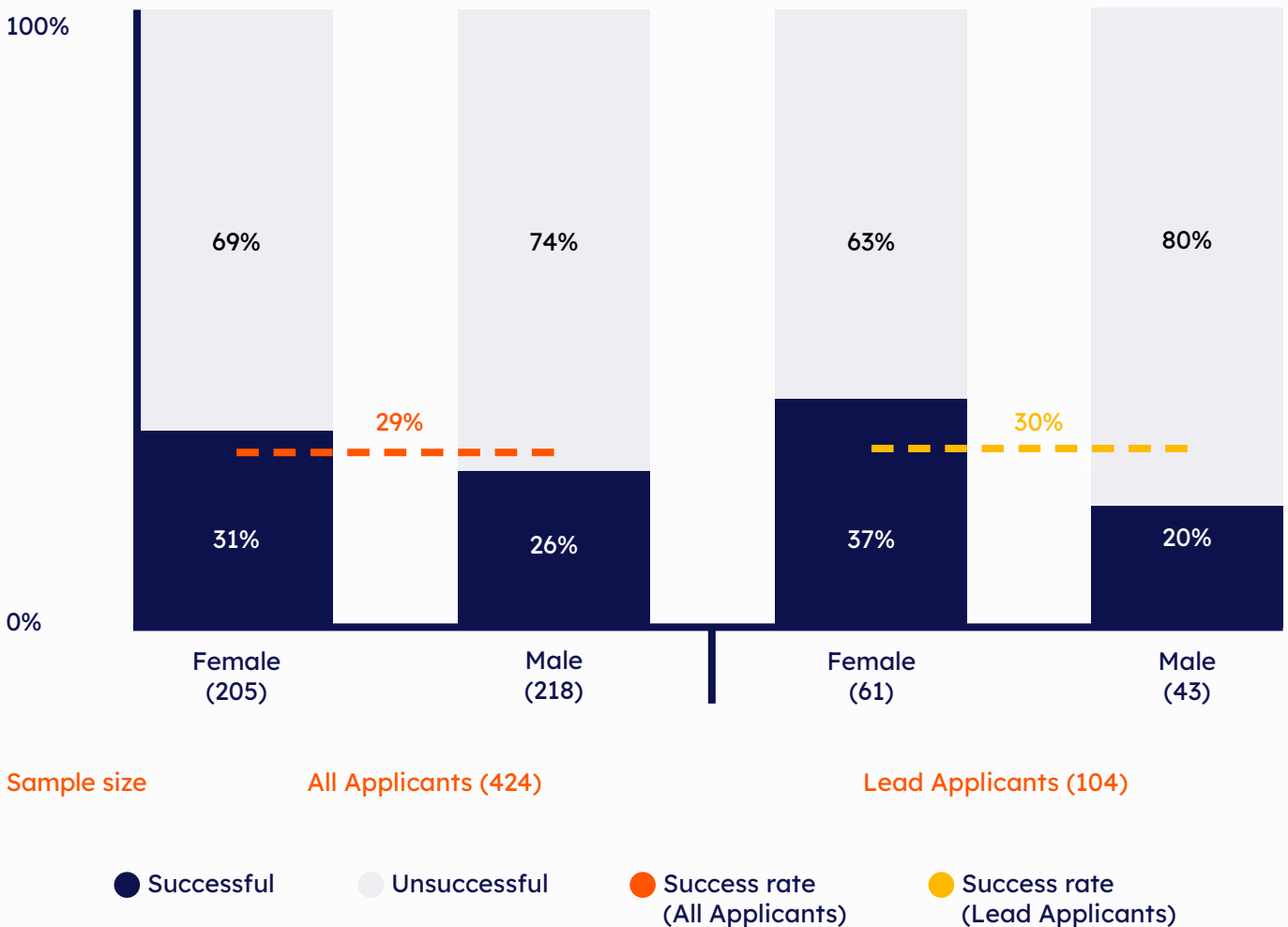
Success rates are higher for females compared to males.

Key findings: Success rates for female applicants is 31% compared to 26% for males across our total pool of applicants.

Success rates for female lead applicants (37%) is significantly higher than for male applicants (20%).

Note: Additional questions were asked about gender identity, but the numbers are too low to report here.

Success rate of applicants to our 2022–2025 Awards Rounds by gender identity



Gender of Award holders

Females are over-represented amongst our award holders.

Key findings: Female applicants make up 48% and 58% of our total pool of applicants and lead applicants. But 53% of our total pool of award holders and

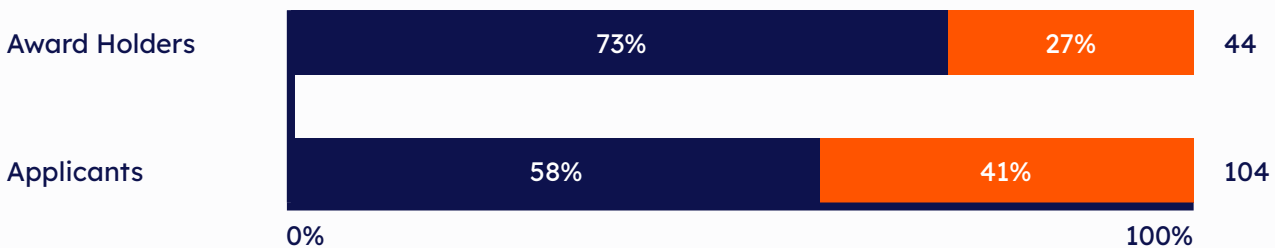
73% of our lead researchers identify as female, reflecting the higher success rates for females.

Note: Additional questions were asked about gender identity, but the numbers are too low to report here.

Gender identity of our 2022–2025 Award Holders

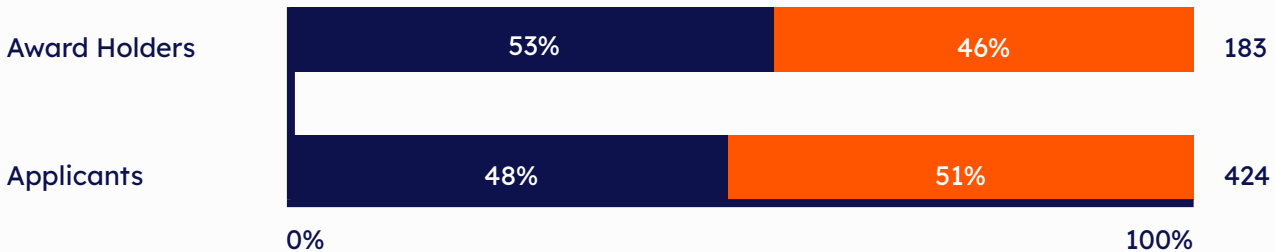
Lead Applicants

Sample size



All Applicants

Sample size



● Female ● Male

Gender of applicants over time

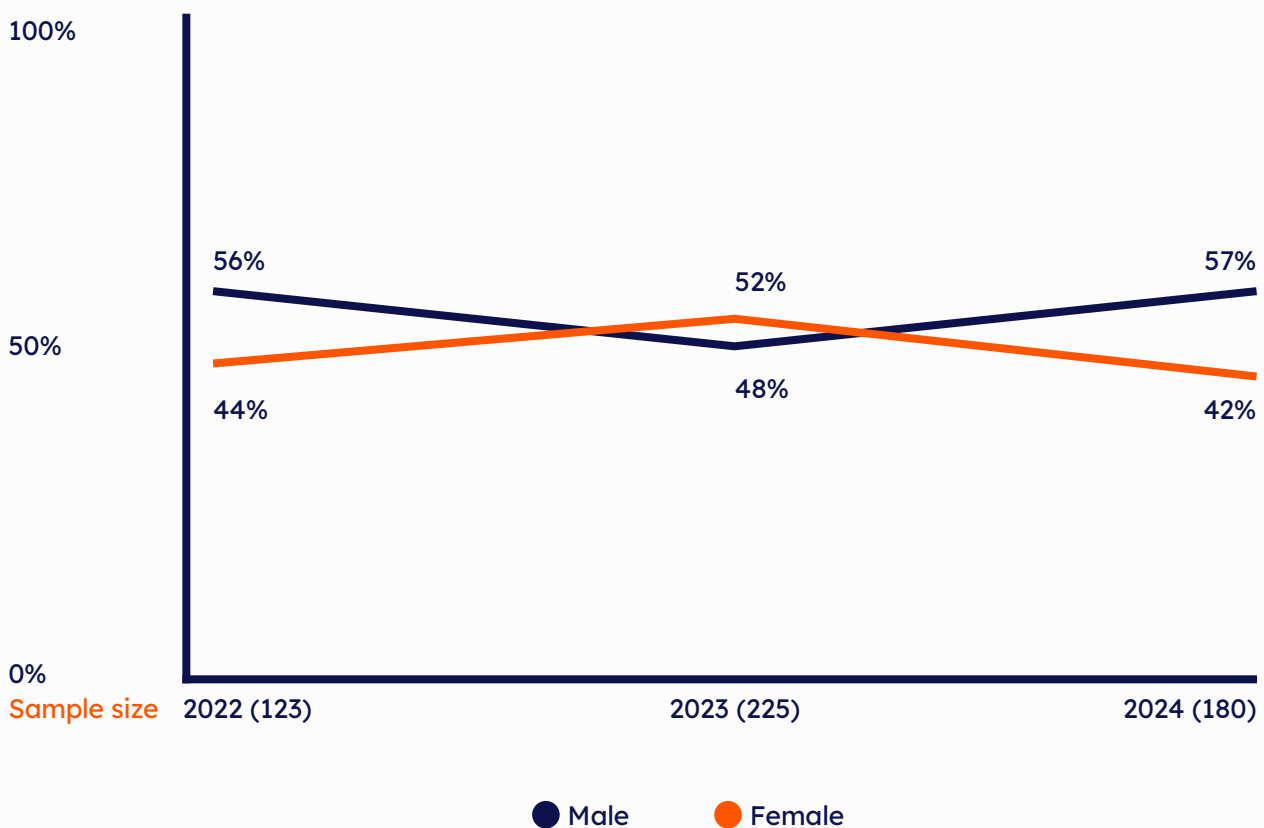
Applications from women and men have remained relatively consistent.

Key findings: There were more applications submitted by male applicants in 2022 (56%) and 2024 (57%).

In 2023, 52% of applications were submitted by women.

Note: Additional questions were asked about gender identity, but the numbers are too low to report here.

Gender identity of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds over time



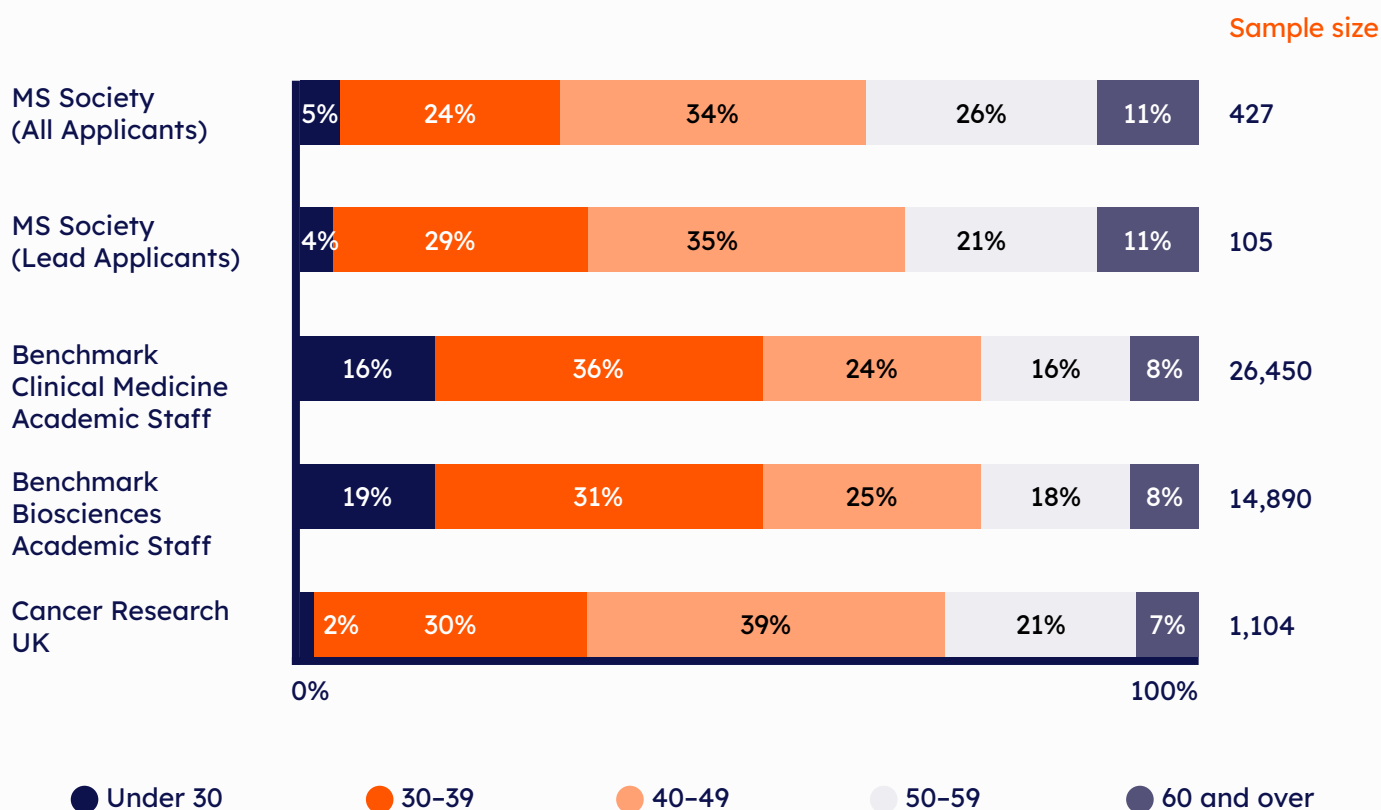
Demographic data of applicants and Award holders: Age

Age of applicants

Most of our applicants are between the ages of 40 to 49.

Key findings: Researchers aged 40–49 make up the largest share (34%) of our 2022, 2023 and 2024 applicants. We see a similar proportion of applications across the age groups compared to Cancer Research UK.

Age of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds

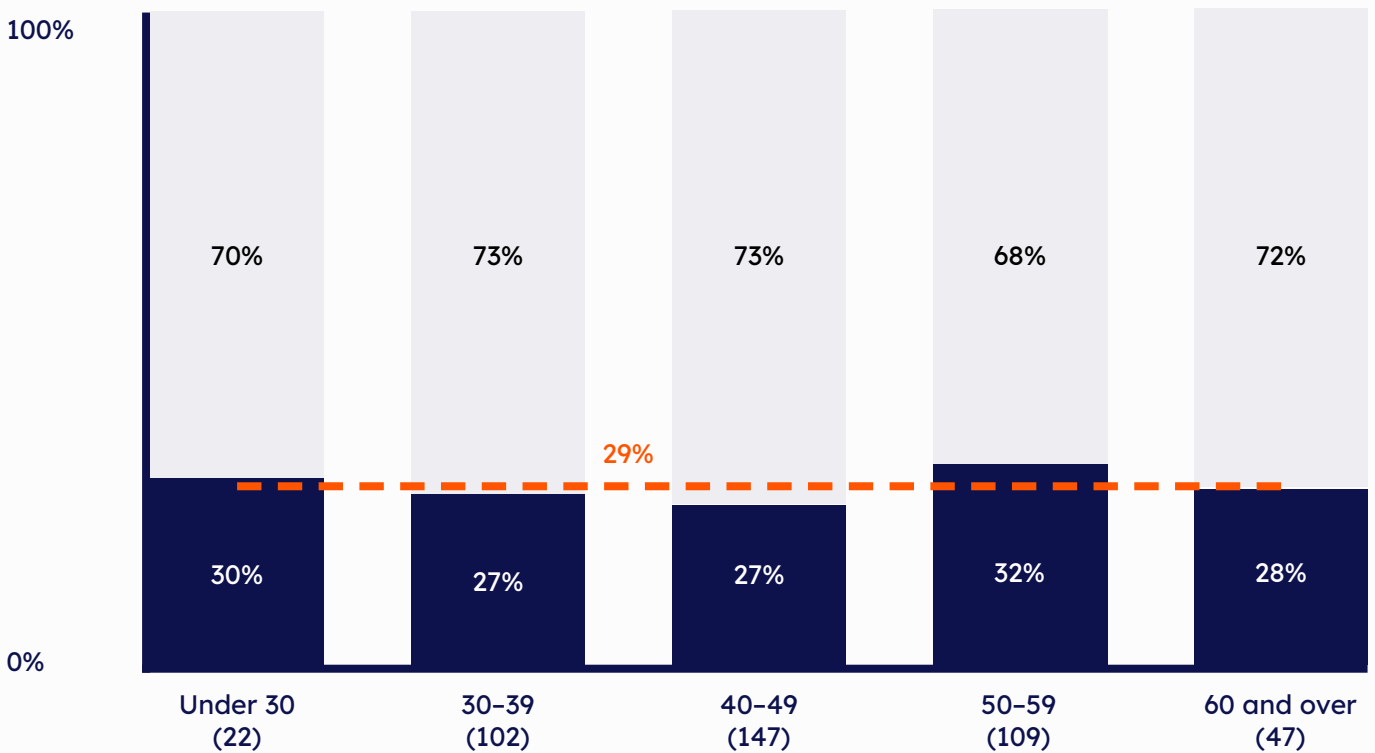


Success rates by age

Success rates are similar for researchers regardless of age.

Key findings: Success rates ranged from 27% (30-39 and 40-49) to 32% (50-59).

Success rate of applicants to our 2022-2025 Awards Rounds by age



Sample size

All Applicants (427)

● Successful

● Unsuccessful

● Success rate (All Applicants)

Age of Award holders

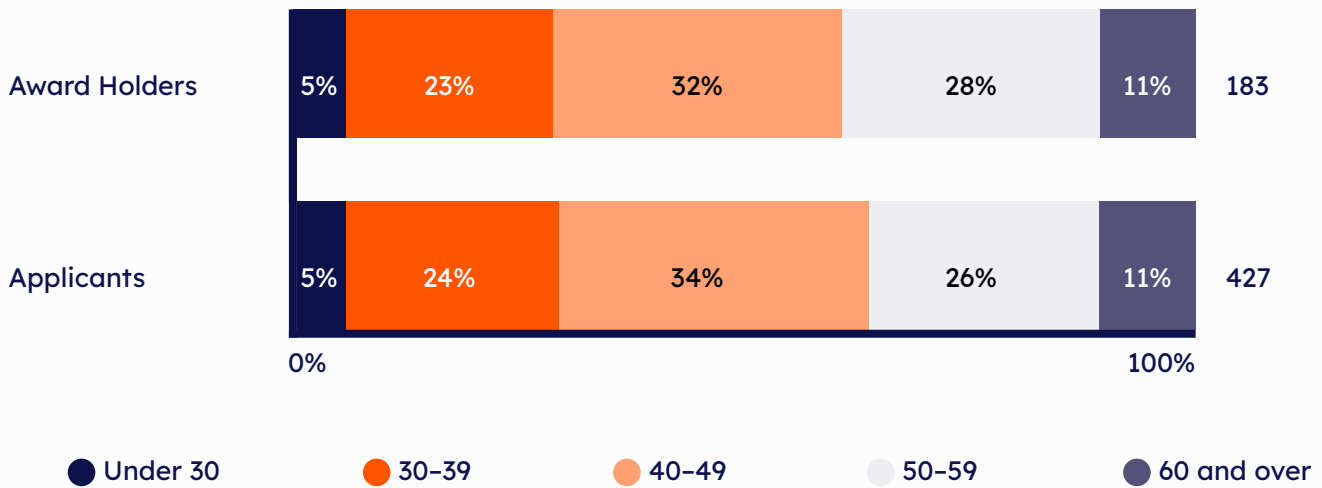
Age of award holders reflects the age of applicants.

Key findings: The proportion of award holders from each age group is similar to that seen amongst the total pool of applicants. Reflecting the similar success rates across the age groups.

Age of our 2022–2025 Award Holders

All Applicants

Sample size



Demographic data of applicants and Award holders: Disability status

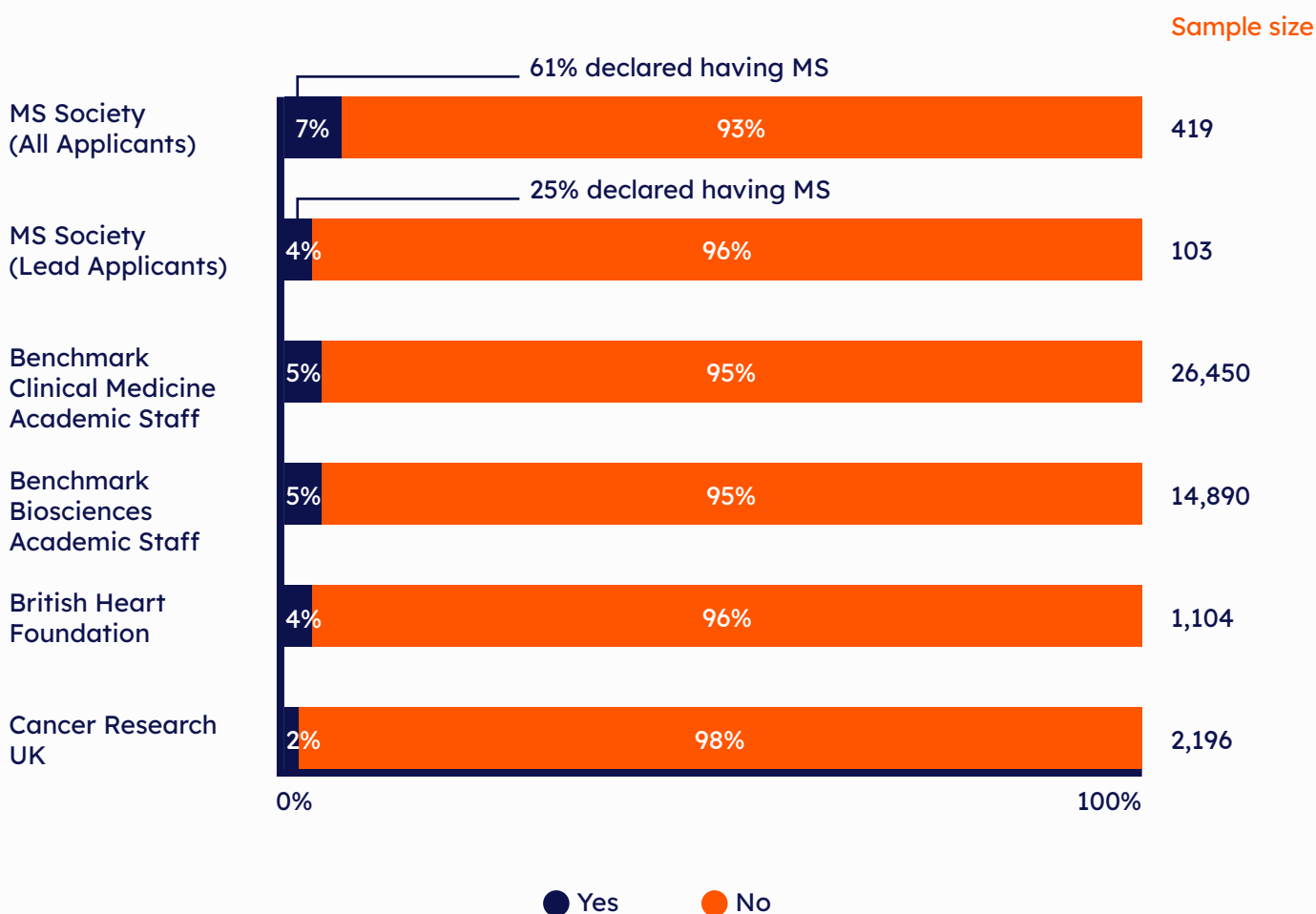
Disability status of applicants

7% of all applicants declared a disability.

Key findings: 7% of all our applicants declared a disability. 61% of these people declared having MS. This is higher than the proportion of the

academic sector who declared a disability. And higher than the proportion of applicants to Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation. 4% of lead applicants declared a disability. 25% of these people declared having MS.

Disability status of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds

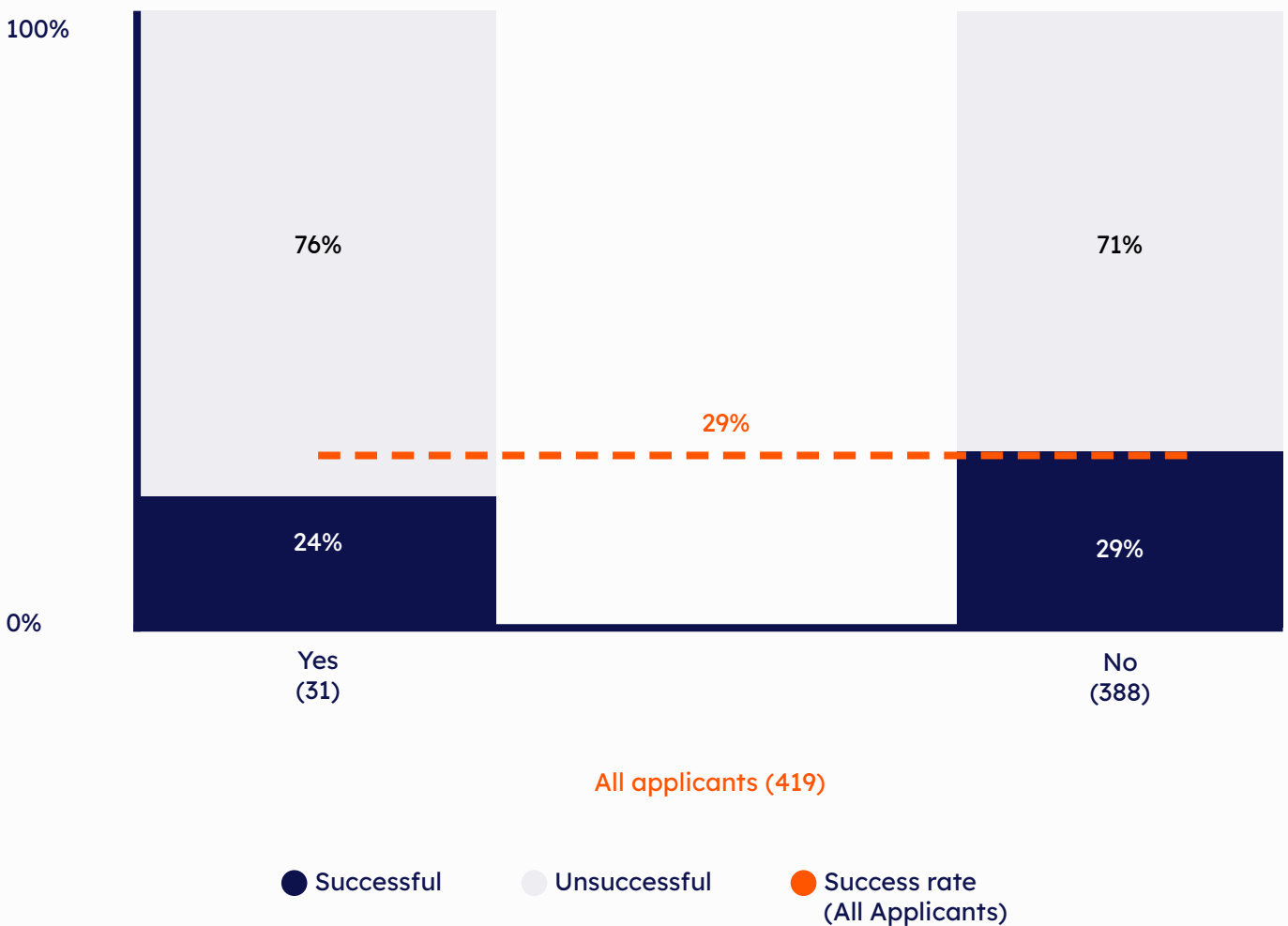


Success rate by disability status

Success rates are broadly the same, regardless of disability status.

Key findings: The success rate for applicants who declared a disability was 24%, this is slightly lower than those who did not declare a disability (29%).

Success rate of applicants to our 2022–2025 Awards Rounds by disability status

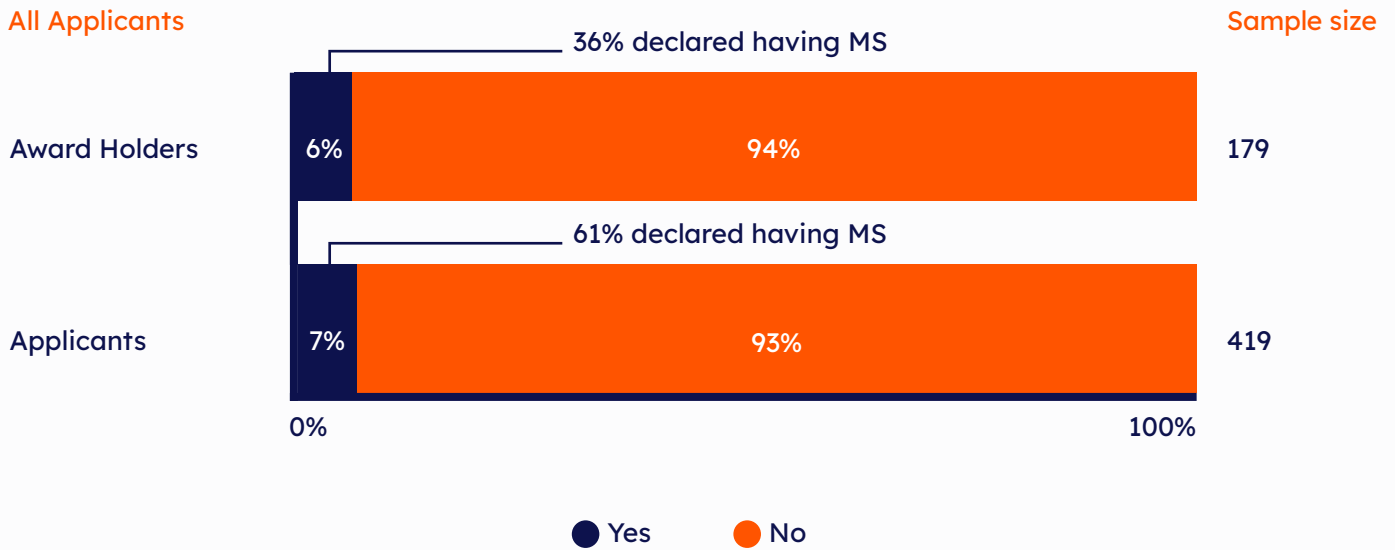


Disability status of Award holders

The number of award holders declaring a disability is 6%.

Key findings: 6% of our award holders have declared a disability. Of these 36% declared having MS.

Disability status of our 2022–2025 Award Holders



Demographic data of applicants and Award holders: Caring responsibilities

Caring responsibility status of applicants

8% of our applicants declared having caring responsibilities.

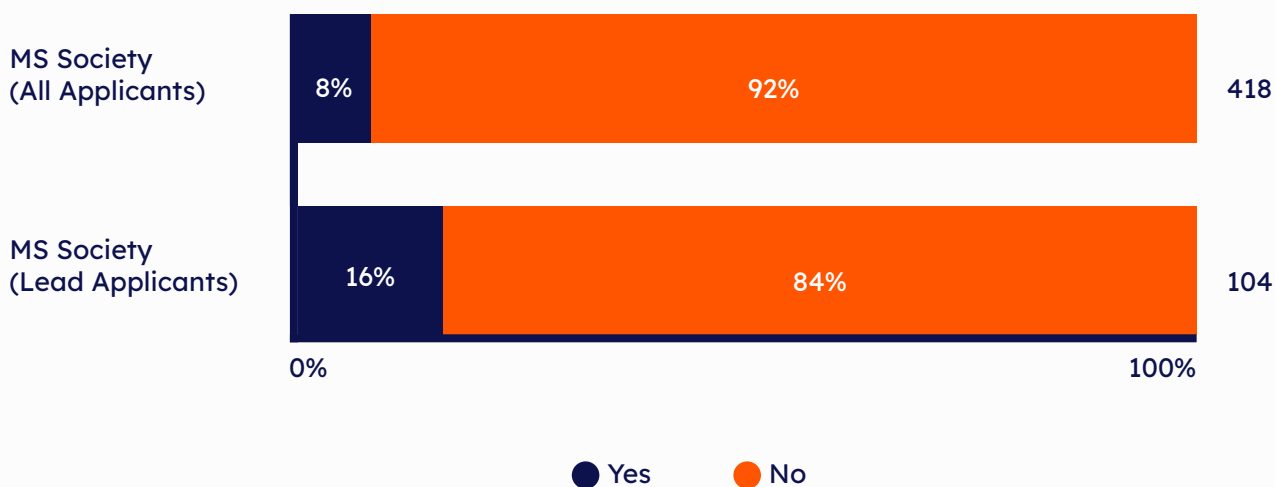
Key findings: 8% of our applicants and 16% of our lead applicants declared having caring responsibilities.

Note: No comparison data is available.

Caring responsibility status for applicants of our 2022–2025 Award Rounds

All Applicants

Sample size

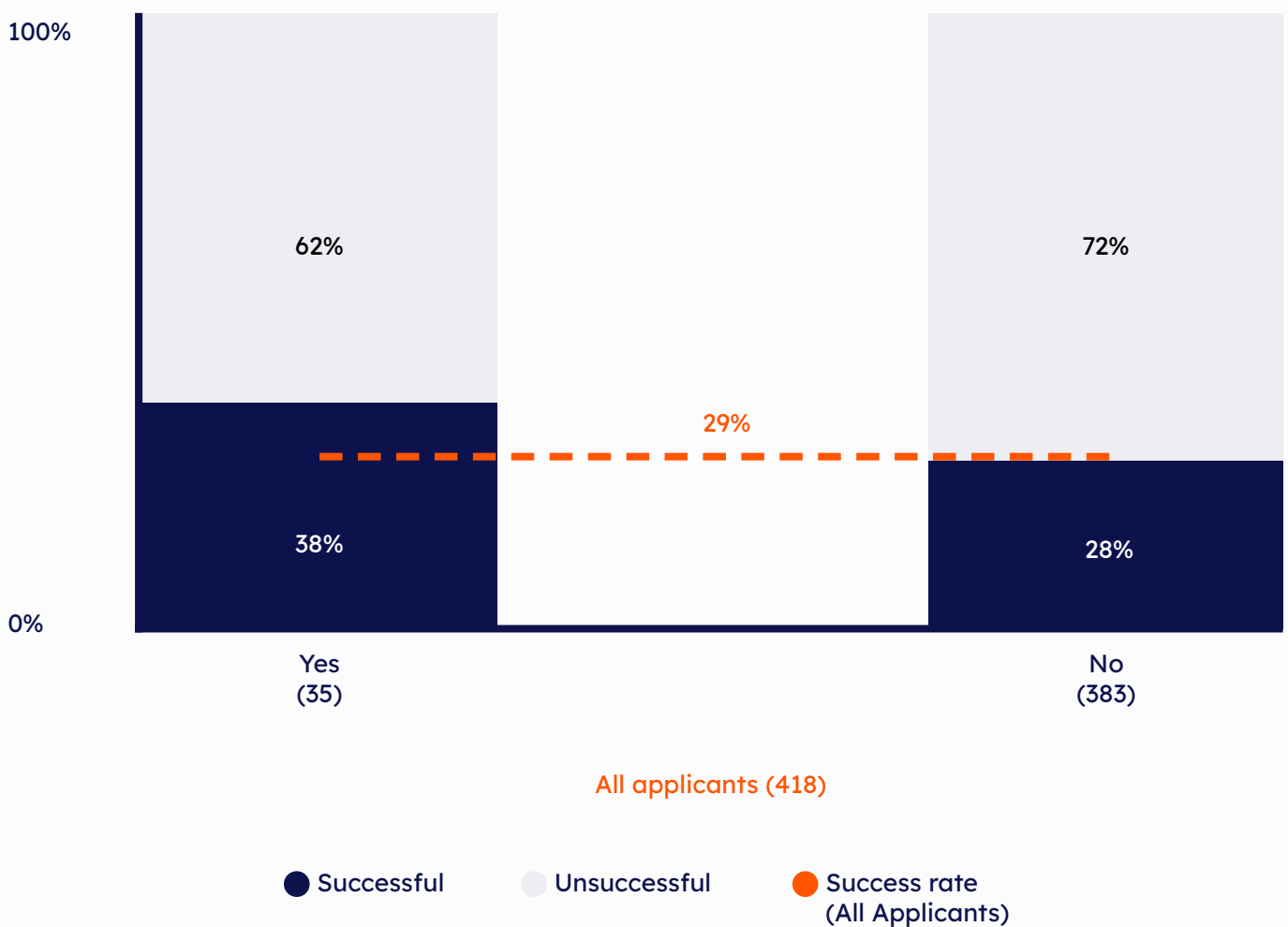


Success rate by caring responsibilities status

Success rates are higher for those declaring having caring responsibilities.

Key findings: The success rate for applicants who declared having caring responsibilities was 38%. This is higher than those who did not declaring having caring responsibilities (28%).

Success rate of Applicants by Caring Responsibility Status



Caring responsibility status of Award holders

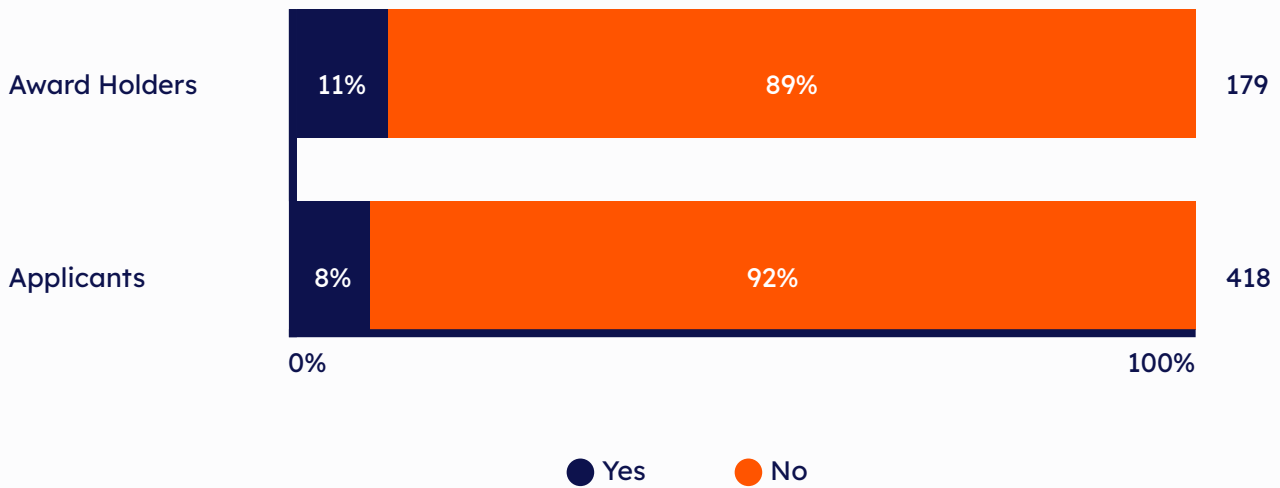
The number of award holders declaring they have caring responsibilities is 11%.

Key findings: 11% of our award holders have declared themselves having caring responsibilities, compared to 8% of our applicants. This is reflective of the higher success rates seen for those declaring caring responsibilities.

Caring responsibility status of our 2022–2025 Award Holders

All Applicants

Sample size



Demographic data of applicants and Award holders: Sexuality

Sexuality of applicants

94% of all applicants to our award rounds are heterosexual.

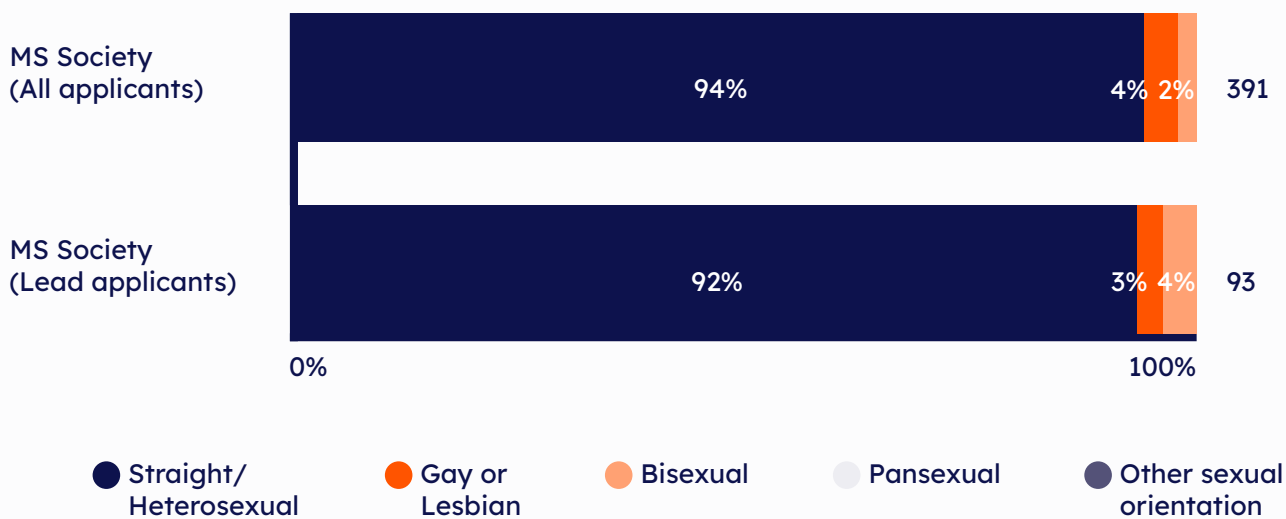
Key findings: 94% of all our applicants and 92% of lead applicants to our 2022–2025 award rounds are heterosexual.

Note: There were a high number of “prefer not to say” responses. 8.4% of all our applicants and 11.4% of our lead applicants chose the “prefer not to say” response.

Sexuality of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds

All Applicants

Sample size



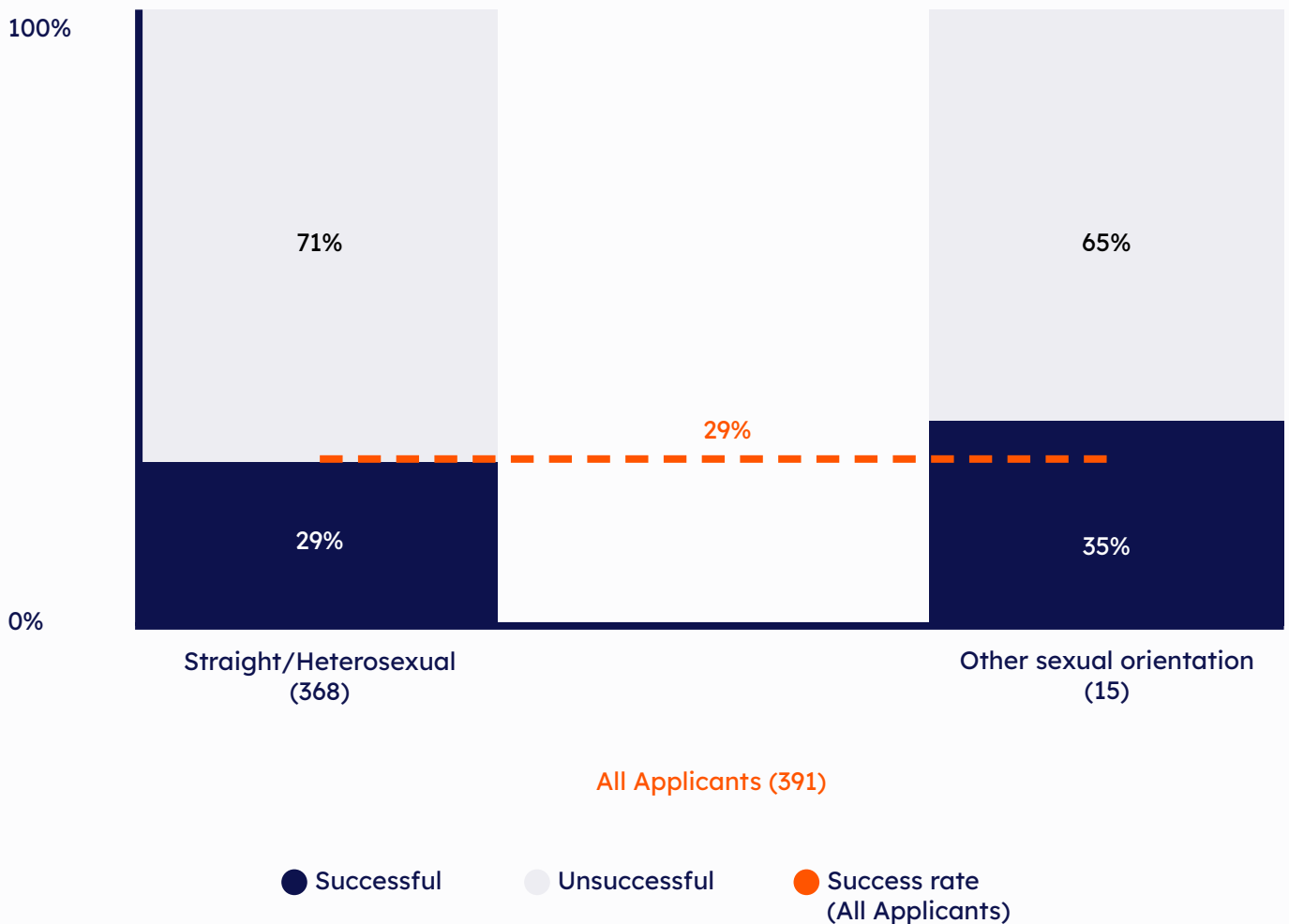
Success rate by sexuality

Success rates are lower for heterosexual applicants.

Key findings: Applicants identifying as gay/lesbian, bisexual or pansexual had a higher success rate (35%) compared to those identifying as heterosexual (29%).

Note: The sample size is small (15) and there were a high number of “prefer not to say” responses. 8.4% of all our applicants chose the “prefer not to say response”.

Success rate of applicants to our 2022–2025 Award Rounds by sexuality



Sexuality of Award holders

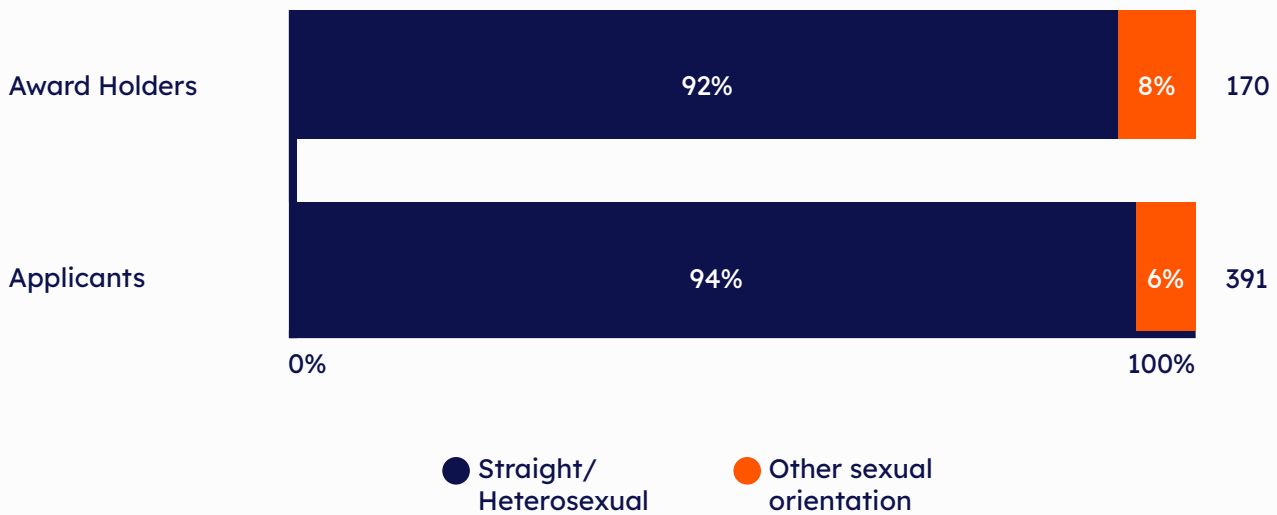
The number of Award holders identifying as heterosexual is 92%.

Key findings: The number of award holders identifying as heterosexual is 92%, compared to 8% identifying as any other sexuality (gay/lesbian, bisexual or pansexual).

Sexuality of our 2022–2025 Award Holders

All Applicants

Sample size



Demographic data of our Early Career Researchers

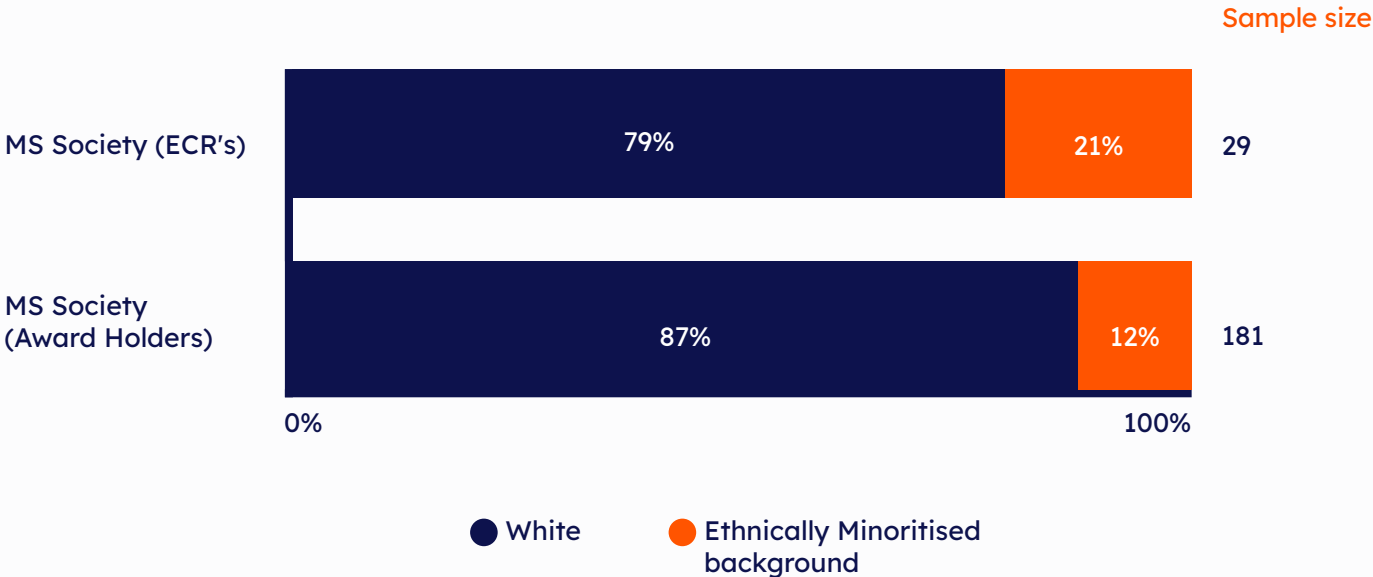
Ethnicity of our Early Career Researchers

21% of our Early Career Researchers are from an ethnically minoritised background.

Key findings: 21% of our ECRs are from an ethnically minoritised background. This higher than the proportion of our wider pool of researchers awarded funding between 2022 and 2025 (12%).

Note: Our ECRs include all those funded on MS Society PhD studentships or through the Edinburgh and Cambridge Centres of Excellence, and ECRs successfully awarded funding through our Early Career Fellowships and Skills Development Awards.

Ethnicity of our 2022–2025 Early Career Researchers



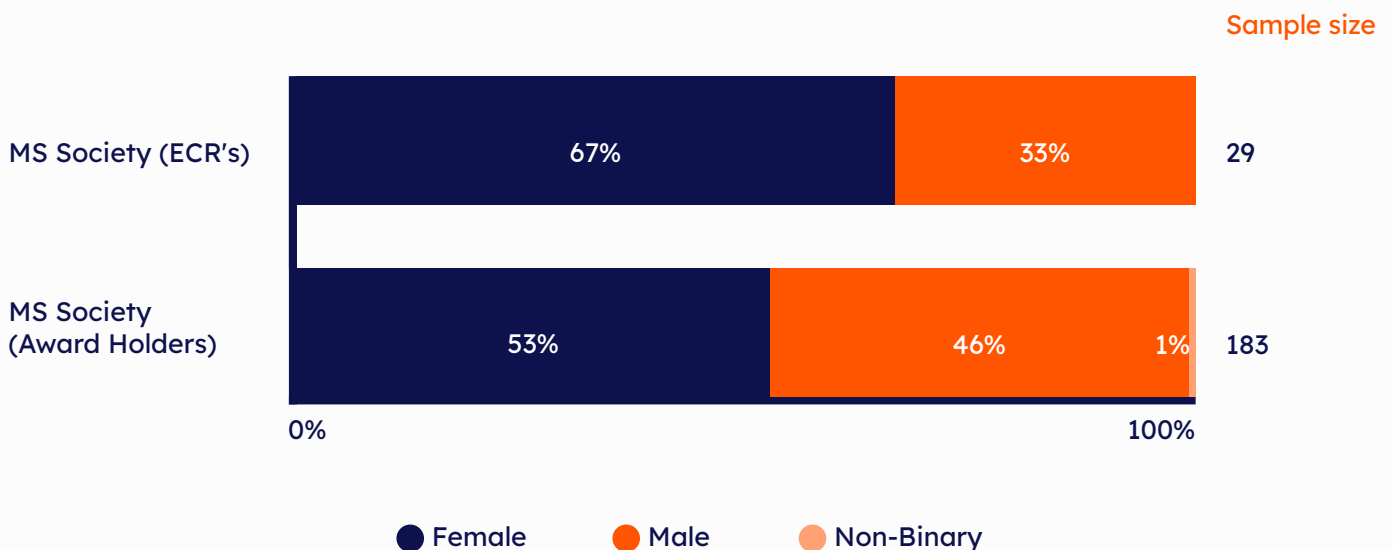
Gender of our Early Career Researchers

67% of our Early Career Researchers identify as female.

Key findings: 67% of our ECRs identify as female. This is higher than the proportion of our wider pool of researchers awarded funding between 2022 and 2025 (53%).

Note: Our ECRs include all those funded on MS Society PhD studentships or through the Edinburgh and Cambridge Centres of Excellence, and ECRs successfully awarded funding through our Early Career Fellowships and Skills Development Awards.

Gender identity of our 2022–2025 Early Career Researchers



Demographic data of our governance members

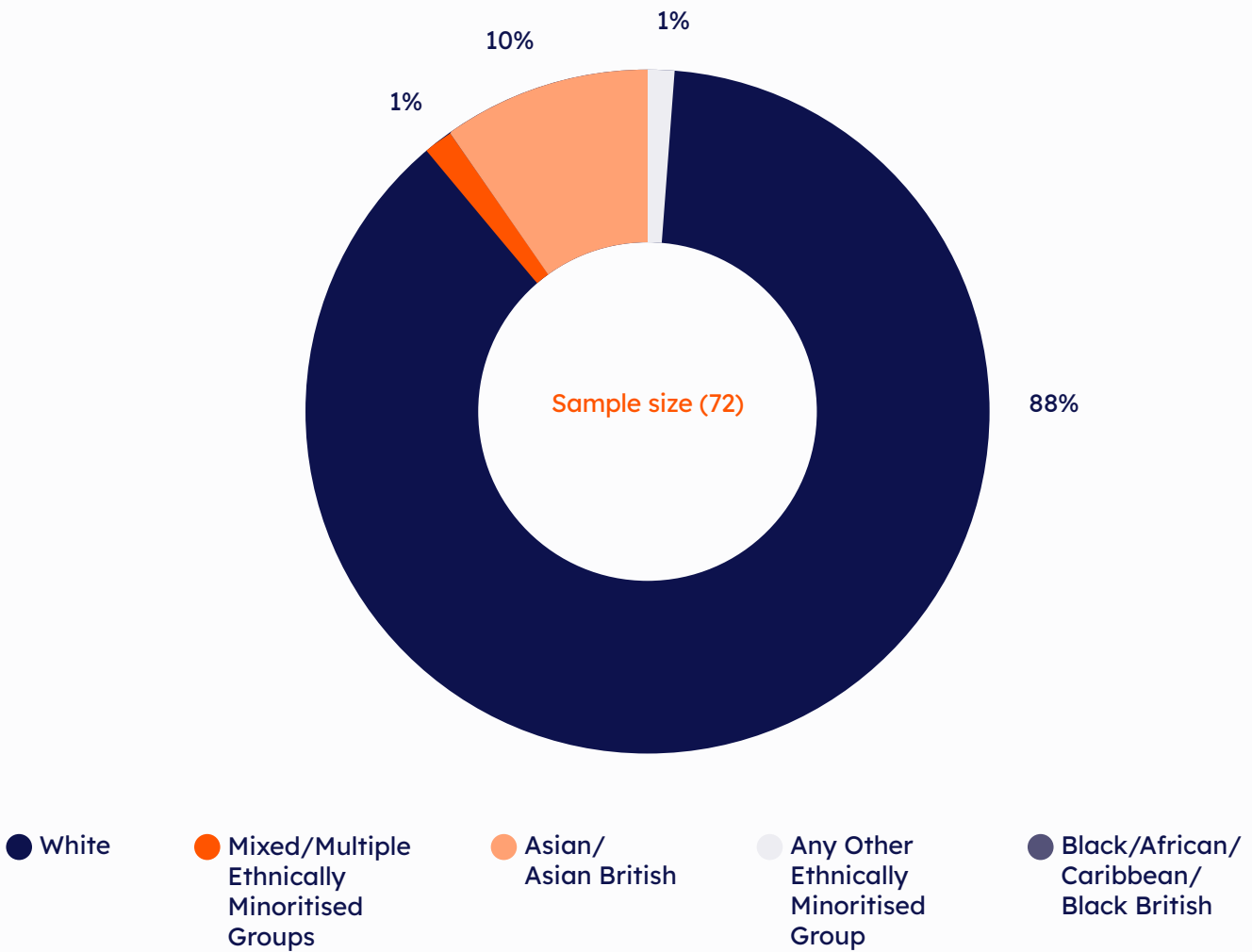
Ethnicity of our governance members

88% of our governance members are white.

Key findings: 88% of our governance members are white. Only 12% are from an ethnically minoritised background.

We've reached our target of 10% representation from people from ethnically minoritised backgrounds across our governance groups. But we have no members from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British backgrounds.

Proportion of our governance members by ethnicity

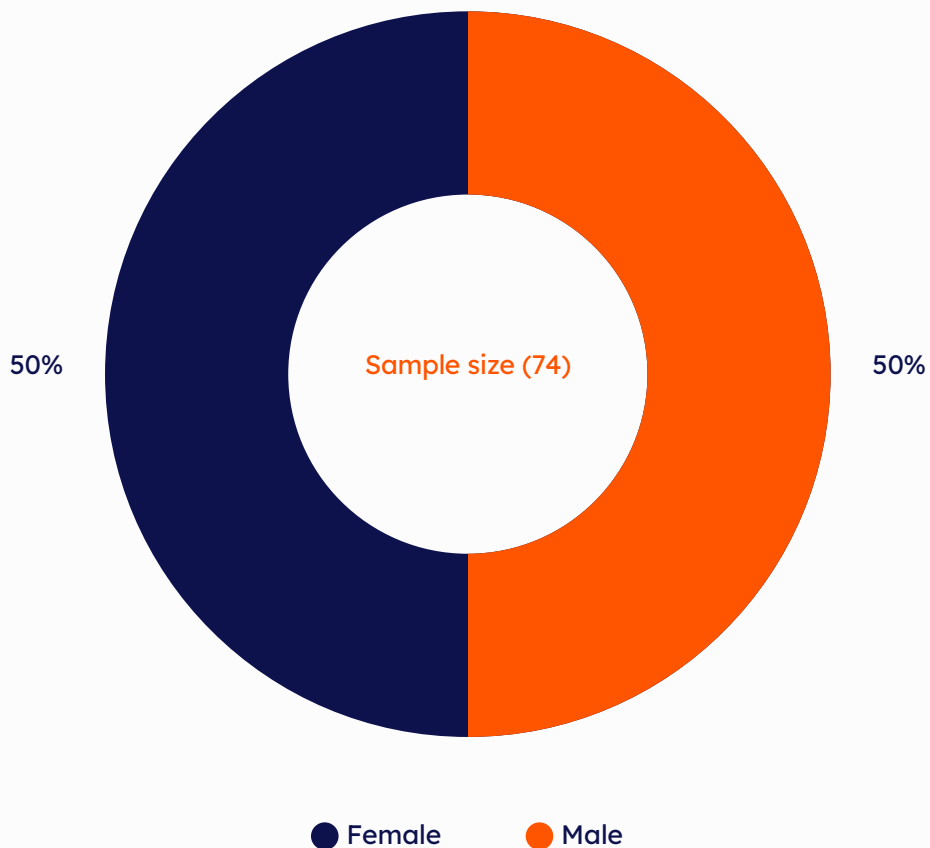


Gender of our governance members

We have a 50% gender split between men and women across our governance members.

Key findings: 50% of our governance members identify as female and 50% of our governance members identify as male.

Proportion of our governance members by Gender identity



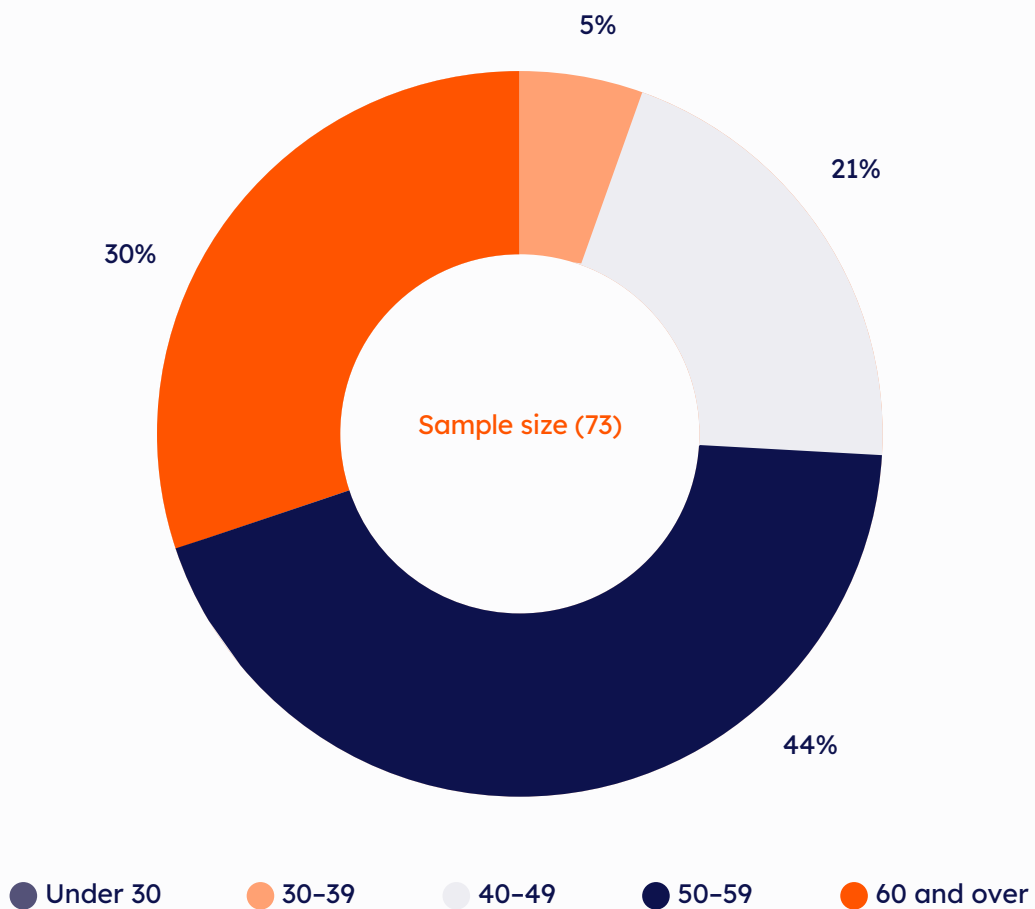
Age of our governance members

95% of our governance members are over 40.

Key findings: Only 5% of our governance members are under 40.

None of our governance members are under 30. The largest proportion of governance members are between 50 and 59 (44%).

Proportion of our governance members by age

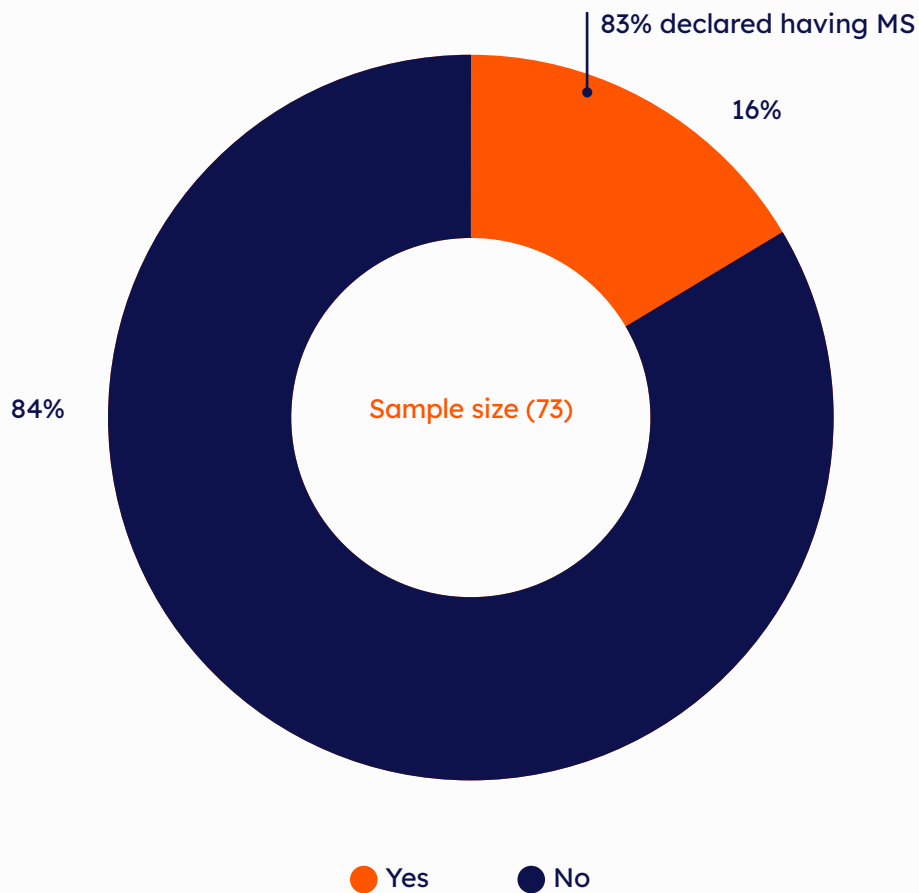


Disability status of our governance members

16% of our governance members have declared themselves to have a disability.

Key findings: 16% of our governance members disclosed having a disability. Of this 16%, 83% disclosed having MS. Each of our governance groups contain people affected by MS.

Proportion of our governance members by disability status



Next steps

EDI work requires long-term commitment, as meaningful change doesn't happen overnight. We're pleased that collecting and reporting demographic data is now embedded in our funding practices. But there is still more to do. We will continue to collect demographic data. However, given it takes time for actions to translate into real impact, our next EDI demographic data report will be published in 2028.

In the meantime, we've published our renewed EDI action plan for 2025 and 2030. We'll continue to use the data collected to inform our ongoing efforts to ensure our work is responsive to the needs of our research community and people affected by MS.



Appendix 1.

Demographic questionnaire

Our questions are designed using the [Diversity and Inclusion Survey \(DAISY\) Question Guidance](#) and modelled after the UK 2021 Census.

When were you born?

What ethnic group do you identify with?

Choose one option that best described your ethnic group or background.

Asian/Asian British – Indian
Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian/Asian British – Chinese
Asian/Asian British – Any other Asian Background
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – African
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Caribbean
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Asian and White
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black Caribbean and White
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black African and White
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
White – British/English/Welsh/Scottish
White – Northern Irish
White – Irish
White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller
White – Any other White background
Any other ethnic group – Arab
Any other ethnic group – Any other ethnic group
Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes your gender?

Female
Male
Non-Binary
I would prefer to use my own term – Please tell us your own term
Prefer not to say

Do you identify as trans?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Straight/Heterosexual
Gay or Lesbian
Bisexual
Pansexual
Other sexual orientation – Please tell us your sexual orientation
Prefer not to say

Do you provide unpaid care to a partner, disabled child, close relative or friend, who could not manage without your help?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?
(By “disability” we mean a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-today activities.)

Yes — Can you tell us about your disability? Yes, it is because of my MS
Yes, it is because of my other condition
No
Prefer not to say

To process your personal data including your special category data (sensitive data including health, ethnicity and diagnosis data) as outlined above, we require your explicit consent.

Yes, I consent
No, I do not consent (any data you entered above will be removed)

What is your employment status?

Employed — Full time
Employed — Part time
Self-employed — Full time
Self-employed — Part time
Not employed — Looking for work
Not employed — Not looking for work
Retired — Retired and receiving pension
Retired — Medically retired early because of ill health



Appendix 2.

References

- 1 Advance HE (2024). *Staff statistical report*. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-reports-2024>
- 2 Cancer Research UK (2023). *Driving Change. How our initiatives are fostering a more diverse inclusive research community*. https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/diversity_data_in_research_funding_2023.pdf
- 3 British Heart Foundation (2023). *Our research funding diversity data 2020-2023*. https://www.bhf.org.uk/-media/files/what-we-do/equalitydiversity-inclusion/diversity-data-research-funding/bhf_our-research-funding-diversity-data-2020-2023
- 4 EDIS (2022). *Diversity and Inclusion Survey (Daisy) Question Guidance (Version 2)*. <https://edisgroup.org/resources/practical-tools-andguidance/diversity-and-inclusion-survey-daisy-question-guidance-v2>
- 5 Office for National Statistics (2021). *Ethnicity harmonised standard*. <https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/ethnicityharmonised-standard/#questions-for-england>



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