

Budget Consultation 2020/21

9 January 2020

Background

As part of its responsibility to inform and involve the public and key stakeholders in policy and decision making processes Cumbria County Council has consulted on its 2020/21 draft budget to inform its development. The consultation began on 14 November 2019 and ended on 6 January 2020.

The consultation had one main question:

Should we:

1. Increase Council Tax by 1.99% to avoid having to make even more savings on top of the £6 million that we currently need to find? This together with the government's 2% increase to help fund Adult Social Care will take the total increase to 3.99%. (This increase is for the county council's element of council tax only.)
OR
2. Not increase Council Tax by 1.99% - which would mean an additional £4.8m of savings would need to be identified across council services bringing the total savings needed for 2020/21 to £10 million.

This report is based on **361** budget survey responses (353 submitted online, 4 paper and 4 email). This is an increase in the number of respondents from last year. Only data where respondents have opted to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree, in the budget consultation survey document, have been used to generate the quantitative data in this report.

The consultation **is not** designed to be a statistically representative sample of public opinion in Cumbria but a gauge of the opinions of those people and organisations that have chosen to participate in the process.

This report does not seek to make any recommendations: its purpose is to help inform decision makers of opinion expressed as part of this consultation. The consultation process conforms to the county council's consultation obligations.

Due to rounding, some totals in tables and charts may not add up to exactly 100%.

Main budget consultation activity

In relation to engagement to stakeholders, a communications and engagement plan included:

- The launch of the consultation on 14 November 2019 with release of documents including a dedicated web page and media release
- Communications to all Members and staff

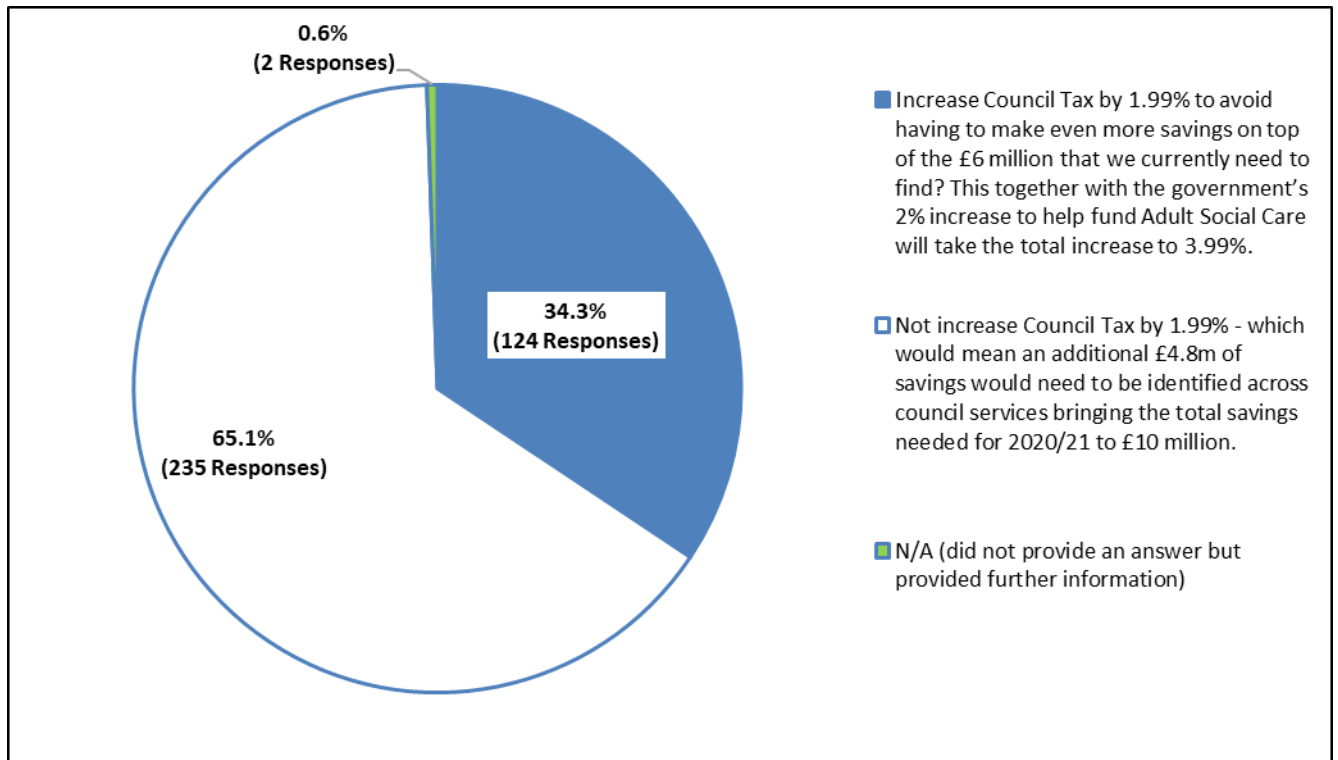
- Communication with Trade Unions colleagues and discussion at both Council JCG and Corporate JCG meetings
- Engagement with Area Management Teams to ensure printed copies were available in localities
- A document being made available as a pdf download, online version and online survey
- A post on the homepage of the internet, intranet and Your Cumbria news website.
- The document being available as a paper copy in all main libraries.
- Social media being used to generate interest via Facebook and Twitter including weekly posts and a 'pinned' banner post.

The following were also notified about the consultation:

- All Chief Executives of the Cumbria Chief Executives Group
- Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC)
- Schools Forum
- Chamber of Commerce
- Cumbria County Council Joint Consultative Group

Overview of views on increase in Council Tax

235 respondents, almost two thirds (65.1%), disagreed with increasing council tax by 1.99%.



As well as responding to the main question, people were asked to give any comments about the proposed approach to meeting the challenges ahead and building a financially sustainable future. 167 people provided comments which have been reviewed against the Council Plan themes and have been summarised in the table below.

Council Plan Theme	Summary
Working Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in voluntary sector services in order to support communities; and ensure Third Sector organisations are appropriately supported and funded • Continue working as a Team – build better, stronger relationships, listen, involve and understand • Work more closely with partners (e.g. District Councils and NHS); and consider shared services (back office functions) • Invest more in community involvement and cohesion
Enterprise & Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more transparent on spending; provide more detailed information on the budget consultation • Be more innovative and better at generating income: better use of assets (land, buildings); charge for resident parking and staff parking; generate income by increasing business rates • Invest in developing local businesses and industry • Be better at finance management – budgeting, long-term planning; lobbying for funding • Reduce spending/be more efficient – reduce staff expenditure (e.g. salaries (Senior Management and Councillors); pensions; travel and council vehicles); Children Looked After, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Adult Social Care; Police Crime Commissioner; cuts to non-statutory services • Be better at procurement and contract management; increase “in-house” service provision • Transform and review service delivery – reduce hours/availability in some areas; review recycling provision; review business support services and senior management • Become a Unitary Authority • Increase scrutiny of Leaders and Senior Managers • Protect and prioritise frontline public services and workers and those who are most vulnerable – Adult Social Care, Learning Disability Day Services, children and young people, people in poverty; prioritise infrastructure

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address financial sustainability with environmental sustainability; protect the environment and address climate change – invest in green initiatives (renewable energy, forestry, efficient housing)
Prevention & Early Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in Education – early intervention • Prioritise prevention – health, social care, children, and older people • Early investment and intervention in people’s health and wellbeing – to avoid greater costs later on

Additional detailed responses were received from the following:

- Cumbria County Council Scrutiny Management Board
- Trade Unions – joint response from Unison and GMB
- Cumbria Third Sector Network
- Adrian Waite – Independent Consultancy Services

The following is a summary of their written detailed feedback:

Cumbria County Council Scrutiny Management Board

Scrutiny’s engagement in the 2020/21 Strategic Planning process has been an ongoing dialogue which has focused around two sessions. The first of which took place on the 29 July 2019 at which Members had the opportunity to question the Chief Executive and Director of Finance about the challenges facing the Council and the direction of travel required. The second session took place on the 26 November 2019. Members received an update from the Chief Executive, Executive Director for Corporate, Customer and Community Services and the Director of Finance on the policy and financial context for the council. The Director of Finance set out the proposals for delivering a balanced budget for 2020/21 as presented to Cabinet earlier in November and as reflected in the Budget Consultation.

Scrutiny Management Board agreed three specific recommendations for Cabinet, which were accepted at its December 2019 meeting:

- To provide assurance that opportunities will continue to be offered for pre-scrutiny and non-executive input with proposals as they emerge through the year, prior to decisions being taken.
- To continue to work together with partners to lobby on behalf of Cumbria in the run up to the 2020 spending review.

To receive a review of the schemes in the Enterprise Framework particularly those identified by Members, with an assessment of their success, which will be communicated to the Council as a whole.

Trade Unions – Unison and GMB

Their response suggested that it is difficult to provide an in depth and comprehensive response without detailed budget and service information – this is requested for future budget consultations.

The Trade Unions raised ongoing concerns in relation to the increasing cost of management and a decrease in front line staff (grades and hours). Furthermore, they raised concerns about financial difficulties for frontline staff (use of foodbanks) and the further financial risks of increased Council Tax.

The Trade Unions recognised the financial pressures and challenges that Cumbria County Council face and praise was given for dealing with significant funding cuts.

In relation to future restructures, the Trade Unions ask that careful consideration is given to ensure that there is the correct balance of management and frontline posts; and that management posts should be recruited for essential purposes only. Furthermore, funding for management posts should be used to support frontline staff. The Trade Unions ask for a review of council policies relating to staff management is carried out in order to improve management and support of staff.

In response to national cuts in Adult Services, consideration should be given to the people and communities who are most vulnerable.

Cumbria Third Sector Network

Cumbria Third Sector Network accepted the financial pressures facing Cumbria County Council and the need to increase Council Tax; and support the Council's approach of focussing on supporting the most vulnerable people in Cumbria.

The Network are pleased to be involved in the Council's Thriving Communities Transformation Programme, by providing expertise and views to help develop the programme. Collaborative relationships between the Council and the Network continue to be developed.

Cumbria Third Sector Network raised the following points:

- All local public sector organisations are facing budget cuts. This affects local third sector organisations and is a challenge for them to fully participate in programmes and collaborative working
- An increase in the numbers of people accessing third sector services, as there are no longer public sector services able to support them
- An increase in the complexity of the issues facing people accessing third sector services
- A decrease in the funding available third sector organisations from the local public sector
- A decrease in the funding available to third sector organisations from some other grant funders (for example, charitable foundations that rely on investment income)

The Network pointed out that there needs to be an acceptance that collaborative working and involvement in transformation has significant benefits, but that it also has

a number of costs (mainly in staff time, that is unlikely to be funded in project delivery work). The scale of the shift in approach that is required to achieve transformation is significant and should be considered.

The Network raised concerns regarding the capacity of community groups (run entirely by volunteers) in supporting people with additional needs and increasing numbers of referrals; furthermore, the skills and cost associated with this need to be recognised.

The Network welcome the opportunity to continue working with the Council in the future, in particular the commitment to support those most vulnerable, and hope to continue to share experience and good practice.

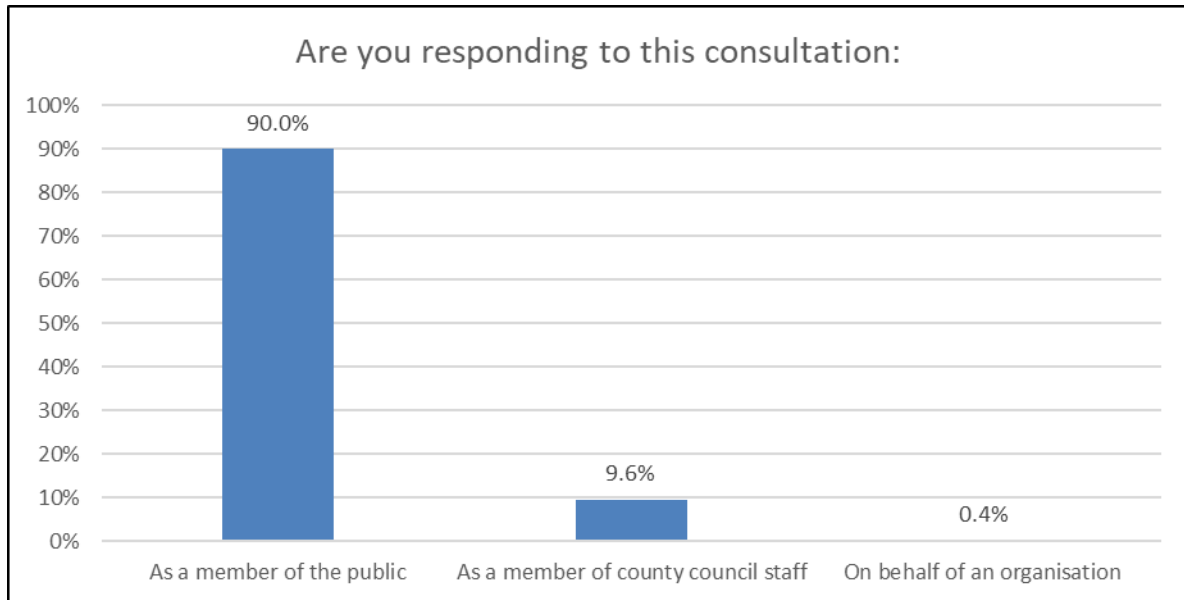
Adrian Waite Independent Consultancy Services – Summary

Adrian Waite provided a very detailed and extensive response categorised by the following areas: Children's Services; Adult Social Care; Economy & Infrastructure; Central Budgets; Efficiency and Savings; Reserves; Capital Programme and Asset Management; Risk Management; Treasury Management; Local Government Financial Settlement and Fair Funding Review; Council Tax; and Devolution. The principal conclusions were that Children's Services and Adult Social Care should be reviewed in order to identify potential savings and set realistic budgets. All budgets should be set and aligned to actual income and expenditure and that central budgets are reviewed and set at an appropriate level. Capital Programmes should be reviewed. Mr Waite agreed to the 3.99% increase in Council Tax but suggested holding a referendum in terms of funding Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The Council should consider the Fair Funding Review; and should consider devolution.

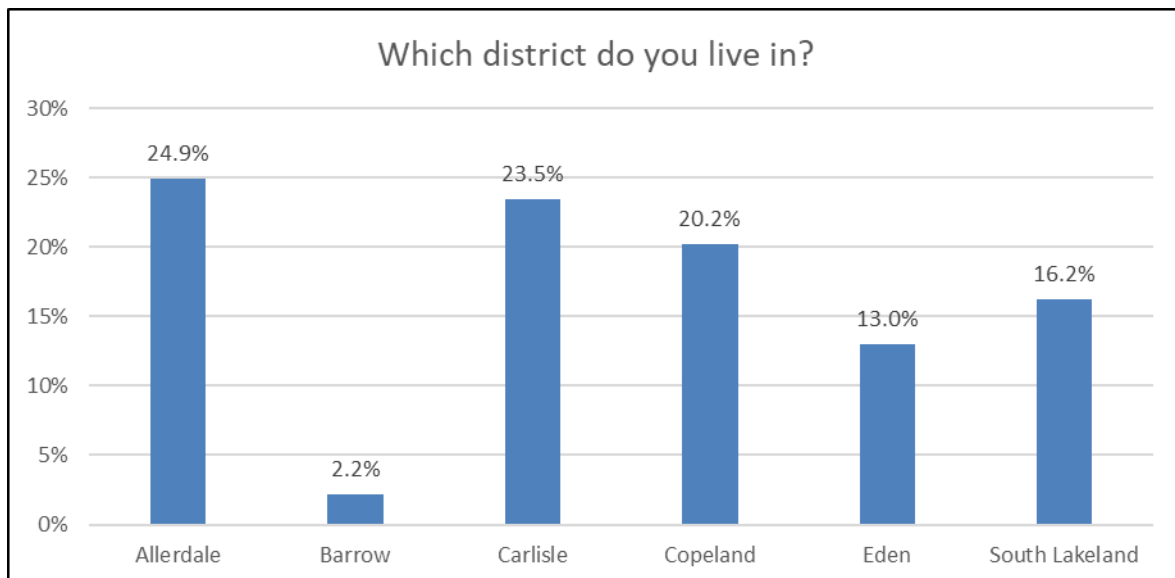
Supplementary information – Demographics

Demographic information for those who have responded to the consultation has been captured with analysis below for information. This analysis has been performed against the online responses and as these questions were not mandatory, not all people have chosen to respond.

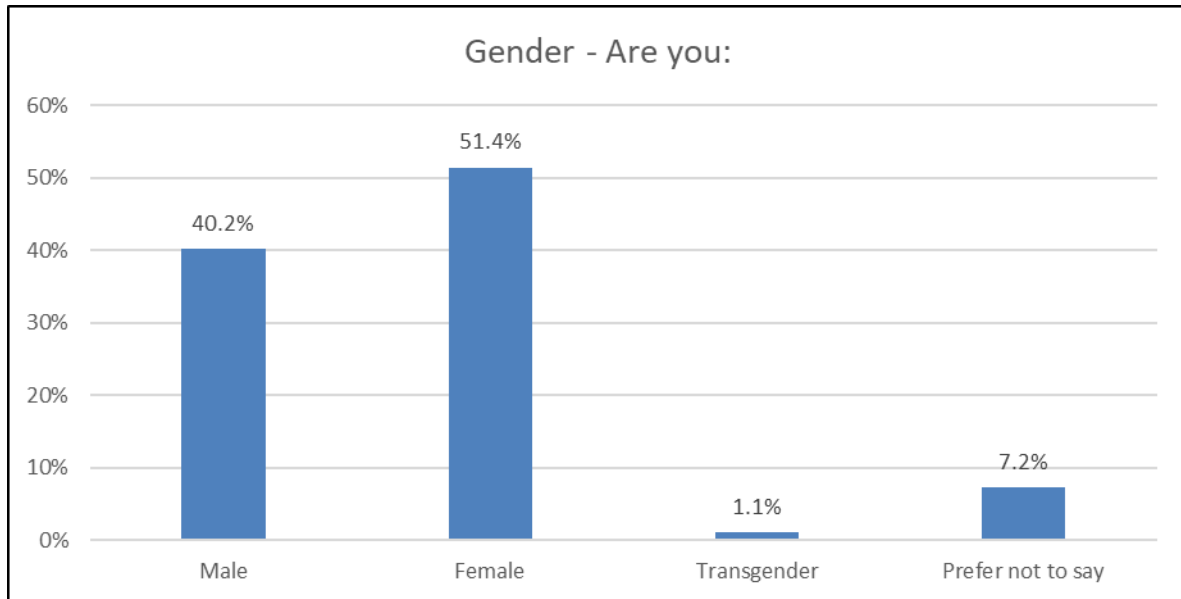
Based on 280 responses, “**Are you responding to this consultation**”



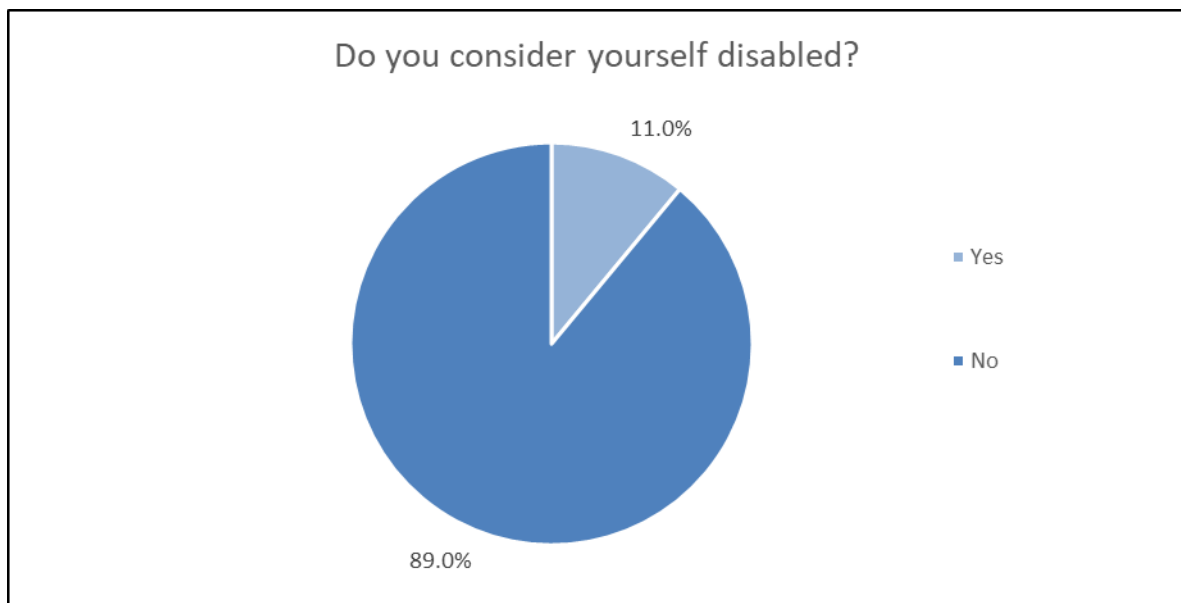
Based on 277 responses, “**Which district do you live in?**”



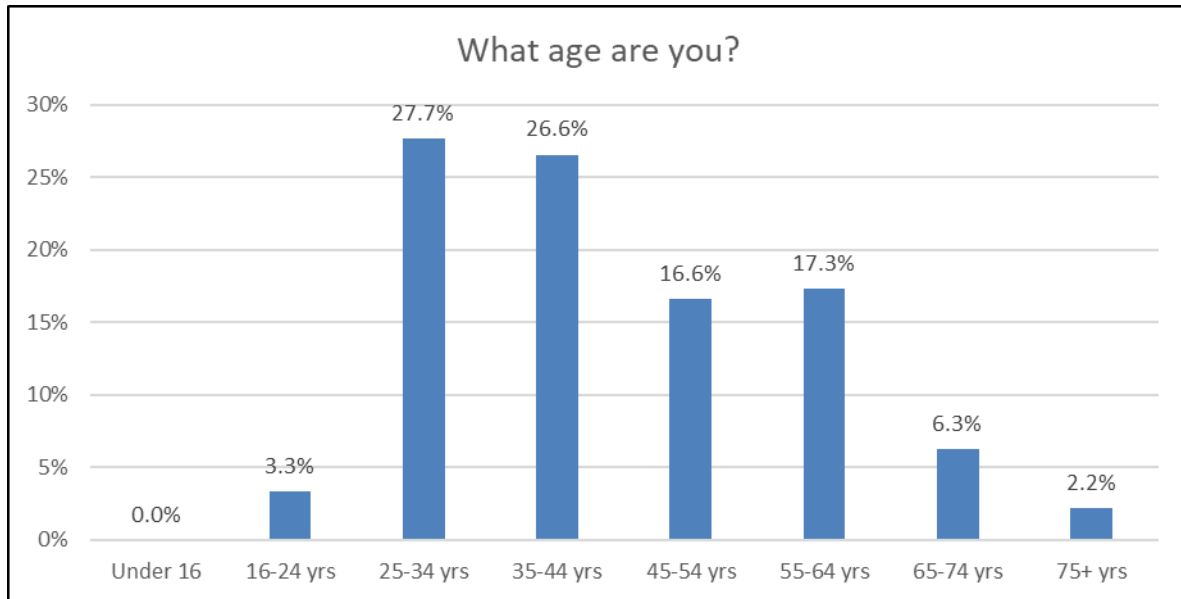
Based on 276 responses, Gender - **“Are you”**



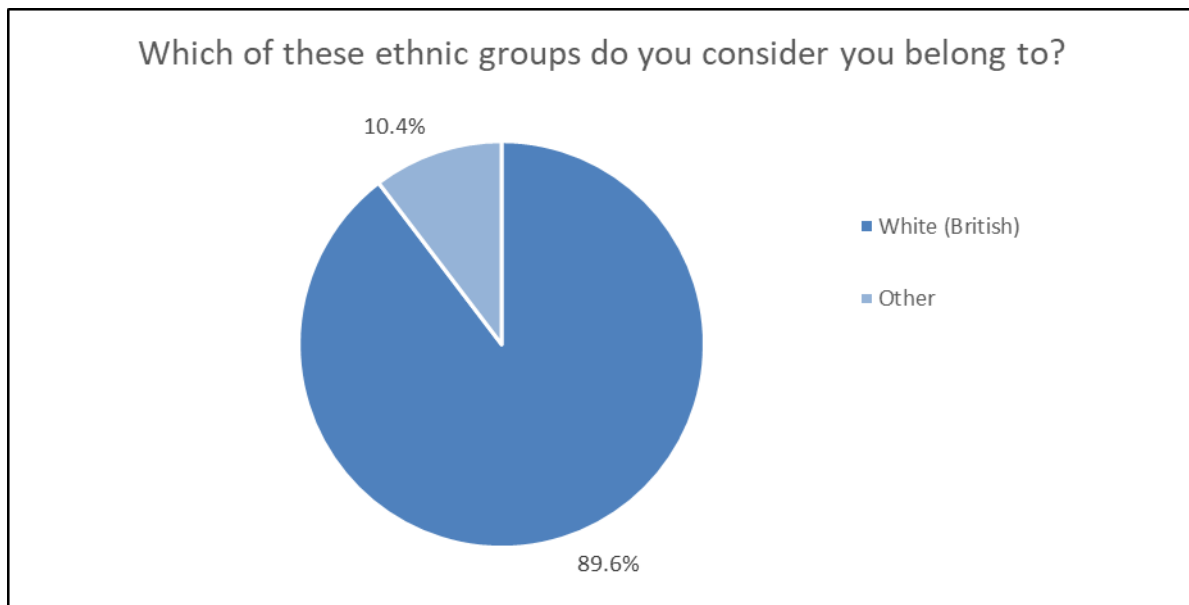
Based on 272 responses, **“Do you consider yourself Disabled?”**



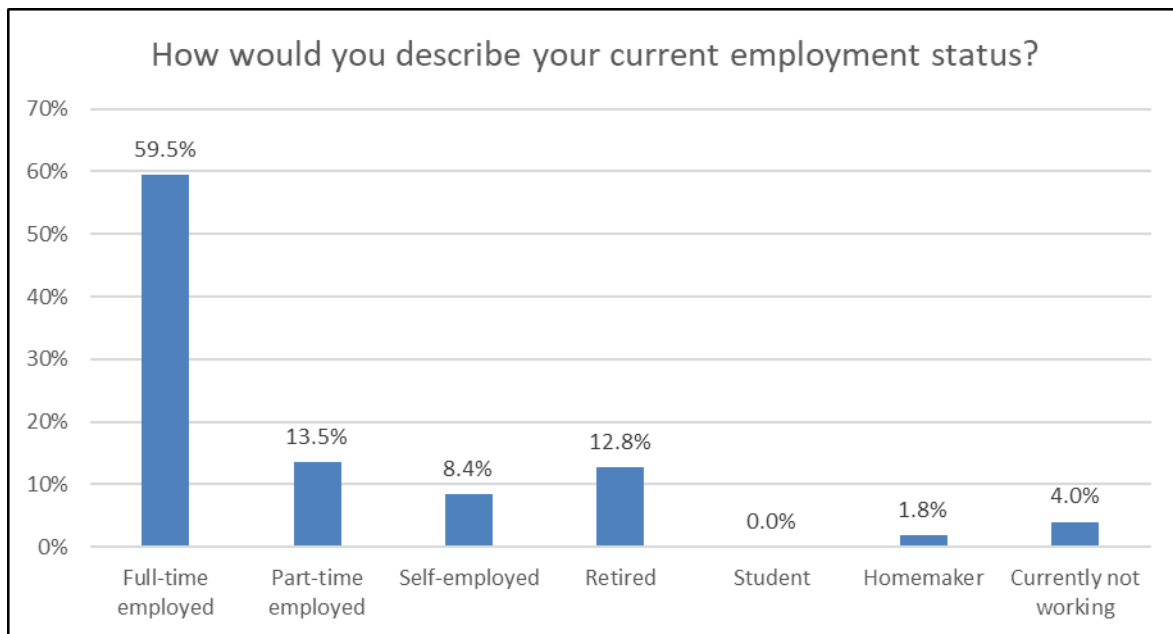
Based on 271 responses, “**What age are you?**”



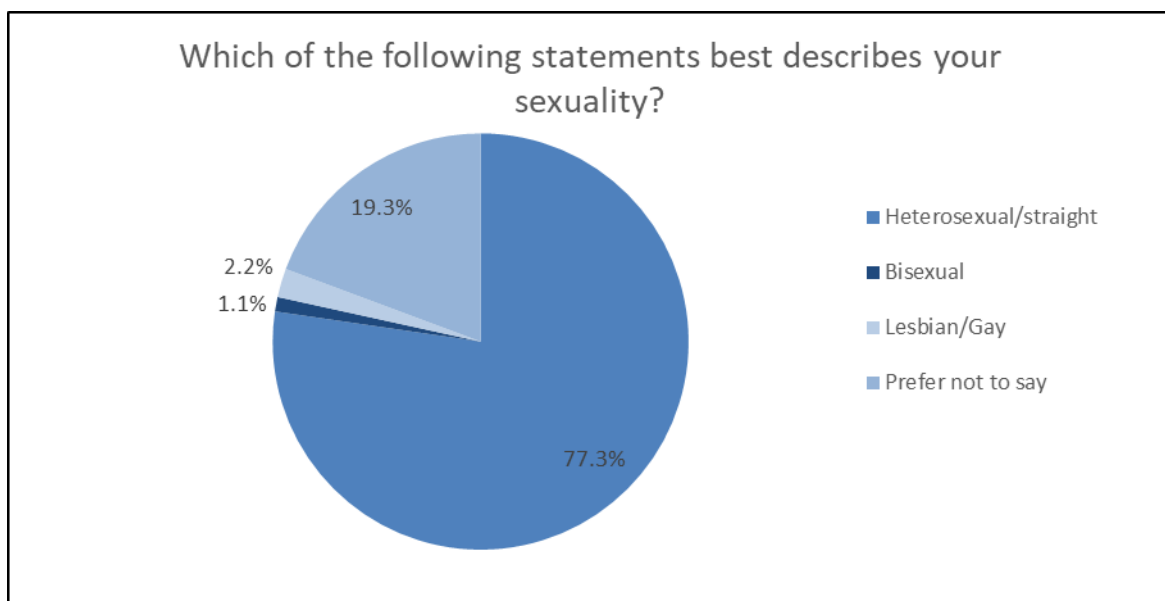
Based on 270 responses, “**Which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong to?**”



Based on 274 responses, “**How would you describe your current employment status?**”



Based on 269 responses, “**Which of the following statements best describes your sexuality?**”



Based on 273 responses, “**Which of the following best describes your faith/ religion/ belief?**”

