



State of the Profession Survey

MAY 2025

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Executive summary

CIEEM's State of the Profession Survey provides a moment in time 'snapshot' of the views, experiences and aspirations of the ecology and environmental management profession. Where possible and relevant we have drawn comparisons with the 2022 CIEEM Employment and Salary Survey report in order to highlight any changes and trends.

The survey, which was open to both members and non-members, was undertaken in late January/early February 2025, at a time of ongoing concern about capacity in our profession. We are also in a period of somewhat shifting environmental policy and practice, although this is proceeding at a different pace and direction across countries of the UK, Ireland and elsewhere. (NB: The survey was undertaken before the publication of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in England but during the consultation period for the preceding Working Paper, and also before the publication of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill).

This survey significantly expands on previous Employment and Salary surveys, seeking to understand more about the direction of professional practice and current concerns and opportunities, as well as how it feels to be a professional ecologist or environmental manager in 2025. The survey was undertaken using Survey Monkey and all data was anonymised and analysed manually or, in the case of some of the open comment data, with the help of Claude 3.7 Sonnet online AI tool.

The headlines

The State of the Profession Survey 2025 provides an important benchmark for the profession. Unsurprisingly (and as with previous surveys) it reveals a picture of a hard-working, highly motivated and committed workforce but one that is also under significant pressure that is impacting job satisfaction and wellbeing.

Overall salaries have increased across almost all sectors, although that is set against a backdrop of significant cost of living rises. Mean salaries are improving for entry level roles but are still lower than many other professional sectors. Employment levels and prospects remain good. We still have a noticeable shortage of suitably experienced people for the more senior roles available and this inevitably creates pressure. Overall, the average excess hours worked are lower but there is still a very noticeable difference during the main ecological field survey season between April and October when the pressure cranks up in

some parts of the sector. Self-employed members work, on average, slightly longer hours but enjoy the flexibility and independence of their role.

Disappointingly, the gender pay gap reported in 2018 and 2022 has not been addressed although there is some limited evidence that it is improving.

Ecologists and environmental managers are keen to embrace new tools and technologies that enable them to work efficiently and deliver better outcomes for biodiversity, but there is a concern that this can lead to a loss of field skills.

There is some concern from respondents that the pressures of work together with a lack of confidence in advocating for actions that will help tackle the biodiversity and climate emergencies means that the profession is not really delivering in leading action in this area. The implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in England, whilst recognised as a potential gamechanger in taking forward nature recovery, has created a lot of work pressure and frustration in the short term.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the survey is the low morale of the profession. Almost without exception, there are hugely worrying indications that the work we do is not valued by the public, by other professions that we work with or by governments and policy makers. It feels even harder and more thankless to be an ecologist or environmental manager in 2025, and this has been exacerbated by new legislative proposals in England and Scotland that could seriously put environmental protections at risk.

There are concerning signs of a continuing gradual decline in job satisfaction. Despite this, pride in the role is generally good and most respondents would recommend (with caveats) the profession to those looking for an interesting, varied and worthwhile career.

What do the survey results mean for CIEEM and our profession?

The results emphasise the importance of the work that CIEEM is doing to champion the profession and to actively try and influence the policy issues that are adversely impacting on job satisfaction and wellbeing. Since the 2022 survey we have made some progress on pay and working hours and, whilst this work will continue, we do need to focus on advocacy for the profession, the crucial work that it delivers and the need for legislation and policy that enables us to deliver nature recovery.

There are important issues and concerns highlighted by the survey that we must not ignore. We need to build on the progress that has been made in recent years by continuing to advocate for reasonable working hours during the survey season and further improvement in salaries, especially at early career grades. We also need to continue our work to diversify the profession and to create more accessible routes into ecology and environmental management careers.

Investing in the early career grades remains a priority and we need to look at expanding our mentoring programme to help those joining the profession navigate industry challenges. Supporting all those in the sector to identify clear career progression pathways, embrace new tools and technologies and develop improved skills will help the profession meet the challenges of the demands being placed upon it.

Alongside this we need to continue to strengthen professional standards to build more confidence in the profession. We need to support and champion the use of sound professional judgement but not to the extent that it becomes an excuse for shortcuts, not investing in professional development or making unevidenced decisions and recommendations.

We want to create more platforms for knowledge-sharing between different sectors (consultancy, NGOs, local and central government, industry) and between the professions so that we can develop collaborative approaches to address common challenges. We also want to build better bridges with academic and research institutions to bridge the gap between research and practice more effectively.

We need to go on the offensive with a communications campaign to improve the public's understanding of our work and its importance. As part of this work, we need to counter negative media narratives about ecology and biodiversity, but in doing so we must be able to evidence ecological successes and positive impacts. We all need to be ambassadors for our profession.

We also need to advocate for stronger monitoring and enforcement of environmental outcomes. We need to continue to vigorously defend environmental protection through our policy influencing work and to champion the critical ecosystem services that flow from nature.

Nature needs us to be its strongest ally and champion, now more than ever. Working in collaboration with all those ecologists and environmental managers out there, doing the heavy lifting, we need to be visible, vocal and persuasive in order to address the pressing challenges we face.



Survey report

The respondents

The survey was 'live' for a 3-week period from mid-January until early February 2025 and was completed by 1,179 respondents of whom 86.3% were CIEEM members. CIEEM membership was by far the most common membership reported by respondents, although the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland and the British Ecological Society were also well represented (**Figure 1**).

The 'Other' category covered more than 20 other organisations including the Royal Entomological Society, Freshwater Biological Association, Landscape Institute, Institution of Environmental Sciences, Society of Ecological Restoration, Botanical Society of Scotland, Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority, British Society of Soil Science, Arboricultural Association and Irish Environmental Law Association.

Of those respondents who were CIEEM members, the majority were Full members, Chartered members or Fellows so effectively more senior practitioners (**Figure 2**). Broadly speaking, the percentage of respondents by membership grade was proportionate to the size of each membership category within the Institute, with the exception of Student members who are under-represented (but note that the survey was not designed for, or promoted to, students).

In terms of location by country, over 75% were based in England and over 93% were based in the UK (see **Figure 3**). For those based in England the regional representation was typical of CIEEM's membership with the majority of respondents based in the South East (27.4%) or South West (21.9%).

Fig 1

Organisational Membership

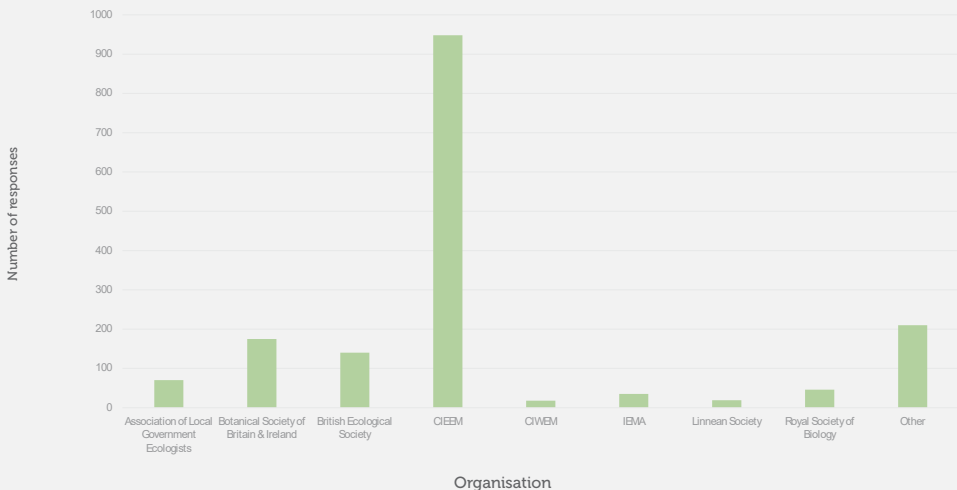
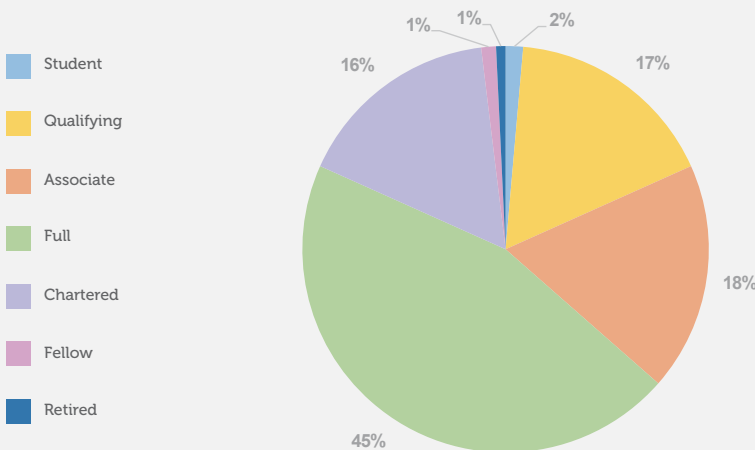


Fig 2

CIEEM Membership Grade



Although the number of overseas respondents was small (n=18) they were widely spread, reporting from New Zealand, Australia, USA, India, Seychelles, Uganda, Benin, Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Carpathians.

The response by gender identity was not very different from our 2022 survey, with 57.3% of respondents identifying as female, 39.5% as male, 0.9% as agender or non-binary and 2.3% preferring not to say.

Whilst the age profile of respondents still shows a comparatively youthful profession with 56.0% under the age of 45 and 79.0% under the age of 55 (**Figure 4**), this is quite a drop from the 2022 results where 72.4% of respondents were under the age of 45. This is difficult to explain because it is contrary to the record number of relatively youthful practitioners joining CIEEM in recent years. It was interesting to note that, with only 7 retired

practitioners responding to the survey (again it was not aimed at this category) 5.0% of respondents were still working beyond statutory retirement age.

Of course, these figures represent those who responded to the survey and may not accurately describe the profession but, based on our membership data and previous surveys, they do provide a reasonable overview of the practitioners' profile in 2025.

Fig 3

Location of Respondents

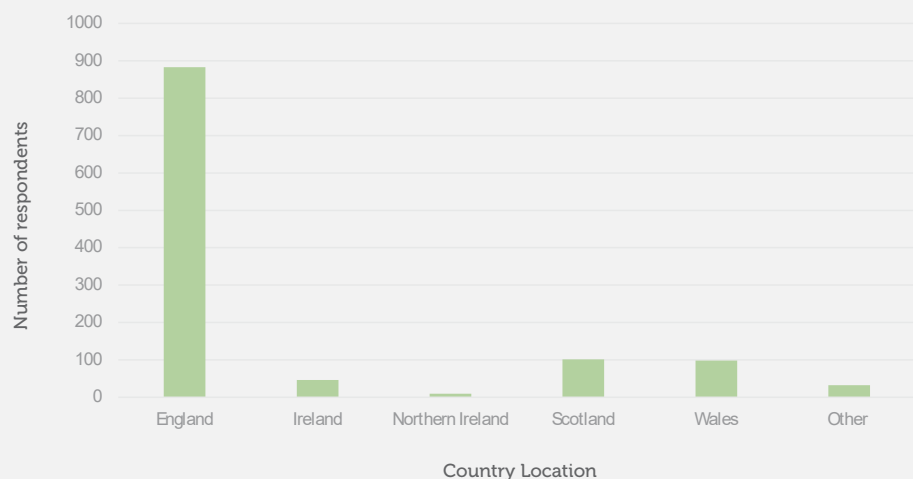
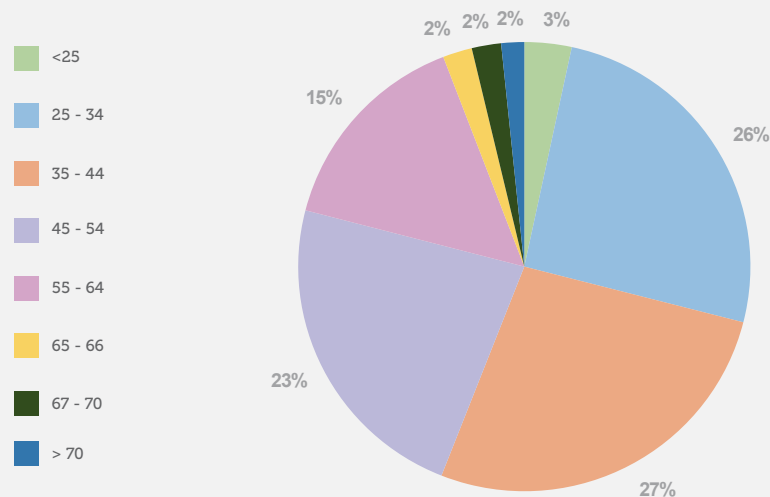


Fig 4

Respondents Profile by Age



As the professional body for both ecologists and environmental managers in the natural environment we are always interested in how many practitioners see themselves as an ecologist and how many as an environmental manager. **Figure 5** shows that the majority of respondents (86.3%) regard themselves as an ecologist (69.9%) or both (16.4%). This is slightly down on the 2018 and 2022 figures, although there has been a less than 1% increase in those who see themselves as an environmental manager (6.2% compared to 5.6% in 2022). Amongst the explanations given for saying 'neither' (7.5% of respondents) were roles such as Biodiversity Specialist (including Botanist), Interdisciplinary Research Manager, Science Adviser, Ecological Engineer, Environmental Policy and Law Specialist, Biodiversity Data Manager, Farm Adviser, Climate Change Adviser and Educator.

Figure 6 shows the percentage profile of respondents by employment sector. There is remarkably little difference between the 2018, 2022 and 2025 surveys. Private sector consultancy has been the largest employment category for the profession for many years now (65.1% of respondents in 2025) and this shows no signs of changing. Local authority, NGO and statutory government agencies are all well represented with between 7.5% and 10.0% of respondents. The number of statutory agency respondents has gone down a little whilst the number of local authority and voluntary sector respondents has risen slightly.

Fig 5
Respondents Identifying As An Ecologist or Environmental Manager

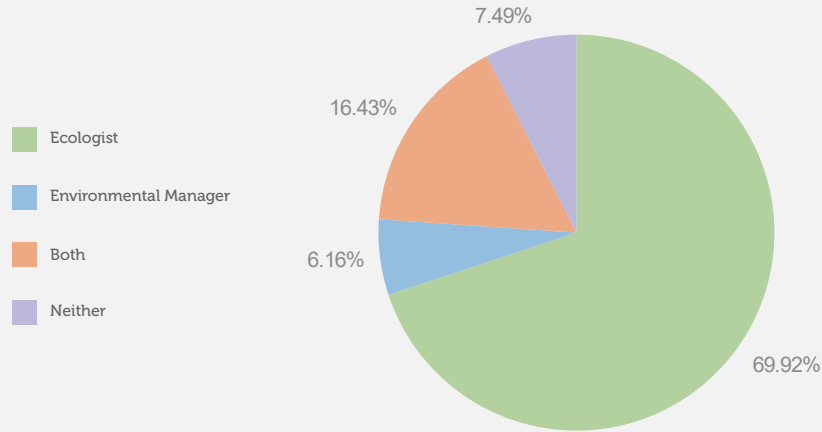
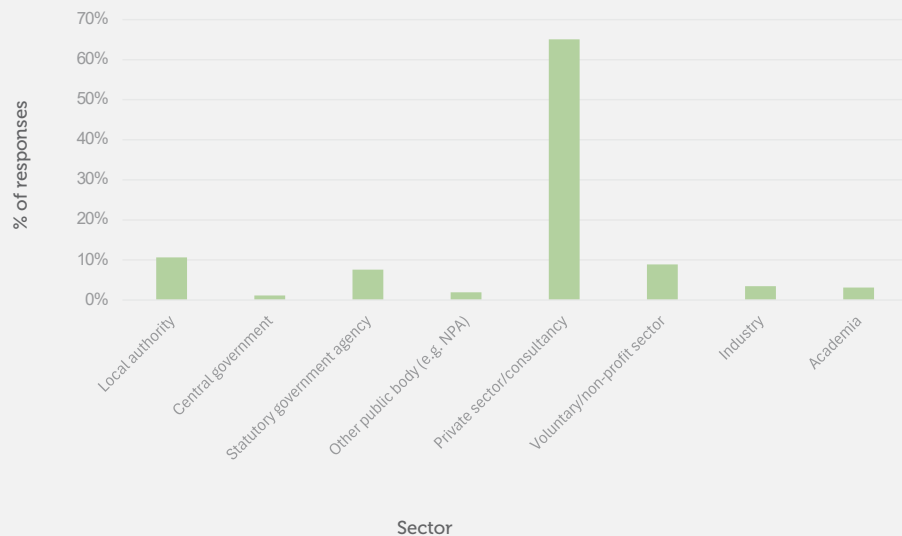


Fig 6
Employment Sector of Respondents



Equity and diversity

As a profession we have struggled (and continue to struggle) with increasing diversity. We know that people of colour, people who are differently abled/live with disability and people from lower socio-economic households are currently under-represented in the nature-focused careers. This section of the survey sought to understand the current make-up of the profession and the challenges some people experience as part of it.

As has previously been mentioned, the profession currently has a fairly even age distribution and, pleasingly, over 80% of respondents had not experienced any barriers or challenges to their career as a result of their age. However, a fifth of respondents had experienced some disadvantages in recruitment and/or career progression.

For the majority in this category it was because they had been regarded as 'too young' and therefore had their professional judgement questioned or were ignored in

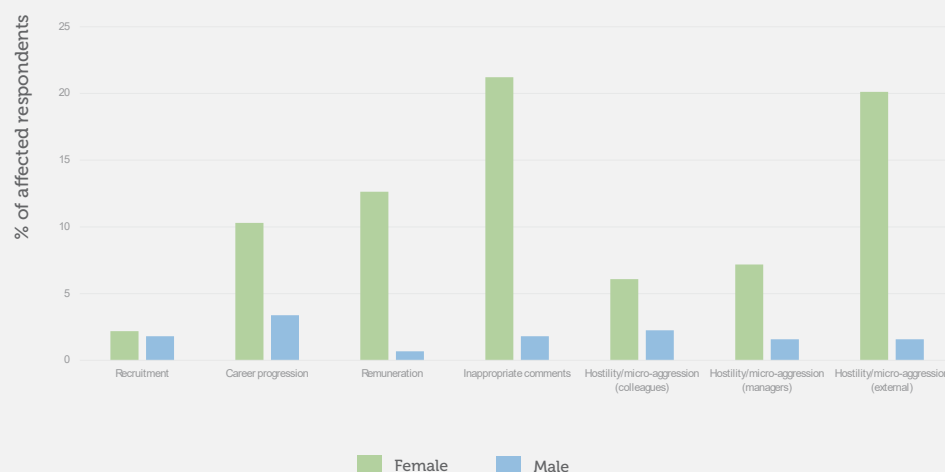
meetings because it was considered that they were likely to be too inexperienced. There were also examples of older respondents reporting that they had been overlooked for career progression opportunities because it was felt that they were 'too old' or it had been assumed that they would be unable to cope with new technologies.

There were multiple references to menopausal challenges and the difficulties of raising this with managers (especially if managers are male) or of having agreement to any reasonable adjustments without it being seen as being detrimental to current and future career opportunities.

As in previous surveys, there was also disquieting evidence of challenges arising from gender identity. Approximately 30% of respondents in total had experienced some aspect of challenge or barrier in their careers as a result of gender identity. As **Figure 7** shows, there are clear differences between the experiences of females and males.

Fig
7

Workplaces Disadvantages Experienced by Gender



More females reported disadvantage in every category of barrier or challenge. Whilst the difference in terms of recruitment was very small, it was much more of an issue in terms of dealing with inappropriate comments and 'banter', outright hostility and micro-aggression. Inevitably this creates an uncomfortable working environment and can impact mental wellbeing.

From the comments received, this issue is most commonly experienced on construction sites (although farm environments were also mentioned on several occasions). Female respondents reported not being taken seriously by contractors, having their advice (identical to that of a male colleague) ignored and having questions addressed to more junior male colleagues when, as the

project lead on site, they should have been the one to answer the questions.

There were also a number of examples of female respondents experiencing inappropriate behaviour on construction sites with the use of belittling terms of address, wolf whistles, indecent gestures and being the butt of jokes.

Also very noticeable was the impact, for some respondents, on equity of remuneration. There were multiple comments regarding male colleagues with similar or less experience being paid more. Indeed, one female respondent noted that her husband was offered £2,000 per annum more for the same position at the same company despite comparable experience.

Several female respondents reported fewer promotion than male counterparts with similar experience and some mentioned maternity leave causing career delays or being overlooked for promotion. Working mothers cited part-time working to support care arrangements as limiting promotion opportunities.

There were some practical considerations too. There is often a lack of adequate bathroom facilities on sites, which disproportionately affects women, especially if menstruating. When they are present, they can often be locked, be unclean or be used for storage so are difficult to access. It can be demeaning to have to ask for a key to use the toilet or to have to clamber over machinery and materials. Lone working can be a more challenging experience for women which can limit career opportunities.

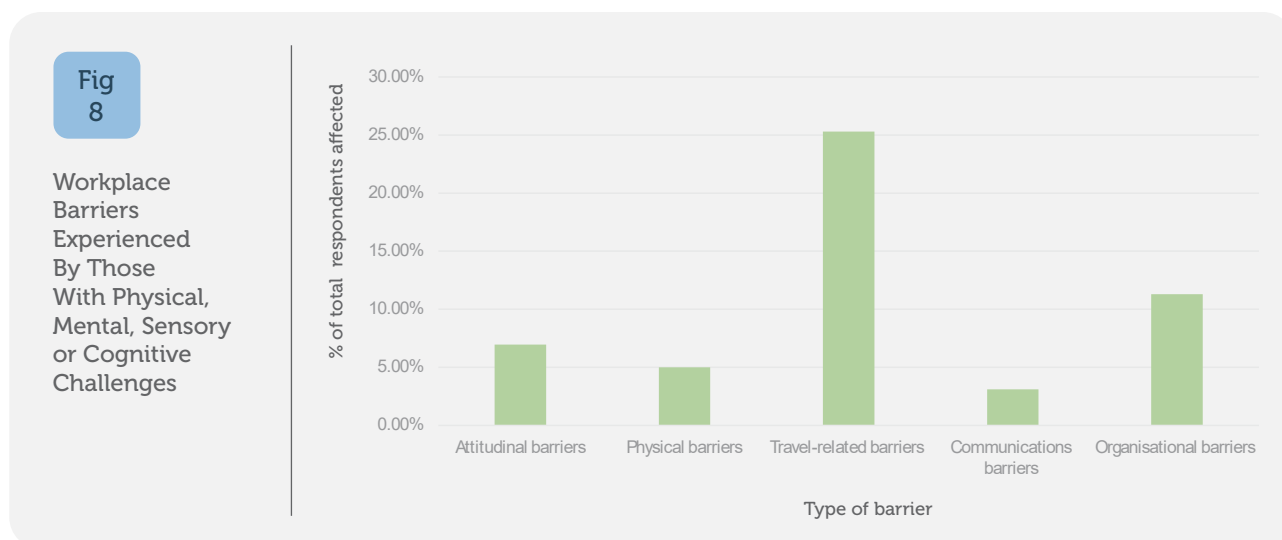
Women experiencing menopausal symptoms also cited examples of challenging work environments and having their career opportunities limited by managers' perceptions of their abilities.

It should be noted that, although much fewer in number, there were also comments about receiving more preferential treatment and courtesy as a woman by external stakeholders/contractors on occasion.

Almost 50% of those who had experienced gender-related challenges or issues had sought to raise them with colleagues/employers. It was noticeable that the decision to do so was influenced by the gender of the manager involved. The results were mixed with some respondents reporting positive support and interventions that made them feel empowered to report any further issues, whilst others reported a sense of an organisation 'closing ranks', being unwilling or unable to tackle external contractors/clients or fear of career repercussions.

Although the number of respondents who identify as trans was very small (n=5), those that were open about their identity had mixed experiences regarding disadvantages around recruitment and career progression but were more likely to have experienced inappropriate comments and unwelcome banter, as well as hostile or micro-aggressive behaviour from external contacts.

Just over 10% of survey respondents identified as disabled whilst 25% reported experiencing barriers or limitations to their day-to-day activities as a result of physical or mental health conditions or physical, sensory or cognitive differences. **Figure 8** illustrates the types of challenge most commonly experienced.



Organisational challenges or barriers were the most common problem, and these were frequently cited by those with an autism spectrum condition. Unscheduled meetings, sudden changes to plans, sensory processing issues, communication challenges and time management were all frequently mentioned.

Mental health was also a concern with repeated reports of anxiety, burnout, stress and feeling overwhelmed. Experience of mental health support in the workplace was very mixed. Physical health issues were less common (perhaps indicating that the sector is not very accessible to those with physical disabilities) but there were several mentions of long-term health conditions such as diabetes,

arthritis, hearing impairment, vision impairment and long-Covid as limiting factors. Although not an illness, menopause was again frequently mentioned as a cause of workplace challenges.

In terms of the impact of these conditions on individuals, several cited negatives in terms of how their abilities were perceived by others, largely in terms of disadvantages to career progression opportunities (**Figure 9**). It was also frequently noted that, even where the attitudes of others were unaffected by or sympathetic to the respondent's condition, one effect of their condition was to diminish their confidence in their ability and to increase anxiety.

Over 60% of affected respondents had raised the issues internally. Disappointingly the majority reported unsatisfactory responses ranging from little or no practical support available to dismissive or unsympathetic responses. In some instances, this has led to respondents changing jobs to find a more flexible and supportive employer.

Figure 10 illustrates the sexual orientation profile of respondents. Almost all respondents are very open about their sexual orientation or make no reference to it as it is not relevant in the workplace and, encouragingly, there were very few comments regarding disadvantages or experiencing inappropriate behaviour.

Fig 9

Workplace Experiences as a Result of Physical, Mental, Sensory or Cognitive Differences

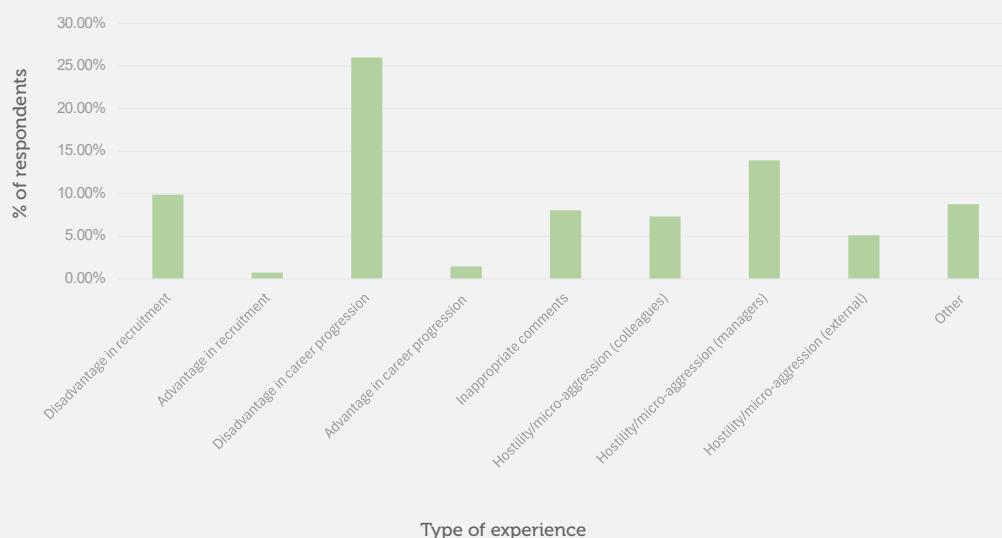
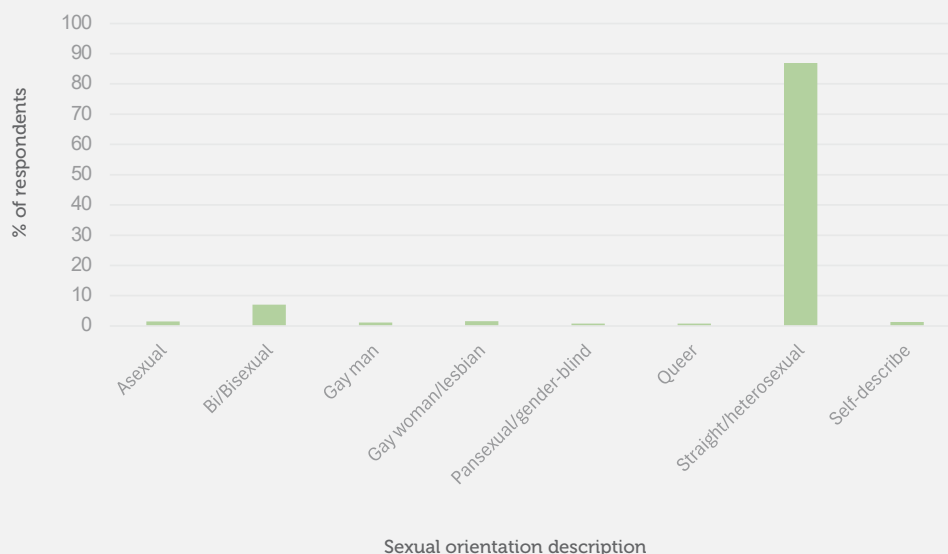


Fig 10

Sexual Orientation Profile of Respondents

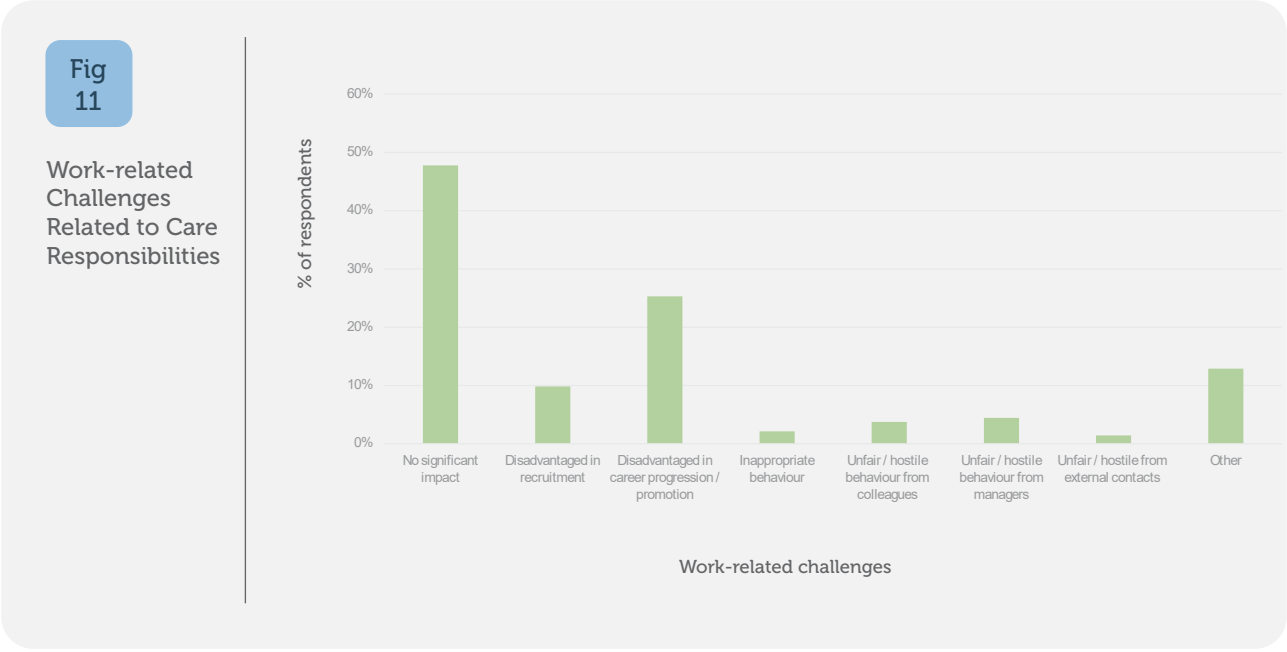


Ethnicity (or lack of it) continues to be a concern for the ecology and environmental sector. Just over 86% of the respondents identified as White British and 4.5% as White Irish. A further 4.6% identified as White (non-British or Irish). With just over 1.9% of respondents preferring not to say, that left 3.0% of respondents identifying with another ethnic background including Jewish, Mixed Asian British, Hispanic or Greek-Cypriot.

With such a small proportion of respondents not identifying as White there were, unsurprisingly, relatively few instances of evidenced career disadvantage, but slightly more examples of inappropriate comments. There were some comments about disadvantage in recruitment because of being part of the ethnic majority in the sector, with employers favouring colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, these were outweighed in number by respondents who recognised the advantages that can flow from their White British or White Irish ethnicity.

Almost 50% of respondents have some kind of care responsibility, with the majority of those who do have care responsibilities being joint primary carer of a child or children. There were some gender differences with 17.5% of women with childcare responsibilities being the primary carer compared with 3.4% of male respondents. Almost 50% of those with care responsibilities of any description feel that these have disadvantaged their careers and/or led to hostile or micro-aggressive behaviour from others (particularly colleagues and managers) as shown in **Figure 11**.

More positively, over 50% of those affected have felt able to raise these issues internally, and there were many reports of employers showing flexibility and support, to the extent that where these are not provided, respondents feel confident to look elsewhere for alternative employment.



As in 2022, almost 60% of respondents did not have a religion or strongly held belief. For those that do, Atheism (as the absence of a religion or strongly held belief) and Christianity were most prevalent. Generally, conversations about religion or beliefs do not arise in the workplace but, if they did, most respondents would feel comfortable discussing them.

In terms of socio-economic background, just over 40% of respondents grew up in household where the main earner was in a professional occupation (**Figure 12**). Despite the oft-quoted perception that ecology and

environmental management is a career option only for the financially privileged, over 80% of respondents attended a state secondary school, although of course we should not ignore the current challenges for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds when trying to access a profession that is still so heavily degree-entry dominant and reliant on unpaid work experience. Just over 15% of respondents had been in receipt of free school meals.

Fig 12

Occupation Of Main Household Earner

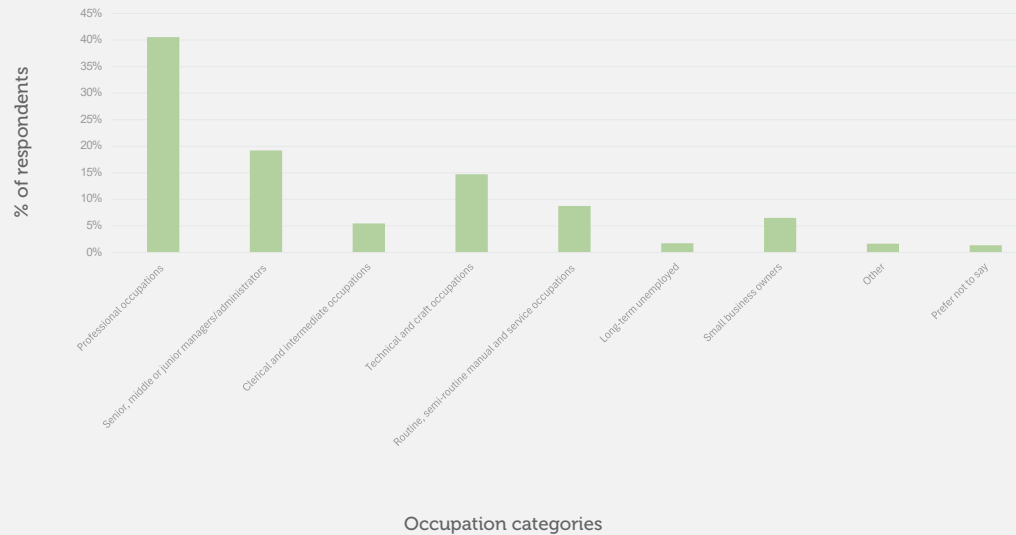
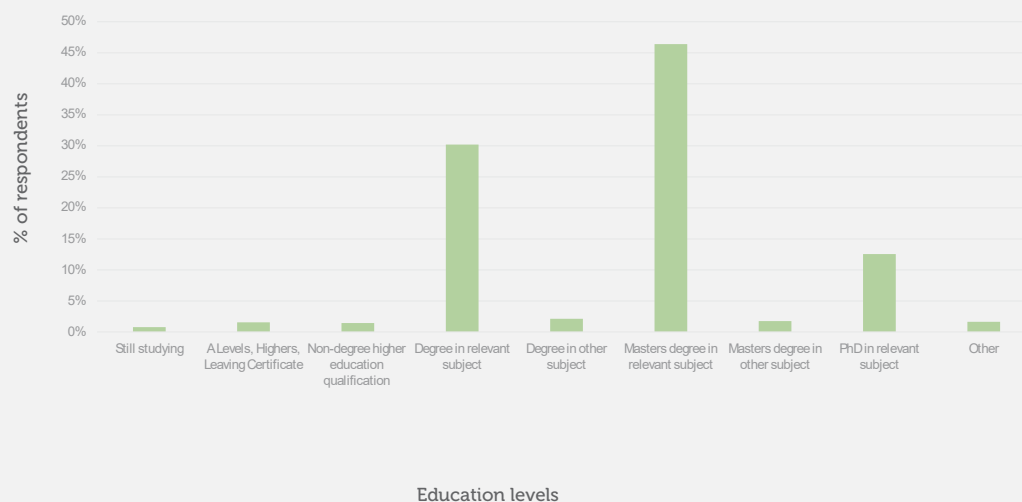


Fig 13

Education Level of Respondents



Over half of respondents did have at least one degree-educated parent, which has been shown to make it more likely that a child will also have the opportunity to attend university. Indeed, as **Figure 13** shows, a Masters-level degree is still the most common highest level of education qualification amongst current practitioners responding to the survey.

So, whilst there are some areas of diversity and inclusivity where the sector appears to perform well, there are others where we clearly still have a long way to go.

This disappointing lack of diversity in key areas emphasises the importance of CIEEM's Green Jobs for

Nature initiative which is specifically targeting young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, young people of colour and those with disabilities to raise awareness amongst them of nature-based career options. Allied to this is our work to improve accessibility to the profession through the creation of more vocational entry routes and qualifications.

But we must also focus on making sure our workplaces and working conditions are inclusive, supportive and flexible to enable those experiencing physical, mental or cognitive challenges to feel confident in asking for help and to work comfortably and effectively without fear of negative reactions from employers or colleagues.

Employment status

The majority of respondents (75.9%) are employed in the profession whilst 15.8% are self-employed and working in an ecology or environmental management role (**Figure 14**). Less than 1% are currently unemployed which is similar to the 2022 figure. The remainder are students, academics or are employed in a different sector having previously been an ecologist or environmental manager.

Whilst the low unemployment rate is encouraging, and perhaps not surprising given the current capacity issues employers are reporting, just under 9% of respondents had had a period of unemployment during the previous 12 months. This mirrors the pattern seen in the 2018 and 2022 surveys and is likely to be indicative of individuals transitioning from full-time education to a paid role.

Perhaps surprisingly almost half of respondents currently work for organisations employing over 100 people. These organisations include statutory nature conservation bodies, local authorities, consultancies and environmental charities. Conversely a third of respondents work for organisations employing fewer than 20 people, including sole traders.

The response to the type of employment shows that full-time employment is by far the most common model (65.1%), but this is much lower than the position in 2022 (74.9%) (**Figure 15**). The proportion of part-time employed staff has risen markedly (16.3% compared with 11.6% in 2022). There has also been a noticeable increase in the number of self-employed respondents completing the survey (almost 6% more than in 2022). Given that these are likely to be experienced practitioners deciding to set up on their own, this change in employment status no doubt contributes to the current difficulties many employers face in recruiting new senior staff.

Fig
14

Current
Employment
Status

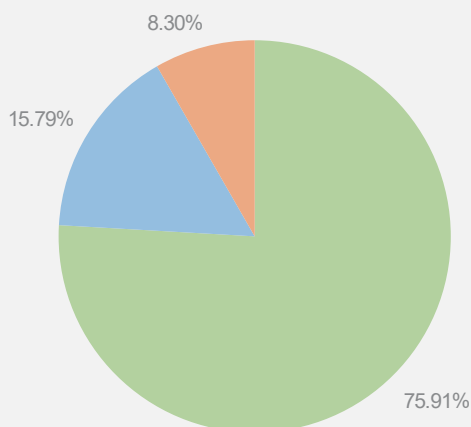
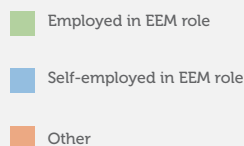
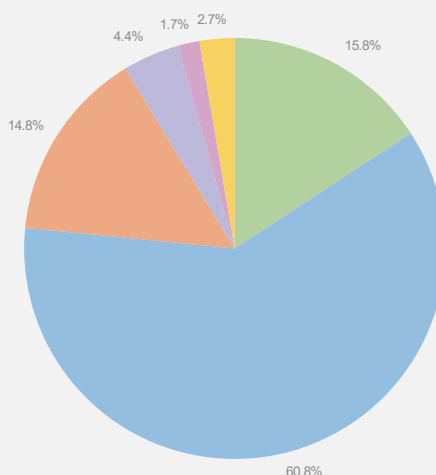


Fig
15

Type of
Employment



There were, however, some gender differences. Only 12.5% of respondents identifying as female were self-employed (up from 7.5% in 2022) compared with 20.4% of those identifying as male (up from 11.9% in 2022). The percentage of full-time and part-time employed workers also showed some differences with 59.3% of female respondents working full-time (down from 69.0% in 2022) and 12.3% part-time (down from 20.3% in 2022) compared with figures of 63.3% (76.0% in 2022) and 6.3% (up from 3.1% in 2022) for males. Perhaps significant is the drop in permanent employment, generally in favour of self-employment. Other respondents were either in full-time or part-time fixed term contracts or on temporary/seasonal contracts. Only 3 respondents were on zero hours contracts, down from 11 in 2022.

The respondents' profile by job level is shown in **Figure 16a**. The overall pattern very much follows that of 2018 and 2022 with a fairly even distribution between the three middle job grades.

There were some notable differences between male and female respondents, with a third more females than males in what we would regard as an 'early career' role (**Figure 16b**). As in previous years, there is a consequent increasing proportion of males in the most senior roles, with a 9.9% difference at Managing Director/Partner/CEO level compared to 5.5% in 2022. Some of this difference may be attributed to the higher number of self-employed respondents who identified as male, as sole traders will often have the job title of Managing Director or Principal.

Fig 16a

Job Level

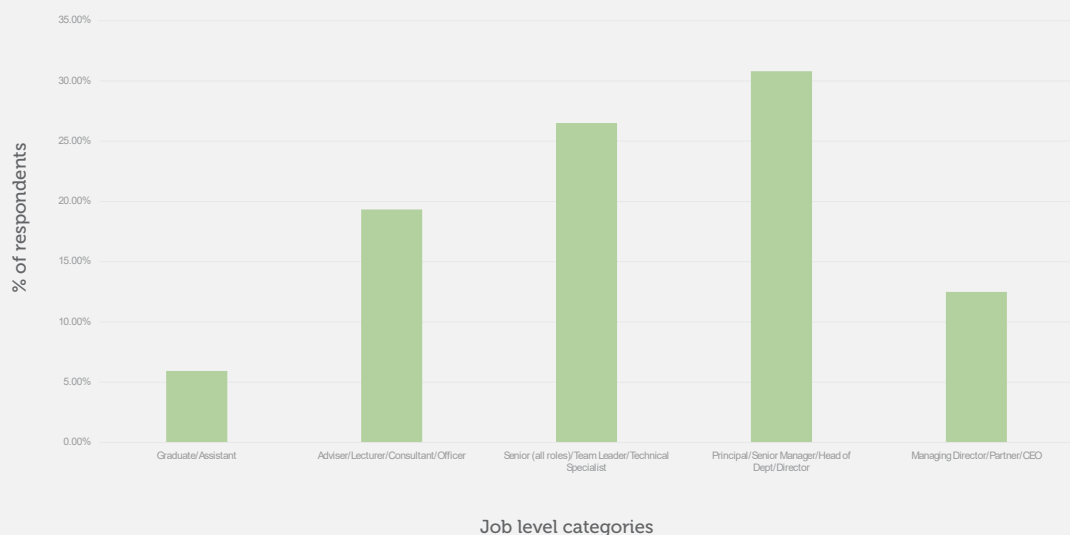
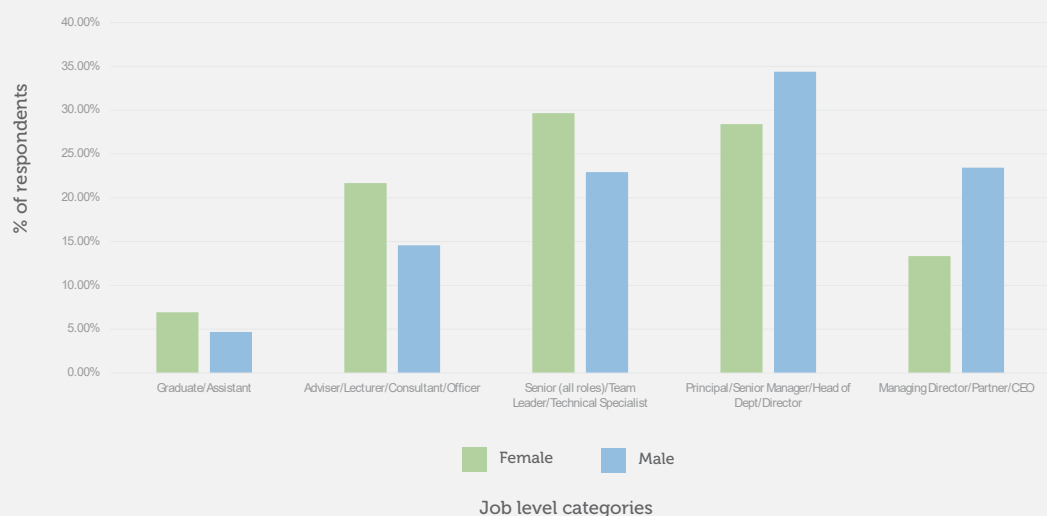


Fig 16b

Job Level By Gender Identity



Working hours

This remains a hard-working sector. Of the 779 respondents employed on a permanent contract, 60.0% regularly work in excess of their contracted hours. The good news is that this is a drop of 5% on the 2022 figure and a drop of 13.2% compared to 2018. **Figure 17** shows the average weekly hours worked by employees in excess of their contracted hours. Unsurprisingly most respondents work more hours during the main ecological survey season between April and October.

Although 23.5% of those working excess hours do not get any additional remuneration or recompense, this is significantly lower than the 37.5% recorded in 2022. Just under 27% get their additional hours remunerated or recompensed in part whilst 49.9% are remunerated or recompensed in full which is a big improvement on the 29.2% figure in the 2022 survey. There is now very little

difference between full-time and part-time employees in terms of the likelihood of getting all or some of the additional hours recompensed in some way. As in the past, many respondents noted that the more senior the role, the higher the expectation that you would not be recompensed for all of your excess hours. However, given the improving picture it is interesting to speculate whether the fact that senior staff are in such demand means that their working conditions are improving as a means of retention.

As in 2018 and 2022, for those that do receive additional remuneration or recompense, the most common form is Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) (**Figure 18**). Many respondents noted, however, that even where the employer's working practices allowed you to claim TOIL for all of your excess hours, there often is not the time to do so, at least in full.

Fig 17

Average Amount of Excess Hours Worked per Week

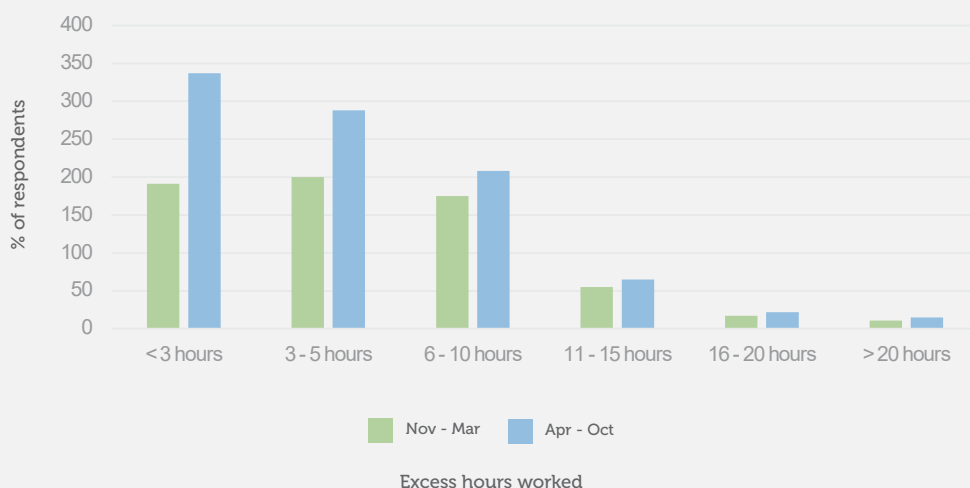
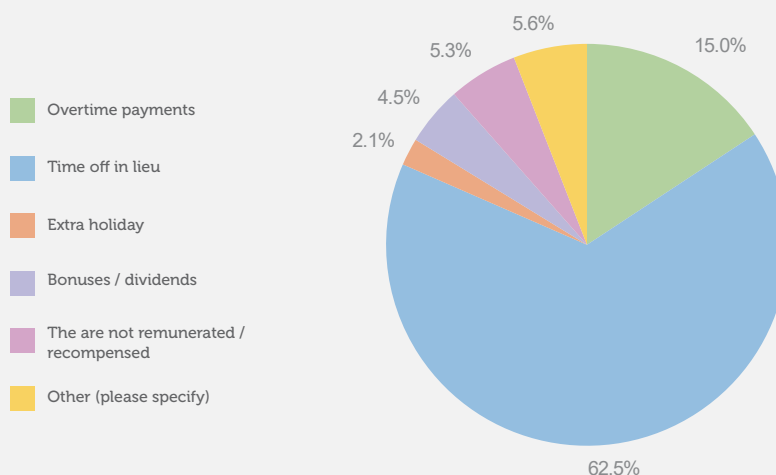


Fig 18

How The Excess Hours Are Remunerated Or Recompensed



Overtime payments were the next most common form of recompense, and in many instances a combination of TOIL and overtime was provided. Some respondents receive a bonus or dividend depending on the company's financial performance, so they view the additional hours as being an investment in the company's success which will hopefully lead to a subsequent financial reward.

Two thirds of part-time employees work between 20 and 30 hours per week. However almost 75% of females work between 20 – 30 hours per week compared to just under 50% of males. Almost a quarter of male respondents work between 31 and 35 hours per week.

The most common average working hours (the mode) for self-employed respondents are 41-50 hours a week (22.9% of self-employed respondents) is higher than the full-time employees most common contracted hours of 35-40 hours a week (which does not take account of the regular additional hours worked by many employed respondents).

Almost 17% of self-employed respondents work more than 50 hours a week on average whilst 27.5% work between 30 and 40 hours. Again, there were some gender differences, possibly associated with care responsibilities, with 27.8% of self-employed females working more than 40 hours/per week on average, compared with 51.3% of males.

Salary and income

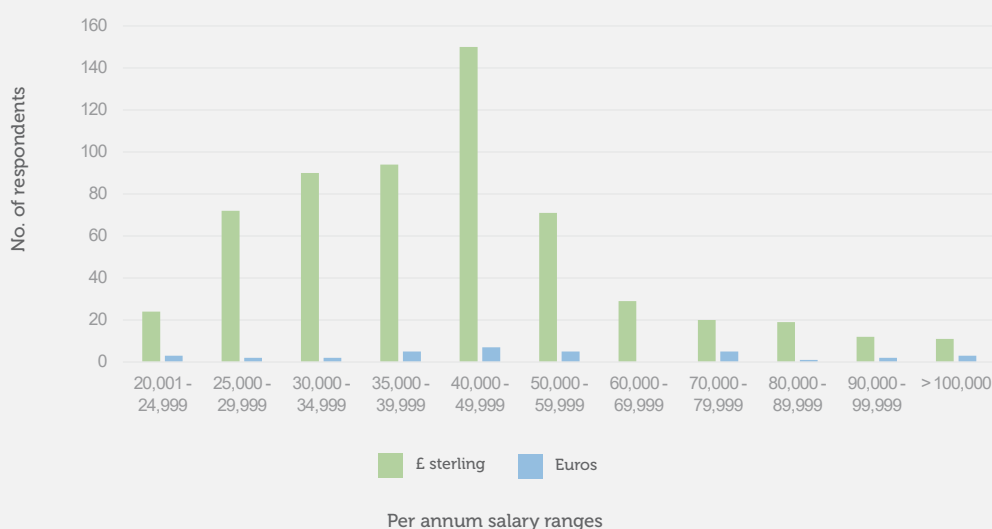
The income profile for those employed full-time in the profession (both members and non-members) is shown in Figure 19a with £40,000 - £49,999 or €40,000 - €49,999 being the most common salary range (**Figure 19a**). When compared with the 2022 data (**Figure 19b** – Euros data not available for comparison), there has been an encouraging and noticeable shift in salaries, especially given that there were fewer full-time employed respondents to the 2025 survey (592 in 2025 and 665 in 2022).

The full-time equivalent salaries for part-time workers show a similar pattern overall although with proportionally fewer respondents in the lower salary bands (**Figure 19c**). This is perhaps to be expected given that the majority of part time workers have previously worked full time and are likely to have made some progress in their careers before choosing to work part time.

Salaries are improving in general with almost 86% of respondents in employment in an unchanged role reporting that their salary has increased over the past 3 years. **Figure 20** shows the scale of change, although it is noticeable that <10% over three years has been the most common increase despite the significant cost of living pressures we have experienced over that period with consumer prices rising by approximately 20%.

Fig
19a

Salary Data
for Full-time
Employees



**Fig
19b**

Comparison
Between 2022
and 2025
Salary Data
for Full Time
Employees



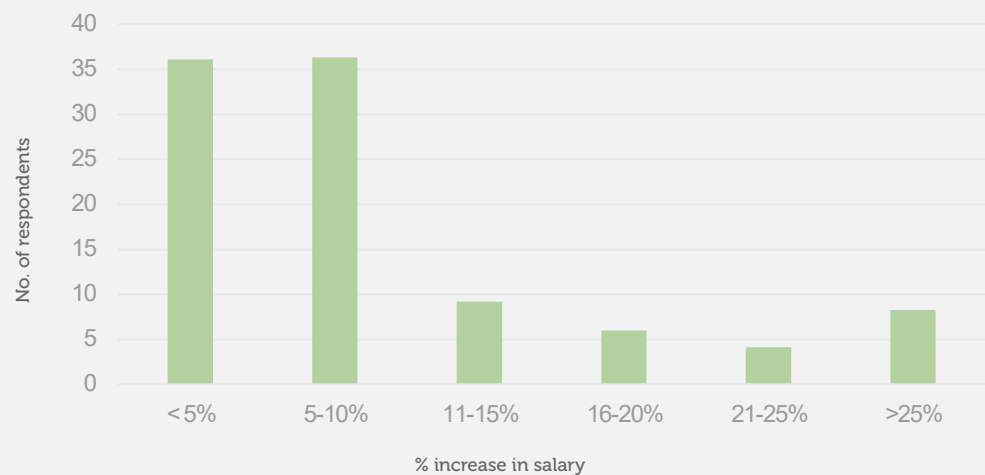
**Fig
19c**

Annual FTE
Salaries of
Part-time
Employees



**Fig
20**

Percentage
Increase In
Salary For
Full-time
Employees
Over The Past
3 Years



The mean annual full time equivalent salary in the UK across all employment sectors (except self-employed) and all job roles/grades is £45,190 (\pm £725¹) which is considerably higher than the 2022 mean of £35,680 (\pm £601). The 2025 figure is below the UK mean full-time salary across for natural and social science professionals of £48,090 (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)² provisional October 2024 figure from the Office of National Statistics) but higher than the ASHE mean annual salary figure for a full-time conservation and environment professional (£40,518). It is well above the ASHE mean annual salary for a planning officer (£35,846) but below the mean salary estimated for architects (£51,122).

The mean annual full-time salary in Ireland across all employment sectors (except self-employed) is €55,572 (\pm €4341) compared to €46,881 (\pm €1049) in 2022. The most recent comparative figures in Ireland are from the 2024 Q4 Earnings and Labour Costs Survey³ published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) which showed an average full-time salary of €50,945 and an average Professional and Technical full-time salary of €62,891.

Disappointingly there is a difference of over £6,000 between the mean annual salary of male respondents in the UK at £49,542 per annum and female respondents at £42,919 per annum. This compares with a gap of just over £8000 in 2022, suggesting the gender pay gap is getting slightly better but is still there. The data possibly reflects the challenges that some women face in reaching more senior positions. Only one of the 11 UK-based respondents earning more than £100,000 per annum was a female. Of those 69 respondents earning over £70,000 per annum, 44 were male and 25 were female.

The picture is a little better in Ireland where male and female respondents earn very similarly - males earning on average €56,810 per annum and females slightly more at €57,206 per annum (no equivalent 2022 data to compare). Yet 3 of the 4 respondents earning more than €100,000 per annum were male and 10 of the 15 respondents earning more than €70,000 per annum were male.

The income profile for full-time self-employed respondents is shown in **Figure 21**, with the 2022 data included for comparison (there was insufficient data for Euros salaries to include). The profile is broadly similar although there are noticeably more self-employed respondents earning at the higher salary ranges than in 2022. As with full-time employed respondents, the most common salary range

is £40,000 - £49,000 per annum. Just over half of self-employed respondents (53.5%) had seen their income increase over the past 3 years, and although the most common increase was between 5 and 10% (reported by 23.3% of respondents), it was noticeable that almost 60.0% had seen increases of more than 15% and almost a fifth of self-employed respondents reported increases of more than 30%.

This may be symptomatic of the ongoing capacity issues being experienced within the sector, with larger consultancies increasingly sub-contracting work to freelancers. This is, of course, also increasing the pressure on freelancers to soak up this work, no doubt exacerbated by the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in England during 2024.

1. Standard Error of the Mean
2. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2024>
3. <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/earnings/earningsandlabourcosts/>

**Fig
21**

Annual salary
of self-
employed
respondents



A comparison of male self-employed respondents and female self-employed respondents showed that males in the UK earned just over £14,000 FTE more on average compared to females (males = £58,4477 per annum, females = £44,152 per annum). This difference may relate, at least in part, to earning opportunity with 51.0% of male full-time self-employed respondents working more than 40 hours per week compared to 28.0% of females. However, the size of the difference suggests that there may be other factors, such as rates charged, at play here.

A comparison by country for Full members only (so not including Chartered members) is shown in Table 1. England has just overtaken Scotland in appearing to have the highest salaries in the UK although the strong 'market leader' is Ireland with an average mean salary/income over £18,724 or €21,907 higher than respondents in England at 22nd April 2025 exchange rates. This is not surprising given that the cost of living in Ireland is estimated as being 10-20% higher than in the UK⁴. The highest percentage increases overall were for those working in Wales. There was insufficient data from Northern Ireland to make a useful comparison. The salaries for respondents from outside of the UK and Ireland showed a very wide spread.

Table 1: Mean annual full-time salaries/income (\pm standard error of the mean) for Full members by country

	England (£)	Ireland (€)	Northern Ireland (£)	Scotland (£)	Wales (£)	Other (£)
Employed	52,065 ± 1225	82,000 ± 6450 (equivalent to £70,520 ± 7289)	41,250 ± 2652	51,563 ± 2947	51,177 ± 2260	64,500 ± 12293
% change since 2022	25.9	19.62	-2.9	13.7	35.7	7.9
Self-employed	52,172 ± 2666	(insufficient data)	(insufficient data)	48,333 ± 6227	50,000 ± 8615	(insufficient data)
% change since 2022	-3.9	-	-	20.5	44.7	-

4. https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/compare_countries_result.jsp?country1=United+Kingdom&country2=Ireland

For self-employed Full members the pattern is a little different. Self-employed income in England is still higher than elsewhere in the UK but has shown an overall percentage drop. Self-employed Full members in Wales are currently earning slightly more per annum than those in Scotland.

Table 2 shows the mean annual full-time salary/income for members by CIEEM grade. It is evident that, with the exception of Fellows, there has been substantial

salary/income increases since 2022. Pleasingly early career entrants (Qualifying members) show the highest percentage increase.

Full-time Chartered members have a higher mean salary when compared with Full members, as would be expected for a group who have been able to evidence additional competence and who are likely to be in more senior roles.

Table 2: Mean annual full-time salaries/income (£ ± standard error of the mean) by membership grade

	Qualifying	Associate	Full	Chartered Full	Fellow
Mean annual full-time salary ⁵	30,489 ±1913	37,120 ±711	52,274 ±1834	63,371 ±2768	66,333 ±5969
Comparison with 2022	25,595	31,974	44,086	54,646	66,042
% change	19.1	16.1	18.6	16.0	0.4

If we compare by membership grade and country (Table 3) we can see these trends further evidenced (being careful of results with low response rates). Members in Wales are earning, on average, more than those in Scotland and England other than for Full members where there is little

difference. Interestingly the significantly higher income for Full members in Ireland is not so evident at the Qualifying and Associate grade levels.

Table 3: Mean annual full-time salaries/income (£ ± standard error of the mean) by membership grade and country.

	Qualifying	Associate	Full	Chartered Full
England (£)	30,333 ±568	37,835 ±775	52,065 ±1246	63,289 ±2836
Ireland (€)	37,778 ±3541	45,000 ±0	82,000 ±7418	68,000 ±30,794
Northern Ireland (£)	27,500** ±3536	41,250**±2652	50,000**±3536	-
Scotland (£)	30,000** ±1768	36,000 ±2191	51,563 ±2947	63,333 ±6667
Wales (£)	31,250 ±1169	44,000 ±2881	51,177 ±2492	68,333**±11863
Other (£)	25,167 ±0	-	64,500** ±0	76,667**±15336

** - low number of respondents (<5)

5. With standard error of the mean shown

If we look at the English regions in more detail, there are some interesting patterns (Table 4). In 2022 members in the North West were amongst the highest earners at every membership grade whilst members in Yorkshire and Humberside were amongst the lowest earners. Members in Yorkshire and Humberside are still the lowest earners and there is a clear difference for senior roles between the

regions in the north of England and those in the Midlands and South. In general salaries for more senior roles are highest in the South West and South East although there are some anomalies (e.g. Chartered members in the West Midlands having the highest mean salaries overall (discounting categories with low numbers of respondents such as chartered members in the North East)).

Table 4: Mean annual full-time salaries/income (£ \pm standard error of the mean) by membership grade and English region.

	Qualifying	Associate	Full	Chartered Full
North West	29,642 \pm 1377	36,667 \pm 2116	49,583 \pm 3335	50,625* \pm 5182
North East	32,500* \pm 0	35,833* \pm 1361	49,583 \pm 4184	88,333* \pm 5443
Yorkshire and Humberside	29,722 \pm 1386	35,781 \pm 1845	47,955 \pm 3605	53,250 \pm 3280
East of England	29,643 \pm 930	33,000 \pm 2228	47,941 \pm 3245	53,269 \pm 13892
East Midlands	29,500 \pm 1095	37,500 \pm 2202	52,292 \pm 4274	65,000* \pm 7071
West Midlands	28,864 \pm 935	38,235 \pm 2864	50,769 \pm 3616	77,500 \pm 3753
South West	29,722 \pm 1977	37,763 \pm 1567	53,041 \pm 2836	60,385 \pm 5512
South East	31,823 \pm 1322	39,167 \pm 1618	56,033 \pm 2475	72,500 \pm 7379

*= low number of respondents (<5)

Another way to look at the data is by employment sector.

Table 5 illustrates full-time employed Full members (including Chartered) by employment sector.

Table 5: Mean annual full-time Full Member salaries (£ \pm standard error of the mean) by employment sector

	Local / Central Government	SNCBs	Private Sector	Voluntary / Non-profit Sector	Academia	Industry	Self-employed
Full member salary 2025	48,269 \pm 1979	47,125 \pm 2647	53,816 \pm 1640	45,227 \pm 4618	40,000 \pm 2041*	55,833 \pm 12038	51,058 \pm 2408
Full member salary 2022	39,028	39,286	46,780	34,861	45,833	51,667	44,866
% change	23.7	19.95	15.0	29.8	-12.7	8.1	13.8

*= low number of respondents (<5)

Industry, private sector and self-employed salaries appear to be the highest-paying sectors. Voluntary/non-profit sector salaries are again the lowest within the profession, although with the highest percentage increase of all sectors when compared with 2022. It is noticeable that generally salaries have gone up considerably, albeit in a period of high cost of living increases so in real terms it may not feel like such a sizeable increase. The next highest percentage increase is in the public sector.

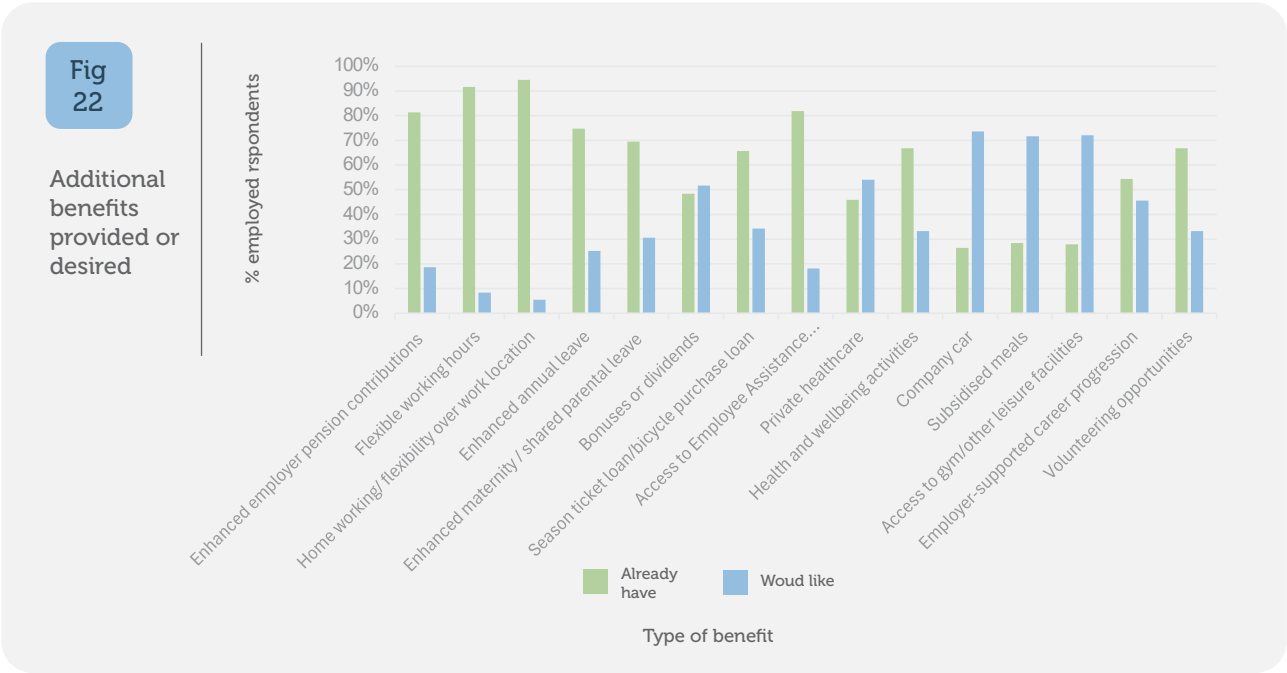
A further approach to analysis is to look at the salary/ income data by job level/responsibility as shown in Table 6. All categories showed at least some level of increase over 2022 figures but again the highest percentage increase is at the Managing Director/CEO/Partner level. Interestingly, despite the reported difficulties of recruiting senior staff, the mean percentage increase in salaries for the senior grades is lower than that for the early career grades. One of the most notable figures is the very significant gap between a ‘Senior’ or Technical Specialist role and that of a Programme Leader/Principal/Director role.

Table 6: Mean annual salary/income (£ ± standard error of the mean) by job level/responsibility

	Graduate / Assistant	Adviser / Lecturer / Consultant	Senior Adviser / Senior Lecturer / Senior Consultant / Technical Specialist	Principal Consultant / Director / Senior Specialist / Programme Leader	Managing Director / Partner / CEO
2025	27,206 ±622	33,818 ±968	41,488 ±750	57,191 ±1201	70,245 ±3462
2022	23,510	28,989	38,232	55,118	60,000
% change	15.7	14.3	8.5	3.4	17.1

Additional employee benefits are an appropriate and useful way to augment salaries and can often be crucially important in a febrile jobs market where competition for recruitment and retention is fierce. **Figure 22** shows some of the most commonly provided employer benefits and those additional benefits that respondents across all sectors would most like to have (NB: clearly those that are already regularly provided are going to score less well on the ‘most like to have’). An enhanced

(above statutory minimum) pension scheme, flexible working (both hours and location), access to an employee assistance programme are the most commonly provided benefits followed by enhanced annual leave and parental leave entitlement (above the statutory minimum), health and wellbeing activities, and volunteering opportunities. This is a little different from 2022 where opportunities to volunteer and access to health and wellbeing activities were less commonly provided.



Of those that are less commonly provided, a company car, subsidised meals and access to gym/leisure facilities were amongst the most popular along with bonuses or dividends, private healthcare and more career progression opportunities.

As in 2022, the main benefits of being self-employed were described as the flexibility of working hours and the

independence/choice over what to do and when to do it (Figure 23a). The ability to work exclusively from home and improved income levels were also seen as positive benefits. However, there are also disadvantages, with more pressure/stress being the most prevalent along with professional isolation, followed by income insecurity (Figure 23b). Interestingly, in 2022 income insecurity was the most frequently cited disadvantage.

Fig 23a

Benefits of being self-employed

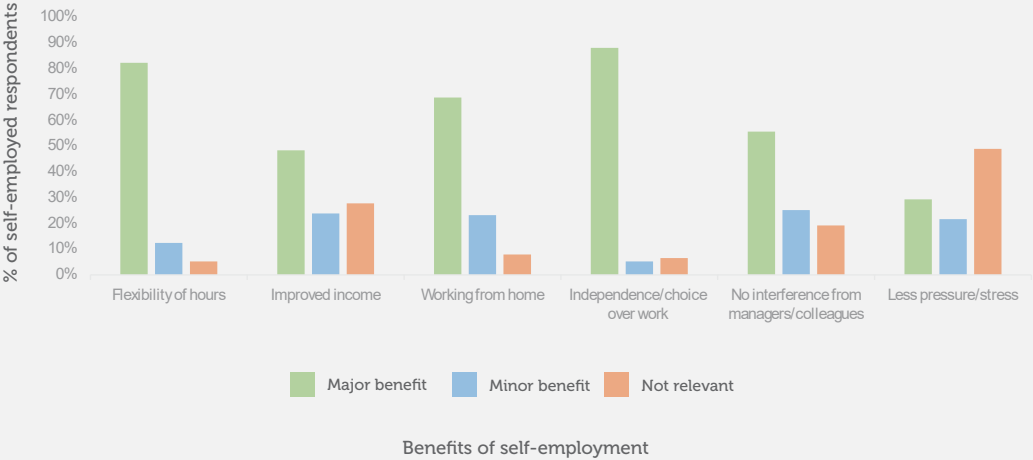


Fig 23b

Main disadvantages of being self-employed



Employment trends

Unemployment in the sector remains low overall (n=12), although the survey may not have reached many of those who are looking for work. Of those respondents who are looking for paid permanent employment, half (n=6) had been looking for more than 2 years and were generally 'getting by' as sub-contractors, trying to build up their experience and contacts.

Over half of employed respondents had seen an increase in the size of their team/organisation over the past 18 months, while a fifth had seen a decrease. This was corroborated by employers although slightly fewer (17.3%) had seen a decrease. It continues the trend from 2022 when similar figures were reported. This suggests a growing profession with good opportunities for recruitment and career progression. However, 63.0% of employers who have been recruiting reported difficulties in recruiting suitable candidates at the senior levels and 37.0% reported problems in recruiting more junior roles (see **Figure 24**). This is a slight change from 2022 when the relevant figures were 68.0% and 31.0% respectively.

Respondents noted that it is extremely difficult to find qualified senior and principal-level ecologists. There are very few applicants for these positions and those that do apply often do not meet the experience requirements. Some organisations reported having unfilled vacancies for several years now and there is a notable skills gap between senior staff and junior staff that needs to be addressed.

It remains relatively easy to recruit inexperienced graduates, but they often lack basic knowledge and even

rudimentary field skills. Employers report that botanical expertise, licensed bat workers and aquatic ecology specialists are particularly prized, whilst the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in England is exacerbating the demand.

Smaller companies and NGOs reported struggling to compete with the higher salaries offered by large consultancies, especially at senior staff level, whilst public sector organisations found matching staff benefits more challenging. There were also comments that there are a number of potential employees who have previously worked on HS2 who are now available for other work but have unrealistic salary expectations. Employers also noted the migration of experienced ecologists into self-employed or freelance roles or choosing to remain employed but on reduced hours.

Retention of staff can be just as important and challenging as recruitment, as **Figure 25** shows. With moves to different employers seemingly easy to come by, employers are coming under pressure to promote staff to more senior levels before they are really ready to do so. Not only does this create pressure on salary budgets, it also potentially exposes those staff and the employer to risk with staff working beyond their competence.

Several employers reported many instances of larger organisations 'poaching' staff as they were able to offer higher salaries, although it was also noted that the rising cost of living experienced in recent years had driven employees to seek higher salaries. Career progression was also seen as a motivator for changing employers. For the first time there were numerous reports of recruitment agencies encouraging more frequent job changes.

**Fig
24**

Challenges Of
Recruitment
Over The Past
18 Months

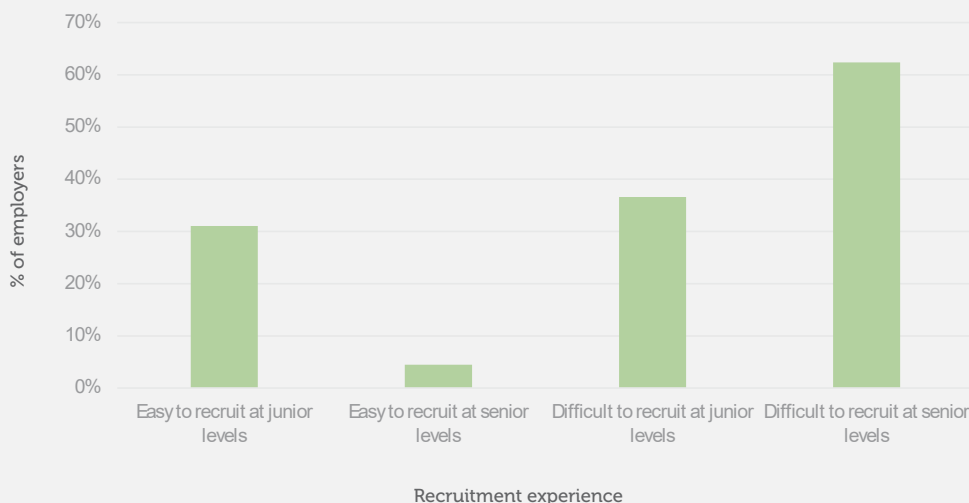
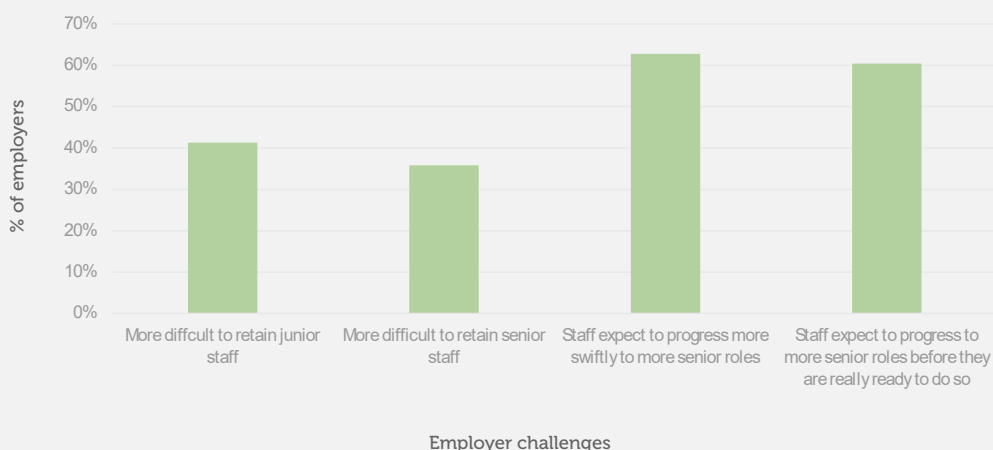


Fig 25

Challenges For Employers



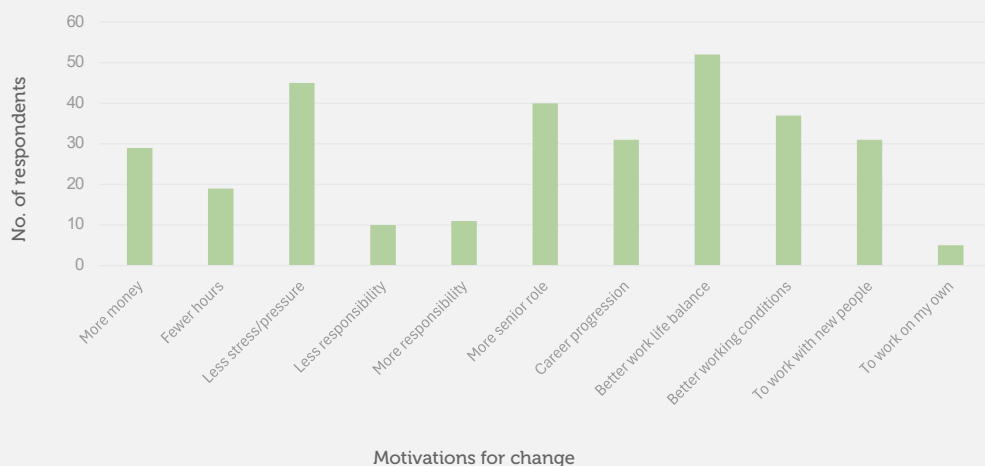
For employees, exactly a third (33.3%) had changed employers/employment status within the past 3 years (down from 39.1% in 2022). Just over a third of movers had joined a different employment sector (33.7%) while over a quarter moved within the private sector.

For those that changed from one employment sector to another there was a noticeable trend away from the private sector into the local authority sectors, voluntary/non-profit sector and civil service. Conversely those moving from the voluntary/non-profit sector, academia or the civil service generally moved into the private sector. These changes are probably driven by factors such as recruitment into local authorities and eNGOs in England in response to challenges and opportunities afforded by mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, and funding cuts in academia.

Figure 26 shows the main motivations for changing employer for those respondents that had done so. Improving work/life balance and relieving pressure/stress were clearly very important, followed by a more senior role and better working conditions, including more flexible working and better accommodation of disabilities. All of these were more important than a higher income. From the additional comments provided, there was a noticeable cohort of academic practitioners who had, as a result of changes in academia, moved into consultancy or NGO roles.

Fig 26

Motivations For Changing Employer



For those that had changed employer, 43.3% were in a more senior role (50.1% in 2022), 57.3% had a higher salary (72.2% in 2022) and 56.3% had better working hours (44.7% in 2022) as a result of the change. However, just over a third had a lower salary (35% compared to 18.5% in 2022) and almost a quarter (24.3%) had longer hours (22.1% in 2022). Clearly a better quality of life is often a strong motivator for change and encouragingly almost three quarters of respondents who had changed jobs reported more job satisfaction than in their previous role with 16.7% reporting no change. Just over half of movers reported lower stress levels in their new role (39.0% in 2022) although just under a quarter reported higher stress levels (compared with 37.2% in 2022).

There were noticeable differences between ecology and environmental management sectors regarding the proportion of respondents that had changed employer or employment sector. Academia and central government have seen the most change with 45% of respondents changing employer or moving into another sector

(primarily the latter). A fifth of local authority and NGO employees have changed employers over the past three years whilst the private sector is, surprisingly given the feedback from employers above, the most stable with only 8.9% of respondents having moved.

Career progression

It was encouraging to see that 70% of respondents were looking to progress their career in the next 5 years. The figure was much higher for early career grades with 88.7% of respondents in graduate roles and 85.8% of those at the next career stage looking to progress their careers.

Interestingly progressing to a more senior role or having more responsibility were not the most significant drivers which might explain some of the difficulties reported in recruiting senior staff (**Figure 27**).

Indeed, the strongest driver for career progression by far was the desire to have a greater impact in nature's recovery. Of course, a higher salary for doing such work

Fig 27

Main Drivers of Career Progression

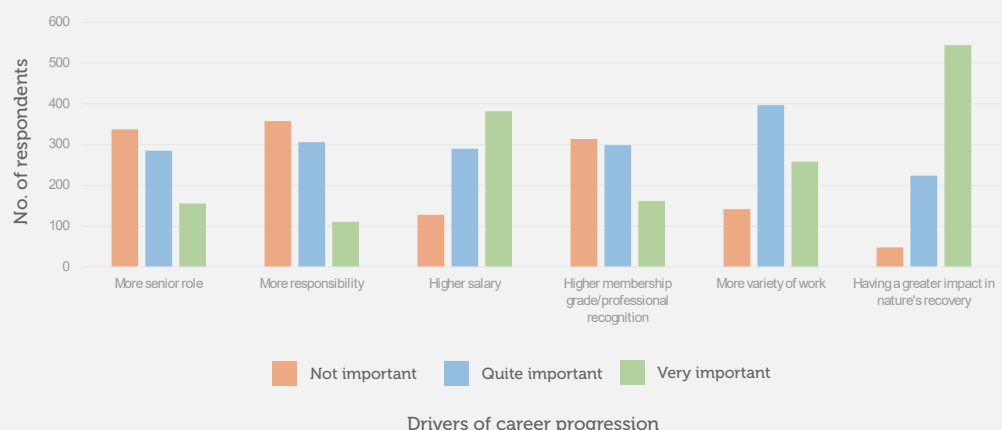
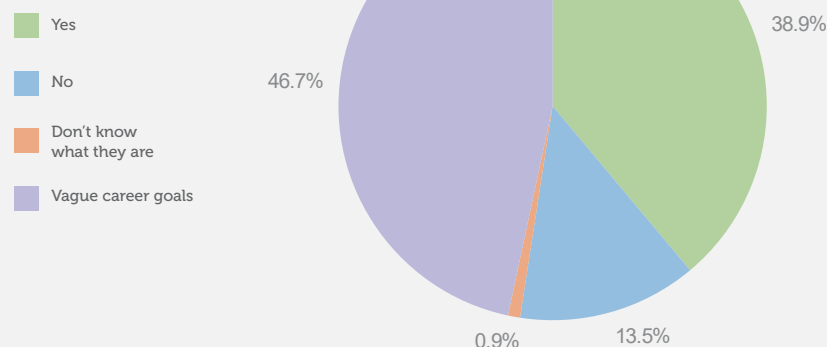


Fig 28

Planning Career Progression



was also a significant driver, along with opportunities for a more varied workload.

Again, there were differences between career grades with early career respondents prioritising higher salaries jointly with having a greater impact on nature recovery.

Over 85% of those looking to progress their career had set career goals although in over half of these respondents the career goals were somewhat vague (**Figure 28**).

Contrary to the responses to the question about career progression drivers (**Figure 27**), the most common personal career goals are to move to a more senior role and to earn a higher salary (**Figure 29**). Progressing their professional membership journey through towards chartership was also highlighted.

To support their career progression, respondents stated that they would most benefit from more technical skills training and management skills training. Opportunities to

progress to more senior roles with current employers were valued, along with greater access to knowledge sharing via conferences and webinars. Networking opportunities were felt to be the least useful.

Cost, time and availability of relevant training and conferences were considered significant barriers to attendance. In fact, time pressures were a consistent barrier across all types of career development covered by the survey, including mentoring, work shadowing, collaborating in research and networking.

For those respondents that are chartered, demonstrating competence and furthering their career had been the main motivator in applying (**Figure 30**). Other comments made in addition to those shown included attracting a higher salary, helping to raise standards in the profession and wanting to show the profession is on an equal footing with engineers, architects, etc.

Fig 29

Setting Personal Career Goals

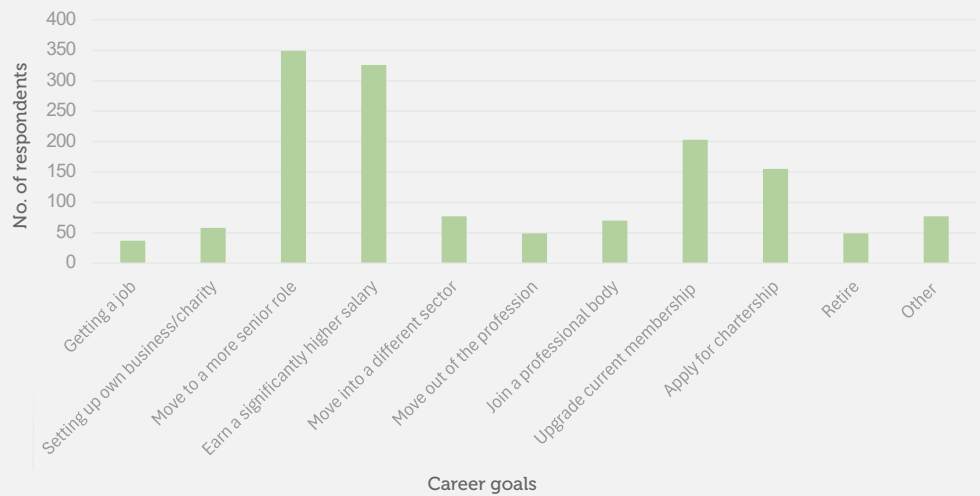
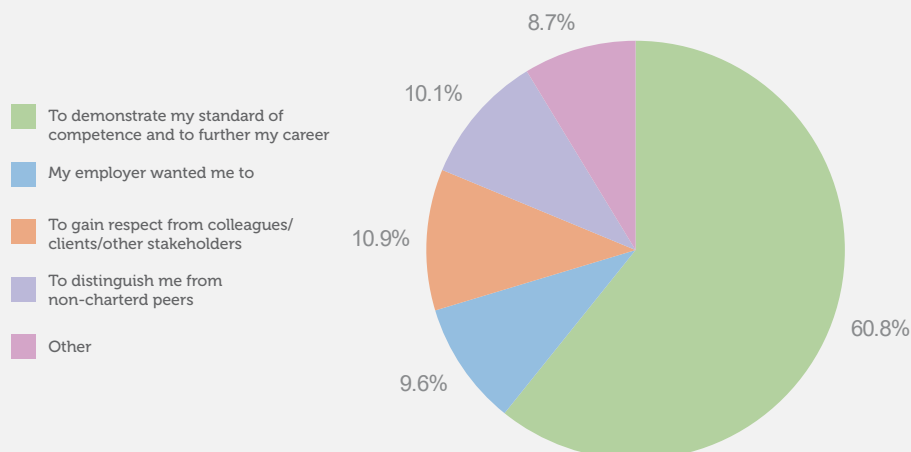


Fig 30

Motivations For Chartership



Almost 95% of respondents felt that their motivation(s) had been met either fully (65.9%) or in part (28.8%) since becoming chartered. Some respondents commented that they felt being chartered had led to more job offers/ opportunities and that it was important to junior staff to see their managers as chartered members. There was also a perception that it had boosted self-confidence.

The majority of chartered respondents (72.1%) felt that chartership was improving the status of the profession, benefiting their own recognition from colleagues working in other roles and would help to improve their seniority over time.

Emerging areas of practice

The survey asked respondents to comment on the extent to which emerging areas of ecological and environmental practice are on their radar. As **Figure 31** shows, biodiversity gain, collaborative working/stakeholder

engagement and habitat restoration were the most prevalent areas with green finance and natural capital assessment being the least common.

In terms of areas that respondents expect to be involved in over the coming years, the data was much more evenly spread. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning and remotely sensed data were the most common, together with climate change adaptation, ecosystem services assessment work and the expanding use of DNA techniques.

Very interestingly, over 50% of respondents would like more opportunity to be involved in rewilding activity, and over a third in species translocations or reintroductions – a very positive commitment to nature recovery but also indicative that these areas do not feature enough at present. Opportunities to be involved in planning strategic nature recovery at a local, regional or national scale was the next most desired new area of work.

Fig 31

Emerging Areas of Practice

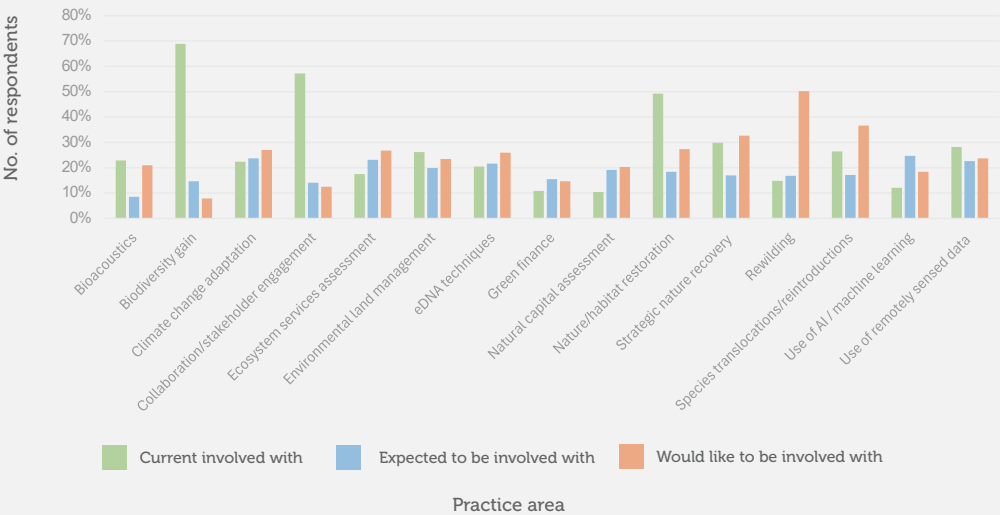
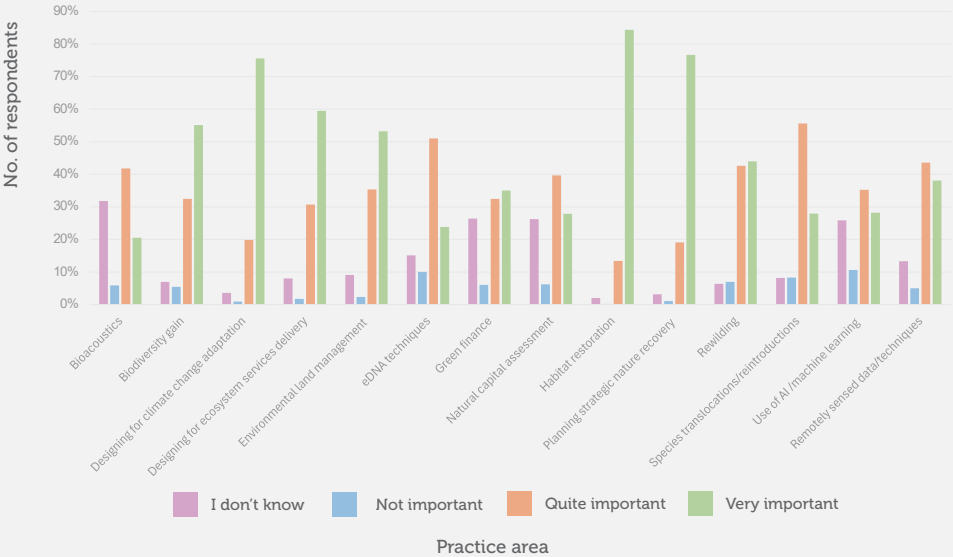


Fig 32

Importance to Nature Recovery and Climate Change Mitigation



Linking professional practice to taking forward nature recovery and mitigating climate change is crucial if we are to play our part in tackling these twin environmental crises. As **Figure 32** shows, effective habitat restoration and planning strategically for nature recovery at local, regional and national scales are felt to be key areas to prioritise, together with designing habitats with climate change adaptation and ecosystem services delivery in mind.

Nearly 90% of respondents answering this question felt that biodiversity gain schemes (such as Biodiversity Net Gain) are important to nature recovery and climate change mitigation (**Figure 32**), but comments indicate frustration with how mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in England for small sites is being implemented. When we look at the level of confidence in individual competence in the areas that respondents felt would be important the results are concerning.

Whilst confidence in habitat restoration competence was reasonably good overall (over 70% very or quite confident) this does not seem to be related to designing habitat restoration with climate change adaptation or ecosystem services delivery in mind (see **Figure 33**), especially as confidence in ecosystem service assessment is low. Where practitioners do feel much more confident is in the process of delivering biodiversity gain. However, a key part of implementation is habitat creation and restoration, so it is important that this is done with climate change mitigation and ecosystem services delivery in mind.

Other areas where respondents did not feel particularly confident, but which are likely to become increasingly important included green finance, natural capital assessment and the use of artificial intelligence, machine learning and remote survey techniques.

It is very important that CIEEM acts on this feedback and provides learning opportunities for practitioners to develop

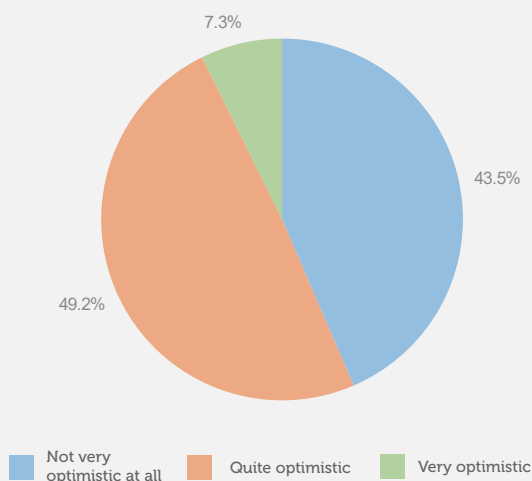
Fig 33

Level Of Confidence In Competence To Practice In These Areas



Fig 34

Level Of Optimism That Work Contributes To Tackling Biodiversity Loss And Climate Change



their competence in all these areas. The imperatives of climate change adaptation and nature recovery are such that we need a skilled and confident workforce able to provide the best advice, make the right decisions and take the most effective actions to tackle these crises.

Encouragingly, respondents were optimistic that the work that they do positively contributes to efforts to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change (see **Figure 34**), although significantly less than half of respondents were very optimistic that this is the case.

The principle reasons given for a lack of high levels of optimism were repeated government rhetoric about the environment (NB: this survey was conducted after the publication of the working paper on development and environmental policy in England but before the publication of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill), the prioritisation of the economy over the environment and concerns about weakening of environmental protections. More generally from respondents across the UK and Ireland there was

frustration at the short-term nature of political thinking and decision-making versus the longer-term environmental needs. Lack of enforcement was another factor. There was also a strong sense of the work of the current size of the sector being 'a drop in the ocean' compared to the scale of the need. Despite this concern, there were some expressions of hope, with faith in the potential for positive change if given the right political support.

In response to a question regarding the extent to which the need to reduce carbon loss and mitigate climate change influences practitioners work, less than half considered it a key driver or consideration in most or all of their work (**Figure 35a**). Although numerous examples were given with regards to personal actions to reduce individual carbon footprints, there was limited evidence of this being an integral part of the advice or recommendations given to clients by those working in the private sector and the amount of work-related travel was especially highlighted as a source of concern. It is more commonly part of working practice in the NGO and public sectors.

Fig 35a

The Extent To Which The Need To Mitigate Climate Change Influences Working Practices

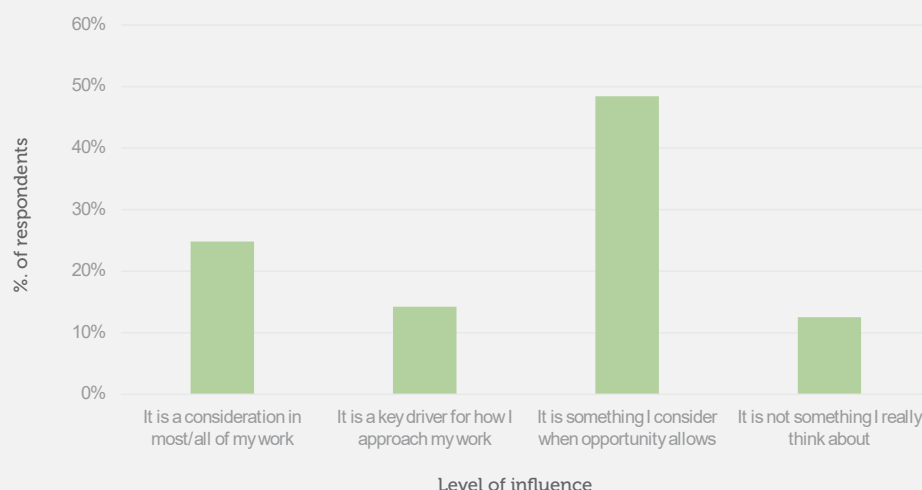
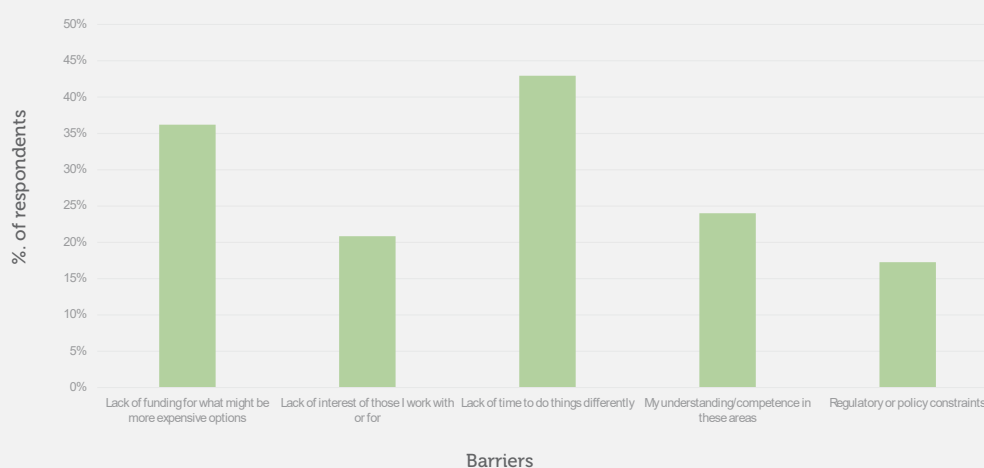


Fig 35b

Barriers To Climate Change Adaptive Practice



For those respondents for whom mitigating climate change is not a significant influence on their professional practice, the main barriers to doing so were the lack of time to do things differently and the lack of funding for what might, in the short term at least, be seen as more expensive options (**Figure 35b**).

The fact that almost a quarter of respondents (24%) cited a lack of understanding and competence in this area is also a concern and is one that CIEEM must help to address.

Professional satisfaction and esteem

In the final section of the survey, we looked at how happy respondents are in their chosen profession and the extent to which they feel valued. As **Figure 36** shows, just over a quarter (25.3%) are very happy and a further 55.6% are generally happy. When compared with 2022 the total of respondents who are either very happy or generally happy is broadly similar (80.9% in 2025 compared to 79.7% in 2022). However, the proportion of respondents who stated that they are very happy has gone up significantly (25.3% in 2025 compared to 17.3% in 2022) and signals a return to 2018 levels. This is good news.

The level of unhappiness was consistent with that reported in 2022, with approximately 10% of respondents feeling generally unhappy or very unhappy. Worryingly the percentage of early career respondents who were

generally unhappy or very unhappy is slightly higher at 13.79%, whilst just under 20% are very happy – a fifth lower than the average across the whole sector.

There was some noticeable variation in levels of job satisfaction amongst employment sectors. Those working in industry were both the 'happiest' (51.9%) and the most likely to be very unhappy (7.4%). Those respondents working in the private sector/consultancy, those working for local authorities and those working for SNCBs were least likely to be very happy. Academia stood out as having the highest proportion of respondents who were generally unhappy (17.4%).

There was little variation in the level of happiness or unhappiness between countries of the UK and Ireland. Respondents from Scotland were slightly happier (28.6% reported being very happy) whilst those from England were least likely to say they were very happy (24.5%).

As **Figure 37** shows, when asked to rank the good things about working in the ecology and environmental management sector in 2025, the reward of feeling that you are doing something worthwhile and making a positive difference to the environment came top (it was 2nd in 2022) together with the interesting and challenging work involved (top in 2022). Working with like-minded people and the variety of work were also popular.

**Fig
36**

Levels of
Happiness
With Chosen
Profession

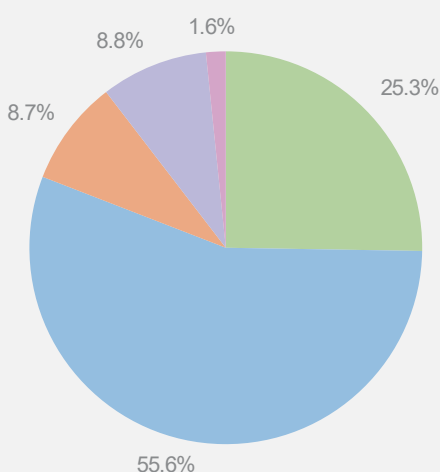
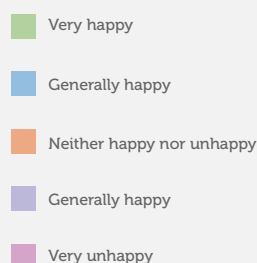


Fig
37

Benefits Of Working In The Sector



Disappointingly, respect from peers/others, or rather the lack of it, was considered the least positive aspect of working in the sector, behind both career opportunities and pay, which also did not score well.

In terms of the negatives of working in the sector, as **Figure 38** shows, it is the lack of support for the environment from government and policy makers that is the most dispiriting factor. Rates of pay, weak environmental legislation and feeling as though you are not having a positive impact on the environment were also significant disbenefits.

Fig
38

Negatives Of Working In The Sector

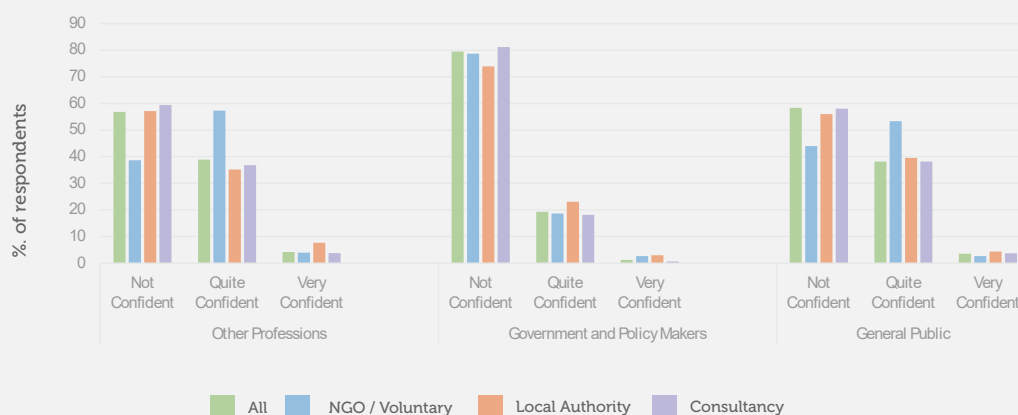


Concerns over how their profession and their role is perceived were reinforced by another series of questions that asked the level of confidence respondents had in the extent to which their work is valued by other professions they engage with, by Government and policymakers and by the general public.

Figure 39 starkly shows how undervalued the profession feels, not just by governments but also by other professions with which we regularly engage and even the general public.

Fig
39

Level of
Respondents'
Confidence
That Their
Work Is
Valued By
Others



Data is presented for all respondents (including those working in academia, industry and for statutory nature conservation bodies) and then separately for respondents from NGOs/the voluntary sector, local authorities and for those working in the private sector.

Many of the respondents felt that their work is viewed as a 'tick box exercise' or 'a problem to be dealt with as easily and cheaply as possible' by other professions. They feel that they do not receive the same respect or status as other professions, with several examples of being mocked. It was frequently noted that recent media representation and potential policy changes had exacerbated this perception. There was a sense that, in terms of development, the ecology consultants are often blamed for issues and problems that arise and yet were frequently left out of the early design stages of a project where they could have influenced the development design and avoided some of the costs of dealing with impacts on ecological features or the resultant delays.

Although the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain in England came in for a lot of criticism and was often cited as a source of stress, many respondents also acknowledged that it had meant ecology was being considered earlier in the design process and some certainly felt that they were being treated with more respect as a result.

This lack of understanding and respect was a constant theme in the survey responses. In terms of how respondents feel they are perceived by governments and policy makers, there was a strong feeling that the profession is being used as a scapegoat by governments (and particularly in England with the rhetoric at the time of the survey about wildlife protections being 'blockers' to development). There is a strong sentiment that

the government does not value ecological work, with respondents noting policy rollbacks and public statements that undermine the profession's credibility and importance.

Respondents believe policymakers demonstrate poor understanding of ecological considerations and the profession's role, leading to ineffective policies and unrealistic expectations. There were consistent mentions of inadequate funding and resources for ecological work, especially in statutory agencies and local authorities, undermining their ability to fulfil obligations effectively.

With regards to public perceptions, respondents report highly variable public attitudes toward ecology and ecologists and environmental managers, ranging from strong support to active hostility, often depending on whether ecological considerations affect individuals personally (particularly in development situations). Several comments highlight negative media representation of ecologists, particularly stories focusing on expensive mitigation measures (like the "£100m bat shed" for HS2) that undermine public perception.

Many respondents believe the general public has limited understanding of what ecologists actually do, with some noting that people are surprised ecology is a paid profession rather than voluntary work. Some responses suggest younger, more educated, and urban populations tend to value ecological work more highly than other demographic groups, creating a societal divide in attitudes.

Similarly, many respondents expressed concern that the public has become increasingly disconnected from nature, making it difficult for people to understand the importance of ecological work and biodiversity protection. There was a strong sentiment that the public values nature

and environmental protection in principle but not when it requires personal sacrifice, costs or delays to development that they support. As one respondent said, “people value ecological work as long as it doesn’t result in them having to change how they live their life.”

Perhaps most surprising is that those respondents working for environmental charities feel just as undervalued by governments and policy makers as those working in local authorities and the private sector. Overall, the proportion of respondents who felt very confident that their work is valued by anybody was shockingly low (<5%).

There were some differences by country. In general, respondents from Wales and Ireland were least confident that their work was valued by other professions, whilst respondents from Scotland were most confident. In terms of being valued by governments and policy makers, respondents from England were very significantly less confident than respondents elsewhere, with 82.8% not being very confident at all. Respondents from Ireland had

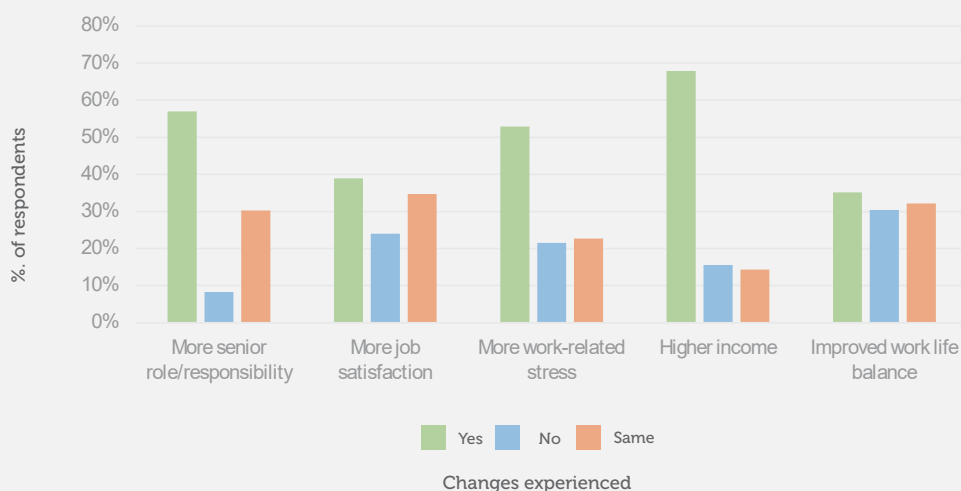
the most confidence in their reputation with government and policy makers. Respondents from Wales were the least confident that their work was valued by the general public, whilst respondents from Ireland were the most positive in this regard.

The implications for the collective morale of the profession, the esteem of individual practitioners and the attractiveness of a career in ecology and environmental management to aspiring and early career entrants should not be underestimated.

In terms of changes over the past 3 years, respondents have reported higher incomes, better job satisfaction and more senior roles and responsibilities, but also higher levels of work-related stress (**Figure 40**). Work-life balance has marginally improved. High stress levels were reported to be due to a combination of workload pressures and long hours (exacerbated by the difficulties of staff recruitment), frustration and sadness at seeing natural areas destroyed and feeling their work is undermined by government policies.

**Fig
40**

Changes
Over The
Past 3 Years



There were some location-based differences with respondents in Wales generally less likely to have moved to a more senior role/ increased responsibility and less likely to have increased job satisfaction. Respondents in Wales and England were more likely to report increased stress whilst those in Ireland were less likely to report an increase in stress but more likely to report a higher income.

There were also some noticeable sectoral differences. Those working in the private sector were more likely to have a more senior role or more responsibility whilst those working for statutory nature conservation bodies (SNCBs) were least likely. Increased job satisfaction was reported

by a higher proportion of respondents working in central government but was least likely in respondents working in the private sector, followed by those working in academia. Having seen an increase to a more stressful role was highest amongst those working in central government and least likely amongst those working in academia.

Income was most likely to have increased in the private sector and least likely for those working in the NGO and academia sectors. An improvement in work life balance was more likely to be reported by those working in academia and least likely in those working for NGOs or in SNCBs.

Given the data shown above, it is to respondents' credit that just over 50% are very proud of their role (**Figure 41**). There are some noticeable differences by sector though, with those working in consultancy less likely to be very proud. Interestingly, those working in the public sector are the proudest overall, just above the respondents working for environmental NGOs.

The commentary associated with responses to this question was mixed. Most respondents alluded to the contribution the profession makes to society and making a positive difference to the environment and to nature. Ecology and environmental management was frequently described as a fulfilling career that aligns with personal values and interests.

However, there were also plentiful references to being 'worn down' in the face of constant battles with other stakeholders and being constantly undermined by government policies. There is frustration at being seen as the 'bad guys' by developers and other professions

and being misunderstood by the public and other professionals.

There was also concern that, as a result of 'the way the system works', ecologists and environmental managers are inadvertently facilitating the loss of biodiversity and that the efforts of those working in the profession is futile. There were some country differences. Wales respondents were most likely to say that they were very proud (57.3%) but also the most likely to say that they were not very proud (13.3%). Respondents from Scotland and Ireland were least likely to say they were very proud (46.8% and 47.4% respectively) and also the least likely to say that they were not very proud (9.1% and 7.9% respectively).

The final question was whether our members would recommend ecology and environmental management as a career. Almost 80% of respondents said yes (see **Figure 42**) which is just above the 2022 figure and is a pretty positive endorsement of the profession overall despite the pressures.

Fig 41

Extent To Which Respondents Are Proud Of Their Role

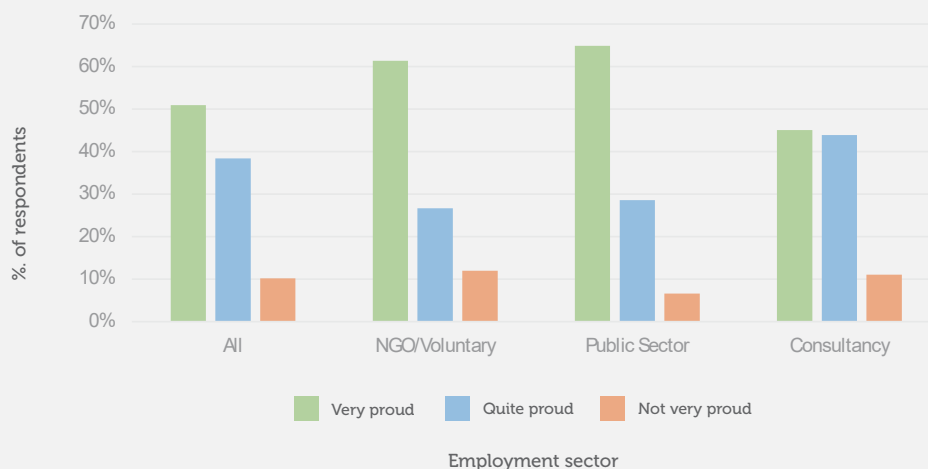
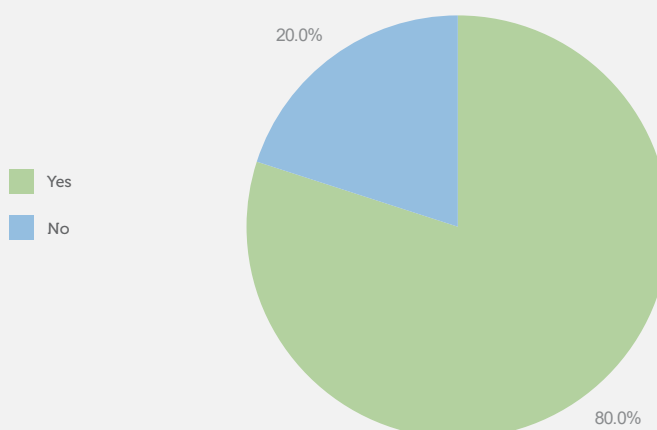


Fig 42

Proportion Of Respondents Who Would Recommend Ecology and Environmental Management as a Career



Many respondents framed their recommendation as a tension between their passion for nature and practical career considerations. While they find the work deeply meaningful and fulfilling, they acknowledge significant drawbacks in terms of compensation, work conditions, and career progression that create difficult trade-offs. So, it is 'yes, I would recommend it as a career if you can live with the drawbacks'.

There's a strong sense that ecology work provides unique satisfaction through making a positive difference (even if small), being outdoors, connecting with nature, and doing work that aligns with personal values. Many describe it as varied, interesting, and intellectually stimulating.

But balanced against this are concerns about inadequate pay (especially compared to similarly qualified professionals), long/antisocial hours, poor work-life balance (particularly during survey seasons), and high stress levels. Many noted that despite requiring extensive qualifications and expertise, the profession remains undervalued financially.

As previously highlighted, there is a pervasive feeling of being undervalued by government, clients, other professions, and society generally. Many express frustration about ecology being treated as "red tape" or a barrier rather than an essential service, and about constantly having to justify their existence and importance.

There is significant concern about the profession's future due to perceived government hostility toward environmental protection, weakening of legislation, and an increasingly "tick-box" approach focused on metrics rather than genuine ecological principles. This contributes to a sense of precarious job security.

Many respondents highlighted the difficulties entering and advancing in the profession, with high competition for entry-level roles, lack of training opportunities, and challenges building required skills and licenses. There was also acknowledgement that there are improvements in this area with the development of more vocational entry routes and more diverse training opportunities.

In summary, there is bittersweet quality to many responses - while respondents generally love the work itself, they are frequently demoralised by external constraints and the gap between ecological ideals and ambitions and the on-the-ground realities.

So, it remains the case that doing a job that you are passionate about with a subject that is infinitely interesting and varied and having the opportunity to make a difference to the natural world and to people's quality of life are suggested as big selling points to those looking for a worthwhile career. But we will not succeed in 'selling' ecology and environmental management as a career option unless and until we can address the issues of comparatively low pay, challenging working conditions and the lack of respect and appreciation of the work that the sector does.



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