2025 Scottish Voluntary Sector Workforce Survey

March 2026

Contents

The headlines...

1,316 paid staff and volunteers responded to the survey.

Job satisfaction

- 64% of paid staff are satisfied with their jobs, down from 79% in 2015.
- 87% of volunteer respondents are satisfied with their main volunteering role.

Fulfilment and purpose

- 87% of paid staff believe their work benefits society.
- 84% of paid staff said that making a real difference to people and communities was one of the top five aspects of working in the voluntary sector.
- 77% of paid staff are inspired by their organisation's mission.
- 68% of volunteers are motivated by a desire to improve things/ help people (68%), and 52% are driven by a strong belief in the cause.

Wellbeing

- Nearly three quarters of paid staff said workloads had increased.
- Only 50% of paid staff felt they have a good work-life balance, down from 60% a decade ago.
- 62% of respondents reported feeling under pressure at work, rising to 86% for CEOs and 78% for senior management.
- 1 in 5 employees took time off in the preceding year due to work related stress, twice the rate reported a decade ago.
- However, only half (51%) felt their organisation has a culture that prioritises and supports staff wellbeing.

Staff and volunteer support

- 74% of paid staff feel well supported by their managers.
- 70% of volunteers feel well supported.
- 69% of paid staff and 76% of volunteer respondents believe their organisation feels open, inclusive and welcoming.

Job security and pay

- 54% of paid staff felt that uncertainty around funding for their role is one of the worst aspects of working in the voluntary sector, alongside a lack of parity with other sectors (49%) and low pay (46%).
- 1 in 5 said their pay does not cover their basic needs.

Staff and volunteer retention

- 1 in 4 paid staff have 'non-permanent' work contracts.
- 26% of paid staff worry about their jobs 'all of the time' or 'often', and this rises to 41% for those on fixed-term contracts.
- 27% of paid staff felt it was quite or highly likely they would lose their job in the next 12 months.
- 39% of paid staff thought it quite or highly likely that they would voluntarily quit their jobs in the next 12 months – double the rate seen in other sectors.
- Limited career progression was a common concern, especially at senior levels. Many respondents were seeking new roles in other voluntary organisations, but a significant number were looking to progress by moving into the public or private sectors.
- Among volunteers, retention is stronger but not guaranteed: One in four are considering stepping back within two years, citing time pressures, stress, and a sense of having "done their bit."

Summary

The 2025 Scottish Voluntary Sector Workforce Survey conducted by SCVO, Volunteer Scotland, and Charity Leadership Scotland gathered responses from 1,316 individuals including over a thousand paid staff and hundreds of volunteers and trustees. The survey explored workforce experiences across recruitment, retention, wellbeing, inclusion, pay, and career pathways.

The survey paints a picture of a sector deeply committed to its purpose but increasingly strained by funding insecurity, low pay, rising workloads and stress, and limited progression opportunities. The findings reveal a workforce motivated by values and a desire to make a difference yet grappling with challenges that threaten its sustainability.

Recruitment and Retention

For paid staff, job satisfaction has slipped significantly over the past decade. While two-thirds of respondents still describe themselves as satisfied, this is down from nearly 80% in 2015, and dissatisfaction has doubled to almost one in four.

Despite this decline, the sense of purpose remains strong: 87% believe their work benefits society, and 83% say it aligns with their personal values. Volunteers and trustees echo this commitment, with 87% satisfied in their roles and many citing altruism and belief in the cause as their primary motivations.

However, satisfaction alone is not enough to keep people in post. Pay and job security emerged as critical pinch points.

Only 39% of paid staff feel that they are fairly paid, and more than one in five say their salary does not cover their basic needs.

Three-quarters of staff are on permanent contracts, but a quarter are employed on fixed-term contracts or more casual arrangements – a rate far higher than in other sectors. This insecurity is compounded by funding uncertainty, which respondents consistently describe as the most stressful aspect of their work. It is little surprise, then, that 39% of paid staff expect to leave their role within the next year, most often for better pay, improved management, or clearer career development opportunities.

Among volunteers, retention is stronger but not guaranteed: one in four are considering stepping back within two years, citing time pressures, stress, and a sense of having "done their bit."

Career progression is another sticking point. While some paid staff report opportunities to learn and grow, 42% say there are no promotion prospects within their organisation. Flat structures and funding constraints limit advancement, and many respondents feel trapped in roles that offer little scope for development. Volunteers, too, highlight the

importance of flexibility and recognition, with many saying they would take on new roles if time commitments were more adaptable or if they were personally invited.

Wellbeing

If recruitment and retention are the sector's structural challenges, wellbeing is its human one.

Rising workloads and mounting pressure are taking a toll. Nearly three-quarters of paid staff say their workload has increased in the past year, and more than half report experiencing high levels of stress on a regular basis.

 High stress levels were seen across all roles from frontline staff to management, with senior leaders and trustees in particular describing feeling overwhelmed by responsibility and the emotional weight of sustaining services in the face of financial uncertainty.

One in five have taken time off due to work-related stress – double the rate recorded a decade ago.

Work-life balance has deteriorated, with only half of paid staff saying they achieve a healthy balance between work and personal life. Flexible and hybrid working arrangements have helped to some extent – 61% of paid staff work remotely or in hybrid patterns, and most are satisfied with the flexibility available. But flexibility alone cannot offset the impact of under-resourcing and rising demand.

Volunteers generally report positive experiences, with 81% finding their organisations flexible, yet concerns about bureaucracy and blurred boundaries between unpaid and paid work persist.

Organisational support for wellbeing is inconsistent. Just over half of respondents feel their workplace genuinely prioritises staff wellbeing, and those with long-term health conditions or from minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to feel supported.

For both volunteers and paid staff, the link between support and retention is clear: those who feel well supported are far more likely to remain engaged and satisfied.

The survey findings reveal a sector powered by dedicated and motivated people, but increasingly stretched by structural and financial pressures.

1. About the survey

1.1 Background and aim of survey

There were several reasons SCVO, Volunteer Scotland and Charity Leadership Scotland wanted to survey the sector's paid and unpaid workers in 2025.

- **Recruitment and retention challenges**
  SCVO's Scottish Third Sector Tracker has consistently been telling us that staff and volunteer recruitment and retention is an ongoing issue for many charities, and Volunteer Scotland's analysis of Scottish Household Survey (SHS) volunteering data was showing fluctuations in volunteer participation rates.

- **Concerns about wellbeing**
  Almost one in five organisations in the Scottish Third Sector Tracker reported staff wellbeing as a concern. This echoed earlier research by Charity Leadership Scotland, which found high levels of burnout and intentions to quit. Wider UK workforce surveys also pointed to a sharp rise in workplace stress in recent years.

- **Concerns around short-term funding practices and job security**
  We wanted to understand what progress, if any, was being made around Fair Work particularly relating to fair pay and employment security. Research by the University of Strathclyde for GCVS (2023) highlighted the challenging funding environment as a major factor influencing job security. Rather than improving, we were hearing from Scottish Third Sector Tracker respondents and anecdotally that funding and job security appear to be worsening, resulting in ongoing annual cycles of redundancy notices and job losses.

- **Post-Covid working practices**
  We wanted to understand how hybrid and home working, flexible arrangements, and work-life balance had bedded in since the pandemic, to better understand the current working environment for both volunteers and paid staff.

- **Comparisons with 2015**
  Finally, our last major voluntary sector workforce survey was in 2015, giving us the opportunity to track changes in areas such as job satisfaction over the past decade.

The aim of the survey was therefore to gather info to:

1. **Help promote careers in the voluntary sector**
2. **Support sector employers to attract and retain staff and volunteers, including a focus on diversity, health and wellbeing**
3. **Identify any gaps in support services available to sector staff and employers**
4. **Inform policy work**

1.2 Methodology

The Scottish Voluntary Sector Workforce Survey questions were developed collaboratively by SCVO and the survey partners: Volunteer Scotland to ensure that the voices of volunteers were properly included, and Charity Leadership Scotland (formerly ACOSVO), to bring in learning from their recent surveys of leaders' wellbeing and diversity. Questions were aligned where possible with surveys such as the CIPD Good Work Index and CIPD Working Lives Scotland survey, the 2023 GCVS Fair Work survey, the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) and NCVO's Time Well Spent survey. The survey also brought in expertise from staff within SCVO including Research, Goodmoves, Learning and HR teams.

The survey questions and data tables can be found here.

The survey was in the field from Thursday 26 June to Thursday 21 August 2025. The survey was conducted online and was promoted via a wide range of channels including: Third Force News, Goodmoves, SCVO, Volunteer Scotland, Charity Leadership Scotland and national and local intermediary bodies.

The headline findings were presented and discussed at the Gathering on 10 June 2026. Feedback from the session will shape how we take the survey findings forward throughout 2026, and where possible stakeholder reflections have been incorporated in our analysis of the findings and into the Reflections and Recommendations section.

2. Respondent profile

1,316 people filled in the Workforce Survey. Respondents came from across all local authority areas, and responses covered a wide range of sectors and job roles. Respondents tended to be slightly older than the wider Scottish population, were 80% female, tended to be white, and also tended to have very high levels of formal education.

2.1 Paid staff and volunteer profile

1,316 people filled in the Workforce Survey, consisting of 1,071 paid staff and 570 volunteers. 325 people answering questions in both the paid staff and volunteer sections, highlighting the importance of viewing paid staff and volunteers

1,266 respondents currently work or volunteer in the voluntary sector, plus there were 50 responses from individuals who had previously worked or volunteered in the sector.

Table 1 Respondent numbers: paid staff and volunteers

Paid staff only	746
Paid staff and volunteer	325
Volunteer only	245
Total respondents	**1,316**

2.1.1 Roles: paid staff

55% of respondents in paid roles were non-managerial employees - 5% assistant level staff, 22% frontline workers, and 28% officers/development workers etc. The other 45% were in management - 21% managers, 14% senior managers, and 11% were CEOs.

While this is a good spread of role levels, we should note here that front-line workers are under-represented, possibly due to the channels used to distribute the survey.

Figure 1. Paid staff: role level, number of respondents

Paid staff: Q18. Which of these is closest to your current role?

Role	Number
Frontline worker /assistant	254
Officer	259
Management	199
Senior leadership	128
Chief officer	100
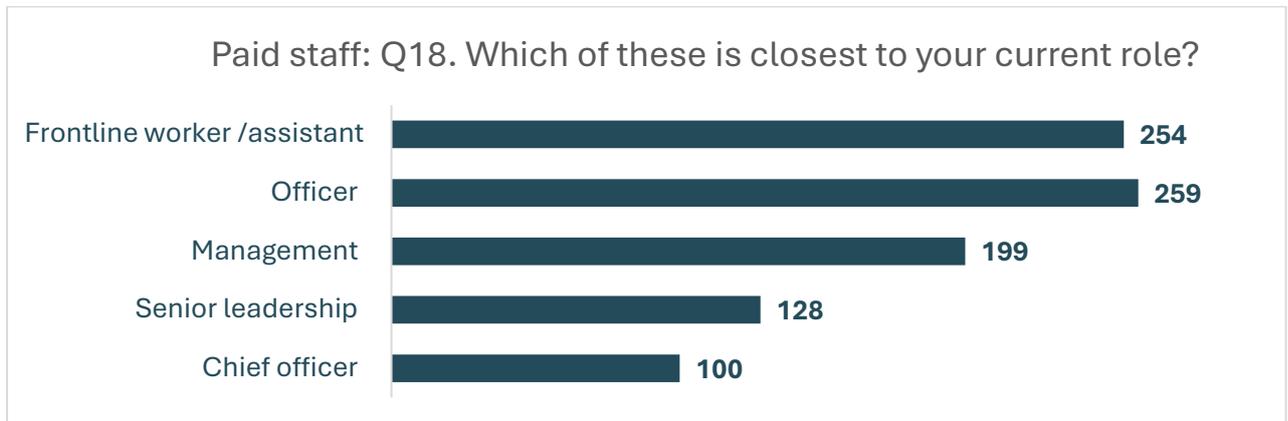
Figure 2. Paid staff: area of work, % of respondents

Paid Staff Q19. What specific area do you work in?

Area	%
Senior management	15%
Community development	12%
Health and social care	22%
Fundraising	5%
Finance	3%
Communications and IT	4%
Policy and research	7%
Organisational support	11%
Other - Write In	22%
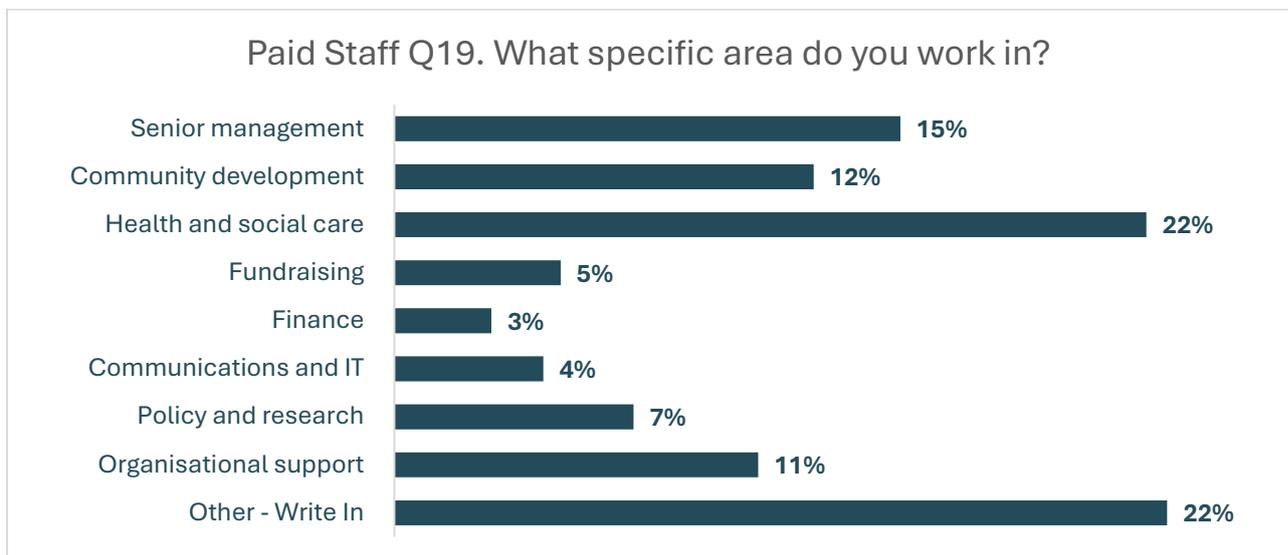
2.1.2 Roles: volunteers

Workforce Survey respondents reveal a distinct profile of volunteer activity compared to the SHS. Survey respondents were significantly more likely to report acting as a committee member or trustee (53% vs. 27%) and engaging in roles such as providing advice or advocacy (23% vs. 12%), and campaigning (11% vs. 4%).

2.1.3 Gender

80% of survey respondents identified as female, 18% as male, and 2% as non-binary or other. Males make up an estimated 35% of the sector's paid workforce (Table 1.19C Scotland's Labour Market Jan-Dec Tables 2021) and account for almost half of all

volunteers ([Volunteer Scotland, 2024](#)), meaning they are under-represented in the survey responses.

2.1.4 Caring Responsibilities

39% of respondents had caring responsibilities, for example childcare or caring for a family member, with women slightly more likely to report caring responsibilities (40% vs. 34%).

2.1.5 Geography

Responses were received from people living across all 32 local authorities. Edinburgh (19%) and Glasgow (16%) were the most common respondent locations.

Figure 3. Geography: Where do respondents live?
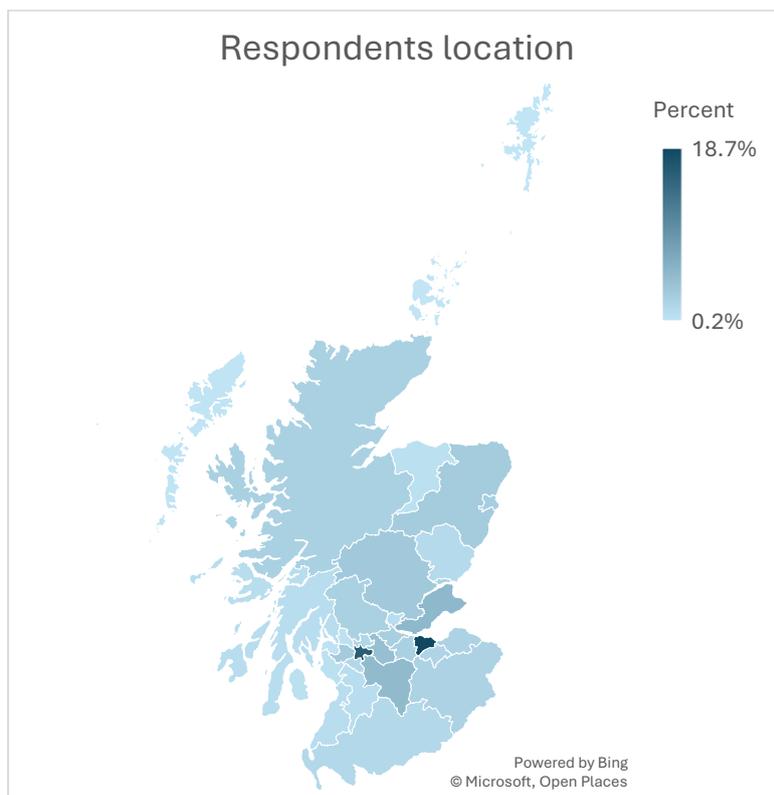
2.1.6 Age

70% of respondents were aged between 30 and 59, 12% were under 30, and 18% were 60 or over. Volunteers tended to be older than paid employees.

Figure 4. Age of respondents

Age of all survey respondents against Scottish population

Categories (x-axis): 16-18, 18-20, 21-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-67, 68 or above

Legend:
- ■ Scottish Mid-2024 population estimates
- ■ Paid staff only
- ■ Paid staff and volunteer
- ■ Volunteer only
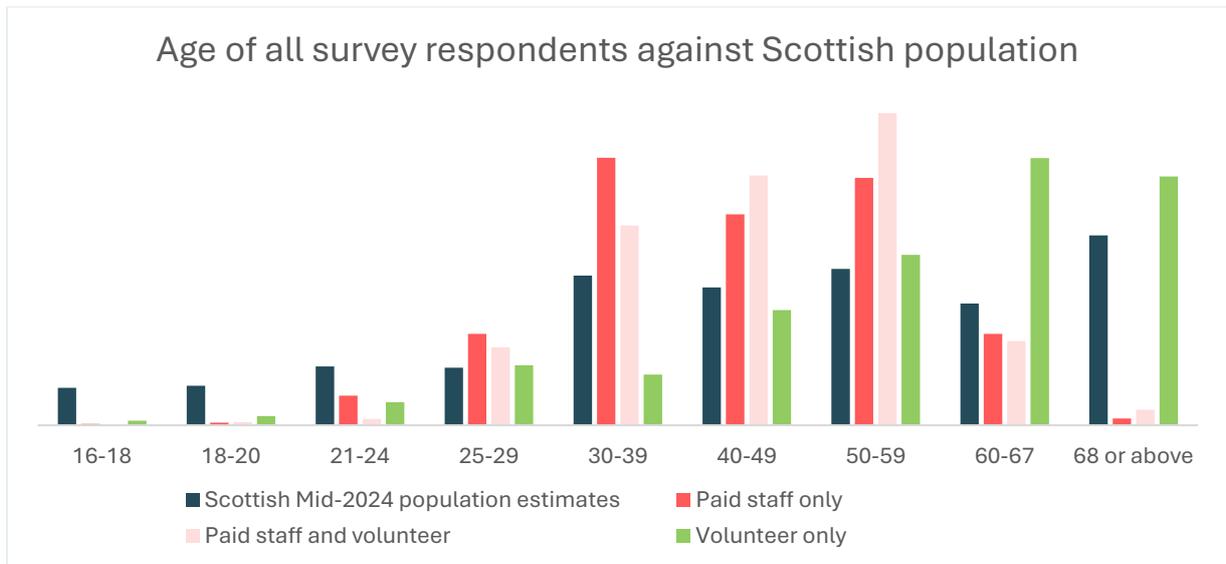
2.1.7 Health and wellbeing

Overall, respondents reported generally good levels of health and wellbeing, though many felt less optimistic and lacked energy, and a significant 42% were living with a long-term physical or mental health condition.

This is roughly in line with what we would expect given the age and gender profile of the sector's workforce.

2.1.8 Education

Survey respondents tended to have higher levels of formal education – 75% of paid staff, 81% of paid staff who also volunteer, and 58% of volunteers had a university degree or postgraduate degree compared with 33% of the general Scottish population who have a university level degree (see Census 2022: Education data). Volunteers were more likely than paid staff to have school-level qualifications or no formal qualifications.

Figure 5. Education

Highest level of formal qualification - survey respondents compared against wider Scottish population (Census 2022)

	No formal qualifications	School qualifications (National 4/5, Highers etc)	Further Education (eg HNC/HND, apprenticeship or other college qualification)	University Degree	Postgraduate Degree
Scottish population (16+)	17%	30%	21%	32%	
Paid staff only	1%	4%	20%	43%	32%
Paid staff and volunteer	0.3%	3%	15%	45%	36%
Volunteer only	9%	11%	22%	34%	24%

2.1.9 Ethnicity

We currently lack robust data on the ethnic backgrounds of the Scottish voluntary sector workforce and were keen to learn more about the experiences of paid staff and volunteers from minority ethnic backgrounds. (Note: for the purposes of this report we are using the term minority ethnic rather than 'global majority' to highlight that these respondents usually find themselves to be minorities in their workplaces).

59 survey respondents were from black and minority ethnic groups, which works out as 4.3% of respondents if we include those who left ethnicity blank, and 5% of respondents if we take out the blanks. This is a little lower than we would have liked based on the latest Census figures.

Figure 6. Ethnicity

Respondent ethnicity

- 4% Minority ethnic
- 85% White
- 11% (blank)
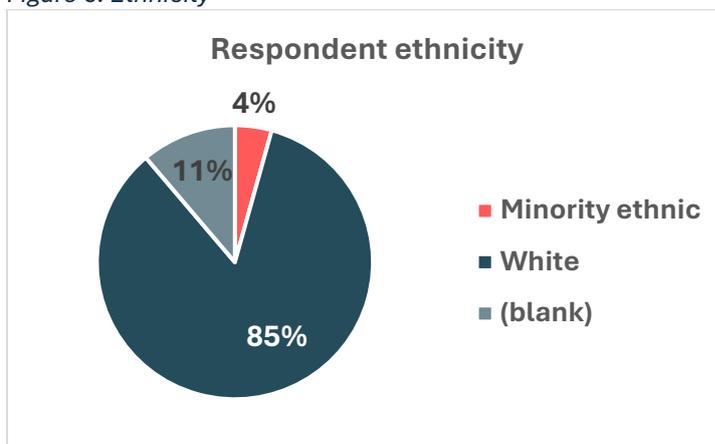
2.2 Employer profile

Paid staff were employed in organisations from small to large. Respondents from small and medium sized organisations (under 100 staff) were slightly over-represented, while those from larger organisations were slightly under-represented.

For the profile of the voluntary sector workforce see SCVO Sector Stats - People, 2025.

Figure 7. Employer size by SME band

Q16. How many people are employed by your organisation in total?

	1-9	10-49	50-99	100-249	250+	Don't know
Workforce survey	18%	41%	13%	11%	15%	3%
Scottish voluntary sector	13%	24%	11%	15%	36%	

■ Workforce survey   ■ Scottish voluntary sector
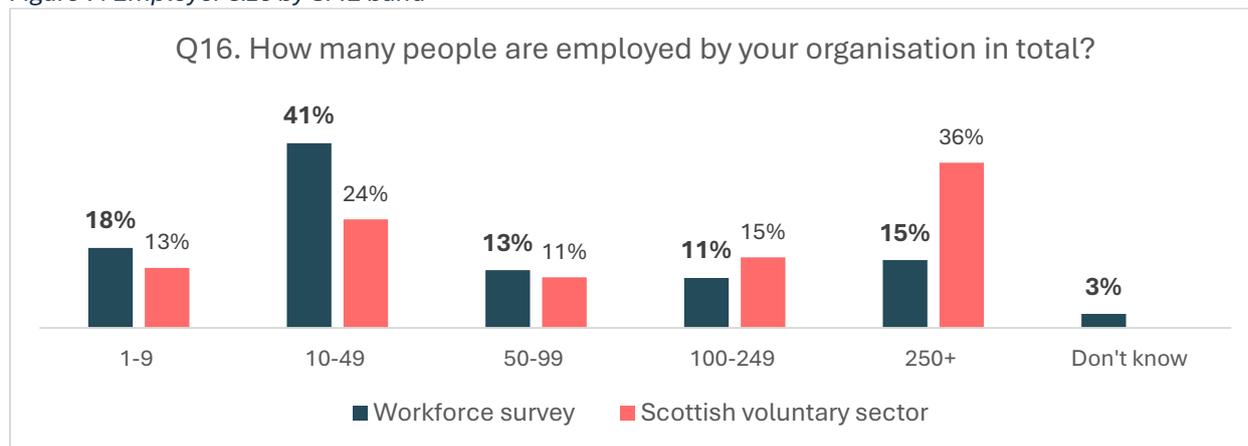
2.2.1 Sub-sectors

Figure 8. Employer area of work

Which of the following is closest to the work your organisation does?
(Total respondent count = 965)

Area of work	Count
Third sector support	182
Social care	114
Health	98
Advice	78
Other - Write In	68
Youth services	68
Community development	62
Children's services	62
Disability-related services	45
Older people's services	34
Volunteering	34
Education	27
Environment and animals	23
Arts	17
Housing	17
Mental health and counselling	17
Employment	10
Sport	9

2.3 Data tables

Data tables (Excel) can be accessed from
2025 Scottish Voluntary Sector Workforce Survey: Data Tables

3. Things to celebrate: paid staff

Respondents spoke of a wide range of positive aspects to working in the voluntary sector including: purpose and impact on communities, strong organisational values and inclusive culture, connection with beneficiaries, flexibility and work-life balance, supportive teams and colleagues, autonomy, creativity, and variety and opportunities for growth and development.

3.1 Best aspects of working in the sector

Respondents were given a list of positive aspects of working in the voluntary sector based on SCVO's 2015 Workforce Survey results and asked to select up to five options.

- 84% of respondents said that making a real difference to people and communities was one of the top five aspects of working in the voluntary sector.
- 56% selected the people /clients they support
- 50% chose their colleagues and team
- 48% chose the independence and autonomy they have, 44% chose the variety of the work, and 31% like the ability to be innovative and creative.
- 40% chose their organisation's values and 34% chose the ethos of the sector.
- Other positive aspects were flexible working (38%), having a supportive employer (20%) and decent work benefits (12%).

We look at all of these aspects in more detail in later sections.

Figure 9. Best aspects of working in sector: multiple choice

What would you say are the BEST things about working in the third sector? Please select up to **five**
(Respondents = 820)

Aspect	Percentage
Feeling that I am making a real difference to…	84%
The people / clients I support	56%
My colleagues and team	50%
The independence and autonomy I have	48%
The variety of the work	44%
My organisation's values	40%
Flexible working arrangements	38%
The ethos of the sector	34%
The ability to innovate and be creative	31%
Having a supportive employer	20%
Decent benefits, eg annual leave, pension, sick…	12%
Fair pay	4%
Other	0.1%

3.2 Best aspects: Summary of open text responses

People were asked to tell us briefly in their own words what the **best** thing about their job currently is.

578 respondents took the time to tell us what they enjoy best about their role and highlighted an enormous range of positive aspects to working in the voluntary sector.

A sense of purpose, flexibility, and supportive teams were the strongest recurring positive aspects, followed by autonomy, values-alignment, and growth opportunities. Many respondents describe the best thing about their work as the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in people's lives. For many there is a deep connection to the mission and values of the voluntary sector.

- Helping others and having impact came up repeatedly, with people describing their roles as "life-changing," "rewarding," and "meaningful."
- Teamwork and support from colleagues were also strongly valued aspects of working in the voluntary sector. Respondents often mentioned being part of a "passionate," "supportive," or "amazing" team.
- Flexibility and work-life balance was another major theme, with people appreciating autonomy and the ability to manage their own time.

Figure 10. Best aspects: open text analysis

Q71 Best aspects: open text comments primary themes
(total respondents = 578)

Theme	Number of responses
Purpose / Making a Difference	261
Clients / Service Users / Community	73
Colleagues / Team Support	66
Flexibility / Work–Life Balance	61
Organisational Values / Culture	23
Autonomy / Trust	19
Variety / Interesting Work	14
Negative comment/ No best aspect	13
Creativity / Innovation	12
Job Security / Contract / Pay & Benefits	12
Professional Development / Learning	7
Remote / Hybrid / Location	6
Policy / Systems Influence	6
Leadership / Management Support	5

Number of responses

3.3 Best aspect: key themes and quotes from respondents

The following broad themes emerged from our analysis of the open text responses. A sample of illustrative quotes is included under each theme.

Purpose and making a difference

- People value that their work has a **positive impact on individuals, communities, or wider society**.
- Many also mentioned alignment with their **personal values and interests**.

"Sense of making an impact and fighting the good fight even in the face of enormous pressures and problems (especially problems driven by public sector failings)"
"Working closely with families and delivering a service that is really needed"
"The impact we make on peoples lives, even when things aren't running as well as could be and the amazing contribution that volunteers make"
"Making a difference and working with people who are consistently marginalised from our community"
"I am doing things I am passionate about and feel we can make a real difference in people's lives."
"The work I do is rewarding, makes a difference and provides a way for me to take action on the things that really matter to me (equality, diversity, inclusion, reducing inequality, community)"

Organisational values and culture

- Pride in working in **values-driven, ethical organisations** and
- Workplaces that feel inclusive, authentic, and aligned with personal beliefs.

"Excellent organisational culture and being able to make a difference for other people."
"Working in a neuro-inclusive organisation"
"The staff are genuinely lovely, there is a lot of training available and we are all encouraged to take part. It feels inclusive with good values and ethos."
"Working in a team that lives our values every day. I've experienced terrible toxic management in my last role and this job is an absolute dream, we all work hard to make things better and are committed to the orgs values"
"I feel my employer is genuinely invested in staff wellbeing at all levels. I see the organisation actively promoting this as much as possible. I truly have never felt more supported in a job until now."
"The work we do is of value to our clients and important to society. It aligns with my own values."

Connection with beneficiaries and communities

- The **direct interaction with service users, volunteers, or communities** and
- **Seeing change first-hand** is rewarding and motivating.

"I love my job. We can offer therapeutic support to people who couldn't afford or access it otherwise and that is a real privilege."
"Passionate about the work, changing lives. Each individual I support is unique. No two days are the same."
"Meeting different people and seeing the difference the organisation makes in the community."
"I love the organisation I work for and what we do - it's an important role for the community."
"Job Satisfaction and seeing Individuals smile and thrive"
"Working face-to-face with clients and being able to support with issues when other's cannot and the positive feedback from clients."
"Using my skills to make a real difference and working with good people who strive to help others in their local community to live better lives."
"The chance to collaborate with those who have lived experience to plan strategic change."
"Working for an organisation that has its clients at the heart of all we do and knowing that the hard work is felt by those we support."
"The families, building relationships and seeing them thrive"
"Seeing the people and staff that we support develop and achieve meaningful outcomes within their lives."

Flexibility and Work–Life balance

- Flexible hours, hybrid/remote working, compressed hours, and autonomy in managing schedules.
- Important for caring responsibilities, health needs, and overall wellbeing.

"Flexible working -work /life balance"
"Working from home around my health"
"My work pattern is very flexible which fits with my rural lifestyle."
"Flexibility to work and also take care of my kid and have a life outside of work"
"The work/life balance - I was previously a teacher where that balance was non-existent"
"working from home allows me to better support disabled family member"
"Overall, I find my workplace has a healthy and proactive attitude when it comes to flexibility and work/life balance."

Supportive teams and colleagues

- Positive workplace culture, collaboration, and supportive managers.
- Many say colleagues are what keep them motivated through challenges.

"Fast paced, great team colleagues and supportive board."
"That I am making a difference to the environment, and that the majority of people in my

organisation are really lovely, kind and supportive"
*"The amazing people in the organisation that deal with the reason the organisation exists.
Full of energy, motivation, compassion, drive and commitment."*
"Working within a team that are committed"
"My team is super supportive"
"I have a great CEO who understands our charity well."
"The people I work with – they care, they support, and they inspire."
"Very hard working but great team and supportive culture"
*"There is a lot of flexibility both in hours and how work is approached. There is a
collaborative approach to work, both internally and with colleagues in the wider voluntary
sector."*
*"The organisation values reflect my own and through the support of colleagues with a similar
vision of making a difference it feels a motivating environment"*

Autonomy, creativity, and variety

- Freedom to shape their work, innovate, and problem-solve.
- Appreciation of the variety - "no two days the same."

*"The independence I have to improve the job and the contribution I can make to making our
charity even better."*
*"I have the freedom to try new things, and my organisation trusts me to do this. I value the
autonomy this gives me."*
"The variety of work we carry out - no 2 days are the same"
"Creativity and innovation - ability to be autonomous in my role"
"Having the confidence from managers to go about my job as I see fit."
"I love supporting the young people and I love the fact I have full autonomy"
*"The independence i have to provide innovative support that's actually effective and helps
people feel seen, unlike in other services"*
*"Being free to carry out my role in the way I think most effective - as long as the results are
there"*
*"I love that I have the autonomy to manage my workload and that I can support others to
develop confidence and skills"*
*"The best thing about my job is that I actually like it and it's in the sector I ultimately want to
get into. I also love the independence and quick decision-making due to a less strict
hierarchy."*
*"The work I do is really impactful. I can be creative and responsive to the community I am
serving"*

Personal growth and development

- Opportunities to learn, build skills, and progress in careers.
- Supportive organisations/managers who invest in professional development.

*"I love how much my supervisor supports my professional growth. I'm still early in my career,
but I think this role puts me in a position to get the skills I need for any number of different*

career paths.”
“Flexibility to work full time while also studying. Working in a diverse, inclusive and supportive team”
“Usually interesting and engaging work, with scope to develop the role myself.”
“Current job - space to breathe, focus, learn and grow; a calm, gentle, understanding and very capable CEO”
“I am getting the chance to learn, grow and develop in a really supported way, whilst maintaining good work/life balance.”

Stability, pay and security

While less frequent than the other themes above there was also a minor theme around:

- Appreciation of permanent contracts, fair pay, or job security where it exists.
- Acknowledgment that these are rarer in the third sector, but highly valued.

“I have caring responsibilities for an elderly parent and I can flex around that and still be paid a pretty reasonable salary.”
“Most people are purpose driven and the permanent contract (unusual in the third sector) gives me security and hope for having a baby”.

4. Areas to strengthen: paid staff

4.1 Negative aspects of working in the sector

Respondents highlighted a range of negative factors to working in the voluntary sector, including: chronic funding insecurity and short-term contracts, ow pay and limited career development, overwork, burnout, and lack of resources, poor leadership and governance, undervaluation of the sector, recruitment and retention challenges.

Respondents were given a list of some of the negative aspects about working in the voluntary sector based on themes that came out of SCVO's 2015 Workforce Survey and asked to select up to five options.

- 54% of respondents felt that the uncertainty around funding for their role is one of the worst aspects of working in the voluntary sector.
- This was closely followed by a lack of parity with other sectors/similar roles (49%) and low pay (46%).
- Other negative aspects were: High workloads (45%), poor career progression (41%), stressful work (38%), poor management/leadership (32%), inadequate resources (31%) and feeling undervalued by stakeholders and partners (29%).

These aspects are explored in more detail in later sections.

Figure 11. Negative aspects of working in the voluntary sector

What would you say are the worst things about working in the third sector?

Uncertainty around funding for my role	54%
Lack of parity of pay with other sectors / similar...	49%
Low pay	46%
High workload	45%
Poor career progression opportunities	41%
Challenging, stressful work	38%
Poor management / leadership	32%
Inadequate resources	31%
Undervalued by stakeholders and partners	29%
Unrealistic targets set by funders	21%
Uncertainty due to short-term or temporary...	20%
Inadequate investment in training and...	19%
Unrealistic targets set by management	16%
Long hours	13%
Other	5%

4.2 Negative aspects: Summary of open text responses

People were then asked to tell us briefly in their own words what the **worst** thing about their job currently is.

552 respondents took the time to tell us what they enjoy best about their role and outlined many of the more negative aspects to working in the voluntary sector.

While people care deeply about their work, they are overwhelmingly burdened by the **financial instability of the sector**. The biggest issues can be grouped into a few recurring themes:

- **Funding insecurity** is by far the most common concern. Respondents describe the stress of short-term contracts, constant firefighting, and jobs hanging in the balance due to grant cycles.

- **Low pay and poor benefits** were frequently mentioned, especially in comparison to the private and public sectors. Many expressed frustration about being undervalued despite the emotional and professional demands of their roles.

- **Burnout and emotional exhaustion** are palpable. People spoke of "relentless pressure," "poor work-life balance," the emotional toll and high workloads with little support.

- **Poor management or governance**, including lack of understanding or support from boards or senior leadership.

Together, these issues create a cycle of instability and high workloads, and a sense of being undervalued, under-paid and under-supported.

The impact of this means that it will potentially become more difficult to recruit, retain, and support skilled staff even though the vast majority of sector staff are highly committed to their work, their organisation's mission and the communities they serve.

Figure 12 Negative aspects - open text analysis

Q72 Worst aspects: open text comments primary themes
(total respondents = 552)

Theme	Count
Funding Insecurity / Short-termism	182
Low Pay / Poor Reward	97
Management / Leadership Issues	94
High Workload / Overstretch / Burnout	49
Lack of Resources / Staff / Tools	24
Lack of Career Progression / Development	17
Lack of support / poor work culture	15
Redundancies / risk of redundancy	14
Political / Policy Environment	13
Emotional toll of work	9
Undervalued by public sector partners	9
Parity / Public Sector Comparison	9
Role Fit / Underutilised / Not fulfilling	8
Positive - No negative aspects	4
Admin / Bureaucracy / Paperwork	4
Work–Life Balance / Flexibility (Lack)	3

4.3 Negative aspect: key themes and sample quotes

Funding insecurity and job instability

- Reliance on short-term and annual funding cycles creates constant uncertainty.
- Fear of redundancies and inability to plan long-term (for staff and organisations).
- Constant pressure to chase and secure new funding streams.

"Level of uncertainty on future which is due to funders not providing contracts longer term"
"Lack of secure, long-term funding means that we lose large number of staff regularly."
"Constant worry about funding and short term grants and funds that don't allow for longer term planning and true creativity. "
"All of my organisations' current challenges stem from a lack of certainty over funding"
"Annual funding from Scottish government - I'm used to it now but it really upsets some of the team every year"
"Short term funding and contracts which limit the ability to deliver good work and recruit well."

Low pay and limited career development

- Salaries significantly lower than comparable roles in public/private sectors.
- Lack of pay progression or recognition despite increasing responsibilities.
- Few opportunities for career advancement, training, or skills utilisation.

"Much lower pay for similar role in other sectors and lack of career progression. My role has also been split so I am on 2 different pay scales although it is really just one job (not sure if this is legal)"

"Pay is very low and awaiting funding decisions can be stressful."

"The pay is the main issue. I am very underpaid, even by third sector standards for similar roles, and the comparison with the private sector is vast. I could earn more than double in the private sector."

"The pay is very low and - as a single person - I have to work a second job to make ends meet. Roles like mine are few and far between in the NHS in Scotland, but where they do exist they are paid at Band 4, meanwhile my third sector job is paid at less than a Band 2 salary."

"Low pay, essentially minimum wage at this point for the work we deliver where as other third sector organisations and especially public sector have drastically high pay Due to little money in the service, not able to deliver the service we would ideally like to and are limited to what we can deliver - a major lack of resources"

"The pay doesn't feel comparable to the workload, and the lack of pay increase opportunities make it difficult to see it being a long term career, unless progression opportunities (that don't regularly exist) come up"

Overwork, burnout, and emotional exhaustion

- High workloads, unrealistic demands, and role overload.
- Staff covering multiple roles with insufficient time or pay.
- High emotional toll of some roles, often with little organisational support
- Limited resources for delivery.

"Not enough staff to deliver the work we funded to do. Fire fighting. Taking on many tasks not in my job description"

"Leadership gaps that will never be filled as investment is always in front line delivery meaning poor investment in the support structure that will help with stability and growth."

"Feeling undervalued, constantly struggling with no resources. Doing the job of 10 people"

"Being undervalued by trustees, lack of management and staff wellbeing never prioritised. I am burned out after a year of trying to work within an impossible contract"

"The pay does not equate to the stress, workload and difficulty of the job"

"Emotionally demanding and resilience sapping work with little support for wellbeing or development"

Poor leadership, governance and organisational culture

- Weak or absent leadership, with poor communication and transparency.
- Boards seen as either over-involved in day-to-day operations or too remote.
- Lack of strategic direction and accountability.
- Staff feeling undervalued, especially that frontline expertise is undervalued.
- Negative workplace cultures: bullying, discrimination, and lack of wellbeing support.

"No real support from line manager or team. Lack of regular meetings. Feel constantly having to ask for clarity and support"

"The half assed nature of everything which gets done (or likely doesn't). The lack of structure and management."
"Management/Leadership neither understand nor value the depth of expertise and knowledge their staff bring to the organisation."
"The Board largely does not understand delineation of duties and segregation of strategic and operational responsibilities."
"I would love to select independence and autonomy as one of the best things about my job, but in my experience this is just a nicer way of saying poor management and lack of strategic direction."

Sectoral inequities and lack of respect/recognition/understanding

- Perception that funders and partners lack understanding of voluntary sector realities.
- Voluntary sector undervalued compared to public sector despite doing critical work.
- Disparities in pay, conditions, and professional recognition.
- Public sector cuts increasing reliance on charities without adequate support.

"Increasing demands and growing complexity of support needs in those we support. This is not acknowledged by stakeholders and the local and national governments. We are underpaid, undervalued and underresourced to meet the demands of the health and social care sector."
"uncertainty around funding and unrealistic KPIs from funders"
"Pressures from funders to increase caseloads and minimise waiting lists without additional staffing means the young people we work with aren't getting the rich, focused service they require and deserve"

Recruitment and retention challenges

- Hard to attract skilled applicants due to low pay, short-term contracts, and instability.
- High staff turnover disrupts service delivery and increases workload for those who remain.

"Recruitment has been difficult over the past 2 years, fewer applicants and those who have applied for posts with us have lacked relevant qualifications and experience."

"Staff retention is problem within the workplace at the moment, and it is felt across all of the teams, within the young carers team we feel the strain as many of us are having to take on additional after school activities and workloads, which can be draining and we are doing it with no offers of increased wages."

"The lack of job security and low pay does not attract good talent, so management positions are not filled with the most skilled people.   Lack of secure, long-term funding means that we lose large number of staff regularly."

4.4 Sector differences: working in voluntary sector versus public or private sectors

- **92% of people who had previously worked in the public or private sectors said they had noticed differences working in the voluntary sector**.

Respondents who had worked in the public or private sector in the previous ten years were asked if they had noticed any difference between working in the public /private sector and the voluntary sector. Only 19 of the 239 people who answered said they had not really noticed any differences. 62% had noticed a lot of differences and 30% had noticed some.

Just over half of respondents focussed primarily on 'negatives': these were mainly around **lower pay, lower pensions, higher workloads** and **less job security**, followed by the constant **uncertainty over budgets and funding renewals**, and the **lack of resources compared to public and private sector**:

> *"Lower wages, less pension, less annual leave and increased job insecurity... in March I didn't know if I had a job in April."*
> *"The expectations of the amount of work differs significantly... in the third sector I frequently go over my weekly hours, whilst I'm contracted to 30, it's more like 50 or more."*
> *"The salary is shocking and there are next to no benefits. I work over my contracted hours more than I ever did in the private sector."*
> *"Where to begin! The starkest difference is the inability to forward plan due to funding constraints."*

Just under half of respondents highlighted positive differences. These were primarily around having a **more supportive work environment** in the voluntary sector, and a stronger sense of **impact, purpose, and community**:

> *"A lot more caring, considerate, compassionate. Not bullied or coercive, friendly work environment, supportive and open."*
> *"Less bureaucracy, senior management more willing to listen"*
> *"There is less efficiency in the voluntary sector in large part due to lack of resources available. However the positive attitude of the people working in this sector is a welcome change"*
> *"The third sector is more flexible and responsive, much less restricted than the public sector."*
> *"More focussed on people/communities and wellbeing issues overall."*

5. Job satisfaction and fulfilment

5.1 Overview

Job satisfaction in the Scottish voluntary sector remains relatively high but has declined notably since 2015. Currently, 64% of respondents are satisfied with their jobs, down from 79% in 2015, and only 22% are "very satisfied" compared to 33% a decade ago.

Job satisfaction is strongly linked to factors such as job role, remuneration, job and pay security, flexible working, work-life balance, stress levels, supportive management, and opportunities for learning and development. While the sector does well in areas such as **flexible work and staff support** it appears to be falling behind in other areas notably **pay, security and workload**.

Despite the overall decline in job satisfaction, sector staff generally report **high levels of fulfilment,** and a strong sense of purpose persists: 87% believe their work benefits society, 83% feel it aligns with their values, and 77% are inspired by their organisation's mission - figures far above those for the wider Scottish workforce.

"**Making a real difference**" remains the most valued aspect of working in the sector. 84% of respondents selected this as one of their top five 'best aspects' of working in the voluntary sector.

5.2 Job satisfaction

5.2.1 Overall job satisfaction

Two-thirds of Scottish voluntary sector employees reported being satisfied with their jobs, but almost 1 in 4 sector employees now say they are dissatisfied.

Job satisfaction in the Scottish voluntary sector was very high ten years ago. While still reasonably high it appears to have fallen significantly since SCVO's 2015 Workforce Survey.

- **64%** of respondents said they were 'Very satisfied' or 'Fairly satisfied' with their jobs, down from **79%** in 2015.
- **22%** were 'very satisfied', down from a third (33%) in 2015.
- **24%** of respondents were 'Very dissatisfied' or 'Fairly dissatisfied', up from only 10% in the SCVO 2015 Workforce Survey.

Figure 13. Job satisfaction

Q32. Overall, how satisfied are you currently with your job?
(respondents = 889)

- Very satisfied: 22%
- Fairly satisfied: 42%
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied: 12%
- Fairly dissatisfied: 16%
- Very dissatisfied: 8%
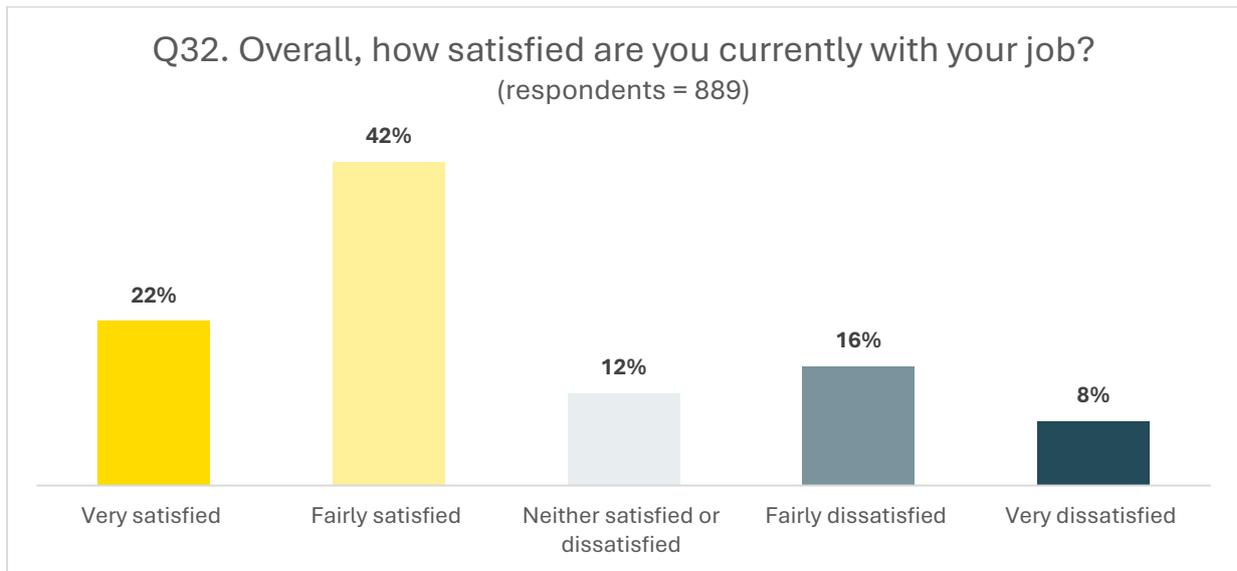
To put this into a wider context, 70% of respondents the 2024 CIPD Good Work Index survey[1] were very or fairly satisfied with their jobs, and the CIPD survey found "no significant differences between the public, private and voluntary sectors" when it came to job satisfaction. However, only 13% of CIPD respondents said they were dissatisfied.

There is research to suggest that job satisfaction may vary across different voluntary sector workforces. For example, the 2025 SSSC Have Your Say survey found that only 56% of the Scottish social care workforce was satisfied with their current job, while 35% were dissatisfied.

5.2.1 Factors shaping job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is shaped by a whole range of factors, which can interact with one another in complex ways (fig. 14).

For example, CEOs tend to score higher on fulfilment and pay but tend to have more stress. Part-time workers have better work-life balance but are less satisfied with pay. Many frontline workers report high job satisfaction but also find the work stressful and emotionally tiring.

Job satisfaction is therefore a simplification of a complex picture but gives us a useful indicator of overall staff satisfaction levels in the sector.

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[1] The CIPD Good Work Index is the largest, most comprehensive annual survey of UK workforce job quality, typically surveying over 5,000 employees. CIPD Working Lives Scotland is part of the broader UK survey and consistently surveys over 1,000 working adults in Scotland. The Scotland figures are weighted and designed to be representative of all Scottish working adults (aged 18+).

Figure 14. Factors influencing job satisfaction

Overall job satisfaction in the survey strongly correlated with the following areas:

- **Role:** Frontline workers were less likely to report being satisfied
- **Area of work**: Fundraising, Finance and Health & Social care staff were more likely to be dissatisfied.
- **Fulfilment:** work fulfilment tended to be very high across the sector's workforce and was particularly high for staff in some roles eg CEOs.
- **Job security:** those in insecure contracts or worried about losing their job were significantly more likely to report feeling dissatisfied.
- **Pay and pay security:** respondents who were dissatisfied with pay were much more likely to report lower job satisfaction.
- **Flexible working:** those who reported having flexibility around working times and locations were more likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction.
- **Work-life balance, workload and stress:** respondents with poor work-life balance and high workloads were far more likely to be dissatisfied with their job.
- **Supportive management:** those with supportive managers and organisations were far more likely to report high job satisfaction
- **Investment in learning and development:** those who feel their organisation invests in training and development were more likely to report high job satisfaction.

5.2.2 Job satisfaction and intention to quit

Overall job satisfaction is also strongly associated with how likely staff are to be considering voluntarily quitting their job. Figure 15 below underscores just how important job satisfaction is in terms of staff retention,.

Figure 15. Job satisfaction and likelihood of quitting job

Q31. Overall, how satisfied are you currently with your job? compared against Q56. How likely are you to voluntarily quit your job in next 12 months?

Legend:
- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Highly unlikely to quit	51%	39%	4%	3%	2%
Quite unlikely to quit	25%	63%	10%	1%	1%
Quite likely to quit	7%	36%	19%	32%	7%
Highly likely to quit	4%	11%	13%	36%	36%

5.3 Meaningful work

"Making a positive difference to the lives of young people is what keeps me going."

Most voluntary sector employees feel that they are doing meaningful work:

- **87% agree they are doing useful for society**
- **83% agree that their work fits with what they value in life**
- **77% are inspired by their organisation's purpose**
- **4 in 10 respondents 'strongly agreed' with these statements.**
- **'Making a real difference to people and communities' was by far the most popular of the five best aspects of working in the voluntary sector and was chosen by 84% of respondents.**

These results are significantly higher than those reported in by the wider Scottish working population – comparable figures from the CIPD Working Lives Scotland 2025 survey found that only around half of respondents agreed with the above statements.

Purpose and making a difference was also the most consistent theme when paid staff were asked to describe the best aspect of working in the voluntary sector in their own words. People valued that their work has a positive impact on individuals, communities, or wider society, and that they ae able to see the difference they make. People described their roles as "life-changing," "extremely rewarding," and "incredibly satisfying", and often it is this sense of real impact and making a difference that keeps people going and keeps them working in the voluntary sector.

Figure 16. Fulfilment

Q33. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(All respondents = 894, compared with CIPD Working Lives Scotland 2025)

Legend:
- Agree or Strongly Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree or Strongly disagree
- CIPD Agree

I am doing useful work for society: 87%, 8%, 5%, CIPD Agree 57%
I am inspired by my organisation's purpose: 77%, 12%, 10%, CIPD Agree 44%
My work fits what I value in life: 83%, 11%, 6%, CIPD Agree 55%

5.4 Implications

"in the voluntary [sector] you are expected to accept less pay because you are gaining more 'job satisfaction'"

Sector employees overwhelmingly find their work meaningful and are inspired by their organisation's purpose. This sense of rewarding and meaningful work is one of the sector's greatest assets and plays a critical in retaining experienced staff and attracting new people into the workforce.

It is important organisations continue to highlight and champion this positive aspect in their communications and recruitment approaches.

However, the decline in job satisfaction over the past decade shows that the sector cannot be complacent. Motivated, engaged staff are at the core of much of the sector's work, and any fall in staff satisfaction and morale will inevitably affect service delivery and workplace culture.

Job satisfaction does of course not exist in isolation. As outlined above it is shaped by a complex interaction of factors - job role, working environment, organisational culture, workload and pay and job security all contribute to how people feel about their jobs.

To understand the fall in job satisfaction we need to look carefully at these wider influences. The following sections explore these factors in more detail.

6. Diversity, inclusion and workplace culture

The voluntary sector tends to be very inclusive in many ways, with high representation from women and those with health issues across all role levels.

Most respondents feel that their organisation is open and inclusive, and many spoke of very positive experiences:

- **69% said their organisation feels open and inclusive**
- **67% feel that opportunities are provided equally**

However, our findings suggest the sector could do better, especially around **support for those with physical and mental health issues** and those from **minority backgrounds**.

We also found that **24% of respondents felt they had been unfairly treated in last 2 years** mainly due to age, gender, physical health reasons or mental health reasons, and socio-economic class.

6.1 Organisational culture

Most respondents feel that their organisations welcome diversity. 69% of respondents agreed that their organisation feels **open, inclusive and welcoming** and 67% agreed that **opportunities are provided equally**, regardless of background or identity.

Many respondents who had worked in the public or private sectors spoke of feeling more respected by their voluntary sector employer, especially around health, mental health and LGBTQ+ issues.

However, a number of respondents including several minority ethnic staff highlighted that while intentions were often good the sector still has a way to go in relation to diversity:

> *"Overall my employer has a good track record on inclusion and diversity. That said we are largely a white led org and haven't invested in key roles around EDI - including not replacing Director for HR which has had an impact"*

> *"We're not as diverse a group of staff as we could or should be. And despite good intentions I think there are still some faces/ types that 'fit' better than others... We are actively trying to address this though."*

> *"My organisation includes people and management who are caring and compassionate in person, but in reality has a lack of leadership and support*

which limits how much support and inclusion is offered to workers (e.g. I have still don't have reasonable adjustments in the workplace despite having multiple disabilities - they just don't have capacity to implement them".

A couple of respondents also felt that while organisations often speak about inclusivity the reality on the ground does not always reflect this:

"On paper the organisations I work for are inclusive but in reality it's very monolithic ethnically, socioeconomically, and in terms of culture/working types. I feel there is a lack of policy and training relating to neurodiversity, ethnic diversity, socioeconomic diversity and overcoming our own biases."

"On paper my organisation is doing all of the above and saying all the right things, but the practice and culture is a different story."

The survey also highlighted several areas where the sector could improve workplace culture and better support staff, discussed below.

6.2 Supporting staff from ethnic minorities

16% of white respondents did <u>not</u> agree that their organisation feels open, inclusive and welcoming, and this figure doubles to 32% of when we look at respondents from other ethnic groups.

Similarly, 17% of white respondents disagreed with the statement that opportunities in their organisation are provided equally, and this rises to 39% when we look at respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Looking at comments from minority ethnic staff suggests that the issue putting change into practice: *"I believe it's an aspiration but they don't know how to do it".* Other respondents noted that part of the problem is that they currently feel isolated, something which could be mitigated by more inclusive recruitment: *"It's very white and middle class -and I am not, so it's hard".*

Figure 17. Perception of organisational culture, by ethnicity of respondents

My organisation feels open, inclusive and welcoming

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
White	27%	43%	14%	10%	6%
Minority ethnic	18%	39%	11%	24%	8%
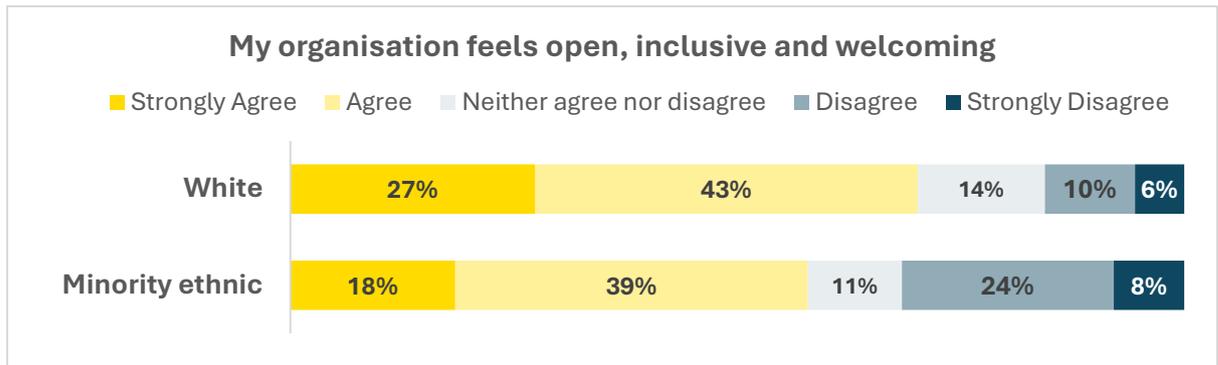
Figure 18. Perception of access to opportunities, by ethnicity of respondents

Opportunities here are provided equally

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
White	28%	40%	15%	11%	6%
Minority ethnic	29%	21%	11%	21%	18%
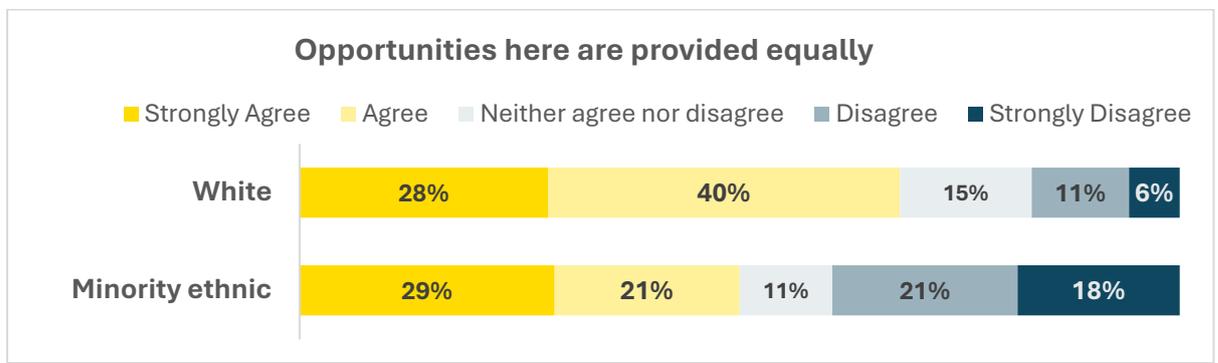
6.3 Supporting staff with physical and mental health conditions

Staff with health and mental health conditions were far less likely to agree that their workplace has a culture that prioritises staff wellbeing.

36% of respondents with a physical or mental health condition disagreed with the statement 'My workplace has a culture that prioritises and supports staff wellbeing' compared to only 17% of staff with no health condition.

Staff with mental health conditions were also slightly less likely to report that their manager is open and approachable on mental health - 19% disagreed that their manager is approachable, compared with 15% of staff overall.

Figure 19. Perception of organisation culture, by respondent health

'My workplace has a culture that prioritizes and supports staff wellbeing', responses split by health condition status

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Physical or mental health condition	19%	29%	16%	20%	16%
No physical or mental health condition	18%	36%	20%	15%	12%

6.4 Supporting staff experiencing unfair treatment or bullying

24% of respondents said that they felt they had personally been **unfairly treated or discriminated** against in the last 2 years in their workplace.

The most common reasons behind the unfair treatment related to **age, gender, physical health reasons, mental health reasons** or **socio-economic class**. In addition around a dozen respondents who selected 'Other' made reference to being unfairly treated in relation to pregnancy and or maternity/paternity leave.

35% of respondents said that they had **witnessed bullying in their organisation at some point.**

In relation to bullying, the following patterns emerged:
- Younger respondents were more likely to report having witnessed bullying.
- Bullying was only partially linked with poor perceptions of management, suggesting that a lot of bullying was peer to peer, from external sources or historical.
- Those who have been with organisations either for a short time or conversely those who have been with the same organisation for a long time (10 years or more) were the least likely to report having witnessed any bullying.
- There was a **very strong relationship between witnessing bullying and how likely a respondent was to be thinking of leaving their current role voluntarily**.

These last two points highlight the importance of a healthy work culture with regards to staff retention.

Figure 20. Likelihood to quit and witnessed bullying

How likely are you to voluntarily quit your job in the next 12 months? compared against whether respondent has ever witnessed bullying

	Highly unlikely	Quite unlikely	Quite likely	Highly likely
I have never witnessed bullying here: Agree	17%	18%	11%	5%
I have never witnessed bullying here: Neither agree nor disagree	3%	4%	2%	3%
I have never witnessed bullying here: Disagree	8%	7%	13%	10%

6.5 Implications

The voluntary sector in general offers staff a very supportive and inclusive work environment. However, the survey results suggest that organisations are often not as inclusive as they *think* they are, especially when it comes to staff with mental or physical health issues and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

A number of respondents reflected that good intentions and policies were often not translating into the real world and this is a key area for the sector to explore further especially in relation to inclusive recruitment and working practices.

As discussed in the Job mobility section, staff from minority ethnic backgrounds tend to be newer in post, suggesting the sector is slowly becoming more diverse – this suggests that inclusive policies and initiatives may be slow to embed but can have real impact once in place and given time.

It is also important to note that a friendly and inclusive work environment is not just a 'nice to have' – there is significant overlap between workplace culture and other key aspects such as Job Satisfaction, Health and Wellbeing and Staff Retention.

7. Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing: Overall, respondents reported generally good levels of health and wellbeing, though many felt less optimistic and lacked energy, and a significant 42% were living with a long-term physical or mental health condition.

Work-life balance, workloads and stress: Nearly three quarters reported increased workloads and many struggle to switch off, contributing to widespread stress—over half regularly experience high stress, and 1 in 5 took time off due to work related stress, twice the rate reported a decade ago.

Work-life balance has also worsened, especially for senior leaders, and is strongly linked to pressure and rising workloads. Only 50% of respondents feel they have a good work-life balance, down from 60% ten years ago (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015). Less than 40% of CEOs and senior managers feel they have a good work-life balance.

However, **only half of respondents (51%) felt their organisation has a culture that genuinely prioritizes and supports staff wellbeing**.

Management support: the majority of employees agree their manager respects them (79%), and is supportive if they have a problem (74%). However, only 67% agree managers are open and approachable on mental health and around 1 in 5 do not feel adequately supported in terms of their development, getting feedback, or being helped to perform their job well.

Good management support is linked to job satisfaction and staff retention, with 53% of those planning to leave said they are 'Unhappy with management'. However, when we look at the open text comments from staff who were unhappy with management a lot of people's complaints are not actually around managers being poor, but that managers are overstretched with little time to support staff or even that no manager is in place, often related to funding issues and redundancies/restructuring.

Flexible working: the majority of voluntary sector staff were happy with the choices they have around when and where they work. Those unhappy with flexible working options were more likely to report low job satisfaction.

7.1 General health and wellbeing of respondents

42% of respondents (paid staff and volunteers) reported having a physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. Mental health conditions and long-term illnesses were the main issues reported.

Respondents scored positively for most wellbeing indicators, although optimism and energy levels were lower.

Figure 21. Wellbeing indicators

Thinking about the last 2 weeks…

	All of the time	Often	Some of the time	Rarely	None of the time
I've been feeling useful	22%	46%	29%	1%	2%
I've been thinking clearly	17%	47%	34%	1%	1%
I've been feeling close to other people	16%	40%	36%	4%	5%
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	11%	30%	46%	7%	7%
I've had energy to spare	6%	19%	46%	12%	18%
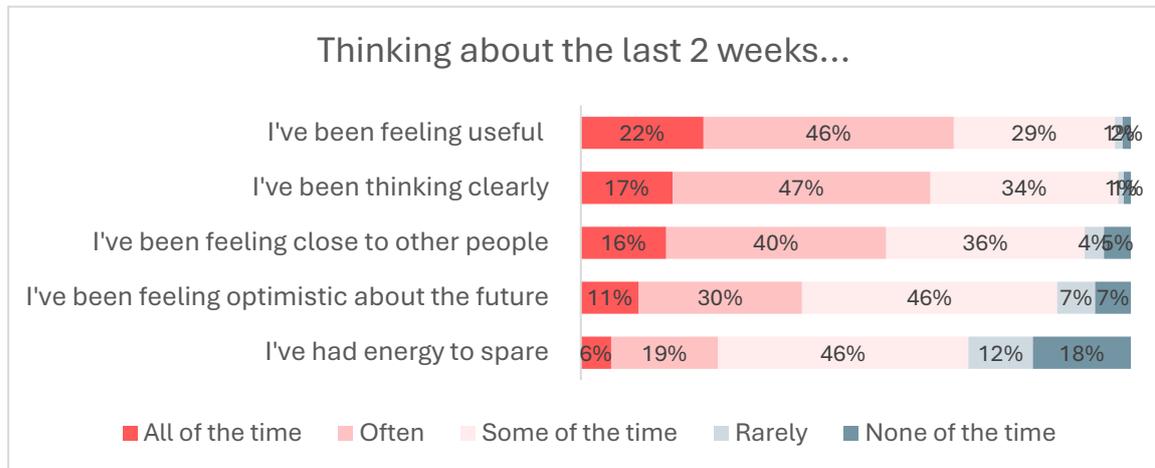
Paid staff and volunteers mostly reported their health in general as Very Good (25%), Good (47%) or Fair (23%). Only 4% reported that their health was Poor, and 1% preferred not to say. Looking at the self-reported health of working age adults in the Scottish Health Survey 2024, Workforce Survey respondents were slightly more likely to rate their heath as good or fair, and less likely to report health as either very good, or poor/very poor (fig. 22 below).

Figure 22. Respondent health rating

How is your health in general? Would you say it was…
(base = 1,193)

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	Don't know / I prefer not to say
Workforce Survey	25%	47%	23%	4%	0%	1%
Scottish Health Survey	30%	42%	19%	7%	2%	0%
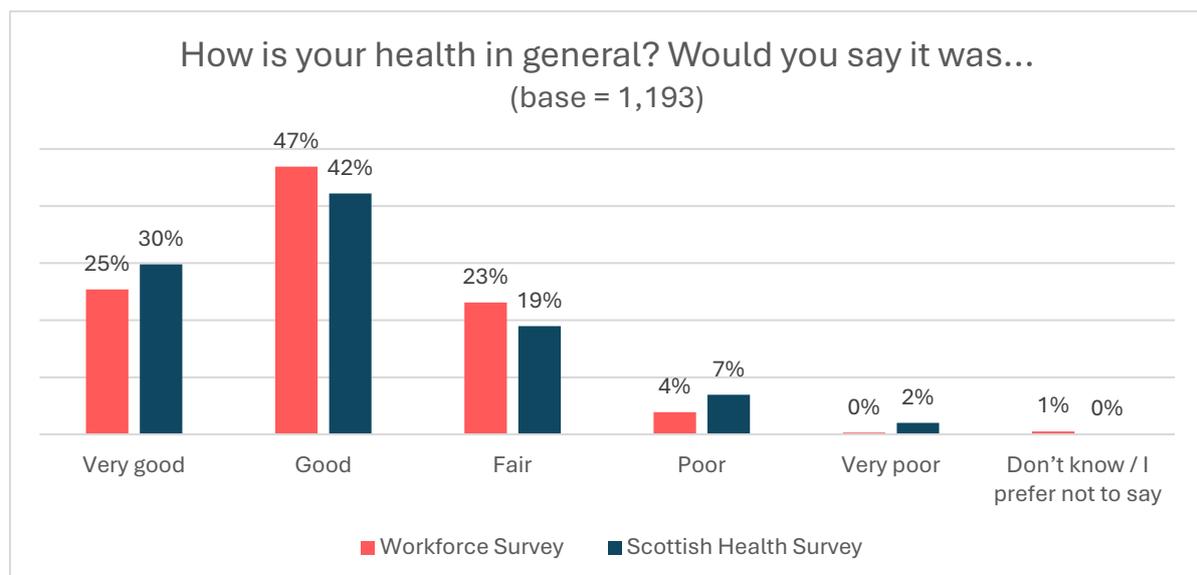
42% of respondents reported having a physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more.

Mental health conditions and long-term illnesses the main issues reported. This is broadly in line with wider population figures and close to what we would expect given the age profile of the sector's workforce.
Respondents were slightly more likely to report a physical disability than what we would expect to see based on the wider working population.

Just over 10% of all respondents reported that they were neurodivergent, which is in line with wider population figures.

Figure 23. Health issues

Health issues reported by paid staff and volunteers
(response base = 497)

Category	%
Mental health condition	41%
Long-term illness	32%
Neurodivergent	25%
Unseen disability or impairment	22%
Physical disability or impairment	15%
Other - please specify	11%
I prefer not to say	6%
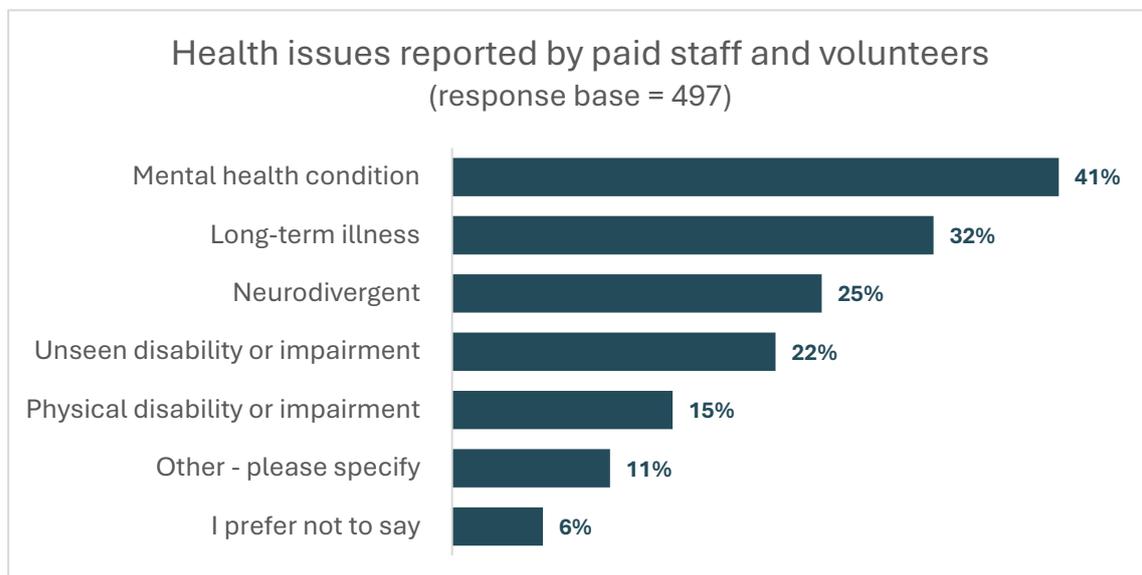
7.2 Wellbeing – organisational support

Only 51% of respondents felt their workplace has a culture that supports staff wellbeing.

30% of respondents disagreed that their workplace has a culture that supports staff wellbeing, of which 13% - over 1 in 10 - strongly disagreed.

Figure 24. Workplace support

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

My workplace has a culture that prioritizes and supports staff wellbeing: 51% Agree or Strongly agree, 18% Neither agree nor disagree, 31% Disagree or Strongly disagree

I feel supported by my colleagues: 70% Agree or Strongly agree, 17% Neither agree nor disagree, 13% Disagree or Strongly disagree

Legend: ■ Agree or Strongly agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree or Strongly disagree

7.3 Colleagues and team support

"The team I work with and my colleagues are wonderful. I feel truly supported by them."

70% feel supported by colleagues, which while still high is lower than a decade ago.

Of the respondents who were considering leaving their jobs voluntarily, 13% said that this was in part due to poor relationships colleagues. However, **only four** respondents made any reference to tensions within teams in the open text questions – a figure dwarfed by the large number of respondents who made references to supportive colleagues and teams.

There seemed to be no major differences in perceptions of colleague support between staff working from home and those working in an office or community setting, but the possible impact of less face to face contact alongside other factors such as high staff turnover and tensions over funding is a possible area to explore further.

7.4 Management support

Most respondents were very positive about their line managers and supervisors especially around respect and being treated fairly. There were however some weaker areas around feedback, support and development.

Figure 25. Management support

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My line manager/ supervisor…

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Respects me as a person	45%	34%	10%	7%	4%
Treats me fairly	43%	34%	11%	9%	4%
Is supportive if I have a problem	41%	33%	12%	8%	5%
Recognises when I have done a good job	37%	33%	15%	9%	
Is open and approachable on mental health	36%	31%	19%	8%	
Supports my learning and development	32%	31%	20%	10%	
Helps me perform well in my job	26%	31%	22%	13%	
Provides useful feedback on my work	22%	31%	21%	16%	

Looking at the figure above we can see that:

- the majority of employees agree their manager respects them (79%), treats them fairly (77%), is supportive if they have a problem (74%) and recognises when they have done a good job (70%). Around 2 in 5 strongly agreed with the above statements.
- 67% agree managers are open and approachable on mental health, while 15% disagree.
- 25% of respondents do not agree that their manager provides useful feedback, 22% do not agree their manager helps them perform well in their job, and 17% do not feel they get support with learning and development.

It is also important to note here that:

- almost 1 in 3 respondents felt that poor management/ leadership was one of the worst aspects of working in the voluntary sector, and
- 53% of those planning to leave say they are '*Unhappy with management'*.

However, when we look at the open text comments from staff who were unhappy with management there are a number of factors at play and some nuances when it comes to interpreting this figure - a lot of people's complaints are not actually around managers being poor, but that managers are overstretched with little time to support staff or even that no manager is in place, often related to funding issues.

Comments from respondents mentioned:

- Poor management practices in general
- Managers not having the right skills or not getting adequate training
- Managers being under pressure, exacerbating tension in teams
- No manager or manager over-stretched - several respondents spoke of having inadequate management support, often due to restructuring and redundancies.

"The charity has made a significant amount of staff redundant in the last year. My line manager recently, then my new line manager this week. The whole structure is becoming unstable and I have had no proper line management for nearly a year and I'm absorbing two more peoples work now"

"Management has no idea what some roles actually do since reduction in management structure and moving to a regional model which has increased isolation/silos"

"There has been a great deal of change in the management which has negatively impacted our organisation."

"I don't even have a direct line manager and have not done so 7+months of the 10 months I've been here"

7.5 Workloads

73% of respondents believe that their workload has increased over the last year, and of these 39% agreed strongly that their workload had increased. This up from 62% reporting an increase in workload in 2015 (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015).

Only 35% find it easy to 'switch off' after work. Almost half (47%) do not find it easy.

Figure 26. Workload and work-life balance

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (All respondents, n = 894)

Statement	Agree or Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree
My workload has increased over the last year	73%	19%	8%
I feel under pressure at work	62%	21%	16%
I find it easy to 'switch off' after work	35%	18%	47%
I feel I have a good work-life balance	50%	22%	29%

■ Agree or Strongly agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Disagree or Strongly disagree

Sample quotes from respondents illustrate the impact that increased workloads are having on staff:

> *"I have been having to work 12+hrs 7 days a week (always short term in response to a crisis, but we seem to be in crisis so often that this is the third such period of intensive overwork since January). It is too much responsibility but we don't have the resources to hire enough staff."*

> *"we're more in demand with an increased workload. In other sectors that might mean more resources are provided for the increased workload but as we need to seek funding for that and the lead in times are long so it may be a long wait to get more staff/resources for the work"*

> *"Workload grows year on year and pay isn't keeping up."*

> *"Really low pay for high stress - constantly feeling overwhelmed and under pressure."*
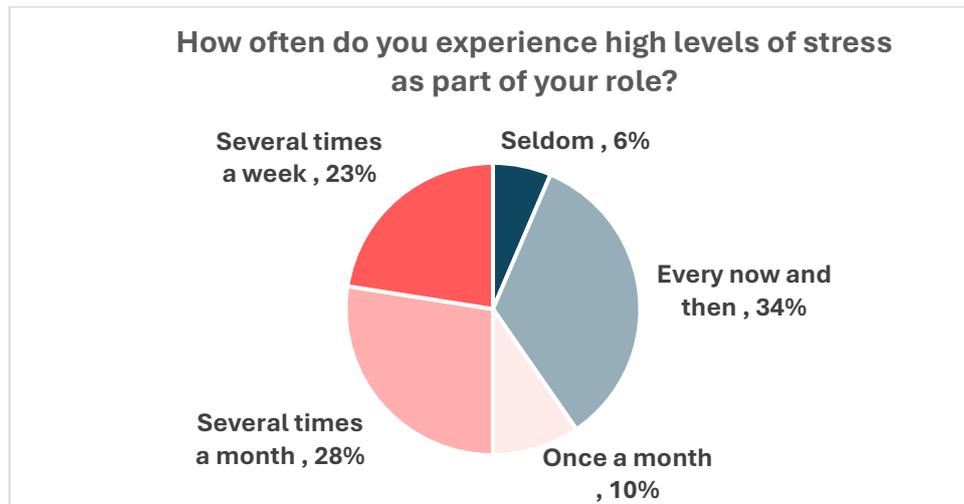
7.6 Stress

Stress and burnout in the voluntary sector appear to have risen sharply in recent years. This reflects wider trends of record levels of stress across UK workplaces both during the pandemic and in the years that followed (see for example the latest Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures on workplace stress and the TUC's recent report on record levels of work-related stress).

62% of respondents reported feeling under pressure at work, rising to 86% for CEOs and 78% for senior management.

We have also seen an increase in the number of people reporting high levels of stress. **Half of all respondents (51%) report regularly experiencing high levels of stress** as part of their role, i.e. several times a week or several times a month, rising to 61% for senior managers and 69% for CEOs.

While the survey focused on work-related stress, the boundary between work and wider life is often blurred. Organisations can offer support around personal pressures, but the broader state of the world also affects people's wellbeing at work, creating background stress that employers can only mitigate to a limited extent. This affects all employees but can be particularly pronounced in the voluntary sector. Many voluntary sector staff work with individuals and communities directly affected by the wider political and economic climate, and several respondent - particularly those in roles such as refugee support, poverty services and mental health support - highlighted additional external stressors (see also Overwork, burnout, and emotional exhaustion).

Figure 27. Levels of stress

How often do you experience high levels of stress as part of your role?

- Several times a week , 23%
- Seldom , 6%
- Every now and then , 34%
- Once a month , 10%
- Several times a month , 28%

7.6.1 Time off for work-related stress

1 in 5 respondents said they had taken time off due to work-related stress in the last year, up from 1 in 10 reporting they had taken time off from their current role due to stress in 2015 ([SCVO Workforce Survey 2015](#)).

109 people commented on taking time off for stress, with many talking about the impact that burnout and stress has had on them:

> *"Have been off with burnout for 2 months the year before"*

> *"I was signed off with Insomnia earlier this year, due to work place stress, I work with young people who are often at crisis point with their mental health."*

> *"I have been forcing myself to go into work for an extended period of time. I want to leave and may change career path completely due to the stress."*

7.6.2 Stress and likelihood to quit

Staff who report high levels of stress were also far more likely to be thinking about voluntarily quitting their jobs. Staff in frontline roles and those in manager and senior leadership roles were most likely to report both high levels of stress and a high likelihood of quitting their roles. While CEOs were reporting the highest levels of stress they were unlikely or only quite likely to be considering leaving their roles, possibly viewing high levels of stress as just 'part of the job'.

Figure 28. Levels of stress and likelihood to quit

Q34. How often do you experience high levels of stress as part of your role? compared against Q56. How likely are you to voluntarily quit your job in next 12 months?

	Seldom	Every now and then	Once a month	Several times a month	Several times a week
Highly likely to quit	4%	20%	5%	24%	47%
Quite likely to quit	6%	25%	12%	26%	31%
Quite unlikely to quit	5%	41%	10%	32%	12%
Highly unlikely to quit	9%	46%	11%	22%	12%
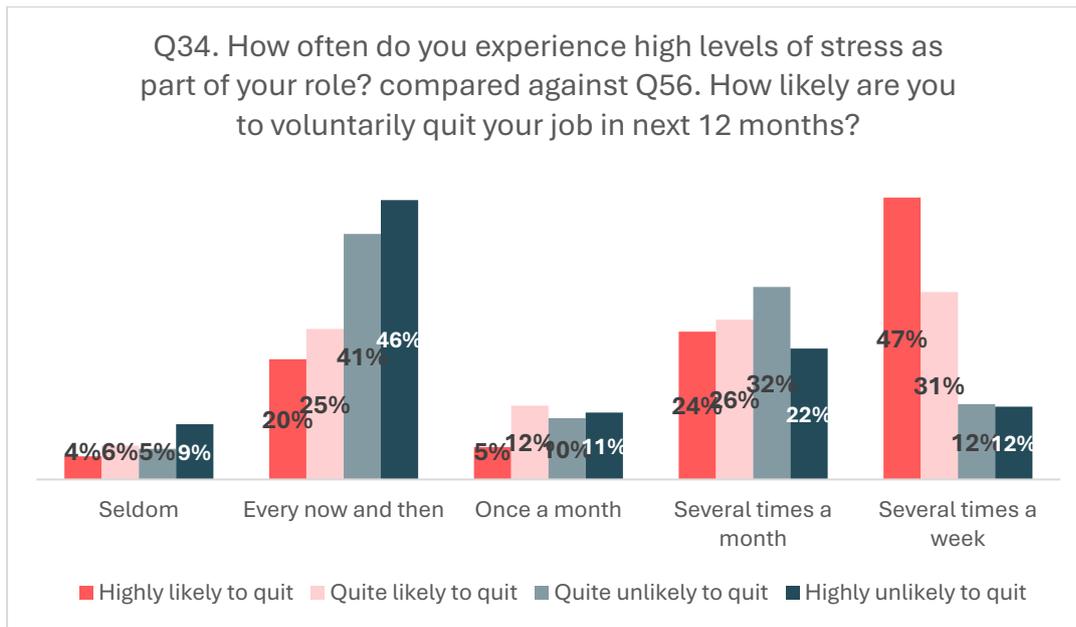
7.6.3 Impact of funding and lack of resources on stress levels

Many respondent comments highlighted that **funding and resource shortages** were key factors contributing to higher stress levels:

> *"I took a week of annual leave just to help me get away from work pressures (and to give me time to finish a couple of work related items). I am finding this fantastic, inspirational job is becoming more and more stressful as time goes on, funding gets more sparse and need grows."*

> *"We have been chronically under resourced. We have had a turnover of managers and cuts to the budget plus one person left who wasn't replaced for five months leaving me with a lot of increased work and no one to speak to about the emotional toll. My managers have all been supportive to a point but the key issue is cutting of resources."*

Several managers and CEOs also spoke of the increased stress caused by short-term funding and/or funding cuts particularly around: **not being able to offer staff job security, having to restructure and/or make staff redundant** and **worries around letting vulnerable service users down** if services have to be cut.

> *"The pressure associated with short term funding cycles and having to make redundancies"*
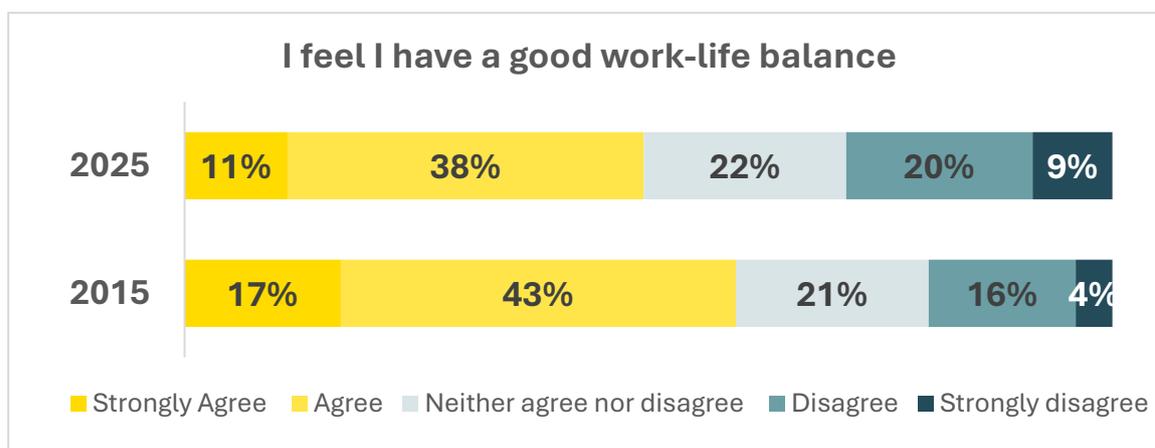
7.7 Work-life balance

"I should be using flexitime and TOIL for normal work-life balance management, but I'm actually using it to take time away from work when I'm overwhelmed due to work-related stress."

Only 50% of respondents feel they have a good work-life balance, down from 60% ten years ago (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015). Less than 40% of CEOs and senior managers feel they have a good work-life balance.

29% disagreed they had a good work-life balance, up from 20% in 2015.

Poor work-life balance was very strongly linked with reporting **feeling under pressure at work** and strongly linked with **increased workloads.**

Figure 29. Work-life balance 2015 v 2025

I feel I have a good work-life balance

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2025	11%	38%	22%	20%	9%
2015	17%	43%	21%	16%	4%

7.8 Hybrid working

61% of survey respondents work primarily from home or hybrid.

This is slightly higher than the wider workforce, where 51% say working from home is not available to them.

Work location seems to have little correlation with job satisfaction overall. Remote working also seems to have no significant impact on staff wellbeing. For example, staff working from home are no less likely to feel 'connected to others' than those in an office or community setting.

Figure 30. Main work location

From which location have you mainly worked in the last 3 months?

- 23% Primarily from home / remote
- 39% Hybrid i.e. from home and a work location
- 24% Primarily in an office
- 8% Primarily in a community setting
- 3% Primarily on-site at various locations including customer/client's premises
- 1% I work from no fixed location
- 2% Other - Write In
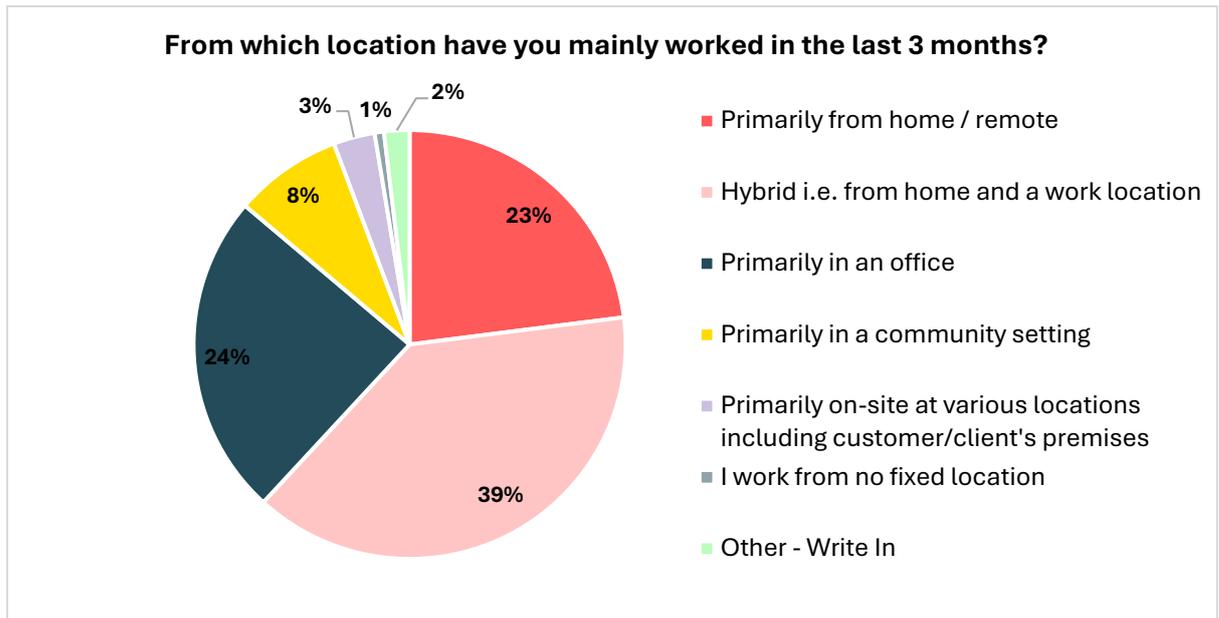
7.9 Flexible working

The majority of survey respondents (76%) were happy with the flexibility of working time options available to them, and only 15% were not happy.

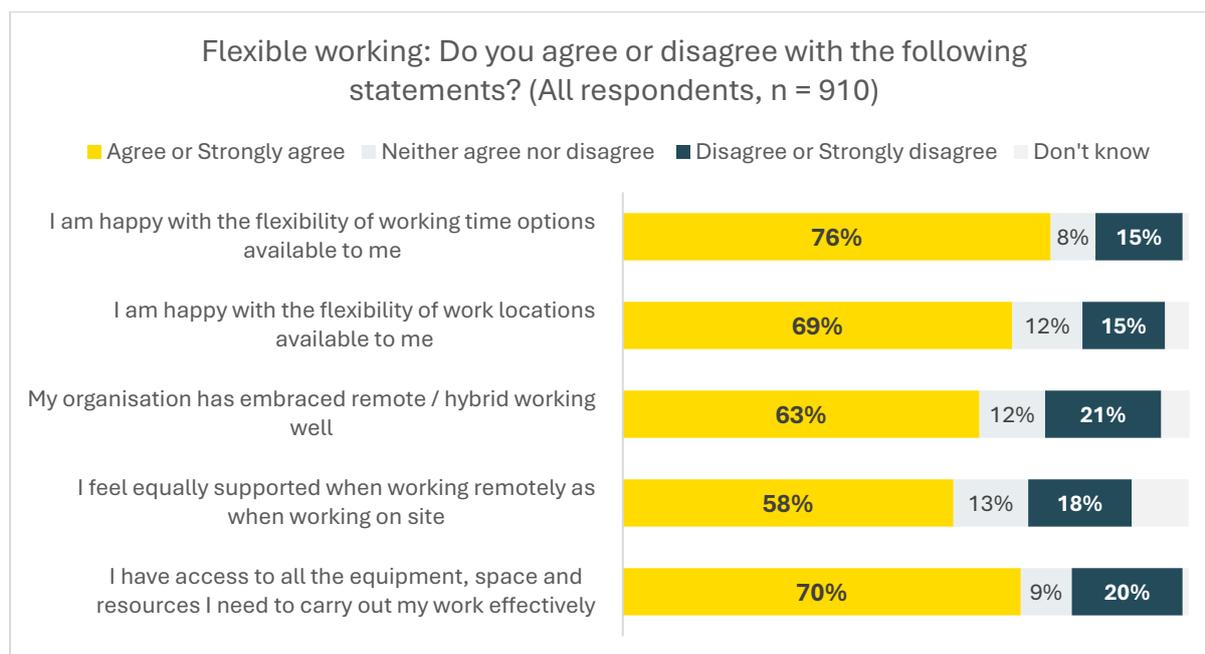3 in 5 respondents agreed that their organisation had embraced remote/hybrid working, although 1 in 5 disagreed. 1 in 5 also feel less supported when working remotely and feel they lack access to the equipment and resources they need to work effectively.

Figure 31. Flexible working

Flexible working: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (All respondents, n = 910)

Legend: ■ Agree or Strongly agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree or Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

Statement	Agree or Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree
I am happy with the flexibility of working time options available to me	76%	8%	15%
I am happy with the flexibility of work locations available to me	69%	12%	15%
My organisation has embraced remote / hybrid working well	63%	12%	21%
I feel equally supported when working remotely as when working on site	58%	13%	18%
I have access to all the equipment, space and resources I need to carry out my work effectively	70%	9%	20%

Flexible working correlated strongly with job satisfaction - those happy with the flexible working options available to them far more likely to report higher job satisfaction overall:

"My organisation has been amazing with working hours and flexibility - absolutely fantastic and the first organisation I've ever worked for that understands caring responsibilities!"

"My work is very flexible, which is much appreciated as it allows me to juggle my hours around my caring responsibilities. I don't feel I would get the same flexibility in other sectors."

7.10 Implications

The findings show a workforce committed to their roles but increasingly stretched by rising demand, resource pressures and inconsistent organisational support.

Increased workloads and pressure are a major issue for paid staff in the sector, often compounded by low pay and understaffing due to budget restraints. The increase in workloads is a key driver behind rising stress levels in the sector.

Many charities are beginning to trial AI tools and are starting to see some productivity benefits, but these gains are still modest, early, and highly dependent on context. Sustained investment in user-centred technology and in building digital skills remains essential (SCVO Digital, 2026). Organisations also need to be realistic about what AI can deliver. While technology may help some staff work more efficiently, it is unlikely to significantly reduce overall workloads or lessen the need for human capacity.

Stress and burnout in the voluntary sector appear to have risen sharply in recent years, reflecting wider trends of record levels of stress across UK workplaces since Covid. CEOs and senior managers report the highest pressure, poor work life balance and

frequent stress. This points to risks around leadership sustainability and the knock-on effects for organisations in relation to organisational stability and staff morale – see **Leadership section** below.

Many survey respondents also spoke of stress exacerbating or triggering underlying health issues. Stress not only takes a toll on individuals but is also threatening organisational sustainability and effectiveness, as rising stress-related illness leads to increasing numbers of lost working days. The HSE also warns of increased tensions within teams and higher staff turnover.

Only 52% of staff agree that their organisation prioritises staff wellbeing and staff with physical and mental health issues are less likely to feel supported by their employers, suggesting that support is either not available, or available but not as visible or accessible as it could be.

Given the potential impact of increased workplace stress, the real or perceived lack of organisational support is an area to explore further.

8. Funding landscape and working with the public sector

Funding insecurity was reported to be the main factor impacting on the recruitment and retention of staff, as well as staff wellbeing.

The strong emphasis on financial challenges reinforces evidence from the [SCVO Third Sector Tracker](#), which shows that financial challenges continue to dominate the top three challenges faced by voluntary sector organisations. Uncertainty about the future and cash-flow constraints have also reached record levels.

The voluntary sector in Scotland receives funding from a mix of sources, including fundraised income, donations, income generation activities, and public sector grants and contracts. Public sector funding accounted for 40 per cent of the voluntary sector's income in 2023.

The survey generated a significant volume of free-text comments relating to public sector funding. Many comments related to working relationships with public sector funders, including some tensions which are discussed below.

The difficult funding environment and the relationship between the voluntary sector and public sector were strong themes that recurred throughout almost all sections of the survey but were particularly prominent in the 'final comments' sections.

8.1 Funding issues

8.1.1 Funding shortages and uncertainty

Concerns around **inadequate and uncertain funding** and the resulting **stresses this puts on the workforce** were the most cited negative aspects of working in the voluntary sector. Respondents cited the negative impact this had on organisations:

> *"There is always uncertainty around funding having to reinvent your organisation at times to continue to receive funding when what you do makes a difference and can be life changing for the people we support."*

> *"The ongoing stress and pressure created by the lack of funding / funding cuts, and as such operating in an uncertain landscape with minimal guarantees of the future security of the programme/organisation. This creates a challenging environment with uncertainty and pressure to perform to secure ongoing funding."*

> *"The budget cuts and increased expense cost (wage increase, NI increase - to be covered without any extra cost provided) all together are crippling organizations which impacts staff well-being, recruitment and it will have a major negative impact on society overall once*

voluntary organizations will vanish into nothing due to lack of money. There's a constant feel that funders just want more and more service to be provided for the same or less money."

8.1.2 Impact of funding shortages on pay and staffing

Respondents raised pay as a key concern, with many situating pay within the context of funding levels, funding practice and wider funding uncertainty.

"This sector is in crisis - people are tired and burnt out. I am actively seeking work elsewhere & so are my colleagues. Talent will leave this sector in droves if funding and recognition of fair pay for the work we do is not addressed"

"I have worked in the third sector for 25+ years and pay has been consistently poor-often driven by funders paying the bare min and expecting unrealistic results-this was always offset by a sense of purpose and job satisfaction. Where I am now feels entirely driven by money and funding with staff welfare, satisfaction so far down the list of priorities that it's hard to believe. Staff turnover and burnout is extremely high and very few people seem to exhibit the sense of purpose I used to see in the sector."

A strong sub-theme was inequity in pay and terms relative to public sector roles, alongside feeling "undervalued" relative to the public sector.

"The third sector is generally being undervalued by statutory funders... seen as the way to provide services on the cheap."

"We end up doing so much of the work the public sector should be doing, yet our wages and conditions are much poorer... This needs to change NOW."

"We are expected to work in partnership with agencies directly funded by Scottish Government, where salaries are significantly higher... The inequity is astounding and puts the Third Sector at a disadvantage."

"In a previous role I occupied we used to joke that it was called the 'third' sector because we did a 'third' more work than the other sectors, for a 'third' less of the pay. That joke is wearing thin the longer I stay in the sector."

8.1.3 Short-term funding

Short-term funding cycles in particular were criticised as creating structural instability and negatively impacting on staff and on organisational effectiveness:

"Short term funding with unrealistic outcome targets for timescales. Lack of stability means constant staff changes/lack of consistency"

"Short term funding and the overall financial challenges are dominating the sector as a whole. I'm seeing many individuals and organisations who can't focus time and energy to deliver services for continually negotiating, sourcing and applying for funding. It feels like a never ending treadmill!."

"Short-term funding and unrealistic targets mean a project can fold before it has even had a chance to get going"

" The sector is haemorrhaging skilled and highly talented people as there is reduced security more than ever, and pay and benefits are highly inequitable compared to public and private sector. We are in a crisis."

8.2.4 Impact of funding insecurity on staff

Short-term funding and funding insecurity were key themes for 64 of the 285 respondents who left final comments – often the respondents were frustrated with the lack of progress on long-term funding despite evidence linking longer term funding with better outcomes.

"Although I am in a stable job with a large charity now I worked on 3-month contracts in previous employment due to short term funding - people cannot live that way and services cannot be delivered effectively that way."

"Everything is temporary and changes so fast. It means I don't have job security, but it also means that you spend most of your time working out what's on in your area as it all changes so quickly due to short term funding. You feel like you've only just got started and spend most of the time building awareness of services or projects and then funding finishes. That's very disheartening."

"Having a fixed term contract - underlying anxiety of the lack of security which impacts other life choices e.g. having children, buying a home."

"Uncertainty in sustainable funding is the worst think about my job, and about the charity as a whole. We are all on temporary contracts, which is very unsettling for all."

"We are often chasing funding just to keep our jobs and that uncertainty and turnover isn't good for staff or the people we support/ projects we deliver."

Respondents highlighted the benefits of longer-term funding, particularly in supporting better outcomes and organisational stability.

"Having worked for 15 years in the public sector and twenty four in the voluntary sector, it is hugely depressing to be facing the same old, same old third sector challenges. Five year funding produces high level outcomes- we've known this for so long, evidenced it etc, so why are we made to limp along as the poor relation, with more and more demands put on us, despite real time cuts and annual last minute grant announcements, just before sector

goes on protected notice. It really is not good enough, given the significant social return/ return to the public purse on the funding investment."

"If funding was longer term for proven organisations that are performing well, it would feel much better... it starts to feel like making a longer-term difference is not a priority."

"We have just secured 3 years' funding for my post... it is a well-managed organisation and I feel supported to do my job well. My answers would have been very different in previous roles without that stability."

Many sector staff, especially longer-term employees, spoke about a sector in "crisis" and characterised the current period as one of the most challenging they have experienced.

"The current funding landscape is the worst I have ever experienced in the last 30 years."

"Having worked in the Sector for 20+ years, this is the toughest time we have ever faced.   I used to enjoy just how innovative and proactive we could be, as well as flexible and independent. [...] We are now a sector of burnt out staff and volunteers - development, innovation and proactive approaches are a thing of the past."

8.2 Relationships with the public sector

The second most prominent theme related to relationships with the public sector. Around a quarter of the final open text comments related to government funding and procurement practices and/ or working relationships with public sector bodies.

8.2.1 Public sector funding issues

Respondents described government and local authorities providing **insufficient, short term or inconsistent funding,** and reported feeling undervalued. Many identified a disparity with 'mainstream' public sector services, particularly in relation to pay, recognition and resourcing.

"I feel we are not valued by government, at all levels, for what we do as a sector. I'm tired of the lack of long-term support and funding and endless cycles of fundraising."

"There should be more recognition for the third sector and funding should be made available to allow for parity of pay compared to the council workers."

Some comments linked these concerns to specific policy changes that increased operating costs without corresponding funding increases.

"The impact of the unfunded increase to Employer National Insurance by the UK government on a voluntary sector which is commissioned to provide services on behalf of local authorities."

"Overall the way pay is approached in the voluntary sector is shocking. I understand that there are restrictions on funding but SG/funders need to be realistic of what it actually costs to run an organisation and that staff cannot survive on good intentions and passion. Funding needs to match the costs of having a staff team to deliver whatever that organisation exists to deliver."

Others described broader structural imbalance, with voluntary organisations increasingly expected to deliver services previously provided by the 'mainstream' public sector, but on significantly poorer terms.

"Having spent my main career (25 years) in the public sector, I feel able to say, with a good degree of certainty, that the third sector is dealing with the fall out of cuts to services and having to act as the 'underpaid help'. Public sector leaders would not work or expect their staff to work for what they pay the third sector to provide services they have stopped providing or cut. That puts third sector leaders in the unenviable position of having to deliver services knowingly under remunerating staff and relying on volunteers or cutting corners in other aspects of their operations."

"We increasingly pick up what the public sector used to do... deliver it for a fraction of the cost, with abysmally lower pensions and constant insecurity."

"Voluntary sector is not valued or remunerated in the way the public sector is and yet when public sector services are cut everything falls on the voluntary sector"

8.2.2 Public sector relationships

Respondents also described **tension and power imbalances in their relationships with government**, particularly in relation to joint working, procurement, referrals practices that exceed community or volunteer service remits, or unrealistic partnership expectations set by better resourced statutory bodies.

Several respondents highlighted pressures arising from referrals and service expectations that surpass capacity in the context of shrinking budgets.

"We are propping up social work services... referrals... require more than a befriending service; budgets are being decimated while expecting high levels of service."

Concern was raised about the transfer of pressures from 'mainstream' public services to the voluntary sector, with respondents highlighting poorer employment conditions and staff burnout.

"The Scottish Government needs to better recognise and fund the social care sector. The gulf between pay grades in the NHS and those in the social care sector (who are largely expected to pick up the slack where the NHS can't) is wildly unfair and staff are finding themselves in positions where they are burning themselves out working overtime to keep themselves afloat."

One respondent described an increasingly challenging funding and commissioning environment, with funders perceived as being removed from operational realities. while being able to impose unrealistic expectations due to the funding insecurity faced by providers.

"Unsustainable changes to services; it does increasingly feel that commissioners and funders of services are completely detached from reality, and can knowingly enforce unrealistic expectations because every service is terrified of losing their contracts. I can deal with most of the other difficulties of working within the third sector (i.e. the 'normal' instability; low pay and lack of parity), and have done for over a decade, but the adversarial approach now in place is difficult to stomach."

8.2.3 Volunteering and public sector relationships

Volunteers and trustees were less likely to comment on funding issues and public sector relationships. However, several respondents used the final comments section in the volunteering section to highlight the negative impacts of funding cuts were having, particularly where volunteers were being asked to plug gaps in provision. Several respondents raised the need for clear boundaries to prevent volunteer burnout. Others also felt that their voluntary work was only made necessary by the lack of adequate government funding for the service.

"My concern is there is now a reliance in the third sector for people to volunteer and work for free because of funding cuts etc. People who tend to volunteer are also very empathetic and give a lot of themselves - there have to be boundaries in place so people don't become burnt out."

Questions were raised about whether voluntary work was compensating for the absence of adequately funded 'mainstream' public services.

"I shouldn't have to volunteer for the causes I do, these programmes should be funded or unnecessary because the solutions we're fighting for should be tackled by government. Volunteering on top of working is exhausting but some of us feel compelled to help causes we care about, and often help multiple causes, so you need to maintain boundaries to ensure you're not burning out."

"Sometimes it feels like I am trapped. If I don't do it who will. I live in a small rural community where there are virtually no statutory services and the reliance is on volunteers and groups to deliver essential social engagement and mental well-being

opportunities. Our group does not receive any core funding."

8.3 Implications

Taken together, these findings reinforce evidence of financial precarity and poor funding practice faced by the voluntary sector, alongside challenging public sector funding and commissioning relationships. This has clear implications for workforce sustainability, organisational capacity and service delivery.

The evidence in this report reinforces what is already well understood across the sector: adequate, timely, multi-year and flexible funding is critical for voluntary organisations and their staff:

- **Short-term and insecure funding is undermining workforce stability and sectoral resilience**, contributing directly to recruitment and retention challenges - including loss of experienced staff, institutional knowledge.
- **Grants and contracts that do not meet the cost of delivery undermine voluntary sector resilience.** This continues to drive staff burnout, undermines staff wellbeing, and reduces the capacity for staff to plan and deliver services.
- **Poor funding practice and inequitable treatment by public sector funders undermine the capacity of voluntary sector organisations to deliver Fair Work**, with many respondents noting marked disparities in pay, terms, and conditions compared with the public sector.
- **Constraints and cuts within mainstream public services are creating failure demand**, with voluntary organisations increasingly expected to respond to unmet need and unsustainable referrals, placing increased pressure on staff and volunteers.
- **Limited scope for genuine collaborative partnership working and unrealistic expectations** continue to undermine continue to define an inequitable relationship between public sector funders and voluntary organisations**.**

9. Pay and benefits

Security is one of the five key dimensions of Fair Work and covers both pay and job security. However, despite positive policies both pay and job insecurity appear to have worsened over the last decade.

Pay: 1 in 5 voluntary sector workers say their pay does not cover their basic needs. Frontline workers in the voluntary sector are most likely to have issues around pay, but pay insecurity is experienced by around 2 in 5 workers across all roles, even in senior roles. The number of respondents who feel they are paid fairly has fallen since 2015, as has the number of who feel they are paid comparably to people doing similar jobs in the private or public sectors. Dissatisfaction with pay appears to be on the rise.

In-work benefits: many respondents commented on the importance of decent in-work benefits but there was a lot of uncertainty around in-work benefits, with many respondents unsure if their employer offered certain benefits. And while many staff valued the in-work benefits offered by employers several noted that these softer benefits were no replacement for decent pay and pensions.

9.1 Pay

Dissatisfaction with pay emerged as one of the strongest themes in the survey, and the evidence suggests that concerns about pay have grown in recent years. A significant proportion of respondents reported financial strain:

- 21% said their pay does not meet their basic needs, rising to 38% among frontline workers.
- 44% felt their job and pay are not stable and secure (55% for frontline staff).
- 32% said they are unable to plan finances months ahead (51% for frontline staff).

Perceptions of fair pay have declined over the last decade. Compared with 2015, fewer respondents now feel they are paid fairly or in line with people doing similar roles in the public or private sectors (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015).

Shorter-term trends also suggest rising pay dissatisfaction even within the last couple of years. For instance, GCVS Fair Work Survey 2023, which received responses from a similar profile of respondents, shows a clear negative shift:
- 73% of respondents in 2022 felt that their pay covers their basic needs, compared to only 64% in 2025
- In 2022, 49% felt they were paid fairly for the work they do; in 2025, only 39% agreed.

Figure 32. Pay and perceptions of pay

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to pay?
All respondents (n = 843)

Statement	Agree or Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Don't know
I am paid fairly for the work that I do	39%	16%	44%	
I am paid comparably to other people doing a similar job to me within my organisation	57%	15%	20%	8%
I am paid comparably to other people doing a similar job to me within the voluntary sector	41%	17%	30%	11%
I am paid comparably to other people doing a similar job to me in the public or private sectors	8%	8%	72%	12%
My pay covers my basic needs	64%	15%	21%	
My job and pay are stable and secure	39%	16%	44%	
I can confidently plan my finances for several months ahead	54%	14%	32%	

■ Agree or Strongly agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree or Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

9.1.2 Pay responses by role level

Frontline workers in the voluntary sector are most likely to have issues around pay, particularly around **pay covering basic needs**.

But as the figures below show, **pay insecurity** is experienced by around 2 in 5 workers across all roles, even in senior roles.
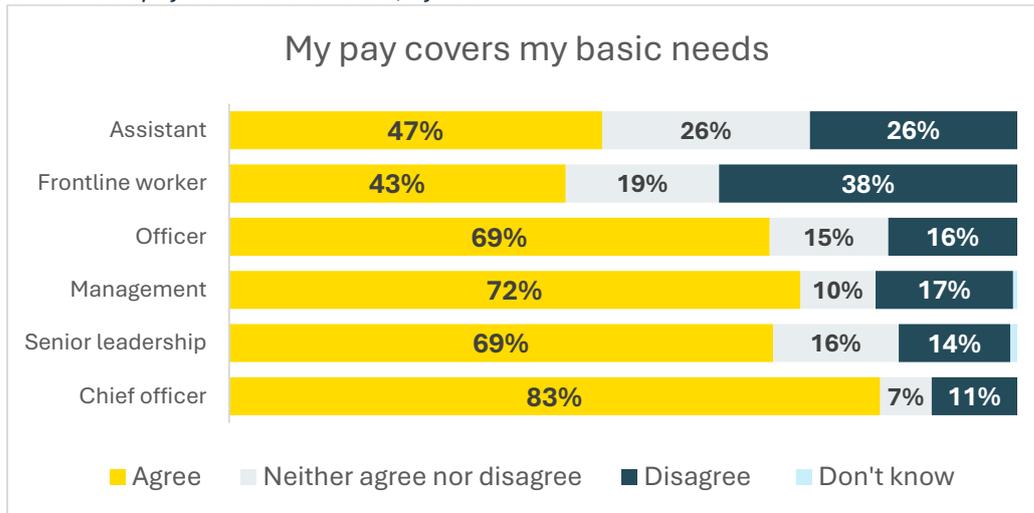
Figure 33. Does pay cover basic needs, by role

My pay covers my basic needs

Role	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Assistant	47%	26%	26%
Frontline worker	43%	19%	38%
Officer	69%	15%	16%
Management	72%	10%	17%
Senior leadership	69%	16%	14%
Chief officer	83%	7%	11%

Legend: Agree ▮ Neither agree nor disagree ▮ Disagree ▮ Don't know

Figure 34. Is job and pay stable and secure, by role

My job and pay are stable and secure

Role	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Assistant	45%	21%	34%
Frontline worker	27%	17%	55%
Officer	40%	19%	40%
Management	45%	13%	40%
Senior leadership	42%	11%	47%
Chief officer	45%	14%	41%

Legend: Agree ▮ Neither agree nor disagree ▮ Disagree ▮ Don't know
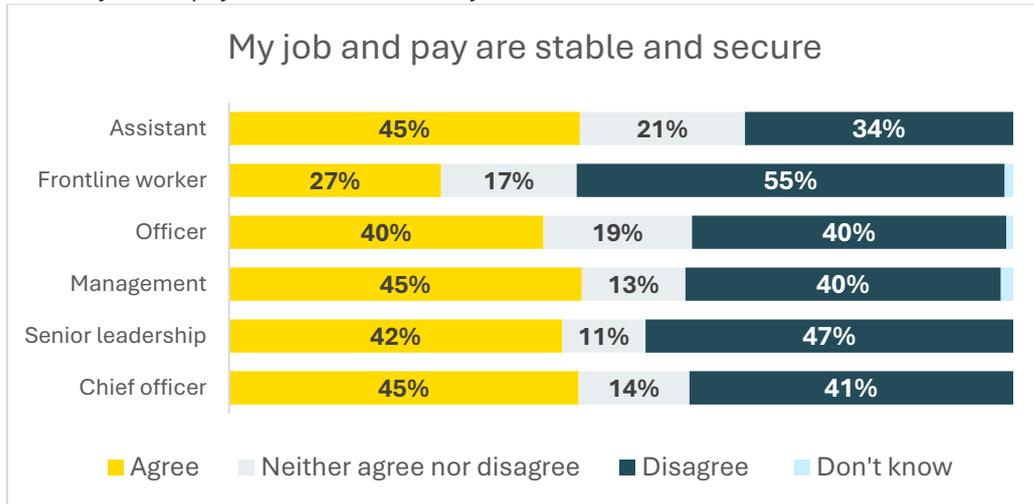
Figure 35. Can finances be planned, by role

I can confidently plan my finances for several months ahead

Role	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Assistant	42%	21%	37%
Frontline worker	35%	14%	51%
Officer	59%	15%	25%
Management	57%	13%	30%
Senior leadership	62%	12%	26%
Chief officer	72%	10%	18%

Legend: Agree ▮ Neither agree nor disagree ▮ Disagree
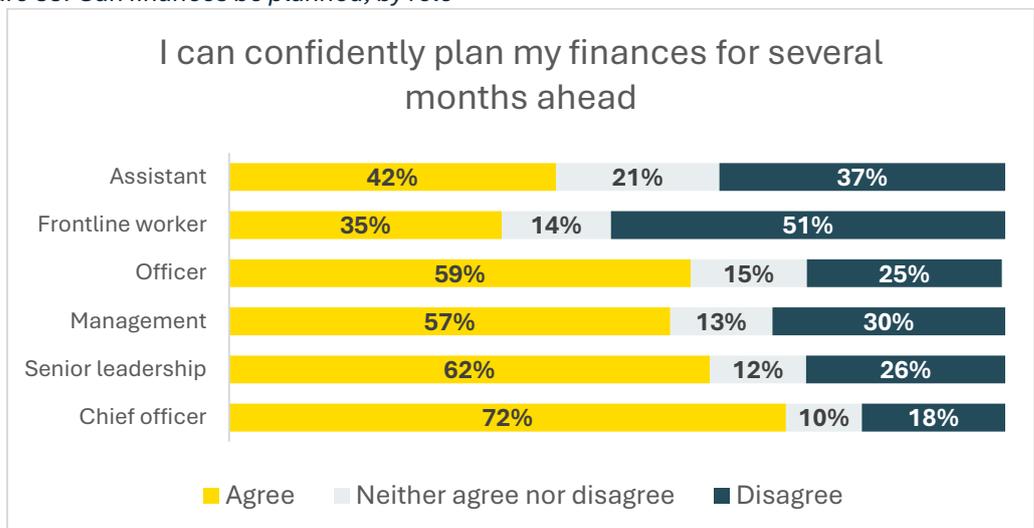
9.2 Fair pay and pay parity

Only 39% of respondents feel they are paid fairly for the work they do, lower than the 51% of staff who agreed they were paid fairly in 2015 (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015) and the 49% who agreed they were paid fairly in 2022 (GCVS Fair Work Survey 2023).

While not directly comparable, this figure is notably lower than the 52% of respondents to the 2025 UK Good Work index who agreed that they were 'paid appropriately' for the work they do.

Pay parity is the biggest area of tension: 72% of respondents do not feel they are paid comparably to people doing similar jobs in the private or public sectors, up from 63% in 2015.

9.3 In-work benefits

Staff benefits are to some extent shaped by the size of the employer, with larger organisations more likely to offer certain benefits.
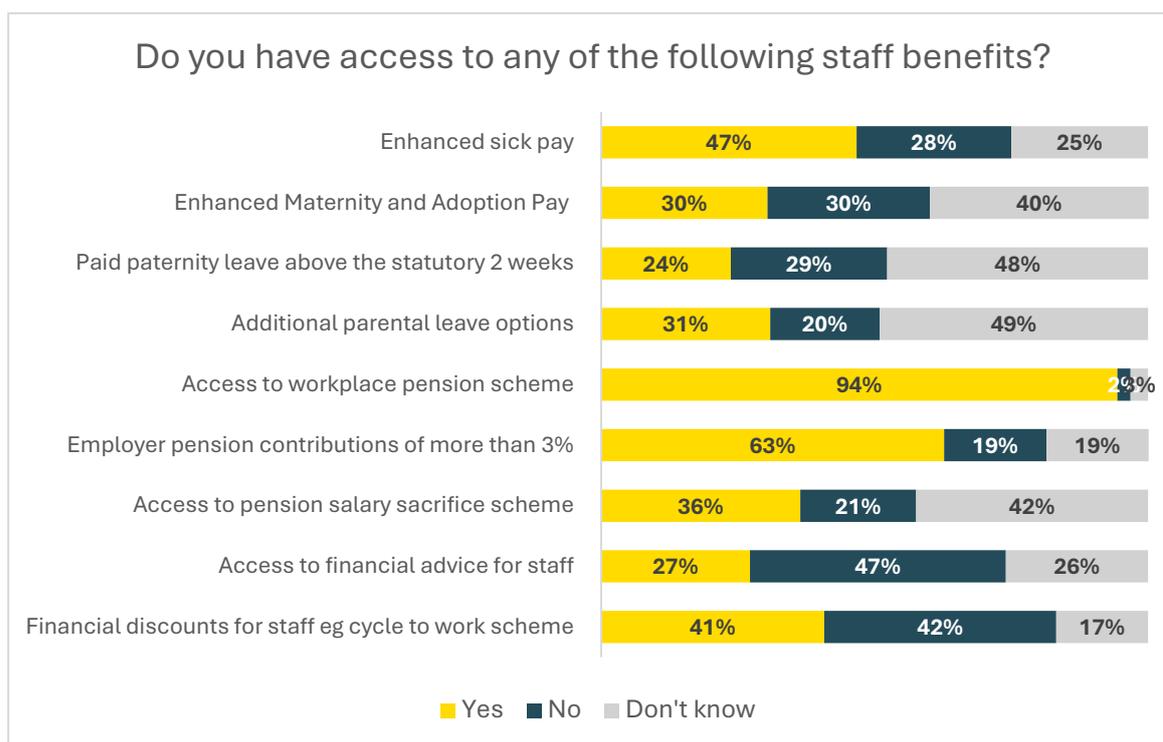
Almost all respondents have access to a workplace pension scheme, and two-thirds of respondents reported that their employer makes contributions of more than 3%. However, many respondents raised inadequate pensions as a key issue, with several contrasting low sector pensions with more generous public sector ones.

Over half of staff employed by medium and large organisations (50+ staff) reported they have access to enhanced sick pay, but the figure falls for smaller organisations.

While many respondents commented on the importance of decent in-work benefits there was a lot of uncertainty around in-work benefits, with many respondents unsure if their employer offered certain benefits.

This was in part influenced by the nature of the benefit (eg parental benefits irrelevant for many) and length of service, but even long-term staff seemed unaware of many fairly 'core' benefits. Several respondents also felt that their employers are not clear on what they offer staff.

Figure 36. In-work benefits

Do you have access to any of the following staff benefits?

Benefit	Yes	No	Don't know
Enhanced sick pay	47%	28%	25%
Enhanced Maternity and Adoption Pay	30%	30%	40%
Paid paternity leave above the statutory 2 weeks	24%	29%	48%
Additional parental leave options	31%	20%	49%
Access to workplace pension scheme	94%	2%	4%
Employer pension contributions of more than 3%	63%	19%	19%
Access to pension salary sacrifice scheme	36%	21%	42%
Access to financial advice for staff	27%	47%	26%
Financial discounts for staff eg cycle to work scheme	41%	42%	17%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

9.4 Implications

Pay

Low pay is a major area of concern for many sector staff, alongside widespread **pay insecurity** that affects staff across all levels.

The perceived lack of **pay parity** is a particular source of tension for many staff, highlighting the need for adequate funding and fair remuneration.

Supporting organisations and funders to commit to the Real Living Wage and Living Hours is a critical minimum step.

While this would help raise pay for those at the lower end of the wage scale the survey also raised concerns around **wage compression**. Many respondents felt that pay for more senior roles does not reflect the additional responsibilities, making progression less attractive and impacting on staff retention. Sector feedback suggests that greater transparency around pay, supported by clear benchmarking guidance would improve pay parity and help ensure pay levels in the sector are competitive and attractive to current and prospective staff.

It is important to note here that even meeting minimum Real Living Wage commitments is a challenge for many employers at the moment, highlighting the need for the sector and its funders to work together to set realistic and fair funding levels.

Pensions

Concerns about low pension provision were common, with many respondents contrasting voluntary sector pensions unfavourably with those available in the public sector. While keeping up with public sector pensions is unrealistic, one area for voluntary sector employers to look at is whether they meet Living Pension savings targets, and if not, how they might work towards them.

> *"Funding position not allowing for increases in salaries for staff in line with inflation and inability to meet real living pension. Staff retention is a worry."*

In-work benefits

There appeared to be a widespread lack of awareness among staff about the exact range of benefits offered by their employer. This suggests that organisations should communicate with staff more regularly to keep them up to date about what is available, and explore what benefits staff would find most valuable.

However, while many staff valued the in-work benefits offered by employers, several noted that these softer or often non-applicable benefits (e.g. child-care related benefits for those without families) were no replacement for decent pay and pensions.

> *"It is nice to have soft benefits, enhanced sick pay etc but it doesn't pay bills or lets one save for buying own property and prepare for a secure future."*

10. Job security and job mobility

[**Security** is one of the five key dimensions of Fair Work](#) and covers both pay and job security. However, despite positive policies both pay and job insecurity appear to have worsened over the last decade.

- 1 in 4 respondents had 'non-permanent' work contracts, far higher than what we see in other sectors ([CIPD 2025](#)).
- 1 in 4 respondents (26%) said they worry about their jobs 'All of the time' or 'Often', and this rises to 41% for those on Fixed Term contracts.
- 1 in 4 respondents (27%) felt it was quite or highly likely they would lose their job in the next 12 months.
- More than 1 in 3 respondents (39%) thought it quite or highly likely that they would voluntarily quit their jobs in the next 12 months – almost twice the rate seen in other sectors.

10.1 Contract types

75% of respondents to the survey were on permanent contracts, while **25% of respondents had 'non-permanent' work contracts, far higher than what we see in other sectors**.

For example the 9% of workers in fixed-term, casual, temporary and freelance roles seen in the [2025 CIPD Good Work Index survey](#).

Non-permanent roles were primarily Fixed Term (21%), with the other 4% made up of casual, temporary and freelance roles (fig. 37). This is very similar to the proportions seen in the [GCVS Fair Work Survey 2023](#). The [GCVS 2023](#) survey also found that many voluntary sector employees had been on successive short contracts with their current employer for lengthy periods of time, with over a quarter of respondents reporting being on successive short contracts for five years or longer.

Those in more senior roles are more likely to be employed on permanent contracts, while 39% of Assistants 38% of Frontline Workers are on fixed or casual contracts – see fig. 38 below.

Given the under-representation of Frontline Workers, the survey is likely to be underestimating the prevalence of non-permanent contracts. The real figure is likely somewhere between 25% and 38%.
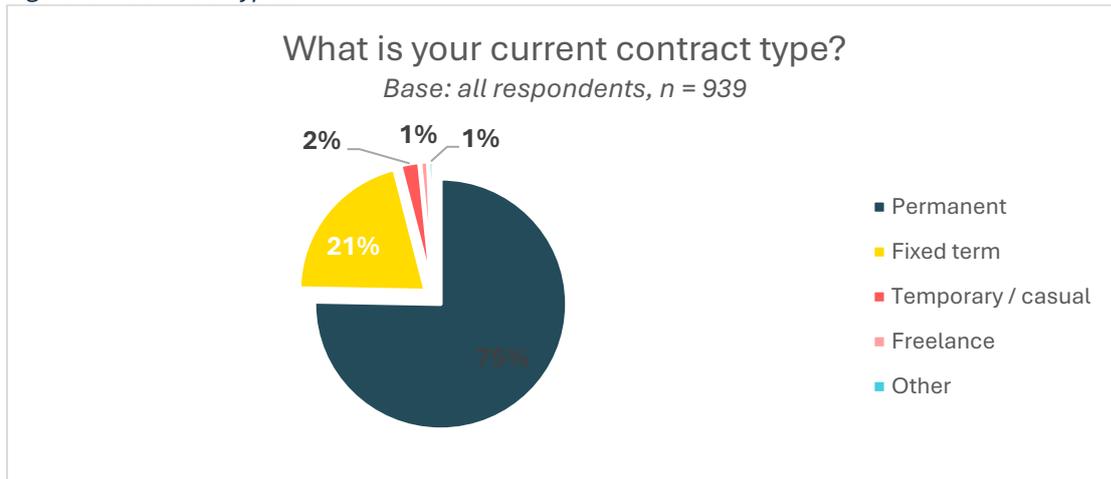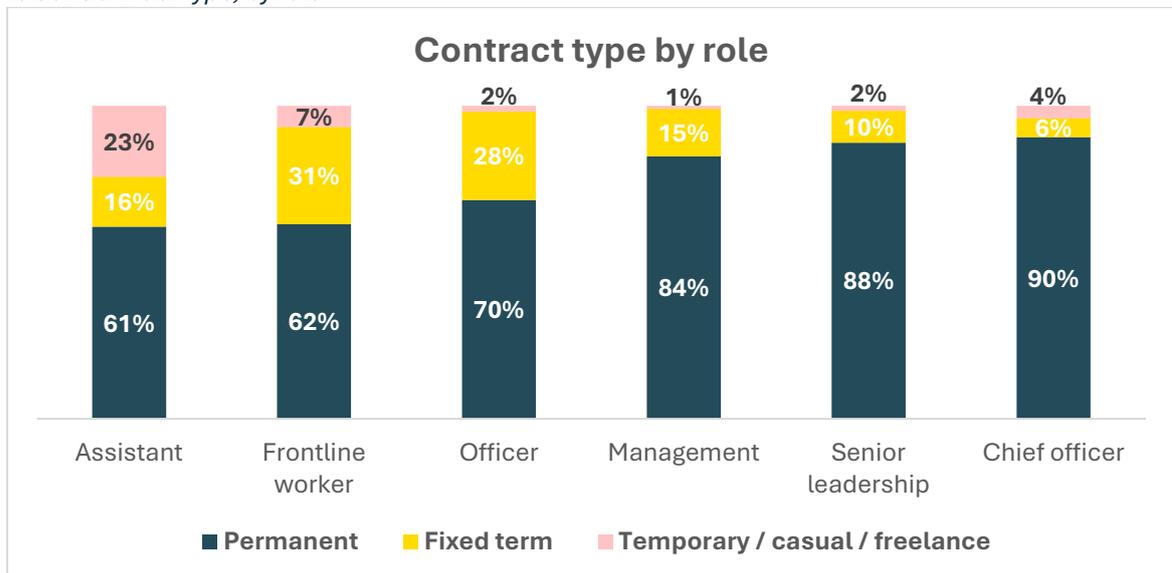
Figure 37. Contract types

What is your current contract type?
Base: all respondents, n = 939

2%   1%   1%

- Permanent
- Fixed term
- Temporary / casual
- Freelance
- Other

21%

73%

Figure 38. Contract type, by role

Contract type by role

	Assistant	Frontline worker	Officer	Management	Senior leadership	Chief officer
Temporary / casual / freelance	23%	7%	2%	1%	2%	4%
Fixed term	16%	31%	28%	15%	10%	6%
Permanent	61%	62%	70%	84%	88%	90%

■ **Permanent** ■ **Fixed term** ■ **Temporary / casual / freelance**

10.2 Job security

10.2.1 Job insecurity and funding uncertainty

Job insecurity was one of the key areas of concern raised by respondents in 2025. There has been no noticeable improvement since we surveyed the sector's workforce in 2015 despite commitments to Fair Work. If anything, security of employment appears to have worsened slightly since then. The Fair Work in the Third Sector in Scotland survey in 2023 also highlighted the poor level of job security in the voluntary sector, and that "Insufficient and unstable funding are key factors in employee insecurity".

Short-term funding is still the norm for many in the sector, and funding shortages and uncertainty are the backdrop for much of the job insecurity and associated worries experienced by the sector's paid workforce.

1 in 4 workers in the voluntary sector are on fixed-term or temporary contracts, rising – far higher than the wider workforce where only 1 in 10 workers is on a non-permanent contract.

54% of survey respondents said that uncertainty around funding for their role is one of the worst aspects of working in sector.

26% of voluntary sector workers said they worry about their jobs 'All of the time' or 'Often', and this rises to 41% for those on Fixed Term contracts.

More than a quarter of voluntary sector workers (27%) felt it was quite or highly likely they would lose their job in the next 12 months, twice the rate reported in the wider workforce (13%). Reasons people gave for thinking they might lose their jobs were: funding cuts, funding uncertainty, fixed-term contracts ending, organisational instability, and general funding precariousness within the voluntary sector.

> *"Uncertainty in sustainable funding is the worst thing about my job, and about the charity as a whole. We are all on temporary contracts, which is very unsettling for all."*

> *"I love working in the voluntary sector but I don't know how long I can continue living in the uncertainty of funding and redundancies. Even if I were to remain through another redundancy process, there is also stress and wellbeing difficulties over being 'the last ones standing'. It is hard to have to say goodbye all of the time"*

10.2.2 Concerns about losing job

30% of respondents rarely or never worry about losing their jobs. However, **26% of respondents said they worry about their jobs 'All of the time' or 'Often'**, and this rises to 41% for those on Fixed Term contracts.
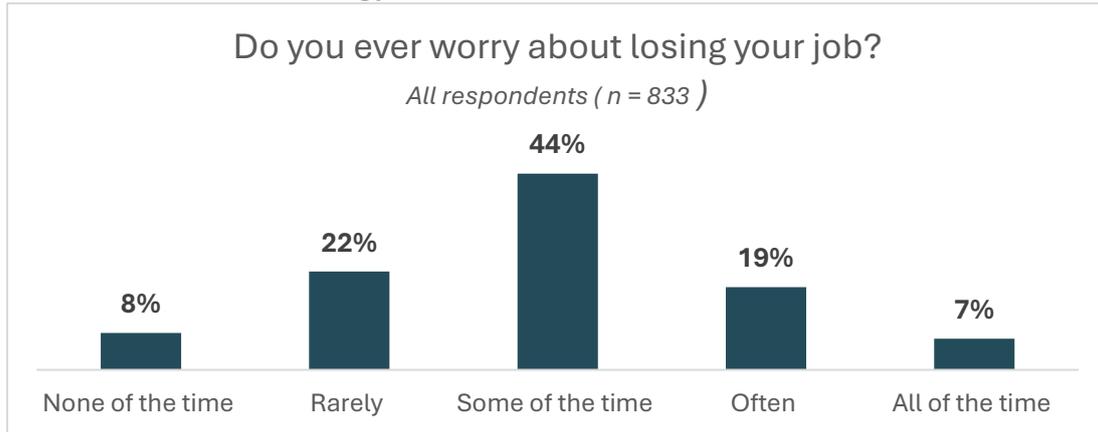
Figure 39. Concerns about losing job

Do you ever worry about losing your job?

All respondents (n = 833)

None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
8%	22%	44%	19%	7%

Table 2 Concerns about losing job, by contract type

Do you ever worry about losing your job?	'All of the time' or 'Often'
Permanent	21%
Fixed term	**41%**
Temporary	26%
All	**26%**

n = 827 respondents

10.2.3 Likelihood of losing job

The majority (60%) of respondents thought it unlikely that they would lose their job in the next 12 months.
However, over a quarter of respondents (27%) felt it was quite or highly likely they would lose their job in the next 12 months.

This is a higher rate of uncertainty than seen in the wider working world. For example, only 13% of respondents to the 2024 CIPD Good Work Index thought it was likely they would lose their job in the next 6 months.

The number of those who think it is Quite of Highly likely they will lose their jobs rises to **48%** for those on Fixed Term contracts.
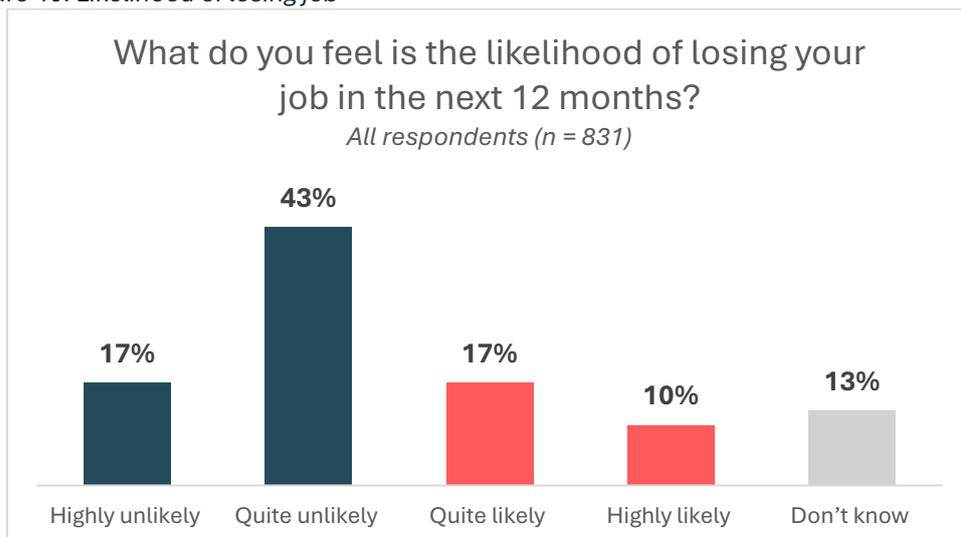
Figure 40. Likelihood of losing job

What do you feel is the likelihood of losing your job in the next 12 months?
All respondents (n = 831)

	Highly unlikely	Quite unlikely	Quite likely	Highly likely	Don't know
	17%	43%	17%	10%	13%

Table 3. Likelihood of losing job, by contract type

What do you feel is the likelihood of losing your job in the next 12 months?	Highly or Quite likely %
Permanent	21%
Fixed term	**48%**
Temporary	37%
All	**27%**

Reasons why people thought it likely they would lose job

Respondents who thought it likely or highly likely that they would lose their job in the next 12 months were asked "Is there any specific reason you think losing your job within the next year is likely?" and 212 people responded.

Table 4. Reasons why respondents think job loss is likely

Is there any specific reason you think losing your job within the next year is likely?	Reasons given (count of themes)
Funding cuts / funding not secured	c.70
Fixed-term contracts / contract ending	c.60
Organisational instability and restructuring	c.35
Sector-wide financial pressures	c.25
Poor management	10
Personal contract circumstances (maternity cover, secondment etc)	8
All respondents who thought likelihood of losing job in next 12 months was 'likely' or 'highly likely'	212

Funding cuts / funding not secured: Many respondents' roles are dependent on external funding (Scottish Government, NHS contracts, local authority grants, etc.), and these are being reduced, delayed, or cut altogether, and much of the funding is insecure (short-term) or not yet confirmed:

> *"Our organisations LA grant has been cut and is insecure. We depend on securing project funding from external funders which makes the organisations financial position unstable all of the time"*

> *"Our funding is up for renewal and it may not happen due to changes in the NHS."*

> *"the last contract was only extended for a year when the previous one was for 4 years."*

> *"We have been told we only have funding for the next few months."*

Fixed-term contracts / contract ending: Many people are on fixed-term contracts that are due to expire within the next 6–18 months, with no guarantee of renewal:

> *"Fixed term contract only 8 months so expecting to be out of a job then but hoping for more funding."*

> *"I work part time for 2 organisations. Both positions are only funded until March/June 2026."*

> *"I'm on a fixed term contract until March. I'm told that there's a chance of my contract being renewed but it is funding dependent and I don't feel very hopeful."*

Organisational instability and restructuring: Many report restructures, ongoing redundancy consultations, or poorly managed organisations that increase job insecurity:

> *"We are restructuring and there is very little clarity about what this means for each role."*

> *"Recruitment freezes, restructure, no pay rises, financial difficulties and discussions about restructure and redundancies are all present for my organisation right now."*

Even those not directly impacted by redundancies spoke of the indirect impact on those left behind:

> *"I love working in the voluntary sector but I don't know how long I can continue living in the uncertainty of funding and redundancies. Even if I were to remain through another redundancy process, there is also stress and wellbeing difficulties over being 'the last ones standing'. It is hard to have to say goodbye all of the time."*

Sector-wide financial pressures: Even where jobs are not directly under notice, respondents were worried about general sector-wide instability, increased competition for funds, and public service cuts.
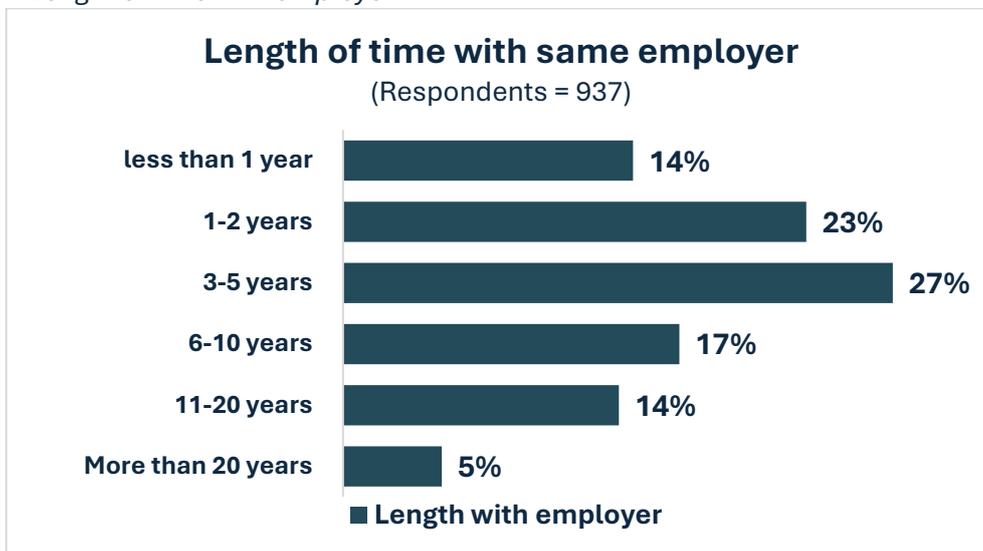
10.3 Job mobility and future plans

10.3.1 Length of time with current employer

Two-thirds of respondents had been with their employer for 5 years or less, and three-quarters had been in their current role for 5 years or less.

It is of interest to note that staff from the global majority tend to be newer in post: 80% reported being with their employer 5 years or less, compared to 64% of those from white backgrounds, suggesting the sector is becoming more diverse.

Figure 41. Length of time with employer

Length of time with same employer
(Respondents = 937)

less than 1 year	14%
1-2 years	23%
3-5 years	27%
6-10 years	17%
11-20 years	14%
More than 20 years	5%

■ Length with employer

10.3.2 Likelihood of voluntarily leaving job

- **More than 1 in 3 (39%) respondents thought it quite or highly likely that they would voluntarily quit their jobs in the next 12 months.**

This figure is twice as high as rates seen in the wider Scottish and UK workforce.

For example, 19% of respondents to the CIPD Good Work Index said they were likely to quit their jobs in the next year, and 22% of respondents to the 2025 SSSC Have Your Say survey said they were likely or very likely to stop working in a social work, social care or CYP role within the next 12 months.

Respondents with low job satisfaction were significantly more likely to be considering quitting their jobs.
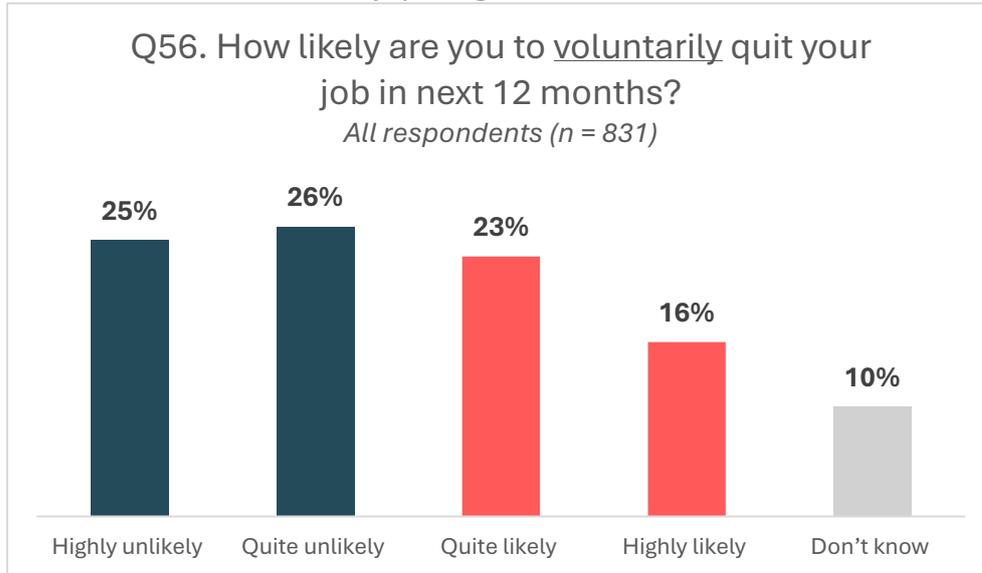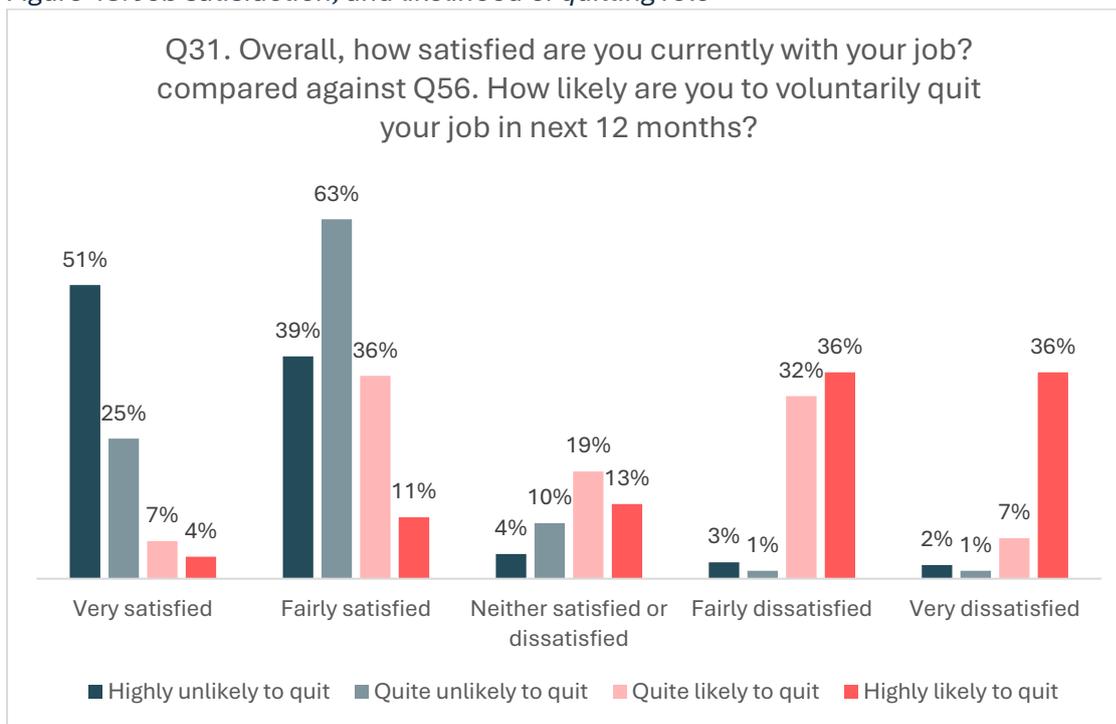
Figure 42. Likelihood of voluntarily quitting role

Q56. How likely are you to <u>voluntarily</u> quit your
job in next 12 months?
All respondents (n = 831)

- Highly unlikely: 25%
- Quite unlikely: 26%
- Quite likely: 23%
- Highly likely: 16%
- Don't know: 10%

Figure 43. Job satisfaction, and likelihood of quitting role

Q31. Overall, how satisfied are you currently with your job?
compared against Q56. How likely are you to voluntarily quit
your job in next 12 months?

	Highly unlikely to quit	Quite unlikely to quit	Quite likely to quit	Highly likely to quit
Very satisfied	51%	25%	7%	4%
Fairly satisfied	39%	63%	36%	11%
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	4%	10%	19%	13%
Fairly dissatisfied	3%	1%	32%	36%
Very dissatisfied	2%	1%	7%	36%

The main reason people were thinking about quitting were for better pay, followed by management issues and better development opportunities.

- Better pay and benefits elsewhere (57%)
- Unhappy with management (53%)
- Better development /promotion opportunities (43%)
- Increased job satisfaction (41%)
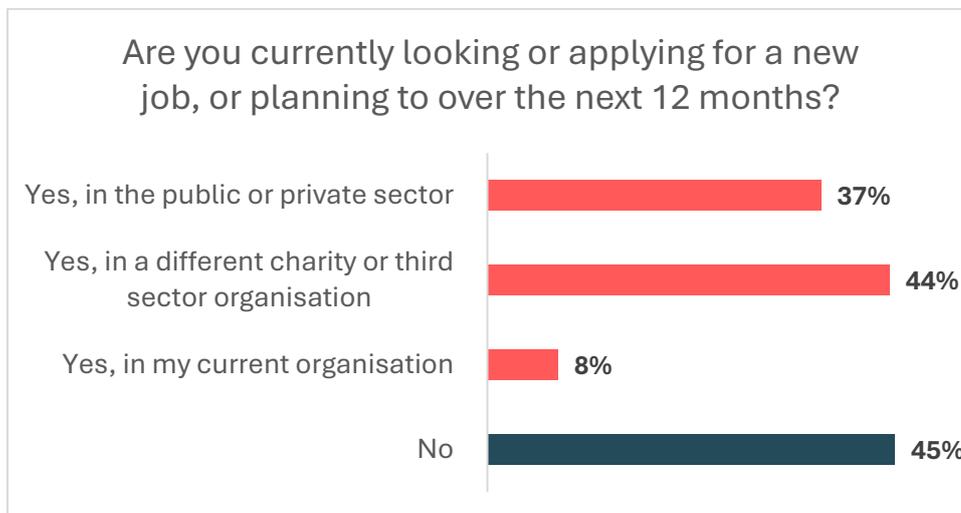- Increased job security (34%)

- Better work–life balance (34%)

"Wouldn't be job hunting right now if it wasn't for funding cuts - i love what i do so it's with a heavy heart"

"Constant worry and stress if I will have a job tomorrow or in the near future and the pay is shocking, can't afford to live"

10.3.3 Currently looking for a new job

- More than half of respondents (55%) said they are currently looking for a new job or planning to look for a new job in the next 12 months. This is slightly higher than in 2015, when 49% of respondents were actively looking for a new role (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015).
- While nearly 50% of respondents were looking for new roles within their current organisation or wider voluntary sector, over a third (37%) were also - and in many cases *only* - looking for work in the public or private sector.

Figure 44. Looking for new role: sectors

Are you currently looking or applying for a new job, or planning to over the next 12 months?

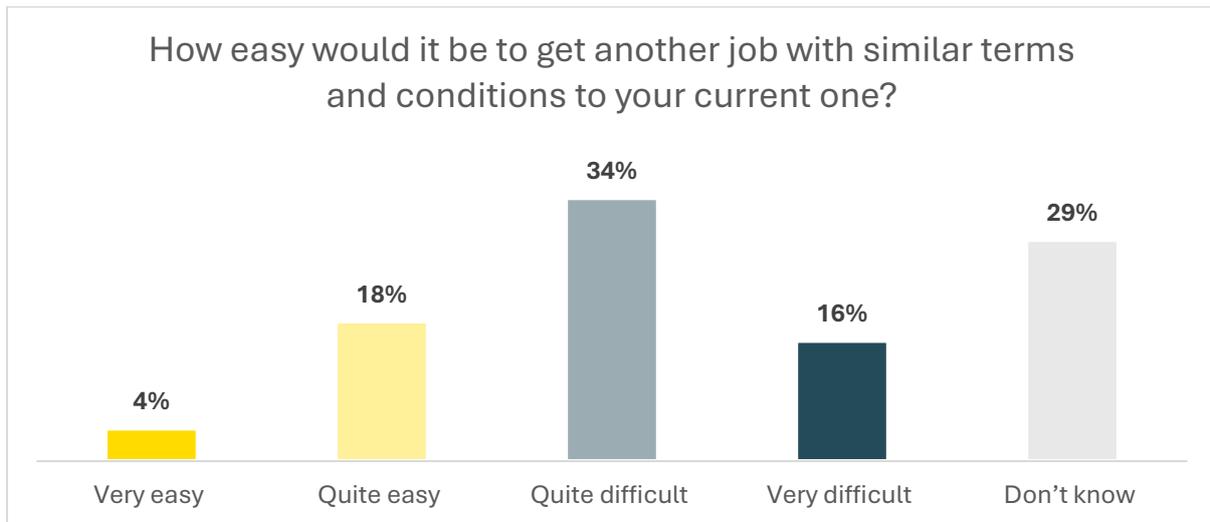| Category	Percentage
Yes, in the public or private sector	37%
Yes, in a different charity or third sector organisation	44%
Yes, in my current organisation	8%
No	45%

10.3.4 Ease of finding a new job

- **Only 22% of respondents thought it would be easy to get another job with similar terms and conditions to their current role.**

50% of respondents thought it would be difficult, and 29% didn't know. There was some variation by the length of time people had been with their employer, with those who had been in post longer more likely to say it would be difficult or very difficult.

Figure 45. Ease of finding a new job

How easy would it be to get another job with similar terms and conditions to your current one?

Very easy 4%
Quite easy 18%
Quite difficult 34%
Very difficult 16%
Don't know 29%

10.4 Implications

Funding insecurity is driving workforce instability. Short-term or uncertain funding is the dominant driver across pay concerns, contract types and reasons for expected job loss, highlighting the importance of longer-term, more predictable funding.

Longer-term, predictable funding and fair employment practices are essential to reduce disruptive levels of churn, protect wellbeing, and sustain sector capacity.

High levels of job insecurity are systemic, with 1 in 4 staff on non-permanent contracts, double the rate in other sectors.

Staff retention is a key risk for the sector: 39% of respondents expect to quit within 12 months; over half are actively job-seeking, with many looking outside the sector.

Skills and capacity loss: loss of skilled staff would create significant problems in terms of service delivery and service continuity.

An ageing workforce: the age of the average voluntary sector worker tends to be slightly older than a typical employee in Scotland, and a number of respondents made specific references to imminent retirement.

While staff leaving the sector due to retirement etc may open roles for existing staff to progress to or for new recruits from outside the sector to fill, high levels of staff turnover have serious implications for service delivery, workforce continuity and succession planning.

All of the above highlight the need for multi-year funding and for funders and sector employers to embed Fair Work principles.

11. Routes into the sector, staff development and career pathways

Attracting and retaining good quality staff with a diverse range of skills and experiences is critical for the voluntary sector. The survey looked at current routes into voluntary sector careers, and how people's career pathways could be strengthened.

Routes into the sector: Over half of respondents were already in the voluntary sector before joining their current employer.18% came from the public sector, 14% from private, 6% were studying, and 4% were not working or studying. Job adverts were the main entry route, with Goodmoves being the most cited source (especially among minority ethnic respondents). Nearly 20% heard about roles through word of mouth, and 17% transitioned from volunteering to paid work.

Learning and development: 36% felt they had access to training; 44% said their organisation encourages learning. Around 10% felt unsupported, and 42% said support was only partial. Permanent staff were slightly more likely to feel unsupported than fixed-term staff.
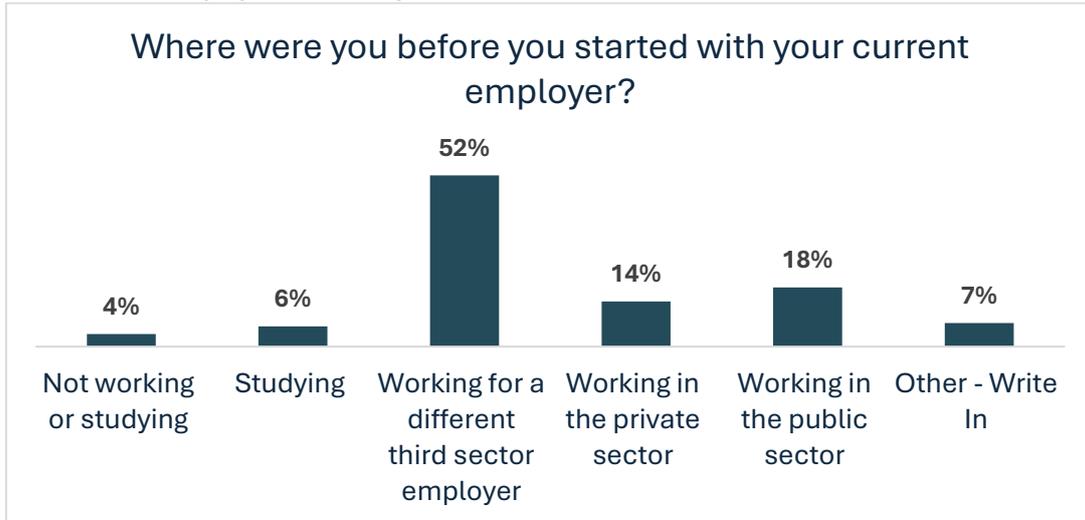
Investment in learning strongly correlates with job satisfaction and retention, but barriers include lack of time, funding cuts, and absence of a learning culture.

Career progression: 25% had been promoted (18% in last 3 years); 42% saw no promotion opportunities. Lack of progression most common in small organisations but also present in large ones. Barriers include flat structures, funding constraints, unclear pathways, and limited CPD, but many staff avoid promotion due to concerns around additional stress for little additional remuneration or personal preference. Career development should not be equated solely with promotion - training and project work also matter.

11.1 Routes into the sector

Just over half of respondents were already working in the voluntary sector before they started work with their current employer. 18% previously worked in the public sector, 14% worked in the private sector, 6% were studying and 4% were not working or studying.

Figure 46. Previous employment/ activity

Where were you before you started with your current employer?

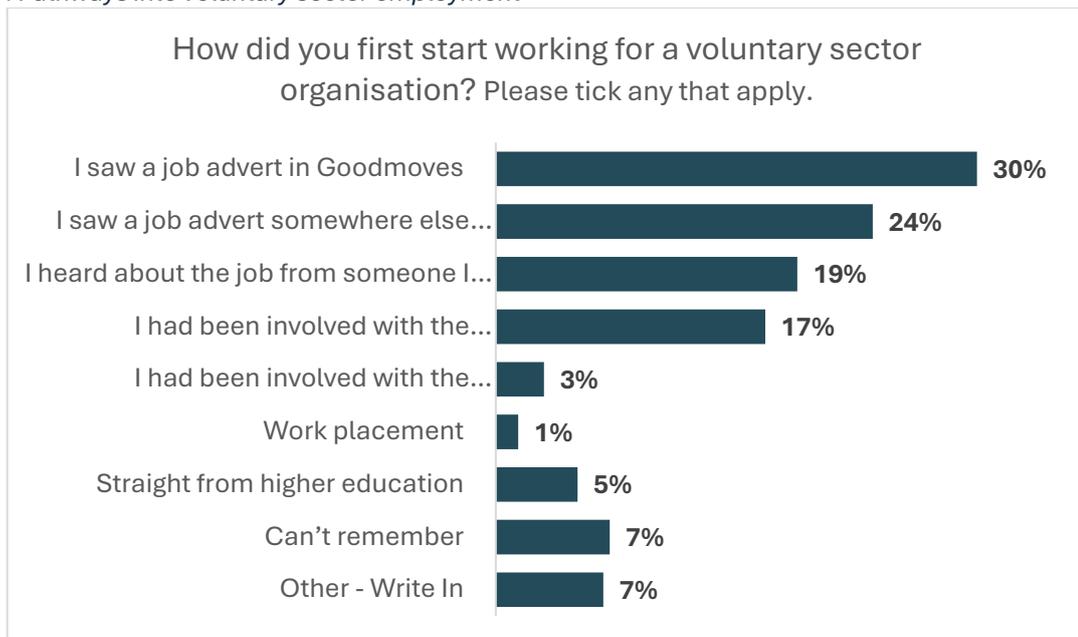| Category	Percentage
Not working or studying	4%
Studying	6%
Working for a different third sector employer	52%
Working in the private sector	14%
Working in the public sector	18%
Other - Write In	7%

Just over half of respondents started working in the voluntary sector after seeing a job advert. Goodmoves was the single most popular source of job adverts, although this may be skewed by the survey being promoted on the Goodmoves site. 41% of respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds reported having seen their job on Goodmoves, which is notably higher than other routes.

Almost 1 in 5 heard about the role through word of mouth from someone they knew.

And while finding a paid job is rarely the main *motive* for volunteers (see Volunteering section) 17% of respondents said they started paid work after being involved with the organisation as a volunteer

Figure 47. Pathways into voluntary sector employment

How did you first start working for a voluntary sector organisation? Please tick any that apply.

Response	Percentage
I saw a job advert in Goodmoves	30%
I saw a job advert somewhere else…	24%
I heard about the job from someone I…	19%
I had been involved with the…	17%
I had been involved with the…	3%
Work placement	1%
Straight from higher education	5%
Can't remember	7%
Other - Write In	7%

11.2 Learning and continuing professional development

- 36% of respondents felt they had access to training and skills support if needed.
- 44% believed their organisation encourages and supports them to take up formal and informal learning or continuing professional development.
- However, around 1 in 10 do not feel that their organisation supports learning, and 42% believe it only does so to some extent.

While we might assume that short-term and fixed-term workers are most likely to report a lack of investment in their training and development this is not in fact the case – permanent workers were slightly more likely to feel that their organisation does not support learning.
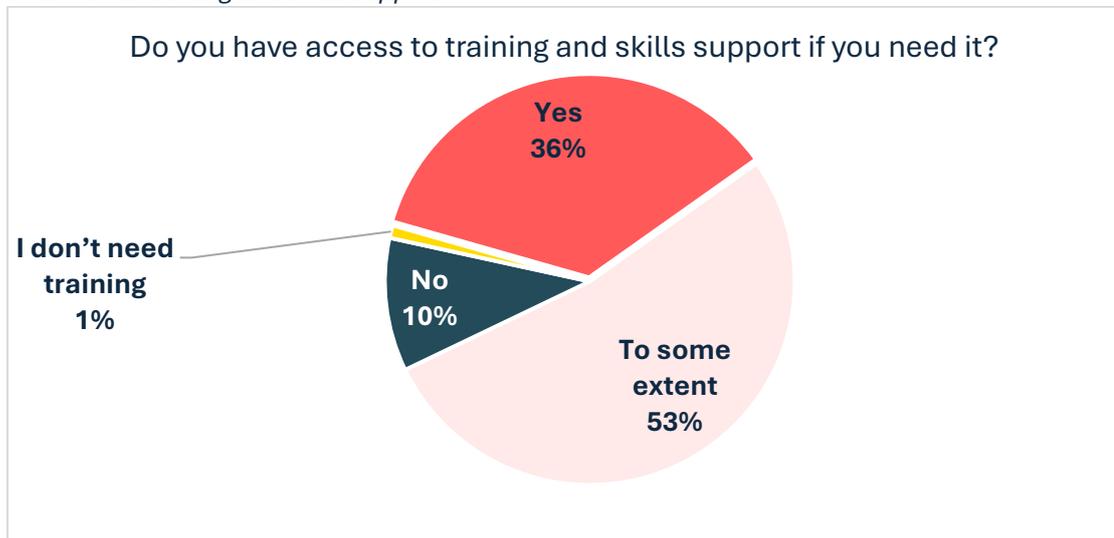
Figure 48. Access to training and skills support

Do you have access to training and skills support if you need it?

Yes 36%
To some extent 53%
No 10%
I don't need training 1%

Figure 49. Does organisation encourage learning?

Does your organisation encourage and support you to take up formal and informal learning or continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities?

Yes 44%
To some extent 42%
No 14%
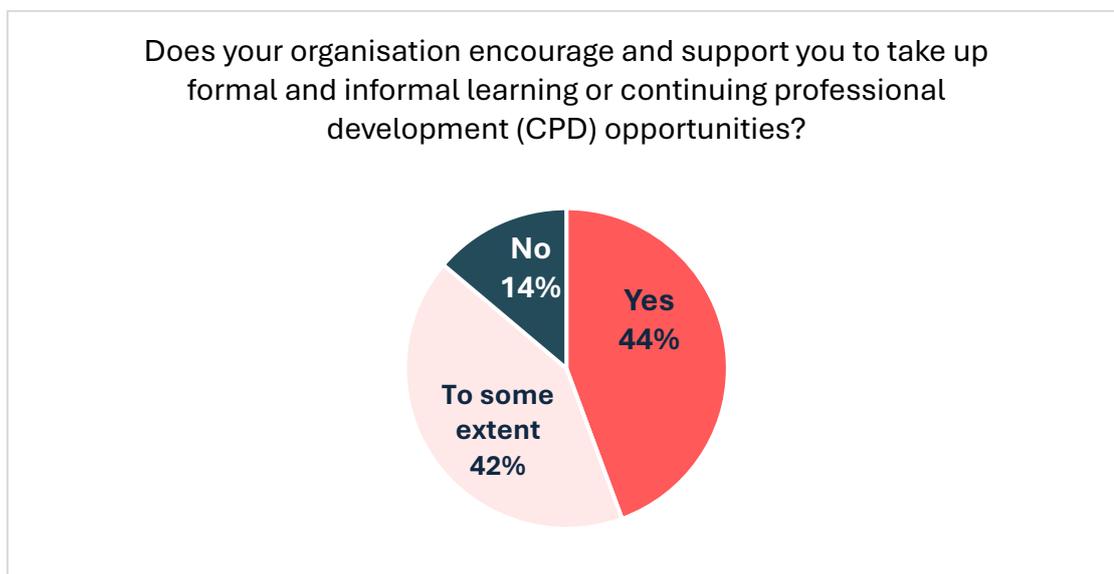
Staff who work for organisations that invest in staff learning and development were **far more likely to say they are satisfied with their current role**, and **far less likely to be thinking about leaving** (Fig. 50 and Fig. 51).

This highlights not just the importance of the training and development itself, but also the perception that an employer who invests in staff development is an employer that values their staff.

Figure 50. Organisation encourages learning, and job satisfaction
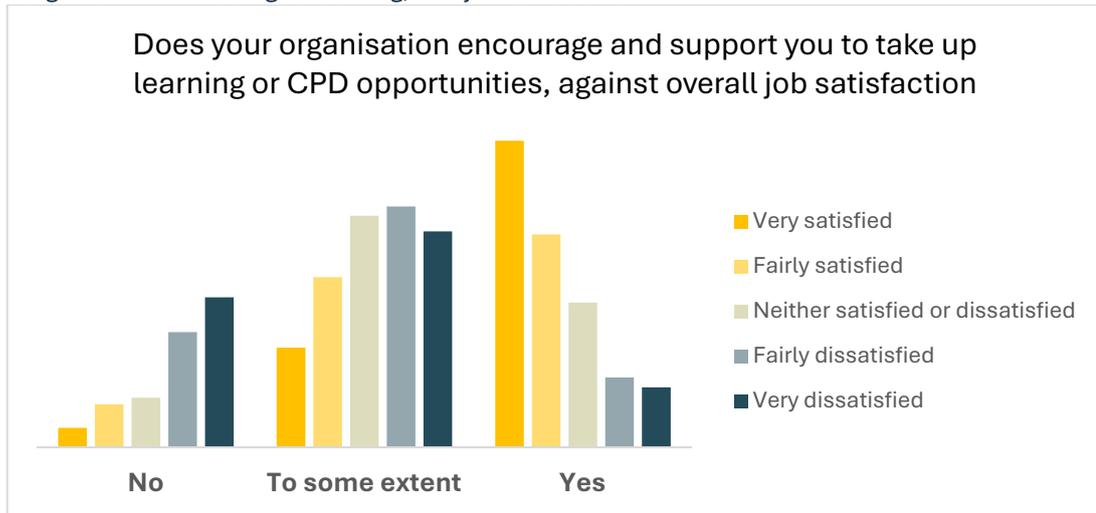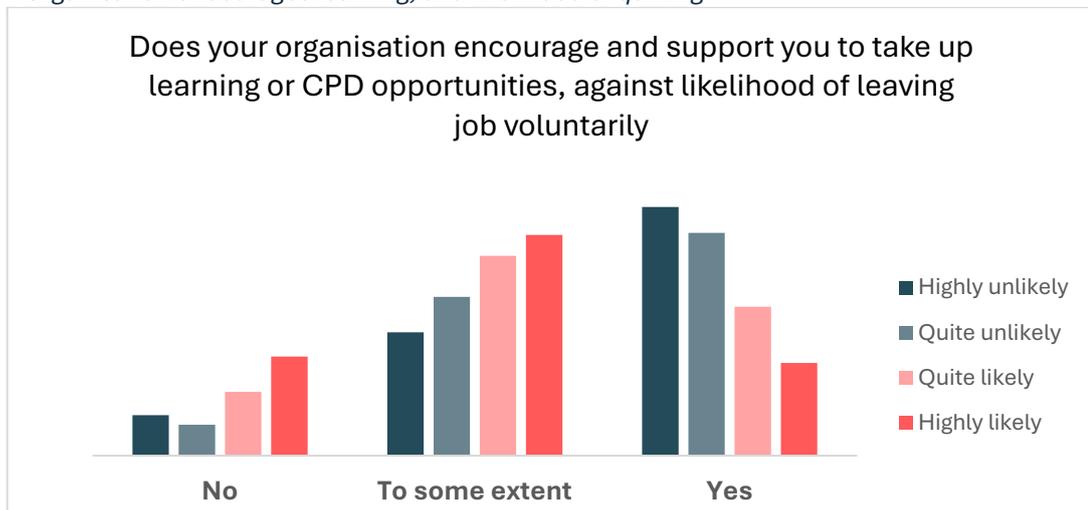

Figure 51. Organisation encourages learning, and likelihood of quitting

Looking at the comments around training and learning opportunities the most common thread was a lack of time and money for training:

"Funding cuts mean that there is little money for attending events or training"

"the organisation has not embedded a learning culture so support for development is not available"

"Cuts are made despite targets being met and charities managing to over-perform on outcome indicators. Meanwhile within charities, there is literally no investment in training and development of any substance (advancing professional qualifications)."

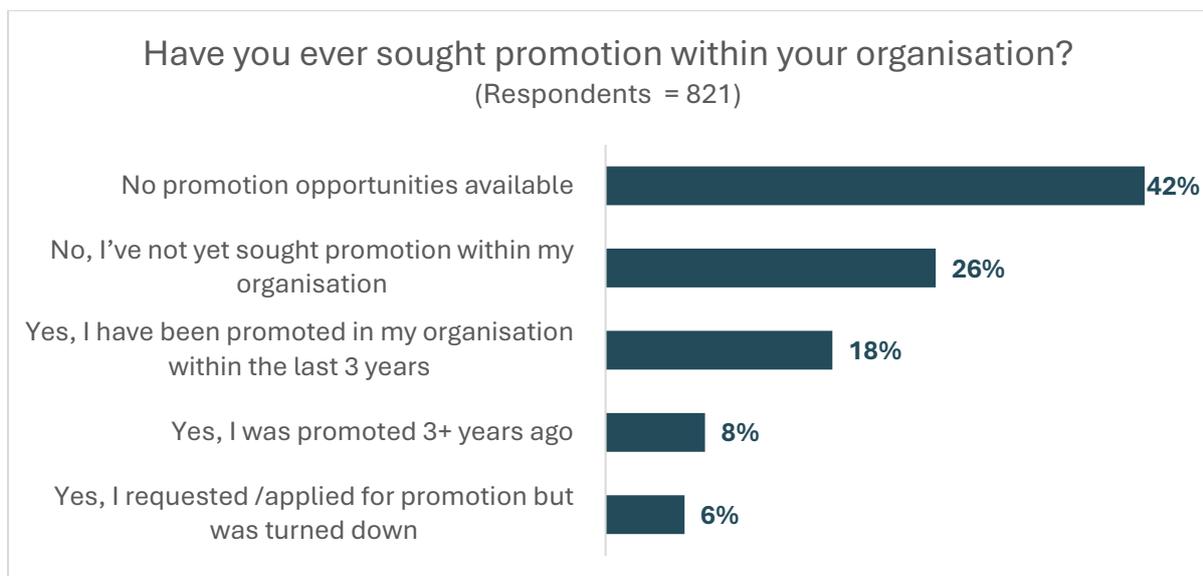*"There's simply not enough money to support career development and training"*

11.3 Career progression and opportunities

A quarter of the survey's paid staff respondents said they had not yet sought promotion, often but not exclusively those recently in post, and (perhaps less expectedly) age did not seem to influence this.

One quarter of respondents had been promoted,18% within the last 3 years.

42% of respondents stated that there were 'No promotion opportunities available'. Many of the respondents selecting this option were senior staff and CEOs that felt they had reached as far as they could go in the organisation. However, around half of respondents in assistant, frontline and officer roles also selected this option.
Not surprisingly, a lack of promotion opportunities was most often seen in small organisations highlighting structural barriers to career progression, but it is notable that a quarter of staff from the largest organisations (250+ staff) also selected this option.

Figure 52 Experience of seeking promotion

Have you ever sought promotion within your organisation?
(Respondents = 821)

No promotion opportunities available	42%
No, I've not yet sought promotion within my organisation	26%
Yes, I have been promoted in my organisation within the last 3 years	18%
Yes, I was promoted 3+ years ago	8%
Yes, I requested /applied for promotion but was turned down	6%

While just under a third of these respondents (30%) felt the wage increase they then got was proportionate to their increased responsibilities 38% did not, and 30% only agreed to some extent:

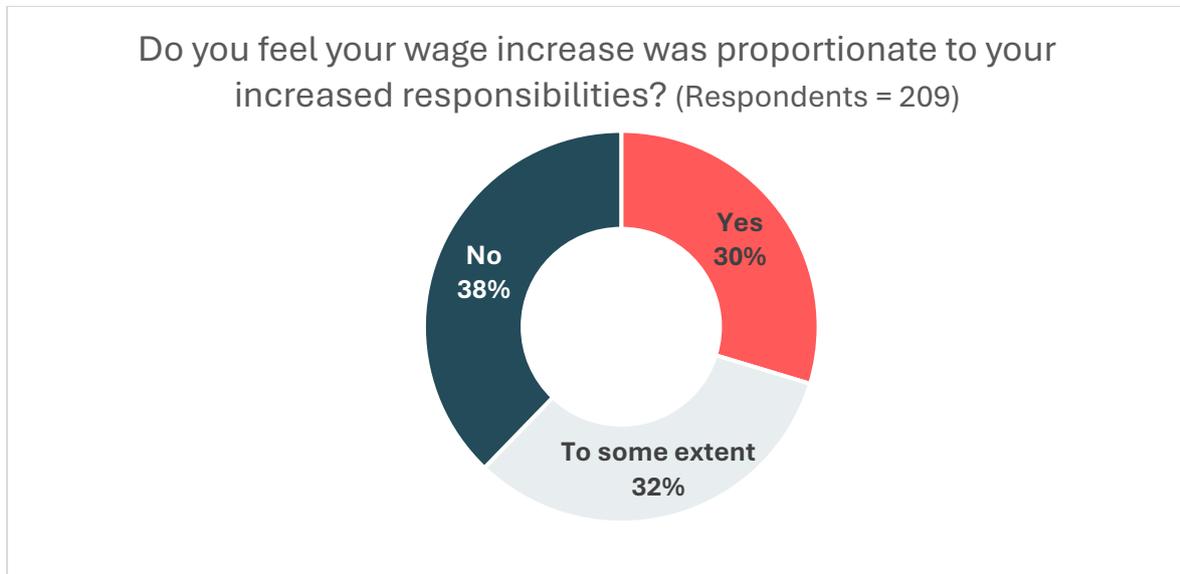*Figure 53. Promotion and wage increase*

Do you feel your wage increase was proportionate to your increased responsibilities? (Respondents = 209)

No 38%
Yes 30%
To some extent 32%

Figure 54. Barriers to carrier progression?

Do you feel there are any barriers to your career progression in your workplace? (Respondents = 813)

44%
35%
22%

Yes
To some extent
No
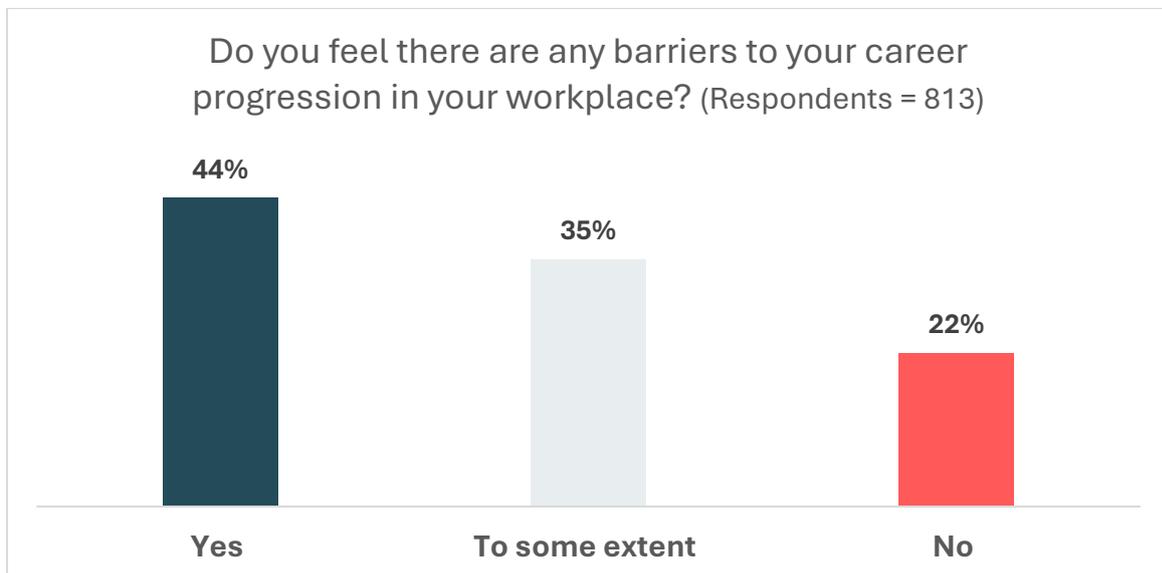
11.3.1 Barriers to career progression: analysis of open text question

Structural ceilings: The most commonly cited barrier to career progression was small or flat structures with very few higher posts, with progression often only possible if someone leaves, or the next rung is CEO/Director which many don't want.

"Flat structure in the team, no place for progression in the organisation."
"A very small team means there are very limited promotion opportunities..."
"There is only the CEO position above me and it's not a job I want."
"My employer says its staffing structure does not allow for altering the status or raising the pay as this would impact higher up the tree of their already exceptionally flat structure. This is a false ceiling holding people back and restricting the capacity for people to work to their full abilities"
"Too few senior leadership positions create a bottleneck

Resourcing and reward barriers: The next most common barrier related to funding constraints and remuneration levels, with many respondents viewing senior roles as more stress for too little extra pay:

"The pay is not reflected for the work..."
"Few senior posts, with not much of an increase in salary, but with a considerably greater set of responsibilities, which makes it feel like it's not worth the extra stress to go for."
"Lack of fair pay - my team are paid £2000 less than my role which is to manage the program"
"Wages not commensurate with responsibilities"

Lack of clear career development pathways: Lack of transparent progression routes/grades, limited internal promotion processes, and insufficient time/budget for CPD were the third most cited barrier.

"No clear progression pathway. I've asked for management/leadership training since early 2024 and yet to receive any."
"There isn't a clear way to move up between grades and lots of staff have been at the top of their pay grade for a long time"
"It's quite a jump from my position to those above... the next role would be to manage my entire department"
"We don't have formal progression route due to unstable funding" Salary is not worth extra responsibilities

Workplace culture and fairness: a small number of respondents mentioned favouritism, poor management practice, and age/gender/class bias.

"If your face fits... you'll be promoted."
"My male colleague got a promotion 2 months after starting..."
"Expected to work full time to apply for management posts."

Personal preference: Many respondents were happy at current level and do not want line management responsibilities, although some of these also spoke of constraints due to health, caring or life stage factors.

> *"I'm not interested in line managing…"*

However, it is also important that career progression is not simply conflated with 'promotion'. As one respondent put it:

> *"Relatively flat structure, therefore promotion is limited but career progression opportunities are still available e.g. training, project work etc*

11.4 Implications

Voluntary sector employers need to strengthen entry routes, learning opportunities, and career pathways to attract and retain skilled employees. Addressing structural barriers such as flat hierarchies and funding constraints requires creative solutions like lateral development opportunities, project-based roles, and transparent grading systems.

Clear progression frameworks and investment in staff training and development are critical, as they directly influence job satisfaction and retention.

Building a learning culture and ensuring equitable access to broad learning opportunities such as training, mentoring and shadowing will help position organisations as employers that value staff, essential for retaining experienced staff in a competitive labour market. Although training can be costly and staff time extremely limited, there are also affordable and flexible options available.

Many of the negative impacts on the workforce result from the external operating environment. However, this survey shows that there are internal issues that organisations and their leaders need to address. This, and other, research tells us that supportive, skilled managers are crucial to staff retention, morale and productivity.

In challenging times, it can be difficult to free up time or money for staff development but it is clear that if employers in the sector do not ensure their staff and managers are skilled-up, they will not be able to weather the storms.

12. Leadership

For a full analysis of leadership-related findings and recommendations see Charity Leadership Scotland's analysis: **Workforce Survey 2025: Leadership in Scotland's Voluntary Sector**.

Summary

Drawing on responses from **1, 021 eligible respondents**, including **11% CEOs** and **14% senior managers**, this section provides a detailed examination of leadership culture, pressure, sustainability, and future leadership capacity across Scotland's voluntary sector.

The findings present a paradox at the heart of voluntary sector leadership. Leadership is widely experienced as values-driven, accessible, and purpose-led: **two-thirds of respondents describe senior leaders as very or fairly accessible,** and **87% of the workforce believe their work is useful to society**. Leaders themselves speak strongly about impact, autonomy, and commitment to mission.

However, this strength is increasingly undermined by structural pressures that sit often outside of organisational control. **86% of CEOs and 78% of senior managers feel under pressure at work, 69% of CEOs regularly experience high stress, and four in five senior leaders report difficulty switching off from work**. Job insecurity, funding precarity, workload growth, and limited progression pathways are creating serious risks to leadership sustainability and succession.

The leadership pipeline is fragile. **41% of respondents identify poor career progression as one of the worst aspects of sector work, while 39% of all respondents – rising to 44% of those on fixed-term contracts – say they are likely to leave their job voluntarily within the next 12 months**. This was more pronounced at smaller organisations and suggests there is a limitation in opportunities available because of the sector makeup. Better pay, improved management, and development opportunities are the most commonly cited reasons for potential exit.

Taken together, the evidence suggests a sector that is held together by commitment and values but increasingly strained by funding models that externalise risk onto leaders and staff. Without systemic change – particularly around fair funding, leadership development, and Board responsibility for sustainability – the voluntary sector faces a growing leadership retention and succession challenge.

12.1 Leadership Accessibility and Culture

### 12.1.1 Perceived Approachability of Senior Leadership

Leadership accessibility is a notable strength across much of the sector. Around **two-thirds of respondents reported that senior leadership is very or fairly accessible**, reflecting generally open organisational cultures and relatively flat hierarchies.

However, **one-third of respondents described senior leadership as fairly or very remote**. Qualitative comments suggest this is often less about physical access and more about *psychological* and *relational* distance – particularly where Boards are perceived as invisible or disconnected from staff experience.

> *"Senior management are physically accessible but I don't find them approachable."*

> *"CEO and management team are accessible, the Board tend to be more remote – staff are not always aware of who the board members are."*

Figure 55. Approachability of senior leadership
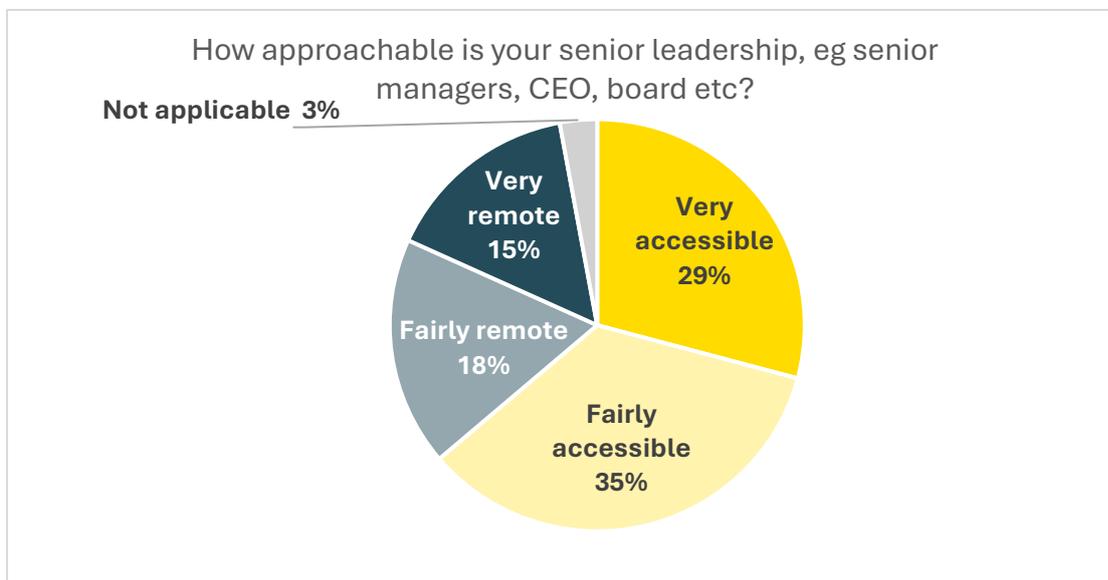
12.1.2 Managers, Trust, and Day-to-Day Leadership

Trust in immediate line management is relatively high. **79% of respondents agree their manager respects them, 77% feel they are treated fairly, and 74% feel supported if they have a problem** (see also section **7.4 Management Support**).

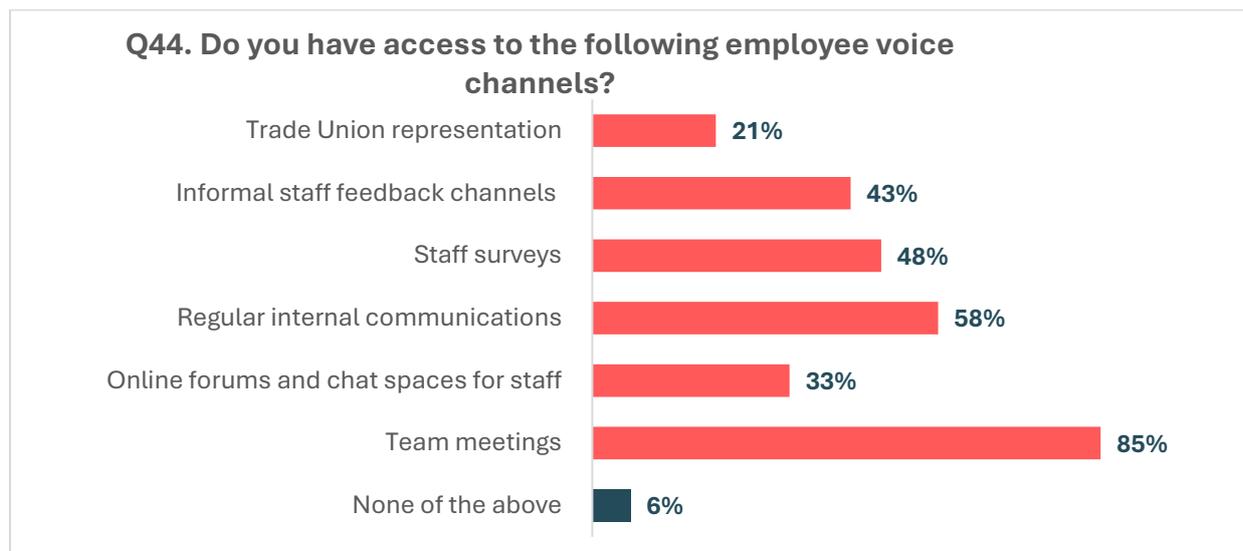These findings reinforce the importance of management as a stabilising force within pressured organisations.

However, there are several gaps and areas for improvement. **25% of respondents do not feel their manager provides useful feedback**, and **17% do not feel supported with learning and development**. These gaps have implications for leadership confidence, development, and readiness for progression.

12.1.3 Leadership, Culture, and Employee Voice

Strong leadership cultures in the voluntary sector are closely linked to the availability and effective use of employee voice channels. The Workforce Survey 2025 shows that **94% of respondents have access to at least one form of employee voice**, such as team meetings, staff forums, or trade union representation. This is significantly higher than the wider Scottish workforce, where 19% of employees report having no voice channel at all (from CIPD Working Lives Scotland 2025).

The most common form of employee voice in the voluntary sector is **team meetings, available to 85% of respondents** – almost double the proportion reported in the wider Scottish workforce in the CIPD Working Lives Scotland 2025 report. Informal channels alongside online forums and chat spaces also feature highly in the voluntary sector's voice channels, reflecting high levels of formal and informal employee engagement. 21% of survey respondents reported Trade Union representation, slightly higher than the 17% of employees who reported availability of a trade union in their workplace in the CIPD Working Lives Scotland 2025 survey (although it is important to note that a formal trade union presence is strongly linked to organisation size, and is rare in small-medium organisations).

Figure 56. Employee voice channels

Q44. Do you have access to the following employee voice channels?

Channel	%
Trade Union representation	21%
Informal staff feedback channels	43%
Staff surveys	48%
Regular internal communications	58%
Online forums and chat spaces for staff	33%
Team meetings	85%
None of the above	6%

However, access to voice channels does not automatically equate to influence. Qualitative responses suggest that while staff often feel able to raise concerns with line managers, they are less confident that their voices reach senior leadership or Boards, or that feedback consistently informs decision-making. This distinction between *having a voice* and *being heard* is particularly important in the context of leadership accessibility.

> *"We have lots of opportunities to talk in teams, but it doesn't always feel like concerns go any further up."*

Leadership that actively listens and responds to employee voice can mitigate some of the pressures associated with funding insecurity and high workloads. Where leaders are visible, responsive, and transparent about constraints, staff report higher trust and psychological safety, even in difficult circumstances.

Conversely, where senior leaders or Boards are perceived as remote, employee voice can feel performative rather than meaningful. Several respondents highlighted a desire for greater Board visibility, clearer feedback loops, and more honest communication about organisational challenges.

Effective use of voice channels is therefore a critical leadership competency. It supports: - Early identification of workload and wellbeing risks - More inclusive and informed decision-making - Stronger alignment between organisational values and lived experience - Increased staff trust during periods of uncertainty.

For Boards and senior leaders, the findings point to the importance of not only providing voice mechanisms but also closing the feedback loop – demonstrating how staff input shapes strategy, priorities, and responses to external pressures.

12.2 Leadership Progression and Career Pathways

For more on this topic see also 11.3 Career progression and opportunities.

12.2.1 Limited Progression Opportunities

Career progression remains one of the sector's most persistent leadership challenges. **41% of respondents identified poor career progression as one of the worst aspects of working in the voluntary sector**, reflecting flat organisational structures and limited senior posts, often due to organisational size.

Only a minority of respondents reported internal promotion opportunities, reinforcing a pattern where leadership advancement often requires moving between organisations rather than progressing within them.

Do you feel there are any barriers to your career progression in your workplace? (Base = 813)

44%	**35%**	**22%**
Yes	**To some extent**	**No**
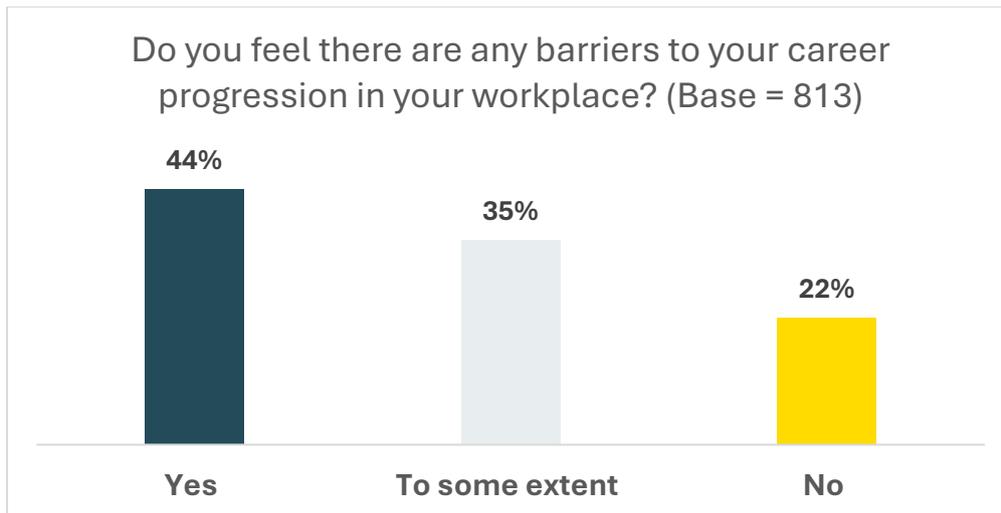
12.2.2 Development Without Pathways

While many leaders value the autonomy and breadth of experience their roles provide, this often occurs without formal training, mentoring, or structured development. **Among managers, 30% report they only 'to some extent' have the skills and support they need**, frequently citing lack of management or leadership training.

> *"Had zero training for moving into management. Have had to learn in the role."*

12.2.3 Leadership Pipeline Risk

The absence of clear pathways, combined with high pressure, creates a fragile leadership pipeline. This is further exacerbated by many believing that the increased responsibilities of senior posts are often not adequately reflected in pay increases (see also Section 11.3.)

> *"Salary is not worth extra responsibilities"*.

46% of senior leaders and 64% of managers are currently looking for, or planning to look for, a new job and **more than a third are considering leaving the sector altogether for public or private sector roles.**

This presents a strategic risk: future leaders are being developed through experience but not retained or supported in the long term.

12.3 Workload, Pressure, and Sustainability

12.3.1 Escalating Workloads

Workload pressure is one of the defining features of leadership experience in 2025. **73% of respondents believe their workload has increased over the last year, up from 62% in 2015**.

Figure 57. Workloads, by role
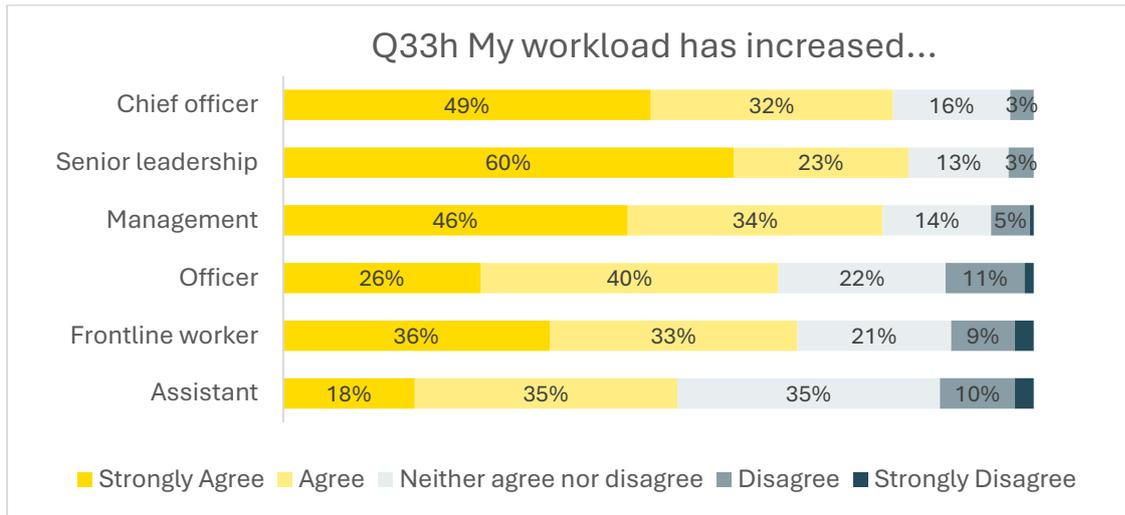
Pressure is particularly acute at senior levels:

- **86% of CEOs feel under pressure at work**
- **78% of senior leadership feel under pressure**

Figure 58. Work pressure, by role
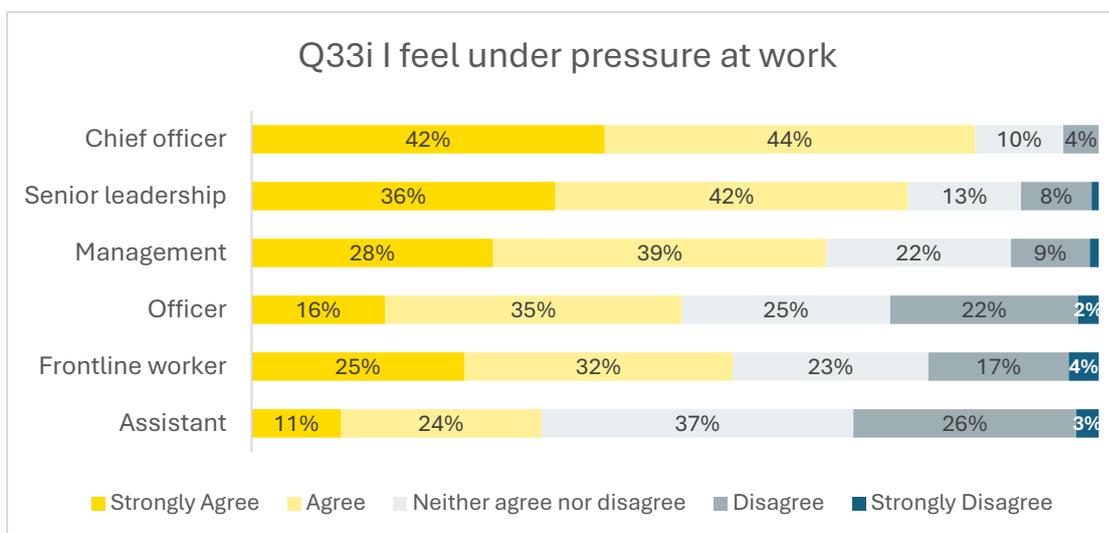
12.3.2 Stress and Burnout at Senior Levels

Stress and burnout are now defining features of senior leadership experience in the voluntary sector. **51% of all respondents regularly experience high levels of stress, rising to 61% of senior leadership and 69% of CEOs**. Almost one in five respondents in management or leadership roles have taken time off due to work-related stress in the last year. However, many in senior roles are reluctant to take any time off for their wellbeing. For many leaders, pressure is not short-term or episodic, but a constant feature of the job.

Figure 59. Stress levels, by role
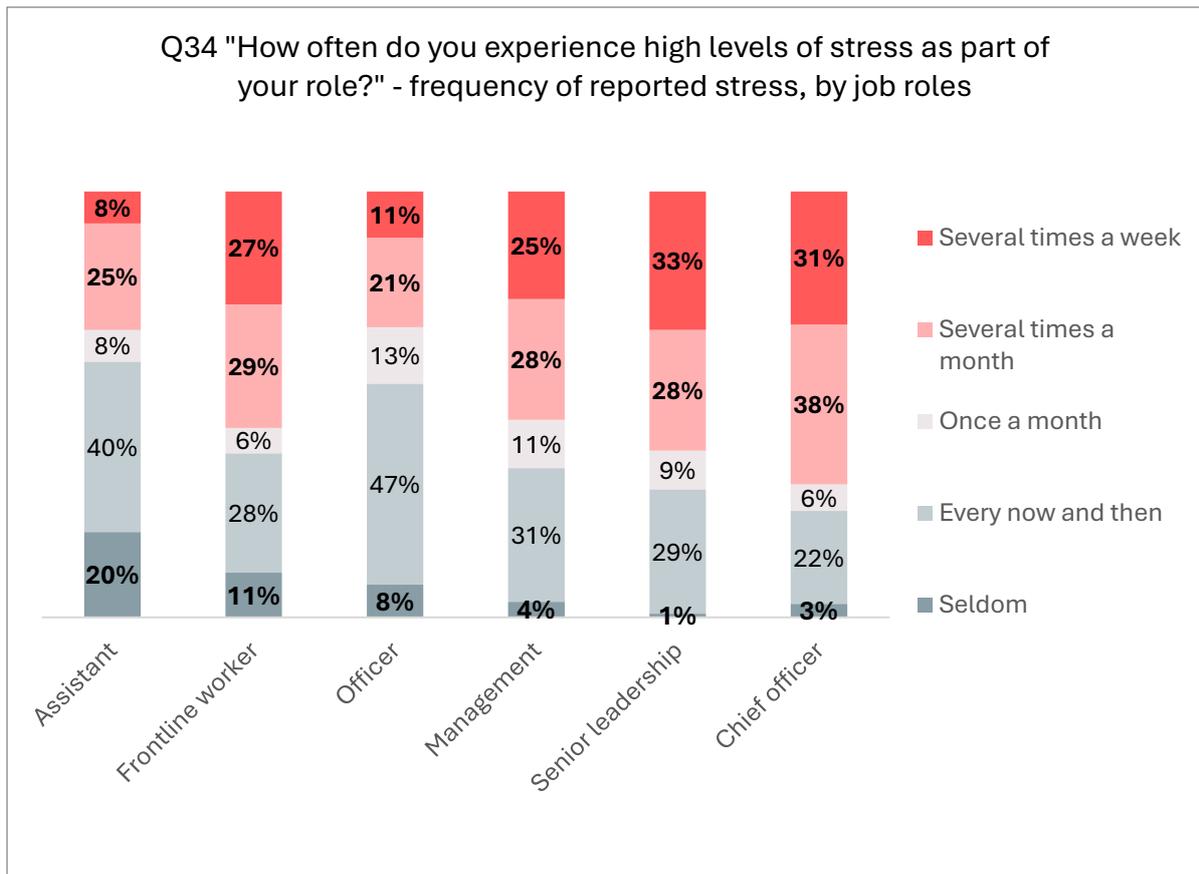
The survey evidence suggests the sector is approaching a tipping point. A substantial proportion of senior leaders report difficulty switching off from work, indicating that this is a widespread experience even when neutral responses are excluded.

In fact, **one in five of all survey respondents has taken time off due to work-related stress in the last year**, double the rate reported in 2015. These trends point to roles (not only leadership) that are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain without personal cost.

Figure 60. Ability to switch off, by role

Q33j I find it easy to 'switch off' after work

Role	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Chief officer	2%	15%	19%	42%	22%
Senior leadership	3%	26%	13%	35%	24%
Management	7%	27%	16%	32%	18%
Officer	11%	35%	19%	26%	9%
Frontline worker	9%	25%	20%	29%	18%
Assistant	13%	33%	18%	28%	10%
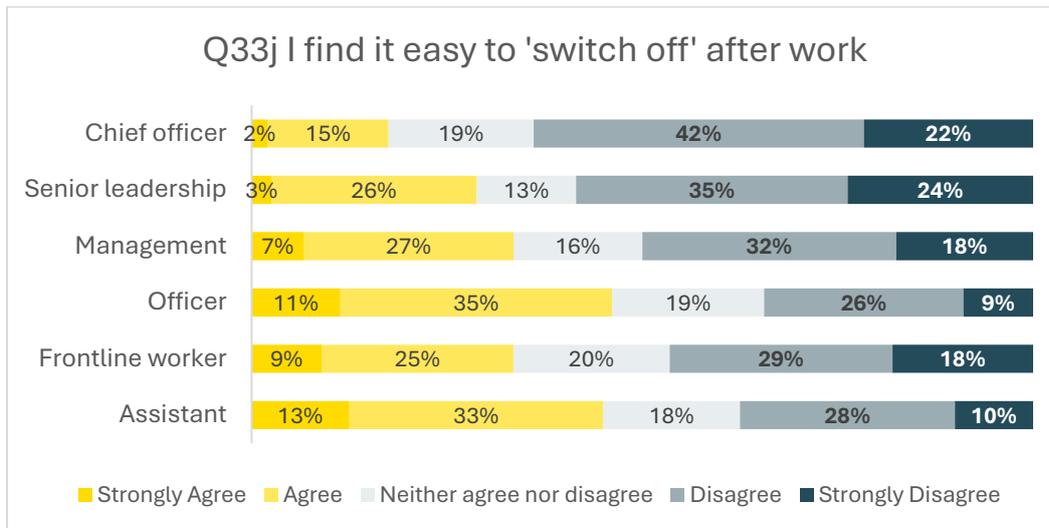
These findings raise serious questions about **the sustainability of senior leadership roles** under current funding and operating models.

12.4 Lived Experience of Leadership: Qualitative Insights

This section brings together qualitative responses from across the survey to illustrate how leadership pressures are experienced in practice. These insights reinforce the quantitative evidence that the sector is approaching a tipping point, where leaders are increasingly questioning the sustainability of current expectations.

12.4.1 Commitment, Purpose, and Moral Pressure

Leaders repeatedly describe a deep commitment to their organisations, staff, and the people they support. Many feel a strong moral obligation to continue delivering services, even where resources are insufficient and site autonomy flexibility and the teams they work alongside as a leading benefit.

This sense of purpose is a defining strength and reward of voluntary sector leadership, but it also creates pressure to absorb risk and stretch capacity beyond reasonable limits.

> *"We are doing this for less funding and with more scrutiny, whilst we maintain high standards... This is not a level playing field and yet we still manage to support many families, children and young people."*

> *"The passion is there, but passion doesn't pay the bills."*

Figure 61. Best aspects of working in the sector: management

Q71. What would you say are the BEST things about working in the third sector?

	Management	Non-management
Feeling that I am making a real difference to people and communities	83%	85%
The independence and autonomy I have	55%	42%
The variety of the work	51%	38%
My colleagues and team	49%	51%
The people / clients I support	47%	62%
My organisation's values	45%	35%
Flexible working arrangements	40%	37%
The ability to innovate and be creative	38%	26%
The ethos of the sector	34%	34%
Having a supportive employer	18%	22%
Decent benefits, eg annual leave, pension, sick pay	7%	16%
Fair pay	2%	6%

12.4.2 Burnout and the Question of Sustainability

Qualitative responses reveal a growing sense among leaders that they are being asked to carry an unmanageable burden of risk and responsibility. Many describe feeling morally compelled to continue delivering services despite shrinking resources, even where this stretches organisations and individuals beyond reasonable limits.
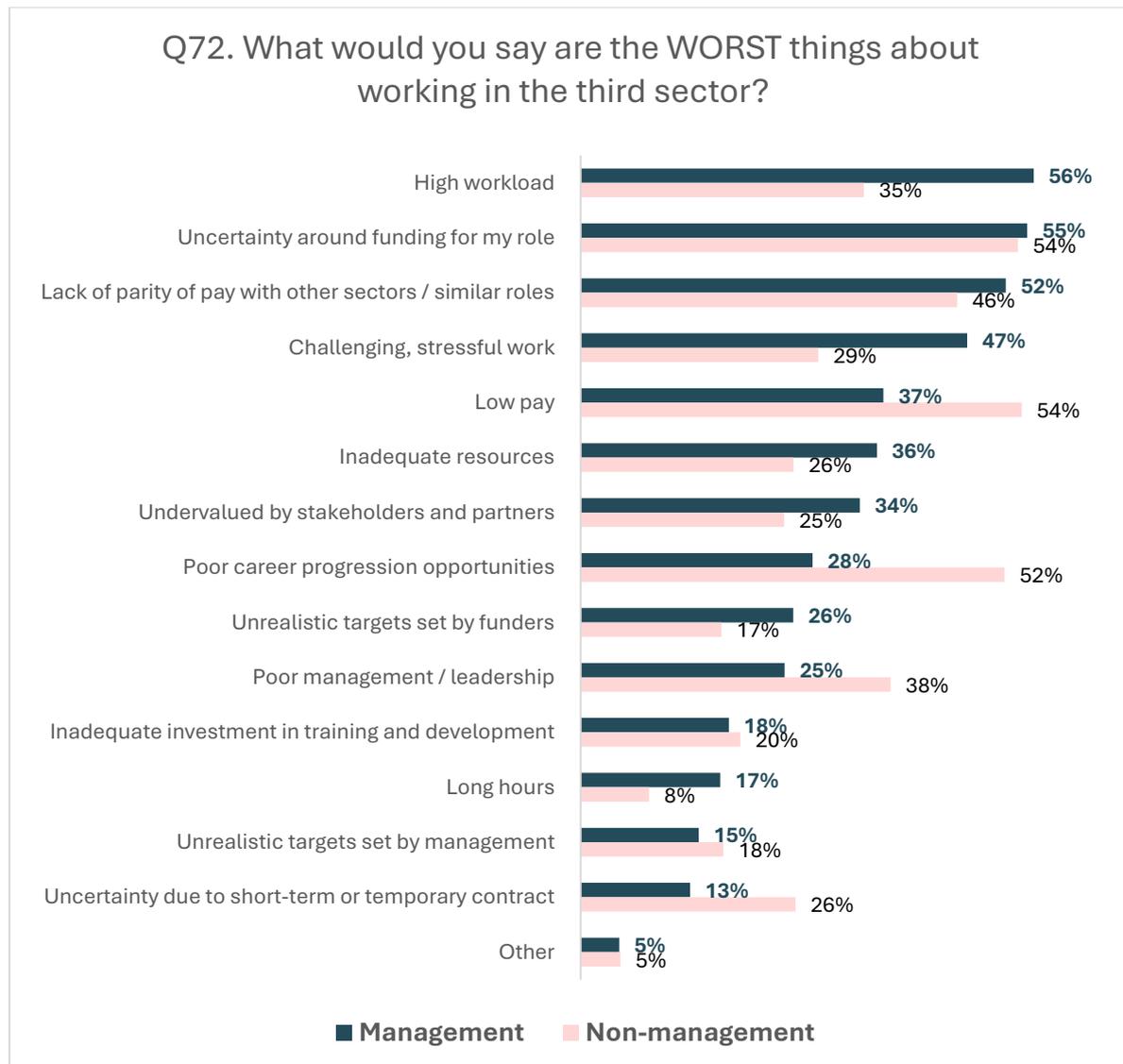
> *"The pressures of the job are only growing. I am exhausted."*

At this stage, leadership is no longer simply about resilience or coping strategies. Instead, leaders are being forced to confront fundamental questions about what is realistically achievable within current funding and operating models to deliver organisational mission.

Without clear boundaries and prioritisation, there is a real risk that organisations and their leaders continue to overextend themselves – mitigating structural problems through unpaid labour, excessive hours, and personal sacrifice

Alongside commitment, many leaders express exhaustion and concern about how long they can continue. Respondents speak candidly about workload and burnout, sector parity and career progression, and the emotional toll of holding organisational risk.

Figure 62. Negative aspects of working in the sector: management

Q72. What would you say are the WORST things about working in the third sector?

Category	Management	Non-management
High workload	56%	35%
Uncertainty around funding for my role	55%	54%
Lack of parity of pay with other sectors / similar roles	52%	46%
Challenging, stressful work	47%	29%
Low pay	37%	54%
Inadequate resources	36%	26%
Undervalued by stakeholders and partners	34%	25%
Poor career progression opportunities	28%	52%
Unrealistic targets set by funders	26%	17%
Poor management / leadership	25%	38%
Inadequate investment in training and development	18%	20%
Long hours	17%	8%
Unrealistic targets set by management	15%	18%
Uncertainty due to short-term or temporary contract	13%	26%
Other	5%	5%

■ **Management** ■ **Non-management**

"I am exhausted – I worked throughout COVID and feel I have not had any time to myself since then. The pressures of the job are only growing."

"Feeling unsupported, like I'm wading through a storm alone, and being on call 7 days per week in a part time role."

Several comments reflect a moment of critical change, where leaders are beginning to ask whether continuing under current conditions is viable.

> *"I used to love my job and would never have imagined leaving... for my own mental and physical health it has become an inevitability."*

12.4.3 Impact on Organisational Delivery

Leaders warn that sustained overextension is already affecting organisational delivery. High workloads, constant firefighting, and insufficient resources reduce capacity for strategic thinking, reflection, and risk management.

> *"We are in a crisis as a sector and you can really feel it. I worked in it many years ago and this is definitely the worst it's been, with reduced budgets but increased demand. I worry not necessarily about my job but the actual organisation as a whole."*

> *"The funding situation in the sector is really difficult and trying to ensure that we have sufficient funds to deliver services is key as the impacts could be closure of services and loss of jobs."*

> *"The gap between the workload we have and the resources we have is immense. I feel overstretched and like I am personally being stretched thin to cover the gap myself."*

These accounts underscore that the leadership tipping point is not only about individual wellbeing, but about the future integrity of voluntary sector organisations.

12.5 Equity, Inclusion, and Leadership

While not a standalone focus of this dataset, leadership accessibility and progression findings have clear implications for equity and inclusion. Limited progression pathways and high workload expectations may disproportionately affect individuals with caring responsibilities or health conditions.

12.6 Implications for Boards and Governance

The findings point to a critical governance challenge: leadership sustainability cannot be addressed without active and informed Board engagement. Boards that engage proactively with these realities are better placed to safeguard organisational quality, staff wellbeing, and long-term impact.

Respondents expressed a clear desire for boards to be more visible and engaged, with a greater understanding of day-to-day pressures on leaders and staff, and clearer communication about strategic constraints and decisions.

> *"It would be nice if they got to know what our jobs actually entail, to ask us about the work that we do."*

12.7 Policy and Funding Implications

Much of the pressure identified throughout this report does not sit primarily within the control of individual leaders or organisations. Instead, they are shaped by external policy, funding, and commissioning environments that determine the conditions in which leadership operates. Addressing leadership sustainability therefore requires action well beyond organisational boundaries.

See also Funding Landscape section.

For analysis of the funding landscape and its impact on organisations and senior leaders see Charity Leadership Scotland's report.

12.8 Implications

Leadership in Scotland's voluntary sector is at a critical moment. This report has highlighted profound challenges: escalating workload and stress, fragile progression pathways, alongside mounting external pressures that sit largely outside leaders' control. Taken together, these factors place leadership sustainability – and organisational delivery – at real risk.

Yet the findings also reveal a powerful counter-narrative. Leadership in the voluntary sector continues to be deeply values-driven, purposeful, and impactful. Leaders speak with pride about the difference their organisations make, the people they work alongside, and the communities they serve. Accessibility, trust, and commitment remain defining strengths of the sector's leadership culture.

This is the paradox at the heart of voluntary sector leadership in 2025: extraordinary dedication and benefit, paralleled by extraordinary strain. The challenge ahead is not to diminish ambition or impact, but to realign expectations with what is realistically achievable and reasonable.

A more hopeful future for leadership lies in focusing on the levers that can be influenced collectively. This includes:

- Acting together to advocate for public service reform and fair, multi-year funding
- Strengthening governance so that responsibility and risk are shared
- Supporting leaders to prioritise, set boundaries, and protect organisational integrity

- Addressing pay, salary progression, and career pathways so that leadership roles are attractive, accessible, and sustainable over the long term

Crucially, progress will depend on leaders, Boards, funders, and policymakers acting with the comfort and courage of a collective, rather than leaving individuals to shoulder systemic pressures alone.

If these shifts are made, the sector has every reason to be optimistic. With the right conditions in place, leadership in Scotland's voluntary sector can remain not only resilient, but sustainable and capable of delivering lasting positive change for years to come.

For a full analysis of leadership-related findings, including more detailed implications and recommendations see:

Workforce Survey 2025: Leadership in Scotland's Voluntary Sector
Charity Leadership Scotland

13. Volunteering

For a full analysis of volunteer-related findings please see **Workforce Survey Volunteer Report - Volunteer Scotland**.

Summary

The Workforce Survey highlights a deeply embedded culture of volunteering among respondents, with over half of respondents consistently involved as volunteers throughout their lives.

Volunteers and trustees are highly satisfied, and many respondents spoke about the personal fulfilment gained through volunteering, including improved wellbeing and a strong sense of purpose. Most volunteers feel well supported and find flexibility in their roles, though there were some concerns about organisation, bureaucracy, and blurred boundaries.   Retention appears reasonably stable, but around a quarter of respondents are considering quitting - the key drivers for this are time pressures, stress, and a sense of completion.

- **Volunteers are highly engaged and long-term**: 58% have volunteered consistently throughout their lives and nearly half in their current role for over five years.
- **Satisfaction is very strong**: 87% are satisfied with their main role, especially younger (18–24) volunteers (89%) and older (60+) volunteers (92%).
- **Volunteering and fulfilment and wellbeing**: Respondents highlighted the personal fulfilment gained through volunteering, including increased confidence, improved wellbeing, and a strong sense of purpose.
- **Volunteer motivations are strongly altruistic and values-driven:** helping others (68%), belief in the cause (52%) and using skills (44%) dominate.
- **Volunteer support and organisational experience are generally positive**, with 70% feeling well supported and 81% finding their organisation flexible, though 42% think things could be better organised.
- Volunteer support appears to be strongly linked with both volunteer satisfaction and likelihood to want to continue volunteering.
- **Volunteer diversity:** Inclusivity is widely perceived, but ethnic minority volunteers are less likely to agree that their organisation feels inclusive or that opportunities are offered equally.
- **Retention is mostly stable**, with 55% unlikely to leave soon. However, 1 in 4 are considering leaving due to time pressures, stress, or feeling they've "done their bit", with middle aged volunteers most likely to quit.
- **Recruitment and future engagement**: 58% said they would volunteer if time commitments were more flexible, and 51% if directly asked.
- While active older volunteers often form the essential backbone of many services an **aging volunteer population** may have implications for volunteer health and succession.

13.1 Life course volunteering

Most volunteer respondents (58%) have been consistently involved in volunteering throughout their lives suggesting a deep-rooted Scottish volunteering culture. The survey focused on formal volunteering, which is defined as any unpaid help given to a club, group or organisation at least once in the last year.

Over a third (37%) of respondents have participated in volunteering occasionally, suggesting a flexible but meaningful connection to volunteering. Only four percent report minimal involvement (hardly been involved throughout life), and one percent are unsure. The findings differ from the Scottish analysis of NCVO's Time Well Spent survey (2023) where a lower proportion of volunteers were involved consistently (45%) and a higher proportion occasionally (45%) and minimally (seven percent).

13.2 Time in current role

Most volunteers have been active in their main role for several years. Nearly one-third (29%) have volunteered for 2–5 years, while 46% have been involved for over five years (23% for 5–10 years and 23% for more than 10 years). A smaller proportion are newer to their role, with 11% volunteering for less than a year and 15% for 1–2 years.

13.3 Reasons for starting to volunteer

Volunteers are primarily driven by altruistic and values-based motivations (Figure 62 below).

The most common reason was a desire to improve things or help people (68%), followed by strong belief in the cause (52%) and the opportunity to use existing skills (44%). Community need (34%) and personal connection to the organisation (33%) were also significant factors. More practical or social motivations were less common, such as being asked to help (26%), having spare time (25%), or wanting to learn new skills (24%). Career-related, religious, and relational reasons were cited by smaller proportions (each around 11% or less), and no respondents reported having no particular reason.

Volunteers in the Workforce Survey sample were notably more likely to cite altruistic and skill-based motivations compared to the national Time Well Spent sample. The most common reason among Workforce Survey respondents was a desire to improve things or help people (68%), substantially higher than the Time Well Spent figure (40%). Similarly, Workforce Survey volunteers were more likely to be motivated by the importance of the cause (52% vs 41%) and the opportunity to use existing skills (44% vs 21%).

Some motivations showed parity across both datasets. For example, feeling a need in the community was cited by 34% of respondents in both samples, and being asked to help was similarly reported (26% Workforce Survey vs 25% Time Well Spent). However, Workforce Survey volunteers were less likely to mention spare time (25% vs 31%) or career-related benefits (11% vs 17%) as key motivators.

Learning and social motivations were more prominent in the Workforce Survey sample: 24% wanted to learn new skills (vs 11% in Time Well Spent), and 22% hoped to meet people or make friends (vs ten percent). Personal connection to the organisation and prior help received were also slightly more common among Workforce Survey volunteers.

Overall, the Workforce Survey data suggests a stronger emphasis on helping others, personal values, and skill development, with less focus on career progression or spare time.

Figure 63. Reasons for starting to volunteer

Reasons for starting to volunteer

Reason	% of work force survey volunteer respondents (n=456)	TWS 2022 % of volunteers (n=109)
I wanted to improve things/help people	68%	40%
The cause was really important to me	52%	41%
I thought it would give me a chance to use my existing skills	44%	21%
I felt there was a need in my community	34%	34%
The group/club/organisation was really important to me	33%	36%
Someone asked me to give help	26%	25%
I had spare time to do it	25%	31%
I thought it would give me a chance to learn new skills	24%	11%
I wanted to meet people/make friends	22%	10%
I felt there was no one else available to help the group/club/organisation	11%	6%
I had been helped by the group/ club/ organisation before	11%	5%
I thought it would help me get on in my career/to get a recognised qualification	11%	17%
It's part of my religious belief/philosophy of life to help people	11%	12%
My friend(s)/ family member(s) were already involved	8%	9%
It was connected with the needs of my family/friends	8%	13%
Other - please specify	6%	3%
Not applicable - there were no reasons in particular why I started giving unpaid help	0%	0%

% of WFS volunteer respondents

13.4 Volunteer Satisfaction

The vast majority (87%) of Workforce Survey volunteer respondents are either very (39%) or fairly (48%) satisfied with their main volunteering role (figure 63).
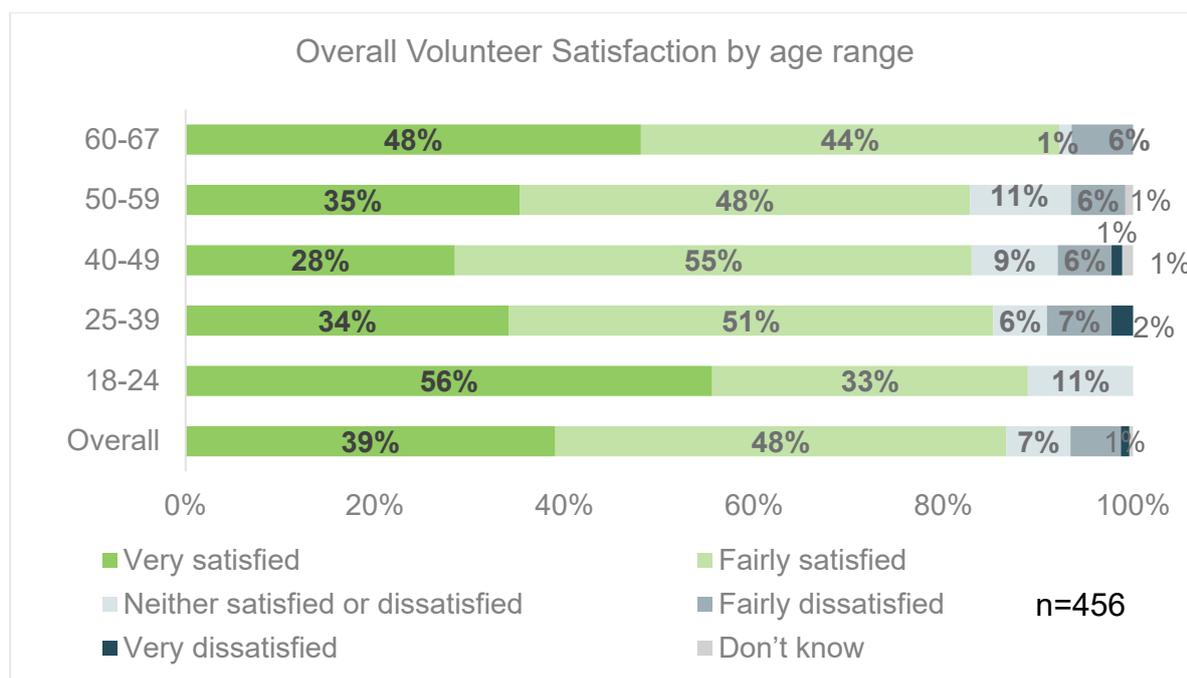
Figure 64. Overall Volunteer Satisfaction
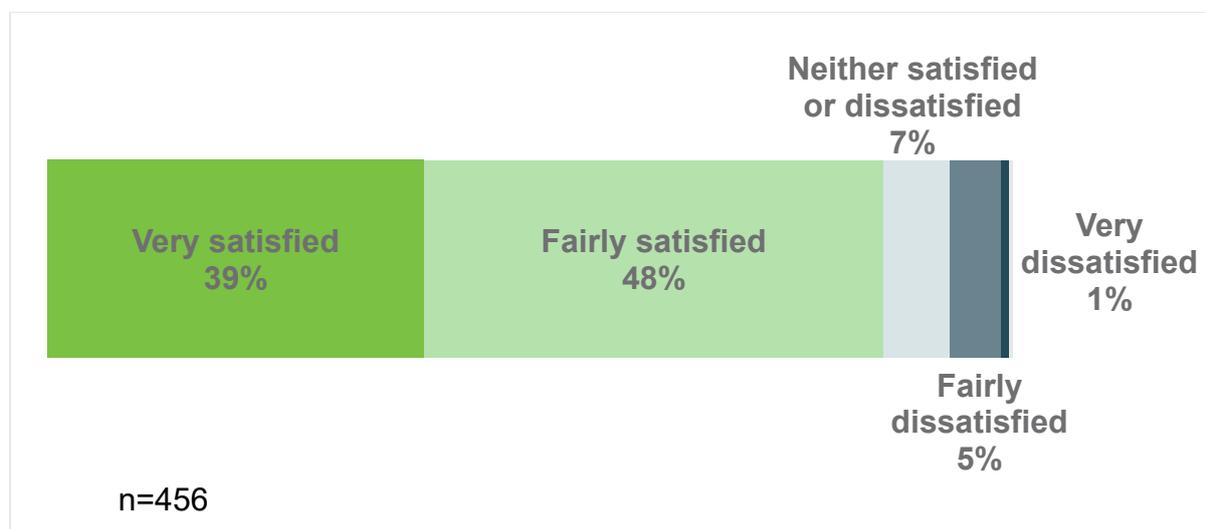
Although satisfaction levels are high, they fall slightly below the Time Well Spent 2023 findings, where 94% of respondents reported being very or fairly satisfied with their main volunteering role. Interestingly, both surveys show the same proportion of dissatisfaction (six percent), with the difference accounted for by the inclusion of an extra response option in the Workforce Survey of 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.

Satisfaction levels with volunteering roles varied noticeably by age. Younger volunteers (18–24) reported the highest proportion of being very satisfied (56%), while middle-aged groups (40–49 and 50–59) showed lower levels of strong satisfaction, at 28% and 35%, respectively. Instead, these groups were more likely to describe themselves as fairly satisfied (55% and 48%). Older volunteers (60–67 and 68+) expressed high satisfaction overall, with nearly half or more very satisfied (48% and 54%). Dissatisfaction was relatively low across all age groups, though slightly more common among those aged 25–59 (six to seven percent % fairly dissatisfied). Neutral responses were most frequent among younger and middle-aged volunteers, while older age groups were least likely to report being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
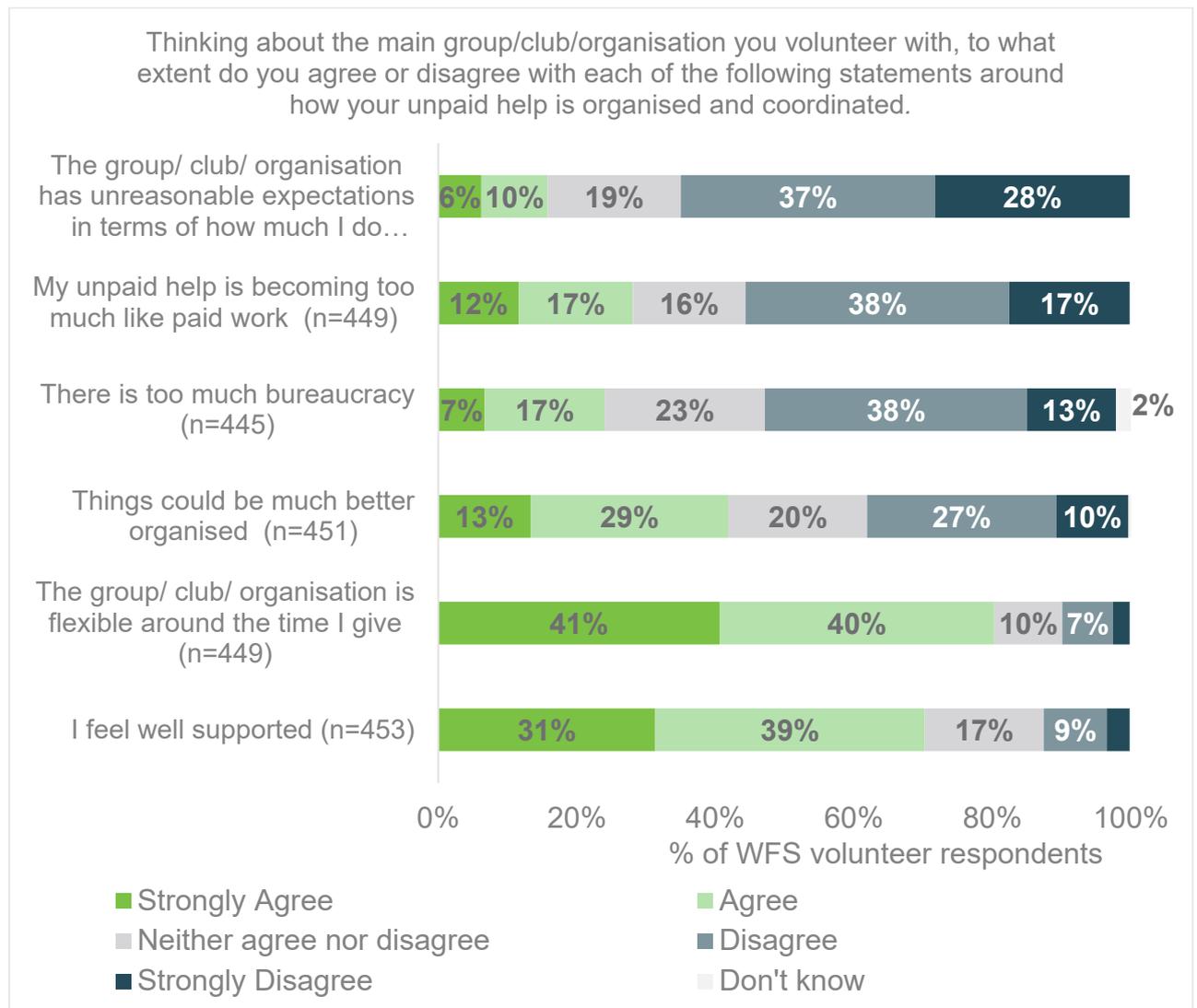
Figure 65. Volunteer satisfaction, by age

Overall Volunteer Satisfaction by age range

Age	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
60-67	48%	44%	1%	6%	
50-59	35%	48%	11%	6%	1%
40-49	28%	55%	9%	6%	1% (1%)
25-39	34%	51%	6%	7%	2%
18-24	56%	33%	11%		
Overall	39%	48%	7%	1%	

Legend: ■ Very satisfied ■ Fairly satisfied ■ Neither satisfied or dissatisfied ■ Fairly dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied ■ Don't know

n=456

13.5 Volunteer Management

Just under half (47%) of respondents report being supported by a paid volunteer coordinator or similar staff member. Slightly more (53%) say they do not receive support from paid staff in their volunteer role. The fact that many volunteers are being managed or supported by volunteer leaders needs to be recognised by the sector, and that a key audience for volunteer management support are themselves volunteers. This is particularly pertinent because two-thirds of registered charities in Scotland have no paid staff and are run entirely by volunteers (see OSCR 2025).

13.6 Volunteer Experience

Overall, respondents expressed positive perceptions of their volunteering experience, with 70% feeling well supported and 81% agreeing that the organisation is flexible with their time, suggesting that volunteers generally feel valued and accommodated. However, views on organisational effectiveness were more mixed: 42% agreed that things could be better organised, while 37% disagreed and 20% remained neutral, indicating scope for improvement in clarity and consistency. Bureaucracy also emerged as a friction point, with 30% agreeing there is too much, though a majority (51%) disagreed. Concerns about role boundaries were evident, as 28% felt their unpaid help was becoming too much like paid work and 16% believed expectations were unreasonable, though most respondents disagreed with these statements. These

findings highlight that while the majority of volunteers find their roles manageable and rewarding, a notable minority experience strain or blurred boundaries. It should be noted that while comparable questions were asked in Time Well Spent the results are not directly comparable due to differences in response options, with the Workforce Survey including a "neither agree nor disagree" choice not present in Time Well Spent.

Thinking about the main group/club/organisation you volunteer with, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements around how your unpaid help is organised and coordinated.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
The group/ club/ organisation has unreasonable expectations in terms of how much I do…	6%	10%	19%	37%	28%	
My unpaid help is becoming too much like paid work (n=449)	12%	17%	16%	38%	17%	
There is too much bureaucracy (n=445)	7%	17%	23%	38%	13%	2%
Things could be much better organised (n=451)	13%	29%	20%	27%	10%	
The group/ club/ organisation is flexible around the time I give (n=449)	41%	40%	10%	7%		
I feel well supported (n=453)	31%	39%	17%	9%		

% of WFS volunteer respondents

Legend: Strongly Agree · Agree · Neither agree nor disagree · Disagree · Strongly Disagree · Don't know

Volunteers who feel well supported report markedly higher levels of satisfaction, as shown in figure 65. Among those who agree that they feel supported, 97% describe themselves as satisfied, compared with 69% of those who neither agree nor disagree and just 53% of those who feel unsupported.

Dissatisfaction shows the opposite pattern, rising from only 1% among volunteers who feel supported to 30% among those who disagree that they are well supported. This suggests that feeling supported is closely associated with a more positive volunteering experience.

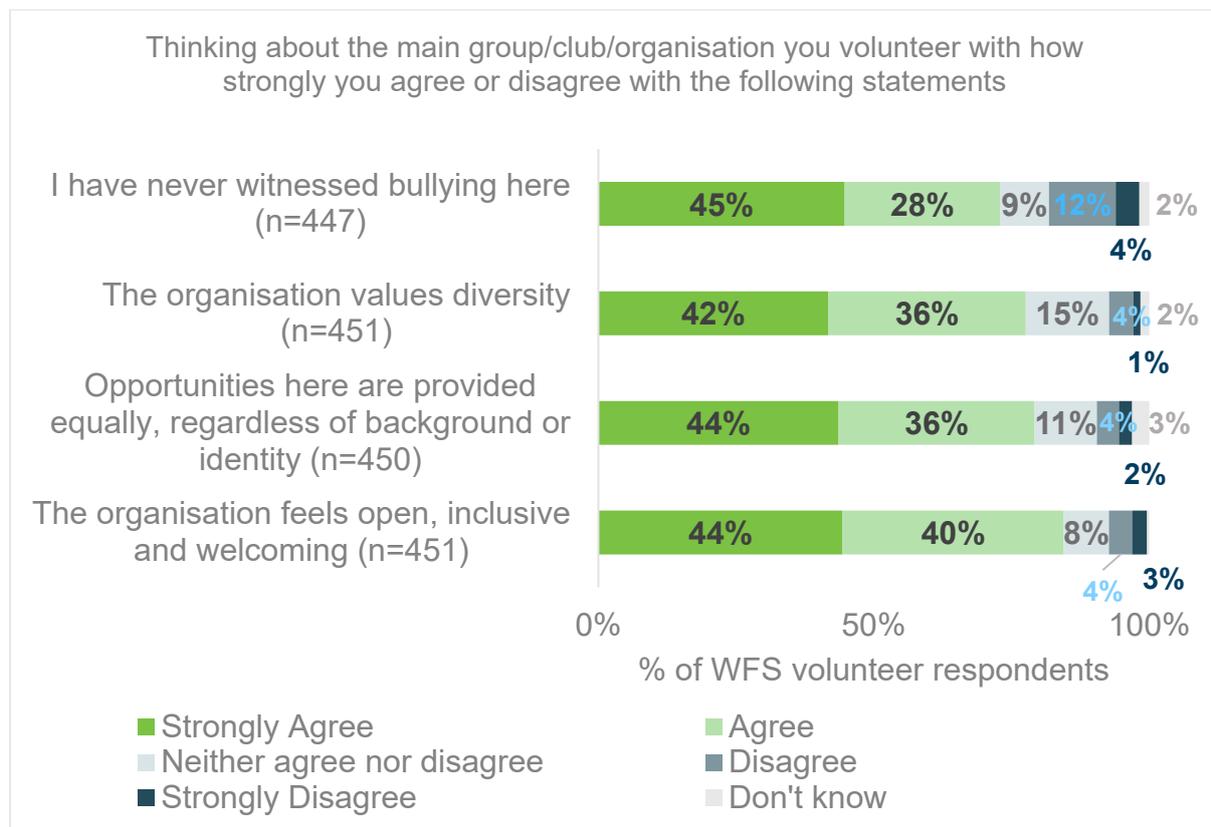*Figure 66. Volunteer support, and volunteer satisfaction*
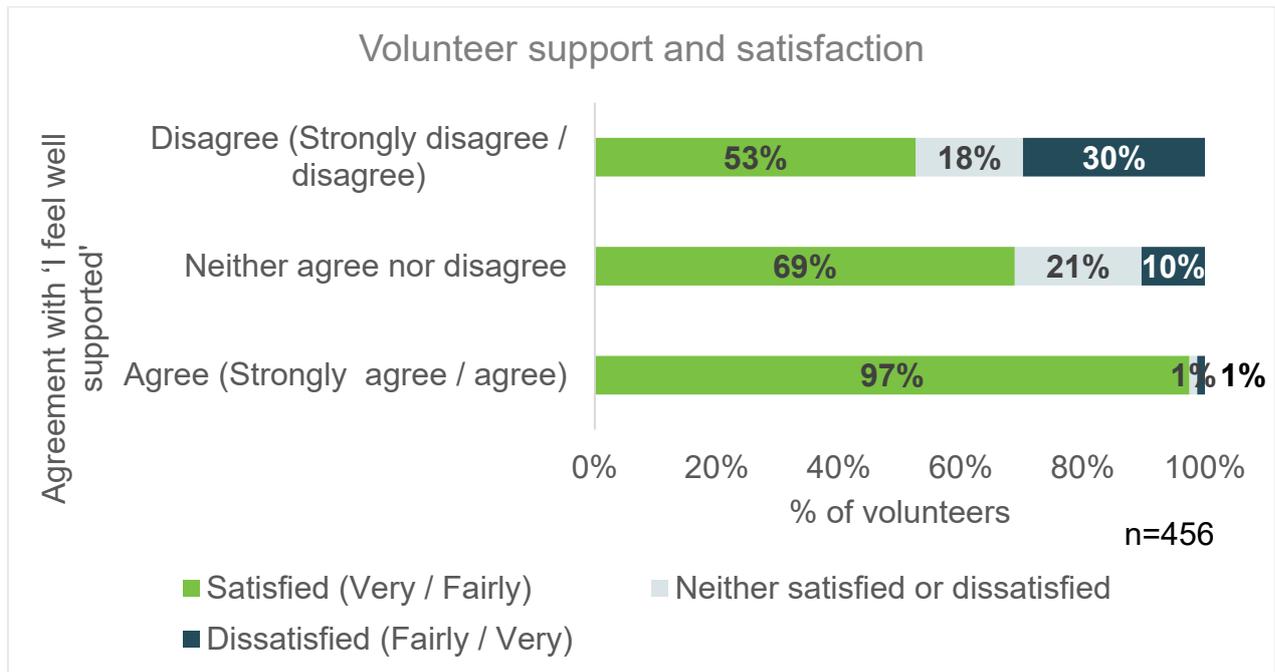
13.7 Volunteer Experience – Diversity and Inclusion

The survey results indicate that volunteers generally perceive their organisations as inclusive, equitable, and respectful environments. Across four statements about diversity and inclusion, the majority of respondents expressed positive views, with between 42% and 45% selecting 'strongly agree' and a further 28% to 40% choosing 'agree'. This suggests that most volunteers feel their organisations are welcoming, value diversity, and provide equal opportunities regardless of background or identity. Notably, 45% strongly agreed that they had never witnessed bullying, reinforcing the perception of a safe and supportive culture.

While overall sentiment is positive, a small but important minority reported less favourable experiences. Between four and 12% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements, with concerns most evident around bullying (16% combined disagreement). Additionally, eight percent to 15% of respondents were neutral, and up to three percent were unsure, indicating that not all volunteers are fully confident in these aspects of organisational culture. These findings highlight both the strengths of current practice and areas where continued attention to inclusivity, equal treatment, and safeguarding could further enhance volunteer experiences.

Figure 67. Volunteer workplace culture

Thinking about the main group/club/organisation you volunteer with how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

I have never witnessed bullying here (n=447): Strongly Agree 45%, Agree 28%, Neither agree nor disagree 9%, Disagree 12%, Strongly Disagree 4%, Don't know 2%

The organisation values diversity (n=451): Strongly Agree 42%, Agree 36%, Neither agree nor disagree 15%, Disagree 4%, Strongly Disagree 1%, Don't know 2%

Opportunities here are provided equally, regardless of background or identity (n=450): Strongly Agree 44%, Agree 36%, Neither agree nor disagree 11%, Disagree 4%, Strongly Disagree 2%, Don't know 3%

The organisation feels open, inclusive and welcoming (n=451): Strongly Agree 44%, Agree 40%, Neither agree nor disagree 8%, Disagree 4%, Strongly Disagree 3%

% of WFS volunteer respondents

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't know

Volunteer Experience – Diversity and Inclusion: Ethnicity

White respondents were significantly more likely to agree (86%) that the organisation feels inclusive, compared to 57% of respondents from other ethnic groups. The latter group also showed higher levels of uncertainty or neutrality (29%) and disagreement (14%), suggesting a potential gap in perceived inclusivity across ethnic backgrounds.

While a strong majority of White respondents (81%) agreed that opportunities are provided equally, only 55% of respondents from other ethnic groups felt the same. The latter group also showed higher levels of neutrality (25%) and uncertainty (ten percent), indicating a less confident perception of fairness in opportunity across backgrounds.

High agreement across both groups suggests broad recognition that the organisation values diversity.

However, respondents from other ethnic groups were slightly more likely to disagree (14%) than White respondents (six percent), indicating a small but notable difference in perception. White respondents also showed more neutrality (15%), which may reflect uncertainty.

Respondents from other ethnic groups were more likely to report never witnessing bullying (90%) compared to White respondents (73%). However, White respondents showed higher levels of disagreement (16%) and neutrality (nine percent), suggesting greater variability in experiences or perceptions of bullying within that group

13.8 Likelihood to continue

Most volunteers are unlikely to leave their current role in the next year or two, with 55% selecting either "Highly unlikely" (27%) or "Quite unlikely" (28%). This suggests a generally stable and committed volunteer base. However, 26% indicated some likelihood of quitting ('Quite likely' at 18% and 'Highly likely' at eight percent), which points to a notable minority at risk of disengagement. A further 14% were neutral and six percent unsure, highlighting opportunities for organisations to strengthen retention through clearer communication, support, and role satisfaction.

Figure 68. Likelihood of quitting volunteering role
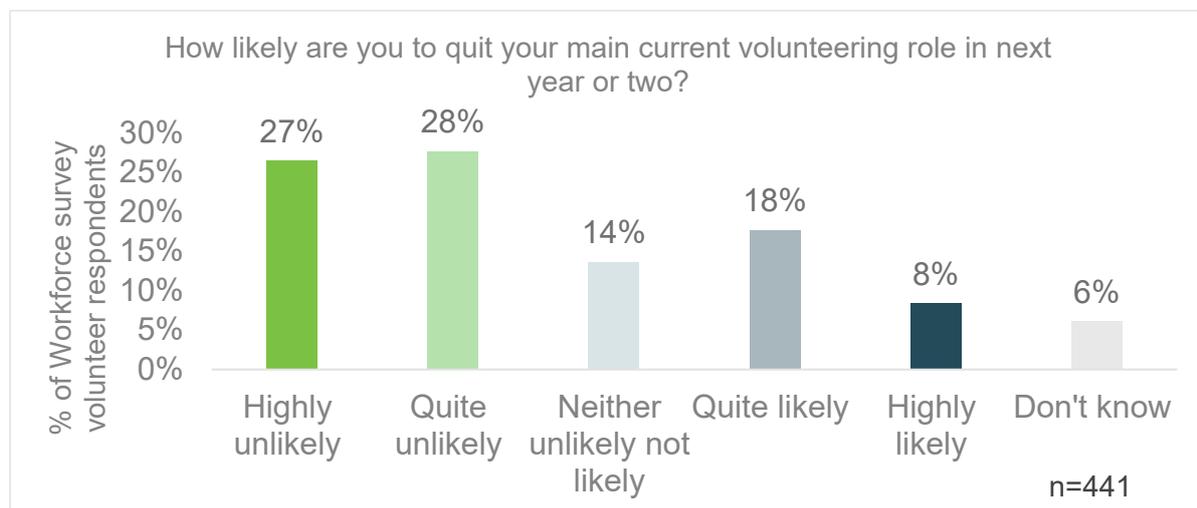
The likelihood of existing volunteers to continue volunteering is not uniform across all demographic groups.

13.8.1 Age

Middle-aged groups (40–49) show the highest likelihood of quitting their main volunteering role in next year or two, with 26% "Quite likely" and 11% "Highly likely." Older adults (60+) lean toward uncertainty or low likelihood, with elevated "Don't know" responses and moderate "Unlikely" ratings.

While older volunteers (60+) are no more likely to be considering quitting than younger volunteers, the respondent profile suggests an **aging volunteer population**, which may have implications for volunteer health and succession planning.

13.8.2 Gender

Most volunteers, regardless of gender, are unlikely to quit, with over half of both female and male respondents selecting "Highly" or "Quite unlikely."
Men are marginally more open to quitting, with slightly higher likely (highly / quite) responses (28% vs 26%). "Don't know" responses are identical across genders at six percent.

13.8.3 Ethnicity

White respondents are more likely to stay, with 55% selecting "Unlikely" versus 45% among other ethnic groups. **Volunteers from other ethnic groups show greater openness to change**, with 35% selecting "Likely" compared to 26% of White respondents. Uncertainty is higher among other ethnic groups, with ten percent responding, "Don't know," nearly double the White group's six percent.

13.8.4 Long-term health conditions

Volunteers without a long-term health condition (LTHC) are more likely to stay, with 58% selecting "Unlikely" versus 48% among those with LTHC. Volunteers with LTHC show slightly higher likelihood to quit, with 28% selecting "Likely" compared to 25% of No LTHC respondents. Uncertainty is more common among those with LTHC, with 17% choosing "Neither", compared to 11% of No LTHC respondents. "Don't know" responses are identical across both groups at 6%.

*Figure 69. Likelihood to quit volunteering role, by health*

How likely are you to quit your main current volunteering role in next year or two by long term health conditions (LTHC).
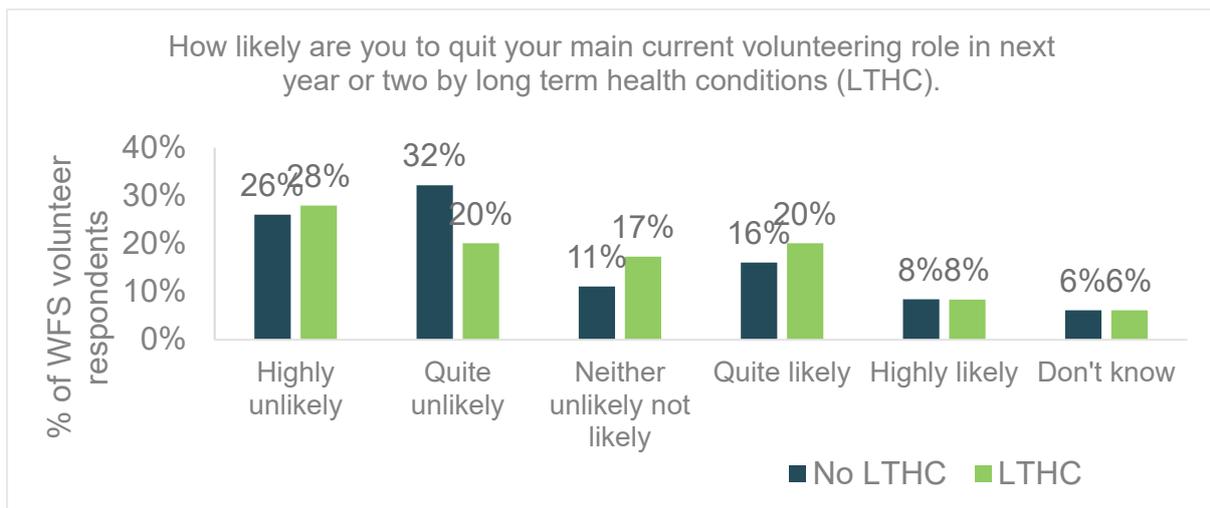
Volunteer support and likelihood of quitting

Volunteers who feel well supported are more likely to report high levels of

volunteer satisfaction and are less likely to be considering quitting their main volunteering role:

Volunteers who feel well supported are considerably less likely to say they might leave their role. Among those who agree that they feel supported, 65% say they are unlikely to leave, compared with 47% of those who neither agree nor disagree and just 28% of those who feel unsupported. The proportion who say they are likely to leave rises sharply as feelings of support decline, from 21% among those who feel supported to 57% among those who disagree that they are well supported. This pattern suggests that feeling supported plays an important role in volunteers' intentions to stay.

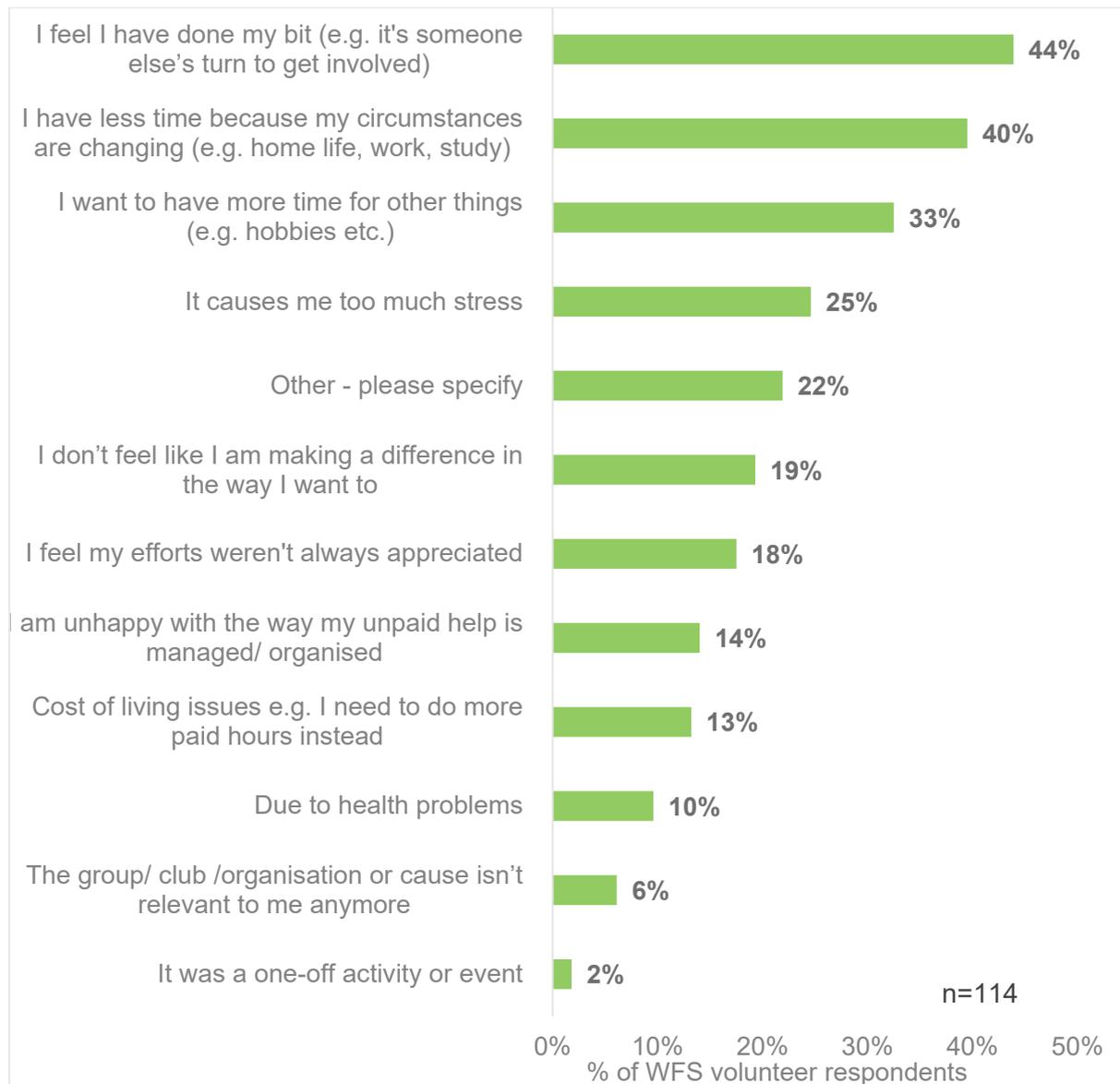*Figure 70. Volunteer Support and Likelihood of Leaving Role*
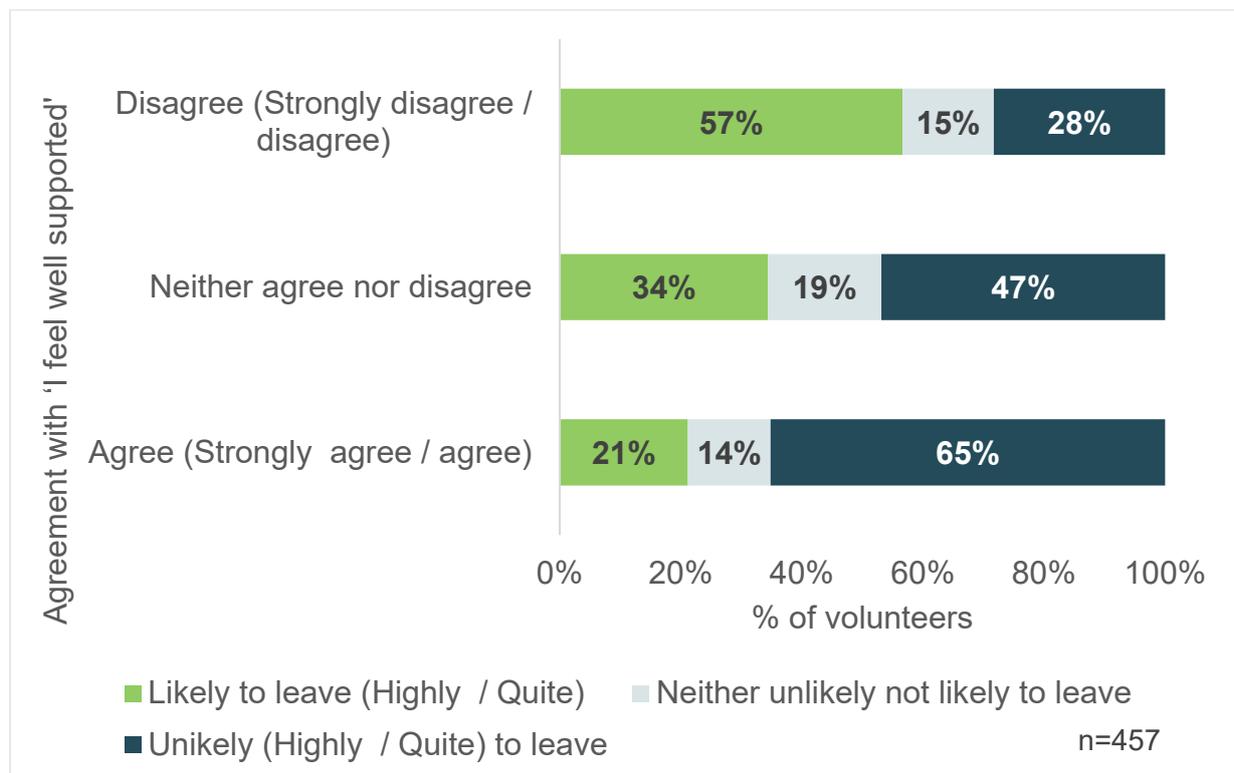
13.9 Reasons for leaving

The most frequently cited reason for considering quitting a volunteer role is a sense of completion, with 44% of respondents feeling they've "done their bit." Time-related pressures also feature prominently: 40% report changing personal circumstances and 33% want more time for other interests. Stress is a factor for one in four volunteers (25%), while 22% selected "Other" reasons, indicating a range of additional personal or contextual factors. A sense of limited impact (19%), lack of appreciation (18%), and dissatisfaction with management (14%) also contribute to disengagement. Financial pressures (13%) and health issues (ten percent) appear less

often but remain relevant. Only a small minority cited relevance of the cause (six percent) or one-off involvement (two percent), suggesting most volunteers had longer-term engagement before considering departure. **These findings highlight the importance of role flexibility, recognition, and wellbeing support in volunteer retention strategies.**

Figure 71. Why are you thinking of leaving your current volunteer role?

Reason	%
I feel I have done my bit (e.g. it's someone else's turn to get involved)	44%
I have less time because my circumstances are changing (e.g. home life, work, study)	40%
I want to have more time for other things (e.g. hobbies etc.)	33%
It causes me too much stress	25%
Other - please specify	22%
I don't feel like I am making a difference in the way I want to	19%
I feel my efforts weren't always appreciated	18%
I am unhappy with the way my unpaid help is managed/ organised	14%
Cost of living issues e.g. I need to do more paid hours instead	13%
Due to health problems	10%
The group/ club /organisation or cause isn't relevant to me anymore	6%
It was a one-off activity or event	2%

n=114

% of WFS volunteer respondents

The open text, 'other,' responses reveal a diverse range of personal and situational factors influencing volunteers' decisions to step away from their roles. Several cited career transitions and professional development as key motivators, including moving into paid employment, seeking new skills, or pursuing trustee roles to build their CVs. Others expressed disillusionment or conflict, referencing unmet support needs or ideological discomfort. Structural frustrations also emerged, with concerns about remote formats, regulatory burdens, and unrealistic expectations.

Organisational change was another common theme, with closures, leadership transitions, and funding issues prompting natural exits. Ageing and personal circumstances featured prominently, with volunteers acknowledging physical limitations or feeling less connected to current issues. Finally, a significant cluster of responses reflected role completion, where terms were ending or individuals felt it was time to make space for new leadership. These insights underscore the importance of flexible pathways, recognition of life transitions, and thoughtful succession planning in volunteer engagement strategies.

13.9.1 Reasons for leaving by age group

The reasons for considering leaving a volunteer role vary notably by age group. **Volunteers aged 18–50 are more likely to cite time pressures and stress, with 47% reporting changing circumstances and 34% saying the role causes too much stress, compared to 33% and 18% respectively among those aged fifty and over**. Younger volunteers are also more likely to want time for other interests (38% vs. 28%) and to feel underappreciated (21% vs. 14%). In contrast, older volunteers are more likely to feel they've "done their bit," with 51% selecting this reason compared to 38% of younger respondents. Health-related concerns are more prevalent among the 50+ group (14% vs. six percent), while relevance of the cause and one-off involvement were only cited by younger volunteers. These patterns suggest that retention strategies may need to be tailored by age, with younger volunteers requiring more flexibility and support, and older volunteers valuing recognition and meaningful engagement.

13.9.2 Reasons for leaving by gender

Gender differences reveal distinct patterns in volunteer disengagement. **Female respondents were more likely to cite time pressures and a sense of completion, with 47% saying they'd "done their bit" and 43% reporting changing personal circumstances, compared to 36% and 28% of male respondents, respectively**. Women were also more likely to select "Other" reasons (24% vs. 16%) and mention health problems (13% vs. zero percent). In contrast, men were more likely to feel their efforts were not appreciated (24% vs. 16%), feel ineffective in their impact (32% vs. 16%), and express dissatisfaction with how their unpaid help was managed (24% vs. 11%). These findings suggest that while women may be more affected by external pressures and transitions, men may be more sensitive to organisational dynamics and recognition. Tailoring retention strategies to address these differing experiences could help improve volunteer satisfaction across the board.

13.10 Volunteer Role Intentions (Next 2 Years)

The findings suggest a mixed outlook on future volunteering. Around four in ten respondents (39%) indicated they are likely to take on a new or additional role within the

next two years ("Highly likely" 10%, "Quite likely" 29%), pointing to a significant pool of potential ongoing engagement. However, a similar proportion (41%) expressed reluctance ("Quite unlikely" 25%, "Highly unlikely" 16%), highlighting barriers to expanding or sustaining involvement. A further 16% were neutral and 5% unsure, reflecting uncertainty or ambivalence about future commitments. Overall, while there is clear interest among a substantial minority, organisations may need to address time pressures, motivation, and role design to encourage more volunteers to remain active or take on new responsibilities.

Figure 72. Likelihood of taking on additional volunteering
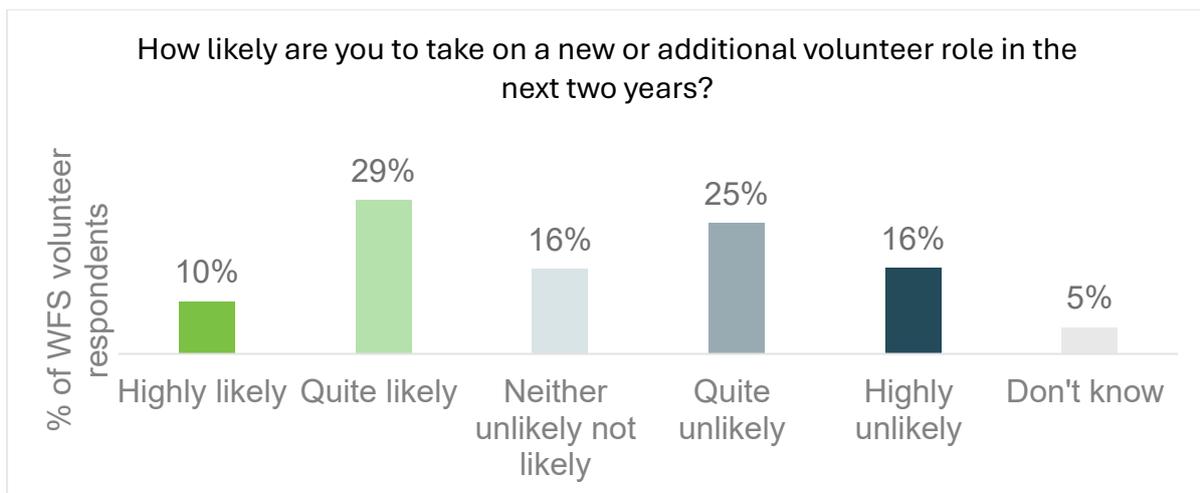
13.11 Encouragements to take on a new volunteering role

The strongest motivators for taking on a new volunteering role are flexibility and personal invitation. Over half of respondents said they would be encouraged if they could be flexible with the time committed (58%) or if someone asked them directly to get involved (51%). Flexibility in how unpaid time is given, such as remote options, was also important to a quarter of respondents (25%). Career and skill development opportunities were cited by around one in five, with 24% motivated by skill improvement and 22% by career benefits.

Smaller but still notable factors included easier processes (12%), clearer information about opportunities (13%), and social aspects such as meeting new people (10%) or volunteering with family and friends (seven percent). Financial support through expenses (eight percent) was the least common motivator. Overall, the findings highlight that making volunteering flexible, approachable, and personally inviting is key to encouraging new or additional involvement, while career and social benefits play a secondary but meaningful role.

The 'other' responses highlight a wide range of personal considerations shaping volunteers' willingness to take on new roles. A considerable proportion centred on time constraints and competing commitments, with many noting they already hold multiple
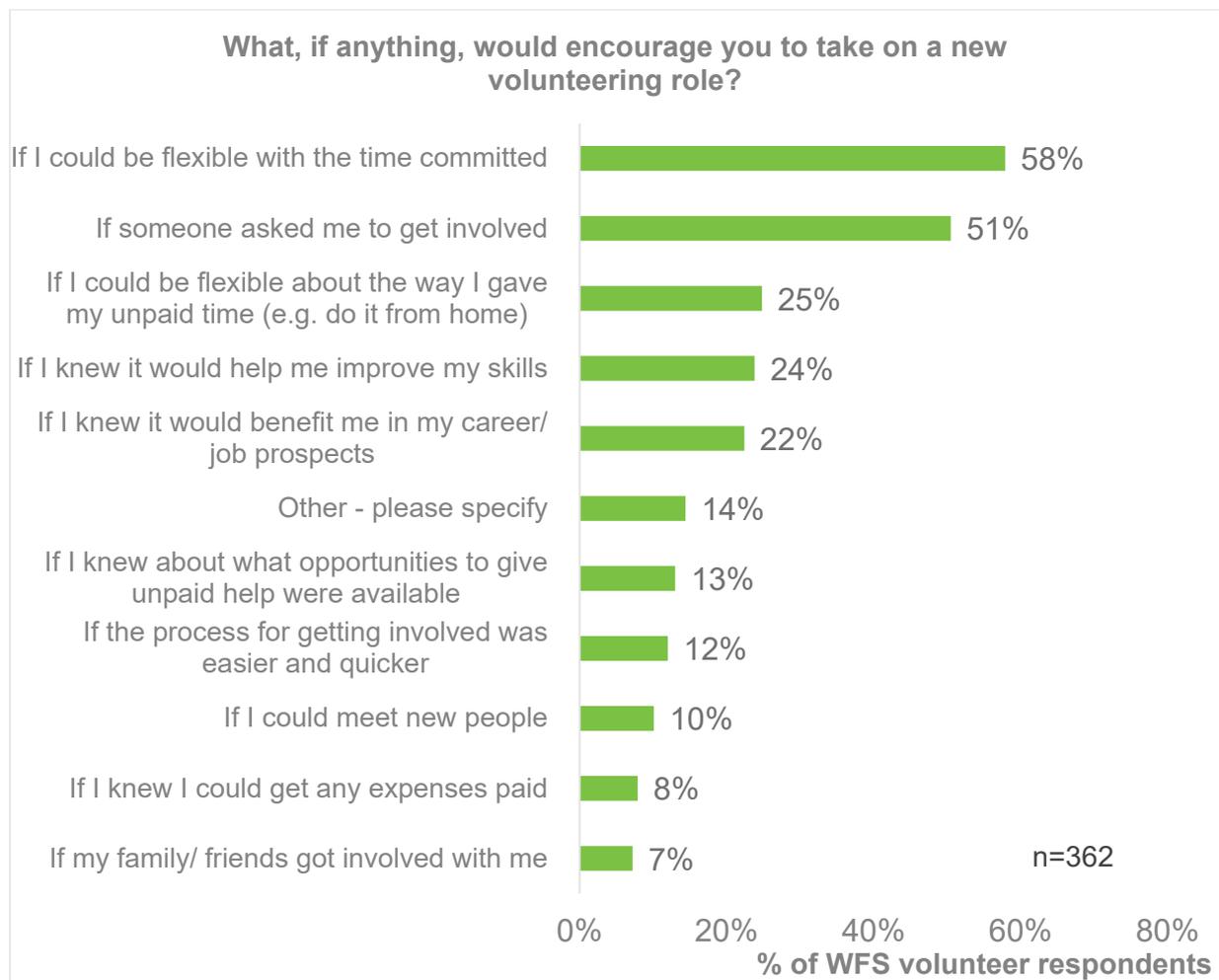
roles, work long hours, or simply lack spare time. For these individuals, taking on additional volunteering would only be possible if current commitments reduced.

Other responses emphasised the importance of role design and flexibility, such as occasional opportunities, clear and limited time commitments, or roles that fit with personal schedules and capabilities. Closely linked were motivations around skills, experience, and personal growth, with several volunteers expressing interest in roles that use or value their expertise, expand knowledge, or offer decision-making opportunities to increase impact.

The social environment and support also emerged as a factor, with respondents highlighting the need for fair management, local community involvement, and peer support. Meanwhile, values and personal connection were strong motivators: many said they would only take on roles aligned with causes they care about, believe in, or feel passionate about, particularly where they could make a tangible difference. Finally, a smaller set of responses reflected work-life balance and prioritisation, where family needs, paid work, or maintaining current levels of volunteering took precedence.

Overall, these insights reinforce that future engagement depends not only on time availability but also on the design, relevance, and recognition of roles, alongside alignment with volunteers' values and life circumstances.

Figure 73. Factors that would support volunteering

What, if anything, would encourage you to take on a new volunteering role?

Factor	%
If I could be flexible with the time committed	58%
If someone asked me to get involved	51%
If I could be flexible about the way I gave my unpaid time (e.g. do it from home)	25%
If I knew it would help me improve my skills	24%
If I knew it would benefit me in my career/ job prospects	22%
Other - please specify	14%
If I knew about what opportunities to give unpaid help were available	13%
If the process for getting involved was easier and quicker	12%
If I could meet new people	10%
If I knew I could get any expenses paid	8%
If my family/ friends got involved with me	7%

n=362

% of WFS volunteer respondents

13.12 Concluding thoughts about volunteering in general

The final comments from volunteers paint a largely positive picture, with many describing their experiences as meaningful, rewarding, and life enhancing.

> *"I enjoy both my volunteering roles immensely and they bring a lot to my life"*

> *"I think volunteering is invaluable when you have knowledge and expertise that can contribute to meaningful change for others"*

Respondents highlighted the personal fulfilment gained through volunteering, including increased confidence, improved wellbeing, and a strong sense of purpose. For some, voluntary roles were even perceived as more valued than previous paid employment, underscoring the deep impact volunteering can have on individuals.

> *"It gives me great satisfaction and a feeling of self-worth."*

> *"Volunteering has greatly improved my overall wellbeing and the skills I have learned have given me confidence in many other areas of my life."*

At the same time, systemic challenges were evident. Time pressures and burnout were recurring concerns, as volunteers struggled to balance commitments alongside work, caring responsibilities, and personal energy. Overcommitment and shortages of volunteers were seen to exacerbate stress, particularly in communities with limited statutory support. Autonomy and legacy also emerged as themes, with long-term contributors reflecting proudly on their service but expressing a desire to step back and make space for others as they age.

> *"Can be very time consuming. I had a very demanding previous Board role that affected my work and home life."*

> *"I joined a board as it was a new company and I had investment in the project being successful for my local community. However, I find it exhausting and challenging to find other people to support with the work on top of the day job"*

Respondents called for cultural change to strengthen engagement, particularly among younger generations. Suggestions included education-based outreach, corporate volunteering opportunities, and broader advocacy to embed volunteering as part of civic life.

> *"There just isn't enough people coming forward to volunteer and the culture around volunteering for my generation and younger is critical to get addressed as part of the education process."*

However, operational barriers such as bureaucracy, regulatory demands, and lack of infrastructure were frequently cited, especially by trustees and grassroots organisations working in underfunded areas. Experiences of volunteer management varied widely: while some felt respected and empowered, others reported poor treatment, lack of guidance, or being asked to replace paid staff, highlighting the critical role of leadership in retention and morale.

> *"There is too much bureaucracy around volunteers, and this has increased relentlessly over the past few years. It means that large amounts of time is spent by other volunteers checking on training, disclosures etc and keeping this all up to date."*

> *"All the government regulation and courses you have to tick the boxes for do make it harder to be involved."*

Finally, broader critiques of the sector were raised. Concerns about reliance on unpaid labour, blurred boundaries between paid and unpaid work, and ethical misalignment with organisational practices were noted. Some volunteers felt exploited or undervalued, while others questioned the sustainability of volunteer-led services without adequate funding or recognition.

"Think it is necessary for more people to do, to have a vibrant healthy community especially with the current political and financial climate. BUT I also think some large organisations rely too muleach on volunteer work and use it to reduce staff costs"

"I volunteer at multiple organisations. It is very rewarding when there is strong professional leadership and the volunteers' professional skills and knowledge are respected and valued. Sadly in my experience this is rare and volunteers are often spoken to in a patronising manner , used to do the jobs that no paid workforce member will take on, and they are taken for granted."

Despite these pressures, many respondents framed volunteering as a civic duty and a way to build stronger, fairer communities. Overall, the comments reveal both the passion that drives volunteerism and the systemic issues that threaten its sustainability, pointing to the need for better support structures, cultural shifts, and strategic investment to ensure volunteering remains empowering and viable for the future.

13.13 Implications

Volunteering remains a cornerstone of Scottish civic life, offering personal fulfilment and huge societal benefit. However, sustaining and growing this commitment requires addressing some systemic challenges — reducing bureaucracy, clarifying role boundaries, fostering inclusive cultures and strengthening support structures.

Flexible opportunities and proactive outreach will be critical to attract new volunteers and trustees, and ensuring volunteering continues to thrive.

For a full analysis of volunteer-related findings including more detailed implications and recommendations see
Workforce Survey Volunteer Report - Volunteer Scotland

14. Focus on trustees

The following section is a summary of findings relating to Trustees. For a full analysis please see the [Workforce Survey Volunteer Report - Volunteer Scotland](#).

Trustees in the Workforce Survey show strong engagement and commitment, with most having volunteered consistently throughout their lives and holding their roles for several years.

Compared to the wider volunteer population, trustees are more likely to be middle-aged, female, and highly qualified, with 76% holding a university or postgraduate degree.

While satisfaction levels are broadly similar to other volunteers, **trustees report slightly higher stress and concerns about unpaid work resembling paid roles**. Inclusivity perceptions remain positive, though bullying concerns are marginally higher among trustees.

Retention intentions mirror the overall volunteer base, but **trustees are more likely to cite "having done their bit" and stress as reasons for leaving**.

14.1 Trustee – Life course volunteering

Patterns of lifetime involvement in unpaid help show trustees to be more consistently engaged than respondents overall. Among those acting as committee members or trustees, 68% report having been involved regularly or often throughout their lives, compared with 58% of all respondents. Occasional involvement is less common among trustees (29%) than in the wider group (37%). Very few trustees (two percent) say they have hardly been involved, compared with four percent of all respondents, and none selected "don't know" (versus one percent overall). **Overall, trustees demonstrate a stronger pattern of consistent, long-term engagement in unpaid help compared with the broader respondent base.**

14.2 Trustee – Time in current role

Trustees tend to have longer involvement in their main volunteering role compared with respondents overall. Only 6% of trustees have been in their role for less than a year, compared with 11% of all respondents, and 12% of trustees have volunteered for 1–2 years versus 15% overall. The largest group of trustees (31%) have been in their role for 2–5 years, slightly higher than the 29% among all respondents. Longer-term commitment is also more evident among trustees, with 25% volunteering for 5–10 years and another 25% for more than 10 years, compared with 23% in each category for all respondents. **Overall, trustees demonstrate greater stability and longer tenure in their main volunteering role than the wider volunteer population.**

14.3 Trustee – Volunteer satisfaction

Levels of satisfaction with main volunteering roles are broadly similar between trustees and respondents overall. Among trustees, 36% report being "very satisfied," slightly lower than the 39% of all respondents, while 48% in both groups describe themselves as "fairly satisfied." Neutral responses ("neither satisfied nor dissatisfied") are somewhat higher among trustees (nine percent) compared with seven percent overall.

Small proportions report dissatisfaction, with six percent of trustees "fairly dissatisfied" compared to five percent overall, and one percent in both groups "very dissatisfied." **Overall, trustees' satisfaction levels closely mirror those of the wider volunteer population, with only minor differences in the distribution of neutral and very satisfied responses.**

14.4 Trustee – Volunteer experience

Trustees' views on their volunteering experience broadly align with those of respondents overall, though some differences emerge.

A majority of trustees feel well supported, with 66% agreeing or strongly agreeing, closely matching the 70% of all respondents. 81% of trustees find their organisations flexible around the time they give, which is identical to the figure for all volunteers.

On organisational effectiveness, 43% of trustees agree or strongly agree that "things could be much better organised," almost identical to the 42% of all respondents, while 36% disagree. Bureaucracy is perceived similarly across both groups, with 25% of trustees agreeing or strongly agreeing that there is too much bureaucracy, and 49% disagreeing, mirroring the wider respondent base.

Concerns about unpaid help resembling paid work are slightly more pronounced among trustees (34% agree or strongly agree compared with 29% overall), though the majority disagree (49% trustees, 55% overall). Likewise, perceptions of unreasonable expectations are broadly consistent, with 19% of trustees agreeing or strongly agreeing compared with 16% overall, while around two thirds in both groups disagree.

Overall, trustees report broadly similar experiences to volunteers generally, with strong levels of perceived support and flexibility, but some concerns about organisation, bureaucracy, and workload expectations.

14.5 Trustee Volunteer Experience – Diversity and Inclusion

Trustees' experiences of inclusivity and organisational culture are closely aligned with those of respondents overall. A strong majority of trustees feel their organisation is open, inclusive and welcoming, with 82% agreeing or strongly agreeing, almost identical to the 84% of all respondents. Similarly, 78% of trustees believe opportunities are provided equally regardless of background or identity, compared with 80% overall.

Views on diversity are also consistent, with 79% of trustees agreeing or strongly agreeing that their organisation values diversity, compared with 78% of all respondents. Perceptions of bullying show a slightly different pattern: 71% of trustees strongly agree or agree that they have never witnessed bullying, compared with 73% overall, while 19% of trustees disagree compared with 16% of respondents.

Overall, trustees report broadly similar experiences to volunteers generally, with strong perceptions of inclusivity, equality and diversity, though a slightly higher proportion of trustees note disagreement regarding bullying.

14.6 Trustee - Likelihood to continue

Trustees' likelihood of leaving their main volunteering role in the next year or two is broadly similar to that of respondents overall, though with some differences in the middle categories. Around one quarter of trustees (27%) say it is "highly unlikely" they will quit, identical to the wider respondent group, and another 27% say it is "quite unlikely," close to the 28% overall. Neutral responses are slightly lower among trustees (11%) compared with 14% overall.

Trustees are somewhat more likely to say they are "quite likely" to quit (23% versus 18%), while the proportion reporting they are "highly likely" to quit is the same across both groups (eight percent). A small minority are unsure, with five percent of trustees and six percent of respondents selecting "don't know." Overall, trustees show similar patterns of retention intentions to volunteers generally, though with a slightly higher proportion indicating they may be quite likely to leave.

14.7 Trustee – Reasons for leaving

Trustees cite a range of reasons for potentially leaving their volunteering role, with patterns broadly similar to respondents overall but with some notable differences. The most common reason among trustees is feeling they have "done their bit," reported by 51% compared with 44% of all respondents.
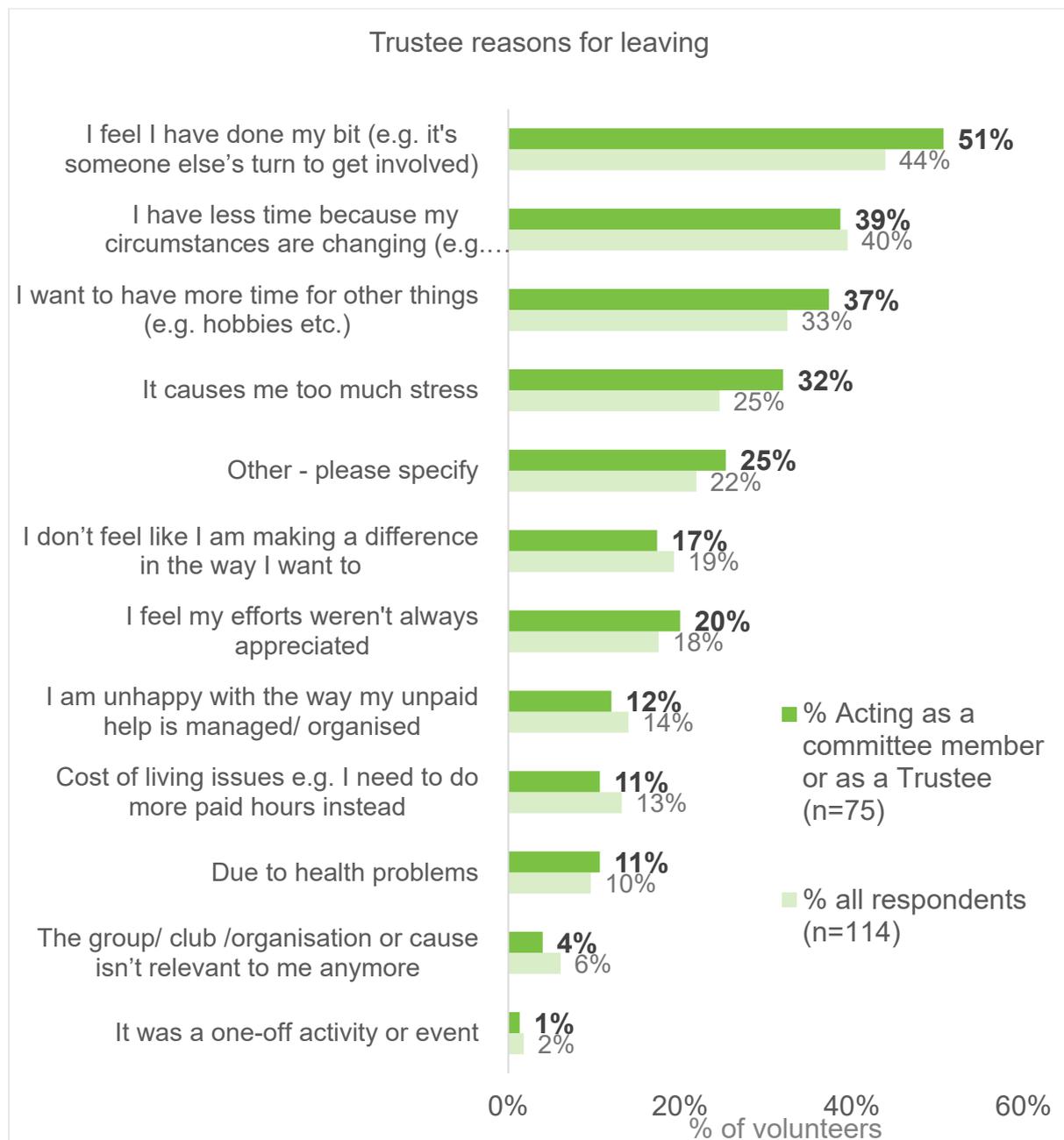
Time pressures are also significant, with 39% of trustees citing changing circumstances and 37% wanting more time for other activities, closely aligned with overall figures (40% and 33% respectively).

Stress is a more prominent factor for trustees, with 32% identifying it as a reason compared with 25% overall. Other reasons include feeling unappreciated (20% trustees, 18% overall), not making the desired difference (17% versus 19%), and dissatisfaction with how unpaid help is managed (12% versus 14%).
Practical issues such as cost of living (11% trustees, 13% overall) and health problems (11% versus 10%) are reported at similar levels. Fewer trustees cite relevance of the organisation (4% versus 6%) or one-off involvement (1% versus 2%).

Overall, trustees are more likely than respondents generally to feel they have contributed enough and to report stress as a factor in considering quitting.

Figure 74. Reasons for leaving - trustees v. all volunteers

Trustee reasons for leaving

- I feel I have done my bit (e.g. it's someone else's turn to get involved): **51%** / 44%
- I have less time because my circumstances are changing (e.g.…: **39%** / 40%
- I want to have more time for other things (e.g. hobbies etc.): **37%** / 33%
- It causes me too much stress: **32%** / 25%
- Other - please specify: **25%** / 22%
- I don't feel like I am making a difference in the way I want to: **17%** / 19%
- I feel my efforts weren't always appreciated: **20%** / 18%
- I am unhappy with the way my unpaid help is managed/ organised: **12%** / 14%
- Cost of living issues e.g. I need to do more paid hours instead: **11%** / 13%
- Due to health problems: **11%** / 10%
- The group/ club /organisation or cause isn't relevant to me anymore: **4%** / 6%
- It was a one-off activity or event: **1%** / 2%

■ % Acting as a committee member or as a Trustee (n=75)

■ % all respondents (n=114)

% of volunteers

14.8 Implications

Trustees play a pivotal role in sustaining voluntary organisations, demonstrating strong commitment, high qualifications, and long-term engagement. While their experiences largely mirror those of other volunteers, trustees face unique pressures, including stress and blurred role boundaries, alongside a greater likelihood of feeling they have "done their bit." Maintaining trustee engagement will require targeted strategies, such as succession planning, recognition of contributions, and support to manage workload, to ensure governance remains robust and inclusive for the future.

15. Conclusion

The survey findings reveal a sector held together by commitment and values but increasingly stretched by structural and financial pressures.

Recruitment and retention challenges are driven by low pay, job insecurity, and limited career progression, while wellbeing is undermined by rising workloads, stress, and inconsistent support.

Volunteers and trustees share many of these pressures, particularly around stress and unclear role boundaries, often exacerbated by the knock-on impact that funding cuts and associated paid staff shortages are having on services and volunteers.

The survey highlights several areas where individual organisations can take practical steps to strengthen their working practices and cultures, including investing in staff wellbeing, staff development and management.

However, many of the challenges raised by staff and volunteers are structural or systemic. Underlying everything is a single, dominant theme: funding insecurity.

Short-term, unpredictable funding cycles create instability that ripples through pay, job security, organisational capacity, and ultimately the wellbeing of those who keep the sector running. Addressing these issues meaningfully will require collective vision and continued dialogue within the sector, as well as with funders and other key stakeholders.

Without systemic change – sustainable funding, investment in career pathways, and a stronger focus on wellbeing – the risk is clear: a sector that cannot sustain the people who sustain it.

For a full analysis of trustee and volunteer-related findings including more detailed implications and recommendations see
Workforce Survey Volunteer Report - Volunteer Scotland

16. Reflections & recommendations

These reflections and recommendations bring together evidence from the Workforce Survey and insights from stakeholders across Scotland's voluntary sector. They highlight key considerations for employers, funders and policymakers in supporting a sustainable and resilient voluntary sector workforce.

1. Scotland's funding landscape is undermining workforce sustainability.

Funding insecurity was reported to be the main factor impacting on the recruitment and retention of staff, as well as staff wellbeing.

In light of this, voluntary organisations increasingly need to plan around volatility as normal, strengthening financial and workforce planning.

For decision-makers, reform of funding practice remains essential, with a strong necessity for Fair Funding.

2. Poor funding practice continues to undermine Fair Work.

While leaders across the voluntary sector are committed to providing fair, meaningful and rewarding employment, the structural conditions they operate within constrain this ambition. Fair Funding is essential for employers to deliver Fair Work principles to the fullest extent.

Despite the significant funding challenges facing the voluntary sector, it will remain important for voluntary sector leaders to take all available steps to strengthen Fair Work, including maintaining transparent pay-setting processes, regular pay reviews and clear bench marking.

While the voluntary sector performs well on staff voice mechanisms, respondents noted that having a voice is not the same as being heard. This underscores the importance of ensuring staff-voice mechanisms are visible, responsive and connected to senior-level decision-making.

3. Rising workloads and stress pose risks to staff wellbeing and organisational resilience.

While workload pressure and associated stress sit within a broader context of challenged wellbeing and resilience across all sectors of the UK's workforce, findings clearly highlight that workforce wellbeing must be a priority for leaders and trustees.

Creating positive workplace cultures will depend on conditions where stress is manageable and staff feel safe and respected.

Structural funding issues, however, cannot be overlooked. The delivery of Fair Funding remains central to supporting the wellbeing of the workforce.

4. Leadership wellbeing and succession risks are emerging as critical issues.

Leaders in the voluntary sector reported significant workload pressures, with stress levels particularly pronounced among chief executives and senior managers.

Respondents were clear that leaders and trustees alike need to set realistic organisational expectations and support healthy organisational cultures.

Many of the conditions influencing leadership sustainability fall outside the control of individual organisations, however. Reform of Scotland's public sector funding landscape remains a priority. Fair Funding is foundational to sustaining leadership capacity and stability.

5. Volunteers remain a cornerstone of Scottish civic life, but sustaining this strength requires supportive conditions.

Clear role boundaries, flexible opportunities, supportive volunteer management and welcoming cultures will be increasingly important to sustaining volunteer and trustee involvement.

Ensuring that volunteer roles remain distinct from paid work, and that volunteers are supported rather than relied upon to fill structural gaps, is also central to maintaining trust, safeguarding quality, and protecting wellbeing – in line with the principles of the Volunteer Charter.

6. Gaps remain between aspiration and lived experience of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Achieving consistency in EDI practice will require sustained attention, capacity and stability so that inclusive intentions are consistently reflected in everyday culture and decision-making.

7. Learning, development and progression are constrained by structures and resources.

While opportunities for progression will vary across the sector, shaped by a range of structural factors, taking steps to support staff development remains key to strengthening retention.

For employers this will involve making the most of available skills and learning opportunities, supporting staff to develop within existing roles, and ensuring time and space for development. This includes developing practical support, training and best-practice guidance on HR and governance.

8. Public sector relationships and commissioning practices have significant workforce impacts.

Strengthening the sustainability of the workforce will depend on formalising more equitable ways of working between the voluntary and public sectors, alongside proportionate, community-informed commissioning approaches and progress on Fair Funding.

9. A strong evidence base is crucial to understanding the health of Scotland's voluntary sector workforce.

SCVO, Charity Leadership Scotland and Volunteer Scotland will continue to explore opportunities to deepen analysis and work with sector partners to build the evidence base. This will include continuing to improve the representativeness of future insights, particularly for smaller organisations.

10. A strong, collective sector voice is essential to strengthening the conditions in which the voluntary sector workforce operates.

SCVO, Charity Leadership Scotland and Volunteer Scotland will continue to champion the sector, working with others to ensure voluntary organisations are recognised as respected peers and that their role in national life is properly supported.

The research also reinforced what makes our sector distinctive — people feel connected to its purpose, motivated by values, and proud of the contribution they make to communities. SCVO, Charity Leadership Scotland and Volunteer Scotland will continue to celebrate these strengths and promote the sector as a rewarding place to work.
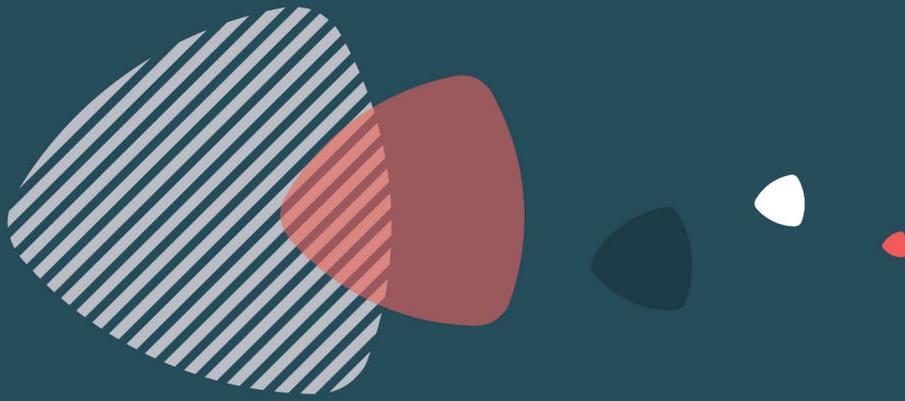
2025 Scottish Voluntary Sector Workforce Survey

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