



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

# CORONAVIRUS & CONSERVATION IMPACT STUDY

Feb 2021

**Report on Employees**



Part 1

# INTRODUCTION

---

THE WHAT, WHY AND HOW BEHIND  
OUR RESEARCH

# ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

## Background and aims

---

The ongoing Coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis presents challenges to the heritage sector and the people who work in our field.

Icon's first Coronavirus Impact report, published in April, presented a worrying situation for conservation professionals, with 90% of respondents reporting serious economic consequences arising from lockdown restrictions.

In November 2020, as most of the UK returned to a state of lockdown, Icon launched a second survey to gather further information and data on how the pandemic was affecting the conservation sector.

The research aimed to capture reliable data specific to conservation and its workforce across the UK.

Icon is grateful to all members who helped to build our evidence base by taking part in the research or by sharing case studies through other means.

Icon will use the findings to develop effective response strategies and coordinate support for conservators and the wider heritage sector.

# METHODOLOGY

## Two surveys

We collected our data through a survey which ran from 25 November to 9 December 2020. In order to capture concerns unique to employers and employees, we ran the survey as two separate questionnaires with questions tailored to both groups.

Some questions referred to Icon's first Coronavirus survey to allow us to assess the course of the crisis, while others took into account how the situation had evolved. We aimed to align questions to ONS Coronavirus surveying to ensure data can be cross-referenced to national reporting.

**This report summarises the results of the Employees Survey.**

### EMPLOYEES

for employees of organisations and businesses  
AIM: to capture sentiment on future employment, working patterns and career plans.

### EMPLOYERS

for business owners, freelancers and the self-employed  
AIM: to build a picture of the current private practice environment.



Part 2

# THE DATASET

---

WHO TOOK PART IN OUR RESEARCH

# THE DATASET

## We heard from 52 respondents...

---

### ACROSS PUBLIC, PRIVATE & THIRD SECTORS

We heard mostly from those in central and local government employment (71%), but respondents also worked in charities and private companies.

---

### WORKING IN LARGE ORGANISATIONS

More than half of respondents (53%) were employed by organisations with over 100 employees. The majority worked in museums, archives and libraries.

### FROM AROUND THE WORLD

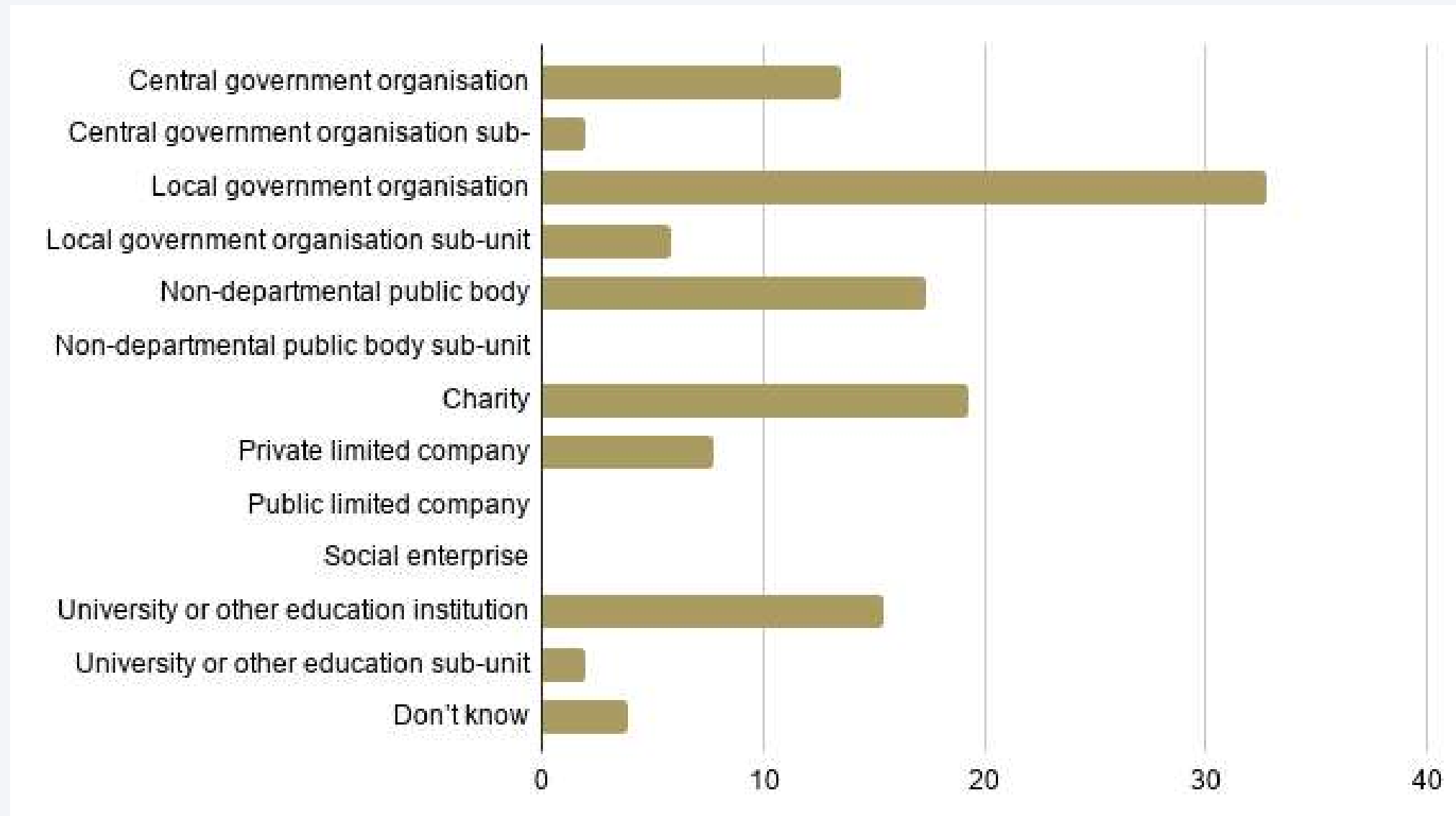
While the majority operated in London and the South of England (65%), all UK nations were represented. 10% of respondents said they worked abroad.

---

### WITH MANY SPECIALISMS

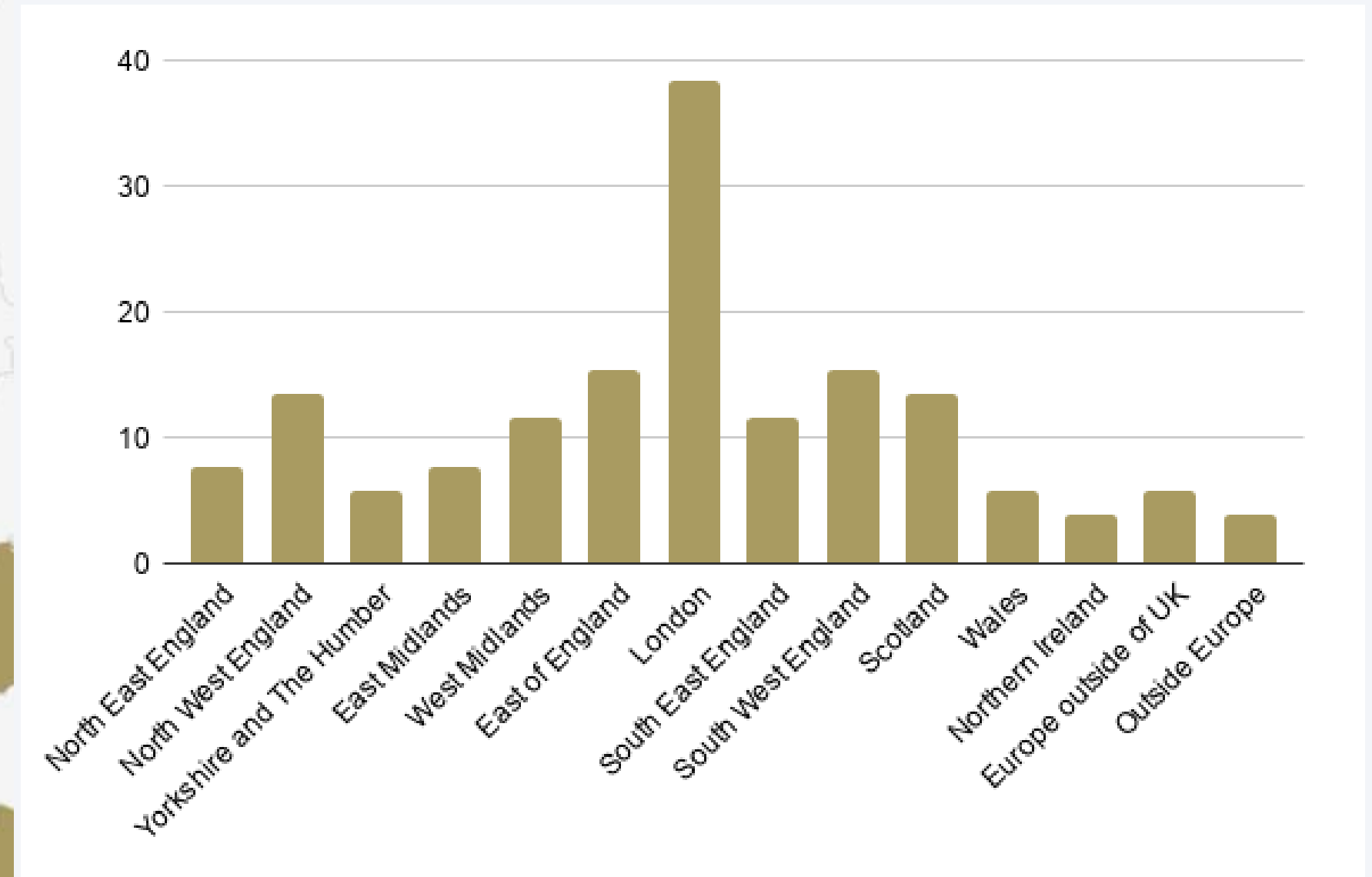
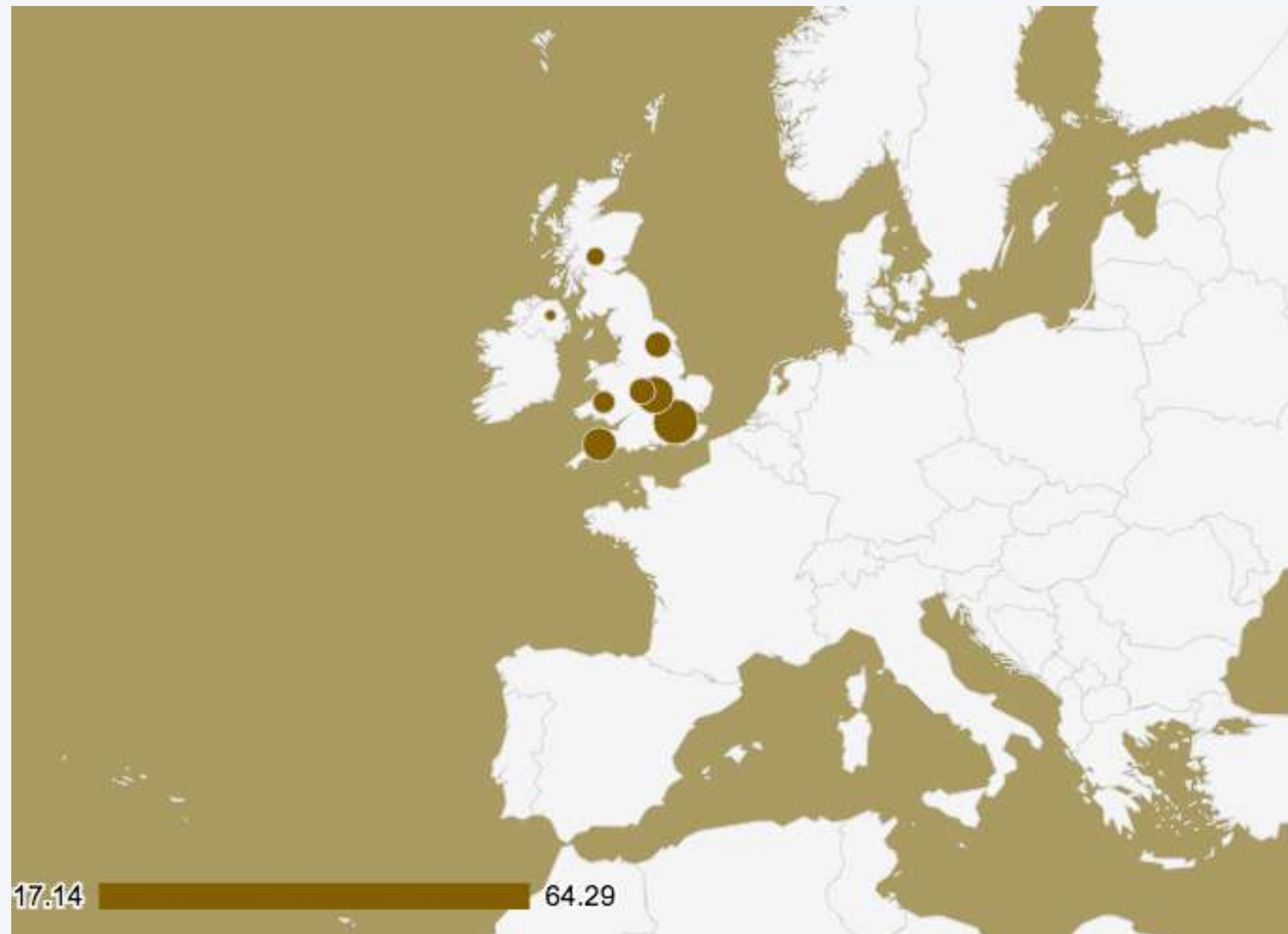
Conservators working in book & paper, photographic materials, paintings and metals were represented the most strongly.

The majority worked for government (71%) with a third in local government. We also heard from many in charities, private companies and universities.



What type of organisation do you represent?

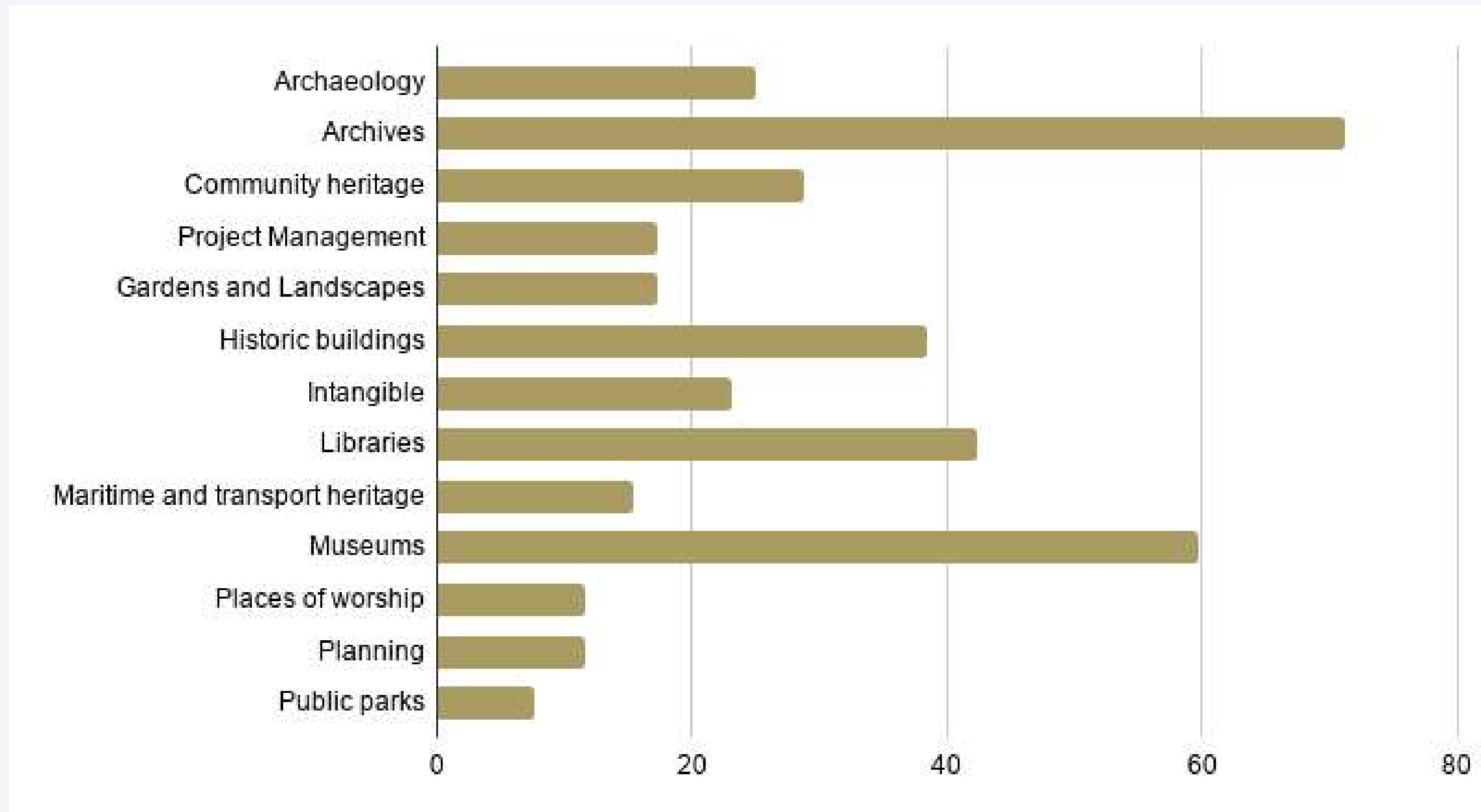
The majority operated in London and the South of England (65%), but all UK nations were represented. 10% of respondents said they also worked abroad.



In which geographic areas do you operate?

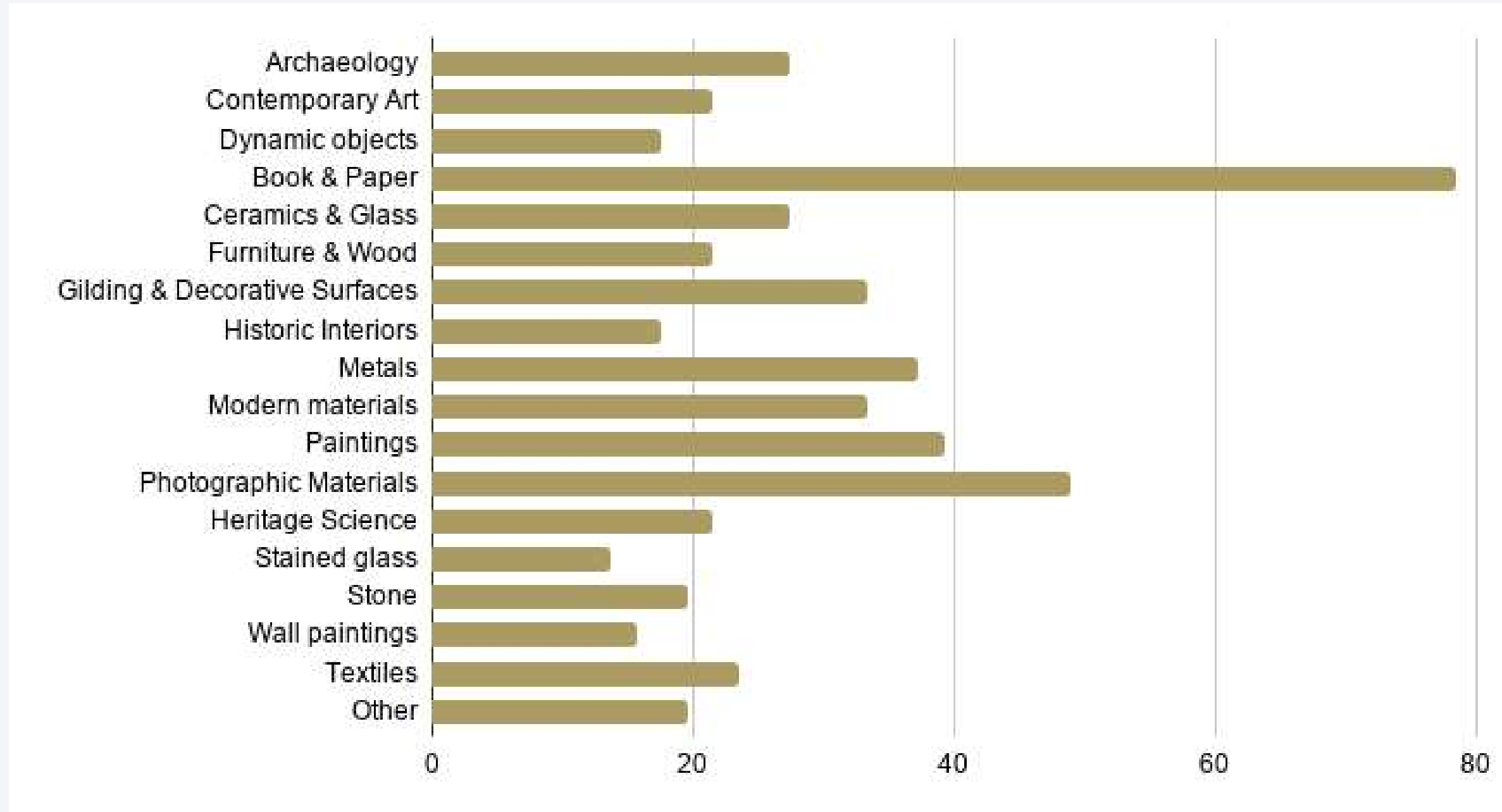


Respondents worked across archives, museums and libraries and other heritage fields:



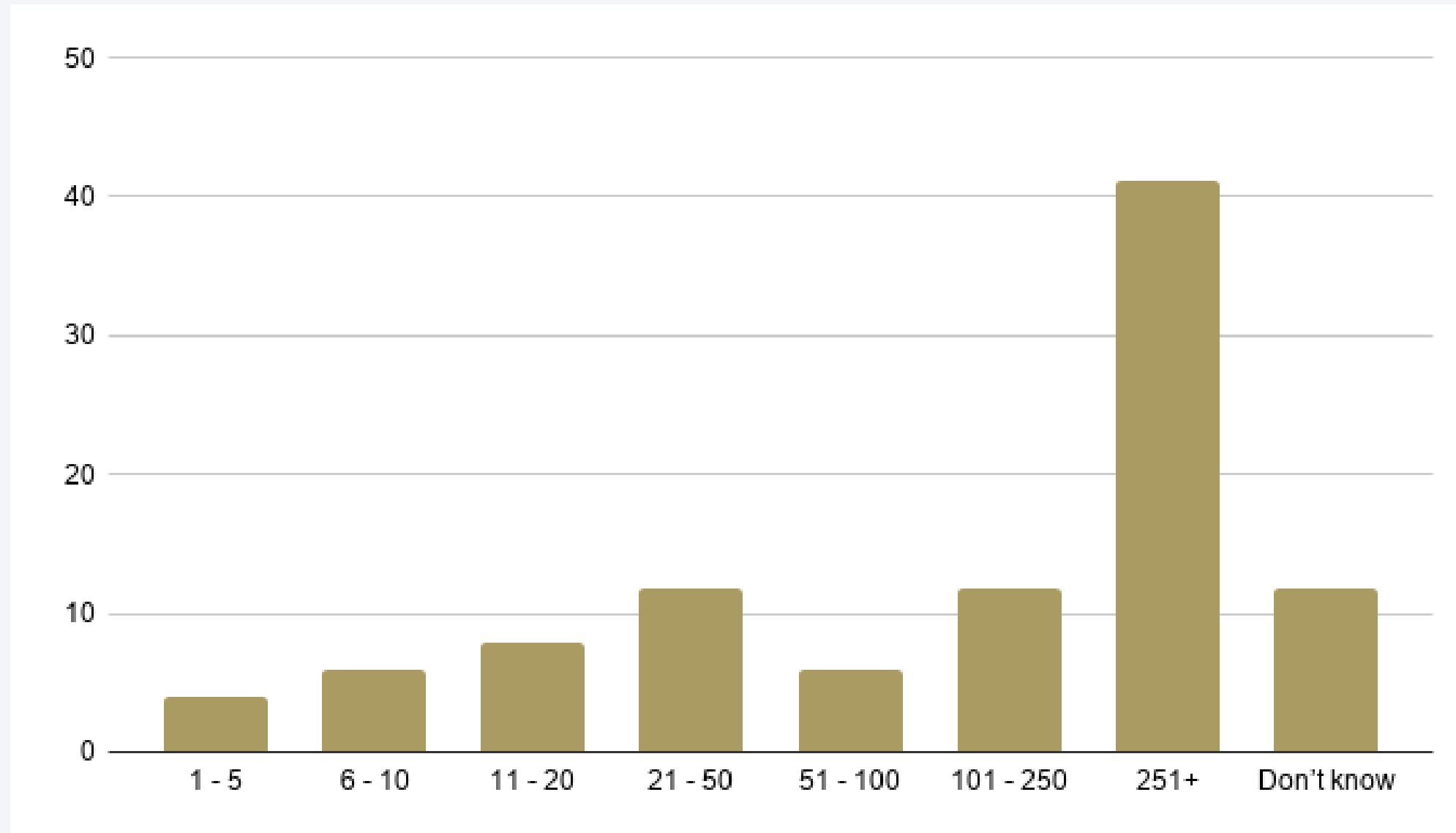
Does your organisation work in or represent any of the following heritage areas? Please select all that apply.

They covered a variety of conservation specialisms, with Book & Paper represented most strongly.



Does your organisation work in or represent any of the following conservation specialisms?

More than half of all participants worked for large organisations employing over 100 people.



How many people does your business or organisation employ?



Part 3

# FINDINGS

---

HOW OUR PARTICIPANTS RESPONDED

# WORK & INCOME

**The Coronavirus pandemic has had a considerable impact on the work of employed conservators.**

---

87% are working at reduced levels compared to before the outbreak with a quarter expecting a reduction in their income in 2021.

Social distancing regulations and lockdowns have resulted in over 60% of organisations shutting down at least once since the start of the pandemic.

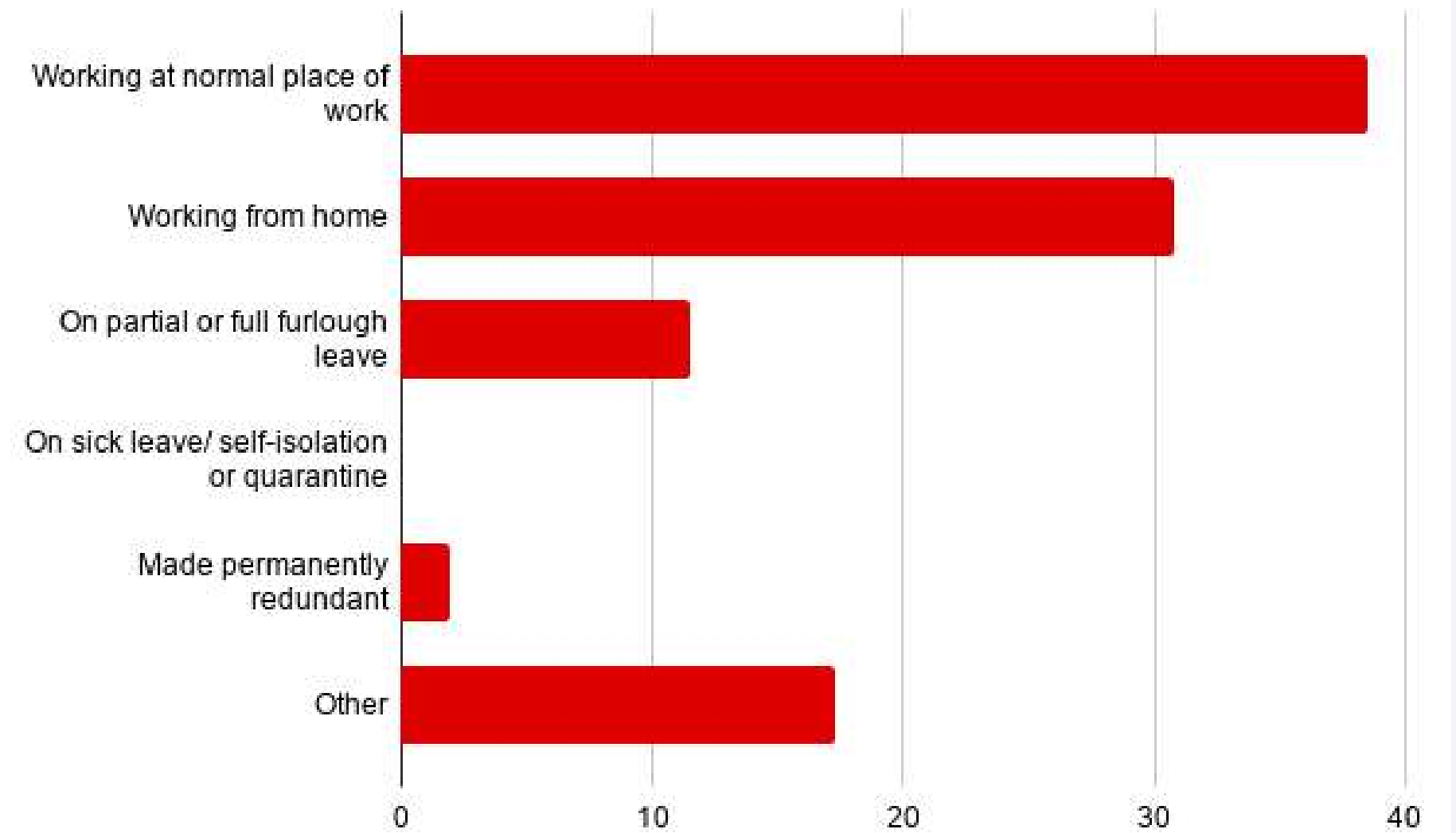
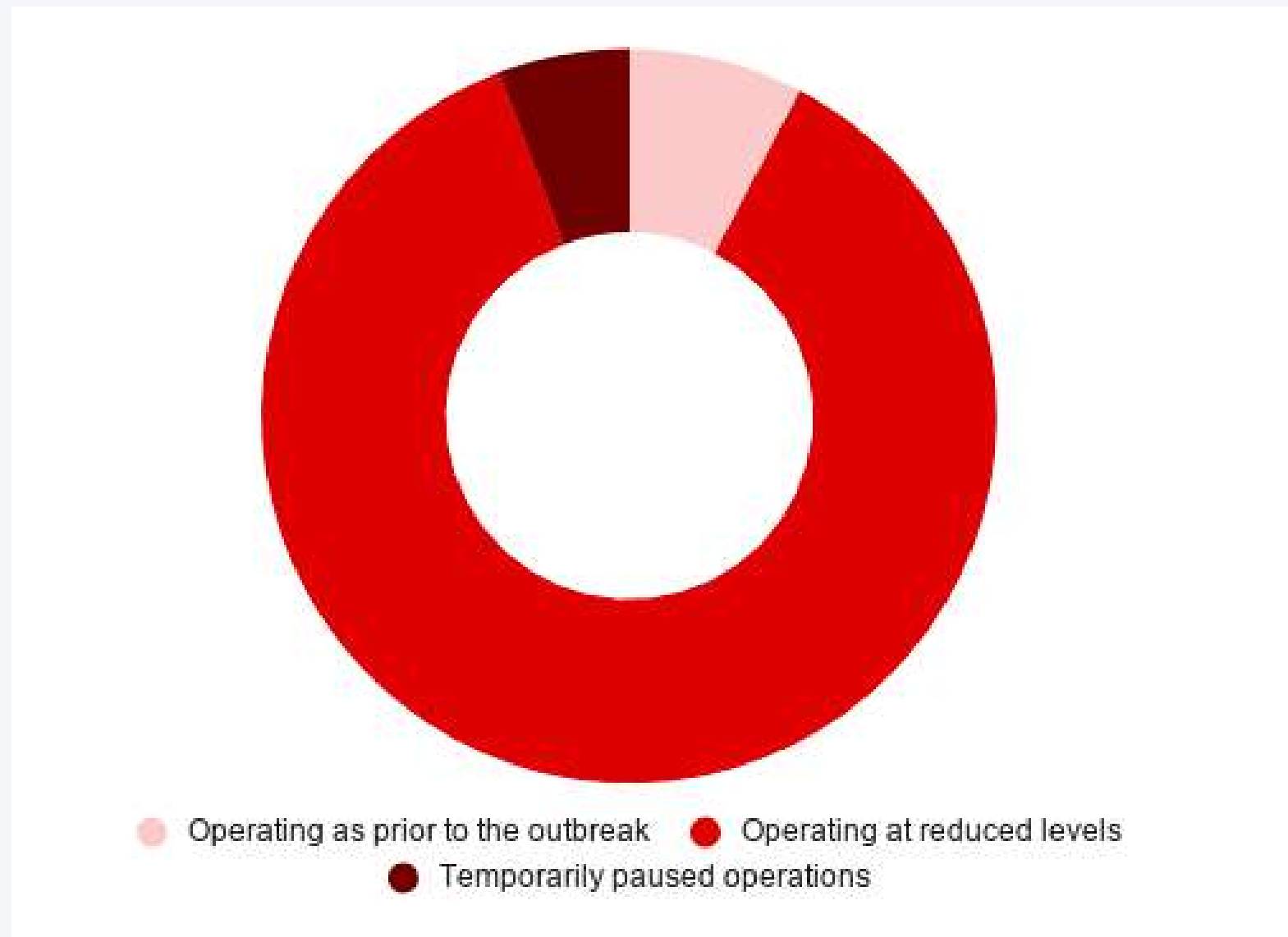
The furlough scheme had been widely used with nearly half reporting their organisations had placed staff on furlough.

A third had experienced redundancies within their organisations.

This has left conservators split between feeling secure in their work and uncertain about the future.

Fewer than 10% of respondents said they were working as they were prior to the outbreak, with a clear majority working at reduced levels.

While nearly a third were working from home, many continued to work at their normal place of work. 12% were on furlough.

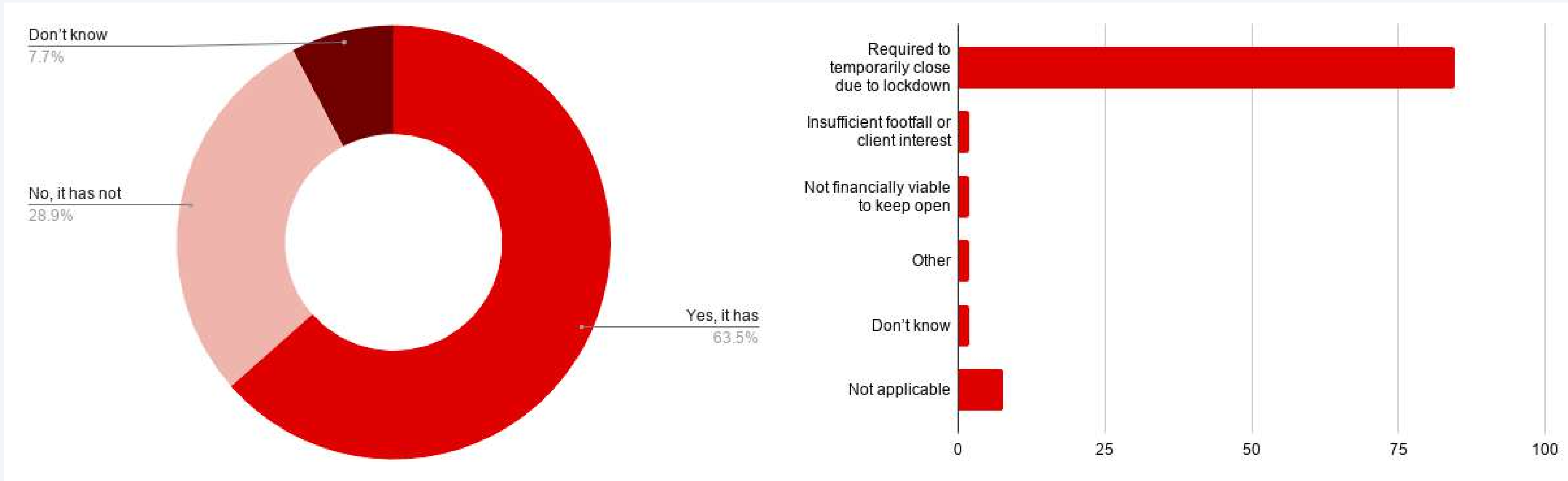


What is the current work/ operational status of your organisation/ business?

What best describes your current state of employment?

Over 60% of respondents said their organisation had ceased operating at least once since March 2020.

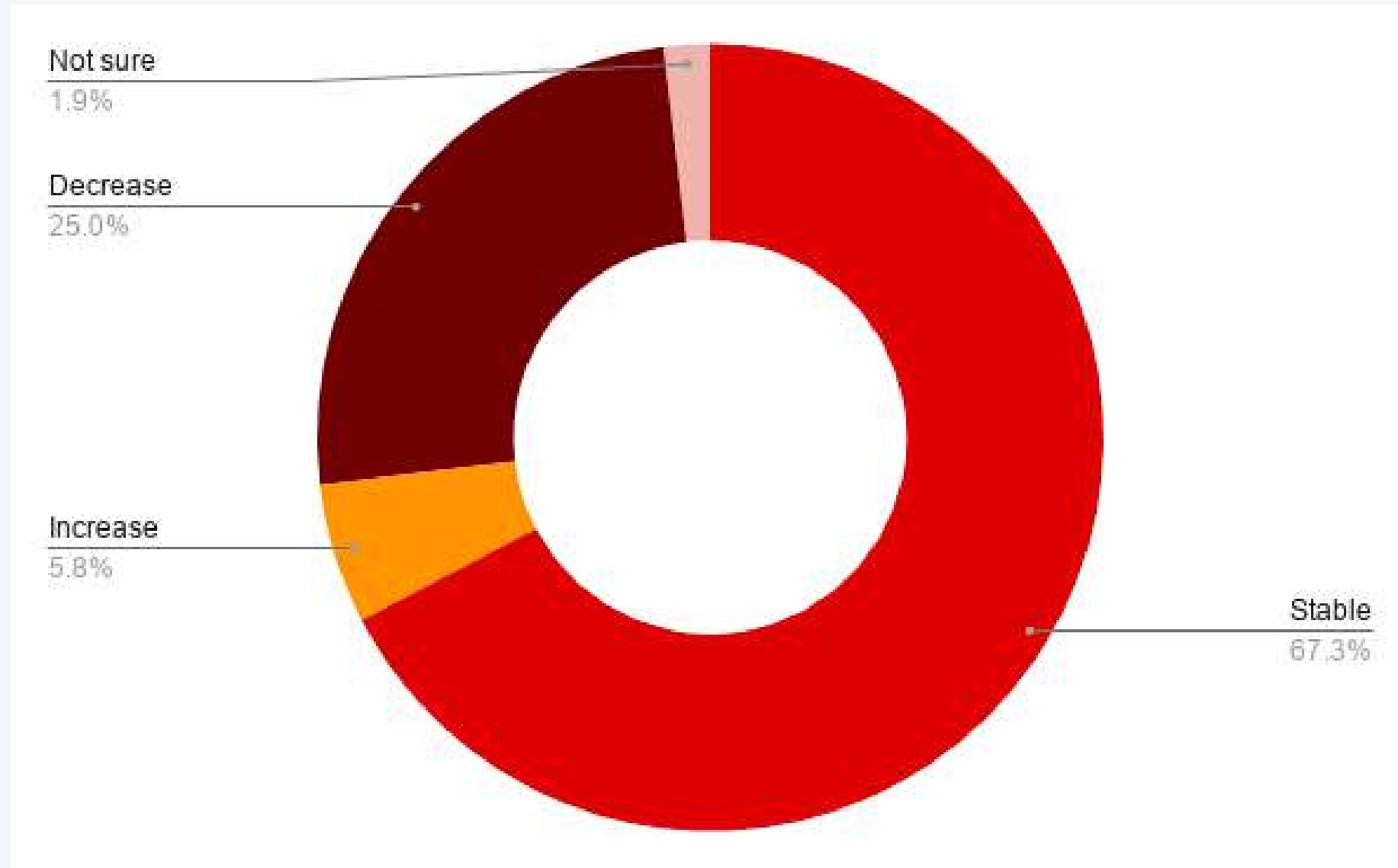
Social distancing regulations were the main culprit, mirroring the widespread closure of museums, galleries and libraries during lockdowns.



Has your organisation entirely paused trading at any point since March 2020?

Why has your organisation had to temporarily or permanently close down operations?

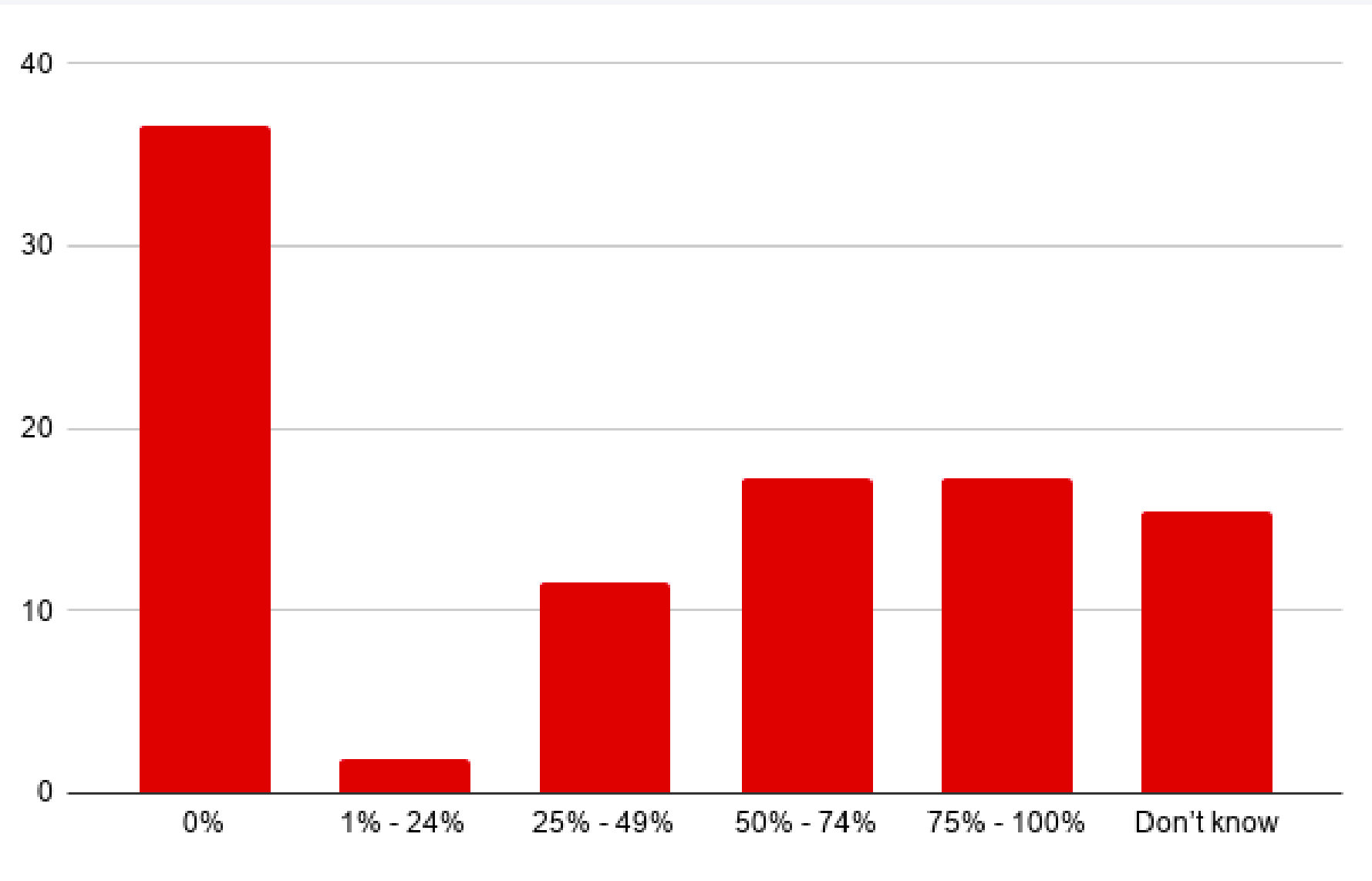
While the majority predicted their income to remain stable in 2021, a quarter expected it to decrease.



During 2021 do you predict your annual personal income to increase, decrease, remain stable or do you not know?

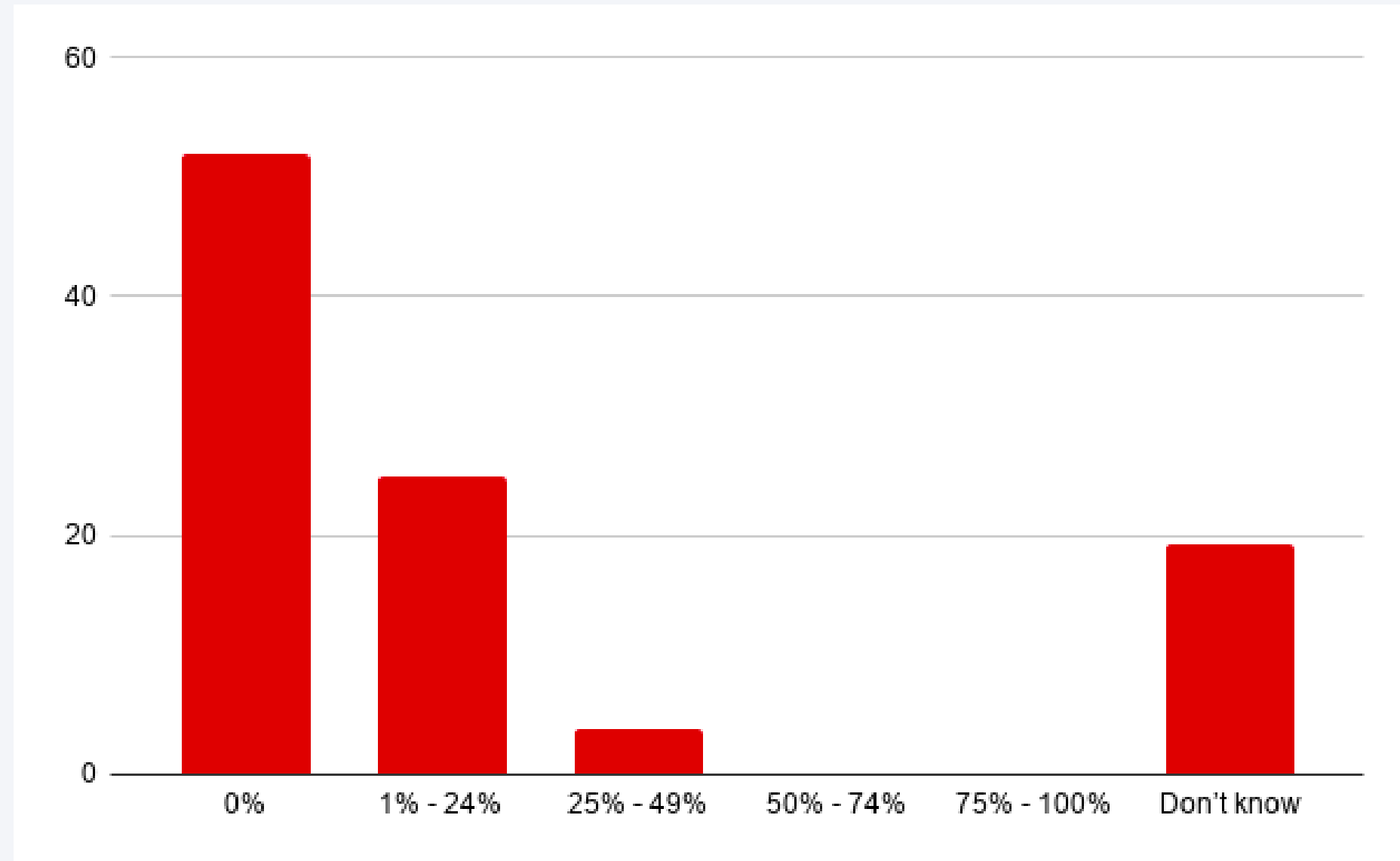


The furlough scheme had been widely used with nearly half reporting that their organisations had placed staff on furlough.



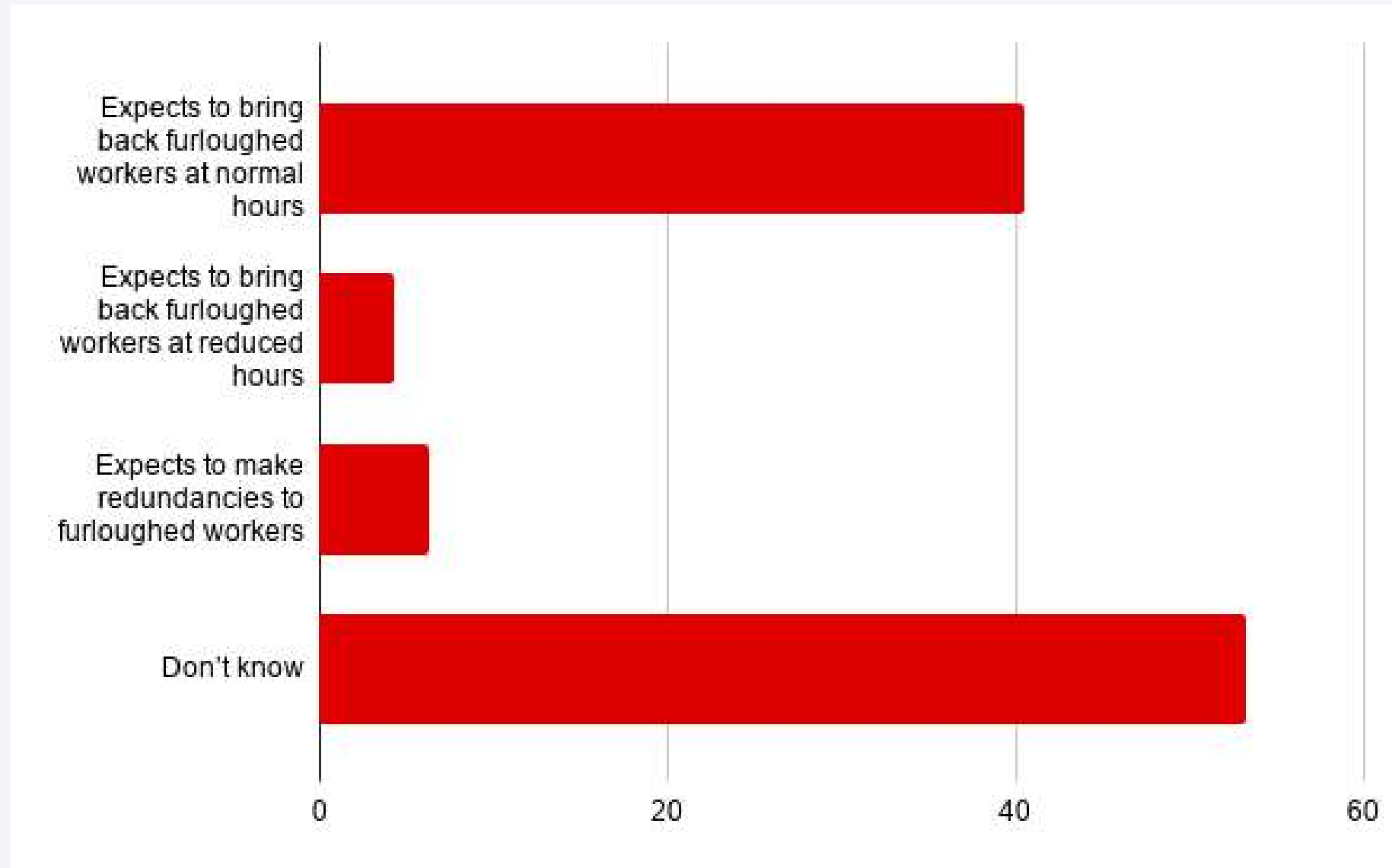
Approximately, what proportion of your organisation's employees have been furloughed?

Almost a third of respondents had seen redundancies in their organisation.



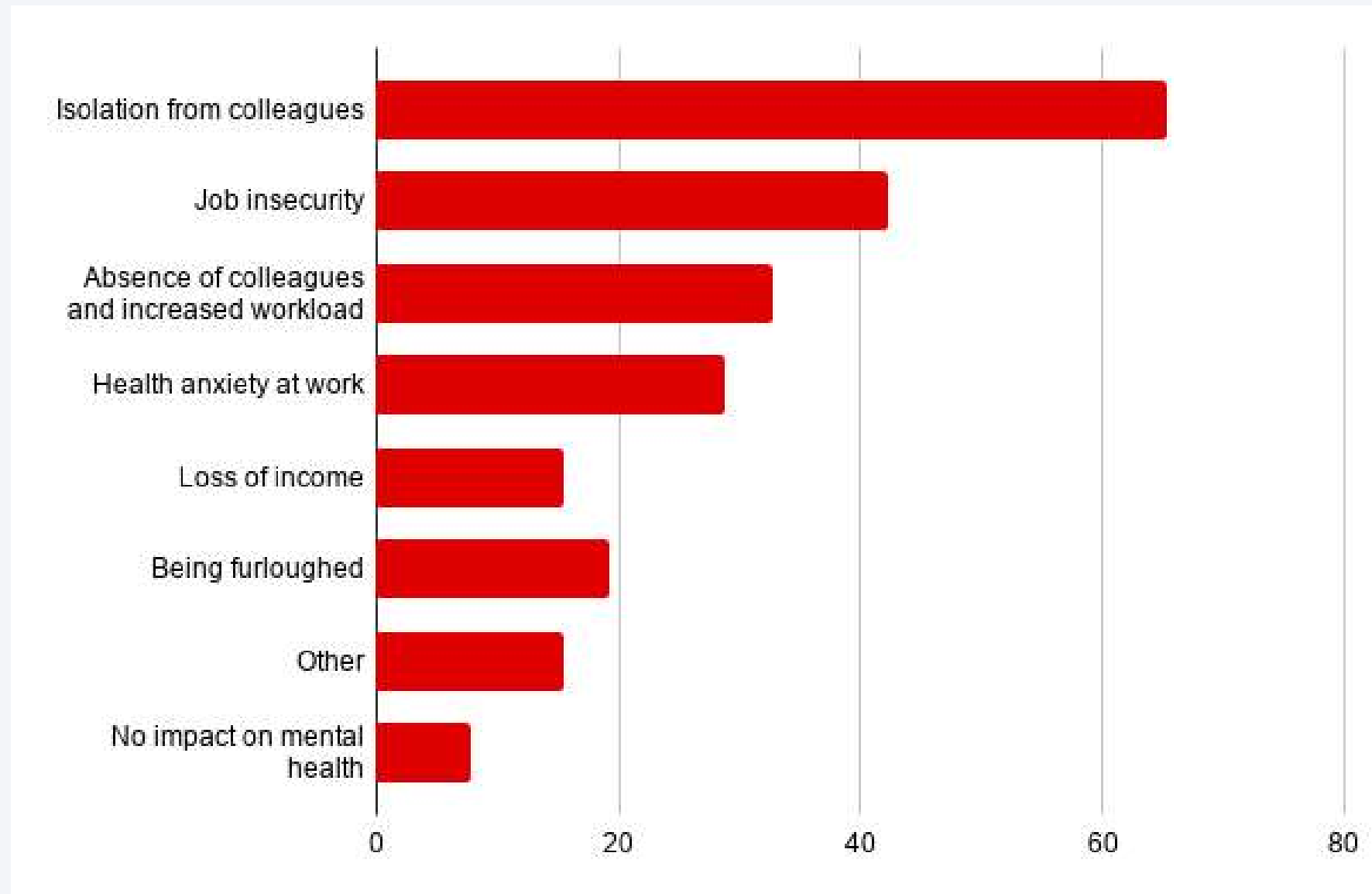
Approximately, what proportion of your organisation's employees have been made redundant?

Most were unclear about what their employers would do at the end of the furlough scheme but over 40% remained positive that furloughed workers would be brought back at normal hours.



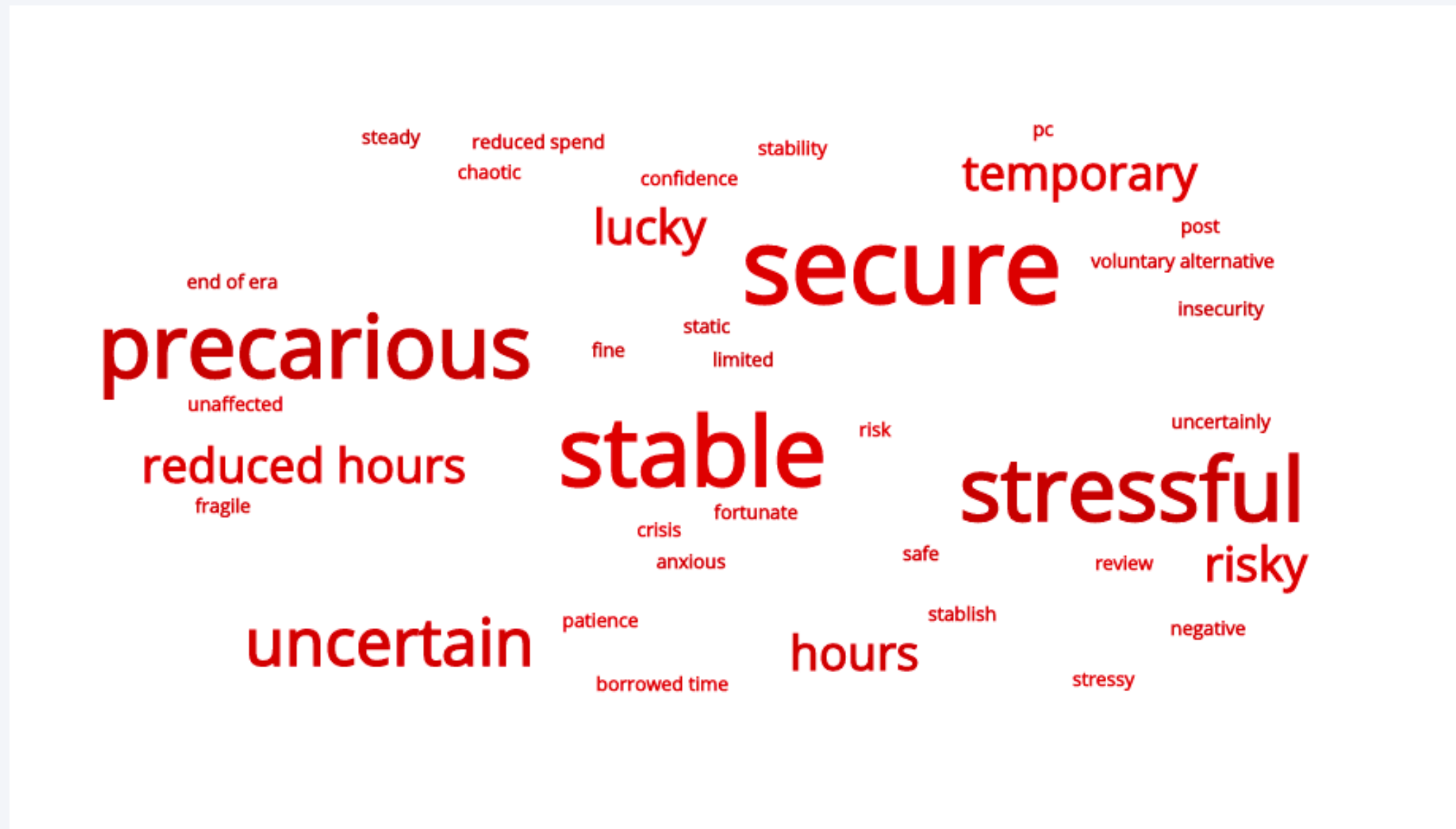
The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is due to continue until the end of March 2021. What does your organisation currently anticipate doing when the furlough scheme ends?

Isolation, job insecurity and increased workload have had a widespread impact on respondents' mental health.



Has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your mental health in any of the following ways?

While some felt uncertain about their organisation's health, others considered their employment secure.



Please list three words that articulate your feelings about the likely health of your organisation at this moment in time.

# CAREER PLANS

## Conservators remain committed to the sector despite uncertainty.

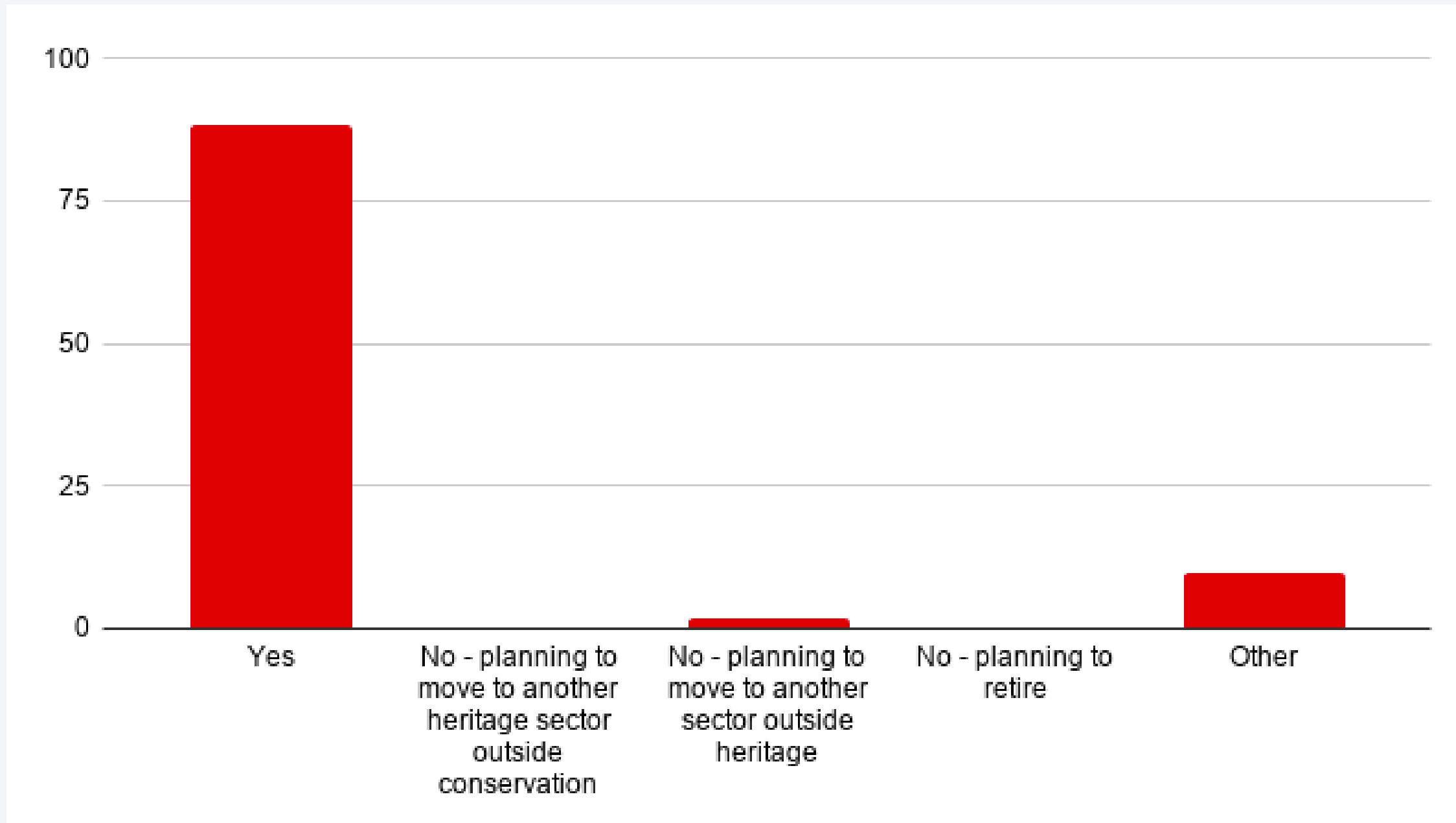
---

Nearly 90% of employees remain committed to conservation work with only 2% explicitly stating plans to move to another sector.

17% are planning to change roles or to move into the private sector within the year.

The value of Icon Accreditation is recognised, with 70% of respondents suggesting they had plans to apply for Accreditation.

Employees remain committed to the sector with under 2% of participants planning to leave conservation work. However, 'Other' responders indicated their job roles had already been extended while others indicated a desire to volunteer.



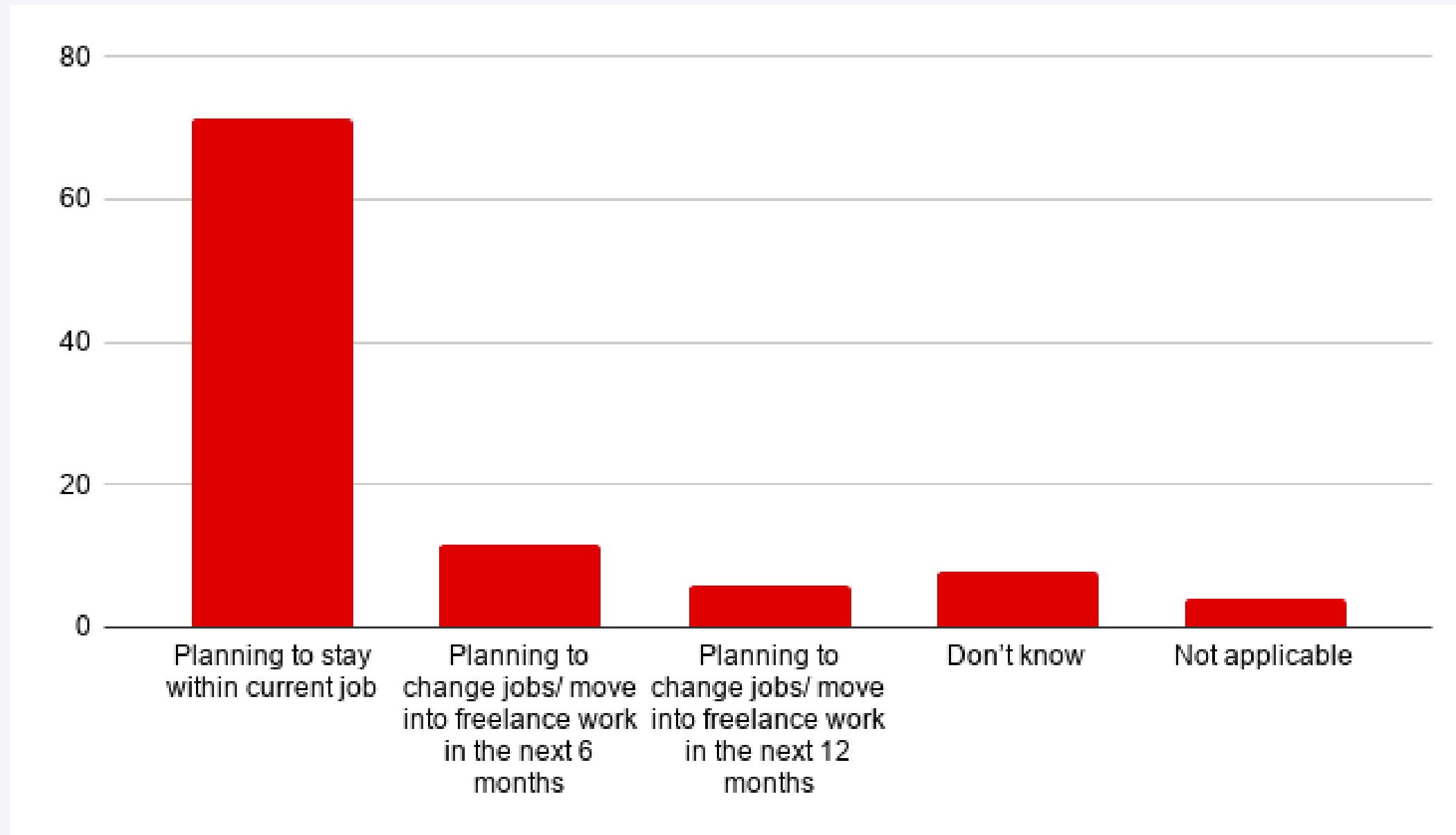
*"Hoping to find a job in conservation, but feeling nervous about the lack of jobs in the sector as a result of the pandemic."*

*"My role has already evolved to encompass Visitor Services."*

*"I will likely volunteer at local organisations."*

Are you planning to stay in conservation related work?

The majority of respondents expected to stay within their current roles, citing job satisfaction and a lack of prospects elsewhere. 17% were planning a career move, with fixed-term contracts as the main reason.



*"Reasonably confident that my job will remain. Not a lot of other opportunities at present other than to remain in a relatively stable job."*

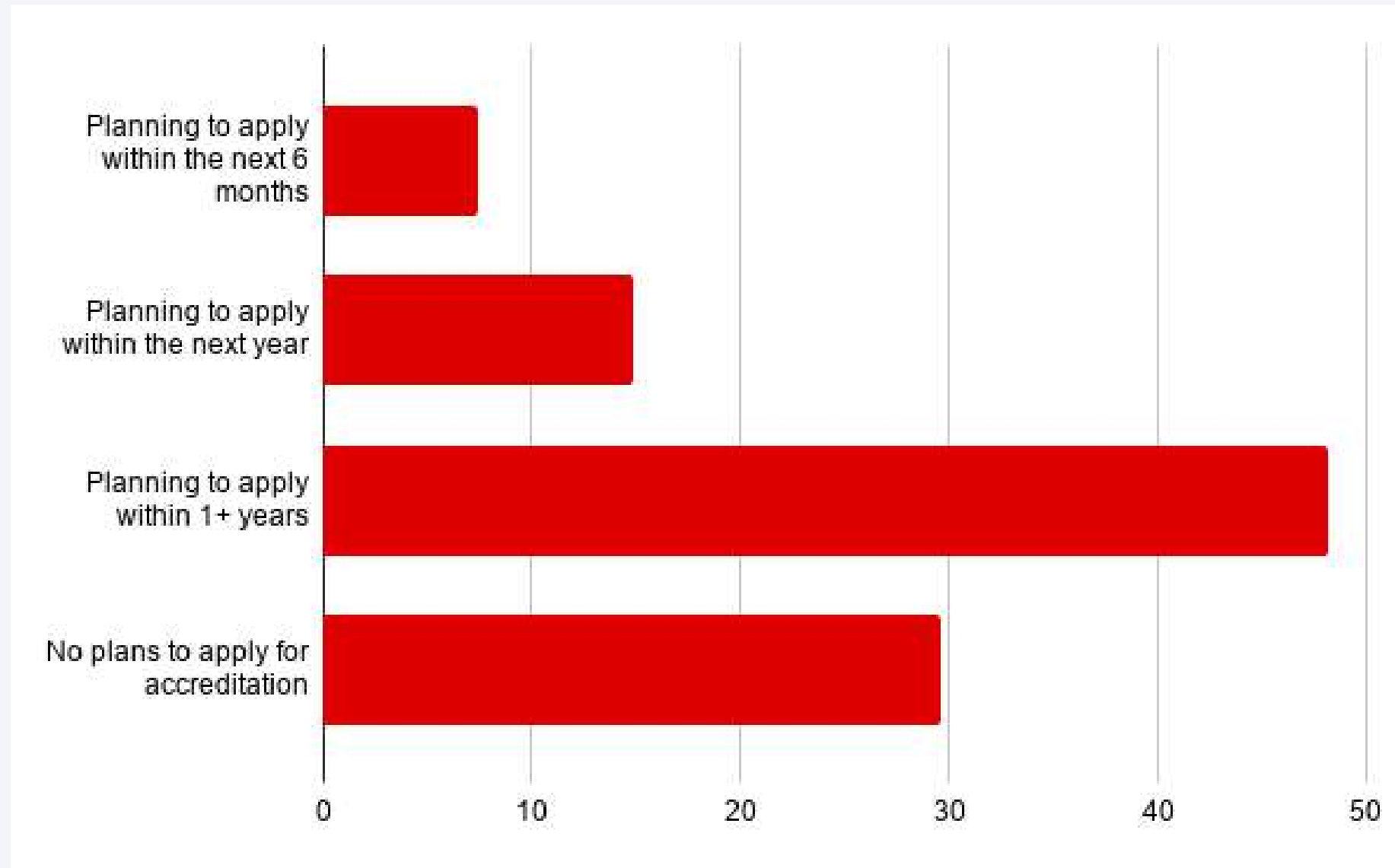
*"Unstable jobs market. Even though there is no opportunity for progression or development, I want to hold onto the stability of a regular income."*

*"Nobody knows what the future holds."*

*"Contract coming to an end."*

Are you expecting to change jobs/move into freelance work within the next 6 months? Within the next year?

The value of Icon Accreditation was widely recognised, with 70% of respondents saying they had plans to apply for Accreditation.



ACCREDITED MEMBER

Icon Accreditation is awarded by the Institute of Conservation and aligned to Icon's Professional Standards.

Accredited Conservator-Restorer (ACR) status demonstrates that a practitioner is a fully qualified and capable professional.

If you are not an Icon Accredited member which of the following statements best reflect your plans for Icon Accreditation?



# SUPPORT

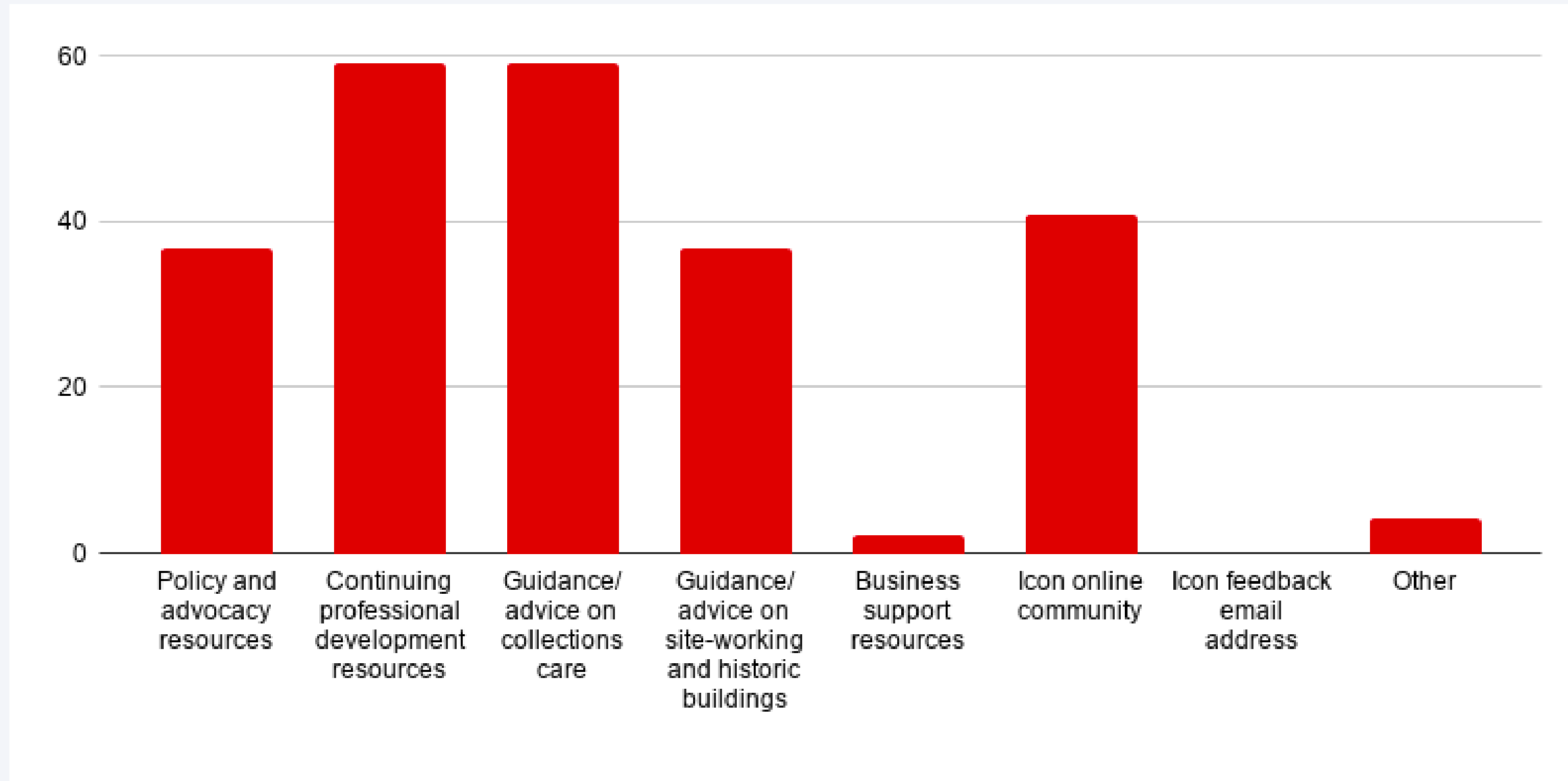
## Conservators want more online resources and advocacy for the sector.

---

Conservators had made use of Icon's Continuing Professional Development resources and online guidance. The presence of Icon's community online was also valued.

Respondents had a variety of suggestions for Icon to support the profession, from further online materials and advocacy to enhanced and tailored support for emerging professionals.

Respondents had made use of the Continuing Professional Development resources and guidance on collections care. Icon's online community was also valued highly with the Conservation Together at Home webinar series highlighted as a useful resource.



Icon has provided the following types of support this year as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Which of these resources have you made use of?

Online resources and CPD, advocacy for the sector, and support for emerging professionals were amongst the practical steps suggested for Icon to support the profession in 2021.

*"More specific help and support for emerging professionals. Supporting institutions to create opportunities in the form of part-time internships or short contracts."*

*"Maintain strong advocacy for the profession in support of the cultural sector as a whole."*

*"Encourage the continuation of the online training/ learning - all our training budgets are going to be slashed so these cheaper options are seriously appreciated."*

*"Advocacy of our profession to the government and wider public so they are made aware of our importance."*

*"Continue to be visible in supporting conservators and fostering online access to practical guidance and CPD."*

What practical steps could Icon tackle to support the conservation profession in 2021 in addition to the resources that we have developed and the action we have taken in 2020?



Part 3

# OUR RESPONSE

---

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO WITH THE  
FINDINGS

The results of this research are vital evidence about the impact of the pandemic. Icon will use them to develop effective response strategies and coordinate support for conservators and the wider heritage sector.

## 01

### SHARE

We will share the results widely and encourage our partners and stakeholders to use the information in their own work so that support for the wider heritage sector is coordinated.

## 02

### INFORM

We will use the findings to inform the priorities of our lobbying activities so that government and funders are urged to provide support where it is most needed.

## 03

### DEVELOP

We will develop our own resources, support measures and projects in line with the findings and suggestions provided by respondents.

## We'll naturally carry on supporting conservators through the several projects already in the pipeline, including:

### NEW RESOURCES

Launching in February 2021, Icon's new digital membership platform will enable members to apply for and maintain their Icon accreditation, file essential documents securely online, and keep training plans on track.

The simplified platform will help members to achieve their fullest potential in their professional careers, while serving their clients and employers effectively. A fully integrated website portal will mean resources and information are more accessible than ever before.

### FUNDING

Made possible through the generous support of the Radcliffe Trust and others, we have launched the Collections Care Stimulus Fund to support the care and conservation of collections at a time when budgets for the conservation of collections and objects are diminishing.

The Fund will support organisations that have suffered from a major drop in income over the last 12 months and are less able to commission conservation projects as a result.

## ADVOCACY

Promoting the value of Accreditation and high standards of practice remains top on our agenda. This year's ACR Conference and Pathway Week take place in June aiming to celebrate the achievements of ACRs and to offer support for those on their way to accreditation.

Our continued promotion of the Conservation Register is building awareness of the free online tool to accessing conservators you can trust, helping enhance the profile of our members and their businesses.

## RESEARCH

We are planning to undertake comprehensive research of the labour market to better understand issues like skills, demographics, employment and salaries.

Icon's LMI research will offer a vital boost to our evidence base in 2021 as well as provide conservators with up to date information upon which to base important career decisions.

## POLICY

Icon continues to work hard to lobby for support for conservators with Government and decision makers.

Our correspondence and briefings have already proven effective, reflected in conservators being made eligible for key sector funding.



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Icon is a charity and the professional body for conservation, seeking to create positive change for cultural heritage.

We represent the interests of conservation and conservators to decision makers on issues that affect cultural heritage, from skills to education to funding.

[www.icon.org.uk](http://www.icon.org.uk)

© 2021 Icon - The Institute of Conservation.

Icon is registered as a Charity in England and Wales (Number 1108380) and in Scotland (Number SC039336) and is a Company Limited by Guarantee, (Number 5201058)

The Institute of Conservation  
Radisson Court, Unit 2  
219 Long Lane  
London SE1 4PR  
T: 020 3142 6799