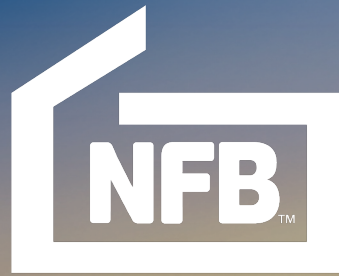


Neurodiversity in construction

A summary research report by the



National Federation of Builders

in collaboration with



June 2023

Accessibility statement



This report has been presented in its current format to ensure accessibility of the information it contains. The format has been carefully designed to cater to diverse audiences, including individuals with neurodivergent traits. By adopting a visually engaging layout with clear headings, concise summaries, and visual aids such as charts and graphs, the report aims to facilitate easy navigation and comprehension for readers with varying cognitive styles. The report has been through a Neurodiversity Accessibility Audit to ensure it is presented in a manner that promotes readership.

Disclaimer

This publication is a production of the NFB. The views expressed in this report are those of the NFB and do not necessarily reflect the view of all other parties named. The links included in the report were correct at time of publication, the NFB is not responsible for the content of 3rd party website.

© National Federation of Builders 2023. All rights reserved.

Contents

- Accessibility statement
- 1. About the NFB
- 2. About CITB
- 3. About People's Partnership
- 4. Foreword
- 5. Introduction
- 6. An introduction to Neurodiversity
- 7. The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work
- 8. The Research
 - Key findings
 - How common is neurodiversity in the construction industry?
 - Insights from neurodiverse workers
 - General perceptions of neurodiversity amongst construction workers
- 9. Recommendations
- 10. Conclusion
- 11. Useful resources for employers
- 12. Appendix
- 13. Contact us

About the NFB



The National Federation of Builders (NFB) is the leading trade association in England and Wales representing real construction and building contractors. The NFB boasts over 1000 members, with a combined turnover of £8bn and 28,500 employees.

The NFB provides expert advice, training, representation and business services for members so that they can comply with industry standards, excel in delivery, and grow successful businesses. Members must observe the NFB's Code of Conduct which commits them to business integrity, good practice and high standards of service.

CITB is the industry training board for the construction sector in England, Scotland, and Wales. It's our job to help the construction industry attract talent and to support skills development, to build a better Britain.

Our purpose:

Support the construction industry to have a skilled, competent and inclusive workforce, now and in the future.

What we aim to do:

- Inform and enable the right people into construction
- Develop a training and skills system to meet future needs
- Support the industry to train and develop its workforce

For over 80 years, **People's Partnership** has been providing financial products to the construction industry.

Our purpose:

To help people build financial foundations for life.

Our flagship product – The People's Pension – is open to all employers of any size. People's Partnership continues to support people in the construction industry to this day with our Employee Life Cover and Employee Accident Cover, providing financial protection for workers and their families. Our Charitable Trust has helped 1,000s of people and funded research into occupational health and safety in the construction industry.

Foreword

This research focusses explicitly on the construction industry and highlights the incidence of neurodiversity amongst workers. The results of which show that neurodiversity is surprisingly common, with one in four identifying as having a neurodiverse condition. ADHD is the most frequent, followed by Autism and Dyslexia. It is clear that this is an area that organisations and the wider industry can't ignore.

Significantly, this paper emphasizes the positive experiences of neurodiverse workers. The majority of people that disclosed their condition reported receiving reasonable adjustments and additional support, while 76% described positive interactions with their colleagues which is a reminder of the nature of the industry.



Danny Clarke CMIOSH

Commercial Director
National Federation of
Builders

Continued >>>

Foreword

However, it is worrying to note that many workers have not revealed the condition to anyone at work, with concerns about both stigma and prejudice being a barrier. This underlines the need to provide greater awareness and education for all around the nature of neurodiversity, as well as taking greater steps to provide proactive efforts to create a culture of inclusion and support in our workplaces including throughout the recruitment and onboarding stages.

Overall, I hope that it acts as a call to action for people to better understand how we can all better support each other. Only through understanding the unique skills and perspectives that neurodiverse individuals bring to the table, will the industry benefit and also improve the overall well-being and job satisfaction of all workers.

Introduction



The **NFB** and **CITB** are both committed to improving the construction industry for the current workforce and new entrants, but little is known about the prevalence of neurodiversity in the sector.

To understand how many of those working in the industry are neurodiverse, and the challenges and hurdles they face, the NFB commissioned research undertaken by market research company OnePoll between 20 March and 30 March 2023. The survey sampled 1000 UK adults working in the construction industry.

The findings of the research and recommendations for improving the accessibility and experience of neurodiverse workers in the construction industry are set out fully in this report.

An introduction to Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the term used to describe the different ways in which people's brains function, learn and process information, not better, not worse, simply different. It is also commonly used to describe a range of medical diagnoses. The most common neurodiverse conditions include:

- ❖ Autism, or Autism Spectrum Conditions
- ❖ ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) & ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)
- ❖ Dyscalculia
- ❖ Dyslexia
- ❖ Dyspraxia, or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

*1 in 7 people**



are estimated to be
neurodiverse in the UK

*NHS (2023)

The research: Key findings



Key findings

1. Neurodiversity is **common** amongst construction workers

- ❖ **1 in 4 construction workers** consider themselves to have a neurodiverse condition, with **17%** (of all) receiving a formal diagnosis, higher than the estimated number in the general population. 16% do not know whether or not they are neurodiverse, suggesting the figure may be higher still.
- ❖ **ADHD is the most common neurodiverse condition** amongst construction workers, accounting for **54%** of all those neurodiverse workers. 32% of neurodiverse workers reported that they were Autistic and 31% Dyslexic (indicating some respondents have more than one neurodiverse condition).
- ❖ However, **75%** of construction workers say they were not asked about neurodiversity at hiring or onboarding, **indicating a possible lost opportunity to offer support.**

Key findings

2. Being neurodiverse made people **more, rather than less, likely** to want to work in construction

- ❖ **34%** of neurodiverse workers said that their condition made them want to **work in construction more**, compared to only 5% who said less – showing construction to be an industry that neurodiverse people actively choose to work in. 61% said it made no difference.
- ❖ **67%** of all construction workers said that they believe the industry is able to **support people with neurodiversity**, only 11% disagree.



Key findings

3. Construction is **overwhelmingly** supportive of neurodiverse employees

- ❖ **80%** of respondents who had told their employer that they had a neurodiverse condition said that the employer had made reasonable adjustments to **accommodate** them, and 71% said their employer provided **additional support** as well.
- ❖ **76%** of neurodiverse workers said that their fellow workers **dealt well** with any issues that arose due to their neurodiversity, only 2% said they responded badly.
- ❖ **67%** of construction workers say they believe the industry is **able to support** neurodiverse people, only 11% disagree.



Continued >>>

Key findings

3. Construction is **overwhelmingly** supportive of neurodiverse employees (continued)

- ❖ **43%** of construction workers think that neurodiversity awareness will make the construction industry **more diverse**, 38% say it will improve understanding of different cognitive abilities and 37% say it will reduce prejudice, discrimination and misunderstanding.
- ❖ **35%** of construction workers believe **neurodiversity training** for all employees will help neurodiverse workers and only 10% of construction workers could not name anything that they thought would help.



Key findings

4. **Concerns** about stigma and embarrassment remain

- ❖ **36%** of neurodiverse construction workers have **not told anyone** at work about their condition
- ❖ **38%** of construction workers say they believe there is no or not much **empathy** for neurodiverse workers.
- ❖ **Only 35%** of those who have **not told anyone** at work about their condition say that it is because they do not believe it to be relevant, but 31% say it is because they are worried about the stigma attached to their condition, 26% worry that they may be viewed differently at work and 24% say they are embarrassed about their condition.



The research:

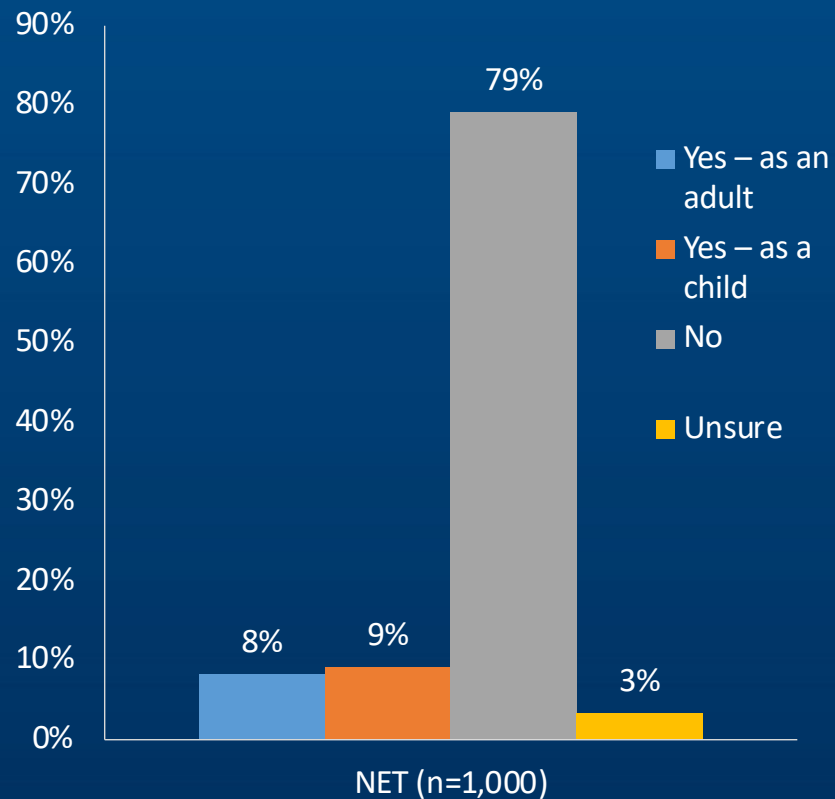
How common is neurodiversity in the construction industry?

The following section investigates the prevalence of neurodiversity in construction, showing how many construction workers have had formal diagnoses and how many consider themselves to be neurodiverse, regardless of diagnosis.

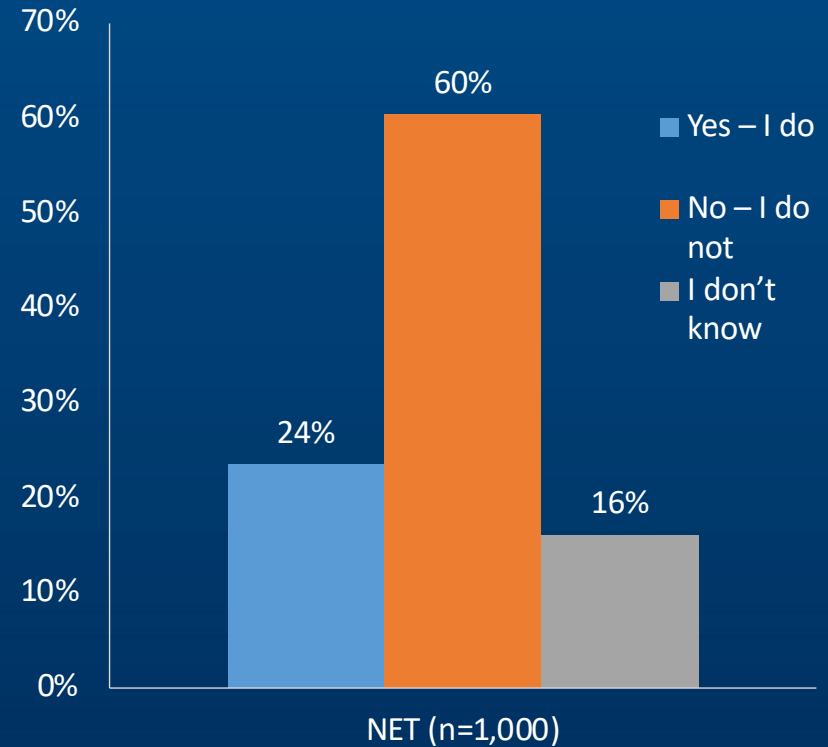
Neurodiversity

How common in construction?

Have you been diagnosed with a Neurodiverse condition by a doctor?

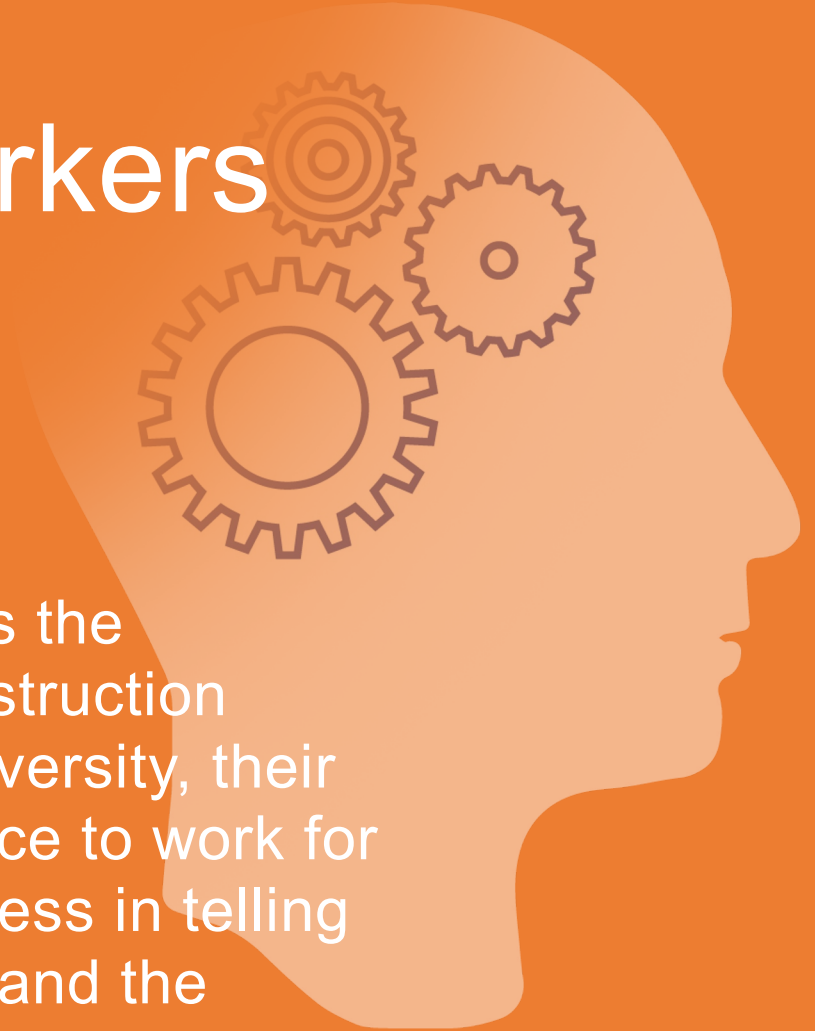


Whether or not you have been diagnosed, do you believe you have any Neurodiverse condition(s)?



The research: Insights from neurodiverse workers

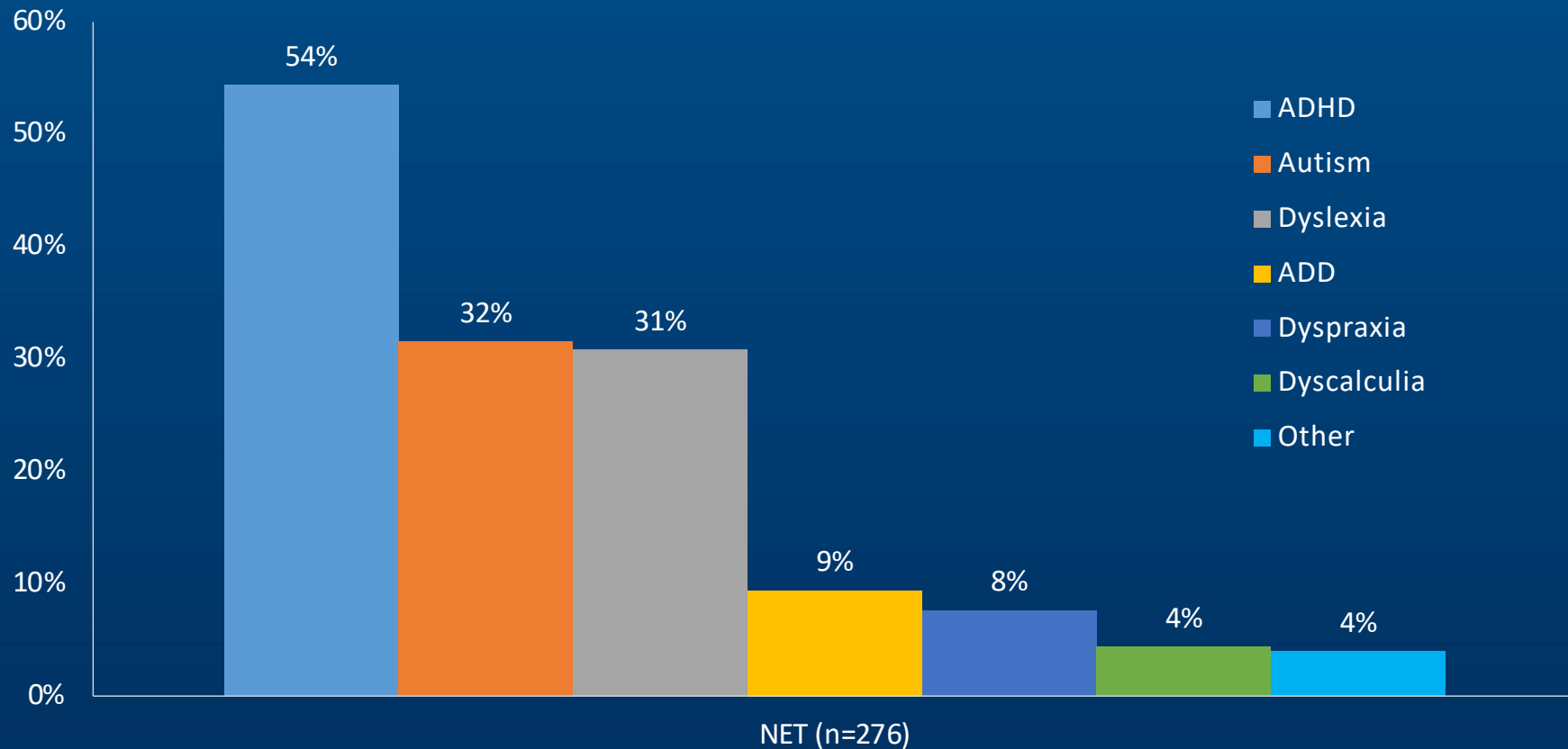
The following section investigates the experiences of neurodiverse construction workers. It explores their neurodiversity, their opinions on construction as a place to work for neurodiverse people, their openness in telling others about their neurodiversity and the support they have received while at work.



Neurodiverse workers

Insights

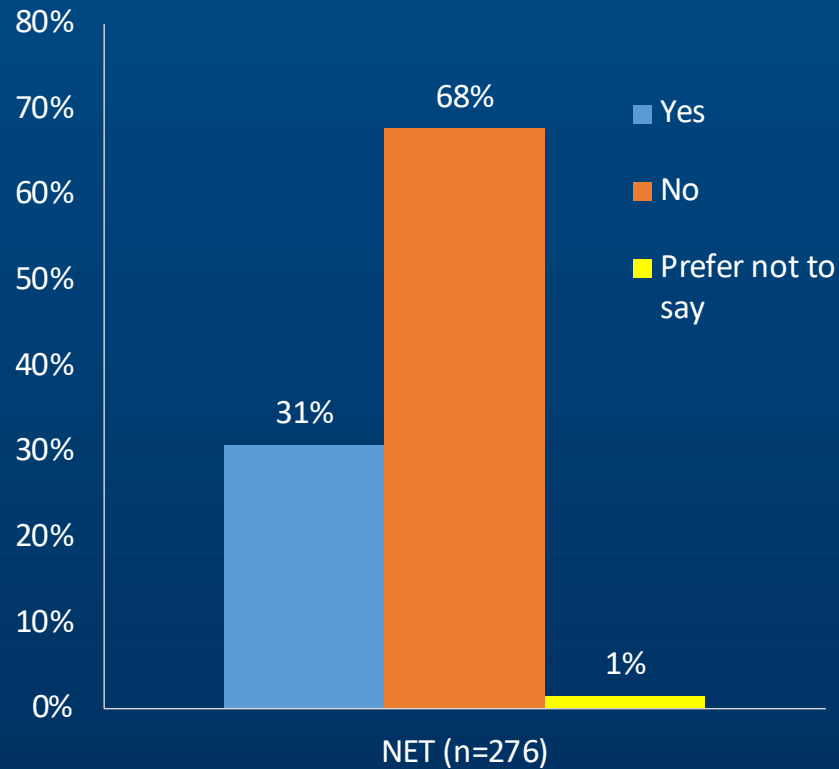
Which Neurodiverse condition(s) do you have and believe you have?



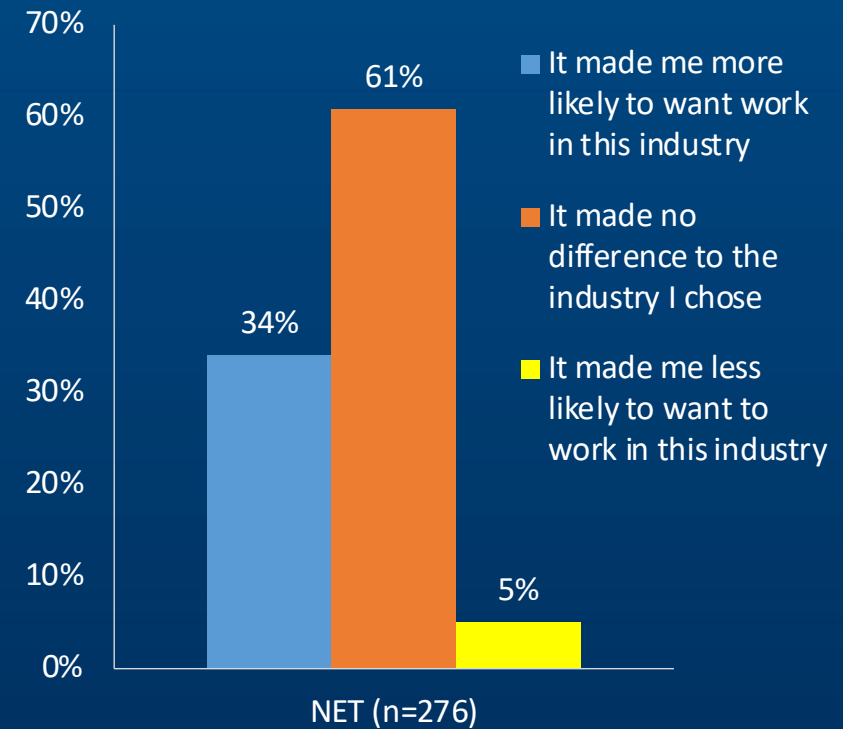
Neurodiverse workers

Insights

Do you take medication for any of the Neurodiverse conditions you have?



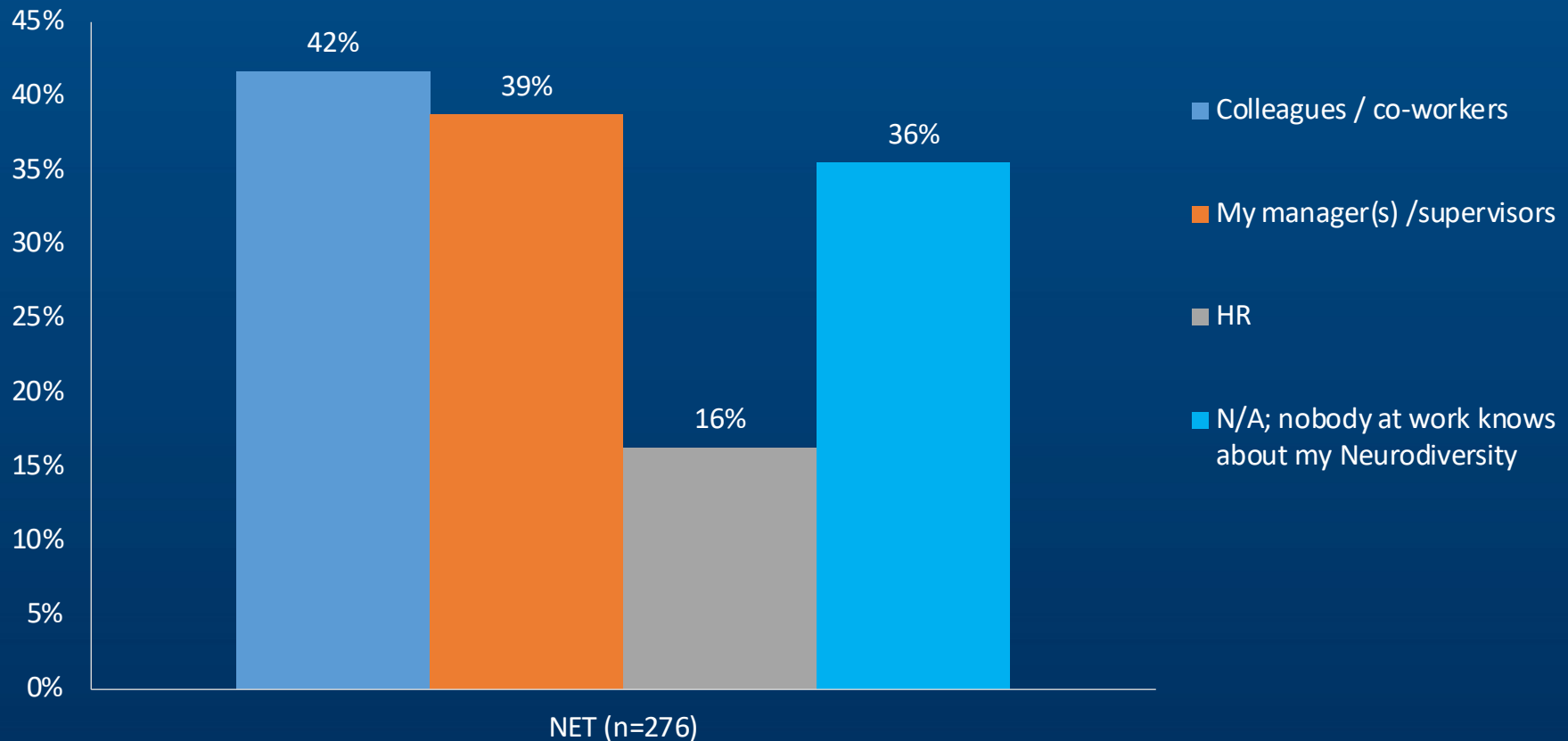
Did having a Neurodiverse condition make you more or less likely to want to work in the Construction industry?



Neurodiverse workers

Insights

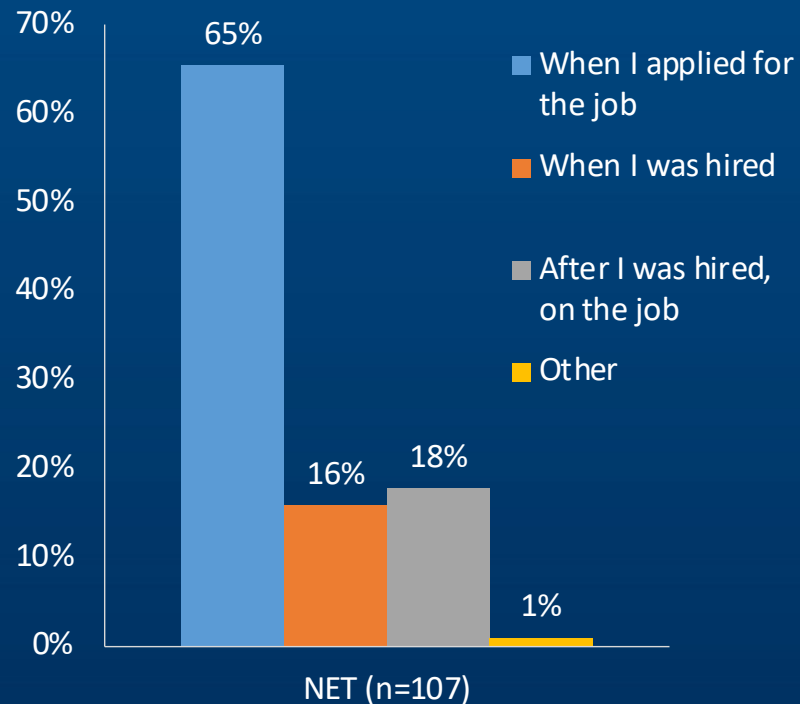
Who at work knows about your Neurodiversity? [Select all that apply]



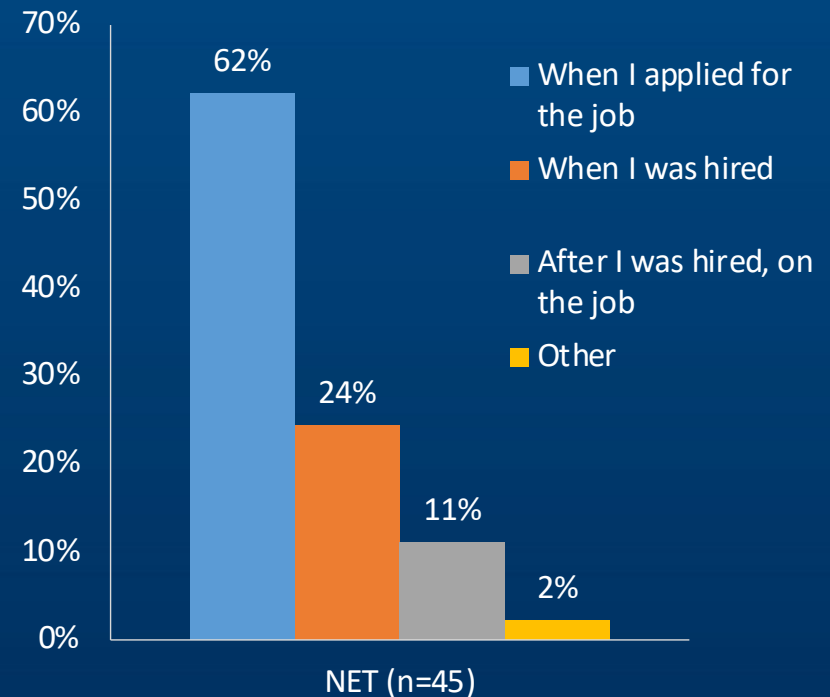
Neurodiverse workers

Insights

When did you tell your manager/supervisor about your Neurodiversity?



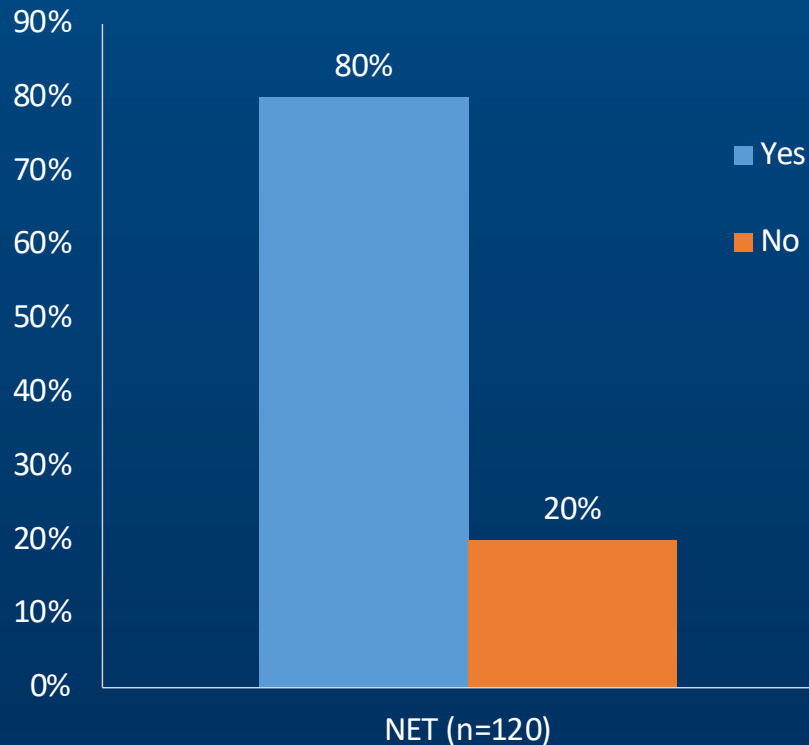
When did you tell HR about your Neurodiversity?



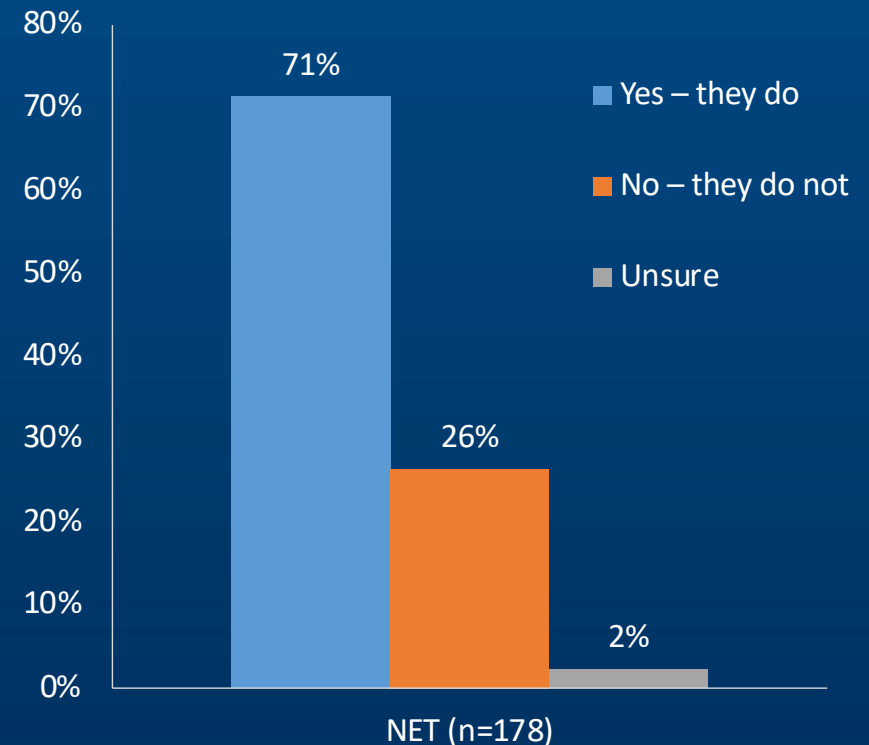
Neurodiverse workers

Insights on support and assistance

Does HR, your managers or supervisors make reasonable adjustments in the workplace to help you with any of the Neurodiverse conditions you have?



Does HR, your managers, supervisors or colleagues provide additional support to you with any Neurodiverse conditions you have?

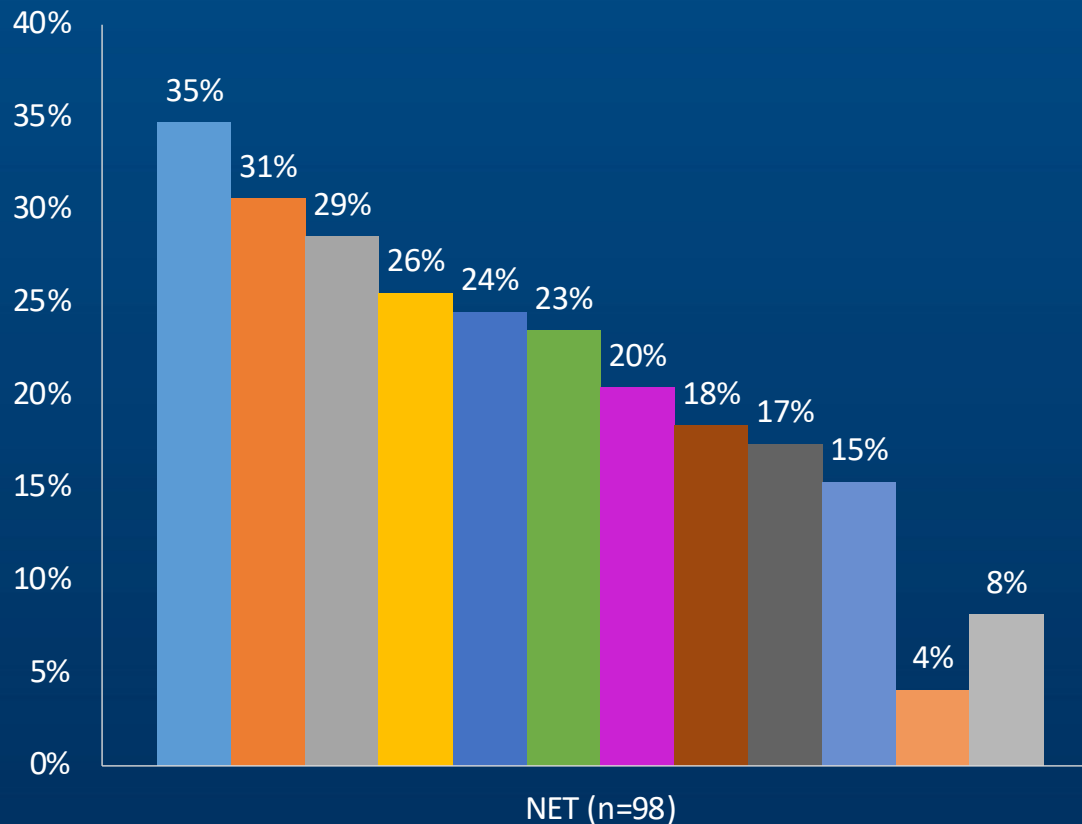


Neurodiverse workers

Insights on support and assistance



Why have you not disclosed your Neurodiversity anyone at work? [Select all that apply]

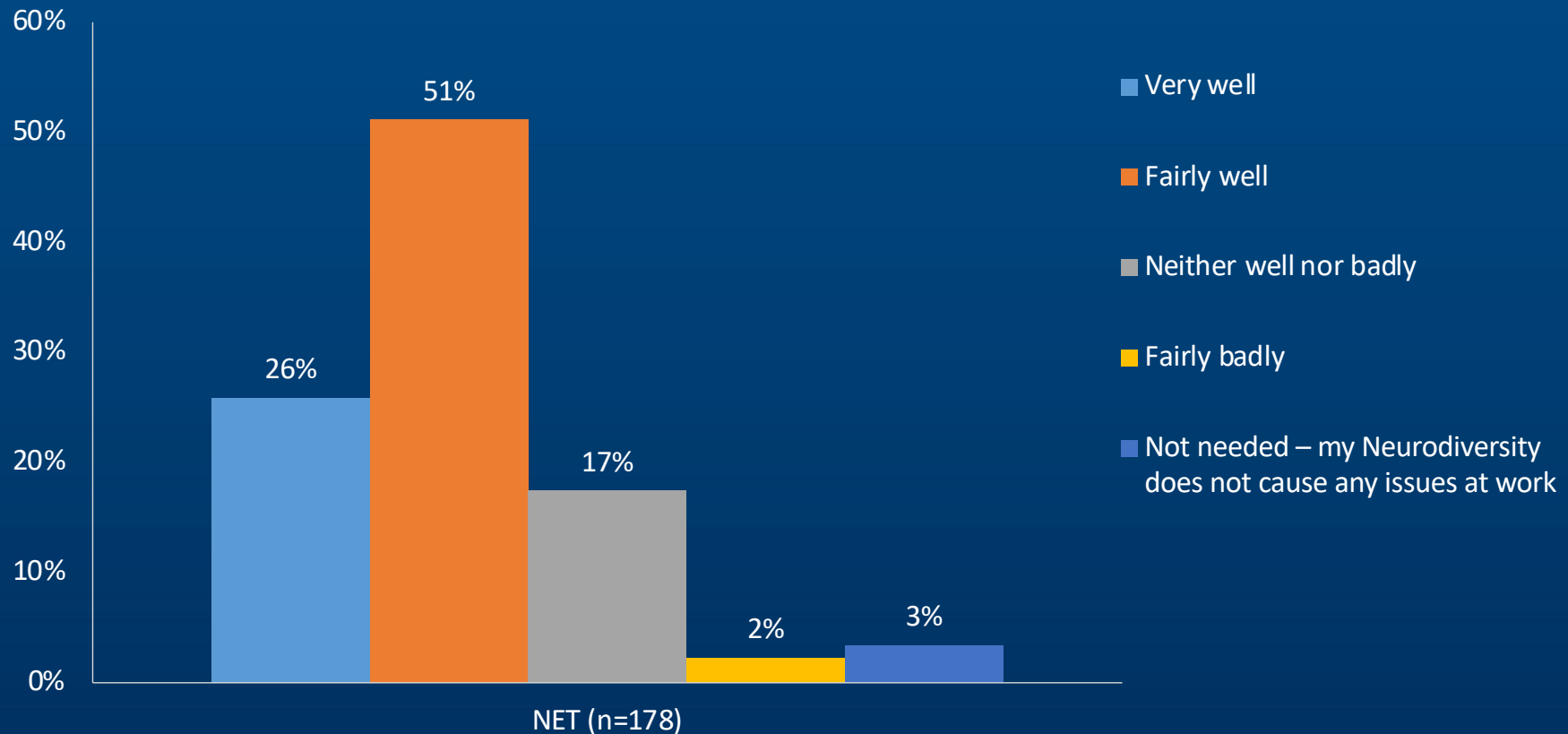


- I don't think it is relevant to bring up at work
- I feel there is a negative stigma attached to Neurodiverse individuals
- I feel it is private information
- I worry I will be viewed differently by those at work
- I am embarrassed
- I don't believe it impacts on my ability to do my role
- I don't want to talk about my Neurodiversity with others
- It's not something that is discussed in my industry
- I worry it will negatively impact my job/career
- I don't know how to bring it up
- Other
- N/A; no specific reason

Neurodiverse workers

Insights on support and assistance

How well or badly do the people you work with support you with any issues caused by your Neurodiversity?



The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work

To help support neurodiverse people at work, it helps to understand some of the challenges that neurodiverse people face in day-to-day life.

The information included in this section is based on expert advice from the NFB as well as the information provided in the CIPD's neurodiversity at work guidance, an excellent and freely available resource that the NFB endorses.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work



When considering the challenges neurodiverse people face, it is worth remembering that everybody is individual and so the challenges they face will vary in severity. It is also important to remember that a neurodiverse person may have more than one neurodiverse condition.

What we refer to below are examples of these challenges and should not be considered to be a definitive list of conditions or challenges nor solutions or benefits.

Motor co-ordination

Dyspraxia can affect motor skills, causing difficulties in movement including operating machinery or tools as well as using keyboards and a mouse.

You could assist employees by implementing workplace adjustments such as providing ergonomic tools, being clear with instructions, and provide training to support with motor co-ordination.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work



Social interaction

People who have Autism spectrum disorders can find social interaction and communication difficult and some may be nonverbal.

They may find it difficult to understand colleagues who use jargon, metaphors, sarcasm, abstract terms and concepts and subtle body language to communicate, as they process information literally.

They may also struggle with social anxiety and eye-contact. This does not mean that they do not want to socialise, simply that they may find it difficult and not know how to proceed.

People who have ADHD or ADD can also struggle to communicate effectively, but for different reasons. For example, organising thoughts when in conversation can make it difficult for people with ADHD or ADD to articulate themselves in the way they would want to.

People with Dyspraxia can also find eye contact overwhelming and therefore feel anxious in social situations.

You could conduct diversity training, encourage clear and direct communication, and offer social skills support.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work



Adapting to change

People who have Autism spectrum disorders may prefer and thrive with structure and routine, as opposed to change which can be disruptive and difficult to adapt to.

You could consider how you can provide clear communication about any pending changes, offer transition support to cope with change, and create a predictable work environment as far as possible.

Reading and writing

People who have Dyslexia can struggle to read and write quickly and depending on the way and manner something is written and presented, may struggle further.

People who have Dysgraphia may face challenges with writing, including writing very slowly, having confused writing and lacking the ability to copy information accurately.

You could provide assistive technologies, alternative formats, and extra time for reading and writing tasks. Consider providing overlays for reading tasks.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work

Attention

People who have ADHD and ADD can struggle to maintain their attention and concentration, especially if they are not sufficiently stimulated. For example, long meetings may prove difficult for people with ADHD and ADD and they can also be more easily distracted by other sensory input, as they cannot screen it out.

People who have Autism spectrum disorders may also struggle to maintain attention if they are over-stimulated due to busy, noisy workplace conditions.

You could break tasks into smaller segments, allow for frequent breaks, and minimise distractions as well as consider the meeting location.

Arithmetic

People with Dyscalculia can struggle with anything relating to arithmetic and calculation, such as sizing, ordering, reading and writing numbers.

You could provide practical tools, visual aids, and alternative methods for numerical tasks.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work



Working memory

Working memory is our ability to process and temporarily store information for short periods of time, such as directions, instructions or recall telephone numbers and codes. People who have ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia can all struggle with working memory.

You could implement written instructions, visual cues, and task reminders to support working memory.

Personal organisation

People who have ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia can struggle with time management and personal organisation.

You could offer training in organisational techniques, use digital tools for scheduling, and create a structured work environment.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work



Sensory sensitivity

People who have Dyslexia and Dyspraxia may experience sensory sensitivity from bright lights as well as experiencing headaches from reading and other detail related processing. People with Dyspraxia may also be negatively affected by loud noise.

Sensory sensitivity can also affect people who have Autism, ADHD and ADD.

You could adjust lighting, provide quiet spaces, and allow the use of noise-cancelling headphones.

Tics

People who have Tics can experience physical motions and verbal sounds including shrugging shoulders or bigger motions, laughing, talking and coughing. People who have Tourette's syndrome represent a small proportion of the number of people who have a Tic.

You could foster an accepting environment, educate colleagues about tics, and provide support to manage stressors.

The challenges facing neurodiverse people at work



Stress, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem

People who are neurodiverse can also suffer from stress, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem for a variety of reasons including because of the challenges that they face in the workplace, their own perception of their neurodiversity and non-acceptance or lack of empathy shown towards them by employers, colleagues and others.

You could promote mental well-being through employee assistance programs, regular check-ins, and a supportive work culture.

Always remember that people's experiences are individual and by providing a supportive environment the most appropriate support can be provided that benefits the individual and the organisation.

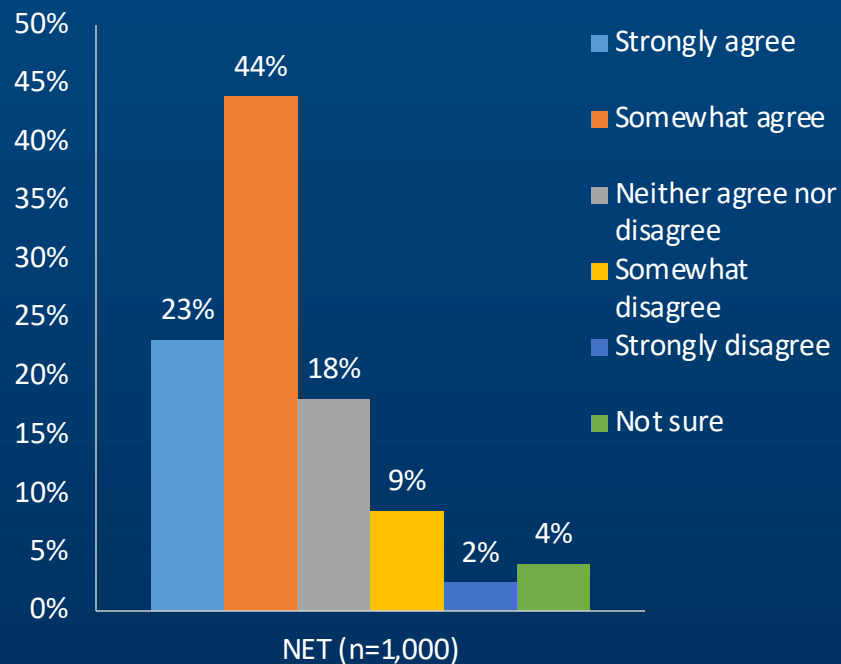
The research:

General perceptions of neurodiversity amongst construction workers

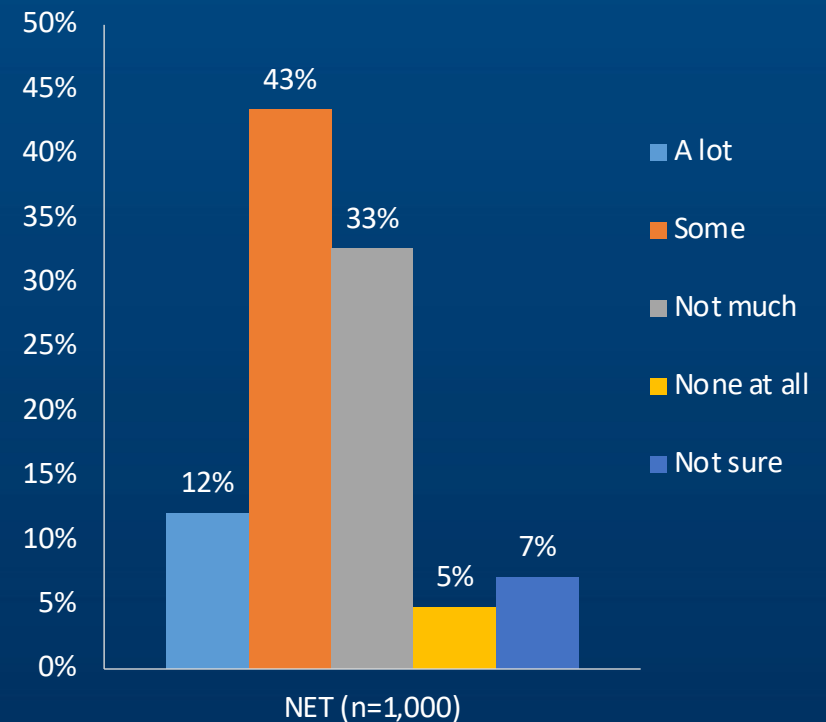
The following section investigates the perceptions of neurodiversity by all construction workers. It looks at worker's opinions in regard to the attractiveness of the industry, their empathy with neurodiverse workers, the perceptions of challenges faced and the interventions that would help neurodiverse workers in the workplace.

Neurodiversity Perceptions

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement.
“I believe the Construction industry is able to support people that have neurodiverse conditions”?



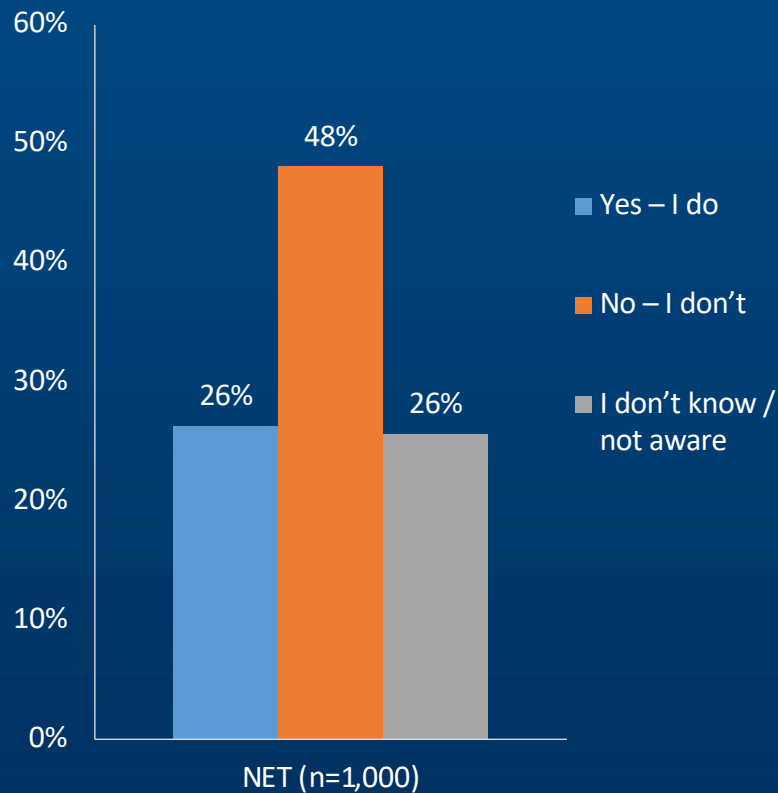
How much workplace understanding and empathy do you think there is for Neurodiverse individuals in the Construction industry?



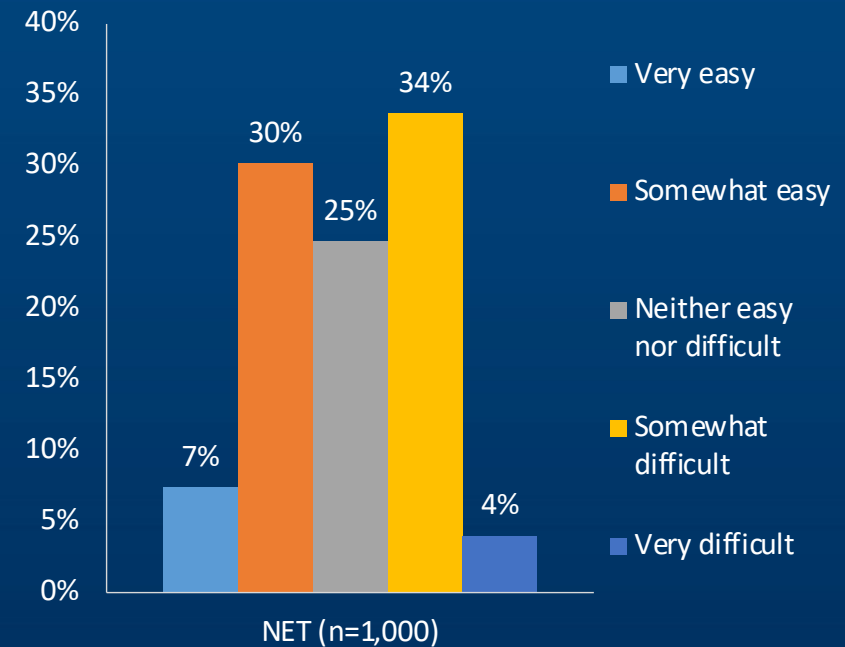
Neurodiversity

Perceptions

**Do you work with any
Neurodiverse individuals?**

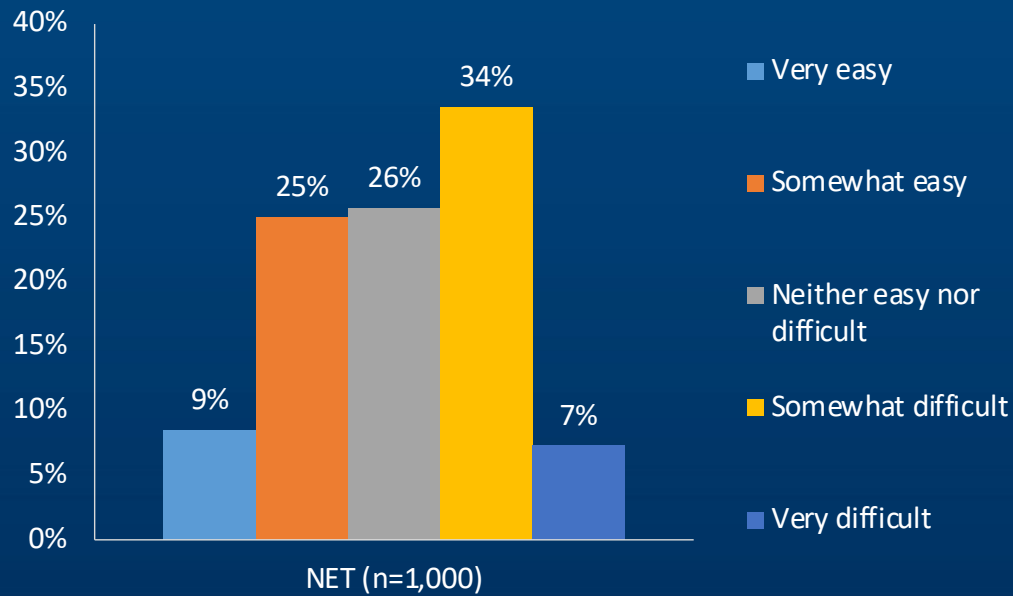


**Thinking about all working industries in
general and not just the Construction
Industry, how easy or difficult do you
think it is for someone with a
Neurodiverse condition to disclose this
with others at work?**

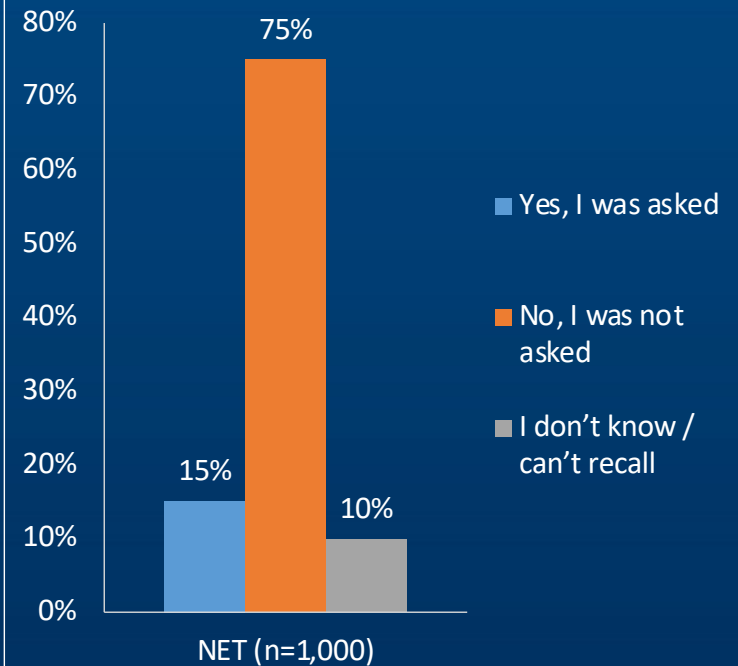


Neurodiversity Perceptions

Thinking now specifically about the Construction industry, how easy or difficult do you think it is for someone with a Neurodiverse condition to disclose this with others at work?



When you got your job – at the hiring then onboarding stage – were you asked whether you had any Neurodiverse conditions?



Neurodiversity Perceptions



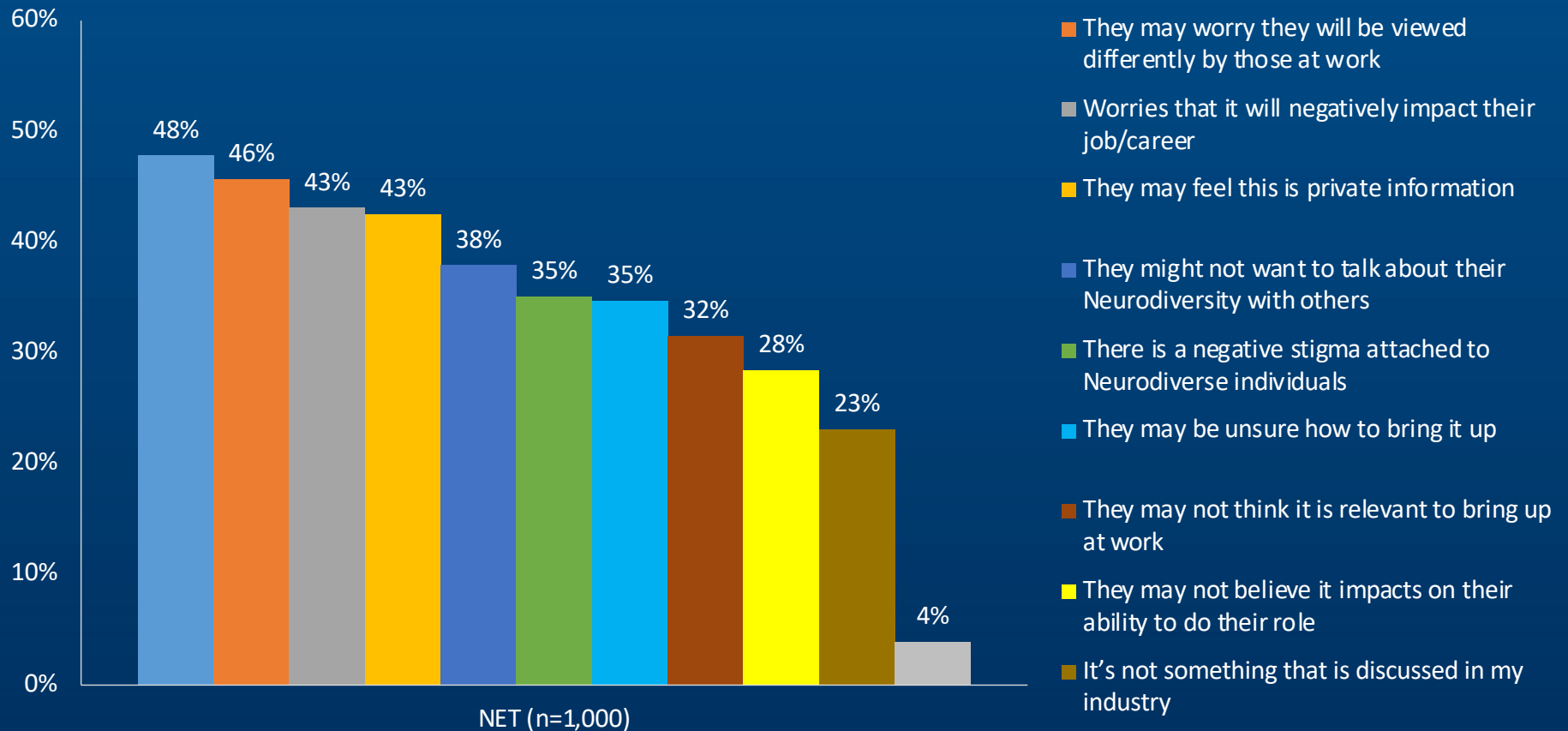
For each of the following options, please indicate whether you think disclosing a Neurodiverse condition would have a positive or negative affect.

Note to readers: the results show, for example, that 45% of respondents believe disclosing a Neurodiverse condition would have a positive affect on the support a neurodiverse person receives from their company.



Neurodiversity Perceptions

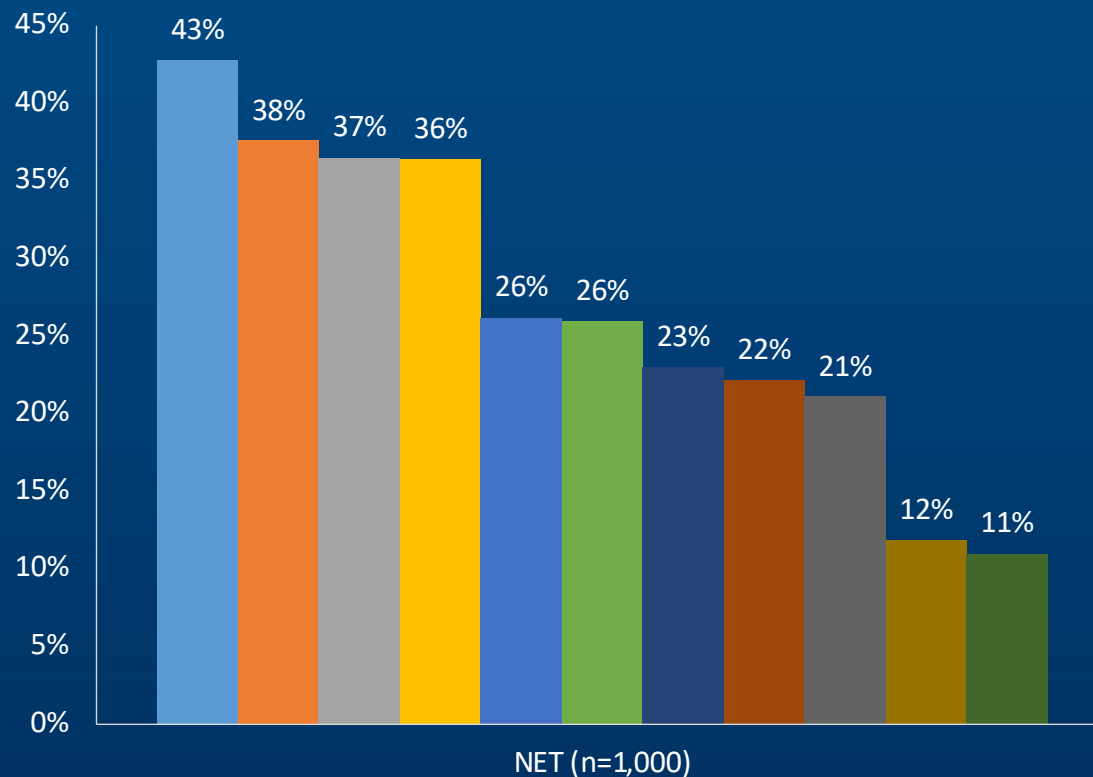
What do you think might prevent someone from revealing they are Neurodiverse? [Select all that apply]



Neurodiversity

Perceptions

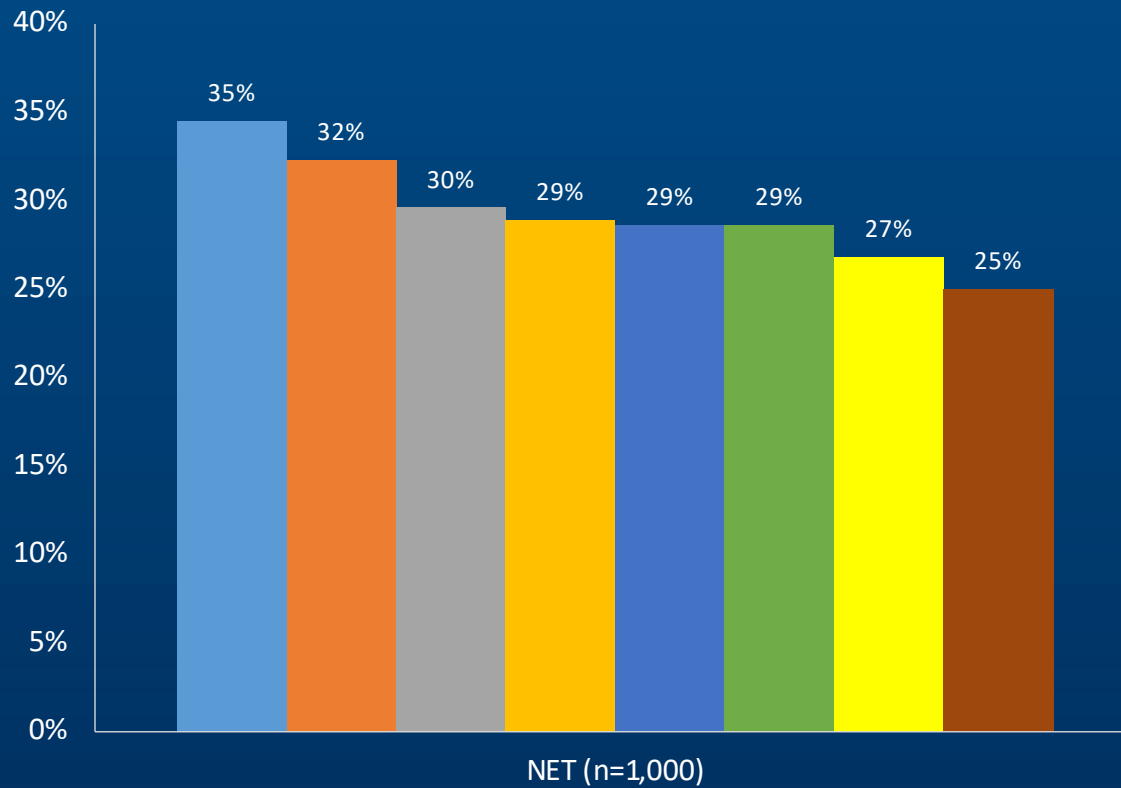
What, if any, do you think are some of the advantages of being aware of Neurodiversity at work? [Select all that apply]



- A more diverse workplace
- Greater understanding of different cognitive abilities amongst Neurodiverse individuals
- Reduction of prejudice, discrimination and misunderstanding of Neurodiverse individuals
- Provides a more inclusive workplace
- Increased creativity via different customisable skills
- Lower staff turnover due to a better understanding of different people and their needs
- Increased team productivity
- Greater innovation and collaboration
- Increased access to a larger talent pool
- Decreased legal liability
- N/A; no specific advantages / I don't know

Neurodiversity Perceptions

What, if anything, do you think could be done to help Neurodiverse individuals in Construction?

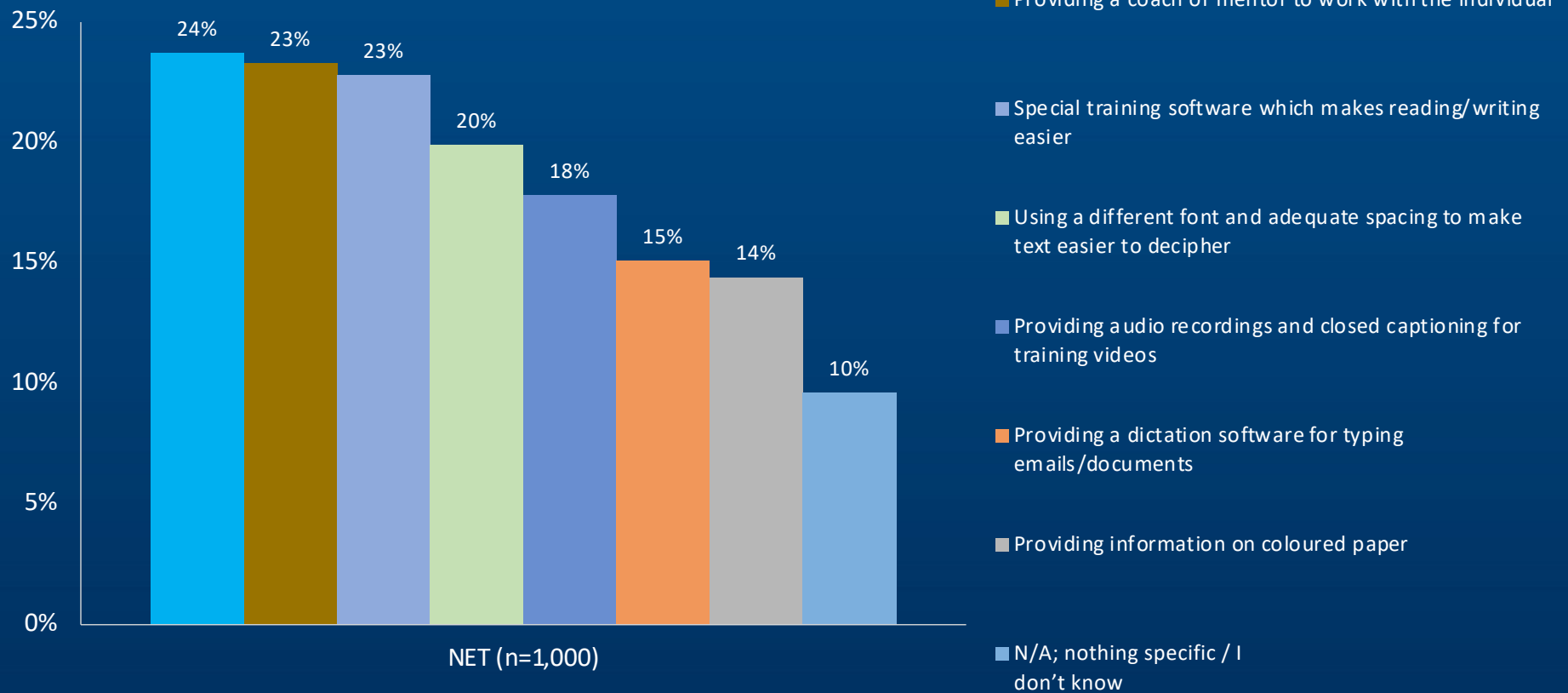


- Neurodiversity training for all employees
- Providing tailored support to the individual
- Wider range of communication options e.g. how different people give/receive information
- Enabling the individual to focus on one task rather than multiple tasks at one time
- Making information easier to absorb, for example in bullet points or shorter sentences in text documents or through visual displays rather than words
- Providing workspaces that are comfortable and functional for people with different needs
- Providing information verbally as well as through written instructions
- Making adjustments to the times that an individual works i.e. more frequent short breaks

Neurodiversity

Perceptions

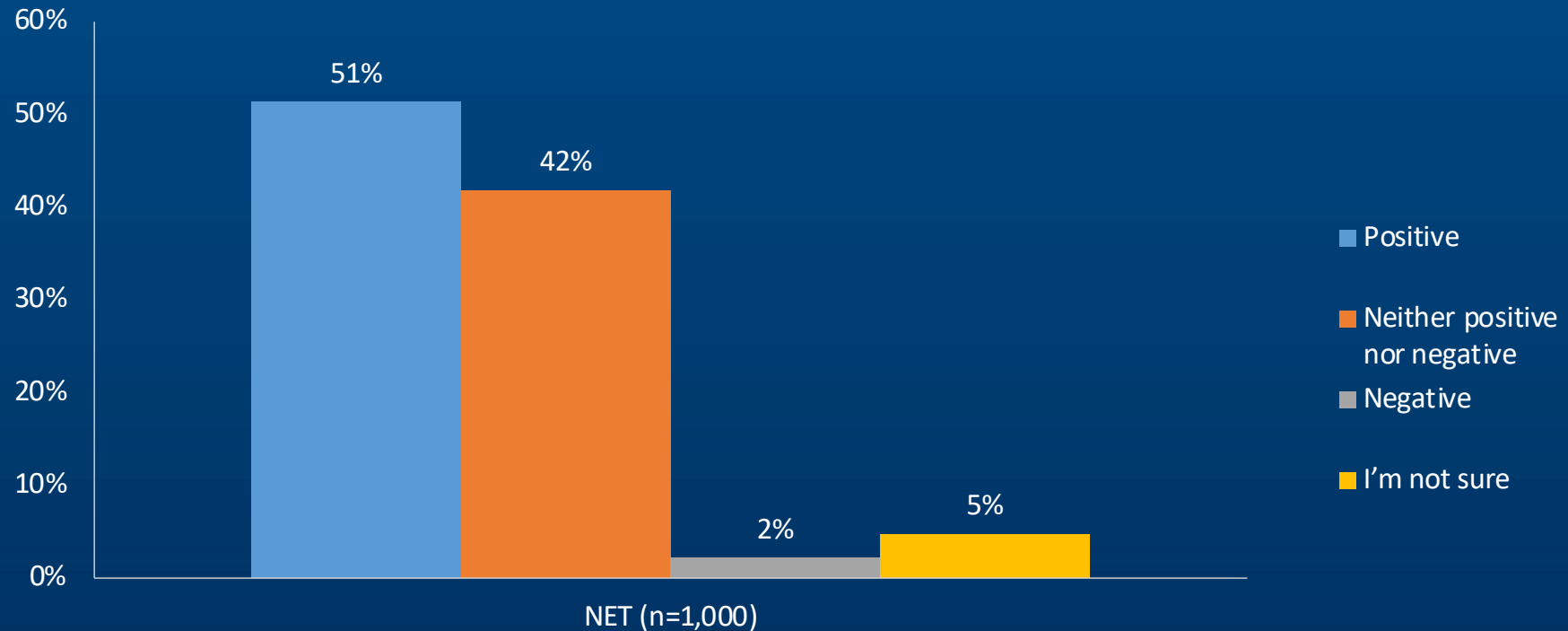
What, if anything, do you think could be done to help Neurodiverse individuals in Construction?



Neurodiversity

Perceptions

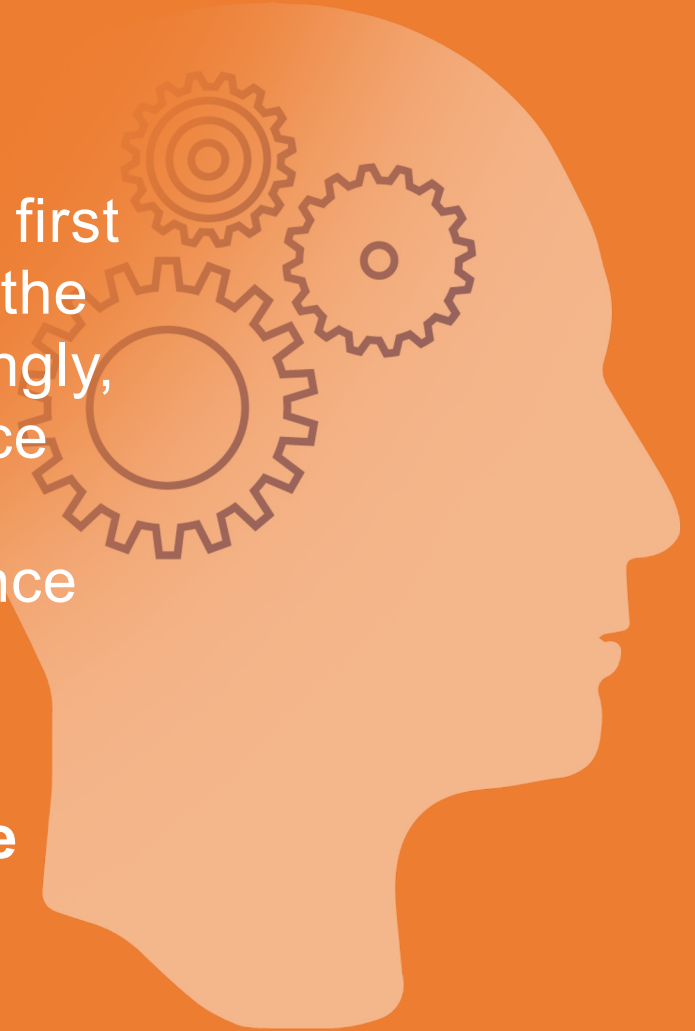
Would you feel positive or negative about hiring or working with someone with a Neurodiverse condition?



Recommendations

The findings in this research offer the first in depth insight into neurodiversity in the UK construction industry and accordingly, allow us to make a number of evidence informed recommendations to better support the accessibility and experience of neurodiverse construction workers.

The recommendations provided are aimed at industry as a whole and individual employers.



Recommendations for industry

Recommendation 1

Increase general awareness of neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is reported as being much more common in construction than the UK general population, yet few new starters are asked about it, making it likely they will not receive the support that they need. Further, only 1 in 4 workers say they know someone with neurodiversity, despite it being likely that all workers work with someone who is neurodiverse. 16% of construction workers say they do not know if they are neurodiverse, indicating a greater need of support to help them determine.

1.1. The industry should invest in awareness programmes to ensure neurodiverse people are recognised and offered adjustment, help and support at the earliest opportunity in their career.

Recommendations for industry

Recommendation 2

Ensure recruitment is open, accessible and welcoming to neurodiverse people

Neurodiverse people have indicated that their neurodiversity made them want to work in construction more than if they were not neurodiverse, indicating that the industry actually attracts neurodiversity. The vast majority of neurodiverse people said that their employer had made adjustments for them, provided extra support and found colleagues to be helpful when encountering issues caused by their condition.

2.1 Recruitment programmes

should explicitly champion the construction industry as a welcome home to neurodiverse people.

2.2 Recruitment practices

must ensure that they are accessible to neurodiverse people, helping and encouraging them to apply.

Recommendations for employers



Recommendation 3

Communicate effectively with neurodiverse workers

3.1 Provide clear and concise communication

Neurodiverse employees can struggle with processing verbal and nonverbal communication. Providing clear and concise communication can help them better understand their tasks and responsibilities. Avoid using idioms, sarcasm, or complicated language, and instead, use straightforward and concise language.

3.2 Encourage open communication

Encouraging neurodiverse employees to share their needs and preferences and providing opportunities for feedback and discussion can help build trust and create a more supportive workplace culture.

Recommendations for employers



Recommendation 4

Create the right workplace environment for neurodiverse workers to thrive

4.1 Offer flexible work arrangements

Neurodiverse employees may have different work styles or sensory needs. Offering flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible schedules, can help them work more comfortably and productively.

4.2 Create a sensory-friendly workplace

Neurodiverse employees may have sensory sensitivities to bright lights, loud noises, or certain textures. Creating a sensory-friendly workplace with adjustable lighting, noise-cancelling headphones, or comfortable seating can help them feel more comfortable and productive.

Continued >>>

Recommendations for employers



Recommendation 4

Create the right workplace environment for neurodiverse workers to thrive (continued)

4.3 Provide accommodations

Depending on the individual's needs, accommodations such as assistive technology, extra time on assignments or projects, or modified work tasks can help them succeed in their role.

4.4 Create a mentorship or buddy system

Providing a mentor or buddy system can help neurodiverse employees feel supported and included in the workplace. Pairing them with an experienced employee who can provide guidance and support can help them succeed in their role and build their confidence.

4.5 Offer training and education

Providing training and education on neurodiversity and specific conditions can help create a more inclusive workplace culture and increase understanding and empathy among c-workers and managers.

Conclusion

As the managing director of a construction company, and someone who has neurodiversity in my family, I know only too well the importance of this research. I have long believed that our sector is one where people who want to 'do' can thrive, no matter who you are, where you come from, or your neurodiversity. It is therefore heart warming to see that over a third of neurodiverse workers said that their condition made them want to work in our sector more.

We must hold this accolade dear while striving to become an even more welcoming home for people with neurodiversity. Together with industry bodies, trade associations, CITB, colleges and ultimately the Government, we can help businesses to make the small changes needed to help our workforce. But we should not stop there. We must also ensure that our ever changing routes into construction do not become a blocker to neurodiverse people, from education to application, let's rigorously challenge any barriers neurodiverse people face to working in our sector from the very first moment.



Joe Cook

Senior Vice Chair
National Federation of
Builders

Continued >>>

Conclusion

There is of course still work to do when it comes to stigma. The research shows that almost 40% of neurodiverse workers have not told their employers and of those about a third say it is because they are worried about the stigma, and a significant percentage say they are embarrassed. This is simply not acceptable. We can only get the best out of our people when they feel fully supported and it is hard for employers to support where we do not know the challenges that our people face. With more awareness, we can change that, and between us, the NFB and CITB, it is our mission to do so.

I'm proud our sector is a home to many neurodiverse people and that it attracts neurodiverse people to work in it. That is something we should shout from the rooftops. Let's do everything we can to make it the most supportive sector too.

Useful resources for employers



Useful websites:

What is Neurodiversity? (The Brain Charity)
<https://www.thebraincharity.org.uk/what-is-neurodiversity/>

What is Neurodiversity? (ADHD Aware)
<https://adhdaware.org.uk/what-is-adhd/neurodiversity-and-other-conditions/>

Neurodiversity at Work (CIPD)
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/research/diversity/neurodiversity-work#gref>

Neurodiversity in Business (NiB)
<https://neurodiversityinbusiness.org/research/>

Supporting Neurodiversity
in the Workplace (BUPA)
<https://www.bupa.co.uk/~media/files/mms/bin/s-05299>

Useful video resources:

What is Neurodiversity? (BBC Newsround)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSTLQk9bB8I>

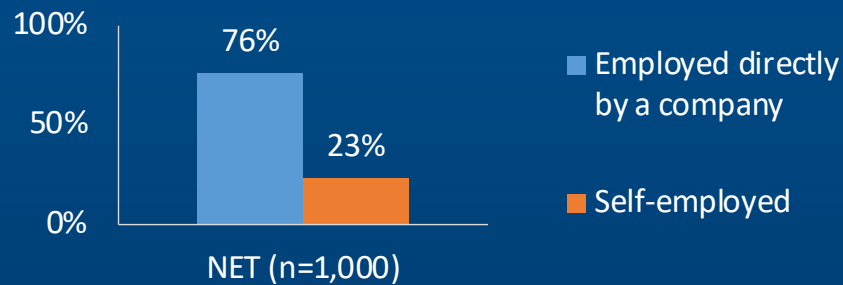
Reasonable Adjustments for
Neurodivergence (NHS)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF4YW_2BCos

A Guide to Neurodiversity at Work (CIPD)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK1rXOV1RdA>

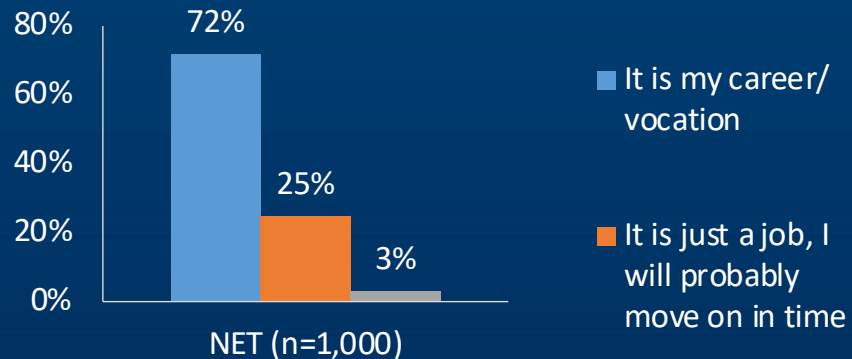
Appendix

Breakdown of respondents by employment types

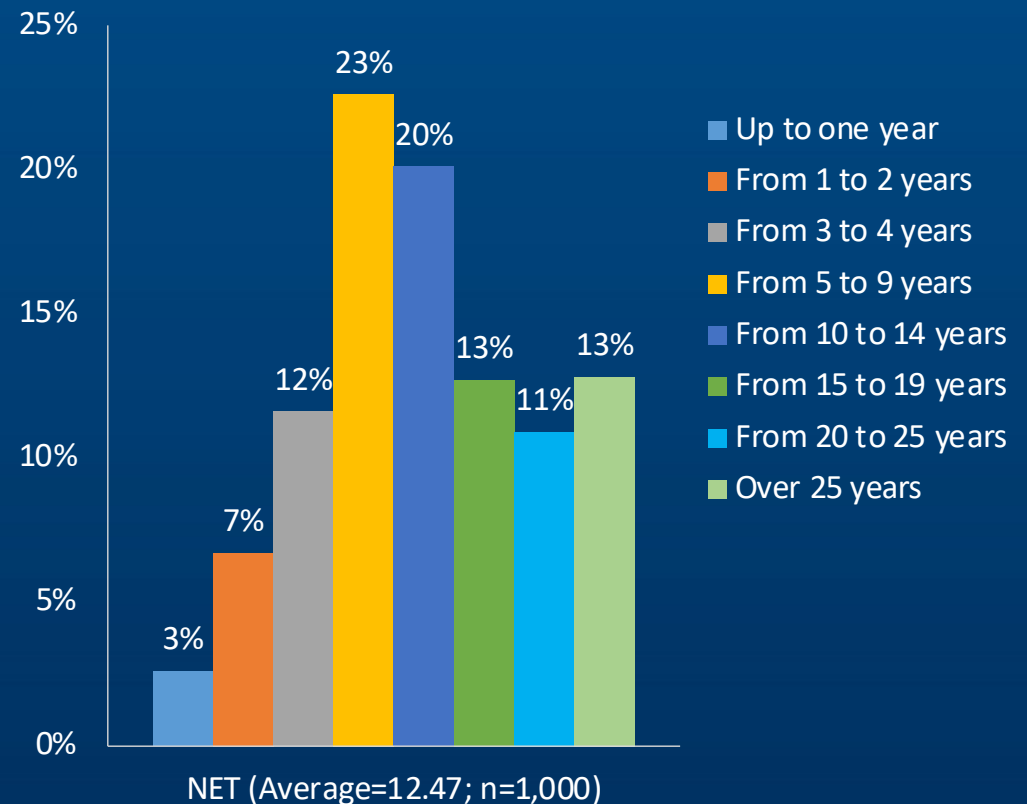
Is your current (main) employment...



Do you see the construction industry as your career/vocation or just a job, for the moment?



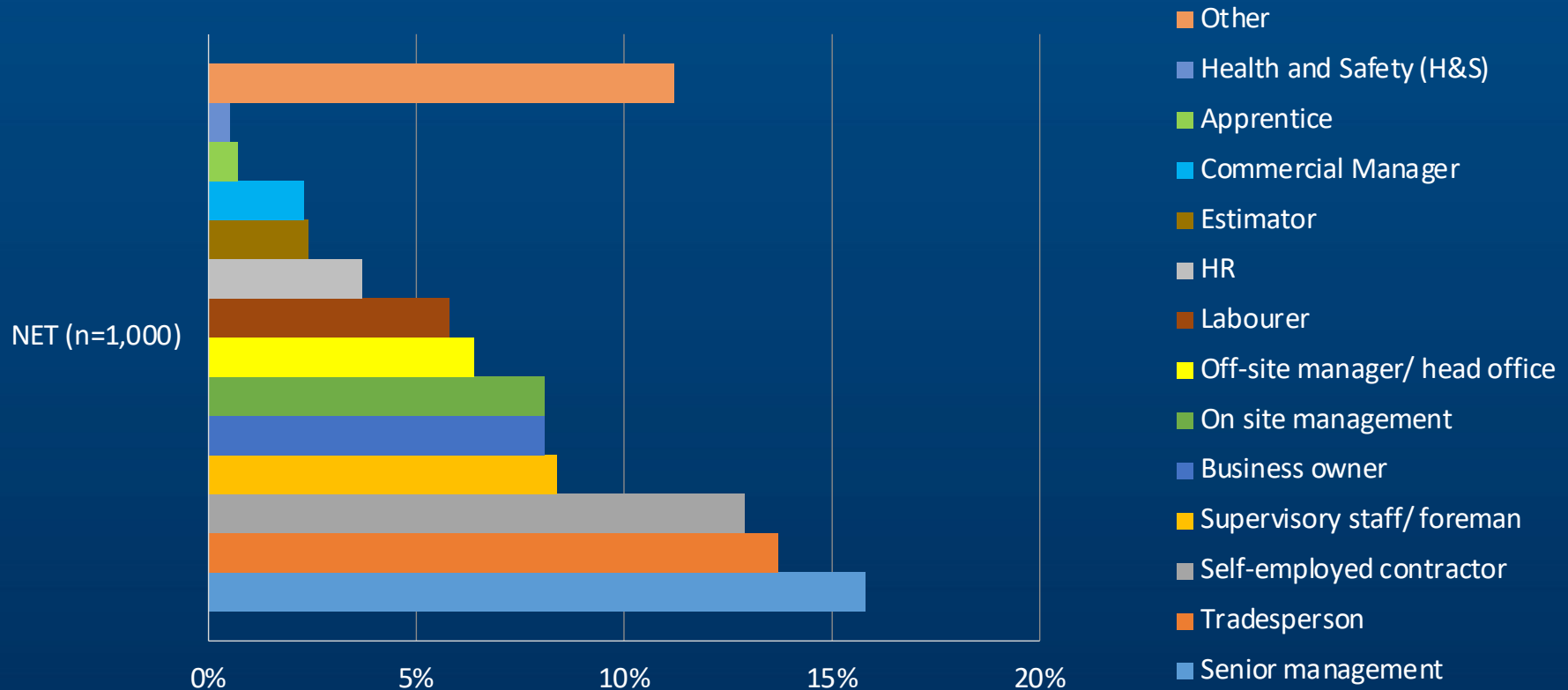
How long have you worked in the construction industry?



Appendix

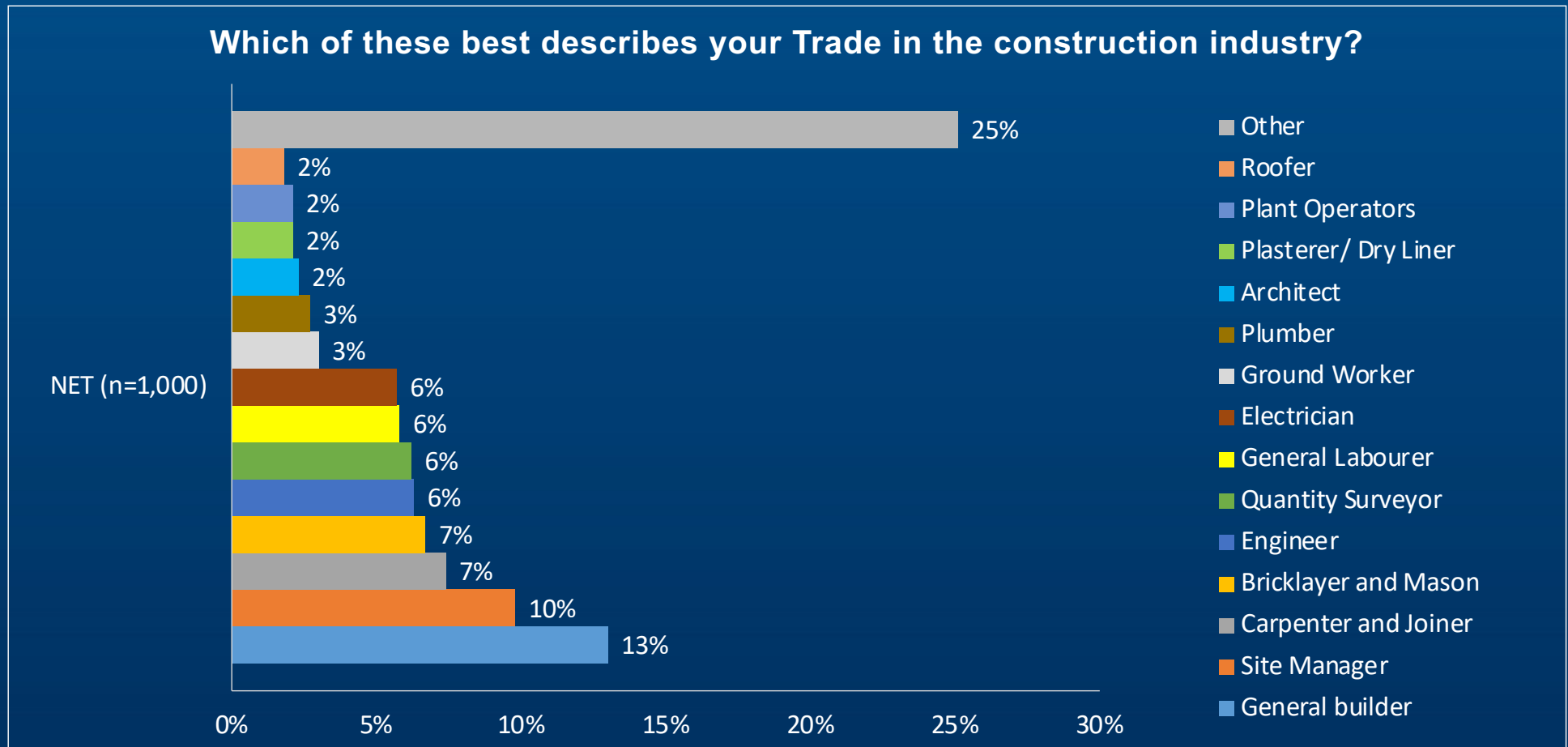
Breakdown of respondents by employment types

Which of these best describes your role in the construction industry?



Appendix

Breakdown of respondents by employment types





National Federation of Builders

Elizabeth House
8A Princess Street
Knutsford
Cheshire
WA16 6DD

03450 578 160
info@builders.org.uk

www.builders.org.uk

