Employers' Skills Survey

2025

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

This report was developed by the Skills and Expertise Group responsible for driving the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment with support from the wider heritage and related sectors:

Historic Environment Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, Archaeology Scotland, the Institute of Conservation, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland, Archives Records Association, Built Environment Forum Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland, the Landscape Institute, Industrial Museums Scotland, the Construction Industry Training Board, Skills Development Scotland, and Developing the Young Workforce.

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This report covers the main findings of the biannual skills employer's survey, which is carried out as part of the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment in Scotland. The survey gathered a total of 57 responses which is consistent with the number of responses received for our last employer skills survey in 2023, which totalled at 56.

The survey was hosted online via Citizen Space, and was promoted and distributed through multiple networks including but not limited to:

- Skills Investment Plan lead partners
- HES social media
- key contact and network distribution.

Please note that throughout this report, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Executive summary

The 2025 Employers' skills survey for Scotland's historic environment sector got 57 responses, similar to 2023 survey response rates. Respondents are primarily small and micro-organisations that operate mainly Scotland wide, receive no grants and are classed as fair work employers.

The survey results show that employers are experiencing significant skills gaps, mainly in traditional, specialist, and digital skills which employers expect will have a big impact on their organisation. In line with 2023 results, access to training and CPD is challenging with the main barriers to upskilling centred around funding, clear professional pathways, and geographic training.

Most employers are aware of Our Past, Our Future and the Skills Investment Plan (SIP). The majority of employers rate progress within the 11 areas of focus identified in the SIP as only adequate. Employers are engaging in diversity and inclusion efforts, with staff training and inclusive recruitment being the most common. However, targeted recruitment is still rare and is primarily focused on women, young people and career changers. Lastly, most organisations are at the early stages of their digital and net zero work

Employers' profile

In summary, the employers who responded to the 2025 skills survey are:

- charities, SCIO or third sector organisations (33%), and private companies (30%).

- working in architecture, engineering, planning and surveying (23%), and archaeology (21%).
- primarily operating at a Scotland wide scale (26%).
- small businesses (25%), micro businesses (21%) or businesses with no employees (23%).
- fair work employers (79%).
- receiving no funding or grants (58%).

This is a change in the profile of the employers who replied to the 2023 survey. While the business size and operating area have remained fairly consistent, the working area has shifted from museums and galleries, and traditional building skills. There is also a notable reduction in the number of employers who identify as fair work.

Business type, size and SIP area

Most respondents were charities, SCIO or third sector organisations (19 respondents), private companies (17 respondents), and sole traders or freelancers (12 respondents).

Most respondents work in: archaeology; architecture, engineering, planning and surveying; and traditional craft, materials and building skills. This is a shift from the 2023 survey response profile which had more museums and galleries respondents, see Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of survey respondents' work area by SIP Pillar.

SIP Pillars	2025 Survey Respondents	2023 Survey Respondents
Archaeology	12	5
Architecture, engineering, planning, surveying in a heritage context and with a conservation approach	13	1
Archives and libraries	5	3
Conservation art and artefacts	2	5
Heritage science	0	3
Heritage tourism	1	2
Historic landscapes and gardens	2	5
Industrial heritage	4	0
Museums and galleries	5	12
Traditional building skills and materials	10	9
Other	3	11
Total	**57**	**56**

The ‘other’ category in 2025 includes Gaelic, historic houses and interiors, and a combination of working both in traditional building skills and surveying.

Respondents primarily operate Scotland (26% of businesses) and UK wide (11%), with the rest operating at council level across the country. This is consistent with the 2023 respondents who primarily operated Scotland (34%) and UK (21%) wide. For a breakdown of the geographic distribution of respondents in 2023 and 2025 see

Table 2. Note that the whole percentages for 2025 are based on a total number of 57 respondents and 2023 are based on 56 respondents.

Table 2: Percentage of survey respondents in 2025 and 2023 operating in each council area.

Employer operating area	2025 Employers	2023 Employers
Aberdeen City Council	2%	0%
Aberdeenshire Council	5%	2%
Angus Council	0%	2%
Argyll and Bute Council	0%	4%
Dumfries and Galloway Council	4%	2%
Dundee City Council	0%	2%
East Ayrshire Council	2%	0%
East Lothian Council	0%	2%
Edinburgh City Council	2%	9%
Falkirk	4%	0%
Fife Council	9%	5%
Glasgow City Council	5%	2%
Highland Council	5%	4%
North Ayrshire Council	2%	2%
Perth & Kinross Council	4%	2%
Scotland wide	26%	34%
Scottish Borders Council	5%	5%
South Ayrshire Council	2%	0%
South Lanarkshire Council	5%	2%
Stirling Council	5%	0%
UK wide	11%	21%
West Dunbartonshire Council	2%	0%
West Lothian Council	2%	2%

Most survey respondents fall in the category of small businesses, micro-businesses and sole traders. This is consistent with the profile of respondents in 2023, as per Figure 1.

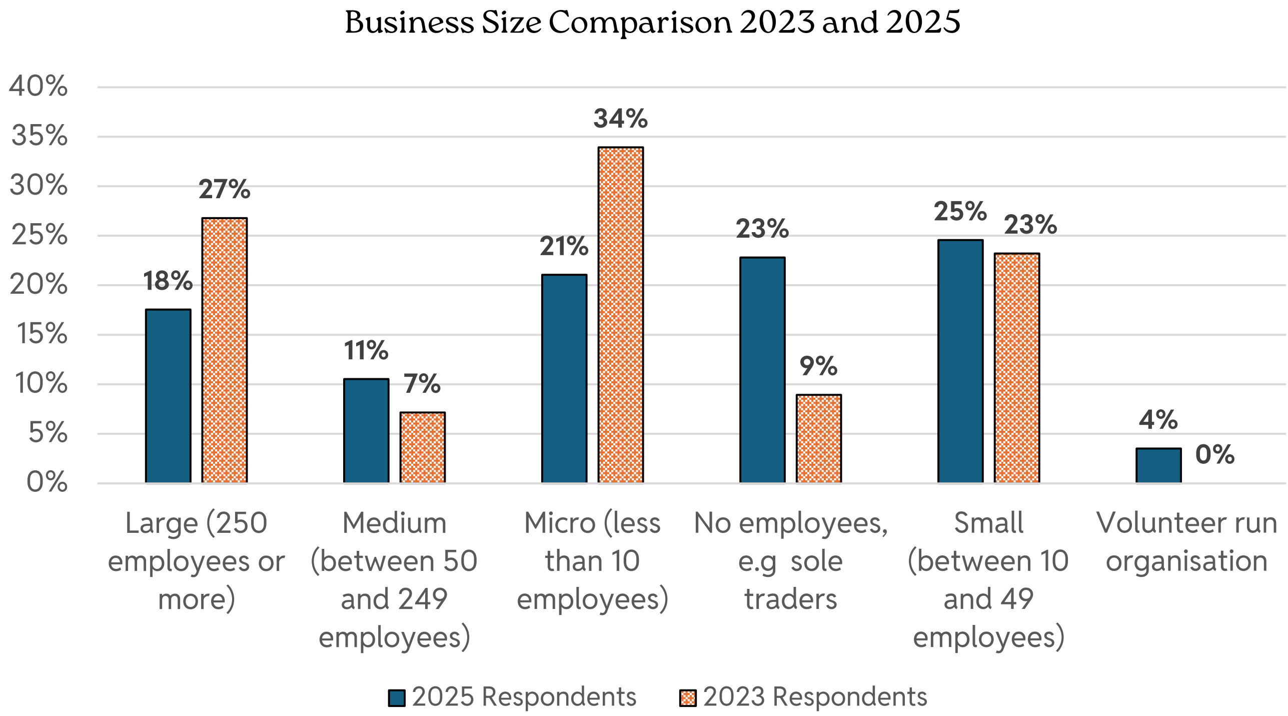

Figure 1: Graphic comparing the size of business of survey respondents in 2023 and 2025. Percentages are based on a total of 56 respondents in 2023 and 57 respondents in 2025.

79% of respondents classified themselves as fair work employers. This is a slight decline from 88% in 2023.

Funding

Most employers (58% of respondents) declared that they do not currently receive any grants or funding. 63% of those who receive funding are Historic Environment Scotland grant recipients.

Half of the grant recipients (50%) receive funding from more than one funder. While key funders are Historic Environment Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland, and National Lottery Heritage Fund, Scottish Government and the Architectural Heritage Fund are also mentioned repeatedly. Other funders include Aberdeen City Council, Coastal Communities Fund, Public Library Improvement Fund, Europe Cultural Foundation, The Robertson Trust, Fife Council, Headley Trust, The Pilgrim Trust, and the Baird Trust. See full funding numbers in Table 3.

Table 3: Percentage of respondents in receipt of grants.

Funder	Percentage of respondents in receipt of grants
Historic Environment Scotland	26%
National Lottery Heritage Fund	14%
Museums Galleries Scotland	9%
Architectural Heritage Fund	5%
Scottish Government	4%
Other	16%

Please note that the total amount of respondents in receipt of grants is 22 and that 50% of them are in receipt of multiple grants.

Skills gaps profile of employers

The summary of the skills gaps profile identified by survey respondents is:

- Employers are experiencing significant skills gaps (79%) which is expected to have a considerable (40%) or huge (25%) impact on their organisation.
- The biggest skills gap areas are traditional and specialist skills (54%), and IT and digital skills (44%).
- Employers cite lack of access to training, funding, and clear professional pathways as major obstacles, and suggest solutions such as accredited courses, mentorship, increased awareness among youth, accessible grants, and more paid apprenticeships, especially in rural areas.
- 42% of employers cannot access the training provision that they need or want.

Organisations' skills and skills gaps

46% of employers who replied to the survey stated that their organisation does not have the skills that they need and 12% are unsure whether they have them. Furthermore, 79% of employers highlighted that they have skills and/or knowledge gaps. Among the key skills gaps are traditional and specialist skills, and IT and digital skills, see Figure 2 for a full breakdown of the skills gaps.

These results are consistent with the results of the 2023 survey, in which 68% of employers anticipated skills shortages between then and 2028, and highlighted that traditional and specialist skills would have a considerable (34% of respondents) or huge (30%) impact on growth. In 2023, leadership and management, and IT and digital skills were seen as having considerable impacts but also being manageable.

The 'others' category includes gaps in achieving conservation accreditation with no clear route, poor provision for relevant safety training, engaging with AI, succession planning, lack of candidates skilled/experienced in historic building construction, skills on applying for and obtaining grants, and a lack of skilled conservators, especially in slating, leadwork, joinery, masonry, pointing, plastering and rendering.

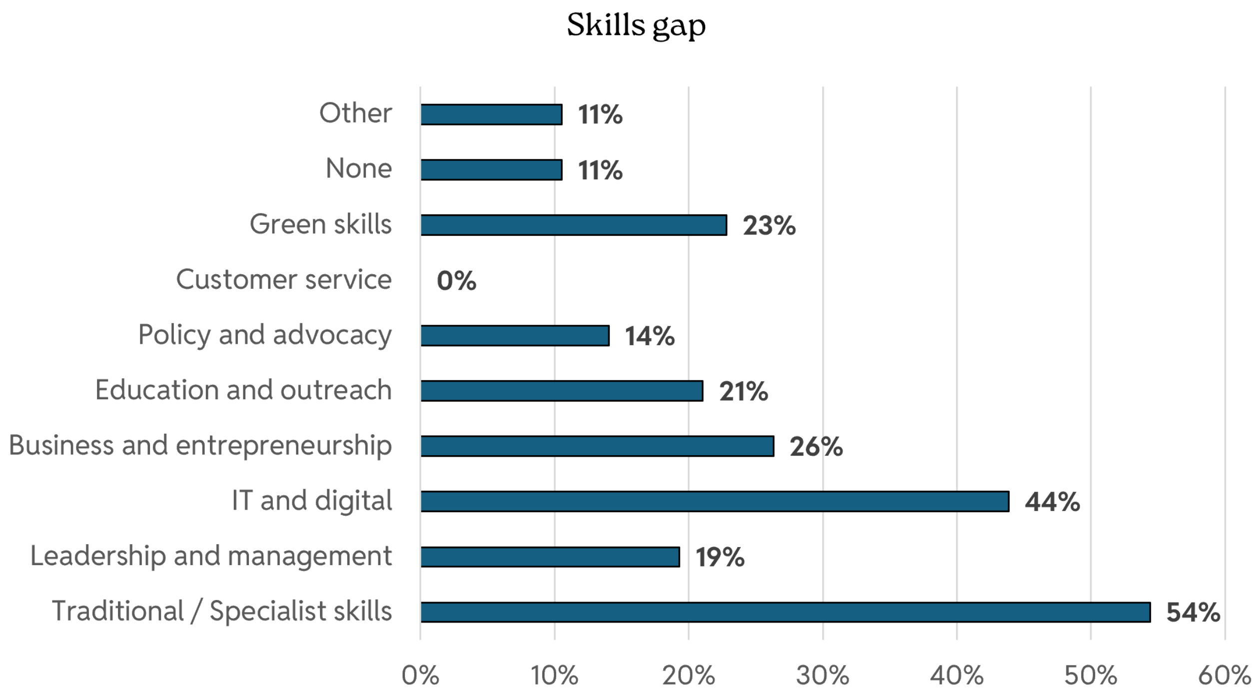

Figure 2: Percentage of organisations with skills gaps. Please note that organisations selected multiple skills gaps and, therefore, the totals do not equal 100%. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 respondents.

Employers expect that skills gaps will have a considerable (40%) or huge (25%) impact on their organisation, its sustainability and growth. See Figure 3 for a more detailed breakdown of the expected impact.

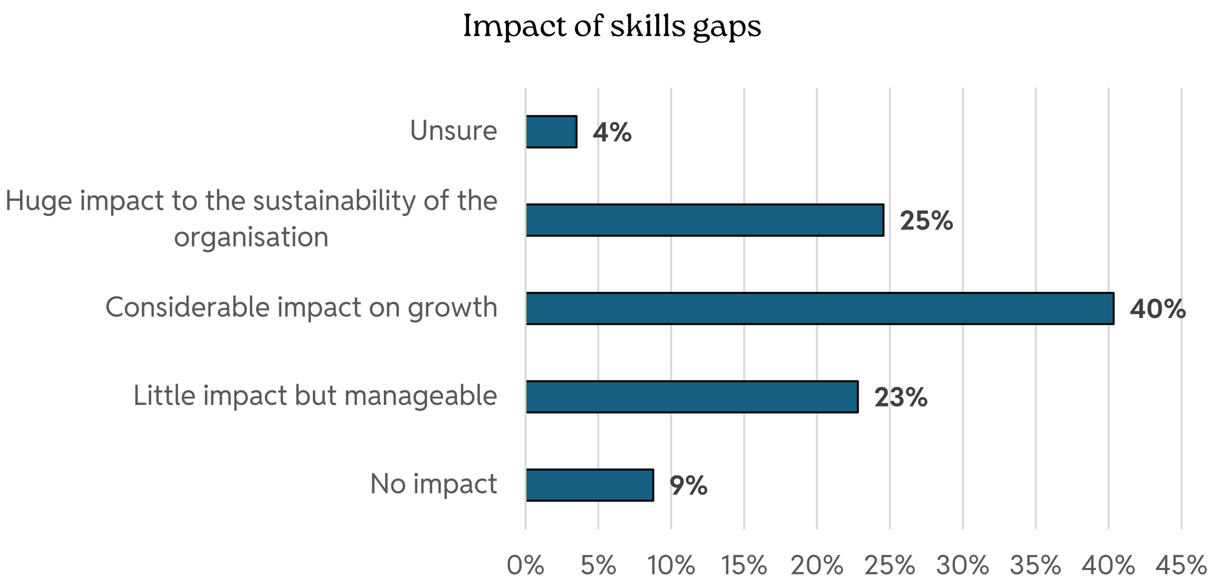

Figure 3: Percentage of employers' expectation of the impact that skills gaps will have on their organisation. The percentages are calculated on a total of 57 survey responses.

How to address skills gaps

Out of the options that employers were given (see Figure 4), the majority agreed that opportunities for upskilling is one of the main ways to address skills gaps.

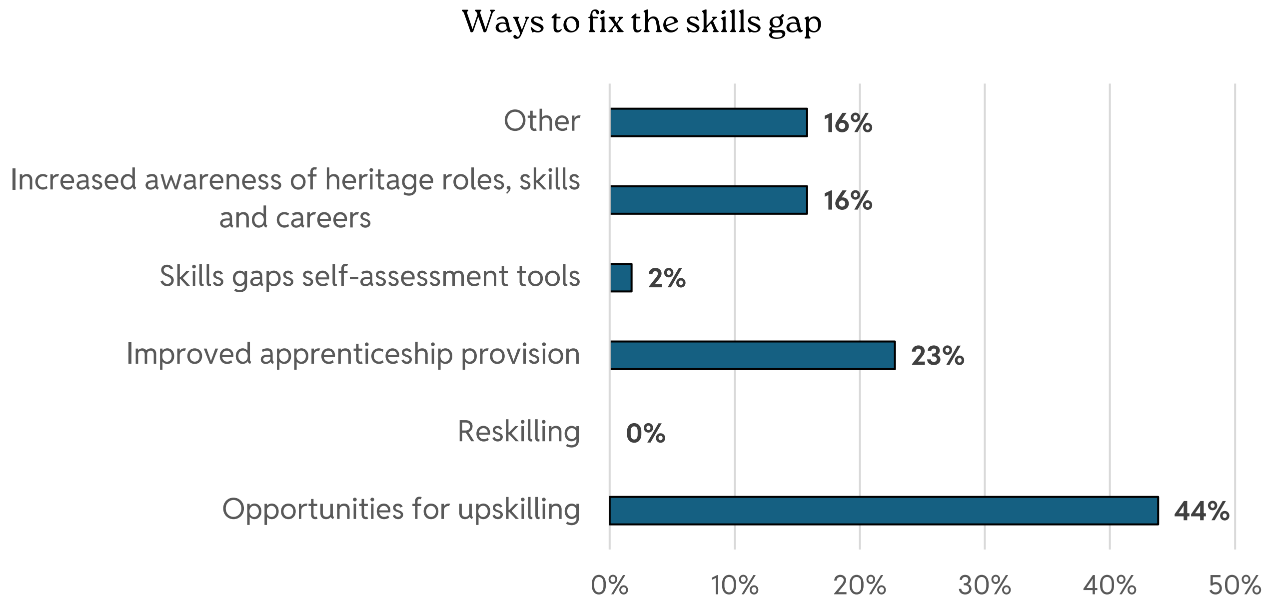

Figure 4: Chart showing the percentage of employers who support each way to fix the skills gap. Percentage numbers are based on a total of 57 responses.

Thirty-three employers also provided alternative ways of addressing the skills gaps in their areas of work. These have been organised in order of frequency/mention in the list below:

- Have accredited courses with clear and defined pathways and training providers based in Scotland, particularly in rural areas (suggested 18% of employers).
- Have progression, secondment opportunities, and mentorship opportunities at work with skilled professionals that can train new recruits (suggested by 15% of employers).
- Increased awareness of the potential careers in the heritage sector among young people through schools' activity and opportunities for young people to get started (suggested by 12% of employers).
- Increased budget and grants which are easily accessible for specialist staff, training and skills development (suggested by 12% of employers).
- More paid apprenticeships, especially for adults (suggested by 9% of employers). It is worth highlighting that archaeology apprenticeships were specifically mentioned by one of the employers.

- Better short courses and targeted CPD that is relevant to the sector (suggested by 9% of employers).
- Employing people in decision-making roles with heritage experience to make decisions that are suited for the sector (suggested by 6% of employers).
- Connecting with skilled professionals.
- Local colleges.
- Better skills provision in rural areas of Scotland.
- Gaelic skills.
- Creation of a skills heritage science role.
- Consistency and rigour across post graduate education.
- Assessment tool to identify the nature of the skills gaps moving traditional skills to equivalent digital areas.
- Free workshops to upskill staff in charities.
- Traditional engineering fitting and machining skills.

Future skills issues

According to employers, the main driver of future skills and labour problems are a lack of skilled/qualified professionals, an aging workforce, and issues with training provision (see Figure 5). These are consistent with the results of the 2023 survey. It is worth noting that Brexit rated highly in the 2023 results, but it was not offered as an option in the 2025 survey.

Training provision

A significant number of employers (42% on average) cannot access the training provision that they need, especially relating to upskilling, and the provision of advanced CPD, and an average of 29% are unsure whether they can access training provision at all (see Figure 6). The main issues employers experience when accessing training are, amongst others:

- lack of funding and resources (staff and time) for both training and apprenticeships.
- lack of suitable, reliable, and geographically accessible training provision.
- issues engaging young people and making the sector competitive when compared to others.
- apprenticeship drop-off rates and a lack of jobs at the end of apprenticeships.
- lack of support, guidance and mentorship.

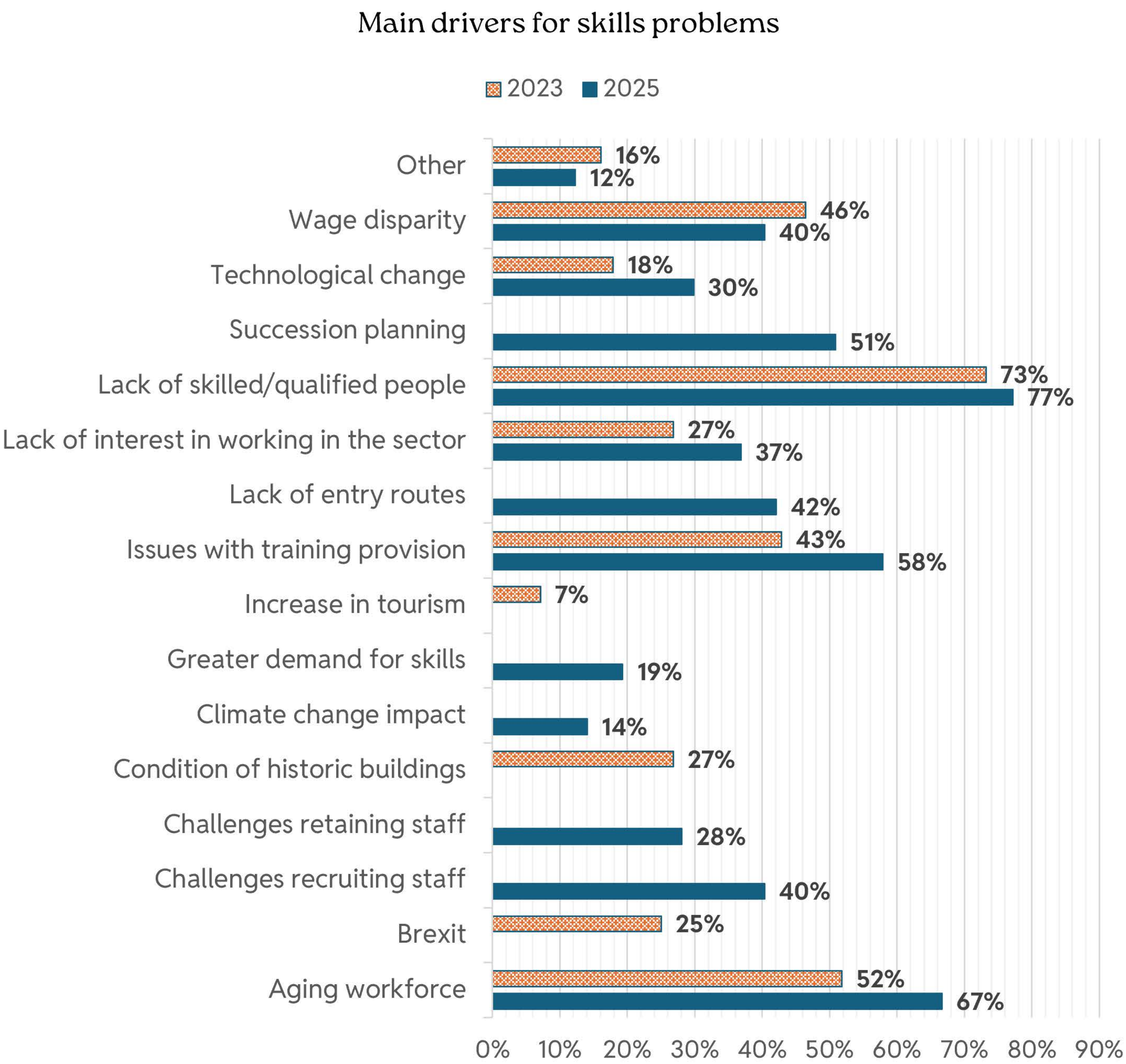

Figure 5: Percentage of employers rating the main drivers for skills problems in the heritage sector. Please note that employers chose multiple drivers. The percentages are calculated based on a total of 57 survey responses.

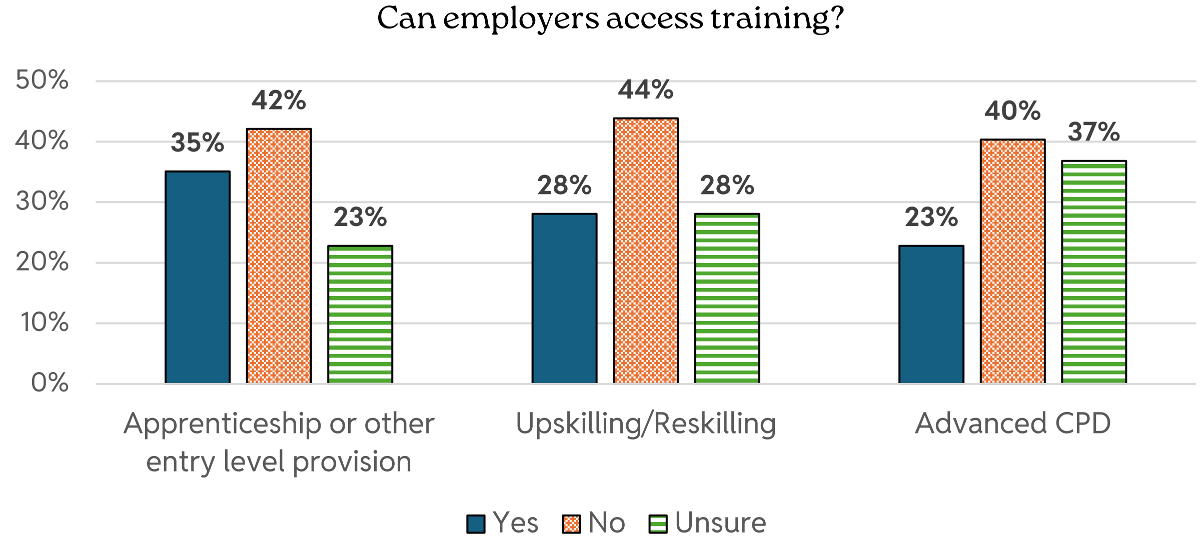

Figure 6: Percentage of employers rating whether they can access training for three areas, apprenticeships, upskilling, and advanced CPD. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 survey responses.

These results are consistent with 2023 employer responses, when 63% of employers cited financial constraints as a barrier to training employees, closely followed by lack of time, and a lack of appropriate and accessible training.

Organisational sustainability and resilience

While 44% of employers are confident that, compared to two years ago, their organisations are resilient and sustainable in the long-term, 30% are not confident at all in the resilience of their organisations (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Employers' self-reported confidence in their organisation's sustainability and resilience moving forward. Percentages are calculated based on a total of 57 responses.

Attracting future talent and improving access

There is a big divide between employers as to whether there are clear and accessible entry and progression routes or not. 51% of employers deem that the routes are clear and accessible while 49% do not.

Within this context, 39 respondents (68%) are actively taking steps to promote diversity and inclusion within the workforce. The most common strategies among them were staff training on inclusion, anti-racism and/or unconscious bias (46%), inclusive recruitment practices (42%), and promoting diverse organisational policies and values (40%). For a full breakdown, see Table 4.

Table 4: Steps that employers take to promote workforce diversity in their organisations.

Steps to promote workforce diversity	Percentage of respondents
Staff training on inclusion, anti-racism, and/or unconscious bias	46%
Inclusive recruitment practices (i.e. targeted outreach, anonymised applications, diverse interview panels, etc)	42%
Diverse organisational policies and values (i.e. inclusive language guides, flexible working, carer policies)	40%
Creating safe spaces for staff feedback and lived experience sharing	39%
Partnerships with organisations supporting underrepresented groups (i.e. grassroot groups, schools, access initiatives)	35%
Monitoring and reporting on workforce diversity (i.e. collecting and analysing demographic data)	25%
Paid internships or training schemes aimed at diverse candidates	19%
We are currently reviewing or developing our approach to diversity	12%

Percentages are based on a total of 57 survey responses.

Most employers do not engage in targeted recruitment for specific demographic groups. Those who do targeted recruitment primarily focus on engaging young people, women and career changers. For a specific breakdown of what groups organisations target see Figure 8

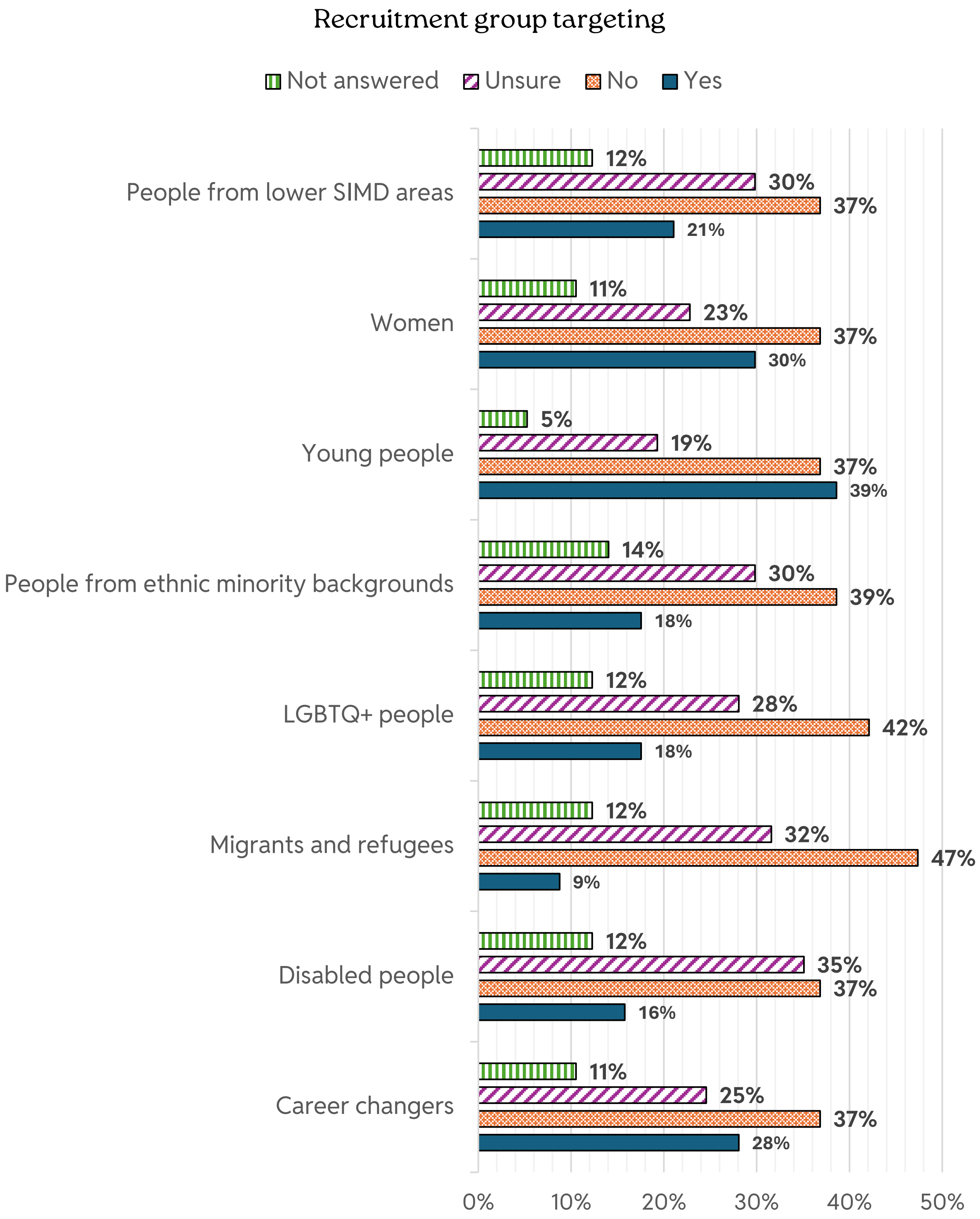

Figure 8: Percentage of employers who target different groups for recruitment. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 survey responses.

Sector strategies: OPOF and SIP

Most respondents are aware of the Skills Investment Plan (68%) and Our Past, Our Future (72%) (see Figure 9). Survey respondents are divided on the relevance of the priorities in both of these strategies. A breakdown of this can be found in the subsections below.

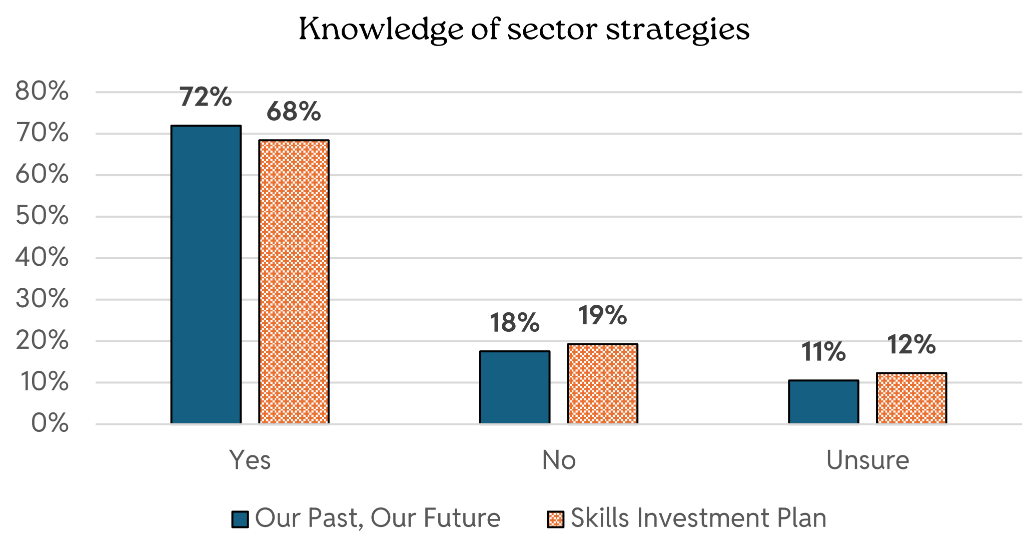

Figure 9: Percentage of employers who are aware of OPOF and the Skills Investment Plan.

Our Past, Our Future

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) is the national strategy for the historic environment. The majority of employers who responded to the survey were aware of this strategy. While opinions on the relevance of the strategy's three priorities were divided between being very relevant and slightly relevant, most employers identified that empowering resilient and conclusive communities and places as the most relevant priority of OPOF (see Figure 10).

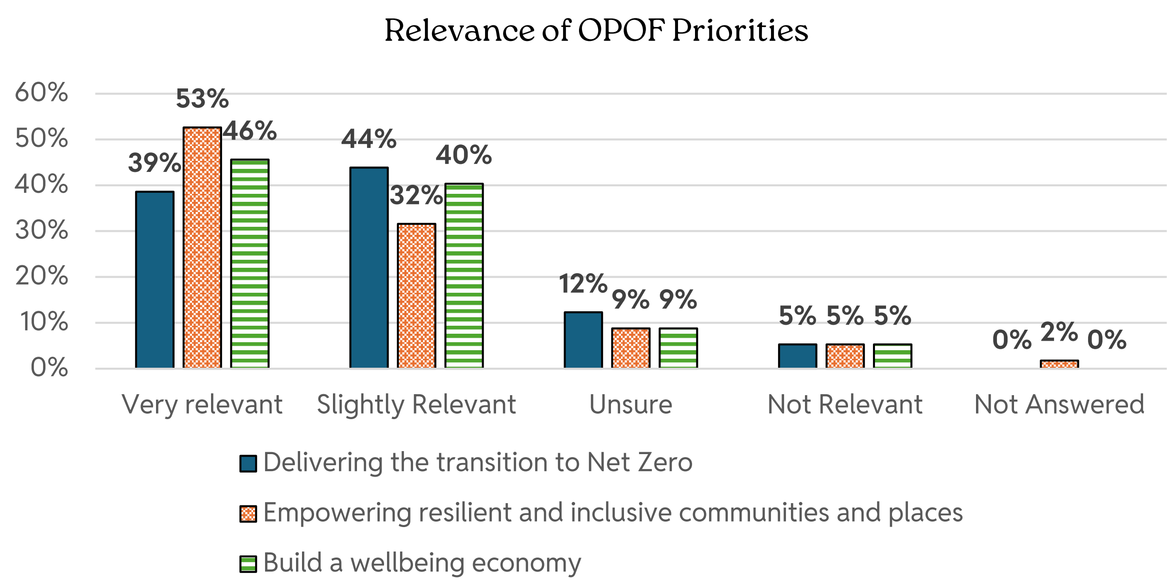

Figure 10: Employers were asked to rate how relevant they deem OPOF priorities to be. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 responses.

Skills Investment Plan

The majority of survey respondents were aware of the Skills Investment Plan (SIP) and thought that the priorities were very relevant (see Figure 11). The most relevant strategy priority according to responding employers is attracting future talent and improving access. The least relevant is fostering innovation.

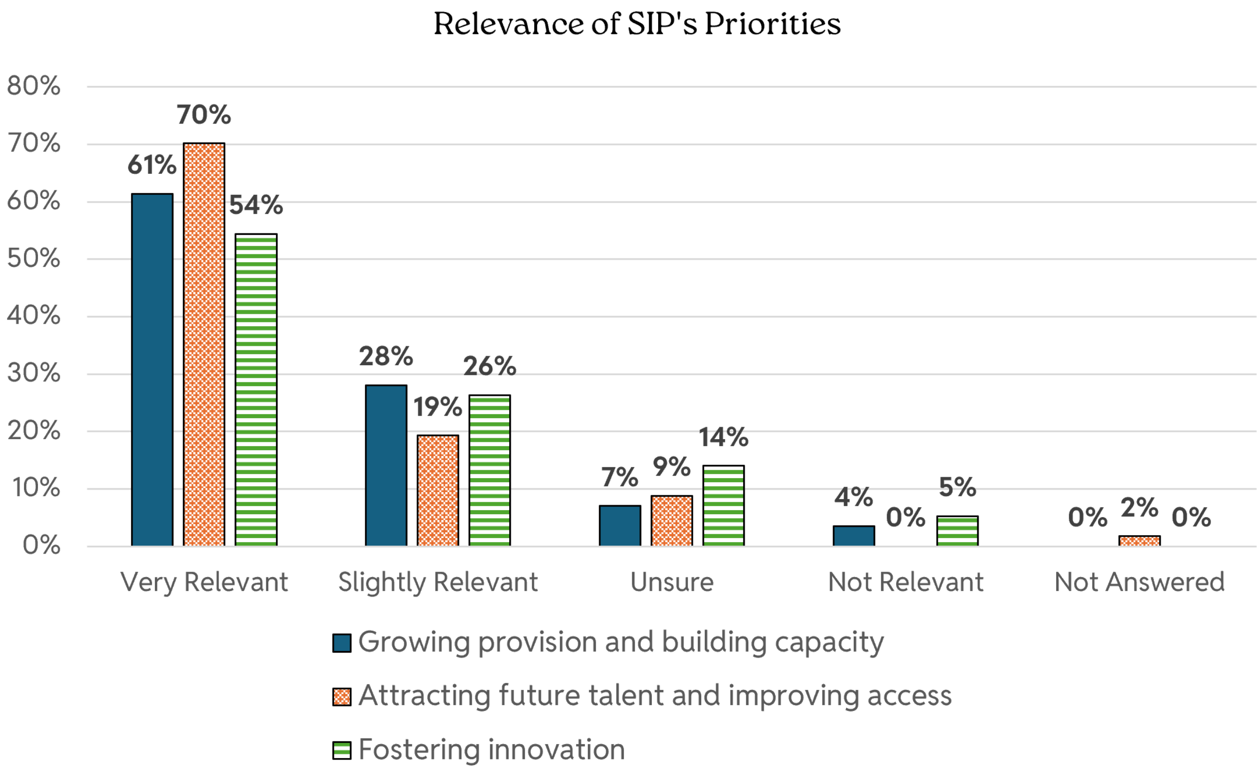

Figure 11: Employers were asked to rate the relevance of SIP priorities. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 responses.

The 11 areas of focus were identified in the consultation to refresh the SIP as being the building blocks for a sustainable skills ecosystem. When asked to rate the health for each of the 11 SIP areas of focus, performance was mostly (scores of 30% or over) marked as adequate or less than adequate. For a breakdown of the areas of focus individual health scores, see Table 5.

Table 5: Percentage of employers' rating of their perception of the health of the SIP's 11 areas of focus.

SIP Areas of Focus	1 (Poor)	2	3 (Adequate)	4	5 (Strong)
Securing sustainable resources	30%	26%	25%	11%	4%
Strong sector leadership	12%	23%	39%	12%	9%
Collaboration and alignment to support skills development	18%	30%	26%	14%	9%
Ability to advocate for skills needs and provision	16%	23%	28%	21%	9%
Appropriate accreditation and standards	16%	19%	33%	16%	11%
Careers education and pathways into the sector	26%	32%	23%	9%	5%
Stabilising, maintaining and growing specialist skills at risk	30%	32%	25%	5%	5%
Attracting future talent and developing inclusive progressive pathways	30%	25%	30%	7%	5%
Accessibility of CPD	18%	21%	30%	19%	9%
Support to improve digital literacy and skills	18%	23%	35%	12%	5%
Support to develop green skills to address climate crisis	19%	23%	37%	9%	7%

The highest rating for each area of focus is highlighted in bold. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 survey responses.

Net zero maturity

By progress towards net zero and climate adaptation we mean any work done by businesses to respond to current or expected climate change impacts and to reduce its emissions. To measure this, respondents were asked to rank themselves against five stages based on Adaptation Scotland's Climate Adaptation Capability Framework:

- Not started.
- Starting: Organisations begin to understand climate risks and start planning initial adaptation actions.

- Intermediate: More detailed assessments are conducted, and adaptation measures are integrated into policies and operations.
- Advanced: Organisations implement comprehensive adaptation strategies and monitor their effectiveness.
- Mature: Adaptation is fully embedded in all aspects of the organisation, with continuous improvement and innovation.

37% of respondents are starting in their net zero journey and 14% have not been able to start any work on this yet, see Figure 12. These organisations are all classed as micro businesses, small organisations or self-employed workers. Larger and medium sized employers were often at higher stages of net zero maturity.

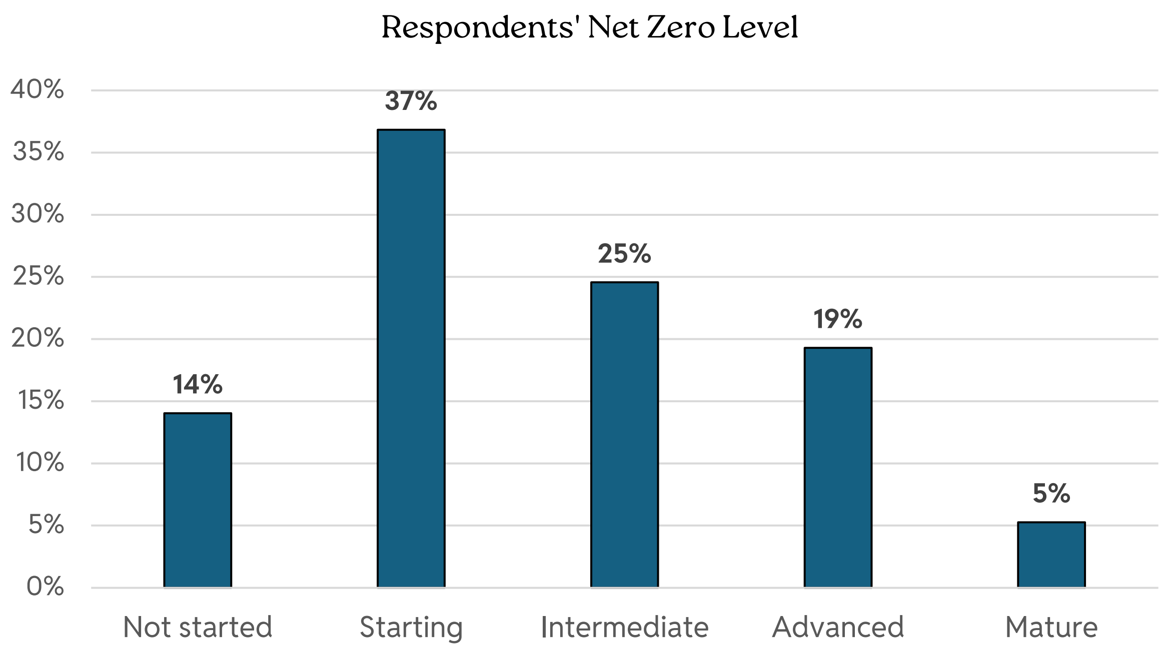

Figure 12: Percentage of employers self-reported Net Zero level. Percentages are calculated based on a total of 57 responses.

Digital literacy and maturity

By digital literacy we refer to an organisation's use of digital elements and solutions for its day-to-day work. This includes strategy and governance, programme development, marketing, research, people management, recruitment, collections management, fundraising, and finance. To rate organisations' digital literacy and maturity, we referred to Digital Culture Compass' five maturity levels and asked respondents to self-classify:

- Initial: Organisations have digital elements happening or can when they need to.
- Managed: Organisations plan and periodically review their digital elements.

- Integrated: Organisations use digital elements effectively to deliver their strategy.
- Optimising: Organisations systematically gather and review evidence of the effectiveness of digital and non-digital elements to improve their approach.
- Transforming: Organisations use digital elements to support significant innovation or substantial strategic change.

Most respondents ranked themselves as being in initial yet developed levels of digital literacy and maturity, see Figure 13. 33% are at an initial, managed or integrated level of maturity and have integrated digital elements in their operational work, 28% are at an initial to mid-level of maturity (managed stage), and 25% are at an initial state and have some digital elements taking place.

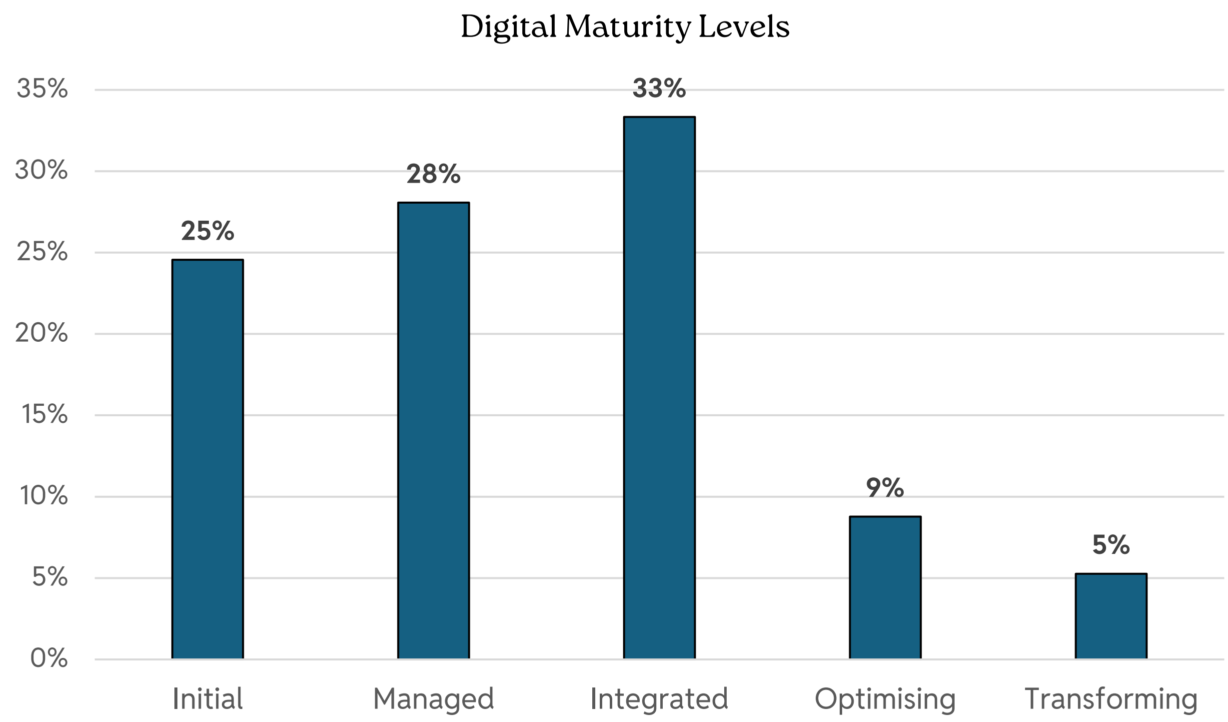

Figure 13: Percentage of employers self-reporting on their digital maturity levels. Percentages are calculated on a total of 57 responses.