

Volunteer equality diversity and inclusion demographics report 2023

Barnes, A., Leech, E. & Balmer, D.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: We would like to thank our volunteers for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire to enable us to report on the demographics of our JNCC partnered schemes. To JNCC for their comments on previous drafts, and to Anna Dupont-Crabtree for checking over the final report and writing the disclaimer. We would also like to thank Mike Toms for formatting the publication and to the Information Systems Team for extracting the volunteer email addresses and assisting with sending the questionnaire. This work was funded by JNCC.

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BTO Research Report 806

Disclaimer

Please note this report was written in 2023; we acknowledge that language and terminology related to demographics and identity have evolved and continue to do so over time. While we have retained most of the original wording to preserve the context and integrity of the data, we strive to respect ongoing changes in how communities and identities are described. **May 2026**

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Contents

- Executive summary** 3
- 1. Introduction / Why we did it** 4
- 2. Methods / What we did** 4
- 3. Results / What we found** 5
 - 3.1. UK-level results 5
 - 3.2. Survey results by scheme 14
 - 3.3 Survey results by country 30
- 4. Discussion** 44
 - 4.1. Demography of BTO-coordinated JNCC-funded schemes 44
 - 4.2. Individual scheme volunteer demography 45
 - 4.3. Individual country volunteer demography 45
 - 4.4. Future work 46
 - 4.5. Lessons learned 47
 - 4.6. Conclusion 48
- 5. References** 48
- 6. Appendix** 49

Executive summary

1. A questionnaire was sent out in August 2023 to volunteers who had participated in a JNCC-funded scheme since 1 January 2022. Of the initial 9,150 emails sent, 5,836 were opened, 2,336 clicked the link and 2,054 responses to the questionnaire were received by 30 November 2023.
2. The majority of respondents were British men based in England, were retired, aged between 65–74, spoke English, did not possess a disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment, their gender matched their sex at birth, they were heterosexual or straight, had no religion or belief, were educated to at least the level of an undergraduate degree, had not undertaken any relevant training, and had been involved in BTO-led schemes for five years or fewer.
3. The survey with the greatest number of participants was the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS; 36%), followed by BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS; 26%), then the British and Irish Ringing Scheme and Nest Record Scheme (16% and 14%, respectively). England had the highest number of respondents to the questionnaire (1,548, 75%) and Northern Ireland had the lowest (36, 2%). The overall proportion of volunteers by country in 2022 is very similar to the percentage of respondents from each country (73% in England, 17% Scotland, 7% Wales, 3% in Northern Ireland), suggesting a lack of national bias in the probability of response.
4. Subsetting the data by country and scheme highlighted some interesting differences. More respondents were involved in the BTO/JNCC/NatureScot Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) in Scotland, more people in the 45–54 age category participated in the BTO/JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) than in other surveys, and a greater diversity of ages was represented in the Ringing Scheme, with a higher percentage of respondents being full-time employed. The impacts of full-time engagement staff members being in post for longer periods were reflected in the responses to the training question.
5. At a UK level, none of the results presented in this report was particularly surprising, but it provides a vital baseline with which to assess the efficacy of future initiatives aimed at improving diversity across the BTO/JNCC volunteer surveys. The next steps outlined here include extending the survey to the wider suite of BTO schemes, contextualising results with independent data sources, developing a strategy that enables pragmatic decisions about initiatives that could help to increase diversity, rolling those initiatives out at a resolution (BTO-wide or survey-specific) that provides greatest impact and establishing mechanisms for ongoing data collection that allow us to monitor their efficacy. This development work will be overseen by the BTO working groups that have already been put in place to implement the priorities of the ‘Engaging Everyone’ and ‘Sustaining Supporters’ Action Areas of the BTO Strategy, including the ‘Becoming More Inclusive Working Group’, in liaison with other key stakeholders, such as the BTO’s Youth Advisory Panel.

1. Introduction / Why we did it

This report outlines the results from the ‘BTO – Learning about our volunteers’ questionnaire funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The questionnaire was designed to collect information on our volunteer demographics, helping scheme coordinators under the BTO/JNCC partnership understand our volunteers better and to generate a baseline by which we can measure the efficacy of initiatives implemented to increase our reach. This forms part of the wider commitment of JNCC and BTO, as set out in the BTO Strategy 2023–30 (BTO 2023), to encourage Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives among its volunteer networks and partnerships, allowing people of all backgrounds and abilities to be able to contribute to our schemes.

2. Methods / What we did

The questionnaire was emailed on 10 August 2023 using Dotdigital platform sent via Charity Digital Mail, to 9,150 volunteers who were over the age of 16 and had participated in one of the following JNCC-funded schemes since 1 January 2022: BTO/JNCC Avian Demographic Scheme (Ringling Scheme (RS) & Nest Record Scheme (NRS)), BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), BTO/JNCC/RSPB Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS), BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), BTO/JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) and the BTO/JNCC/NatureScot Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP). A further 348 emails were unsuccessfully delivered due to duplicates and people who had unsubscribed from receiving Charity Digital Mail from BTO; as many issues as possible were rectified and the majority were resent.

Every question was entirely optional and completely anonymous. Some questions asked for a single option to be selected, some allowed multiple options and some provided additional open text fields. The questions were based on a standard set of diversity and equality questions similar to those used in the official national 10-year census and by other biological recording schemes (e.g. Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, National Plant Monitoring Scheme and the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme) in equivalent questionnaires. The questionnaire also included a link to a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix) with further information about why the survey was being conducted.

The questionnaire collected information using the following questions:

- Which **schemes** do you participate in?
- **How long** have you been participating in schemes?
- Which **country** are you based in?
- Which BTO **training** events have you accessed in the last two years?
- Which **age** category are you in?
- Which term best describes your **gender**?
- Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself? (**sexuality**)
- Is your **gender identity the same as the sex you were registered at birth**?
- What is your highest level of academic **education** (so far)?
- How would you describe your **employment status**?
- What is your **household’s main language**?
- I would describe my **ethnic origin** as ...
- Do you consider yourself to have a **disability**, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment?
- If yes, please indicate the **type of disability**, impairment or condition which applies to you: If you have more than one type of impairment / condition, please tick all that apply.
- What is your **religious identity** and/or belief?

3. Results / What we found

Of the initial 9,150 emails sent, 5,836 were opened, 2,336 clicked the link and a total of 2,054 responses to the questionnaire were received by 30 November 2023, with the data downloaded on the 8 January 2024. The following sections display the breakdown of responses in each demographic category: i) as a composite of all respondents across the whole of the UK, ii) by each individual scheme coordinated by BTO (Ringing Scheme, Nest Record Scheme, Breeding Bird Survey, Waterways Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey, Seabird Monitoring Programme and Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme) and ii) by each country (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) where possible; there were not enough data to analyse the responses from the Channel Islands and Isle of Man alone.

‘Prefer not to say’ was an option given to respondents in all the questions; ‘No response’ was only assigned by staff where no response was provided. The ‘Other’ category differs between demographic questions and details of composition are given within the relevant section and/or figure legend; it is generally used as a catch-all for answers provided in the open text fields, including negative feedback, non-sensible responses, and answers that cannot be easily translated to individual categories provided in the questionnaire.

3.1. UK-level results

The greatest number of respondents took part in the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS; 1,117), followed by the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS; 812), with reasonable numbers also taking part in the Ringing Scheme (504) and Nest Record Scheme (428; Figure 1). The majority of respondents have been taking part in BTO schemes for five years or fewer (31%; Figure 2). It is worth noting that this question is based on the longest time in any one scheme and cannot be split by scheme if the respondent takes part in more than one.

75% of respondents were based in England (1,548), 15% respondents were based in Scotland (312) and 6% were based in Wales (126), with only 2% (36) respondents based in Northern Ireland (Figure 3).

Almost half of the respondents did not respond to whether they had completed/taken part in BTO training (47%) and 6% of those who did stated that they had not undertaken any BTO training (Figure 4); of those who had, 27% had taken part in ‘Online bird ID course’, 11% in ‘Online Survey skills/methods training’ and 7% had taken part in ‘In person training’. A number of other respondents had undertaken training that was not administered directly by BTO staff, including ringing training and BTO YouTube videos (Figure 4).

In total, 71% of the respondents identified as men (1,460) and 26% as Women (537), five selected Non-binary, one Agender and one Genderqueer (Figure 5). The majority (95%) of respondents had the same gender assigned at birth (Figure 6) and 89% identified as heterosexual or straight (Figure 7).

The 65–74 aged category was best represented, accounting for 36% of respondents (743), 26% were aged between 55–64 (530) and 17% were 75–84 (342; Figure 8), with 61% of the respondents being retired as their employment status (Figure 9). Approximately 63% had attended university and obtained at least an undergraduate degree (Figure 10).

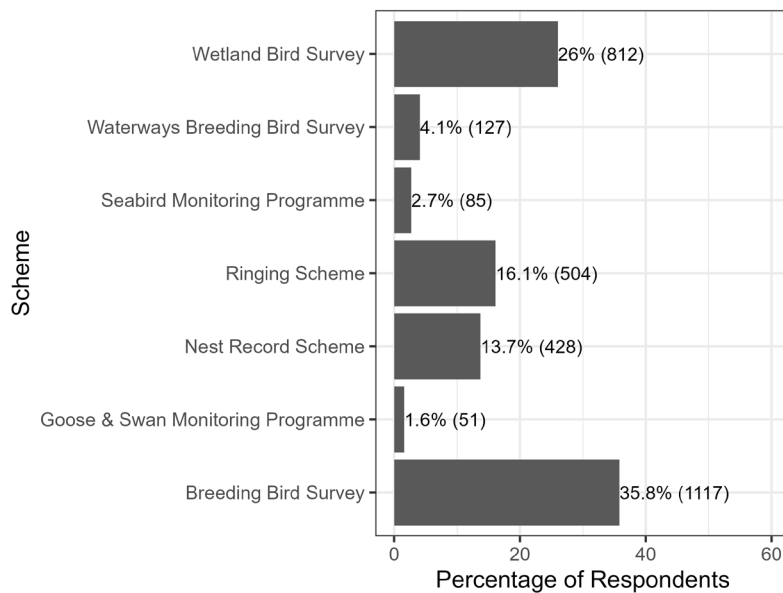
Over 98% of the respondents spoke English as the household’s main language (2,017; Figure 11) and 92% described their ethnic origin as British, which includes English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh (1,879; Figure 12). No religion or belief was held by 45% (923) of respondents, 29% were Christian (604), which includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations (Figure 13). A further nine options were added to the 10 provided via free text fields.

The majority of the respondents (82%) did not have a disability (Figure 14) and therefore did not respond to the type of disability question (Figure 15). Of the 15% (311) that did have a disability, 335 responded provided detail of its nature, with some respondents selecting more than option; the 371 responses received translates to 42% of respondents having a ‘Long-standing injury or health condition’, 32% having a ‘Physical impairment/condition’ and 12% having a ‘Mental health

impairment/condition' (Figure 16). Old age, and associated ailments of old age were categorised as a 'Physical impairment/condition'. 'Neurodivergence' covered autism and dyslexia, though some respondents may have also categorised these under 'Learning difference, impairment, disability or difficulty'.

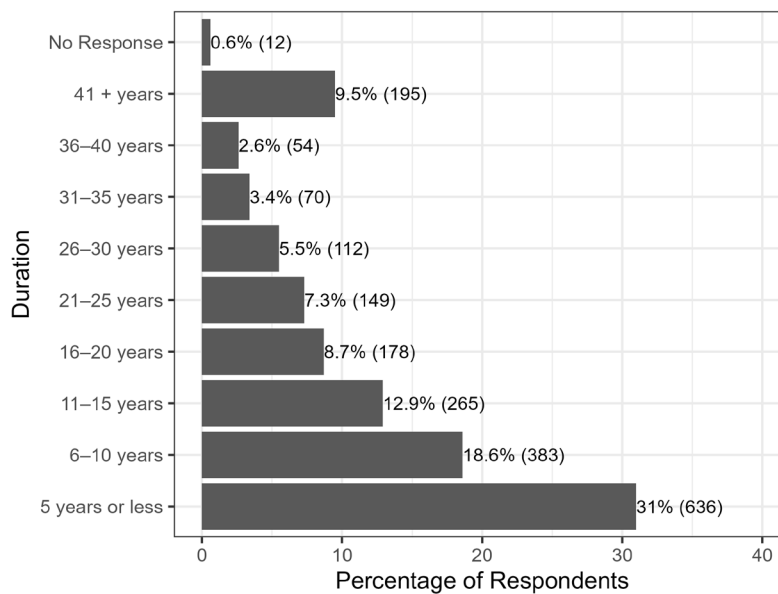
3.1.1. Scheme

Figure 1. The schemes that respondents who completed the survey take part in, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note that people could select more than one, so numbers may be more than the total number of respondents.



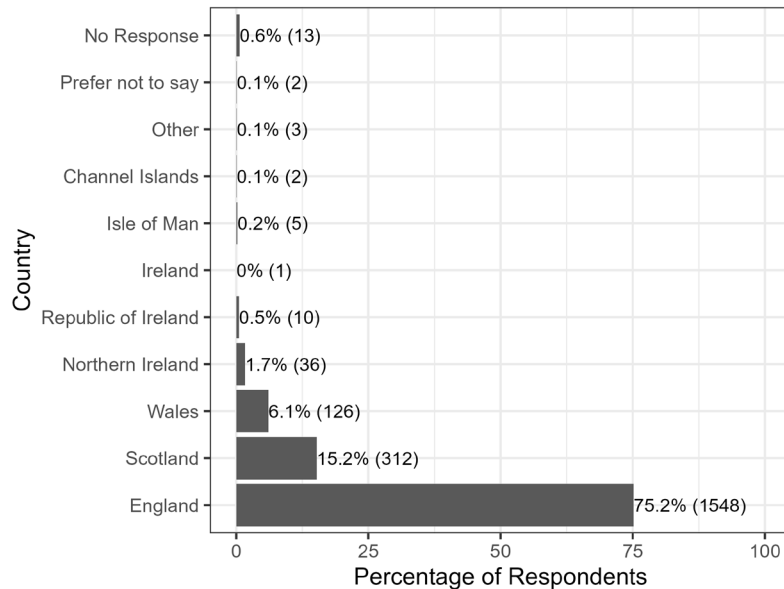
3.1.2. Length of time in the scheme

Figure 2. The length of time respondents who completed the survey have been taking part in JNCC-funded schemes as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



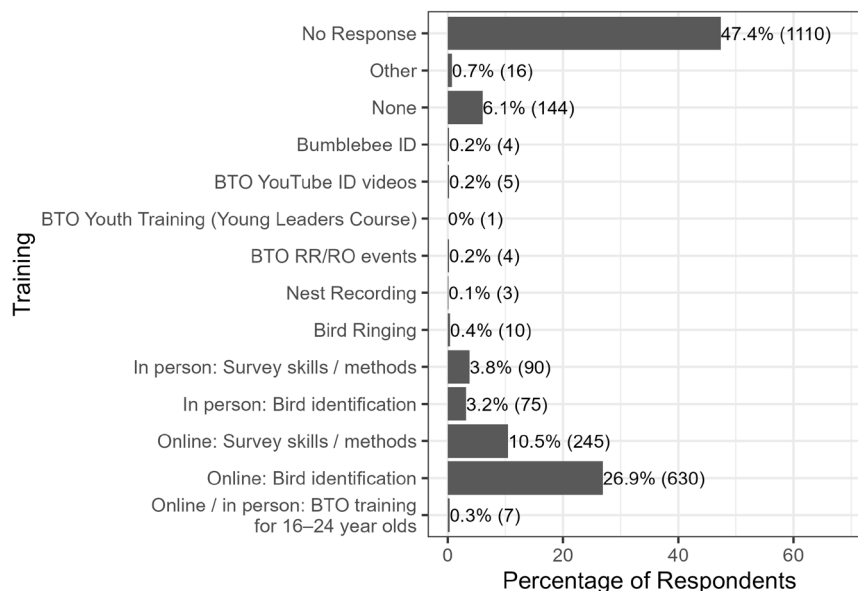
3.1.3. Country

Figure 3. The country respondents who completed the survey are based in, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'Other' refers to 'Austria', 'Sweden' and 'Gibraltar'; The response 'Cornwall' was included in England and some respondents stated more than one country so the total will be higher. Note BTO/JNCC-funded schemes do not operate outside the UK.



3.1.4. Training

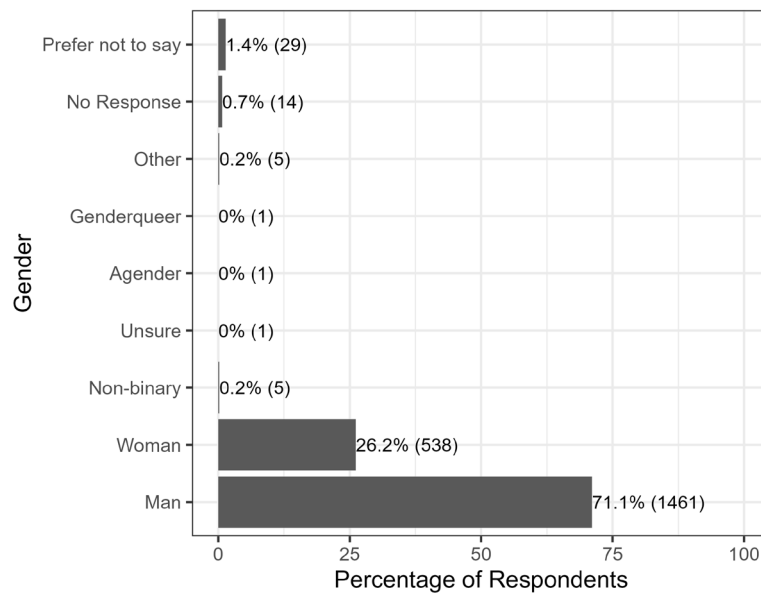
Figure 4. Training events that the respondents who completed the survey attended in the last two years as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' is answers that did not specify a course or one that fit into the above categories, e.g. Meet the BTO, training provided outside BTO etc.; 'None' was specified by respondent, whereas 'No Response' comprises blank responses.



3.1.5. Gender

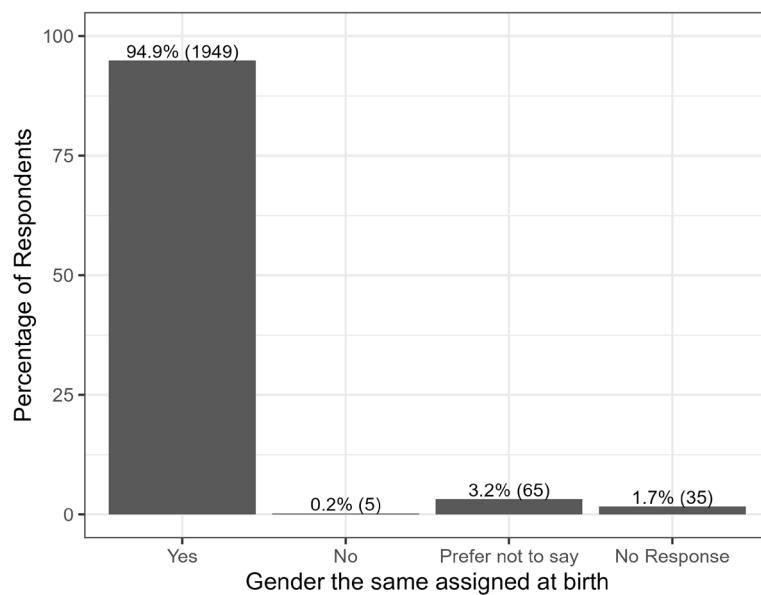
Out of the main options: 'Man', 'Non-binary', 'Woman', 'Unsure', 'Prefer not to say' and 'Other' with a free text field, below are the responses to the question, 'What best describes your gender?'. 'Other' stated in the graph, includes negative feedback regarding the question, such as the irrelevance of the question towards bird recording/surveys and BTO.

Figure 5. The gender of the respondents who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' in this case refers to non-sensible answers and negative feedback, 'No Response' comprises blank responses.



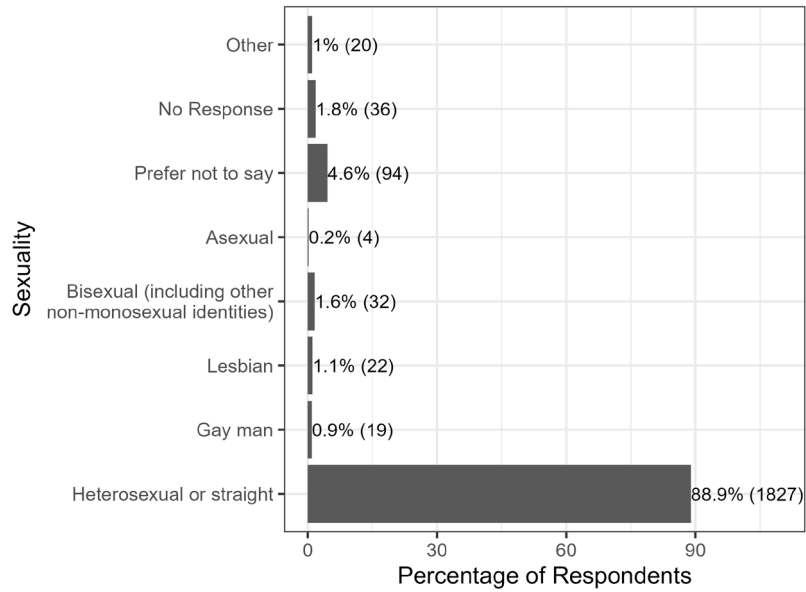
3.1.6. Gender the same as assigned at birth

Figure 6. Whether the gender of the respondents who completed the survey was the same as assigned at birth, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'No Response' comprises blank responses.



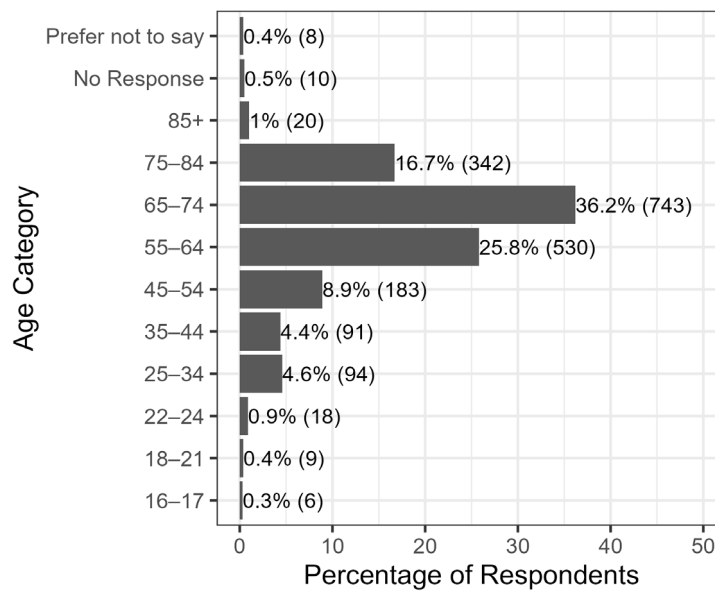
3.1.7. Sexuality

Figure 7. The sexuality of the respondents who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' in this case refers to negative feedback, 'No Response' comprises blank responses.



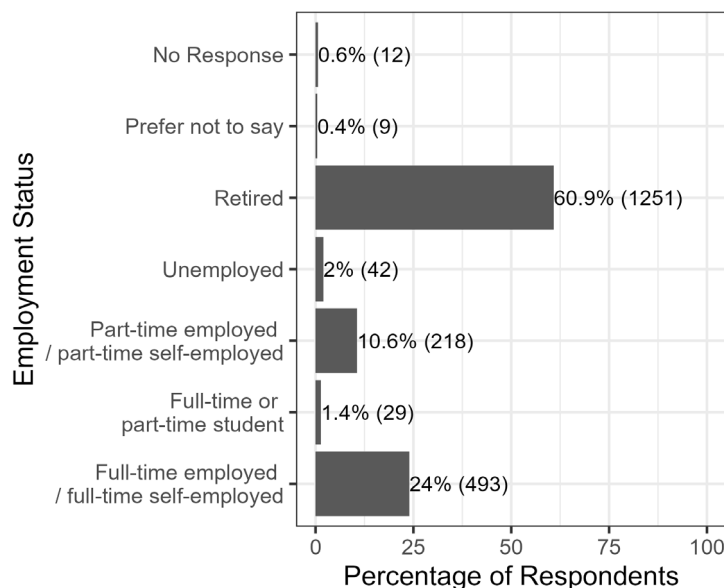
3.1.8. Age

Figure 8. The age categories of people who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



3.1.9. Employment status

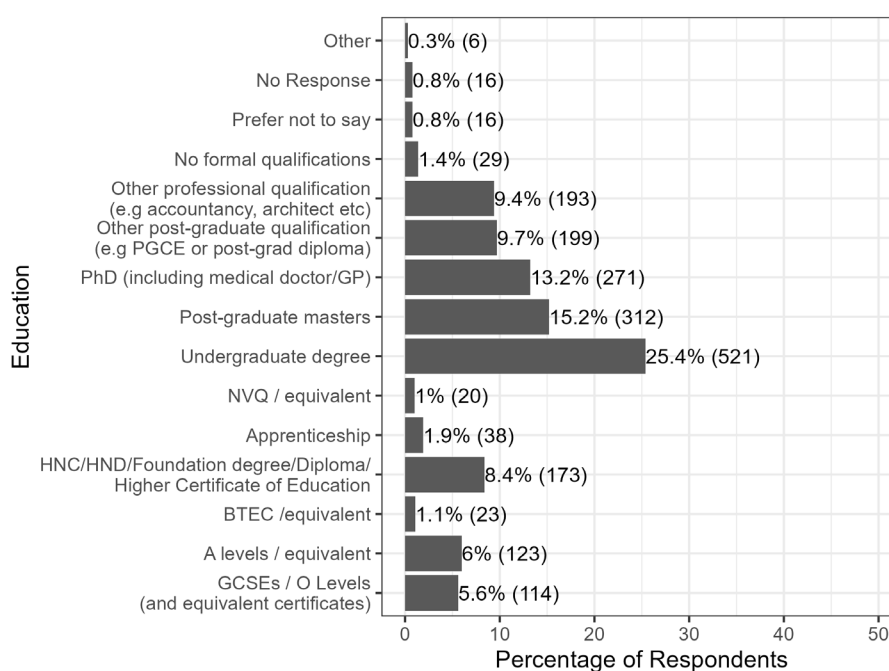
Figure 9. The employment status of the respondents who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



3.1.10. Education

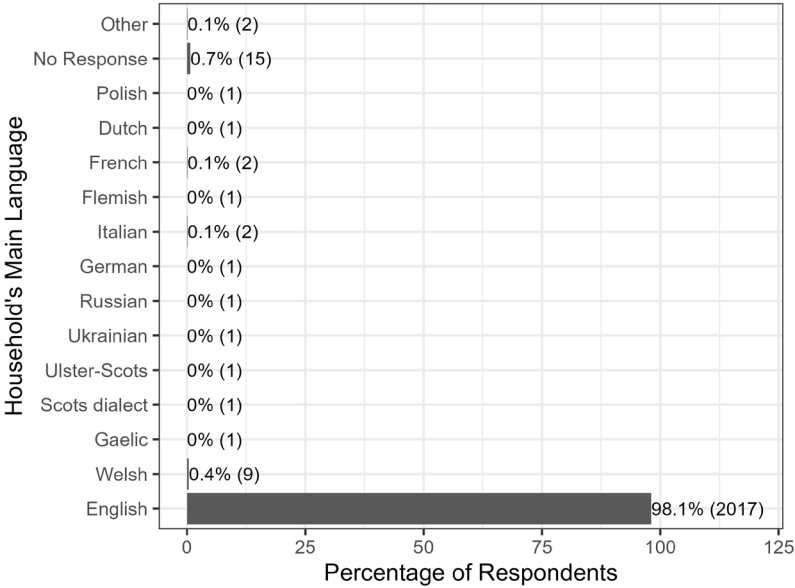
‘Other post-graduate qualification (e.g. PGCE or post-graduate diploma)’ includes FPath (Royal Coll. of Pathologists) and ‘Other professional qualification (e.g. accountancy, architect etc.)’ includes ACIB and FRICS. Professors were assumed to have a PhD. City & Guilds were categorised as NVQ equivalents. ‘Regular in-house trading in nature conservation management’ was included in No Formal Qualifications. ‘Other’ includes negative feedback from three respondents, two years at Sandhurst, Church of England Reader Certificate (Lay minister) and Fellowship of the Royal Entomological Society.

Figure 10. The highest education achieved of the respondents who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note specific qualifications were grouped into the relevant category (see above), ‘Other’ includes negative and non-sensible responses.



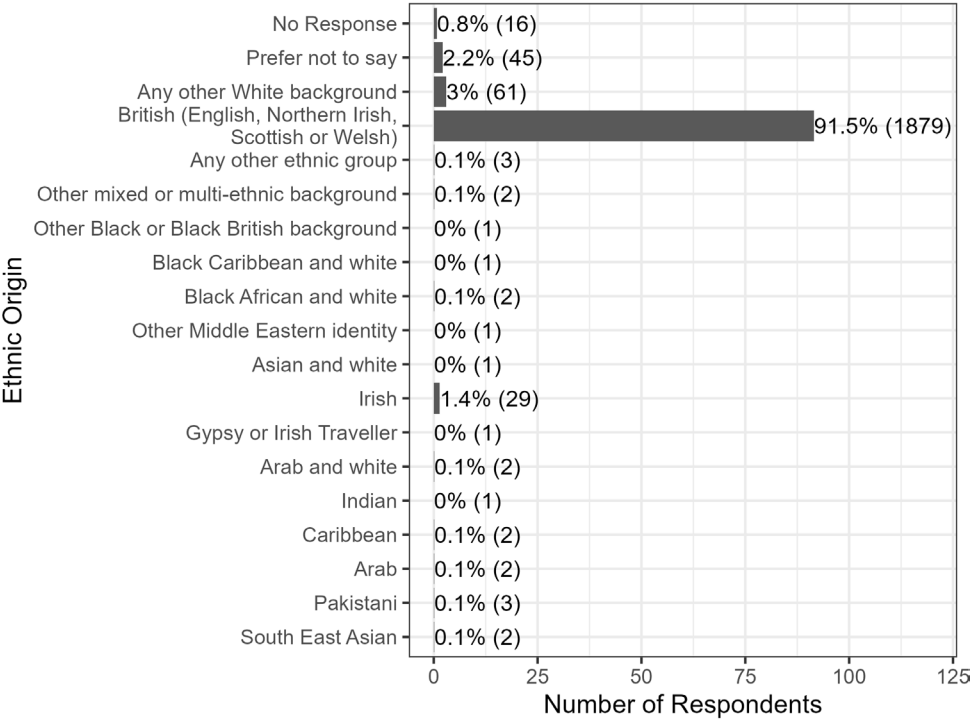
3.1.11. Household's main language

Figure 11. The main language spoken in the households of the respondents who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'Other' includes negative feedback on the options and one letter 'V'; 'Yorkshire' was included in English. Note some respondents stated more than one language.



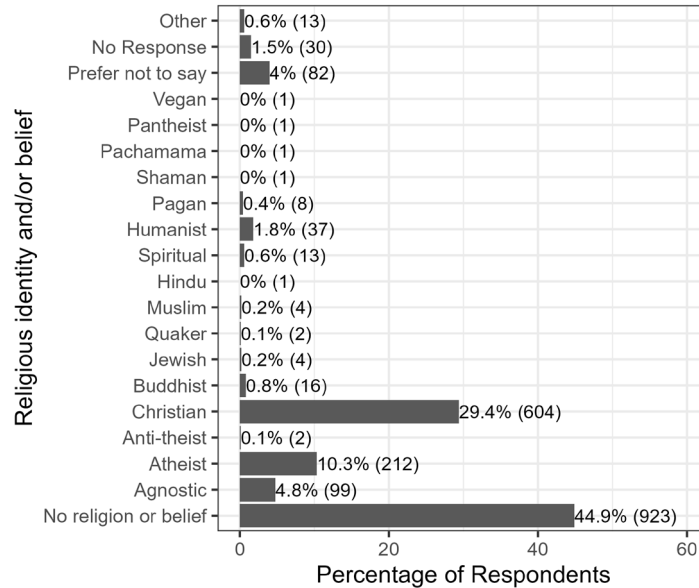
3.1.12. Ethnic origin

Figure 12. The ethnic origins of the respondents who completed the survey as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



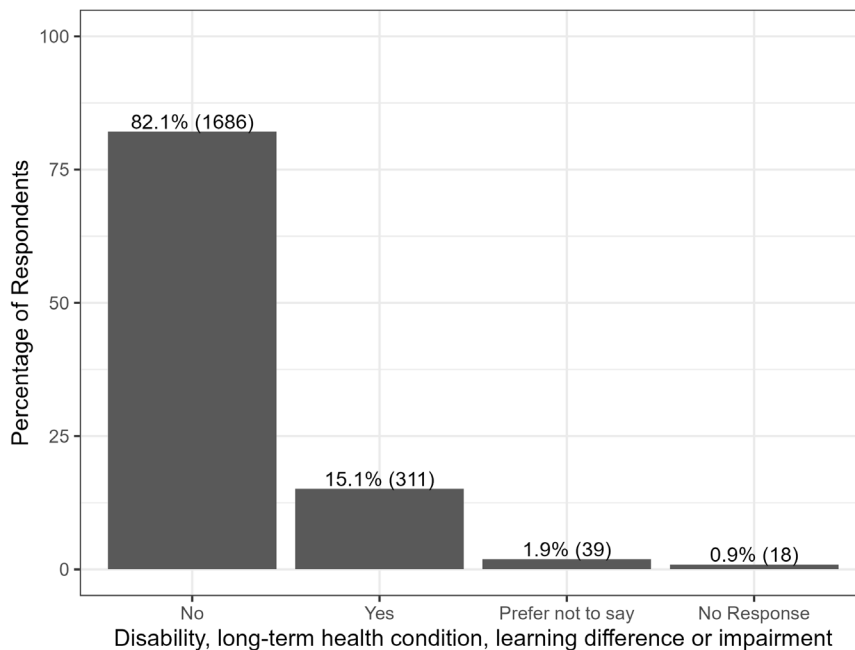
3.1.13. Religious identity and/or belief

Figure 13. The religious beliefs and/or identities of the respondents who completed the survey as and percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'Christian' includes the Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations. Note 'Other' includes answers from 13 respondents that did not specify a religion/belief and could not be categorised, and negative responses.



3.1.14. Disability

Figure 14. Whether the respondents who completed the survey consider themselves as having a disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



3.1.15. Type of disability

Figure 15. The type of disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment the survey respondents consider themselves as having, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'None' was specified by respondent, whereas 'No Response' comprise blank responses.

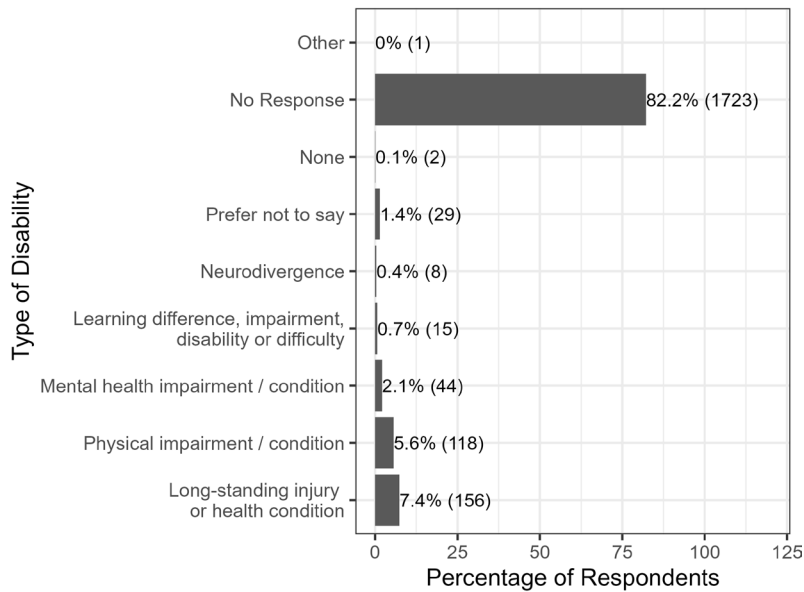
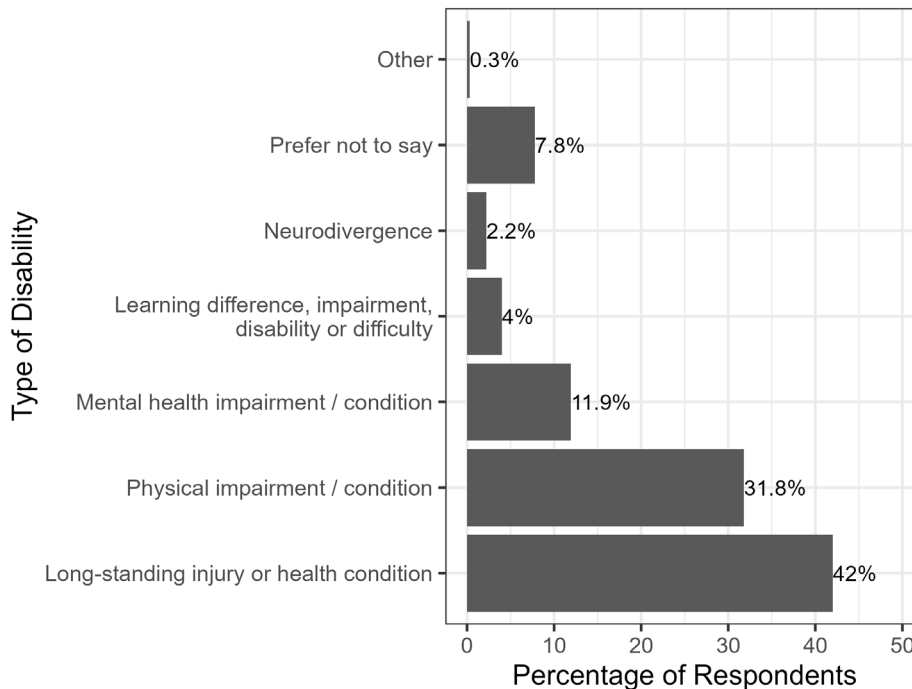


Figure 16. The percentage of respondents who stated a type of disability once blank responses in Figure 15 were removed. Note that four respondents stated they did not have a disability/no response or selected prefer not to say to the previous question, but supplied a type of disability.



3.2. Survey results by scheme

The majority of respondents were based in England for most surveys; the Ringing Scheme (74%), Nest Record Scheme (75%), BBS (76%), WBBS (70%), WeBS (69%) and SMP (52%). The exception is GSMP, where the majority are based in Scotland (57%; Figure 17). The majority of respondents gave no response to the question about training (43–66%). Where there was a response, SMP and GSMP volunteers had undertaken the least BTO training (Figure 18) and across all schemes, the most commonly undertaken type of training was ‘Online bird identification’ (16–30%), followed by ‘Online survey methods’ (7–13%).

The majority of respondents across all schemes were ‘Men’ (70–80%; Figure 19), around 95% were assigned the same gender at birth (Figure 20) and 86–90% were heterosexual or straight (Figure 21). The highest response was from respondents in the 65–74 age category (RS 26%, NRS 29%, BBS 39%, WBBS 36%, WeBS 39%, SMP 27%, GSMP 35%) with most being above 55 years of age (RS 66%, NRS 71%, BBS 83%, WBBS 89%, WeBS 82%, SMP 54%, GSMP 77%); the exception was SMP, where the highest percentage of respondents fell into the 45–54 age category (22%; Figure 22).

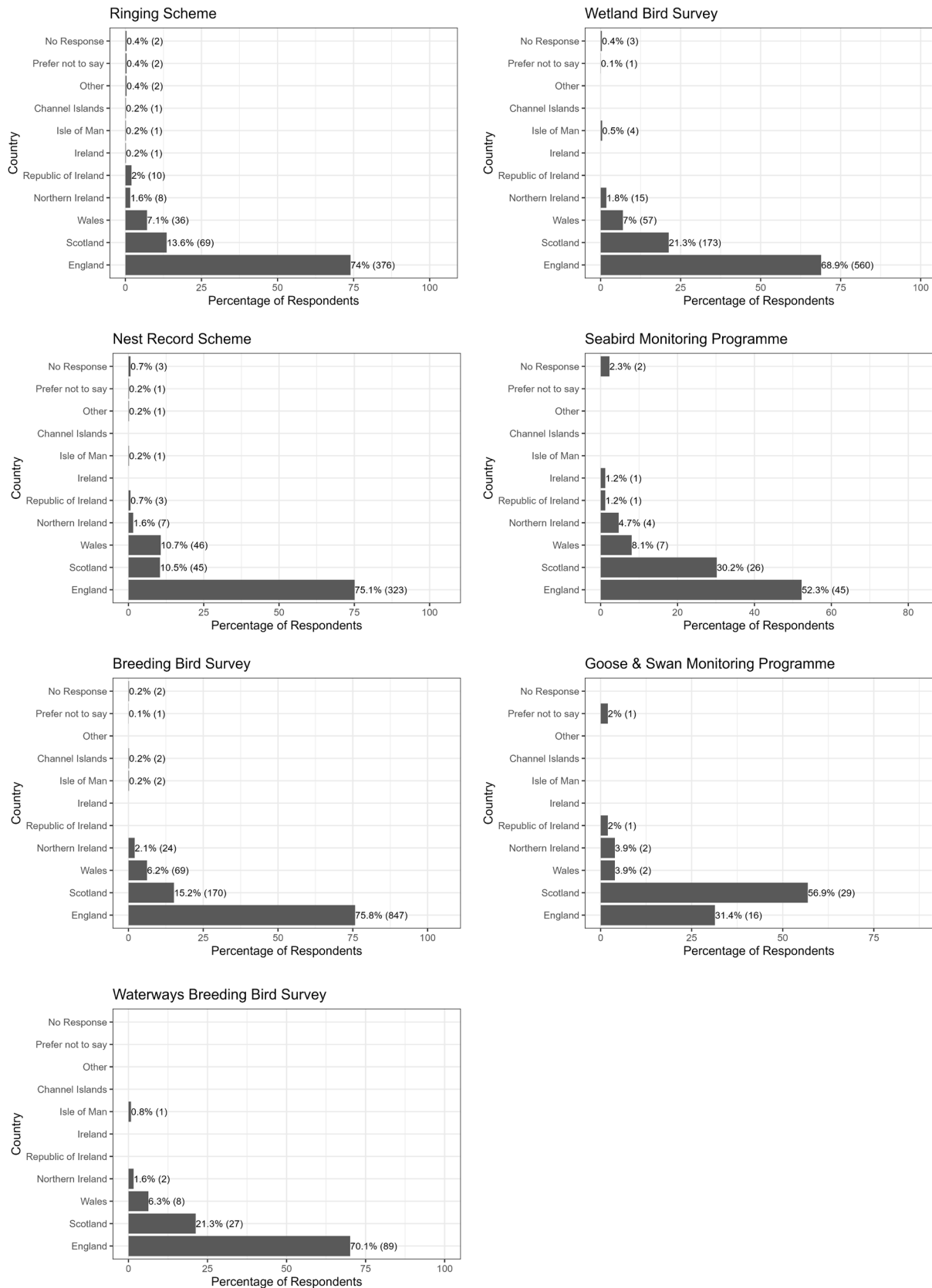
A much greater percentage of participants were retired than in full-time employment/self-employed with respect to BBS (64% cf. 21%), WBBS (70% cf. 17%) and WeBS (63% cf. 22%; Figure 23). For RS, NRS, and GSMP the percentage of retired and full-time employed/self-employed were closer (46% cf. 35%; 53% cf. 32%; 47% cf. 33% respectively), and more SMP participants were full-time employed/self-employed (49%) than were retirees (33%). The range of respondents across all schemes with an undergraduate degree was 24–27%, with the exception of GSMP, where the figure stands at 39% (Figure 24).

The main household language across all schemes was English (96–99%; Figure 25), the majority of respondents were British (87–93%; Figure 26) and had no religion or belief (40–53%), with the second highest religion/belief being Christian followed by Atheist (Figure 27).

The majority of respondents had no disability (76–80%). The RS displayed the highest number of respondents reporting a disability (20%), followed by the NRS (19%) then SMP with 18% (Figure 28). Where a type of disability was indicated, the most frequent for the RS, NRS, BBS and WBBS was a ‘Long standing injury/health condition’ (44%, 40%, 45%, 41%, respectively), whereas for WeBS and SMP, this category was equivalent to ‘Physical impairment/condition’ (38% and 26%, respectively), and the GSMP volunteer base included more people with a ‘Physical impairment/condition’ (40%) than ‘A long-standing injury or health condition’ (20%; Figure 30).

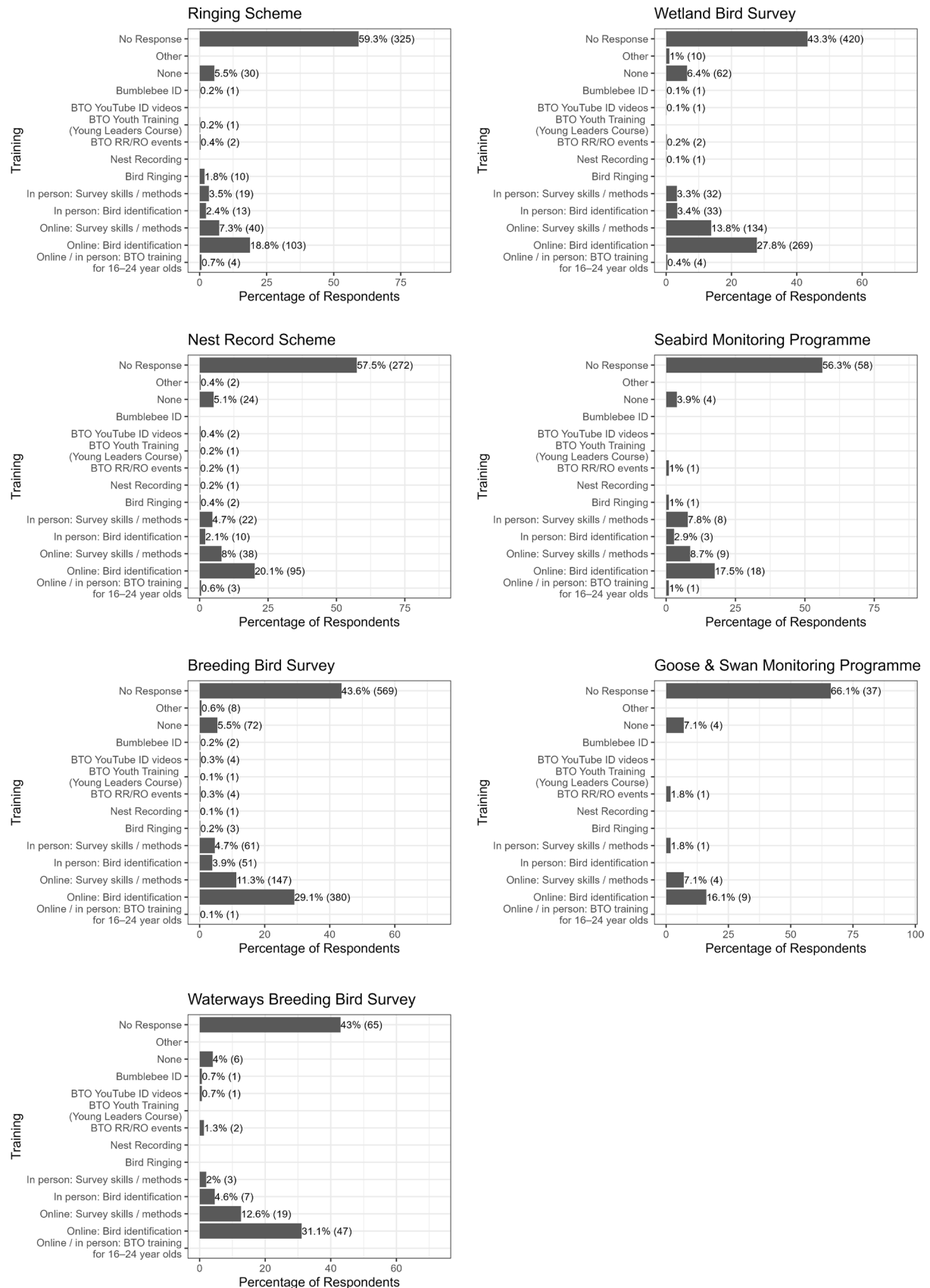
3.2.1. Country

Figure 17. The country respondents who completed the survey are based, separated by scheme, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note BTO/JNCC-funded schemes do not operate outside the UK. 'Other' includes 'Sweden', 'Austria' and 'Gibraltar'; 'Cornwall' was included in England as there was only one who differentiated it from England.



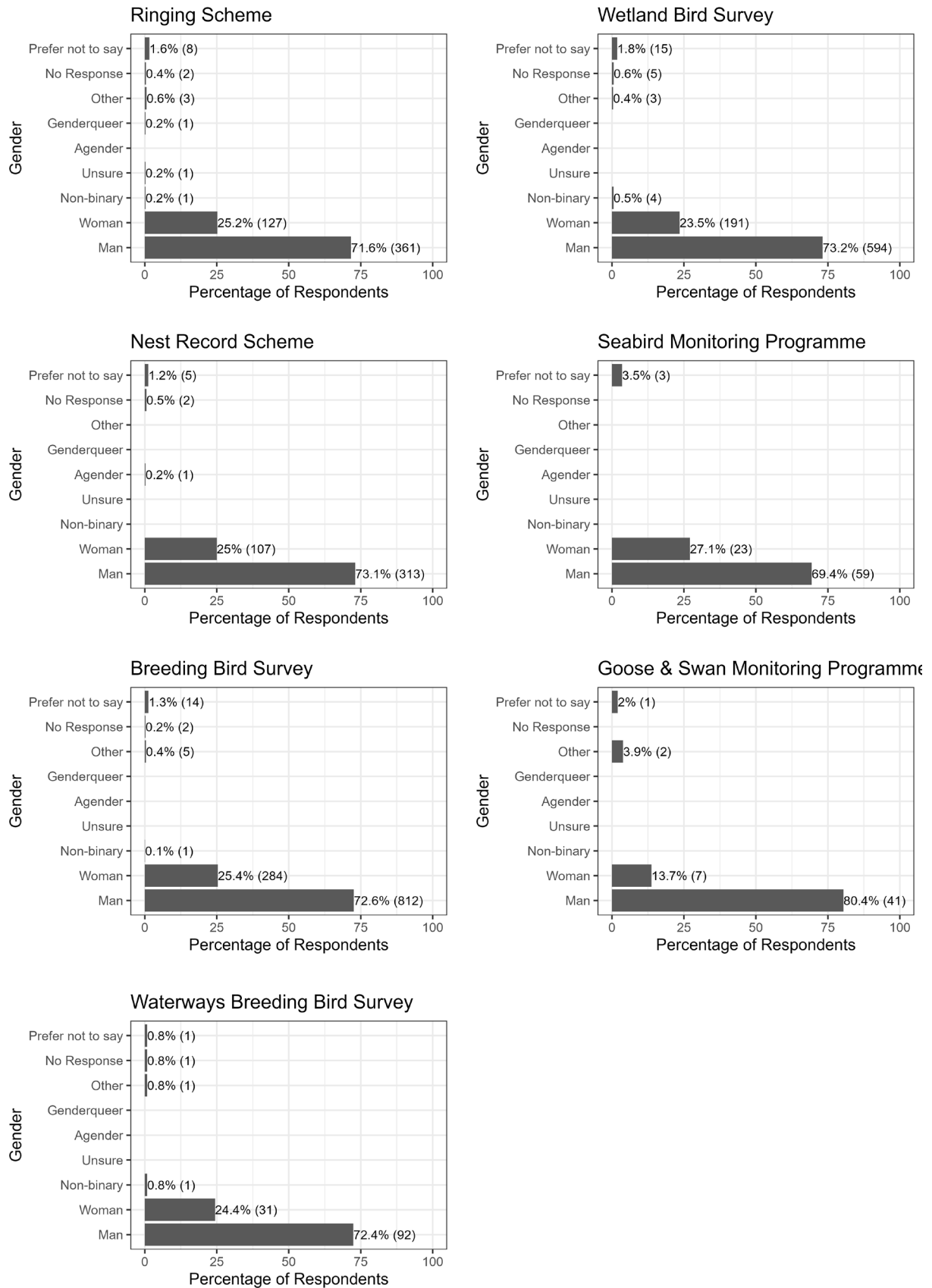
3.2.2. Training

Figure 18. Training events that the respondents who completed the survey attended in the last two years for each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' comprises answers that did not specify a course or one that fitted into the above categories, e.g. Meet the BTO, training provided outside BTO etc.; 'None' was specified by respondent, whereas 'No Response' denotes blank responses.



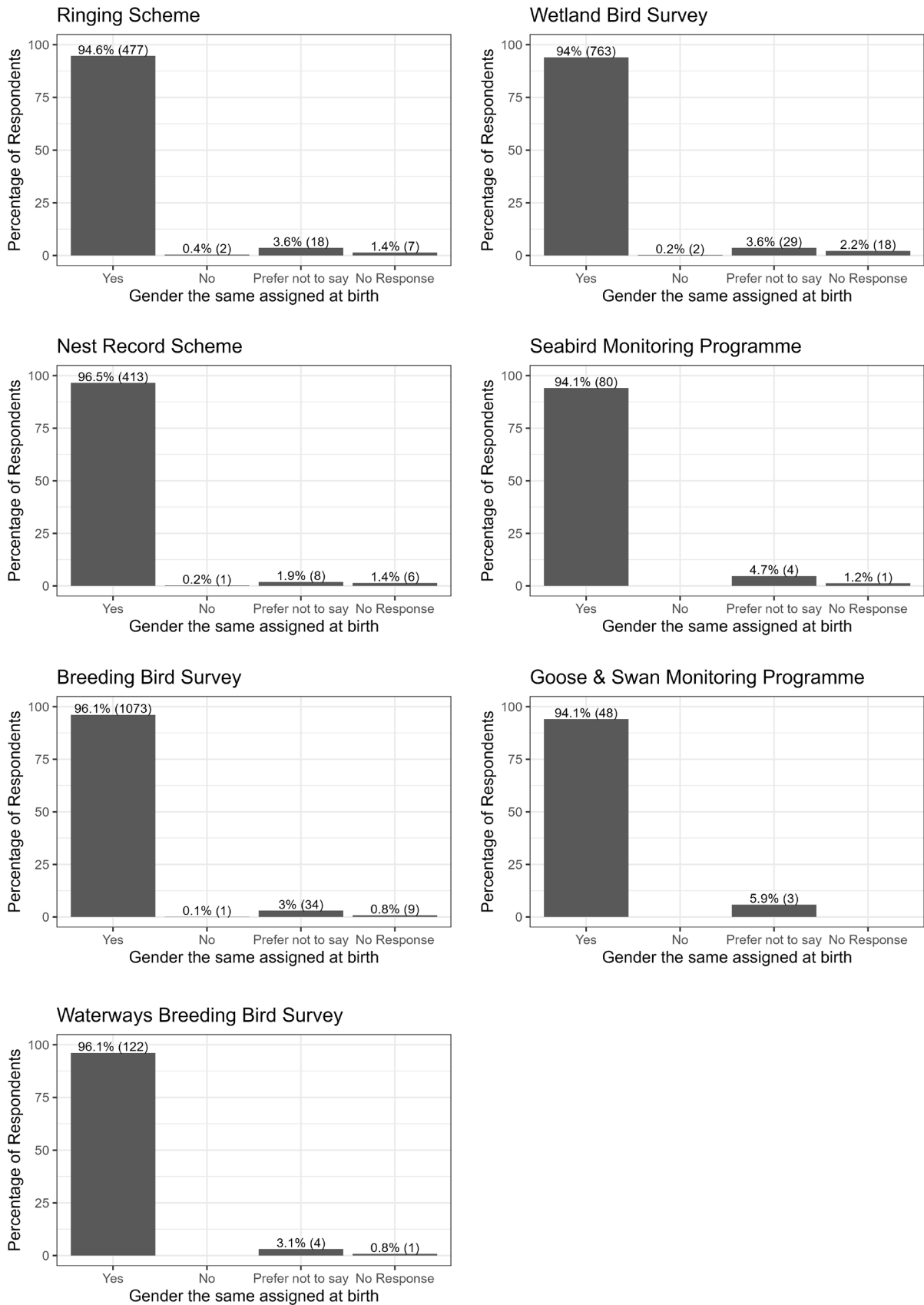
3.2.3. Gender

Figure 19. The gender of the respondents who completed the survey for each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' in this case refers to non-answers and negative feedback.



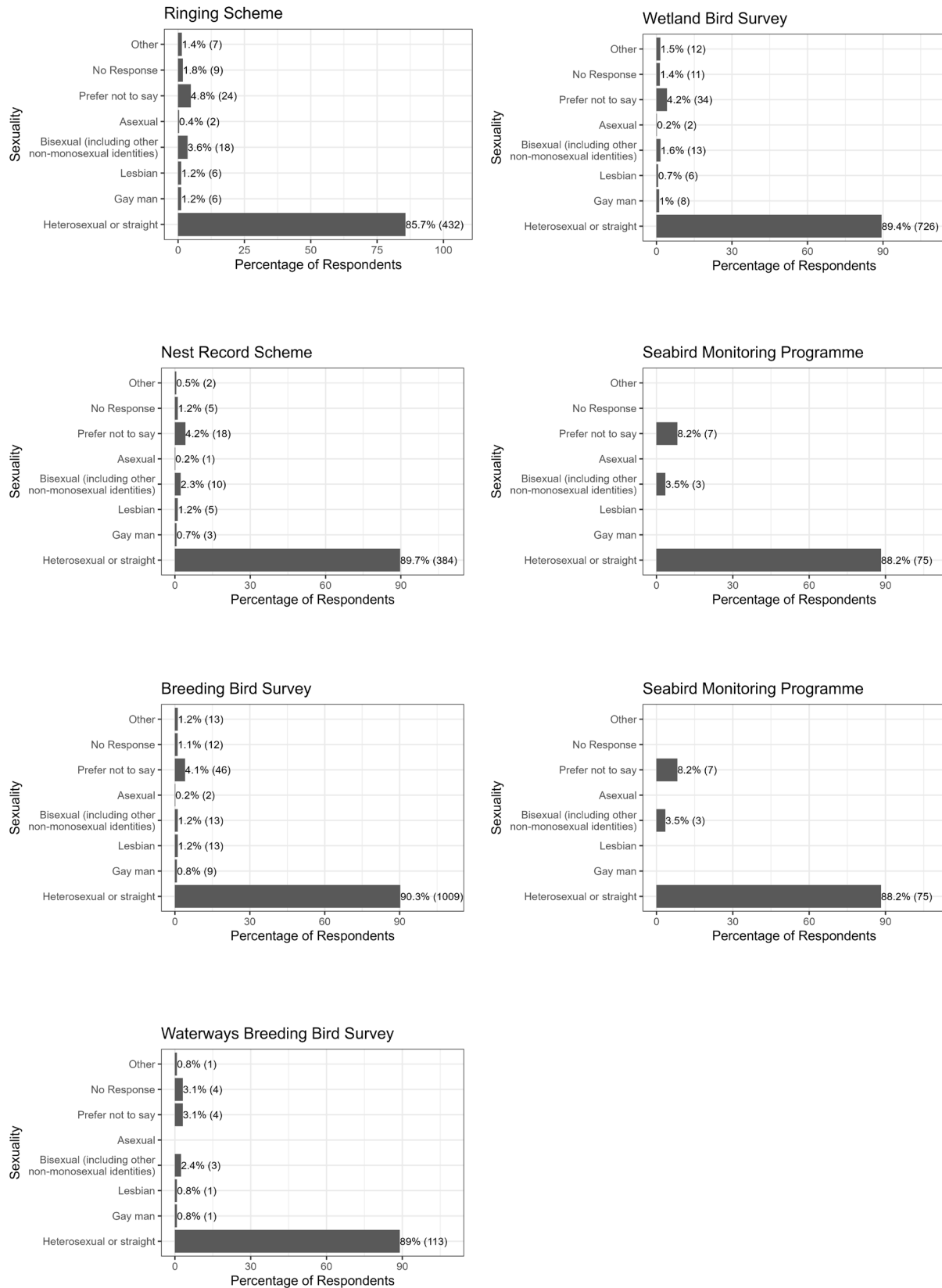
3.2.4. Gender the same as assigned at birth

Figure 20. Whether the gender of the respondents who completed the survey was the same as assigned at birth in each scheme (actual numbers in brackets).



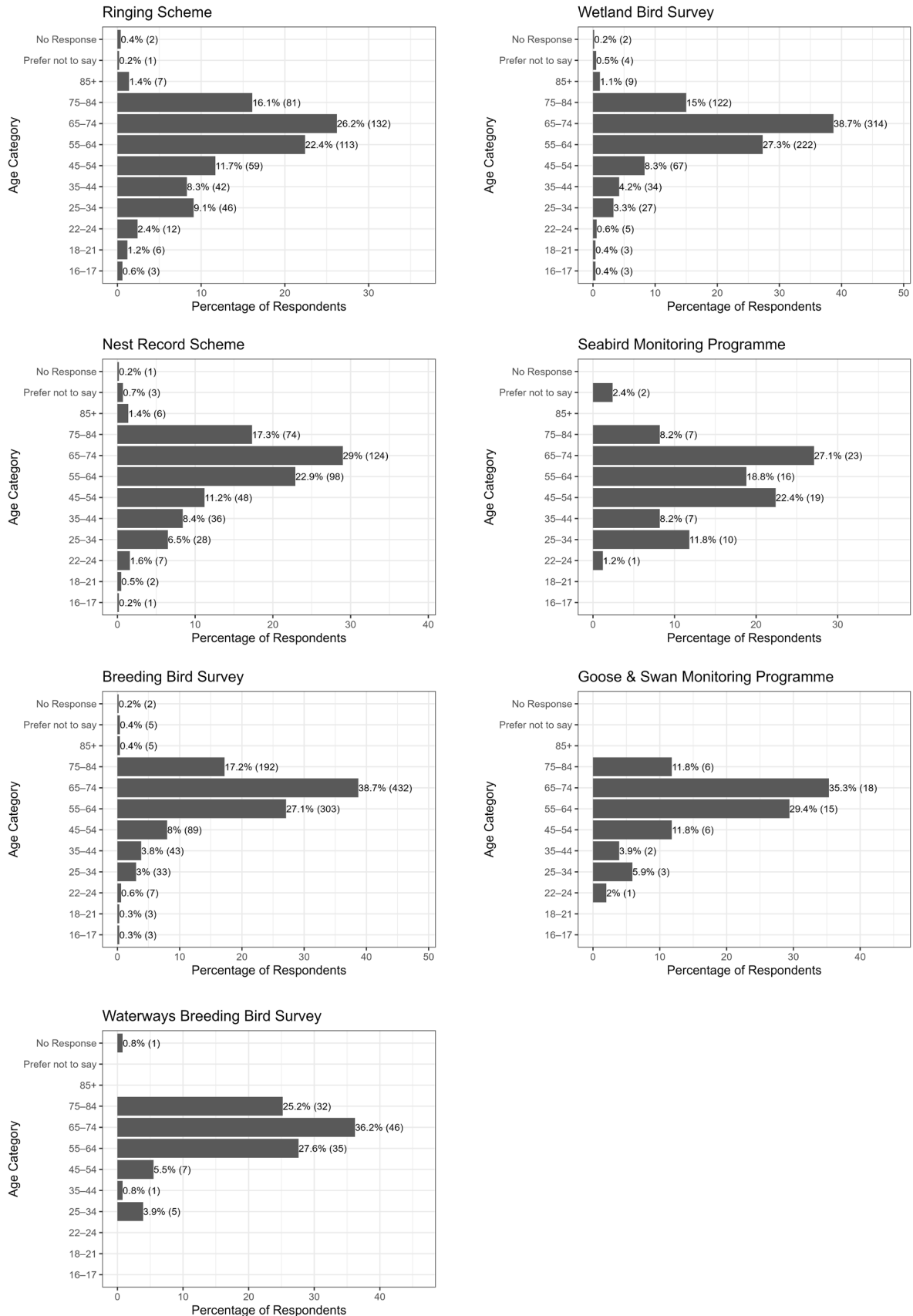
3.2.5. Sexuality

Figure 21. The sexuality of the respondents who completed the survey for each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' in this case refers to negative feedback.



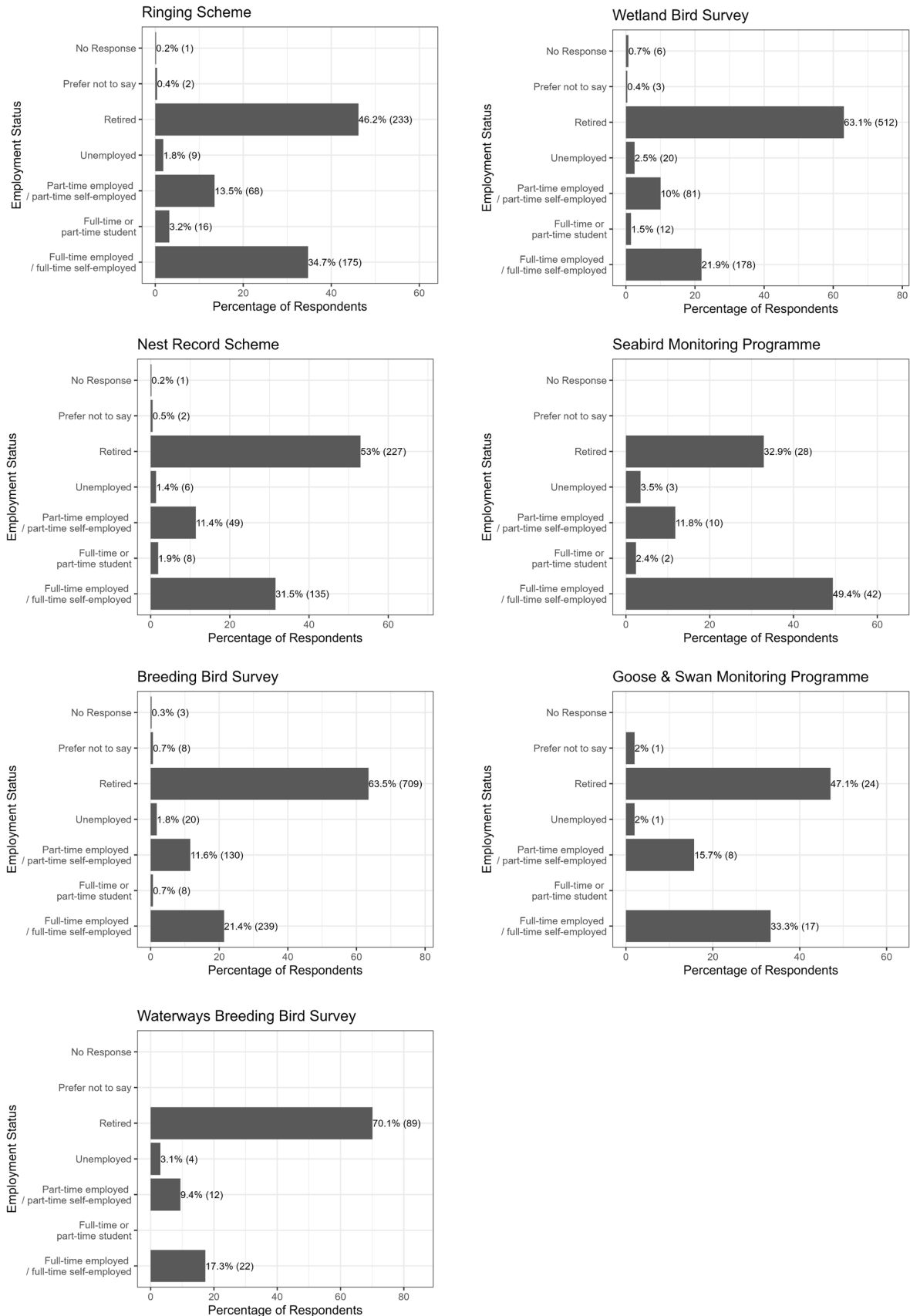
3.2.6. Age

Figure 22. The age categories of people who completed the survey for each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



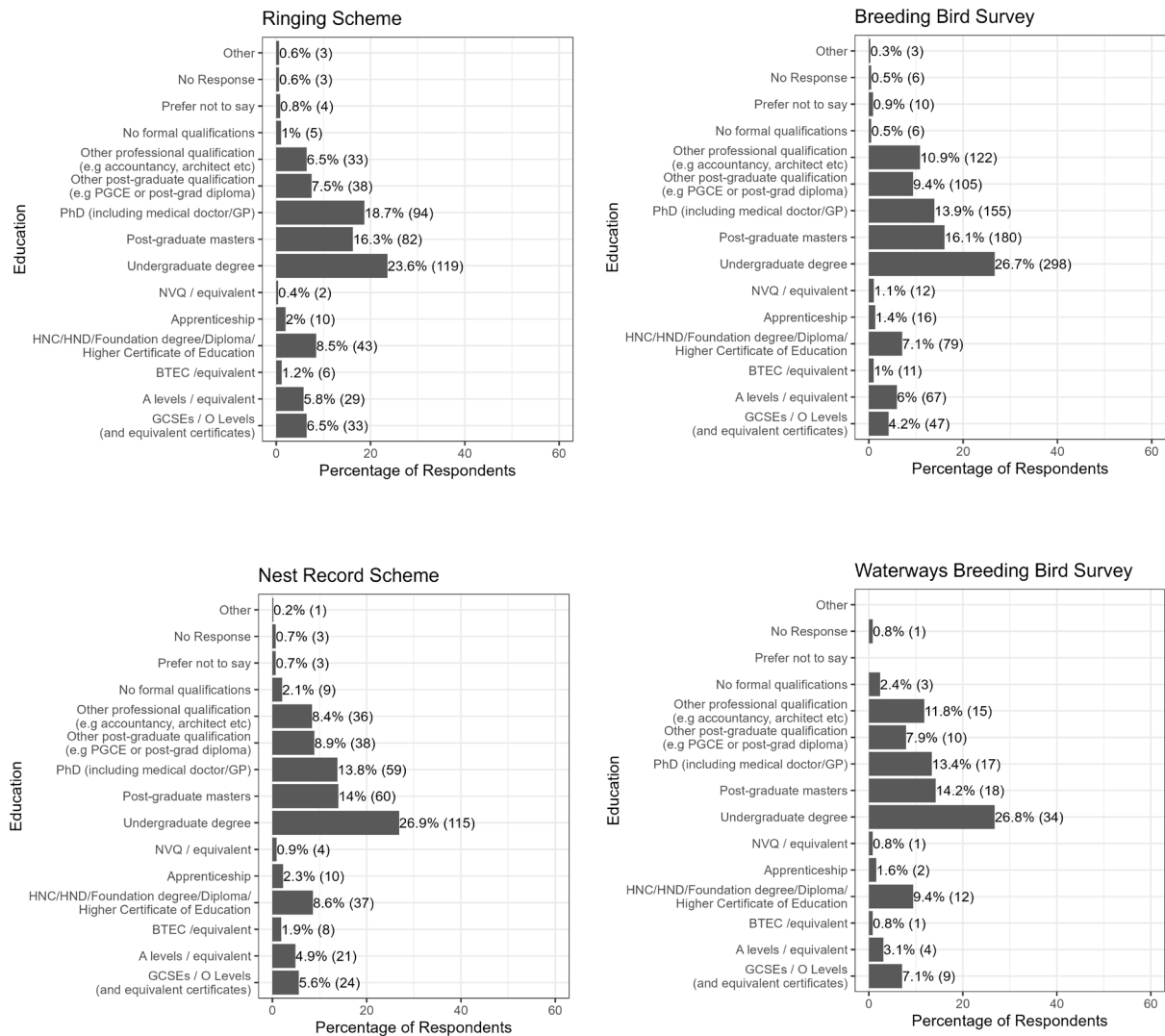
3.2.7. Employment status

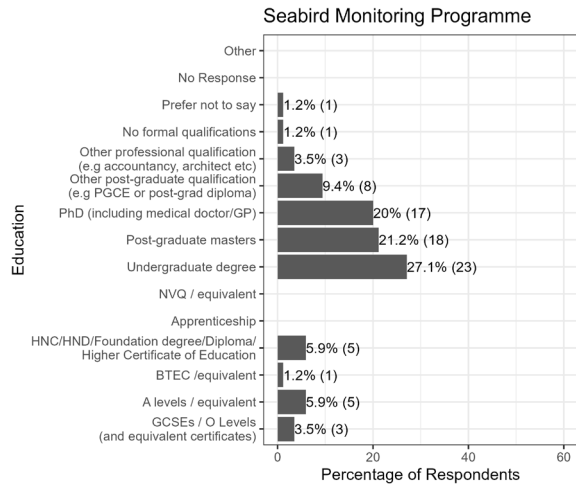
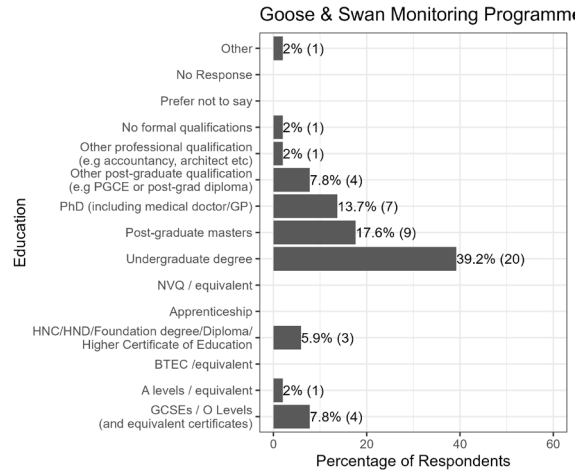
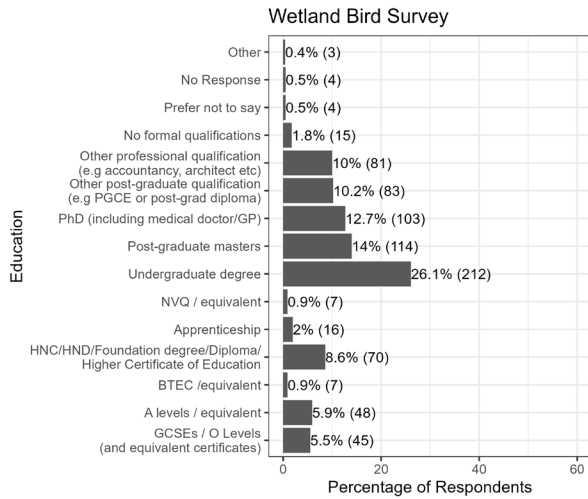
Figure 23. The employment status of the respondents who completed the survey for each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



3.2.8. Education

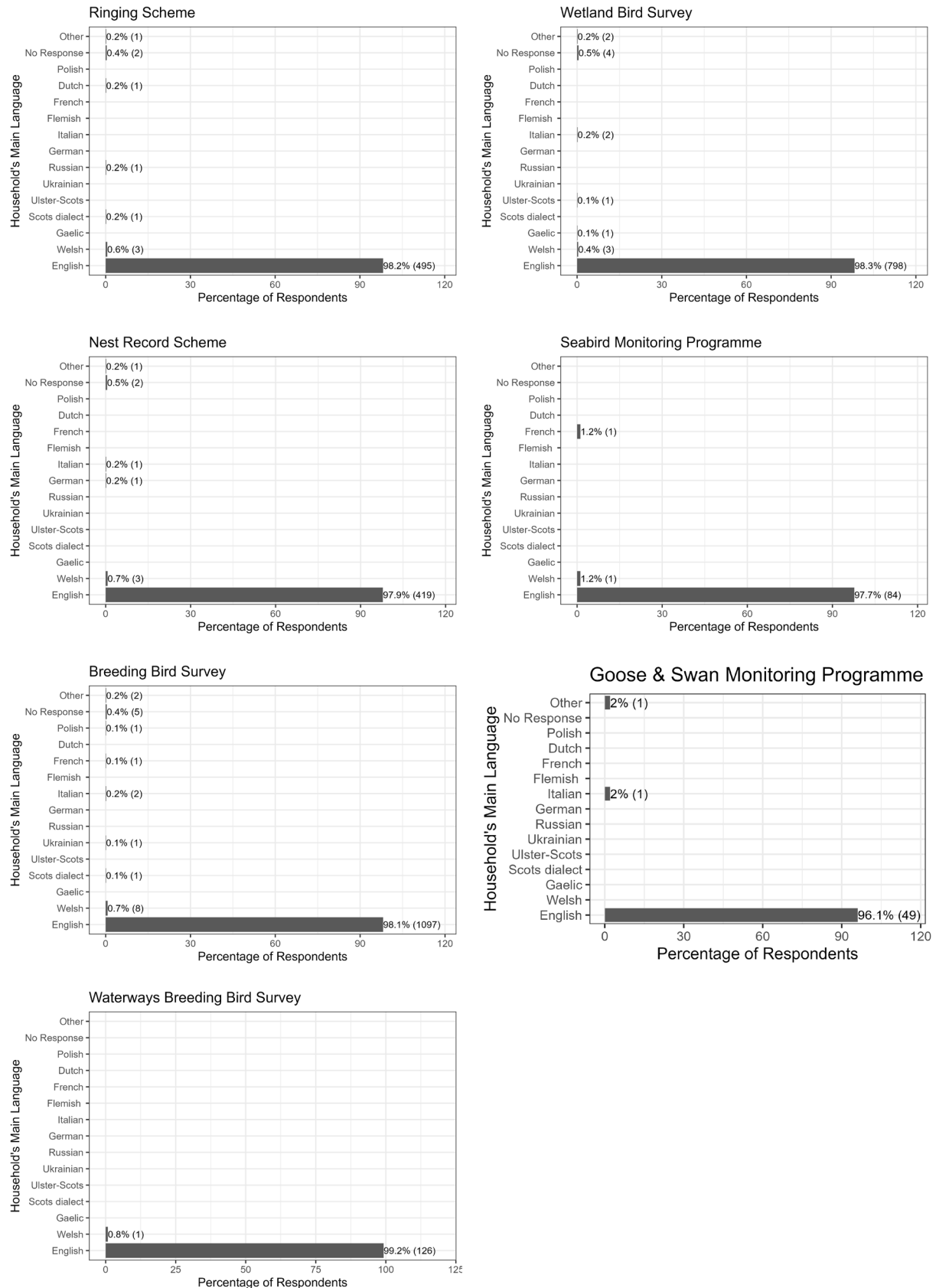
Figure 24. The highest level of education achieved of the respondents who completed the survey in each scheme, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note specific qualifications were grouped into the relevant category 'Other post-graduate qualification (e.g. PGCE or post-grad diploma)' includes FPath (Royal Coll. of Pathologists) and 'Other professional qualification (e.g. accountancy, architect etc.)' includes ACIB and FRICS. Professors were assumed to have a PhD. City & Guilds were categorised as NVQ equivalents. 'Other' includes negative and non-sensible responses.





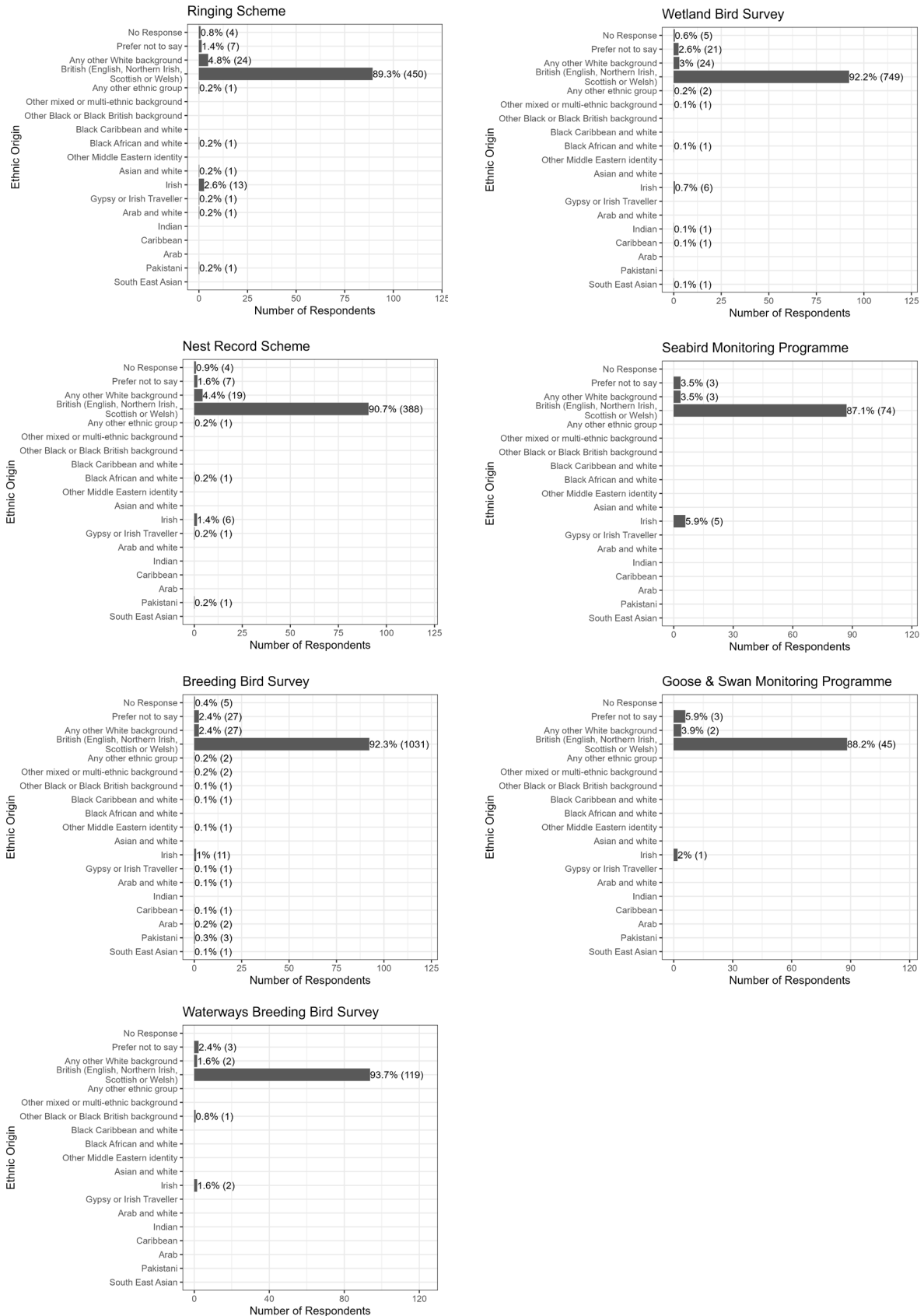
3.2.9. Household's main language

Figure 25. The main language spoken in the households of the respondents who completed the survey in each scheme, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'Other' includes negative feedback on the options and one letter 'V'; 'Yorkshire' was included in English. Note some respondents stated more than one language.



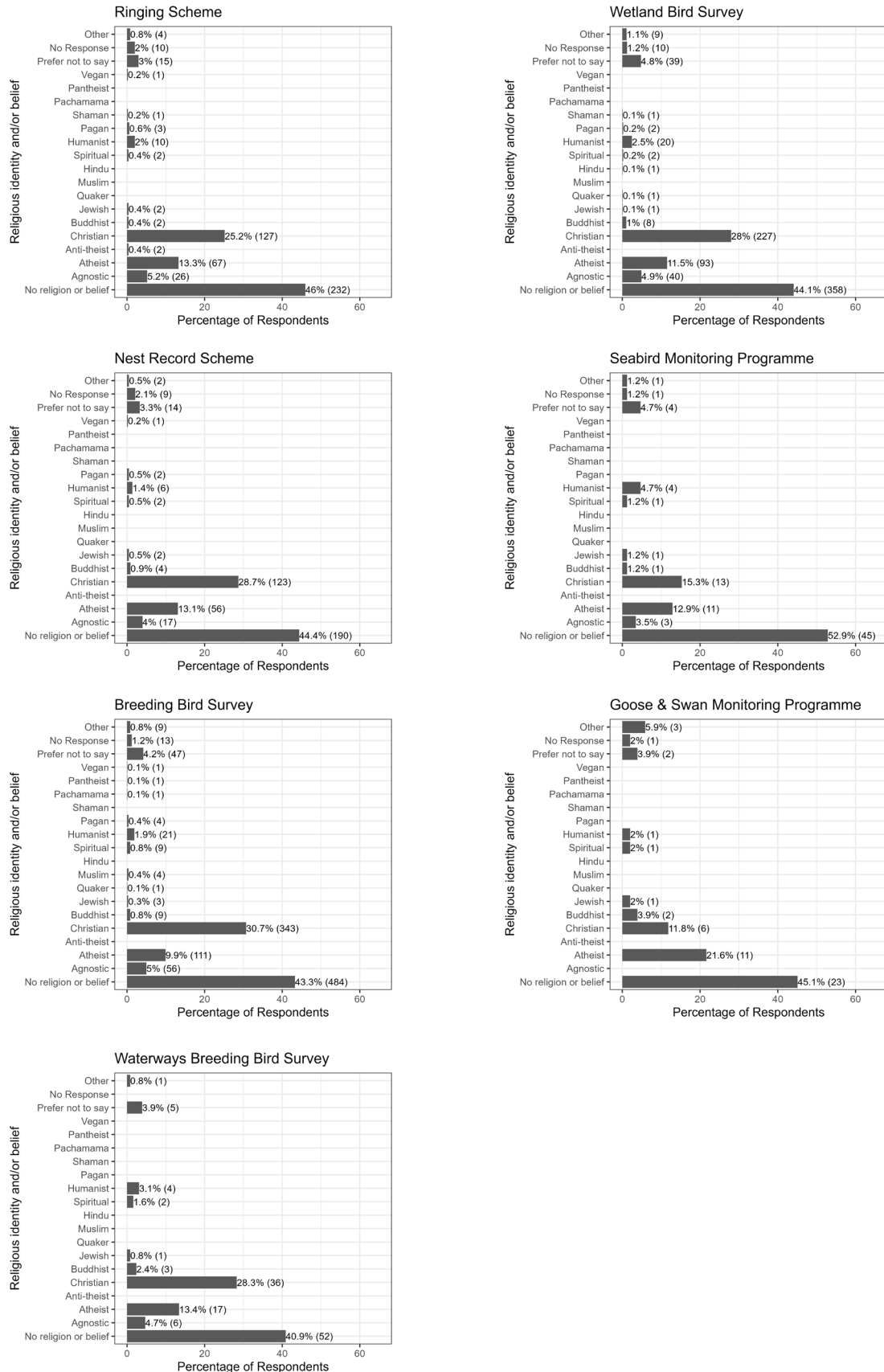
3.2.10. Ethnic origin

Figure 26. The ethnic origins of the respondents who completed the survey in each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



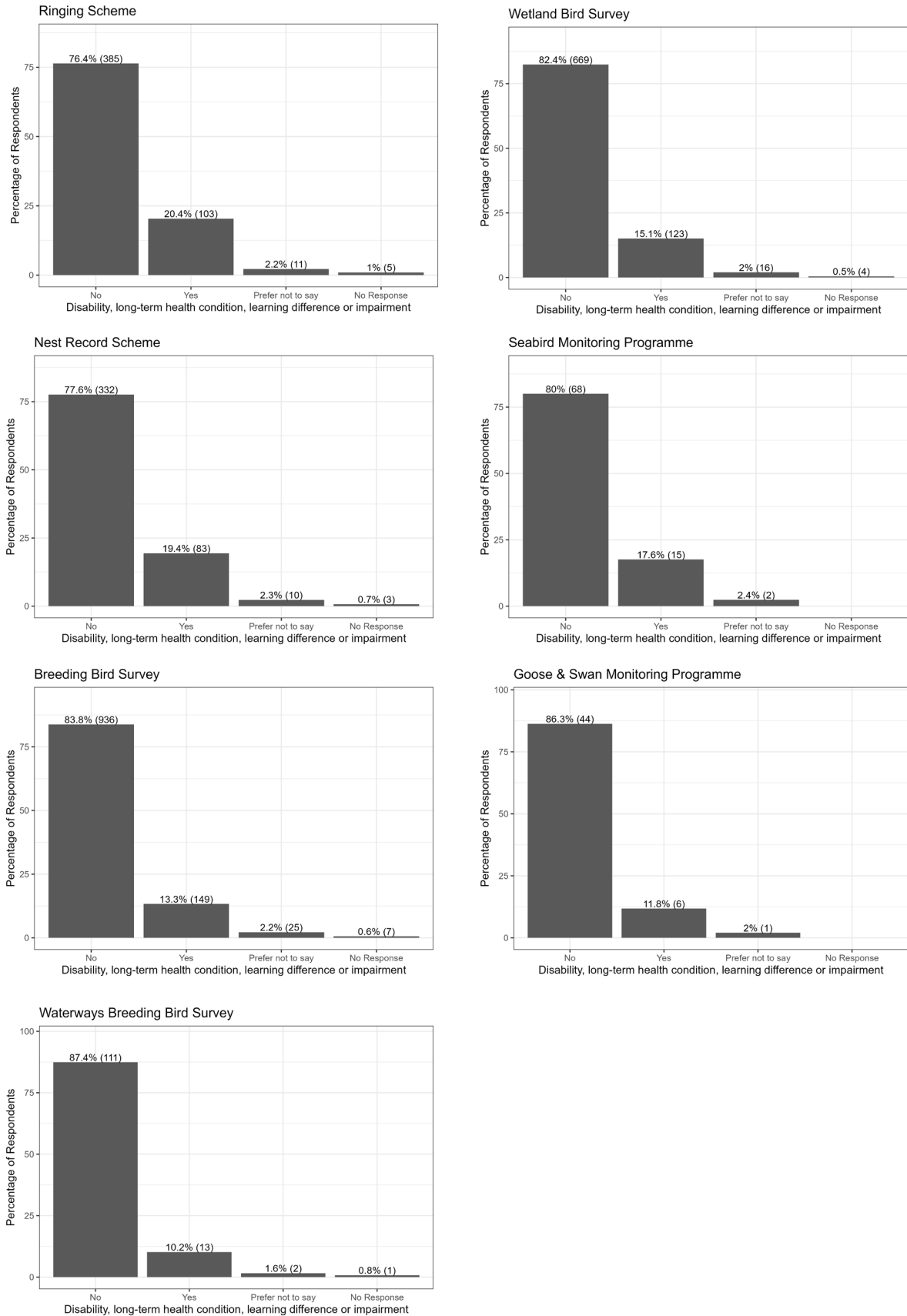
3.2.11. Religious identity and/or belief

Figure 27. The religious beliefs and/or identities of the respondents who completed the survey in each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Christian includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations. Note 'Other' comprises answers that did not specify a religion/belief and negative responses.



3.2.12. Disability

Figure 28. Whether the respondents who completed the survey consider themselves as having a disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment in each scheme as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



3.2.13. Type of Disability

Figure 29. The type of disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment the survey respondents consider themselves as having for each scheme, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'None' was specified by respondent, whereas 'No Response' are blank responses.

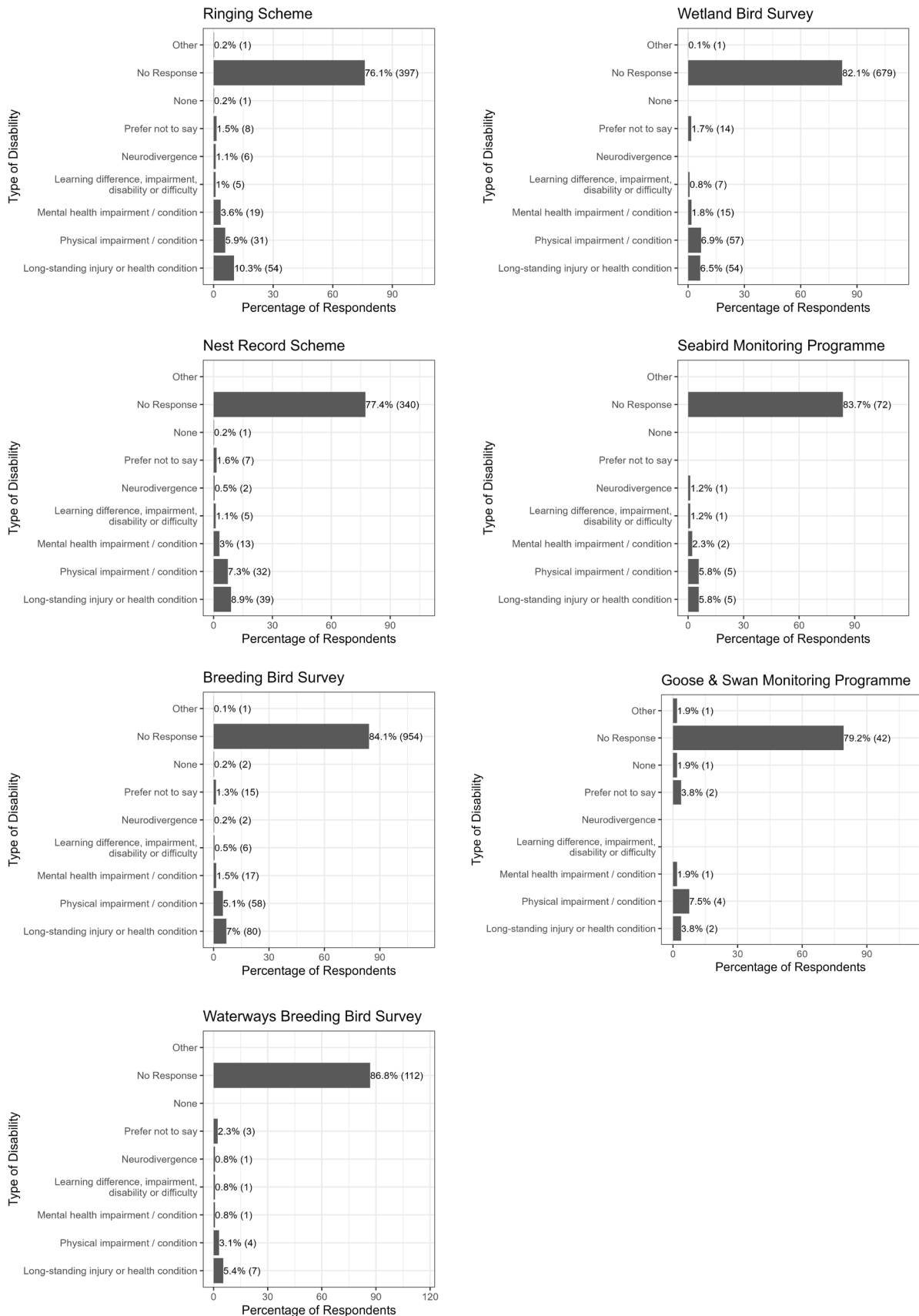
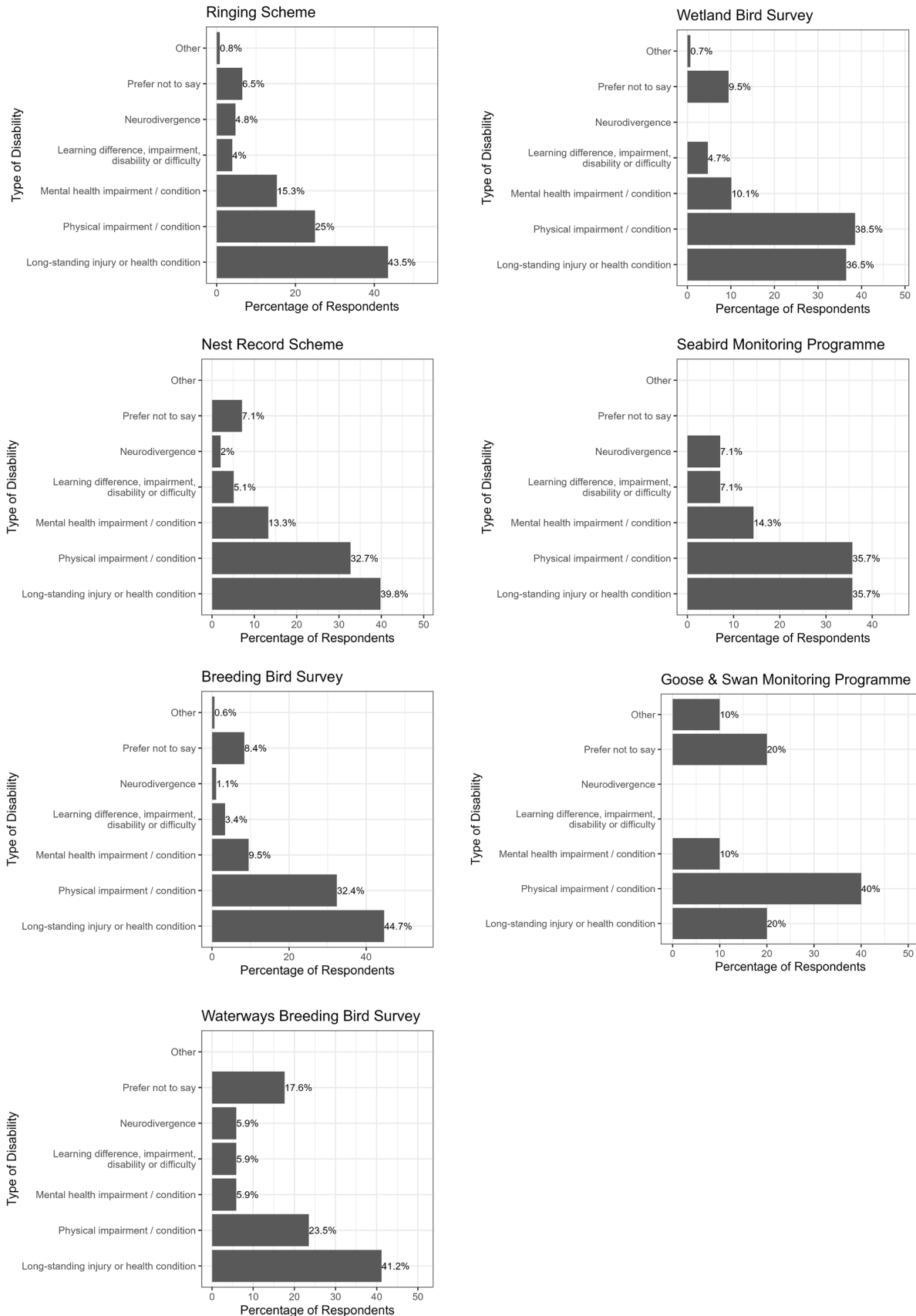


Figure 30. The type of disability as a percentage of respondents who stated a type of disability for each scheme. Note that four respondents stated they did not have a disability/no response or selected prefer not to say to the previous question, but supplied a type of disability.



3.3. Survey results by country

Across England, Scotland and Wales the majority of respondents gave no response to whether they had completed any training (51%, 36% and 45% respectively); the figure in Northern Ireland was lower, with only 24% failing to respond. 'Online bird ID training' was the most popular option in all countries, with 'Online survey methods training' the second most frequent response (Figure 31). The majority of respondents had an undergraduate degree (25–31%); Northern Ireland has the fewest respondents with PhD (3%), while Scotland has the most (21%; Figure 37).

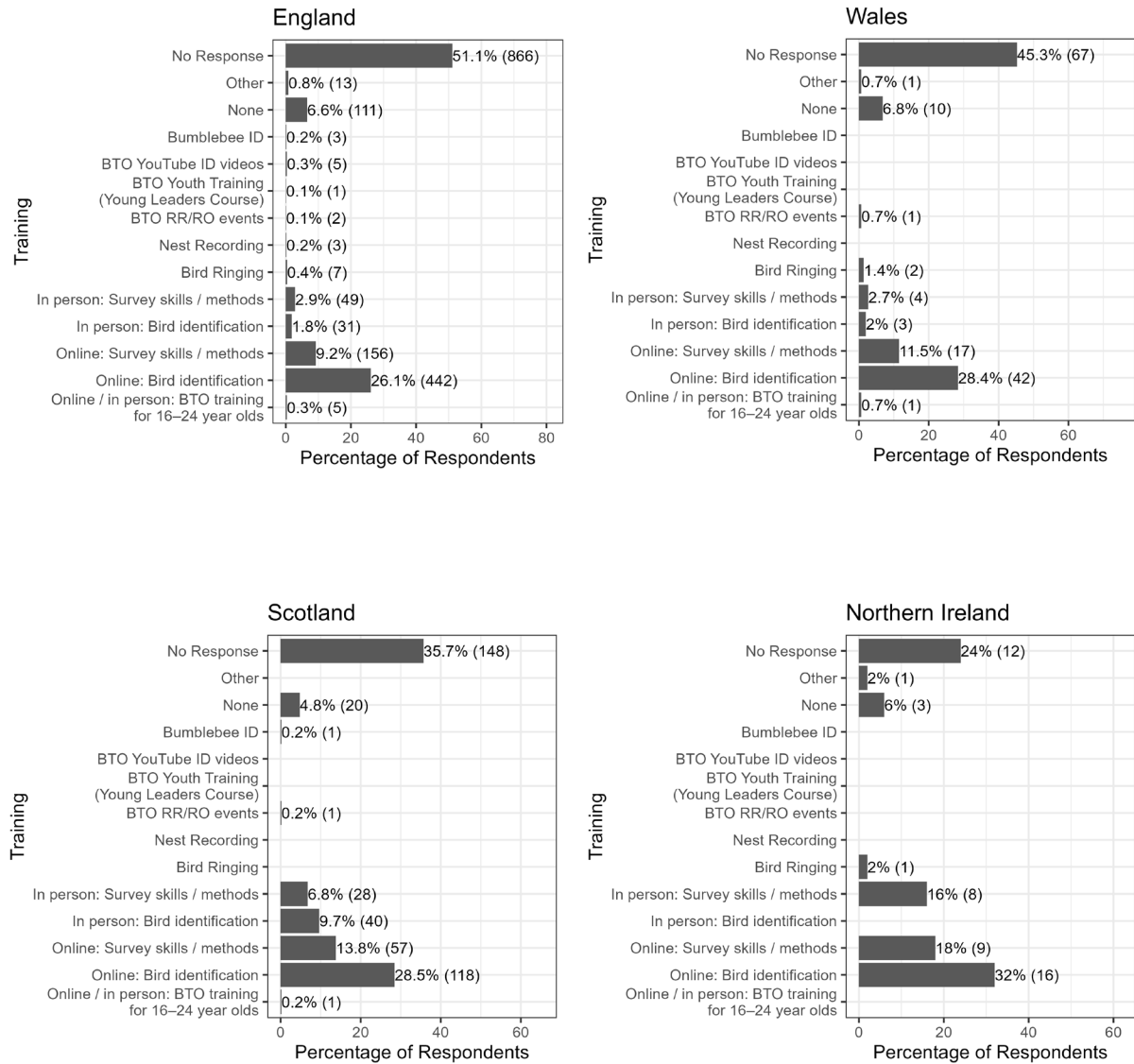
Wales had the greatest difference in men and women respondents (75% cf. 23%) followed by England (72% cf. 26%) and Scotland (67% cf. 30%), and Northern Ireland came closest to equity (61% cf. 36%) (Figure 32). The majority of respondents in all countries were assigned the same gender at birth (94–96%; Figure 33) and were heterosexual or straight (88–92%; Figure 34). The peak respondent age category is 65–74 for each country (Figure 35), with the majority of respondents being above 55 and retired (Figure 36), although Northern Ireland has an equal number of respondents in the 45–54 and 55–64 categories (19%) and similar numbers of retired and full-time employed respondents (44% and 33%).

The main household language was English in every country (92–99%) and only nine respondents (7%) based in Wales spoke Welsh (Figure 38). The majority of respondents were British in each country and in Northern Ireland there were 17% Irish and 72% British (Figure 39). The main response for religious identity/belief in England was no religion or belief (44%), followed by Christian (32%), figures were similar in Wales (45% and 29%, respectively) and in Scotland there was a slightly greater difference (54% and 18%, respectively). In Northern Ireland there were more Christians (44%) and fewer respondents with no religion (28%; Figure 40).

The majority of respondents from each country do not have a disability (82–86%) with England demonstrating the highest proportion respondents with a disability (16%) and Northern Ireland the lowest (8%; Figure 41). The main type of disability in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland was 'Long-standing injury or health condition' (42%, 41% and 40%, respectively), followed by 'Physical impairment/condition' in England (32%) and Scotland (29%), and 'Mental health' in Northern Ireland (20%). In Wales where there were more respondents with a 'Physical impairment/condition' (50%) relative to a 'Long-standing injury or health condition' (38%; Figure 43).

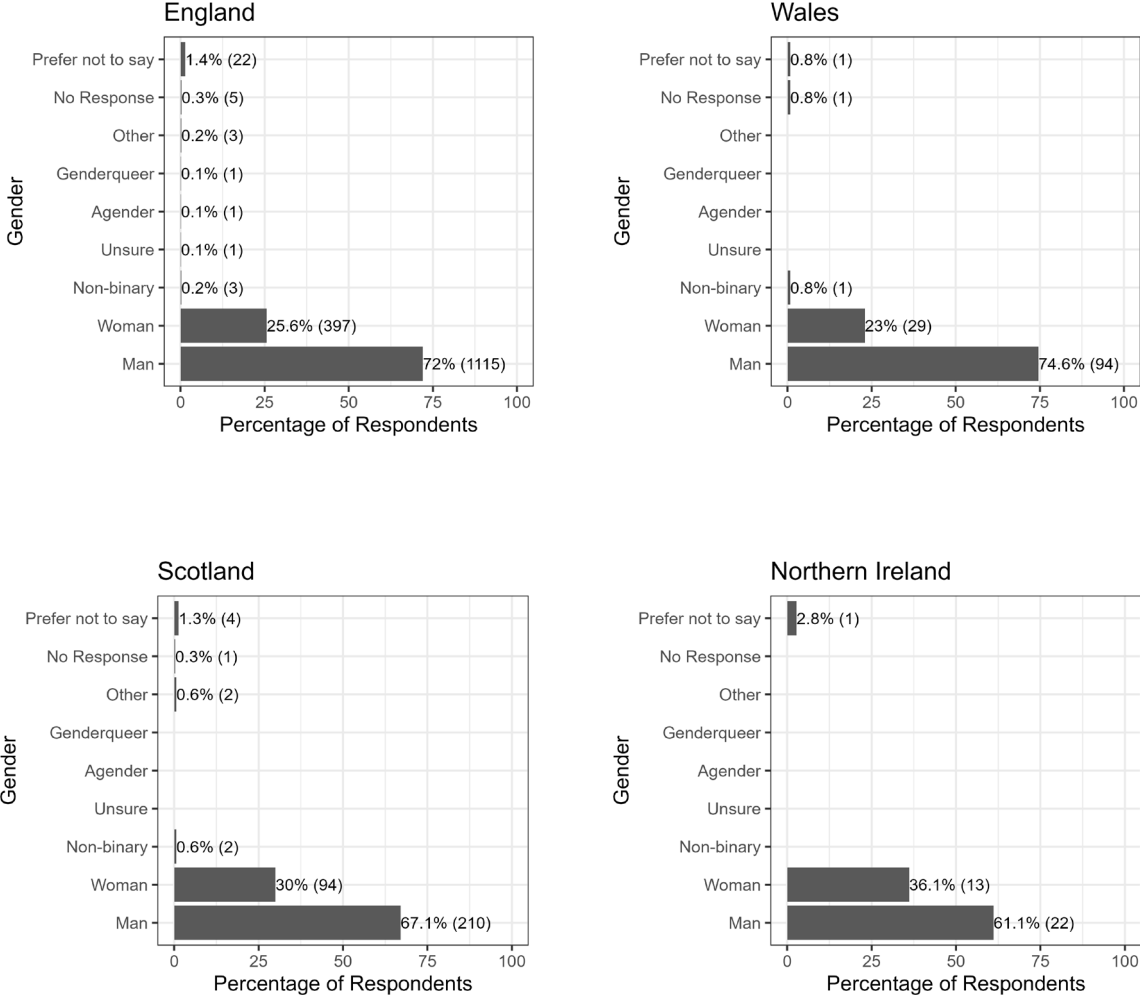
3.3.1. Training

Figure 31. Training events that the respondents who completed the survey attended in the last two years for each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' comprises answers that did not specify a course or one that fit into the above categories, e.g. Meet the BTO, training provided outside BTO etc.; 'None' was specified by respondent, whereas 'No Response' are blank responses.



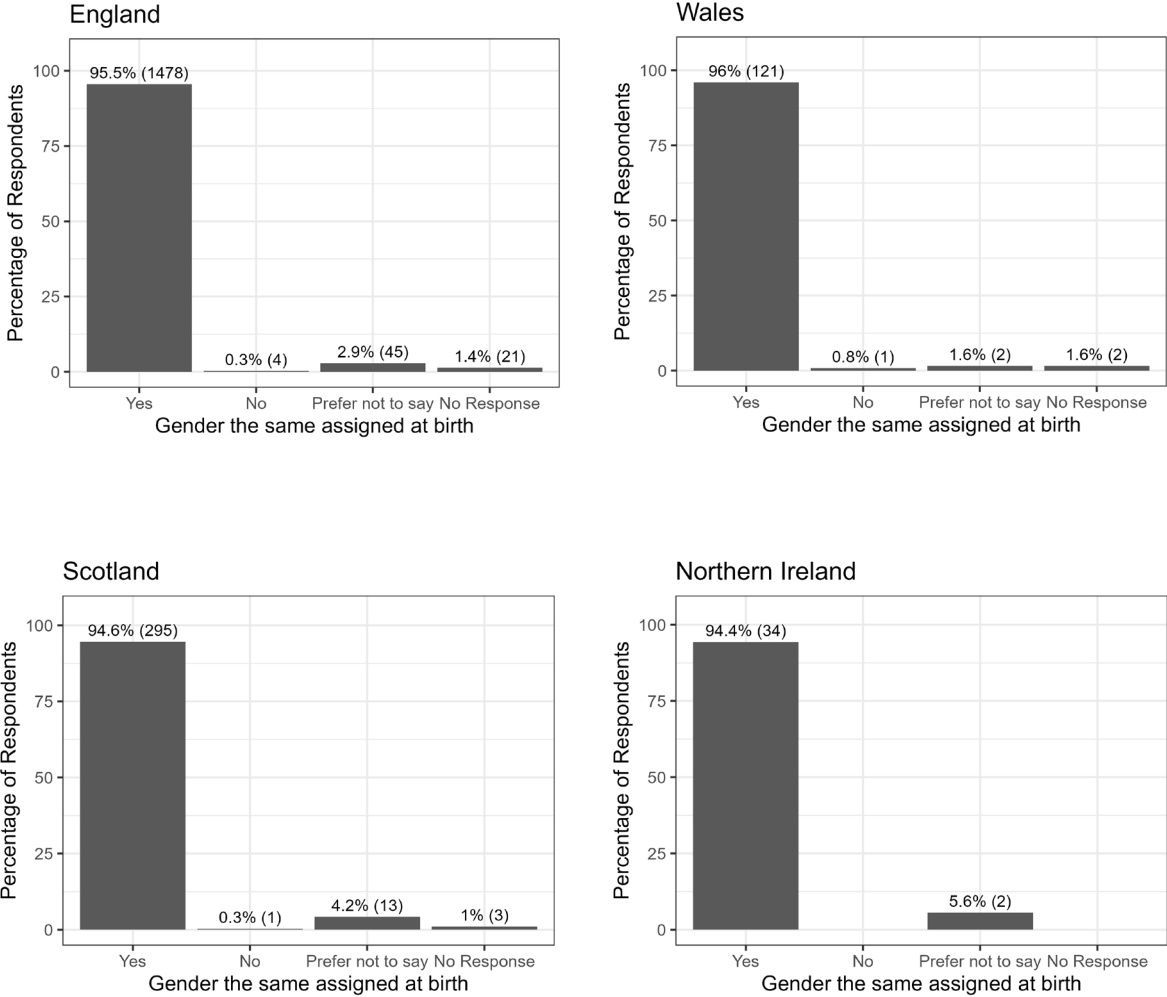
3.3.2. Gender

Figure 32. The gender of the respondents who completed the survey in each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note 'Other' in this case refers to non-sensible answers and negative feedback.



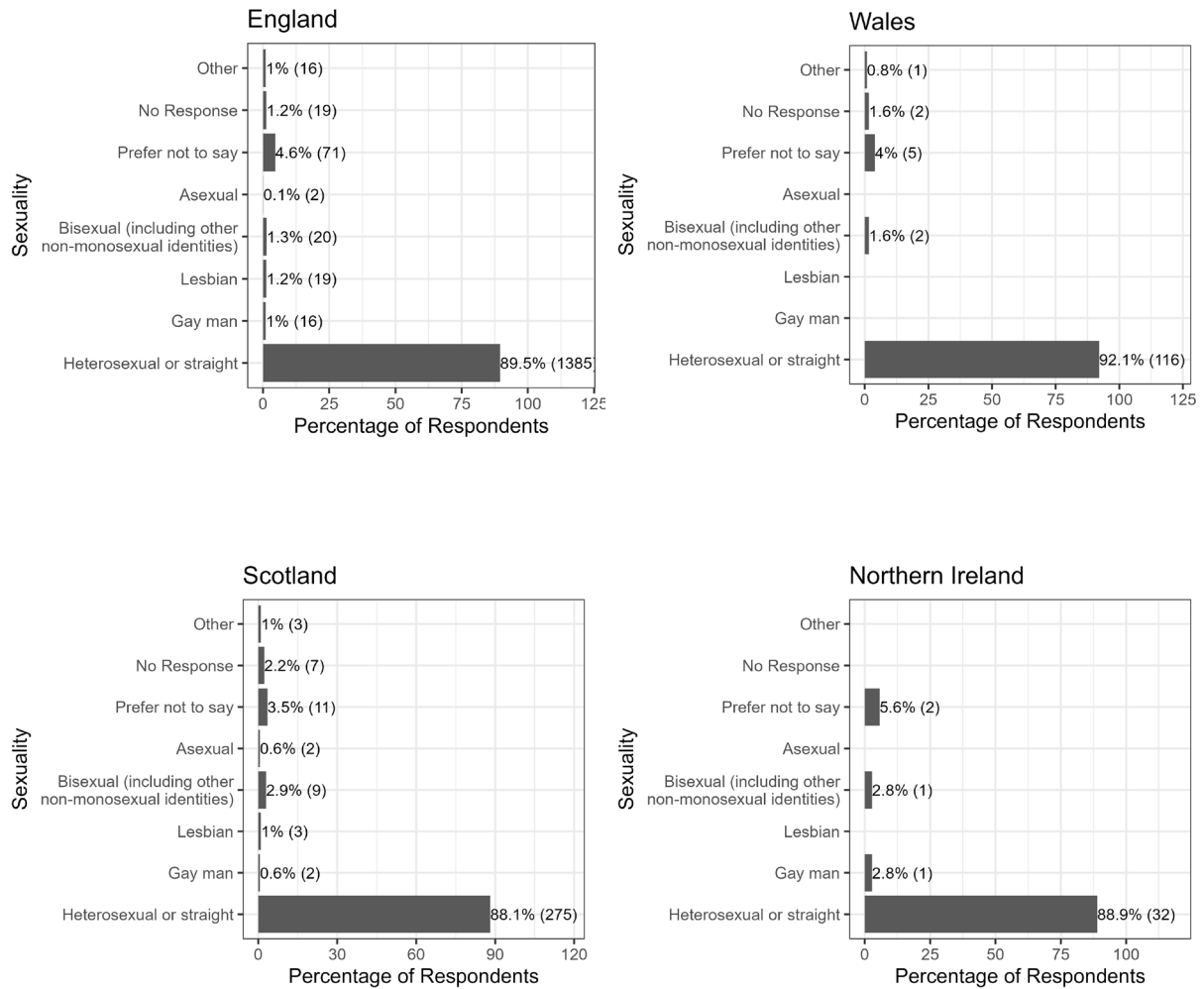
3.3.3. Gender the same as assigned at birth

Figure 33. Whether the gender of the respondents who completed the survey was the same as assigned at birth for each country, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



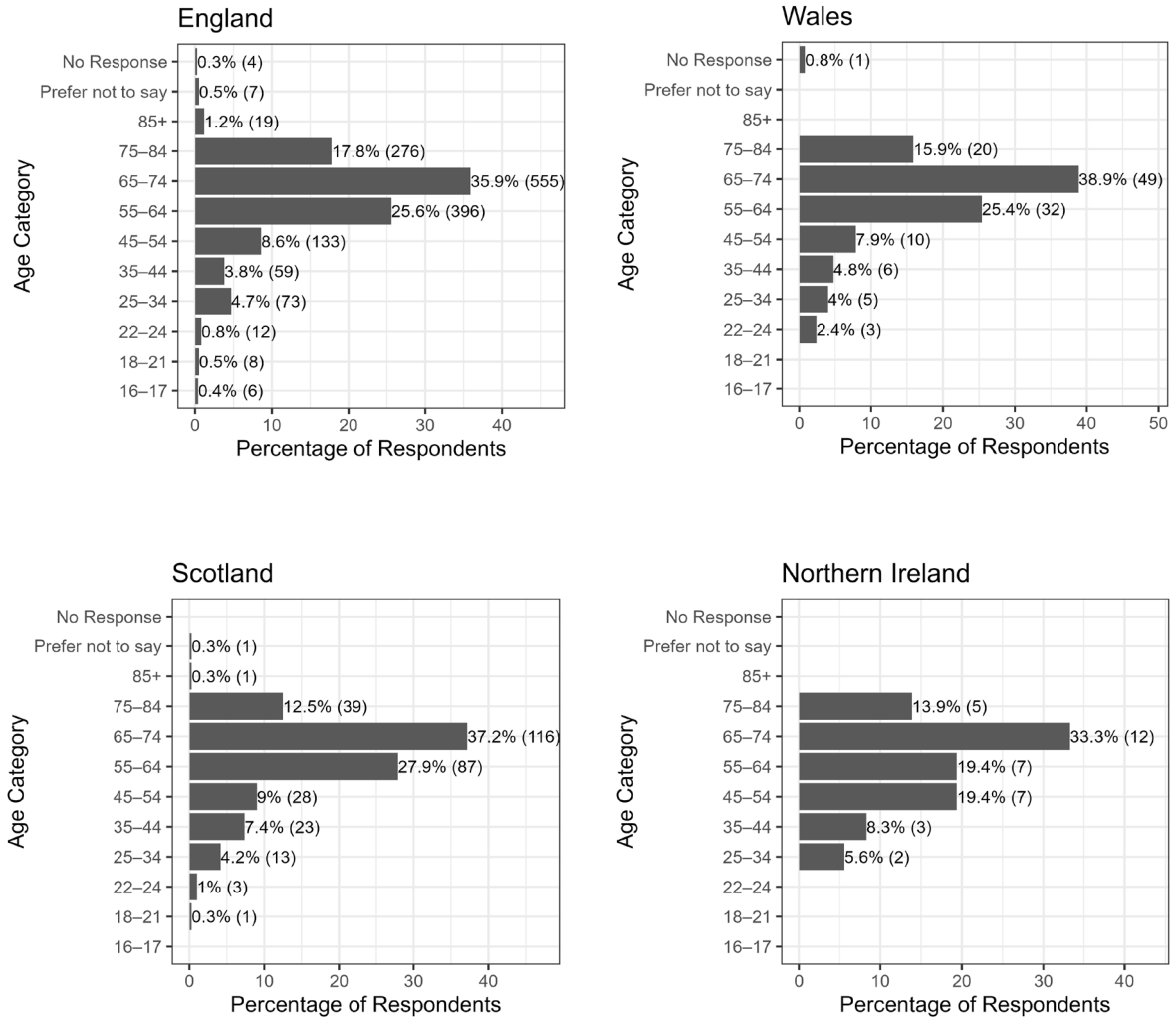
3.3.4. Sexuality

Figure 34. The sexuality of the respondents who completed the survey in each country as actual numbers (top) and percentages (bottom). Note 'Other' in this case refers to negative feedback.



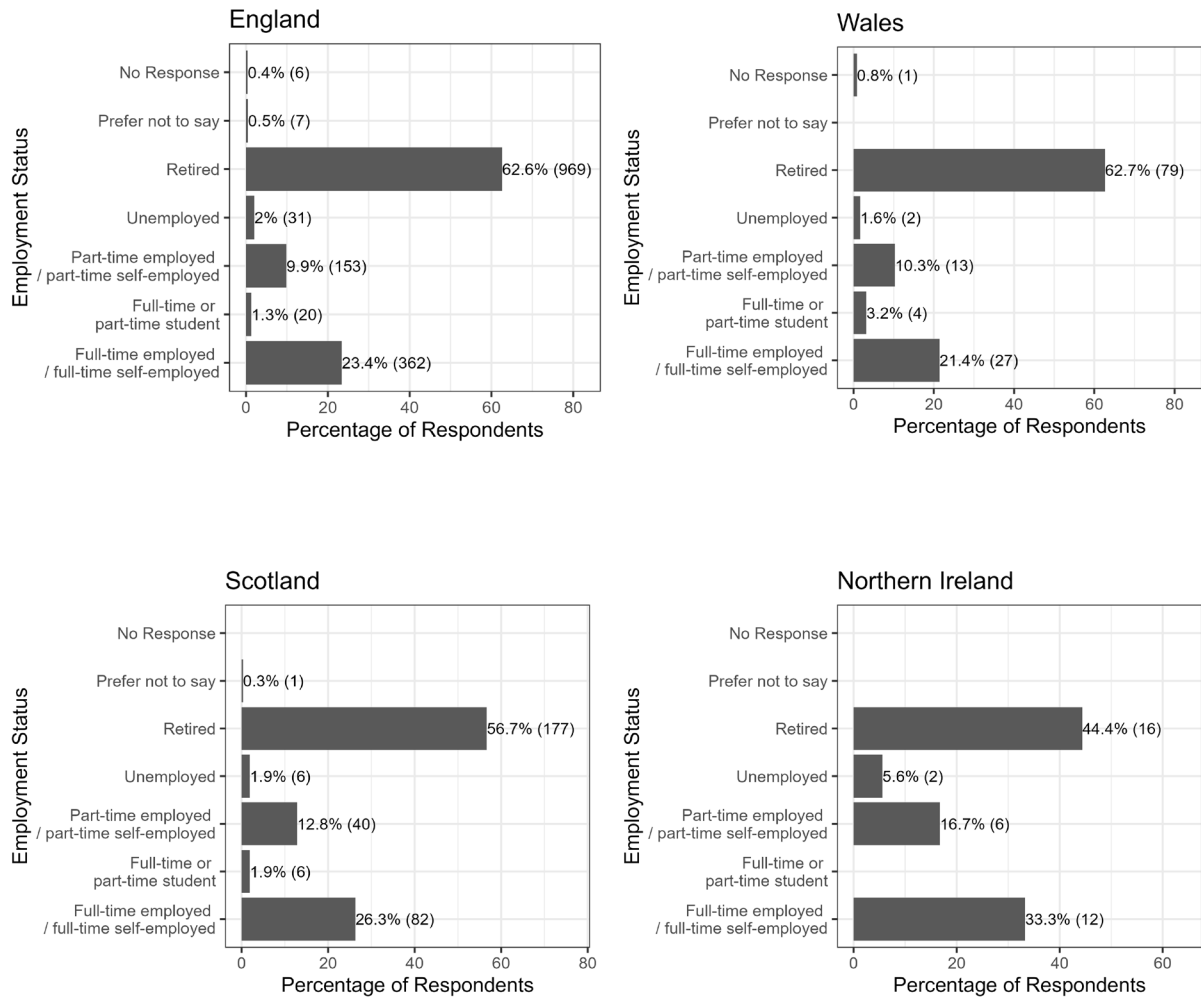
3.3.5. Age

Figure 35. The age categories of people who completed the survey for each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



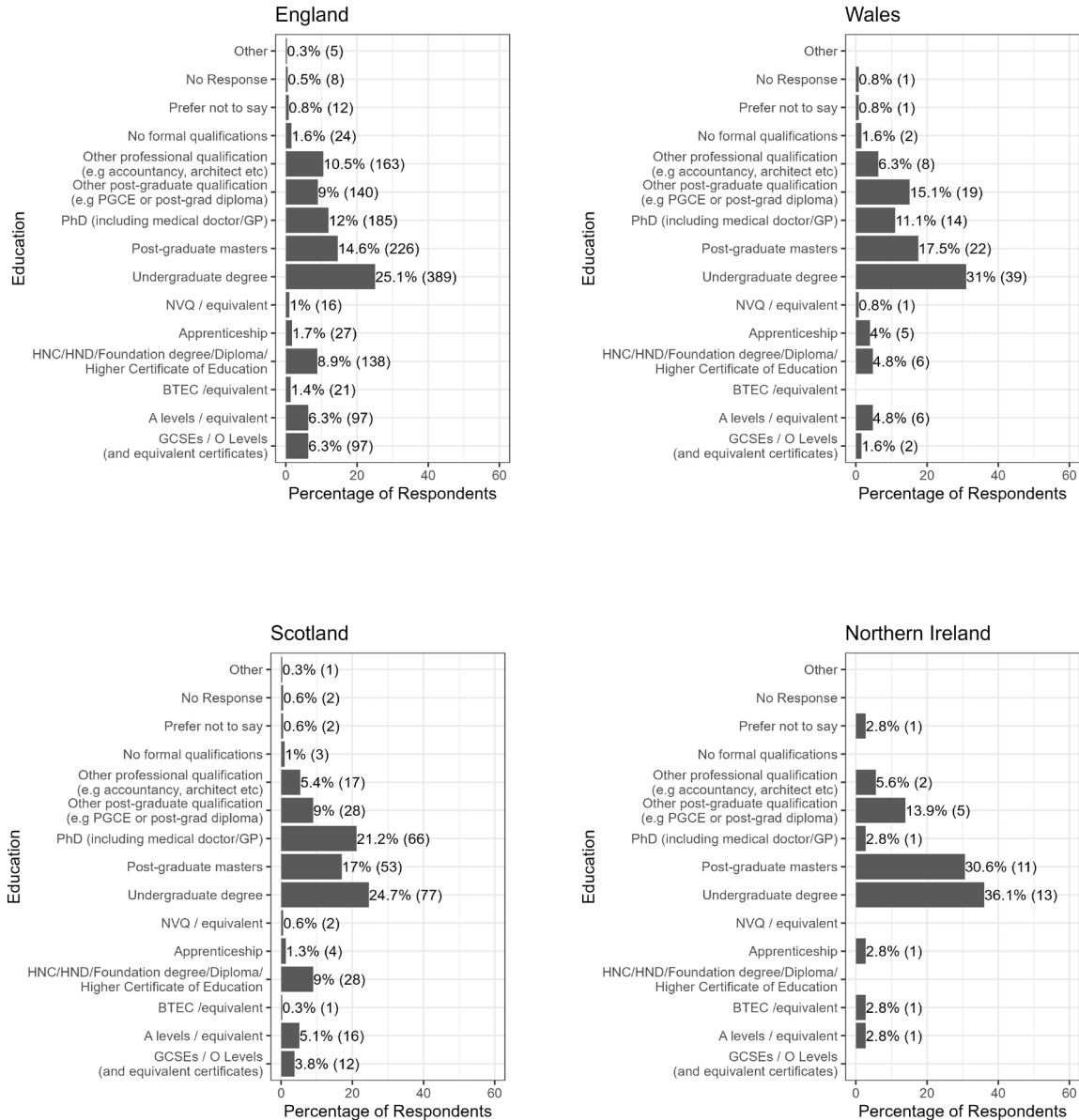
3.3.6. Employment status

Figure 36. The employment status of the respondents who completed the survey for each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



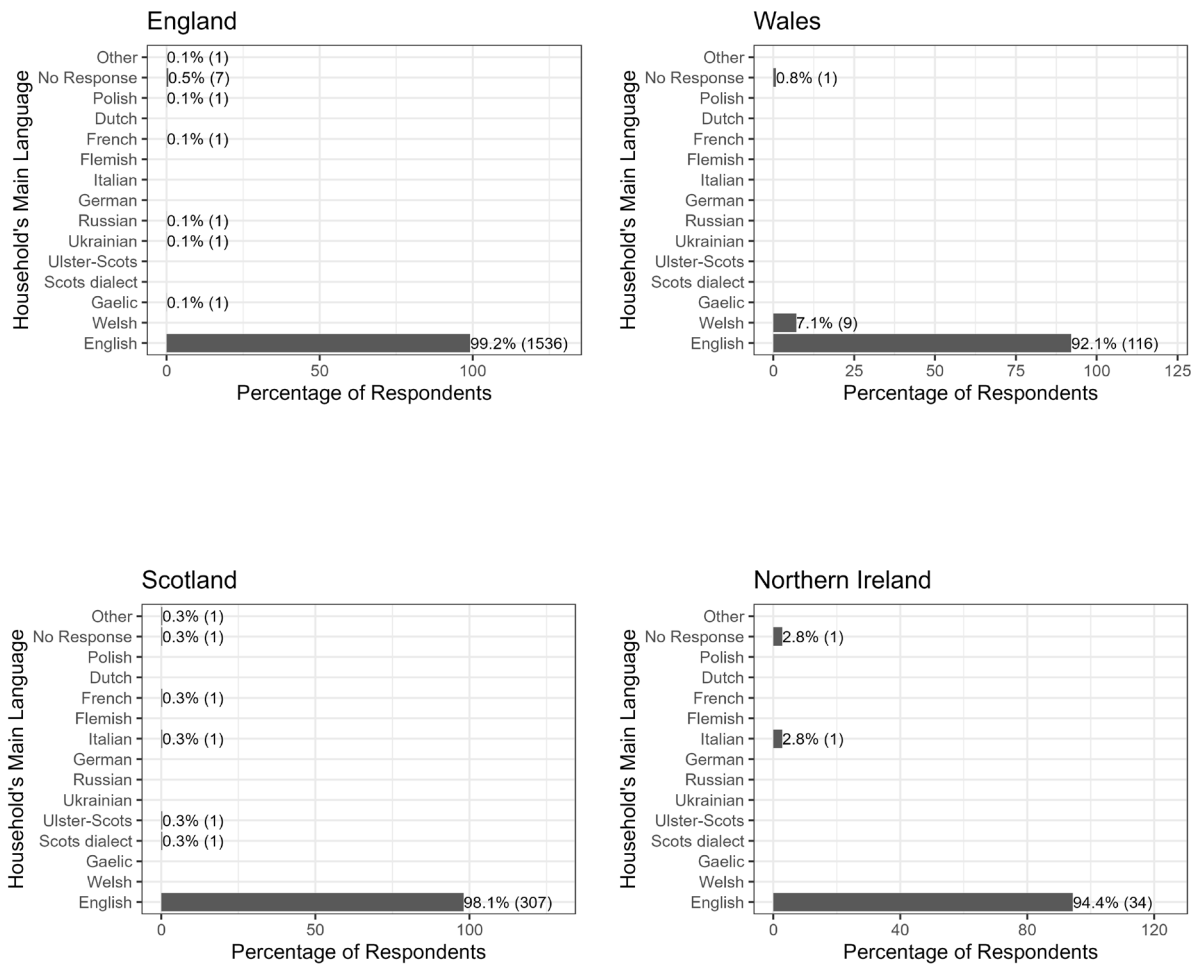
3.3.7. Education

Figure 37. The highest level of education achieved of the respondents who completed the survey for each country as and percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Note specific qualifications were grouped into the relevant category 'Other post-graduate qualification (e.g. PGCE or post-grad diploma)' includes FPath (Royal Coll. of Pathologists) and 'Other professional qualification (e.g. accountancy, architect etc.)' includes ACIB and FRICS. Professors were assumed to have a PhD. City & Guilds were categorised as NVQ equivalents. 'Other' includes negative and non-sensible responses.



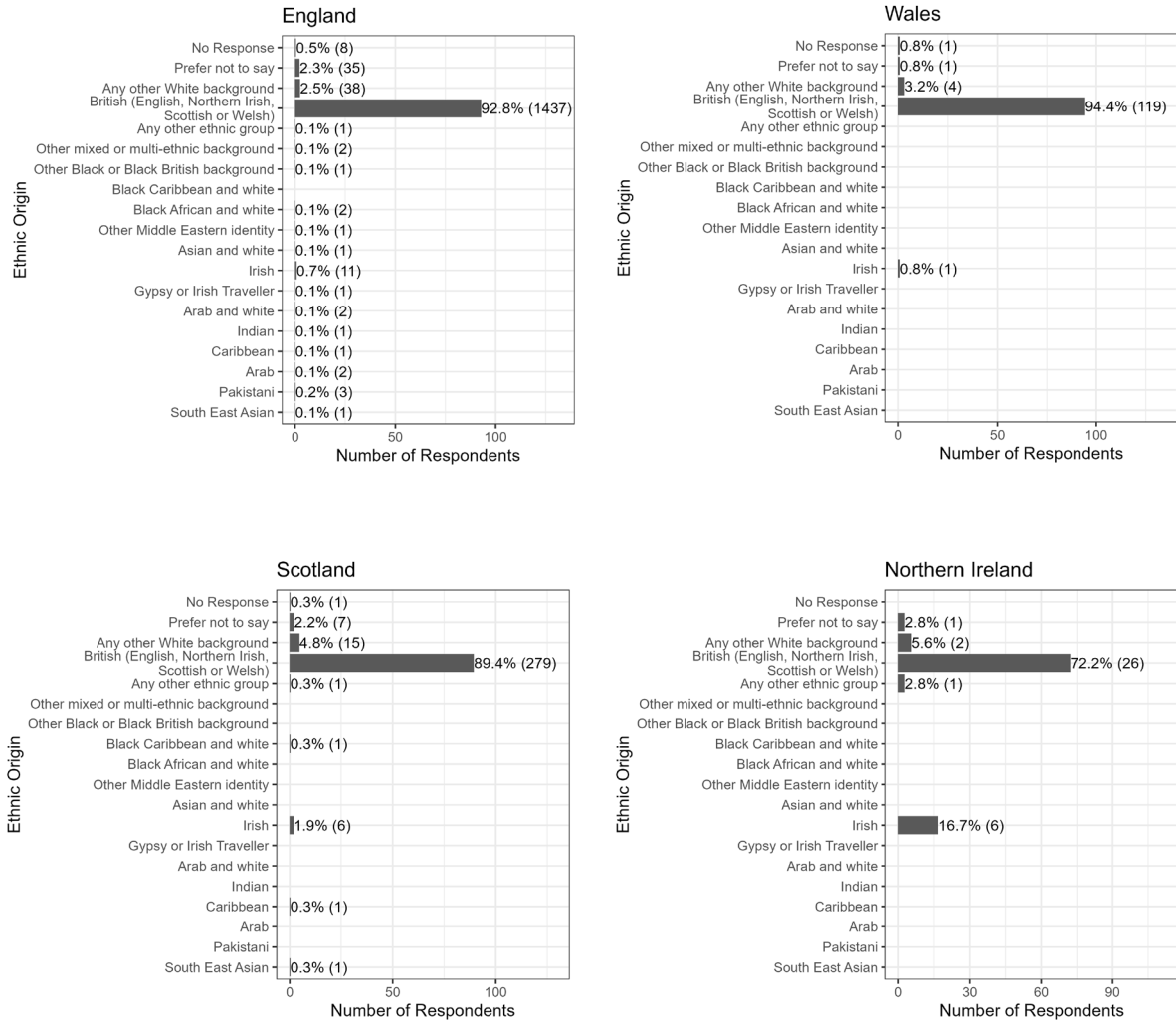
3.3.8. Household's main language

Figure 38. The main language spoken in the households of the respondents who completed the survey in each scheme, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'Other' includes negative feedback on the options and one letter 'V'; 'Yorkshire' was included in English. Note some respondents stated more than one language.



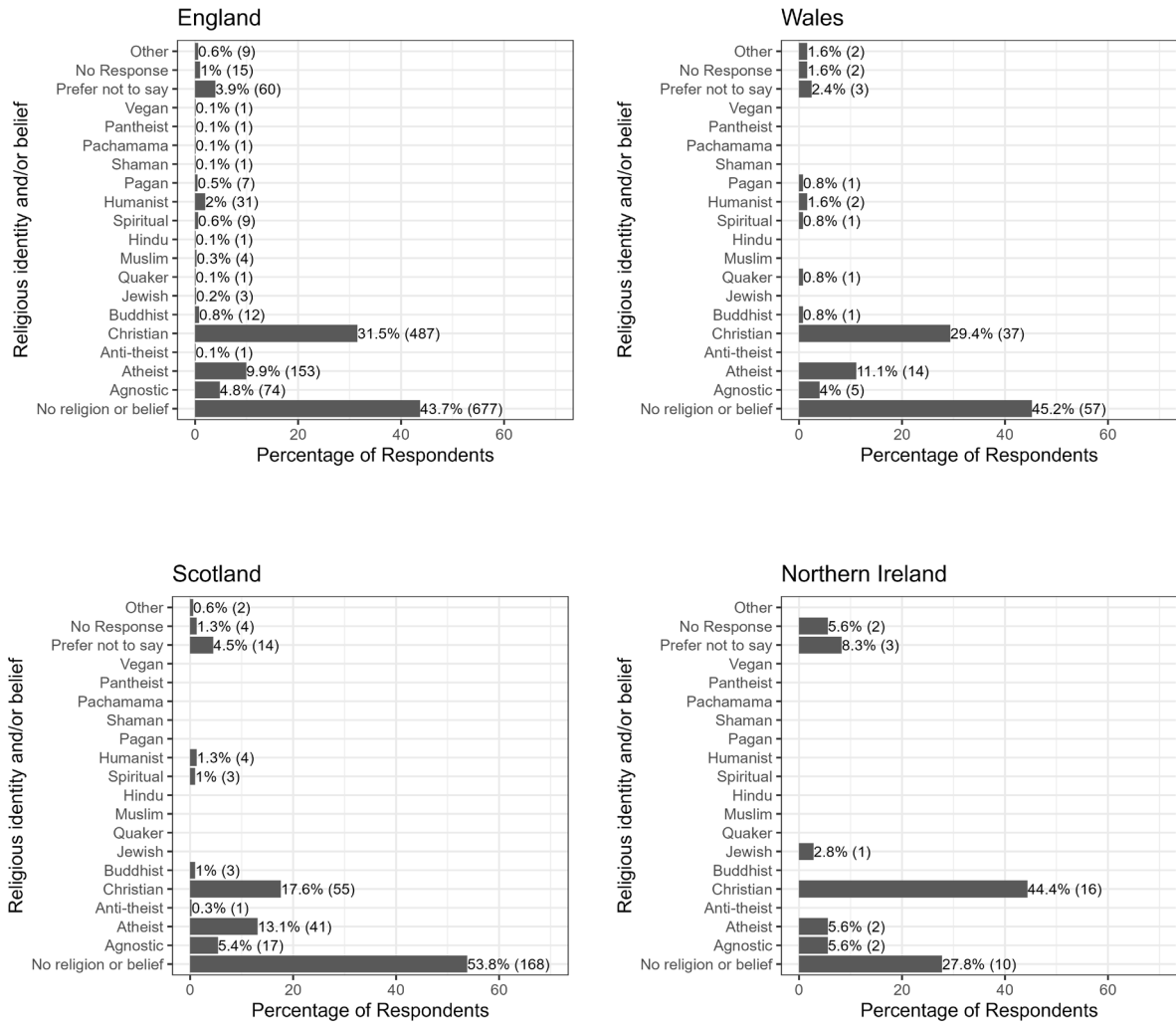
3.3.9. Ethnic origin

Figure 39. The ethnic origins of the respondents who completed the survey in each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



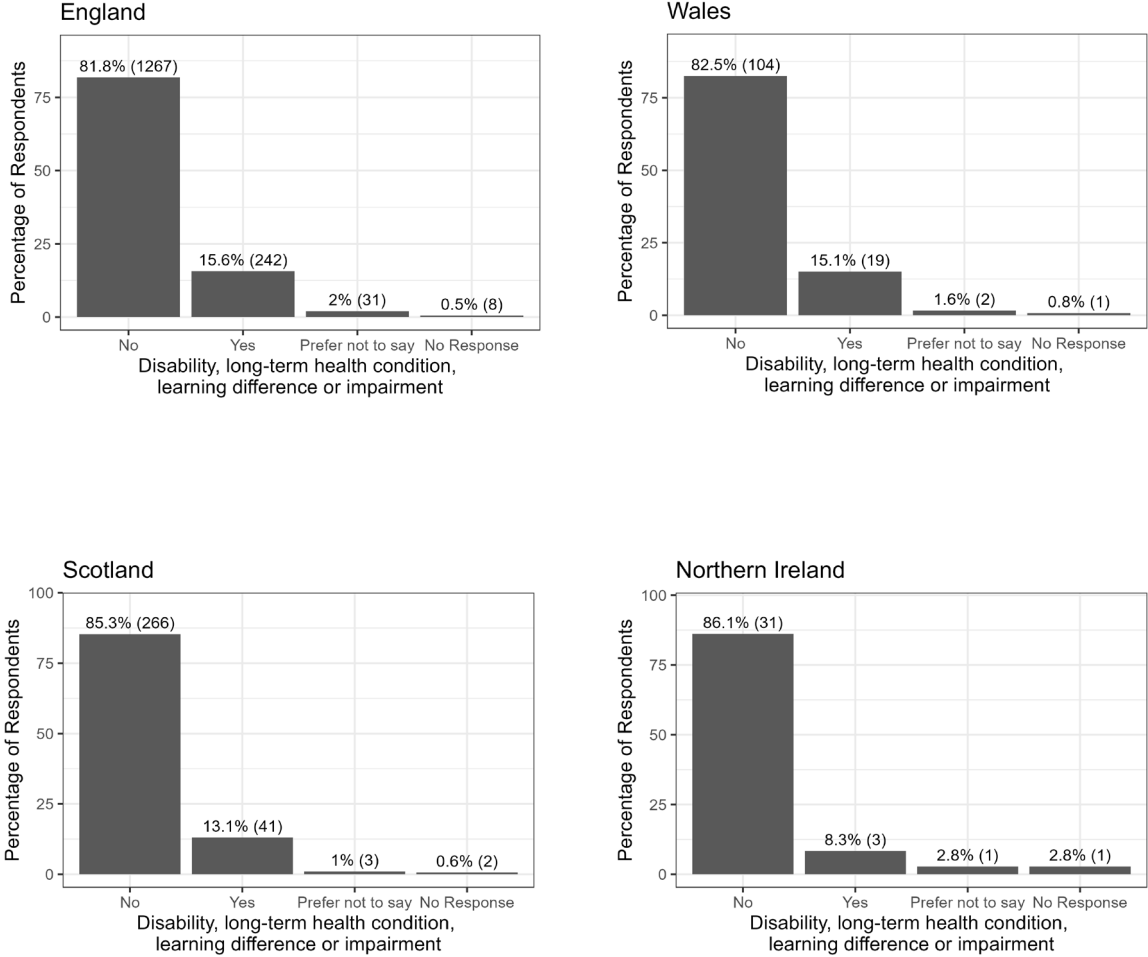
3.3.10. Religious identity and/or belief

Figure 40. The religious beliefs and/or identities of the respondents who completed the survey in each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). Christian includes Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations. Note 'Other' comprises answers that did not specify a religion/belief and negative responses.



3.3.11. Disability

Figure 41. Whether the respondents who completed the survey consider themselves as having a disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment in each country as percentages (actual numbers in brackets).



3.3.12. Type of Disability

Figure 42. The type of disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment the survey respondents consider themselves as having for each country, as percentages (actual numbers in brackets). 'None' was specified by respondent, whereas 'No Response' are blank responses.

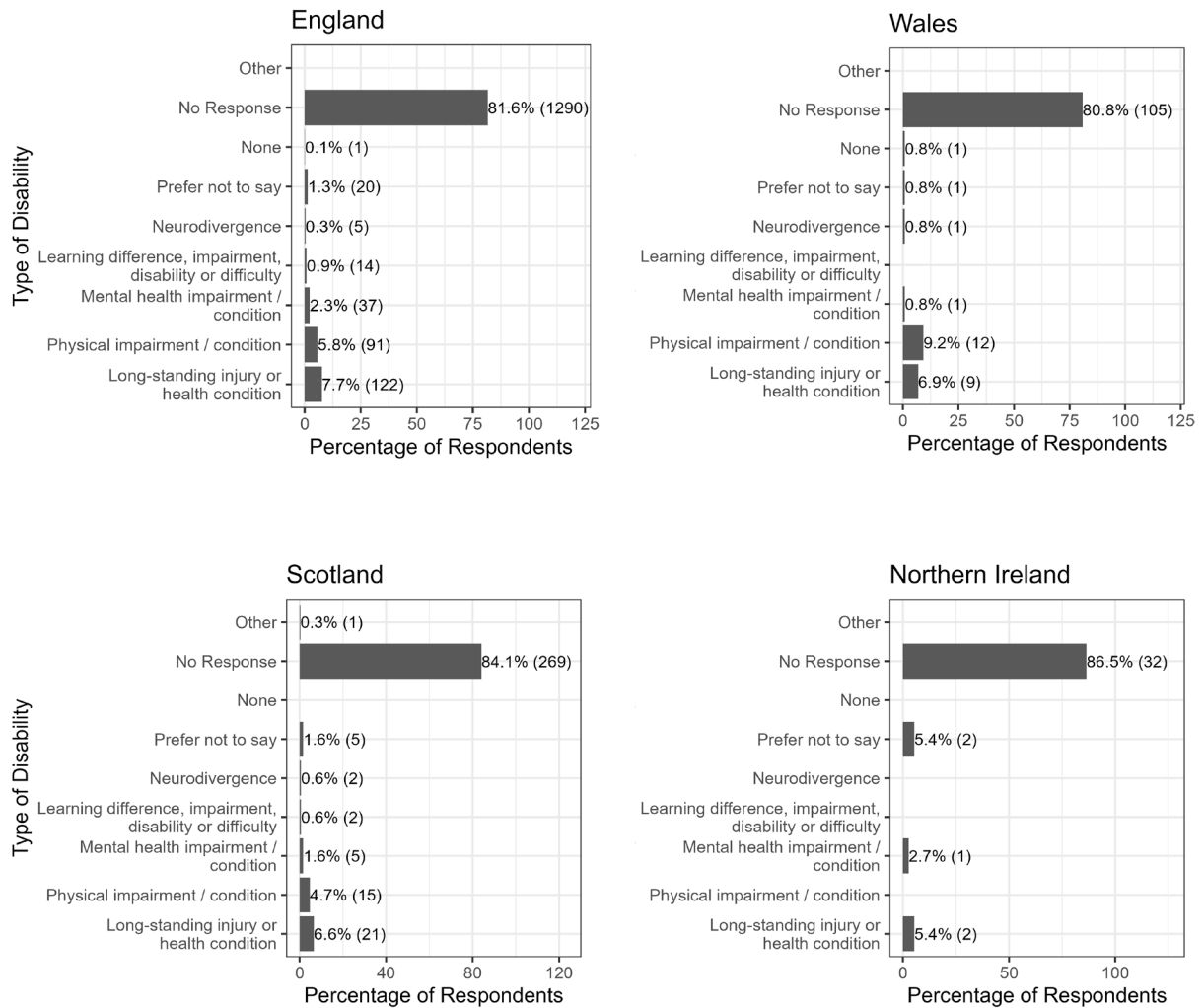
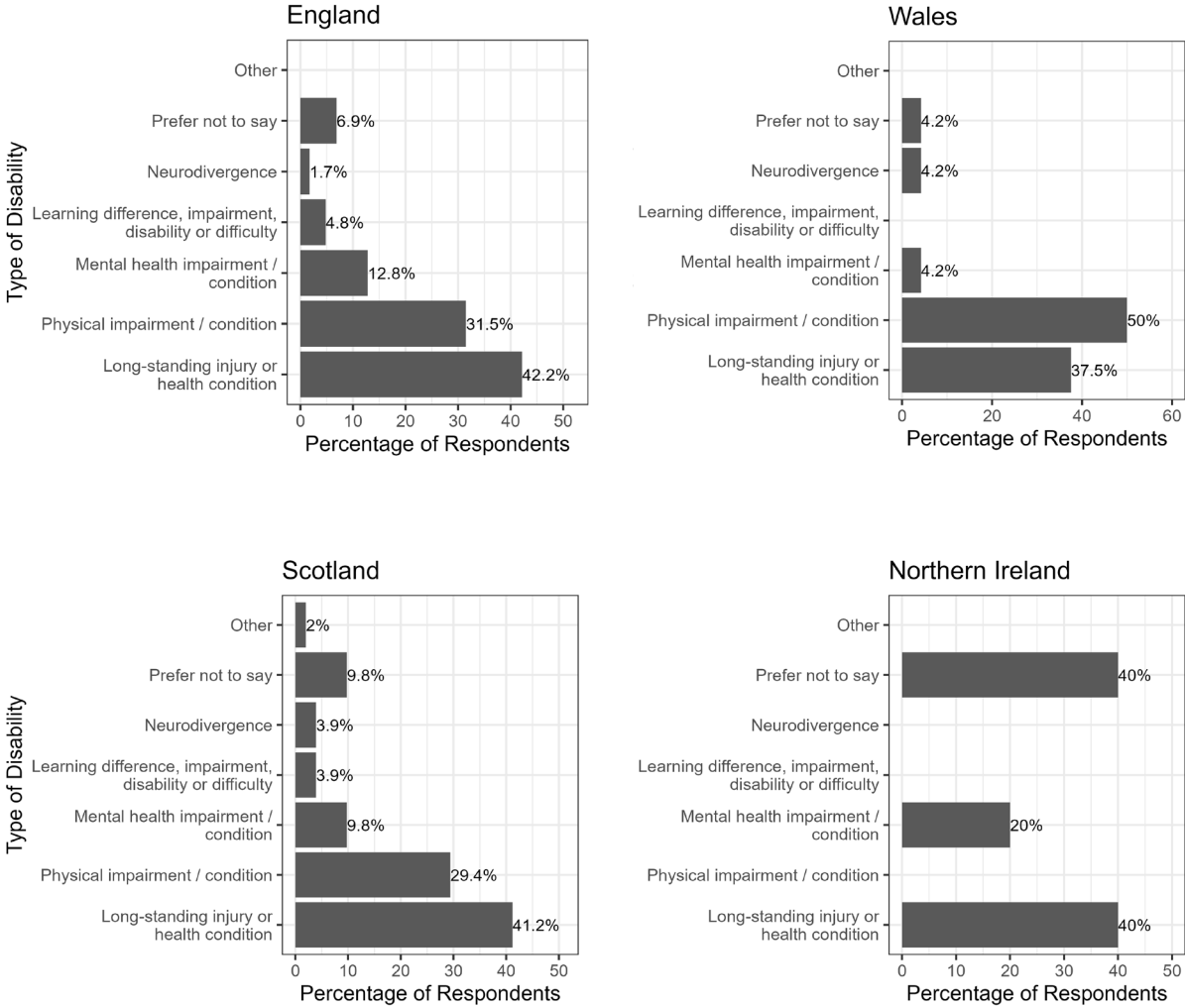


Figure 43. The type of disability as a percentage of respondents who stated a type of disability for each country. Note that four respondents stated they did not have a disability/no response or selected prefer not to say to the previous question, but supplied a type of disability.



4. Discussion

4.1. Demography of BTO-coordinated JNCC-funded schemes

Overall, the majority of respondents were men, their gender matched their sex at birth, they were heterosexual or straight, aged between 65–74, based in England, were retired, with at least an undergraduate degree, spoke English, were British, had no religion or belief, had not undertaken any training and did not possess a disability, long-term health condition, learning difference or impairment.

BBS was the survey in which the greatest number of respondents (1,117) were involved, despite the number of BBS surveyors in 2022 (2,738, Heywood *et al.* 2023) being lower than that the number of surveyors contributing data to WeBS (3,694, Austin *et al.* 2023), in which 812 respondents participated, or the Ringing Scheme (2,898). Note that the survey was not circulated to participants in the BTO's largest schemes, BirdTrack (~11,000 people took part in 2022) or Garden BirdWatch (9,300 people took part in 2022), as they operate outside the JNCC/BTO Partnership. As a percentage of participants in 2022, 37% of BBS volunteers responded, compared to 22% for WeBS participants, 21% for SMP, 17% for the Ringing Scheme; while absolute numbers were lower, the proportional response for NRS, GSMP and WBBS was higher than that for BBS (50%, 54% and 51% respectively).

The majority of respondents had been involved in BTO schemes for five years or fewer, possibly due to surveyors who had started their journey with bird monitoring relatively recently being also more enthusiastic in providing feedback. Alternatively, these results could be an indicator of high turnover resulting from poor surveyor retention. However, given that 61% of respondents are retired and 53% are 65 years of age or older, a more likely explanation, which better tallies with anecdotal evidence from Survey Organisers, is that free time is a significant limiting factor with respect to participation, and volunteers therefore tend to start to contribute later in life. Another window of opportunity to contribute, where the availability of free time is greater and people may be less mobile, is that between leaving full time education and starting a family, which again represents a relatively short engagement period. The over-representation of the retired category among respondents, relative to the national situation, may relate to the availability of free time and/or available capital with which to invest in surveying. The increased opportunity retirement provides to respond to the questionnaire should also be considered, although equally age can correlate negatively with engagement in EDI initiatives and this may therefore compensate for any response bias.

A training question was added by BTO, to understand uptake of the various types we provide. Most respondents said that they had not done any training; of those who had, the online ID courses being the most frequently attended. This is perhaps unsurprising, as most current BTO training is focused on bird identification skills, which many of the volunteers taking part in JNCC-funded surveys are likely to already possess.

It is unsurprising that the highest number of the respondents to this questionnaire are based in England (1,548), being the largest country with the largest population in the UK/British Isles. It is equally unsurprising that Northern Ireland, with the smallest population, had the lowest number of contributors (36); it is well documented that there are fewer volunteers, and therefore less biological data collection, in Northern Ireland (Border *et al.* 2019, Barnes *et al.* 2024). The distribution of the UK population is similar to that of questionnaire respondents (73% in England, 17% in Scotland, 7% in Wales, and 3% in Northern Ireland), suggesting a lack of bias with respect to location.

There was a strong male bias (71%, vs 26% female) apparent in respondents, which may reflect a genuine bias in participation but could also be influenced by differences in the likelihood of each gender to respond to questionnaires. The majority of respondents classified themselves as heterosexual, with their gender reflecting sex assigned at birth; more comparison with national statistics would be required to determine whether the average orientation of volunteers is representative of the British population.

The majority of respondents had obtained at least an undergraduate degree, and many had progressed further. While this may reflect a better understanding of the value of the data arising, a more likely explanation is that the correlates of level of education provide differential barriers to participation. People educated to degree level or higher may be more likely to have a higher income, which may have a direct impact (e.g. increased capacity to pay for optical equipment and fuel) as well as indirect impacts (more likely to live in rural areas, may have shorter working hours/options to retire earlier). We cannot exclude the fact that, given the visibility of EDI initiatives within higher education, people educated to degree level or higher would also be more likely to complete the questionnaire.

Over 98% of the respondents speak English as the household's main language, and 92% describe their ethnic origin as British, which is perhaps unsurprising as BTO survey materials are predominantly distributed in English, as was this questionnaire. Of the 55% of respondents identifying as religious, over half identify as Christian, which is again likely to correlate strongly with the ethnicity of those completing the questionnaire.

Only 15% of respondents possessed a disability. The fact that only a third of these identified the disability as physical impairment is unsurprising, as most of the survey types included require a reasonable degree of mobility, as a minimum walking around a field site carrying optical equipment. Comparison with national statistics is required to assess how representative respondents are in terms of the wider population, noting that mental disabilities could be over-represented due to the positive links between engaging with nature and mental health.

4.2. Individual scheme volunteer demography

In general, the results for individual schemes are similar to the overall results, but there are some differences, the majority of which are likely to have a logistic basis. There are, for example, more GSMP volunteers in Scotland, as a result of there being larger populations of geese to monitor. In addition, NatureScot part-fund the scheme, and it is therefore likely to have more promotional investment and higher visibility in Scotland.

A larger number of SMP participants occupied the 45–54 category, relatively more GSMP participants had obtained an undergraduate degree, and a greater percentage of GSMP surveyors classified themselves as full-time employed, all of which is likely to relate to the increased proportion of surveyors contributing to these schemes in an academic/professional capacity. BTO training uptake is also lower in SMP and GSMP, most likely because BTO has relatively recently taken over the running of these schemes and the majority is carried out by experienced surveyors.

A greater proportion of BBS, WBBS and WeBS participants are retired, which may reflect the reduced physicality relative to surveys that generally require more access to land away from footpaths, such as SMP, GSMP, RS and NRS, noting that participation in the Ringing and Nest Record Schemes may also require use of heavy equipment, climbing, etc. Conversely, volunteers are also able to contribute to the Ringing and Nest Record Schemes in their own garden, as sites are self-selected, which may explain why the representation of people with disabilities is greater. Generally, there is a greater diversity across the age categories in the Ringing Scheme, and many are full-time employed/self-employed or retired. Ringing training requires a lot of time and therefore commitment, and the resultant level of engagement tends to be greater, with participants adopting it as part of their identity, so the duration of engagement is likely to be longer, and this is reflected in the age distribution.

4.3. Individual country volunteer demography

Training in England has been largely virtual, but there has been more in-person ID training in Northern Ireland and Scotland, where full-time BTO engagement staff have been in place for longer, and this is reflected in the survey results. As of November 2023, and January 2024 respectively, a full-time engagement officer has been in place in Wales and England; results from subsequent surveys should therefore display greater national parity.

In Northern Ireland, DAERA/NIEA and BTO staff contribute considerable staff time to surveys, particularly WeBS and BBS, which may explain the predominant age category (45–54) being higher than in the other three countries. There were also more respondents stating that they were Christian in Northern Ireland, which is not surprising given the religious history of the country.

Only 7% of Welsh respondents spoke Welsh as the main household language. This figure is considerably lower than the census data from 2021, which indicates that 18% of the population could speak Welsh (ONS 2022), and the Annual Population Survey, which states that, up to 2023, 29% of the population above the age of three were able to speak Welsh (Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government 2024). It is worth noting, however, that other respondents may also speak Welsh as a secondary language.

4.4. Future work

In order to maximise the value of this analysis, and to ensure that it catalyses real world change in terms of survey participation, we recommend that the following stepwise approach is taken:

Step 1: Assess the degree to which responses are representative of the wider BTO supporter network. This would be achieved through a comparison with the independent data held on BTO survey participants; as a minimum, length of participation and assumed gender could be calculated for most surveys, and age information is also available for Ringing Scheme participants. Any under-representation identified could then potentially be addressed through more targeted approaches. We recognise that the Partnership-funded surveys represent a subset of those coordinated by BTO and would therefore advise that the questionnaire was also circulated to participants in other BTO coordinated schemes, such as Garden BirdWatch, BirdTrack, Heronries and the Winter Gull Survey.

Step 2: Assess the degree to which BTO surveyors are representative of the wider UK population. The Office of National Statistics runs a decadal Census that captures similar information collected by this survey across the English and Welsh population, e.g. in 2021 in England and Wales 90% of population were British, 93.5% assigned same gender at birth, 89.4% were heterosexual/straight, 3.2% identified with an LGBTQ+ orientation, 46% are Christian. A brief comparison has been made above to illustrate the potential for assessment of the degree to which BTO volunteers reflect the wider public. There is also potential to compare results across other Terrestrial Evidence Partnerships of Partnerships (TEPoP) schemes e.g. Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, National Bat Monitoring Programme and UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, which would further help to understand whether any biases identified are BTO-specific, which could be captured in a peer-reviewed paper that raises the profile of the issues and initiatives.

Step 3: Produce a strategy aimed at increasing volunteer diversity across the surveyor network. Once the degree of under-representation has been identified, decisions will need to be made regarding the degree to which resources are invested in tackling it and the order of prioritisation. Factors likely to influence these decisions include i) the nature of existing barriers, ii) the ability of BTO initiatives to remove them (e.g. are they specific to BTO or reflective of wider societal trends?), and iii) the degree to which they are already being addressed by other initiatives (e.g. the BTO's Youth Advisory Panel, the Monitoring Strategy). As a minimum, age, gender, ethnicity, orientation, educational history and economic background all seem to be tractable areas that would warrant consideration. Development of a strategy must integrate with, and include staff involved in, the 'Embracing Everyone' Action Area of the core BTO Strategy and the 'Becoming More Inclusive' Working Group, established in conjunction with an external charity that will generate a three-year Framework aimed at improving diversity across the Trust; input from the BTO's Youth Advisory Panel should also be sought. The strategy will also determine the level at which initiatives will be rolled out; for those characteristics with the potential to impact directly on fieldwork, such as those impacting on mobility, this is likely to require a survey-level approach, but other areas of diversity, such as sexual orientation and educational history, could be addressed at the organisational level, or indeed across all Partnership surveys, to minimise wheel reinvention and maximise efficiency.

Step 4: Develop BTO systems to better capture data around volunteer characteristics. The most effective way by which to monitor the outcomes of any strategic initiative will be to collect data on volunteer characteristics at the point of first engagement; this will almost certainly lead to a higher proportion of participants completing the information relative to occasional surveys, particularly as it provides the potential to encourage those who have not completed information initially to do so at a later date. It is vital, however, that this data collection does not act as a disincentive for participation, so it must remain strongly encouraged, rather than mandated, with a comprehensive explanation of why it is useful and how it will be used going forwards and a structure that permits rapid entry of data.

Step 5: Develop and roll out initiatives needed to improve inclusivity and diversity among volunteers. Once the strategy has identified the priority areas to address, initiatives can be planned and rolled out. The nature of initiatives will depend on the characteristic and potentially the survey, but the options can be broadly grouped into passive communication (e.g. improving website content to highlight BTO as a safe space, better advertising of existing initiatives) and proactive approaches (e.g. provision of grants and training courses, establishment and support of community champions, collaboration with existing minority groups in the sector).

Throughout this process, it is vital to consider and minimise the risks relating to a drive for increased diversity, the primary one of which is the potential for it to act as a disincentive to the continued participation of existing volunteers. The two mechanisms by which this might occur are:

1. Through accusations of positive discrimination leading to a reduction in volunteer quality, either through a relaxation of standards or reduced investment in recruiting from traditional sources – the best way to counter this is to explain that surveys are already open to all-comers so filtering is largely self-imposed, and that we will continue to recruit from as broad a range of the population as it possible.
2. Through concerns that EDI initiatives will divert funding away from core BTO work – these are best dealt with through transparency around the funding sources involved and by explaining that increasing diversity is highly likely to be beneficial to the long-term sustainability of the core monitoring work.

4.5. Lessons learned

Some informal feedback from volunteers suggests that the email may not have been obvious in its intentions. The email subject heading ‘Can you help BTO? – Learning about our volunteers’ may have benefited from including a direct ask e.g. ‘complete questionnaire’, although this could equally still deter some people. As some of our volunteers (3,314, 36%) obviously missed the first ask/email, a reminder email or sending the email more than once may have been useful to increase the uptake; as the survey/questionnaire was anonymous, we would not know who had already completed it.

The ‘Other’ responses in the free text fields were often unhelpful, not sensible and/or contained a complaint about the questionnaire, such as ‘What has this got to do with birds?’, ‘Why are you asking this question?’ and ‘This is irrelevant.’ The Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix) supplied answers and explanations, so this suggests that it may not have been read and would have benefited from greater prominence; conversely, people with strong opinions on the value of EDI initiatives may have voiced their opinion regardless of the visibility/quality of supplementary information provided. Including an abridged version of the Participant Information in the heading text to explain the reason behind the questionnaire may help in future.

Some free text answers were already included in the options or were quite ambiguous and could not be easily categorised, particularly if the respondent was unsure or had stated multiple e.g. ‘Christian/Spiritual/Gaia’ for religion/belief. These text fields did give people the opportunity to express their identity in ways that were not included as an option, however, e.g. Agender, Genderqueer, Pagan, Vegan and Anti-theist, allowing them to feel represented and therefore incentivising provision of a response to the questionnaire generally, without a negative impact on the utility of the data collected, so were likely net positive.

Managing the predominantly negative responses to the survey was also time consuming but overall, the level was relatively low, with 10 complaints received by email plus around 20 negative comments included within the questionnaire answers (2% of a possible 2,054 respondents).

4.6. Conclusion

This questionnaire was vital to understanding the volunteer demography within the survey schemes coordinated by BTO. It has provided a baseline of participant diversity that will enable us to assess progress in response to strategic initiatives implemented in future years and we would welcome running a repeat survey once these have been put in place.

At a UK level, none of the results were particularly surprising, the majority of volunteers who responded being retired, older, white, male and having participated in higher education. The range of answers provided to questions around gender and religion/belief suggest that our volunteer base is beginning to expand into other backgrounds, however, and splitting the data by scheme and by country did provide further insight, which has highlighted priorities for further development.

Future work outlined above includes extending the survey to the wider suite of BTO schemes, contextualising results with independent data sources, developing a strategy that makes pragmatic decisions about initiatives that could help to increase diversity, rolling those initiatives out at a resolution (BTO-wide or survey-specific) that provides greatest impact and establishing mechanisms for ongoing data collection that allow us to monitor their efficacy. This development work will be overseen by the working groups that have already been put in place to implement the 'Embracing Everyone' and 'Sustaining Supporters' Action Areas of the BTO Strategy, in order to meet our overarching organisational objective of greater inclusivity.

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Appendix

Participant Information Sheet

BTO questionnaire - learning about our volunteers

This Participant Information Sheet explains the procedure for taking part in the BTO questionnaire (June 2023). This will help you to understand why and how the survey is being carried out, and what participation will involve. Please contact the Data Protection team (data.protection@bto.org) if anything is unclear or if you have any questions.

1. Who is conducting the survey?

Representatives of BTO. The key contacts at BTO are Dawn Balmer, Ellie Leech, Sian Knott, Graham Hatt and Andrew Scott. We are working with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to learn more about the volunteers that take part in schemes under the BTO/JNCC Partnership, often operated in partnership with others including RSPB, NatureScot. We are contacting all participants who have volunteered in at least one of the following schemes since 1 January 2022: BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey, BTO/JNCC/RSPB Waterways Breeding Bird Survey, BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey, BTO/JNCC Avian Demographic Scheme (ringing & nest recording), BTO/JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme and the BTO/JNCC/NatureScot Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme.

2. Who is funding the survey?

This questionnaire survey is being funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and BTO, under the JNCC/BTO Partnership.

3. What is the purpose of the survey?

The aim of this questionnaire is to better understand who is getting involved in our schemes and improve our engagement with new audiences, helping to ensure sustainability of data collection and give as many people as possible the opportunity to interact with the natural world. This is part of the wider commitment of JNCC and BTO to encourage equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives among its volunteer networks and partnerships.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part is completely optional and deciding to not take part will not disadvantage you in any way.

5. What will happen if I take part?

Participating will entail completing an anonymous questionnaire survey that is accessed online via the generic survey link in the invitation email. Your data will then be combined with all other responses and a report written up.

6. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no apparent risks to taking part in the survey that the research team can foresee.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate direct benefits to you from taking part in this survey but analysis of the results will help us to inspire new people to take part in wildlife monitoring, to increase the value they experience when participating in schemes under the BTO/JNCC Partnership and to increase the chances they remain involved in future. It is hoped that this will bring benefits to both the natural world and the people who are giving their time to help protect it.

8. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Yes – the survey is designed to be anonymous. No personal data (names or email addresses) will be linked with any survey responses at any time. We request you avoid including information in the free text boxes that could identify any individual, including yourself.

Whilst theoretically it could be possible for someone to try to work out who a participant was from their unique combination of answers, we can reassure you that all questionnaire data will be handled with complete confidentiality.

9. What will happen to the information I provide?

The information you provide will be captured electronically by BTO. Only BTO staff working on this survey will have access to the data gathered. The data will be stored securely to support analysis. A summary of the results will be made available to survey participants, and may be made publicly available, but we will ensure that any personally identifiable information is not included. BTO will store the raw questionnaire results for up to five years before deleting, and JNCC will receive a summary of the results for future research use.

10. Data Protection

BTO and JNCC (Data Controllers) have carried out a Data Protection Impact Assessment to ensure the careful management of processing personal data. We have designed the questionnaire to be anonymous, and the data that is collected will be stored securely.

Any personal data will be collected under the legal basis of 'public task'. By completing the questionnaire you are consenting to this processing of your data and confirming that you are at least 16 years of age.

Please note, due to the anonymous set up of the questionnaire we do not anticipate being able to identify individual responses, so you will not be able to modify your response after submission, and we are unable to delete your response if you wish to retract it.

Only BTO will use the name and email address you have provided when registering for schemes in order to contact you with a link to this survey and subsequent findings.

The BTO Privacy Policy is set out on the BTO website <https://www.bto.org/privacy>

If you have any concerns about how your personal data is being used please contact BTO's Data Protection Officer in the first instance (email: data.protection@bto.org). You have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk>). You also have the right to an effective judicial remedy against decisions of the Information Commissioner's Office.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and contribute to the survey.



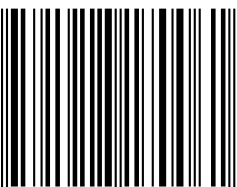
Front cover: Ailidh Barnes / BTO. Back cover: Rob Jaques / BTO / BTO

Volunteer equality diversity and inclusion demographics report 2023

This report, based on responses to a questionnaire sent out in August 2023, provides a vital baseline with which to assess the efficacy of future initiatives aimed at improving diversity across the BTO/JNCC volunteer surveys.

Suggested citation: Barnes, A., Leech, E. & Balmer, D. 2026. Volunteer equality diversity and inclusion demographics report 2023. *BTO Research Report 806*, BTO, Thetford, UK.

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