

HOW SATISFIED ARE PhD CANDIDATES ABOUT THEIR PhD PROGRAMME?

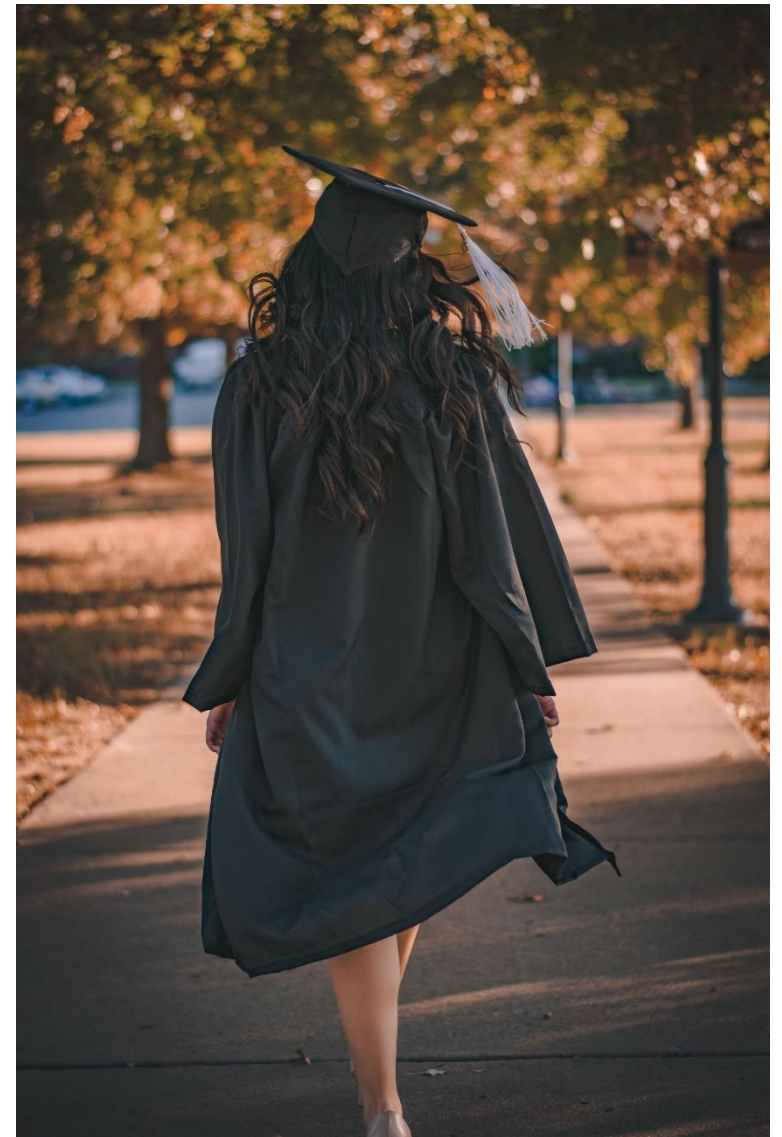
Quantitative research among PhD candidates on behalf of Finette Lips and Liesbeth Geudeke, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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HANS ONKENHOUT

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REASON AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH



Background

- > In 2016, the national 'PhD monitor' was launched. A study that aims to investigate the satisfaction of PhD candidates regarding their PhD trajectory.
- > It is a national survey that allows the VU to compare the satisfaction of its PhD candidates with the results of other universities.
- > The main goal of the PhD monitor is the optimization of the PhD trajectory.



Research question

- > This research focuses on the following main question: *How do VU PhD candidates view their current PhD trajectory?*
- > With sub questions:
 - *How satisfied are PhD candidates with their PhD trajectory?*
 - *Where are the areas for improvement in the PhD trajectory?*

REASON AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH



Method and target group

- > The quantitative study was conducted online.
- > A total of 688 PhD candidates completed the questionnaire in its entirety.
- > This survey's target group consisted of PhD candidates at VU Amsterdam.
- > It is not possible to make statements about the representativeness of the sample. The questionnaire was sent to all PhD candidates present in the Hora Finita. PhD candidates who are not present in the Hora Finita did not receive an invitation.

Reading guide

- > In this report we refer to the participants in the study as 'respondents'.
- > Answers to open questions were analysed in a qualitative manner. We will not only discuss the answers most often mentioned, but also the answers that we believe are important in terms of content.
- > We illustrate results with relevant quotes from participants, which are shown in italics.
- > In the analysis, we considered all the participants as a single group. We examined the differences between subgroups from different type of PhD-candidate, type of employment and PhD phase.
- > We tested the differences between target groups for significance. The percentages in the report have been rounded off. As a result, the total can incidentally add up to more or less than 100%.

ABOUT A PYRAMID REPORT

Report structure

- > We have written this report based on the principle of 'Pyramid Thinking'.
- > We start on slide 8 with an overview of the main conclusion, partial conclusions and most important results of this research: the 'pyramid'.
- > After this overview we present a summary with the conclusions.
- > We then discuss each of the sub-conclusions based on the results of the study.

Attachments

- > A detailed explanation of the used research method can be found in de appendix.
- > This also contains the questionnaire used, the tables and a printout of all the answers to the open questions.

The main conclusion answers the main question of the study

These are the results on which the conclusions are based, and we elaborate on them for each sub-conclusion

Main conclusion		
Sub-conclusion	Sub-conclusion	Sub-conclusion
<u>Page number</u>	<u>Page number</u>	<u>Page number</u>
Results	Results	Results
Results	Results	Results
Results	Results	Results

The sub-conclusions underpin the main conclusion, they form the parts of the chapter "Sub-conclusions".

The page numbers link directly to the corresponding sub-conclusion



Respondents are generally satisfied with the supervision they receive, and feel somewhat integrated into the research community. They are satisfied with the educational activities on offer, but lack sufficient time to participate. Over half of the respondents have fallen behind on schedule. Covid-19 is a contributor to this

Supervision Respondents are generally satisfied with the supervision they receive	Education Most respondents have access to educational activities. Over half of them are satisfied with these activities	Research Environment Respondents are not sufficiently integrated into the research community	Progress & Wellbeing Half of the respondents have fallen behind on schedule. Covid-19 is a big reason for this	Future Career A third is not planning to pursue a career in research
Pagina 18-22	Pagina 23-26	Pagina 27-30	Pagina 31-37	Pagina 38-40
On average, respondents have 3 supervisors and receive an average of 5.5 hours supervision per month. They are generally satisfied with the supervision they receive	Almost all respondents have access to one or more educational activities, the majority have access to seminars and conferences. Over half are satisfied with these educational activities on offer	Less than half of the respondents feel integrated into the community, although two thirds have contact with other researchers at least once a week. A third has contact less frequently	Only a third is on schedule with their planning, almost half has fallen behind. A third of them expect to be delayed by more than nine months. Half of them indicate the Covid-19 pandemic is the reason.	Only two out of five respondents (totally) agree that their supervisor(s) encourages them to think about their future career
Almost three quarters of respondents are satisfied with the feedback and they know what their supervisor expects from them. More than half of them think that their supervisor knows what is expected from them	Almost half of the respondents have access to career orientation activities. Only two out of five of them are satisfied with this activity	Only 56% of the respondents find that within their research group integrity issues can be discussed freely	Nearly two thirds experience workload/time pressure in their PhD project. And half of them find this considerably to extremely bothering. The workload pressure is mostly project-related	Two out of five respondents aspire to continue their research outside academia. A third is not planning to continue with research.
Two thirds of the respondents find the scientific requirements for their thesis clear. The majority discussed these requirements with their supervisor(s)	Two thirds feel that educational activities contribute to the completion of their PhD. Less than half feel they have sufficient time to participate in these activities	Almost three quarters of the respondents teach or supervise students during their PhD-project. On average they teach 14.2 hours per month	A Majority of the respondents rate their wellbeing as (fairly) good. For a third their PhD project has a negative impact on their wellbeing	
Courses, symposia and workshops offered by the graduate school are most relevant for the respondents PhD-projects			For half of the respondents Covid-19 has a mostly negative impact on their PhD-project. A quarter thinks Covid-19 will also negatively impact their future career prospects	

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Respondents are generally satisfied with the supervision they receive

- > On average respondents are generally (very) satisfied with the supervision they receive. However, there is a noteworthy group of respondents (14%) that are not satisfied with their supervision.
- > There is a significant difference between how junior and medior/senior respondents feel satisfied with the supervision they receive. Juniors are more satisfied with this than medior and seniors.
- > We can also see this difference when we look at the satisfaction with the feedback they receive from their supervisor. Again, juniors are more satisfied with the feedback they receive than medior and seniors.
- > Even though most of the respondents have discussed the scientific requirements of their PhD thesis with their supervisor, for only two thirds of the respondents, it is clear what these requirements are.

Educational activities are available to most respondents but only half of them are satisfied with these activities

- > In general, most respondents have access to some form of educational activities, with most respondents having access to seminar and conferences and general skill courses/workshops. Only half of the respondents are (very) satisfied with the educational activities on offer.
- > 20% of the external respondents do not have access to educational activities. Only 1% of the employed respondents do not have access.
- > When looking at career orientation activities, only half of the respondents have access to these activities. And less than a third of them are satisfied with these activities. Two thirds of the respondents feel that the educational activities are contributing to the completion of their PhD-project.
- > Only half feels encouraged by their supervisor to participate in the educational activities. But only less than half feel they have sufficient time to participate.
- > Junior and medior respondents are more likely to feel encouraged by their supervisor to participate in educational activities than senior respondents.

Only half of the respondents feel that they are sufficiently integrated into the research community

- > In general, only half the respondents feel integrated into the research community. However, employed respondents are more likely to feel integrated than external respondents.
- > We can also see this when looking at the extent to which they have contact with other researchers. Two thirds of the respondents have contact with other researchers at least once a week, thus explaining why they feel more integrated into the community. But again, the employed respondents have more contacts on a weekly basis than the external respondents.
- > Almost three quarters of the respondents teach or supervise students during their PhD-project. External respondents are more often not allowed to teach than employed respondents.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Half of the respondents have fallen behind on schedule. With the Covid-19 pandemic being a big reason for their delay

- > A third of the respondents who have fallen behind on schedule, expect their delay to be more than nine months. Seniors are more often not on schedule with their planning compared to junior and medior respondents.
- > From the respondents who have fallen behind on schedule, half has indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic is the reason. Another important reasons for their delay are the too ambitious projects and circumstances in their personal life.
- > Employed respondents are more often delayed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, too ambitious projects or because they have problems with the data collection. External respondents are more often delayed because of non-project related issues.
- > Almost two thirds of the respondents also experience a high workload or time pressure in their PhD-project. Of which half of them finds this considerably bothering. The employed respondents experience more often a higher workload or time pressure than the external.
- > Respondents who are bothered by the high workload or time pressure indicate that this is mostly project related. With the amount of work and the pressure to publish having a big impact on their perceived high pressure.
- > External respondents indicate more often that their perceived pressure is more related to their personal circumstances, like their PhD-project being part-time.
- > Even though two thirds of the respondents experience a high workload, most of the respondents still rate their general wellbeing as (fairly) good. When specifically looking at how their PhD-project relates to their wellbeing, a third indicates that their project has a negative impact.
- > When asked how the Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on their PhD-project and wellbeing, half of the respondents indicate that it has a negative impact on the progress of their project, motivation to work on their project and their mental health. A quarter indicates they think that the pandemic will also negatively impact their future career prospects.

A third of the respondents is not going to pursue a career in research

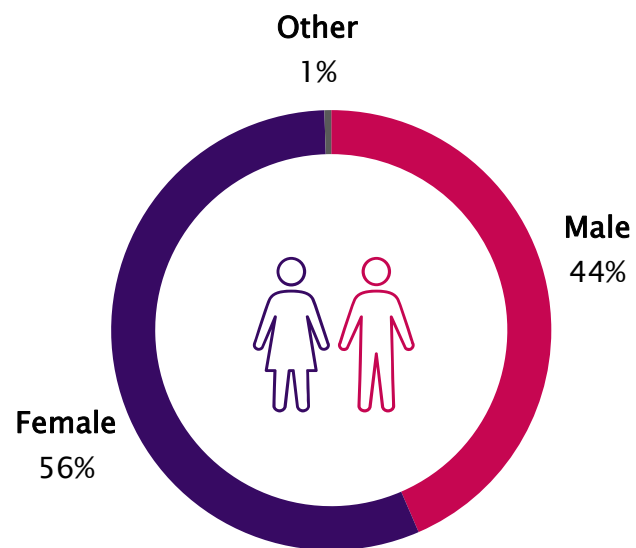
- > Only two out of five respondents are encouraged by their supervisor to think about their future career. With the employed respondents receiving more encouragement than the external respondents.
- > When asked about their career perspectives, a third indicate that they are not going to continue with a career in research and two out of five will continue their research outside academia. Half of them will pursue a career in education.



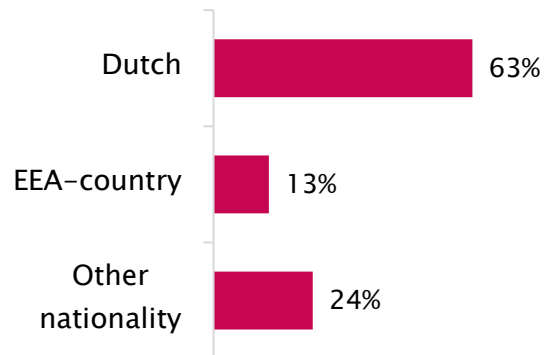
PROFILE RESPONDENTS

PROFILE VU-PROMOVENDI

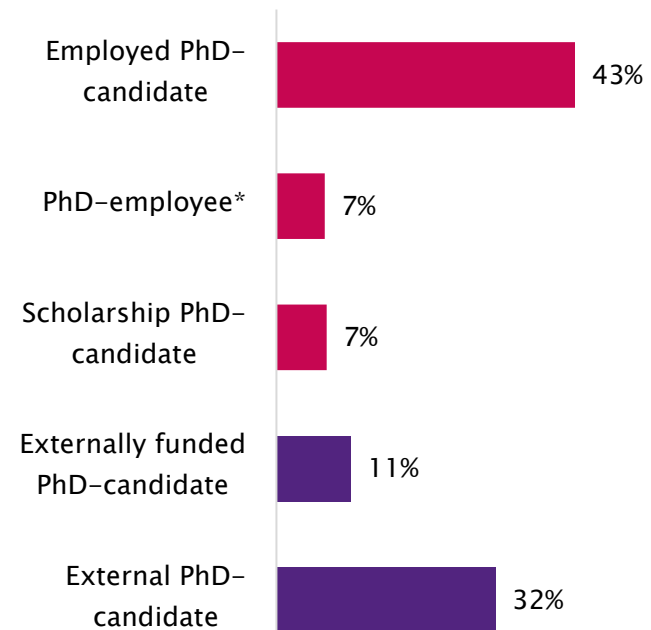
Gender



Nationality



Type of PhD candidate

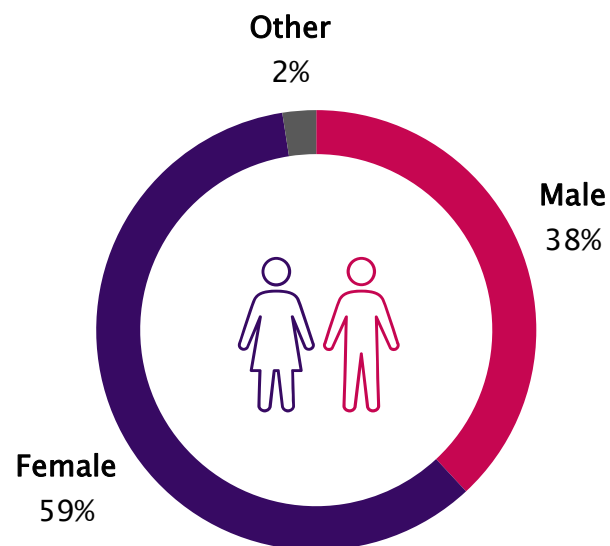


*Employee (not PhD candidate) working on a PhD project

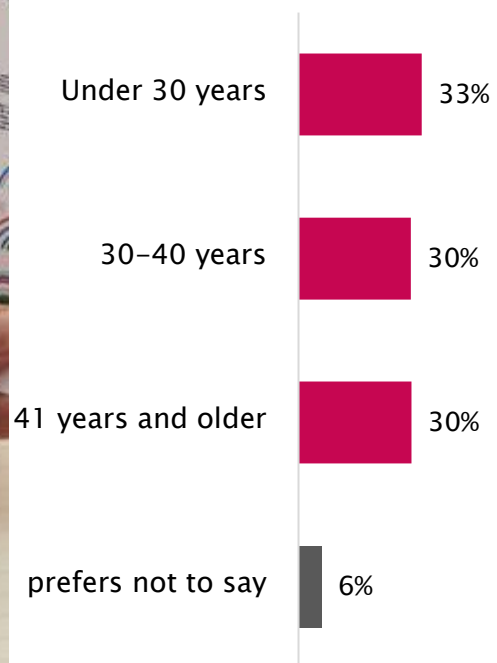
[Microsoft Word – Flow chart PhD_ENG \(vsnu.nl\)](#)

PROFILE RESPONDENTS (N=688)

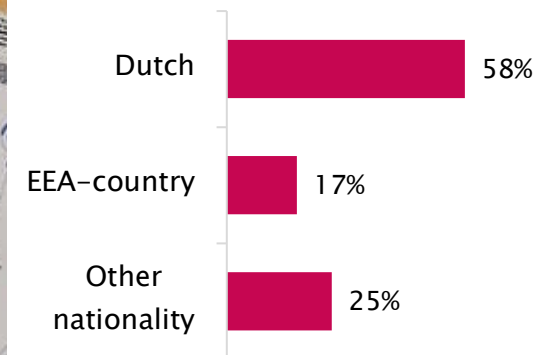
Gender



Age

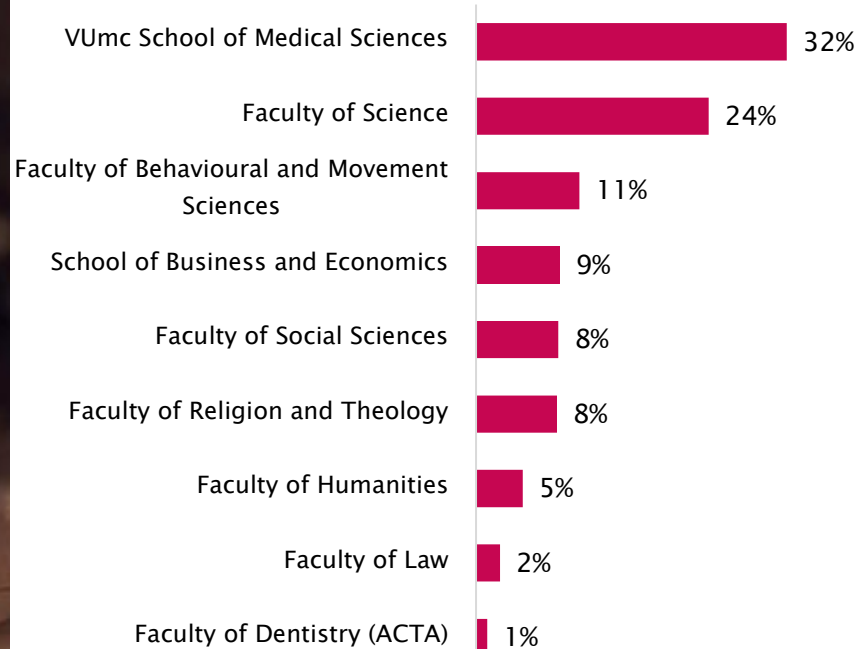


Nationality

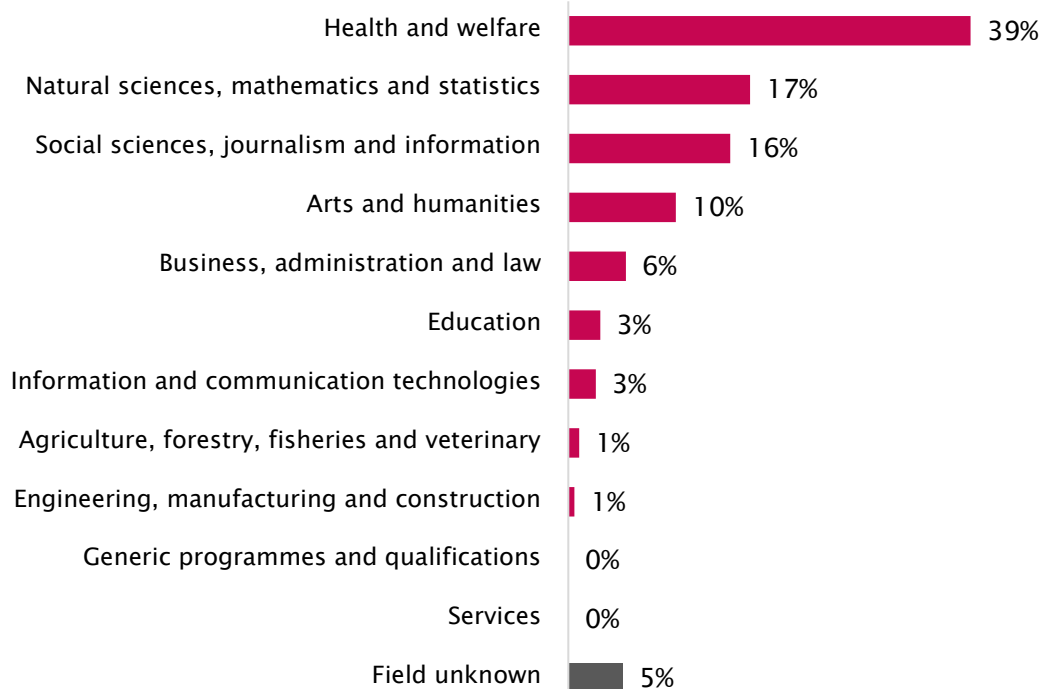


PROFILE RESPONDENTS (N=688)

Faculty



Academic domain (conform ISCED Fields)

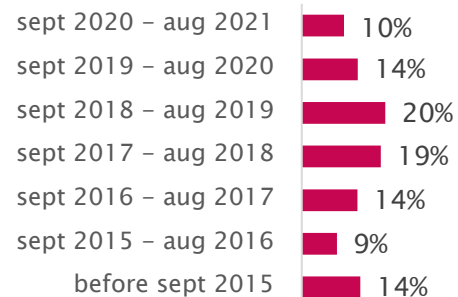


PROFILE RESPONDENTS (N=688)

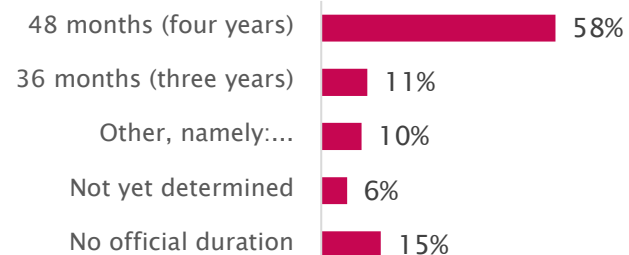


Start PhD project

In what year and month did you officially start your PhD?

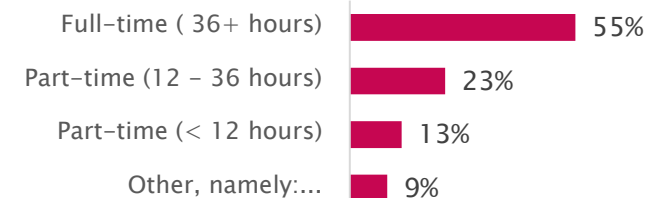


What is the official duration of your PhD project as agreed upon at the start?

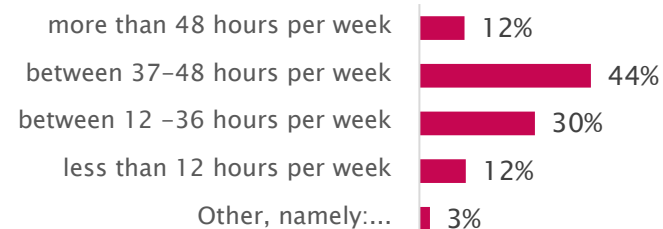


Duration PhD project

How many hours per week do you have to work on your PhD project, according to your contract or training and supervision plan?

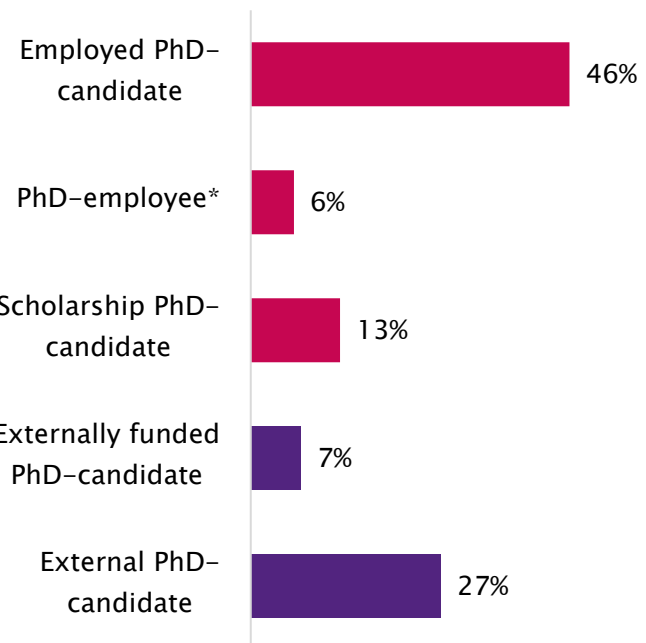


In an average week, how many hours do you actually work on your PhD project?



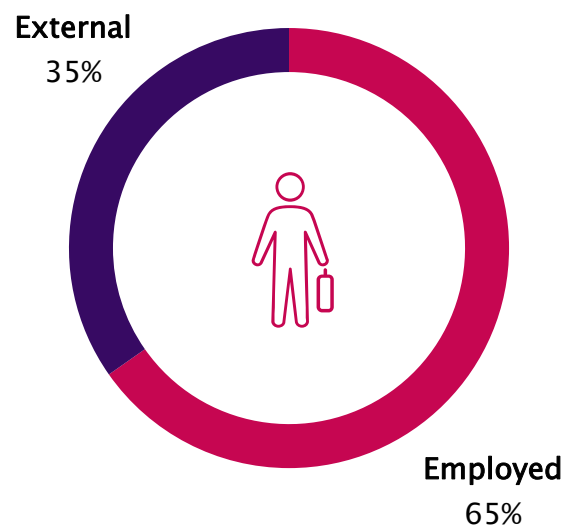
PROFILE RESPONDENTS (N=688)

Type of PhD candidate

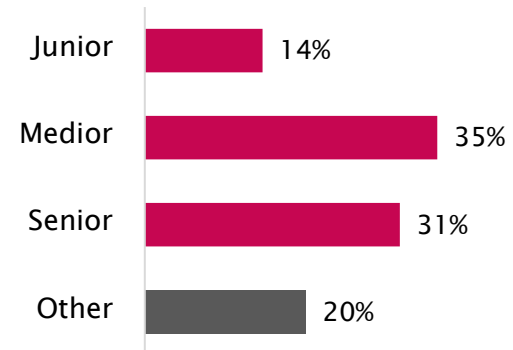


*Employee (not PhD candidate) working on a PhD project
[Microsoft Word – Flow chart PhD_ENG \(vsnu.nl\)](#)

Type of employment



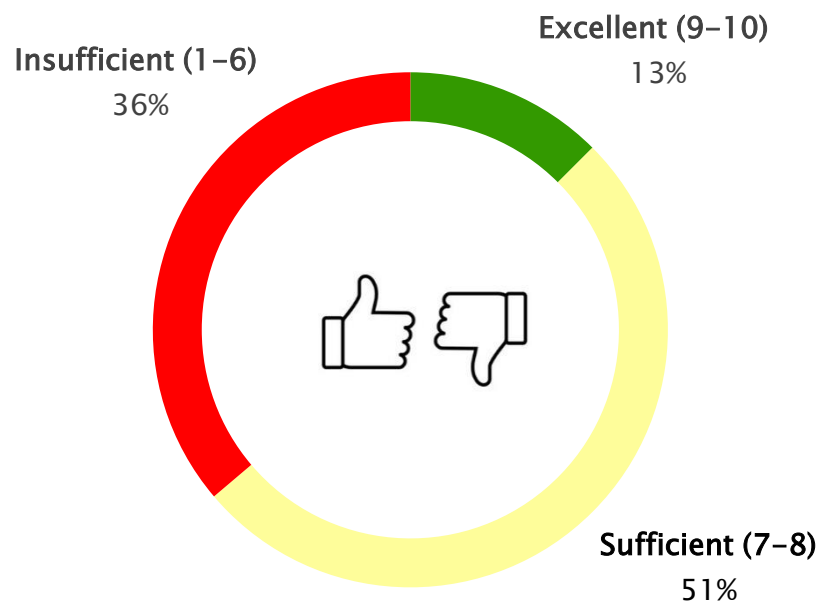
PhD phase*



*PhD candidates have different PhD phases depending on whether they are employed or not. In this graph we have combined these phases.

PROFILE RESPONDENTS (N=688)

Satisfaction with PhD trajectory

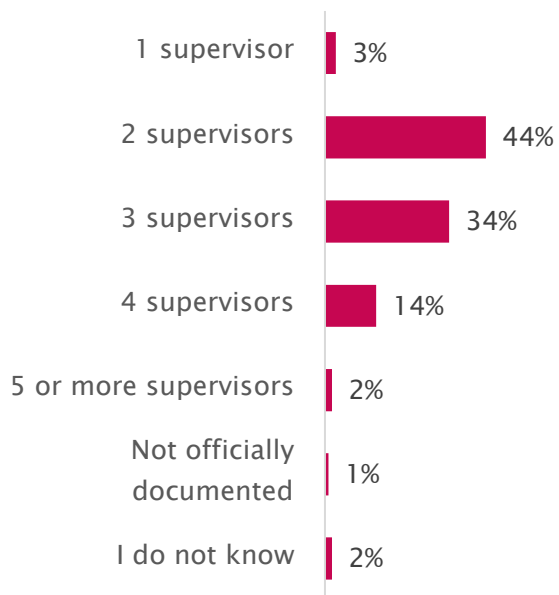


RESPONDENTS ARE GENERALLY (VERY) SATISFIED WITH THE SUPERVISION THEY RECEIVE

ON AVERAGE, RESPONDENTS HAVE 3 SUPERVISORS AND RECEIVE AN AVERAGE OF 5.5 HOURS SUPERVISION PER MONTH. THEY ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THE SUPERVISION THEY RECEIVE

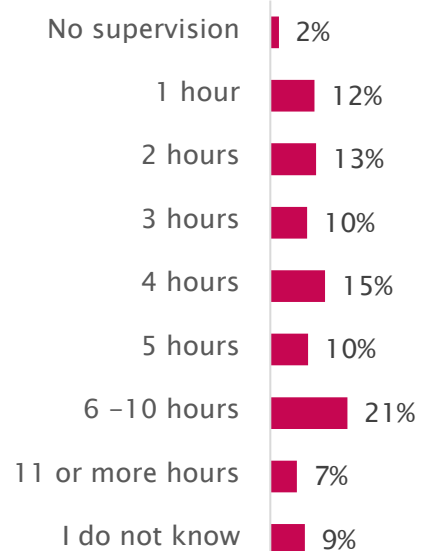
Please state the number of people who are officially part of your supervision team?

Base: all (n=688)



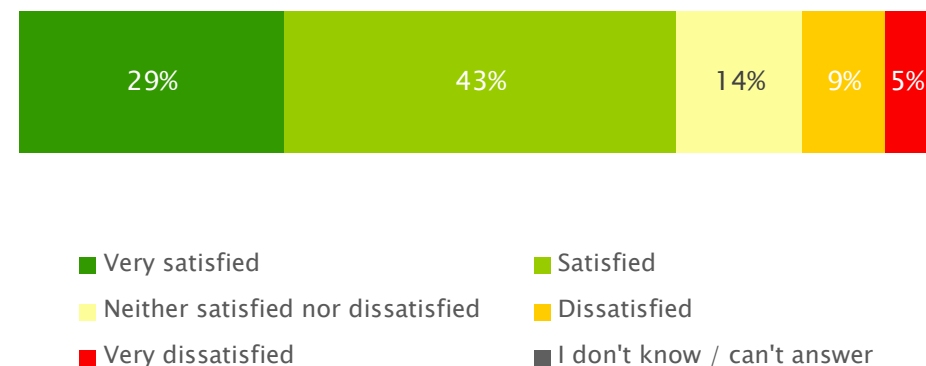
In an average month, how many hours supervision do you receive (from all your supervisors combined)?

Base: all (n=688)



Are you, in general, satisfied with the supervision you receive?

Base: all (n=688)

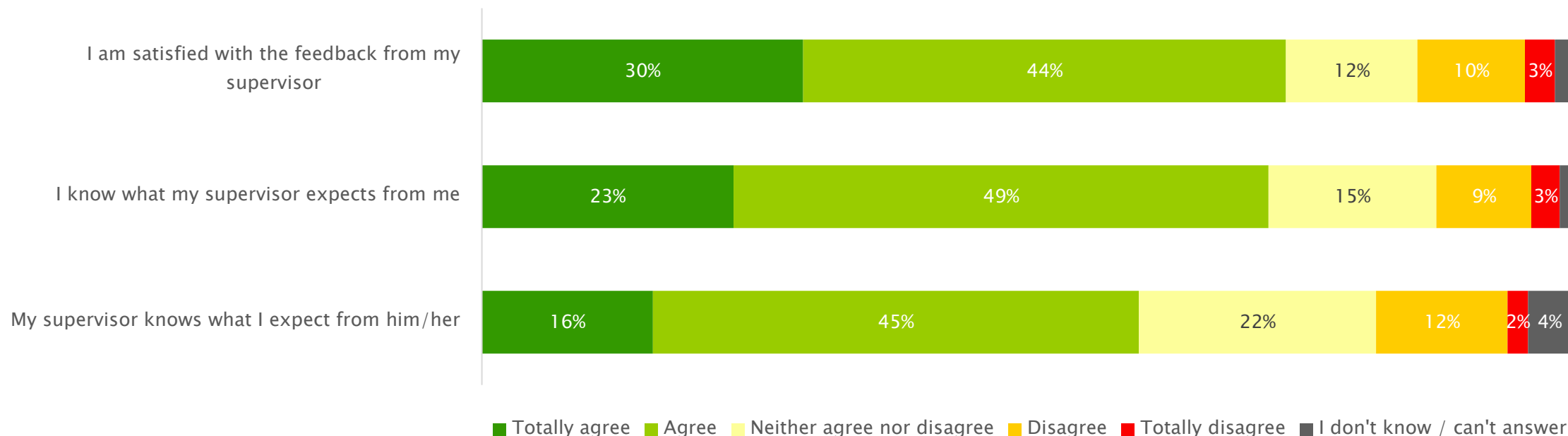


> Juniors are generally more satisfied with their supervision (87% (very) satisfied) then medior and seniors (76% and 67%).

ALMOST THREE QUARTERS OF RESPONDENTS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE FEEDBACK AND THEY KNOW WHAT THEIR SUPERVISOR EXPECTS FROM THEM. MORE THAN HALF THINK THAT THEIR SUPERVISOR KNOWS WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM THEM

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: all (n=688)

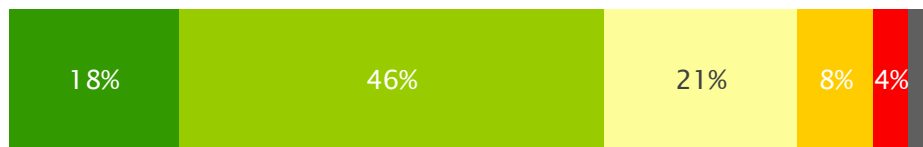


- > Juniors are generally more satisfied with the feedback they receive from their supervisor (86% (totally) agree) then medior and seniors (75% and 72%).
- > Juniors more often think that their supervisor is aware of what is expected from their supervision (71% (totally) agree) then medior and seniors (60% and 57%).

TWO THIRDS OF THE RESPONDENTS FIND THE SCIENTIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR THEIR THESIS CLEAR. THE MAJORITY DISCUSSED THESE REQUIREMENTS WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR(S)

Are the scientific requirements clear to you?

Base: all (n=688)

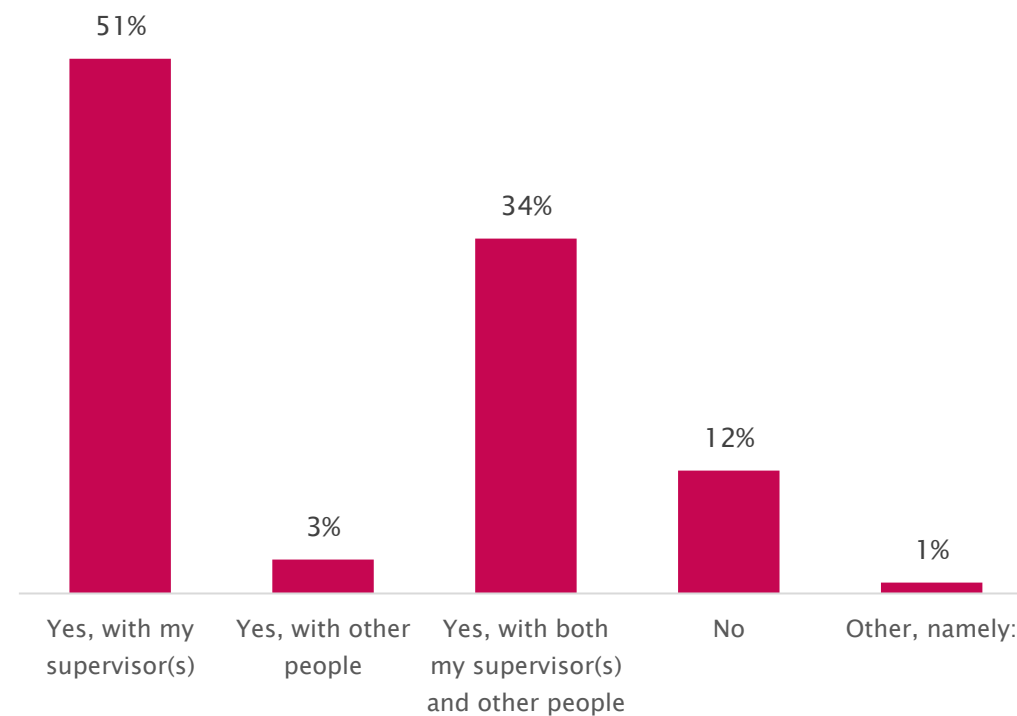


Very clear
A bit unclear
Very unclear

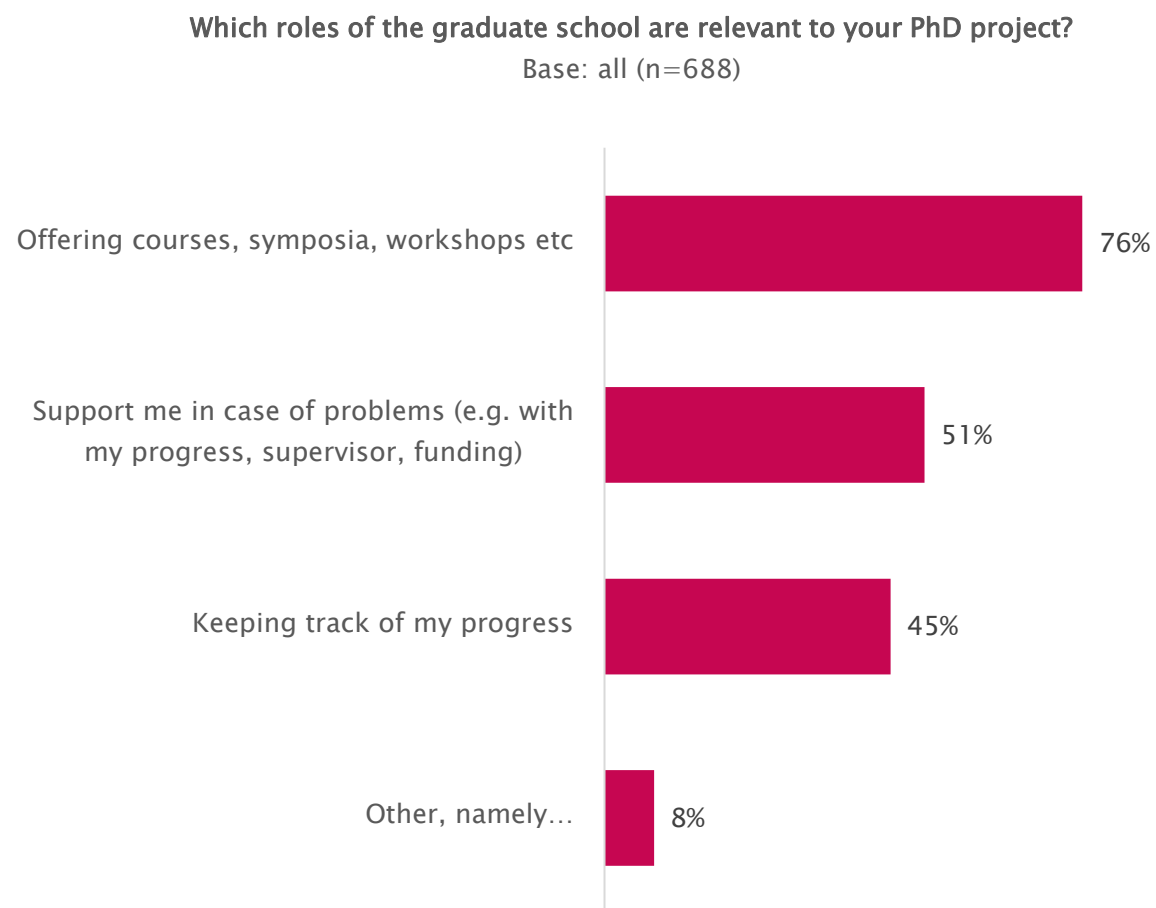
Rather clear
Rather unclear
I don't know / can't answer

Have you discussed the scientific requirements of your PhD thesis?

Base: all (n=688)



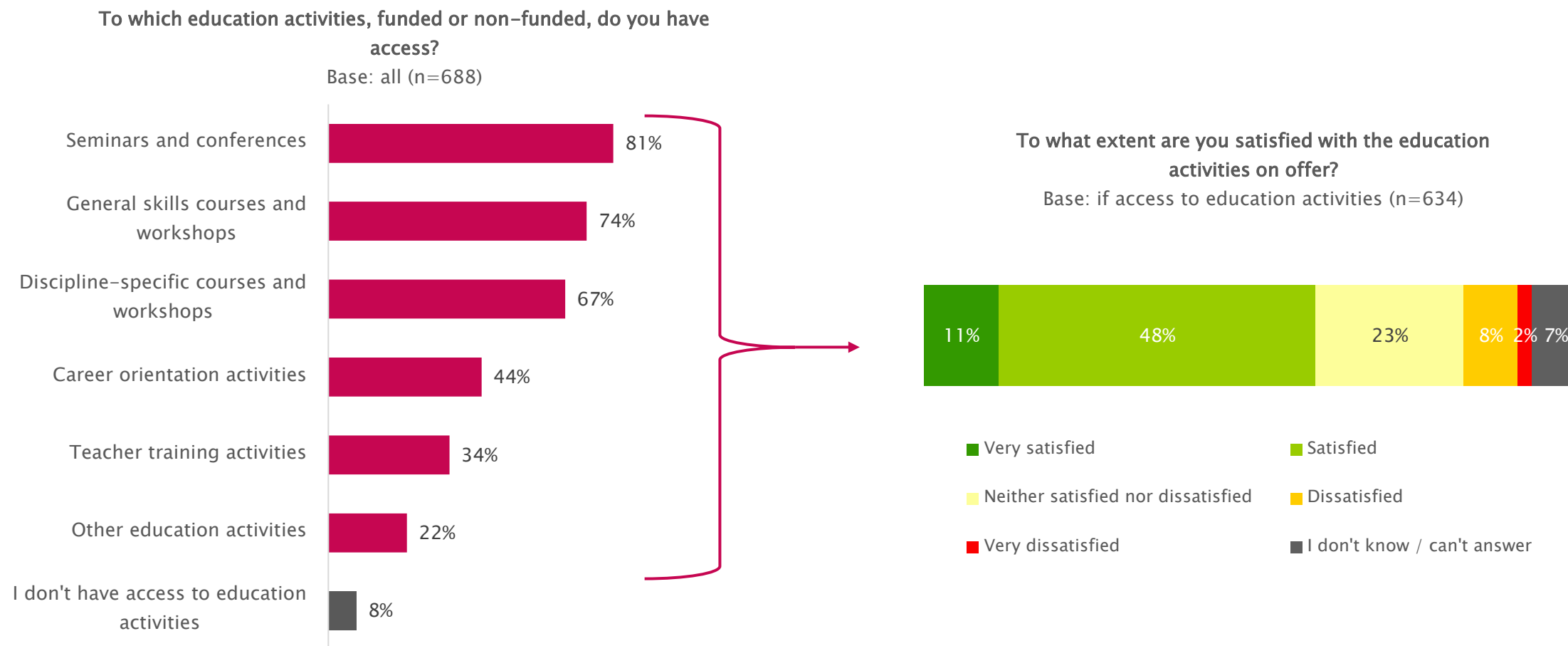
COURSES, SYMPOSIA AND WORKSHOPS OFFERED BY THE GRADUATE SCHOOL ARE RELEVANT FOR MOST RESPONDENTS PHD-PROJECTS



- > Offering courses, symposia, workshops, etc are more relevant for respondents who are employed (84%) then external respondents (60%).
- > Keeping track of my progress is seen as more relevant by external respondents (52%) then the employed respondents (42%). This role is also seen as more relevant to junior respondents (63%) then medior and senior respondents (46% and 43%).

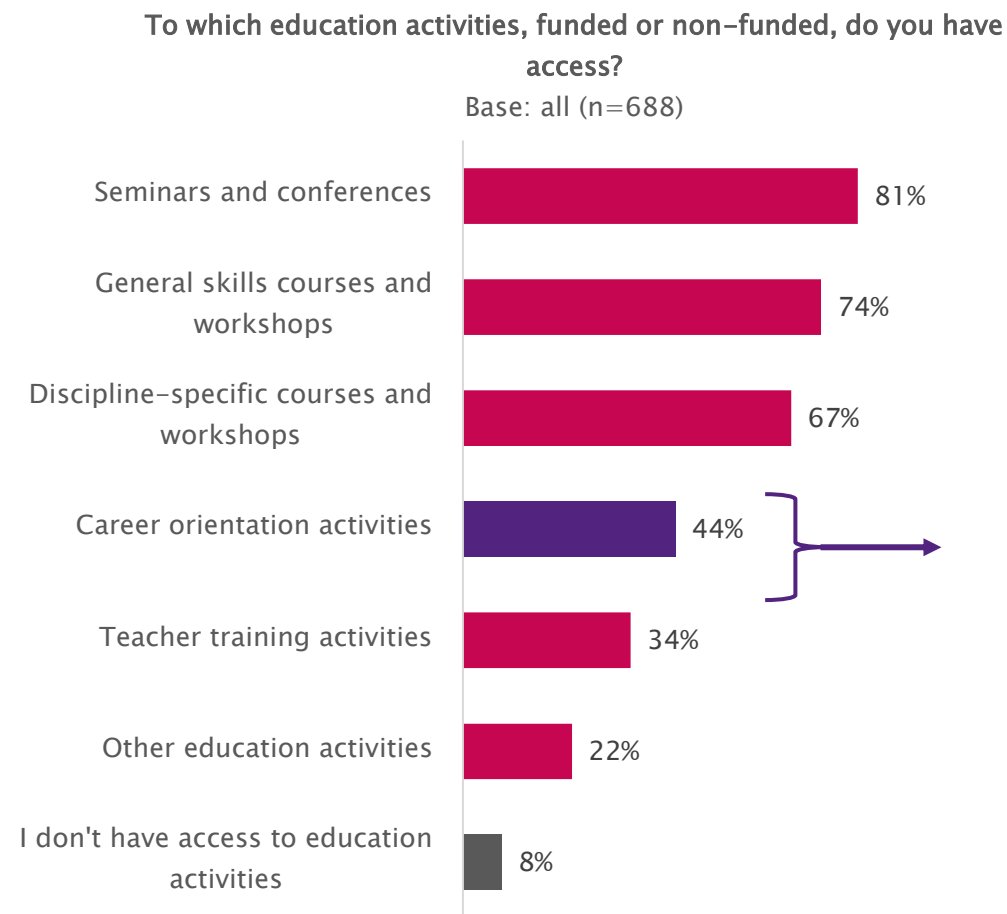
MOST RESPONDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES. OVER HALF OF THEM ARE SATISFIED WITH THESE ACTIVITIES

ALMOST ALL RESPONDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO ONE OR MORE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES, THE MAJORITY HAVE ACCESS TO SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES. OVER HALF ARE SATISFIED WITH THESE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON OFFER



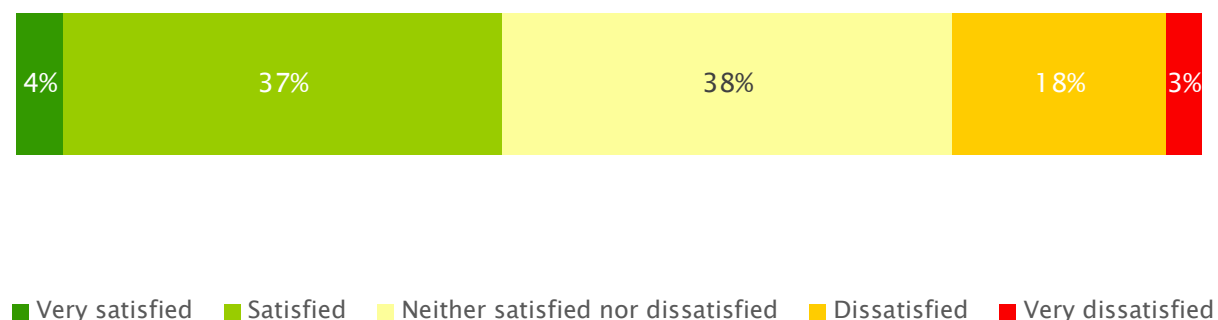
- > The external respondents have the least access to education activities (21%) compared to the employed respondents (1%).
- > The number of respondents who are (very) dissatisfied with the education activities are higher among medior and senior respondents (both 13%) compared to junior respondents (5%).

ALMOST HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO CAREER ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES. ONLY TWO OUT OF FIVE OF THEM ARE SATISFIED WITH THIS ACTIVITY



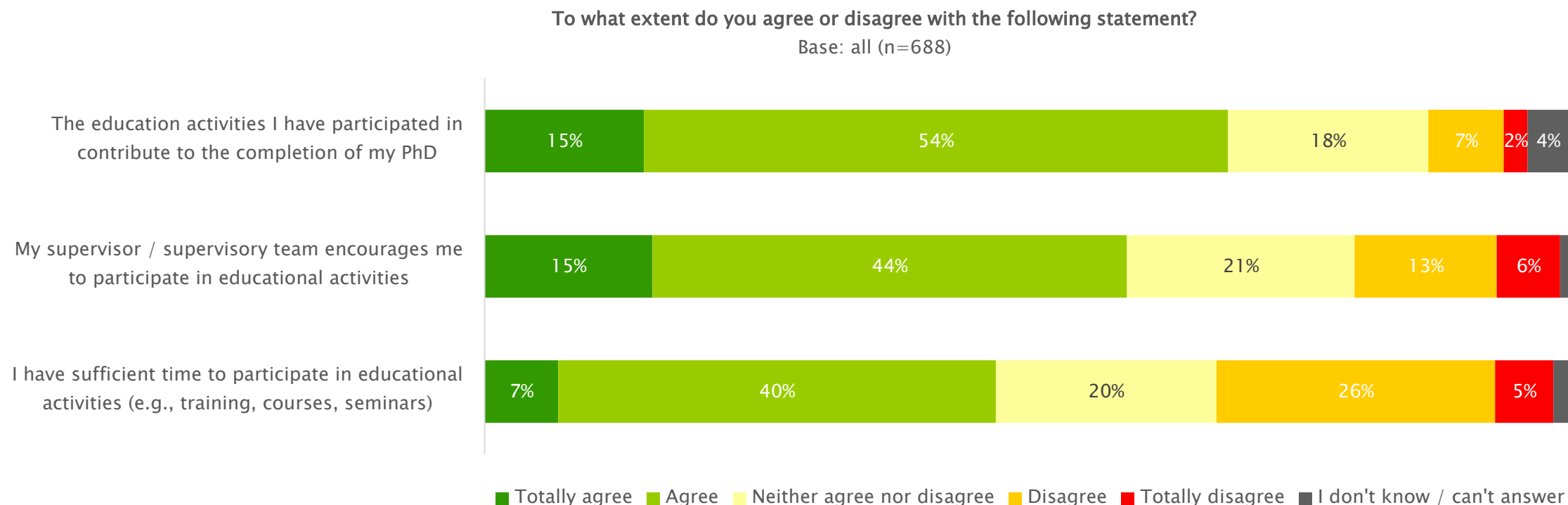
To what extent are you satisfied with the career orientation activities that are offered?

Base: if access to career orientation activities, excluding 'don't know' (n=223)



- > The number of respondents who are (very) dissatisfied with the career orientation activities are higher among medior and senior respondents (17% and 19%) compared to junior respondents (4%).

TWO THIRDS FEEL THAT EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMPLETION OF THEIR PhD. LESS THAN HALF FEEL THEY HAVE SUFFICIENT TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE ACTIVITIES

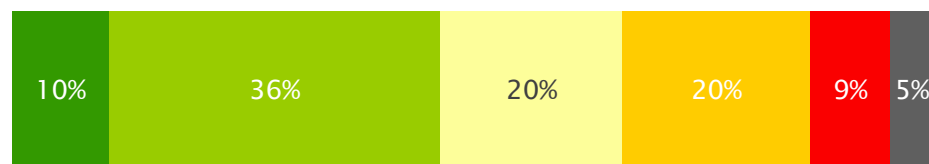


- > Seniors are less likely to be encouraged by their supervisor to participate in educational activities (53% (totally) agree) compared to junior and medior respondents (75% and 66%)

**RESPONDENTS ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY INTEGRATED INTO THE RESEARCH
COMMUNITY**

LESS THAN HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS FEEL INTEGRATED INTO THE COMMUNITY, ALTHOUGH TWO THIRDS HAVE CONTACT WITH OTHER RESEARCHERS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK. A THIRD HAS CONTACT LESS FREQUENTLY

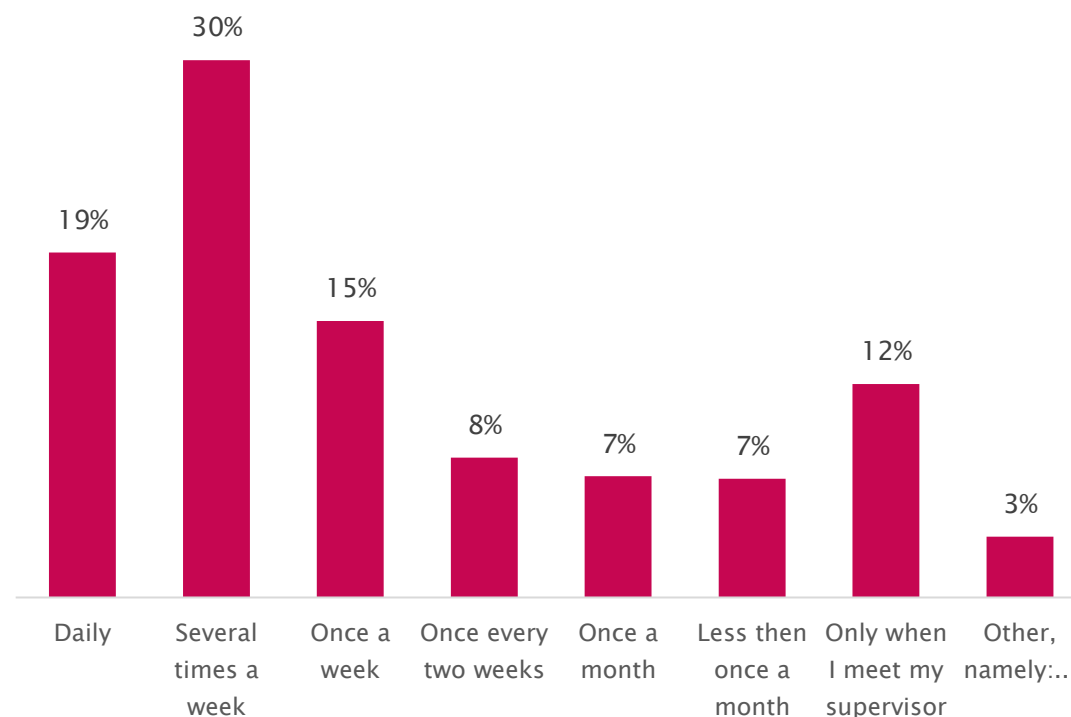
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
I feel integrated into the community of my graduate school/ department/ institute
Base: all (n=688)



■ Totally agree ■ Agree
■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree
■ Totally disagree ■ I don't know / can't answer

To what extent do you have contact with other researchers when working on your PhD project?

Base: all (n=688)

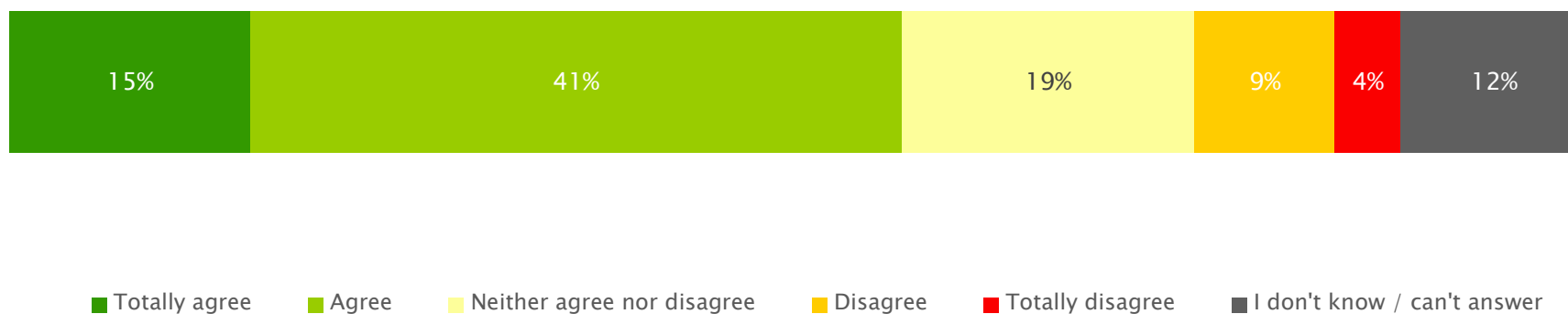


- > Employed respondents are more likely to feel integrated into the community (52%) than external respondents (37%).
- > Senior respondents are also more likely to feel integrated into the community (58%) than junior and mid-level respondents (42% and 43%).
- > Employed respondents have more contact with their supervisor on a weekly basis (81%) than external respondents (33%).

ONLY 56% OF THE RESPONDENTS FIND THAT WITHIN THEIR RESEARCH GROUP INTEGRITY ISSUES CAN BE DISCUSSED FREELY

In my research group, research integrity issues are discussed openly

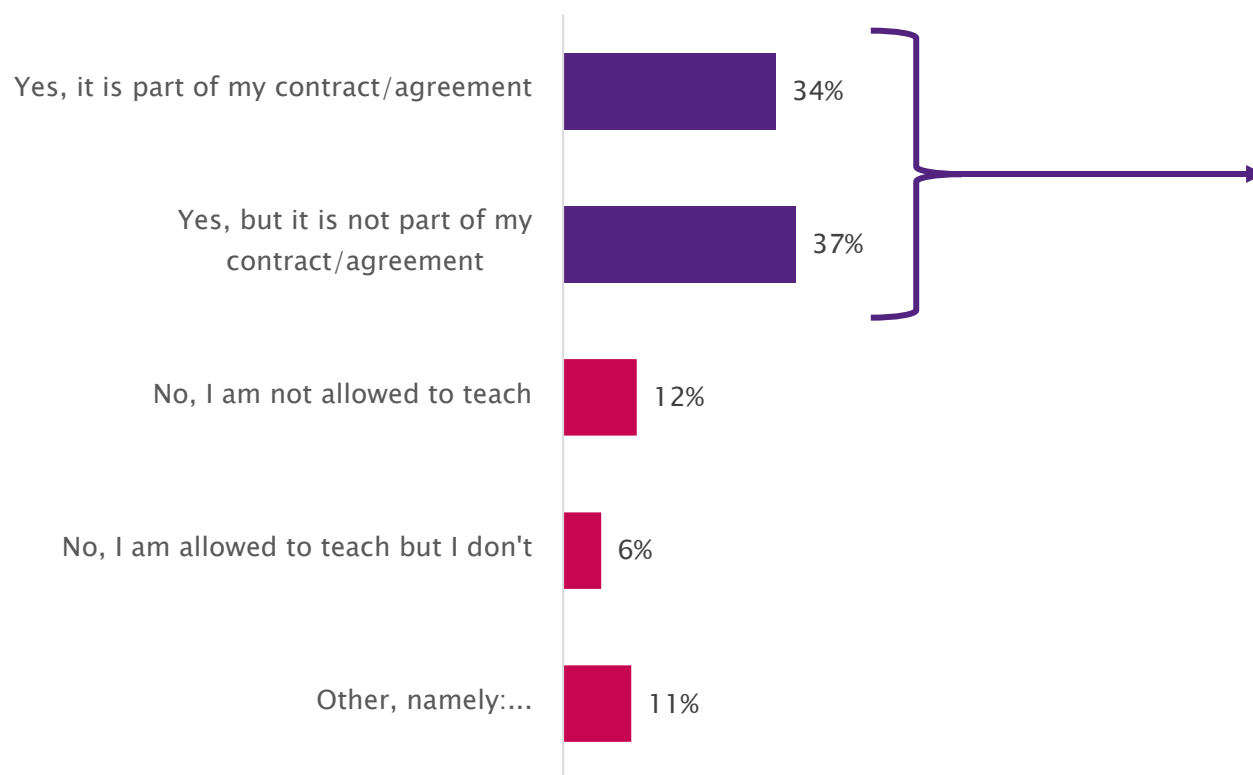
Base: all (n=688)



ALMOST THREE QUARTERS OF THE RESPONDENTS TEACH OR SUPERVISE STUDENTS DURING THEIR PhD-PROJECT. ON AVERAGE THEY TEACH 14.2 HOURS PER MONTH

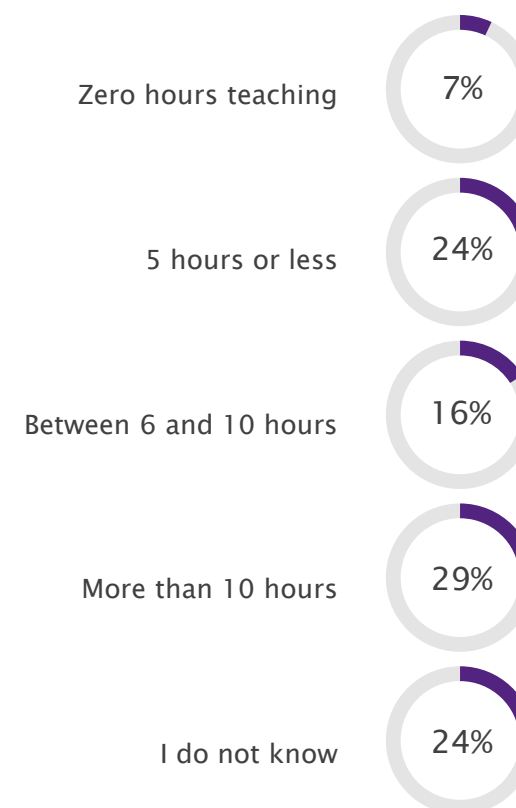
Do you teach and/or supervise students (or are you planning to do so)?

Base: all (n=688)



How many hours per month do you, on average, spend on teaching?

Base: when teaching students (n=490)



14.2 hours*

- > External respondents are more often not allowed to teach (22%) than employed respondents (6%).
- > Among employed respondents, teaching is more often part of the contract for employed PhD-candidates (54%) than for other employed respondents (scholarship PhD-candidate, 19%; PhD-employee 37%).

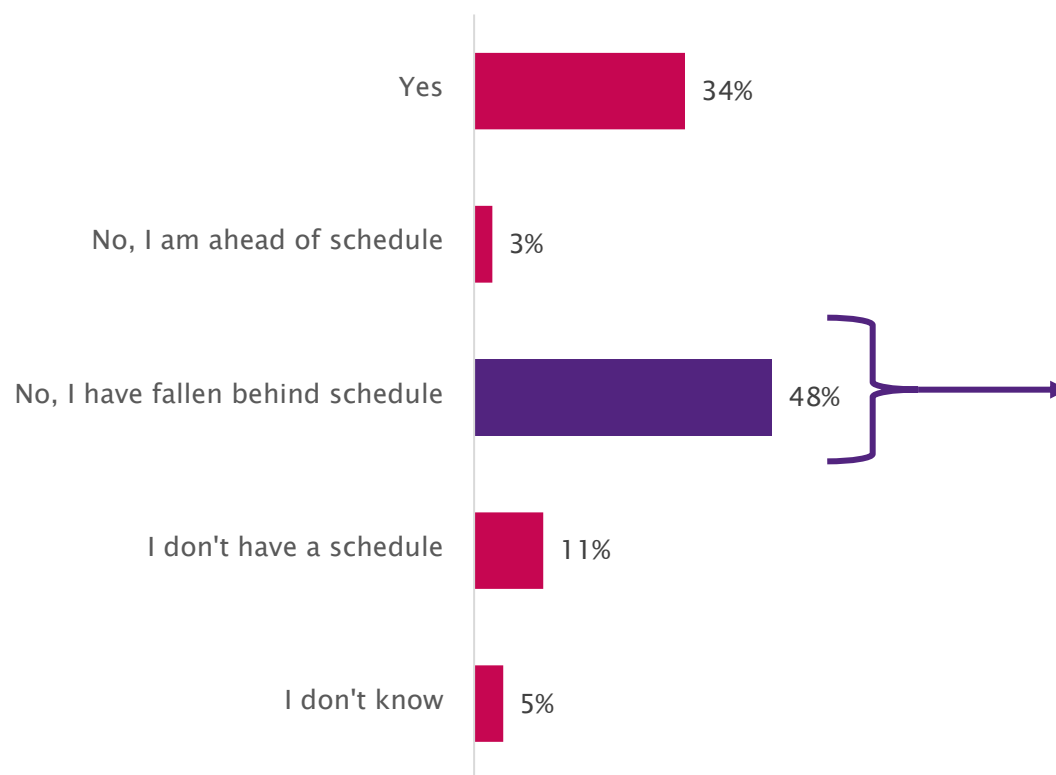
*Excluding I do not know

**HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS HAVE FALLEN BEHIND ON SCHEDULE. COVID-19
IS A BIG REASON FOR THIS**

ONLY A THIRD IS ON SCHEDULE WITH THEIR PLANNING, ALMOST HALF HAS FALLEN BEHIND. A THIRD OF THEM EXPECT TO BE DELAYED BY MORE THEN NINE MONTHS

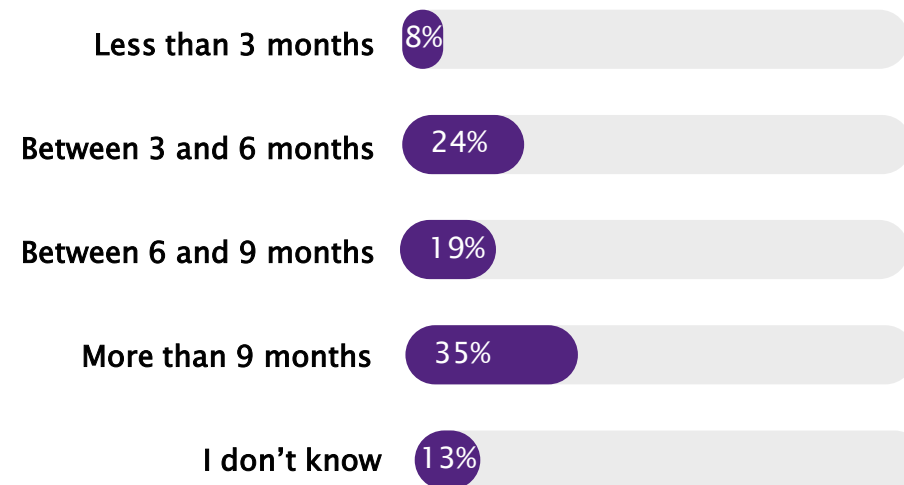
Are you currently on schedule with your planning?

Base: all (n=688)



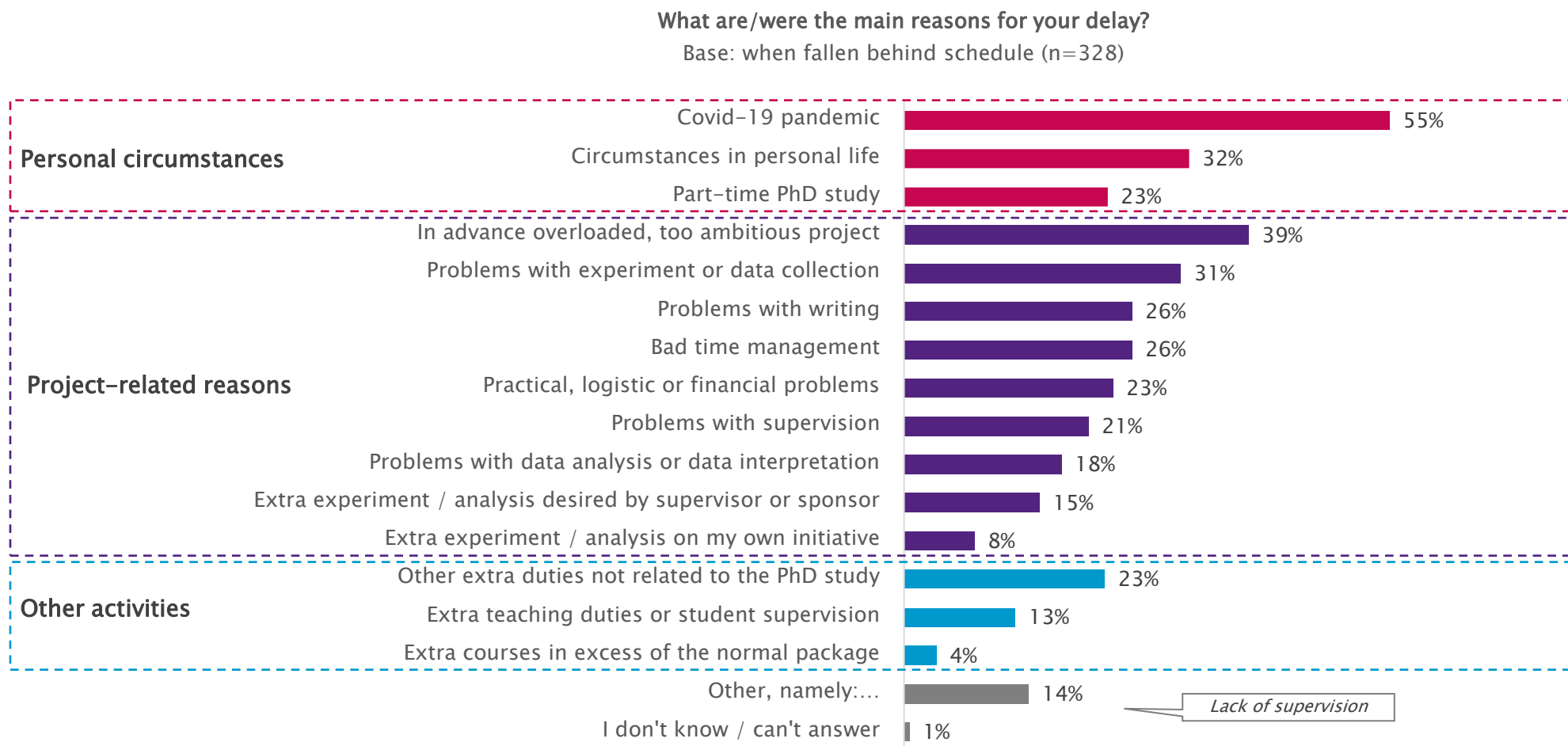
How long is the expected delay?

Base: when fallen behind schedule (n=328)



- > Seniors are more often not on schedule with their planning (60%) then junior and medior respondents (24% and 42%).
- > When not on schedule, medior and senior respondents have a longer delay (over 6 months, 47% and 59% respectively) then junior respondents (8%).

OF THE RESPONDENTS WHO ARE FALLING BEHIND, HALF INDICATE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS THE REASON. OTHER REASONS ARE TAKING ON A TOO AMBITIOUS PROJECT AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN THEIR PERSONAL LIFE

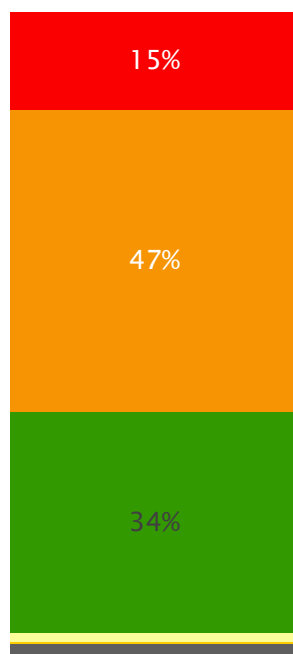


- > Employed respondents compared to external respondents, are more often delayed because of the Covid-19 pandemic (60% vs. 42%), too ambitious projects (45% vs. 25%) and problems with the data collection (36% vs. 20%). External respondents are more often delayed because of other non-project related activities.

NEARLY TWO THIRDS OF THE RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCE WORKLOAD/TIME PRESSURE IN THEIR PhD-PROJECT. HALF OF THEM FINDS THIS CONSIDERABLY TO EXTREMELY BOTHERING

How would you describe the workload/time pressure in your PhD project?

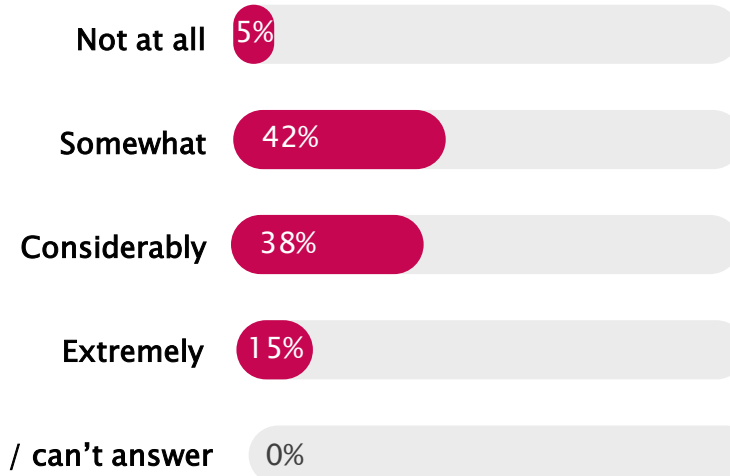
Base: all (n=688)



I don't know / can't answer
 Too low
 Normal
 High
 Too high

To what extent does the high workload or time pressure bother you?

Base: when workload is (too) high (n=425)

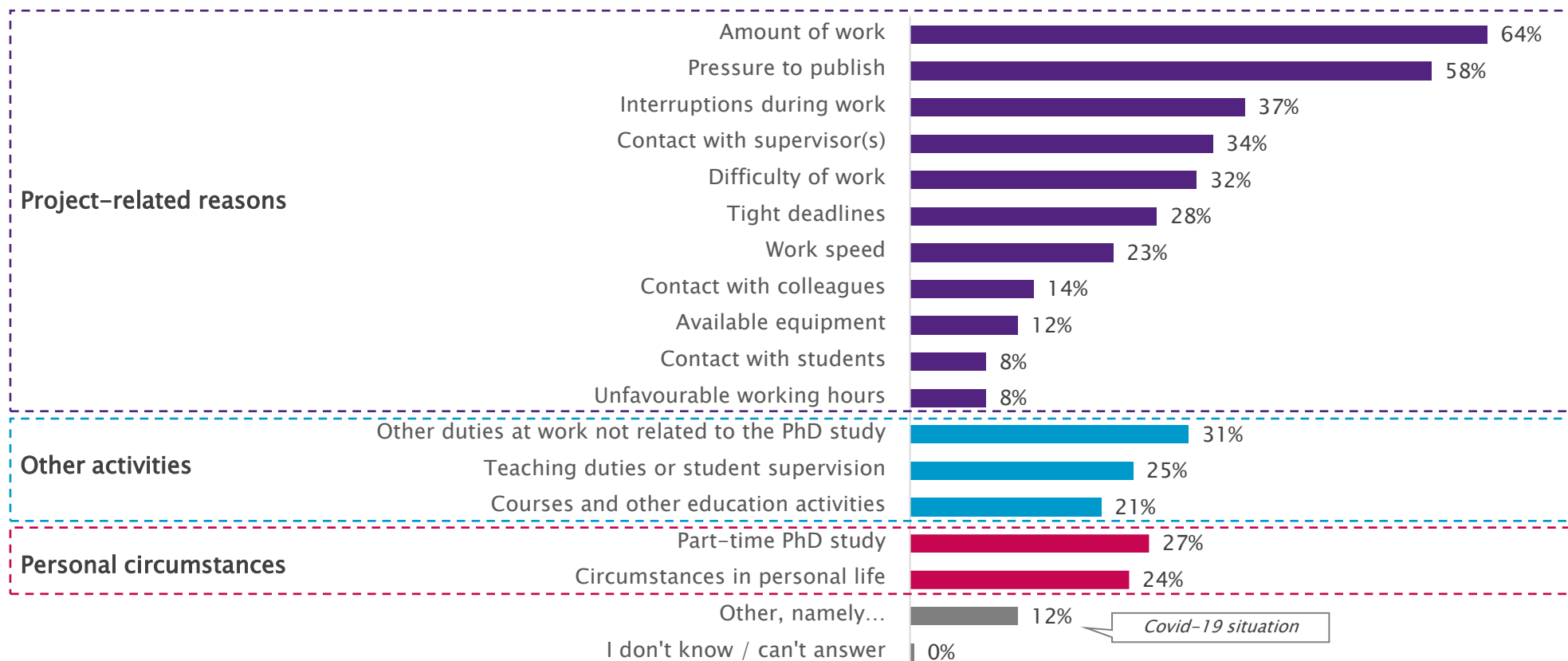


- > Employed respondents more often experience a (too) high workload compared to external respondents (70% vs. 46%).
- > External respondents indicate more often that this workload does not bother them at all (11% vs. 3%)

RESPONDENTS WHO ARE BOTHERED BY THE WORKLOAD INDICATE THAT IT IS MOSTLY PROJECT-RELATED. THE AMOUNT OF WORK AND THE PRESSURE TO PUBLISH ARE MOSTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HIGH PRESSURE

Who or what do you think is responsible for a high workload or time pressure?

Base: when workload bothers considerably/extremely (n=225)

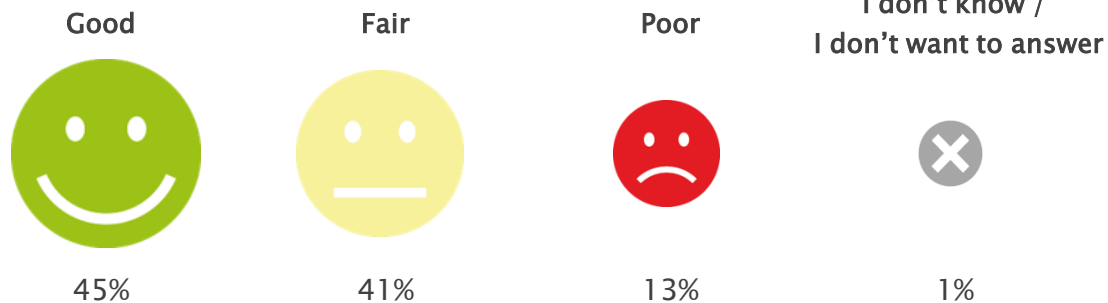


- > Employed respondents experience more pressure to publish compared to external respondents (63% vs. 44%). And experience more pressure because of teaching duties (32% vs. 5%). External respondents experience more pressure because their PhD is part-time (49% vs. 19%) and because of circumstances in their personal life (36% vs. 20%).
- > Junior respondents experience more pressure than senior respondents because of courses and other education activities (45% vs. 16%). Whereas senior respondents experience more pressure than juniors because of other non work related duties (33% vs. 10%).

A MAJORITY OF THE RESPONDENTS RATE THEIR WELLBEING AS (FAIRLY) GOOD. FOR A THIRD THEIR PhD PROJECT HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR WELLBEING

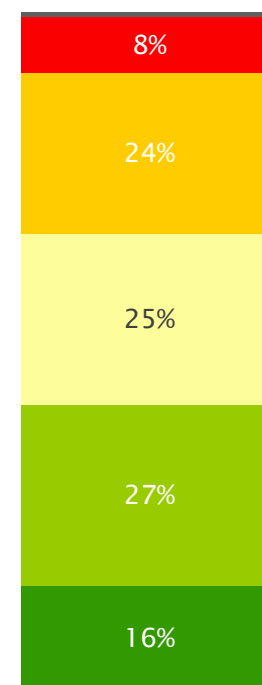
How would you rate your general wellbeing?

Base: all (n=688)



In general, what impact does your PhD project have on your wellbeing?

Base: all

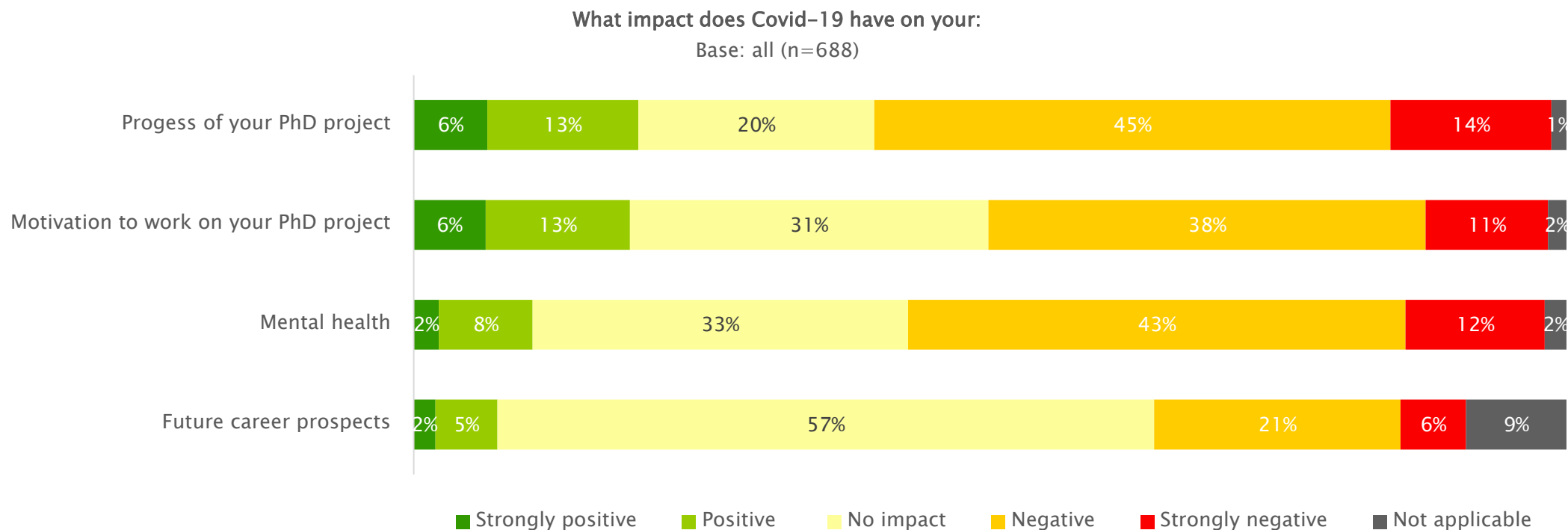


■ Positive
■ Neutral
■ Negative

■ Fairly positive
■ Rather negative
■ I don't know / no answer

- > External respondents rate their well being more often as good than employed respondents (51% vs. 42%). They also indicate more often that their PhD has a positive impact on their wellbeing (51% vs. 37%).
- > Seniors indicate more often that their PhD project has a negative impact on their wellbeing compared to juniors (34% vs. 21%).

FOR HALF OF THE RESPONDENTS COVID-19 HAS A MOSTLY NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR PhD-PROJECT. A QUARTER THINKS COVID-19 WILL ALSO NEGATIVELY IMPACT THEIR FUTURE CAREER PROSPECTS



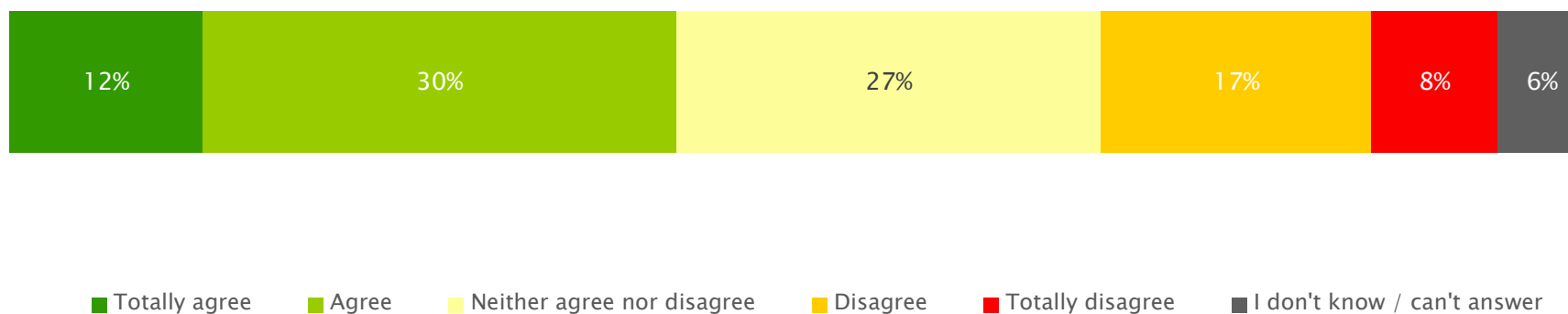
- > Employed respondents experience a more negative impact on their PhD project progress than external respondents (65% vs. 46%). They also experience a more negative impact on their future career prospects (33% vs. 17%) and their mental health (63% vs. 41%).

A THIRD IS NOT PLANNING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN RESEARCH

ONLY TWO OUT OF FIVE RESPONDENTS AGREE THAT THEIR SUPERVISOR(S) ENCOURAGES THEM TO THINK ABOUT THEIR FUTURE CAREER

My supervisor / supervisory team encourages me to think about my future career

Base: all (n=688)

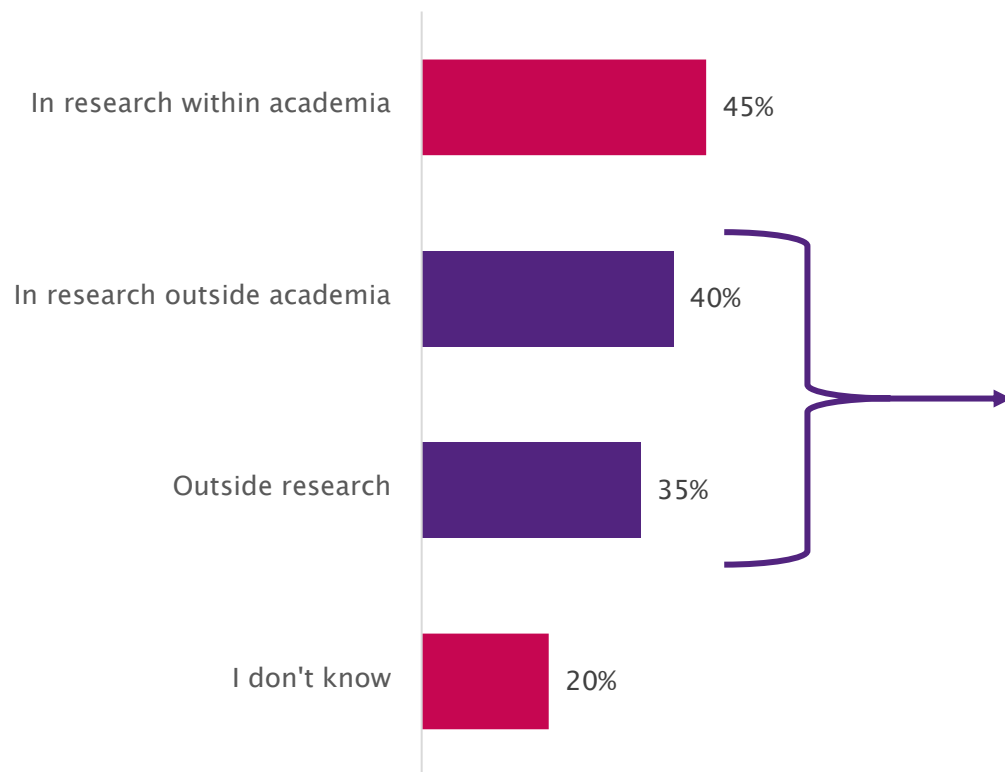


- > Employed respondents are more often encouraged by their supervisor than external respondents (45% vs. 37%).

TWO OUT OF FIVE RESPONDENTS ASPIRE TO CONTINUE THEIR RESEARCH OUTSIDE ACADEMIA. A THIRD IS NOT PLANNING TO CONTINUE WITH RESEARCH

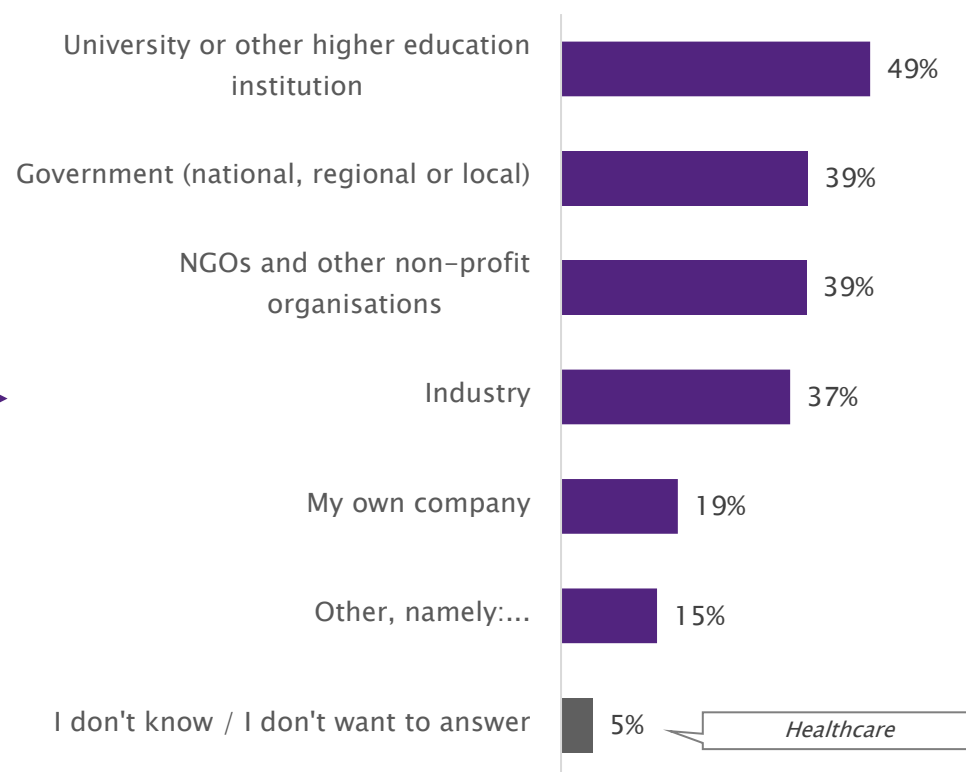
What career perspectives do you aspire after graduation?

Base: all (n=688)



Where do you aspire to pursue a career after completing your PhD trajectory?

Base: career perspective outside academia or outside research (n=390)



> Employed respondents more often aspire to work in government (47% vs. 25%) or the industry (42% vs. 25%) than external respondents.



RESEARCH SETUP

Method



- > Online quantitative research



- > 47 questions



- > Time needed to fill in the questionnaire: 10 minutes

Target group & sample



- > Target group: PhD candidates VU Amsterdam



- > Sample frame: We obtained e-mail addresses from all current PhD candidates from VU Amsterdam with a registered e-mail address

Fieldwork



- > Questionnaire completes: 688 participants (maximum margin is 3.7% with 95% reliability)



- > Data collection: 21 June until 22 July 2021



- > Response: 25%

RESEARCH SETUP

Response

- > In total 688 PhD candidates from VU Amsterdam completed the questionnaire.
- > 2,848 Invitations have been sent. VU Amsterdam PhD candidates that did not responded to the first invitation, received a reminder invitation.
- > The response rate is 25%.

Description	Number
Number of invitations (gross sample)	2,848
Bouncers (not reached)	134
Started the questionnaire	780
Screened out (no target group)	–
Screened out (quota full)	–
Incompletes	85
Screened out (did not provide consent)	7
Qualified participants (net sample)	688



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