



EDI action plan for MS Society research

Demographic data report 2023

May 2024

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Executive summary

We know that diversity underpins research excellence. A diverse research workforce makes us more creative and helps us to grow. In recent years, there's been considerable efforts to improve equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in scientific research. With research funders and universities working together to drive change. We want to take down the barriers that prevent people from participating and continuing to work within academic and clinical research.

Despite these efforts, there are issues across the entire research sector. A historic and current culture of organisational discrimination disadvantages people from marginalised groups. This includes inequity at the point of entry into academia. And we can see a lack of diversity among senior academics [1]. People from marginalised groups are also less successful in obtaining research funding from both government bodies and charities, of all sizes. [2].

We're committed to addressing these inequalities. Our EDI action plan for MS Society research sets out how we'll become more inclusive in our funding practices. And how we'll support researchers equally, despite their background, all the way throughout their careers.

We need to understand who we're currently funding so we can begin to tackle inequality. And who's supporting us to deliver our research programme. We've been routinely collecting data on our researchers and governance members since 2022. And last year we published our first annual report containing this data. We were pleased to see that success rates were equal for those applying to funding, regardless of their gender identity and ethnicity. And that women make up more than 50% of our governance members. But we saw under representation among our researchers' when looking at ethnicity. Only 11% of our applicants and 6% of our governance members identified as being from a minoritised ethnic group.



Executive summary

We can see some of these inequities in our second year of data from 2023. Again, we see low diversity when looking at the ethnicity of researchers applying to us for funding. We're working hard to address these inequities and we're developing a plan for attracting all researchers to apply to us for funding, regardless of their background. This plan will form part of the basis of our 2024-2029 EDI action plan for MS Society research.

This year, we're able to present data on researchers applying to our Career Development Awards. These awards aim to attract talented early career researchers and support them to build a successful, long-lasting career in MS research.

It's important to consider that we fund a relatively low number of applicants compared to other larger organisations. This means small changes in who is applying to us for funding can drastically change what trends we see year on year.

Share your feedback

If you want to find out more about what we're doing to create a fairer MS Society, or join our EDI Reference Group, email edi@mssociety.org.uk

This means we still need more data to fully understand the inequalities that exist in MS research.

We're also aware that the data presented in this report is only a snapshot in time. It doesn't reflect all the inequalities that people from under-represented groups face. We're committed to combatting the systemic discrimination faced by people from marginalised groups. And the collection of data is just one tool we're using from our wider [action plan](#).

We're grateful to all of our applicants and governance group members for providing their data. We'll continue to publish these reports annually and we'll consult with the research community and people affected by MS to address inequalities. And we'll develop our 2024-2029 action plan with these inequalities in mind.

This report sits alongside our overall [EDI action plan for our funded research - 2023 progress report](#).



Our methods

Since May 2022, we've been routinely collecting demographic data for our governance members and applicants to our Research Awards. The data's collected using a survey on our grants management system. The survey's optional and respondents must provide consent. We wanted to increase the number of people that completed the survey so people weren't able to navigate to other areas of the platform until they either provided data or decided not to participate.

This report contains data on our governance members, and lead and co-applicants from January 2023 to December 2023. We present diversity data by age, disability, ethnicity and gender identity. And where relevant, we've compared our data with:

- The UK medical and biosciences academic staff populations published by the Advance Higher Education (HE) in their [Equality in Higher Education staff statistical report 2023](#) [1].

- Cancer Research UK in their [2023 diversity report](#) [3].
- The British Heart Foundation in their [2020-2023 research funding diversity data report](#) [4].

Where possible, we've been able to make comparisons with the population of academic staff from relevant scientific disciplines and separate UK medical research charities. We hope to report on sexual orientation and caring responsibilities in the future, when comparable data from other organisations becomes available. We removed "prefer not to say" responses from our dataset as the Advance HE analysis does not include this category.

We designed our questions (Appendix 1) using the [Diversity and Inclusion Survey \(DAISY\) Question Guidance](#) [5] and modelled them on the UK 2021 Census.



Our methods

We know that our question regarding race and ethnicity may not fully describe a person's individual background. But we modelled this question on the UK 2021 Census for the following reasons:

- We need our questionnaire to produce results that are comparable to the general UK population and consistent with the standards produced by the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\)](#) [6] This helps us to draw meaningful conclusions.
- On some occasions we combined data into larger categories to make results more reliable and to protect individuals' identities. This was necessary due to the small number of responses.
- Where datasets are large enough, ethnicity is presented according to the UK 2021 Census list of ethnicity groups (Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, other ethnic group, White).

Due to small sample sizes regarding gender identity, we've only included responses for those selecting male and female in this report. But, additional gender categories including non-binary and prefer to self-describe are available within the survey.

When the number of responses within datasets were too small (less than 10), we combined multiple ethnicity groups into single 'ethnicity groups'. We did this to make results reliable and to protect individuals' identities. As our dataset grows, we'll split up the data. This means we'll be able to identify and look at inequalities within individual ethnic groups with distinct identities and challenges.



Our methods

We'll continue to listen to feedback and understand new learnings in this area to improve our survey. And ensure it's as inclusive and representative as possible. All diversity questions will be updated when new DAISY guidance is published.

Our current EDI action plan ends in 2024. Next year we'll publish a summary of our demographic data from the past three years. But our journey won't stop there. We're already thinking about our new action plan that'll take us through to 2029. As part of this, we'll continue to collect data over the coming years so we can analyse trends and assess the impact of our EDI action plan. This'll help us to identify areas in which there's still work to be done to combat the systemic discrimination faced by people from under-represented groups.

Our data

This report contains data on our governance members, and lead and co-applicants to our 2023 Research Award rounds.

'Award holders' are applicants from this round that successfully secured research funding. Our governance committee members are researchers, clinicians, MS healthcare professionals and people affected by MS that sit on governance groups. These groups help us to set and review our research strategy. They also provide recommendations on funding decisions and advise us on the management of our larger research programmes. We need our governance processes to be inclusive. And contain diverse voices to make our research strategy and funding high quality. This helps us to connect with a wider portion of the MS community.



Our data

Between January 2023 and December 2023, we received 62 applications for funding from 299 lead and co-applicants. Data's presented in this report for a maximum of 231 applicants (77% response rate) and 61 of our 111 governance members (55% response rate). We included duplicates in the dataset where applicants have applied for more than one award in the 2023 Research Award rounds. Alongside the total data pool, we've also presented data for applicants applying to our Early Career Development Awards.

We fund a broad range of Awards designed to support researchers at different stages of their careers in MS research. In 2023, these included:

- **General Research Awards** – Project Awards, Data Discovery Awards and Catalyst Awards. We run two Catalyst Award rounds a year.
- **Career Development Awards** – PhD fellowships, Early Career Fellowships and Skills Development Awards. We run two Skills Development Awards a year.
- **Commissioned funding calls** – We ran two commissioned calls in 2023.

You can find out more about our Research Awards on our [website](#).

Lead applicants for our PhD fellowships are the project supervisors, not the PhD students. So data regarding our PhD student diversity isn't included in the early career sub-group. We hope to report on our PhD student diversity in 2024.



“Prefer not to say” responses aren’t included in this report. Therefore, sample sizes differ between each demographic characteristic reported against. There are multiple reasons people don’t want to disclose personal information. We’ve summarised the number of “prefer not to say” responses below.

Prefer not to say responses					
	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Disability	Total
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Applicants	2 (<1%)	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)	5 (2.1%)	233
Award Holders	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)	88
Early Career Researcher	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12
Governance members	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)	2 (3.2%)	62



Headline points

Our applicants and award holders

15%

of our 2023 applicants are from an ethnic minority background

41%

success rate for our 2023 applicants from an ethnic minority background compared to 38% for White applicants

60%

of our applicants awarded funding in 2023 identify as female

7%

of our 2022 applicants declared a disability



Headline points

Our committee members

10%

of our governance members
are from an ethnic minority
background

51%

of our governance members
identify as female

<2%

of our governance members
are under 40 years of age

13%

of our governance members
have declared a disability

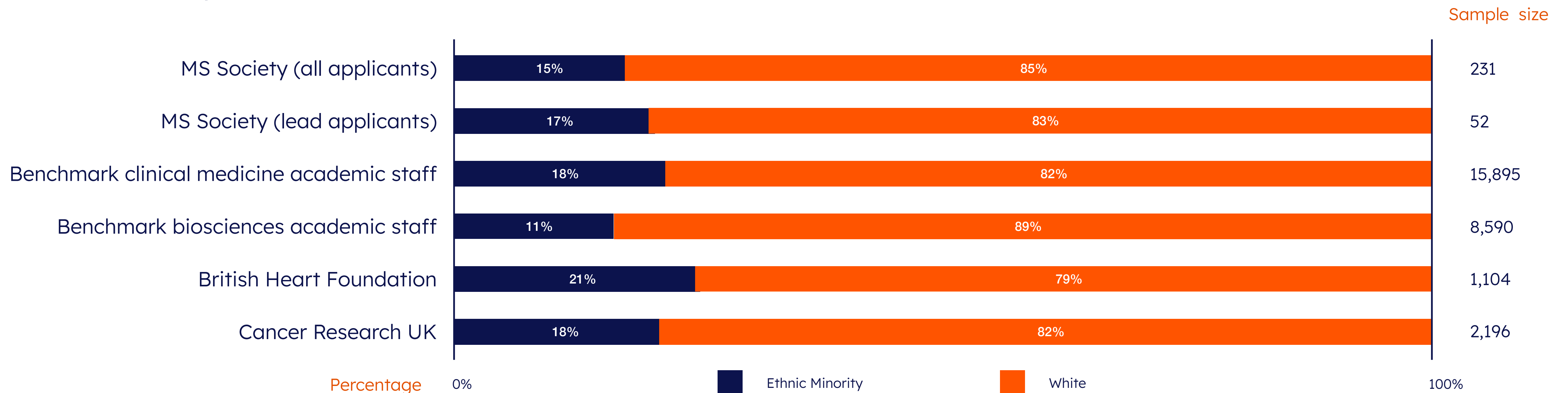


The proportion of applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds broadly reflects the UK medical and biosciences academic sectors and other relevant charities

Key findings: 15% of our total pool of applicants and 17% of our lead applicants are from an ethnic minority background. This is representative of the medical academic sector (18%), the biosciences academic sector (11%) and Cancer Research UK (18%). But it's low compared to the British Heart Foundation (21%).

Ethnicity of applicants

Ethnicity of applicants to our 2023 Grant Rounds





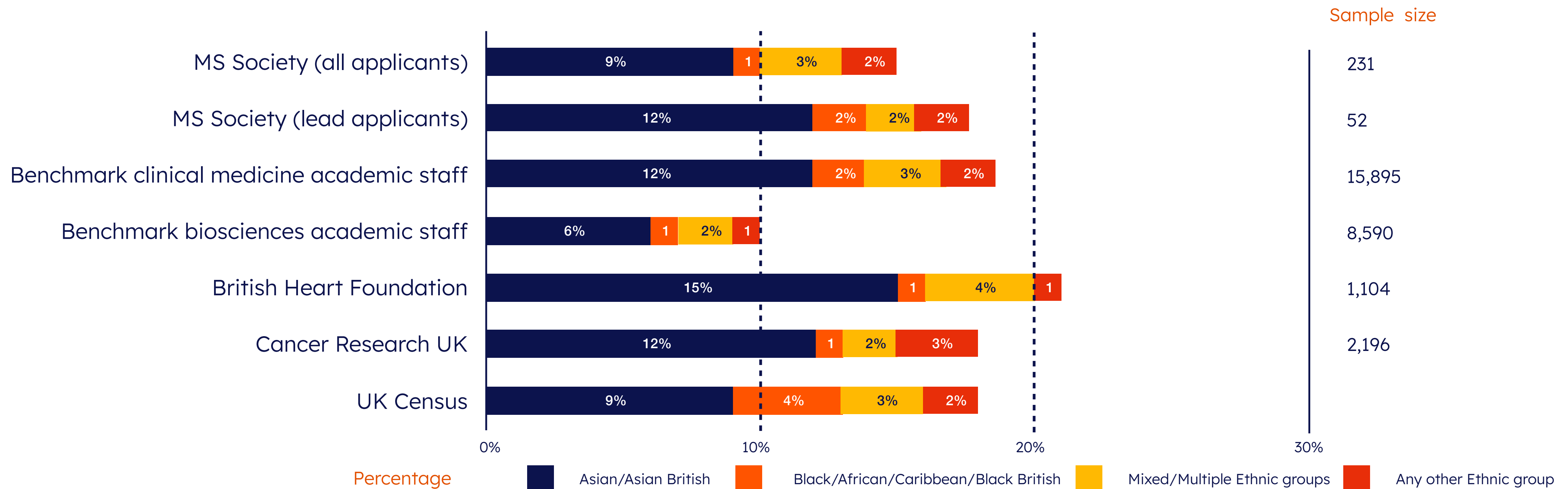
Asian researchers are under-represented amongst our total pool of applicants

Key findings:

- Researchers from Asian/Asian British backgrounds among our total pool of applicants has increased from 3% in 2022 to 9% in 2023. But 9% is still lower than the medical academic sector population, Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.
- The proportion of lead applicants who are from Asian backgrounds (12%) is higher than our total pool of applicants (9%). This is reflective of the academic and charity sector populations.

Ethnicity of applicants

Ethnicity of applicants to our 2023 Grant Rounds by ethnic group



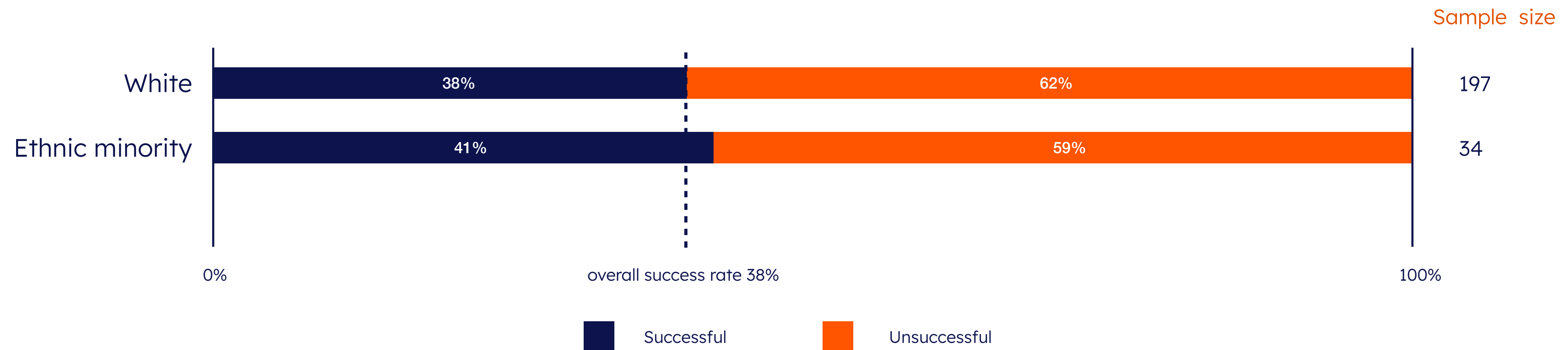


The success rate for our 2023 grant applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds is comparable to white applicants.

Key findings: Success rates for applicants are broadly equal regardless of ethnic background. In 2022, the success rate for applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds was 6 percentage points higher than for white applicants. This trend continued in 2023, with a 41% success rate for applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds and 38% for white applicants.

Ethnicity of Award holders

Success rate of applicants by ethnicity



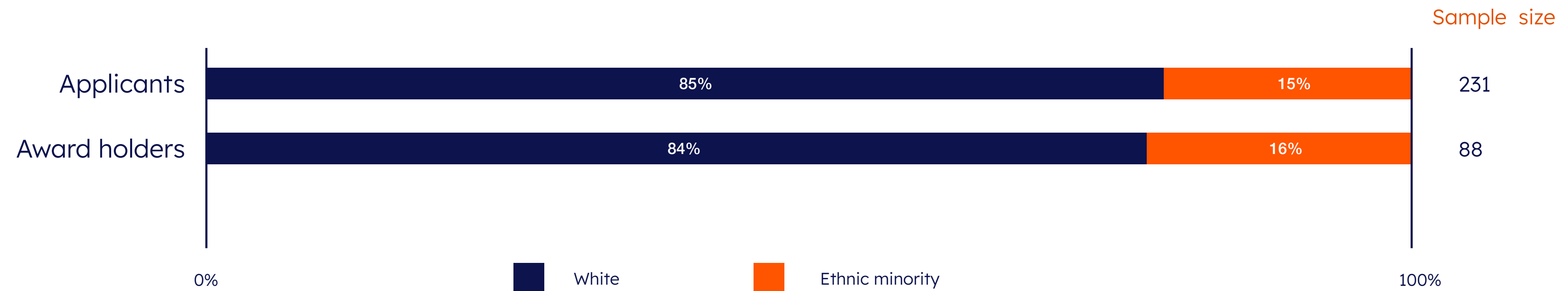


Researchers from ethnic minority backgrounds receive 16% of awards

Key findings: The proportion of award holders from ethnic minority backgrounds is similar to that seen amongst the total pool of applicants.

Ethnicity of Award holders

Ethnicity of 2023 Award holders





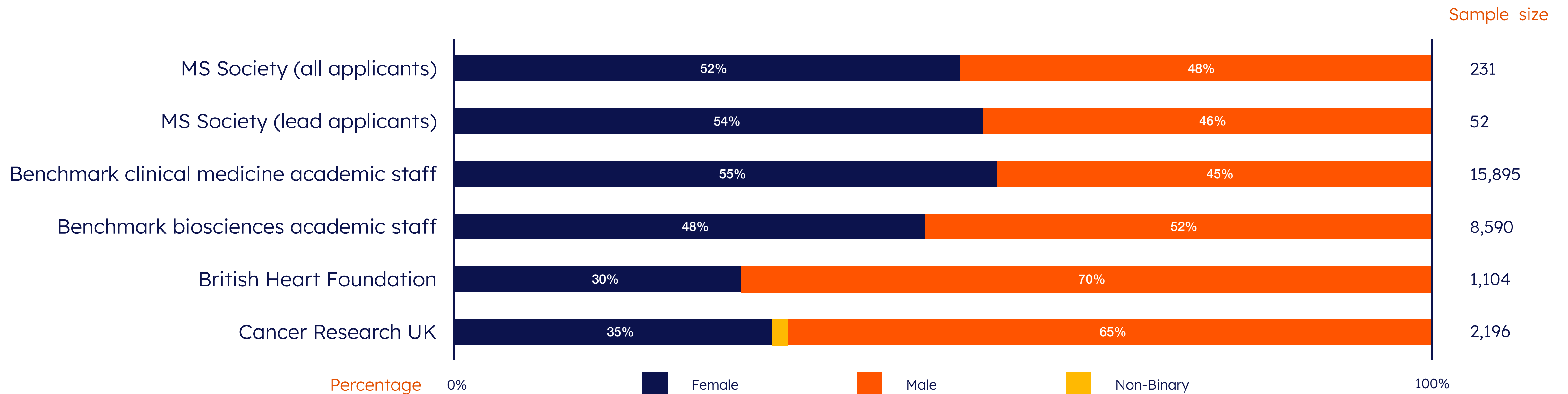
Around 50% of our applicants in 2023 identify as female

Key findings: 52% of our applicants and 54% of our lead applicants identify as female. This is reflective of the academic sector populations. And it's higher than the proportion of applications received by female applicants to Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

Note: Additional questions were asked about gender identity but the numbers are too low to report here.

Gender of applicants

Gender identity of applicants to our 2023 Grant Rounds by ethnic group





Success rates are higher for females compared to males.

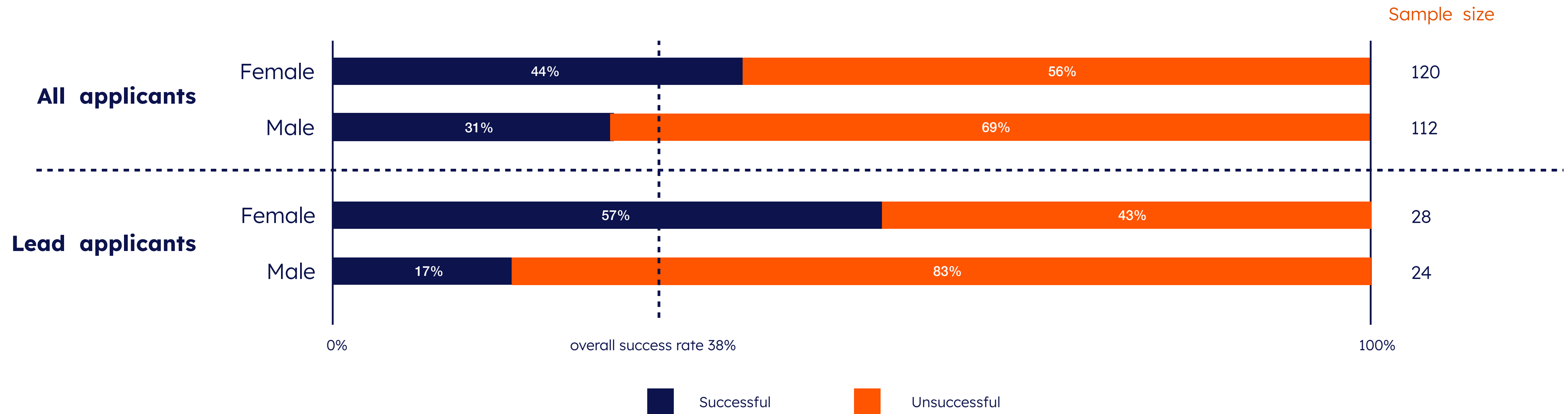
Key findings:

- Success rates for female applicants is 44% compared to 31% for males. This is consistent with 2022 where females also had a higher success rate (37%) than males (30%).
- Success rates for female lead applicants (57%) is significantly higher than for male applicants (17%).

Gender of Award holders

Note: Additional questions were asked about gender identity but the numbers are too low to report here.

Success Rate of applicants by gender identity, sub-divided by applicant type



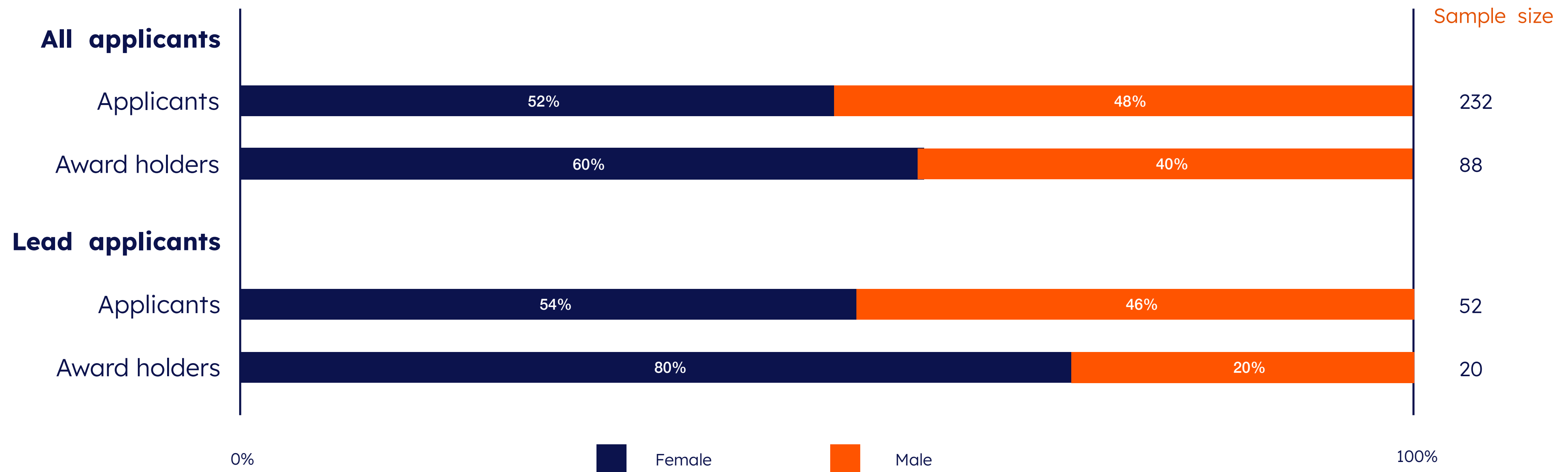


Females are over represented among our award holders.

Key findings: Female applicants make up 52% and 54% of our total pool of applicants and lead applicants. But 60% of our total pool of award holders and 80% of lead researchers identify as female, reflecting the higher success rates for females.

Gender of Award holders

Gender identity of 2023 Award holders, sub-divided by applicant type





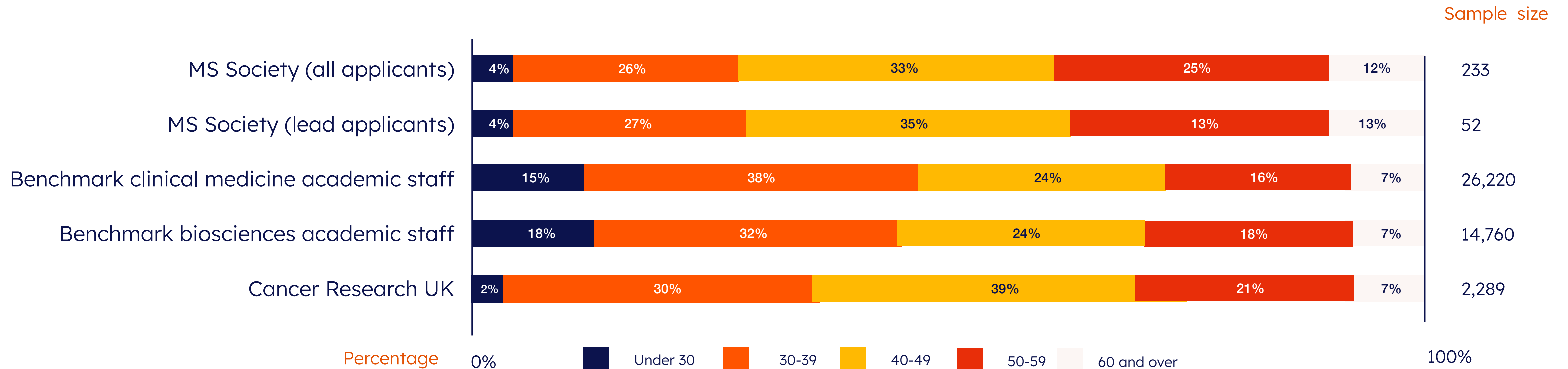
Age of applicants

Age of applicants to our 2023 Grant Rounds

The launch of our Skills Development Awards for Early Career Researchers in 2023 has likely attracted more applicants under the age of 40 compared to 2022

Key findings:

- Researchers aged 40-49 still make up the largest share (33%) of all our 2023 applicants. But the number of applicants under the age of 40 has increased from 22% in 2022 to 30% in 2023. We attribute this to the launch of our Skills Development Awards designed for Early Career Researchers.
- We see a similar proportion of applications from researchers under 40 compared to those applying to Cancer Research UK.



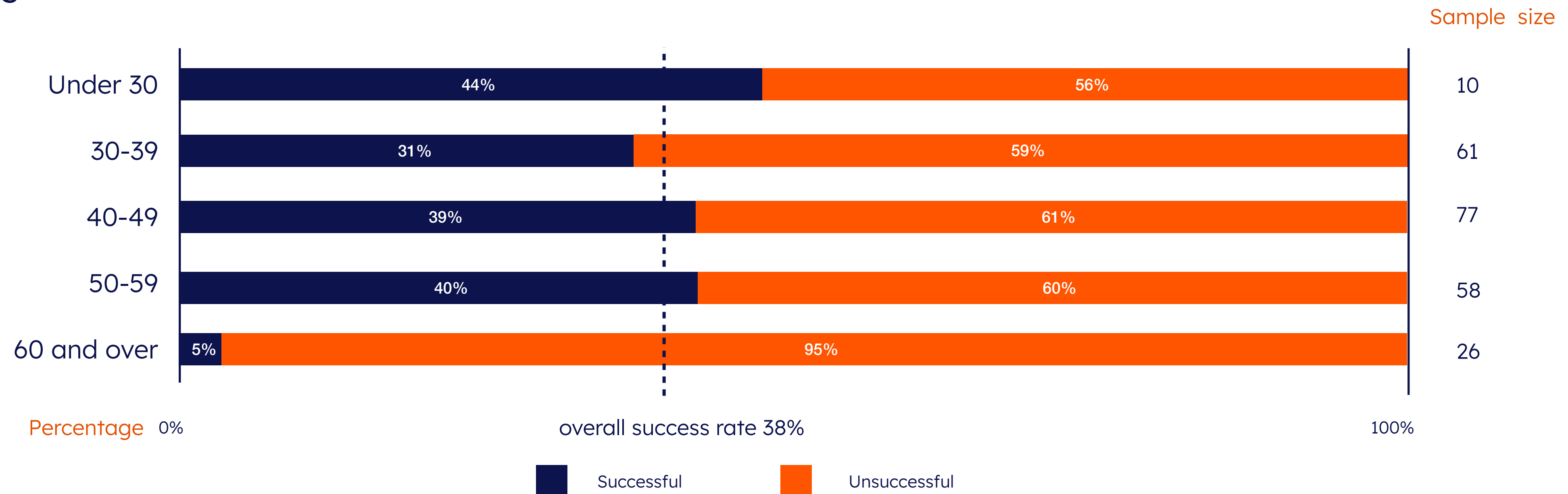


Success rates are similar for researchers under 60, but lower for those over 60.

Key findings: Success rates for the under 60 age group ranged from 31% (30-39) to 44% (under 30). But success rates are very low for those over the age of 60 (5%). This is consistent with 2022, where success rates for the over 60 age group was 4%.

Age of Award holders

Age of applicants to our 2023 Grant Rounds



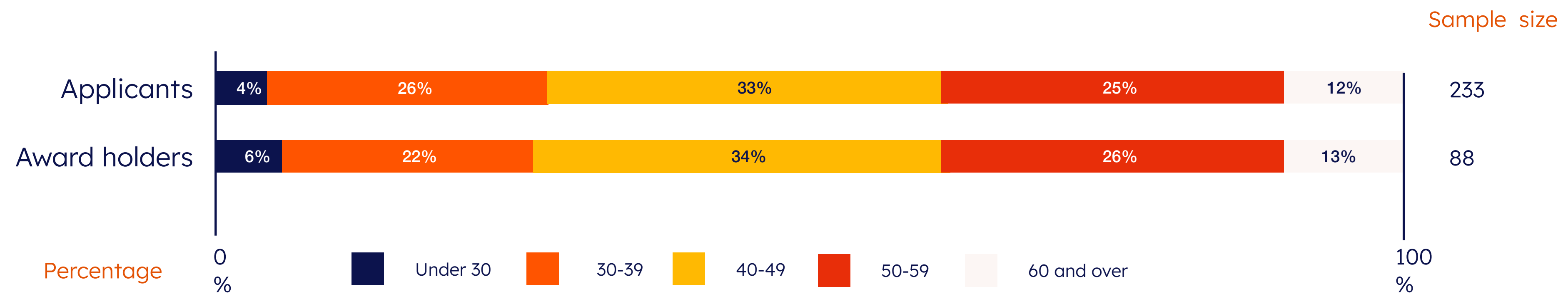


The age of award holders reflects the age of applicants.

Key findings: The proportion of award holders from each age group is similar to that seen amongst the total pool of applicants. Reflecting the similar success rates across the under 60 age groups.

Age of Award holders

Age of 2023 Award holders





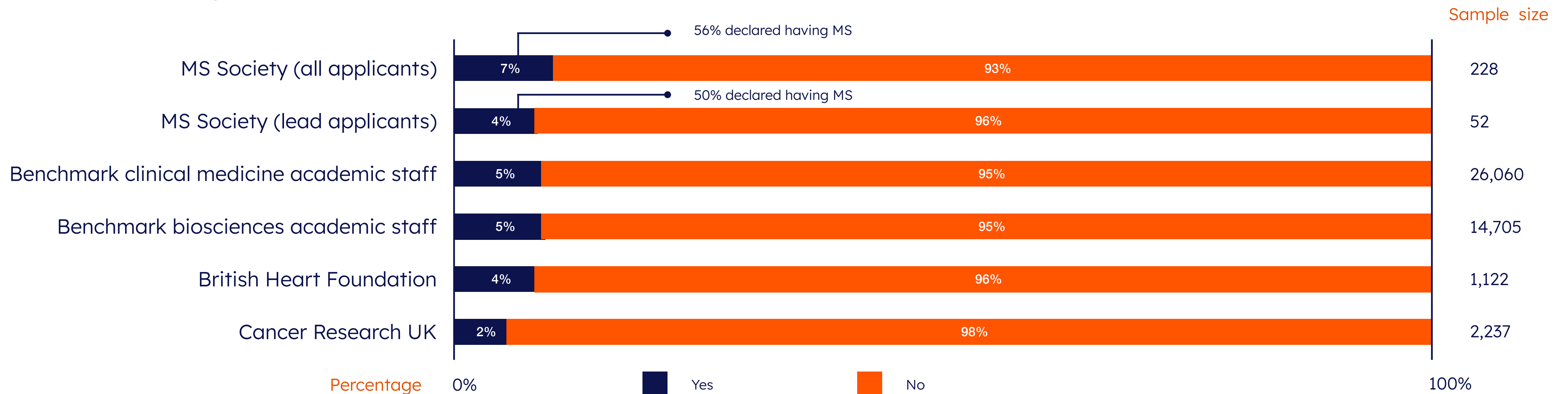
Disability status of applicants

7% of all applicants declared a disability.

Key findings:

- 7% of all our applicants declared a disability. 56% of these declared having MS. This is higher than the proportion of the academic sector who declared a disability. And higher than the proportion of applicants to Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.
- 4% of lead applicants declared a disability. 50% of these declared having MS. This is representative of the proportion of the academic sector who declared a disability.

Disability status of applicants to our 2023 Grant Rounds



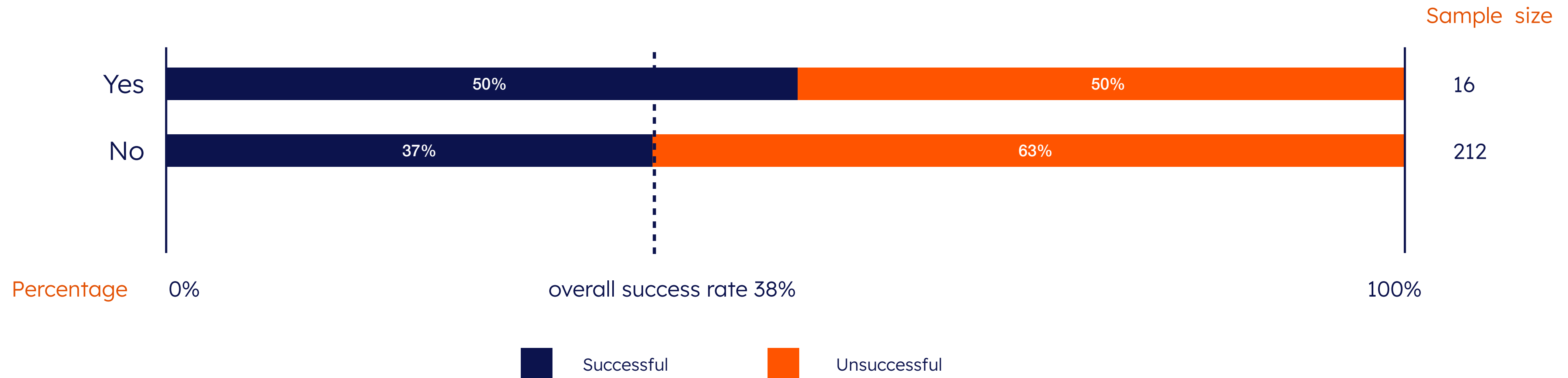


Success rates are higher for those declaring a disability.

Key findings: The success rate for applicants who declared a disability was 50%. This is higher than those who did not declared a disability (37%).

Disability status of applicants

Success rate of applicants by disability status



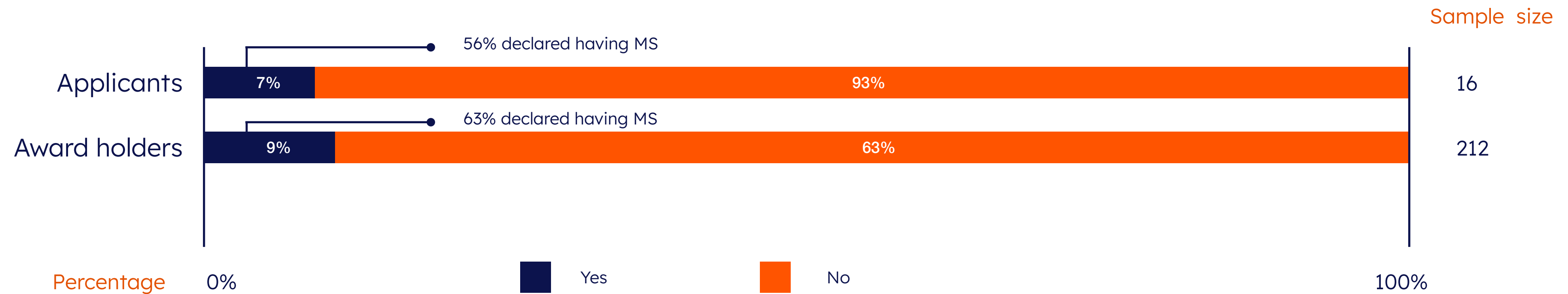


The number of award holders declaring a disability is 9%.

Key findings: 9% of our award holders have declared having a disability. Of these, 63% have declared that they have MS.

Disability status of Award holders

Disability status of 2023 Award holders





25% of all Early Career applicants are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

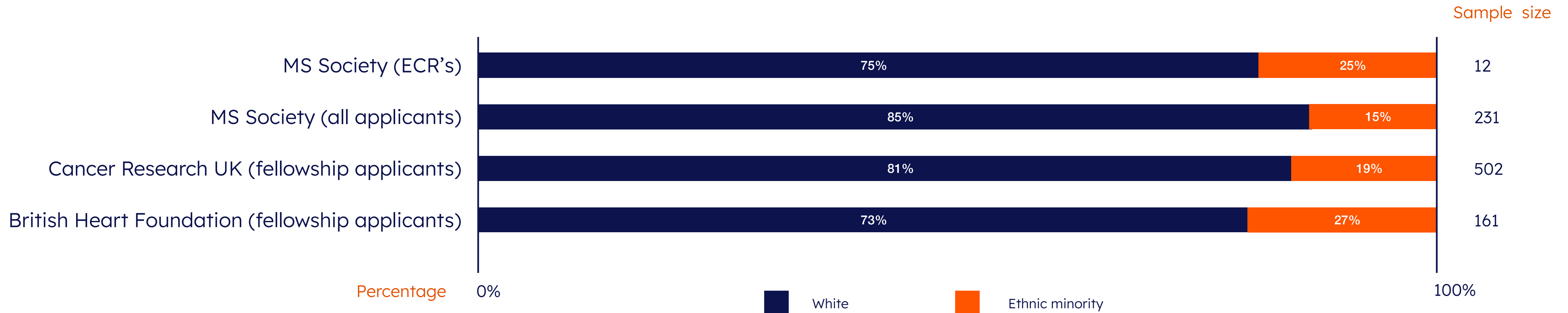
Key findings:

- 25% of our Early Career applicants are from an ethnic minority background. This is higher than the medical (18%) and biosciences (11%) academic sectors. And it's higher than the proportion of our wider pool of applicants applying to us for funding in 2023 (15%).
- The proportion of Early Career applicants from an ethnic minority background applying to us for funding is higher than that seen by other charities.

Note: We have a low number Early Career Researchers compared to other Charities. This means small changes in proportions can drastically impact the demographics of our applicant pool.

Early Career Researchers

Ethnicity of Early Career Researchers to our 2023 Grant Rounds





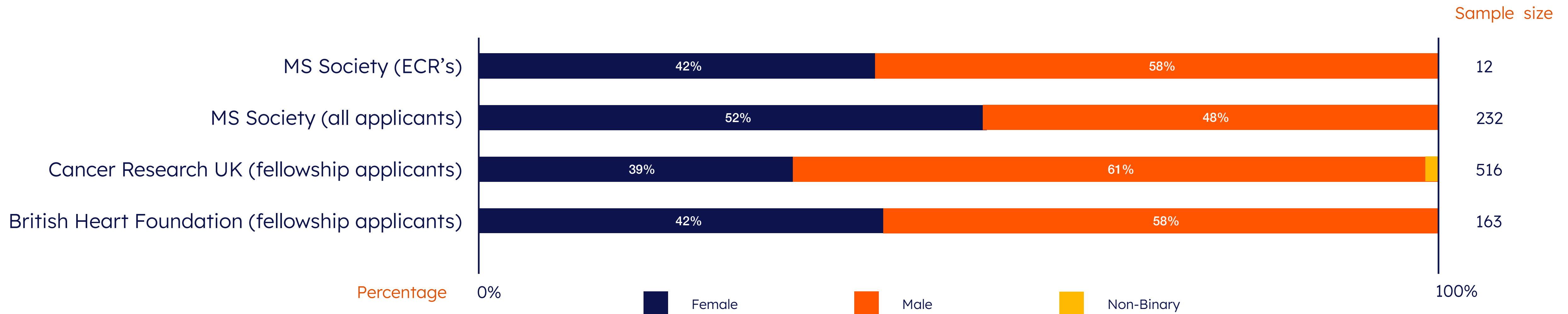
Less than 50% of Early Career applicants identify as female.

Key findings:

- The proportion of Early Career applicants who identify as female (42%) is lower than the proportion of our wider pool of applicants (52%).
- The proportion of applications received by Early Career researchers who identify as female is similar to those received by other Charities.

Early Career Researchers

Gender identity of Early Career Researchers to our 2023 Grant Rounds





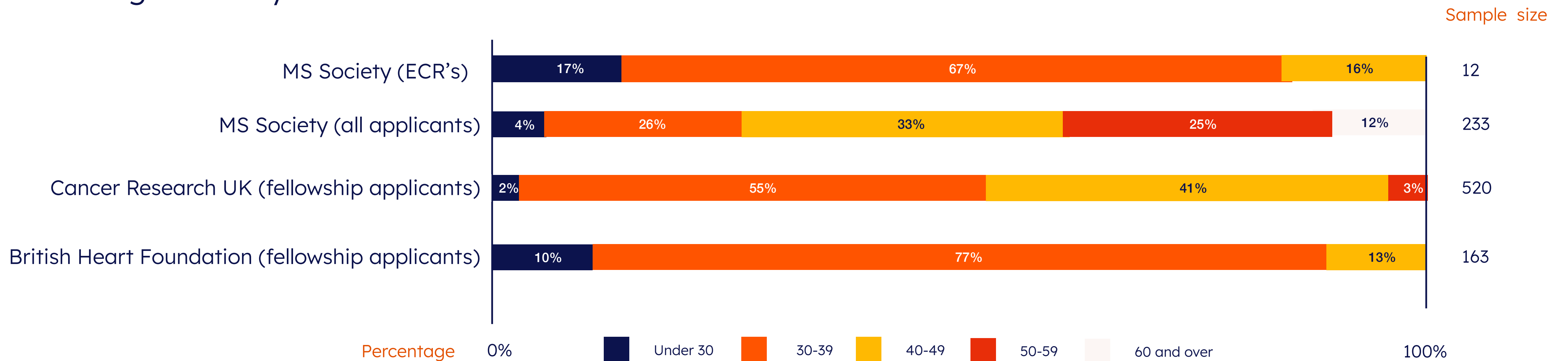
Two thirds of Early Career applicants are aged between 30-39.

Key findings:

- Researchers aged 30-39 represent the majority (67%) of applications received by Early Career Researchers. Whereas our wider pool of applicants is mostly comprised of people between the ages of 40-60.
- We receive a higher proportion of applications for our Early Career Awards from researchers under the age of 30 (17%) compared to other Charities.

Early Career Researchers

Age of Early Career Researchers to our 2023 Grant Rounds



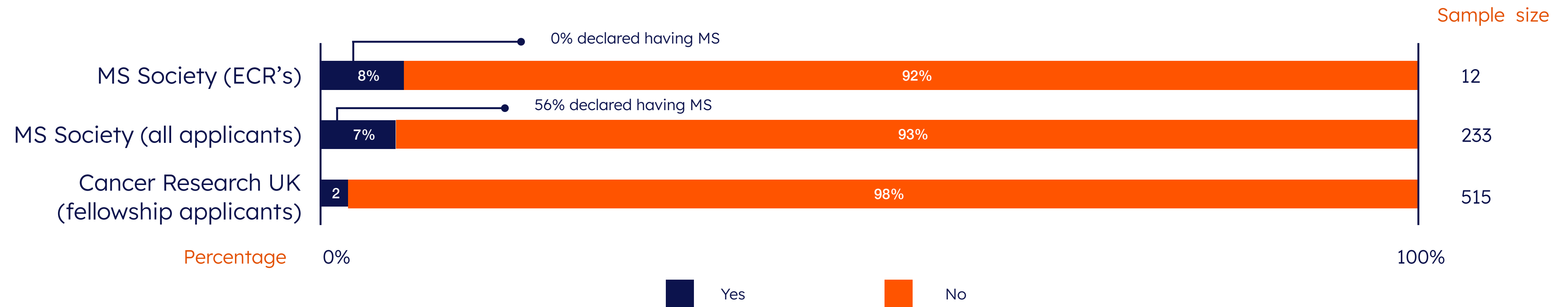


Less than 50% of Early Career applicants identify as female

Key findings: 8% of our Early Career applicants declared a disability. This is higher than the proportion of academic staff (5%) and higher than Cancer Research UK (2%).

Early Career Researchers

Disability status of Early Career Researchers to our 2023 Grant Rounds

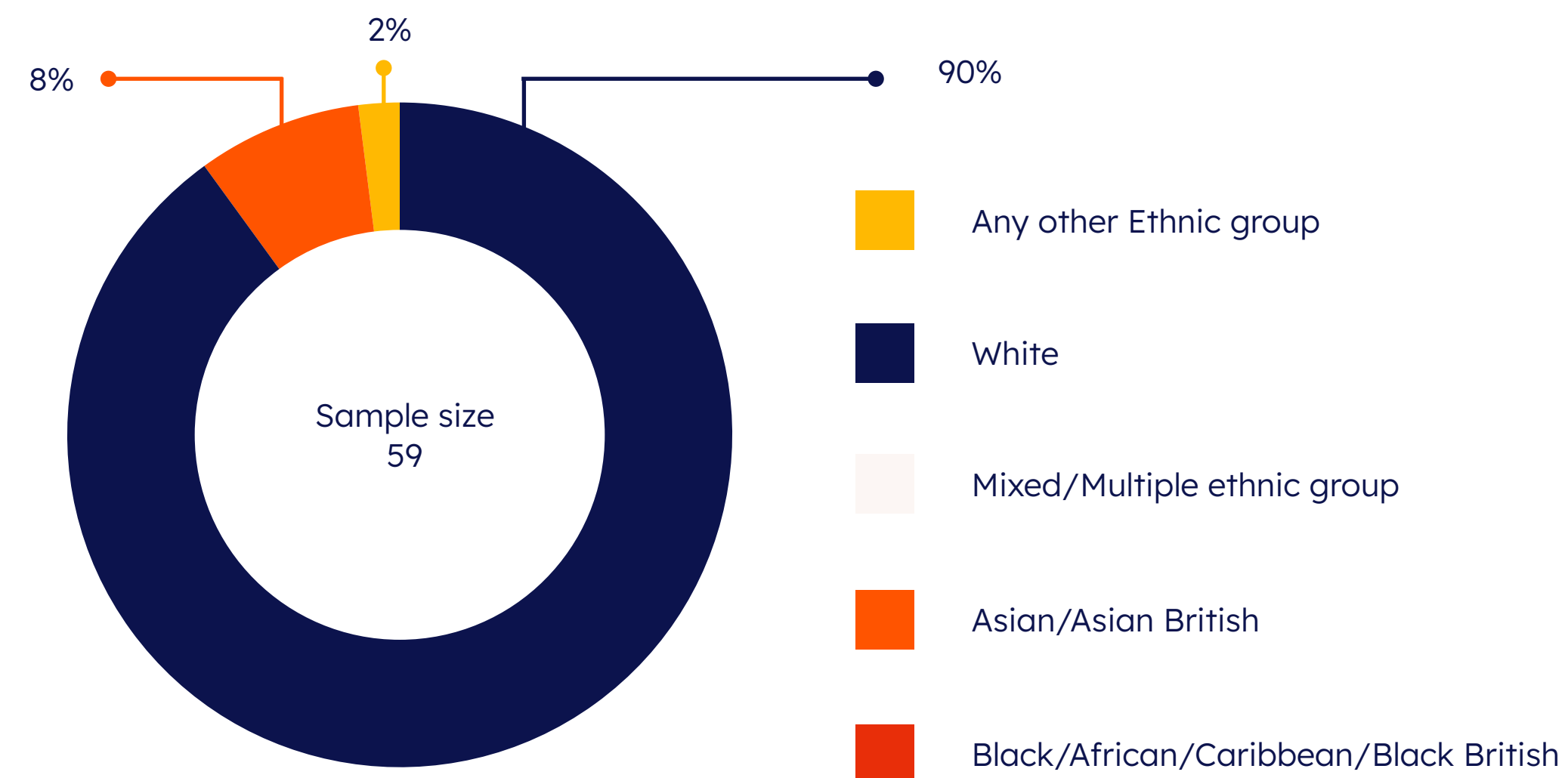




Note: We had a low response rate from governance members. Only 59-61 of 111 members completed the survey.

Governance members

Disability status of Early Career Researchers to our 2023 Grant Rounds



90% of our governance members are white

Key findings:

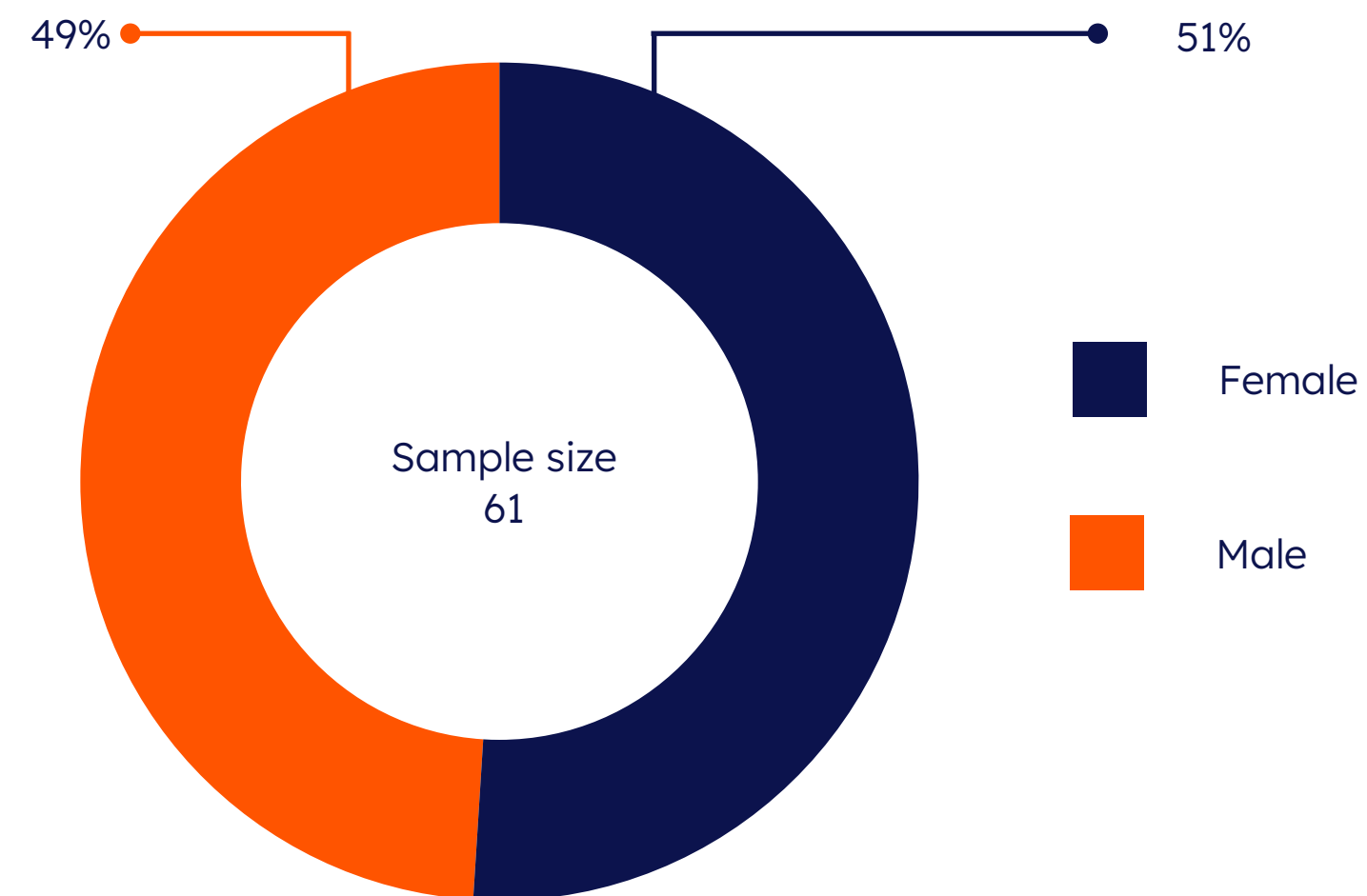
- 90% of our governance members are white. Only 10% are from an ethnic minority background.
- We've hit our target of 10% representation from people from ethnic minority backgrounds across our governance groups. But we have no members from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British or Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups.



Note: We had a low response rate from governance members. Only 59-61 of 111 members completed the survey.

Governance members

Proportion of our governance members by gender identity



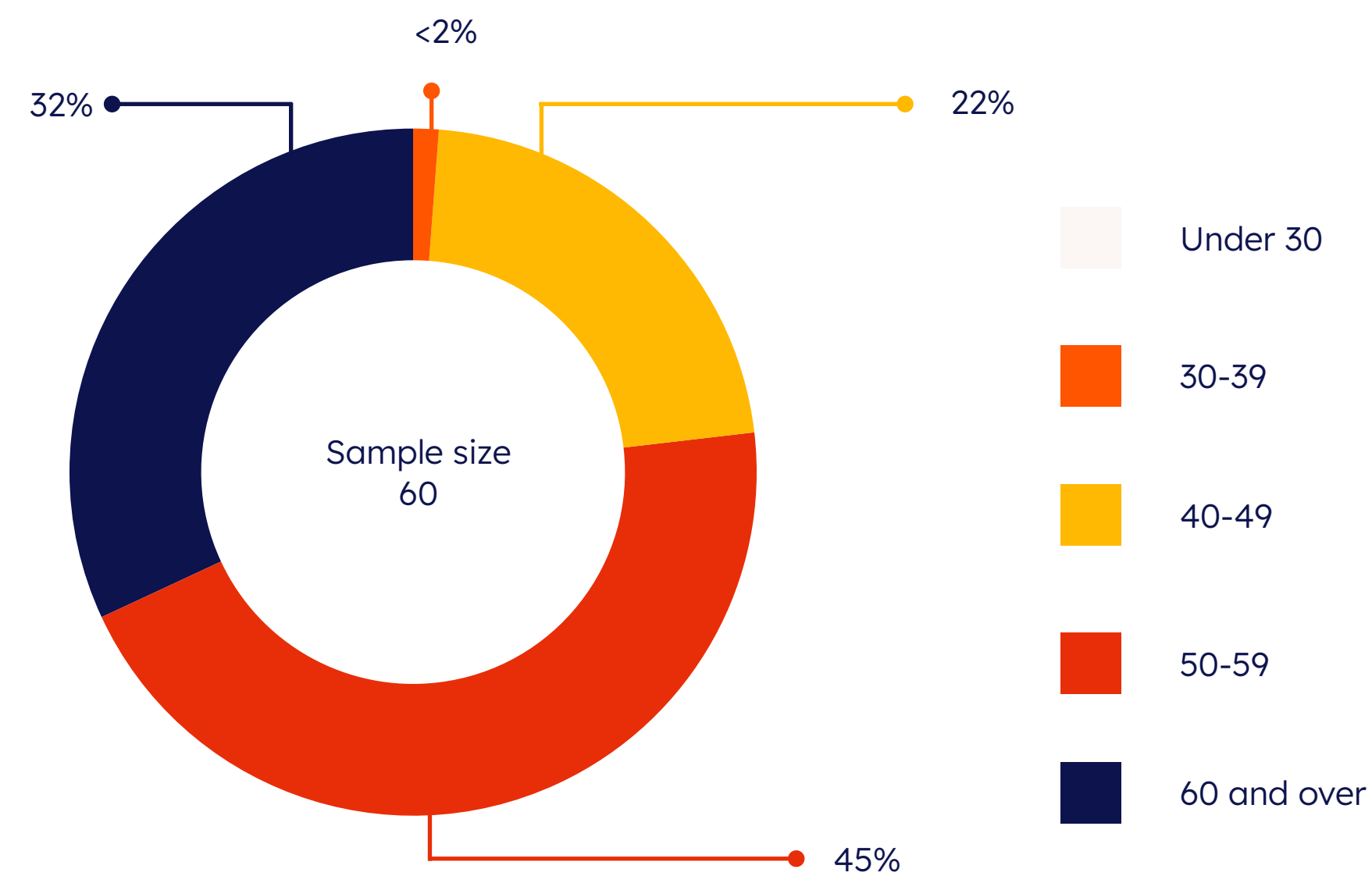
Women make up 51% of our governance members.

Key findings:

51% of our governance members identify as female. We're above our target of 50% representation from women across our governance groups.

Governance members

Proportion of our governance members by age



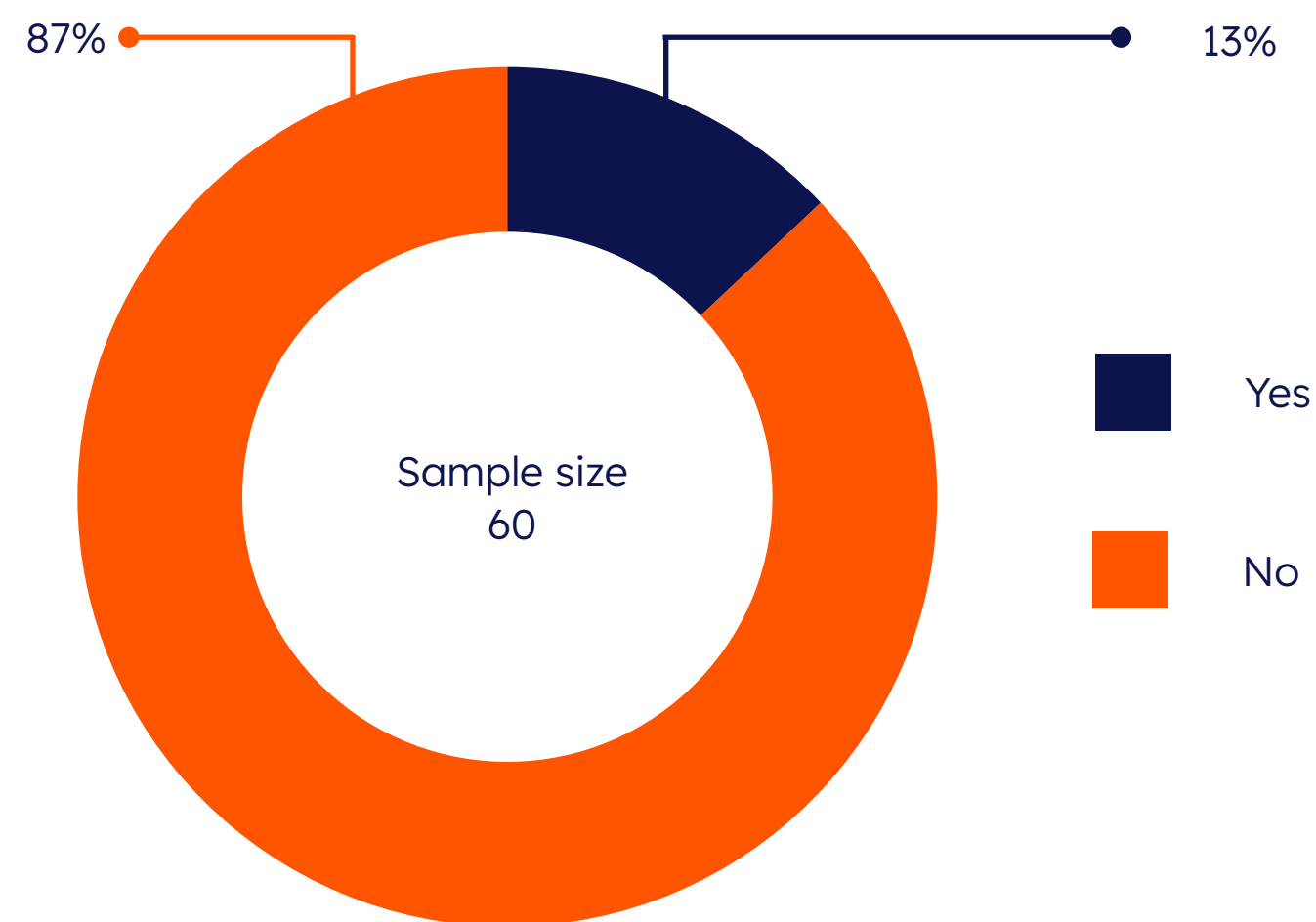
98% of our governance members are over the age of 40.

Key findings:

- Less than 2% of our governance members are under the age of 40. But this is an increase from 2022, where all members were over 40 years of age.
- The largest proportion of governance members are between the ages of 40-49 (45%).

Governance members

Proportion of our governance members by disability status



13% of our governance members have declared a disability.

Key findings:

- 13% of our governance members disclosed a disability.
- Of this 13%, all declared having MS.
- Each of our governance groups contain people affected by MS.



Next steps

We must

- ensure the demographics of applicants and governance members reflect the academic sector of biosciences and medical researchers
- increase grant applications from researchers from diverse backgrounds
- maintain equal success rates for researchers regardless of background
- maintain equal proportion of applications from female applicants. And increase applications from female researchers applying to our Career Development Awards
- maintain at least 50% females on our governance groups

In line with our EDI action plan, our 2024 priorities are to:

- continue to collect demographic data on our applicants and governance members. This will help us see under-representation and inequalities in our funding processes
- publish a report containing all the data from the first three years of our action plan. By analysing this larger dataset we'll be able to break down macro categories (such as ethnic minorities) into micro categories (such as individual ethnic background groups). A larger dataset will hopefully allow us to perform more granular intersectional analysis
- publish the demographic data for all our Early Career Researchers including the PhD students funded through our PhD Fellowship Award Rounds



Next steps

In line with our EDI action plan, our 2024 priorities are to:

- develop a plan to increase applications from under-represented groups as part of our new 2024-2029 EDI action plan
- make an active effort to recruit people from ethnic minority backgrounds to our governance groups. In this way we'll be able to make sure diverse voices are represented
- develop a plan for facilitating the involvement of Early Career Researchers in our governance groups

Our ongoing plans include:

- following up on our previously funded early Career Researchers to identify whether people from certain backgrounds are more likely to leave MS research. And identify barriers to career progression among these groups
- continuing to review our communications plan to ensure people from all backgrounds know about opportunities to take part in MS research. This communications plan will be reviewed by our [EDI Reference Group](#)
- share case studies showcasing best practice examples of researchers considering EDI in their research
- consult with the research community and people affected by MS to develop our new EDI action plan for 2024-2029

Appendix 1

Demographic questionnaire

Our questions are designed using the [Diversity and Inclusion Survey \(DAISY\) Question Guidance](#) and modelled after the UK 2021 Census.

1. When were you born?

2. What ethnic group do you identify with? Choose one option that best described your ethnic group or background.

- Asian/Asian British – Indian
- Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
- Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi
- Asian/Asian British – Chinese
- Asian/Asian British – Any other Asian Background
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – African
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Caribbean
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Asian and White
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black Caribbean and White
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black African and White
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
- White – British/English/Welsh/Scottish
- White – Northern Irish
- White – Irish
- White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- White – Any other White background
- Any other ethnic group – Arab
- Any other ethnic group – Any other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following best describes your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non-Binary
- I would prefer to use my own term - Please tell us your own term
- Prefer not to say

4. Do you identify as trans?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

5. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- Straight/Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Other sexual orientation – Please tell us your sexual orientation
- Prefer not to say

6. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

(By “disability” we mean a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-today activities.)

- Yes – Can you tell us about your disability?
- Yes, it is because of my MS
- Yes, it is because of my other condition

Appendix 1

Demographic questionnaire

No
Prefer not to say

7. Do you provide unpaid care to a partner, disabled child, close relative or friend, who could not manage without your help?

Yes
No
Prefer not to say

8. What is your employment status?

Employed – Full time
Employed – Part time
Self-employed – Full time
Self-employed – Part time
Not employed – Looking for work
Not employed – Not looking for work
Retired – Retired and receiving pension
Retired – Medically retired early because of ill health

9. To process your personal data including your special category data (sensitive data including health, ethnicity and diagnosis data) as outlined above, we require your explicit consent.

Yes, I consent
No, I do not consent (any data you entered above will be removed)

Appendix 2

References

[1] Advance HE (2022). ‘Staff statistical report’. https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-reports-2023?_ga=2.206934227.1370185303.1704715111-2095997450.1703247846

[2] NIHR (2022). ‘Diversity data report 2022’. <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/diversity-data-report-2022/31959>

[3] Cancer Research UK (2023). ‘Driving Change. How our initiatives are fostering a more diverse inclusive research community’. https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/diversity_data_in_research_funding_2023.pdf

Appendix 2

References

[4] British Heart Foundation (2023). 'Our research funding diversity data 2020-2023'. https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/what-we-do/equality-diversity-inclusion/diversity-data-research-funding/bhf_our-research-funding-diversity-data-2020-2023.pdf?rev=fa2eb9a706154f2789010076a2d2dc83&hash=F756A98BF26401A61E202B41865AEEB6

[5] EDIS (2022). 'Diversity and Inclusion Survey (Daisy) Question Guidance (Version 2)'. <https://edisgroup.org/resources/practical-tools-and-guidance/diversity-and-inclusion-survey-daisy-question-guidance-v2/>

[6] Office for National Statistics (2021). 'Ethnicity harmonised standard'. <https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/ethnicity-harmonised-standard/#questions-for-england>