

Freelancers – the perfect fit for your project?



A survey of the experience, motivations and added value of freelance medical writing professionals

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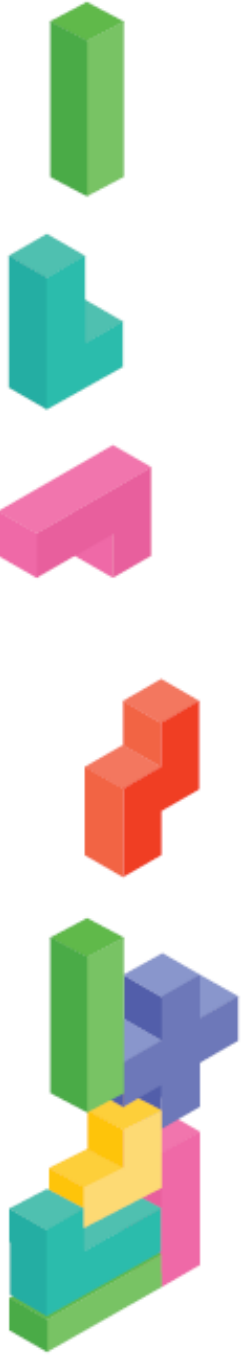
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^cMedCommsTech Medical Writers Collective, Orpington, UK;

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^eMedCommsTech Medical Writers Collective, Pulborough, UK.



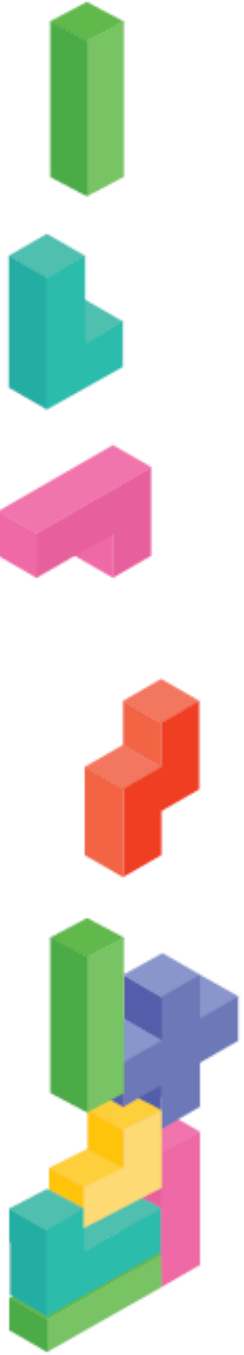
Introduction

- Freelance medical writing professionals represent an important component of the scientific team for many medical and value communications agencies and pharmaceutical/biotech companies^{1,2}
- Understanding the perspectives of freelance medical writers may help to enhance business practices and collaboration between freelancers and other medical communications professionals

Objective

- To characterize freelance medical writing professionals' experience, motivations and added value in medical communications

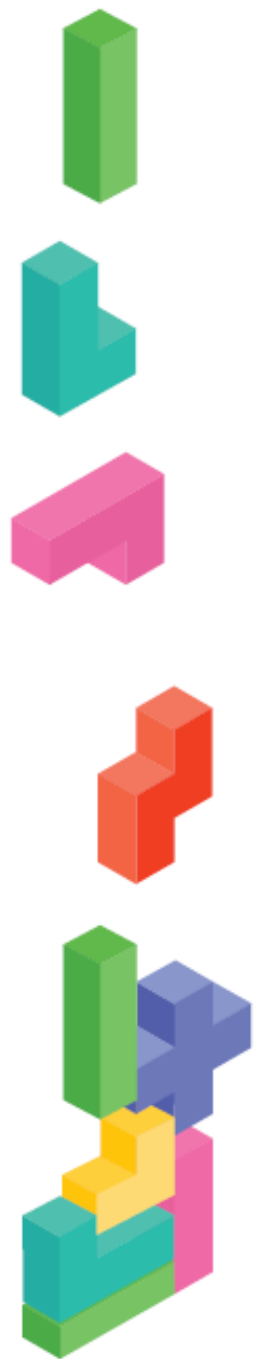
1. Chester JM, Kaleci S, Kehoe L. Seventh Freelance Business Survey: The freelance landscape 2018–2023. *Medical Writing* 2023;32(2):56–70. <https://doi.org/10.56012/worg5056>;
2. MedComms Networking. MedComms Freelancing Barometer 2024. Available at: https://medcommsnetworking.com/docs/barometer2024_all_data.pdf (accessed Dec 2024).



Methods

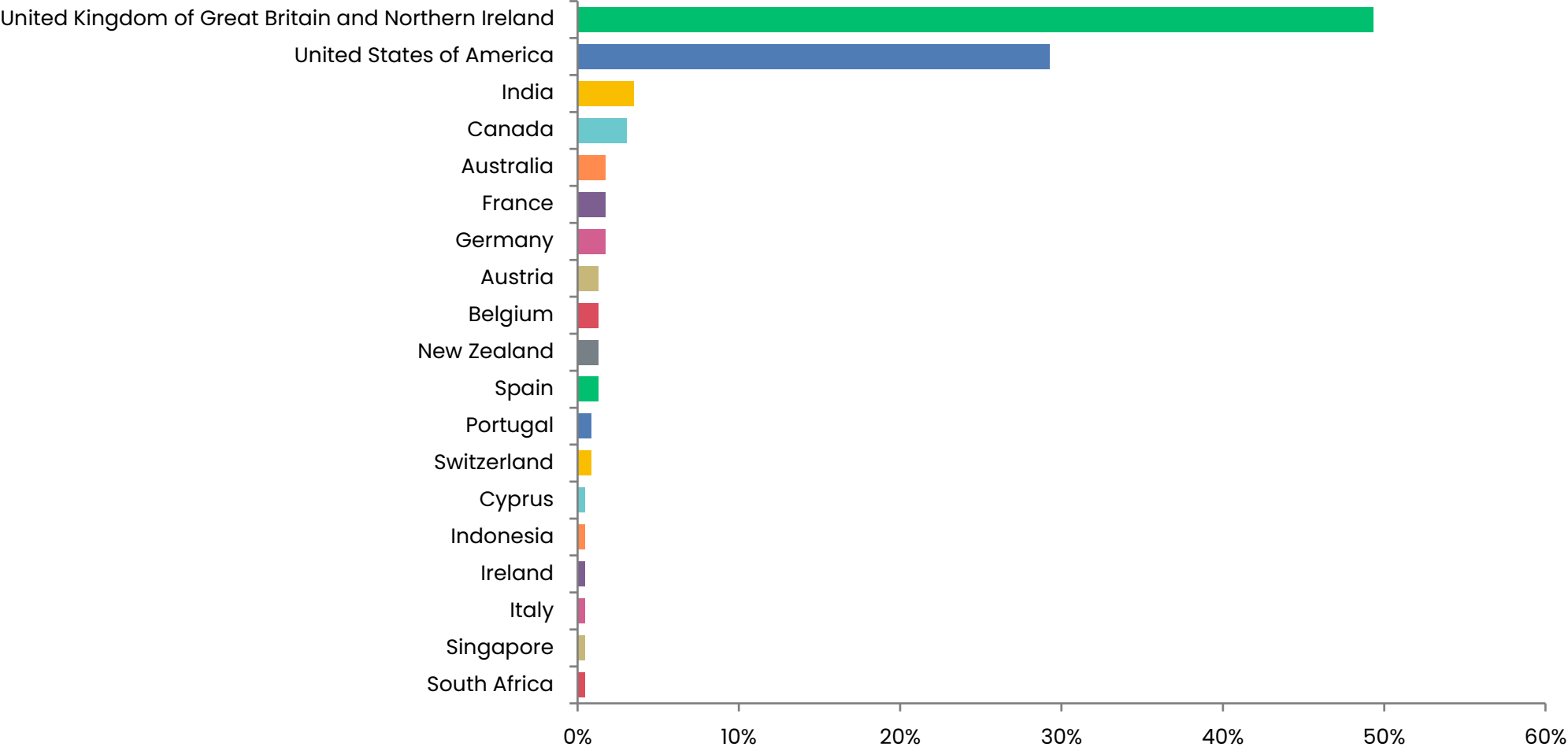
- An online survey was conducted among freelance medical writers from 4–25 September 2024.
- The survey included 26 questions across 5 categories:
 - Demographics and professional background
 - Freelance services and business practices
 - Experience and credentials
 - Motivations and value
 - Future directions
- The survey was shared with members of the ISMPP Freelancers Community, EMWA Freelance Business Forum LinkedIn group, AMWA Freelance Network, MedComms Workbook, MedComms Networking email list, Freelancers in Pubs email list, Talus freelance platform (medical writers only) and the authors' LinkedIn networks

Results



Q1: In what country do you work?

• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0



Q1: In what country do you work?

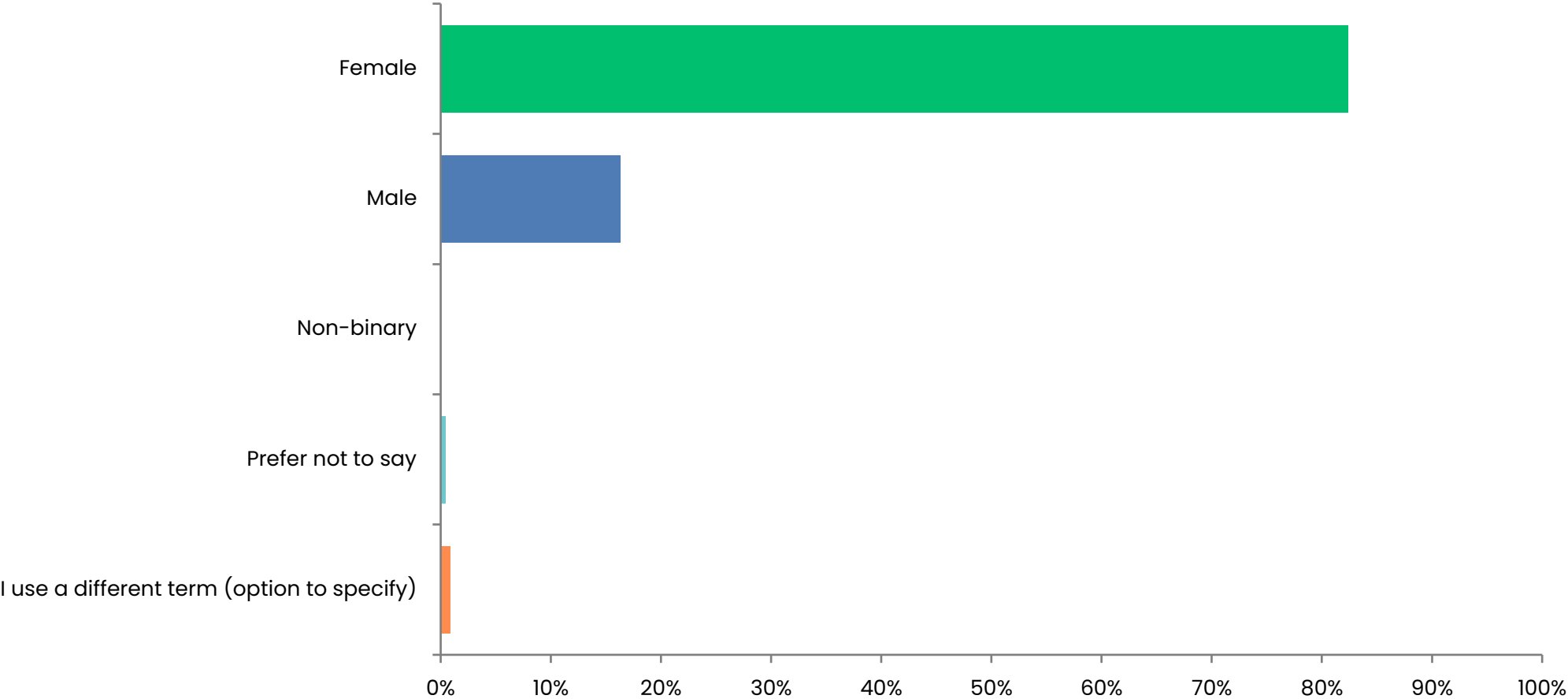
- Answered: 229 Skipped: 0

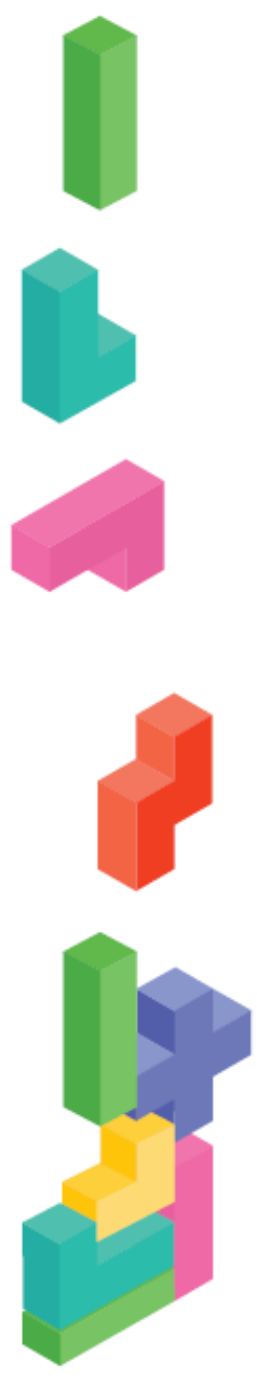
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	49.34%	113
United States of America	29.26%	67
India	3.49%	8
Canada	3.06%	7
Australia	1.75%	4
France	1.75%	4
Germany	1.75%	4
Austria	1.31%	3
Belgium	1.31%	3
New Zealand	1.31%	3

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Spain	1.31%	3
Portugal	0.87%	2
Switzerland	0.87%	2
Cyprus	0.44%	1
Indonesia	0.44%	1
Ireland	0.44%	1
Italy	0.44%	1
Singapore	0.44%	1
South Africa	0.44%	1
TOTAL		229

Q2: What is your gender?

• Answered: 227 Skipped: 2





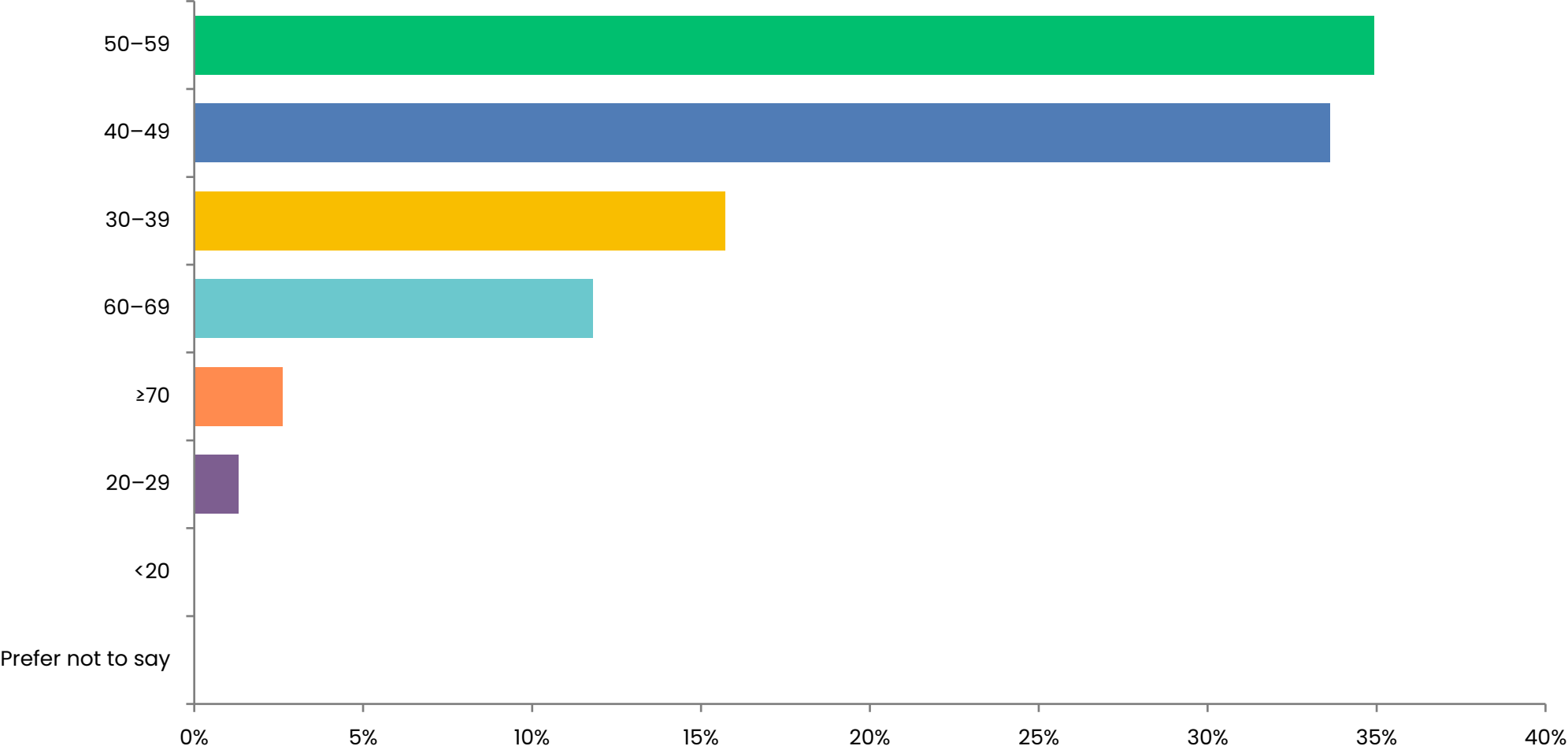
Q2: What is your gender?

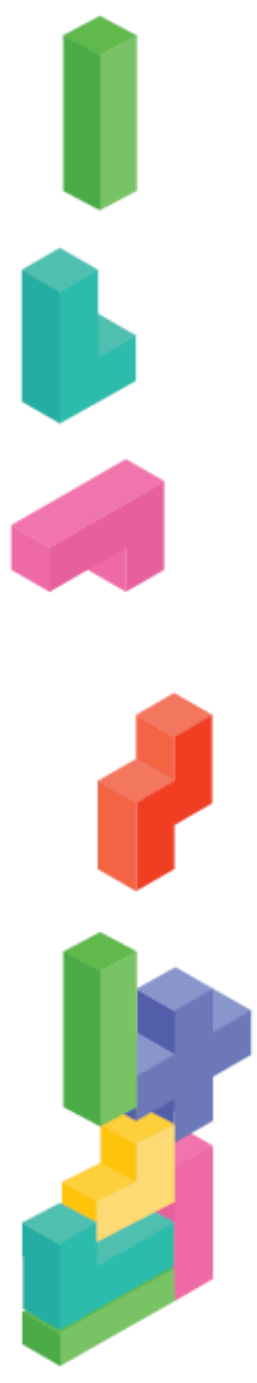
- Answered: 227 Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Female	82.38%	187
Male	16.30%	37
Non-binary	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	0.44%	1
I use a different term (option to specify)	0.88%	2
TOTAL		227

Q3: What is your age (years)?

• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0





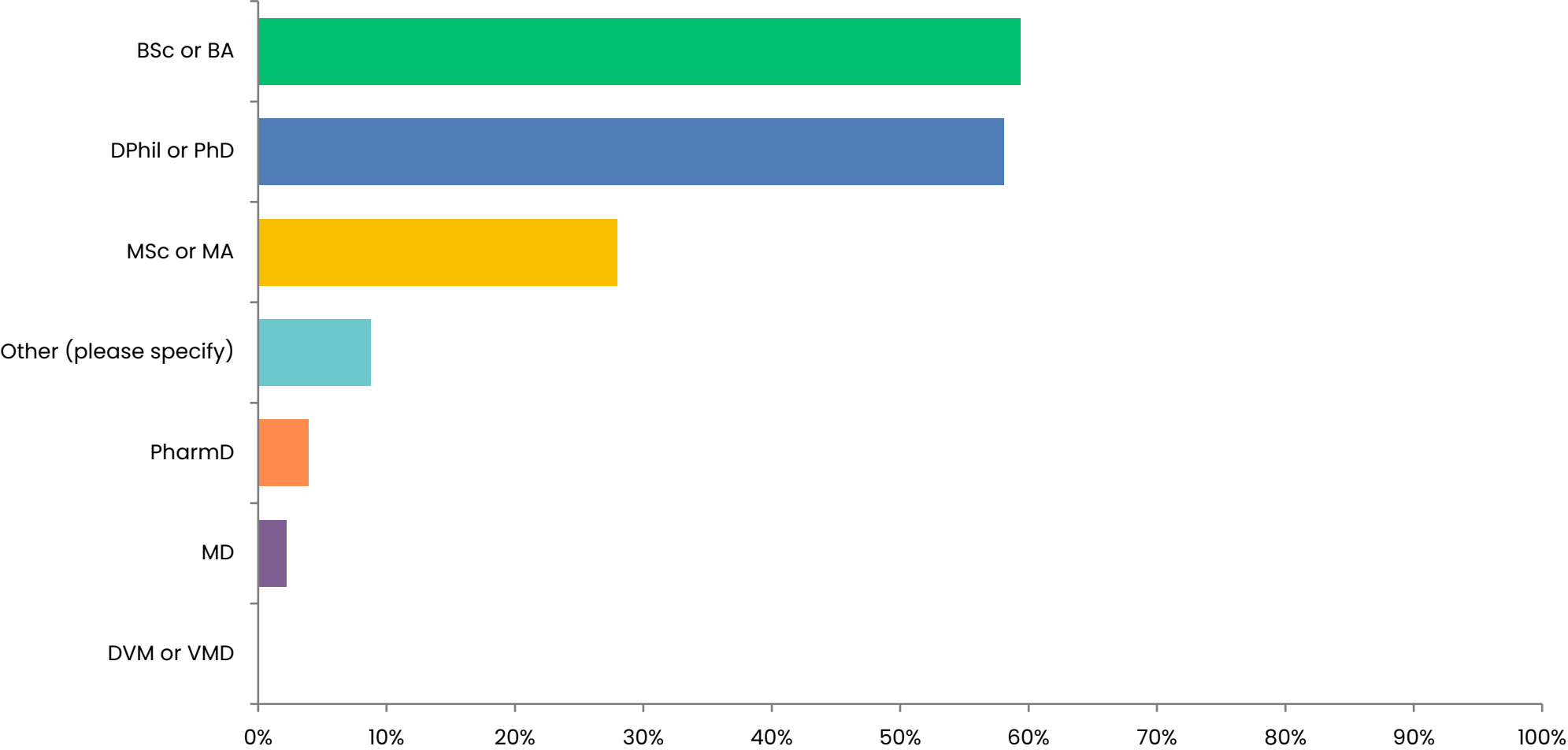
Q3: What is your age (years)?

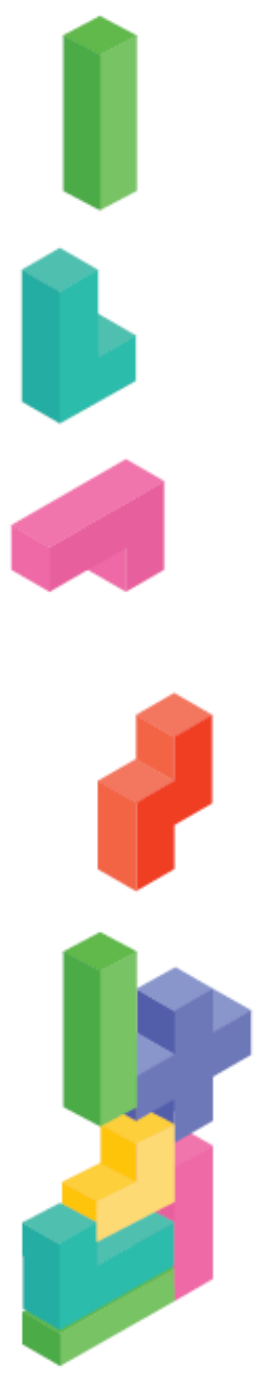
- Answered: 229 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
50–59	34.93%	80
40–49	33.62%	77
30–39	15.72%	36
60–69	11.79%	27
≥70	2.62%	6
20–29	1.31%	3
<20	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
TOTAL		229

Q4: What academic degrees do you hold? Select all that apply

• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0





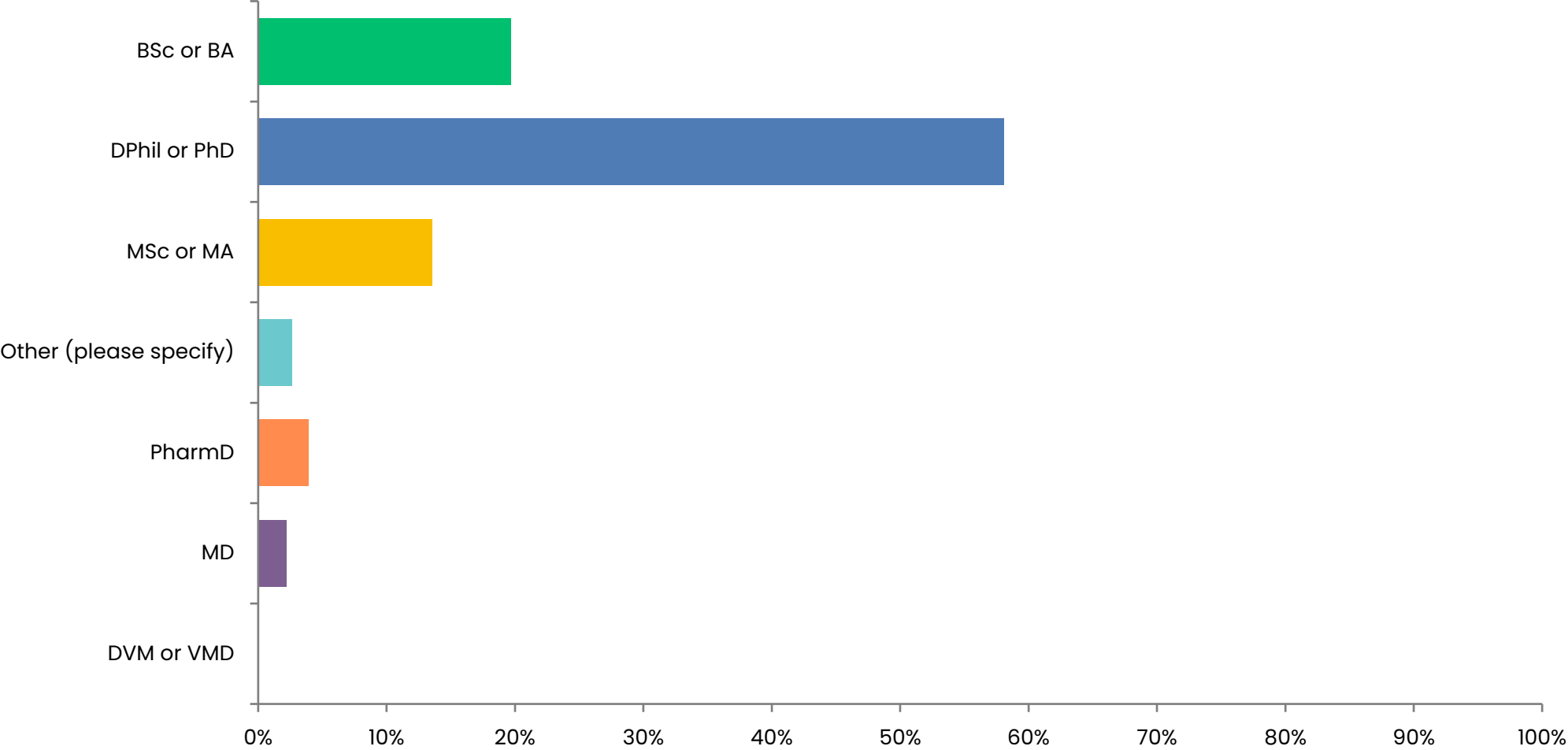
Q4: What academic degrees do you hold? Select all that apply

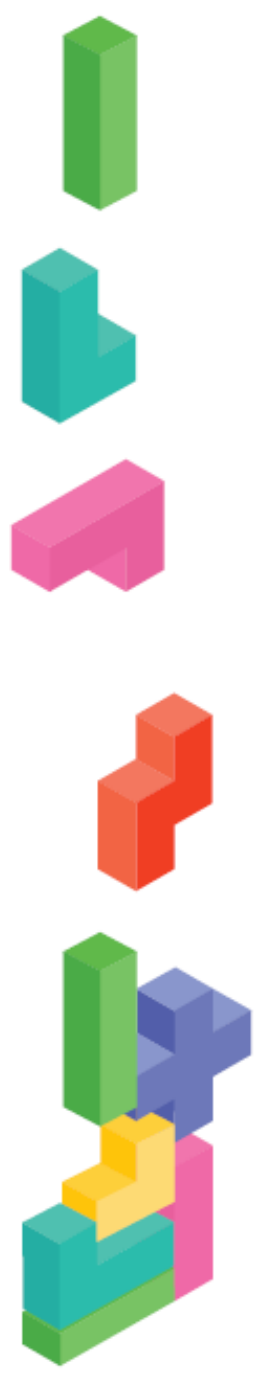
• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
BSc or BA	59.39%	136
DPhil or PhD	58.08%	133
MSc or MA	27.95%	64
Other (please specify)	8.73%	20
PharmD	3.93%	9
MD	2.18%	5
DVM or VMD	0.00%	0
TOTAL		367

Highest degree based on individual responses to Question 4

• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0





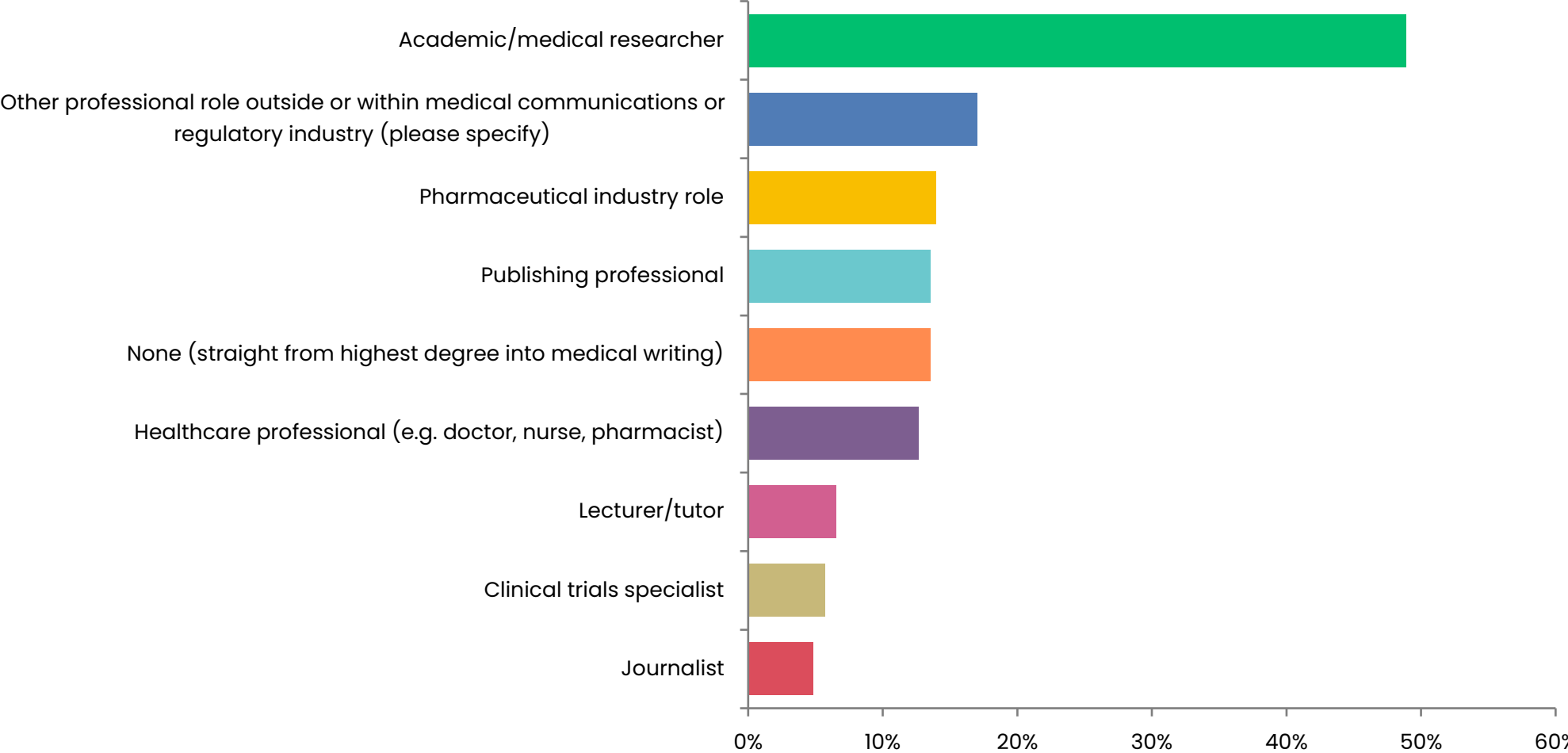
Highest degree based on individual responses to Question 4

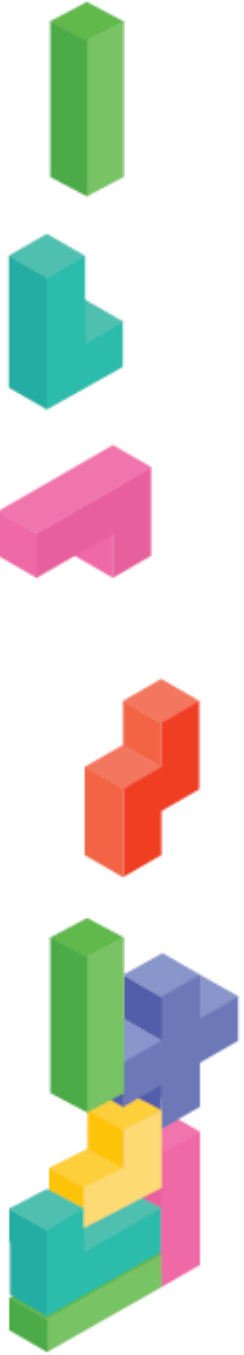
• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
BSc or BA	19.65%	45
DPhil or PhD	58.08%	133
MSc or MA	13.54%	31
Other (please specify)	2.62%	6
PharmD	3.93%	9
MD	2.18%	5
DVM or VMD	0.00%	0
TOTAL		229

Q5: What professional roles did you hold prior to becoming a medical writing professional? Select all that apply

• Answered: 229 Skipped: 0





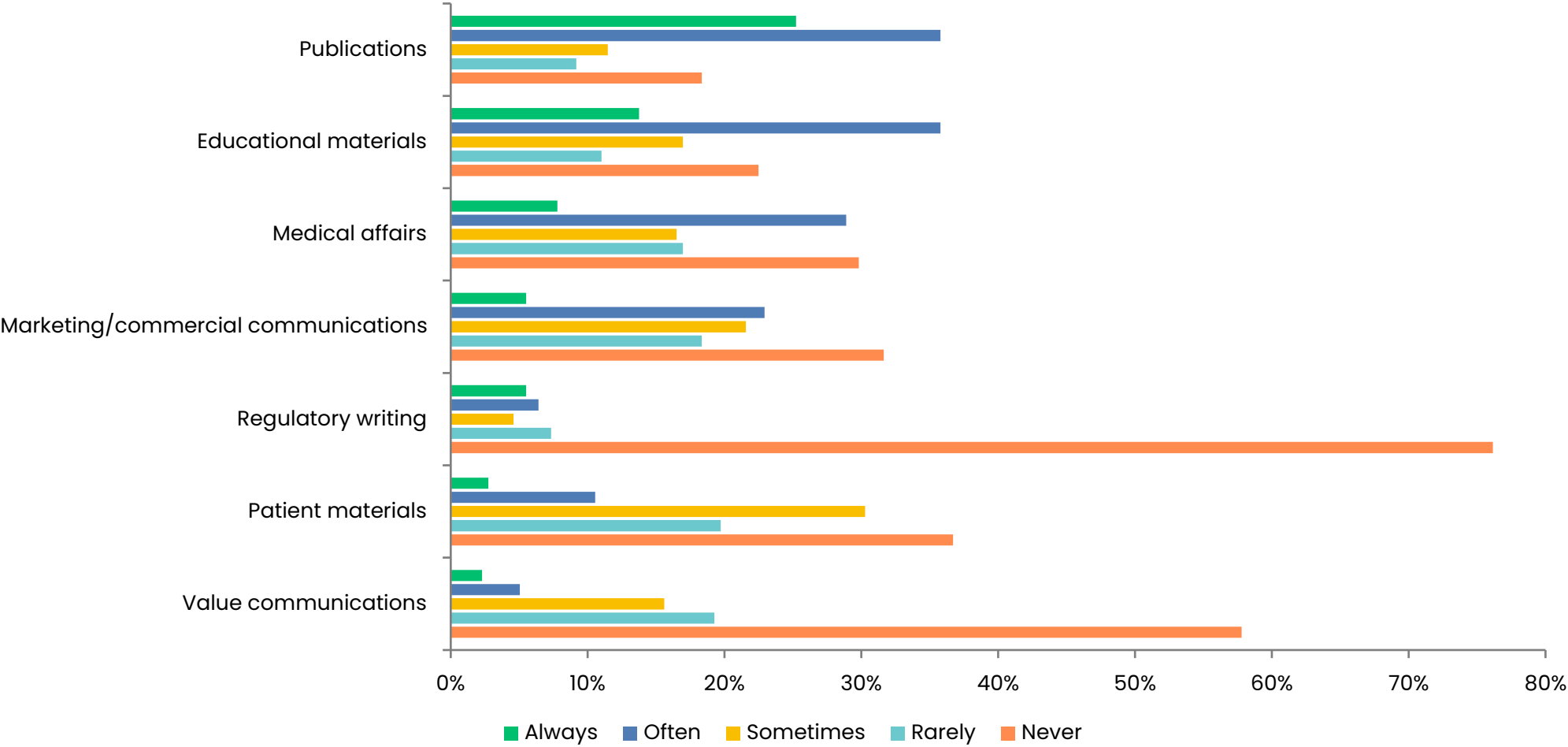
Q5: What professional roles did you hold prior to becoming a medical writing professional? Select all that apply

- Answered: 229 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Academic/medical researcher	48.91%	112
Other professional role outside or within medical communications or regulatory industry (please specify)	17.03%	39
Pharmaceutical industry role	13.97%	32
Publishing professional	13.54%	31
None (straight from highest degree into medical writing)	13.54%	31
Healthcare professional (e.g. doctor, nurse, pharmacist)	12.66%	29
Lecturer/tutor	6.55%	15
Clinical trials specialist	5.68%	13
Journalist	4.80%	11
TOTAL		313

Q6: How frequently over the past year have you worked on the following types of medical writing projects?

• Answered: 218 Skipped: 11



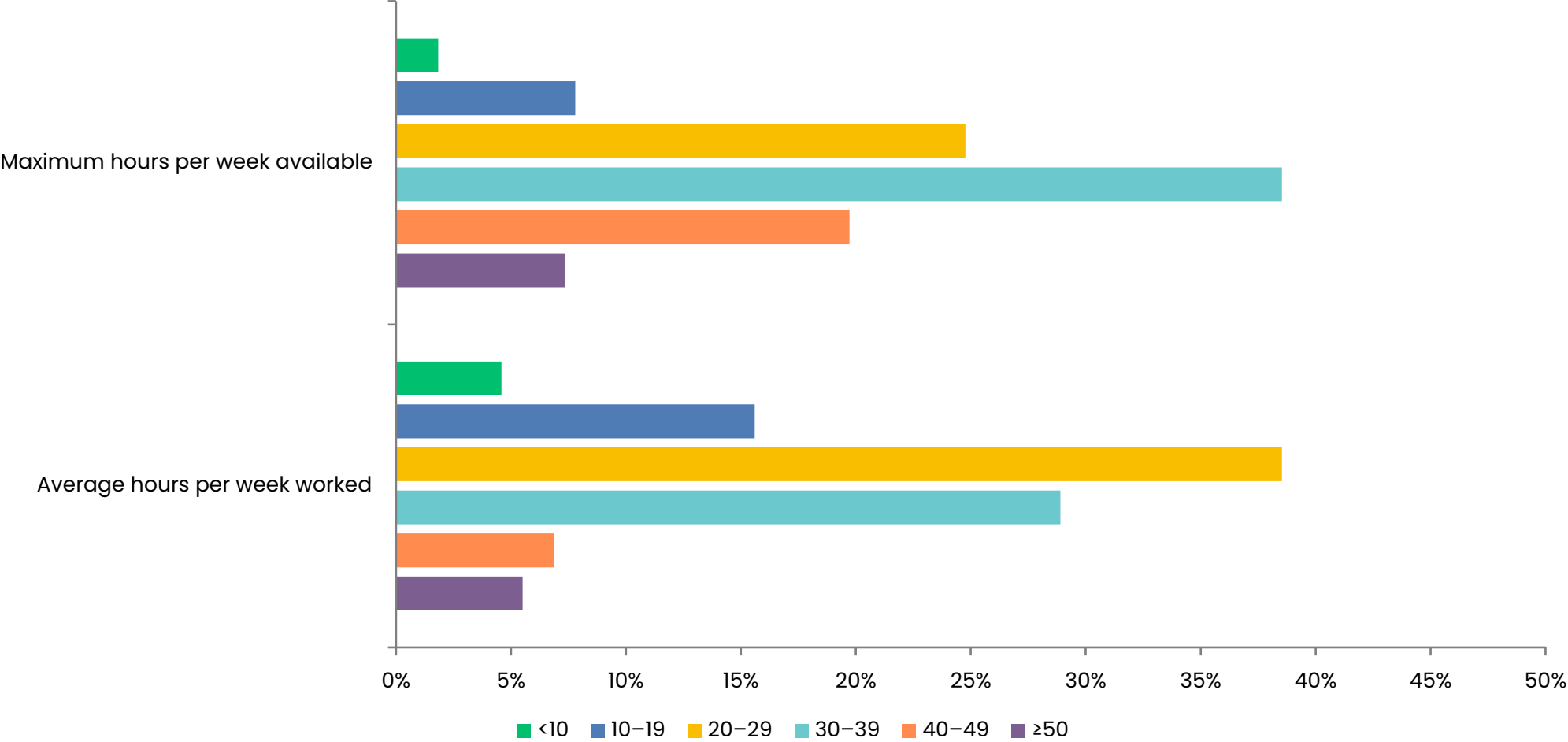
Q6: How frequently over the past year have you worked on the following types of medical writing projects?

- Answered: 218 Skipped: 11

	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Publications	25.23% 55	35.78% 78	11.47% 25	9.17% 20	18.35% 40	218	1
Educational materials	13.76% 30	35.78% 78	16.97% 37	11.01% 24	22.48% 49	218	1
Medical affairs	7.80% 17	28.90% 63	16.51% 36	16.97% 37	29.82% 65	218	1
Marketing/ commercial communications	5.50% 12	22.94% 50	21.56% 47	18.35% 40	31.65% 69	218	1
Regulatory writing	5.50% 12	6.42% 14	4.59% 10	7.34% 16	76.15% 166	218	1
Patient materials	2.75% 6	10.55% 23	30.28% 66	19.72% 43	36.70% 80	218	1
Value communications	2.29% 5	5.05% 11	15.60% 34	19.27% 42	57.80% 126	218	1

Q7: How many hours do you have available and how many hours do you work in a typical working week as a freelance medical writing professional?

• Answered: 218 Skipped: 11



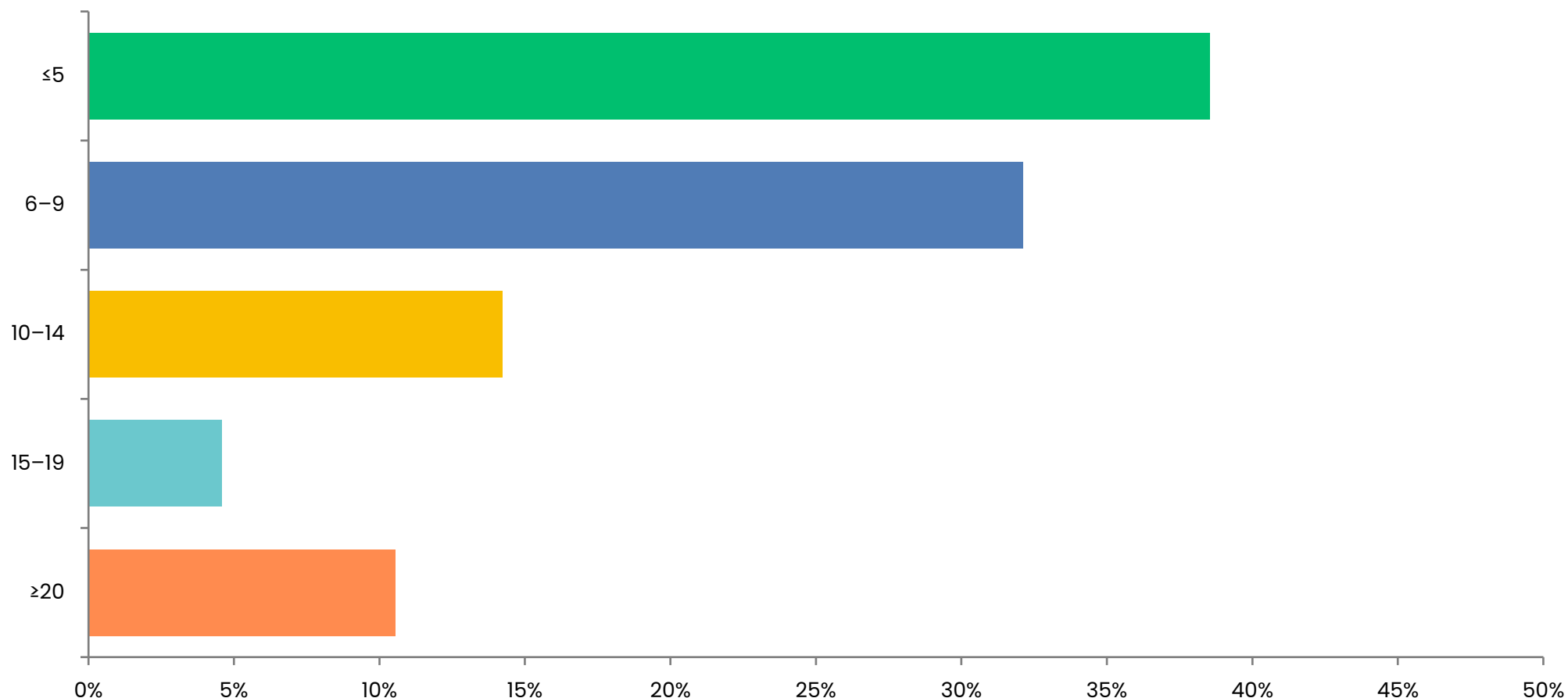
Q7: How many hours do you have available and how many hours do you work in a typical working week as a freelance medical writing professional?

- Answered: 218 Skipped: 11

	<10	10–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	≥50	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Maximum hours per week available	1.83% 4	7.80% 17	24.77% 54	38.53% 84	19.72% 43	7.34% 16	218	1
Average hours per week worked	4.59% 10	15.60% 34	38.53% 84	28.90% 63	6.88% 15	5.50% 12	218	1

Q8: On average, how many hours per month do you spend on your freelance medical writing business outside your paid work (e.g. invoicing/accountancy, business development, training, networking)?

- Answered: 218 Skipped: 11



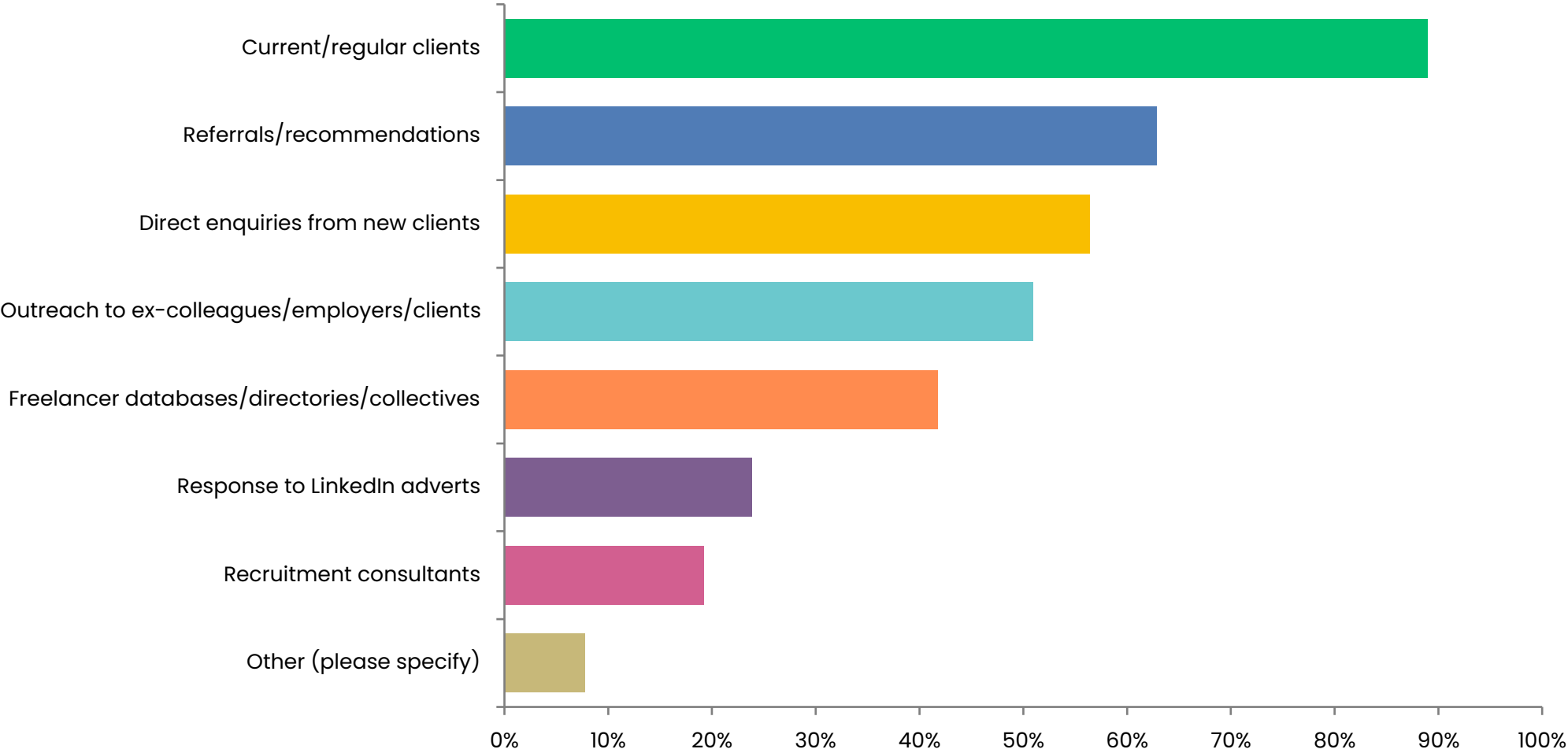
Q8: On average, how many hours per month do you spend on your freelance medical writing business outside your paid work (e.g. invoicing/accountancy, business development, training, networking)?

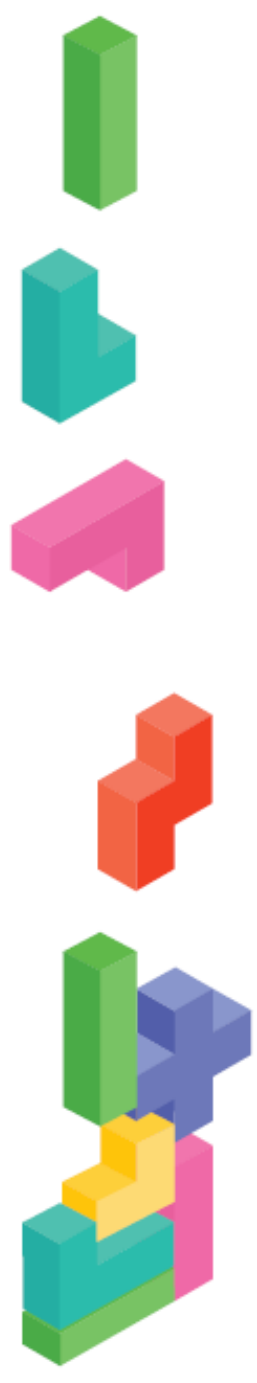
• Answered: 218 Skipped: 11

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
≤5	38.53%	84
6–9	32.11%	70
10–14	14.22%	31
15–19	4.59%	10
≥20	10.55%	23
TOTAL		218

Q9: How do you source your freelance work? Select all that apply

• Answered: 218 Skipped: 11





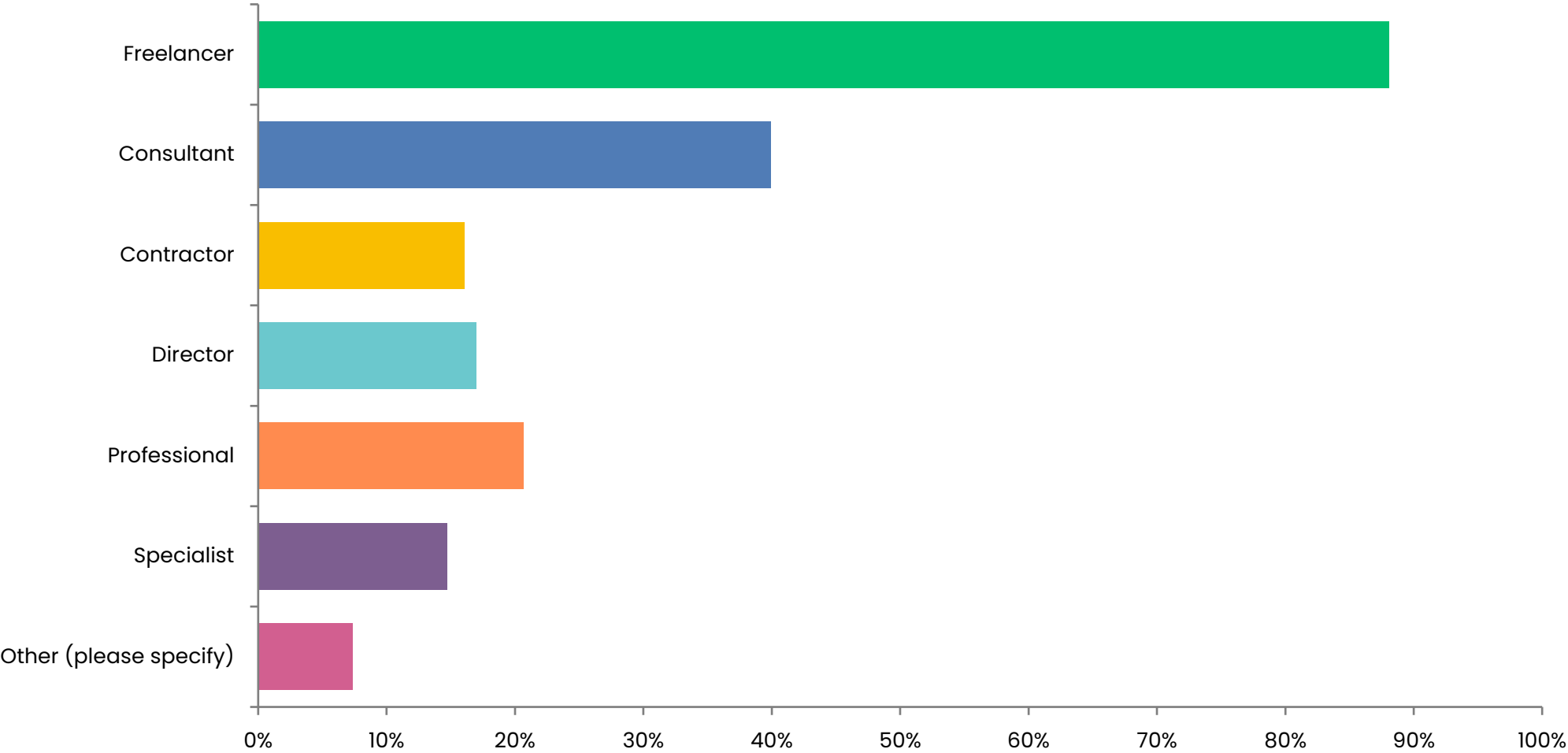
Q9: How do you source your freelance work? Select all that apply

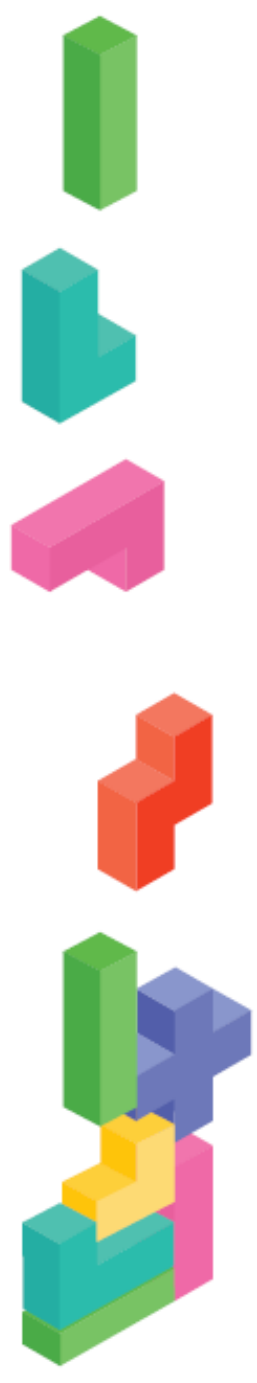
- Answered: 218 Skipped: 11

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Current/regular clients	88.99%	194
Referrals/recommendations	62.84%	137
Direct enquiries from new clients	56.42%	123
Outreach to ex-colleagues/ employers/clients	50.92%	111
Freelancer databases/directories/collectives	41.74%	91
Response to LinkedIn adverts	23.85%	52
Recruitment consultants	19.27%	42
Other (please specify)	7.80%	17
TOTAL		767

Q10: What descriptors do you currently use for your role/job title?
Select all that apply

• Answered: 218 Skipped: 11





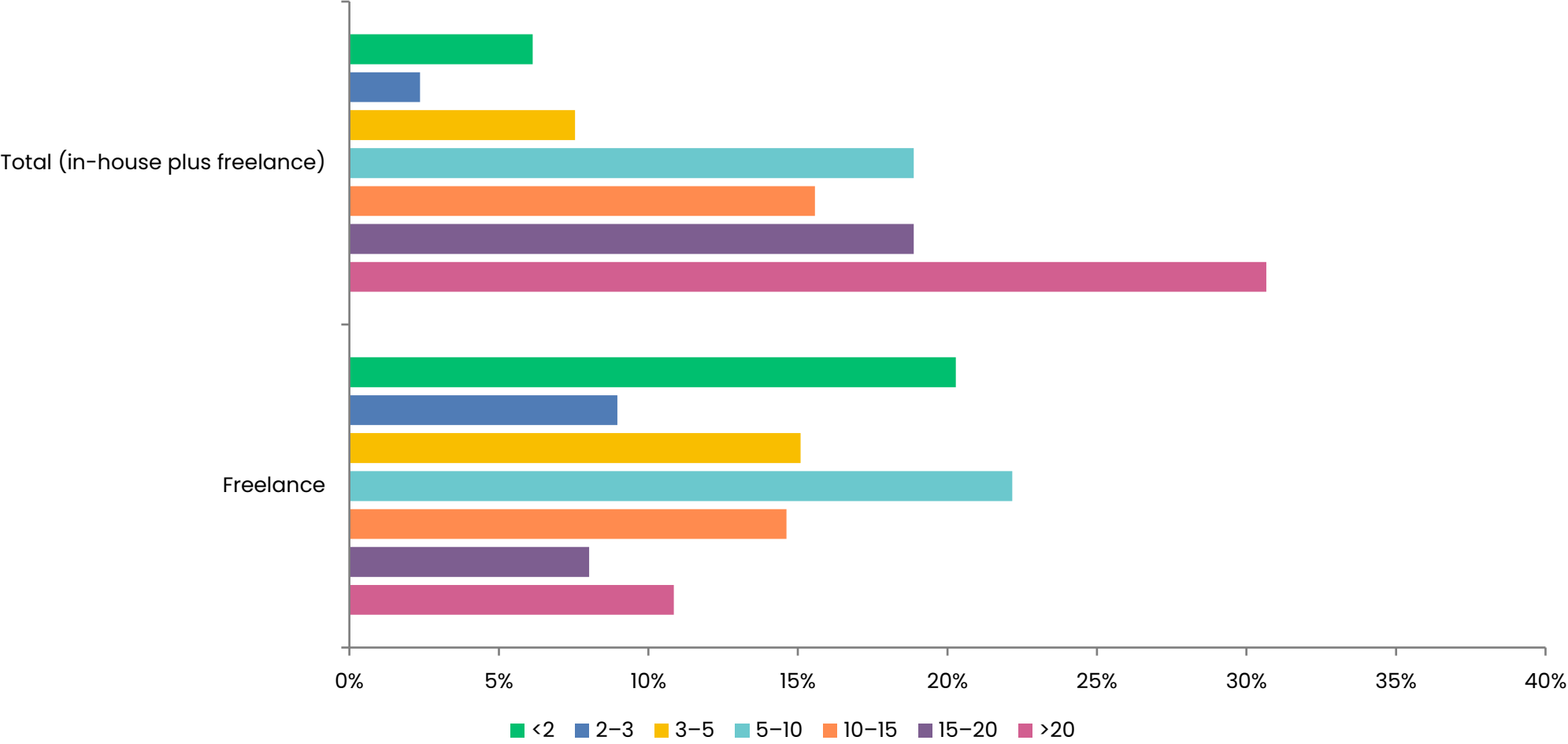
Q10: What descriptors do you currently use for your role/job title? Select all that apply

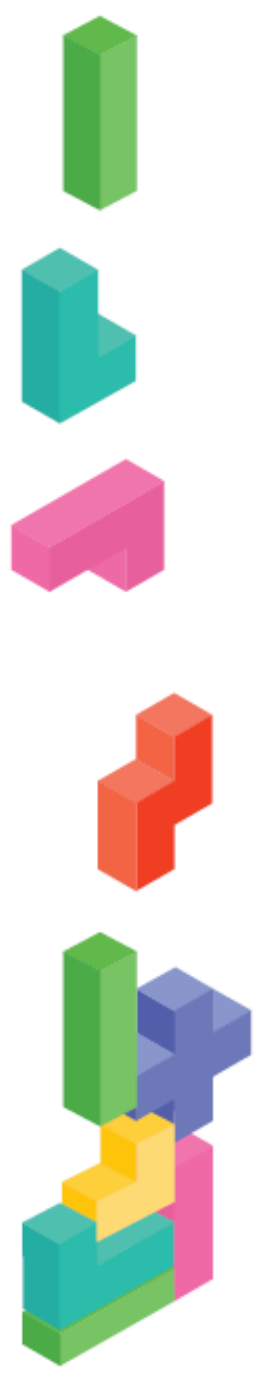
• Answered: 218 Skipped: 11

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Freelancer	88.07%	192
Consultant	39.91%	87
Contractor	16.06%	35
Director	16.97%	37
Professional	20.64%	45
Specialist	14.68%	32
Other (please specify)	7.34%	16
TOTAL		444

Q11: How many years have you been a medical writing professional?

• Answered: 212 Skipped: 17





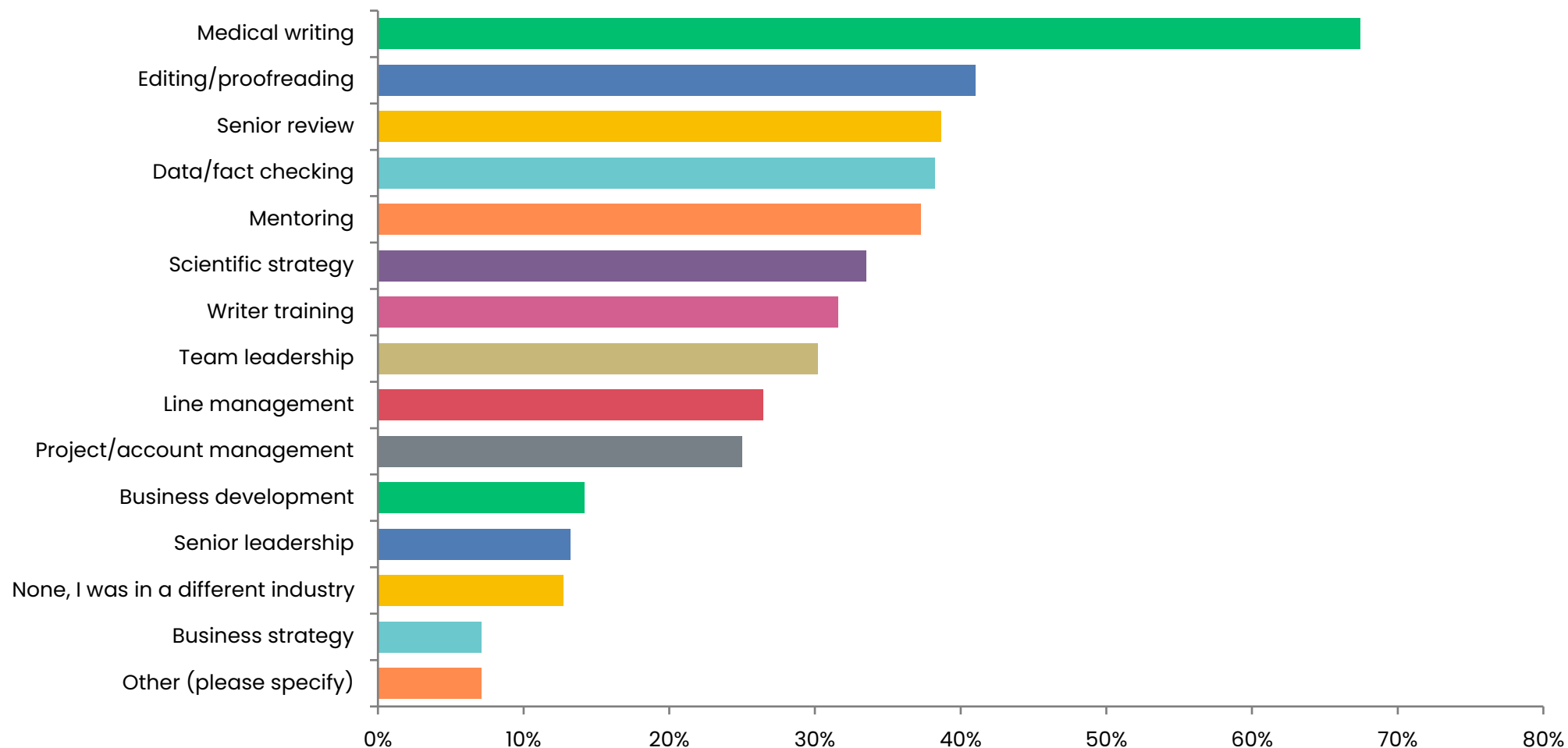
Q11: How many years have you been a medical writing professional?

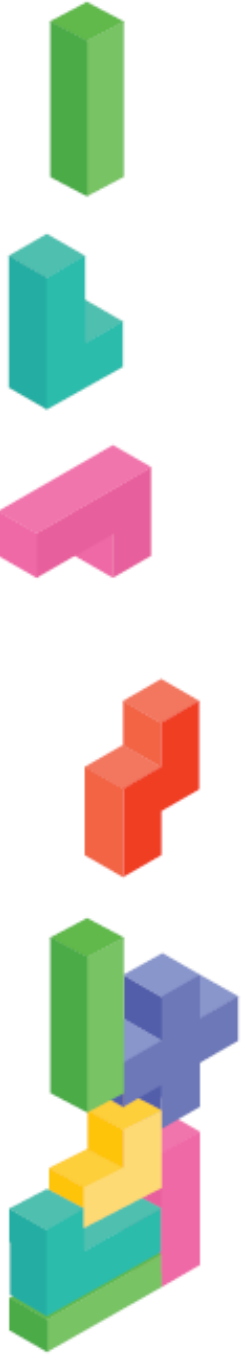
- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17

	<2	2–3	3–5	5–10	10–15	15–20	>20	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Total (in-house plus freelance)	6.13% 13	2.36% 5	7.55% 16	18.87% 40	15.57% 33	18.87% 40	30.66% 65	212	1
Freelance	20.28% 43	8.96% 19	15.09% 32	22.17% 47	14.62% 31	8.02% 17	10.85% 23	212	1

Q12: What were your medical communications responsibilities immediately prior to becoming a freelance medical writing professional? Select all that apply

- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17





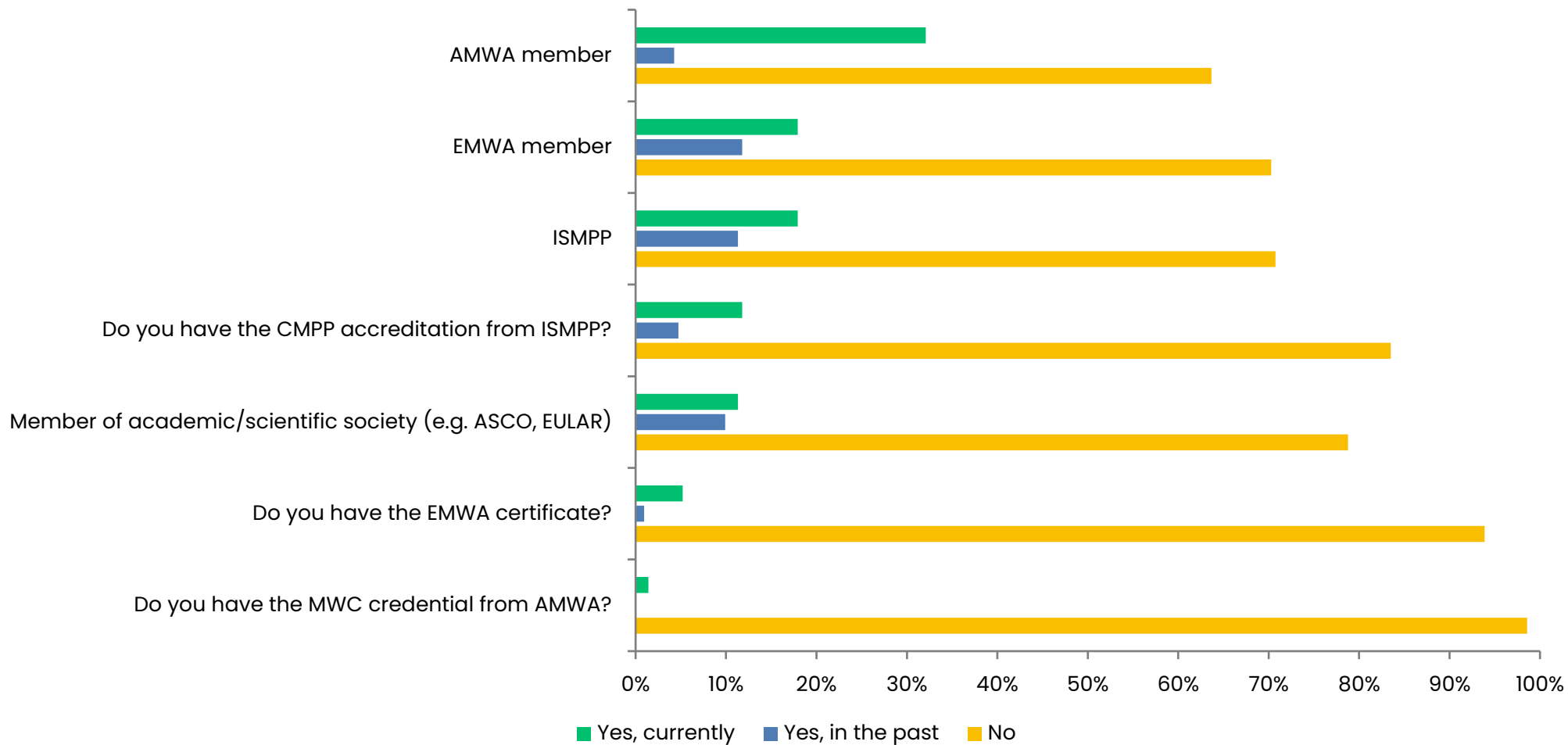
Q12: What were your medical communications responsibilities immediately prior to becoming a freelance medical writing professional? Select all that apply

- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Medical writing	67.45%	143
Editing/proofreading	41.04%	87
Senior review	38.68%	82
Data/fact checking	38.21%	81
Mentoring	37.26%	79
Scientific strategy	33.49%	71
Writer training	31.60%	67
Team leadership	30.19%	64
Line management	26.42%	56
Project/account management	25.00%	53
Business development	14.15%	30
Senior leadership	13.21%	28
None, I was in a different industry	12.74%	27
Business strategy	7.08%	15
Other (please specify)	7.08%	15
TOTAL		898

Q13: Are you a current/past member of any of these societies? Do you have their certification/credential?

- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17



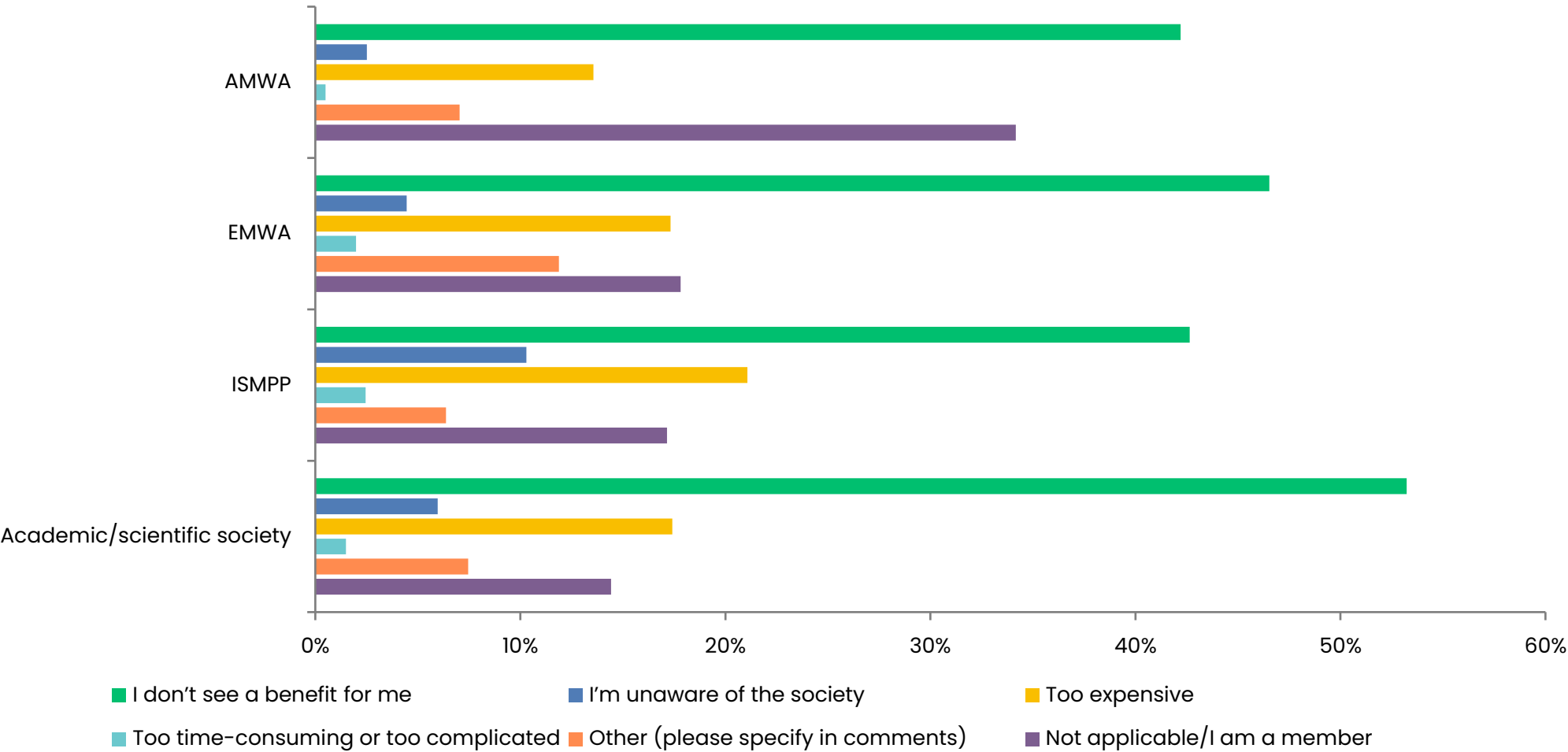
Q13: Are you a current/past member of any of these societies? Do you have their certification/credential?

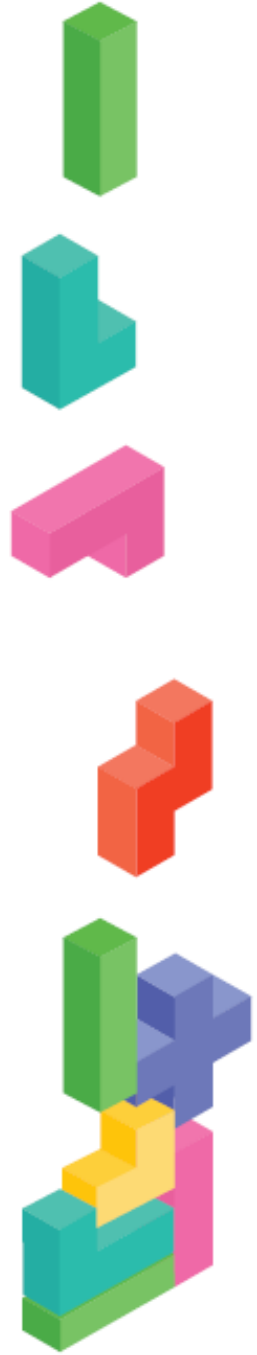
- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17

	YES, CURRENTLY	YES, IN THE PAST	NO	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
AMWA member	32.08% 68	4.25% 9	63.68% 135	212	1
EMWA member	17.92% 38	11.79% 25	70.28% 149	212	1
ISMPP	17.92% 38	11.32% 24	70.75% 150	212	1
Do you have the CMPP accreditation from ISMPP?	11.79% 25	4.72% 10	83.49% 177	212	1
Member of academic/scientific society (e.g. ASCO, EULAR)	11.32% 24	9.91% 21	78.77% 167	212	1
Do you have the EMWA certificate?	5.19% 11	0.94% 2	93.87% 199	212	1
Do you have the MWC credential from AMWA?	1.42% 3	0.00% 0	98.58% 209	212	1

Q14: If you are not a current member of the societies in the previous question, what are the main reasons?

• Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





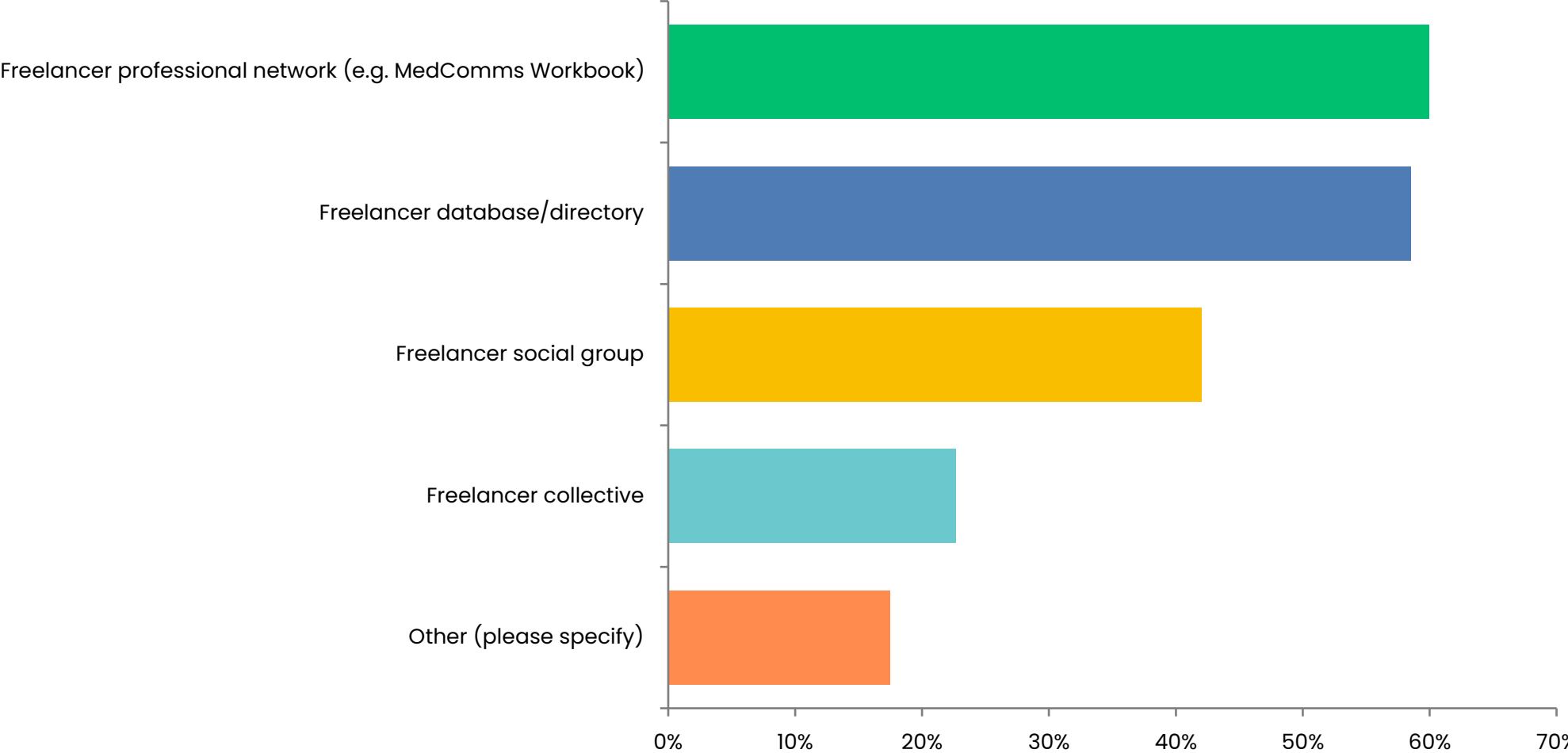
Q14: If you are not a current member of the societies in the previous question, what are the main reasons?

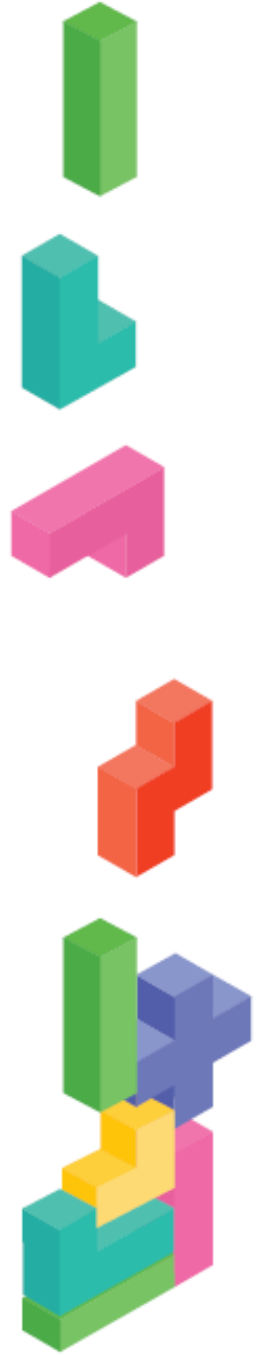
- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

	I DON'T SEE A BENEFIT FOR ME	I'M UNAWARE OF THE SOCIETY	TOO EXPENSIVE	TOO TIME- CONSUMING OR TOO COMPLICATED	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY IN COMMENTS)	NOT APPLICABLE/I AM A MEMBER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
AMWA	42.21% 84	2.51% 5	13.57% 27	0.50% 1	7.04% 14	34.17% 68	199	1
EMWA	46.53% 94	4.46% 9	17.33% 35	1.98% 4	11.88% 24	17.82% 36	202	1
ISMPP	42.65% 87	10.29% 21	21.08% 43	2.45% 5	6.37% 13	17.16% 35	204	1
Academic/ scientific society	53.23% 107	5.97% 12	17.41% 35	1.49% 3	7.46% 15	14.43% 29	201	1

Q15: Are you a member of any freelance medical writing professional groups? Select all that apply

• Answered: 212 Skipped: 17





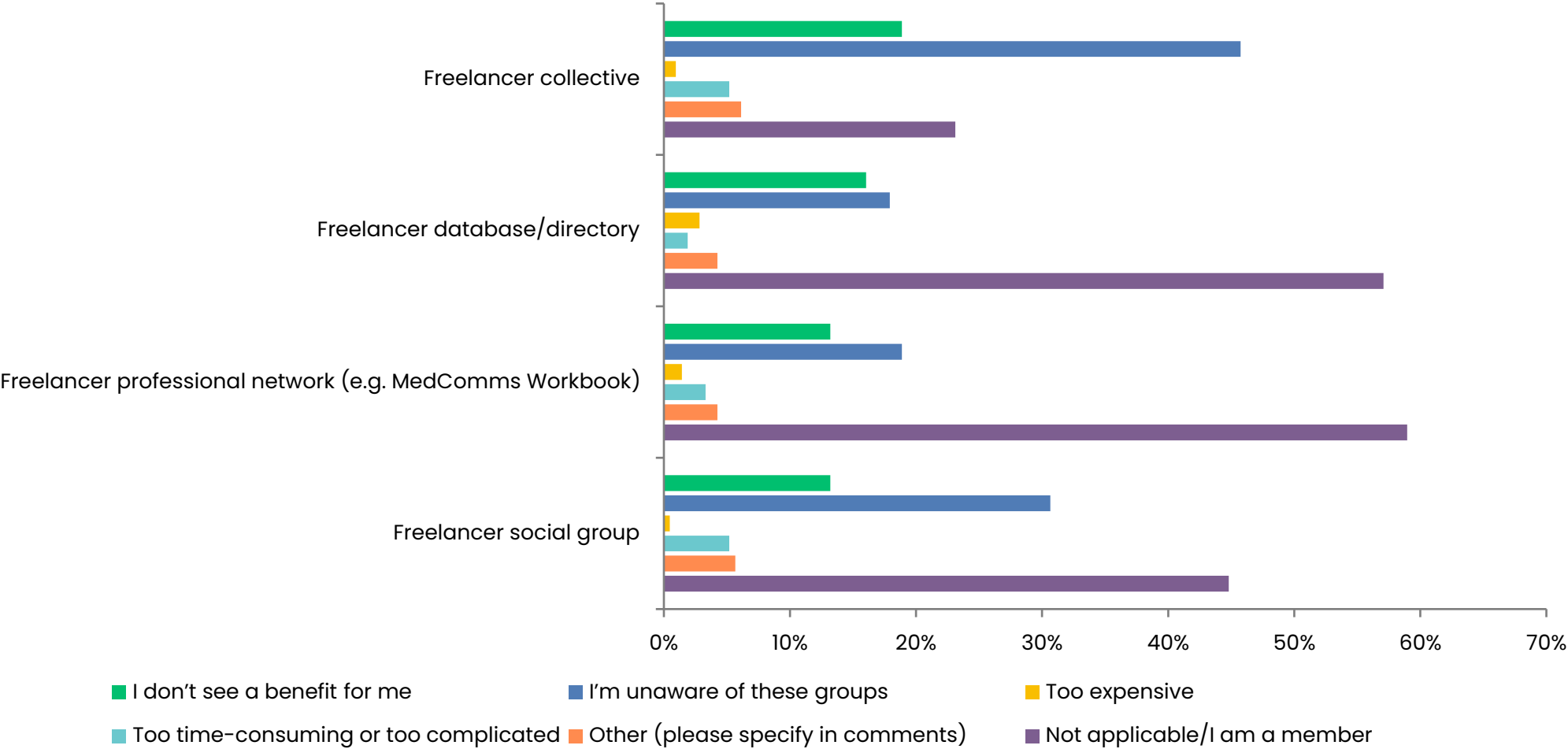
Q15: Are you a member of any freelance medical writing professional groups? Select all that apply

- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Freelancer professional network (e.g. MedComms Workbook)	59.91%	127
Freelancer database/directory	58.49%	124
Freelancer social group	41.98%	89
Freelancer collective	22.64%	48
Other (please specify)	17.45%	37
TOTAL		425

Q16: If you are not a current member of these freelance medical writing professional groups, what are the main reasons?

• Answered: 212 Skipped: 17



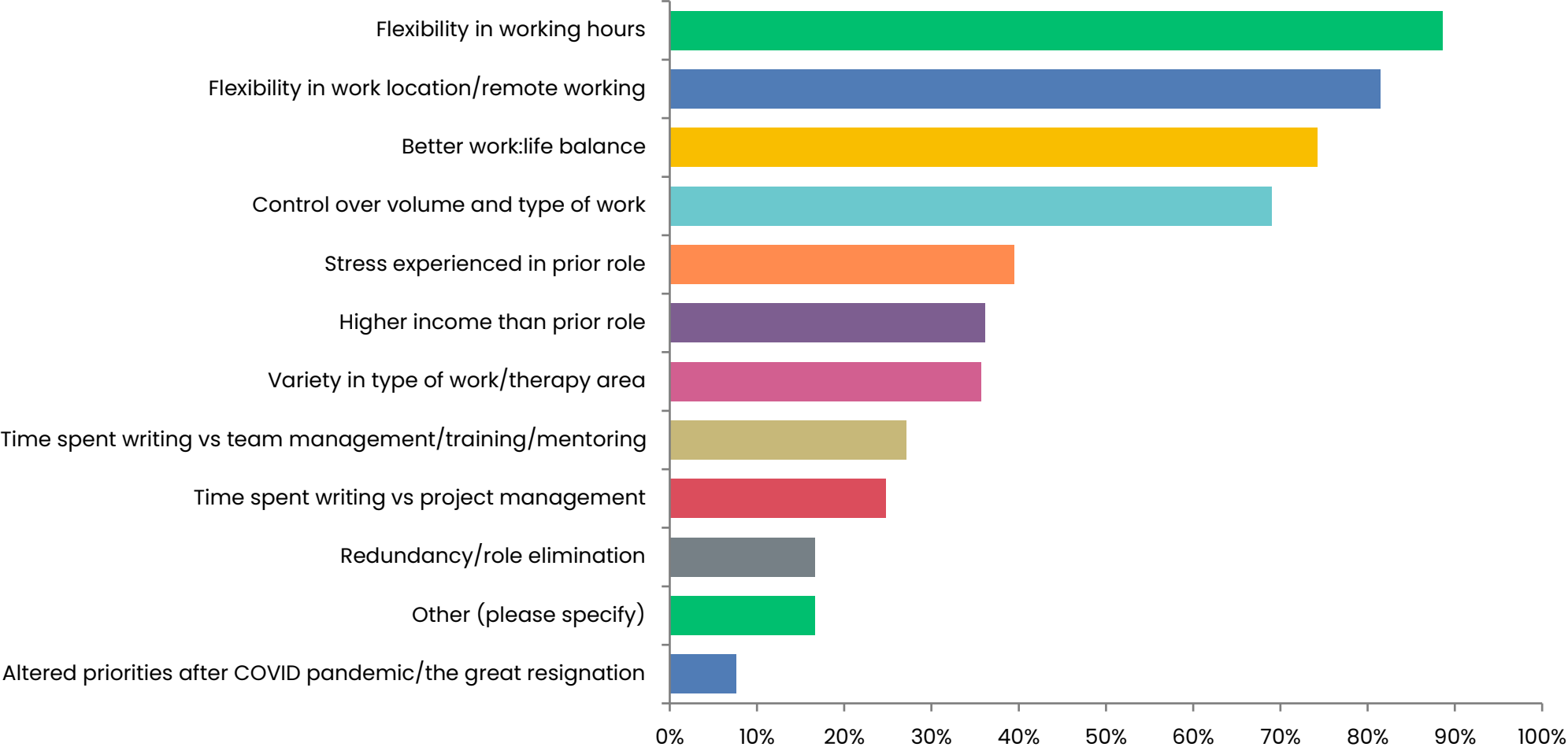
Q16: If you are not a current member of these freelance medical writing professional groups, what are the main reasons?

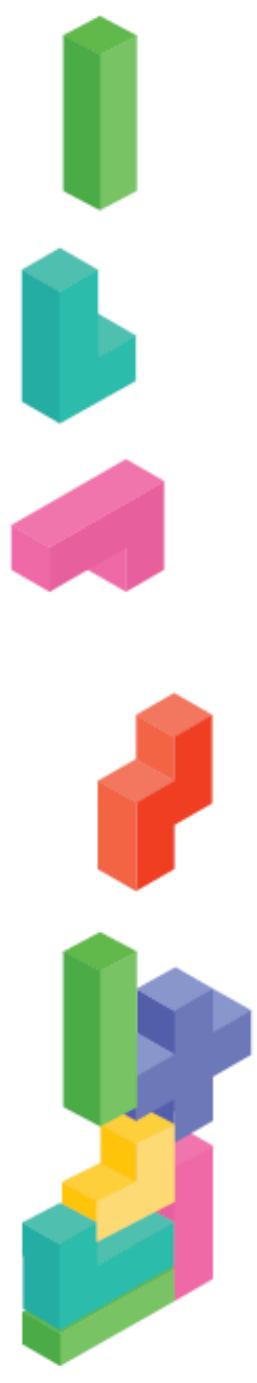
- Answered: 212 Skipped: 17

	I DON'T SEE A BENEFIT FOR ME	I'M UNAWARE OF THESE GROUPS	TOO EXPENSIVE	TOO TIME- CONSUMING OR TOO COMPLICATED	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY IN COMMENTS)	NOT APPLICABLE/I AM A MEMBER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Freelancer collective	18.87% 40	45.75% 97	0.94% 2	5.19% 11	6.13% 13	23.11% 49	212	1
Freelancer database/di rectory	16.04% 34	17.92% 38	2.83% 6	1.89% 4	4.25% 9	57.08% 121	212	1
Freelancer professional network (e.g. MedComms Workbook)	13.21% 28	18.87% 40	1.42% 3	3.30% 7	4.25% 9	58.96% 125	212	1
Freelancer social group	13.21% 28	30.66% 65	0.47% 1	5.19% 11	5.66% 12	44.81% 95	212	1

Q17: What key factors drove your decision to become a freelance medical writing professional? Select all that apply

• Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





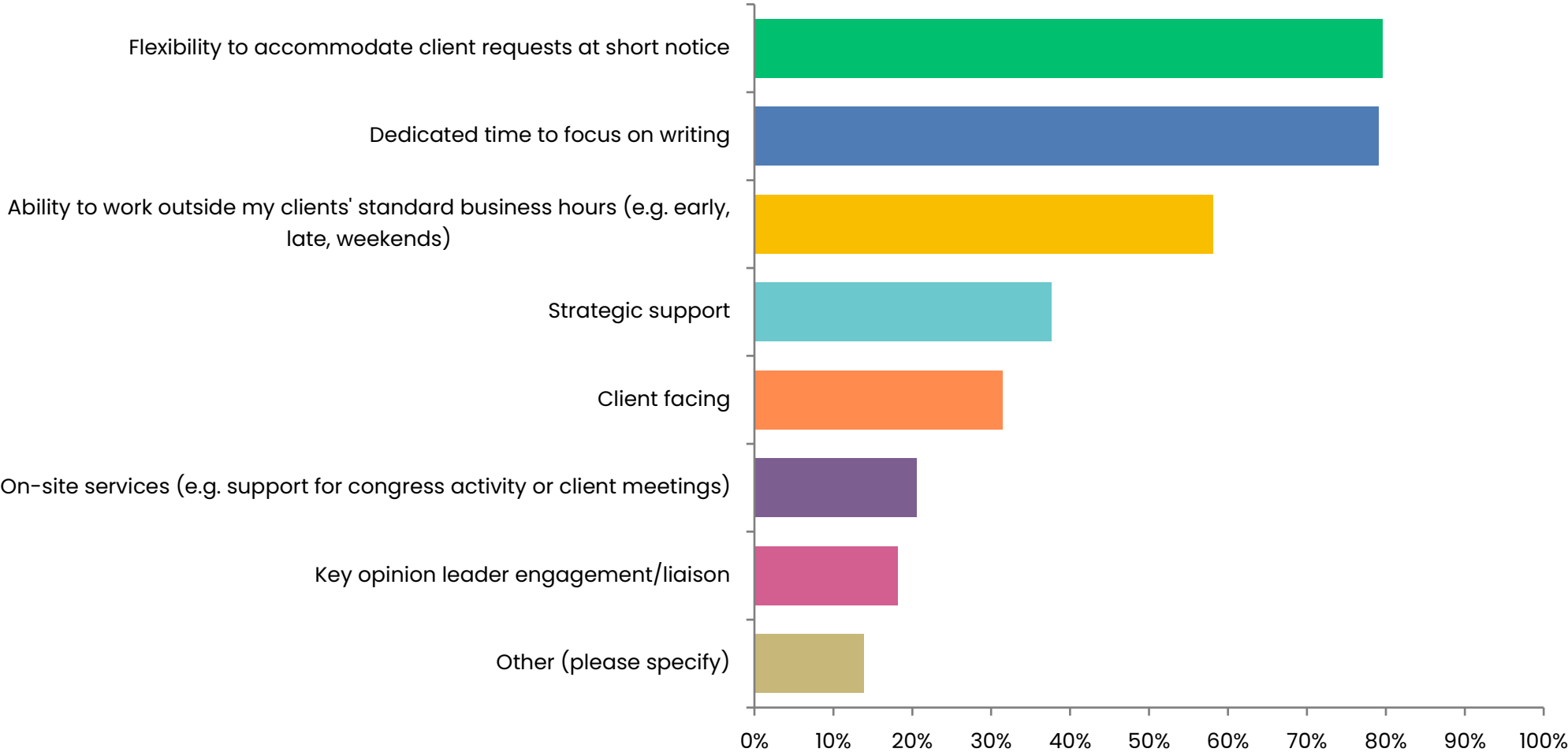
Q17: What key factors drove your decision to become a freelance medical writing professional? Select all that apply

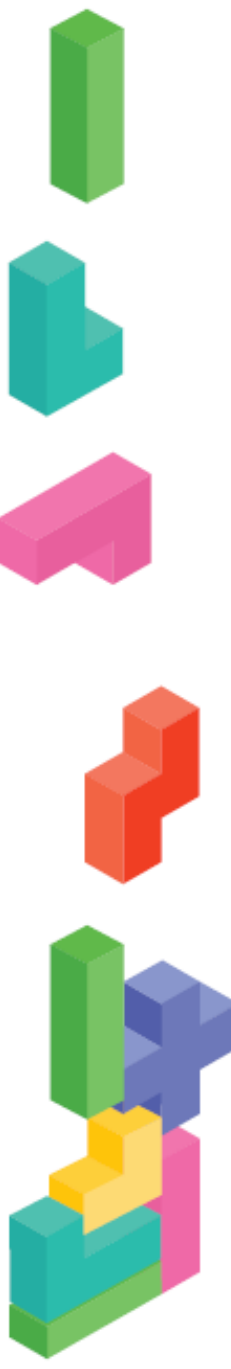
- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Flexibility in working hours	88.57%	186
Flexibility in work location/remote working	81.43%	171
Better work:life balance	74.29%	156
Control over volume and type of work	69.05%	145
Stress experienced in prior role	39.52%	83
Higher income than prior role	36.19%	76
Variety in type of work/therapy area	35.71%	75
Time spent writing vs team management/training/mentoring	27.14%	57
Time spent writing vs project management	24.76%	52
Redundancy/role elimination	16.67%	35
Other (please specify)	16.67%	35
Altered priorities after COVID pandemic/the great resignation	7.62%	16
TOTAL		1087

Q18: What elements of your role as a freelance medical writing professional do you feel add value for your clients? Select all that apply

• Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





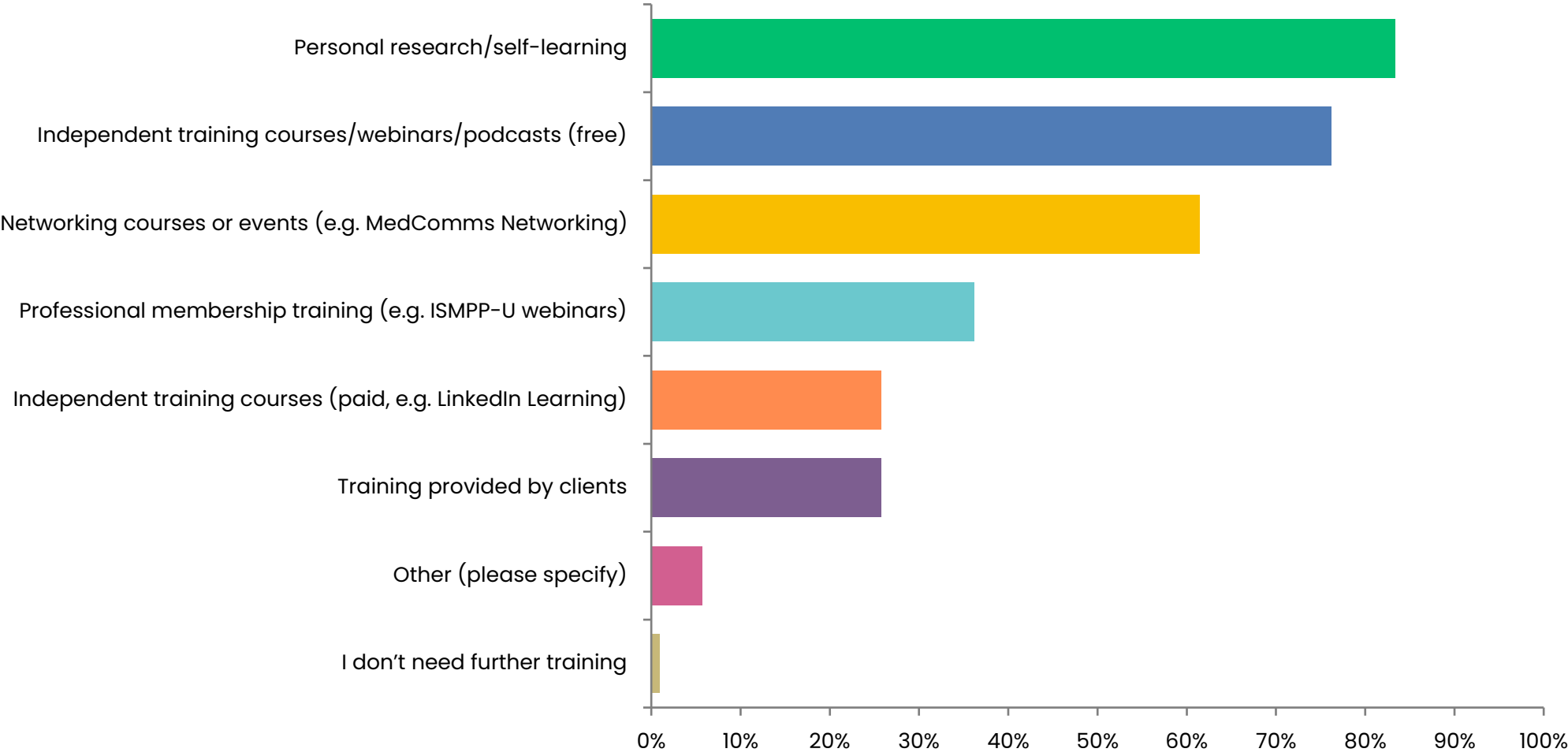
Q18: What elements of your role as a freelance medical writing professional do you feel add value for your clients? Select all that apply

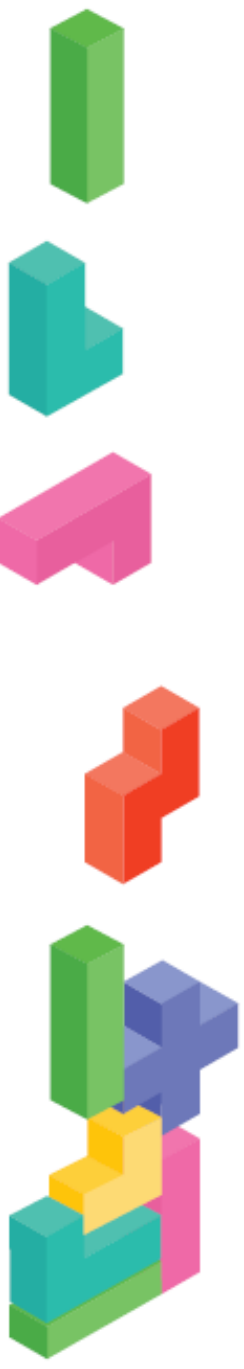
- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Flexibility to accommodate client requests at short notice	79.52%	167
Dedicated time to focus on writing	79.05%	166
Ability to work outside my clients' standard business hours (e.g. early, late, weekends)	58.10%	122
Strategic support	37.62%	79
Client facing	31.43%	66
On-site services (e.g. support for congress activity or client meetings)	20.48%	43
Key opinion leader engagement/liaison	18.10%	38
Other (please specify)	13.81%	29
TOTAL		710

Q19: How do you keep up-to-date with industry trends and advances that could add value to your role? Select all that apply

• Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





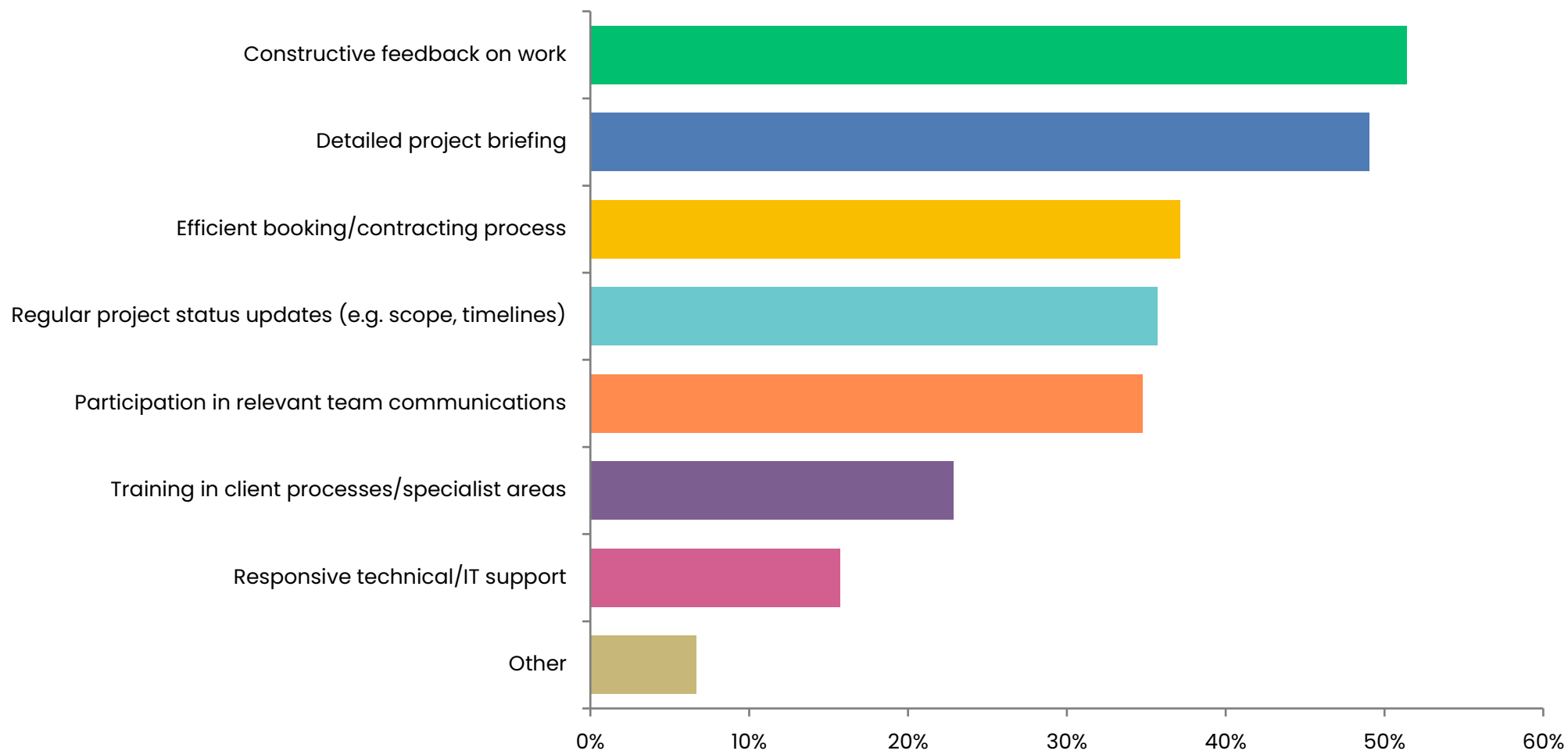
Q19: How do you keep up-to-date with industry trends and advances that could add value to your role? Select all that apply

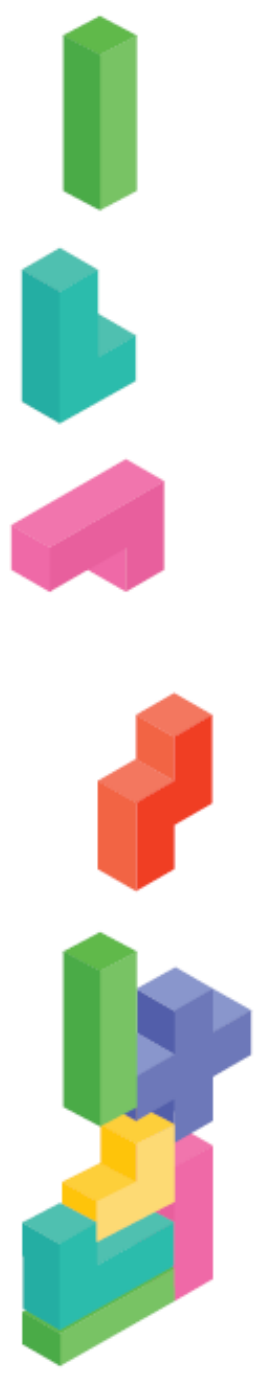
- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Personal research/self-learning	83.33%	175
Independent training courses/webinars/podcasts (free)	76.19%	160
Networking courses or events (e.g. MedComms Networking)	61.43%	129
Professional membership training (e.g. ISMPP-U webinars)	36.19%	76
Independent training courses (paid, e.g. LinkedIn Learning)	25.71%	54
Training provided by clients	25.71%	54
Other (please specify)	5.71%	12
I don't need further training	0.95%	2
TOTAL		662

Q20: Thinking about your main clients in the past year, select up to THREE ways of working that would help you provide more value

- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





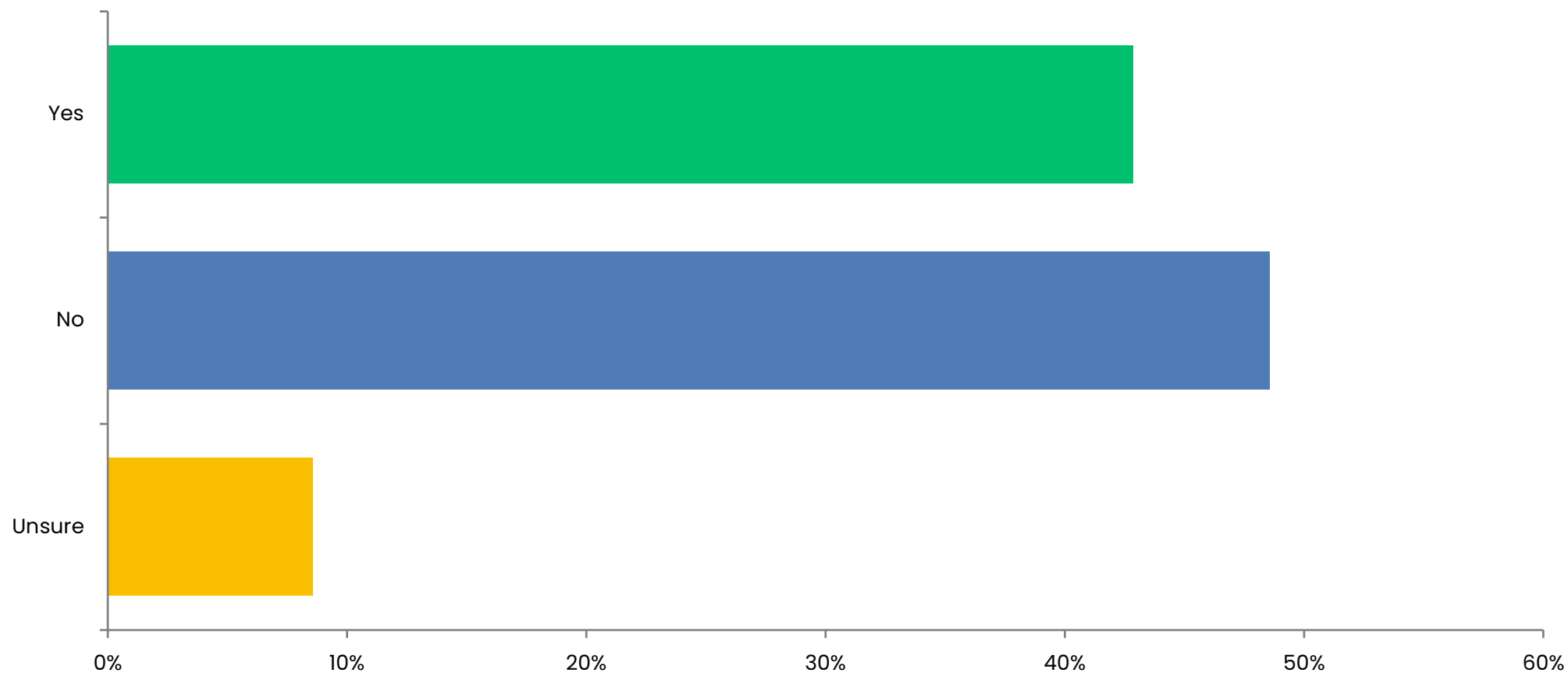
Q20: Thinking about your main clients in the past year, select up to THREE ways of working that would help you provide more value

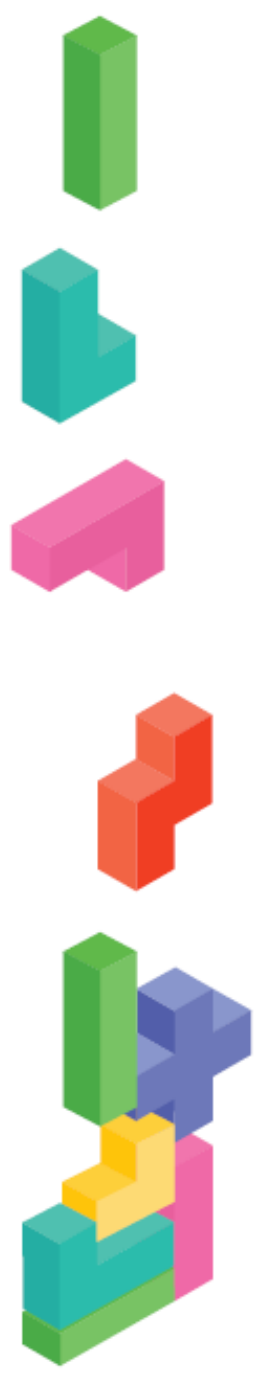
- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Constructive feedback on work	51.43%	108
Detailed project briefing	49.05%	103
Efficient booking/contracting process	37.14%	78
Regular project status updates (e.g. scope, timelines)	35.71%	75
Participation in relevant team communications	34.76%	73
Training in client processes/specialist areas	22.86%	48
Responsive technical/IT support	15.71%	33
Other	6.67%	14
TOTAL		532

Q21: Thinking about the type of work you have undertaken in the past year, do you think the full breadth and depth of your skills and experience have been utilized?

- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





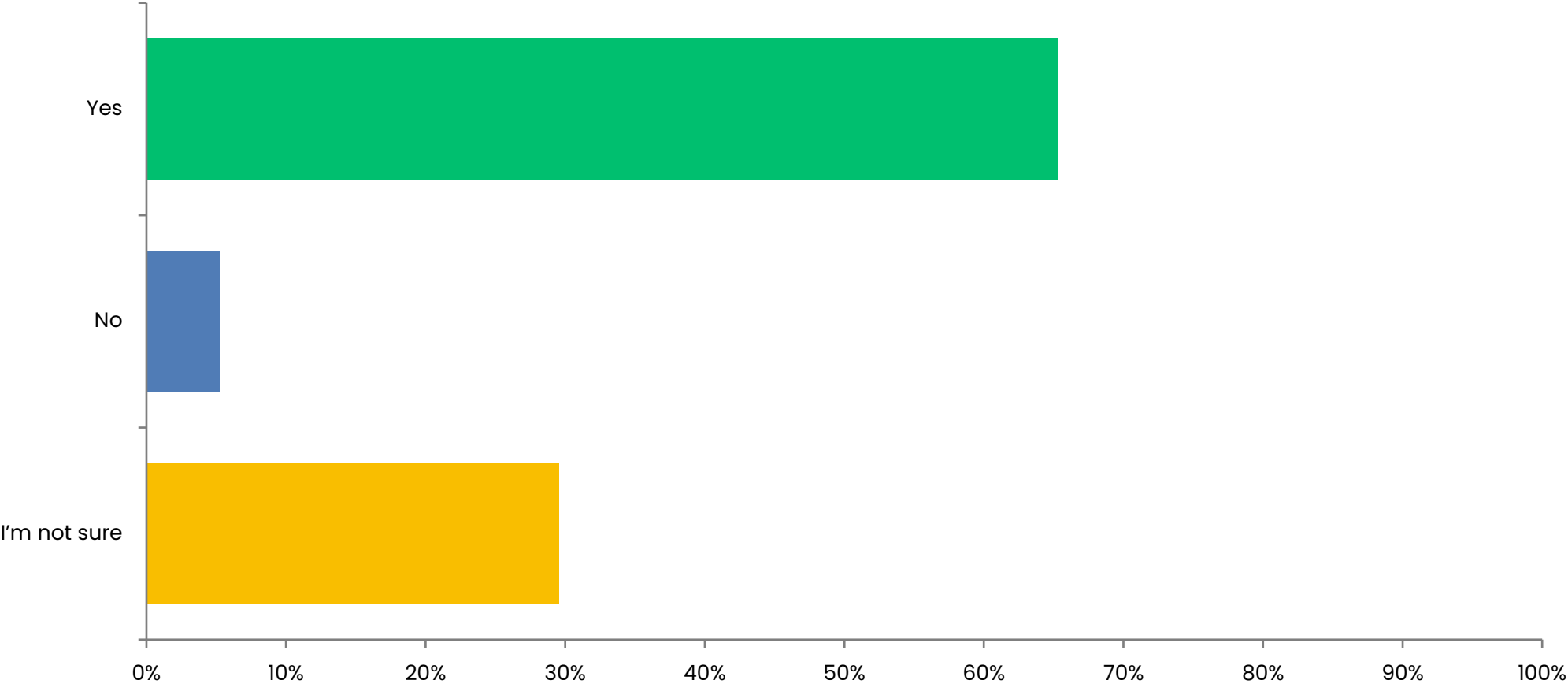
Q21: Thinking about the type of work you have undertaken in the past year, do you think the full breadth and depth of your skills and experience have been utilized?

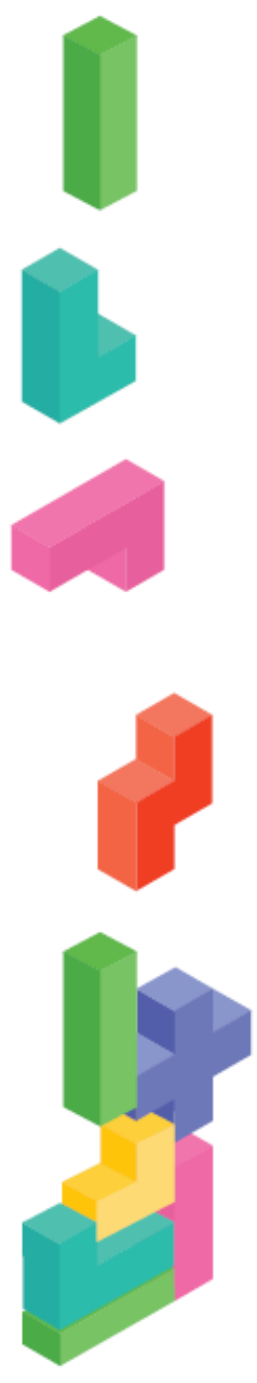
- Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	42.86%	90
No	48.57%	102
Unsure	8.57%	18
TOTAL		210

Q22: Looking ahead, do you think you will still be a freelance medical writing professional in 5 years' time?

• Answered: 210 Skipped: 19





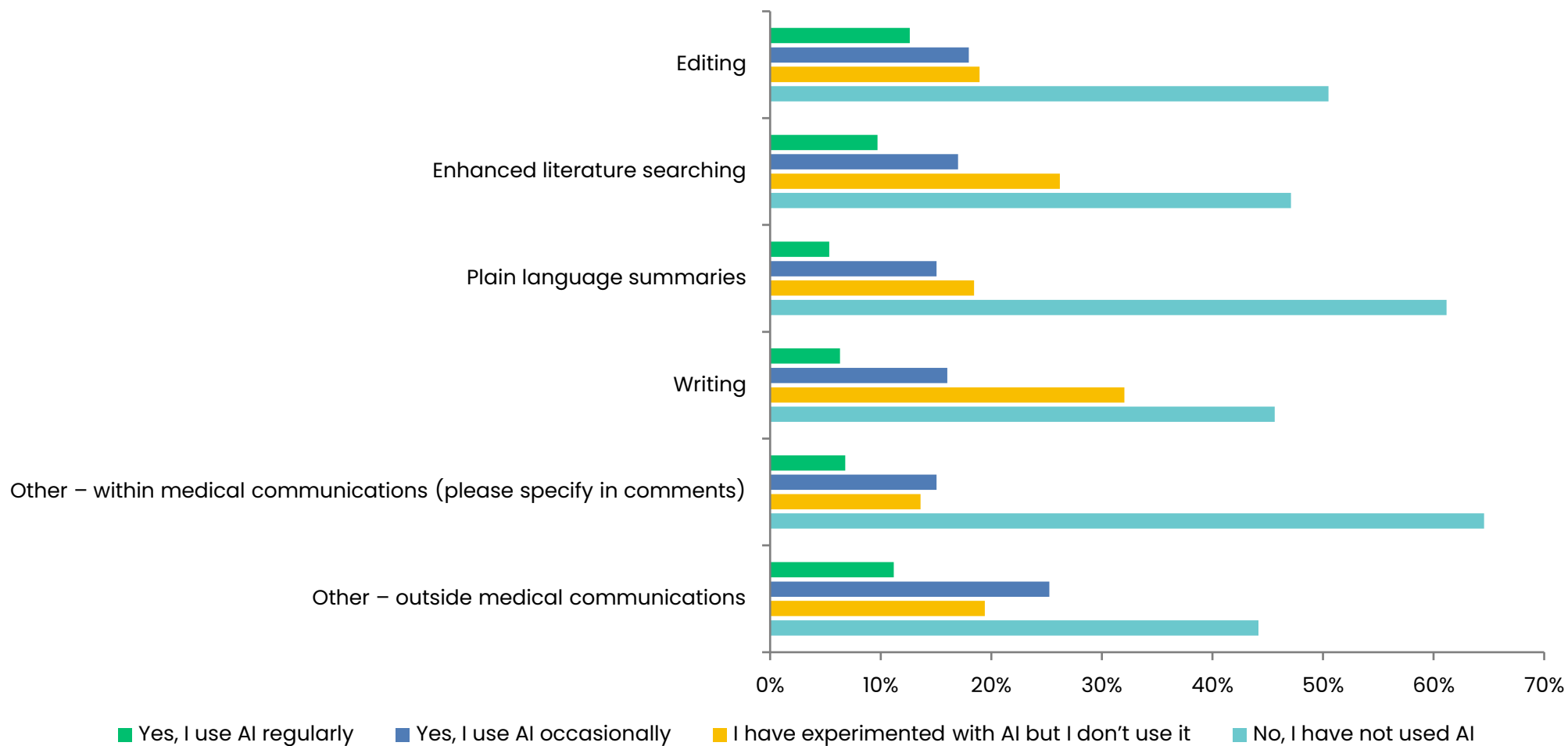
Q22: Looking ahead, do you think you will still be a freelance medical writing professional in 5 years' time?

• Answered: 210 Skipped: 19

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	65.24%	137
No	5.24%	11
I'm not sure	29.52%	62
TOTAL		210

Q23: Have you had experience in using generative AI tools for any of the following?

- Answered: 206 Skipped: 23



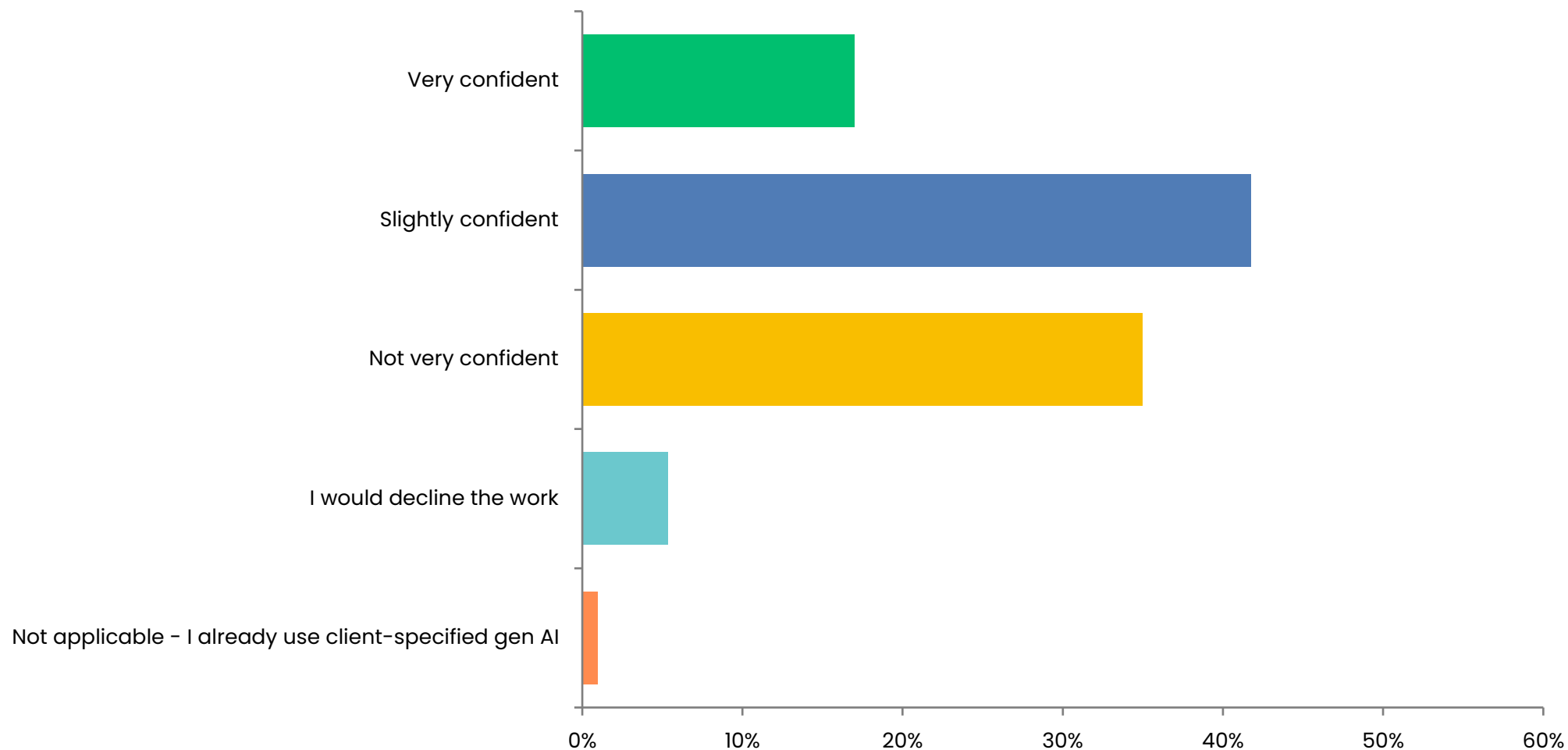
Q23: Have you had experience in using generative AI tools for any of the following?

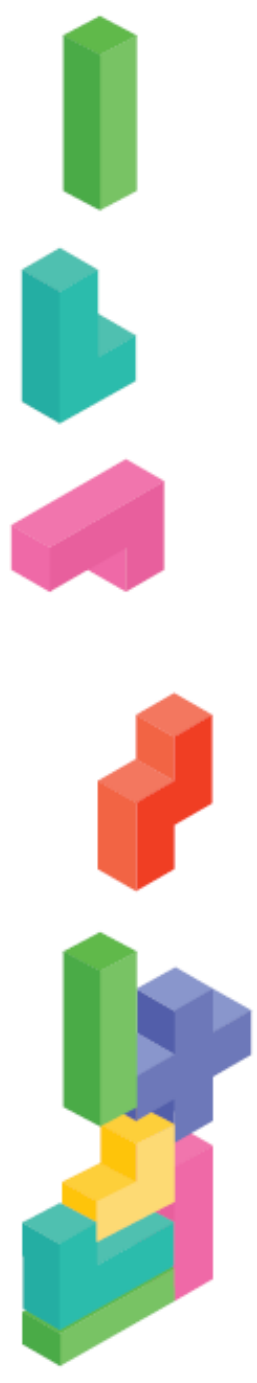
- Answered: 206 Skipped: 23

	YES, I USE AI REGULARLY	YES, I USE AI OCCASIONALLY	I HAVE EXPERIMENTED WITH AI BUT I DON'T USE IT	NO, I HAVE NOT USED AI	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Editing	12.62% 26	17.96% 37	18.93% 39	50.49% 104	206	1
Enhanced literature searching	9.71% 20	16.99% 35	26.21% 54	47.09% 97	206	1
Plain language summaries	5.34% 11	15.05% 31	18.45% 38	61.17% 126	206	1
Writing	6.31% 13	16.02% 33	32.04% 66	45.63% 94	206	1
Other – within medical communications (please specify in comments)	6.80% 14	15.05% 31	13.59% 28	64.56% 133	206	1
Other – outside medical communications	11.17% 23	25.24% 52	19.42% 40	44.17% 91	206	1

Q24: How would you feel about using generative AI tools if specified by your client for medical writing?

- Answered: 206 Skipped: 23





Q24: How would you feel about using generative AI tools if specified by your client for medical writing?

• Answered: 206 Skipped: 23

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very confident	16.99%	35
Slightly confident	41.75%	86
Not very confident	34.95%	72
I would decline the work	5.34%	11
Not applicable - I already use client-specified gen AI	0.97%	2
TOTAL		206

Q25: How do you see AI impacting medical writing/content development in the future?

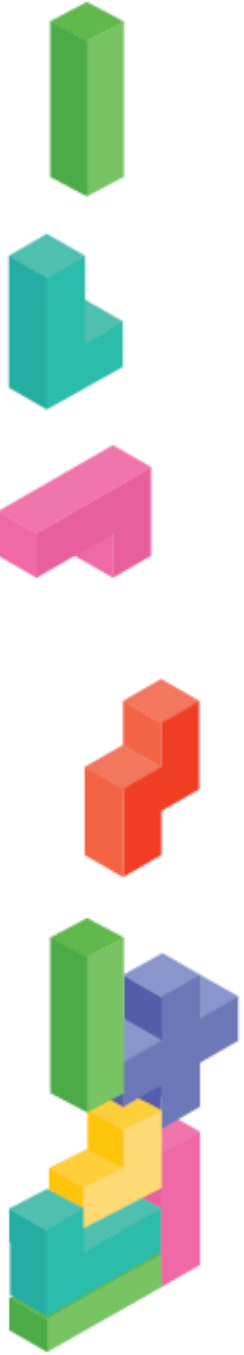
• Answered: 206 Skipped: 23



Q25: How do you see AI impacting medical writing/content development in the future?

- Answered: 206 Skipped: 23

	BETTER	WORSE	NO CHANGE	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Accuracy	15.05% 31	44.66% 92	14.56% 30	25.73% 53	206	1.99
Available work for freelance medical writing professionals	5.34% 11	43.69% 90	21.36% 44	29.61% 61	206	2.23
Opportunities for medical writers	12.14% 25	43.69% 90	14.56% 30	29.61% 61	206	2.03
Writing quality	16.50% 34	43.69% 90	15.05% 31	24.76% 51	206	1.98
Hourly/daily rates	7.77% 16	35.44% 73	25.24% 52	31.55% 65	206	2.26
Job description/role of medical writers	19.42% 40	27.18% 56	11.17% 23	42.23% 87	206	1.86
Job satisfaction for medical writers	19.42% 40	26.70% 55	20.87% 43	33.01% 68	206	2.02
Development time	54.85% 113	9.71% 20	10.19% 21	25.24% 52	206	1.40

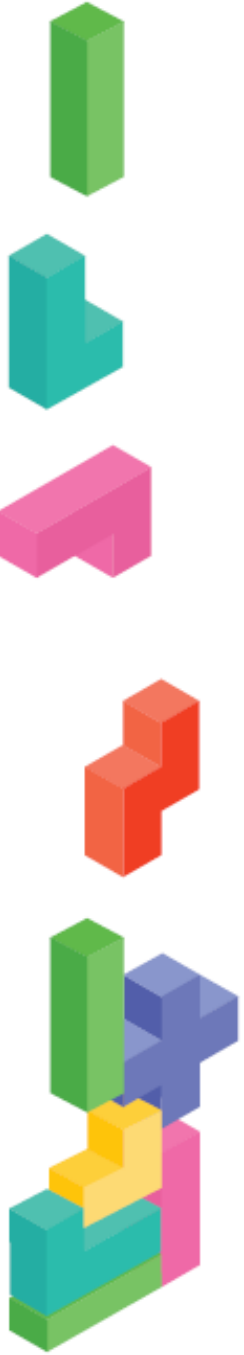


Limitations

- Bias may have occurred through distribution of the survey through the authors' professional networks and other selected forums

Conclusions

- Freelance medical writers represent a highly-experienced, diverse and flexible resource that can add value to publications and medical communications
- Because many freelance medical writers reported underutilization of their skills, experience and time, there may be untapped potential available to medical communications agencies and pharmaceutical companies for enhancing productivity, innovation and quality



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