

## **Appendix 1**

### **Minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum Meeting** **Monday 22 March 2021 at 12.30pm** **Microsoft Teams**

#### **Present**

Cllr Niamh Doris	Mid Ulster District Council (Vice Chair)
Cllr R Colvin	Mid Ulster District Council
Cllr O'Neill	Mid Ulster District Council

Raymond O'Neill	Coalisland Traders Association (Chair)
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Francie Molloy	Coalisland Residents & Community Forum
Ursula Marshall	Mid Ulster Disability Forum
Dermott McGirr	Translink
Brian O'Neill	Coalisland Credit Union
Patrick Anderson	Department for Communities

#### **In Attendance**

Mark Leavey	Mid Ulster District Council
Catherine Fox	Mid Ulster District Council
Oliver Donnelly	Mid Ulster District Council
Colin Mc Kenna	Mid Ulster District Council

	<b>DISCUSSION</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies</b> Cllr Dan Kerr                      Mid Ulster District Council Cllr Niall McAleer                Mid Ulster District Council  Adrian McCreesh                Mid Ulster District Council Mark Kelso                        Mid Ulster District Council Fiona McKeown                 Mid Ulster District Council Raymond Lowry                 Mid Ulster District Council Michael McGibbon               Mid Ulster District Council  Aedamar McCrossan            PSNI
<b>2.</b>	<b>Minutes of Previous Meeting - Monday 8 February 2021</b>  Proposed by Cllr Doris Seconded by Ursula Marshall and agreed: -  The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8 February 2021 were a true and accurate record of proceedings.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Matters Arising from Previous Meeting – Monday 8 February 2021</b>

	<p>P Anderson updated that he has asked for a meeting with Council to discuss a Revitalisation programme for Coalisland after the Public Realm Scheme has finished.</p> <p>F Molloy asked if there was any progress with the Sandy Row project and asked if it could be tarmacked as a minimum. Cllr Doris gave her support that something should be done to address the issue saying that it is a perfect time to do something.</p> <p>P Anderson felt that it would be difficult to do under the Revitalisation programme but it possibly could be picked up under a Coalisland phase 2 programme that would look at linkages. The Revitalisation programme would be for immediate small items to promote the town.</p>
4.	<p><b>Coalisland Projects Updates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Coalisland Public Realm Scheme</b></li> </ul> <p>M Leavey updated that the white lining of the areas will take place over the next few weeks – the parking bays and loading bays on Main Street are part of this work. A Road Safety Audit will then take place once all markings are complete.</p> <p>O Donnelly carried out an informal consultation exercise with residents and businesses on Dungannon Rd and Barrack Street regarding proposed parking enforcement in these areas. DfI will be carrying out a formal consultation process in the forthcoming months, which will take approximately 6-12 months.</p> <p>Cllr Doris stated that the Public Realm Scheme is looking well; community feedback has been positive and asked was there a possibility that flowers could be planted around the town.</p> <p><b>Action: M Leavey to check if flowers could be planted in town.</b></p> <p>R O'Neill asked if there was a plan for speed bumps to be put on Barrack Street to slow the traffic down. M Leavey suggested that there is another legislative process for this and is to check this and report back at the next meeting.</p> <p>R O'Neill mentioned that he was aware that a local school bus with Special needs children on board took 15 minutes to go through the town recently. He would like it recorded that he would like the 2 way system re-instated and the public realm reassessed. This will be brought up at the next Public Realm meeting.</p> <p>F Molloy suggested caution against speed bumps as in many areas they have been taken out as residents have complained about the noise of lorries going over them.</p> <p>Cllr O'Neill raised the issue of oil on the footpath outside the taxi office on Platers Hill. He said that the pavement has become unsightly as a result of cars parking in this area.</p>

	<p>U Marshall stated that parking on the footpath causes a huge obstruction to those less able bodies and it is very thoughtless of those doing it. It is a particular problem where there are dropped kerbs.</p> <p>R O'Neill stated that an option for Barrack Street could be the flashing signs to warn drivers of their speed. He also raised the issue of the 7-spoke roundabout at the end of Main Street saying this it is dangerous. M Leavey stated he will look at possibility of getting additional signage in place and that there are also road markings to be laid in the next few weeks. R O'Neill also raised the issue of additional particulates building up in the town as a result of increased traffic congestion.</p> <p>Cllr Colvin also stated that speed bumps are not a popular remedy for reducing speed and that speed indicators would be useful in this instance.</p> <p>P Anderson asked if the contractor was putting down the yellow lines at this stage and also asked if the footpaths were going to be cleaned by the contractor. M Leavey said that he would speak to the contractor about keeping the footpaths clean.</p> <p>M Leavy stated that car enforcement discussions were ongoing. That a formal process could take 6 -12 months with DfI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gortgonis Recreation Centre Redevelopment</b></li> </ul> <p>M Leavey stated that there was a discrepancy in the public consultation process for planning which means this has to be repeated. This means that planning will be applied for at the end of summer with a start date of October/November. B O'Neill referenced whether the new school will be completed at the same time to which M Leavey replied that projects would run simultaneously.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Town Centre Recovery Plan</b></li> </ul> <p>C Fox updated that businesses are currently submitting their claims for the Covid-19 Recovery grant.</p> <p>O Donnelly updated with regard to the Halloween event in 2021 that Council are investigating potential alternative locations including Na Fianna GFC grounds. This is all based on restrictions easing.</p>
5.	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p>B O'Neill raised the issue of access to the play park at Brackaville and was asking if Council could look at providing better access to the park. This would be pertinent given the fact that Gortgonis will be closed for redevelopment.</p> <p><b>Action: Nigel Hill is to be contacted to look in to providing better access to Play Park.</b></p> <p>Meeting ended at 2.00pm</p>



Comhairle Ceantair  
**Lár Uladh**  
**Mid Ulster**  
District Council

# **SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS**

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **2020/2021**

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HEADLINE ACHIEVEMENTS 2020/2021

The activities undertaken by Council's economic development team have resulted in the following achievements over the course of the last 12 months, ending 31 March 2021.

✓ <b>Creation of 126 new jobs</b> through the <b>Business Start Programme</b>
✓ <b>ESF Funded Programmes supported 304 participants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helped <b>134</b> people gain employment</li> <li>- Assisted participants to achieve <b>768</b> new qualifications</li> <li>- Helped <b>64</b> participants progress to Further Education/Training</li> </ul>
✓ <b>18 business events delivered to 797 attendees</b> , including <b>12 webinars</b> run as part of Mid Ulster Enterprise Week in 2020
✓ <b>Suite of 4 business development programmes have:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supported <b>287</b> businesses</li> <li>- created <b>39 jobs</b> (equating to a value of £767,974)</li> <li>- helped <b>11</b> businesses win <b>16</b> tenders (<b>total value of £3,343,400</b>)</li> <li>- referred <b>4</b> businesses to Invest NI for further support.</li> </ul>
✓ <b>£1,339,067.81 of Covid-19 Business Grants</b> delivered to <b>587</b> businesses across the district
✓ <b>22 villages</b> being supported to develop projects with a total cost of <b>£731,089</b>
✓ <b>£5.9m of Public Realm Schemes</b> being progressed in Maghera and Coalisland
✓ <b>57 business properties enhanced</b> , with a <b>total investment of £318,513</b> under Town & Village Business <b>Spruce Up Scheme</b> (Apr 20-Mar 21). (Council Grant Aid of £195,159.02 has leveraged a further £123,354.02 of private sector investment).

This Report which follows provides a comprehensive overview of activities against each of the 4 thematic pillars within Council's economic development strategy, 'Our Plan for Growth'.

### NI Business Start Programme 'Go For It'



In the challenging twelve month period to March 2021, 205 local entrepreneurs were supported to develop Business Plans, promoting 126 jobs in the Mid Ulster area.

To provide further support to those completing 'GoForIt', in February and March 2021 Mid Ulster District Council delivered a 'Pilot Covid Recovery Business Start Up Payment' Scheme providing £250 to 69 clients.

### Suite of four Business Programmes 'Advance your business in Mid Ulster'

Formally launched by Minister Dodds and Council Chair on 27 August 2020, these are designed to build the capacity, resilience and growth prospects of 690 Mid Ulster micro and small businesses (<49 employees) and will run until Dec 2022.

- **Gearing for Growth Programme** ...offers up to 5 days' support in key business areas (business planning, effective pricing, financial management, steps to exporting, marketing, social media, customer care and industry standards)
- **Tender Ready Programme** ... provides up to 5 days' assistance for businesses to win new work, develop compliant tendering documentation to industry standards, respond to live tendering opportunities, and mobilise contracts
- **Digital First Programme** ...provides up to 4 days' support to build businesses' digital capacity, grow their online presence and sales through adopting new digital strategies and technologies
- **Transform Programme** ...delivers support of up to 5 days' to help businesses enhance their attractiveness to the labour market and implement tailored and sustainable measures to recruit and retain staff and also flex in response to the impact of Covid.



*By March 2021:*

- 287 businesses are participating
- 39 jobs created (equating to a value of £767,974)
- 11 businesses have won 16 tenders (total value of £3,343,400)
- 4 businesses have been referred to Invest NI for further support.

### **Social Enterprise Programme (2021-2023)**

In May 2021, Council appointed Workspace Enterprises to deliver the new Social Enterprise Programme, which will provide support to emerging, new, and existing social enterprises in Mid Ulster by September 2023.

### **Rural Business Development Scheme 2020 (RBDS)**

The Rural Business Development Scheme is funded under the DAERA Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation initiative and aims to support the sustainability, survival and development of rurally based micro businesses across Northern Ireland by offering a small capital grant at 50% up to £4,999.

In 2020:

- 150 applications were approved for funding in the Mid Ulster District Council area.
- Letters of offer to the value of £504,000 in funding were issued, matched by the same level of private sector investment.

### **Rural Business Investment Scheme (LEADER)**

The LEADER funded Rural Business Development Scheme (RBIS) administered by Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership with the support of Council concluded in 2020. The standout achievements from the RBIS, which ran from 2017 – 2020, are:

- 95 rural businesses supported
- £2.8m in letters of offer issued
- Over £7m of invested by supported businesses in business development and expansion activities
- 160 new jobs created to date

### **Digital First Webinars**

March – May 2021, the Digital First Programme delivered three successful Digital Webinars with **160 participants**. The Webinars focussed on the topics of Effective Working from Home, Building a Digital Business, and Connecting with Customers.

**Covid Response Business Webinars** to support businesses coming out of lockdown; these were held on;

- 13 & 18 May 2020 – Communicating through Uncertainty
- 21 May 2020 – Building Psychological Resilience

### **Mid Ulster Enterprise Week 2020**

During Enterprise Week (16-20 November 2020) twelve free virtual webinars were delivered to a total of 539 business representatives; a further 251 businesses viewed recordings of the webinars after the event on Council's YouTube channel.

### **Council's Business E-Zine Service**

Over the year, Council issued **49 comprehensive e-zine bulletins** were issued to companies registered on our business directory, providing information, as it emerged, on key issues such as latest government advice on Covid regulations and grants, EU Exit changes, as well as any other events, opportunities and sources of support for Mid Ulster businesses.





## THEME 2: ENABLING SKILLS & EMPLOYABILITY

### Launch of 'See Your New Career' (SYNC) project



Council in partnership with Mid Ulster Skills Forum invested over £21K in the 'See Your New Career' (SYNC) project, which focused on promoting and profiling Mid Ulster's key employment sectors to post-primary students so they are better informed of the career opportunities available to them locally.

The project resources comprise a mix of videos, fan-deck brochures and storyboards showcasing six key sectors (Manufacturing & Engineering; Food and Agri-Food; Construction; Retail; IT; and Hospitality). The resources detail career opportunities and pathways, interesting developments, potential earnings, skills, attributes and qualifications needed to gain entry.

The SYNC career resources were distributed in a safe manner to all post primary schools in the district in November 2020. The resources will provide schools with a great stimulus for classroom discussions on the range of career options available in Mid Ulster. All video resources are available to view on the Council's [YouTube](#) page.



### MEGA (Manufacturing and Engineering Growth & Advancement) Collaborative Network

MEGA has led the Covid-19 response for the sector - spearheading a campaign for government apprenticeships support, which enabled MEGA companies to retain 58 apprentices and recruit 33 new apprentices. As part of its campaign the network designed and developed new easy to follow 'MEGA Apprenticeship Model' literature. MEGA made a successful application to the apprenticeship challenge fund for a MEGA Degree Apprenticeship in Manufacturing & Engineering with specialism in Industrial Digitalisation, Robotics and Automation, in partnership with Ulster University. This will be the first ever Manufacturing & Engineering Degree Apprenticeship.



In addition, MEGA launched a brand new website to help inform students, teachers and parents about the opportunities within the advanced manufacturing and engineering sector in Mid Ulster. MEGA also supported the development of a Mid Ulster Industry Training Centre (ITC) with SWC. Furthermore, 18 'Ambassadors' were recruited and trained under its MEGA Ambassador Programme. Each ambassador is now linked to an individual post primary school in Mid Ulster and will deliver mentoring, industry talks, careers events etc.

### **ESF Employability & Skills Programmes**

Following the success of the three-year ESF1 Programmes (2015/18), Council committed to a providing match funding for a further four years (2018/22) towards these 4 Programmes:

- Step Up to Sustainable Employment (SUSE+)
- Exploring Enterprise 4
- Up for Work
- Job Match

By the end of yr 3 Council funding of £52,740 leveraged £1,672,487 and resulted in a total investment of £1,725,227:

- Supporting 304 participants
- Helping 134 people into employment
- 768 qualifications being achieved
- 64 progressing to Further Education / training

## **THEME 3: ENABLING URBAN & RURAL REGENERATION**

### **Covid19 Response**

Economic Development Support to Businesses during Covid-19 included –

- Development of a Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan
- Updating Covid-19 Business Section on Council's Website
- Responding to Business Enquiries for Covid-19 Grants
- Carrying Out Validation Checks for Department for the Economy for Covid-19 £25,000 Business Support Grants for Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure sectors
- Resilience Messages from Mid Ulster's Business Leaders
- Sourcing PPE Supplies for Local Businesses
- Supporting the MEGA Network

### **Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan**

The Economic Development team directly engaged with over 100 local businesses including micro, small and medium sized enterprises across the district to identify the unprecedented challenges and issues they faced as a result of the economic shock caused by Covid-19. This evidence identified the need for a robust economic response aimed at shoring up our economy in Mid Ulster and protecting our business and employment base. The purpose of the Business Recovery Plan was to inform government and key stakeholders of the precarious situation facing Mid Ulster and the interventions and support needed to help our industry recover from the ongoing pandemic.

## Mid Ulster Covid19 Town Centre Recovery Plan

In addition to preparing the Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan, the Economic Development team liaised with the Town Centre Forums/Traders Associations in each of our five main towns and had in depth discussions with Traders from across our district. A Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan was developed to address a number of short/medium term measures to support town centre businesses and encourage customer confidence to return to their local high street.

The action plan is based around four key themes:

- Capital
- Grant Support
- Communication & Marketing
- Digitalisation

The actions identified are deliverable, with the relevant funding, over the short term but strategic intervention will be required over the months ahead to regenerate our town centres when the full effects of the Covid19 Pandemic become apparent.

## Covid-19 Business Grant Scheme

Council along with Department for Communities (DfC) and Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) provided funding to deliver a Covid-19 Business Grant Scheme to support urban and rural businesses to reopen and make adjustments to their premises and welcome customers back to a safe trading environment. Funding support of £1,339,067.81 was provided to 587 businesses across the district.



**'Confidence Mark' Window Stickers** – An initiative completed by the economic development team was geared towards boosting customer confidence to return to our towns and villages in the knowledge that businesses are taking positive steps to keep their customers safe. Any business with evidence was awarded a #ReconnectWithConfidence window sticker.

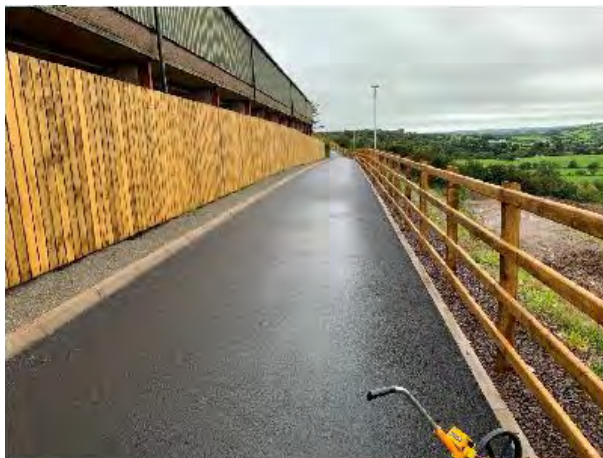




**Mid Ulster Online Retail Pack (Guidance and Posters Available)** – Development of a useful online retail pack containing Government guidance for the retail sector as they return to work.

### Village Renewal Scheme

Council are responsible for delivering the Village Renewal element of the Rural Development Programme through the Local Action Group funded by DAERA. Economic Development Officers are working with 37 villages to develop projects. Over the period Apr 2020 to Mar 2021, 1 large village enhancement scheme was completed in Pomeroy and smaller schemes were completed in 21 villages – Coagh & Drumullan, Rock, Killeeshil, Moortown, Sandholes, Bush, Stewartstown, Eglish, Clonoe, Brocagh, Cappagh, Knockloughrim, Curran, Tamlaght, Culnady, Inishrush, Killeenan, Ballymaguigan, Washingbay and Tullyhogue.



**Pomeroy**  
Walkway at GAA Grounds



Car Park resurfacing at Soccer Pitch





**Bush**



**Moortown**

### **Rural Basic Services Scheme (LEADER)**

The Rural Basic Services Scheme administered by Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership with the support of Council has funded 18 community hub projects across rural areas of the district.

£2.68m in funding was approved to these projects through the LEADER element of the NI Rural Development Programme leveraging an overall investment of £6.5m for community infrastructure, which will leave a lasting impact within the communities supported.

**Aughnacloy Presbyterian Church  
Hall Community Group**



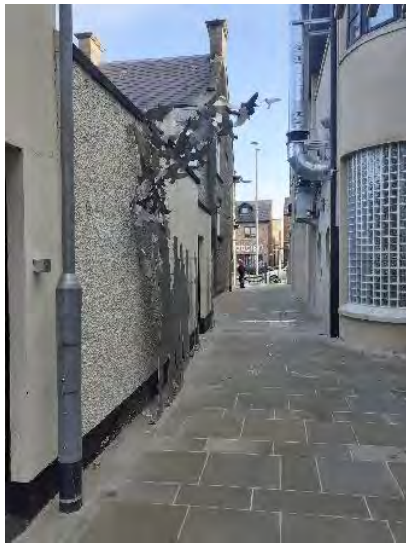
**Kildress GFC**





### **Seamus Heaney HomePlace Open Ground Project**

The Seamus Heaney HomePlace Open Ground project aims to enhance the Seamus Heaney HomePlace experience by developing a literary and heritage experience linking with the local landscape and local heritage that inspired so much of Seamus Heaney's group. Economic Development officers have worked alongside Council's Culture and Arts and Capital Teams to bring this project to fruition. Funding has been secured from DAERA through the Rural Tourism Scheme to deliver this scheme. Capital works on the project have been completed and interpretation is ready to be installed prior to the launch of the project.

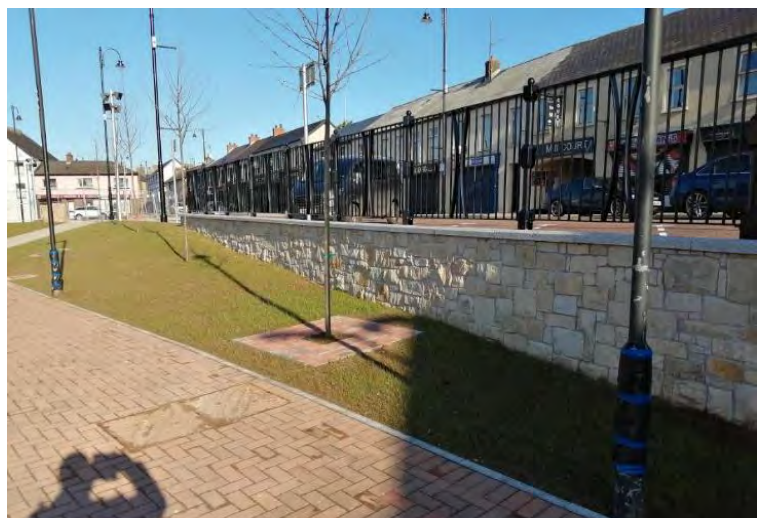


### **Public Realm Schemes**

Council's Public Health and Infrastructure Dept. are working alongside Council's Economic Development team and Department for Communities to progress public realm schemes in Coalisland and Maghera.

The **Coalisland** scheme will be officially launched in early summer 2021.

**Maghera** Public Realm Scheme is currently at the outline design stage.  
**Civic Space, Coalisland**



### **Redevelopment - Maghera High School Site**

The former High School site is owned by Council has been identified as a strategic site for economic development purposes within the Maghera Development Framework Plan 2017-30. Planning application currently being reviewed by Department for Infrastructure to allow for the construction of a number of industrial units on fully serviced sites. Work in progress.

### **Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme (2019-2022)**

57 schemes were completed through Phase 2 with a total investment of £318,513.04. Council Grant Aid of £195,159.02 has leveraged a total of £123,354.02 private sector investment. A further 16 schemes are expected to be completed by June 2021 as part of Phase 2. The Total project cost of the remaining schemes is expected to be £89,391.86 with Council Grant aid of £59,058.23 leveraging private sector investment of £30,333.63.

Through the delivery of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Mid Ulster Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme (2019-2022) 89 properties were enhanced, resulting in a total of £519,347.42 spent on improving properties in towns and villages. This included a total of £307,441.44 of Council grant aid and £211,905.98 of private sector investment

### **A29 Roundabout - Cookstown**

A £55K upgrade scheme was completed at the A29 roundabout in Cookstown and marked an investment of over £55,000 with over £44K funding coming from the Department for Communities and the Council contributing £11K. The upgrade included new Cookstown branding being installed as well as updated signage, enhanced lighting, and the installation of a maintenance footpath and cleaning of the existing public art.



### **Marketing & Promotion**

Marketing Campaigns were delivered for the town centres at key periods as part of the town centre recovery plan using print media, outdoor advertising and social media as the key channels.

### **Reconnect with Retail**

Professional short videos were commissioned to promote the 'Reopening of Mid Ulster Towns and Businesses' and encourage the public to support their local traders and shop local.





## **Business Storytelling**

Building interest stories about local businesses/owners and why their town is important to them and was to encourage public support/engagement with local traders through this professional video storytelling initiative.

## **Open For Business Video Messages**

As traders returned to the high streets, Council invited any business in Mid Ulster who wanted to promote they're 'open for business' again to send us a 30 second video clip, telling us why they're glad to be back and any key message they wanted to communicate to their customers. For the video shy, we also accepted a photo of the business owner within their shop, along with a quote saying why they are glad to be back.

## **Love Local Campaign – Christmas 2020**

To coincide with the easing of restrictions prior to Christmas a 2 week marketing campaign incorporating billboards, videos and a radio campaign ran to encourage people to “Love Local” in Mid Ulster.



## **Virtual Christmas Switch On Events**

Due to government guidelines the traditional Christmas Switch-On events could not be held. A virtual Christmas Lights switch on was posted on Council's Social Media channels featuring Santa and the Chairperson visiting each town centre.



### Reduced Christmas Car Parking

As in previous years the very popular reduced Christmas Dungannon & Magherafelt benefitted from reduced Christmas Car Parking charges from 20 November 2020 – 2 January 2021.



### 12 Gifts of Christmas

As part of the Christmas marketing Campaign the “12 gifts of Christmas” campaign was rolled out on social media from Saturday 5 – Wednesday 16 December 2020. People were able to enter the competition for the chance to win a different prize package every day with gifts from the five town centres.

### Town Centre Wi-Fi

Town centre Wi-Fi is installed and maintained in each of the five town centres.

## THEME 4: ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE & CONNECTIVITY

### **Gas to the West**

Significant works have been completed in the towns of Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt. Works to connect homes and businesses to the network in the towns are ongoing.

### **Project Stratum**

Project Stratum is a £165m broadband project that aims to improve rural internet connectivity to 76,000 premises across NI and over 12,000 premises in Mid Ulster. Fibrus were awarded the contract in November 2020 and the first Optical Line Termination was in Coalisland in quarter one 2021 and is now live to 2,000 premises. The rollout of the project across NI is set to continue until 2024.

Following the start of the roll out of Project Stratum, Mid Ulster District Council undertook a Project Stratum Broadband survey across the district to determine any gaps in provision that still exist within Mid Ulster. Early initial indications revealed that many properties were going to be excluded from the broadband upgrades being delivered by Fibrus and funded by Department for the Economy (DfE). Several meetings involving Mid Ulster Councillors and Officers, together with MPs and MLAs for the region, and representatives from Department for the Economy (DfE) and Fibrus were held to discuss gaps in provision and how these could be adequately addressed. Council remains actively engaged with DfE and Fibrus to ensure that solutions and funding are found to address all the important issues/gaps raised by Council, to prevent any property in Mid Ulster which cannot get a 30mpbs broadband signal being left behind, during/after the rollout of Project Stratum.

### **Full Fibre Northern Ireland (FFNI)**

Mid Ulster District Council are part of a consortium of 10 Council and Business Services Organisation (BSO) who have now contracted with Fibrus to implement dark fibre to Council and NHS premises across the district. The FFNI project has been funded through The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). Council has 86 sites within the project. The project has the potential to improve not only Council broadband connectivity but also those properties along the route where the fibre will travel between the exchange and the end destination.



**MID ULSTER DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**PROJECT STRATUM BROADBAND SURVEY REPORT**  
**MARCH 2021**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Following the start of the roll out of Project Stratum, Mid Ulster District Council undertook a Project Stratum Broadband survey across the district to gauge the level of broadband concerns that still exist within Mid Ulster. The survey covered the period 15<sup>th</sup> February to 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

It was targeted at the properties within the “White postcode list” as identified by the Department for the Economy (DfE). This was the posted areas understood to be included in the Project Stratum. Initial indications showed that there were many properties going to be excluded from the broadband upgrades being delivered by Fibrus the broadband Provider.

The Project Stratum programme is a welcomed as a major game changer in broadband provision for over 12,000 rural premises in Mid Ulster. It will bring full fibre to these premises and future proof broadband for a generation. This vital technology will enable the region to grow, expand and stop playing catch up.

Today broadband technologies are of critical importance especially in this area to our SMEs to enable them to be global players. Our SME’s are the lifeblood of this region’s economy. Moreover, during the Covid pandemic the importance of broadband has never been more critical to all our citizens who are now working from home and home schooling their children from home.

### **The importance of Internet in 2020.**

- Adults are spending 4 hours a day online on average, as coronavirus changes communications.
- Twice as many using video calls to keep in touch during lockdown.
- One in three now watch online video more than traditional TV, with two in five making videos themselves.
- UK adults are now spending more than a quarter of their waking day online – the highest on record – with services such as TikTok and Zoom seeing unprecedented growth

Source: Ofcom’s latest study into the nation’s online lives.

To recap, in January 2019 The Department for the Economy undertook a consultation with broadband suppliers and members of the public to help ensure they had correctly identified all those postcodes that contain premises currently unable to access 30 megabits per second (Mbps) broadband services.

- 'White' area postcodes are those in which there is no qualifying broadband infrastructure and none is likely to be developed within 3 years. These postcodes will be targeted for public investment through the Project;
- 'Grey' area postcodes are those where only one network is present or is to be deployed within the coming 3 years. These postcodes will not be specifically targeted for public investment from the Project;
- 'Black' area postcodes are those where at least two networks of different operators exist or will be deployed in the coming 3 years. These postcodes do not form part of the Project.

It is unfortunate that Council is discovering as Project Stratum is being rolled out that rural issues are still ongoing. This is causing a source of genuine frustration to those who are experiencing them, whether it is as a domestic or business user. The local issues in broadband are exceeding what was first thought. Therefore, in a response from citizens looking help Council has undertaken this broadband survey.

### **Properties on Project Stratums "White postcode list" but not on Fibrus' Contract list**

Mid Ulster District Council is committed to ensuring that high quality broadband is accessible to all our citizens. For this reason, the Council undertook a Project Stratum broadband survey following phone calls from citizens who started to use Fibrus postcode checker in January 2021 and they found out that although they were on the Project Stratum "White postcode list" they are **NOT** included in Fibrus' rollout plans.

They received the following message:

*"Unfortunately your property is not within the project Stratum area. A broadband service with a speed of 30 Mbs is already available at your address, or is expected to become available in the coming months. If you have concerns about how this assessment was reached, please contact the Department for the Economy at [stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk).*

In greater numbers than before citizens contacted Council to say they are not receiving a service of 30Mbps as per message above. Secondly, when they contacted BT and Fibrus who are the main fibre providers in the rural areas about 30mpbs being available in the coming months they were disappointed when told by the Providers they were not making it available. Many citizens are now concerned



their properties will be left outside of Project Stratum. Now, they have no idea if they will get an upgrade or when they will eventually get an upgrade. They need answers.

*For example, 79 Drummurrer Lane, Coalisland, BT71 4QJ is on the "White postcode list" and currently gets between 1 and 3 mbps download speed and received the response above.*

Council has therefore become concerned that there might be significant numbers of citizens getting a similar response. Council was aware that there were 354 premises on the "White postcode list" who have been identified as falling outside of Project Stratum.

Simply the expectation was that premises included within the "White postcode list" were guaranteed of being included on Project Stratum. Councils were never provided with the exact addresses within the "White postcode list" and did not know that such specific detail existed. This information was not known until January 2021 when property owners could check the Fibrus HyperfastNI link for themselves.

For this reason, Council undertook the broadband survey to investigate any further issues that might exist and they were not aware of.

There is also concern that at the time of the Open Market Review process in January 2019 those Providers using a selection of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies responded to DfE.

***Question: Can DfE confirm if Providers of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies responded to DfE OMR in January 2019 as being able to provide broadband in rural areas?***

Council has always maintained the position that Project Stratum should be FFTP. It is the Councils experiences that Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies to date have proved less reliable and are often limited in terms of customer support services.

*In another example 63 Sherrygrim Road, Stewartstown, BT71 5PP, Fibrus poles are being installed at the end of the drive. The property is on the "White postcode list" but not on Project Stratum. Resident currently does not receive 30mbps as per HyperfastNI checker. The concern is that they may be losing out.*

***Question: In appendix one there are 329 properties on the white postcode list. Council needs clarification on why these 329 properties are on the Departments white postcode list and not on Fibrus contract list.***

### **Properties on "Grey postcode list" and not on Fibrus Contract list**

There were 304 responses to the broadband survey from postcodes that were on the "Grey postcode list". These responses were checked and showed that 251 of these premises were also not receiving 30mbps. It is clear from the comments that citizens are concerned that they are outside of Project Stratum and do not have clarity around what is happening to them.



*For example, 32A Annaghnaaboe Rd, Coalisland, BT71 4QH, is on the “Grey postcode list”. Residents are using 4G for their internet access there download speed with broadband was 1.5mbps maximum.*

**Question: In appendix two, there are 251 properties on the Grey postcode list currently receiving less than 30mbps and not on Project Stratum. They are receiving no information on when they will see improvements. Please provide clarity on when, what and how these properties will receive 30mbps?**

### **LPS Pointer**

Pointer is a comprehensive address database, which holds address information for every property in Northern Ireland. Land & Property Services (LPS) who maintain it supplied pointer to DfE. It was used to inform DfE of all properties within the Project Stratum catchment area at January 2019. Premises that were not classified, as ‘Built’ and ‘Approved’ on Pointer as of January 2019 were not included in the target intervention area.

Unfortunately, Pointer does not seem to be up to date and it excluded some properties that should be included within Project Stratum.

*For example, number 6 Kilmakardle Road, Pomeroy, BT70 2UF was on Pointer as commence/under construction 2007 and states provisional. The property was completed in circa 2008. The postcode is within the “White postcode list” but within HyperfastNI checker the premises is not included in Project Stratum. Next house is number 8 Kilmakardle Road, which is also within “White postcode list” and on Project Stratum to be completed in autumn 2023.*

*Another example is 53D Ballymacomb Road, Portglenone, BT44 8NS, which is also on Pointer as commence/under construction November 2007 and states provisional. The house has long been completed and is adjacent to 51 & 53 Ballymacomb Road. The neighbouring properties are included in project Stratum but number 53D is not.*

**Question: Council requests DfE or Fibrus advise the solution in order to get those properties included on the white post code list and allow Council to respond to the people most affected?**

### **New Properties Post January 2019**

Within Mid Ulster, there are approximately 982 premises that were not classified as ‘Built’ or ‘Approved’ at the time of Open Market research at January 2019. Therefore, they would not be included in the target intervention area. As a result, many property owners would have their postcode on the intervention list but their specific house would not be included for upgrade by Fibrus. People are genuinely concerned that existing neighbouring properties will be upgraded and they will miss out. There are examples where new property owners have reached out to DfE and Fibrus as instructed. The responses do not fill them with encouragement.

*For example, 15 Kelly's Lane, Dungannon, BT70 3SU a new build. It is on the "White postcode list" surrounded by other existing properties on the same postcode. The existing properties are being upgraded as per Hyperfastni website. Fibrus and DfE have both been contacted about not being included on Project Stratum.*

At no stage were individual addresses mentioned regarding who was or was not being connected within a postcode list. If you were on the "White postcode list", you believed you were being upgraded.

***Question: How can these new builds be included in Project Stratum?***

***Question: Can DfE provide a response for Council to relay to the people on when they will get FTTP?***

## **Universal Service Obligation (USO)**

BT Openreach are currently contacting around 2,000 premises in Mid Ulster regarding delivery of the Broadband Universal Service. Council asked BT Openreach if they could share the addresses in an effort to know where exactly the premises are located. This would enable Council to see if some of the 354 properties excluded from Project Stratum are going to get any assistance, or if other problem areas were being targeted. There is surely going to be overlap with Project Stratum in Mid Ulster and Council would be keen to find out if this is the case and where? BT Openreach were asked for the addresses but were unwilling to supply.

***Question: Will DfE provide Council with information around what properties will benefit from delivery of the Broadband Universal Service Obligation in Mid Ulster?***

## **Project Stratum Broadband Survey Results**

Council undertook an end-user broadband survey to get a snapshot of the number of properties that were on the "White postcode list" but not included in Project Stratum.

There were 878 responses in three weeks to the survey, which was quite overwhelming. However, in closer analysis there were 329 survey responses from property owners within the "White postcode list" and not included in Project Stratum.

What Council did not expect was the responses from people on the "Grey postcode list" 354 in total. Although these premises are outside the scope of Project Stratum, there were 293 responses from people not receiving 30mbps and are concerned that they are being left behind.

It is 2 years since the Market research in January 2019 was conducted with Providers who indicated that they would be servicing the "Grey postcode list" by January 2022. People are concerned if this is still a reality.

There were a further 100 responses for property owners who were already on the white list and already included on Project Stratum. Please see overview of responses in Table 1.0

**Table 1.0: Survey Overview Responses**

Responses from	Number of Responses
Properties on White postcode list and <b>not</b> on HyperfastNI list for upgrade	329
Properties on White postcode list and <b>are already</b> on HyperfastNI list for upgrade	170 <i>(34 of these had wrongly indicated they were not on white list)</i>
Properties on Grey postcode list who are not included in Project Stratum	304 grey postcode list responses
- Receiving less than 30mbps	251
- Receiving more than 30mbps	53
<b>Total</b> Properties on White postcode list and Grey postcode list and <b>not</b> on HyperfastNI list for upgrade receiving less than 30mbps	580
Properties not in MUDC/ Answers incomplete/Duplications/ Not on any list	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>878</b>

- This sample survey highlights 329 properties on the Departments White postcode list and are not on the Fibrus contract list. Appendix 1
- There were 304 responses from properties on the Grey postcode list who responded. Appendix 2
- This was checked and found 251 properties on the Grey postcode list were also receiving less than 30mbps.
- The sample survey highlights that there are 580 properties under 30 mbps in Mid Ulster uncertain of getting broadband improvements in the near future.

All 580 properties received the following message from the HyperfastNI checker:

*“Unfortunately your property is not within the project Stratum area. A broadband service with a speed of 30 Mbs is already available at your address, or is expected to become available in the coming months. If you have concerns about how this assessment was reached, please contact the Department for the Economy at [stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:stratum@economy-ni.gov.uk).*

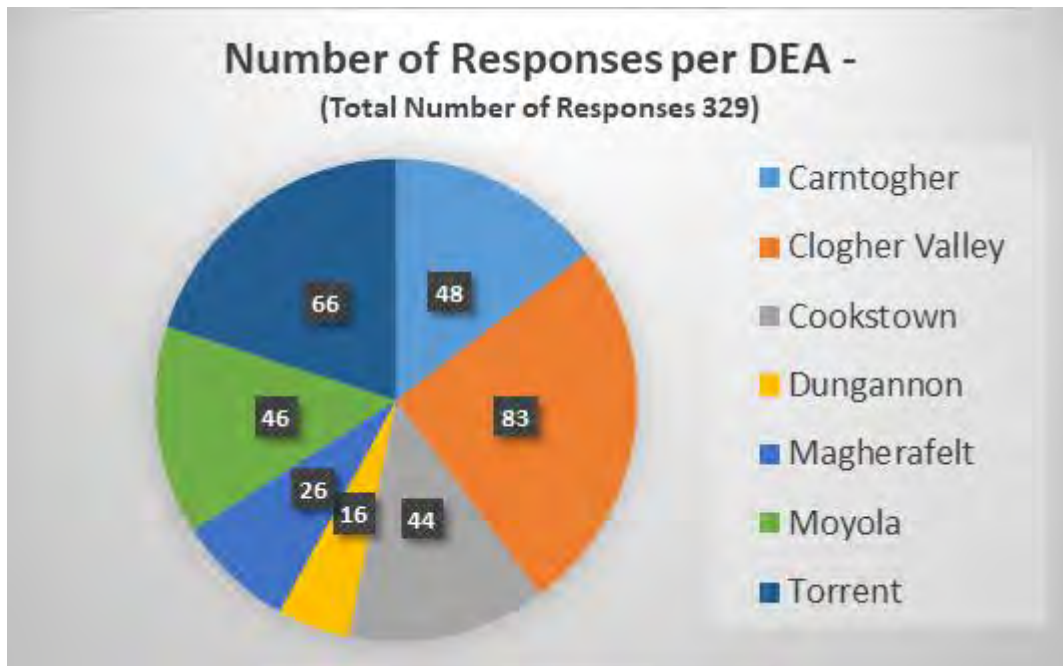
Within the survey, there were 75 responses from people who submitted twice, resided outside the area or were not on any list. Staff attempted to contact all people who submitted incomplete forms.

Table 2.0 below presents the number of survey responses received from users in each DEA Council area on the “White postcode list” and not included in Project Stratum.

**Table 2.0: Number of Survey Responses Received in DEA on the “White postcode list” and not included in Project Stratum.**

<b>Council Area</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Carntogher	48
Clogher Valley	83
Cookstown	44
Dungannon	16
Magherafelt	26
Moyola	46
Torrent	66
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>329</b>

From the response to the survey, it is clear that the Clogher Valley and Torrent are the areas have the most issues. Clogher Valley area was already identified as having the most properties (in Mid Ulster) outside the scope of Project Stratum with 171 properties out of 354 properties de-scoped.



Council has always argued that the worst affected areas should have been addressed first because these areas remain at the bottom of the list.

***Question: Project Stratum has been awarded with lower than anticipated costs. The Department has potentially scope and resources available to address the identified gaps and anomalies in Mid Ulster (who are part of the early deployments in Project Stratum). How does the Department propose to address and resource Mid Ulster's Project Stratum's issues and develop a mechanism to address wider NI deployment issues?***

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - 329 properties on white postcode list.

Appendix 2 – 304 properties on grey postcode list

- **DEA maps of white postcode areas not getting Project Stratum**

Appendix 2 - Carntogher DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 3 - Clogher Valley DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 4 - Cookstown DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 5 - Dungannon DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 6- Magherafelt DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 7 - Moyola DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 8 - Torrent DEA on White list but not Project Stratum

Appendix 9 – Overview of Mid Ulster on white list not Project Stratum

Appendix 10 - Map of the new Builds post January 2019

Appendix 11 – Drummurrer Lane, Coalisland





**DfE Telecoms Branch – 11.5.21**

**Mid Ulster District Council Broadband Report / Project Stratum Implementation**

**1 - INTRODUCTION**

The Department for the Economy (DfE) would like to thank Mid Ulster District Council for preparing its 'Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report' and recognises the effort that has gone into preparing the report, through engagement with citizens across the district.

DfE fully appreciates the impact of poor broadband on local communities, particularly in rural areas of Northern Ireland, and recognises that the Covid-19 crisis has emphasised the greater challenges faced by those with poor broadband coverage. Project Stratum was developed to improve connectivity for premises unable to access broadband services of 30 Mbps or greater, primarily across rural areas of Northern Ireland.

The Department's responses to the questions contained in the Broadband Survey Report are intended to provide further clarity regarding the various categories of premises within postcodes that, under State aid rules outlined in the National Broadband Scheme 2016 (NBS 2016) require postcodes to be defined as 'White', 'Grey' or 'Black.'

As a result of the Open Market Review (OMR) process conducted in summer 2018, and State aid Public Consultation for Project Stratum, which concluded in January 2019, the Department identified 58,502 premises in Mid Ulster, of which 12,643 were deemed to have inadequate broadband, based on the data supplied in the OMR, and further clarifications considered as a result of State aid Public Consultation. Postcodes containing any of those 12,643 premises were listed in Annex 1 of the public consultation, which is the list of postcodes containing at least one white premises. Of the 12,643 eligible premises, 7,231 are in postcodes that contain a mix of eligible and ineligible premises.

Premises identified during OMR/SaPC	58,502
Premises in white postcodes (Annex 1)	22,628
Premises in grey or black postcodes (Annex 2 and 3)	53,090
Premises in postcodes containing only white premises	5,412
White premises in postcodes containing eligible and ineligible premises	7,231
All white premises	12,643

- Annexes refer to the Annexes within the State aid Public Consultation
- A white list comprises postcodes containing one or more white premises, it does not mean all premises in listed postcode are considered white
- Postcodes are ineligible where NGA infrastructure has been deployed to the postcode
- However, by identifying ineligible premises in grey postcodes, an additional 7,231 premises could be classified as eligible

The contract for Project Stratum was awarded to Fibrus Networks in November 2020, and deployment is already under way to deliver full fibre broadband services to over 76,000 premises across the intervention area, of which 12,289 premises are in Mid Ulster. Deployment in the Mid Ulster area has already commenced, with premises in Coalisland the first to benefit from access to improved (fibre to the premises) broadband infrastructure. Deployment across all parts of Mid Ulster will continue throughout the implementation phase for Project Stratum.

Some 3% of premises in the intervention area, 2,517 premises, will require additional funding in order to maximise broadband coverage, of which 354 are in Mid Ulster. The Department is in advanced discussions with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and expects to secure additional funding under the headroom provision of the contract, in order to reach as many eligible premises as possible.

The Department recognises that there will be a number of additional premises that will also require full consideration for eligibility, utilising the headroom funding provision, and we are in the process of identifying these premises. Some premises deemed eligible will emerge as a result of the Department's ongoing engagement with Land and Property Services, and are associated with premises that may not have been classified as 'Built' and 'Approved' on the Pointer Dataset by January 2019, the time of State aid Public Consultation.

Some premises that may be considered to be eligible under Project Stratum may be the result of infrastructure providers changing datasets, or commercial broadband roll out plans, and the Department will continue to engage with the appropriate stakeholders and either de-scope premises, or bring eligible premises into the scope of the contract, where appropriate, and under the State aid requirements set out in NBS 2016.

It remains the overarching aspiration of the Department to ensure that as many eligible premises as possible benefit from Project Stratum, working within defined State aid parameters and subject to the confirmation of available public funding.

The information contained in this document seeks to address the questions raised by Mid Ulster Council as a result of its Broadband Report, and highlight the complexity associated with a number of premises categories that form part of the deployment landscape. The Department continues to address the various issues associated with this large-scale broadband infrastructure project with a solutions-focused approach, for the benefit of homes and businesses in Northern Ireland.

## **2 - RESPONSES TO MID ULSTER COUNCIL'S QUESTIONS**

*Question 1: Can DfE confirm if Providers of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) technologies responded to DfE OMR in January 2019 as being able to provide broadband in rural areas?*

Yes – a number of providers of Fixed Wireless Access technologies, also known as Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs), responded to the OMR exercise that commenced in Summer 2018. The Department engaged with all such providers, and the majority elected to participate in the OMR process. Under State aid requirements set out in NBS 2016, premises with access to Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband services delivering speeds of 30 Mbps or above are kept 'Under Review' during the three year monitored period to ensure that any qualifying NGA broadband services claimed by WISPs are available to those premises.

*Question 2: In appendix one there are 329 properties on the white postcode list. Council needs clarification on why these 329 properties are on the Departments white postcode list and not on Fibrus contract list.*

**[Note –** Premises have been assigned a Premises Categories (A-E) during the implementation phase for Project Stratum, in order to:

- address the eligibility criteria for these premises;
- to identify potential solutions for premises deemed to be eligible; and
- for those premises that are not eligible for intervention under State aid rules

Further details on this categorisation can be found at Section 3 of this document.]

From the properties contained in Appendix 1, the Department has identified 312 Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs).

- 152 of those premises are identified as ‘grey’, of which:
  - 10 are ‘Under Review’ (see Premises Category B section in the following pages);
  - 114 have a 30 Mbps+ speed estimate from an infrastructure provider (see Premises Category E section in the following pages);
  - 27 were removed from the intervention area as a result of a UK-wide data refresh exercise by an infrastructure provider, indicating that qualifying broadband would be available to these premises (Category E)
  - 1 premises was not eligible, having received a gigabit voucher (Category E)
- 69 premises are identified as ‘white’ and eligible for intervention under Project Stratum, of which:
  - 64 premises are in current build plans
  - 5 premises are currently out of scope (see Premises Category B section in the following pages);
- 91 of the premises were not considered for Project Stratum, of which:
  - 32 of those premises were not valued in January 2019, the cut-off point for consideration under State aid rules, and the closing date of Public Consultation (see Premises Category D section in the following pages),
    - 16 of these were still not valued in December 2020
  - 53 premises were valued but not recorded on the Pointer Dataset as ‘Built’ and ‘Approved’ at the cut-off point for consideration under Project Stratum (see Premises Category C section in the following pages).
  - 6 premises do not appear on Pointer and are unverified.

*Question 3: In appendix two, there are 251 properties on the Grey postcode list currently receiving less than 30mbps and not on Project Stratum. They are receiving no information on when they will see improvements. Please provide clarity on when, what and how these properties will receive 30mbps?*

From the properties contained in Appendix 2, the Department has identified 171 unique UPRNs that did not appear in Appendix 1:

- 109 of those premises identified as ‘grey’, of which:

- 0 are 'Under Review' (Category B Premises);
  - 98 have a 30 Mbps+ speed estimate provided by an infrastructure provider (Category E);
  - 8 were removed from the intervention area as a result of a UK-wide data refresh exercise by an infrastructure provider, indicating that qualifying broadband would be available to these premises (Category E); and
  - 2 premises benefitted from a Better Broadband Voucher via BDUK, another 1 benefitted from a gigabit voucher, and are therefore not eligible to benefit from Project Stratum under State aid rules (Category E).
- There are 15 white premises, 11 of which are in the current rollout plans (leaving another 4 beyond current funding, Category A)
  - 47 premises were not considered for Project Stratum, of which:
    - 17 were not valued in January 2019 (Category D)
      - 7 were still not valued in December 2020
    - 30 premises were valued but not recorded on the Pointer Dataset as 'Built' and 'Approved' (Category C).

*Question 4: Council requests DfE or Fibrus advise the solution in order to get those properties included on the white post code list and allow Council to respond to the people most affected?*

Please see Premises Categories (A-E) below for further details regarding the categorisation of premises during the implementation phase for Project Stratum, in order to address the eligibility criteria for these premises, and to identify potential solutions for premises deemed to be eligible, and for those premises that are not eligible for intervention under State aid rules.

*Question 5a: How can these new builds be included in Project Stratum?*

*Question 5b: Can DfE provide a response for Council to relay to the people on when they will get FTTP?*

New Builds would be classified as Category D premises for the purposes of Project Stratum implementation, being those that, as of 1 January 2019, were not identified as 'Built' on Pointer and which were also not listed on the valuations list held by Land & Property Services (LPS) on 22 January 2019. The State aid public consultation closed in January 2019. These newly built premises have been deemed beyond the scope of Project Stratum, as a cut-off date for eligible premises within an intervention area is required under State aid rules.

If a premise falls into this category, other options may be open to them for getting a broadband connection. These options include considering if they are eligible to be connected under the Broadband Universal Service Obligation, or via the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. More details on these options are provided in the following pages.

Also, 'Category D' premises not currently included in project build plans can still register interest with Fibrus Networks at [www.hyperfastni.com](http://www.hyperfastni.com). These premises will then be captured and considered by the contractor during the build of the network. The commercial viability of connection of these premises will be considered, which may require inclusion of additional financial support from the premises owner if such premises are not eligible for public intervention under State aid rules.

*Question 6: Will DfE provide Council with information around what properties will benefit from delivery of the Broadband Universal Service Obligation in Mid Ulster?*

The Department would like to see as many premises as possible benefiting from Project Stratum in Mid Ulster and other local council areas, and also benefiting from the various schemes offered to citizens as ways to improve broadband connectivity. This includes the Universal Service Obligation (USO), for which Openreach is the infrastructure provider; the Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme, managed by Building Digital UK (BDUK), part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Citizens within the intervention area for Project Stratum could be eligible to benefit from the USO, if their premises meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme, which includes not benefitting from subsidised intervention plans within 12 months of the application. If a service is provided to premises delivering broadband speeds of 30 Mbps or above, the premises would be de-scoped from the contract; if a premises benefits from the USO provision but can still not access broadband speeds above 30 Mbps, based on the solution provided, they would still be eligible for intervention under Project Stratum, if currently classified as a 'white' premises. Please see the following pages below (USO and other Broadband Improvement Schemes) for further information.

## **2 - CATEGORISATION OF WHITE, GREY, BLACK POSTCODES**

The European Commission published 'EU Guidelines for the application of State aid rules in relation to the rapid deployment of broadband networks' (2013/C 25/01).

These guidelines summarise the principles of the Commission's policy in applying the State aid rules of the Treaty to measures that support the deployment of broadband networks, and seek to ensure that State aid schemes for broadband are well-designed so that they target market failures and minimise negative effects on competition.

The guidelines require public interventions to be targeted so as to limit the risk of crowding out private investments, of altering commercial investment incentives and ultimately of distorting competition.

The Commission's guidelines distinguished between geographic areas on the basis of their existing or planned broadband infrastructure.

Using this approach:

### **WHITE POSTCODES**

'White' postcodes are those in which there is no qualifying broadband infrastructure and none is likely to be developed within three years. The information held by DfE is based on data provided by infrastructure providers during the Open Market Review process and State aid Public Consultation. White lists comprise postcodes containing one or more white premises, it does not mean all premises in a listed postcode are considered white.

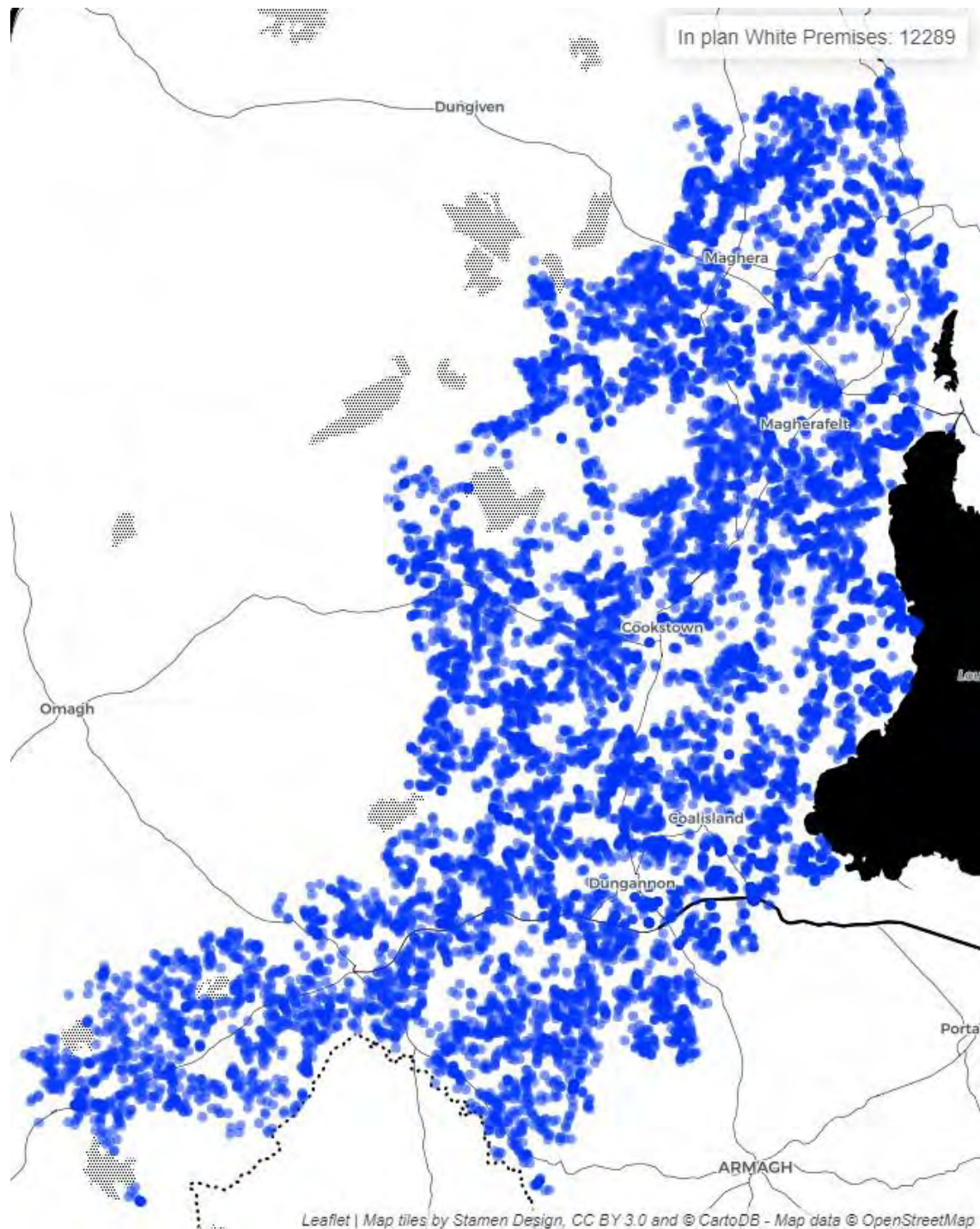
### **GREY POSTCODES**

'Grey' postcodes are those where only one network capable of providing qualifying broadband is present or infrastructure is to be deployed within the coming three years. If the infrastructure provider is a Wireless Internet Service Provider, premises able to access such services will be kept 'Under Review' for the measured period to ensure that WISP coverage claims meet the stated requirements.

### **BLACK POSTCODES**

A postcode has been classified as Black if the data held by DfE, gathered as a result of the Open Market Review process, indicates that all premises in that postcode can access speeds of at least 30Mbps from two or more broadband providers.

Below is a map indicating the broad spread of the 12,289 'white' premises across Mid Ulster District Council currently in scope as part of Fibrus Networks' deployment plans.



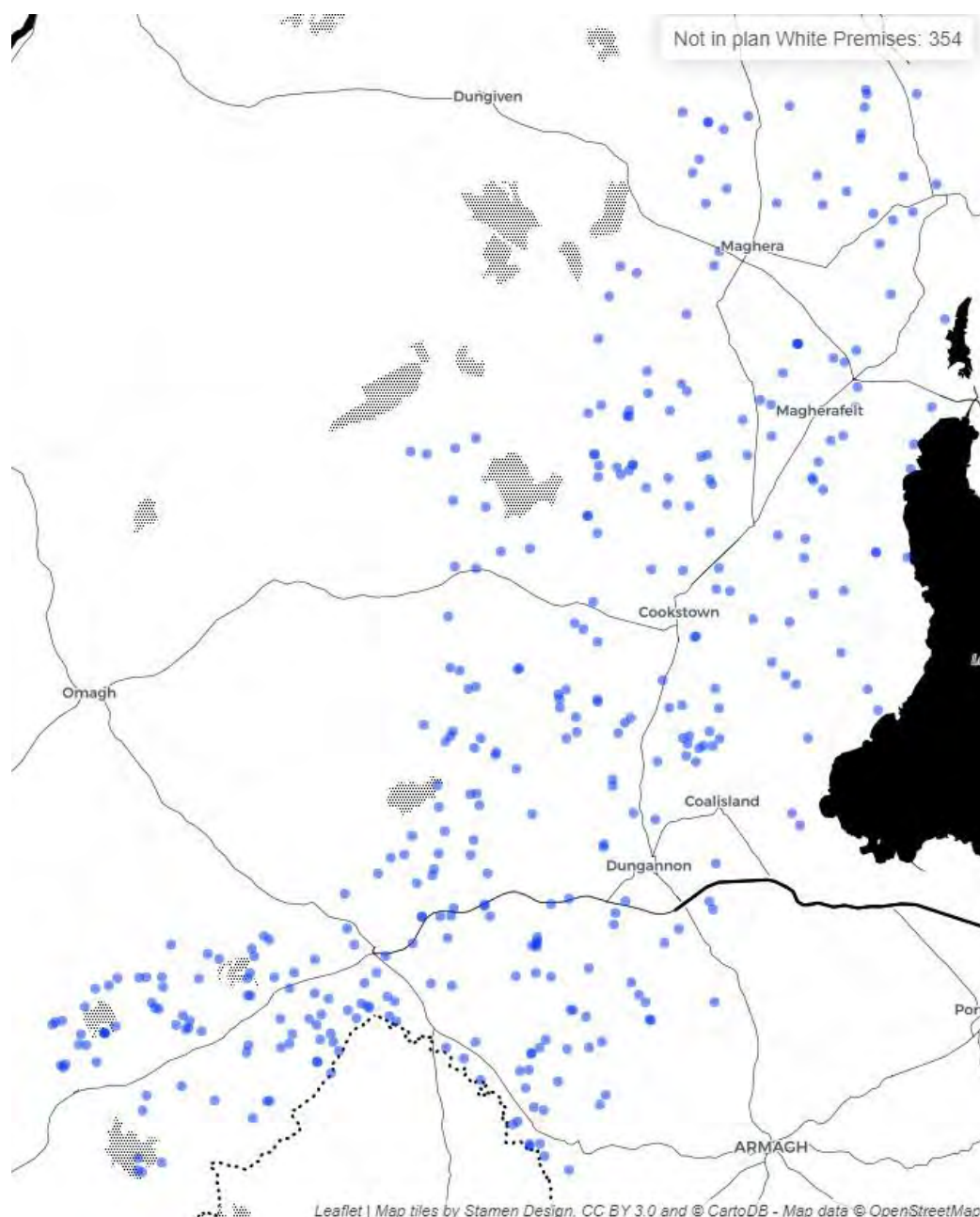
### 3. CATEGORIES OF PREMISES ASSOCIATED WITH ALL POSTCODES

#### Category A (3% out of scope)

78,750 eligible premises were identified at the Invitation to Tender stage for Project Stratum. A combination of available public funding of £165m, and Fibrus Networks' investment in network build costs, will see broadband infrastructure rolled out to 76,233



predominantly rural premises across the intervention area. There are an additional 2,517 eligible premises, approximately 3% of the previously identified intervention area, which are currently out of scope. These harder-to-reach premises will require additional funding in order to bring them into the contract using the headroom funding provision. Of these, 354 are in Mid Ulster. The Department has advanced discussions with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to secure additional funding in order to maximise coverage and reach as many eligible premises as possible.



### Category B (Under Review)

Under Review premises are premises which are served solely by Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs). These premises will be kept under review over the course of the project to ensure that the quality and availability of services claimed by the WISPs are delivered. If this proves not to be the case, such premises can be re-categorised and

deemed eligible to benefit from Project Stratum or any future public intervention. However, this will be subject to additional funding becoming available and value for money considerations, or the premises becoming commercially attractive.

Premises under review are not prohibited from being connected to the Project Stratum Network, but no subsidy will be paid to connect these premises unless they are first deemed unable to receive an NGA service.



### Category C (LPS Pointer Dataset Clarifications)

Land & Property Services (LPS) maintains the authoritative address database (Pointer®) for Northern Ireland with input from Local Councils and Royal Mail. Pointer is used by other government departments and the emergency services. Project Stratum has relied on Pointer as the best available address dataset of premises in Northern Ireland. At the

time the Department undertook the Project Stratum Open Market Review (OMR) in the summer of 2018 and EU State aid public consultation, between December 2018 and January 2019, which allowed citizens and other stakeholders to correct any errors or omissions in the OMR data by referring to an online address checker.

As a result of the Public Consultation, a small number of potentially eligible premises were identified as not being recorded on Pointer with a Building Status of 'Built' and Address Status of 'Approved' in Pointer, and further enquiries were made through LPS on behalf of citizens to ensure that any further identified eligible premises were not excluded from the target intervention area for the project. The Department compiled a list of eligible premises, as required under the State aid rules governing the project, using the Pointer dataset. The contract to make services available to the defined intervention area was awarded to Fibrus Networks in November 2020.

The Department has received a number of enquiries following the launch by Fibrus Networks of the address / postcode eligibility checker for Project Stratum on the HyperfastNI website. This has highlighted some anomalies with the Pointer dataset. We are assessing these enquiries on a case-by-case basis and are working with LPS in order to access the most up to date premises information. Through this engagement, a number of premises have been appropriately categorised with Status of 'Built' and Address Status of 'Approved' in Pointer, where warranted.

Some citizens whose premises were not recorded on Pointer as 'Built' and 'Approved', may have received an automated response from the HyperfastNI website indicating that their property was not eligible for Project Stratum because data held by the Department indicated that they already had access to broadband services delivering speeds of at least 30 Mbps. In the case of 'Category C' premises, this was incorrect, and we have notified citizens who have submitted enquiries. The automated messaging on HyperfastNI has now been updated.

If the information held by the Department concerning any premises is identified as being inaccurate, we will reclassify the premises so that it will be eligible to benefit from Project Stratum intervention. This will be subject to additional funding becoming available, which the Department is in the process of securing under the headroom funding provision within the contract, and value for money considerations.

We expect to be in a position to provide a further update in the coming months.

Premises not currently included in project build plans can still register interest with Fibrus Networks at [www.hyperfastni.com](http://www.hyperfastni.com). These premises can then be captured and reviewed by the contractor to determine commercial viability. The Department's Telecoms Branch officials are in regular contact with Fibrus Networks to determine whether or not the contractor is able to bring additional premises into rollout plans on such a basis.

Where premises are not considered to be commercially viable for Fibrus Networks, but are found to be within the eligibility criteria for Project Stratum, the Department will seek to ensure that as many of those as possible are included in Project Stratum, subject to value for money considerations and the confirmation of available funding, as indicated above. It remains the overarching aspiration of the Department to ensure that available public funding is maximised under Project Stratum to improve broadband connectivity in predominantly rural parts of Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, we may not know whether premises can be included until the period leading up to deployment in their specific area. Every effort will be made to provide confirmation of deployment plans as early as possible, in consultation with Fibrus Networks, and subject to confirmation of available funding under State aid rules. A map of the current deployment roll out plans, including anticipated timings, can be found at [www.hyperfastni.com](http://www.hyperfastni.com).

### **Category D (New Builds / Not Valued in January 2019)**

Category D premises are those that, as of 1 January 2019, were not identified as 'Built' on Pointer and which were also not listed on the valuations list held by LPS on 22 January 2019. The state aid public consultation closed in January 2019. These newly built premises have been deemed beyond the scope of Project Stratum, as a cut-off date for eligible premises within an intervention area is required under State aid rules.

If a premise falls into this category, other options may be open to them for getting a broadband connection. These options include considering if they are eligible to be connected under the Broadband Universal Service Obligation, or via the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme. More details on these options are provided in the following pages.

### **Category E (30 Mbps available or to become available)**

During its engagement with broadband infrastructure providers under the Open Market Review, information was provided to the Department indicating that certain premises could or would be provided with a broadband service of 30 Mbps or better within the three year period following this process (ending January 2022). Under State aid rules, these premises were therefore not eligible to benefit from Project Stratum.

Premises not currently included can still register interest with Fibrus Networks at [www.hyperfastni.com](http://www.hyperfastni.com). These premises can then be captured and reviewed by the contractor to determine commercial viability. A map of the current deployment roll out plans, including anticipated timings, can be found at [www.hyperfastni.com](http://www.hyperfastni.com).

Since the launch of the Project, it has been brought to our attention that some of the information provided to the Department by infrastructure providers may not be accurate, either as a result of data anomalies or changes to the infrastructure providers' commercial build plans. There may, for example, be premises for which it was indicated by infrastructure providers that a service could be provided, or would be provided within the measured period, whereas it may not now be the case.

We are investigating further, through engagement with the respective suppliers, to agree what further steps might need to be undertaken in these circumstances.

## **UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION (USO) AND OTHER BROADBAND SCHEMES**

### **What is the broadband USO?**

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) for broadband is a UK-wide measure intended as a "safety net" to deliver broadband to those premises that do not have access to a decent and affordable connection. The Government have defined a decent connection as one that can deliver 10 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and 1 Mbps upload speed (along with other defined quality parameters). Ofcom has defined an affordable connection as one that costs less than £45 per month.

The USO provides a legal right to request a decent broadband connection, up to a cost threshold of £3,400.

BT is the Universal Service Provider responsible for fulfilling requests from eligible consumers.

## **What are the eligibility criteria?**

Residents and businesses are eligible for the USO if:

- they do not have access to a decent broadband connection (10 Mbps download speed, 1 Mbps upload speed and other specified quality parameters); or
- if the only service available that can provide the minimum criteria costs more than £45 per month; and
- the property is not due to be connected to a publicly funded roll-out scheme within 12 months; and
- the connection will cost no more than £3,400 to build (or the customer has chosen to pay the excess above that amount).

Access to a decent connection means by any technology capable of delivering the standard, including wireless networks such as mobile broadband.

Ofcom estimated in December 2019 that approximately 155,000 premises (0.5% of UK) would potentially be eligible for the USO taking into account fixed-line and wireless connections.

## **When and how can a request be made?**

Requests must be made through BT. BT's [website on the USO](#) includes further information and an eligibility postcode-checker.

Ofcom's FAQ page on the USO: [Your right to request a decent broadband service: What you need to know](#) provides further information and contact details.

## **What technology will be used?**

Any technology capable of delivering the minimum technical USO standards could be considered to deliver connections, including mobile broadband. In practice, most connections under the USO are likely to use full-fibre or fibre-to-the-cabinet technology.

## **GIGABIT BROADBAND VOUCHER SCHEME**

### **Background**

The UK Government is providing up to £210m worth of voucher funding as immediate help for people experiencing slow broadband speeds in rural areas.

Vouchers worth up to £1,500 for homes and £3,500 for businesses help to cover the costs of installing gigabit broadband to people's doorsteps.

If you and your community are not included in any commercial rollout plans and you do not want to wait for your area to be connected through the Project Gigabit rollout, you can apply for UK Gigabit Vouchers through this scheme.

To apply, you must go through a registered supplier.

You can find out more about the process on [this page](#).

### **Who is eligible?**

Home and businesses in rural locations which meet the following criteria can use vouchers to support the cost of installing new gigabit-capable connections when part of a group project.



- Existing broadband speeds are less than 100Mbps
- A gigabit capable network isn't likely to be built to that area commercially in the near future
- There is no government-funded contract planned or in place to improve the network already

Group projects are when two or more residents and/or eligible businesses get together to combine their vouchers towards the shared cost of installation. Single connections are *not* eligible for the scheme. Projects will also be subject to BDUK commercial and value for money assessments.

Your new connection speed must reach:

- At least double your existing speed if your current speed is less than 50Mbps
- At least 100Mbps if your current speed is more than 50Mbps

'Rural' is defined using agreed standard measures in the relevant part of the UK. For the gigabit voucher premises in the following areas will be defined as rural.

- [Northern Ireland – NISRA definitions E – H](#)

You can check whether your home or business is eligible on the [Get a voucher](#) page. The search will list suppliers that are active in your area. Your chosen supplier will be able to advise and support your eligibility and guide you through the process.

## **Business Eligibility**

In order to qualify for a business voucher you will be asked to self-certify that you are a Small or Medium size Enterprise (SME), as defined by sections 465 to 467 of the Companies Act 2006 which can be summarised as:

- Up to 249 employees and annual turnover no greater than £36 million; and/or
- An annual balance sheet total not exceeding £18 million.

You will be asked to provide evidence of your status as a SME or sole trader.

You will also have to self-certify that the organisation will have received less than 325,000 Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) in public grants over any period of three fiscal years including the current year, including the voucher contribution.

The Special Drawing Rights amount has replaced the €200,000 de minimis grant limit following the UK's exit from the European Union on the 31st December 2020. The SDR to GBP exchange rate can be found [here](#).

Not-for-profit and charitable undertakings which qualify as SMEs are eligible in the same way that for-profit enterprises are.

## **How do the vouchers work?**

Businesses or residents that are eligible for gigabit vouchers can access the scheme through a supplier.

Voucher funding can only be used through a broadband supplier registered to this scheme as part of a broadband upgrade project shared with your neighbours. A supplier

may already be developing a project in your area or they may be able to develop a new project if there is enough demand in your community.


They will need to develop a project proposal to connect you and your neighbours, and then request vouchers on your behalf. Funding is only committed when a voucher requested on your behalf has been approved by us, and we have your agreement to our terms and conditions.





**MANUFACTURINGNI**

# Tughans



## Findings from a survey of businesses in the manufacturing industry

May 2021

# Executive Summary



## GROWTH & STABILITY

### Performance & Trade

Although Covid-19 continues to affect manufacturing businesses, the sector is showing signs of recovery compared to July '20

- 17% of those surveyed described their business as reducing or contracting compared to 42% previously.
- 48% are experiencing growth, compared to 23% previously.

### Outlook for the future

- 45% of businesses expect that the sector will see growth in the next 12 months, compared to 15% that expect continued weakness
- 48% believe their productivity will improve in 2021
- However, 44% expect their profit margins to deteriorate in 2021 relative to the previous 12 months, although 35% expect to see improvement



## ISSUES & CONCERNS

### Top 4 most prevalent concerns

1. Availability of raw materials – 66% businesses rated this 4 or 5.
  - 93% of manufacturers have increased expenditure on raw materials.
  - 50% think their GB suppliers are unprepared for the new requirements.
  - 37% said disrupted supply chains are the biggest obstacle to their firms recovery, with 42% requiring supply-chain support to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 as the economy re-opens.
2. Impact or uncertainty of Brexit – 63% businesses rated this 4 or 5.
  - 77% said the first three months following the transition period have had a negative impact on their business.
  - Although 36% are currently struggling with the new processes and believe this will persist, there is a growing number saying they are now on top of these issues.
  - GB suppliers preparedness and willingness is the largest issue but EU supplies and sales continue to be an issue
  - Almost half (46%) want the NI Executive to identify and secure new opportunities for their business.
3. Cost of doing business– 61% businesses rated this 4 or 5.
  - 86% have increased input costs on transportation.
  - 66% of businesses want the government to cut employment related costs to support the sector.
4. Impact or uncertainty of Covid-19– 59% businesses rated this 4 or 5.
  - 43% of businesses availed of government loan schemes in the last year.
  - 37% have made redundancies due to Covid-19.

## Background



# Approach

## AIM

The aim of this research is to assess the needs, experiences and issues affecting businesses in the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland.

Perceptive Insight, an independent market research company, collected information on **businesses'** performance, activity and experiences within the manufacturing industry.

## SAMPLE

A total of 190 questionnaires were completed by manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland.

## METHOD

- 1 An online survey was emailed to manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland
- 2 Data was processed and analysed using specialist survey software

*The survey ran from 2<sup>nd</sup> April – 23<sup>rd</sup> April.*



## QUESTIONNAIRE TOPICS

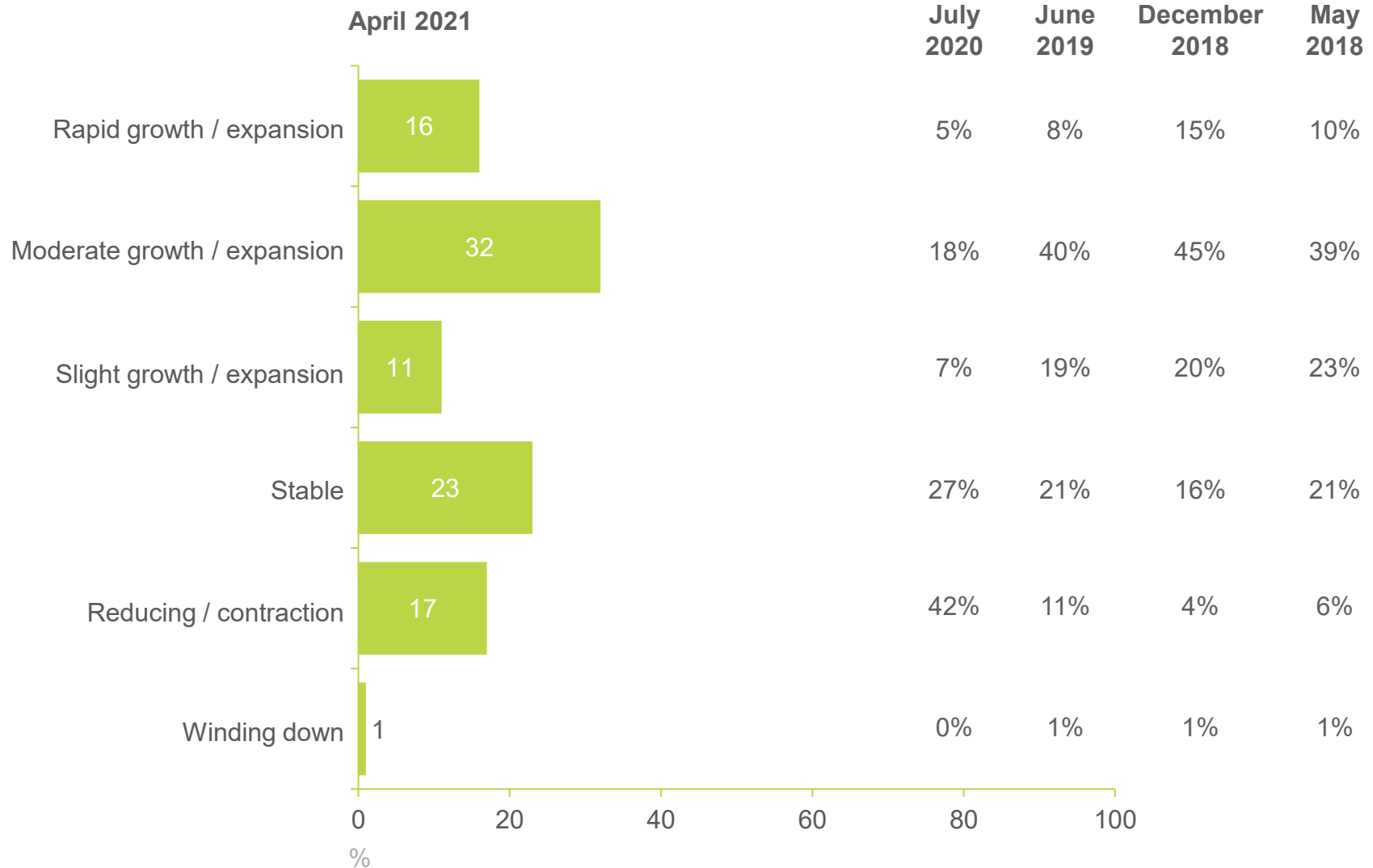
- Performance and trade
- Business strategy and productivity
- Support for business
- Impact of leaving the EU
- Skills and people
- Innovation



# Performance & trade

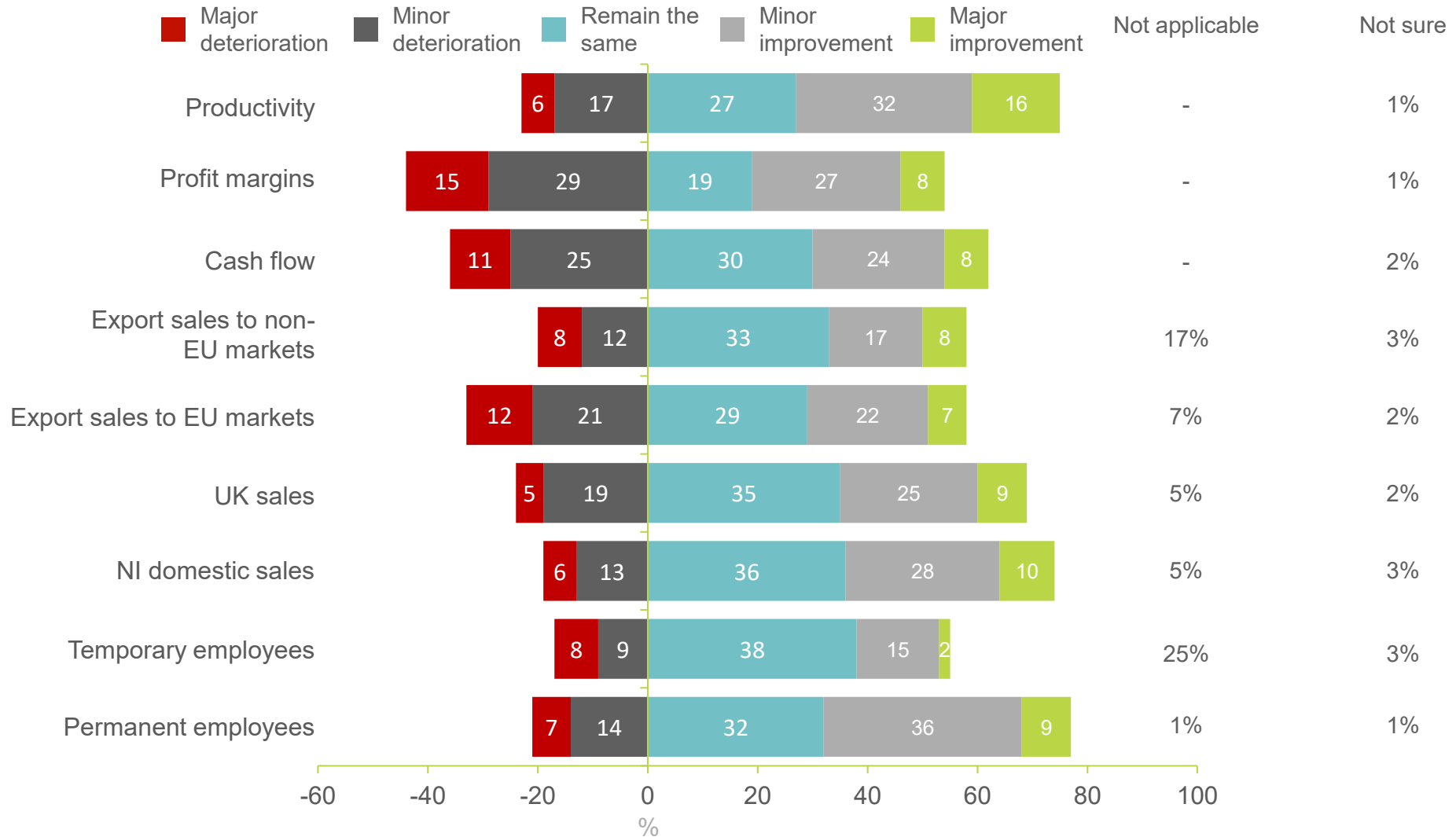
# B1 Which of the following best describes the current position of your business?

Base 190: All respondents



# B2 What changes, if any, is your company expecting in the following areas in 2021 relative to the previous 12 months?

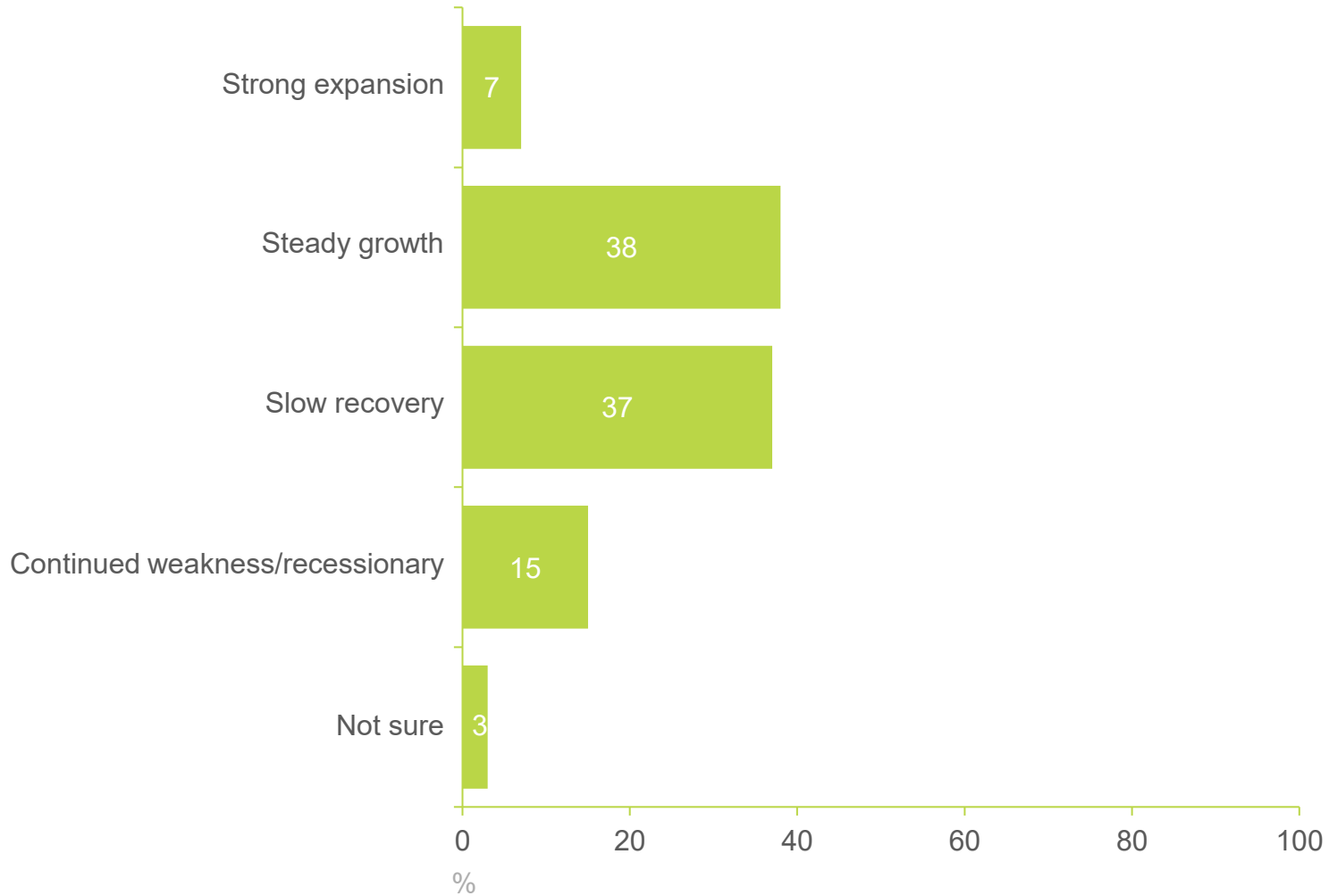
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding percentages add to >100%

## B3 How would you assess the 12-month outlook for your sector?

Base 190: All respondents

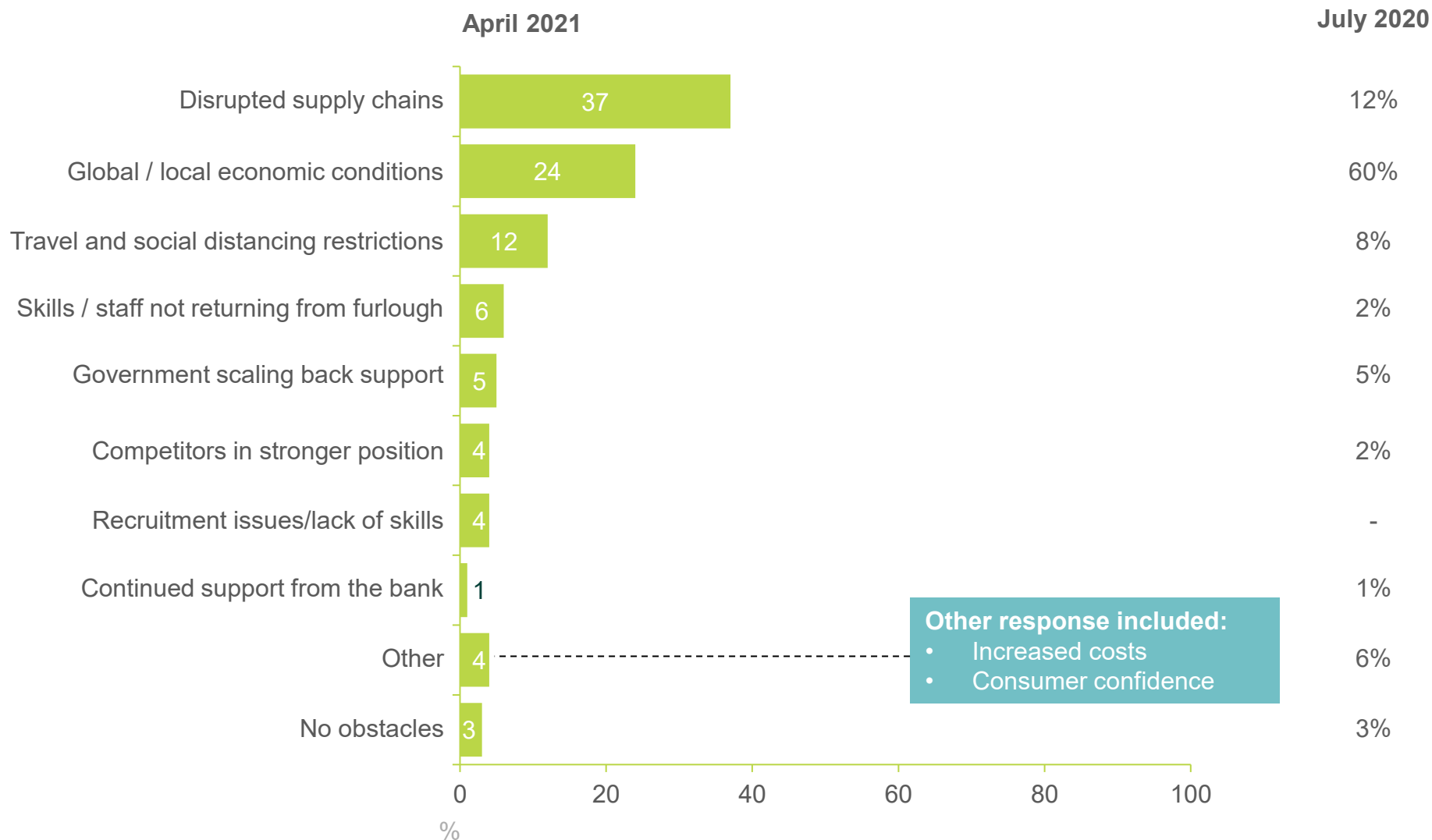


# Business strategy and productivity



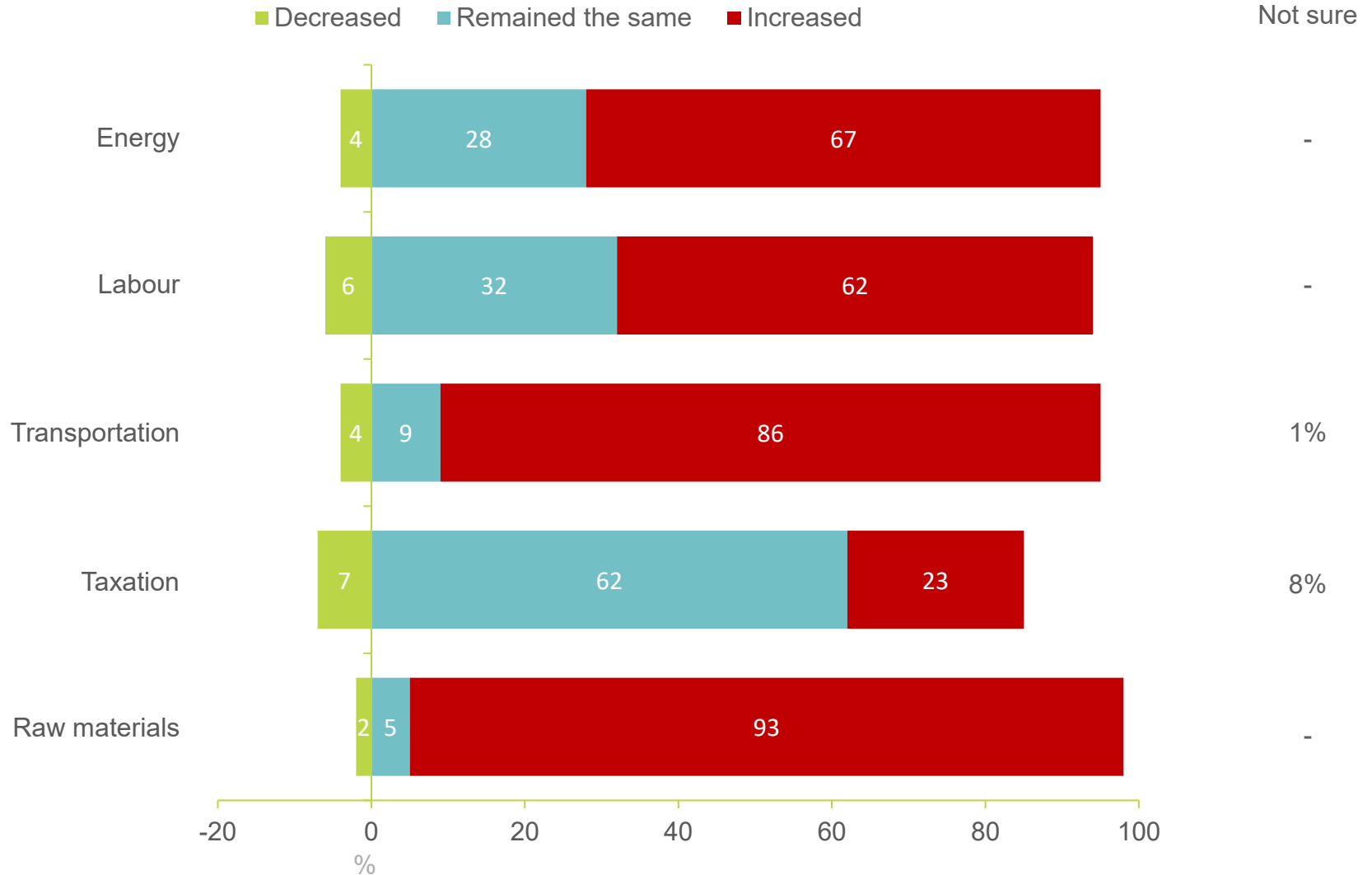
# C1 What's the biggest obstacle to the pace of recovery for your firm?

Base 190: All respondents



## C2 In the past 12 months, have the following input costs to your business increased, decreased or remained the same?

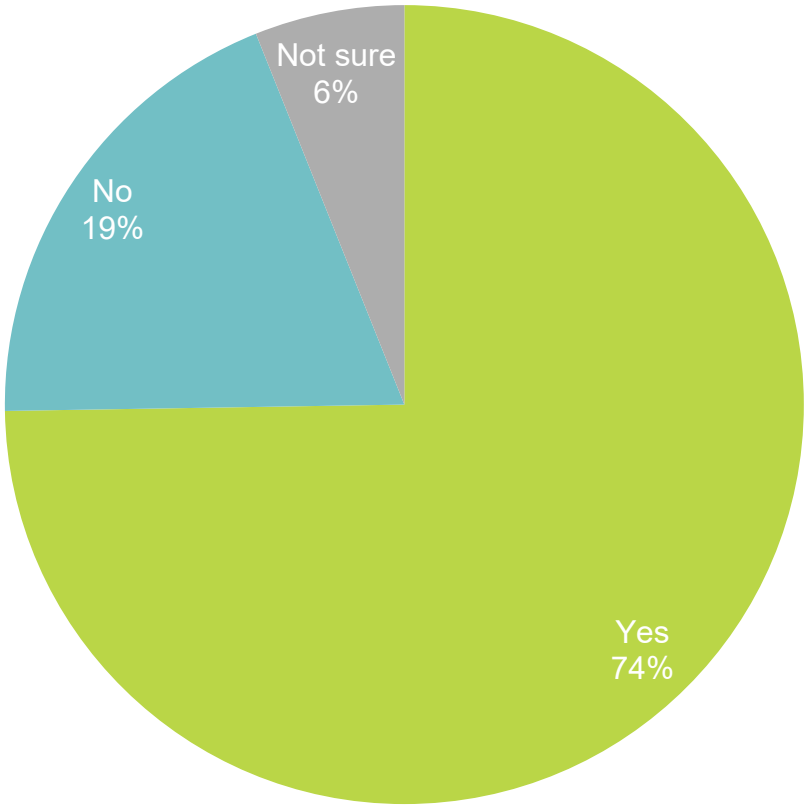
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding percentages add to >100%

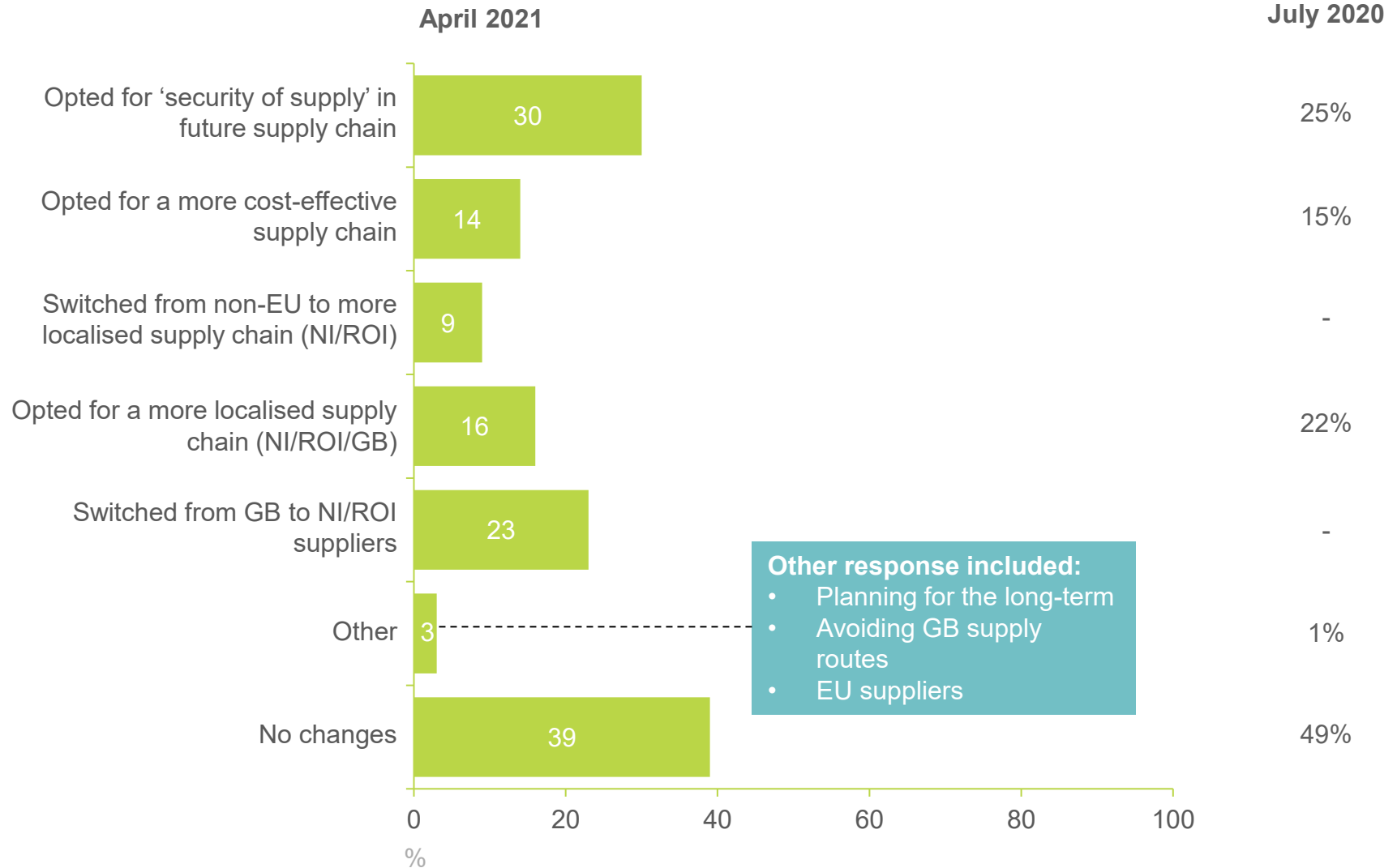
# C3 Has the shift in consumption patterns as a consequence of Covid-19 had an impact on your business?

Base 190: All respondents



# C4 As a result of Brexit / COVID-19 have you made changes to your future supply chain/ procurement processes?

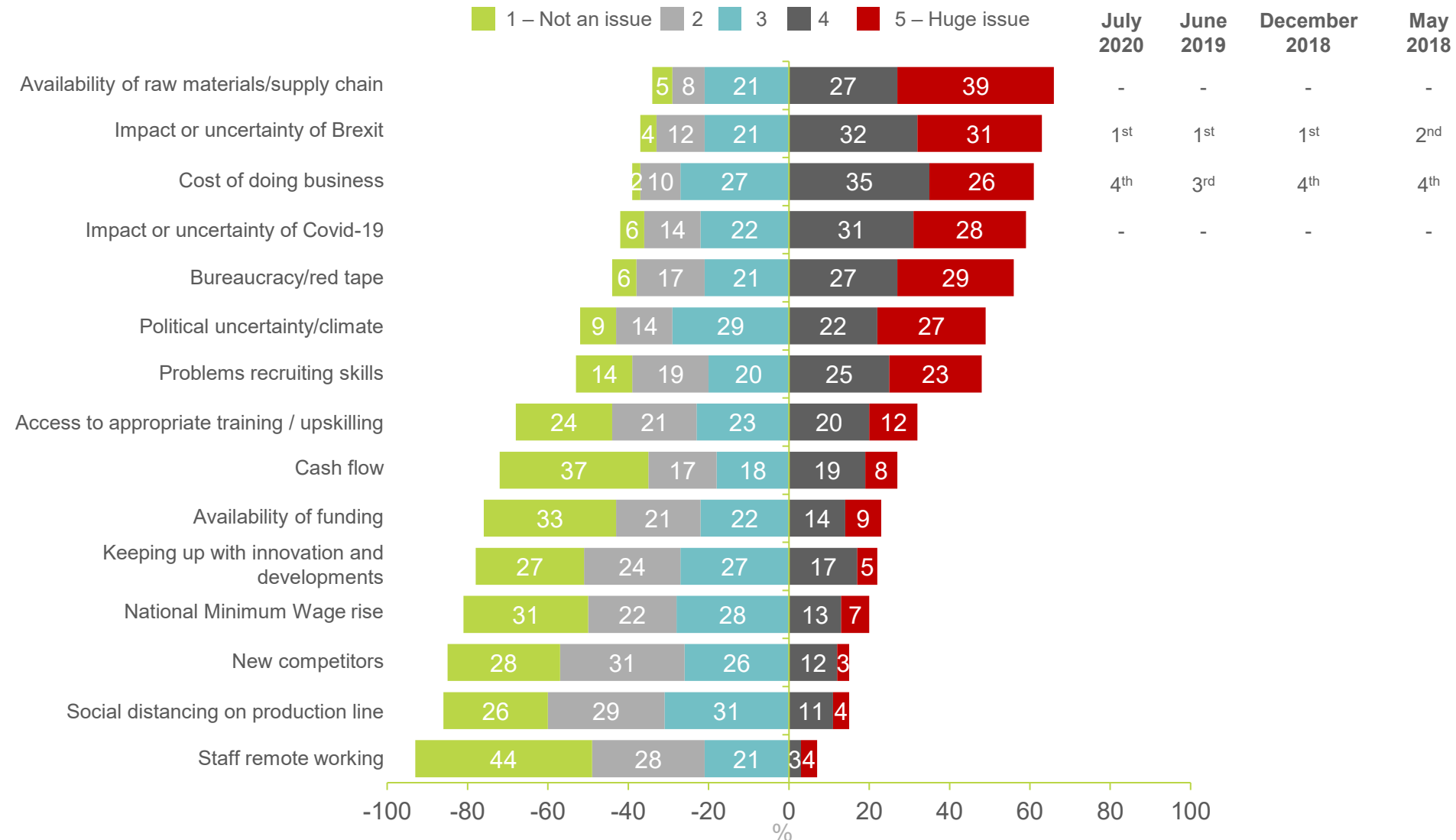
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Multiple choice question

# C5 To what extent, if at all, are each of the following an issue for your business currently?

Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding percentages add to 99%-101%



# C5 To what extent, if at all, are each of the following an issue for your business currently?

Base 190: All respondents.

% saying it is an issue

C5 To what extent, if at all, are each of the following an issue for your business currently?	April 2021 Base:190	July 2020 Base:130	June 2019 Base: 139	December 2018 Base: 122	May 2018 Base: 155
Availability of raw materials/supply chain	66%	-	-	-	-
Impact or uncertainty of Brexit	63%	65%	76%	67%	56%
Cost of doing business	61%	38%	61%	65%	60%
Impact or uncertainty of Covid-19 pandemic	59%	-	-	-	-
Bureaucracy / red tape	56%	36%	48%	45%	-
Political uncertainty/climate	49%	57%	69%	59%	51%
Problems recruiting skills to meet orders	48%	20%	56%	57%	47%
Access to appropriate training/upskilling	32%	-	-	-	-
Cash flow	27%	34%	28%	22%	31%
Availability of funding	23%	25%	24%	24%	26%
Keeping up with innovation and developments in your industry	22%	15%	23%	21%	14%
National Minimum Wage rise	20%	-	-	-	-
New competitors in your market	15%	12%	26%	10%	21%
Social distancing on production line	15%	-	-	-	-
Staff remote working	7%	-	-	-	-

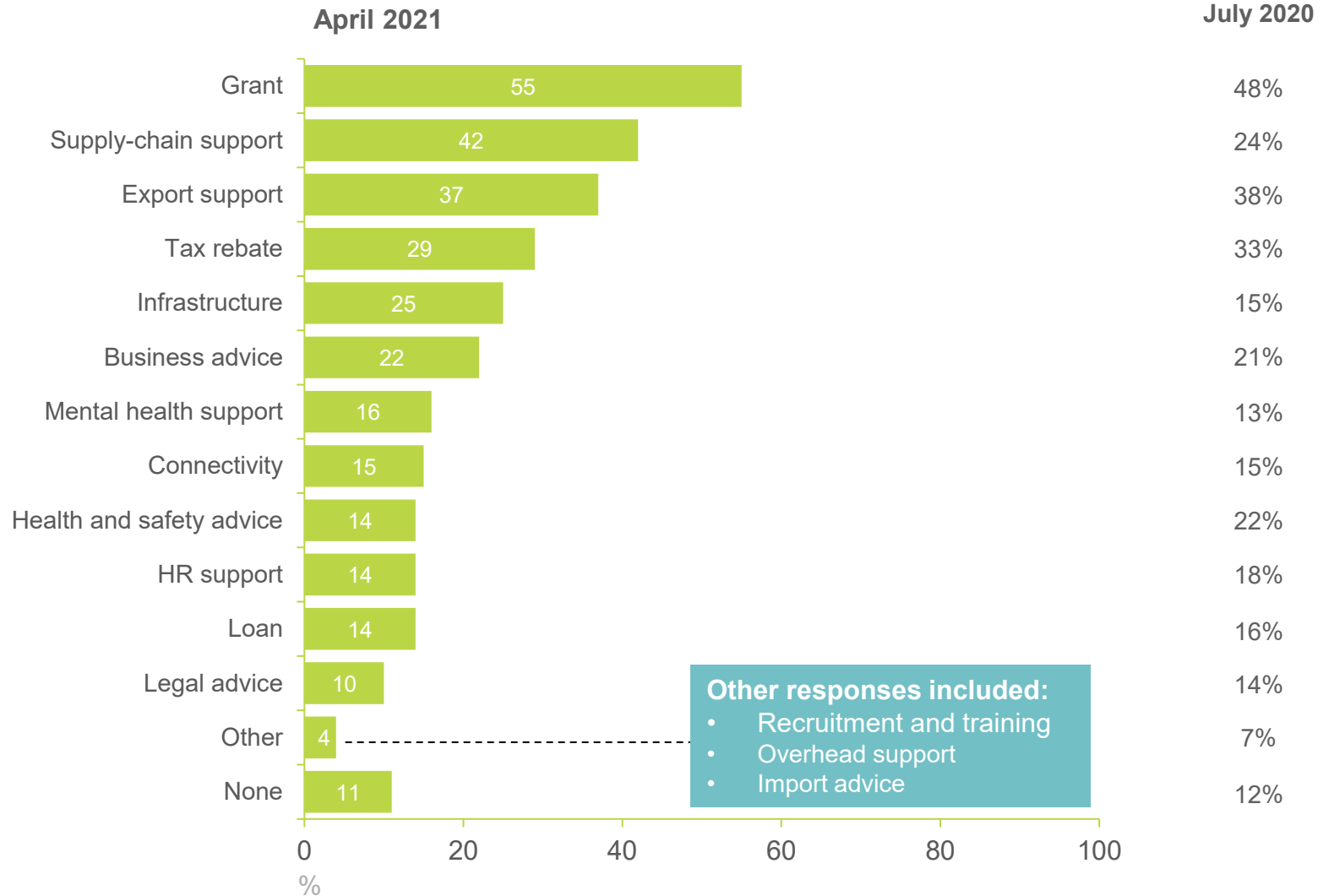
<sup>1</sup> Percentage of those giving a rating of 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5

<sup>2</sup>Social distancing on the production line, staff remote working, availability of raw materials/supply chain, National Minimum Wage rise and access to appropriate skills/upskilling not asked between May '18 and July '20

Support for business

# D1 As the economy re-opens what type of support do you need, if any, to further mitigate the impact of COVID-19?

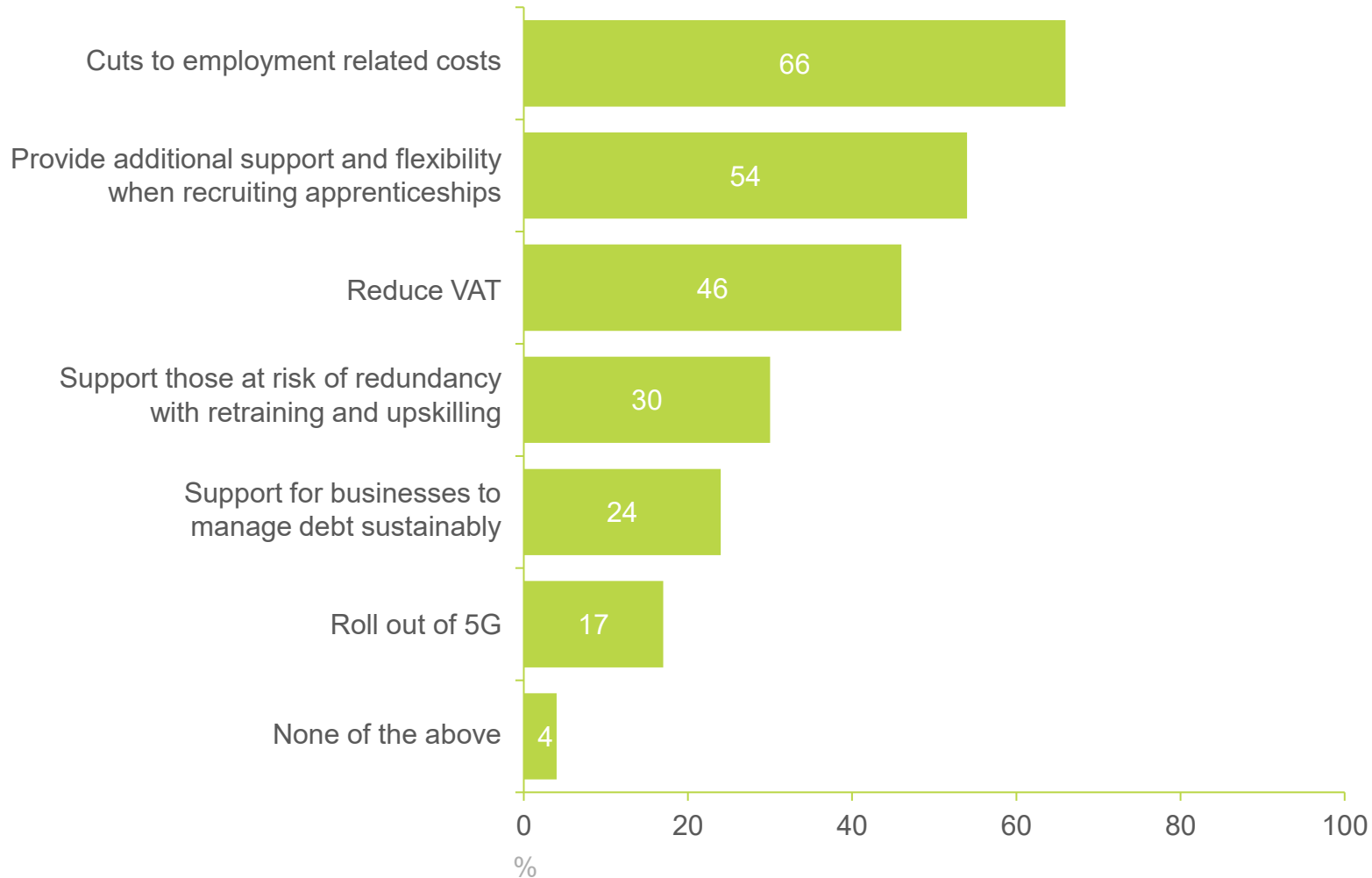
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Multi response question so percentage is greater than 100%

## D2 Which of the following measures do you think Government should do to support NI manufacturers at this current time?

Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Multiple choice question

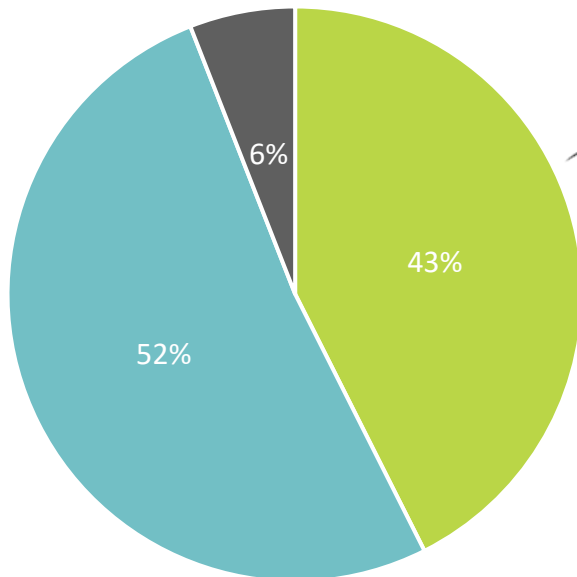
# Covid loan schemes

Base: 190. All respondents

**D3 Has your business availed of any of the specific Covid loan schemes introduced by the UK government in the last year?**

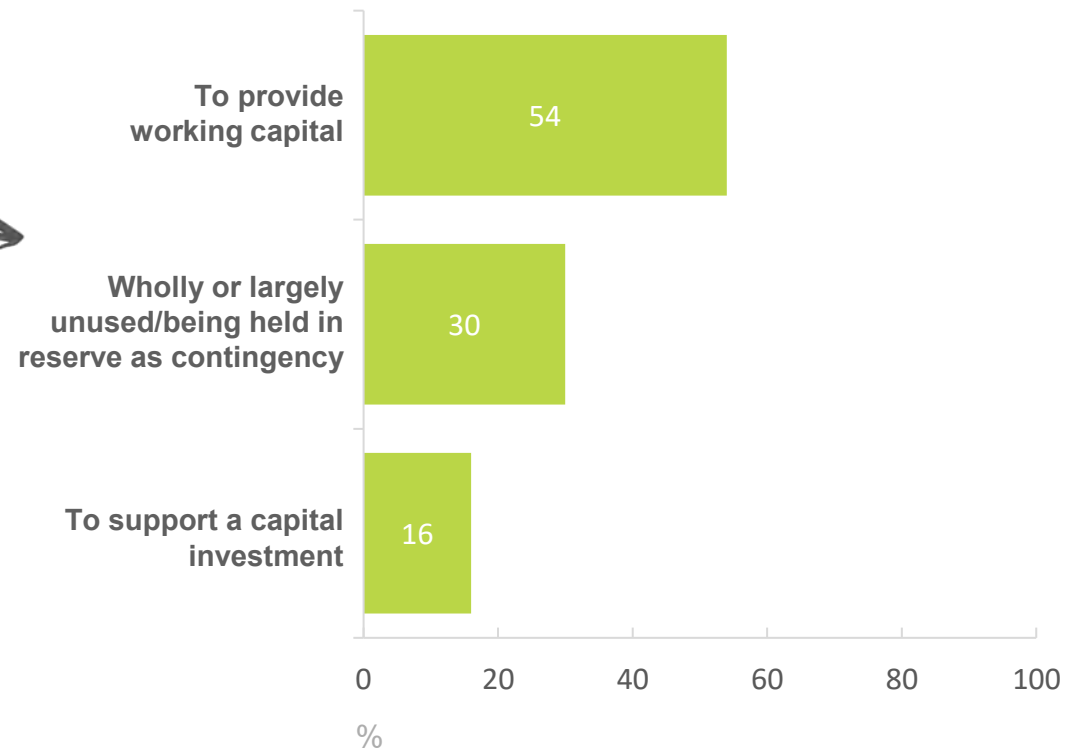
Base 190: All respondents

Yes No Not sure



**D4 What are the funds being used for?**

Base 81: Those that availed of Covid loan schemes

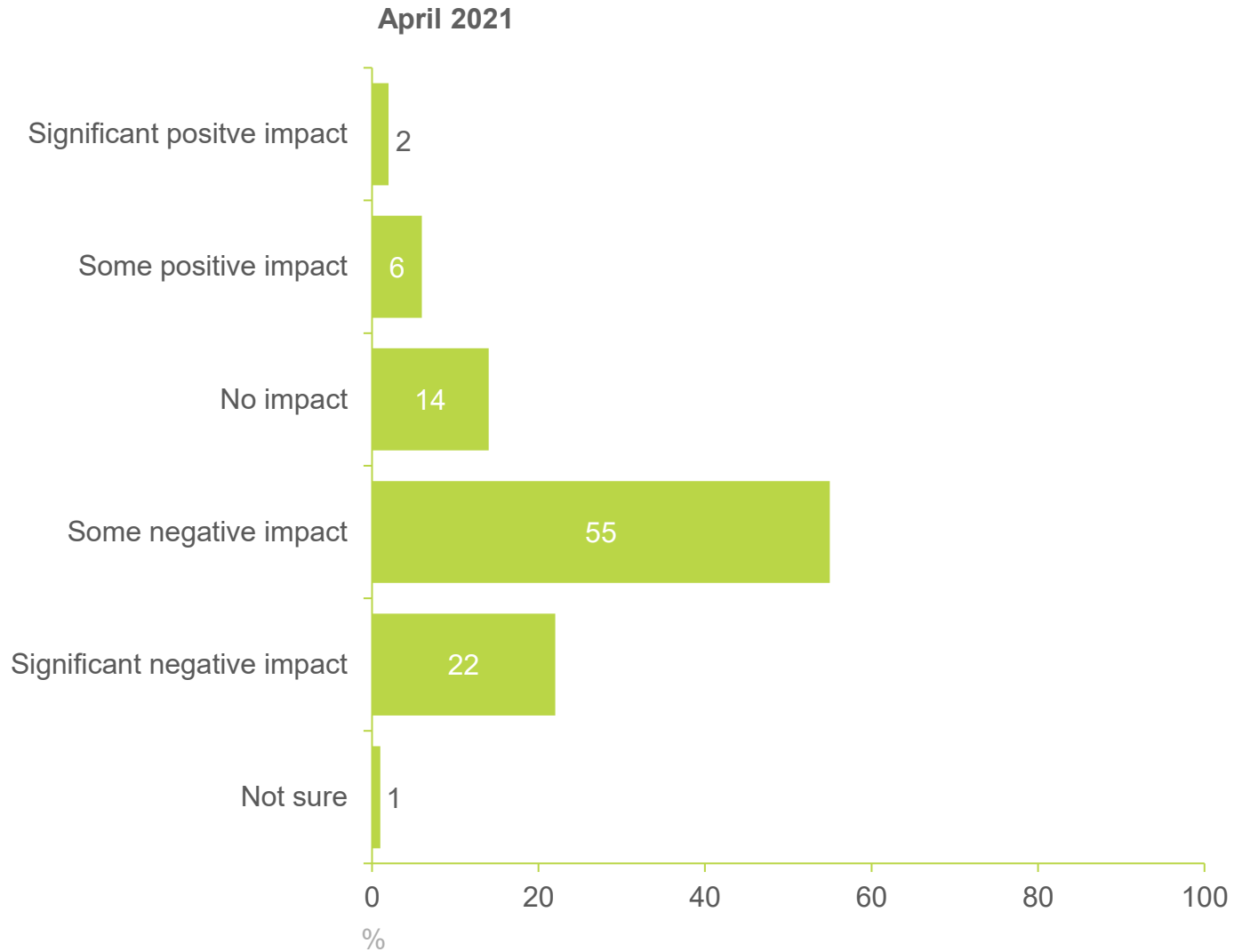




# Impact of leaving the EU

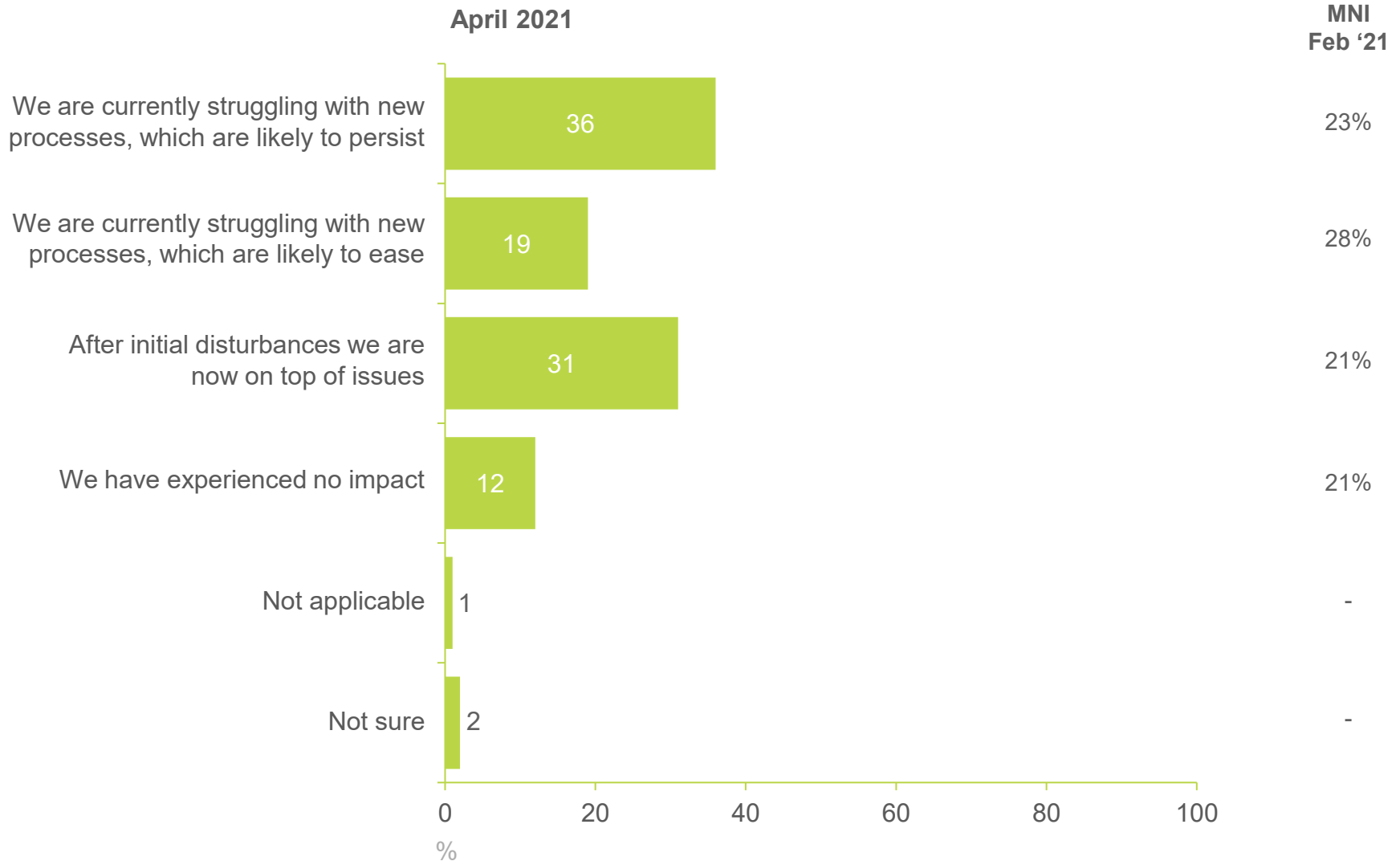
# E1 What impact, if any, has the first three months, since the end of the transition period, had on your business?

Base 190: All respondents



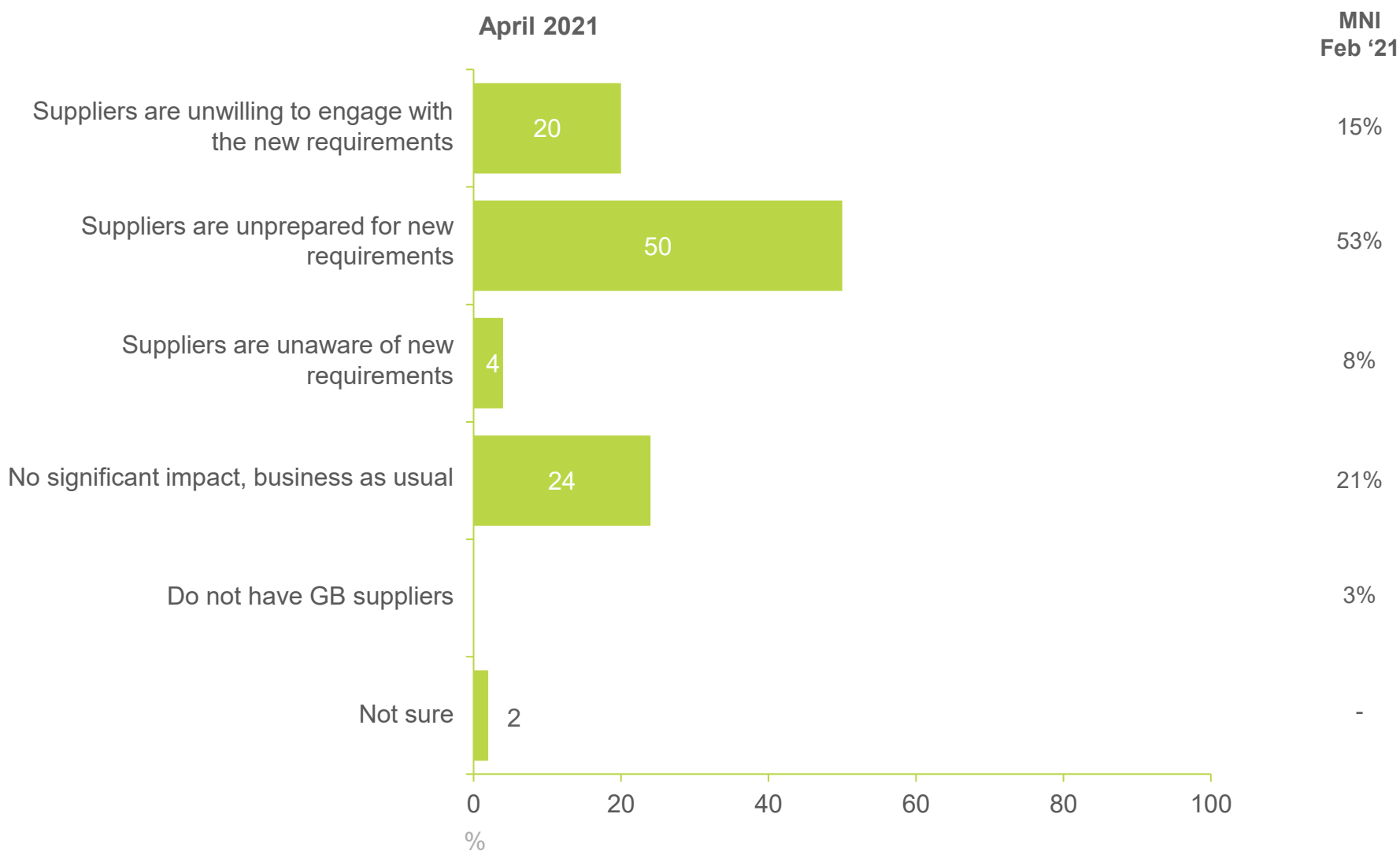
# E2 How, if at all, have the new processes as a result of the Irish Sea Border impacted your business in the past 3 months?

Base 190: All respondents



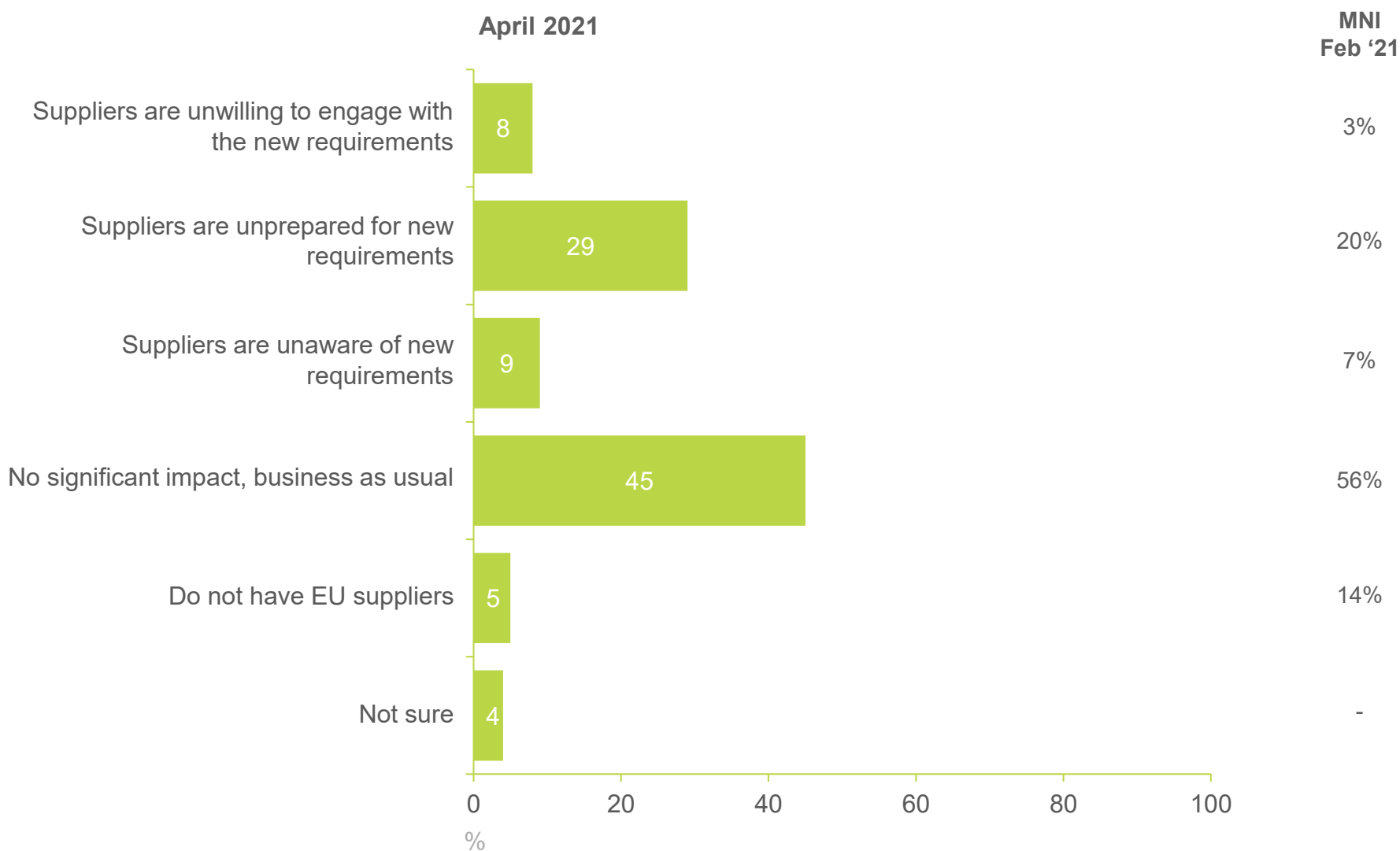
# E3 Which of the following best describes how your GB suppliers have reacted to the new requirements of the Irish Sea Border (or NI Protocol)?

Base 190: All respondents



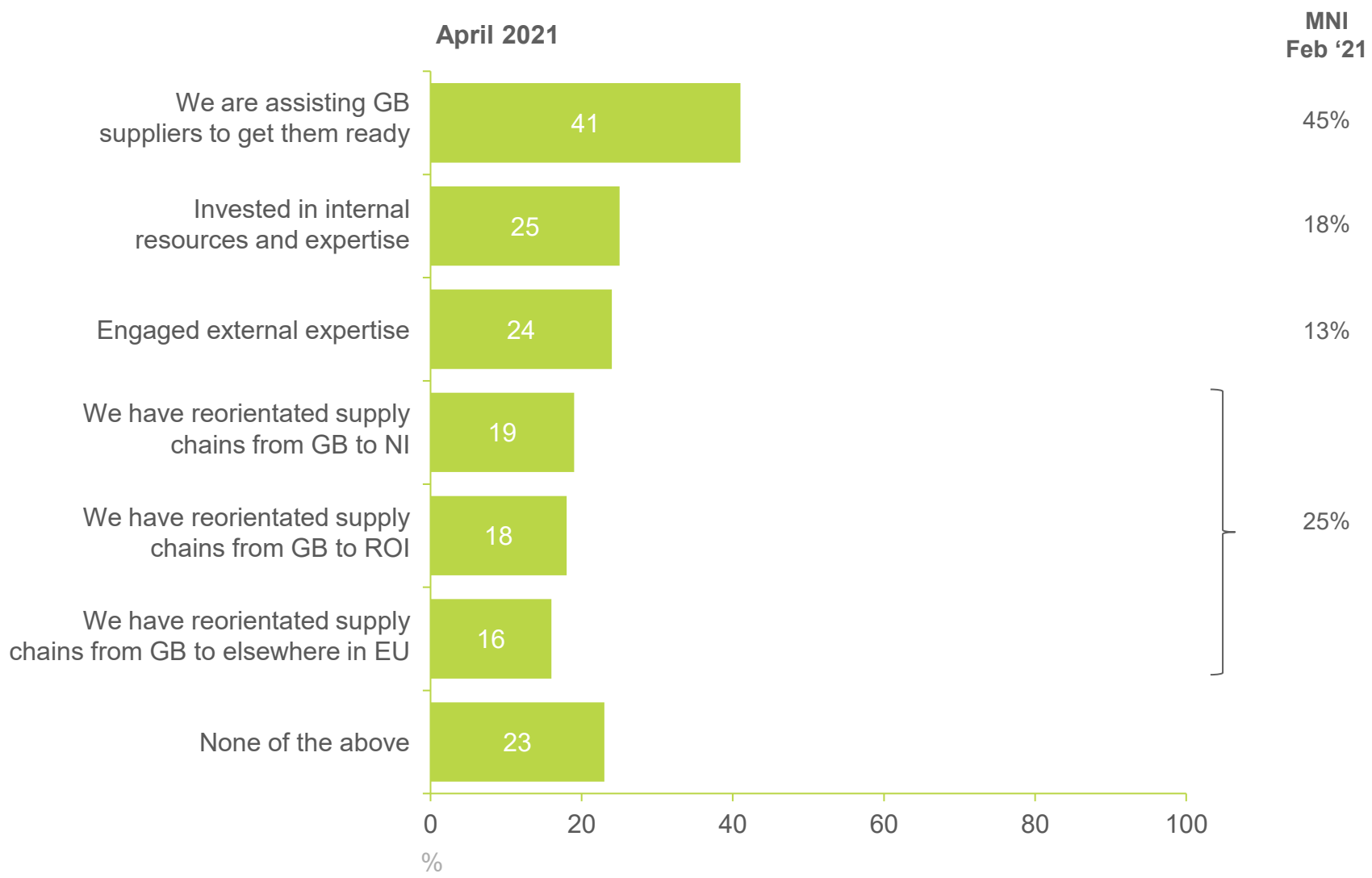
# E4 Which of the following best describes how your EU suppliers have reacted to the new requirements of the Irish Sea Border (or NI Protocol)?

Base 190: All respondents



# E5 Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken to protect your supply chains?

Base 190: All respondents

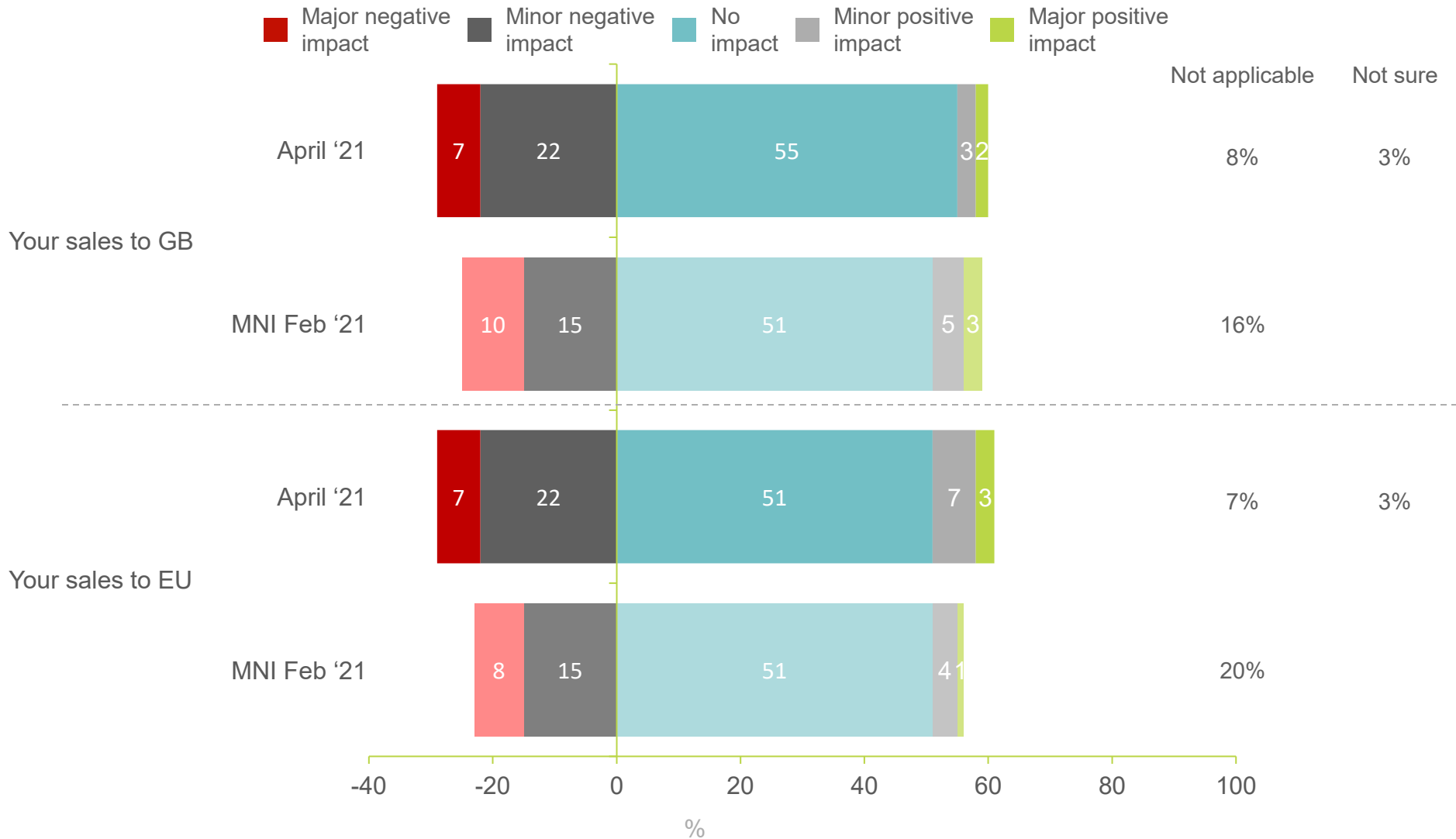


<sup>1</sup> Multiple choice question



## E6 What impact, if any, has the NI Protocol had on the following?

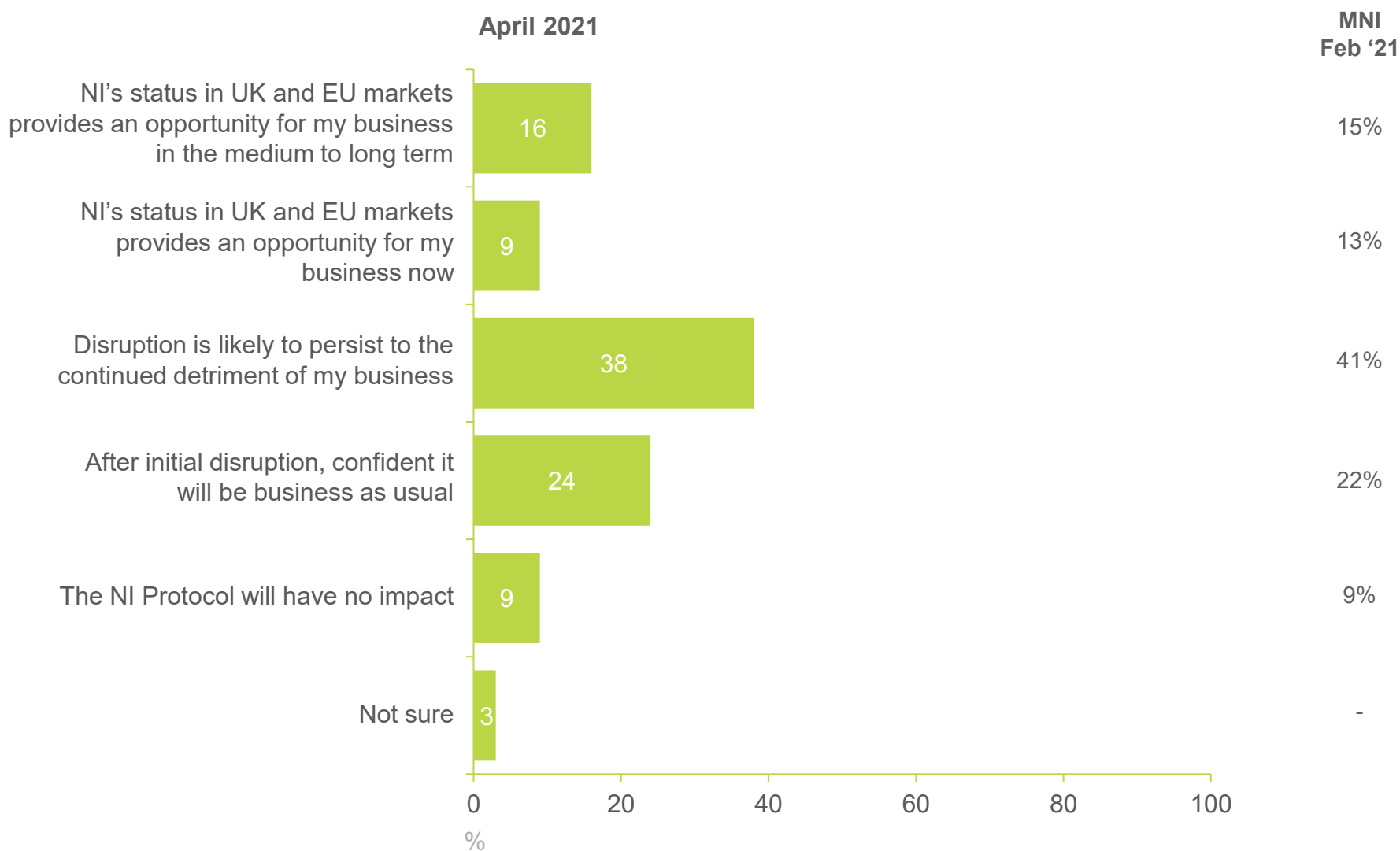
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding percentages add to >100%

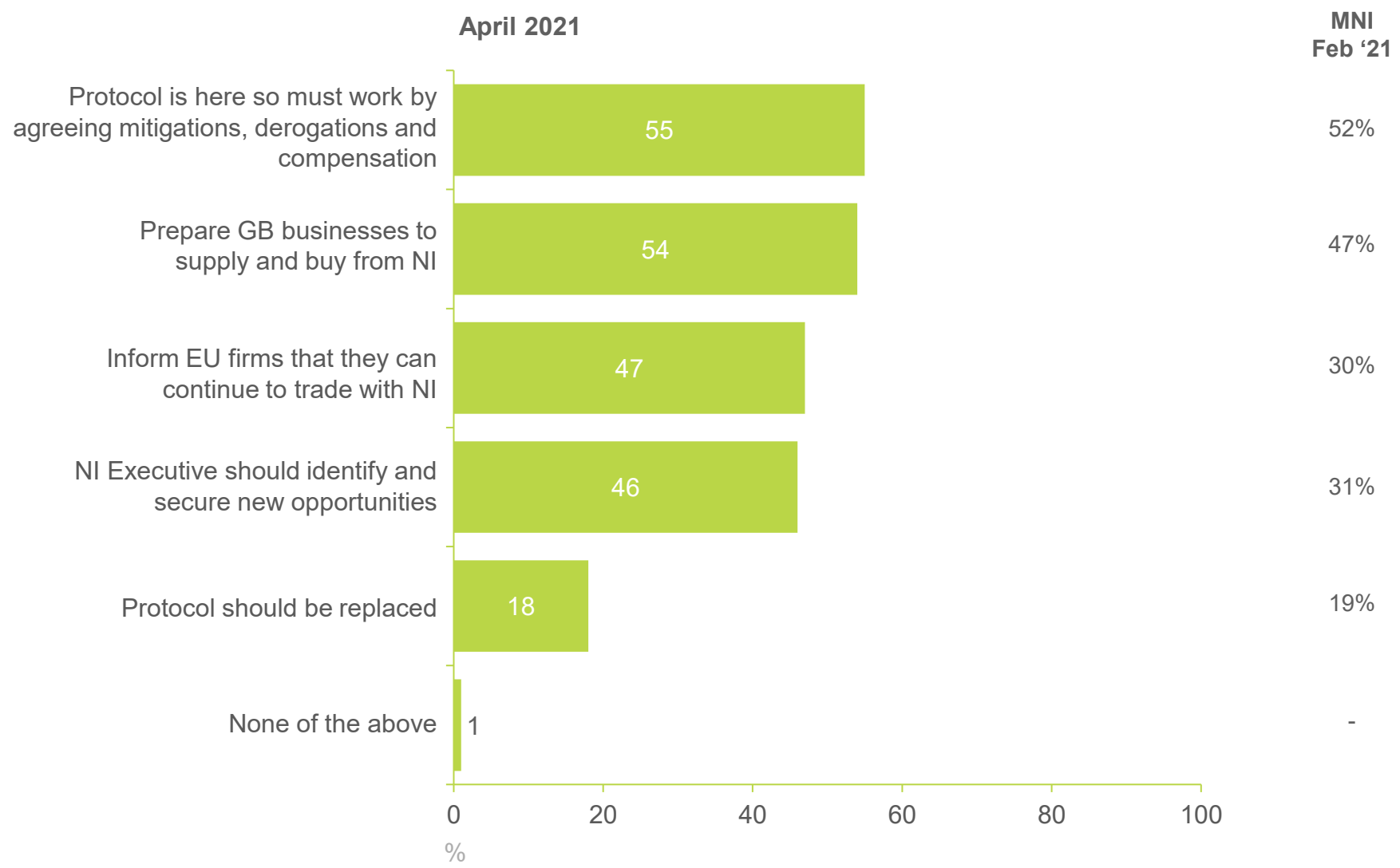
# E7 Looking ahead, which of the following best describes your view of how the NI Protocol will impact your business?

Base 190: All respondents



# E8 Which, if any, of the following actions do you believe the Government at home, in the UK and EU need to do?

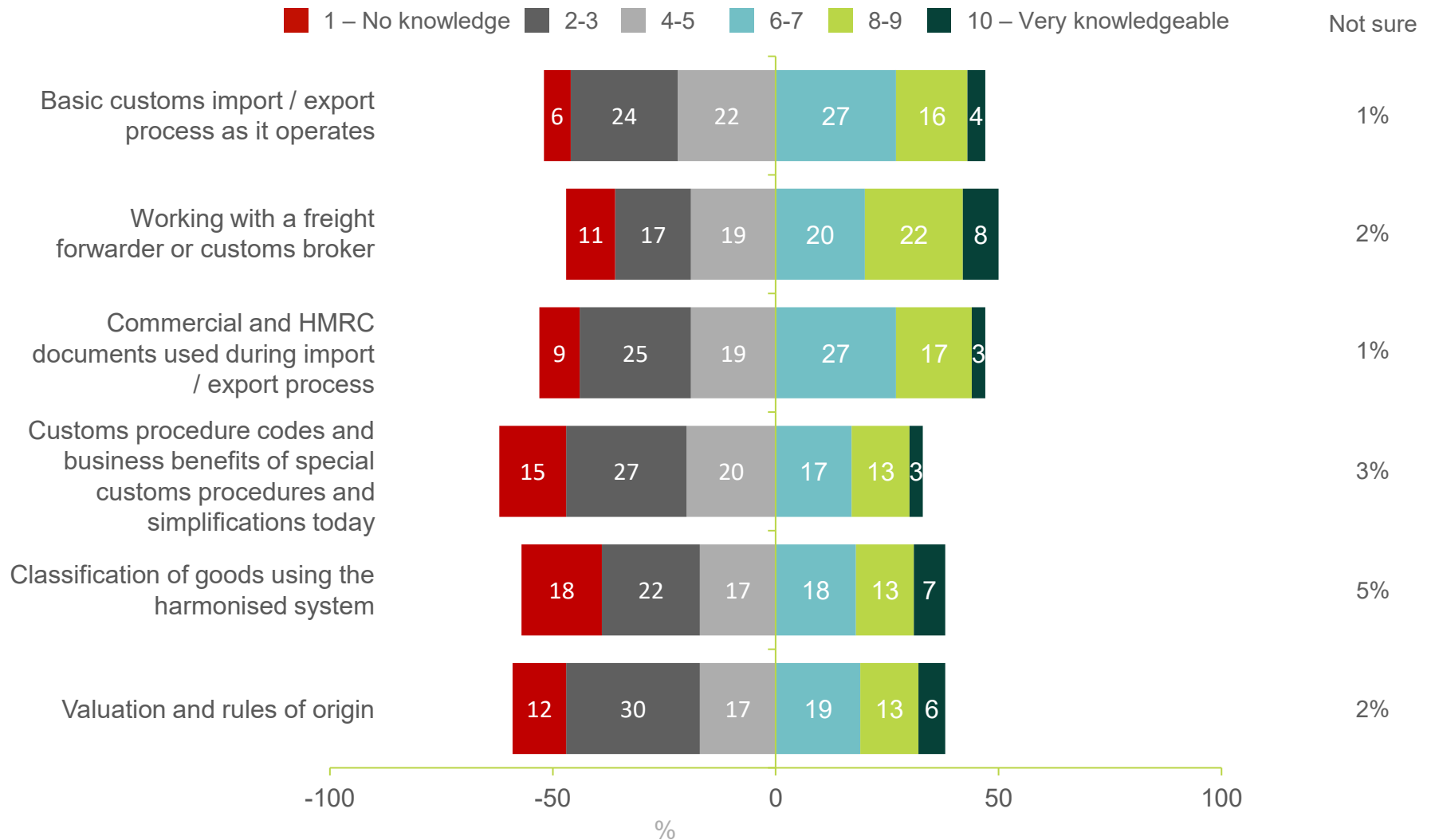
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Multiple choice question

## E9 How would you rate your knowledge of...?

Base 190: All respondents

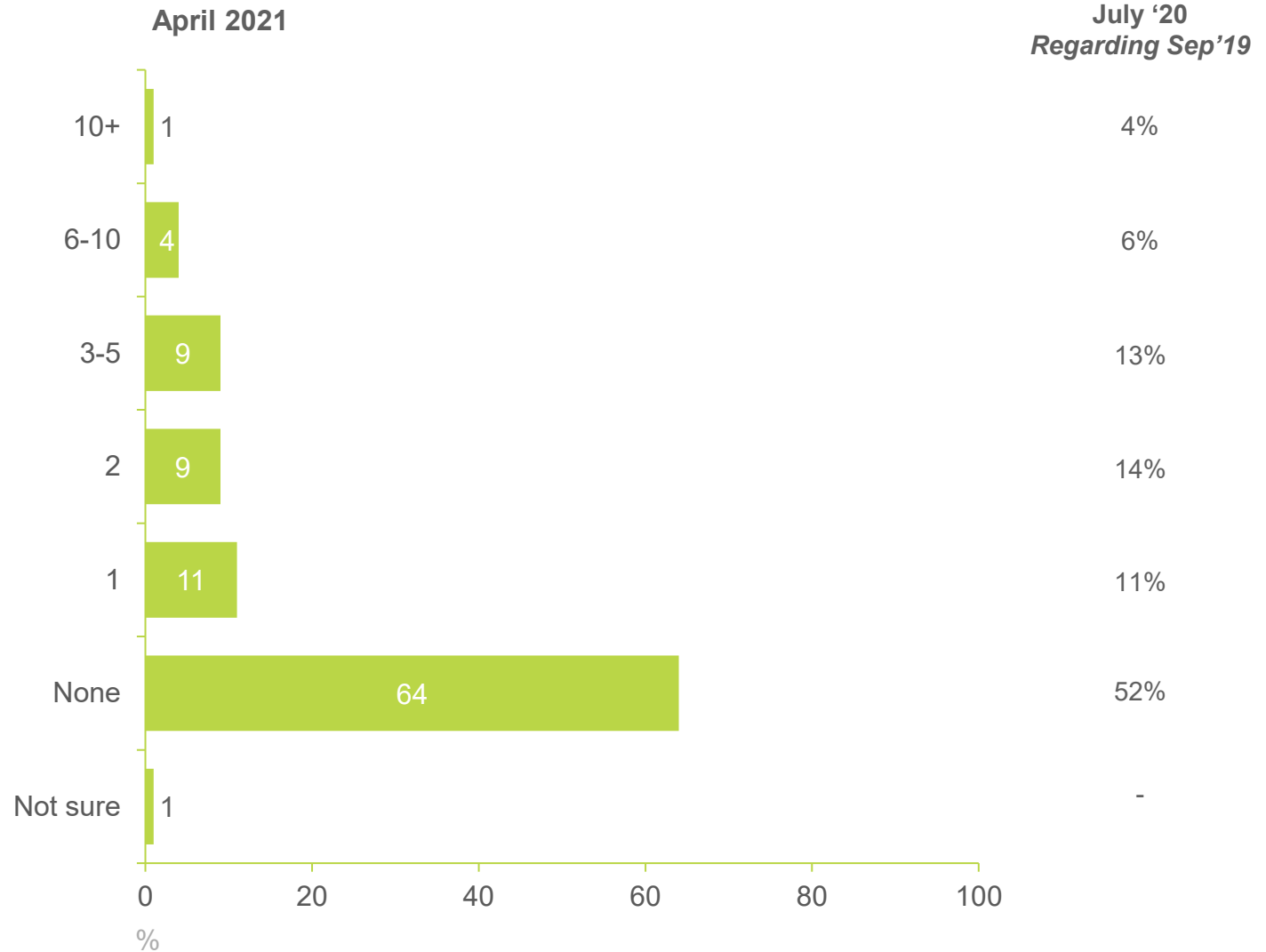


<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding percentages add to >100%

# Skills & People

# F1 How many apprenticeships did you take on in September 2020?

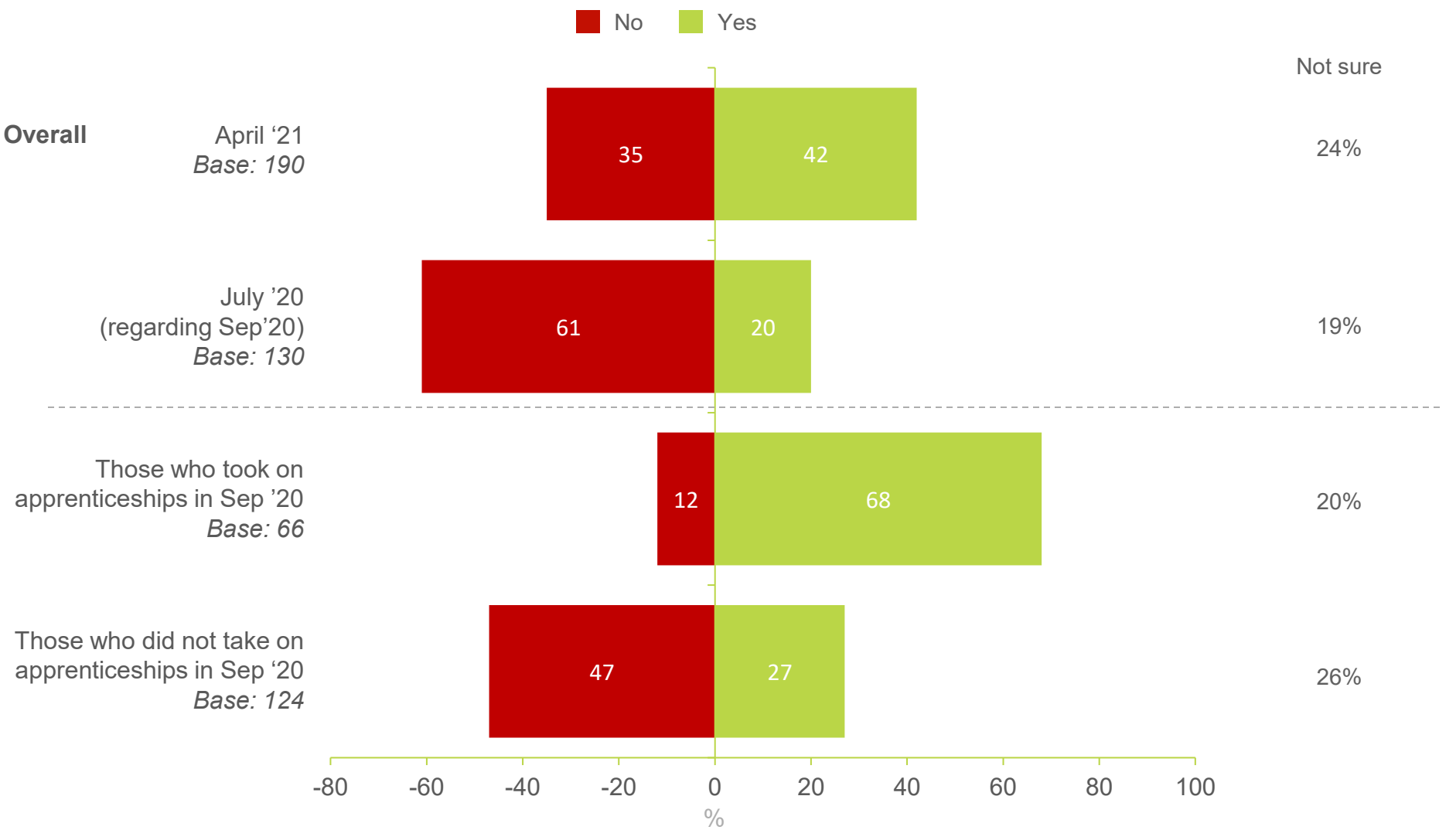
Base 190: All respondents





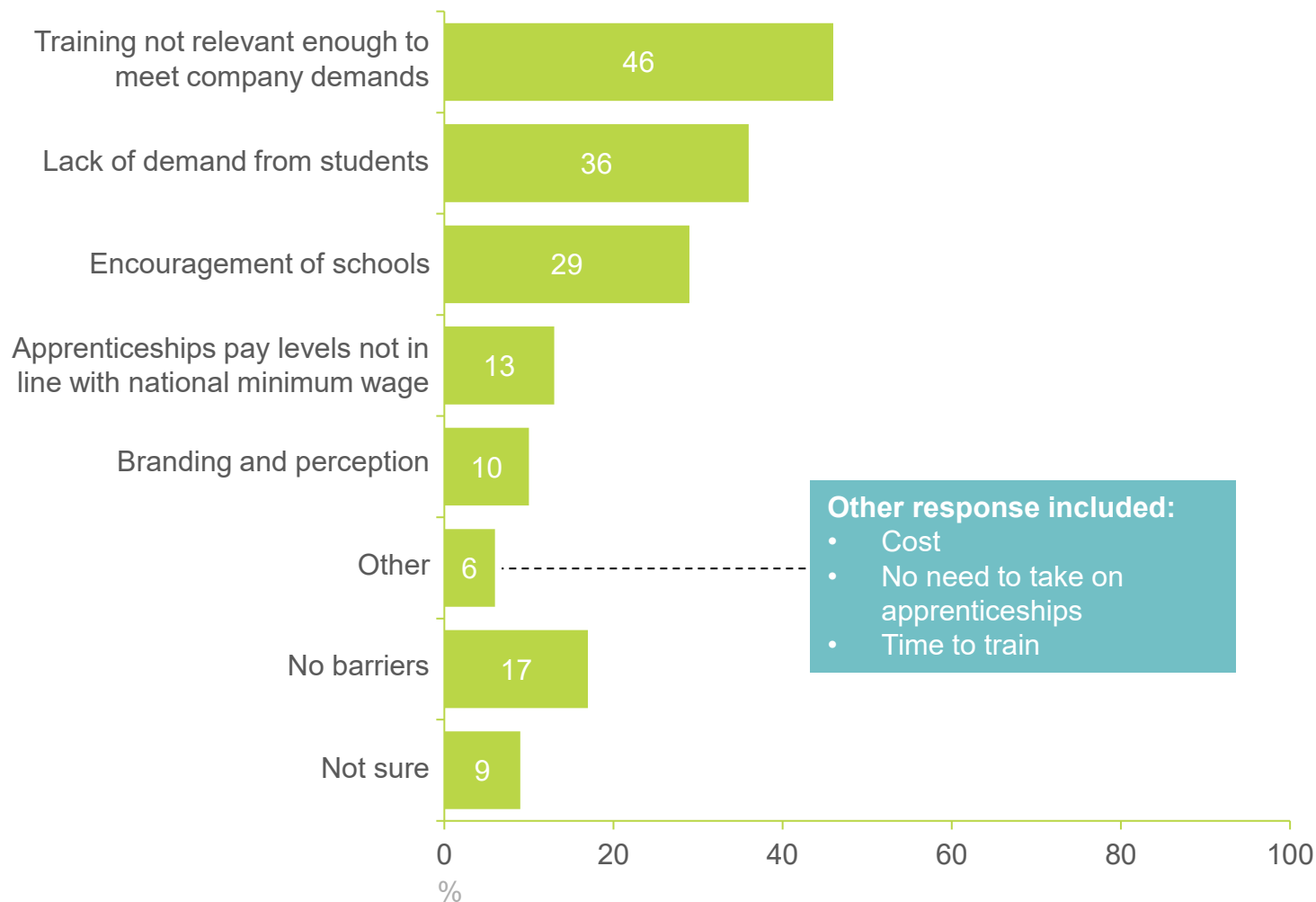
# F2 The furlough scheme starts to taper out in July and ends in October. Can you commit to taking on new apprenticeships in September 2021?

Base 190: All respondents



## F3 What barriers, if any, do you feel there are to taking on new apprenticeships?

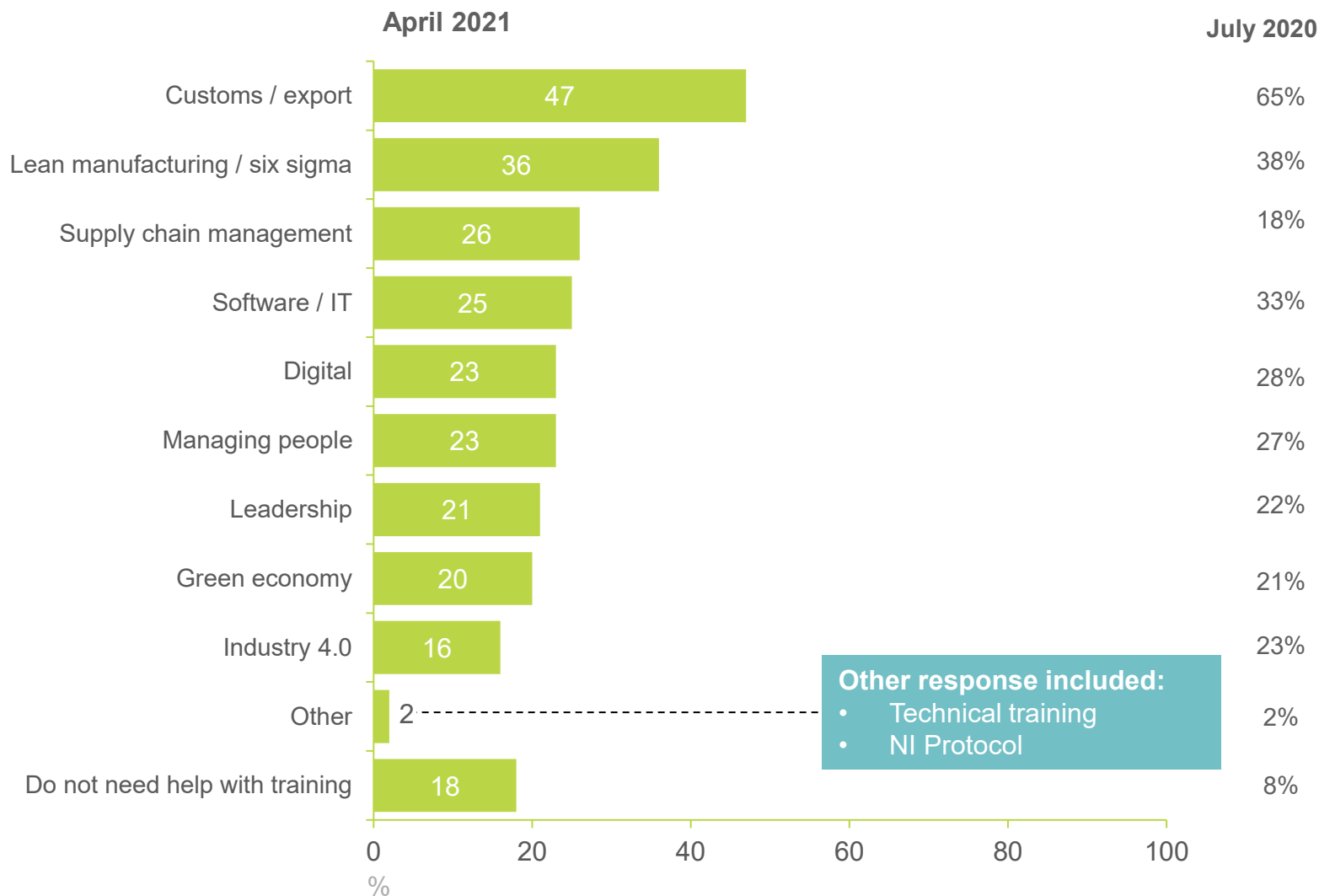
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Multi response question so percentage is greater than 100%

## F4 Which of the following areas of training, if any, do you need help with?

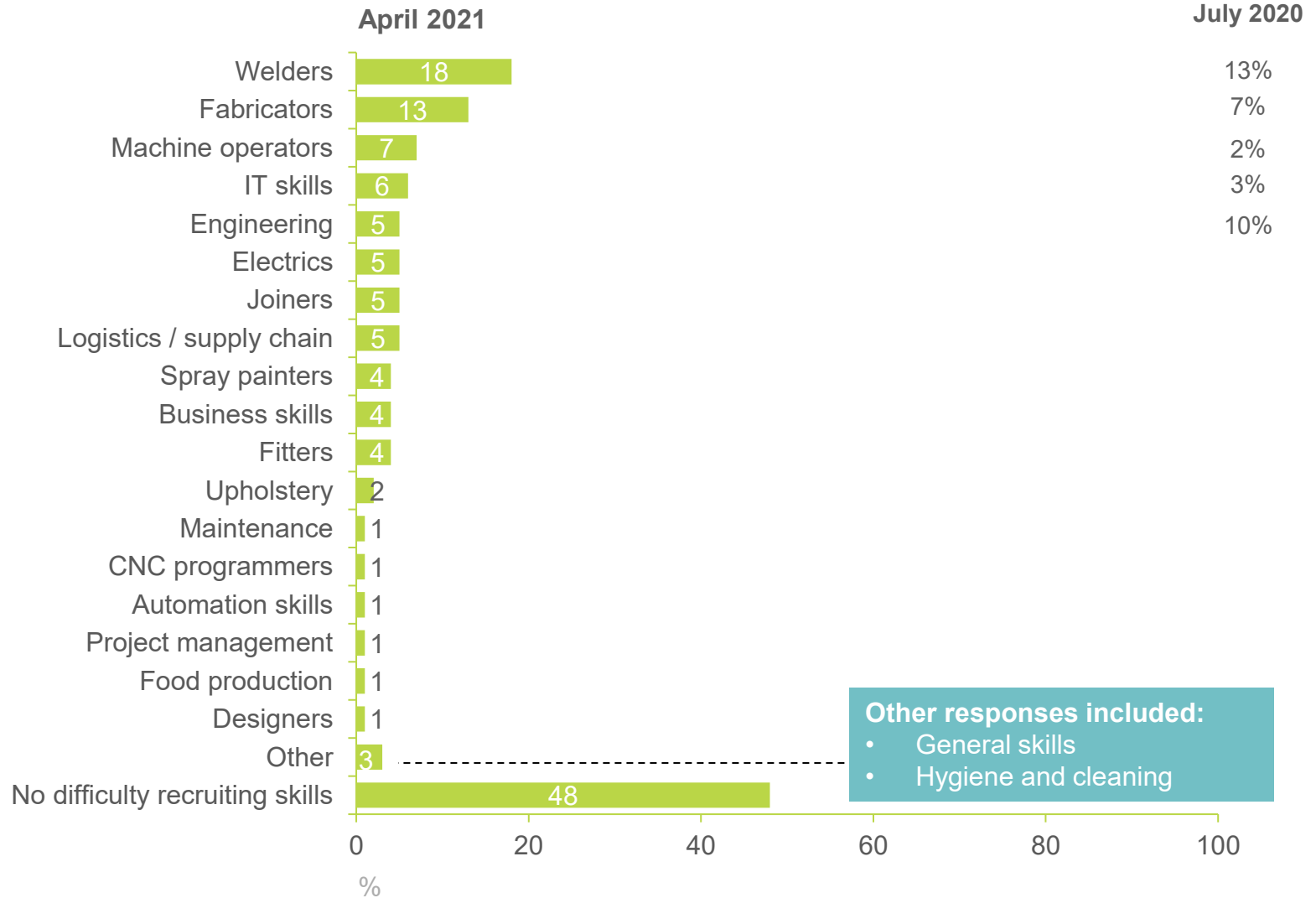
Base 190: All respondents



<sup>1</sup> Multiple choice question

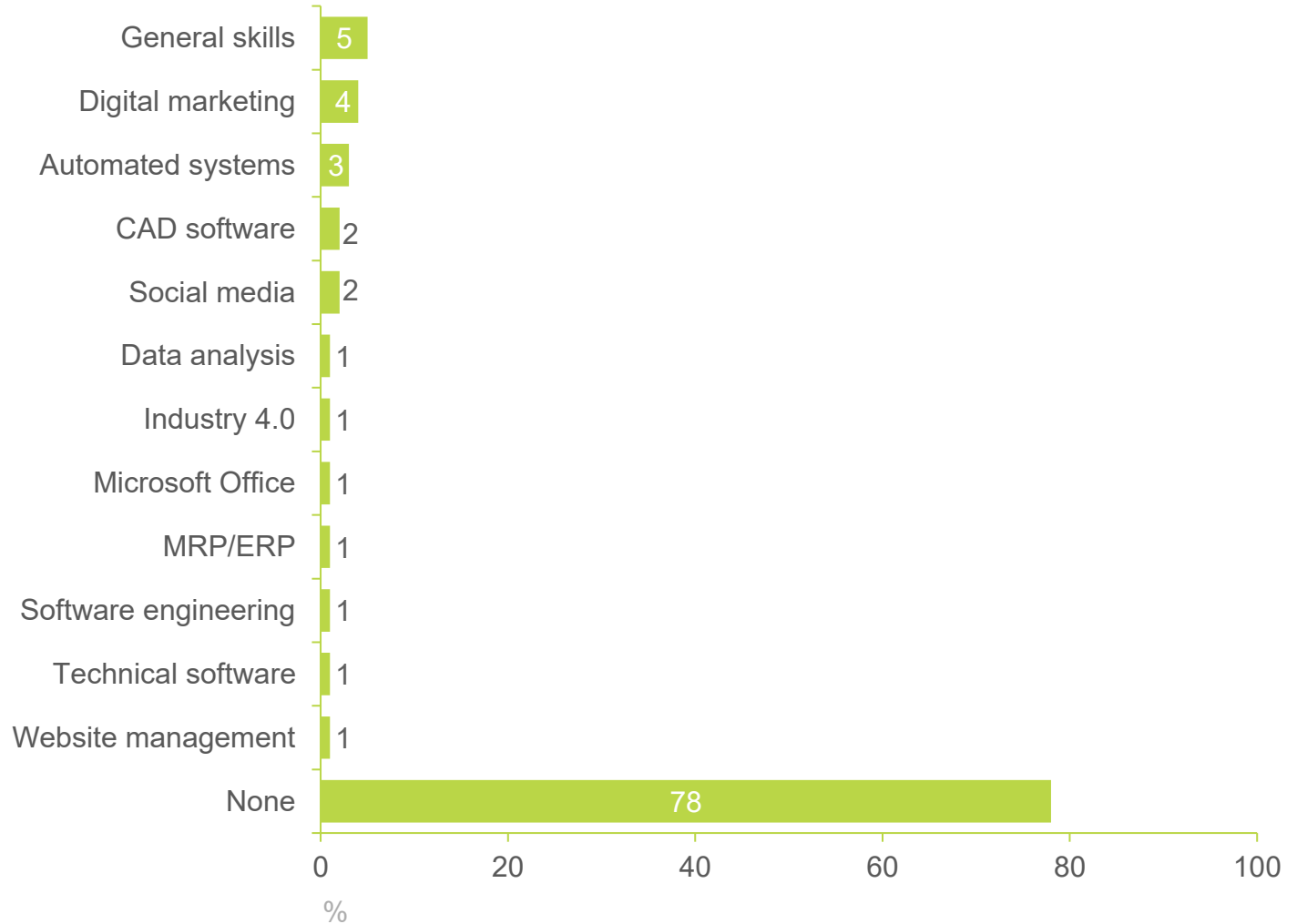
# F5 Are there any particular occupations/skills which you find difficult to recruit for from the local labour market?

Base 190: All respondents



## F6 What, if any, are your priority training requirements in the area of digital skills?

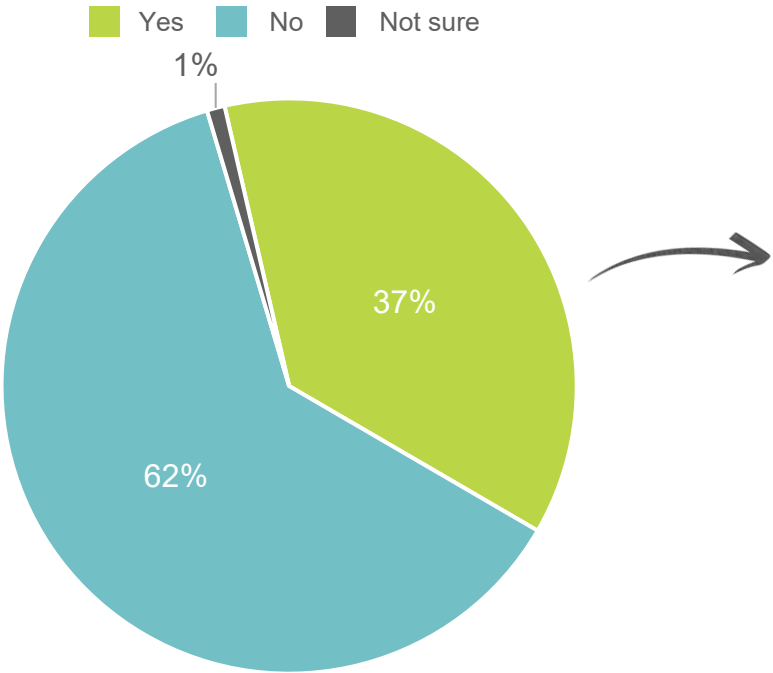
Base 190: All respondents



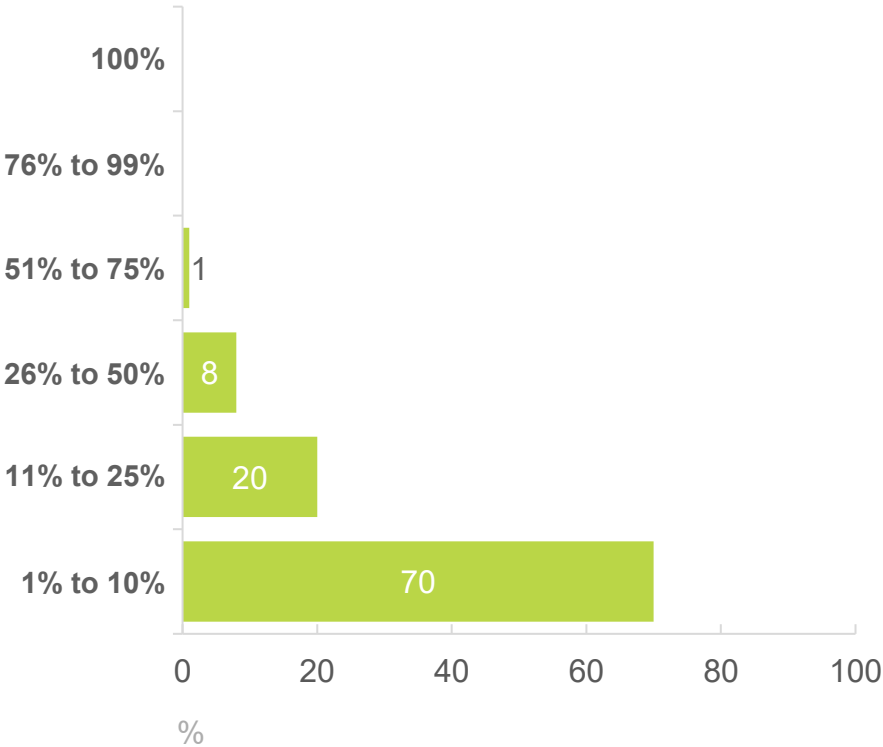
# Redundancies due to Covid

Base: 190. All respondents

**F7 Has your company already made redundancies due to Covid-19?**  
*Base 190: All respondents*



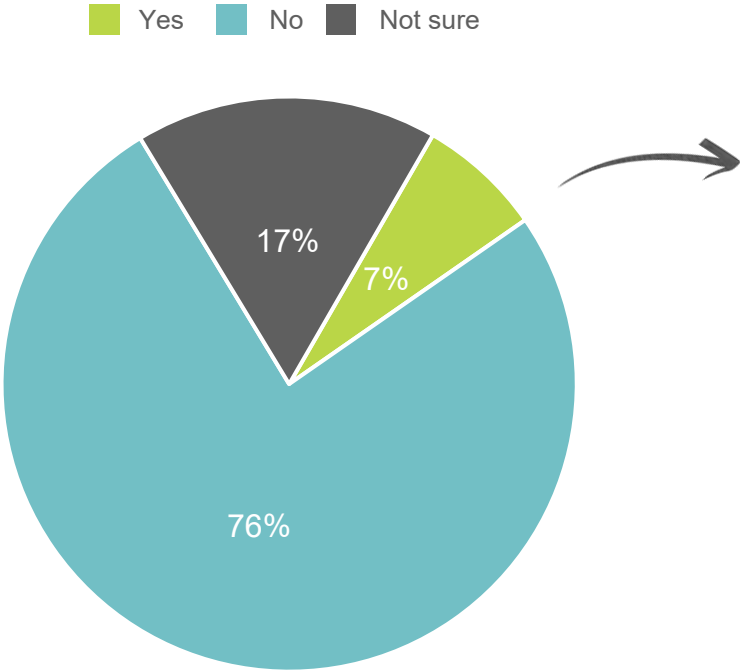
**F8 What proportion of your staff has been made redundant due to Covid-19?**  
*Base 71: Those that made redundancies*



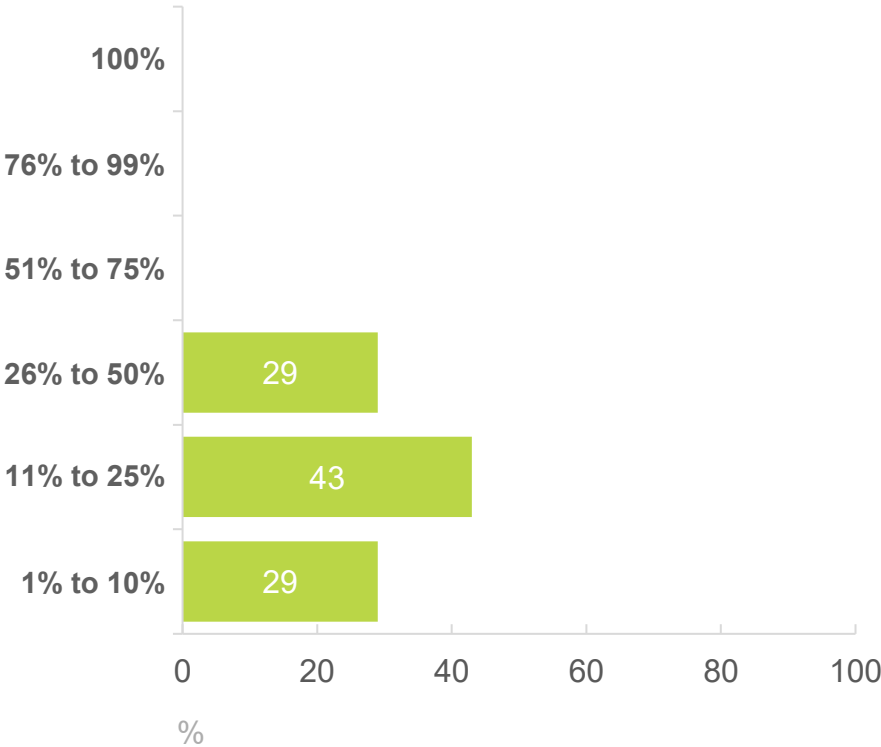
# Planned redundancies due to Covid

Base: 190. All respondents

**F9 Does your company plan to make redundancies in the next six months?**  
*Base 190: All respondents*



**F8 What proportion of your staff do you plan to make redundant in the next six months?**  
*Base 14: Those that plan to make redundancies*



Overall, 41% have or plan to make redundancies



# Innovation

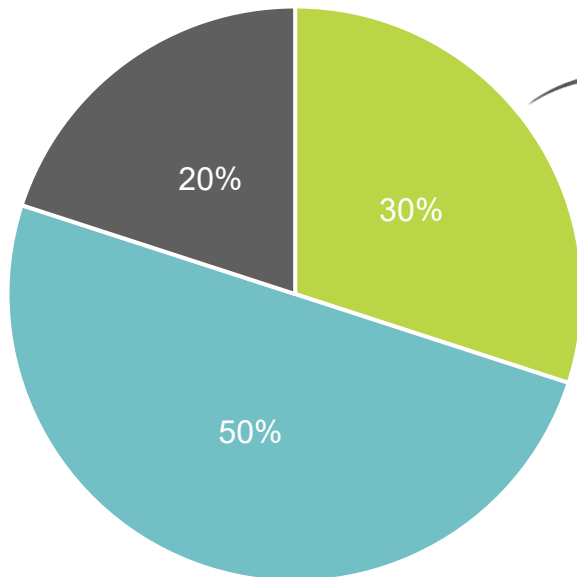
# Green technology investment

Base: 190. All respondents

## G1 Are you considering any investment in green technology in 2021?

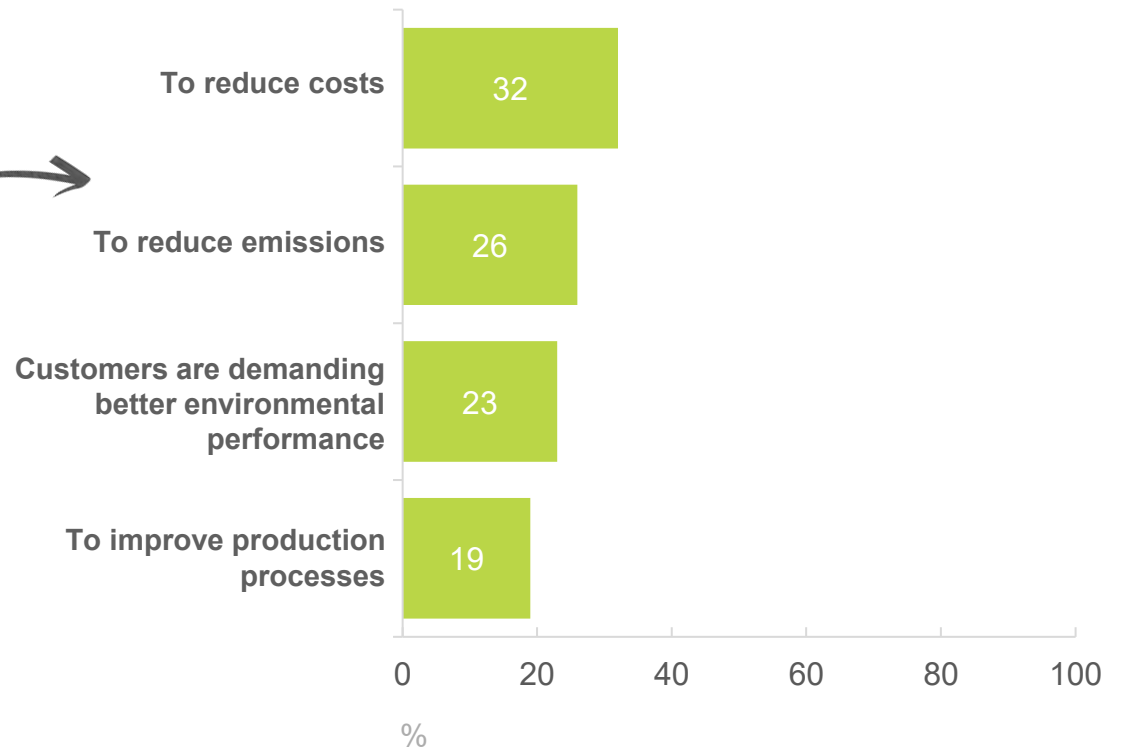
Base 190: All respondents

Yes No Not sure



## G2 Which one of the following best describes your rationale for doing so?

Base 57: Those that are considering investment in green technology





# Thank you for reading.

If you have any questions please get in touch with the team

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