

LEADERSHIP IN SCOTLAND'S  
VOLUNTARY SECTOR

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**WELLBEING,  
SUCCESSION &  
DIVERSITY**

ACOSVO.ORG.UK

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# ABOUT ACOSVO

ACOSVO (the Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations) is a growing membership organisation of 600+ voluntary sector Chief Executives and senior leaders across Scotland, all committed to the vision of: **'Excellent Voluntary Sector Leadership in Scotland.'**

ACOSVO exists to support, develop and inspire leaders; advance thinking; and strengthen connections. We do this by providing relevant services, networks, and events encouraging the sharing of ideas and good practice in a safe, confidential space. In the past year alone 1,980 participants have utilised our services from over 350 organisations.

ACOSVO holds a unique position being the only organisation of its kind

in Scotland, with our members comprising of the key decision and change makers in the sector, ranging from those who lead smaller, community-based organisations to those who head up some of the largest charities in the country.

We believe that by supporting and championing the leaders of the sector, we support and champion the sector as a whole.

For more information about ACOSVO, please visit [acosvo.org.uk](http://acosvo.org.uk)

*We believe that by supporting and championing the leaders of the sector, we support and champion the sector as a whole.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

144 voluntary sector CEO's and senior leaders, members and non members of ACOSVO filled out our Wellbeing, Succession and Diversity survey which ran from July 19th to August 23rd 2021.

This followed on from succession planning survey ACOSVO ran in 2017 that showed over 50% of the sector's leaders were planning to leave their roles in the following 5 years.

A lot has changed since then and with a more recent survey\* highlighting that almost half of charity leaders are considering leaving their roles due to burnout, ACOSVO sought to understand more about how the sector's leadership might be changing post pandemic.

*"I feel like I'm trying to keep my team afloat as well as myself, and it gets harder every week."*

Key findings from this snapshot of Scotland's sector leaders showed a huge disparity in feelings of wellbeing within work and outside of it. 86% rated their wellbeing outside

of work as 'good' or 'excellent', but this dropped by a third to 52% when in relation to work. 43% described their work wellbeing as 'poor', whereas only 14% gave this rating outside of work.

39% of leaders highlighted that they had felt the need to take time off for stress and burnout within the last year but didn't feel able to do so, with an additional 13% taking the time off.

*"Getting my board more engaged but that not resulting in me having a long list of tasks would be beneficial but a difficult balance."*

Many leaders receive little support in their role other than 'regular contact with their board' (69%) and an 'annual appraisal' (52%). Professional support networks like ACOSVO and having a mentor were highlighted by 54% and 33% of respondents as a source of support, with 'time' selected by 43% as being the biggest hurdle to getting the support they need.

More than half of respondents (53%) said they wanted to leave their role in the next 5 years, with 71% of this group looking to leave in less than 2.

The biggest reason for wanting to leave was not retirement (chosen by only 15% and unlike the results of our 2017 succession survey where this was

chosen by 30% of leaders) but for 'a new career in the sector' chosen by 50%. Further comments highlight that it's not necessarily the sector itself that is the issue but the high-level demands on the leader that are pushing many to want to reduce hours, levels of responsibility, and pressure.

Only 11% of those surveyed had a full leadership succession plan in place in their organisation.

Lastly, the survey highlights a real lack of diversity in the sector's leadership with the majority of responders being white (96%), heterosexual (84%), women (80%), aged 50-59, without a disability (43% and 89% respectively). The caring responsibilities somewhat paint a different picture with over half (54%) responding that they have some form of caring responsibilities alongside being a sector leader.

Overall, the report highlights some very worrying stats about the lack of support and expectations on those at the top. Many leaders in Scotland feel they are having to choose between their leadership positions and their healthy work/life balance and wellbeing. It also highlights that there could be a very real and sizeable gap in leadership over the

*"Regular check-ins with others in the same or similar roles, which happened last year helped."*

*"Don't feel I need other support. Need a more manageable workload and a more realistic pace of work."*

coming years if those who are looking to leave their roles follow through and there is no leadership pipeline or succession plan in place.

The fact that this data, or similar reports like the Ecclesiastical study mentioned above, don't make these positions look particularly appealing to those on the rise, will not be helping fill this potential gap in leadership either.

Organisations like ACOSVO can support in times of crisis and bring leaders together to share, learn, and develop. But more value (and support) must be placed on the sector and its leaders generally in order to avoid mass burnout, gaps in leadership, and to encourage the next generation of leaders eager and willing to take the helm. Without this the sector, its leaders, and society, will suffer.

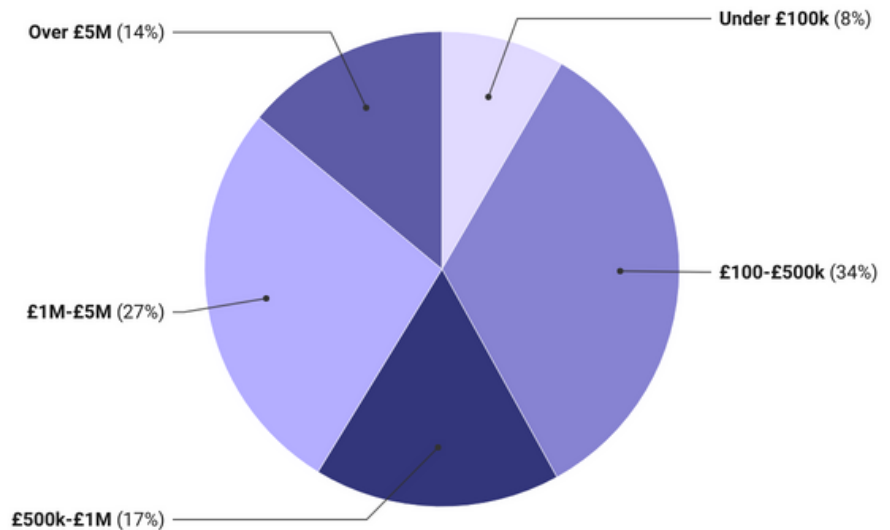
**Thank you to everyone who contributed and was so candid with their responses to this survey.**

# YOU & YOUR ORGANISATION

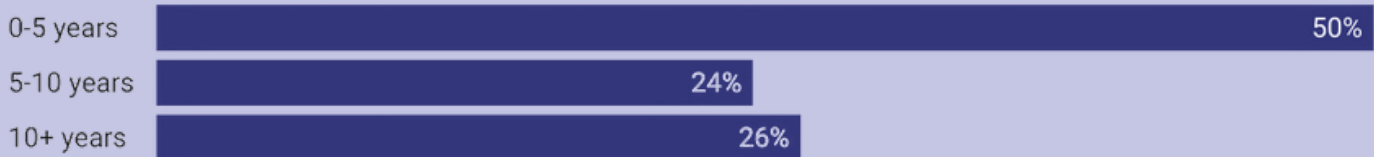
## ORG TURNOVER & WELLBEING

Baseline questions were asked in an attempt to establish any correlation between areas such as number of staff, organisational turnover, length of time in role and the impact these had on a leader's stress and wellbeing levels. There was however found to be no strong evidence that these greatly impacted the individual's wellbeing, with almost identical data reported from those leading the smallest and largest organisations in Scotland.

### What is your current organisational turnover?



### How long have you been in your current position?



### Is this your first Chief Officer position?



For the majority of leaders who responded, most had been in their role for less than 5 years and for nearly three quarters of the Chief Officers who responded this was their first CEO position. This could infer that a younger demographic of relatively new in post leaders were completing the survey. Interestingly however, 89% of those who selected 10+ years also said this was their first Chief Officer role highlighting that many leaders in the sector stay in roles for long periods of time.

*"My work engagement is high, but my energy overall is low. I give my all to work right now, then collapse in my free time!"*

# WELLBEING

# 78%

*of leaders rated their overall wellbeing as 'good' or 'excellent' but this drops to*

# 52%

*when in relation to work, with*

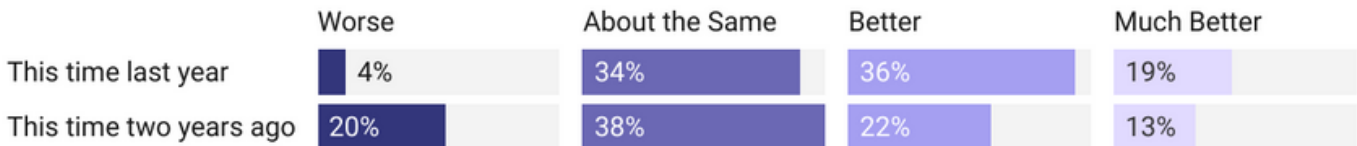
# 43%

*describing their wellbeing in relation to work as 'poor'.*

# 86%

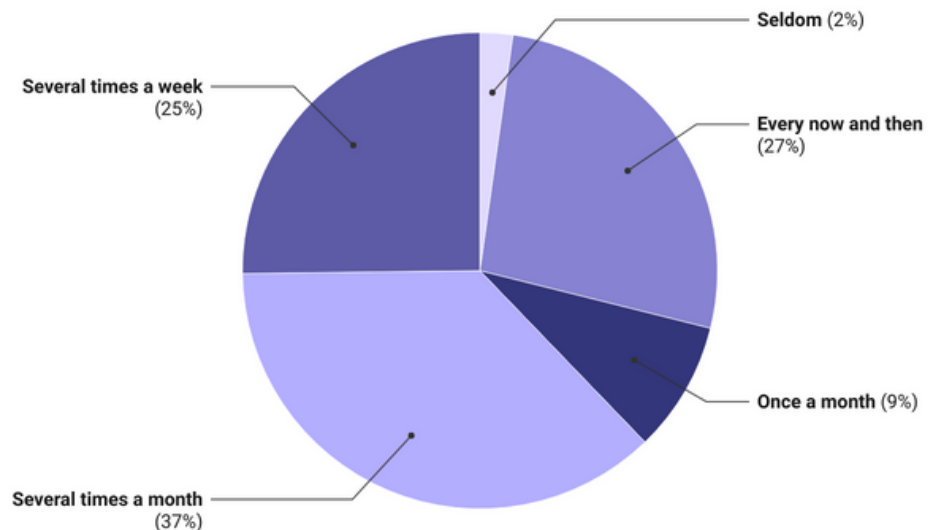
*rated their wellbeing outside of work as 'good' or 'excellent'*

## How would you rate your wellbeing compared to...?



*"For me it's not 'high' level stress - it's constant never-ending low level stress. Nothing I can't cope with just gruelling and never-ending."*

## How often do you experience high levels of stress as part of your role?



## BURNOUT

86% of respondents described their wellbeing outside of work as 'good' or 'excellent' but this dropped significantly to 52% when in relation to work. 43% described their wellbeing in relation to work as 'poor', whereas only 14% gave this same rating when considering their wellbeing outside of work.

Another worrying statistic showed close to 40% of respondents said they had felt the need to take time off due to work related stress but didn't, pushing on despite knowing they shouldn't. Further comments suggested leaders were struggling to take any time off let alone time off for stress which has larger implications about expectations, culture and pressures for leaders in the sector.

Similarly, high engagement and energy at work is often used as the positive antithesis of 'burnout' however this phrasing, especially in the voluntary sector where passion for the cause is often a huge driver, can be problematic. It has a subtle implication that if you are not highly engaged with your work, you lack dedication to your charities purpose which is not true and can push leaders even further toward burnout, as added guilt is thrown into the mix of stress and pressures.

*"I took long weekends and put more effort into looking after my health outside work. Hard balancing this but knowing the signs earlier and acting on them critical, easy to tip into full burnout!"*



# 62%

of respondents experience high levels of stress either several times a month or several times a week. Only 2% said they seldom experience high levels of stress at work.

# 39%

said they felt the need to take time off due to work related stress but didn't. 13% did take the time off.

# 46%

of leaders said they were running low on energy and work engagement, with a further 18% saying they were close to or had already 'burned out'.

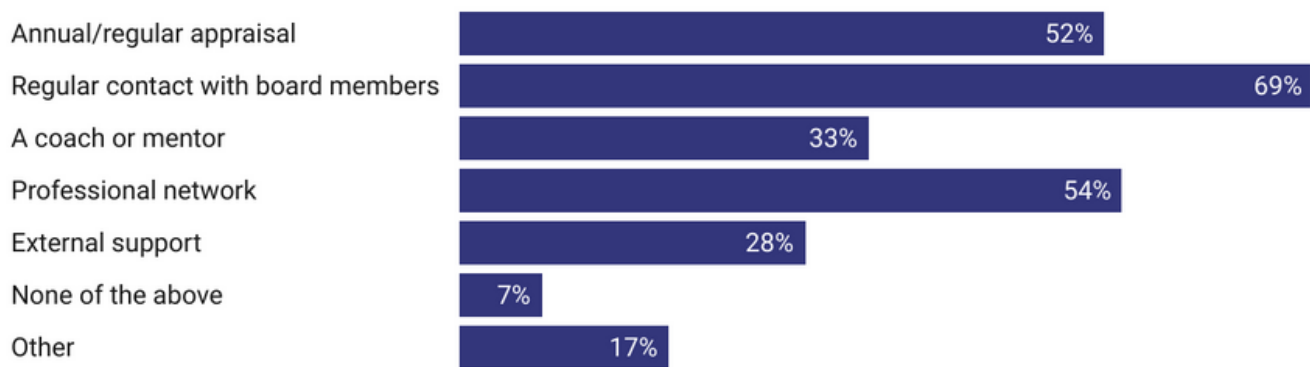
# 58%

of respondents said they had a health and wellbeing policy (or equivalent) in place in their organisations.

*"Too much to do, too little time to do it, unrealistic expectations from others, constantly needing to be seen to be calm and in control for everyone else, be there to meet others needs and feel like a robot as no one thinks you have needs to."*

*"I frustrate myself because I know my own signs of burnout and yet I feel a bit unable to do what I know needs to be done. I know the theory. It's like I've used up all that bit of me to save our services and now don't have enough to make sure I'm ok."*

## Which of the following types of support do you receive in your role?



## SUPPORT

While close to 70% have regular contact with their Board, and this was the most common form of support for leaders, when this was examined further it had two very distinct arms. The following two comments highlight the vast difference many experienced in regard to board support: "Contact with Board members is not for "support" it usually involves meetings and then more work for me." Compared to: "My Chair is fantastic - a huge support throughout". A small but sizable percentage of respondents received no support in their role, while peer network organisations like ACOSVO were identified as being a source of support for many. Mentoring and/or coaching were the most popular responses for support leaders currently do not have access to but which they felt would improve their wellbeing. This was followed by more support from/for senior leaders and regular contact with trustees who offer support or to bounce ideas around with, rather than adding to the workload and pressure.

# 43%

identified 'time' as being the biggest hurdle to getting the support they wanted. With 'lack of financial support' second at 28%.

*"Don't feel I need other support. Need a more manageable workload and a more realistic pace of work."*

*"Time. There's not enough hours in the day to do good work and to cope with 18 months of built up pressure and stress or to have the energy to cook the healthy meal or go for the walk. With a small child too who has missed out on so much my spare time tends to go to that."*

*"Getting my board more engaged but that not resulting in me having a long list of tasks would be beneficial but a difficult balance I think."*

*"Regular checkins with others in the same or similar roles, which happened last year helped. Being external from the organisation helped as were able to be more subjective. Unfortunately making or having the time is more difficult."*

*"Need extra staff roles to support workload but don't have the core funds to appoint these - trying to fundraise just to maintain current staffing."*

*"ACOSVO is a huge support"*

# SUCCESSION

**53%**

said they are planning on leaving their role in the next 5 years rising to 80% if 'potentially if a new opportunity arose' is included.

**71%**

of those that answered 'Yes' to the previous question are planning on leaving in the next 2 years.

**50%**

selected 'A new career in the sector' when asked what new opportunities they would be looking for.

**11%**

of respondents said their organisation had a proper succession plan in place. An additional 30% said they had a partial plan in place.

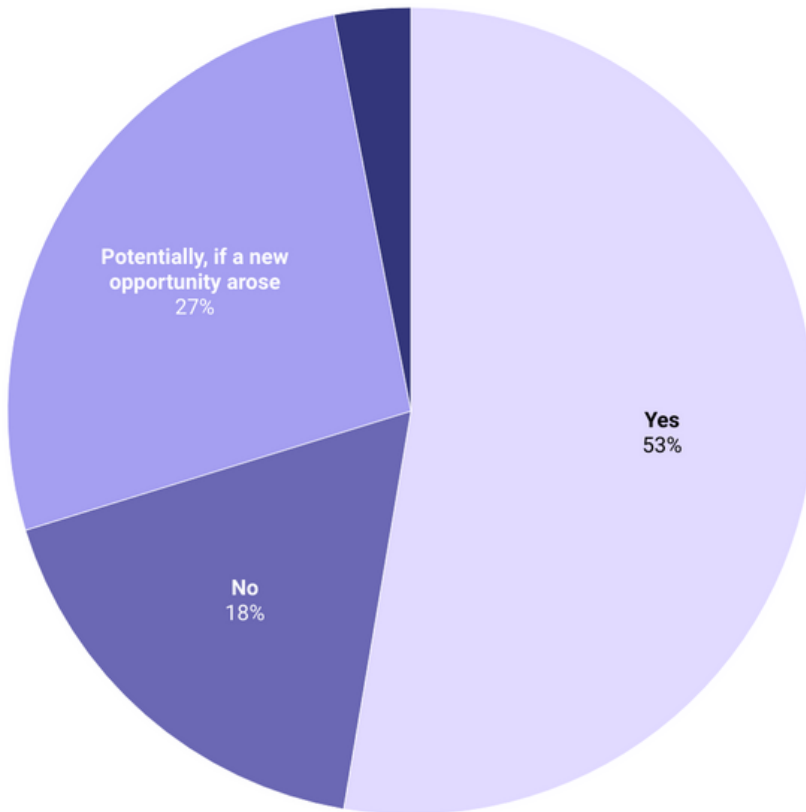
*“I’m too young to retire and don’t want to - but I always knew working at this level would have a shelf life. And the pandemic has exacerbated that. I love what I do but it can’t be at the expense of health and well-being.”*

# SUCCESSION

*“Reducing hours/level of responsibility but not clear on what I'd want to do and retirement is not imminent either.”*

## Are you planning on leaving your post within the next five years?

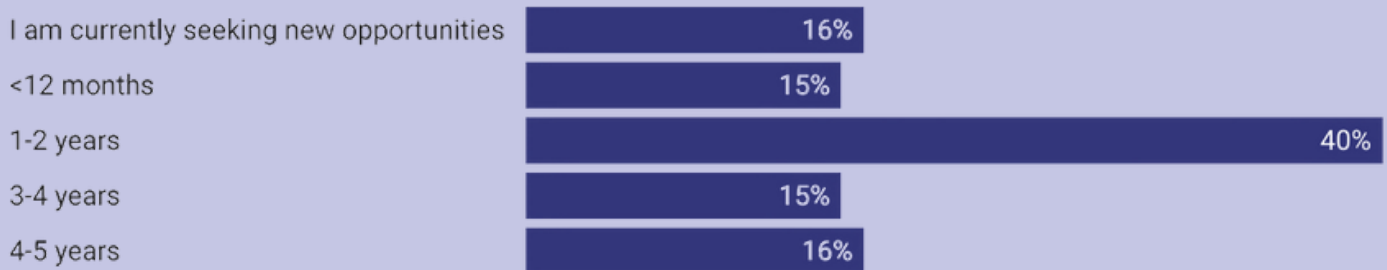
■ Yes
 ■ No
 ■ Potentially, if a new opportunity arose
 ■ Don't know



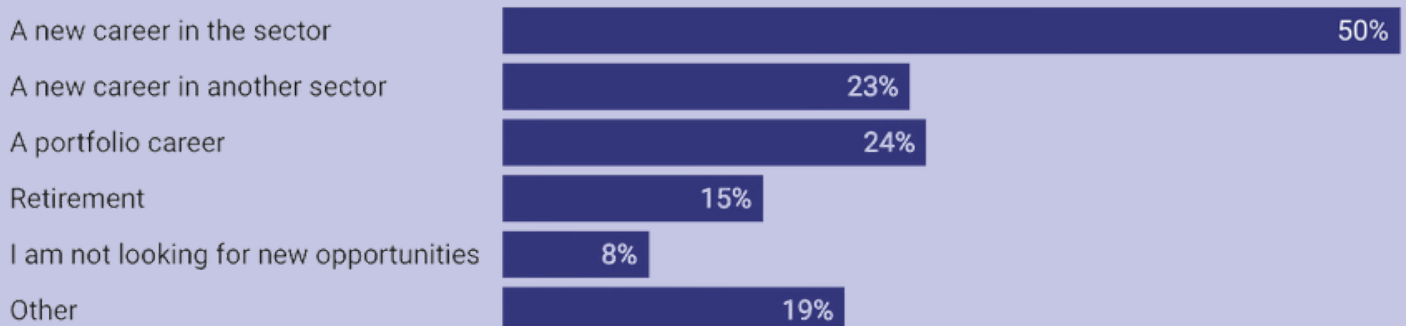
Looking at these responses, it is apparent that there could be very real and sizeable gap in leadership over the coming years. Of those that responded saying they are planning to leave their posts, 71% said they were planning to leave in less than 2 years highlighting issues once again around succession and the leadership pipeline in the sector.

Interestingly, the reasons for leaving have changed. In ACOSVO's 2017 succession survey the most common reason for leaving (30%) was retirement however this was only chosen by 15% of respondents this time around. 'A new career in the sector' was the most popular response with a major theme coming through that while many were not at an age, nor wished to, retire, working at this leadership level is unsustainable for their wellbeing and work/life balance.

## If you answered yes to the above, within what time-frame are you considering leaving your post?

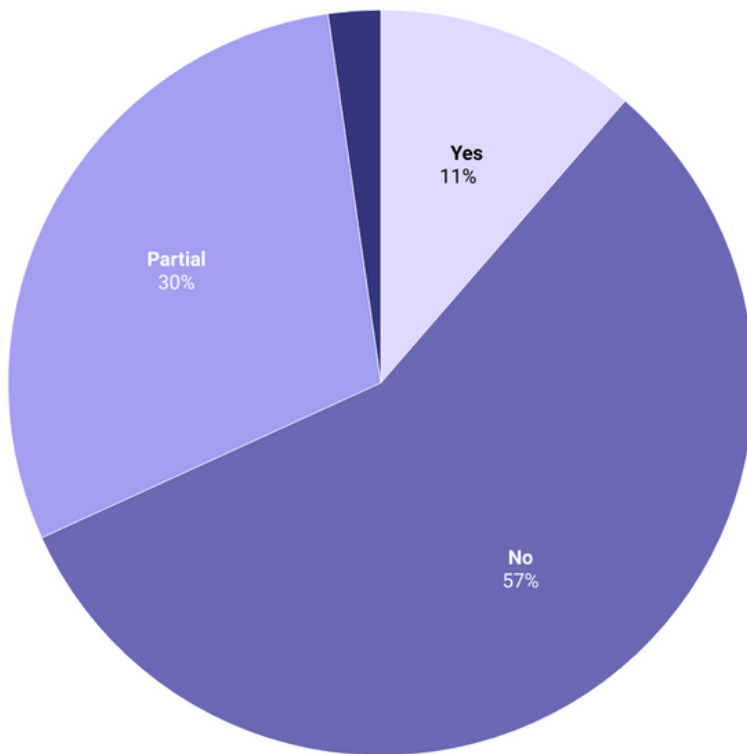


## If you are considering leaving your post, what kind of opportunities are you looking to pursue (please select all that apply)?



## Does your organisation have a leadership succession plan in place?

Yes No Partial Unsure



*"I developed the org's strategy which included succession planning in relation to training and opportunities but was not given the support to implement this. There is a wide gap between managers and operational director, which the managers would struggle to bridge."*

## EMERGING FUTURE

Two open ended questions about concerns and hopes for the emerging future were asked.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, funding was easily the biggest concern for leaders in the sector, with close to 80% of responses mentioning some version of funding or financial sustainability concerns. Another common response was around recruitment, staffing shortages, and retaining current staff, with capacity, and in turn the wellbeing of staff, being directly linked to this staffing issue. While a whole host of other issues were raised, including around climate change, governance, succession, the vast majority of responses included one or more of the above issues.

The hopes identified were much more varied but did primarily still fall into a few broad areas including, the increased collaboration the pandemic had brought; pride in teams and pulling together; new ways of working including increased flexibility, hybrid working, a 4 day week, and more importance placed on wellbeing; and also hope for growth, direction and new opportunities on the horizon.

### Top concerns for the emerging future

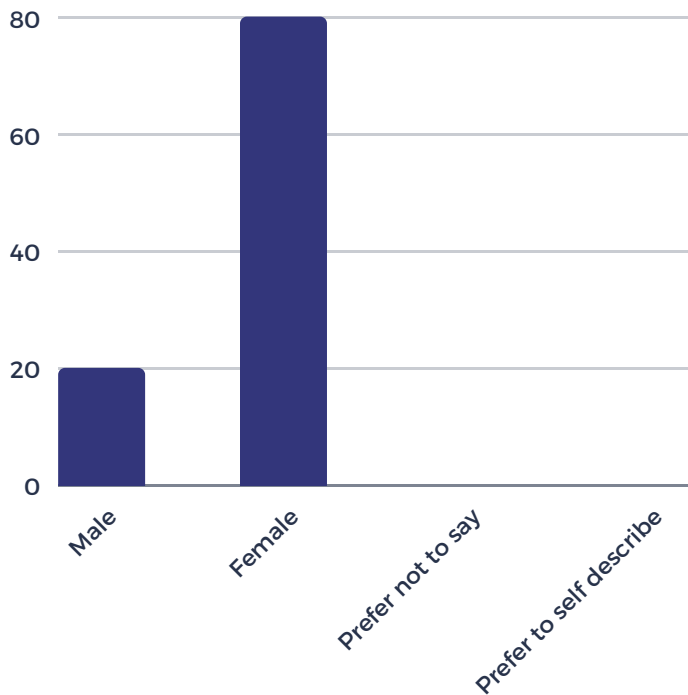
- Funding/financial
- Staff shortages & recruitment
- Staff wellbeing & burnout
- Capacity (both personal and staff)
- Personal wellbeing

### Top hopes for the emerging future

- Greater collaboration & connection
- New ways of working & importance of wellbeing
- Team dynamics
- Growth & new opportunities

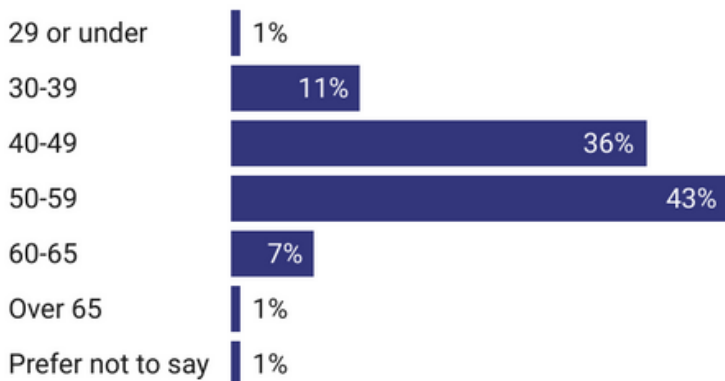
*"Reimagining approaches to work, changing work dynamic and a commitment to work patterns that suit the individual where possible."*

# DIVERSITY



## CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

54% responded saying they had some form of caring responsibility whether that is being primary or secondary carer of a child under 18, an older person, or a disabled child or adult.



\*ACEVO Pay and Equalities Survey 2021

## GENDER & AGE

80% of responders to the survey identified as female, with the other 20% identifying as male. This compares to ACOSVO's wider membership which is currently 64% female, 34% male and just less than 1% preferring to self describe. There may be issues to consider here like whether women may be more likely to be open about their, and others, mental wellbeing but without proper analysis in this area it would just be anecdotal and even potentially do more than harm than good.

Similarly with age, 79% of respondents are aged between 40 and 59 but given the level of seniority the survey was aimed at this is perhaps unsurprising. This broad age profile was also replicated in ACEVO's 2021 pay and equalities survey which showed the majority of CEO's were aged between 45 and 64.\*

## FUTURE LEADERS

While these stats represent a fairly narrow view of who is most likely to be a leader in Scotland's voluntary sector, it is important that emerging and future leaders see a place for themselves in these positions.

Working in collaboration, ACOSVO's diversity and inclusion plans intend to increase visibility and pathways to leadership positions of those less represented in our current structures. Diversity in leadership whether ethnicity, gender, age, disability etc, is proven to be a marker for success, providing greater depth and breadth of experience and perspective which can only be a positive thing for the future of the sector.

**93%**

answered they were 'white British/Scottish'

**84%**

identified as heterosexual

**89%**

do not consider themselves to have a disability

**54%**

of respondents have caring responsibilities

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