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Perennial Wellbeing Research Report **2025**

For the Horticulture Sector

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Helping people
in horticulture

Perennial

Perennial (Gardeners Royal Benevolent Society) Wellbeing Research Report 2025

For the Horticulture Sector

SIG Reports and Policy Papers 2025

Perennial Wellbeing Research Report 2025

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Executive Summary

Perennial and the University of Exeter's Social Innovation Group (SIG) came together to research the wellbeing of workers in the horticulture sector. The research consisted of a survey completed by workers. Where possible, results were compared to the findings of a similar survey conducted by Perennial in 2021.



Following the survey, sector leaders reflected on key findings at a workshop and considered collaborative actions to improve the wellbeing of workers. The recommendations that are summarised below have been formulated in light of our research, discussions with sector leaders and, where relevant, other research studies. Importantly, these recommendations are for the industry and are intended to spark action and cooperation across the sector.

Recommendations for Industry





Actions for sector-wide issues

-  The creation of connected networks that share guidance, best practices and case studies at a local level and across the sector. Ideally, sector area-specific networks (e.g. for gardeners) would be connected locally and to a central network that is used to share relevant information across the sector. A diagram of how these connected networks would work can be seen in the appendix (Item 1).
-  Perennial can be used and promoted as a source that signposts information about local support. Local signposting can be further enhanced by building relationships with other relevant organisations, such as local voluntary sector infrastructure organisations.
-  Employees need to be encouraged to seek advice and/or support early into problems. Support should be non-judgemental and provided in comfortable environments.
-  The challenges that are endured by self-employed workers should be given consideration. Sector-wide discussions around ensuring support for self-employed workers – especially those in roles that involve long periods of lone working – should be initiated across all sector networks.
-  Employers in relevant sector areas can be encouraged to support local networks for self-employed people – particularly by offering their networking activities to self-employed workers.
-  Elevate the sector's value in the public domain via the establishment of a policy steering group. The main outcome being to attract added investment in the short, medium and longer term.


Actions around employment

-  Employment appraisal and review processes may be used to share person-centred financial guidance that is available through organisations like Perennial. The sharing of guidance and information around pensions should be part of these appraisals and reviews.
-  Appraisals and reviews can be used as an opportunity to explore career development plans and boost confidence around the uptake of relevant training opportunities.


Actions around wellbeing

-  Employees should be provided with space and time to discuss their wellbeing.
-  Where possible, discussions around social activities that workers value should be facilitated and encouraged.
-  Measures that prevent the escalation of poor physical and mental health amongst workers should be recognised and adopted in workplaces. A checklist of actions has been provided and can be seen in the appendix (Item 2).
-  Early reporting of accidents should be encouraged as a form of prevention. Even minor impacts on physical wellbeing can become more problematic for an individual in the future if they are reported late.

Actions around financial management

-  Personal financial management approaches, such as household budgeting, can be more effective if applied in peer-to-peer groups. Peer-to-peer groups reduce stigma and a sense of being patronised. It should be noted that this recommendation is based on recent national research and peer-to-peer approaches in this area have not been tested in relation to the horticulture sector.

Actions around digital skills

-  Workers would benefit from the signposting of information on how to spot and stay safe from online (phishing and malware) scams.

Additionally, the challenges that are endured by self-employed workers should be given consideration. Sector-wide discussions around ensuring support for self-employed workers – especially those in roles that involve long periods of lone working – should be initiated across all sector networks.

The recommendations above are drawn from our research which demonstrates that workers in the horticultural sector have a lower level of life satisfaction compared to the national average (53.60% scored lower than the national average). The Office of National Statistics's (ONS's) score for life satisfaction was used to determine this finding. Low scores for life satisfaction are linked to financial precarity, job security worries, confusion around career development opportunities and co-morbidities (two or more diagnosed conditions). Of these, no confidence or empowerment with money has the greatest impact. The statistics for the relevant findings are summarised below:

- **61.26%** of individuals without an emergency fund (savings amounting to three months or more of salary) scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.
- **66.19%** of workers who did not know where to find career development information scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.
- **66.53%** of workers with comorbidities (two or more health conditions) scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.
- **74.38%** of workers who had job security worries scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.
- **88.16%** of workers who had no confidence or empowerment over money scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.

Physical discomfort and working with physical discomfort remain commonplace amongst workers. Specifically, 84.84% of respondents experienced aches and pains in the last 6 weeks, which is an increase in comparison to 2021 (78.00%). These circumstances lead to a culture of presenteeism, which is when someone goes to work even when they feel unable to carry out their work-related tasks.

Low pay and job insecurity were identified as two other common problems. Here, the sector could benefit from increased external investment to improve pay levels and the number of secure jobs. In terms of personal financial management, household budgeting worked well once such budgets were in place. Although, just under 1 in 3 people were unable to save what is recommended for an emergency fund (three or more months of salary put aside).

Digital confidence was not an issue for the respondents of our research. However, the sharing of guidance and information around scams would be of benefit to the sector. Encouragingly, our research indicates the difference that positive engagement and campaigning can make. A lack of awareness around blood pressure is a key problem nationally. Perennial's work around blood pressure has yielded positive results. Between 2021 and 2024, the proportion of workers who are aware of their blood pressure measures rose from 27.00% to 41.57%.

Finally, emerging research shows that individualised approaches to dealing with wellbeing-related issues are less effective than working on problems collectively. Perennial will collaborate with the horticulture sector to work on the recommendations that are made in this report. They will use the learning that was established through our research to support industry and build a better future for people working in horticulture.

Introduction

Physical discomfort and working with physical discomfort remain commonplace amongst workers. Specifically, Perennial and researchers from the University of Exeter's Social Innovation Group (SIG) collaborated to produce this research report. It was funded through an Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Award. The research aimed to understand the wellbeing of workers in the horticulture sector, the barriers to good wellbeing, and how workers can be supported.

Specifically, findings from the following research activities are covered:

- A survey on the wellbeing of workers in the horticulture sector.** The survey covered a range of topics, such as life satisfaction, job security, training and career development opportunities, and aspects of physical health and mental health, to ensure wellbeing was studied holistically. Respondents completed the survey in Spring/Summer 2024.
- A workshop for sector leaders.** At the workshop, the survey's initial findings were discussed and sector leaders were invited to reflect on: a) what is being done to address key issues; b) what can be done to provide better support for workers? and c) what support the sector needs to adopt actions that can improve worker wellbeing?

The results that are presented in this report build on the wellbeing survey that Perennial co-ordinated in 2021¹. Although it is difficult to directly determine how the sector has changed in terms of wellbeing since 2021 by comparing both surveys, this report reflects on 2021's results where relevant. The main reason for not being able to make a direct comparison between 2021's survey and 2024's survey is because different workers (respondents) have answered the two surveys, and some survey questions were adapted for 2024. 2024's survey also includes new questions. Importantly, useful insights can still be drawn by considering both sets of results.

Where relevant, this report also draws from existing research employee wellbeing. The authors of the studies and reports that are considered are included in brackets throughout the text. The full details of these studies and reports are provided in the reference list.

Methods

A survey was rolled out to workers in the horticulture sector by Perennial in Spring/Summer 2024. The survey's questions captured:

- Demographic information.**
- The area/type of work that workers carried out – including information around their contractual situation and employment status.**
- Opportunities for training and career development.**
- Insights into physical and mental aspects of wellbeing.**
- How respondents managed their finances.**
- Confidence in using digital products and services.**

Importantly, the survey included the following two validated, nationally-used measures:

- The Office for National Statistics's (ONS's) Life Satisfaction Score.**
- The Short-Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).**

¹IWI (2021). Perennial Health and Wellbeing Survey Report and Recommendations. International Wellbeing Insights. (Available upon request)

Both these measures are used to understand someone's overall level of wellbeing (WEMWBS, 2020; ONS, 2023).

The survey's results underwent initial analysis in Autumn/Winter 2024. Initial findings were presented at a workshop for sector leaders in November 2024. At this workshop, a series of focus group activities were conducted to understand what support is available for workers, what can be done better, and what support is needed by the sector to implement actions that can help workers in the future. Mainly, the focus group activities concentrated on overall wellbeing, career development and training opportunities and financial support. After this workshop, added analysis was undertaken on the survey's results to identify links between specific experiences, e.g. job insecurity, and life satisfaction.

In the next section, we outline our findings comprehensively.

Findings

1452 respondents completed, at least, part of the survey. All primary questions yielded between 890 and 1200 responses. To ensure transparent reporting, the sample size of each question is noted when its results are covered.

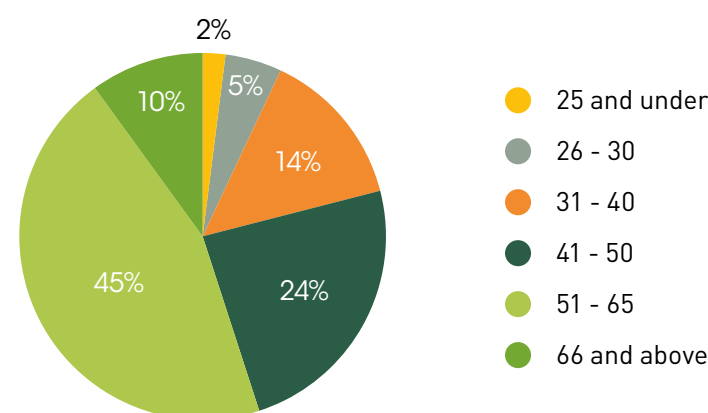
This section is structured as follows:

1. **Who completed the survey?**
2. **General sector-wide issues.**
3. **Employment (including insights on training and career development).**
4. **Wellbeing (including physical and mental aspects of wellbeing).**
5. **Financial management.**
6. **Life skills: digital confidence.**

Who completed the survey?

Our survey sample is dominated by older age respondents. People who are 41 years of age and above make up 79.00% of the sample (45.00% for 51-65 years of age; 24.00% for 41-50 years of age and 10.00% for 66 years of age and above).

Age of Respondents (years of age)



Graph 1. Age of respondents – based on 1448 responses.

With regards to gender, the sample is relatively balanced between males and females. Although, male respondents do slightly outnumber female ones. Of 1445 respondents, 812 are male (56.20%) and 628 respondents are female (43.50%). Five individuals who responded to the survey did not identify as a binary gender (0.30%).

Further, the following table displays the respondents' employment areas within the horticulture sector and is based on 1452 responses.

Area of Sector	Percentage of Respondents
Gardener	43.50%
Growing and nurseries	11.40%
Grounds keeping and maintenance	7.60%
Garden centre worker	7.50%
Garden designer or architect	6.30%
Prefer not to say	6.20%
Landscaping	5.70%
Academic	4.30%
Countryside, parks and open spaces	3.30%
Arboriculturist/tree surgery	1.40%
Floristry	1.40%
Greenkeeping	1.20%
Forestry and woodlands	0.20%

Table 1. Respondents' work areas within the horticulture sector – based on 1452 respondents.

Gardeners constitute the most significant part of this research's sample. Apart from people working in growing and nurseries, workers in other areas of the sector contribute less than 10.00% each to the overall sample.

In terms of contractual arrangements, the most common circumstance reported is to be employed full-time by an employer (43.90% of 1452 respondents). Self-employed full-time individuals and self-employed part-time individuals follow as the second and third most numerous categories – 20.50% and 15.80% respectively. These figures mean that 36.30% of the sample are self-employed.

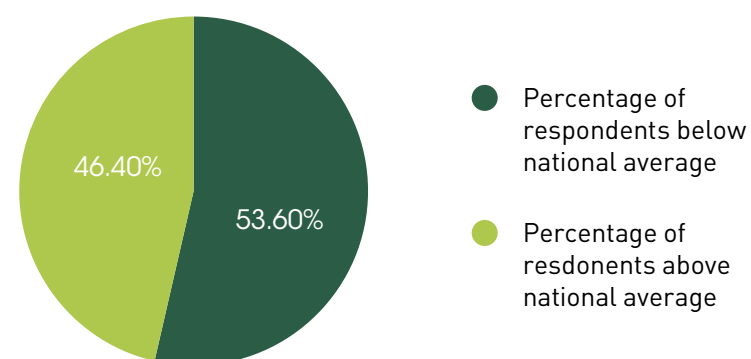
When compared to national averages, a higher rate of self-employment in the horticultural sector (compared to others) is shown by the survey's sample. Overall, 13.10% of the UK's workforce is self-employed (Statista, 2024).

The next sub-section outlines the general sector-wide issues that were highlighted by our research activities.

General sector-wide issues

One of the most pressing findings of our survey is that there is a lower level of life satisfaction amongst horticultural workers compared to the United Kingdom's overall population. In accordance with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) standard measure for life satisfaction, respondents were invited to provide an overall satisfaction score (out of 10) for their life. In comparison to the latest figures, the national average for life satisfaction is 7.45 out of 10 (ONS, 2023), over half (53.60% of 1397 respondents) of the survey's respondents scored below that figure.

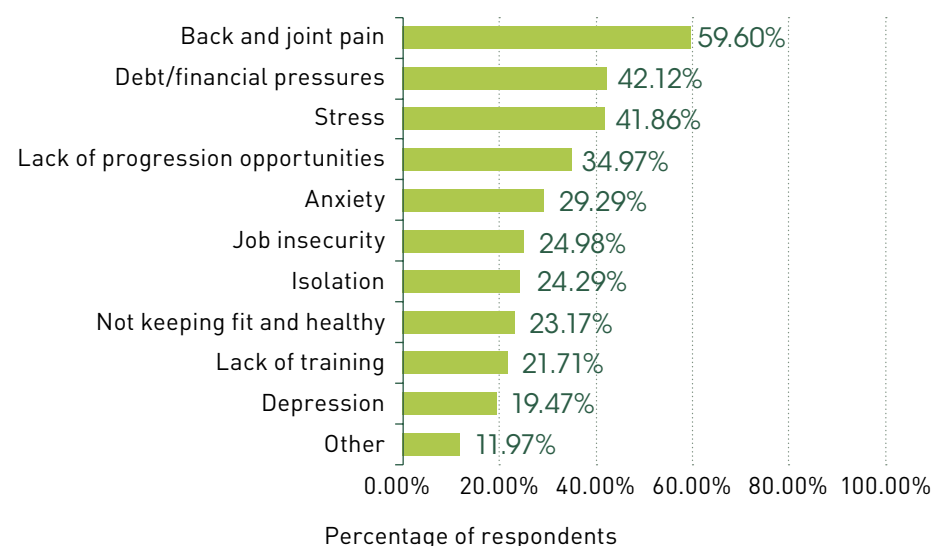
Life Satisfaction Score



Graph 2. Life satisfaction score summary – based on 1397 responses.

To explore the main sources of 'life dissatisfaction', survey respondents were asked about the sector's key issues from the perspective of a worker. That question yielded the results that are shown in the following graph.

Prevalence of Health Issues Amongst Workers



Graph 3. Key issues for workers – based on 1161 responses (respondents were able to select more than one option).

The sector's impact on physical wellbeing – specifically on back and joint pain – is seen as the most pressing issue experienced by workers. As seen in the graph above, stress also significantly impacts workers in the sector.

Evidence suggests it is reasonable to assume some degree of causality between these factors, as the relationship between continued and/or chronic pain and downturns in mental wellbeing is documented in many studies (Goesling et al. 2018; van Rysewyk et al. 2023; Lumley et al. 2024).

Alongside the impact of work on the body (back and joint pain) and mind (stress), financial insecurity and a lack of progression opportunities are highlighted as significant issues. These four areas (back and joint pain, stress, debt/financial pressures and lack of progression opportunities) featured as the top four key issues in 2021's survey too. Therefore, it can be assumed that the issues mentioned above continue to remain notable problems for people working in the sector.

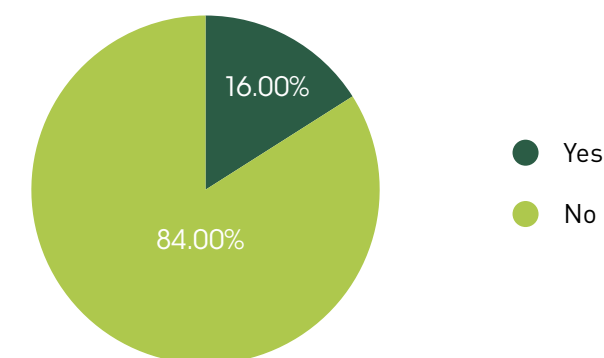
These findings are consistent with the national picture. Back and joint pain remains a significant problem for workers across all sectors in the United Kingdom. For example, 27.00% of respondents to a general workplace survey (national) in 2023 mentioned that they had worked with backpain. Additionally, 8 million working days were lost to sick leave due to back pain (Simplyhealth UK, 2024). Calls to redress this issue centre around the early reporting of back and joint issues – even if individuals experience minor pain. In 2017, a Public Health England-led toolkit for employers was amassed by occupational health experts and states the following:

“The sooner an MSK [musculoskeletal] problem is managed, the less likely here will be long-term work loss. (BITC, 2017, p. 33)”

The toolkit also identifies significant links between physical pain and mental health. More holistic approaches that understand a health problem's wider impacts on the body and mind can therefore help to create person-centred strategies. Such strategies can prove to be effective, as they consider a person's personal situation and how their problem impacts their day-to-day life (Silver, 2018). This point will be expanded upon where our findings around mental wellbeing are detailed.

Accidents and the way that they are dealt with (both by workers and employees) is another area that needs sector-wide consideration. Specifically, accidents at work in the past five years were experienced by over 1 in 10 respondents (16.00% of 1332 respondents). To put that into context, for a workforce of 100 people, sixteen people would experience an accident at some point over five years. The relevant results are shown in the graph that follows.

Accident at work in the past 5 years



Graph 4. Experiencing an accident in the past 5 years – based on 1332 responses.

Direct comparisons with national data are difficult to establish here, as different surveys relate to different timeframes and classify accidents in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, nationally, the proportion of employed people that experience a non-fatal accident at work each year can be estimated as being somewhere between 1% and 2% (HSE, 2024; ONS, 2024, Statista 2024b). This estimate suggests that accidents occur at a higher rate in the horticulture sector than within the overall UK workforce.

Further, 59% of respondents replied that they reported their accident at work, while 41% did not. 87 individuals provided a reason for not reporting their accident. Two themes dominate these responses:

- Being self-employed or a sole trader.
- The accident being deemed too minor or unimportant.

Further analysis of these responses revealed a sub-theme, which is self-blame. The quote below demonstrates how individuals can blame themselves for accidents and dismiss its importance and/or impact:

“ It was my fault. I badly cut my finger with a hedge-cutter, but I used [my own] first aid and carried on. ”

The following table summarises the top reasons for not reporting accidents.

Ranking of reasons that would stop an individual reporting an accident	
First	Nothing
Second	Worried about consequences
Third	Other
Fourth	No expectation to report
Fifth	No clear process
Sixth	Too much paperwork
Seventh	Peer pressure to not report
Eighth	Takes too much time

Table 2. Reasons for not reporting an accident – based on 1187 respondents.

Encouragingly, as seen in Table 2, most individuals felt that no barriers existed to prevent them from reporting an accident. Specifically, the proportion of respondents who selected nothing as a reason for not reporting an accident is 65.20%. Other was the third most popular reason given. Two themes, as summarised below, dominated responses that specified these other reasons.

- This question was not relevant, as the respondent is self-employed.
- Job worries, whereby individuals feared losing their job and/or losing income if they were advised to take time off due to an accident.

The first of the two themes suggests that self-employed workers have either no or limited processes in place that help them to deal with accidents. The provision of support in this area should be a key consideration, as even minor impacts on the body from an accident can lead to negative health issues in the future (SUU, 2024). Such impacts are worsened when individuals repeatedly injure the same body parts and do not take enough time for recovery between episodes of reinjury (Knight, 2008). A shift away from a culture of self-blame and/or dismissing accidents as being too minor can help with workers seeking the right help at the right time. Overall, we concentrate on accidents here because they pose a potential risk for increased physical wellbeing problems (pain), which can then influence downturns in mental wellbeing (Goesling et al. 2018; van Rysewyk et al. 2023; Lumley et al. 2024).

Insights from the sector-leaders' workshop on general sector-wide issues

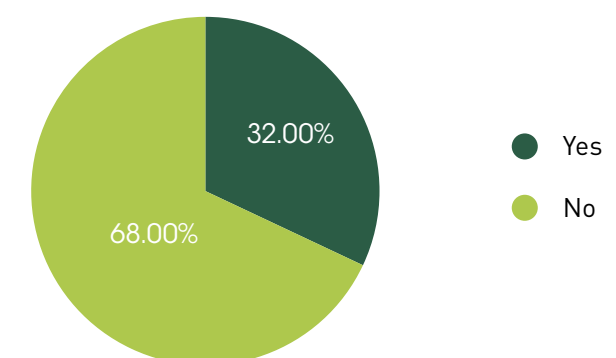
- The adoption of strategies and actions that address sector-wide issues was highlighted as a difficult challenge during the workshop. The main reason for difficulty was seen to be the sector's breadth in terms of the types of work it covered. Sector leaders reflected on how horticultural work is hugely diverse and includes people who grow plants to make fine art drawings of those plants, individuals who do high-end garden landscaping, workers who maintain public green spaces, tree surgeons, farmers and garden centre retail personnel (and many more). Therefore, actions that are relevant to all working contexts are hard to establish.
- In addition, workshop attendees discussed how messaging around such actions would need to speak to a wide range of workers and working contexts. An interesting idea that was offered was to form small networks within the different areas of the sector. These networks can then scope, design and adopt actions that are more relevant to their area. With such an approach, sector-wide learning (on wellbeing) can be shared when representatives from each of the sector's areas come together to form a larger network that is maintained and co-ordinated regularly. Examples of this approach being in place were given (such as the Young People in Horticulture Association's work). However, the establishment and co-ordination of such networks at a truly sector-wide level was seen as a gap. A period of continued engagement that promotes and shares the potential benefits of the network model that is described here was seen as a key first step. Again, ideally, this engagement would need to be specific to the sector's different areas.

The next sub-section details our findings on employment.

Employment

The findings in this sub-section concentrate on job security and themes relating to training and career development. The responses to whether workers were worried about their job security are summarised by the graph that follows.

Worried about job security



Graph 5. Job security worries – based on 1392 responses.

The proportion of respondents who felt worried about their job security is similar to 2021 – 31.00% in 2021 and 32.00% in 2024. Consequently, it would be reasonable to assume that job insecurity remains a key problem for workers especially in challenging economic circumstances. When compared to the national context, these

findings suggest that job insecurity is more prominent within the horticultural sector than amongst the overall workforce. For example, recent research by the Work Foundation found that 19.80% of the UK's workforce were experiencing job insecurity (Work Foundation, 2022).

Moreover, further analysis of the survey data revealed that job security worries had a significant influence on lowering life satisfaction. 74.38% of workers who were worried about their job security scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.

425 respondents gave reasons for their job security worries. A summary of the key themes that emerged from their responses is provided below:

- **The UK-wide Cost of Living Crisis's impacts are being experienced in multiple ways. Specific concerns were:** i) less work due to clients having less money; ii) keeping up with rising costs; iii) setting prices so they cover business running and living costs, while ensuring that custom can still be attracted and iv) employers making cuts (redundancies).
- **Family/home life issues feed into job security worries. For example, ill-health in the family can mean that people take on care responsibilities. Sometimes these care responsibilities can arise suddenly and unexpectedly. Overall, such responsibilities impact on how and when individuals can work.**
- **Personal health concerns can spark job security worries. Predominantly, such worries relate to occasions when health issues limit a person's capacity to work. Individuals can also worry about what might happen in the future if they become unwell.**
- **Unpredictable/unstable contracts (including long probation periods) give rise to job security worries.**
- **Seasonal and weather-related influences can create anxiety. Specifically, bad weather makes it difficult for people to work and earn money in certain areas of the sector, e.g. gardening.**
- **Fears around job security were voiced by individuals who have older client bases. For such individuals, future security becomes hard to imagine without the opportunity to attract new custom.**

The prevalence of job insecurity becomes a more pronounced issue when we consider national trends. Interestingly, a recent national survey found that a large majority (77.00%) of workers value job security over pay (CXM, 2024). Labour market economists have termed this shift as going from 'the great resignation', where jobs are changed in the pursuit of better pay, to 'the big stay', where people value the stability of long-term contracts and working in teams that have developed longstanding relationships (CXM, 2024). Moreover, the detrimental impacts of constant change on mental health are well-documented by many public health studies – especially when such changes are unplanned and/or sudden (Miller, 2010; Swinton-Douglas, 2016; Kaldestad et al. 2024).

Respondents were also asked about the prevalence of certain negative workplace experiences. The results showed that the most prevalent negative workplace experience is: working long hours. 76.30% of 1333 respondents feel like they work long hours either some of the time, often or all of the time.

The percentage of respondents who feel like they work long hours all of the time is 14.2%, which equates to over 1 in 10 respondents. Significantly, this is an area that seems to have worsened since the 2021 survey. In that survey, 64.00% of 899 respondents stated that they worked long hours sometimes, often or always.

Other negative experiences, i) bullying, harassment and discrimination; ii) isolation and iii) strained relationships with managers / colleagues, did not yield significant results. Responses for those experiences noted that they, on average, occur rarely.

Alongside workplace experiences, opportunities for training and learning can influence a person's wellbeing positively (Easterbrook et al. 2015). The following graph shows the qualification levels that have been achieved by the respondents.

Prevalence of Qualification Levels Amongst Workers



Graph 6. Qualification levels of respondents – based on 1152 responses (respondents were able to pick more than one option if they held more than one qualification).

Industry tickets and Level 2 qualifications are the most common types of qualification amongst the respondents. Overall, our qualifications findings suggest that individuals do go on to achieve higher levels of qualification once they begin a course/programme. Yet, it should be noted that over a quarter of the respondents have no formal qualification.

An encouraging finding is revealed by a follow up question around training. Over three quarters of respondents know where to access career development information. The sources that are used to access information on career development are summarised in the table that follows.

Information Source	Percentage of Respondents
Online	38.10%
Employer	24.27%
Professional body	18.82%
Colleagues/friends/family	9.76%
Training provider/college	7.55%
Perennial	1.50%

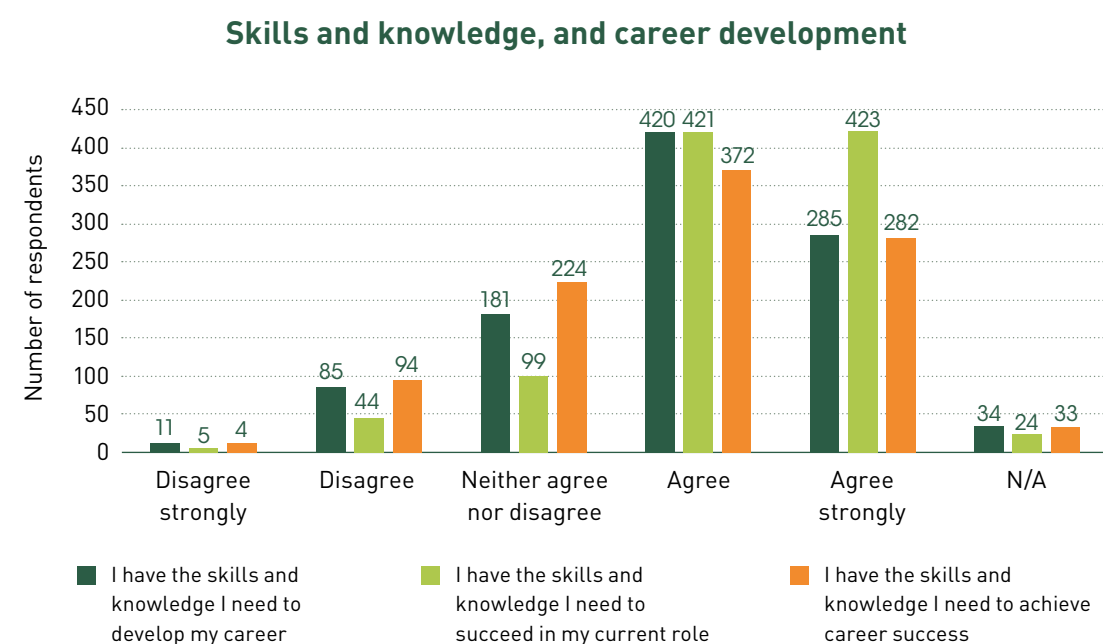
Table 3. Information sources used by respondents for career development information – based on 861 responses.

Although, further analysis showed that not knowing where to find career development information influences life satisfaction negatively. 66.19% of respondents who did not know where to look for career development information scored lower than the national average for life satisfaction.

A qualitative question that asked workers to describe what career success looks like was included in our research's survey. Six key themes dominated responses:

- **Happiness and satisfaction – including maintaining a good home life and being able to have a comfortable life.**
- **Having enough and/or a steady flow of work.**
- **Opportunities to learn new things and progress.**
- **A satisfied client base.**
- **Completing projects successfully.**
- **Maintaining/keeping jobs, which some respondents referred to as 'surviving!'**

The following graph summarises how respondents feel about certain aspects of their skills, knowledge and career development.



Graph 7. Skills, knowledges and career development – based on 1016 responses.

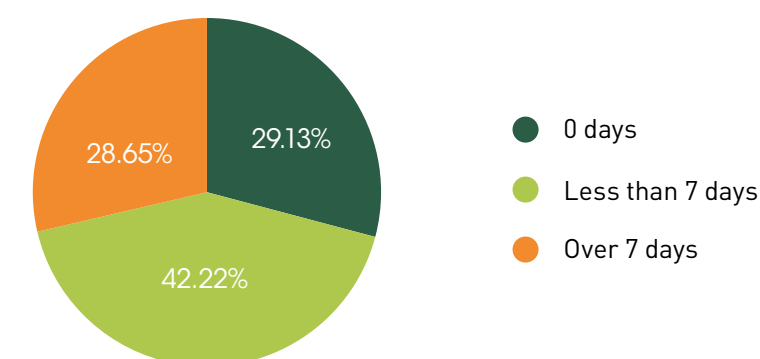
Generally, career success, progress and development can be regarded as strong points for the sector. Specifically, most respondents agree or agree strongly that they have the right skills and knowledge to develop their career, succeed in their current role and make their career a success. However, key needs concerning career development were of interest to us. The table that follows shows how respondents ranked such needs.

Ranking needs for achieving career goals	
First	Industry specific training
Second	Self-employment advice
Third	Networking opportunities
Fourth	Financial wellbeing information
Fifth	Other
Sixth	Career advice and guidance
Seventh	Employment support e.g. job hunting and CVs

Table 4. Ranking of needs to achieve career goals – based on 1016 responses.

As implied in the table above, relevant training, self-employment advice and networking opportunities are seen as the top needs by workers. Where respondents chose other and provided a qualitative response, two key points emerged as important considerations. First, respondents mentioned that sectoral change (in general) is needed to drive the achievement of career goals. Predominantly, this general change involves rethinking recruitment processes, which can be 'too complicated' and/or 'unreliable'. Second, respondents mentioned the demotivating effect that low pay and long hours has on setting and achieving career goals. The demotivation that is highlighted here is, to some extent, further demonstrated by the graph that follows. A significant majority (71.35%) of respondents spent either zero days or less than 7 days undertaking career development-related training in the last year.

Number of days spent on training and developing career in the last 12 months



Graph 8. Days spent on career development training in the last year – based on 1016 responses.

Of note, our initial results depicted career progress and development as strengths of the sector. However, career development emerges as an area that needs support when we focus on training and the lack of time workers have to pursue training. This point was reaffirmed by the discussions that took place during the workshop for sector leaders.

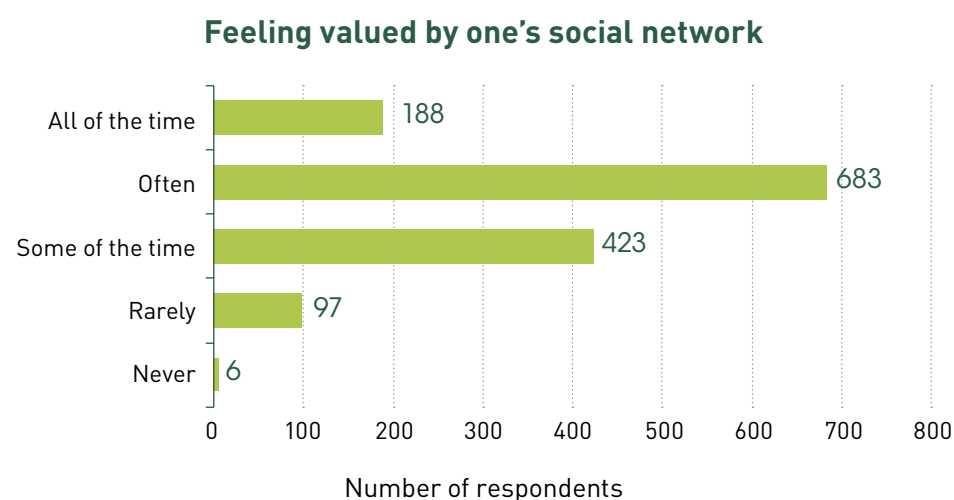
Insights from the sector-leaders' workshop on general sector-wide issues

- In relation to employment, sector leaders discussed how workers need nurturing to build confidence in planning and progressing their career development. Working environments and relationships with colleagues and managers that instil confidence were seen as a key influence. Such environments and relationships were deemed to be even more important in circumstances where workers were not 'traditionally academic' or 'high achievers at school'. In essence, individuals who had negative experiences in educational settings need added encouragement to follow learning and training pathways. It was mentioned that peer-to-peer discussions and presenting case studies of success stories can help with providing encouragement and building confidence. Additionally, the 'tone' of career progress meetings and reviews (usually held by managers) was said to impact on confidence as well. Managing such meetings and reviews as a benefit (to the employee) can motivate people to pursue pathways of progression through training.
- Two key barriers to training were discussed. The first barrier related to the vast number of training courses that exist and the complexities of navigating choice vis a vis career pathways. It was mentioned that employees can get confused about what is best for them. Information about relevant opportunities – particularly those that relate to specific areas of the sector – can get lost amongst the volume of information that is generated by an online search for courses. The second barrier concerned the high level of self-employed people in the sector (compared to the UK's overall workforce). Workshop attendees discussed how self-employed workers are less likely to establish relationships that can help them gain confidence and pursue career development opportunities.

The next sub-section summarises the findings that relate to wellbeing.

Wellbeing

The relational and social aspects of wellbeing have been documented by a growing body of academic research (Atkinson, 2013; Esmene et al. 2020; White and Jha, 2023). Therefore, how an individual relates to their social network acts as an important influence on their wellbeing. The following graph relates to our findings on the social networks of the respondents and feeling valued.



Graph 9. Feeling valued by one's social network – based on 1397 responses.

Overall, respondents feel valued by their social networks, with only a relatively small proportion feeling valued rarely or never (7.37%). While this is an encouraging result, support for worker wellbeing in the sector can be enhanced by further strengthening social networks within workplaces. Specifically, positive workplace relationships play a key role in positive wellbeing outcomes (Colbert et al. 2016). At present, it can be difficult for individuals in the sector to establish such work-related relationships, due to the high prevalence of self-employed workers.

Next, we cover what people thought was important to them around wellbeing. The table below shows how respondents ranked certain aspects of wellbeing in terms of their importance.

Ranking of aspects of wellbeing that are valued	
First	Eating a balanced diet
Second	Managing mental health
Third	Participating in physical activity – other than work
Fourth	Keeping weight in a health range
Fifth	Managing alcohol consumption – i.e. drinking in moderation

Table 5. Ranking aspects of wellbeing – based on 918 responses.

In 2021's survey, 62.00% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their emotional wellbeing was important to them. The high ranking of managing mental health in the table above demonstrates a certain level of consistency with that finding.

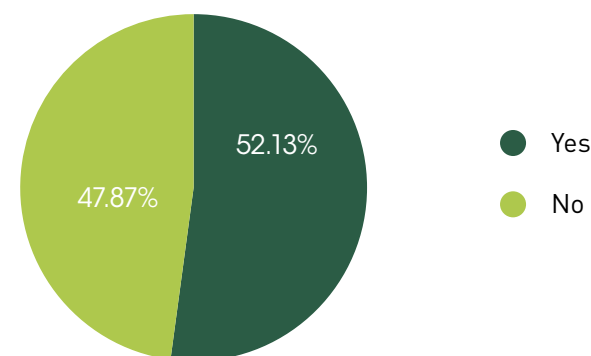
The value given to wellbeing is further demonstrated by significant levels of adherence to health professional advice. The table below shows the relevant results.

Statement	Response	Percentage of Respondents
I act on the information I obtain about my health from a professional.	Strongly agree or agree	62.20%
	Neither agree or disagree	27.78%
	Disagreed or strongly disagreed	10.02%

Table 6. Tendency to act on information from health professionals – based on 918 responses.

To understand levels of ill-health, respondents were asked about current health conditions that were expected to last more than 12 months. Workers who are experiencing such conditions and those who are not are matched quite evenly (see the graph that follows).

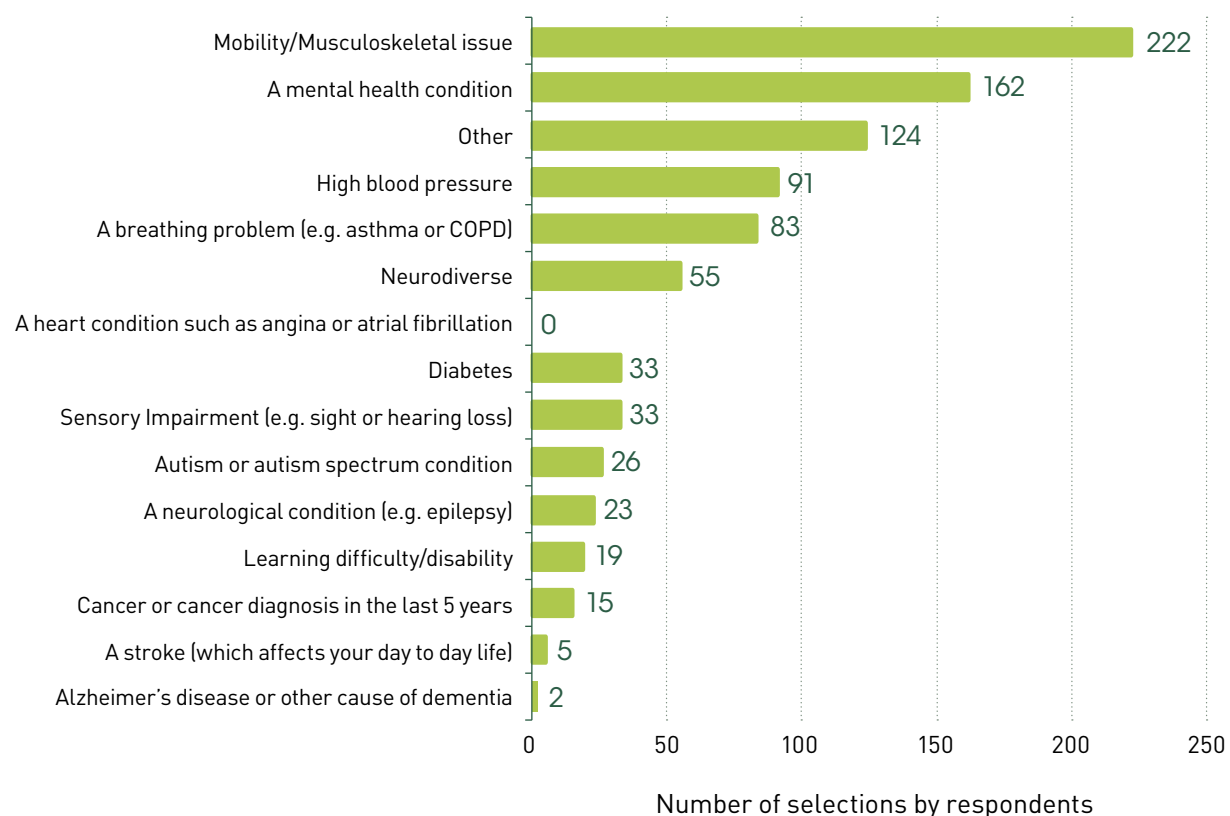
Health condition expected to last more than 12 months



Graph 10. Health conditions expected to last more than 12 months – based on 917 responses.

Notably, the proportion of workers experiencing a condition that is expected to last more than 12 months was larger in 2024's survey in comparison to 2021's survey (52.13% vs. 41.00%). Although those surveys cannot be compared directly, the upward trend in such conditions should not be overlooked. This finding is consistent with existing research on ageing workforces (EU-OSHA, 2016). The graph that follows shows the types of conditions that respondents are experiencing.

Prevalence of Health Issues Amongst Workers



Graph 11. Types of health conditions – based on 473 responses (some respondents selected multiple options).

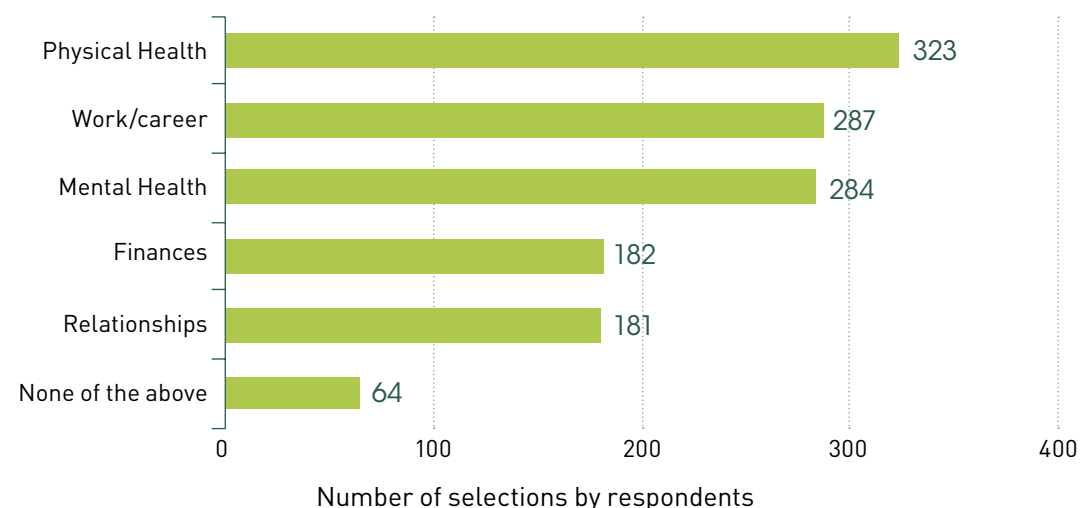
Further, the graph above illustrates that physical wellbeing is a key issue for the sector. Mobility and musculoskeletal health conditions are the most prevalent type of condition amongst workers. A high prevalence of aches and pains was confirmed by another question as well. 84.84% of 910 respondents mentioned that they experienced aches and pains in the last 6 weeks. This finding demonstrates an increase in comparison to 2021's result (78.00%).

Mental health issues are the second most common type of condition being experienced. These findings are consistent with the results that are covered in the sections on general sector-wide issues and employment. In particular, we have reaffirmed the links between physical ill-health (e.g. aches and pains) and mental ill-health (e.g. stress and anxiety).

Significantly, further analysis showed that individuals with two or more conditions experience lower levels of life satisfaction. 66.53% of individuals with one or more conditions reported lower life satisfaction than the national average. Individuals with two or more diagnosed conditions are often referred to as having comorbidities. Here, our findings are consistent with existing research. For example, a large study of 67,366 participants highlighted that individuals who reported being very dissatisfied with life, on average, scored three times higher on a scale for comorbidities (Rosella et al. 2018).

We were able to further understand the impacts of ill-health through the results that are summarised in the graph below.

Areas of life impacted by health conditions



Graph 12. Areas of life impacted by health condition – based on 473 responses (some respondents selected multiple options).

Physical health emerges yet again as the key area of concern. Although, all the options (in the graph above) were selected by a significant number of respondents, showing how the impacts of health conditions can be far reaching. Essentially, individuals can experience difficulties in multiple areas of their life due to a health condition. Therefore, approaches to understand the exact impacts of a condition must be person-centred (holistic approaches) and focus on the experiences of the individual (Silver, 2018).

Interestingly, an even split is revealed when we consider workers who take action when they experience physical discomfort and those who do not. In other words, the prevalence of seeking professional help for aches and pains is similar when compared to the prevalence of not seeking such help – 48.70% versus 51.30%. When compared with 2021's survey, a drop in the percentage of workers who seek advice is seen. In that survey, 62.00% of respondents mentioned that they sought advice.

The following table shows how respondents ranked reasons for not seeking advice.

Ranking of reasons for not seeking advice for aches and pains	
First	I don't think my current health issue requires medical attention
Second	I only seek help when I am really ill/really not feeling well
Third	I don't want to take time off work
Fourth	I prefer to deal with my health on my own
Fifth	Other
Sixth	I am concerned that I may be advised to stop doing the things I enjoy or key tasks

Table 7. Reasons for not seeking professional advice for aches and pains – based on 394 responses.

In Table 7, the top two reasons suggest that individuals tend to trust their own judgements about their health and whether they require advice. The third highest ranked reason was I don't want to take time of work. Again, this finding reiterates that individuals in the sector experience difficulties around taking time off work when they require it.

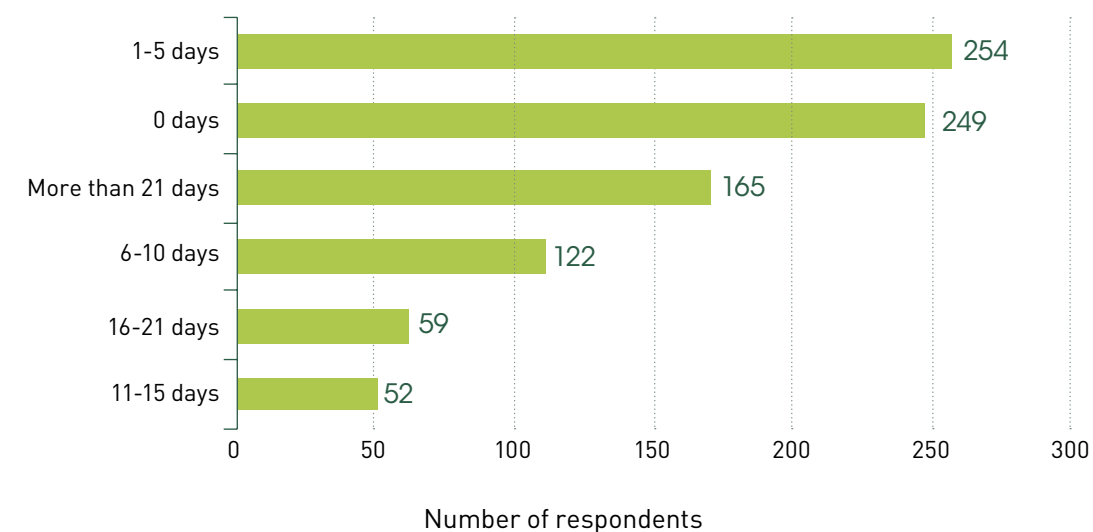
The following bullet points highlight the four key themes that emerged from the qualitative responses around why health advice is not sought.

- **Knowing the cause of and illness already.**
- **Seeing what they are experiencing, e.g. aches and pains, as being part of their job.**
- **Preferring to self-medicate or self-manage – predominantly because they have found a way to self-medicate or self-manage that works for them.**
- **A loss of faith in health services and/or reporting poor health services in their local area.**

The fourth theme aligns with emerging research into the UK's healthcare systems. Between 2020 and 2023, public satisfaction with the National Health Service fell by 29.00% and dissatisfaction is at a record high (52.00%) (Kings Fund, 2023).

To further demonstrate the tendency of workers not wanting to take time off from work, the following graph shows the number of days those respondents worked while feeling physically unwell.

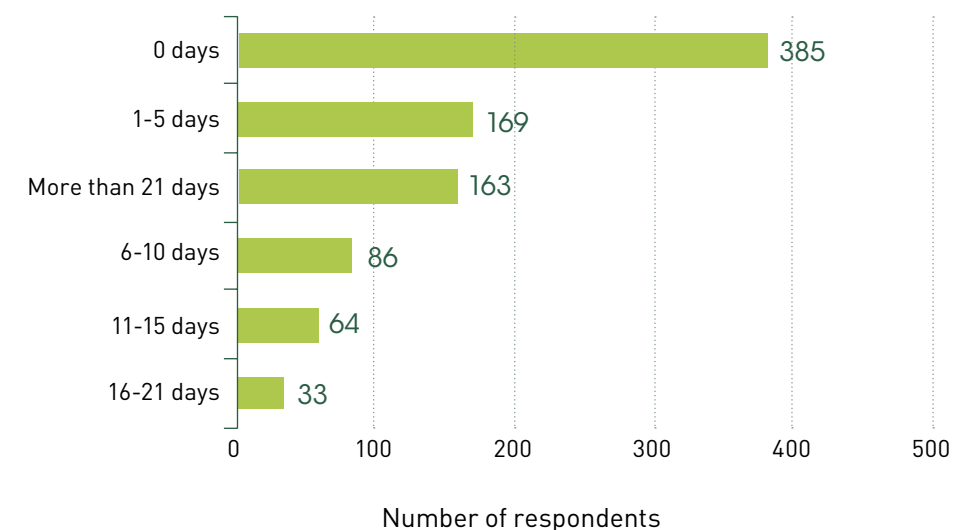
Days worked while feeling physically unwell (in the last year)



Graph 13. Days worked by respondents while feeling physically unwell – based on 901 respondents.

In addition, the graph below shows the days worked by respondents while feeling mentally unwell.

Days worked while being mentally unwell in the last 12 months



Graph 14. Days worked by respondents while feeling mentally unwell – based on 900 respondents.

A tendency to continue working when feeling physically unwell is (slightly) more prevalent than the tendency to work when feeling mentally unwell. There is a culture of presenteeism in the industry, where individuals continue to work even if they feel unfit to work. This issue was also highlighted in 2021. Presenteeism is a problem across most sectors of work in the United Kingdom (CIPD, 2023) and should not be regarded as something that is a particular problem for the horticultural sector. Yet, the issue remains as an important point of action to address. Current research into presenteeism suggests that establishing strong relationships at work alongside a close-knit workforce, where a sense of belonging is established (individually and collectively), can help to overcome presenteeism (Wang et al. 2024).

Interestingly, three themes dominated the reasons that were put forward for not taking time off and they were the same for both mental health and physical health.

- **Own choice.**
- **Loss of earnings.**
- **Pressure of workload.**

All three of these reasons (above) further link to cultures of stoicism and, to some extent, workplace stigmas. Specifically, stoicism (the endurance of hardship without complaint) can foster workplace environments where workers underreport problems and experience hardships that can be dealt with if/when discussed (Duke, 2011). These types of environments tend to lead to high expectations around worker resilience and durability, which then fuel stigmas around reporting health issues (Saxby, 2016). From a pragmatic point of view, such stigmas hinder early reporting and the prevention of health problems that may lead to the loss of more working days in the future (BITC, 2017).

Our research also shed light on the difficulties that are endured by self-employed individuals around taking time off from work, e.g. they don't have anybody to cover for them if they were to take time off. Additionally, the nature of some jobs mean that they cannot be delayed. The quote below illustrates this point:

“It's hard to catch up on a garden if I miss a fortnightly session.”

Although, it should be acknowledged that some people treat the workplace as an 'escape' from their issues. Their work environments help them to manage their issues. This point is alluded to in the quote below:

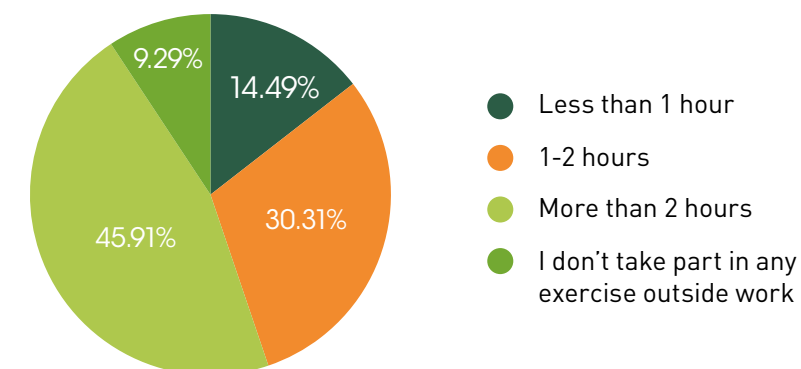
“I was in a state while splitting from my ex-partner, but work felt like a safe and comforting environment - I wanted to be there! It really helped.”

Problems around wellbeing that arise from difficult life experiences develop differently from person-to-person. Additionally, difficult life circumstances and experiences that can come with being in an underrepresented (marginalised) social group (e.g. low-income, ethnic minority, LGBTQ etc.) can worsen the impacts of a health problem for an individual. For example, a general population level review demonstrates the disproportionate (increased) level of health issues that are experienced by ethnic minority groups and how such issues worsen their quality of life (Gray et al. 2019). Similar studies have been conducted in relation to single parents and low-income households, and reveal similar findings (Richard and Lee, 2019).

Encouragingly, existing research argues for strong work-related relationships (with colleagues and/or clients) that can help to manage personal issues (Colbert et al. 2016). Close-knit workplace networks and peer mentoring can play a significant role in understanding and creating management strategies for unique personal problems (Hernandez et al. 2023).

With regards to self-managing issues, physical activity is seen as an important positive influence on wellbeing (mentally and physically) (Saxena et al. 2005; Marquez et al. 2020). Our research reflects this notion. The following graph displays the relevant results.

Amount of exercise undertaken outside of work per week

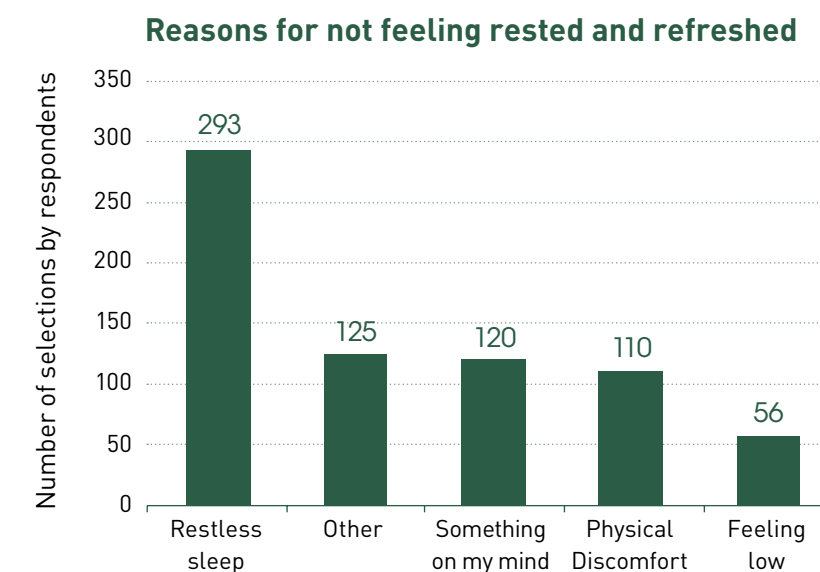


Graph 15. Amount of exercise undertaken by respondents per week – based on 904 responses.

Respondents are more likely to engage in exercise outside of work than not. This was the case for the respondents of 2021's survey as well. We invited respondents who do not undertake additional exercise to explain why that was the case. Three key themes emerged from those responses:

- **Having no time due to work – including not having enough time to plan an exercise routine.**
- **Tiredness.**
- **Care and/or family commitments leaving no time for exercise.**

Another area that generated similar results to 2021's survey is how rested people feel. In 2021, 63.00% of people (902 respondents) reported that they did not wake up feeling rested during at least four days-per-week. For 2024's survey, this figure is 64.12% (903 respondents). Reasons for not feeling rested are summarised in the following graph.



Graph 16. Reasons for not feeling rested – based on 579 responses (some respondents selected multiple options).

As shown in the graph above, restless sleep is the main reason for why respondents feel unrested. An interesting consideration here is the well-researched link between physical discomfort and restless sleep (Finan et al. 2013). It would be reasonable to assume that the high prevalence of aches and pains amongst horticulture workers contributes to individuals experiencing poor sleep patterns.

An area of improvement between 2021 and 2024 is the level of workers who are aware of their blood pressure (BP) measurements. In 2021, only 27.00% of respondents knew their BP figures. This figure has improved to 41.57% (based on 902 respondents). However, still, over half of the respondents (58.43%) are unaware of their BP reading.

Based on qualitative responses, common ways of knowing BP readings included:

- **Self-measuring.**
- **General Practitioner (GP) appointments.**
- **Appointments with other healthcare professionals.**
- **During medical reviews for an existing health condition.**

Key reasons for not knowing their BP reading were:

- **Not being tested for a long time.**
- **Not recognising their BP as a valid and/or an important issue.**
- **Not seeing their BP as their responsibility, i.e. it is the responsibility of healthcare professionals, e.g. GPs.**
- **Never having their BP measured before.**

It should be acknowledged that the need to raise awareness around BP is a national issue. In the UK, around 5.3 million people have high pressure, without knowing it (Blood Pressure UK, 2024).

Finally, the overall wellbeing of respondents was measured via SWEMWBS. The table below provides a breakdown of our results.

Wellbeing categorisation according to SWEMWBS	Percentage of respondents
High	17.15%
Medium	64.18%
Low	18.67%

Table 8. SWEMWBS Categorisations of respondents – based on 899 responses.

The table above shows that 82.85% of respondents were categorised as having medium or low wellbeing. This finding is similar to the 2021 survey, where 85.00% of respondents were categorised as having medium (average) or low wellbeing. The fact that only 17.15% of respondents expressed a high level of wellbeing reflects the wide-ranging issues that have been covered by our findings. Here, we must acknowledge the nature of some forms of horticultural work and self-employment which may leave individuals lonely and isolated. Both are drivers for poor wellbeing (Saxby, 2016; Khan et al. 2021). Loneliness's negative influences are often deepened by physical issues that in turn fuel anxieties around job security, that lead to physical discomfort becoming a mental burden (Bryan, 2024).

The negative impacts of lonely working environments have been further evidenced by a recent national study. In summary, wellbeing strategies that target individuals (e.g. the use of mindfulness apps) have very little influence on improving overall employee wellbeing (Wellbeing Research Centre - University of Oxford, 2024). Alternatively, environments where workers have opportunities to voice and work on issues collectively (e.g. in peer discussion groups) can support wellbeing more effectively (Wellbeing Research Centre - University of Oxford, 2024).

Insights from the sector leaders' workshop on wellbeing

With regards to wellbeing, sector leaders related how giving people a purpose that they value contributed to positive wellbeing outcomes. Employees should be empowered to shape a business's services and direction. The creation of 'business cultures' around openness and making workers feel comfortable and proud about their work was put forward as another key step for improving wellbeing. One attendee summarised this point by saying that "it's like creating one big family." Therefore, working environments that give people confidence and where they feel a sense of belonging were seen as an important quality. Where possible, the encouragement of social activities – particularly ones that are meaningful to a workforce – were said to make a difference as well. For some individuals, networking meetings provided such opportunities. This was because they met 'like-minded' people and/or people 'in the same situation as them.' Such meetings were deemed to be effective for signposting community (local) events and activities that could be beneficial for wellbeing. This point was said to be particularly useful for new workers and/or workers who had little knowledge of what activities (social and work-related) were available in their local area.

Additionally, attendees discussed how 'getting to know your employees' was important. Specifically, where some employees want and value leadership, whilst others want to 'just get on with their work'. Notably, different forms of leadership can be encouraged, i.e. not only around work. Some people enjoy organising social events and activities, which can be good for wellbeing. In a positive environment, such individuals would have the ability (freedom) to organise such activities. Barriers to creating such an environment were identified for small businesses and large businesses. For large businesses, it is hard to establish such meaningful relationships throughout the workforce. However, where possible, relationships should be fostered and maintained in small teams. At the other end of the spectrum (small businesses), the main issue was identified as 'time'. Particularly, small businesses find it difficult to create time for developing relationships with workers during periods of hardship. Hence, the Cost of Living crisis was seen as a major risk to the wellbeing of workers and small business owners. Although, the management styles of business owners were cited as a key influence on wellbeing too. Essentially, it becomes very difficult to encourage positive action in businesses that focus on either getting by or prioritising a profit rather than paying attention to the wellbeing of their workforce. It was encouraging that attendees felt that such owners were a minority and that they should not discourage positive steps being taken in other businesses. One attendee mentioned how "every step is important if its positive", as those positive results can be shared and become examples for others.

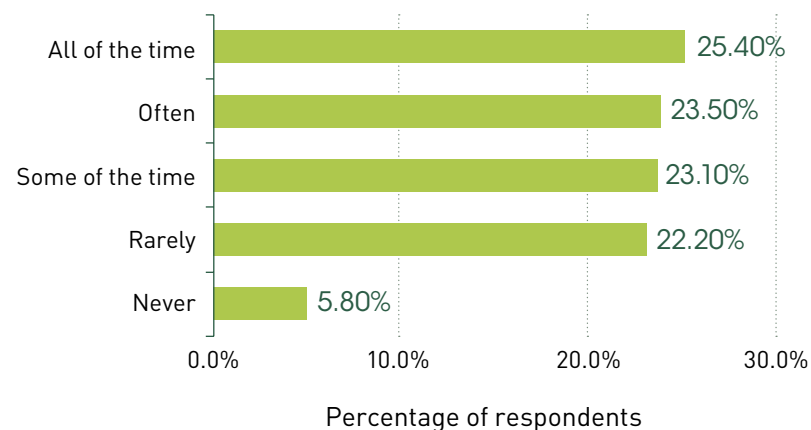
Self-employed individuals were spoken about as facing distinct challenges in terms of improving wellbeing in the sector. Their lack of interaction with others and, often, lonely working environments were seen as a risk to their wellbeing. In such cases, supportive networks that were specific to a person's area of work and local to them were offered as a solution here. Perennial's work around forming networks and sharing guidance was mentioned as a benefit to the sector. However, the lack of a single, central resource that signposts networks run by other groups and/or associations in the sector was seen as a gap and a tool that could be very useful. Finally, acknowledgement was given to individuals – especially self-employed people – who need help beyond signposting. The first step for seeking help is often the most difficult one to take. Therefore, face-to-face interactions and spaces that are inviting can support individuals in making those difficult first steps. Interestingly, charities that encourage men to talk about their mental health were mentioned as examples to learn from, e.g. Man Down. Their main strengths were said to be their informality and the comfortable spaces that they offer to people.

In the next sub-section, findings around finances and financial management are outlined. Financial management.

Financial Management

As a starting point for exploring financial management, we explored confidence and empowerment with money. The relevant results are summarised in the graph below.

Confidence and empowerment with money



Graph 17. Confidence and empowerment with money – based on 989 responses.

Most respondents feel either slightly or not at all confident and empowered about money. Over a quarter of the respondents (24.50%) are not confident or empowered about money. This is a quite significant proportion. Although, the national picture around money confidence is starker. The latest available figures, which are from a national survey in 2021, found that 45.00% of adults are not confident with money (Money and Pensions Service, 2021).

Individuals feeling very confident comprised the smallest proportion of respondents (5.80%). Reasons put forward for low confidence and empowerment with money echo the worries about low pay and job insecurity that have been discussed already. The key themes of these reasons are summarised by the following bullet points.

- **Being in low paid jobs.**
- **Insecurities around pensions.**
- **Living cost increases – mainly attributed to the Cost of Living crisis.**
- **Money-related issues being worsened by other inequalities that are not supported adequately, e.g. for single parents, disabled people and/or individuals who are unable to work due to an illness.**

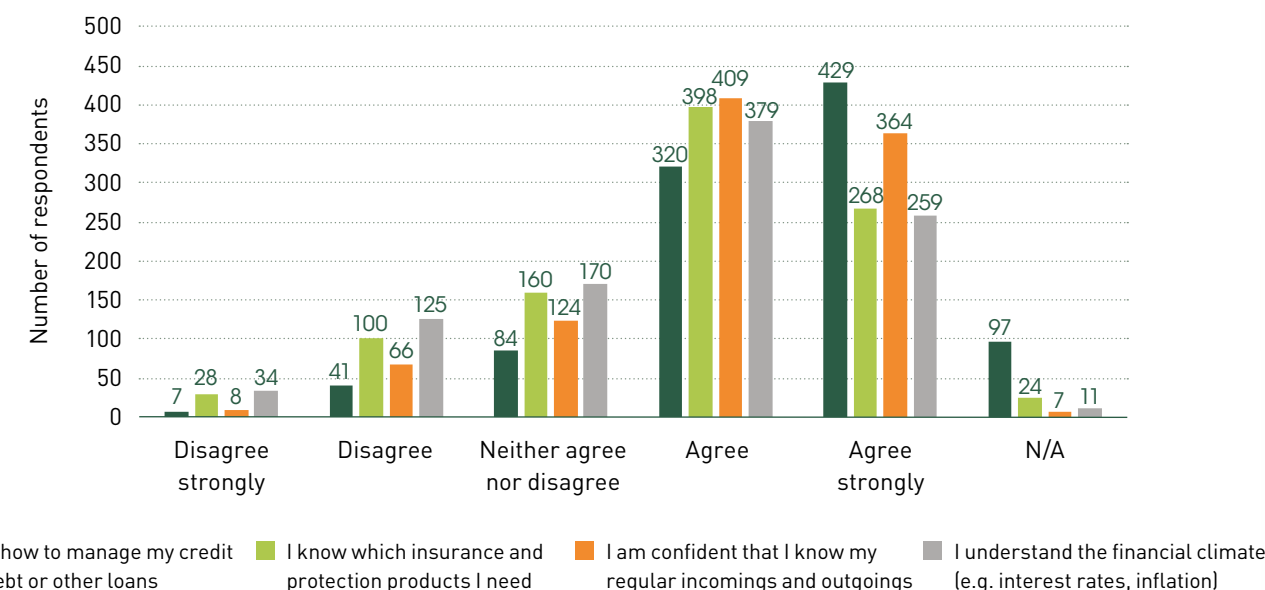
Through additional analysis, we uncovered the influence that a lack of confidence and empowerment with money has on life satisfaction. For respondents that feel no confidence and/or empowerment over money (251 individuals), life satisfaction declines steeply. 88.16% of those individuals reported life satisfaction levels that were lower than the national average.

Although a number of contemporary studies have explored the wellbeing challenges that are endured by individuals in low-pay employment (Daykin, 1998; Hassall et al. 2004; Cottini, 2011; Cominetti et al. 2023), ways of supporting individuals in workplaces remain difficult to design and apply. Improvements in this area are best addressed when a sector gains value as a whole. Value can be added by elevating and promoting the importance of work done in a sector (Mason and Brown, 2011). This is very difficult to achieve without support from policymakers (local and national). Yet, the adoption of policies that demonstrate the value of a sector to the public

do tend to attract more investment (Mason and Brown, 2011). The horticulture sector had such an opportunity recently. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the key role that outdoor (green) spaces play in maintaining public wellbeing (Pouso et al. 2021). This policy-related momentum needs to be capitalised upon soon if the sector is to progress and develop financially.

Next, we look at financial management at an individual level. The graph below summarises the relevant results that were produced by our research.

Understanding of financial management



Graph 18. Understanding financial management – based on 978 responses.

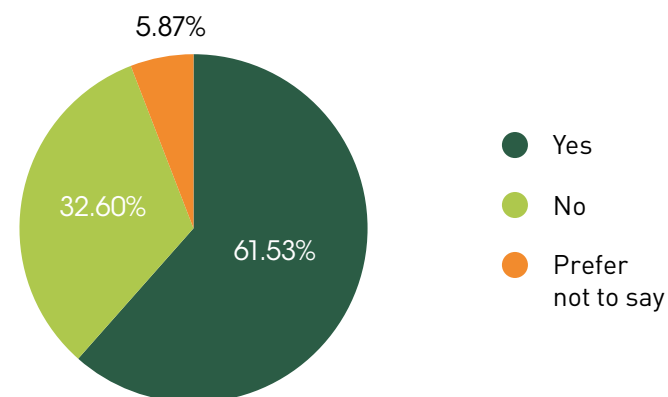
In general, respondents were comfortable with the four aspects of financial management explored:

- Managing credit cards, debts and loans.**
- Understanding insurance and protection needs.**
- Being aware of regular income and outgoing amounts.**
- Understanding round the UK's general financial climate.**

Insecurities and negative experiences around finances therefore do not seem to be driven by a lack of financial confidence or bad personal management. This finding is also evidenced by most respondents (86.73% of 972 respondents) reporting that they save money at some point in the calendar year. Although explored through a different question, personal management (of finances) seemed to be a bigger issue in 2021. In that survey, 26.00% of individuals reported that they were unable to meet their living costs through their finances.

To help us further understand the financial situation of workers, survey respondents were asked to report whether they had an emergency fund. Their responses are summarised by the graph below.

Respondents with an Emergency Fund - i.e. 3 months or more salary put aside

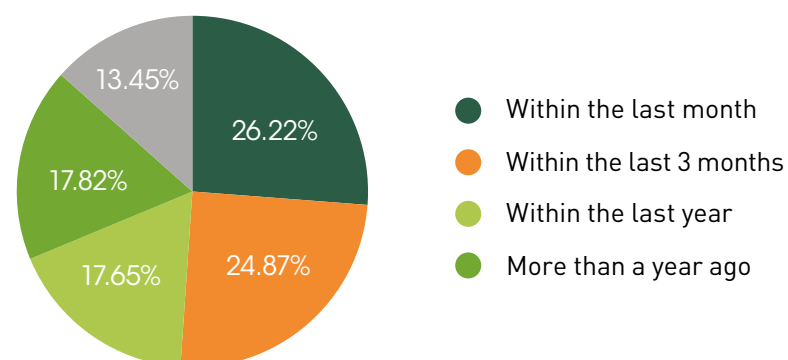


Graph 19. Respondents with an Emergency Fund – based on 681 respondents.

Around a third of the respondents do not have an emergency fund. This figure is similar to the national picture. Research by a national credit company showed that 32.00% of people have less than £500.00 in their emergency fund (Lowell, 2023). Through further analysis, we identify the impact of not having an emergency fund on life satisfaction. Respondents are more likely to score lower than the national average for life satisfaction if they do not have an emergency fund. 61.26% of individuals (based on 222 respondents) without an emergency fund scored lower than the national average.

An encouraging finding around financial management is the number of workers that keep a household budget. 61.73% of 972 respondents hold a household budget. Although, this finding does also mean that over 1 in 3 workers do not keep such a budget. Importantly, individuals tend to maintain budgets once they are created. The graph that follows shows that over half of the respondents (51.09% - 26.22% plus 24.87%) who had a household budget updated their budget in the last three months.

Last update made to household budget

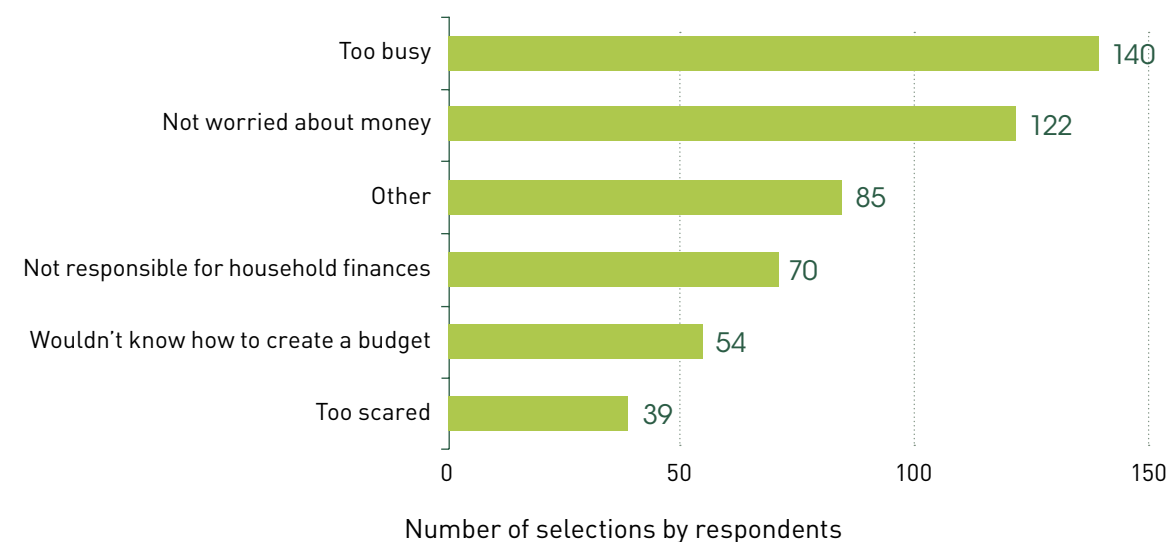


Graph 20. Updates to household budgets – based on 595 responses.

We see similar results around household budget adherence. 57.98% of the 595 respondents who have a household budget adhere to their budget often or all of the time. The proportion of individuals who never adhere to their budget is very low (1.34%). Once more, this finding illustrates that workers use their budgets and keep to them once they are in place.

Reasons for not having a household budget are summarised by the following graph.

Reasons for not having a household budget



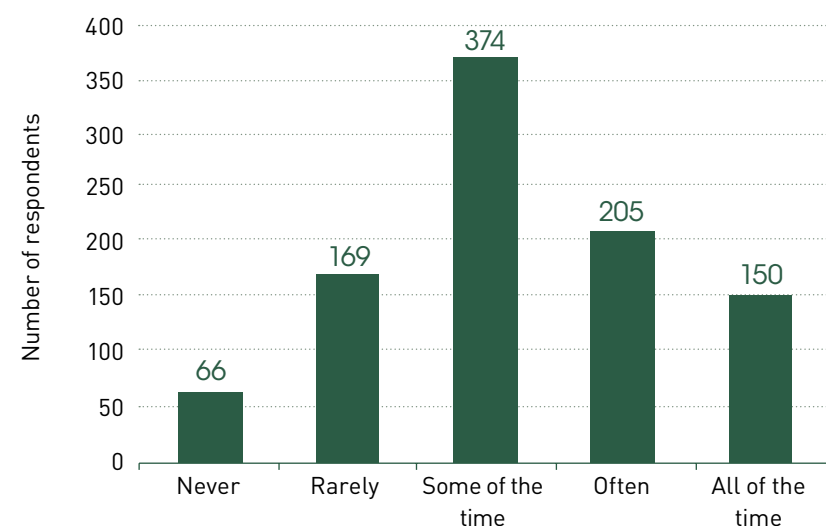
Graph 21. Reasons for not having a household budget – based on 371 responses (respondents were able to select more than one reason).

The most common reason for not having a household budget is that individuals feel too busy to keep one. Given that long hours are a key problem for workers in the sector, this is unsurprising. Individuals who selected other as a reason for not having a household budget were invited to expand upon their response. The key themes that emerged from those responses are summarised below:

- Deeming household budgets as something that is unnecessary.
- Difficult life experiences, e.g. being diagnosed with a serious illness, make planning and budgeting difficult.
- Finding the process of putting together a budget overwhelming – particularly when individuals are going through worries about their life (including around financial difficulties).

Our findings around financial planning for the future were similar to those on household budgets. The following graph displays the relevant results.

Respondents who plan ahead for their financial future



Graph 22. Planning for the future (financially) – based on 964 respondents.

Most respondents were more likely to plan for the future than not. 75.65% of respondents planned their financial future some of the time, often or all of the time. A small percentage of respondents did not plan at all (6.85%). The ranking table that follows shows the reasons that impact on a worker's ability to plan for the future (negatively).

Ranking of reasons that impact ability to plan ahead (financially)	
First	Low income
Second	Mental health
Third	Family commitments
Fourth	Expenditure
Fifth	Physical health
Sixth	Other reasons
Seventh	Job/career

Table 9. Reasons that impact the ability to plan for the future (financially) – based on 786 responses.

Low income being a significant negative influence on financial planning aligns with existing research into low pay and mental health. Past academic studies have demonstrated how lower income and worries about living costs can fuel negative outlooks about the future (MacLeod and Conway, 2005; Hoge et al. 2015).

Three key themes emerged from the qualitative responses around negative influences on financial planning. They are as follows:

- **The current negative economic climate, which is worse for people with low pay.**
- **Finding planning overwhelming.**
- **Self-reported bad spending habits.**

Next, we outline what was discussed about finances at the workshop for sector leaders.

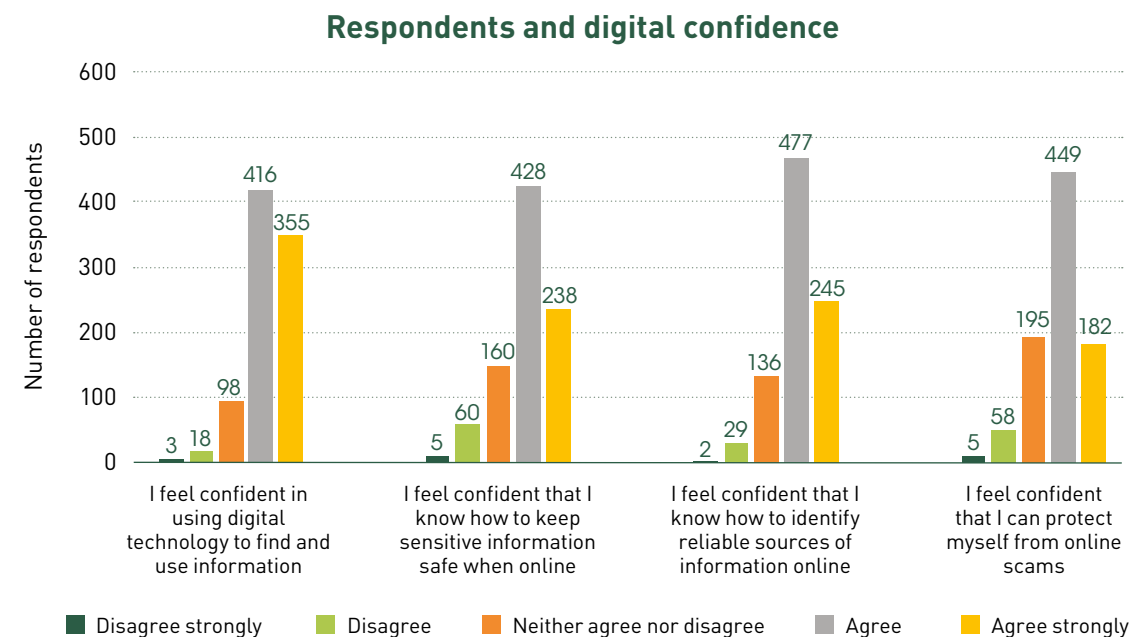
Insights from the sector leaders' workshop on finances and financial management

- Discussions centred around finances aligned closely with the results that are presented in this sub-section. The need for increased investment into the sector was a focus point. Attendees discussed how finding influential individuals and groups who can lobby and engage policymakers was 'a must' for the sector. It was felt that many opportunities for elevating the sector's value in the public eye were missed in the past. Specifically, although the sector's importance was acknowledged in the aftermath of Brexit (around food production) and the Covid-19 pandemic (around the maintenance of outdoor space), there was a sense that this acknowledgement was waning, and the sector was not being treated as a priority. As some reflected there are real worries that the sector was in the 'same boat' again. A solution that was offered for this problem centred around the formation of a policy strategy group that understands and promotes the sector as a whole. Additionally, such a strategy group would need to listen to the wide-ranging areas of the sector and promote values based on feedback from businesses and employees – including self-employed people. The group could also advocate on behalf of the industry.
- During the workshop, acknowledgement was given to the high level of low-income workers in the sector. It was felt that improving the wellbeing of such workers without wider investment would be difficult. However, efforts could be made to identify free local activities and opportunities that were beneficial to the wellbeing of such workers. These opportunities and activities can be different for different individuals. Therefore, processes that invite workers to talk about what they need and value were recommended. Once more, local signposting for social activities and the establishment of free-to-access peer networks were offered as potential positive actions.
- Relevant guidance and information around pensions were also seen as an important area to address. Reasons for this revolved around an ageing workforce and the tendency of workers – particularly self-employed people – to deal with their pensions towards the end of their careers. Attendees felt that earlier planning would help workers have more secure futures.
- Towards the end of the workshop, discussions around finances reverted back to the need for wider investment. Essentially, free-to-access initiatives can only emerge and be maintained if funds are available within the sector and shared with associations and charities that can co-ordinate and signpost such activities.

At present, personal financial management is predominantly co-ordinated via online services and tools (Statista, 2024c). In acknowledgment of this point, the final sub-section on our research's results relates to digital confidence.

Life Skills: Digital Confidence

We aimed to understand digital confidence by exploring how respondents related to certain digital services and activities. The following graph summarises the results that were generated.



Graph 23. Confidence in relation to certain digital activities – based on 891 responses
(the figures in the graph may vary in relation to this total, as not all respondents completed all parts of the question).

Generally, respondents demonstrated a good level of confidence in relation to all of the digital services and activities that were explored. I feel confident in using digital technology to find and use information was the statement that was agreed or strongly agreed on the most. The statement that respondents felt least comfortable with was I feel confident that I can protect myself from online scams. Of note, in the UK, individuals are more likely to be the victim of an online scam in their lifetime if they have a mental health issue. The Money and Mental Health Policy Institute reported that the rate of being scammed online is around three times higher amongst people with mental health issues when compared with the general population; 23.00% versus 8.00% (Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, 2020).

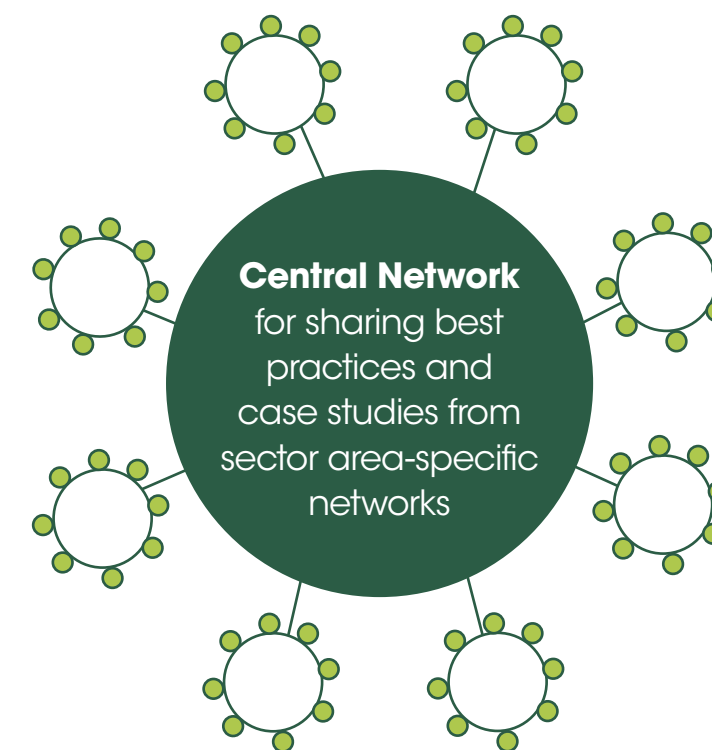
Finally, any work that aims to engage horticulture workers in digital technology would benefit from focussing on techniques to avoid online scams or phishing. Additionally, confidence with digital skills is a new area of study in relation to horticulture workers. These findings can be used to benchmark future research into this area.

The following section outlines the conclusions and recommendations that emerged from our research.

Conclusions

Our research has highlighted the benefits that could be achieved by bringing the sector together. In response to these findings sector leaders have proposed a network-related approach which aligns with recent research into innovative practices around health and wellbeing (HAIRE, 2023). For brevity, we will refer to this approach as the multiple network model. This model involves defining each area of the sector (e.g. gardening and landscaping, growing and nurseries, grounds keeping and maintenance etc), then identifying issues and concerns in each sub-sector and finally, co-ordinating engagement activities in these smaller networks that are relevant to each of those areas. If consistent definitions for the sector's areas do not exist, establishing those definitions with the sector is a key step towards implementing a multiple network model.

Importantly, through the multiple network model, different areas of the sector are more likely to participate and collaborate if engagement is established in a way that is socially, culturally and economically beneficial (HAIRE, 2023; Avelino et al. 2024). These types of networks can enhance benefit to the sector if they are connected at local levels (Avelino et al. 2024). Therefore, gathering information on local social activities and sharing that information through sector area-specific networks would be of benefit to the wellbeing of workers. A diagram of the multiple network approach is presented in Figure 1. The diagram demonstrates how smaller (sector area-specific) networks are connected to local areas and to a larger central network where best practices and positive case studies are shared.



A multiple network approach for bringing the sector together to collaborate and innovate around wellbeing. The white circles represent the sector area-specific networks, which are connected to local areas (represented by the smaller lime-green circles). Connections to local areas will help to gather and share (signpost) social activities for workers. All sector area-specific networks are connected to a central network for sharing best practices and case studies.

A strategic way to gather and share local information would be to form links with National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). NAVCA support local voluntary sector infrastructure organisations (NAVCA, 2024). Such organisations can act as sources for information on local wellbeing-related activities and events.

As promoted by the multiple network model shown in Figure 1, collaboration around sharing best practices and case studies of lived experiences will provide workers in the sector with much needed inspiration comfort and confidence. This is a pressing need, as individuals who participated in our research fell short of the national averages for measures on life satisfaction and overall wellbeing.

Although wellbeing is often viewed as a personal matter, recent research has shown the benefits of dealing with wellbeing-related issues collectively (Wellbeing Research Centre - University of Oxford, 2024). Where possible, workers should be given the opportunity to socialise and share their experiences – especially ones that impact their wellbeing – in a safe and comfortable environment. This type of peer-to-peer relationship building and social connection can make individuals feel like they belong in their workplace, which influences mental health positively (Dhiman, 2021). As stated at the sector leaders’ workshop, approaches to improving wellbeing should centre around making “a big family”.

A key challenge for the sector is to facilitate similar environments for self-employed people who spend a lot of time alone. Here, local peer-to-peer networks for self-employed people should be promoted. Such interactions have been shown to have a beneficial influence on lone workers (Nieminen and Hytti, 2016). An interesting approach to test is to link self-employed individuals to events and activities that are run by employers that undertake similar work.

We must also acknowledge that many people with wellbeing issues struggle to ask for support. Consistent positive outreach and messaging around being open about wellbeing could support individuals to come forward with their issues. This has been the case with many emerging charities that focus on talking about mental health (Vickery, 2022). Though, privacy is very important here, businesses and networks should strive to establish confidential places and processes that workers can use to talk about their concerns if they wish to keep matters private. This recommendation is particularly relevant to workers with comorbidities (more than one diagnosed health condition). Our research has shown that individuals in the sector with comorbidities have a lower level of life satisfaction. Comforting environments and opportunities to speak about wellbeing therefore will be more valuable for such individuals. In addition, trust can be built with employees if workplaces are proactive and take action when health problems arise. As a minimum, the checklist below, which was adapted from research by the Council for Work and Health, can be used as a guide for practical actions (Walker-Bone, 2021).

Reducing or changing working hours or allowing flexibility	Time off to attend medical or rehabilitation appointments
Rotation of tasks with co-workers	Re-locating to more accessible workspace
Working from home	Reduction of physical loads / intensity of work
Provision of tailored equipment (desk, chair, mouse, keyboard, voice-activated software)	Restriction of time spent doing repetitive tasks
Car park space nearer to workplace	Provision of flexible working
Longer or more frequent breaks	Re-deployment to a more suitable role
Provision of suitable space for stretching	Providing support for travel to/from work

Figure 2. Checklist for proactive workplace actions – adapted from research by Council for Work and Health.

This list above was generated predominantly for addressing musculoskeletal health problems, which our research has shown is a key issue in the sector. Hence, the list should be prioritised for such issues. Though, it is worth noting that the actions included can be applied to other physical and mental health problems as well. Similarly, for self-employed people, proactive responses should be encouraged and, where possible, offered through networks that are relevant to their work.

The research illustrates that developing a ‘culture of talking’ and openness in the sector may help in tackling issues before they escalate. Specifically, early intervention is the best preventative step for many health problems (Kitchener and Jorm, 2008; Walker-Bone, 2021). Encouragement and openness around reporting accidents and recognition of the health and wellbeing impacts (however small) of any accidents should be part of the processes that support early intervention.

Low pay and job insecurity are key issues for workers in the sector. Financial progress and the provision of more secure jobs can only be achieved in the sector if its value is elevated in the public consciousness (Mason and Brown, 2011). Here, a collaborative communication plan for policy that is put together across the sector would be beneficial to all. The multiple network model shown in Figure 1 can help the design of such a plan. Importantly, the plan should focus on engaging government and local policymakers in the strengths of the sector and its key role in supporting society. As highlighted at the sector leaders’ workshop, the benefits of public greenspaces to public health, and the importance of the industry to food production are two themes that can be used as a starting point for such a plan. A policy steering committee that the whole sector feeds into can help to sustain dialogue within the sector itself as well as with law- and policymakers. Once more, Figure 1’s multiple network model can aid in assembling such a sector-wide committee.

At an individual level, prudent financial management is closely allied to positive wellbeing and can be supported in the sector through personal budgeting and planning. Encouragingly, our research demonstrates that people do tend to update budgets and adhere to them once they are in place. A recommendation that can support the wider adoption of budgets would be to establish peer-to-peer groups and dialogues that demonstrate how budgeting can be done effectively, without being patronising. Peer-to-peer approaches align with research that shows how stigma around financial (mis)management can be reduced and best practices can be shared in inclusive environments through peer-to-peer advice (Pinto et al. 2020).

Employment appraisals and reviews that address someone’s financial situation can further support individuals with their financial management. To ensure that effective action can be taken when issues are raised, clear guidance should be provided on the support and entitlements that are available to someone. Specifically, this is an area where Perennial’s services can be signposted. Moreover, the provision of clear guidance around pensions is a gap that our research highlighted. The collation of relevant pension-related information and improving access to such information is an area that the sector needs to develop going forward.

Training and career development is another area that appraisals and reviews can focus on. Clear guidance and relevant information on opportunities would help such appraisals and reviews to be more effective. Though, training is most effective when its outcomes align with someone’s personal goals and what they enjoy doing (Bravenboer, 2016). Ideally, co-planned (between employer and employee) career development plans should be standard practice. Self-employed individuals would need to gain access to similar processes through sector area-specific networks, as displayed in Figure 1.

The final area that our research explored related to confidence with digital skills. Overall, respondents were confident about using digital products and understanding digital processes. Guidance around how to recognise scams and phishing is as an area that could be better supported.

Finally, the power of developing networks and sharing information and personal stories around wellbeing should not be overlooked. Perennial’s success in supporting the sector has been influenced by sharing information effectively. The increase in workers with more awareness around their blood pressure is one example of how effective information and guidance sharing can achieve positive results. Our overarching message is for the sector (employers and employees) to come together and build interlinked networks that are relevant to the workers in each area of the sector. Improved dialogue across these networks – particularly around sharing information, best practices, case studies and lobbying government and policymakers to support the industry – would provide multiple benefits for all workers.

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