

Applicant perception survey 2025

Young Women's Mental Health Programme

Timothy Harrison-Byrne & Sarah Nathan

20th June 2025



Pilgrim
Trust



Methodology



Online survey of grantees and unsuccessful applicants



6th - 30th May 2025

Grantees

43

Emails sent

39

Responses

91%

Response rate

Unsuccessful applicants

278

Emails sent

38

Responses

14%

Response rate

- We have included a **‘benchmark average’** on some slides based on research conducted with **16** other funding organisations **since 2013**
- The sample size of the benchmark is approximately **13,000 applicants**, although this varies according to the question asked

John Ellerman
Foundation



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION



THE
MERCERS'
COMPANY



Making Roads Safer



CUMBRIA
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

the
Tudortrust



The Wolfson*
Foundation



Community
Foundation

NOMINET
TRUST

Pilgrim
Trust



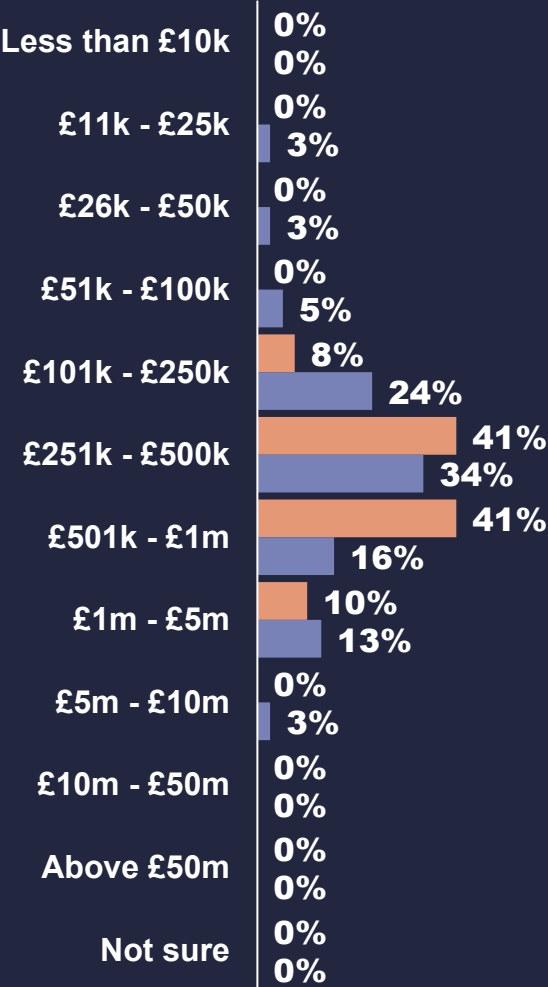
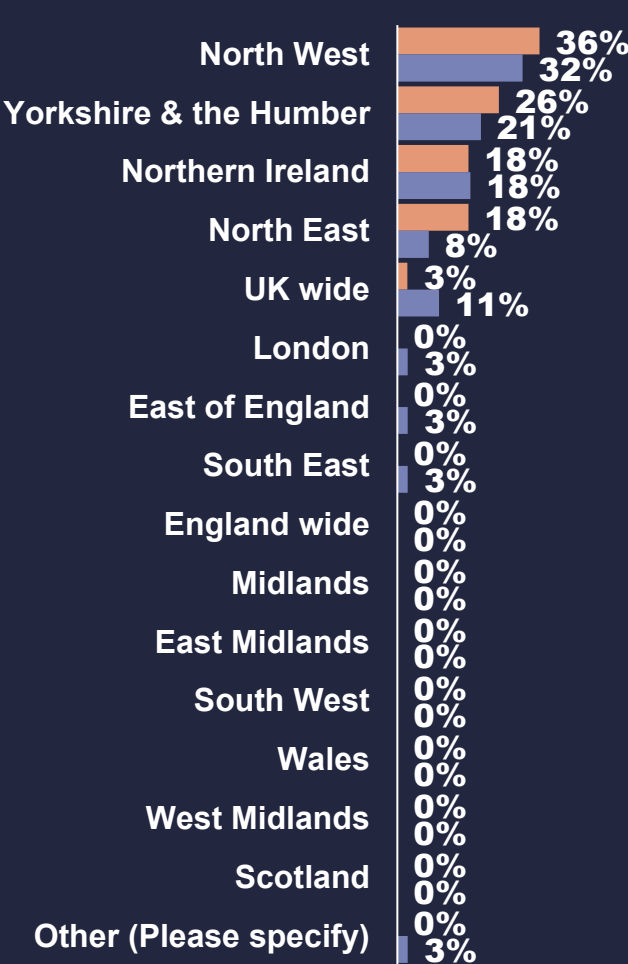
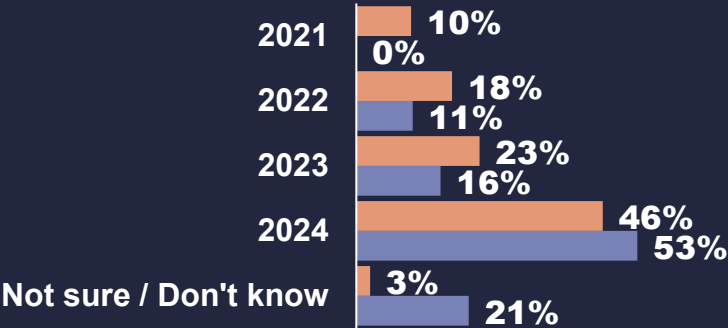
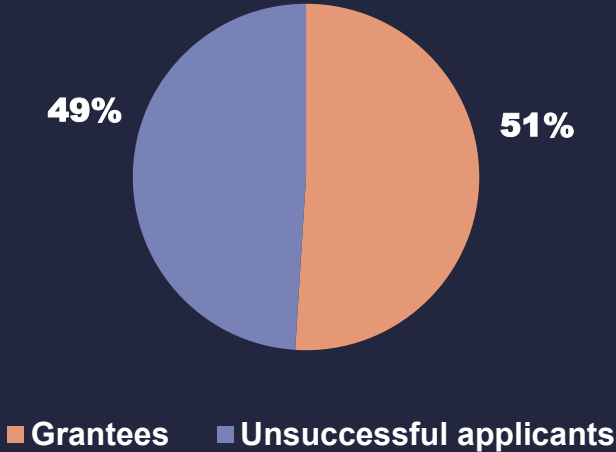
- I. The landscape for young women's mental health
- II. Perceptions of the Pilgrim Trust
- III. Your application process
- IV. Your relationship with grantees
- V. Feedback and clarity on rejection

What we'll cover today

Key findings

- The Young Women's Mental Health Programme is seen as targeting the right issue. Mental health and emotional wellbeing were cited as the biggest challenges facing young women by the vast majority of both grantees and unsuccessful applicants. Grantees described the funding as vital in enabling them to support underserved young women and to develop work informed by lived experience.
- The Pilgrim Trust is viewed as a transparent, flexible and relational funder. 98% of grantees agreed the programme meets the needs of young women, and 92% agreed that a gender-specific focus is the right approach. Applicants consistently praised the Trust for its supportive style, and many said they felt “part of something bigger” through cohort participation.
- 85% of grantees rated the application process as excellent or very good – a stronger performance than the nfpFunders benchmark. The two-stage process and ‘Book a Conversation’ system were described by most as clear and time-efficient, though some applicants noted that the expression of interest stage could feel too limited to reflect complex work.
- The community of practice is highly valued. Grantees said the cohort model helped reduce isolation and supported shared learning. They described these sessions as “energising”, “not isolating”, and a space to connect with others “working for social change”.
- The independent evaluation is broadly accepted as necessary, but views on delivery are mixed. Some welcomed the opportunity for reflection and external insight. Others raised concerns around appropriateness for young participants, lack of early co-design, and over-complexity in the reporting requirements.
- Feedback on unsuccessful applications remains an area for improvement. Many applicants felt feedback was too limited, unclear or generic. While some appreciated even a brief response, some also indicated they would have welcomed more specific input to support learning.

Profile of 77 respondents – quite similar between grantees and UAs, though UAs more likely to have income under £250k

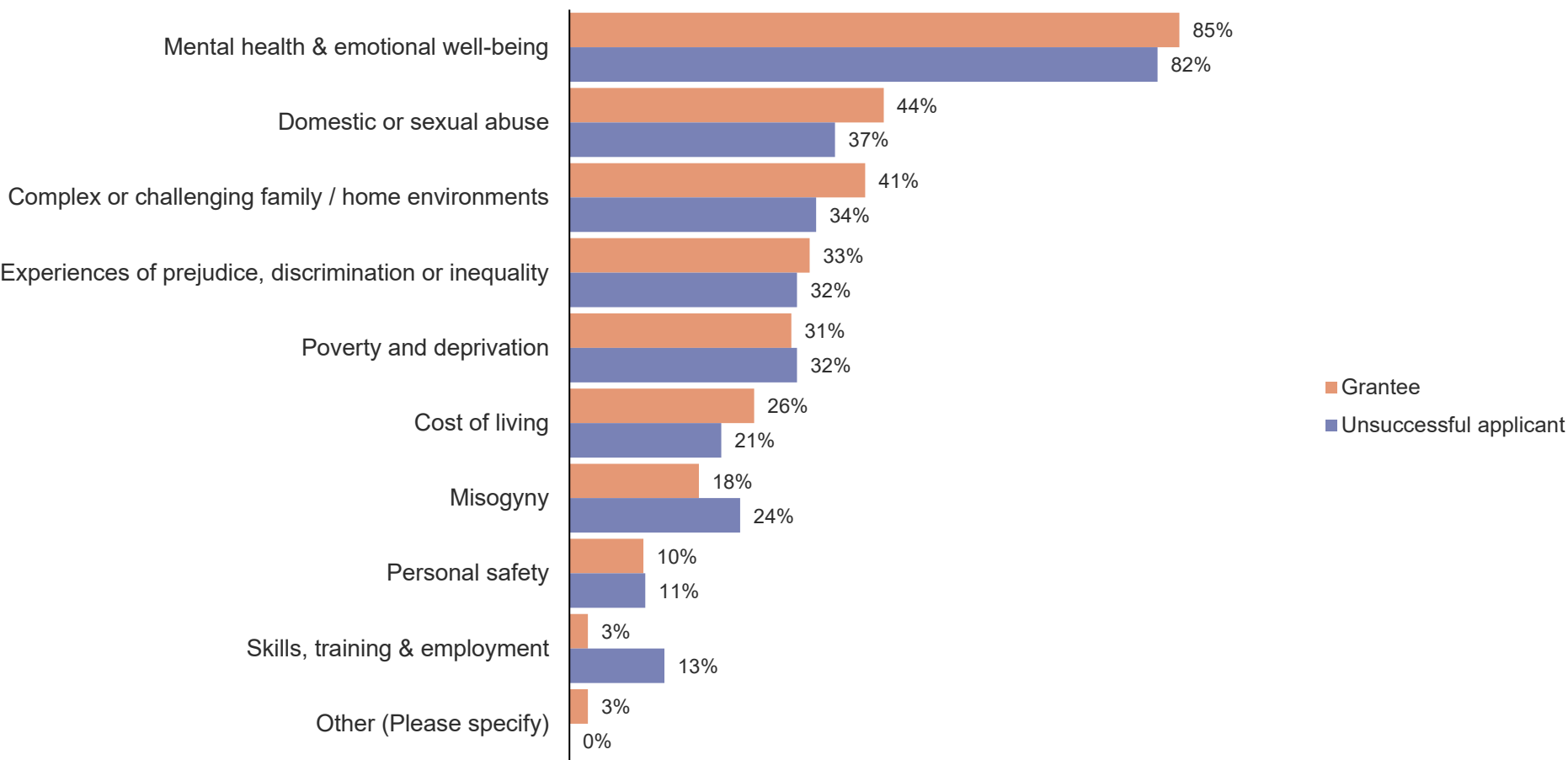


A photograph of three young women wearing hijabs, looking directly at the camera. The woman in the center is slightly behind the other two. The background is a blurred city street at dusk or night, with warm lights from buildings and street lamps. A thin horizontal line is positioned above the text.

The landscape for young women's mental health

Mental health and emotional well-being seen as the biggest challenge facing young women by vast majority of grantees and unsuccessful applicants

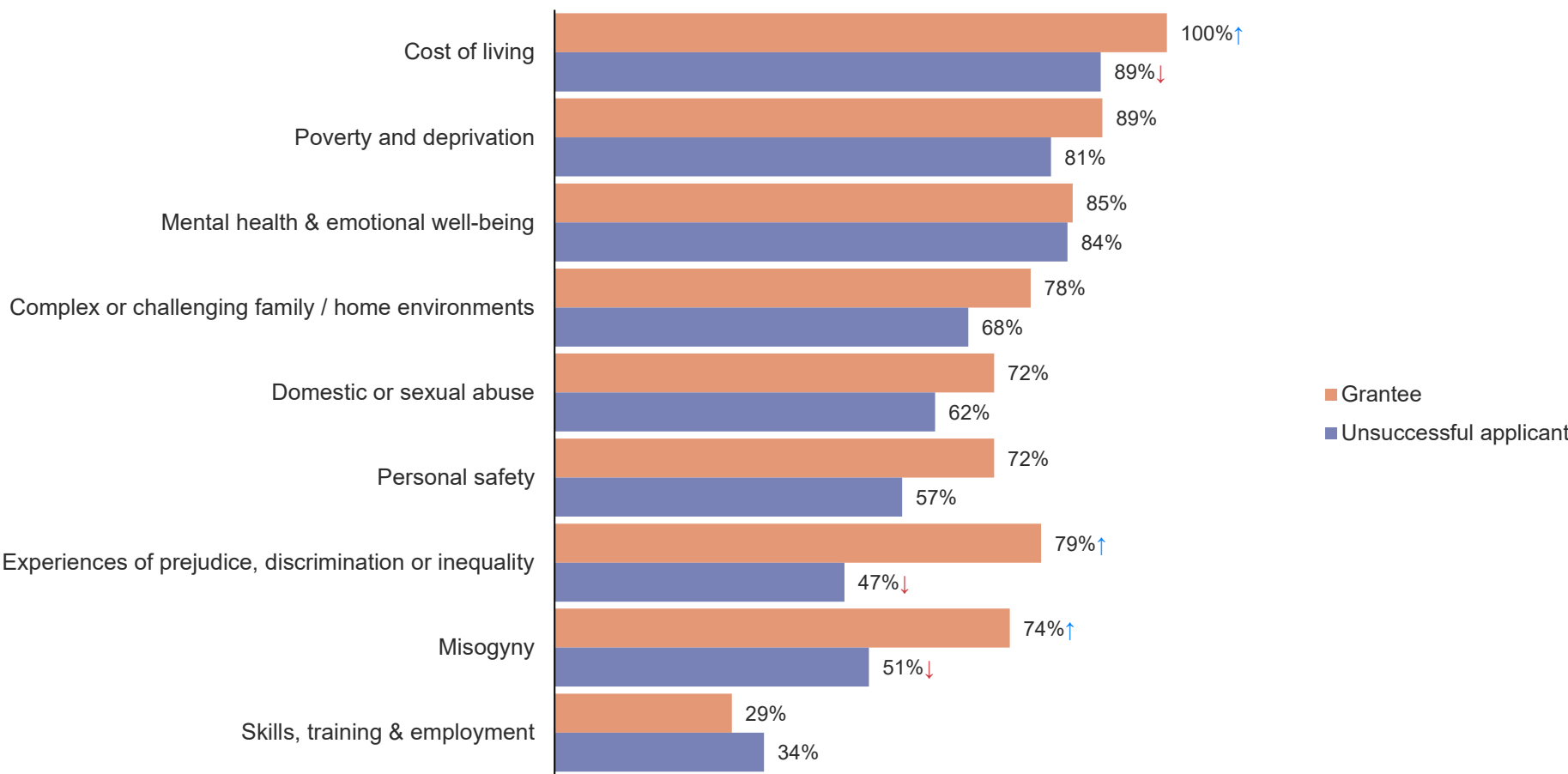
"What do you consider to be the biggest challenges facing young women today? Please select up to 3 options."



Cost of living and poverty are seen as the areas to have worsened the most over the last 5 years

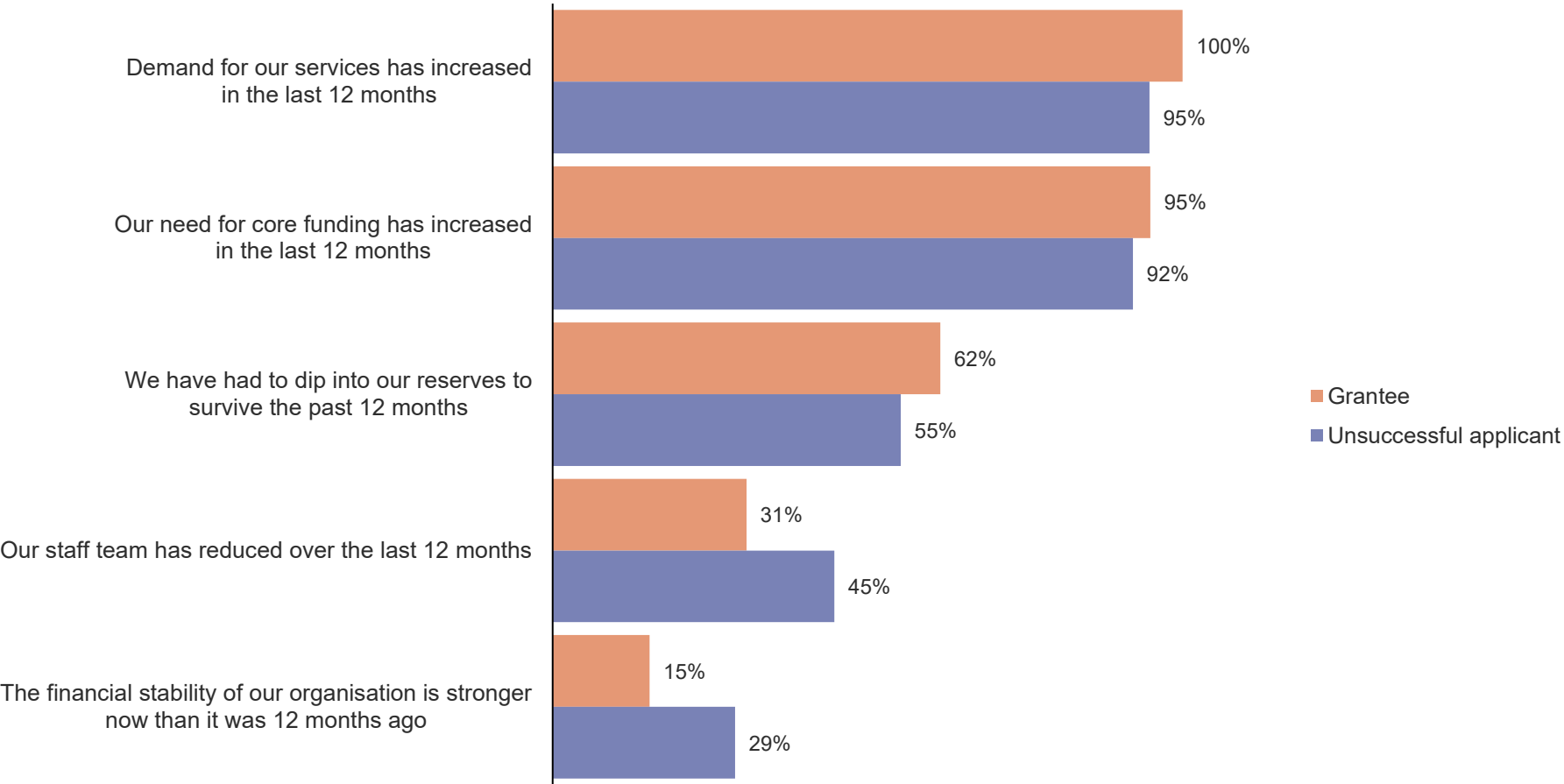
"To what extent do you think the situation has gotten better or worse for young women in the following areas, over the last 5 years:"

A lot worse + A little worse



Almost all grantees and unsuccessful applicants are battling with increased demand for services and higher costs

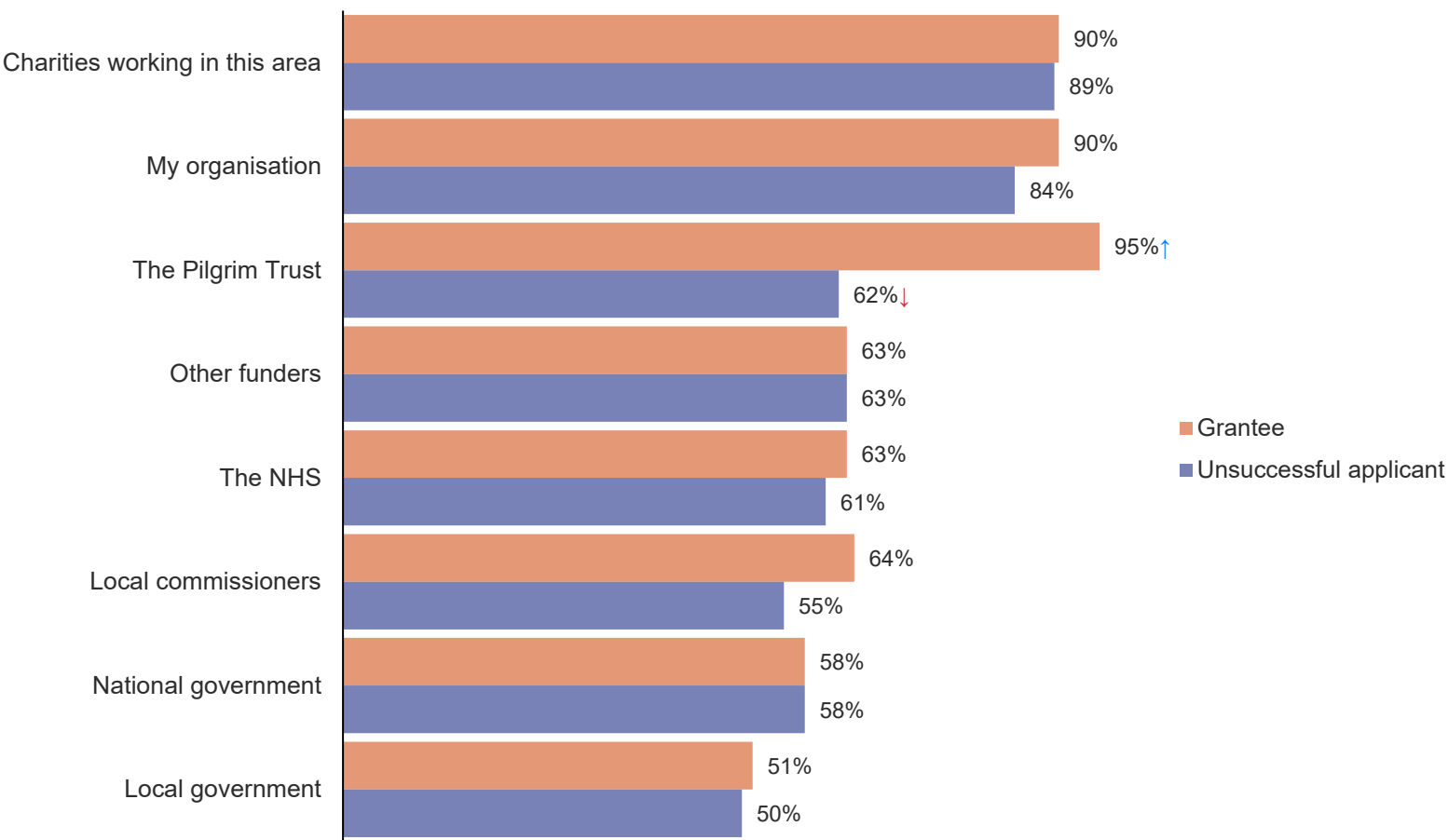
"The Pilgrim Trust wants to understand more about the context within which you are operating – what are your priorities and challenges? These questions ask about your organisation's experiences during the past 12 months. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

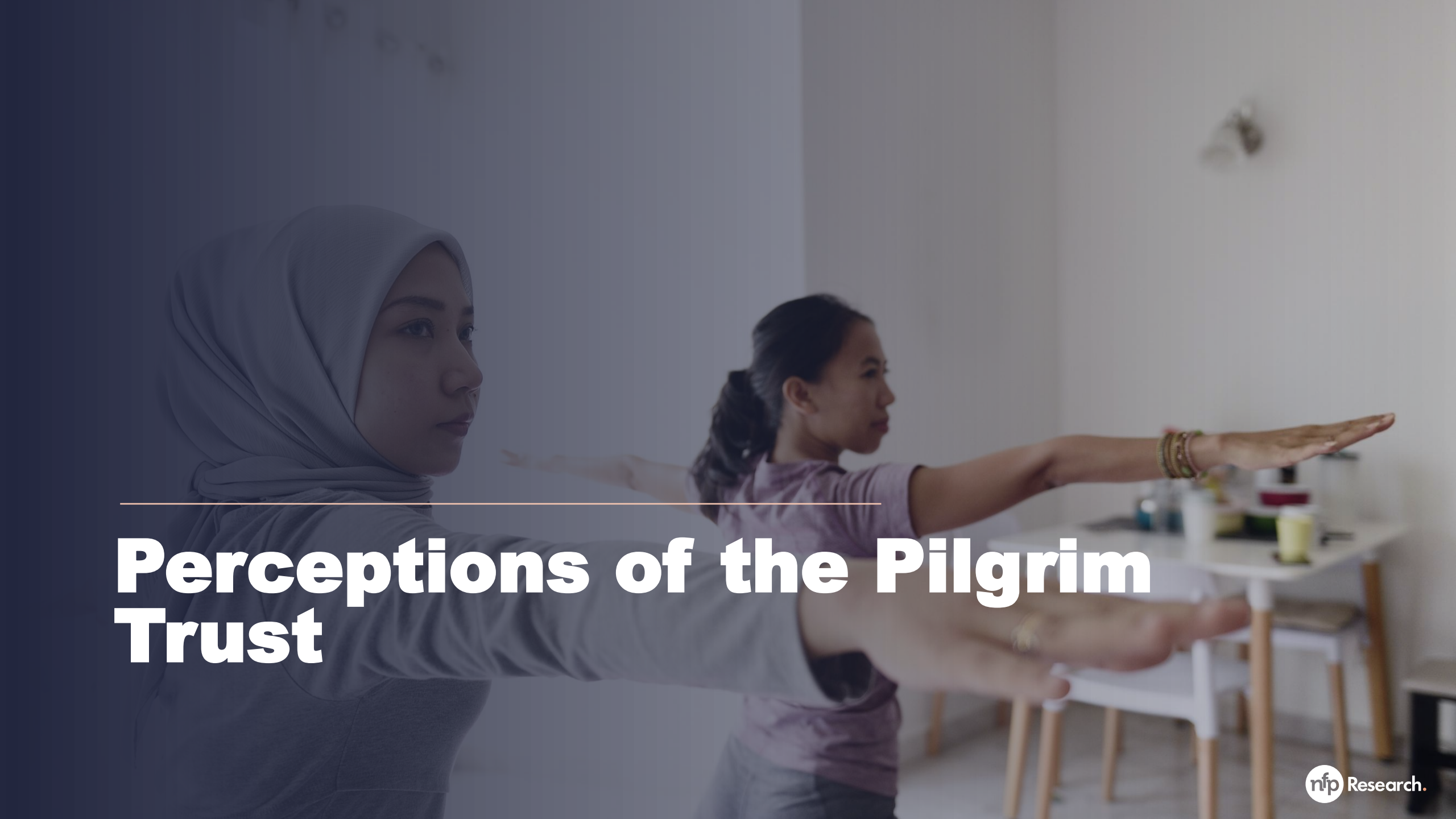


Lots of organisations are seen to have influence in the young women's mental health space, almost all grantees see the PT as having influence

"To what extent do you think each of the following people or organisations have influence in the young women's mental health space?"

Very influential + Influential



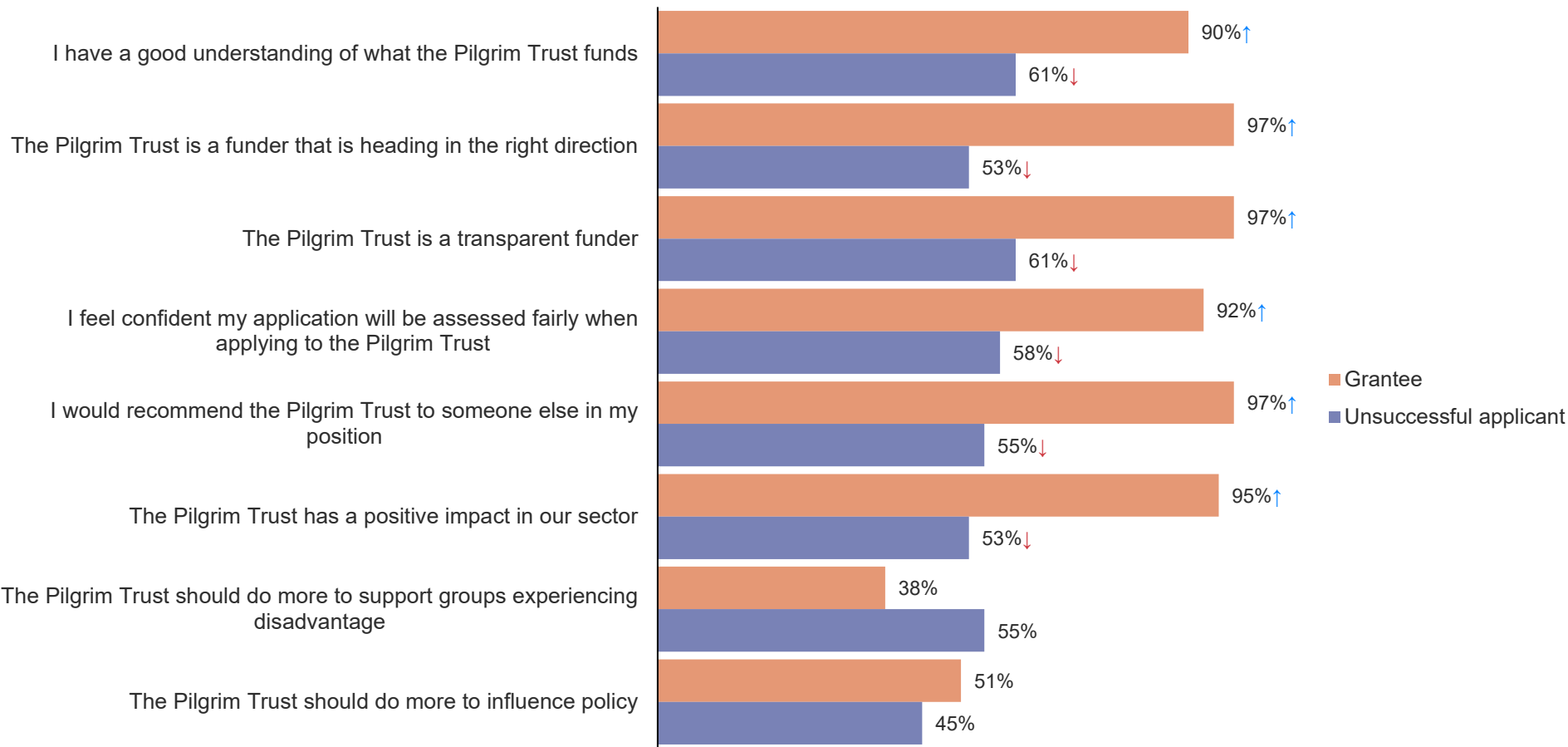
A photograph of two women practicing Tai Chi in a bright, modern room. The woman in the foreground is wearing a grey hijab and a grey long-sleeved shirt, with her arms extended forward. The woman in the background is wearing a purple t-shirt and has her arms extended to the side. In the background, there is a white table with various items on it, including a yellow cup and some containers. The room has white walls and a light-colored floor.

Perceptions of the Pilgrim Trust

The majority of grantees understand the Pilgrim Trust, think you are heading in the right direction and are transparent

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:"

Strongly agree + Agree



What does the Pilgrim Trust do well?

Communications and listening

- ✓ *"Communication is first class. The focus on developing an understanding of our organisation, feeling a sense of value and also motivational." Grantee, £101k - £250k*
- ✓ *"Pilgrim Trust listens to the groups they are funding with an openness and sincerity rather than a pressure that other funders can put on groups. The Cohort is an excellent way of meeting other people of like minds, people who are seeking to make social change and help the most vulnerable in society." Grantee, £501k-£1m*

Collaborative, relational funder

- ✓ *"Our experience is that they are available; they have focus; they are open to listening and responding to their grantees and the needs of young women and have done this brilliantly with Cohort 1; they are understanding and generous; they are purposeful. I think they have supported their vision for creating a community of practice really well." Grantee, £251k - £500k*
- ✓ *"I like the relational aspect of the cohorts, makes us feel part of a wider approach and not isolated - able to see the broader response of Pilgrim to charities working with those experiencing low mental health" Grantee, £1m - £5m*

Flexible and approachable

- ✓ *"Humanistic approach!! Funders can be scary to small organisations like ours, as they seem to hold all the power. Often, we are steering our work to please the funder and agreeing to meet unrealistic outcomes against unrealistic budgets. This isn't the case with the Pilgrim Trust, it genuinely feels like we are learning together." Grantee, £501k - £1m*
- ✓ *"Shares learning, is flexible and understands the practical pressures that we work under" Grantee, £501k - £1m*

Focus on young women & mental health

- ✓ *"Maintains a focus on young women which is often overshadowed by other issues. Creating a space for young women and supporting charities to develop ideas and project to address what is fundamentally missing from their lives at a hyper local level." Grantee, £1m - £5m*



“The Pilgrim Trust does an excellent job of providing meaningful, focused support to organisations working with vulnerable and underrepresented groups. They listen to the needs of grantees, offer flexible and thoughtful funding, and foster a sense of partnership rather than just oversight. Their commitment to long-term impact, particularly through programmes like the Young Women's Mental Health initiative, shows a deep understanding of the complex issues facing communities. Pilgrim Trust also communicates clearly and creates opportunities for shared learning through community of practice groups.”

Grantee, £251k - £500k

Where might the Pilgrim Trust need to improve?

Long term & core funding

- ❖ *“5-year funding - allows us to make an impact” Grantee, £101k - £250k*
- ❖ *“Core grant fund - would be useful, but I would feed that back to most funders!” Grantee, £501k - £1m*

Feedback

- ❖ *“Full feedback in the rejection email following telephone interview would be helpful.” Unsuccessful applicant, £501k - £1m, applied in 2024*
- ❖ *“Feedback from your grant officers. Taking into account the experience and understanding of the grantee.” Unsuccessful applicant, £101k - £250k, applied in 2024*

Restrictiveness of grant funding

- ❖ *“Only to ensure you are not putting off/restricting grants to organisations that are not solely focus on outcomes for women and girls but that have the relationships, understanding and knowledge to deliver fantastic projects exclusively for women and girls.” Grantee, £501k - £1m*
- ❖ *“Take away the age limit for target groups that organisations may apply for.” Unsuccessful applicant, £101k - £250k*
- ❖ *“In my opinion, the Trust should invest more in families as a whole, and in organisations that promote trauma informed early intervention support and training. This would make projects sustainable beyond delivery.” Unsuccessful applicant, £251k - £500k*

Simplified evaluation/reporting processes

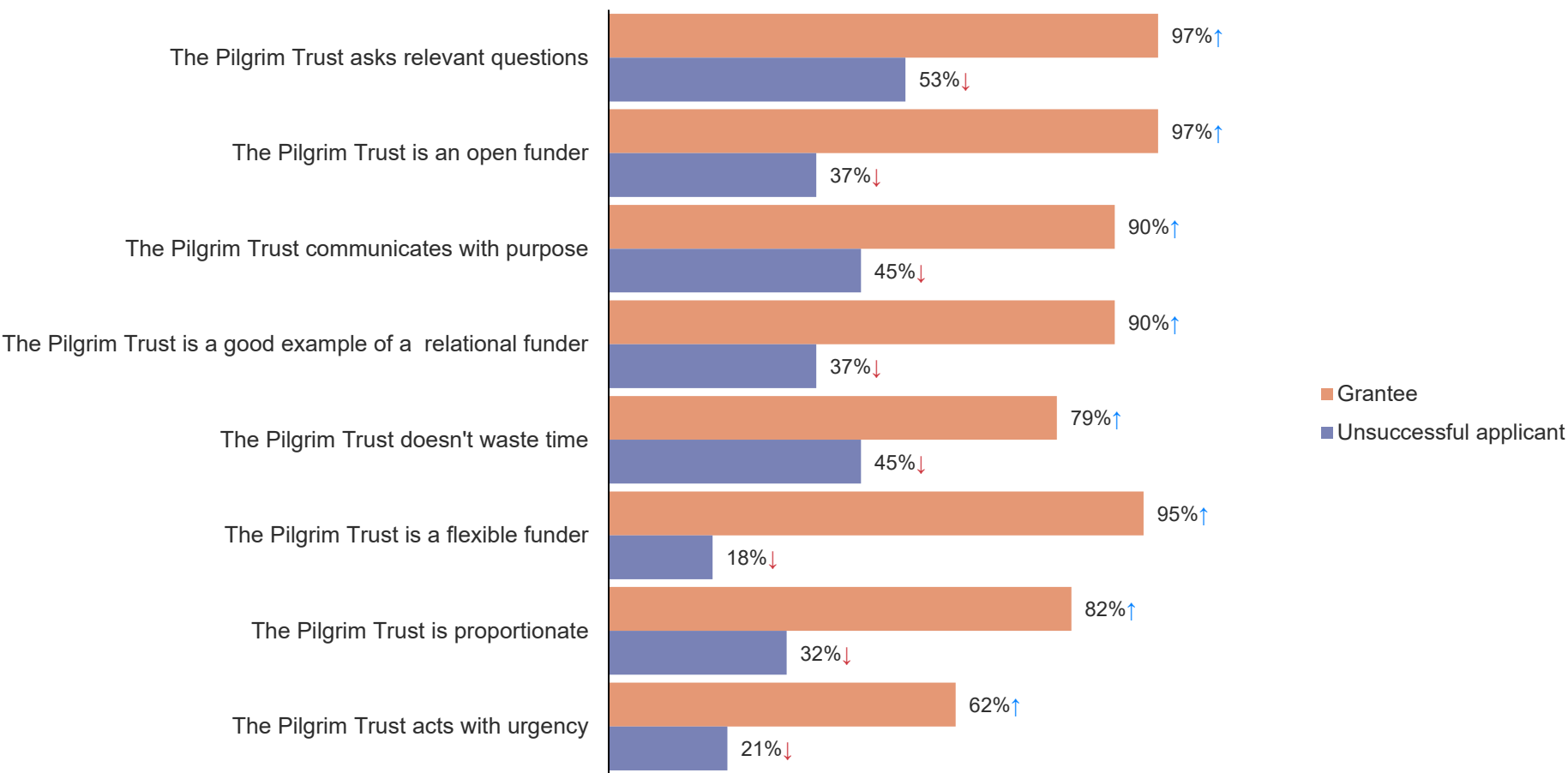
- ❖ *“Other than longer term funding or funding to grow, and simplifying the evaluation process I can’t see where there needs to be any improvements.” Grantee, £501k - £1m*
- ❖ *“Greater care in designing the monitoring and evaluation with CMH - paying attention to the participants and those who work with them.” Grantee, £251k - £500k*
- ❖ *“Lot of reporting and video evidence required. Feels over the top in some respects and almost an invasion of privacy.” Grantee, £101k - £250k*

Both grantees and unsuccessful applicants see you as a forward-thinking and innovative funder

	No. of mentions (grantees)	No. of mentions (unsuccessful applicants)
Supportive	18	6
Forward thinking / Innovative	12	7
Supports female / women projects	6	9
Focused / engaged	7	4
Approachable / Accessible	9	1
Impactful	6	3
Collaborative	6	2

Grantees are more likely to have a positive perception of the Pilgrim Trust using IVAR's guidelines

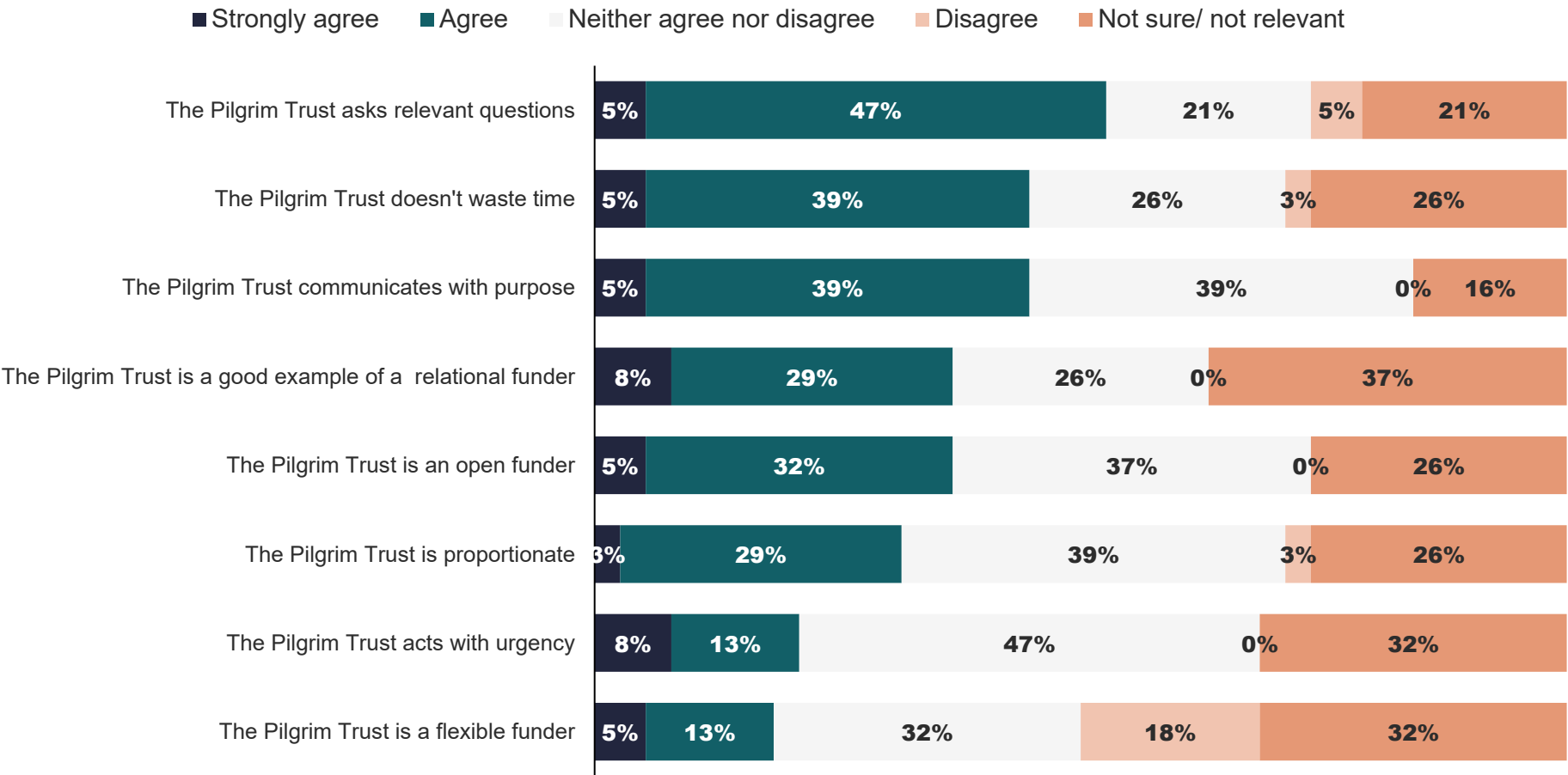
"The Pilgrim Trust aims to be a supportive, relational funder and has committed to IVAR's Open and Trusting Grantmaking. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:"



Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 0 to 39 respondents

IVAR's Open and Trusting Grantmaking

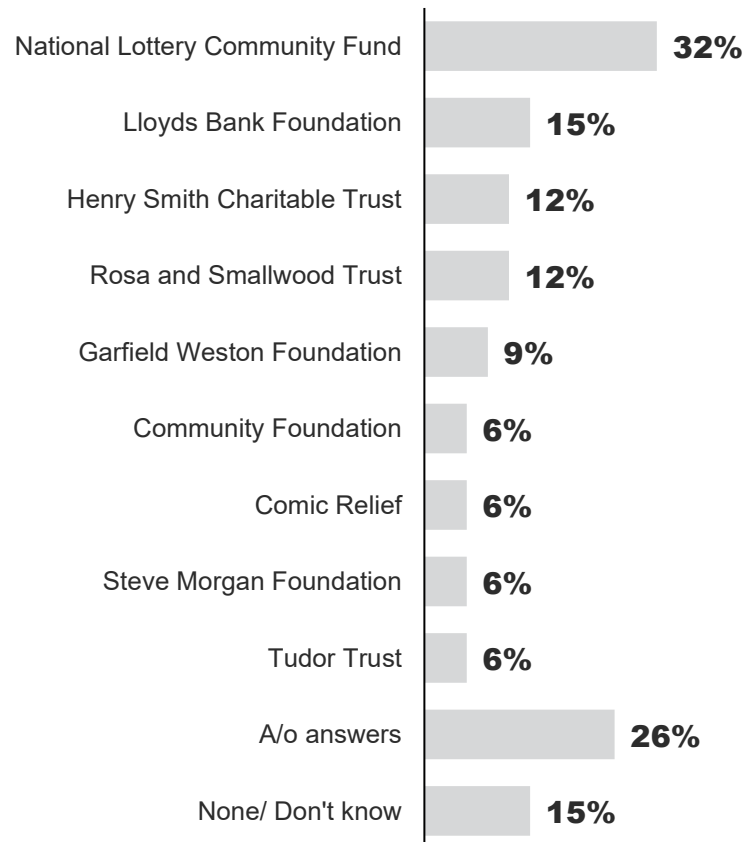
"The Pilgrim Trust aims to be a supportive, relational funder and has committed to IVAR's Open and Trusting Grantmaking. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:"



Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 38 respondents
Filters: Unsuccessful applicant, Year - 2025

Funders Pilgrim Trust could learn from

Top mentions



Reasons given

"We think the Pilgrim Trust application is great as it is, however, we also like the stages the lottery go through, which is stage 1 application with 4 main questions, then stage 2 is an open process where you present your proposal in the way you want without word counts or completing separate boxes." Grantee, £501k - £1m

"Our experience of LBF was really good. Alongside providing funding they also offer nonmonetary support for grantees to build capacity etc." Grantee, £501k - £1m

"Great relationship builders. Regular contact from Regional Manager, Monthly peer support groups that cover subjects pertinent to the sector. Very personable." Grantee, £251k - £500k

"They are open to new ideas and trying new things to meet new challenges." Unsuccessful applicant, £251k - £500k

"Are there any other grant-makers who you think the Pilgrim Trust could learn from? In what way?"

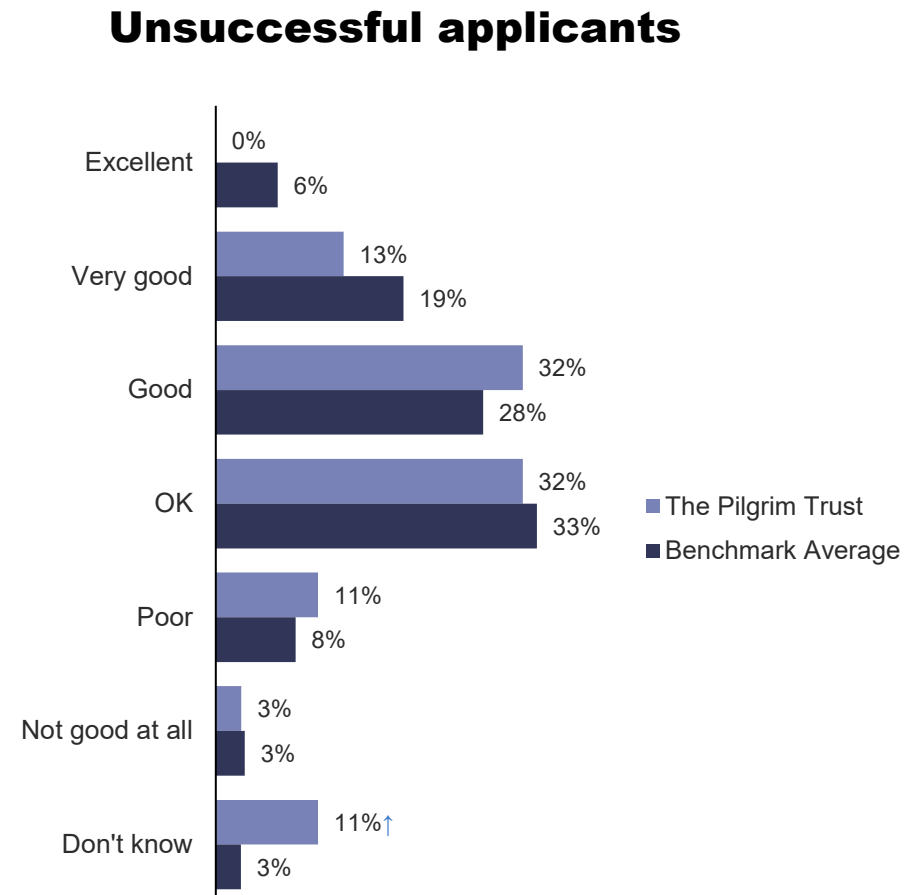
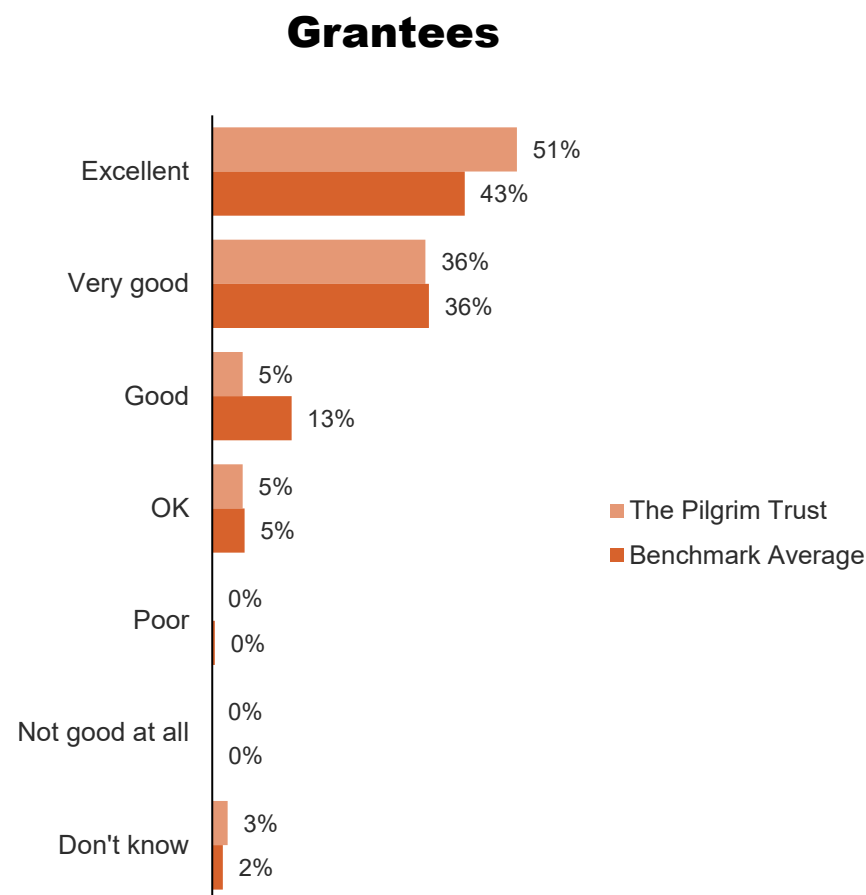
Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 34 respondents



Your application process

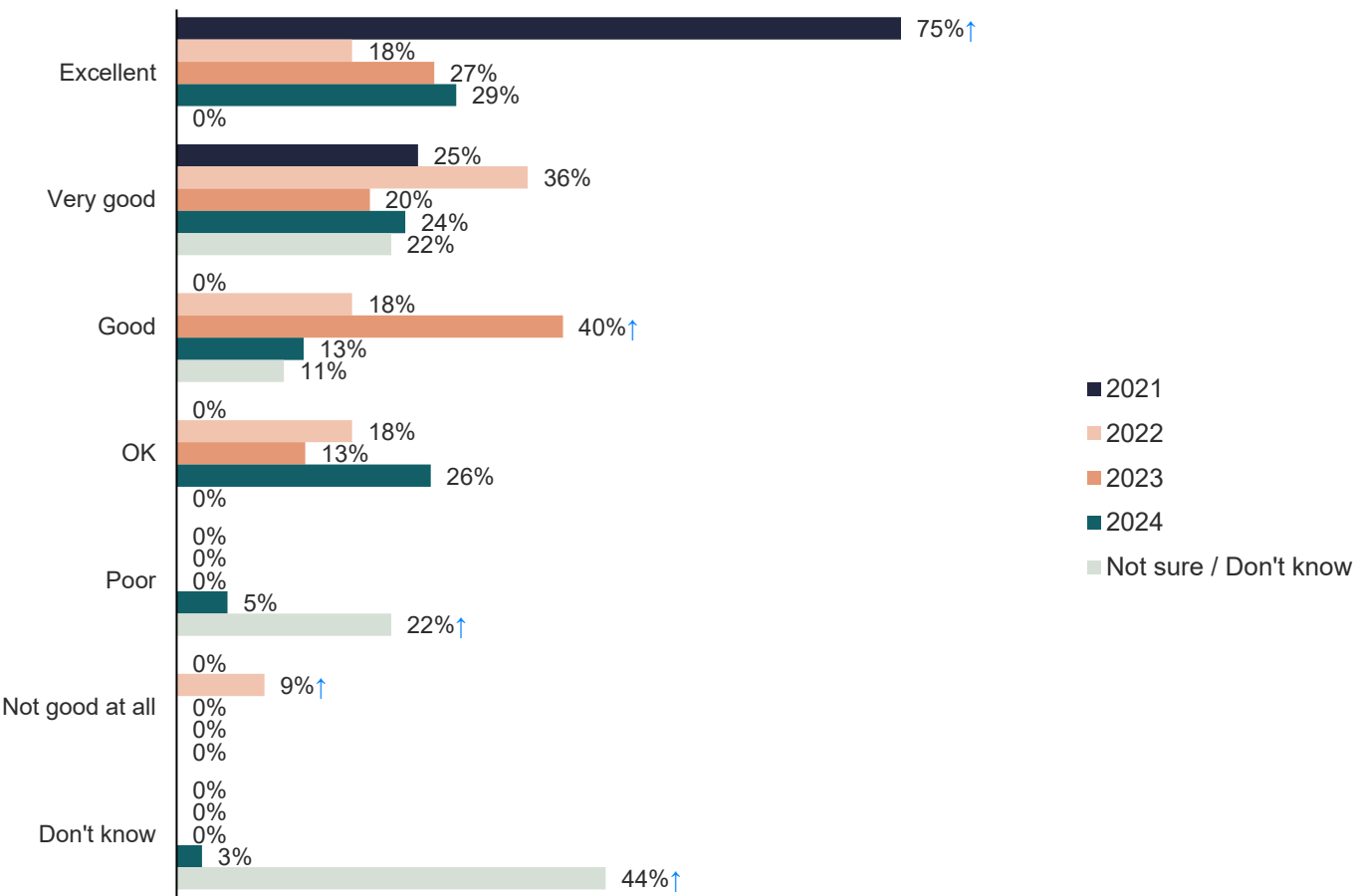
A majority of grantees rate the application process as excellent or very good – higher than the benchmark

"How would you rate your experience of the application process?"



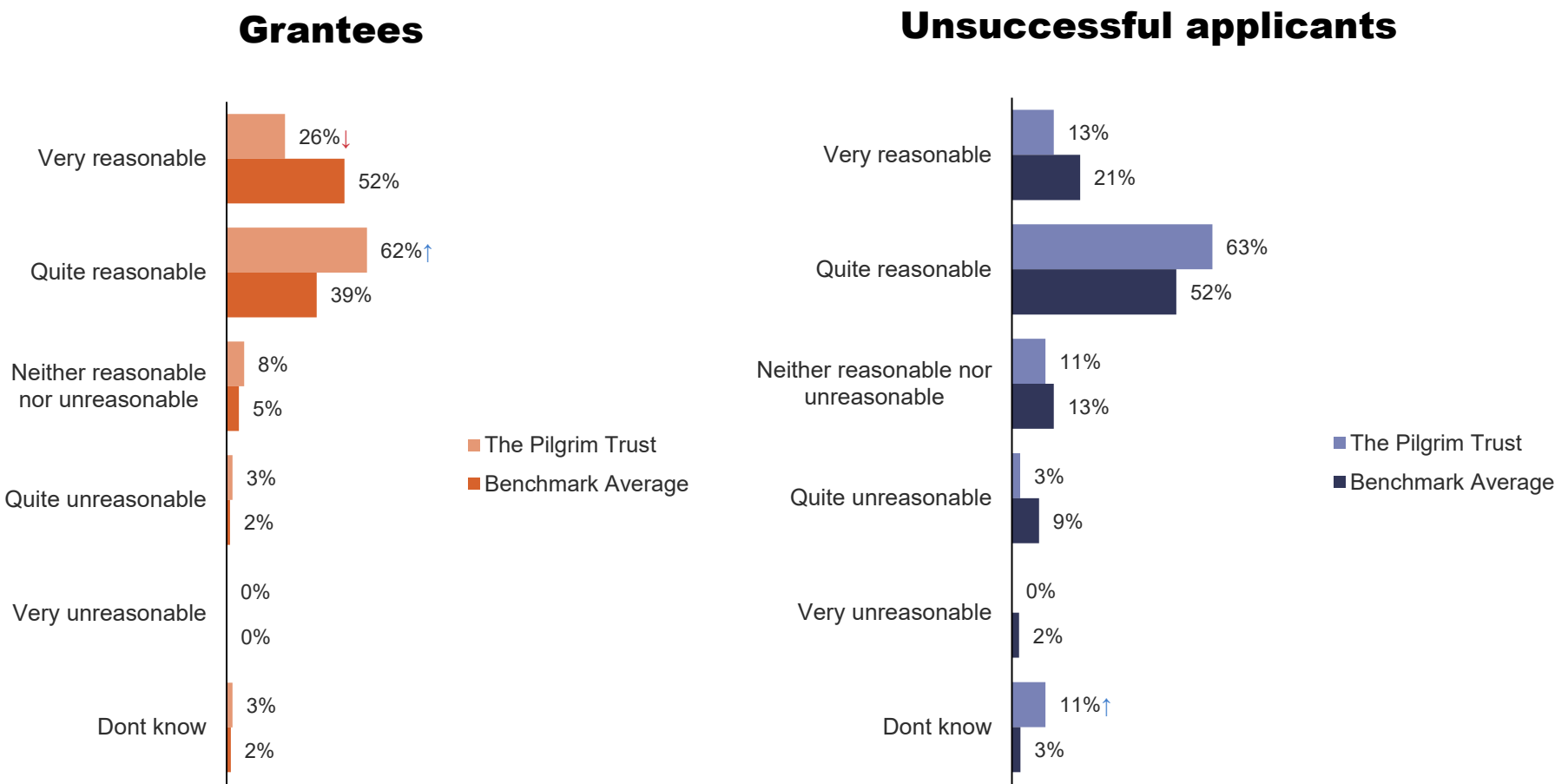
Overall Experience - Application process

"How would you rate your experience of the application process?"



However, perceptions of the reasonableness of your application process underperform for ‘very reasonable’ compared to the benchmark average

"How reasonable did the application process feel for the size of grant you were applying for?"

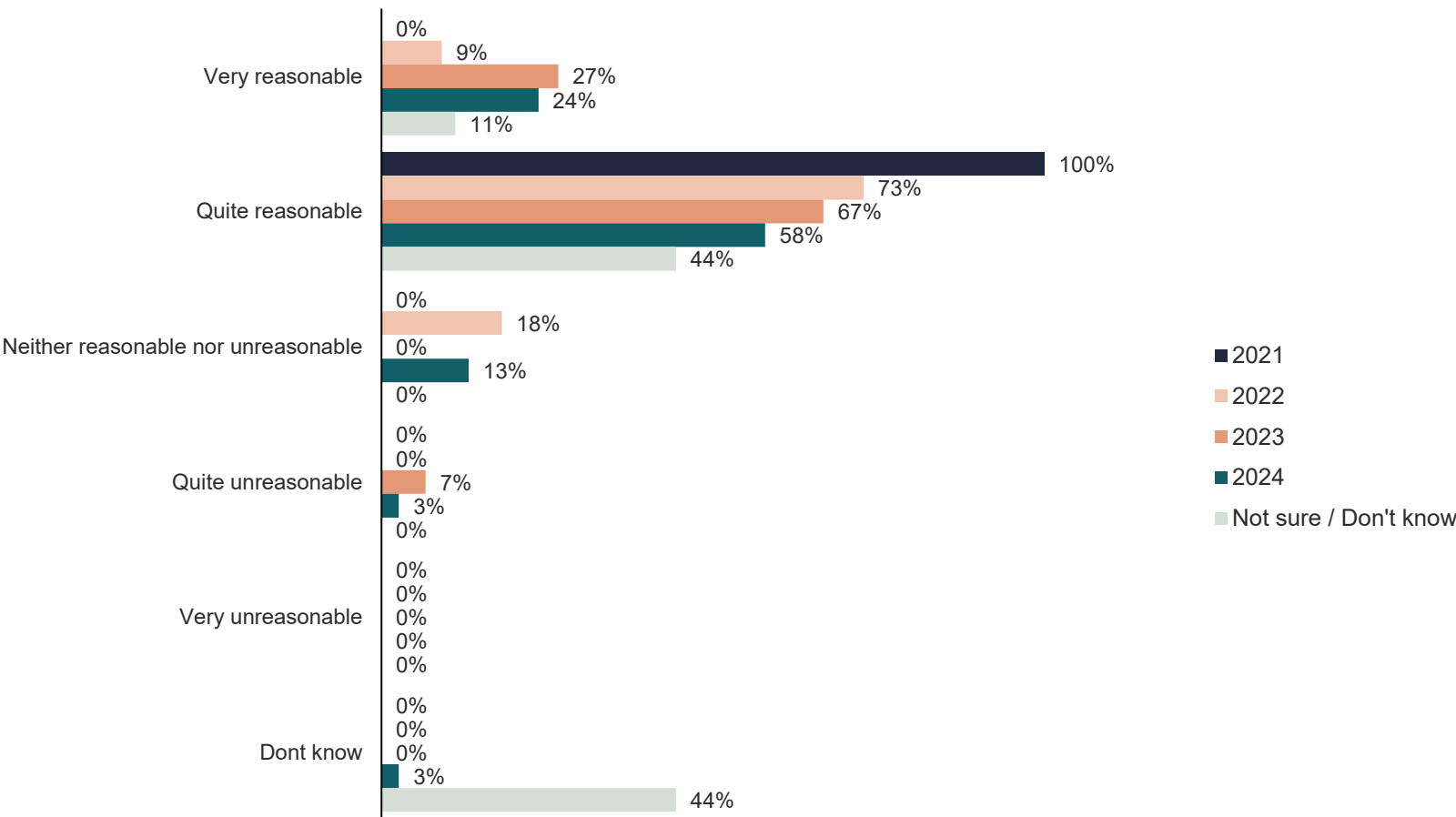


Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 0 to 1287 respondents - Grantee
Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 0 to 1275 respondents – Unsuccessful applicant

Reasonableness of application process

Demographics

"How reasonable did the application process feel for the size of grant you were applying for?"



Book a conversation

- ✓ The book a conversation system was described by a majority of applicants as easy, good and helpful
- ✓ It allowed applicants to better understand if they were eligible to apply and they appreciated the opportunity to get to know the funding stream/funder better
- ✓ It was seen as useful in saving time i.e., not writing the larger funding application
- ❖ A few applicants did not find the system helpful as they felt rushed, didn't receive funding or felt they were not understood as an organisation

"This was so good, Sonja was lovely! Very approachable and easy to talk to. She had a genuine interest in what we do and the difference we are making with young women. She was most focused on what we wanted to achieve and how we would make it happen, rather than how we would spend the money. Which was really refreshing. It made us want the funding even more. We felt like she believed in us."

Grantee, £501k - £1m

Stage 1 form

- ✓ Some applicants found the stage 1 form to be simple, time-efficient and useful
- ✓ A couple of applicants commented on how helpful the webinar about this funding stream was before submitting the stage 1 form
- ❖ Other comments were conflicting with some saying that stage 1 forms require a lot of work and information, whereas others felt having the shorter form limited their ability to convey the complexity of the issues they work on

"Useful, as we did not have to complete a full application and then (potentially) be rejected"

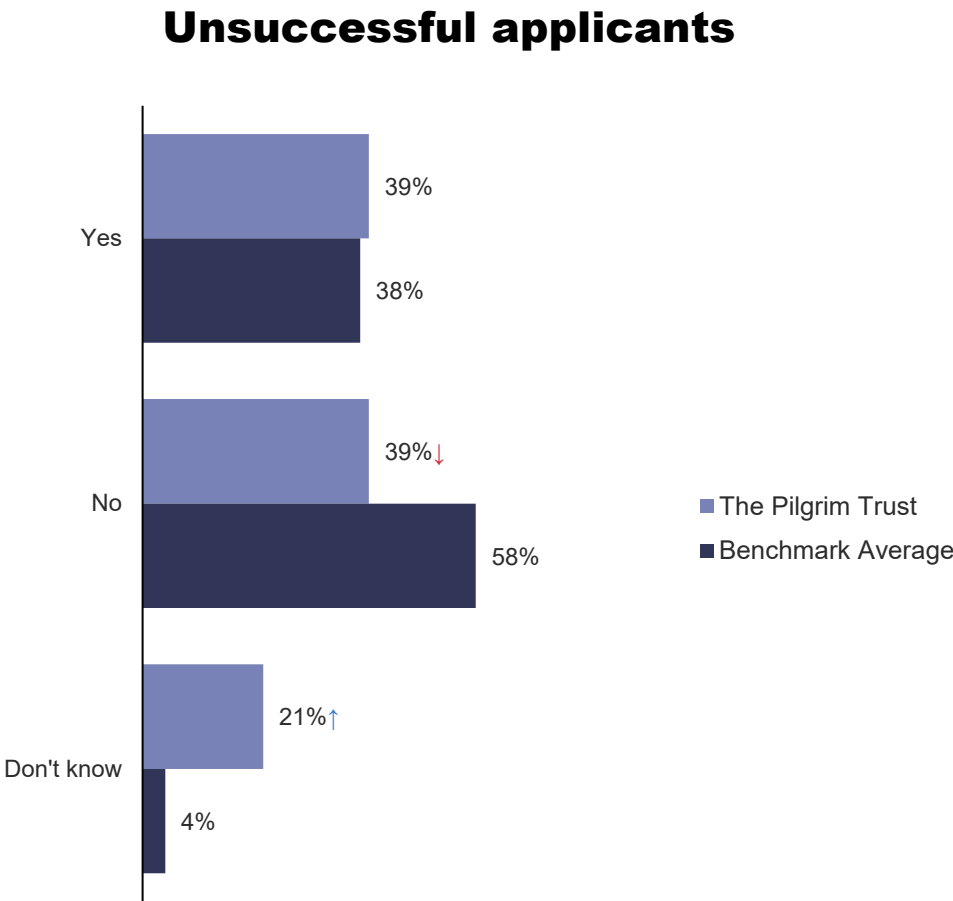
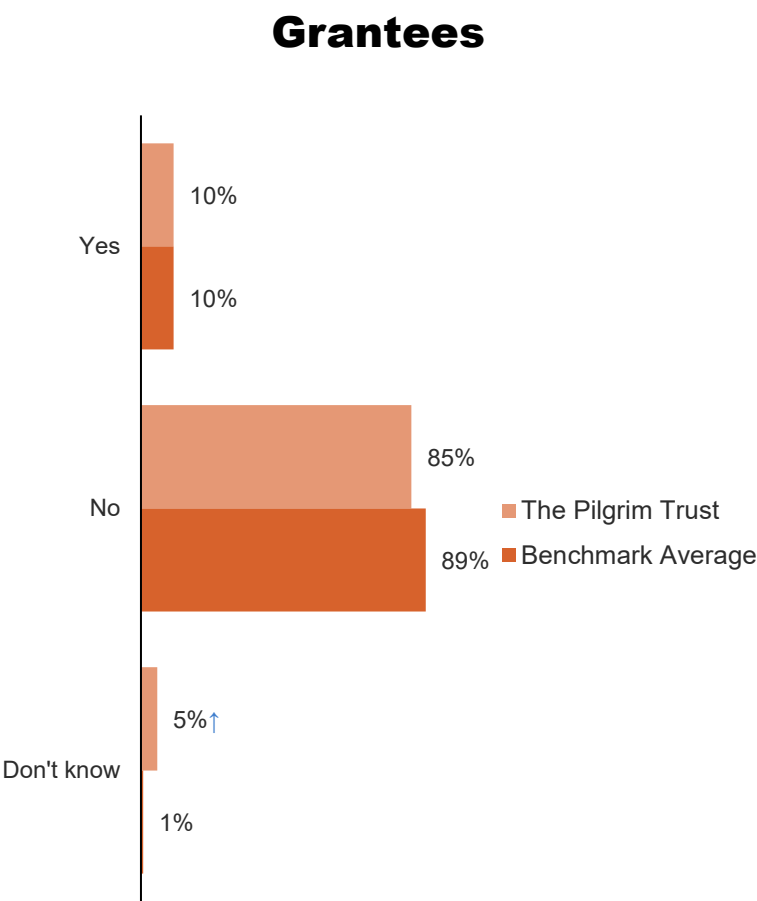
Grantee, £251k - £500k

"It was hard to reflect in detail the true experiences of our young women. Their issues are so complex, it was difficult to give in-depth information on our young women's experiences."

Unsuccessful applicant, £101k - £250k

Perceptions of barriers to accessing funding are in line with the benchmark average for grantees

"Would you say that your organisation has experienced any barriers to accessing funding from the Pilgrim Trust?"

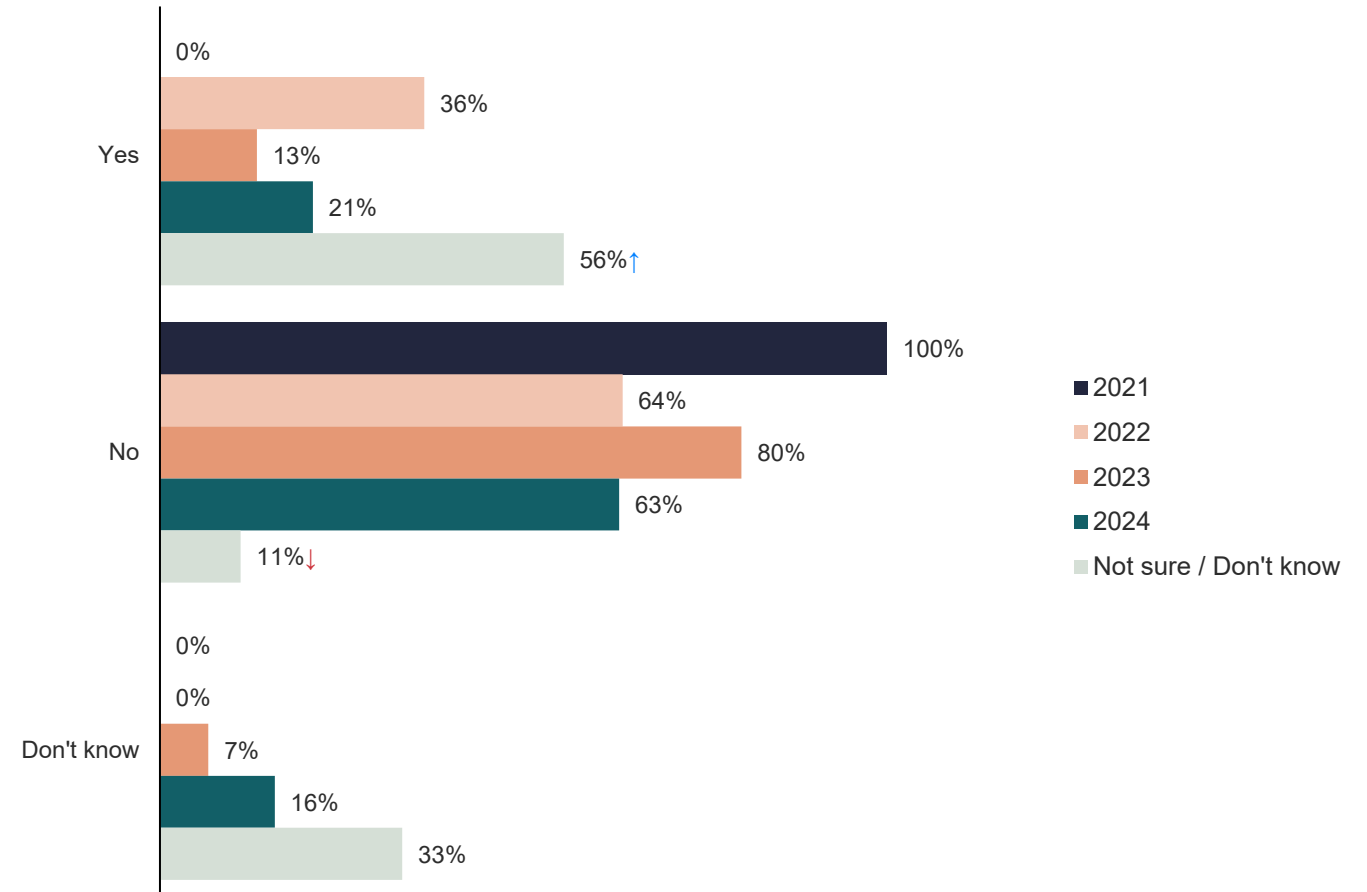


Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 0 to 572 respondents
Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 0 to 1061 respondents

Barriers to accessing funding

Demographics

"Would you say that your organisation has experienced any barriers to accessing funding from the Pilgrim Trust?"





Would you say that your organisation has experienced any barriers to accessing funding from the Pilgrim Trust?

Answered Yes

- The main barrier discussed by applicants was the specific demographics of funding i.e., only supporting young women and the age range being fixed
- Income/size of organisation meant they were too big to apply for the funding
- Structures of organisations not adhering to Pilgrim Trust guidelines
- A couple of applicants felt you did not fully understand their area of work and approach sufficiently and saw this as a barrier

“The barrier is the age group of only funding projects mainly for women under 25.”

Unsuccessful applicant, £101k - £250k

“We received funding, but I believe one quite strong objection to our application was that we don't have a female majority board (ours is 50:50). Whilst I can understand why this could be seen as a potential red/amber flag, it's also important to see non-female leaders and non-executives as allies rather than opponents and realise that some organisations that are not solely focused on women's mental health can still deliver projects which exclusively support women.”

Grantee, £501k - £1m

“It is my opinion that my applications for funding have been rejected due to reduced knowledge and understanding the impact of early intervention family support, and our trauma informed approach.”

Unsuccessful applicant, £251k - £500k

A photograph of two young women sitting on a stone wall outdoors. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt with colorful embroidery and is laughing with her head tilted back. The woman on the right is wearing a patterned tank top and blue jeans, clapping her hands and laughing. The background shows green foliage and a building with a window.

Your relationship with grantees

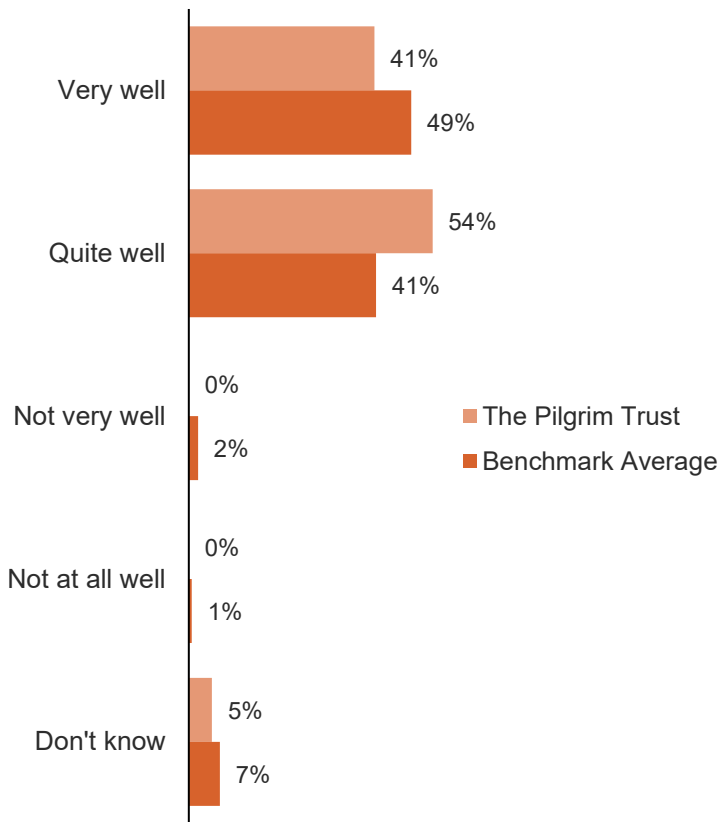
Grantees feel well understood by the Pilgrim Trust and staff are seen as helpful

"How well do you feel the Pilgrim Trust understands your organisation and its aims?"

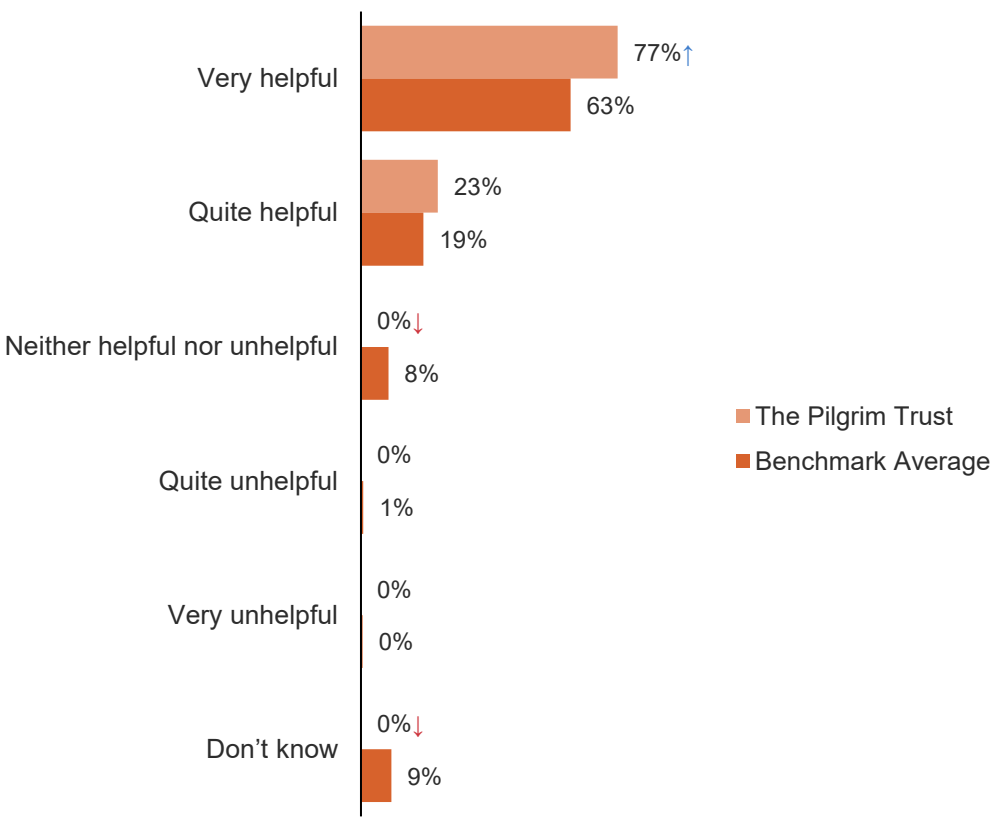
/

"How helpful were the Pilgrim Trust staff *after you received your grant?*"

Understands organisation



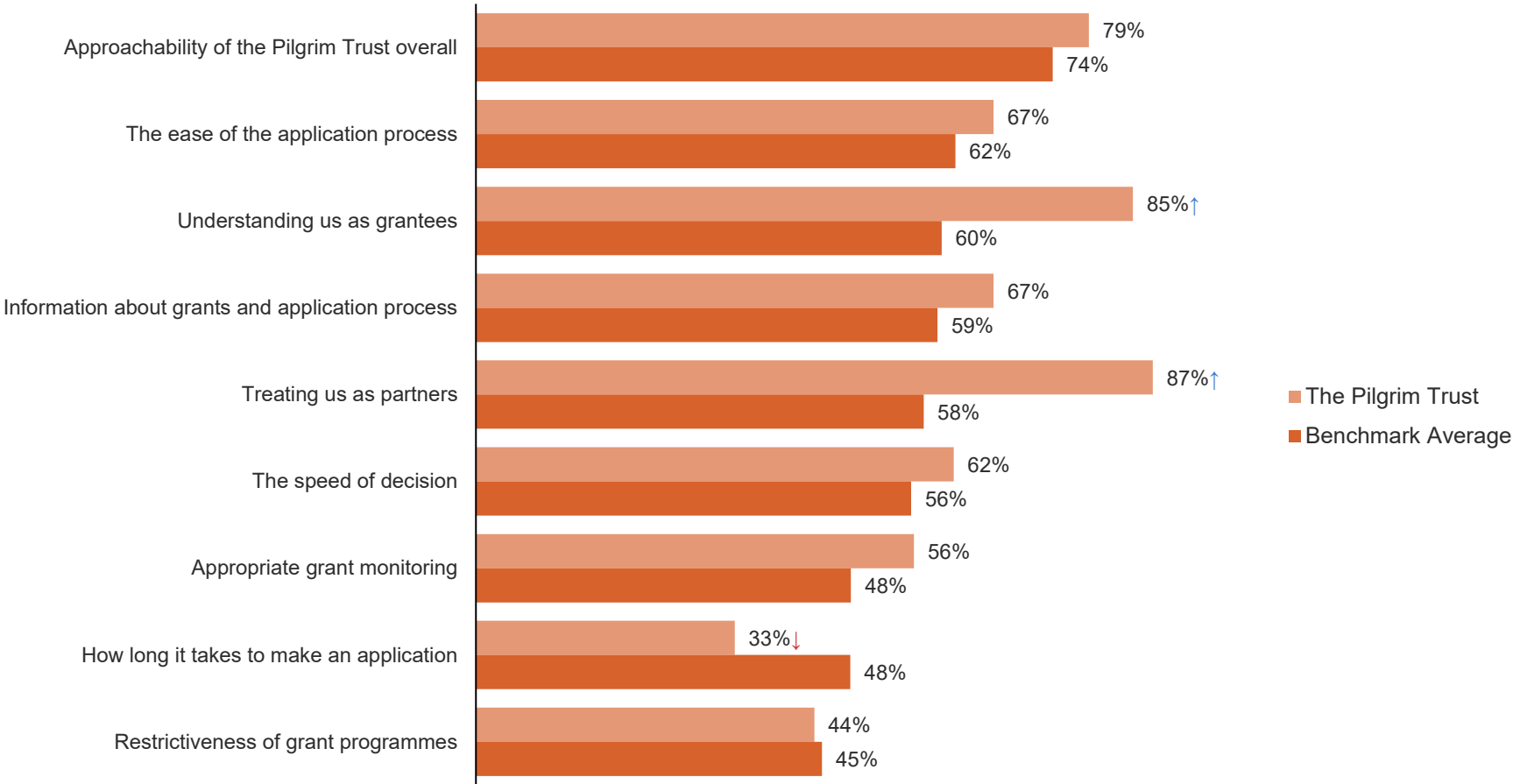
Staff helpfulness



In comparison to other funders, you are significantly better at understanding your grantees and treating them as partners

"When you think about your experience of applying for and getting a grant with the Pilgrim Trust, how would you say they compare with other funders? Please indicate on the scale of 1-5 below how you think the Pilgrim Trust compares with other funders, where 1 is much worse and 5 is much better."

Much better + Better



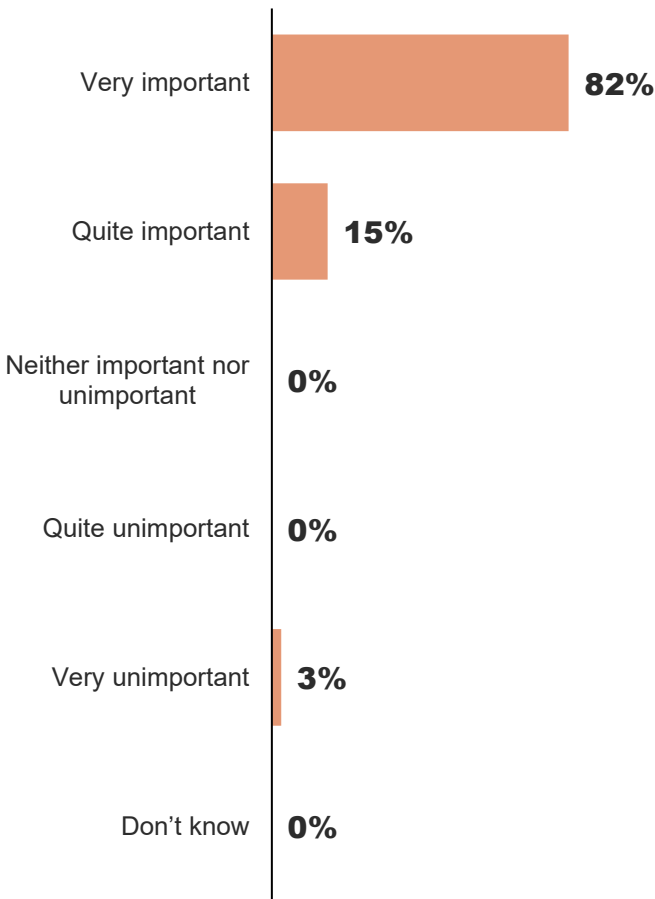
97% grantees agree the young women’s mental health programme been important to their organisation

"How important has the young women’s mental health programme been to achieving your organisation’s aims / mission?"

/

"To what extent to do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the young women’s mental health programme:"

Strongly agree + Agree



98%

It meets the needs of young women

92%

Focussing on women/a specific gender is the right approach

74%

Focussing on a specific age range is the right approach

41%

The definition of ‘young’ should be broader

Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 39 respondents



How important has the young women's mental health programme been to achieving your organisation's aims / mission? Please explain why you gave this answer.

"We work in a communities where young women face too many barriers to accessing the right support at the right time and where young women have received inadequate support for their mental health. This funding has enabled us to accelerate our model of working to reach more young women and develop an approach informed by lived experience."

Grantee, £101k - £250k

"The programme is one of the only such programmes we have come across and it aligns perfectly with our mission and aims. Developing cohort relationships with other grantees is also quite unique and gives great opportunities for developing longer term data and insights into the work being undertaken within young women's mental health and successful interventions."

Grantee, £501k - £1m

"We have prioritised single-gender work for many years, in order to maintain a safe and bounded space for young women. Having funding that supported this at practice level and through gathering together the other organisations that were being funded has been invaluable for the young women and for our learning and confidence."

Grantee, £251k - £500k

"We would not be able to deliver a women-focused mental health programme without the support of Pilgrim Trust. The funding has enabled us to empower young women in so many ways, including them leading on the project to support other vulnerable young women."

Grantee, £501k - £1m

"Focusing on improving the outcomes of young mums is a core part of our strategy and to have support from Pilgrim Trust to capture this into learning and influence policy is vital."

Grantee, £251k - £500k

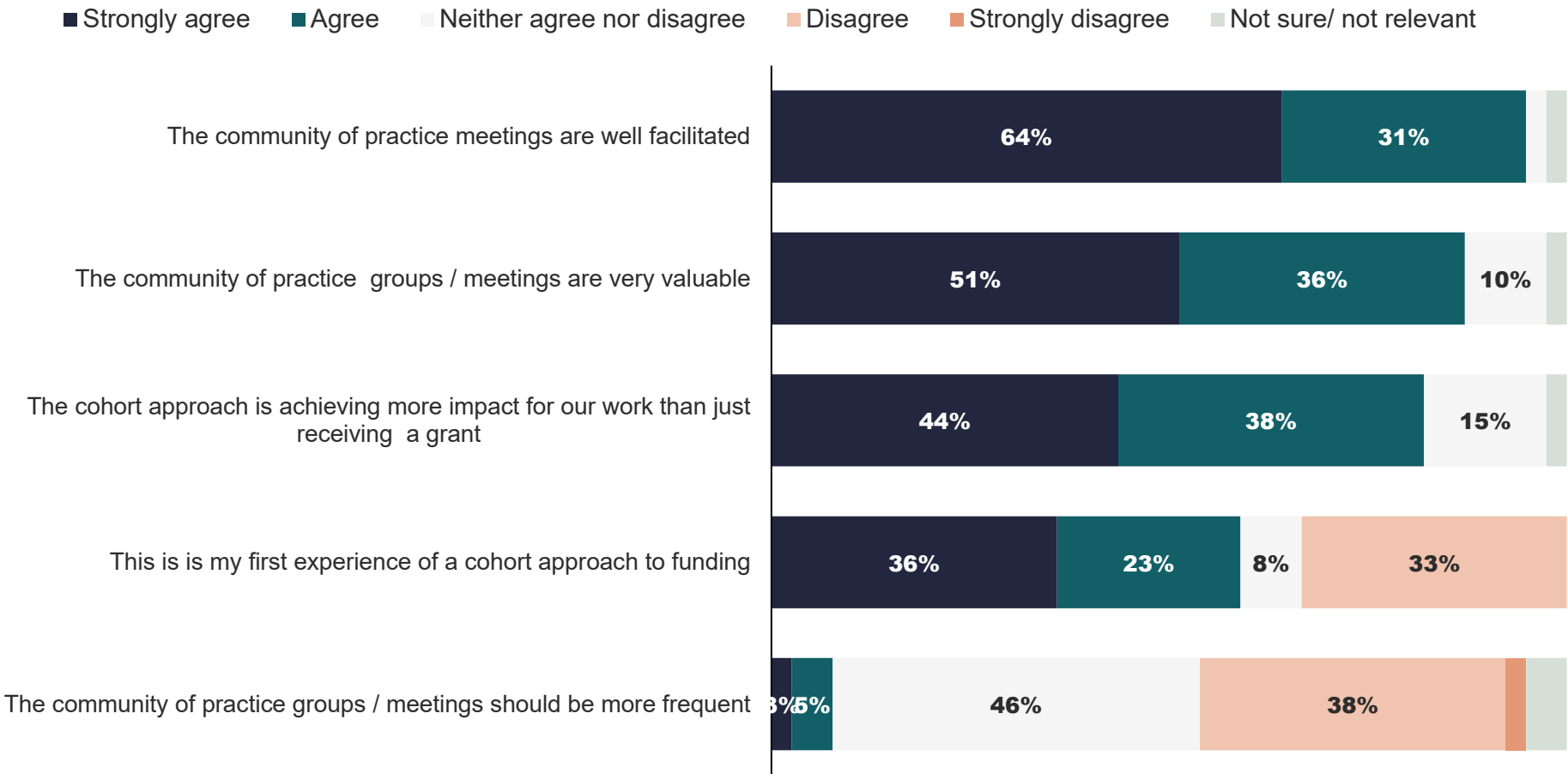


“The Young Women's Mental Health programme has been very important in helping us achieve our organisation's aims. It has enabled us to deliver targeted, meaningful support to young women who are often underserved in mental health services. The programme has provided the resources and structure needed to reach those most at risk, amplify their voices, and develop tailored interventions that reflect their real-life experiences. It has strengthened our capacity to deliver impactful work, expanded our reach, and helped us build trust within communities all of which are central to our mission.”

Grantee, £251k - £500k

The community of practice meetings are well facilitated and are valued by grantees

"To what extent to do you agree or disagree with the following statements:"

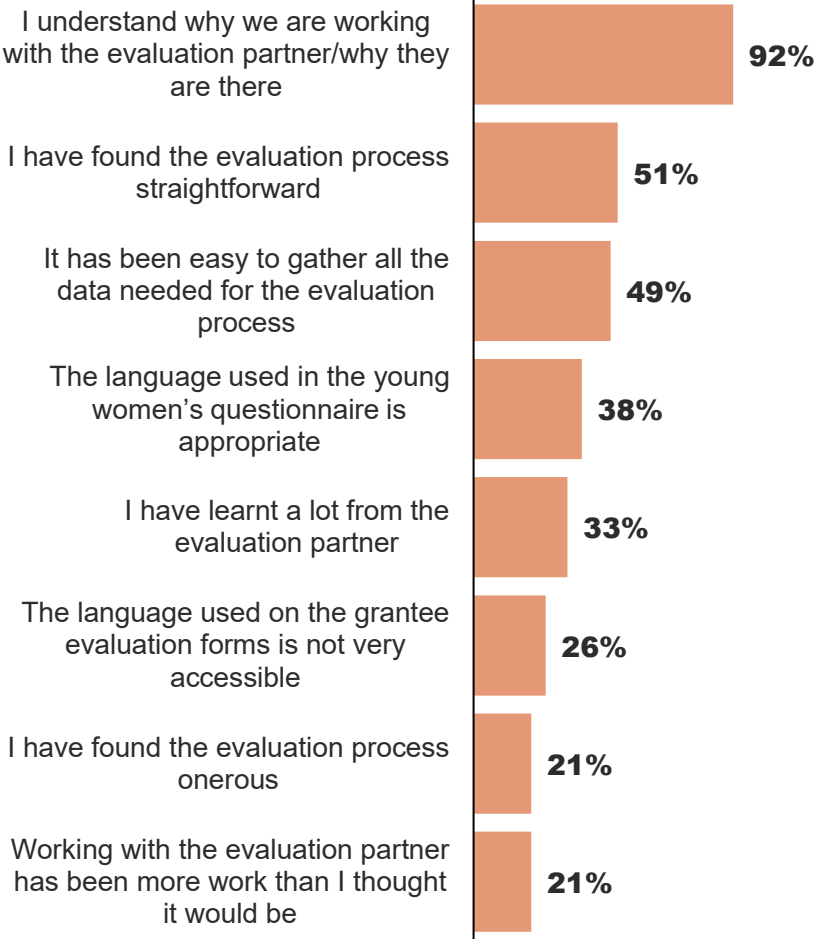


Whilst a majority understand why there is an independent evaluation partner, there are mixed opinions about the process overall

"To what extent do you agree or disagree about the following statements in relation to working with the independent evaluation partner (Centre for Mental Health):"

Strongly agree + Agree

Do you have any other comments about with working with an independent evaluation partner (Centre for Mental Health)?



"They've brought valuable expertise and an external perspective that has helped our organisation reflect more deeply on our work and its impact. Their approach has been respectful and collaborative, making the evaluation process feel supportive rather than burdensome."

Grantee, £251k - £500k, applied 2024

"As explained from the beginning (from us and the other funded organisations), the delay for the baseline surveys at the beginning set us back with our reporting, then the reporting requirements have been confusing at times. All projects are on different timescales so all reporting different stages of their project, which can make things confusing."

Grantee, £501k - £1m, applied 2022



“I'm really not sure that CMH heard our views and contributions at the start of the process when they asked, and they ended up developing a monitoring survey which was way too overwhelming for young women - very academically/research focused with little understanding of youth work processes and the lived experience and needs of the young women involved in our work. I think there were other way this could have been done, e.g. developing a questionnaire and then running a pilot to get feedback from participants - this would have immediately revealed the challenges - and then adjusting it early on. Focus groups would be another way to have gathered the information; and there are also lots of creative ways we could have used to get info, that are valid in research circles. Some thought also needed to be given around how to survey young women who were long-term involved in work - they tire being asked to do the same things twice/three times a year and it felt that the monitoring was designed on the basis of project work - that young women would have a fixed time within a PT funded project and then move on from it, so they would have a clear 'joining' point and 'leaving' point. This isn't the case with some projects. I feel a bit sad that the 'professional' research partner wasn't more open, collaborative and creative in working with us and the young women to develop something that would have worked with and for young women.”

Grantee, £251k - £500k, applied 2021



Feedback and clarity on rejection

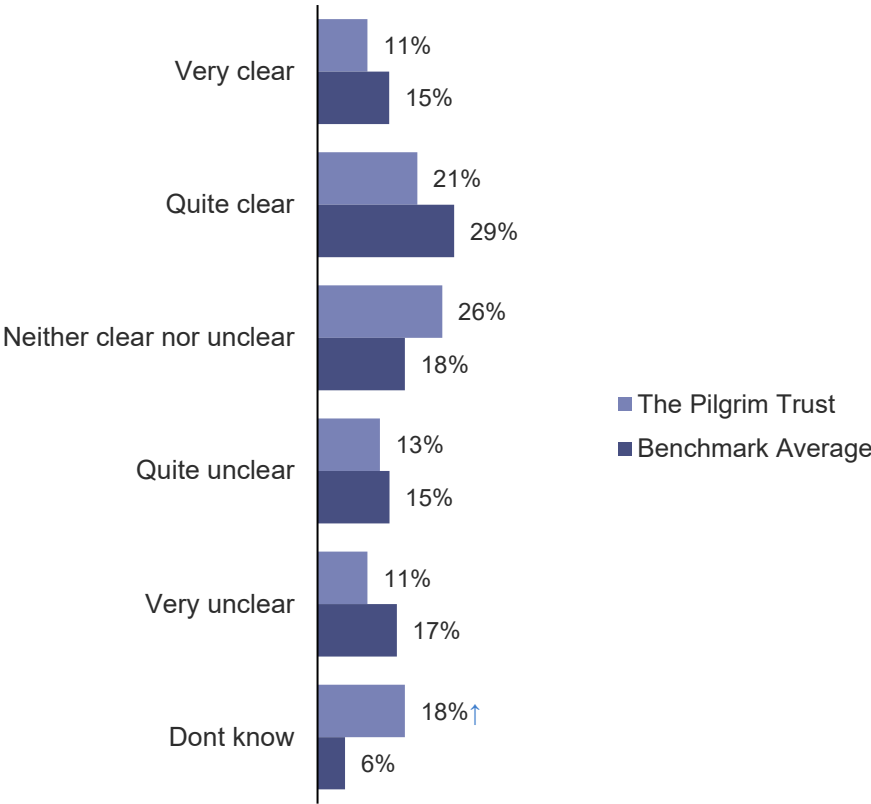
The Pilgrim Trust slightly underperforms compared to the benchmark for clarity of refusal

"How clear was it why the Pilgrim Trust declined your application?"

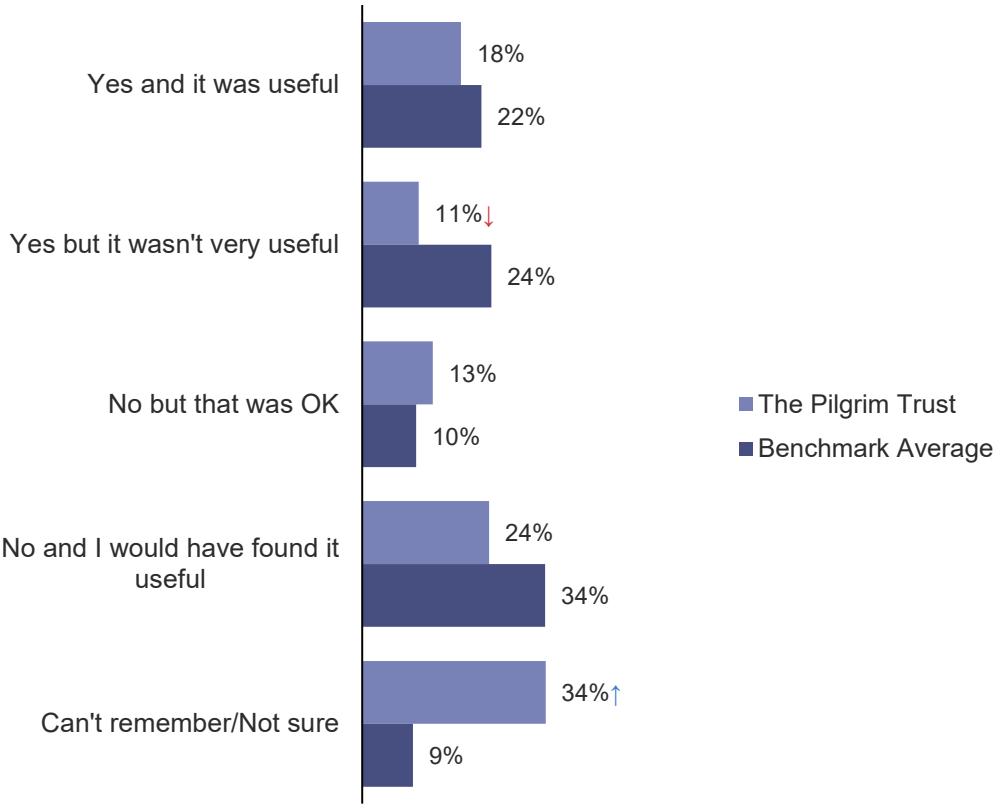
/

"Did you receive any feedback on why your proposal was unsuccessful?"

Clarity of refusal



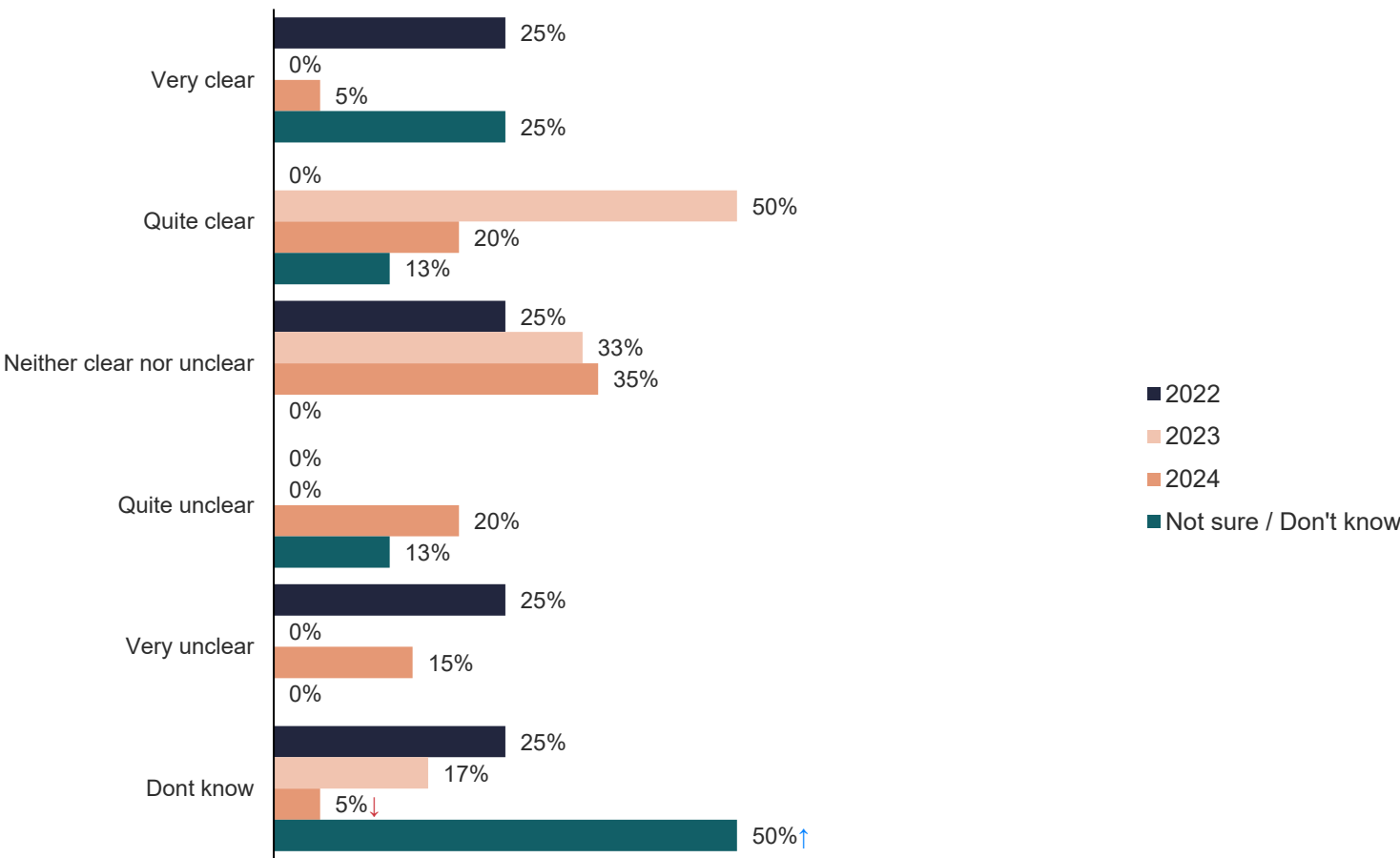
Helpfulness of feedback



Clarity on refusal

Demographics

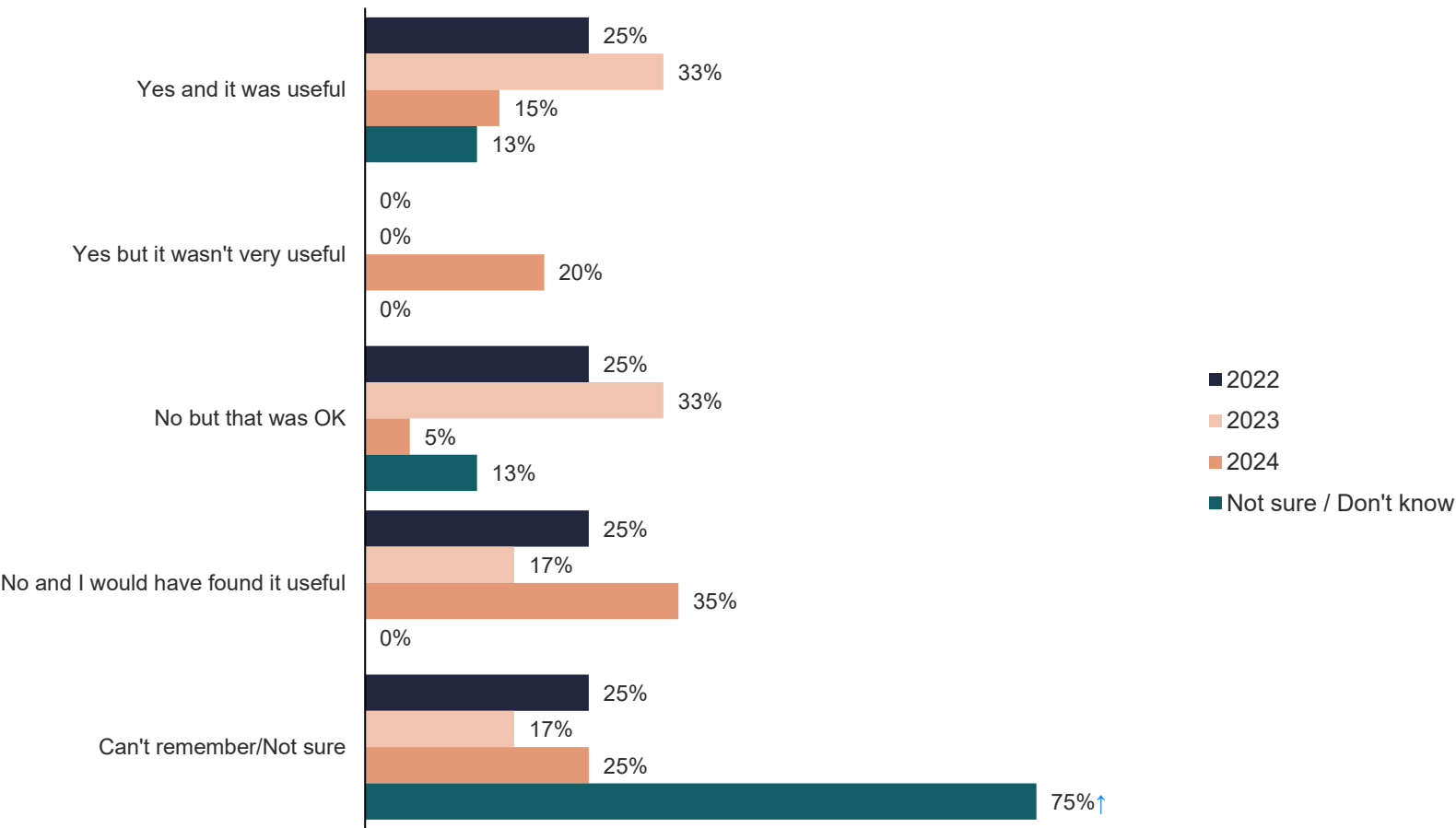
"How clear was it why the Pilgrim Trust declined your application?"



Feedback on unsuccessful application

Demographics

"Did you receive any feedback on why your proposal was unsuccessful?"



Feedback comments

Yes, and it was useful

“Noted that value of our proposal - rather than a straight 'no'”

Unsuccessful applicant, £251k - £500k, applied 2024

“Very clear informative phone call”

Unsuccessful applicant, £26k - £50k, applied 2022

Yes, but it wasn't very useful

“The feedback was minimal and essentially said there were lots of applicants”

Unsuccessful applicant, £1m - £5m, applied 2024

No and I would have found it useful

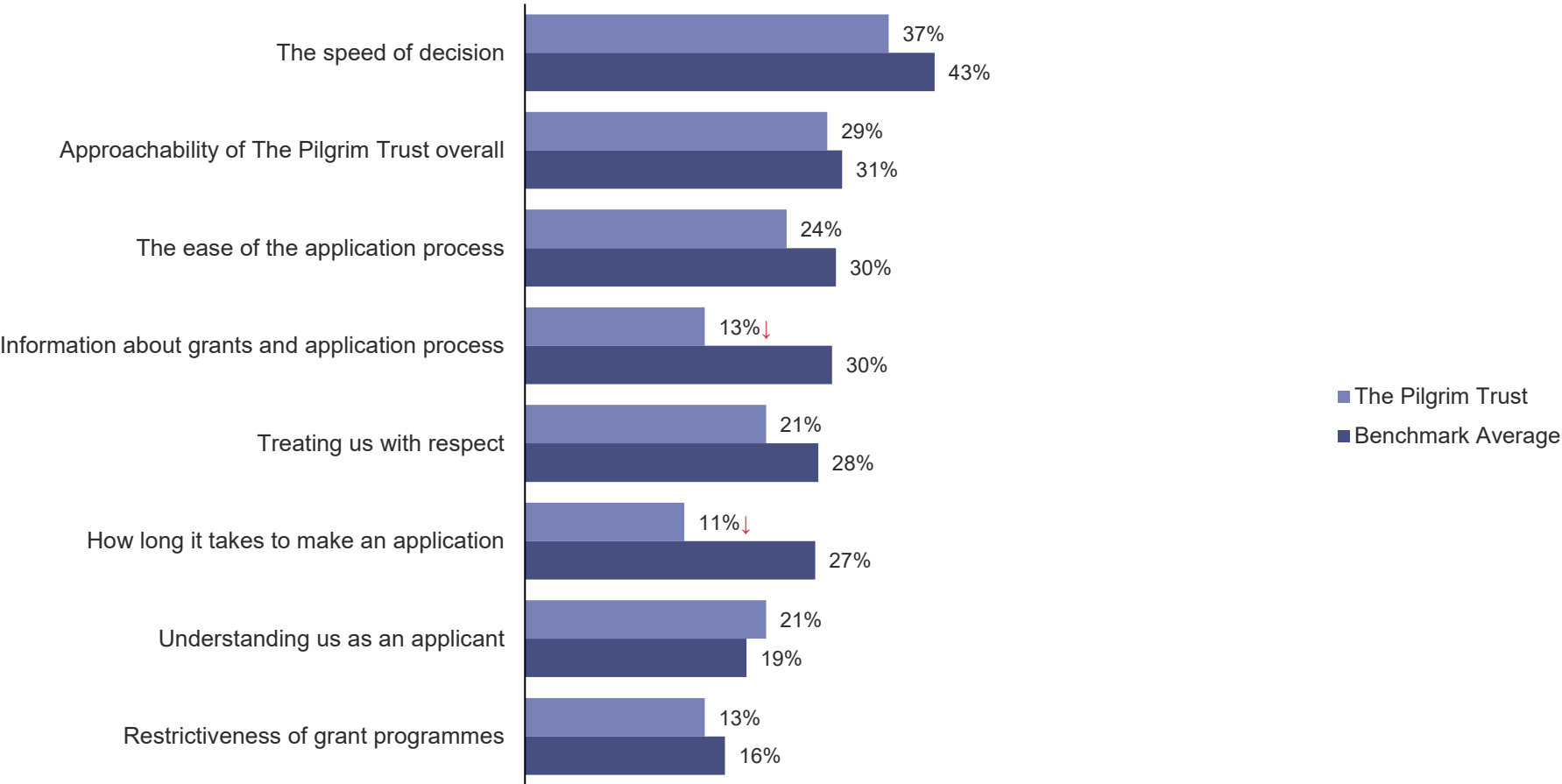
“I didn't feel the person I spoke to really understood the proposal and I felt we were going round in circles so formal feedback would have been useful to clarify that”

Unsuccessful applicant, £501k - £1m, applied 2023

Unsuccessful applicants feel other funders are better at providing information about grants and with the length of application

"When you think about your experience of applying for and NOT getting a grant with the Pilgrim Trust how would you say they compare with other funders? Please indicate on the scale of 1-5 below how you think the Pilgrim Trust compares with other funders, where 1 is much worse and 5 is much better."

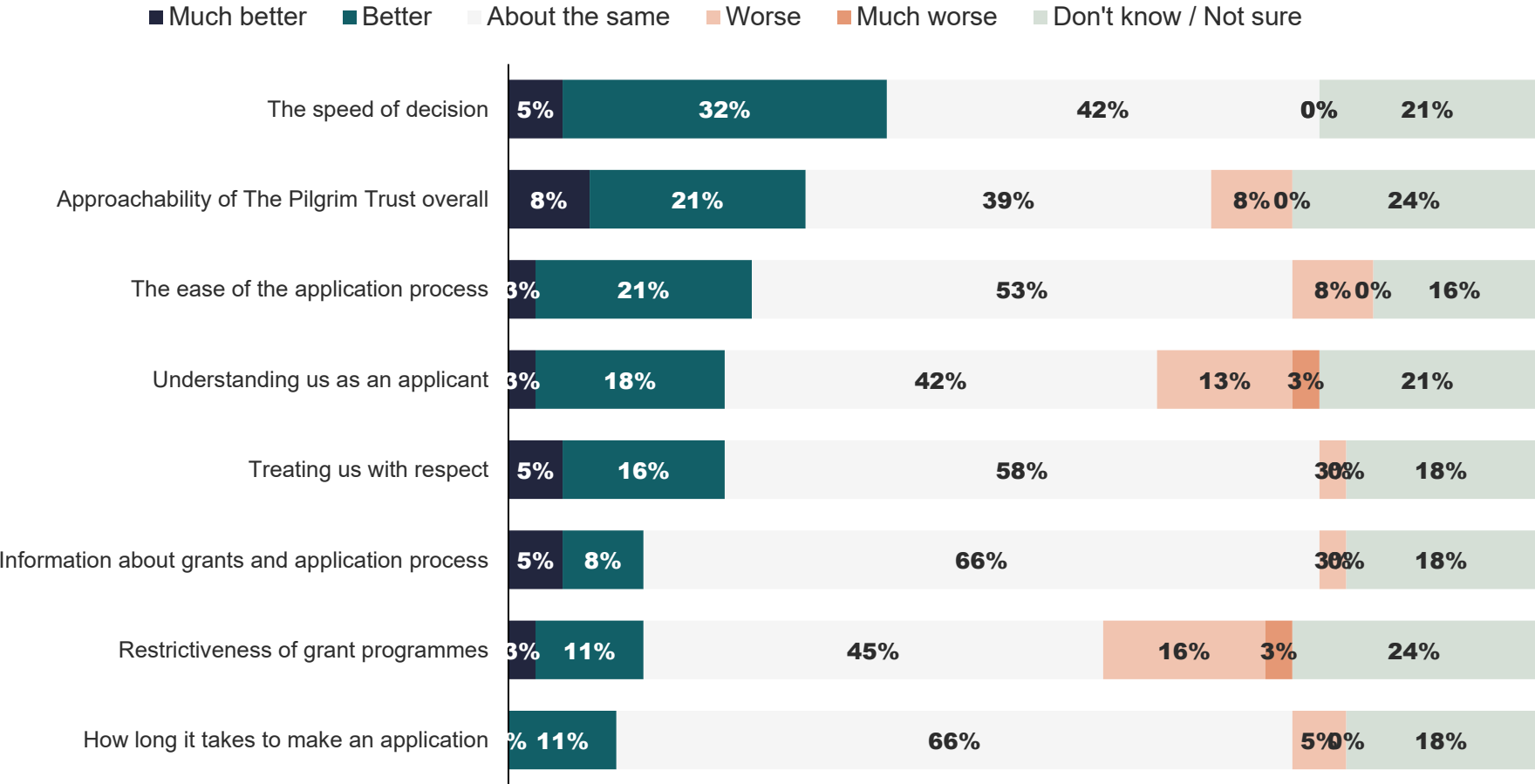
Much better + Better



Source: The Pilgrim Trust grantees and applicants survey 2025 - Young Women's Mental Health Programme | Base: 0 to 657 respondents

Comparison to other funders - Unsuccessful applicants

"When you think about your experience of applying for and NOT getting a grant with the Pilgrim Trust how would you say they compare with other funders? Please indicate on the scale of 1-5 below how you think the Pilgrim Trust compares with other funders, where 1 is much worse and 5 is much better."



Comparison to other funders - Unsuccessful applicants

"When you think about your experience of applying for and NOT getting a grant with the Pilgrim Trust how would you say they compare with other funders? Please indicate on the scale of 1-5 below how you think the Pilgrim Trust compares with other funders, where 1 is much worse and 5 is much better."

Much better + Better

	The Pilgrim Trust
The speed of decision	37%
	14
Approachability of The Pilgrim Trust overall	29%
	11
The ease of the application process	24%
	9
Understanding us as an applicant	21%
	8
Treating us with respect	21%
	8
Information about grants and application process	13%
	5
Restrictiveness of grant programmes	13%
	5
How long it takes to make an application	11%
	4

Thank you.



68-80 Hanbury St
London E1 5JL

insight@nfpresearch.com
+44 (0)20 7426 8888

Registered office: 68-80 Hanbury St
London E1 5JL Registered in England No.
04387900. VAT Registration 839 8186 72