



What Happens Next? 2026

A report on the outcomes of disabled graduates from the 2022/23 academic year

Foreword by Emerita Professor Jackie Carter

www.graduatefutures.org

Acknowledgements

Report authors:

- Claire Toogood, Research and Strategic Projects Manager, Graduate Futures Institute
- Sarah Nichols, Content and Research Officer, Graduate Futures Institute

The authors would like to thank the Graduate Futures Institute Disability Community of Practice for their input and support.

Published by Graduate Futures Institute in May 2026 © Graduate Futures Institute, 2026

What Happens Next? © 2026 by Claire Toogood and Sarah Nichols is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

About Graduate Futures Institute

Graduate Futures Institute is the community for all who contribute to careers and employability in higher education.

Through our 150+ member universities we are shaping graduate futures, together.

For more information visit www.graduatefutures.org

Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of contents.....	3
List of figures and tables.....	4
Report foreword by Emerita Professor Jackie Carter.....	5
Executive summary.....	6
Key findings.....	7
What is graduate voice, and what does it tell us?.....	8
1. Introduction.....	10
1.1. Report approach and aims.....	10
1.2. Methodology and sample.....	11
1.3. Terminology.....	12
2. Sharing a disability.....	16
2.1. Background information on sharing a disability.....	16
2.2. Sharing a disability by qualification level.....	16
2.3. Sharing a disability by type of disability.....	17
2.4. Sharing a disability by ethnicity.....	18
2.5. Sharing a disability by gender.....	18
3. Disabled graduates' outcomes by type of disability.....	19
3.1. All graduate activities and total employment by type of disability.....	19

3.2. Graduate voice by type of disability.....	21
4. Disabled graduates' outcomes by ethnicity.....	24
4.1. All graduate activities and total employment.....	24
4.2. Graduate voice by ethnicity.....	26
5. Disabled graduates' outcomes by gender.....	29
5.1. All graduate activities and total employment.....	29
5.2. Graduate voice by gender.....	31
6. Other employment factors.....	34
6.1. Highly skilled employment.....	34
6.2. Basis of employment.....	34
6.3. Main reason for taking job.....	35
6.4. Qualification required for job.....	36
7. Conclusions.....	37
8. Recommendations.....	38
8.1. Recommendation 1 - Target further transition and employability support where the outcome gaps are widest.....	38
8.2. Recommendation 2 - Embed an intersectional approach in design and delivery.....	38
8.3. Recommendation 3 - Strengthen data, learning and accountability.....	38
8.4. Recommendation 4 - Embed graduate voice in institutional policy and practice.....	38

List of figures and tables

Figure 1 – Number and percentage of Graduate Outcomes survey respondents who shared a disability with their institution during their studies.....	11
Figure 2 – GO survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution 2017 to 2023.....	16
Figure 3 – Total employment by type of disability	20
Figure 4 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity is meaningful” grouped by type of disability.....	21
Figure 5 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity” grouped by type of disability.....	22
Figure 6 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity fits with my future plans” grouped by type of disability	23
Figure 7 – Total employment by ethnicity.....	25
Figure 8 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity is meaningful” grouped by ethnicity.....	26
Figure 9 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity” grouped by ethnicity.....	27
Figure 10 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity fits with my future plans” grouped by ethnicity	28
Figure 11 – Total employment by gender	30
Figure 12 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity is meaningful” grouped by gender	31
Figure 13 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity” grouped by gender.....	32
Figure 14 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity fits with my future plans” grouped by gender	32
Figure 15 – Levels of highly skilled employment reported in GO 2022/23 survey.....	34
Figure 16 – Basis of employment reported in GO 2022/23 survey	34
Figure 17 – Main reasons for taking jobs reported in GO 2022/23 survey.....	35
Figure 18-- Requirements for qualifications reported in GO 2022/23 survey.....	36
Table 1 – Disability terminology used in report	12
Table 2 – Ethnic group terminology used in report	14
Table 3 – Gender terminology used in report	15
Table 4 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution	16
Table 5 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution grouped by type of disability	17
Table 6 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution grouped by ethnicity.....	18
Table 7 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution grouped by gender	18
Table 8 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents graduate outcomes grouped by type of disability.....	19
Table 9 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents graduate outcomes grouped by ethnicity	24
Table 10 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents graduate outcomes grouped by gender.....	29

Report foreword by Emerita Professor Jackie Carter

It is a privilege to introduce the What Happens Next? 2026 report at a time of profound change across the higher education sector, and increasing pressure to demonstrate not only access, but outcomes. This long-standing series provides vital insight into how disabled graduates are faring 15 months after leaving university and, importantly, where the system continues to fall short. As a Shaw Trust Disability Power 100 awardee, former Disability Academic Lead at The University of Manchester, and creator of the Let's Talk Disability podcast, I am proud to support the Graduate Futures Institute in bringing this evidence to light.

24% of the UK working-age population is disabled¹, and an estimated 70–80% of disabilities are non-visible². Yet legal protection under the Equality Act 2010 has not translated into equity of opportunity. The report findings are clear: disabled graduates remain less likely to be in employment (79% compared to 83%) and more likely to be unemployed (7% compared to 5%). However, the most significant insight is not simply that a gap persists, but that it is uneven and structural. Autistic graduates experience particularly poor outcomes, and intersectional disadvantage is stark, with disabled graduates from racially minoritised

backgrounds facing notably lower employment and higher unemployment.

Crucially, this report shifts the conversation beyond access. Disabled graduates are less likely to be in roles that are skilled, secure, or meaningful, and less likely to report that their work aligns with their aspirations or makes use of their capabilities. This is not a marginal matter; it is a systemic issue that disabled graduates experience as an individual challenge in the transition from higher education to employment.

If there is one priority for the coming year, it is this: to fix that transition. That will require coordinated action across higher education and employers – embedding intersectional support, strengthening accountability, and ensuring that disabled graduates are not simply entering the workforce, but thriving within it, in work that reflects their ambitions and expertise.

Jackie Carter is Emerita Professor of Statistical Literacy at The University of Manchester, a National and Principal Teaching Fellow, and a national leader and advisor in disability inclusion in higher education.

¹ Sonja Stiebahl, Shadi Danechi and Rachael Harker. [UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences](#). House of Commons Library, 17 November 2025.

² Rebecca Kelly and Natasha Mutebi. [Invisible Disabilities in Education and Employment](#). House of Commons Library, 12 January 2023.

Executive summary

This is the twenty-second What Happens Next? publication, and the fifth report using data from the national Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey to present an analysis of the outcomes of disabled graduates 15 months after they leave UK higher education. The nature and focus of the report has evolved in recent years, and it now includes graduate data beyond disability and qualification level. The analysis also considers ethnicity and gender, to more fully reflect the layered and multiple challenges that disabled graduates may face, and incorporates an explanation of, and focus on, 'graduate voice' measures, to understand how graduates feel about their activities following higher education.

The authors use data from the 2022/23 GO survey to understand the outcomes of disabled graduates and compare these with outcomes for graduates with no known disability. This report describes the number and proportion of graduates sharing a disability at different qualification levels and the types of disabilities disclosed, as well as the outcomes of disabled graduates by qualification level, ethnicity, gender and type of disability. For employed graduates, the report includes further evaluation of their basis of employment, their reason for taking

the role, the level of skill in their role, and the extent to which their qualification was required.

The report shows a persistent employment gap 15 months after graduation for disabled graduates. Outcomes vary by disability type, ethnicity and gender: disabled graduates are not a single homogeneous group. Autistic graduates experience particularly low employment and high unemployment. Intersectional disadvantage particularly affects disabled graduates who are not White, and those whose gender identity has changed. Disabled graduates are also less likely to find work they see as meaningful or aligned to career plans, and are slightly less likely to hold permanent contracts or highly skilled roles, highlighting the need for more targeted, intersectional support.

The report recommends the following:

- Target further transition and employability support where the outcome gaps are widest.
- Embed an intersectional approach in design and delivery.
- Strengthen data, learning and accountability.
- Embed graduate voice in institutional policy and practice.

Key findings

- **Disability sharing is increasing.** In 2022/23, 54,815 Graduate Outcomes respondents (21.2%) had shared a disability with their higher education institution during their studies; this level has been consistently rising year-on-year.
- **Disability sharing continues to vary by qualification level.** Disability sharing is highest at first degree (22.4%) level, compared with postgraduate masters (18.7%) and postgraduate doctoral (13.1%) level.
- **A disability employment gap persists 15 months after graduation.** Disabled graduates report lower total employment (79%) than graduates with no known disability (83%), alongside higher unemployment of 7% compared to 5%.
- **Outcomes continue to differ substantially by disability type.** Autistic graduates show the lowest total employment (72%), with lower full-time employment (41%) and higher unemployment (12%) than most other groups.
- **Intersectional differences are evident.** For example, when disabled graduate outcomes are grouped by ethnicity, disabled White graduates report the highest total employment (80%) and lowest unemployment (6%), while disabled graduates from other ethnic backgrounds report notably lower total employment (67%) and higher unemployment (13%).
- **Gender identity is associated with distinct patterns in outcomes.** Disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth report lower full-time employment (39%) and higher part-time employment (20%) and unemployment (10%) than disabled male and female graduates.
- **Employment quality differences are small but persistent.** Disabled graduates are slightly less likely to be in highly skilled employment (74% compared to 78%) and are marginally less likely to report a permanent/open-ended contract than graduates with no known disability.
- **Graduate voice differences are evident.** Disabled graduates are consistently less likely than graduates with no known disability to report that their current activity felt meaningful, aligned with their future plans, or made use of the learning from their studies.

What is graduate voice, and what does it tell us?

Fully understanding disabled graduates' outcomes after they leave UK higher education requires us to listen to the graduate voice and look beyond simple classifications of current activities.

As part of the GO survey, graduates are asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following three statements (commonly referred to as graduate voice questions)³.

- My current activity is meaningful
- I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity
- My current activity fits with my future plans

This year, for the first time, the What Happens Next? report explores these graduate voice responses through three lenses: type of disability, ethnicity and gender. This provides more nuanced understanding of how disabled graduates feel about their activities following higher education, potentially helping to identify where more tailored support may be needed to ensure

equity of opportunity. Hearing directly from graduates offers critical context to outcome data, highlighting not just what they are doing, but how they feel about their progress and direction. Responses to the graduate voice statements show the following.

- Across all three graduate voice measures, disabled graduates are consistently slightly less likely than graduates with no known disability to strongly agree or agree that their current activity is meaningful, makes use of their learning, or aligns with their future plans.
- Differences in responses are generally smallest in relation to perceptions of meaningful activity, and more evident in use of learning and alignment with future plans. These patterns are reflected across type of disability, ethnicity and gender.
- Agreement levels by type of disability are broadly consistent. However, there are some more pronounced differences. Autistic graduates, for example, report lower levels of

³ Note that wording varies slightly depending on the graduate's activities during the census week. For more information, see [HESA guidance on Activity Reflection](#).

agreement across all three questions, indicating less favourable perceptions of their current activity.

- Response variation by ethnicity is most evident in levels of strong agreement rather than overall agreement. Disabled White graduates tend to report the highest levels of strong agreement for some graduate voice questions, while disabled Asian graduates and disabled graduates from other ethnic backgrounds report lower levels of strong agreement.
- Disabled graduates whose gender identity differs from that assigned at birth are consistently less likely to report favourable responses across all three measures.
- There are also differences between disabled male and female graduates in responses relating to meaningful activity and the use of learning from their studies.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of considering not only graduate outcomes, but how those outcomes are experienced by different groups of graduates. While overall patterns are broadly consistent, the persistence of slightly less positive responses among disabled graduates, and

more pronounced differences for some groups, suggests there is still room for improvement and development.

The graduate voice responses also point to the importance of taking an intersectional approach to understanding the disabled graduate voice. Differences in responses across disability, gender and ethnicity background indicate that some graduates may experience overlapping and compounding forms of disadvantage, which can shape how they experience and interpret their graduate outcomes.

Recent policy developments further underline the importance of this perspective. For example, the Office for Students (OfS) recently announced that it will develop a statement of expectations relating to disability for higher education in England⁴, signalling a growing emphasis on personalised support and accountability. In this context, responses to the graduate voice questions provide important insight into how disabled graduates perceive the value, relevance and direction of their current activity, helping to identify where further progress may be needed to support positive and equitable graduate outcomes.

⁴ [Transcript of OfS speech announcing the statement of expectations.](#)

1. Introduction

1.1. Report approach and aims

In 2025, the OfS highlighted that equal access to higher education does not consistently translate into equal outcomes and called for whole-institution approaches⁵. This report aims to develop broader and deeper understanding of the barriers facing disabled students and graduates and thus enable the provision of professional support that facilitates and enables their labour market success.

The report also aims to highlight the potential loss to the UK economy created by unemployment and underemployment of disabled graduates. Examining and quantifying disabled graduates' outcomes draws attention to any employment gaps. We encourage all readers to use the report's findings to highlight the challenges and barriers experienced by disabled graduates and to inform evidence-based action.

In this report:

- Outcomes for disabled graduates and graduates with no known disability are compared, at first degree and postgraduate levels.
- Outcomes for graduates with different types of disability are explored to identify any differences in employment prospects among disabled graduates.
- The outcomes for all disabled graduates are also considered in conjunction with ethnicity and gender, to provide insight into intersectionality⁶ in this population, and how this may connect to graduate outcomes.
- Contract types, qualifications and skills required, and the main reason for taking roles, are explored to build a more detailed picture of disabled graduates' employment.

The What Happens Next? report series offers insight into outcome trends. Where possible, this report notes where findings agree with, or diverge from, earlier editions⁷.

⁵ OfS Insights Brief, [One size doesn't fit all: Equality of opportunity for disabled students](#)

⁶ Stemming from Black feminist activism, the term 'intersectionality' was originally used and defined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw as "a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create

obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking".

<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

⁷ The [2025 What Happens Next? report](#) based on 2021/22 GO survey data is available on the Graduate Futures Institute website.

1.2. Methodology and sample

This report examines the data captured by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) through the 2022/23 GO survey, the biggest annual social survey in the UK⁸, completed 15 months after graduation. In total, 258,080 graduates across three qualification levels⁹ (first degree, postgraduate masters, postgraduate doctoral) responded to the 2022/23 GO survey. Of these, 54,815 (21.2%) shared a disability with their higher education institution (HEI) during their studies. Figure 1 shows the equivalent data since 2017/18. Further details on sharing disability are explored in section 2 of this report.

All report data is rounded in line with HESA’s Standard Rounding Methodology (SRM)¹⁰. As a result, table totals may vary slightly from totals cited in the commentary. Graduate numbers are rounded to the nearest multiple of five. From section 3 onwards, percentages are rounded to zero decimal places as these sections consider disabled graduates in smaller groups. This may also cause discrepancies in sub-totals and totals.

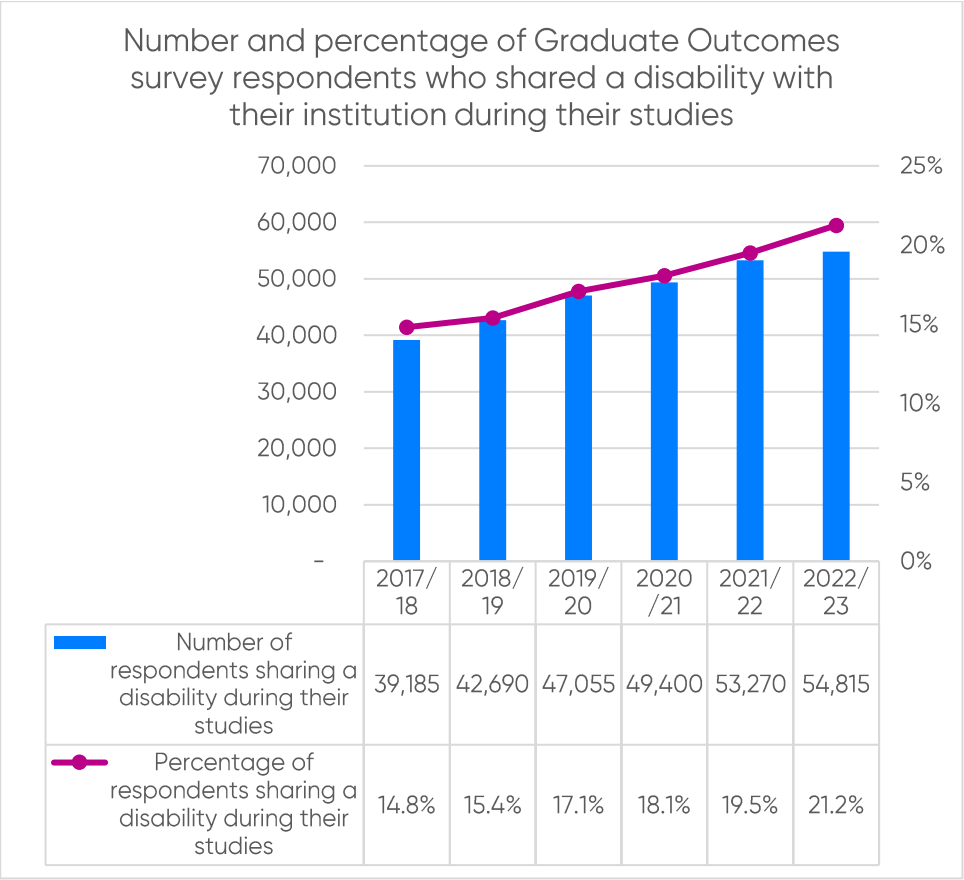


Figure 1 – Number and percentage of Graduate Outcomes survey respondents who shared a disability with their institution during their studies

⁸ More information about the [Graduate Outcomes survey](#)
⁹ Those who completed an award classified as “Other postgraduate” or “Other undergraduate” have been excluded, due to small sample sizes and for consistency with previous What Happens Next? datasets and reports.

¹⁰ More information about [HESA’s Standard Rounding Methodology](#)

1.3. Terminology

1.3.1. Disability

In this report, disability data is presented as shown in table 1, to align to the social model of disability¹¹ and maintain concise terminology.

Table 1 - Disability terminology used in report

Categories used in report tables/charts	Group descriptor used in report text	Categories of disability as captured by HESA
Autism	Autistic graduates	Social/communication conditions such as a speech and language impairment or an autistic spectrum condition
Blind or visual impairment	Blind or visually impaired graduates	Blind or have a visual impairment uncorrected by glasses
D/deaf or hearing impairment	D/deaf or hearing-impaired graduates	D/deaf or have a hearing impairment
Development condition since childhood	Graduates with a development condition since childhood	Development condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and speech and language
Learning difference(s)	Graduates with learning differences	Learning difference such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D
Long-term illness or health condition	Graduates with long-term illness or conditions	Long-term illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy
Mental health condition	Graduates with mental health conditions	Mental health condition, challenge or disorder, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety
Mobility or physical disability	Graduates with mobility/physical disabilities	Physical impairment (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying)
Other disability or condition	Graduates with other disabilities or conditions	An impairment, health condition or learning difference not listed
Two or more conditions	Graduates with two or more conditions	Multiple impairments, health conditions or learning differences

¹¹ Disability Rights UK, [Social Model of Disability: Language](#)

This report adopts the definition of disability described in the Equality Act 2010. This states that a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities¹².

In this report, the term 'disabled graduates' refers to GO survey respondents who shared a disability with their HEI during their course, and the term 'graduates with no known disability' refers to survey respondents who did not share any disability with their HEI. 'Graduates with no known disability' therefore includes graduates who declared that they did not have a disability, and those who did not provide any disability data to their HEI.

1.3.2. Total employment and total employment gap

Where the term 'total employment' is used, this has been calculated as the sum of graduates in all forms of employment – full-time, part-time, voluntary, and employment and further study. The total employment gap is the difference between this calculated sum for disabled graduates, and graduates with no known disability.

1.3.3. Approach to outcome terminology

Throughout this report, graduate outcomes have not been marked as positive or negative in any way, to recognise individuals' unique aspirations and expectations from higher education participation. In sections 3.1, 4.1, 5.1 and 6 there is a focus on employment. This does not indicate a preference for employment over further study or other activities as a graduate outcome and is certainly not intended to imply that this is a more positive outcome. Instead, it is a pragmatic approach to work with the dataset as effectively and thoroughly as possible; the larger numbers reporting employment of various kinds allow for more detailed analysis within each of the groups considered in this report.

¹² [Equality Act 2010, c.15](#)

1.3.4. Ethnicity

HESA uses the graduate's self-assessment of their ethnicity, as recorded when they were a student¹³. HESA data is presented in line with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) ethnicity frame¹⁴ for UK-wide data collection. This is reproduced in table 2, along with the HESA group descriptors used in this report. Throughout this report, these categories are presented as in table 2, to maintain concise report terminology aligned to government guidance on writing about ethnicity¹⁵.

Table 2 – Ethnic group terminology used in report

Categories used in report tables/charts	Group descriptor used in report text	ONS ethnic groups (as used in 2021 census of England and Wales) and used by HESA
Asian	Asian graduates	Asian or Asian British Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese Any other Asian background
Black	Black graduates	Black, Black British, Caribbean or African Caribbean African Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background
Mixed	Graduates from Mixed ethnic backgrounds	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups White and Black Caribbean White and Black African White and Asian Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background
White	White graduates	White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British Irish Gypsy or Irish Traveller Roma Any other White background
Other	Graduates from other ethnic backgrounds	Other ethnic group Arab Any other ethnic group
Unknown	Graduates from unknown ethnic backgrounds	Not known or not available Not known/Prefer not to say/Not available

¹³ More detail on [ethnicity](#) is available from HESA.

¹⁴ ONS, [List of ethnic groups](#).

¹⁵ UK Government, [Writing about ethnicity](#).

1.3.5. Gender

HESA collect data from students on their sex, and whether the gender they identify with is the same as their registered sex at birth¹⁶. In this report, this information has been brought together, to represent a graduate's employment outcomes and experiences in line with their gender identity, wherever possible. Anyone who chose not to share their gender identity, or whose gender identity was not available, is not included in the gender-led report elements, to ensure there is no misrepresentation. Table 3 shows how the two HESA datasets (sex and gender identity) combine and are presented in the report. Graduates in the "Gender identity not the same as at birth" group may identify as non-binary, transgender, male, female, or other; it is not possible to be more specific due to the limitations in the existing data.

Table 3 – Gender terminology used in report

Categories used in report tables/charts	Group descriptor used in report text	Sex in HESA student record	Response to HESA gender identity question
Female	Female graduates	Female	Yes – gender identity is the same as that originally assigned at birth
Male	Male graduates	Male	Yes – gender identity is the same as that originally assigned at birth
Gender identity not the same as at birth	Graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth	Female	No – gender identity is not the same as that originally assigned at birth
		Male	No – gender identity is not the same as that originally assigned at birth
		Not known	No – gender identity is not the same as that originally assigned at birth

1.3.6. Report changes and comparability

Although part of a longstanding report series, What Happens Next? has evolved year-on-year to ensure the report remains current, inclusive and of maximum value to stakeholders. Changes to this year's report, designed to develop the focus on graduate voice and intersectionality, rather than reporting by qualification level, have reduced direct comparability to previous reports in some sections.

¹⁶ More detail on the [Sex](#) and [Gender](#) questions is available from HESA.

2. Sharing a disability

2.1. Background information on sharing a disability

Each graduate makes an individual choice about whether to share a disability with their institution; there is no obligation to report disability, but support may not be available if this information is not shared. The disability statuses used in this dataset are those recorded for graduate GO survey respondents during their course of study. These are later matched (using HESA's unique student identifier) to the GO survey responses. As a result, there is the potential for specific gaps in the data, for example, graduates who become disabled after graduation, graduates who chose not to share their disability with their institution whilst studying, and graduates who did not complete the GO survey.

2.2. Sharing a disability by qualification level

Table 4 shows the number and proportion of GO survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution at each qualification level in 2022/23. Proportions are higher at first degree level (22.4%) than at postgraduate (masters) (18.7%) or at postgraduate (doctoral) level (13.1%). This is a recurring pattern in recent years, as figure 2 illustrates.

Table 4 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution

Level of qualification	Graduates with no known disability	Graduates sharing a disability	Total number of graduates	Disability sharing by level of qualification
First degree	149,375	43,050	192,425	22.4%
Postgraduate (masters)	46,040	10,585	56,625	18.7%
Postgraduate (doctoral)	7,850	1,180	9,030	13.1%

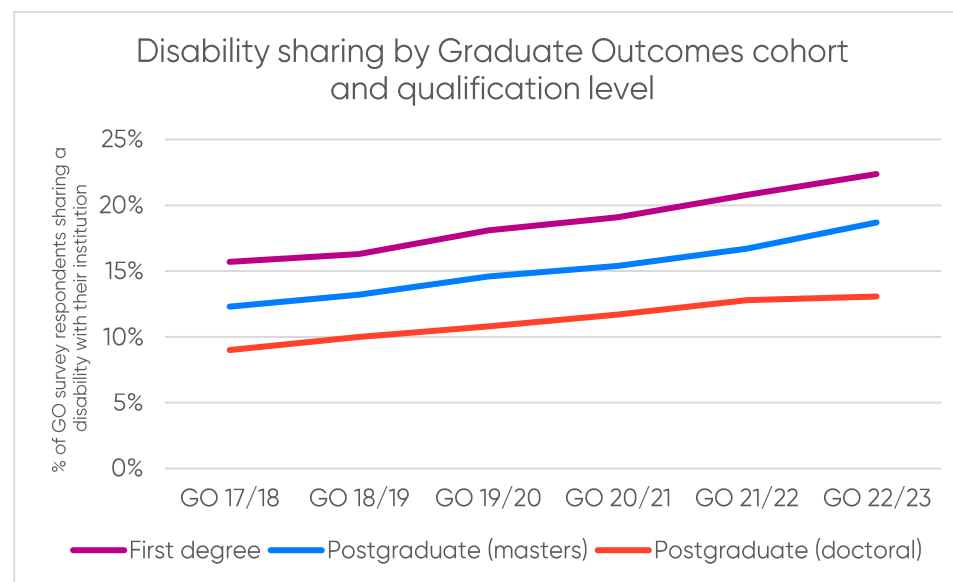


Figure 2 – GO survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution 2017 to 2023

No clear data is available on whether the proportion of disability sharing at each qualification level varies because students on higher level qualifications are less willing to share their disability, or because fewer disabled students access higher level qualifications than those with no known disability. Other factors may also be involved, or a combination of factors may create this imbalance.

2.3. Sharing a disability by type of disability

As in previous years, learning difference(s) are the most commonly shared disability, followed by mental health conditions, as shown in table 5. Earlier What Happens Next? reports show that learning difference(s) consistently account for just over a third of all shared graduate disabilities. Although there are minor changes across categories from year to year, the overall percentage of disclosures for each disability type in 2022/23 is broadly consistent with recent years.

Table 5 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution grouped by type of disability

Disability type	Number of graduates sharing this disability	% of whole graduate population	% of whole disabled graduate population
Autism	2,200	0.9%	4.0%
Blind or visual impairment	465	0.2%	0.8%
D/deaf or hearing impairment	865	0.3%	1.6%
Development condition since childhood	50	0.0%	0.1%
Learning difference(s)	18,670	7.2%	34.1%
Long-term illness or health condition	4,660	1.8%	8.5%
Mental health condition	15,720	6.1%	28.7%
Mobility or physical disability	1,180	0.5%	2.2%
Other disability or condition	4,105	1.6%	7.5%
Two or more conditions	6,895	2.7%	12.6%

2.4. Sharing a disability by ethnicity

Table 6 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution grouped by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Graduates with no known disability	Graduates sharing a disability	Total number of graduates	Disability sharing by ethnicity 2022/23	Disability sharing by ethnicity 2021/22
Asian	25,080	3,865	28,945	13.4%	12.4%
Black	15,310	3,145	18,460	17.0%	15.9%
Mixed	7,890	2,675	10,560	25.3%	23.4%
Other	3,675	830	4,500	18.4%	16.3%
Unknown	20,665	3,320	23,985	13.8%	10.4%
White	130,650	40,980	171,630	23.9%	22.2%

As in 2021/22, differences by ethnicity are immediately apparent in table 6, with White graduates, and graduates of Mixed ethnic background, notably more likely to have shared a disability whilst at university than Black or Asian graduates, or those from other or unknown ethnic backgrounds.

2.5. Sharing a disability by gender

As in 2021/22, differences by gender are clear. Table 7 shows that male graduates are notably less likely to have shared a disability

whilst at university than any other gender. UK-wide, levels of disability are higher amongst women than men¹⁷, and this appears to be mirrored in the graduate population. Graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth have a notably higher rate of disability disclosure.

Table 7 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents sharing a disability with their institution grouped by gender

Gender	Graduates with no known disability	Graduates sharing a disability	Total number of graduates	Disability sharing by gender 2022/23	Disability sharing by gender 2021/22
Female	97,560	29,780	127,345	23.4%	21.40%
Gender identity not the same as at birth	1,285	1,375	2,660	51.7%	46.20%
Male	74,050	15,205	89,250	17.0%	16.10%

The total number of graduates in table 7 is different to that in tables 5 and 6 due to the exclusion of graduates whose gender identity is unknown and those who chose not to share their gender identity.

¹⁷ Sonja Stiebahl, Shadi Danechi and Rachael Harker. [UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences](#). House of Commons Library, 17 November 2025.

3. Disabled graduates' outcomes by type of disability

This section considers activities reported by graduates in the 2022/23 GO survey. It compares outcomes for disabled graduates by the type of disability with outcomes for graduates with no known disability. The small numbers of graduates reporting unknown patterns of employment or further study are excluded from the analysis in this section.

3.1. All graduate activities and total employment by type of disability

Table 8 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents' graduate outcomes grouped by type of disability

Type of disability ----- 2022/23 graduate outcomes	Autism	Blind or visual impairment	D/deaf or hearing impairment	Development condition since childhood	Learning difference(s)	Long- term illness or health condition	Mental health condition	Mobility or physical disability	Other disability or condition	Two or more conditions	All disabled graduates	All graduates with no known disability
Employment and further study	11%	14%	12%	8%	11%	11%	12%	12%	11%	12%	11%	11%
Full-time employment	41%	51%	55%	37%	57%	54%	52%	44%	53%	44%	52%	60%
Full-time further study	9%	7%	5%	4%	6%	7%	7%	9%	6%	8%	7%	6%
Other including travel, caring for someone or retired	7%	6%	7%	12%	6%	7%	6%	11%	7%	10%	7%	6%
Part-time employment	17%	12%	14%	27%	13%	13%	14%	14%	13%	15%	14%	11%
Part-time further study	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Unemployment	12%	8%	5%	10%	5%	7%	7%	7%	6%	8%	7%	5%
Voluntary or unpaid work	3%	1%	2%	4%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%

Table 8 shows graduate outcomes reported by respondents in GO 2022/23, grouped by type of disability. Autistic graduates reported lower levels of full-time employment alongside higher levels of both part-time employment and unemployment than most other groups. Graduates with a development condition since childhood have comparable outcomes; however, very small numbers in this group mean these results should be used cautiously. All groups of disabled graduates have higher unemployment than graduates with no known disability, apart from D/deaf or hearing-impaired graduates and graduates with learning differences, who also reported unemployment of 5%. These findings are similar to those from earlier editions of the What Happens Next? report.

In figure 3, graduate outcomes are presented by disability type, from highest to lowest total employment. Autistic graduates have the lowest total employment of 72%. This compares to total employment of 79% for all disabled graduates collectively, and 83% for graduates with no known disability. The variation in total employment by type of disability demonstrates that treating disabled graduates as a single group may mask specific outcomes for particular groups of disabled graduates.

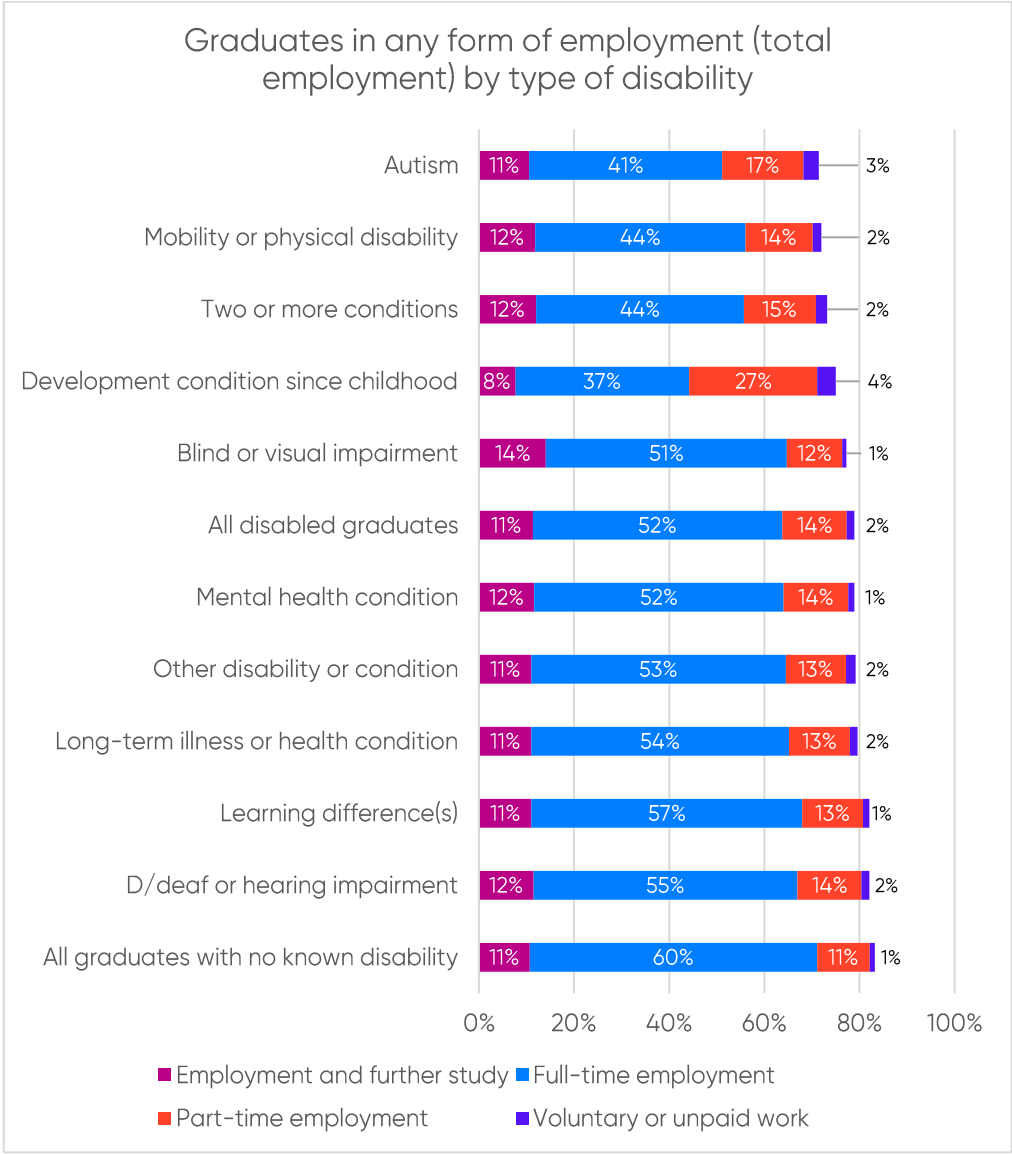


Figure 3 – Total employment by type of disability

3.2. Graduate voice by type of disability

Figure 4 shows that levels of agreement around the extent to which the graduate's current activity is meaningful are broadly consistent across most groups. Autistic graduates, however, are less likely to strongly agree with the statement (36%), compared with higher levels of strong agreement across most other groups (from 39% to 52%). Only a very small number of graduates with a development condition since childhood responded to the survey, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions from their data.

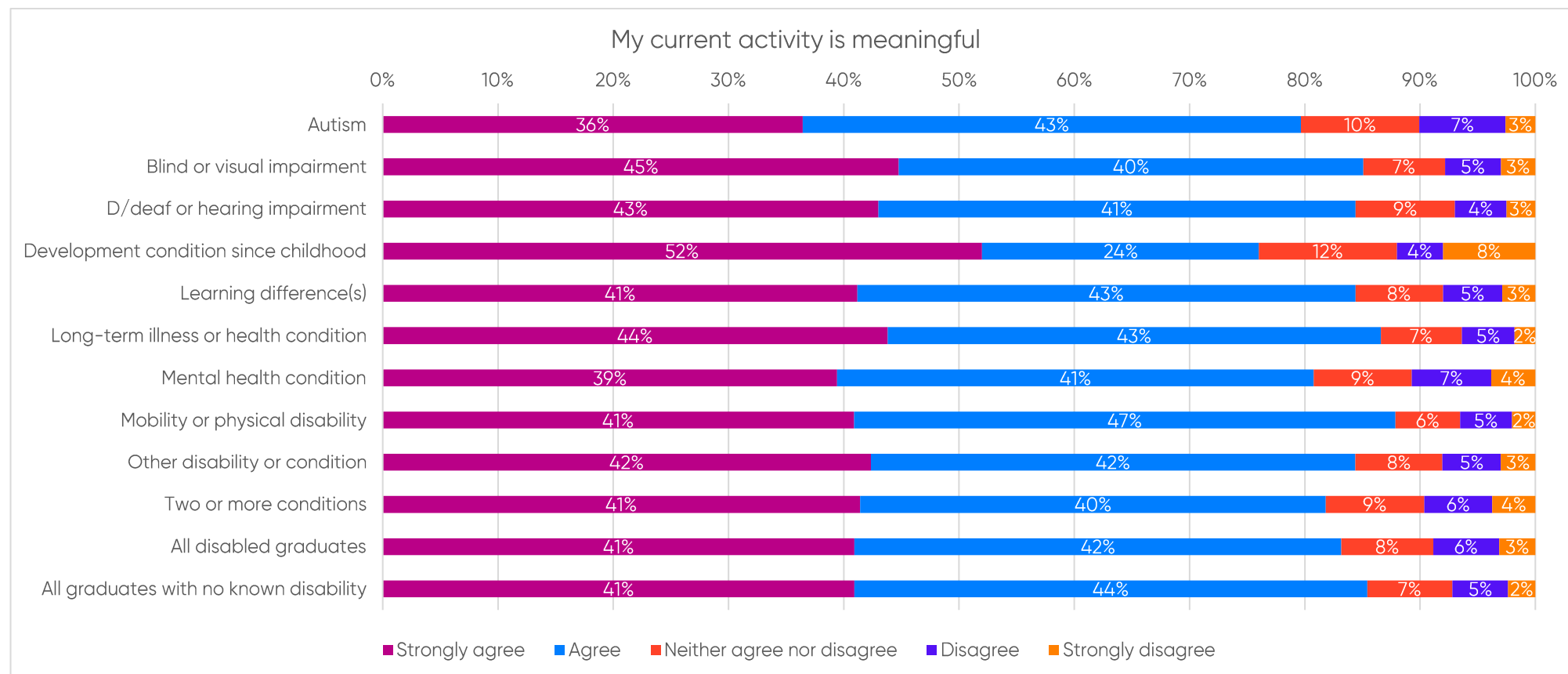


Figure 4 - Disabled graduates' levels of agreement with the statement "My current activity is meaningful" grouped by type of disability

Figure 5 shows that levels of agreement around the extent to which graduates are using the learning from their studies are broadly consistent across most groups. However, autistic graduates and graduates with a development condition since childhood reported notably lower levels of agreement and higher levels of disagreement.

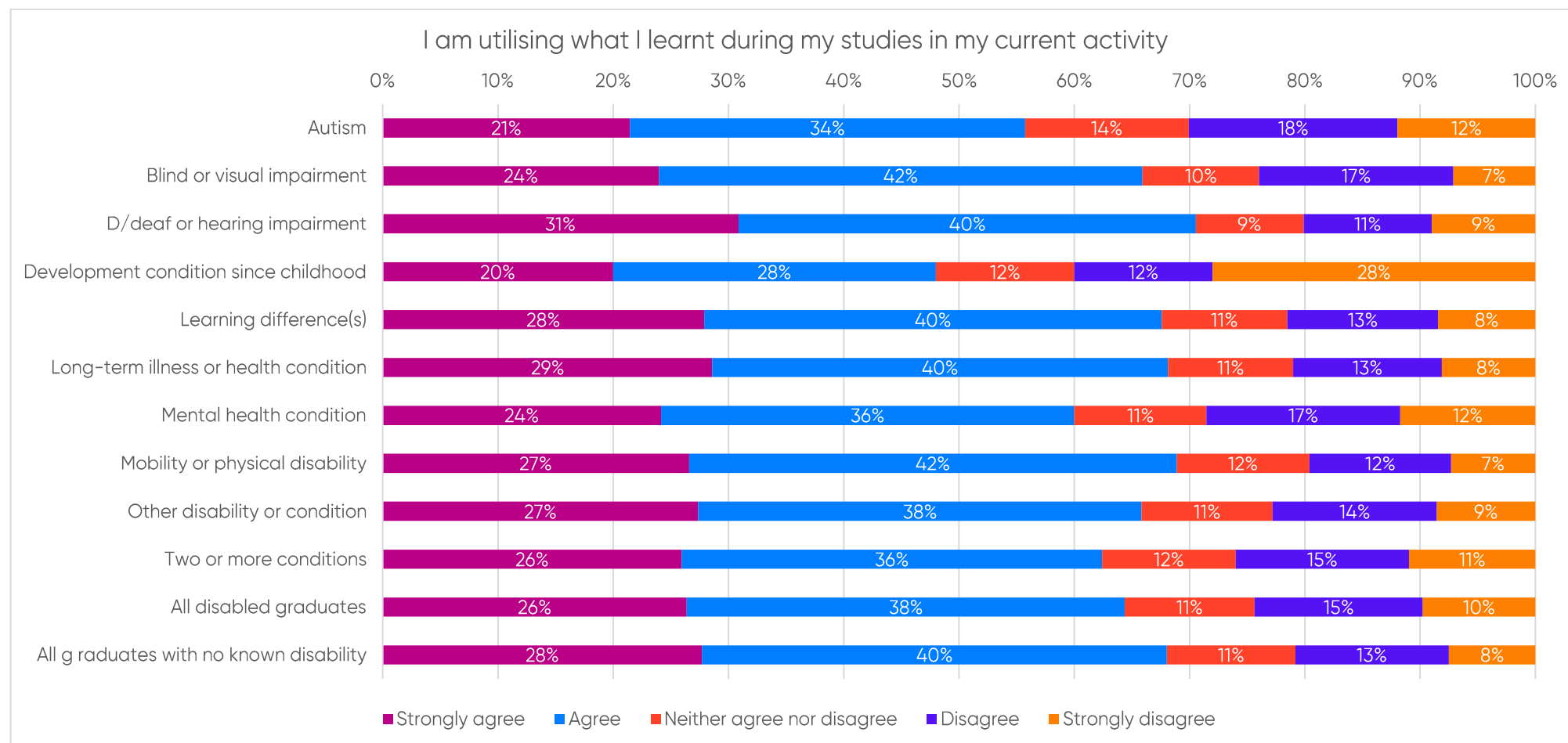


Figure 5 - Disabled graduates' levels of agreement with the statement "I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity" grouped by type of disability

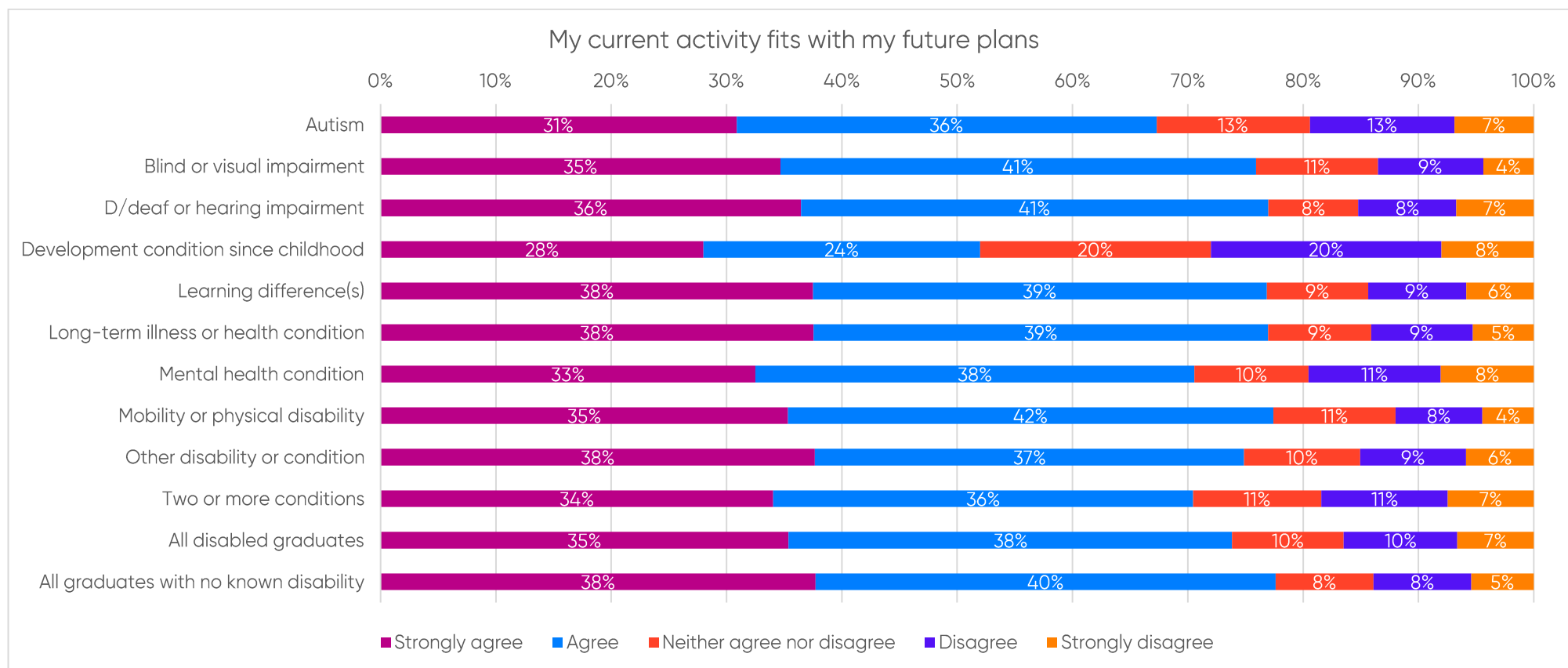


Figure 6 - Disabled graduates' levels of agreement with the statement "My current activity fits with my future plans" grouped by type of disability

Figure 6 shows some groups of disabled graduates have broadly similar levels of agreement on whether their current activity aligns with their future plans, when compared to graduates with no known disability. However, as a whole, the disabled graduate population are less likely to agree their current activity aligns with their future plans, with a three-percentage point difference in strong agreement, and a two-percentage point difference in agreement. As with other graduate voice statements, when responses are broken down by type of disability, autistic graduates and graduates with a development condition since childhood show lower levels of strong agreement and agreement.

4. Disabled graduates' outcomes by ethnicity

This section considers activities reported by graduates in the 2022/23 GO survey. It compares outcomes for disabled graduates with outcomes for graduates with no known disability, grouped by the graduates' ethnicity. The small numbers of graduates reporting unknown patterns of employment or further study are excluded from the analysis in this section.

4.1. All graduate activities and total employment

Table 9 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents' graduate outcomes grouped by ethnicity

Ethnicity ----- 2022/23 graduate outcomes	Disabled Asian graduates	Disabled Black graduates	Disabled graduates from Mixed ethnic backgrounds	Disabled graduates from other ethnic backgrounds	Disabled graduates from unknown ethnic backgrounds	Disabled White graduates	All disabled graduates of all ethnic backgrounds	All graduates with no known disability of all ethnic backgrounds
Employment and further study	13%	11%	12%	10%	14%	11%	11%	11%
Full-time employment	47%	50%	47%	45%	46%	54%	52%	60%
Full-time further study	7%	4%	7%	8%	11%	7%	7%	6%
Other including travel, caring for someone or retired	8%	8%	7%	10%	7%	7%	7%	6%
Part-time employment	12%	14%	16%	10%	12%	14%	14%	11%
Part-time further study	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Unemployment	11%	9%	8%	13%	8%	6%	7%	5%
Voluntary or unpaid work	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%

Table 9 shows that of all disabled graduates, disabled White graduates reported the highest full-time employment (54%) and lowest unemployment (6%). Figure 7 illustrates this further, showing total employment of 80% for disabled White graduates. By comparison, disabled graduates from other ethnic backgrounds reported total employment of 67% and unemployment of 13%. As explained in section 1.3.6, figures shown in table 9 are not directly comparable to those in the previous What Happens Next? report, but they show the same overall trend of White disabled graduates having higher employment and lower unemployment than disabled graduates from all other ethnic backgrounds.

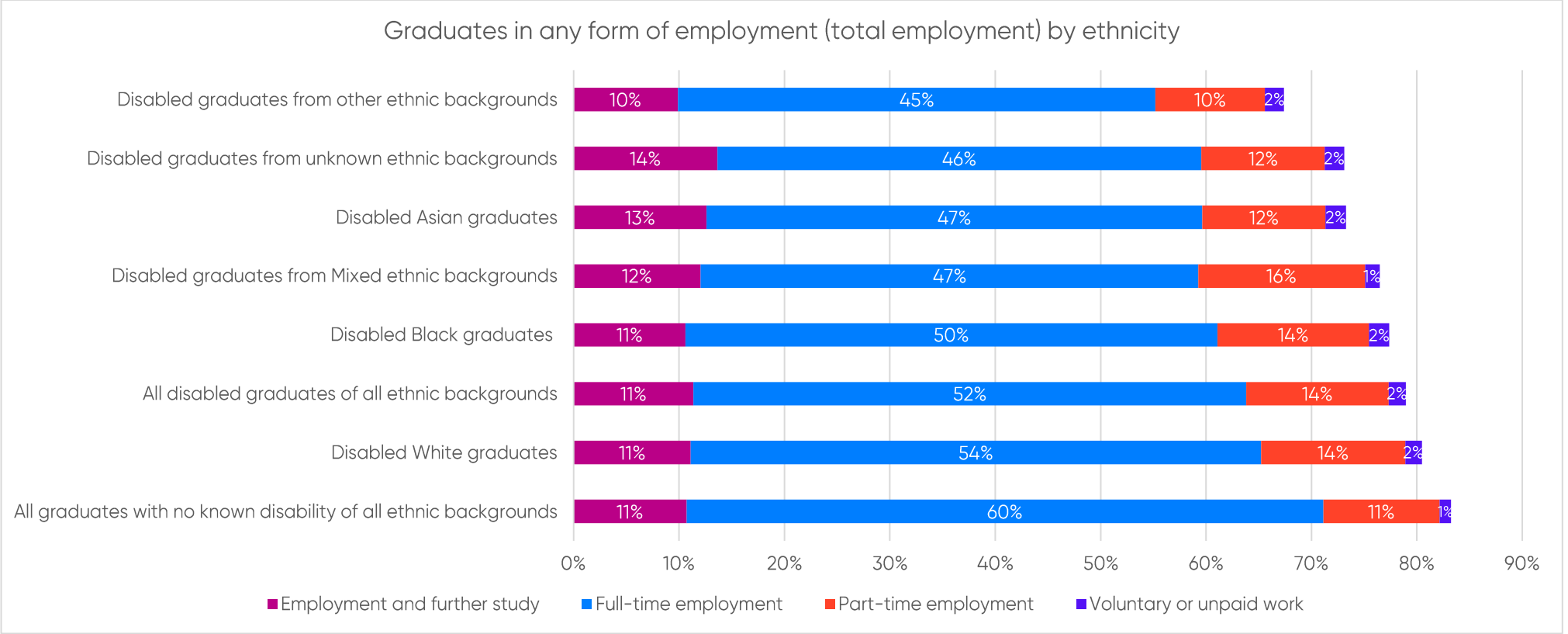


Figure 7 - Total employment by ethnicity

4.2. Graduate voice by ethnicity

Figure 8 shows that levels of agreement about whether graduates viewed their current activity as meaningful are broadly consistent across most ethnic groups. Variation between ethnic groups is generally smaller than the differences observed between disabled graduates overall and graduates with no known disability; there is no difference in levels of strong agreement by ethnicity for all disabled graduates (41%) compared to all graduates with no known disability (41%). Disabled White graduates reported the highest strong agreement (42%) on meaningful activity, while disabled graduates from other ethnic backgrounds reported the lowest (33%).

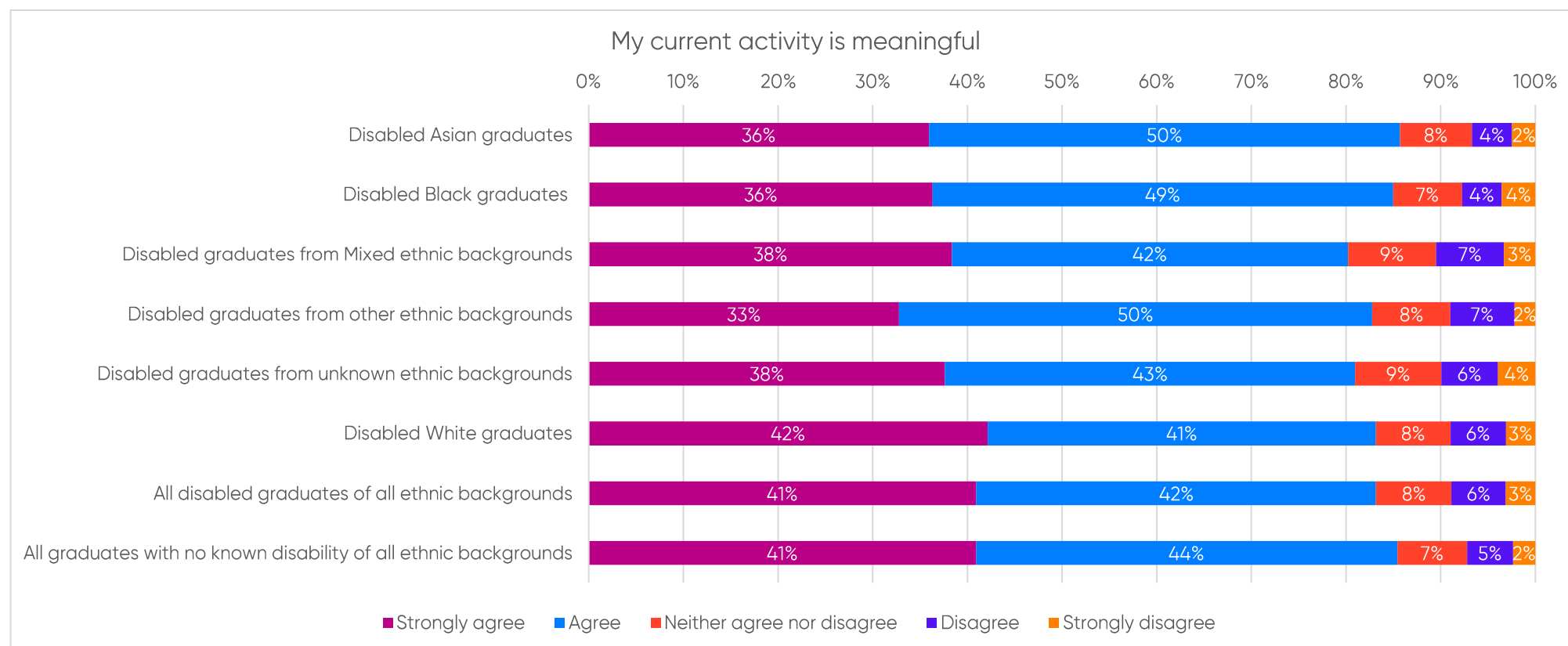


Figure 8 – Disabled graduates' levels of agreement with the statement "My current activity is meaningful" grouped by ethnicity

Disabled graduates of all ethnic backgrounds reported slightly lower levels of agreement, and slightly higher levels of disagreement, about whether they are using the learning from their studies than graduates with no known disability from all ethnic backgrounds. Disabled Asian graduates reported the lowest level of strong agreement (22%).

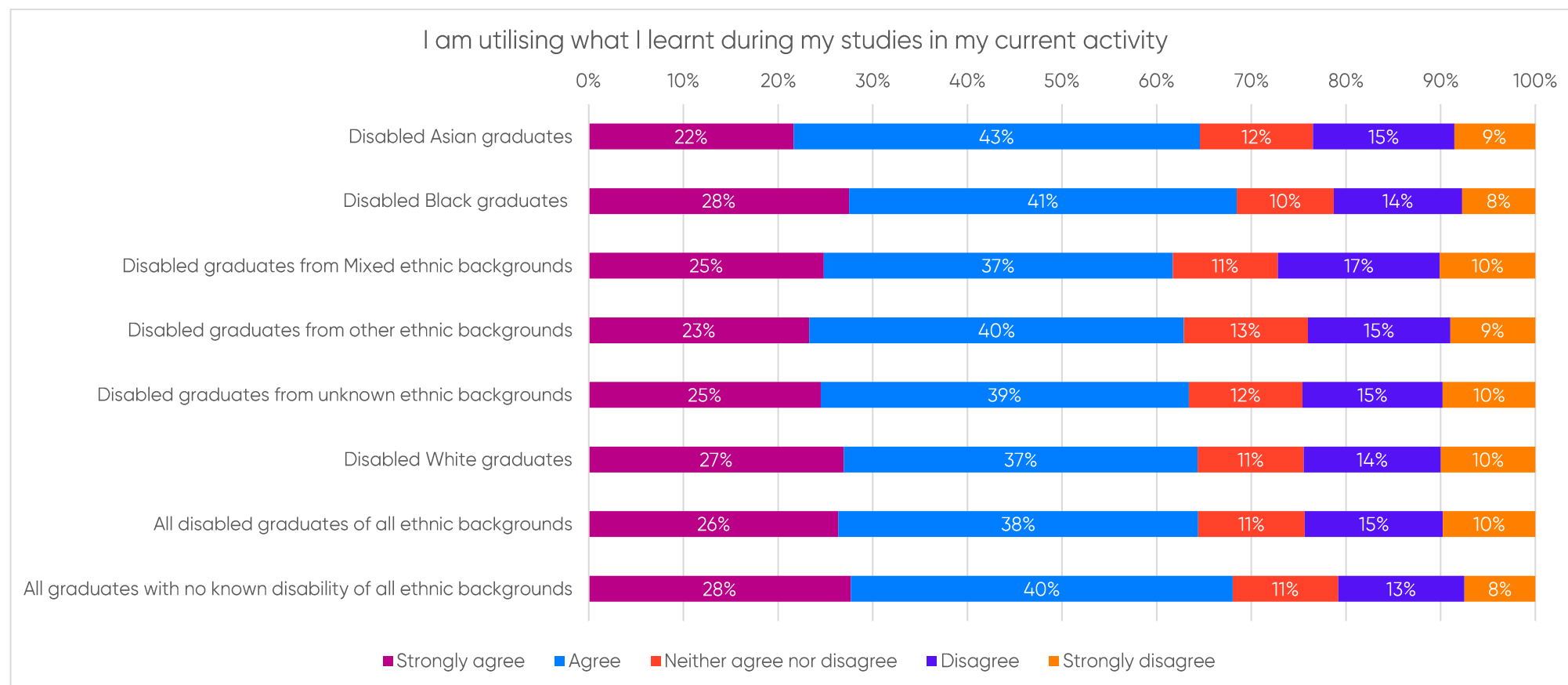


Figure 9 - Disabled graduates' levels of agreement with the statement "I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity" grouped by ethnicity

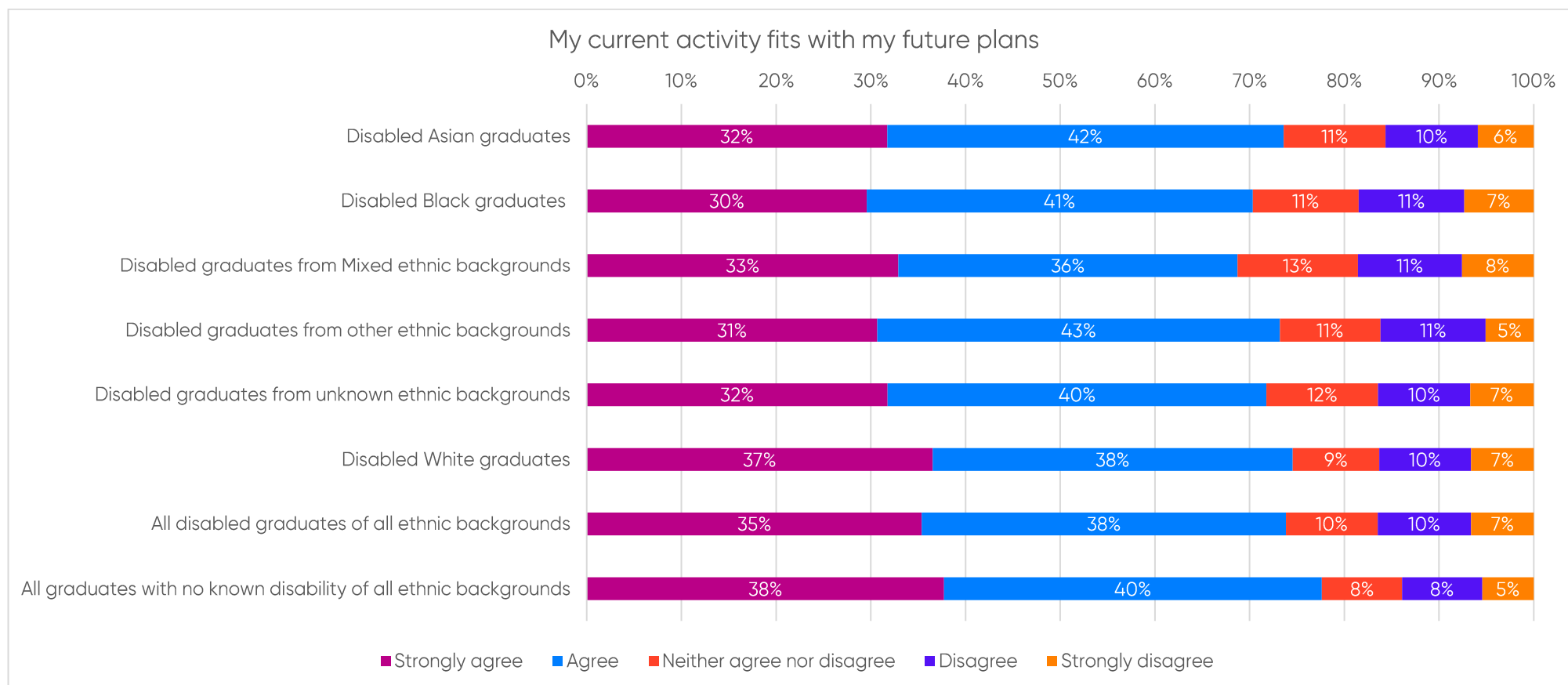


Figure 10 – Disabled graduates' levels of agreement with the statement "My current activity fits with my future plans" grouped by ethnicity

Figure 10 shows that across all ethnicities, disabled graduates are more likely to disagree that their current activity fits with their future plans when compared with graduates with no known disability. Disabled White graduates reported the highest strong agreement (37%). Disabled graduates from Mixed ethnic backgrounds are less likely to strongly agree or agree (when the percentages are combined) than other ethnic backgrounds.

5. Disabled graduates' outcomes by gender

This section considers activities reported by graduates in the 2022/23 GO survey. It compares outcomes for disabled graduates with outcomes for graduates with no known disability, grouped by the graduates' gender identities (see section 1.3.5 for exclusions). The small numbers of graduates reporting unknown patterns of employment or further study are excluded from the analysis in this section.

5.1. All graduate activities and total employment

Table 10 – GO 2022/23 survey respondents' graduate outcomes grouped by gender

Gender ----- 2022/23 graduate outcomes	Disabled female graduates	Disabled male graduates	Disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth	All disabled graduates of all genders	All graduates with no known disability of all genders
Employment and further study	11%	12%	12%	11%	11%
Full-time employment	53%	53%	39%	52%	60%
Full-time further study	7%	7%	9%	7%	6%
Other including travel, caring for someone or retired	7%	6%	6%	7%	6%
Part-time employment	14%	12%	20%	14%	11%
Part-time further study	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Unemployment	6%	8%	10%	7%	5%
Voluntary or unpaid work	1%	2%	3%	2%	1%

Table 10 shows that disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth had higher levels of unemployment (10%) and part-time employment (20%) and lower levels of full-time employment (39%) than male and female disabled graduates. Figure 11 illustrates how these levels of full- and part-time employment contribute to total employment of 74%, compared to total employment of 79% for all disabled graduates, and 83% for all graduates with no known disability. Results for male and female disabled graduates are very similar, with female graduates slightly more likely to be in part-time employment than male disabled graduates, but equally likely to be in full-time employment.

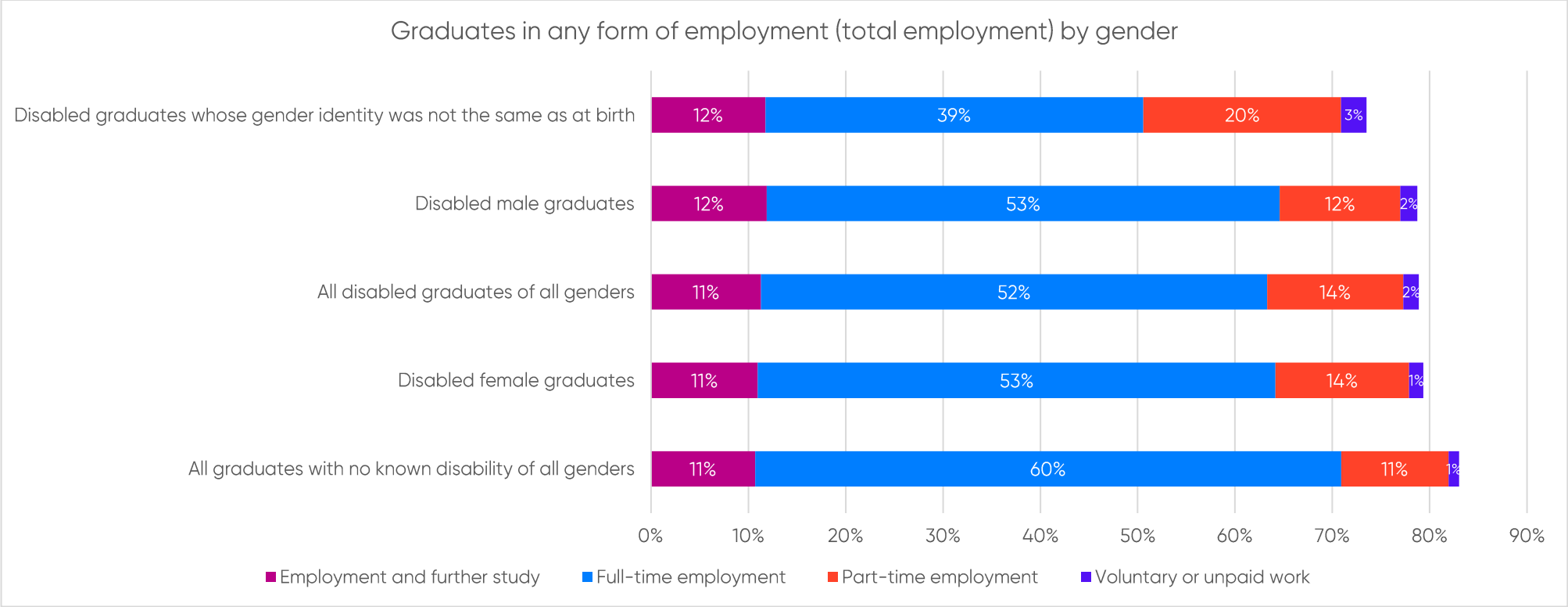


Figure 11 – Total employment by gender

5.2. Graduate voice by gender

Figures 12, 13 and 14 show that disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth are consistently less likely to strongly agree or agree, and more likely to disagree or strongly disagree, with the graduate voice statements.

Figure 12 shows that disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth reported lower levels of agreement and higher disagreement than other groups with the statement about whether their current activity is meaningful. Disabled female graduates reported the highest levels of strong agreement (43%). Disabled male graduates are less likely to strongly agree (37%) with the statement, and more likely to disagree (6%) than disabled female graduates (5%).

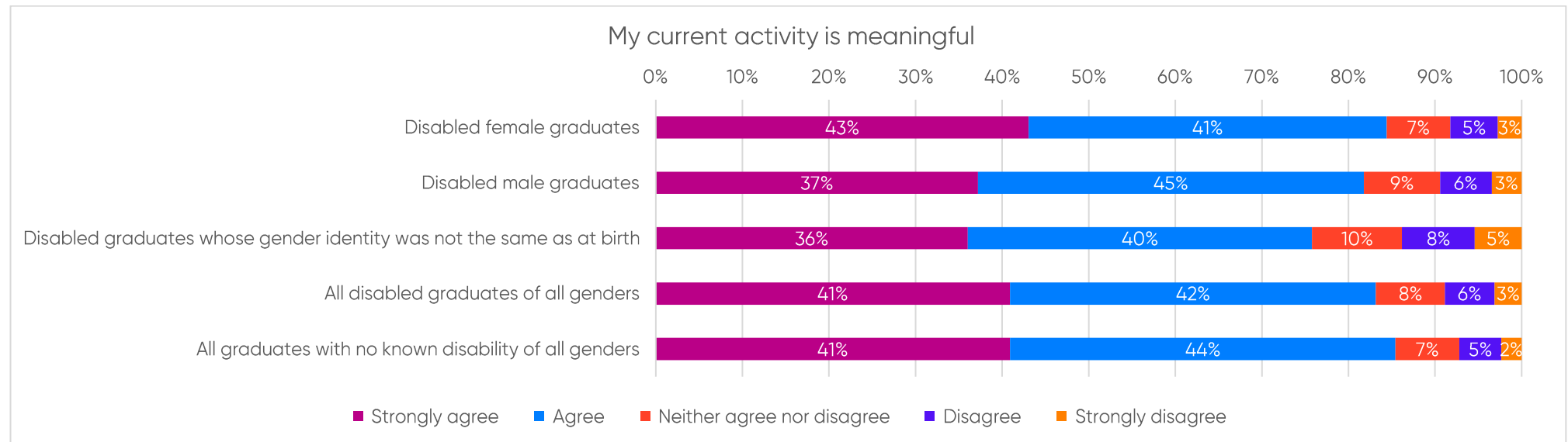


Figure 12 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity is meaningful” grouped by gender

A similar pattern is shown in Figure 13. Disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth reported lower levels of agreement and higher levels of disagreement than all other disabled graduates. Disabled female graduates reported the highest strong

agreement (28%). Disabled male graduates are less likely to strongly agree (24%) that they are using the learning from their studies, and more likely to disagree (15%) or strongly disagree (11%), than disabled female graduates (14% and 9% respectively).

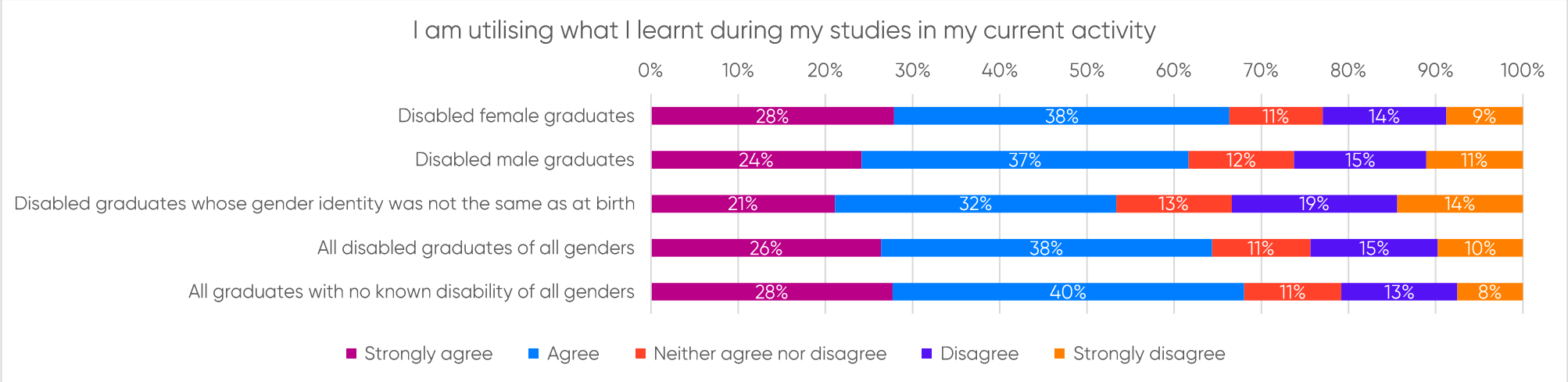


Figure 13 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity” grouped by gender

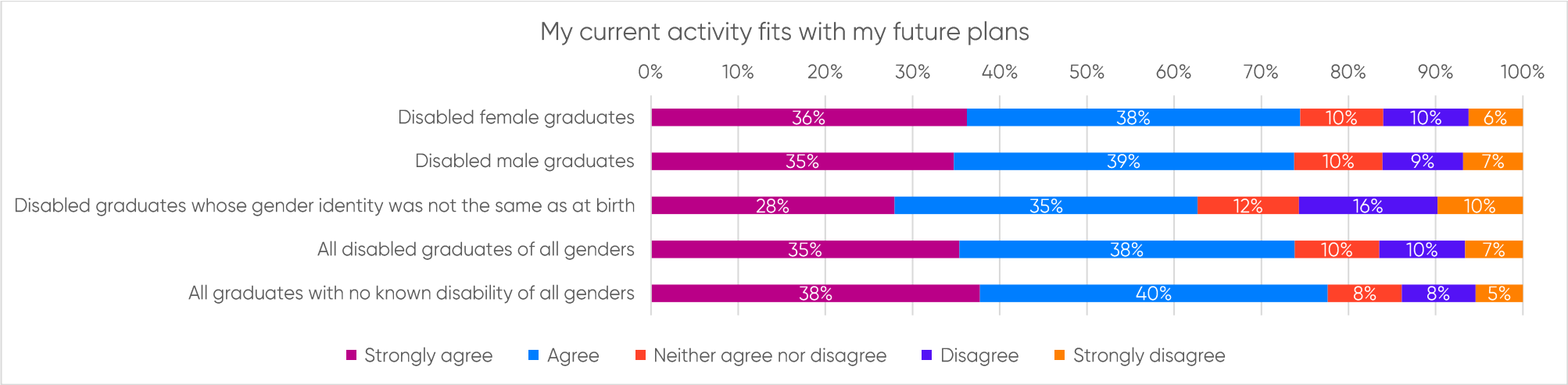


Figure 14 – Disabled graduates’ levels of agreement with the statement “My current activity fits with my future plans” grouped by gender

Figure 14 shows that disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth reported lower levels of agreement and higher levels of disagreement than all other disabled graduates. Graduates with no known disability reported the highest overall agreement levels.

While the difference between the experiences of disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth is more pronounced than all other disabled graduates, across all three graduate voice questions, there are also differences between disabled male and female graduates in responses relating to meaningful activity and the use of learning from their studies.

6. Other employment factors

This section considers activities reported by graduates in the 2022/23 GO survey. It compares outcomes for disabled graduates with outcomes for graduates with no known disability. The small numbers of graduates reporting unknown patterns of employment or further study are excluded from the analysis in this section. All section findings are in line with those from 2021/22; there were no major changes.

6.1. Highly skilled employment

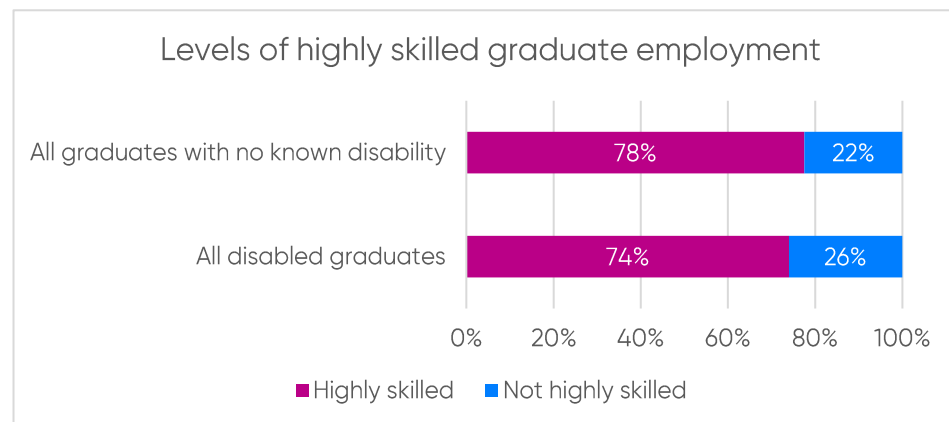


Figure 15 – Levels of highly skilled employment reported in GO 2022/23 survey

Figure 15 shows the proportion of disabled graduates in highly skilled employment. This was unchanged from 2021/22, at 74%. The equivalent figure for graduates with no known disability dropped slightly from 79% to 78%. Overall, graduates with no known disability are slightly more likely to report that they are in highly skilled employment than disabled graduates.

6.2. Basis of employment

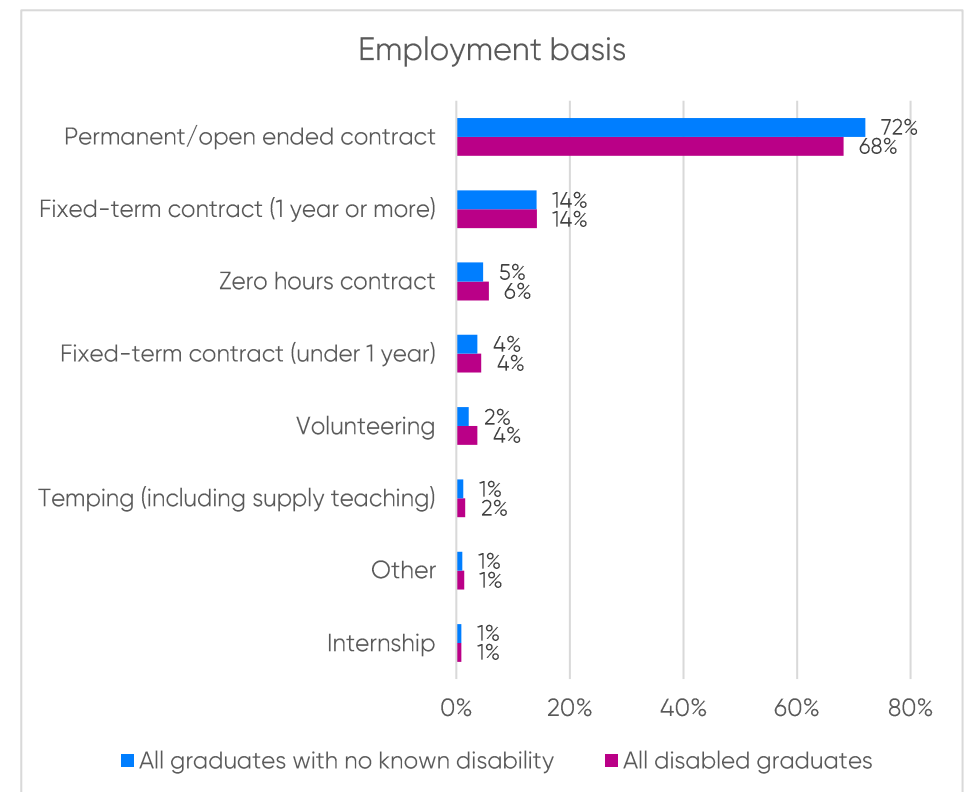


Figure 16 – Basis of employment reported in GO 2022/23 survey

Where the graduate's basis of employment was unknown, the response was not included in figure 16. Graduates with no known disability more commonly reported being on a permanent or open-ended contract than disabled graduates. Disabled graduates were slightly more likely to report that they were volunteering. The two groups are within one percentage point difference on all other categories.

6.3. Main reason for taking job

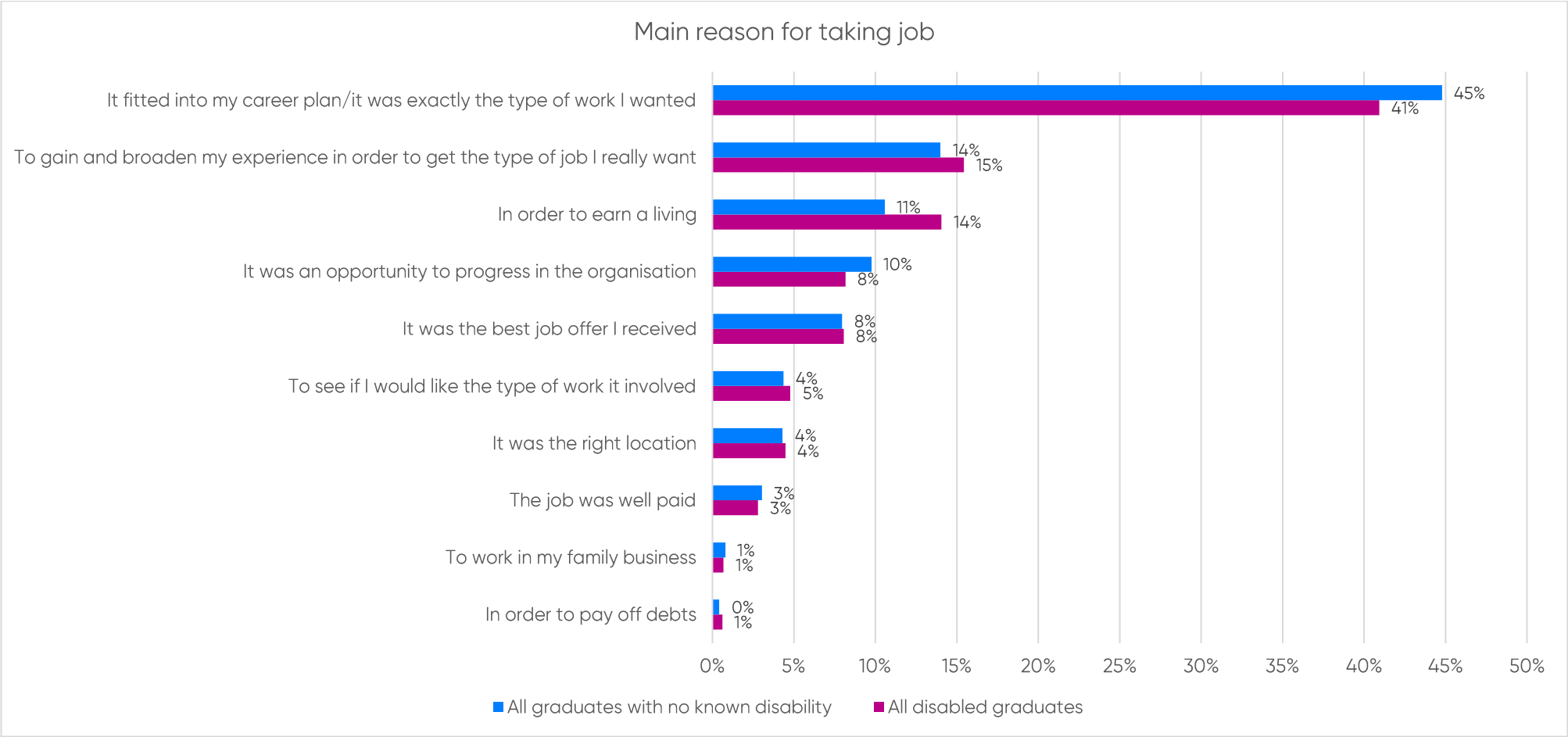


Figure 17 – Main reasons for taking jobs reported in GO 2022/23 survey

Figure 17 shows that graduates with no known disability are more likely to identify that their role fits into their career plan (45%) than disabled graduates (41%). Disabled graduates are also slightly more likely to indicate that they took a role to earn a living.

6.4. Qualification required for job

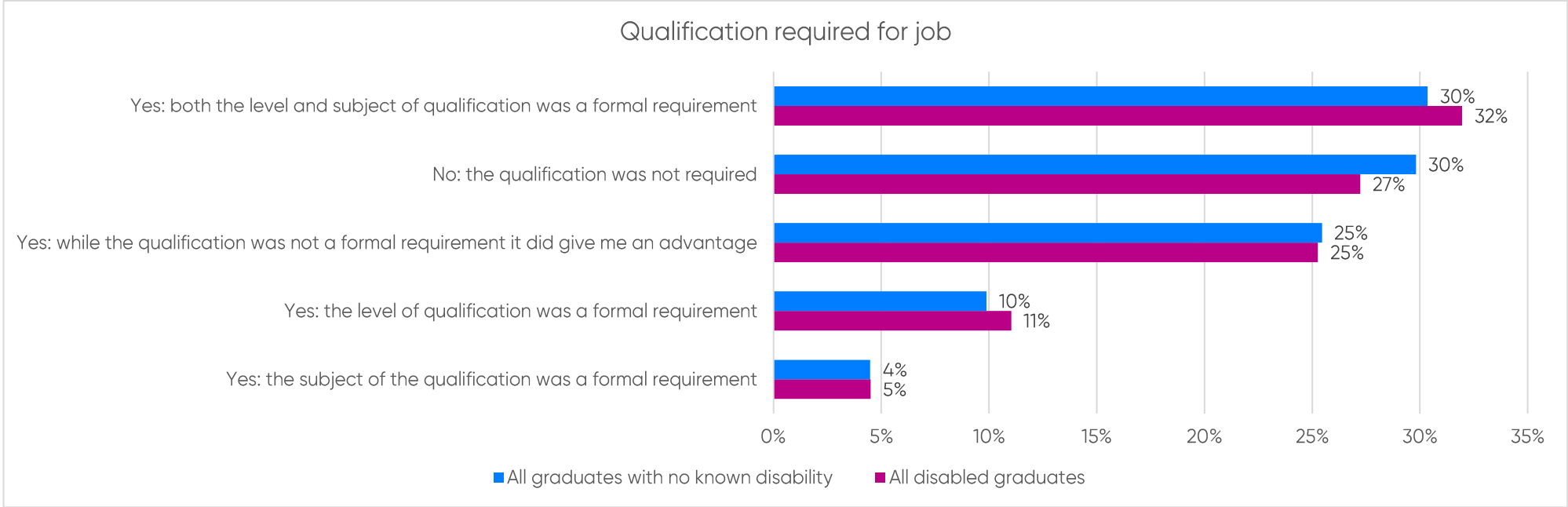


Figure 18-- Requirements for qualifications reported in GO 2022/23 survey

Where the requirement for qualification was not known or not applicable, the response was not included in figure 18, which shows broadly similar results for graduates with no known disability and disabled graduates. Graduates with no known disability are slightly more likely to be in a role where their qualification was not required (30% compared to 27%). Disabled graduates are slightly more likely to report that they needed both the level and subject of their qualification to secure their current role (32% compared to 30%).

7. Conclusions

The 2022/23 Graduate Outcomes data show that a substantial and growing proportion of graduates shared a disability with their institution, and that disabled graduates continue to experience an employment gap 15 months after graduation compared with graduates with no known disability. While the overall patterns are broadly consistent with previous years, the analysis reinforces that “disabled graduates” should not be understood as a single group: outcomes vary meaningfully by type of disability, ethnicity and gender.

Differences by disability type are particularly marked. Autistic graduates report the lowest total employment, alongside lower full-time employment and higher unemployment than most other disability groups. This suggests that general employability offers may not be sufficient for those who face distinct and potentially compounding barriers in recruitment and workplace adjustment. The intersectional findings strengthen this conclusion: disabled graduates from all other ethnic backgrounds report lower total employment and higher unemployment than disabled White graduates. Disabled graduates whose gender identity was not the same as at birth report lower full-time employment, with

higher part-time employment and unemployment. These patterns indicate that targeted support needs to be sensitive not only to disability, but also to how experiences of disadvantage can accumulate across identity and circumstance.

The graduate voice findings add an important dimension to these conclusions. Disabled graduates are consistently slightly less likely than graduates with no known disability to report that their current activity is meaningful, aligns with their future plans, or makes use of their learning. More pronounced differences for some groups also reinforce the importance of intersectional and tailored approaches to support.

Indicators of employment quality add further nuance. Most disabled graduates in employment are in highly skilled roles, yet the proportion remains below that for graduates with no known disability, and disabled graduates are marginally less likely to be on permanent contracts. Alongside evidence that disabled graduates are slightly less likely to report their role fitting their career plan, this points to a need to strengthen the transition from study into secure employment that aligns with career plans.

8. Recommendations

These recommendations are guided by report data and evaluation and the growing body of work on equity of opportunity across UK higher education. Graduates' backgrounds continue to shape their employment outcomes, strengthening the case for action that focuses on graduate voice, employment quality and sustained progression, rather than access to employment alone.

8.1. Recommendation 1 – Target further transition and employability support where the outcome gaps are widest.

The delivery of inclusive and accessible support for all students and graduates must be a sector priority, alongside evidence-informed targeted careers and employability support for groups with the lowest total employment.

8.2. Recommendation 2 – Embed an intersectional approach in design and delivery.

Co-design support with disabled students and graduates and apply culturally competent and gender-inclusive practices to address the differing outcomes observed across ethnicity and gender.

8.3. Recommendation 3 – Strengthen data, learning and accountability.

Improve pathways for sharing disability information and the consistency of support records, monitor outcomes across disability type and intersecting characteristics, and evaluate which interventions close gaps in total employment, highly skilled work and contract security.

8.4. Recommendation 4 – Embed graduate voice in institutional policy and practice.

Use graduate voice findings to inform inclusive and accessible co-designed approaches to student support, ensuring that the experiences of disabled students and graduates shape institutional decision-making, service design and evaluation.