



UK Research
and Innovation

UKRI doctoral extension policy: Phase 1 awards





Accessibility

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BACKGROUND



The COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous challenges for everyone engaged in research and innovation, including doctoral students and their supervisory and support teams.

On 9 April 2020, UKRI announced Phase 1 of its support package for postgraduate research students. The Phase 1 policy provided additional stipend and fee support for students with a funding end-date between 1 March 2020 and 31 March 2021. The objective of this policy was to enable UKRI-funded students to achieve doctoral training outcomes and to be paid to do so. It is too early to assess whether the purpose of the funding was achieved, as this can only be determined by looking at submission rates that are not available yet. We continue to monitor this.

To understand the scale and nature of the pandemic's impacts on UKRI-funded students we conducted three surveys, two of which (Surveys 1 and 3) related to the effectiveness of our Phase 1 policy. The surveys were completed by UKRI training grant holders (not individual students). This report analyses the returns from the most detailed survey (Survey 3), in which UKRI asked Research Organisations (ROs) in autumn 2020 to provide the details of each UKRI-funded final-year student identified by their organisation as requiring an extension.

ROs could request additional UKRI funding for the first six months of a student's extension only. Where the host organisation determined that a student would need more time than this, UKRI's expectation was that training grant underspend would cover the extra cost wherever possible. Survey 3 asked ROs to detail the total length of extensions requested so we could ascertain the number that requested in excess of six months. The analysis set out in this report presents both the average length of extensions requested and the average length of extensions granted.

KEY FINDINGS

- In autumn 2020, UKRI asked ROs to provide the details of each UKRI-funded final-year student identified by their organisation as requiring an extension. This information was captured in a UKRI survey (Survey 3). ROs returned 5,315 requests for an extension, with an average length of 5.3 months. In earlier surveys, ROs estimated that just under 6,600 students might be eligible for an extension. As almost everyone who requested an extension was awarded one, this means that around one fifth of potentially eligible students did not request an extension.
- Extension lengths and the reasons given for them varied by UKRI council. The average awarded extension length was 4.9 months. This is less than the average length requested as some requests were for extensions of greater than six months which could not be funded in full under the UKRI policy.
- A lack of access to research resources and facilities was the most common reason for requesting an extension (cited by 82% of all students), but there was variability across councils and discipline areas.
- Increased caring responsibilities were cited by 17% of all students as the reason for requesting an extension.
- Differences in the length of extension requested between binary disability status, ethnicity, gender and age categories were relatively small.
- Extension requests relating to female students tended to be slightly longer than those associated with male students.
- Extension requests relating to students from ethnic minorities tend to be slightly longer than those associated with students reporting white ethnicities.
- Extension requests relating to students who reported one or more disabilities tended to be slightly longer than those associated with students who reported no disabilities.
- Extension requests relating to older students tended to be longer than those associated with younger students.



PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS

This analysis summarises key findings of Survey 3 data. In this survey, UKRI asked ROs in autumn 2020 to provide the details of each UKRI-funded final-year student identified by their organisation as requiring an extension.

Two other, less detailed surveys took place in June 2020. In Survey 1, ROs were asked to provide aggregated estimates of the extensions required for final-year students, to allow UKRI to estimate the maximum cost of extensions. Survey 2 (not part of this analysis) asked ROs to provide comparable data for all UKRI-funded students. We published our analysis of Surveys 1 and 2 in our Review of Extensions for Students Impacted by COVID-19¹ in November 2020.

Where possible the Survey 3 results are compared here to those from Survey 1. Where it is useful for understanding the pattern of extension requests, variation at the level of the individual research councils of UKRI is also described.

Annex 1 explains some of the limitations in the student-related data that we hold.

Annex 2 explains the reasons for extension requests by EDI categories.



¹ Available from: www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UKRI-11112020-ReviewOfExtensionsForStudentsImpactedByCovid-19.pdf

EXTENSIONS REQUESTED AND AWARDED

Figure 1 shows the number of extensions requested², disaggregated by UKRI research council.³

Data gathered in Survey 1 suggested that there were 6,590 students with funding end-dates between 1 March 2020 and 31 March 2021 who might be eligible for an extension and therefore could have been reported in Survey 3. The number of student records returned in Survey 3 was 5,315, meaning that around 80% of potentially eligible students requested an extension.

EPSRC-funded students accounted for around 40% of all extension requests; the next most common studentship funder in Survey 3 data was AHRC.

Fewer than 100 of the students returned in Survey 3 indicated a need for an extension of longer than six months (see **Figure 2**, bottom-right panel). The most notable variation in council-level behaviour was seen for STFC, where around 40% of extension requests were for one to three months (about double the proportion typically seen for the other councils).

The mean extension length requested was higher than the estimated figure gathered in earlier surveys (5.3 months against 4.6 months across UKRI as a whole, see **Table 1**; note that these numbers include all requests, including those which were for longer than six months and which could not be funded in full by UKRI). There is some variation in this figure across councils.⁴

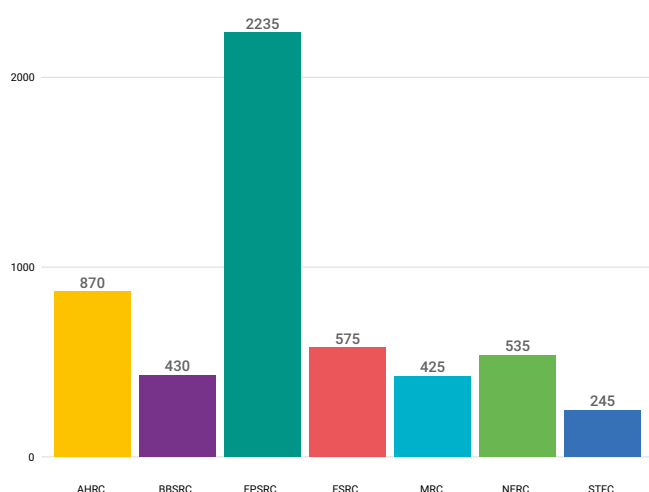


Figure 1: Number of extension requests by UKRI Council
Rounded figures labelled directly

Council	Survey 1 mean extension request (months)	Survey 3 mean extension request (months)
AHRC	5.1	5.5
BBSRC	4.8	5.4
EPSRC	4.5	5.3
ESRC	4.5	5.1
MRC	5.0	5.5
NERC	4.7	5.2
STFC	4.2	4.6
UKRI	4.6	5.3

Table 1: Mean extension request length (months) for Survey 1 and Survey 3, by UKRI council

² As not all requests recorded in Survey 3 actually resulted in funding for an extension, the analysis is of extension requests rather than of those granted (unless specifically indicated).

³ Where 'UKRI' data is indicated in other charts, it refers to the combined data of all seven research councils. The UKRI research councils are: the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

⁴ In Survey 1, extension length information was gathered based on categories of defined length ('0-1 month', '1-3 months' and so on), recognising that only estimated information would be available at that stage. Survey 3 asked for exact organisation-approved extension lengths for each student. In order to make a comparison between the information in the two surveys, all data uses the same categories found in Survey 1 to calculate averages. As this does not take account of the distribution of extension requests within these categories, these comparisons are approximate only.

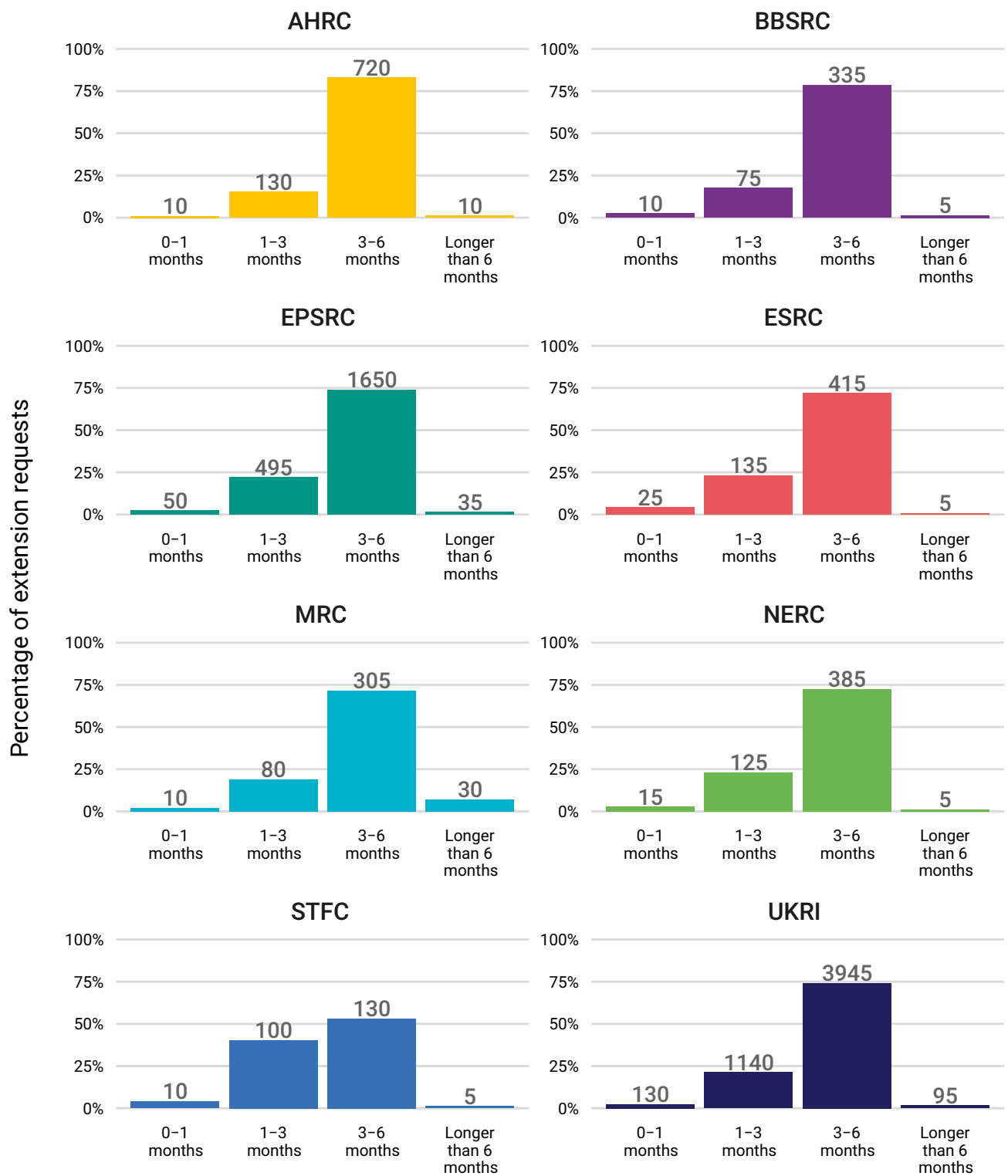


Figure 2: Length of extension requested
Rounded counts labelled directly

This difference in confirmed extension lengths arises partly because several returns for Survey 1 included, in the '0-1 month' category, students who did not need an extension (meaning that a provisional extension of 0 months was recorded in Survey 1 for students who did not in the end appear in Survey 3).

98% of extension requests were approved at their full length; for MRC this figure (93%) was slightly lower than for the other UKRI councils. The average length of an approved extension was 4.9 months. Where an extension was not granted exactly as requested in Survey 3, the most common reason was that the extension was for more than six months.

EXTENSION LENGTH REQUESTS AND EDI CHARACTERISTICS

Across UKRI the mean length of extension requested in Survey 3 varied with disability status, ethnicity, gender (Figure 3); this figure uses data only from those students whose Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) characteristic in each category is known.

Extension requests relating to female students were on average five days longer than those relating to male students. Extension requests relating to students reporting white ethnicities were on average about five days shorter than those relating to students in the ethnic minorities category. Extension requests relating to students reporting a disability were on average nine days longer than those for students reporting no disability.

Figure 4 shows the differences in extension length requests between age groups.

When looking only at the three most common age categories (<30, 30-39 and 40-49), into which around 90% of all students fall, there is a slight increase in mean extension length with age.

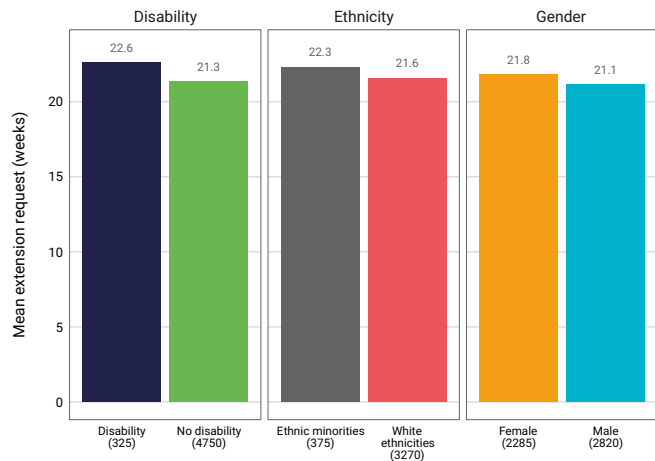


Figure 3: Mean extension length requests by disability status, ethnicity and gender
Excluding unmatched and 'Not disclosed/unknown' data

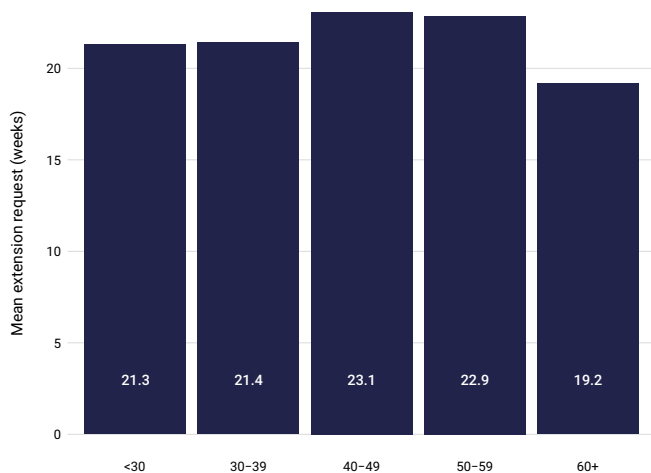
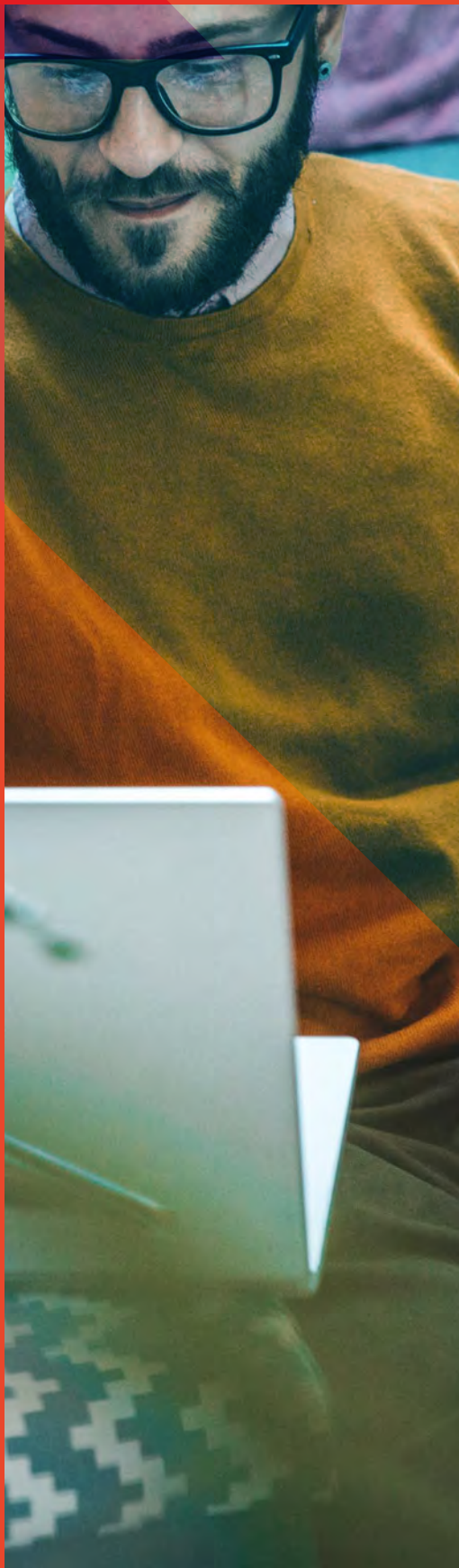


Figure 4: Mean extension request length by age category
Missing data omitted

STUDENT CO-FUNDING AND STATUS OF CO-FUNDER CONTRIBUTIONS



Survey 3 asked ROs to provide the following information for students whose studentship was co-funded:

- how many organisations contribute to the co-funding of the student?
- sector of the co-funder: private, public, voluntary or higher education institution (HEI)?
- is the co-funder able to contribute to the extension costs?
 - able to provide all of the contribution
 - able to provide some of the contribution
 - not able to provide the contribution.

44% of all UKRI studentships in Survey 3 draw on the additional support of at least one co-funder type (HEI or non-HEI, see **Table 2**). Prevalence of co-funding of individual studentships returning extension requests varies across UKRI councils, from 23% of studentships for STFC to 61% for BBSRC.

EPSRC is the only council for which non-HEI co-funding associated with a Survey 3 student is more common than HEI co-funding. Anticipated non-HEI co-funding for UKRI studentships which feature in Survey 3 is least common for students funded by AHRC, ESRC and STFC.

Figure 5 shows counts and percentages of co-funding instances by the sector (voluntary, public, private or HEI) of each co-funder, for each council and for UKRI overall. (Note: these are not the percentages of students reporting each co-funder type).

Council	HEI co-funder only (%)	Non-HEI co-funder only (%)	HEI and non-HEI co-funder (%)	Any co-funder (%)
AHRC	46	1	~0	47
BBSRC	42	16	3	61
EPSRC	17	20	4	41
ESRC	38	3	~0	41
MRC	37	19	2	58
NERC	35	6	4	45
STFC	21	2	0	23
UKRI	30	12	2	44

Table 2: Prevalence of studentship co-funding by binary co-funder type

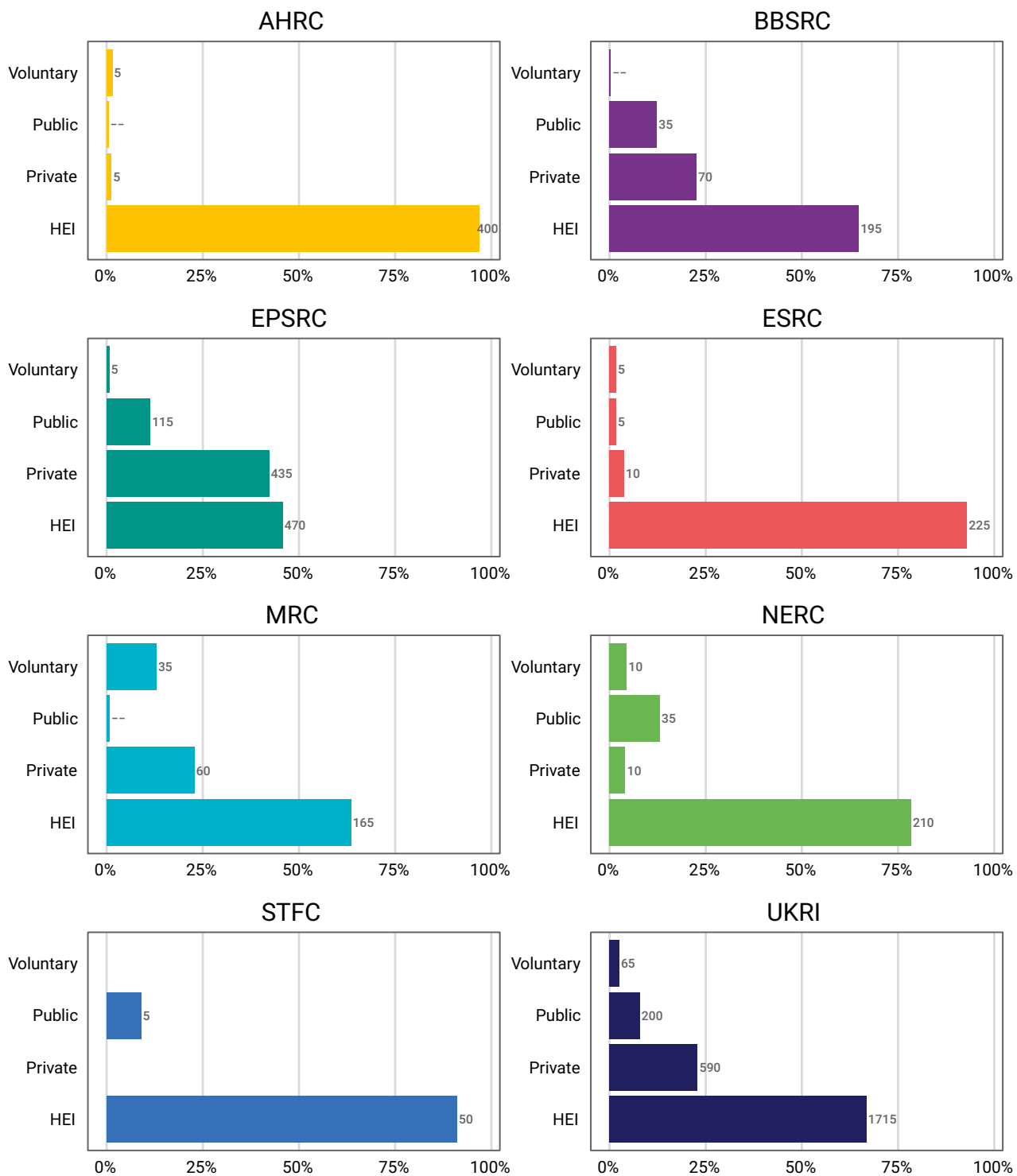


Figure 5: Percentage of instances of co-funding which relate to each sector
Rounded counts labelled directly

Across UKRI (bottom-right panel), HEIs accounted for 67% of all instances of co-funding reported in Survey 3, while 23% of instances reflected private sector support for a student. A smaller proportion represented contributions from the public (7%) and voluntary (3%) sectors.

The distribution of co-funding sectors varies across councils. For example, 97% of AHRC co-funding instances relate to HEIs, while for EPSRC the

figure is 46%; voluntary sector co-funders are proportionately most commonly reported in relation to MRC studentships.

Survey 3 did not ask about the amount of support, or the proportion of support for each studentship, that co-funders actually provide. So we are unable to say what fraction of the cost of these studentships is being met by organisations other than UKRI.

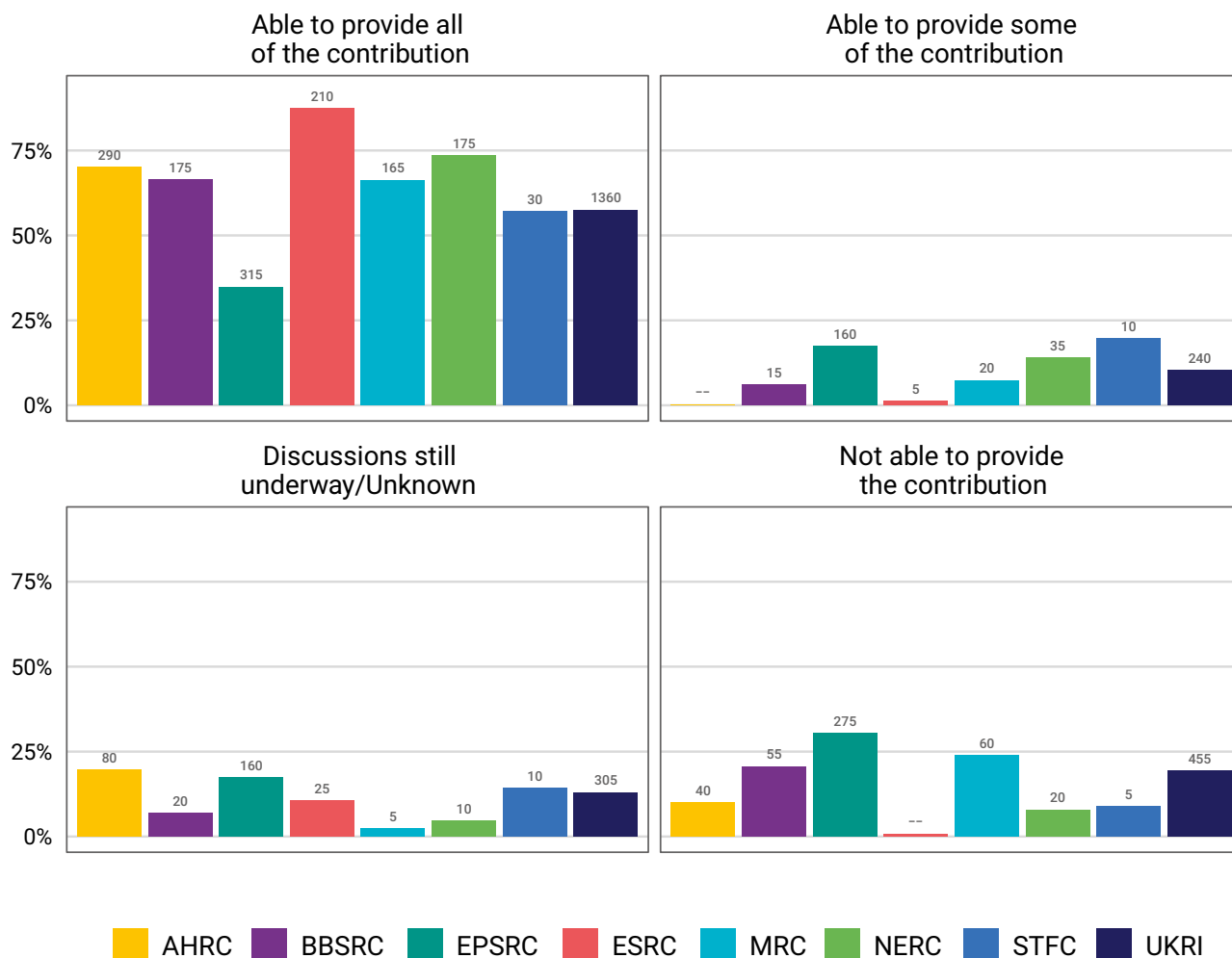


Figure 6: percentage of co-funded studentships by their co-funders' contribution status
Rounded counts labelled directly

If a studentship's co-funders are unable to provide additional funding in support of an extension request recorded in Survey 3, affected students may experience shortfalls. **Figure 6** summarises the overall co-funding status of studentships returned in Survey 3, including studentships with multiple co-funders.⁵

Slightly more than half of co-funded UKRI studentships returned in Survey 3 are expected to receive a full co-funder contribution to the cost of their extension (top-left panel in **Figure 6**.) There is some variation in this between councils. For example, 87% of ESRC studentships are expected to receive all of their co-funder contributions, while 34% of EPSRC co-funded studentships are likely to be in the same position.

19% of all UKRI co-funded studentships returned in Survey 3 are not expected to receive any co-funder extension contributions (bottom-right panel in **Figure 6**), but this proportion varies by UKRI council.

More than a quarter of EPSRC co-funded students returned in Survey 3 fall into this category, while almost no ESRC students do.

Co-funders other than HEIs are more likely to have indicated that they are unable to contribute to the cost of an extension than HEI co-funders (**Figure 7**, which only shows figures for UKRI as a whole). In general, the more likely it is that a studentship has a non-HEI co-funder, the less likely it is that the student will receive a full contribution to the requested extension.

While more than two thirds of HEI co-funding contributions to extensions requested in Survey 3 are expected in full, this is true of only 31% of co-funding contributions from other co-funders. Survey 3 data suggests that nearly 40% of instances of non-HEI co-funding will not result in any contribution towards a relevant extension, explaining some of the variation in outcomes seen in **Figure 6**.

⁵ For example, for a studentship reporting two co-funders, if one co-funder is able to provide all of their contribution and another is not, this studentship's co-funders are 'able to provide some of the contribution'.

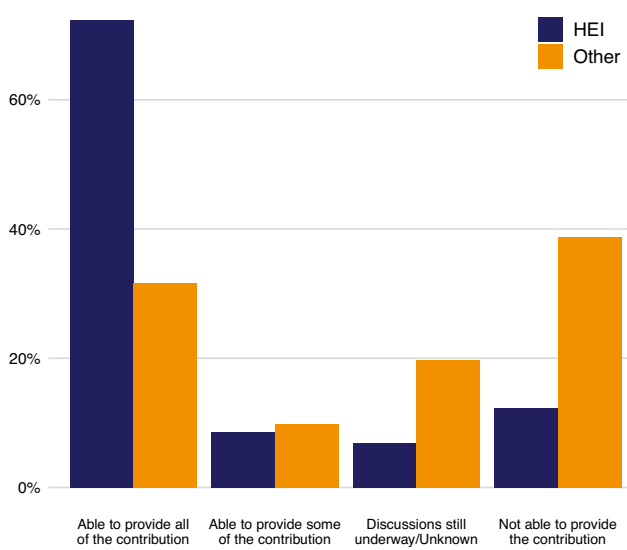


Figure 7: status of co-funder contributions by co-funder type, for UKRI overall

REASONS FOR EXTENSION REQUESTS

Survey 3 asked ROs to choose one or more reasons for extension requests for each student, from the following five:

- affected health and wellbeing
- increased caring responsibilities
- interruption of data collection and/or fieldwork
- lack of access to research resources and facilities
- other.

This information allows us to identify and understand, in a broad way, the reasons why extension requests were made and whether those reasons differed across UKRI councils.

The picture overall is variable, but extension requests recorded in Survey 3 most commonly reflected technical or practical research-related issues.

The most common reason given for requesting an extension, found in association with a majority (82%) of all extension requests across UKRI, was 'lack of access to research resources and facilities' (Figure 8, 'UKRI' series). The next most common extension reason was 'interruption of data collection and/or fieldwork', indicated in 49% of requests. Caring duties were cited by 17% of those requesting extensions.



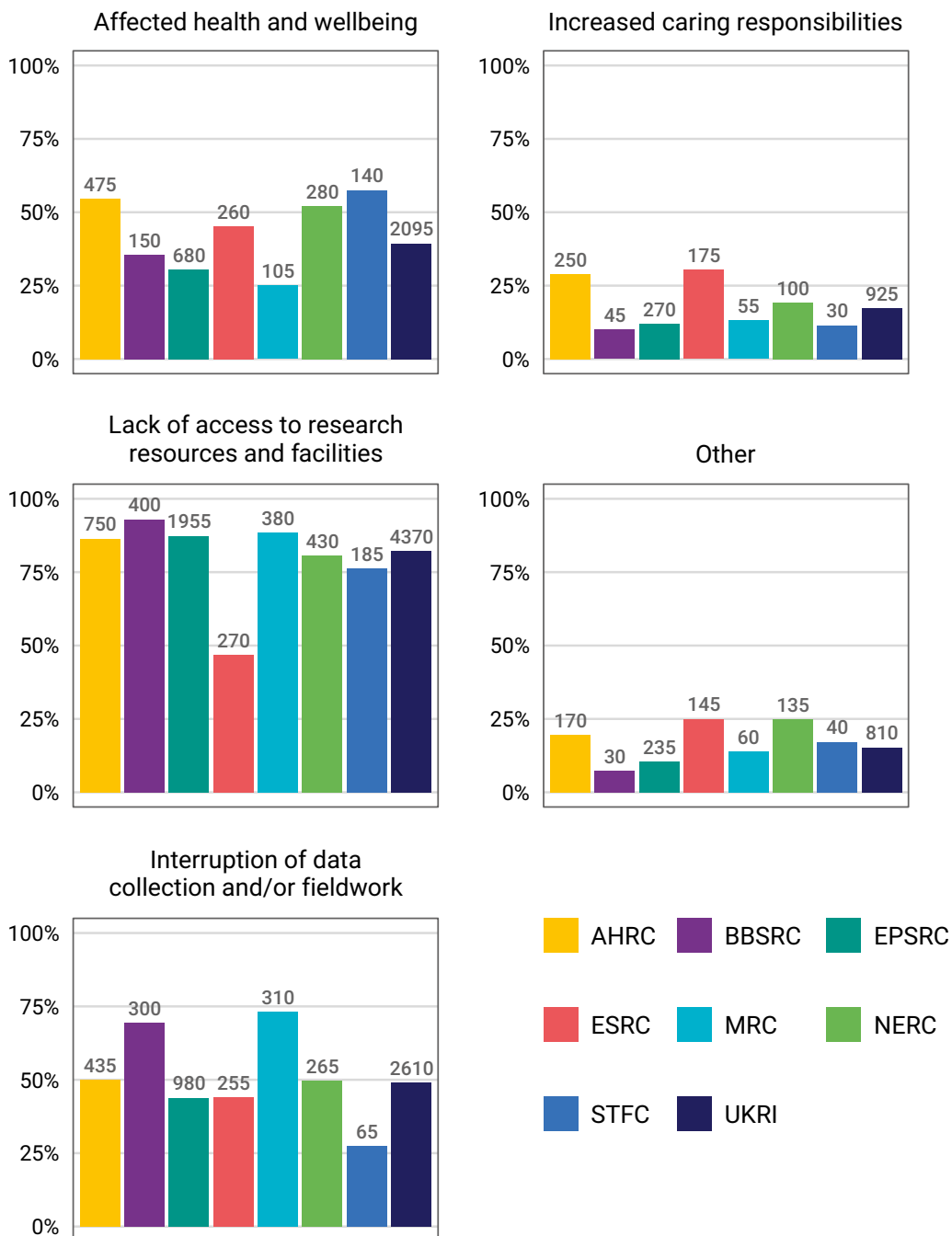


Figure 8: Percentage of extension requests citing each reason
Rounded count of students citing reason labelled directly

The distribution of reasons for extension requests differed noticeably across councils.

- STFC students were less likely to indicate that they have been affected by ‘interruption of data collection and/or fieldwork’ than other councils’ students.
- ESRC students were less likely than other councils’ students to have cited experiencing a ‘lack of access to research resources and facilities’ as a reason for requesting an extension.

- AHRC and ESRC students were more likely to have indicated ‘increased caring responsibilities’ than students funded by other councils.⁶
- Most BBSRC and MRC students in the survey indicated an ‘interruption of data collection and/or fieldwork’.
- ‘Other’ reasons beyond the four explicitly listed in the survey were also common, especially for ESRC and NERC students; for both these councils, 25% of students cited an ‘other’ reason – note that this may be in addition to one or more of the four specific reasons listed.

⁶ As AHRC and ESRC students tend to be older than other students, this is perhaps not surprising. The potential for confounding factors should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures. A full understanding of them would require a more complicated, model-based approach.

ANNEX 1: INFORMATION ON THE DATA AND METHODS USED

ROs provided the data used in this analysis in response to UKRI's third studentship extension survey (Survey 3) in autumn 2020.

Reported counts are rounded to the nearest five. Percentages are usually rounded to the nearest 1% for clarity.

Where 'UKRI' appears in a chart or the text, it refers to the combined data of the seven UKRI research councils. It does not refer to anything relating to UKRI's other constituent bodies, Research England and Innovate UK.

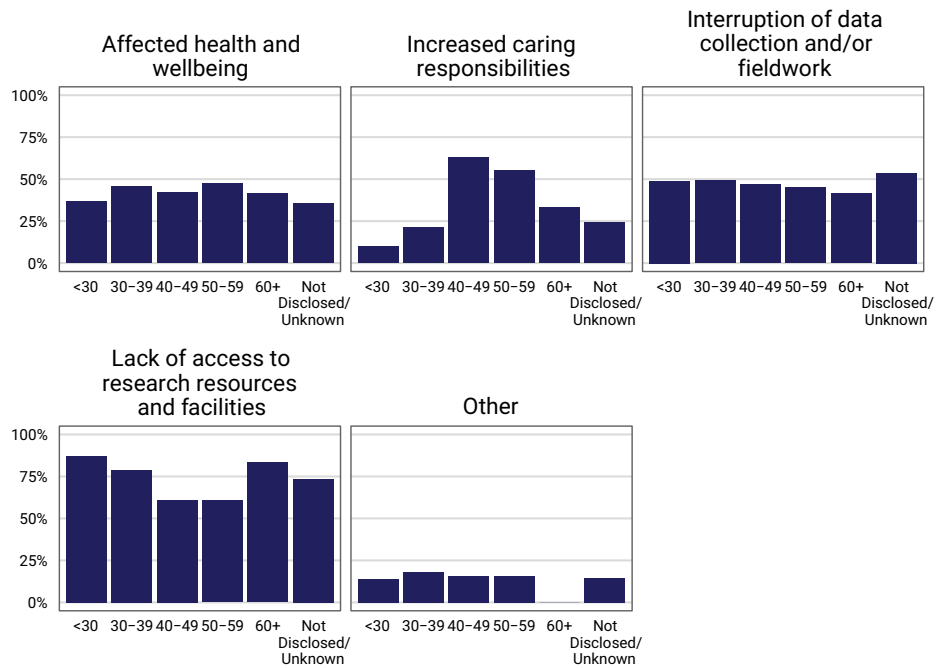
While Survey 3 did not ask for students' age, disability status, ethnicity or gender, we have been able to match the data received with student records in Je-S (with a successful match rate of 96%) in order to understand more fully the characteristics of students requesting an extension.⁷ Student Je-S records can have a high proportion of missing or not disclosed data, so the near-completeness of the matching process is not a guarantee of completeness of student data.

Disability status, ethnicity and gender categories are treated as binary variables in the analysis: disability/no disability, white ethnicity/ethnic minority, female/male. The derived binary ethnicity categorisation combines all subcategories available in Je-S that stem from a white ethnicity, placing all remaining ethnicities in the 'Ethnic minorities' category. The white ethnicity categories are 'White – British', 'White – Irish' and 'White – other'. All remaining ethnicities are placed within the 'Ethnic minorities' category.

⁷ Je-S is the Joint electronic Submission system used to submit research proposals to the UKRI research councils.

ANNEX 2: EXTENSION REASONS BY EDI CATEGORIES ACROSS UKRI

Charts A2a to A2d show the percentage of all students in Survey 3 citing each extension reason by age, gender, ethnicity and disability status category. The total number of students is 5,315.



A2a: Percentage of extension requests citing each reason, by age, for all 'Survey 3' students

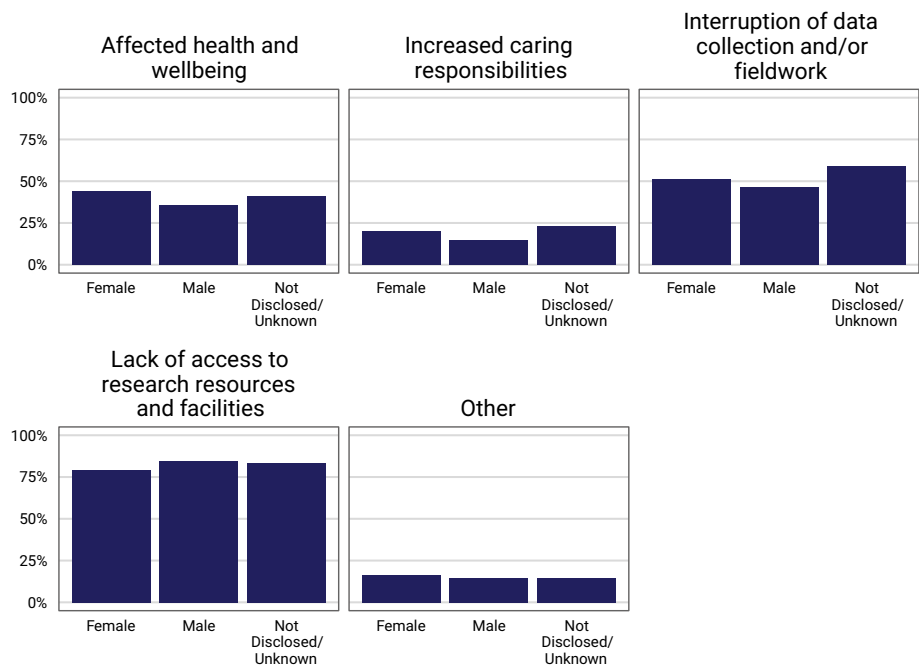


Figure A2b: Percentage of extension requests citing each reason, by gender, for all 'Survey 3' students

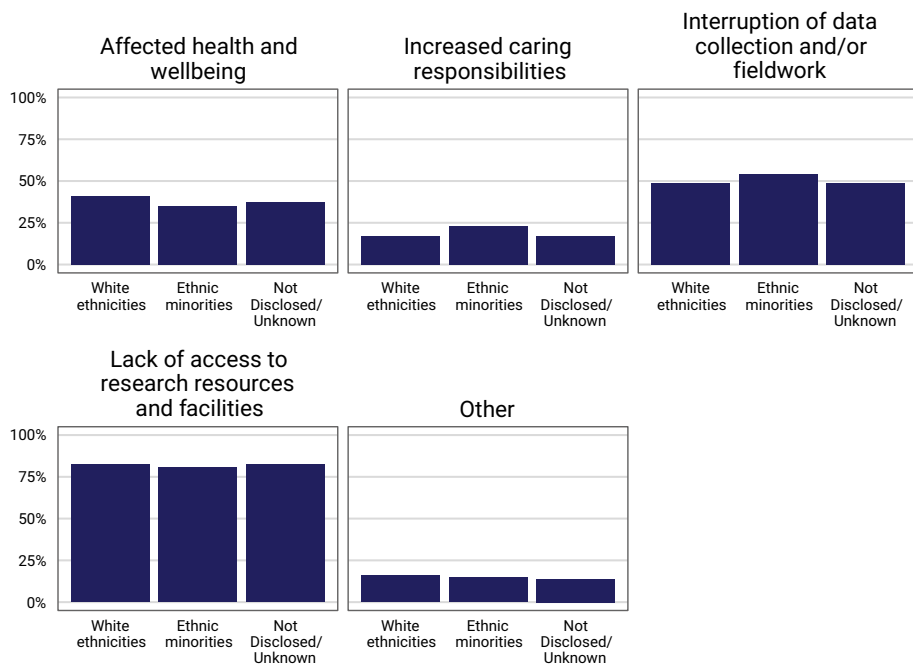


Figure A2c: Percentage of extension requests citing each reason, by ethnicity, for all 'Survey 3' students

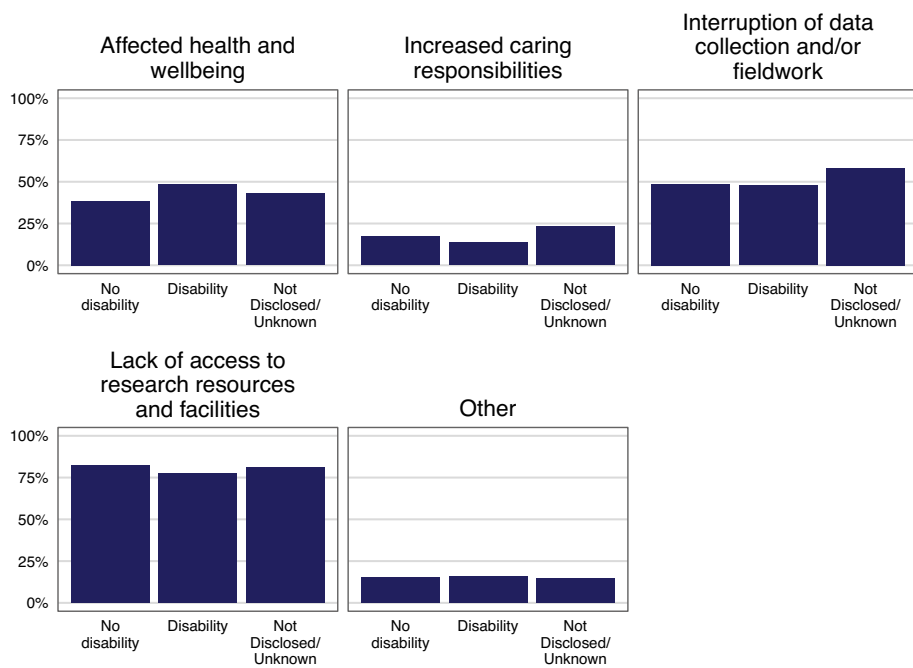


Figure A2d: Percentage of extension requests citing each reason, by disability status, for all 'Survey 3' students





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