MS Society

EDI Action Plan for MS Society Research

Demographic Data Report 2022

March 2023

▶ Contents

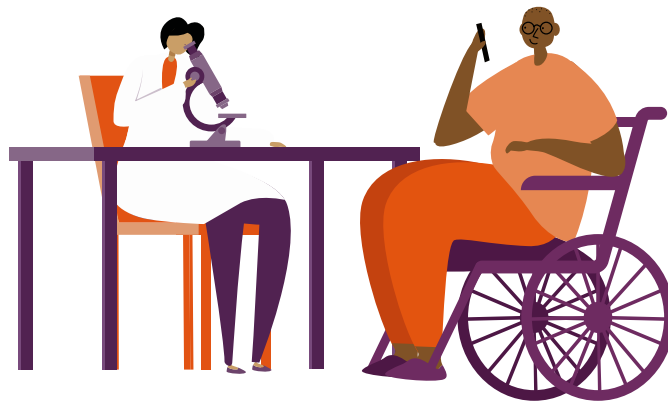## EDI Action Plan for MS Society Research

Demographic Data Report 2022

March 2023

▶ Introduction

Executive Summary

To achieve our goal of a world free from the effects of MS, we need to attract and retain the best and brightest minds to the field of MS research. Diversity underpins research excellence. Therefore, it is essential that we are funding diverse talent and supporting them to thrive, as well as drive innovation and improved quality and inclusivity of MS research.

Our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan for MS Society Research** sets out how we will deliver on our commitment to attract and retain diverse talent within MS research between now and 2024. The first step in tackling inequalities is to understand who we are currently funding and who is supporting us to deliver our research programme.

Our research programme is overseen by research boards, committees and grant panels. These groups are made up of relevant MS professionals and people affected by MS. They help us set and review our research strategy, provide recommendations on funding decisions, and advise on the management of our larger research programmes. It is essential that these governance processes are inclusive, containing diverse voices to make our research strategy and funding high quality and relevant to a wider portion of the MS community.

In 2021, we collected demographic data on 24/45 of our 2021 funding applicants. Although this was only a small number of people, this survey suggested the gender split, sexual orientation and disability status of applicants was representative of the UK population. 54% identified as women, 13% as lesbian or gay and 25% as disabled. The age range (32–69 years of age) reflected the typical age of post-doctoral researchers, suggesting younger researchers are not applying.

We saw underrepresentation amongst our researchers when looking at ethnicity, with 92% identifying as white. One of our aims in our 2020–2024 EDI Action Plan for MS Society Research was to collect further data to assess the diversity of our research grant applicants and those who participate in our governance processes. And use this data to develop a plan to increase applications and visibility from under-represented groups.

▶ Introduction

Executive Summary

In 2022, we launched a survey on our grants management system to collect demographic data from researchers applying to us for funding. We also asked our committee and panel members to complete the survey. Now, in 2023, we report on application, award and governance data for 2022.

This evidence base forms part of the first step in identifying barriers to individuals participating and being retained within MS research. We want to lead by example and we hope publishing this data will help other charities in their work to address inequalities within their research funding and governance. This report and our EDI Action Plan for MS Society research sits alongside our broader EDI strategy to ensure the MS Society is able to support everyone affected by MS.

We thank all of our applicants and governance group members for providing their demographic data. Provision of this data is the key to allow us to uncover inequalities in the research we fund and oversee and develop strategies to improve.

We will continue to publish these reports annually and will consult with the research community and people affected by MS to address inequalities, and will refine our research EDI Action Plan as we go.

Share your feedback

If you want to find out more about what we're doing to create a fairer MS Society, or join our EDI reference group, email **edi@mssociety.org.uk**

▶ **Introduction**

Methodology

For application and award data we report on lead and co-applicants from May 2022 to December 2022. This included applicants for our Project Awards, Catalyst Awards, Data Discovery Awards, Early Career Fellowships and our PhD Fellowships.

All existing research board, committee and grant panel members were asked to complete the survey in October 2022, and any subsequent new members were asked to complete their survey upon induction. The survey was optional and respondents had to provide consent. However, to increase interaction with the survey, users were unable to navigate to other areas of the system until a response to either consent to provide data, or not, was provided.

We present diversity data by age, disability, ethnicity and gender identity. And where relevant, we have compared our data with the UK biosciences and medicine academic staff population published by the Advance Higher Education (HE) in

their Equality in Higher Education Staff statistical report 2022. We have also compared against data published by Cancer Research UK in their 2022 diversity report. Together this allows us, where appropriate, to make comparisons with the general UK population, academic staff from a relevant scientific discipline and a separate UK medical research charity. We hope to report on sexual orientation and caring responsibilities in the future, when comparators become available.

We have removed prefer not to say responses from our dataset as the Advance HE analysis does not include this category.

Our questions (Appendix 1) are designed using the Diversity and Inclusion Survey (DAISY) Question Guidance and modelled on the UK 2021 Census.

We know that our question regarding Race and Ethnicity does not fully describe a person's individual background. However, we have modelled this question on the UK 2021 Census for the following reasons:

- To draw meaningful conclusions, it is important that our questionnaire produces results that are comparable to the general UK population and consistent with the recognised standards produced by the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

- Due to a small sample size, it is necessary for us to aggregate data into larger macro-categories to make results more reliable and to protect individual identities.

Where datasets are large enough, ethnicity is presented according to the UK 2021 Census list of ethnicity groups (Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, other ethnic group, White).

When sample sizes within datasets were too small (less than 10), it was necessary to further aggregate multiple ethnicity groups into single 'ethnicity groups'. For the reasons above, this was to make results reliable and to protect individual identities.

▶ Introduction

Methodology

As our dataset expands we will present disaggregated data to allow us to identify and address inequalities within ethnic groups with distinct identities and challenges.

We will continue to listen to feedback and understand new learnings in this area to improve our survey and ensure it is as inclusive and representative as possible. All diversity questions will be updated as and when new DAISY guidance is published.

We'll continue to collect data over the coming years so we can analyse trends and assess the impact of our EDI Action Plan. This will help us to identify areas in which there is still work to be done. We are also mindful that the data presented is only a snapshot in time and does not reflect all inequalities that people from under-represented groups face. The collection of data is one tool, in our wider Action Plan that we are using to combat the systemic discrimination faced by people from under-represented groups.

Headline Points

Our Applicants and Award Holders
11%
of our 2022 applicants are from an ethnic minority background
38%
success rate for our 2022 applicants from an ethnic minority background compared to 32% for White applicants
49%
of our applicants awarded funding in 2022 identify as female
9%
of our 2022 applicants declared a disability

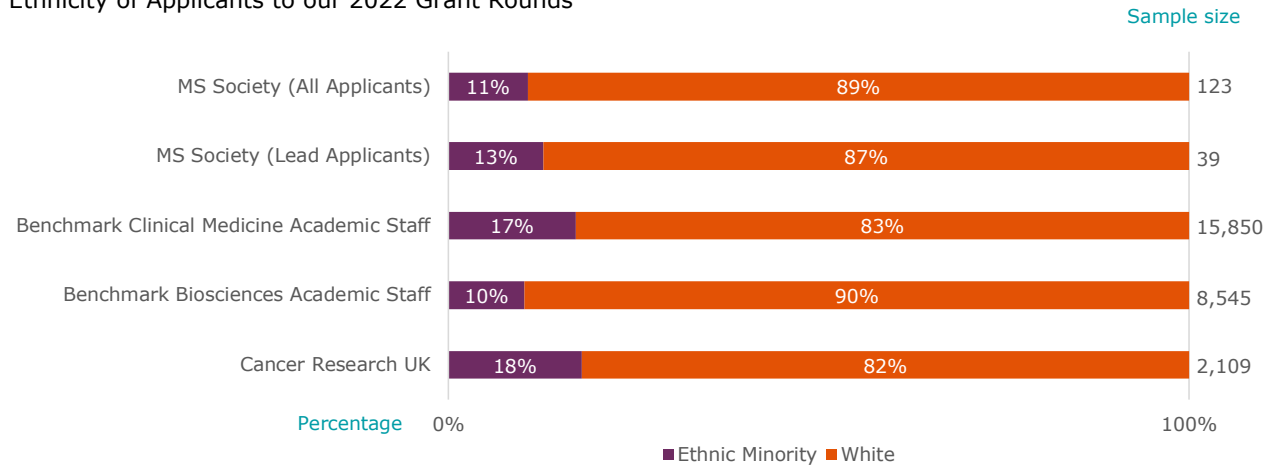| Our Committee Members |
| :---: |
| **6%** |
| of our governance members are from an ethnic minority background |
| **59%** |
| of our governance members identify as female |
| **0%** |
| of our governance members are under 40 years of age |
| **17%** |
| of our governance members have declared a disability |

▶ Ethnicity of Applicants

- The proportion of applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds reflects the bioscience academic sector, but is low compared to the medical academic sector and a relevant charity.
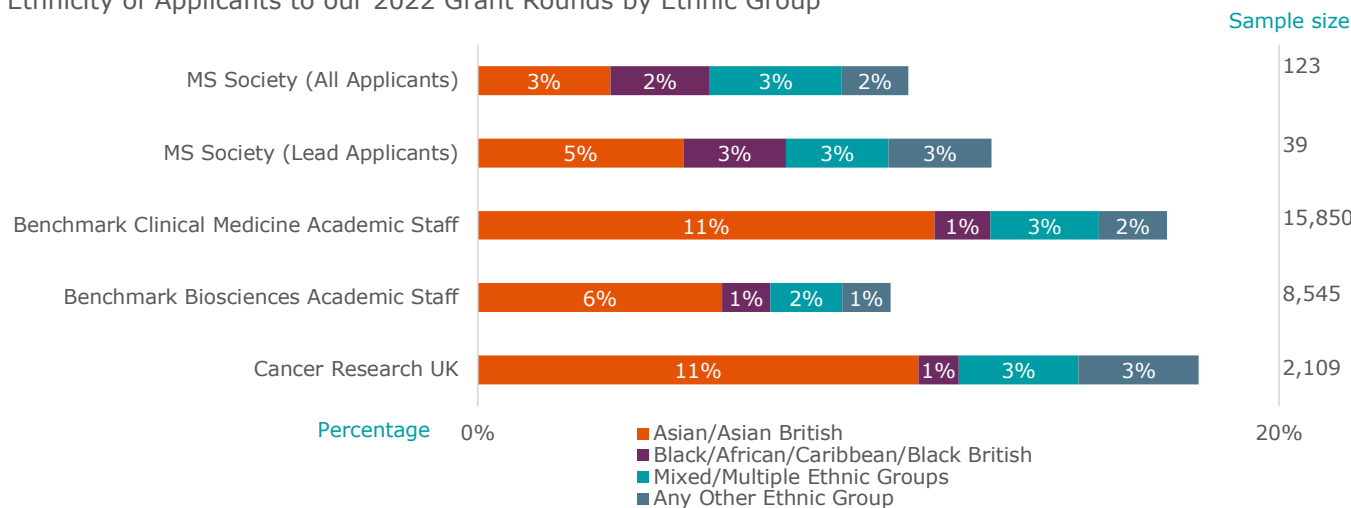- Asian researchers are underrepresented amongst our applicants.

Ethnicity of Applicants to our 2022 Grant Rounds

Sample size

MS Society (All Applicants)	11% / 89%	123
MS Society (Lead Applicants)	13% / 87%	39
Benchmark Clinical Medicine Academic Staff	17% / 83%	15,850
Benchmark Biosciences Academic Staff	10% / 90%	8,545
Cancer Research UK	18% / 82%	2,109

Percentage 0% — 100%

■ Ethnic Minority ■ White

Key findings:
- 11% of our total pool of applicants and 13% of our lead applicants are from an ethnic minority background. This is lower than the medical academic sector (17%) and Cancer Research UK (18%).

Ethnicity of Applicants to our 2022 Grant Rounds by Ethnic Group

Sample size

MS Society (All Applicants)	3% / 2% / 3% / 2%	123
MS Society (Lead Applicants)	5% / 3% / 3% / 3%	39
Benchmark Clinical Medicine Academic Staff	11% / 1% / 3% / 2%	15,850
Benchmark Biosciences Academic Staff	6% / 1% / 2% / 1%	8,545
Cancer Research UK	11% / 1% / 3% / 3%	2,109

Percentage 0% — 20%

■ Asian/Asian British
■ Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
■ Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups
■ Any Other Ethnic Group

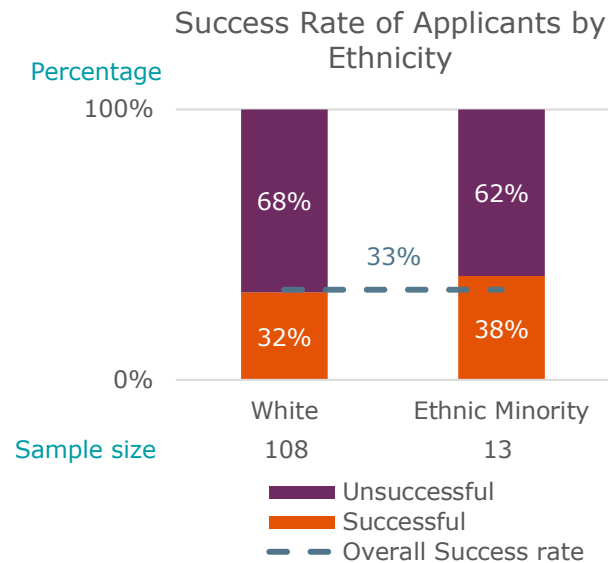**Key findings:**
- Only 3% of our wider pool of applicants and 5% of our lead applicants are from Asian/Asian British backgrounds which is lower than the academic staff populations and Cancer Research UK.
- Our lead applicants from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups and any other ethnic groups are broadly representative of the academic and charity sector populations.
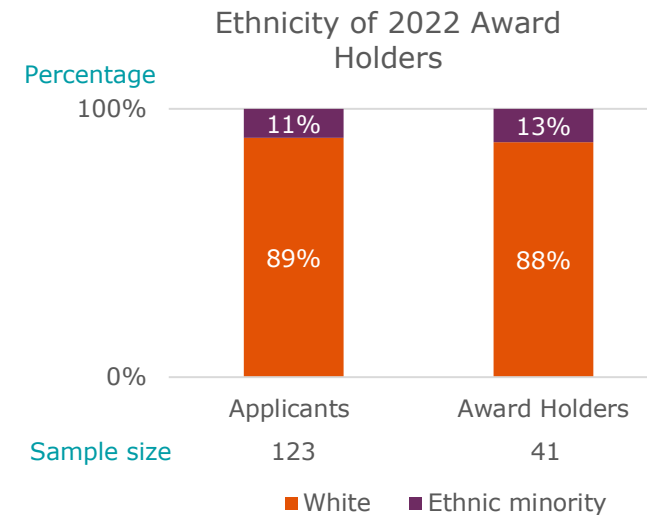
▶ Ethnicity of Award Holders

- Success rates for our 2022 grant applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds is comparable to White applicants.
- Researchers from ethnic minority backgrounds receive 13% of awards.

Success Rate of Applicants by Ethnicity

Percentage

	White	Ethnic Minority
100%		
	68%	62%
	33%	
	32%	38%
0%		

Sample size: White 108, Ethnic Minority 13

- Unsuccessful
- Successful
- Overall Success rate

Key findings:
- The success rate for applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds is 6 percentage points higher than for white applicants.

Ethnicity of 2022 Award Holders

Percentage

	Applicants	Award Holders
100%	11%	13%
	89%	88%
0%		

Sample size: Applicants 123, Award Holders 41

- White
- Ethnic minority

Key findings:
- The proportion of award holders from ethnic minority backgrounds is slightly higher than the proportion of applicants reflecting the higher success rates seen for applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds.
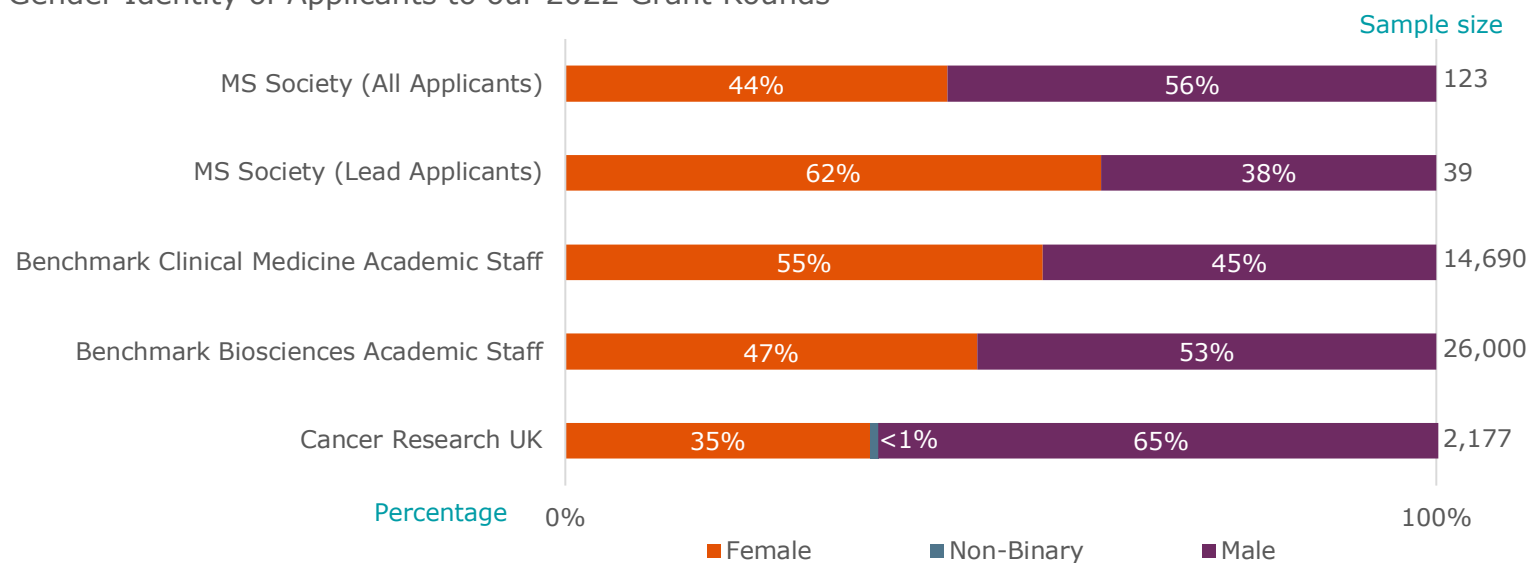
▶ Gender of Applicants

44% of all applicants identify as female, this increases to 62% for lead applicants only.

Note:
· Additional questions were asked surrounding gender; numbers are too low to disclose.

Gender Identity of Applicants to our 2022 Grant Rounds

Sample size

Category	Female	Non-Binary	Male	Sample size
MS Society (All Applicants)	44%		56%	123
MS Society (Lead Applicants)	62%		38%	39
Benchmark Clinical Medicine Academic Staff	55%		45%	14,690
Benchmark Biosciences Academic Staff	47%		53%	26,000
Cancer Research UK	35%	<1%	65%	2,177

Percentage   0%   100%
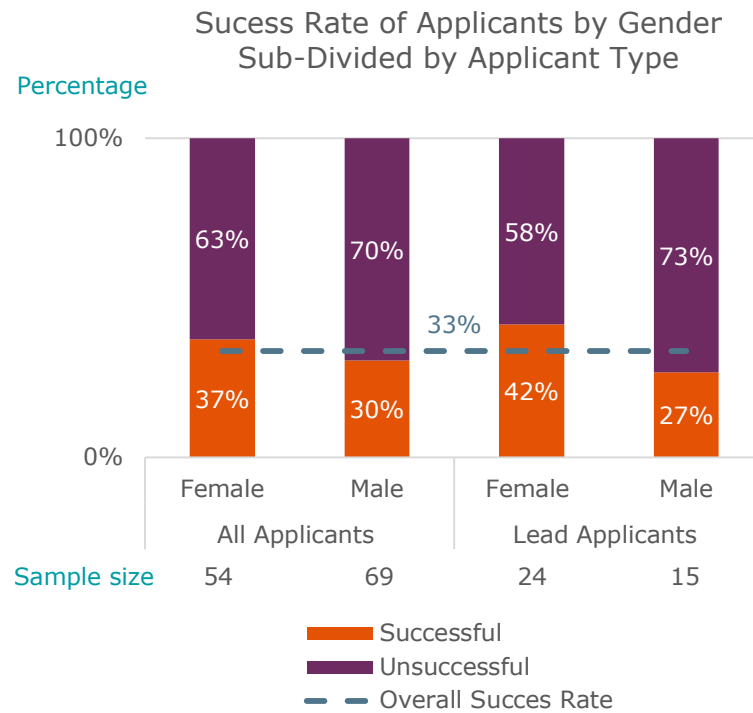
■ Female   ■ Non-Binary   ■ Male

Key findings:
· 44% of all our applicants identify as female. The proportion is reflective of the bioscience academic population and higher than the proportion of applications received by female applicants to CRUK award rounds.
· 62% of our lead applicants identify as female, this is higher than the academic and charity sectors.

▶ **Gender of Award Holders**

- Success rates are higher for females compared to males.
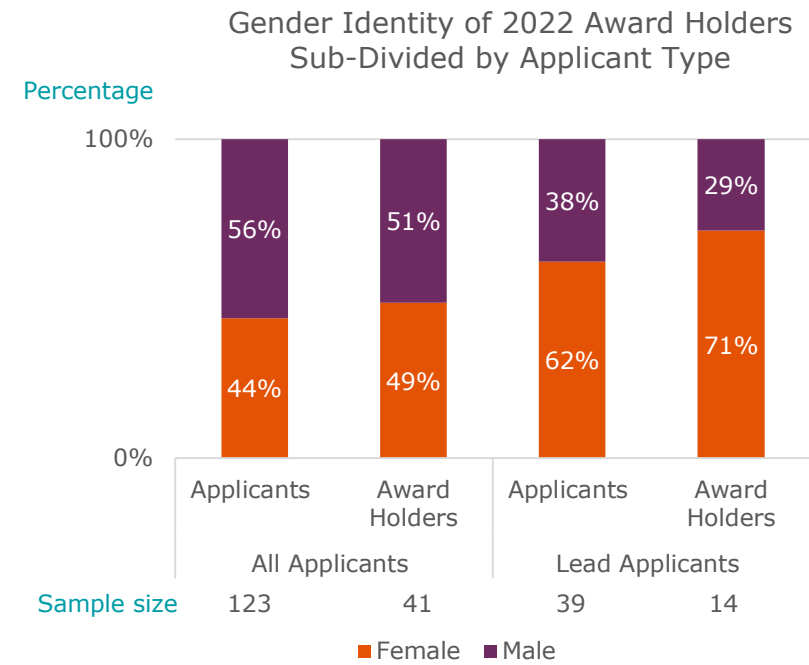- Women are over-represented amongst our lead applicants and award holders.

Note:
- Additional questions were asked surrounding gender; numbers are too low to disclose.

Sucess Rate of Applicants by Gender Sub-Divided by Applicant Type

Percentage

	All Applicants		Lead Applicants	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Unsuccessful	63%	70%	58%	73%
Successful	37%	30%	42%	27%
Sample size	54	69	24	15

Overall Succes Rate: 33%

- Successful
- Unsuccessful
- Overall Succes Rate

Key findings:
- Success rates for female applicants is 37% compared to 30% for male
- Success rates for female lead applicants is 42% compared to 27% for male applicants

Gender Identity of 2022 Award Holders Sub-Divided by Applicant Type

Percentage

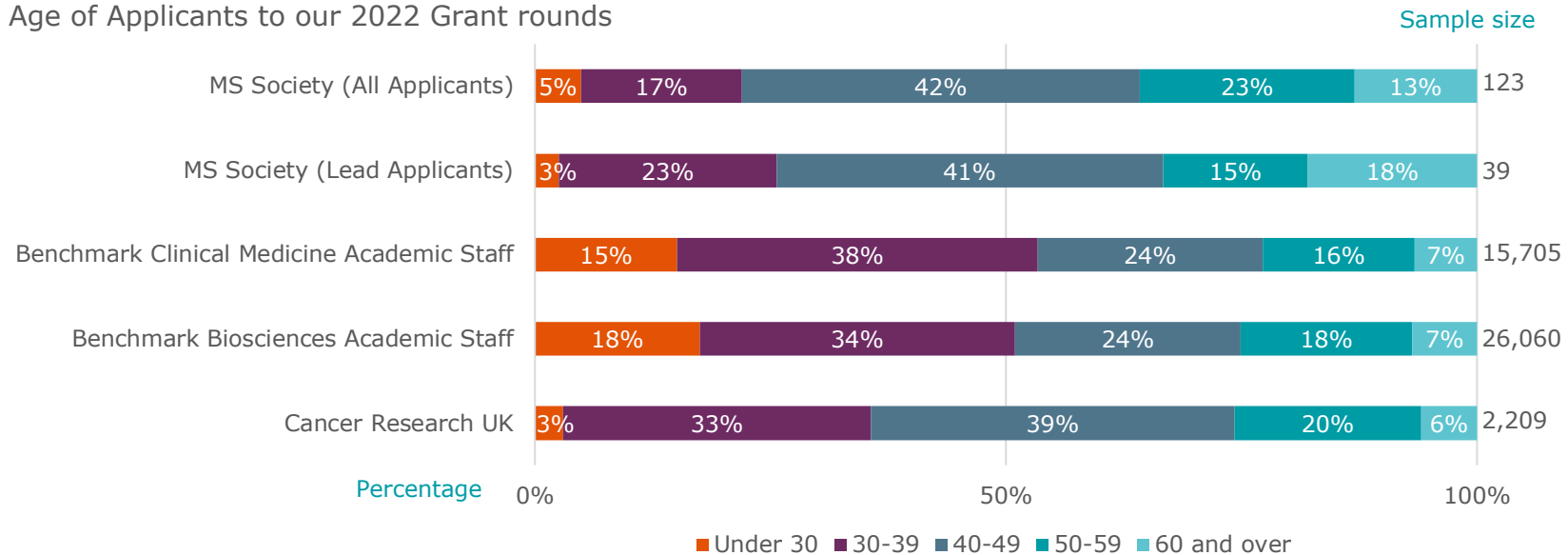|	All Applicants		Lead Applicants	
	Applicants	Award Holders	Applicants	Award Holders
Male	56%	51%	38%	29%
Female	44%	49%	62%	71%
Sample size	123	41	39	14

- Female
- Male

Key findings:
- Female applicants make up almost 50% of our wider pool of applicants and award holders, but make up 62% and 71% of our lead applicants and award holders.

▶ Age of Applicants

Over 75% of our 2022 applicants are over the age of 40

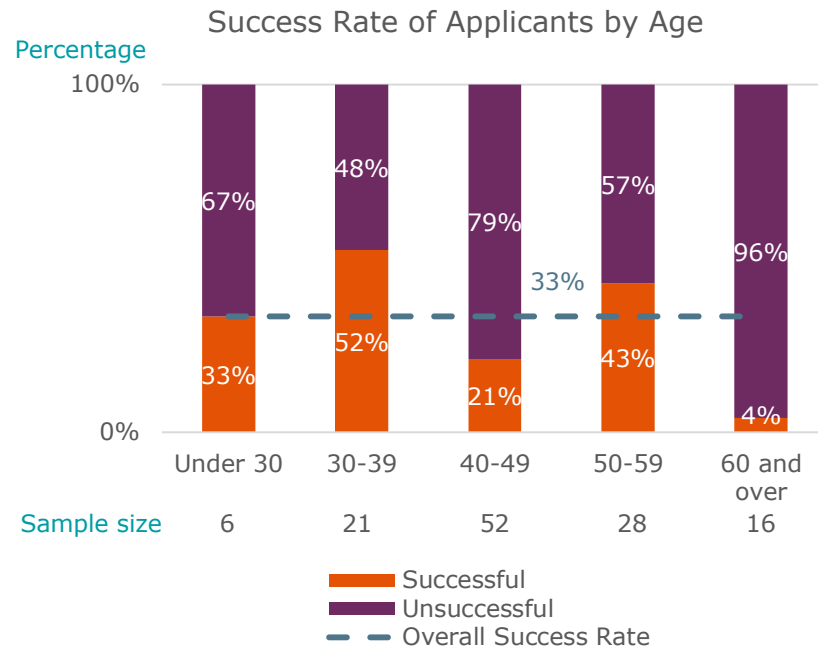Age of Applicants to our 2022 Grant rounds

Sample size

Category	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over	Sample size
MS Society (All Applicants)	5%	17%	42%	23%	13%	123
MS Society (Lead Applicants)	3%	23%	41%	15%	18%	39
Benchmark Clinical Medicine Academic Staff	15%	38%	24%	16%	7%	15,705
Benchmark Biosciences Academic Staff	18%	34%	24%	18%	7%	26,060
Cancer Research UK	3%	33%	39%	20%	6%	2,209

Percentage 0% 50% 100%

■ Under 30 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50-59 ■ 60 and over

Key findings:

· Researchers aged 40–49 make up the largest share (42%) of all our 2022 applicants.

· We received less applications from researchers aged 30–39 (17–23%) compared to those applying to Cancer Research UK.
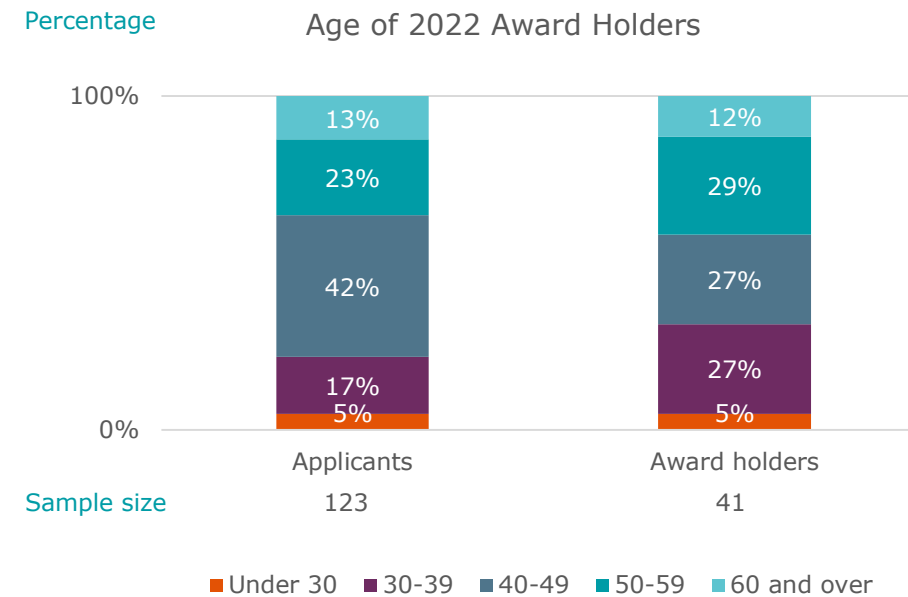
▶ Age of Award Holders

- Success rates are variable across age groups.
- There are similar proportions of Award Holders belonging to the age groups 30-39, 40-49 and 50-59.

Success Rate of Applicants by Age

Percentage

Age	Under 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over
Unsuccessful	67%	48%	79%	57%	96%
Successful	33%	52%	21%	43%	4%
Sample size	6	21	52	28	16

Overall Success Rate: 33%

Legend:
- Successful
- Unsuccessful
- Overall Success Rate

Key findings:
- Success rates are lower for those aged 40-49 and 60 and over
- Success rates are higher for those aged 30-39 and 50-59

Age of 2022 Award Holders

Percentage

	Applicants	Award holders
60 and over	13%	12%
50-59	23%	29%
40-49	42%	27%
30-39	17%	27%
Under 30	5%	5%
Sample size	123	41

Legend:
- Under 30
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 and over

Key findings:
- Lower success rate of 40-49 year olds and higher success rate of 30-39 year olds is reflected in the demographics of our funded award holders.
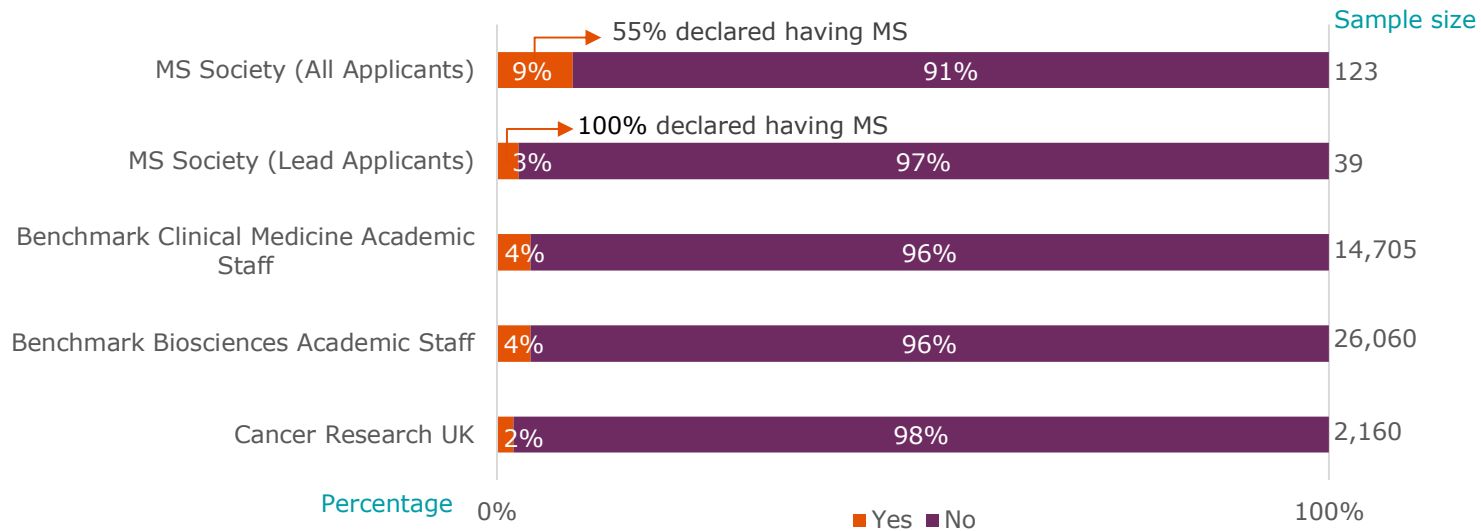- Similar proportions of those aged 30-39 (27%), 40-49 (27%) and 50-59 (29%) amongst our Award Holders.

▶ Disability Status of Applicants

9% of all applicants declared a disability.

Disability Status of Applicants to our 2022 Grant Rounds

Sample size

		Sample size
MS Society (All Applicants)	55% declared having MS — 9% / 91%	123
MS Society (Lead Applicants)	100% declared having MS — 3% / 97%	39
Benchmark Clinical Medicine Academic Staff	4% / 96%	14,705
Benchmark Biosciences Academic Staff	4% / 96%	26,060
Cancer Research UK	2% / 98%	2,160

Percentage 0% — ■ Yes ■ No — 100%

Key findings:

· 9% of all our applicants declared a disability. This is higher than the proportion of the academic sector who declared a disability and higher than the proportion of applicants to Cancer Research UK declaring a disability.

· 3% of lead applicants declared a disability, in line with the proportion of the academic sector who declared a disability.

▶ Disability Status of Applicants

- Success rates are lower for those declaring a disability
- The number of Award holders declaring a disability is 5%

Note:
- This data does not include applicants who preferred not to say whether they had a disability. Prefer not to say responses accounted for 1.6% of total responses.

Success Rate of Applicants by Disability Status

Percentage

Sample size

Yes 11 / No 110

Unsuccessful
Successful
Overall Success Rate

82% / 65%
33%
18% / 35%

Disability Status of 2022 Award Holders

Percentage

Sample size

Applicants 121 / Award Holders 40

91% / 95%
55% declared having MS
9% / 5%
100% declared having MS

■ Yes ■ No
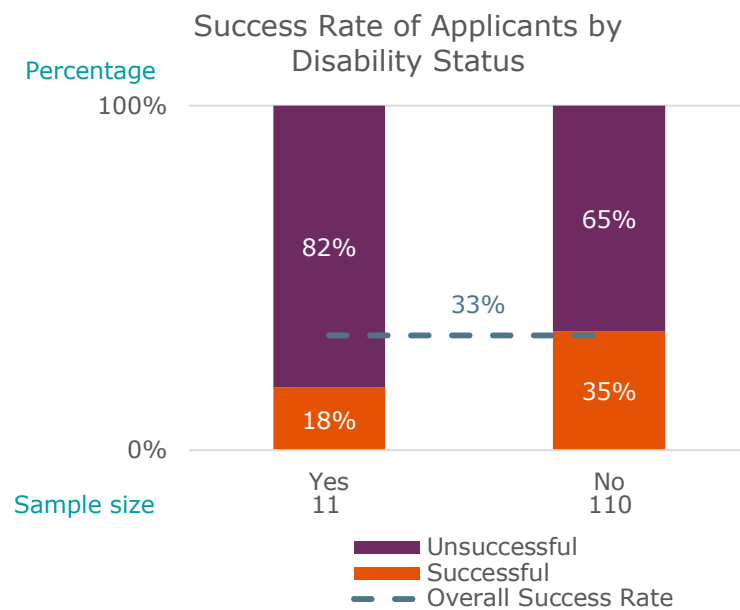
Key findings:
- The success rate for applicants who declared a disability is lower than for applicants who did not report a disability, at 18% and 35%, respectively.
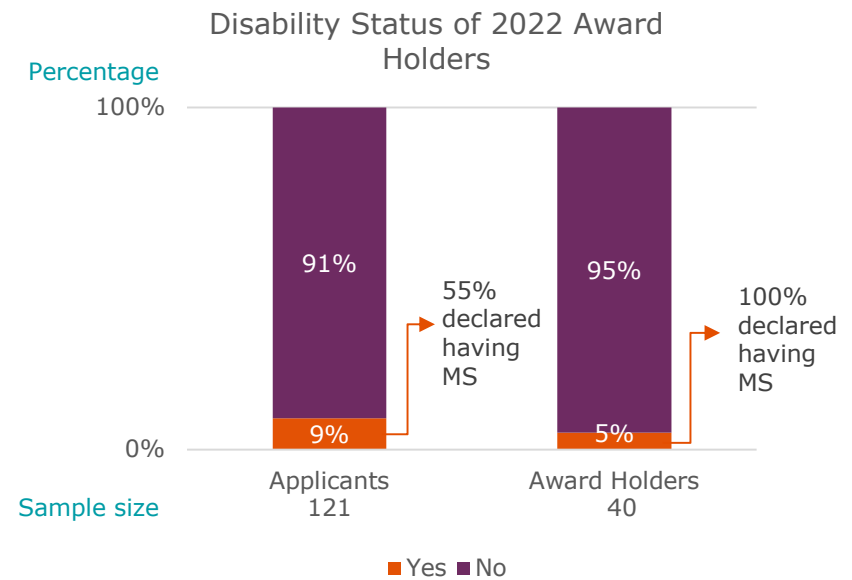
Key findings:
- 5% of our award holders have declared a disability. Of these all have declared that they have MS.
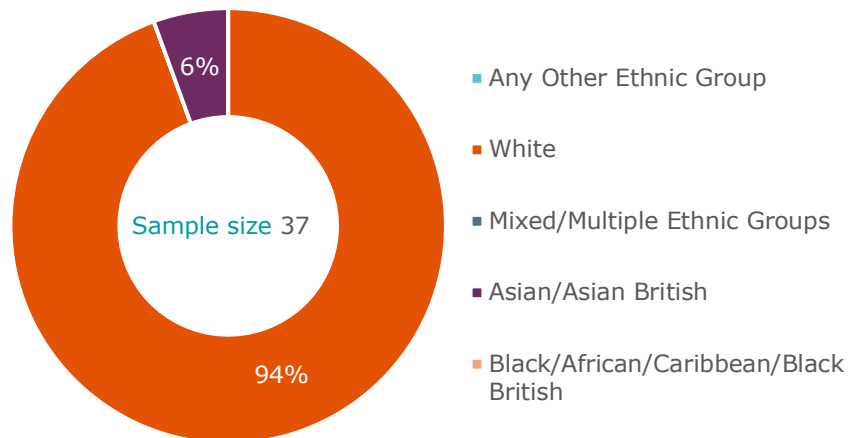- This is in line with the proportion of the academic sector who declare a disability at 4%.

▶ Governance Members

- 92% of our Governance Members are White.
- Women make up over 50% of our Governance Members.

Note:
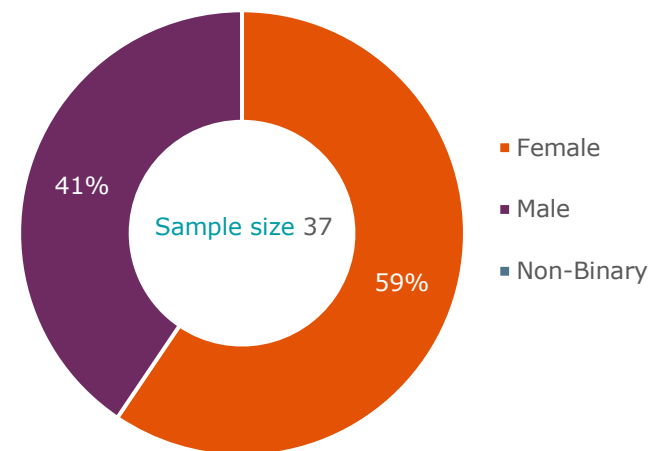- We had a low response rate from Governance Members with only 37 of 110 members completing the survey.

Proportion of our Governance Members by Ethnicity

Sample size 37

94%

6%

- ■ Any Other Ethnic Group
- ■ White
- ■ Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups
- ■ Asian/Asian British
- ■ Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

Proportion of our Governance Members by Gender Identity

Sample size 37

41%

59%

- ■ Female
- ■ Male
- ■ Non-Binary

Key findings:
- 92% of our Governance members are white, only 6% are from an ethnic minority background.
- We have no members from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, Mixed/Multiple ethnic Groups or Any other ethnic group.
- We are below our target of 10% representation from ethnic minority backgrounds across our Governance Groups.

Key findings:
- 59% of our Governance Members identify as female compared with 41% who identify as male.
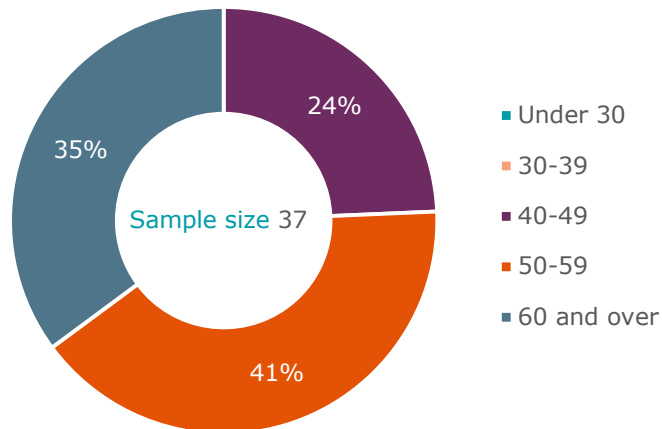- We are above our target of 50% representation from women across our Governance Groups.

▶ Governance Members

- All of our governance Members are over the age of 40.
- The proportion of Governance members declaring a disability is higher than the academic sector.

Note:
- We had a low response rate from Governance Members with only 37 of 110 members completing the survey.
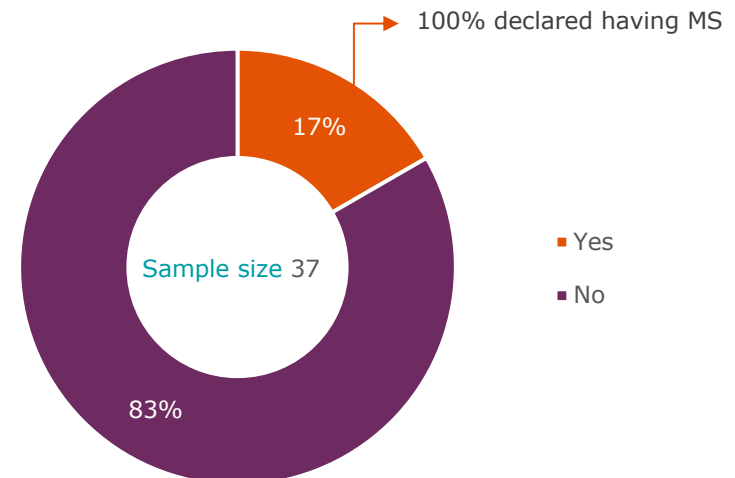
Proportion of Governance Members by Age

Sample size 37

- Under 30
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 and over

24%
35%
41%

Proportion of Governance Members by Disability Status

100% declared having MS

17%
83%

Sample size 37

- Yes
- No

Key findings:
- None of our Governance Members are under the age of 40.
- The largest proportion of our Governance members are between the ages of 40–49.

Key findings:
- 17% of our Governance Members disclosed a disability.
- Of this 17% all declared having MS.
- Each of our Governance Groups contain people affected by MS.

▶ **Next Steps**

It is essential that we:

- Ensure the demographics of applicants and governance members reflect the academic sector of biosciences and medical researchers.

- Increase grant applications from researchers from diverse backgrounds.

- Maintain equal success rates for researchers regardless of background.

- Maintain equal proportion of applications from female applicants.

- Understand why those that declared a disability, that is not MS, are unsuccessful through our current funding process.

- Maintain at least 50% females on our governance groups.

- Increase the proportion of our governance members from ethnic minority backgrounds to at least 10%.

In line with our EDI Action Plan our 2023 priorities are to:

- Continue to collect demographic data on our applicants, award holders and governance groups to improve our ability to see under-representation and inequalities in our funding processes.

- Develop a plan to increase applications from under-represented groups.

- Continue identifying communication channels to reach researchers from under-represented groups.

- Redesign the CV section in our grant application forms to be more inclusive.

- Make an active effort to recruit people from ethnic minority backgrounds to our governance panels to ensure diverse voices are being heard.

- Recruit early career researchers and recruit or appoint an EDI champion to each of our governance groups.

Our ongoing plans include to:

- Review and improve our selection processes to increase the number of grant recipients from diverse backgrounds. This includes adapting the MRC applicant framework for use by our peer reviewers and panels.

- Update our award Terms and Conditions to be more inclusive to improve retention of researchers from diverse backgrounds.

- Develop and communicate positions on part-time fellowships and on maternity, paternity, adoption and carer leave for grant holders.

- Follow up on our previously funded early career researchers to identify whether people from certain backgrounds are more likely to be lost from MS research. And identify barriers to career progression amongst these groups.

- See all our ongoing plans in the **EDI Action Plan for MS Society Research**

▶ **Appendix 1.**
Demographic Questionnaire

Our questions are designed using the [Diversity and Inclusion Survey (DAISY) Question Guidance](#) and modelled on the UK 2021 Census

1. When were you born?

2. What ethnic group do you identify with? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

Asian/Asian British – Indian

Asian/Asian British – Pakistani

Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi

Asian/Asian British – Chinese

Asian/Asian British – Any other Asian Background

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – African

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Caribbean

Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – Any other Black/African/Caribbean background

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Asian and White

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black Caribbean and White

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Black African and White

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups – Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background

White – British/English/Welsh/Scottish

White – Northern Irish

White – Irish

White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller

White – Any other White background

Any other ethnic group – Arab

Any other ethnic group – Any other ethnic group

Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following best describes your gender?

Female

Male

Non-Binary

I would prefer to use my own term - Please tell us your own term

Prefer not to say

4. Do you identify as trans?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

5. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Straight/Heterosexual

Gay or Lesbian

Bisexual

Pansexual

Other sexual orientation – Please tell us your sexual orientation

Prefer not to say

6. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?
(By "disability" we mean a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal daytoday activities.)

Yes – Can you tell us about your disability?

　　　Yes, it is because of my MS

　　　Yes, it is because of my other condition

No

Prefer not to say

No

Prefer not to say

▶ ## Appendix 1.
Demographic Questionnaire

7. Do you provide unpaid care to a partner, disabled child, close relative or friend, who could not manage without your help?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

8. What is your employment status?

Employed – Full time

Employed – Part time

Self-employed – Full time

Self-employed – Part time

Not employed – Looking for work

Not employed – Not looking for work

Retired – Retired and receiving pension

Retired – Medically retired early because of ill health

To process your personal data including your special category data (sensitive data including health, ethnicity and diagnosis data) as outlined above, we require your explicit consent.

Yes, I consent

No, I do not consent (any data you entered above will be removed)

If you have any questions please email us:

research@mssociety.org.uk

Let's stop MS together