

# SMART WORKS

## UNEMPLOYMENT INDEX 2023

“I am strong.  
I am powerful.  
And I got the job.”  
**Nasra**

**Experiencing  
Unemployment**  
+  
**The Importance  
of Confidence**  
+  
**The Meaning of  
Having a Job**



SMART  
WORKS

## Foreword

“Together, we can support more women into the workforce and make employers realise that women are one of the greatest assets we have in our economy.”

Here at Smart Works, we have all witnessed the effect the cost-of-living crisis and an increasingly demanding job market is having on our clients.

The Smart Works service is all about positivity and joy: connecting women to their potential through the medium of clothing and coaching. So, I had hoped that this year's report would bring some much-needed positive news about the recruitment landscape. Ideally, we wanted to be able to share with you that women are feeling more confident about the recruitment process and are more hopeful for their futures. Sadly, this is not the case.

One year on from the launch of the inaugural Smart Works Unemployment Index, we have found that the circumstances under which women are seeking work have deteriorated.

The Smart Works Unemployment Index is a critical mouthpiece for the people we support on a day-to-day basis. Over the last year, we have heard the first-hand experiences of over 3,700 of our clients across the UK about their feelings on the employment market and their desperation about finding a job.

To put it simply, 2023 was a bleak year. Our clients, all of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and communities, told us that they found it harder to secure work, despite applying for more jobs and attending more interviews. We have also heard about the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis and the desperation it is creating. More women are applying for lower skilled and lower paid jobs that they are overqualified for, because they simply have to secure something to make ends meet. Under the circumstances of a more competitive and demanding job market, it comes as no surprise that our clients are feeling less confident about the application process than last year.

Something needs to change.

Through our Unemployment Index we want to amplify the voices of the women we see in our centres every day. We can share their stories, their experiences, and their aspirations with you, so that you can hear directly what it is to be an unemployed woman seeking work in the UK today, and why having a job matters so much.



The Smart Works service is specifically designed to address the barriers women face when securing employment. We know how much having a job means to our clients, the opportunities it unlocks, and the ripple effect it has on their lives and those of their loved ones, not just financially but also psychologically. We are proud that since our launch in 2013 we have supported over 35,000 clients, helping them unlock the confidence they need to reach their full potential. 69% secure a role after visiting one of our centres.

We told you last year that we had launched the Unemployment Index to create an annual benchmark against which progress, impact and change could be tracked and measured. This year we have taken this report one step further and used our expertise to recommend clear and simple actions that employers can take to ensure a more accessible recruitment process.

Together, we can support more women into the workforce and make employers realise that women are one of the greatest assets we have in our economy.

**Kate Stephens**  
CEO



Executive Summary	2
Methodology	3
Our Clients	4
<b>Experiencing Unemployment</b>	<b>6</b>
Collay's Story	8
<b>The Importance of Confidence</b>	<b>10</b>
Nasra's Story	12
<b>The Meaning of Having a Job</b>	<b>14</b>
Kathryn's Story	16
Recommendations	18
The Impact of our Service	19
The Smart Works Manifesto	20

# Counters

# Executive Summary

The 2023 edition of the Smart Works Unemployment Index provides an analysis of 3,784 conversations with those supported by Smart Works over the course of 2023, providing a unique insight into what it is to be an unemployed woman in the UK.

Building on the 2022 pilot study, this full year edition of the Index explores three topics: experiencing unemployment, the importance of confidence, and the meaning of having a job, with this analysis followed by our recommendations.

## Experiencing Unemployment

- Our clients applied for an average of 33 jobs without finding work, compared to 28 in our 2022 pilot study.
- Parents spent more time unemployed, citing the financial burden of childcare.
- 68% of clients applied for lower paid and lower skilled work compared to 62% in our pilot study.
- Clients were most likely to apply for roles in Health and Social Care, Administration and Customer Service.
- Those outside of London had fewer opportunities available to apply for than their counterparts in London.

## The Importance of Confidence

- 56% of clients in our sample felt somewhat or much less confident after going through the job application process, 25% of these clients felt much less confident.
- 27% of clients felt underqualified for the roles they were interviewing for, 17% felt overqualified.
- Low confidence was seen most amongst disabled clients.
- Feelings of underqualification were more prominent amongst younger and disabled clients, whereas feeling overqualified was most pronounced for clients over 50.

## The Meaning of Having a Job

- Finding a sense of purpose and identity was the most common reason for seeking work, followed by financial security which saw a 5 percentage point rise compared to the 2022 study.
- 65% of clients in this sample went on to secure a job within a month of their Smart Works appointment, however this differed between demographic groups at 63% for ethnic minority individuals, compared to 68% of white individuals, and 60% for those 50 and older, compared to 67% of those younger.

## Our Recommendations

- As a result of the conclusions outlined in this piece, we are suggesting that employers implement the following recruitment practices:
  - Clear job descriptions with salary, location and options for flexibility listed upfront.
  - Offer to reimburse costs associated with applications.
  - Regardless of salary and the qualifications expected, all roles should be advertised where unemployed people will see them.
  - Provide useful and objective feedback to unsuccessful job applicants.

# Methodology



## January 2023

The findings of this year's Index are based upon survey data collected from 3 January until 22 December 2023. Throughout this process, we have been supported by research agency nfpResearch.

Building on the quantitative findings of our pilot study last year, survey respondents were all clients who used the Smart Works Interview Dressing and Preparation service ahead of upcoming job interviews and were provided with paper surveys to complete at their appointments. They are referred to as "our clients" throughout the report. Our bespoke service is open to all women, including transgender women and non-binary people who feel their gender expression connects with our service and wardrobe.

## May 2023

At the beginning of May 2023, we reviewed the survey responses received so far. As a result of this analysis, we introduced a new question asking our clients how qualified they felt for the roles they were applying for.

## October 2023

We ran Focus Groups to enhance our understanding of the quantitative responses we were receiving. We conducted four sessions with 15 clients in total who were demographically representative of those in our quantitative sample, coming from a range of backgrounds and locations across the UK.

Led by trained facilitators, and a discussion guide based on the themes of this report, clients were invited to share their experiences of unemployment. These conversations provide potential explanations for trends emerging in our data and will be referenced throughout.

## December 2023

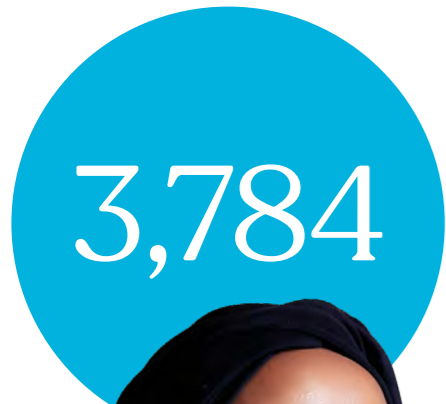
With the data collection period concluding on 22 December 2023, this survey is based on a sample of 3,784 clients. The findings referenced throughout this report have been verified by nfpResearch and all comparisons made are significant at a 95% confidence interval.

# Our Clients

The findings from the 2023 Smart Works Unemployment Index are derived from a sample of 3,784 clients who accessed the Smart Works service between 3 January and 22 December 2023. Using a full year of data, this sample is based on 2,980 (323%) more responses compared to last year's 3-month pilot study.

To access the service, our clients need to be referred by an organisation supporting them to find work such as Job Centres, refugee services, mental health charities and the prison service. All respondents were unemployed, with a confirmed upcoming job interview, at the point they were surveyed.

## Sample size



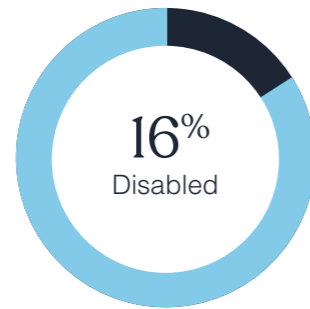
## Age



The average age of this client group was 37 with the ages of those sampled ranging from 16 to 73.

This is based upon 3,591 responses with 193 missing responses.

## Disability



16% of those surveyed identify as having a disability.

This is based upon 3,555 responses excluding 179 who answered, "prefer not to say" and 50 missing responses.

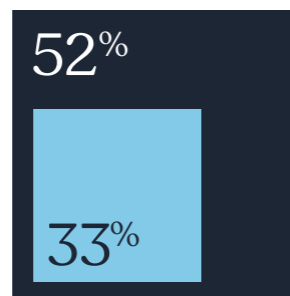
## Ethnicity



55% were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

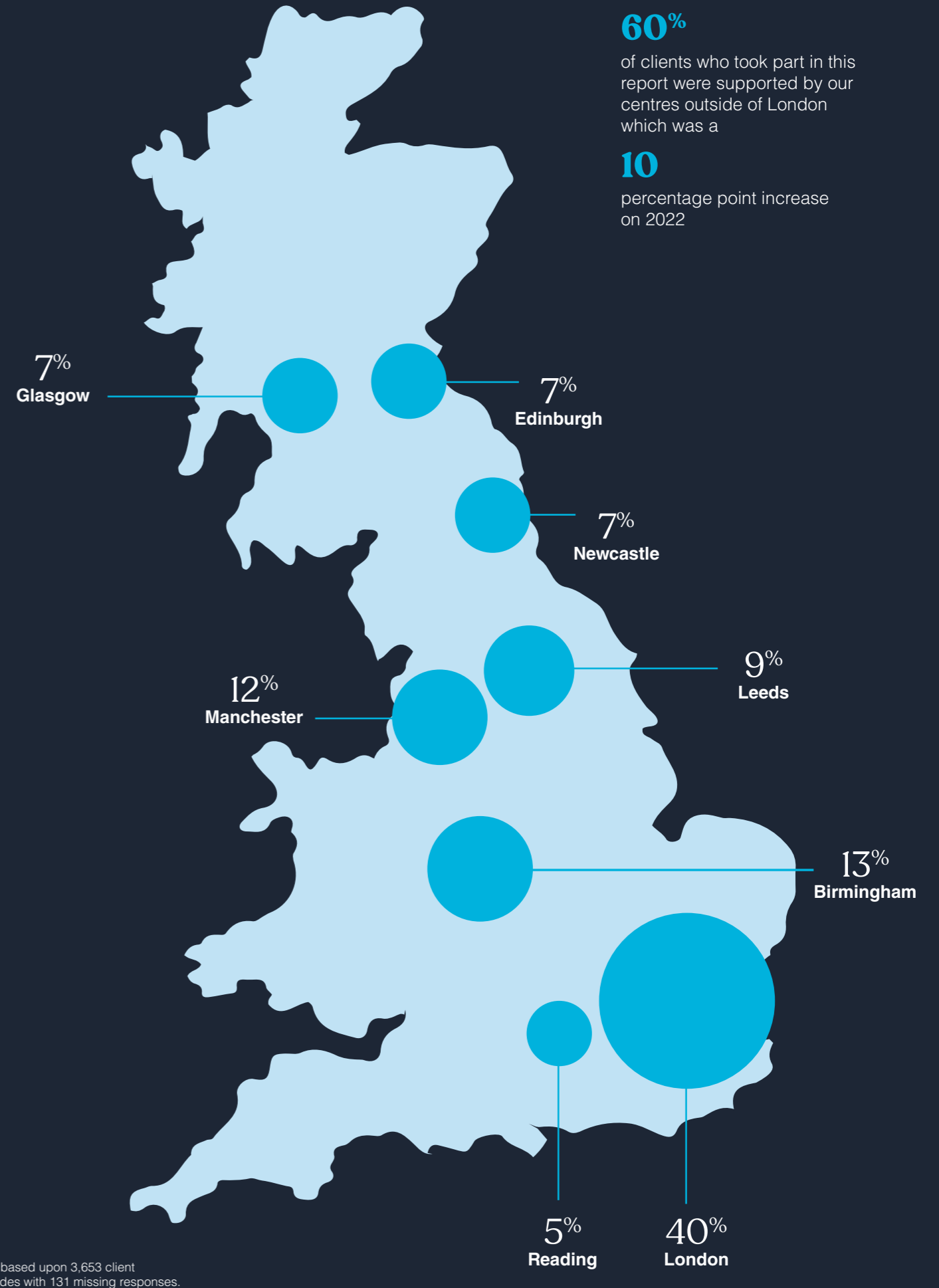
This is based upon 3,715 responses excluding 34 who answered, "prefer not to say" and 35 missing responses.

## Parenthood



33% were single parents, with just over half (52%) being parents.

This is based upon 3,648 responses excluding 62 who answered, "prefer not to say" and 74 missing responses.



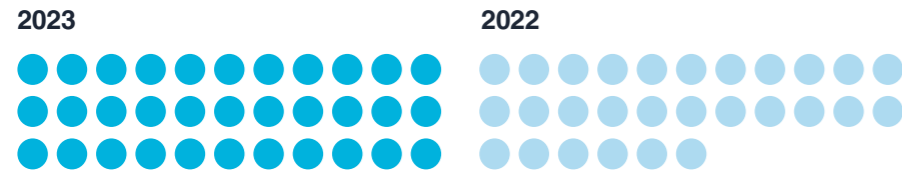
**60%** of clients who took part in this report were supported by our centres outside of London which was a

**10** percentage point increase on 2022

This is based upon 3,653 client postcodes with 131 missing responses.

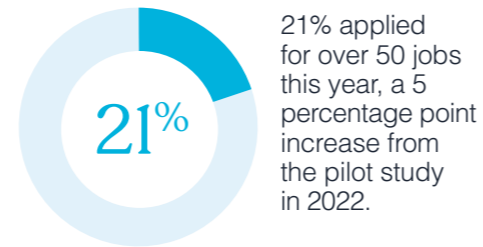
# Experiencing Unemployment

Analysing both our focus group and survey findings, we found that the already tough circumstances of being unemployed were only made more challenging by the cost-of-living crisis and an increasingly competitive labour market.



Since they were last employed, our clients had applied for an average of 33 jobs without finding work, compared to 28 in our 2022 pilot study.

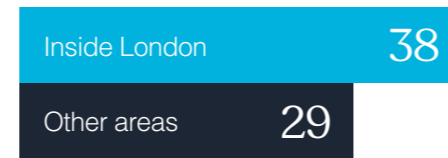
This is based on 3708 responses with 76 missing values.



## Fewer opportunities outside of London

Our research found that London based clients applied for an average of 38 jobs and attended 3 interviews. This is 9 more jobs and 1 more interview than those outside of London, who applied for 29 jobs and attended 2 interviews.

Our clients based outside of London cited a lack of job vacancies that catered for their desired salary. Due to limited opportunities, they often had to travel long distances out of their local area for work, making working less financially worthwhile.



London clients applied for an average of 38 jobs compared to those outside of London who applied for 29 jobs.

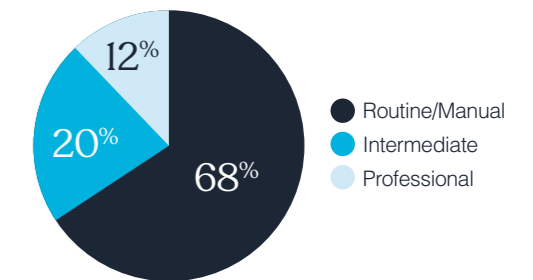
Using the method developed in the pilot study, we were able to categorise the roles our clients had upcoming interviews for. Our method is based on the three-category version of The National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification (NS-SEC).

This year, we saw a 6 percentage point increase in clients applying for Routine / Manual roles which are typically lower skilled and lower paid, with the majority (68%) of clients applying for these roles rather than intermediate or professional positions. The most popular industries applied to by our clients were Health and Social Care (22%), Customer Service (17%) and Administration (17%).

In line with the above findings outlining how the challenges of unemployment are enhanced by location, 73% of clients outside of London applied for routine or manual jobs, compared to 61% in London.

## Role level

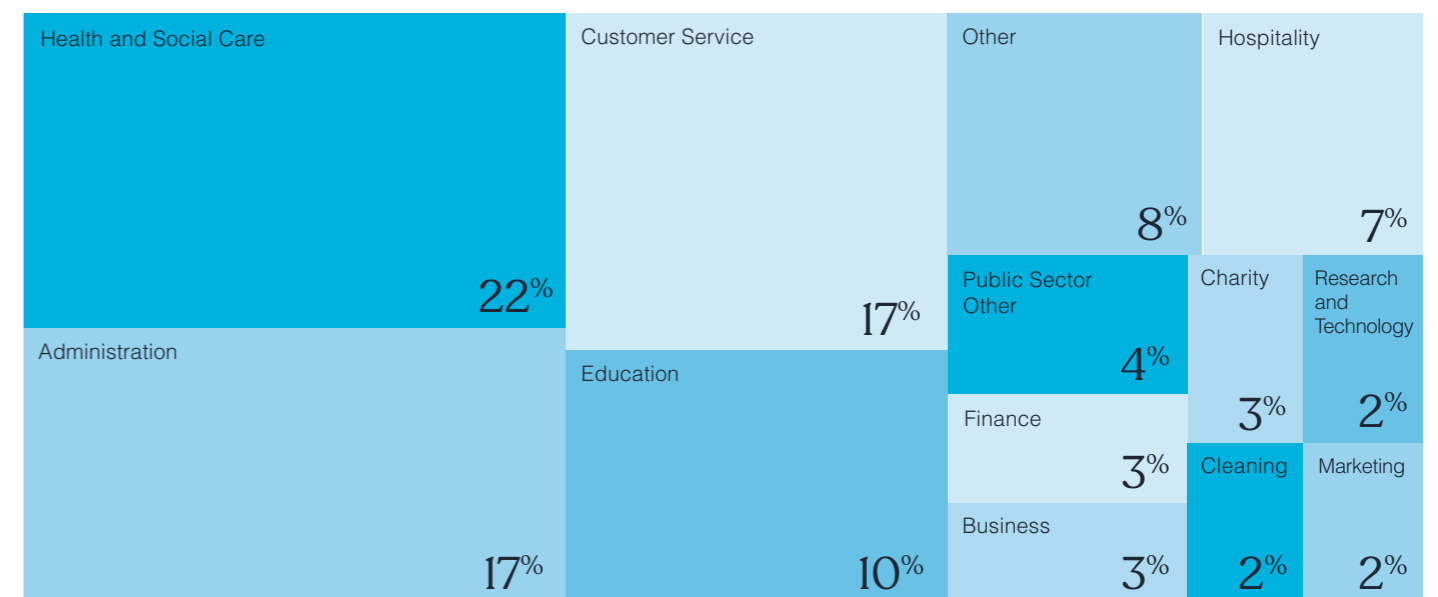
This is based upon 2,897 qualitative responses with 887 that were missing or not applicable.



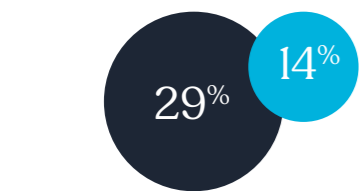
Outside of London, Health and Social Care was the most applied for industry at 26%. In London, the most applied for sector, Administration, only stood at 19%.

Overall, we found that a wider variety of career paths and professional opportunities are accessible and available to clients in London.

## Sectors our clients applied for



This is based on 2,659 responses with 1,125 missing or not applicable.



29% of parents spent over 3 years unemployed compared to 14% of non-parents.



23 hours per week is the number of hours on average spent applying for jobs.

This is based on 3654 responses with 130 missing values.

## The pressure to accept any job

Clients spent less time unemployed prior to their appointment than in last year's pilot study (with 40% unemployed for over a year compared to 45% in 2022). However, our clients shared that due to the current cost-of-living crisis they felt pressure to accept any job, even if it wasn't what they wanted to do or offering a salary that matched their skillset and qualifications. They ultimately found that these opportunities didn't lead to the stability they had hoped for and sometimes found themselves quickly out of work again.

The economic circumstances meant that those around them were in the same position, making roles even more competitive than before. This was enhanced by employers having less money to hire or needing to make redundancies, which led to even more people competing for a small number of roles.

“Not only are you competing with people who are on the same level as you, you're also now competing with unemployed people who have 8, 9, 10 years of experience.”

## A lack of adequate feedback

Despite applying for more roles, with this increased competition, clients still didn't feel confident that their applications were improving with employers not providing sufficient feedback.

“I had a lot of people that didn't give me any feedback ... I had no idea why I wasn't getting interviews.”

## The impact of being a parent

Although hardship was felt universally, it manifested itself in different ways for clients from different backgrounds. Our survey showed that parents spent longer out of work with 29% of parents spending over 3 years unemployed compared to 14% of non-parents.

Focus group participants cited caring duties as a partial reason here, however emphasised the additional financial challenge of covering childcare whilst working. When salaries weren't high enough, this made claiming universal credit a more viable option than working.

“People turn to jobs that are illegal. People turn to jobs that are cash in hand, just to avoid losing their universal credit... If you're working, you're going to be working to pay for childcare, and that doesn't make sense.”

“There I was – with two degrees, nearly 10 years of experience in my field, and I couldn’t find a job. Despite trying, despite applying, despite spending over 40 hours a week preparing for presentations, for interviews...”

Collay



## Collay's Story

After being made redundant from her job in marketing, Collay found herself facing a job market that was far more daunting and competitive than she had experienced in the early days of her career. With the job application process being more complicated than ever, and few relevant roles available in her location, Collay found it took longer than expected to find suitable opportunities.

“Previously, when I'd looked for work, my online portfolio had been really useful. I invested so much time in it, but when I started applying for jobs, nobody cared. I wasn't even sure if employers were looking at it. If I got to interview stage, I would then have to do a presentation of some kind, with a lot of extra work. The fact that nobody cared was a bit of a hit.

I ended up applying for a lot of jobs outside of Newcastle. Even now, Newcastle doesn't have a lot of jobs in marketing... I find it tailors more towards manual labour. If you're wanting to get into construction, it would be a great place, but not the best for any sort of tech or digital work. So, it was quite limited in jobs that I wanted, and especially within the salary band I was hoping for.

It's also hard because job titles aren't clear, they don't really mean anything. It's hard to even know what you want to apply for.

One person's Marketing Executive is another person's Marketing Manager is another person's Marketing Director.

I started looking at lower-level jobs, but I wasn't getting those either. I would get an interview, and then at the end of it be told 'you're too qualified'. They would worry I'd want to leave quickly.

I chose my career because I thought it would be safe, and yet there I was – with two degrees, nearly 10 years of experience in my field, and I couldn't find a job. Despite trying, despite applying, despite spending over 40 hours a week preparing for presentations, for interviews...

Overall, I applied to hundreds of jobs. I think I got maybe four or five interviews out of all those applications. I started getting desperate as time passed by, because I *needed* to have a job – I cannot survive in this world without an income.

Looking for work, it's very soul sucking, very soul destroying. It's hard to not just slip into a depression and stay there.”

After expressing her feelings to her work coach at the Job Centre, Collay was referred to Smart Works ahead of an upcoming interview.

“It was everything she said it was going to be and more. Smart Works was the first time I'd really felt the effect of a sisterhood.

It wasn't just superficial customer service; it was real and genuine. And wow, did I need it.



By the time I got to Smart Works, I was in a very unhappy, very hopeless kind of place. I wasn't taking care of myself; I was just in survival mode. But being at Smart Works felt like a breath of fresh air. It was just what I needed in that time to reflect and understand that you're more than just having a job, you're more than just your one-page CV or whatever it is that you're being whittled down to and judged on. And being able to gain some self-love and self-worth again in the process... I feel worthy of being in the world again.”

# Self-Worth

# The Importance of Confidence

The association between unemployment and low confidence continues to be a theme running throughout client responses, with 56% feeling less confident after applying for jobs, and 25% of those feeling much less confident.

**“It was just so time consuming. And so soul-destroying, because you put in so much effort and you don’t even know if it’s going to be worth it.”**

Low confidence was more pronounced for some in our sample than others. 64% of disabled people said the job application process had made them feel less confident compared to 53% of non-disabled people.

The impact of physical, mental, and cognitive disabilities on employment were prominent topics of discussion in focus groups. Clients also revealed specific challenges associated with the intersection of gender and health, feeling that reproductive and menstrual concerns were not understood by employers:

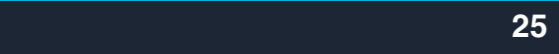
**“When I’m on [my period] I’m not going to work. I know that pre-emptively because I can barely move. For people with reproductive health issues, that can be difficult to explain, because I feel like as a woman, you’re not sure that you’re going to be understood.”**



## Confidence after the application process (%)

This is based on 3,606 responses with 178 missing values.

- Felt somewhat or much less confident
- Felt much less confident



## How qualified do you feel for your new role? (%)

This is based on 2,465 responses with 1319 missing or not asked due to late addition. See methodology.

- Felt underqualified
- Felt overqualified



### Overqualification and underqualification

In May 2023, we began asking clients whether they felt exactly qualified, underqualified or overqualified for the roles they were applying for.

### Only 56% of clients felt exactly qualified for the roles they were interviewing for

Those who felt underqualified when applying for jobs (27%) linked this to feeling intimidated by high expectations outlined in often unclear job descriptions. Feeling underqualified was more pronounced amongst the demographic groups who were least confident after the process of applying for work. 37% of younger clients felt underqualified for their roles compared to 25% of those in the 26-49 age bracket. 34% of disabled people felt underqualified for their new role compared to 26% of non-disabled people.

Conversely, in an increasingly competitive job market, and under financial pressure to accept “any” job, 17% of those surveyed feel they were overqualified for the role they had applied for.

In focus groups, parents put this down to finding few opportunities matching their skills or salary expectations that also catered for the level of flexibility they needed to fulfil parental commitments. These commitments were all the more prominent when they couldn’t afford to pay for childcare. They also felt that requesting flexibility, or simply making known that they were a parent, made employers more likely to perceive them as unfit for the role.

**“I feel like to them it makes you less reliable, because the job’s not your priority if your family is.”**

27% of those 50 and over felt overqualified for roles they were applying for compared to just 10% of clients under 25. In focus groups, clients in this age bracket mentioned the impact of prejudice against them based on their age and a belief that employers were more likely to hire younger workers as they would accept lower salaries.



## Nasra's story

For Nasra, who was re-entering the workforce after having a child, there were a number of barriers that stood in the way of her securing employment. Like many parents, she found that despite roles being advertised as flexible, few actually enabled her to continue caring for her young daughter.

"I took a career break to have a child - I wanted to start a family, and I didn't want to miss my daughter's first years. But I didn't know what I wanted to do with my career going forward because I was working really long hours before that which weren't sustainable as a mum.

After a while, I decided I wanted a career in tech, and I felt really optimistic. I applied for a tech bootcamp scholarship and got in - it went really well. I couldn't wait to apply for jobs, and get jobs, but at that time, big tech companies were having lots of redundancies.

I applied for 200 roles, maybe more than that, but never succeeded. I got so fed up of being told that others had more experience - and these were people with years more experience than me, who were applying for the same entry level job I was. I thought it was unfair, but at the same time, they'd been made redundant and had bills to pay just like me.

I fell into a depression. It felt like I had taken 10 steps forward and then been dragged 20 steps back. The first 50 disappointments you think 'it's fine, I'll be alright.' Then it's 100 disappointments, and then 150, and by the end of it you think 'is it just me?'

I started looking for any job, any level. The cost-of-living crisis made people more desperate for stability, for something regular, for something to keep them from going into debt or losing their homes... it made people afraid.

I would have taken any job, but I had to think about my daughter - I can't work for long hours because who's going to look after her? Would I then be working just to pay childcare costs?

Every time I looked at 'flexible' roles, what that actually meant was that you can leave an hour early on a Friday, or you can work from home one day a week. It's a very big barrier, having kids. It makes me feel like because I'm a mum, they think I would put my kid before the work, and that's a reason to not hire me. But it's not, it just means that you have a more diverse group of people in your workplace."

"My ADHD also got particularly bad when I was unemployed - when I'm happy, it affects me a lot less, but I've never felt as depressed as when I was



getting all those rejections. So, my symptoms were through the roof. I couldn't concentrate, my memory was awful... It was such a sad time in my life.

The one thing I looked forward to was the volunteering I did, at my local community centre. It was my favourite part of the week, and I eventually came across an opportunity to do an apprenticeship there.

I was a bit sceptical at first about going backwards, because it was a Level 3 apprenticeship, but I had been in a Level 4 role before. At the same time, I knew that it was something I loved doing.

I really didn't want to get my hopes up for the job, my confidence was so low. That's when I got referred to Smart Works - and my life has been on the up ever since.

"It's a very big barrier, having kids. It makes me feel like because I'm a mum, they think that I would put my kid before the work, and that's a reason to not hire me."

Nasra

I hadn't bought anything for myself in two years, and it was such a confidence boost to have the dressing, to be wearing something brand new. And I had lost all my confidence when it came to expressing myself, but after my coaching - I felt so empowered, I felt relief as well. Not only did she understand where I was coming from, she was very empathetic, and so gentle. By the time I went for my interview, I felt on top of the world. Like even if I didn't get the job, I would survive. I would live. I wasn't going to allow it to get me down. Because I am strong. I am powerful.

And I got the job. Now, I wake up every morning and I'm excited to go to work, and I love what I do when I get there."



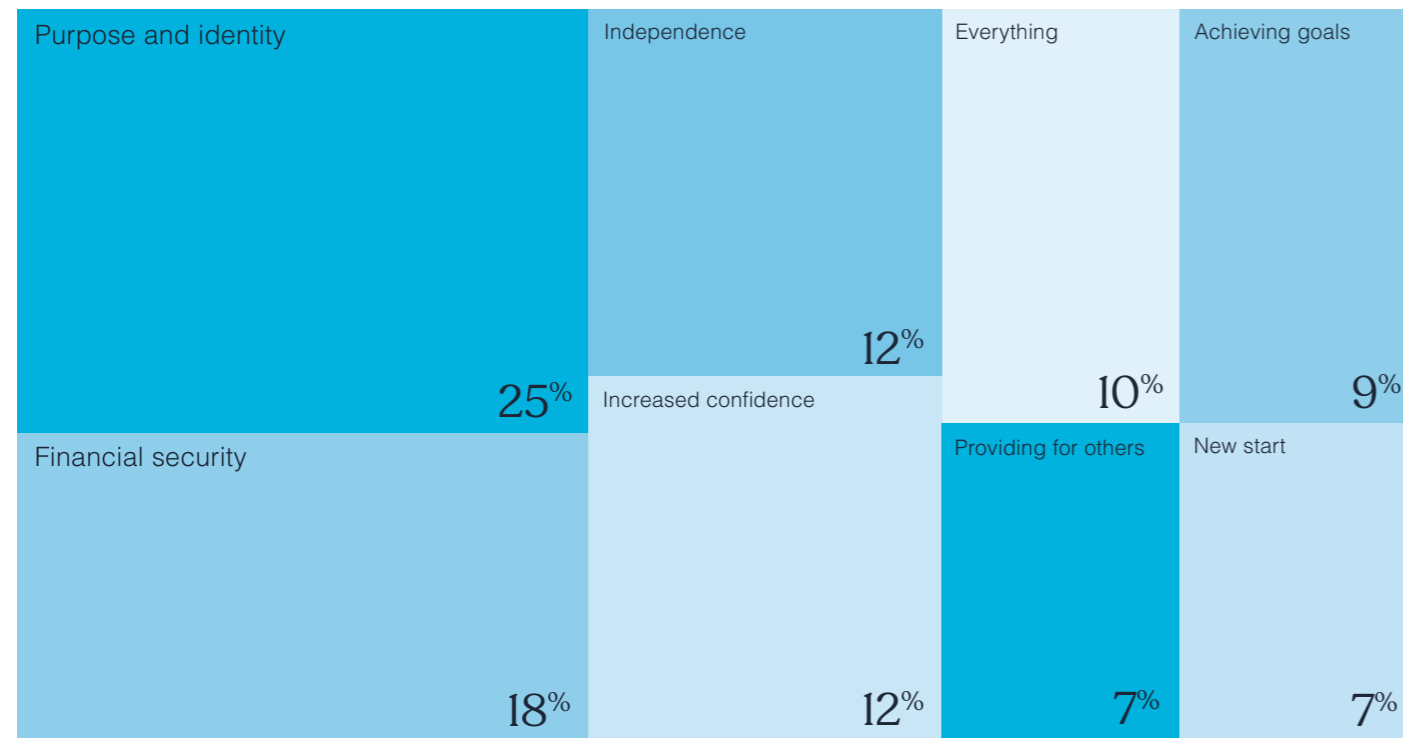
# Strength



# The Meaning of Having a Job

In delivering our service over the last decade, we have learned how much having a job means to our clients.

## What having a job means to our clients



This is based upon 3,085 responses with 699 missing or not applicable.

To gain more insight on its impact, we specifically ask our clients what having a job would mean to them when they come in for their appointment. Whilst each answer is unique to the client, coding these responses reveals overarching themes in clients' motivations to find work.

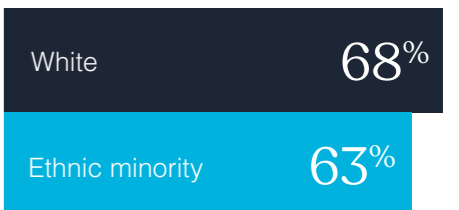
The most common response to the question 'What would having a job mean to you?' was finding a sense of purpose and identity, with 25% of clients referencing this. This was also the most common response in our 2022 study.

However, financial security has become an increasingly common motivator behind finding work. 18% of clients said this was their main motivator, a 6 percentage point increase compared to 2022. Financial security also moved from fourth to second most common motivator in 2023.

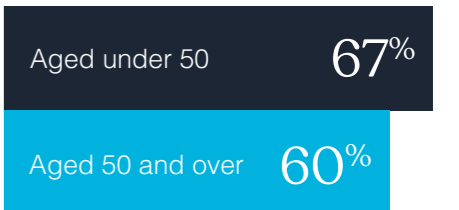
The need for financial security was more pronounced for clients 50 and over, with 24% referencing this as what having a job would mean to them. Those in this age bracket emphasised the connection between financial worry and feelings of shame.

**"You feel like a failure if you are asking your family to be giving you money at a certain age, like I'm [over 50], I don't want to be asking my family for money."**

Being able to "provide for others" was a common motivator for finding work amongst parents in our sample. This reason was cited by 12% of parents and 13% of lone parents, compared to 7% of clients in the overall sample.



Ethnic minority clients were 5 percentage points less likely to secure work than their white counterparts.



Clients aged 50 and older were 7 percentage points less likely to secure work than clients younger than them.

**"It's as expensive as it gets with a new baby... I see what some other mothers do for their kids. And I'm like, I wish I had the money to do it."**

Of the clients in our sample that we were able to recontact as of January 3, 65% went on to secure a job within one month of their Interview Dressing and Preparation Appointment at Smart Works.

However, for the first time, we want to use this measure to examine the differences in outcomes between clients from different demographic backgrounds.

In this year's survey we saw no statistically significant differences between the application experiences of ethnic minority and white clients with both groups applying for a similar number of roles and attending the same number of interviews. Ethnic minority clients were also 12 percentage points less likely to report lower confidence after the job application process.

Yet, when it came to securing work, we found that ethnic minority clients were 5 percentage points less likely to secure work than their white counterparts. 68% of white clients got a job within a month compared to just 63% of ethnic minority clients.

Clients aged 50 and over have been a group of note throughout the Index reporting low confidence, feeling unable to access roles they are qualified for and reporting concerns about ageism from employers. With just 60% of clients 50 and over getting the job, they were 7% less likely to secure work than those younger than them.

Overall, these figures show the challenges that not only gender poses to finding a job in the current economic climate, but how those challenges become even tougher when gender intersects with other disadvantaging characteristics.

“I didn’t want to stay at home. I wanted to work. It gives me a sense of something to do... a sense of purpose.”

Kathryn



## Kathryn’s Story

When Kathryn came to Smart Works, her confidence was at an all-time low. Like many of our clients who participated in this research, Kathryn struggled to stay positive when applying for work, worried that her age would pose a barrier to securing employment.

“I can’t remember how many jobs I applied for, honestly, hundreds. And I think the most soul-destroying thing was not getting replies from people. Not even ‘I’m sorry, you’ve been unsuccessful’.

It makes you feel worthless. I understand that employers have an awful lot of people apply for these jobs, but I’m sure there’s somebody, somewhere, that can make sure you get an email just so you’re not sitting there waiting.

My first thought was: I’m 56. I thought, who’s going to want me? That was my biggest worry. I felt dreadful that it was taking me so long to get a job. I had one experience where a company asked me for my age; once I eventually told them they were no longer interested. And I told them, I don’t think you’re meant to ask about age...

That’s when I went even further downhill. I was thinking, am I going to get that from everybody? I’ve only technically got 11 years left to work.

Is that how they’re looking at it? Am I only going to be useful for 11 years?

I didn’t want to stay at home. I wanted to work. It gives me a sense of something to do, something to be useful. A sense of purpose.

And with the cost of living... You try to keep your spirits up, but when you have minimal amounts of money, and you’re still having to pay all your bills, the electric, food, phone contract, car insurance – you can’t stop any of these things. And you don’t get anything to spend on yourself, you can’t go and do anything to make yourself feel better.”

“I finally got an interview – that’s when I spoke to the people at the Job Centre, and they referred me to Smart Works.

When I had my dressing... the only way that I can describe it, it was like being famous and having people do shopping for you. I felt so special. To be made to feel that you’re worth something again, it’s so important.

And my coach was brilliant. In the scenarios, I would say ‘I believe’ and she would go ‘Don’t say that. You know you can do it. Say ‘I can’’. That was in my head for the interview. She really taught me, and made me think ‘No, I can do this. I am worth something.’

When I went to my interview, the lady complimented my outfit. By the time I actually got into the interview room, I felt like a million dollars.



I felt sky high! I do believe that’s why I got the job. It’s amazing what that can do to your confidence.

Having a job, it just makes you feel part of the world. When you’re on Universal Credit, you’re sitting at home, you can’t go out and do anything because you haven’t got any money. So you end up sitting indoors and then you go further down down down... When you’ve got a job, you’ve got a purpose. It’s nice to feel wanted, to feel useful, to feel that you’re doing something. It makes me feel proud to have a job.”

# Purpose

## Recommendations

The Smart Works Unemployment Index is a means of communicating the experiences and stories of the clients we support, through our service, every day.

Built from this unique, on-the-ground perspective of women's unemployment and its associated hardships, the following recommendations are clear and tangible steps that employers can implement to create a more accessible recruitment process. At Smart Works, in our capacity as an employer, we are committed to adopting these learnings and ensuring that we seek to make our workplace best in class, and accessible to those who use our service.

### 1 Clear job descriptions with salary, location and options for flexibility listed upfront.

- Job descriptions should clearly outline the essential requirements of the role with those just on the employer's wish list clearly separated as desirable requirements.
- Adverts and job descriptions should be written clearly and avoid the use of jargon.
- The salary (or salary band) of the role should be listed upfront so applicants know whether to spend time applying.
- All expected working locations should also be specifically listed so applicants can account for the associated travel time and costs.
- The flexibility options an employer is willing to provide, such as working from home options or reduced hours, should be clearly stated.

### 3 Regardless of salary and the qualifications expected, all roles should be advertised where unemployed people will see them.

- Employers should consider where they're advertising roles and whether their opportunities are visible to a diverse pool of individuals e.g. avoiding only advertising through exclusive networks.
- Diversifying where roles are advertised doesn't necessarily require a high cost. It could involve advertising positions at events frequented by unemployed people including job fairs run by charitable organisations or Job Centres.

### 2 Offer to reimburse costs associated with applications.

- The cost-of-living crisis has been a theme running throughout the report. Reducing the costs associated with the interviewing or application process is a small way employers can reduce this burden for those seeking work. These costs may include, but are not limited to, the cost of travel to an interview, or printing materials.
- Employers should take reasonable steps to conduct first round interviews virtually, avoiding unnecessary travel expectations.
- Reimbursement policies should be explicitly stated on the job advert in case applicants are unaware of existing policy.

### 4 Provide useful and objective feedback to unsuccessful job applicants.

- Our clients noted that not receiving feedback after submitting applications or completing interviews made it challenging to improve when seeking other work.
- If opening a position, employers should be prepared to provide constructive feedback allowing an individual to improve their application skills.

## The Impact of our Service

Smart Works is dedicated to empowering all women who need help getting into work. Over the last decade, we have supported over 35,000 women, and we know from the conversations had with each and every client that the coaching, clothing, and confidence provided by our service unlocks something they didn't know existed. It is this confidence that allows them to fulfil their potential, get the job, and transform their lives. In the last financial year:

95%

Felt more confident having received their new outfit.

91%

Felt clearer about their skills and experiences.

69%

Got the job within a month of their appointment.



All 3,784 clients in this sample came to Smart Works for support whilst they were unemployed and awaiting an upcoming job interview. Our focus groups revealed that clients feel overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive from Smart Works, reporting that they were treated with dignity and respect, and felt seen and supported throughout their appointment. Ahead of their interviews, clients reported feeling more confident and empowered.

“It just makes you feel seen in the most beautiful way, that people are thinking of the things that you didn't even think of and then supporting you through something that's already a really stressful process with such care and dignity. Just brilliant.”

## The Smart Works Manifesto

We are Smart Works, a community dedicated to supporting and empowering women in their professional pursuits.

We treat every woman as an individual and give her the safe space she needs, listening without judgement.

We are powered by volunteers, united by a mission to help all women realise their potential.

We work together to support our clients with the clothing and coaching they need to get the job and transform their lives.

We believe in fashion as a force for good. We know that when a woman looks and feels great about who she is, she can change her life. We are proud of the joy and magic our service brings to the women we serve.

We are guided by data to deliver simple, profound and tangible results, constantly innovating to tackle the challenge of female unemployment.

We know our service is deceptively simple. It only works because of the care and thought we invest in our clients' journey with us.

**Join us and help transform a woman's life.**

### About Smart Works

Smart Works is a dynamic and fast-growing UK charity that exists to empower all women who need help getting into work. We use the power of high-quality clothing and one-to-one coaching to help unemployed women fulfil their potential, get the job and transform their lives. The tangible impact is profound. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 69% of the clients Smart Works helped ahead of a job interview got a job within one month of their appointment.

At an appointment with Smart Works, each client receives a bespoke dressing consultation with two stylists to find a beautiful and high-quality interview outfit that will fill her with confidence. This is free of charge and the clothes are hers to keep. This is followed by a one-to-one coaching session with an expert interview coach where every client receives valuable interview preparation, unlocking her potential and enabling her to succeed at interview.

All the coaching and dressing is done by trained and skilled volunteers, and all the pieces in our wardrobe are donated by individuals and retailers, making our model efficient and effective.

Over the last decade, we have supported 35,000 women across centres in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Reading. By 2025, we want to double our reach and help 10,000 women each year, delivered by centres in every major urban hub in the UK. Our manifesto unites everyone in the Smart Works community with a shared ethos and mission to transform women's lives.

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