



More fear than hope: What the British public really thinks about AI and the future of work

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King's Institute for Artificial Intelligence

People + Data + AI, June 2026, London

A new major study, baselining attitudes and behaviours



General public

2,000, UK, aged 16+

Young people

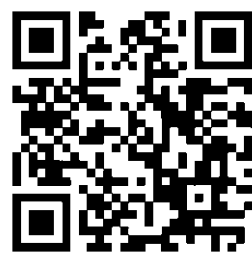
1,002, GB, aged 16-29

University students

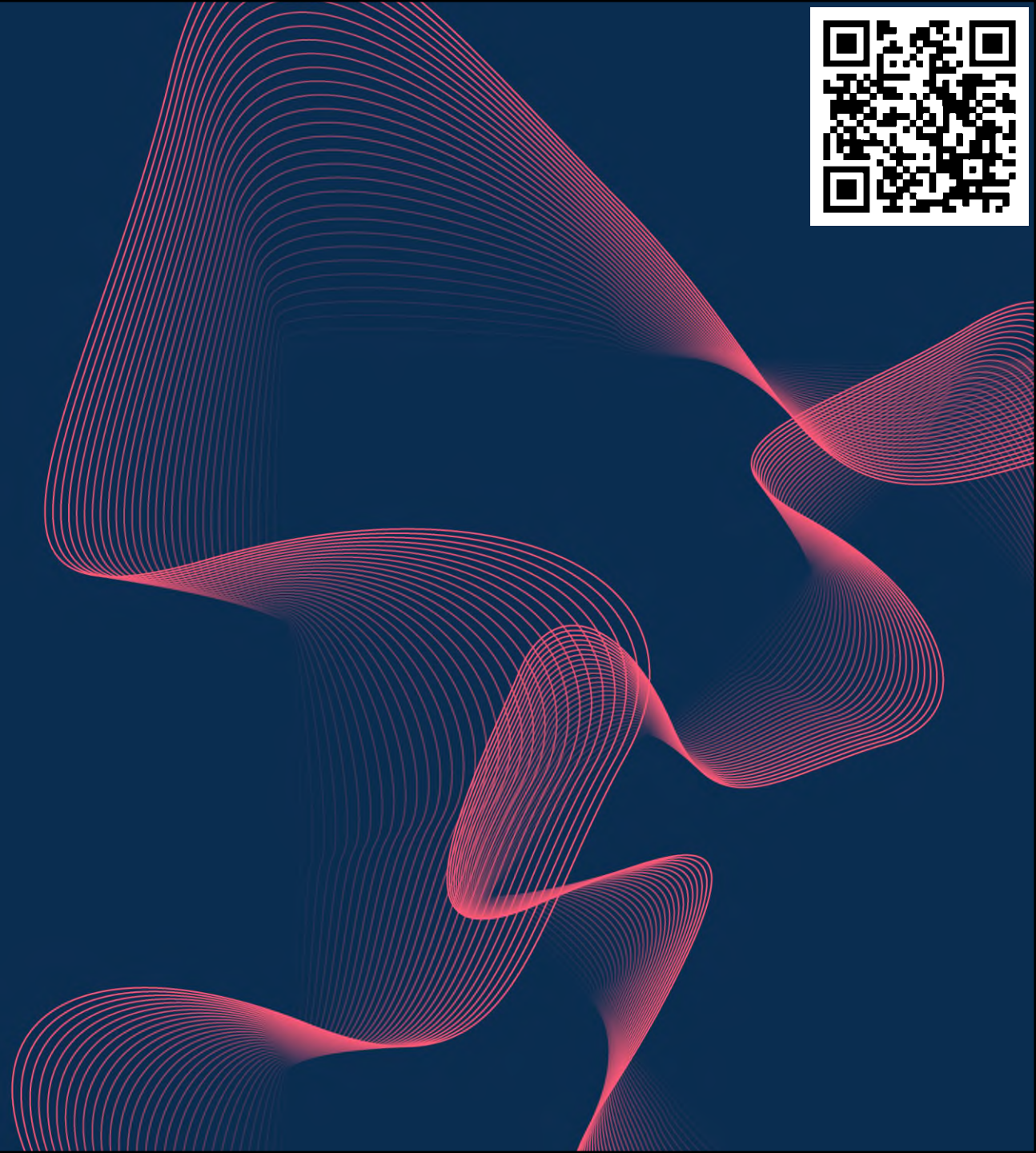
1,000, GB, university students

Employers

506 decision-makers in UK
businesses with 11+ employees



More fear than hope



Some groups are more positive than others

General gender split: **30%** men say positive for humanity, **18%** women

More so in universities:

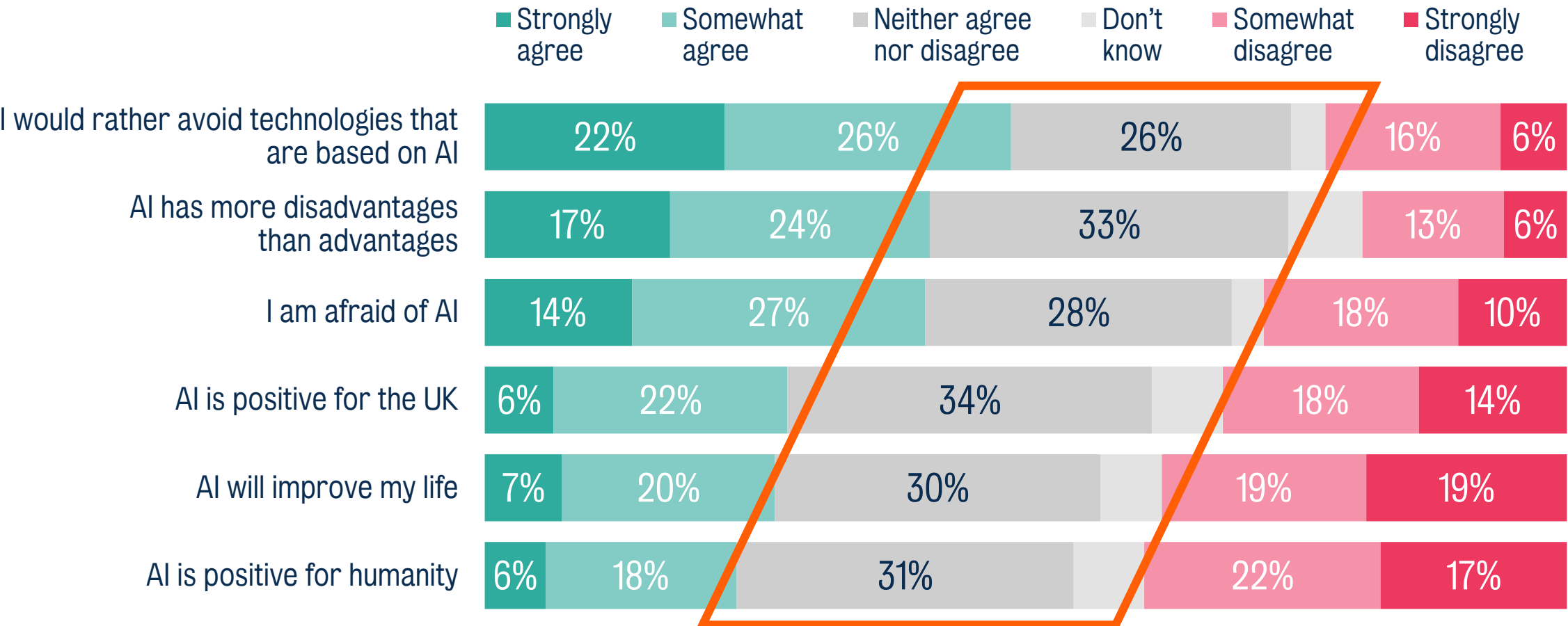
- **4 in ten** female university students think AI good for humanity – but **6 in 10** male university students;
- **4 in ten** male university students say AI making their ability to think *better*, **nearly half** of female say making *worse*

Employers:

- **Two-thirds** of employers think AI will create more jobs than it eliminates, only **28%** of public;
- **7 in ten** employers think AI will make jobs easier and more interesting, only **35%** of workers

But a lot of people are still making up their minds

To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about artificial intelligence (AI)?



No wonder really that people are worried

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By Lila Shroff



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Prepare for an AI jobs apocalypse

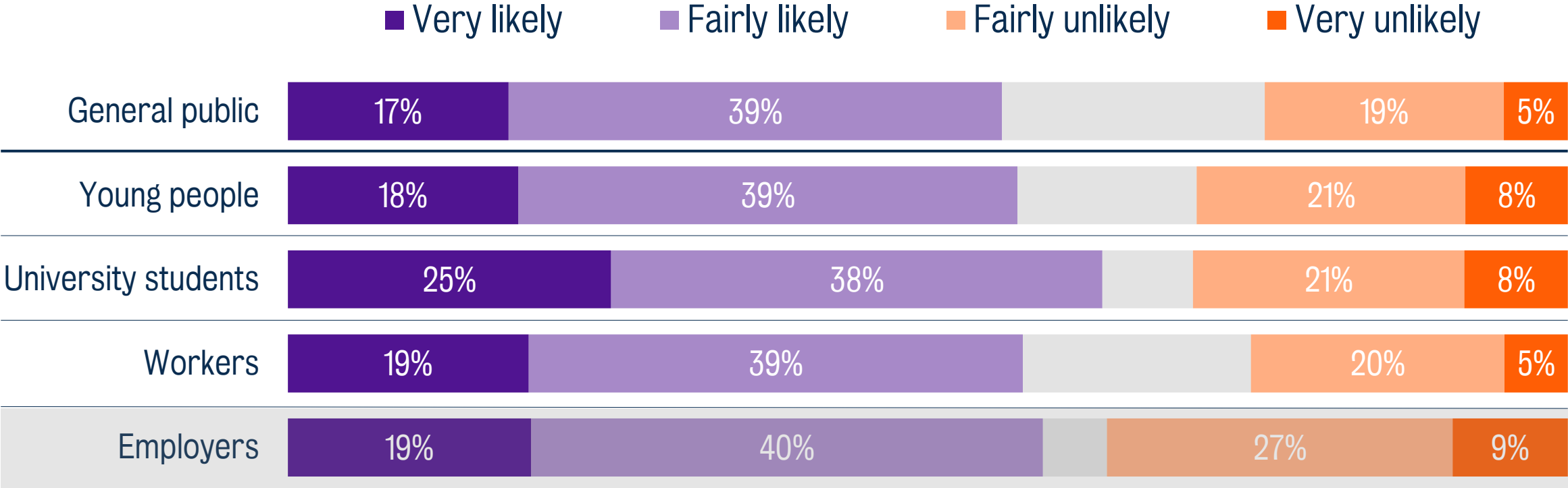
It is not here yet. But governments should lay a safety-net

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Most agree with Anthropic's CEO Dario Amodei's 2025 prediction

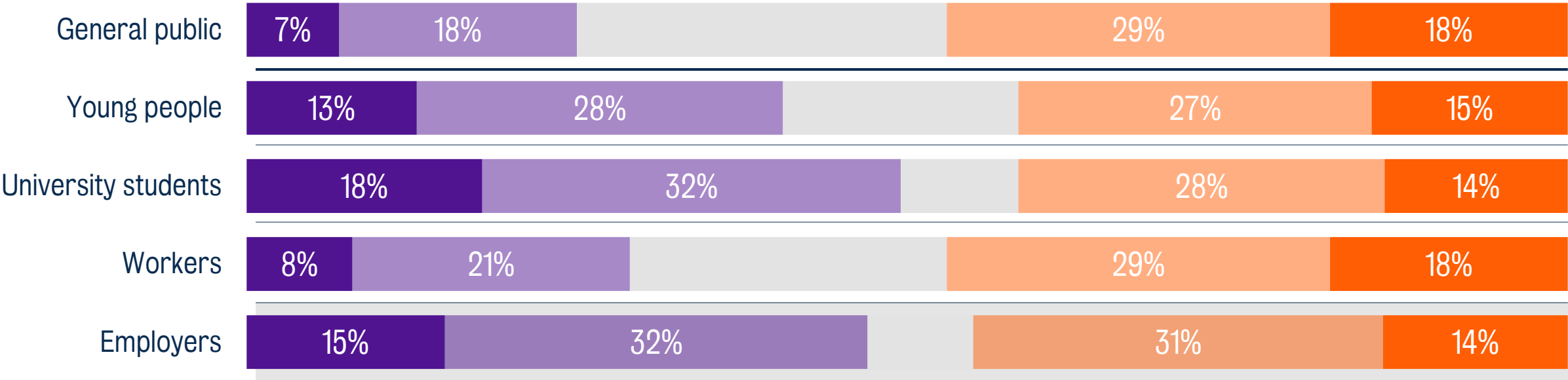
AI will eliminate half of all entry-level white-collar jobs in the next 5 years



They are less convinced by WEF prediction that AI will create twice as many jobs as it destroys by 2030

AI will eliminate around 90 million existing jobs around the world, but will create nearly double that number of new jobs globally

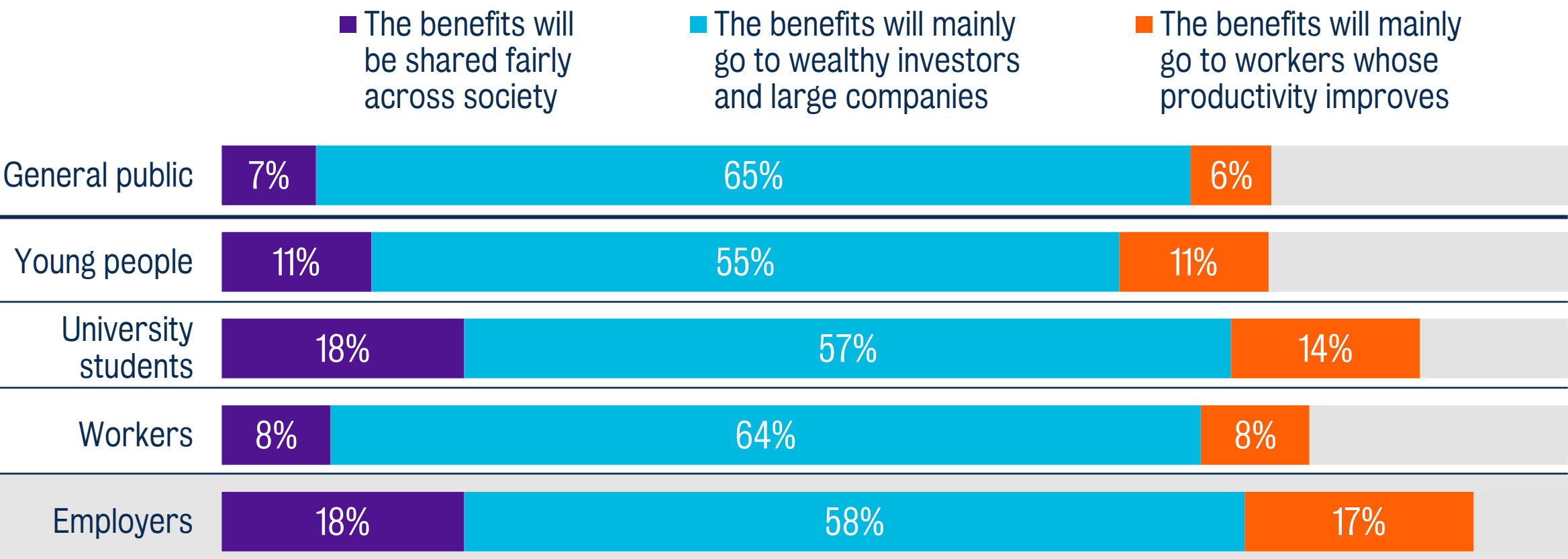
■ Very likely ■ Fairly likely ■ Fairly unlikely ■ Very unlikely



50% of public think AI's impact will be worse than a normal recession. 22% think it could create civil unrest

Distributional anxiety is real

Thinking about the economic benefits that AI is expected to generate, which is closest to your view?



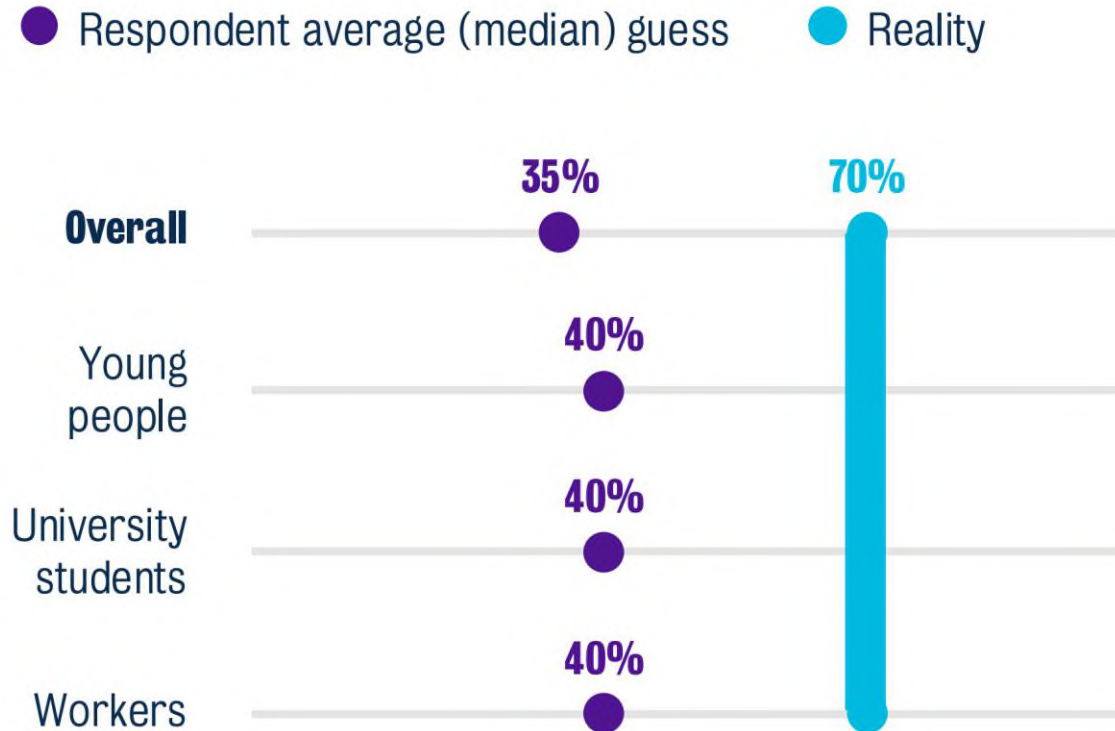
60% of employers think AI will increase inequality and polarise society



**Are we worried enough?
And about the right
things?**

People guess that 35 per cent of UK workers are in jobs with tasks that AI could potentially perform or enhance. However, the International Monetary Fund estimates that it's twice this

Roughly what percentage of UK workers do you think are in occupations involving tasks that AI could potentially perform or enhance, according to the International Monetary Fund? Please write in a number between 0 and 100. If you are unsure please answer with your best guess.



According to the International Monetary Fund, around 70 per cent of the UK workforce are in roles that AI could potentially perform or enhance. This contrasts with around 60 per cent in other advanced economies, reflecting the large role of the service sector in the UK.

But the public significantly underestimate this potential impact, guessing that only 35 per cent of workers are exposed to AI in this way.

Workers, young people and university students guess only a slightly higher proportion (40%).

AI is affecting other people, just not us



Split sample A

Are AI tools are making **your own ability** to think for yourself better or worse?



Split sample B

Are AI tools are making **people's ability** to think for themselves better or worse?



And other jobs are at risk, **not ours**

Which of the following statements, if any, is closest to your view?

- AI will eliminate far more jobs than it creates, leading to widespread unemployment
- AI will create as many or more jobs than it eliminates, as new industries and roles emerge



How worried, if at all, are you about... **Your own job being replaced by AI**

- Very worried
- Somewhat worried
- Not very worried
- Not at all worried





**What do we want people
to use AI for?**

Most (56%) students are using AI tools at least a few times a week, compared with a third of workers (33%)

Thinking about your job, course, or studies, how often do you personally use artificial intelligence (AI) tools – such as ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini/Google AI search mode, or AI features built into other software?

■ Several times a day ■ Once a day or almost every day ■ A few times a week ■ A few times a month ■ I'm not sure what counts as AI ■ Rarely ■ Never

University students



Workers

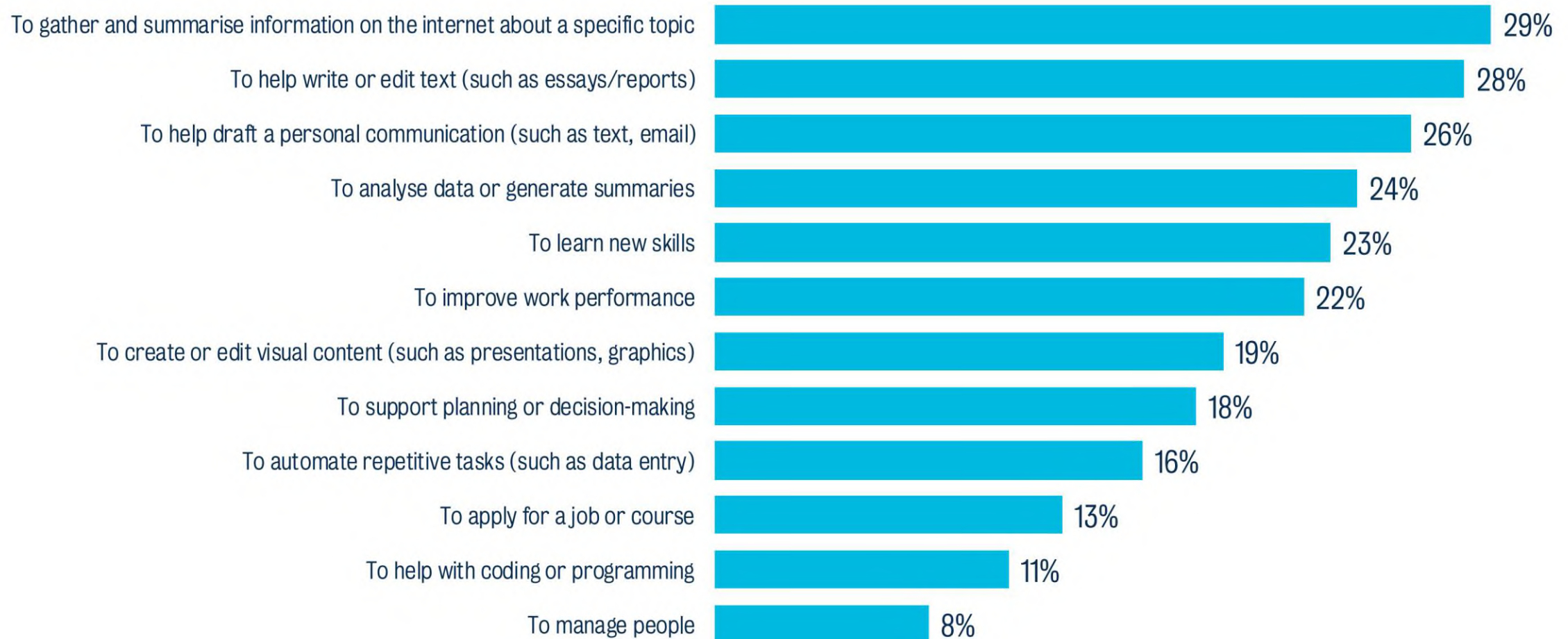


Around three-quarters of university students (77%) say they use AI regularly – at least a few times a month. This includes more than one-quarter (27%) who use AI daily or almost daily. Only a small minority of students (8%) say they never use AI.

Workers use AI somewhat less frequently. 46 per cent use them a few times a month and only 15 per cent use them daily or almost daily. More than one-third (37%) rarely or never use them.

Workers use AI most commonly to gather and summarise information (29%), and to help write or edit reports (28%) and communication (eg emails) (26%)

Have you used artificial intelligence (AI) tools in any of the following ways for work?



Only a minority of students (43%) and workers (44%) say that they usually or always check or verify the output of AI

When you use artificial intelligence (AI) for work or study tasks, how often, if at all, do you check or verify the output before using it – for example, checking original sources or references?

■ Always ■ Usually ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely ■ Never

University students



Worker



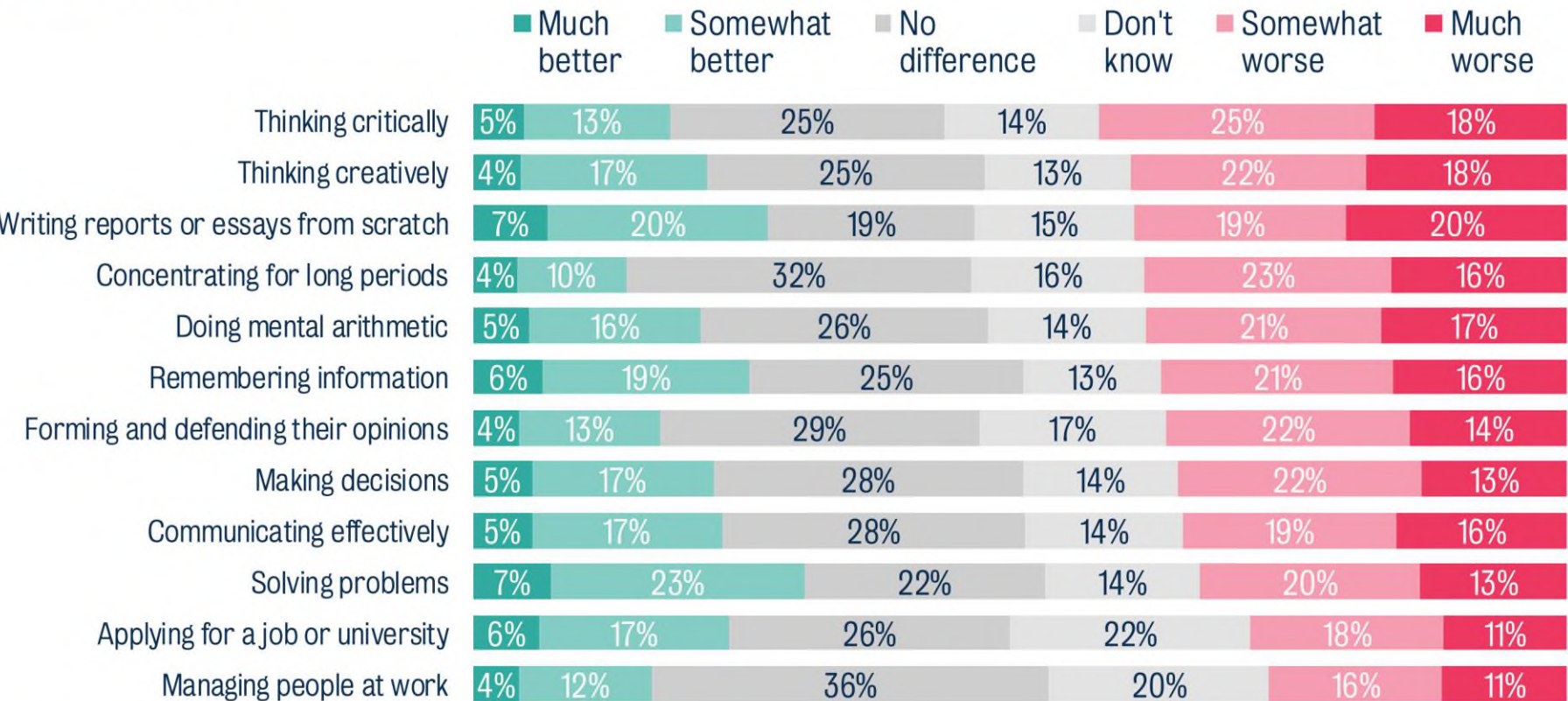
Although most students (80%) and workers (75%) say that they at least sometimes check output from AI, fewer than half say that they do so ‘usually’ or ‘always’.

Two in 10 (19%) students and one-quarter (25%) of workers say that they rarely or never verify output created using AI.

More people say AI is making us worse at doing a range of tasks independently than say it's making us better or that it's making no difference – with critical and creative thinking the most affected

Split sample A

And do you think AI tools are making people better or worse at doing each of the following independently – that is, without the help of AI?



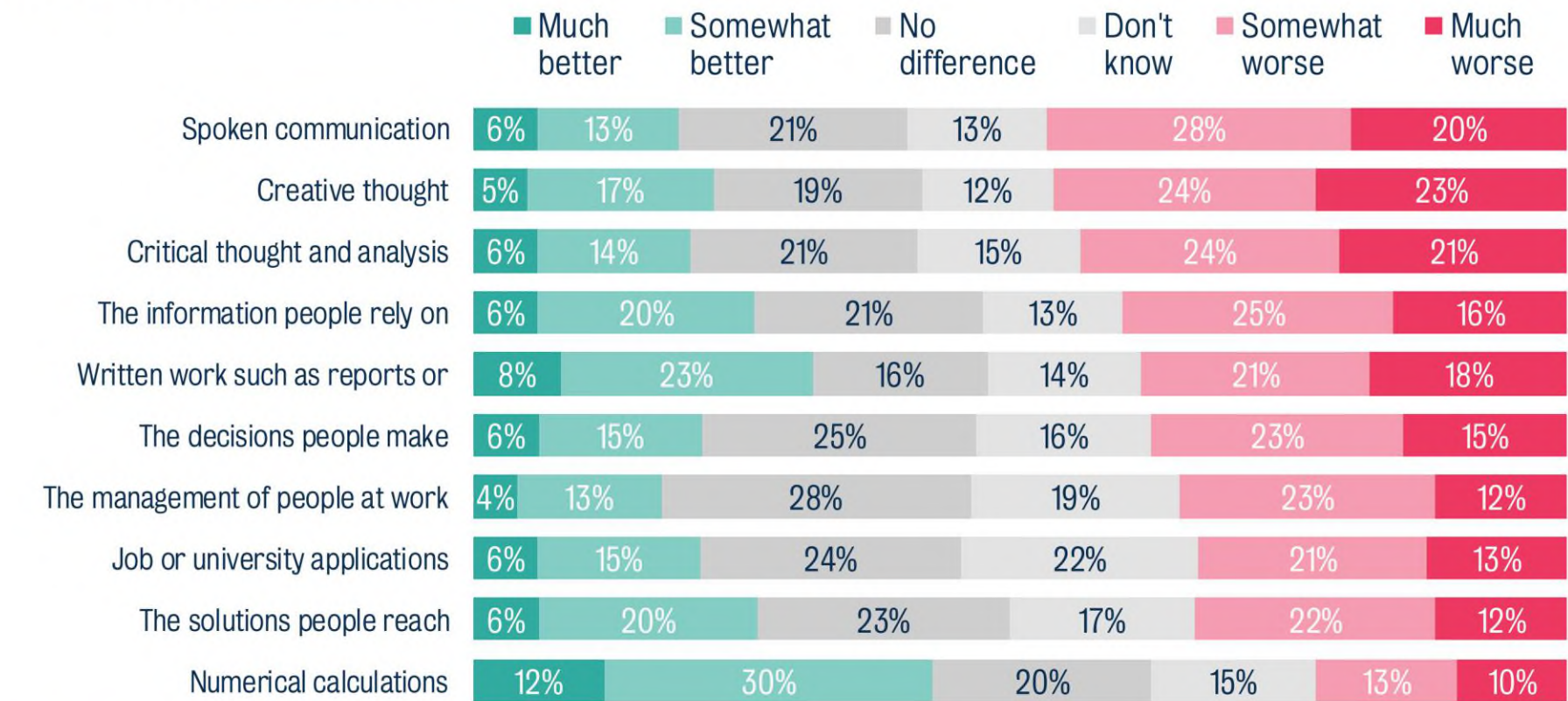
On a range of tasks, people are more likely to think AI is making us worse at doing them independently than making us better or it making no difference. Around four in 10 think this about critical (43%) and creative (40%) thinking. But on some tasks, opinion is more divided. For example, nearly as many say AI makes us better at solving problems (30%) as say it makes us worse (33%).

However, on all tasks, there are also large minorities saying that AI is making no difference to our ability to perform them independently, as well as some saying they don't know. So that there is no majority view about any task.

It's also the most common view that using AI makes the quality and accuracy of many types of work and decision worse, rather than making them better or it making no difference

Split sample B

And do you think AI tools are making each of the following better or worse – that is, the quality or accuracy of what people produce with the help of AI?



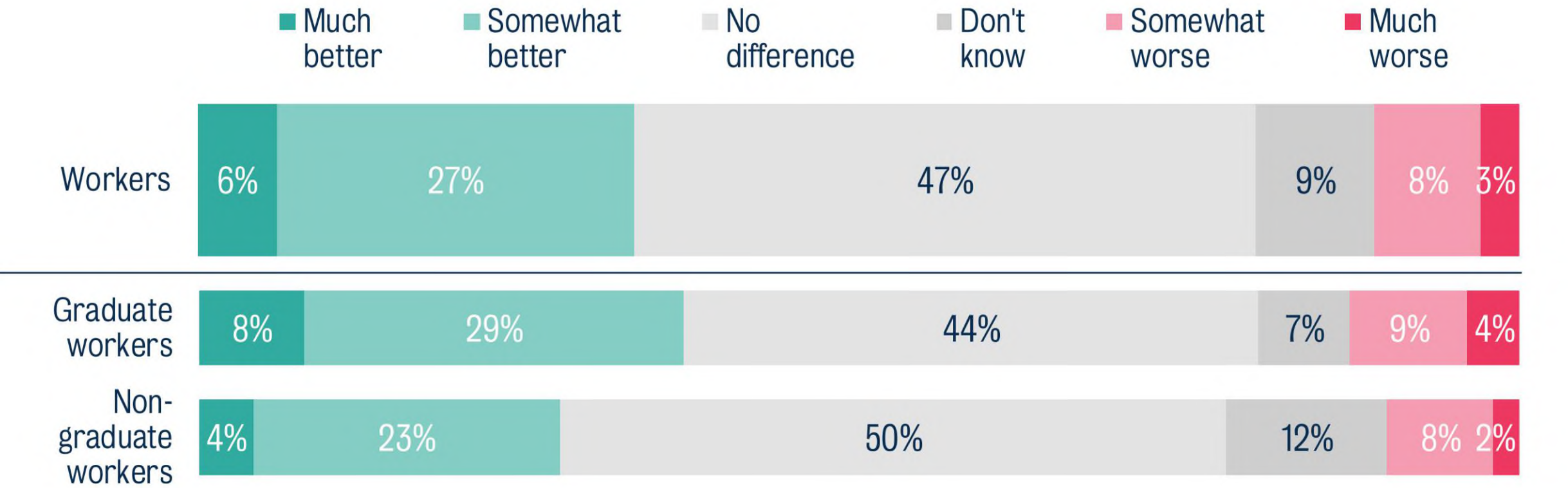
Many also think that AI tools are making a variety of types of work and decision worse. This mainly applies to spoken communication (48%), creative thought, (47%) critical thought and analysis(45%), the information people rely on (41%), and written work (39%) – though in the case of written work, there is also a large minority (31%) who think that AI is making this better.

The exception is numerical calculations, which more think is performed better with AI (32%) than worse (23%).

Again, in most cases, a sizeable minority (normally around two to three in 10) think AI is making no difference to quality or accuracy.

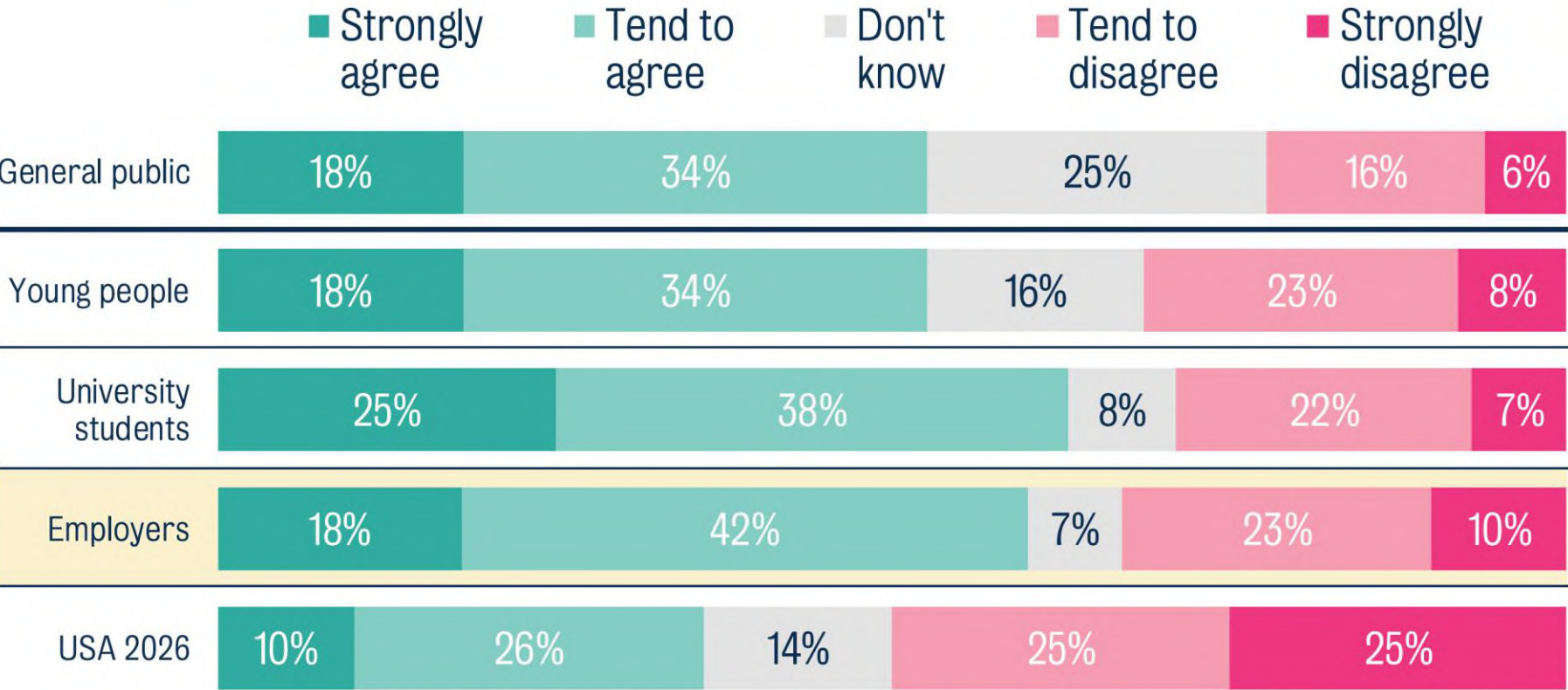
The most common view amongst workers is that using AI makes no difference to how good they are at their job (47%). Graduates (37%) are somewhat more likely than non-graduates (27%) to say AI makes them better at it – and 11% of workers say it makes them worse

Asked to those who work and use AI. Thinking about your overall experience of using AI for work, to what extent, if at all, does AI make you better or worse at your job, or does it make no difference?



Across all UK groups, a majority say AI will reduce transparency and accountability in corporate decision-making – with university students (63%) and employers (60%) the most likely to agree, and the UK more pessimistic than the US

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? **Increased use of AI will lead to less transparency and accountability in corporate decision-making**



Majorities across all UK groups agree that AI will lead to less transparency and accountability in corporate decision-making, ranging from just over half of the general public (52%) and young people (52%) to 63% of university students. Notably, a majority of employers (60%) also say this, despite being broadly more positive about AI's impact across other measures.

The US divergence is striking. Just 36% of Americans agree, compared with majorities across all UK groups, and 50% disagree – more than double the rate of disagreement seen among the UK general public (22%).

Almost nine in ten (86%) employers say AI has led to productivity improvements – with significant and modest improvements reported in equal measure

Has your organisation experienced any improvements in productivity from using artificial intelligence (AI), such as saving time, reducing costs, or improving quality?



... which is a stark contrast with perceptions of workers, seen earlier, where only a third (33%) say that AI makes them better at their job

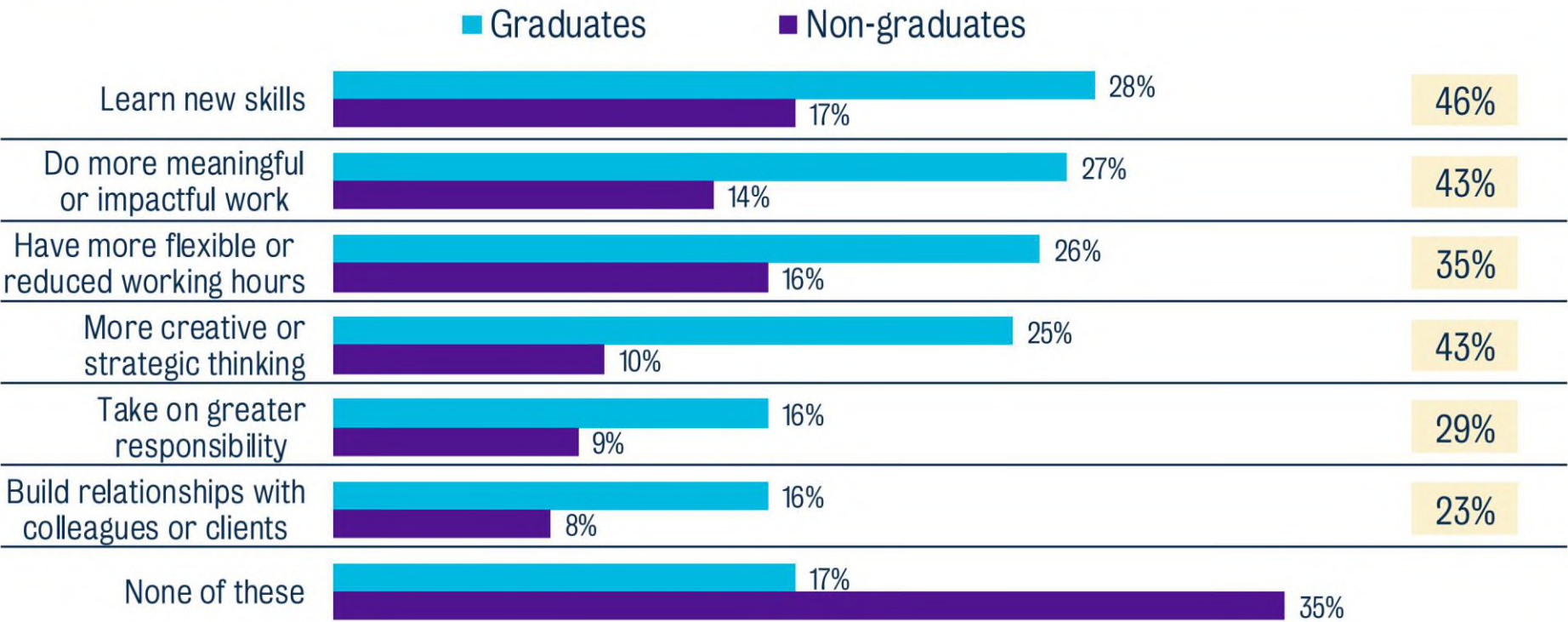
Asked to those who work and use AI. Thinking about your overall experience of using AI for work, to what extent, if at all, does AI make you better or worse at your job, or does it make no difference?



Employers are far more optimistic than workers about what AI taking over routine tasks would free employees up to do – and graduates are consistently more optimistic than non-graduates

Asked to workers. If artificial intelligence (AI) took over the routine parts of your job, which, if any, of the following do you think it would allow you to start or do more of?

Asked to employers. If artificial intelligence (AI) took over the routine parts of your employees' jobs, which, if any, of the following do you think it would allow them to start or do more of?



Employers are considerably more optimistic than workers about what AI freeing up routine tasks would enable, with around four in ten or more believing it would allow employees to learn new skills (46%), do more meaningful work (43%) or think more creatively (43%) – roughly double the proportion of graduate workers who feel the same (28%, 27%, 25% respectively).

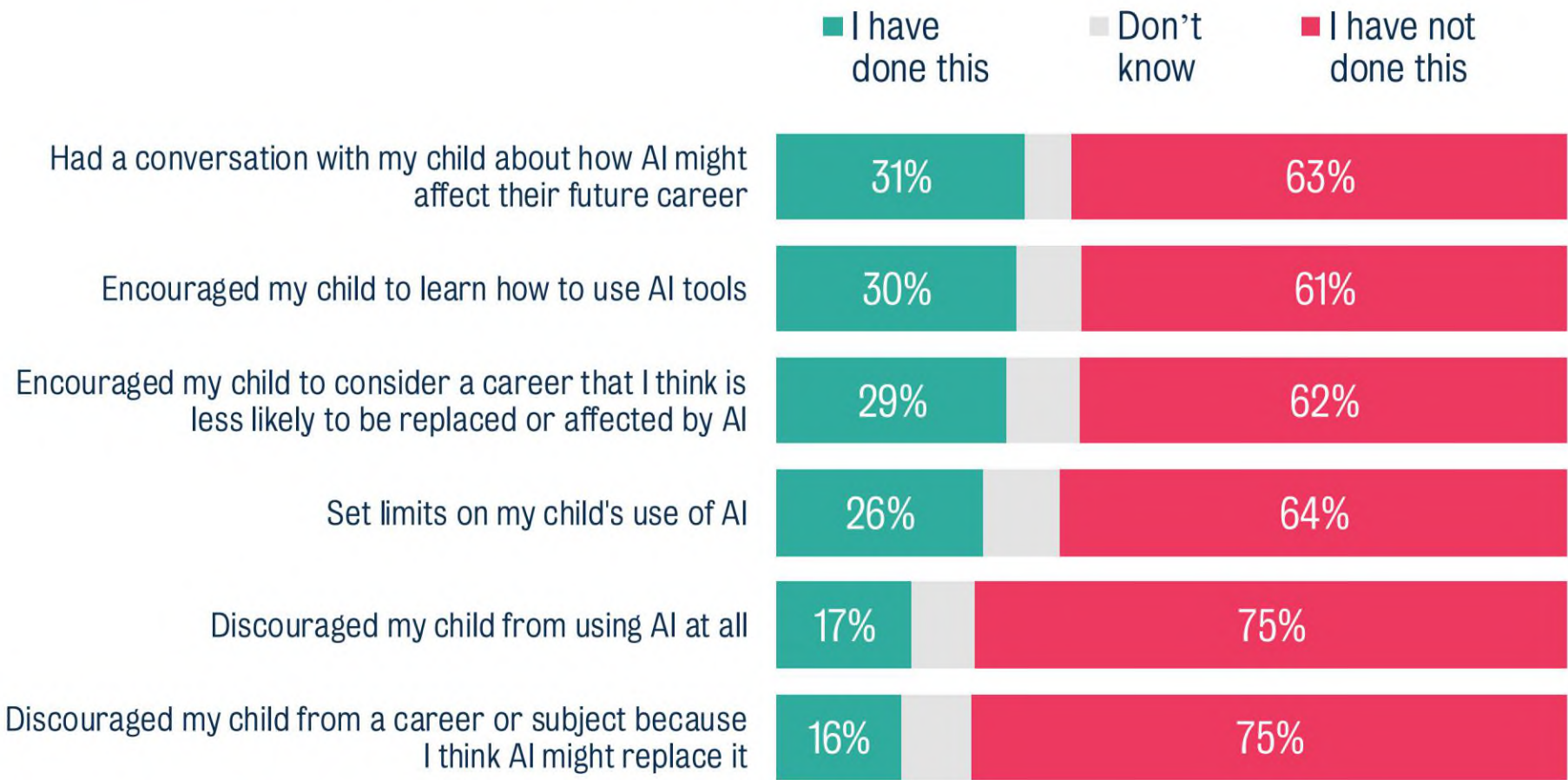
Among workers, graduates are more optimistic than non-graduates across every measure, and 35% of non-graduates say none of these opportunities would open up for them – double the share of graduates (17%).



We need to do more

The majority of parents of 11-to-29-year-olds have not engaged with their children on AI – though around three in 10 have discussed career implications and encouraged learning to use AI tools

Asked to parents of children aged 11-29. Which of the following, if any, have you done?



Only a minority of parents of children aged 11-29 have proactively engaged with their children about how AI will affect their futures. Around three in 10 (31%) have said they've had a conversation with their child about how AI will affect their careers. A similar proportion have actively encouraged their child to learn how to use AI tools (30%) and to consider a career that they think is less likely to be replaced or affected by AI (29%).

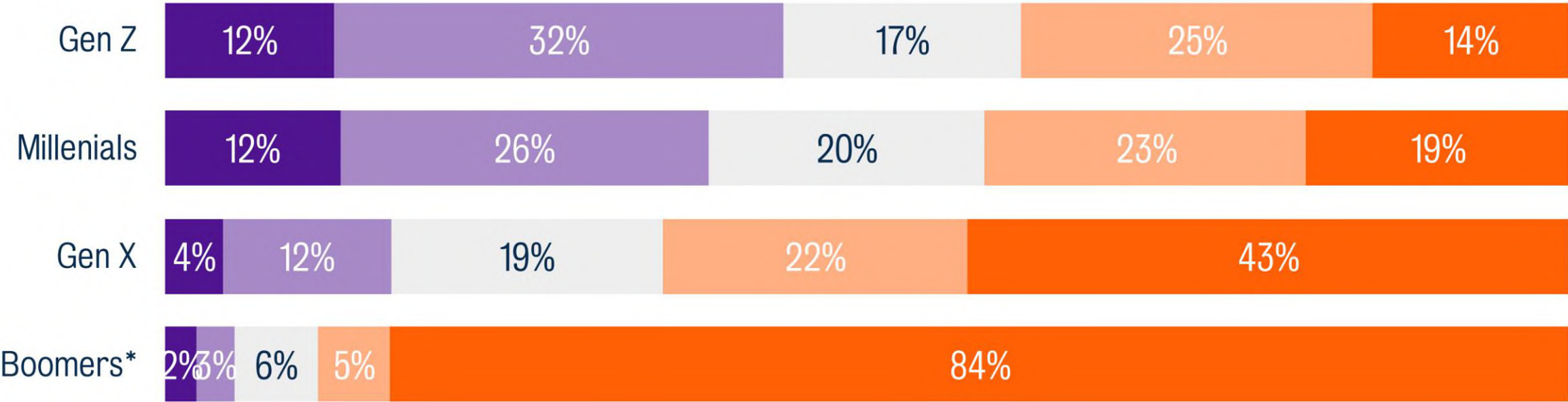
A smaller share have discouraged their child from using AI at all (17%) and discouraged them from a career or subject because it might be replaced by AI (16%).

Fathers (39%) are almost twice as likely as mothers (23%) to say they have encouraged their child to learn how to use AI tools.

...young workers are far more likely to think they will need to retrain because of AI – with 44% of Gen Z and 36% of Millennials saying it is likely

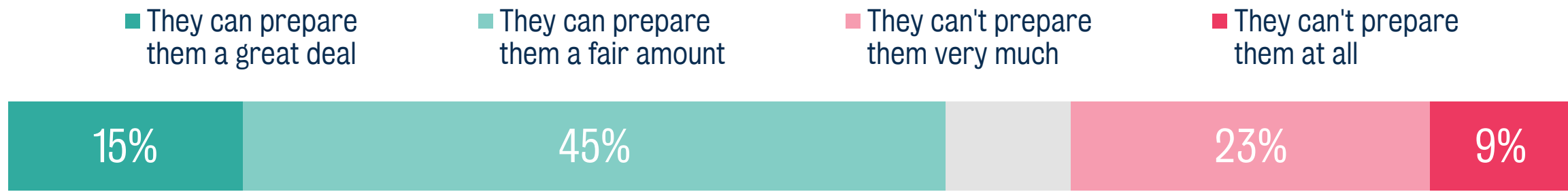
How likely do you think it is that you will need to retrain for another career, as a result of artificial intelligence (AI), in your lifetime?

Very likely Fairly likely Don't know Fairly unlikely Very unlikely

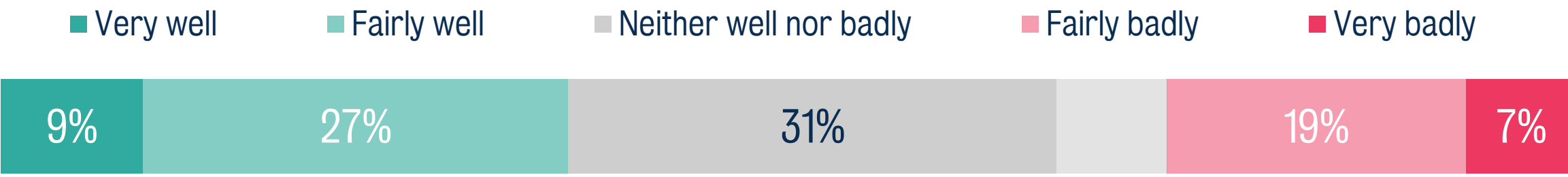


University students think universities CAN prepare them for AI – they're less convinced unis ARE

To what extent do you think educational institutions can prepare students for a job market shaped by AI?



How well or badly do you feel your own... university is helping to prepare you for a job market shaped by AI?



Majorities support retraining guarantees/taxes – BUT also slowing down to protect jobs

We're at the very beginning

Public not paying nearly as much attention as us.

But some messages getting through, mostly around risks and downsides, especially among women

Need to fill that vacuum with

- Different narratives
- Imaginative new ways of working with AI
- AI technology and tools that makes everyone better



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