

# Lead Pipes Webpage Report

January 2025

# Research Approach

# Research objectives and approach

United Utilities has an area of their website that customers can visit to find out more information on the topic of lead pipes and lead pipe replacement.

This area of the website has recently been updated and so United Utilities wished to test this webpage with customers to understand their views on the content, particularly:

- Is the tone and language appropriate
- Does it provide the correct level of information
- Is there anything customers do not understand
- Is the website customer-friendly
- Is there anything missing from the webpage

## What we did:



A 5-minute survey with 193 'In The Flow' panel members

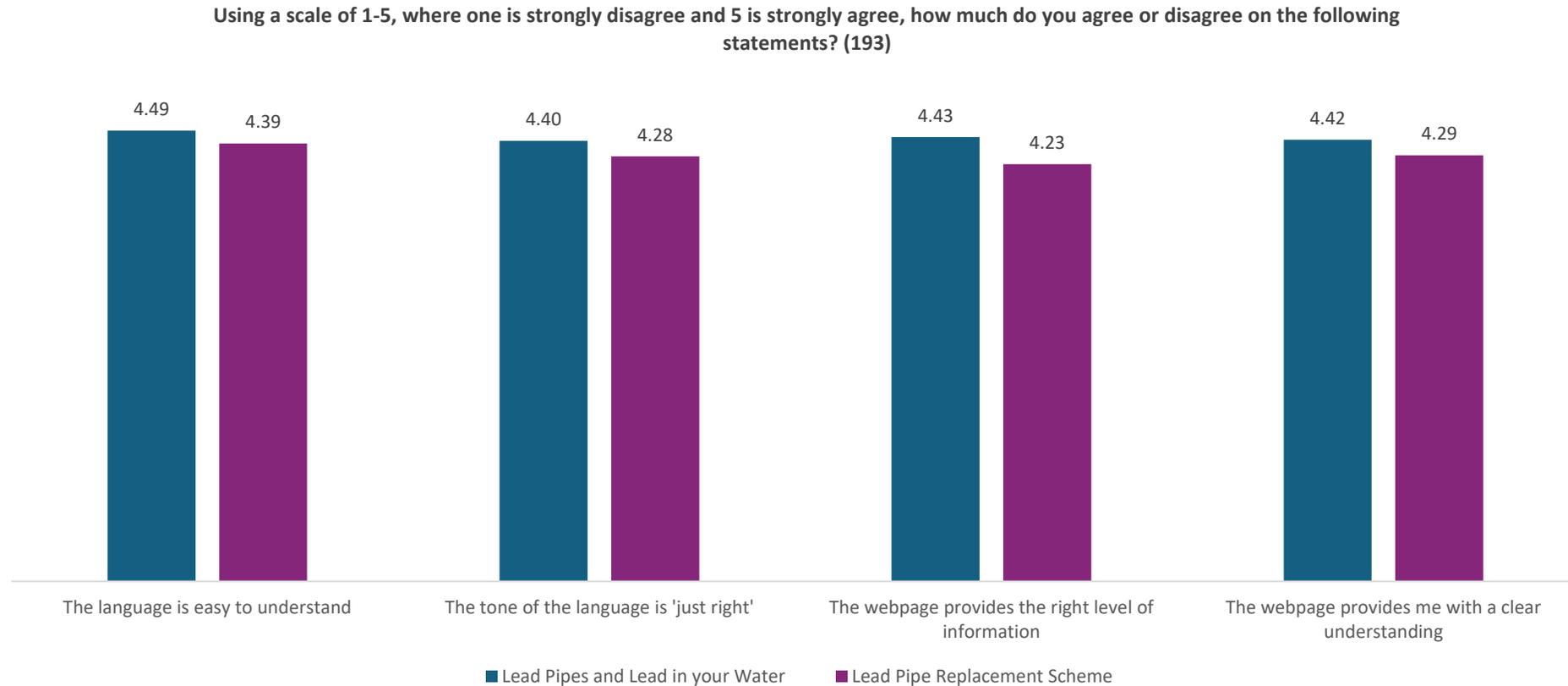


Fieldwork took place 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025

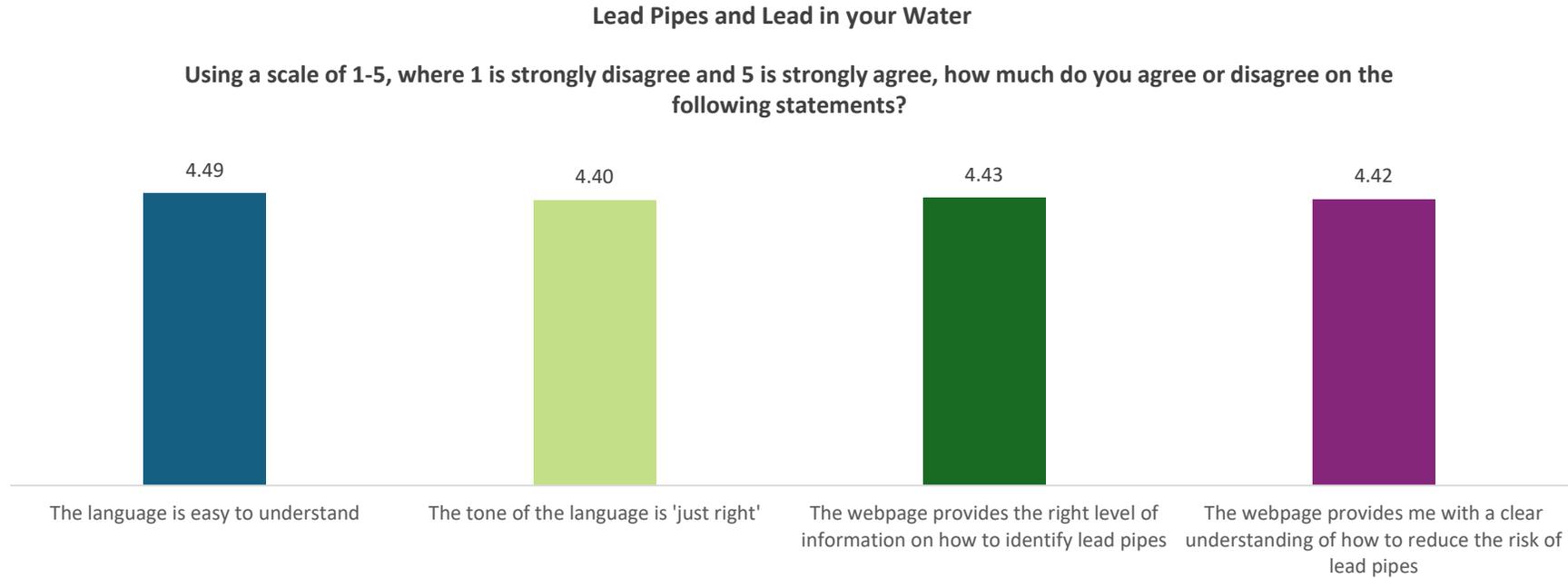


# Key Findings

Both webpages were received positively by customers with all statements achieving an average score of 4.2 out of 5 or above. 'The language is easy to understand' received the highest average rate of agreement when reviewing all areas across both webpages.



# The webpage discussing Lead Pipes and Lead in your Water received high rates of agreement on the statements in the survey, averaging no less than a score of 4.4.



Most respondents agreed that the website is clear and easy to understand.

Although the majority of respondents found no issue with the webpage, some identified areas for further improvement.

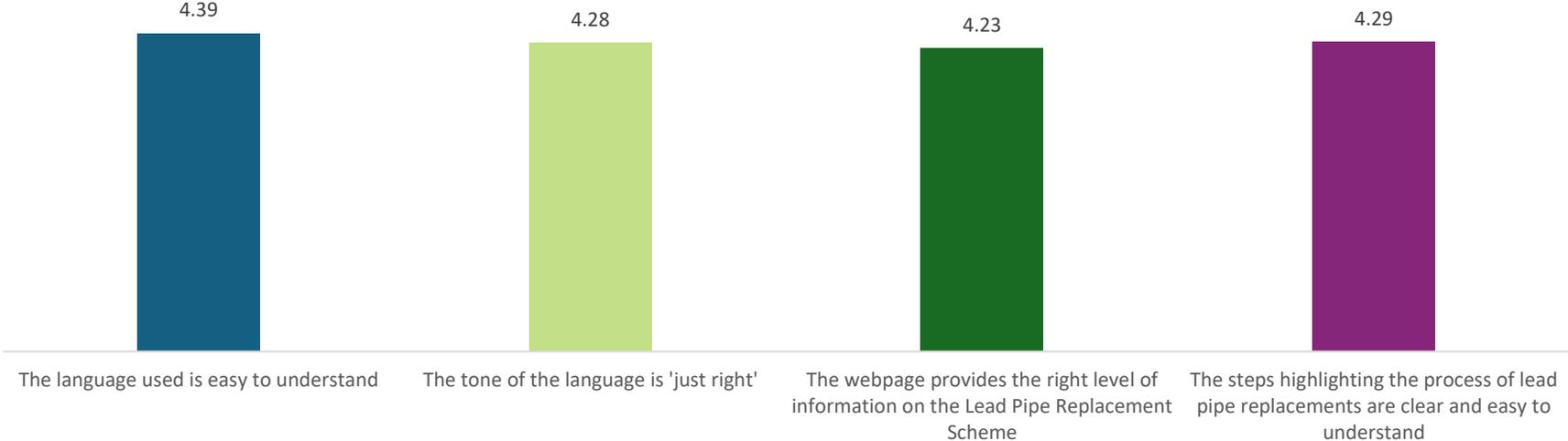
Some claimed there was too much information on the screen and this should be replaced with more pictures and videos.

Others suggested there was a need for further information e.g. clarification on definitions; how to identify lead pipes and professional assistance.

# The webpage with information on the Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme received similarly high rates of agreement on the statements, averaging no less than 4.2.

## Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme

Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree on the following statements? (193)



Generally, most respondents agreed that the webpage is clear and easy to understand.

While the majority had no issues, some claimed they struggled to read the page as it seemed too technical.

Some found it lacked detail in customer relevant areas such as cost and the process of replacement.

There were issues raised with the practical support and assistance of the scheme itself.

# Results

After reviewing both webpages, participants were asked to share their initial thoughts on each. Both pages were well received at this stage, with over 70% of people detailing largely positive sentiments.

Positive Sentiments  
Q1 (162)

- “ *Very thorough and informative (Q1)*
- “ *Interesting! Informative and readable (Q1)*
- “ *It is simple and clear. Easy to understand (Q1)*

Positive Sentiments  
Q8 (136)

- “ *Very comprehensive and easy to follow (Q8)*
- “ *It explains the problem well and gives good advice (Q8)*
- “ *Really interesting to read (Q8)*

# Despite the generally positive response, some concerns were raised on the level of information; technicality and transparency.

## Level of information Q1 (4) & Q8 (8)

“ Good but left questions unanswered (Q1)

“ Easy to understand but no information on the differences between hard and soft water (Q8)

## Technicality Q1 (3) & Q8 (6)

“ Very wordy, considering most homes that had lead are very old and would all need modernising (Q1)

“ Terrible! So complicated to apply most people would give up! (Q8)

## Transparency Q1 (1) & Q8 (16)

“ Would there be a cost to me to get them removed? (Q1)

“ It does seem to gloss over the costs and disruption of getting a plumber in. There are no indicative "average price per metre" costs given (Q8)

# Lead pipes and lead in your water

## Lead pipes and lead in your water

Lead was historically used a lot in petrol, paint and water pipes, but in 1970 the government banned the use of lead in water pipes. This decision was made due to evidence that exposure over a period of time can have health implications, with the greatest risk being to children under six and pregnant women.

Our water mains are not made from lead and the water that leaves our treatment works contains virtually no lead. However, water may pick up lead as it passes through any lead pipes within a customer's property, or when it passes through the pipe that connects the property to our water main in the street.

### Could you have lead pipes?

- Lead pipes may be in your home or property boundary regardless of if you are fed by a single supply or a shared supply. [You can find more about water supply pipes and pipe responsibility here.](#)
- Properties built **after 1970** will not have lead pipes due to the law and regulations set by the government.
- Any properties built **before 1970** may still have lead pipework; your supply pipe, the underground pipe that connects your home to the public water mains, and there's a chance that there might be some lead pipes inside your home.

### Here are some steps to identify lead pipes

You can read the steps below, or [click here to take a look at our handy lead factsheet](#). Alternatively we have a short video for you to watch at the bottom of the page, alongside some helpful resources from the Drinking Water Inspectorate, GOV.UK and others.

Find your internal stop tap, usually behind the cupboards in your kitchen or a downstairs toilet. This will be where the water first comes into the property. Now, carry out the below checks to determine if your pipes are lead.

 <p><b>Grey in appearance</b></p> <p>Unpainted lead pipes appear a dull grey colour.</p>	 <p><b>Swollen joints</b></p> <p>There is often a swollen joint next to the tap if there is lead pipework.</p>	 <p><b>Tap the pipe</b></p> <p>Tap the pipe with a metal object. Lead makes a dull thud; other metals make a clear ringing.</p>	 <p><b>The coin test</b></p> <p>Gently scrape the pipe with a coin, a shiny silver metal will be beneath.</p>
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If you're still unsure, ask a plumber for a second opinion. [We can help you find a plumber here.](#)

### Top tips to minimise the risk of lead pipes



If you have lead pipes the best way to eliminate the risk is to make an application onto our **Lead Replacement Scheme**, once accepted you can get them replaced by a WaterSafe approved plumber.

[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE](#)

<p><b>Run the cold kitchen tap</b></p> <p>In the morning run the cold kitchen tap to fill a wash bowl, this will flush out any standing water from the pipes. Reuse this to water the plants.</p>	<p><b>Flush the toilet to clear</b></p> <p>Flush the loo, this will also do the job of clearing any water that has been standing in the pipes.</p>	<p><b>Food and drink preparation</b></p> <p>Only use water from the kitchen cold tap for food and drink preparation.</p>	<p><b>Avoid knocking the pipes</b></p> <p>Do your best not to knock or disturb lead pipes, as this can increase lead in your water.</p>
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### Some further things to consider:

- Boiling the water doesn't help and will not remove lead content.
- Some of this advice may not be effective if the underground pipe that brings water your home is over 30m long.
- If you decide to give infants bottled water, or use it for preparing infant formula, ensure that it contains *less than 200mg per litre of sodium*, sometimes written as 'Na'. Check the bottle label for details. You should also make sure that you follow the instructions on the infant formula regarding boiling water to sterilise the formula.

Lead pipes - advice for customers

**Identifying lead pipes and actions you can take**

If you do have lead pipes, there's plenty you can do to minimise the risks to you and your family.



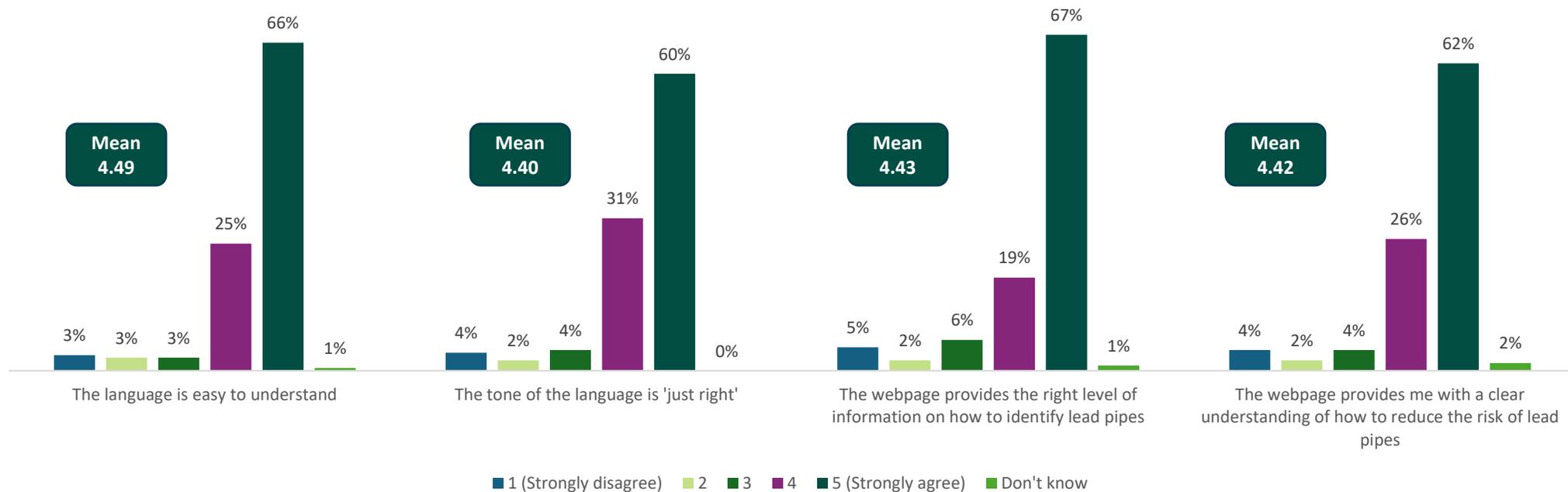
Watch on  YouTube

<p><b>Lead in drinking water</b></p> <p>The Drinking Water Inspectorate have produced an article</p> <p><a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a></p>	<p><b>Lead poisoning advice</b></p> <p>GOV.UK have a guide for public &amp; healthcare professionals</p> <p><a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a></p>	<p><b>Risks, monitoring &amp; correction</b></p> <p>The World Health Organization have created a lead technical brief</p> <p><a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a></p>
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<p><b>Lead in water FAQs</b></p> <p>WaterSafe have pulled together some handy FAQs</p> <p><a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a></p>	<p><b>Working safely with lead</b></p> <p>The Health and Safety Executive have pulled together some useful information</p> <p><a href="#">FIND OUT MORE</a></p>
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**When reviewing the Lead Pipes and Lead in Water webpage, an overwhelming positive response was achieved with the majority of respondents (over 85%) agreed to each statement to some degree. With an average score of 4.48, the highest rate of agreement was reached when evaluating how easy the language was to understand.**

Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree on the following statements?  
(193)



Of those who disagreed with the statements, 38% had no suggestions for improvement. However, for the 62%, it was indicated across all questions that the information was too technical or wordy and that more specific information would be useful. A further 5 respondents recommended incorporating more illustrations and pictures. 1 suggested the tone be softer to alleviate sense of immediate danger.

**Information is too technical/wordy**  
Q3 (2)  
Q4 (1)  
Q5 (3)

- “ I found it too busy and didn’t manage to read it all. (Q5)
- “ There need to be a better definition as I have learning difficulties so couldn’t really understand much. (Q5)
- “ I think it needs to be slightly softer in tone as some people may panic thinking they are at immediate danger. (Q3)

**Needs more information**  
Q5 (2)  
Q6 (2)

- “ There should be more emphasis on the best way to reduce risk of lead and any assistance available. (Q6)
- “ Ram home the size of the lead pipe problem in this country... how many deaths due to lead pipes, cost of reducing/removing problem. (Q5)

**Needs illustrations/pictures**  
Q3 (1)  
Q4 (1)  
Q5 (2)  
Q6 (1)

- “ Needs varied typeface for emphasis. (Q3)
- “ Too wordy, would do better for me using more pictures / hyroglyphics or stick figure diagrams. (Q6)

Q3. [If 1 or 2 to Q2A] How could United Utilities make the information easier to understand?  
Q4. [If 1 or 2 to Q2B] How could United Utilities create a more suitable tone on the lead pipes webpage?  
Q5. [If 1 or 2 to Q2C] What do you feel is missing from the lead pipes webpage?  
Q6. [If 1 or 2 to Q2D] What do you feel needs to be included to provide a better understanding of reducing the risks?

# Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme

## Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme

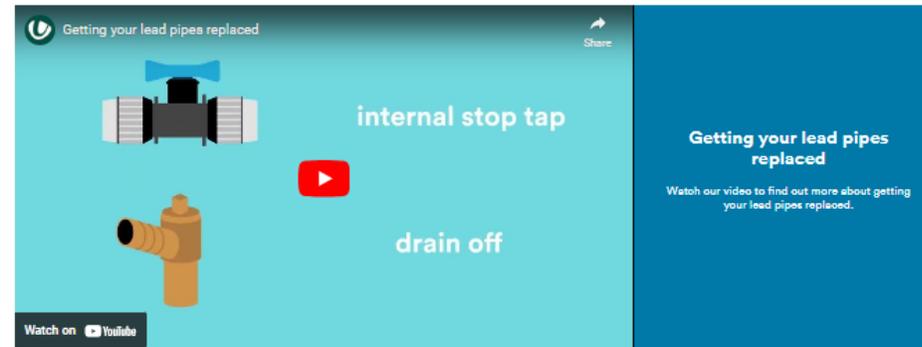
We recommend that any customer with lead pipes has them upgraded. This isn't just to avoid any potential health implications, but also to improve the quality of your pipes. This will reduce the likelihood of household leaks, in turn avoiding high water bills, water waste and even damage to your property.

*If you have lead pipes and want to replace them, it's essential that you have applied and been accepted onto the United Utilities Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme before you get any work done.*

Under the scheme, we may offer a free like for like connection of a replacement water supply pipe (i.e. same size), from your boundary to the water main in the road or footpath.

Please note you'll need to replace all the pipework up to the boundary of your property, and you will be responsible for the costs related to this part of the work.

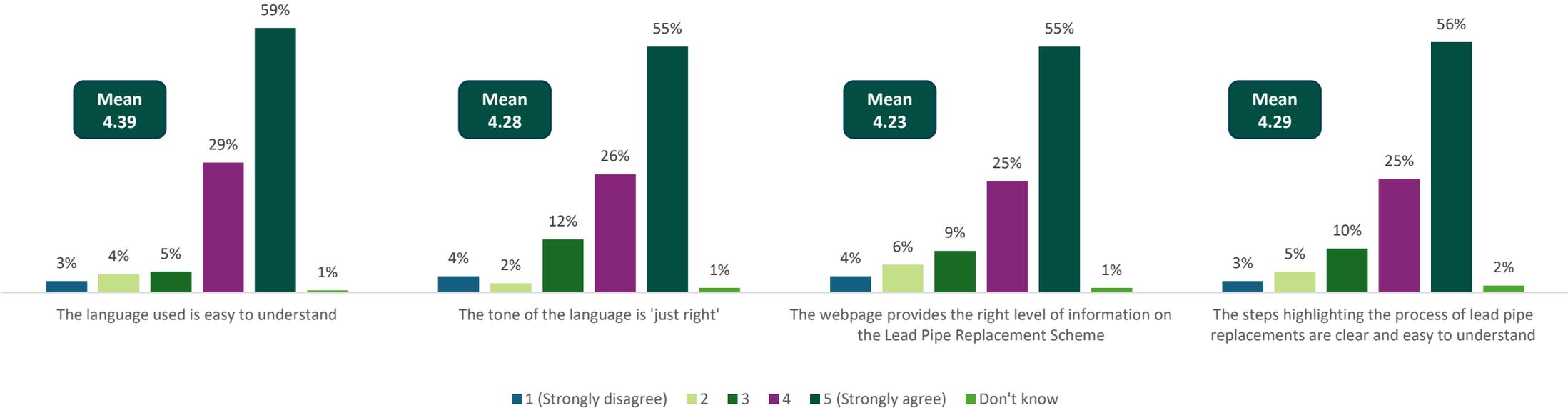
Find all the information you need about the scheme and how to apply by watching our video or reading the steps below.



<b>Step 1 – Eligibility for the scheme</b>	▼
<b>Step 2 – Application</b>	▼
<b>Step 3 – Acceptance</b>	▼
<b>Step 4 - Replacing your pipework</b>	▼
<b>Step 5 - Inspection</b>	▼
<b>Step 6 – Connection</b>	▼
<b>Step 7 – Disconnection</b>	▼

The Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme page also received positive response. With an average of 4.39, the highest level of agreement was subsequently reached when considering how easy the webpage’s language was to understand. However, the rate of scores below 4 were generally higher than the previous webpage– highlighting potential areas of concern.

Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree on the following statements? (193)



**51% of those who disagreed with the previous statements did not provide any recommendations for improvement. However, out of the 49% of people who did, across all questions it was highlighted that there needs to be more transparency about costs and more specific information.**

**More transparency about costs**

Q10 (1)  
Q11 (1)  
Q12 (5)  
Q13 (1)

- “ *Improve responsibilities to make it clearer who does what (Q10)*
- “ *UU could clearly state that it's effectively the householder's responsibility to foot almost the entire cost of replacement (Q11)*
- “ *Real clarity on replacement costs (Q12)*

**Needs more information**

Q10 (2)  
Q11 (2)  
Q12 (2)  
Q13 (2)

- “ *Provide more information relevant to consumers (Q10)*
- “ *Not enough information is given about what the Scheme itself actually provides (Q12)*
- “ *What to do if you don't own the accommodation that you are living in but, you do pay for your water (Q13)*

Q10. [If 1 or 2 to Q8A] How could United Utilities make the information easier to understand?

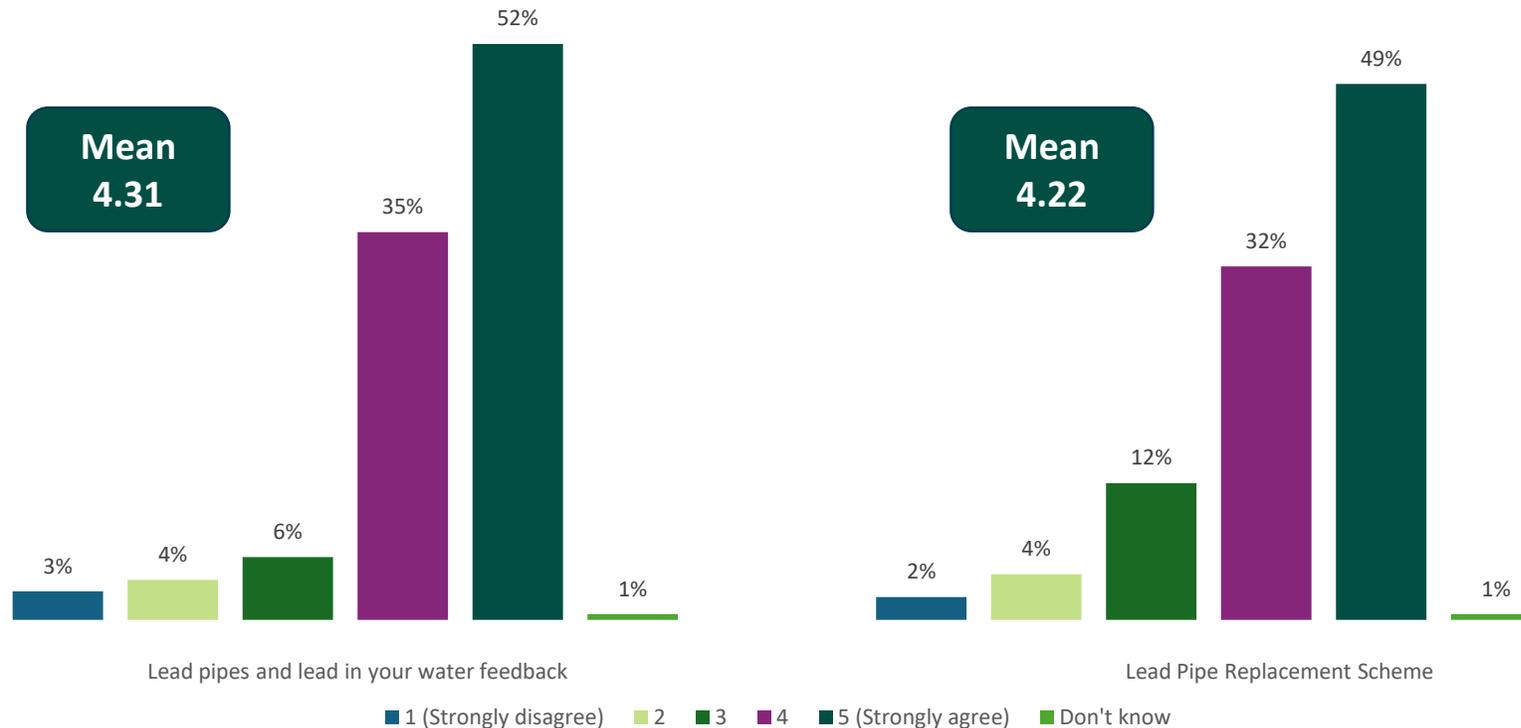
Q11. [If 1 or 2 to Q8B] How could United Utilities create a more suitable tone on the Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme webpage?

Q12. [If 1 or 2 to Q8C] What do you feel is missing from the Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme webpage?

Q13. [If 1 or 2 to Q8D] What in particular could be easier to follow within the 7 steps?

The respondents were asked, overall, how user-friendly they think each webpage is. Collectively over 80% agreed both webpages are user-friendly. However, the rate of respondents scoring a '3' doubled from the first webpage to the second, forming the only discernible difference.

Overall, how customer friendly do you feel the webpage is? Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not at all customer friendly' and 5 is 'extremely customer friendly' (193)



Reflecting on the previous figure (Q14), one common theme across the feedback on the Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme webpage, perhaps driven by overuse of technical wording, was the absence of personalised guidance.

Since this issue did not appear in responses to the other webpage, it could suggest that this contributes to dissatisfaction with the user-friendliness of the second webpage.

“ Offer personal guidance to those who need it, low income, unable to understand and need support. (Q11) ”

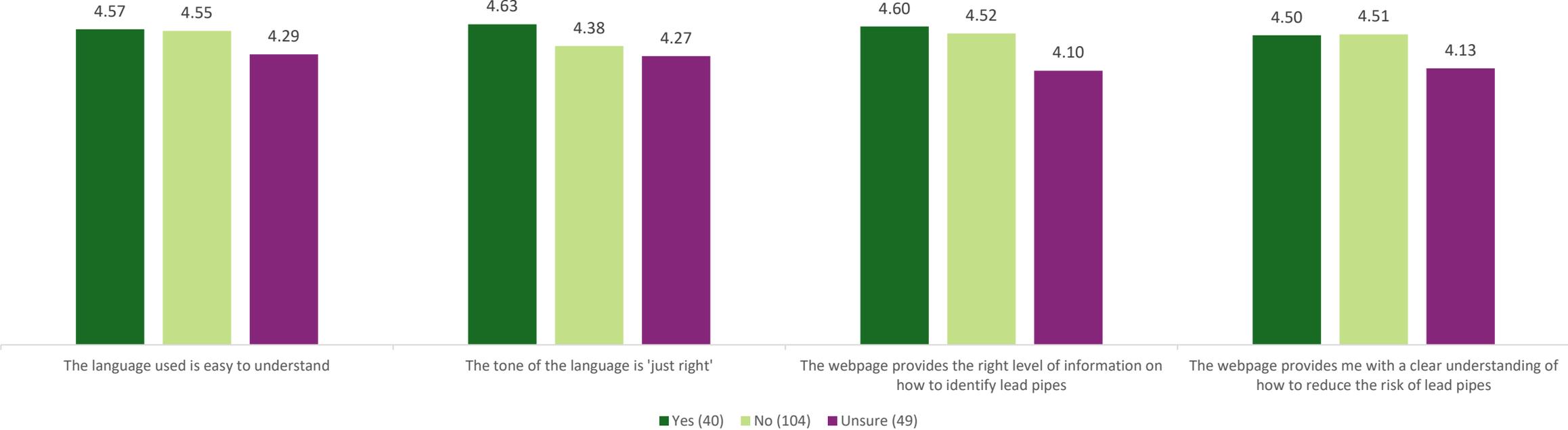
“ Trying to cover everything but doesn't give the customer the opportunity to ask questions and confirm understanding. (Q12) ”

# Additional Analysis

Exploring customer attitudes from those with previous experience of Lead Pipes.

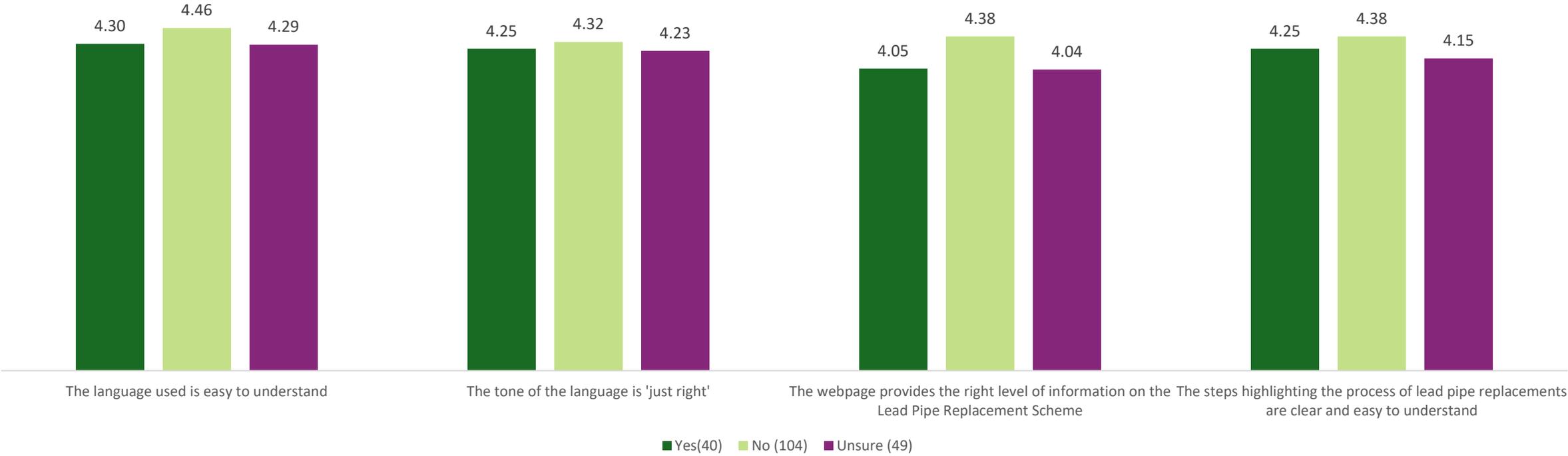
To explore the analysis from another angle, we categorised responses by prior experience with lead pipes, we had asked respondents whether they had knowingly had them on their property. While 79% had not or were unsure, those who had lead pipes, on average, tended to agree more with the statements, suggesting the webpage may have reinforced some existing knowledge.

Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree on the following statements?

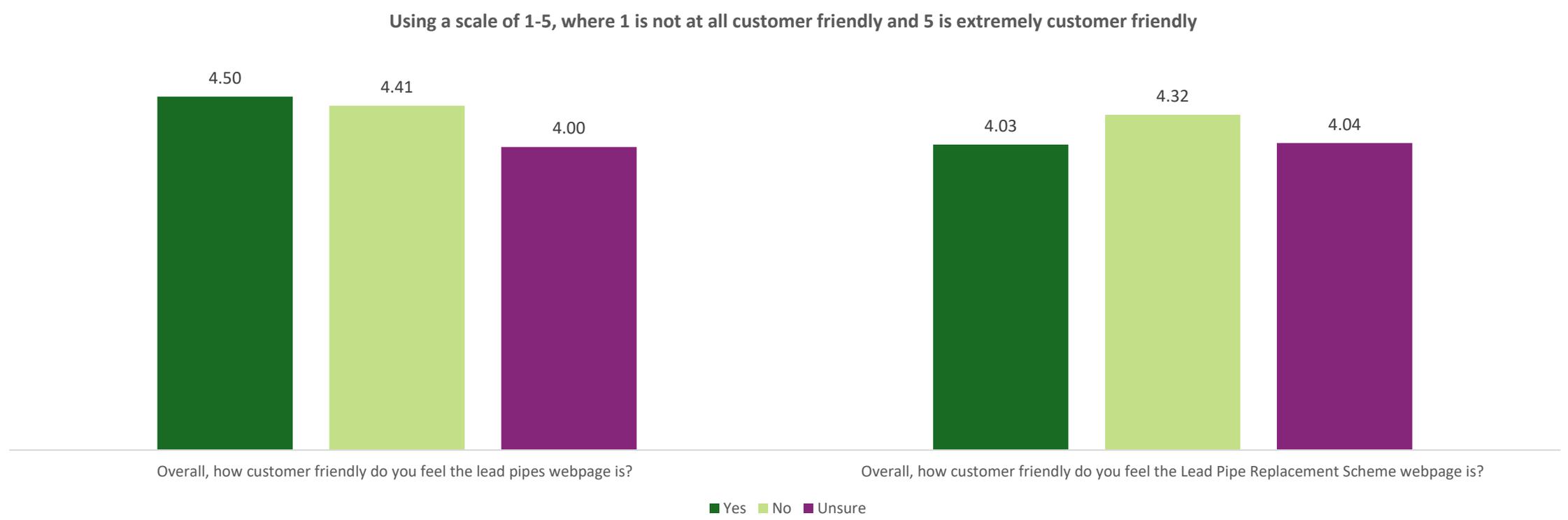


**For the webpage on the Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme, it seemed that those who had not knowingly had lead pipes on their property agreed more with the statements, though all responses averaged lower than the first webpage. This may suggest that those who have had lead pipes in their property were slightly more critical due to their own experience and knowledge of the scheme.**

Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much do you agree or disagree on the following statements?



The same pattern is reflected across the groups of respondents. Where those who have knowingly had lead pipes have a more positive response to the first webpage, whereas those who have not knowingly had lead pipes in their property have a more positive response to the second webpage. People who were unsure consistently scored lower than the rest.



Of those who had knowingly had lead pipes in their property, no one had any additional comments to make to the Lead Pipes and Lead in Water webpage, reinforcing their satisfaction. On the other hand, for the second webpage, there were a number of comments left regarding the level of information mostly around funding of the scheme.

### Lead Pipe Replacement Scheme

- “ Wording not clear, it may give the impression that UU will replace a lead pipe for free when the most they will do is they may replace the lead pipe outside the boundary of the property
- “ Provide more information relevant to consumers
- “ An approximate guide on costs, even if it's only digging up, replacing pipework, filling in will cost a minimum of ? per meter.

**For those who had not knowingly had lead pipes, it was difficult to identify a clear pattern in the comments, as feedback was spread across all themes on both webpages, leaving no definitive conclusion.**

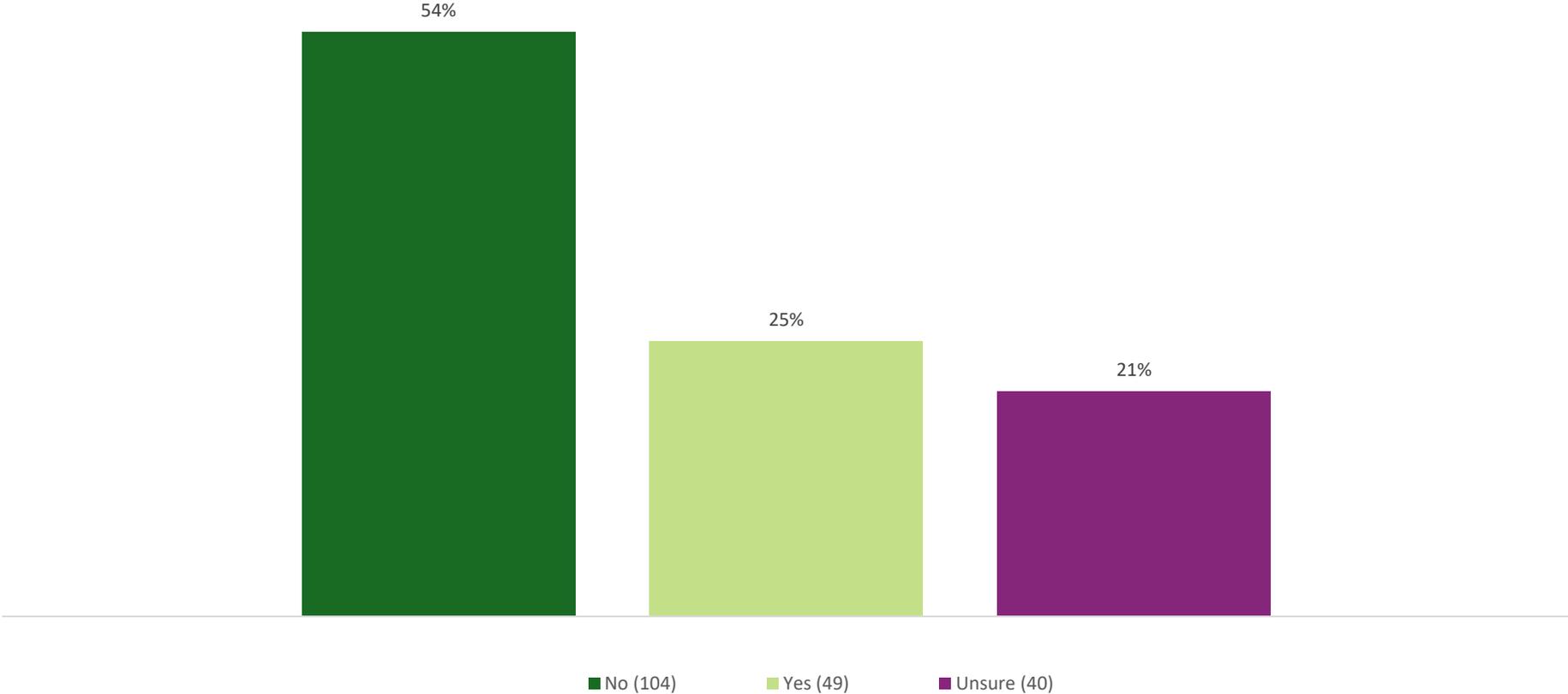
**Though theories can be drawn, the difference in attitudes towards each webpage across those who have, have not or are unsure whether they have knowingly had lead pipes in their property was marginal.**

**With varying base sizes for each group, the overall average is influenced, so while hypotheses can be made, clear trends cannot be established without further research.**

# Demographic Breakdown

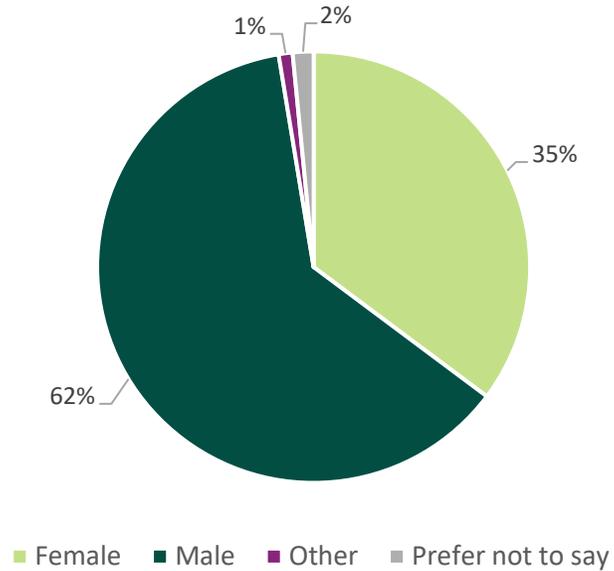
# Demographic tables

Have you ever knowingly had lead pipes on your property? (193)



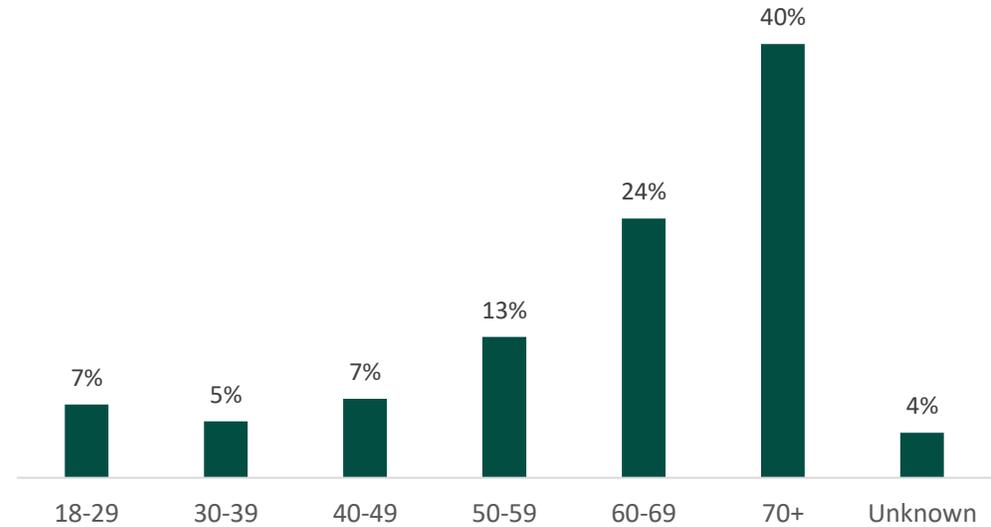
# Demographic tables

How would you describe yourself?



Gender	Count	%
Female	68	35%
Male	120	62%
Other	2	1%
Prefer not to say	3	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

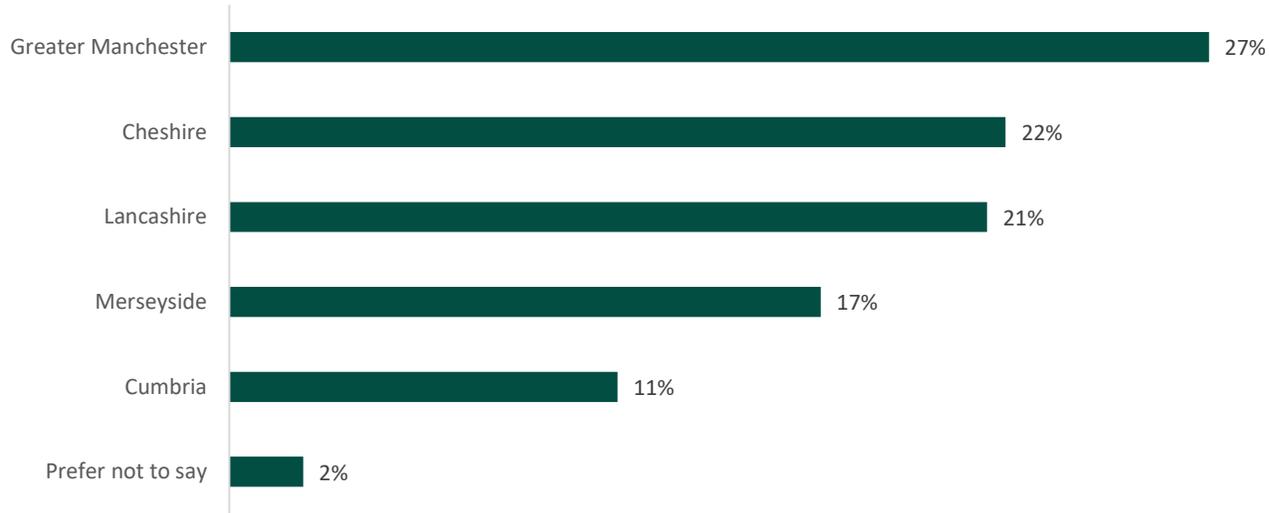
Age



Age	Count	%
18-29	13	7%
30-39	10	5%
40-49	14	7%
50-59	25	13%
60-69	46	24%
70+	77	40%
Unknown	8	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

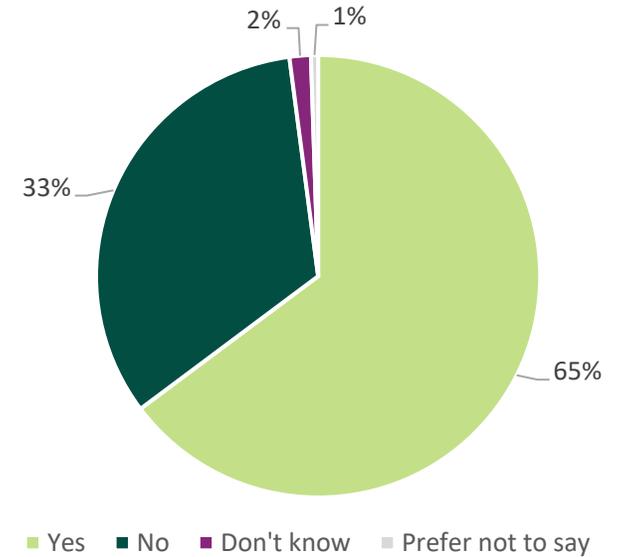
# Demographic tables

Which of the following regions do you live in?



What region do you live in?	Count	%
Greater Manchester	53	27%
Cheshire	42	22%
Lancashire	41	21%
Merseyside	32	17%
Cumbria	21	11%
Prefer not to say	4	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

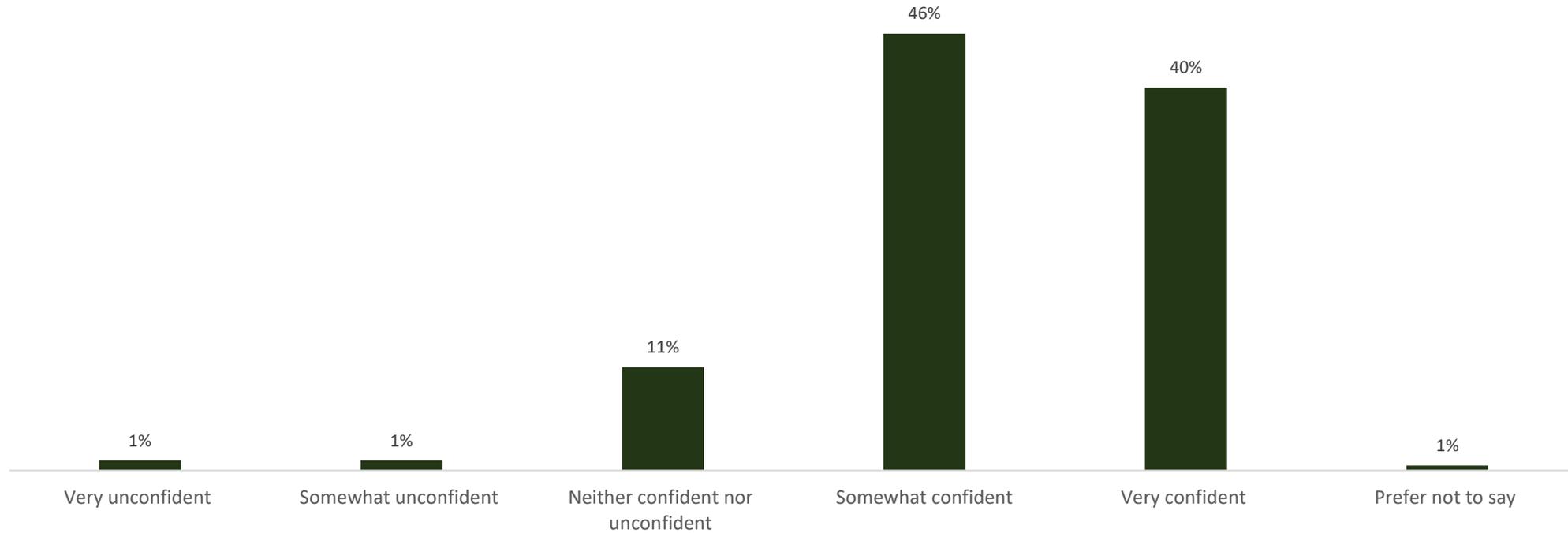
Do you currently have a water meter installed at your home?



Do you have a water meter?	Count	%
Yes	125	65%
No	64	33%
Don't know	3	2%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Demographic tables

How would you rate your technical ability when it comes to using online tools? (193)



Technical Ability	Count	%
Very unconfident	2	1%
Somewhat unconfident	2	1%
Neither confident nor unconfident	21	11%
Somewhat confident	89	46%
Very confident	78	40%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Demographic tables

Do any of the following apply to you? (193)

