



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Boater Census Survey 2022 Results



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A **home mooring** is a paid-for place where you can leave your boat long-term, including private mooring sites or marinas and long-term towpath moorings provided by the Canal & River Trust.

Boaters who do not pay for a home mooring are known as **continuous cruisers** and they move their boats around the network regularly.

Using this data

The information in this report is free to use but should be referenced to the Canal & River Trust. If you would like further information on the Canal & River Trust Boater Census, please send any requests to information.request@canalrivertrust.org.uk

In August 2022, the Canal & River Trust launched its first ever Boater Census Survey.

The Canal & River Trust is the charity working to care for a 2,000-mile-long, 250-year-old network of canals, rivers, reservoirs and docks, because we believe that life is better by water. Our vision is to have living waterways that transform places and enrich our lives, for today and generations to come, and boating is at the centre of that.

There are around 35,000 boats on our canals and rivers, which provide a sanctuary for leisure boaters and holidaymakers, a home to liveaboard boaters, and a workplace for the many boats selling goods and services up and down the country.

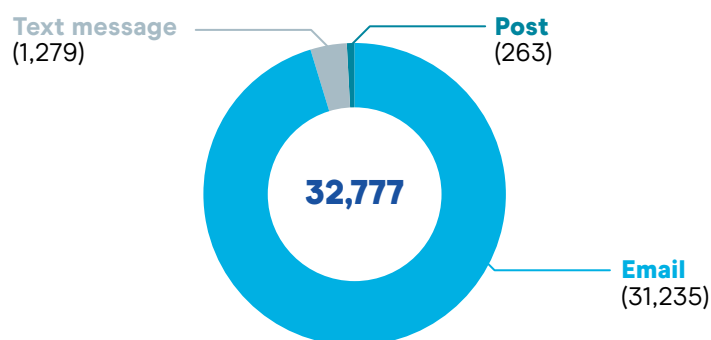
To understand more about the needs of the boaters who live on and use our waterways and the challenges they face, the Trust ran its first ever Boater Census Survey in 2022 and this report presents a summary of the results. This data will help inform our own work and that of others, such as health service providers and local authorities, to make sure boaters are taken into account and their needs are met through decision-making, policy and services.

About the survey

The anonymous online survey was open for ten weeks and boaters took part by completing a questionnaire online or over the telephone. Invitations to take part were sent to current licence-holders by email, text message or post, and we asked people to complete one survey per boat. Roving traders were included but other business boat licence holders were not. This means that the Census Survey Report does not cover the thousands of hire boaters who enjoy trips and holidays on the waterways each year.

The survey automatically presented different questions depending on whether the respondent had permanent mooring (a home mooring) or not (continuously cruising), and whether they live aboard all year round or not. Some questions were compulsory and others were optional. In this report, results given as percentages relate to the total number of respondents who answered that specific question, not necessarily the overall total. The number of responses to each question are also shown.

We sent a total of 32,777 invitations to take part in the census Survey:



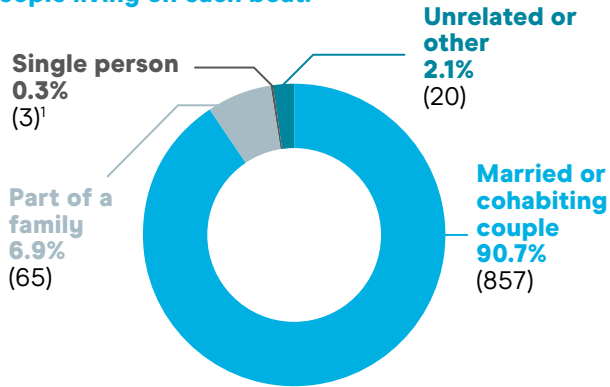
Response

A total of **9,530 boaters responded**, which is just under a third of all licence holders. The split between boaters with home moorings and continuous cruisers is similar to the results of the annual National Boat Count that was carried out in March 2022.

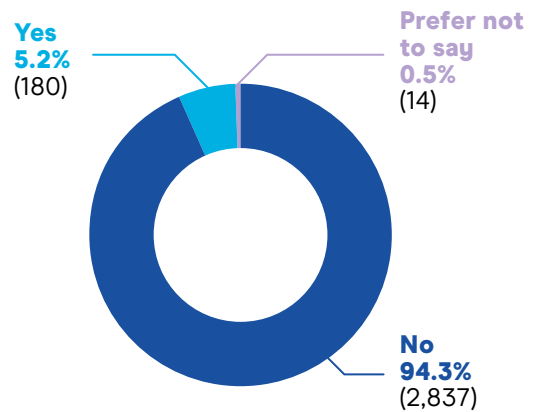
National Boat Count, March 2022	Boater Census, August 2022
79% (27,356) boaters with a home mooring	76% (6,944) boaters with a home mooring
21% (7,296) continuous cruisers	24% (2,200) continuous cruisers

About the boaters

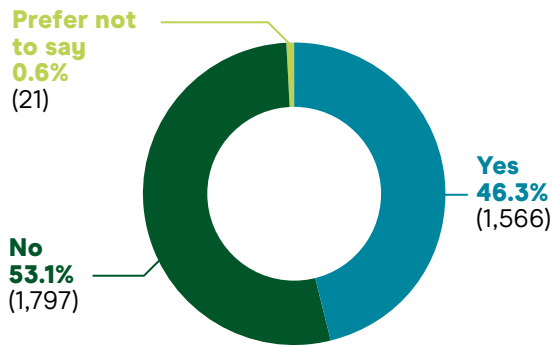
We asked about the relationships between the people living on each boat:



Are there any children (under 16) living aboard?



Are there any animals living aboard?



Dog(s)	76.7% (560)
Cat(s)	28.5% (208)
Other animal	4.4% (32)

We asked boaters which area they did most of their boating in, over the last 12 months. This data is compared with where boats were seen in the annual National Boat Count in March 2022, below.

Regional boundaries

North West

Census Survey data	NBC data
17.3% (1,628)	17.1% (6,019)

West Midlands

Census Survey data	NBC data
23.1% (2,180)	23.9% (8,434)

Wales & South West

Census Survey data	NBC data
9.8% (921)	12.4% (4,370)

Yorkshire & North East

Census Survey data	NBC data
7.7% (723)	9.3% (3,268)

East Midlands

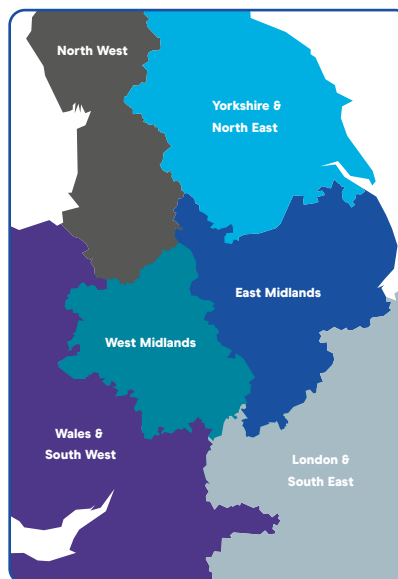
Census Survey data	NBC data
21.2% (1,997)	17.1% (6,014)

London & South East

Census Survey data	NBC data
16.0% (1,514)	12.4% (4,370)

None/unable to boat this year

Census Survey data	NBC data
5.0% (473)	



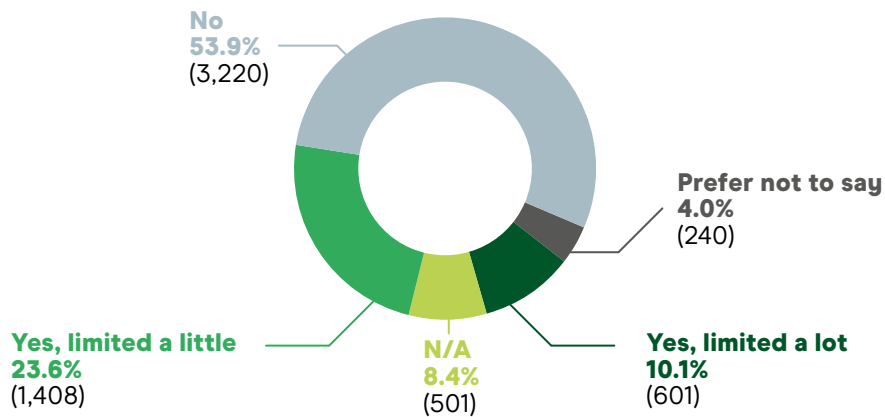
Note: For operational purposes, North Wales is managed by the West Midlands region.

¹ This number is strikingly low, which suggests a section of the boating population has not responded to this survey. For more information on this, please see the section 'Who didn't respond to the Census Survey?' on page 11.

Disabilities and benefits

Disabilities

Many boaters report that their day-to-day activities are limited because of a long-term health problem or disability. The 2021 Census of England and Wales² indicates that **17.8%** of the population are disabled people. Our Census Survey suggests that proportion is considerably higher among the boating population.

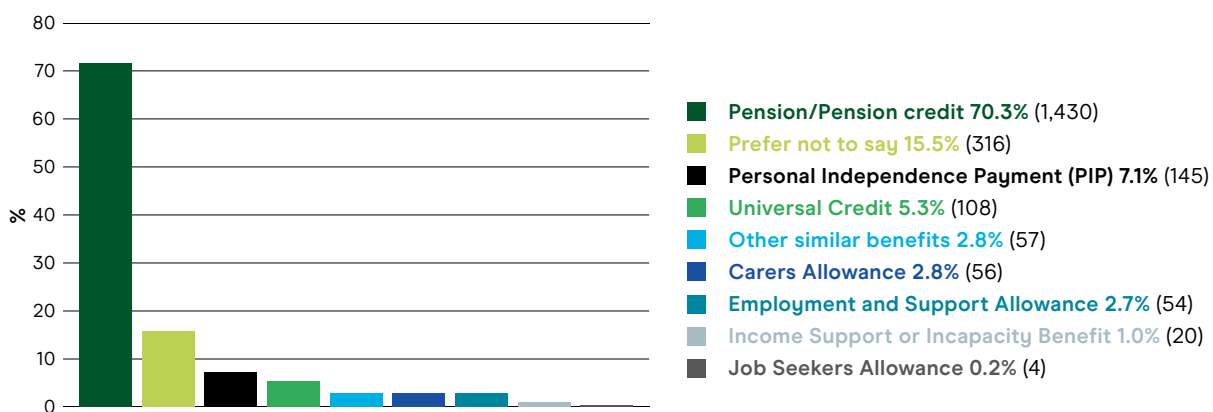


Mobility or gross motor	33.3% (287)
Manual dexterity	18.9% (163)
Progressive conditions and physical health (e.g. cancer, MS)	11.9% (103)
Behavioural and emotional	8.1% (70)
Hearing	6.4% (55)
Sight	2.9% (25)
Memory, learning, concentration	4.4% (38)

Mobility or gross motor	31.3% (161)
Manual dexterity	14.0% (72)
Progressive conditions and physical health (e.g. cancer, MS)	16.3% (84)
Behavioural and emotional	9.7% (50)
Hearing	5.2% (27)
Sight	3.7% (19)
Memory, learning, concentration	7.2% (37)

Benefits

The majority of census respondents receive a pension or pension credit, and smaller numbers receive a range of other types of benefits or support. A significant minority preferred not to share this information.



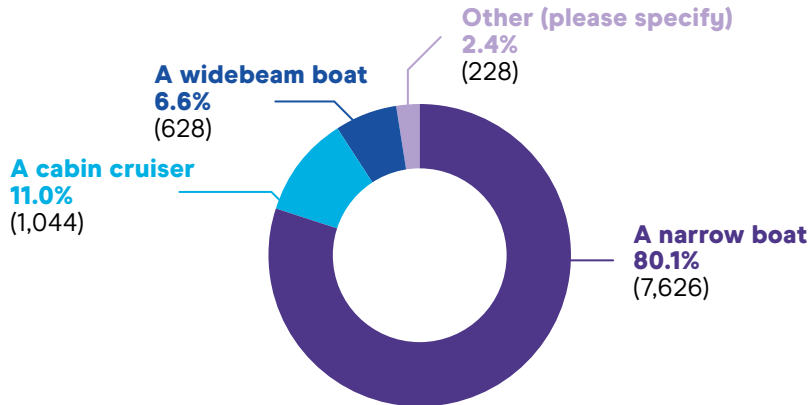
² See www.ons.gov.uk

About the boats

According to figures from the annual National Boat Count in March 2022, there were **35,262 boats** in total on Canal & River Trust waterways.

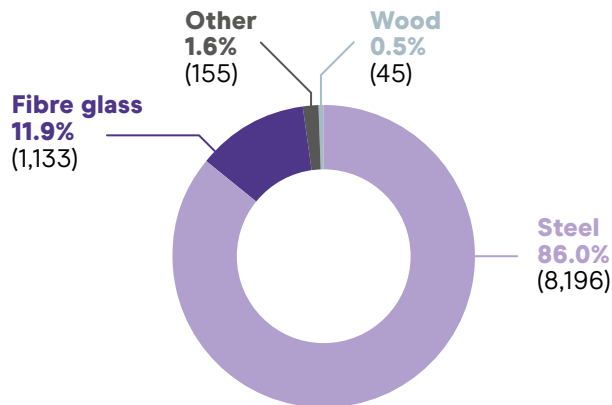
The 2022 Boater Census Survey suggests that the typical boat on our waterways is a **steel narrowboat with fixed beds for 2 people, and pull-out beds³ for 2 more.**

What type of boat do you have?



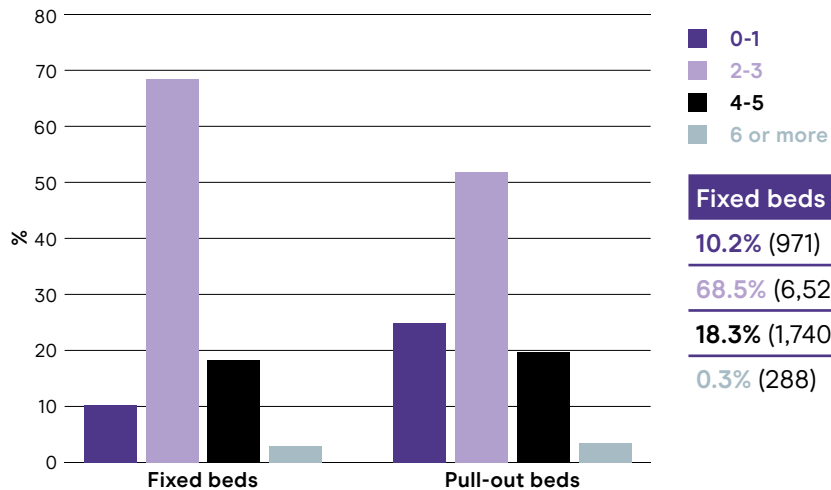
Boats in the “other” category include small, powered boats, such as day boats and cruisers without cabin accommodation (21.5%, 49 boats), wide beam boats such as Dutch barges (18.4%, 42 boats) and unpowered craft such as kayaks and rowing boats (11.0%, 25 boats).

What material is the boat primarily made of?



³ Pull-out beds include beds that are normally stored (e.g. under another bed) or can be converted (e.g. a dining table and chair area that can be converted into a bed).

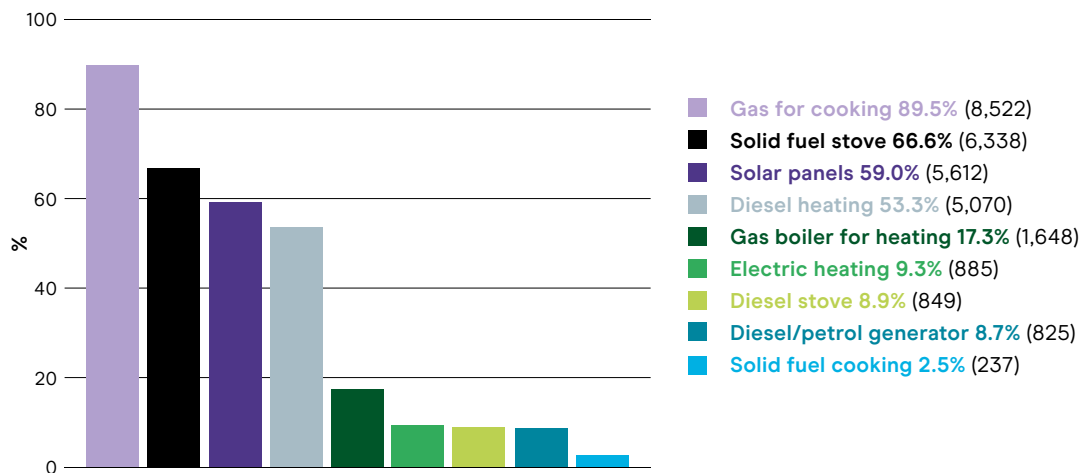
How many people can sleep on the boat?



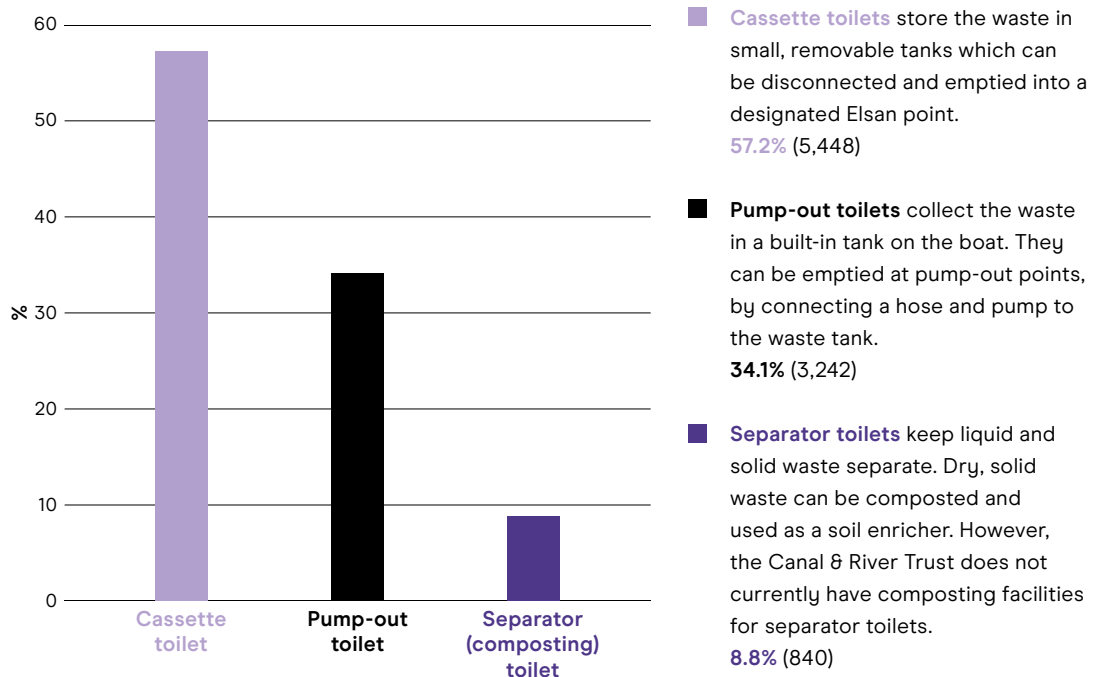
Fixed beds	Pull-out beds
10.2% (971)	24.9% (2,374)
68.5% (6,522)	51.8% (4,928)
18.3% (1,740)	19.8% (1,881)
0.3% (288)	3.5% (337)

The survey asked what facilities and equipment people have on their boats, and what they are thinking of installing.

Fuel



Toilets



- Cassette toilets** store the waste in small, removable tanks which can be disconnected and emptied into a designated Elsan point.

57.2% (5,448)
- Pump-out toilets** collect the waste in a built-in tank on the boat. They can be emptied at pump-out points, by connecting a hose and pump to the waste tank.

34.1% (3,242)
- Separator toilets** keep liquid and solid waste separate. Dry, solid waste can be composted and used as a soil enricher. However, the Canal & River Trust does not currently have composting facilities for separator toilets.

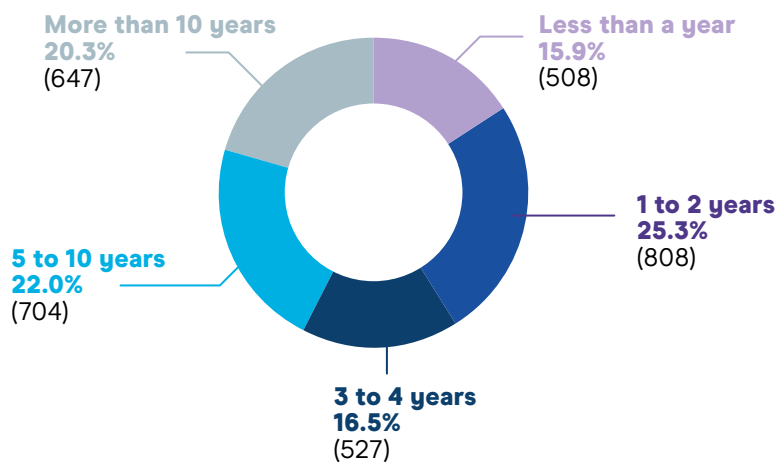
8.8% (840)

What are you planning to install in the future?

None of these	76.5% (7,266)
Solar panels	12.3% (1,173)
Diesel heating	3.2% (306)
Separator (composting) toilet	2.7% (252)
Solid fuel stove	1.3% (125)

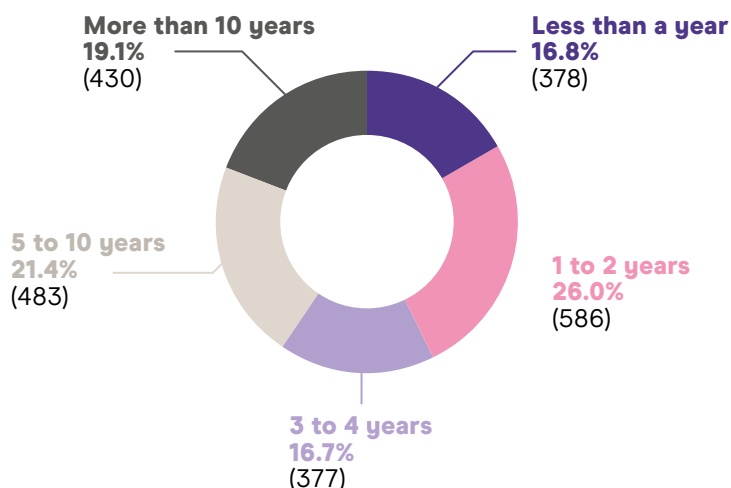
32.1% (3,056) of respondents have experienced mechanical issues with their boats in the past 12 months.

We asked liveaboard boaters how long they have lived on their current boat.



New liveaboard boaters

For 74.7% (2,254) of liveaboard respondents, this is the first boat they have ever lived on. About two fifths of these boaters have been living aboard for less than 3 years:

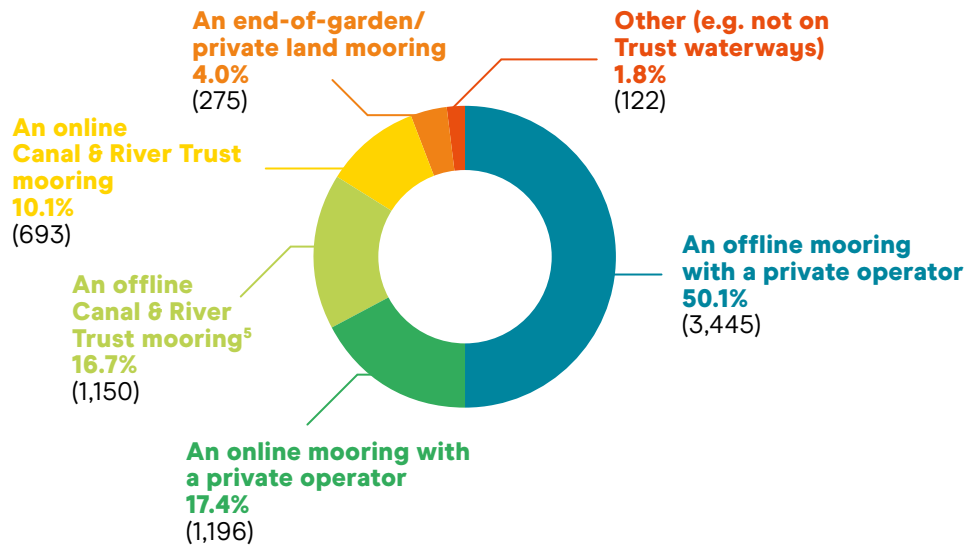


Moorings

There are around **1,600 long-term mooring sites** on the Canal & River Trust network, varying in size from a very small site with just one or two berths, to large marinas with 100+ berths. The Canal & River Trust's Waterside Mooring team directly manages **323 sites with a total of 3,720 berths**. This represents about 11% of the total long-term mooring space available on the network: the rest is managed by private mooring providers.

According to the Census Survey results, **74.3%** of respondents have a home mooring. Of these, 76.6% are leisure boaters and 23.4% live aboard.⁴

Mooring types



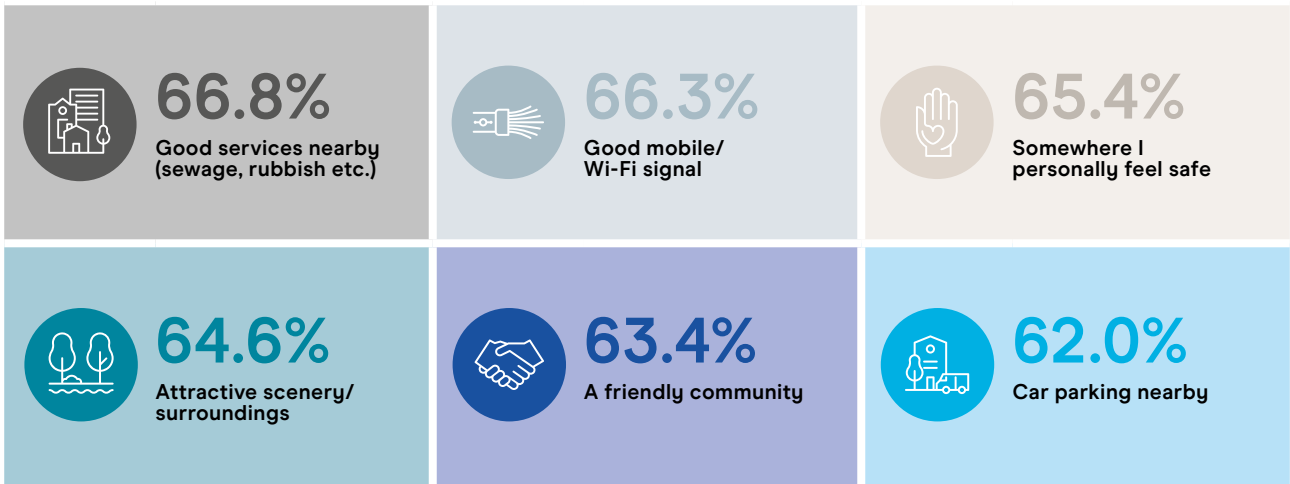
Offline moorings are not on the main line of the navigation. They are usually in marinas, docks and basins.

Online moorings are those along the main line of the navigation, including both those on the towpath side and "offside" (the opposite side to the towpath).

⁴ These figures represent what boaters have told us they use their boats for, but do not indicate whether the mooring they occupy has leisure or residential planning status. The Canal & River Trust does not hold this information for all the moorings on our network.

⁵ Although 1,150 respondents indicated that they have an offline Canal & River Trust mooring, there are in fact only 1,105 berths in this category on the network. This indicates there may be some confusion around the definition of types of mooring site.

We asked what matters most when choosing a long-term mooring.



We also asked continuous cruisers if they were considering getting a long-term mooring.

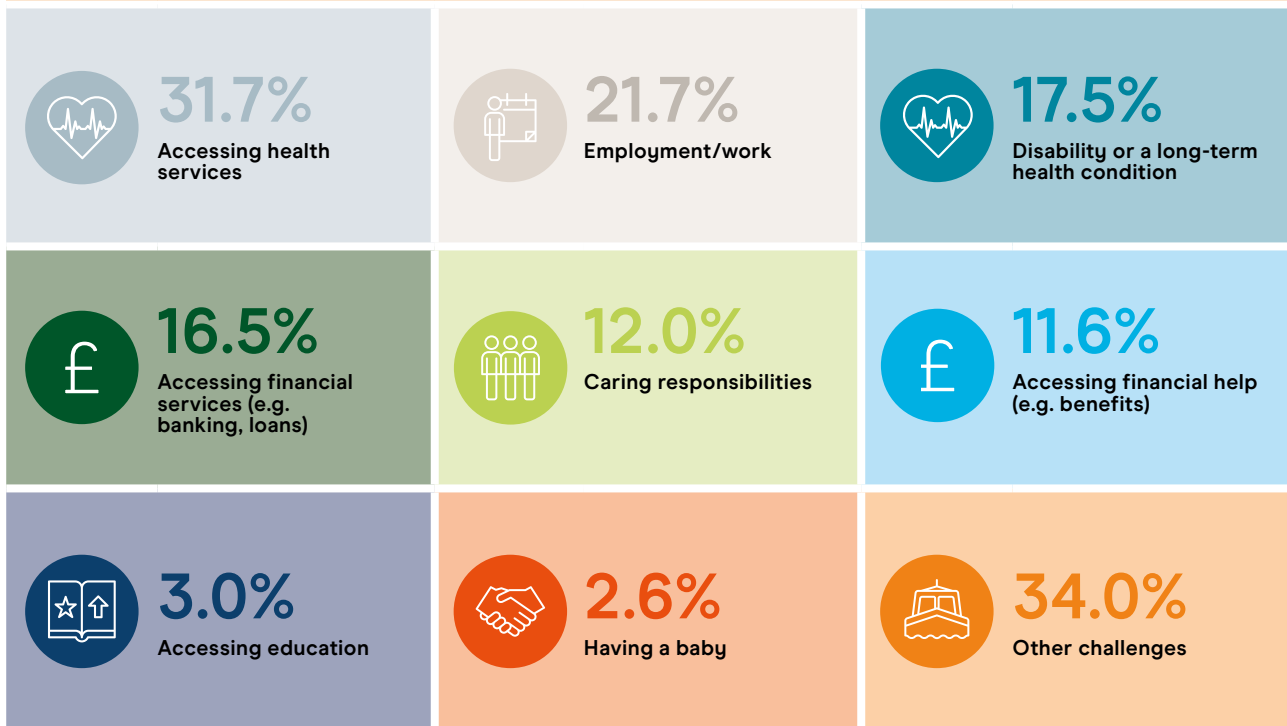


31.0% (681)	I have no plans to take a permanent mooring, but I may/do take a mooring during winter months
28.6% (630)	I have no plans to ever take a permanent mooring, I always want to continuously cruise
22.7% (499)	I don't plan to take a permanent mooring any time soon, but am interested in a permanent mooring at some time in the future
9.6% (212)	I have no plans to stop continuously cruising at the moment but plan to move off my boat into land based accommodation at some point in the future
6.6% (145)	I am actively looking for a permanent mooring now
1.5% (33)	I am actively looking to move off my boat into land based accommodation now

Challenges

We asked boaters about the issues and challenges they have experienced due to living on a boat. The results include a large amount of qualitative data, which will be analysed section by section and published in a separate report. Here is a summary of the issues and challenges that respondents told us they have faced:

Summary



Who didn't respond to the Census Survey?

Although the response rate to the Census Survey was relatively high, we are aware that some vulnerable boaters are overall less likely to have responded. In addition, those vulnerable boaters who have responded may have preferred not to answer some of the more personal questions about health, disabilities, living arrangements, benefits, and the challenges and issues they face. There are many possible reasons for this: access to computers and telephones, language barriers, and a range of potentially complex social and psychological factors.

We received far fewer responses from single boat dwellers compared to couples and families. In contrast, the vast majority of our active welfare cases relate to people who live alone on their boats. We can't be sure, but it is likely that there are many more single boat dwellers than these survey results suggest, and they probably include the boaters who face the most issues and challenges in their lives. Turn to page 12 for more information about our welfare work.

Our welfare work

The Trust has a dedicated team of Welfare Officers who offer support to boaters who are struggling. The Welfare team works with boaters in a wide range of situations, often looking at requests for help accessing benefits, registering with services, managing their health needs. They also support boaters who are in crisis or who are having difficulties adhering to the terms and conditions of their boat licence.

The Welfare Officers support boaters who have or would like an adjustment to the normal cruising requirements under the Equalities Act (2010). Our equality adjustment process has supported over 1,400 boaters so far.

Signposting is an essential service, and the Welfare team works closely with a number of other organisations including local authorities, Citizens Advice, the Waterways Chaplaincy, health outreach teams and local homeless outreach charities. The team also runs events around health, wellbeing and accessing support services with local partners.

The Trust is committed to advocating for boaters and is working with the Government Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to highlight the boating community's needs. The Disabled Boaters' Forum meets regularly to understand and respond to the needs of boaters with disabilities.

Canal & River Trust

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All information correct at the time of publication.