

**Webinar**  
**Career Progression in Local Government:**  
**What's it Like at the Top Since the RPA?**

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**Ulster University**  
**24<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

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# Background to the Survey

**Original Survey: Gender Equality in the NI Public Sector (2016)**

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/investigation-gender-equality-issues-executive-level-northern-ireland-public-sector-0>

## **Issues Identified:**

- **Flexible Working**
- **Work Life Balance**
- **Mentoring**
- **Talent Management/Succession Planning**
- **Leadership Training and Development**

# Background to the Survey

- **Focus Groups:**

- Directors 20<sup>th</sup> August 2019
- Heads of Service 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019

- **Follow up survey:** Mid 2020 (n=116)

- CEOs n=4
- Directors n=25
- Heads of Service n=69
- Other n=4

- **Responses:**

- Males 56.2%
- Females 42.9%
- Prefer not to say 1.0%



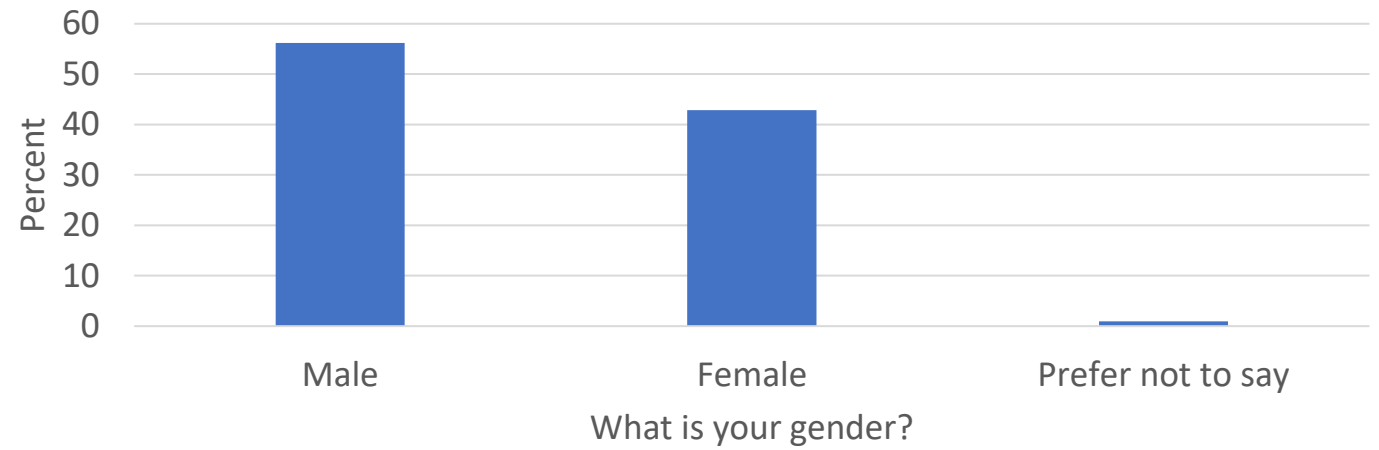
# Demographics

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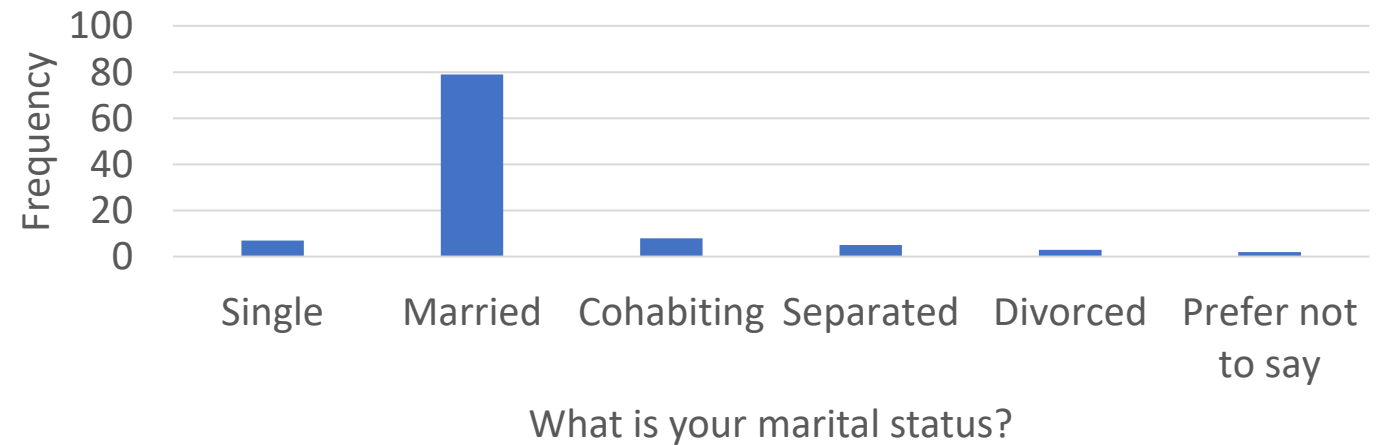
- Respondents
- Organisations Employed Within

# Gender and Marital Status

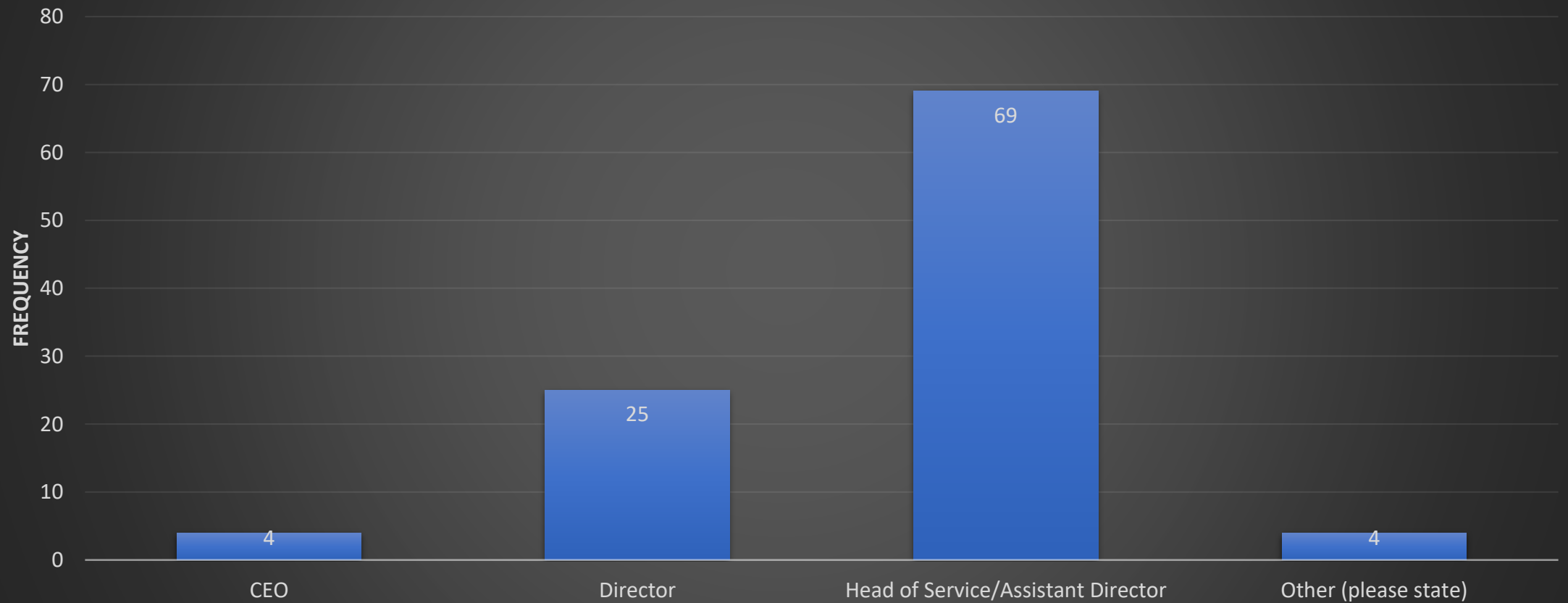
### What is your gender?



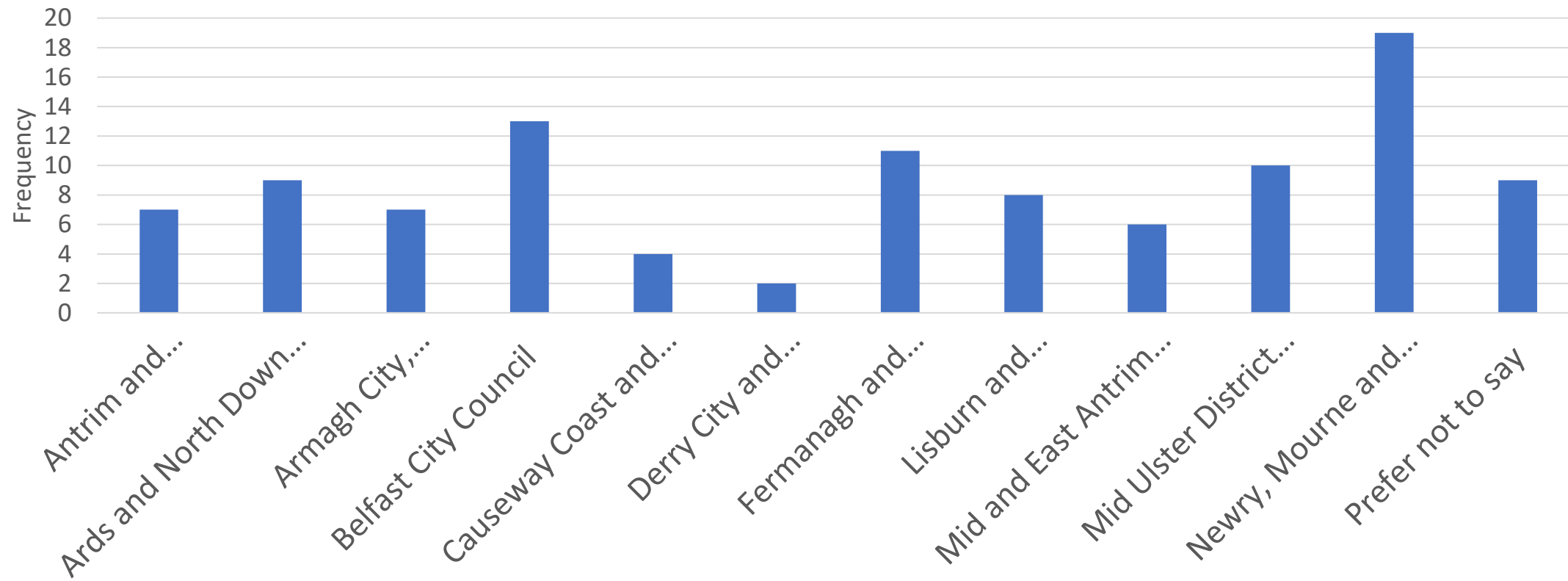
### What is your marital status?



## Position within Council



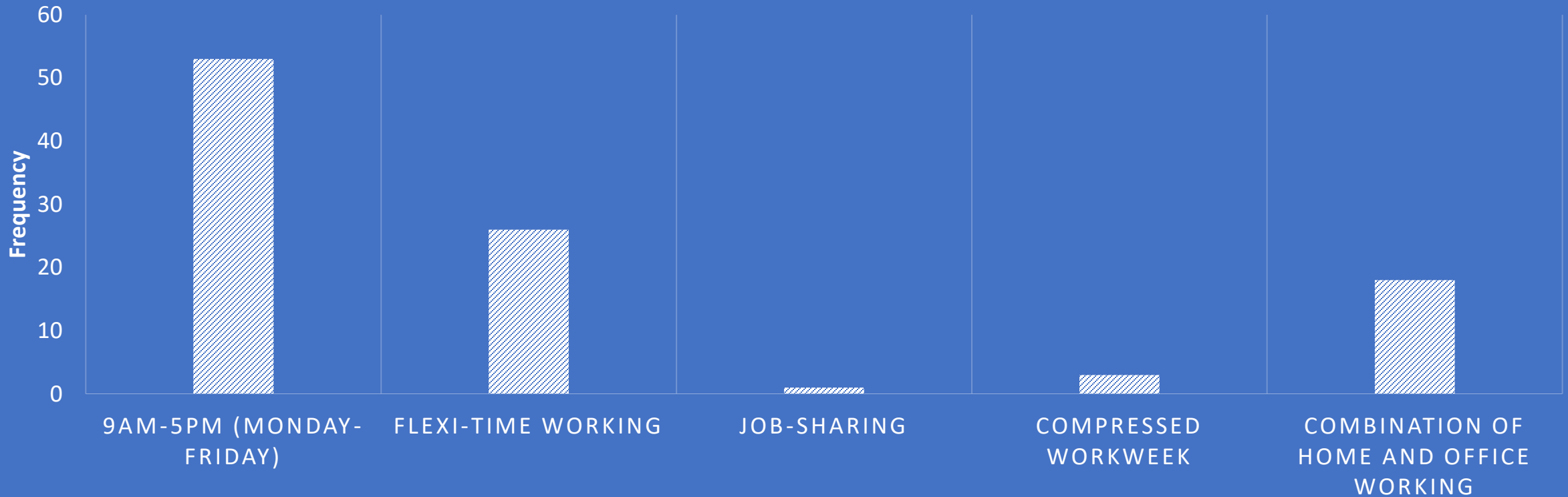
## What Council do you work for?



# Working Patterns

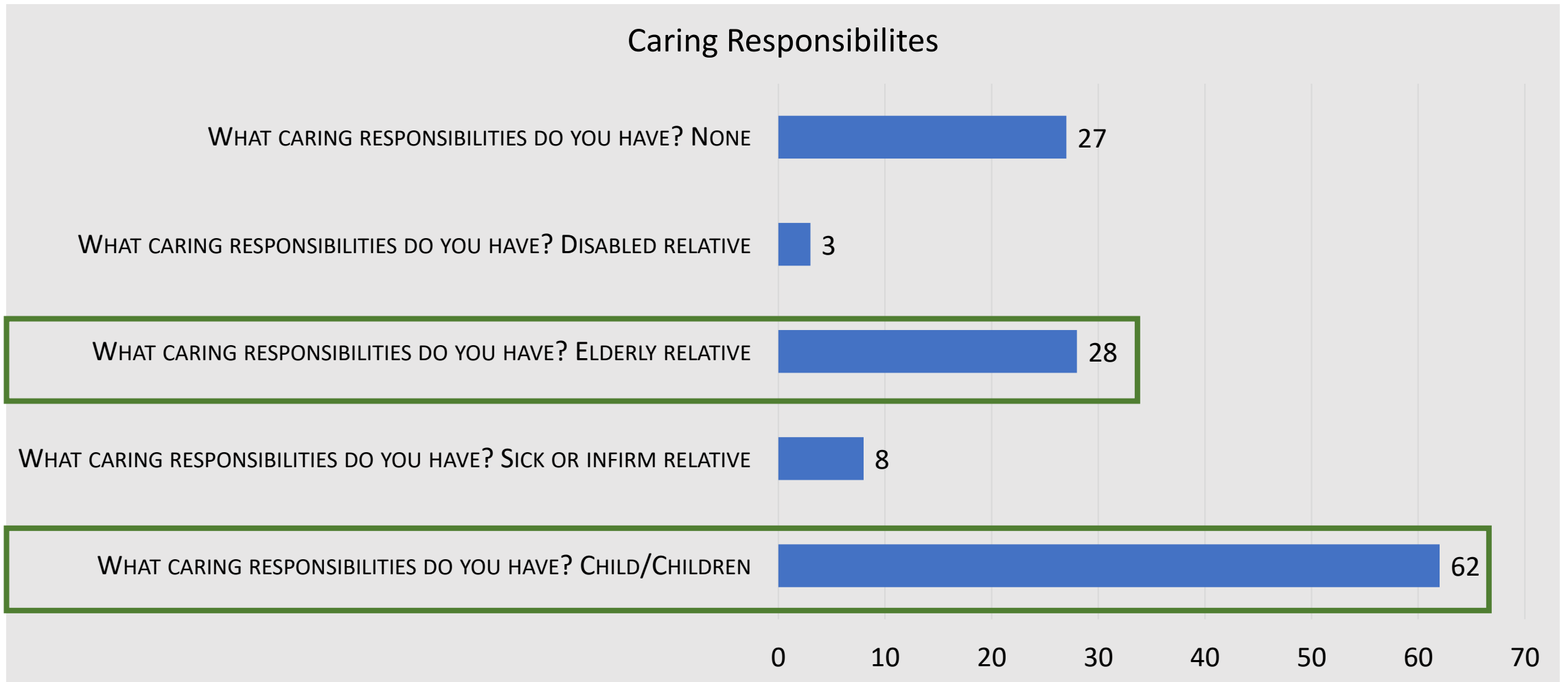


WHAT IS YOUR GENERAL WORKING PATTERN?





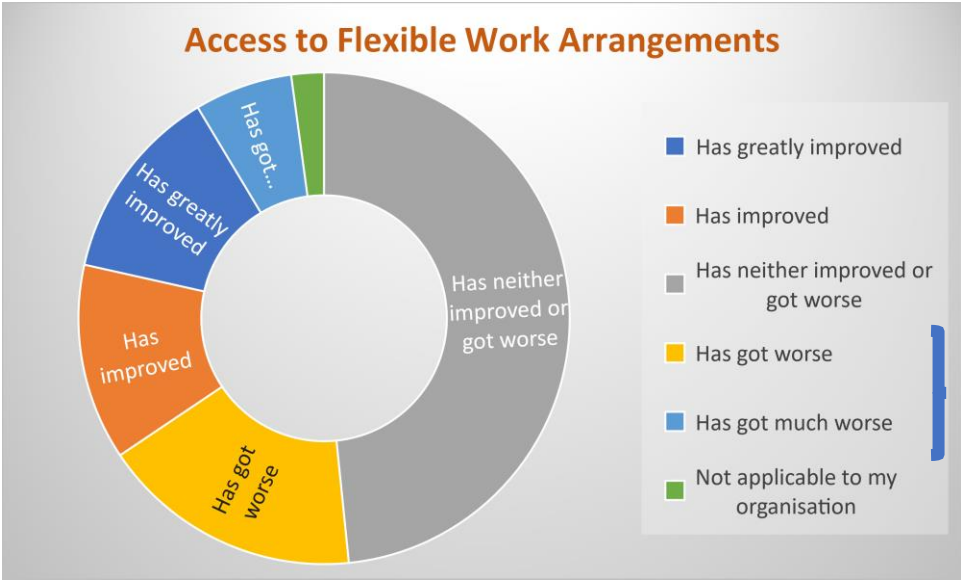
# Caring Responsibilities



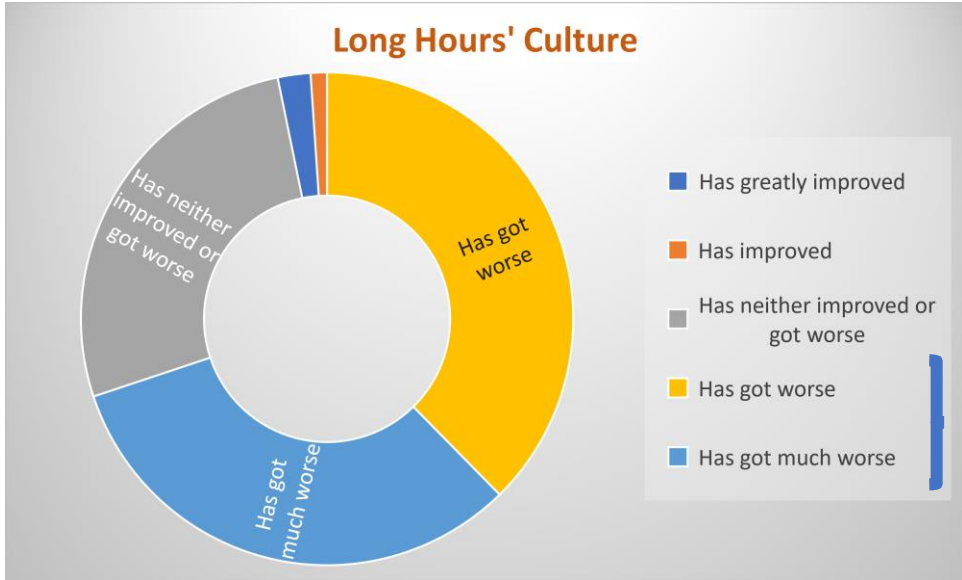


# Improvements since Review of Public Administration: last 5 years

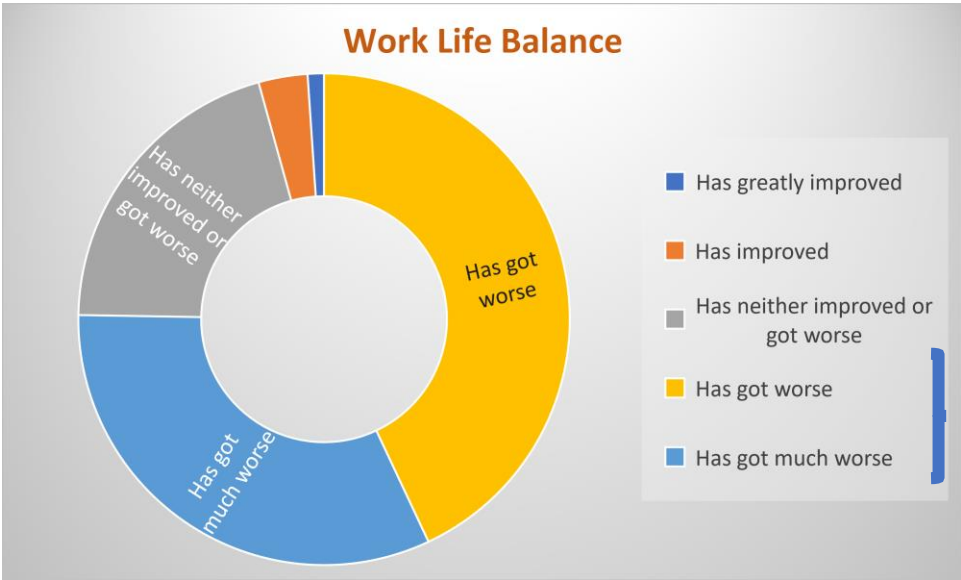
- Flexible Working
- Long Hours' Culture
- Work Life Balance
- Mentoring (internal, external)
- Talent Management
- Succession Planning
- Leadership Training & Development



24%



70%

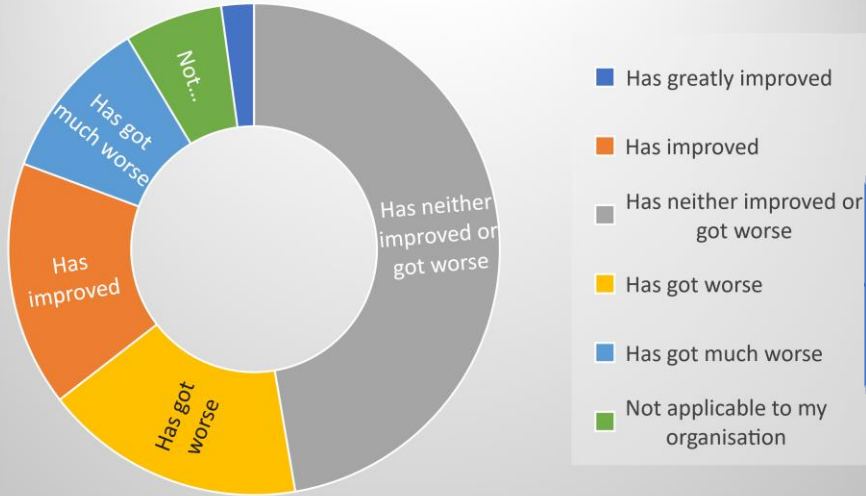


75%

**Flexible Working/  
Long Hours' Culture  
Work Life Balance**

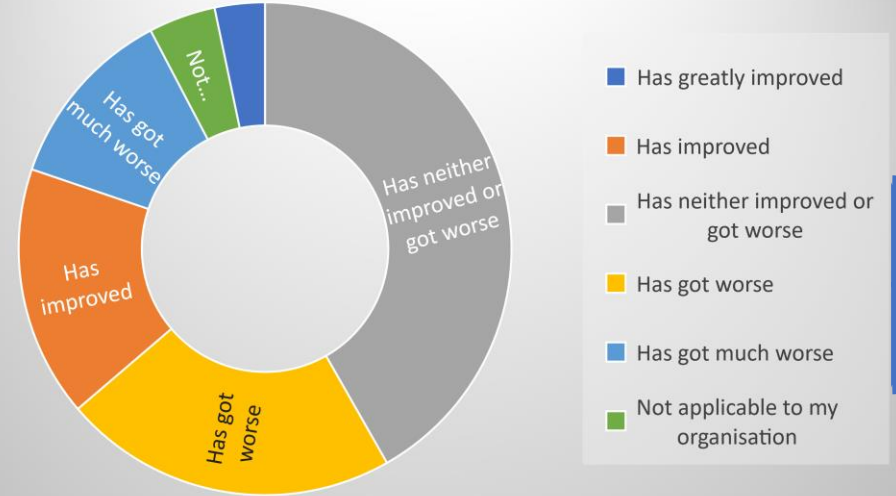
# Access to Mentoring

### Access to Internal Mentoring (Formal)



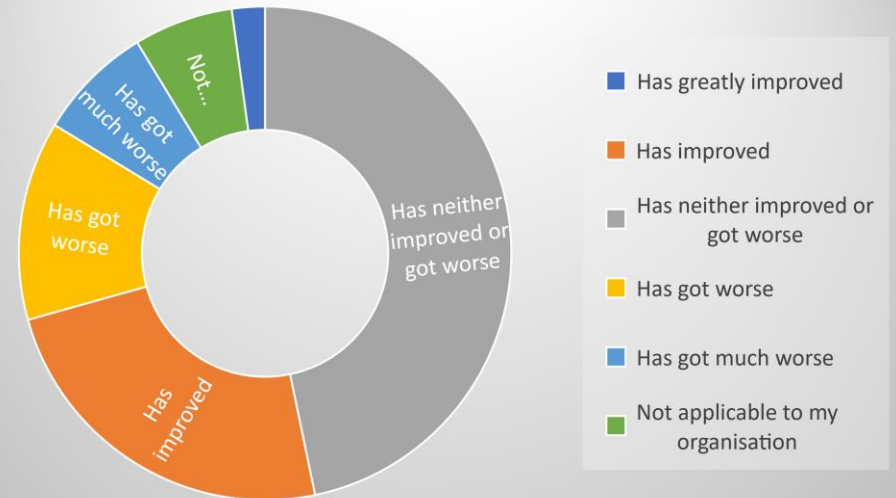
75%

### Access to Internal Mentoring (Informal)



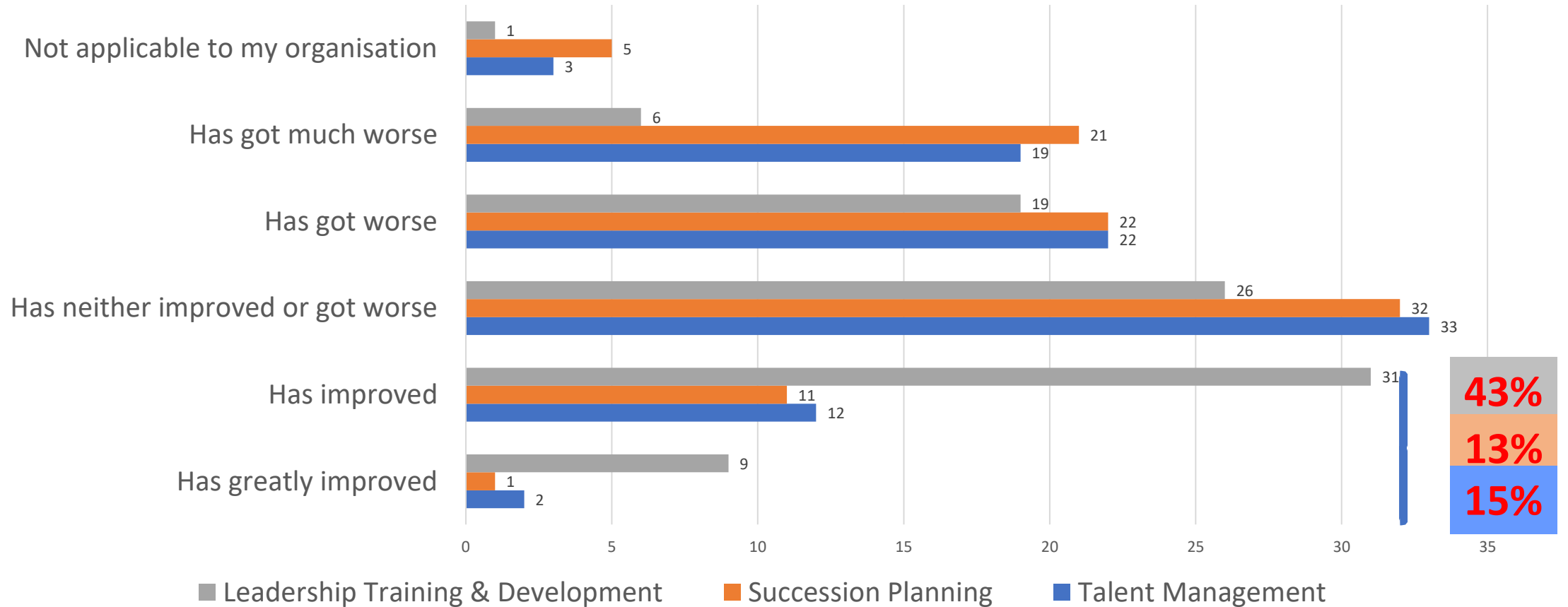
76%

### Access to External Mentoring



68%

# Improvements: Since Review of Public Administration

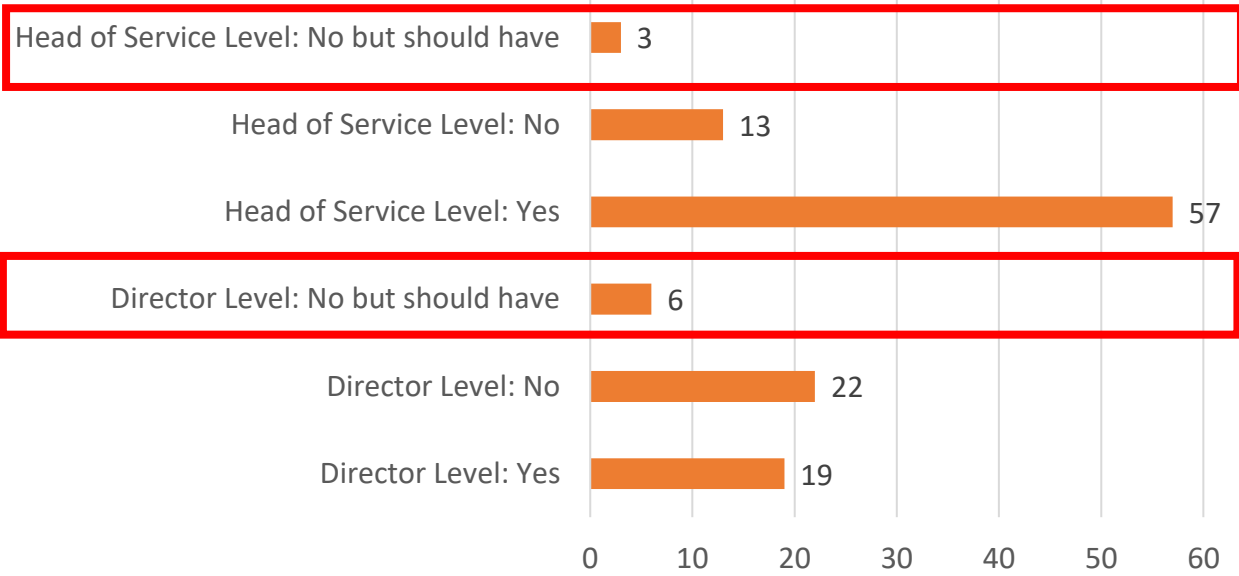




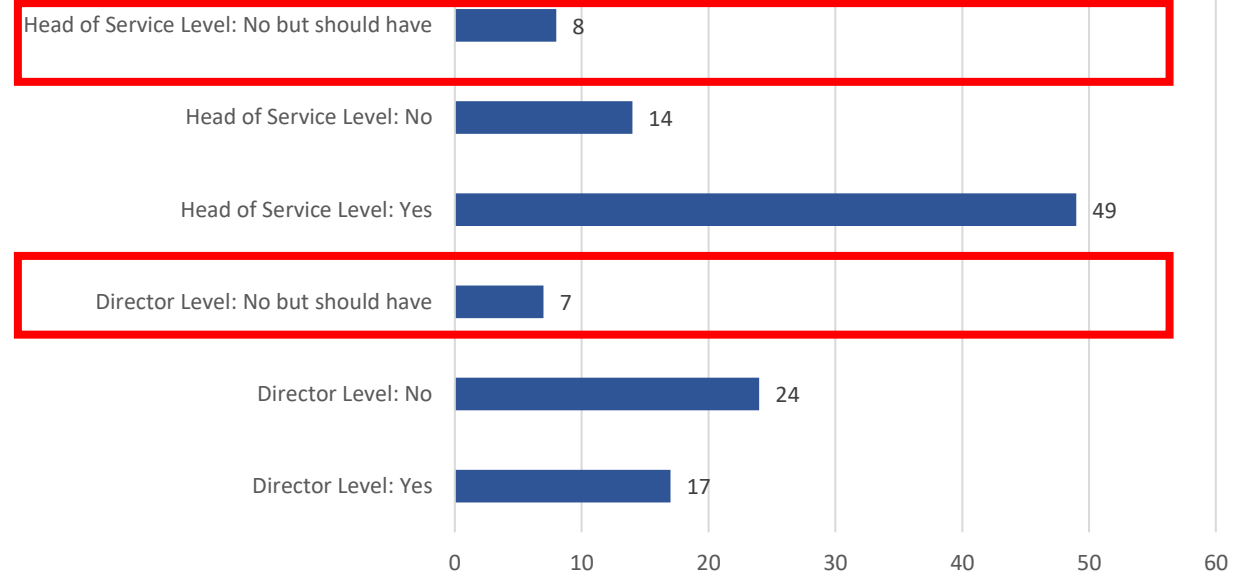
# Flexible Working Arrangements

- Availability at Director, Head of Service Levels
- Enhancing Flexible Working Arrangements

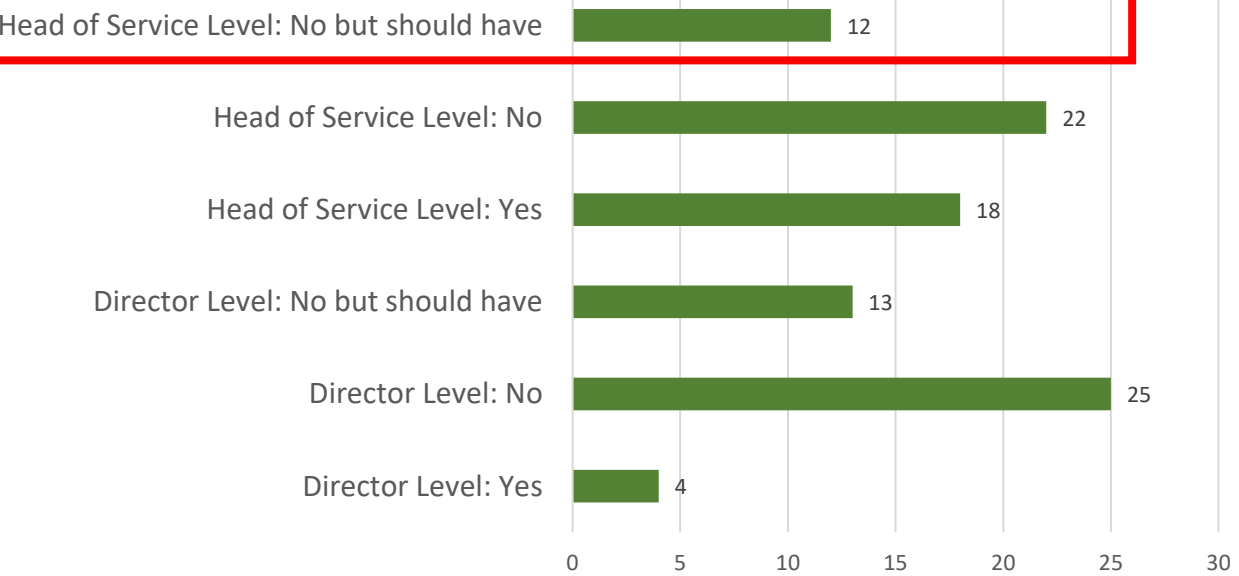
### Flexible Working: Flexi Time



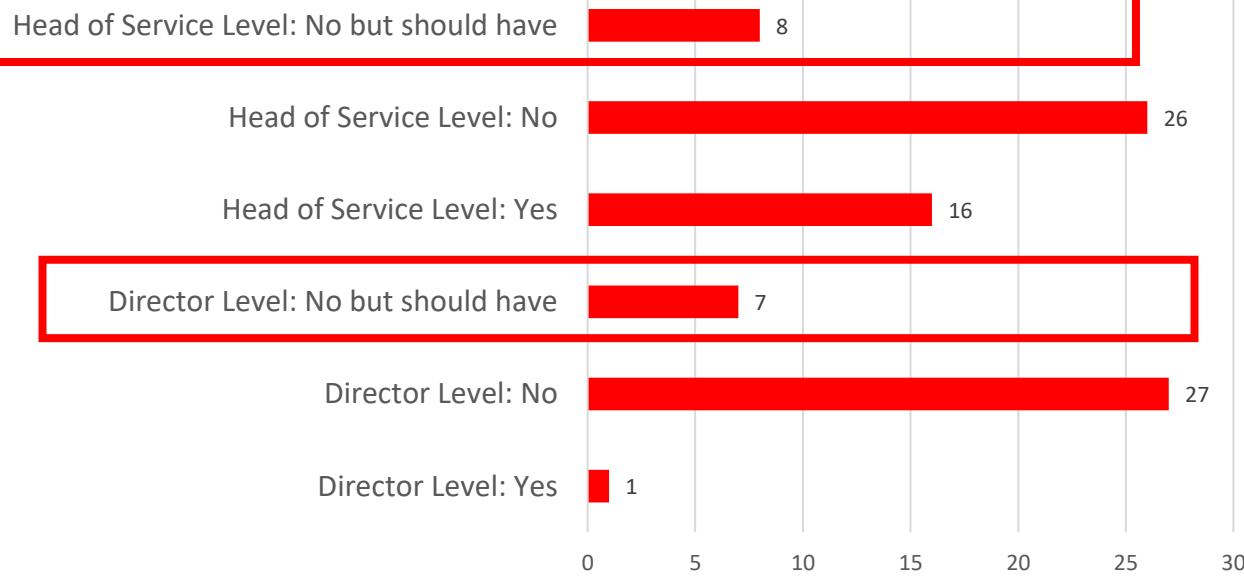
### Flexible Working: Time Off in Lieu (TOIL)



### Flexible Working: Compressed Working Week



### Flexible Working: Job Sharing



# Flexible Working Arrangements

There is a lack of uniformity in FWAs being made available across the Sector

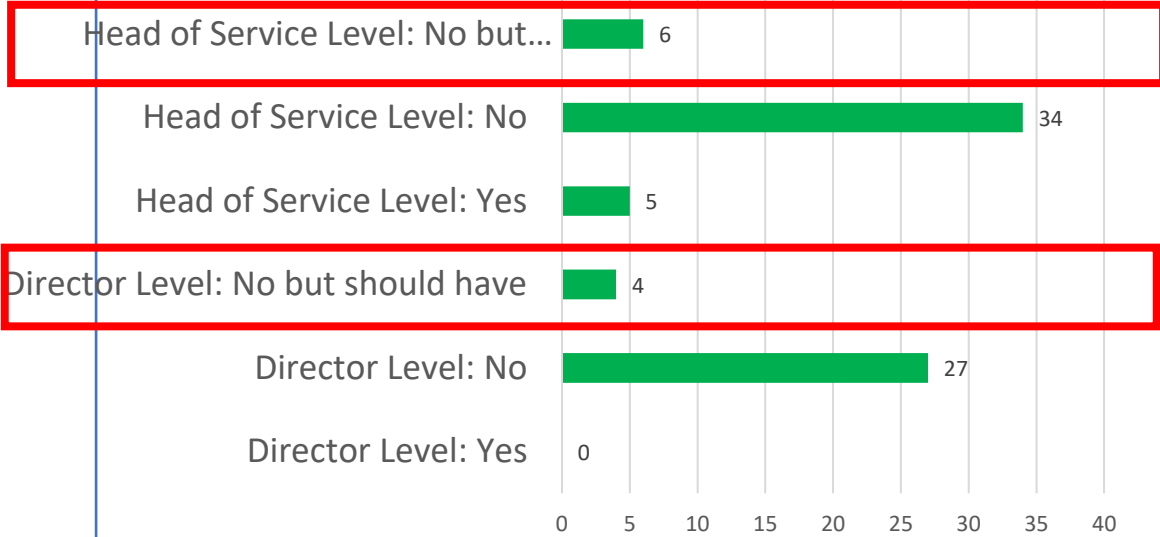
There is a lack of uniformity in FWAs being made available between HOS and Directors

There are low levels of availability of FWAs being made available to Directors

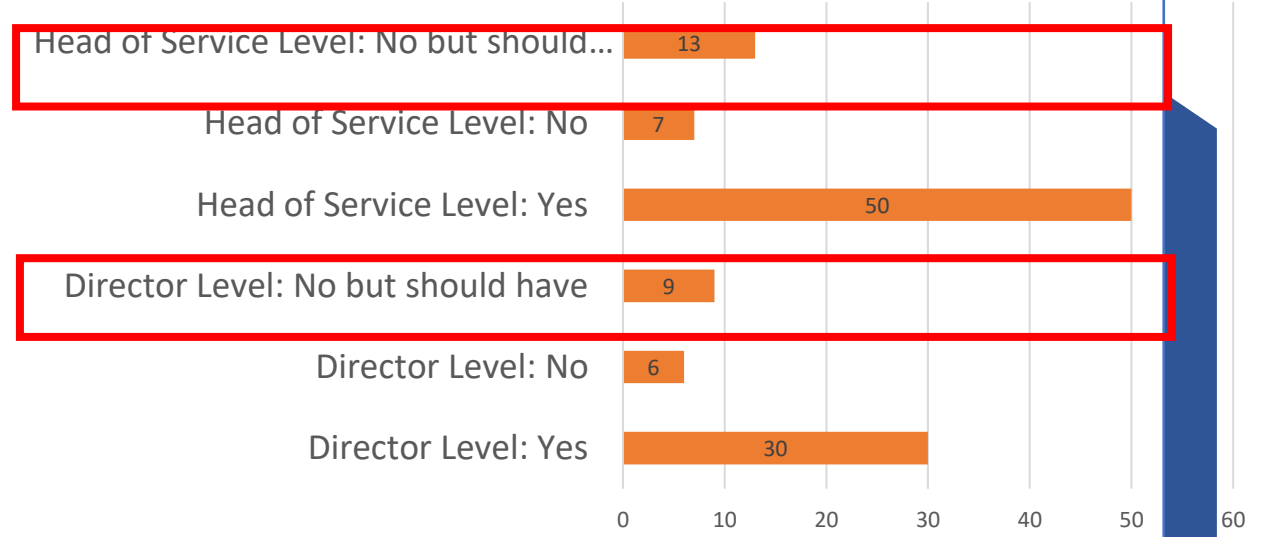
There is demand for FWAs being made available to HOS & Directors, more so by females, but also by males



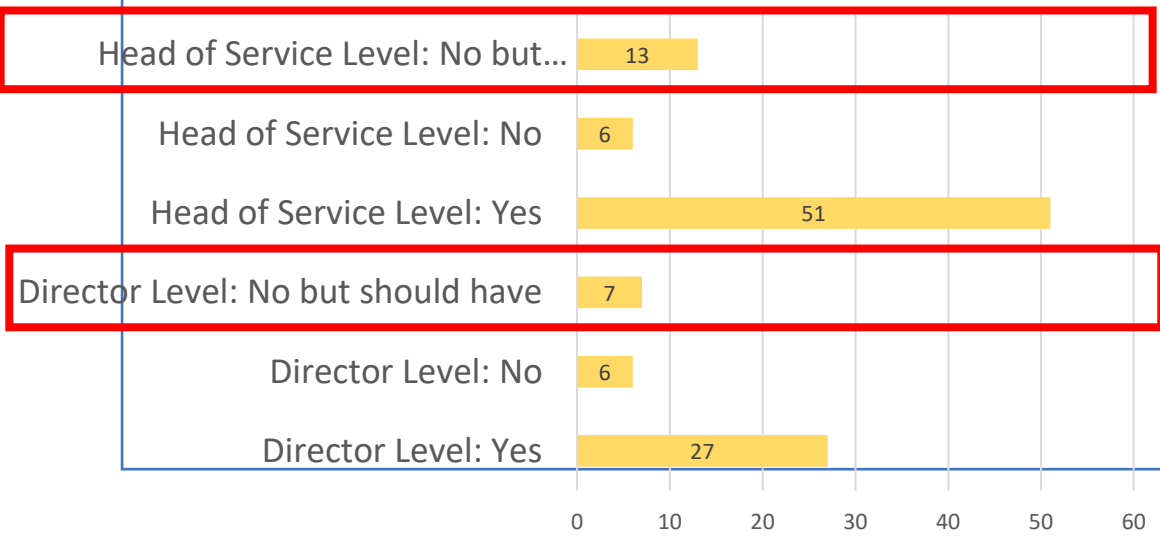
### Flexible Working: Term Time Working



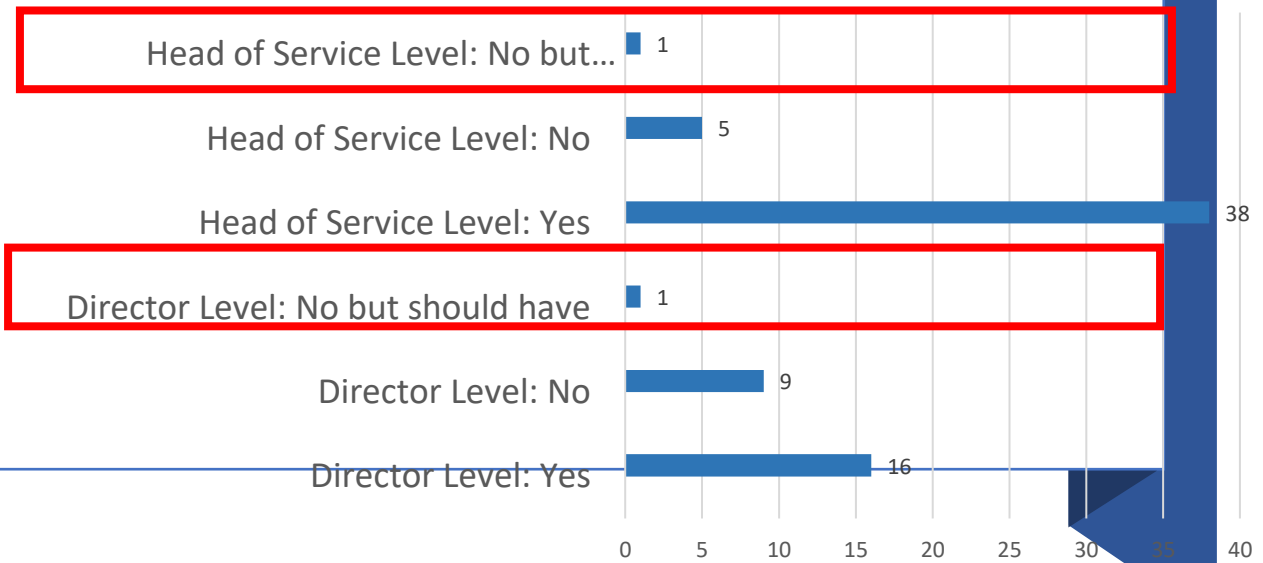
### Flexible Working: Homeworking



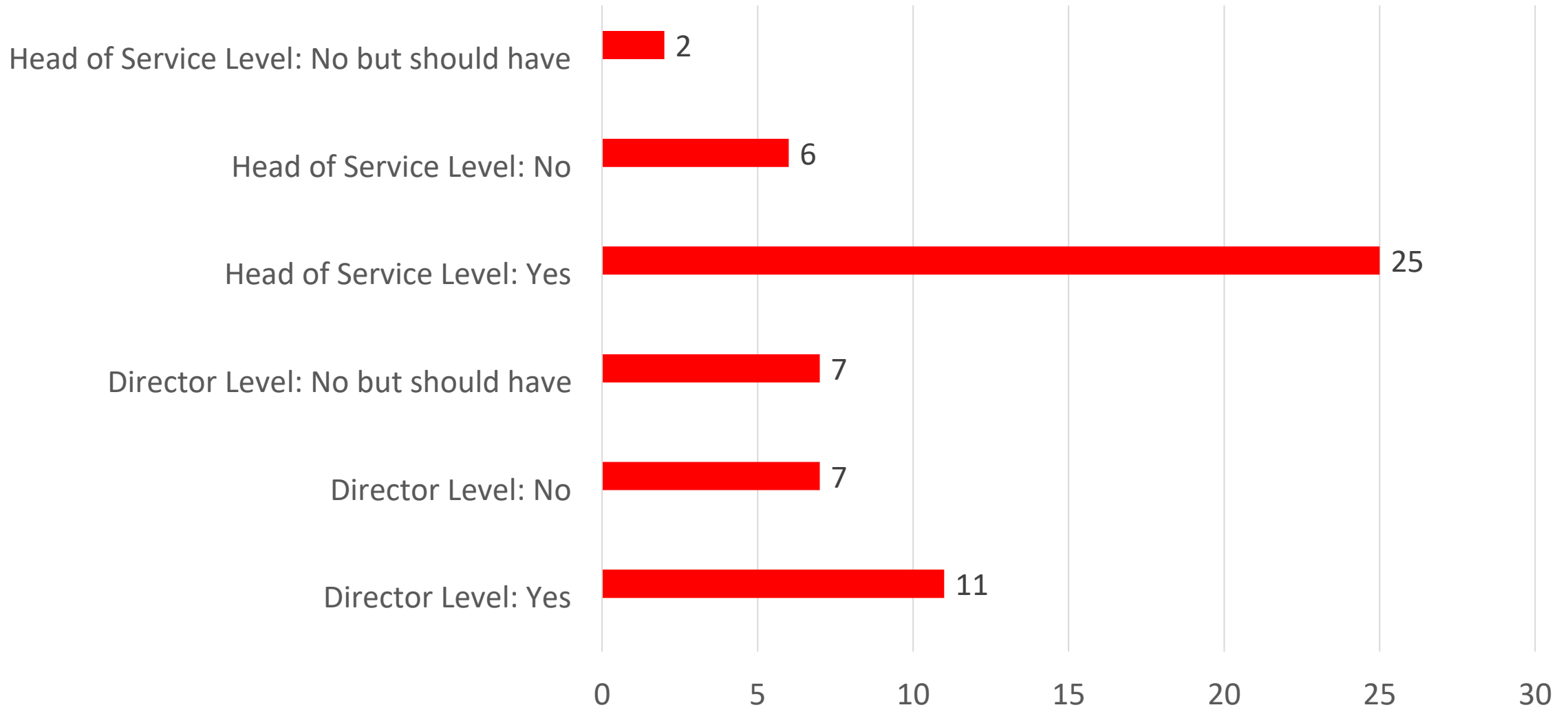
### Flexible Working: Agile Working



### Flexible Working: Career Break



# Flexible Working: Flexible Retirement



	Yes	Maybe	No, but should be	Don't know	Is already in place in my organisation
Formal policy regarding the provision of home working	47 (58%)	9 (11.1%)	4 (4.9%)	2 (2.5%)	19 (16.4%)
Reduction in negative perceptions around flexible working arrangements (e.g., lack of commitment)	40 (55.4%)	15 (18.1%)	6 (7.2%)	8 (9.6%)	8 (9.6%)
Active job redesign when someone avails of a flexible working pattern	37 (44.6%)	11 (13.3%)	9 (10.8%)	19 (22.9%)	7 (8.4%)
Formal policy regarding the provision of remote/hot desking	35 (42.7%)	20 (24.4%)	5 (4.3%)	7 (8.5%)	15 (18.3%)
Use of videoconferencing for meetings	23 (27.7%)	2 (2.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.2%)	57 (68.7%)

## Enhancing Flexible Work Arrangements

# Flexible Work Arrangements: COVID Comments

- “The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that for the first time there has been home working and agile working. However, this is ***not yet formally adopted in policy*** and is currently only a response mechanism to the emergency situation. There is an opportunity to address this going forward”.
- “Home working has ***only come in due to Covid measures***. These arrangements did not exist before Covid”.
- “Home working only a "yes" under covid-19. ***Prior to this period home working was not available***”.
- “Home working arrangements have only applied since Covid although a ***new policy is under development***”.
- “Home working only available now due to Covid. ***Previously lack of trust*** regarding home working”.
- “In terms of home working it has ***not been acceptable for HOS***, except for a short period at the start of the covid pandemic for some staff, and then not again until these current restrictions - January 2021”.



# Long Hours' Culture

- Factors Impacting Long Hours' Culture
- Emails
- Council Meetings
- Responsibility for Long Hours' Culture

## Long Hours' Culture within your Organisation: General Issues

Strongly Agree/Agree

Neither Agree or disagree

Disagree/ Strongly Disagree

Senior management within my organisation have a responsibility to have a **discussion with their management team about the long hours' culture**

85.3%

11.0%

3.7%

There is a **long hours' culture** within my organisation

81.9%

14.5%

3.6%

Working **long hours is part of the job** at my level

73.2%

12.2%

14.6%

The long hours' culture **is influenced by the tone from the top** (i.e. senior management) within my organisation

69.5%

20.7%

9.8%

The **impact of social media** has contributed to a long hours' culture within my organisation

53.6%

24.4%

22%

## Factors Impacting Long Hours' Culture within your Organisation: Emails

I **regularly receive emails** after 7pm, at weekends and when I am on holiday

Strongly Agree/Agree

Neither Agree or disagree

Disagree/Strongly Disagree

84.4%

6.0%

9.6%

All members of my organisation (including councillors) **need to be aware of what is urgent** and what can wait until normal working hours

78.7%

15.0%

6.3%

The **volume of emails** in my organisation has contributed to a long hours' culture

75.9%

18.1%

6.0%

If I decide not to reply to an email, I **should not be sent a text asking if I have received it**

67.8%

19.5%

3.7%

I **regularly send emails** after 7pm, at weekends and when I am on holiday

63.0%

7.4%

29.6%

My organisation **needs to provide training** on how to manage the volume of emails in my organisation

60.5%

29.6%

9.9%

My organisation **needs to urgently develop and implement an email policy** to help manage the long hours' culture

56.8%

32.1%

11.1%

**Senior management are poor role models** in terms of sending emails after 7pm, at weekends and when staff are on holiday

51.9%

27.1%

21.0%

I **do not respond to emails outside of working hours unless it is urgent**

38.3%

6.2%

55.5%

## Factors Impacting Long Hours' Culture within your Organisation: Council Meetings

There should be a **cut off time for council meetings** to conclude (e.g. no later than 11pm) in the evening in my organisation

My **Council should have a conversation about what is acceptable timings for council meetings**

Meetings should be **better structured** so that you only have to attend for the discussion that is relevant to you

The **amount of travelling** I have to do as a result of the Council having one headquarters has significantly increased my working hours, thereby contributing to my poorer work life balance

Strongly Agree/Agree

Neither Agree or disagree

Disagree/Strongly Disagree

82.9%

11.0%

6.1%

72.8%

19.8%

7.4%

62.2%

26.8%

11.0%

17.1%

31.7%

51.2%

## Responsibility for Long Hours' Culture

At my level, it is **my personal responsibility to manage my work life balance**

**I am in control of my own work life balance**

**If you are prepared to delegate, then you should not have to work long hours**

Strongly Agree/Agree

Neither Agree or disagree

Disagree/Strongly Disagree

81.5%

7.4%

11.1%

46.9%

17.3%

35.8%

27.5%

20.0%

52.5%



# Free Form Comments: Long Hours' Culture

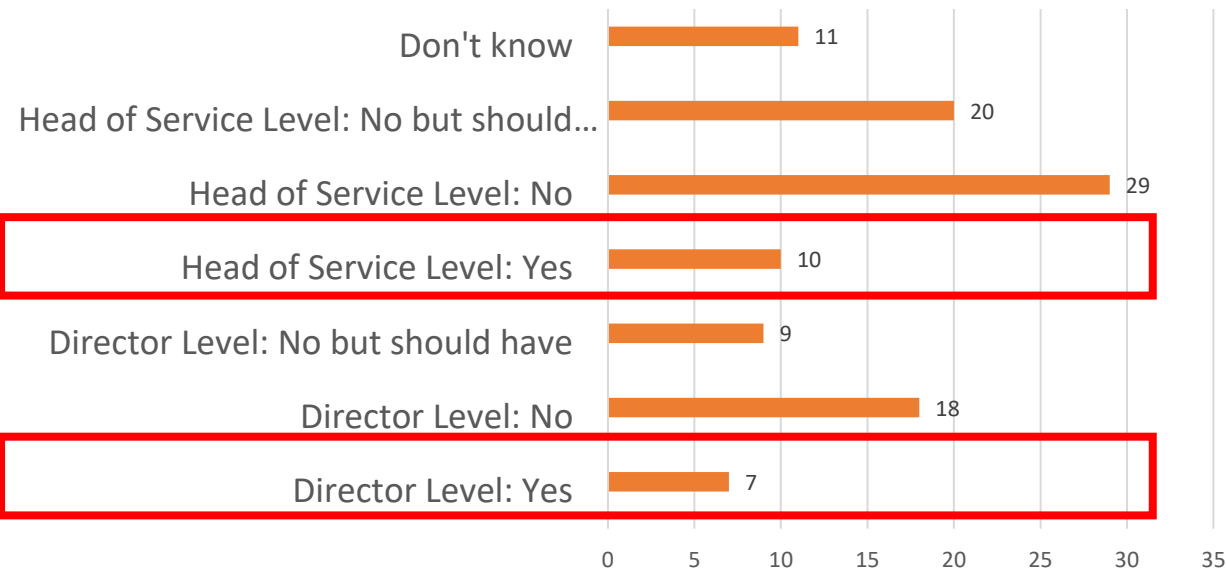
- No longer eligible for flexi working or TOIL. Most weeks are 45+ hours worked
- Under my new contract I lost access to the flexible working system and was told the requirement was to work as many hours as required to undertake the duties of the post. As a working mother, flexible hours was of great benefit.
- Workloads increased and staff roles overloaded
- Due to the enlarged organisational structure, the workload and demands have increased considerably
- Evening meetings at least once (up to three times) per week are standard.
- There is an expectation that staff work long hours and are available 24/7. The practice of long hours and differing approaches to terms and conditions for staff would also need to be looked at across the 11 Councils.
- Culture of your time not being valuable as your pay reflects your position, so have to work 12 additional hours in evenings per month before getting TOIL for 13th hour
- All talk and tick boxing re people management, training, support and health and well-being of staff. Increasing demands placed on senior officers with increasingly strained resources.
- The work/life balance is not sustainable in the long run.



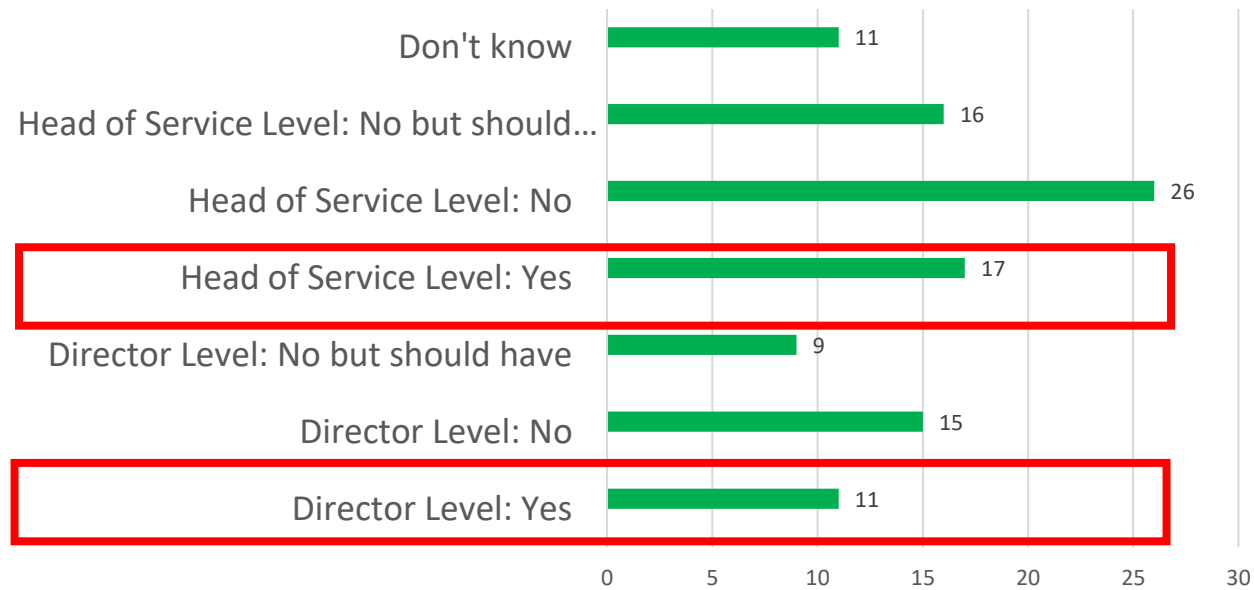
# Mentoring

- Formal & Informal
- Internal & External
- Views on Mentoring

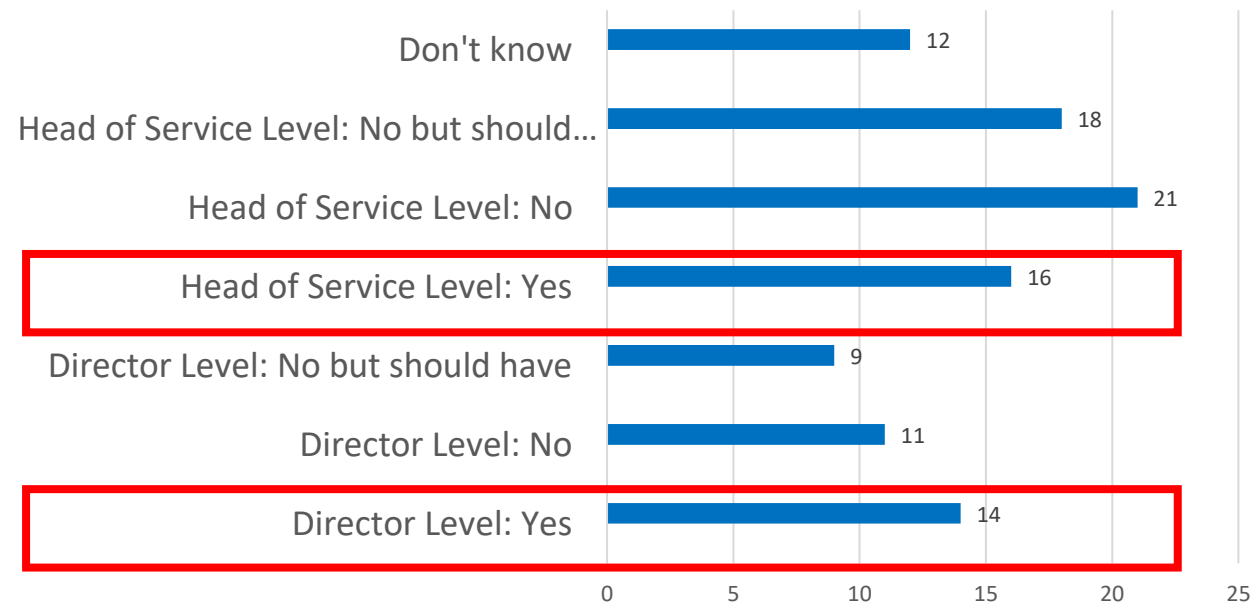
### Formal Internal Mentoring



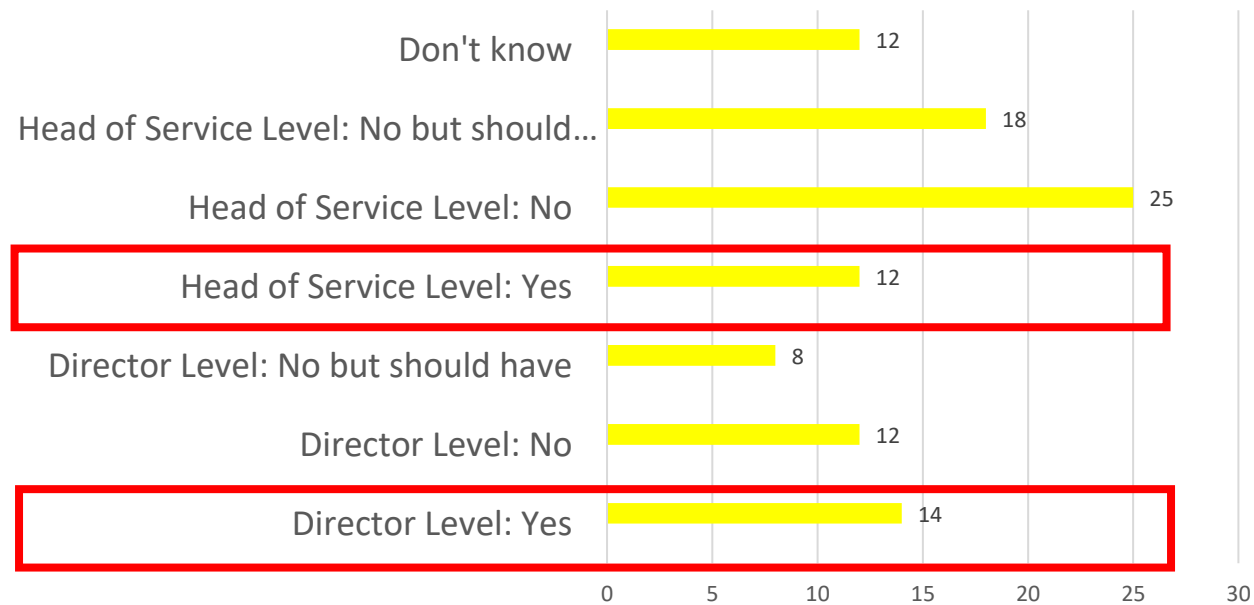
### Informal Internal Mentoring



### Formal External Mentoring



### Informal External Mentoring



Relatively low levels of mentoring (internal formal, more external)

High level of demand for all types of mentoring

## Free Form Comments: Mentoring

- There has never been access to formal and informal mentoring within the Council. External mentoring and leadership training and development have been made available through ILM programmes. Due to work pressures of the job it is difficult to find time to implement any changes to current practices.
- Almost none of the above exists within this organisation. Succession planning isn't needed as no one goes anywhere. There is no mentoring ... Council will certainly provide ... training in certain areas of corporate responsibility, but any opportunity to spread your wings is non-existent.

# Talent Management & Succession Planning



## Talent Management and Succession Planning

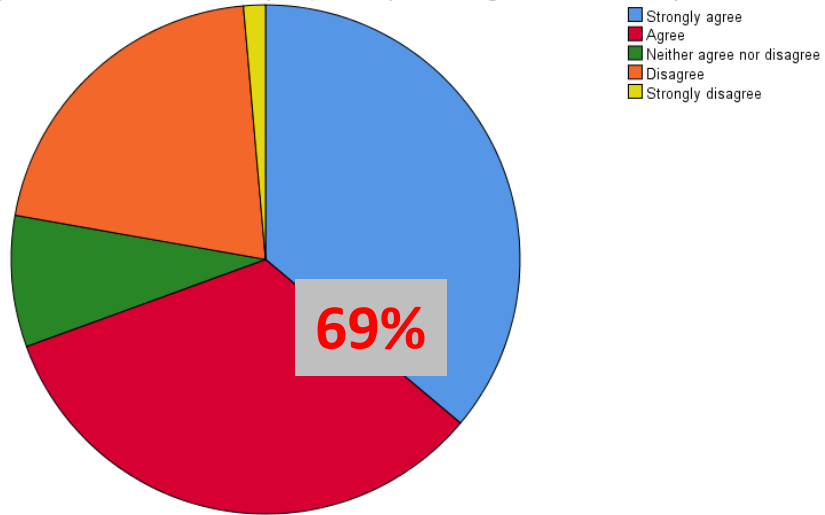
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable in my Organisation
Talent management is an <u>important aspect</u> in supporting an individual's progression to senior levels	93.4%	2.6%	4.0%	N/A
There are <u>sufficient talent management processes</u> within my organisation	9.2%	21.1%	67.1%	2.6%
Talent management is <u>undertaken effectively</u> within my organisation	5.2%	24.6%	66.3%	3.9%
Talent management <u>needs to be equality proofed</u>	55.2%	31.6%	11.9%	1.3%
Succession planning is <u>effectively undertaken</u> in my organisation	5.3%	21.1%	72.3%	1.3%



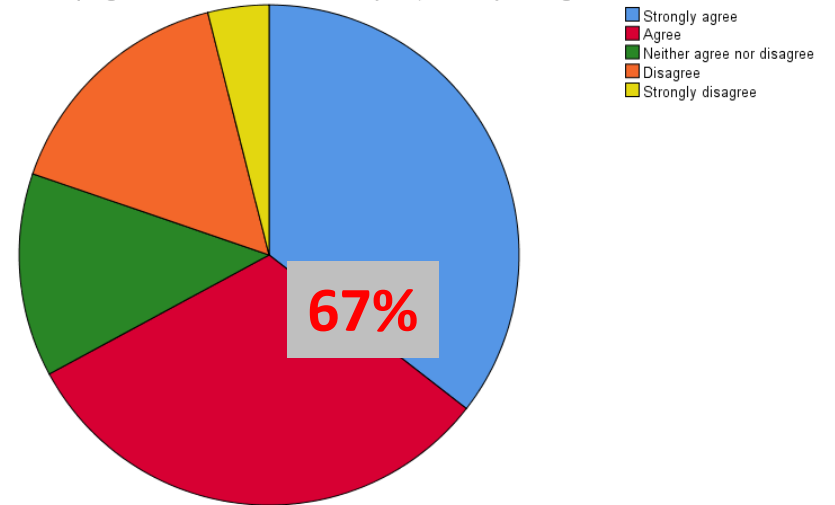
# Progression to More Senior Level

- Barriers

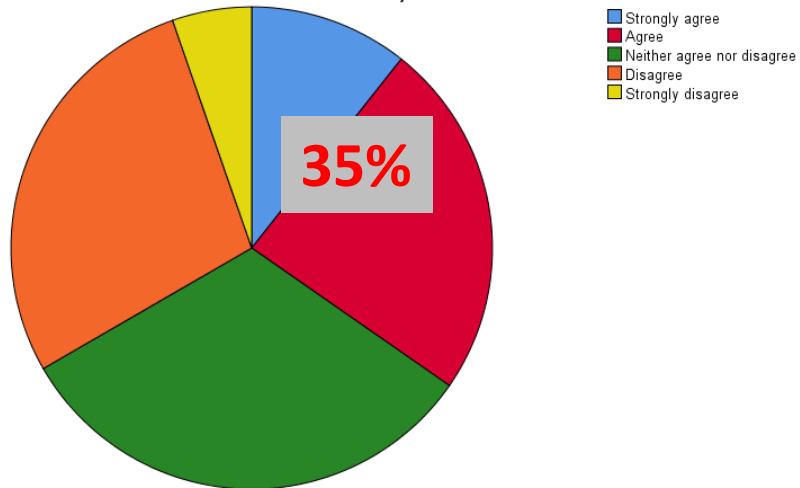
Section G: Progression to a More Senior Level Which of the following are potential barriers to your progression to a more senior level (CEO, Director)? - The long hours I would be expected to work



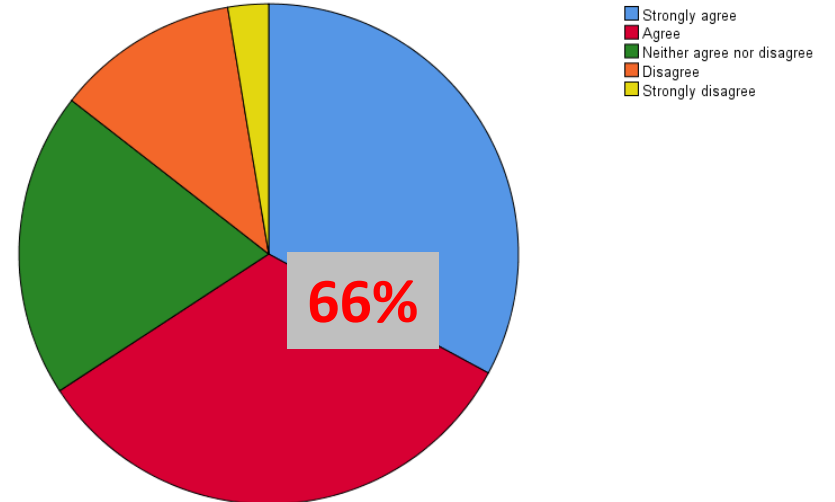
Section G: Progression to a More Senior Level Which of the following are potential barriers to your progression to a more senior level (CEO, Director)? - Long hours culture



Section G: Progression to a More Senior Level Which of the following are potential barriers to your progression to a more senior level (CEO, Director)? - Caring responsibilities for dependents (children or elderly relatives)

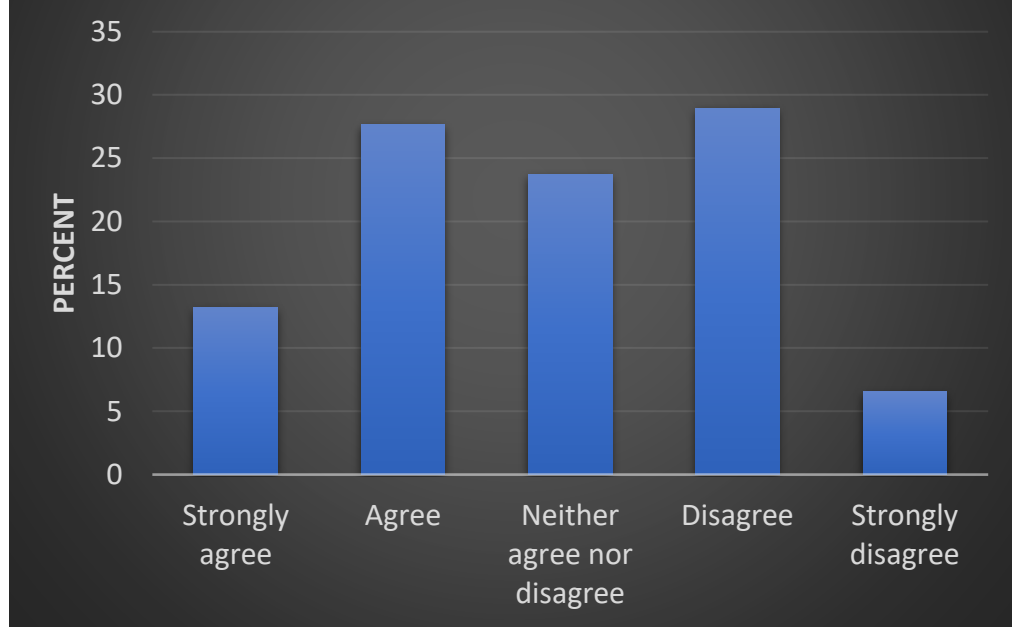


Section G: Progression to a More Senior Level Which of the following are potential barriers to your progression to a more senior level (CEO, Director)? - Poor work life balance



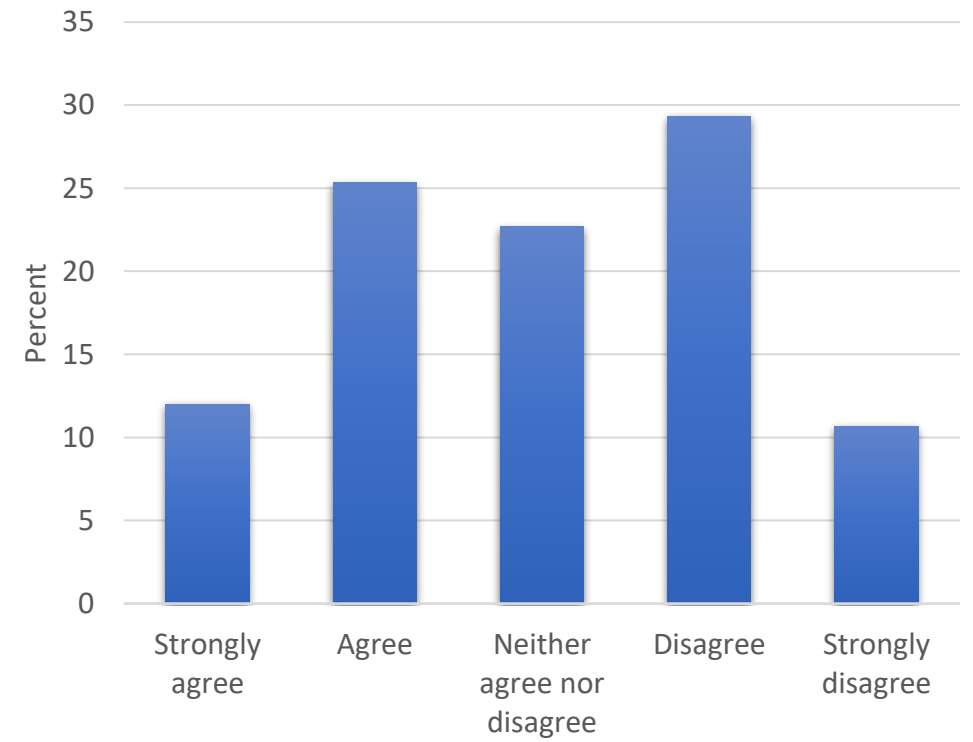


### The increase in pay is insufficient for the increase in workload



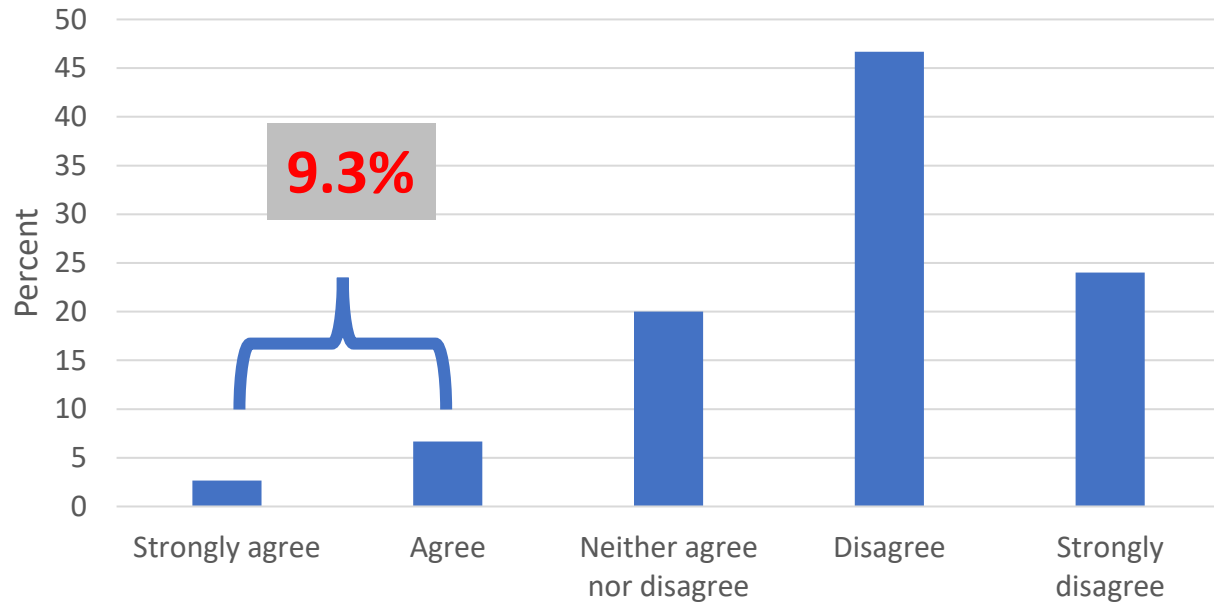
**41%**

### Exposure to the media

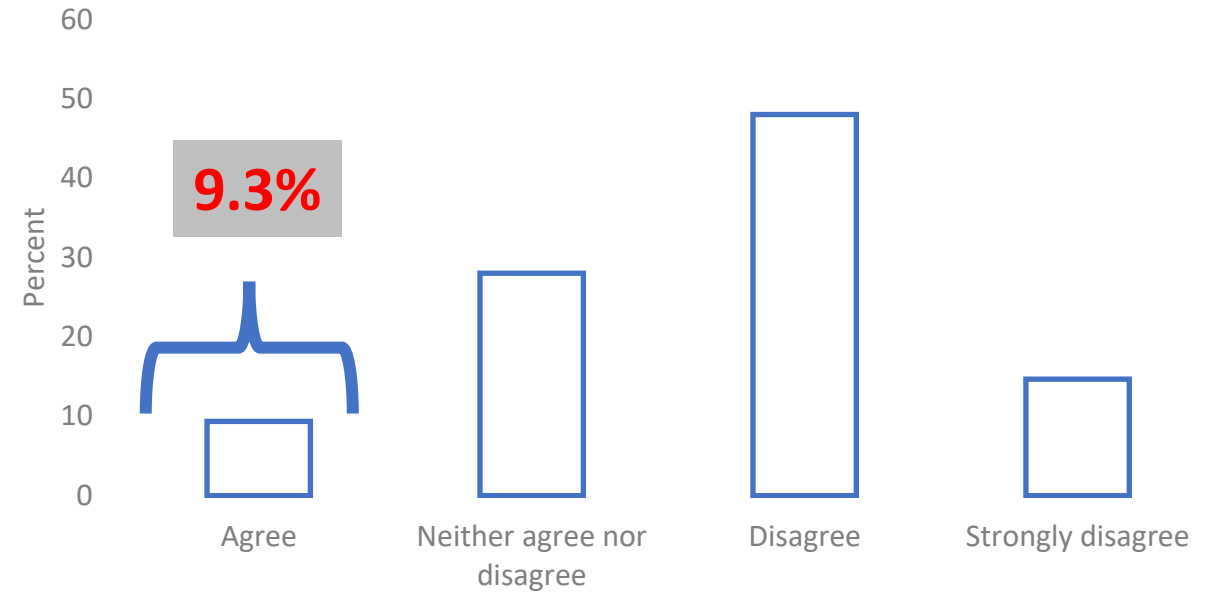


**37%**

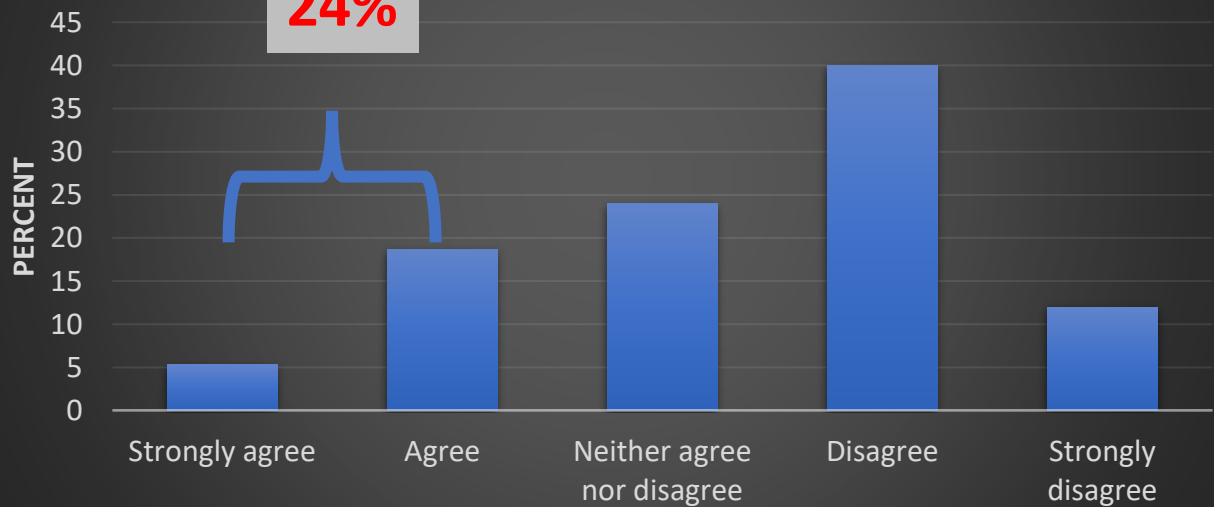
### Feeling marginalised because of my gender



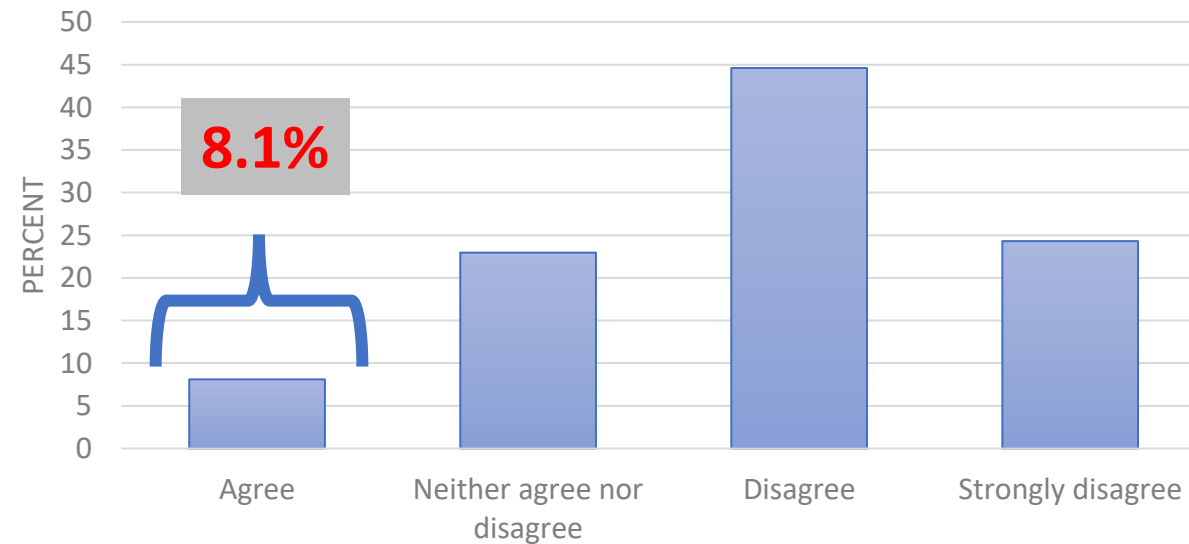
### I do not believe I have the right skills



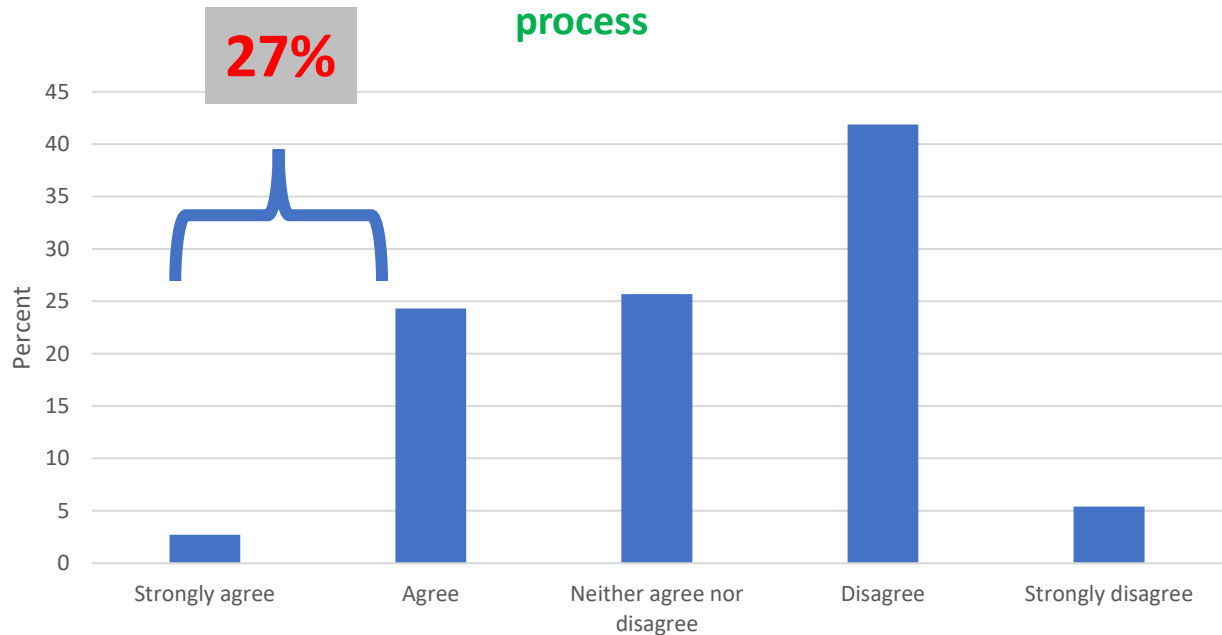
### Exclusion from informal networks of communication



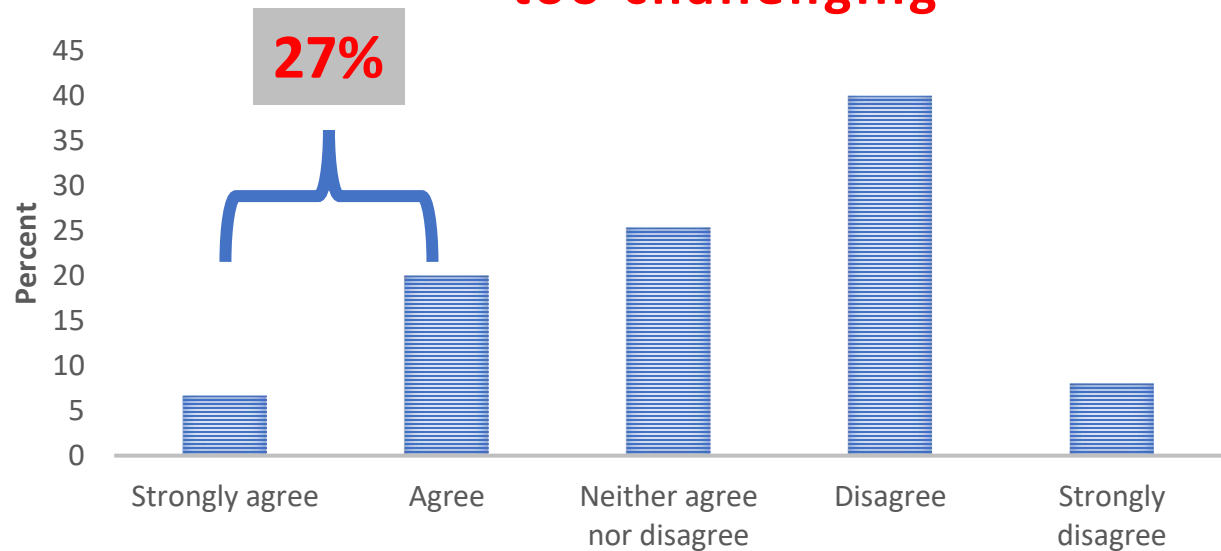
### Existing imbalance in gender composition at executive/senior managerial levels



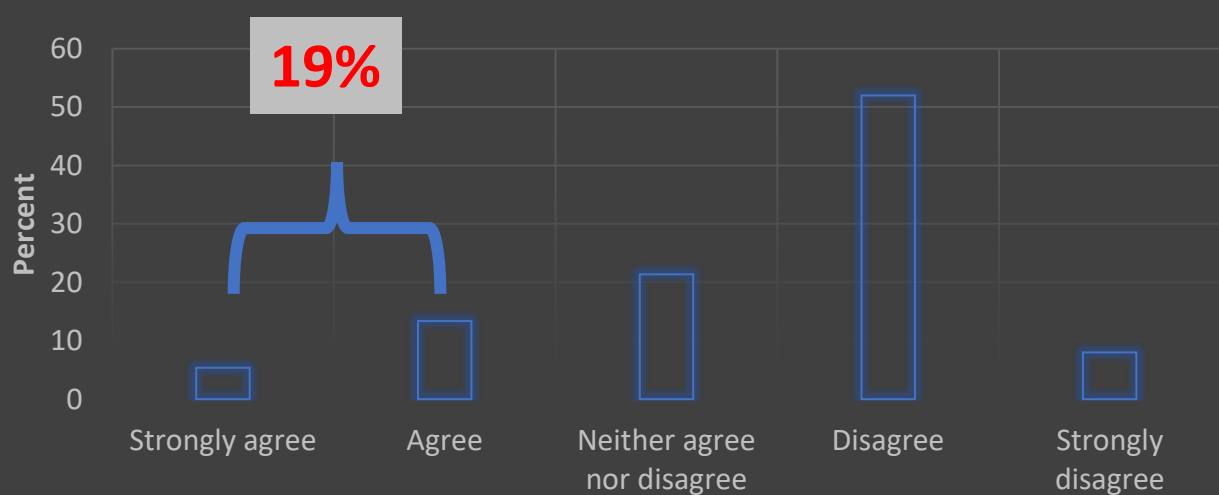
### I do not want to put myself through the application process



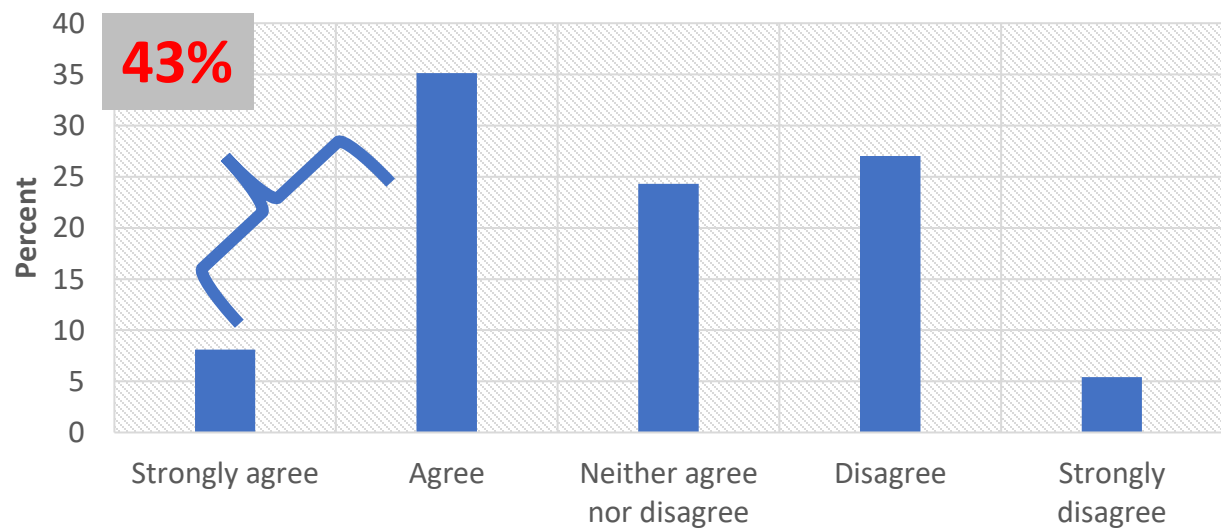
### The external recruitment process is too challenging



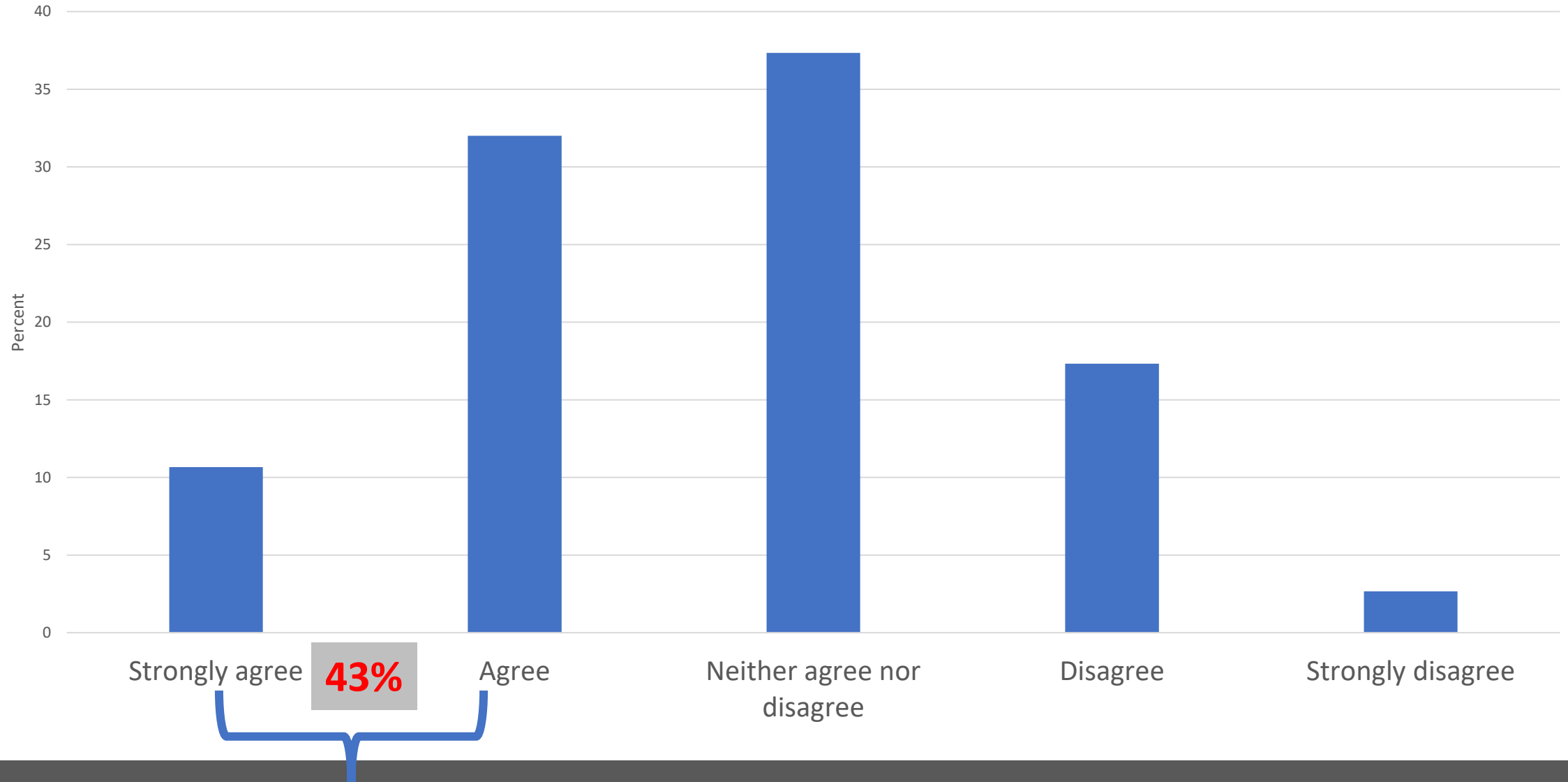
### I would no longer be able to avail of certain flexible work arrangements at a more senior level



### As there are now fewer councils, my options are limited

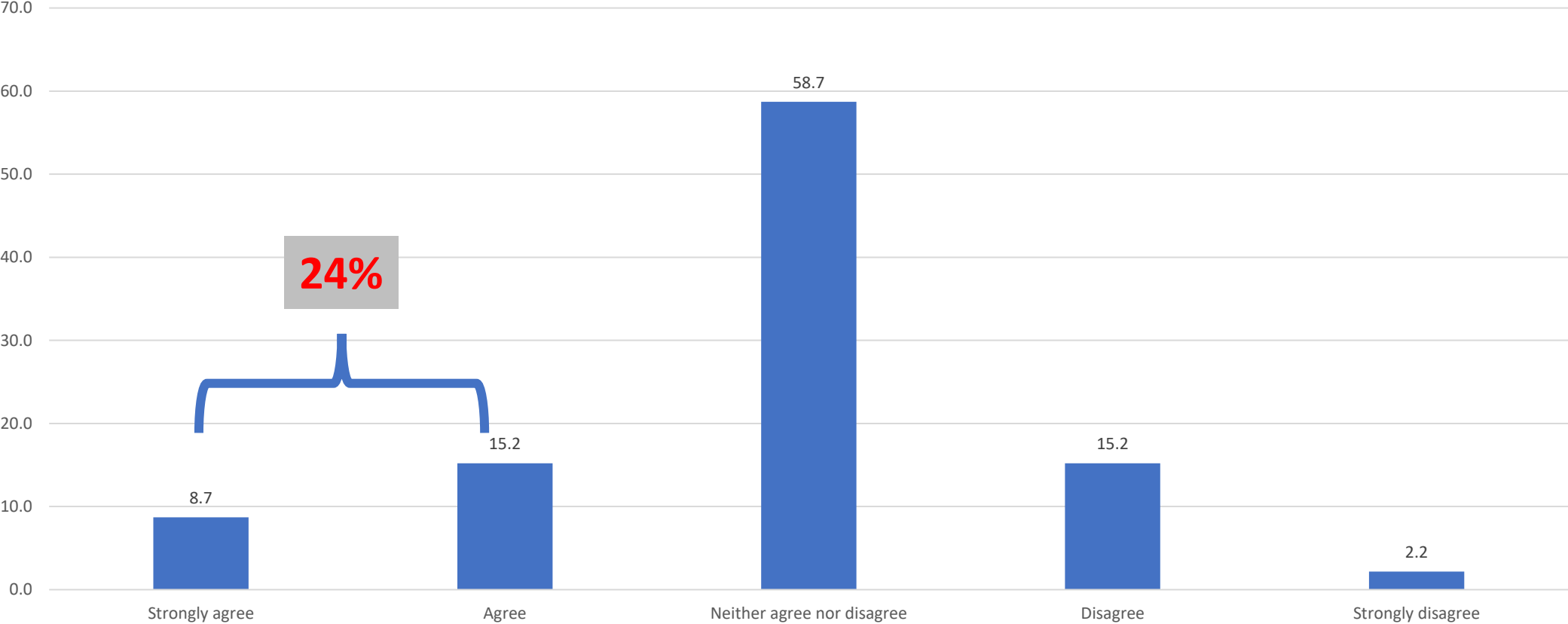


## I am quite happy in my current position (n=75)



# I intend to go for promotion

(n=46 respondents)



24%

76%

# Free Form Comments: Career Progression

- There is **virtually no open and transparent career progression** within local government with senior management (Director & Assistant Director), basically pulling up the ladder once they have been appointed.
- There is **no effective career progression** within my Council. **Local government reform has lessened the talent pool and demoralised employees**. With financial difficulties already being faced and redundancies on the horizon, employees are more concerned with keeping their jobs than progressing to senior levels.
- **Five years on we are still working between legacy and new Council arrangements**, there is a **lack of cohesion** and still no performance management system for staff at any level. There is **no succession planning, just random attempts** to reduce the payroll by not backfilling posts without a business assessment as to whether the post is required.
- **RPA saw the development of new structures in councils** and now these structures appear to be **unsustainable** from a financial perspective and as a result protracted restructuring and uncertainty **dampens enthusiasm for progression within the sector**.
- In the absence of appraisal systems which result in promotion of the best individuals, **progression is a bit random**. **Over-reliance on a single interview selection process** from HOS level down is unlikely to result in consistently selecting the best person "on the job".
- In the 5 years **since RPA there have been no opportunities for progression to a more senior level** in my sector of work in my Council or any other Council in NI.
- Senior posts in Local Government are **very stressful which puts off a lot of people**

# Sector Wide Policies and Practices



<b>Would it be preferable for all Councils to have similar policies &amp; practices?</b>	<b>Strongly Agree/Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
Succession Planning	77.3%	10.7%	12.0%
Home working at senior levels (Director & Head of Service)	76%	13%	10.7%
Talent Management	75.7%	13.5%	10.8%
Agile working (i.e. working at a location that is not your normal workplace – e.g. hot desking) at senior levels (Director & Head of Service)	72%	14.7%	13.3%
TOIL (Time off in lieu) at senior levels (i.e. Director & Head of Service)	69.7%	17.1%	13.2%
Flexi-time at senior levels (i.e. Director and Head of Service)	67.6%	20.3%	12.2%
Mentoring	66.7%	20.0%	13.3%



# Free Form Comments: Legacy Issues

- Post voluntary severance, most service areas including my own are **trying to do more but with less resources**, especially at middle management level.
- My Council has **not resolved the most basic of matters** (Terms and Conditions) and almost five years later while **one legacy Council's employees work 36 hours/w the other is still working 37 hours/w**. HR and Senior Management view employees as resources you buy in and **HR policies reflect a negative tone** which regress to the worst T&Cs for new employees.
- **Five years on we are still working between legacy and new Council arrangements**, there is a **lack of cohesion** and still no performance management system for staff at any level. There is **no succession planning, just random attempts** to reduce the payroll by not backfilling posts without a business assessment as to whether the post is required.



# Key Findings

# Key Findings (1)

- **Working patterns:** limited numbers availing of flexible working (some flexi-time working, combination of home and office working)
- **Caring responsibilities:** large numbers have caring responsibilities
- **Improvements since Review of Public Administration**
  - **Access to Flexible Work Arrangements:** mainly static picture
  - **Long Hours' Culture & Work Life Balance:** has got worse/much worse
  - **Mentoring:** mainly static picture (neither improved/got worse, few improvements)
  - **Leadership Training & Development:** 43% indicate it has improved/greatly improved
  - **Succession Planning:** few (13%) indicating it has improved
  - **Talent Management:** few (15%) indicating it has improved

# Key Findings (2)

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:**

- Different types of flexible working are not available in all Councils
- There is demand for greater availability, both from Directors and Heads of Service for the following in particular:
  - Compressed working week
  - Home working
  - Agile working (hot desking)
  - TOIL
  - Job sharing
- There is greater demand from females (both Directors and Heads of Service) for FWAs which are not currently available

- **Useful in Enhancing Flexible Work Arrangements:**

- **Formal Policy Home Working:** support for this, few organisations already have this in place
- **Reduction in Negative Perceptions re FWAs:** support for this, very few already have this in place
- **Active Job Redesign:** support for this, very few organisations already have this in place
- **Formal Policy Remote/Hot Desking:** support for this, few organisations already have this in place
- **Videoconferencing:** many organisations already have this in place

# Key Findings (3)

- **Long Hours' Culture:**
  - Recognition of a long hours' culture, it is part of the 'job', is influenced by the tone from the top & social media (to a lesser extent)
  - Agreement that senior management have a responsibility to have a discussion with management team about long hours' culture
- **Factors Impacting Long Hours' Culture**
  - **Emails:**
    - volume of emails is an issue
    - patterns is an issue (sending/receiving emails after 7pm/weekends/on holiday)
    - organisation could do better in managing expectations of what is urgent & senior management are poor role models (less so)
    - some support for developing a policy (56.8%) and training (60.5%)
  - **Council Meetings:**
    - support for cut off time to conclude Council meetings and policy regarding what are acceptable timings for meetings
    - support for having better structured meetings
    - travelling to council meeting is not an issue
  - **Responsibility for Long Hours' Culture:**
    - acceptance individuals have responsibility for managing work life balance
    - under half (47%) of respondents say they are in control of their own work life balance

# Key Findings (4)

- **Mentoring:**

- Relatively low levels of formal mentoring, both internal and external
- There is demand for all types of mentoring

- **Talent Management/Succession Planning:**

- Recognition that talent management is an important aspect in supporting progression (93.4%)
- Recognition that talent management processes are not sufficient & not undertaken effectively (67.1% & 66.3%)
- Importance of equality proofing talent management (55.2%)
- Recognition that succession planning is not undertaken effectively (72.3%)

- **Barriers to Progression:**

- Long hours' culture and long hours I would be expected to work (67% & 69%)
- Poor work life balance (66%)
- Caring responsibilities – not so much a barrier (35%)
- Issues related to pay (41%), the media (37%) & progression opportunities (e.g., skills - 37%), some concerns
- Other issues related to gender, mixed picture (feeling marginalised (9.3%), exclusion from informal networks (24%), existing imbalances in gender composition (31%))

# Key Findings (5)

- **Similar Policies & Practices**

- Support for sector wide policies around developing people:
  - succession planning (77.3%)
  - talent management (75.7%)
- Support for sector wide policies around flexible working:
  - Home working at senior levels (72%)
  - Agile working (72%)
  - TOIL (69.7%)
  - Flexi-time (67.6%)
- Support for sector wide policies around mentoring (66.7%)

# Webinar

## Career Progression in Local Government: What's it Like at the Top Since the RPA?

**Professor Joan Ballantine & Tony Wall**

**Ulster University**

**24<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Thank you - Questions?**

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