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THE **LAW SOCIETY**  
OF NORTHERN IRELAND



**Solicitor In-office Training Study 2023**

## Methodology and response rates

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- The trainees element of the study was conducted as an on-line survey in May 2023
- Invitations to participate in the study were sent to 634 trainees or recently qualified solicitors (qualified within the last 5 years)
- We received 8 bouncebacks (incorrect emails/ unsubscribed/ mail box full or otherwise curtailed by permissions set up) leaving an effective base of 626
- In addition to the individual invitation to participate a link to an anonymous generic questionnaire was created and practices were asked to encourage appropriate staff to participate in the survey by sharing this generic link.
- The survey deadline was also extended for a further 2 weeks.
- These results are based on responses from 298 trainees or recently qualified solicitors that is a response rate of 48% overall
  - 51% from trainees
  - 42% from newly qualified solicitors

## Methodology and response rates

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- The Employers element of the study was conducted as an on-line survey in May 2023
- Invitations to participate in the study were sent to 987 Masters or Employers
- We received 22 bouncebacks (incorrect emails/ unsubscribed/ mail box full or otherwise curtailed by permissions set up) leaving an effective base of 965
- In addition to the individual invitation to participate a link to an anonymous generic questionnaire was created and invitees were invited to respond via this generic link.
- The survey deadline was also extended for a further 2 weeks.
- These results are based on responses from 117 Masters or Employers that is a response rate of 12%
- With a total base of 75 responses from Masters this represents a response rate of 27% from this sub group.
- The majority of questions were completed by a base of 99 Masters or practising solicitors responsible for or involved in the recruitment of newly qualified solicitors.

# A quick look at Where the views of Trainees and Employers Diverge



	Trainees	Employers	Differential Trainees Vs Employers
Trainees are paid minimum wage	67	27	+40
Performance reviews are undertaken	69	94	-25
IPLS fees are covered by employer	32	41	-9
Salary is paid throughout 2 year contract	40	45	-5
STRONGLY AGREEING THAT....			
Monitor trainee's workload to ensure that they have sufficient but not an excessive workload	20	45	-25
Set realistic timescales for work to be completed and answer questions as they arise, within a supportive environment that does not deter trainees from asking questions in the future	29	52	-23
Provide clear instructions and ensure that they are understood	24	39	-15
Allocate work and tasks at an appropriate level to trainee(s), gradually increasing the level and complexity of work over time	27	40	-13
Provide trainee(s) with a balance of substantive and procedural tasks that, as a whole, demand the use of a broad range of skills	27	40	-13
Give regular feedback regarding trainee' s performance, recognising achievements and improvements, and constructively raising areas that require further effort	18	29	-11
Provide an environment that encourages trainee(s) to take responsibility for their own development	39	41	-2

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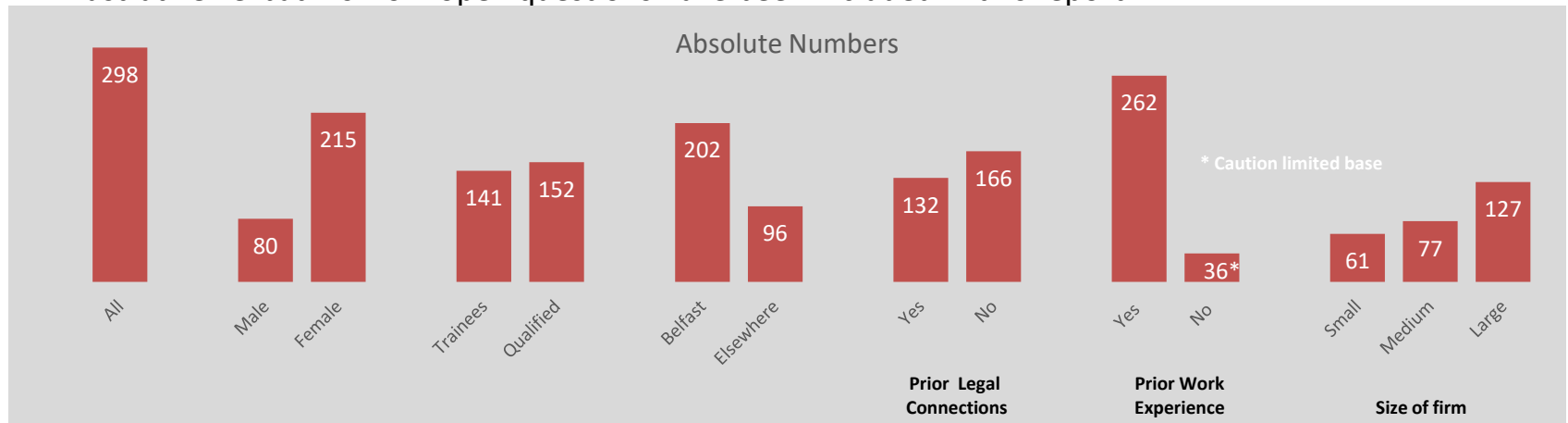


**Solicitor In-office Training Study 2023**  
**Trainees & Newly Qualified Solicitors**

## Bases and reading these results



- The following section is based on 298 responses from trainees or recently qualified solicitors.
- Where relevant we illustrate differences in the base of responses within sub groups. The volume of responses in each of these sub groups is illustrated below.
- Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of those that stated that prior to training they had not had work experience in the legal sector, as the volume of responses in this group was only 36 persons.
- Although included in the Total (All) data there are some other sub groups with low numbers have been excluded from these charts, e.g. 33 persons working in practices other than law firms; 1 person identifying as transgender and a further person preferring not to state their gender.
- Please note that unless otherwise stated the figures presented in charts are %'s.
- In cases where 0 is shown there has been some response but insufficient to round to 1% of the base
- Illustrative verbatims from open questions have been included in this report

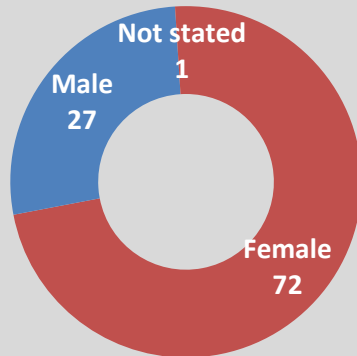


# Profile Of Trainees And Newly Qualified Solicitors

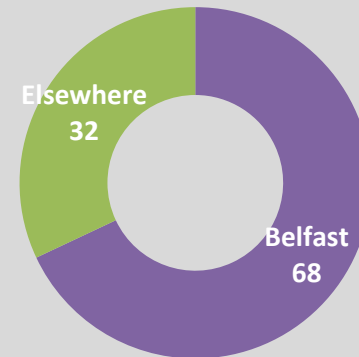
Almost two thirds (72%) of those that have responded are female and over two thirds (68%) were trained in the Belfast area. Respondents were almost equally divided between trainees (47%) and newly qualified (53%). The vast majority of the newly qualified solicitors are working in law firms (43%).



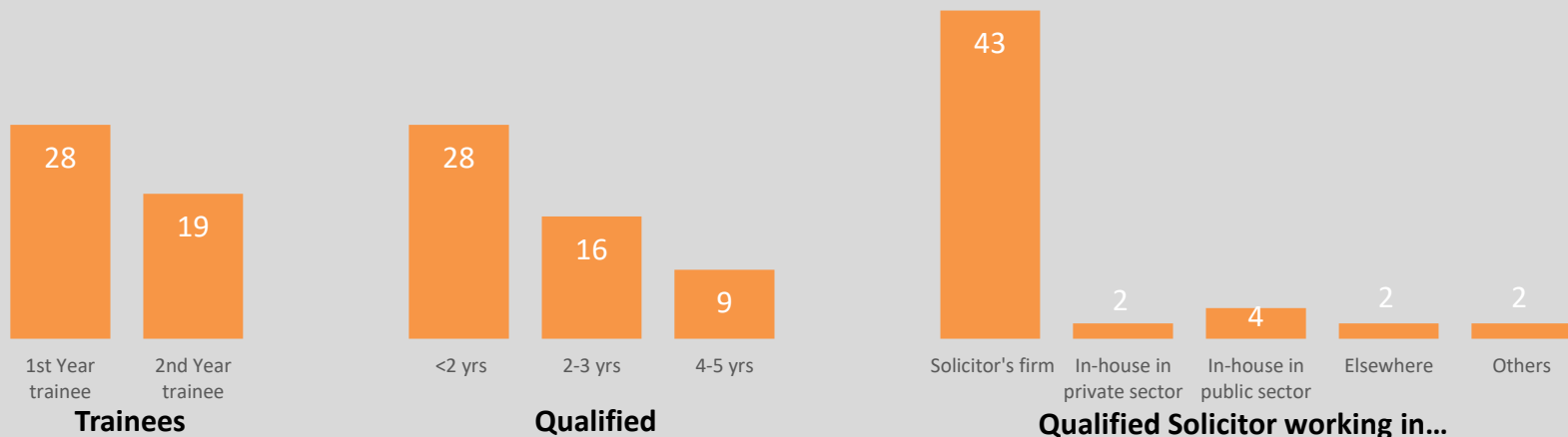
Gender



Training Contract Locale



Stage of Qualification/ Career

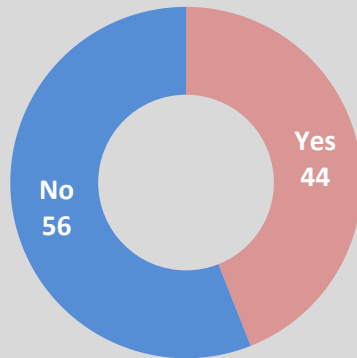


# Prior To Undertaking Training

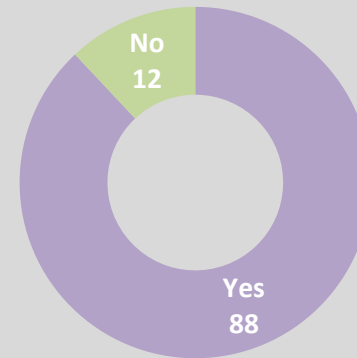
Over 2 fifths (44%) of trainees have some prior connection in the legal profession and almost 9 in 10 (88%) had undertaken work experience prior to entering their training. Half of those entering legal training had applied for 3 or more contracts, with over a quarter (27%) applying to more than 5 contracts.



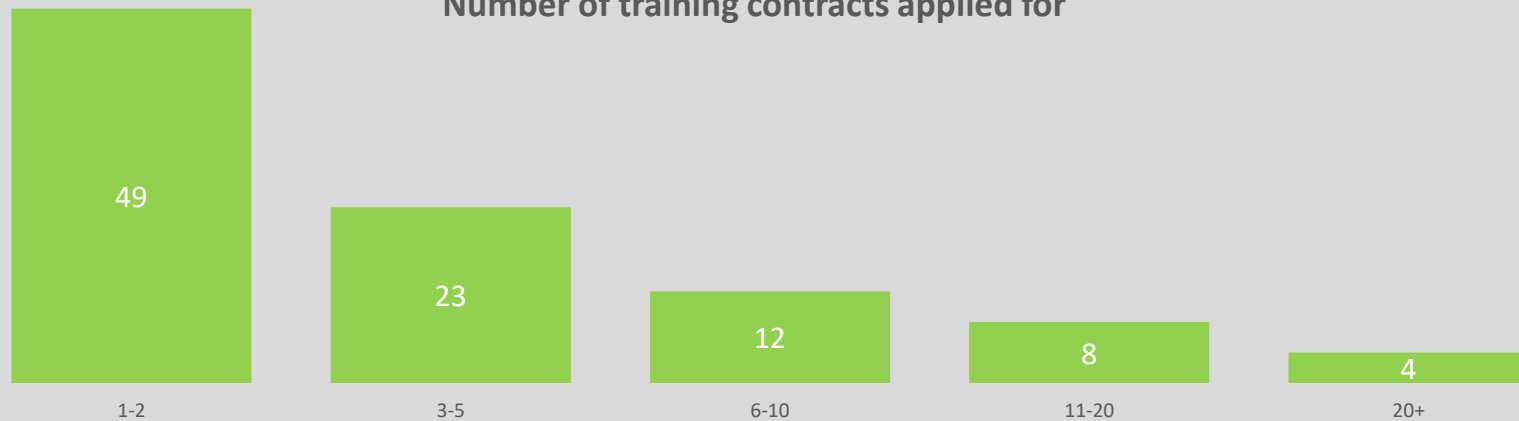
Prior Connections in the legal profession



Prior work experience



Number of training contracts applied for

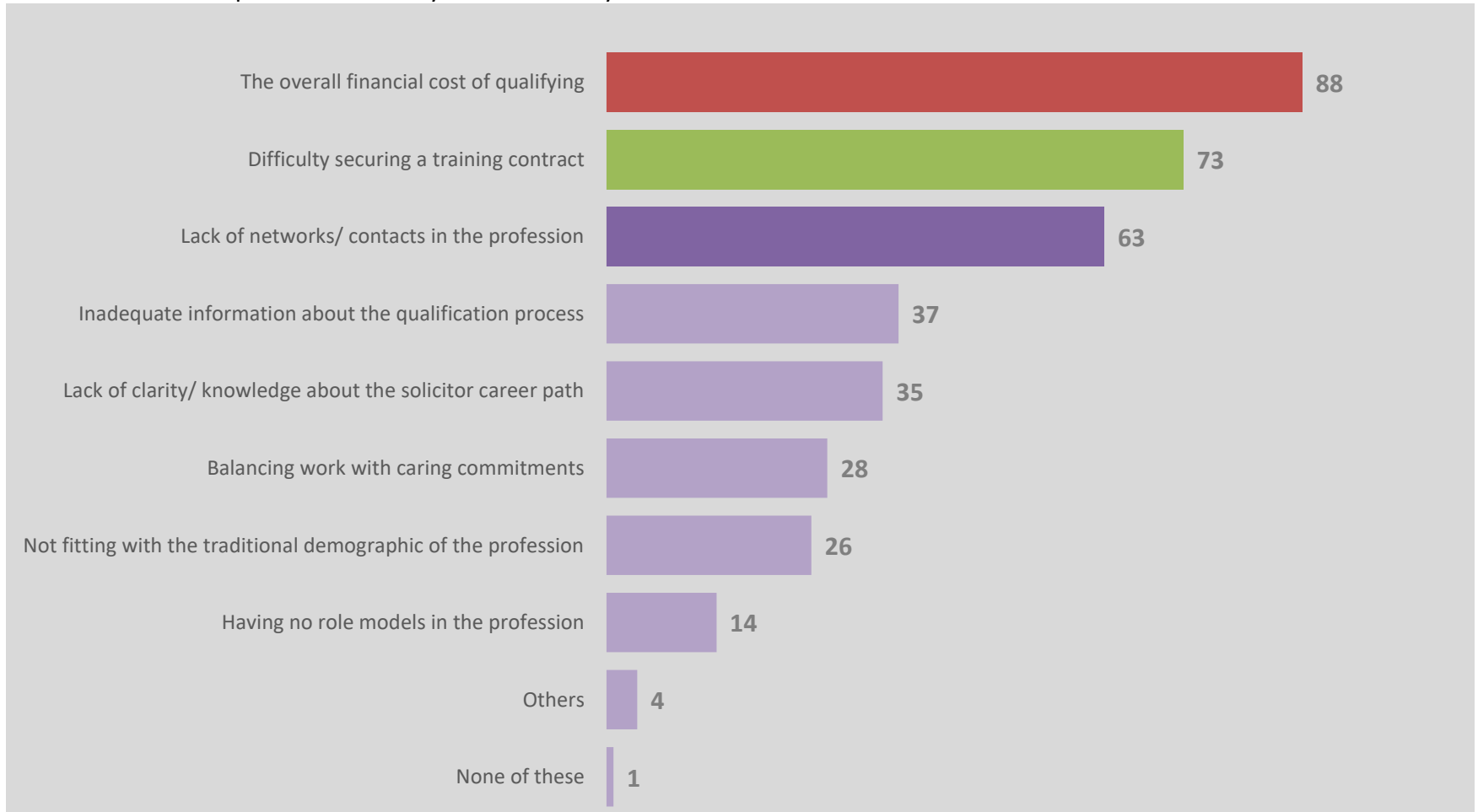




## Barriers To Entering Profession

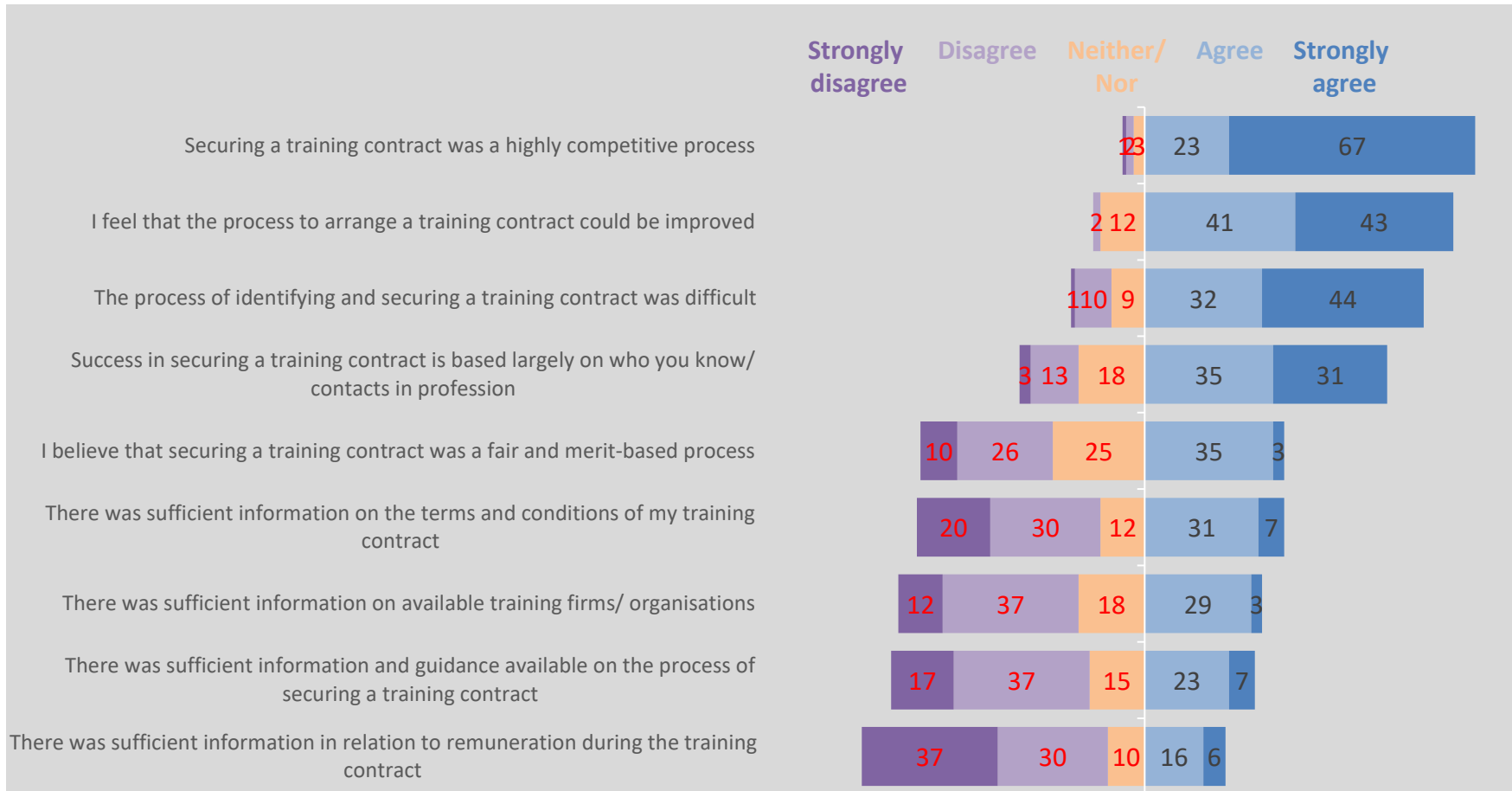
The financial burden of qualifying as a solicitor is perceived as the key barrier to entering the legal profession. Three quarters (73%) see the difficulty of obtaining a contract as a key barrier and almost a third see a lack of networks within the profession as a key barrier to entry.

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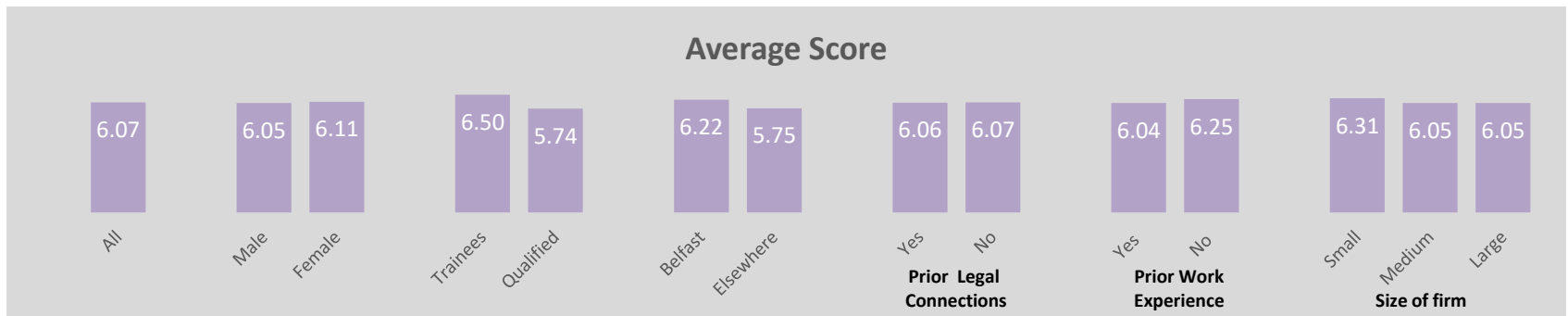
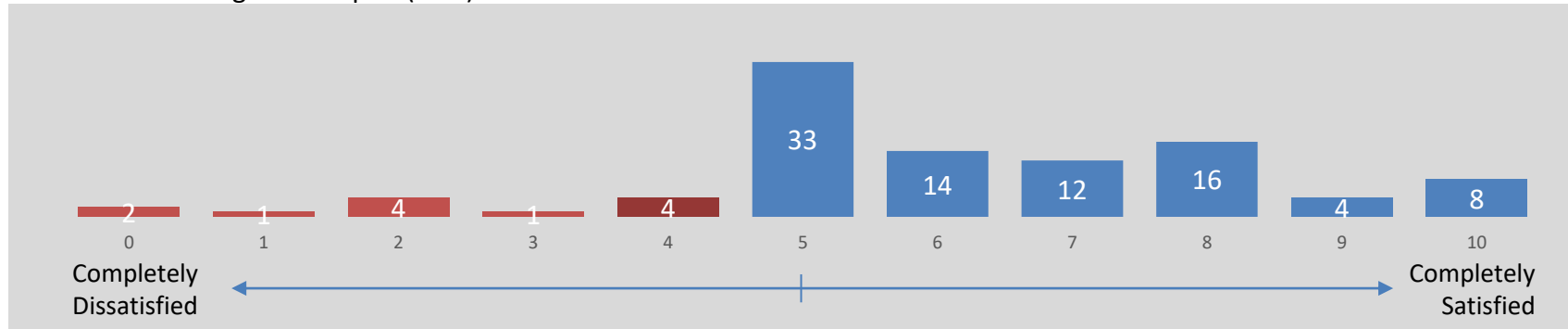
# Attitudes To Training Contract

Securing that all important training contract is viewed as highly competitive by 9 in 10 trainees. Almost as many (84%) see the process of arranging these contracts as warranting improvement. Three quarters agree that securing this training contract was difficult. Two thirds did not perceive that there was sufficient information on remuneration



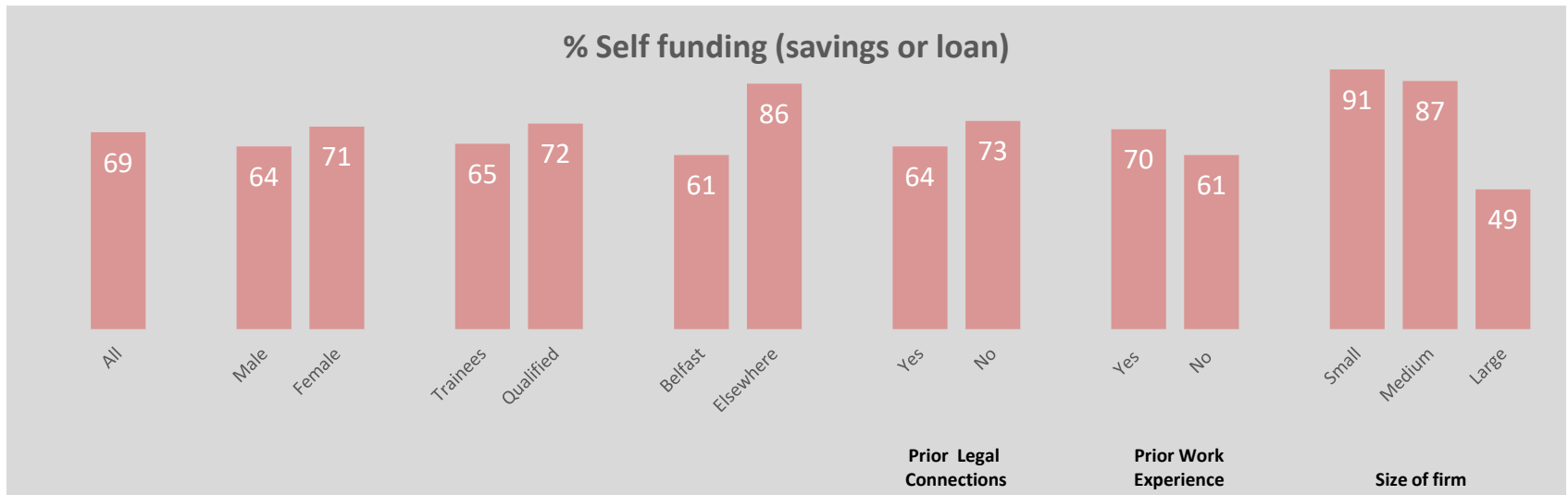
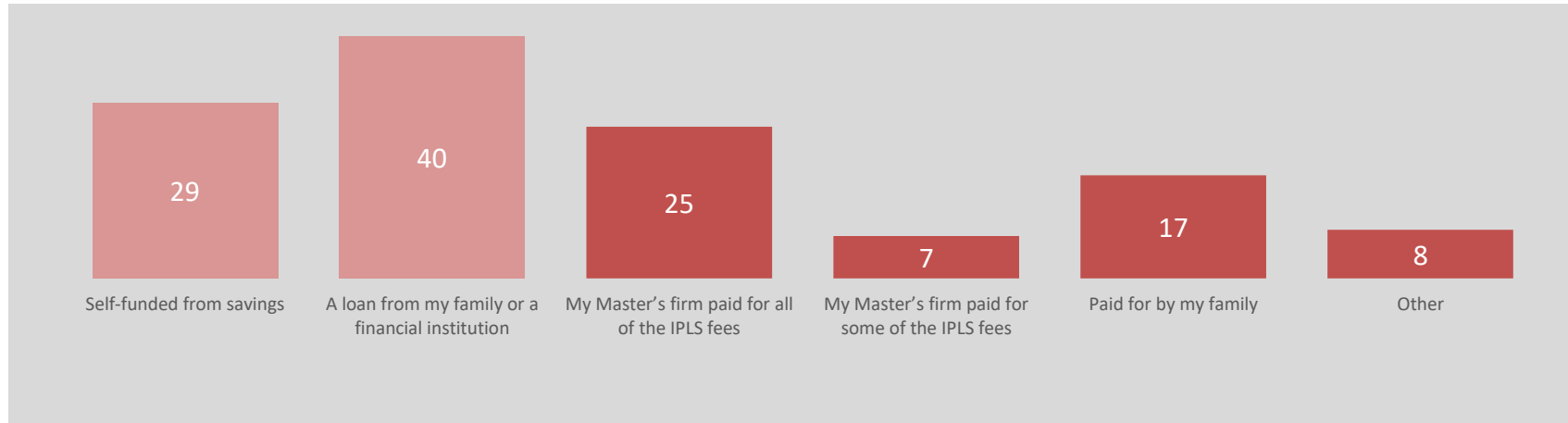
# Satisfaction With Law Society Registration Process

1 in 8 (12%) are highly satisfied with the registration process, the same proportion are dissatisfied. Newly qualified solicitors, those working in larger practices and those that had not had prior work experience were more likely to have been dissatisfied with the registration process (12%) ess.



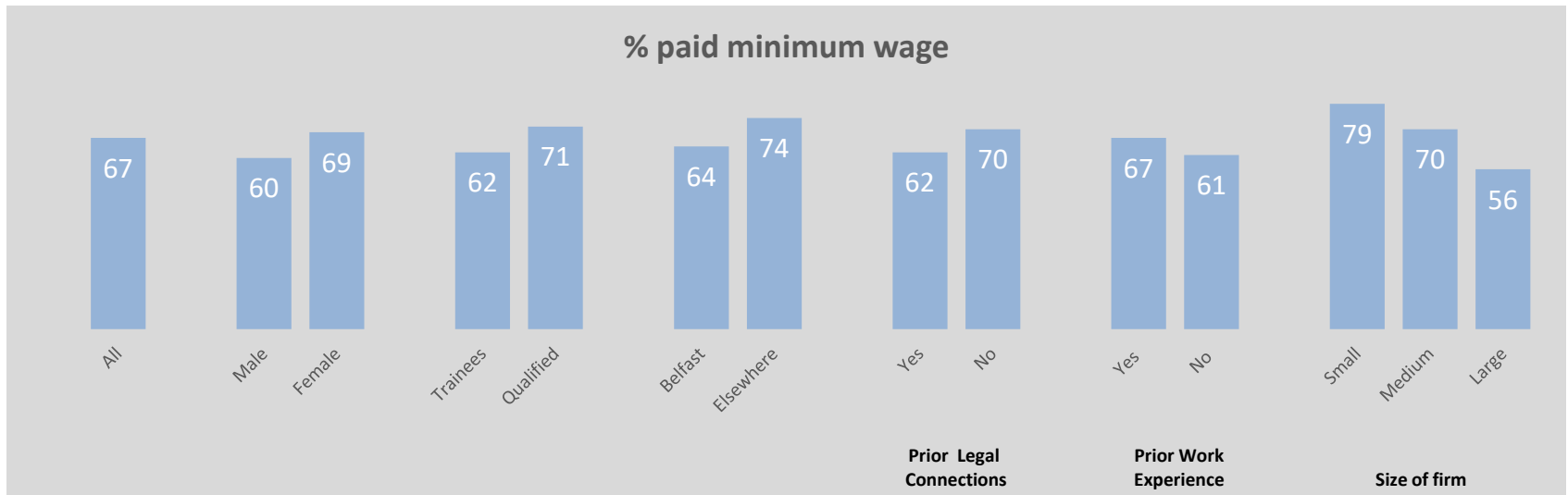
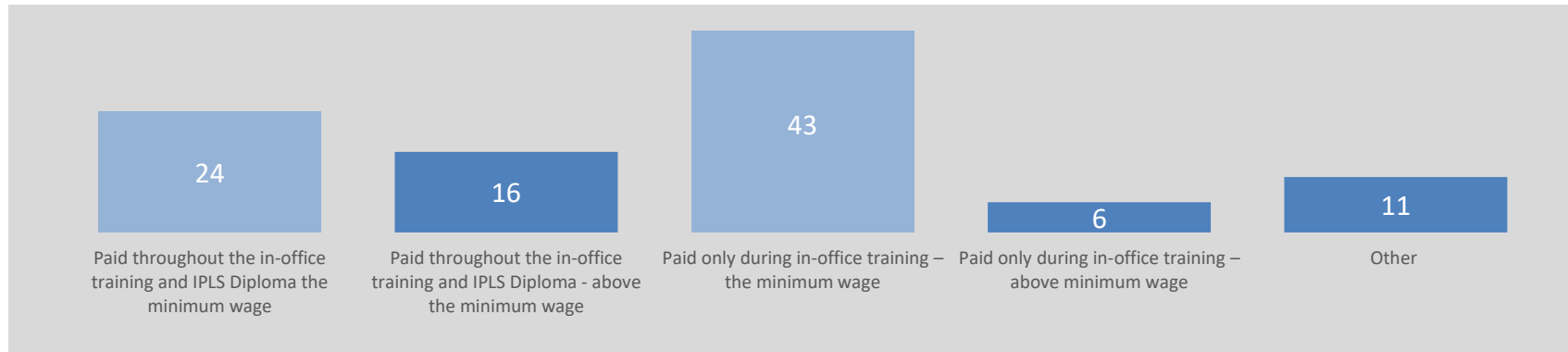
# Funding The IPLS Course Fees

Two thirds (69%) of current or recent trainees have funded their legal training themselves via savings or loans from family or financial institutions. Self funding is a larger element of those training outside Belfast and those working in small and medium sized law firms. Student loans (4%) were the most commonly cited other source of funding



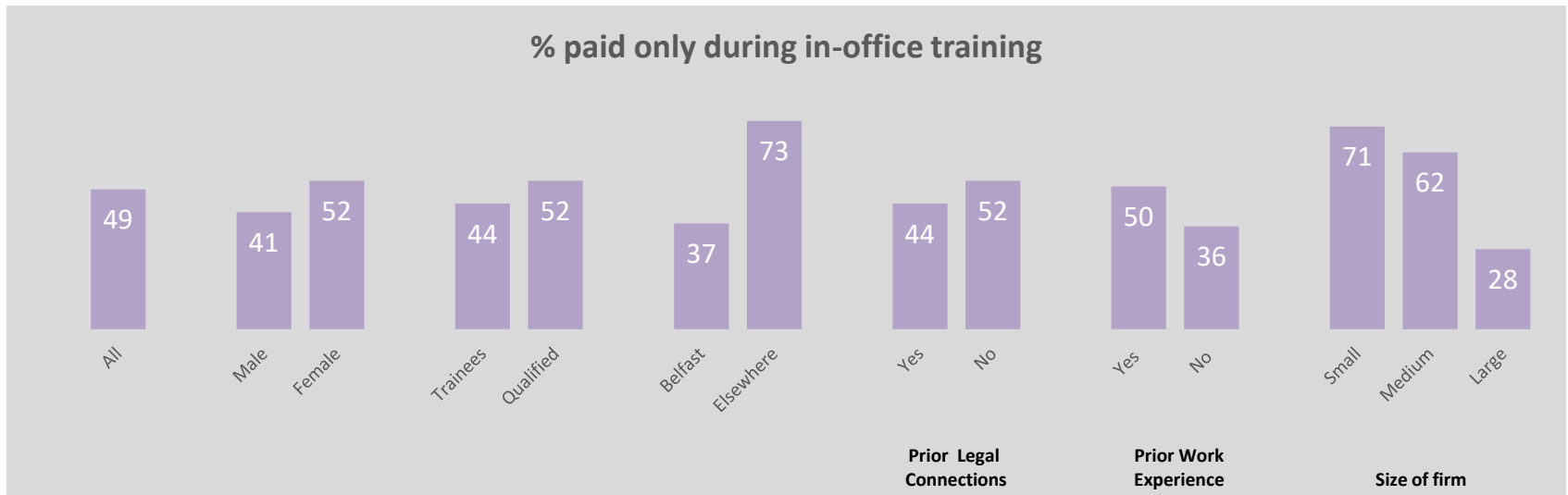
# Remuneration During Training

Most commonly, over 2 in 5 trainees (43%) have been paid minimum wage only during in office training. A further quarter (24%) are paid minimum wage throughout their in-office training and the IPLS diploma. Only a third have been paid more than minimum wage, this is more likely in larger law firms. 3% were paid below minimum wage, 2% worked during their IPLS period, 2% were paid at 50% whilst at IPLS, 1% had pay averaged out over IPLS and in-office periods



# Remuneration During Training

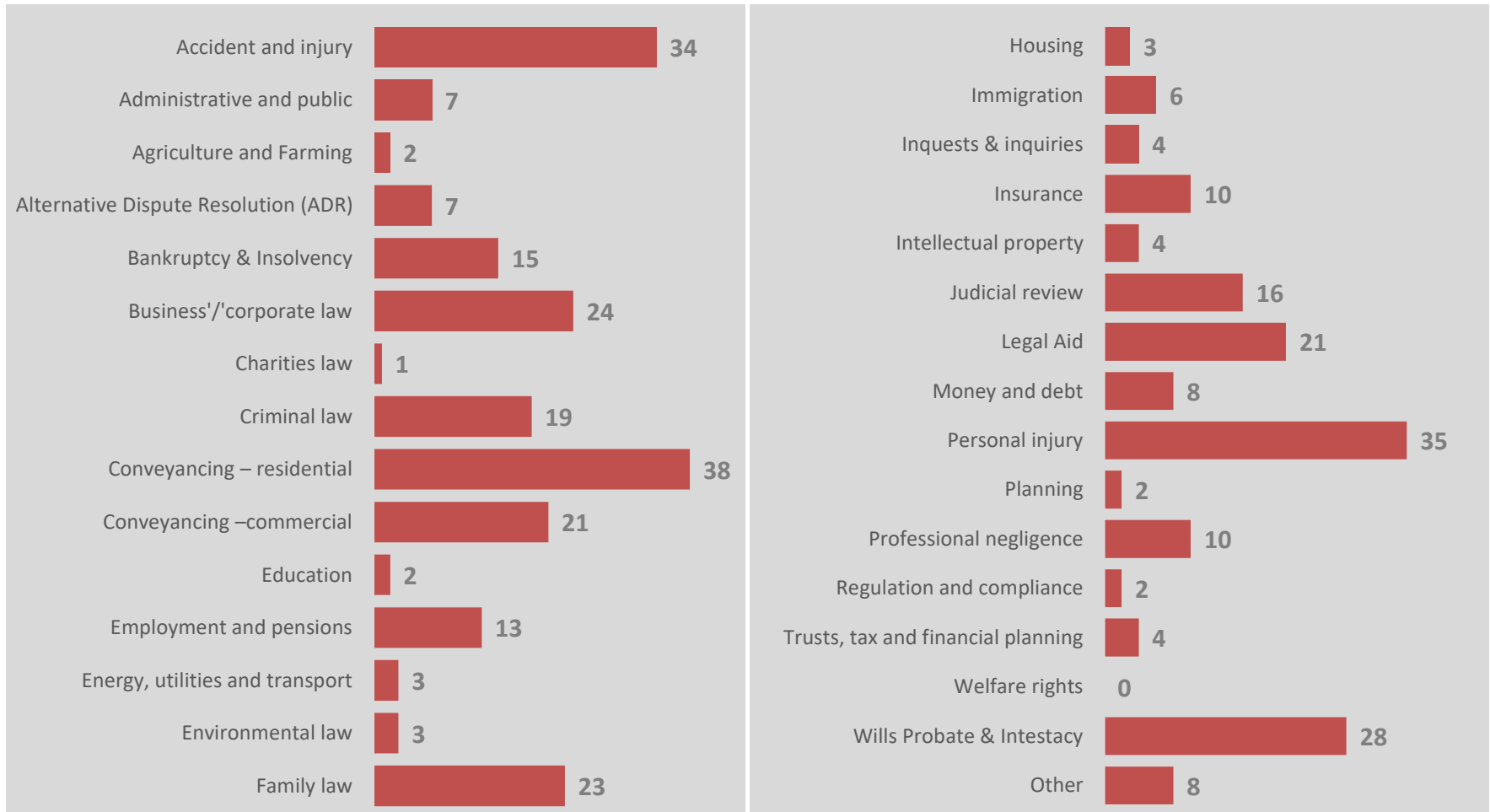
Whilst 2 in 5 (40%) have been paid throughout their in office and IPLS training, half (49%) have not, this is most likely to happen if training outside Belfast and training in small or medium practices.



# Practice Areas Where Most Experience Was Gained During In-office Training Periods

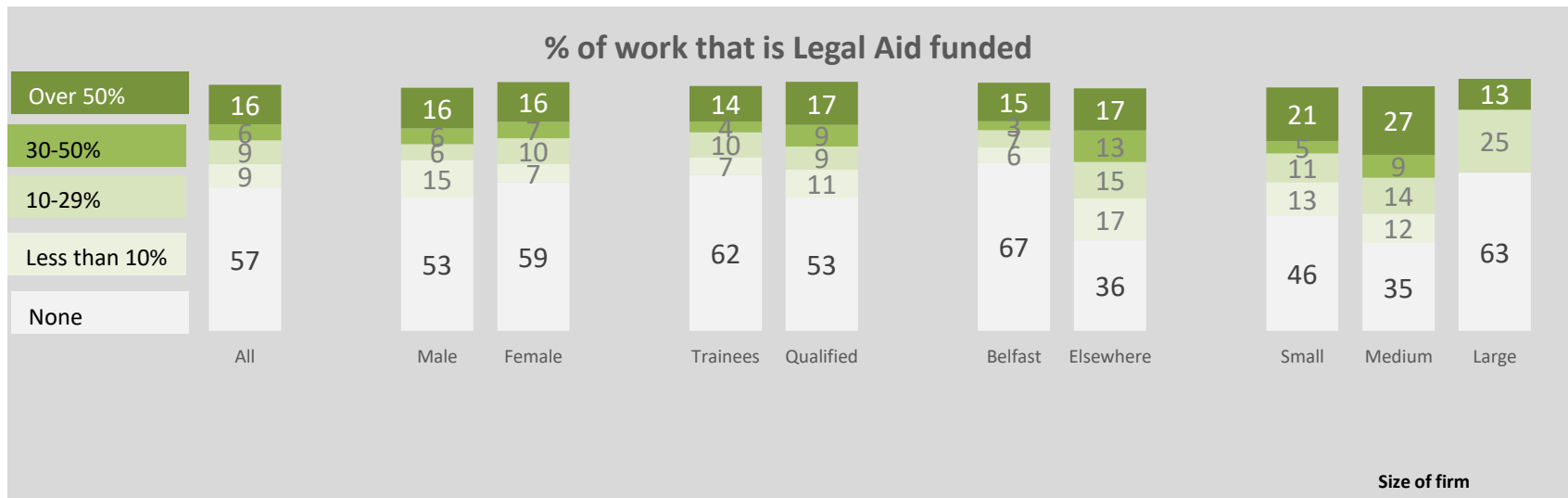
The six most common areas where trainees gain experience are in residential conveyancing (38%); personal injury (35%); accident and injury (34%); wills, probate and intestacy (28%); corporate law (24%) and family law (23%)

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# Exposure to Legal Aid work

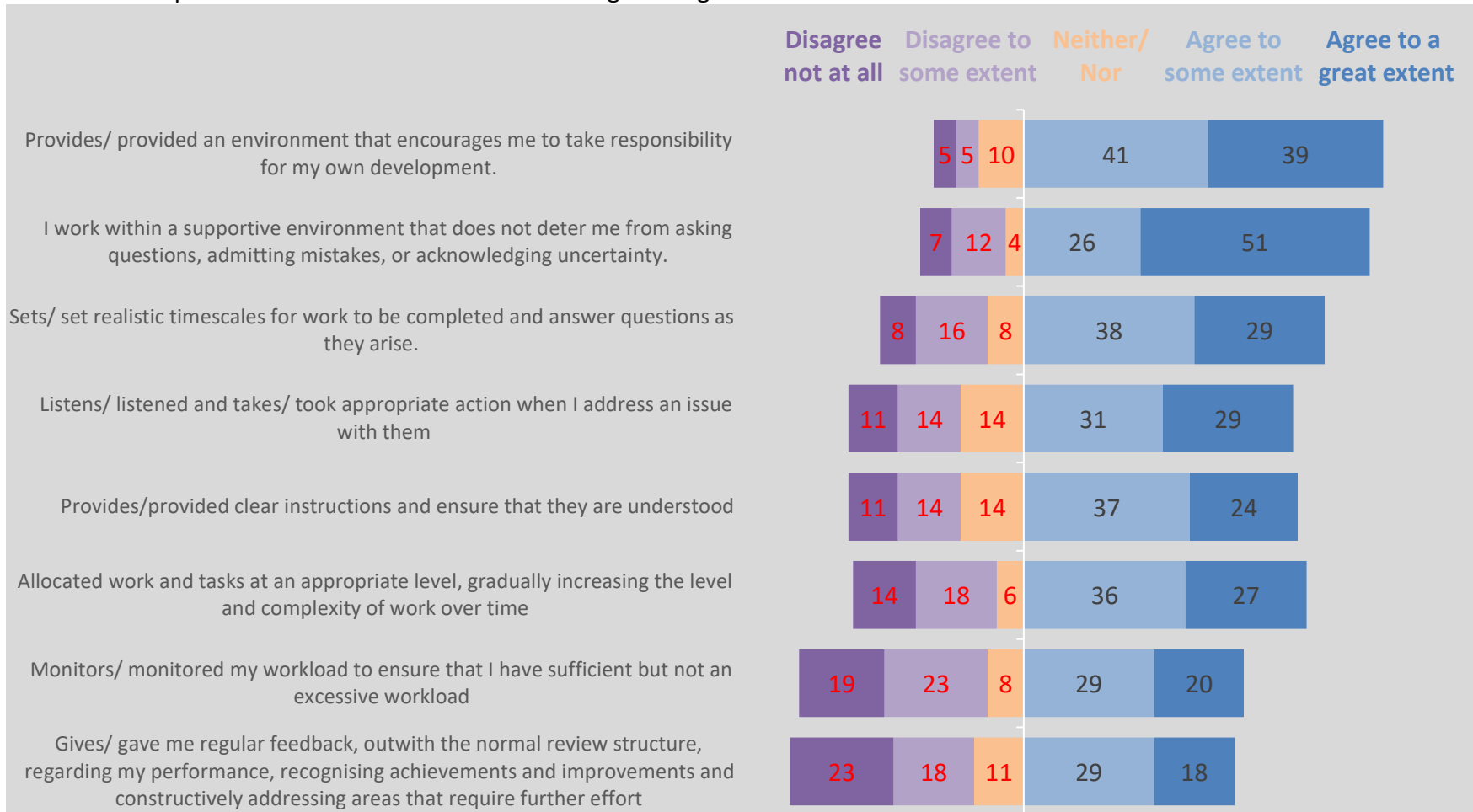
Over 2 in 5 have been exposed to Legal Aid work during their training, those working in small and medium sized law firms and working outside Belfast are most likely to be exposed to this work, and it is those trained in the small and medium practices that undertake a higher proportion of legal aid work





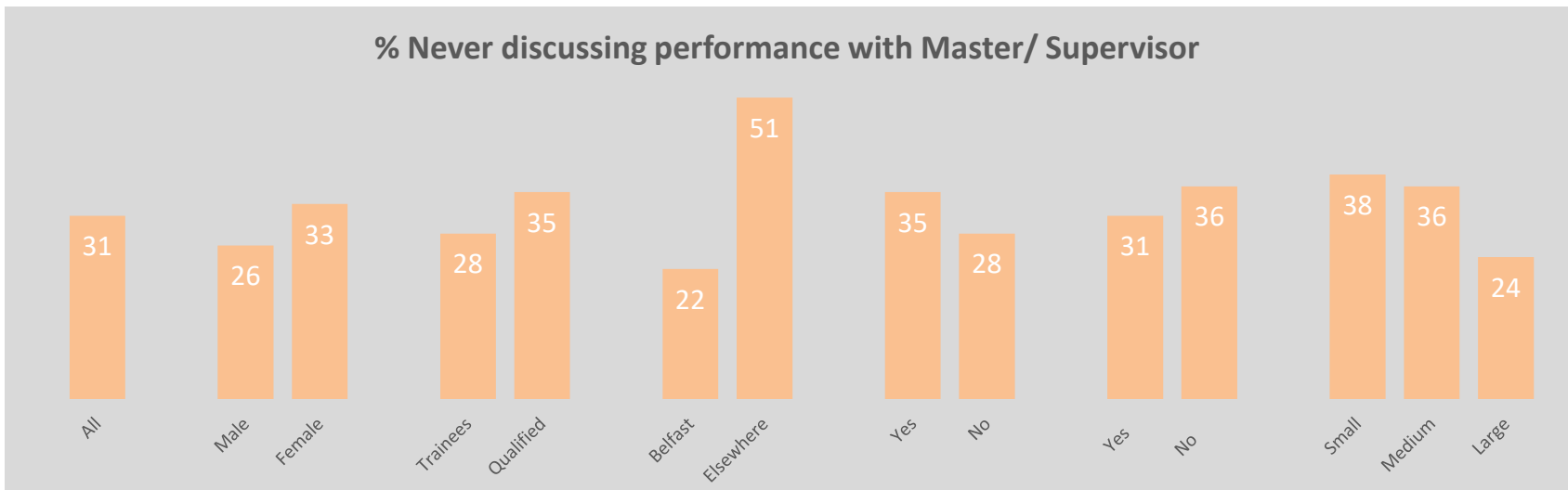
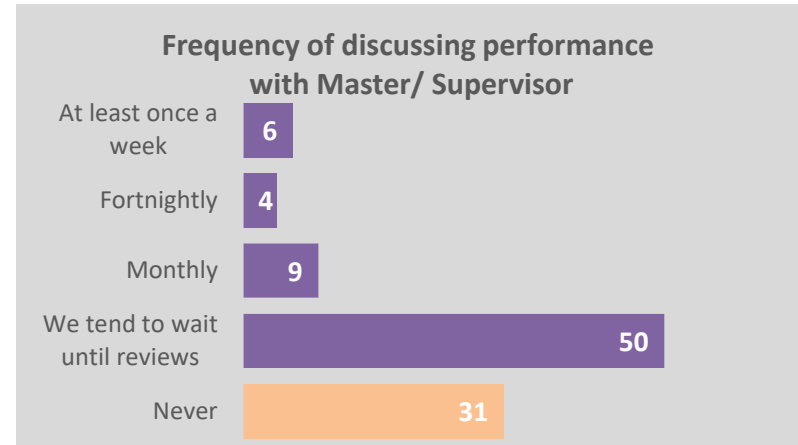
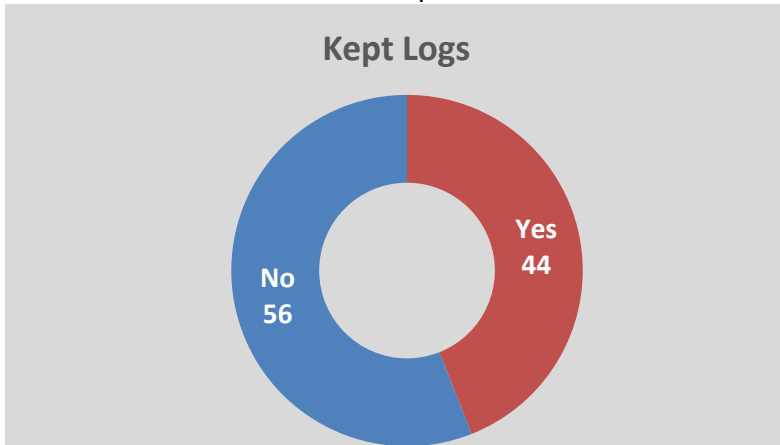
# Trainee's Experiences Of Masters/ Supervisors

4 in 5 agree that they were provided with an environment encouraging them to take responsibility for their own development. Three quarters agreed that they were working in an environment where they could ask questions etc. There was much more divided opinion on whether their workload during training was monitored.



# Performance review with Master/ Supervisor

Only just over 2 in 5 trainees kept logs during their training. Just under a third stated that they never discussed performance with their master/ supervisor. This lack of review was most evident in those training outside Belfast and in small or medium practices.

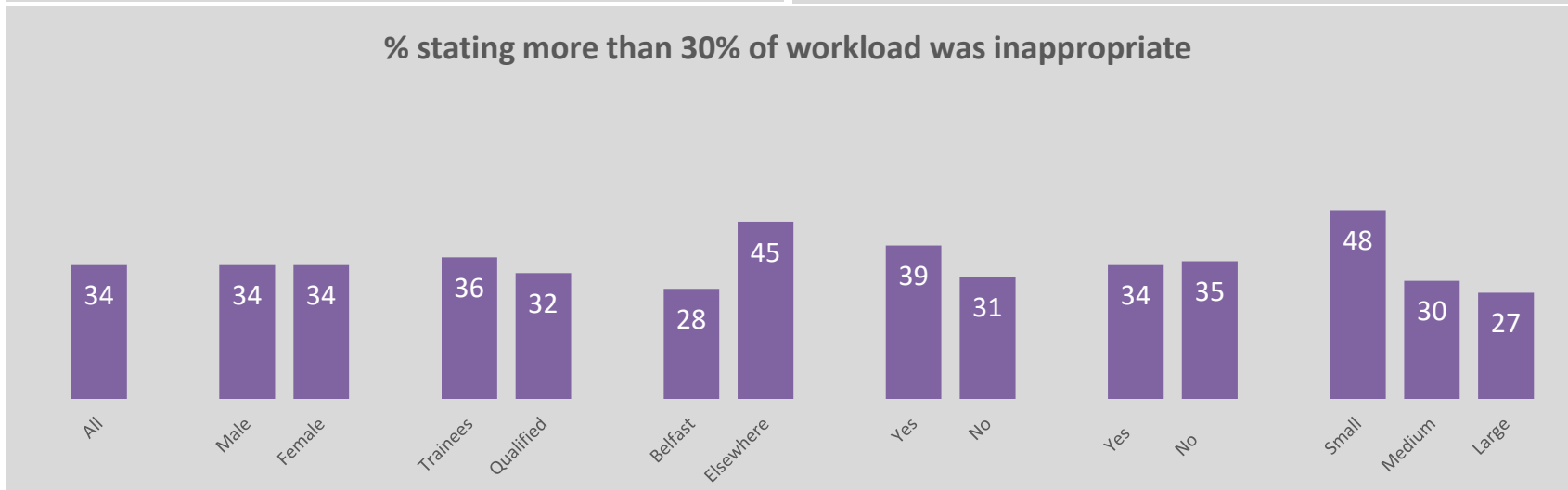
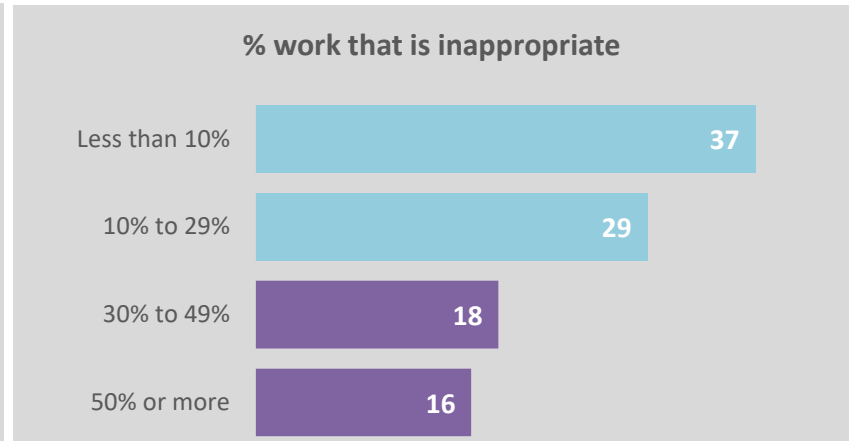
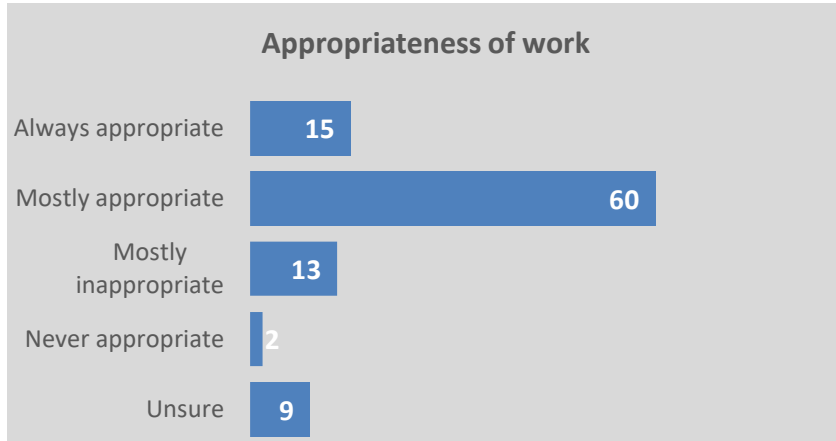


# Appropriateness Of Work Undertaken During In-office Training



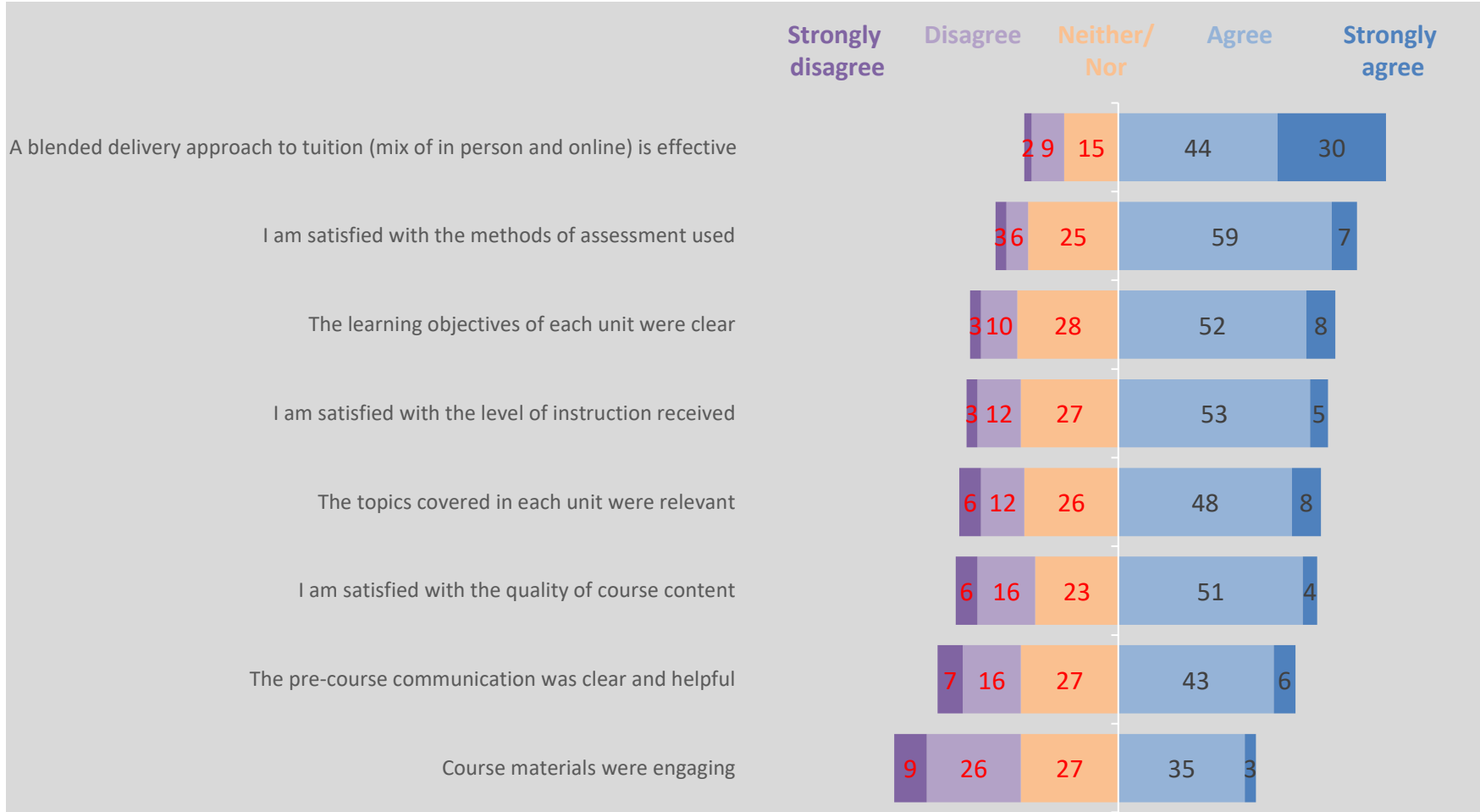
Three quarters thought the work they undertook during training was mostly appropriate. Two thirds stated that less than 30% of their work was inappropriate. Those experiencing higher levels of inappropriate work are most prevalent in training outside Belfast and in smaller practices.

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# Attitudes To Law Society Module

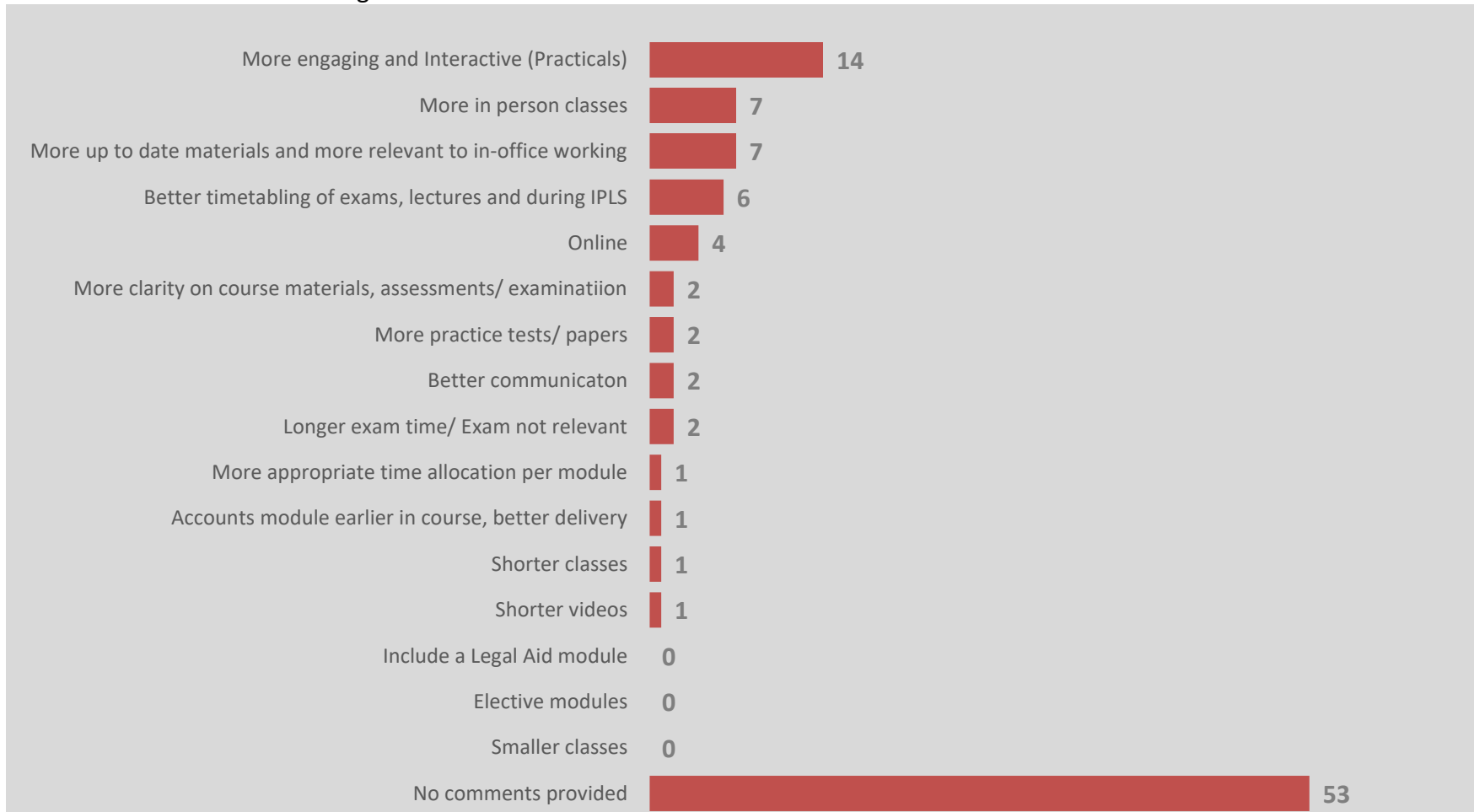
Three quarters of current/ recent trainees would agree that a blended delivery approach is an effective model for training delivery. Whilst more than half agree with many of the statements on their course, there are low levels of strong agreement. Almost as many disagree as agree that their course materials were engaging or that the pre-course communications were clear and helpful.



# How Delivery Of The Law Society Module Might Be Improved

1 in 7 trainees would like to see the Law Society module made more engaging and interactive. 1 in 12 would like to see more classes delivered in person and a similar number would like to see the materials more up to date and in line with in-office learning.

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# Satisfaction With In-office Training

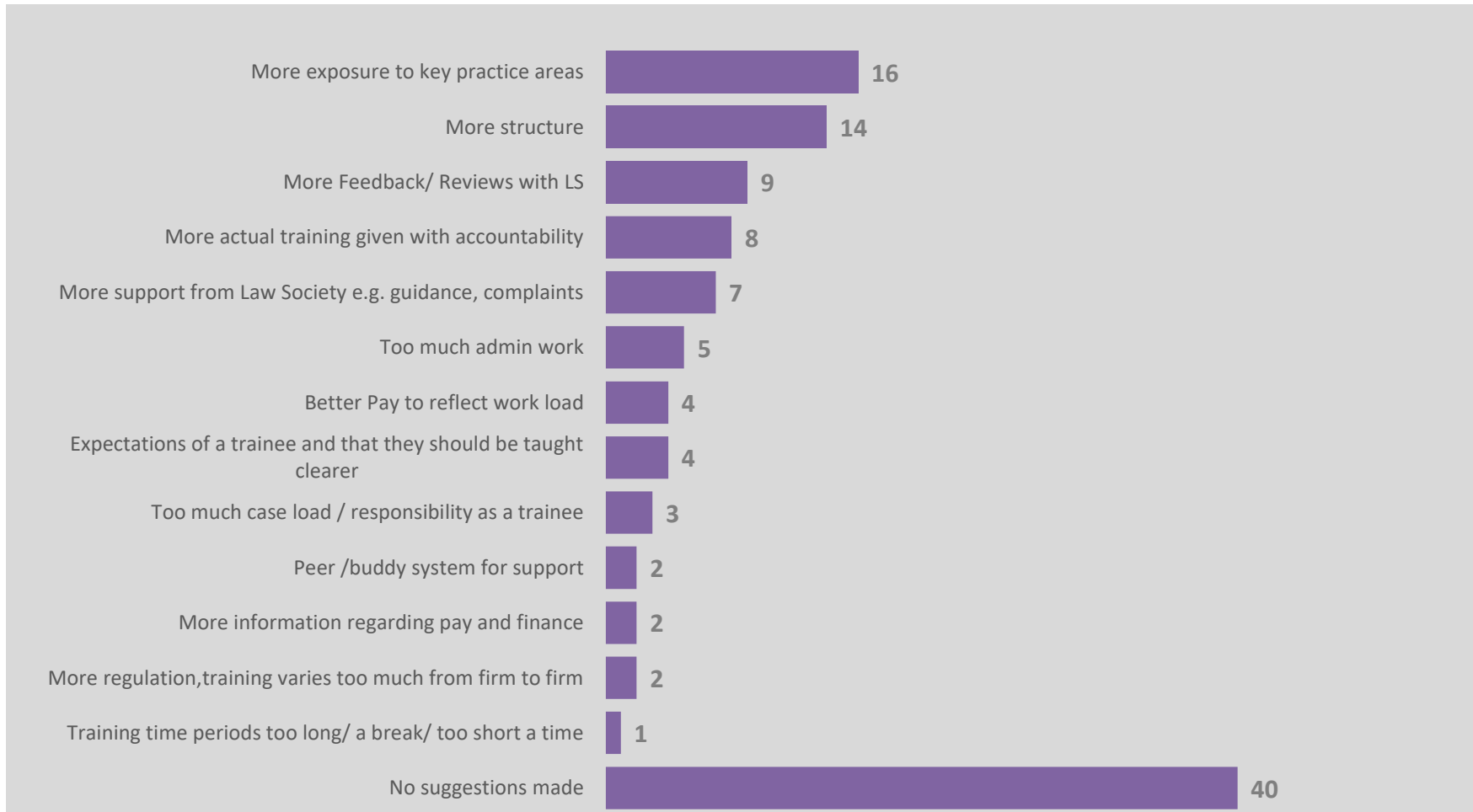
Two thirds (65%) of trainees are or were satisfied with the quality of in office training; 1 in 5 (21%) were not. Just over half (55%) feel that their training equipped them well to work as a solicitor but half this number (24%) disagree. Almost 2 in 3 (58%) disagree that there was sufficient oversight of their in office training.



## How In-office Training Might Be Improved

1 in 8 trainees would like to see an increase in exposure to different practice areas and almost as many, 1 in 7 would like to see greater structure, with just under 1 in 10 wanting to have greater feedback with the Society.

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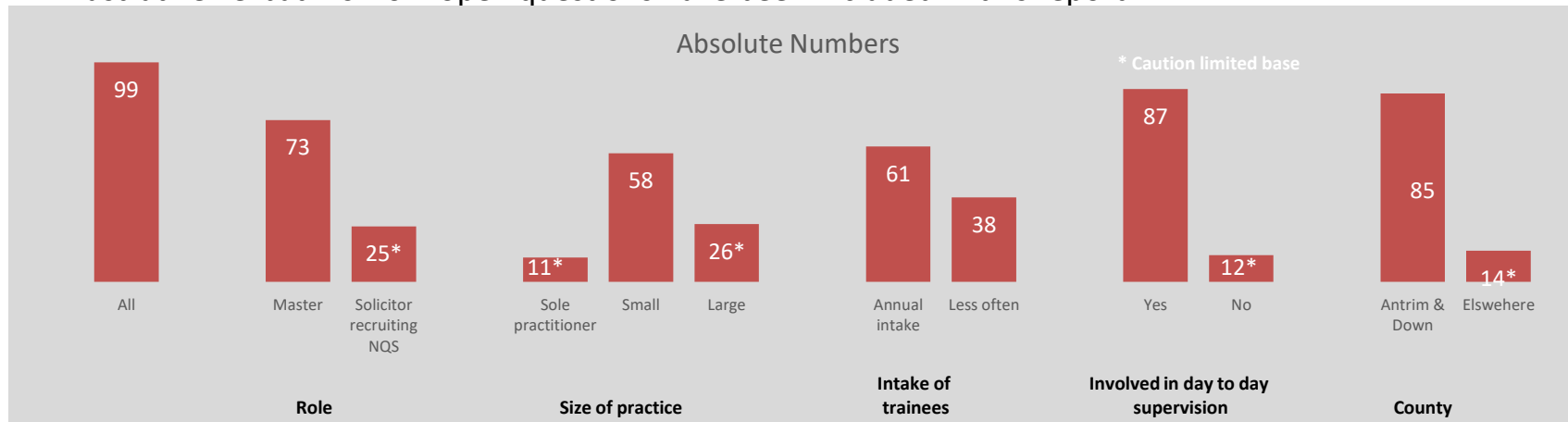
**Solicitor In-office Training Study 2023**  
**Employers**



## Bases and reading these results



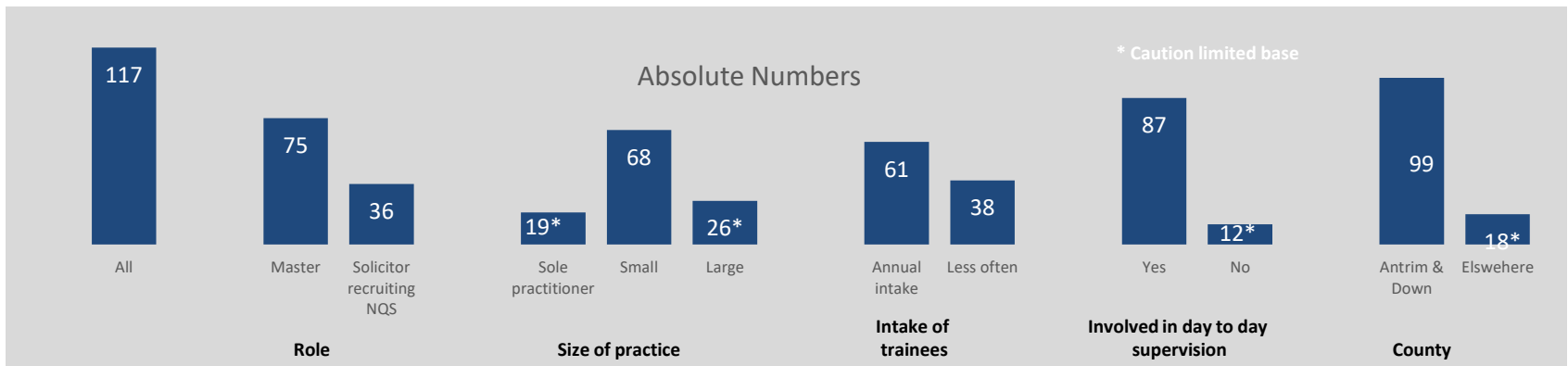
- Most of the following section is based on 99 responses from those working in firms that take on trainees.
- Where relevant we illustrate differences in the base of responses within sub groups. The volume of responses in each of these sub groups is illustrated below.
- Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of those asterixed, as the volume of responses in these sub group was limited.
- Although included in the Total (All) data there are some other sub groups with very low numbers have been excluded from these charts, i.e. 1 person stating other when responding to role; 1 people working in the public sector.
- Please note that unless otherwise stated the figures presented in charts are %'s.
- In cases where 0 is shown there has been some response but insufficient to round to 1% of the base
- Illustrative verbatims from open questions have been included in this report



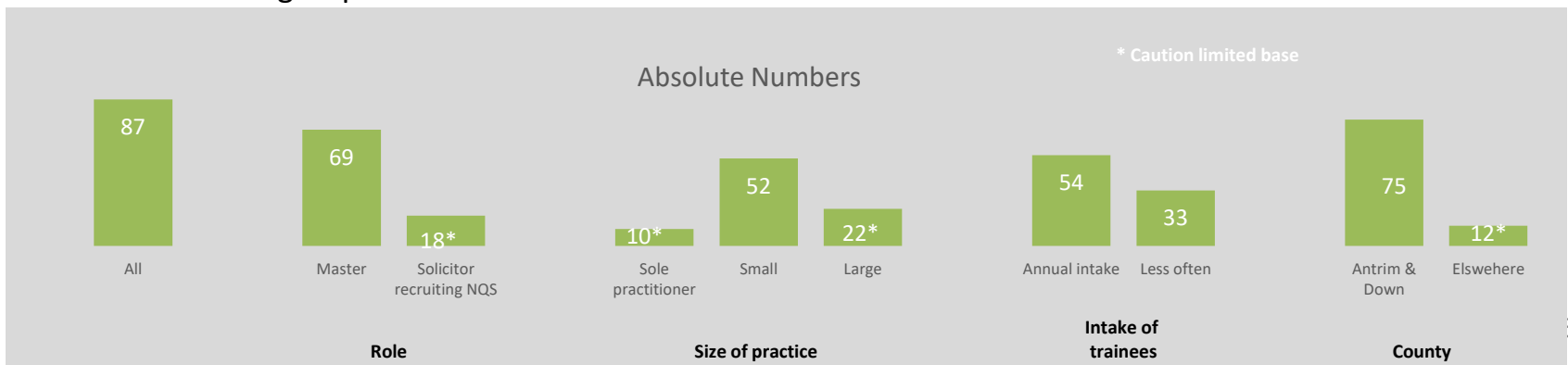
## Bases and reading these results



- The full base of respondents of 117 has sub groups as illustrated below

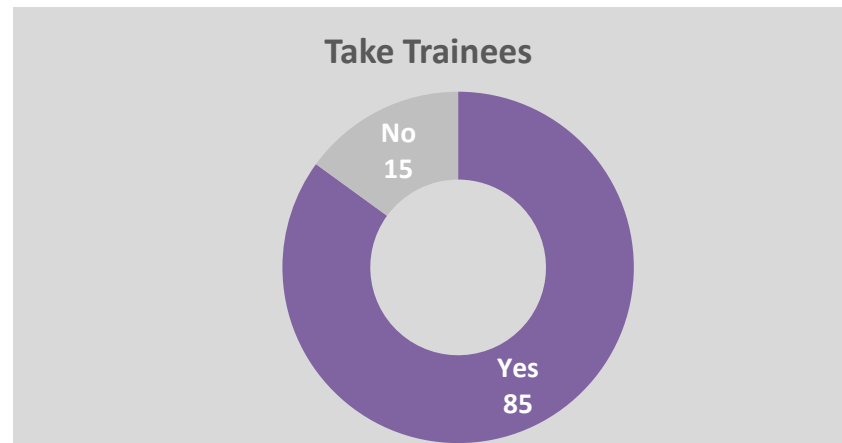
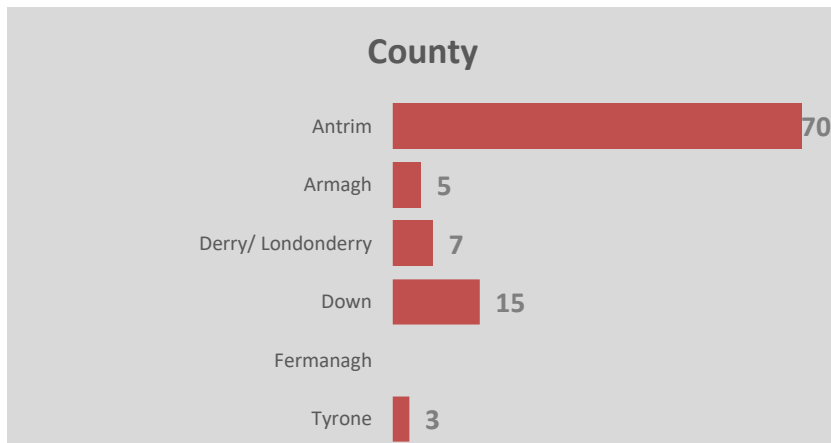
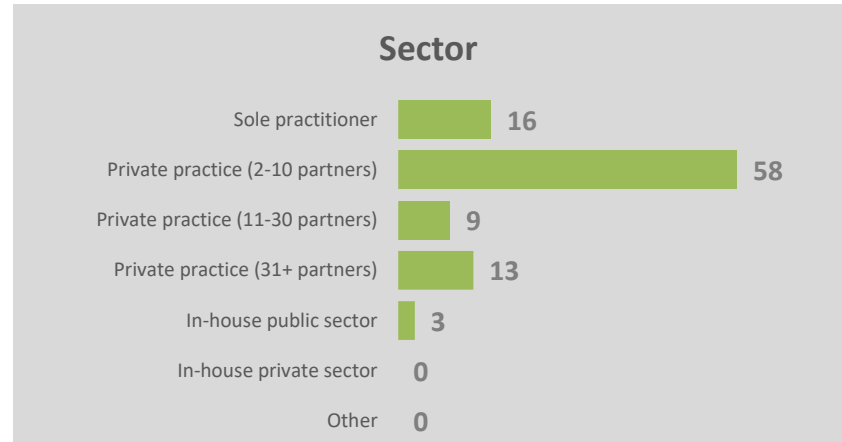
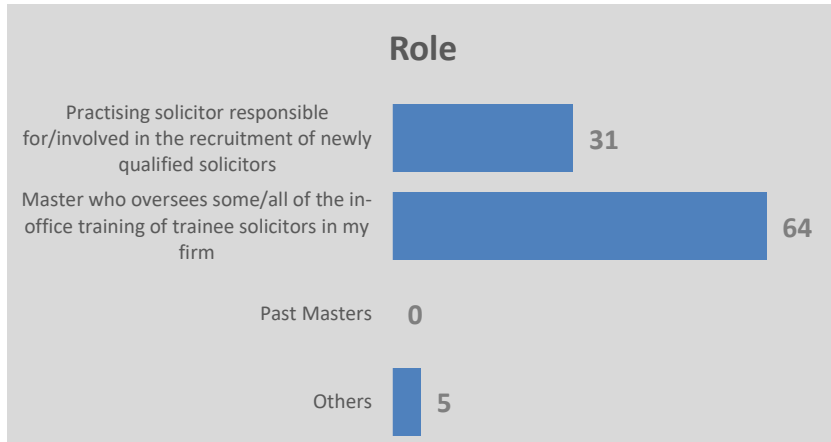


- Some of the charts are based on only those with personal involvement in day to day supervision with a base of 87 and sub groups illustrated below



# Profile Of Employers Responding

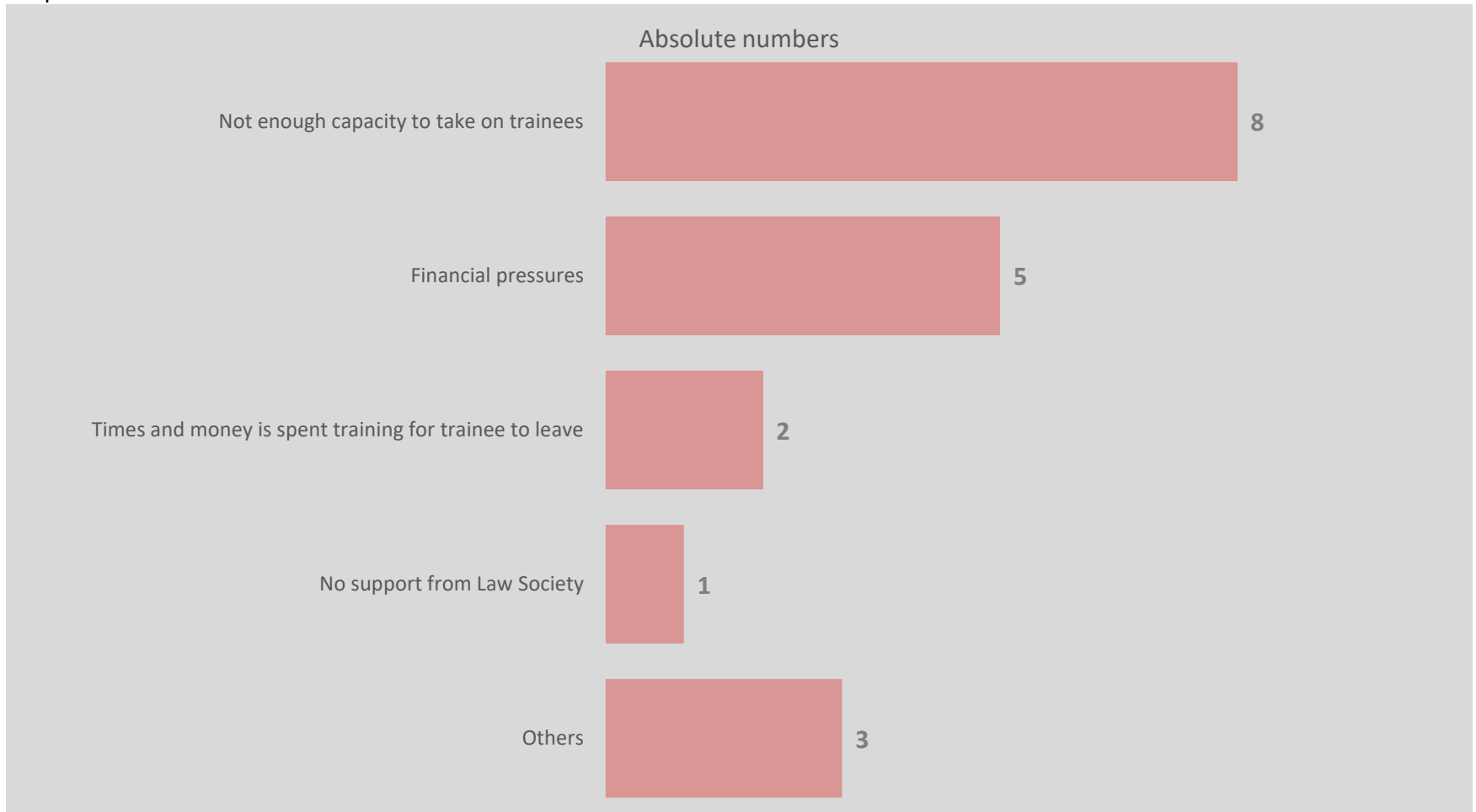
Almost two thirds of those responding to the survey are Masters. Most, 3 in 5, of the responses were from Masters/ Recruiters working in smaller practices. 7 in 10 of those responding work in County Antrim, this largely will reflect Belfast based practices. 17 in 20 of those responding take trainees, the 15% not taking trainees were asked only a small proportion of the questions in this survey.



Q1. Please tell us about your role? Base: All respondents n=117  
 Q2. What sector do you work in? Base: All respondents n=117  
 Q3. Which county are you based in? Base: All respondents n=117  
 Q4. Does your firm take trainees? Base: All respondents n=117

## Barriers To Taking On Trainees

Of the 18 respondents whose firms do not take on trainees, 8 stated that capacity is the main barrier with 5 stated financial constraints as the key barrier. 2 perceived that the investment in training would not add to their corporate resource.

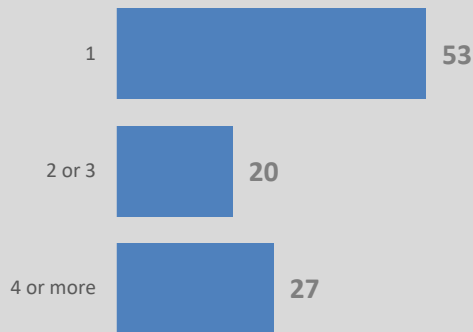


# Trainee Intake

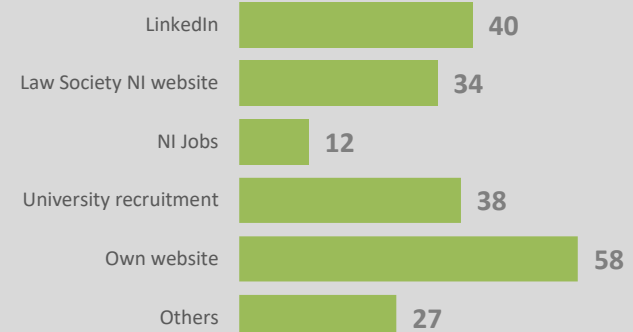
Almost half (47%) of these employers take on more than one trainee at each intake. Taking more than 1 trainee is the norm in practices with more than 10 partners. The channels used to recruit trainees are diverse. Reliance on the Law Society Ni website is a stronger feature of the recruitment process of sole practitioners. Larger practices rely more on their own website and LinkedIn.



Number of trainees per intake

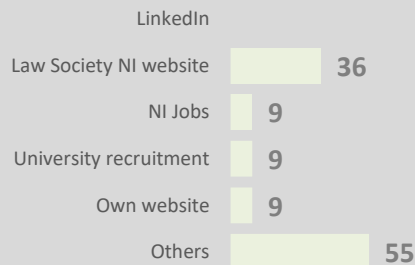


Recruitment channels



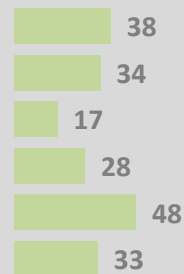
Sole practitioner

\*Caution very limited base=11



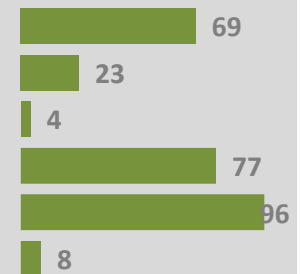
Small practice

10 or less partners



Large practice

\*Caution limited base=26



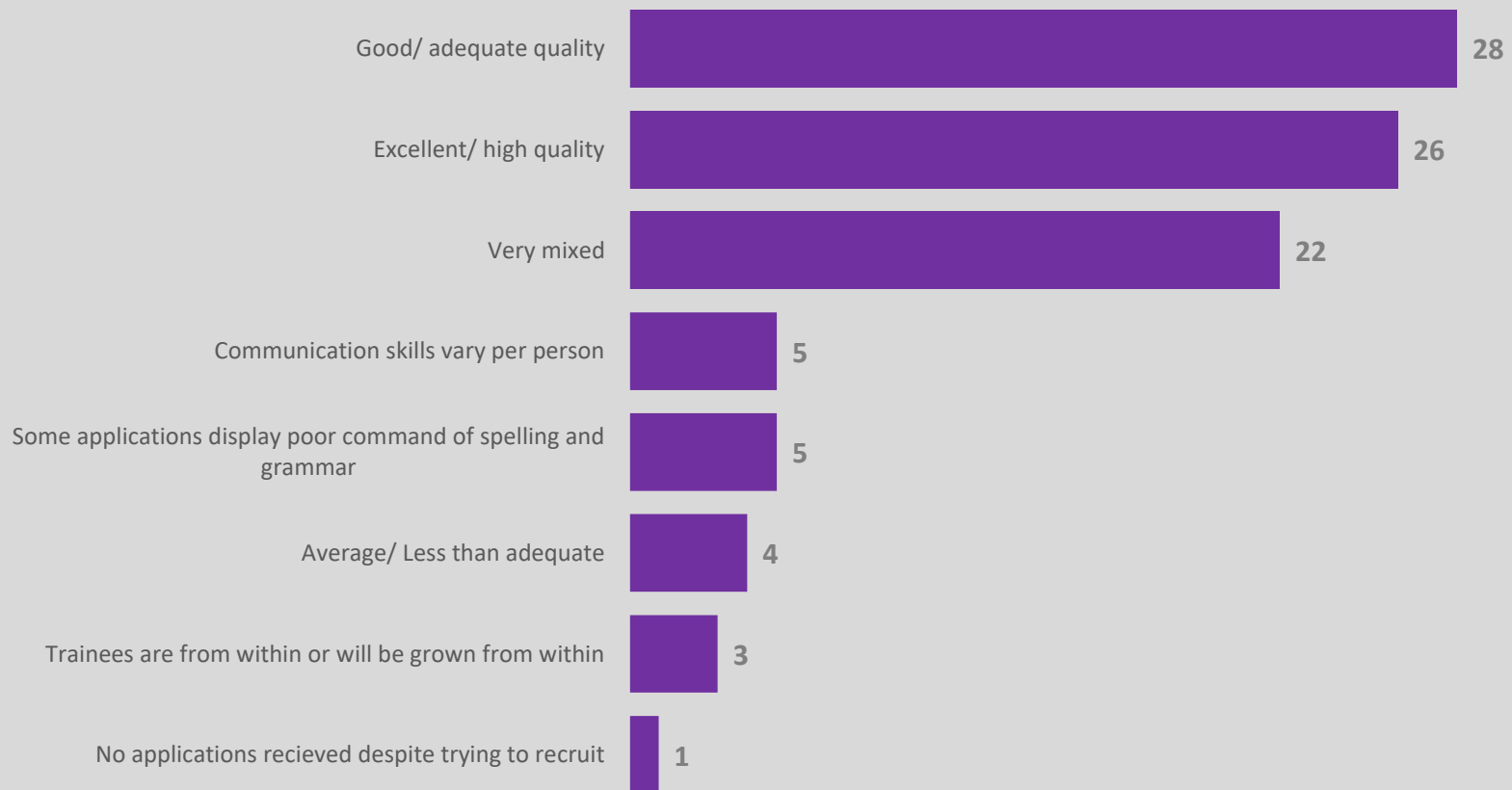
## Quality of applicants

Provided with an open question asking employers to comment on the quality of trainee applicants over half stated the applicants to be of good quality, but 1 in 5 stated a very mixed experience.

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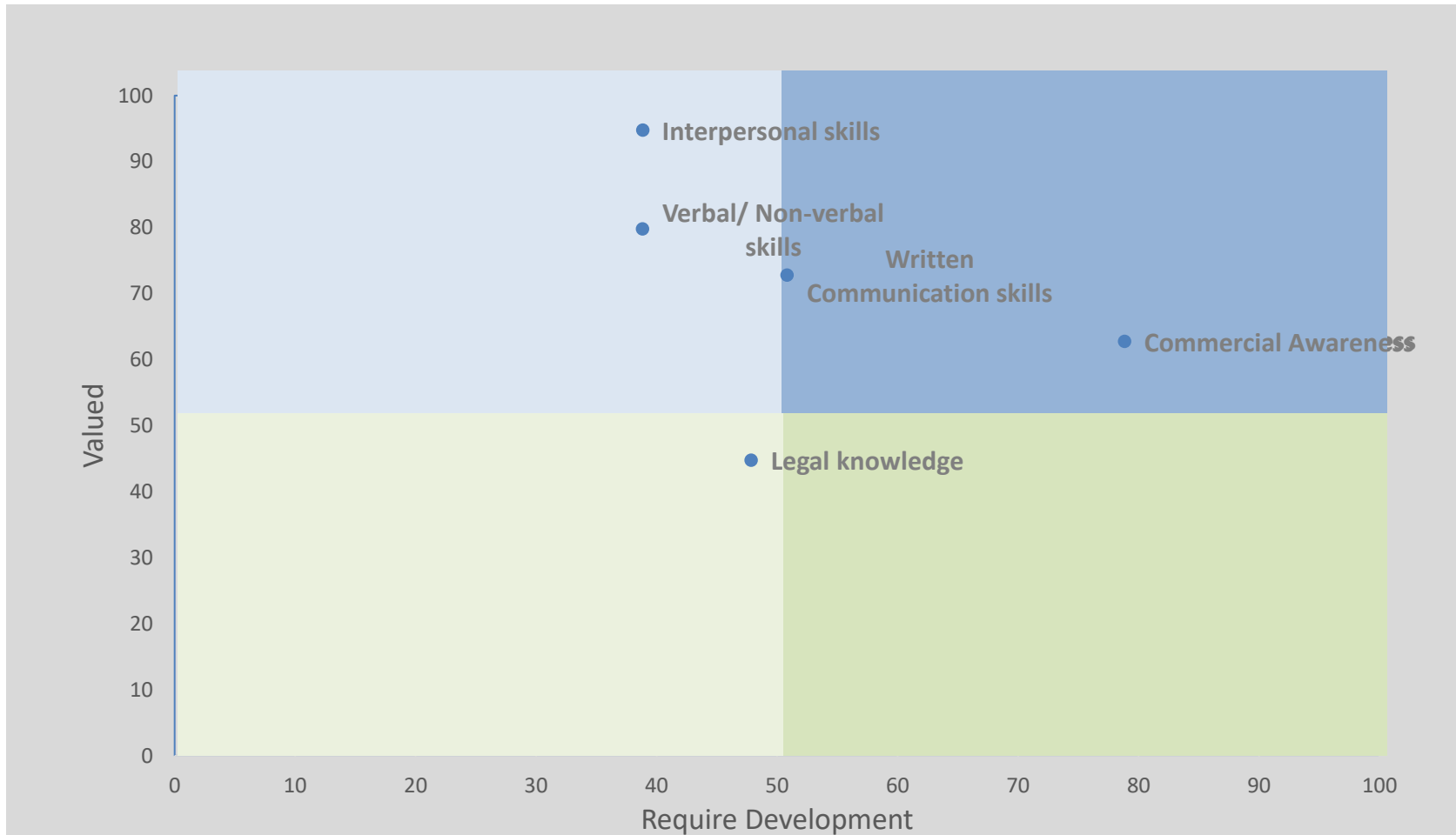
### Comments on quality of applications received



Q9. Based on your experience, comment on the quality of applications received e.g. presentation, knowledge demonstrated, applicant's communication skills. Base: n=99

# Valued Skills

Interpersonal capabilities are the most valued skills; closely followed by communication skills and whilst there is some need for development in these areas. The greatest need is for development of commercial awareness required by 79% of employers and valued by 63%.

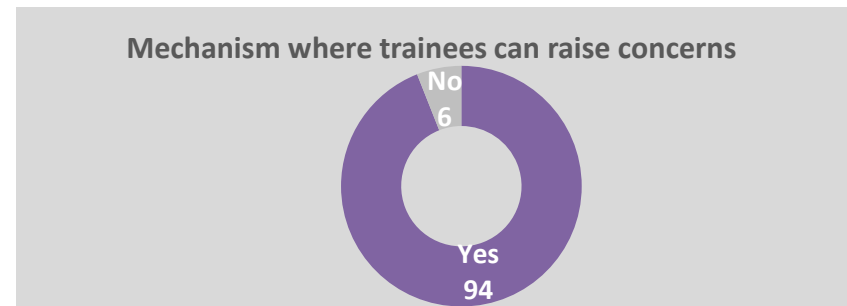
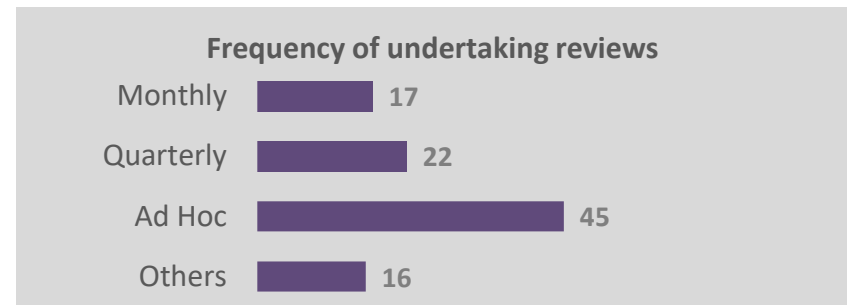
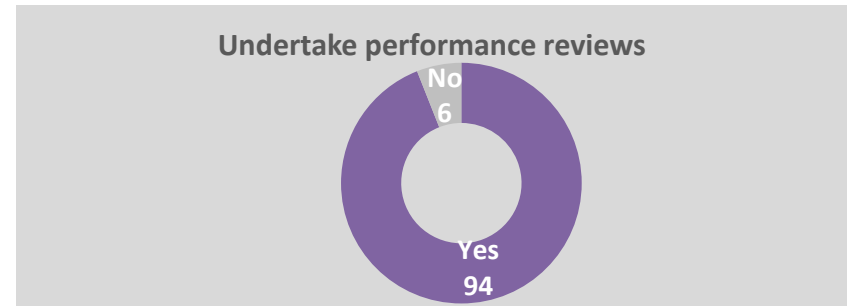
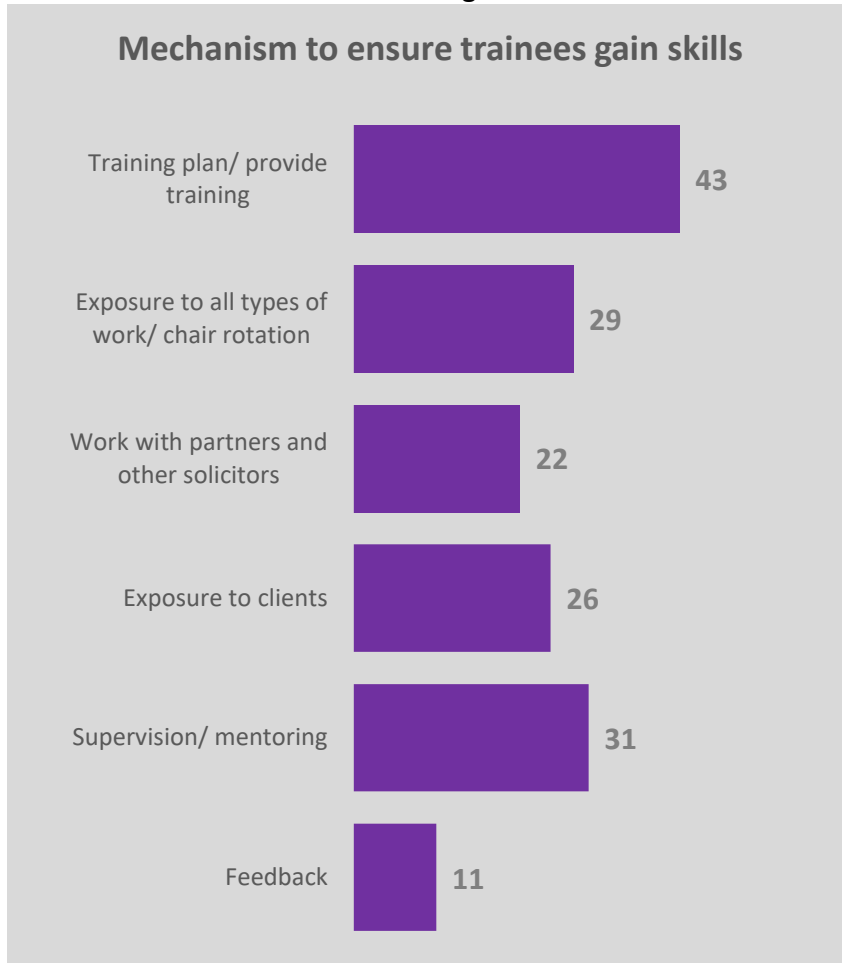


# How trainees are expected to gain skills during In-office traineeship



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Two in five employers see their training plan as the key mechanism for developing trainee skills, just under a third see supervision and mentoring as key. 19 in 20 employers undertake performance reviews, though most do not schedule these reviews on a regular basis.



Q11. How do you ensure that trainees gain these skills during their in-office training? Base: All taking trainees n=99

Q12. Do you undertake performance development reviews? Base: All taking trainees n=99

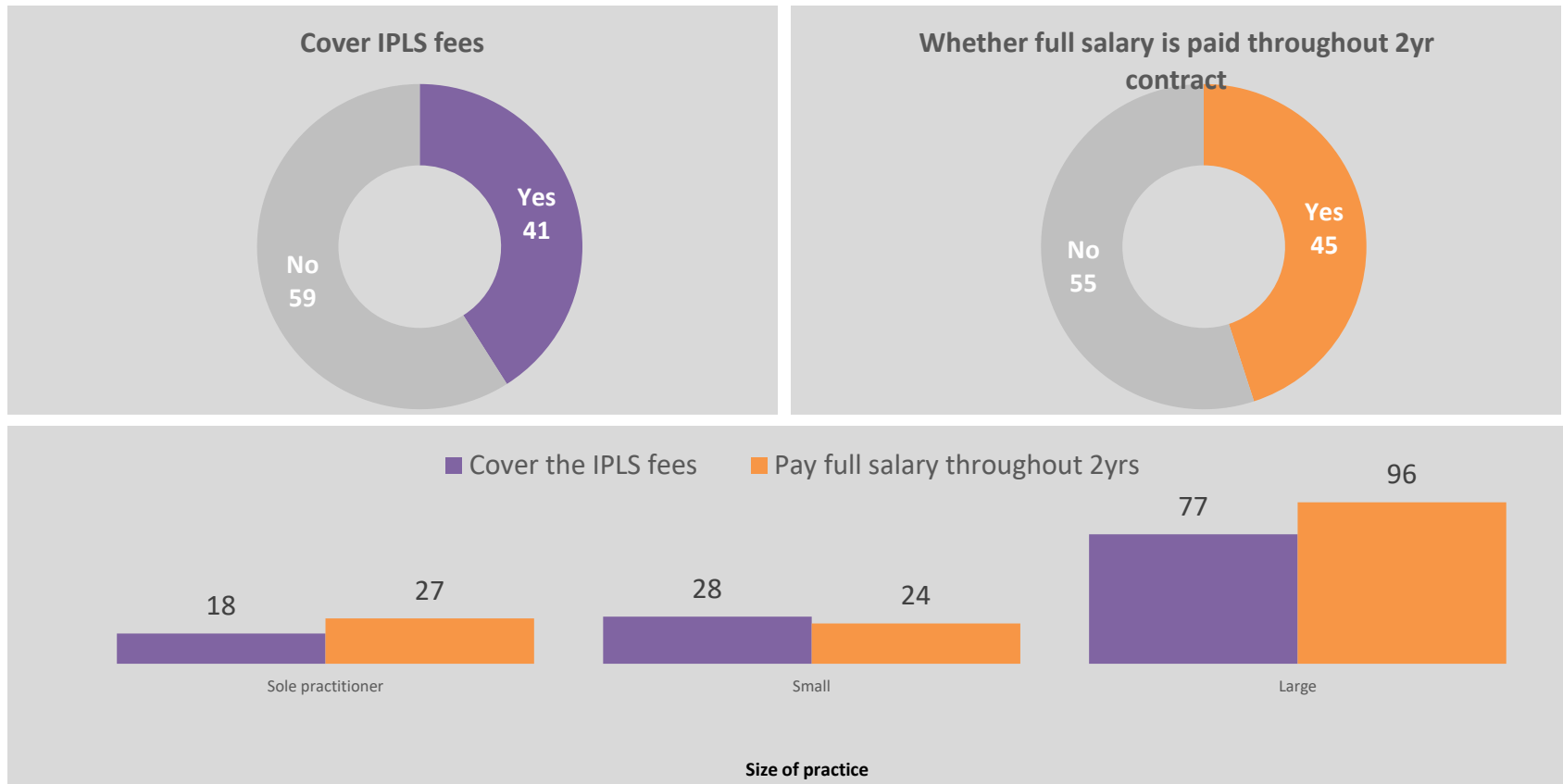
Q13. How often do these reviews/conversations happen? Base: All undertaking reviews with trainees n=93

Q14. Do you have any mechanism in place whereby trainees can raise concerns about their training? Base: All taking trainees n=99



# Remuneration

Two in five employers cover the trainee’s IPLS fees. 9 in 20 employers pay the trainee a full salary during their contract. There is a substantial difference between larger practices and smaller practices and sole practitioners, the majority of larger practices both paying a full salary throughout the 2 year contract (96%) and covering the IPLS fees (76%), where both funding arrangements are in a minority in smaller practices and amongst sole practitioners.

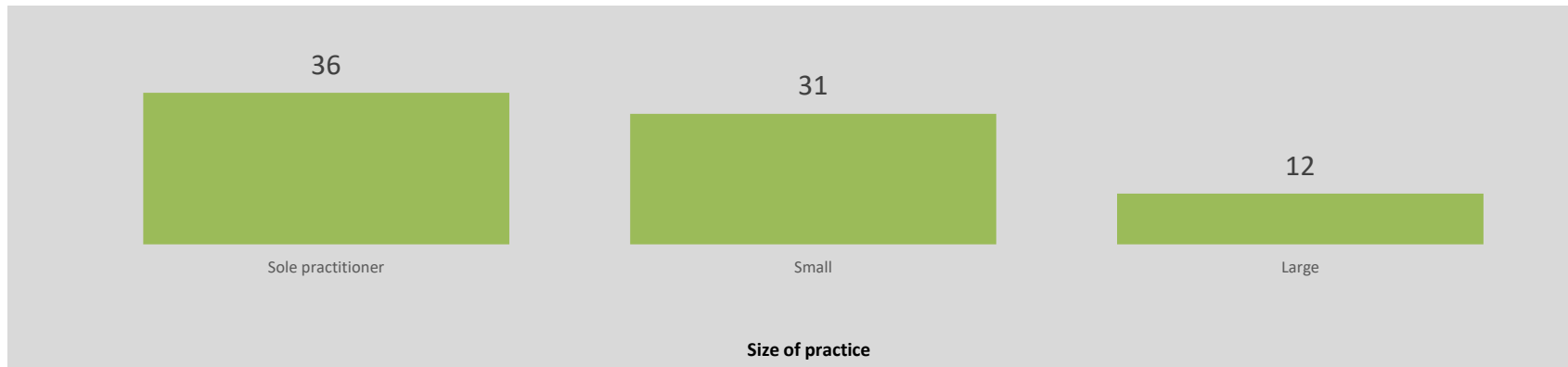


Q15. Do you cover the cost of fees at IPLS? Base: All taking trainees n=99

Q18. Do you pay trainees their full salary throughout the duration of the two year contract (including time spent studying at IPLS)? Base: All taking trainees n=99

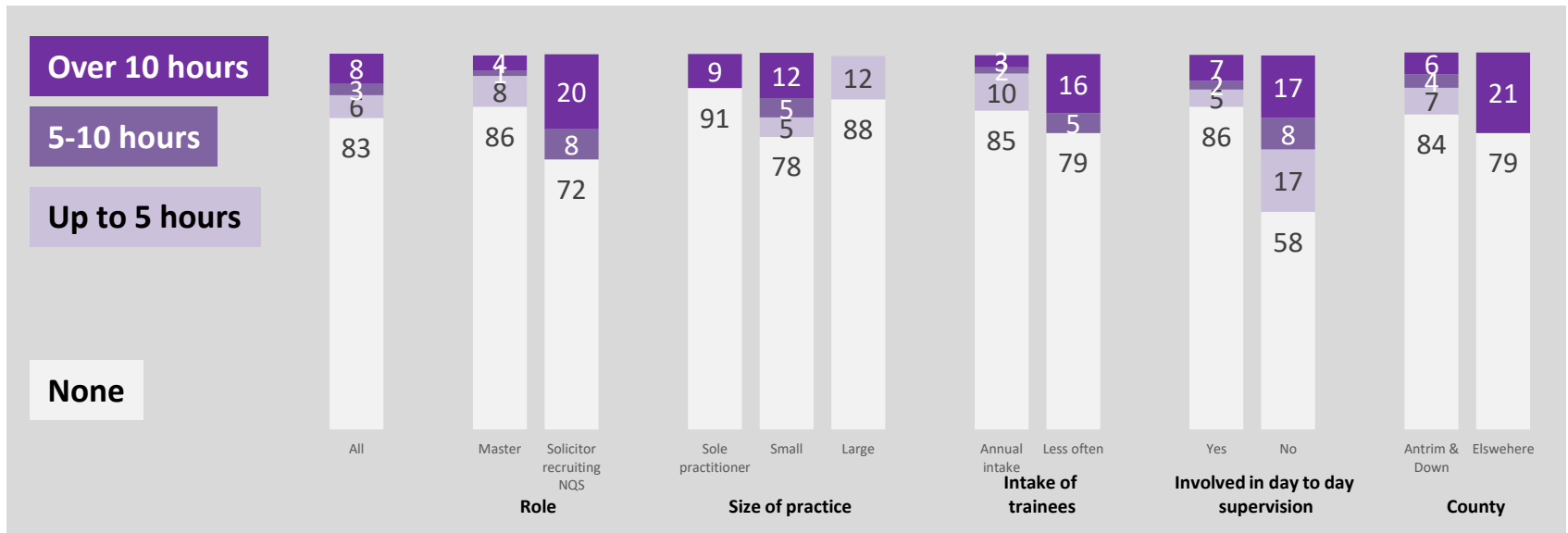
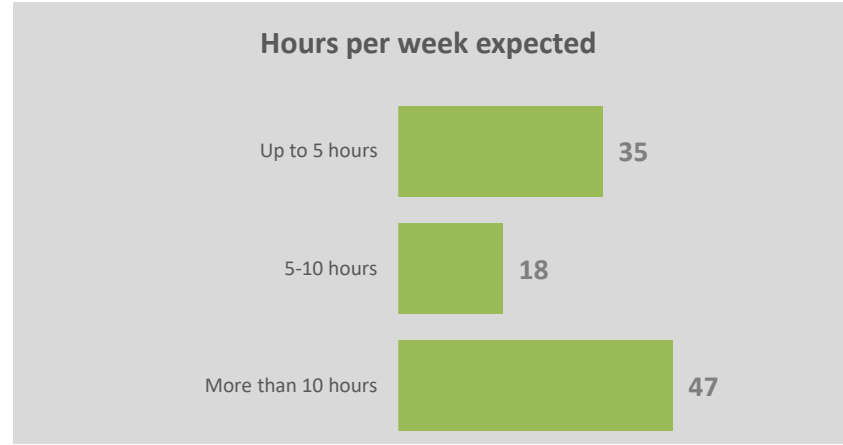
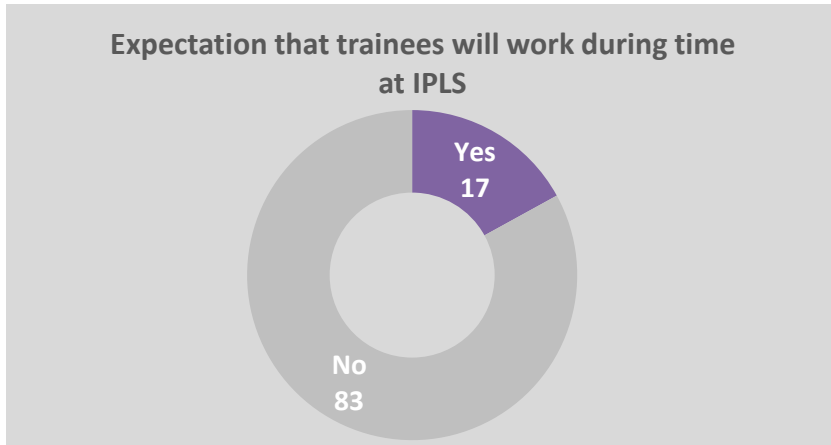
# Remuneration

Whilst the vast majority of employers pay newly qualified solicitors based on local market conditions, over a quarter pay trainees minimum wage. 1 in 3 sole practitioners (36%) and smaller practices (31%) pay trainees minimum wage, amongst larger practices this falls to 1 in 8 (12%).



# Working hours

One in six employers expect trainees to work during their time at IPLS. 8% of employers expect over 10 hours per week input from trainees; higher expectations of hours worked is more a feature of smaller practices, taking trainees less regularly and those based outside the East of the Province.

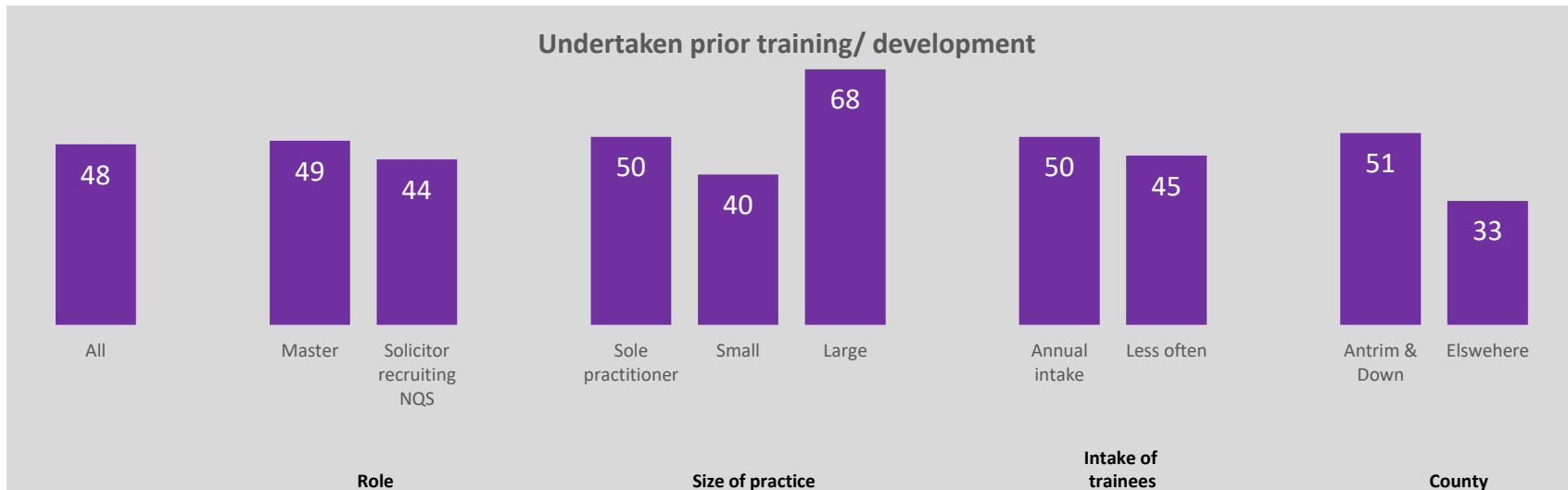
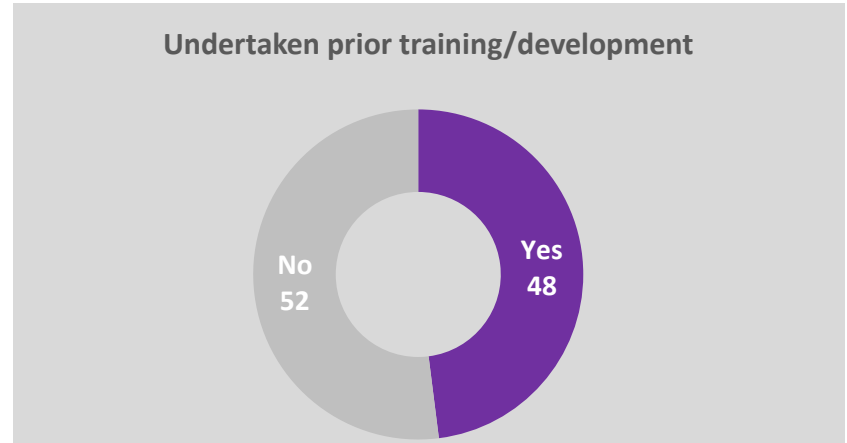
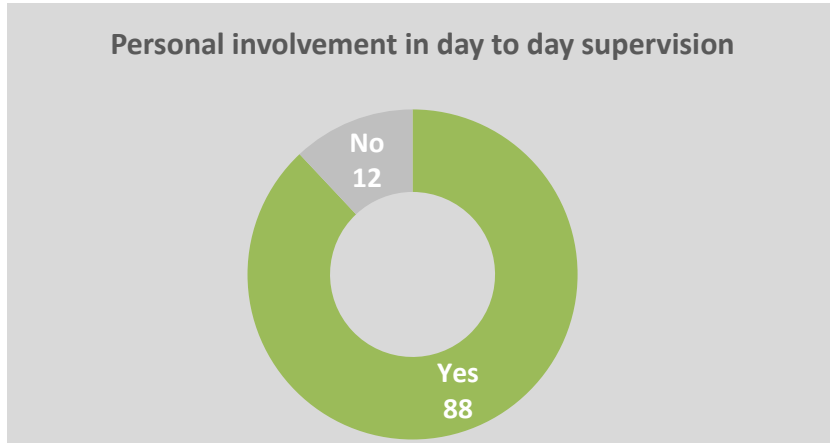


Q19. Do you expect trainees to work in-office during time at IPLS (not including required attendance at Easter and Summer holidays)? Base: All taking trainees n=99

Q20. For how many hours per week? Base: Those expecting trainees to work during IPLS n=17

# Training the trainer

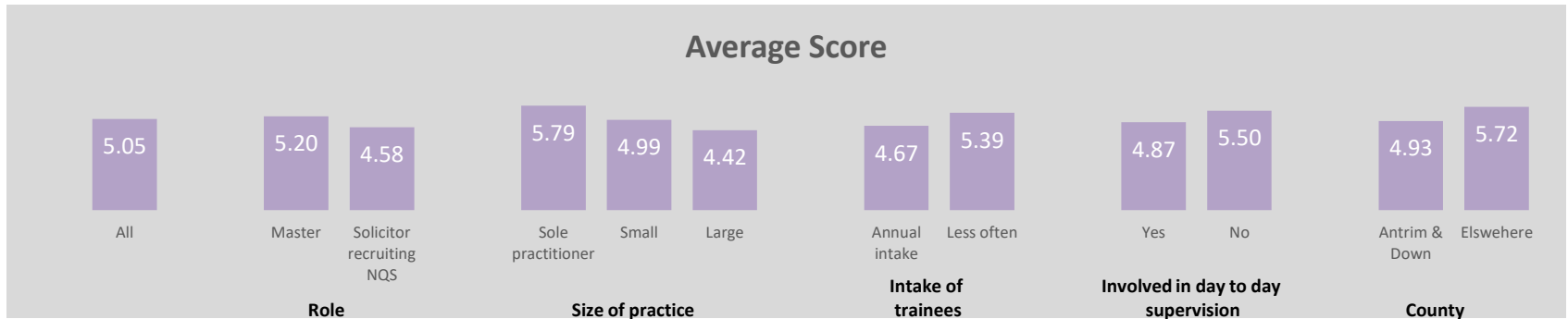
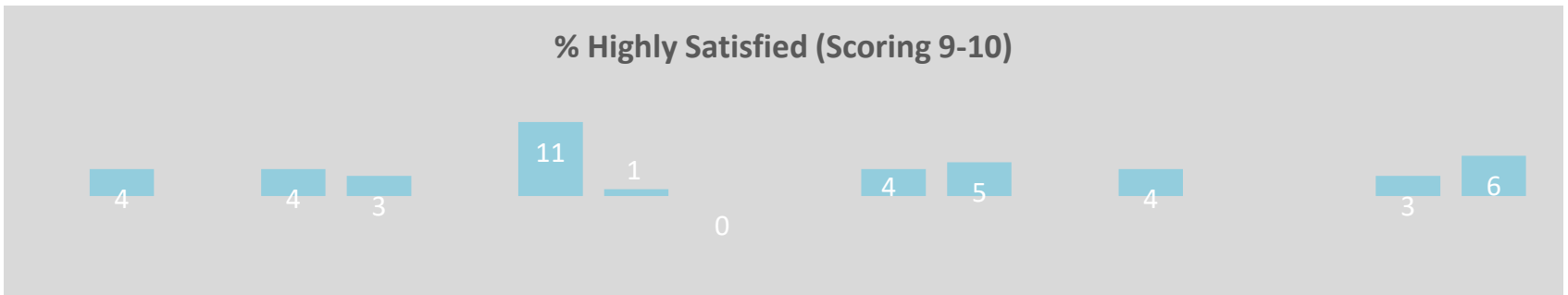
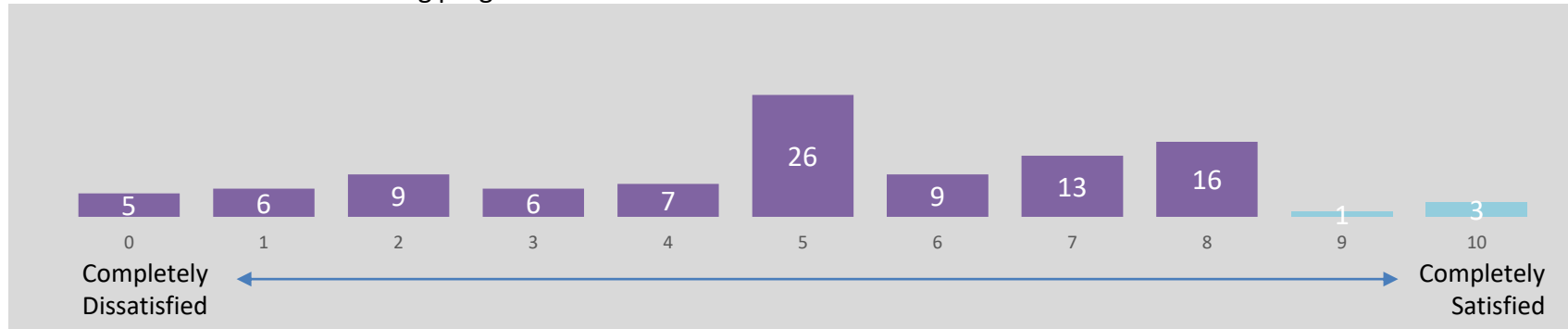
Only half (48%) of those involved in the supervision of trainees have had some form of training or development in order to undertake this role; again this is more common amongst larger practices and in the East of the Province.



Q21. Are you personally involved in the day-to-day supervision of trainees? Base: All taking trainees n=99  
 Q22. Prior to supervising trainees, had you undertaken any training or development focusing on managing and supervising junior members of staff? Base: All personally involved in day to day supervision of trainees n=87

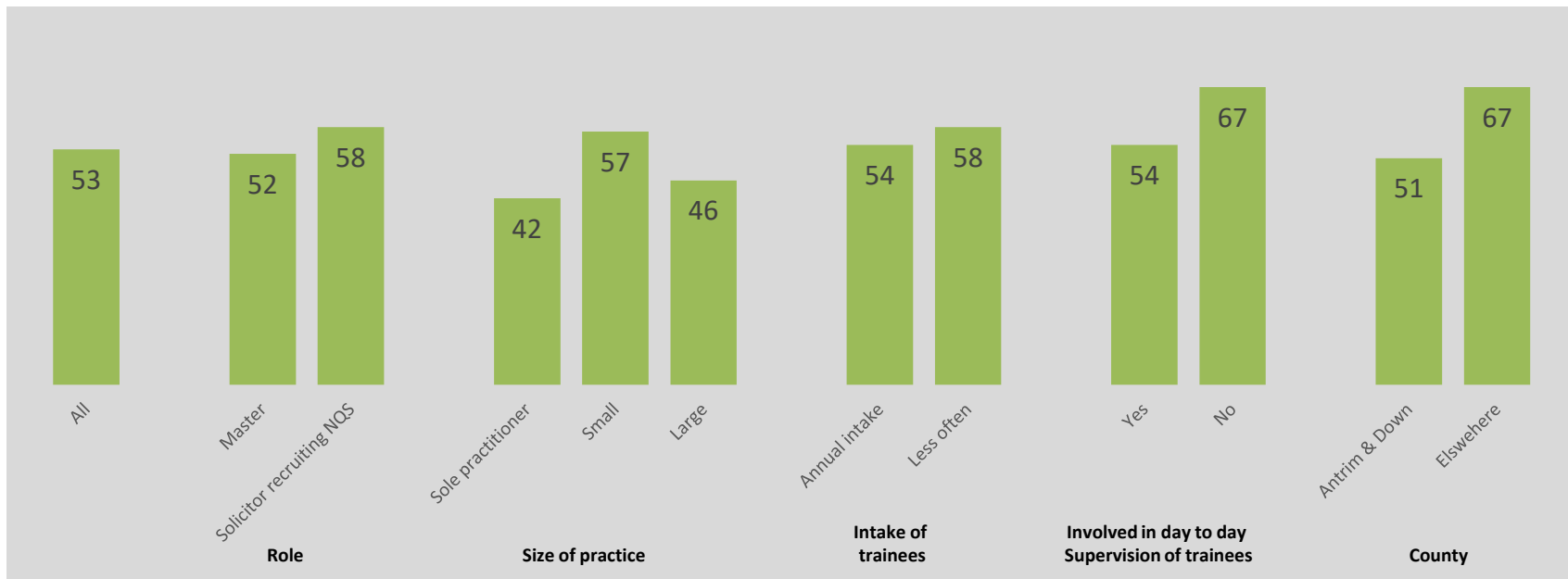
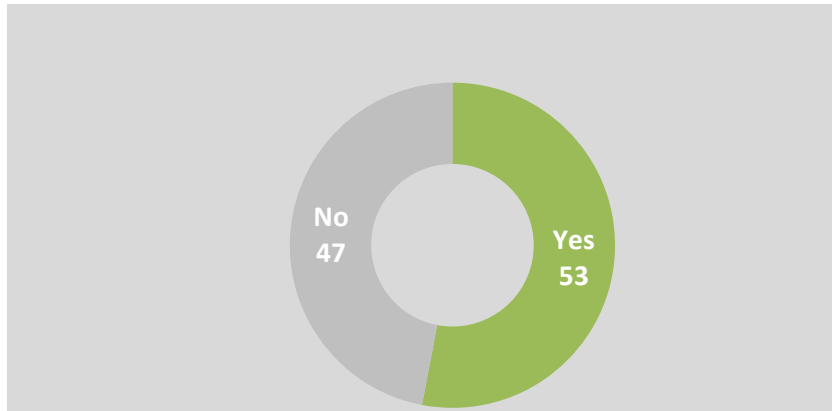
# Satisfaction With The Structure Of In-office Training

Only 2 in 5 (42%) employers are satisfied with the structure of the current in-office training programme, with only 1 in 20 stating strong levels of satisfaction. Larger practices, those based in the east and those taking trainees less regularly tend to be more satisfied with the current training programme structure.



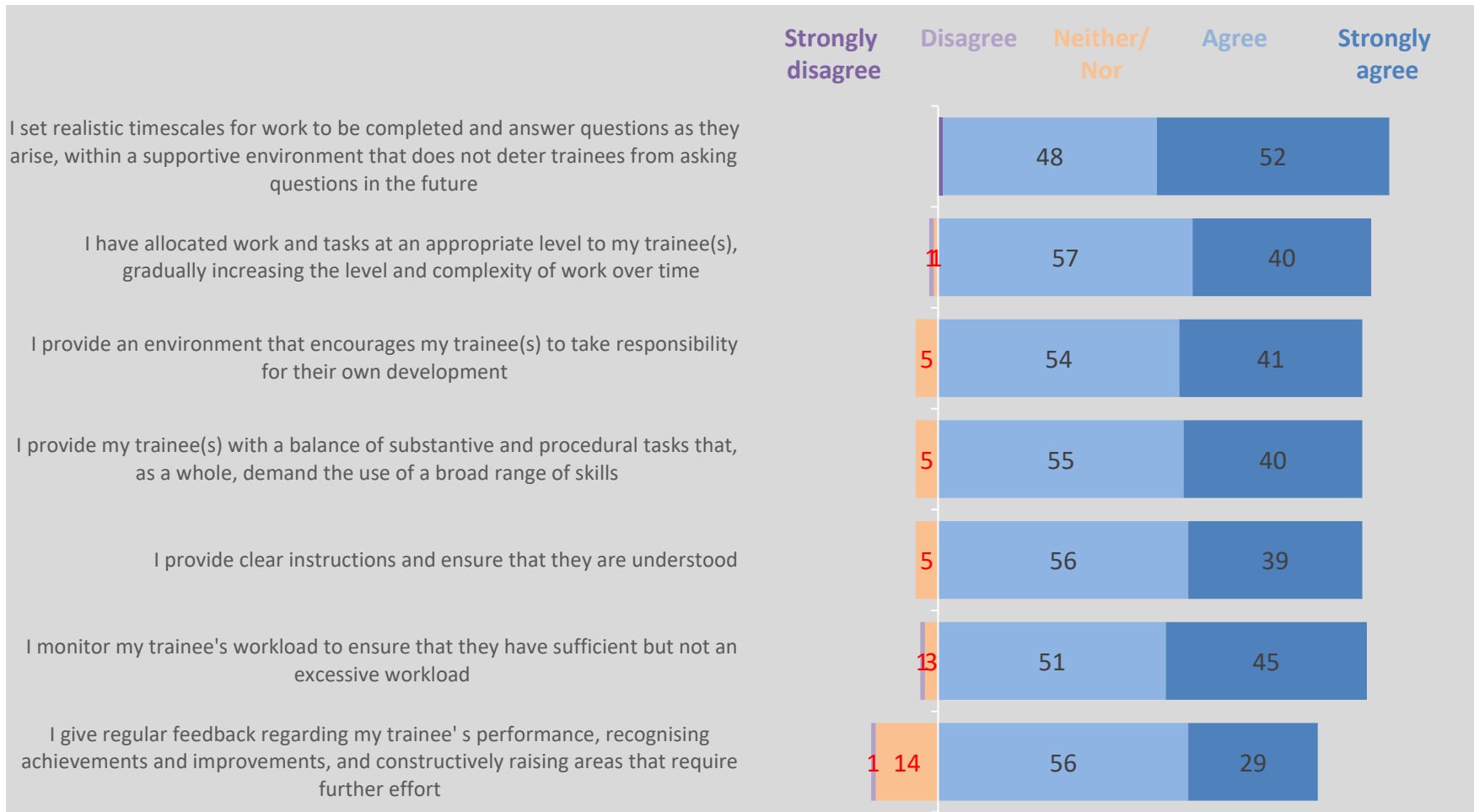
# Whether Current In-office Training Model Adequately Prepares Trainees

Half (53%) of employers perceive the current in-office training model adequately prepares trainees, again smaller practices, those taking trainees irregularly and those outside the east of the Province are more supportive of the current model.



# Agreement with statements on in-office training practices

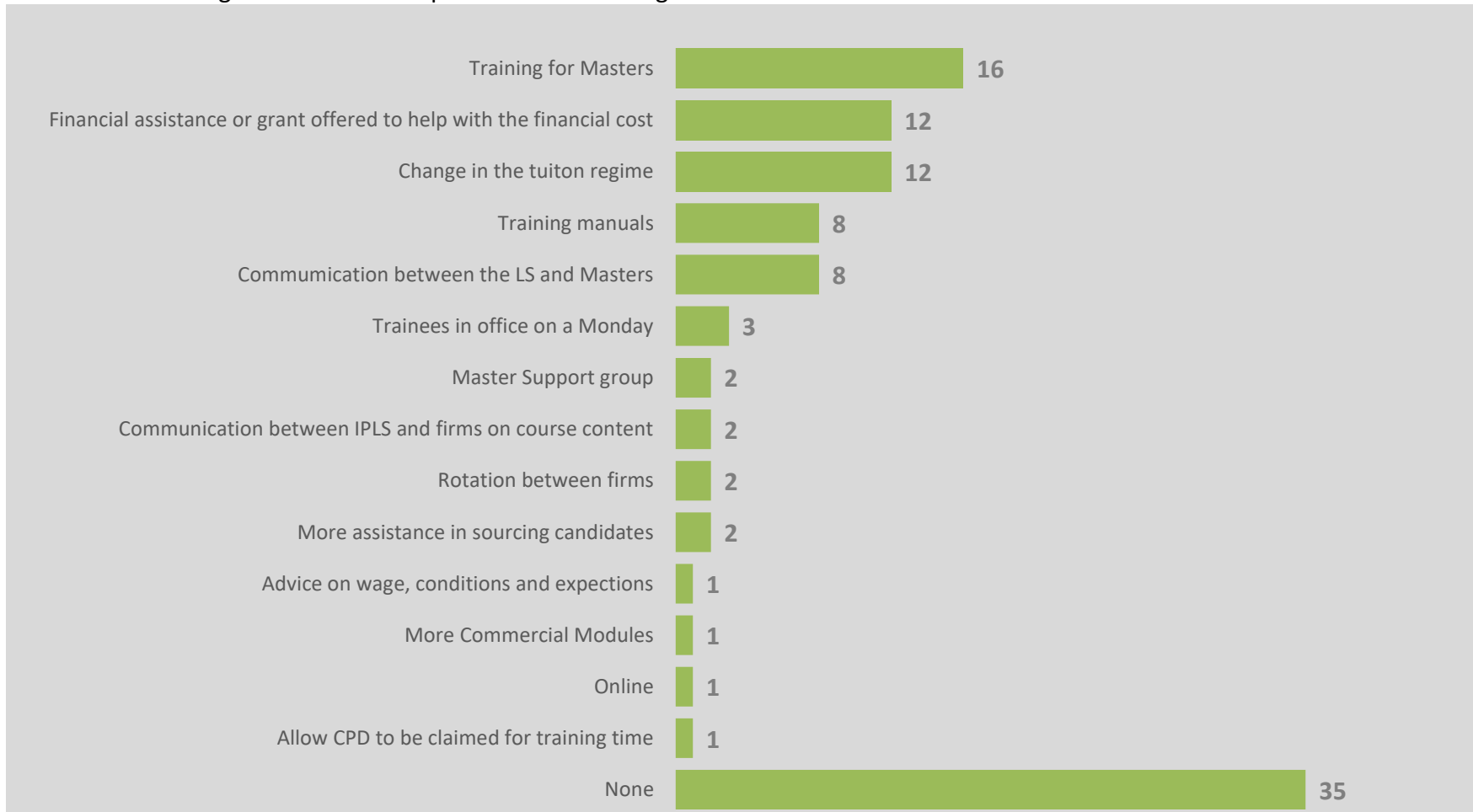
Employers are largely in agreement with the statements about creating a positive learning environment. There was a little less consensus on the issue of providing regular feedback.



## Additional Support That Should Be Provided to Masters

Responding to an open question on additional support that should be provided to Masters, one in six (16%) would like training to be provided to Masters, whilst one in eight would like to see a change in the teaching regime and a similar proportion would like to see a grant offered to help the costs of training.

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**ANY QUESTIONS?**