



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Report on National Survey of Special Needs Assistants

6 February – 5 March 2024

SNA Workforce Development Unit
Department of Education
May 2024

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Abbreviations

DE	Department of Education
ELC	Early Learning and Care
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SNAWDU	Special Needs Assistant Workforce Development Unit
The Plan	Special Needs Assistant Workforce Development Plan
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Education Needs Coordinator

Acknowledgements

SNAWDU wishes to thank all those who assisted with the design and implementation of the first national survey of special needs assistants including external stakeholders and colleagues in Department of Education.

Thanks to school leaders and staff, school management bodies and Fórsa for publicising and disseminating the survey link and encouraging SNAs to complete the survey.

SNAWDU would also like to express our gratitude to the SNAs who tested and completed the survey. We are grateful that you contributed your valuable time, honest information, and shared insights into your role. Your contribution will enable the Department to have a better picture of the workforce and assist in decision making to deliver better outcomes for the SNA workforce and the students that you work with.

1. Executive Summary

SNAs make a valuable contribution to our school communities, through the provision of adult support to enable students with significant care needs attend school. There are currently approximately 21,000 SNAs working in our schools.

This report details the results of the DE's first national survey of SNAs. It presents analysis of key characteristics and trends of the SNAs workforce in recognised primary, post primary and special schools in the Republic of Ireland which will support evidence-based planning and policy making in this sector.

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 The purpose of the survey is to collect and record baseline information about SNAs and their work. The data collected will help the DE to capture and develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the role of the SNA in the different educational settings and to explore and enhance the role that SNAs play in facilitating inclusion.

1.1.2 The data collected will be used by the DE to build an overall profile of the SNA workforce that will feed into important policy decisions in the sector.

1.1.3 The data sought includes information on employment and service details, professional development diversity in the sector, and other general questions around the SNA role in the school community.

1.2 Methodology and Design

1.2.1 The survey was created and administered by staff in the SNAW DU. In drafting the questions, the unit researched and consulted with all relevant internal stakeholders and other Departments. The unit also considered recent, similar surveys that have been conducted including the following:

- CSO Central Statistics Office Census
- UCD National Training Programme for SNAs – Evaluation Report
- Pobal - 22/23 Early Years Sector Profile Survey

- Studies carried out by St. Angela's College, Sligo
- The Public Appointments Service (PAS) Essential information on relevant staff who are being reassigned.
- Fórsa survey 2017

1.2.2 The survey was tested by a number of SNAs to ensure that questions were clearly set out, easily understood and that questions and categories flowed in a logical order.

1.2.3 The survey was conducted between 6 February and 5 March 2024, with the deadline extended to 5 March 2024 to allow additional time to SNAs to complete it. The data gathered through this survey was quantitative in nature.

1.2.4 The survey was uploaded online on Checkbox professional survey software and was open to all SNAs including those on leave of absence.

1.2.5 The Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion Josepha Madigan TD launched the survey on 6 February 2024. The Minister in a short video which was shared on www.gov.ie, the SNA Information Hub and on the social media platform 'X', formerly Twitter, encouraged SNAs to complete the survey. In her statement, the Minister said: *"This is about ensuring that the views of SNAs are fully considered in policy making. This is about listening. It is an important part of the Plan that experiences of the SNAs are recorded and considered in the decision-making process."*

1.2.6 In order to encourage a good response rate all recognised primary, post primary and special schools were provided with the link to the survey by the DE on two occasions between 6th February to 5th March 2024. An accompanying email encouraged school principals to invite SNAs in their school to complete the survey. School management bodies were contacted by the DE and encouraged to contact their members to alert them to the survey and encourage their staff to complete it.

1.2.7 Fórsa, the recognised trade union representing SNAs, was informed when the survey was launched, and they shared the information with their members.

1.2.8 During the first two weeks after the survey was launched, approximately 4,000 SNAs completed the survey, representing 20% of the SNA workforce. On 28 February 2024, the DE extended the deadline for completion of the survey by one week to allow SNAs a further opportunity to engage with it. The survey closed on 05 March 2024.

1.2.9 The survey was available in English and Irish. Responses were anonymous to encourage participation and the provision of honest views and opinions.

1.2.10 The survey questions were based on six key themes:

- General Information
- Workplace
- Training
- SNA Information Hub
- SNA Role
- Workplace Environment

Findings are presented in percentage charts and tables. The following quantitative terms are used when interpreting the information set out in the tables:

Percentage	Language used
More than 90%	Almost all
75% - 90%	Most
51% - 74%	Majority/more than half
50%	Half
25% - 49%	Less than half/a significant minority
16% - 24%	A small number/less than a quarter
Less than 15%	A few

In a small number of cases, adjustments were made to ‘round up’ or ‘round down’ percentages in charts and tables to ensure that percentages add up to a total of 100% where applicable.

1.3 Limitations

1.3.1 The DE relied on stakeholders to distribute the survey link and to encourage SNAs to complete it. There is a risk that the survey did not reach all members of the workforce. However, every effort was made to promote the survey and maximise the response rate. The sizeable sample obtained is invaluable for research and analysis as part of a multi-method approach in addition to the other research methods carried out by the unit in relation to this sector.

1.4 Response Rates

1.4.1 It is estimated that a total of 21,000 staff were working in the sector across Ireland at the time of the survey. The survey received 13,465 responses (64% of the SNA workforce) in total. From this total 7,401 (55%) were complete and 6,056 (45%) were incomplete responses.

1.4.2 To ensure the accurate representation of the results, incomplete responses were carefully reviewed.¹ The responses reflected in the data displayed in this report reflect the views of those SNAs who completed the survey in full.

1.5 Profile of respondents

1.5.1 A total of 7,401 complete responses accounts for approximately 35% of the total SNA workforce in Ireland which is an excellent response rate.²

¹ Out of 6056 incomplete responses, 3259 were completely blank and excluded from analysis. The remaining 2,797 incomplete responses were analysed for partial completion in each section.

² [Optimizing Your Survey Response Rate | Kantar](#)

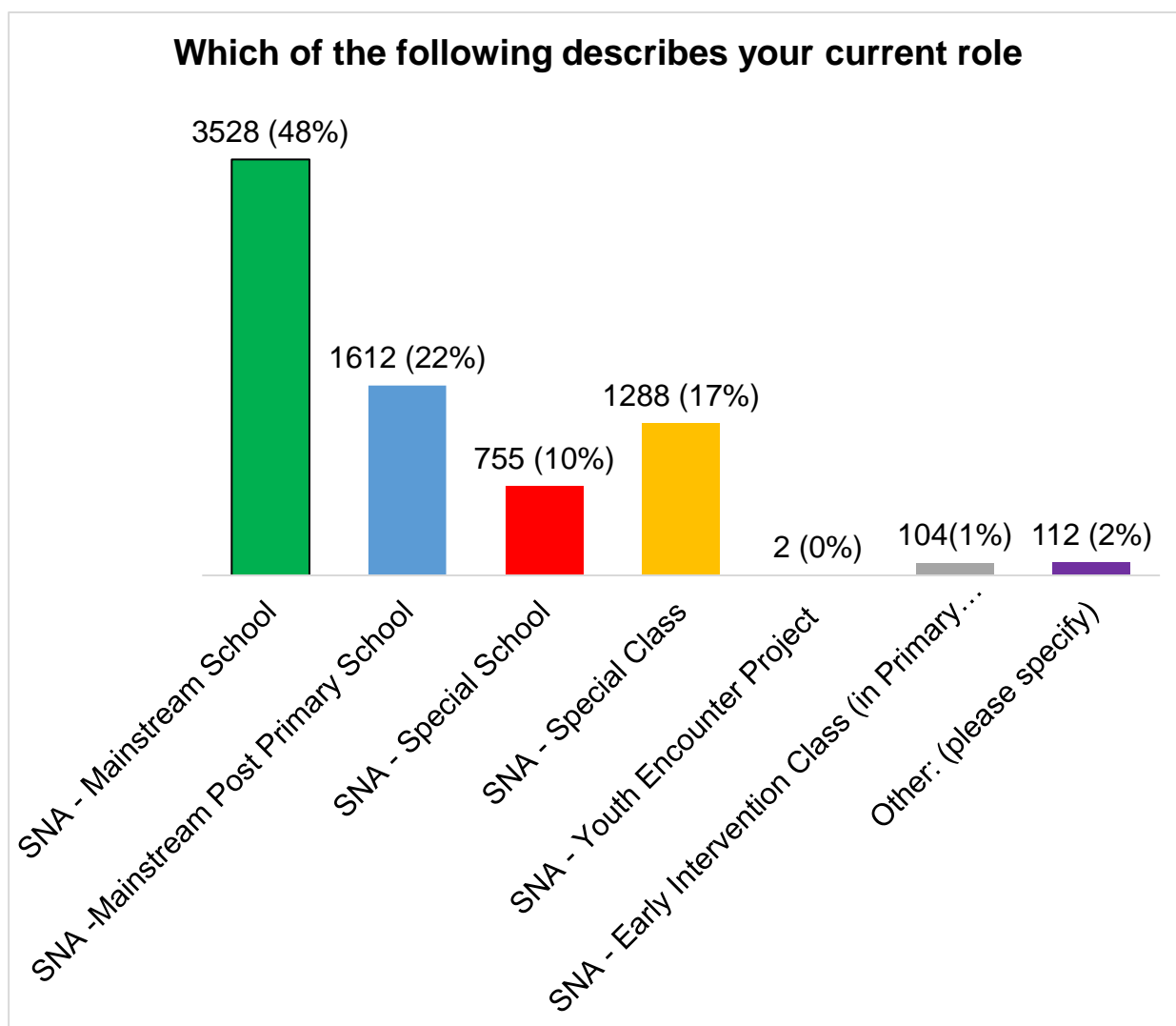


Table 1 Current role

1.5.2 The distribution of SNA responses across different types of schools appropriately reflects the variety of school settings in which SNAs work.

1.5.3 As reflected in Table 1, the highest number of responses received was from SNAs employed in mainstream primary schools, accounting for almost half of the total responses, followed by those in mainstream post primary schools.

1.5.4 Additionally, a considerable portion of responding SNAs are deployed in special classes, comprising 17%. A total of 1288 responses from SNAs in special classes is a combined number from both Primary and Post Primary school sectors. 755 responses

were received from SNAs working in special schools, representing 10% of the total number of responding SNAs employed in this sector.

1.5.5 104 (1%) responses were received from SNAs in Early Intervention Classes in primary schools, followed by 2 (0%) SNAs in Youth Encounter Project.

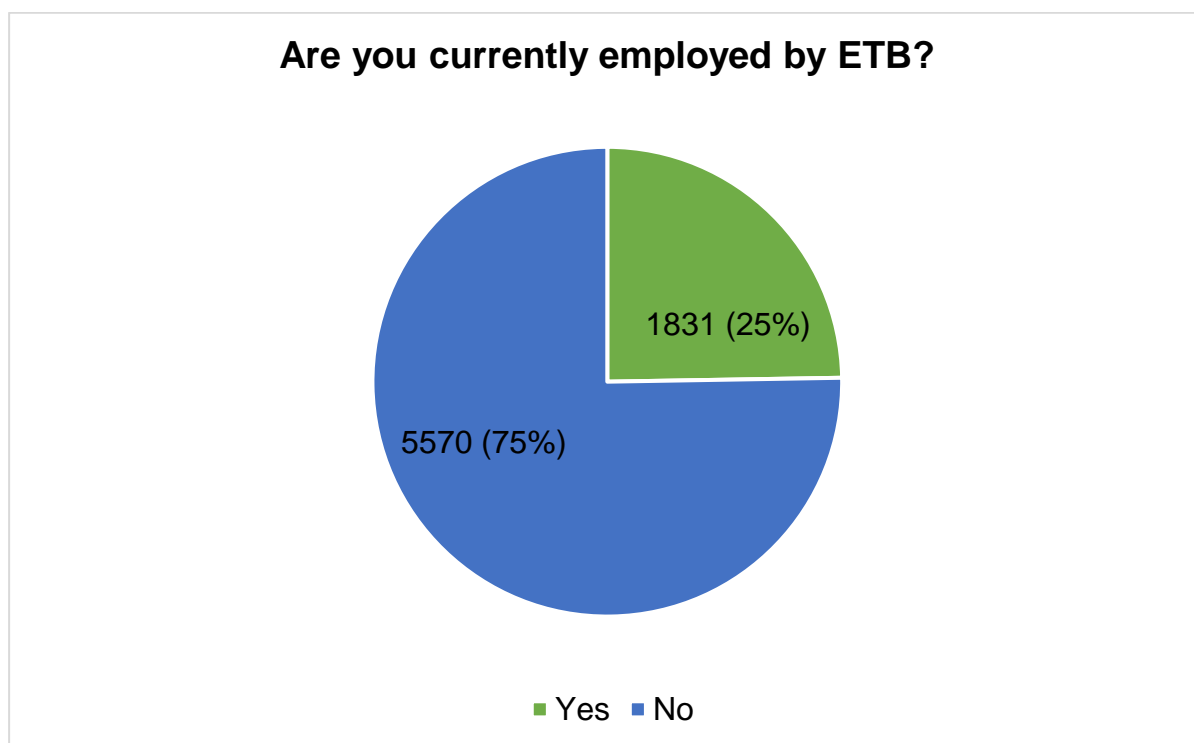


Table 2 ETB employment

1.5.6 As presented in Table 2, 25% of respondents were employed in schools under the patronage of Education and Training Boards.

2. Findings of the survey

2.1 General Information

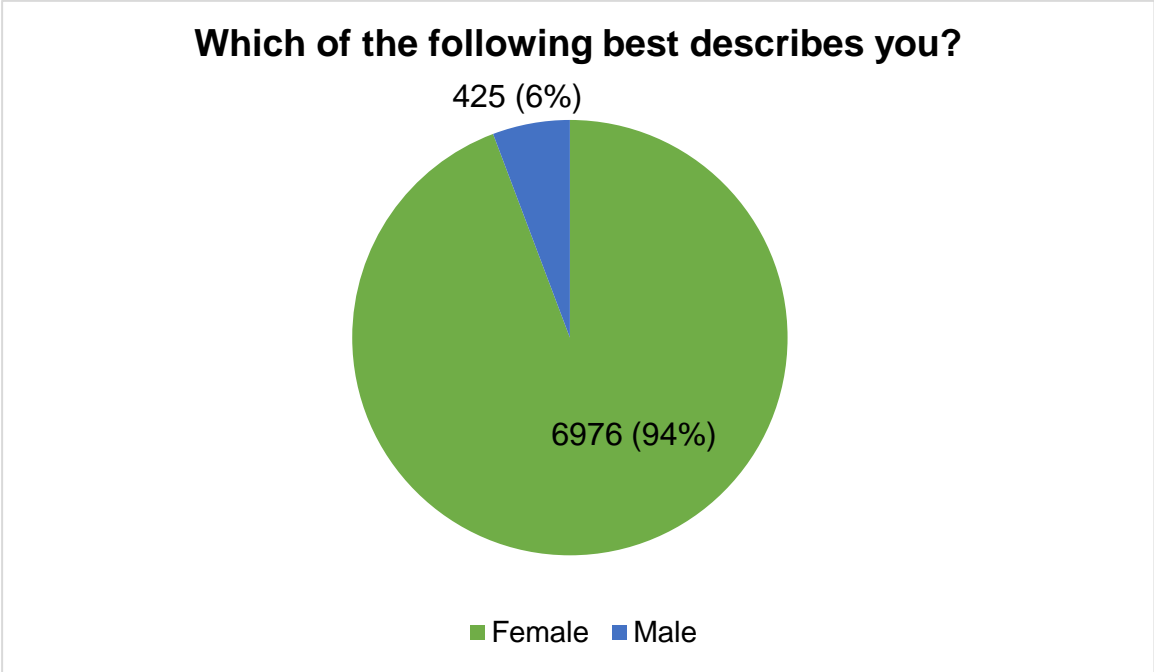


Table 3 Gender profile of respondents

2.1.1 As reflected in Table 3, the majority of SNAs surveyed identified as female, accounting for 94% of respondents, while males represented 6% of the sample. This is reflective of previous statistics on the sector which has historically comprised of mainly female workers.

What is your cultural or ethnic background?

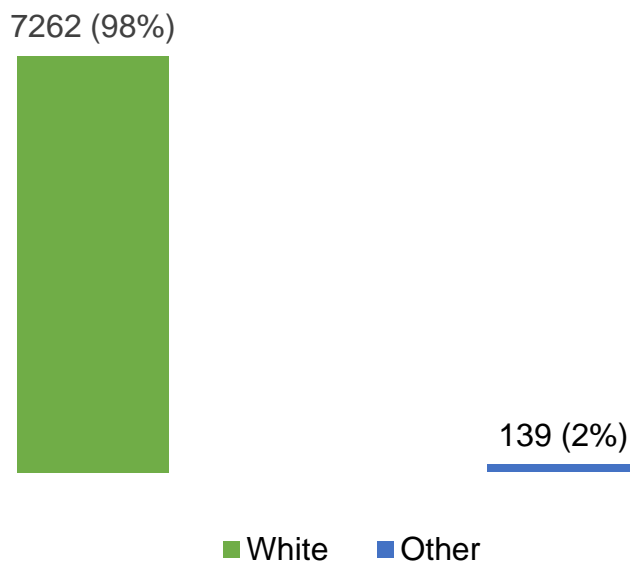


Table 4 Ethnic or cultural background

2.1.2 Almost all SNAs (98%) who responded identified their cultural background as White.³ Minority cultural backgrounds, such as Black or Asian, were listed by a very small percentage of respondents (12 (0.2%) and 27 (0.4%) respectively).

³ 98% respondents were white of whom 6975 (96%) were Irish, 6 (0.1%) represented Irish Travellers community and 281 (4%) were any other white background.

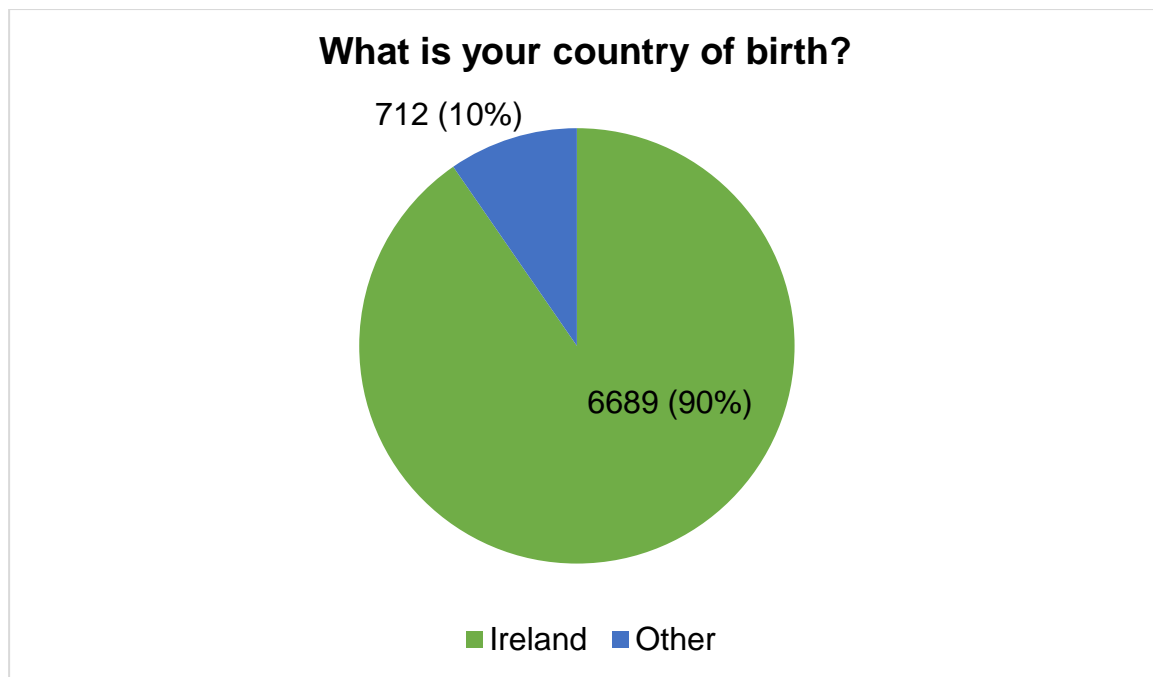


Table 5 Country of birth

2.1.3 90% of SNAs who participated in the survey are Irish and the remaining 10% were born outside Ireland in various locations.

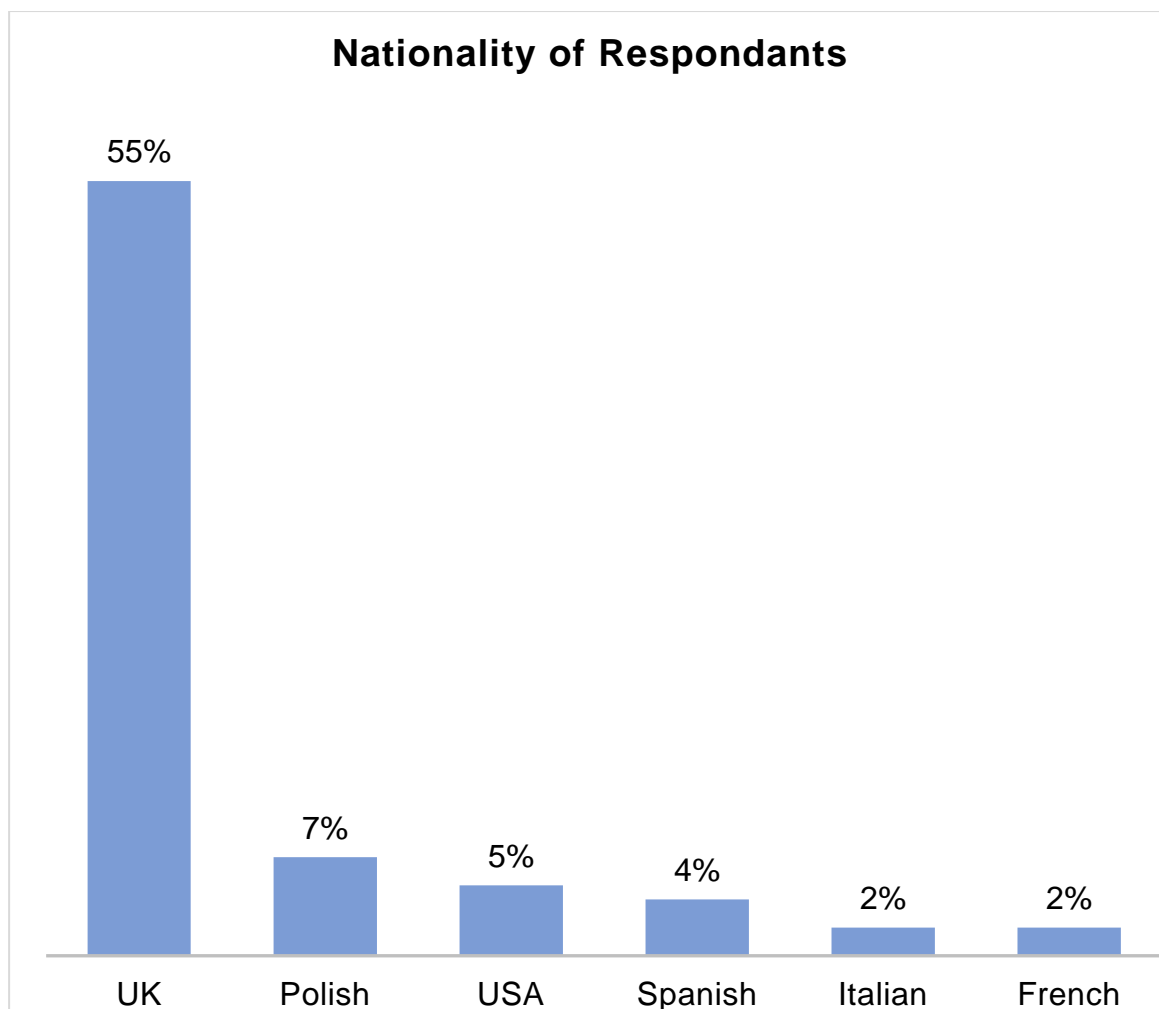


Table 6 Nationality of respondents

2.1.4 A total of 66⁴ countries were represented by 712 SNAs. The highest number of 388 foreign nationals advised that they are from the UK (55%), while 53 are Polish (7%) and 38 are from the United States of America (5%). Followed by Spanish, Italian and French.

⁴ Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, Czechia (Czech Republic), Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mauritius, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Zambia, Zimbabwe

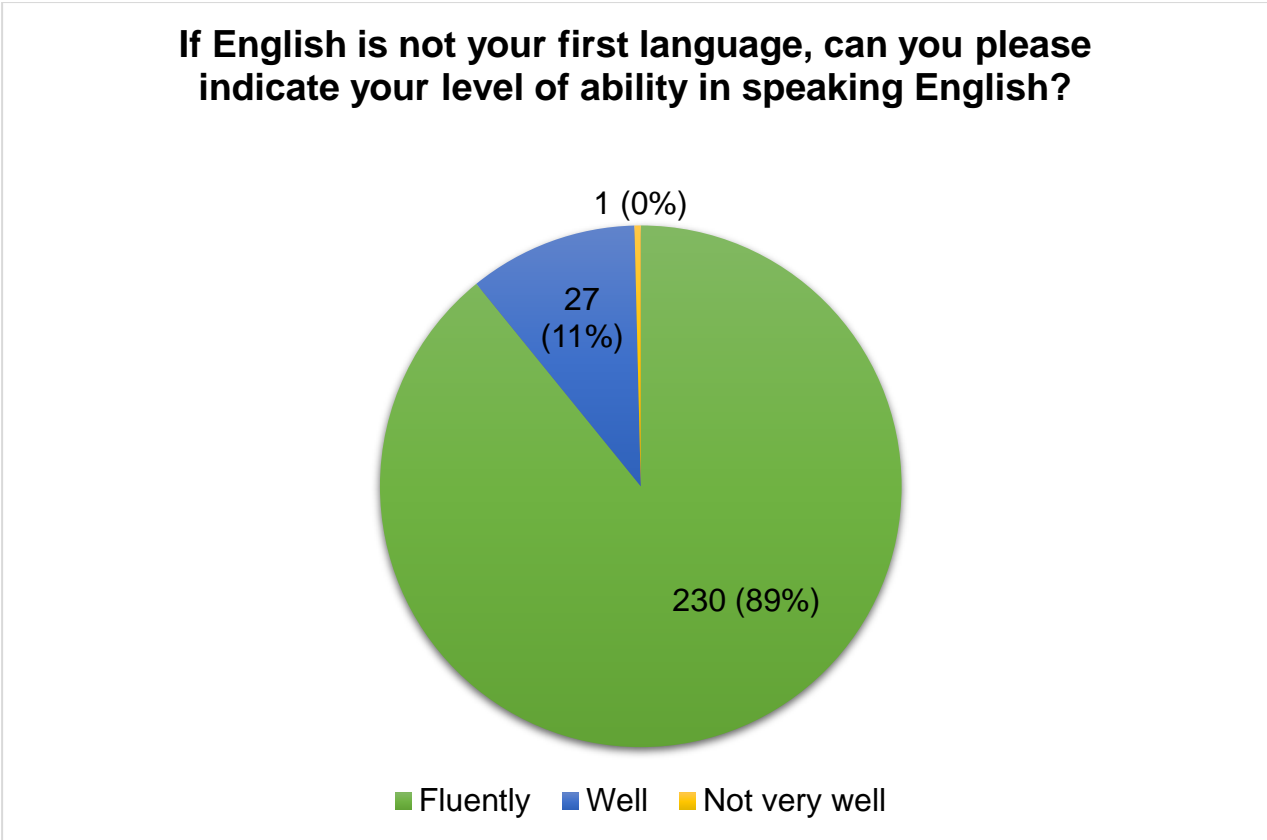


Table 7 Proficiency in English

2.1.5 Of those that indicated that English is not their first language, 230 (89%) advised that they were fluent in the English language.

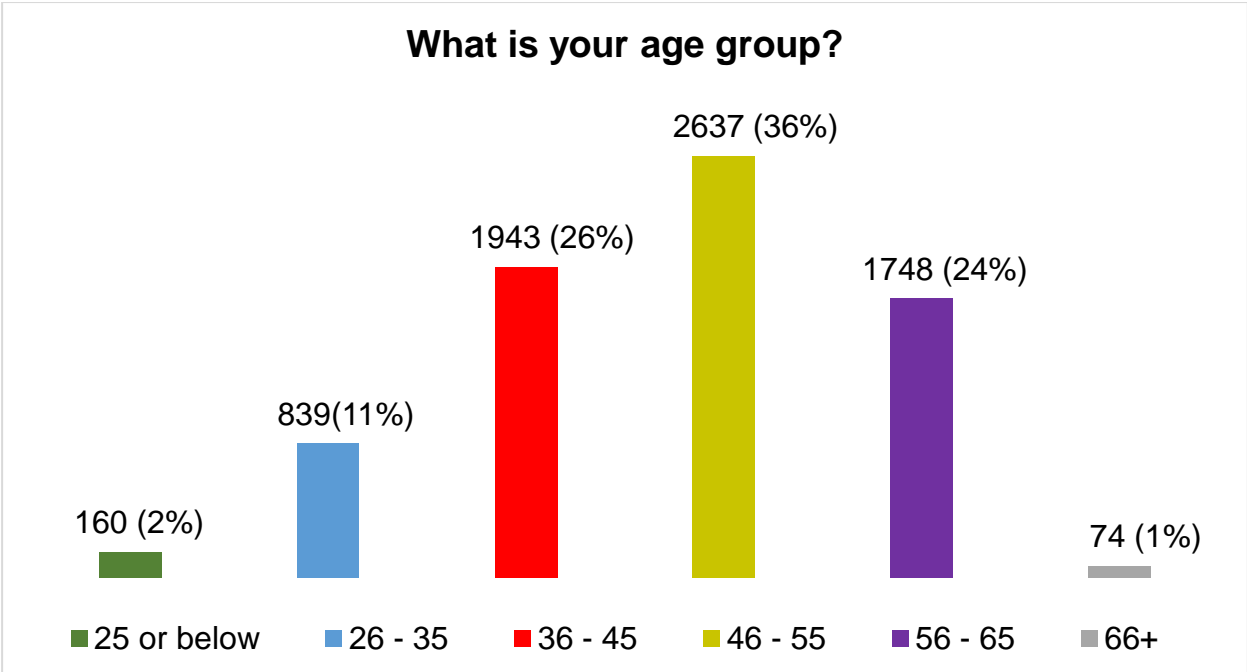


Table 8 Age profile of respondents

2.1.6 As presented above a significant majority comprising 2637 (36%) of respondents fell within the 46-55 age bracket. The 36-45 age group at 1943 (26%) followed. Additionally, 1748 (24%) were aged 56-65, while smaller percentages represented younger age groups, with 839 (11%) aged 26-35 and only 160 (2%) aged 25 or below. A negligible percentage (1%) of respondents were aged 66 or above.

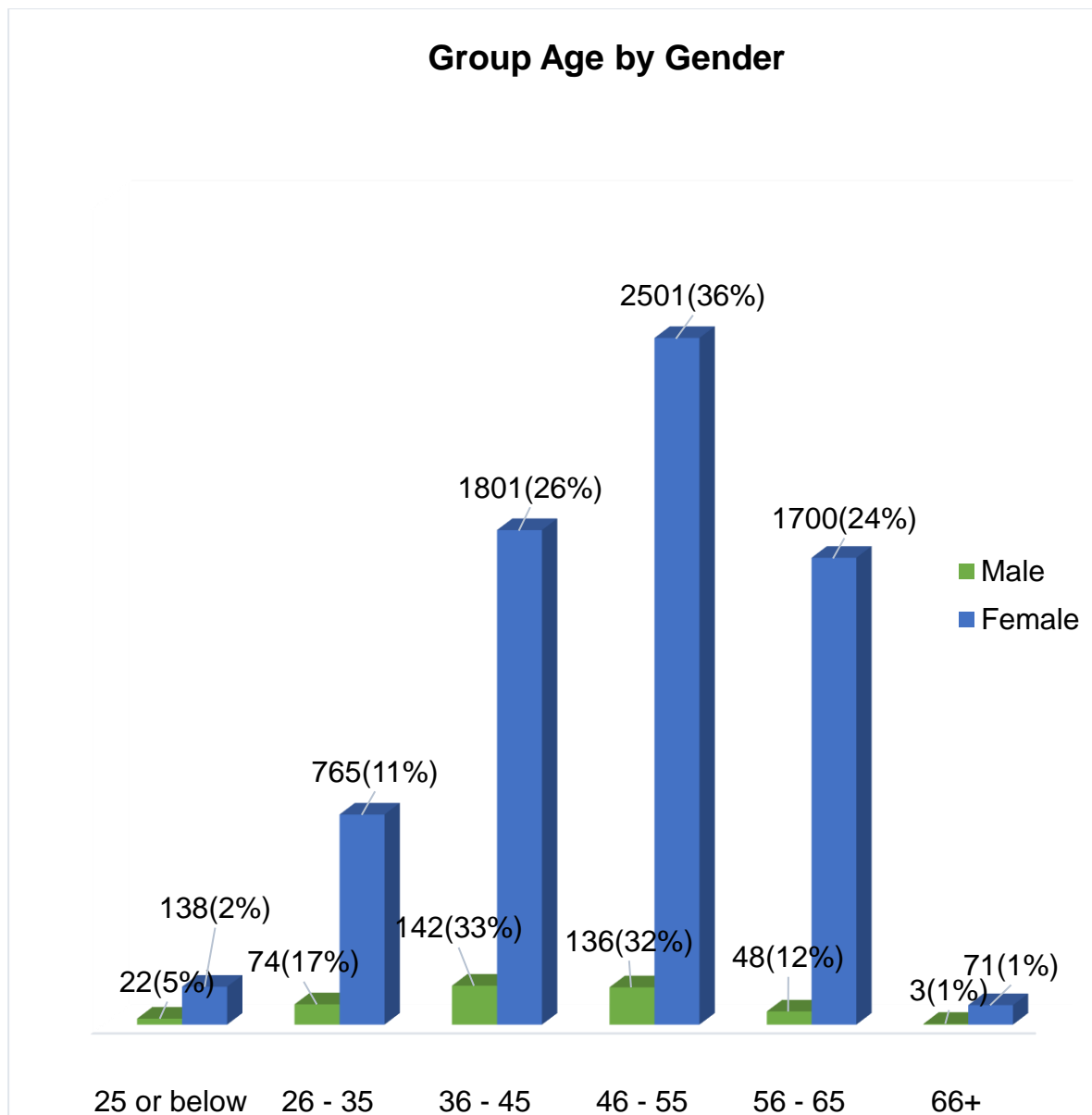


Table 9 Age groups by gender

2.1.7 Table 9 above sets out the range of age groups by gender.

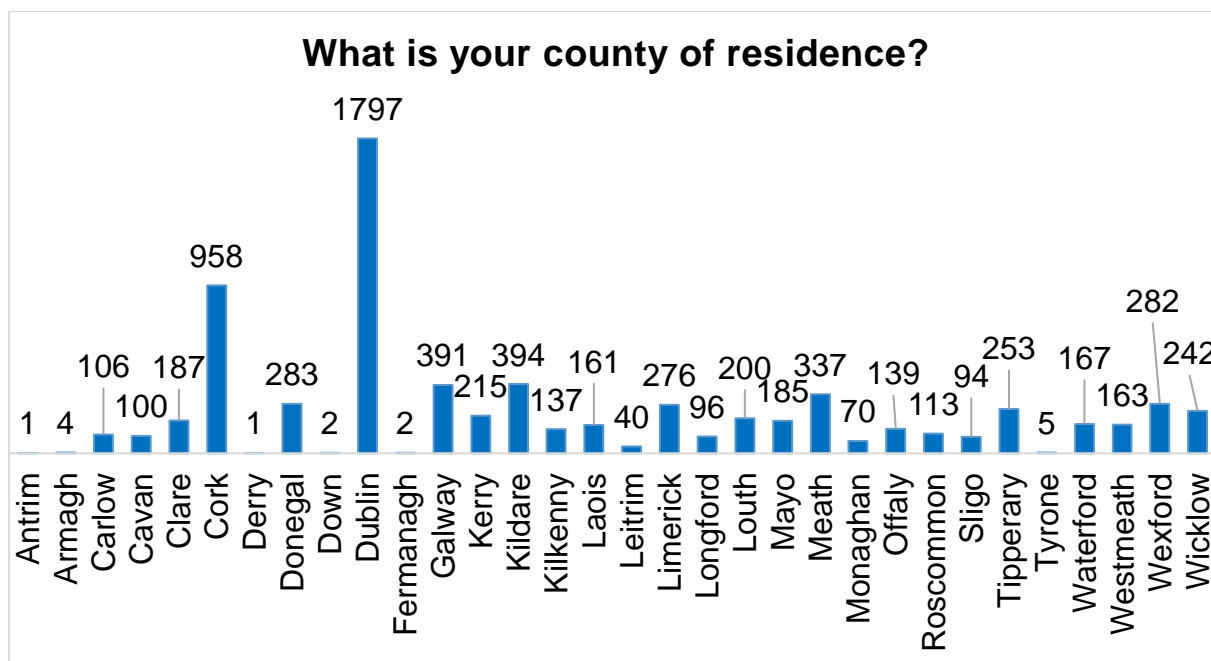


Table 10 County of residence of respondents

2.1.8 Geographically, of those SNAs who responded to the survey 1,798 (24%) indicated they reside in Dublin, while 958 (13%) live in Cork, 394 (5%) in Kildare, 391 (5%) in Galway and 337 (5%) in Meath. The smallest number (less than 1%) live in Antrim (1), Derry (1), Armagh (4), Down (2) Fermanagh (2) and Tyrone (5).

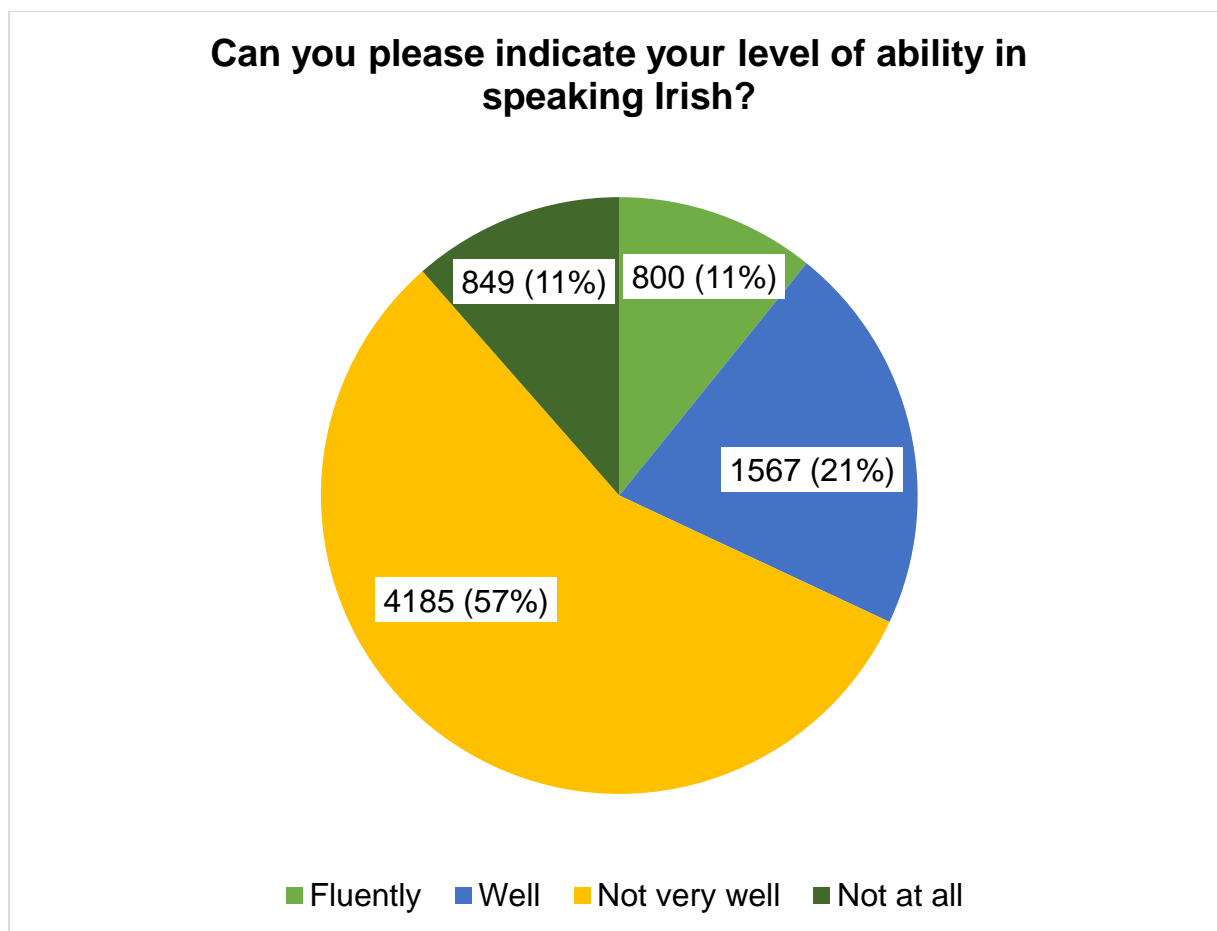


Table 11 Proficiency in Irish

2.1.9 Regarding proficiency in the Irish language, the majority of SNAs surveyed reported limited proficiency. Specifically, 57% stated they didn't speak Irish very well, while 11% reported not speaking Irish at all. Only 11% claimed fluency, with 21% advising that they spoke Irish well. A total of 16 (0.2%) SNAs completed the survey through Irish.

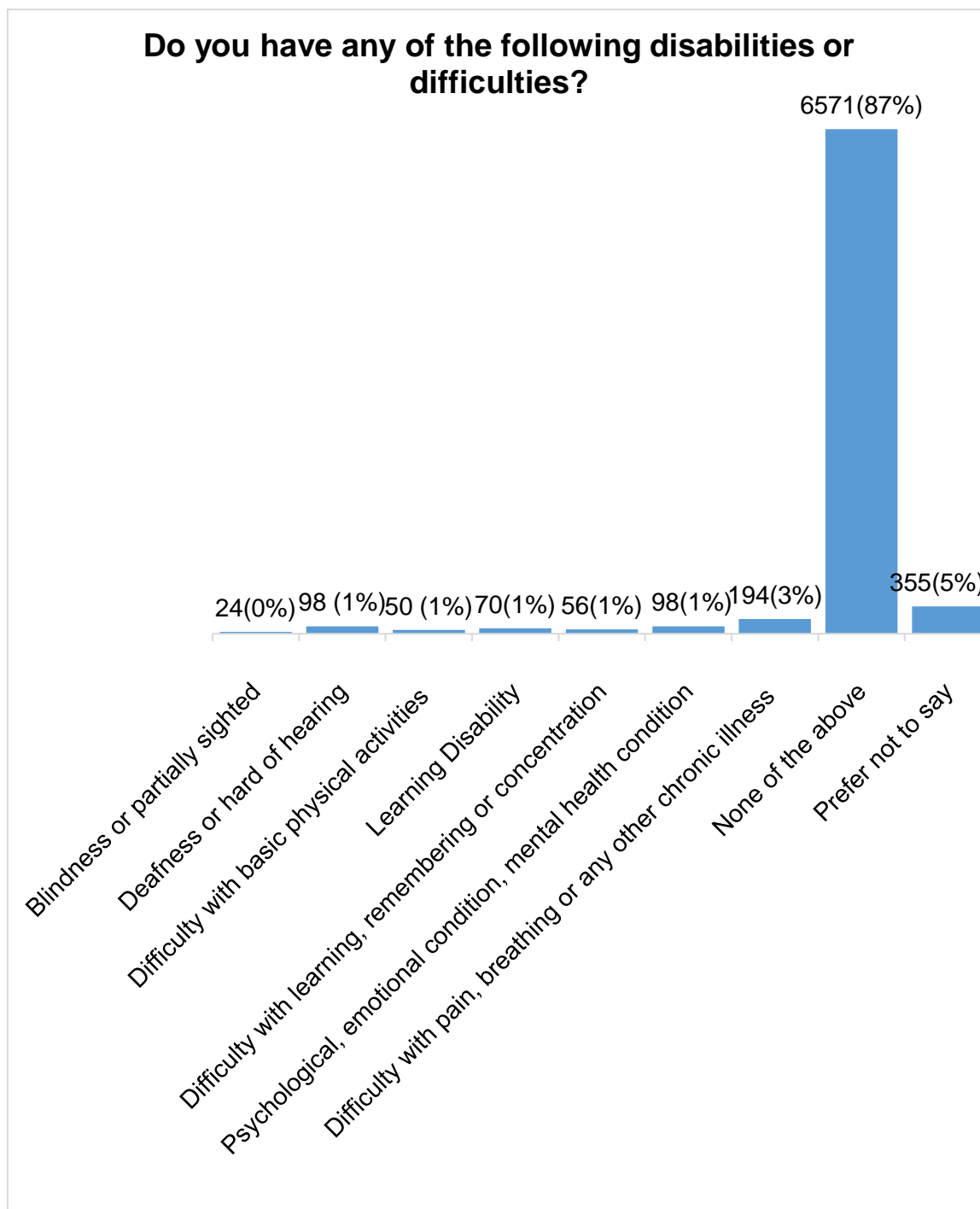


Table 12 Disability among respondents

2.1.10 Most of the responding SNAs reported not experiencing any disabilities or difficulties. About 3% of total respondents indicated having difficulty with pain, breathing or other chronic illness or condition. 1% SNAs suffered from psychological or emotional condition or a mental health condition, and another 1% indicated deafness or hard of hearing difficulties.

2.2 Workplace

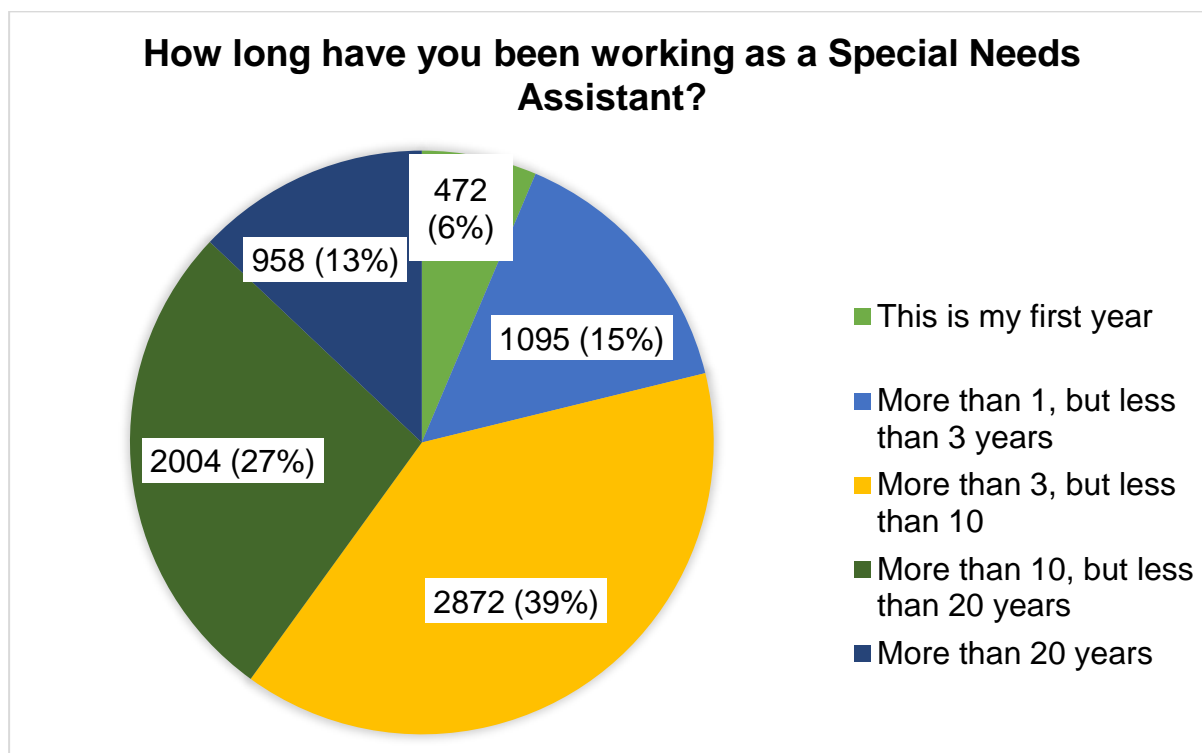


Table 13 Length of service as a SNA

2.2.1 Regarding the length of time respondents had been working as a SNA, the survey captured a diverse range of experiences.

2.2.2 As reflected in Table 13, while a small portion (6%) reported being in their first year as a SNA, the majority (79%) had been working in the profession for more than three years. Specifically, 39% had worked for more than three but less than 10 years, 27% for more than 10 but less than 20 years, and 13% for more than 20 years. Among all respondents, a few (6%) were new entrants. At the other end of the spectrum, 27% of respondents were in the sector for over ten years, but less than 20 years, and 13% of respondents having over twenty years of experience.

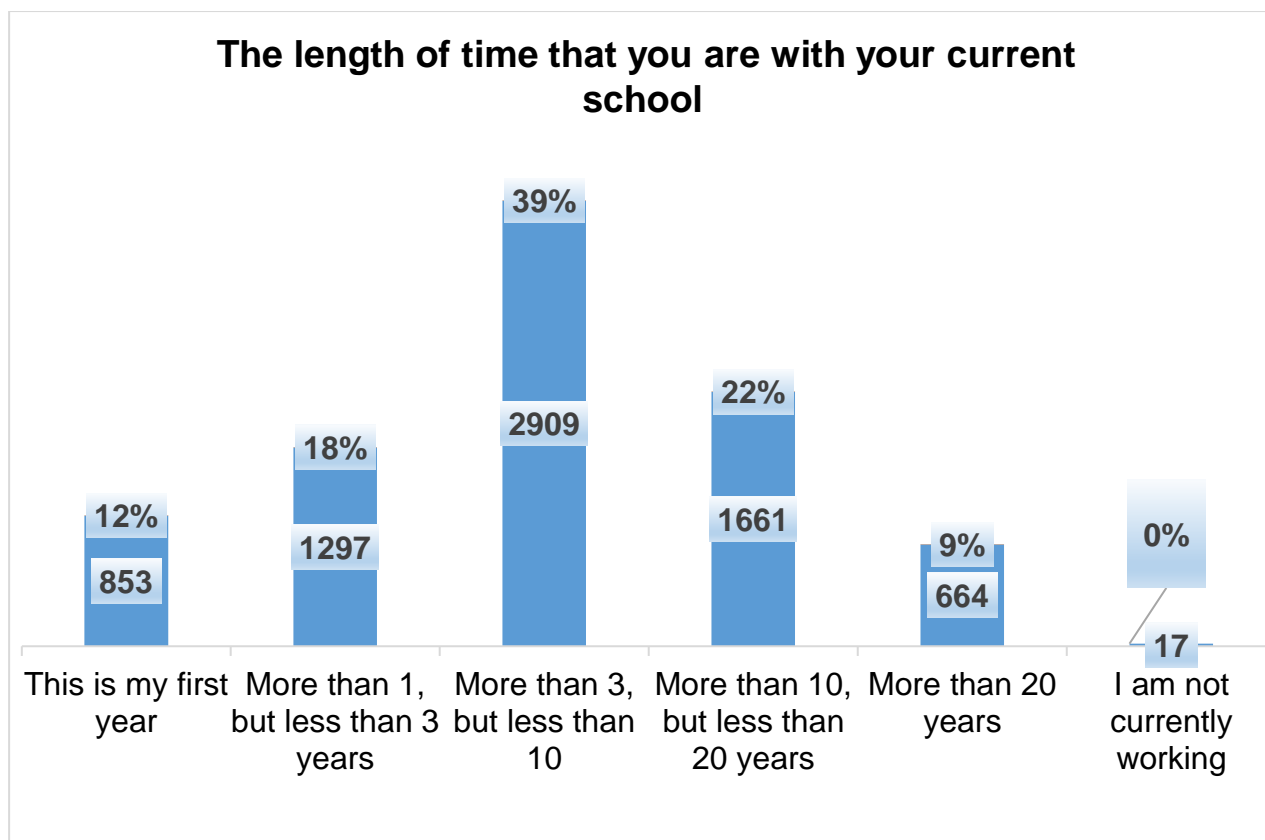


Table 14 Length of service in current school

2.2.3 When asked about their tenure in their current school, responses provided similar distribution patterns to those set out in Table 14.

2.2.4 While 12% reported being in their first year at their current school, the majority (88%) had been in their current school for more than one year. Specifically, 18% had been for more than 1 but less than 3, 39% had been in their current school for more than three but less than 10 years, 22% for more than 10 but less than 20 years, and 9% for more than 20 years.

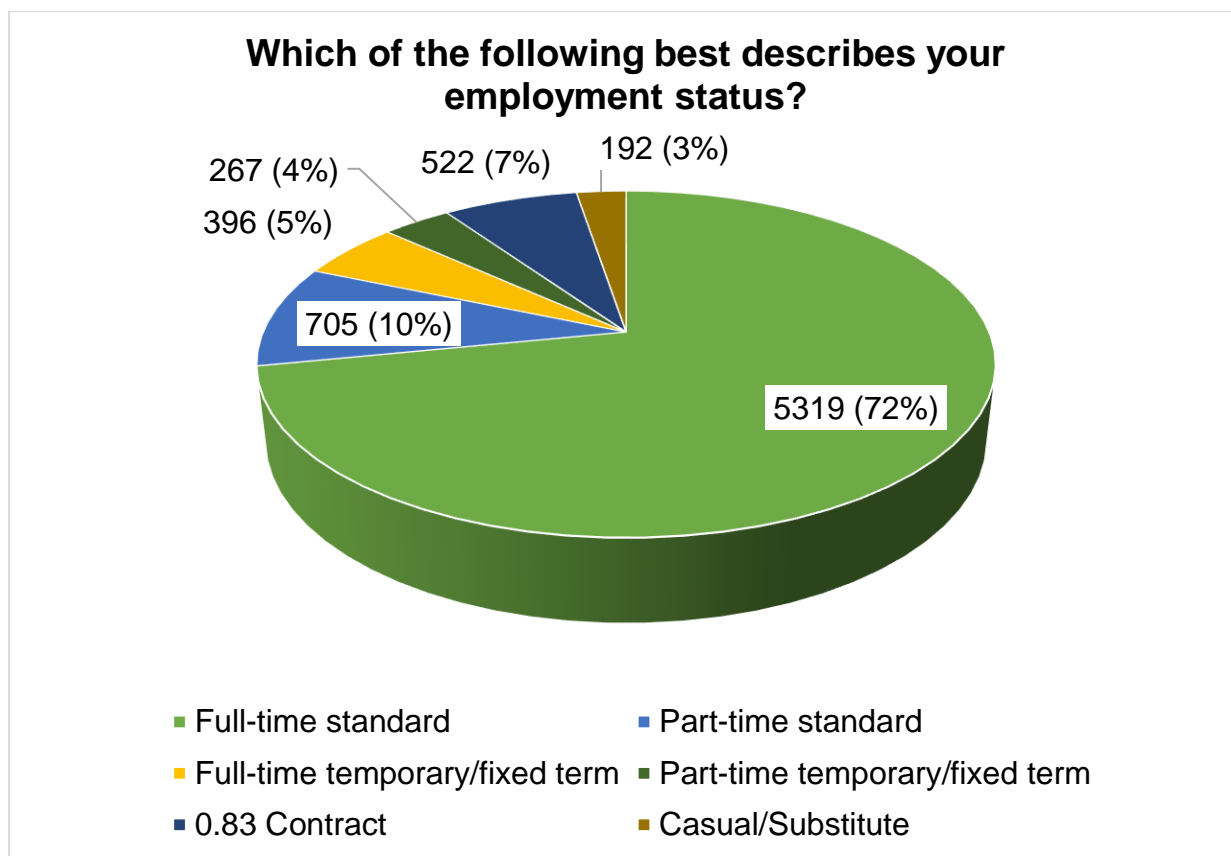


Table 15 Employment status

2.2.5 Many respondents (82%) reported being employed on a full-time basis, with 72% in full-time standard positions and 10% in full-time temporary positions. A smaller percentage (14%) reported part-time employment, with 10% in part-time standard roles and 4% in part-time temporary positions. Additionally, 7% of respondents reported being on a 0.83 contract, while 3% identified as casual workers.

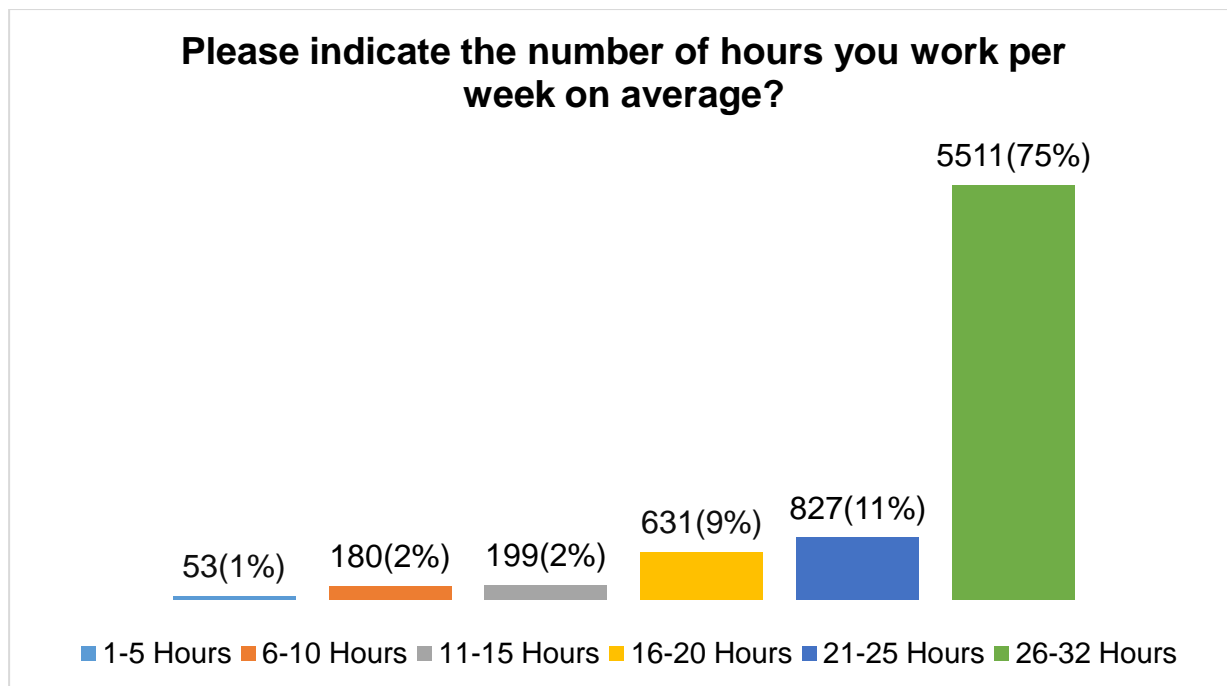


Table 16 Hours worked per week

2.2.6 Respondents reported varying average weekly working hours. A significant majority (75%) worked between 26 to 32 hours per week. Smaller percentages reported working fewer hours, with only 1% working 1-5 hours, 2% working 6-10 hours, 2% working 11-15 hours, 9% working 16-20 hours, and 11% working 21-25 hours per week.

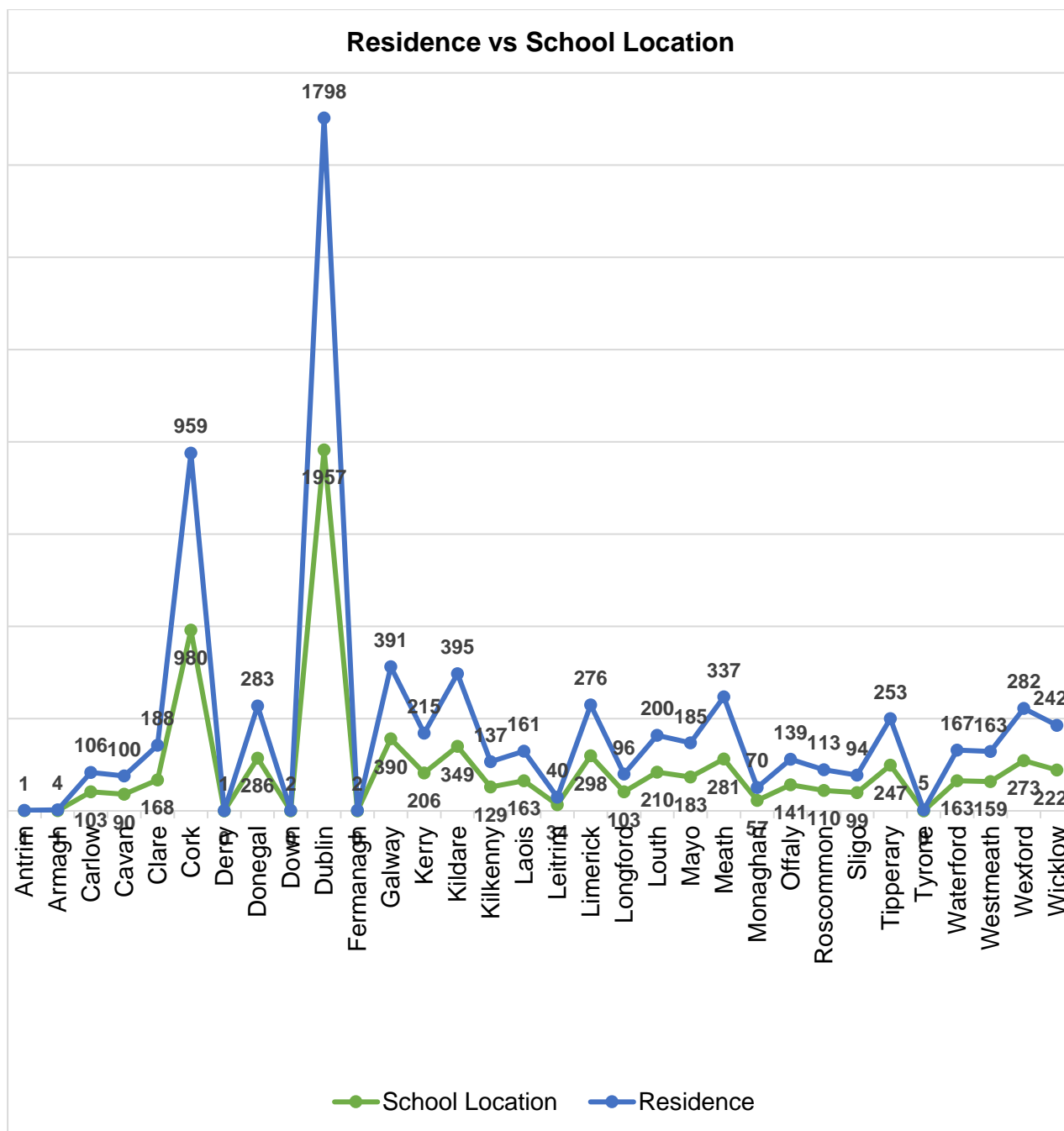


Table 17 County of residence vs county where school is located

2.2.7 In terms of county of residence relative to the county where they are employed findings in this area showed that 9 of the SNA respondents travelled to work from Northern Ireland. As can be seen from Table 17 the vast majority of respondents live and work in the same county. This differs for Dublin where 159 of respondents who work there do not live in the county, while 46 SNAs live in Kildare and travel to work in another county. 44 SNAs live in Meath and travel to work in another county.

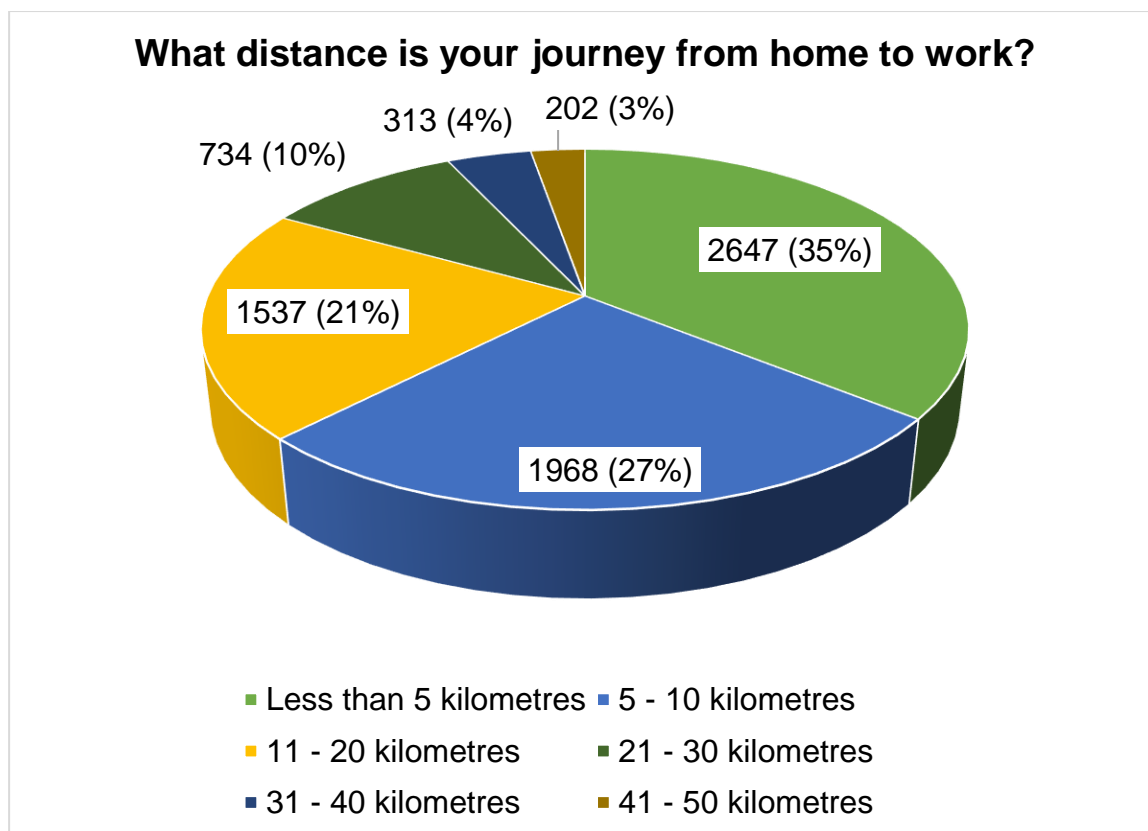


Table 18 Distance to work

2.2.8 As presented in Table 18 above, SNAs commuting distances from home varied, with the largest proportion (35%) traveling less than 5 kilometres to work. Another significant portion (27%) commuted 5-10 kilometres, followed by 21% traveling 11-20 kilometres. Smaller percentages of respondents reported longer commuting distances, with 10% traveling 21-30 kilometres, 4% traveling 31-40 kilometres, and 3% traveling 41-50 kilometres.

2.3 Educational Attainments and Training

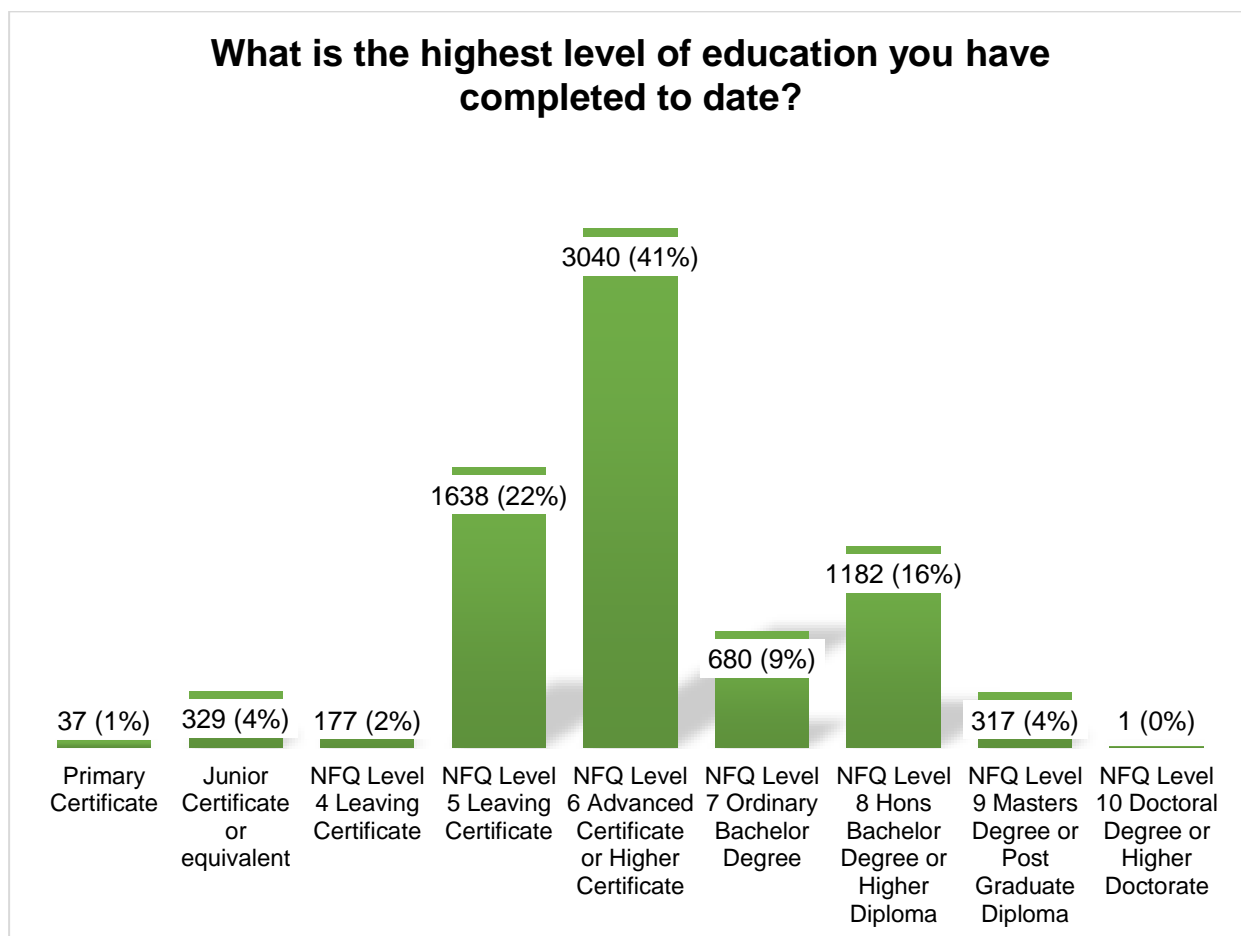


Table 19 Level of education

2.3.1 Results, as presented in Table 19 above, show a diverse range of education levels. The majority (70%) of all SNAs surveyed had obtained a qualification at the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)⁵ Level 6 or above. Specifically, 41% reported having a NFQ Level 6 qualification, 9% NFQ Level 7, while 16% reported holding a NFQ Level 8 qualification and 4% a NFQ Level 9. Less than a quarter (22%) had a NFQ Level 5 qualification while one hundred SNAs (1%) were in the process for obtaining same. Only (5%) of respondents had the minimum qualification of a Junior Certificate.

⁵ The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a 10-level system used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system.

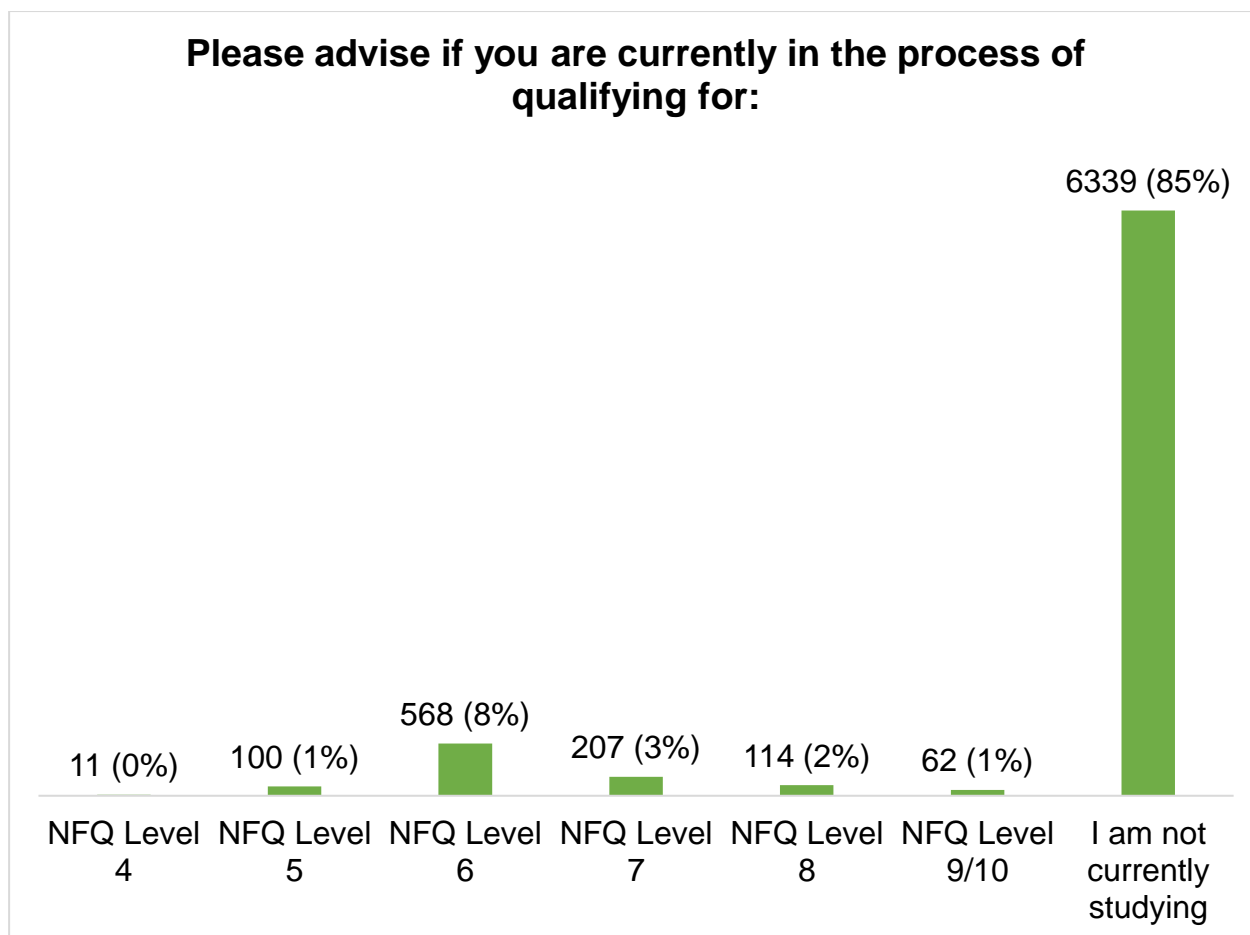


Table 21 Current studies

2.3.3 SNAs were also asked to indicate if they were in the process of attaining a NFQ qualification. Most SNAs were not doing so (85%). A small number of SNAs currently studying (14%) planned to obtain an award at NFQ Level 6 or higher.

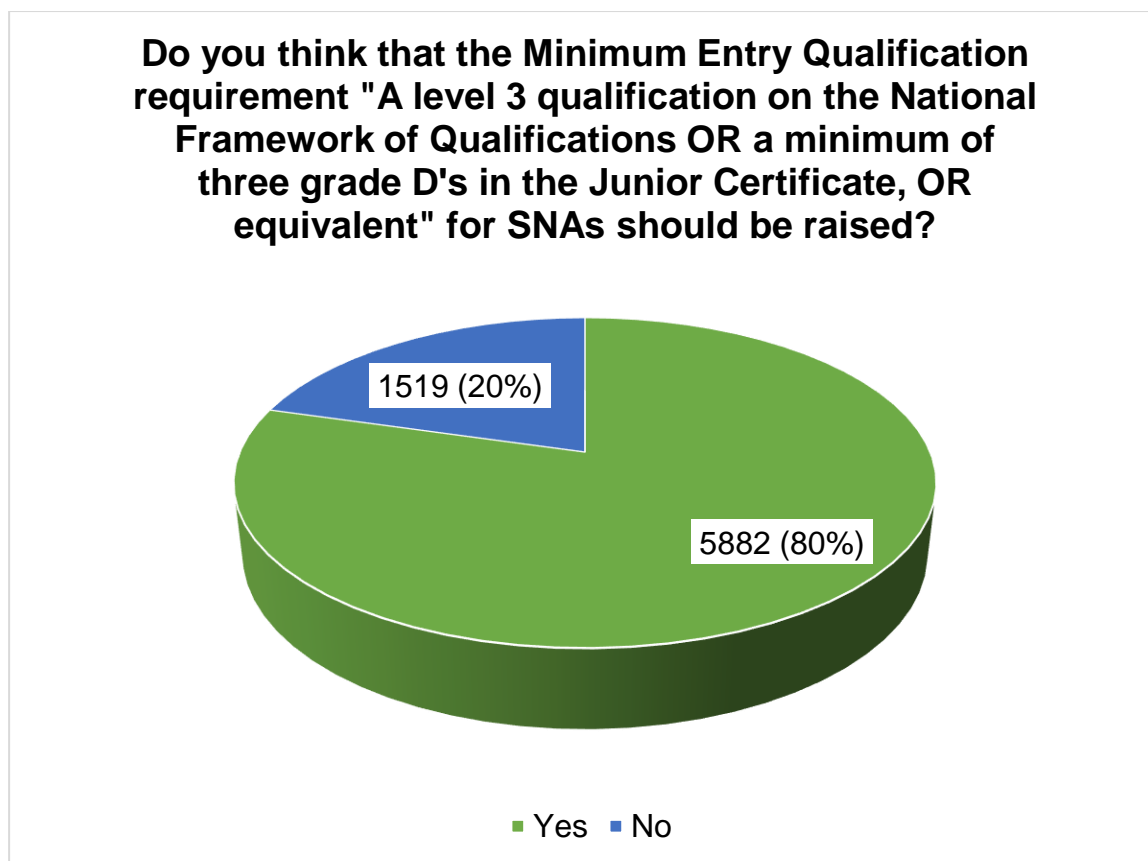


Table 22 Minimum entry qualification

2.3.4 The current minimum entry qualification requirement to become a SNA is set at level 3 NFQ or a minimum of 3 grade D's in the Junior Certificate or equivalent. The majority of respondents (see Table 22 above), at 80%, indicated they are in favour in raising this minimum requirement to become a SNA.

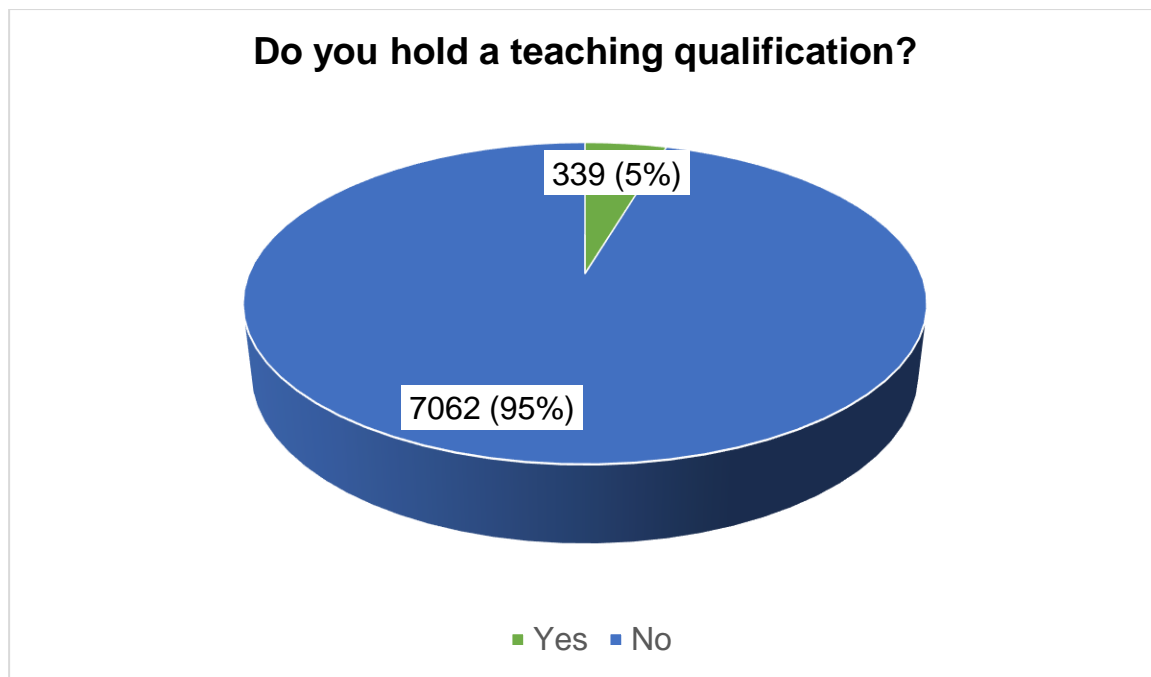


Table 23 Additional qualification in teaching

2.3.5 Respondents were asked to report if they held any relevant qualifications in other fields. As per Table 23, the vast majority of SNAs (95%) reported they do not hold a teaching qualification. 339 (5%) reported holding a teaching qualification. A follow up question was posted to determine the origin of their qualification.

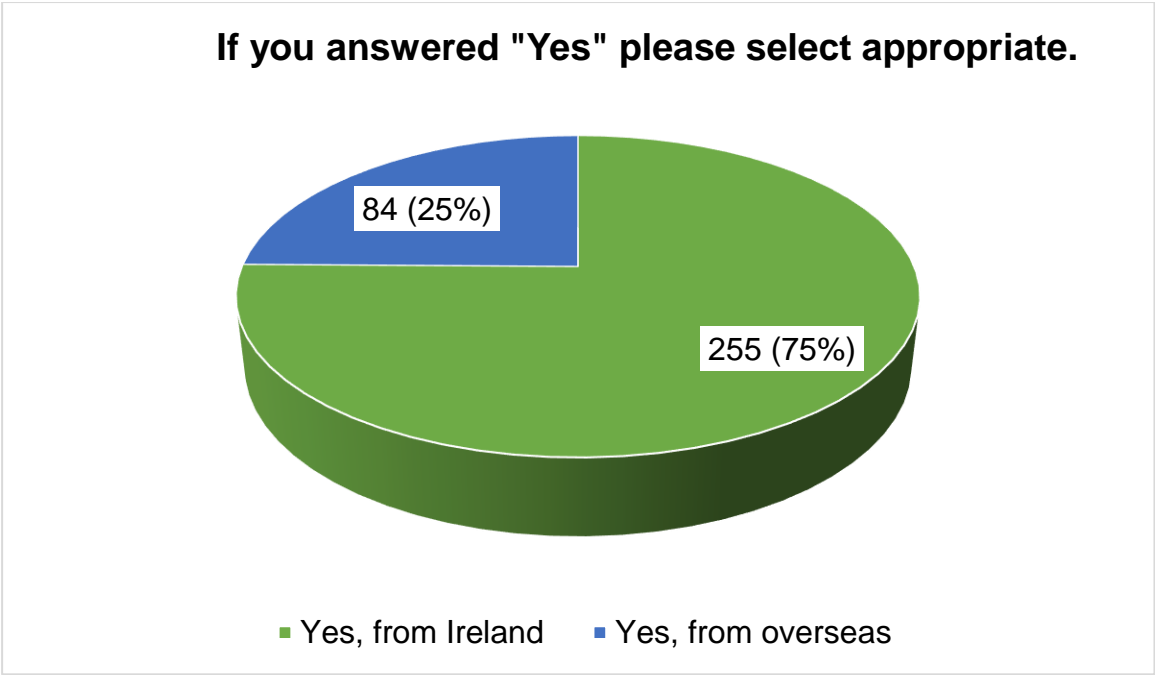


Table 24 Additional qualification in teaching

2.3.6 For the SNAs who do hold a teaching qualification, a significant majority (75%) obtained this qualification in the Republic of Ireland (see Table 24).

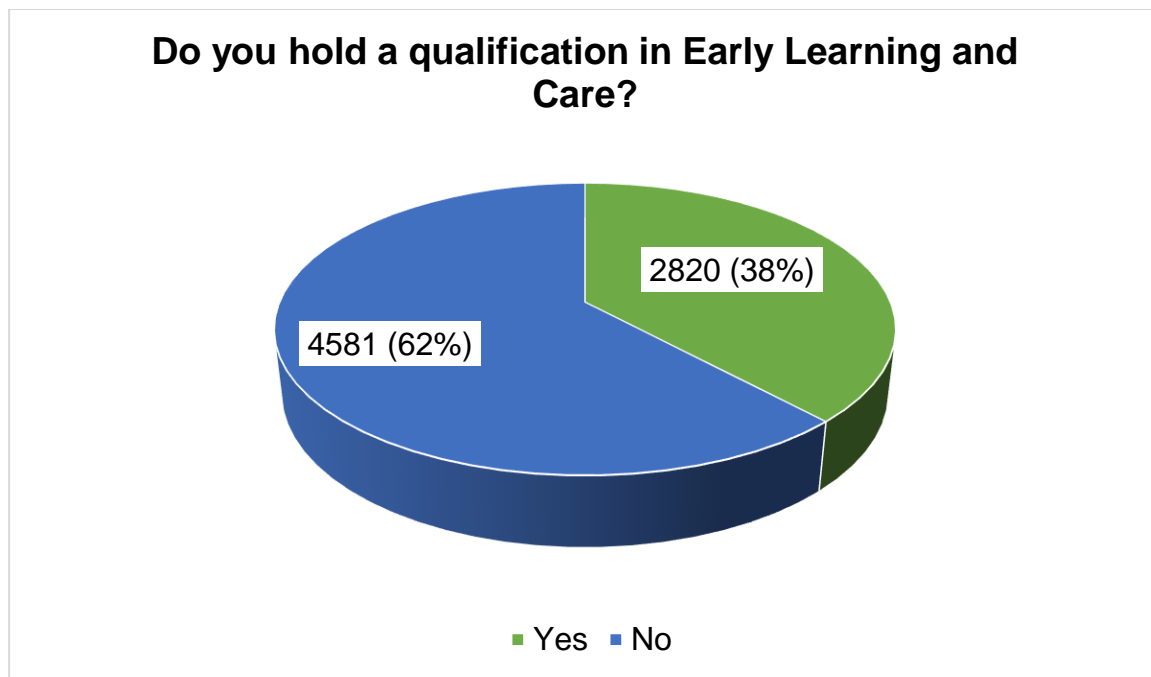


Table 25 Additional qualification in Early Learning and Care

2.3.7 A significant portion of respondents 4581 (62%) reported not having a qualification in Early Learning and Care (ELC) (see Table 25).

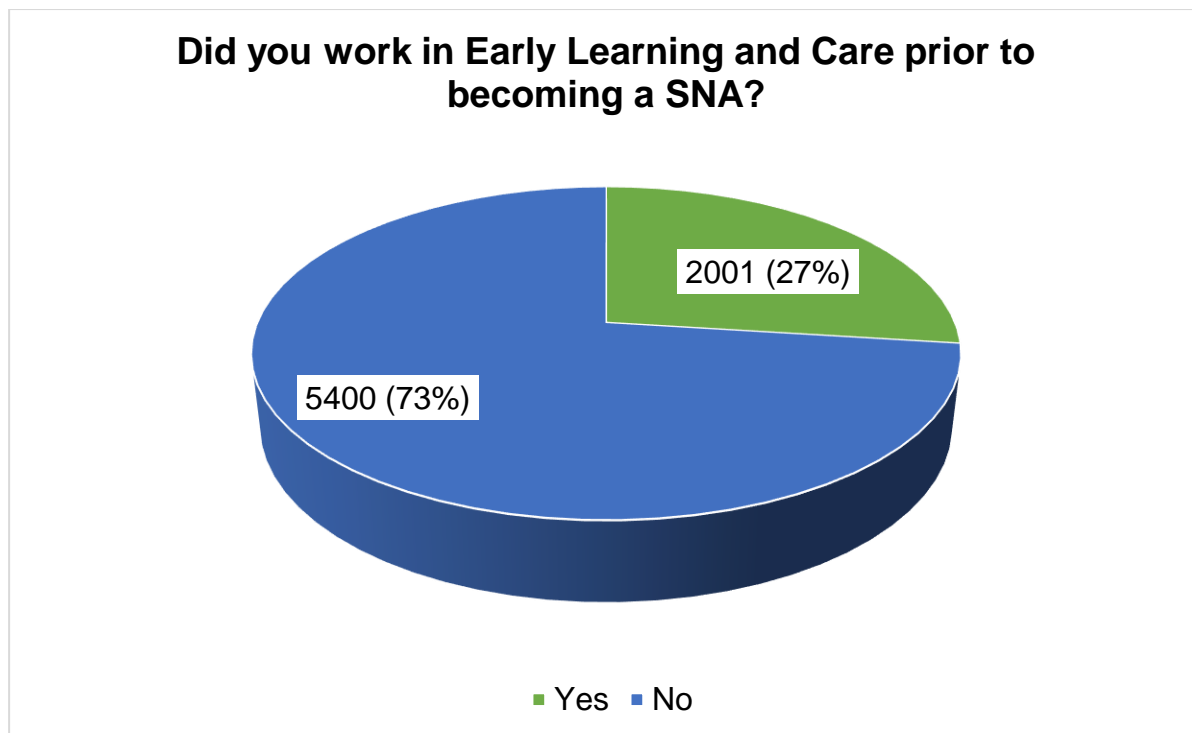


Table 26 Previous work experience in Early Learning and Care

2.3.8 The majority of SNAs, entered their roles without prior experience in the ELC sector. However, as presented in Table 26, 2001 (27%) of respondents had worked in ELC ahead of becoming a SNA.

2.3.9 The survey data indicates that 1691 (60%) of SNAs who reported having a qualification in ELC were part of the group with prior work experience in ELC, while 310 (7%) of those without ELC qualifications also fell into this category.

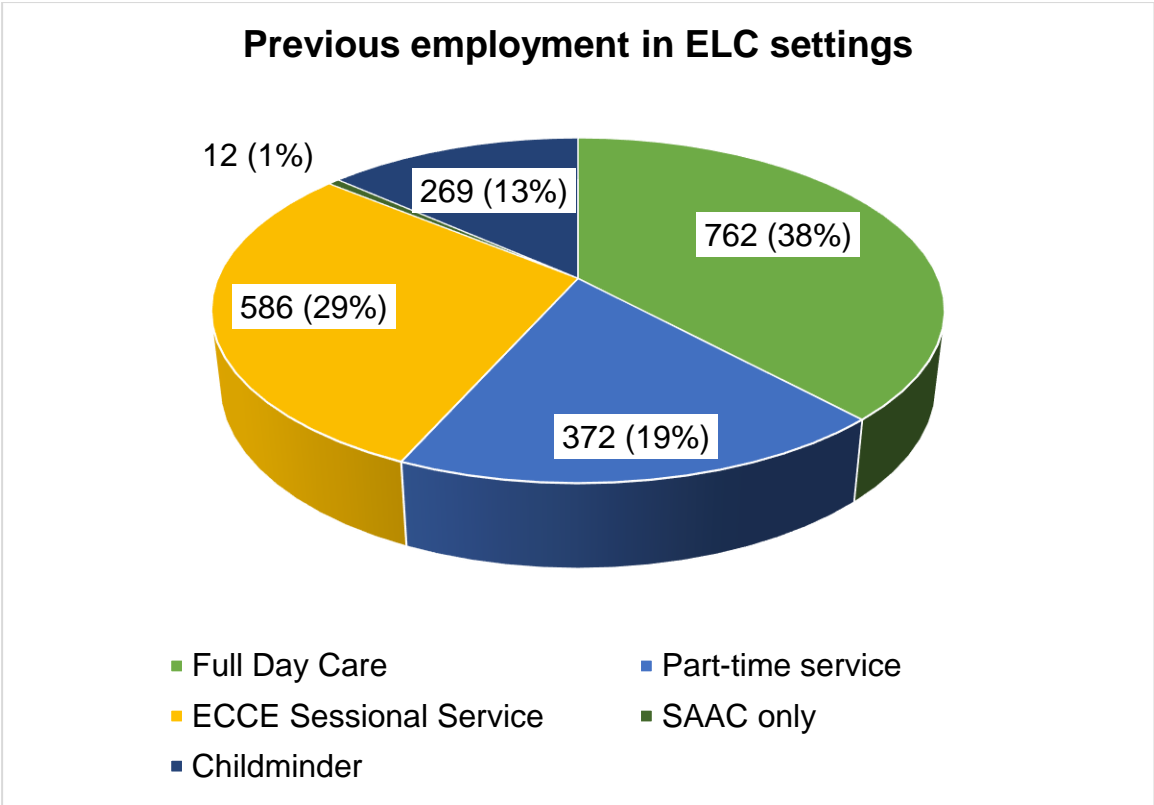


Table 27 Previous employment in Early Learning and Care settings

2.3.10 The survey further investigated the types of ELC settings that respondents were previously employed in. A significant majority (38%) were employed in a Full Day Care (see Table 27).

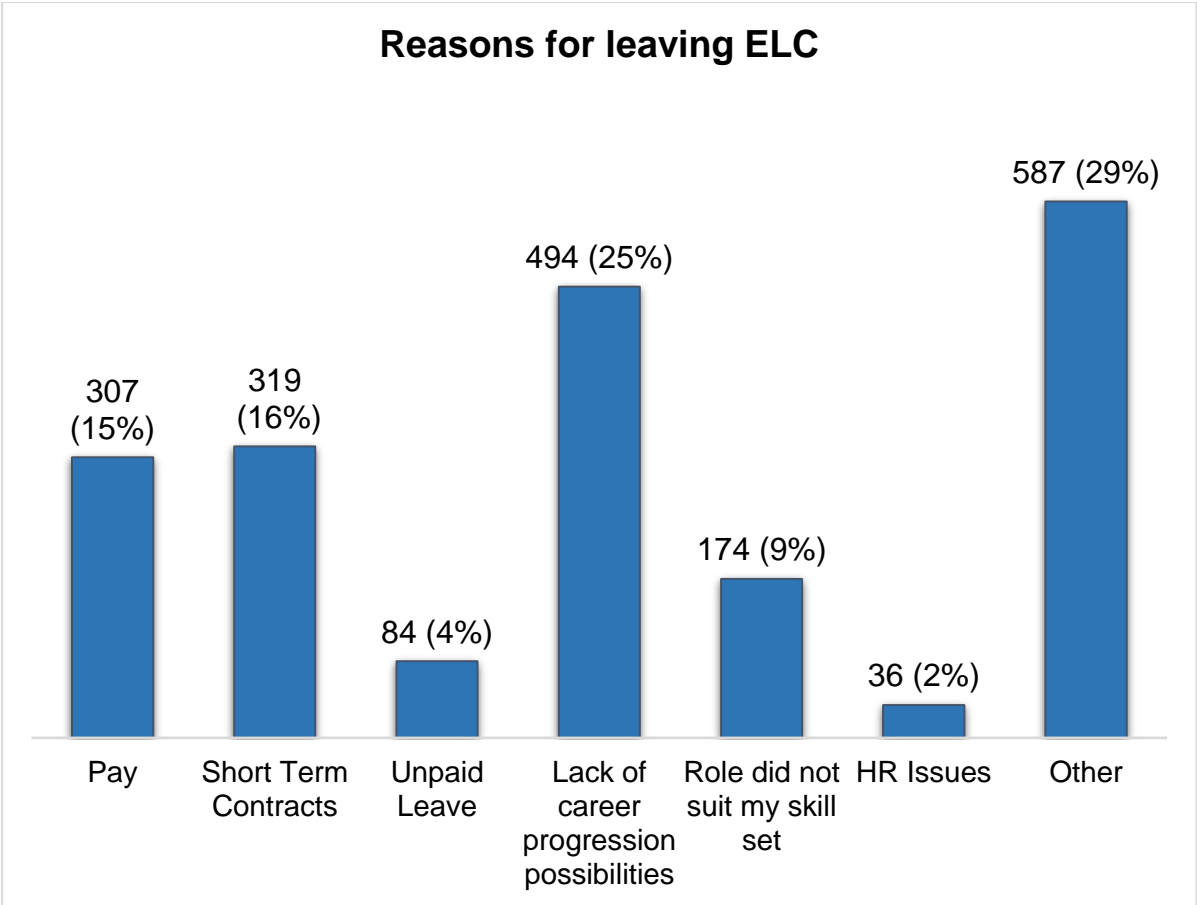


Table 28 Reasons for leaving Early Learning and Care sector

2.3.11 When asked about the reason for leaving positions in the ELC sector, a lack of career progression (25%) was one of the highest answers chosen, followed by short term contracts (16%) and rate of pay (15%) (see Table 28).

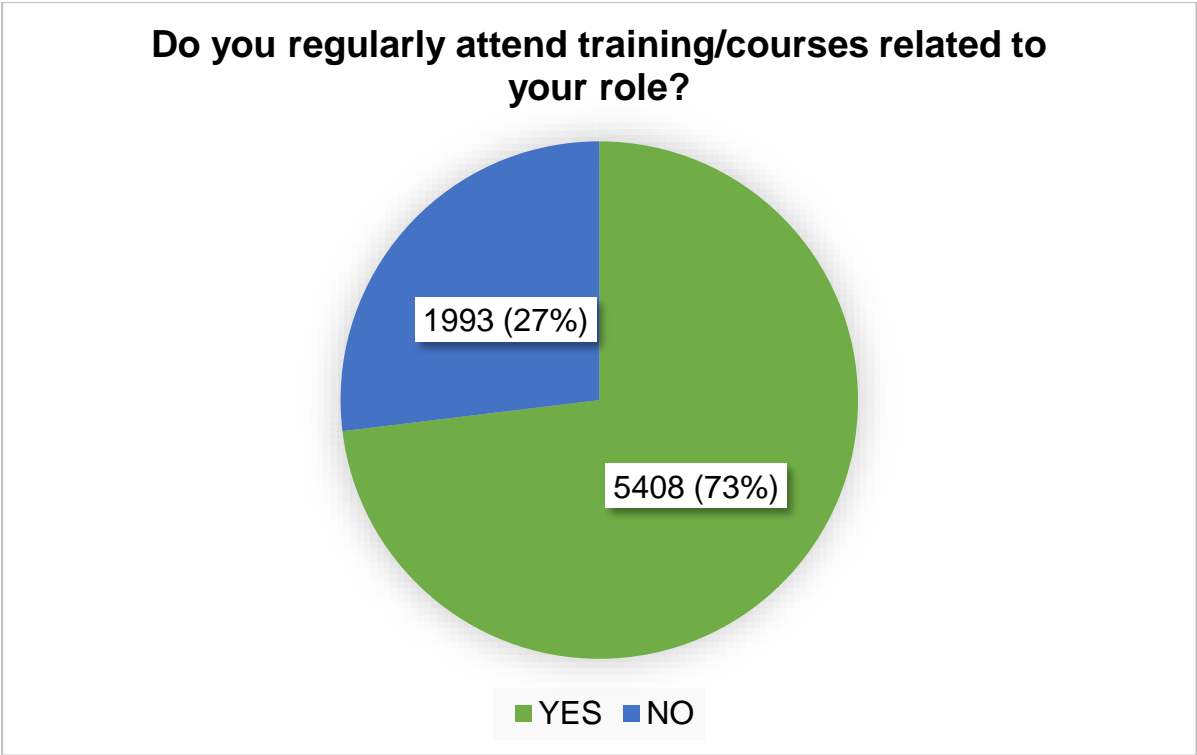


Table 29 Training and development

2.3.12 As reflected in Table 29, the majority of the workforce (73%) reported regularly attending training or courses related to their role, while 27% did not participate in such training.

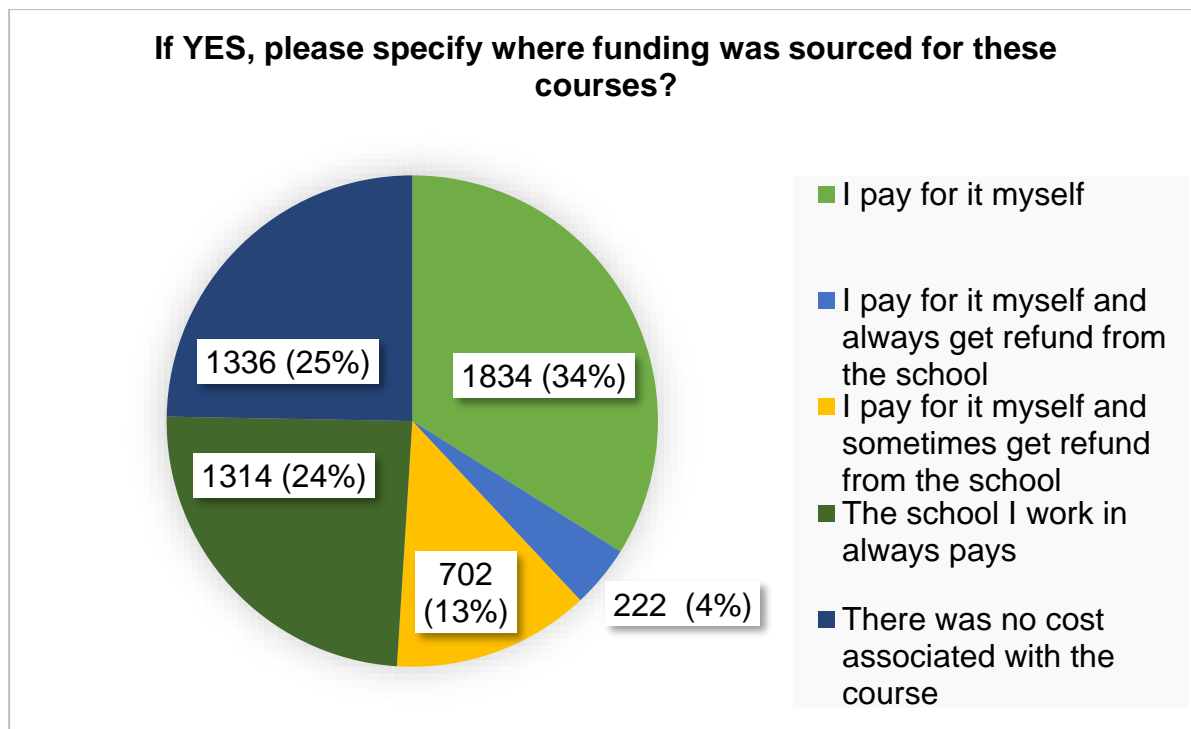


Table 30 Funding for training

2.3.13 As presented, in Table 30, funding sources for training and courses varied among respondents. The largest proportion (34%) reported paying for courses themselves, while 24% stated that the school they work in always covers the costs. Additionally, 25% reported no cost associated with the course, while smaller percentages indicated partial reimbursement from the school.

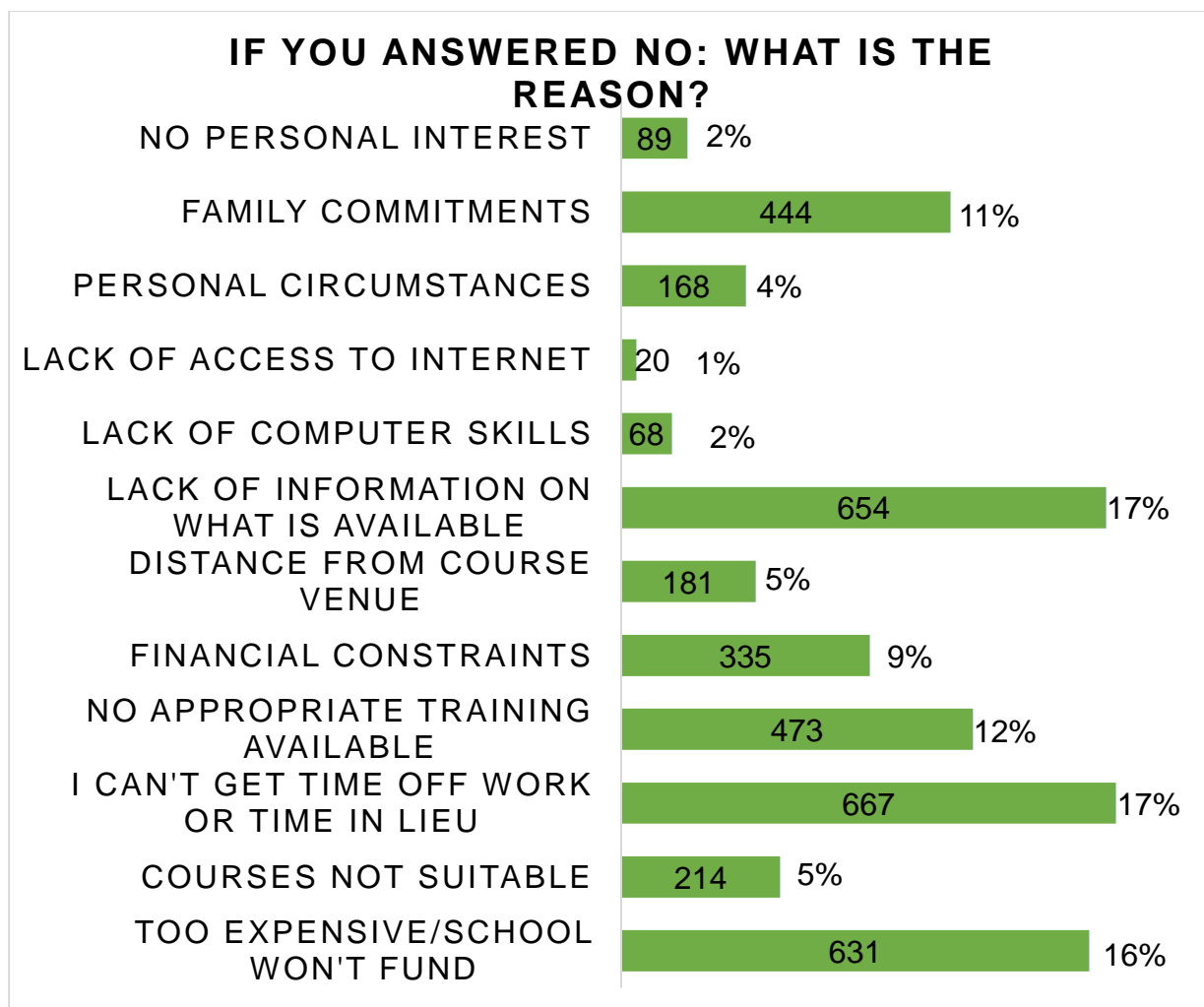


Table 31 Reasons for not participating in training

2.3.14 As previously stated in table 29 27% of SNAs don't regularly attend training. Table 31 indicates that the lack of time off/time in lieu, lack of information around what is available, and the cost associated as the top three reasons reported by these SNAs for not participating in any professional development courses.

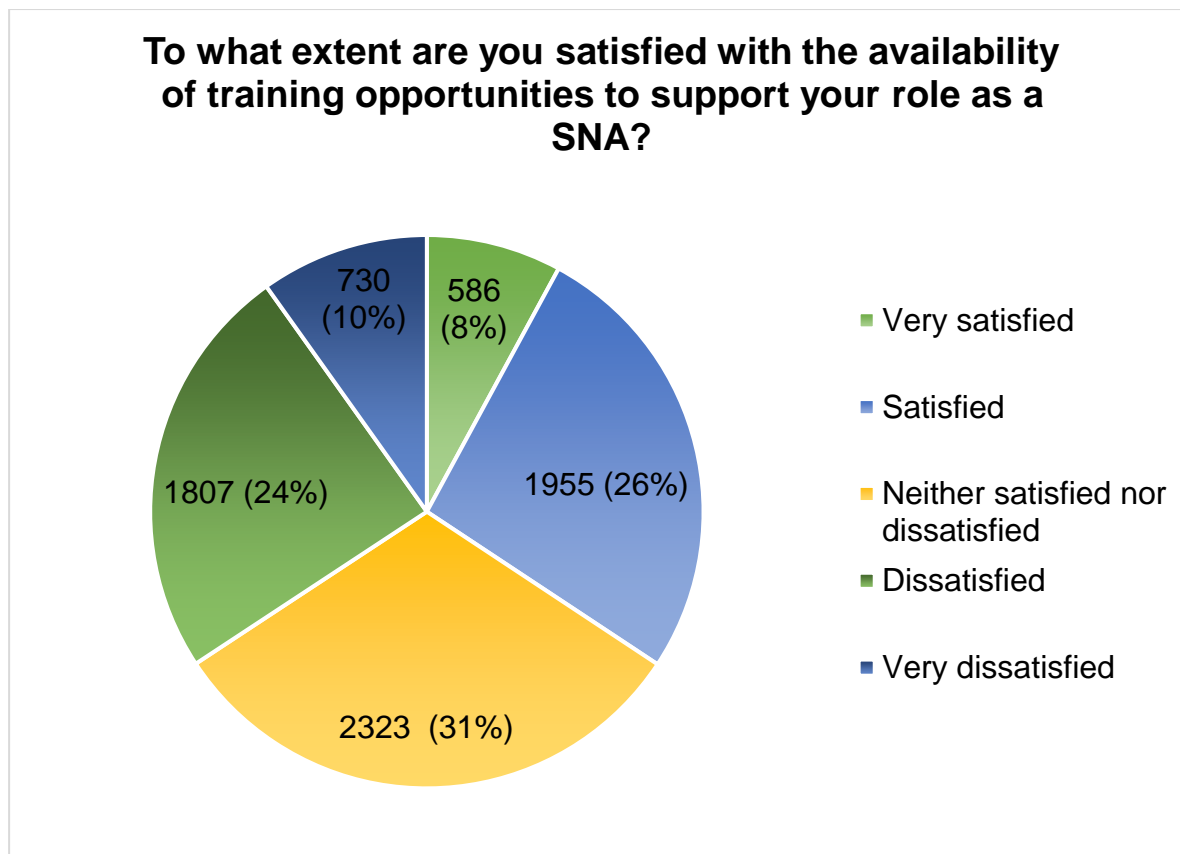


Table 32 Satisfaction levels with the availability of training

2.3.15 The SNAs were asked about their satisfaction levels with the availability and quality of training opportunities to support their role.

2.3.16 As reflected, in Table 32 above, responses varied. While 34% expressed satisfaction with the availability of training (26% satisfied, 8% very satisfied), a significant portion (34%) expressed dissatisfaction (24% dissatisfied, 10% very dissatisfied). 31% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

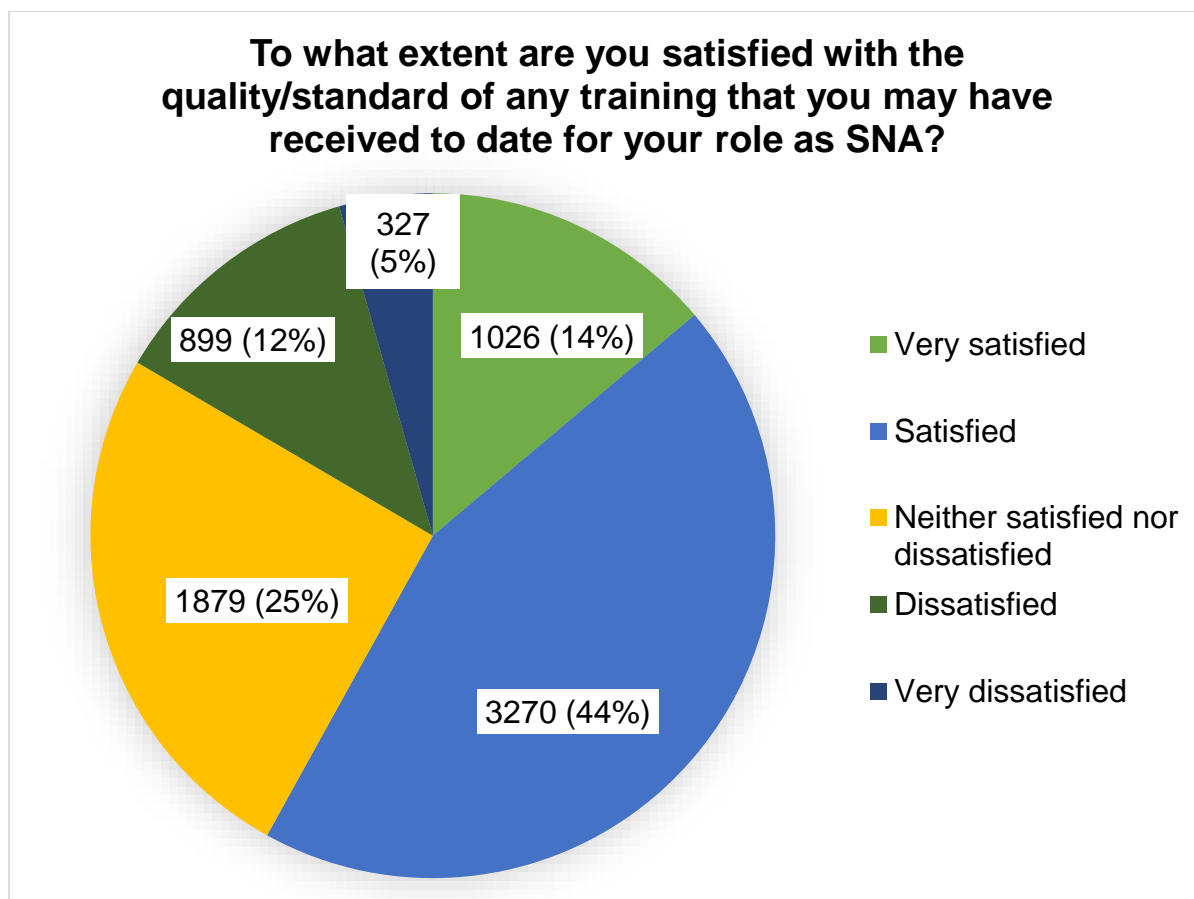


Table 33 Satisfaction levels with the quality/standard of training received

2.3.17 The majority of respondents (58%) expressed satisfaction with the quality of training received for their role (44% satisfied, 14% very satisfied), while 17% expressed dissatisfaction (12% dissatisfied, 5% very dissatisfied), and 25% remained neutral (see Table 33).

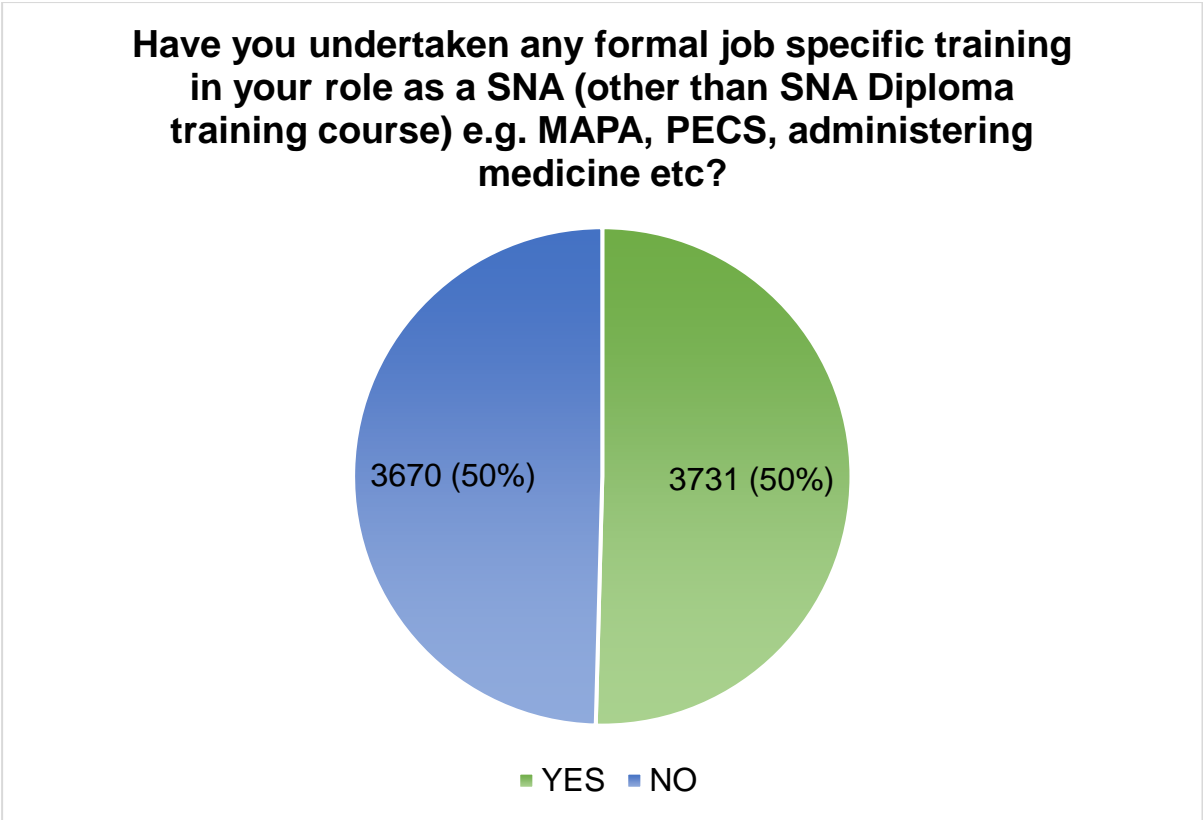


Table 34 Formal job specific training completed by SNAs

2.3.18 Beyond initial qualifications, participants outlined their involvement in role-specific training. Approximately almost half of respondents reported undertaking formal job specific training.

2.4 National Training Programme for SNAs

2.4.1 The 2018 Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme published by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) includes a recommendation for the provision of a national online training programme for existing SNAs who do not have the requisite level of relevant training. Arising from this recommendation the Department tendered for providers and a four-year contract was awarded to University College Dublin (UCD) School of Education to design and deliver a new national online training programme (National Training Programme) for SNAs employed in schools. The National Training Programme is fully funded by the Department and delivered at no cost to the SNA. To date approximately 2,200 SNAs have completed the National Training Programme and feedback overall to the NCSE/UCD has been positive.

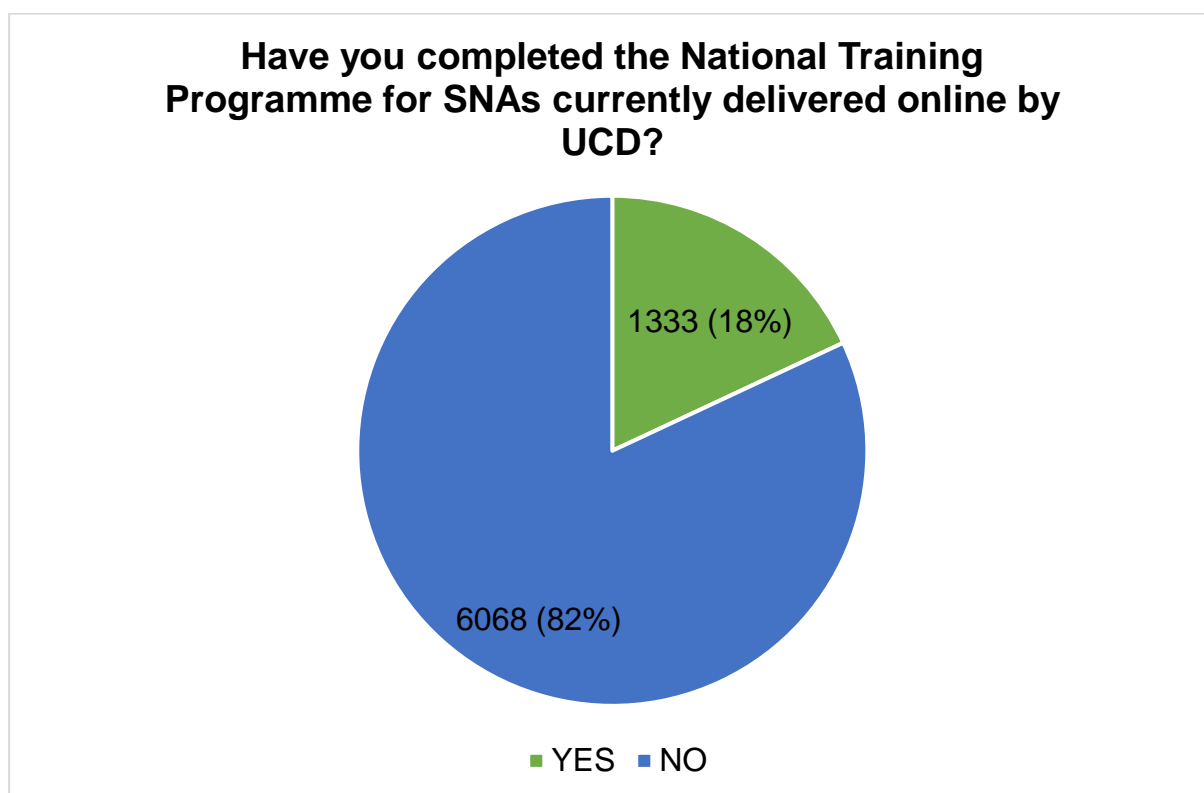


Table 37 UCD National Training Programme for SNAs

2.4.2 The survey asked respondents to advise if they had completed the National Training Programme for SNAs delivered online by UCD. 18% (1333) of respondents advised that they had completed it, and 82% had not.

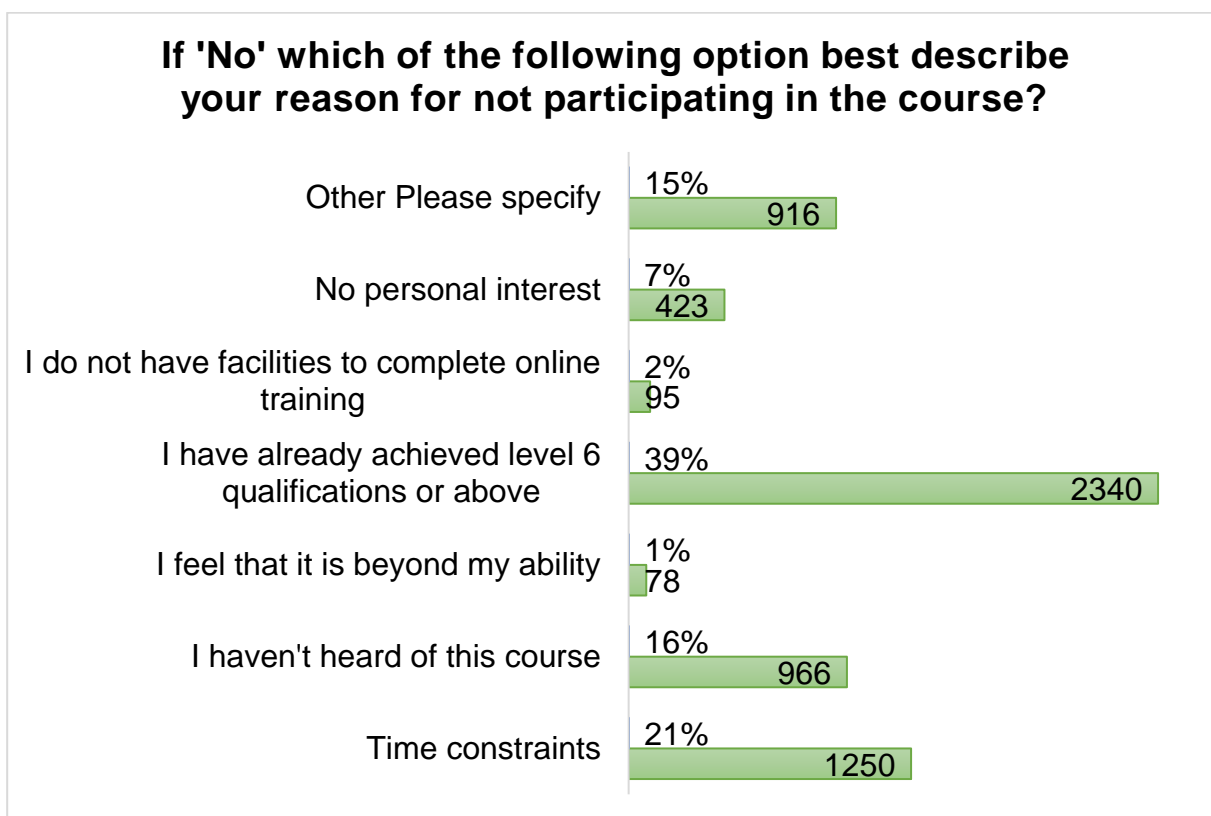


Table 38 Reasons for not participating in the course

2.4.3 As presented, in Table 38, those who answered 'No', reported that they already obtained a NFQ Level 6 qualification. The other main reasons chosen for not participating in the National Training Programme related to time constraints (21%) and the lack of awareness of the course.



Table 39 Reasons for not applying for SNA National Training Programme

2.4.4 There were a variety of reasons provided as to why respondents did not apply for the National Training Programme. These have been summarised under different themes in Table 39. The main reasons given were lack of time/no incentive or career progression/already have attained at or above this level.



Table 40 Training completed by SNAs

2.4.5 More than half (54%) of respondents also indicated they completed courses other than the National Training Programme for SNAs⁷. Table 40 displays some of the main courses and institutions in which they obtained qualifications.

⁷ The list of institutions where SNAs obtained their qualifications: ADHD Ireland, Atlantic Technological University, Ballyfermot College of further education Dublin, Barrow Training, Blackrock College of further education, Cabinteely Community College, Carlow IT, Chevron College, Church of Ireland College, CMIT, Colaiste Dhulaigh, College of Progressive Education, Community Health services, Cork College, Cork College of commerce, Dorset College, Dundrum College of Further Education, Dungarvan Technical College, Education Support Centres Ireland, Frobel College, Galway Community College, Galway Institute of Technology, Greenhills College, Hibernia Collage, ICEP Europe Dyslexia, Kerry College of Further Education, Kylemore College Ballyfermot, Leeds Beckett University, Liberties College Dublin, Mallow College for Further Education, Mary Immaculate College Limerick, Maynooth University, Midlands School of childcare, O á College Dundalk, The Open College, Portobello school Dublin, Progressive College Dublin, Queens University Belfast, Rossan College Letterkenny, St. Angela Sligo, The Liberties College Dublin, Trinity college, Waterford Institute of Technology

2.5 Induction Training

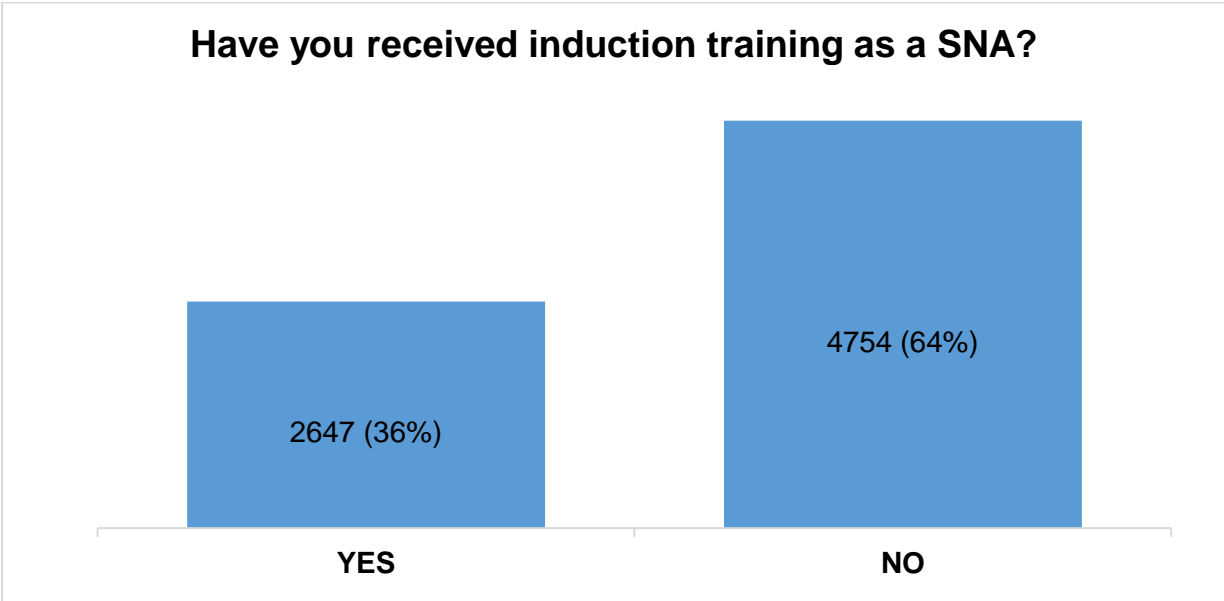


Table 41 Induction training

2.5.1 36% of SNAs surveyed reported receiving induction training during their employment, while the majority (64%) did not receive any induction training.

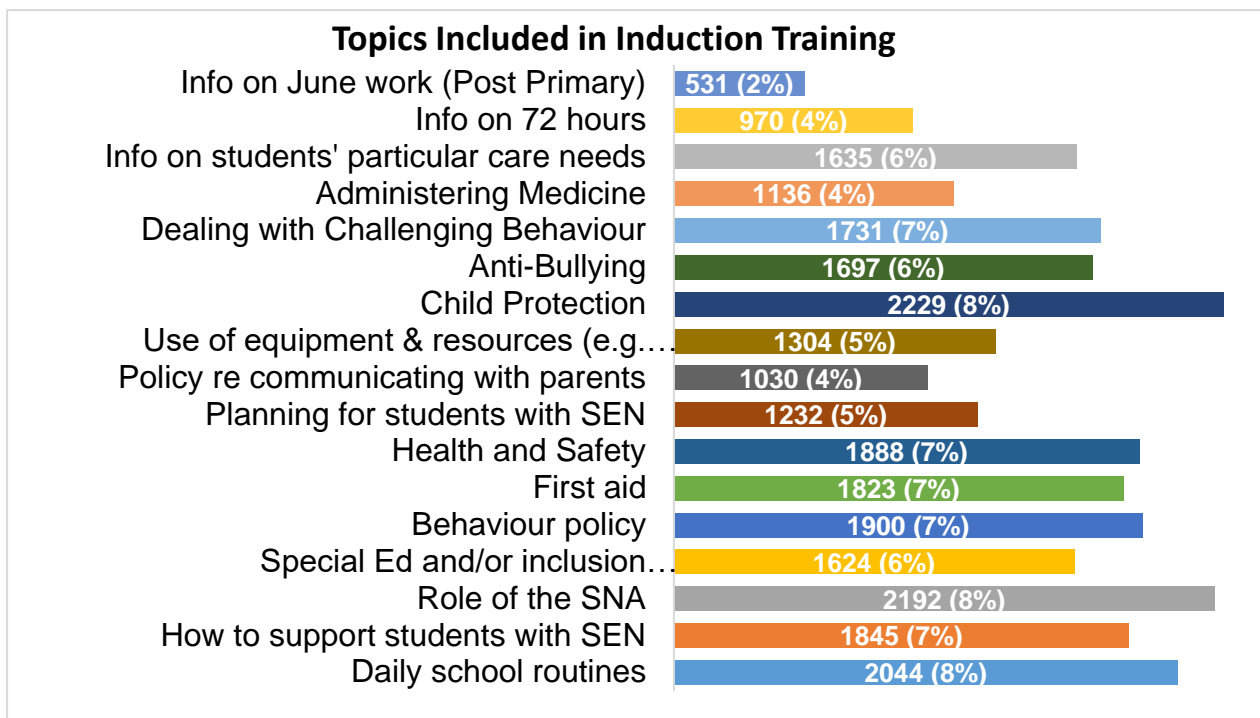


Table 42 Topics included in the induction training

2.5.2 Those SNAs who received induction training stated that the following topics were covered: Child protection training and training on the role of the SNA scored the highest, followed by daily school routines, behaviour policy, health and safety and how to support students with SEN.

How many students are you currently assigned to support?

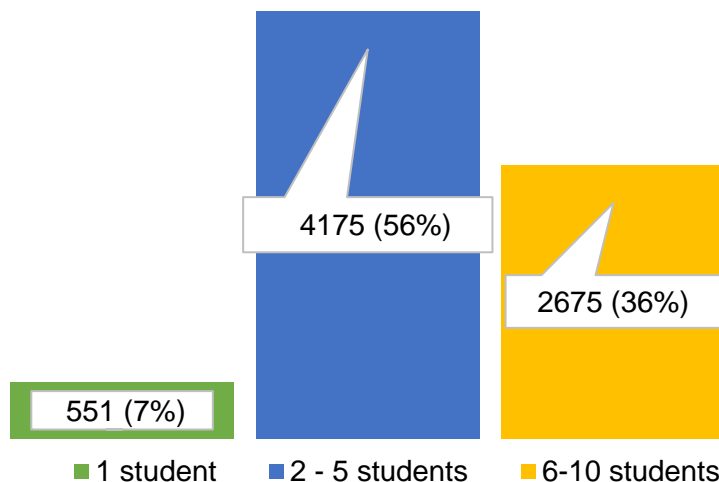


Table 43 Number of students assigned

2.5.3 Regarding the number of students SNAs were assigned to support, the majority reported (see Table 43) supporting 2-5 students (56%), followed by 6-10 students (36%), and a smaller percentage supporting only one student (7%).

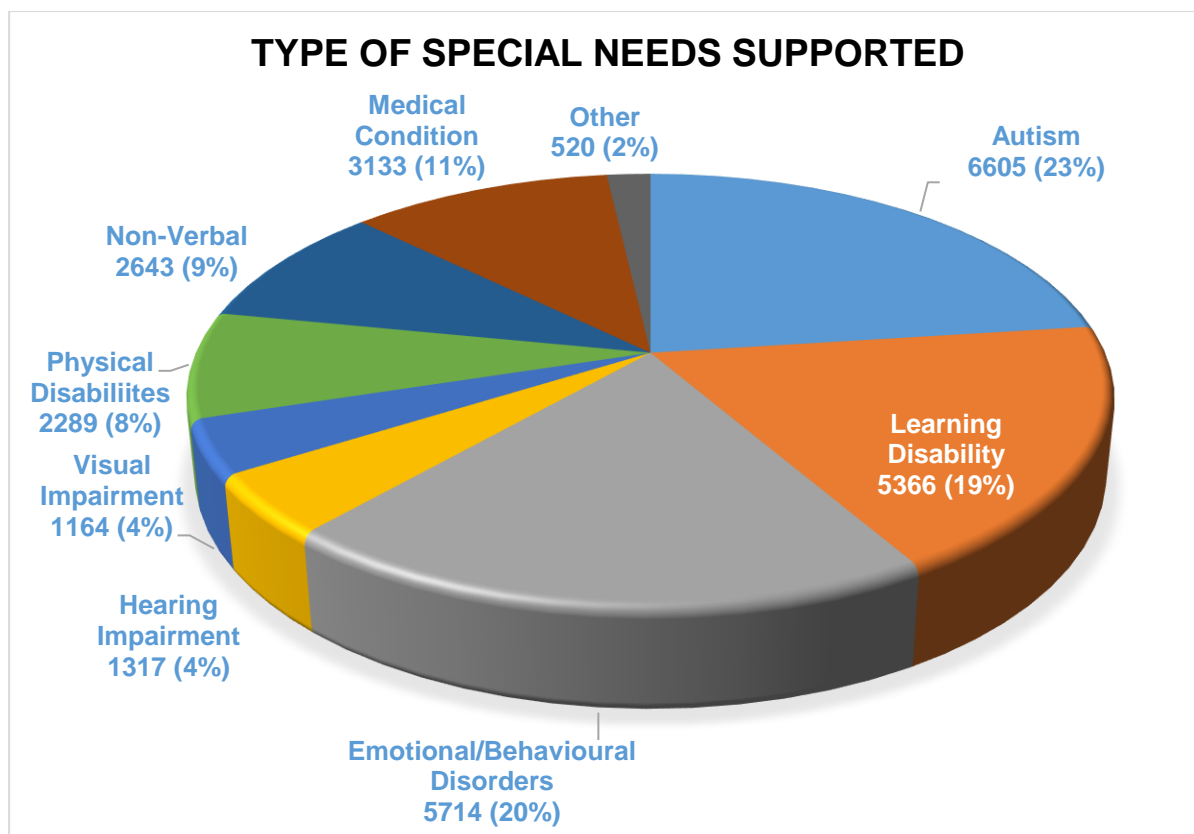


Table 44 Types of special education needs supported

2.5.4 The findings illustrated in Table 44 indicate that SNAs support students with a variety of special needs. The majority of SNAs were supporting students with Autism (23%). The next highest scored categories were Emotional/Behavioural disorders (20%) and Learning Disabilities (19%).

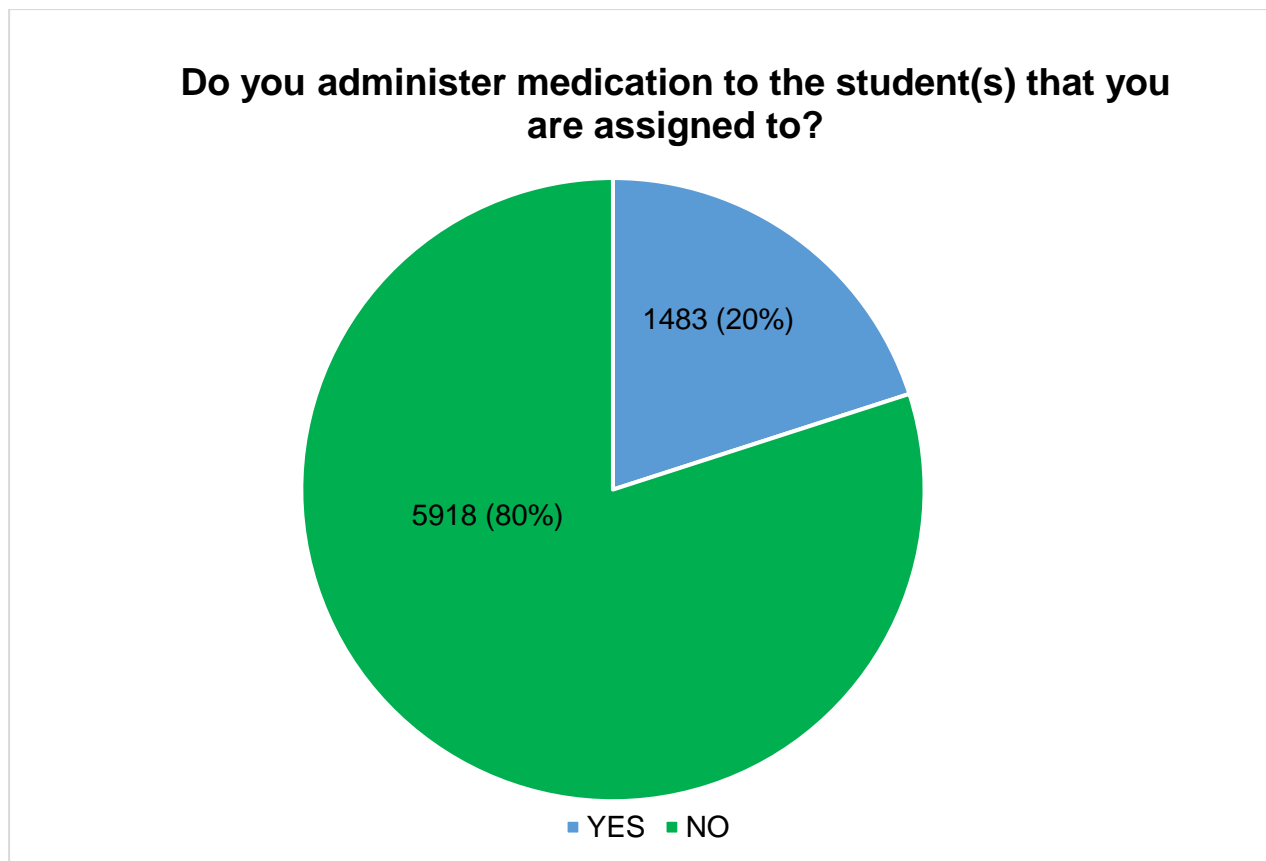


Table 45 Administration of medication

2.5.5 When asked about administering medication to the students they support, 20% of SNAs reported administering medication in their current role, while the majority (80%) stated they do not administer medication (see Table 45).

2.6 SNA Information Hub

2.6.1 In September 2023 the SNA Information Hub was set up by the SNAWDU on foot of direct feedback from the SNAs in the focus groups convened in May 2023. This resource enables SNAs to quickly and easily find important information around their role, policy information, relevant up to date circulars and links to training resources. Upon its launch, the Department issued an email to principals of all recognised schools seeking their assistance to share the message with wider school communities.

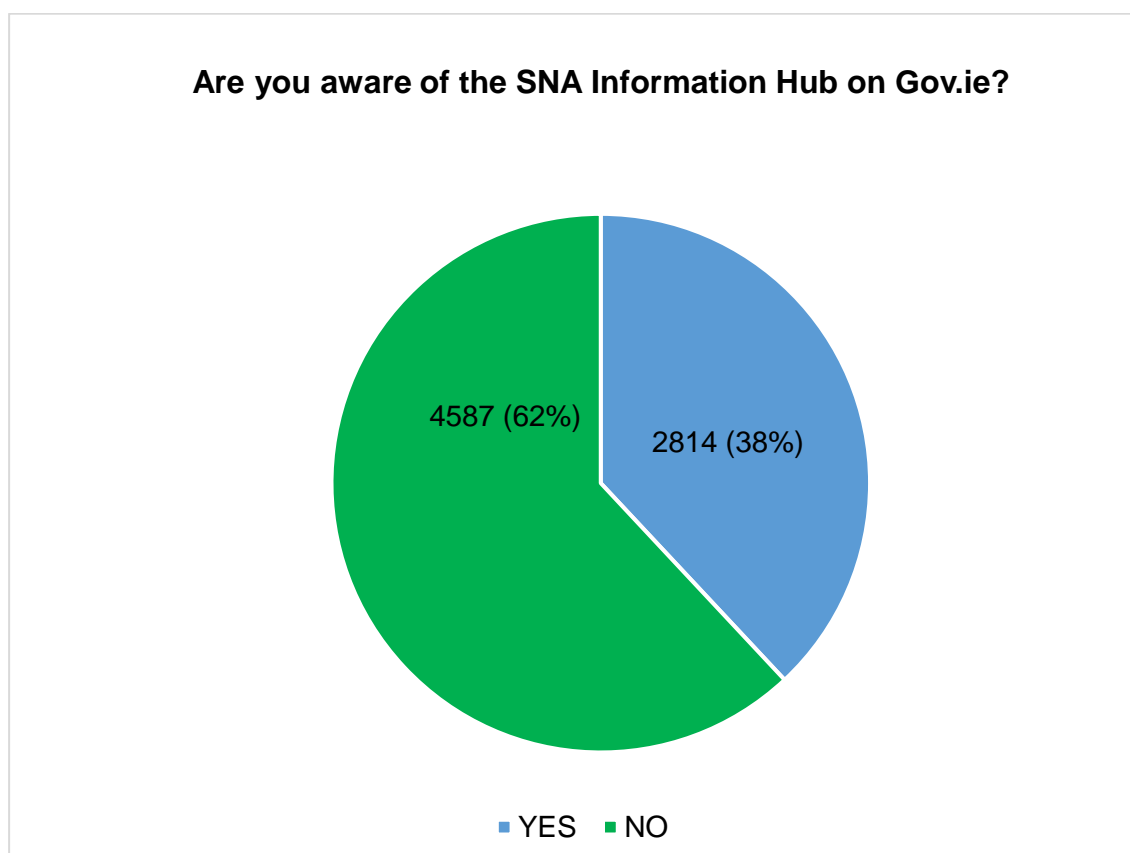


Table 46 Information Hub

2.6.2 When asked if SNAs were aware of the SNA Information Hub on Gov.ie, as illustrated in Table 46, more than a half (62%) reported 'No'.

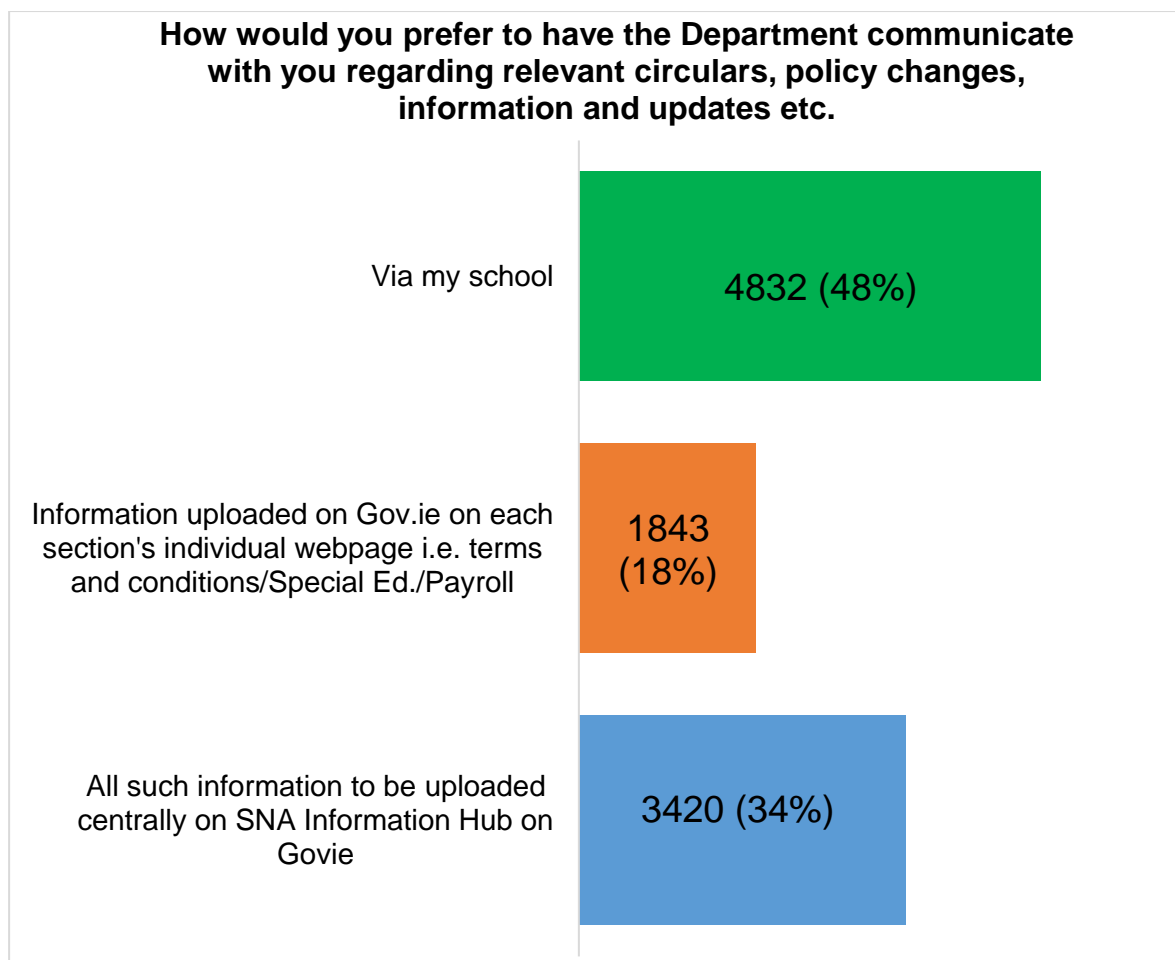


Table 47 Communication channels

2.6.3 The SNAs were also asked about the ways they would prefer the Department to communicate with them regarding relevant circulars, policy changes, information, and updates. Table 47 illustrates the findings.

2.7 SNA Role

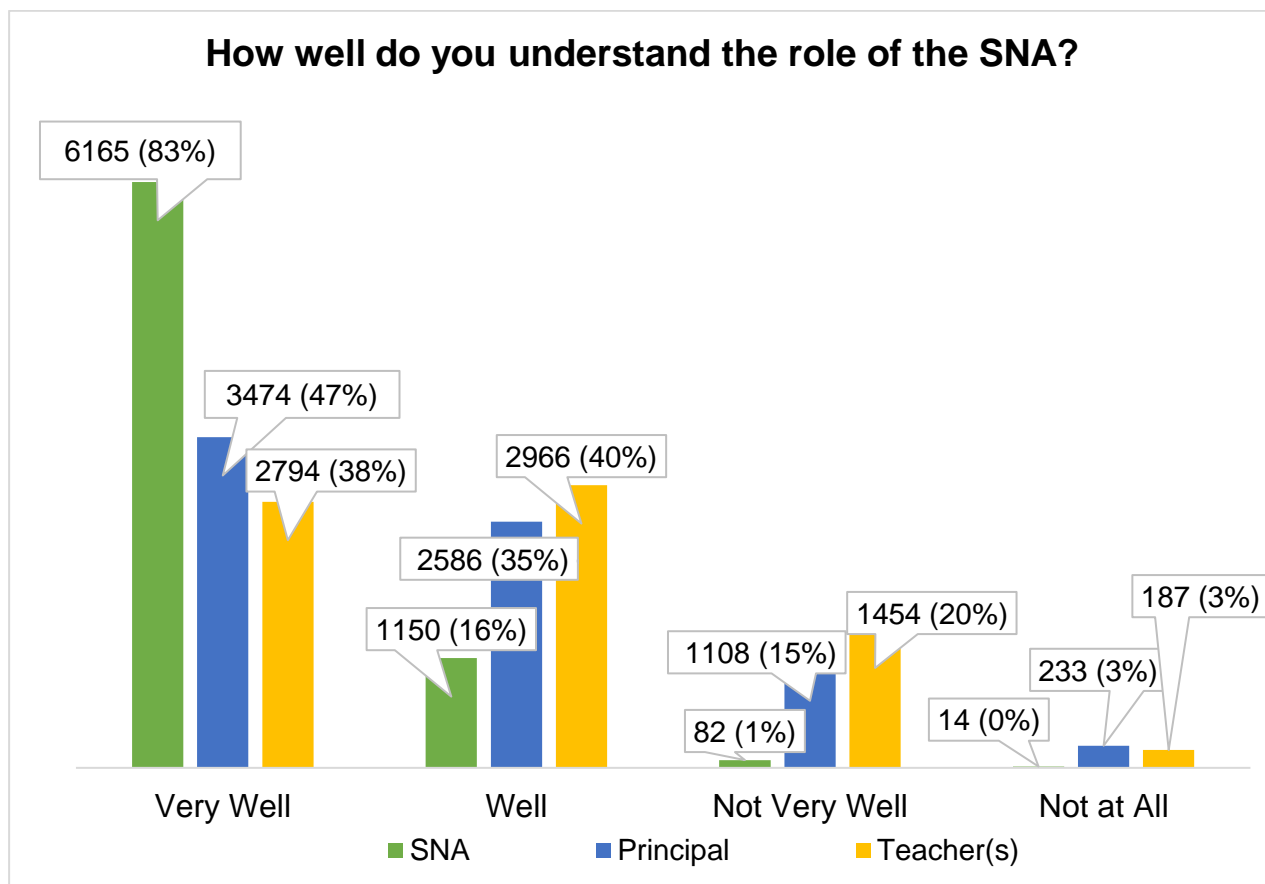


Table 48 Understanding the role of SNA

2.7.1 SNAs were asked to indicate an understanding of the role from their own perspective. The findings in Table 48 above indicate that almost all SNAs (99%) felt they had a good understanding of their role. The SNAs were also given opportunity to express their views regarding the extent they felt the principal and teacher(s) understood their role. Most (82%) felt the principal and (78%) the teacher understood the SNA role in the school community very well or well. Conversely only 18% of respondents felt that the principal didn't understand the role of SNA very well or at all. 23% had similar views regarding the teacher(s)' understanding of the SNA role.

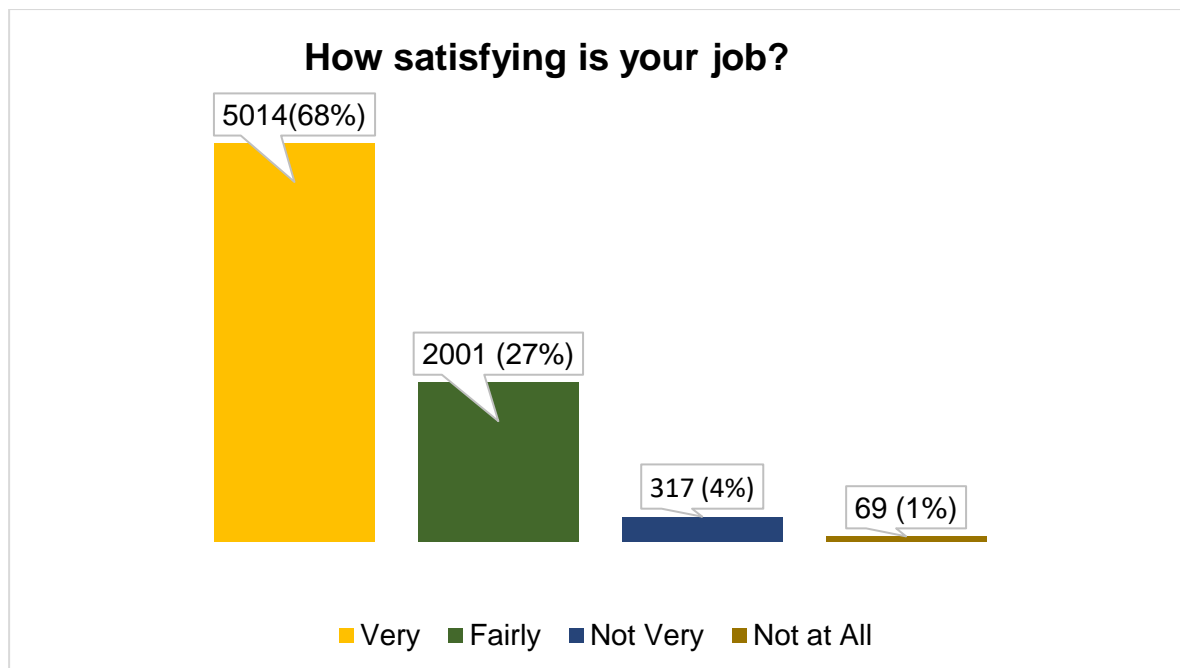


Table 49 Job satisfaction levels

2.7.2 Respondents were asked to rate their level of job satisfaction on a scale from "Very" to "Not at all". Most respondents (68%) reported being very satisfied with their job. A significant portion (27%) reported feeling fairly satisfied, while smaller percentages reported lower levels of satisfaction, with 4% indicating their job satisfaction as not very satisfying and 1% as not at all satisfying.

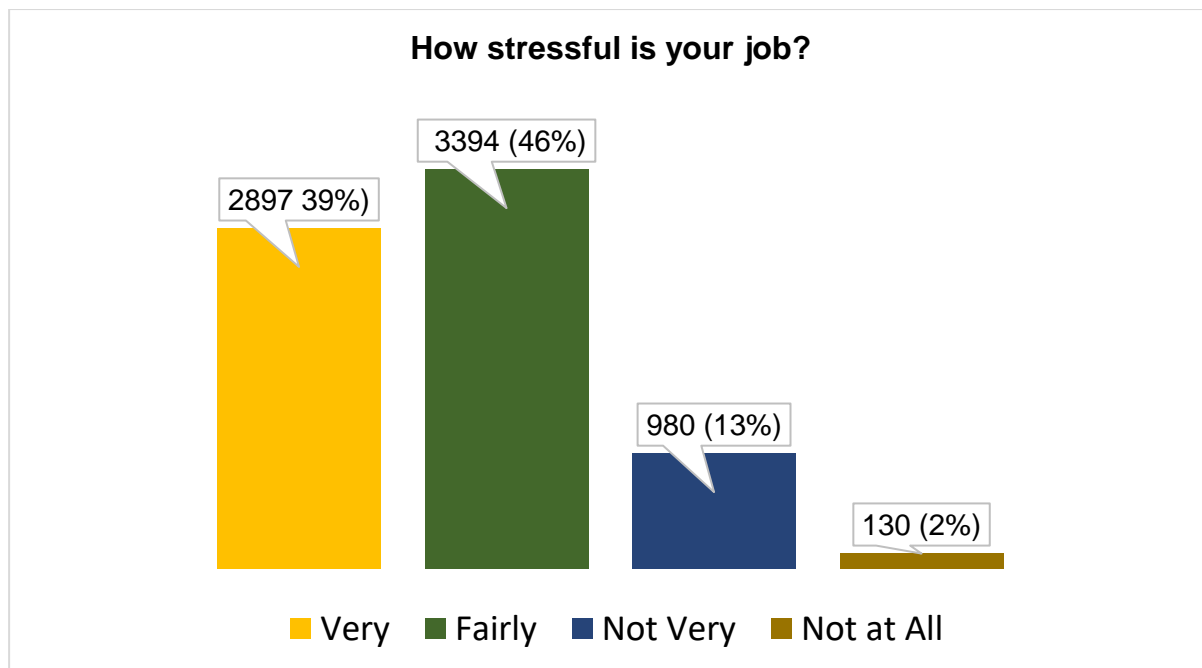


Table 50 Stress levels

2.7.3 Regarding job stress, respondents provided similar ratings on a scale from "Very" to "Not at all." While a significant portion (39%) reported experiencing very high levels of stress in their job, a slightly higher percentage (46%) indicated feeling fairly stressed. A minority of respondents (13%) reported lower levels of stress, with 2% stating they experience no stress at all.

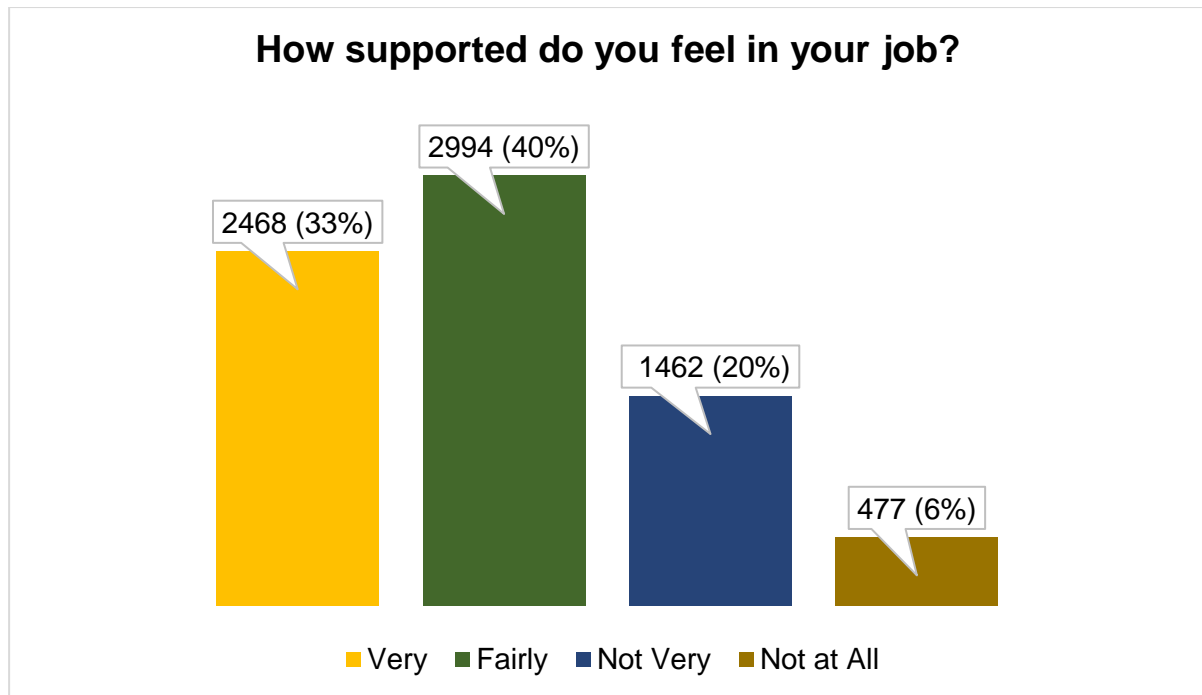


Table 51 Support levels

2.7.4 While a third of respondents (33%) reported feeling very supported in their job, a larger portion (40%) indicated feeling fairly supported. However, a significant minority (26%) expressed feeling less supported, with 20% stating they feel not very supported and 6% stating they feel not supported at all.

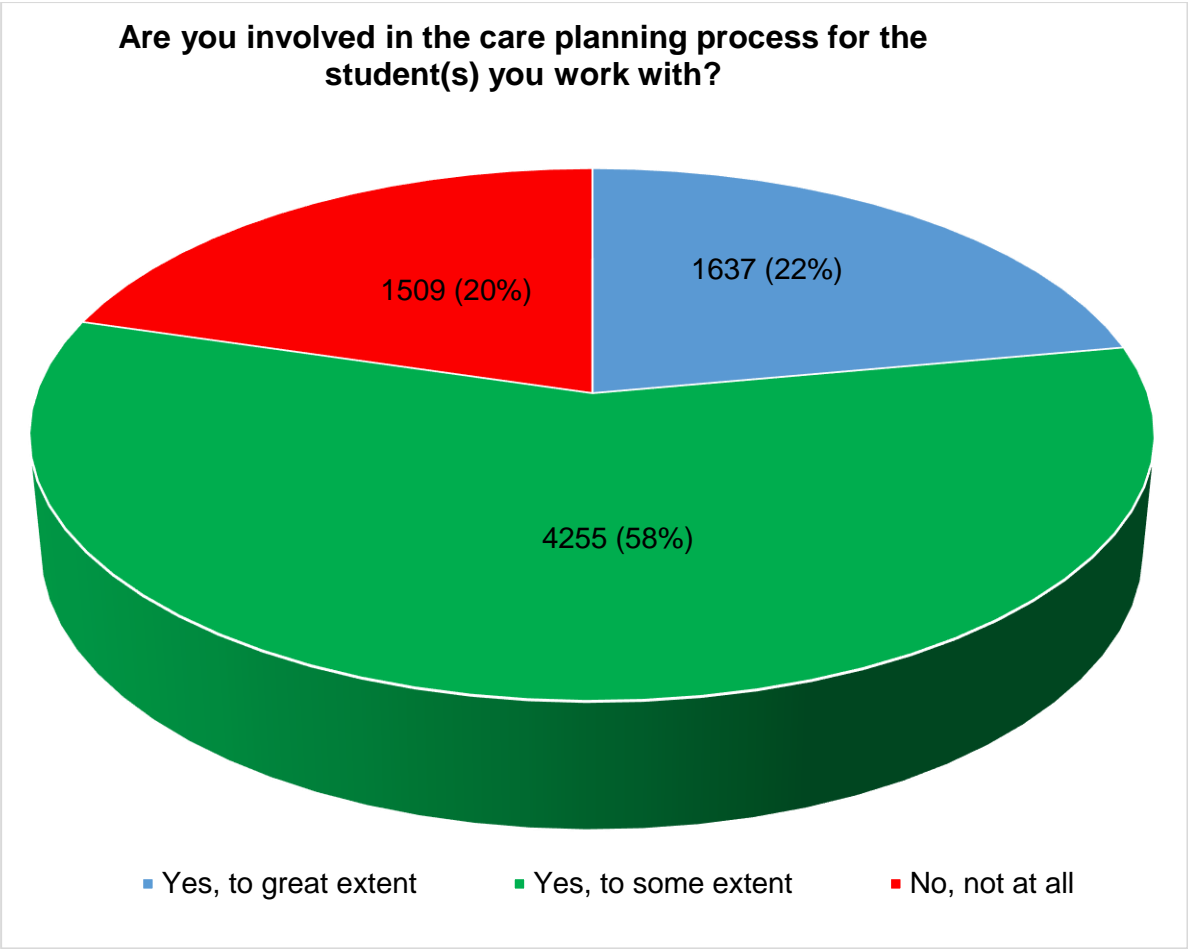


Table 52 SNA involvement in the care planning process

2.7.5 Table 52 shows findings in relation to the participants involvement in the care planning process for the student(s) they care for. As reported 80% of the workforce participated in the planning process. A fifth of the respondents advised that they were not at all involved in the care planning process.

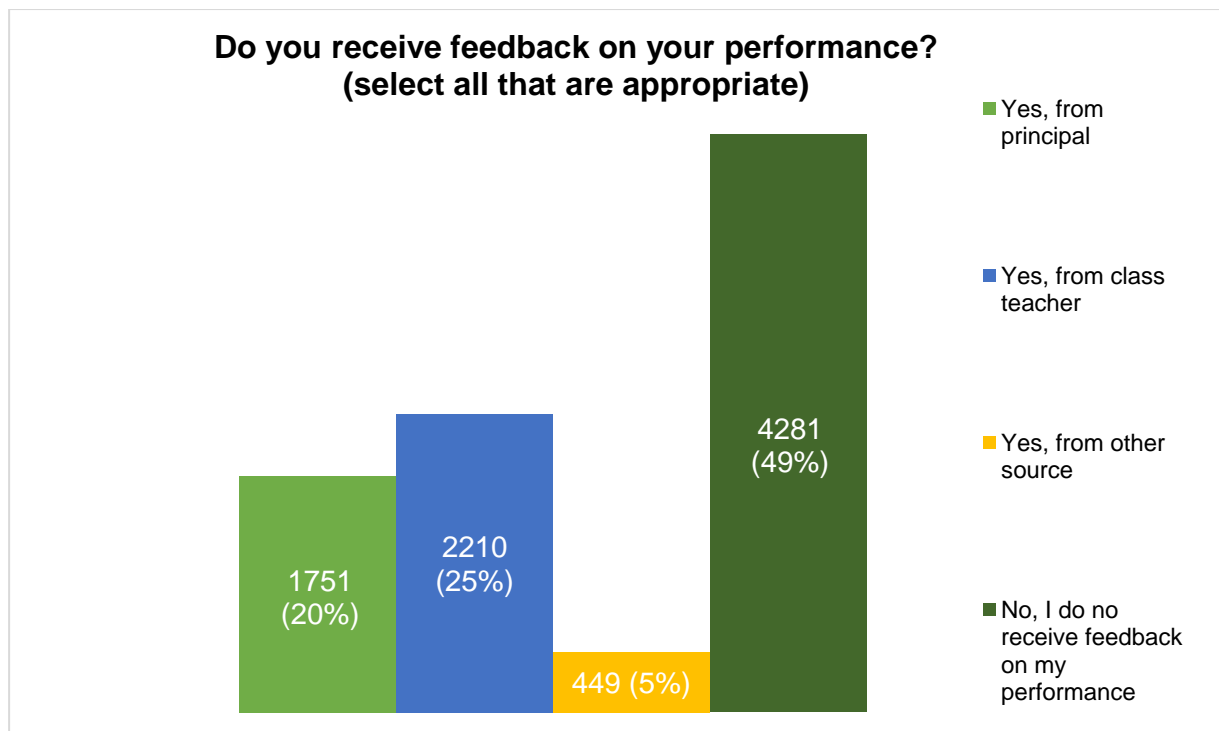


Table 53 Performance feedback

2.7.6 As outlined in Table 53, almost half (49%) of SNAs didn't receive any feedback on their performance. The other half of the sample indicated that they had feedback through meetings with the principal, class teacher or others.

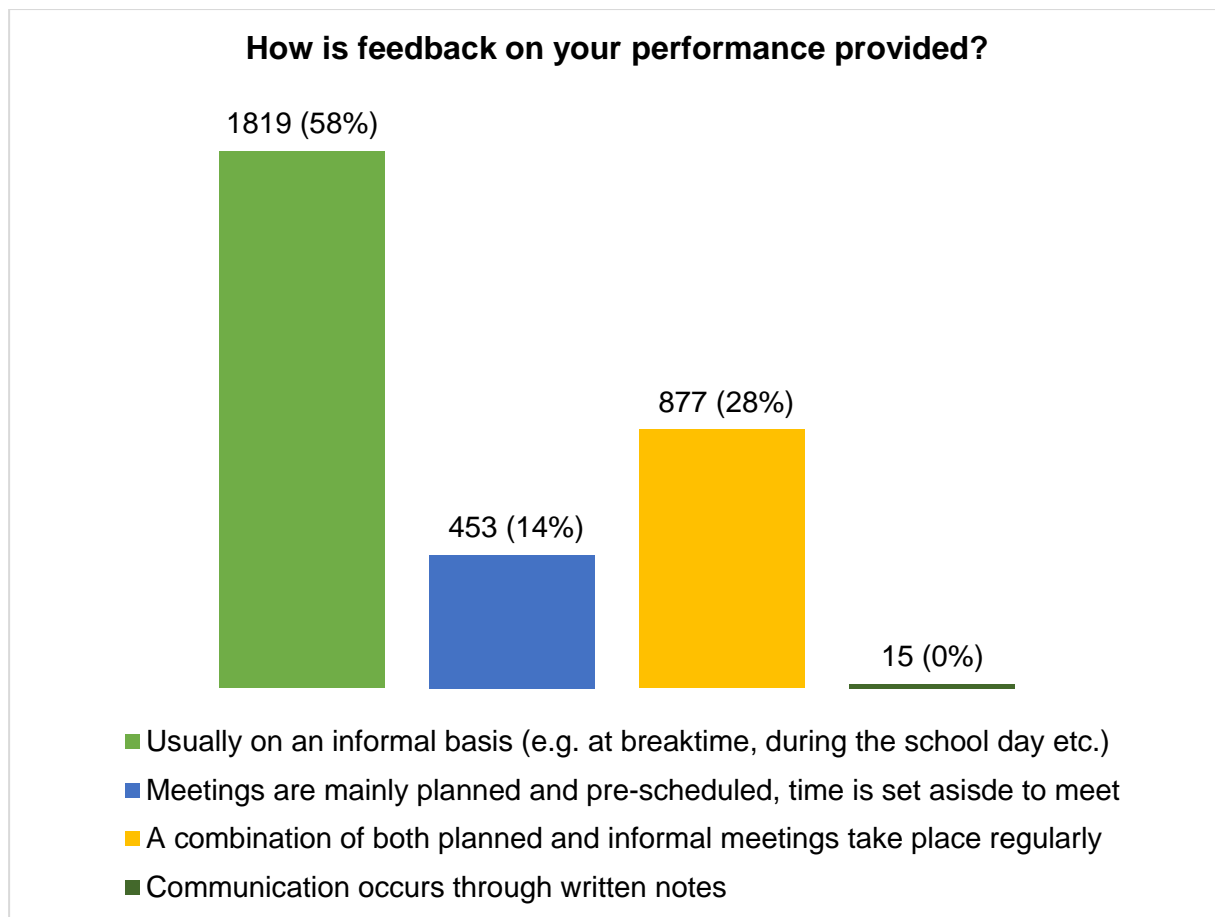


Table 55 Performance feedback methods

2.7.8 As presented in Table 55, feedback mainly occurs on an informal basis, or through a regular combination of both planned and informal meetings. 14% of respondents stated that the performance meetings were scheduled and planned in advance.

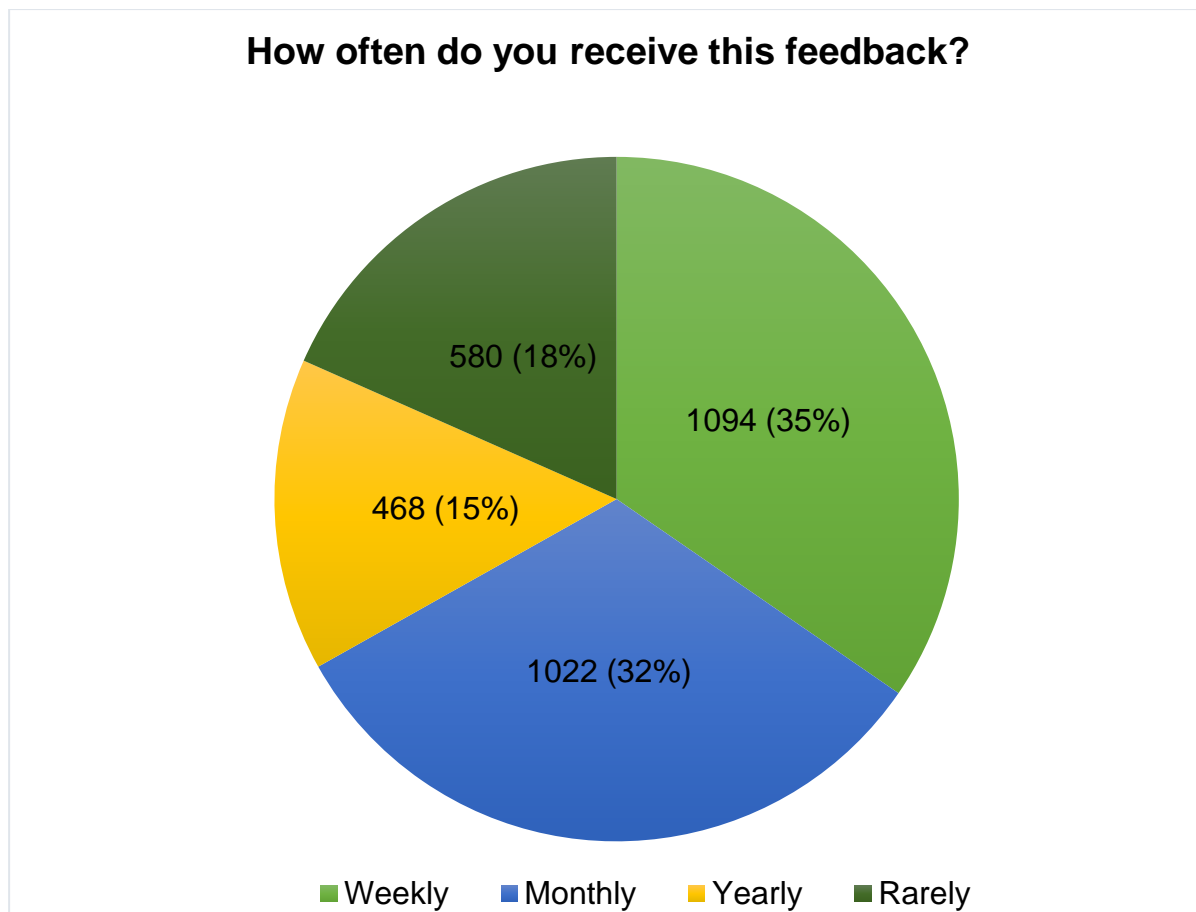


Table 56 Frequency of performance feedback

2.7.9 Table 56 shows findings in relation to the frequency of the performance feedback meetings. Over 60% of those meetings occurred on a regular weekly or monthly basis. 18% of SNAs reported rarely receiving feedback.

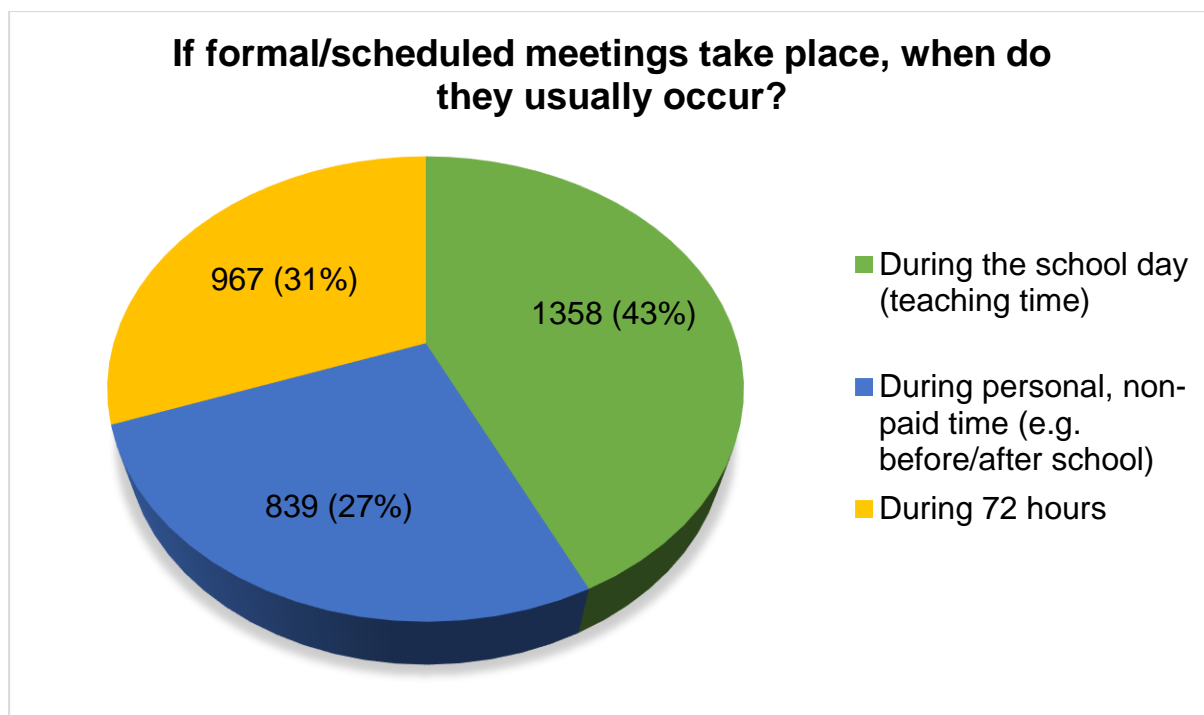


Table 57 Scheduling of formal meetings

2.7.10 Table 57 shows the timing of formal meetings, with less than a half (43%) of formal meetings occurring during SNAs school day, and 31% as part of 72 hours. Less than a quarter of formal meetings happened during SNAs' personal, non-paid time.

2.8 School Transport - Bus Escorts

2.8.1 The school transport scheme supports the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs that arise from a diagnosed disability.

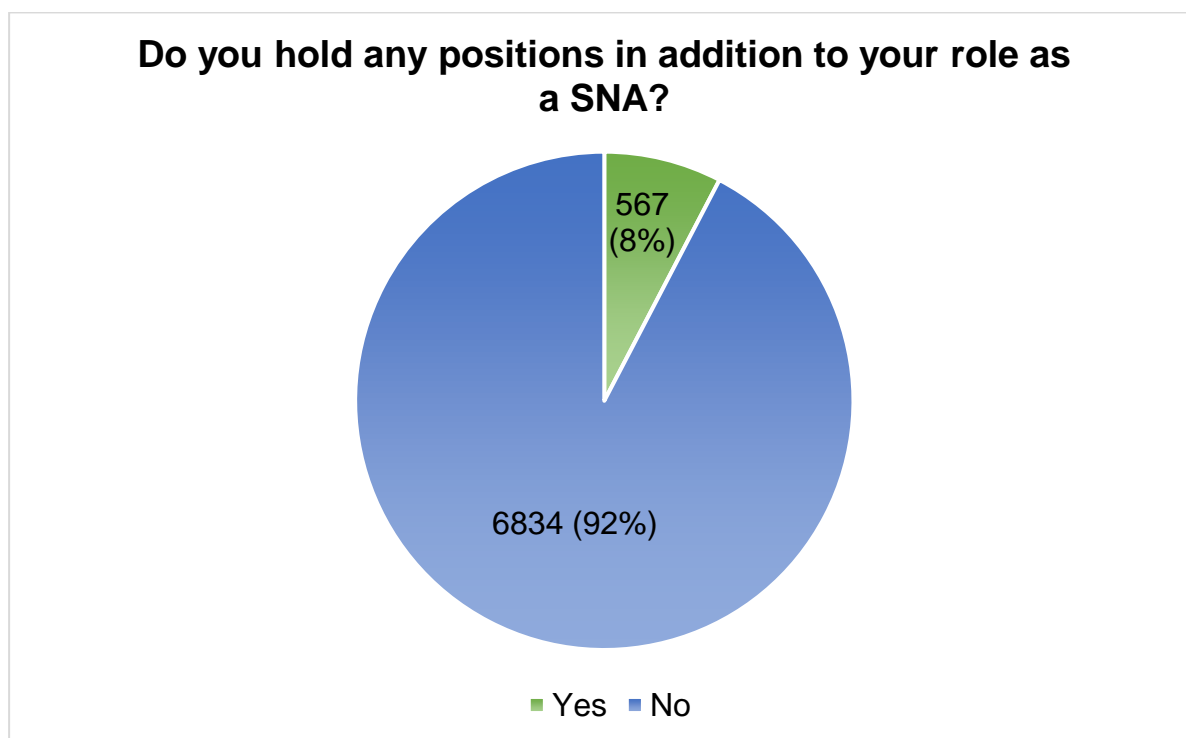


Table 58 Positions held in addition to the SNA role

2.8.2 As illustrated, in Table 58, 567 (8%)⁸ of respondents carried out extra duties in addition to their role as a SNA. Approximately 6% (446) of the respondents hold the position of a bus escort in addition to their role as a Special Needs Assistant (SNA).

⁸ Around 57 (1%) of the respondents work as school secretaries. A small percentage (0.4%) of individuals (32) hold the position of a teacher alongside their SNA role. Similarly, 32 (0.4%) of respondents are also SEN teachers.

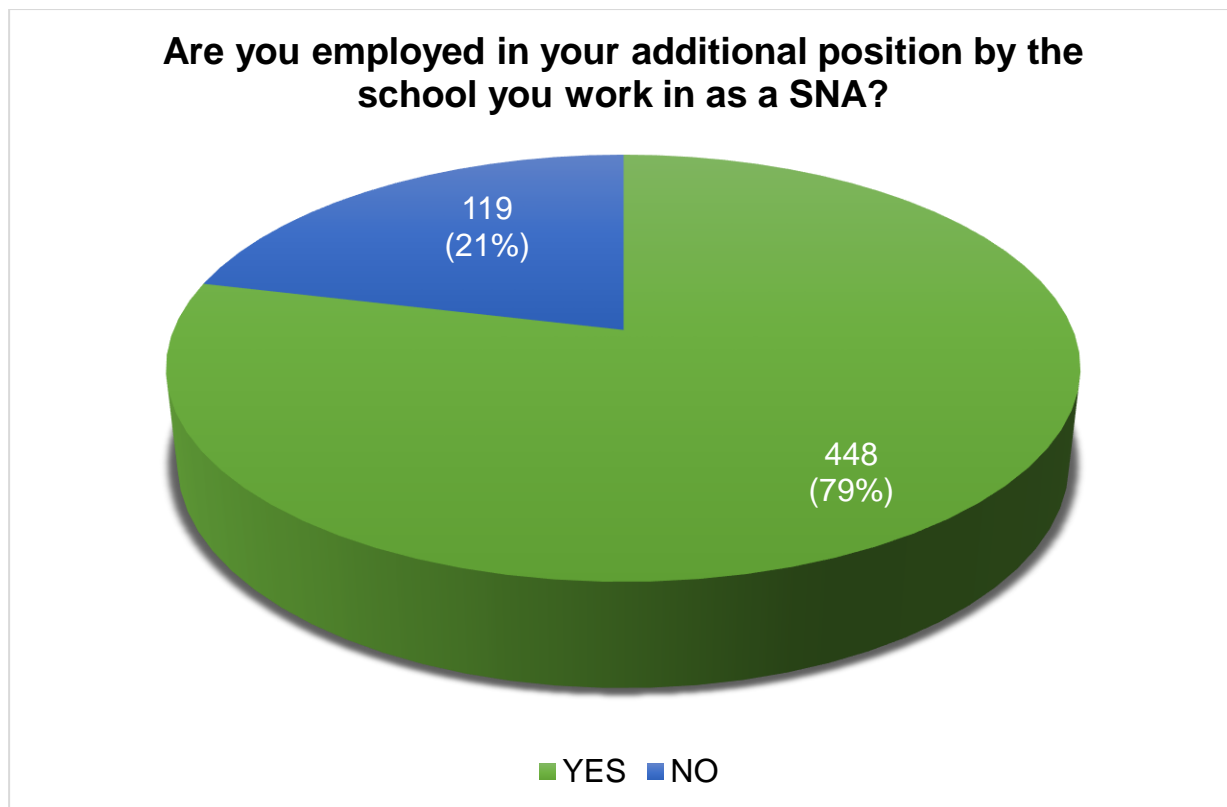


Table 59 SNAs whose additional position is with current school.

2.8.3 The majority of respondents were employed by the same school they worked as a SNA (see Table 59).

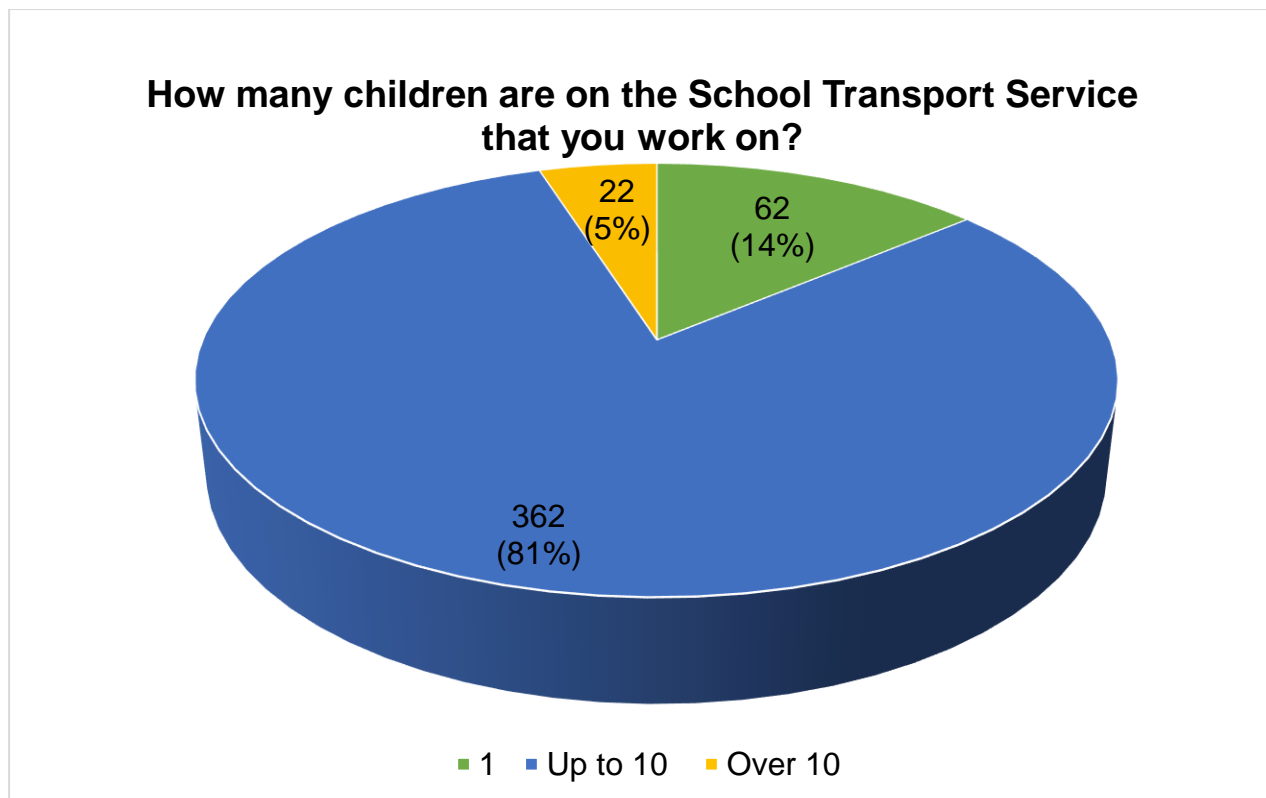


Table 60 Number of children on the school transport service

2.8.4 Table 60 shows findings in relation to the number of children on the School Transport Service. Most of participants (81%) recorded that up to 10 children were on the transport they travel on, while 14% have 1 child on board, and 5% indicated there are over 10 children on board.

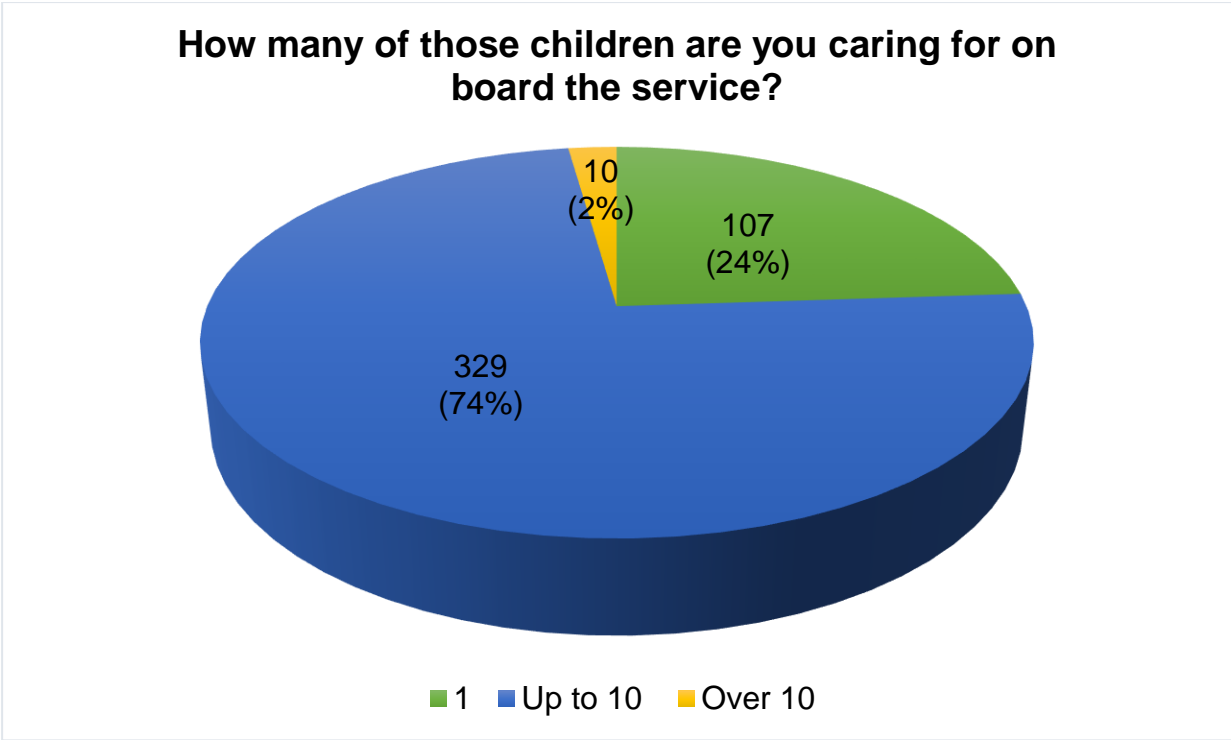


Table 61 Number of children cared for by SNA on the school transport service

2.8.5 A majority or 74% of SNAs employed as a Bus Escort are responsible for 2 to 10 children on board, while only 24% recorded that they cared for only one student on board. 2% indicated they are responsible for over ten children in their role as bus escort.

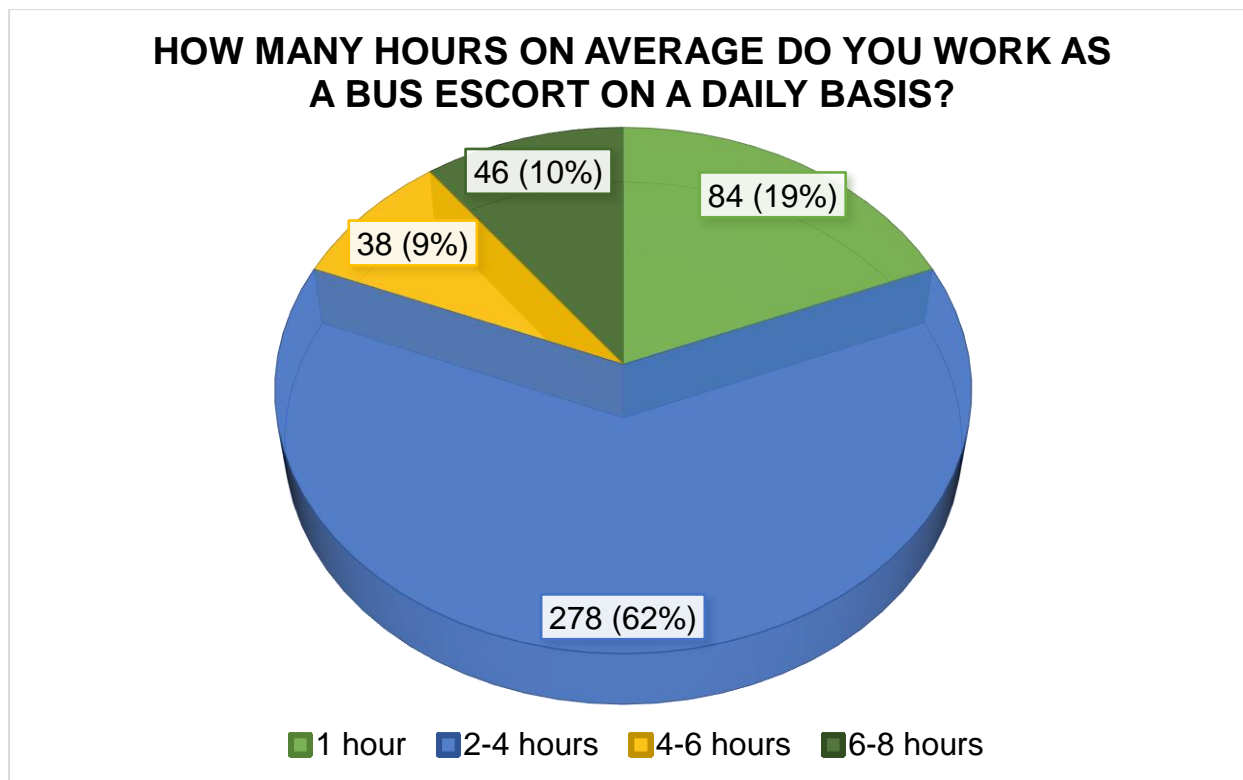


Table 62 Average time spent working as a Bus Escort

2.8.6 The average time spent on the bus transport services varied across participants. Over half indicated that they spent 2 – 4 hours on daily basis working as a bus escort, while the proportion of those working up to one hour and over 4 up to 8 hours equalled to 19% each.

2.9 Workforce Environment

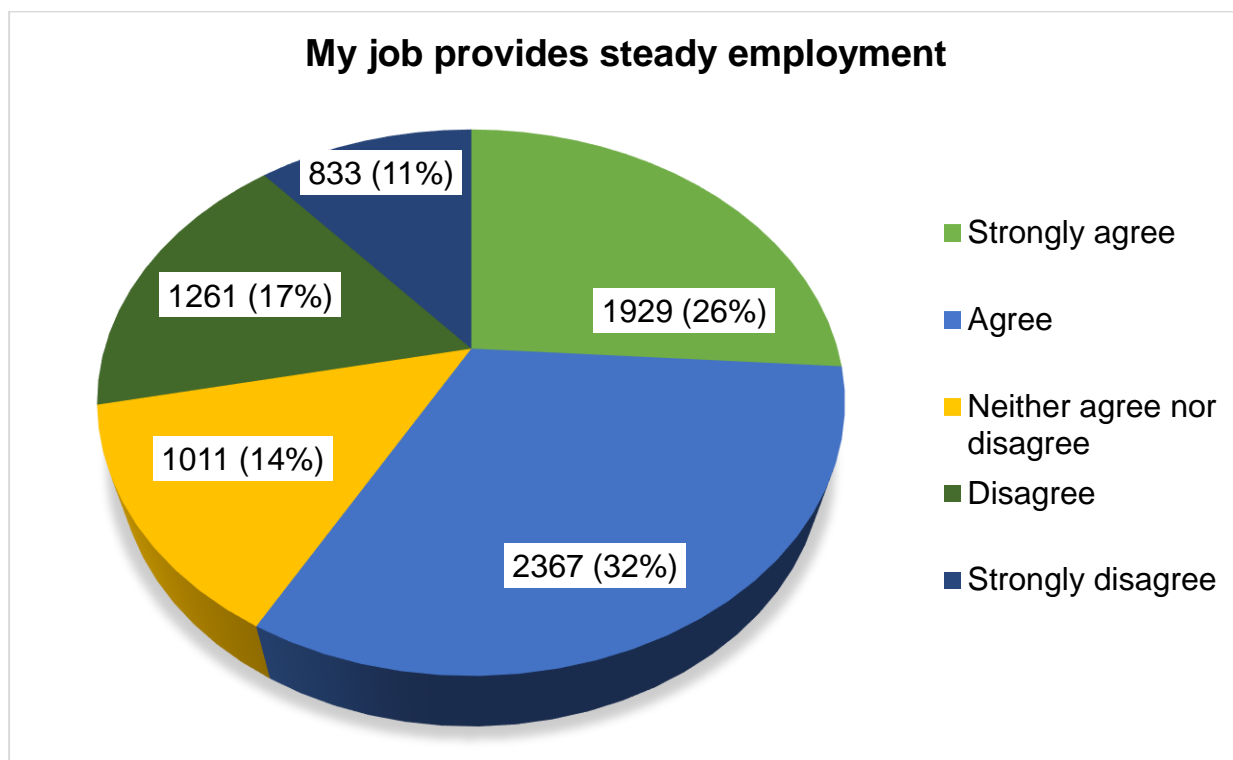


Table 63 Employment stability

2.9.1 Analysis of the data collected, as presented in Tables 63 - 68, reflect SNA perceptions of employment stability, workplace inclusivity, and school environment.

2.9.2 As presented in Table 63 above, combined, a significant majority (58%) either strongly agree or agree that their job provides steady employment. A notable proportion (14%) neither agree nor disagree, indicating some uncertainty or mixed feelings about job stability. Dissatisfaction with job stability is reported, with 28% (disagree + strongly disagree) expressing varying degrees of disagreement with the statement.

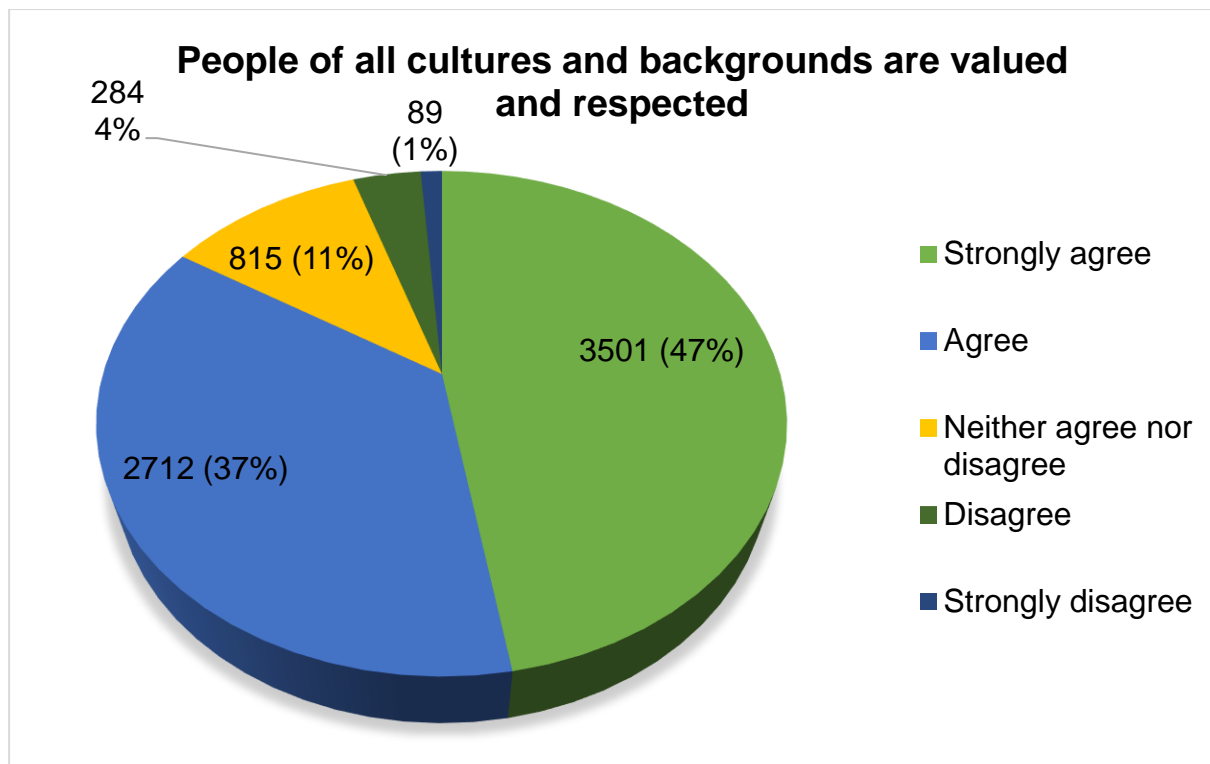


Table 64 Inclusion levels

2.9.3 The majority of respondents (84%) agreed that people of diverse backgrounds are valued and respected in their workplace. However, a small percentage (4%) disagreed with this statement.

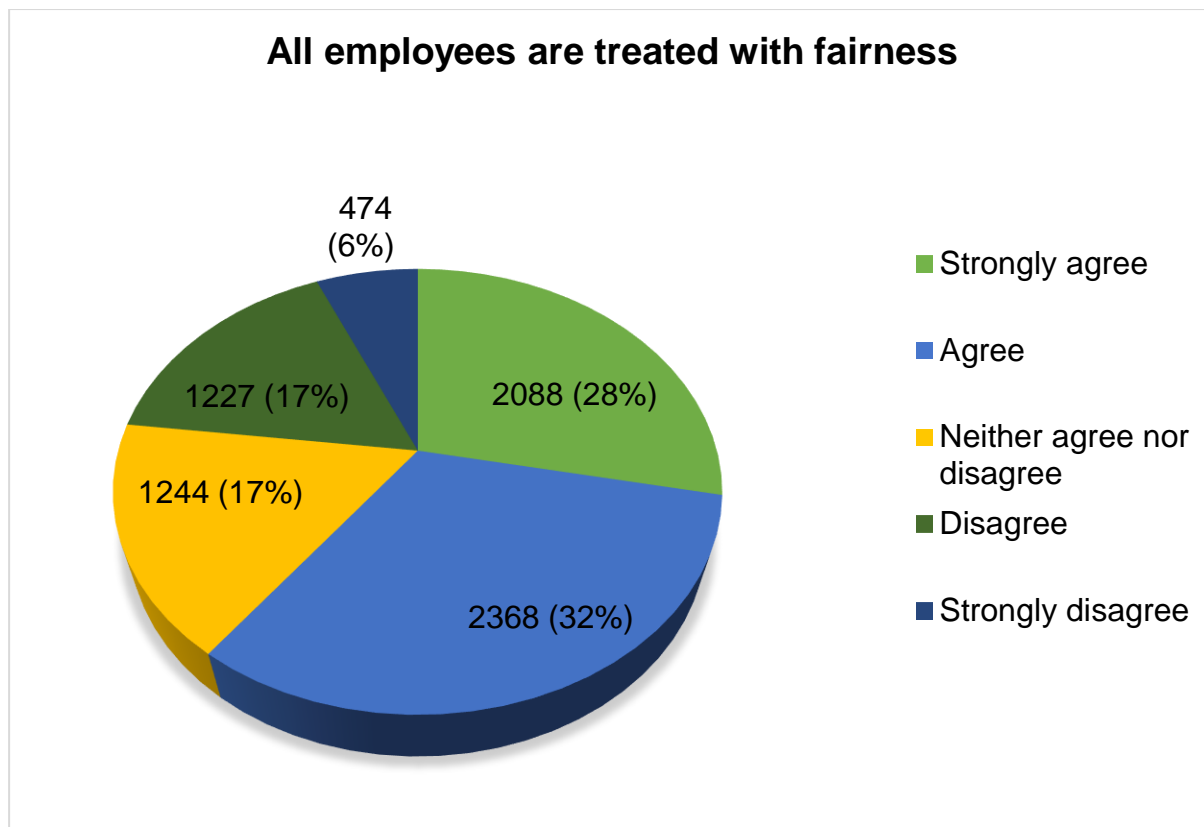


Table 65 Fairness levels

2.9.4 Like the previous statement, most respondents (60%) agreed that all employees were treated with fairness. Nonetheless, a notable percentage, 23%, expressed disagreement with this statement.

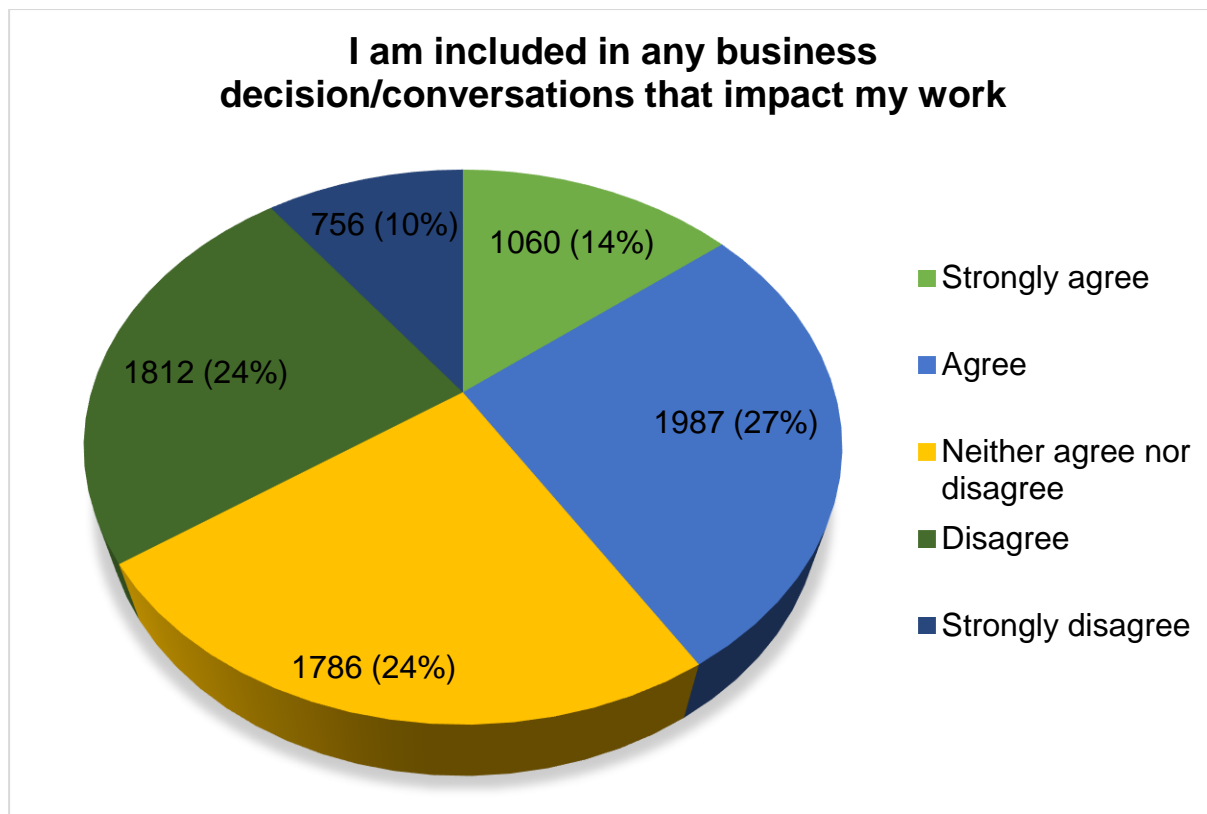


Table 66 Inclusion levels

2.9.5 “I am included in any business decision/conversation that impact my work” - this statement received mixed responses, with only 41% of respondents indicating agreement that they were included in relevant business decisions. A significant proportion (34%) disagreed with this assertion.

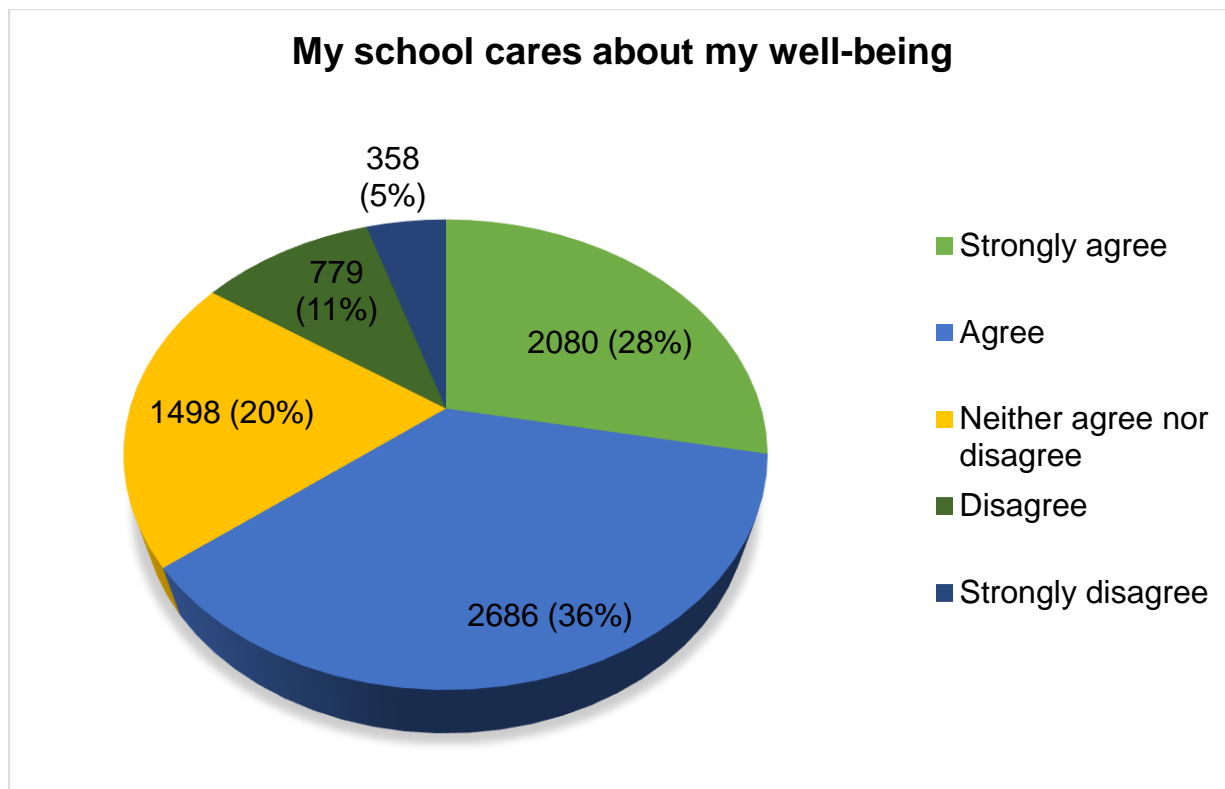


Table 67 Level of care for well-being

2.9.6 A considerable number of respondents (64%) agreed that their school cares about their well-being. However, a noteworthy percentage (16%) expressed disagreement with this statement.

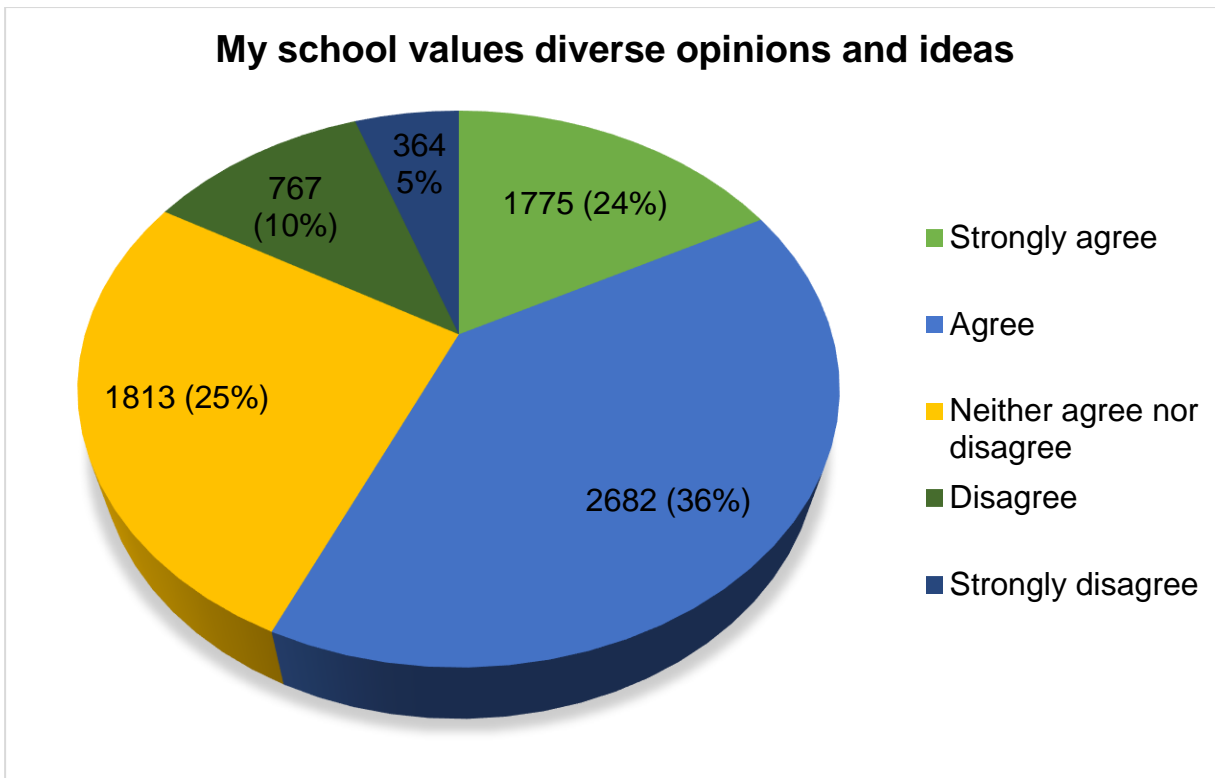


Table 68 Diverse opinions and ideas

2.9.7 While a significant number of respondents (60%) agreed that their school values diverse opinions and ideas, a notable minority (15%) disagreed with this assertion.

2.10 Relationships in the School Community

2.10.1 Tables 69 – 71 display data regarding SNAs perceptions of their relationships with school staff, particularly the principal, class teachers and other SNAs in the school.

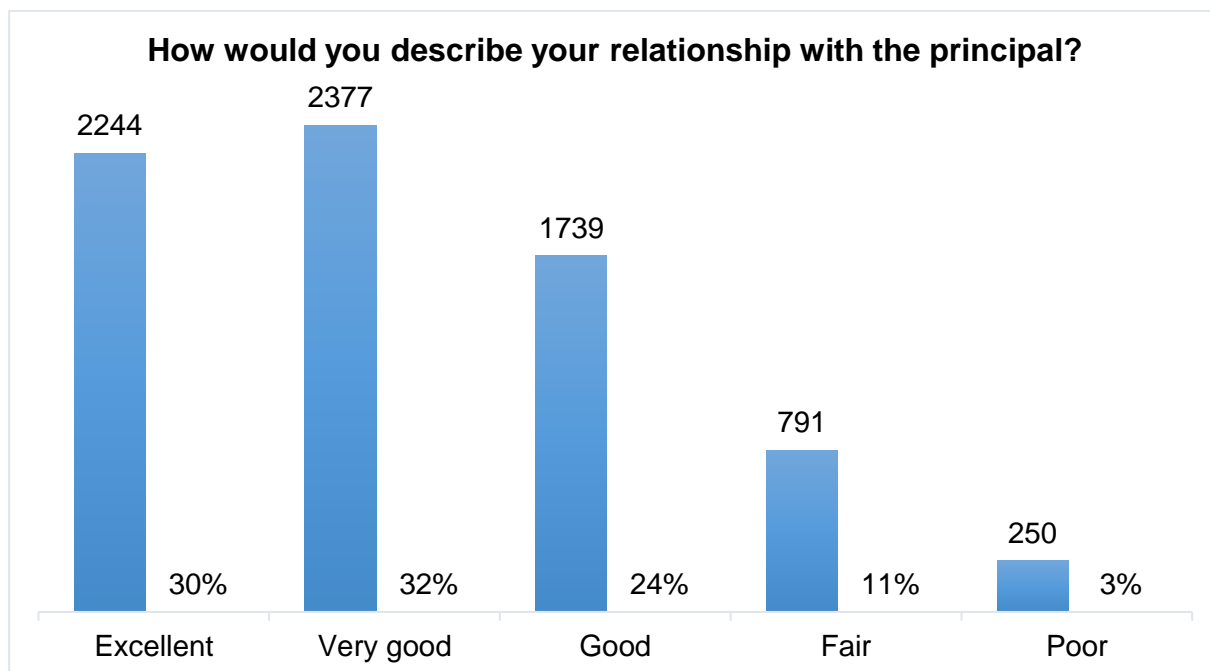


Table 69 Relationship with the principal

2.10.2 Respondents were asked to describe their relationship with the principal of the school. Most respondents (86%) reported positive relationships, with 62% rating their relationship as excellent or very good. However, 14% of respondents indicated fair to poor relations with the principal.

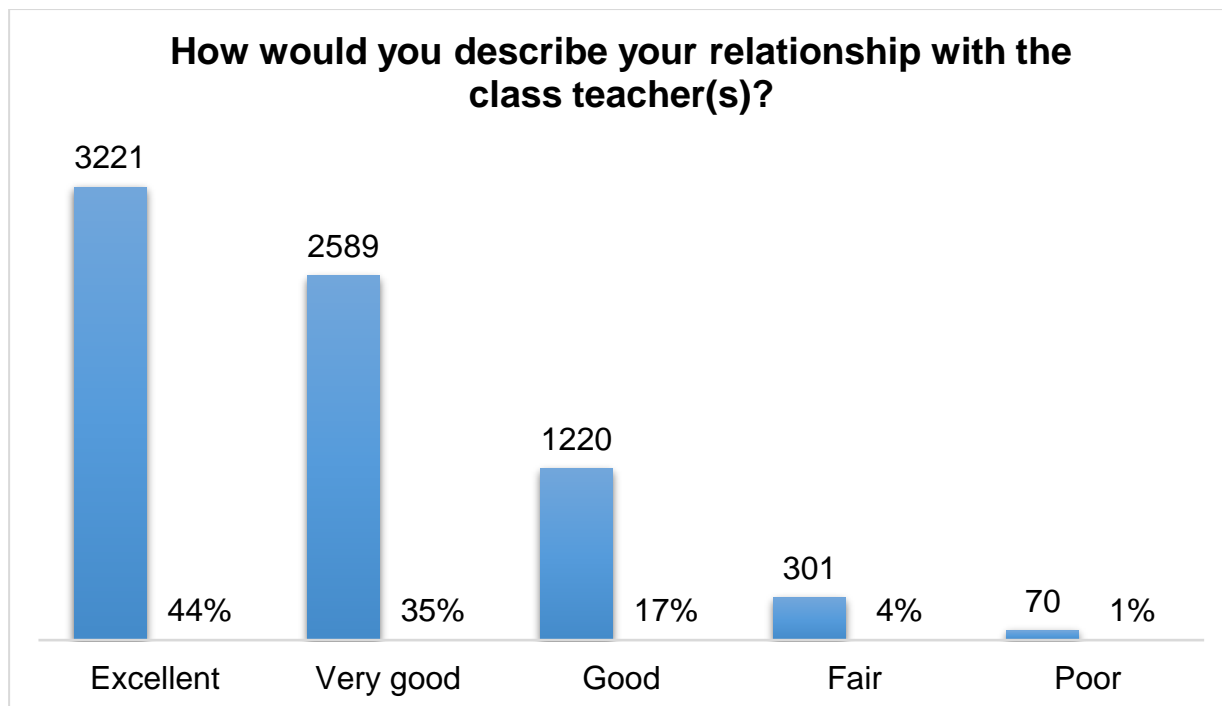


Table 70 Relationship with the class teacher(s)

2.10.3 Regarding relationships with class teachers, a higher percentage of respondents reported positive experiences. Over three-quarters of respondents (79%) rated their relationships with class teachers as excellent or very good. However, a small percentage (5%) expressed fair to poor relations with class teachers.

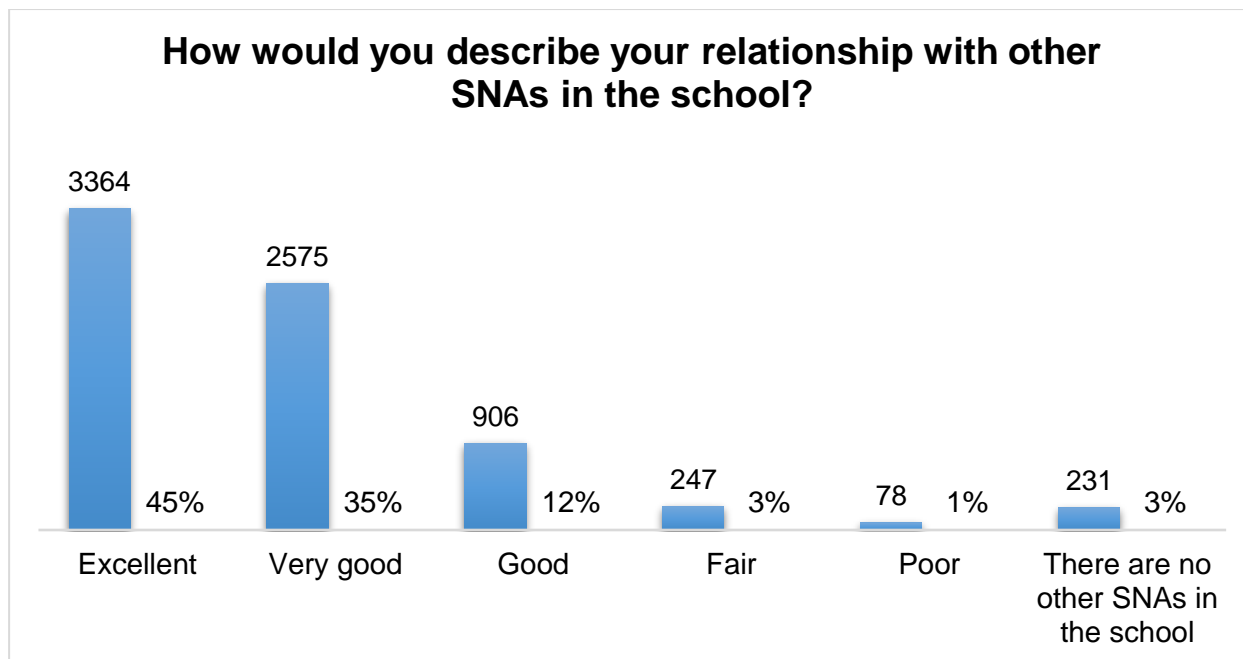


Table 71 Relationship with other SNAs in the school

2.10.4 A significant majority of respondents (92%) reported positive experiences with other SNAs in the school. Most respondents (80%) rated their relationships with other SNAs as excellent or very good. However, a small percentage (4%) expressed fair to poor relations with other SNAs, and 3% stated that there were no other SNAs in the school.

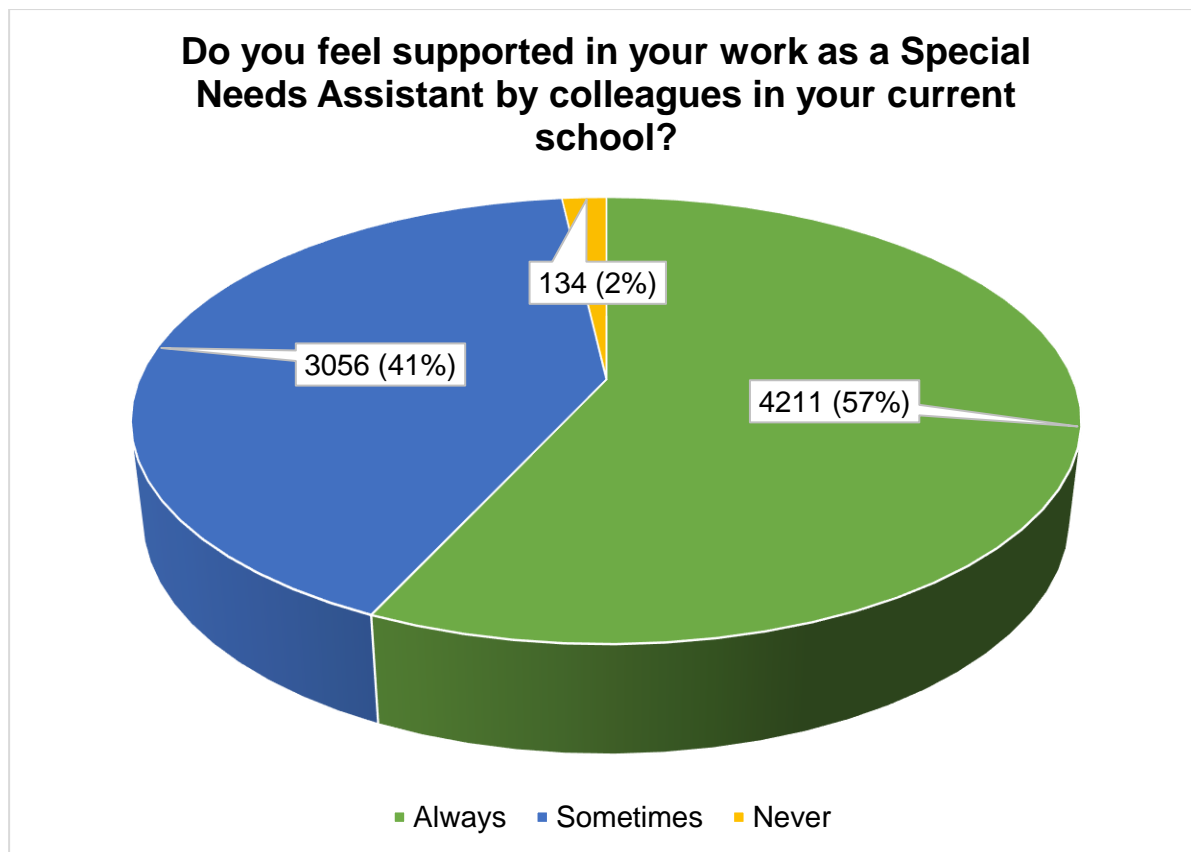


Table 72 Level of support from colleagues

2.10.5 Respondents were asked to assess how supported they feel in their job. While over half of respondents (57%) reported feeling always supported by colleagues in their job (41%) indicated they sometimes feel supported. 2% stated they never feel supported.

2.11 Recruitment

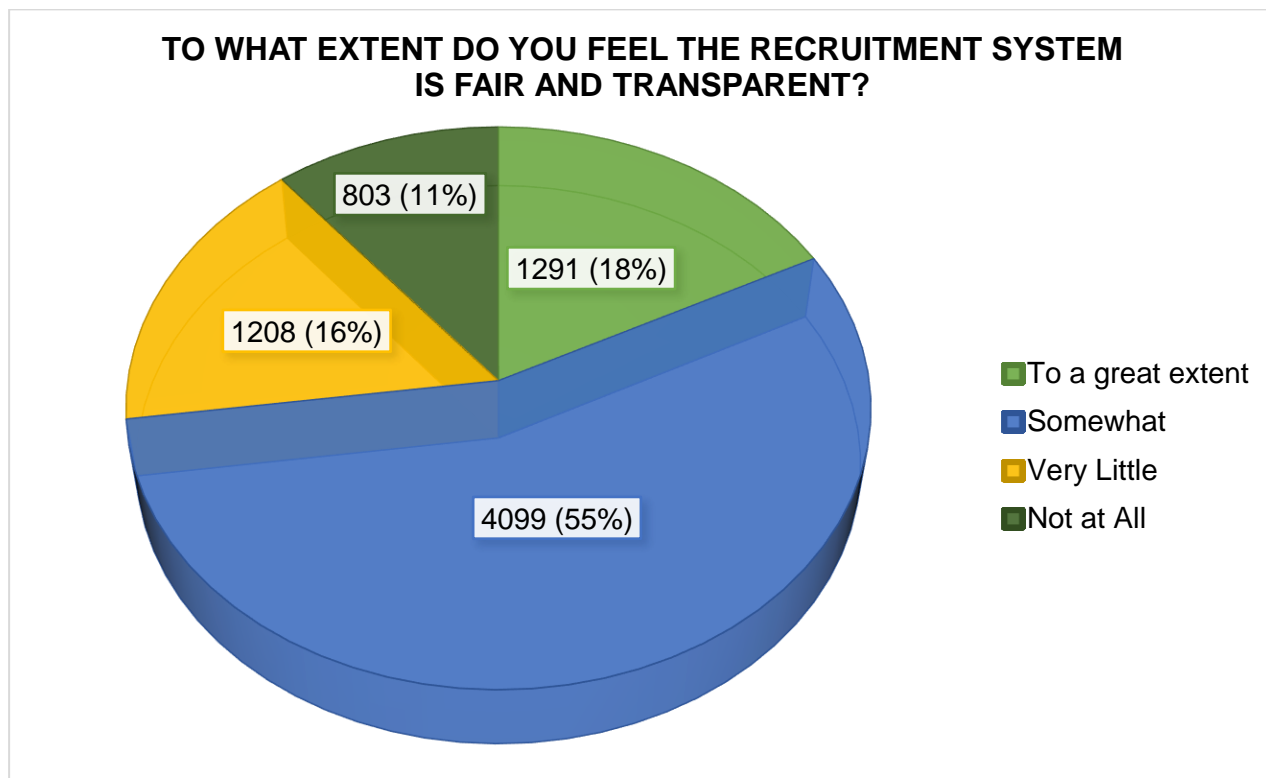


Table 73 Recruitment process

2.11.1 As presented in Table 73, perceptions of the fairness and transparency of the SNA recruitment process reflect mixed views. While a majority (73%) indicated some level of confidence in the fairness and transparency of the process, a significant minority (27%) expressed doubts. Notably, 16% of respondents believed the process is somewhat fair, while 11% believed it to be not fair at all.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The survey results provide valuable insights into the education levels, qualifications, and training experiences of SNAs. It is evident that SNAs hold a wide variety of qualifications in a variety of different fields. It also indicates that SNAs are more highly qualified than the minimum educational requirements for the role i.e., a FETAC level 3 major qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications or a minimum of three grade Ds in the Junior Cert or Equivalent. Respondents on the whole support a review of the minimum educational requirements.

3.2 The findings of this research suggest that there are significant disparities in the SNA workforce in terms of gender balance and diversity. This is an area that will be considered by the Working Group on SNA Recruitment, Retention and Diversity established to provide input to the SNA Workforce Development Plan.

3.3 While a significant portion of SNAs participate in training courses related to their role and express satisfaction with the quality of training, there are concerns about the availability of training opportunities and funding sources. The Working Group on SNA Learning and Development established to provide input to the SNA Workforce Development Plan will consider opportunities for all SNAs to access training for their professional development.

3.4 While many SNAs indicated they have received induction training, the majority have not. The Working Group on SNA Recruitment, Retention & Diversity established to provide input to the SNA Workforce Development Plan will consider how this important part of the recruitment process can be addressed to ensure SNAs are ready to deliver the best standard of care when they enter the classroom for the first time.

3.5 The findings highlighted the diverse range of special needs supported by SNAs and their varied caseloads. Understanding these aspects can inform strategies to better support SNAs in their roles and ensure the effective provision of care and assistance to students with special needs in educational settings.

3.6 The survey results indicate generally positive relationships between respondents and school staff, including principals, class teachers, and other SNAs.

3.7 There are some concerns among respondents about the fairness and transparency of the SNA recruitment process, with a significant minority of respondents expressing doubts. Addressing these concerns and demonstrating consistency and transparency in the recruitment process will contribute to a more supportive and cohesive school environment.

3.8 The survey results revealed a mixture of positive and negative perceptions among respondents regarding their job satisfaction and school environment. While a majority expressed satisfaction with aspects such as workplace diversity and fairness, there are areas for improvement, particularly concerning inclusivity in decision-making processes and perceptions of support in educational settings. These findings highlight the importance of ongoing efforts to foster inclusive and supportive environments both in the workplace and in educational institutions.

3.9 The findings highlight the overall high level of job satisfaction among respondents, with a majority reporting being very satisfied with their job. However, a substantial portion of respondents also reported experiencing high levels of job stress, which may have implications for their overall well-being and productivity. Additionally, while many respondents feel supported in their job, there is still room for improvement, as a notable percentage are feeling unsupported.

3.10 Further analysis of the roles and challenges faced by SNAs in each school sector will be carried out over the course of the SNA Workforce Development Plan with a view to providing appropriate support, and training and development opportunities. This work will be completed with the objective of optimising educational outcomes for students in the care of SNAs.