

Ethical Standards Commissioner

Applicant Research 2023

5 Month Report

May 2024

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of surveys carried out of applicants for public appointments in Scotland between the period April 2023 – August 2023. Applicant surveys have been conducted annually by the Ethical Standards Commissioner since 2016 but were paused during 2020-22. This was due to the impact of Covid-19 and limited resources available to provide regulatory oversight of public appointments. While this activity was paused, the applicant survey itself was refreshed during the latter half of 2022 and into 2023. This followed the introduction of a new Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland. A new set of questions was developed to reflect the changes made to the Code. A copy of these questions is included in Appendix 1. The survey was relaunched in early 2023 following the conclusion of the first appointment round under the new Code.

An annual survey report will be produced at the end of 2024, which will include a full analysis and resulting set of recommendations for the Scottish Government, with the aim of improving the applicant experience. In the interim, this shorter report provides a snapshot view of the applicant views in the initial period after the launch of the 2022 Code of Practice and during 2023 and is for information only. This survey will not use comparison data from prior survey reports. Its aim is to provide an interim snapshot of the views of participating applicants since the launch of the new Code.

Analysis was carried out on the views expressed by those who reach interview stage and those who don't, first time applicants, women and under-reflected groups such as disabled applicants, black and minority ethnic applicants, applicants under the age of 50 and lesbian, gay, bisexual and, for the first time, trans (LGBT) applicants. The Scottish Government now collect data on Trans history, and we have also now included this data in our applicant survey report, although due to the low number of responses received, we do not report on these figures separately. Where the views of these groups vary significantly from the view of the overall group this is highlighted. In previous surveys, bespoke questions were occasionally asked of applicants following individual rounds when innovative methods have been employed by selection panels. This has been scaled back following the relaunch of the applicant survey, as we have sought to streamline and reduce the time taken to complete the survey. Only one round included bespoke questions over the period analysed and its results have not been included here to protect the anonymity of participants.

Key Findings

A summary of the key findings from the analysis is provided below. Each of these findings are explored and discussed fully within this report.

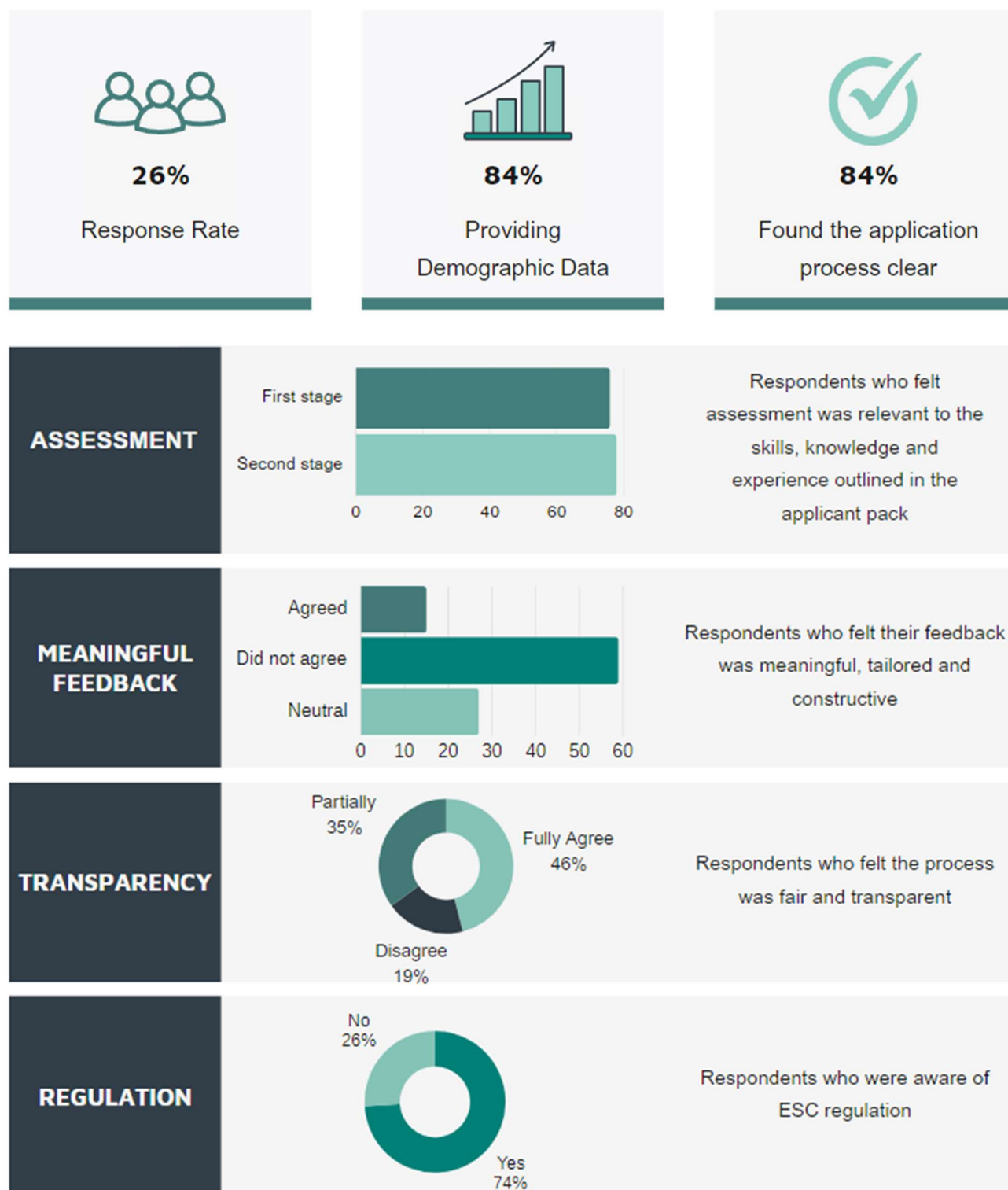


Figure 1 Overview of key findings from the survey analysis.

Respondent Data

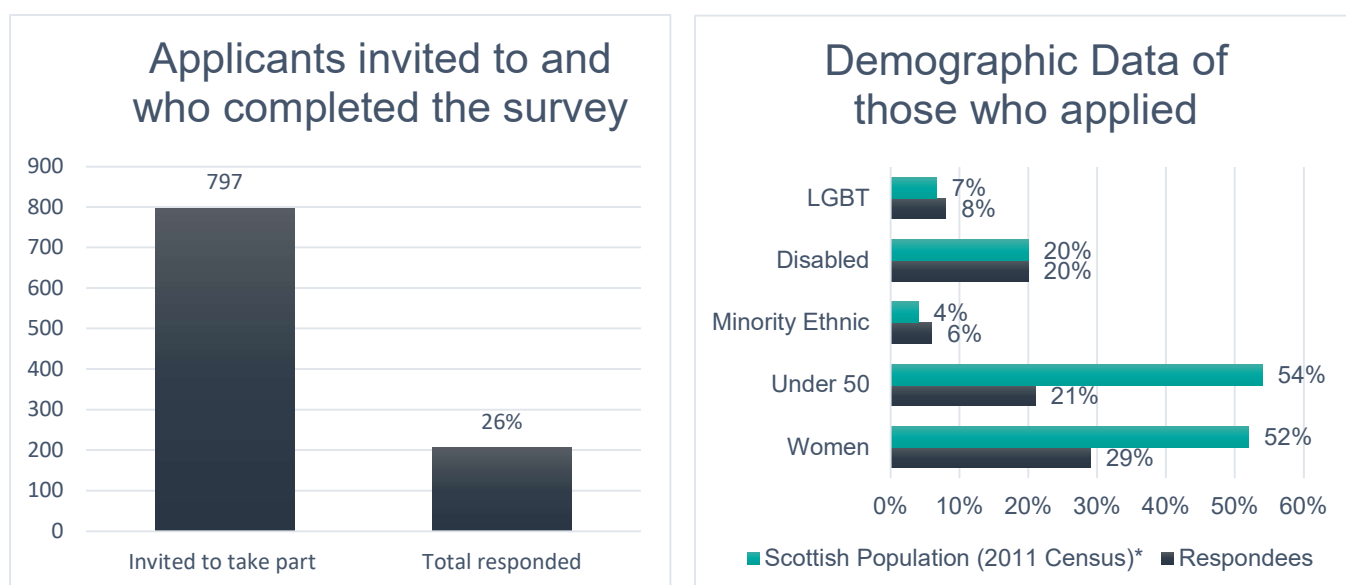


Figure 2 Applicants invited to and who completed the survey.

Figure 3 Demographic data of those who completed the survey and provided this information.

Between April 2023 - August 2023 a total of 797 applicants across 20 appointment rounds were invited to take part in an applicant survey. 206 applicants responded (26%) in full and of those 184 (84%) applicants provided demographic data. Sources suggest that a 'good' response rate for online surveys lies anywhere between 5% - 30%¹ and historically for the ESC the applicant survey response rate averages at 37%.² We should note here that the ESC applicant surveys only resumed activity part way through 2023, covering only 20 of the 62 appointment rounds concluded that year. This is because of the redesign and relaunch of the survey and the number of surveys concluded by the end of 2023. The 26% response rate is therefore not a reflection of a full year's worth of data as we have analysed in prior years and cannot usefully be compared to prior surveys for this reason.

Throughout this report, the demographic data has been analysed against the Scottish population published following the Census in 2011, and the LGB details estimated based on information from Stonewall Scotland's website.³ Details of the 2022 Census have not yet been published. This analysis and comparison demonstrate that respondents in the under 50 and women categories do not reflect the Scottish population as well as the other groups do, though we must remember that these figures do not represent all applicants to all public appointments.

Applicant surveys are now run on a monthly basis and as close to the announcement of the public appointment as practical. The full year 2024 survey report will demonstrate whether this has been an effective way of increasing the current survey response rate.

¹ [What Is A Good Survey Response Rate? - SmartSurvey](#)

² [2021-01-18 \(Annual applicant survey report\)- FINAL.pdf \(ethicalstandards.org.uk\)](#)

³ LGB data estimated based on information from Stonewall Scotland's website and trans data as at 2011 Census*

The lower the percentage of applicants completing the survey, the lower the statistical validity of the survey findings and the higher the potential for sampling bias to occur⁴. The views of the 206 applicants who did respond, however, remain valid and important. At this stage, the analysis within this report simply seeks to provide a snapshot view of applicant views in the months following the introduction of the 2022 Code.

Of the applicants who provided their views, 42% applied for a public appointment for the first time. The results of this survey will therefore provide insights on how people entering the process for the first time are viewing it.

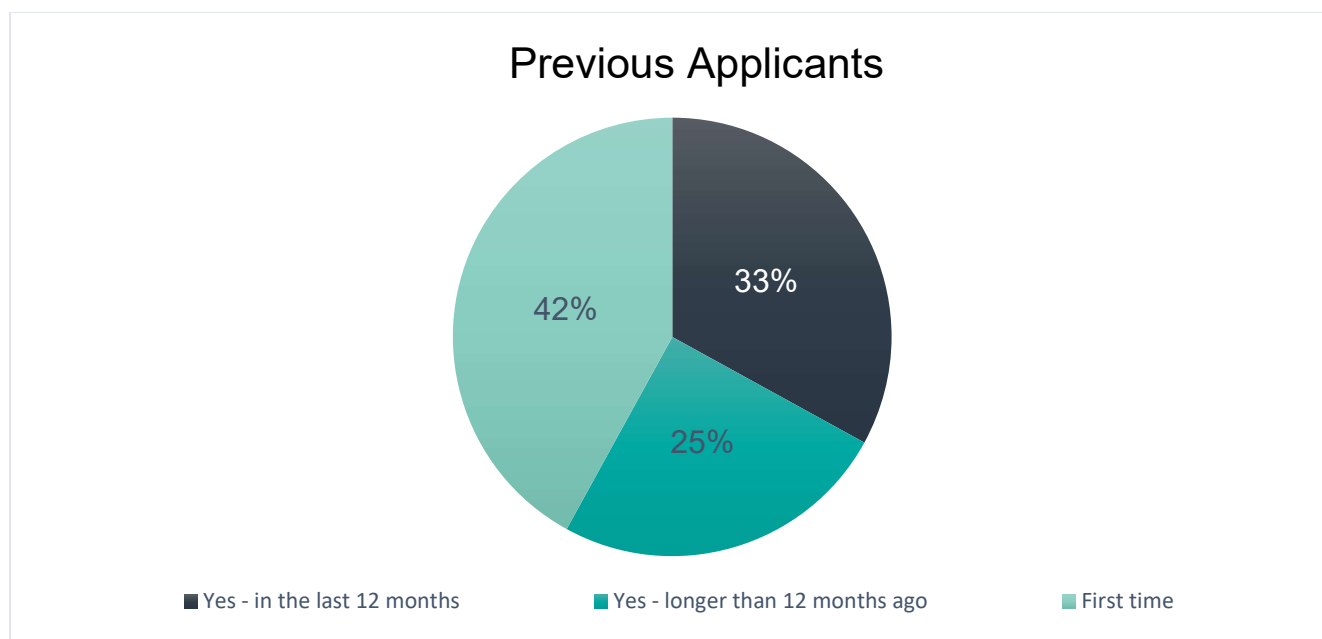
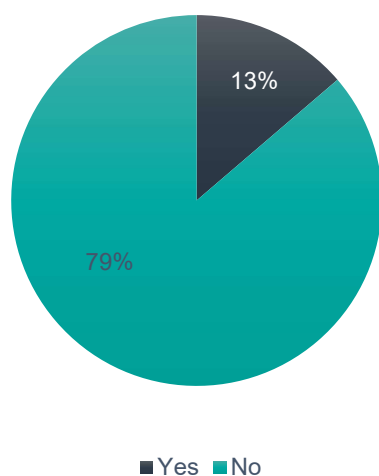


Figure 4 Previous applicants.

Applicants who have previously applied for a public appointment were asked whether they experienced something new or innovative during their most recent involvement in the process. This question was introduced with the introduction of the 2022 Code and relates to the Code's focus on enabling more creative and ambitious approaches to attracting and appointing the best new board members from the widest pool of possible applicants.

⁴ <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/blog/ways-to-avoid-sampling-bias-in-surveys>

Previous applicants who experienced something new or innovative



Of the applicants who responded yes to this question (13%) many referenced being able to apply online as a newer aspect of the experience for them in addition to greater flexibility in how the second stage of assessment was conducted.

A focus on values. Being able to complete interview remotely

Figure 5 Previous applicants who experienced something new or innovative.

“

It seems to me as a well established, robust and open process, aiming for transparency

It was possible to apply online, which is good.

The application is now online, which is positive, and the guidance is clearer.

”

Attraction

Applicants were asked about the advert for the roles they applied for and what, if anything, about the advert attracted them to the role. The highest response to this was that the advert sounded like they were looking for people like them. This was closely followed by applicants reporting that the advert made the role and / or public body sound attractive / interesting.

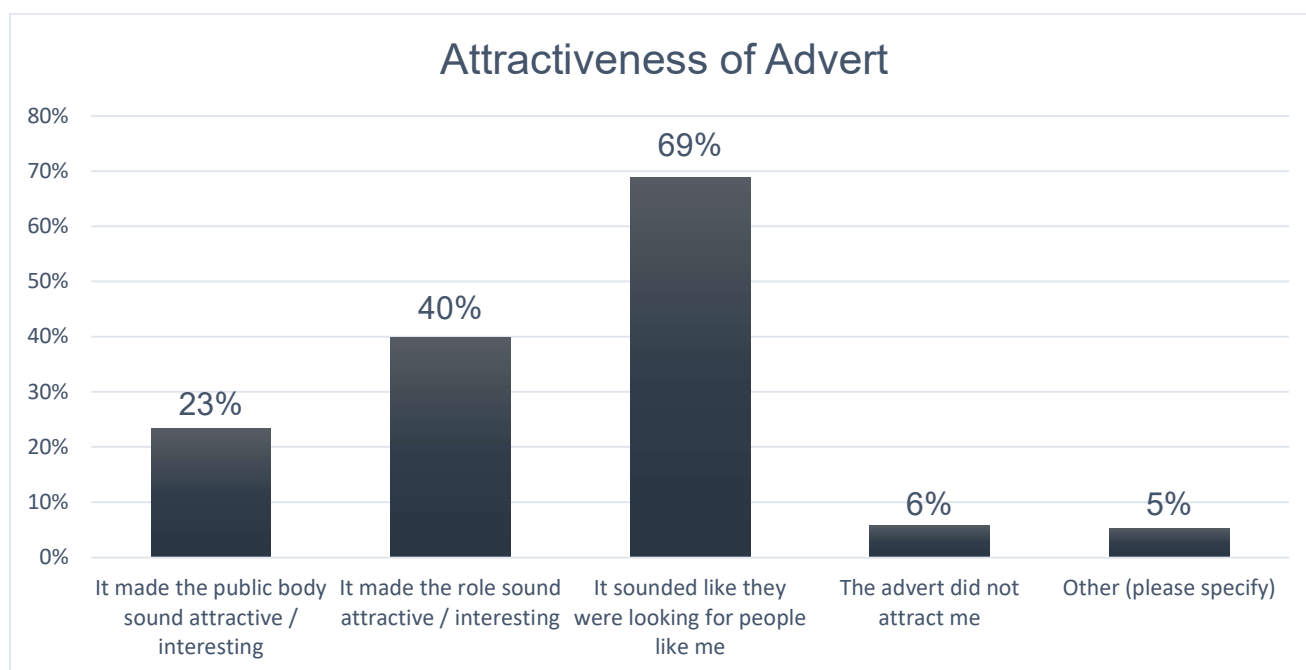


Figure 6 What attracted applicants to the advert.

When split by demographic data the responses largely mirror those of all respondents, though for first time applicants the importance of the advert sounding like the board were looking for people like them was of particular importance in comparison to the other options, in addition to a variety of other contributing motivators – more comments about what influenced applicants about the advert can be found in Appendix 2.

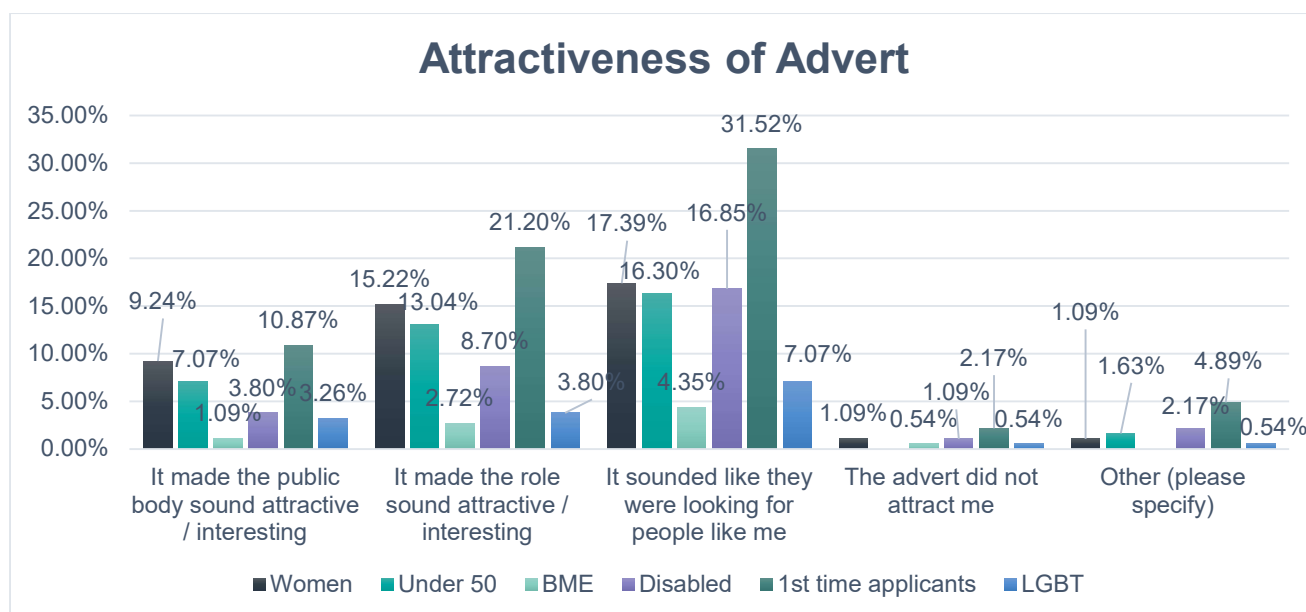


Figure 7 What attracted applicants to the advert split by demographic group.

“

I live near the park and make use of its facilities. I am an advocate of the outdoors and was interested in supporting it for that reason.

It wasn't an advert that attracted me - it was hearing the Chairman and CEO talk that attracted me.

”

Publicising of Opportunities

The top three methods for finding out about appointment opportunities was via the Scottish Government Public Appointments website (41%), from a personal contact (23%) or via social media including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and LinkedIn (18%).

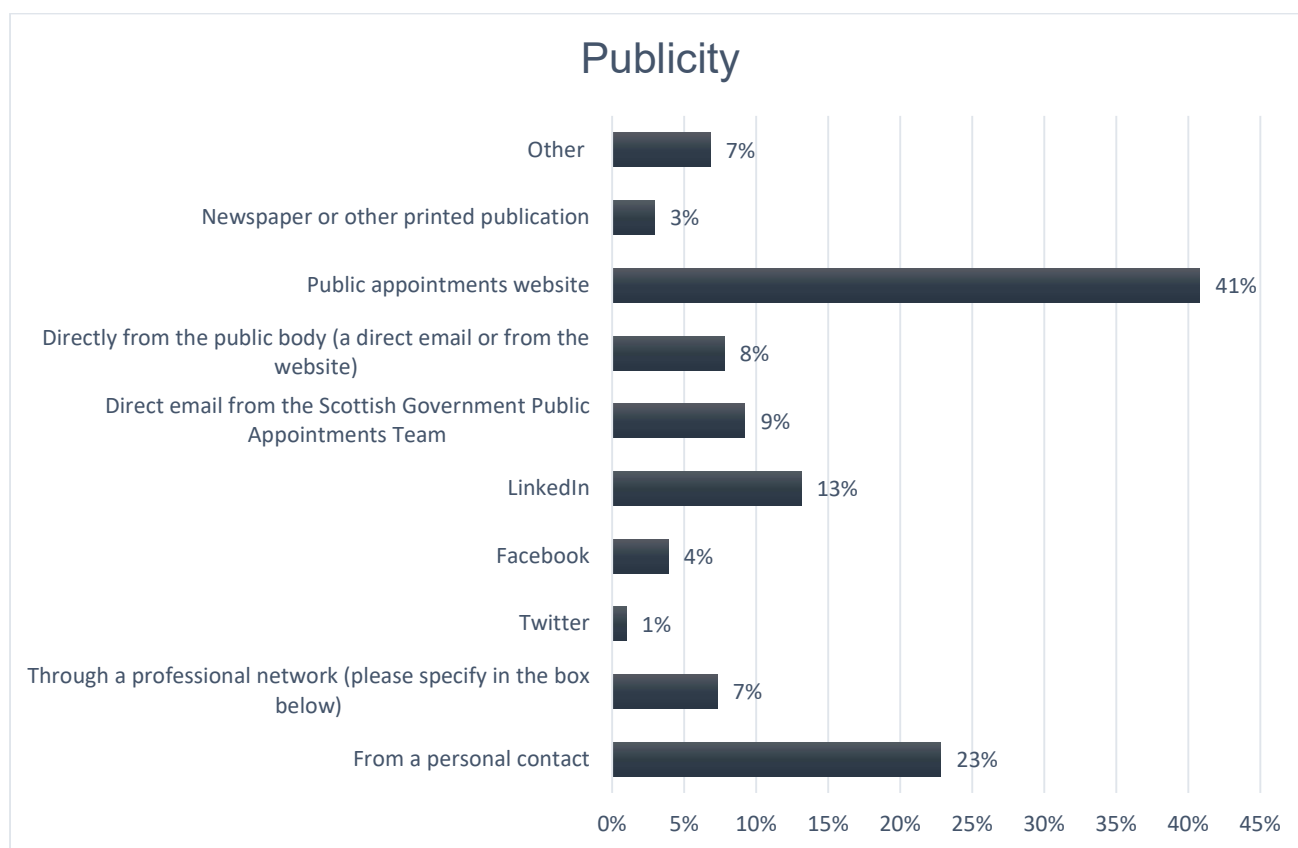


Figure 8 How applicants found out about public appointment opportunities.

The findings also show that social media and professional networks were the most likely way first time applicants found out about opportunities. Personal contacts and directly from the public bodies (a direct email or from their website) also received a high number of responses. The 2017 and 2018 survey reports recommended that panels leverage the use of social media as points of access for applicants. As such, it is heartening to see that these methods continue to be a significant source of information for applicants – both those who are first time or familiar with the process already.

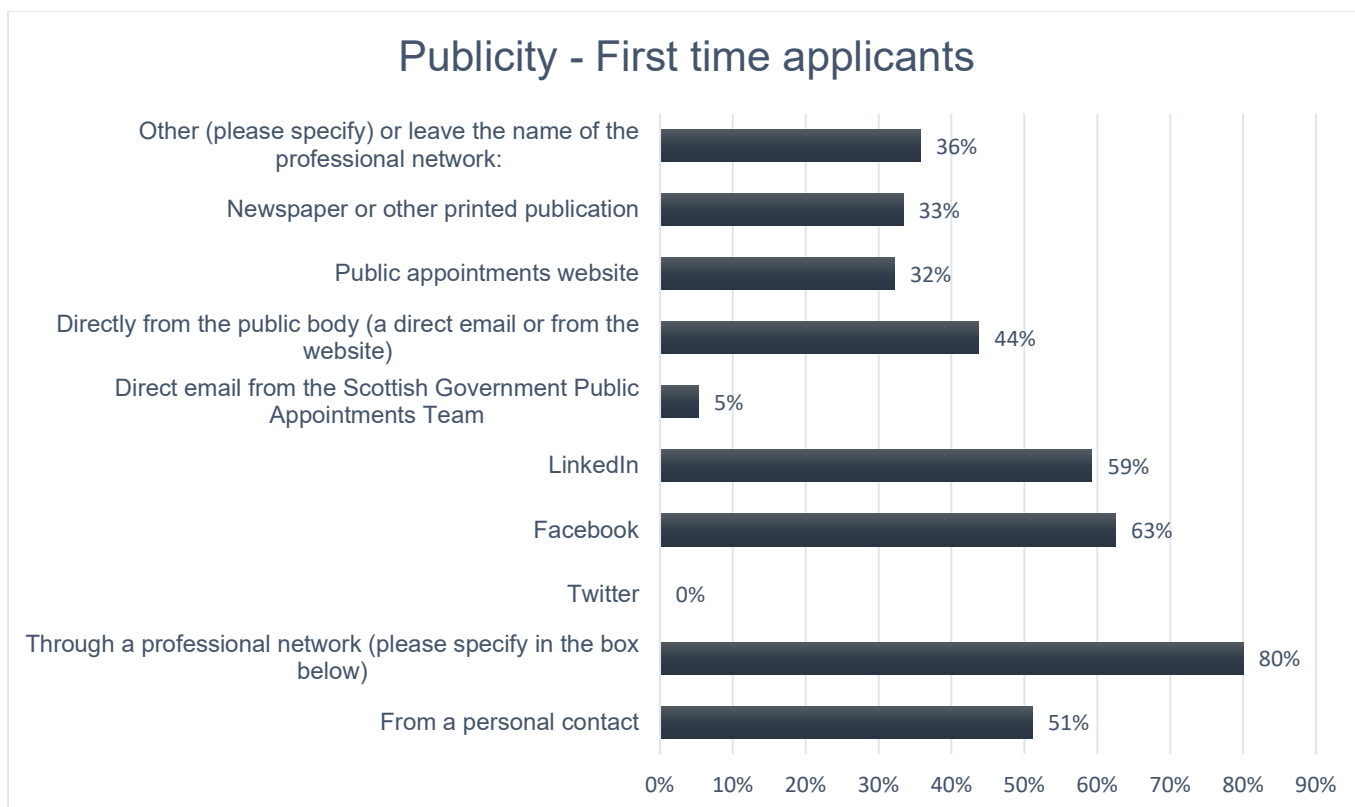


Figure 9 Where first-time applicants found out about public appointment opportunities.

Like first time applicants, social media and personal networks remain the main ways in which those with protected characteristics accessed appointment opportunities. Disabled applicants also heavily utilised X (formerly Twitter) and newspapers or other printed publications to find out about opportunities, while under 50s utilised professional networks primarily.

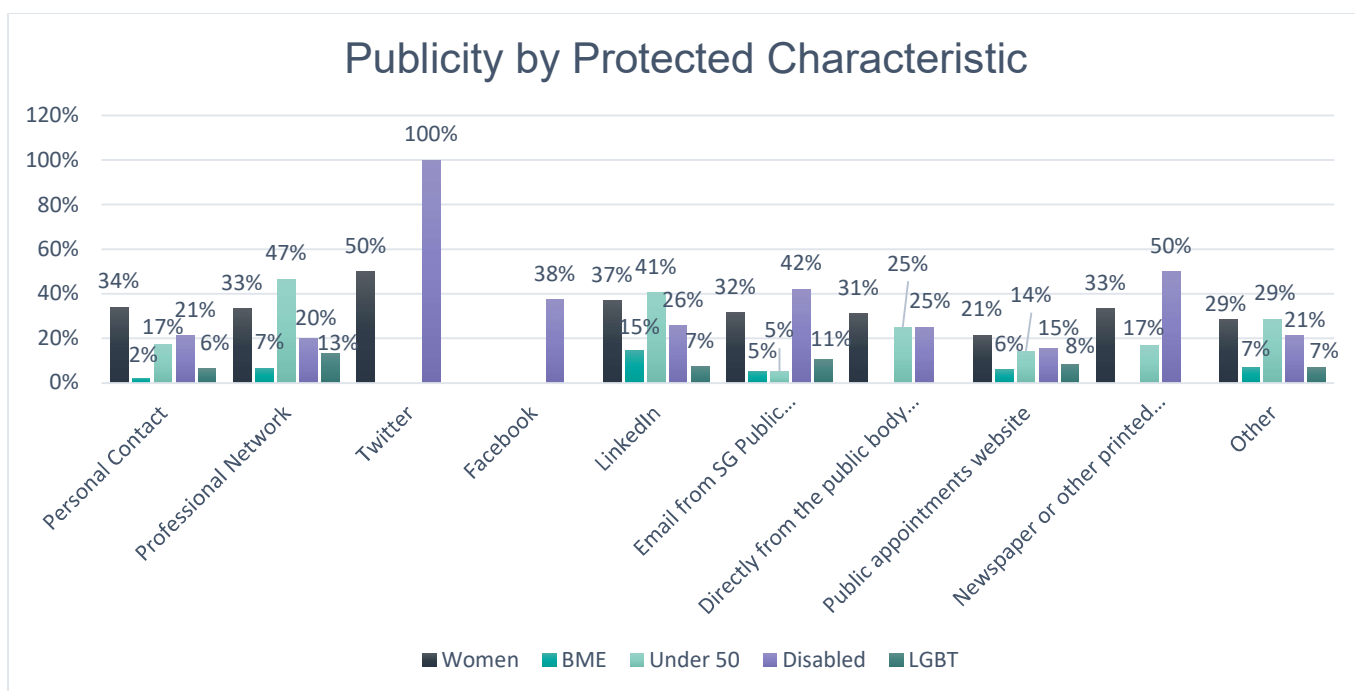


Figure 10 Demographic data of where applicants found out about public appointment opportunities.

Application Process

Most questions on the application process were answered positively. In summary, applicants found the process for making an application clear, including having clarity around the process itself and the requirements of the role. Additionally, the majority felt that they had all the information needed to apply and that the applicant packs contained enough information. While still a strong response, only 74% felt that the time and effort to complete the application form was reasonable. This compares to the rest of the responses, all of which received over 80% of applicants agreeing or strongly agreeing about clarity of process and criteria.

“

The application pack was very clear and had all the info I needed to apply easily. It helped me make good choices and complete my application. This follows the Code of Practice, which focuses on providing clear and easy-to-understand information for applicants, making things simpler and friendlier for everyone.

”

Comments on the application process more generally can be found in Appendix 2.

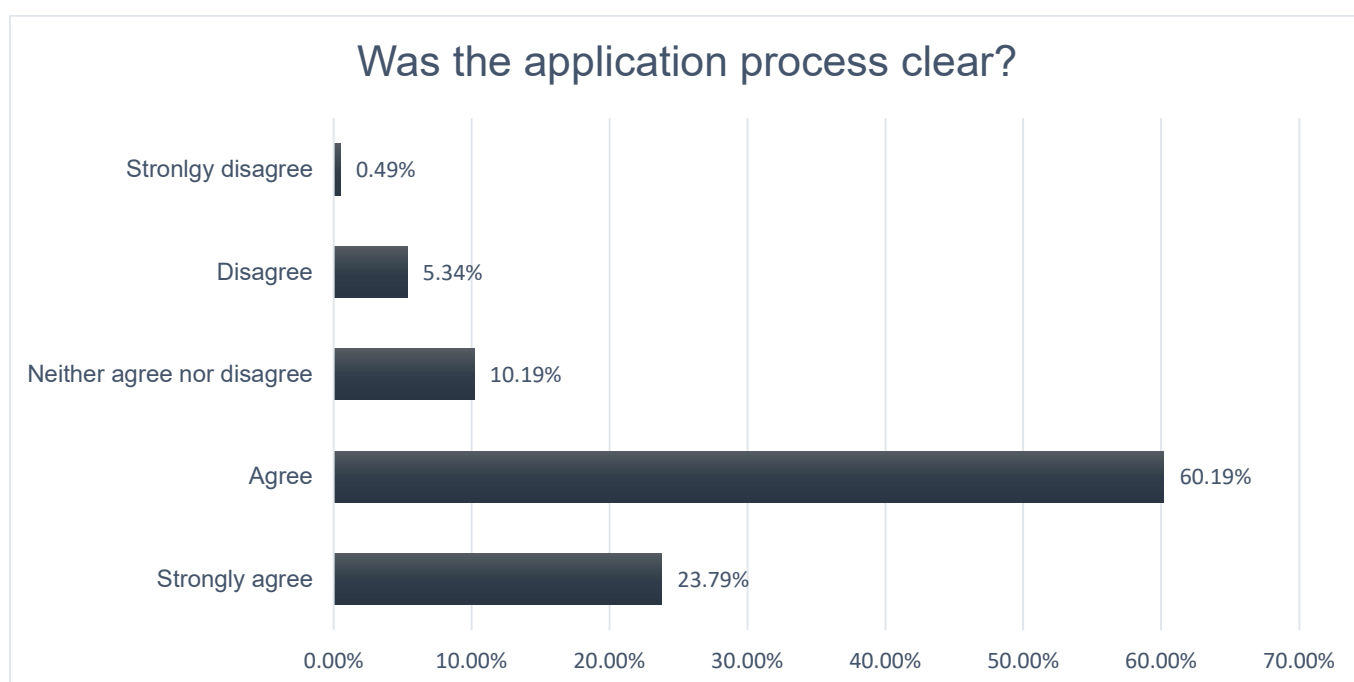


Figure 11 How clear applicants found the application process.

Split by those who provided demographic data, very few strongly disagreed with the statement that the application process was clear. Across all groups other than under 50, the response rate was over 80% and for the Under 50 group it followed closely at 77%. No one in these groups strongly disagreed with the statements and those disagreeing were under 10% of all those within these groups who responded to the question. First time applicants also found the application process clear, with 81% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the question.

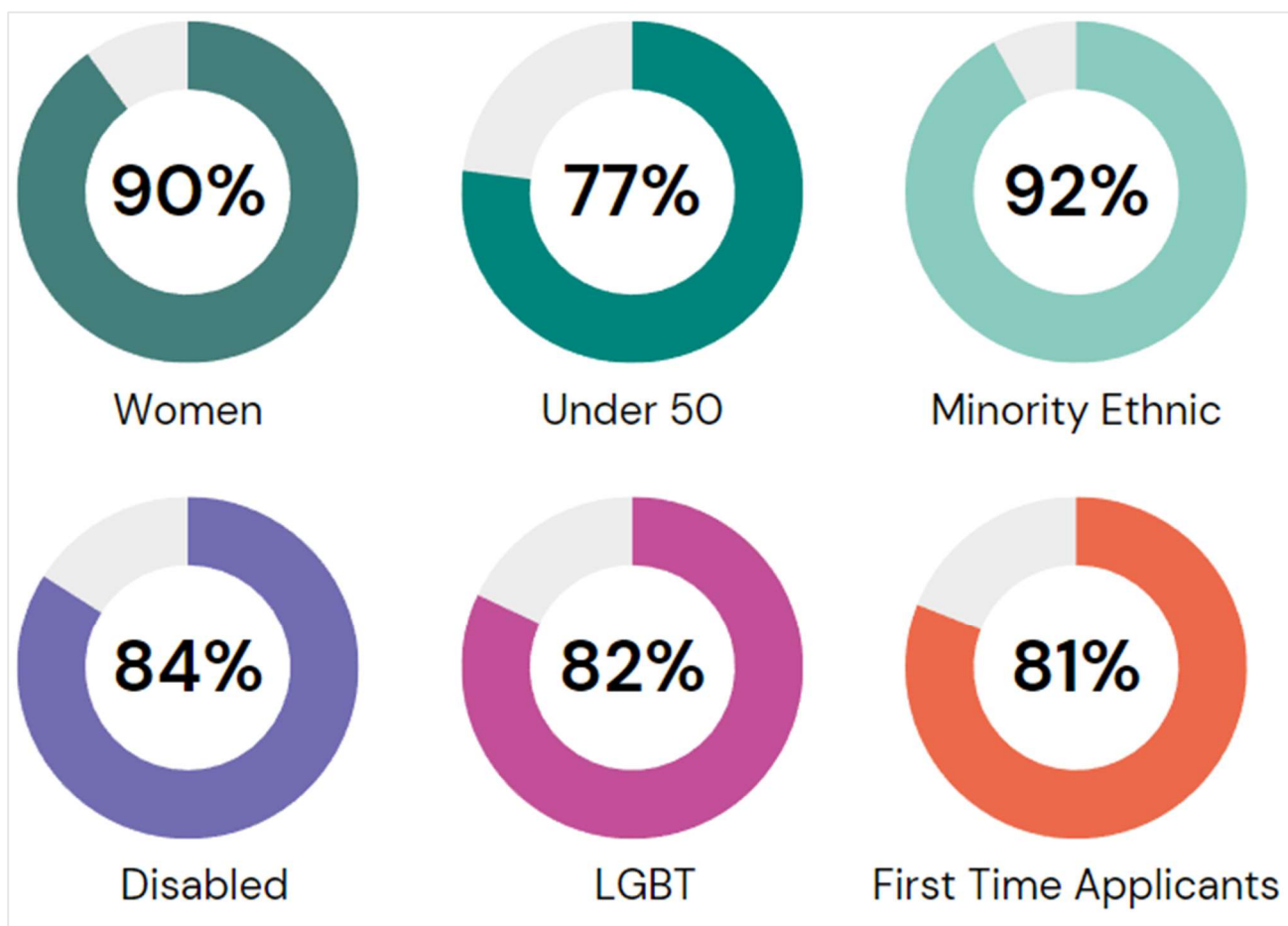


Figure 12 Total percentage of groups who agreed the application process was clear.

Applicants were asked further questions about their experiences during the application process, with a view to assessing whether the process and information provided to applicants was clear and sufficient. Responses to each of these questions are provided in the graphs below. Each question received similarly positive responses, with the exception of the question 'Was the time and effort taken by you to complete the application form reasonable?' which was more mixed. A fuller analysis of responses to this question is provided below.

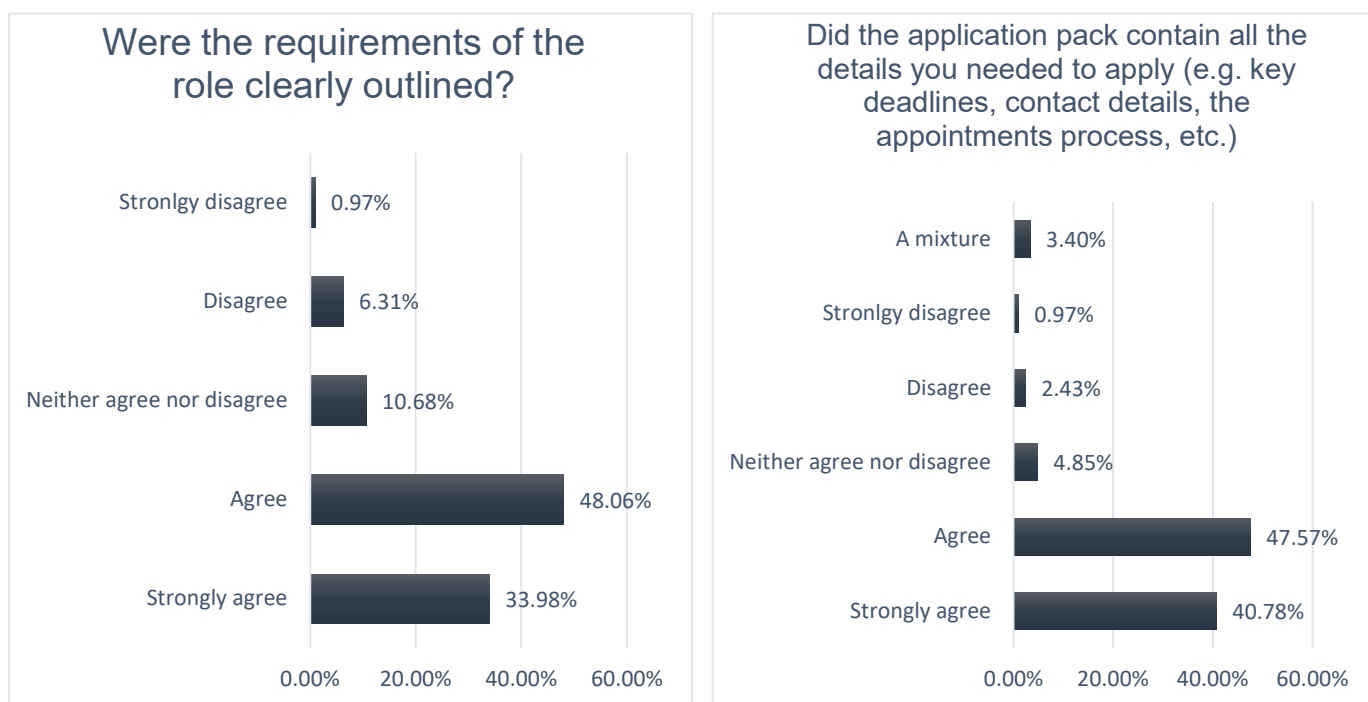


Figure 13 How clearly applicants felt the requirements were outlined.

Figure 14 Applicants views on whether the applicant packs contained all the details needed to apply.

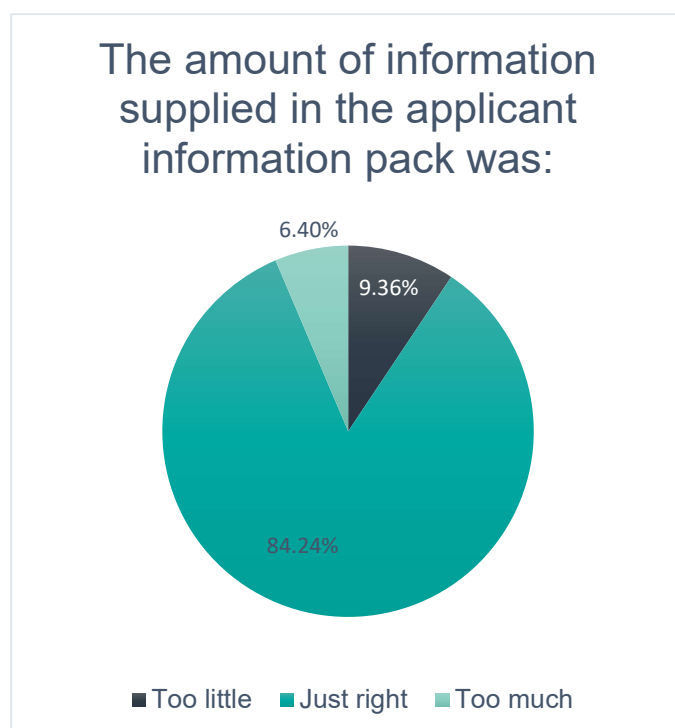


Figure 15 Whether applicants felt the amount of information supplied in the applicant pack was right.

74% of all respondents felt that the time and effort taken by them to complete the application form was reasonable, which on average is lower than the responses to other questions in this section but remains positive. Split by those who provided demographic data, the result demonstrates a similarly positive result, with the majority of all groups agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Women and Under 50s had the most responses disagreeing with the statement, with 10% women and 14% Under 50 disagreeing.

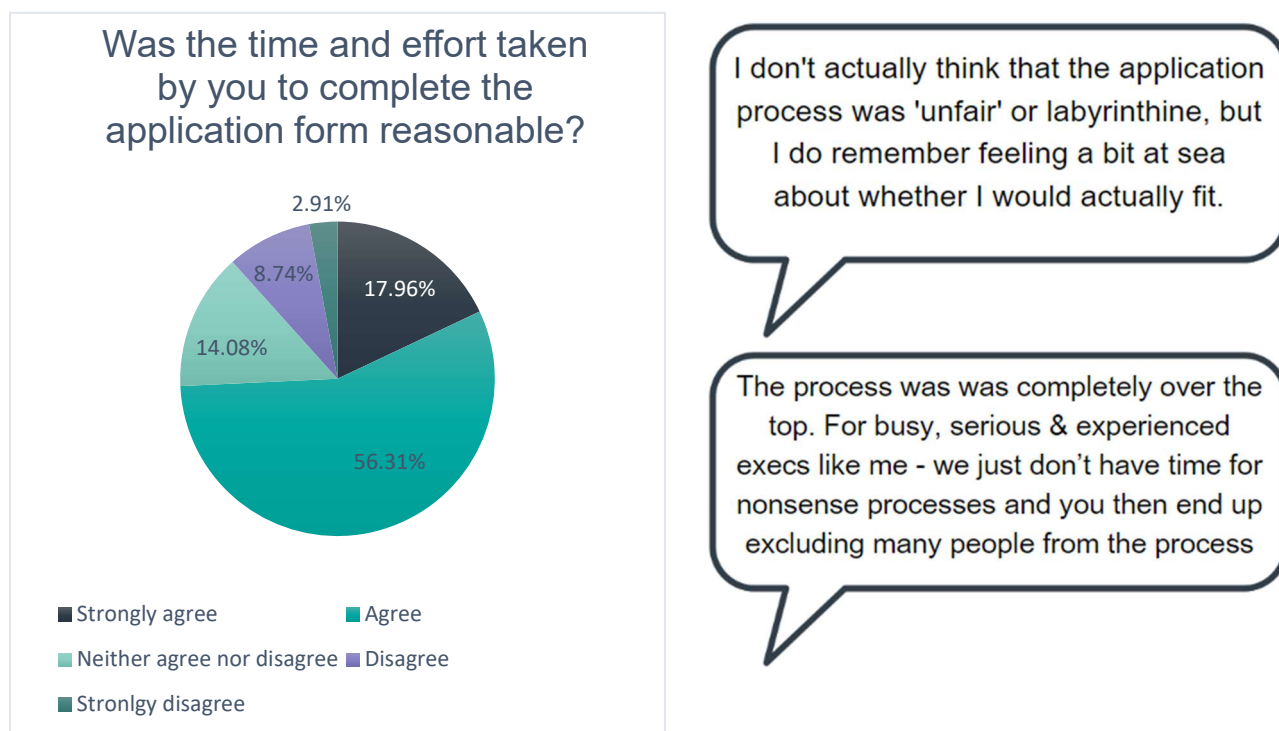


Figure 16 Views on time and effort to complete the application form.

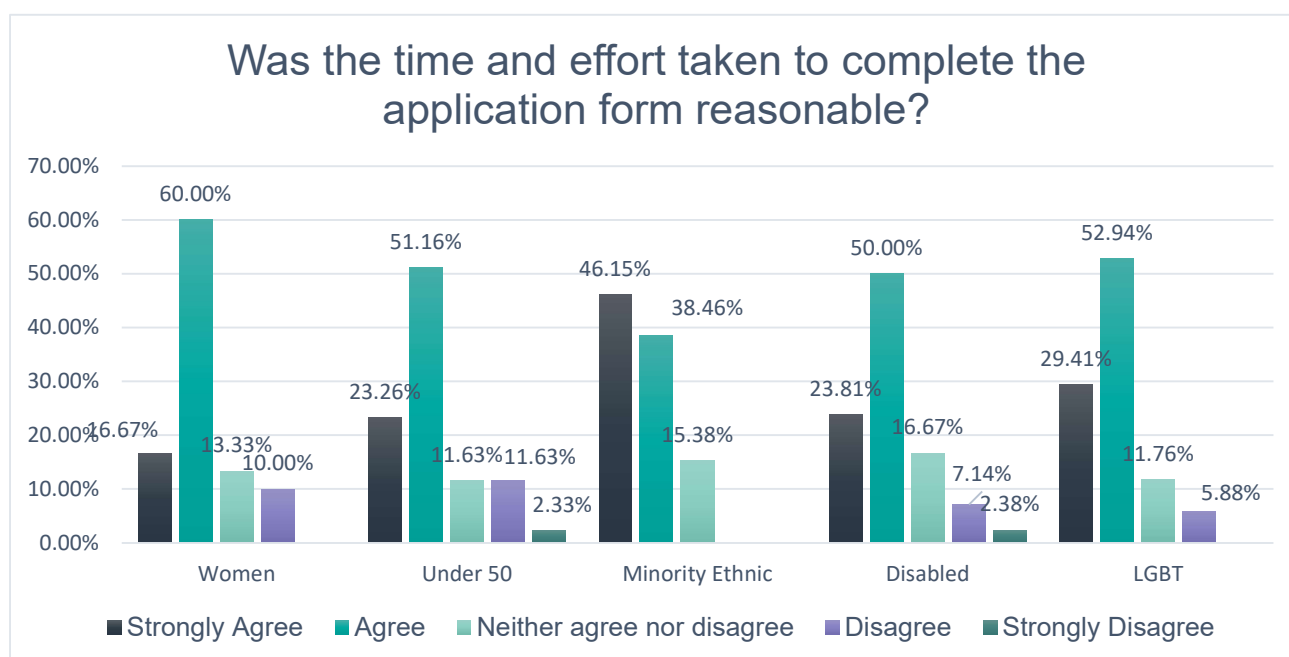


Figure 17 Demographic data view of time and effort to complete the application form.

This somewhat more mixed view of the time and effort required to apply is supported by some of the comments received to a later question in the survey. The 2022 Code of Practice states that the materials available to prospective applicants should be plainly and clearly drafted, and that the '*objective should be to encourage the optimum number of people to apply for positions and for people to find it a comparatively easy exercise to submit applications.*' We have asked applicants whether they have found this to be the case, with 50% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. A further 23% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Given that only 50% of respondents agree with the statement, and that 84% of respondents found the application process clear, this suggests that those who were more frustrated with the process were more inclined to leave responses. The responses are insightful as many reflected on the application process and whether the amount of information required might be off putting for applicants. An extract of the comments is noted below and a fuller selection available in Appendix 2.

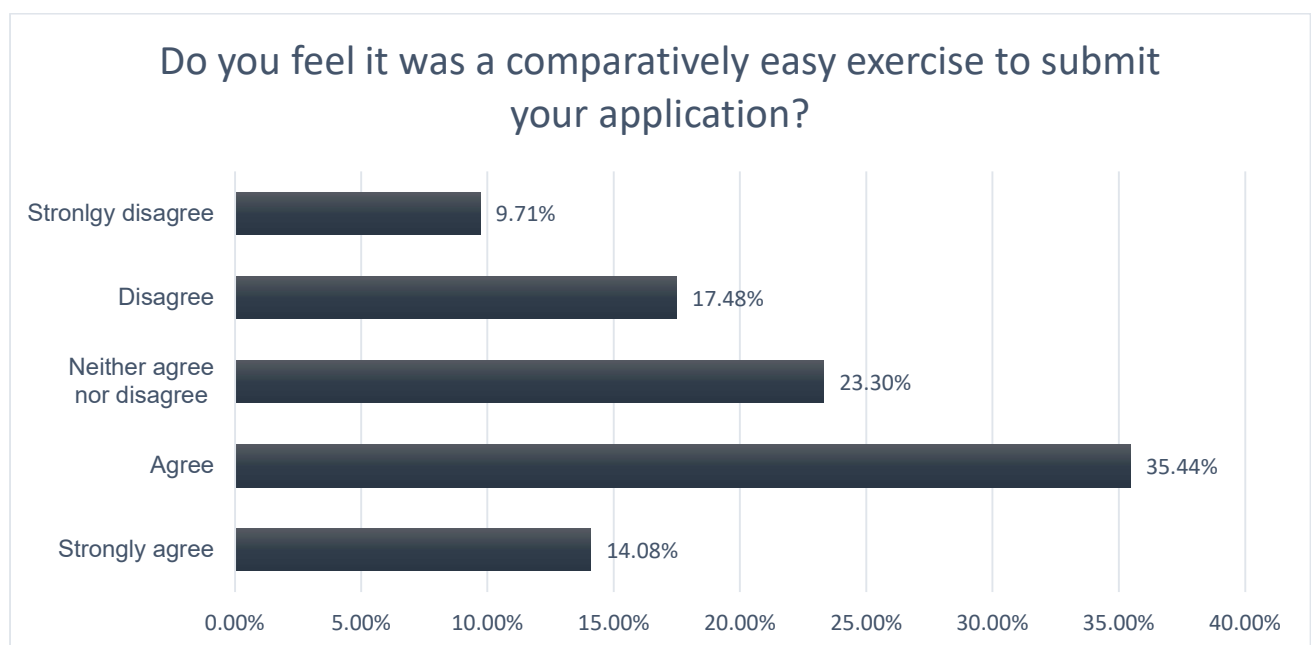


Figure 18 Whether applicants found it was a comparatively easy exercise to submit their application.

It is notable that the majority of applicants (84%) found the application process clear, while only 50% agreed with the statement that people should *find it a comparatively easy exercise to submit applications* as outlined in the Code. A graph illustrating these responses together is provided in Figure 19.

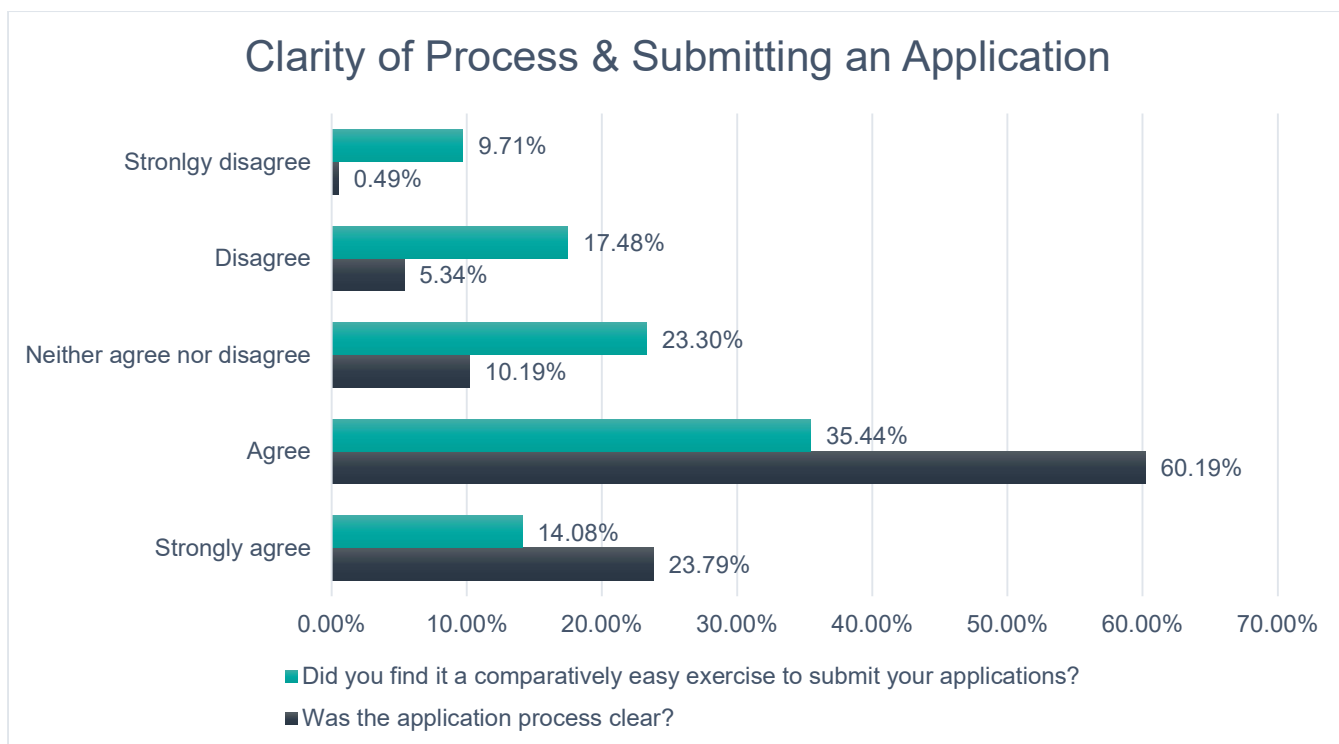


Figure 19 Comparison of applicants who found the process clear and whether applicants found the process comparatively easy.

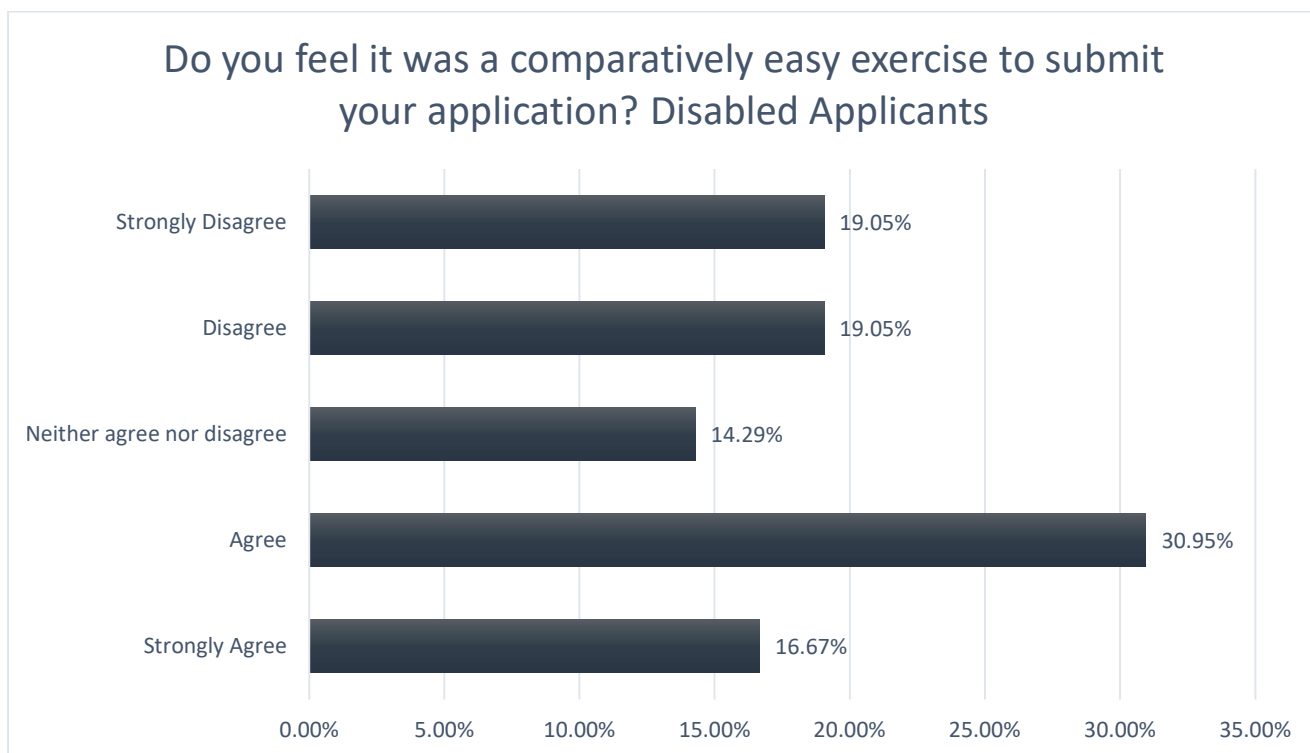


Figure 20 Breakdown of responses by disabled applicants.

Finally, the results for disabled applicants demonstrates that 38% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the question on whether they found the process for submitting their application a *comparatively easy exercise* as outlined in the Code. A further 15% were neutral about the question.

“

Yes but only because I am familiar with the process. Others might not find it so straightforward.

I think there was a lot of information required with a very tight word limit. The application may be small, but there is a lot of skill and time required to complete it.

”

We have asked applicants whether they have been able to contact anyone to discuss their application, should they feel the need to do so. 41% did not wish to speak with anyone regarding the application and 25% were able to make contact. 12% of those who responded could not make contact, or could not find details to make contact, with anyone regarding the application form. Of the 22% who responded ‘Other’ to the question on contacting someone regarding their application, comments were varied with many noting that it was too late in the process to make contact or that their request for information was not met with sufficient information.

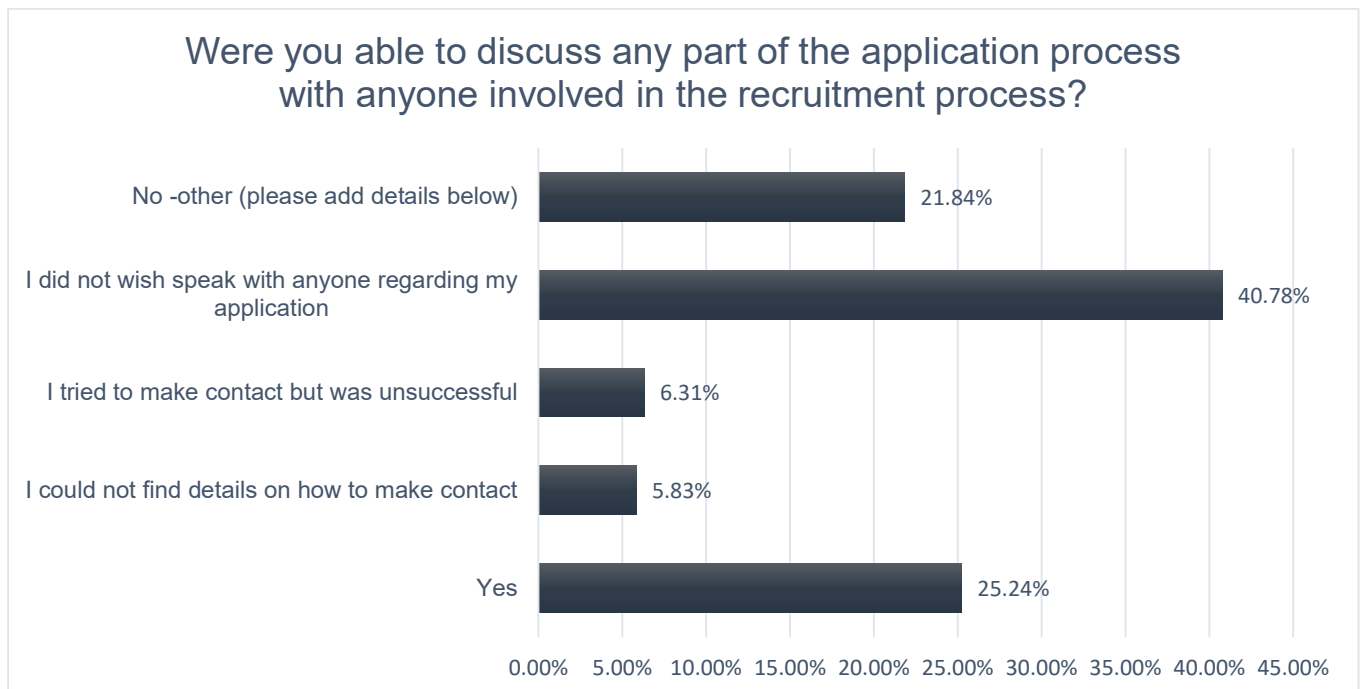


Figure 21 Whether applicants were able to discuss the application process with anyone

“

I was not aware that I could discuss this, but I may have missed that in the application information.

I made a few attempts at contact over email but responses were not followed up or were responded to in short detail.

”

Further comments from applicants about whether they felt able to make contact about their application can be found in Appendix 2.

Assessment

The survey's remaining questions on assessment have been significantly reduced in comparison to former surveys. This was done with the intention of encouraging more applicants to respond and complete the survey, and to gain a fuller overview of how applicants felt about the assessment process instead of asking appointment round specific questions. This will assist us in identifying longer term trends.

The majority of applicants (76%) felt that the first stage (application) of assessment was relevant to the skills, knowledge, experience and other relevant attributes outlined in the application pack. Only 4% disagreed or strongly disagreed while 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. This result may correspond with the results of the questions about whether applicants felt that the requirements of the role were clearly outlined, which also received a strong result.

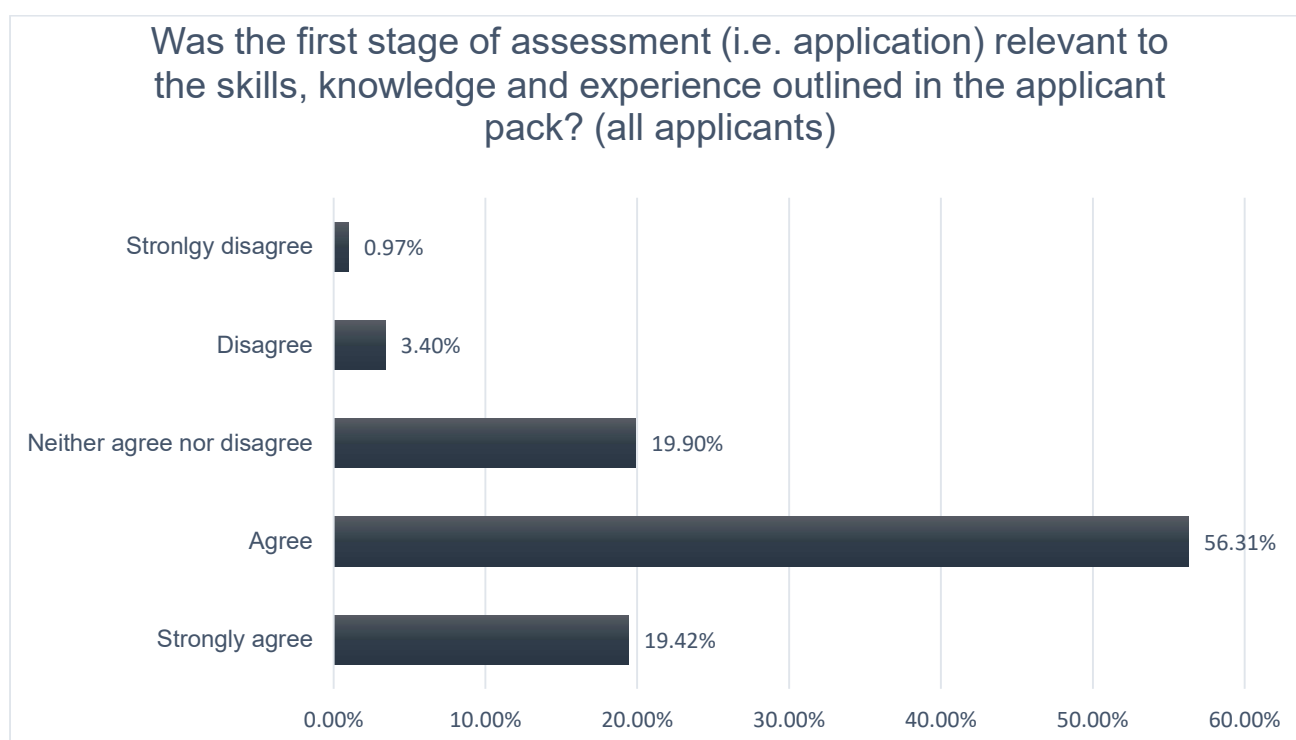


Figure 22 Applicant views on first stage of assessment

The same question was asked for the second stage of assessment (interview and other assessment methods). This question was asked of those who were invited to interview and for those who were not invited. Those who were not invited to interview were asked to comment on the relevance of assessment methods based on the information contained within the applicant pack. Most responses to this question (52%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the question. From the comments provided by respondents, the neutral response was mainly provided by applicants who did not progress to the second stage of assessment and who ultimately felt that they could not comment on the question. 38%

agreed or strongly agreed with the question and 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Comments on this question are included here and in Appendix 2.

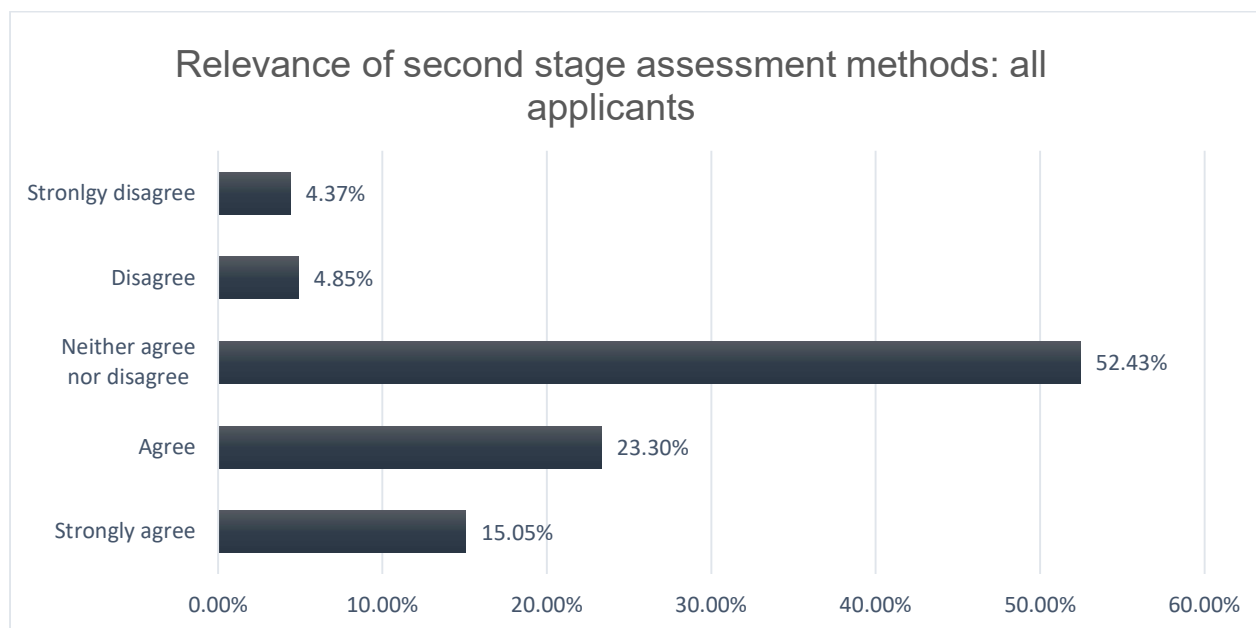


Figure 23 Applicant views on second stage of assessment.

When splitting this question by those who reached the second stage of assessment, the results are quite different with the majority agreeing that the methods used for the second stage of assessment were relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack.

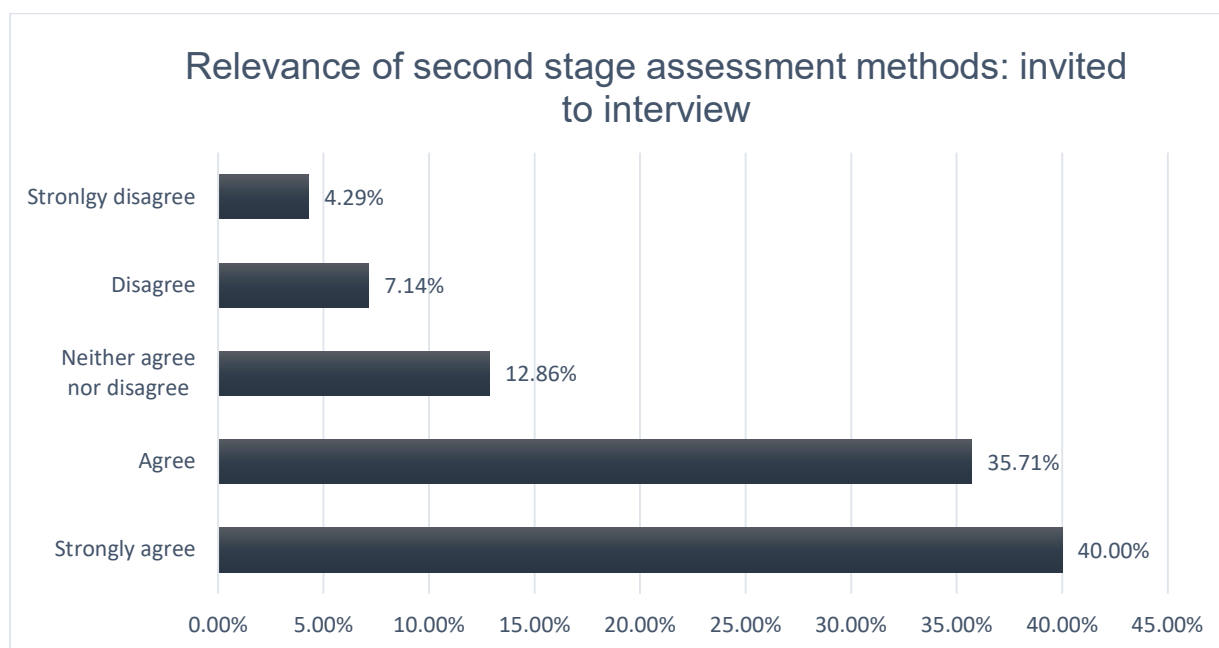


Figure 24 Applicants views on second stage of assessment: invited to interview.

Feedback

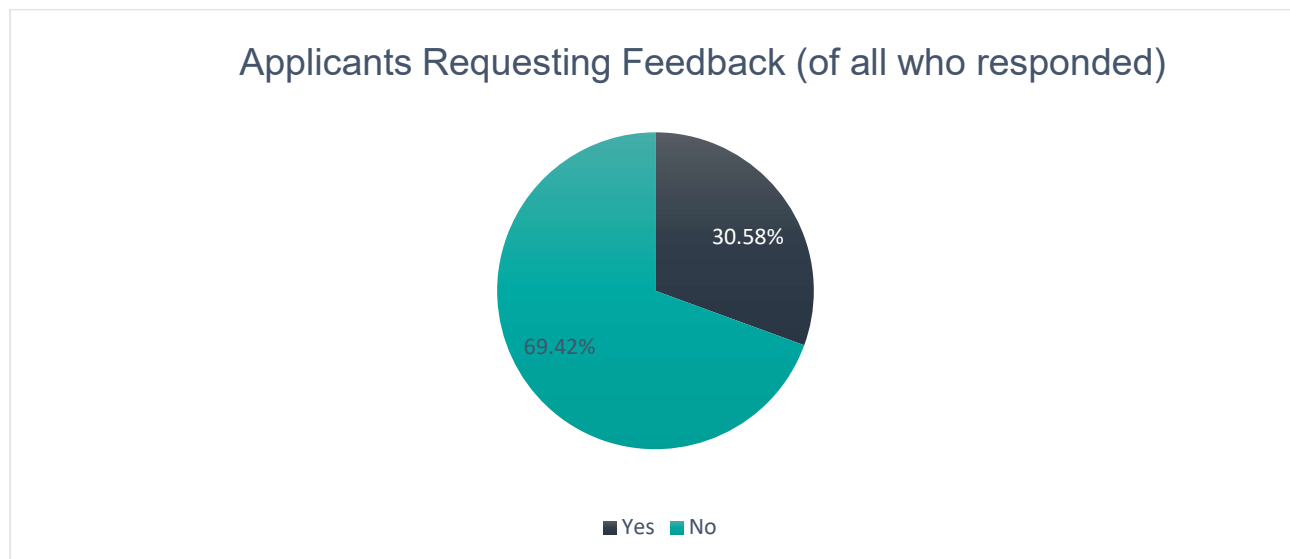


Figure 25 Applicants who requested feedback.

31% of respondents requested feedback. A breakdown of those who requested feedback according to the demographic data provided is set out below. The data for minority ethnic applicants shows that a significant majority did not request feedback. However, only 4% of respondents fall into this group and we must consider whether the small number of respondents impacts the overall results. Nevertheless, this remains an interesting result and it will be useful to analyse this question more fully when we have a full year's worth of data at the end of 2024.

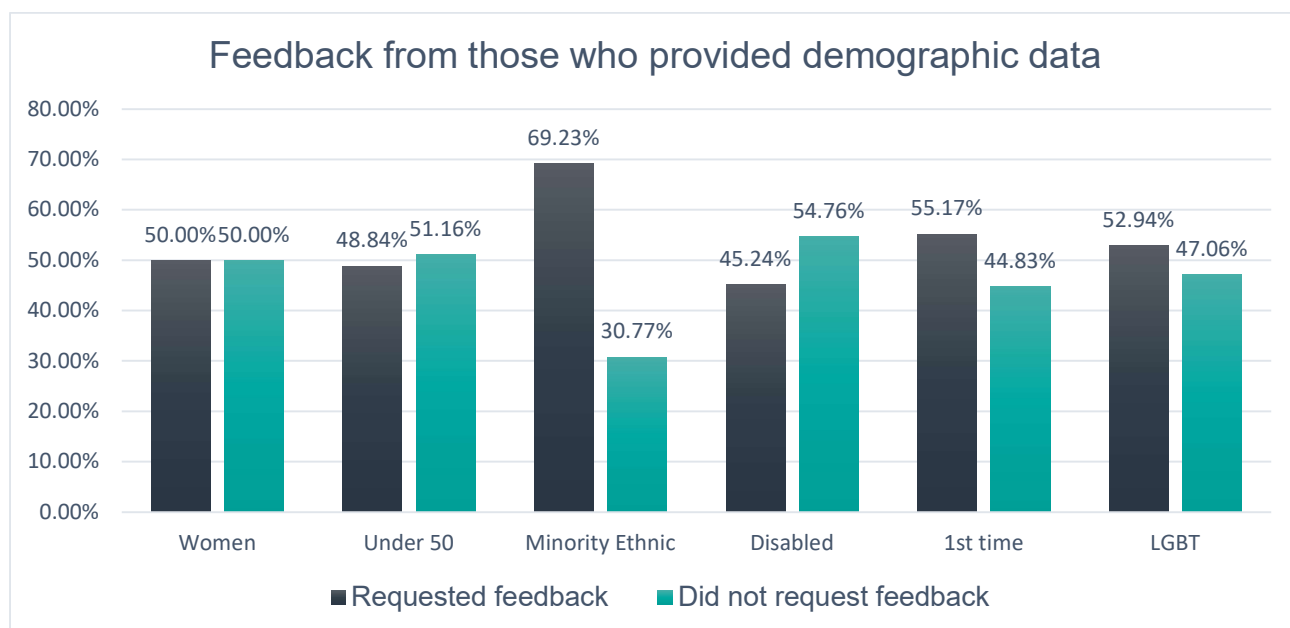


Figure 26 Applicants who requested feedback by demographic data.

We also ask applicants whether they feel that the feedback they received was constructive, tailored and meaningful. The results to the question were negative leaning, indicating a poor experience for applicants. 15% strongly agreed or agreed with the question, and 59% strongly disagreed or disagreed. A significant number neither agreed nor disagreed (27%). Based on the comments left for this question, many of these responding neutrally in fact did not receive the feedback they requested. Based on this, during the ESC's annual review of the survey we will ask applicants, before they are asked whether their feedback was meaningful, whether they received the feedback requested. This will give us greater insight into how many respondents receive feedback where it has been requested.

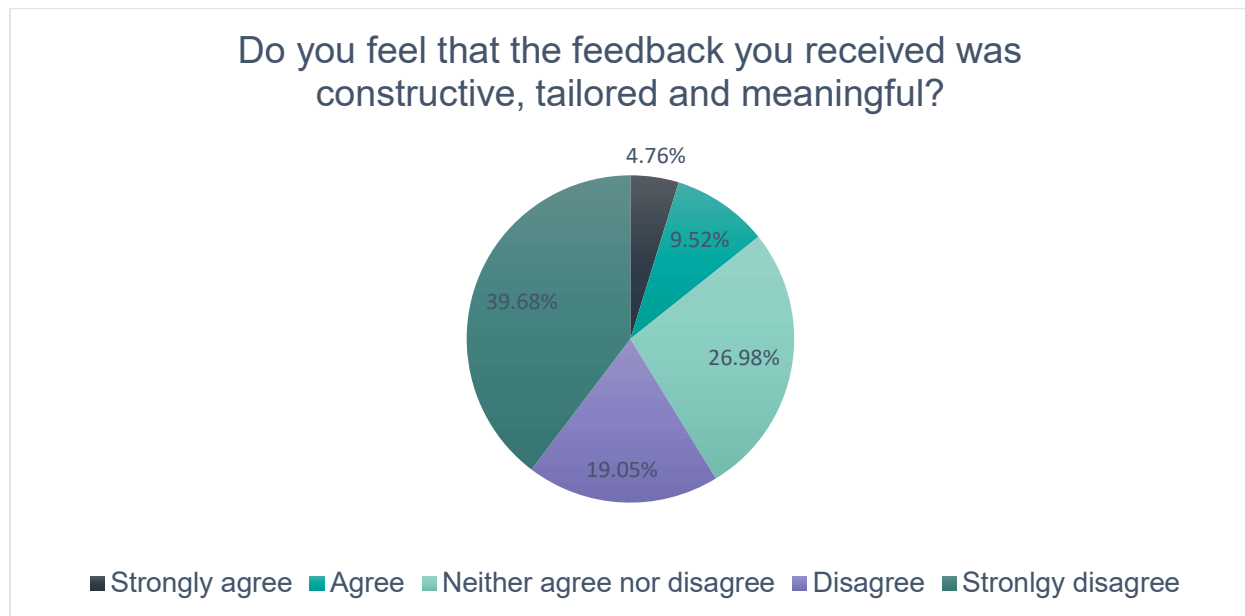


Figure 27 All applicants and views on feedback received.

An analysis of results based on the experiences of those who were invited to interview and those who were not invited to interview reveals somewhat contrasting results in relation to the quality of feedback they received. The graphs depicting respondents who found the feedback constructive, tailored and meaningful shows that, generally, applicants who were invited to interview find the feedback of higher value than those who were not invited to interview, though the responses across all respondents were significantly negative leaning.

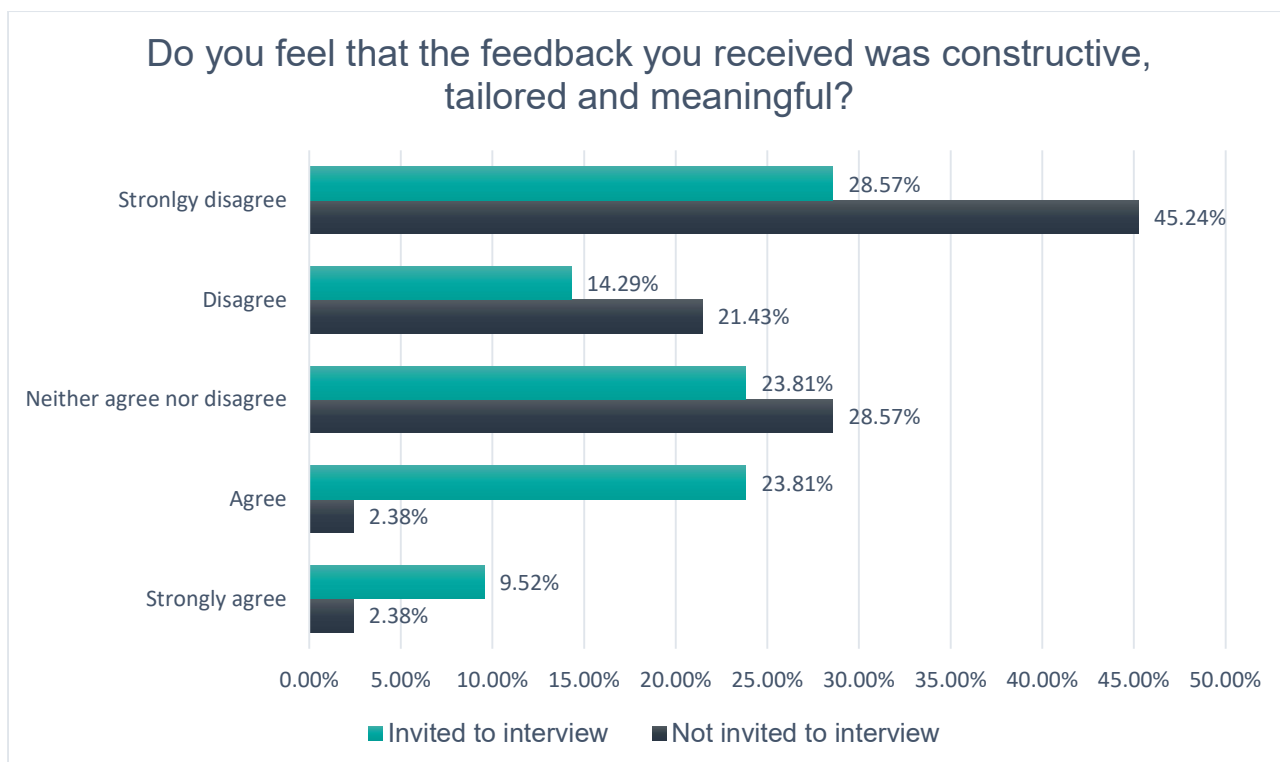


Figure 28 Comparison views of feedback of those who were and who were not invited to interview.

Views on feedback for those who provided demographic data was also analysed. Notably, 100% of LGBT respondents were either neutral or strongly disagreed with the question, while across all groups the majority were neutral or disagreed with the question.

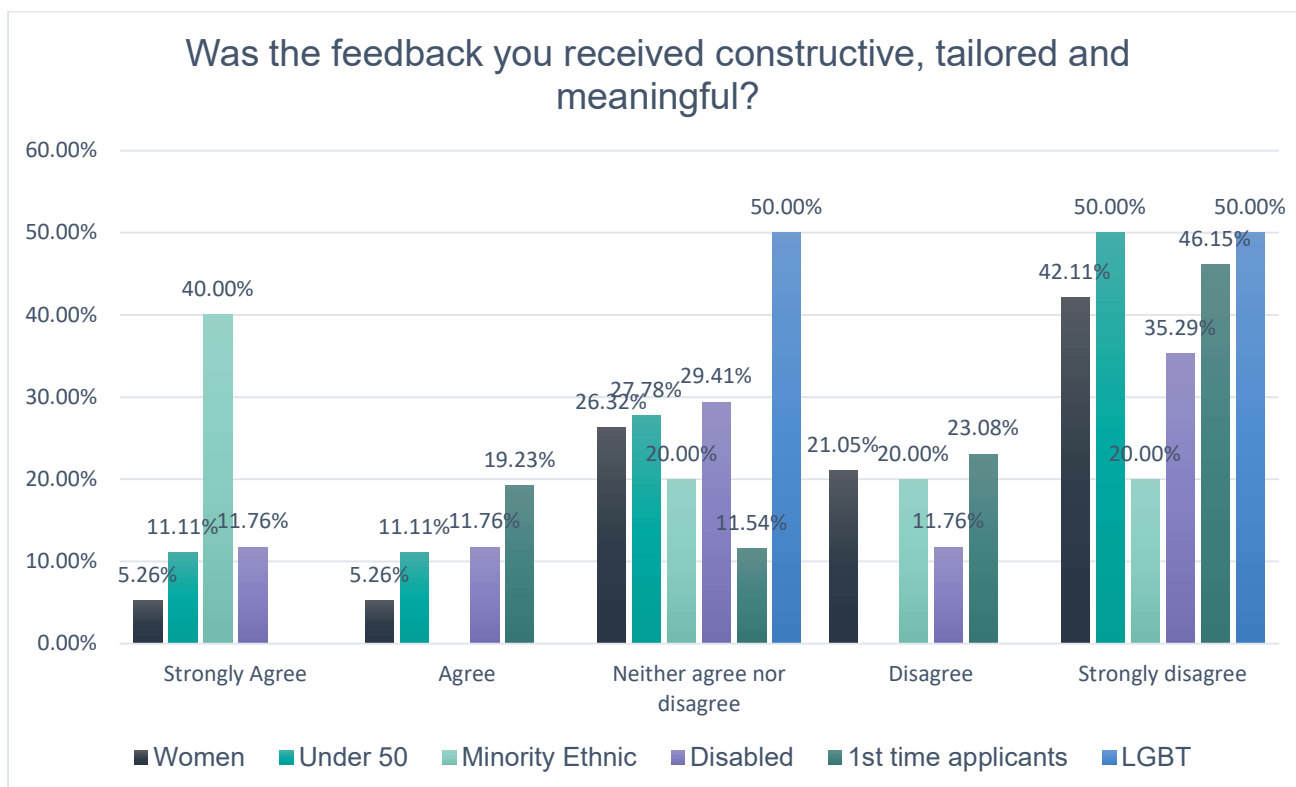


Figure 29 Views on feedback split by demographic data.

Of the 21 comments left in relation to the quality of feedback received, 15 (71%) noted that they did not receive feedback. Of those who did receive feedback and chose to leave a comment about it, many noted that the quality was poor.

“

It was a lot of waffle and very unclear. It did not explain how I didn't meet the criteria they were looking for beyond "there was stronger candidates"

I did not receive the requested feedback.

”

Under the new principle of Respect in the 2022 Code, it is required that *Applicants will be accorded the respect that they are due for their interest and their efforts and appointees for their contribution to public life*. The feedback experience for applicants is closely linked to this principle and it will be interesting to analyse this relationship when we have a full year's worth of data at the end of 2024.

Other comments left in relation to the quality of feedback received are in Appendix 2.

Respect

The 2022 Code of Practice introduced the principle of Respect, stating that *Applicants and ultimately the people appointed to boards are integral to the good governance of Scotland's public bodies. Applicants will be accorded the respect that they are due for their interest and their efforts and appointees for their contribution to public life.* Respondents were asked during the survey to provide any comments in relation to how they experienced the principle of Respect during the appointments process. Many respondents commented positively on the experience overall. Other comments highlight specific areas of the process, such as lack of feedback or not finding out about the result of the process, where they did not feel respected. These comments are very helpful for learning about parts of the process which are important to applicants, and which should be given due attention by those involved in the process.

Extracts from these responses are included below, and a fuller extract included in Appendix 2.

“

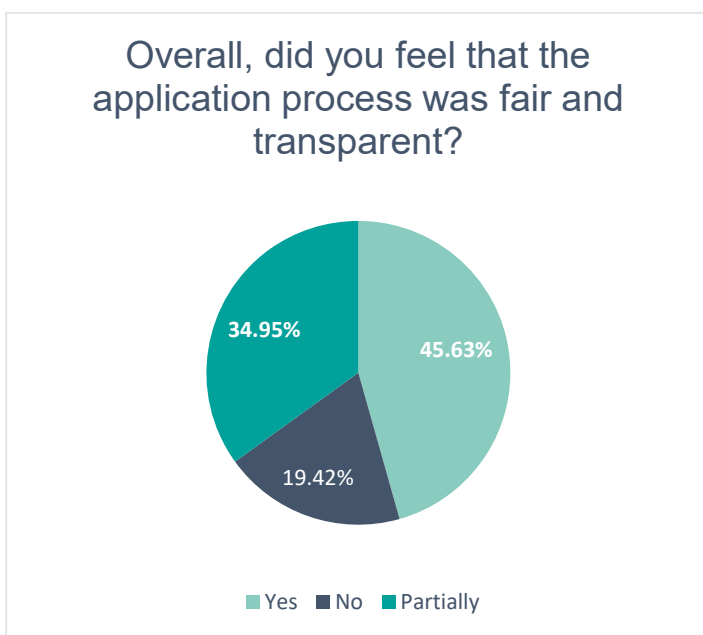
Response to applicant I felt was generic which did not show the principle of Respect to the applicants and the efforts put into the completion of the form.

I think the lack of feedback did not demonstrate the respect I would have expected

I would have liked more eye contact from the very large interview panel - they were all writing so much, i felt that sometimes I was talking to myself. It was odd.

”

Fairness and Transparency



81% of applicants felt the application process was fair and transparent. Although this report does not seek to compare responses to previous years' surveys, historically this number has been falling.⁵

Of those who did not feel that the application process was fair and transparent, the majority noted lack of feedback and feeling that they had the exact, skills, knowledge, experience and values as outlined in the applicant pack but were not appointed. Extracted comments are included here and in Appendix 2.

Figure 30 Applicants views on transparency of process.

Applicant views on transparency:



Figure 31 Applicant reasons for partially or disagreeing about transparency of process.

⁵ See 2019 Applicant Research: <https://www.ethicalstandards.org.uk/publication/applicant-research-2019>

Regulation

Applicants were asked whether they were aware that the appointments process was regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner and whether they believe that this regulation makes the process fairer and more transparent. 74% of respondents were aware of ESC regulation, and in total 78% felt that this regulation makes the process fairer and more transparent than if it were not regulated.

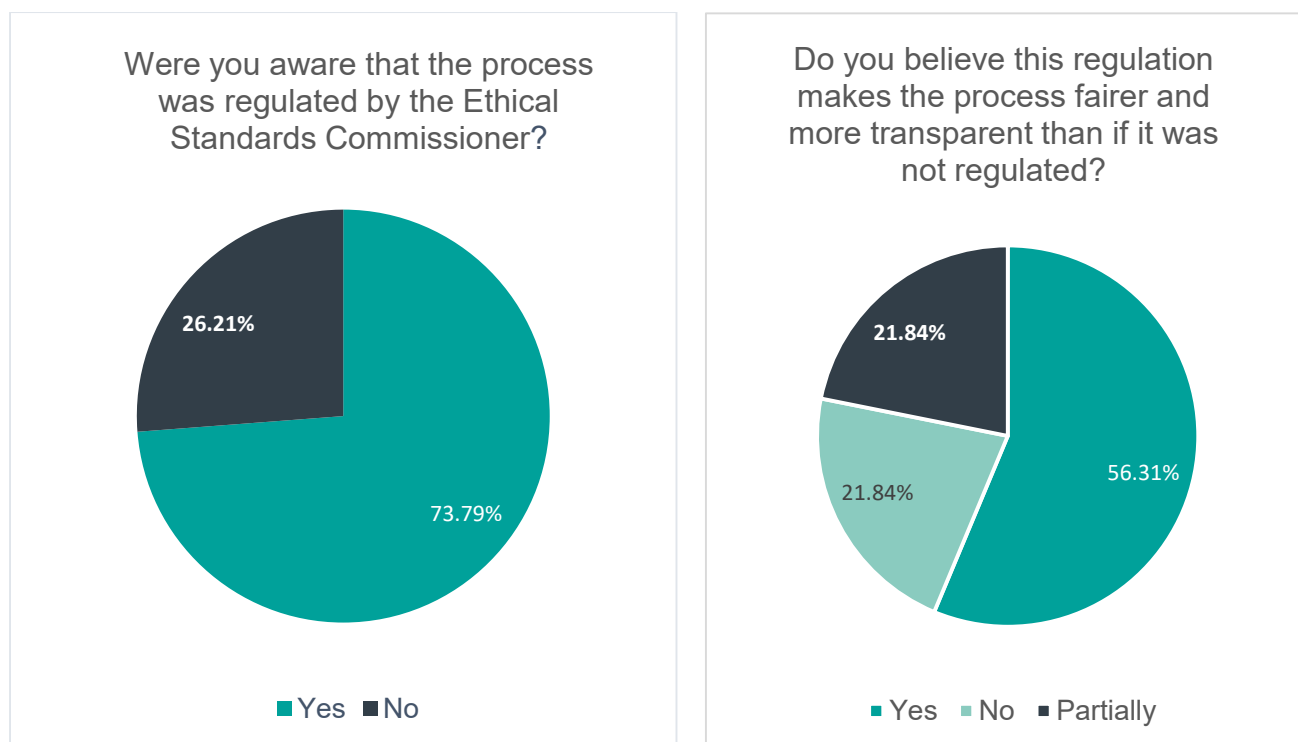


Figure 32 Applicant awareness of ESC regulation.

Figure 33 Applicant views on impact of ESC regulation.

Respondents were invited to comment on what more the ESC could be doing by way of regulation to improve the appointments process. A selection of comments is noted below with more in Appendix 2.

“

Consider those who don't succeed - they are the majority - they are a pool of interested people who could be nurtured and will certainly advocate for the system if they have a good experience. Or the opposite.

More robust in its investigation of ethical issues.

”

Conclusion

It has been helpful to analyse the feedback of applicants for some of the first rounds run under the 2022 Code of Practice. In future, it will be beneficial to compare the results year on year so that we can identify aspects of the process that appear to be particularly helpful to, or present barriers for, applicants within currently under-reflected groups.

Although the response rate is lower than average, it is encouraging that so many applicants are prepared to provide their views on how they found the process. We hope to build on this figure and have started inviting feedback from applicants in alternative formats, and now that the applicant surveys are running with increased frequency, we hope to see the response rate improve.

As in previous years, respondent comments are invaluable in helping us and the Scottish Government to understand and learn from viewpoints on all the different aspects of the process.

“

Thank you for considering feedback, it's essential to keep making the process fair and easy for everyone. Thanks again.

I am heartened to be asked by ESC to outline my impressions.

Having made this application, albeit unsuccessfully, I am minded to make a greater contribution in whatever way I can to the improvement of civil society in this country.

”

Appendix 1 – Applicant Survey Questions

1. Have you applied for a regulated appointment to a public body before this application?

Yes - in the last 12 months	Yes – longer the 12 months ago	No
-----------------------------	--------------------------------	----

2. Did you experience anything new or innovative during the process compared to your previous experience? Please provide any additional comments.

Yes	No
-----	----

3. What statement best describes the outcome of your application?

I submitted an application but was not invited to interview
I was invited to interview but was not appointed
I was offered the appointment
Other (please specify):

4. How did you first find out about this particular public appointment opportunity? *

From a personal contact	Through a professional network (please specify in the box below)
Twitter	Facebook
LinkedIn	Direct email from the Scottish Government Public Appointments Team
Directly from the Public Body (a direct email or from the website)	Public Appointments Website (www.appointed-for-scotland.org)
Newspaper or other printed publication	Other (please specify below)

5. What about the advert attracted you? *

It made the public body sound interesting
It made the role sound interesting
It sounded like they were looking for people like me
That advert was not attraction

6. Did the application pack contain all the details you needed to apply (e.g. key deadlines, contact details, the appointments process, etc.) Please provide additional comments.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	A mixture
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------	-----------

7. Were the requirements of the role (skills, knowledge, experience and other relevant attributes) clearly outlined in the applicant pack?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------

8. Was the time and effort taken by you to complete the application form reasonable?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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9. The amount of information supplied in the applicant information pack was:

Too little	Just right	Too much
------------	------------	----------

10. Were you able to discuss any part of the application process with anyone involved in the recruitment process?

Yes
I could not find details on how to make contact
I tried to make contact but was unsuccessful
I did not wish to speak with anyone regarding my application
No – other (please add details below)

11. Was the application process clear?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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12. Please provide any comments on the previous five questions

13. Was the first stage of assessment (i.e. application) relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack? Please provide any additional comments.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------

14. Was the second stage of assessment (i.e. interview and other assessment methods such as presentation, role play, board paper exercise or similar) relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack?

If you were not invited to interview, please feel free to leave your thoughts on the proposed assessment in the applicant pack. Please provide any additional comments.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------

15. The Code of Practice states that, in relation to materials provided to applicants and the assessment process for appointments, *The objective should be to encourage the optimum number of people to apply for positions and for people to find it a comparatively easy exercise to submit applications.* * Do you feel this reflects your experience?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------

16. Did you request feedback on your application?

Yes	No
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17. Do you feel that the feedback you received was constructive, tailored and meaningful?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------

18. Since 2022 the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland includes the principle of Respect to applicants. Please provide any comments in relation to how you experienced the principle of Respect during the appointments process.

19. Please describe one (or more) positive aspect of the process for you.

20. Overall, did you feel the process was fair and transparent? Please provide any additional comments

Yes	No	Partially
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21. What makes you believe that the process was not fair and transparent? *

I believe that the requirements specified in the applicant pack were not appropriate for the board
I felt that I had the skills, knowledge, experience and other relevant attributes as outlined in the applicant pack but was not appointed
I did not receive feedback to help me understand why I was not the best fit for the role
The feedback that I received was inadequate to help me understand why I was not the best fit for the role
I did not have trust in the selection panel
Other (please specify)

22. Were you aware that the process was regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner?

Yes	No
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23. Do you believe this regulation makes the process fairer and more transparent than if it was not regulated?

Yes	No	Partially
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24. What more should the ESC be doing by way of regulation to improve the appointments process?

25. Please provide any other comments you may have on regulation. We would be particularly keen to receive more detail if you consider that the regulation does NOT make the process fairer and more transparent.

26. If you are happy to be included in further qualitative research following completion of this survey, please enter your email address below.

27. Thank you for taking the time to provide this feedback on the appointments process. If you have any final comments, please leave these in the box below.

Appendix 2 – Additional Applicant Comments

(Previous Applicants) Did you experience anything new or innovative during the process?

Shorter, crisper format in the application with very clearly guidance on the nature and amount of information requested.

Post-Covid, able to be interviewed in person

Quite the opposite, the application form was very limited, as was the available information to guide interested parties

excellent direct engagement from the SG team

Previous application was via an online portal; this was more a traditional application form

Found the interview stage very intimidating and unwelcoming

It was a lot more open ended than other applications which seemed appropriate

The feedback provided after the initial interview was very detailed and welcome. It was also a pleasant surprise to be asked if I could start earlier than the date indicated during the interview, even if I was able to do so due to existing commitments. It gave me confidence that the board were happy with my application and keen to have me on board.

I was pleased to get an interview this time.

Just delays in the process

Straightforward setting out of requirements / fill on application

This was the first time I have encountered a two-stage application process with the emphasis on anonymity in the initial selection round.

As interviews in person this time there was greater attention to accessibility issues so I was able to attend on level terms with other shortlisted applicants

There was a useful online information session with Changing the Chemistry for anyone thinking of applying.

Simplified application form

No - The case study appeared to be reasonably straightforward and the video interview was adequately delivered. However I do not think video interviewing is suitable for these types of appointments due to the lack of chemistry that is possible on screen.

Yes - I think this is the first time I have been in an exclusively on-line interview option

The option of an online open evening.

The application format was different.

I have noticed new and innovative aspect during the process, which was user-friendly online platform used for this survey. The survey was easier to use than others I've done before because the questions were clear, and it was simple to move around. This made the whole process better for participants like me.

What about the advert attracted you?

I thought I would have been suitable for the role and I see it has been readvertised which is disappointing

I felt I have value to add to the challenge the public body was/is dealing with.

Not so sure they were though.... Probably a tick box exercise prior to selection of the person with the most ticks not necessarily a person who would be good at the position

With my past executive and current board positions I felt this was a role I could make a positive contribution to.

I thought it was a positive opportunity to contribute my perspective.

Options were lacking for principle choice of role vis-a-vis secondary choice of role, etc.

Although the application pack contained the details needed, the dates and procedures outlined in the pack were not adhered to in my experience, which was intensely frustrating.

I discovered the role needed greater experience in the creative industry than I was expecting.

I found the text documents sufficient to be able to apply but that they did not outline what specifically was being looked for- I.e. 'screen experience' but not actually explaining what elements of working in that industry was of interest to the board and this hindered the interview process

I was attracted to the advert because it made the role sound interesting, and it sounded like they were looking for people like me.

It sounded like they MIGHT be looking for people like me.

Having recently completed a long period of working in senior academic management, I was looking for a new challenge and the role seemed directly aligned with my personal interests and my expertise, as well as involving the kinds of activity that I enjoy.

Did the application pack contain all the details you needed to apply (e.g. key deadlines, contact details, the appointments process, etc.)

The information wasn't particularly clear. I had to look in multiple documents to find relevant guidance.

I thought it was short on detail, and focussed on diversity candidates.

I was slightly perplexed by the fact that all applicants had to show skills in one of four areas, and applicants could in addition show evidence of the ability to work collaboratively and constructively with others. That suggested that one of the board positions would be different from the others - but it wasn't clear from the application what was different about it. I did query it in correspondence but still wasn't really clear.

Email for the chairperson was included but I received no reply to my enquiry.

It could have been clearer in terms of what information they wanted from me. I felt I was talking in very general terms about my expertise and would have liked to have been more specific in areas that might have been more useful.

It's a custom and practice academic exercise with no alternative lived or equality lived experience market entry.

Were you able to discuss any part of the application process with anyone involved in the recruitment process?

I only discovered the advertisement with very limited time to submit so did so without being able to speak to anyone.

I did make contact but by the time I heard back it was really too late to make a difference and therefore didn't have a discussion. It's worth saying that the original meeting mentioned above (which was actually about elected members) was by far the most interesting and informative opportunity.

As I was not invited to interview I did not have the opportunity to discuss the role further with anyone in the recruitment team. I was not provided with much feedback either which was the only disappointing part of the process for me. I understand that there was likely a lot of interest in the role though and this is why in-depth feedback was not provided.

No reply when I asked a specific question

There was a virtual workshop which I attended prior to completing the application.

Emailed queries and got a reply saying here's the link for the application! So no they absolutely do Not respond to questions or further information

I had a phone meeting with the chairperson

I didn't need to so I just completed it but it required a lot of work!

I felt confident in completing the application form due to previous work experience

I did not find this aspect particularly clear and would have appreciated a conversation. I have a lot of relevant professional experience and interest, but also lot of tangential and marginal experience and it would have been helpful to get clear before beginning to apply whether I was in roughly the right territory or not to be applying.

No return contact from the recruiters.

Colleague in public appointments prior to my retirement

When I challenged the outcome, I was only able to speak to someone who clearly had had no involvement in the recruitment process,

I made a few attempts at contact over email but responses were not followed up or were responded to in short detail.

I have never understood why it's not a breach of the application process to discuss your application before submitting it, but no reasonable adjustment is made to discuss the application once it is submitted. Seem a contradiction to me and a vetting exercise outside the vetting process however simplistic that is

Please leave a comment on the application process

I'm familiar with the public appointments process so knew what to expect. It is time consuming but I expected it to be.

The application process & info wasn't clear because I didn't get an interview despite very clear evidence, with acknowledgement that my experience was relevant and, having seen the successful candidates experience, mine more closely aligned with the literature suggesting there were other considerations that were not made clear.

I think a short letter/statement of interest and how we meet the selection criteria and CV would be fairer and less time-consuming for applicants. This would give the panel insight into our presentation style and a better idea of who we are in context.

Excellent info pack with suggestions on how to fill out the required sections, and what they were looking for. Not too onerous in terms of time.

I thought the process, selection criteria, the feedback was all very poor.

On question nine feedback from panel chair has told me I didn't put all my skills on the table.

At time of application I considered I had but was advised I should have brought more elements out.

As I recall some of the information in the pack was irrelevant & came across as padding

The application pack was very clear, which helped me a lot in the application process. It made it easy to understand what was required and how to apply. I found it easy to access information about the role's requirements in the applicant pack. This made the application process smoother for me. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any details on how to contact someone involved in the recruitment process, which would have been helpful for clarification and questions. Overall, the application process was well-organized and provided clear information, making it easier for me to proceed.

I had a very good, full and detailed conversation with the Board Chair, which helped me to clarify all remaining areas of question.

I actually applied to two separate organisations in a short space of time and the feedback I got was almost identical on both occasions, somewhat generic and not very helpful to making an application in future.

Although I had the skills looked for, I was not invited to interview. When I saw who was appointed, in the case of one body I had no argument but, in the case of the other body, I could not see that those appointed had the skills looked for in the role specification. Better feedback would be good.

I feel that the stated desire for diversity of experience and perspectives was directly at odds with the level of status/years of experience/social and professional capital that the selection seemed to reward. There is an urgent need for emerging/early-career/freelance perspectives in Scottish arts and culture governance

All reasonable questions

The board's oversight responsibilities were not made clear. Hence, skills appropriate to being a board member/trustee were also unclear.

There was quite a lot of information, but it was all clear.

There were three options for roles for applicants. There was no clear distinction on how to weigh up which was the most compatible role to apply for.

Application process provided good information to allow me to consider submitting an application.

Advertisements could start with a clearer expectation of the role and background needed rather than the initial 'waffle'.

The level of contact during the process was bare minimum and it took a long time to hear back

Terrible process, no feedback, lost my application

This role was advertised very clearly and with lots of supporting documentation in my opinion - there was enough given detail for me to put together a successful presentation

I don't think the application process made clear enough what exactly the board was looking for.

No feedback was provided nor any opportunity to request feedback to enable future applications

Was the first stage of assessment (i.e. application) relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack?

It isn't entirely clear the level of detail wanted, or how 'evidenced' it needs to be.

The detailed descriptions were much narrower in scope than the headline advert suggested.

The application form seemed very short in relation to the requirements of the role.

The applicant pack indicated that the panel were looking for three specific board roles with specific skills, knowledge and experience in each. I was able to bring a breadth of skills, knowledge and experience across all roles, but had to specify which role I was specifically applying for - this made responding a challenge.

I think the applicant pack was focused more on passion "I.e. why are you interested" and therefore did not allow you to make sure your actual experience was an appropriate fit.

Was the second stage of assessment (i.e. interview and other assessment methods such as presentation, role play, board paper exercise or similar) relevant to the skills, knowledge and experience outlined in the applicant pack?

If you were not invited to interview, please feel free to comment your thoughts on the proposed assessment in the applicant pack.

I was somewhat surprised that the initial application focused ONLY on the skills set out on pages 7 and 8 and specifically did not ask for any evidence of skills etc set out on pages 9 and 10 - which would be assessed only at interview stage - nor of applicants' reasons for applying (though page 15 said that the selection panel are keen for you to demonstrate your passion and enthusiasm for the role of the national park now and in the future throughout the assessment process).

The second stage of the process appeared to be appropriate

I do not think your assessment team have any desire to think outside the box as to who could bring novel approaches to providing workable solutions from the private sector to benefit the public sector. This is not just for this post and the National Park, but across Scotland. Too often this attitude of the public sector officers knowing what is best for a community they do not know, and there is no real allowance for the voice of the common man to be heard.

Interview didn't include any test or activity. Interview largely repeated questions from application, so I found it hard to answer as I tried not to repeat myself. Would have been nicer for interview to test board skills and be done in a board format to test those skills. I didn't feel the interview test was relevant to the role, and instead favoured people with non-relevant skill sets

I haven't a clue. The feedback I received was minimal. Given my background and relevant experience I would have expected a more analytical response.

Interesting experience of being invited to provide thoughts on a Board paper & ideas of what/how things can be different, only to get a defensive reaction back from a member of the interview panel. I imagine being a Board member getting challenged on one's thinking, and having a discussion, but was surprised during the interview to be basically asked: "How do you know we haven't tried these things?"

The interview was framed like a civil service interview in which you were matched against graded criteria. This was not made clear I'm advance and tonally was totally different from the application questions. I.e. while the initial questions were conversational and passion based the interview was rigid and felt more of a check box exercise.

The Code of Practice states that, in relation to materials provided to applicants and the assessment process for appointments, the objective should be to encourage the optimum number of people to apply for positions and for people to find it a comparatively easy exercise to submit applications. Do you feel this reflects your experience?

I felt the application 1st stage was asking too much of people, willing to put themselves forward, for the position the NHS board. Writing personal "experience" today would be much better with phone or personal applications.

This most recent process has merely reinforced my views that appointed officers think they know best and are not wishing to test the wider market place to get the best fit and most beneficial candidates for the job

I thought it did but the interview process was the opposite

Encouraging more applicants is pointless if there is no follow-through i.e. if the volume makes next phases inoperable?

The actual process made it comparatively easy to submit an application, although condensing 35 years of relevant experience into 300-word answers was an interesting challenge.

Easy exercise is giving everyone a virtual interview in vetting is a grown-up way

It was not easy to decide which role to apply for.

Considerable prep work was required to apply, including crafting multiple targeted essays - this felt like quite a lot to be doing for the role under consideration, and in retrospect seems even more out of line in terms of my application experience. It was overall very discouraging and I would not apply again, nor recommend others to apply.

I find these kinds of applications time consuming and onerous particularly when they are for voluntary roles.

Do you feel that the feedback you received was constructive, tailored and meaningful?

I have not yet received feedback.

I have not been offered any feedback.

I didn't receive feedback, which would have been helpful in deciding whether to apply for the same role in another national park that is now advertised. I'm not willing to waste my time so will not apply.

I did not receive feedback. To be fair, as I was not short listed, I don't think that the shortlisting panel was required to provide feedback, but can't find anything since being told that my request had been passed onto the shortlisting panel. I don't want to reopen it now. I have however been in touch directly with the CNPA since then.

I did not receive any feedback although I requested it

I did not receive the requested feedback.

I did not receive any feedback. I had to call the government offices in Edinburgh for a response. Which as always was impossible on one attempt

I am still waiting on receiving feedback, despite numerous attempts

I did not receive feedback

The feedback I got was questionable in quality and detail, but also revealed ignorance of the organisation's own disability confident policies.

No feedback was given whatsoever.

I did not receive any feedback and therefore was not given the chance to assess its quality.

I did not receive feedback, although I had requested it

Since 2022 the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland includes the principle of Respect to applicants. Please provide any comments in relation to how you experienced the principle of Respect during the appointments process.

Not applicable except that I did get to speak to someone who was respectful

I didn't find the process respectful of my time.

Experience was good.

I enjoyed the interview and felt this was conducted in a fair and balanced way and I had every opportunity to make my points.

I have no comments to make on this, other than everyone at interview was professional and respectful to me.

I felt respected at all points in the process.

Yes I felt respected

Polite and friendly

The whole process was very welcoming and well conducted.

I am very pleased with how the entire process was run.

Shown full respect

They don't even respect applicants enough to answer questions regarding the position. There must be an awful lot of time wasted going through applications that would never have been made if questions were answered at the start

I felt the process was disrespectful and if I may lacking in empathy for the applicant by making me chase where the application was positioned. I had business and charitable appointments in my diary and was trying to keep it clear should I be asked for interview.

I felt respected.

The interview was very patronising, felt they were trying to belittle me and the feedback I received was similar despite the fact that I have worked all of my working life and served in many different committees

was very respectful.

I found out I didn't get the job when a post on Twitter was made congratulating the winning candidate.

I did not experience this.

fair

I was treated respectfully throughout the process

The process feels uncomfortable, as someone who is "pale, male and stale", straight and not disabled, it feels as if my skills/knowledge are not wanted.

Very respectful

Not applicable, I only ever had a 'Thank you for your application message'.

The principle of respect was evident in the communication around the application and this opportunity to feed back

Hard to say. It certainly wasn't disrespectful - just nice friendly panel

The process felt respectful. However, post the process (1) I had to chase a couple of times for reimbursement of my travel expenses, and (2) I was not contacted about receiving feedback, which I had requested

the whole process felt respectful while friendly

Respect shown throughout, but interview panel was not diverse.

I wasn't offered an opportunity to gain feedback the length of time following deadline to hearing the outcome was too long

Very unhelpful process, lack of response

Please describe one (or more) positive aspect of the process for you.

The short application form was a positive, but also a negative as I didn't feel I was able to provide all the skills and experience I could offer for the Board role.

Application was clear I was disappointed that I was not invited to an interview which questions if the process is fair

Learning about the national park authority was very interesting.

It was relatively easy.

I received timely replies to my queries from the administrator

I hope that the completing of this survey will allow my voice to be heard

Process and timescales were clear.

The interview was in the nature of a discussion, with all the board members. It was constructive and covered what I thought were all the key points.

As someone who interviews a lot of people for my job, it was good to experience the process as an applicant again.

Getting appointed to the board after putting in lots of effort into the application and also presentation.

The interactions at interview were probing but personable.

I felt the criteria in the application form and application form overall was good, and helps people from a variety of backgrounds to apply

I felt taken seriously, that my application was valued, and the position was respected and important.

A positive aspect for me was, to be able to evaluate myself. Appreciate my strengths in different areas I had worked and made differences in both paid and volunteering aspects of my working life.

Clear process and timescales.

Process straightforward, so neither positive or negative, merely just that, a process.

The application form was mercifully short.

Added to my knowledge and understanding

Straightforward application process, stuck to timelines

When I was being asked why I like to apply the job.

Nothing positive

Can't think of one! The other people present at the interview were very pleasant!

Getting shortlisted.

The interview process was engaging.

the SG team were very open and warm throughout

Clear simple process

Enjoyed the interview!

One positive aspect of the appointments process was the clear and timely communication. This made it much easier for applicants like me to understand what was expected and to follow the process effectively. Clear communication helped reduce uncertainty and allowed me to engage confidently in the process.

Communication and deadlines were very clear.

The initial application on-line was quick and straightforward to use

However fair it wasn't really a positive experience for me.

criteria well identified and application has to be aligned to the criteria.

I really appreciated being able to speak with the CEO before application

The selection criteria are clear and reasonable, given the stated objectives of the recruitment.

I feel my experience wasn't fully taken onboard.

The public bodies team were extremely helpful

Really just came down to a practise run

I have no positives to report.

Extremely friendly administrator of the process put be totally st ease

The Panel was well structured and asked good questions which flowed well across its members, all of whom came across as professional and approachable

Clear criteria, application pack easily understandable

None - total waste of my time

Honestly, seeing who was appointed fills me with a bit of hope that the board might better function.

I was pleased to see positions like this being advertised on social media to raise awareness of them amongst a wider group of people.

I had no positive experiences with this process.

None. I had to repeat email for very poor feedback.

The only positive was the fact that the role was advertised publicly, everything after that was lack of communication and feedback

As far as I got, the process seemed straightforward.

It was all digital, as it should be nowadays. But it is still considerably more involved than most modern job application processes.

Overall, did you feel that the application process was fair and transparent?

I think it's good the questions are open ended, but it's not clear what they are looking for. From what I could gather from their feedback (and I am not clear if I've interpreted it correctly) they wanted to know more about my experiences. I think this is slightly misguided in itself, since we are representing patients. We should have experiences that reflect broad patient experience, not our own gripes with healthcare.

Weighting for people with protected characteristics was not clear.

Not at all

Without getting feedback it is difficult to know why I was not considered so in that sense it is not transparent. My experience of this application process is that the application form is a blunt instrument for identifying potential candidates.

I don't think it was fair since I was not invited for an interview which questions if there was someone lined up to take on the role

Given the actual successful candidates, I don't believe the criteria have been fully satisfied at all suggesting the literature was wrong or not transparent

It felt like a tick box exercise rather than one where you got to know applicants. I've much experience of recruitment from my professional life and the process felt far from best practice.

I have no doubt that the process is both fair and transparent. I remain slightly surprised that the criteria are applied so rigidly in a particular order, rather than in the round, but that is presumably the result of a conscious decision by the Board.

I would have loved to know that tailored feedback could have been requested. Other than that everything seemed fair and transparent.

I understand the need to target board members with particular skills and experience based on what the recruiting board are looking for. On reflection it may be even more helpful for the weighting of this to be as clear as possible to avoid unnecessary or inappropriate applications.

Difficult to answer. I had all of the types of experience - personal and professional - that the board said they were looking for at that time. I referenced and evidenced this in the application, but I wasn't even interviewed.

Hard to know why and puts me off applying for similar roles in the future.

To date there has only been one person appointed to the board.

Just feel the interview panel had made up their mind very quickly that I was not the person they wanted.

I can't really comment on that - feedback was limited and have not yet had any additional feedback.

I feel now I should definitely have spoken to someone before I started the process.

In truth, I cannot recall if I asked for feedback. I should have. I believe I had a great deal to offer this role and considerable relevant experience. I found the rejection email bland and impersonal. I may be wrong, but I strongly suspect my age had something to do with it.

short-listing is not transparent, lacks more precise information on the number of applicants and number of short-listed for interview.

See earlier comment. I understand that there is a need to recruit for experience, however in a board setting there should be room for genuine diversity including age and career stage/pathway

I would have appreciated communication as to whether my application had been considered and feedback if applicable why I was not selected for interview. I received no communication of any kind.

I got the feeling (rightly or wrongly) that priority would be given to minority applicants and those with disabilities. I come across this a lot and whilst I can appreciate the need for diversity - I feel that if you are white, healthy and educated you are at a disadvantage.

I did not find the actual application process unfair, but the fact that I did not receive a response makes me feel like my application was not fully considered.

I believe there was age bias present in the process and that despite the implied openness to a range of perspectives and experiences the final appointments show a lack of commitment to that statement.

What makes you believe that the process is not fair and transparent?

The questions were very limited and without a CV I felt it didn't allow the panel a fair insight into who I am and what I would bring.

The application process was good. The interview process wasn't good. It was an older style competency interview, and this approach doesn't accurately test relevant skills. From what was stated in the application pack, I was expecting very different questions and also expecting some form of test/activity.

I have no problem not being appointed, but hard to see why I wasn't short listed.

The tailored CV lacks guidance on its format and excludes important contextual information. There was simply no contact beyond the initial application.

I had no considered response.

As the Board is the body that places emphasis on the varied but 'defined' 'Roles' required by the Board, then perhaps the Board should assess the applicant's attributes and decide which role fits them best, rather than applicants having to gamble one of three choices.

I believe the application pack did not make clear that the panel were looking for people like them- i.e. of their age and shared professional experience. If it had made that clear from the beginning it would have made things more honest (even if disheartening- given these kinds of bodies should be more reflective of our society and current industry). As previously indicated I also did not receive personal feedback so cannot comment on its merit.

What more should the ESC be doing by way of regulation to improve the appointments process?

The ESC can make the appointments process better by doing a few things. They can try harder to include people from different backgrounds and make sure everyone has a fair chance. They should also be more open about how they make their decisions and be accountable for them. To help, they could ask for feedback from the people applying. They should make the process easier to understand and use. The way they test people should be fair, and they need to talk to everyone involved clearly and on time. People who decide on the jobs should get good training. ESC should keep checking and changing things if needed. It's important to hear from the people who apply and also get help from others to make the process better.

Hands on life experience should score more highly including the whole geography of the activity applied for. For instance, living in remote, coastal or rural should be thought as valuable experience along side professional skills

Check CVs of successful candidates against the selection criteria and skills needed

My own appointments process was a model of the application of regulation with a good dose of humanity.

Listen to such responses and do not be swayed by bringing just like-minded people to the table

More actual powers independent of political interference

Not sure - regular audits perhaps, or presence on shortlisting panels?

try using mechanisms that are standard in Industries like private companies, financial sector. The government process is way too protective and lacking in transparency. In addition it leaves candidates who spent significant time and effort feeling the selection was already made.

Clear reasons for rejection

Align the publicity emphasising the inclusive aspect of the recruitment, with the actual recruitment criteria and outcomes. Lack of diversity and inclusion in the recruitment.

Clarity about exclusions and who need not apply.

Provide a central contact to help navigate the process and address any queries to ensure applicants are putting their case forward in the most relevant way. Consider out of the box applications where expertise comes from other industries and always provide feedback

Seek more diversity in interview panels

You could have an independent person on the interview panel, overseeing fairness towards each candidate.

A broader definition of inclusion should be used to ensure a full spectrum from society is encouraged to apply.

Be cautious that they don't make the process too cumbersome, too focused on navel gazing

This seems a very good start.

Neuro-diverse friendly application processes.

For candidates who have gone through to the interview stage, it would be more transparent if they were copied in on any announcement about the successful applicant.

Work closely with SG Public Appointments, not just in an audit capacity, but to improve processes. The ESC should be challenging the board to remove implicit bias. Opting to hire people from the BBC, BFI and British Council restricts access to these kinds of roles to people who are likely already in the boards professional network and who hold similar experience to them. This in turn limits the relevance of the organisation and its ability to reflect Scottish people more broadly.

Oversight and, indeed, an ombudsman system to allow objections or complaints to be made would improve the system.

Investigate properly poor practice.

I think the commission should be totally independent and also appoint the position not just over see it.

Simplify

Please provide any other comments you may have on regulation. We would be particularly keen to receive more detail if you consider that the regulation does NOT make the process fairer and more transparent.

Regulations are important to make sure the appointments process is fair and clear. However, sometimes, too many rules can make things too complicated and stop good candidates from applying. It's essential to find the right balance, so the rules are helpful but not too difficult to follow. Also, we should check the rules often to make sure they still work well, and if needed, change them to make the process better for everyone. The main goal should always be to keep things fair and easy to understand.

I want to make it clear that I do not feel hard done by in this experience. I should have should have found a way to get a sense of whether I was a reasonable fit or not. Then I would have known if the effort was worth the time or not, even if I was not successful.

I took long time to read all the materials that were provide plus time to complete the application I didn't even get an interview and the time taken to reject me was too long I had to send an email in asking for an outcome

A focus of fairness can unfortunately sometimes have the opposite effect, where individuals, such as those with disabilities or from less fortunate backgrounds, are put at an unfair disadvantage. The answer, in my eyes, is a recruitment process which most closely reflects the actual role. The interview process didn't.

Having a framework to operate within which sets standards and check and balances is very beneficial but is only as good as the staff delivering the service and how well that is monitored to achieve the key goals

ESC conducting a vital role

Thank you for reaching out with this questionnaire. I think CS have handled my application poorly and I have been ignored in the process.

Thank you for taking the time to provide this feedback on the appointments process. If you have any final comments, please leave these in the box below.

Not happy that I wasn't fully reimbursed my expenses, especially when I purchased overpriced food from the national museum to experience what a visitor would.

Disappointed in the whole process - application lost so not considered. Happy you got strong Board members though

Just looking forward to more inclusiveness for better and healthier NHS.

No final comments, just thanks for considering my application and making the process fair :)

The wait between interview and decision was so long that my commitments and plans changed so that I would have declined the appointment.

My first time applying as part of a public appointment process, and thought it was all very well done. My only slightly negative feedback is that decisions were much longer than initially advertised, but this was due to a change in government positions, and was understandable.