

## Annex D | Stage Two Research

### **The experiences of people who recently applied for, or expressed interest in, a public appointment opportunity – summary of research findings**

#### **Methodology**

1. In April 2007, when the new Code of Practice had been in operation for one year, an invitation was sent to a sample of people who had either applied for a post during the past year or who had requested an application pack but had not applied.
2. The invitation was issued by e-mail. The survey was mainly conducted online with a paper based survey also available to ensure full accessibility. 1722 invitations were successfully delivered and 532 completed surveys received, giving an overall response rate of 31%.
3. The survey was administered by independent consultants on behalf of the Commissioner. This method was chosen to encourage people to comment freely and to ensure respondents' anonymity. Surveys were returned directly to the consultants.
4. Four different versions of the survey were used, each tailored to reflect the different stages of the process the respondents had experienced. So for example, those who had not attended an interview were not asked about their experiences of the interview stage, those who had not applied were asked only general questions and questions about the publicity for the post. The four types of respondents were classified as follows:
  - Type 1     People who had requested an application pack but did not apply
  - Type 2     People who had applied but were not shortlisted for interview
  - Type 3     People who had applied, were interviewed but were not appointed

- Type 4 People who applied, attended interview and were appointed

5. The sample was as follows:

**Table A**

Survey Type	Number of invitations issued	Completed questionnaires received
Type 1	1172	244 (21%)
Types 2-4	550	288 (52%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	1722	532
		31%

The 52% response rate from recent applicants shows that people are clearly interested in the process used for appointment and in addressing the barriers within it. The 21% response rate from the 'non-applicants' is equally encouraging as these people received the invitation to participate 'cold', with no prior contact from OCPAS or the Scottish Government.

6. The breakdown by type of the 532 respondents was:

**Table B**

Survey Type	% of respondents	Number of respondents
Type 1 (non-applicants)	46%	244
Type 2 (not interviewed)	34%	183
Type 3 (interviewed but not selected)	11%	56
Type 4 (selected)	9%	49
	<b>100%</b>	<b>532</b>

As would be expected, the numbers of survey respondents decreases at each stage of the process, reflecting what happens in the process itself.

## **Demographic information**

7. All respondents were asked about their gender, age, disability, ethnicity, working background and postcode area. This enabled their experiences of the process to be cross-referenced with this information to identify any trends. Throughout this report, where no comment is made about the demographic breakdown of responses to a particular question it is because there were no significant observations to be made on that point.
8. As the survey sample did not include every applicant for a public appointment over the relevant period, comparisons with the demographic profile of the whole pool of applicants have been made where appropriate.

### **Gender**

9. The overall breakdown by gender was:

***Table C***

<b>Gender</b>	Male	64%
	Female	36%

Overall, the proportion of survey respondents who were female (36%) was higher than the Scottish Government's latest figures for the whole pool of applicants (29.8%). There were no significant differences in gender profile between the different types of respondents (Types 1-4); the representation of women remained fairly constant throughout the appointment process.

### **Disability**

10. The number of people declaring a disability was higher than the 6.2% of applicants who declared themselves disabled on the monitoring forms used during the appointment rounds themselves:

***Table D***

<b>Disabled</b>	No	89.5%
	Yes	<b>10.5%</b>

This may be because the survey included a link to the website of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), where a definition of disability was provided. It may also indicate that applicants may be reluctant to declare themselves disabled in their applications for public appointments, even on a confidential monitoring form. Even the higher figure of 10.5% of respondents in our survey is just over half the DRC's current estimate of the proportion of people in Scotland who have a disability.

11. There were no significant differences in declared disability between the different types of respondents (Types 1–4). We have no information about the type or degree of respondents' disabilities, or which of them had declared their disability during the appointments process. Scottish Government monitoring figures tell us that 6.2% of applicants who currently apply declare a disability, but that this figure falls to 2.5% amongst the people who currently hold appointments.

## Age

12. The ages of survey respondents were as follows:

**Table E**

Age	Percentage %
<30	1.7
31-40	13.1
41-50	22.7
51-60	40.5
61-70	20.5
>70	1.3

There was a clear weighting in favour of the 51-60 age range, with over 40% of respondents falling into this group. There were no significant differences in the age profile of the different types of respondent (Types 1–4).

The age profile of the survey respondents was similar to the age profile of all the applicants for the same period.

## Ethnicity

13. The questions about ethnicity in the survey mirrored the questions on the Scottish Government's monitoring forms for public appointments, to enable comparisons to be made.

**Table F**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Type1</b>	<b>Type2</b>	<b>Type3</b>	<b>Type4</b>
	%	%	%	%
White	98	95.1	96.4	100
Mixed	0.8	1.1		
Asian		1.6	3.6	
Black	0.8	2.2		
Other	0.4			

The vast majority of survey respondents were white (96.8% overall). This was considerably higher than the current figure for applicants who identify themselves as white (86%).

The 96.8% of white respondents were sub-divided as follows:

- 71% white Scottish,
  - 22.5% white British
  - 0.6% white Irish
  - 2.6% other white
14. Just over 3% of respondents overall were from other ethnic groups (Asian, Black, Mixed or 'other'). We were keen to look separately at the views of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, but unfortunately we were unable to do this confidently with such a small number of respondents.
15. It is interesting to note that 100% of Type 4 respondents (those selected for appointment) were white, either white Scottish or white British. The greatest ethnic diversity was within Type 2 respondents (who applied but progressed no further) where 4.9% identified as BME.
16. The ethnicity of our respondents reflects the 2001 census where minority ethnic groups accounted for fewer than 2% of the population in Scotland. However, the minority ethnic population in Scotland is now expected to be significantly higher, particularly

in light of recent Scottish Government initiatives such as Fresh Talent<sup>1</sup> and of increased migration from Eastern European countries. It is therefore disappointing to note the low ethnic diversity of the respondents to this study.

### Sexual orientation and religion or belief

17. In line with the Scottish Government’s equality monitoring for public appointments, no questions were asked of respondents regarding sexual orientation or religion/belief.

### Work experience

18. Respondents were also asked to indicate where most of their experience had been gained:

**Table G**

<b>Experience gained</b>	<b>Type1 %</b>	<b>Type2 %</b>	<b>Type3 %</b>	<b>Type4 %</b>	<b>% of total sample</b>
At home as a carer	0.4	--	1.8	2.0	0.6
At home as a homemaker	--	1.1	--	--	0.4
Other <sup>2</sup>	8.2	7.1	12.5	6.1	8.2
Private sector	36.9	34.4	16.1	28.6	33.0
Public sector	43.9	45.4	53.6	59.2	46.7
Voluntary sector	10.7	12.0	16.1	4.1	11.1

19. A significant proportion said that the bulk of their experience came from the public sector (46.7%). This is the only group whose representation increases at each stage of the process, suggesting that the process may be easier to navigate for people who have knowledge of the sector and the systems involved.
20. In contrast, there is a significant drop in the percentage of people with a voluntary sector background between those who were interviewed (Type 3) and those who were appointed (Type 4). It would appear from this that some barrier exists which is preventing voluntary sector applicants from progressing past the interview stage.

<sup>1</sup> The Fresh Talent initiative encourages people to come to live and work in Scotland

<sup>2</sup> The majority of people within the “other” category worked across more than one sector as management consultants, or were working within the education field.

21. There is a significant drop in private sector respondents between the application stage and the interview stage, but an increase between interview and appointment. They make up 34.4% of applicants who were not interviewed, only 16.1% of interviewees and 28.6% of appointees. These figures suggest that people with a private sector background are not very successful at completing their application form in a way that enables them to be shortlisted for interview, but that when they *are* interviewed they do well.
22. At present the Scottish Government does not collect information about where applicants' experience has been gained, so we were unable to compare our findings with this data.

### **Gender and ethnicity**

23. There are significant gender differences within respondents from the private and public sector, with women making up 23% and 40% of these groups respectively. With regard to ethnicity, 2% of those with a public sector background identified as BME, slightly higher than the 1% with a private sector background. Of those with a voluntary sector background, however, 8% declared as BME. This means that, as outlined in paragraph 20 above, the sector where there was the highest BME representation is finding it most difficult to progress past the interview stage.

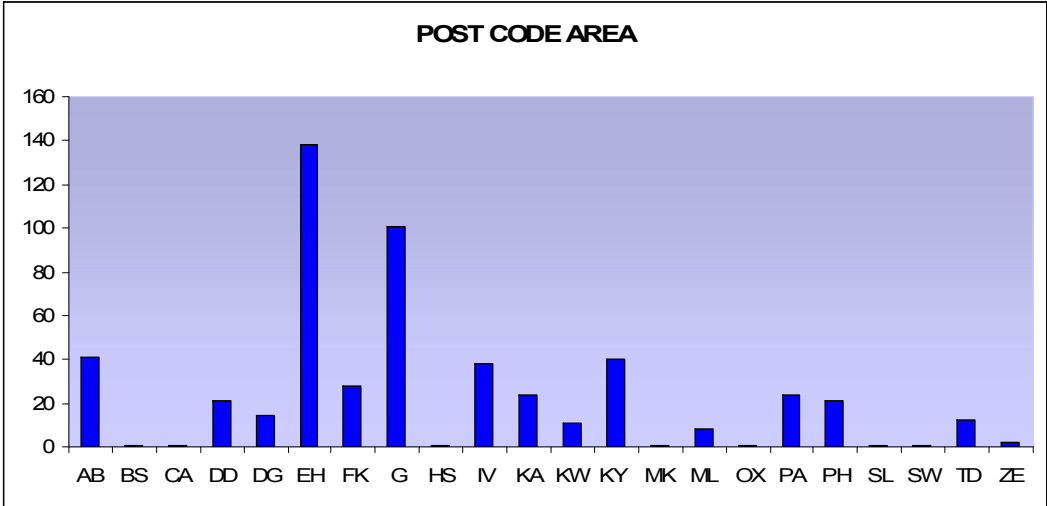
### **Post code area**

24. The highest represented areas were Edinburgh and Glasgow. Within the Edinburgh area post codes the highest number of respondents came from EH10, EH3 and EH4. As many respondents came from EH10 as came from the entire Dumfries & Galloway area. There was no particular trend in the Greater Glasgow post code area.
25. Within the Forth Valley the FK8 postcode accounted for over a third of all Forth Valley respondents. In the Highland area, an IV2 postcode represented a quarter of all respondents with an IV postcode; similarly those with postcode KY15 represented a quarter of Fife respondents and 38% of Perth postcodes came from PH2.



Reliable analysis of respondents' views by post code area was not possible due to the small numbers of people involved (often less than 5 in each area). It is clear, however, that there is a continuing trend for applicants to be located in the central belt and in urban areas.

**Chart H**



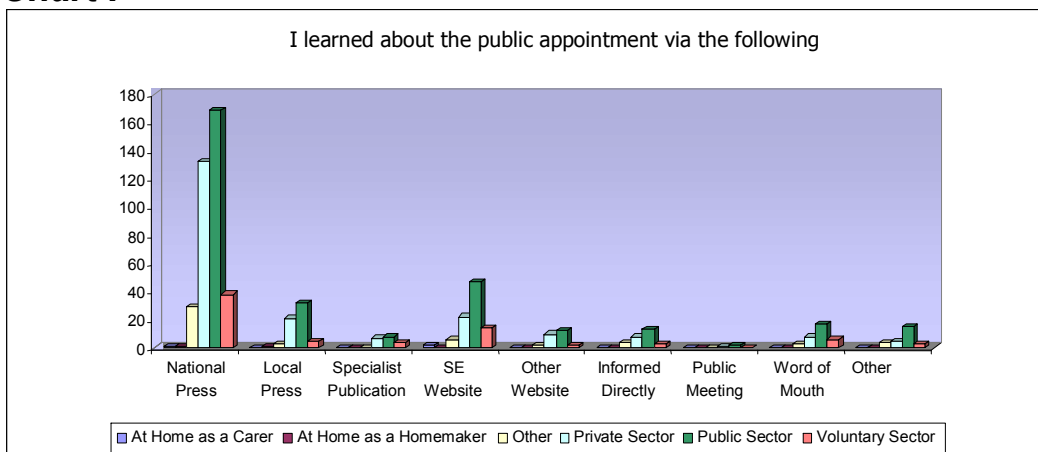
## **Respondents' experience of the process**

26. The survey questions covered the following areas:
- how the respondent found out about the position
  - why they did or did not apply
  - the application process
  - informing applicants and providing feedback (Types 2 & 3 only)
  - the interview process (Types 3 & 4 only)
  - how the process might be improved

### **How did respondents find out about the position?**

27. As the national press was the most commonly cited medium (by 69.5% of respondents), although a number of respondents mentioned adverts on public transport which were used in one particular round for a transport users' committee. This unusual (and clearly appropriate in this case) form of advertising would therefore appear to have made some impact.
28. Only 5% of respondents were directly informed of the vacancy by someone, however, of the male respondents who were successful in gaining a public appointment 25% of them learned about the appointment by direct contact, compared to only 5.9% of female respondents in this category (Type 4). This suggests that 1 in 4 men who are successfully appointed have been approached by someone directly to encourage them to apply, whereas women who are successful are more likely to have identified the opportunity for themselves.

**Chart I**



**Why did respondents apply (or express an interest in applying)?**

29. Respondents were able to select as many relevant answers as they wished. In order of popularity the reasons given were:

**Table J**

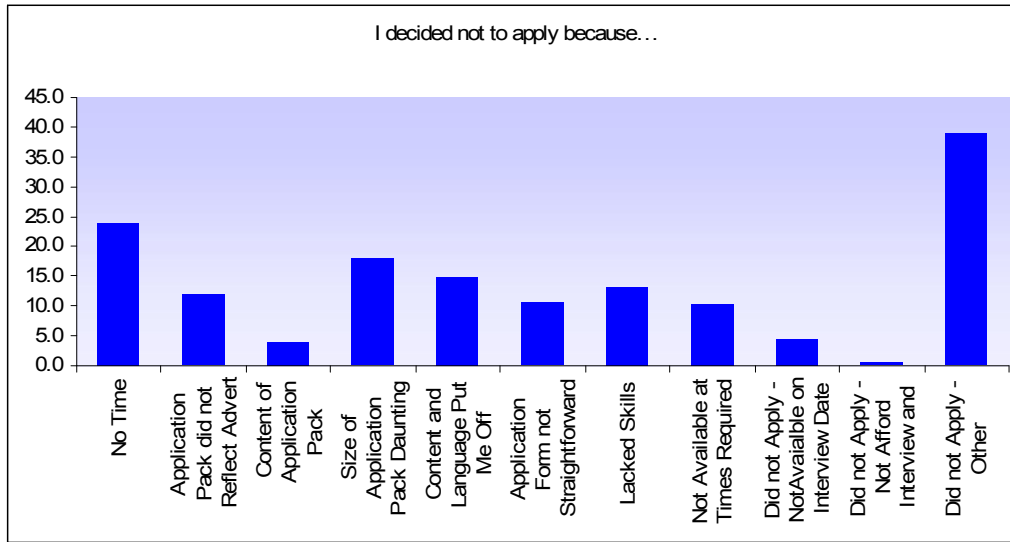
	% of total sample
I thought I had the skills and knowledge for the role	75.4
I was attracted by the nature of the role	67.9
I wished to contribute to improved public services	64.5
I was attracted by the part time nature of the post	33.6
I was attracted by the opportunity for personal development	32.5
I was attracted by the profile of the public body	28.4
I was attracted by the remuneration	12.0
The style of the advert attracted me	3.8
Other	3.0

Remuneration was only cited by 12% as a motivating factor and a range of the qualitative comments received indicated that the

remuneration, when on offer, was too low for the role and associated time commitment. It was also extremely clear that the advertisements currently being used appeal to very few people (3.8%).

### Why did Type 1 respondents not apply?

**Chart K**



30. This question was asked of Type 1 respondents only (people who had requested a pack but not submitted an application). Again, they could select as many answers as they wished. The most popular response (24%) was that they did not have time to complete the application before the deadline. There were no significant demographic variances on this point. Delays in receiving application packs and the size of the packs themselves were common factors limiting respondents’ ability to complete the application, as reflected in some of the comments received:

*“I seem to remember it took a long time between my asking for the form to be sent and the information arriving, by which time my motivation had gone down a bit and I didn’t really have time to complete the form fully.”*

*“I never received the application pack - which was extremely disappointing....”*

31. Nearly 40% of respondents had ‘other’ reasons for not having applied, many of which related to personal circumstances. 18%

found the size of the application pack daunting and nearly 15% said that the language and content of the pack put them off.

32. Male respondents were more likely to note inconsistencies between the advert and application pack with 15.3% of men noting that the application pack did not reflect the advert compared to only 6.4% of female respondents.

*“Whilst I felt that I had the skills and experience to fulfil the role, the skill level in the application pack was at odds with that in the newspaper advertisement. The implication from the application pack was that a much higher skills level was required than originally advertised.”*

Given that it is recognised that men and women process information differently, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from this finding.<sup>3</sup>

### **The application process**

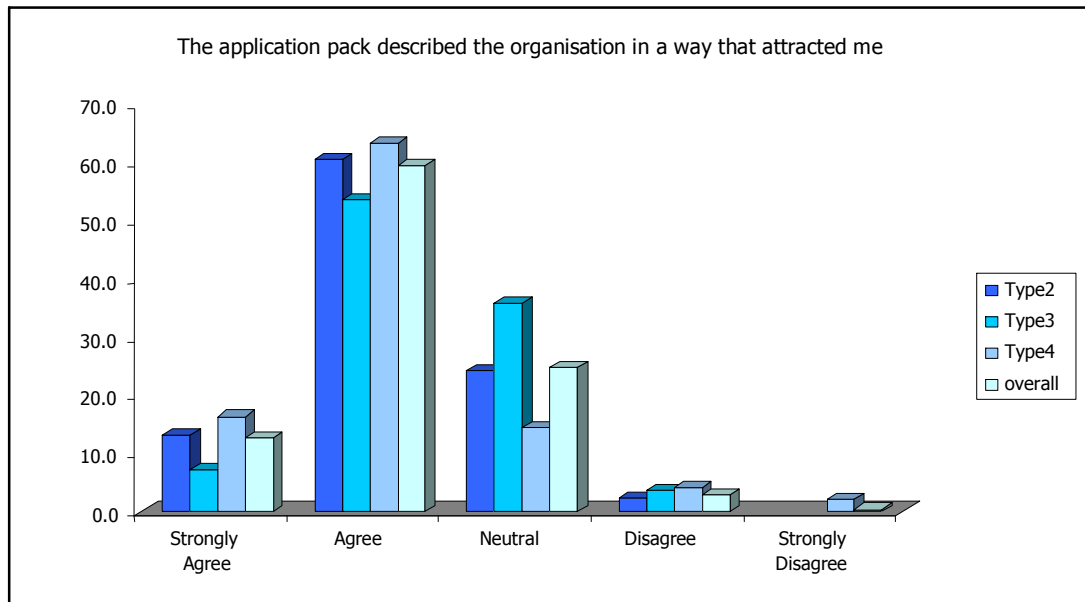
33. All respondents who did apply for a post (Types 2, 3 and 4) were asked a series of questions about the written application stage. The text of the question is given at the top of each chart.

As illustrated below, most responses to the first question were positive.

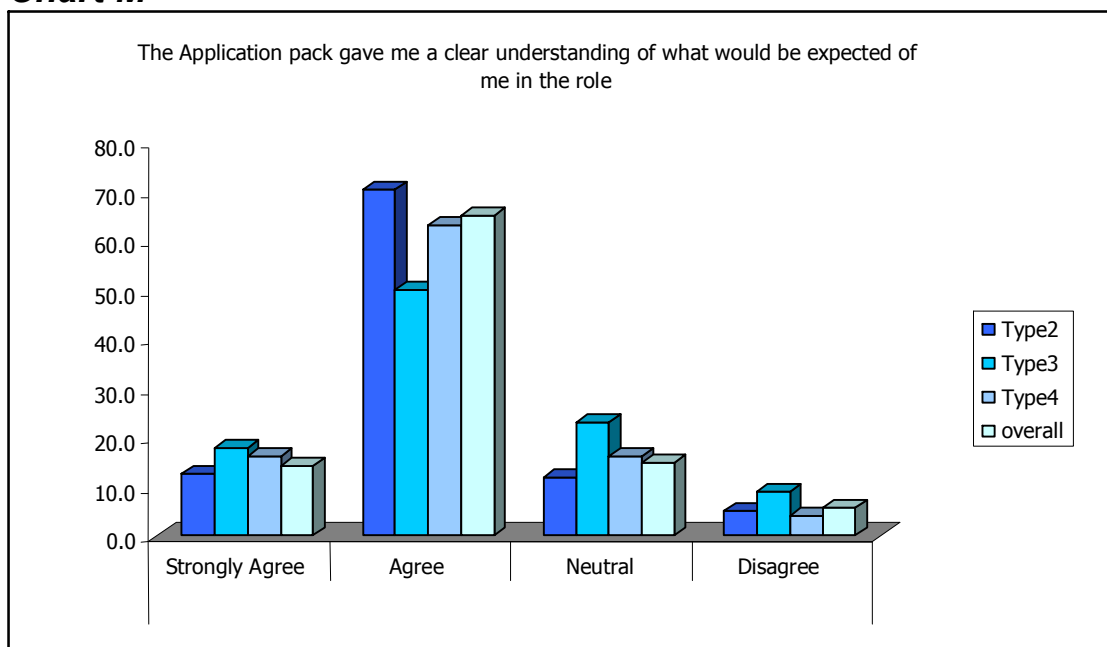
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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Darley and Smith, *Gender differences in information processing strategies*, Journal of Advertising Vol. 24, Issue1 at page 41 (1995)

**Chart L**

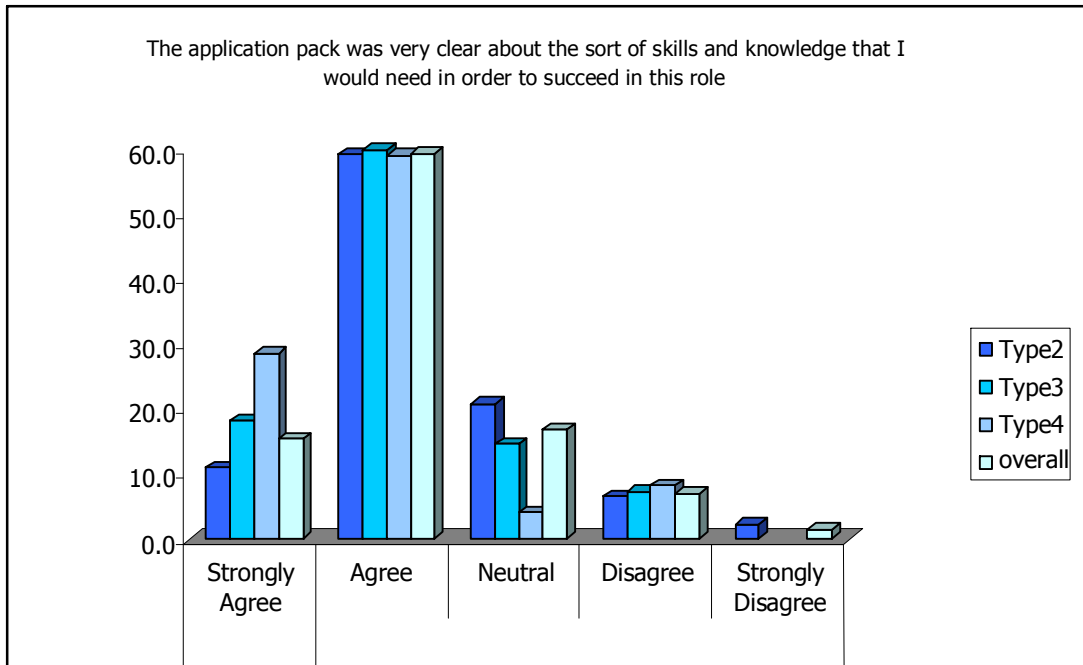


**Chart M**



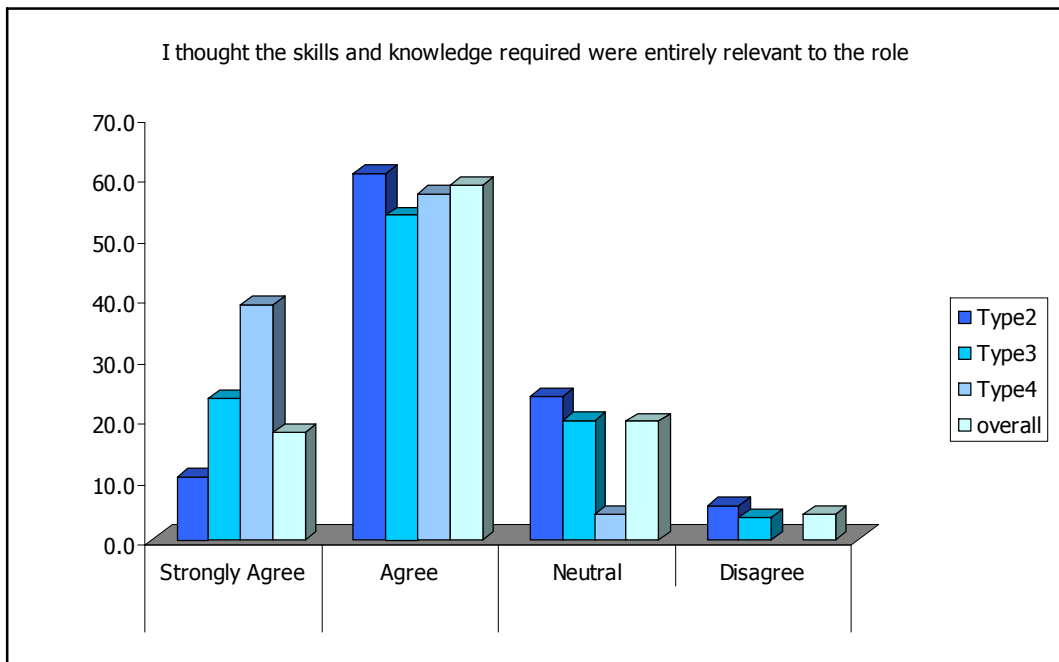
The description within the application pack of the requirements of the role also seemed clear to most people. No respondents strongly disagreed here.

**Chart N**



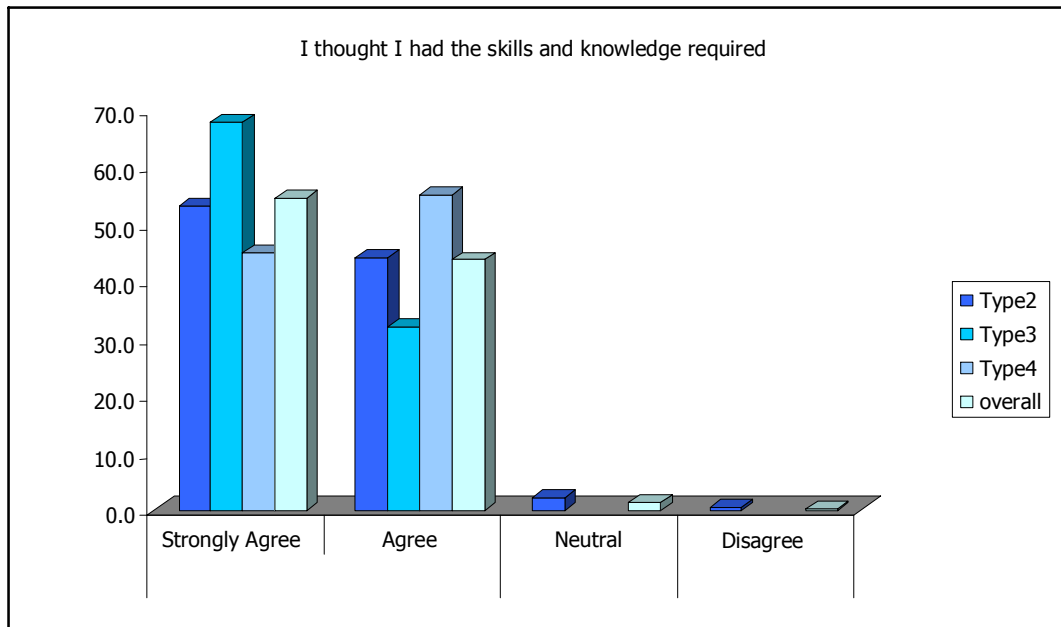
This question related primarily to the person specification for the role and again most respondents thought it was clear about what was required.

**Chart O**



Notably, Type 4 respondents (successful appointees) gave no negative responses to this question.

**Chart P**



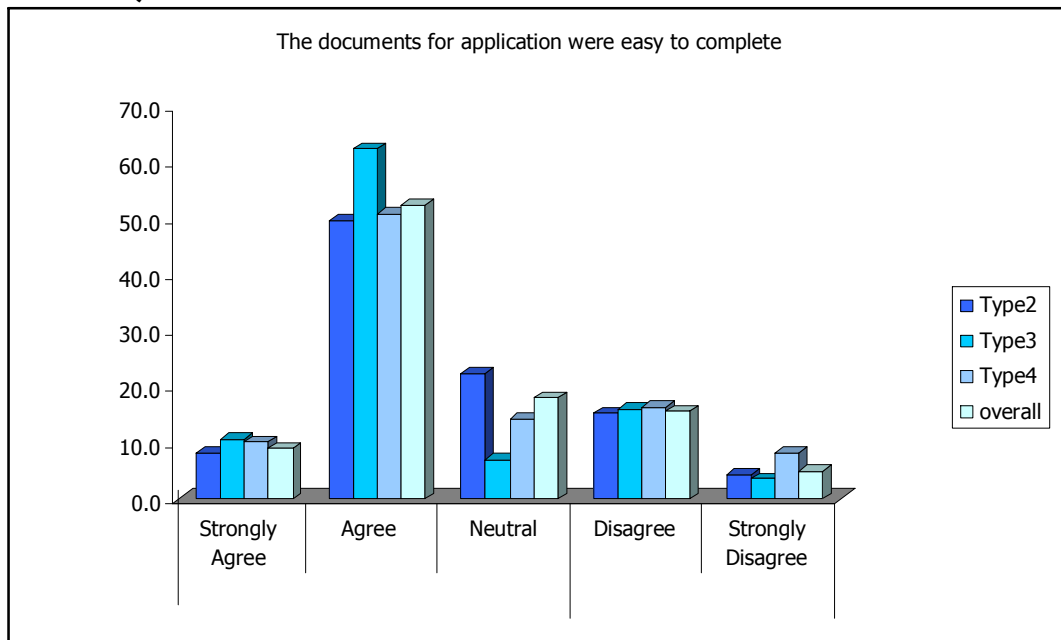
Unsurprisingly, again there was wide scale agreement with only respondents in Type 2 responding neutrally or negatively.

When we look at the positive scores for Type 4 respondents (successful appointees) it is interesting to note that whilst 59% of male respondents 'strongly agreed' that they thought they had the skills and knowledge required, only 18% of female respondents chose to 'strongly agree'. This echoes other research findings that women are less confident about putting themselves forward than their male counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See for example, DTI Women and Equality Unit report, *Brighter Boards for a Brighter Future*: women will only apply if they have at least 8 out of 10 of the criteria asked for, men will apply if they have six.



**Chart Q**



Here, whilst still broadly positive we do see an increase in dissatisfaction. Interestingly, Type 4 respondents (successful appointees) were most likely to disagree that the application documents were easy to complete. Some of the comments made by respondents were:

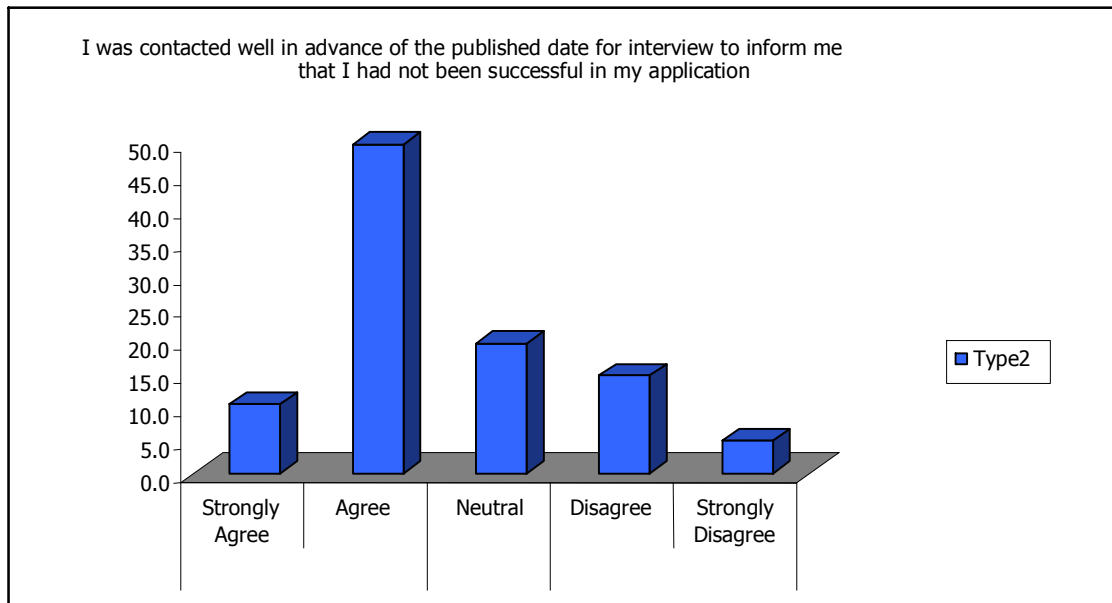
*“My completed application form ran to 18 pages and took many hours to complete. This is an excessive and unreasonable length for a voluntary, un-paid post.”*

*“The application form could be much better structured and not so ephemeral. It should be better targeted to the role applied for. It is clearly an application form prepared generically and I don't feel you will attract the best applicants unless you make your target more focussed”*

### **Informing applicants and providing feedback**

34. The first question was about informing unsuccessful applicants that they had not been shortlisted for interview, hence it was asked of Type 2 respondents only.

**Chart R**

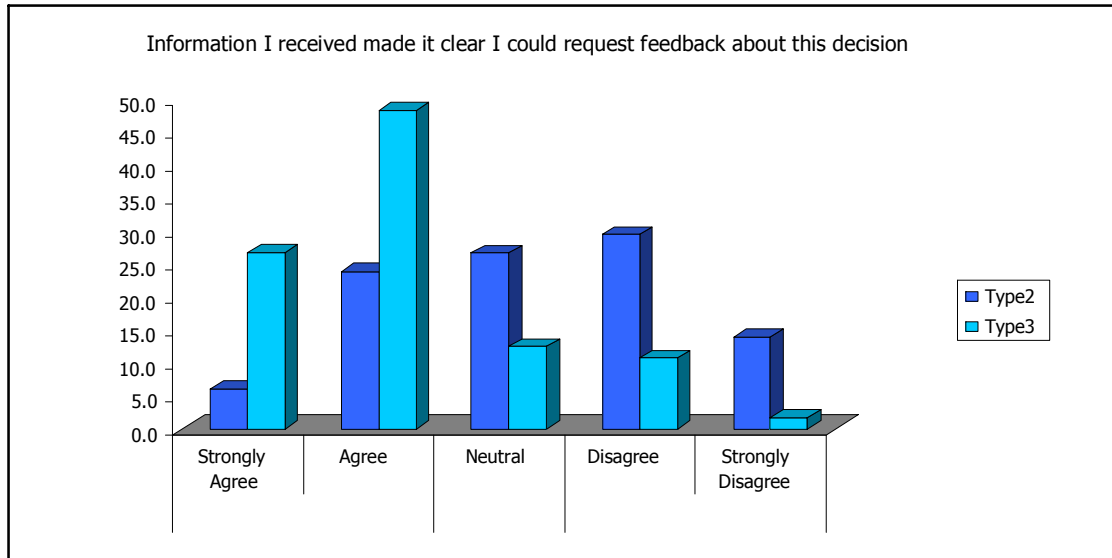


Approximately 20% of respondents gave negative responses to this question. Failing to keep people informed during an appointment round is clearly not only discourteous but carries with it a degree of reputational risk. Giving late notice of the outcome of an application can inconvenience applicants who have been holding dates for interview and may therefore discourage them from applying again.

The feedback about this aspect of the process was, however, far more positive than in stage 1 of our research which was carried out before the new Code came into force. It would appear, therefore, that the new Code has had a positive impact in this area.

35. The next few questions were asked of respondent Types 2 and 3 only and related to the provision of feedback about the decision that their application had been unsuccessful.

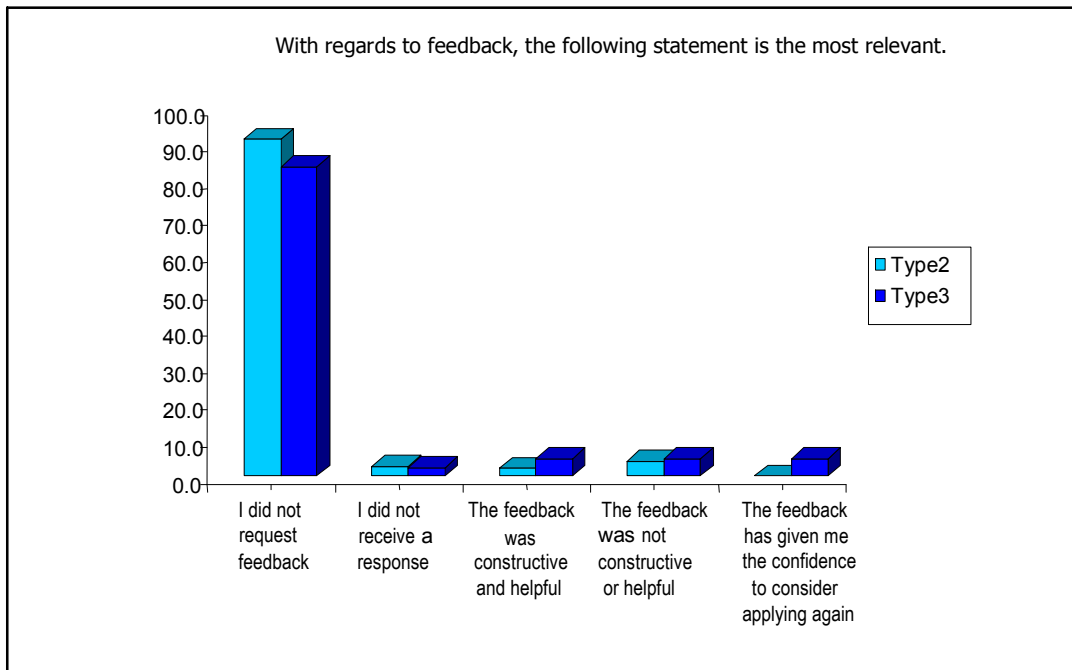
**Chart S**



Type 2 respondents were considerably less clear that feedback was available than Type 3 respondents. In fact, 70% of Type 2 respondents gave a neutral or negative answer to this question compared with 25% of Type 3 respondents. The reason for this difference is likely to be that the Code of Practice now requires feedback to be given to all applicants on request, but only requires that it is *offered* to those interviewed (Type 3). These results clearly indicate that more must be done to make all applicants aware that they can request feedback on their application.

36. The respondents were then asked whether they had requested feedback and if so, how constructive and helpful it had been.

**Chart T**



When constructive feedback is given it is likely to encourage respondents to apply again, however, the majority of respondents to our survey did not request feedback. This may be due in part to them being unaware that feedback was available, however, even though 75% of Type 3 respondents knew they could ask for feedback, only 16% of them did so. Where it was given, responses were mixed about whether it was constructive or helpful. More work is therefore needed not only to make applicants aware that feedback is available and to encourage them to ask for it, but also to ensure that the feedback given by the Scottish Government is accurate, constructive and helpful.

*“I was advised that although my academes and financial skills were commensurate I did not display previous experience of non executive roles. My view is that on this basis I will never experience non executive appointments therefore hardly worth the effort of applying again!”*

*“.....Her feedback suggested that I had no experience in the area in which I am a specialist consultant. I did not display this evidence as it was not mentioned in the interview.”*

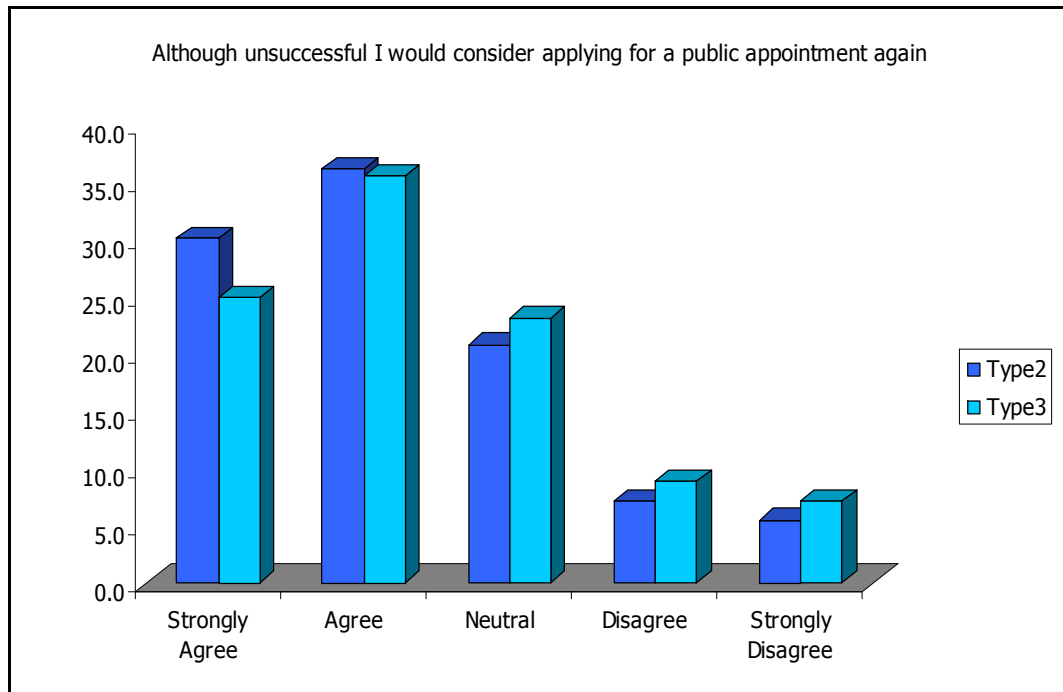
A small number of people asked for feedback but did not receive a response, which is extremely disappointing.

*“I was very disappointed not to be short listed for interview when I felt I met all the essential and desirable criteria. I did not receive any*

*feedback despite requesting it, so I do not know why my application was unsuccessful. I would not be keen to experience this frustration again, and I would not be quick to apply for other positions”*

37. The final question asked only of Types 2 and 3 concerned whether or not they would consider applying again, despite having been unsuccessful.

**Chart U**

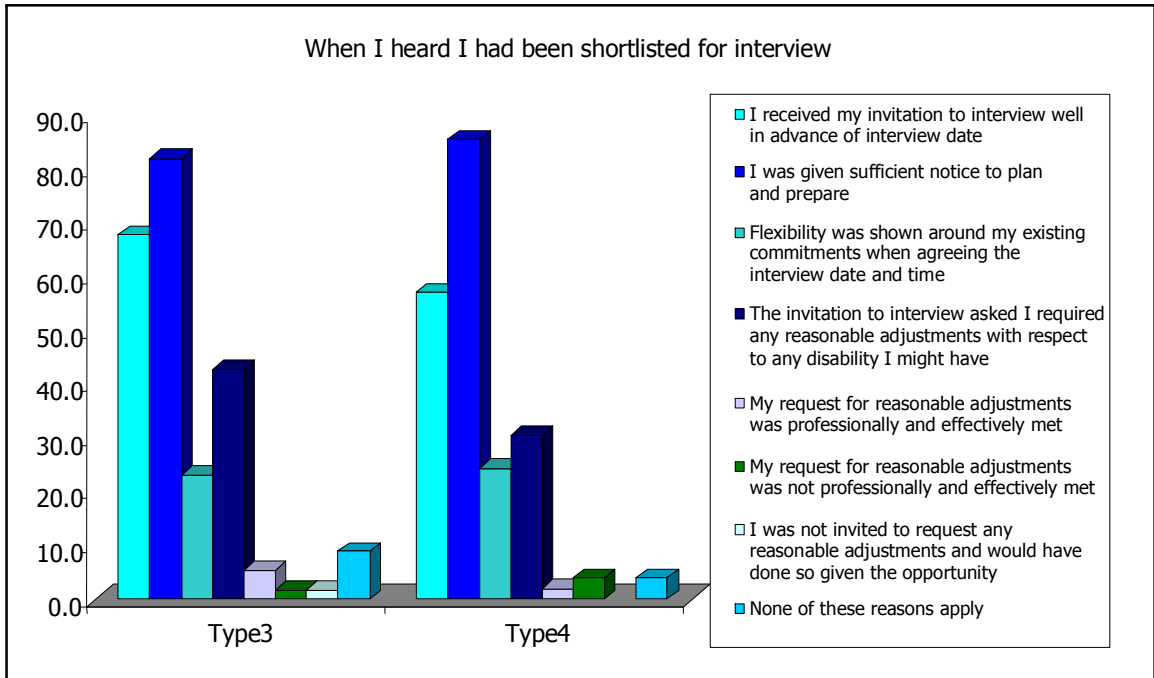


Responses here were generally positive with only 13.5% overall responding negatively to this question.

### **The interview process**

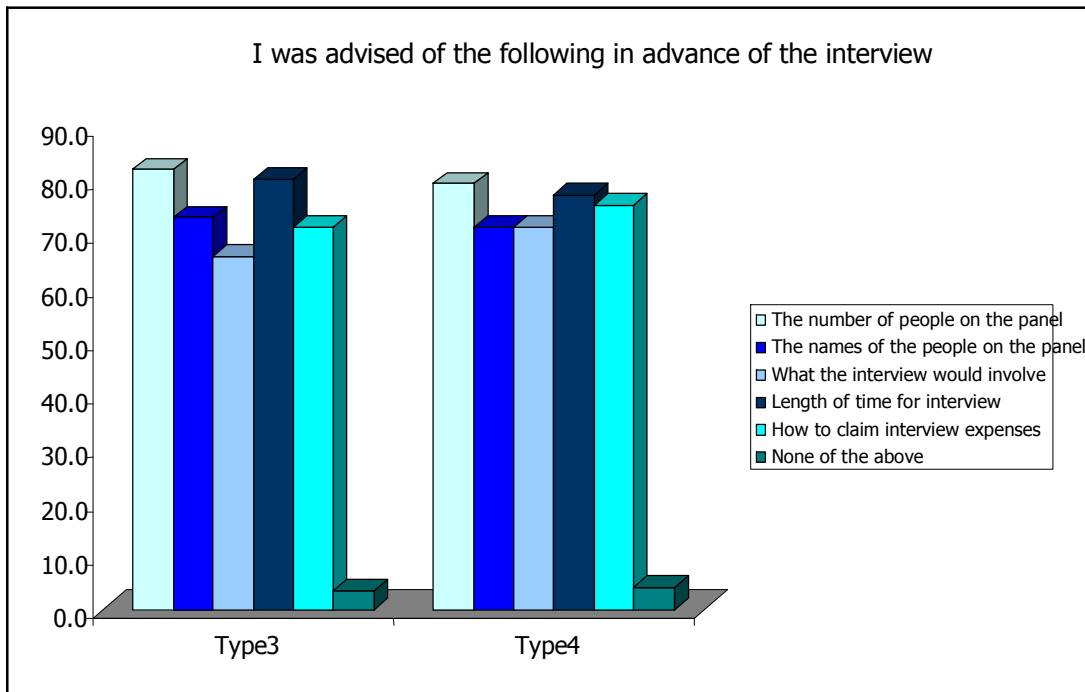
38. The next set of questions concern the interview process and therefore were only asked of Type 3 and 4 respondents.

**Chart V**



The first question (above) indicated that most respondents considered they were given enough notice to enable them to plan and prepare for the interview (84% overall). The lower positive responses about flexibility being shown around existing commitments may have been because respondents did not request this, as the additional comments provided did not indicate that this was a significant problem in the process.

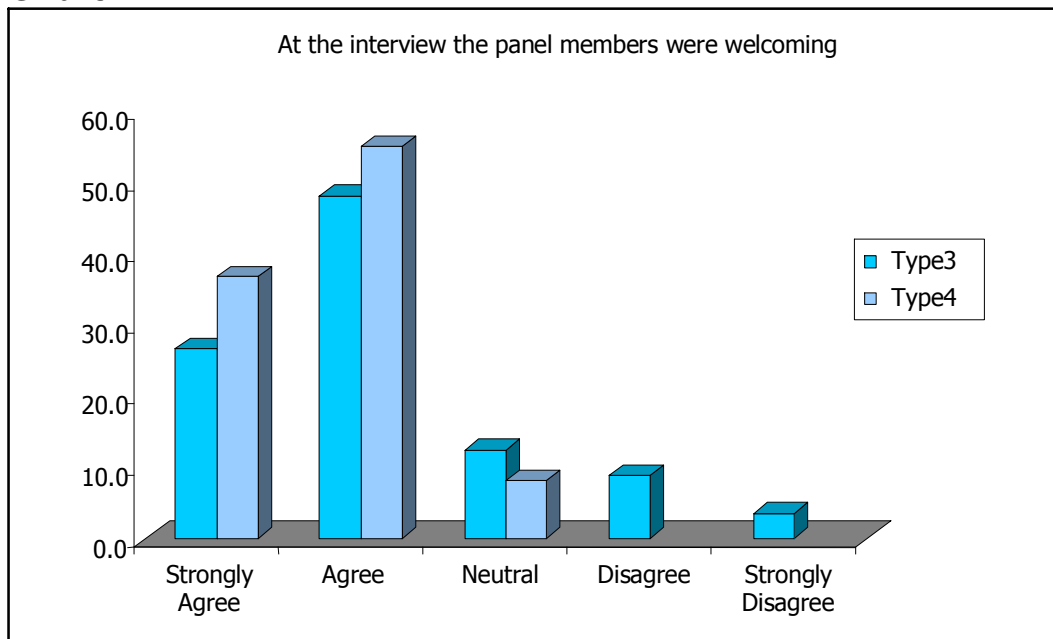
Only 37% of candidates were asked if they needed any reasonable adjustments for the interview with respect to any disability they may have. This is very disappointing as it is not only good practice to offer reasonable adjustments to all candidates, but the Disability Equality Duty now imposes a legal requirement on all public authorities, including the Scottish Government, to actively promote disability equality. Further, where reasonable adjustments were made for our respondents, opinion was divided about whether their needs were professionally and effectively met.



The positive responses here were encouraging. They are a clear indication that the requirements in the new Code which ask for information to be provided ahead of interview have been very effective.

39. The questions about the interview itself began with a question about the selection panel.

**Chart X**



The majority of respondents though the panel were welcoming (83% overall) but it is interesting to note that the negative responses came solely from Type 3s, who were not successful at interview. None of the Type 4 respondents (who went on to be appointed) found the panel unwelcoming.

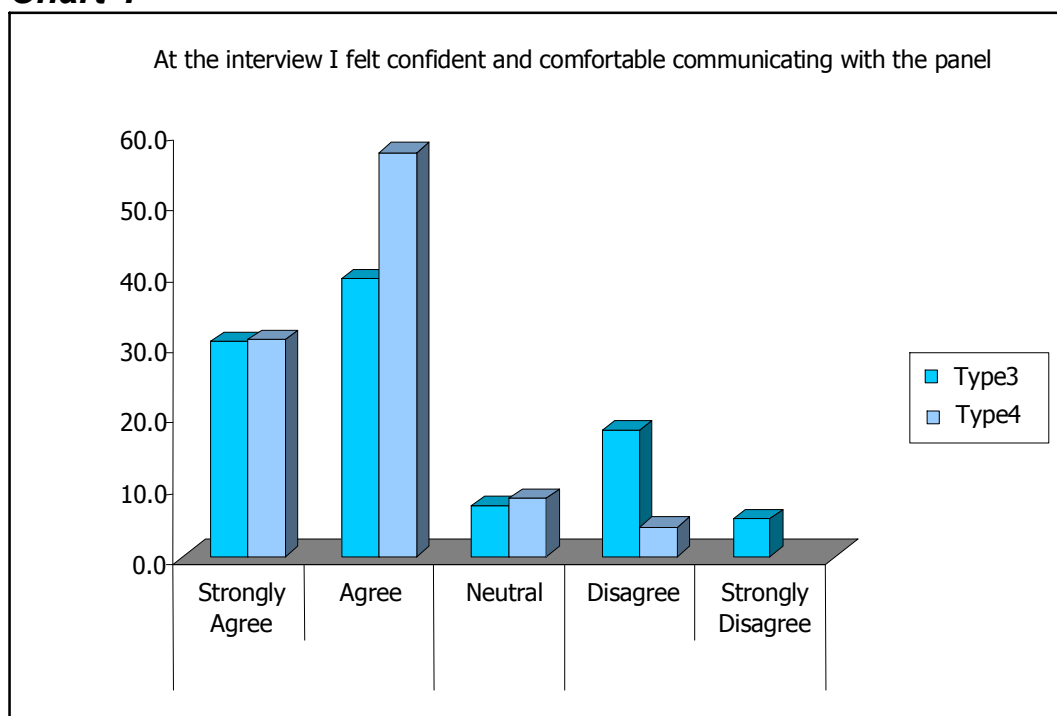
Additional comments included:

*“....Two interviewers in particular were extremely unfriendly and obtuse.”*

*“..... two members asked very clear questions, the 3rd did not and didn't seem to be interested in the answers either”*

40. Respondents were also asked whether they felt confident and comfortable communicating with the panel. 23% of Type 3 respondents said they did not, compared with only 4% of the successful candidates (Type 4).

**Chart Y**



41. These findings support the conclusions of the stage 1 research which noted varying degrees of competency among selection panel members, some of whom openly declared that they feel



uncomfortable sitting on selection panels. We can conclude from the results above that where the candidate does not feel welcome or at ease during the interview this has a negative impact on their performance. From a diversity and inclusion perspective, selection panels will also find it more difficult to appreciate the skills and experience of candidates to whom they cannot easily relate, for example candidates who come from a different cultural background or who have a disability. It is therefore essential that effective training and support is provided for selection panels to assist them in understanding and valuing people's differences and establishing a comfortable interview environment for all candidates. Comments and suggestions relating to the panel included:

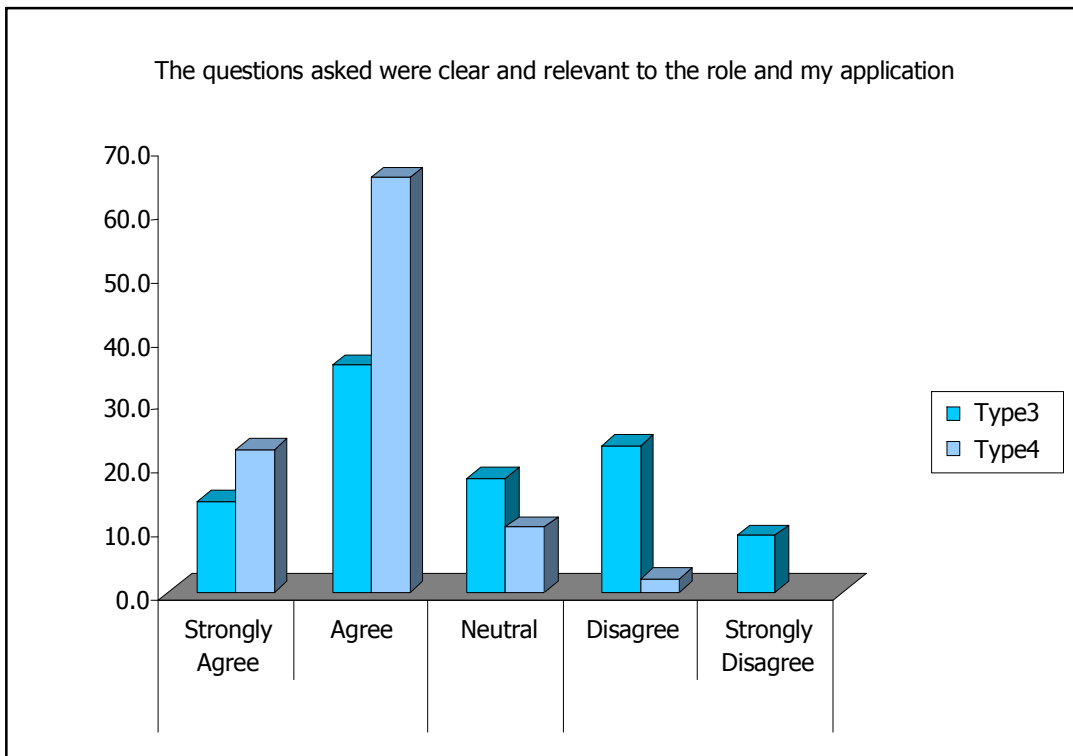
*“A more diverse panel, more relevant questions, more willingness of the panel to accept a different style. a non-white, relatively young woman may have a different style to a white, middle aged man and interview panels need to think differently and to accept that there are different types of 'gravitas'”*

*“The interview panel were solely male and I felt discouraged by this when entered the room.....”*

*“A better pre-selection of candidates should be undertaken; the interview was too anodyne, far too politically correct and lacked any sort of intellectual robustness, it avoided addressing the critical issues, and one sensed a pre-selection had already been made.”*

42. When candidates were asked about any presentation they had been asked to give at interview their views were almost entirely positive, with 96% considering the presentation appropriate and relevant. Of the 4% who disagreed, all were from Type 3.
43. The next question concerned the clarity of the interview questioning and its relevance to the candidate's application.

**Chart Z**

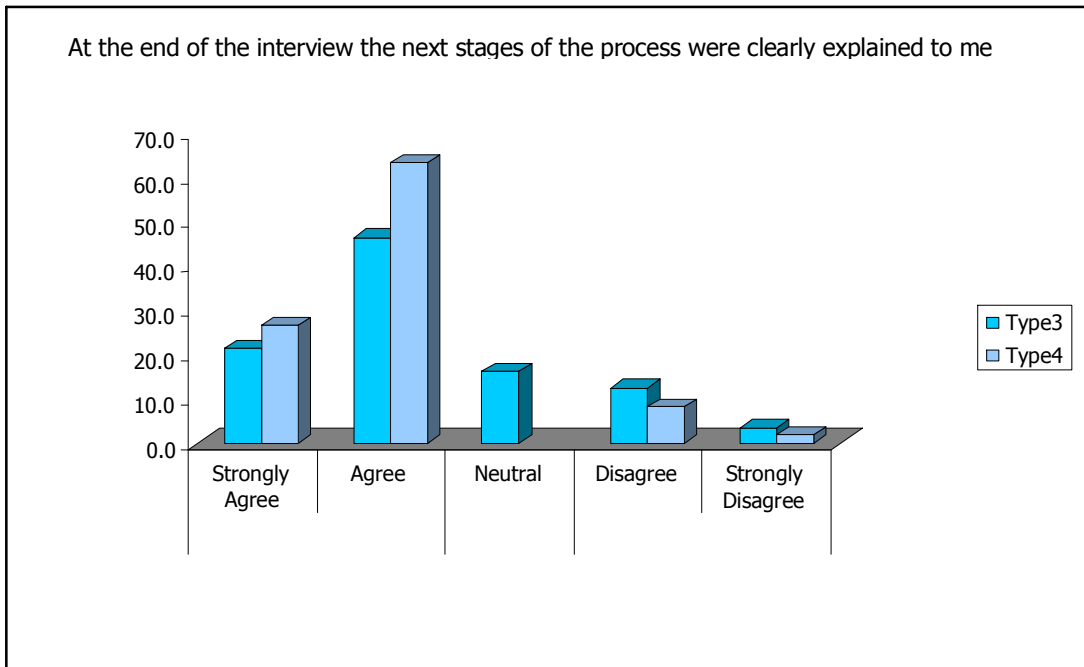


Here, 32% of Type 3 respondents thought the interview questions were not clear and relevant, compared to only 2% of Type 4s. It would follow, therefore, that people who unclear about the meaning or relevance of the questions were more likely to be unsuccessful at interview. It is possible that, had the questions been clearer to them, some of these respondents might have provided the necessary evidence to be successful.

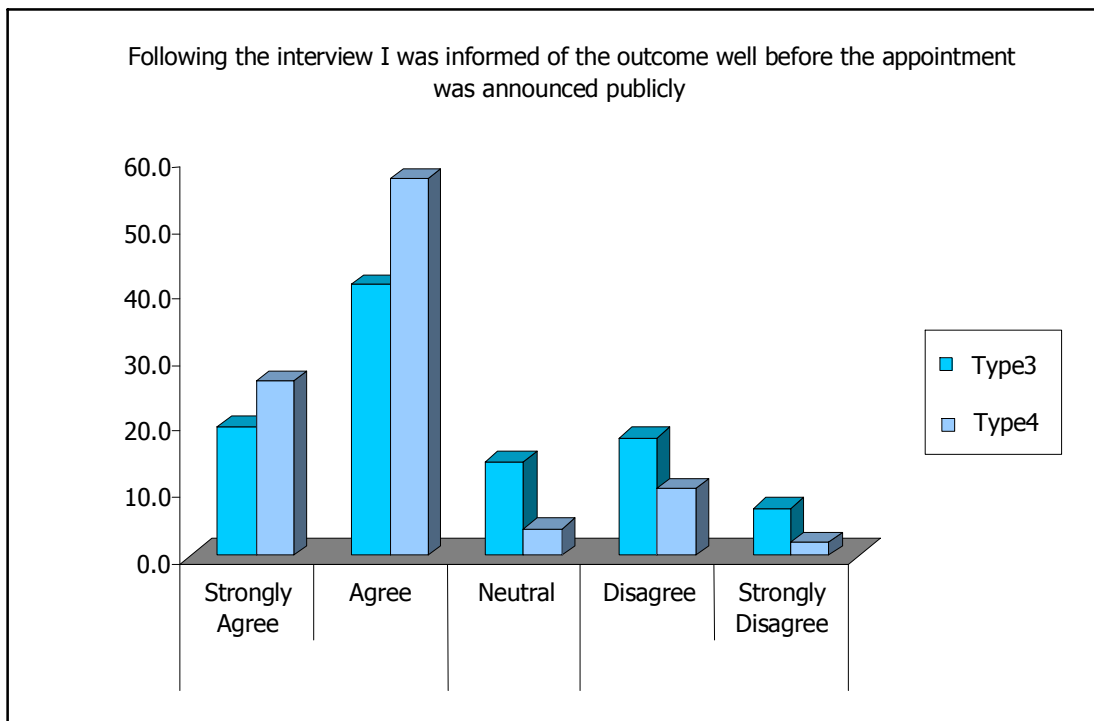
44. Of the respondents interviewed, 13.5% did not think the next stages of the process had been clearly explained to them at the end of the interview, despite this being a specific requirement of the new Code.

They were then asked about when they were informed of the outcome of their interview.

**Chart AA**



**Chart BB**

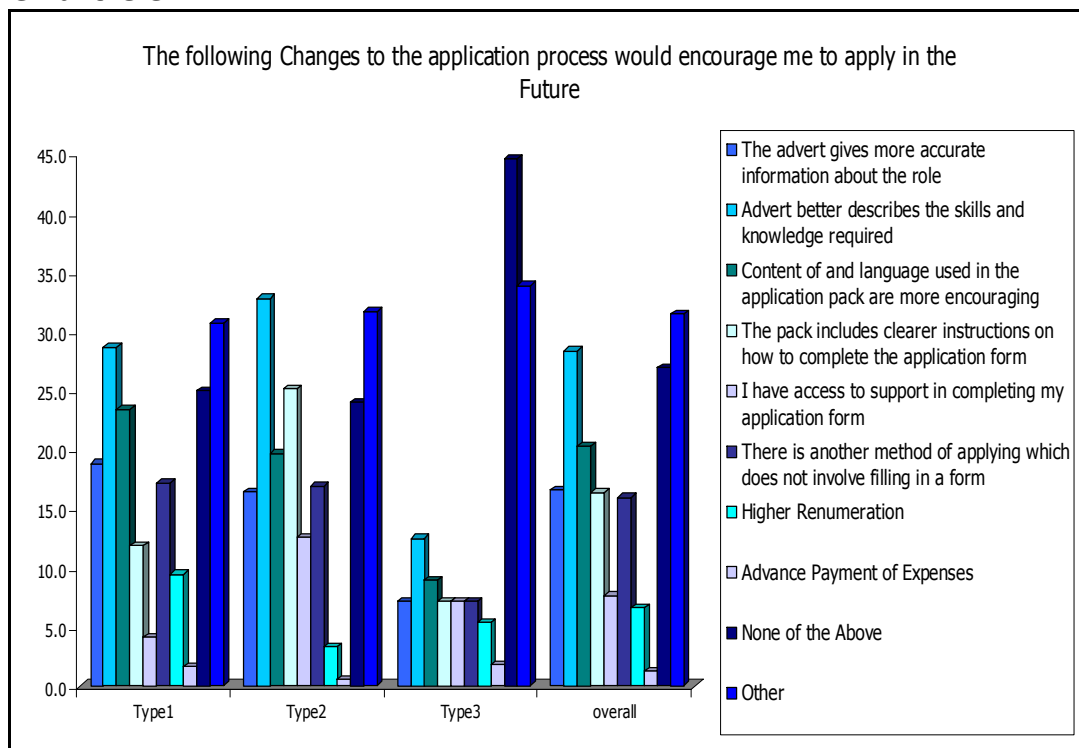


Responses here were largely positive but there were 19% of respondents, including 12% of successful appointees (Type 4), who did not think they had been informed of the outcome of their interview well before the appointment was publicly announced.

## How the process might be improved

45. All respondents who did not go on to be appointed (Types 1-3) were asked what changes, if any, could be made to the application process to encourage them to apply again.

**Chart CC**



Perhaps surprisingly, only 7% cited higher remuneration as a motivating factor here and only 1% considered advance payment of expenses significant. These views have not, however, been echoed in stage 3 of our research, where overwhelmingly remuneration was considered important as a motivating factor.

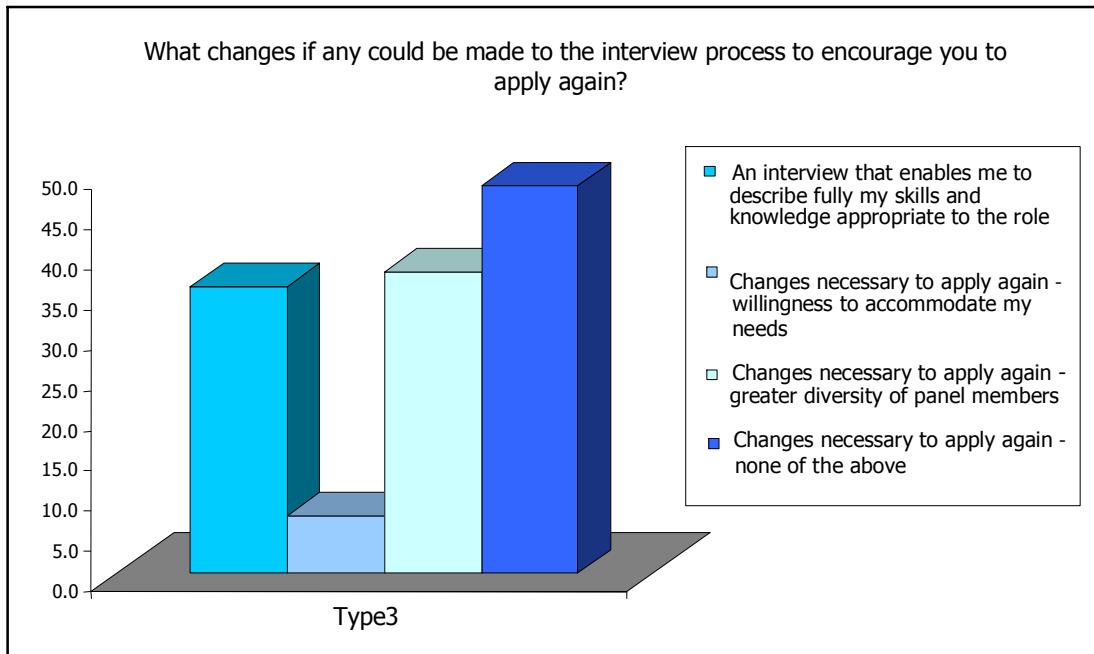
16% of Type 1-3 respondents said they would be encouraged if another method of applying were available. Only 8% wanted help in completing their application form, although this figure was slightly higher (12%) for Type 2 respondents, whose forms had not enabled them to progress to interview when they had applied. Only 16% overall favoured clearer instructions on completing the form, but again this was higher for Type 2s, at 25%.

20% overall said that more encouraging content and language in the application pack would encourage them to apply again and 28% would be looking for a better description of the skills and knowledge required. A significant proportion (31.5%) also thought there were

changes other than those listed that would encourage them to apply.

46. Type 3 respondents, being the only respondents who were interviewed but not appointed, were also asked what changes could be made to the *interview* process to encourage them to apply again. They were able to select as many answers as they wished.

### Chart DD



48% did not think that any of the suggested changes were required but 38% suggested that a greater diversity of panel members would encourage them to apply again. 36% would be encouraged if in future the interview enabled them to describe fully their skills and knowledge appropriate to the role, suggesting that they did not think they had been given this opportunity in the interview they had. This view supports the findings not only of the stage 1 research conducted for this project, but also the earlier Reid-Howie report commissioned by the Scottish Government.<sup>5</sup>

47. Finally, Type 4 respondents were asked for general suggestions for improvements to the whole appointments process which might encourage people to apply for public appointments in the future. Some of the suggestions included:

<sup>5</sup> *Diversity in the Public Appointments Process in Scotland*, Reid-Howie Associates, 2003

*“It may be helpful to candidates to explain that if successful further training will be provided - including an opportunity for them to indicate specific training requirements”*

*“I think that there should be more work done around advertising the roles to encourage younger people to apply, and also people with full time jobs.”*

*“Explain that many employers have a policy of allowing time off for public duties. Potential applicants may be deterred from applying if they are not aware of or have not checked this”.*