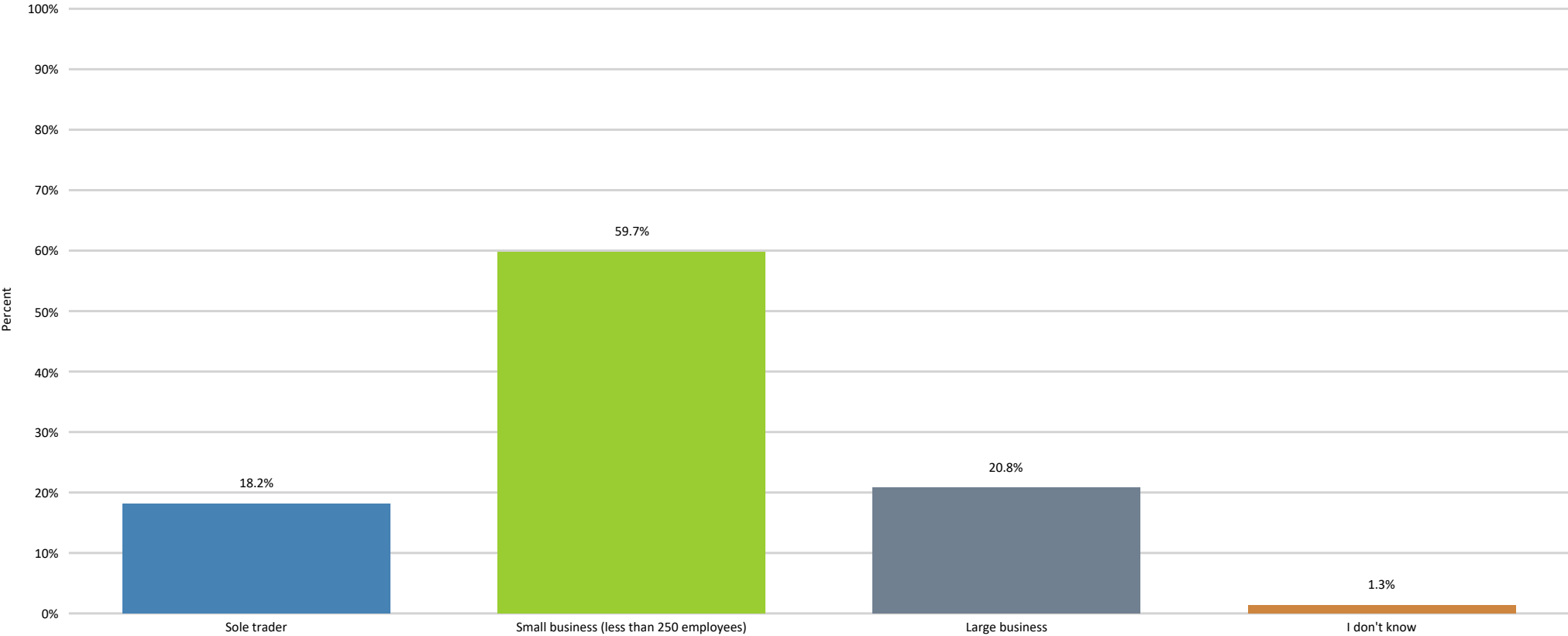


Forestry Grant Scheme Evaluation

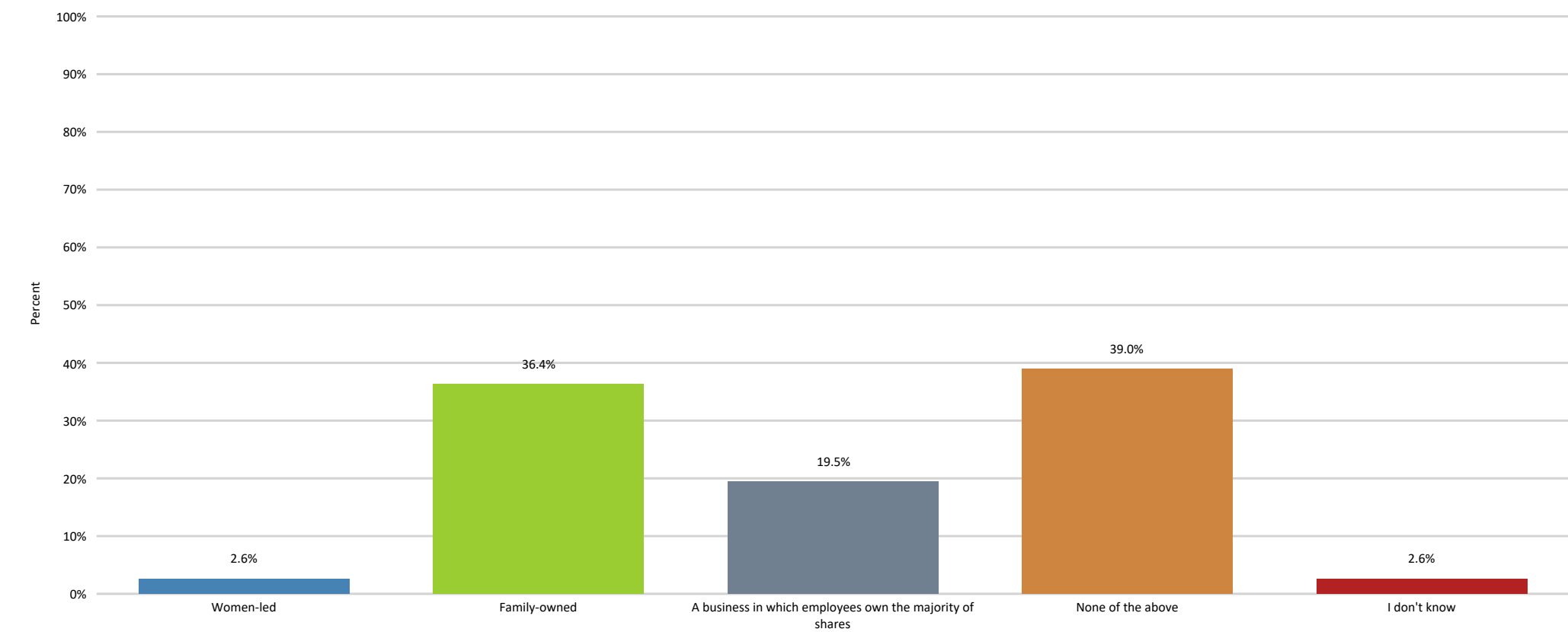
The following questions relate to the business you worked for at the time of your application to the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS).

1. What kind of company did you work for at the time of your application?



Name	Percent
Sole trader	18.2%
Small business (less than 250 employees)	59.7%
Large business	20.8%
I don't know	1.3%
N	77

2. Which of the following, if any, describes the business you worked for at the time of your application? Please select all that apply

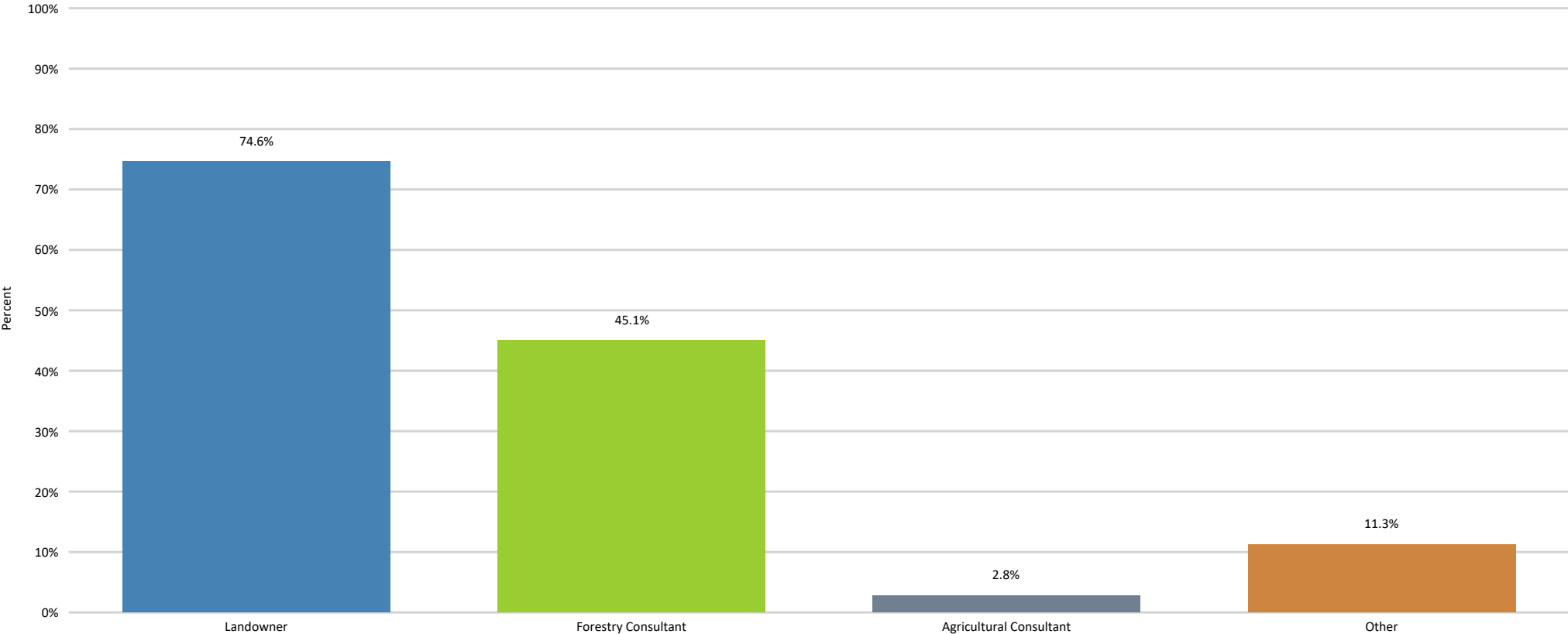


Name	Percent
Women-led	2.6%
Family-owned	36.4%
A business in which employees own the majority of shares	19.5%
None of the above	39.0%
I don't know	2.6%
N	77

The following questions relate to your experience of applying for the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS), from preparing your application through to receiving your contract.

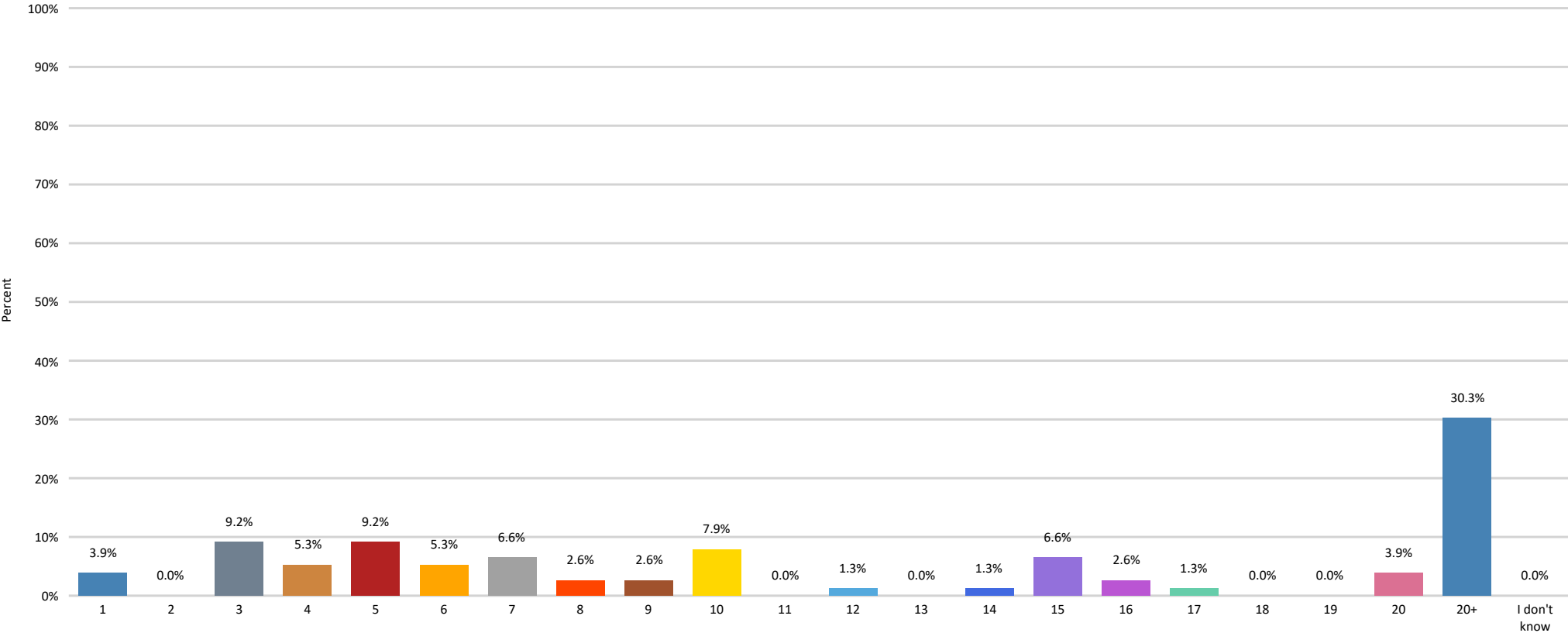
If you have submitted multiple applications then please answer the questions based on your overall experience.

3. Including yourself, who was involved in the application process?



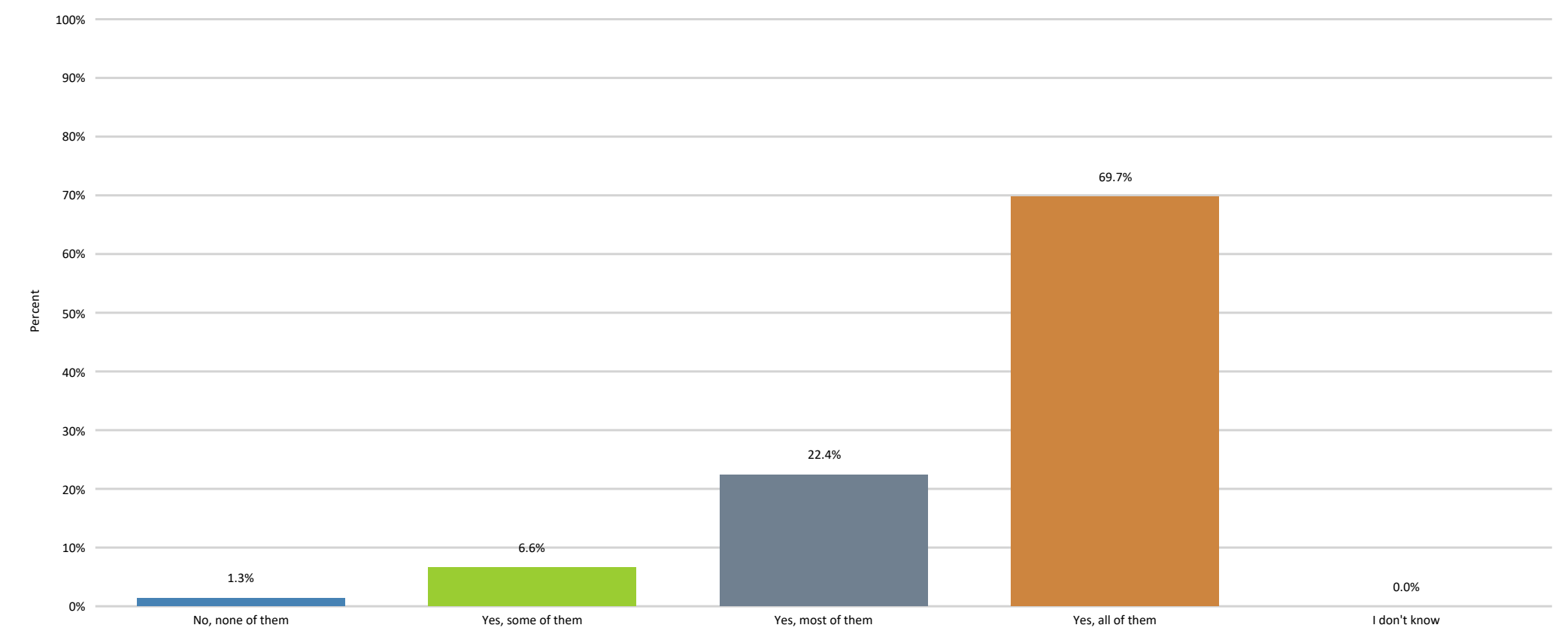
Name	Percent
Landowner	74.6%
Forestry Consultant	45.1%
Agricultural Consultant	2.8%
Other	11.3%
N	71

4. How many applications to the FGS have you submitted over the period 2014-2021?



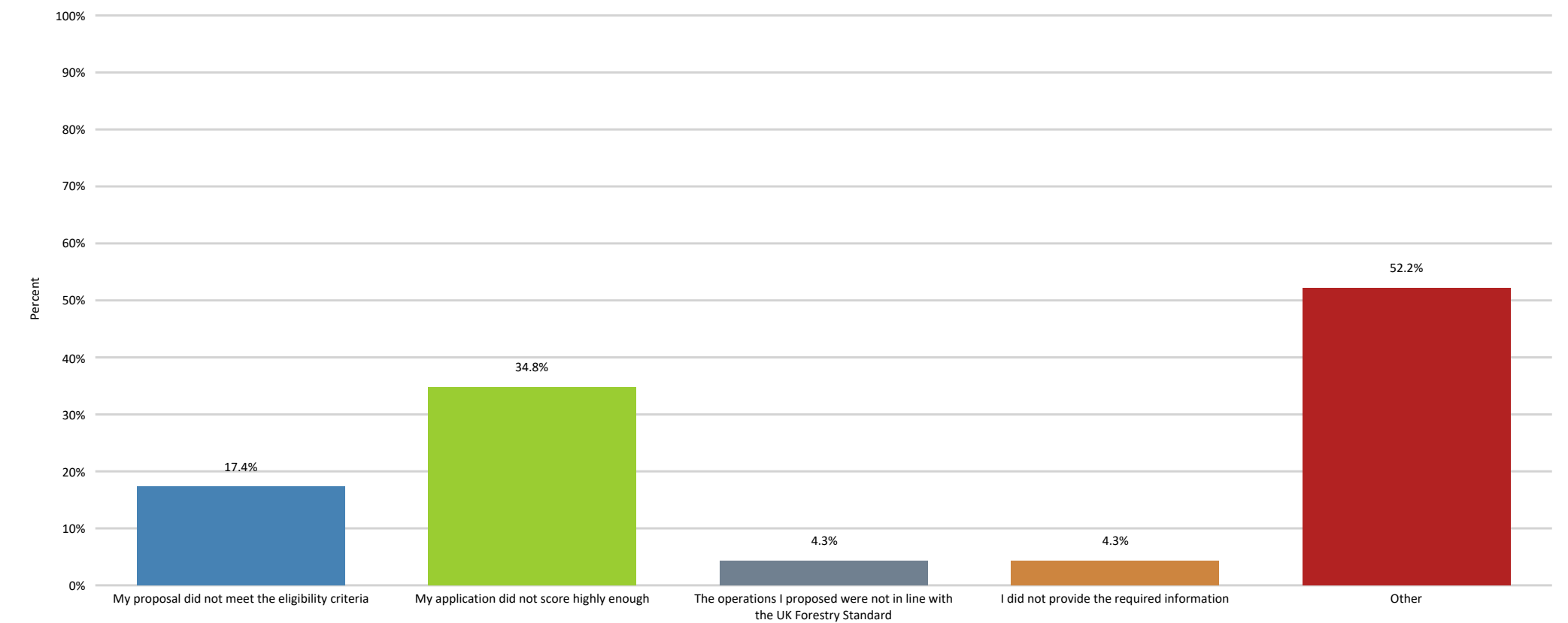
Name	Percent
1	3.9%
2	0.0%
3	9.2%
4	5.3%
5	9.2%
6	5.3%
7	6.6%
8	2.6%
9	2.6%
10	7.9%
11	0.0%
12	1.3%
13	0.0%
14	1.3%
15	6.6%
16	2.6%
17	1.3%
18	0.0%
19	0.0%
20	3.9%
20+	30.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	76

5. Were your applications successful?



Name	Percent
No, none of them	1.3%
Yes, some of them	6.6%
Yes, most of them	22.4%
Yes, all of them	69.7%
I don't know	0.0%
N	76

6. What were the reason(s) given to you why your application was not successful? Please select all that apply.



Name	Percent
My proposal did not meet the eligibility criteria	17.4%
My application did not score highly enough	34.8%
The operations I proposed were not in line with the UK Forestry Standard	4.3%
I did not provide the required information	4.3%
Other	52.2%
N	23

7. What were the reason(s) given to you why your application was not successful?

Answers

Deep peat, wrong trees, wrong ecosystem

Because of the delay in processing the application, by the time it was approved I had gone ahead with the planned restocking, making it ineligible

Species selected were not suitable.

cost of protection

design

didn't agree with evidence

WEAG

Woodland officer was a dick

Inconsistent interpretation of rules by SF staff

There were two elements that were identified

- that there were landscape issues due to fencing. This could have been identified at the initial site visit instead of at submission, as it would have avoided the cost of survey and design.

- that the area in question did not have a presence of woodland until deeper into the glen. This is actually incorrect as the first thing you drive through as you enter the glen is a woodland that has established around a gorge and small part of the river.

The woodland officer was not willing to discuss alternative designs.

Another example (which did not result in the full application being rejected but resulted in a reduction of 20 hectares of native woodland in the application area).

- The Conservator stated that the woodland would create predator shadows for a species of wader, however when I requested the information from the Conservator that was not supplied and I was told to remove the areas or the application would not be approved. The application was in line with UKFS.

Landowner withdrew from scheme once contract was issued. Was frustrated with the length of time taken to process the application and the subsequent changes in costs during this timeframe / changes in material circumstances. This was for a new woodland creation.

I applied for 10-year period in which to carry out clear-felling and thinning.

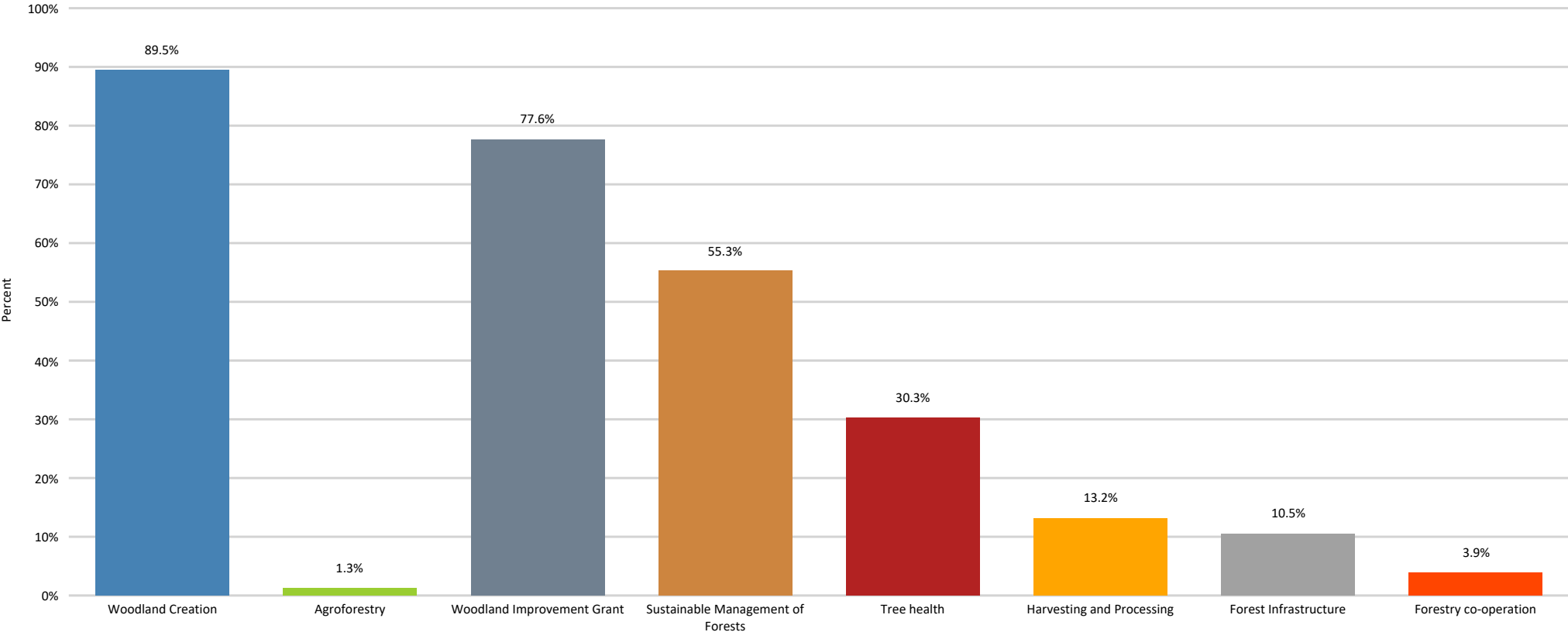
1. FCS told me that all the clear-felling and thinning had to be done in year one in spite of a 10-year application to carry out all the works.

2. FCS told me that I could not have clear-felling and thinning on the same application.

3. FCS told me that the felling licence only lasted for one year after which I would have to re-apply using the full application process.

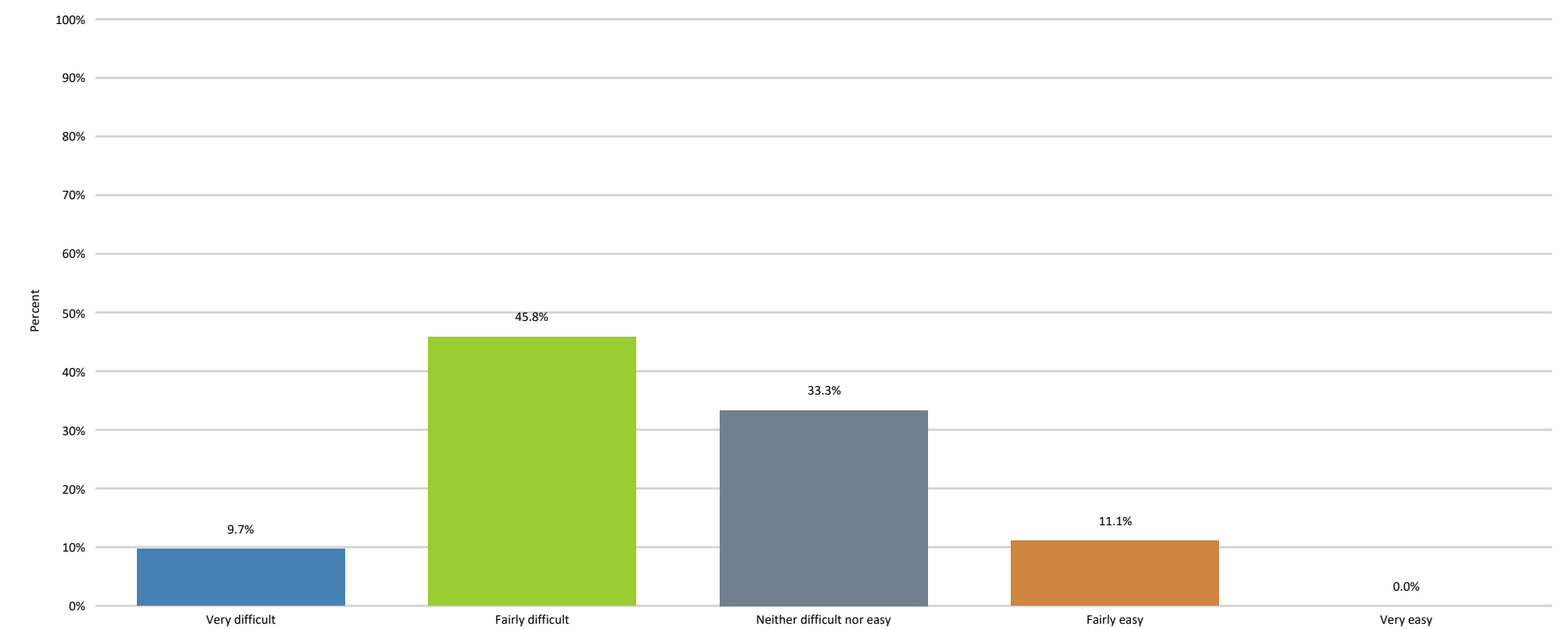
3. FCS told me initially that I had to do all the re-establishment costs (ditching and draining, fencing, herbivore control and replanting) in Year 2 until I pointed out to them that FLS would do their clear-felling in Year 1 then wait for 2 - 3 years for the peak populations of Hyllobius and Hylastes to pass before replanting in Year 4. I pointed out to FCS that if the practice of waiting was good enough for FLS, it should be good enough for the private forester and that FCS should not engage in the practice of double standards.

8. Which grant option(s) have you applied for? Please select all that apply.



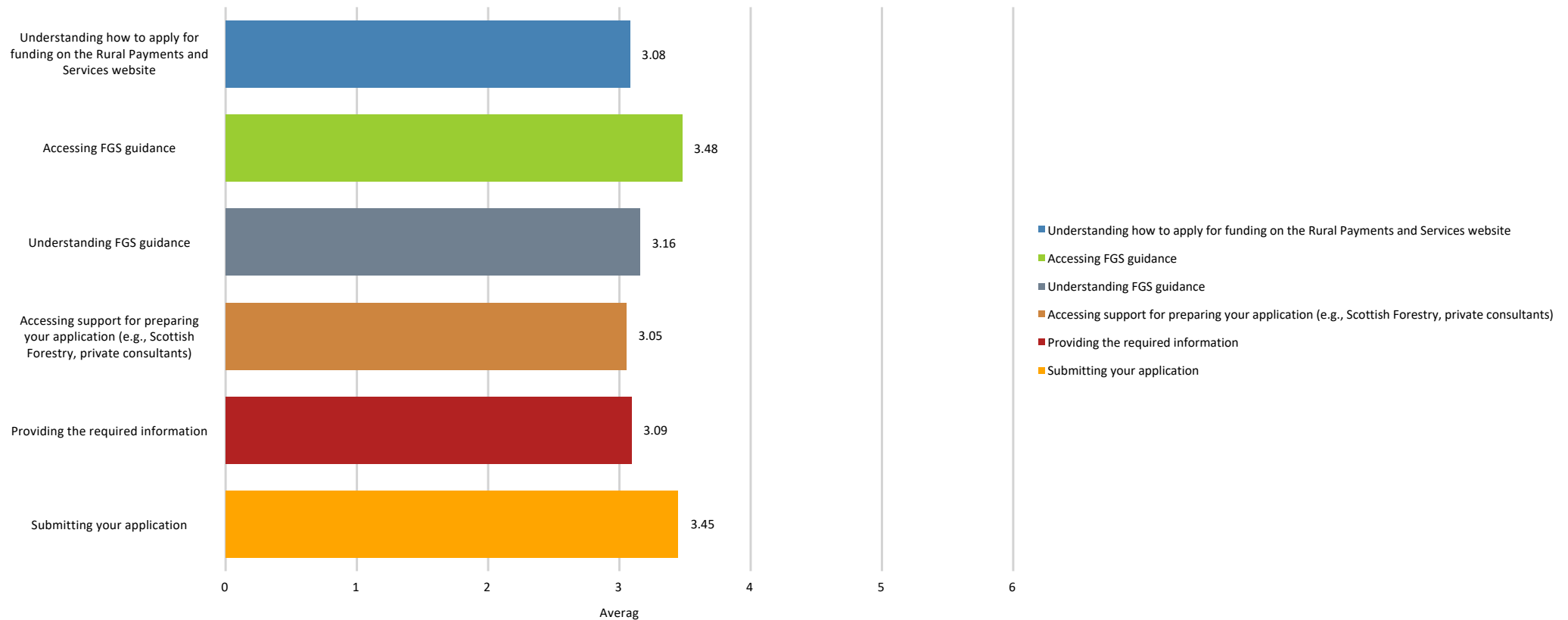
Name	Percent
Woodland Creation	89.5%
Agroforestry	1.3%
Woodland Improvement Grant	77.6%
Sustainable Management of Forests	55.3%
Tree health	30.3%
Harvesting and Processing	13.2%
Forest Infrastructure	10.5%
Forestry co-operation	3.9%
N	76

9. How did you find the application process?



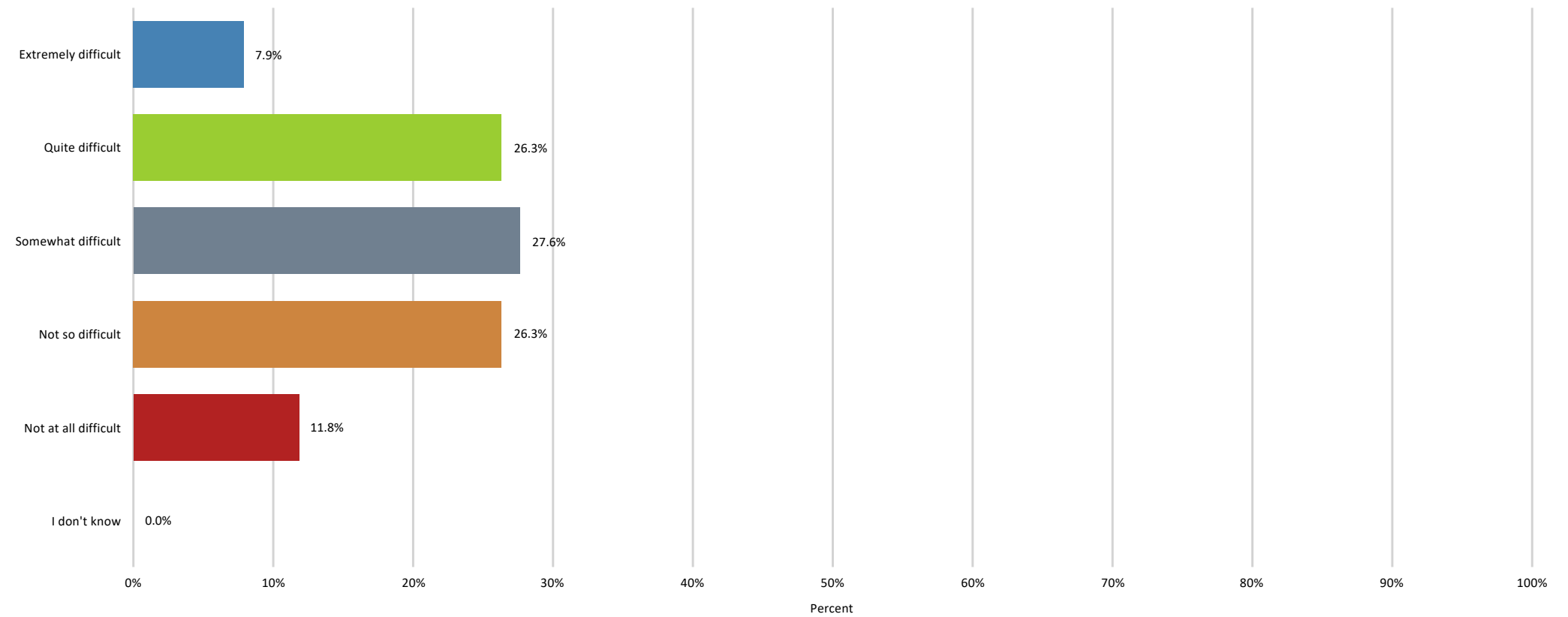
Name	Percent
Very difficult	9.7%
Fairly difficult	45.8%
Neither difficult nor easy	33.3%
Fairly easy	11.1%
Very easy	0.0%
N	72

10. Please rate the difficulty of the following aspects of the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) application:



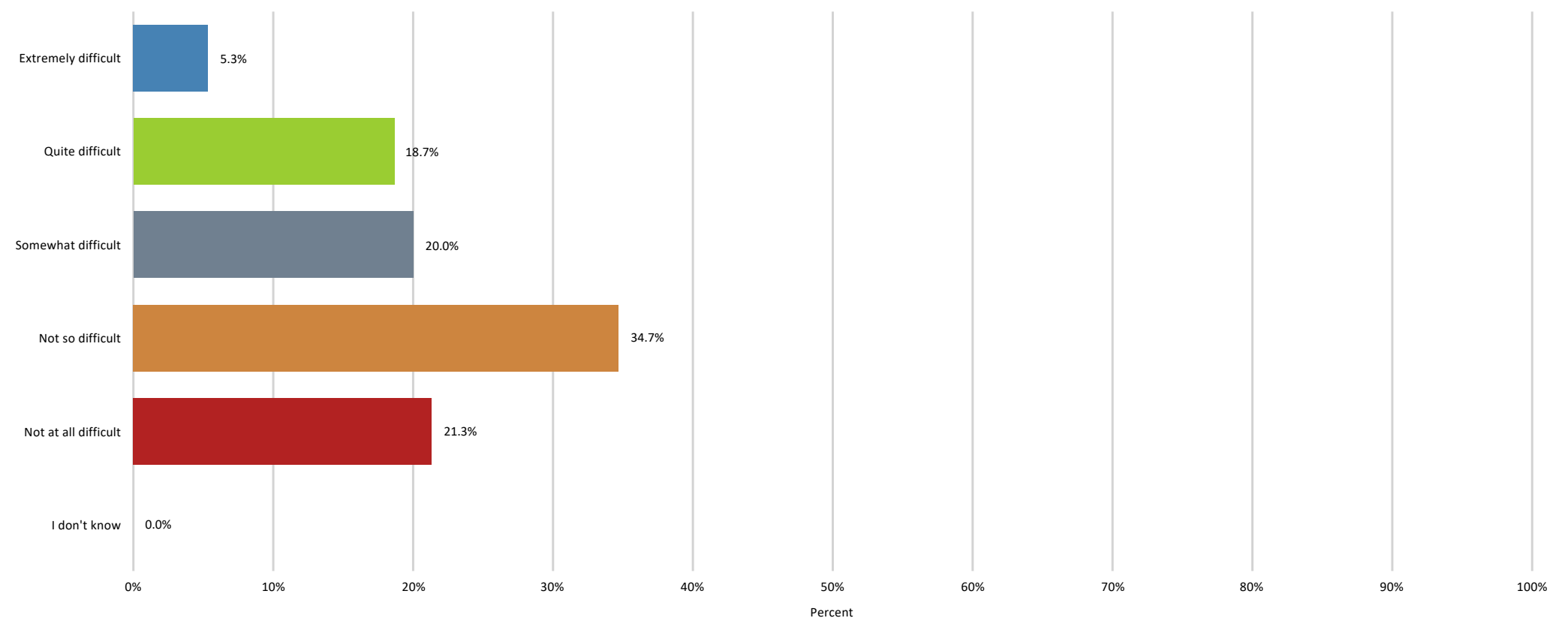
Question	Average	N
Understanding how to apply for funding on the Rural Payments and Services website	3.08	76
Accessing FGS guidance	3.48	75
Understanding FGS guidance	3.16	76
Accessing support for preparing your application (e.g., Scottish Forestry, private consultants)	3.05	75
Providing the required information	3.09	76
Submitting your application	3.45	76

11. Understanding how to apply for funding on the Rural Payments and Services website



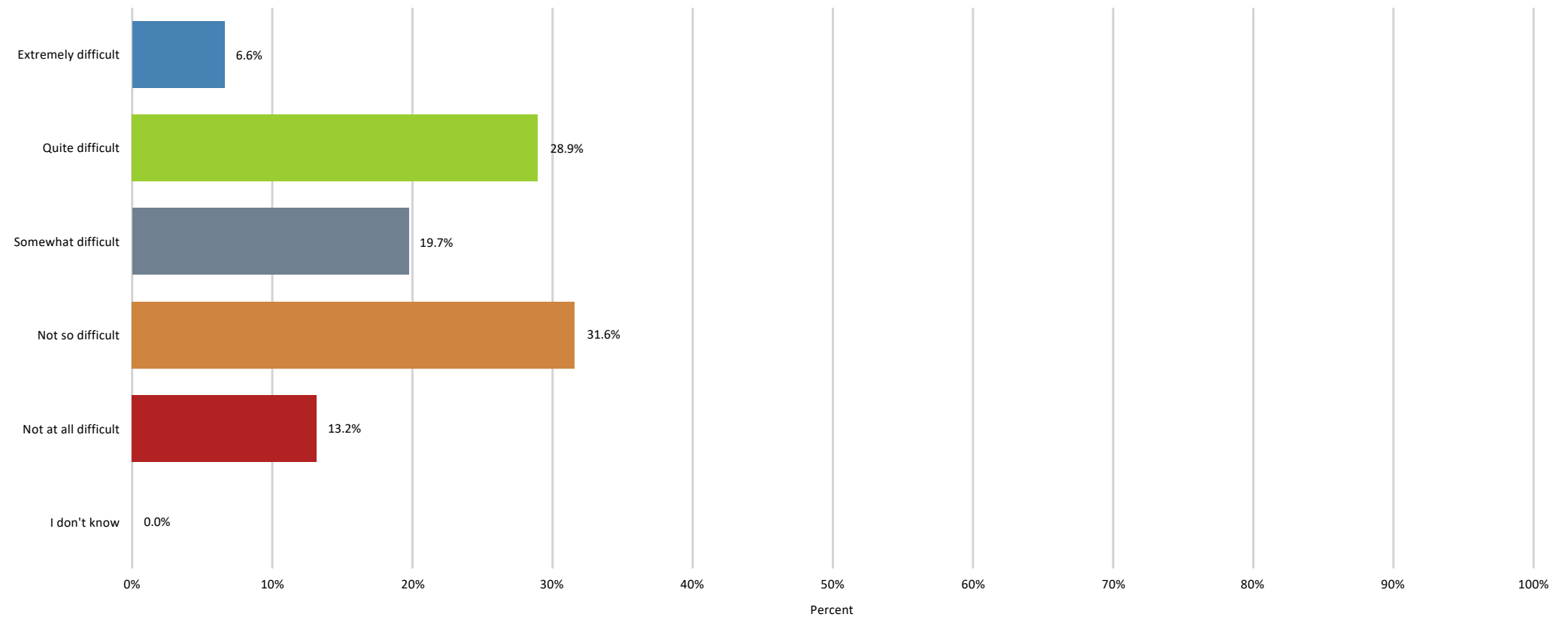
Name	Percent
Extremely difficult	7.9%
Quite difficult	26.3%
Somewhat difficult	27.6%
Not so difficult	26.3%
Not at all difficult	11.8%
I don't know	0.0%
N	76

12. Accessing FGS guidance



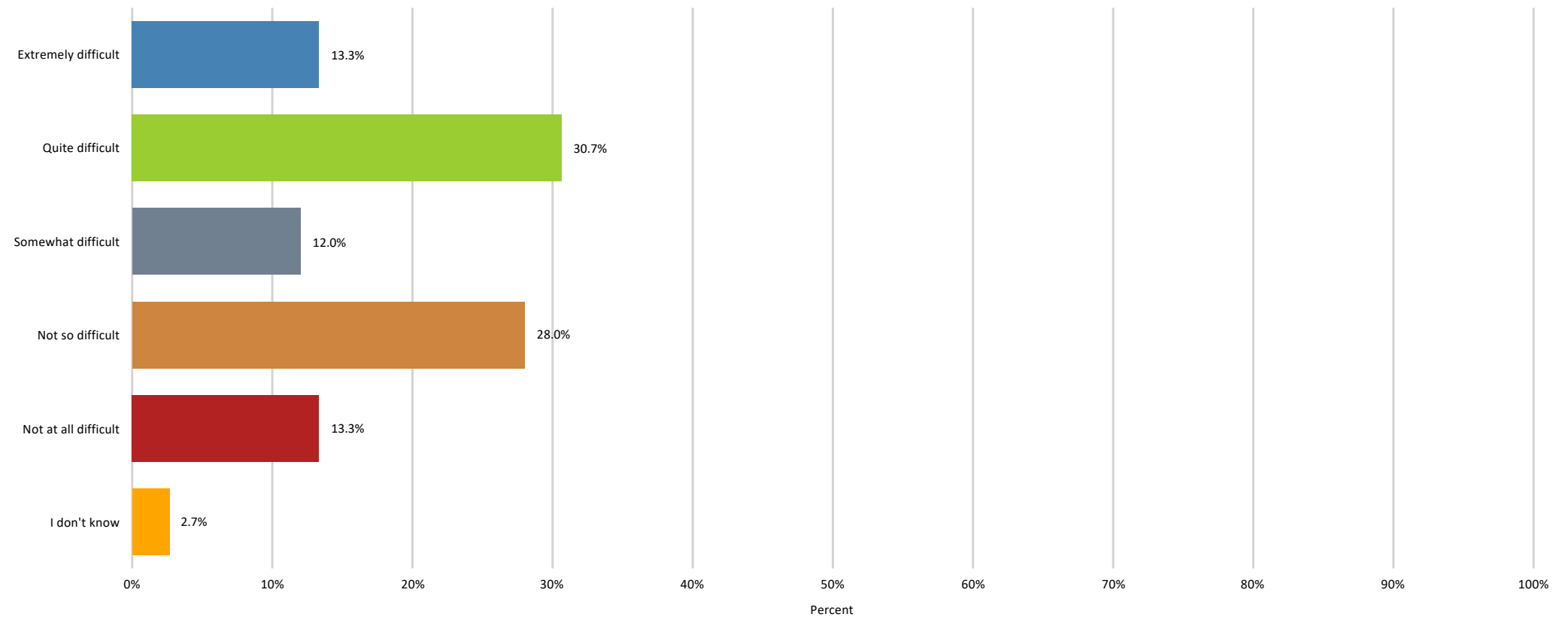
Name	Percent
Extremely difficult	5.3%
Quite difficult	18.7%
Somewhat difficult	20.0%
Not so difficult	34.7%
Not at all difficult	21.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

13. Understanding FGS guidance



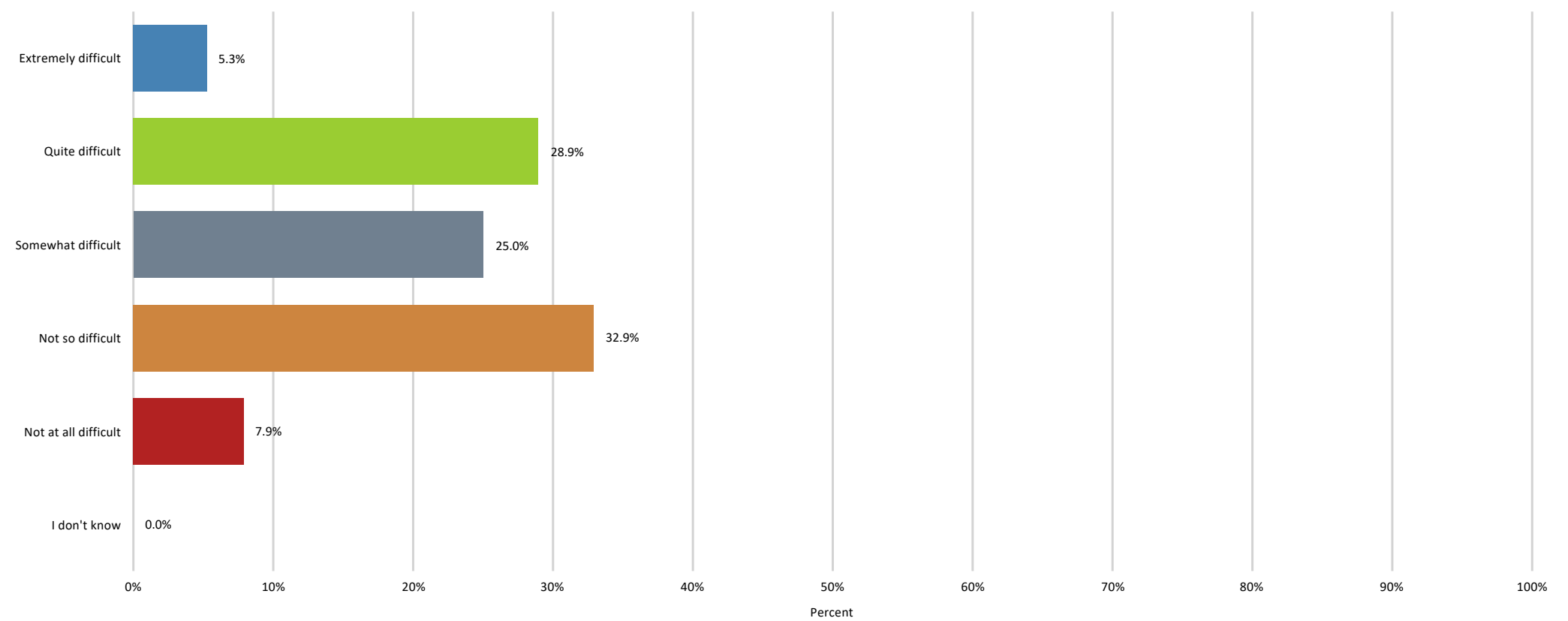
Name	Percent
Extremely difficult	6.6%
Quite difficult	28.9%
Somewhat difficult	19.7%
Not so difficult	31.6%
Not at all difficult	13.2%
I don't know	0.0%
N	76

14. Accessing support for preparing your application (e.g., Scottish Forestry, private consultants)



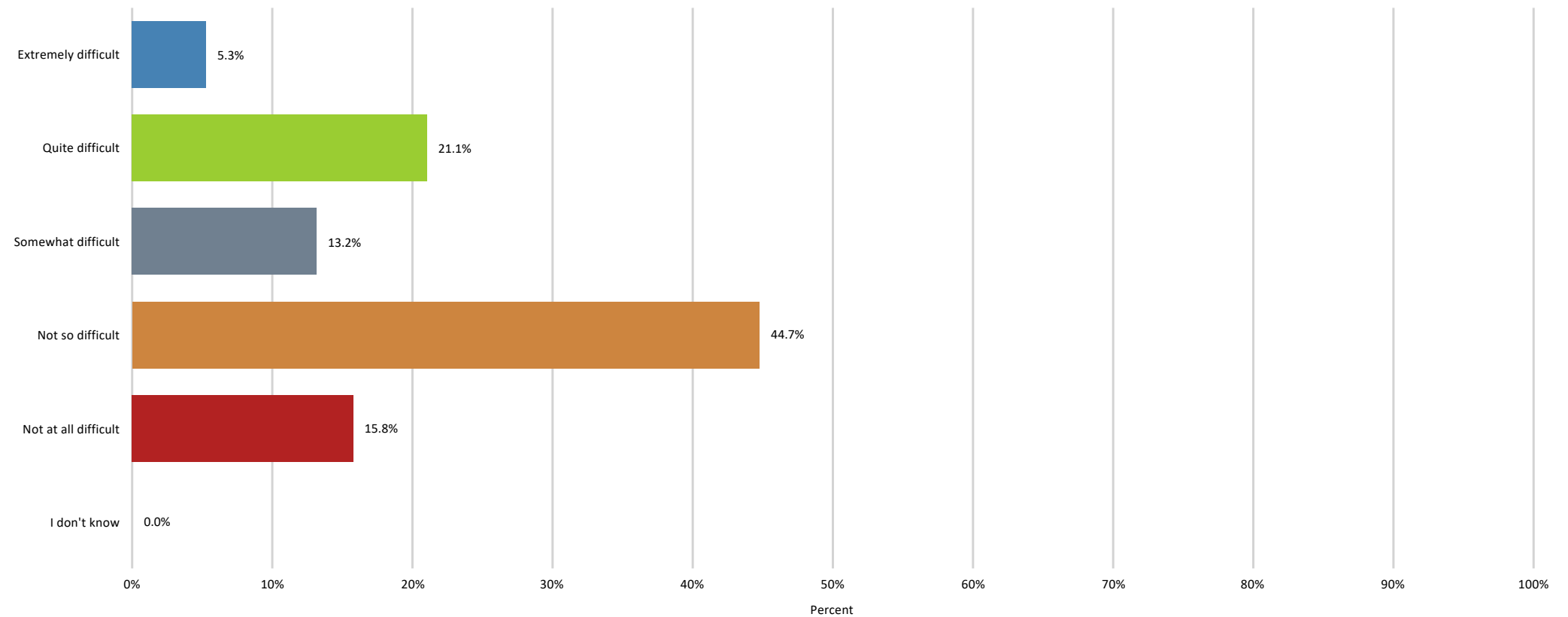
Name	Percent
Extremely difficult	13.3%
Quite difficult	30.7%
Somewhat difficult	12.0%
Not so difficult	28.0%
Not at all difficult	13.3%
I don't know	2.7%
N	75

15. Providing the required information

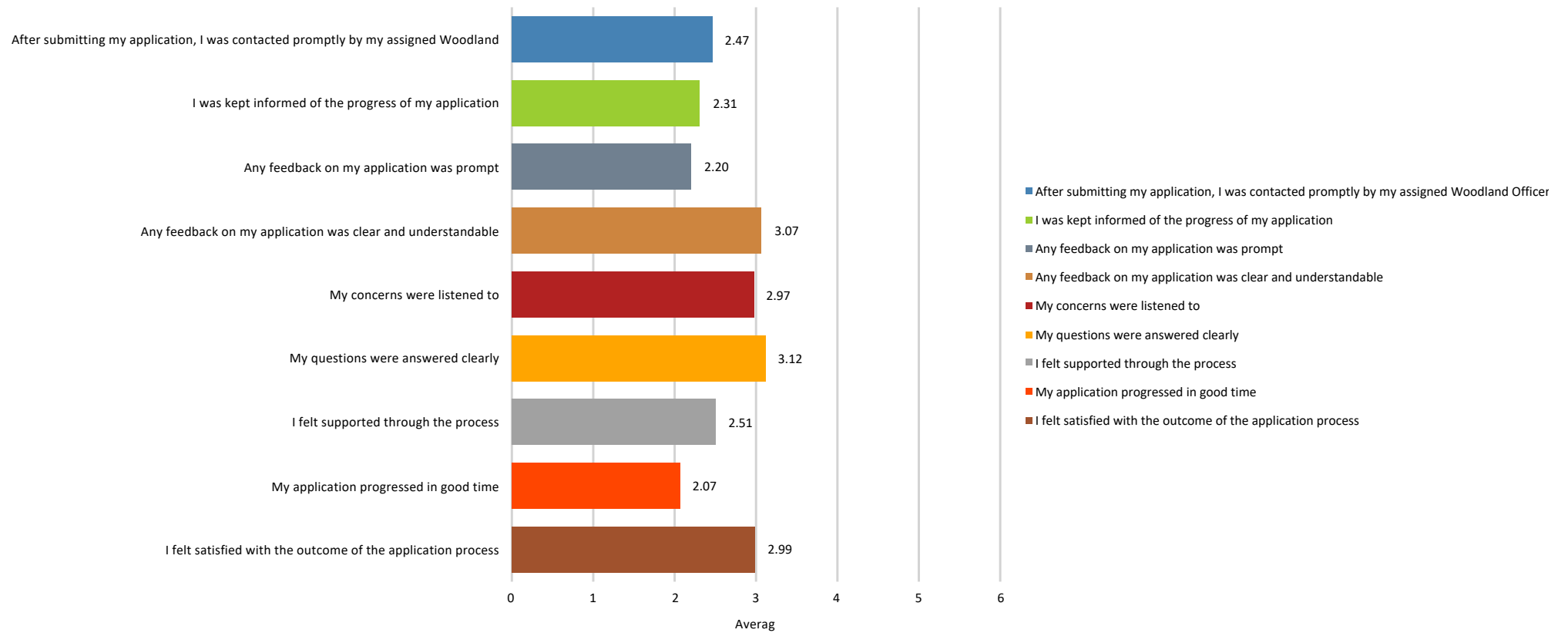


Name	Percent
Extremely difficult	5.3%
Quite difficult	28.9%
Somewhat difficult	25.0%
Not so difficult	32.9%
Not at all difficult	7.9%
I don't know	0.0%
N	76

16. Submitting your application

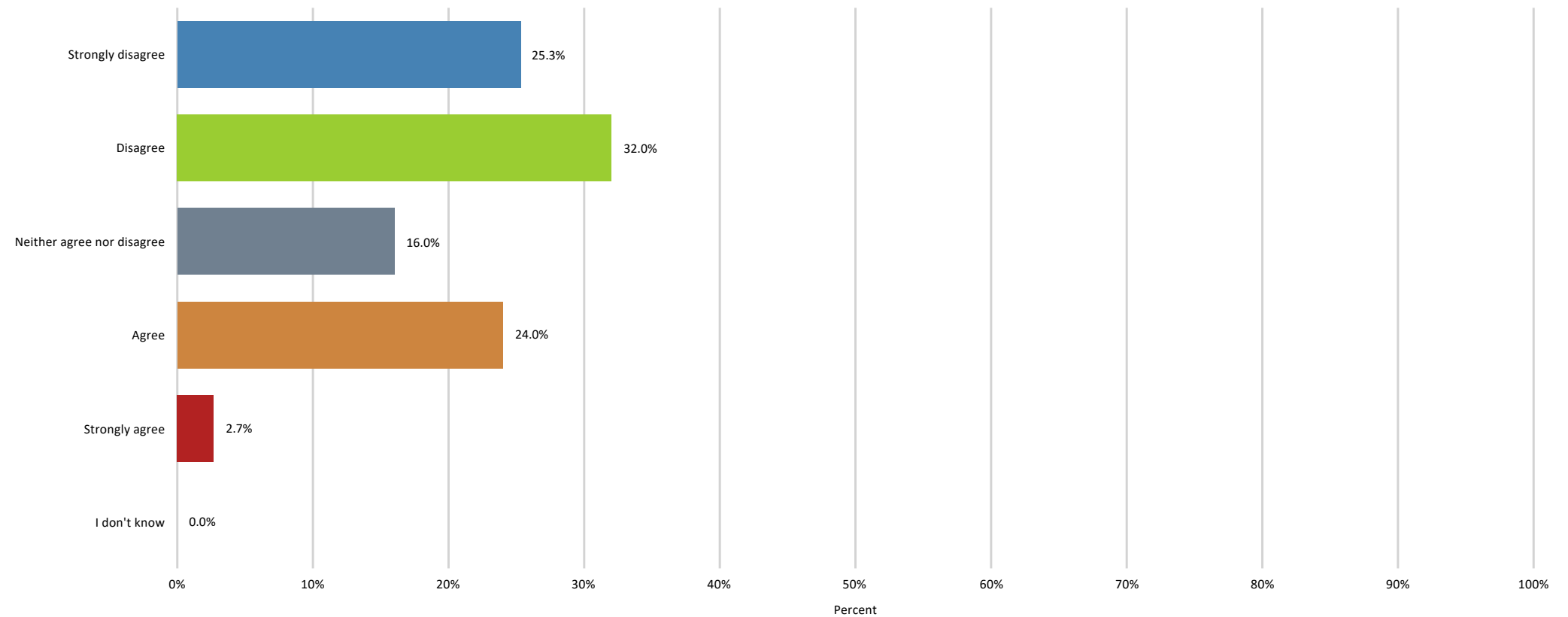


Name	Percent
Extremely difficult	5.3%
Quite difficult	21.1%
Somewhat difficult	13.2%
Not so difficult	44.7%
Not at all difficult	15.8%
I don't know	0.0%
N	76

17. Please select the statement that best applies to your experience of the application process

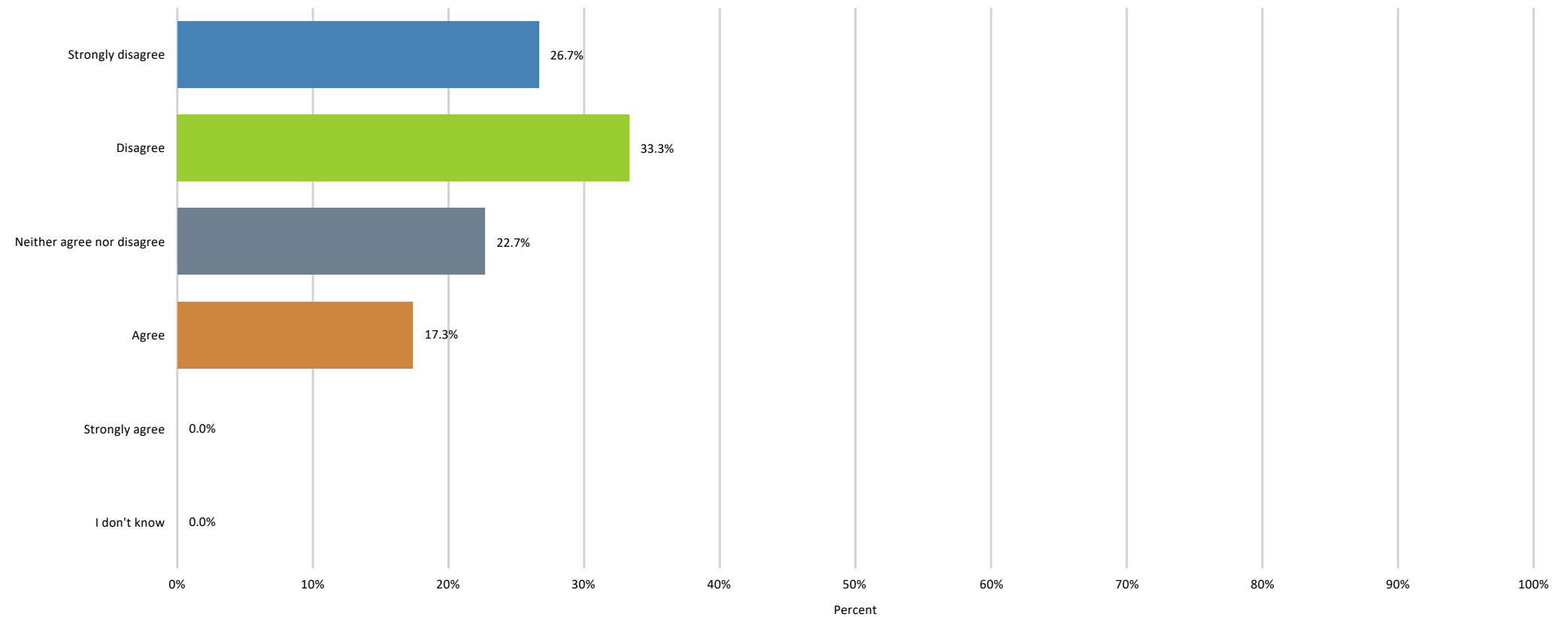
Question	Average	N
After submitting my application, I was contacted promptly by my assigned Woodland Officer	2.47	75
I was kept informed of the progress of my application	2.31	75
Any feedback on my application was prompt	2.20	75
Any feedback on my application was clear and understandable	3.07	75
My concerns were listened to	2.97	75
My questions were answered clearly	3.12	75
I felt supported through the process	2.51	75
My application progressed in good time	2.07	75
I felt satisfied with the outcome of the application process	2.99	75

18. After submitting my application, I was contacted promptly by my assigned Woodland Officer



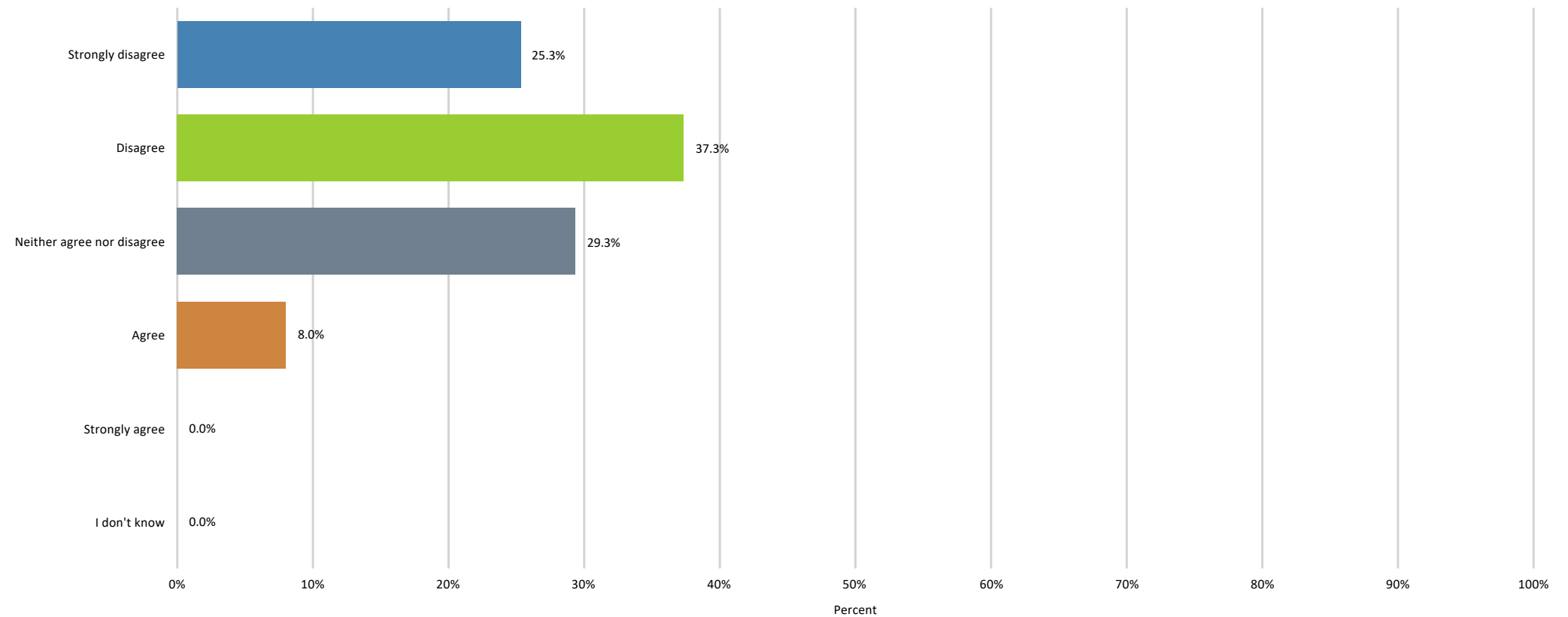
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	25.3%
Disagree	32.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	16.0%
Agree	24.0%
Strongly agree	2.7%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

19. I was kept informed of the progress of my application



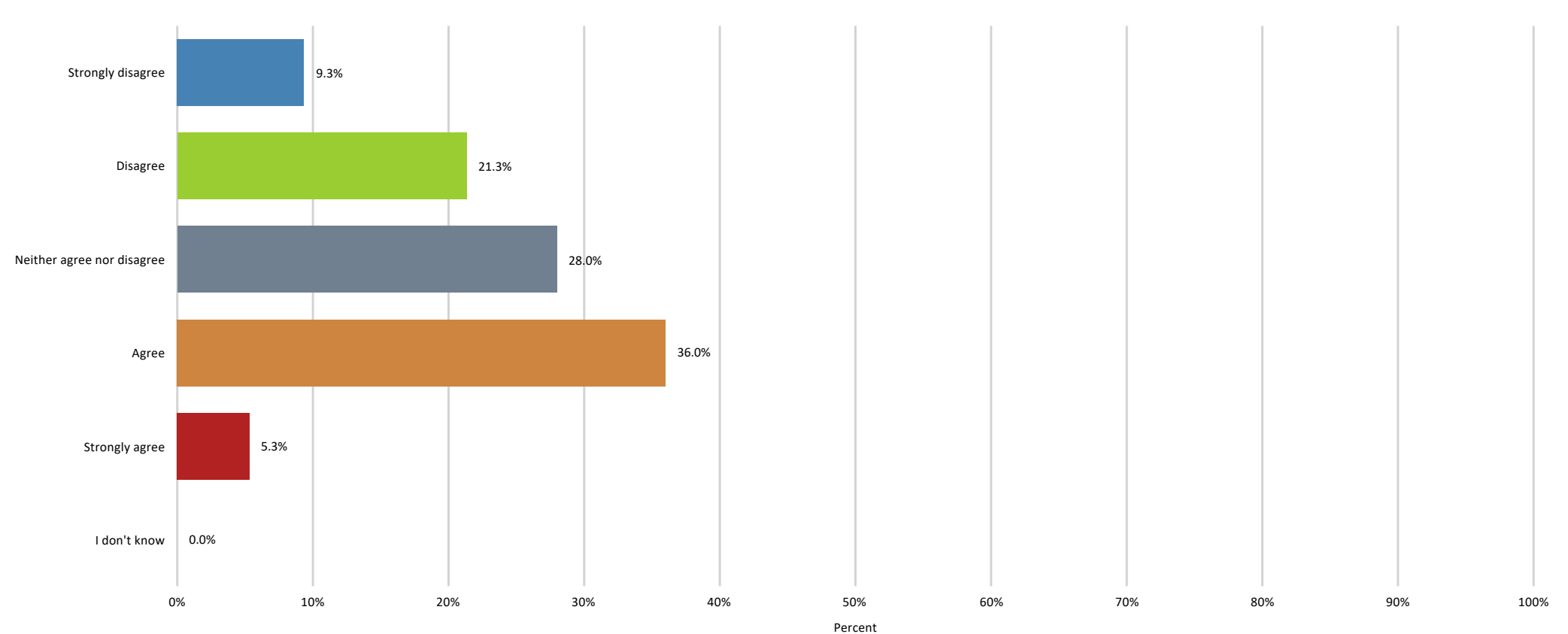
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	26.7%
Disagree	33.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.7%
Agree	17.3%
Strongly agree	0.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

20. Any feedback on my application was prompt



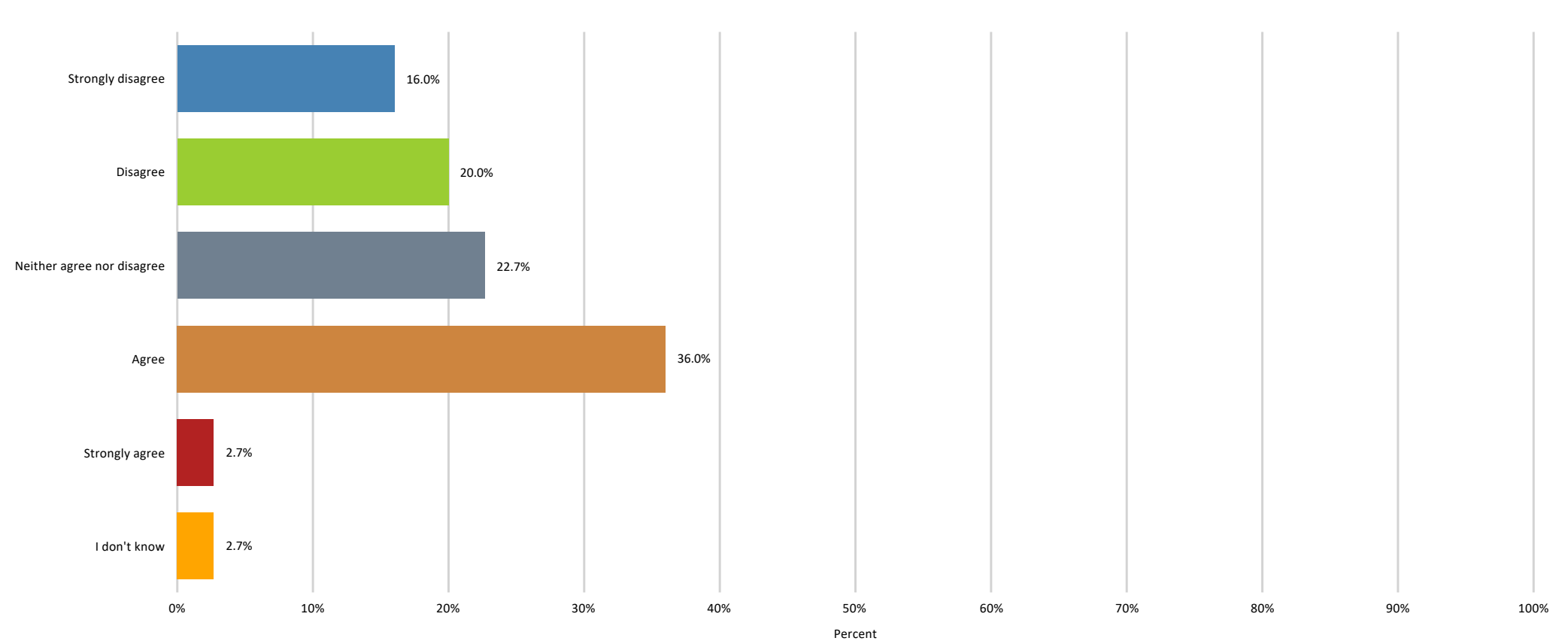
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	25.3%
Disagree	37.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	29.3%
Agree	8.0%
Strongly agree	0.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

21. Any feedback on my application was clear and understandable



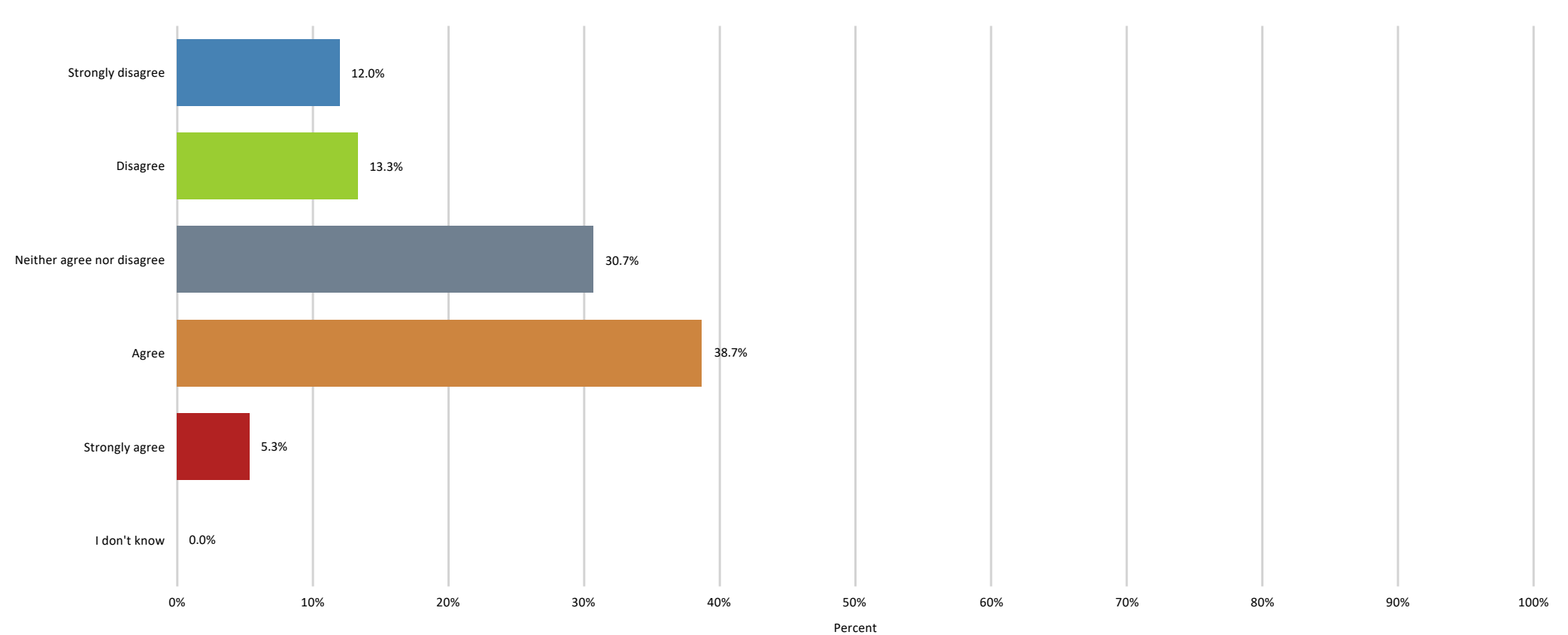
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	9.3%
Disagree	21.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	28.0%
Agree	36.0%
Strongly agree	5.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

22. My concerns were listened to



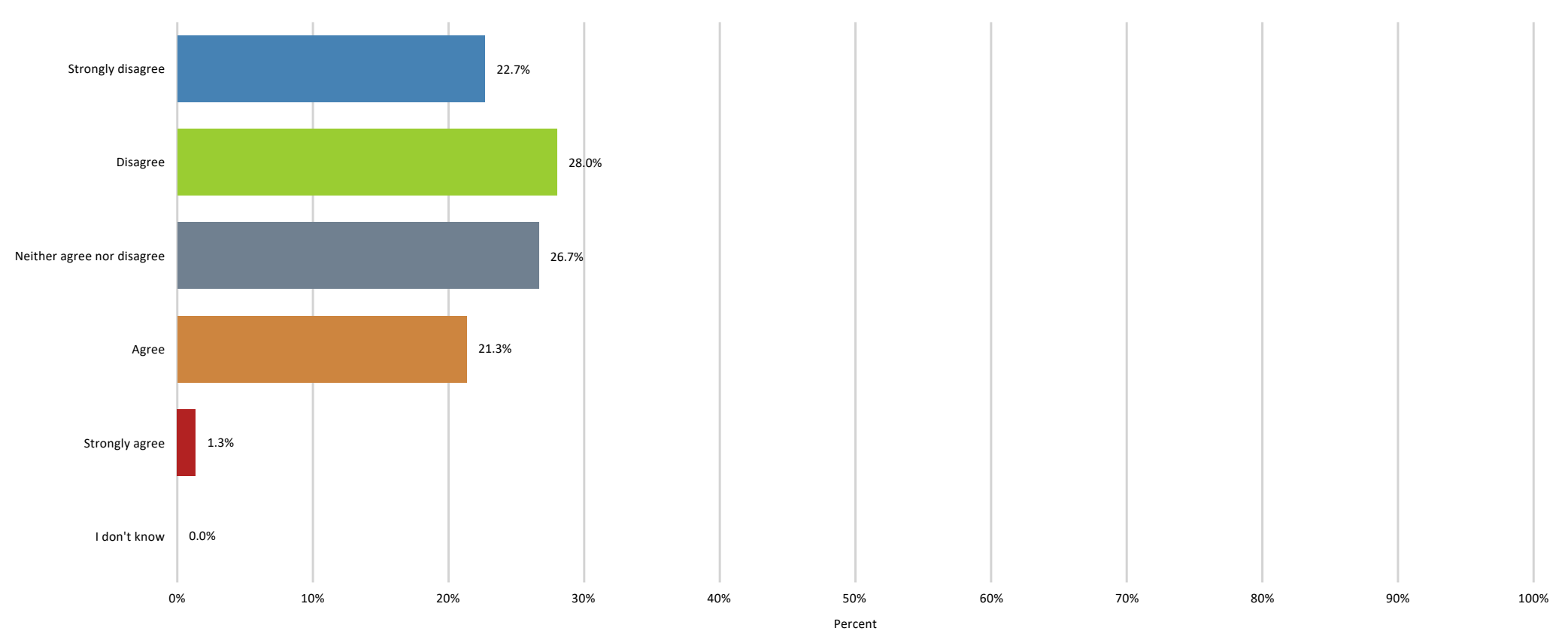
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	16.0%
Disagree	20.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.7%
Agree	36.0%
Strongly agree	2.7%
I don't know	2.7%
N	75

23. My questions were answered clearly



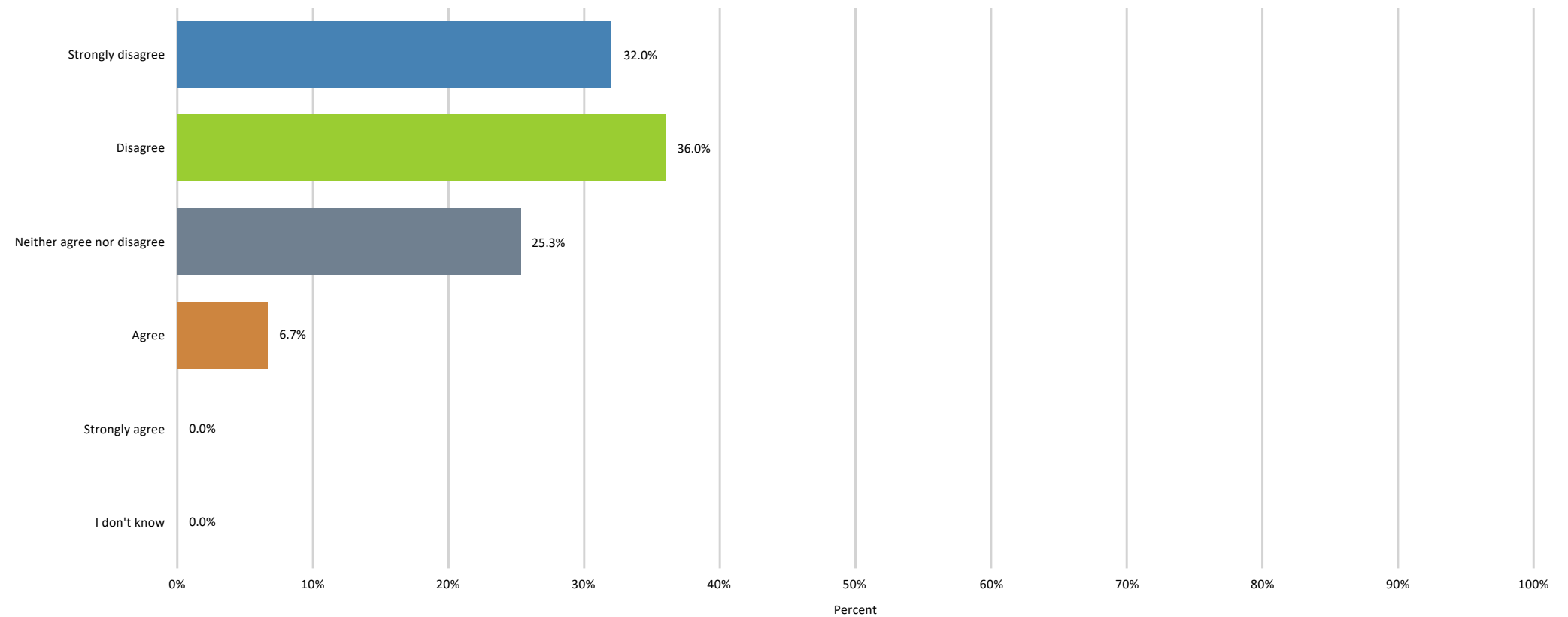
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	12.0%
Disagree	13.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	30.7%
Agree	38.7%
Strongly agree	5.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

24. I felt supported through the process



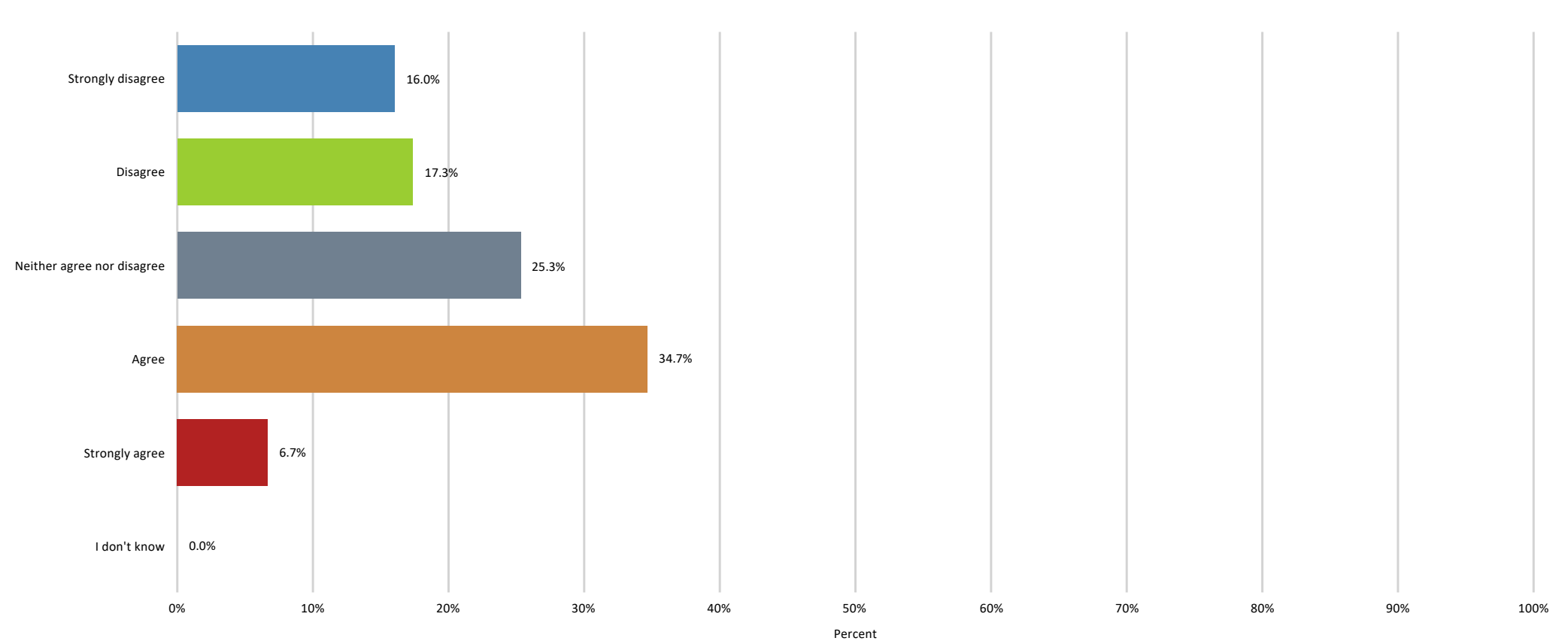
Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	22.7%
Disagree	28.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	26.7%
Agree	21.3%
Strongly agree	1.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

25. My application progressed in good time



Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	32.0%
Disagree	36.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	25.3%
Agree	6.7%
Strongly agree	0.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

26. I felt satisfied with the outcome of the application process



Name	Percent
Strongly disagree	16.0%
Disagree	17.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	25.3%
Agree	34.7%
Strongly agree	6.7%
I don't know	0.0%
N	75

27. If you have any further comments on the application process, or what could be done to improve it, please comment here:

Answers

The online guidance is very convoluted and some parts of information are in bizarre locations. The latest example I have noted was guidance on 10% or more capital grant underspend, for which penalties can occur. There is no guidance or even reference on this in the claims section - only in the penalties section. Surely such information should be in the claims section, and actually, best on the form itself too. If not detailed in these sections, it should at least be referenced.

Less onerous focus on consultation.

More urgency required

SF Woodland Officers are inexperienced. There is a concern that WOs are not there to aid delivery of the SFGS but rather to obstruct applications and to limit spend. More experienced WOs are usually thwarted in decision-taking by their Ops Managers.

the process has been built on the hoof and so it's a mess, not even SF staff understand it all. Staff cherry pick rules to apply depending on their bias and politics of the day.

the application process needs to be made easier for small scattered woodlands

More support is required prior to submission. Need to be able to submit a request for initial feedback early in developing a project and work collaboratively with case officer as a project is developed. Currently this does not form part of the formal process, though it is done informally, and there is therefore no standard requirements in terms of responses and processing time. 90% of the work happens before the application is submitted.

The pre application consultation process is broken. The organizations we are asked to consult do not have the resources to respond to applications on the public register, much less initial thoughts on draft applications. This can take months to resolve. The application process should follow the Planning process or come under Town and Country planning acts.

The criteria for approval of a scheme should be compliance with the UKFS. It's a yes/ no question. Thereafter the scheme can be scored for public benefits and if Woodland Officers don't like a scheme they can score accordingly. Now Scottish Forestry is part of the Scottish Government and we're out of EU, Scottish Forestry should become the vehicle for forestry grant payments and the FID system, which is not designed for forestry, should be removed or redesigned to suit.

Having single budget years for operations to be completed in works against scale and leads to bad practice just to meet deadlines. If constrained by breeding birds and then adjacent land use requirements, the working period can be as short as 5 winter months in one financial year. Given poor weather and a dwindling resource base to do the work, meeting the deadline for claims can be challenging, leading to variations anyway.

It would be better in a multi year window to allow time to get the works right rather than comply with a budget deadline.

If the Scottish Government want to deliver 18000 ha a year of new woodland, the present process is as big a barrier as landowner inertia and lack of planting resource.

The single biggest issue is the use of RPS for which FGS just feels shoehorned into - a forestry specific online portal would vastly improve the process.

As I'm sure you're all too aware, SF are massively under resourced. Certain things take longer than others. Priorities are not dealt with evenly. Grant funded LTFP will sit around forever without being assessed while FPA are dealt with relatively quickly but an inordinate amount of time is dealt with sweating the small stuff such as 0.01Ha queries, while much larger issues are left untended.

Woodland Creation scheme are taking years to get through and goal posts seem to be changing, particularly with inexperienced WOs. Endless minor changes and reiterations instead of dealing with them all together, often around such minor issues of compliance that it beggars belief. Suggestion, get some staff, pay them a decent wage and support/ management them adequately.

Very hard to follow the detailed rules and requirements.

Process of progressing a FGS Woodland Creation application is becoming ever more difficult to be approved, and specifically the conifer model is not supported equally with the others. A general consequence of increasing the complexity and constraints on application is pricing out small to medium sized landowners or clients from making an economic application, resulting in larger investment style clients being an overwhelmingly dominant player in woodland creation. While a solution to this is not without its challenges, perhaps funding (or part thereof) the application progress would help identify afforestation suitability with lower risk to the land owner, which may also contribute to regulating the land prices for other land uses. The funding through FGS is not linked with inflation, and depending on the timing of the grant model, after several years the funding value deteriorates substantially, which we are currently experiencing. If funding is tied to an inflationary escalator, or otherwise, this would further help meet government planting targets, and support projects with sensitive cashflow.

The process is straight forward, its the people that make it complicated. Inexperience and lack of authority make this more challenging, Woodland officers can no longer make pragmatic decision based on experience, knowledge and commonsense, meeting them on site is pointless as they dont commit to anything and often defer to line management, meeting more senior staff is even harder as they are busy and rely on their woodland officers so round in circles you go.

At present the lack staff in SF together with a good working knowledge of forestry at times

Woodland officer input is important and valued, however their caseload sometimes means that they do not respond in a timely manner

Approach was 'by the book / application by numbers' i.e. have to fill in box A with info 'Y' etc so process could be administered / scored by office admin with minimal checks/oversight by a forester. Instead a forester administers whole process very inefficiently - slow, minimal feedback, obscure process.

Complexity of scheme means some inexperienced woodland officers struggle to give good guidance & support because they don't understand the scheme.

Common to encounter fundamental blocks in the process (scoring issues, consultee issues etc) late in the application process because guidance and adherence to process was poor.

Consistency across all conservancies and individual woodland officers would help. Whole process has become more involved and time consuming in last few years. Much with good reason but this will be contributing to not meeting national planting targets. As an agent I'm having to spend more time and charge my clients more. Coupled with increased operational costs, against grant rates largely unchanged, woodland creation is becoming less financially viable, particularly for smallscale landowners and diversifying farmers. If you want more small, integrated woodlands, the system needs to be tailored to these types of landowners, rather than the large scale investment planters.

Most did conclude well, but it totally depended on the woodland officer .

I find the process quite arduous and never a pleasurable experience. This is not all at the fault of Scottish Forestry, but also a clunky online system on Scottish Rural Payments doesn't help matters.

I'm not sure whether 4000 words is sufficient, but having submitted ~ 100 applications, the following unfortunately are mostly issues I have been having with the administration:

I'm never updated on applications, I usually do the chasing.

The quality of surveying carried out by Scottish Forestry staff is dubious and never shared. The should be a transparent and stadardised process for inspections.

I'm never updated on scoring criteria changes; a prime example are with LTFP grant applications (e.g. after winning LTFP contracts across several conservancies over the first 3-4 years of SRDP II, I'm suddenly advised that applications don't score high enough and I should refer to the guidance with no helpful suggestions).

This is also apparent with certain capital items, justifying funding for the fencing of Sitka spruce areas springs to mind.

I've had a number of situations whereby the integrity of third party surveys carried out by Chartered Ecologists, Ornithologists etc. have been questioned by Scottish Forestry staff, purporting to be authorities on certain matters where their qualifications and experience say otherwise.

The 28 day stakeholder consultation period should be enforced. There has been many times where I have been asked to re-contact stakeholders after this period. Also, stakeholders seem to be contacted by Scottish Forestry outside the formal periods, often at the 11th hour of receiving approval for contracts, which is incredibly frustrating.

There is a degree of business process design in the application process but it fall over both in the process and geographically. Not all comms are acknowledged- service level agreements are never explicit, the process often feels adversarial, rather than a business process. This was fine when WOs had a sense of being 'promoters' of the Scottish Forestry Strategy. Now that they are functionaries of a process, the training in process design understanding and delivery needs to be better. Attempting a web based application is fine for the scale required and its efficiency, but is not suited to a process where the processor initiates so many quality criteria which are so discretionary and open to subjective appraisal.

That the forms are on and off the web, some locked some not, some inputs only capable within the SGRPID system, others by word/pdf forms, leads to confusion and missed timescales where SLAs are not (seemingly?) routinely managed.

Before the recent impetus for new planting, we took the view of not pursuing woodland creation work unless expressly requested by existing clients, as the process was so fragile and the outcomes so uncertain that we considered it a business risk to get too involved. We looked for other lines of forestry work first.

Depends on the Woodland Officer.

Never been notified who the woodland officer is.

Central Ops Manager does not want to engage with the Forestry Consultant he pass info onto the Woodland Officer were clearly it has come from a third person.

It depends on what conservancy you deal as to the response and reaction you get. In one case it was extremely drawn out and overly bureaucratic with questions being asked that did not relate to the point of process. Due to the fact that you are reliant on their decision it is extremely difficult to argue your case in fear that you will be treated differently and even more slowly.

Difficult to contact SF staff

Slow responses from SF staff (with requests for unrealistic responses once they have made contact)

Inconsistent advice from SF staff.

SF staff give the impression of being under resourced and having higher priorities elsewhere

Level of support and co-operation between me as agent and local SF Conservancy has declined sharply over the last 15 years. Before, progressing an application was a two-way process, this became more like a bureaucratic if not adversarial relationship. Stabilising the turnover of Woodland Officers would help.

It is not clear above whether the Application Process referred to above includes the preliminary Environmental Impact Decision and Scoping Processes pre- application where these relate to Woodland Creation and Sustainable Management of Forests.

The whole combined process is onerous, time consuming and fraught with bias and personal views, beyond legal and required industry guidance, from regulators and stakeholders that make the applicants ability to predict what will eventually be agreed and then approved very uncertain.

Successful applications result from compromise by the applicant towards stakeholders interests/demands but that does not necessarily mean that the best long term environmental, economic and social outcomes result from the whole process.

The Rural Payments website is notoriously difficult to follow, but once accustomed to it, becomes easier. Some of the guidance is 'hidden away' e.g. claim rules found only in the 'penalties' section and many other examples.

Inputting the actual data online is the simplest part of the entire FGS process, particularly when compared to consulting stakeholders, the EIA scoping stage, mapping etc.

During the development phase, it can be extremely slow to receive a response from Scottish Forestry, mainly because staff seem overloaded with work and under significant pressure

Inconsistency and constant moving of goal posts. Lack of clarity of guidance and "on the hoof" decision making by NO in interpreting guidance and eligibility

I find that the time line outlined in the code of practice is rarely held to and responses/requests can feel like they are a delaying tactic. Some examples are;

- told that the office was busy and that it would be a while before they were able to get to it.
- told it would most likely not need to go on the public register, but it then was put on after a significant delay so the process took over 4 months
- Ask to redesign an enclosure even though a design was agreed in a meeting with both Nature Scot and the Woodland Officer, which caused a delay in progressing the application and increased costs to my client, which were difficult to justify.
- Ask to clarify with a contractor if their quoted price included welfare unit. I feel this is the role of the FWM, not the Woodland Officer.
- After getting feedback on an EIA determination my response with justifications and proposed changes to satisfy the items raised was ignored so I assumed they were to a satisfactory level that enabled me to progress to submission. However after submission I was told by the Conservator that he didn't feel my response was sufficient so ignored it. That resulted in another redesign, adjustments in the Rural Payments screen, and a new set of documents. All this time had to be written off.

No feed back from agent

I have noticed that applications are being processed very slowly which has had a material impact on our business and on the way landowners view the undertaking of FGS applications.

Often a variety of surveys are being required, most of which are not necessarily needed due to the ground conditions, but woodland officers are claiming that they are required so that all bases are covered from their end. This is compounded by these decisions being made without the woodland officer ever viewing the ground conditions and/or the relation to the new woodland creation proposal with the ground conditions.

There has been issues with response times from woodland officers and conservancies in general also. With extremely excessive time lapses between responses and zero communication in the interim to notify ourselves as a business and for the landowner as to why there is a delay and a potential timescale for resolution. This has caused landowners to lose patience, look to escalate the excessive time delays with the conservancy or in one instance, pull out of the new woodland creation altogether.

There has also been issues with incorrect mapping data held by Scottish Forestry and the National Forest Inventory influencing a decision on whether or not a new woodland creation scheme would be eligible for grant support. An area of open rough grazing was mapped incorrectly as existing woodland and due to this the woodland officer was unable to progress the application for grant support.

My experiences varied across the different applications I submitted. Some more positive than others. I did receive good support from the Woodland Officers involved. There was difference in speed of response between earlier and later applications for which indicated that workloads had increased making prompt responses harder. Also we applied for a less common grant option and there was little knowledge available about this grant. Available information and knowledge on what was required would have speeded the process up and avoid duplication of effort. However the outcome in the end was good and very satisfied with support from SF.

-
- Prompt feedback from Conservancy after pre-application submission or full application submission.
 - Active engagement from conservancy for site visits at an early stage to identify constraints and agree actions required for complex sites.
 - Proactive feedback and progress reporting during the application process between different stages.

Applications have taken too long to process in some instances. Minor design changes, additional surveys that arguably are not required have caused delays.

SF Conservancies generally seem to be under resourced and have a high staff turn over. This makes it difficult for Woodland Officers to respond timeously to applications and the get consistent input on applications. While more senior woodland officers are experienced and usually feedback comprehensively and in good time, many assistant woodland officers seem to be given caseloads that they cannot handle alone and are not adequately supervised/supported to review and feedback information in good time. This results in frustration for applicants as it is difficult to know how applications are progressing, and likely contributes to the high turnover in Woodland Officer staff as they become overwhelmed and frustrated.

Requirements for applications are growing in complexity and requirements sometimes seem to vary from conservancy to conservancy and woodland officer to woodland officer. Greater consistency in what is required and when would enable applications to proceed more smoothly.

The current grouping of LTFPs within a BRN that are not "geographically separate" is confusing. No definition is available as to when properties are considered to be "geographically separate" and according to a woodland officer this is left to the discretion of Operational Managers. This leads to it being difficult to know when forests require to be grouped, but has also led to grand claims and the production of LTFPs that do not require them and will have no action (thinning, felling, restocking etc) undertaken within them for the duration of the plan. This leads to the grant being claimed when very little benefit will be received to the management block and only a lower grant rate being unavailable when clients need the support to produce comprehensive designs for these forests.

SF continue to be slow to respond to questions and seem unable to drive the process but rather seem happy to allow delay from scoping process and consultees not responding within the given timeframe

Better trained staff in Central Scotland with a more positive approach to the Forestry Grant scheme would have helped in the failed application.

To submit an application to a level that is ready for scoring is quite a lot of work and the outcome is uncertain. It would suit a private estate that is investing forester time into the application process to have a two stage process: pre-application with a statement of interest, the feedback of which would indicate that SF would be strongly supportive of the application, or that the application might not make the required scoring. Also the pre-application stage would indicate whether the application would be eligible for full cost funding rather than standard cost.

One of the time consuming elements of applications through SRDP is in relation to how SGRPID divides up the forest into fields and perhaps I should have been proactive in amalgamating fields that cover larger forest areas being managed in similar ways, in order to reduce the time taken to fill in data for each field when applying for or claiming FGS. I am glad that mapped areas of natural regeneration do not have to be mapped as individual fields for regeneration grants, although the guidance has stated otherwise.

Some of the FGS supporting information templates could be improved, e.g. to include spell-checker and make fonts consistent.

Scottish Forestry is currently not fit for purpose with poor reaction times to enquiries and FGS consultation in all conservancies. It has replaced FCS which functioned well with independent conservancies and years of small refinements. The replacement centralised organisation lacks the knowledge and staffing levels required to deliver ever more ambitious targets to an industry which is short on education, staffing, long term stability and a strong independent voice. In short the FGS scheme is slightly to complex, with too much emphasis given to certain stakeholders (eg RSPB & Woodland Trust) with Scottish Forestry not able to effectively run the system to benefit commercial and native woodland development.

The application process is labyrinthine to put it mildly.

1. One would think there would be one application form to carry out all the operations with a box to tick to show which type of application was being applied for.
2. Stakeholders (the general public and other consultees) have more say than the woodland owner who is growing and managing the trees.
3. The amount of detail required is far too onerous. (Actual numbers of trees to be cut, actual species and actual tonnages to be extracted, etc. FCS has indicated that they want one to measure every tree.)
4. The mapping standards are impossible to comply with.
5. There is nowhere on the application form to say how each compartment is to be managed.
6. The 10-year time period is far too short.
7. The application form should have a box to tick if the woodland is to be used for carbon credits.

Woodland officers have become disempowered, no point asking them for advice or guidance as they wont or cant give any. There is now an industry within an industry providing surveys for everything regardless of the likelihood of it existing. We have been told to budget for every type of survey and to get it done as SF wont make a call without it. Sf were concerned about how much money is spent on tree protection but not surveying!! Hybrid/home working does not work!!! impossible to get hold of a woodland officer or ops manager, you may as well take their mobile phones off them as they don't answer them, cant ring the office cos nobody's there, save the rent close the offices! use the money to enhance the capital items or to pay for surveys!!

Application was subject to delays of many months at SF, with no information or feedback.

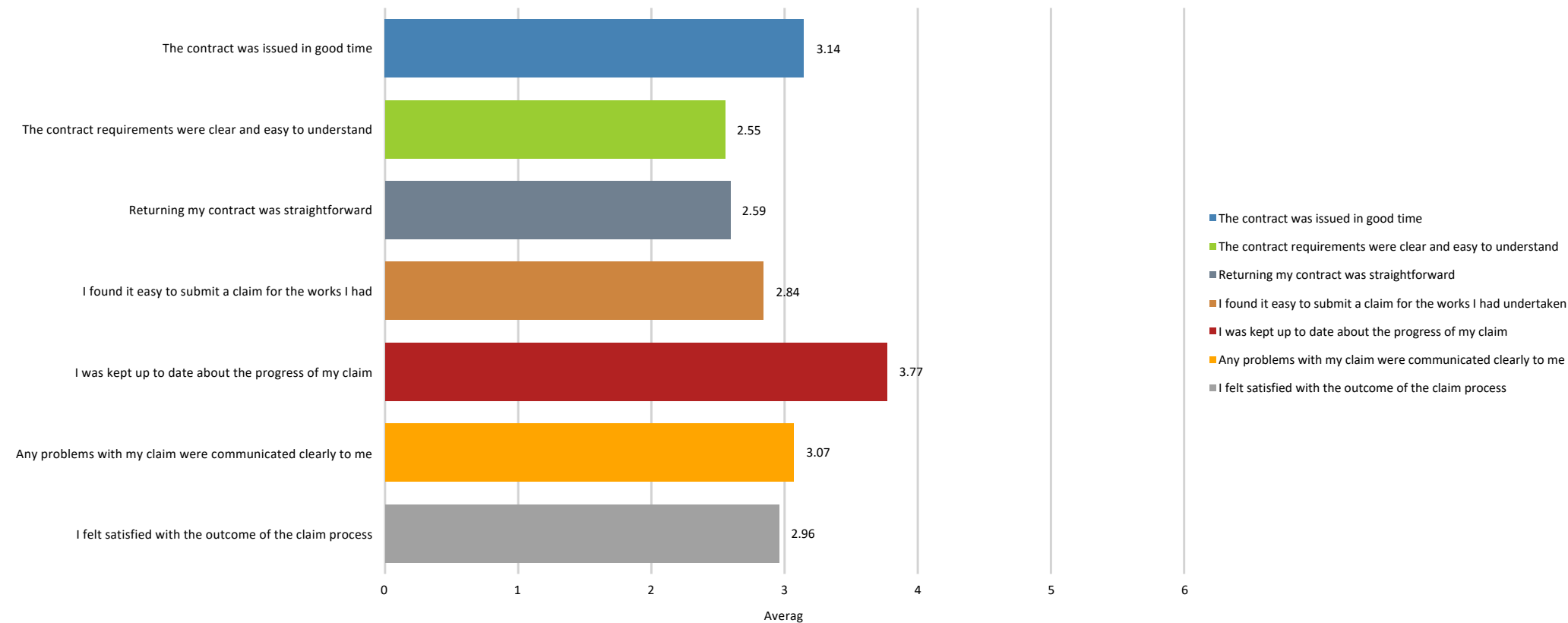
Employ more competent and diligent Woodland Officers!

There has been a significant change in how applications are handled from the start of the scheme in 2014/5 to now in 2022/23. This is part due to the increase in the number of applications SF are receiving, part due to the increase in complexity of the applications as policy and stakeholders has evolved and part due to the loss of experienced personnel from SF. The scores given above are for now not as they were at the start of the process.

In my experience the woodland creation process is relatively streamlined with Woodland Officers understanding this part of their role. However the other options (especially LTFPs) are often less understood by Woodland Officers and this can lead to a frustrating delay in processing times.

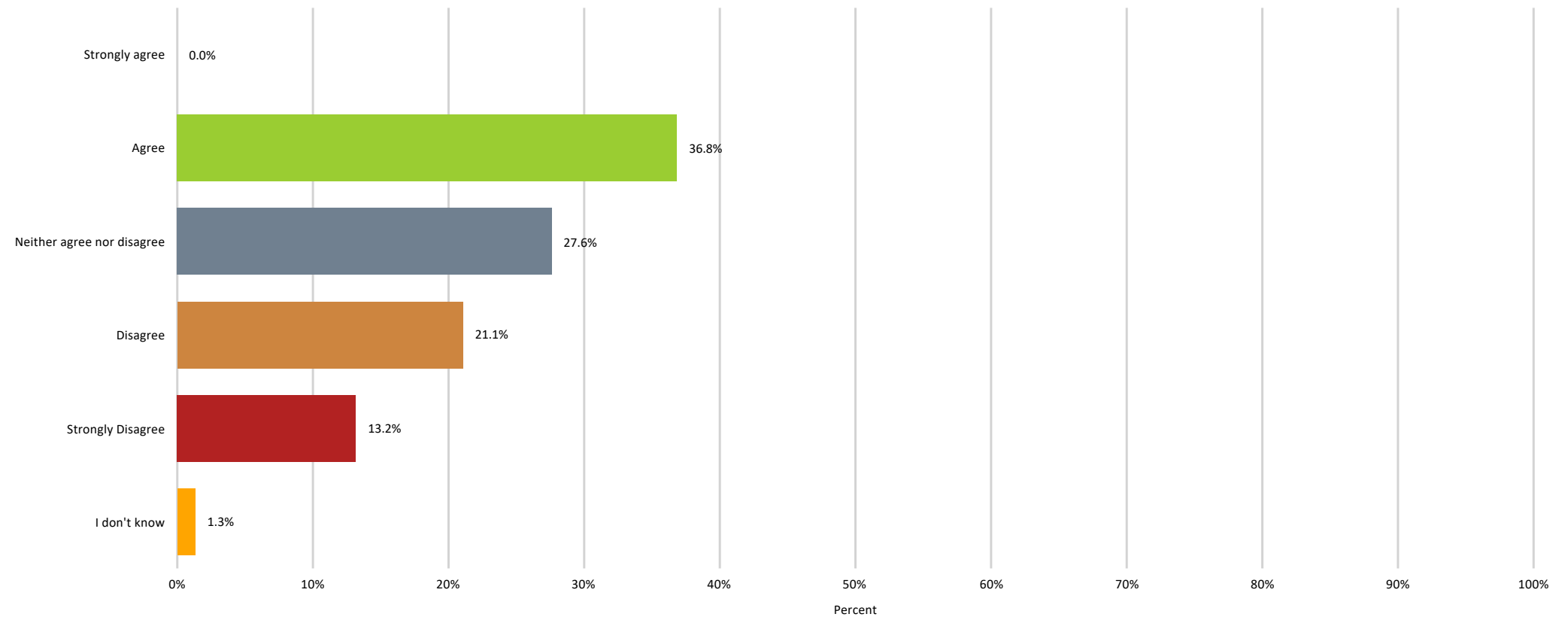
The following questions relate to the contract stage of your application.

28. Please select the statement that best applies to your experience of the contract stage of your application



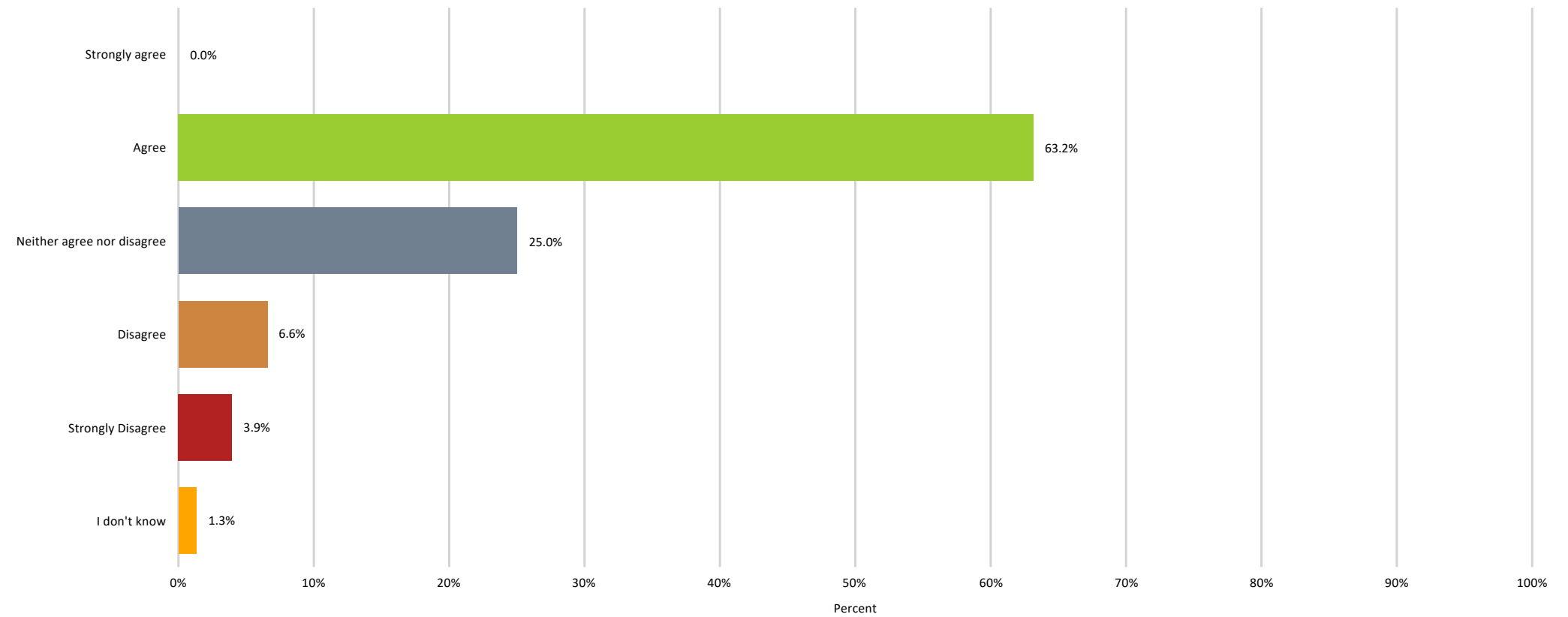
Question	Average	N
The contract was issued in good time	3.14	76
The contract requirements were clear and easy to understand	2.55	76
Returning my contract was straightforward	2.59	76
I found it easy to submit a claim for the works I had undertaken	2.84	74
I was kept up to date about the progress of my claim	3.77	74
Any problems with my claim were communicated clearly to me	3.07	74
I felt satisfied with the outcome of the claim process	2.96	75

29. The contract was issued in good time



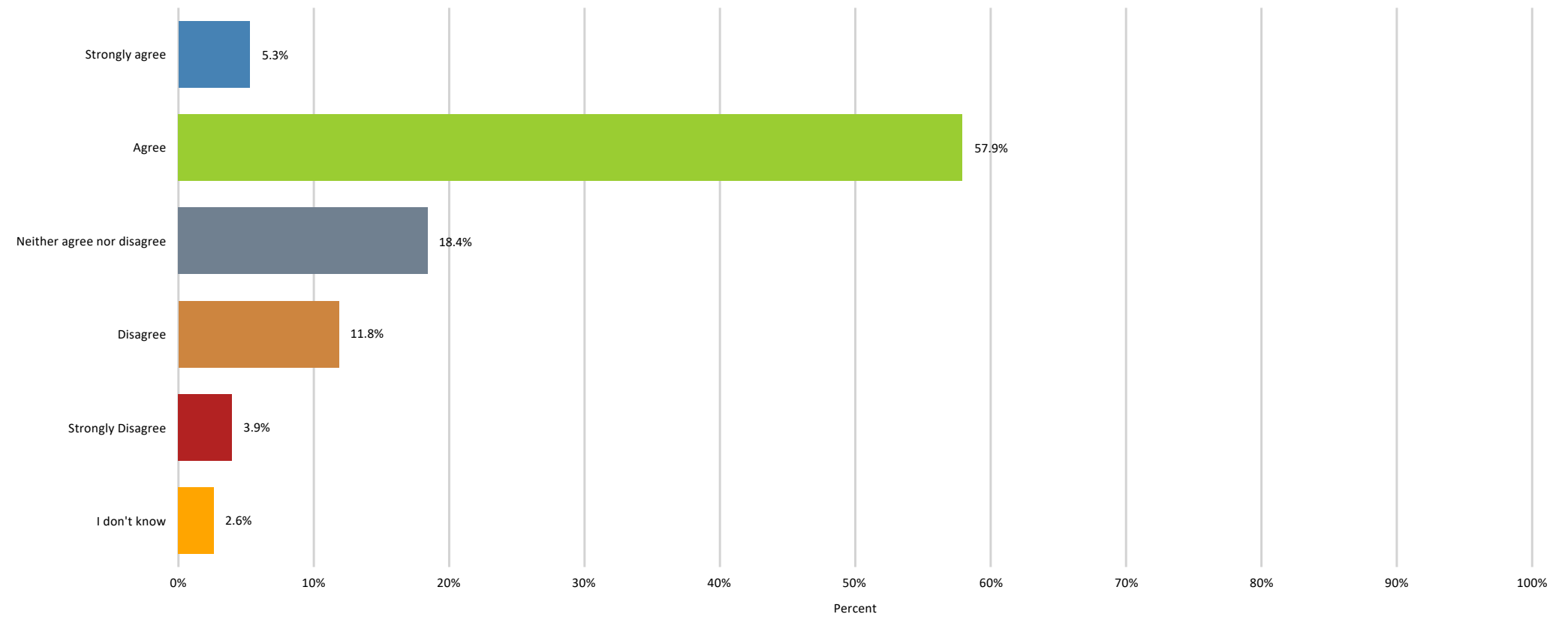
Name	Percent
Strongly agree	0.0%
Agree	36.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	27.6%
Disagree	21.1%
Strongly Disagree	13.2%
I don't know	1.3%
N	76

30. The contract requirements were clear and easy to understand



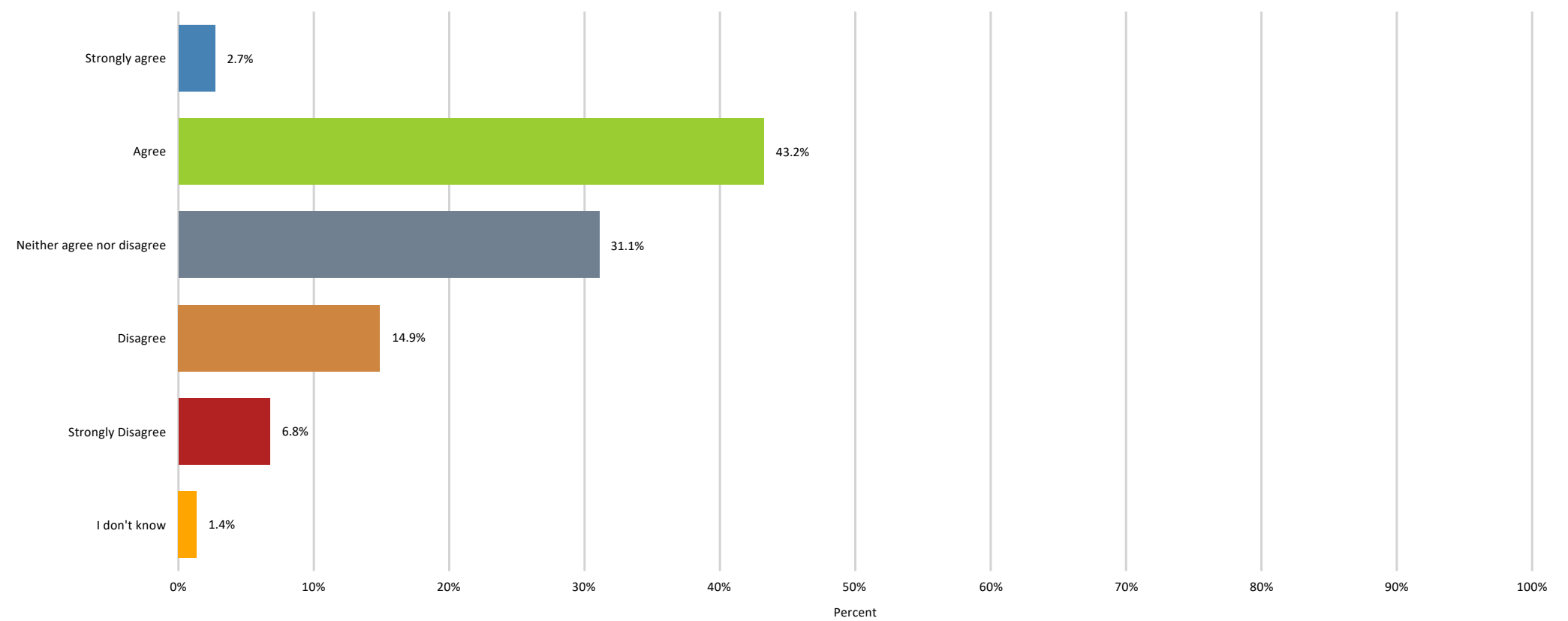
Name	Percent
Strongly agree	0.0%
Agree	63.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	25.0%
Disagree	6.6%
Strongly Disagree	3.9%
I don't know	1.3%
N	76

31. Returning my contract was straightforward



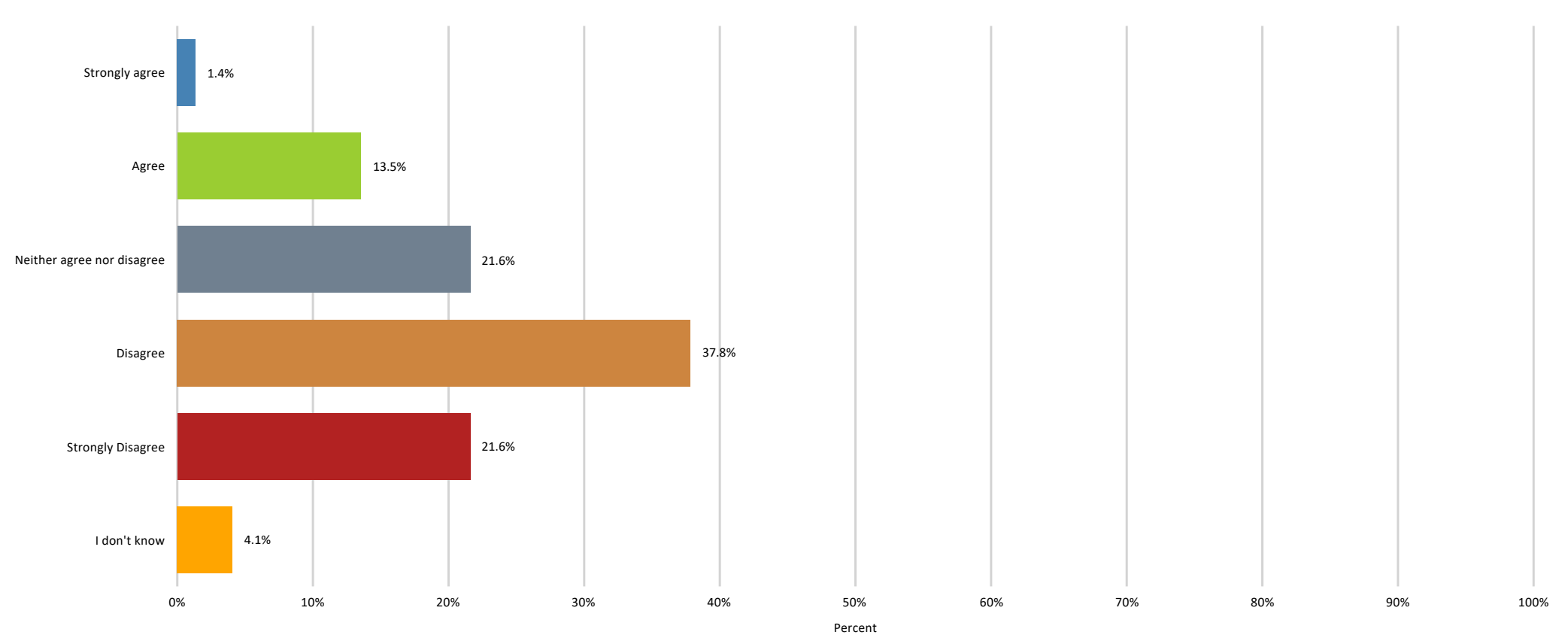
Name	Percent
Strongly agree	5.3%
Agree	57.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	18.4%
Disagree	11.8%
Strongly Disagree	3.9%
I don't know	2.6%
N	76

32. I found it easy to submit a claim for the works I had undertaken



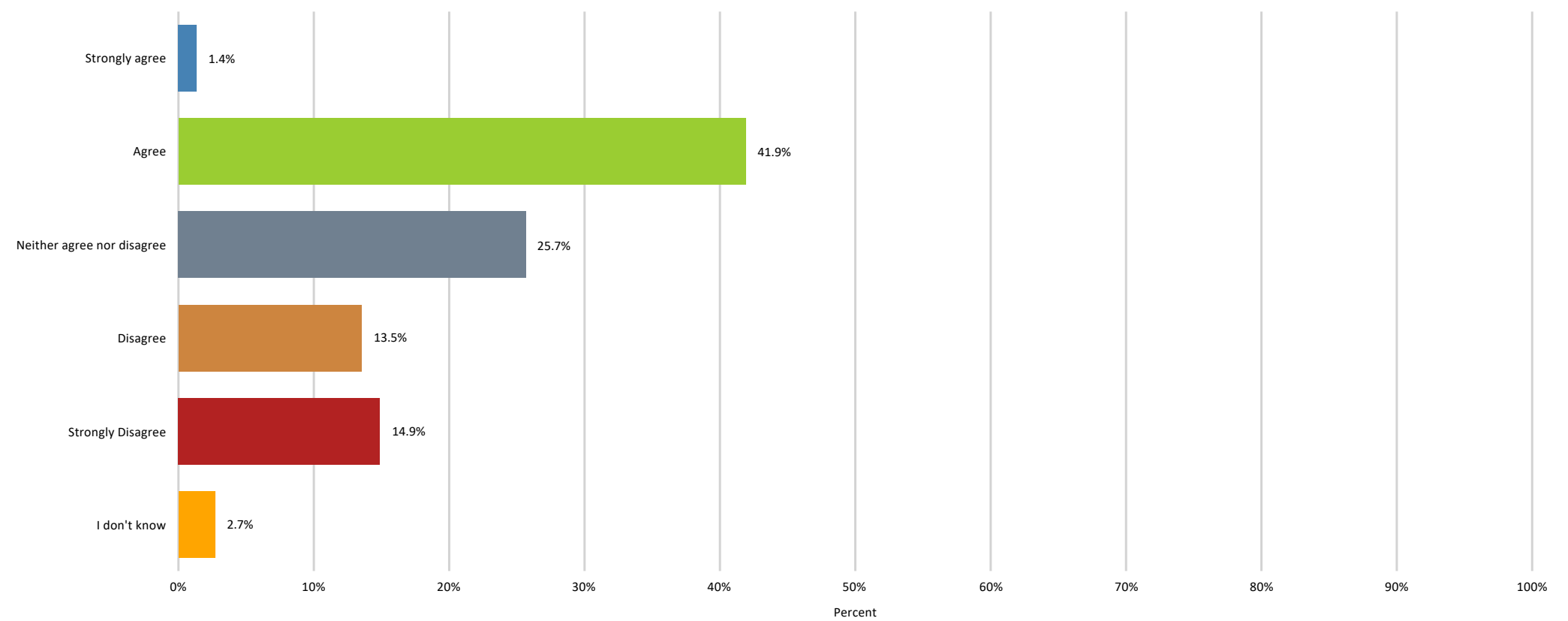
Name	Percent
Strongly agree	2.7%
Agree	43.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.1%
Disagree	14.9%
Strongly Disagree	6.8%
I don't know	1.4%
N	74

33. I was kept up to date about the progress of my claim



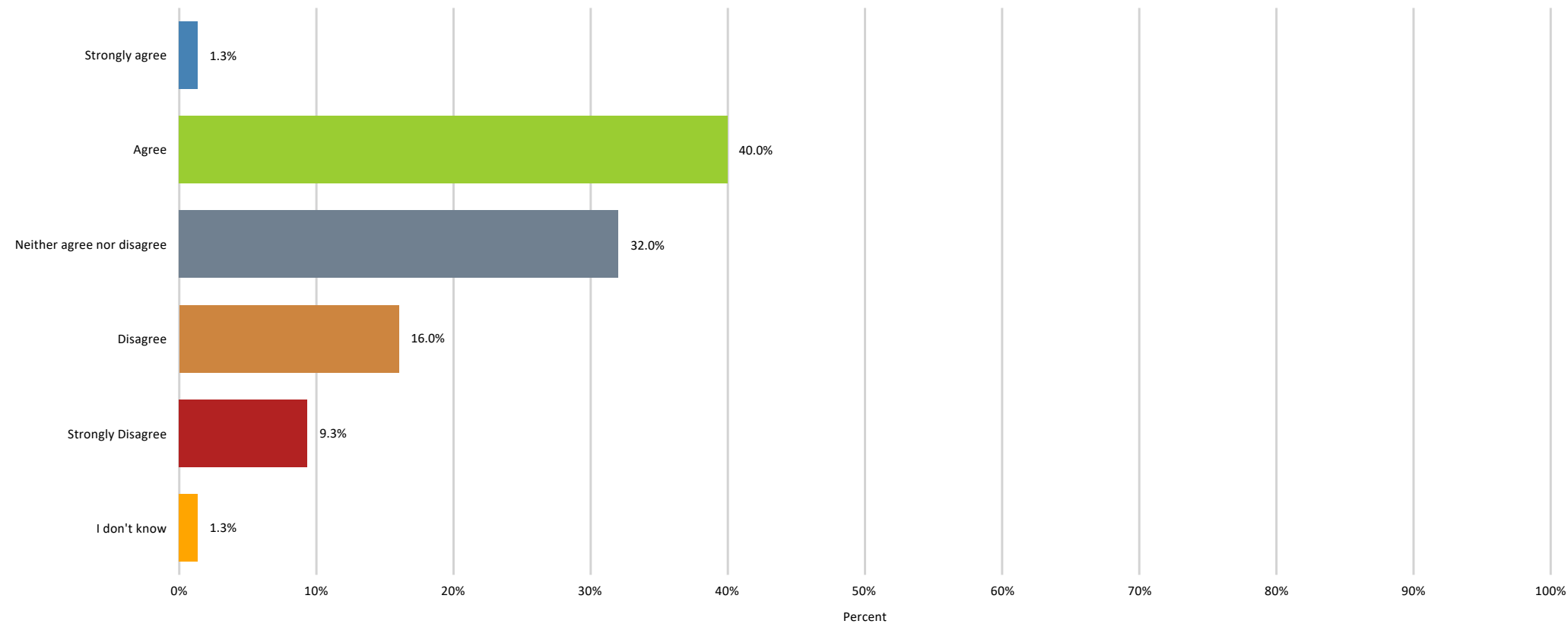
Name	Percent
Strongly agree	1.4%
Agree	13.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	21.6%
Disagree	37.8%
Strongly Disagree	21.6%
I don't know	4.1%
N	74

34. Any problems with my claim were communicated clearly to me



Name	Percent
Strongly agree	1.4%
Agree	41.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	25.7%
Disagree	13.5%
Strongly Disagree	14.9%
I don't know	2.7%
N	74

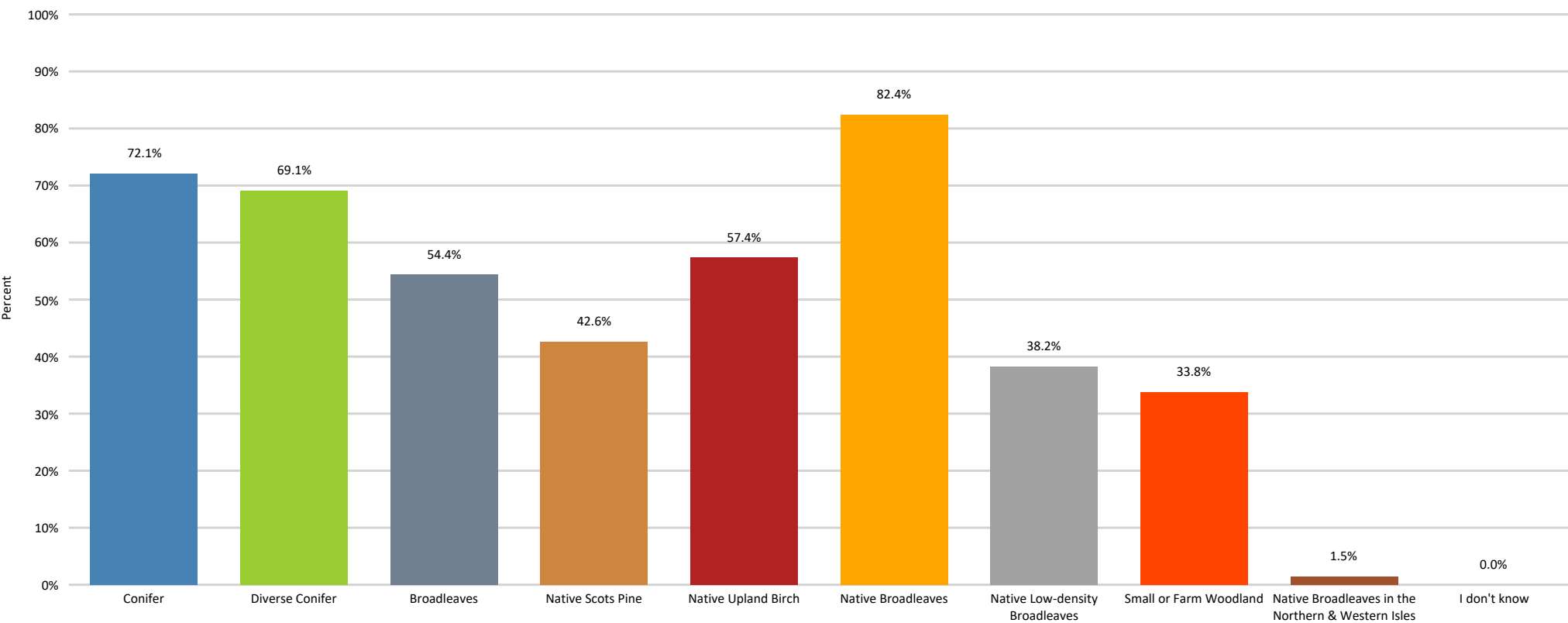
35. I felt satisfied with the outcome of the claim process



Name	Percent
Strongly agree	1.3%
Agree	40.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	32.0%
Disagree	16.0%
Strongly Disagree	9.3%
I don't know	1.3%
N	75

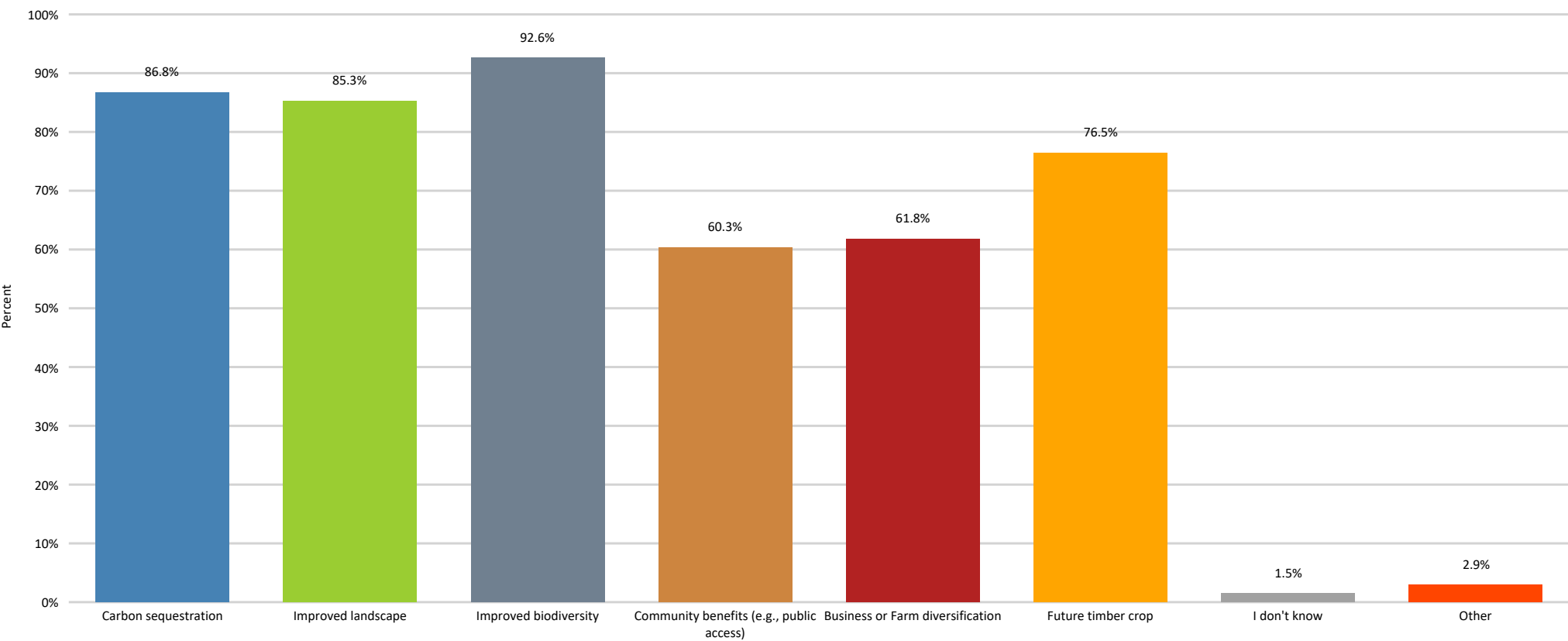
The following questions relate to Woodland Creation

36. Which Woodland Creation option(s) did you apply for? Please select all that apply.



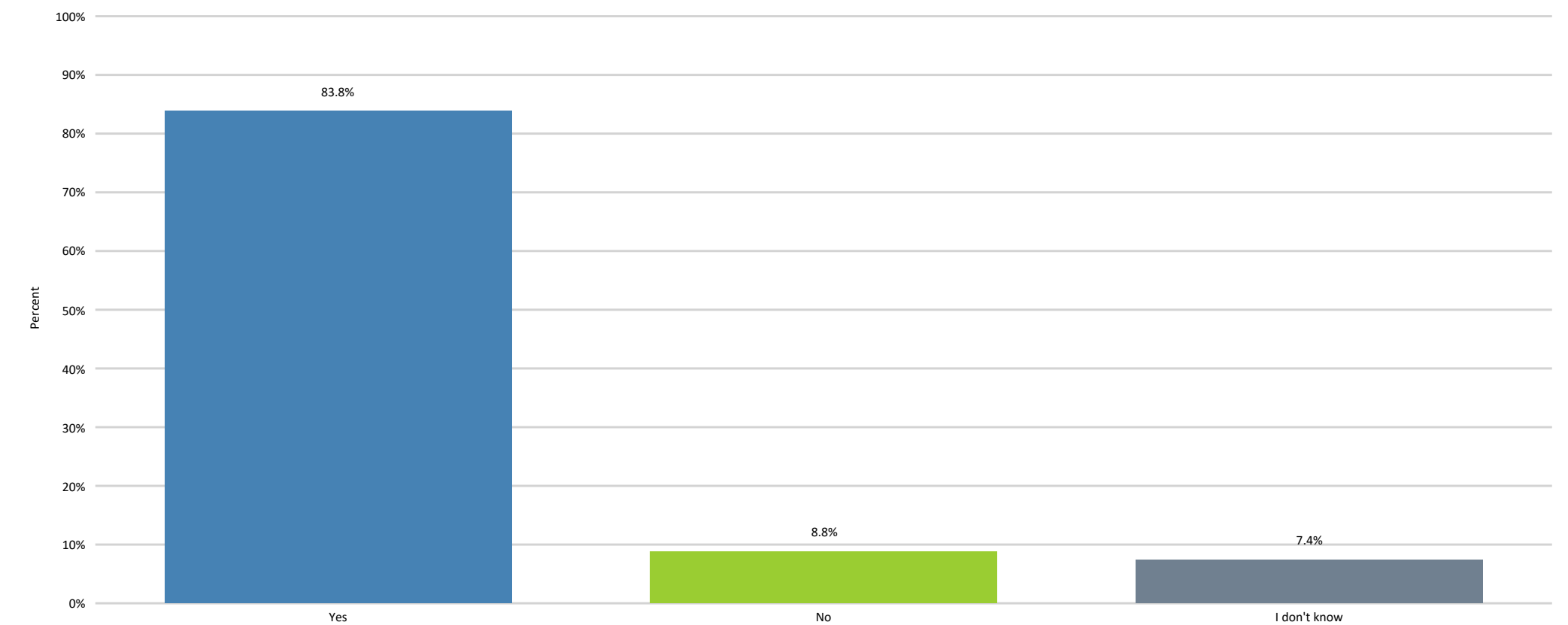
Name	Percent
Conifer	72.1%
Diverse Conifer	69.1%
Broadleaves	54.4%
Native Scots Pine	42.6%
Native Upland Birch	57.4%
Native Broadleaves	82.4%
Native Low-density Broadleaves	38.2%
Small or Farm Woodland	33.8%
Native Broadleaves in the Northern & Western Isles	1.5%
I don't know	0.0%
N	68

37. What benefits have you seen, or expect to see, from your new woodland? (please select all that apply)



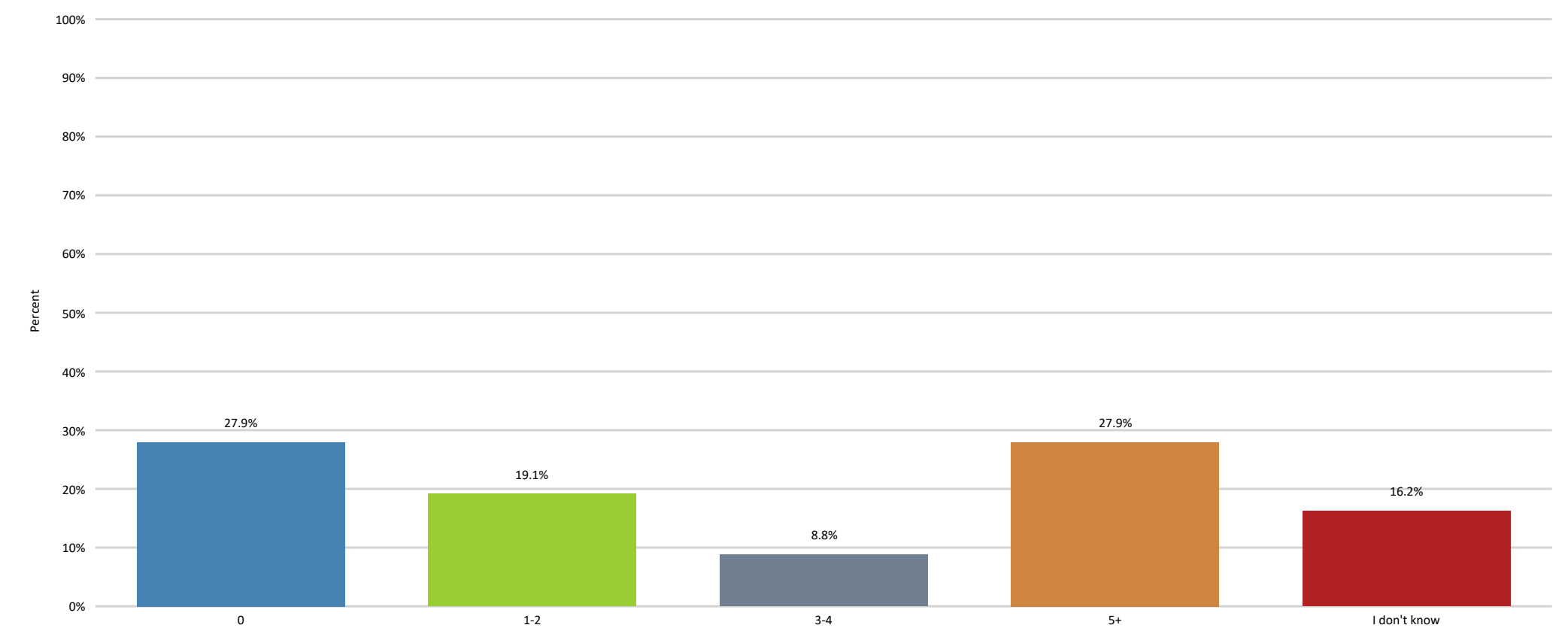
Name	Percent
Carbon sequestration	86.8%
Improved landscape	85.3%
Improved biodiversity	92.6%
Community benefits (e.g., public access)	60.3%
Business or Farm diversification	61.8%
Future timber crop	76.5%
I don't know	1.5%
Other	2.9%
N	68

38. Did you go beyond the minimum UK Forestry Standard requirements when designing your woodland creation scheme(s)?



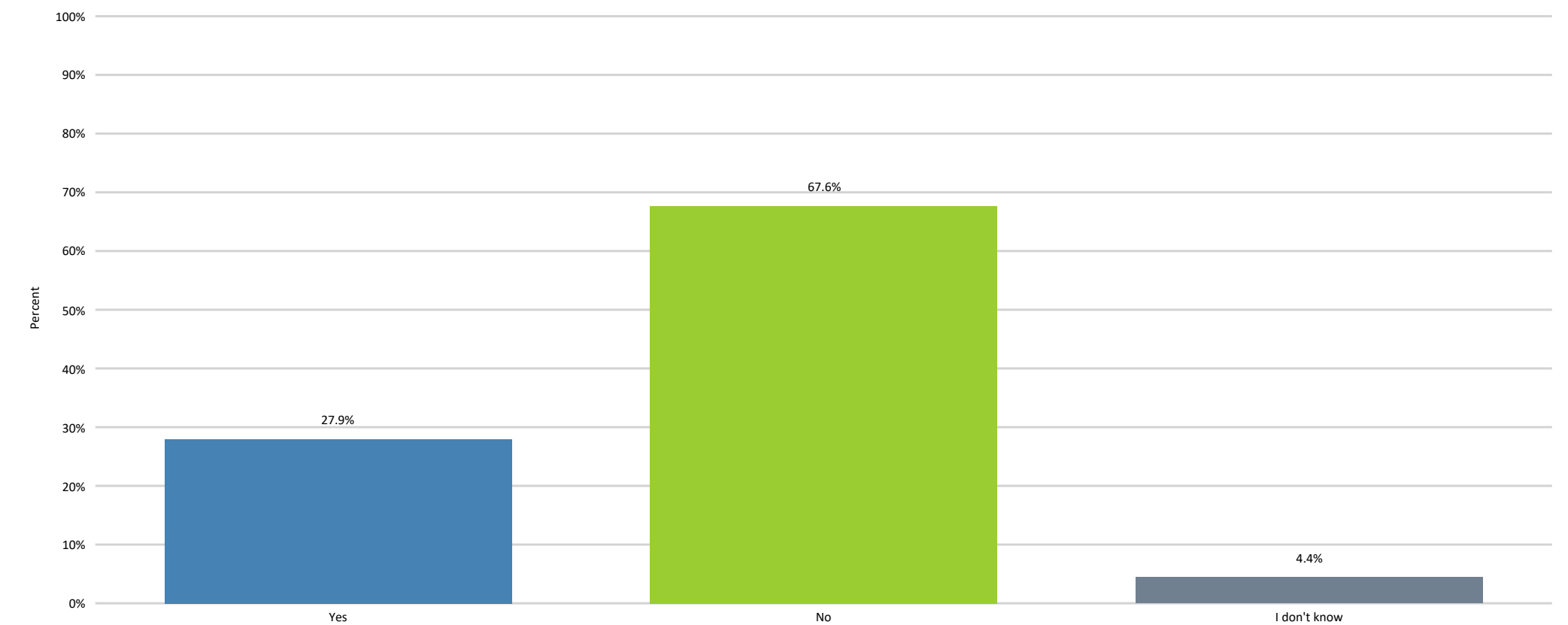
Name	Percent
Yes	83.8%
No	8.8%
I don't know	7.4%
N	68

39. How many jobs (full time equivalent) were created as a result of your woodland creation scheme(s)?



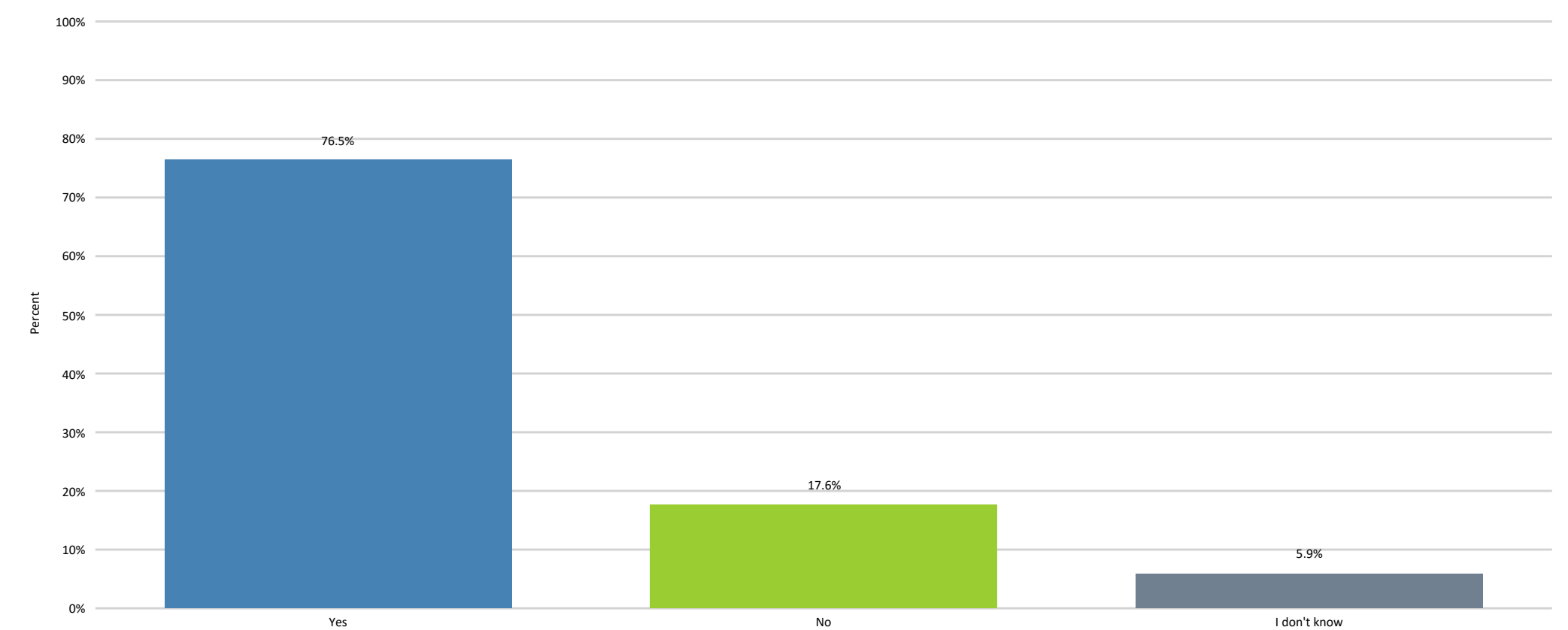
Name	Percent
0	27.9%
1-2	19.1%
3-4	8.8%
5+	27.9%
I don't know	16.2%
N	68

40. To the best of your knowledge, was your woodland creation scheme planted within 2km of a population of 2000 people or more?



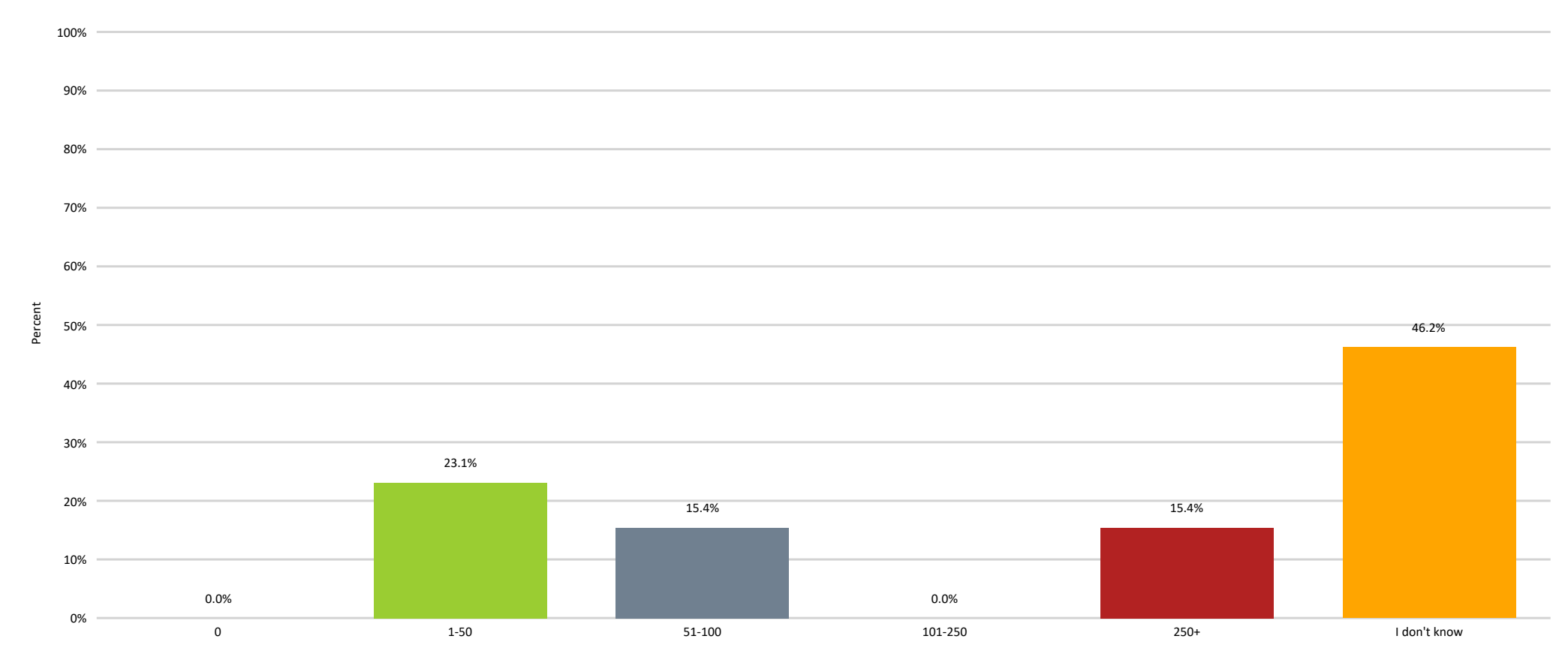
Name	Percent
Yes	27.9%
No	67.6%
I don't know	4.4%
N	68

41. Did you make provision for the woodland to be public access?



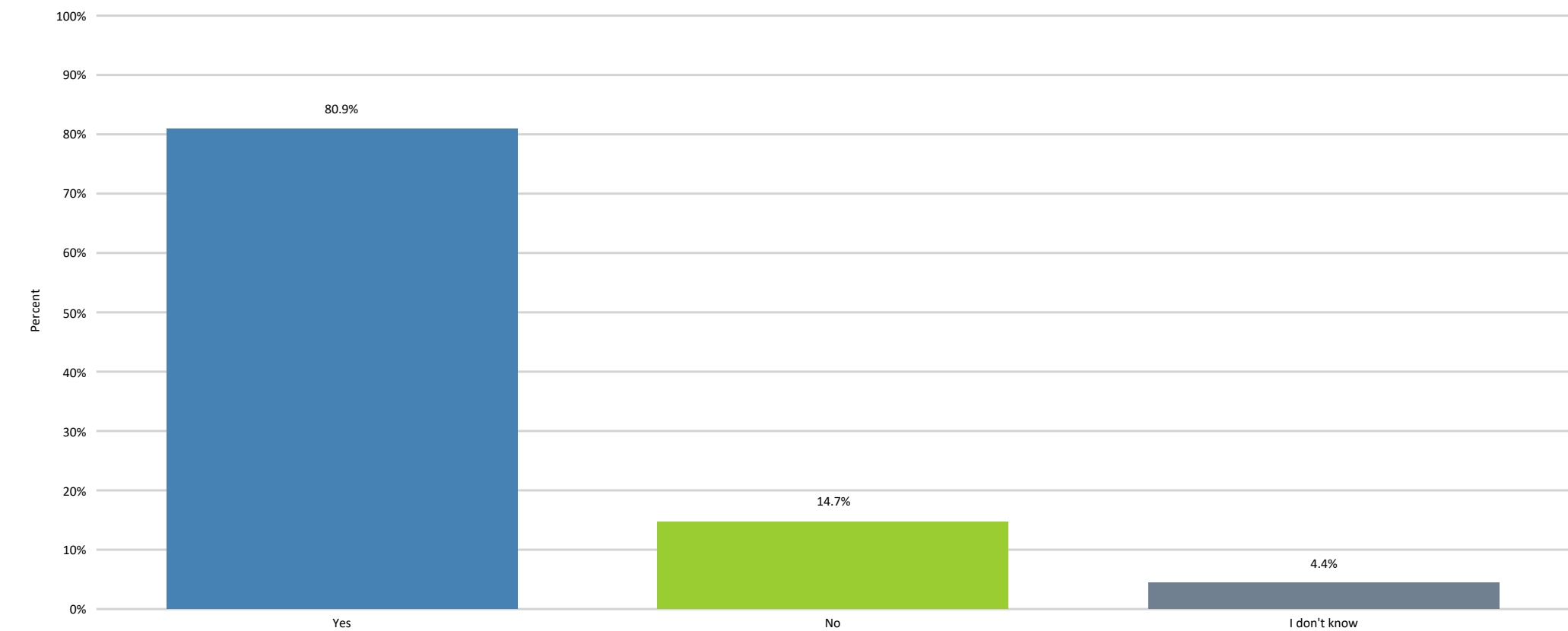
Name	Percent
Yes	76.5%
No	17.6%
I don't know	5.9%
N	17

42. Approximately how many people visit the woodland each month?



Name	Percent
0	0.0%
1-50	23.1%
51-100	15.4%
101-250	0.0%
250+	15.4%
I don't know	46.2%
N	13

43. Did the woodland creation option(s) chosen for your project allow you to achieve your objectives?



Name	Percent
Yes	80.9%
No	14.7%
I don't know	4.4%
N	68

44. Why do you feel the woodland creation objective(s) chosen for your project did not allow you to achieve your objectives?

Answers

SF were not happy with the amount of Sitka spruce for the ground and made us remove vast swaths of trees to meet their objective not my clients. SF refusal to allow Sitka spruce to be planted is holding back afforestation.

In upland cases I would have included more montane woodland. In all cases, the woodland creation options mean that the silvicultural design of the site has to be divided up into the pre-existing grant boxes rather than being evaluated as a whole. This means that adjustments have to be made so that the scheme matches the various restrictions imposed by the grants rather than being assessed on its merits. This is particularly true when multiple grant options are being used where the requirements for native broadleaf elements in each option do not necessarily make any sense.

Greater diversity than UKFS compliance was requested by the Conservancy, thereby diluting the benefits sought and delaying delivery by 2 planting seasons.

Scottish Forestry too concerned about petty detail and process and lose sight of the broad picture

The WO requested changes beyond the standards of the UKFS and so the original objectives were compromised.

The options are narrow and constrictive.

For example if you want a native woodland with 40% Scots pine then you have to have a complicated mixture of options, so we tend to put everything under upland birch with 10% scots pine.

1600 per ha is not sufficient on poorer sites where closer spacing is necessary in order to allow canopy closure within the lifetime of the fence.

There is no option geared at creating seed sources, eg there are times when it would be better to create 10 areas of 10 ha rather than one area of 100ha, but the grant and economies of fencing favour the single big scheme.

Also there is no option for landscape scale deer reduction which in some cases would be more suitable than fencing.

Options and grant rates are geared towards planting over regen, even where regen is the better option.

The grant rates are no longer adequate due to the increased labour and material costs.

It was not approved

For small farm woodlands the farm Woodland Model requires tree spacing at 2500 per ha which is too much when in tubes as these small schemes invariably are. We often use the native woodland model to get around this issue.

The woodland creation models do not always fit with the objectives of applicants and should be removed from a future FGS.

45. If you have any further comments on the Woodland Creation option for FGS, please comment here.

Answers

I very much appreciate the input from SF Woodland Officers at the application stage. As an agent who also applies to AECS, the FGS application process is so much better as Woodland Officers are actively interested and engaged in proposals from the start. This is really important and to me, very valued. I am aware that staff shortages have made the process harder, but I do appreciate the dedication to Woodland Officers to help get a good outcome on the ground.

SF used to share risk with the applicant. Now they take every opportunity to pass the buck to the poor applicant. SF staff at all levels lack resent practical experience of delivery, which results in them failing to appreciate the practical limitations of applying their rules on the ground. There is a lot of anti sentiment in SF towards commercial forestry which is unfair and unhelpful. There Ground prep guidance is truly awful and will cause long-term disastrous consequences for the industry. They are forcing industry to apply truly terrible silvicultural practice.

The criteria for approval should be: does the design, using these options, comply with the UKFS. YES/no.

Woodland creation using different models vastly complicates the process, and limits flexibility in terms of changes related to plant availability etc - it would be better if the options were simplified so that good multi-purpose woodlands could be created within a single model, limiting the need for amendments which create further delays.

everything in pdf format??? Virtually everybody has to convert to word to be able to work on it.

A clear list of potential surveys and consultee/scoping frameworks should be made available. Woodland creation should have more capital items to improve public access and recreation, which could be linked with community benefit. Where applications exclude ground as other land, and form areas outside the application area, enforcing management restrictions on such areas is received as overreach.

Scottish Forestry local offices should engage more with applicants and agents to identify changes in political support and opportunities for better uptake of the other FGS categories.

The FGS has created a culture where we are asked to survey everything prior to submission whether its required or not. Example being breeding bird survey on land where numerous surveys have been done in the past, archaeological surveys done on previously ploughed farmland, phase 1 habitat survey on farmland that's hand silage and hay grown on it. When questioned, the response is we don't know what's there until its surveyed! Fine, but money that could be spent on establishment, access, or other enhancement is lining the pockets of surveyors and has created a mini industry in its own right. You need clear protocols of when its right to ask for these and standby your decisions if they are not required! Remove some of your telflon.

It may be helpful to have a dedicated Atlantic rainforest option.

The agroforestry option needs a review to make it better fit for purpose.

Hoping that there will be a useful option to support riparian woodlands soon

The forms to submit applications and to make claims are clunky, out-dated, and not fit for purpose. Fully online system would be great. In the meantime could the grant claim form be a proper PDF form? Why do you still require wet signatures posted to you?

Certain woodland officers basically are not wanting to see land change to forestry from farming, they have own agendas and can deliberately stop what would be a reasonable application.

Scottish Forestry are the statutory authority and should over rule the other consultees an or statutory authority when thier consultation is obviously ridiculous. particularly in regards archeology that is speculative and extensive covering larger area that might or might not have been site of roman camp or battle field that could extended anywhere in that 10km area but might not have nonsense bollocks... for example.

Some reviewing of capital items to be more in line with actual contracting costs will be needed. The integration of carbon payments from the Scottish Government pending successful establishment after year 5 may be a good step to encourage increased uptake, but this'll likely only apply to native woodland schemes.

There was always talk of finessing the WC options to make the computer system less rigid. Its daft that each Option has to be evaluated individually rather than the whole design. this is a computer modelling failure, not a matter of sustainable management

No grant allows for shelterbelts.

Small or Farm Woodland does not allow for Sitka to be used more than 10%, this is the closest to a shelterbelt grant and so Sitka is vital if the agricultural business is going to see the shelter for livestock is a short period of time possible.

Agro Forestry, to many trees per ha and grant not sufficient to cover cost of individual tree protection.

Sheep and Trees unfair as it does not include farmers that only have cattle and estate are excluded.

Currently too loaded towards the conifer options, with the result that we are seeing an explosion of Sitka spruce planting.

often by investment institutions with no connection to the locality. This has consequences for biodiversity and local social/economic wellbeing.

Achieving Objectives Yes, No or Don't know requires a further option of partially achieved.

The weighting of objectives can be skewed through the application process. Economic and carbon sequestration objectives can be diluted by agreeing to plant less commercial and slower growing species in order to progress the application.

This is not to advocate one objective over riding others, A well balanced mix of objectives is generally possible on most woodland creation sites. However, throughout the productive conifer forestry application process the general direction of travel is to dilute the carbon sequestration and productive potential of the woodland creation proposal. Whereas for non productive applications there is no requirement to demonstrate and evidence the providing an evidenced balance of optimal carbon sequestration, economic and environmental benefit from the native woodland creation proposed.

Cost of application is now beyond some potential applicants. Drip feeding of conditions by case officers/operations managers cause significant delays in processing. Grants now far behind costs due to inflation over recent years which is resulting in potential projects being shelved. Scotland now behind England in level of grant support.

More nuance needed from woodland officers when evaluating applications. Having a blanket response and blanket requirements for all applications is detrimental as all applications are unique and should be evaluated as so. If there are opportunities to expediate the application process, these should be explored.

Response times and informing land agents and landowners of delays in the application process should be swiftly dealt with. For the majority of the FGS applications I have undertaken, the minimal-to-zero responses, minimal communications and delays in processing the applications have been extremely excessive.

There seems to be different Conservancy interpretations on capital expenditure on small schemes.

Do options allow for objectives of projects to be met - I have answered yes and that is correct in general, however a review of suitable species and more flexibility in the options would allow for better designed forests and stop 'painting by numbers' to fit designs into option % thresholds, in some cases.

Grant options are limited and set up for larger scale woodlands. £/ha are now out of date - Making it harder for smaller scale woodland creations to be done due to financial constraints

Models are generally good, however rates of payment are generally falling behind current costs and require reviewed.

Greater consideration to funding protection for schemes should be considered. Maximum grant available is currently based on the cheapest capital option. It would be positive to see the FGS encourage reducing the use of plastic in planting (eg greater scoring awarded if landowners fund the difference to use fencing instead of tubes, higher grant rate or greater scoring for using biodegradable tubes).

When thinking about a new FGS, it would be worth while speaking to people who use the scheme to get a better result.

The relative complexity of grants following on from SFGS have made them accessible in the main to wealthy individuals, with the Woodland Trust providing a role in delivering for crofters and small landowners. Although helpful, advice given is generally not by a trained forestry professional, but by an ecologist interested in general native woodland and habitat restoration. This leads to unintended bias in woodland development especially in the highlands and islands.

We are all used to the process now, but it could still be streamlined. The components table is a fudge! the grant claim form is a horrible to complete, it should be prepopulated for the schedule of works! Woodland officers need to be able to contribute to the process and have the backing of their line management, even if they get the decisions wrong!

The biggest single barrier for woodland creation is the incredibly cumbersome IACS part of the process. The inability for quick changes to parcel boundaries and registrations is a considerable barrier to schemes progressing smoothly.

Rates are too low now, smaller clients are less interested due to increased costs of planting and establishment.

Difficulty in understanding 'subjective opinion' on a given Woodland Creation. For example, where the species diversity mixture exceeds the requirements (under UKWAS/UKFS), why are Woodland Officers still keen to further diversity and unwilling to allow a scheme pass through - despite the fact it met all requirements. Why are Woodland Officers advising silvicultural prescriptions? Why do different conservancies have differing opinions? For smaller-scale Woodland Creations, some of the costing requirements (numerous surveys/complex planning) do not weight up anywhere near grant income.

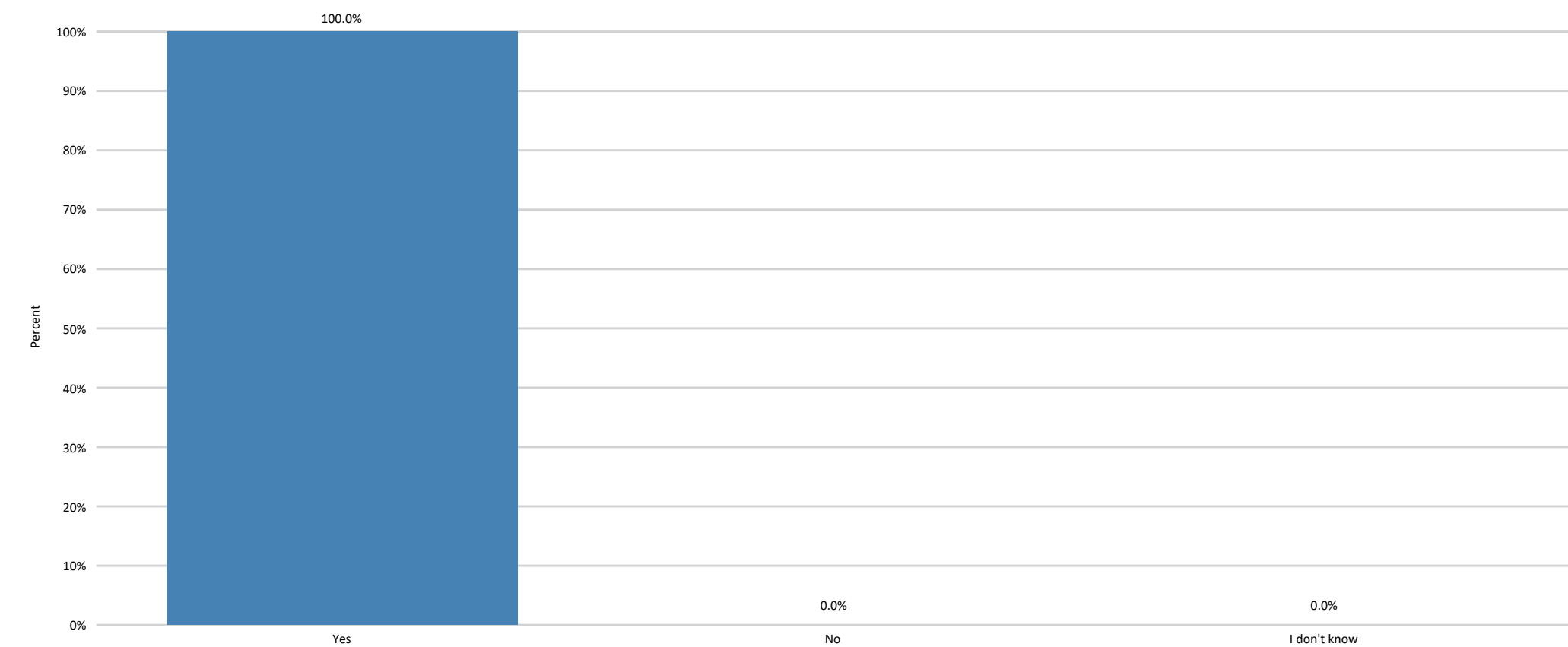
There is a presumption by many woodland officers to go above and beyond UKFS, I think that this is not the role of the WO and that the species percentages highlighted in UKFS must be upheld as acceptable if the site fits certain criteria. For example in some cases a large amount of single species crop is the best use of the land or the landowners objective. As long as this fits the UKFS criteria then this should be accepted by the WO and other (as long as all other site issues are covered off).

If SF would like the percentages to be different then there must be a UKFS review (which I am aware is currently happening) in which both private and public sector foresters are given fair representation.

A general presumption against productive forestry is not something that should be decided by woodland officers with a personal agenda.

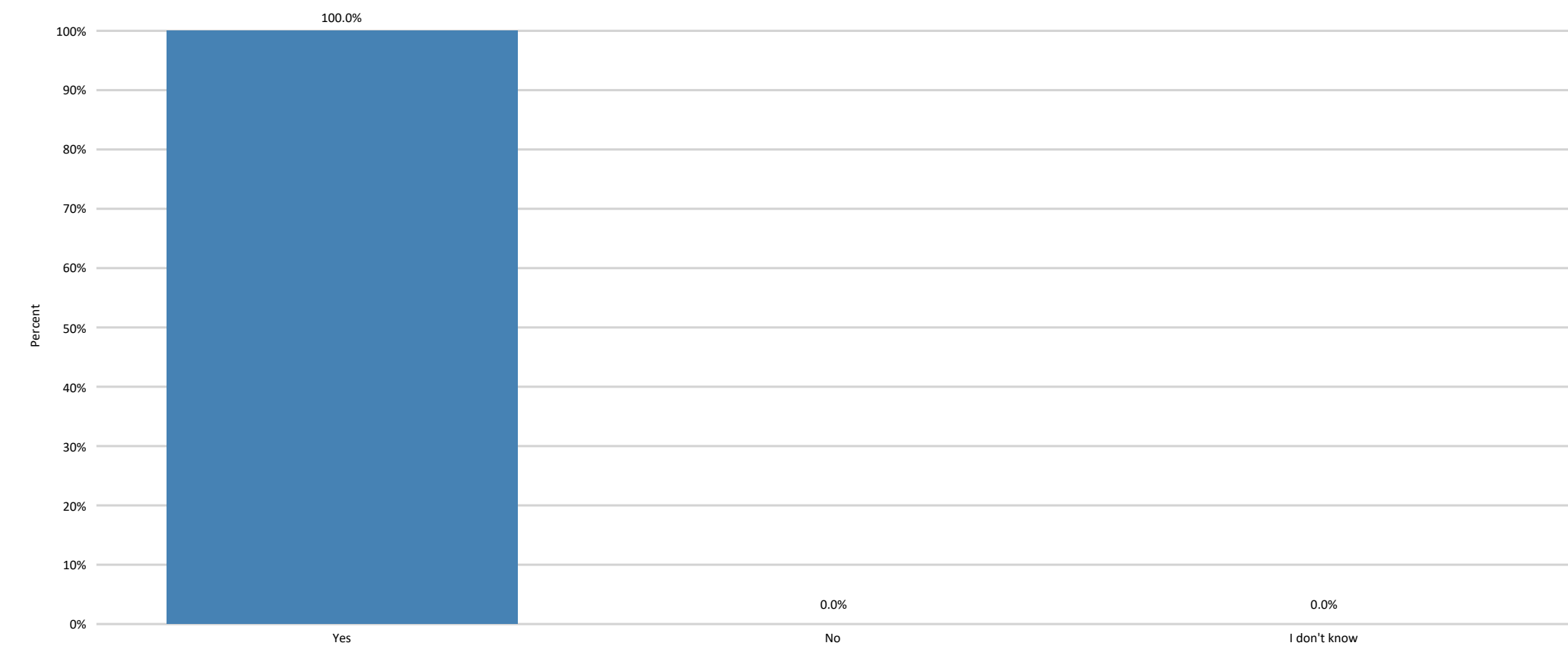
The following questions relate to Agroforestry

46. Did the Agroforestry Grant encourage you to diversify your farm business where you otherwise may not have?



Name	Percent
Yes	100.0%
No	0.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	1

47. Did the Agroforestry grant allow you to achieve your objectives?



Name	Percent
Yes	100.0%
No	0.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	1

48. Why do you feel the Agroforestry grant did not allow you to achieve your objectives?

Answers

49. What benefits has it brought (if any) to other farming activities

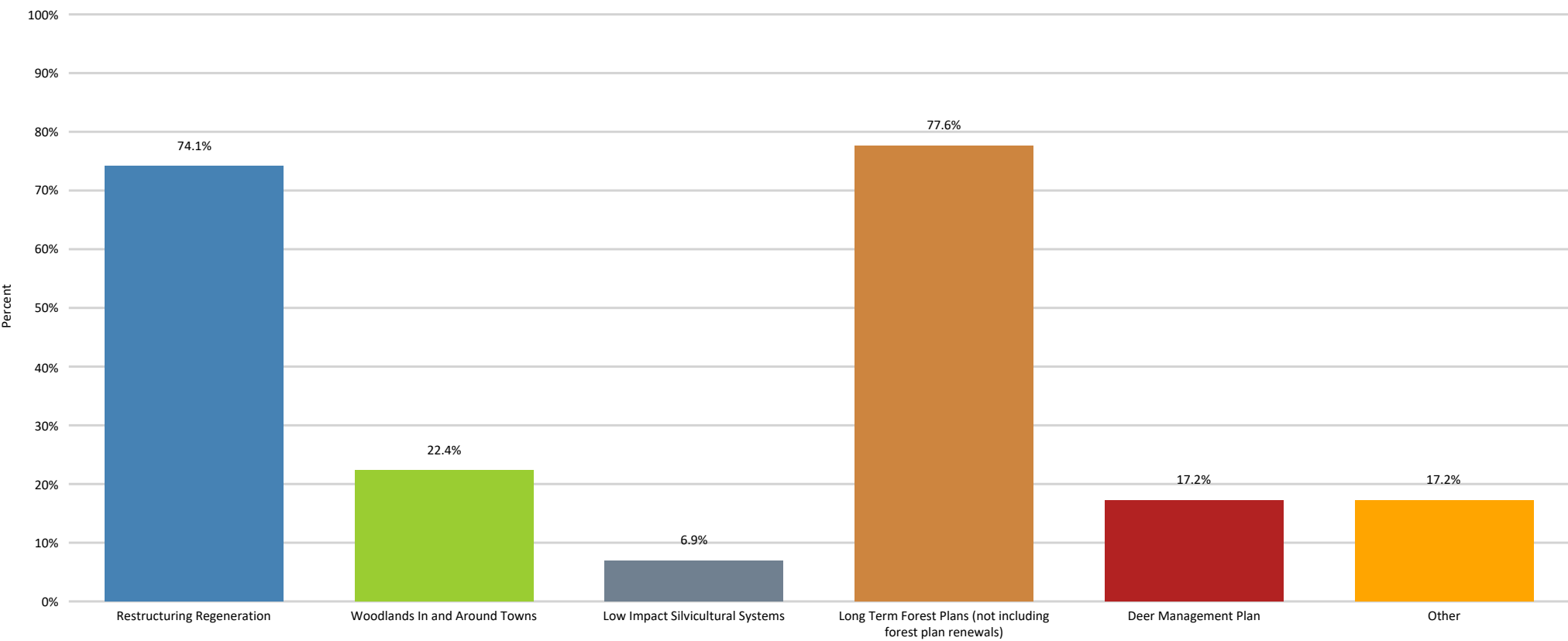
Answers

50. If you have any further comments on the Agroforestry grant, please comment here

Answers

These questions relate to the Woodland Improvement Grants.

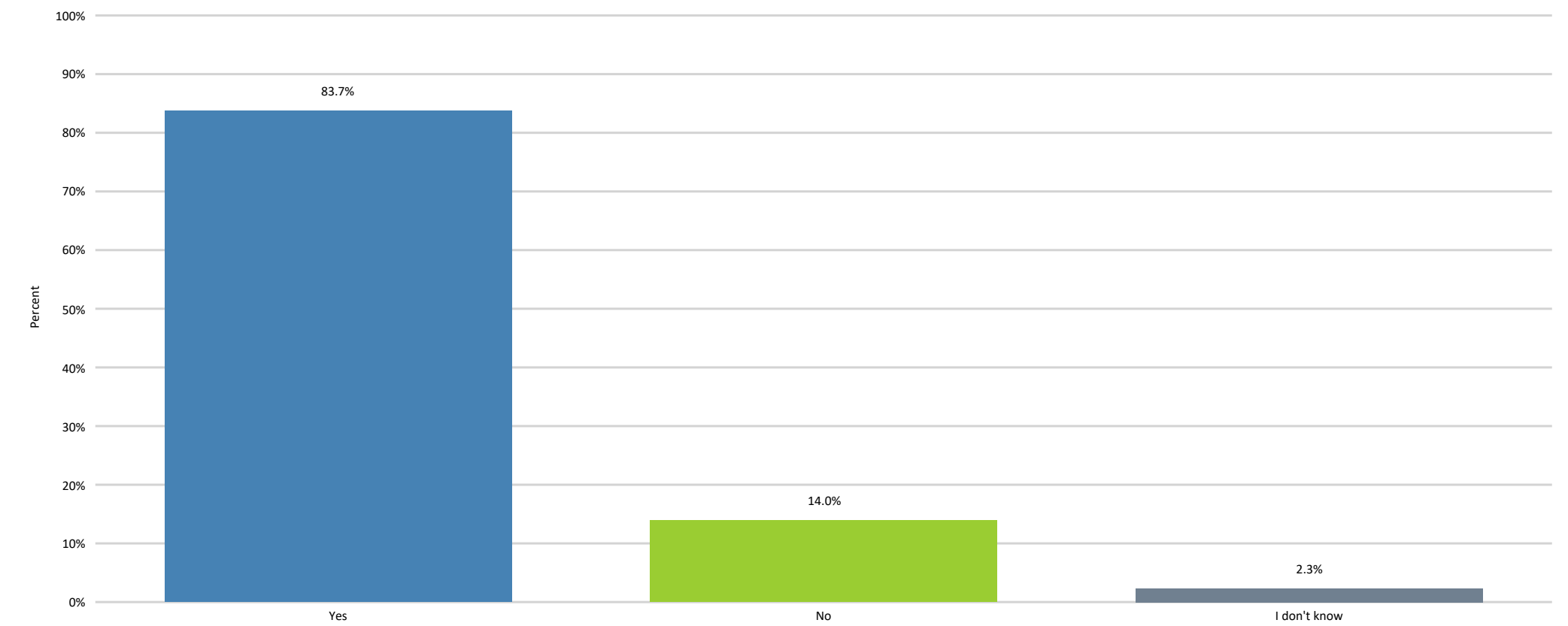
51. Please indicate which of the following Woodland Improvement Grant options you applied for



Name	Percent
Restructuring Regeneration	74.1%
Woodlands In and Around Towns	22.4%
Low Impact Silvicultural Systems	6.9%
Long Term Forest Plans (not including forest plan renewals)	77.6%
Deer Management Plan	17.2%
Other	17.2%
N	58

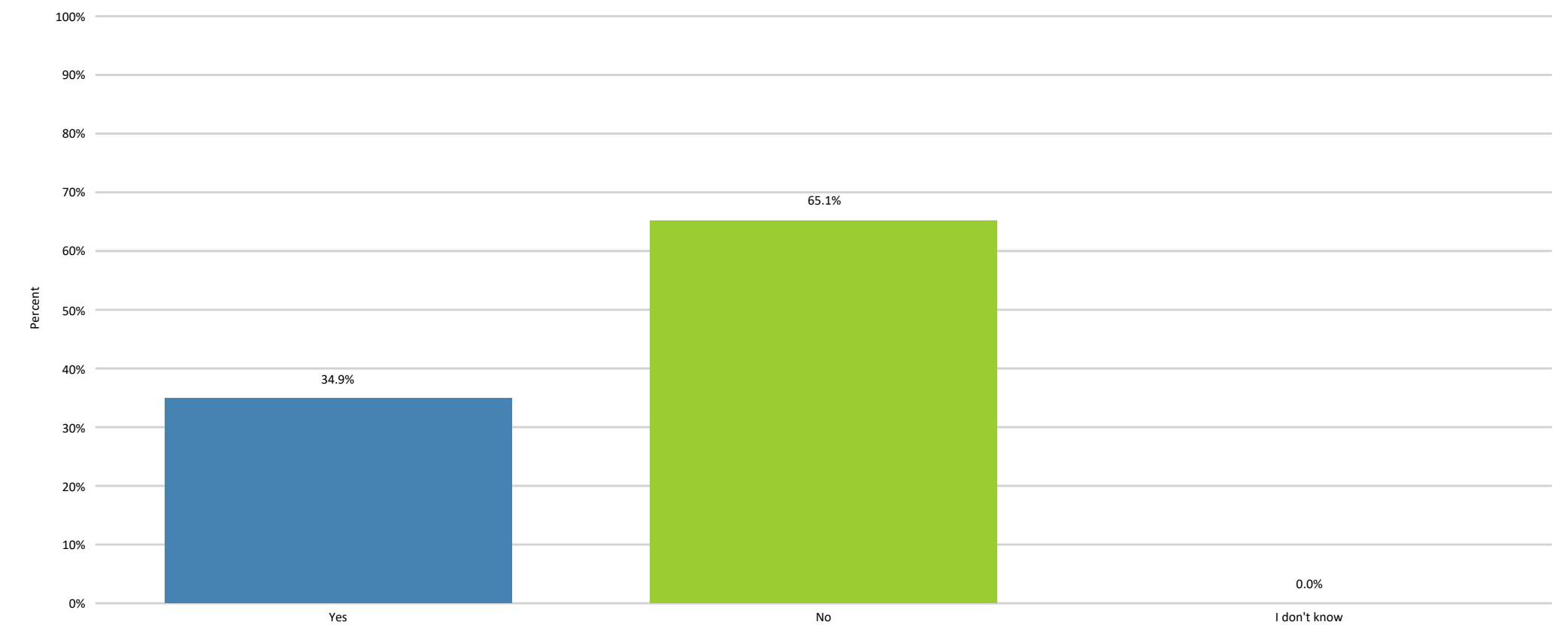
The following questions relate to the Woodland Improvement Grant option "Restructuring Regeneration".

52. Did you go beyond the minimum UK Forestry Standard species diversity requirements when restructuring your woodland?



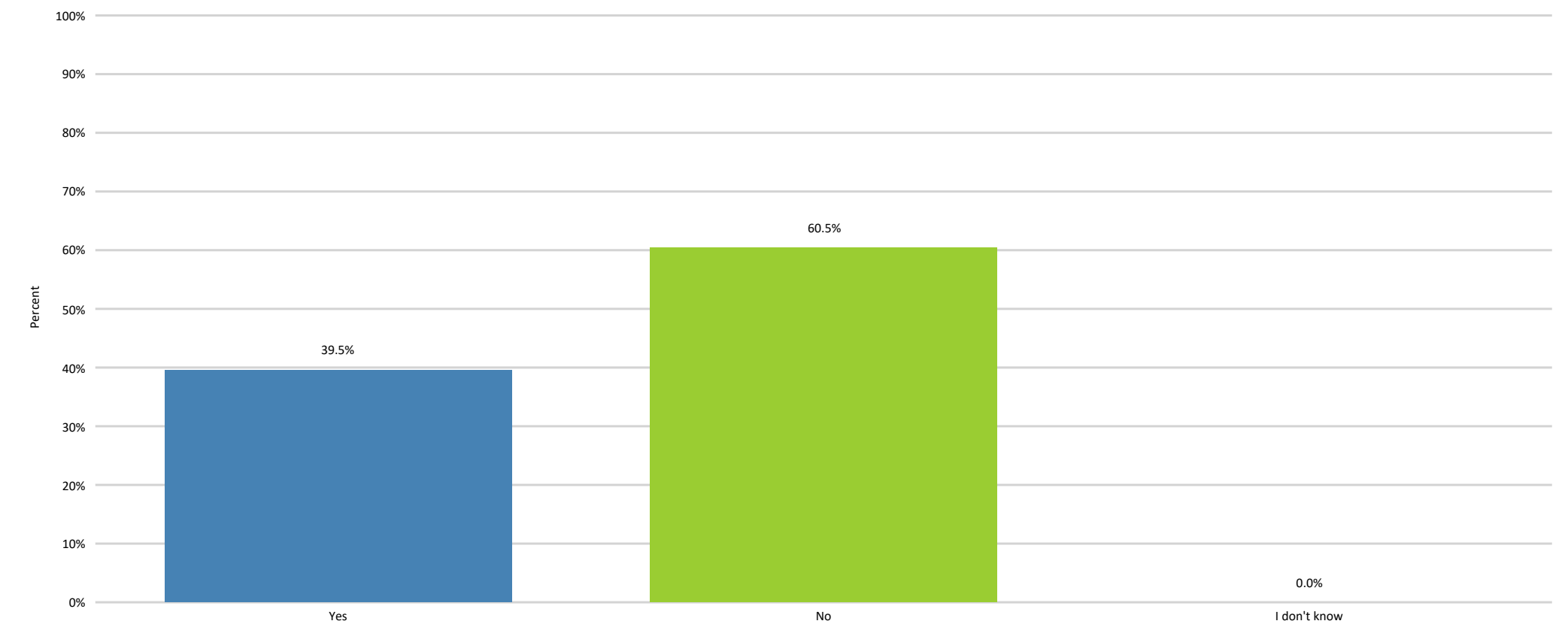
Name	Percent
Yes	83.7%
No	14.0%
I don't know	2.3%
N	43

53. Did the Restructuring Regeneration grant option encourage you to bring forward the diversification of your woodland?



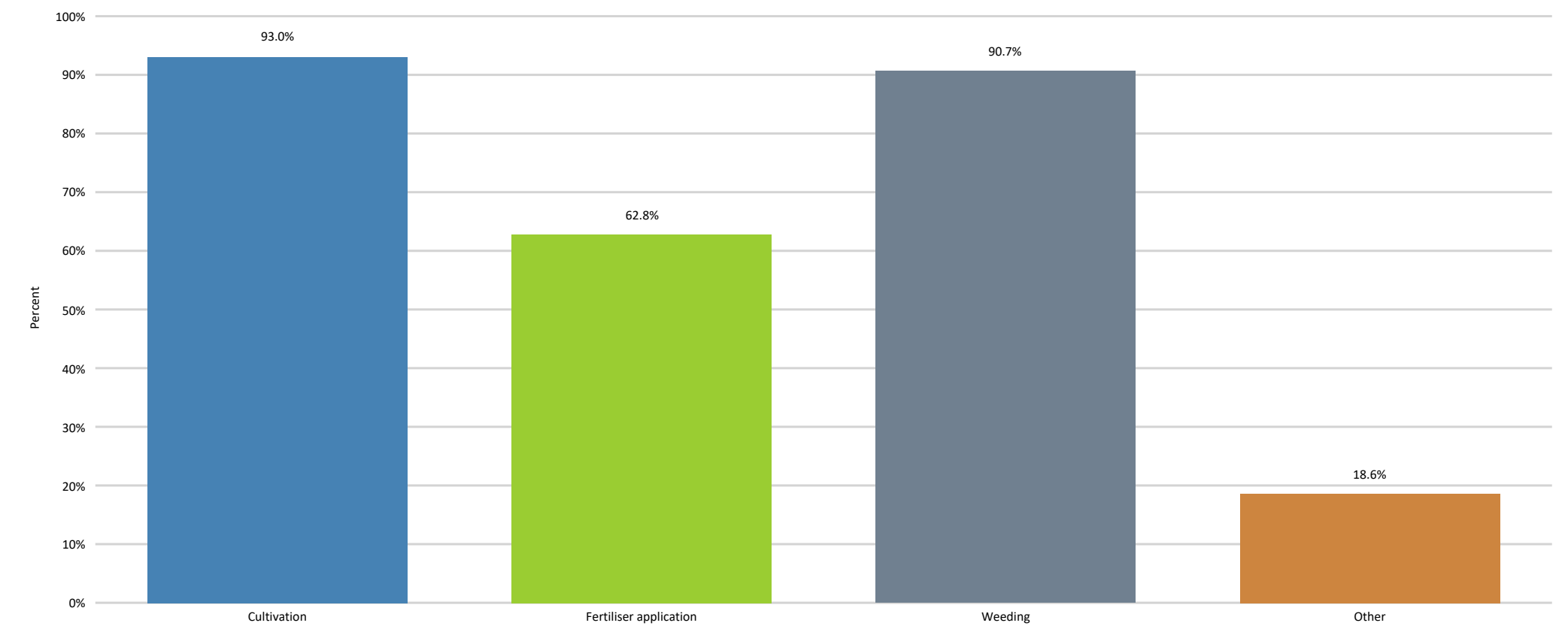
Name	Percent
Yes	34.9%
No	65.1%
I don't know	0.0%
N	43

54. Did the Restructuring Regeneration grant option encourage you to replant a greater diversity of tree species?



Name	Percent
Yes	39.5%
No	60.5%
I don't know	0.0%
N	43

55. What management techniques were used to aid establishment (select all that apply)



Name	Percent
Cultivation	93.0%
Fertiliser application	62.8%
Weeding	90.7%
Other	18.6%
N	43

56. Please provide detail about the management techniques used:

Answers

All of our forests required further diversity and we are happy to oblige as we restructure them. SF need to understand this is not a one rotation event and could take several, especially as the trees we are encourage to use for diversity are becoming susceptible to disease.

Continues Mounding

Excavator Mounding

V bucket drainage

Inverse mounding was used with some direct planting

Hinge mounds and brash raked. trees treated for weevils and top up spraying, following years weevil spraying and herbicide weeding. Vole guards in some areas. Restock deer fenced.

Cultivation

Tree protection

Trico application

Fencing

Deer management

Hylobius control

Generally we mound

Brash harvesting before ground prep.

A mixture of brash raking, trench mounding and no ground prep where brash had been removed and the original plough ridges were still intact. Conifers treated with Gazelle in the nursery, 10g of slow release fertiliser applied when planted and top up spraying with Gazelle post planting when necessary. Beating up as required.

Trench mounding used as main ground prep technique. Where suitable, brash recovery used to reduce soil disturbance.

Daft question. The most cost effective management techniques were used to ensure rapid establishment and compliance with UKFS, UKWAS and the grant obligations were applicable.

Mounding / tree protection deer / rabbit netting / chem weeding / hand screefing / vermin control / integrating natural regen all of it that could be utilized

Restocking is quite input intensive. Hinge mounding, fertilizing at planting. weevil management and weeding over 2/3 years and beat up (2 year restock requirements still often standard)

Generally excavator mounding/drainage/ATV access provision pre planting.

Planting bare root transplants pre treated with an approved insecticide to protect from weevil damage and applying slow release fertiliser to the planting notch as part of the planting process.

Beat up, weevil control and weeding as necessary until restocked areas are established.

Hinge or invert mound with planting, weeding and beat-up.

Hinge or trench mounding. Drainage. Planting with bare rooted stock. Fertilising. Fencing. Deer management. maintenance

Ground preparation, primarily hinge mounding was used to establish trees. This provides a better planting microsite but another key factor is that it provides weed suppression for a minimum of 1-2 years, which reduces the requirement for weed control across the site. There is some evidence that having the tree situated on mounds can result in reduction of vole impacts as they feel exposed (snow cover counters that). Drainage is put in at this time, although for non-commercial schemes there is less of a requirement.

Weeding is required in areas where mechanical ground prep is not feasible and at approximately year 2. Although if ground preparation has occurred weeding is usually only required in selected areas, but bracken can be spread wider.

Slow release fertilizer was applied at time of planting, which results in a better growth initially both height and diameter. This gets the tree out of the "risk" period quicker as I've found they can get above week competition, diameter is greater than affected by weevil, and helps the tree establish on site. Due to a delivery error I had a site where an area did not receive the slow release fertilizer which in turn resulted in increased maintenance and beat-up. I would not plant another site without slow release fertilizer.

machine mounding, hand screefing, planting.

planting in clumps or nests with regen between.

restock mounding, drainage, fertiliser and weeding carried out.

Invert or trench mounding, v-drainage. Fencing or tubes for protection, deer control. Weevil control, chemical and hand weeding. Respacing. Fertiliser application.

use of tree guards rabbit and deer control fertiliser where necessary

Remove brash

Leave land fallow for 7 years

Sound ground

trench mounding was used but I would try not to use this in the future; weevil spraying was required in order to establish the trees without a fallow period, some follow up hand weeding was required especially where ground conditions did not allow mounding and where bracken was at its most dense.

CCF

daft question! we undertook, where appropriate, brash recovery, brash raking, trench mounding, hinger mounding, direct planting, weevil control, more weevil control, deer control, weeding, fencing, road improvements, tree shelter maintenance etc etc etc

Ground preparation is all but essential on many of our sites due to a combination of wetness, harvesting material and richness. I can remember the state of the restocking in the 1990's before ground cultivation techniques really evolved. We must remember the objective of a lot of these woodlands - productive timber.

Plant selection from nursery, cultivation type based on soil and vegetation, pesticide and herbicide as required, beating up and weeding.

57. If you have any further comments about the "Restructuring Regeneration" option, please comment here

Answers

The restructuring regeneration option did not encourage me to diversify planting as that was already part of the plan and previously approved through the LTFP. This option is very complicated to apply for and not financially viable for areas less than 20ha. This means that it is effectively a subsidy for large scale clear felling as small scale felling (of shelterbelts etc.) are less likely to be able to apply for support even though they are less likely to have had significant timber income and their relative establishment costs are likely to be high.

Species diversity can be controlled by felling conditions not necessary to grant aid it.

The delivery of UKFS option seems almost pointless - we should be doing this anyway (albeit not on a single coupe scale) under UKFS so this doesn't seem to be a good use of money. An improved offer around going beyond the minimum would surely encourage more diversity, and perhaps re-focussing the scope of this grant may allow for an element of deer fence funding, which is the biggest barrier to establishment of diverse species.

Sometimes it just isn't worthwhile applying for the grant. I've had plenty of times whereby we have foregone the grant because of the impracticality or cost of providing the required level of diversity at the site level, even though it already occurs at the LTFP level.

All we do is keep whittling away at the productive areas each time they get felled, making them smaller and smaller. It fragments landscapes and makes everything a microcosm of the diversity that should really be measured at the LTFP level. The way it is currently set up is a very poor way to deliver diversity within a forest.

The grant rate is so low per hectare that it is hardly worth the hassle of applying. certainly the grant would not cover the cost of a consultant doing the application. I only apply because I do not put a cost on my own time

I think this grant option should be removed as it slows down and over complicates the replanting process

While a LTFP or FPA provide conditions of restocking, it is often the case that the species selection is best fine tuned during operations (specifically post ground prep) and species suitability is best determined at this time. It is highly frustrating that planting can only occur after a WIG application is approved, meaning a likely several month delay before being able to start planting. As this option is dedicated to promoting diversification of planting, a retrospective application would likely see a greater uptake of right tree in the right place silviculture. The ops plan could be a more streamlined, and mostly feels like a redundant document.

Restock of felling coupes that are approved within a UKFS compliant plan should not have to meet UKFS species proportions at the individual coupe basis when the overall plan is UKFS compliant. Restocking in accordance with the overall UKFS compliant plan should be sufficient to qualify for grant approval with a contract condition that enables historic grant recovery in the event of applicant deviating from the pathway to UKFS compliance in terms of species mix

it is too low a payment to encourage applying for.....

The scoring criteria for LTFPs is restrictive and has a preference for Environmental objectives based on designated areas that may, or may not be within the vicinity of a given woodland. This needs a review.

There should be greater encouragement of natural regeneration. No one dies it as there are no capital grants.

Restructuring does provide an opportunity to improve riparian zones, expand existing native woodland areas through regeneration.

However, non native species diversification needs to be suited to the site and the blind pursuit for species diversification is not promoting the right tree in the right place for the right reason. Growing less productive and less resilient species in the name of species diversification is not a guarantee of making the national forest resource more resilient.

The application process can feel like a tick box exercise to meet paper based guidance rather than looking at the constraints and opportunities of the actual site.

I think support for SS restocking should be dropped and all the support should be made available for diversifying the forest structure. This will help support protection measures, such as fencing which is difficult to justify. Therefore agents and owners will be more inclined to stick to SS, which perpetuates the problem of limited diversification.

Restructuring generation grant is out of step with Forest Plan process and certification assessment of forest meeting UKFS. A FP will look at felling and restructuring over 10 year period and the restructuring is assessed against this time line. WIG Restructuring application which could be a small part of approved FP has to meet UKFS for every application which means that if the applicant wishes to apply for grant then they may have to adapt species and design to meet grant eligibility. This makes a nonsense of the design work which has been undertaken for the FP process.

I did feel that there were some species restrictions based on Woodland Officer preference. There was also restrictions around utilising natural regeneration, the example I was thinking about is a property that had a SSSI but due to the restrictions around when a site had to be "established" I had to take the cautious approach and plant instead of seeing if the regen potential of the retained mature trees would be sufficient to expand on the SSSI woodland type.

The cost of fencing encourages larger ("fencible") felling coupes.

On plantations established on new ground (ie first rotation), It would be good to have an option to fell and replant an alternative more silviculturally suitable and fencible area, as long as there were portions of retained woodland and effective deer management on the felled area, this area could develop extensive woodland edge habitats and contain valuable windblown habitats.

Would suggest that higher rates should be available for smaller scale operations. Perhaps a sliding scale, reducing as scale increases. This would be in line with the same sliding scale of expenditure per hectare to undertake the works.

Encourage more areas of natural regeneration with better grant to support this option and a more realistic timescale

Grant option should be based on coupes being restocked based on the LTFP design rather than requiring a "minimum of 10% other species" within the coupe. This would give greater flexibility to woodland managers to site secondary conifer and native broadleaves in the areas within the forest where they are best suited to grow and deliver environmental benefits. LTFPs should meet UKFS requirements over the whole woodland management unit, so this change would encourage better, more cohesive planting of these species in sensitive areas where they will deliver most benefit rather than fragmented "grant chasing" designs.

The requirement to have an improved Forest plan before applying for the restructuring regeneration grant should be dropped.

The previous crop included greater species diversity than what is now planted, but there is no viable market for grand fir and Noble fir! We optimised Sitka spruce, although drought crack could be a risk, and took a risk with European larch because we are not yet affected by *P. ramorum*. We planted Douglas fir for diversity and for the drier sites, although it is an exposed site and the previous crop did not achieve very good form.

The cost of application usually makes this grant pointless to apply for.

The costs of establishing the minor conifer species and native woodland with their inherent lower value as a crop is not recognised in the grant rate differentiation. The separate rates will not encourage a shift in species choice. In fact it will likely head in the opposite direction.

The grant income for using 'alternative species' does not anywhere near offer a financial alternative to planting standard conifer (e.g. Sitka spruce). £300/ha to plant a lower-yielding and more difficult to establish conifer would be outweighed, sometimes considerably more than £10,000/ha achieved by the volume of good timber at end of rotation (e.g. 750 tonnes of Sitka spruce @ £65/ton versus 400 tonnes of Scots pine @ £50/ton for each ha).

This option is something that should be protected in future versions of the FGS, while it does not change my plans for the species to be planted on site (as a professional forester I base this on site based requirements) it does provide a useful tool for helping to bring landowners to doing the correct thing with their forests. Some landowners struggle with the idea of restocking and although it is a legal requirement the small amount of grant available through the 'restructuring regeneration' option helps in these discussions.

The following questions relate to the Woodland in and Around Town option of the Woodland Improvement grant.

58. What public benefits have been provided as a result of your Woodland in and Around Town scheme?

Answers

Local authorities are under resourced in staff and finance and skills to deal with SRDP system

Public access in to woodland, educational resources, mental health, wheelchair friendly paths/

Public access improvement, enhanced site security for forest owner, increased biodiversity, better control of pests and diseases, improved age and species diversity, reduced liability to owner from dangerous trees or dangerous access

application was not succesful (scoring)

ACCESS

Area is used for walking large amount since it was agriculture, but this has also create additional cost a vole guards are constantly remove by dogs. Client considered WIAT access funding but explained this will increase usage and potential damage so not worth the risk. If they did want to go down this route suggested when the woodland is 10 years old.

Improved public access, infrastructure and woodland signage.

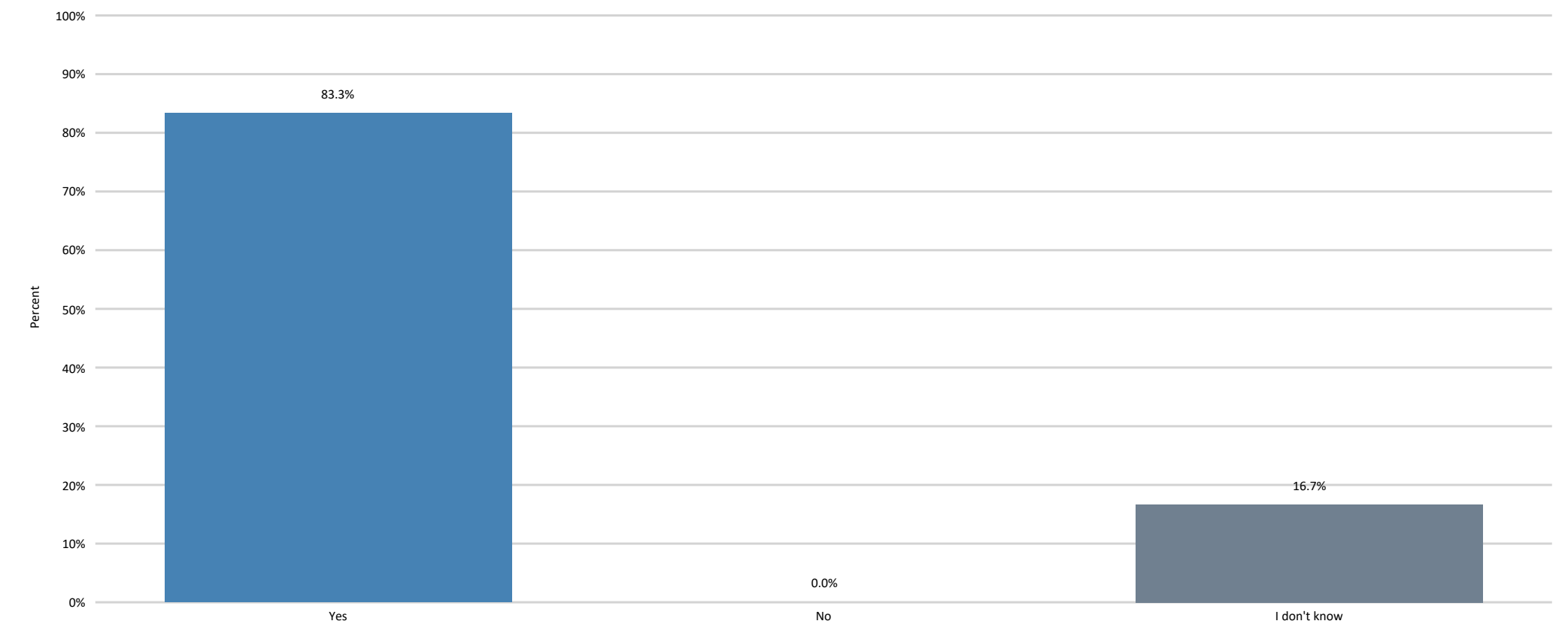
Removal of diseased trees which are a public health and biosecurity risk.

public access, signage and litter picking

Access & Education

Access improvements, maintaining or reducing liability to the owner through tree safety works, path works etc, biodiversity enhancements, improved waymarkers, seats,

59. Has public usage of the woodland increased as a result of this grant?



Name	Percent
Yes	83.3%
No	0.0%
I don't know	16.7%
N	12

60. Please provide approximate monthly number of visitors, if known**Answers**

Approximately 500-1,500/month

500?

50

usually see at least 2 people on a site visit that lasts 1 to 2 hours, very rare that it is people that i have met before, 3000 nr per month

9000

unknown

61. If you have any further comments on the Woodlands in and Around Towns option, please comment here:**Answers**

Grant value for money has deteriorated as costs have increased over the years. The requirement of quarries to switch to white diesel has vastly increased the cost of bought in stone.

Woodland officers not really experienced to deal with these applications. Should be someone with at least 5 years experience in working in the conservancies dealing with WIAT woodlands, local authorities and community groups.

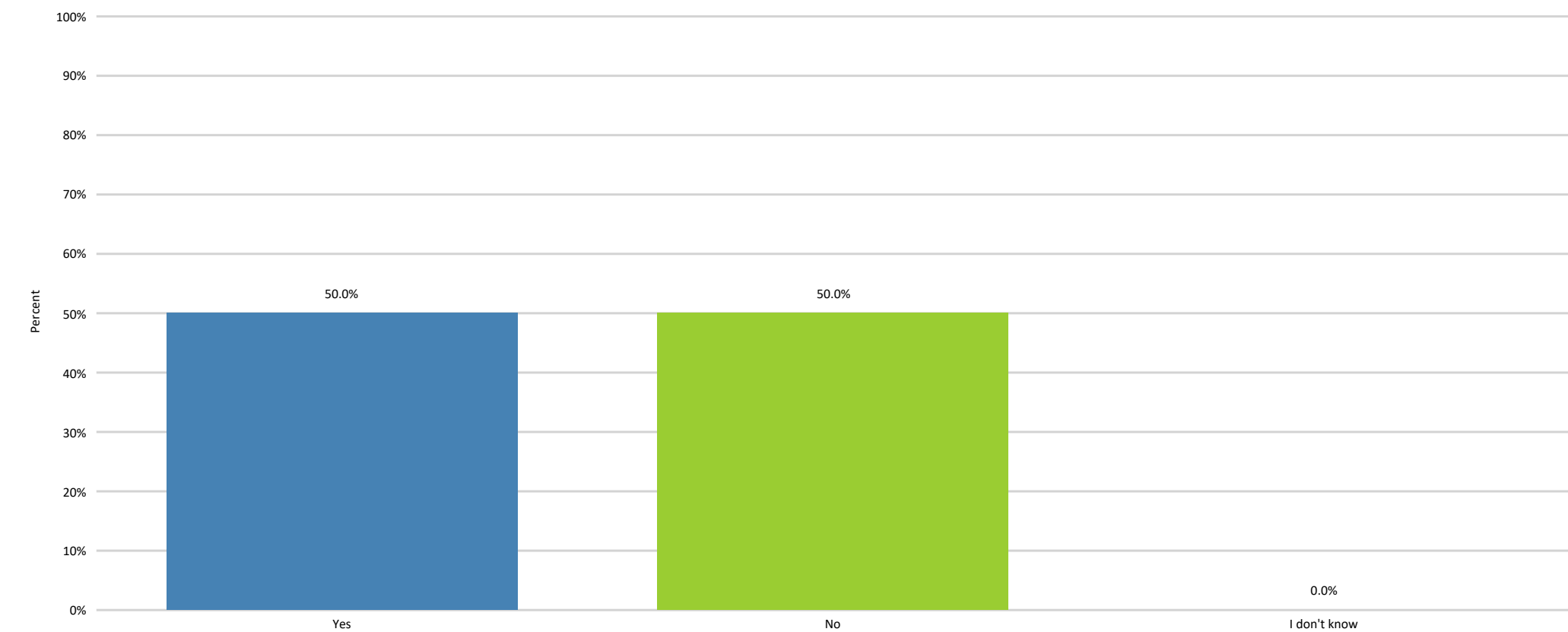
It is a complicated process and grant rates are too low..

Similar as to the new woodland creation. Extremely excessive timescales to process the application and minimal-to-zero communications or updates.

expensive to do as there is basically two grant application processes, one for the WIAT management plan and then one for the implementation, this makes it expensive. Woodland officers aren't that familiar with WIAT because they keep leaving or promoted sideways or upwards in record time.

The following questions relate to the Low impact Silvicultural Systems option available as part of the Woodland Improvement Grant.

62. Did the grant encourage you to use Low Impact Silvicultural Systems where you otherwise may not have?



Name	Percent
Yes	50.0%
No	50.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	4

63. What systems did you employ that you otherwise would not have?

Answers

CCF / SMALL / LOW GROUND PRESSURE WOODLAND HARVESTING...

LISS allows management flexibility for managers with the least amount of interaction with stakeholders as its benefits are universally acknowledged.

64. If you have any further comments on the Low Impact Silvicultural Systems option, please comment here:**Answers**

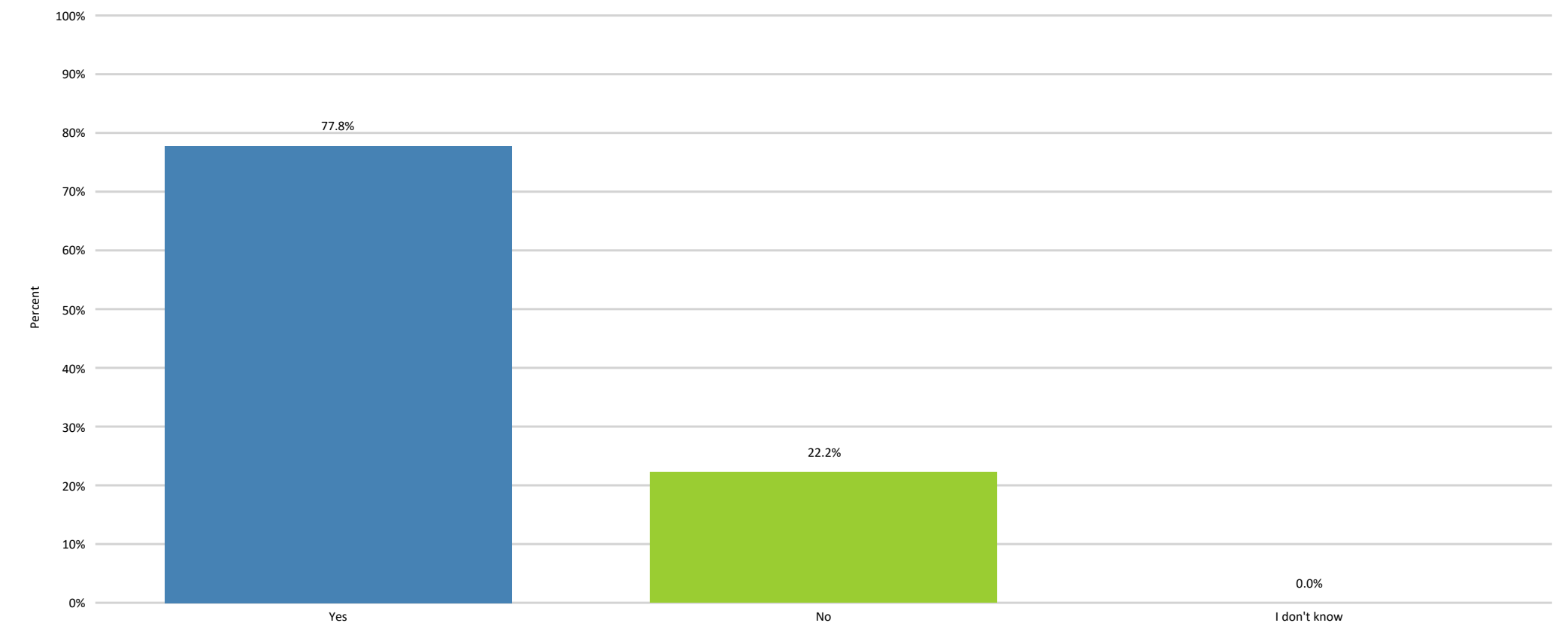
IT WAS DO ABLE WHEN THE TIMBER MARKET WAS BOUYANT

often the first stage of converting to LISS is small scale clearfelling, as discussed above the cost of fencing encourages larger felling coupes.

The best time to plan for LISS is at the time of planting / restocking, design of which should assume LISS and create extensive green edges and access options

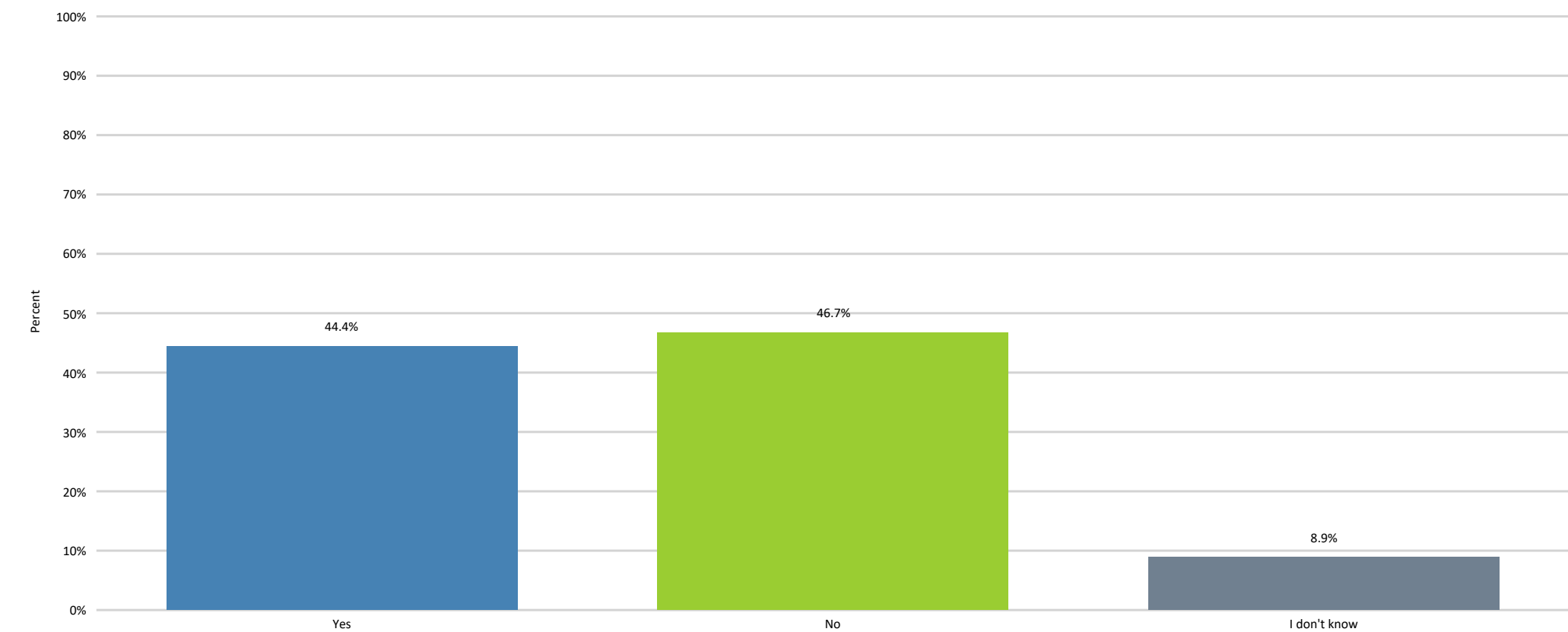
The following questions relate to the Long Term Forest Plans option of the Woodland Improvement grant (not including forest plan renewals).

65. Was your forest ever under a previous forest management plan?



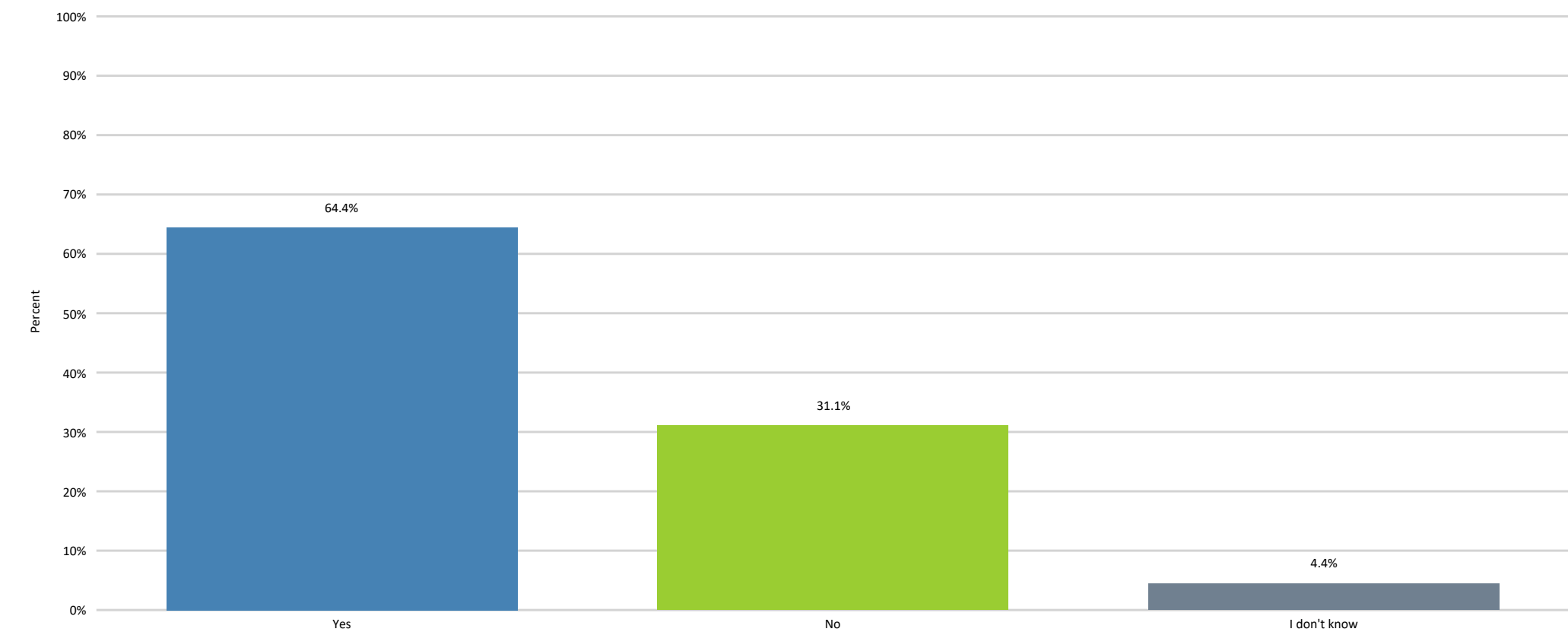
Name	Percent
Yes	77.8%
No	22.2%
I don't know	0.0%
N	45

66. Would you have created a long term forest plan if this grant was not available?



Name	Percent
Yes	44.4%
No	46.7%
I don't know	8.9%
N	45

67. Do you feel this grant encouraged you to plan the future of your forest differently?



Name	Percent
Yes	64.4%
No	31.1%
I don't know	4.4%
N	45

68. In what ways have your plans for the future of your forest changed? (e.g., sustainable forest management practices)

Answers

The landowner was not convinced about managing his forest through CCF means but the responses of consultees and long discussions with forest manager helped to convince him.

Greater emphasis on carbon sequestration therefore more emphasis on fast growing conifers in the restock design

Future felling plans clearly defined

Discussions with woodland officers help provide alternative strategies and greater compliance with UKFS.

increased amounts of scrubby broadleaved trees that probably will never come to anything other.

following UKWAS, and managing the asset in a sustainable manner going forward, after being ill advised in the past. Smaller clear fell areas to reduce the landscape impact. Good restock policy

Species diversity

Climate resilience

Mainly in terms of infrastructural improvements / much of the landscape issues are subjective and guff

It now complies with the UKFS

The grant requires the applicant to adapt what they feel is right for the site, within legal and appropriate industry practice, in order to have the plan approved by regulatory staff and single issue stakeholders whose direction and opinions go beyond legal requirements and appropriate industry practice.

Removal of low yielding crops to increase future timber resource. Diversification where possible

Great native woodland cover and diverse conifers.

Improved buffers to watercourses.

Greater focus on local wildlife.

Long term strategy for management of commercial woodlands, but also small copses used for shooting.

Improved forest infrastructure.

The forest plan allow for a wholistic approach to be taken and avoids treating each felling cpt. as a single entity. This improves the overall opportunities to focus the right tree in the right place and provides an opportunity to focus commercial timber crops and habitat protection/improvement in the right areas.

encourages more broadleaf & other conifer planting however, this can be site specific. Not all areas will be suitable for certain species and with landowner priorities for productive commercial forests the grant pushes to reduce this need.

Greater understanding of local issues and how best to mitigate and improve them from consultation with statutory bodies.

The provision of a grant encourages a far higher level of detail to go into a plan. Most owners would have a strategic plan but would not go to the detail of the current plan templates without the assistance of grant aid.

Considerations for species choice, silvicultural systems, water and historic environment management were given more detailed thought due to additional time allowed by grant income payment.

69. If you have any further comments on the Long Term Forest Plans option of the Woodland Improvement grant, please comment here;

Answers

The time lag in processing LTFPs is a real problem, particularly when there is annual harvesting activity. It is difficult to predict when to apply for renewal in order to ensure that there is enough time for the grant to be processed. There is no requirement of Scottish Forestry to respect the renewal dates of the forest plans meaning that felling permission can lapse with economic consequences for owners.

There is a disparity between how LTFPs and Management Plans are dealt with. I appreciate that MPs are a cut down version, but completely unsupported by grant and yet still required to access the grant system. I would estimate that in simple cases there is about two thirds of the work required for a MP. And you still need to apply for the felling permission separately, which pushes up the work required.

This needs to be addressed.

The template is generally fine but a bit clunky in places. This could be improved. A couple of obvious omissions as well. no section on landscape, for example. The tables, being in Word, don't tally so there is manual calculation required. The table takes ages to complete, unnecessarily. The schedules and production forecast, too. Clunky formats and repetition. Shouldn't be needed with all the technology we have.

I found the LTP very difficult to do because I do not have mapping software. I also found SF staff very difficult and slow to respond and deal with my application. I need a LTP to get a squirrel control grant and restructure grant and this is the main reason I did it.

Some conservancies seem to want plan reviews every 5 years whereas other conservancies don't. I think that 10 yearly reviews at plan renewal is often enough.

The reduced grant available for renewals is not helpful, and transferring a legacy plan to the new template is not an efficient process, which often is easier to start from scratch anyway.

Different types of forests should be treated differently. Upland commercial forestry plantations should be viewed with a commercial perspective and woodland officers should stop asking for high proportions of diverse conifers and broadleaves where silviculturally they will not perform. Lowland forests on the other hand could increase species choice by a greater amount. A broader view is required on forestry in Scotland.

Process for properties < 100ha is not very clear. Previous application rejected at a late stage

Rate is miles too low,... the woodland officer is incapable of bringing it to a conclusion due to mindless comments from landscape architect and others which are just missing the point... that is to manage the wood not make it an academic exercise in not managing the wood ---- far far far too much comment on irrelevant nonsense

Very slow process when dealing with SF staff

Plans are a direction of travel, but circumstances often change within a 5 or 10 year Plan Period and more flexibility and regulatory resource is needed to facilitate timely and sensible amendments to plans in progress where necessary. For example the impact of Phytophthora ramorum on proposed larch retentions, timber market influence on felling programs etc.

It is broken and too bureaucratic and now being ignored for the FPA process. Delays in processing are having significant implications on forestry businesses.

Similar issues with slow processing of applications and minimal communications.

Overall grant rates do not cover the cost of works required with inflation and increased complexity of the works involved.

See previous comments about grouping of non-"geographically separate" LTFP applications for BRNs.

I have a feeling that having woodland in areas that are highly designated we would have been required to produce a long-term forest plan whether or not there was a grant available; the alternative being to work to individual felling licences. The grant certainly encourages us to put more time into stakeholder engagement.

Forest plans should be creative and fun, and the pinnacle of forest management. Instead they are laborious tick box glorified felling licences, which take too long to commission. "You do know we have to read these don't you"

Basically the LTFP is a means to avoid applying for several felling permissions. What it doesn't do is allow for flexibility and this can be difficult to manage when flexibility is required. For instance Storm Arwen blew down areas of phase 3 or 4 which meant that felling permission was required, despite the intentions of the LTFP being very clear, it added to the bureaucracy and caused delays when it didn't need to, when the trees are blown over, why is approval needed, when the restocking plans are in place. Timing of felling might change but the restocking shouldn't! Appreciate when a LTFP isn't in place felling permission is required for wind blow, but not when considerable effort has been made to get the restocking correctly mapped out.

LTFPs are a useful tool for both owners and SF to be able to ease the administrative burden of the felling regulations over time. ie applications for felling approval on a site by site basis would be incredibly onerous for both parties. It would also prevent the ability to manage the forest unit as a whole and provide greater biodiversity benefit by concentrating minor species and native into the key areas.

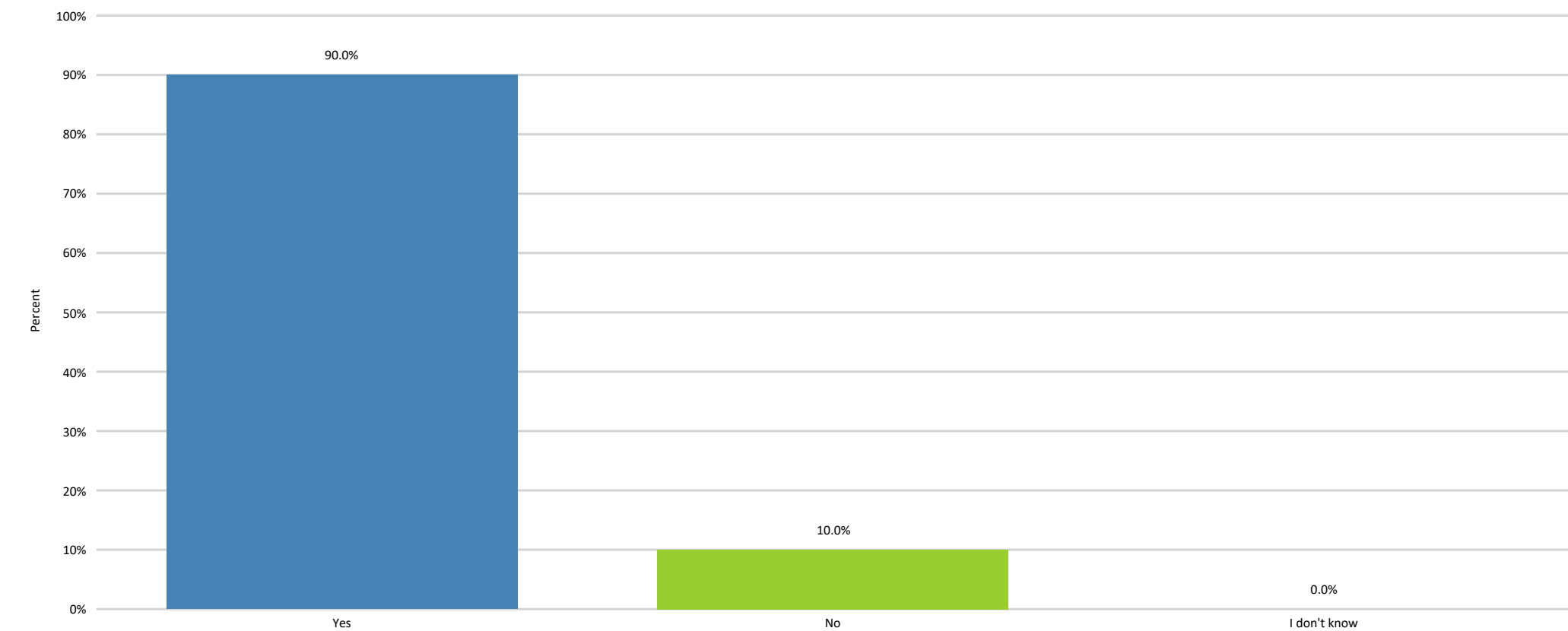
The application process for the LTFPS is straight forward, however the major stumbling block is the sign off of plans by operations managers in the conservancies. I have had experience of it has taking 18 months to achieve sign off with very minor changes being asked for by the conservancy.

As an ex SF employee this was also an area which was a cause of frustration for woodland officers when I was in the conservancy.

Please review this process.

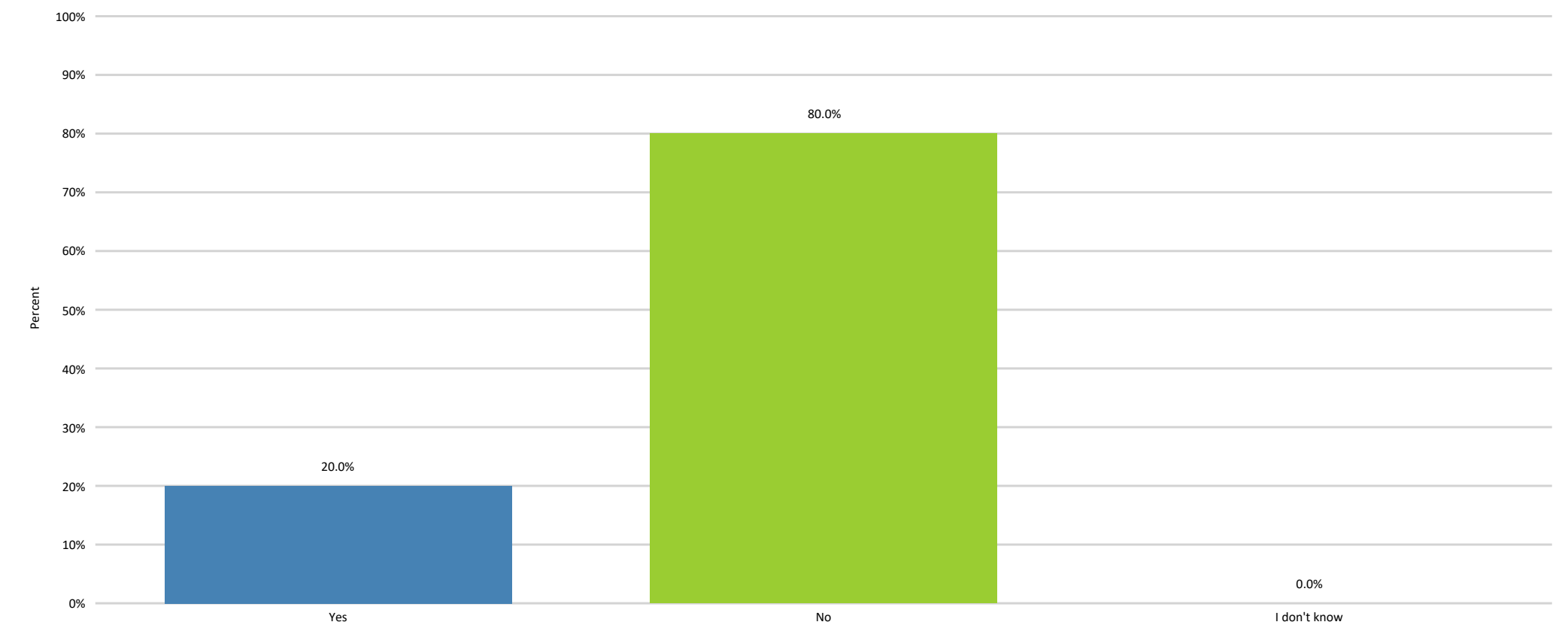
The following questions relate to the Deer Management Plan option of the Woodland Improvement grant.

70. Did you carry out deer management as part of forest management before applying for this grant?



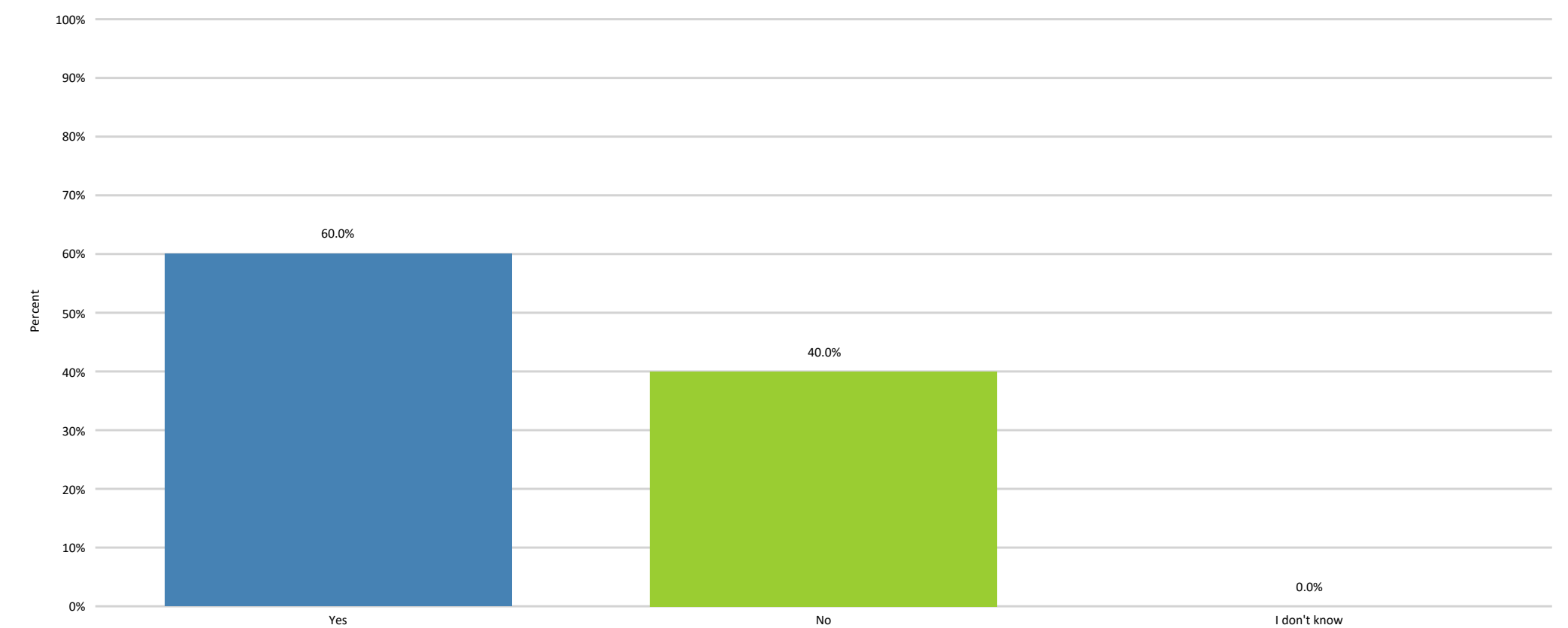
Name	Percent
Yes	90.0%
No	10.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	10

71. Did the grant encourage you to carry out deer management where you otherwise may not have?



Name	Percent
Yes	20.0%
No	80.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	10

72. Has this grant improved your ability to carry out effective deer management?



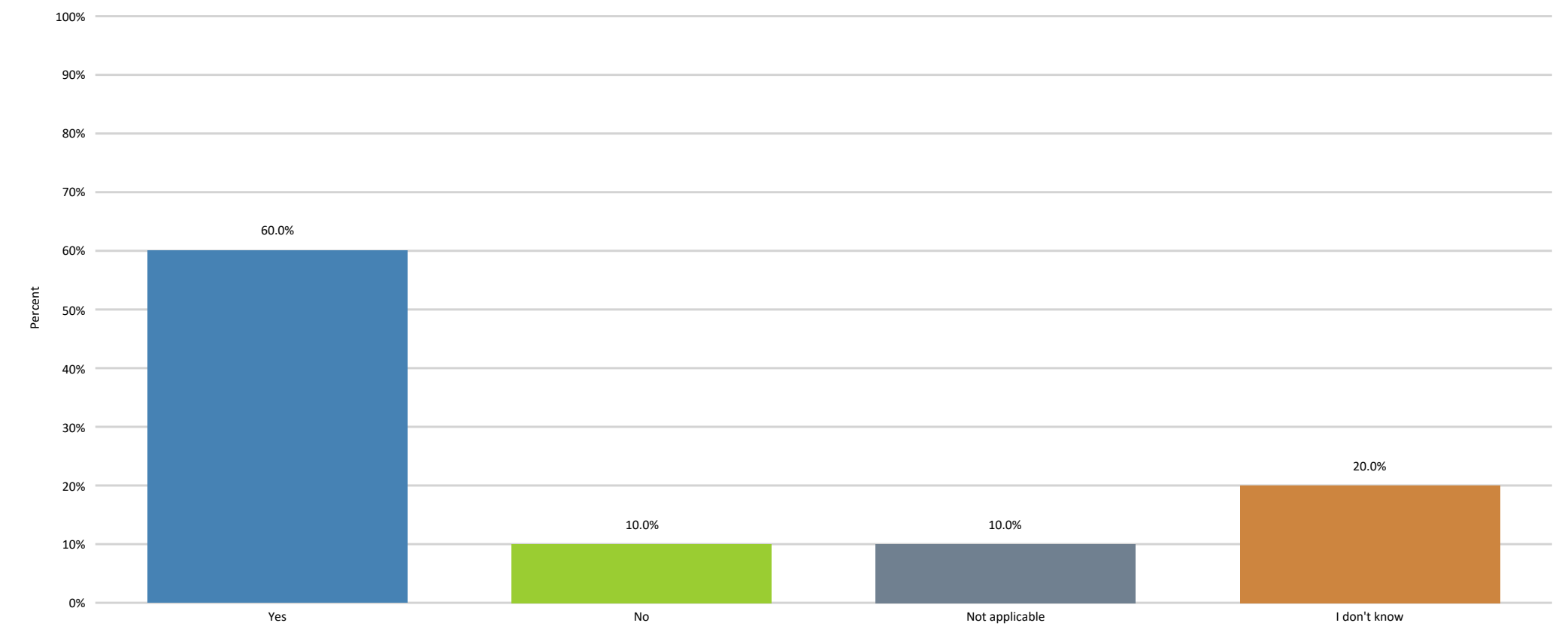
Name	Percent
Yes	60.0%
No	40.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	10

73. What do you think is preventing you from carrying out effective deer management?

Answers

- Collapse of the venison market
- Nothing it is carried out well... it has been over subscribed in terms of what is effective....
- High human populations and public access are usually the biggest barriers to effective deer management.

74. To the best of your knowledge, did you manage to get deer populations below 10/km² within 3 years?



Name	Percent
Yes	60.0%
No	10.0%
Not applicable	10.0%
I don't know	20.0%
N	10

75. If you have any further comments on the Deer Management Plan option of the Woodland Improvement grant, please comment here:**Answers**

Does not take into consideration the sale of venison

It would be nice to be offered training in the HIA that SF requires to support this option. There needs to be a clear understanding of where SF sits in relation to NS and designation, but also national parks. Sometimes deer fences are required and are a tool to be used, too much negative thoughts about landscape impact with fences.

They miss the point ---- shoot them until trees established and allow sporting value to be done post this by having some reasonable design elements in the wood for deer control

Deer control does benefit from ATV access improvements, provision of Deer ladders locally etc. that have resulted from DMG. However, deer move around and every forest has different levels of cover, sightlines etc, and the deer population and the ability of stalkers to cull them are influenced by weather, venison markets etc as well. Whilst there are in forest improvements that can be made to improve deer culling opportunities the focus of available funds should perhaps be focussed on trying to make the deer management process more economically viable. If the value of the venison pays professional stalkers to cull deer then deer culls and control will increase.

76. If you have any further comments on the Woodland Improvement Grant, please comment here:

Answers

Too many hoops to jump through to get some of the grant. WOs and Conservators go on about the natural regeneration. Frankly, it takes more time to fill in the forms and produce all the evidence on deer management and monitoring that it just isn't worth the hassle. There are a few grants that fall into this category.

SF officers need to be more pragmatic and sympathetic to the private owner

Guidance should be made clearer with regards to the maximum and minimum levels of other species that need to be replanted. Eg it would be more helpful to state something like:

Maximum Sitka spruce 75%

Minimum other conifer 5%

Minimum native broadleaves 5%

Minimum DOG 15%

Support for restructuring grants should be changed to stop grant support for Sitka spruce and provide much greater support from broadleaves and soft conifers. This would greatly help with the cost of protection (tubes/fencing), and increased maintenance costs to achieve establishment. Especially where the planting would contribute to exceeding minimum diversity of UKFS.

Would be good to see more budget allocated to this grant

It is not set up well and over complicated ...

I always struggle to find the right location for the claim forms on the website; ideally they should be accessible from any of the "claim" sections.

When applying for grants within designated areas there perhaps needs to be better guidance on when it would be appropriate to apply for full cost recovery. Almost like a pre-application process. A lot of staff or consultant time can be spent on applying for a grant that might get rejected, which is also justification for a pre-application process.

Unless the grant income is more than £2,000 there is rarely financial justification for applying for a grant given the cost of preparing an application, reporting and claiming.

Some good options included in WIG. T

I have not commented on the WIG applications associated with Rhododendron removal, as the earlier questions were geared towards planting. However I feel it is worth mentioning that the grant rates within the Rhododendron removal section are out of date and the actual cost of activities outweigh the grant contribution (ie. grant for foliar application is £200/hectare where in reality cost is greater than £700/hectare).

As with FGS, greater encouragements to reduce use of plastics in forestry would be welcomed.

Could the claim process be built into the online application system? E.g. Once you have applied for 1500m of fence marking, going back into the application form might enable you to tick the relevant completion boxes, rather than filling in a claim form that repeats much of the information that is in the application.

Montane habitats. Specific CCF encouragement

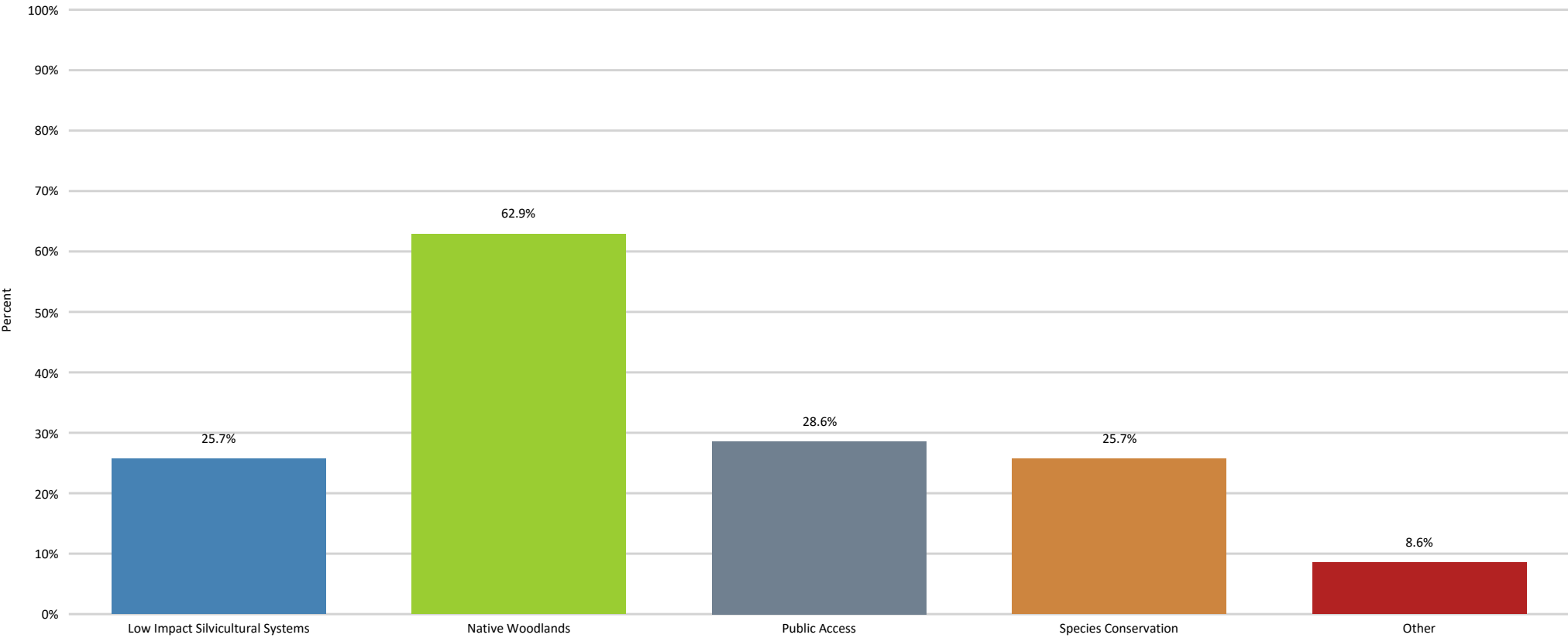
1. The current system does not serve woodlands growing in Scotland as it ought to.
2. The WIG is a bureaucratic nightmare.
3. Woodland owners have to kow-tow to the personal preferences of the FCS bureaucrats.
4. There is no right of appeal against idiosyncratic decisions.

WIG and WIAT appear to be a very low priority for SF, which appears to care only about meeting woodland creation targets

Capital costs would be helpful. Deer management - needs to include scale of reporting.

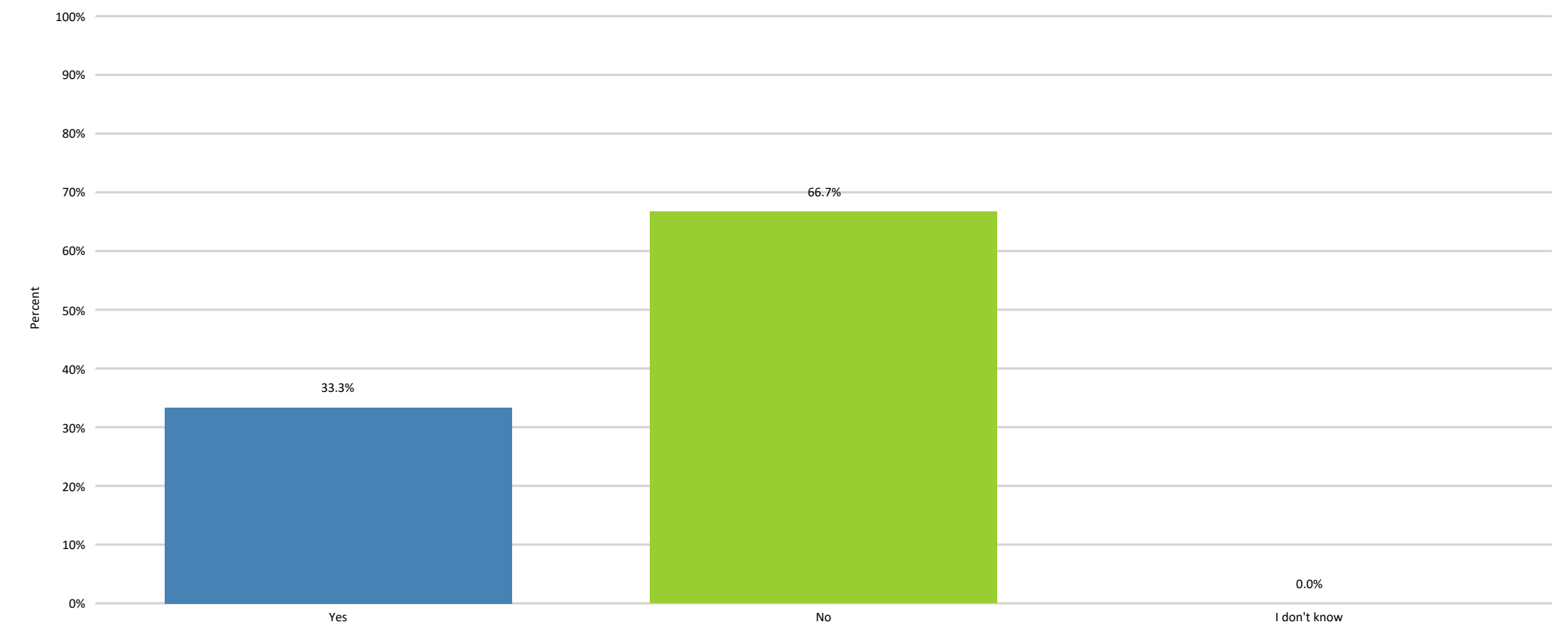
The following questions relate to the Sustainable Management of Forests Grant.

77. Please indicate which of the following Sustainable Management of Forests Options you applied for (tick all that apply).



Name	Percent
Low Impact Silvicultural Systems	25.7%
Native Woodlands	62.9%
Public Access	28.6%
Species Conservation	25.7%
Other	8.6%
N	35

78. Did the grant encourage you to use Low Impact Silvicultural Systems where you otherwise may not have?



Name	Percent
Yes	33.3%
No	66.7%
I don't know	0.0%
N	9

79. What systems did you employ that you otherwise would not have?

Answers

Shelterwood

80. If you have any further comments on the Low impact Silvicultural Systems option of the Sustainable Management of Forests grant, please comment here:

Answers

Another one that is actually difficult to apply for. You need far too much information to make the application and then half to the WOs have never seen one and lack confidence to a degree that they don't really know what to do with it.

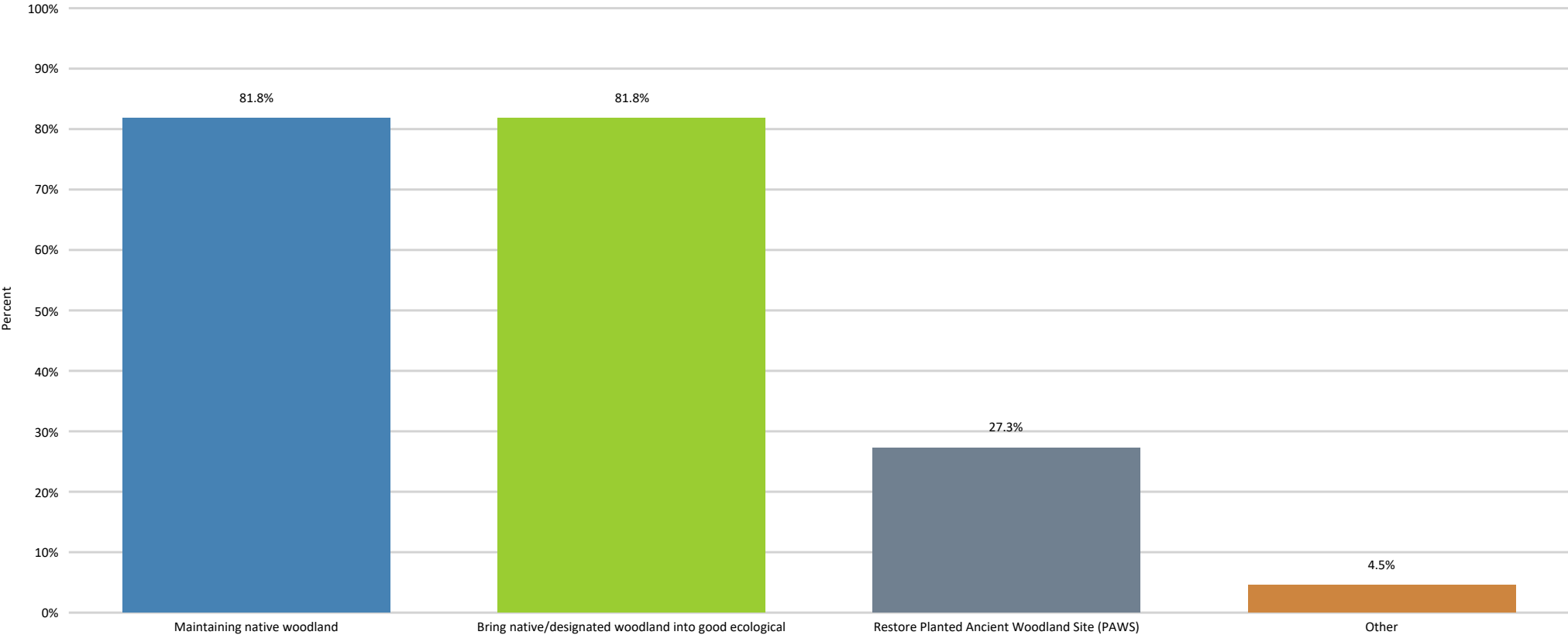
This one really needs to be slimmed down quite a lot. Once you've written a deer management plan for an LTFP you really shouldn't have to produce another one for a grant application (which I have been asked to do for LISS and for Native woodlands). That put me off and I couldn't be bothered to apply.

the answer no was because it was always the only option a supposed alternative system .. what are you talking about the gods sake ?

see previous comments

The following questions relate to the Native Woodlands option of the Sustainable Management of Forests Grant.

81. What were your objectives for the Native Woodlands grant option? (tick all that apply)



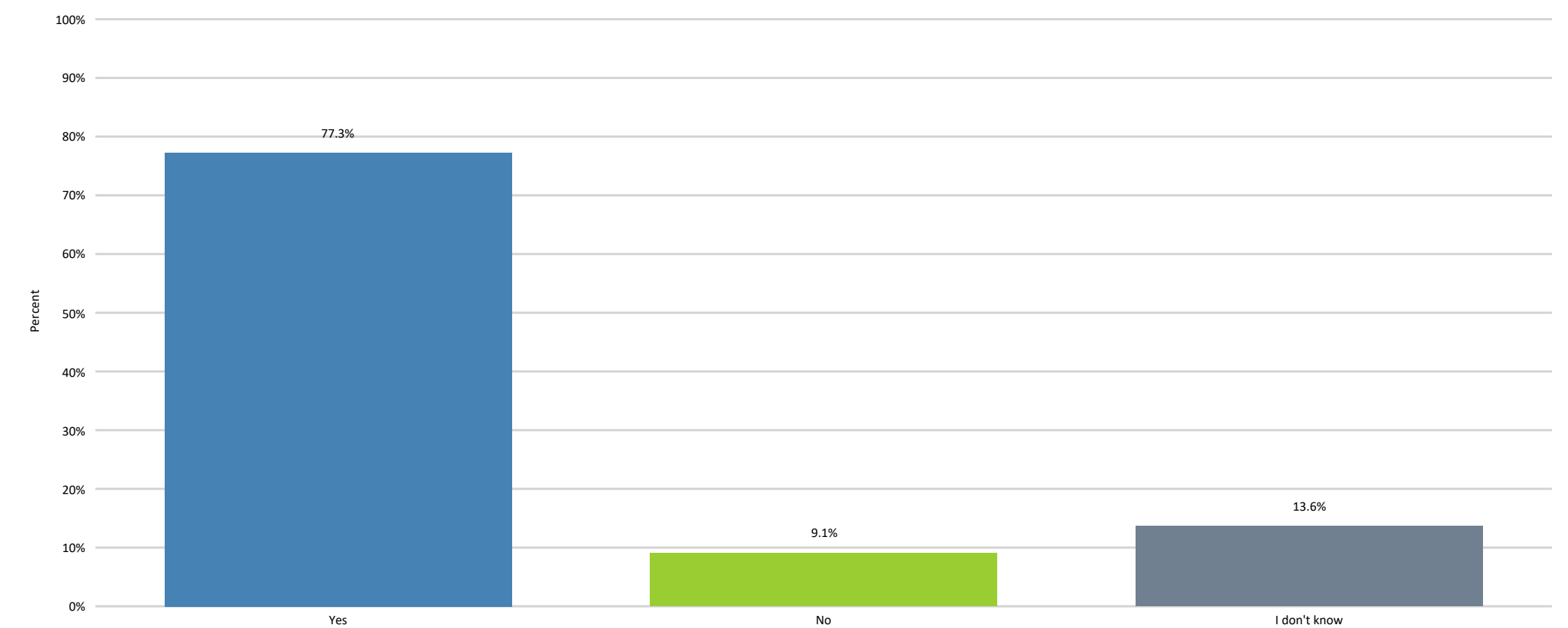
Name	Percent
Maintaining native woodland	81.8%
Bring native/designated woodland into good ecological condition	81.8%
Restore Planted Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS)	27.3%
Other	4.5%
N	22

82. What were your objectives for the Native Woodlands option?

Answers

Controlling and monitoring deer impacts

83. Did you achieve your objectives for the Native Woodlands option?



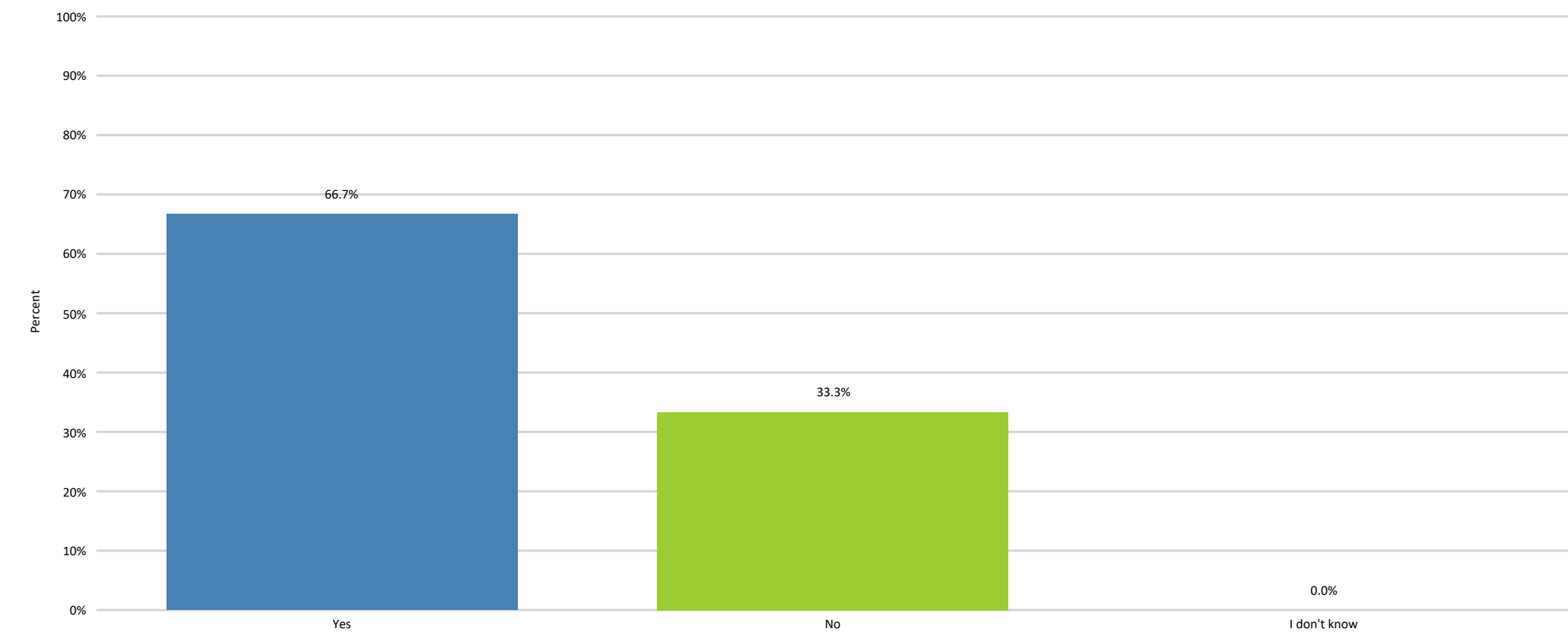
Name	Percent
Yes	77.3%
No	9.1%
I don't know	13.6%
N	22

84. What prevented you from achieving your goals for the Native Woodlands option?**Answers**

The grant application

lack of flexibility from the conservancy in applying commonsense to an application, not funding items such as dyke repairs as it costs more than a new fence, despite the fact that a dyke will last hundreds of years and provide shelter where fencing does not.

85. Did the Native Woodlands option encourage you to carry out work where you otherwise would not have?



Name	Percent
Yes	66.7%
No	33.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	21

86. if you have any further comments on the Native Woodlands grant option, please comment here:**Answers**

Its just not worth the effort

It was obviously the only option ... often the ASNW is completely knackered and has no or little redeeming value, but the WO like a drone institutionalized idiot bang's on about when it is not important, and another area without that status is better by miles in same plan area.

Grant income is essential to pay for the staff time required to get deer numbers to a level that secures natural regeneration, especially with low venison prices.

It focussed minds on the need to control deer and monitor their impacts.

Cost of applications now discouraging applicants coming forward.

This became extremely difficult with the Woodland Officer repeatedly changing the design and requirements. To the extent that several plans and designs were created, in total the process took over 2 years for the work on site to commence, ultimately losing out on two years of protection on the suppressed regen. It is extremely difficult to justify this cost to the landowner as they are expecting the process to be supported by Scottish Forestry, especially when it is a SSSI and action has been requested by both Nature Scot and Scottish Forestry.

we use the nw option to help pay for maintenance of fences after the wc grant expires.

WC grants do not cover the full cost of long term fence maint and eventual removal.

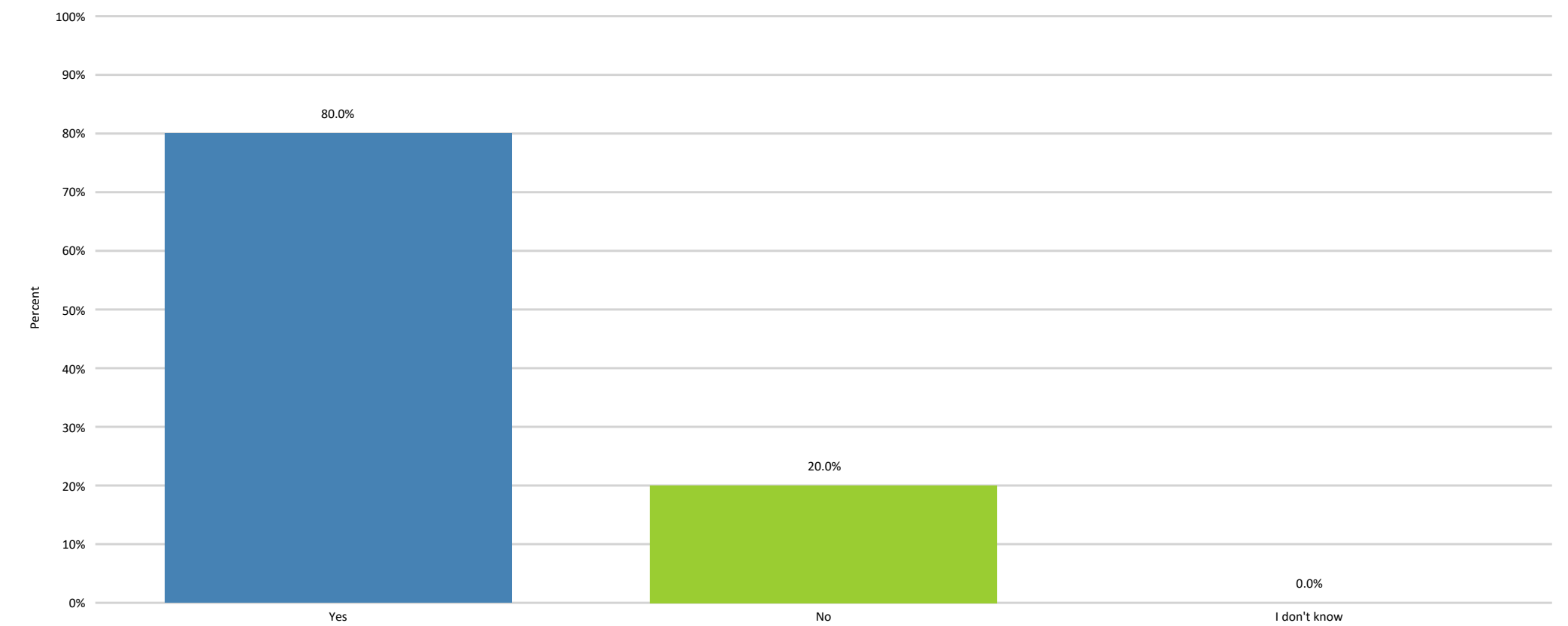
We were delighted to be awarded this grant however the process was a challenge due to the lack of knowledge about the grant and a number of criteria were not appropriate for our proposal which resulted in delays when challenging the requirement. For example we have native woodlands over 100ha we wanted to manage and following the guidelines needed a LTFP. However this document is principally applicable for productive forests which our woodlands are not and no felling was intended. A woodland management plan was much more appropriate but only considered useable when less than 100ha. We have to ask for this document to be acceptable a number of times and acceptance of this took a considerable amount of time. We also produced a DMP using the proposed SMF template however following submission this was subsequently deemed not detailed enough so had to produce another DMP on a WIG template to provide more information. This further delayed the process. While I appreciate this is a little accessed grant so people may not be familiar with how it works, having documents fit for purpose would have been useful to avoid causing significant delays in the application process.

While the focus is on reducing deer numbers in existing woodland, for our area the focus needs to be on reducing deer numbers to ensure regeneration in non-woodland areas. There is unlikely to be significant natural regeneration of pioneer species under woodland canopies; so for this woodland the focus needs to be on deer management to secure woodland expansion. The justification of costs in the application process might also include other operations such as non-natives removal that is of a scale that does not justify a separate WIG application.

While it did not encourage work from the grant alone, this is a helpful grant option in helping persuade landowners to do the correct thing with their forestry.

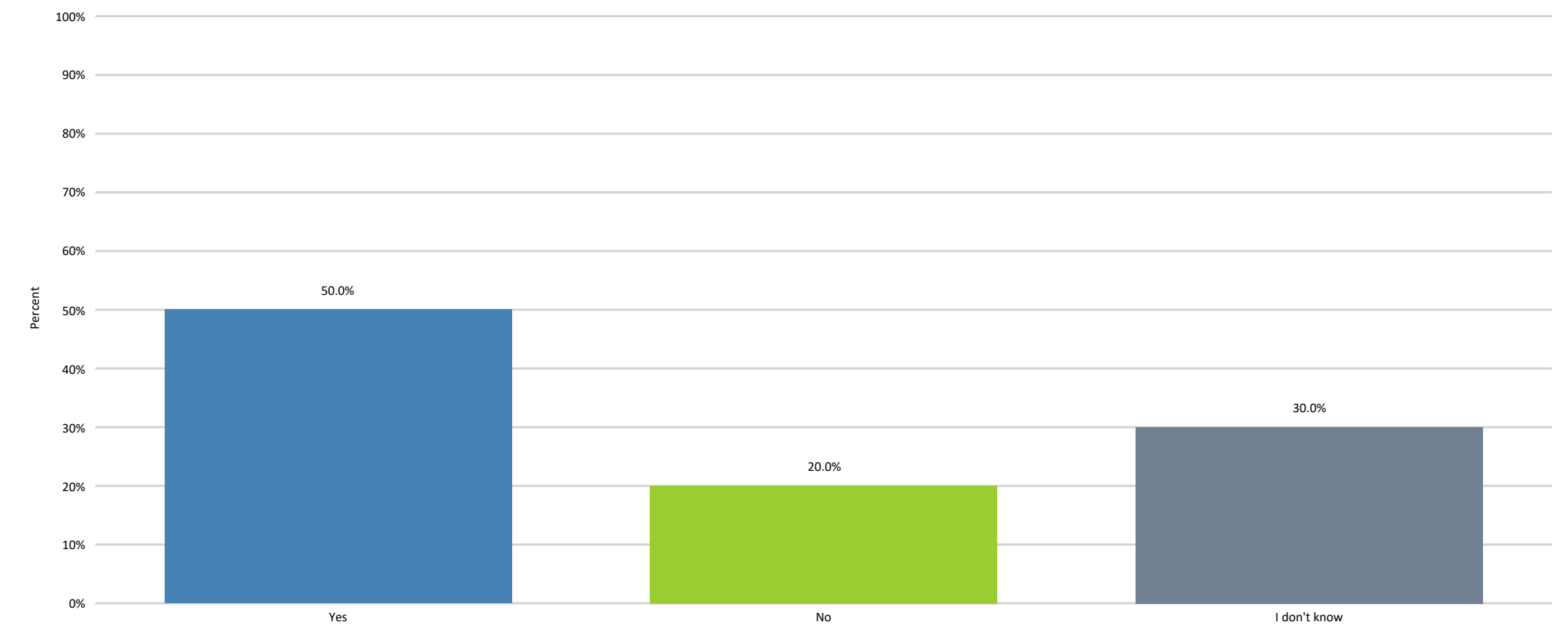
The following questions relate to the Public Access option of the Sustainable Management of Forests Grant.

87. Did the Public Access option encourage you to carry out work where otherwise you would not have?



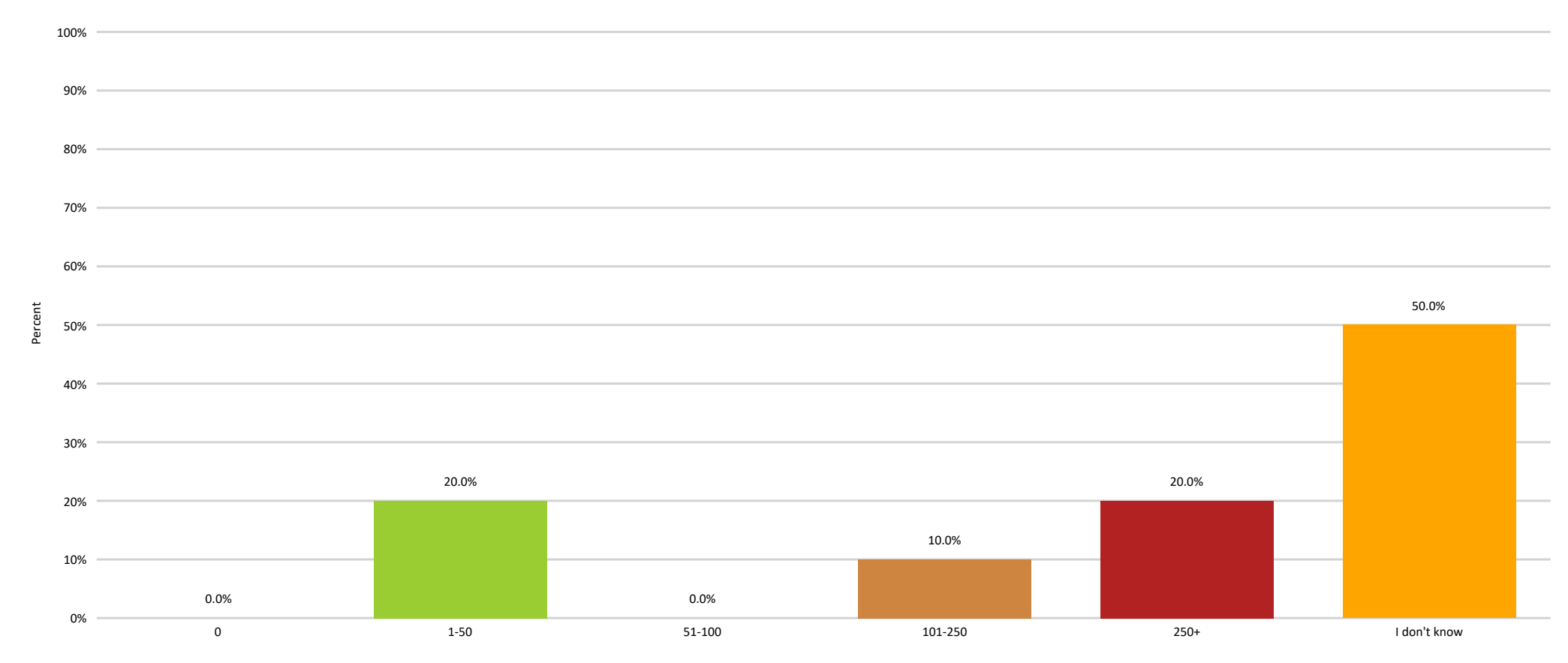
Name	Percent
Yes	80.0%
No	20.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	10

88. Has public usage of the woodland increased as a result of this grant?



Name	Percent
Yes	50.0%
No	20.0%
I don't know	30.0%
N	10

89. Please provide approximate number of monthly visitors, if known



Name	Percent
0	0.0%
1-50	20.0%
51-100	0.0%
101-250	10.0%
250+	20.0%
I don't know	50.0%
N	10

90. If you have any further comments on the Public Access option of the Sustainable Management of Forests Grant, please comment here:**Answers**

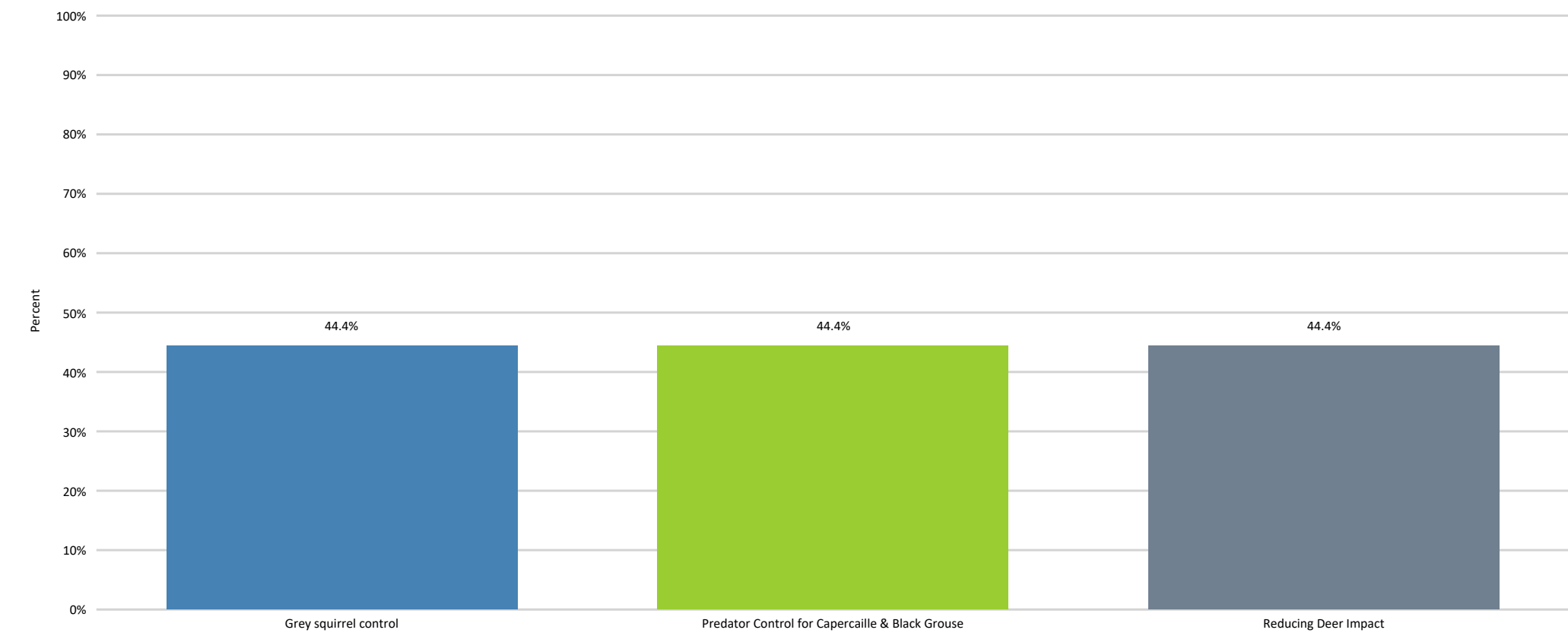
This isn't a bad grant as far as they go. I don't think they encourage any more public access, but they do compensate owners to carry out work that they really should be doing anyway, particularly in relation to public health and safety. It doesn't allow for the creation of any new trails or car parks and does nothing for the running surface, but it does at least allow something to tidy up and carry out tree inspections. So there is definitely a public benefit associated with it.

Not well understood by WOs due to the low level of applications. Again, a convoluted and tied to SMF.

Most people don't go out in the rain, it rains a lot in SCOTLAND..

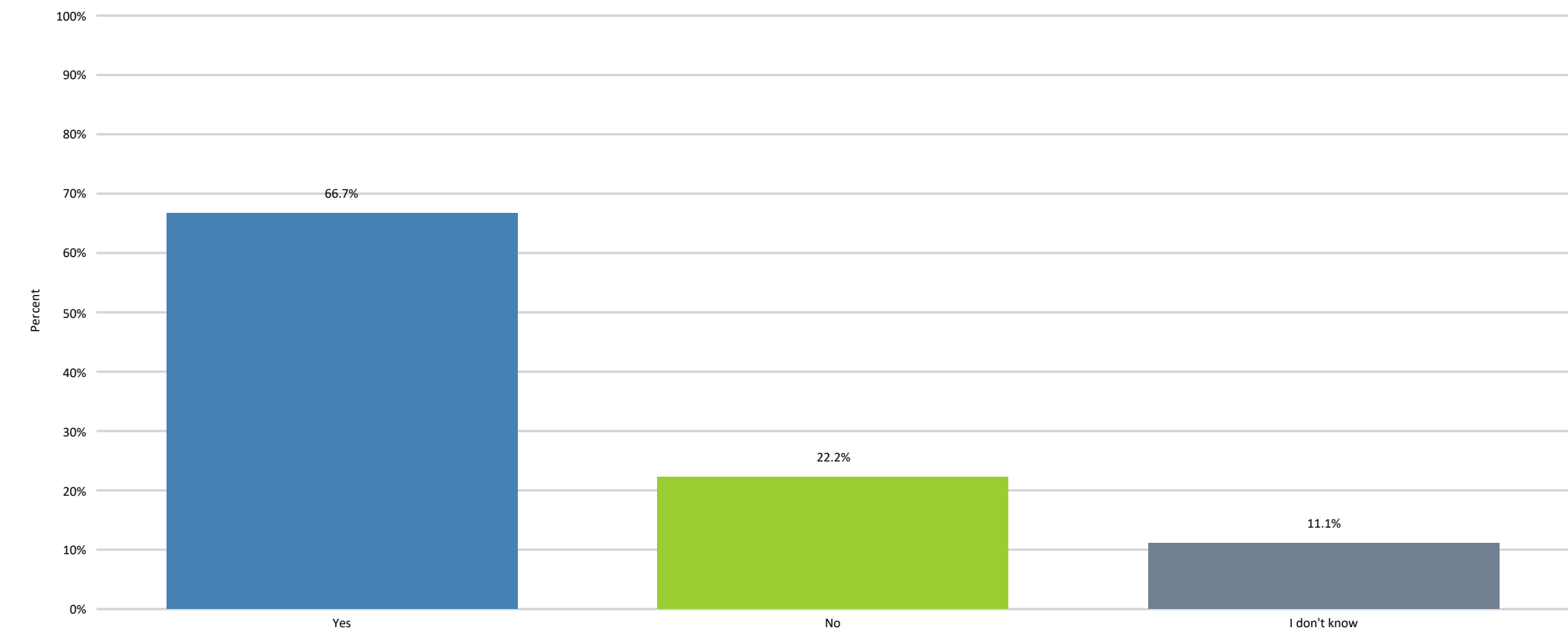
The following questions relate to the Species Conservation option of the Sustainable Forest Management Grant.

91. Which Species Conservation grant(s) have you applied for? (tick all that apply)



Name	Percent
Grey squirrel control	44.4%
Predator Control for Capercaillie & Black Grouse	44.4%
Reducing Deer Impact	44.4%
N	9

92. Do you consider there to be barriers to applying for these grants?



Name	Percent
Yes	66.7%
No	22.2%
I don't know	11.1%
N	9

93. What do you think are the barriers to applying for grants like the Species Conservation option?**Answers**

the claim process stopped me from doing anymore.....

The staff time required to bring all the supporting information together; the uncertainty of not knowing if the application will be successful.

Complexity of forms

High cost of administering grant compared to overall grant aid.

The grant's focus on spring time culling of foxes and crows is a bit mis-placed now that, especially for foxes, control through the year and especially in the winter using thermal imaging equipment is at least as successful as tracking down dens with cubs or trapping/snaring.

This one was OK

94. If you have any further comments on the Species Conservation option of the Sustainable Woodland Management Grant, please comment here:**Answers**

the claim process stopped me from doing anymore.....

The reporting form is a bit clunky - no spell check, variable fonts

The reducing deer impact grant has been almost impossible to undertake in a lowland setting. Although we have significant damage assessment data over a considerable timeframe it is not admissible. The grant appears to have been a deer counting contractor payment mechanism.

If the targets for increasing tree species diversity are to be realised then the increase in deer control is going to need support. This is for both upland red deer range and lowland areas with smaller block sizes. It's the lowland block sizes that have greater potential for diversity.

95. If you have any comments on the Sustainable Management of Forests Grant, please comment here:

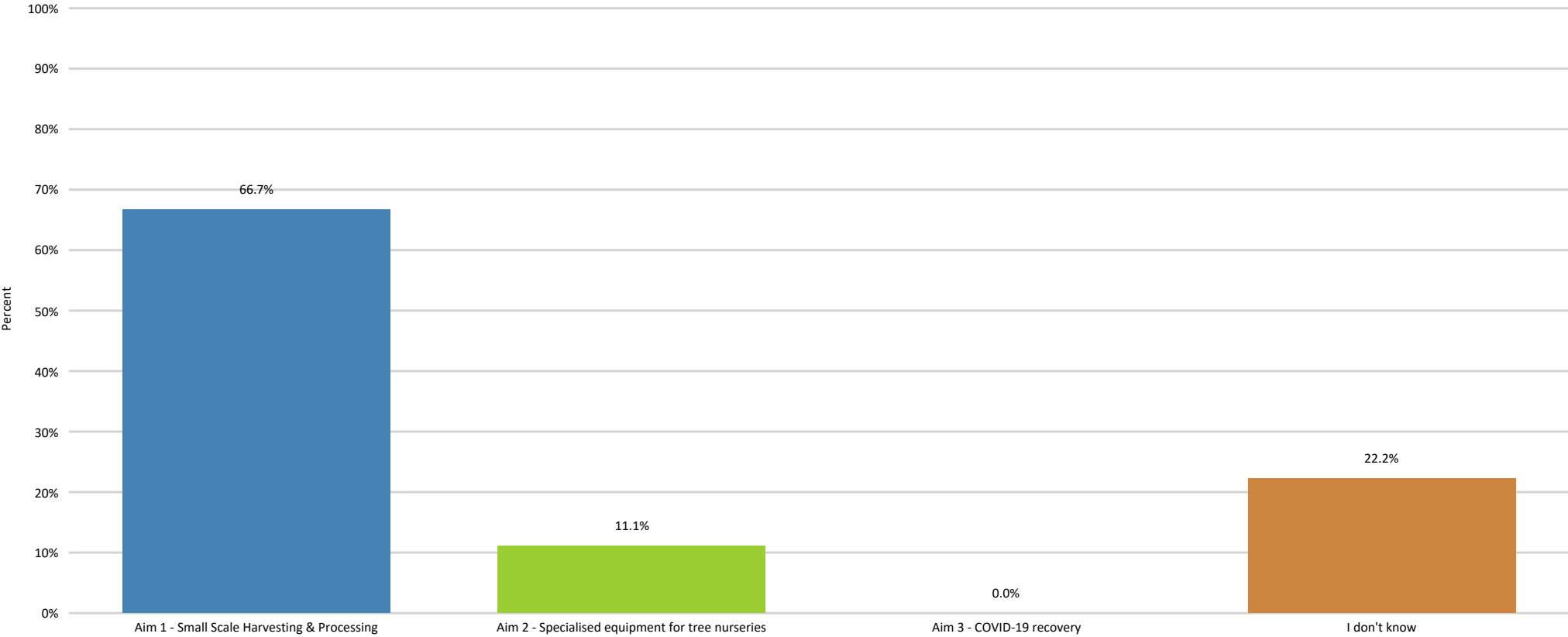
Answers

The application process and guidance does not make it clear what the level of reporting needs to be, so we were a bit caught out having to report in quite a lot of detail in order to claim each year.

None - I did not know there was such a thing.

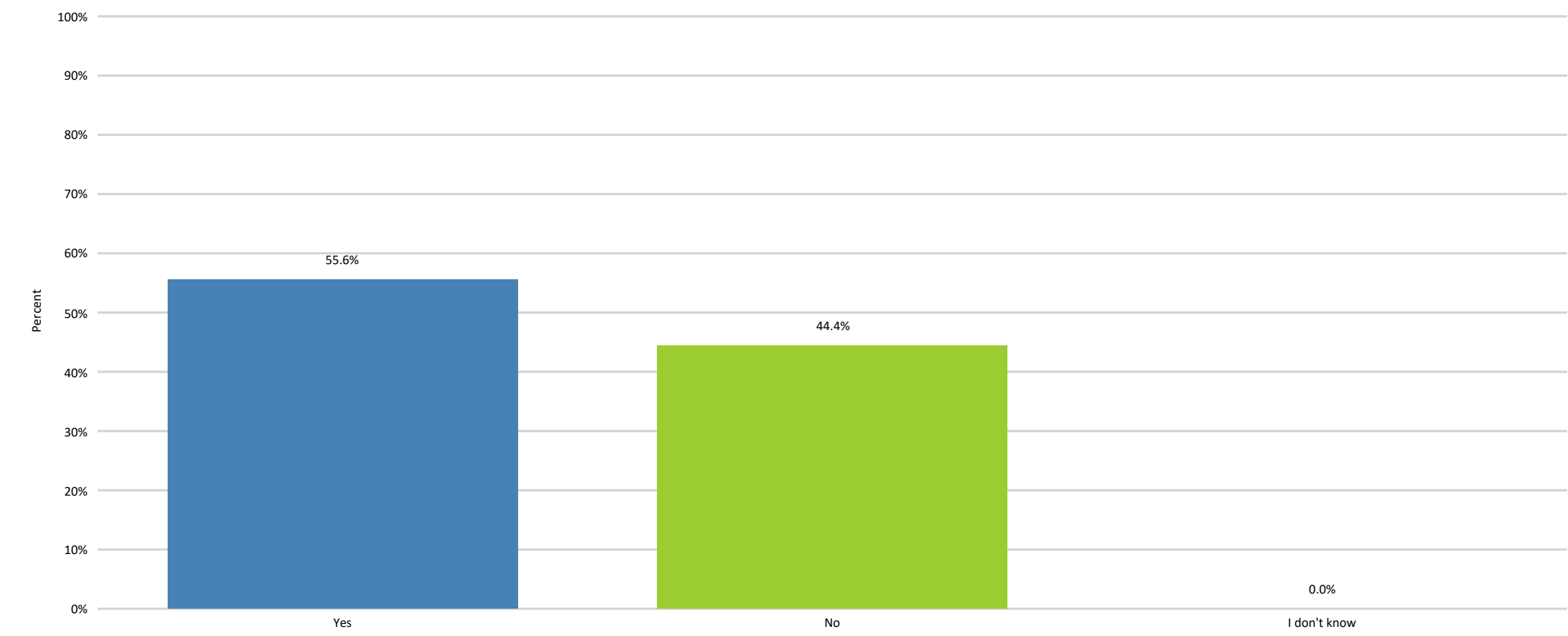
The following questions relate to the Harvesting and Processing Grant.

96. Under which aim of the Harvesting & Processing grant did you apply? (tick all that apply)



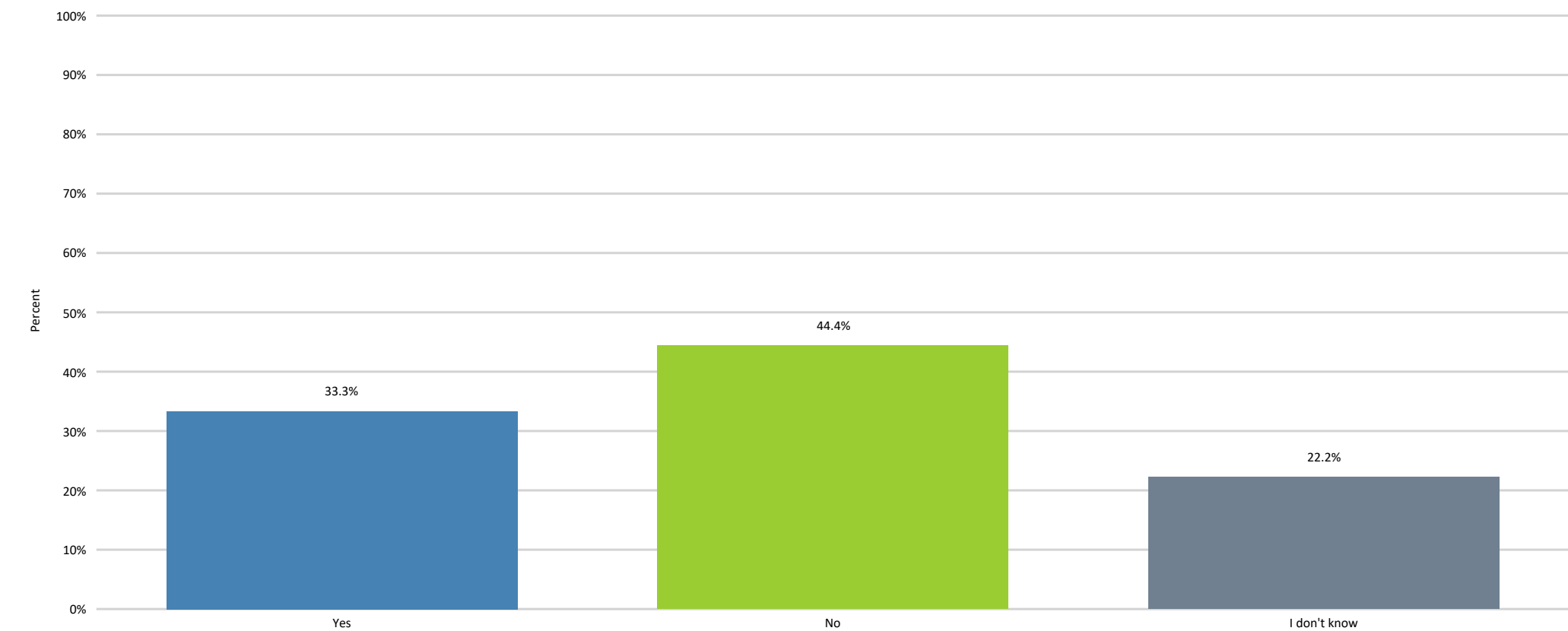
Name	Percent
Aim 1 - Small Scale Harvesting & Processing	66.7%
Aim 2 - Specialised equipment for tree nurseries	11.1%
Aim 3 - COVID-19 recovery	0.0%
I don't know	22.2%
N	9

97. Were you considering expanding/diversifying your business before being aware of this grant?



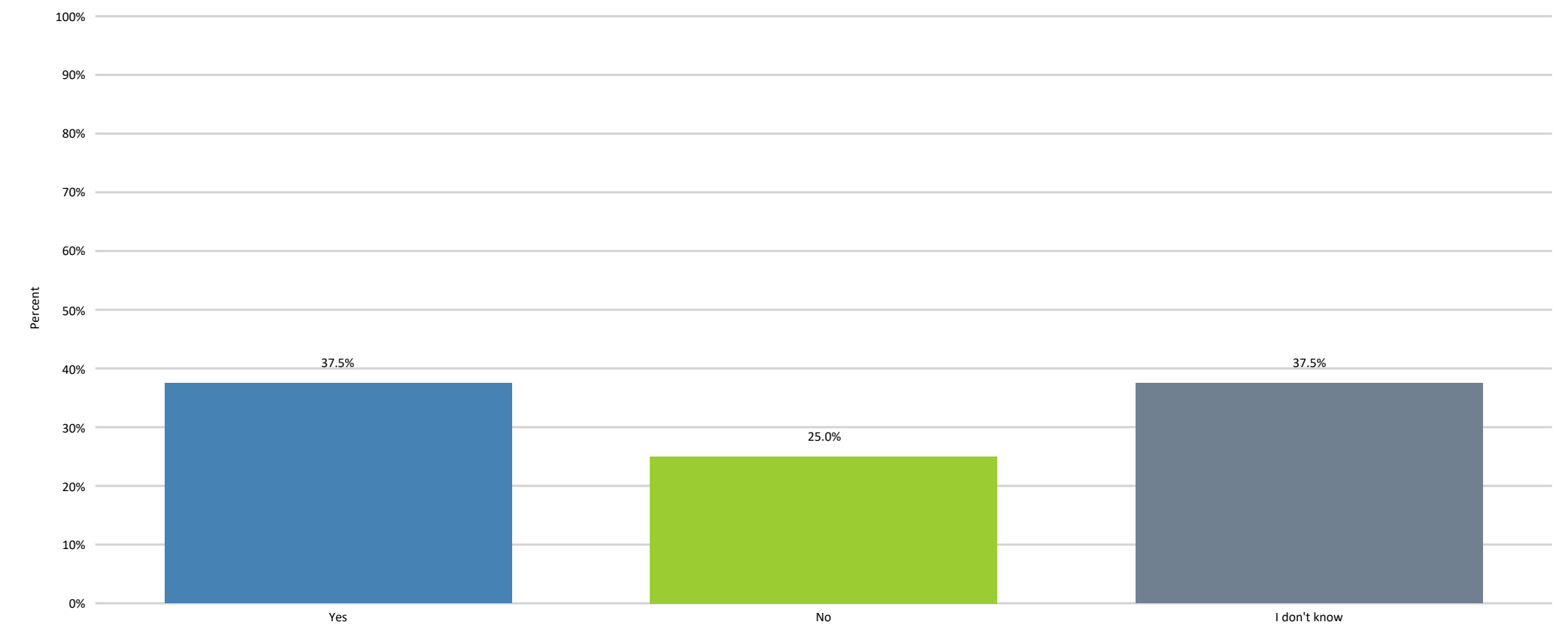
Name	Percent
Yes	55.6%
No	44.4%
I don't know	0.0%
N	9

98. Did this grant have a fundamental impact on your decision to expand/diversify your business?



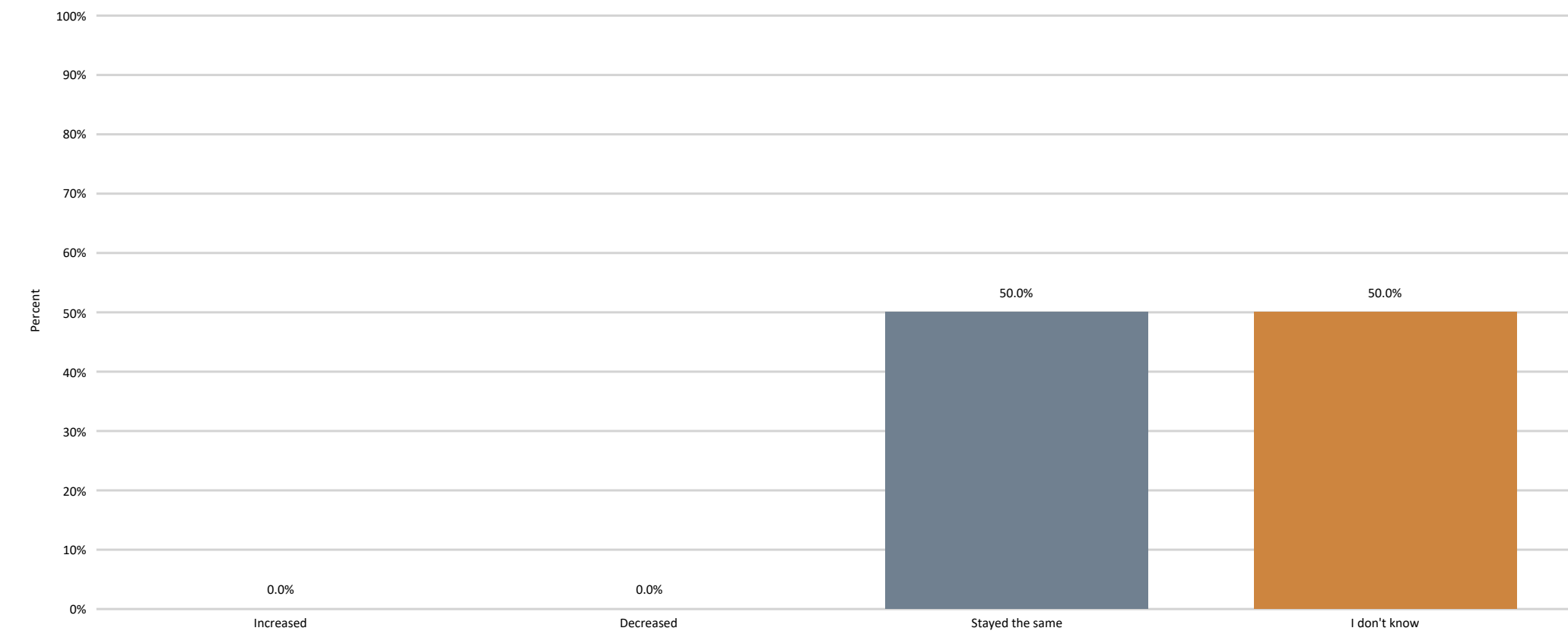
Name	Percent
Yes	33.3%
No	44.4%
I don't know	22.2%
N	9

99. Were the forecasted jobs (full-time equivalent) in your application created as expected?



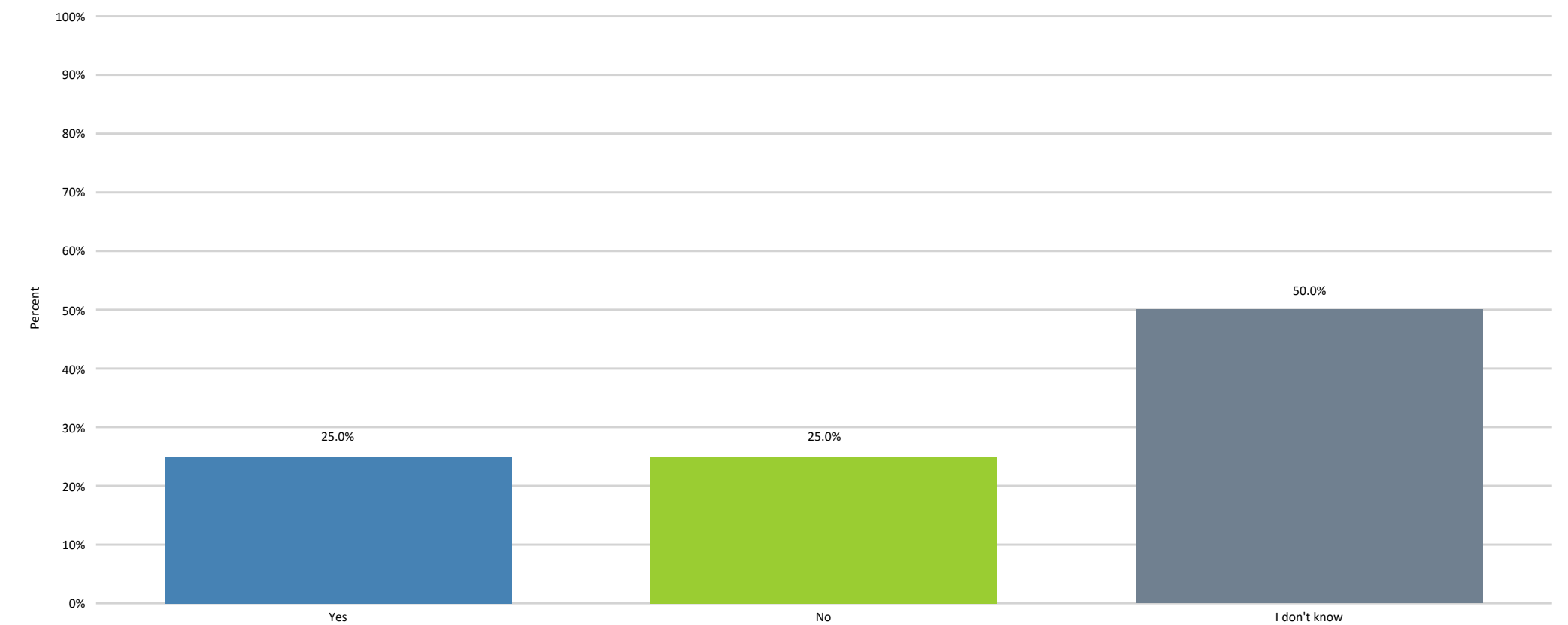
Name	Percent
Yes	37.5%
No	25.0%
I don't know	37.5%
N	8

100. In what way did the number of Full Time Equivalent jobs change?



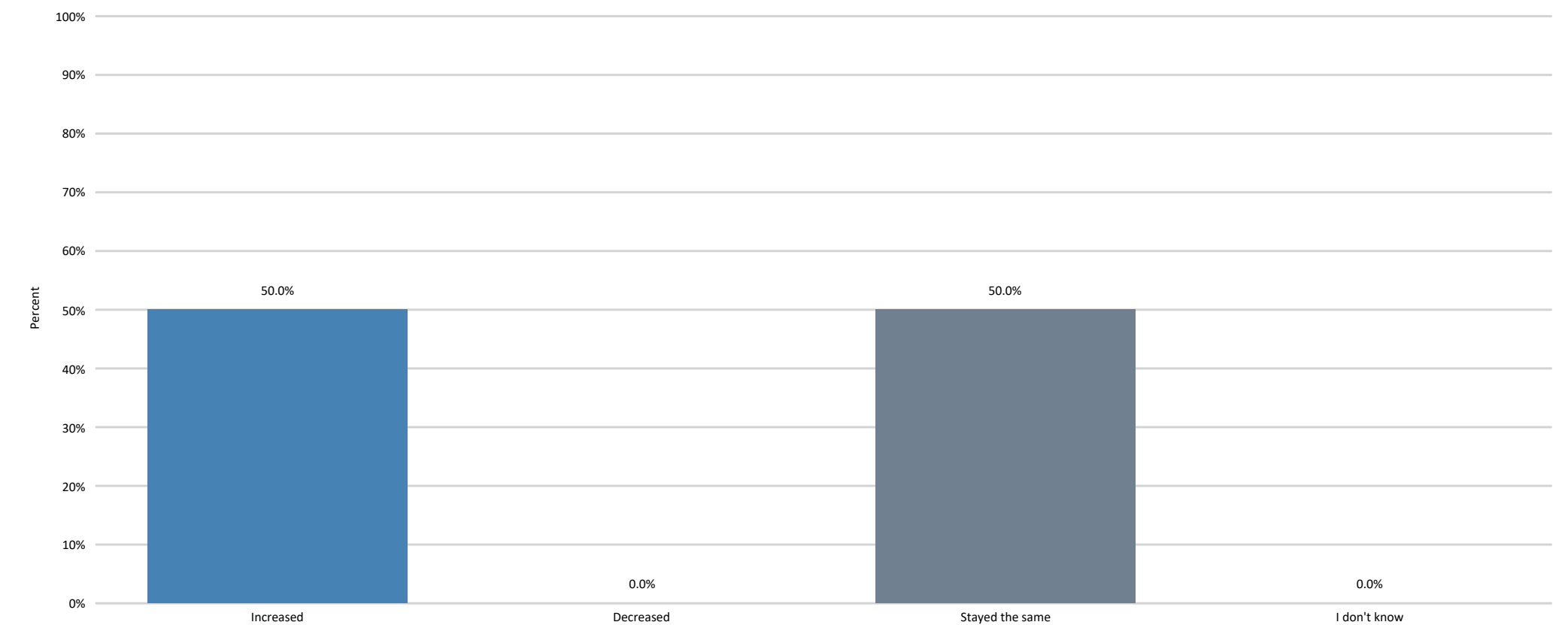
Name	Percent
Increased	0.0%
Decreased	0.0%
Stayed the same	50.0%
I don't know	50.0%
N	2

101. Did the increased turnover forecasted in your application occur as expected?



Name	Percent
Yes	25.0%
No	25.0%
I don't know	50.0%
N	8

102. In what ways did turnover change?



Name	Percent
Increased	50.0%
Decreased	0.0%
Stayed the same	50.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	2

103. If you have any further comments on the Harvesting and Processing Grant, please comment here:**Answers**

Needs to take into account that most businesses operate on credit and have little or no cash reserves for purchases of this scale.

The quote system is bollocks --- JAS Wilson is often the only person who has the equipment... or their supplier so you have to get make up quotes to get it done oftenthe WO hasn't a clue what it is that is happening...

the application process is a faff, the rules around competitive quotes are not flexible enough for the real world. It is embarrassing to ask suppliers for quotes when you both know it's just jumping through hoops for people that don't understand the business.

The forward timescale is not adequate to allow for the significant forward planning that is needed for projects and development.

We need to be able to plan and commit to expenditure at least 2 years ahead, and not just within the small window that is allowed under the Grant.

The requirement for timescale is too short .

It is not always possible to find 3 quotations as most of our equipment is bespoke.

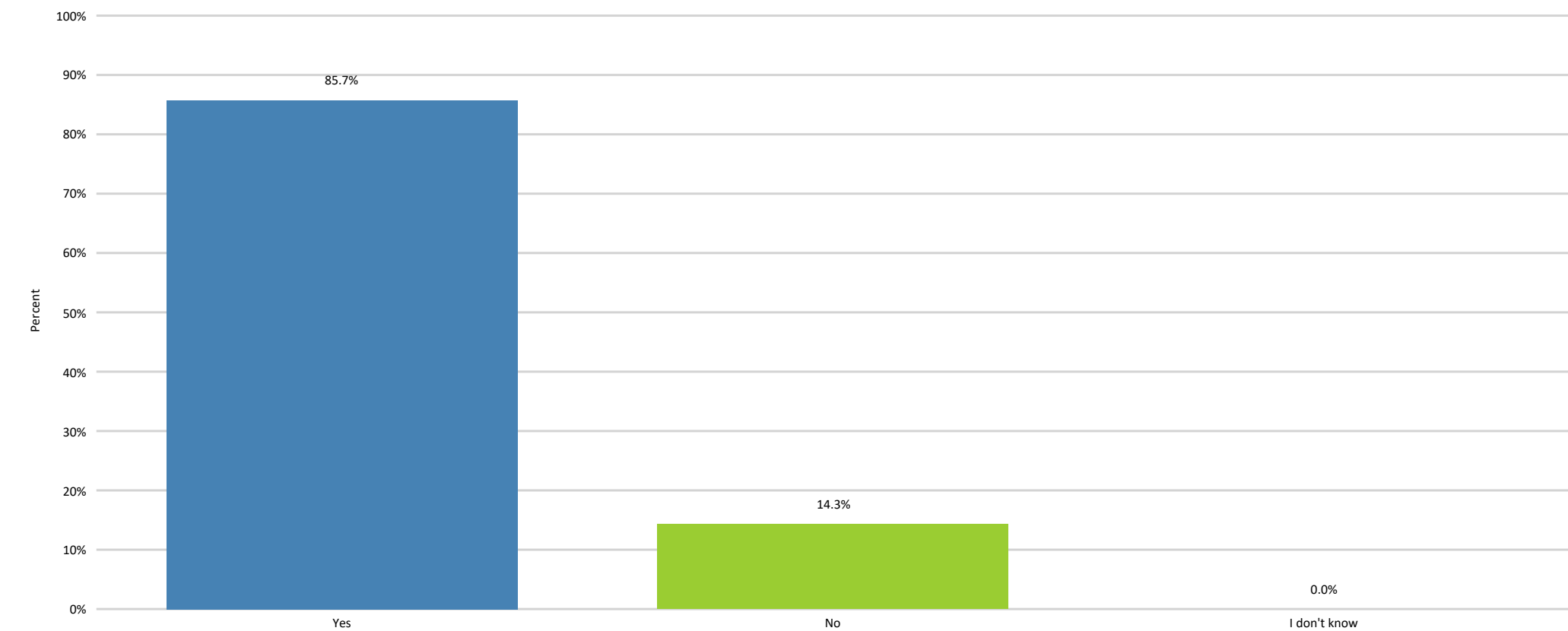
While any grant is helpful of course, the level of the grant could be larger.

This would reflect the significant pressure that Government targets are putting the nursery sector under to increase.

We had to pay the grant back because the machine we bought was too small to cope with the scale of windblow caused by Storms Arwen and Malik. We had to sell the machine, pay back the grant and buy bigger machinery.

The following questions relate to the Forest Infrastructure Grant.

104. Did the Forest Infrastructure Grant allow you to achieve your intended objectives for the forest?



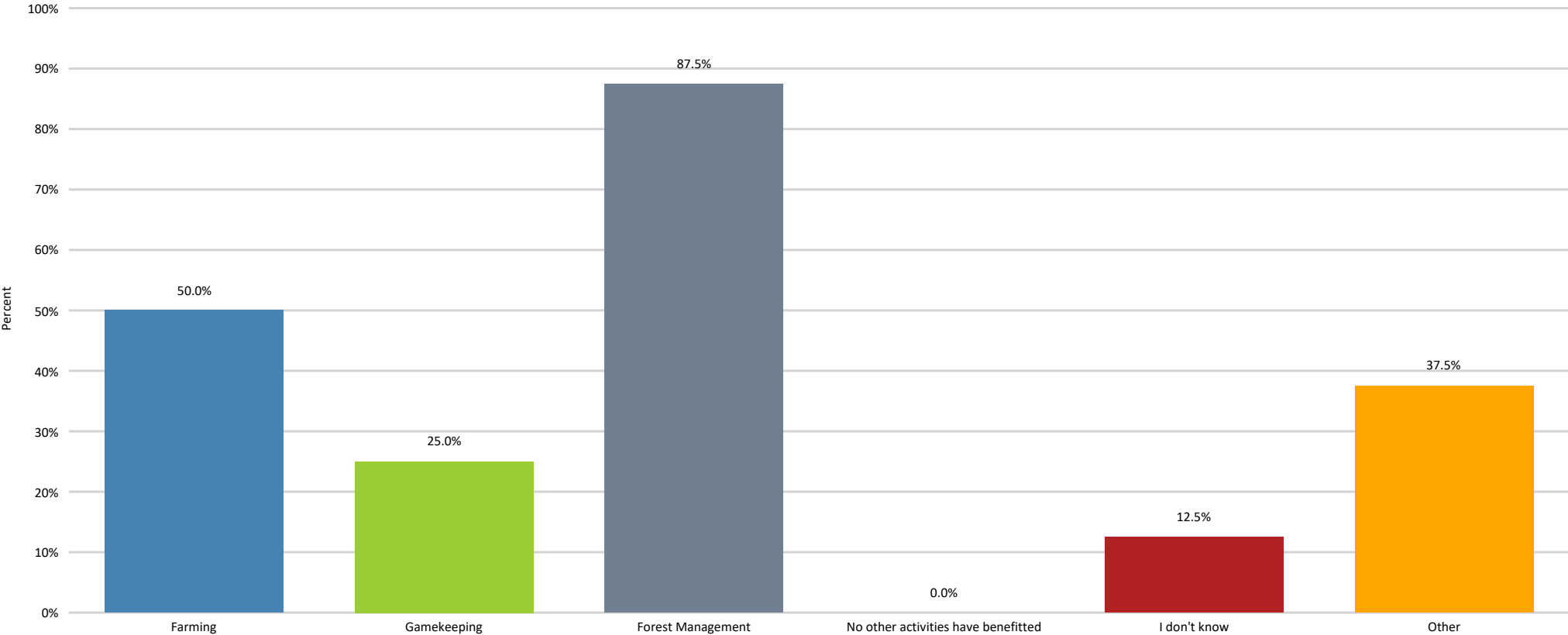
Name	Percent
Yes	85.7%
No	14.3%
I don't know	0.0%
N	7

105. What prevented your intended objectives for the forest from being achieved?

Answers

the application process is crap, unless you lie and cheat it..

106. Have other activities benefitted from the infrastructure funded by the grant? (please select all that apply)



Name	Percent
Farming	50.0%
Gamekeeping	25.0%
Forest Management	87.5%
No other activities have benefitted	0.0%
I don't know	12.5%
Other	37.5%
N	8

107. In what ways have other activities benefitted from the infrastructure?**Answers**

Many it is a fantastic option

increased value of property and timber. Also timber sales revenue and lower contract prices because access was easier and saved time walking in. 20ha of woodlands now being thinned for second time and transitioned into continuous cover. Without grant the woodland would have been felled to fund the road.

The public generally seem to prefer to walk on forest roads. It opens up new areas for them to roam without fear of being lost.

108. If you have any further comments on the Forest Infrastructure Grant please comment here:**Answers**

Rate needs to be increased

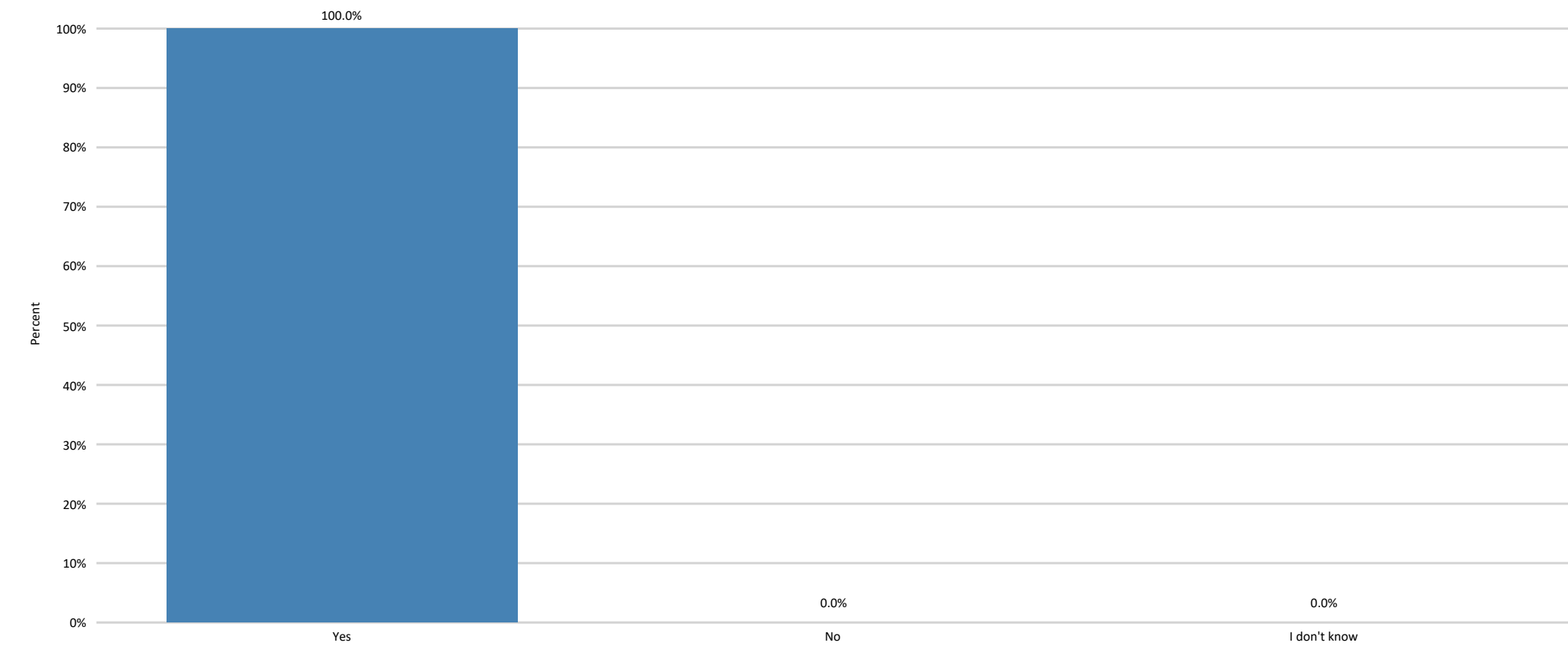
Confusing scoring process and too focused on uneconomic harvesting sites

I'm amazed more woodland owners haven't made use of it, as it is such helpful and generous support to help get woodlands managed and timber being harvested. it was transformational in opening up a 20ha woodland and then led to a second application the allowed access to a neighbouring 3ha woodland that was otherwise inaccessible. In total over 1000 tonnes of timber has been harvested and

We realise it is a finite pot but there are cases where the levels of public access are now at levels (since covid) that we almost need new forest infrastructure to keep the public and harvesting apart. This should be looked at under eligibility as these cases will be few but important.

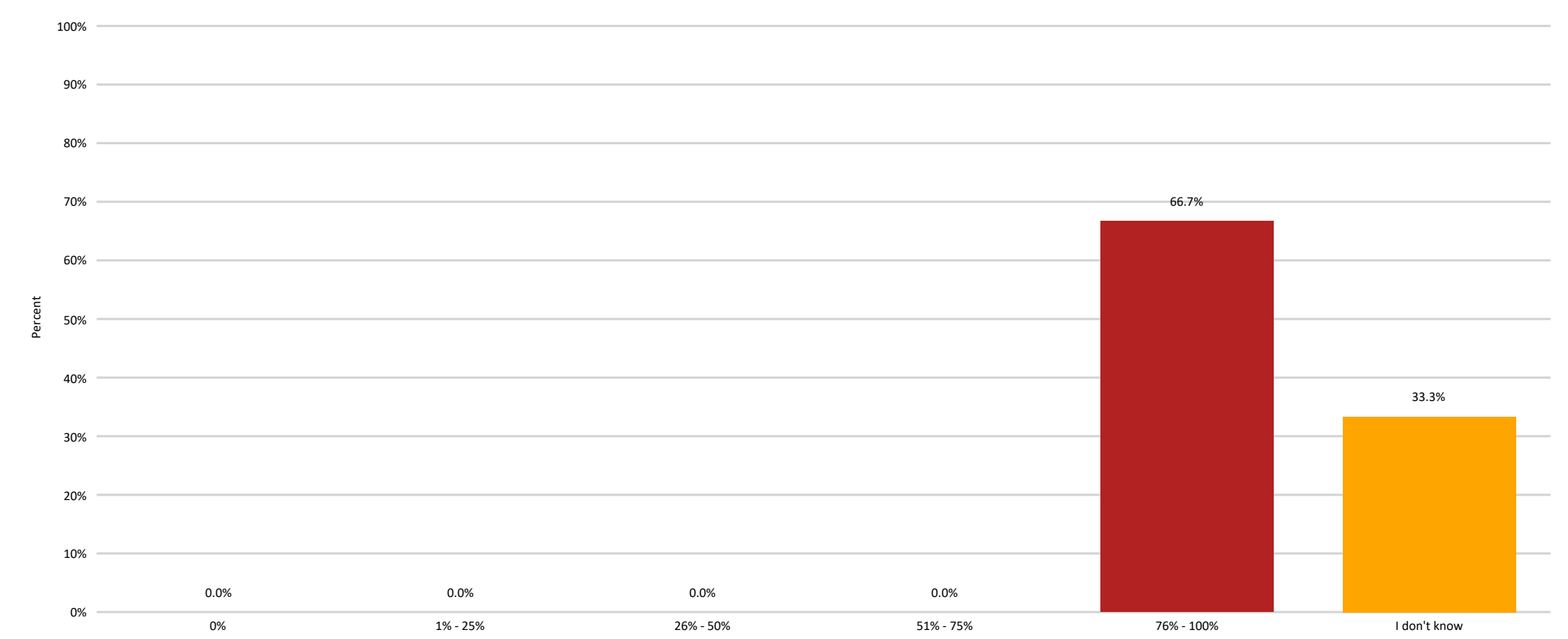
The following questions relate to the Forest Co-operation Grant

109. Did your Forest co-operation Grant lead to subsequent grant applications or management activities?



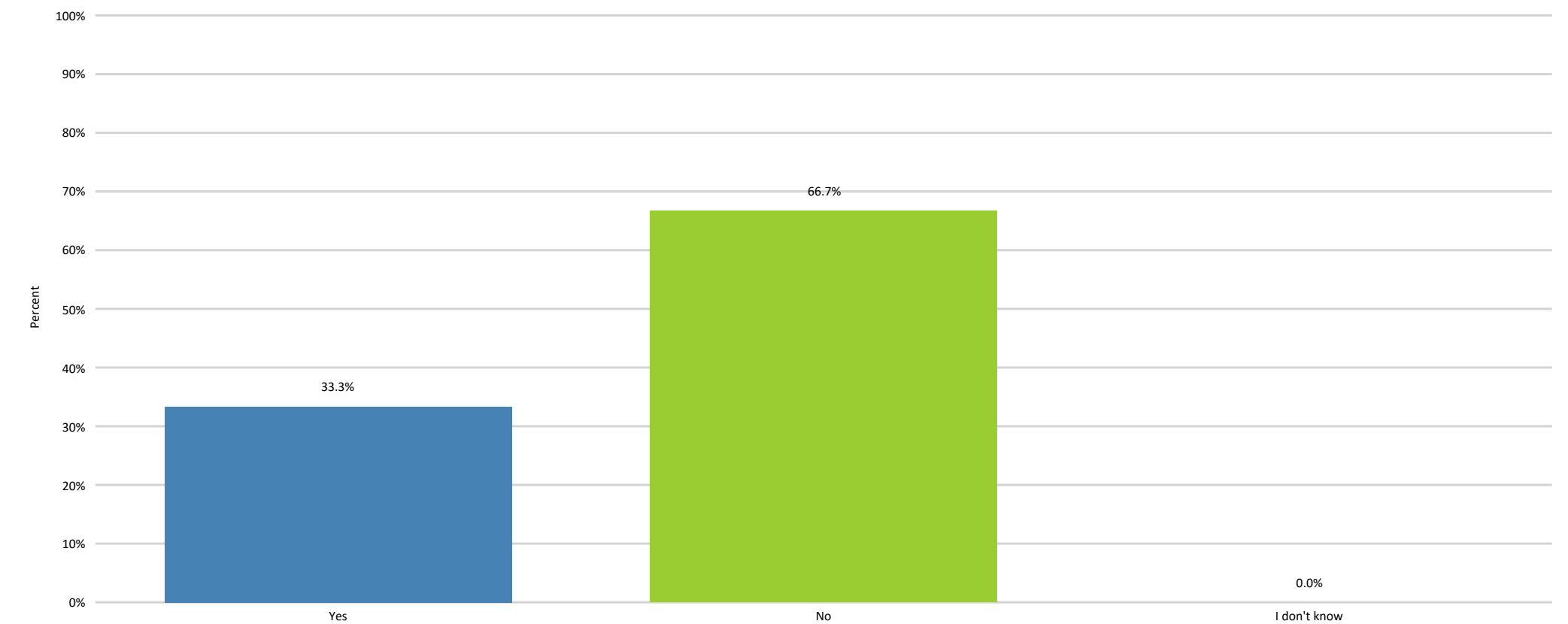
Name	Percent
Yes	100.0%
No	0.0%
I don't know	0.0%
N	3

110. Of the original co-operation participants, approximately what proportion went on to carry out planned future operations?



Name	Percent
0%	0.0%
1% - 25%	0.0%
26% - 50%	0.0%
51% - 75%	0.0%
76% - 100%	66.7%
I don't know	33.3%
N	3

111. Do you feel these operations would have been possible without this grant?



Name	Percent
Yes	33.3%
No	66.7%
I don't know	0.0%
N	3

112. If you have any further comments on the Forest Co-operation Grant please comment here:

Answers

This was potentially a good one. Not easy to apply for, but really useful for higher level assessments.

its a good scheme

113. If you have any further comments or feedback on the Forestry Grant Scheme, please comment here:

Answers

SF staff, don't create rules and guidance you are not competent in - don't ask someone to do a job you either haven't done yourself or wouldn't do. Listen to industry staff who have this experience and quickly loose the attitude that we are in charge so you'll do as we say. Get a programme in place to have your staff deliver forest management so they have the required skills and experience. You could easily set this up with FLS. Stop trying to appease organisations like RSPB at the expense of your industry.

Requirements seem to be getting ever tighter and more convoluted, certainly not simpler which was the idea following the Mackinnon report. Simplifying the process in some way would be massively beneficial.

I think that native woodland creation schemes should all have the same grant rate. On large schemes, even after soil surveying, an applicant often does not know the proportions of the different soil types and their distribution across a site, until the ground preparation has been completed. The applicant may wish to plant a mixture of 3 native woodland models, and to include Scots pine within this. The applicant may wish to plant more than 10% if the site is suitable, however she/he may not know the % suitable for SP until after the cultivation has been completed. It is very difficult to map 3 different woodland models and estimate the % suitable for SP at the application stage. If there was only 1 native woodland model it would be much more versatile and easier for all concerned. The applicant wants the woodland to establish successfully and is contractually obliged to make sure this happens, so the incentive to match species to site conditions is implicit.

Grant claims should be made possible online using Rural Payments, ideally being prepopulated from the schedule of works. .

The current scheme works reasonably well. There are some inconsistencies in interpretation between Conservancies

I appreciate that woodland officers are chronically overworked and over capacity. Response times can be far too long. I've had experiences where a woodland officer continually didn't answer the phone or return calls, and needed reminders to respond to emails. Very often the woodland officer I deal with initially doesn't have the experience to answer my questions. It's not usually their fault. You need to look deeply at why there's such a high turnover of people in these roles and find a way to make the job worth staying in.

the consultation coupled with the institutionalized flow chart non thinking combination of the Woodland Officers who are now completely inexperienced and often not from any relevant discipline means that they often completely waste everyone's time and also think they know more than the actual people doing the application when they know only how to pass on the message from the insane local archaeologist or wild campers or instead of cutting through the the guff and getting on with it...

I have come across a major issue with a farmer who wants to bring his woodland SSSI into good condition by deer fencing and control of rhododendrons. However, the system precludes him from being able to implement through FGS, as he cannot bank roll the significant cost (10s of thousands of £) to cover the period between paying the fencing contractor and claiming/receiving an FGS grant.

I think support for SS should be dropped in the RR WIG, with all the grant made available for diverse species. This will encourage increased diversity in restocking.

Grants need to follow inflation. Be more user friendly. Needs to increase support for commercial woodland. Be more realistic for species choice on marginal sites with limited species availability. Forestry agenda needs rebalancing.

I find there is a lack of support from Scottish Forestry, that Scottish Forestry's default position is No and if certain terminology is not captured in your application it will be rejected. It often appears that when a concern is raised by a consultee (statutory or public) there is a lack of support from the Woodland Officer and ultimately it will result in something being removed from the application, no matter the benefit (economic, environmental or social) that item may have.

the template forms eg "Supporting info template" are clunky and frustrating, formatting and functions like cut and paste don't work as normal. I have found myself recreating SF forms from scratch as word docs just so I don't have to get frustrated by them.

Overall points:

- More resource required at a conservancy level to allow better efficiency in supporting and processing applications. Many hectares of Woodland creation not being planted each year due to late issue of contracts.
- More resource required at conservancy level to make prompt inspection and then payment of grants or communication of issue to be resolved. If there are issues, ability to part pay grants as there can sometimes be hundreds of thousands of pounds held up due to a very minor issue identified and can take a long time to be made aware, resolved and then have reinspection undertaken.
- Grant rates are dramatically out of sync with current cost of operations and need revised to encourage particularly smaller projects.
- All area based grants would benefit from sliding scale of rate value to focus better on smaller who have more focus on the grants to be able to engage with a project and recognise the higher rate per hectare of expenditure to deliver small projects.

N/A

payments a bit sticky on old computer format 2006 7 8 9

Separate FGS from the SAF system and allow Conservancy staff to make creative decisions based on local knowledge. The SAF system has enforced unnecessary timing constraints to forest operations such as AMG timings linked to a claim system that concludes prior to the end of the forestry establishment season, which with erratic weather events can last months over that planned. Conservators judgement should have more weight and be independent of the SAF system.

What is the difference between the Forestry Grant Scheme and the Woodland improvement Scheme. The 2 designations seem to be interchangeable as far as the FCS bureaucrats are concerned.

It takes a significant investment of time to become familiar with the FGS including understanding the options, rules and RP&S system etc, but after the first application it was very straightforward to prepare and submit an FGS application. The forestry process was much more straightforward than associated permitted development processes. They have been tortuous and in most cases taken much longer than EIA and FGS. One took six months and required detailed topographical, landscape and archaeological surveys that weren't required for the EIA or FGS.

Allow the conservancies to make decisions again, decentralise the approval process, empower woodland officers to influence and add value to schemes, manage the hybrid working better, insist on email signatures containing mobile phone numbers, monitor the response time of woodland officers, make them accountable, pay them more,

FGS is far too focussed on woodland creation - there needs to be a better balance with management of existing woods

Generally fit for purpose bar the LPID problems. We know this causes considerable problems for SF staff as well as us due to the time taken with variations.

The FGS is in my opinion a generally good scheme. I think the conservancy staff do a great job in dealing with the large work load and are often overlooked by the private sector.

That being said, I believe that high staff turnover is incredibly damaging to the public sector and there has been a shift in the perception of SF staff in recent years to slow down the process in order to give them more time to react. This is almost certainly caused by a lack of experience and overworked staff and I would like to see a larger number of employees with greater experience in the conservancies again.

There is also a dangerous presumption against commercial crop from most SF staff in recent years, this has become a culture and should be addressed. While I have planted mainly native schemes myself I am a firm believer in the right tree in the right place and in many cases this is Sitka dominated forestry. Landowners requirements and management objectives should not be overlooked and it is worth considering that many would like a safe financial return on their investment rather than planting with biodiversity as the main objective.

Equalities Monitoring Questions

The Scottish Government is required to collect equality evidence to meet requirements of The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. This information is not mandatory and will be used for statistical and research purposes only.

The following questions are entirely voluntary, you do not have to answer them if you do not want to.

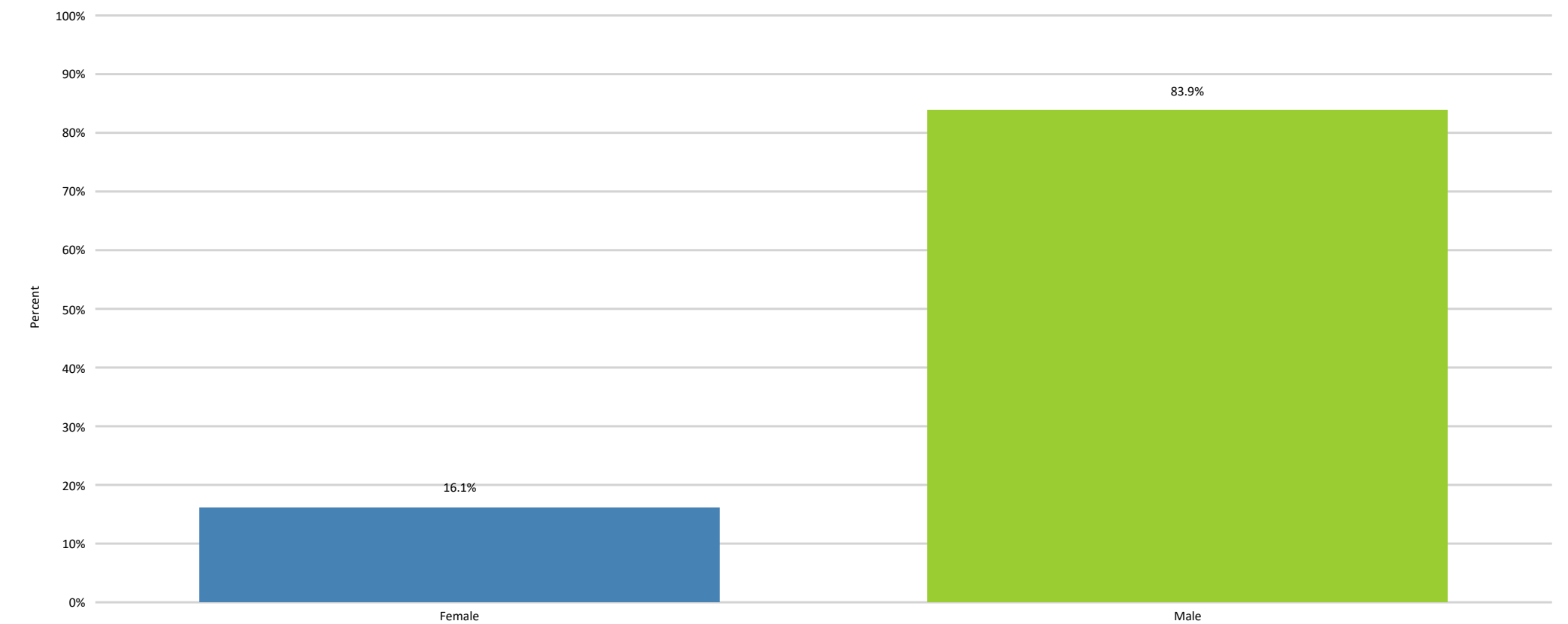
114. What was your age at your last birthday?

Answers

52
48
64
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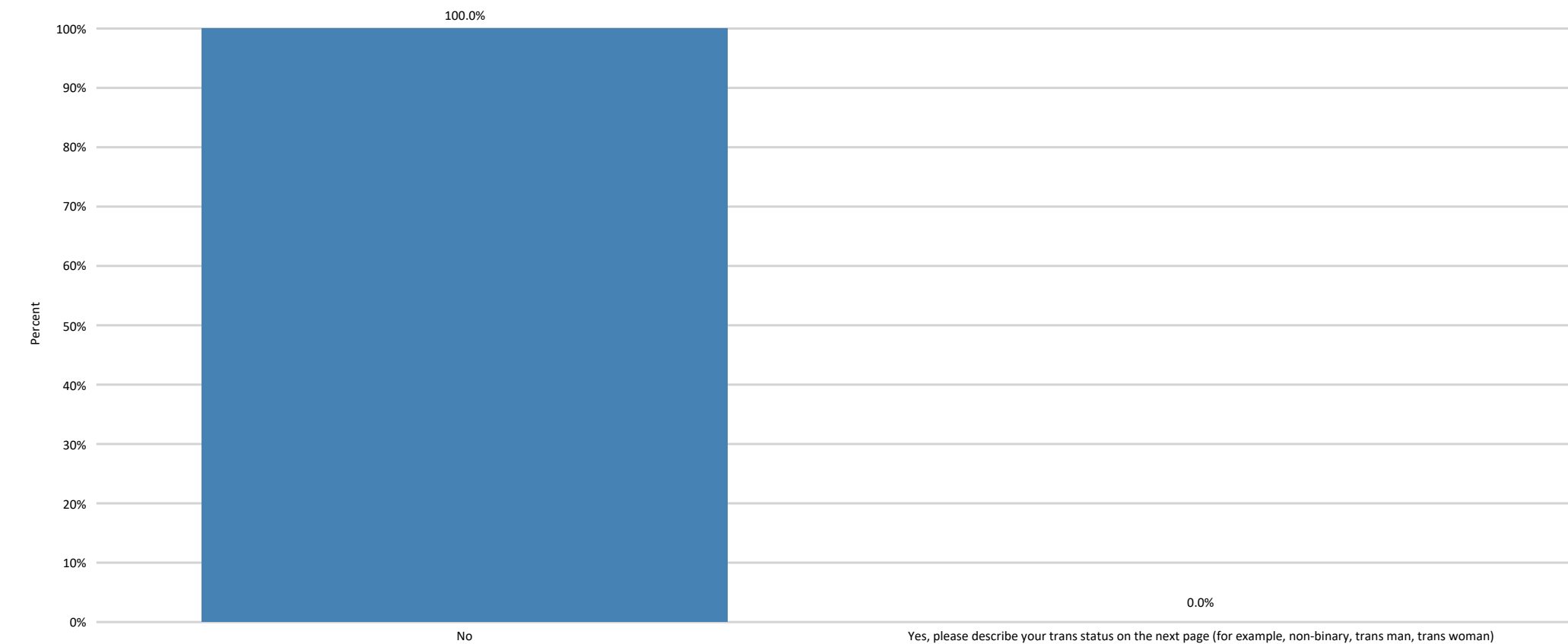
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62
31
32

115. What is your sex?



Name	Percent
Female	16.1%
Male	83.9%
N	62

116. Do you consider yourself to be trans, or have a trans history?

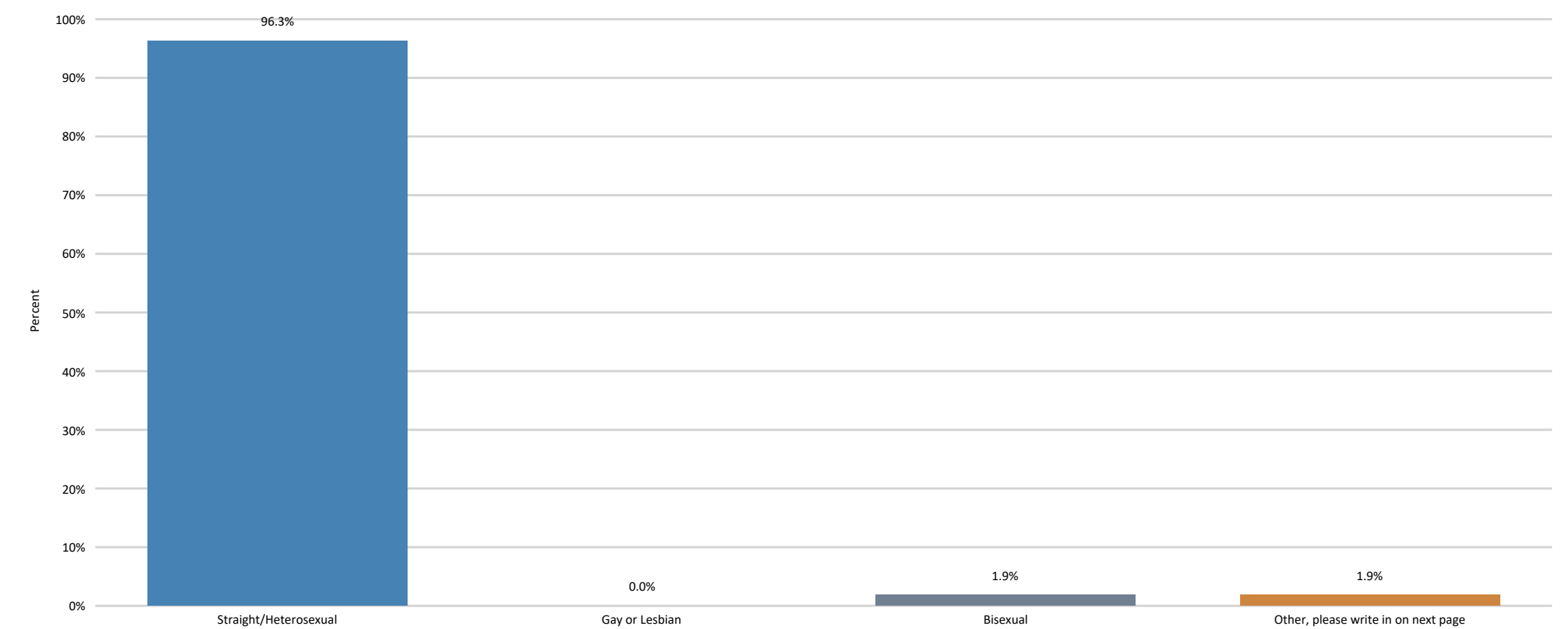


Name	Percent
No	100.0%
Yes, please describe your trans status on the next page (for example, non-binary, trans man, trans woman)	0.0%
N	57

117. Please write in your trans status (e.g., non-binary, trans man, trans woman)

Answers

118. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?



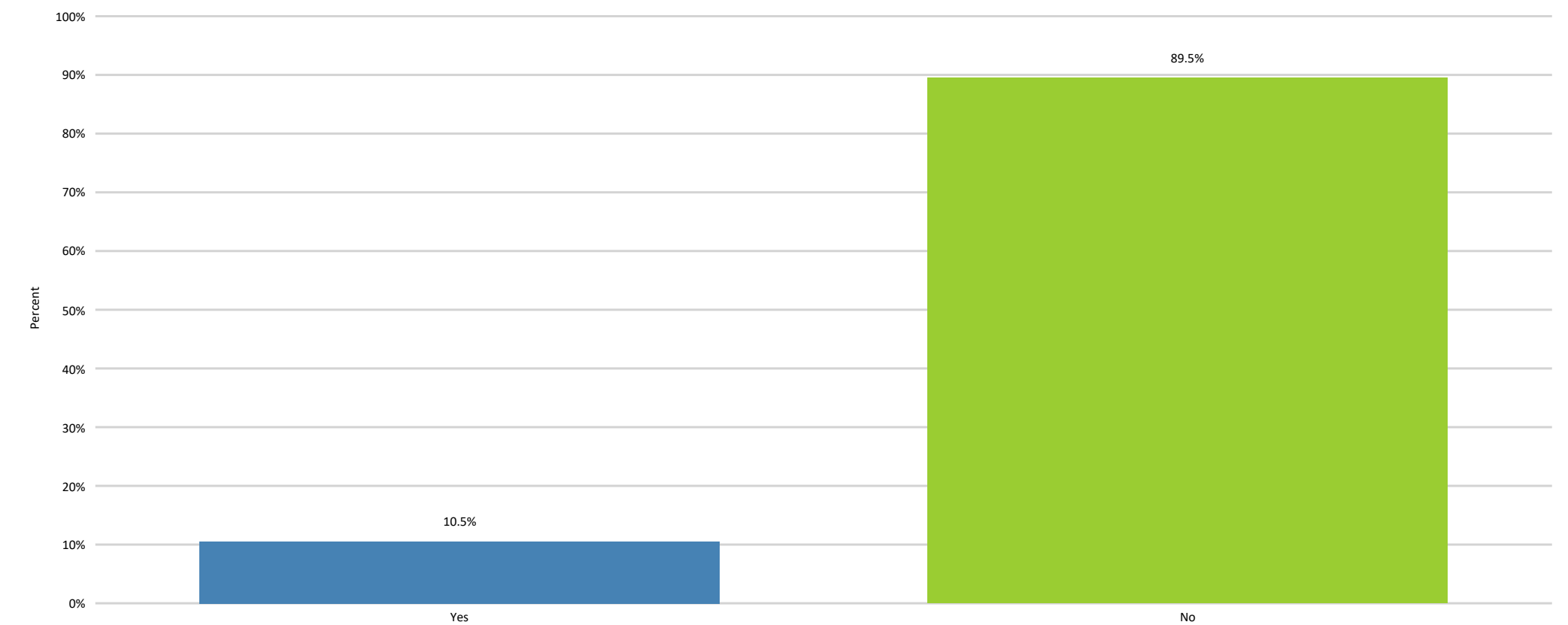
Name	Percent
Straight/Heterosexual	96.3%
Gay or Lesbian	0.0%
Bisexual	1.9%
Other, please write in on next page	1.9%
N	54

119. Please write in your sexual orientation

Answers

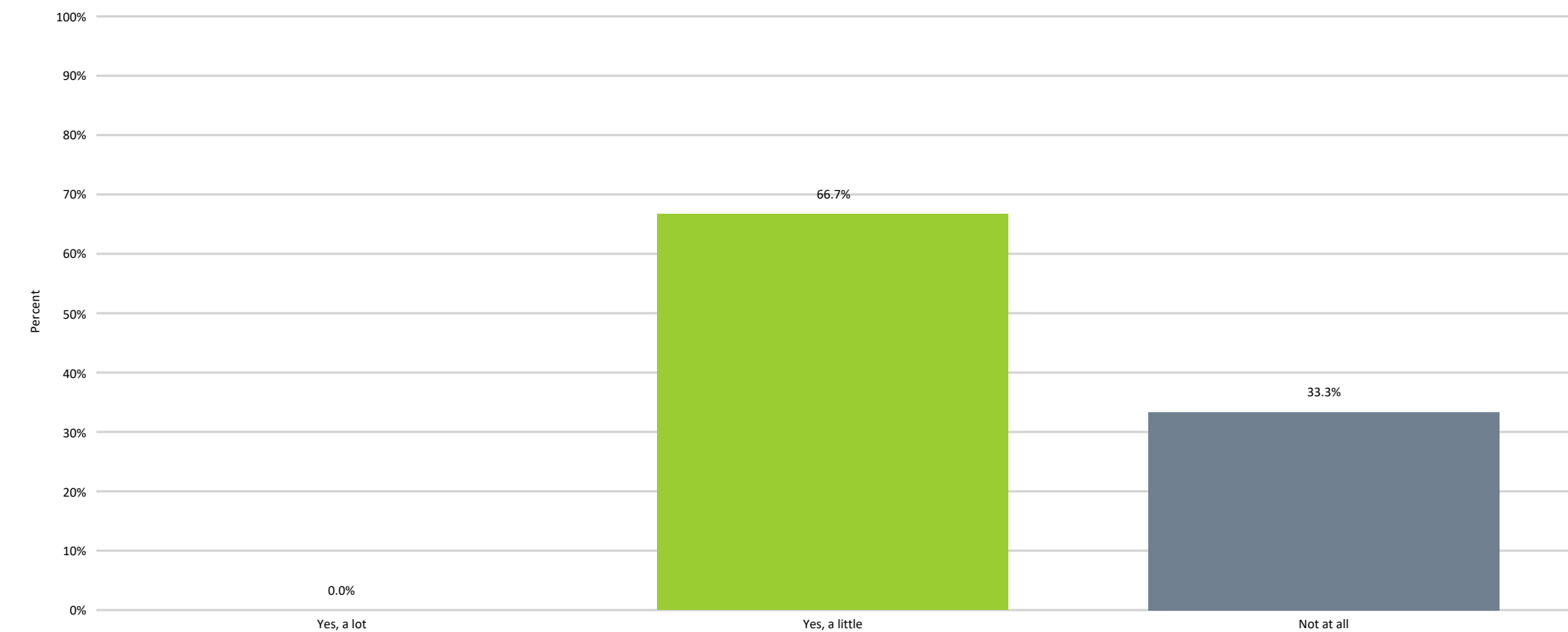
I don't see what my sexual orientation is of any consequence so will not be answering these questions.

120. Do you have a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?



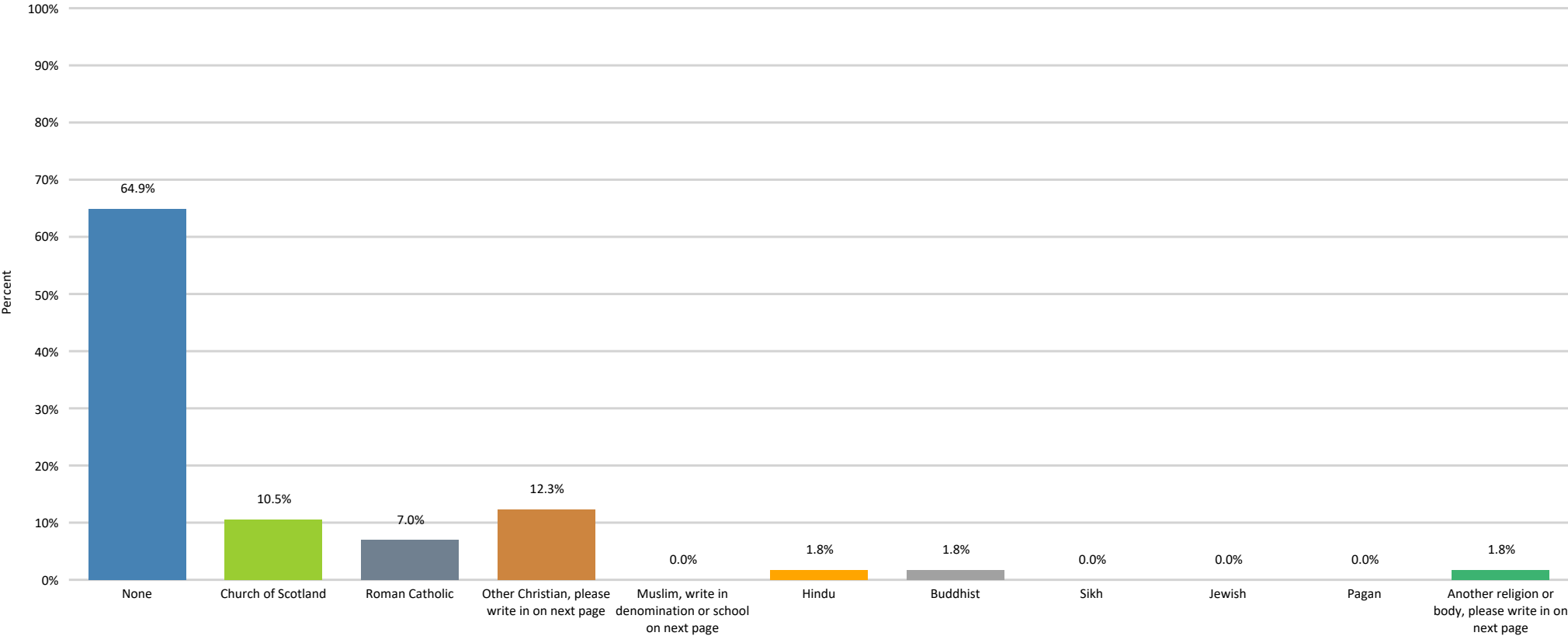
Name	Percent
Yes	10.5%
No	89.5%
N	57

121. Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?



Name	Percent
Yes, a lot	0.0%
Yes, a little	66.7%
Not at all	33.3%
N	6

122. What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?



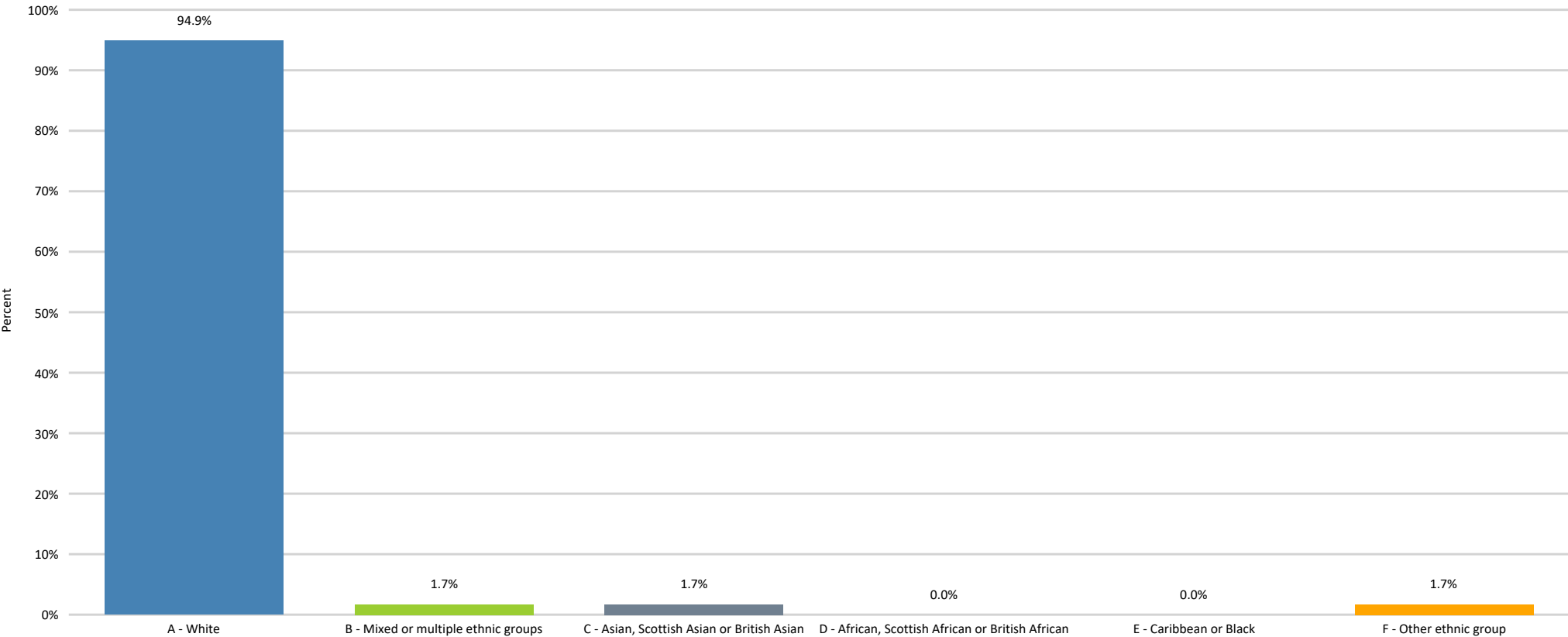
Name	Percent
None	64.9%
Church of Scotland	10.5%
Roman Catholic	7.0%
Other Christian, please write in on next page	12.3%
Muslim, write in denomination or school on next page	0.0%
Hindu	1.8%
Buddhist	1.8%
Sikh	0.0%
Jewish	0.0%
Pagan	0.0%
Another religion or body, please write in on next page	1.8%
N	57

123. Please write in your religious denomination or body

Answers

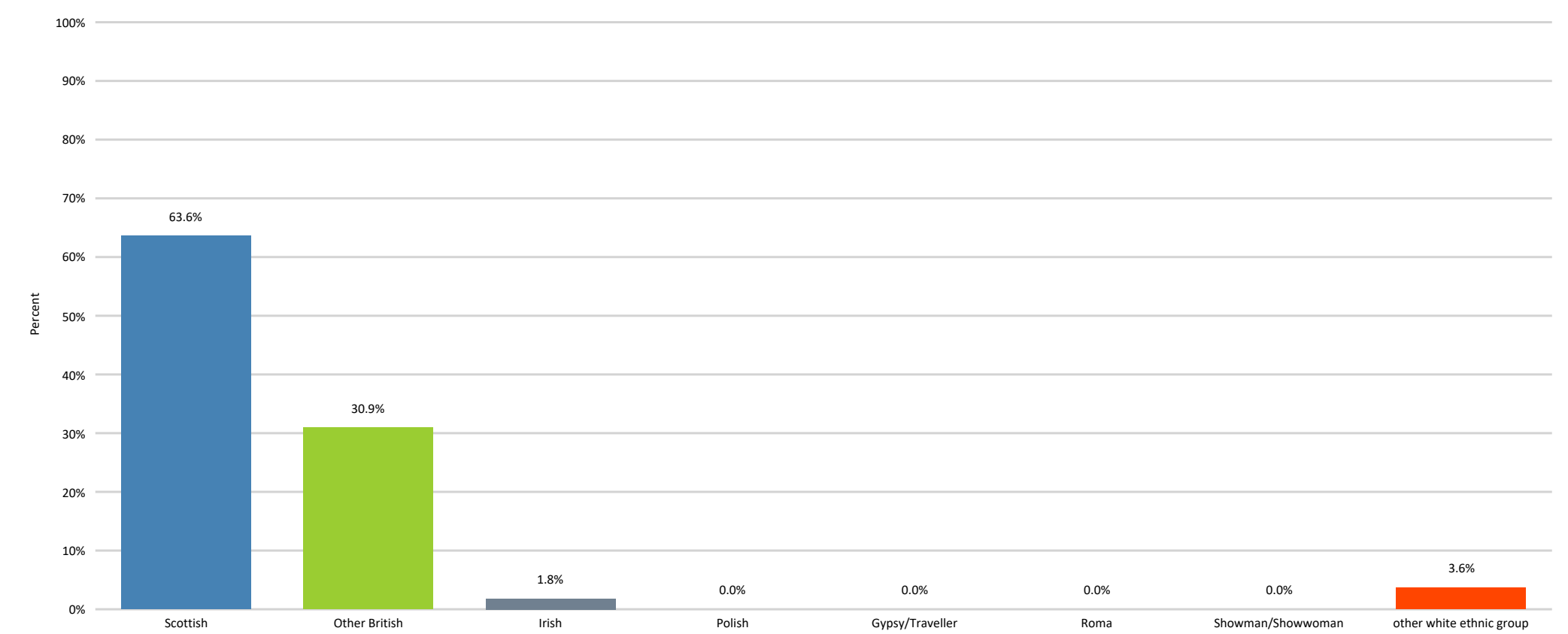
C of E
non denominational
Society of Friends (Quaker)
Non denominational evangelical.
Episcopalian
Society of Friends (Quaker)
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
Episcopalian (Anglican Church)

124. To which ethnic group do you belong? Please choose one section from A-F, then tick one box on the next page that best describes your ethnic group or background.



Name	Percent
A - White	94.9%
B - Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	1.7%
C - Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	1.7%
D - African, Scottish African or British African	0.0%
E - Caribbean or Black	0.0%
F - Other ethnic group	1.7%
N	59

125. Please choose one which best describes your ethnic group or background



Name	Percent
Scottish	63.6%
Other British	30.9%
Irish	1.8%
Polish	0.0%
Gypsy/Traveller	0.0%
Roma	0.0%
Showman/Showwoman	0.0%
other white ethnic group	3.6%
N	55

126. Please write in your ethnic group or background

Answers

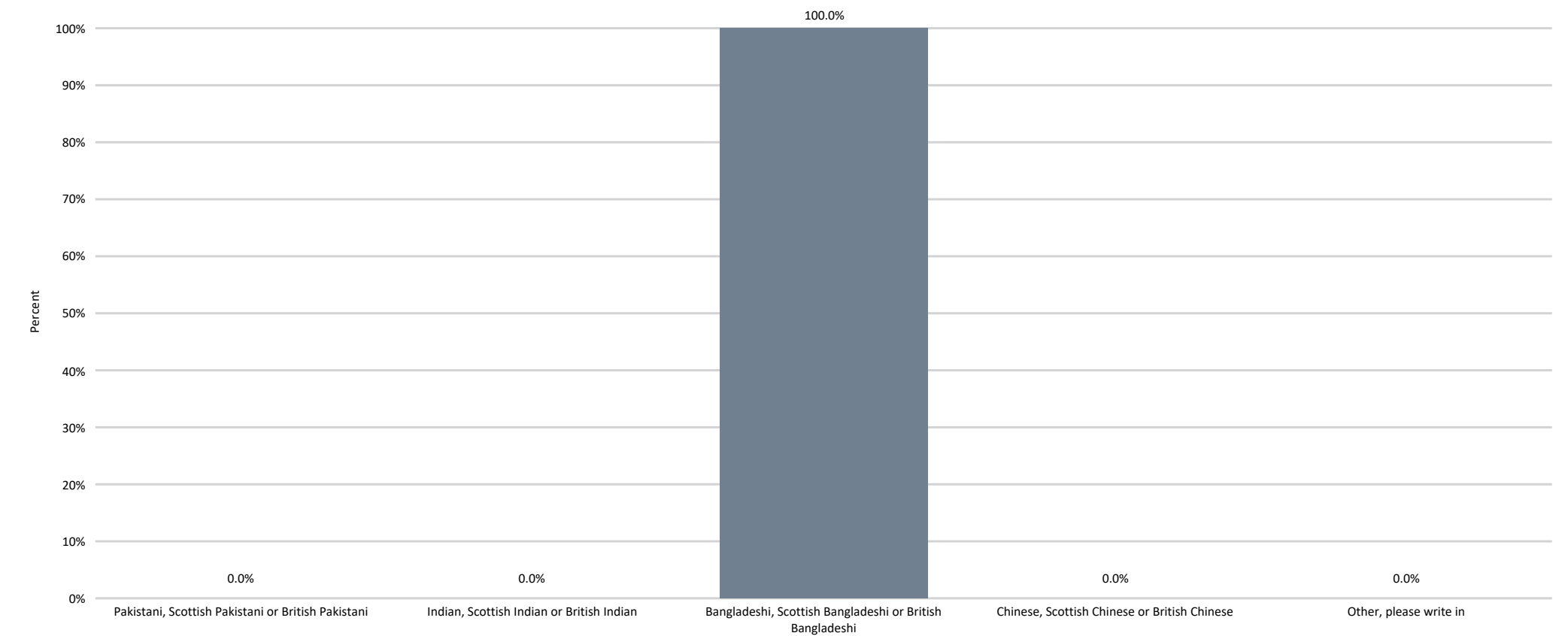
German

South African

127. Please write in your ethnic group or background

Answers

128. Please choose one which best describes your ethnic group or background



Name	Percent
Pakistani, Scottish Pakistani or British Pakistani	0.0%
Indian, Scottish Indian or British Indian	0.0%
Bangladeshi, Scottish Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi	100.0%
Chinese, Scottish Chinese or British Chinese	0.0%
Other, please write in	0.0%
N	1

129. Please write in your ethnic group or background

Answers

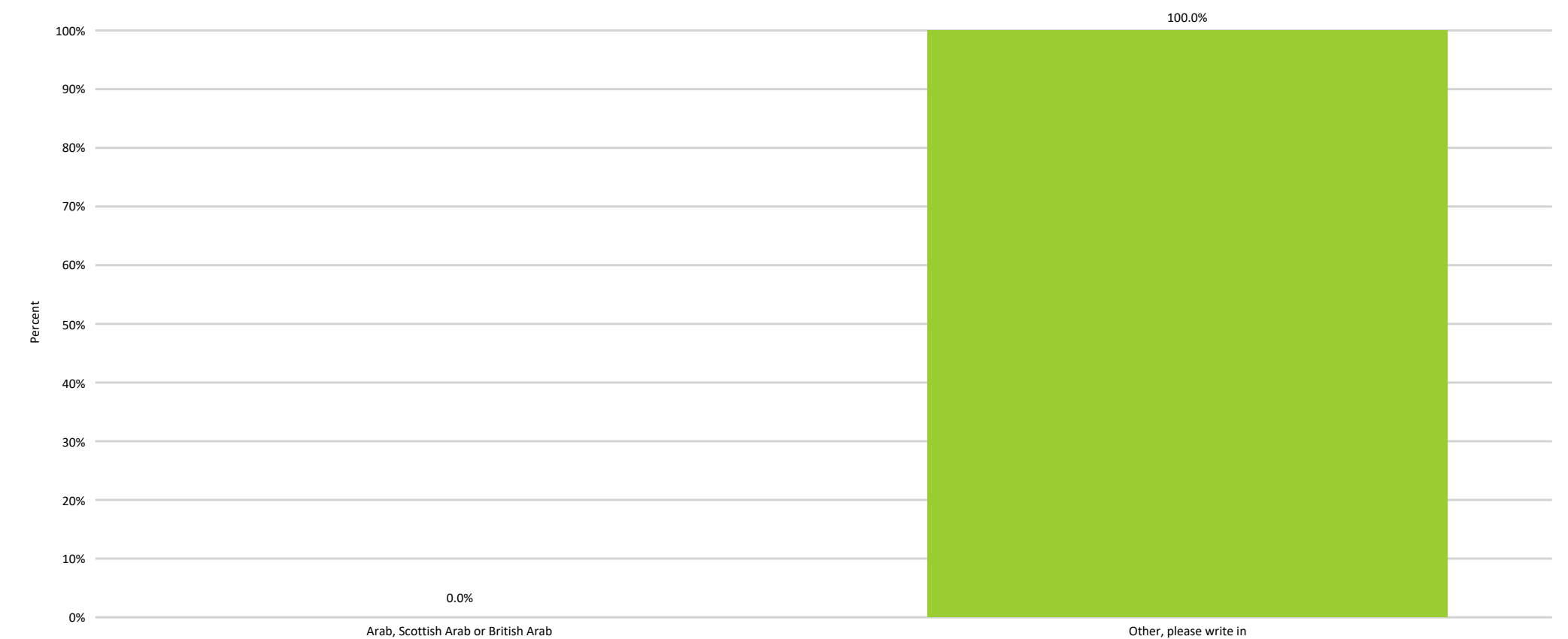
130. Please write in your ethnic group or background

Answers

131. Please write in your ethnic group or background

Answers

132. Please select one that most accurately reflects your ethnic group or background



Name	Percent
Arab, Scottish Arab or British Arab	0.0%
Other, please write in	100.0%
N	1

133. Please write in your ethnic group or background

Answers

Irish in UK