

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Self-Perceptions of Teachers within the Private English-Language School Sector in the Republic of Ireland

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This study is being made possible with the kind funding of an MIC Departmental Assistantship Award

Motivation for study

In 2016 in Ireland:

- 122,000 students came to study in “high-quality English-language training organizations” (11% increase on 2015)
- Ireland ranked fifth globally, first per capita
- Aim to grow international education sector worth to €2.1 billion per annum by 2020
- More students were staying in Ireland for longer periods **in ELT schools**
Total output impact of ELT sector in Ireland - €762 million

(Bruton in *DES International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-20*, pp.18-20)

Motivation for study

- ▶ During 2015-16, sixteen sudden school closures throughout the Republic of Ireland left large numbers of ELT teachers unemployed, in most cases without having been paid wages or redundancy, and no legal means of recourse
- ▶ Media attention to this issue initiated the acquisition of real voice for Irish ELT teachers (Griffin and Donnelly 2015; Ní Aodha 2016; Hassey 2017; Pollack 2018).
- ▶ A recurring pattern of inexplicit work terms and conditions emerged in further mainstream media and social media reports, appearing an accepted norm in many schools and a revelation to the general public: a once-hidden problem thrust into the public arena.

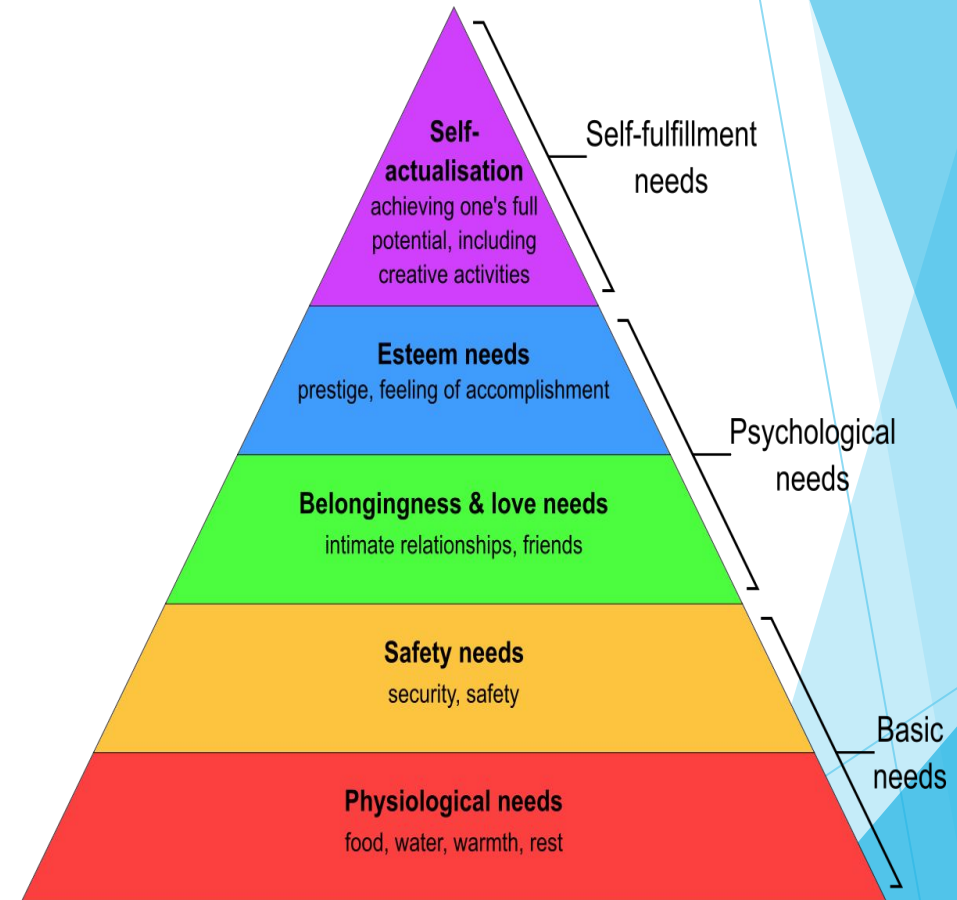
Motivation for study

This clearly showed the difficulties faced by many Irish ELT teachers in fulfilling the most basic of that which motivates us as humans outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943):

“Work will provide us with the wherewithal to buy food, put a roof over our heads. It makes us feel secure. Job security is in fact, something we all seek, and if that is threatened, it leads to unease.”

“Losing one's job is a major risk factor for depression and anxiety”

(O'Neil 2020, p.232)



Aim of study

- ▶ To be a contributor to the process of raising awareness of ELT teacher work conditions at academic level by collecting baseline data;
- ▶ To investigate ELT teacher self-perceptions in the private ELT sector in the Republic of Ireland as a community of practice

(Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1999; Vaughan 2007)

Objectives and methodology

To conduct a mixed-methods study including:

- Fifteen face-to-face and online interviews with twenty-four ELT teachers for qualitative data collection between mid-July 2019 and early November 2020
- An online questionnaire survey with ELT teachers in the industry for quantitative and qualitative data collection between Nov 2019 and May 2020
- To examine language in literature relevant to the industry
- Conduct a CDA corpus-assisted analysis of the triangulated data

Methodology - RQs

The central research questions of this study are:

- ▶ **RQ1: What are the primary perceptions and concerns of English-language teachers within the private language school sector in Ireland?**

Methodology

- ▶ **RQ2: How does teachers' language use express their position within the sector in terms of power** in relation to other principal stakeholders within the ELT industry?
 - a) To what degree are variables of age, gender or amount of experience a factor in how teachers use language to express **how empowered/disempowered** they feel?
 - b) How does language used in texts relevant to the sector reflect **levels of empowerment/disempowerment** felt among its teachers?

Methodology - Questionnaire

Devised for online distribution/collection/analysis using
QUALTRICS between Nov 2019 and May 2020

75 closed questions for quantitative data

4 open-ended questions for qualitative data

Distribution Channels:

Phase 1 (Nov 19) - Emailed ACELS list of 85 language schools in the
Irish Republic

Phase 2 (Dec 19 - Jan 20) - Twitter - @ELTAdvocacy @ELTIreland
EL Gazette

Phase 3 (Feb 20) - ELT Ireland Conference

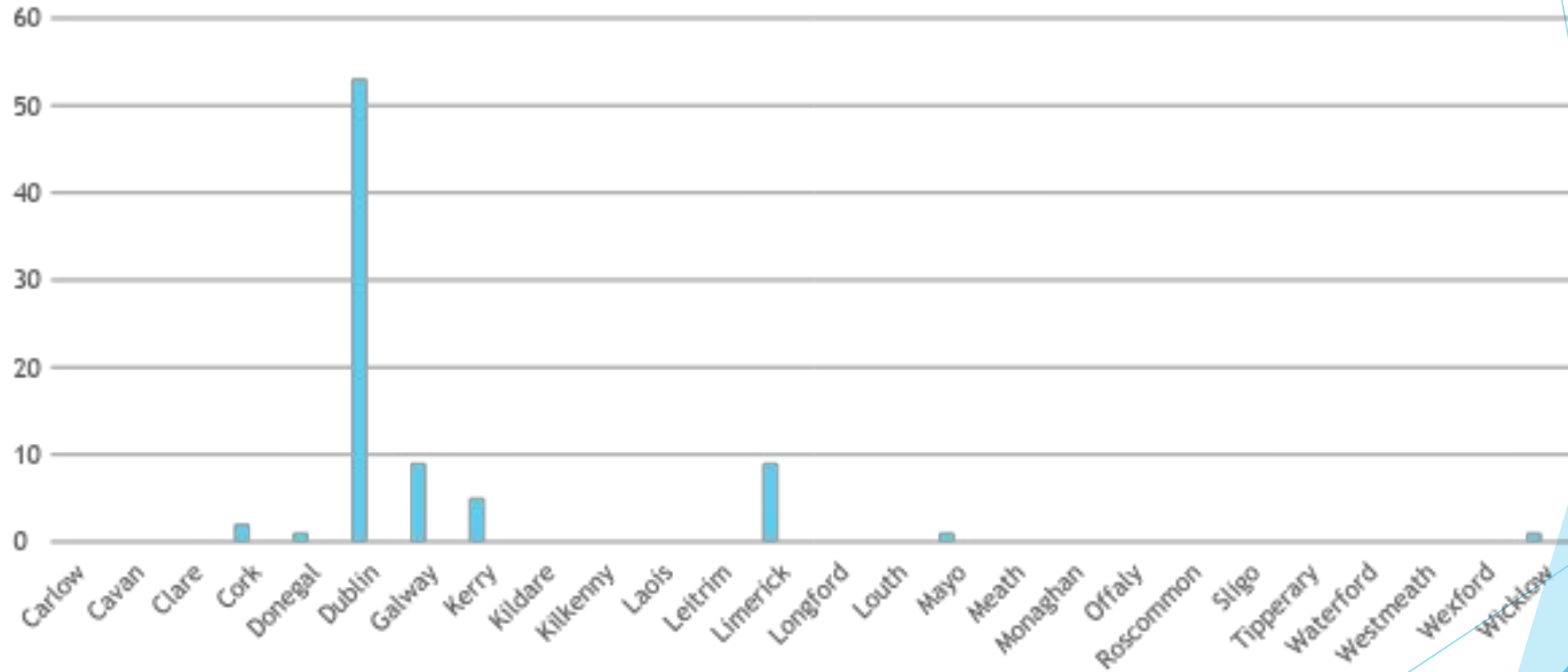
Quantitative data focus

- ▶ Gender, age and nationality profile
- ▶ ELT teaching experience
- ▶ Undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications
- ▶ Workshop and conference attendance for CPD
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Hourly pay rate/salary
- ▶ Sick days and force majeure entitlement
- ▶ Pension and medical insurance status
- ▶ Accommodation status

Quantitative data findings

- ▶ A cross-section of 81 valid responses represented teachers from Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo and Wicklow, with a majority of 66% from Dublin-based schools
- ▶ More females (67%) replied than males (33%)
- ▶ The majority of respondents (68%) identified themselves as Irish, while the remaining 32% comprised fourteen different nationalities
- ▶ 42% of respondents were in the 31-40 age bracket, debunking the myth of the young, transient backpacker and representing a more settled, steady, career ELT teacher

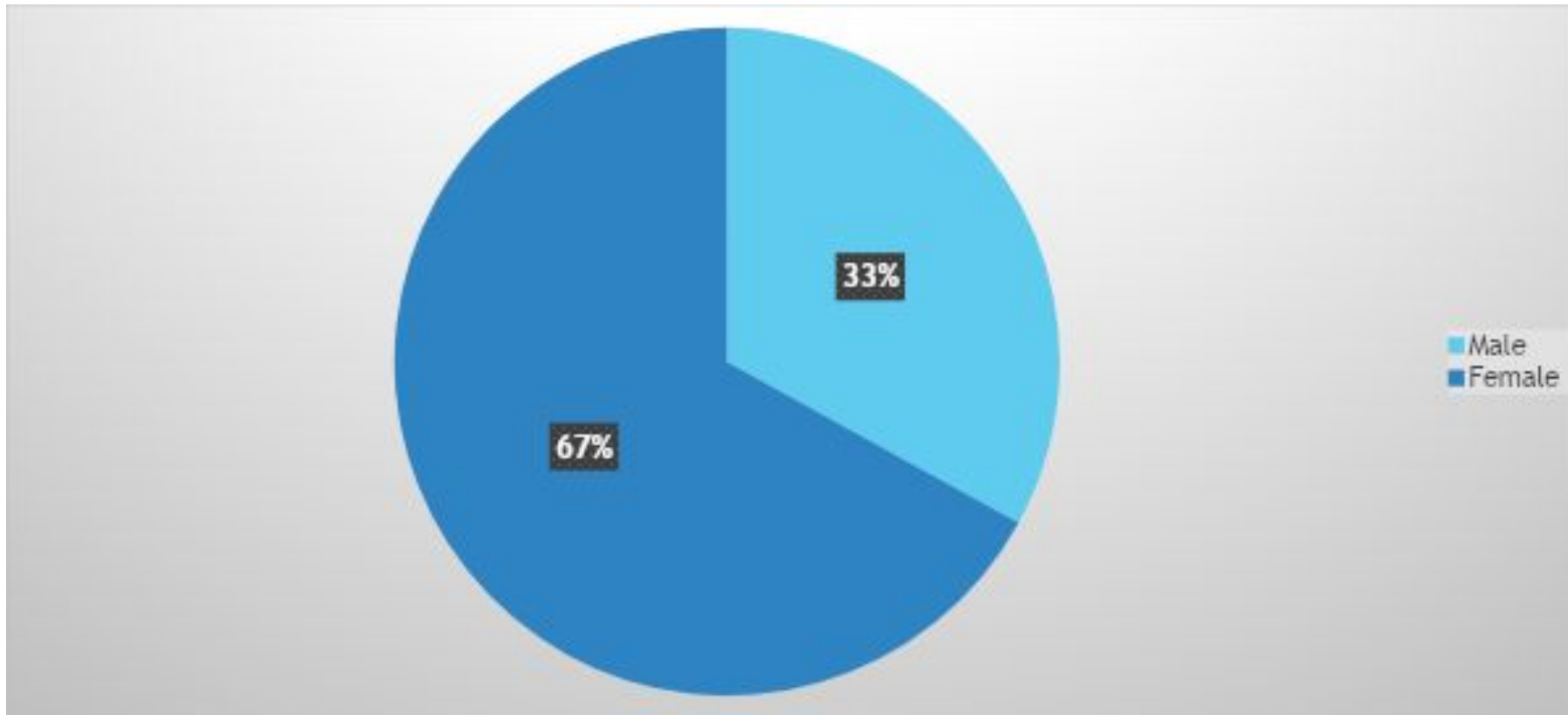
Number of respondents by county (n = 81)



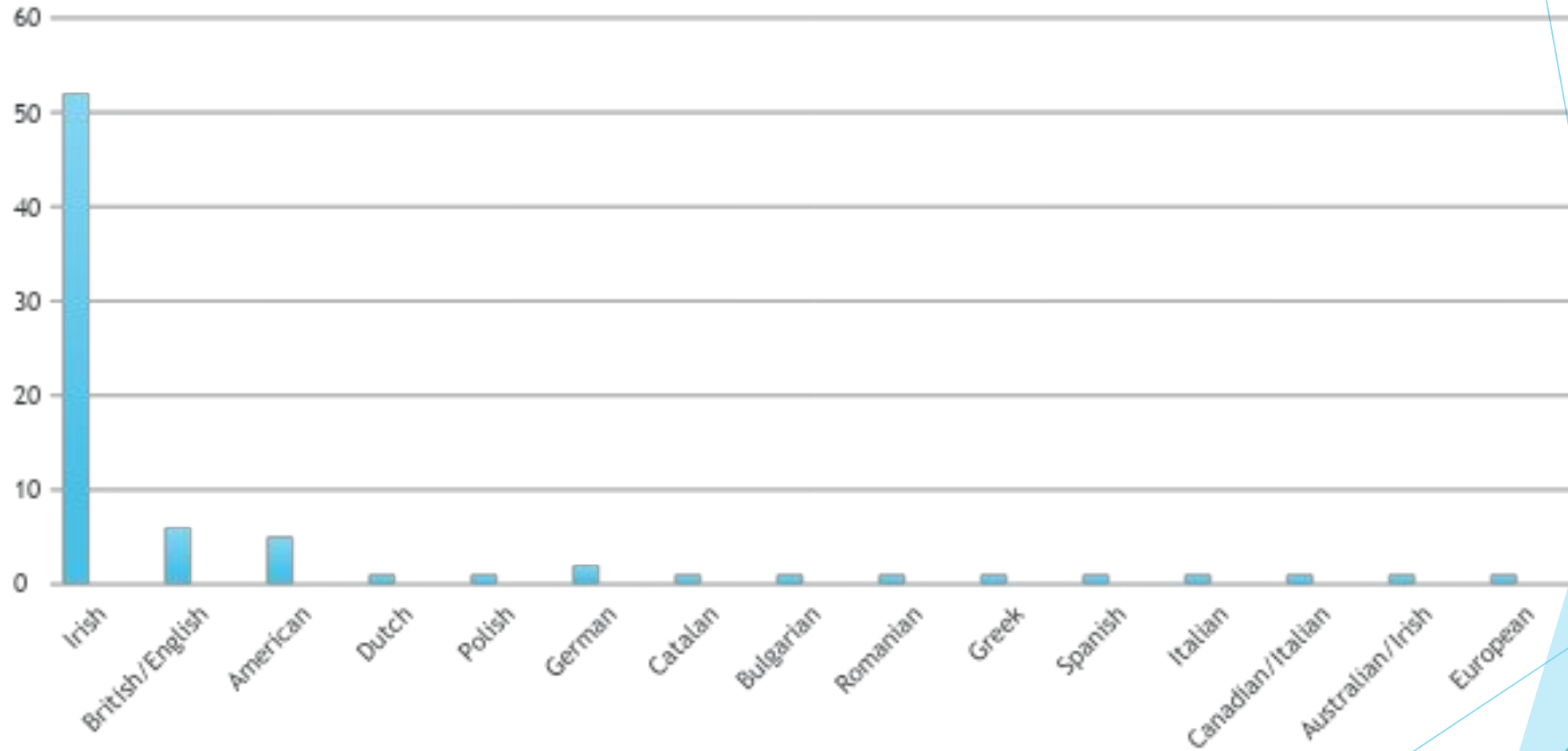
Age category of respondents (n =76)

Age Category	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Under 20	0	0
21-30	15	19.74%
31-40	32	42.11%
41-50	16	21.05%
51-60	8	10.53%
61-70	5	6.58%
Over 71	0	0

Male/Female distribution of respondents



Breakdown of teachers by nationality



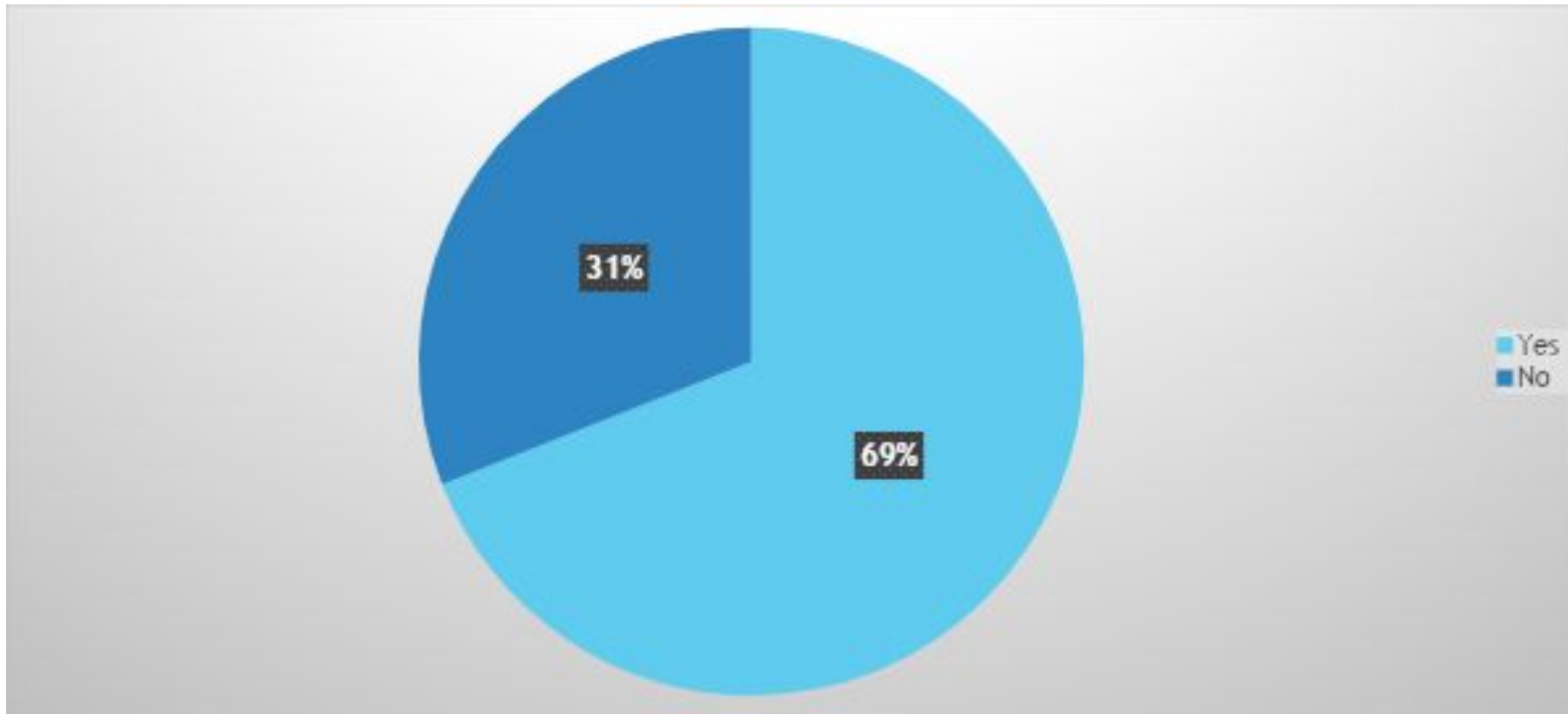
Findings

- ▶ No respondent was an inexperienced teacher, with 19% having an average of 11-15 years' teaching experience
- ▶ almost 70% of respondents had worked abroad in countries ranging from the UAE, Australia, the UK, Italy, Japan and Saudi Arabia, demonstrating a highly-skilled, experienced cohort

Years of ELT experience (n = 75)

<p>Q.9 <i>If you have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools, are you:</i></p>	<p>Number of teachers</p>	<p>Percentage of teachers</p>
<p>Newly qualified (under 1 year)</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>2.67%</p>
<p>1-2 years</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6.67%</p>
<p>3-4 years</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>14.67%</p>
<p>5-6 years</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>13.33%</p>
<p>7-10 years</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>13.33%</p>
<p>11-15 years</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>18.67</p>
<p>16-20 years</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>12%</p>
<p>21-25 years</p>	<p>8</p>	<p>10.67%</p>
<p>25+ years</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>8%</p>

Q.72 I have worked in a school or schools abroad

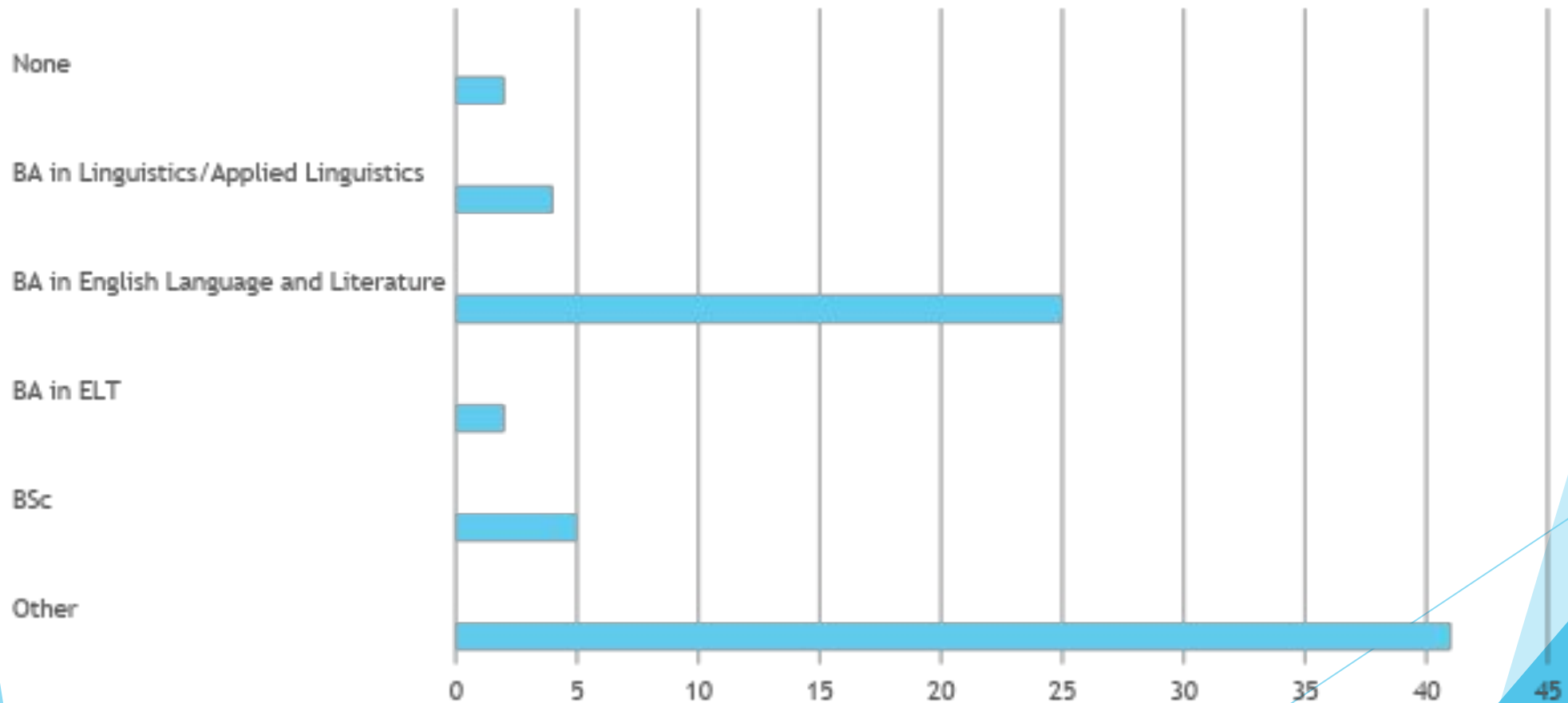


Findings - Undergraduate Qualifications

The most common undergraduate degree was not a BA in ELT, which only 3% of respondents held, but a BA in English Language and Literature, which 25 or nearly 32% of respondents recorded having

A diverse range of disciplines presented under 'Other' qualifications and listed more than half (52%) of recorded responses

Undergraduate qualifications held by respondents (n = 79)

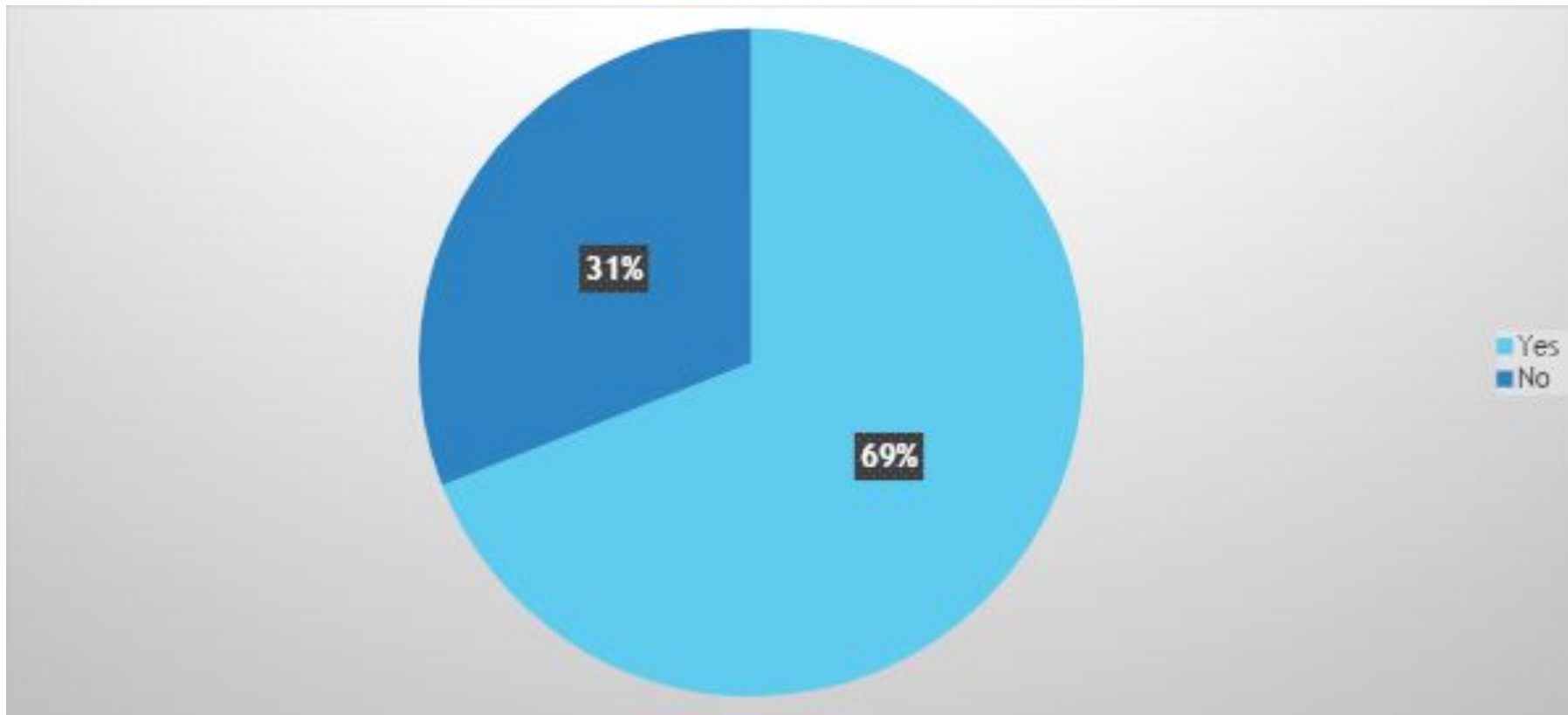


Findings -

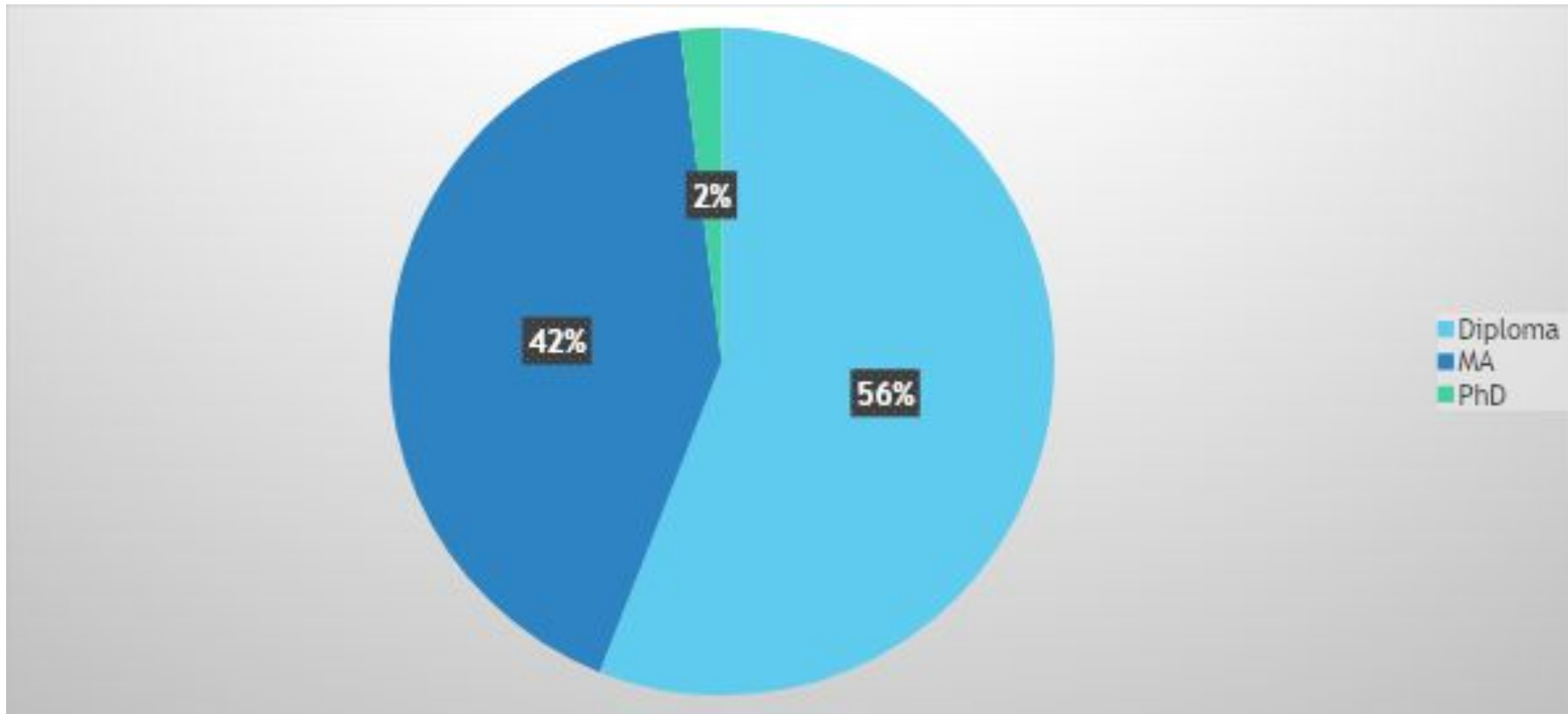
Postgraduate Qualifications

- ▶ Nearly 70% of respondents were qualified to postgraduate level
- ▶ 56% held a certificate or diploma, the CELT (QQI Ireland) and CELTA (Cambridge) being the most prevalent
- ▶ 42% held an MA, among these an MA in ELT (5.88%), an MA in English Language and Literature (6.86%) and an MA in Applied Linguistics (8.82%)
- ▶ 19.61% majority of remaining responses recording an MA in the 'Other' category
- ▶ Over 80% of respondents stated either not having or not knowing of the availability of an ELT/ESOL postgraduate course in their institution after completing their undergraduate course, or having access in some way to one

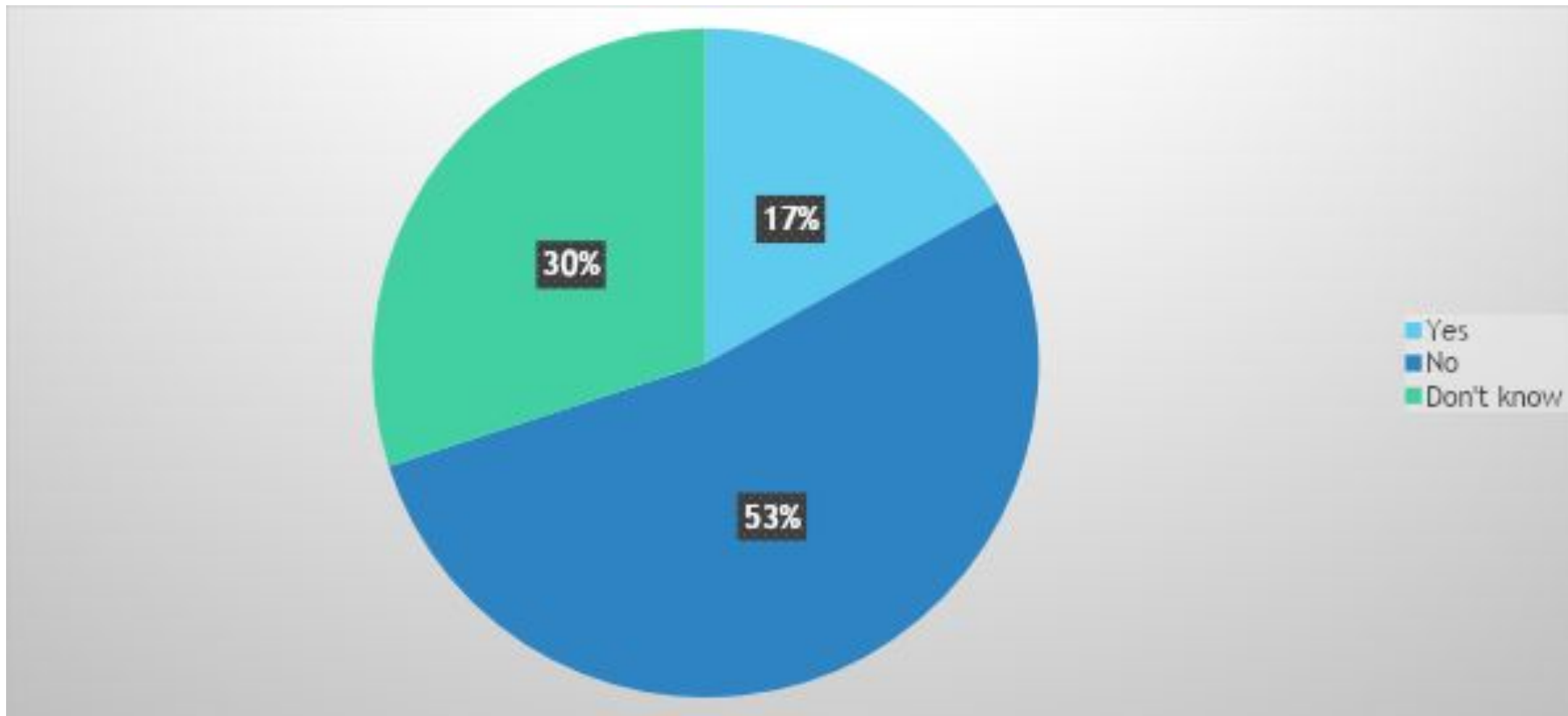
Q.12 Do you hold postgraduate qualifications?



Breakdown of postgraduate qualifications



Q. 10 Was there a postgraduate course in ELT/ESOL available to you? (n = 74)



Findings

The lack of available undergraduate and postgraduate courses specifically catering for the practical needs of ELT as a discipline has been identified as a potential contributing factor in diminishing the career viability of Irish ELT for its teachers

(Willoughby 2019, pp. 86-7)

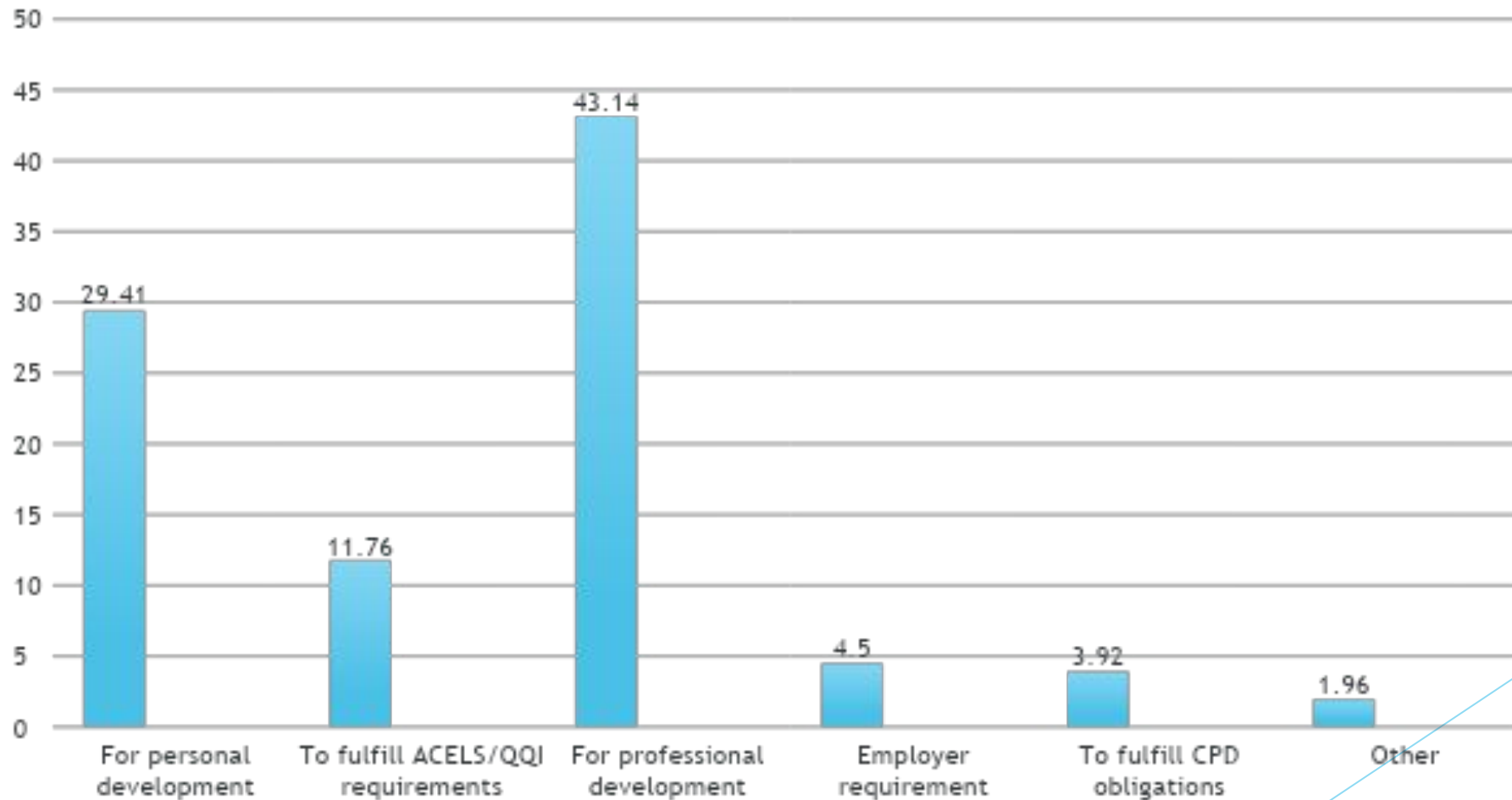
Findings - Qualifications

Reasons given for undertaking postgraduate study:

- ▶ for professional development (43.14%)
- ▶ for personal development (29.41%)

These results suggest a talented cohort from immensely rich and varied subject backgrounds, but raise questions as to why so few of these ELT teacher respondents had access to either an undergraduate or postgraduate experience specifically in ELT as a discipline to enhance their academic repertoire, and merits further investigation.

Q.14 Why did you decide to undertake postgraduate study? (n = 102)

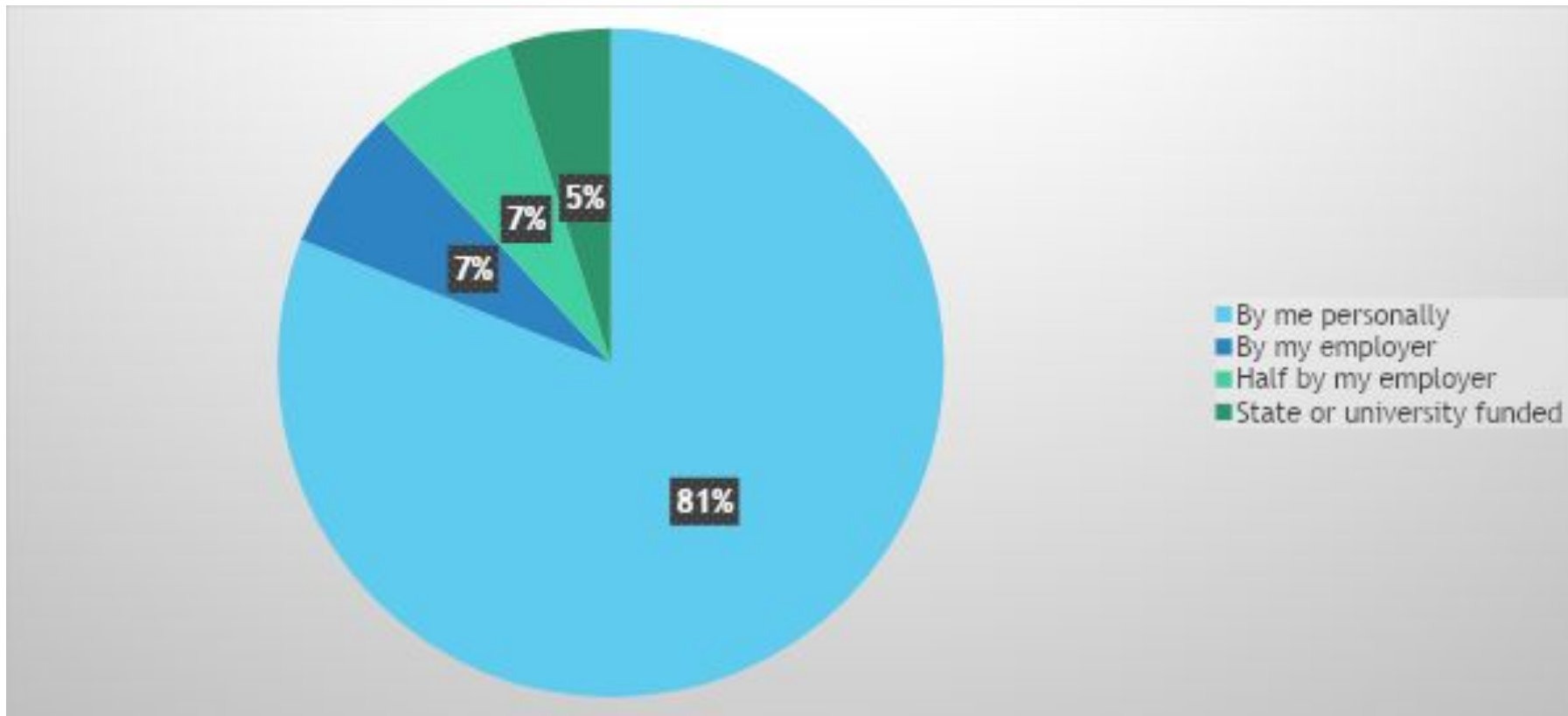


Findings - course funding

- ▶ 81% of respondents personally funded their own course
- ▶ only 13% of respondents were aware that their fees for courses would be fully covered by their employer, while 29% stated a course would be partially funded
- ▶ almost 35% of respondents were not aware of what kind of funding their employer would provide for courses at all.

Why such knowledge was unavailable to these respondents remains unclear, but it is certainly an area which needs addressing if schools are to retain highly-qualified teachers, given 31% stated outright that courses would not be funded in any way.

Q.16 How was your postgraduate course funded? (n = 58)

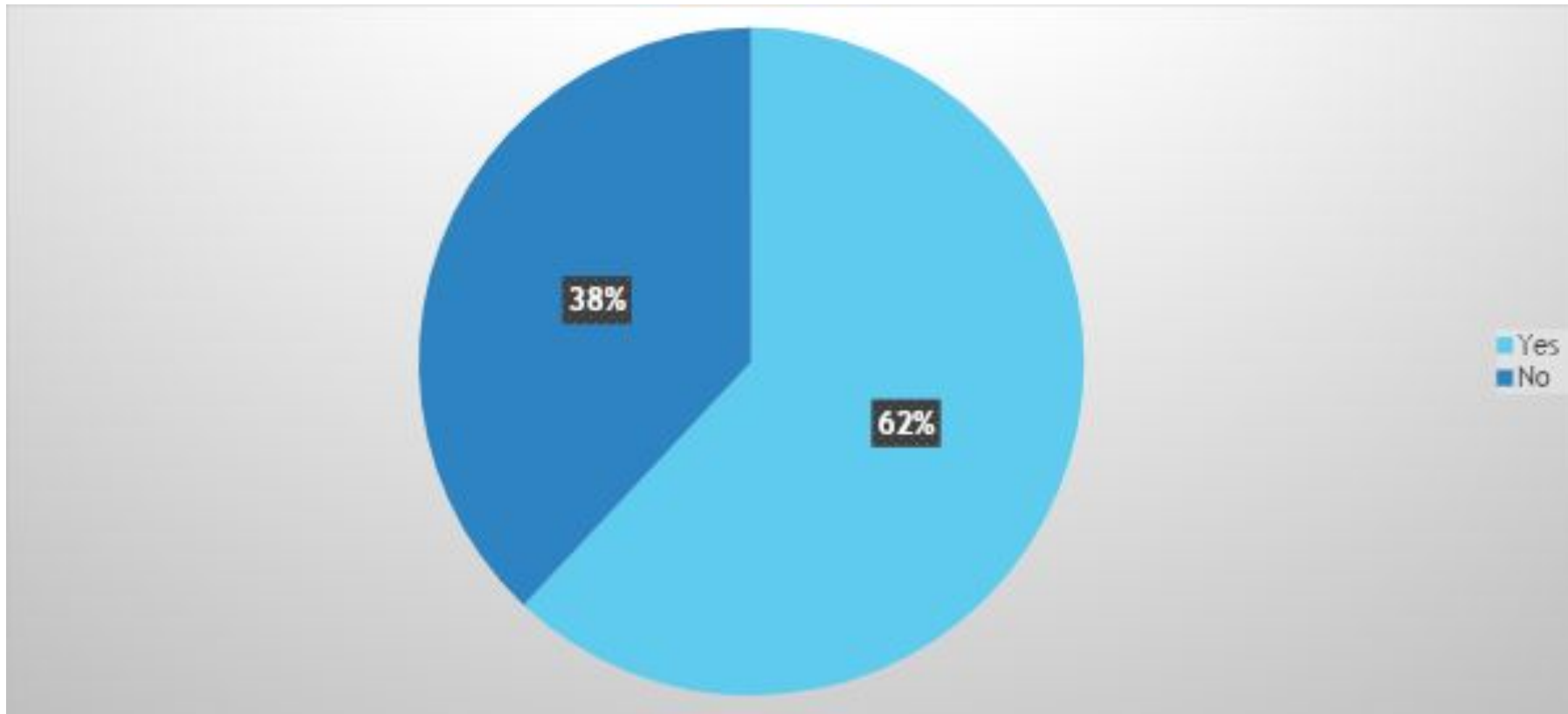


Findings - Continuous Professional Development:

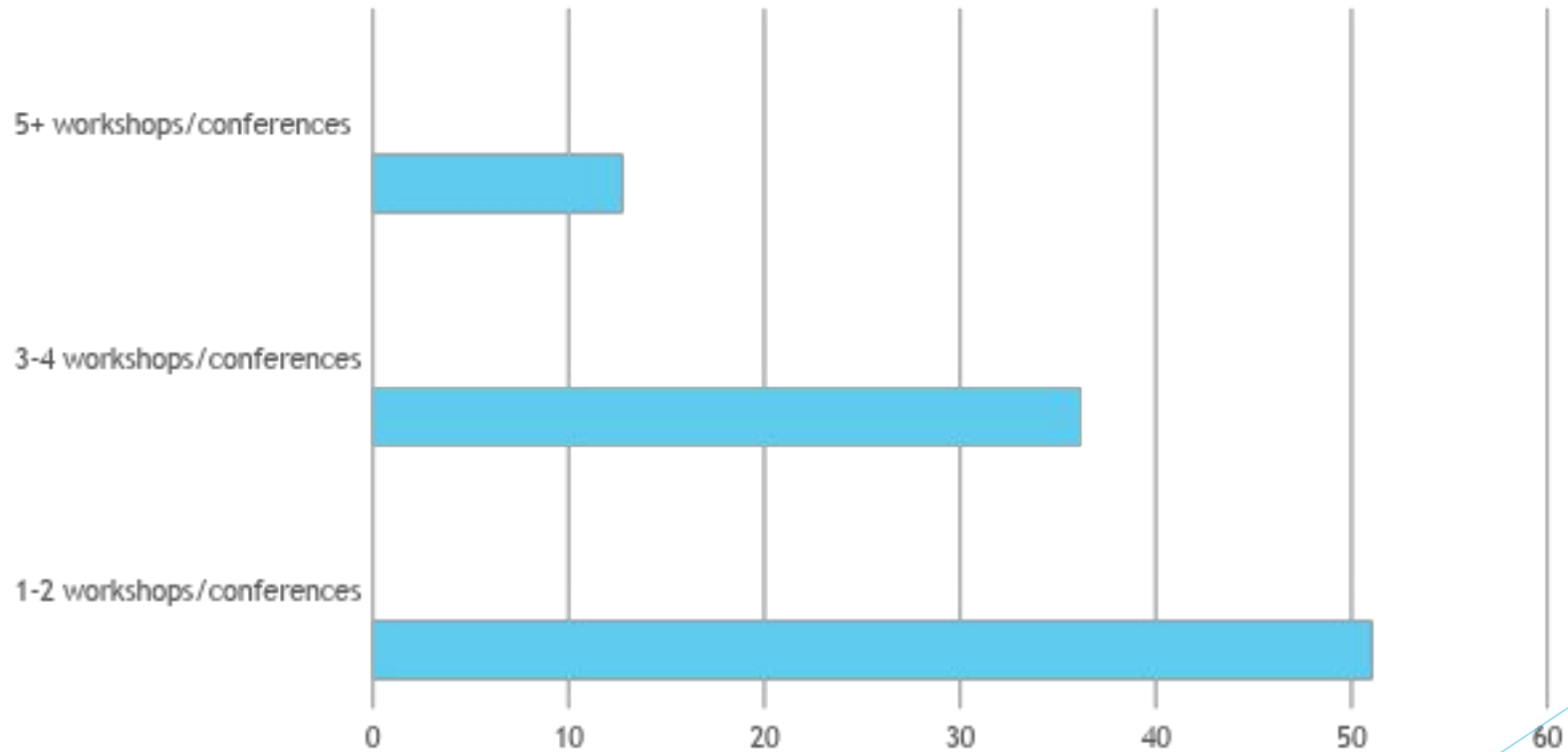
62% of respondents had attended a workshop or conference in the previous twelve months

- ▶ the majority (51.06%) had attended 1-2 workshops or conferences
- ▶ 41 (46.59%) out of 88 respondents stated it had been primarily for their professional development

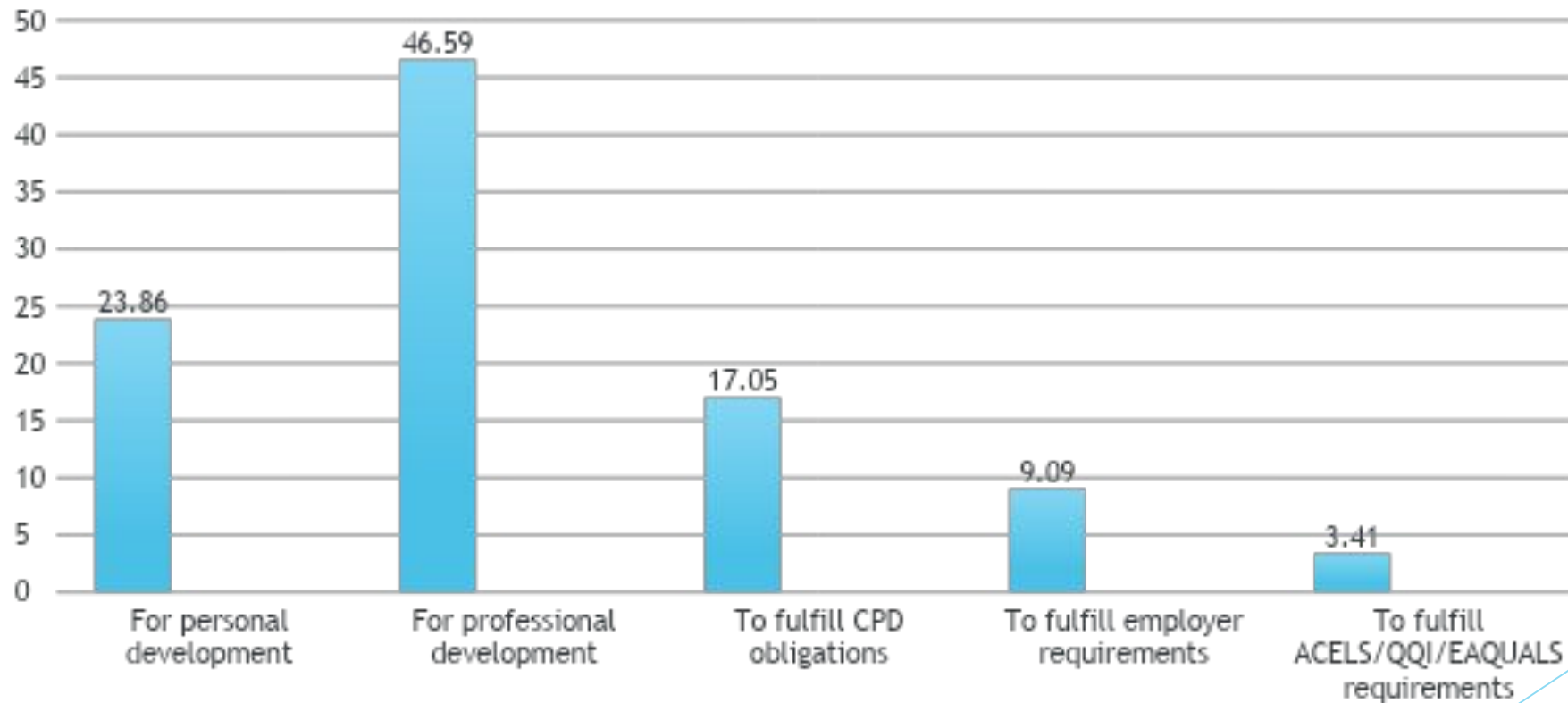
*Q.17 Have you attended any ELT workshops/conferences in the last 12 months?
(n = 76)*



Q.18 How many workshops have you attended?



Q.19 Why did you attend recent workshops/conferences? (n = 88)

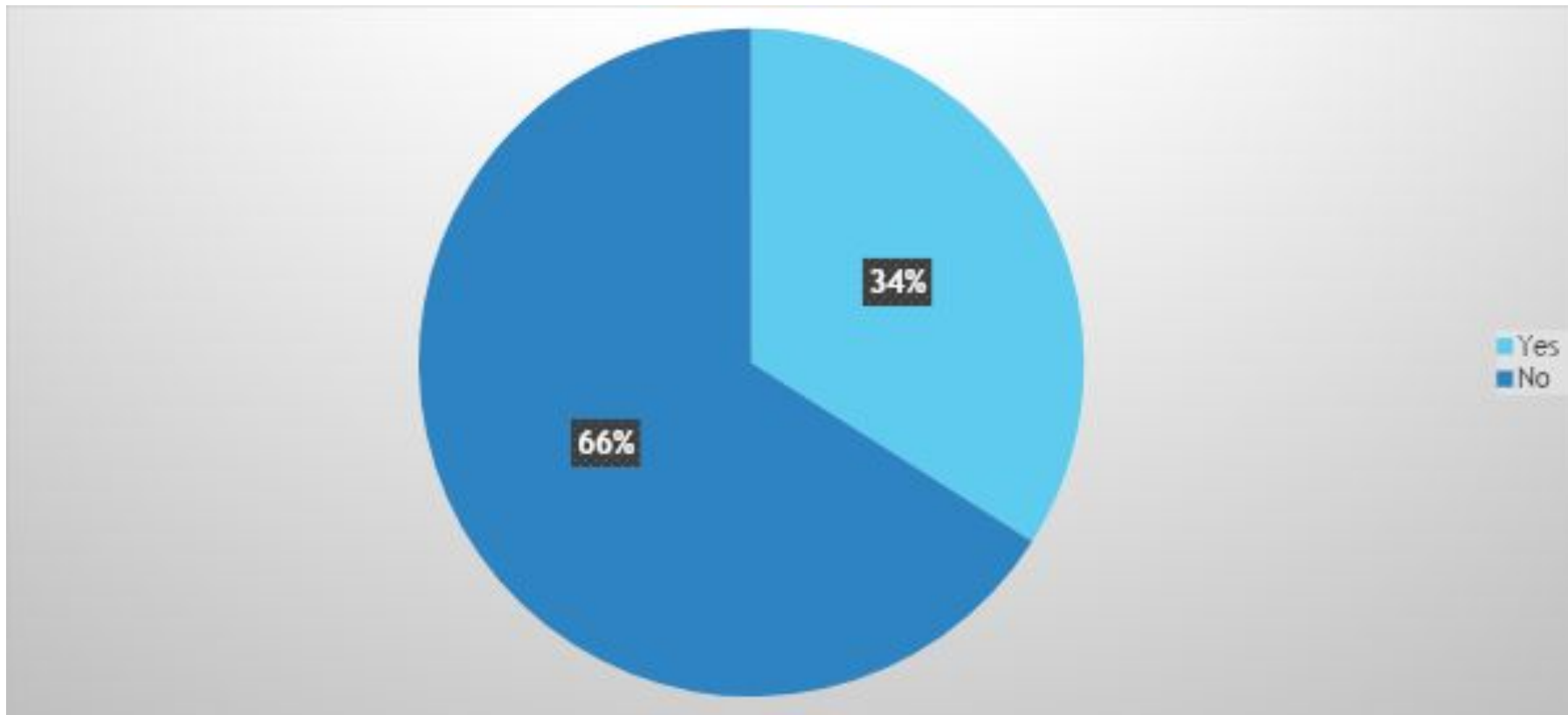


Findings - CPD (n = 47)

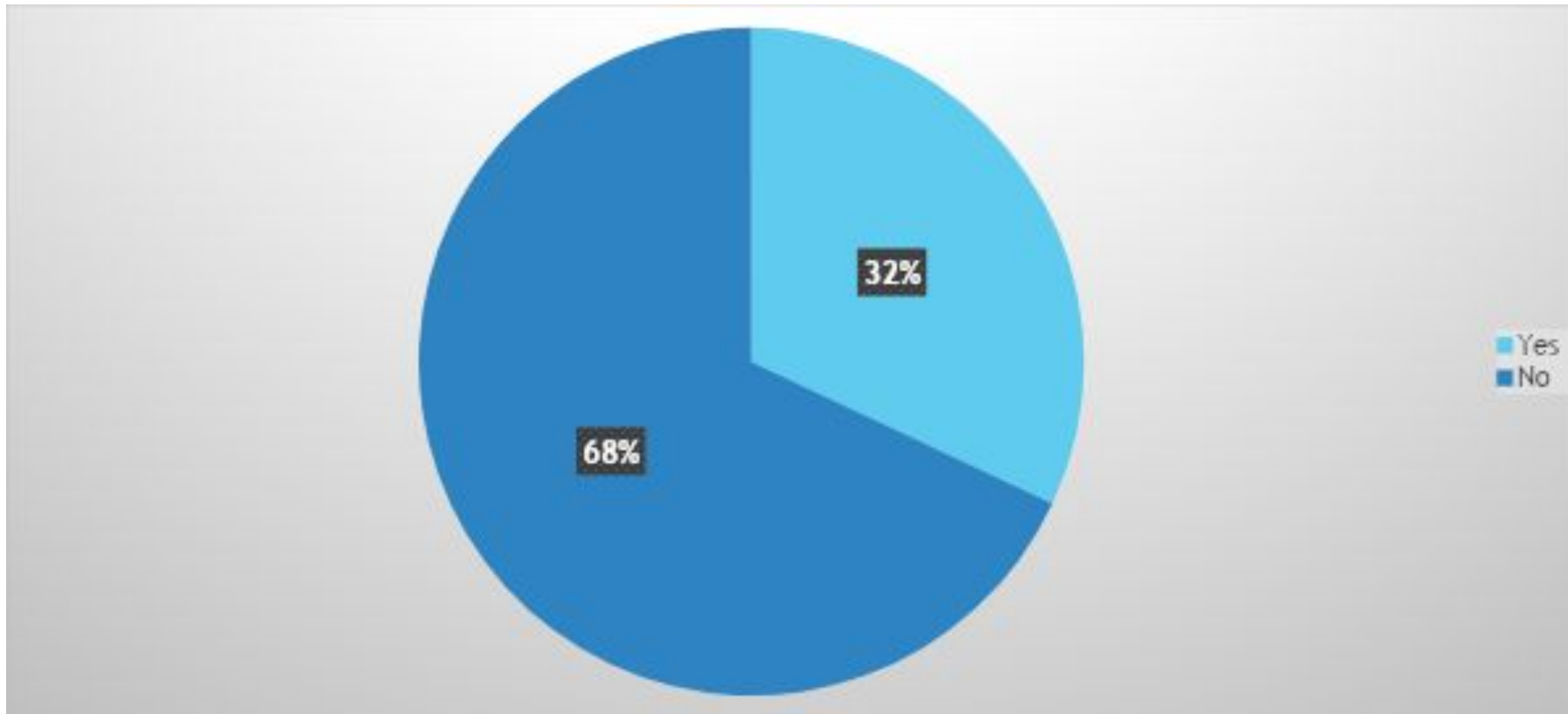
The question of **payment and expenses for courses or attendance at conferences, workshops and meetings** was examined in seven 'yes' 'no' or 'don't know' questions:

- ▶ Of 47 responses to the question of whether respondents had **had to travel outside their town or city** to attend workshops or conferences the number was roughly even, with 23 (48.94%) saying yes and 24 (51.06%) saying no respectively.
- ▶ 16 (34%) had been paid but 31 (66%) **had not been paid for attending**
- ▶ only 15 (33%) reported that they had received while 32 (67%) **had not received travel expenses for attending**
- ▶ only 16 (34.04%) had **received a certificate** as proof of attendance, the remainder (31 or 65.96%) had not.

Q.21 Were you paid for attending your last workshop? (n = 47)



Q.22 Were you paid travel/accommodation expenses for your last workshop/conference?

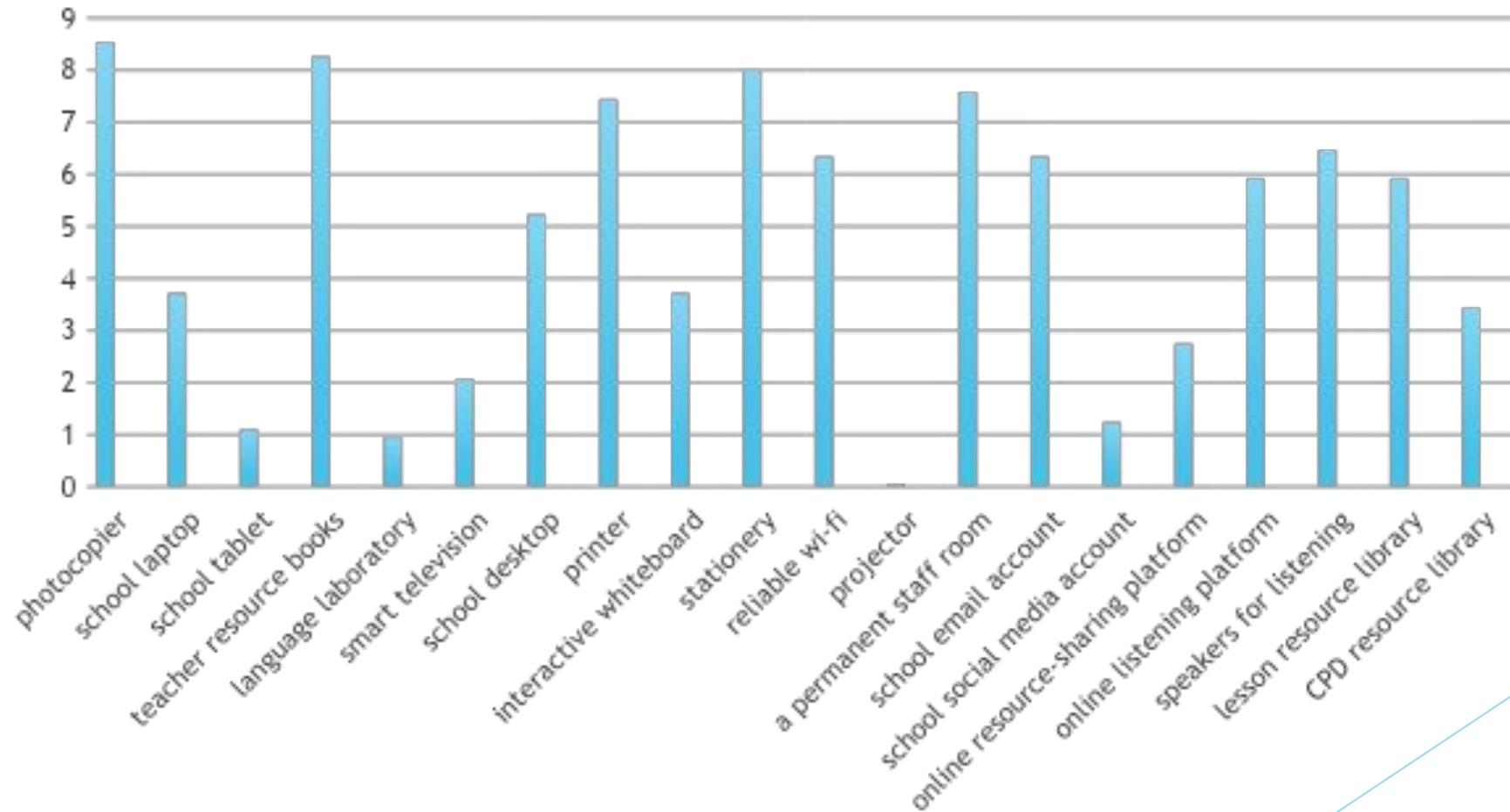


Findings - resources

- ▶ Basic resources teachers had at their disposal to enable them to carry out their teaching duties were recorded as adequate
- ▶ Teacher respondents appeared somewhat under-resourced technologically; concerns voiced regarding inadequate technology at a number of schools suggested they were lagging behind in the area of technological delivery of their pedagogy

Given the overnight shift to the virtual classroom environment demanded by the COVID pandemic, and the subsequent upheaval experienced by many schools and their teacher and student populations, this clearly demonstrates a need for school owners and management to use their teachers' observations as a source of feedback on lesson delivery and updating resources (Unite ELT Branch 2020a, pp. 10-11; 2020b, pp.7-8).

Percentage breakdown of resources available to teachers (n = 726)



Findings - payment (n = 51)

The majority recorded being paid hourly

- ▶ lowest specified rate = €10 (min wage for age 20+ worker = €10.50 from 1 Jan 2022)
- ▶ highest = €28
- ▶ average hourly rate calculated as €20.30 for face-to face contact teaching

Annual pay rates were recorded among 12 respondents

- ▶ Ranged from €15,000 to €40,000
- ▶ average calculated at €26,860 per annum
- ▶ difficulty in ascertaining any kind of consistent pattern between what respondents were paid and level of seniority, years of teaching experience, qualifications held, duties and days, times of day and number of hours worked
- ▶ little evidence of any consistent incremental pay-scale among this cohort, reinforcing the description of “anarchic pay structures” throughout the industry (Unite ELT Branch 2020a, p. 7).

“anarchic pay structures” (Unite ELT Branch 2020a, p. 7)

respondent	gender/age group	ACELS recognised school?	qualification	experience	hours worked	salary
A	F 41-50	Yes	BA, DELTA MA	25+ years	morning afternoon	€40,000
B	M 41-50	Yes	BA, CELT MA	16-20 years	morning afternoon	€15,000
C	M 21-30	No	BA	3-4 years	morning afternoon evenings some weekends	€35,000
D	F 31-40	Yes	BA, CELTA, DELTA, MA	11-15 years	weekends only	€35,500

Findings - payment (n = 51)

Only 7% of respondents were paid for lesson preparation or correction

Only 5% were paid for exam correction and preparation despite the regular extra time this required

Correlates with previous Irish ELT teacher work condition survey findings where 82% of teachers reported consistently being unpaid for such work, both pre- and during the pandemic (Unite ELT Branch 2020b, p.7)

“included in your hourly rate of pay” and disregarded as additional, with none of this work actually “logged or officially counted” in the sector (Unite ELT Branch 2020b, p.11)

Findings - payment

Study of contemporary Irish ELT teachers found poor work conditions to be **a demotivating factor** for 75% of observed cohort, who cited **better pay, greater job security and having a better-defined career** as influencing elements in improving teacher motivation, their professional profile and that of the industry as a whole

(Aherne 2014, pp.48-50)

Findings - holiday pay (n = 64)

- ▶ Only two respondents recorded receiving none
- ▶ Average holiday time calculated as **20.16 paid days**, suggesting the minimum entitlement period of leave for the majority of these teacher respondents as provided for in Irish work legislation (i.e. 8% of worked hours in the annual leave year)
- ▶ 3 respondents specified receiving paid public/bank holidays, including two weeks at Christmas
- ▶ Highest recorded number = 36 paid holidays

Findings - sick pay

- **Only 17 respondents** out of 31 received sick pay
- Of those who specified how many days, the majority received between 3-5 paid sick days

Until June 2021, Irish employment law stated employers must give an employee written information about their sick leave policy but paid sick leave entirely at the discretion of the employer (Citizens Information 2020)

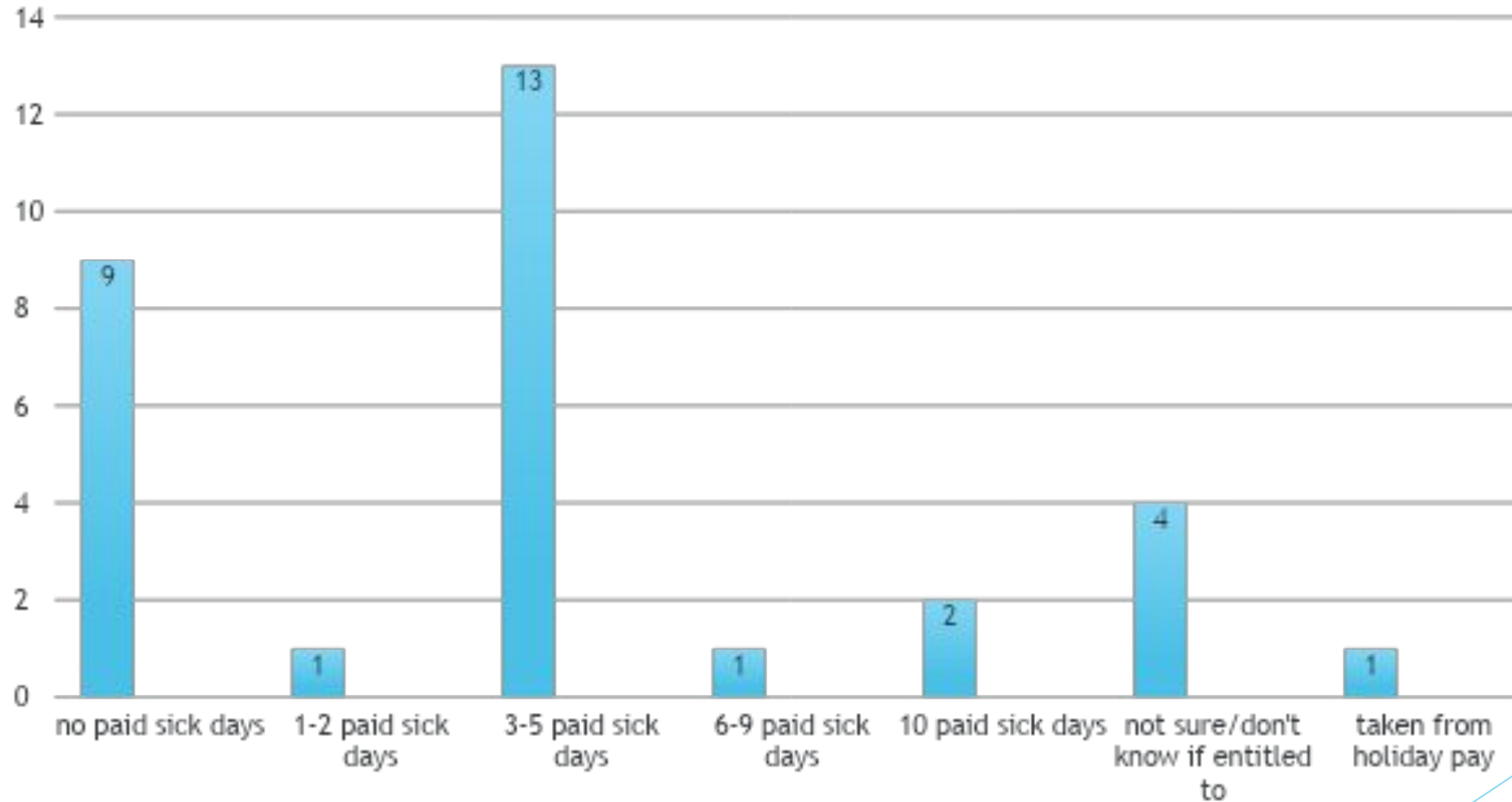
Only **44% of Irish employers** were found to have provided any form at all (Fry 2020)

Findings - sick pay

- Lack of statutory sick pay identified as a “disincentivising factor” for employees who might be displaying symptoms of COVID-19 from taking sick leave during the pandemic, roundly criticised by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) because of its possible impact on the spread of the virus (Glynn in Hennessy 2020; Fry 2020)
- The Sick Leave and Parental Leave (COVID-19) Bill will bring statutory sick pay into law in Ireland by the end of 2021 (*KildareStreet 2020; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2021*)

“potentially significant costs to the majority of employers not offering such a benefit, and indeed to those many employers whose policies may not be as generous as that required by legislation” (Fry 2020).

Findings - sick days (n = 31)



Findings - force majeure

“limited leave from work following a family crisis”

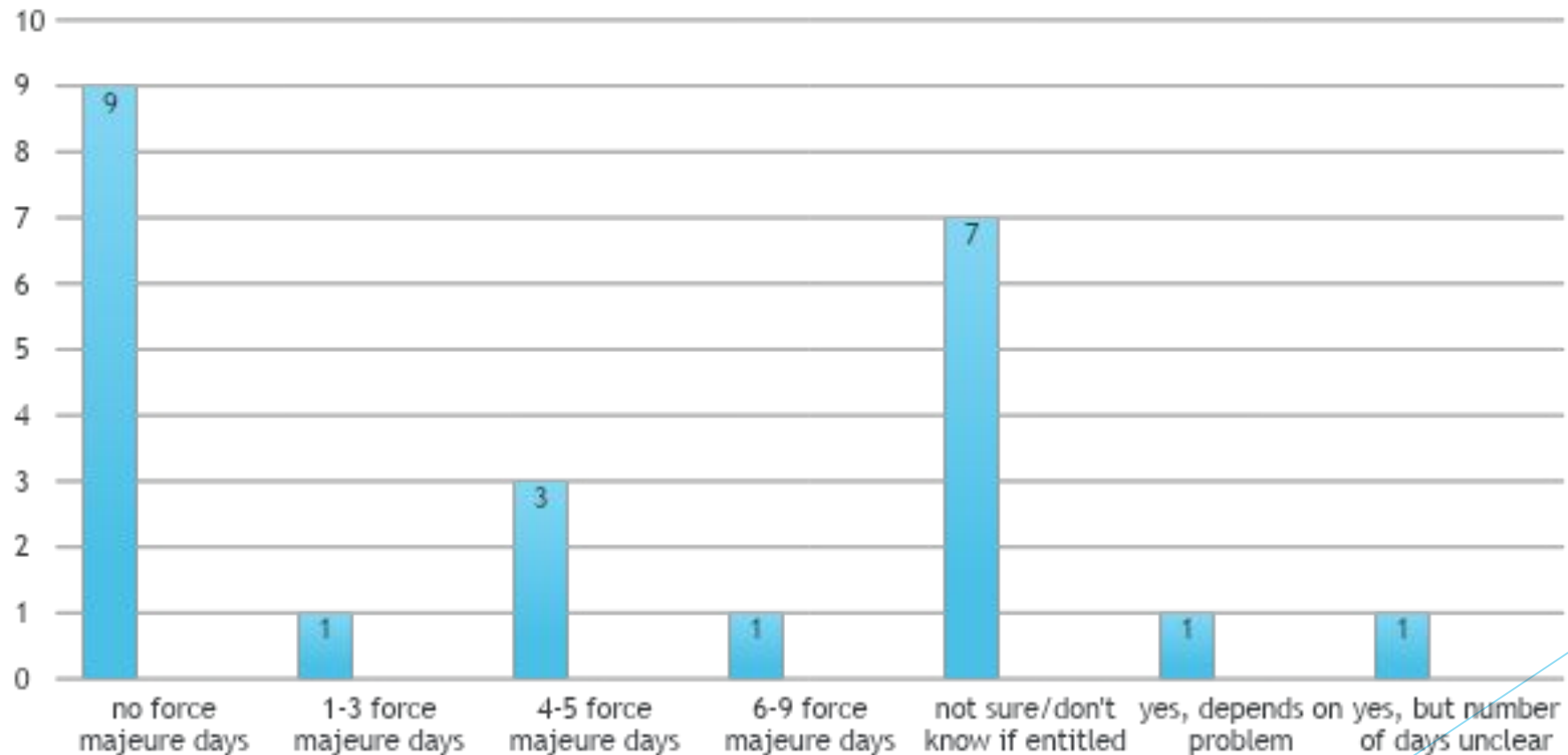
- ▶ granted only if there is a provision in the employee’s contract of employment, or “an established custom and practice in [one’s] place of work”

employees do not have automatic legal entitlement to force majeure

(Citizens Information 2020)

- ▶ 16 out of 24 recorded responses knew what their entitlement was - **majority received none**
- ▶ **only one respondent** was aware of 3 days’ force majeure clearly stated in their contract
- ▶ one had received one paid day off for a family bereavement
- ▶ two respondents stated that force majeure days had been taken from their holidays when the necessity arose

Findings - force majeure (n = 24)



Findings - pension

- ▶ Only 8 respondents out of 62 recorded responses had made any provision for a pension plan, just 3 of whom had contributions made by their school employer
- ▶ **80.65% of teachers who responded had no pension plan whatsoever**
- ▶ more than one and a half times the national average of 48% of working adults found to have made no provision for one, and demonstrates Irish ELT schools as being among the 75% of national employers who do not provide company pensions (Zurich Life 2020; Daly 2020).

Findings - medical insurance

- ▶ 23 out of 62 respondents had their own private medical insurance, yet only 2 had the benefit of their school contributing to this
- ▶ 37 respondents, or **nearly 60%**, stated they had no form of medical insurance at all

Both pension and medical provision are areas that need attention if the sector is to be truly considered a profession for its teachers.

Findings - accommodation

- ▶ Of 62 responses, fewer than 17% of teachers recorded 'yes' to having a mortgage on their own home, with nearly 84% stating they did not
- ▶ nearly 60% lived in rented accommodation
- ▶ 21 respondents recorded sharing accommodation with people other than family members, only 8 recorded living with members of their family (see Table 8).

Highly consistent with previous survey findings of nearly 80% of ELT teachers either renting or assumed to be, which makes them **2.5 times more likely** to be so doing than the general population (Unite ELT Branch 2020a, p.5; Pembroke 2018, pp.75-81; Central Statistics Office 2016).

A cause for concern in terms of the **direct link between precarity and not having a permanent address** or access to home ownership (Pembroke 2018, p. 80-1).

Qualitative data focus

Attitudes to ELT and where teachers positioned themselves within it

Four open-ended questions:

- ▶ *Do you regard ELT as a profession?*
- ▶ *Do you regard yourself as a professional?*
- ▶ *What are the **typical attributes** of a professional ELT teacher?*
- ▶ *What are your longer-term career plans? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT?*

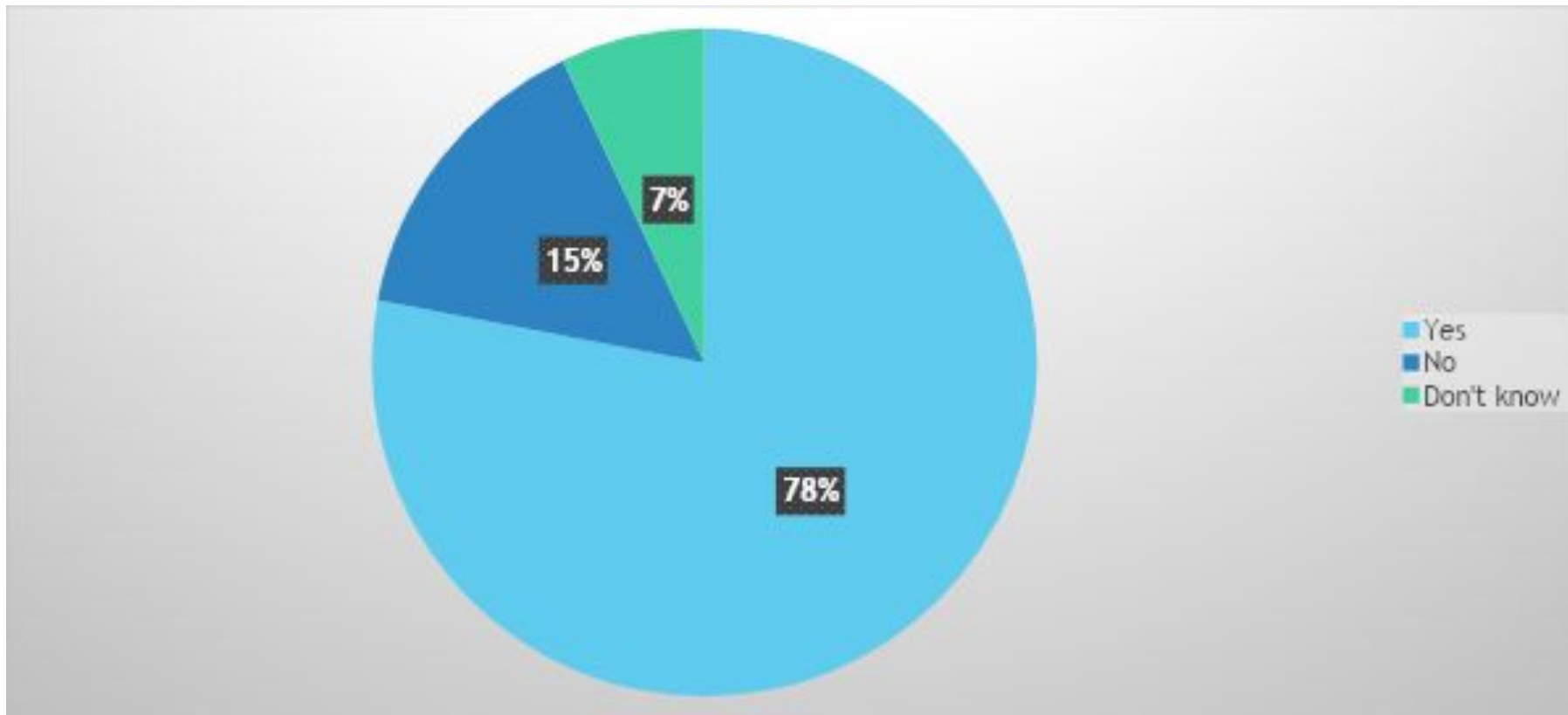
Findings - Qualitative Data

Teacher attitudes to ELT

Responses to the question *Do you regard ELT as a profession?*

- ▶ 78% of 60 teacher respondents stated 'yes', with central word-cloud keywords being 'teacher' and 'professional', along with 'important', 'talented' and 'opportunity'
- ▶ Only 15% stated 'no' and were highly critical of the field
- ▶ 7% were undecided, with keywords for both including 'advantage', 'lack', 'precarious', 'capitalist' and 'racket'

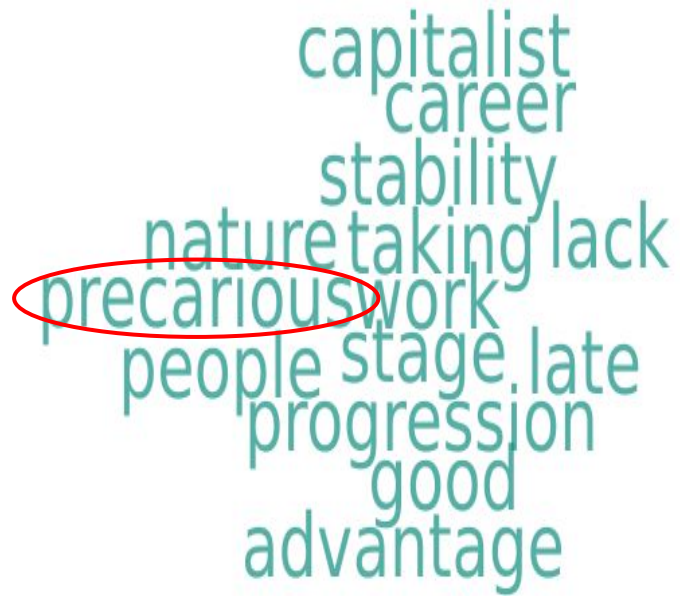
Q.75 Do you regard ELT as a profession?



Word cloud for 'yes' responses



Q73_2_TEXT - Don't know



Q73_3_TEXT - No



Word clouds for 'don't know' and
'no' responses

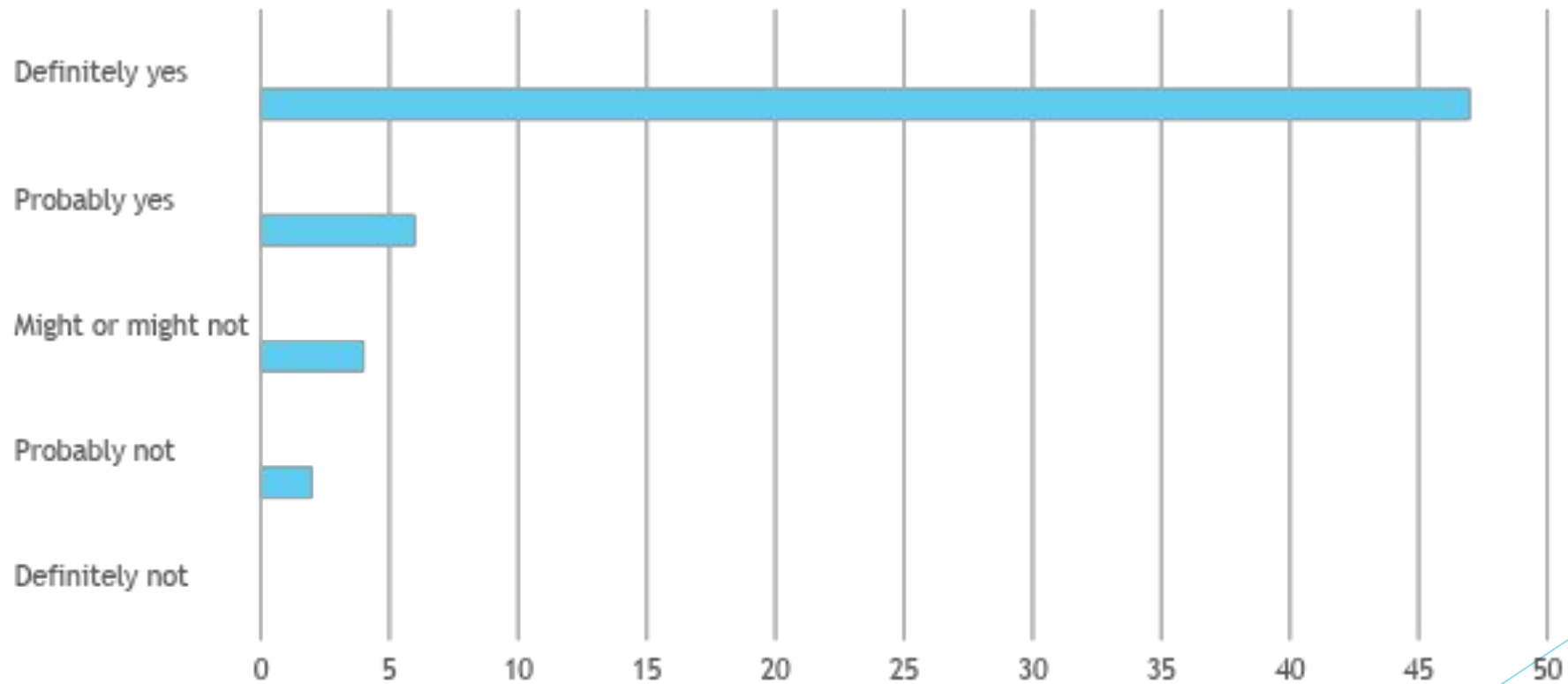
Findings - Qualitative Data

Teacher attitudes to ELT

Do you regard yourself as a professional?

- ▶ 80% of respondents definitely saw themselves as professionals
- ▶ 10% as 'Probably so'
- ▶ 7% undecided
- ▶ 3% replied they were 'Probably not'
- ▶ no respondent stated they were 'Definitely not' a professional

Q.77 Do you regard yourself as a professional? (n = 59)



Findings - qualitative data - teacher attitudes to ELT

- ▶ Reasons offered by the 'Definitely yes' respondents included having high qualifications, a capacity for hard work, dedication to their job, fulfilling student needs and a love for what they do

This is most encouraging; despite “appallingly poor working conditions” officially recorded among many Irish ELT teachers (Unite ELT Branch 2020b, p.10), combined with the many challenges faced by the cohort in this study, it demonstrates empowerment and high self-esteem among the majority of respondents and a sense of self-assuredness in terms of their professional identity.

Findings - Qualitative Data

Teacher attitudes to ELT

What are the typical attributes of a professional ELT teacher?

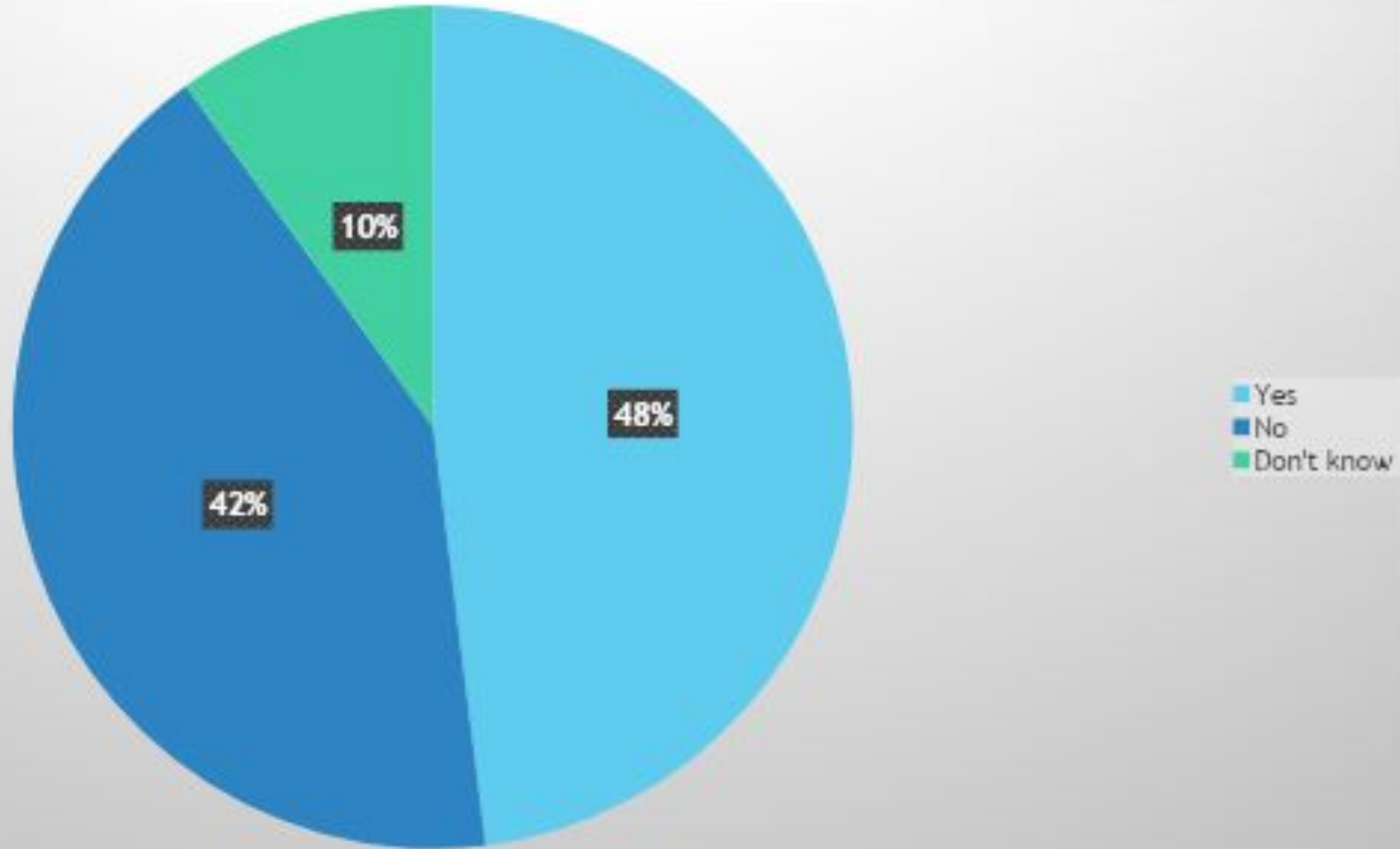
- ▶ a word cloud generated includes words of positive semantic prosody such as 'patience', 'good', 'kindness', 'empathetic', 'passionate' and 'creative'
- ▶ 'language' and 'people' at its heart
- ▶ of keen significance is the centring of the word 'student' over the word 'teacher', clearly displaying the regard these respondents have for students, and where they position them in their Irish ELT world.



Q.74 What are your longer-term career plans? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT?

- ▶ received 52 responses
- ▶ an almost fifty-fifty split between 25 (48%) stating they would remain in ELT seeing it as a viable, longer-term career option, and 22 (42%) who simply did not
- ▶ 5 (10%) unsure as to what their long-term plans were

Do you see yourself continuing in ELT?



Conclusions

- ▶ Findings from the online questionnaire reflect a highly-skilled, highly-qualified and highly-motivated ELT teacher cohort with an empowered, strong sense of their own professionalism. However, this is not found in many instances to be reflected in their work conditions.
- ▶ **Additional comments** at the end of the survey included an appreciation of questions on mental health, how widely conditions varied between different schools, and expressions of concern over perceived conflicts of interest between the focus of ELT school owners/stakeholders and teacher focus on education.

Recommendations

- ▶ This raises an integral question on stakeholder status, who it includes and what it is to be a stakeholder in the Irish ELT industry, consistent with Unite ELT Branch findings that “first, we need proper regulation and recognition of teachers as stakeholders” (2020b, p.12).
- ▶ Teachers **must be** directly included in and represented at all government-level negotiations concerning post-COVID recovery plans for the sector. Continued exclusion of their voices “indicates a disturbing lack of respect” from both government and other industry stakeholders, and “will not succeed in the short-term or otherwise” (Unite ELT Branch 2020b, p.12).



Thank you!

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