



Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service

ORDINARY TO

EXTRAORDINARY

# On-call Staff Survey Report 2017





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## **Introduction**

In July 2017, a review of the On-call service commenced within Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS); contributing factors to this review were the publication of the Sir Ken Knight report in 2013, the Thomas review in 2015 and the Teresa May report on Fire Reform in May 2016, these outlined how improvements could be made to frontline services and identified the importance of workforce reform. The main aim of the review is to improve the On-call duty system for the benefit of CFRS, the staff who work the system and ultimately the communities of Cumbria.

Fundamental to this review was to seek the views and opinions of the workforce so staff could contribute to the improvement and re-shaping of the On-call service. In August 2017 a survey was distributed to all On-call staff within CFRS. The feedback from the employee survey has helped the Service understand the employees' motivation and satisfaction.

The overview of the report covers three distinct areas:

- What's important to On-call staff?
- What are we doing well?
- What can we improve on?

Some very valuable and innovative suggestions were made in respect of the above and more detailed findings are contained within this report.

## **Methodology**

The survey was distributed via email and paper copies to 381 On-call staff within the Service between 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2017 and 18<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Responses were received from 208 staff giving a response rate of 55%. This is a very good response for a survey which means that the results can be taken as representative of the position and views of CFRS On-call staff. All the results have been collated and a comprehensive analysis of the data carried out.

## Summary

This survey aims to feed into a range of strategies across the Service in order to support service development for On-call staff.

Overall the majority of On-call staff (85%) were satisfied with their current role as an On-call firefighter and the vast majority felt the role met their expectations. The survey identified five key areas that were important to maintaining job satisfaction.

The areas identified were:

- Helping the community
- Variety, challenge and excitement
- Ensuring effective support to do a good job
- Work-life balance
- Recognition and value

Within these five areas the survey identified where CFRS was performing and also areas for improvement.

### **Helping the community**

87% of On-call staff said that they joined to help their community and that this was a priority for their job satisfaction. They valued the community events they hosted and were keen to reverse the trend for fewer activities. They felt that management should be made more aware that community involvement was a key contributor to job satisfaction. Typical comments included “The most satisfying part is helping the community”, “I am proud to serve my community” and “The job has moved away from the community I think”.

### **Variety, challenge and excitement**

58% said they joined as an On-call firefighter because it is an exciting job, the majority of these (90%) said the role met their expectations. However, the volume of paperwork and administrative tasks was more than expected and by some staff this was seen to be increasing. The number of incidents across the stations varies and in some areas there were fewer incidents than anticipated. On quiet stations staff felt their time could be used more effectively.

### **Ensuring effective support to do a good job**

There were six key areas identified which On-call staff thought were necessary to support them in providing a good service. Only 66% felt they received enough support from CFRS when carrying out their work. One area which staff felt was important was to ensure effective staffing numbers to maintain appliance availability. A range of solutions were offered such as maintaining numbers through recruitment and retention, effective operational management, alternative crewing models such as

three person crewing, promoting learning and development opportunities, improved communication and engagement, improved working environments and effective IT systems and processes.

## **Work-life balance**

The overall view of staff was that they felt that the job was very demanding in terms of time which made it very difficult to balance work and home life. 46% of staff stated they would prefer to keep two pay scales (full and limited cover) and 45% were keen to keep the current retaining fee. There were mixed feelings in terms of payment, suggestions included banded pay scales, pro-rata pay, incentive for peak time cover, rewards for maintaining appliance availability and a retainer fee based on actual hours of cover. A very high majority of staff (84%) felt it would increase flexibility and appliance availability if they were given the opportunity to take annual leave in smaller blocks.

## **Recognition and value**

Some staff felt that they were undervalued and under supported as only 66% of respondents indicated that they received enough support from the Service, however they did feel valued by their communities. 46% of staff would have liked improved communication with employers and 36% felt that their employer didn't understand the commitment required. A suggestion was made that we should *"invite employers to the station to observe practical demonstrations"*. Staff felt that there should be some recognition and appreciation given to local employers such as letters/certificates, public/media recognition, regular updates for employers and the re-introduction of passing out parades so local employers can be invited to the stations. Staff also felt that there was no recognition or appreciation given to their families in supporting them in their role as an On-call firefighter.

This summary highlights the key areas of importance identified through the On-call survey. However the survey was comprehensive and included more targeted questions on:

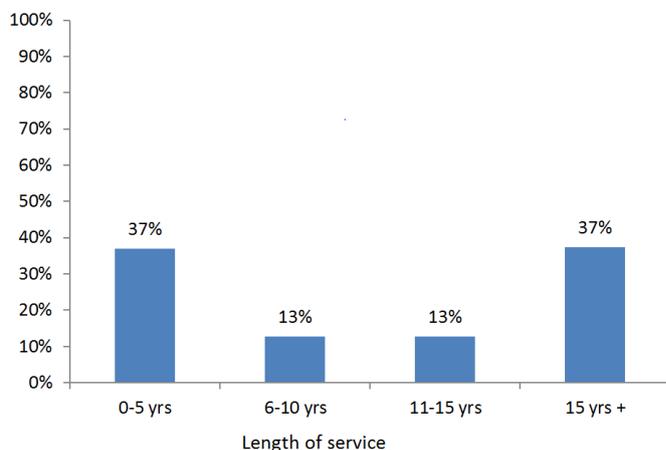
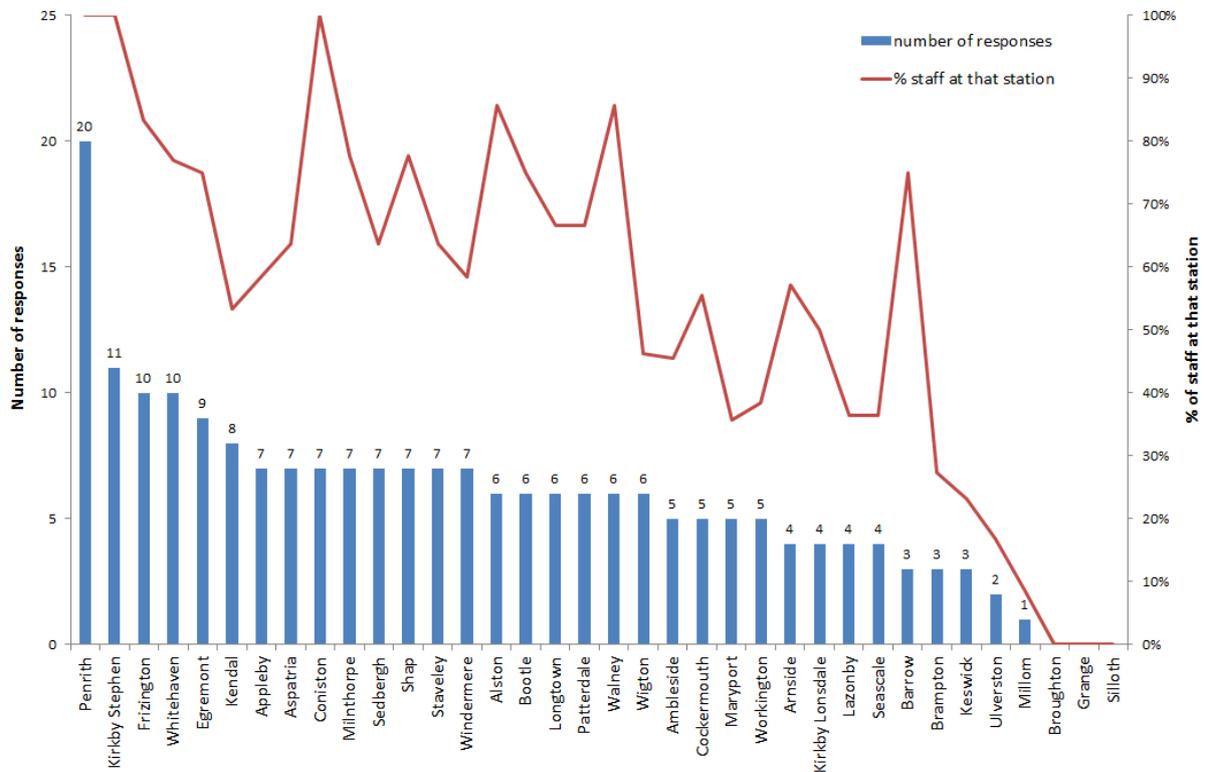
- Recruitment and retention
- Remuneration/working time
- Training/development
- Other duties
- Help and support
- Demographics

Brief analyses of these questions are included in the main body of this report.

## Profile of Respondents

55% responded to the survey (208 of 381 On-call staff). The profile of these respondents is shown below:

- 94% male, 6% female
- 72% firefighters, 25% Crew Managers, 4% Watch Managers
- 75% employed, 25% self-employed
- Almost three quarters of respondents have been in the service for up to five years or more than 15 years (37% for each).

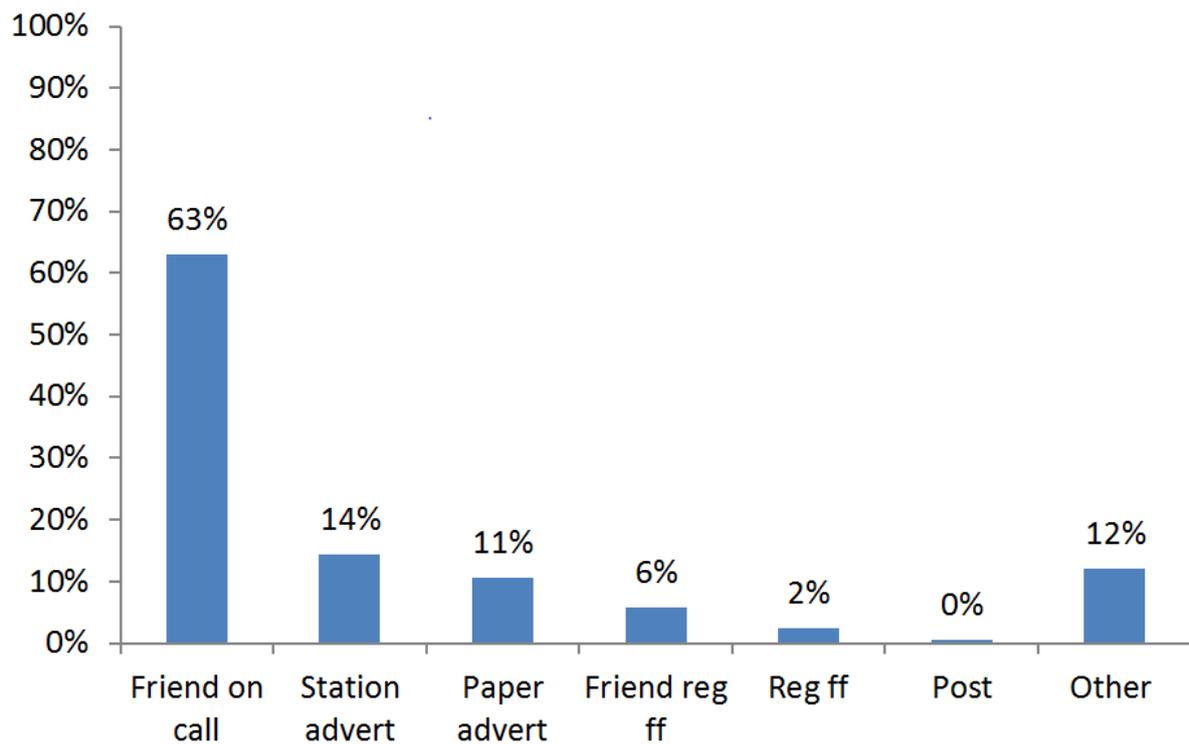


## Recruitment and Retention

Section A in the report covers recruitment and retention.

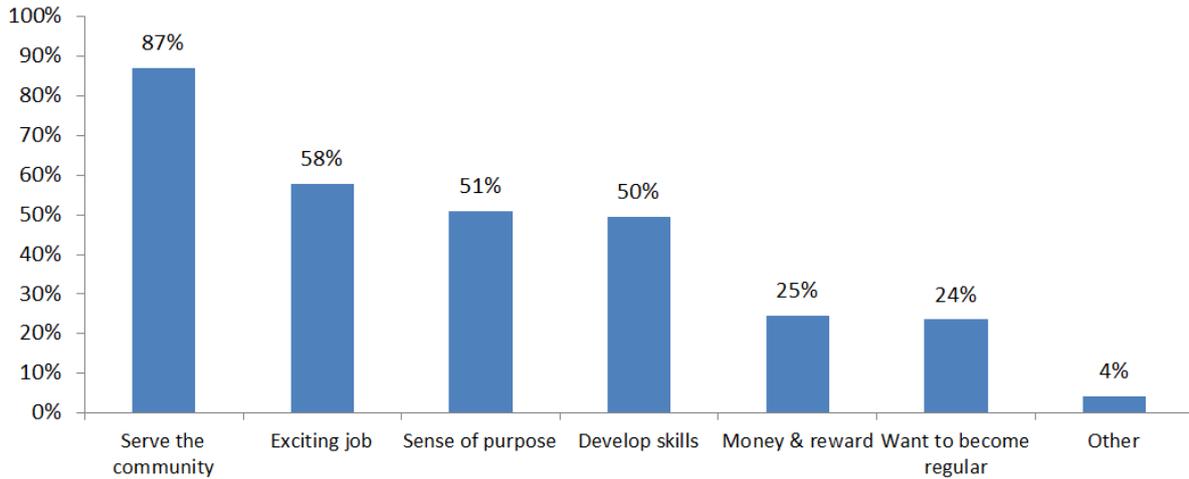
### QA1. How did you find about the possibility of becoming an On-call firefighter?

Just under two thirds (63%) of On-call firefighters found out about becoming a firefighter through a friend or relative who was already in the service. Advertising (station or newspaper) was the second most common method (25%).



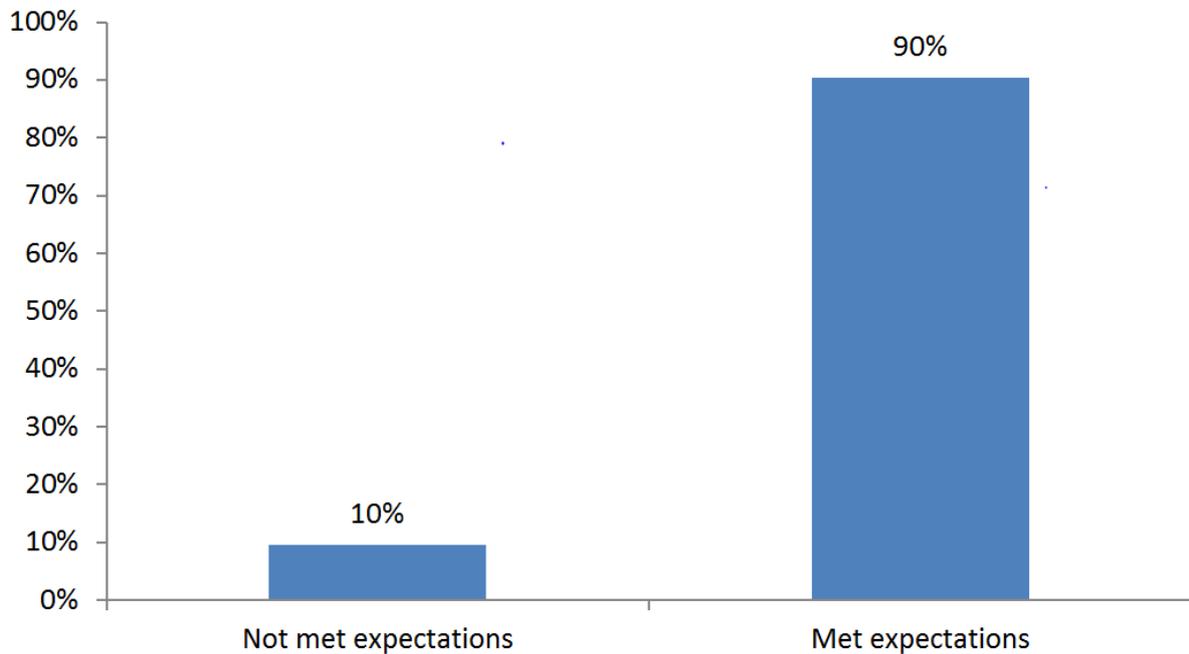
## QA2. Why did you want to become an On-call firefighter?

Respondents could select more than one reason. Almost all (87%) said that they became an On-call firefighter to serve their community. The next most popular choice was that they thought it would be an exciting job (58%). Around half joined because they thought it would give them a sense of purpose or because it would help them develop new skills.



### QA3. Has the role met your expectations?

Almost all of the respondents who answered this question (90%) felt that the role had met their expectations.



*“Expectations were met earlier in my career, however in more recent years the commitment has become more of a burden.”*

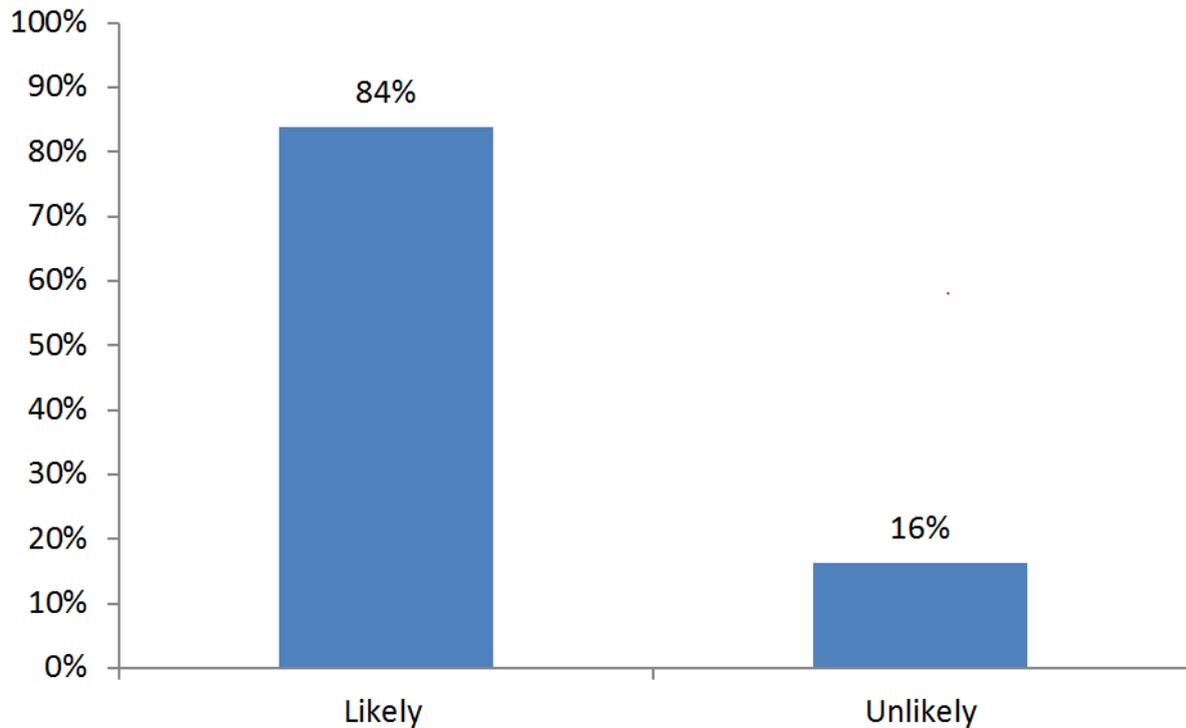
*“I find being part of the team at my station is very rewarding.”*

*“In some ways yes – sense of fulfilment and helping community. In others no – far more demanding of time and commitment than I thought.”*

*“I enjoy the role and have developed my skills. It can be frustrating with such limited number of shouts and limited chance to gain experience.”*

## QA4. How likely or unlikely do you think it is that you will still be an On-call firefighter in 12 months' time?

The vast majority of respondents (84%) thought it was likely that they would still be an On-call firefighter in 12 months' time.



*“Still like to help local community.”*

*“I thoroughly enjoy being part of the team, and enjoy the camaraderie between us all, as well as learning new skills constantly.”*

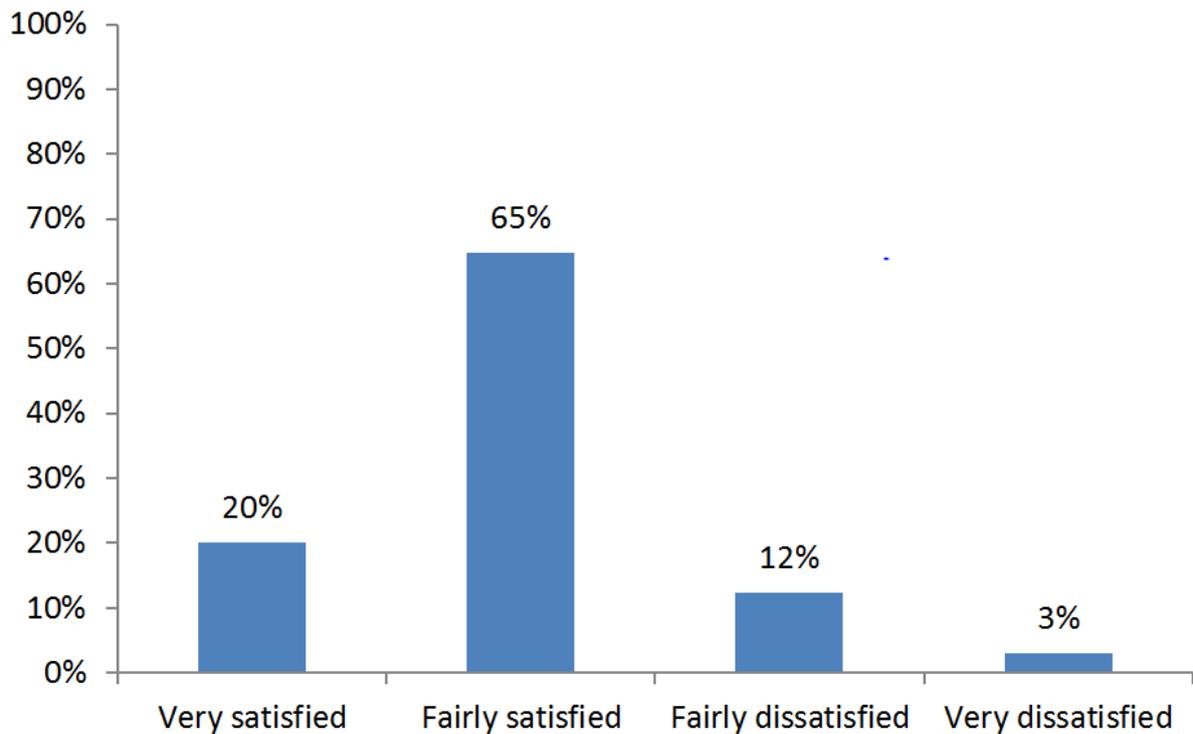
*“The station is very short staffed so feel it would put pressure on others. The money helps. Although it can be hard to balance with other work and family life it does give a sense of purpose and pride.”*

*“I enjoy the role and want to enhance my skills.”*

*“Not enough staff on stations so there would be less availability if I left.”*

## QA5. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your current job as an On-call firefighter?

Most of the respondents (85%) were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their current job as an On-call firefighter.



*“Not enough time to practice the basics.”*

*“Great sense of purpose and achievement. Excellent workforce. Hugely demanding of time. Feels like not enough understanding of how demanding On-call is.”*

*“Got a fantastic station with some exceptionally experienced crew.”*

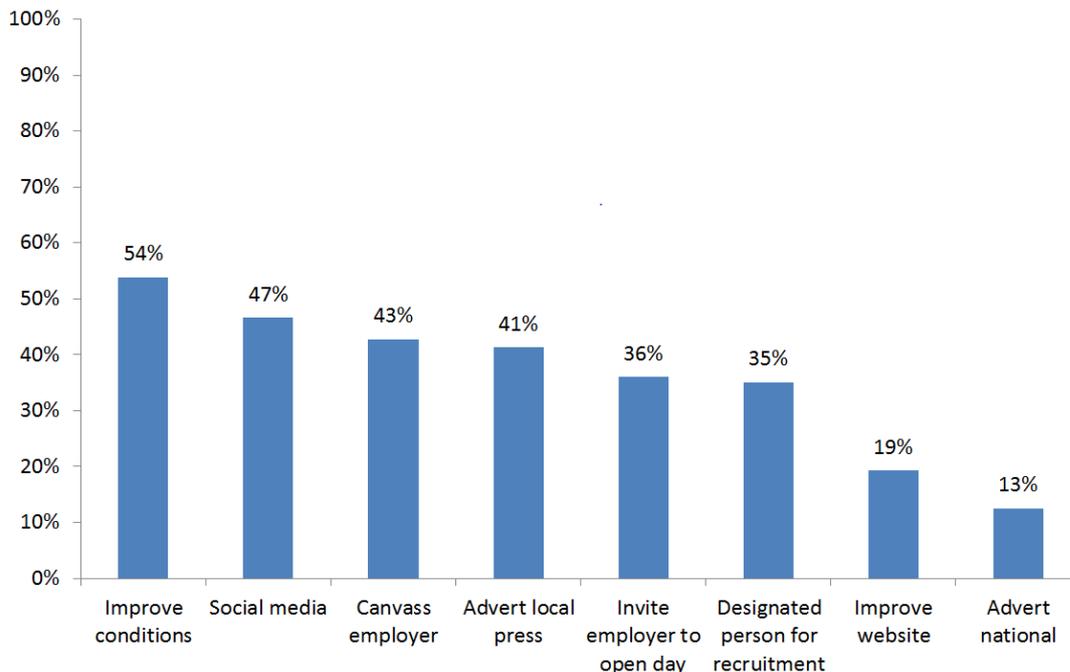
*“It is becoming more difficult to fulfil the role. I still like to feel I am serving the rural community I live it.”*

*“Would like more call outs as that is where you gain your experience.”*

*“As a station we have had low staffing levels for a few years and the restriction has been difficult at times with a small and young family.”*

## QA6. Which of the following methods, if any, do you think would help improve the recruitment of On-call firefighters?

Respondents could select more than one response. More than half (54%) thought that improving terms and conditions (for example cover requirement or pay) would be helpful. Using social media, canvassing local employers and advertising in the local press were all thought to be a good idea by more than 40% of respondents. An additional suggestion was to hold station open days with demonstrations.



*“More pay incentives. Help and coaching for applicants that are rejected upon first attempt to join. More basic application form.”*

*“Recruitment and retention go hand in hand. Need to be understood together.”*

*“Recruitment run by station personnel.”*

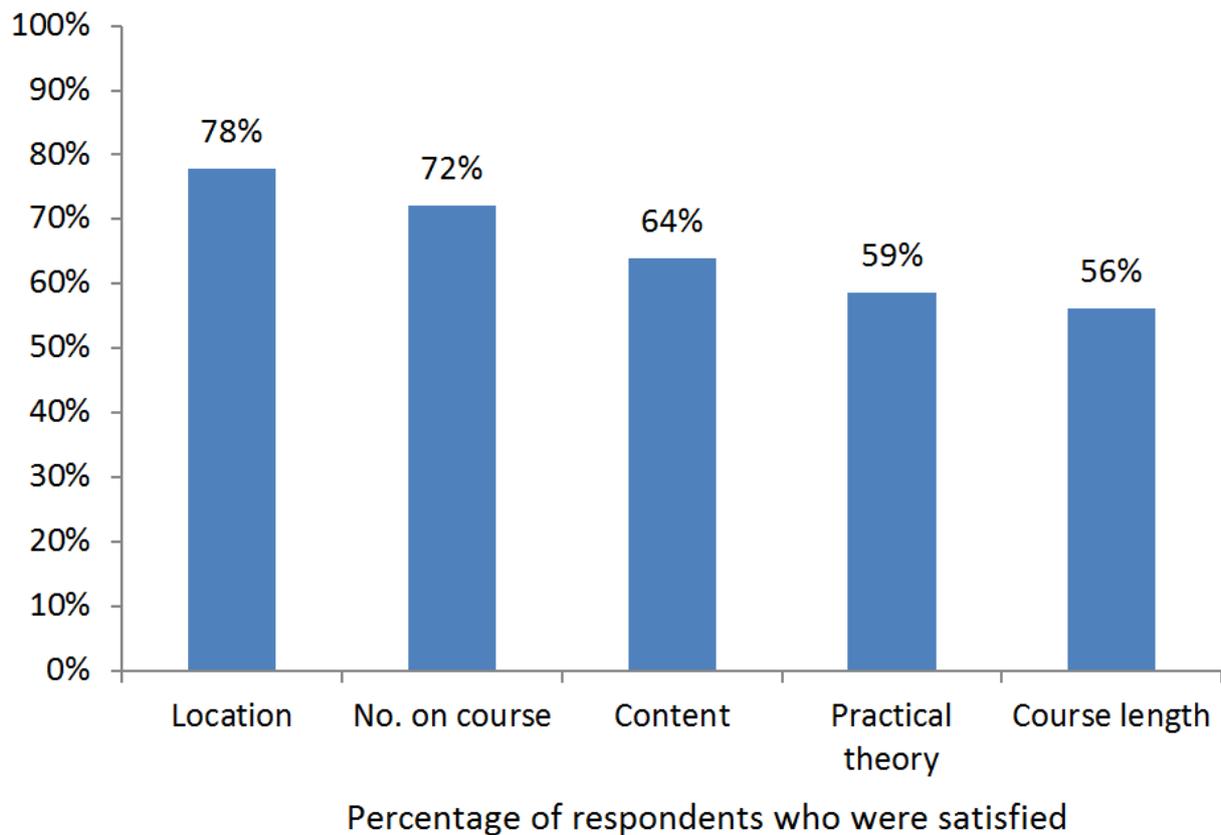
*“You could also use Facebook if fire stations have a group for the station. My station currently has around 300 members.”*

*“I think employers need to understand (especially in areas like my station which has low turnouts) it very rarely impacts on business, as calls are rare, but to have an appliance available is in their interest re an incident – good PR.”*

*“A recruitment banner outside the station saying the station is recruiting. More clear advertising campaigns explaining to the public what an On-call firefighter entails and that the station is recruiting.”*

**QA7a. Do you agree or disagree that the current recruit training course is sufficient in terms of: content; location; balance between practical and theory; number of personnel on the course; and length of course?**

Most respondents were happy with the training course overall. Around three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the location and the number of personnel on the course. Some of those who weren't satisfied with the course length suggested it should be longer.



*“The length of the course needs to be longer.”*

*“Employers would not release staff for more than two weeks.”*

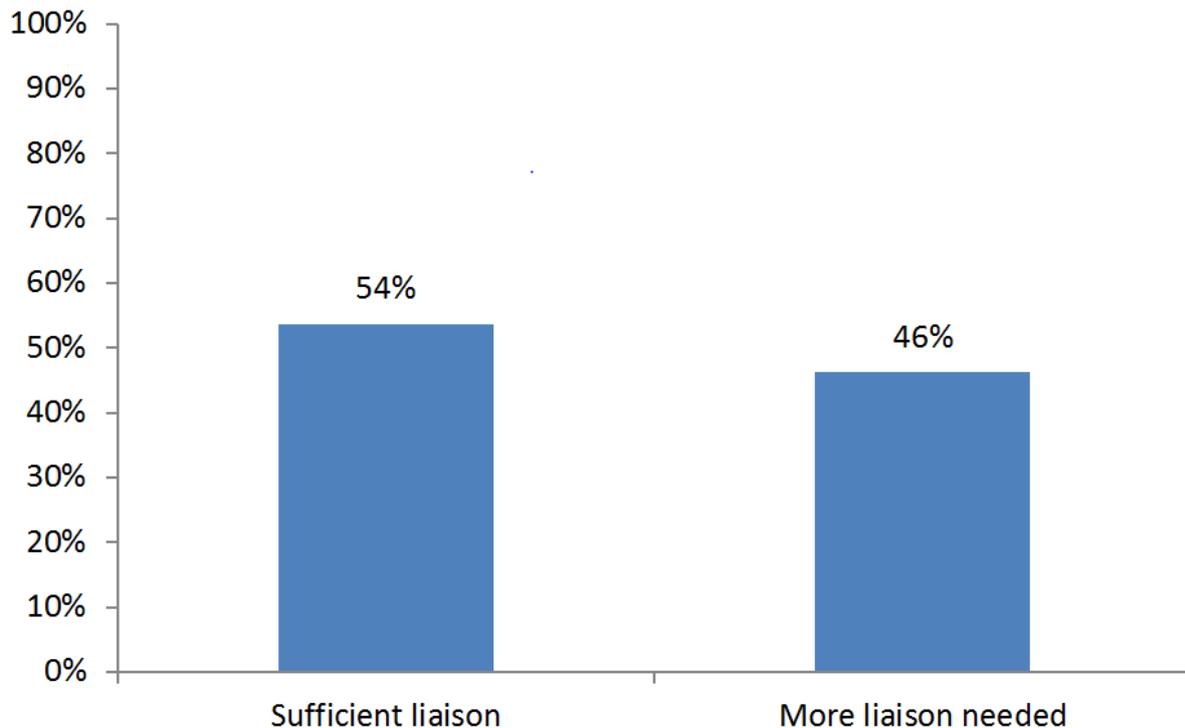
*“Very intense training, lot to take in short time.”*

*“I think the course should be broken down over a longer period ie Week 1 – pumps and ladders; Week 2 – BA and FBT; Week 3 – split over 3 weekends includes RTC, height safety and combination drills. Once on station further assessment and practical training weekly.”*

*“More on RTC, as RTC course not provided straight away.”*

## QA8. Would you have liked CFRS to liaise more closely with your main employer during the recruitment process?

Out of the relevant respondents slightly more than half (54%) thought there was sufficient liaison with their main employer, but almost as many thought more liaison was needed.



*“I have just released a member of my work team to join CFRS. I found it frustrating that no other options for course dates or availability were put to me before the applicant was given them. Feel taken for granted.”*

*“It is important to continue to liaise with the main employer on a more regular basis.”*

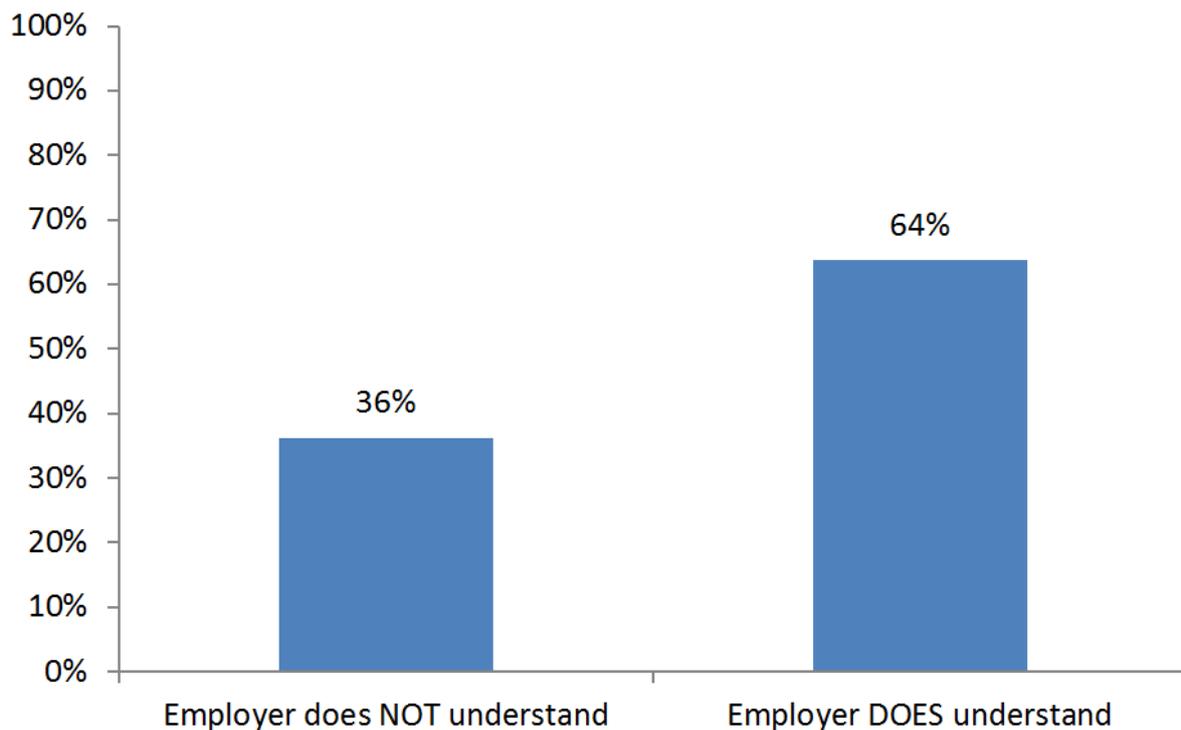
*“I believe that the main employer plays a big role in the job even if cover isn’t given while in main employment.”*

*“Definitely and to express gratitude too.”*

*“Main employer didn’t fully understand process nor were they especially supportive / understanding of the role.”*

### QA9. Do you believe that your employer understands the commitment required of an On-call firefighter?

This question was relevant to more than three quarters of the respondents. Almost two thirds (64%) of those that replied said that their employer understood the commitment required of an On-call firefighter.



*“I don’t think you understand the commitment required for On-call personnel until you have worked the duty system yourself.”*

*“But my commitment to my employer must take priority over CFRS in all aspects other than call outs.”*

*“Don’t know if all employers understand the commitment given by On-call staff. But do CFRS understand the commitment the employer gives to the On-call?”*

*“Working with employer would improve relationship.”*

## Remuneration/Working Time

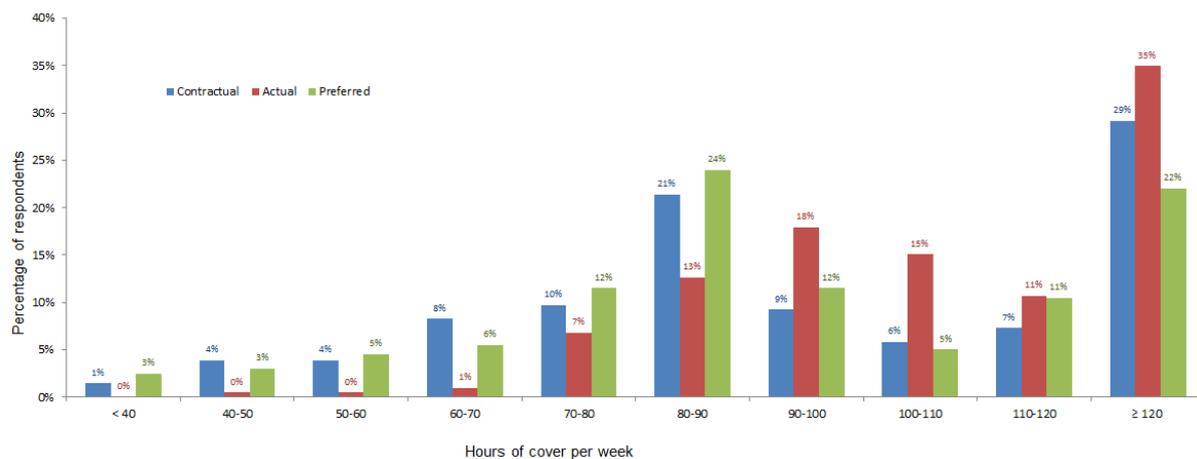
Section B in the report covers remuneration and working time.

**QB1. On average, how many hours cover per week are you contracted to provide for CFRS as an On-call firefighter?**

**QB2. How many hours of cover do you actually provide per week?**

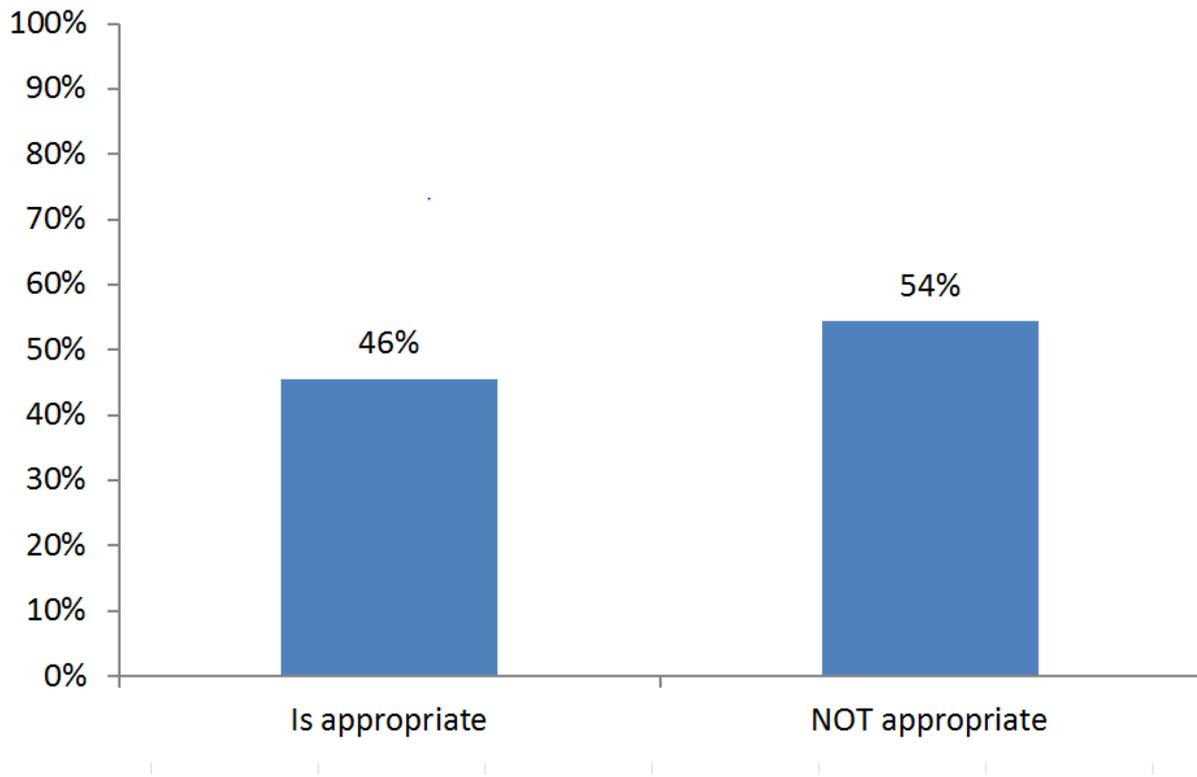
**QB3. How many hours of cover per week would you like to provide for CFRS as an On-call firefighter?**

These results have been combined so that direct comparisons can be made between the hours contracted, those actually worked and the hours that would be preferred. There is a mismatch between the hours contracted, worked and preferred for most people. 61% of respondents work more than 100 hours per week, but only 36% would choose to work that many hours. A quarter of respondents would like to work between 80 and 90 hours and, despite the fact that almost as many (21%) have a contract for this amount of hours, only 13% actually do.



### QB4a. Do you agree or disagree that the present system of two pay scales in relation to the retaining fee (full and limited cover) is appropriate?

More than half of respondents (54%) thought the current system of two pay scales was not appropriate.



*“I think there is little chance for people who are working to provide 120 hours cover per week. I think the pay should be on your cover and the skills you hold.”*

*“A sliding scale would seem more appropriate and needs to recognise day cover, both weekday and weekend.”*

*“Very unfair for someone providing 115 hours when others are providing 20 for same pay.”*

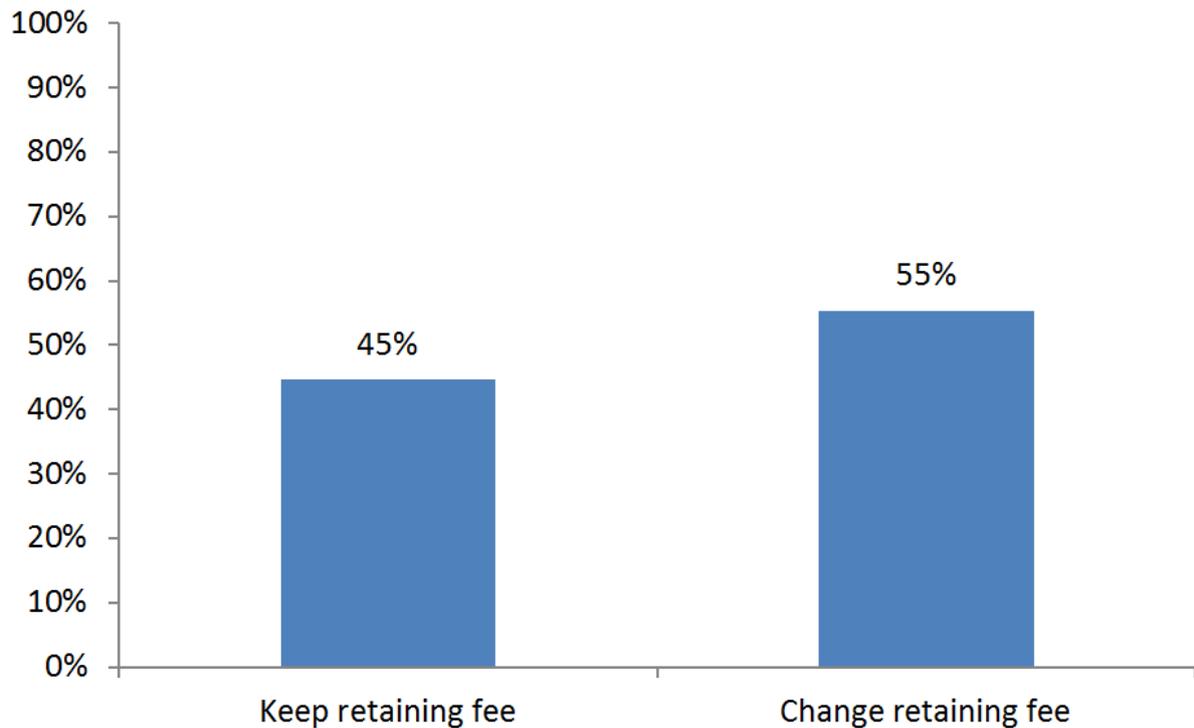
*“Retrospective pay for actual hours would be better as there is a wide variety of cover.”*

*“I feel retainers are too small already. No one should receive less than they do already.”*

*“Pay should relate to hours cover provided. Some firefighters give greater than 120 hours yet are on the lower rate as contract hours are less.”*

## QB4b. Do you think that the system of a retaining fee should be changed, if so how?

A small majority of respondents who answered this question thought that the retaining fee system should be changed. However, more than 10% of the total respondents did not express an opinion. Almost 100 respondents wrote comments, the majority of which suggested ways to change the system.



*“Sliding scale in relation to hours? All systems will have advantages and disadvantages though.”*

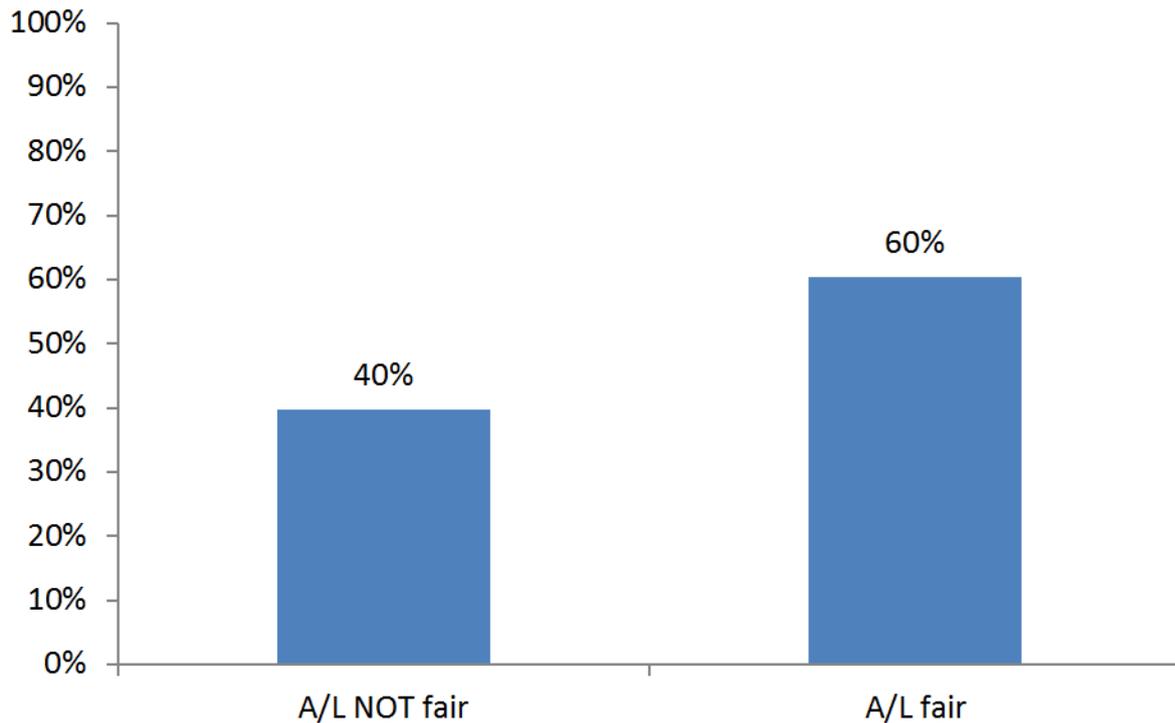
*“Like our turn out – disturbance fees are calculated on a monthly basis. Why can’t the retaining fee be calculated also on a monthly basis on the actual hours covered over or under your contracted hours.”*

*“It’s a lot of commitment to give for the pay.”*

*“Work out a pay structure based on hours given. Possibly different bands for weekend cover.”*

**QB5. Under the present system do you believe that annual leave is fairly calculated i.e. all individuals receiving the same annual leave entitlement regardless of hours of cover (not currently pro-rata)?**

Three fifths of the respondents (60%) thought that the current annual leave system was fair.



*“Should be calculated for the amount of hours that each individual provides.”*

*“Leave should remain the same but you should be allowed to take it in hours, this will improve pump availability.”*

*“Should be pro rata and not positive hours when booking off on annual leave.”*

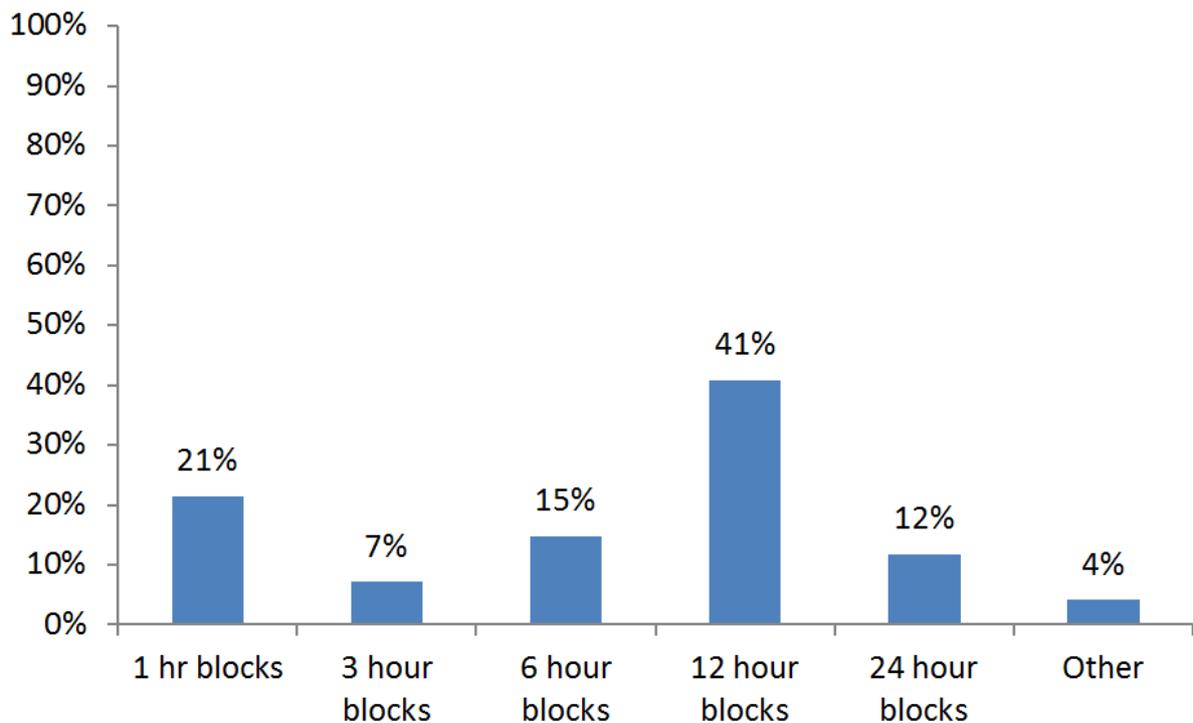
*“We still give cover over the same amount of days.”*

*“It is not as clear cut as looking at the number of hours an individual is contracted to, 99% of people will cover more hours than they are contracted to.”*

*“I don’t really understand the leave.”*

## QB6. How would you prefer to take your annual leave?

The most popular choice was to take annual leave in 12 hour blocks (41%). This was preferable to almost twice as many respondents as the next option (one hour blocks chosen by 21% of the respondents).



*“More flexibility, pump would generally be on the run more if leave could be taken in smaller blocks.”*

*“The more flexible this is the better; it’ll allow people to be more available.”*

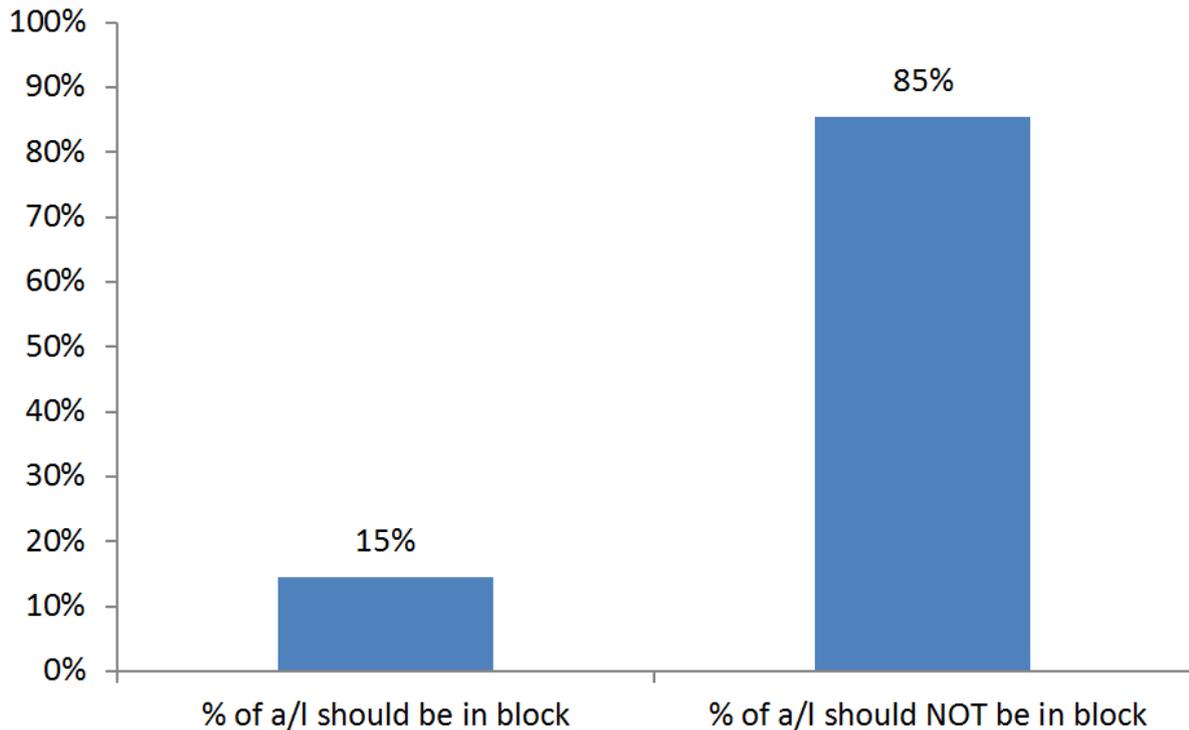
*“Our cover is more fluid than a standard job it follows that our annual leave should reflect that fluidity.”*

*“Holidays should only have to cover contractual hours.”*

*“If I have returned on the day of training/drill night and want to attend I cannot attend and thus have to do a catch up drill.”*

**QB7. With reference to question B6 do you agree that a percentage of your annual leave entitlement should be taken in a block (e.g. 7 days)?**

The vast majority of the respondents (85%) did not want to take a percentage of their annual leave in a block. Only five respondents suggested an amount for the percentage of the leave entitlement to be taken in block.



*“This would make pump availability worse.”*

*“I think that would be restrictive when it doesn’t need to be.”*

*“Can’t see how this would benefit anyone – firefighter or employer.”*

*“It is far harder for self-employed to do this and benefit.”*

## **QB8. Gartan manages your availability, are there any improvements you would like to suggest to be made to the system?**

There was a fairly even split between those who thought that all staff should be allowed to knock the pump off the run with a booking and those who felt it should be only managers who could do this. There was a lot of frustration expressed about having to ring round a number of people to find someone who could put the booking on Gartan, and the suggestion for a single point of contact was made by many.

Some people are having problems with the Android App. A lot of stations use WhatsApp to help cover shortfalls in crewing. Many people find the Gartan notification texts helpful when they work, but they only work intermittently. Suggestions to improve the text messaging system included targeting the recipients of the message so that those who are off call get told when the pump is being knocked off the run giving them the opportunity to book back on. It would be helpful if this text included who was off so that the crew could coordinate putting the pump back on the run. Having been told that the station was going to be off the run it would be useful for the crew to be texted again if someone was able to put the pump back on the run. However, some people would prefer to have fewer texts.

There was a suggestion that Crew Managers should be able to import staff from other stations when they are in the area. It was felt by some that if the pump was already off the run then other crew members should be allowed to book off at the same time. A management system was suggested in which penalties and bonuses are awarded for taking the pump off the run when contracted or improving the availability by booking back on when not contracted. This system could also prevent the 'banking of hours' by not allowing more than a maximum number to be booked on at any one time and to have an ordered list of crew members willing to book back on to enable others to book off.

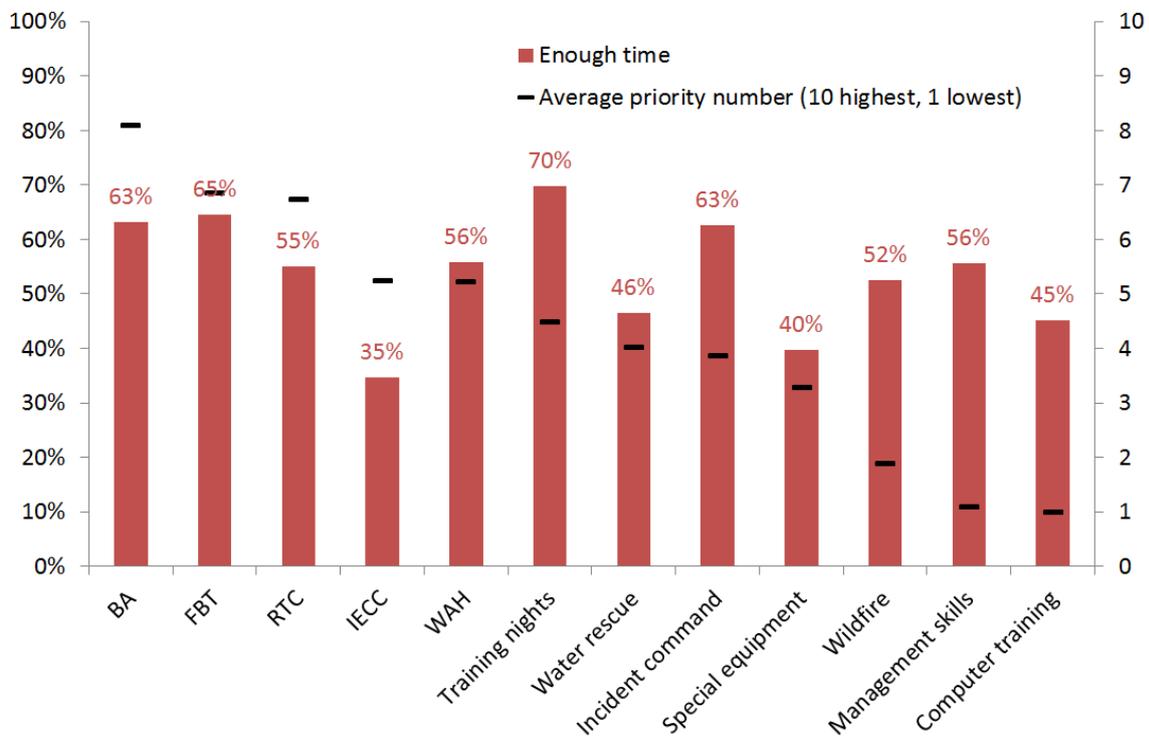
There should be the facility for the work pattern to automatically populate Gartan into the future. Some thought it would be helpful for information about the nature of the incident to be sent when the alerters go off. Several people missed having the availability screen to look at on arrival at the station. Although this information is accessible on the MDT it takes time to load up.

## Training/Development

Section C in the report covers training and development.

### QC1a. Do you agree or disagree that you spend enough time training for your work with CFRS? (Please prioritise.)

Breathing apparatus training was considered to be the most important from the given list (average priority 8.1), closely followed by fire behaviour (6.8) and road traffic collision (6.7) training. More than half the respondents agreed that sufficient time was allowed for these types of training (63%, 65% and 55% respectively). Only 35% of respondents felt that enough time was given to IECC (trauma) training despite it being considered reasonably important (average priority 5.2).



*“Although I have put agree for my answers there is always a benefit to more training, however finding the time is not always easy with a full-time job and family.”*

*“I don’t think we spend enough time with practical training.”*

*“The balance of getting enough training in a limited time is difficult.”*

*“There isn’t any time to keep on top of new skills because of keeping up to date with other skills. MOS should be tailored to fit the needs of the crew.”*

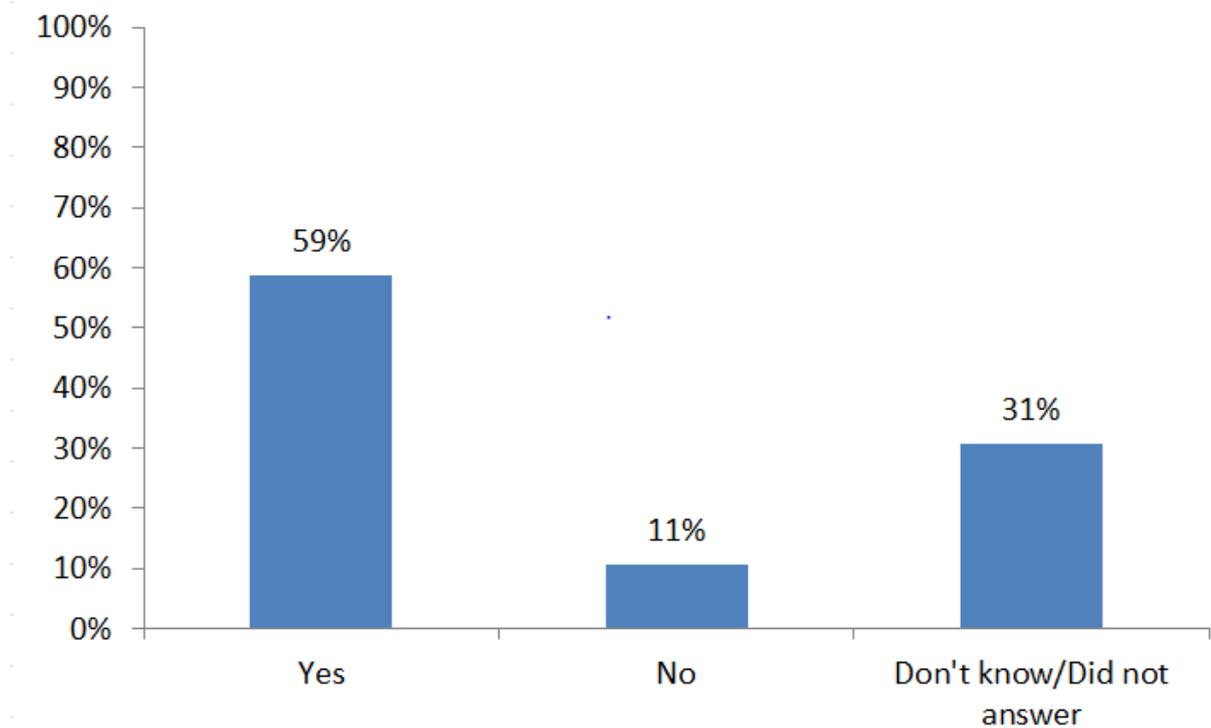
*“Hands on training with specialist equipment is not frequent enough.”*

**QC1b. How many additional hours per week do you think you need to spend training?**

72% of respondents answered this question and the average amount of extra time suggested for training was 1.8 hours per week.

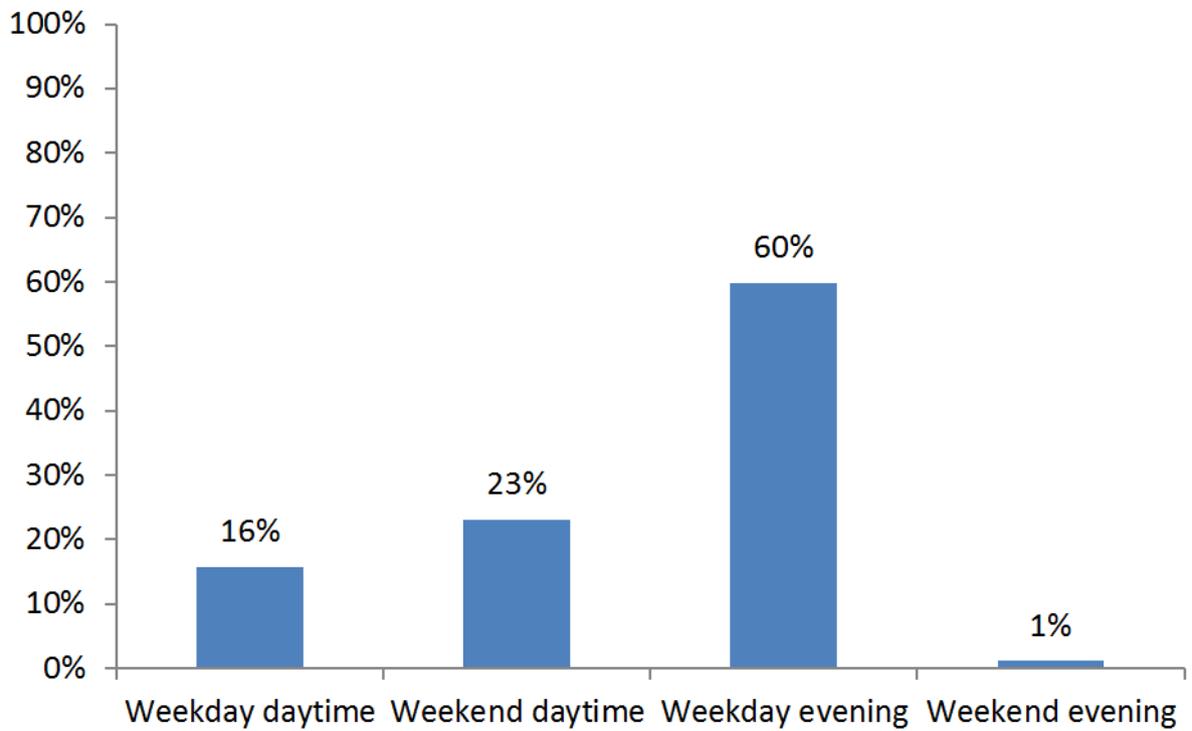
**QC1c. If you feel you require additional training, are you able to provide the additional time and commitment?**

More than half of the respondents (59%) felt able to provide additional time and commitment to the Service. However, more than 30% of respondents either did not know if they could or did not answer the question.



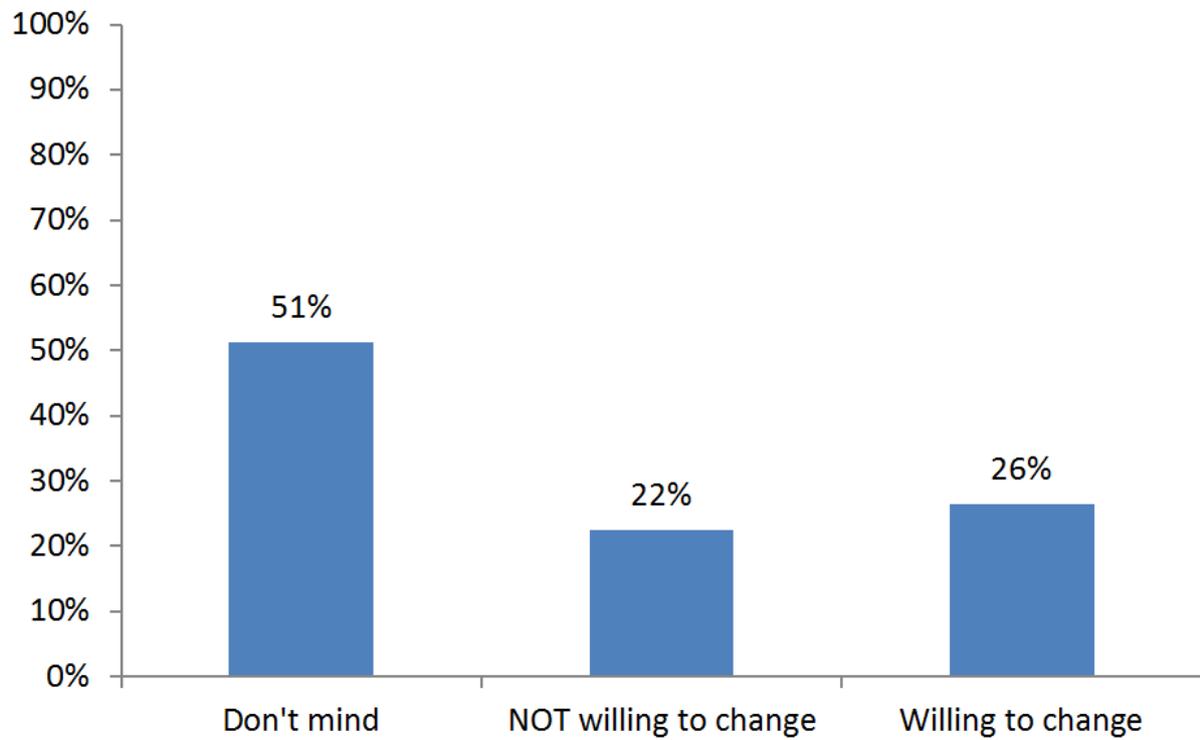
### QC1d. When would you prefer additional training with CFRS?

More than half of respondents preferred to do additional training on weekday evenings.



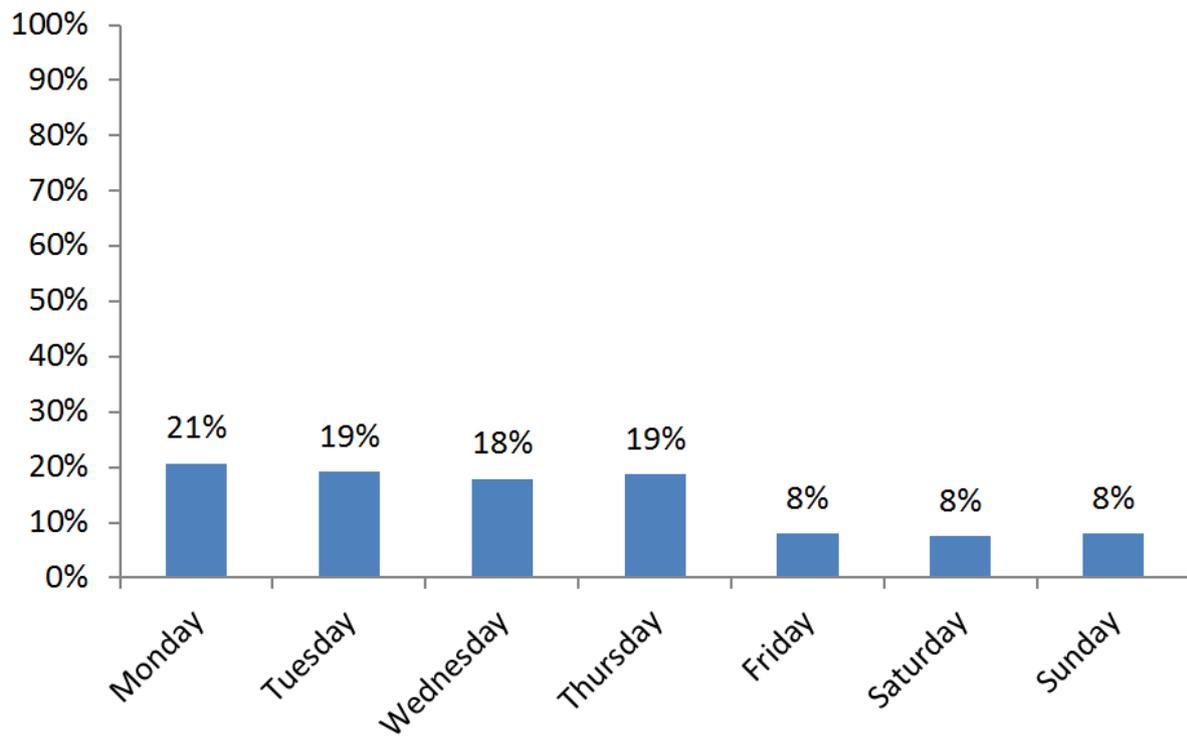
### QC2a. Would you be willing to change your training evening?

The majority of respondents were either willing, or did not mind changing their training evening (77%).



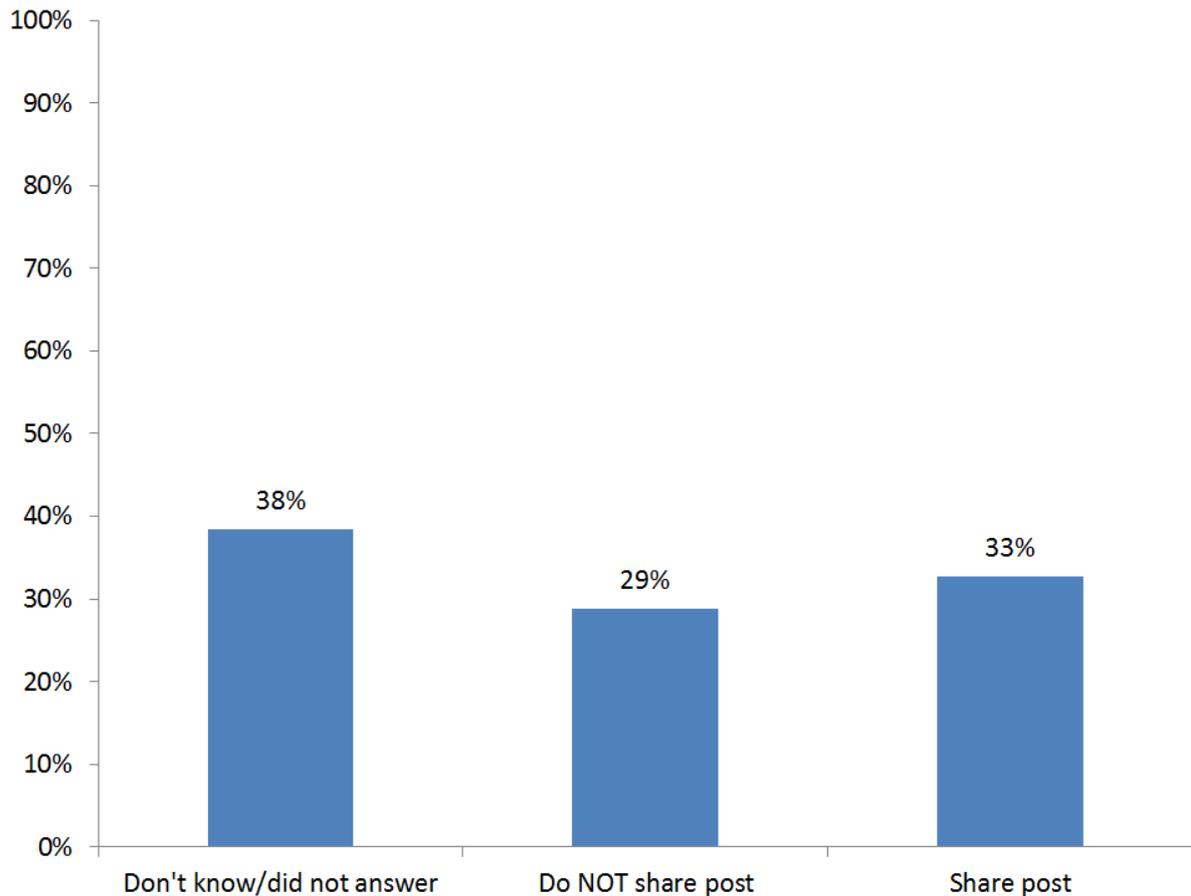
## QC2b. What night of the week would you prefer your training evening to be on?

A large number of respondents (58%) did not answer this question. Of those that expressed a preference Mondays to Thursdays were the most common choice (around 20% for each).



### QC3. Managers of On-call stations often stay in post for many years. For future vacancies would you like to see one post maintained as temporary and shared around for development purposes?

There was a fairly even spread of answers for this question, with slightly more choosing not to answer or selecting 'don't know' (38% in total for both).



*“This could work on a busy station with many call outs, but not on a quiet station like ours.”*

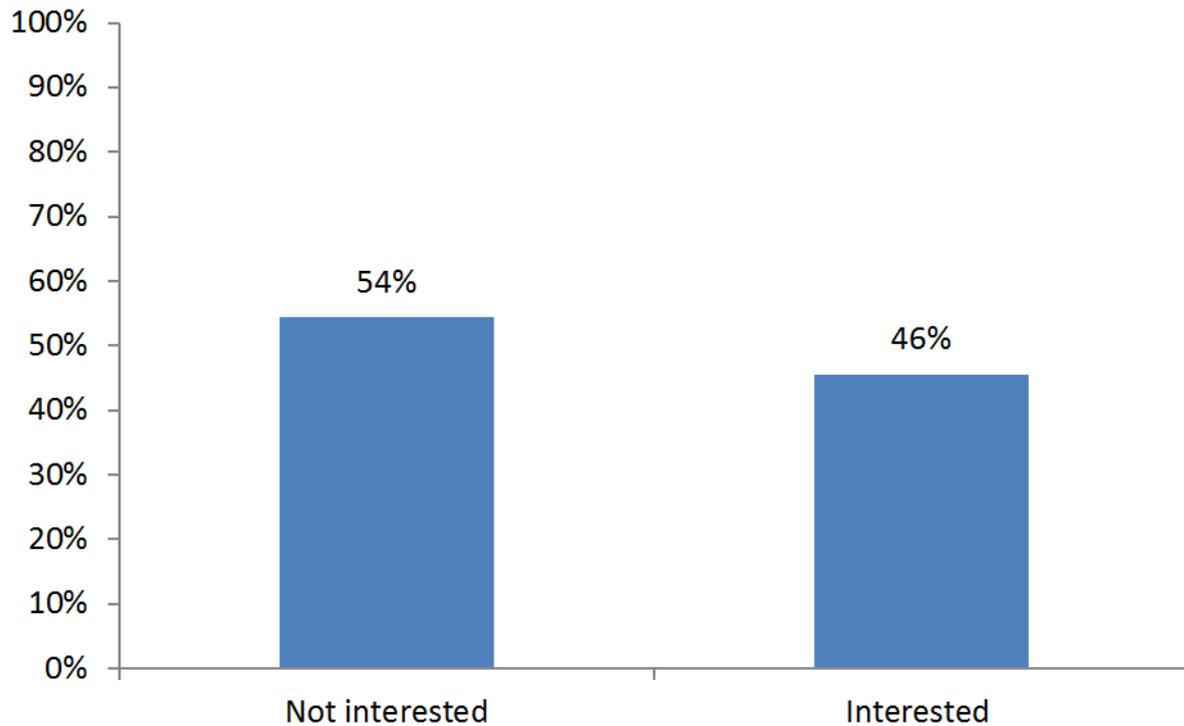
*“Could be done on a station basis, e.g. ask personnel on station if this is a possibility.”*

*“A station needs stability.”*

*“I think allowing firefighters to act up gives them the experience of the role above, and exposes them to a different hazard perception. This is useful in their role of firefighter.”*

#### QC4. Would you be interested in applying to be an On-call manager if the opportunity arose?

Almost 20% of respondents did not answer this question. Of those that did answer more were not interested in applying for promotion than were interested.



*“Would like to know what is required and what additional training is available before committing to becoming an OiC.”*

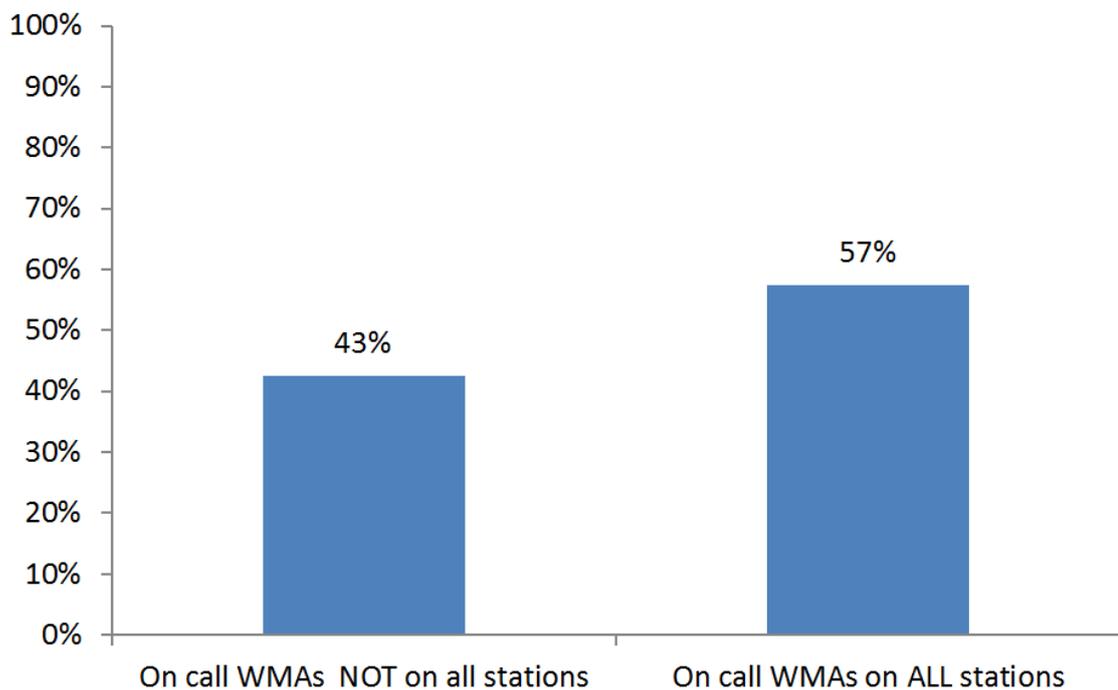
*“I don’t mind the idea of that role, someone has to do it! Although managers need better back up and guidance in terms of what is expected.”*

*“Would like to develop and progress in CFRS.”*

*“Would need more experience before applying.”*

### QC5. Some stations are managed by On-call Watch Managers. Do you think the Service should introduce On-call Watch Manager A's on all stations?

Around half of respondents thought an On-call Watch Manager should be introduced on all stations (57% of those who answered the question, although when null responses are taken into account this drops to 48% of respondents).



*“It is important to have a lead figure on a station.”*

*“It depends on the size of the station and frequency of call outs.”*

*“Yes, or rotate between CM to run station for a while.”*

*“Due to workload for Regular officers there should be a WM who can oversee the station, problems can be addressed promptly. If you have 3 CM’s who is in charge of whom?”*

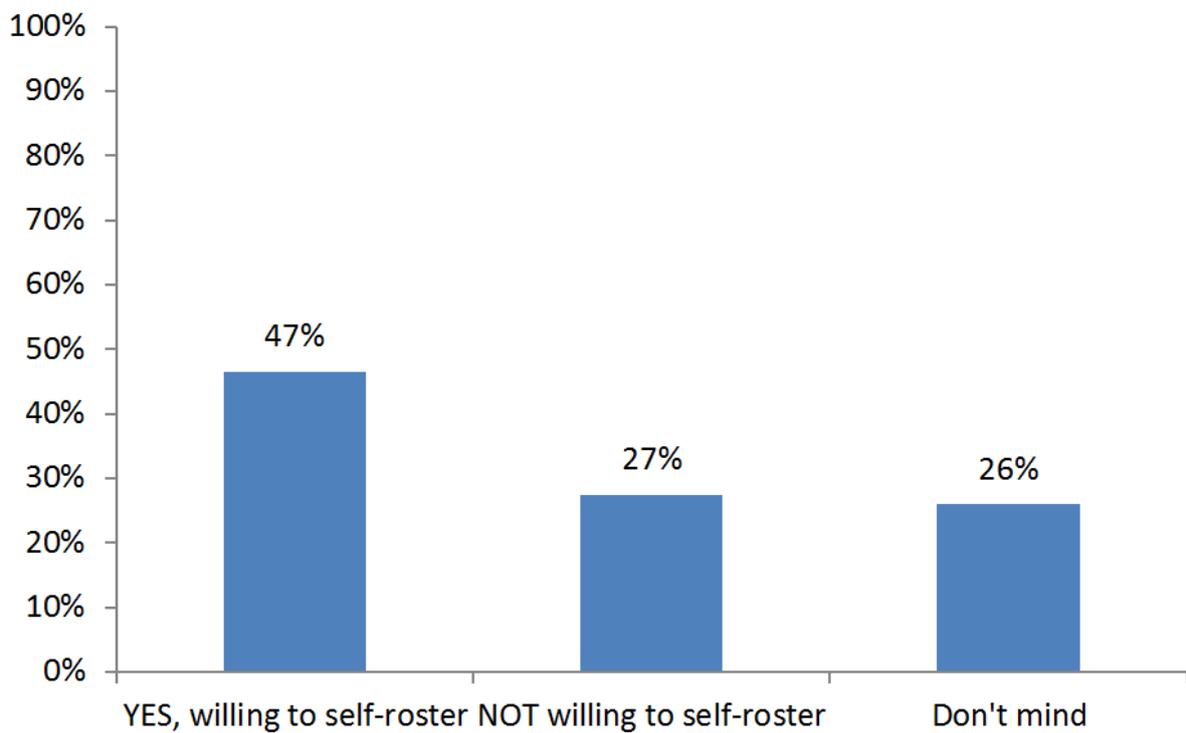
*“I don’t know enough about this to comment.”*

## Other Duties

Section D in the report covers other duties.

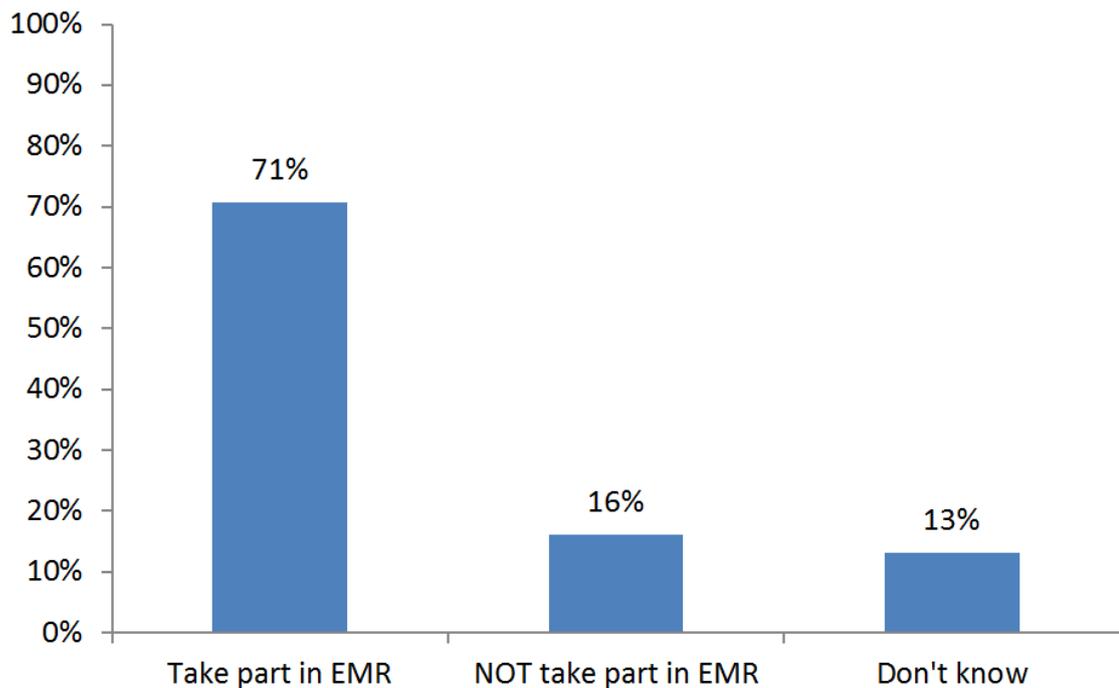
### QD1. Would you be willing to take part in a self-rostering pilot on your station?

Most of the respondents (73%) were either willing to take part or didn't mind taking part in a self-rostering pilot. A few respondents suggested piloting having a Command Support Unit in the south of the County.



## QD2. If EMR (Emergency Medical Response) is implemented within the Service would you be interested in taking part?

Most respondents were willing to take part in EMR.



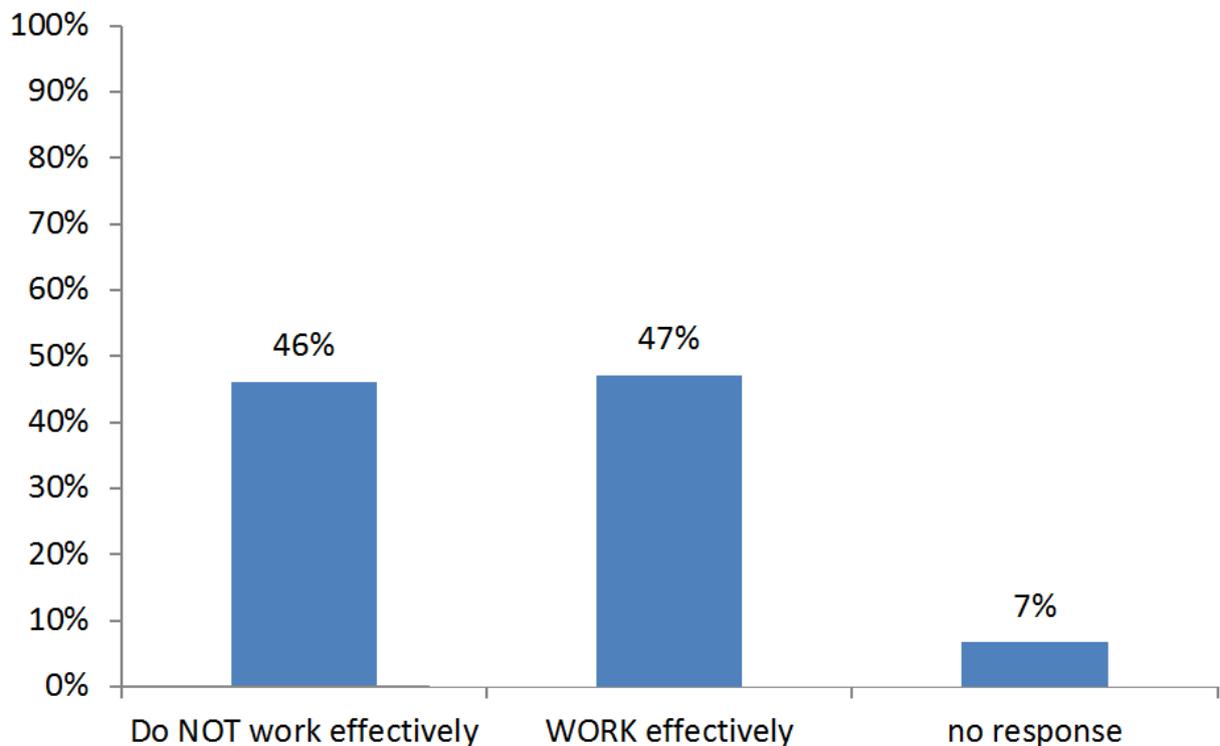
*“All part of improving service to help save lives. This in Cumbria has got to be a benefit as resources from other services are stretched to their limits.”*

*“Yes I would definitely be interested as long as the training is thorough and we have a line manager to support us.”*

*“Again training and time are the issues; also on quiet stations you may not get the chance to use your skills as other agencies are involved.”*

### QD3. Do you think PDR Pro / Learn Pro work effectively?

There was a fairly even split between those respondents who thought that PDR Pro and Learn Pro work effectively and those that thought they did not.



*“There is still room for improvement. Greater automation between Learn Pro and PDR Pro. Clearer instruction to firefighters, especially developing firefighters.”*

*“Not enough time spent showing how to use it correctly.”*

*“Could be taught how to use PDR Pro at beginning. Now I know how to use it properly I find it a lot better.”*

*“Learn Pro is good, I use it a lot. It is a good training aid. PDR Pro is over complicated and is very difficult to understand.”*

*“In my mind you can’t beat practice training with Q&A built in to the session.”*

*“The two sites should be linked. Currently a lot of duplication is required. The site should be specific to your role and the equipment you use.”*

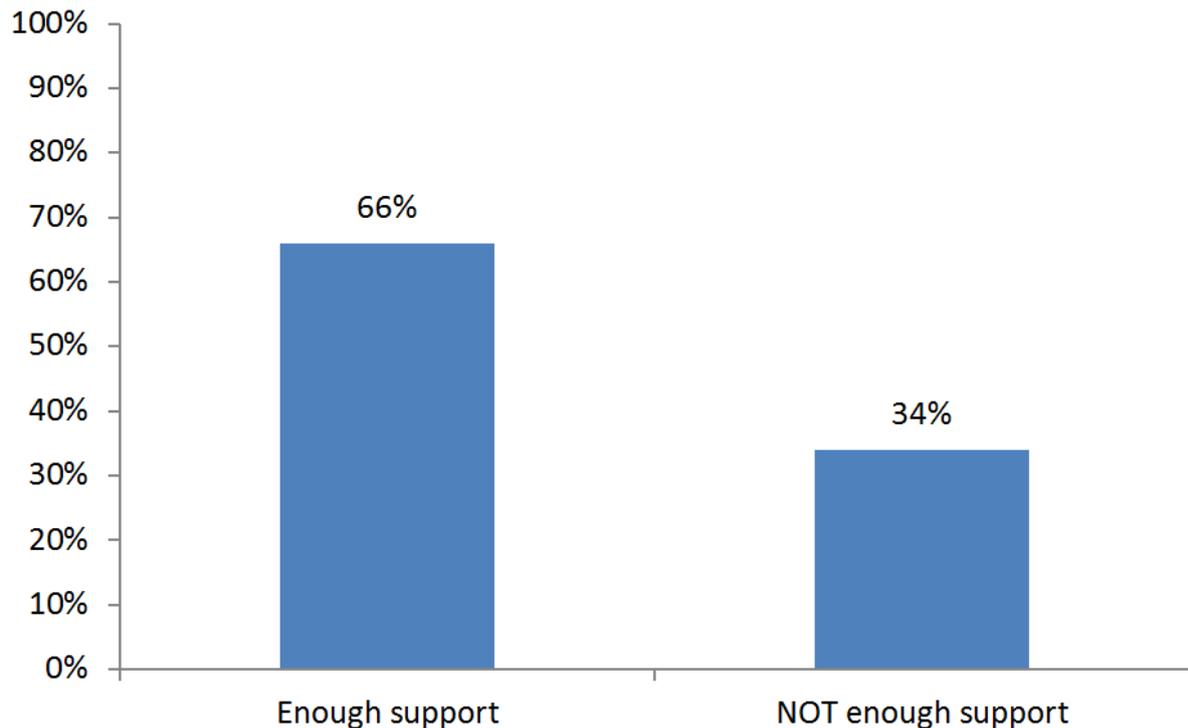
*“System is not user friendly or intuitive.”*

## Help and Support

Section E in the report covers help and support.

### QE1a. Do you agree or disagree that you receive enough support from CFRS when carrying out your work as an On-call firefighter?

Two thirds of respondents felt they received enough support from CFRS.



*“I think the support is available if you ask for it.”*

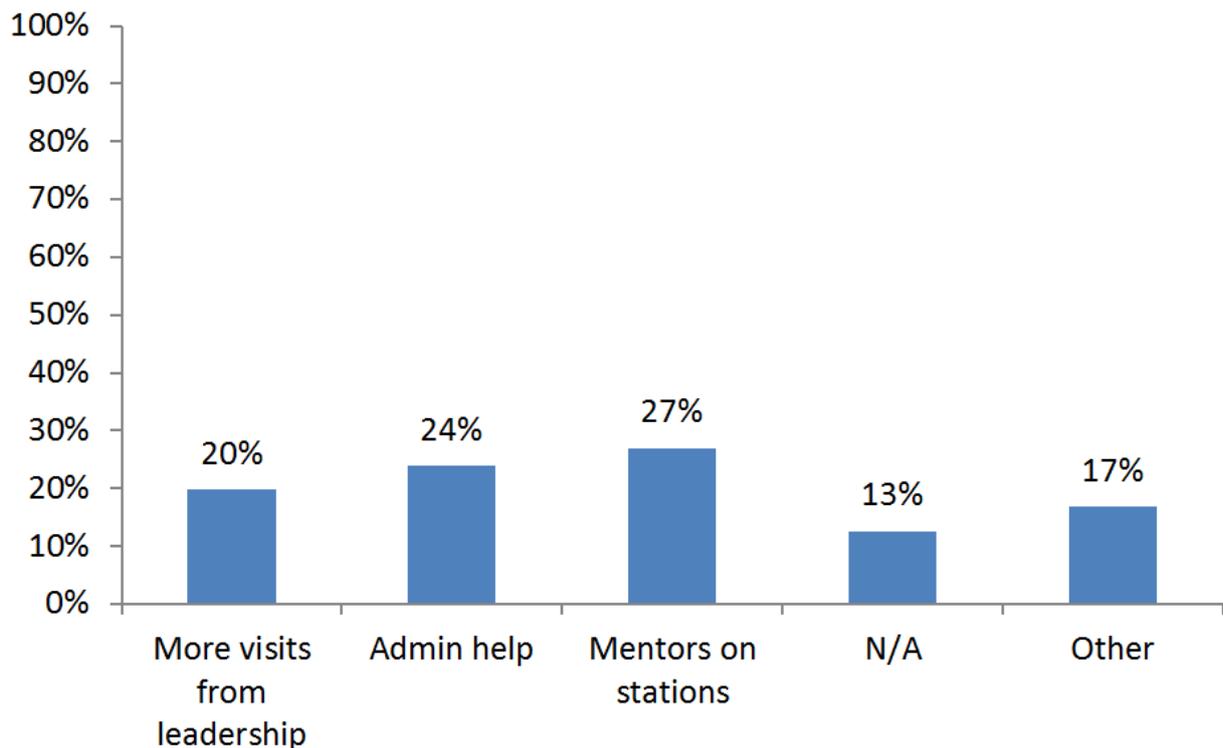
*“Some managers provide more support than others as do some firefighters.”*

*“On the whole we do receive a good amount of support although we would benefit from less paperwork so we can improve practical training times.”*

*“But we need more one to one time with mentor. This is difficult because of both our commitments. Mentors would be better if on station.”*

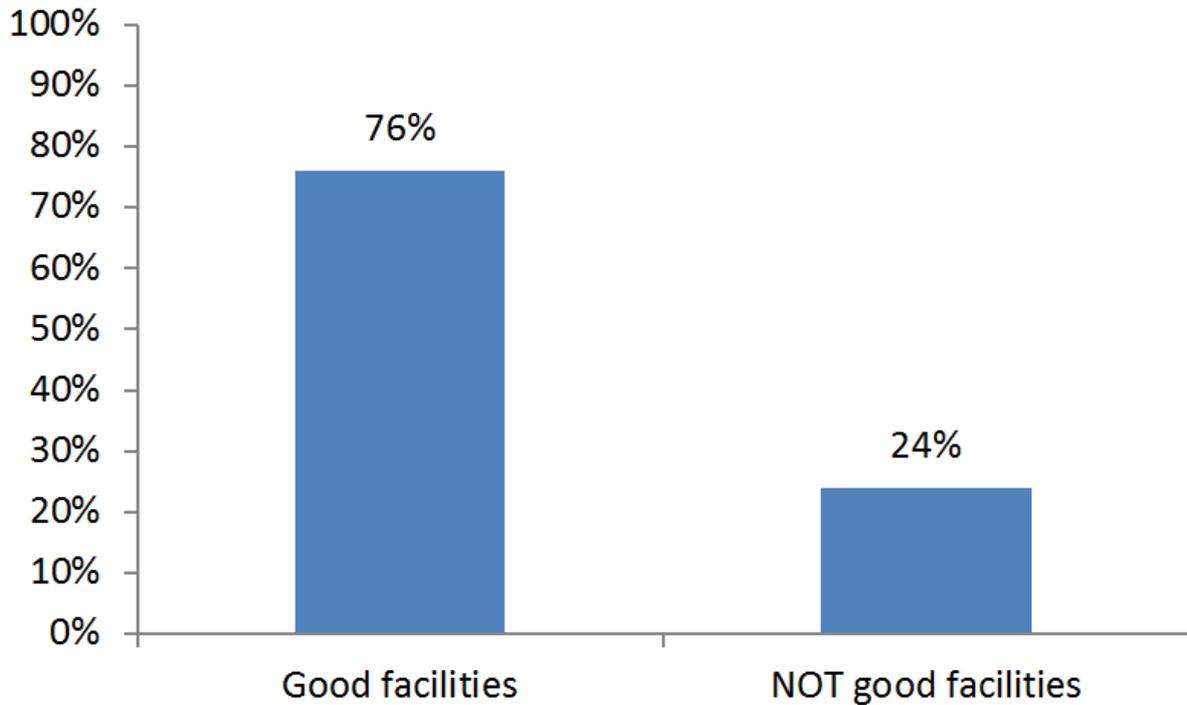
### QE1b. If you disagree, what additional support would you like to see provided?

There were 167 responses to this question. Having mentors on station was the most frequent choice (27%), closely followed by administrative support. Other suggestions included having development days, visits from specialists and using plain language where possible in training materials, but explaining fire specific terminology/acronyms where they can't be avoided.



**QE2. Do you agree or disagree that facilities are suitable and sufficient on your station i.e. clean, maintained and not used for storage?**

Three quarters of respondents (76%) thought that facilities were suitable.



*“The station very rarely gets cleaned, there needs to be a rota system put in place. There seems to be a reluctance to defect things on station, so things get left unsorted.”*

*“Our station is clean and well maintained, and as a team we take pride in our workplace.”*

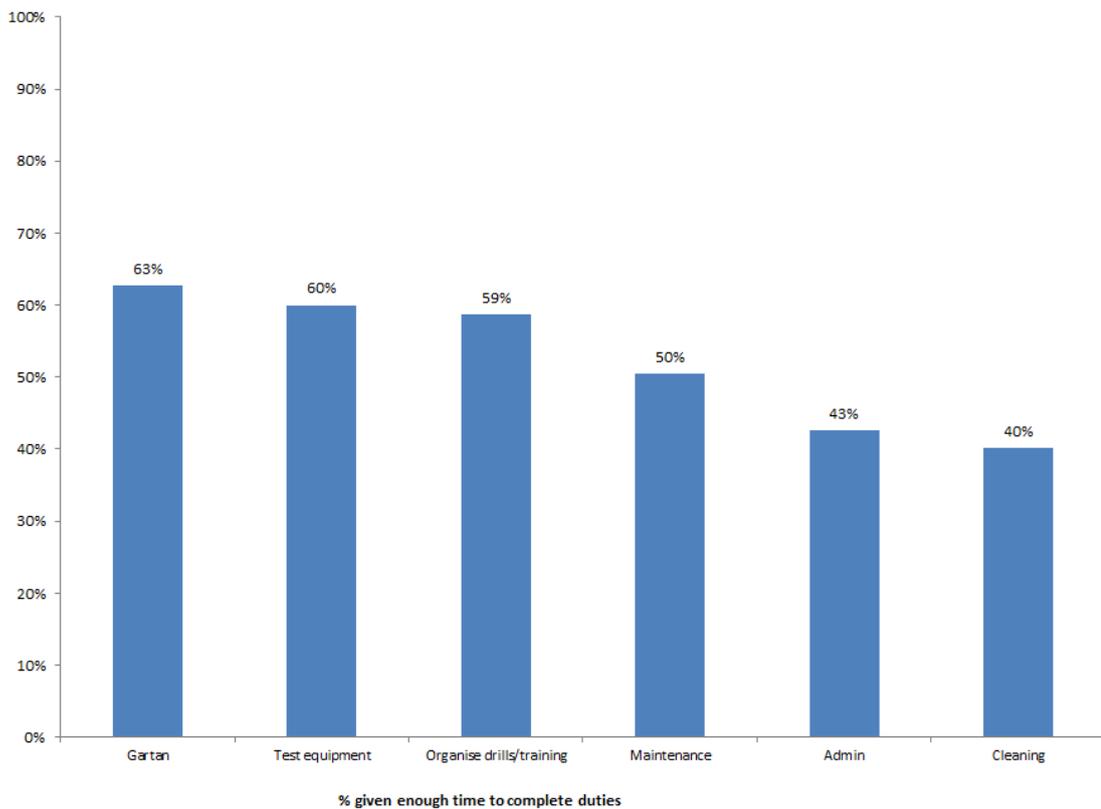
*“Most stations are adequate and provide the service that is required.”*

*“The crew maintain the station but the infrastructure requires updating.”*

*“Although with all new PPE no room left in lockers.”*

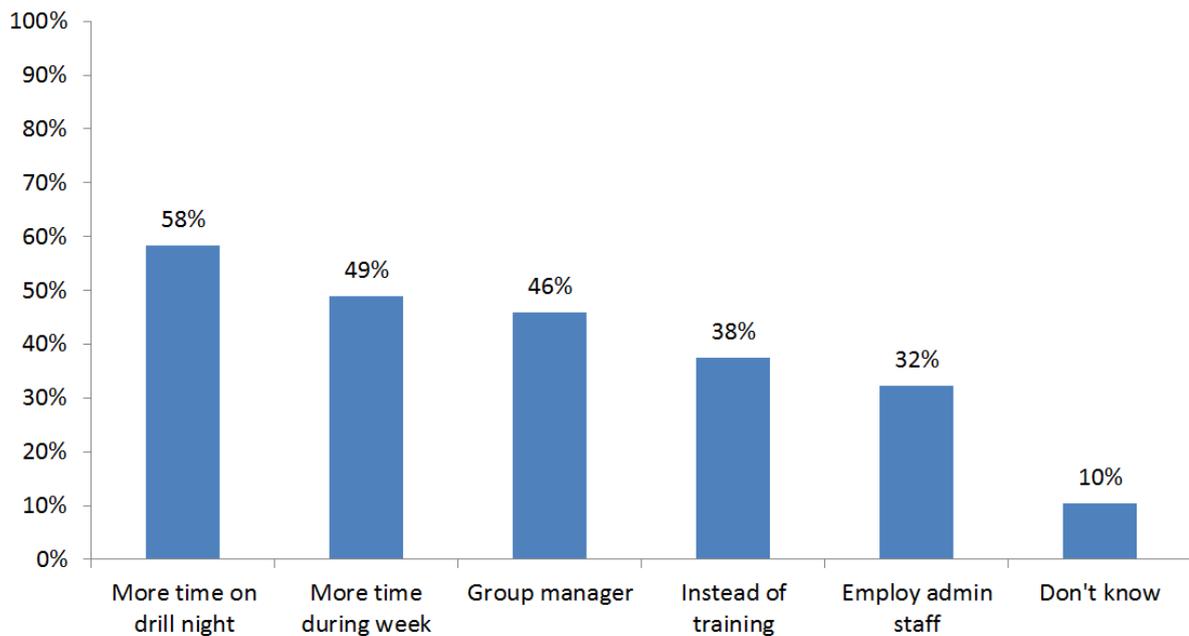
### QE3a. If you assist with or manage a station are you given sufficient time to carry out the following duties?

More than half of the respondents who answered this question felt they were given sufficient time to update Gatan (63%), test equipment (60%) and organise drills/training (59%).



### QE3b. If no to any of the above, how do you think these issues should be dealt with?

There were 96 respondents who answered this question. The most popular choices were to increase the time available, either on drill nights (58%), another time during the week (49%) or time allocated by the Group Manager (46%).

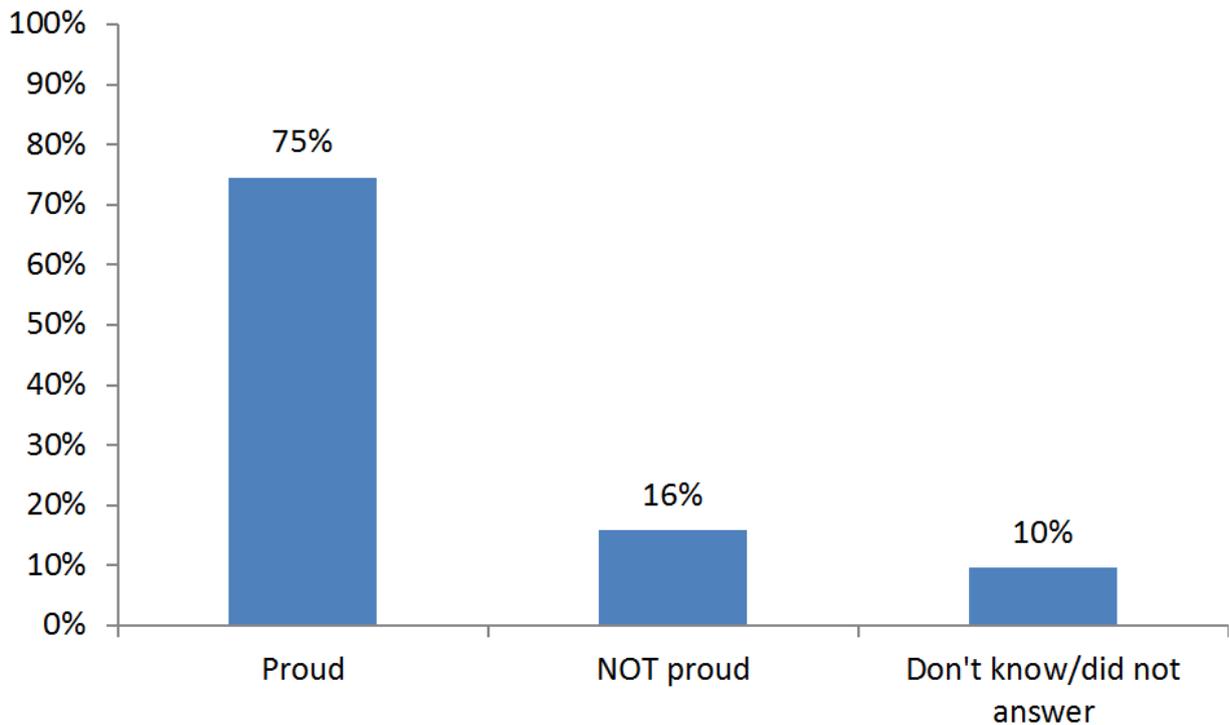


*“It’s not that we don’t have enough time as such, but my night seems often spent in front of the computer rather than being on the drill ground.”*

*“I do think additional time should be made available for cleaning and maintenance of tools and equipment.”*

#### QE4. Are you proud of your station, is it maintained and provides the image you want to present to the public and potential new recruits?

The majority of respondents (75%) are proud of their station.



*“The station is poorly maintained especially the outside.”*

*“It used to be but is starting to look run down. We do a lot of small maintenance jobs ourselves off our own backs to keep the station in good order.”*

*“Station is cleaned by the team regularly. Would be nice to paint the inside of the station and have a clear out as the Watch Room looks messy.”*

*“I am proud of my station. It is a beacon for this town and surrounding areas. It is maintained to a high standard, mostly through its own firefighters.”*

*“I am proud that we have a station in the community but don't know how it is viewed. It is quite an old building and it shows.”*

## About You

Section F in the report asked for personal information about the individual. This is covered at the start of this report. The last three questions in this section gave respondents the opportunity to comment on what they feel works well or not so well in the On-call Service and how they think it could be improved.

### Areas of the On-call service that are working well

The common threads running through the comments in this section were the commitment and team spirit of the crew, supporting the local community and the improved training received. Here is a small selection:

*“Working with other crew members. Work has a strong sense of purpose and serving community.”*

*“Turning out to shouts. Drill night is the favourite.”*

*“Responding to incidents and serving the people of Cumbria.”*

*“Being part of a team and just being ready to go when my pager goes off.”*

*“The On-call service relies heavily on the goodwill of the firefighter.”*

*“Working as part of a team. Knowing our community has fire cover.”*

*“A sense of doing something positive for the community.”*

*“Most satisfying part is helping the community when it is needed.”*

*“Resolving fire and rescue incidents.”*

*“The training planner with scheduled training, and support with these from managers and the training team is great.”*

*“Operational side works well. Firefighting skills and technical knowledge have improved over recent years, mainly due to having the opportunity to work on regular stations. Individuals bring back skills and knowledge that improves everyone’s skills.”*

### Areas of the On-call service that are not working well

The themes here were work/life balance, contractual hours, recruitment/retention, competency/development:

*“Rigid contracts that put pressure on home life.”*

*“As crew levels fall on stations it is putting more strain on personnel to give additional cover which isn’t healthy for a work/life balance.”*

*“The self-study time required is a huge requirement ... which puts pressure on personal lives/families.”*

*“I don’t think new recruits know enough about the commitment that is required and genuinely don’t last long which puts a strain on the rest of the crew.”*

*“RECRUITMENT RECRUITMENT RECRUITMENT!!! I hate having to knock the pump off the run, I feel I am letting people down but I also have a wife and kids.”*

*“When new recruits show interest they are often having to wait a considerable time to apply.”*

*“Recruitment is not working. Need to be more positive with the people that don’t make the grade to encourage them to come back.”*

*“Need to work to get more people in and retain them.”*

*“Biggest strain definitely lack of crew numbers. Feel guilty for booking off.”*

*“Not enough practical training time, especially for stations with new recruits.”*

*“The amount of computer work required for evidence of competence seems excessive.”*

*“The main issue is the bureaucratic obstacle course that is the recruitment and probationary training.”*

*“Time taken to gain competency through PDR Pro.”*

*“During development I had five different managers ... I felt I had to prove time and time again where I was and what I was achieving.”*

*“I think the On-call service puts too much emphasis on computer based work and not enough time on practical training.”*

*“Time allowed for training. Too many topics to cover.”*

## **Ideas/suggestions to improve the On-call service**

The majority of comments and suggestions in this section related to improving the availability of the station, recruitment, remuneration and training. Below are some of them:

*“If a station is off call due to crew numbers (3) turn the pump out but also mobilise the next nearest pump station with three crew members makes a crew of six.”*

*“Combine neighbouring stations together to improve crew levels and response to incidents.”*

*“Rendezvous points for depleted crews with holding points.”*

*“...any attendance is better than waiting 30-40 minutes for a pump ...three people there in seconds can often do more than no one being there for half an hour.”*

*“Increase in recruitment area for stations struggling with the five mile radius.”*

*“Spend money on recruitment advertising (social media, TV, newspapers).”*

*“Recruitment needs to be a continual process, when somebody shows an interest they should be encouraged to become involved in the station i.e. attend MOS session to keep interest.”*

*“‘Open the doors’ to the community and make more people interested in what we do.”*

*“Simplify the recruitment process – current application form for one!”*

*“Better pay/more incentive if you are on call at a weekend.”*

*“Increase the wages. The commitment we give is second to none yet we are continually being asked to draw on our goodwill (attend galas, fetes etc) for no reward.”*

*“Overhaul of retaining fees – make it attractive for people to provide additional cover to their contracts.”*

*“Should get paid for the hours you do a week, e.g. if I do over my contracted hours and reach the higher band of payment I should get paid for it.”*

*“An incentive for keeping or putting the pump back on the run.”*

*“A reduction of paper and computer work giving more time for more practical training.”*

*“More hours available to train to the highest standard. Specialist skills should be divided and only certain number of personnel trained to cover special appliances.”*

*“More one to one training. Stick to the basics and remove all other aspects.”*

*“More weekend courses or split over a number of weekends.”*

*“More exercises to make up for a lack of incidents.”*

*“Engagement with local employers, to help them understand the impact on them.”*

*“Speaking to employers more, making sure they understand the commitment needed and also understanding if they have any issues.”*

*“A simple letter of thanks to all employers from Cumbria FRS would probably go down well with company directors, managers, chief execs of employees.”*

*“If CFRS could produce an info pack, especially explaining the numbers of hours required, it might have made them more acceptable.”*

*“It would be nice to see some appreciation go to the main employer e.g. letter of thanks, invite to the station for a demo, cakes!”*

*“I feel contact between CFRS and employers should just be part of general courtesy.”*

## Finally

Section G in the report asked the respondents to prioritise areas for improvement.

### **QG1. Thinking about the issues covered in this questionnaire: If CFRS could only fund one area for improvement at a time, in which order would you place the following?**

16 respondents (8%) did not answer this question, 35 (17%) only picked one or two choices. The average priority was calculated in such a way that the higher the priority the higher the number. Training & development and recruitment & retention were given a similar high priority (2.3 and 2.0 respectively).

