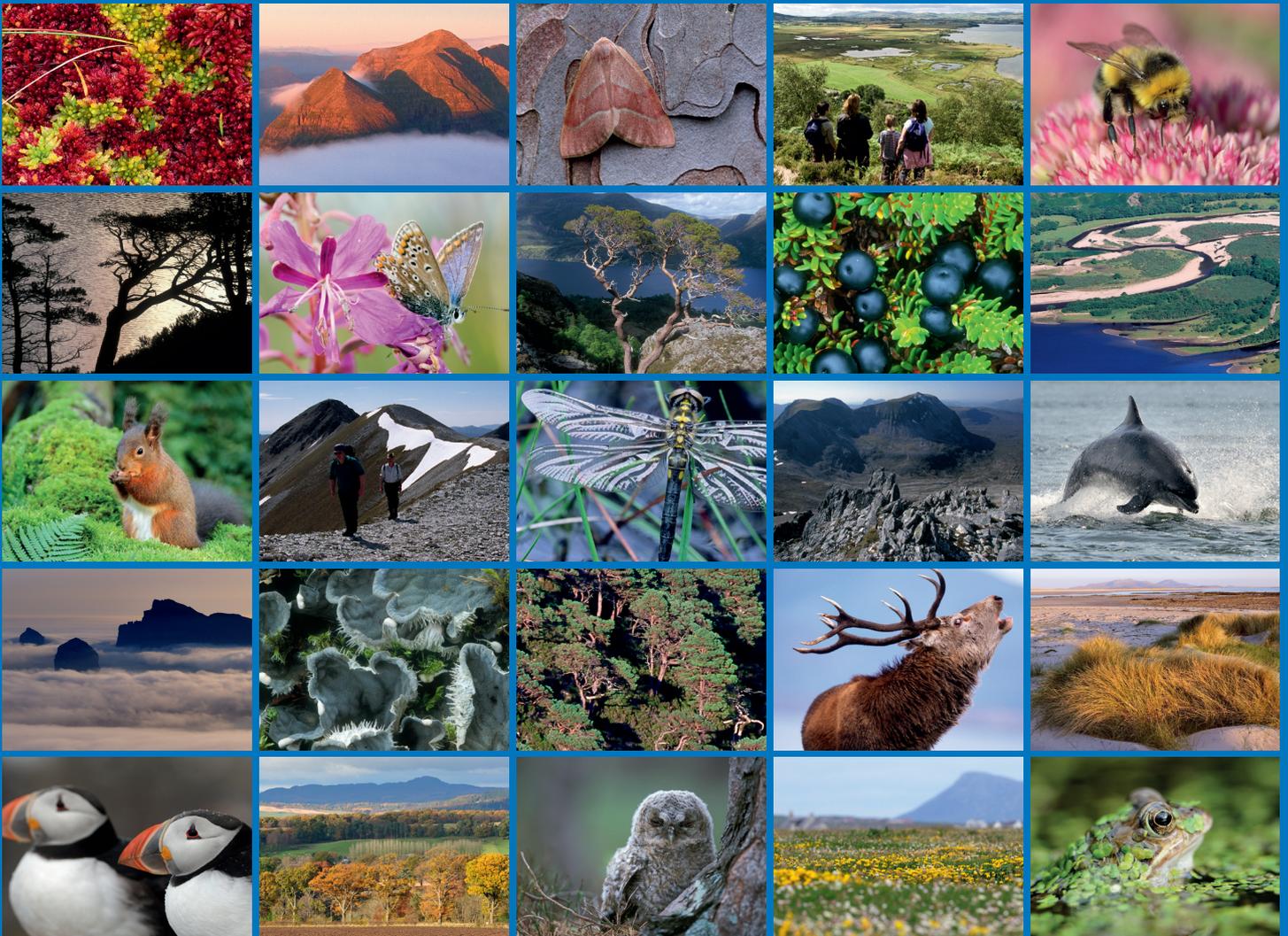


Planning for development – customer survey 2019





Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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RESEARCH REPORT

Research Report No. 1159

Planning for development – customer survey 2019

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RESEARCH REPORT

Summary

Planning for development – customer survey 2019

Research Report No. 1159
Project No: 117193
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Keywords

customer satisfaction; planning and development; advice; services; guidance; service statement; contact

Background

SNH commissioned Why Research to undertake the fifth annual customer satisfaction survey covering its planning for development customers. The purpose was to gather evidence to inform SNH's judgements about service improvement and support SNH's commitment to continuous improvement.

Main findings

- The findings from the 2019 Customer Survey are positive and in many instances see improvements from the 2018 survey:
 - SNH is perceived to make a positive contribution to the planning process.
 - Overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH remains high.
 - Most customers agree that SNH's approach to advice is enabling and influential.
 - Views are positive in relation to contacting SNH.
 - Awareness of SNH guidance documents remains high and views on the guidance are positive.
 - There has been an increase in the level of awareness of the SNH Service Statement.
- While across many areas the findings are more positive than have been seen in previous years of this survey, the main areas where respondents would like to see improvements are in consistency of advice within SNH and across other agencies, as well as guidance which is clear and concise and easier to find on the website. There were also requests for SNH to have a more robust involvement in local issues and in objecting to planning applications.

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Table of Contents	Page
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Consistency of sample compared with previous surveys	1
1.3 2019 findings	1
1.3.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process	1
1.3.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling	1
1.3.3 Contacting SNH	1
1.3.4 SNH's planning services	2
1.3.5 SNH's Service Statement	2
1.3.6 Guidance	2
1.3.7 Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH's website	3
1.3.8 Planning and Development e-newsletter	3
1.3.9 Usefulness of SNH's responses on SEA	3
1.3.10 SNH's focus	3
1.3.11 SNH's approach to guidance and advice	4
1.3.12 Satisfaction	4
1.4 Key messages	4
2. INTRODUCTION	5
2.1 A need to gather feedback and update information on customer satisfaction	5
2.2 Consistency of sample compared with previous surveys	5
2.3 Respondent profile information	5
2.4 Respondent groupings	6
2.5 Primary area of business or involvement	8
2.6 Area of involvement in renewables	9
2.7 Involvement with Environmental Impact Assessment	10
3. FINDINGS FROM THE 2019 SURVEY	11
3.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process	11
3.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling	11
3.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff	13
3.4 SNH services used	13
3.5 Views on SNH services	14
3.6 Views on advice given by SNH	16
3.7 Examples of inconsistencies	17
3.8 Awareness of SNH Service Statement	17
3.9 Awareness of SNH guidance	18
3.10 Views on SNH guidance	19
3.11 Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH's website	21
3.12 Possible improvements to SNH guidance	21
3.13 Planning and Development e-newsletter	23
3.14 What else could SNH do in support of their guidance	23
3.15 Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA	24
3.16 SNH's focus	24
3.17 SNH's approach to guidance and advice	25
3.18 Satisfaction with SNH's service	25
3.19 Improvements to SNH's service	26
4. DATA ACROSS THE FIVE SURVEYS	29
4.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process	29
4.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling	30

4.3	Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff	30
4.4	SNH services used	31
4.5	Views on SNH services	33
4.6	Views on advice given by SNH	34
4.7	Examples of inconsistencies	34
4.8	Awareness of SNH Service Statement	35
4.9	Views on SNH guidance	36
4.10	Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH's website	37
4.11	Possible improvements to SNH guidance	37
4.12	Planning and Development e-newsletter	38
4.13	What else could SNH do in support of their guidance	38
4.14	Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA	39
4.15	SNH's focus	39
4.16	SNH's approach to guidance and advice	39
4.17	Satisfaction with SNH's service	40
4.18	Improvements to SNH's service	40
5.	KEY MESSAGES FROM THE 5 YEARS	41
5.1	SNH's contribution to the planning process	41
5.2	Managing customer relations	41
5.3	SNH services and advice	41
5.4	SNH Service Statement	42
5.5	SNH guidance	42
5.6	Planning and Development e-newsletter	42
5.7	SNH's focus	42
5.8	Satisfaction with SNH's service	42

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

SNH commissioned Why Research to carry out a fifth annual customer survey amongst its Planning for Development customers. The purpose was to gather evidence to inform SNH's judgements about service enhancement and support SNH's commitment to continuous improvement.

1.2 Consistency of sample compared with previous surveys

The 2019 survey asked many similar questions to those used in the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 surveys in order to gather consistent information on any changes in customer views.

However, in 2018 and 2019, data protection issues meant that a much smaller sample of customers was invited to participate. This resulted in 81 responses in 2018 and 66 responses in 2019. In 2018, a far higher proportion of respondents was individual interests, or belonged to NGOs and special interest groups, compared with previous surveys. However, in 2019 this data has reversed to a large extent, with only a small proportion of individual interests, and higher proportions of planning authorities and planning consultants / agents.

In addition, sub-group differences could not be tracked between the previous surveys and the 2018 and 2019 versions. This was due to the very small base sizes in each group (for example, the planning authority base sizes were 26 in 2019 and 18 in 2018, compared with 120 in 2016). As a result, direct comparisons with the previous years' surveys are not possible and any data relating to the 2019 and 2018 surveys should be taken as indicative only.

Results from each of the five years are included in the full report.

Top level findings from the 2019 survey are outlined below.

1.3 2019 findings

1.3.1 *SNH's contribution to the planning process*

SNH is perceived to make a positive contribution to the planning process, with 82% of respondents in 2019 agreeing with this statement (only 8% disagreed). This data shows an increase since 2018 and brings the figures closer to the levels seen in 2015 (87%) and 2016 (89%).

1.3.2 *Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling*

When asked to give examples of where SNH could have been more enabling, a key comment was the need for SNH to be more robust in involvement in local issues or planning applications, for example, in making objections. This echoes comments made in earlier customer surveys.

1.3.3 *Contacting SNH*

Views are positive in relation to contacting SNH, with 79% of respondents claiming it is easy to contact relevant SNH staff. This figure shows an increase on the 2018 (72%) data and is in line with the figures seen in the 2015 (79%) and 2016 (78%) customer surveys.

1.3.4 SNH's planning services

SNH guidance is clearly important to respondents, both on planning and development matters and on awareness of natural heritage assets; these are the two types of guidance used by highest proportions of respondents (cited by 86% and 85% of respondents respectively). This echoes the position seen in previous years of the customer survey.

Views on SNH services were largely positive with far higher proportions of respondents being positive about each service than were negative.

SNH's involvement in pre-application discussions is recognised by respondents with 62% of respondents agreeing that SNH is willing to engage in pre-application discussions. 57% of respondents also agreed that SNH's engagement is influential' at Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping. Both of these elements show an improvement on previous surveys.

The statement with the highest proportions disagreeing to some extent was: 'The reasons given by SNH for requests for further information are clearly explained', although only 10% disagreed with this. Views on all but one of these services are more positive than in 2018.

This picture is similar when we examine views on the **advice given by SNH, with greater proportions of respondents holding positive views than negative views**, albeit that there is still a significant proportion of respondents who do not offer a view on each type of advice. The statement with the highest proportions agreeing to some extent was: 'SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process' (48% agreed). There are small increases in average scores across most of these types of advice compared to previous customer surveys; the only exception being SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements. While there is a slight decrease in comparison with the average score in 2018, this is still higher than the survey data in 2016 and 2015.

The most negative views related to 'SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies' where 19% of respondents disagreed with this.

1.3.5 SNH's Service Statement

There continues to be a good level of awareness of the SNH Service Statement; the increase seen across previous surveys has continued in 2019 to a level of 76% awareness (38% of respondents claim to have read this). The proportion of those **not** aware of the service statement has decreased from 42% in 2015 to 24% in 2019.

1.3.6 Guidance

Awareness of SNH guidance documents remains high, with a large majority of respondents being aware of the new guidance on species advice notes for developers (87%), the EIA Handbook (84%) and guidance on assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind farm developments (71%). Not surprisingly, there continues to be less awareness of guidance on more specialised topics such as 'natural heritage considerations for solar photovoltaic installations (Version 3, 2017) (cited by 47%), 'Decommissioning and Restoration Plans for onshore wind farms (Version 2, February 2016)' (51%) or 'Wind farm proposals on afforested sites – advice on measures to minimise attractiveness to hen harrier, merlin and short-eared owl (January 2016)' (50%).

Views on SNH guidance are largely positive, and much greater proportions of respondents agreed with each of a series of positive statements than disagreed. Information contained in guidance was seen to be useful and relevant to respondents (cited by 82% and

81% respectively); and over three quarters (76%) agreed that guidance documents are well laid out. The statement with the lowest level of agreement was that guidance is unambiguous, at a level of 46%. The ease of using the SNH website to access guidance is an issue for some respondents, with 25% disagreeing that they can easily find the guidance on the website.

The average scores have increased year on year across most of these statements (the exception being finding guidance on the website).

1.3.7 Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH's website

Respondents were extremely positive about how useful they found the information and/or guidance that they have accessed through the SNH website, with almost all (95%) claiming this material was either very or quite useful. This is the highest level seen across the customer surveys.

When asked to make suggestions for improvements to guidance, the key suggestion (albeit only mentioned by a small number of respondents) was that guidance needs to be more widely publicised and accessible.

1.3.8 Planning and Development e-newsletter

The proportion of respondents aware of the Planning and Development e-newsletter has increased considerably in 2019, from 37% in 2016 and 38% in 2018 to 73% in 2019. Furthermore, **most of those who were aware of the newsletter found it useful (96%)**. However, although the sample bases are very small, awareness is not universal among those involved in planning; for example, 20 respondents in planning authorities were aware of this newsletter compared to 5 who were not; 7 planning agents were aware of this compared to 3 who were not.

The input of SNH in helping other organisations consider natural heritage assets is clearly welcomed, and when asked to say what else SNH could do, the most popular suggestion continued to be to host a programme of sharing good practice events (cited by 71%), followed by delivery of capacity-building and / or continued professional development training (68%).

1.3.9 Usefulness of SNH's responses on SEA

Views on the usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) were positive, with 39% finding this very or quite useful, compared with only 2% who felt this was not useful. This shows a slight decline on the 2018 figures where 41% of respondents found this very or quite useful, compared with 5% who felt this was not useful. However, the comparative figure for 2016 was 35% who found it useful.

1.3.10 SNH's focus

Views on the importance of SNH's efforts in a range of areas were positive with high average scores being awarded to each. The most positive views were for SNH's advice on Habitats Regulations Appraisal (with an average score of 9.02 from a maximum of 10), followed by inputting to Strategic and Local Development Plans (average score of 8.66), and Advising on SEA (average score of 8.52). Once again, the data for 2019 shows an increase in average scores across almost all of these areas of focus (the exception was for pre-application discussion, albeit this still achieved a high average score of 8.44).

1.3.11 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

A large majority (81%) continued to agree that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed); this is a small increase on the 2018 figure of 79%. Moreover, the level of disagreement has decreased from 19% in 2018 to 8% in 2019. That said, the 2019 figure of 81% has not quite reached the level of agreement seen in 2016 (90%) or 2015 (85%). This data suggests that this is an area on which SNH should continue to focus in the coming year.

1.3.12 Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH has increased in 2019, with an average score of 7.73 being awarded, compared to 6.61 in 2018. The 2019 score is also slightly higher than that from 2016 (7.59) and 2015 (7.39).

In terms of how to improve on the overall service received from SNH, respondents focussed on the need for SNH to be given the resources they need to carry out their job, consistency across SNH offices and provision of concise, easy to use and easy to access information.

1.4 Key messages

Trends in data across the five surveys from 2014 to 2019 show that, in many cases, where there were higher proportions of professional respondents, rather than individual-interest, ratings tended to be higher. This meant that in 2018 where there was a relatively high proportion of individual interests, many of the figures were lower than had been seen in previous years. There was a higher proportion of professional respondents in 2019, and data is more in line with data from the 2016 and 2015 surveys. Indeed, in many instances, the 2019 data is more positive than that seen in any of the previous surveys.

Views are largely positive across these five surveys about many aspects of the service from SNH and overall there is a perception that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process. That said, the data points to the need for SNH to ensure that advice from staff is consistent both from staff at SNH and with other agencies.

There are still some references to the need for SNH to be more robust in its involvement in the planning process and in its objections to planning applications where natural heritage issues are identified.

The data shows that most SNH staff manage to maintain good relations with customers, with a high proportion of respondents noting that staff are easy to contact.

Views on SNH guidance are very positive, with 95% of respondents describing information and / or guidance they have accessed as being useful, although an issue identified by some respondents is of a need to ensure that guidance is more widely publicised and accessible.

The provision of actions such as sharing good practice events or the delivery of capacity building and professional development training that support SNH guidance is welcomed and offer opportunities for SNH to be seen as customer-focussed. As well as the more formal delivery of information at sharing good practice events, these also offer informal opportunities for SNH staff to continue to build upon existing customer relationships as well as building new customer relationships.

2. INTRODUCTION

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is the government's adviser on all aspects of nature and landscape across Scotland. Its role is to help people understand, value and enjoy Scotland's nature now and in the future. Its aspiration is for the natural heritage to be used and managed sustainably. The organisation promotes good practice widely and helps to care for local nature and landscapes which are of national and international significance. Its success depends on working with others.

2.1 A need to gather feedback and update information on customer satisfaction

Customer feedback plays an essential role in helping SNH provide an effective Planning for Development service. To gather this feedback, SNH has conducted several pieces of research among customers it works with via the Planning System and other development-related processes. These have included customer surveys in July 2014 ([Customer Survey 2014](#)), October 2015 ([Customer Survey 2015](#)), 2016 ([Customer Survey 2016](#)), February 2018 ([Customer survey 2018](#)), research on SNH's influence on natural heritage outcomes in 2015 ([SNH's influence on natural heritage outcomes](#)) and research on the effectiveness of its guidance.

In line with its commitment to continuous improvement, SNH appointed Why Research Limited, an independent market research company based in Edinburgh, to undertake a customer survey in 2014. Why Research Limited was appointed again to undertake four further annual customer surveys from 2015 to 2019. In October 2015 and 2016 the first two of these four online surveys were conducted.

In February 2018 and January 2019 the survey was repeated, although a number of amendments to the questions were made following feedback from respondents. These aimed to make the survey quicker and easier to complete.

2.2 Consistency of sample compared with previous surveys

As well as changes to the questionnaire, data protection issues meant that the sample used to invite respondents to participate in 2018 and 2019 was greatly reduced, resulting in 81 and 66 completed surveys respectively (compared with 363 in 2016).

The 81 responses in 2018 showed a markedly different profile to what was seen in the previous surveys. In 2018, a far higher proportion of respondents were individual interests, or belonged to NGOs and special interest groups, compared with previous surveys. In 2019, the respondent profile is not as markedly different as in the previous year, with decreases in the number of respondents who are individual interests or NGOs/ voluntary bodies and increases in those within planning authorities and planning consultants / agents.

In addition, sub-group differences could not be tracked between the previous surveys and the 2018 and 2019 versions. This was due to the very small base sizes in each group (for example, the planning authority base size in 2018 was 18 and in 2019 this was 26, compared with 120 in 2016).

2.3 Respondent profile information

As mentioned above, data protection issues meant that the sample used for this survey was greatly reduced. In 2019, invitations to participate were sent to 294 individuals and organisations which have had contact with SNH; this was a large reduction from the 2,796 invited to participate in 2016.

A total of 66 responded to the 2019 survey. Although this was a relatively high response rate (22%), it was still very low in absolute numbers compared with surveys carried out prior to 2018 (for example, 363 responses in 2016). This does mean that direct comparisons with the previous years' surveys are not possible at a sub-group level and, in addition, any data from the total sample relating to the 2019 survey should be taken as indicative only. In 2019, while the sample base remains small, the respondent profile is more in line with the pre-2018 surveys.

In order to set the findings in context, respondents were asked to provide some information about themselves or their organisations and these are discussed in the following sections.

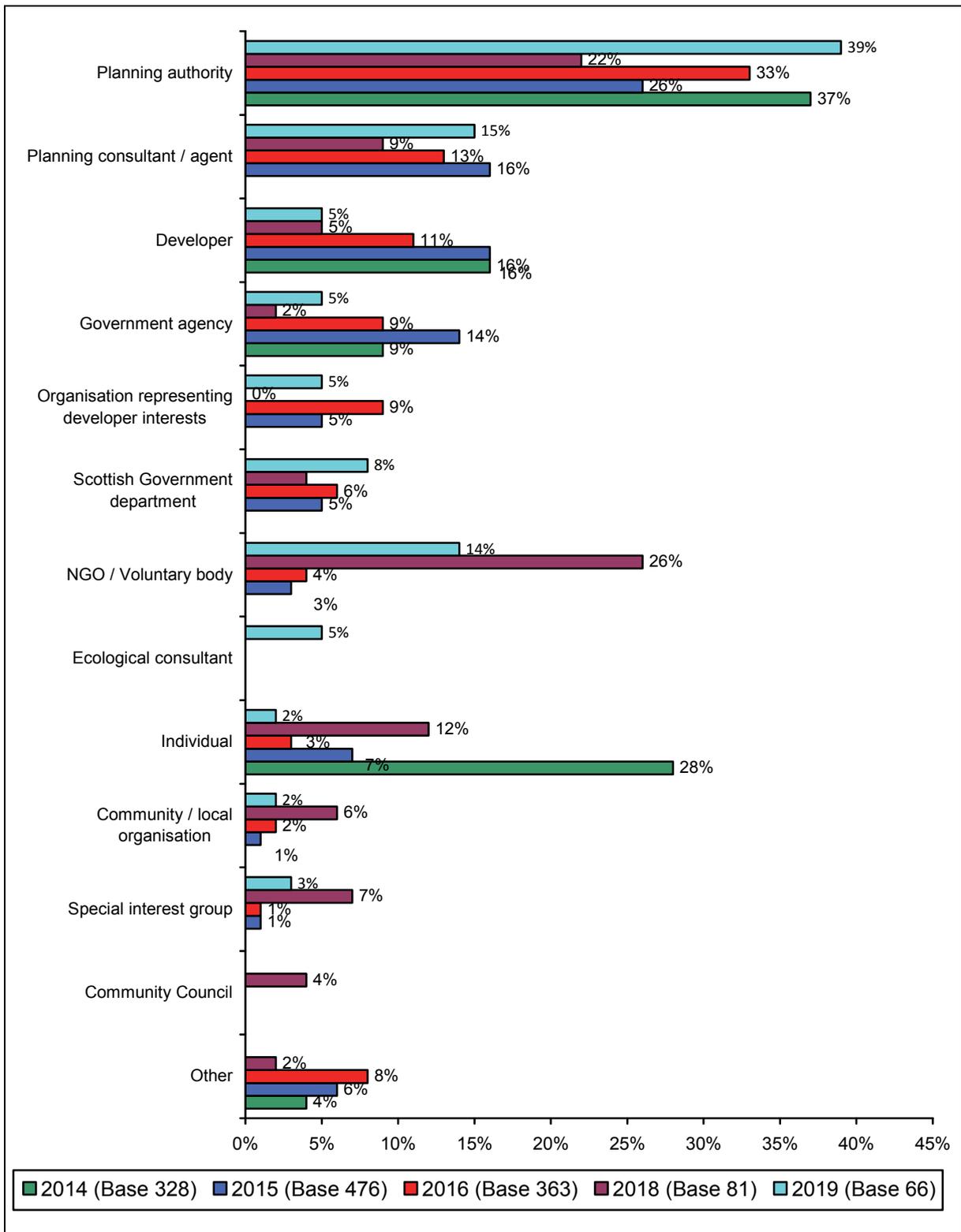
2.4 Respondent groupings

At the start of the online survey all respondents were asked to indicate what type of organisation, if applicable, they were responding from.

Figure 1, overleaf, shows the respondent groupings.

Where possible, we have included 2014 data, although the groupings used were not exactly the same as in 2015 and 2016.

It should be noted that in 2014 there was a far higher proportion of 'individual' respondents than in any other year.



Source: Q1

Figure 1. Respondent groupings (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

As shown in Figure 1, the three groups with the highest proportions of respondents in 2019 were planning authorities (39%), planning consultants / agents (15%) and NGOs/Voluntary organisations (14%).

There were some differences across the data in comparison to earlier surveys, although the proportion of respondents within planning authorities and planning consultants / agents is similar, with the exception of the data from 2018.

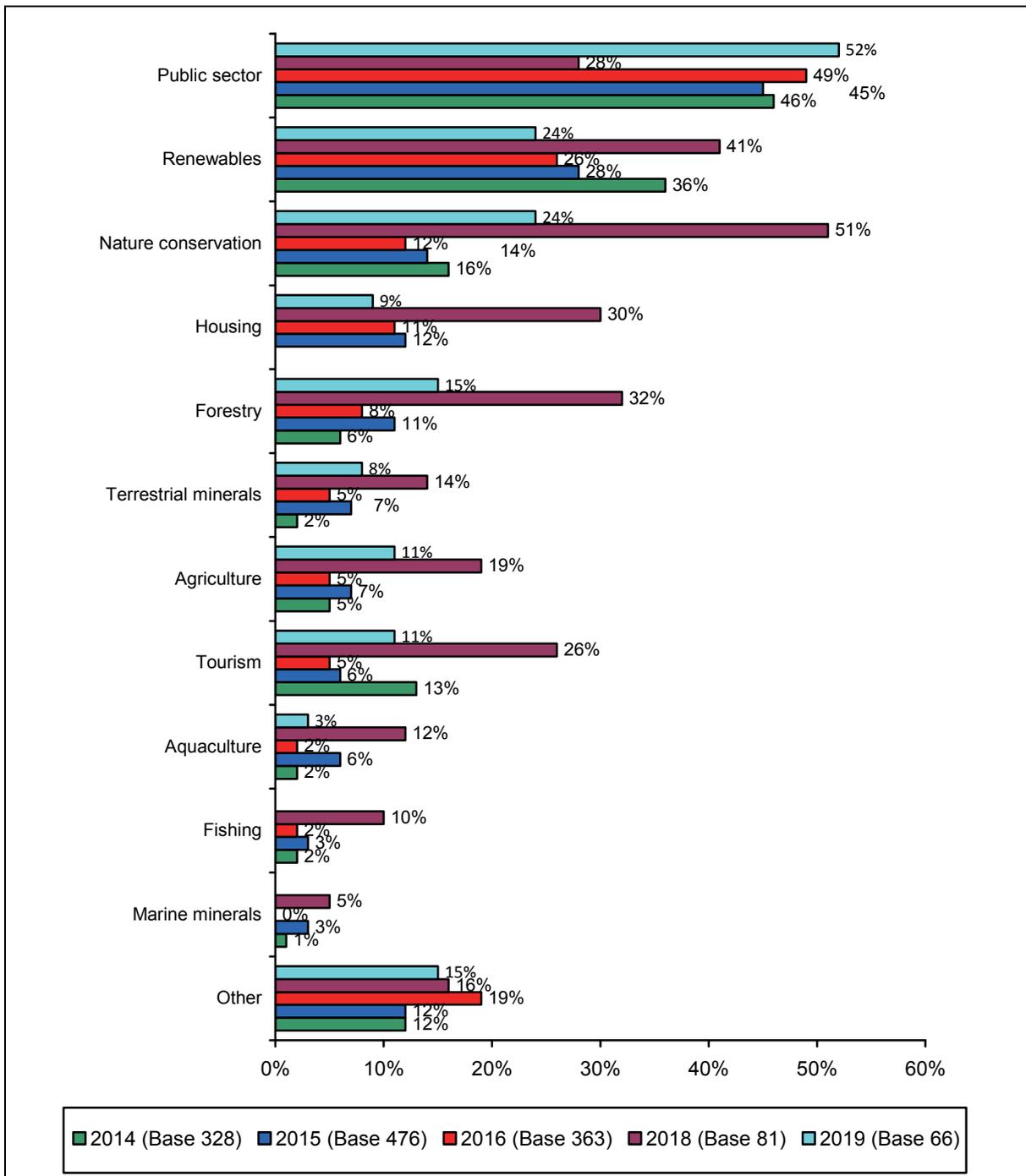
In the reports relating to the previous surveys, we looked at different types of respondents to ascertain whether or not there are differences in responses across different groups. However, given the small number of respondents in the 2018 and 2019 surveys, none of the sub-groups have large enough base sizes for sensible comparison, so this analysis has not been included in this report.

2.5 Primary area of business or involvement

Those respondents outwith the public sector were then asked to indicate their primary area of business. Respondents from the public sector (i.e. planning authorities, Scottish Government departments and government agencies) were not asked to provide this information, as their involvement covers many business sectors or aspects of the planning system.

While the profile of respondents in the 2018 survey was quite different to earlier surveys, the profile in 2019 was more broadly similar to surveys pre-2018. As shown in Figure 2, just under a quarter of respondents (24%) were involved in renewables; this figure is similar to 2016 (26%) and 2015 (28%). A similar proportion of respondents were involved in nature conservation, although this figure is higher than that seen in 2016 (12%), 2015 (14%) or 2014 (16%).

Smaller proportions of respondents were involved in other areas such as forestry (15%), agriculture (11%), tourism (11%) or housing (9%). With the exception of the 2018 data, these figures are broadly similar to those seen in earlier surveys.



Source: Q2a & Q2b

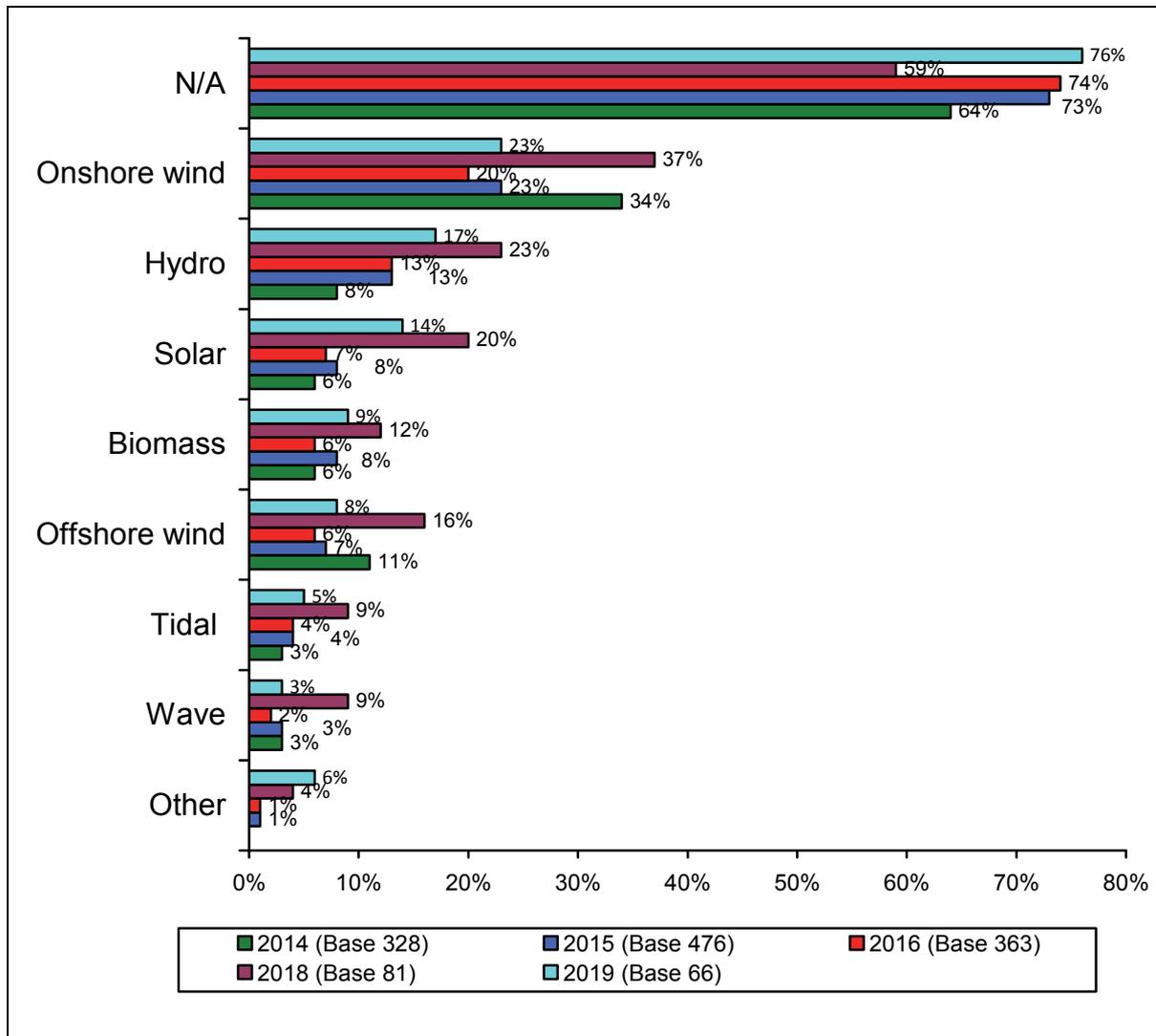
Figure 2. Primary area of business or involvement (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

2.6 Area of involvement in renewables

Respondents were also asked to say in which area of renewables, if any, they were involved.

As Figure 3 demonstrates, onshore wind continues to account for the greatest proportion of 2019 respondents (23%), with smaller proportions referring to hydro (17%) or solar (14%). Other areas of involvement in renewables were cited by less than one in ten respondents.

With the exception of the data from 2018, the data from 2019 is more in line with earlier surveys, although there were slight increases in 2019 in the proportion of respondents claiming involvement in these areas of renewables.



Source: Q2ai & Q2bi

Figure 3. Area of involvement in renewables (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

2.7 Involvement with Environmental Impact Assessment

Respondents were also asked: 'If you are involved with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), at which stages are you involved with SNH?'

Figures are similar to those from 2018, 2016 and 2015, where most were involved at the Scoping stage or in the Environmental Statement, although in 2019 a significant number were also involved before Scoping. The 2019 figures are:

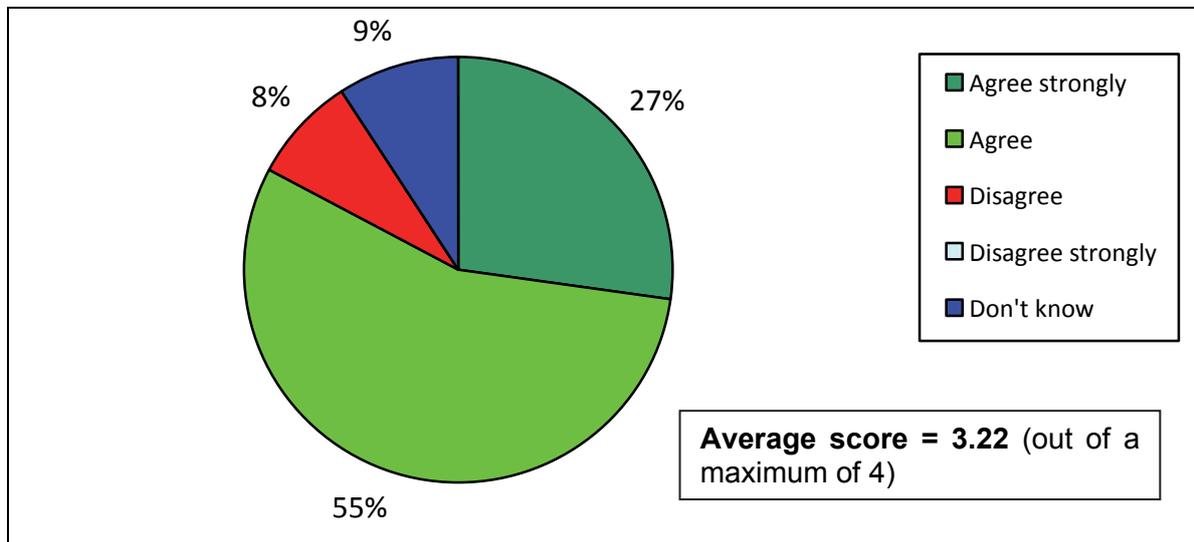
- Before Scoping (35%)
- Scoping (42%)
- Environmental Statement (39%)
- Other (17%)
- Not involved with EIA (45%)

3. FINDINGS FROM THE 2019 SURVEY

This chapter presents the findings from the 2019 survey.

3.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

To help put their views into context, all respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.



Q19a (Base = 66)

Figure 4. SNH's contribution to planning process 2019

As can be seen in Figure 4 above, results to this question are positive, with a majority (82%) agreeing, and only 8% disagreeing, that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

3.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling

A new question was added in 2016 and repeated in the two subsequent surveys: 'Please can you give any specific examples of where SNH could have been more enabling or made a more positive contribution to the planning system'. Comments were received from 18 respondents, 4 of whom simply noted general positive comments about SNH or did not provide examples; the main themes noted in the remaining 14 responses are outlined below.

Four respondents commented on specific local issues or planning applications where, they felt, SNH could be more robust in its involvement or made objections. For example:

"Despite the provision of extremely poor survey data, analysis and interpretation, SNH was minded to grant protected species licences and 'approve' mitigation proposals for planning purposes. On challenging this, we were advised that the decision had only been reached because SNH had to be 'more development friendly'. We appreciate this approach 'enables' development, but at the expense of pragmatic nature conservation and in contradiction of all existing guidance documents and licensing policies." (NGO / Voluntary organisation)

Three respondents thought that SNH should focus on being a strong advocate for the natural heritage and biodiversity:

“For example, in the HRA of ...’s LDP, SNH accepted the finding that recreational pressure would not impact the birds of the ... SPA - despite the HRA stating that dog walkers were the main issue, and offering no evidence that new development of the scale envisaged would not bring more dog walking. It may be fine - it may well be fine - but it was not provably fine, and that was wrong.” (Planning authority)

The need for clearer, more practical advice was requested by three respondents:

“More engagement at the post consent/discharge of conditions stage for major applications would help ensure that the issues highlighted by SNH at the application stage are adequately addressed on the ground. This would also help to improve the understanding of SNH staff on the practicalities of delivering mitigation on the ground and lead to better advice at the application stage.” (Planning authority)

Three respondents thought SNH needed to review policies in a specified area, or needed to consider wider policy objectives in an advice context. For example:

“SNH’s officers tend to be too wedded to their detailed guidance notes and do not consider its wider policy objectives, therefore advice tends to be unbalanced. If a more balanced and enabling role as a goal is to be met, then officers need to set advice in the context of national policy objectives, sometimes looking beyond policies which apply at the site specific level to consider development proposals in a wider policy context.” (Developer)

Three respondents made negative comments about SNH’s contributions in relation to wind farm or other renewable energy developments:

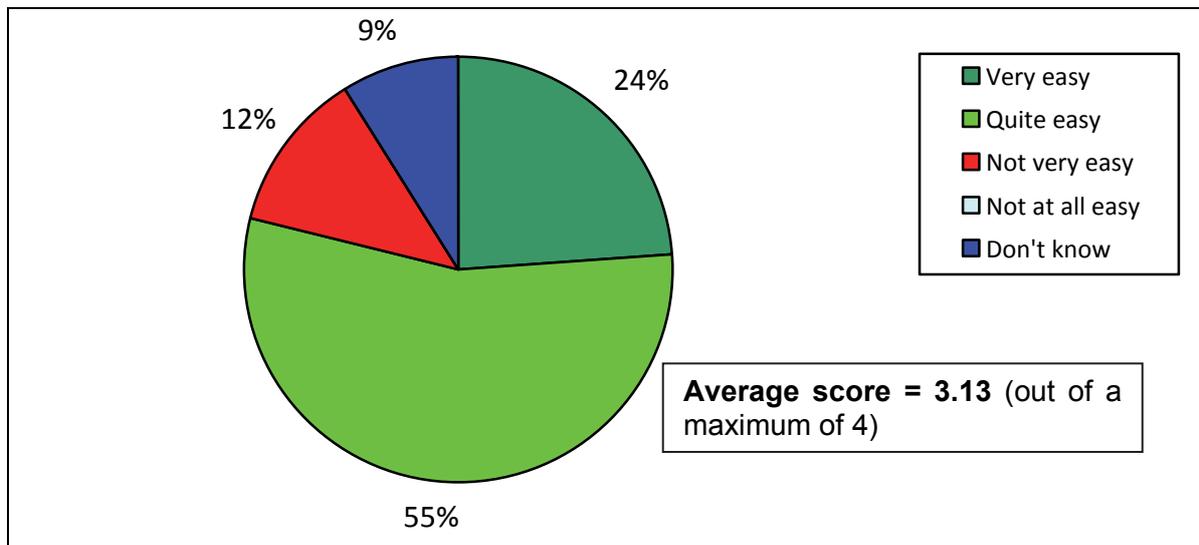
“Specifically we have concerns with the proposed approach to EIA for repowering onshore wind projects and view the requirement to assess against a baseline of the fully restored site as disproportionate and fear this will add unnecessary costs and delays to repowered projects. We have discussed these concerns with SNH and are hopeful that a more pragmatic solution can be found.” (Developer)

Respondents also made other observations as follows:

- The need for closer engagement with and support for local communities and voluntary groups (two responses).
- More effort needed to engage with the public and consultancies (two responses).
- A need for more consistent advice (e.g. a ‘one SNH’ approach) (two responses).
- The need for more or closer liaison with industry (one response).
- The need for to be less pro-development (one response).
- The need for SNH to be less cautious in its approach to developments (one response).
- The need for a better website (one response).

3.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

Respondents were asked to indicate how easy it is to contact relevant staff at SNH.



Q4 (Base = 66)

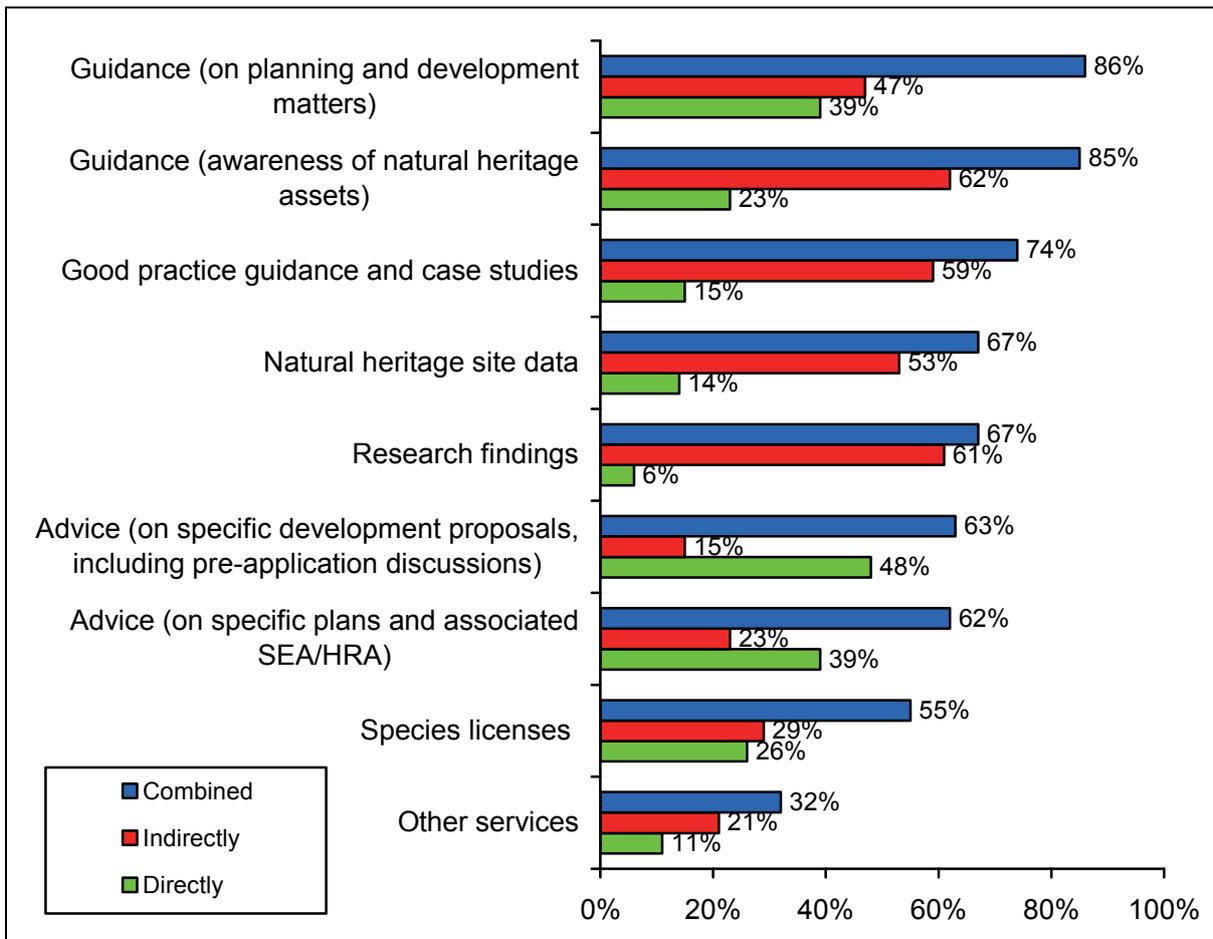
Figure 5. Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

As shown in Figure 5, views on contacting relevant staff at SNH are positive, and over three quarters (79%) of respondents agreed, to some extent, that it is easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH. This compares to only 12% who felt that it is not easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH.

3.4 SNH services used

SNH offers a wide range of services to organisations, communities and the general public as part of its overall planning service. This part of the survey was designed to help understand which of these services have been used, and by whom.

Respondents were asked which services they had used and whether these had been mainly accessed directly (through SNH correspondence: by letter or email) or indirectly (through the SNH website).



Source: Q11 (Base=66)

Figure 6. SNH services used

As Figure 6 demonstrates, numbers accessing SNH services were high, and over half had accessed most named services either directly or indirectly.

In terms of services which have been accessed directly, those accessed by highest proportions of respondents were advice on specific development proposals, including pre-application discussions (48%), guidance on planning and development matters and advice on specific plans and associated SEA/HRA (both cited by 39%). The services accessed directly by fewest numbers of respondents were good practice guidance and case studies (15%), natural heritage site data (14%) and research findings (6%).

3.5 Views on SNH services

Having gathered information on which SNH services were used, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements about SNH services. Seven of these statements related specifically to SNH services and eight related to advice provided by SNH. Figure 7 shows responses relating to views on SNH services.



Source: Q12 (Base = 66)

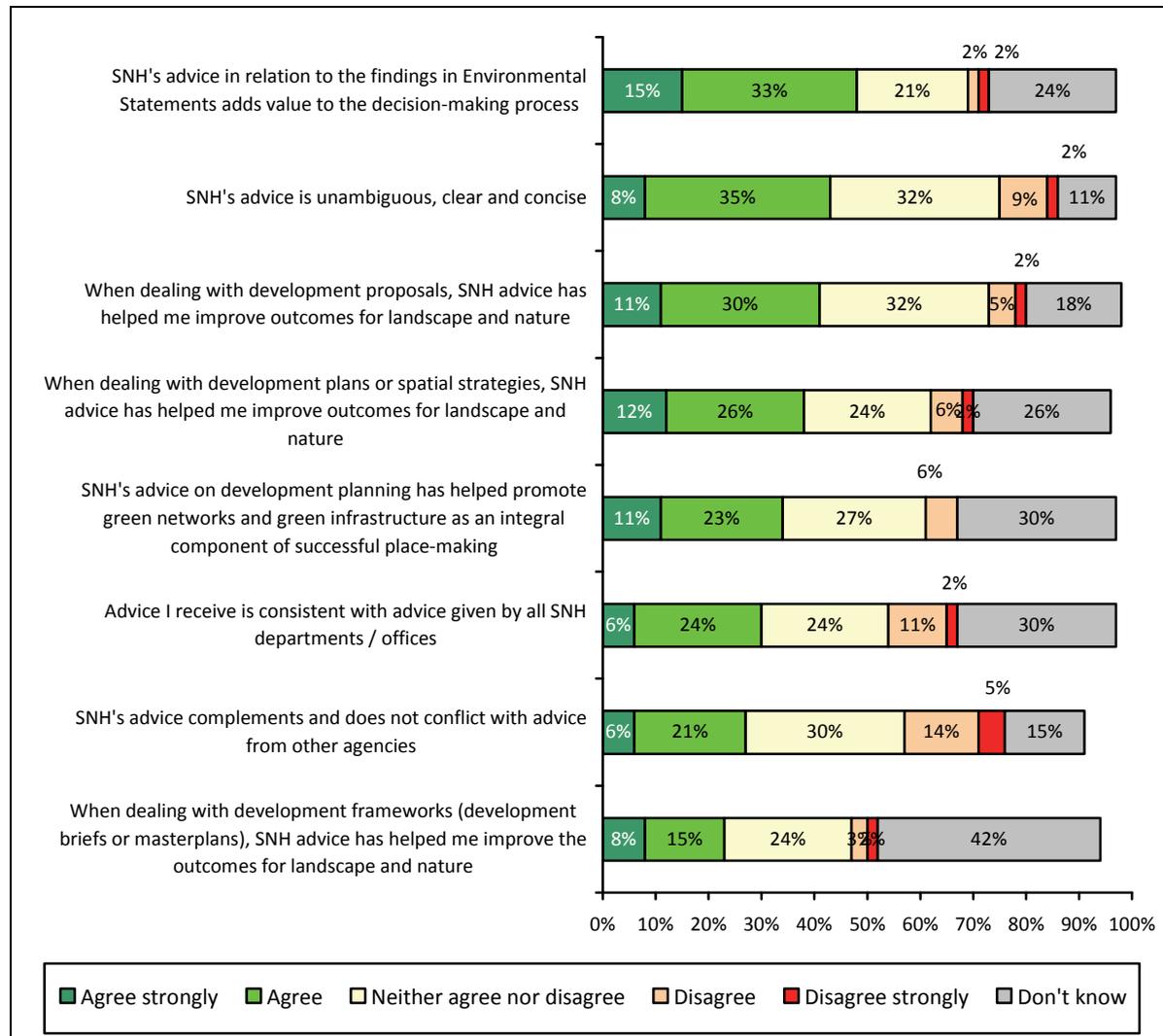
Figure 7. Views on SNH services

Figure 7 shows that views were positive. Higher proportions of respondents agreed than disagreed with each statement, although significant proportions gave a neither/nor or don't know response.

Although there was not majority agreement across all statements, only small proportions of respondents (10% or less) disagreed with any of these statements. The statement with the highest level of disagreement was 'The reasons given by SNH for requests for further information are clearly explained' (10% disagreed).

3.6 Views on advice given by SNH

Respondents were also asked for their agreement or disagreement with a range of statements on advice given by SNH. Figure 8 shows the findings.



Source: Q13 (Base=66)

Figure 8. Views on advice given by SNH

As shown in Figure 8 above, views in relation to advice given by SNH were not as positive as those for services, although across all statements, higher proportions of respondents agreed than disagreed with each. The most positive views were for 'SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process', where 48% agreed and only 4% disagreed. The least positive views were for 'SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies', where 27% agreed and 19% disagreed.

However, as with the statements on service, significant proportions gave a neither/nor or don't know response.

3.7 Examples of inconsistencies

Respondents who disagreed with the statements ‘SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies’ or ‘Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all SNH departments/offices’ were invited to provide examples of inconsistencies in advice that they have experienced either between SNH departments or between SNH and other agencies – 9 respondents provided examples.

Three of these respondents cited examples relating to SNH providing advice that was either out of step with that of other organisations, or contradictory to other advice from SNH, in connection with landscapes, particularly regarding wind farms. For example:

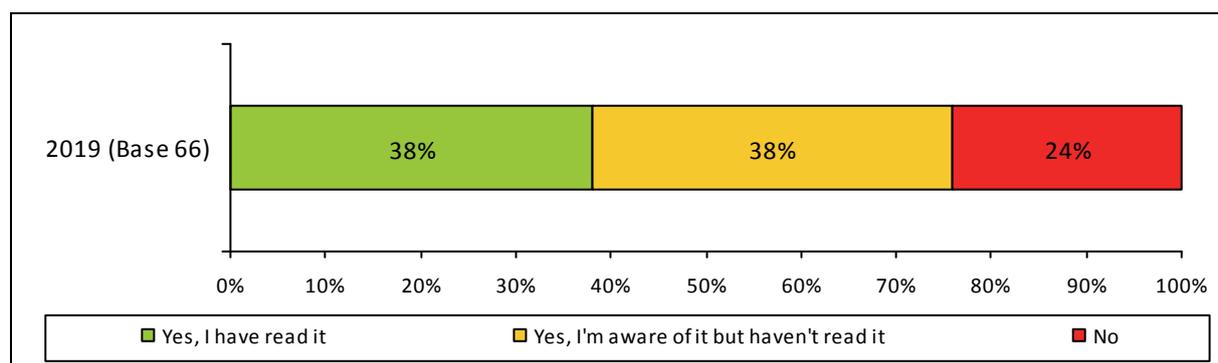
“SNHs comments on formal proposed plan differed from previous direct comments from the agency that had been included in the Plan at SNH's request. This repeated earlier inconsistent advice related to landscape impact of proposals. A significant amount of resources was expended trying to negotiate and respond to this; which ultimately was not productive in any case.” (Planning authority)

Inconsistencies of advice were also caused by different individuals providing advice within SNH, rather than SNH providing advice as an organisation, according to two respondents. Single specific examples were also given involving differing compensatory planting advice being given by SNH and FCS, and SNH and SEPA being out of alignment when considering impacts on freshwater ecology.

3.8 Awareness of SNH Service Statement

SNH offers detailed guidance for developers and planning authorities and its Planning for Development Service Statement outlines how the organisation engages with the planning system to support its ambitions for connecting people and nature. As part of its customer satisfaction survey, SNH is keen to know about levels of awareness of its Planning for Development Service Statement.

All respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of the SNH Service Statement and a link to ‘Planning for Development - Our Service Statement’ was provided within the survey for respondents to access.



Source: Q5

Figure 9. Awareness of Service Statement

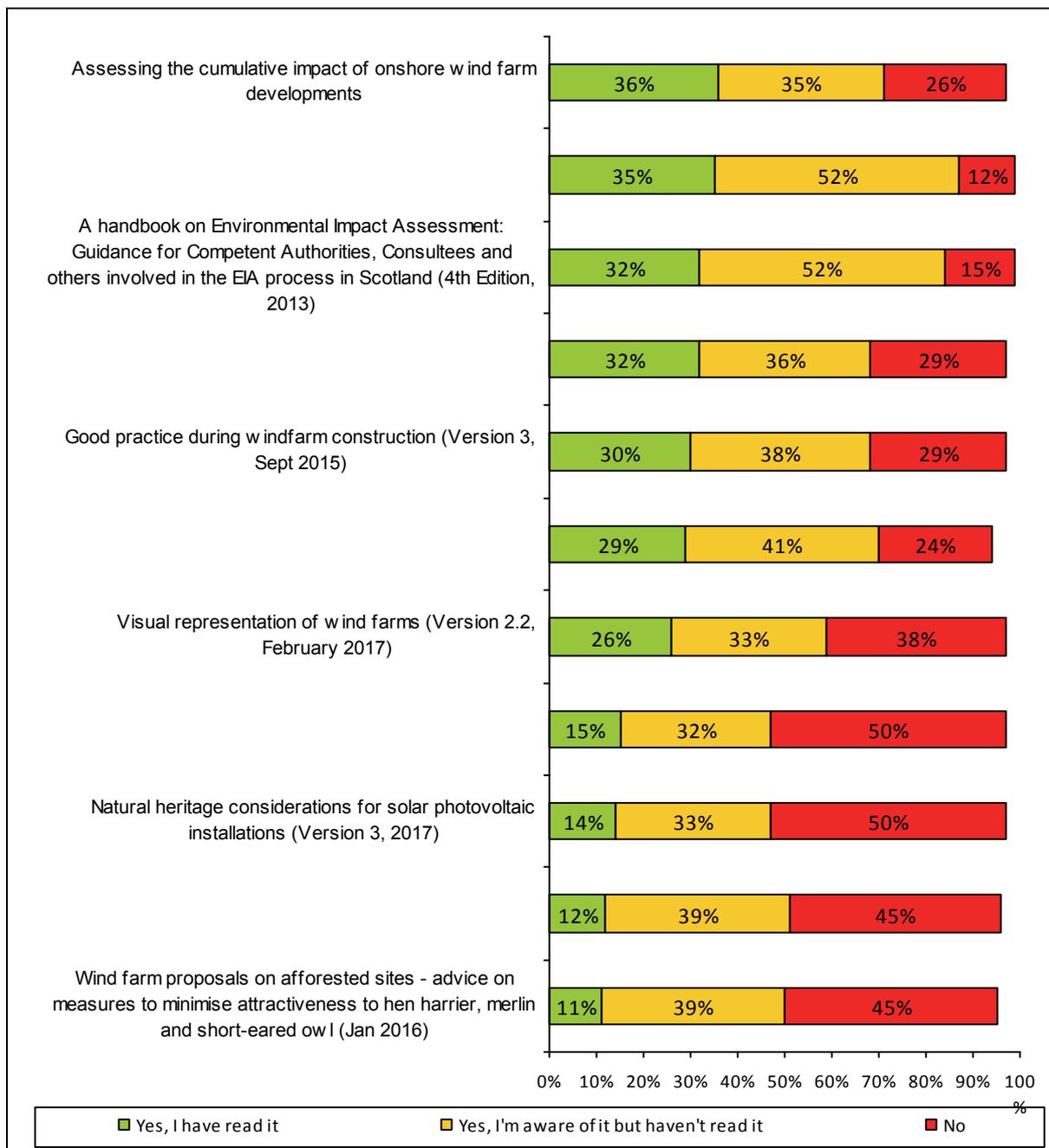
Figure 9 shows that views are positive, with just over three quarters of respondents (76%) being aware of the Service Statement. This includes over a third (38%) who have read it.

Overall, just under a quarter (24%) of respondents were not aware of the Service Statement.

3.9 Awareness of SNH guidance

SNH is also keen to obtain views on the guidance it produces. It is integral to its efforts to influence development at the upstream end of the planning system. Customers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about SNH guidance.

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of various pieces of guidance (available at <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development>) produced by SNH.



Source: Q6 (Base = 66)

Figure 10. Awareness of SNH guidance

As can be seen in Figure 10, over half of respondents were aware of most of the different pieces of guidance. At the highest level, 87% of respondents were aware of species advice notes for developers, 84% were aware of 'A handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment: Guidance for Competent Authorities, Consultees and others involved in the EIA process in Scotland', and 71% were aware of 'Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind farm developments (Mar 2012).

The guidance with highest levels of respondents who had read it was 'Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind farm developments' (36%), followed closely by 'Species advice notes for developers' (35%).

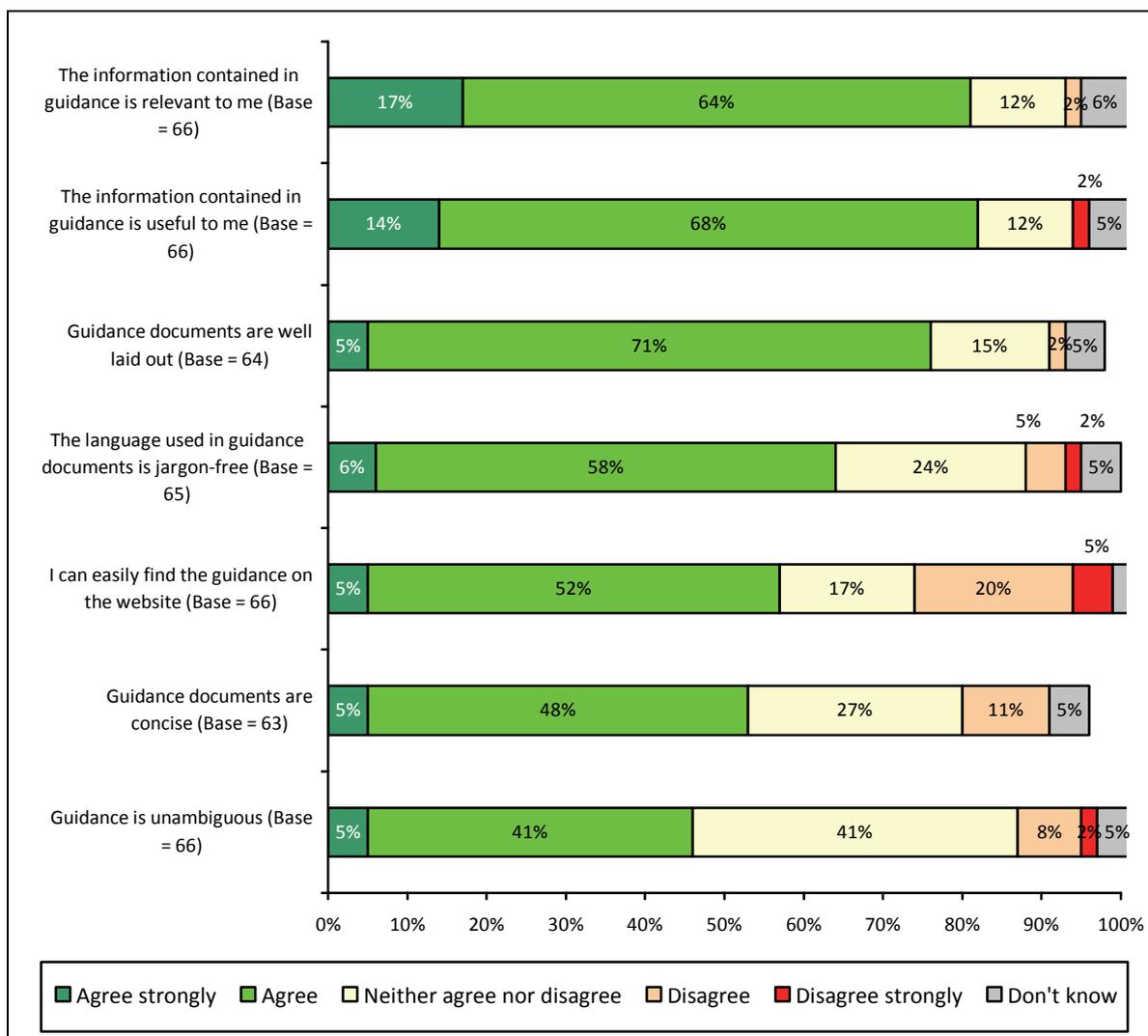
Just under half of respondents were aware of two of the more technical pieces of guidance:

- 'Good practice image guide for hydro scheme contractors (47% aware).
- Natural heritage considerations for solar photovoltaic installations, Version 3, 2017 (47% aware).

3.10 Views on SNH guidance

Respondents were also asked to give their level of agreement with a series of statements about the guidance produced by SNH.

As Figure 11 demonstrates, more respondents agreed than disagreed with each of these statements, although again a significant number of respondents 'sat on the fence' and neither agreed nor disagreed.



Source: Q7

Figure 11. Views on SNH guidance

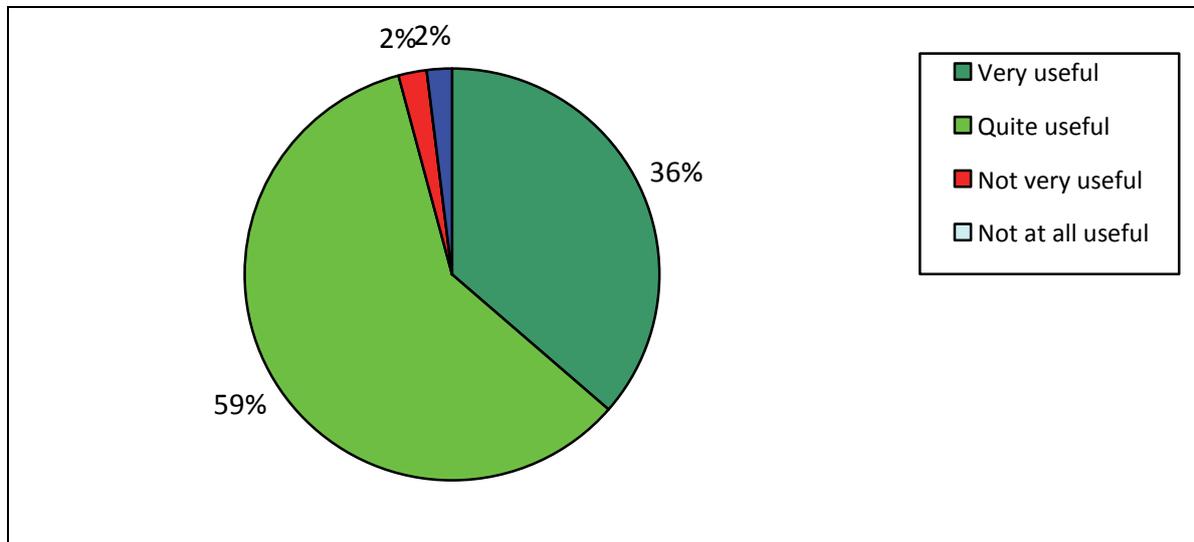
Views were positive, with half or more of respondents agreeing with all bar one of these statements. High proportions of respondents agreed that information contained in guidance is relevant (81%) or useful (82%), and only 2% of respondents disagreed with either of these statements. Other statements received positive views:

- Guidance documents are well laid-out (76% agreed; only 2% disagreed).
- The language used in guidance documents is jargon-free. (64% agreed; only 7% disagreed).
- Guidance documents are concise (53% agreed; 11% disagreed).
- Guidance is unambiguous (46% agreed; 10% disagreed).
- I can easily find guidance on the website. (57% agreed; 25% disagreed).

The data suggests that some guidance could be more concise and unambiguous, and easier to find on the website.

3.11 Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH’s website

Respondents were also asked to indicate how useful they found the information and/or guidance that they have accessed through the SNH website.



Source: Q15 (Base = 66)

Figure 12. Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH’s website

As shown in Figure 12 above, the response to this question was very positive with almost all respondents (95%) describing the information and/or guidance they had accessed via the website as very or quite useful. Only 2% said this was not useful to any extent.

3.12 Possible improvements to SNH guidance

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further comment on what SNH could do to improve its guidance in order to help reduce impacts on the natural heritage – just under half (31 respondents) provided comments.

A number of key themes emerged, albeit that most were noted by relatively small numbers of respondents. Unsurprisingly a main theme, mentioned by almost one in three of the respondents who made comments, was the desire to see guidance more widely publicised and / or accessible. In connection with this, significant numbers of respondents wanted to see improvements to the SNH website and / or electronic communications. The following paragraphs highlight the number of respondents commenting on each theme and provide some verbatim quotes to illustrate the points being made.

The most widely-mentioned theme (cited by ten respondents), was the desire to see guidance, or updated guidance, more widely publicised and accessible:

“A table or document setting out the circumstances when surveys should be done as a matter of course would be very useful for that. It wouldn’t mean a survey was never required in other circumstances. It would be useful for this to be consolidated and not hidden in separate guidance for each species.” (Planning authority)

“Publicise it more, ensure that each published guidance note is heavily promoted at the time and to circulate the lists of what is available regularly, once or twice a year perhaps.” (NGO / Voluntary)

“A guidance map would be useful (if it does exist, publicise it), to increase awareness of existing resources across the various development compartments.” (Planning agent)

Seven respondents commented on the need for improvements to the website, or to e-communications, with several of the comments again pertaining to ease of accessibility of guidance:

“I would like more documents to be cited on relevant website pages within related text. It would be useful to search for keywords to gain access to guidance documents. Alerts/ emailed when new documents become available.” (Special interest group)

“Have guidance easier to find online. Keep old links live/redirect as some leaflets have old SNH website on them.” (Planning authority)

“The nature.scot website is still confusing with very circuitous routes to find essential guidance and often incomplete, e.g. there’s no explanation of what ecosystems are, why they matter, what relevance they have to planning for nature conservation let alone a discussion about the fact that ecosystem services are really life support systems” (Planning authority)

Relating to guidance content, four respondents perceived a need to set guidance in a wider context:

“Guidance needs to be more balanced, reflecting wider environmental concerns, eg Climate Change and how economic schemes can help mitigate such effects on a macro scale. Guidance is often so detailed it loses the context of broader-reaching policy.” (Developer)

“Set the specific guidance all in context of the imperative to address Climate Disruption and Sustainable Development.” (Community / local organisation)

Conversely, three respondents thought there was a requirement for SNH to focus their advice solely on the protection or conservation of the natural heritage:

“We believe, as the Statutory Advisor on Natural Heritage, that you should focus your advice towards conservation and protection. Other agencies should bear the responsibility for economic growth. We believe that SNH should provide impartial advice and guidance in the best interest of the Natural Heritage. Balancing the needs of conservation and economic growth sits with other agencies.” (NGO / Voluntary organisation)

The need for less-ambiguous guidance or guidance which is less open to interpretation was noted in three responses:

“At times, guidance can be open to interpretation and it is important that this is supplemented with expert advice from SNH.” (Developer)

Also relating to guidance content, mentioned by three respondents, was the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamlined:

“Make it easy to find and short! Sorry it’s a time thing, the guidance is good but even a summary or checklist would help.” (Planning authority)

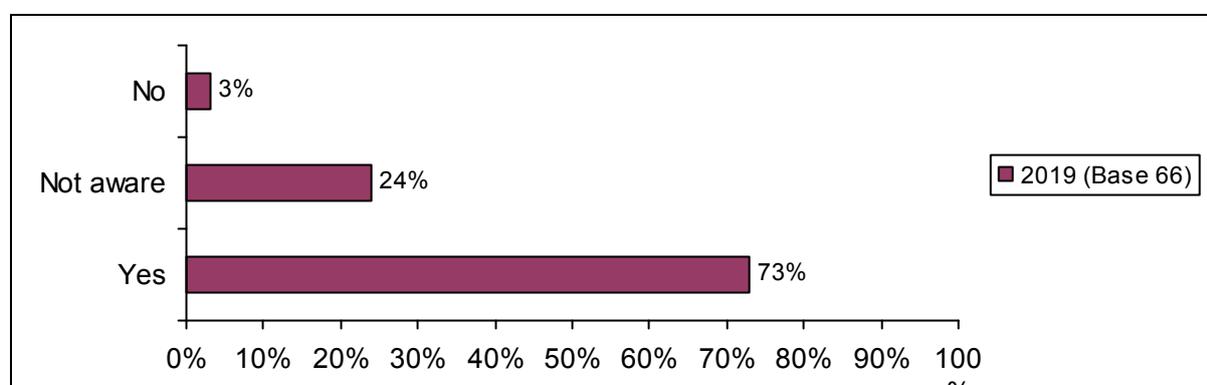
Contact with SNH staff in addition to written guidance was suggested by three respondents, an example being:

“Where guidance advises further discussion with SNH over a particular issue, ensure that there is sufficient staff resource for such dialogue (particularly specialists).” (Planning authority)

Other comments and suggestions, each made by one or two respondents, included:

- A requirement for more SNH engagement on a local level (2 respondents)
- Including case studies or examples of best practice (2 respondents)
- SNH being stronger or firmer about what their requirements are (2 respondents)
- Providing training on the guidance provided (2 respondents)
- Allowing a wider number of consultancies to be involved in producing guidance documents (1 respondent)
- Guidance not requiring to be followed in all cases, depending on the specific case (1 respondent)

3.13 Planning and Development e-newsletter



Source: Q10

Figure 13. Usefulness of SNH's Planning and Development e-newsletter

Figure 13 shows that findings were relatively positive with almost three quarters of the total sample being aware of the e-newsletter and considering this to be useful. If we look at data in relation only to those who were aware of the e-newsletter, this shows that almost all respondents considered this to be useful (96%).

3.14 What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

Respondents were also asked what else SNH could do to help other organisations consider natural heritage assets. The data suggests that face-to-face contact at good practice events and opportunities to discuss issues are important, with hosting a programme of sharing good practice events being the most popular suggestion (cited by 71%). Slightly fewer respondents (68%) would like to see SNH deliver capacity building and / or continued professional development training; this is perhaps not surprising given the reduced numbers of staff, and particularly specialist staff, among some organisations in recent years. As staff numbers decline elsewhere, access to staff at SNH and the specialist knowledge they have, become increasingly important to individuals outwith the organisation who are involved in the planning process.

Table 1. What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

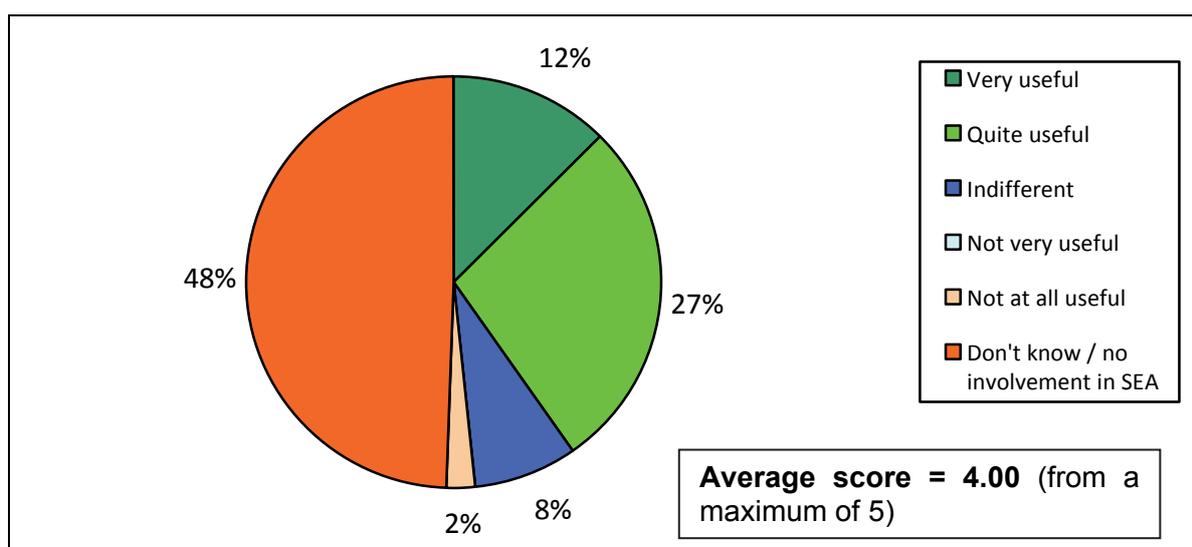
	2019 %
Host a programme of sharing good practice events	71
Deliver capacity building and/or continued professional development training	68
Develop online, interactive scenario-based eLearning activities	52
Develop video podcasts that demonstrate best practice and guidance in action	50
Deliver a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals	48
Other	17
Don't know/no reply	3

Source: Q9

The main theme from those who selected 'Other' was the need for SNH to engage better with the various professional audiences for the guidance (e.g. consultants, planners, developers). In addition, a minority of respondents pinpointed a need for liaison with available, dedicated SNH staff.

3.15 Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA

Respondents were also asked to indicate how useful they have found SNH's responses in relation to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).



Source: Q16 (Base = 66)

Figure 14. Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA

As can be seen in Figure 14, views on the usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA were positive, with a greater proportion of respondents (39%) finding this very or quite useful, compared with only 2% who felt this was not useful. 48% replied 'don't know' or said that they had no involvement in SEA.

3.16 SNH's focus

Given the move towards early engagement in the planning process, respondents were also asked to rate the importance of a number of SNH initiatives across a range of areas, using a scale from one to ten where one indicated 'not at all important' and 10 indicated 'very important'. Table 2 shows that views were largely positive across each of these areas. The initiative considered most important was advising on Habitats Regulations Appraisal, which

achieved an average score of 9.02 out of a maximum of 10. The lowest average score was for advising on Design Frameworks, Development Briefs and Masterplanning, albeit this still achieved an average score of 7.93.

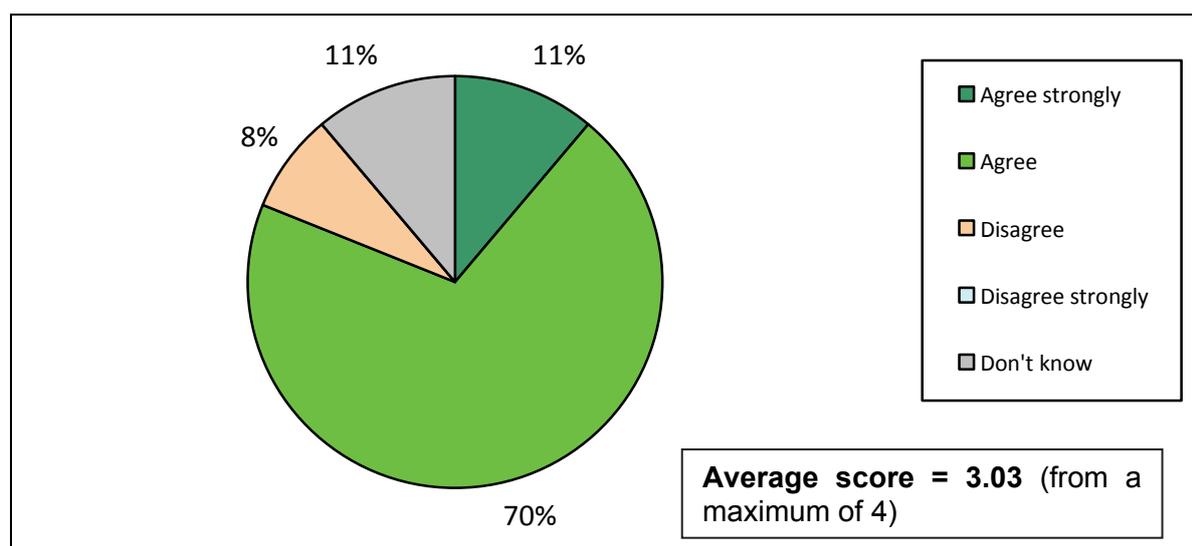
Table 2. Focus of SNH efforts

	Average 2019
Advising on Habitats Regulations Appraisal	9.02
Inputting to Strategic and Local Development Plans	8.66
Advising on Strategic Environmental Assessment	8.52
Contributing to pre-application discussions on development proposals	8.44
Influencing National plans of other agencies / bodies	8.16
Building capacity in others through guidance and training	8.05
Advising on Design Frameworks, Development Briefs, Masterplanning	7.93

Source: Q17

3.17 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed).



Source: Q18 (Base = 66)

Figure 15. Whether SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling

As shown in Figure 15 above, views were positive, and most respondents (81%) agreed that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (70% said they agreed while 11% said they agreed strongly; only 8% disagreed).

3.18 Satisfaction with SNH's service

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating highest satisfaction.

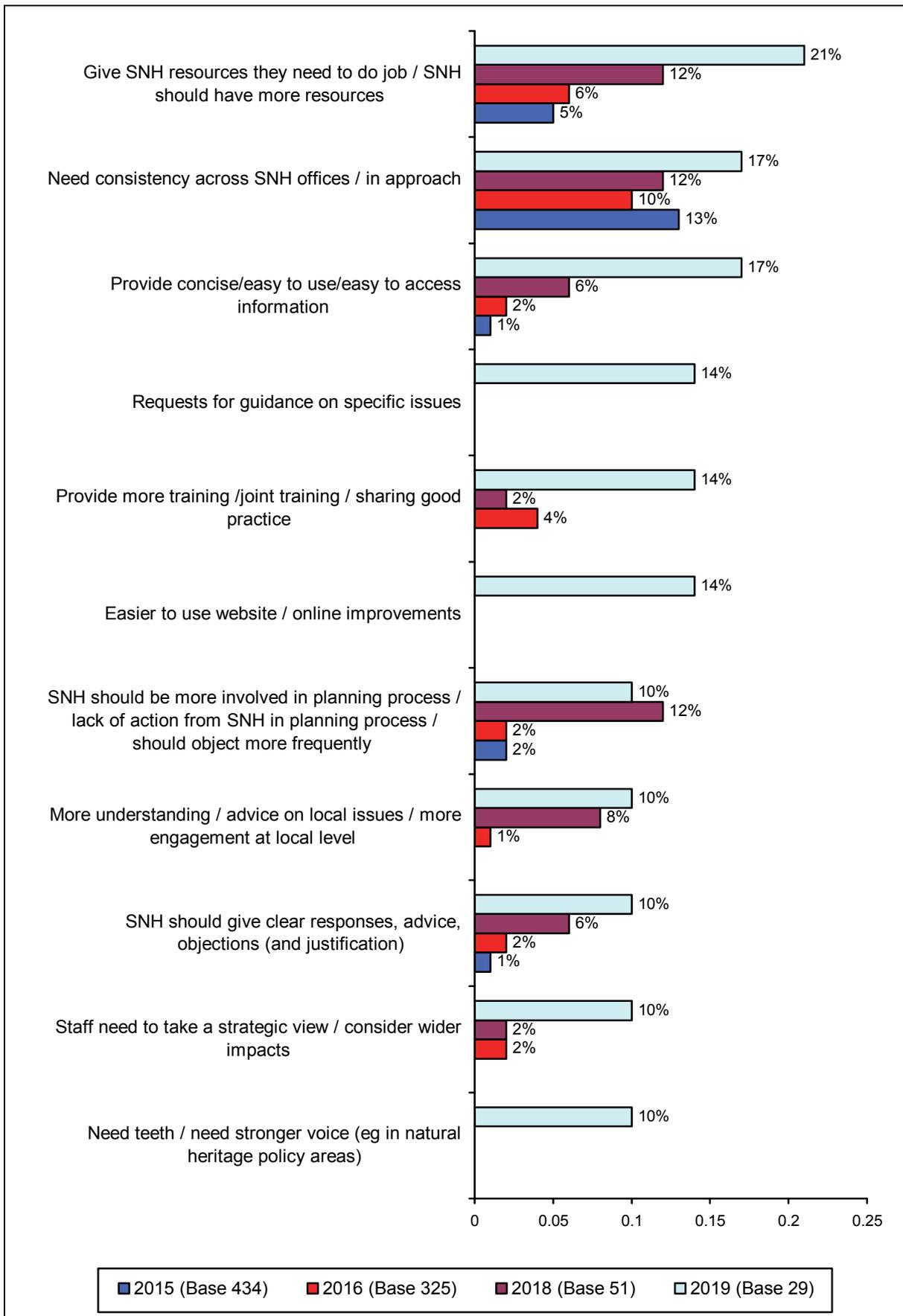
The average score for 2019 was 7.73 out of 10.

Looking at actual scores given by individual respondents:

- No respondents said they were not at all satisfied (score of 1).
- 43 respondents (65%) gave a score of 7, 8 or 9.
- 7 (11%) respondents gave a score of 10 (completely satisfied); these came from the Planning Authority, Planning agent and Scottish Government groupings.

3.19 Improvements to SNH's service

Finally, those respondents who had not given a score of 10 out of 10 were asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10; and 29 respondents commented in response to this question. As Figure 16 shows, key issues in 2019 were a need to provide SNH with the resources they need to go their job (21%), followed by a need for consistency across SNH offices and in their approach (17%) as well as providing concise / easy to use / easy to access information (17%).



Source: Q20b (shows all responses in 2019 made by 10% or more of respondents)

Figure 16. What SNH could do to achieve 10 out of 10

Some of these respondents echoed themes already cited such as the need for SNH to safeguard the natural environment or the need for consistency from SNH staff. There is clearly recognition of the need for SNH to be given the necessary resources to fulfil their role, with the main theme being that SNH should be given the resources they need to do their job (21%, or 6 respondents).

Below are some typical quotes from the main themes (over 10%; 4+ respondents):

That SNH should be given the resources they need to do their job, particularly in terms of staffing:

- *“Have the resources to participate more in the planning process, particularly where information or witnesses are requested in relation to appeals, hearings & public inquiries”* (Scottish Government)
- *“Have more staff on the ground to fight really bad planning applications”* (Ecological Consultant)

The need for consistency across SNH offices or consistency of approach:

- *“Communicate more clearly and consistently with NGO partners, and utilise our expertise. Ensure all case officers are providing consistent advice (i.e. consistent with one another and with your published advice and guidance).”* (NGO / Voluntary organisation)
- *“Greater consistency of advice within a single development application process (from scoping to post-application discussions) would be an important step forwards.”* (Developer interests)

The provision of concise / easy to use / easy to access information:

- *“make up to date guidance easier to find on the website”* (Planning authority)

The provision of guidance on specific issues:

- *“Have people provide direct natural heritage and biodiversity expert advice.”* (Planning authority)

The provision of more training and sharing of good practice:

- *“More training for Local Authority staff. Landscape character is an area where many councils do not have expertise and could benefit from further training.”* (Planning authority)

The availability of an easier to use website or enabling of other online improvements:

- *“I would find it beneficial if more training could be provided via webinar or VC.”* (Planning authority)

4. DATA ACROSS THE FIVE SURVEYS

While the previous chapter has examined data from this year's survey, this chapter looks at the data collected across the 5 surveys and considers what trends and differences there are in the data. The implications of this and key messages for SNH are outlined in the following chapter.

As mentioned previously, data protection issues meant that the sample used for the 2019 and 2018 surveys was greatly reduced. Invitations to participate in this survey were sent to much smaller numbers of individuals and organisations who have had contact with SNH; 200 in 2018 and 294 in 2019. These were large reductions from the 2,796 invited to participate in 2016. A total of 66 people responded to the 2019 survey and 81 to the 2018 survey. While these are good response rates for an online survey (22% in 2019 and 40% in 2018), both years are very low in absolute numbers compared with earlier surveys (e.g. 363 responses in 2016).

Given the smaller 2018 and 2019 base sizes, it is difficult to say whether any changes shown here reflect a difference in respondent views or are caused by the difference in profile. However, the data can indicate instances where trends occur. Overall the data from 2019 is more positive than that seen in 2018.

Where possible, we have included 2014 data, even although the groupings used were not exactly the same as in 2015 and 2016. In 2014, there was a far higher proportion of 'individual' respondents.

4.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

Figure 17 shows the results from a question asked in 2014 and 2015 (on agreement or disagreement that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes) and a similar question asked in 2016, 2018 and 2019 (Overall, do you agree or disagree that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes?).

At this question an average score was calculated to enable comparisons where:

- Strongly agree = 4
- Agree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Strongly disagree = 1

Thus, the nearer to 4 the average score, the higher the level of agreement.

As can be seen in the following Figure, the figures in the 2019 survey are similar to those seen in 2016 and 2015, with a large majority of respondents considering that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process, and under one in ten disagreeing with this.

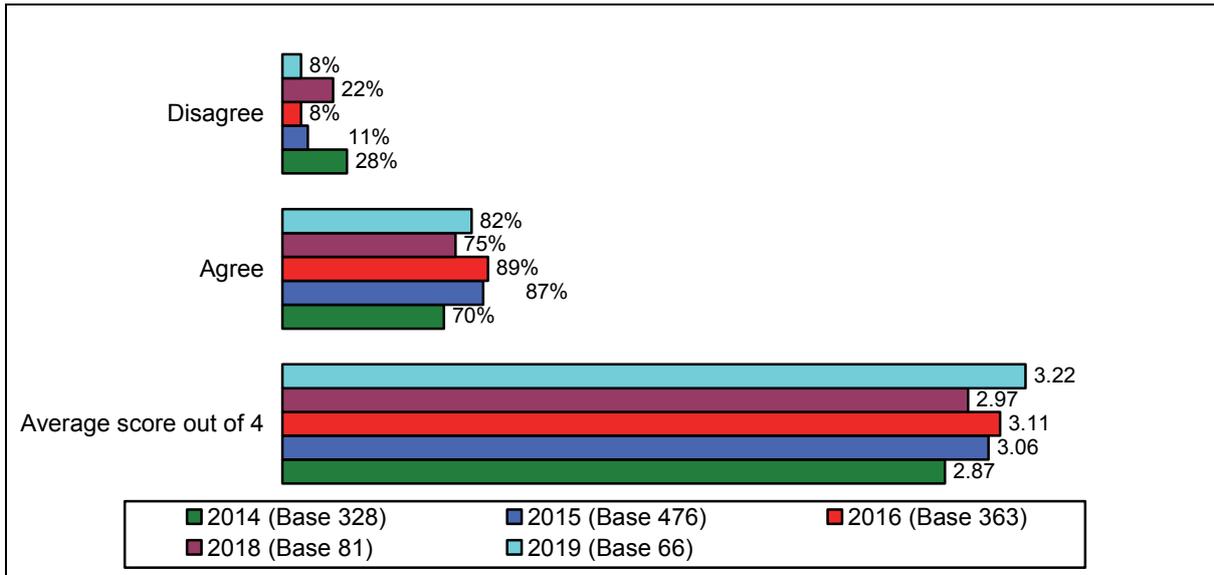


Figure 17. SNH's contribution to planning process (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

4.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling

A new question was added in 2016 and repeated in subsequent surveys: 'Please can you give any specific examples of where SNH could have been more enabling or made a more positive contribution to the planning system'.

The main themes seen in 2019 responses were:

- The need for SNH to be more robust in its involvement on specific local issues or planning applications.
- SNH to focus on being a strong advocate for the natural heritage and biodiversity.

These broadly fit with some comments seen in previous surveys, albeit that the emphasis on some issues changes year on year. So, for example, the main themes in 2018 focussed on the need for SNH to comment on more applications or to be stronger in its objections, or that SNH was too pro-development, while the main theme in 2016 was about advice from staff being inconsistent, ambiguous or perceived as obstructive.

4.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

SNH's remit over recent years has been to be more accessible and responsive and respondents were asked to indicate how easy it is to contact relevant staff at SNH.

Figure 18 shows the changes since 2014.

Again, an average score was calculated to enable comparisons where:

- Very easy = 4
- Quite easy = 3
- Not very easy = 2
- Not at all easy = 1

Thus, the nearer to 4 the average score, the higher the perception of ease of contact.

In 2019, views remain broadly positive, with just over three quarters (79%) of respondents agreeing, to some extent, that it is easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH. This is slightly higher than the figure of 72% seen in 2018 and is at a similar level to 2016 (78%) and 2015 (79%).

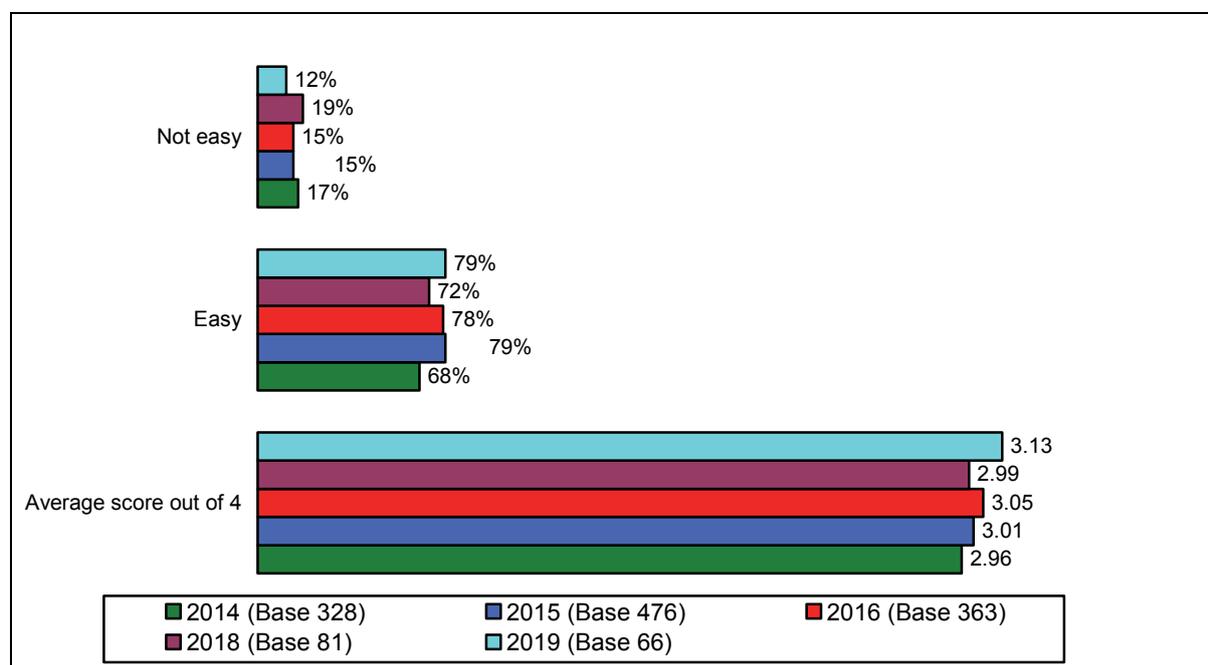


Figure 18. Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

4.4 SNH services used

SNH offers a wide range of services to organisations, communities and the general public as part of its overall planning services. This part of the survey was designed to help understand the scale of use of these services, and by whom.

Respondents were asked which services they had used and whether these had been mainly accessed directly (through SNH correspondence by letter or email) or indirectly (through the SNH website).

Figure 19 shows results from 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019. The vast majority of respondents used several services. Data from 2014 has also been included in the Figure. However, the list of services and specific names used changed somewhat between the 2014 and 2015 surveys and this, coupled with the much higher proportion of 'individual' respondents in 2014 probably explains the differences in results between 2014 and subsequent years.

Views are broadly similar across these surveys, with guidance (on planning and development matters) and guidance (awareness of natural heritage assets) being the two most popular services in 2019 and used by 86% and 85% of respondents respectively. In 2019 there has been a slight decrease in the numbers using natural heritage site data and advice on specific development proposals, including pre-application discussions). There have been slight increases in 2019 in terms of use of good practice guidance and case studies, research findings, advice on specific plans and associated SEA/HRA and species licenses.

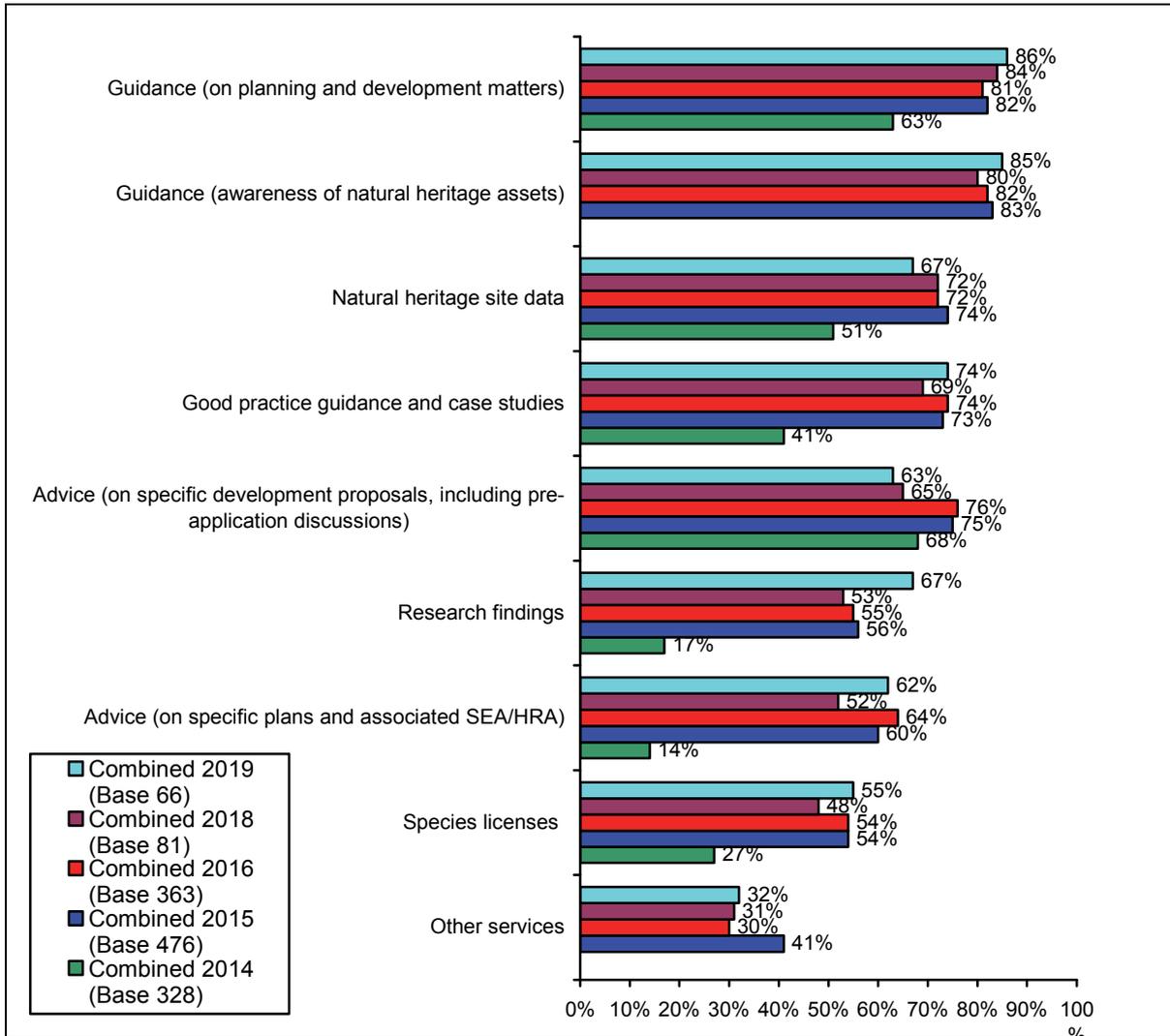


Figure 19. SNH services used (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

4.5 Views on SNH services

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements about these services. Seven of these statements related specifically to SNH services and eight related to advice provided by SNH.

The seven statements had also been asked in the 2015 survey and most had been asked in 2014. Table 3 shows the average scores (out of a potential 5) for the 2019, 2018, 2016 and 2015 surveys, for comparison between the years. Totals from the 2014 survey are also included for those questions which were asked in 2014.

Encouragingly, 2019 has seen increases across all bar one of these services since 2018; as well as increases across all of these services since the start of the survey in 2014.

Table 3. Views on SNH services (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 average scores)

	2019	2018	2016	2015	2014
SNH is willing to engage in pre-application discussions.	4.20	3.75	3.89	3.85	3.70
At Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, SNH's engagement is influential.	4.11	3.86	3.88	3.85	-
Engaging in pre-application discussions has resulted in better-quality planning applications.	3.98	3.71	3.85	3.88	-
The SNH staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed.	3.78	3.61	3.72	3.62	3.47
SNH's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes.	3.77	3.51	3.61	3.48	3.19
SNH's role at the various stages of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process is clearly defined.	3.70	3.54	3.49	3.47	-
The reasons given by SNH for requests for further information are clearly explained.	3.68	3.72	3.62	3.57	3.52

4.6 Views on advice given by SNH

Respondents were also asked for their agreement or disagreement with a range of statements on advice given by SNH.

The average scores (out of a potential 5 for strongly agree) for statements on advice from the 2019, 2018, 2016 and 2015 surveys are shown in table 4. Totals from the 2014 survey are also included for those questions which were asked in 2014.

As table 4 demonstrates, overall, the responses were positive over the years. There have been slight increases for most of these services since the 2018 survey; and in many instances these also show an increase on earlier surveys.

Table 4. Views on SNH advice (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 average scores)

	2019	2018	2016	2015	2014
SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process	3.81	3.84	3.74	3.76	
When dealing with development plans or spatial strategies, SNH advice has helped me improve outcomes for landscape and nature	3.59	3.45	3.52	3.50	3.29
SNH's advice on development planning has helped promote green networks and green infrastructure as an integral component of successful place-making	3.57	3.41	3.40	3.39	
When dealing with development proposals, SNH advice has helped me improve outcomes for landscape & nature	3.56	3.47	3.72	3.64	3.29
When dealing with development frameworks (development briefs or masterplans), SNH advice has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature	3.47	3.38	3.43	3.39	
SNH's advice is unambiguous, clear and concise	3.45	3.23	3.52	3.43	3.10
Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all SNH departments/offices	3.34	3.31	3.22	3.13	3.17
SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies	3.14	3.05	3.12	3.08	2.92

4.7 Examples of inconsistencies

Respondents who disagreed with the statements 'SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies' or 'Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all SNH departments/offices' were invited to provide examples of inconsistencies in advice that they have experienced either between SNH departments or between SNH and other agencies. Nine respondents identified inconsistencies, with 3 of these relating to landscape advice, particularly regarding wind farms.

4.8 Awareness of SNH Service Statement

The SNH Service Statement is a key document for customers to be aware of in terms of what input they can expect from SNH.

Figure 20 shows that there have been year-on-year increases in the proportions of respondents who have read this document and who are aware of it, with allied decreases in the proportion of respondents who are not aware of the Service Statement. The vast majority of SNH's customers should therefore be in a position of knowing what to expect from SNH's service.

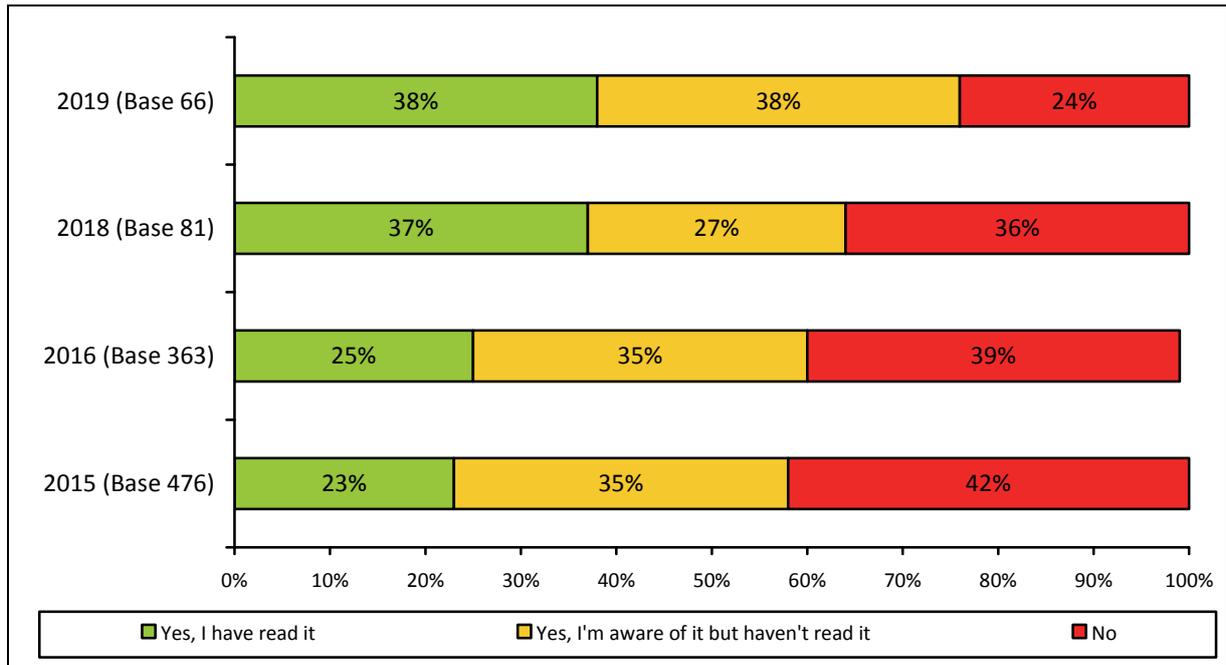


Figure 20. Awareness of Service Statement (2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

4.9 Views on SNH guidance

Each year, respondents have been asked to what extent they agreed with a series of statements (from a score of 5 for 'agree strongly' to a 1 for 'disagree strongly').

As Figure 21 shows, these results are positive and show a slight increase in 2019 across most of these statements.

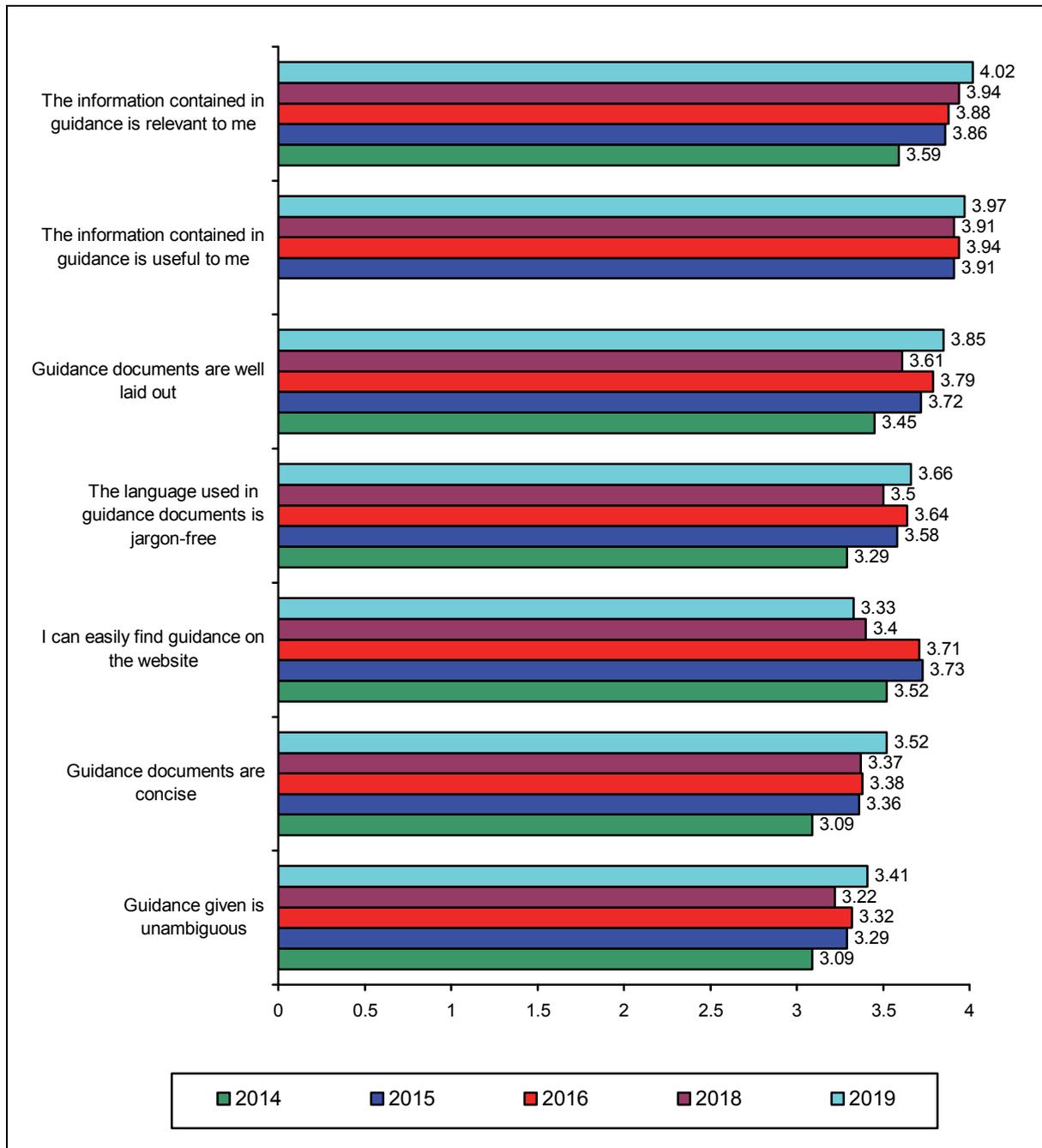


Figure 21. Views on SNH guidance (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

4.10 Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH’s website

Respondents were also asked to indicate how useful they found the information and/or guidance that they have accessed through the SNH website.

Figure 22 shows the data from 2019, 2018, 2016, 2015 and 2014.

At this question an average score was calculated to enable comparisons where:

- Very useful = 4
- Quite useful = 3
- Not very useful = 2
- Not at all useful = 1

Thus, the nearer to 4 the average score, the higher the level of perceived usefulness.

As Figure 22 shows, there has been an increase this year in the proportion considering information and / or guidance through SNH’s website is useful, with all but 5% of customers agreeing.

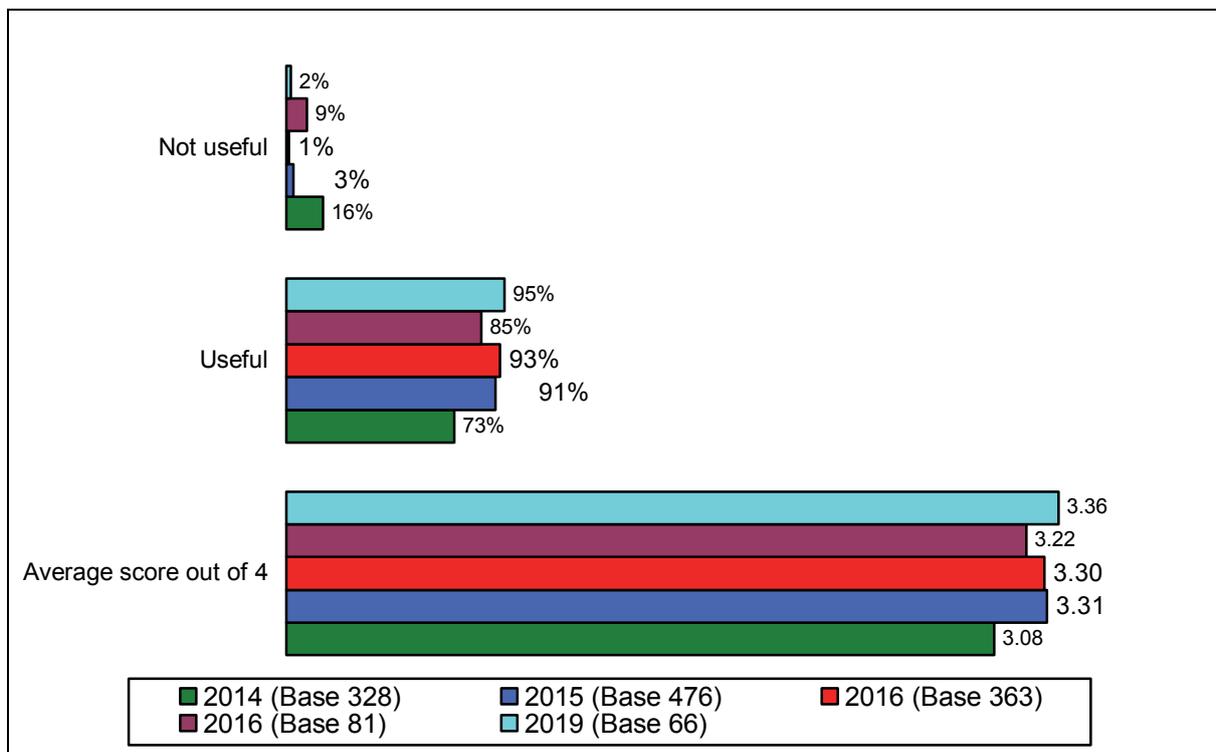


Figure 22. Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH’s website (2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019)

4.11 Possible improvements to SNH guidance

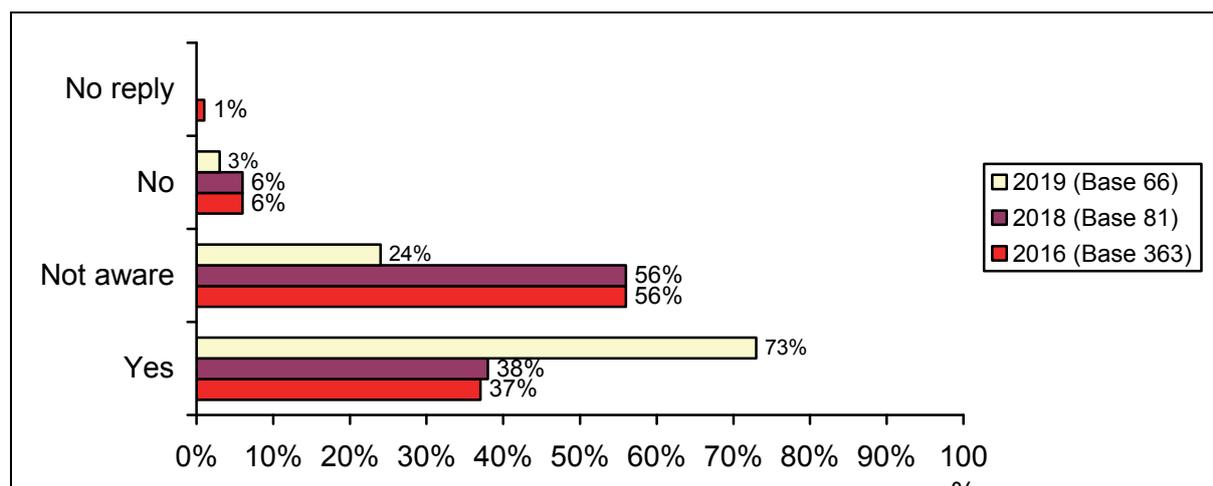
Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further comment on what SNH could do to improve its guidance in order to help reduce impacts on the natural heritage.

In 2016 and 2018, a main theme was the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamlined. In 2019, respondents focussed on the need for guidance to be

more widely publicised and accessible; there were also some references of a need to ensure that guidance is set in a wider context than at present.

4.12 Planning and Development e-newsletter

In 2016, a new question was added asking respondents: ‘Did you find SNH’s Planning and Development e-newsletter useful?’ This was repeated in 2018 and 2019. While there was low awareness initially and little difference between 2016 and 2018, the data in 2019 shows a large increase in the proportion of respondents who claim to have found this e-newsletter useful (73%).



Source: Q10

Figure 23. Usefulness of SNH’s Planning and Development e-newsletter

4.13 What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

Respondents were also asked to say what else SNH could do in support of the guidance to better help other organisations consider natural heritage assets. As the data shows, hosting a programme of sharing good practice events continues to be the most popular suggestion, followed closely in 2019 by the delivery of capacity-building and / or continued professional development training. Since the 2016 survey, the proportions of respondents wishing to see all of the forms of support has increased.

Table 5. What else could SNH do in support of their guidance?

	2019 %	2018 %	2016 %
Host a programme of sharing good practice events	71	78	65
Deliver capacity-building and/or continued professional development training	68	54	55
Develop online, interactive scenario-based eLearning activities	52	42	36
Develop video podcasts that demonstrate best practice and guidance in action	50	36	33
Deliver a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals	48	41	37
Other	17	20	6
Don’t know/no reply	3	3	13

Source: Q9

4.14 Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA

There has been a very slight decline in the percentage of respondents finding SNH's responses in relation to SEA useful (39%). This compared to 41% in 2018 and 35% in 2016). Only 2% claimed not to find this useful, compared to 5% in 2018 and 1% in 2016. Across all three surveys, almost half the sample (48%) replied 'don't know' or that they had no involvement in SEA.

4.15 SNH's focus

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of SNH's efforts in a range of areas of its work. Table 6, below, shows the average scores (out of a possible 10) for each area, which range from 7.93 to 9.02. Positively for SNH, 2019 has continued to show an increase across all areas except one (i.e. pre-application discussions) in terms of the importance of SNH's efforts.

Across the surveys, there has been a slight change in emphasis, and respondents in 2019 identified Habitats Regulations Appraisal as the area most would like to see SNH focus its efforts. This was followed by Strategic and Local Development Plans and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Table 6. Focus of SNH efforts

	Average 2019	Average 2018	Average 2016	Average 2015
Habitats Regulations Appraisal	9.02	8.38	8.02	7.85
Strategic and Local Development Plans	8.66	8.45	7.98	7.91
Strategic Environmental Assessment	8.52	8.27	7.55	7.48
Pre-application discussion	8.44	8.47	8.32	n/a
National plans	8.16	7.93	7.29	7.53
Building capacity in others through guidance and training (2015: Capacity building)	8.05	7.75	7.54	6.93
Design frameworks, development briefs, masterplanning	7.93	7.67	7.12	6.98

Source: Q17

4.16 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed).

Figure 24 shows that there has been a slight increase since 2018, although the proportion of those agreeing with this statement has not quite reached the level of agreement seen in 2016 (90%) or 2015 (85%).

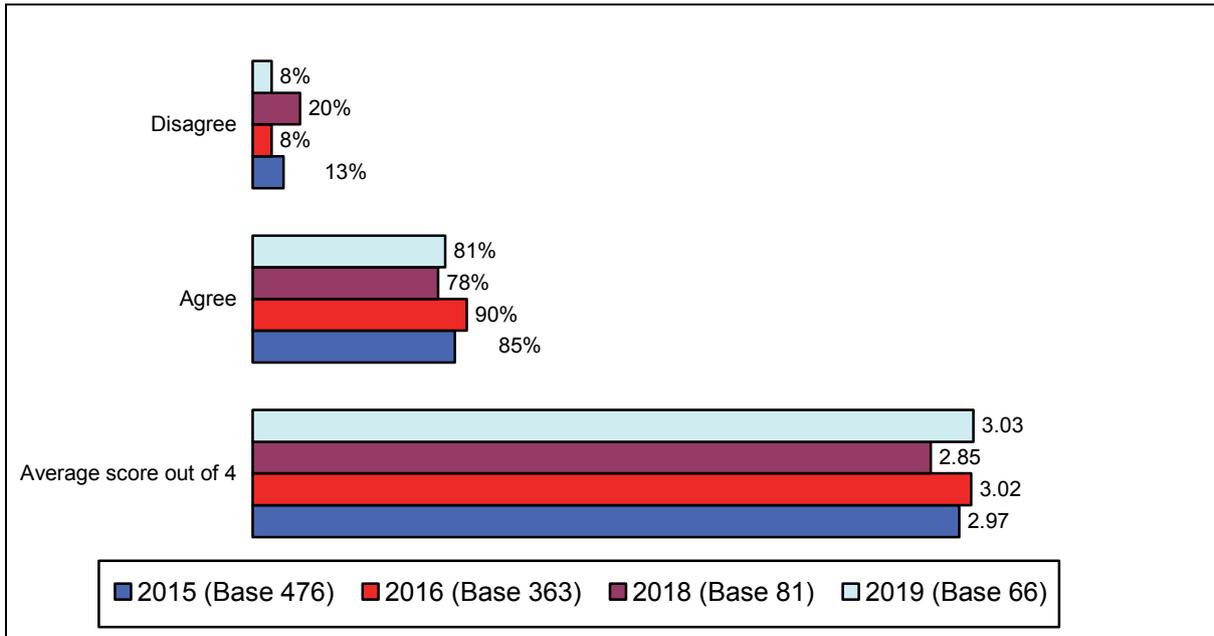


Figure 24. Whether SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019

4.17 Satisfaction with SNH's service

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating highest levels of satisfaction. As table 7 demonstrates, satisfaction levels were the highest in 2019 since the surveys started.

Table 7. Overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH

	Average Score
2019	7.73
2018	6.61
2016	7.59
2015	7.39

Source: Q20a

4.18 Improvements to SNH's service

Finally, those respondents who had not given a score of 10 out of 10 were asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10. While a key comment in 2018 was of the need for SNH to safeguard and support the natural environment, the key comment in 2019 is for the need for SNH to be given the resources they need to do their job properly. As in previous surveys, there was also reference to the need for consistency across SNH offices and consistency of approach.

5. KEY MESSAGES FROM THE 5 YEARS

Although not all five versions of the survey are directly comparable, for the reasons outlined earlier, there are some recurring themes and key messages for SNH to consider.

The trends and messages from across the five surveys show that, in many cases, where there are higher proportions of individual-interest, rather than professional, respondents ratings tend to be lower. This may be because many of the individual respondents have contacted SNH in relation to a local matter, or are dissatisfied with SNH's response to a local development.

The data in 2019 is more in line with data from the 2016 and 2015 customer surveys; in some instances the 2019 data is even more positive than has been seen in previous surveys, and overall results are very positive.

The following paragraphs outline some of the recurring themes and messages from the four surveys.

5.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

Respondents continue to agree that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes. The figures in the 2019 survey were similar to those seen in 2016 and 2015, and a large majority of respondents considered that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process and only a small proportion disagreed with this.

That said, there were still concerns that SNH should be more robust in its involvement in planning applications or on specific local issues and that the organisation should focus on its role as being an advocate for the natural heritage. So, for example, there were some requests for SNH to provide stronger objections on some planning applications.

The 2019 data also point to the need for SNH staff and other agencies to offer consistent advice to customers.

The data also continues to suggest a need for closer engagement and involvement with local communities on issues relating to planning applications.

5.2 Managing customer relations

A majority of respondents continued to note that relevant SNH staff are easy to contact and this suggests that SNH staff manage customer relationships relatively well. The data show that SNH's approach to be more accessible and responsive to customers as well as becoming more involved in pre-application discussions appears to be recognised by respondents.

5.3 SNH services and advice

Usage of SNH services and advice is relatively high, although more specialist guidance and advice tends to be used by lower numbers of customers. That said, guidance issued by SNH is clearly important and is used by high proportions of respondents. The data points to the importance of ensuring that advice is concise, unambiguous and easy to access, with some references to the need for clear signposting on the SNH website.

Respondents were largely positive about SNH services, particularly in relation to SNH's willingness to engage in pre-application discussions, their engagement at EIA scopings and looking for solutions to landscape and nature conservation so that developments can be progressed. Again, these results point to the importance of managing customer

relationships, providing consistent advice that is unambiguous and concise and outlining SNH's role at the various stages of the EIA process.

Most of the SNH services assessed in this Customer Survey show year-on-year increases between 2019 and 2015 (the exception being in 2018, when the sample profile was very different).

5.4 SNH Service Statement

The data suggest that SNH has continued to do a good job in raising awareness of the SNH Service Statement as figures for this have risen consistently since 2015 and are now at the highest level seen. There will be a need for SNH to continue to raise awareness of its Service Statement so as to ensure that it is used by all relevant audiences.

5.5 SNH guidance

Views on SNH guidance continue to be positive, especially in relation to its usefulness and relevance. However, the least positive views continue to be about the unambiguity of guidance and there is a need for SNH to address this by way of how guidance is presented to customers. The data shows there is also a need to ensure there is clear signposting on the SNH website to ensure that guidance is easy and quick to access.

Ratings for the usefulness of information and/or advice accessed through SNH's website have been consistently high across the five surveys and this has now reached the highest level seen.

The actions undertaken by SNH to support their guidance are welcomed, with respondents welcoming opportunities for face-to-face contact with SNH staff, for example sharing good practice events or training opportunities. While SNH needs to exploit a wide range of different communication channels, smaller proportions of respondents show enthusiasm for other approaches such as video podcasts, webinars or eLearning activities.

Overall, the data continues to point to the need for SNH to use a wide range of communication and information channels. For example, while the website is important as a source of guidance, the data also demonstrates the importance of direct contact for customers if they wish to discuss a specific issue. As such, the SNH website, newsletters and guidance are all clearly important channels for the provision of information, but there are occasions when customers want to discuss a specific issue directly with SNH staff.

5.6 Planning and Development e-newsletter

SNH's efforts to develop a Planning and Development e-newsletter have clearly paid off with awareness of this having increased considerably in 2019. However, it will be important for SNH to ensure that all relevant individuals are aware of this.

5.7 SNH's focus

Respondents are positive about different areas in which SNH has been focussing in recent years and the data suggests that this should continue, particularly in terms of their involvement in Habitats Regulations Appraisal and Strategic and Local Development Plans. Again, this data points to the importance attributed to SNH in terms of its role in the planning process.

5.8 Satisfaction with SNH's service

Overall satisfaction with the service provided by SNH is at its highest level to date and the decrease seen in 2018 has been reversed.

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