Veterinary Schools Council Employer Survey 2017

A national survey of employers' attitudes towards recent graduate competency

VSC

Veterinary Schools Council

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Contents

Who we are

The Veterinary Schools Council provides a source of informed opinion on matters concerning veterinary education and research. We engage in representative and policy work to ensure that the voice of veterinary schools is recognised for its experience and innovation. For more information, visit www.vetschoolscouncil.ac.uk.

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- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
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- University of Nottingham
- Royal Veterinary College

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- University College Dublin
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Background to the survey

It is essential for veterinary schools to know how their graduates get on in the workplace. This helps them ensure that the education they provide is aligned with the needs of veterinary practice and the profession, and these needs are always evolving. The views of veterinary employers are crucial to this process.

Veterinary schools have collected feedback from employers for a number of years, but this has been undertaken independently by each veterinary school, looking only at their own graduates. This results in data which cannot be used to build a national picture of graduates. It is also a burden for employers to ask that they complete multiple surveys, and this can lead to a low response rate.

A new approach

The Veterinary Schools Council was well placed to conduct a UK-wide survey of employers on the subject of their recent graduates.

This approach simplifies the process for employers and will provide information which will enable a deeper understanding of the relationship between veterinary education and employers' needs. This is the first Veterinary Schools Council employer survey, with similar surveys planned in future years. It is hoped that over time a significant body of data will be built up, allowing for ever more powerful analyses of the outcomes of veterinary education.

Development of this survey was led by the Veterinary Schools Council Education Committee. It was made in collaboration with Work Psychology Group and its distribution was facilitated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, as well as use of social media and local networks by veterinary schools.

Format

Respondents were asked for feedback on the performance of their most recently employed graduate from a UK, Irish or Dutch veterinary school. Where more than one graduate started at the same time (within the previous two years) the respondent was asked to complete the survey in terms of one of them only.

The survey to the form of questions which required answers on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 for Not Competent, 5 for Highly Competent), and answers in free text.

Highlights

There were 576 responses to the survey. The results suggest that graduates are broadly competent across the range of attributes surveyed.

The question items were grouped into categories, which are here ranked in order of the overall mean competency score of the items within each category.

Categories by overall mean competency score of contained items

Category	Items in category	Score
Empathy	2 items	4.0
Communication and Collaboration	7 items	3.9
Clinical and Practical Skills	14 items	3.9
Professionalism and Professional Identity	8 items	3.8
Decision Making	8 items	3.7
Resilience	5 items	3.5
Financial and Business Management	5 items	3.1

Top mean competency scores for individual question items

| Item	Category	Score
Can carry out basic sedation and anaesthesia procedures	Clinical and practical skills	4.2
Is able to perform a complete clinical examination, appropriate to the circumstances	Clinical and practical skills	4.2
Shows sensitivity to the feelings of owners and others, in relation to recommending euthanasia	Empathy	4.1
Is able to assess pain and implement analgesic protocols	Clinical and practical skills	4.1
Is able to obtain an accurate and relevant history of the animal/animal group and the animals environment	Communication and collaboration	4.1
Prepares accurate clinical and client records, ensuring that language is clear and legible	Communication and collaboration	4.1
Adapts language to ensure effective communication with colleagues	Communication and collaboration	4.1

Lowest mean competency scores for individual question items

Item	Category	Score
Can perform a systematic post-mortem examination, including recording their observations	Clinical and practical skills	3.2
Demonstrates an understanding of the economic context of the veterinary profession	Financial and business management	3.2
Is aware of the legislation affecting veterinary businesses (e.g. disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines)	Financial and business management	3.2
Demonstrates knowledge of systems of quality assurance (e.g. knowledge and explanation of the procedure for reporting adverse incidents)	Financial and business management	3.2
Remains calm and appears comfortable working in pressurised situations	Resilience	3.2
Shows an awareness of expenditures involved in running a veterinary business	Financial and business management	2.8

Data – profile

Number of graduates by location of employment
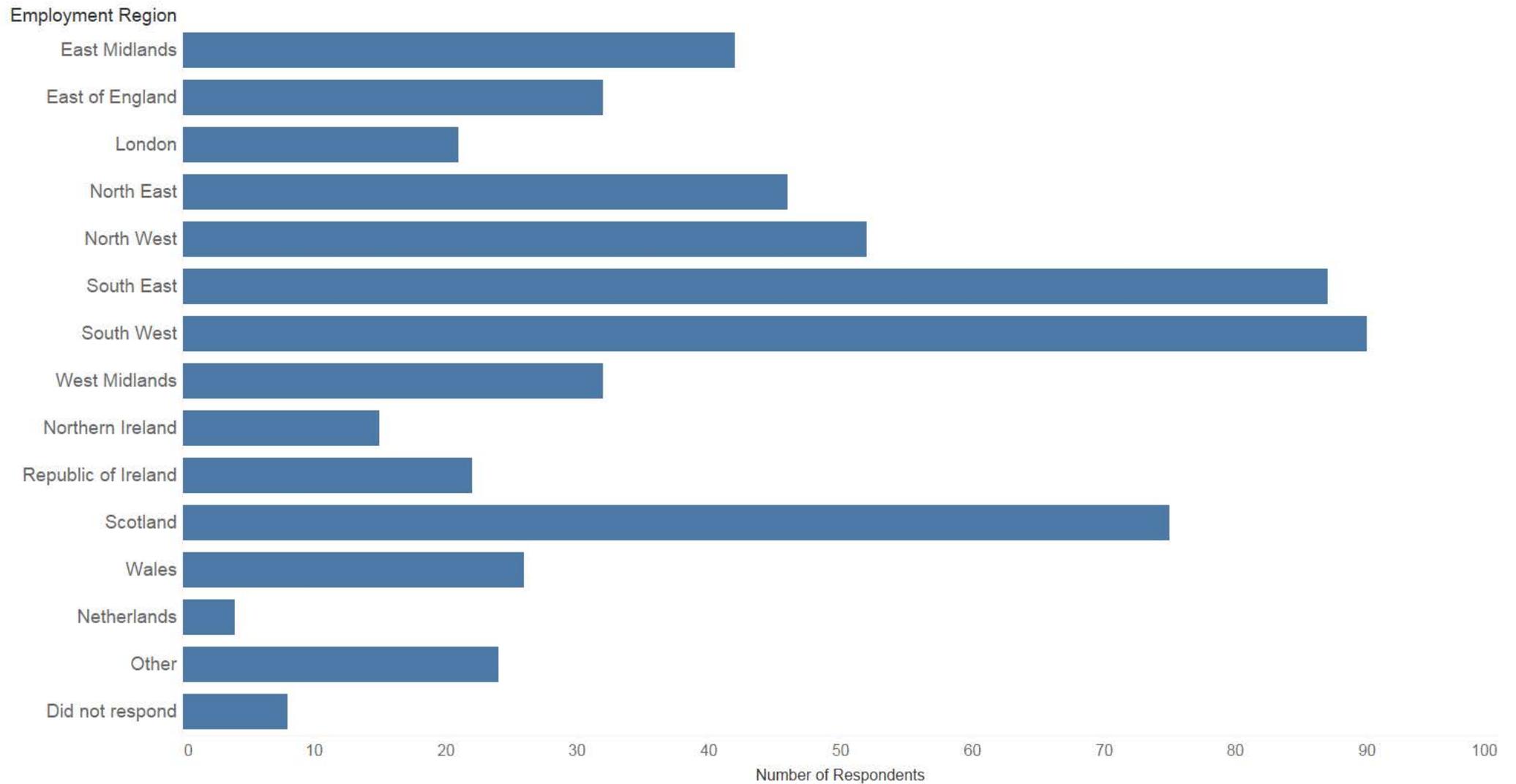
Number of graduates by employment specialism
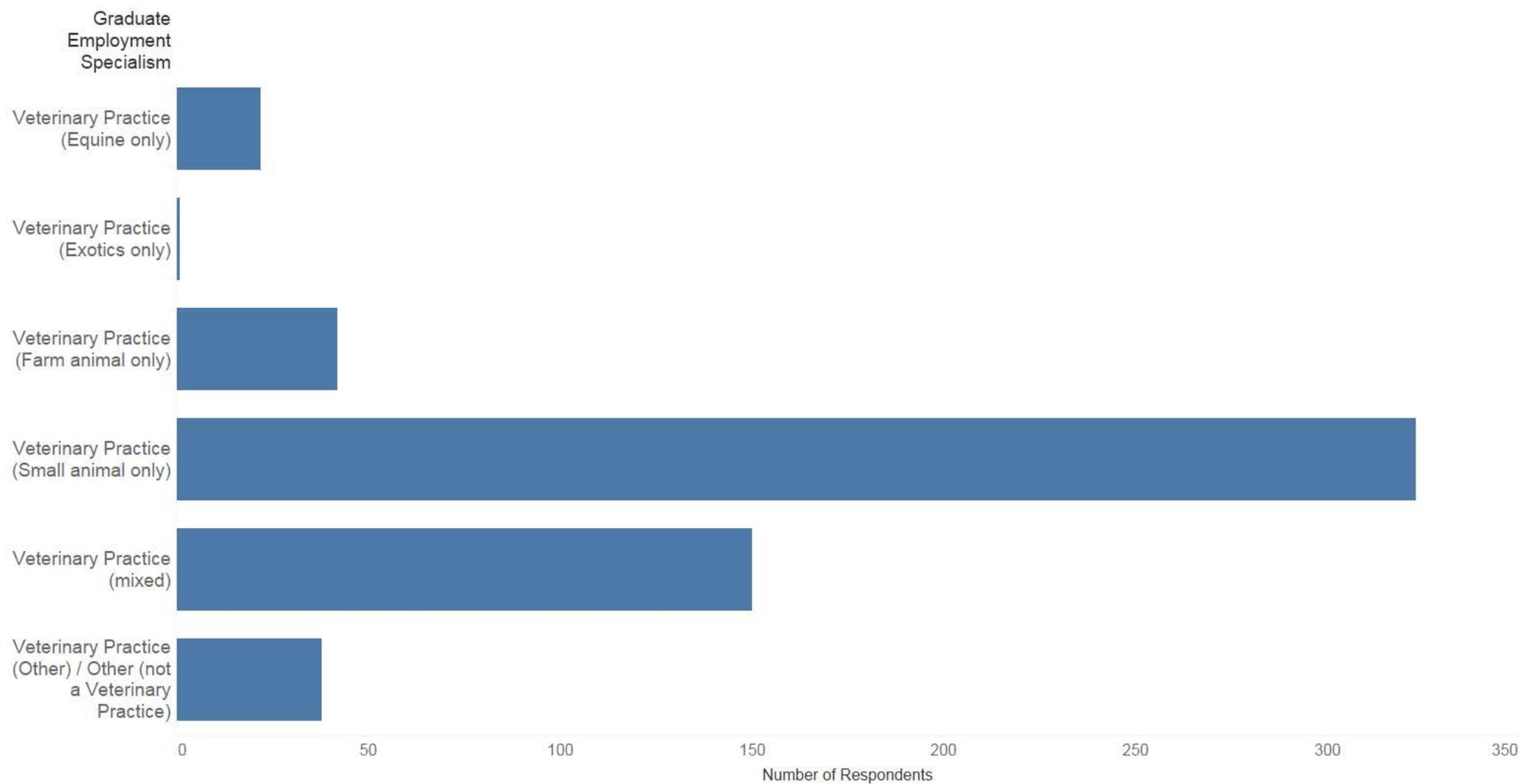
Number of graduates by employment duration

Number of graduates by place of qualification
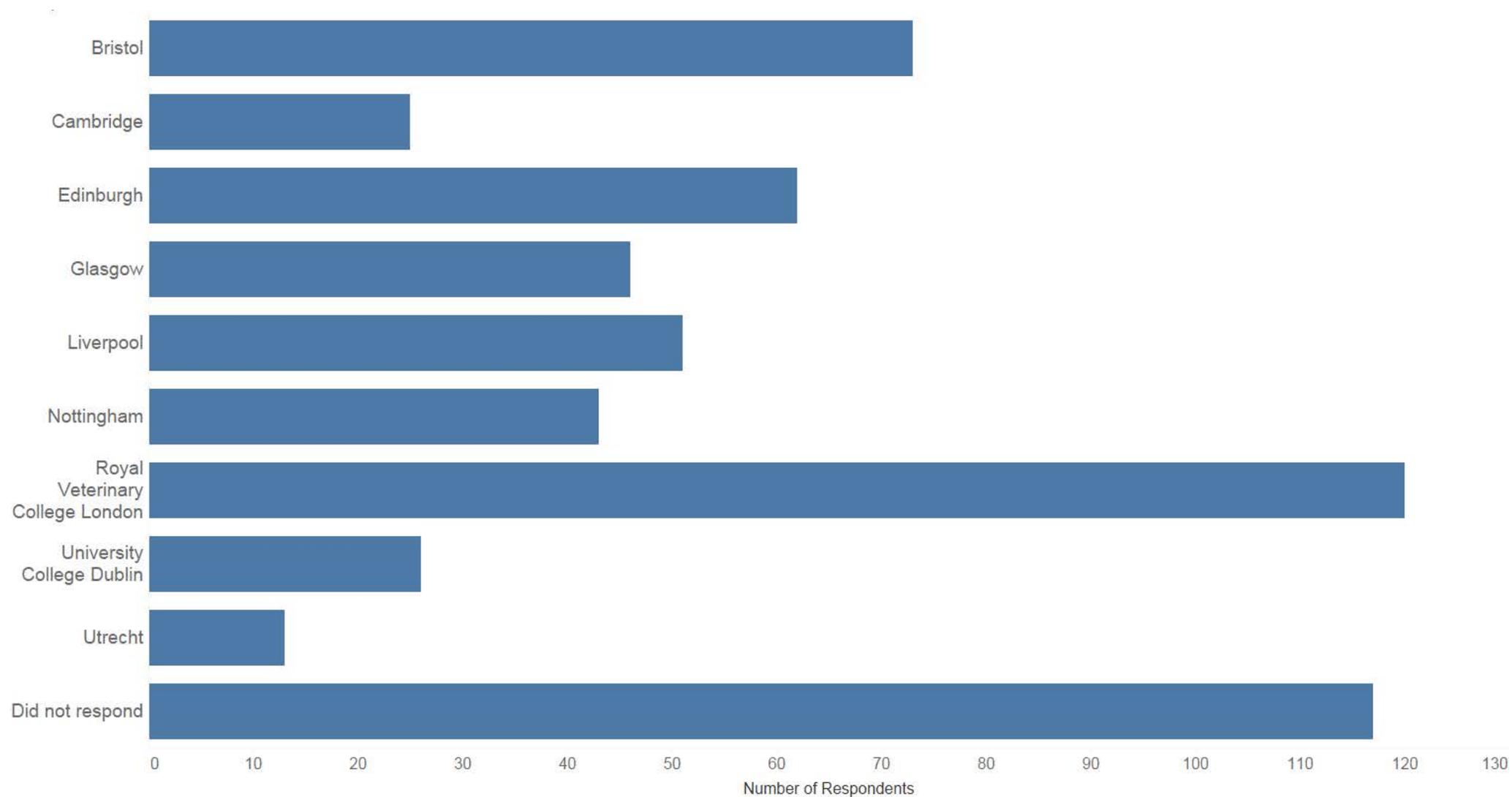
Data – competency

Question responses to Communication and Collaboration

Legend:
- Not competent (orange)
- Uncertain (teal)
- Somewhat competent (red)
- Competent (blue)

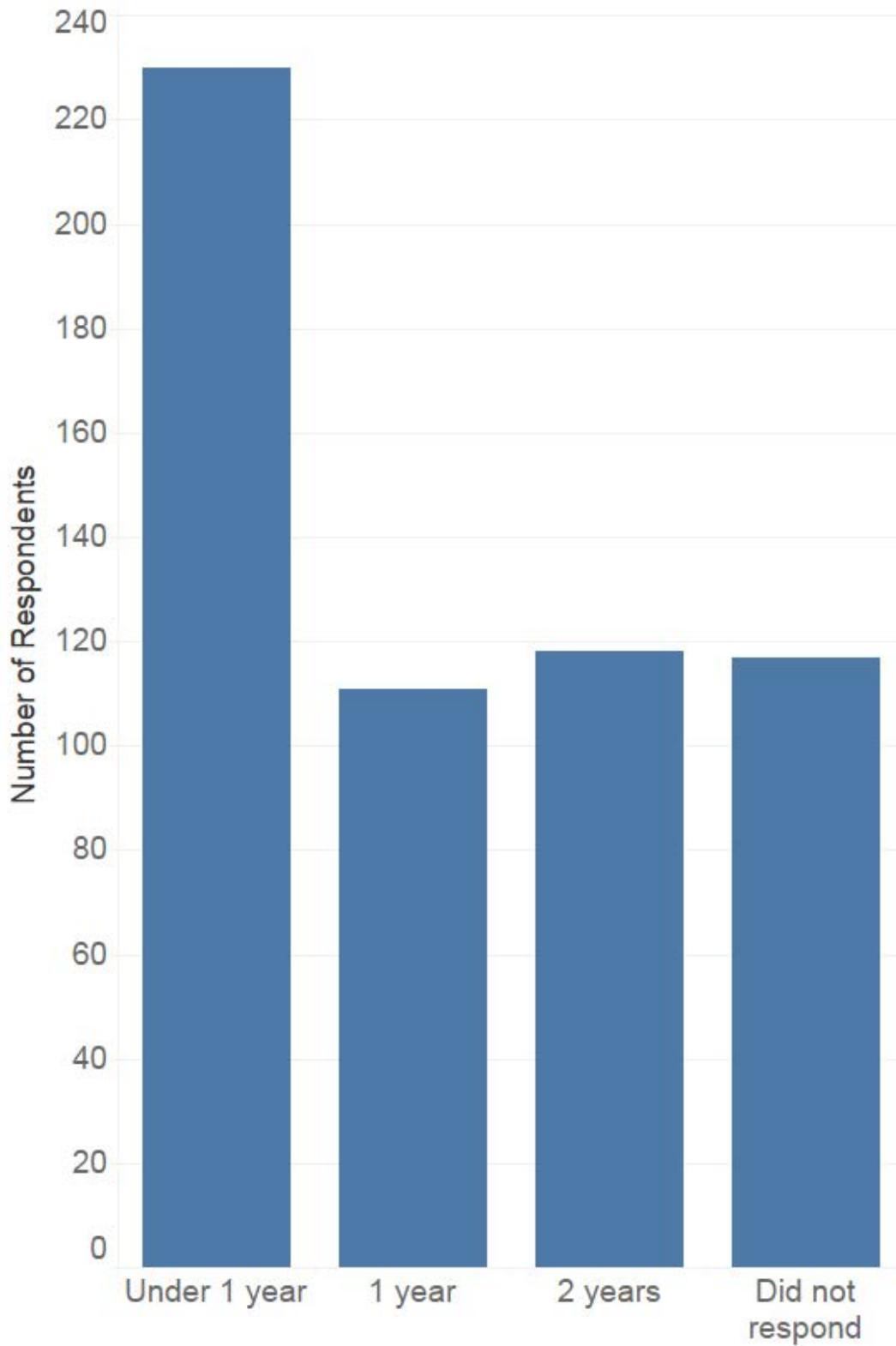| Code	Not competent	Somewhat competent	Uncertain	Competent
CAC1	6.00%	13.25%	10.75%	70.00%
CAC2		8.59%	6.57%	81.57%
CAC3	4.26%	10.78%	9.27%	75.69%
CAC4		10.58%	4.79%	82.87%
CAC5		7.83%	4.80%	84.34%
CAC6	11.28%	13.28%	14.04%	61.40%
CAC7	3.80%	8.35%	6.58%	81.27%

% of respondents
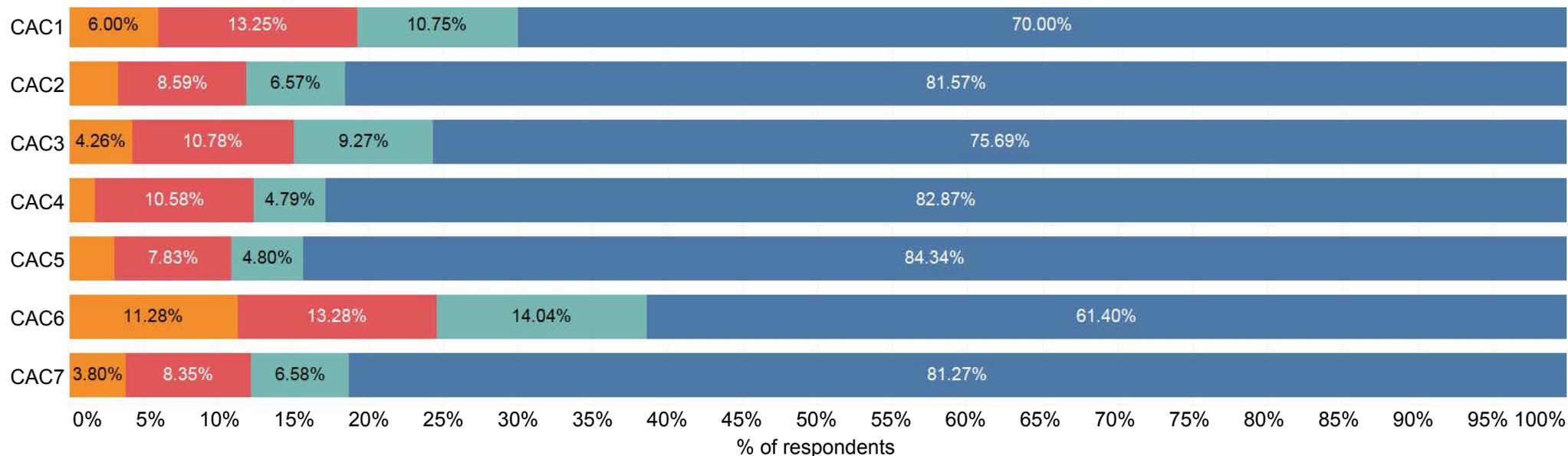
CAC1	Adapts language to ensure effective communication with clients (e.g. when dealing with a complaint)
CAC2	Adapts language to ensure effective communication with colleagues
CAC3	Listens to others and responds appropriately depending on the context, using both verbal and non-verbal communication
CAC4	Prepares accurate clinical and client records, ensuring that language is clear and legible
CAC5	Is able to obtain an accurate and relevant history of the animal/animal group and the animals environment
CAC6	Demonstrates effective interpersonal interactions including leadership, communication, management and teamwork
CAC7	Has an understanding of the various roles within the veterinary team (e.g. receptionists, students, veterinary nurses)

Question responses to Clinical and Practical Skills

	Not competent	Somewhat competent	Uncertain	Competent
CPS1		8.11%		85.59%
CPS2		7.60%		88.75%
CPS3	6.71%	14.94%	8.23%	70.12%
CPS4	4.85%	12.73%	3.94%	78.48%
CPS5	3.61%	15.06%	5.12%	76.20%
CPS6	3.73%	10.56%		83.54%
CPS7		6.44%		89.26%
CPS8	9.51%	15.34%	9.51%	65.64%
CPS9		8.84%	3.96%	84.15%
CPS10	11.29%	13.71%	31.85%	43.15%
CPS11		10.94%	10.03%	75.68%
CPS12		6.10%		90.55%
CPS13		7.76%	9.01%	81.06%
CPS14		9.35%	18.06%	69.35%

% of respondents
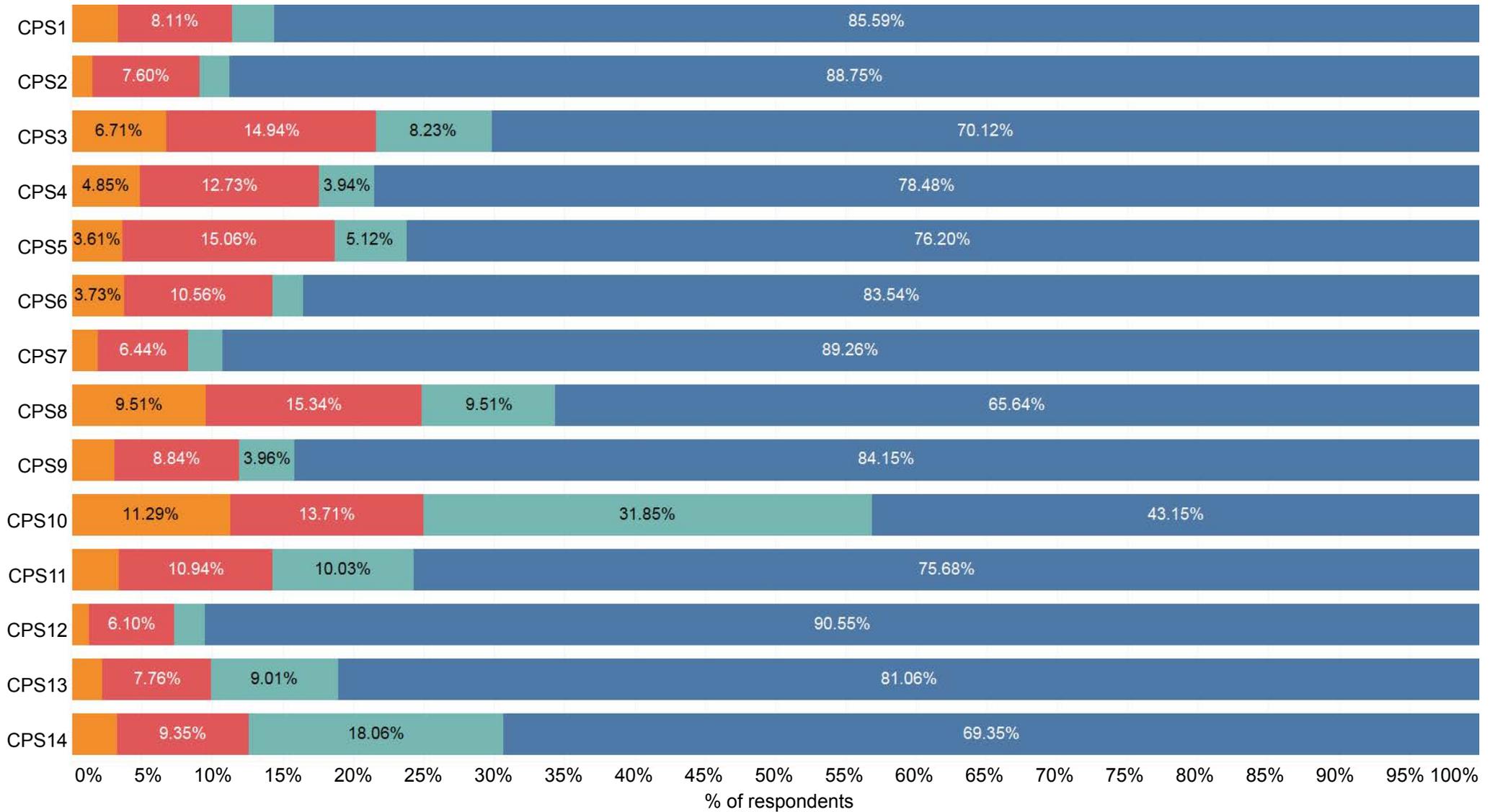
CPS1	Handles and restrains patients in a safe and humane way
CPS2	Is able to perform a complete clinical examination, appropriate to the circumstances
CPS3	Develops and tailors appropriate treatment plans, whilst considering financial or other constraints
CPS4	Is able to perform basic emergency care
CPS5	Performs the relevant tests for a condition under investigation and can interpret results where appropriate
CPS6	Uses basic imaging equipment to carry out an examination effectively and in accordance with local safety regulations
CPS7	Is able to assess pain and implement analgesic protocols
CPS8	Is able to perform surgery appropriate to their role
CPS9	Is able to recognise when euthanasia is appropriate and carry this out humanely
CPS10	Can perform a systematic post-mortem examination, including recording their observations
CPS11	Is able to advise clients on principles of care, nutrition and husbandry
CPS12	Can carry out basic sedation and anaesthesia procedures
CPS13	Is able to apply principles of bio-security correctly
CPS14	Demonstrates an awareness of veterinary public health issues e.g. epidemiology, zoonotic and food-borne diseases

Question responses to Decision Making

	Not competent	Somewhat competent	Uncertain	Competent
DMA1	4.64%	16.94%	4.64%	73.77%
DMA2		17.63%	5.23%	73.83%
DMA3	5.25%	14.64%	5.52%	74.59%
DMA4	8.77%	15.62%	7.40%	68.22%
DMA5	6.61%	14.60%	10.19%	68.60%
DMA6	11.36%	16.07%	14.40%	58.17%
DMA7		12.53%	4.46%	80.22%
DMA8	3.98%	11.08%	14.49%	70.45%

% of respondents
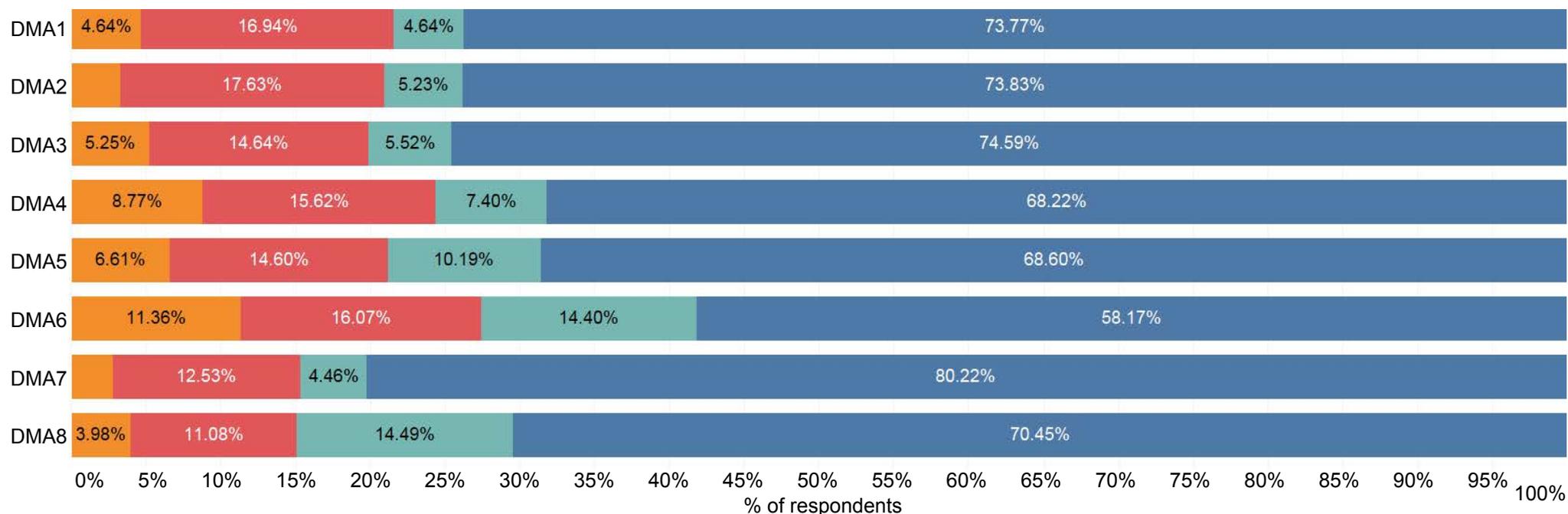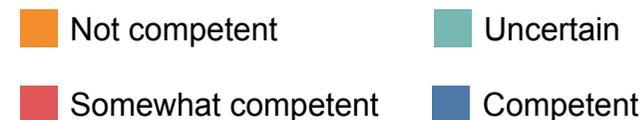
DMA1	Is able to make day to day decisions required of the role
DMA2	Demonstrates the ability to select the appropriate diagnostic tests
DMA3	Manages cases and makes decisions based on case information
DMA4	Adapts approach to problem solving and decision making based on the circumstances
DMA5	Demonstrates reflection on own decisions and learns from the outcome to make changes to own practice
DMA6	Demonstrates the ability to think through a dilemma when faced with conflicting priorities and is able to justify their decision
DMA7	Demonstrates an understanding of the contribution of imaging and other diagnostic tests in decision making
DMA8	Demonstrates an appreciation for and understanding of research methods and the contribution of basic and applied veterinary science

Question responses to Empathy

Legend: Not competent (orange), Uncertain (teal), Somewhat competent (red), Competent (blue)

	EMP1	EMP2	EMP3
Not competent	4.08%		6.39%
Somewhat competent	11.22%	6.79%	11.76%
Uncertain	6.38%	5.22%	7.67%
Competent	78.32%	84.86%	74.17%

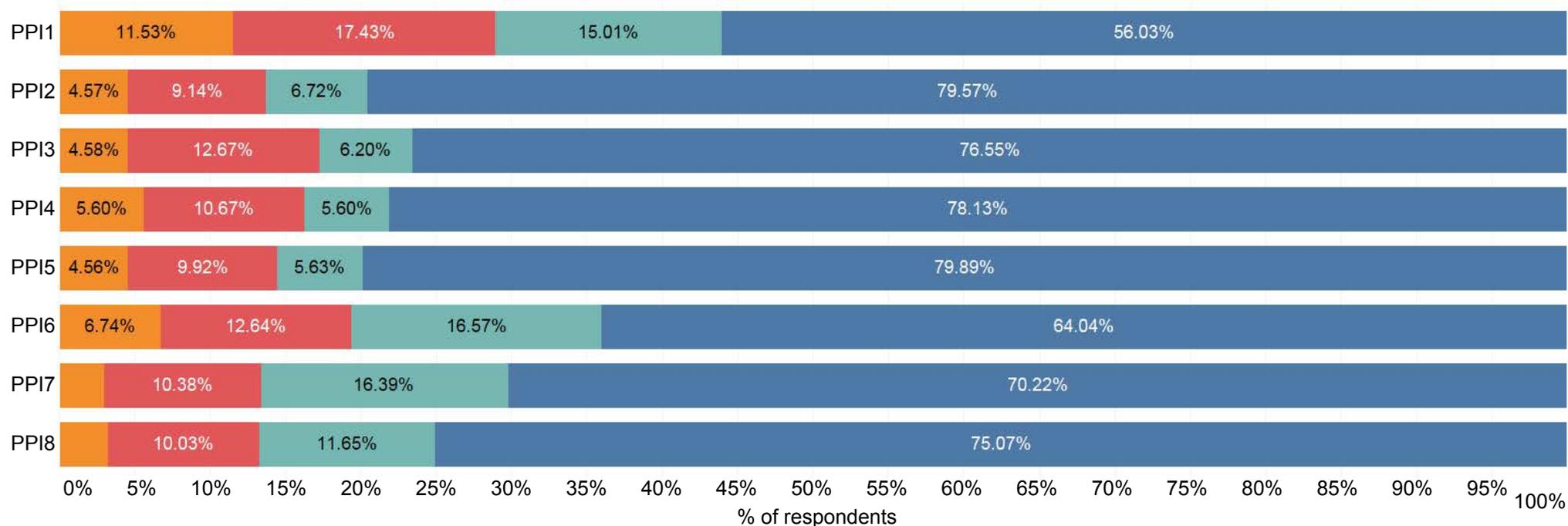X-axis: % of respondents (0% to 100%)
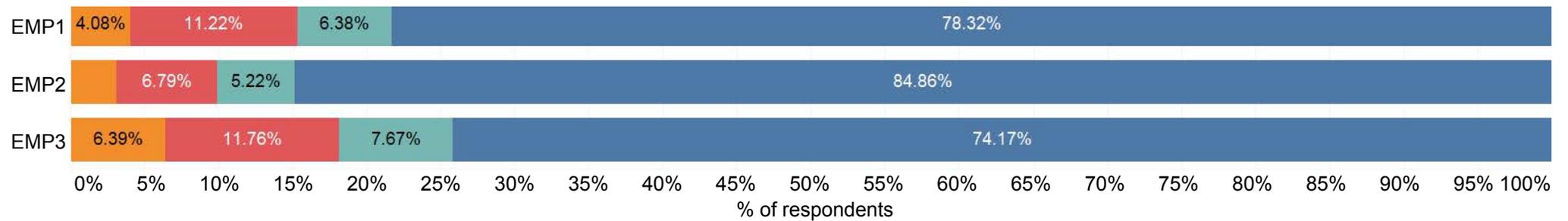
EMP1	Demonstrates empathy towards clients, seeking to understand the care of the animal from the client's perspective
EMP2	Shows sensitivity to the feelings of owners and others, in relation to recommending euthanasia
EMP3	Works effectively and respectfully as a member of a multi-disciplinary team to successfully deliver services

Question responses to Financial and Business Management

Legend: Not competent · Uncertain · Somewhat competent · Competent

	FBM1	FBM2	FBM3	FBM4	FBM5
Not competent	11.52%	8.73%	20.85%	10.45%	8.81%
Somewhat competent	19.94%	18.31%	21.69%	19.77%	17.61%
Uncertain	18.26%	19.72%	26.20%	19.21%	24.43%
Competent	50.28%	53.24%	31.27%	50.56%	49.15%

% of respondents
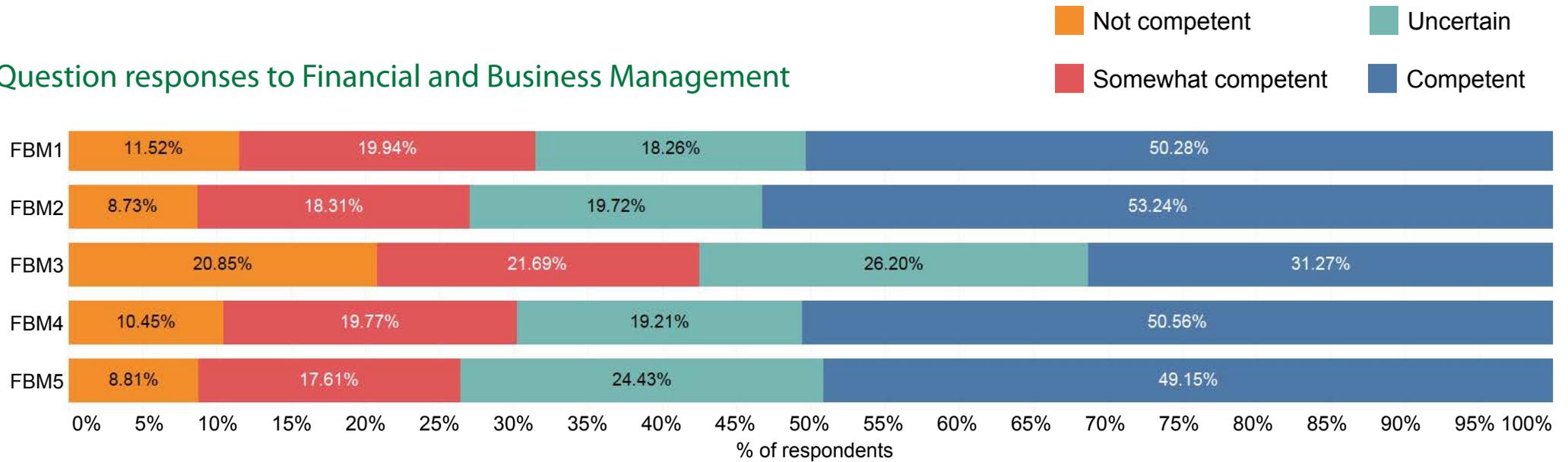
FBM1	Demonstrates an understanding of the economic context of the veterinary profession
FBM2	Demonstrates an awareness of their own and their employer's responsibility in relation to employment, financial and health and safety legislation
FBM3	Shows an awareness of expenditures involved in running a veterinary business
FBM4	Is aware of the legislation affecting veterinary businesses (e.g. disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines)
FBM5	Demonstrates knowledge of systems of quality assurance (e.g. knowledge and explanation of the procedure for reporting adverse incidents)

Question responses to Professionalism and Professional Identity

Legend: Not competent (orange), Uncertain (teal), Somewhat competent (red), Competent (blue)

Question	Not competent	Somewhat competent	Uncertain	Competent
PPI1	11.53%	17.43%	15.01%	56.03%
PPI2	4.57%	9.14%	6.72%	79.57%
PPI3	4.58%	12.67%	6.20%	76.55%
PPI4	5.60%	10.67%	5.60%	78.13%
PPI5	4.56%	9.92%	5.63%	79.89%
PPI6	6.74%	12.64%	16.57%	64.04%
PPI7		10.38%	16.39%	70.22%
PPI8		10.03%	11.65%	75.07%

% of respondents

PPI1	Demonstrates confidence in own professional judgements
PPI2	Demonstrates an understanding of the ethical and legal responsibilities of a veterinary surgeon
PPI3	Contributes to case discussions and clinical audits to improve the quality of animal care and safeguard animal and public health
PPI4	Recognises their personal and professional limits and seeks support when necessary
PPI5	Demonstrates a commitment to learning and professional development (e.g. personal reflection, improving performance and competence)
PPI6	Takes an active role in performance appraisal, taking part in self-audit and peer-review processes
PPI7	Is aware of the legislation relating to animal care and welfare and animal movement
PPI8	Is knowledgeable about and follows the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct

Question responses to Resilience

Legend: Not competent, Somewhat competent, Uncertain, Competent

	Not competent	Somewhat competent	Uncertain	Competent
RES1	5.00%	10.26%	7.37%	77.37%
RES2	13.39%	18.37%	10.76%	57.48%
RES3	15.75%	18.11%	12.60%	53.54%
RES4	7.37%	13.95%	15.00%	63.68%

% of respondents
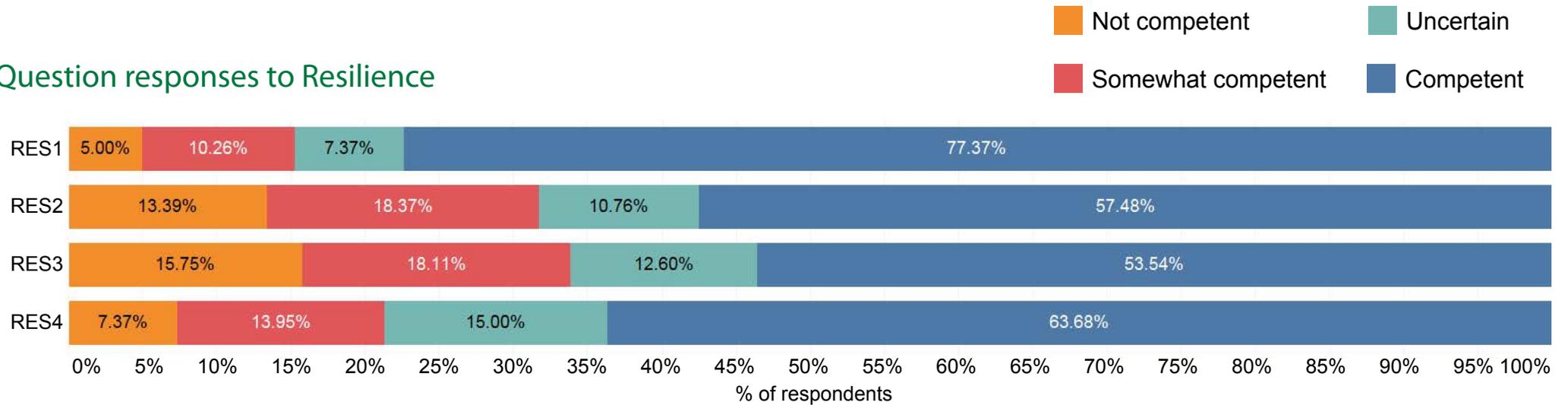
RES1	Appropriately manages own emotions during client interactions
RES2	Is able to 'bounce back' from set-backs and challenging situations
RES3	Remains calm and appears comfortable working in pressurised situations
RES4	Seeks support where necessary to mitigate stress and demands faced in the workplace

Free text responses

The survey included four questions with free-text responses. These questions focused on:

- Clinical skills
- Non-clinical skills
- Areas of deficiency
- Areas of commendation

The responses were organised into themes and the prevalence of certain responses measured.

The good

More frequently noted than any theme across the four sets of responses was good communication skills. Many respondents stated that their graduates communicate effectively with staff and adapt well to a teamworking environment. Empathy towards clients was an area which received numerous mentions.

General enthusiasm and a commitment to independent learning was commonly cited as positive, as was the overall level of clinical knowledge and skills.

Some respondents noted that their graduates had adapted quickly to life in practice as a result of having undertaken extra-mural studies in the same location.

The not so good

While clinical skills fared well overall, surgery was a frequently highlighted area in which graduates were lacking skills or experience.

The second most frequently highlighted negative area was the confidence of graduates, with many respondents stating that their graduates' lack of confidence has held back their progression. In this context, a number of respondents raised the fear in their graduates of facing legal action from clients or sanction from the regulator.

Bitch spaying was a commonly cited example of a task which some newer graduates were not comfortable with, either in the context of insufficient surgical skills or low confidence.

Poor customer interaction was noted a number of times, despite communication skills being praised overall, as was a lack of understanding of the business side of running a practice. These aspects overlapped in several comments, with respondents noting a lack of understanding of clients' financial constraints.

A lack of emotional resilience in times of stress received a high number of mentions.

Next steps

With the input and support of employers, the survey will be refined for its next iteration in 2019.

A number of areas have been identified for deeper consideration.

The scope

While this survey focused on competence, responses indicated that it would be of equal benefit to gain a better understanding of behaviours and attitudes. These arose through the survey responses but could be assessed more directly.

The window of consideration

The survey concerned those who have graduated in the last two years. It was noted that a graduate of two years can be radically different to a graduate of a few months, so comparisons are not always fair.

Explaining the rationale

Some feedback indicated that the rationale behind the survey's structure was not clear. Some noted that it does not build a picture of all veterinary graduates because it does not include those from beyond the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands. However, it was not intended to be a full picture; it is only at Veterinary Schools Council member veterinary schools that the results can shape veterinary education. Others did not appreciate why this survey was only looking at the respondent's most recent graduate and not their views on graduates as a whole. This would be bad practice in surveying as it would invite broad opinions which would be more subject to bias than observation of the most recent graduate, even if that graduate was anomalous compared to those previous.

Your input

Views of employers will be the vital to how the survey develops. To discuss the structure and approach of the survey, its findings, or the work of the Veterinary Schools Council more broadly, you are welcome to contact the council secretariat.

admin@vetschoolscouncil.ac.uk

Related projects

Projects

Inputs

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Continued Professional Development Working Group

Employers

Recent graduates

Veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurses

Veterinary Schools Council Employer Survey

VetSet2Go

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and British Small Animal Veterinary Association Professional Development Phase review