

INSPIRING WORLD-CLASS TEACHING  
PROFESSIONALISM



## **Professional Update Longitudinal Study Sessions 2014 - 19**



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## Contents

Contents .....	1
1 Background .....	1
2 The Role of the Evaluation and Research.....	1
3 Survey Response Rates .....	2
4 Analysis of 5-year longitudinal data .....	2
(i) Preparation for the PRD meeting.....	2
(ii) Engaging with Professional Standards .....	5
(iii) Professional learning and PRD.....	9
(iv) The PRD discussion .....	10
(v) Professional Learning and Evidence of Impact .....	12
5 Summary of findings.....	20
6 Recommendations.....	20
7 Acknowledgments .....	21



## 1 Background

All registered teachers should now have completed the first cycle of the national implementation of Professional Update (PU). This 5-year implementation plan divided all registrants into five cohorts based on their registration number. The Professional Update sign-off year is primarily determined by the second digit of the registration number. However, this can differ depending on when a registrant gained Full Registration; if a registrant has had a break in service; if a registrant has been lapsed from the register for a period of time.

- ❖ 2014/15 - registrants with the following registration numbers x9xxxx and x4xxxx
- ❖ 2015/16 - registrants with the following registration numbers x0xxxx and x5xxxx
- ❖ 2016/17 - registrants with the following registration numbers x1xxxx and x6xxxx
- ❖ 2017/18 - registrants with the following registration numbers x2xxxx and x7xxxx
- ❖ 2018/19 - registrants with the following registration numbers x3xxxx and x8xxxx

The table below outlines the number of registrants per year who have completed the sign off process.

**Table 1: PU registrant annual sign off figures**

Registration date	No of PU Registrants
2014/15	9111
2015/16	10096
2016/17	10314
2017/18	11167
2018/19	10945

It is important that the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) understands the experiences of registrants as they engage with and complete the process of Professional Update. It is also important to compare the key messages from registrants in each cohort of PU.

## 2 The Role of the Evaluation and Research

GTCS conducts an annual survey of registrants who have engaged in PU and completed their sign off. This research seeks to explore, understand and evaluate the range of elements that make up the PU process to:

- ❖ understand the potential impact of PU on the Scottish education system and on the individuals engaged in the process;
- ❖ identify and address emerging issues that may challenge, limit or hinder progress;
- ❖ develop the Council's evidence base to inform and underpin policy development; and
- ❖ inform on-going development of the procedures, processes and supporting systems for PU.

This has enabled GTCS to build an informed understanding of the needs of the profession and gain an insight into the emerging picture of the impact of PU. Each PU annual evaluation report has allowed GTCS to review registrants' experiences of professional learning and professional review and development (PRD) and in turn informed on-going policy development. Relevant outcomes have also been shared with employers so they are informed of any emerging issues and areas where targeted support or development may be required.

### 3 Survey Response Rates

This report offers analysed longitudinal quantitative data supplemented with qualitative data and comments from the first cycle of the national implementation of Professional Update, 2014-2019.

The response rate for each cohort is shown in the table below.

**Table 2: Response rate for reviewees from each cohort**

	Invited Participants	Respondents	Response Rate
2014/15	3446	747	21.7%
2015/16	9142	1290	14.1%
2016/17	10019	1053	10.5%
2017/18	10266	1351	13.2%
2018/19	10945	995	9.1%

Note: Only those who had completed the Professional Update sign off by October 31 for the relevant year were invited to complete the survey.

Data was collected through an online survey. For cohorts, 2014-15 and 2015-16, the survey link was sent out in two rounds to ensure individuals received the survey as close to their sign off date as was practicable. Since cohort 2016-17, the reviewee survey link was embedded within the confirmation email for those registrants who use the MYGTCS portal to sign off PU.

For those local authorities who elect to use an alternative system to record PU, the reviewees were sent an email with an embedded link to the online survey post October 31 of the relevant year.

### 4 Analysis of 5-year longitudinal data

The aim of the online survey was to evaluate the experiences of registrants taking part in the PU process. The survey was structured around the following key areas:

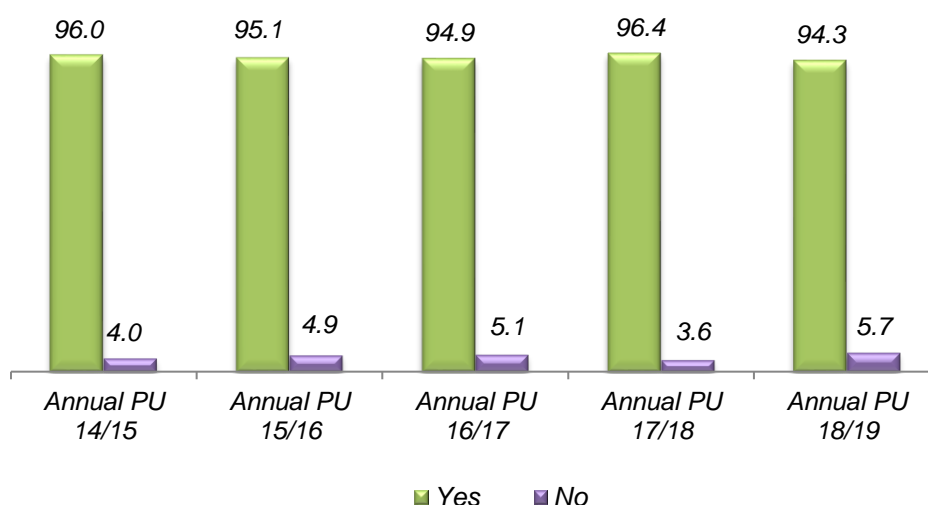
- ❖ brief details to determine the respondent population and essential demographic information;
- ❖ details relating to current knowledge of the PU system and the process of updating details annually;
- ❖ the PRD process:
  - preparation for the PRD meeting,
  - engagement with the GTCS Professional standards (PS) as part of the PU process,
  - the professional discussion;
- ❖ professional learning and using associated evidence of impact;
- ❖ systems used for the PU process;
- ❖ the PU sign off process.

#### (i) Preparation for the PRD meeting

PRD is a recognised and valued process which provides teachers with an opportunity to share their significant professional learning experiences with their line manager and enter into professional dialogue regarding the impact of their professional learning.

The number of respondents reporting that they had completed a PRD meeting has remained relatively constant over the five-year period as shown below in graph 1.

**Graph 1: Have you had a PRD meeting?**

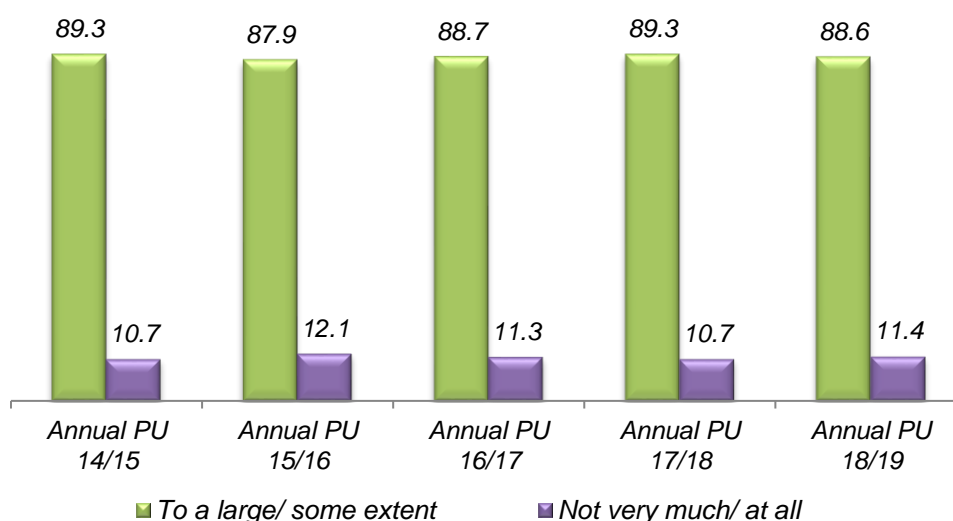


Over the five-year period, the responses as to why a PRD has not taken place remain consistent. The main reasons given for a PRD not being undertaken are as follows.

- ❖ Time is not prioritised for PRD by either the reviewee but more often by the reviewer. This is due to significant and sometimes competing demands.
- ❖ Significant staff absence has an impact on the completion of individuals PRD's.
- ❖ For some respondents they suggested that they were waiting for their line manager to arrange their PRD for them, this shows a lack of understanding about the role and responsibilities within the PRD process.

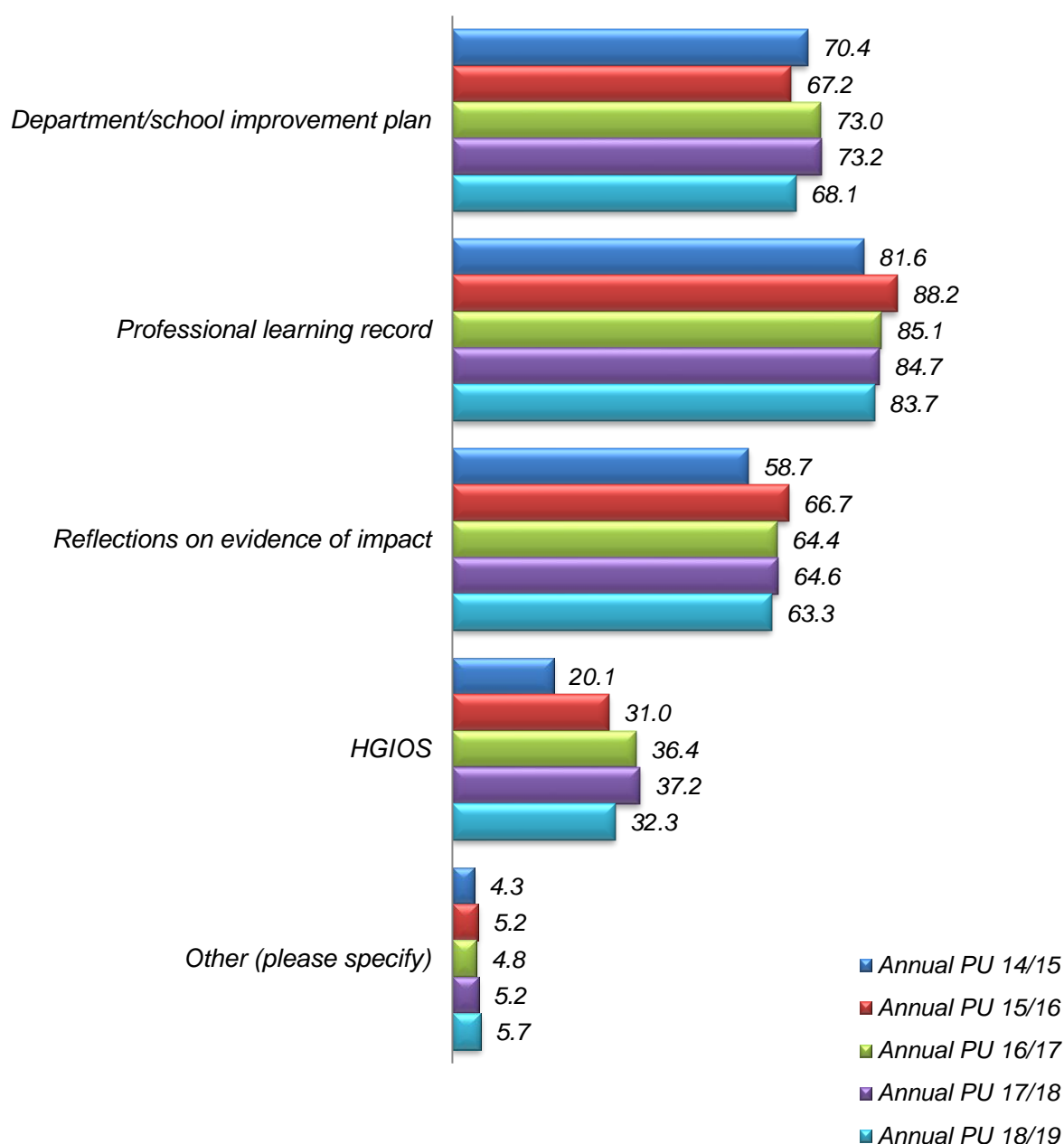
As can be seen from graph 2, the number of respondents reporting that they used Professional Standards to a large extent/some extent to prepare for their PRD remained constant.

**Graph 2: To what extent did you use the GTCS Professional Standards for your self-evaluation in preparation for your PRD meeting?**



Respondents were asked to identify which self-evaluation tools they used to prepare for their PRD, graph 3.

**Graph 3: Did you use any of the following to prepare for the PRD meeting? (please select all that apply)**



Across the identified self-evaluation tools, the use of each remains relatively constant, with the exception of HGIOS (How Good is Our School). The latest iteration of HGIOS4 was launched in September 2015, which may account for the increased use, from 20.1% to 31.0%, of this self-evaluation tool in preparing for PRD.

Over the five-year period, respondents have stated that the self-evaluation prior to the PRD meeting is valuable and helpful to “stop and reflect” and “to show progress”.



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Many respondents were also very positive about the support they received from colleagues and local authorities and found coaching conversations to be very beneficial. A few commented that in their view, the “PRD was supportive” and “easy, if you do it every year”.

In contrast to the above, some respondents found the PRD process difficult to engage with and stated that they required more support, particularly respondents who identified themselves as supply teachers. Equally, respondents who identified as having a role outwith school noted that Professional Standards were difficult to use to inform their PRD as they were related mainly to in school contexts.

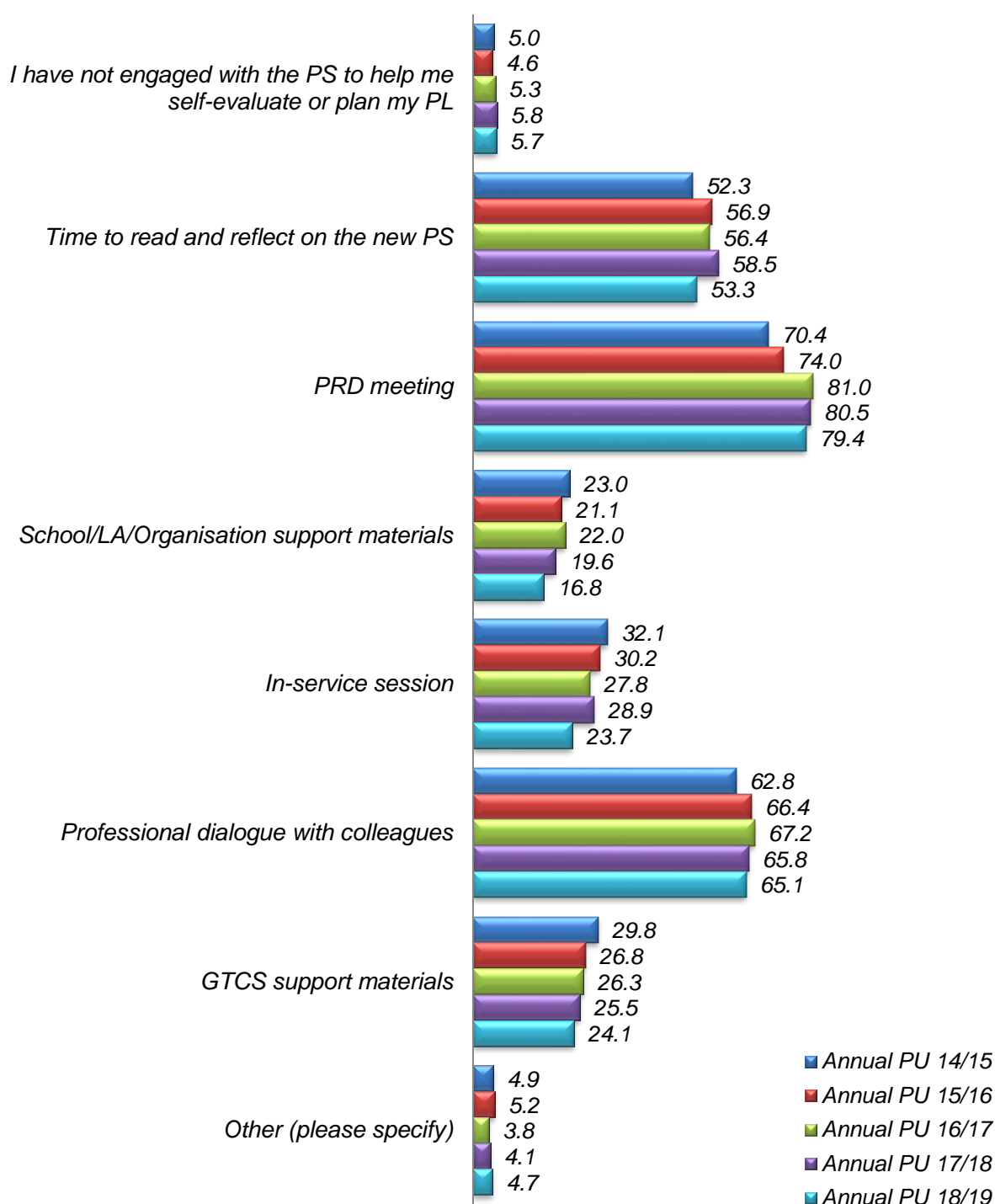
There were many calls for additional professional learning for reviewers to ensure they are sufficiently skilled in coaching so they can offer appropriate support and challenge during the PRD meeting.

Over the period of the study, comments around time and workload, as a barrier in preparation for an effective PRD, have increased.

## **(ii) Engaging with Professional Standards**

Over the period of the study, graph 4 indicates that respondents are taking opportunities to use Professional Standards as a touchstone for professional learning in preparation for PRD. Alongside this, *professional dialogue with colleagues* and *time to read and reflect on Professional Standards* are key factors in self-evaluation.

**Graph 4: Considering the following factors, which, if any, have *helped/supported* your engagement with the Professional Standards to self-evaluate and plan your professional learning? (please select all that apply)**



Over the 5-year period, there has been a decrease in the number of respondents who consider support materials and in-service sessions valuable in engaging with Professional Standards. This could be an indicator of system learning as more teachers have used Professional Standards to self-evaluate and guide their professional learning. However, supply teachers commented that support is still required to engage with Professional Standards.

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Respondents reported that Professional Standards are a very helpful self-evaluative tools in the following ways.

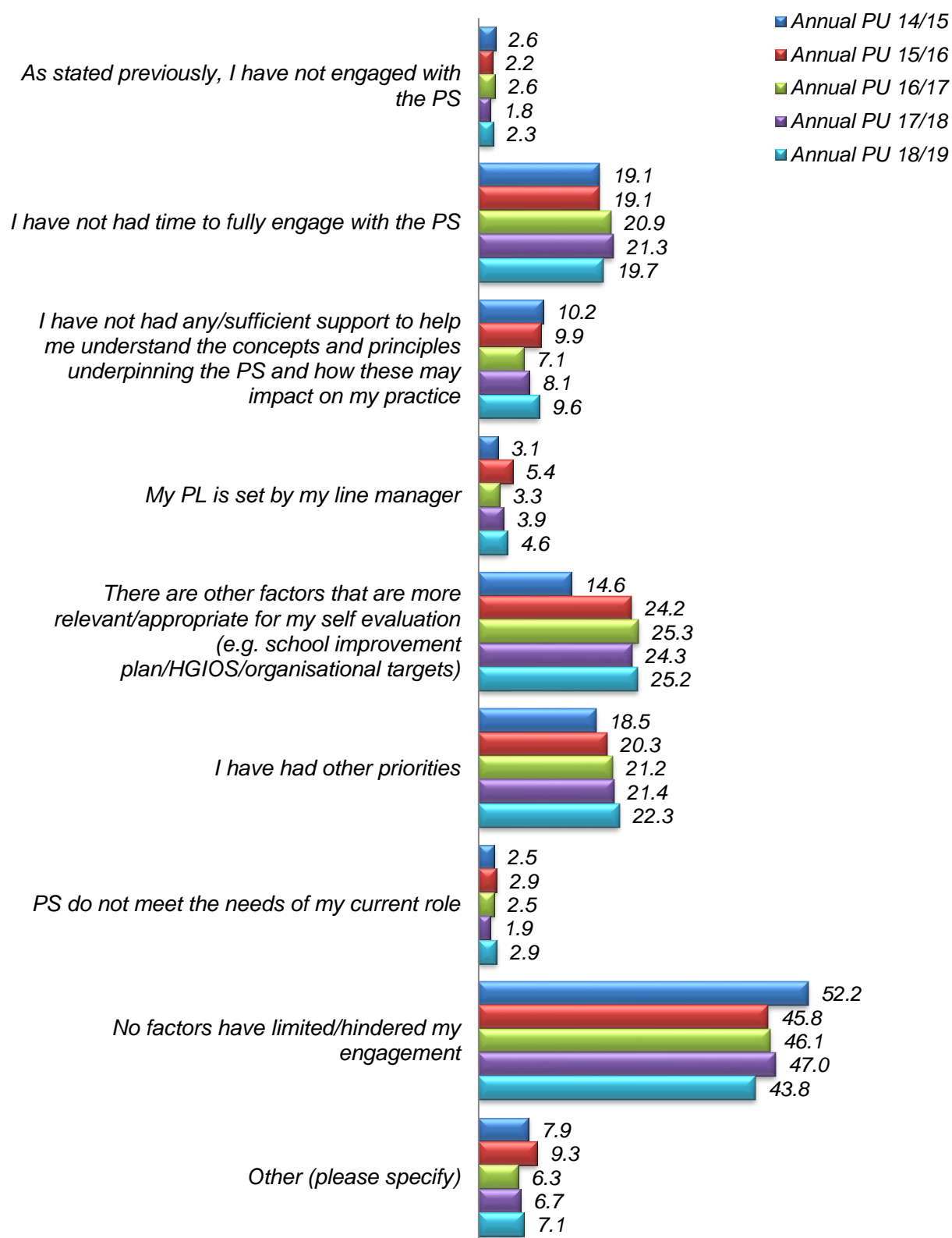
- ❖ to support critical reflection of their practice,
- ❖ to provide a provocation for next steps,
- ❖ to show their own progress,
- ❖ to help colleagues and
- ❖ support career aspirations.

The Standard for Career Long Professional Learning is singled out as the most useful by respondents as it provides a broad and varied framework to enhance teacher professionalism. Respondents reported that using this Professional Standard allows them to reconnect with professional values and offers guidance to 'what it means to be a teacher in Scotland', with one respondent commented that "I really like the [Professional] Standards. They are my compass."

Many respondents stated that they used Professional Standards retrospectively, i.e. they engaged in professional learning and when recording this, tried to align it to statements in the Professional Standards.

Respondents were asked to identify factors that limited/hindered engagement with Professional Standards to self-evaluate and plan professional learning. From graph 5 below, respondents selected '*no factors have limited/hindered my engagement with Professional Standards*' most frequently across the period of the study. However, this is showing a decreasing trend from 52.2% to 43.8%, while '*other factors are more relevant/appropriate for my self-evaluation*' and '*I have had other priorities*' are showing increasing trends.

**Graph 5: Considering the following factors, which, if any, have **limited/hindered** your engagement with the PS to self-evaluate and plan your PL? (please select all that apply)**



The upward trend of *'other factors are more relevant/appropriate for my self-evaluation'* from 14.6% to 25.2% and to a lesser extent *'I have had other priorities'* from 18.5% to 22.3%, appear to coincide with the increase in using HGIOS4 as a self-evaluation tool. Some respondents commented that although they used Professional Standards to self-evaluate and plan professional learning, these needed to be used alongside other policy documents to align professional development with school improvement.

Some respondents stated that they require more support to engage effectively with Professional Standards, as in their view the Professional Standards are too wordy, lacked clarity and are considered too restricting. Respondents who work in out-of-school contexts or identified as supply teachers found Professional Standards more difficult to engage with.

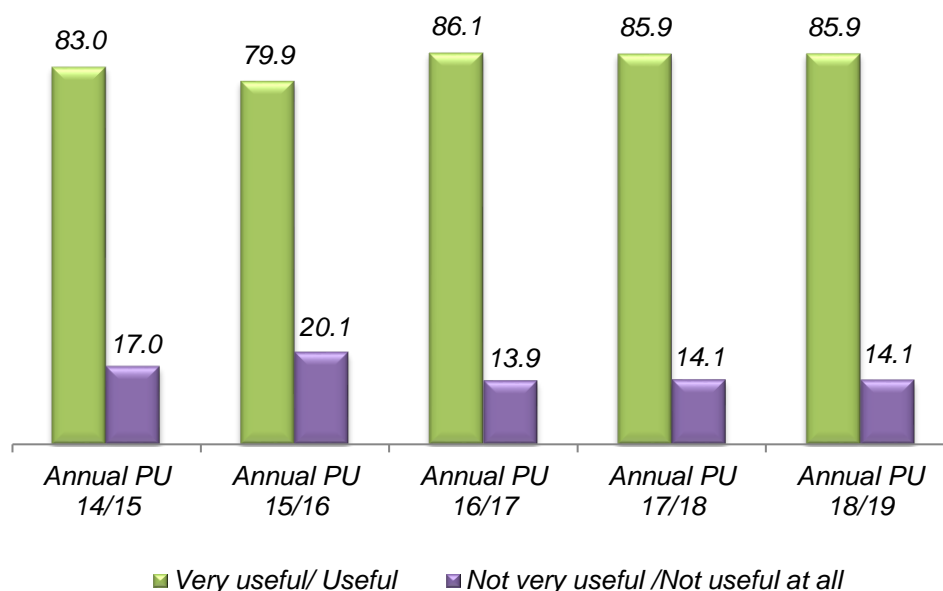
The number of respondents who called for professional learning in coaching for reviewers has increased over the period of the study, some respondents reported that their PRD is not meeting their needs.

Increasingly across the period of the study, time and workload were cited as major contributing factors that limited/hindered engagement with Professional Standards to self-evaluate and plan professional learning. Additionally, there are an increasing number of comments around the perceived decrease in staffing numbers and lack of funding to support teachers to access professional learning opportunities.

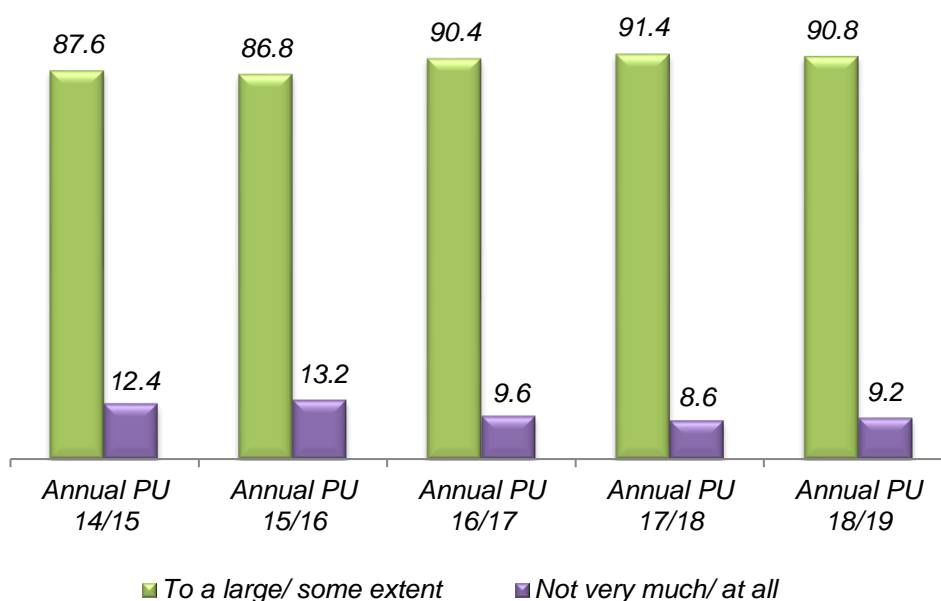
### (iii) Professional learning and PRD

There is a highly positive response to the perceived usefulness of the PRD meeting in terms of supporting reflection on professional learning, its impact and next steps, graphs 6-7.

**Graph 6: Overall, how useful was your PRD meeting in helping you to reflect on the previous year's professional learning, its impact and plan your professional learning for next year?**



**Graph 7: To what extent do you feel you have appropriate plans/steps for your professional learning and development from the PRD discussion?**



Most respondents stated that their self-evaluation had indicated the type of professional learning they wish to engage in, rather than this being generated from the PRD discussion.

Some respondents commented that although they had clearly identified their next steps in professional learning, this was then changed by circumstances, such as a change of context, or by other school priorities being given prominence and determining their professional learning. Many respondents indicated their perception was that professional learning is 'done to teachers' to meet the needs of school improvement rather than being generated from their own practice.

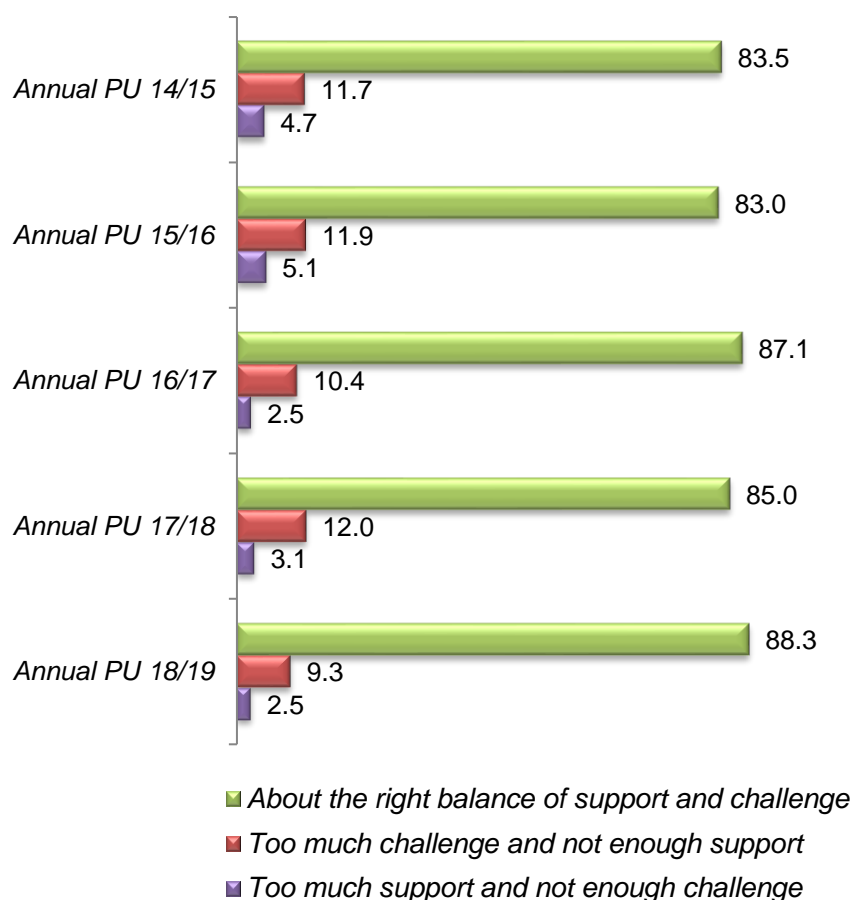
A few respondents commented that they are not invested in the PRD process as they see it as an additionality that they have to engage with, rather than view this as an entitlement to enhance their professionalism and an opportunity to enact their professional autonomy.

Many respondents reported that the barriers of time and resources frequently prevented the planned professional learning from taking place.

#### **(iv) The PRD discussion**

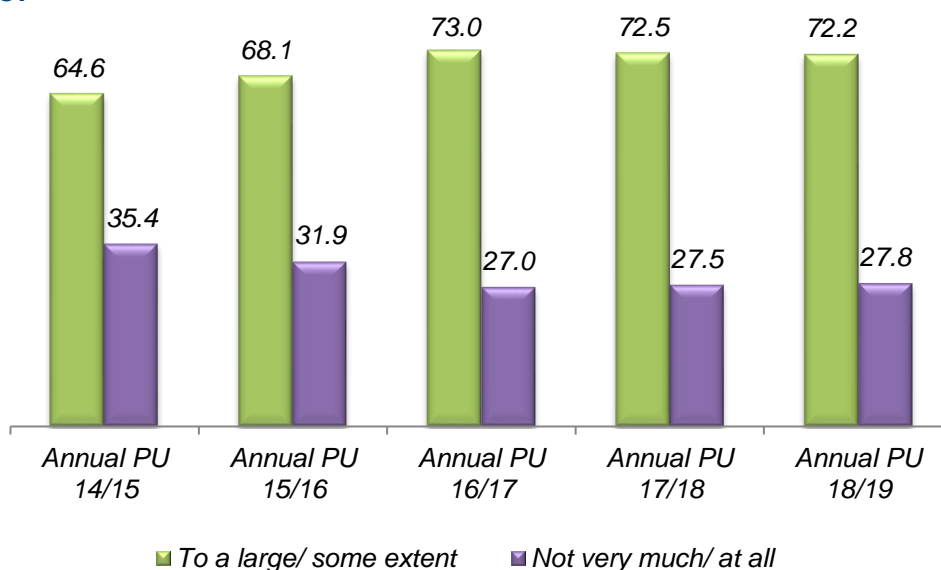
It is interesting to know about the experiences of registrants as they engage in the PRD discussion. To understand this better, respondents were asked about the nature of the PRD experience both in terms of the balance between *support and challenge* and *coaching and mentoring*.

**Graph 8: Reflecting on the balance of support and challenge at your PRD meeting, from the following descriptions, please select the most appropriate:**



There is a small increasing trend over the 5-year period, that indicates that teachers are being given *the right balance of support and challenge* through the PRD process from 83.5% to 88.3%, graph 8. There is also an improving trend in the number of respondents who stated that their reviewer is using coaching/mentoring approaches from 64.6% to 72.2%, graph 9.

**Graph 9: To what extent would you say your manager used coaching and/or mentoring approaches?**



For the majority of respondents, the PRD discussion is very supportive, one respondent stated that their PRD was “a very enjoyable, thought provoking and positive experience”.

However, as mentioned previously, there is still a significant percentage of respondents whose PRD is not meeting their needs. Those who commented stated that this is mainly due to their reviewer misunderstanding the purpose of PRD, being insufficiently prepared due to competing demands or not having sufficient skills in coaching.

#### **(v) Professional Learning and Evidence of Impact**

Professional learning is a fundamental aspect of teacher professionalism and as such it is essential that GTCS understands the ways that registrants learn and the impact that it has on themselves, the young people they teach, their colleagues, their school and wider community.

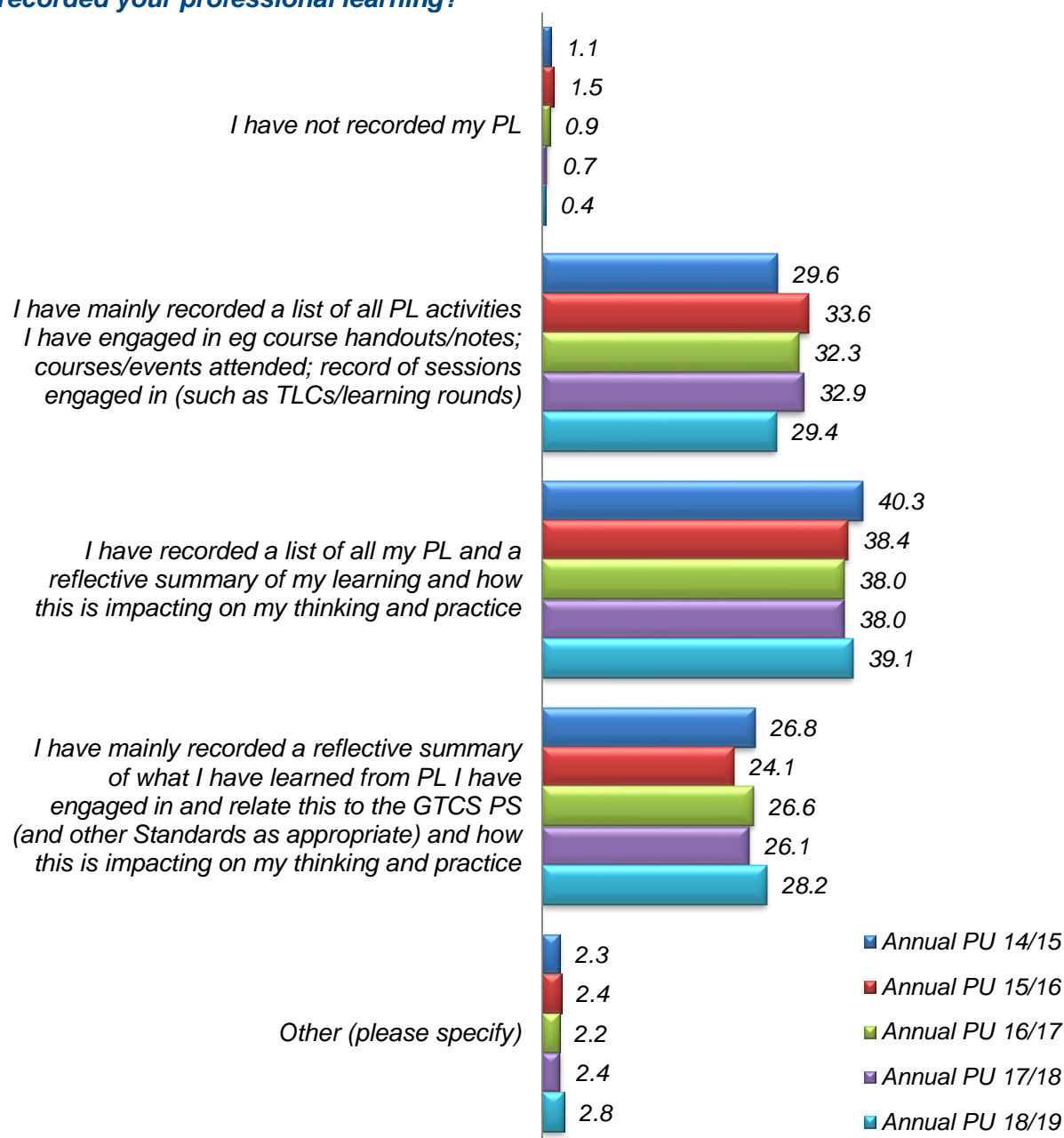
In reflecting and recording professional learning, almost all respondents are engaging to some extent, graph 10.

Most respondents in each cohort state *I have recorded a list of all my PL and a reflective summary of my learning and how this is impacting on my thinking and practice*, this is a positive response rate and shows that respondents are not only ‘doing’ professional learning but also reflecting on the impact this has on themselves, their colleagues, learners and the school community, graph 10.

The next step would be to then relate this to Professional Standards as in the choice *I have mainly recorded a reflective summary of what I have learned from PL. I have engaged in and related this to GTCS PS (and other Standards as appropriate) and how this is impacting on my thinking and practice*, graph 10.

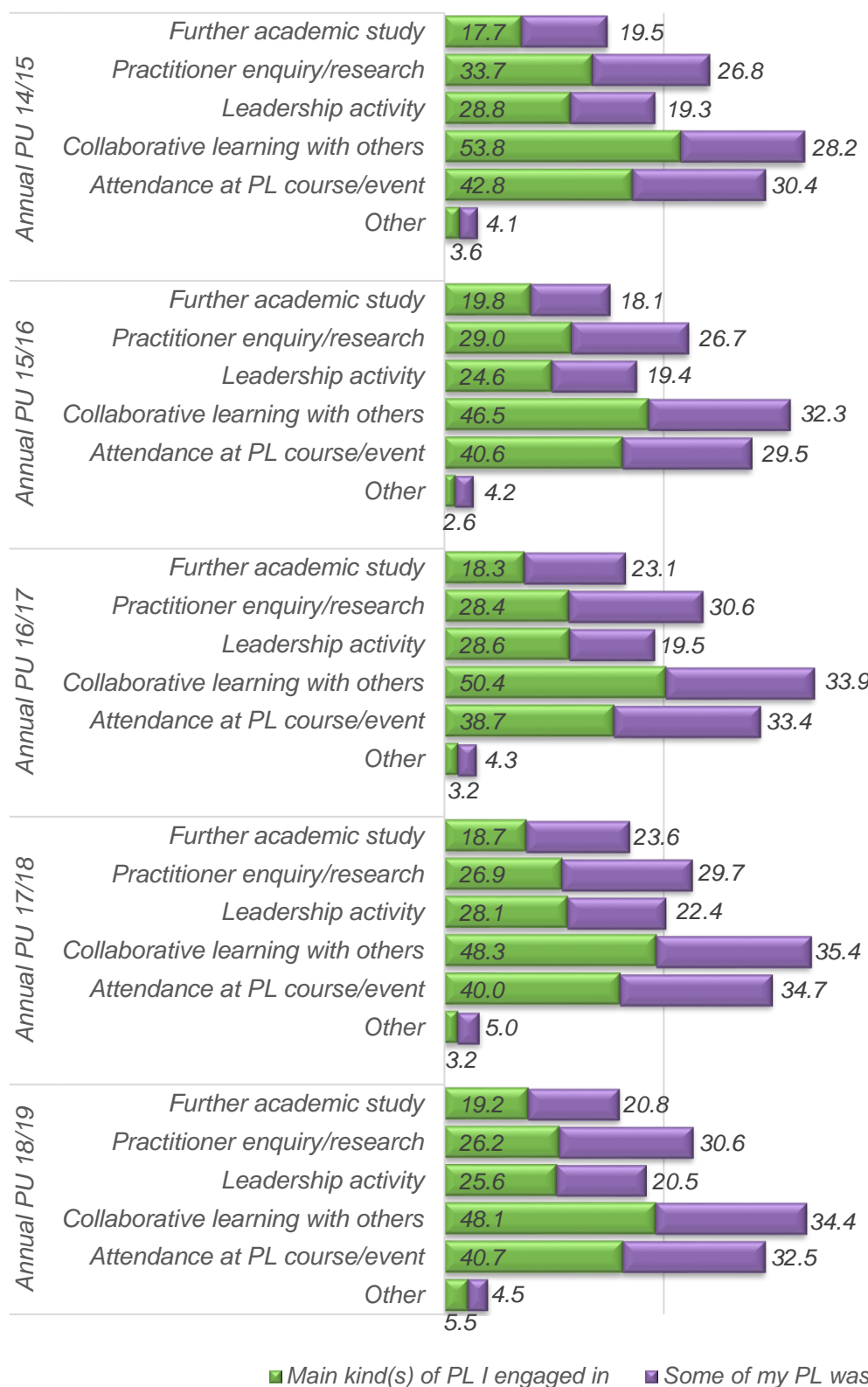


**Graph 10: Which one of the following best describes the way in which you have recorded your professional learning?**



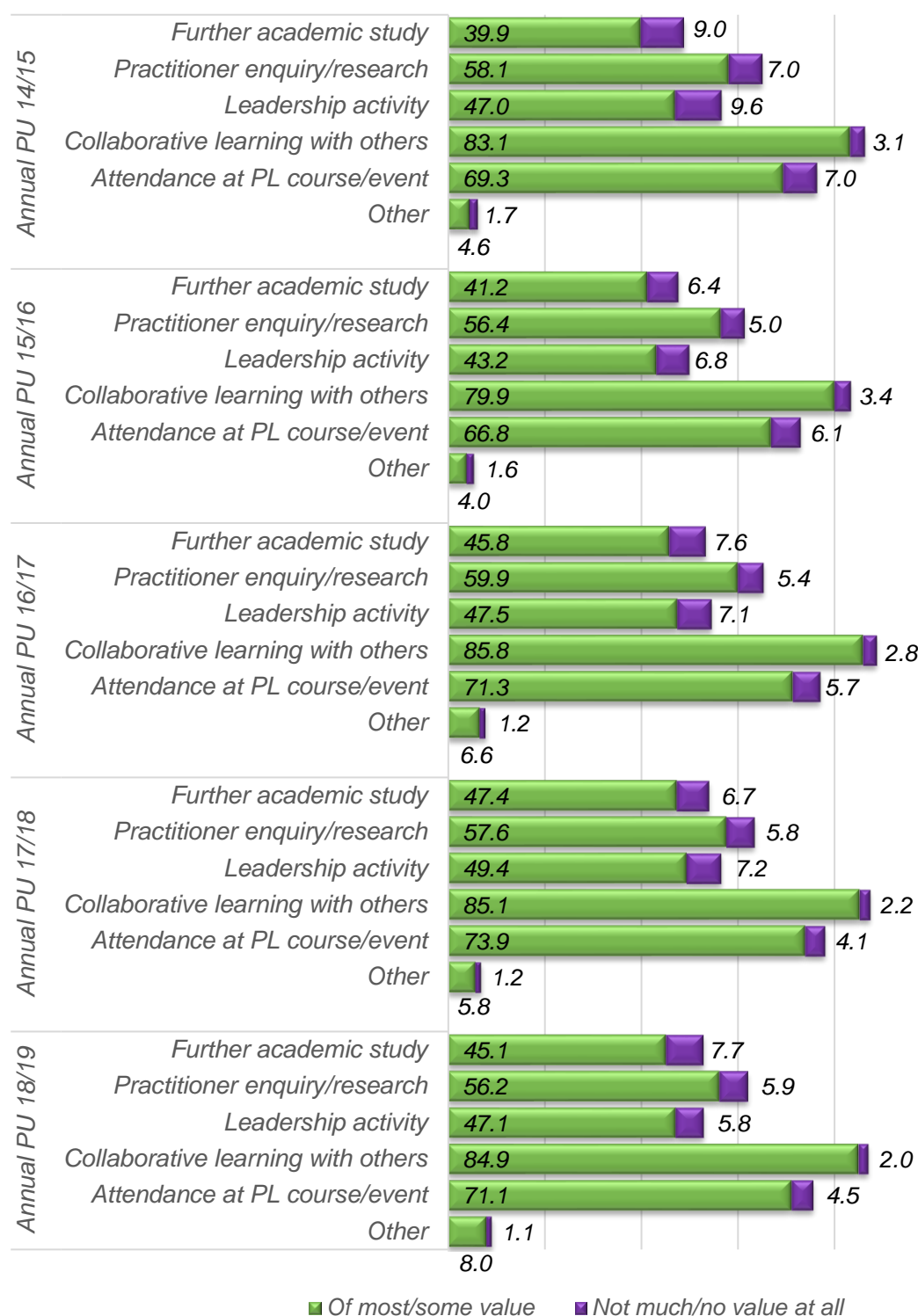
The type of professional learning that respondents are undertaking shows a constant pattern. For each cohort *collaborative learning with others* is the main type of professional learning respondents engage in, followed by *attendance at PL course/event*, graph 11. The type of learning from the list that fewest respondents identified as undertaking was *further academic study* for all cohorts.

**Graph 11: Please identify the kind of professional learning you engaged in to help you address the focus of your PL (please select as appropriate and as many as apply)**



Graph 12 gives an insight into what value registrants place on various types of professional learning. Respondents place most value on *collaborative learning with others*.

**Graph 12: How valuable was this kind of professional learning for you? (please rate this and select as many as apply)**



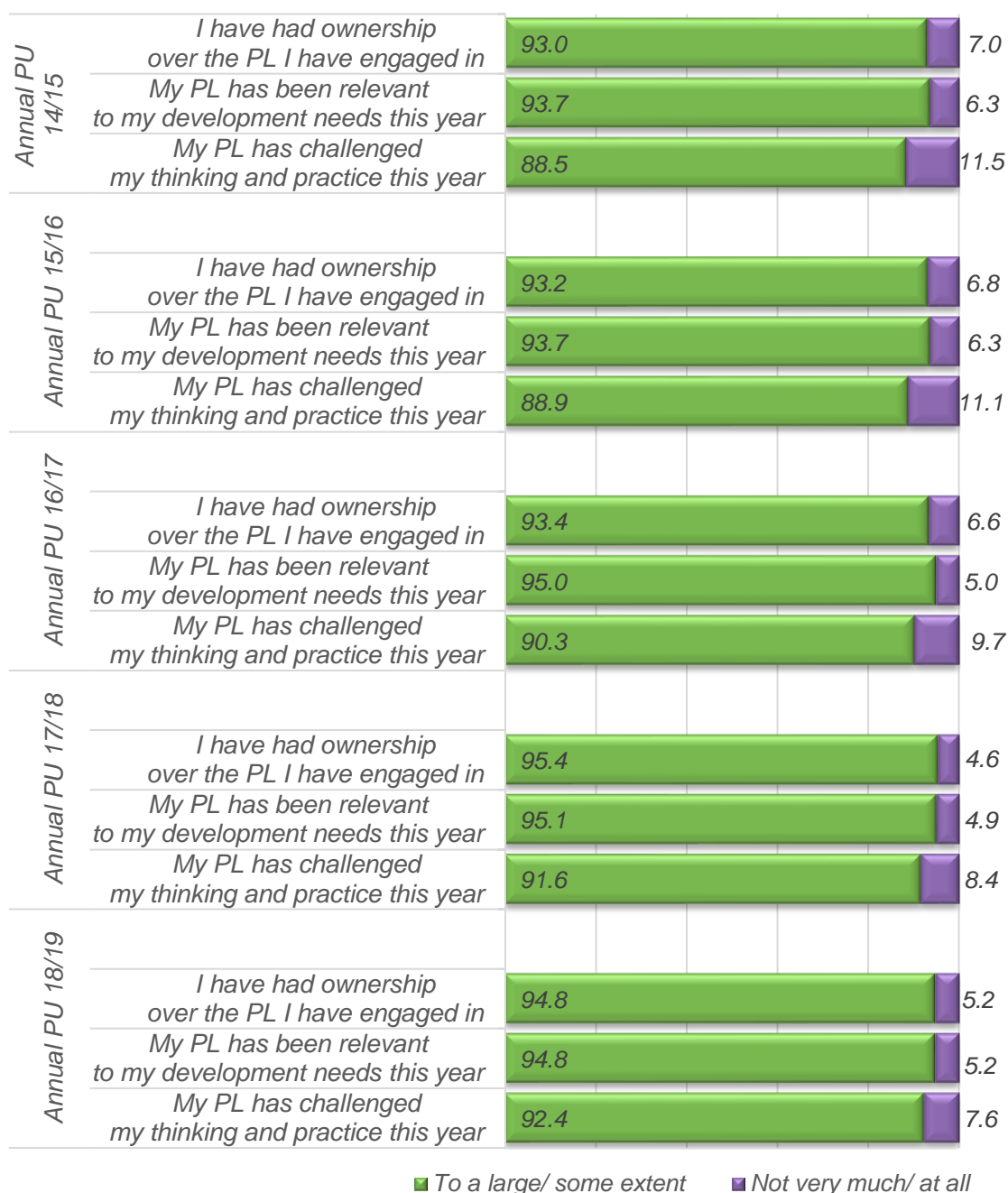
Most local authorities through improvement planning, offer collaborative learning opportunities for teachers. The focus of this professional learning usually addresses issues raised through self-evaluation, inspection or in response to policy directives. Collaborative learning is highly valued as it can offer new perspectives and challenges from within and beyond the current context.

Literacy and numeracy are both reported to be of high priority across all sectors, with professional learning in response to SQA being more prevalent in the secondary sector.

Further academic study is engaged in by those who self-select and usually self-fund. Subsequently, those engaged in further academic study were positive about the impact of this type of professional learning on themselves, their practice as develop a wider appreciation of the complexities of the Scottish education system.

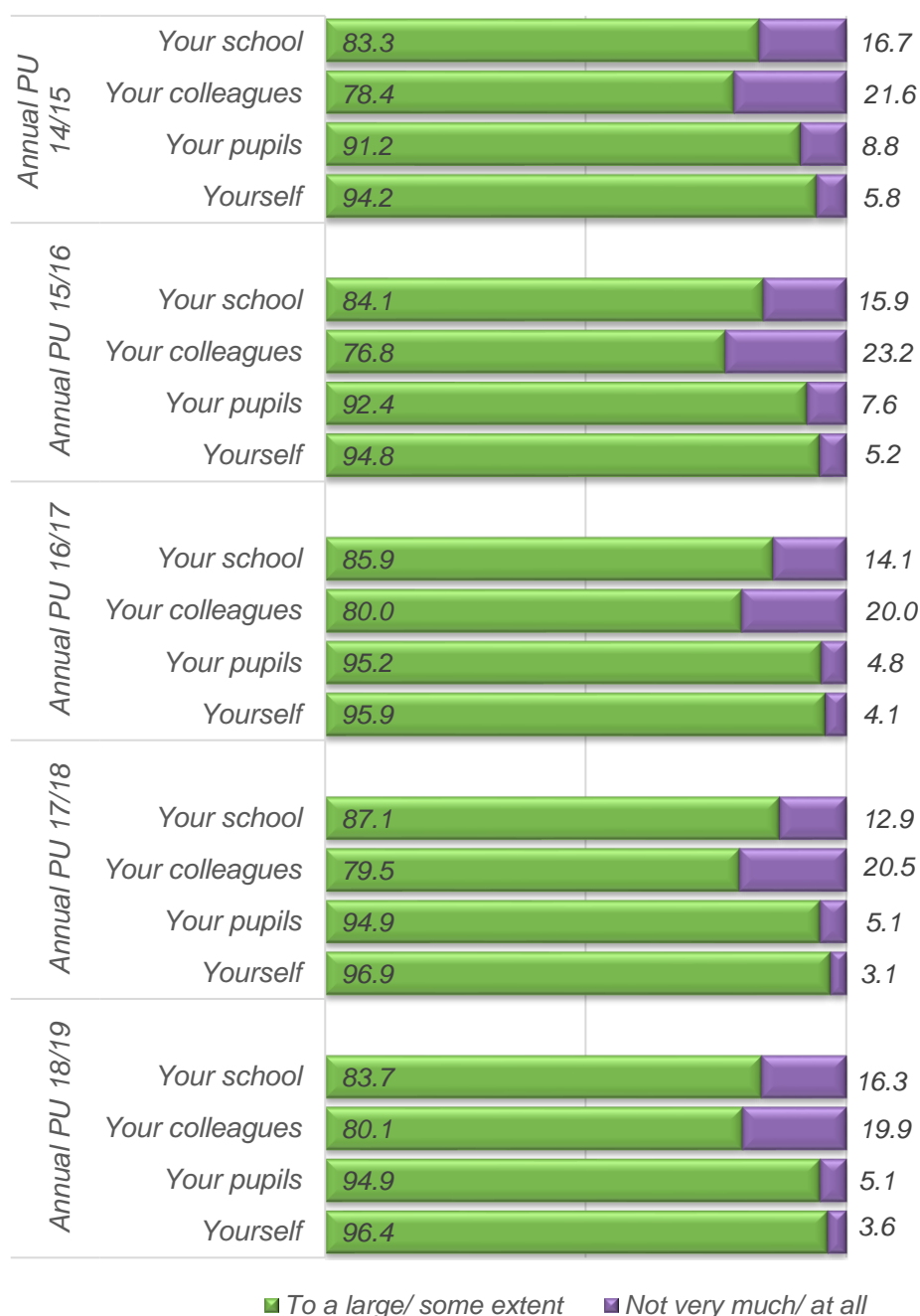
An important aspect of teacher professionalism is professional autonomy i.e. being enabled to make decisions around the most appropriate professional learning activities to engage with. As can be seen in graph 13, across each of the cohorts, 93% or more of respondents indicated that they had ownership over the PL they had engaged in. Additionally, 93.7% or more agreed that their professional learning had been relevant to their development needs and 88.5% or more, responded that their professional learning had challenged their thinking and practice. This is a very positive response with respondents indicating that, in most cases, they have professional autonomy.

***Graph 13: Thinking about the professional learning you have engaged in this year, please rate the extent of your agreement with the following:***



It is interesting to link this to the perceived impact this professional learning has on the respondents, their colleagues, their pupils and the school community. Graph 14 shows that in each cohort, the impact on self is highest, followed by the impact on pupils, then school community and finally colleagues.

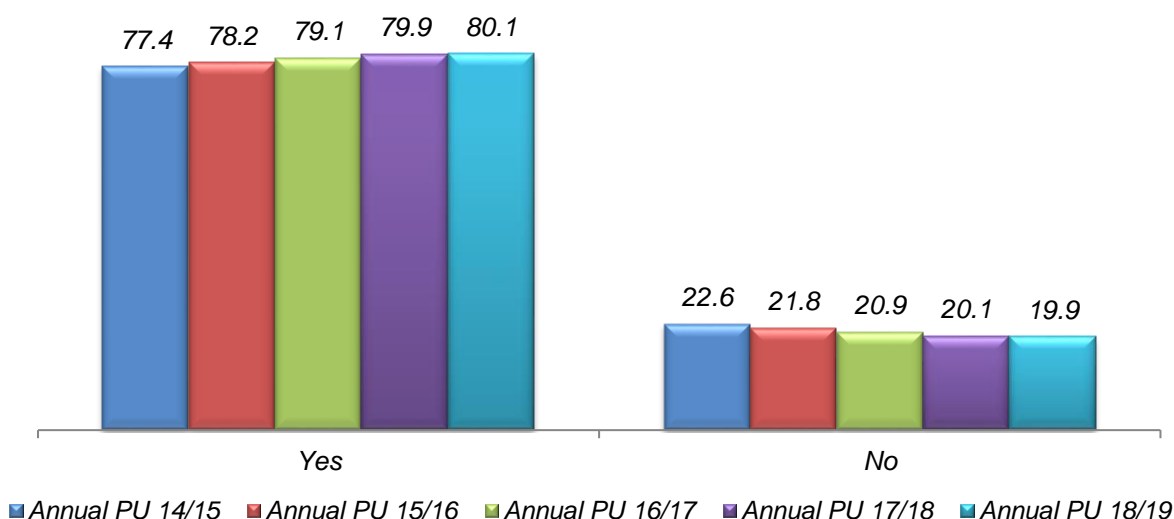
**Graph 14: To what extent do you think your professional learning has had an impact on yourself, your pupils, your colleagues or your school? (please rate as appropriate)**



Linking the findings from graph 11 where collaborative learning is identified as the type of professional learning most engaged with, and from graph 12 where collaborative learning is considered the most valuable type of professional learning, it is then puzzling that when asked about impact of professional learning, impact on colleagues learning is considered the least impactful. This raises questions as to what is understood by collaborative learning.

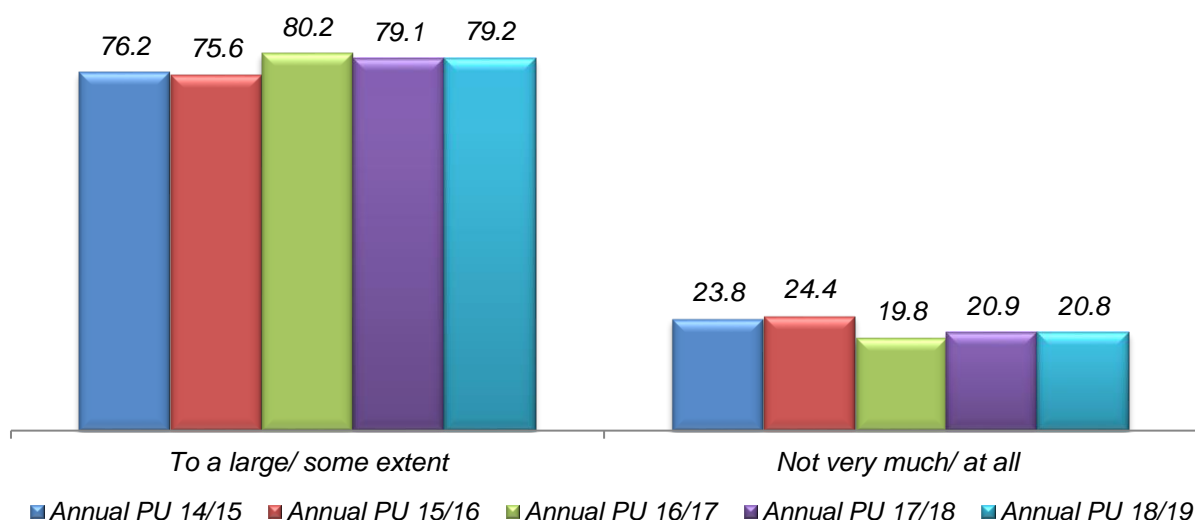
Gathering evidence of impact is important to understand what has worked, for teachers, for children or young people and/or for colleagues. Graph 15 shows that across all cohorts the percentage of respondents gathering evidence of impact is very similar. Although this is a positive picture, it does indicate that a fifth of respondents are not gathering evidence of impact.

**Graph 15: Have you gathered evidence of impact of your professional learning?**



Respondents were asked to what extent they felt prepared and knowledgeable to develop evidence of impact. As can be seen from graph 16, the percentage of respondents is reflective of those who gathered evidence of impact, graph 15.

**Graph 16: To what extent do you feel appropriately prepared/knowledgeable to develop evidence of impact?**



Respondents were asked to comment on what had prevented them from gathering evidence of impact. Some respondents stated that they did not realise this had to be done but are now starting to do this. Other respondents commented that they did not understand what was meant by evidence of impact.

Many respondents offered that they lack confidence in gathering evidence of impact for some types of professional learning and would like support with this.

Others were more confident in gathering evidence of impact of their professional learning and stated that for them this is an on-going activity.

One respondent noted “sometimes it is hard to pinpoint what PL has especially helped the children - often it's lots of bits of learning gleaned from a mixture of courses, colleagues,

reading etc.” and another commented that for some professional learning activities “it was too soon” to evidence impact.

The major factor indicated by many respondents that prevented them from gathering evidence of impact was time and workload. The issue of time and workload increased over the period of the study.

## **5 Summary of findings**

It is important that GTCS understands the experiences of registrants as they engage with and complete the process of Professional Update. This 5-year longitudinal study provides evidence from registrants who responded to the annual evaluation in the year of their PU sign off. The data gathered was used to explore, understand and evaluate the range of activities that together lead to PU sign off.

The analysed data offers indications of a strong learning system and gives insights into the experiences of registrants as they engage in the PU process.

Professional Standards are considered a touchstone for teacher professionalism. The Standard for Career Long Professional Learning is used by most registrants as a very useful self-evaluation tool, alongside other policy documents. Professional Standards are mainly used retrospectively, rather than to signpost professional learning activities.

The majority of registrants undertake the PRD process. Those who haven't had a PRD meeting claim this is due to competing time demands, priorities and staff absence. There also appears to be a lack of awareness in the roles and responsibilities for the PRD process. Those who have an effective PRD enjoy support and challenge that is helpful to their continuing development. However, there is a body of evidence that suggests that more professional learning in coaching is required for reviewers.

The culture of professional learning offers registrants the opportunity to work collaboratively with others and reflect and learn together. Collaborative learning is the main type of professional learning teachers engage in and is highly valued. However, individuals rate the impact of collaborative learning on colleagues least, giving a disconnect between the type of professional learning and impact. Registrants continue to gather evidence of impact of their professional learning, although more support is required to ensure all registrants are confident in this area.

Most registrants feel they are well supported by school leaders and local authorities in the PU process, with the exception of supply teachers, who require more specific support. Those who work outwith schools also require further specific support to ensure PU is worthwhile and supportive.

These findings from this longitudinal study will inform and underpin GTCS policy development for Professional Standards, professional learning, professional review and development and professional update.

Finally, although outwith the scope of GTCS's remit, time and workload are very real factors in the depth of engagement of registrants in the PU process. Over the period of the longitudinal study the number of instances of time and workload being mentioned as a limiting factor increased significantly.

## **6 Recommendations**



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This longitudinal study provides GTCS with an opportunity to evaluate and reflect on the learning from each of the previous PU annual evaluation reports. Through this research GTCS has identified trends to show system learning and inform GTCS of the next steps support the PU process. These are:

- ❖ In response to previous PU annual evaluation reports, in October 2019, GTCS released guidance entitled *Professional Review and Development: Unlocking the Potential of Professional Review and Development*.

Additional resources to support PRD were made available and shared with local authority officers at this time. Further engagement is needed to ensure all registrants understand their roles and responsibilities in the PRD process.

- ❖ Working with partners across the education system, GTCS should continue to support and promote professional learning in coaching approaches to ensure high quality PRD for all registrants.
- ❖ Evidence from PU annual evaluation outcomes were used in part to inform the refreshed Professional Standards. GTCS should consider producing guidance on the use of the refreshed Professional Standards
  - To enhance teacher professionalism through linking professional learning to Professional Standards.
  - To signpost professional learning activities through professional actions
  - As a self-evaluation framework to recognise and acknowledge their progress and identify next steps in their professional development.
- ❖ Building on findings to date, about evidence of impact, wider dissemination and signposting is required e.g. resources available on the GTCS website. Additional resources that can support teachers to understand the why, how and what of evidence of impact should be added and shared with registrants.
- ❖ Emerging from the data is the conundrum surrounding collaborative learning. There is a disconnect between the reported usefulness and value given to collaborative learning and the impact this has on colleagues' learning. GTCS should consider creating resources to support registrants to engage with the principles and practices of collaborative learning.
- ❖ GTCS are continually looking for ways to engage and support all registrants with PU. GTCS has previously offered targeted support for 'hard to reach' registrants, i.e. those outwith schools, supply teachers and headteachers. It is recommended that GTCS continue to explore innovative solutions to support specific groups of registrants.

## **7 Acknowledgments**

Although PU remained a new experience for each of the cohorts, the evidence from this study indicates system learning. This includes an increase in the understanding of the centrality of the Professional Standards, the type of professional learning undertaken and how effective PRD enhances teacher professionalism. These inter-related aspects of teacher professionalism are cornerstones of a forward-looking education system that ensures highly qualified teachers continue to develop as professionals to ensure we improve the life chances of all of our children and young people.

The final acknowledgment goes to registrants who supported this longitudinal study by completing the PU annual evaluation survey helping GTCS to understand their experiences

of PU. The outcomes have been used to identify and address emerging issues and provide evidence for policy and process developments on an ongoing basis which we hope benefits all registrants as they engage in the next cycle of PU.

*Inspiring world-class teaching professionalism*

## GTC Scotland *Comhairle Choitcheann Teagaisg na h-Alba*

The General Teaching Council for Scotland is the independent professional body which maintains and enhances teaching standards and promotes and regulates the teaching profession in Scotland. We strive to be a world leader in professional education issues.

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