

## Appendix F: Analysis of Post-Referral Questionnaires

- F.1 The SAU sends out Post-Referral Questionnaires (PRQs) to public authorities shortly after publication of their reports to gather feedback on how this aspect of the regime is working and on how the SAU is performing, including identifying areas for improvement. The questionnaire includes a mix of 35 qualitative and quantitative questions.<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire is based on a branching form, which means that some questions are only asked dependent on the response to the previous one.
- F.2 This appendix sets out our analysis of responses to the PRQs.

### Methodology

- F.1 The analysis covers 46 responses received for reports published during the review period of January 2023 to March 2026. The SAU sent 109 PRQs during the review period so 46 represents a response rate of 42%.
- F.2 We looked at the overall 'score' for each of the quantitative questions (shown in the top graphs). We also looked at the trend in responses across the review period (shown in the bottom graphs).<sup>2</sup> We did this by calculating an average score based on the mean response for each quarter of the review period. We also calculated a weighted rolling average, based on the mean response from the previous three quarters.<sup>3</sup>
- F.3 In analysing the qualitative responses, we looked at the most common positive themes and areas of improvement offered in each question.
- F.4 We note that the style, format and questions asked were changed part-way through the review period (in response to feedback and to try and improve the response rate).
- F.5 This report uses the questions asked in the most recent version of the questionnaire as the basis for analysis. A small number of previous questions have been combined with the newer ones where we consider they are similar enough to contribute to the overall analysis. For example:

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<sup>1</sup> Quantitative questions asked the public authority for views based on a scale, eg 'very helpful'; 'fairly helpful'; 'not very helpful'; 'not at all helpful'.

<sup>2</sup> Questions asked in the 'Yes/No' format are displayed as a percentage (%) of respondents that answered 'Yes' to the question.

<sup>3</sup> Data labels on the graphs represent the number of respondents for each quarter.

1. 'When designing the subsidy or scheme or drafting the assessment, did you engage with DBT and/or any relevant body (including through the subsidy case teams)?'; and
2. 'To what extent did you find this helpful?'
3. 'If you engaged with DBT and/or any relevant body (including through the subsidy case teams) when designing the subsidy or scheme or drafting the assessment, to what extent did you find this engagement helpful?'

## Responses

F.6 Of the 46 responses received:

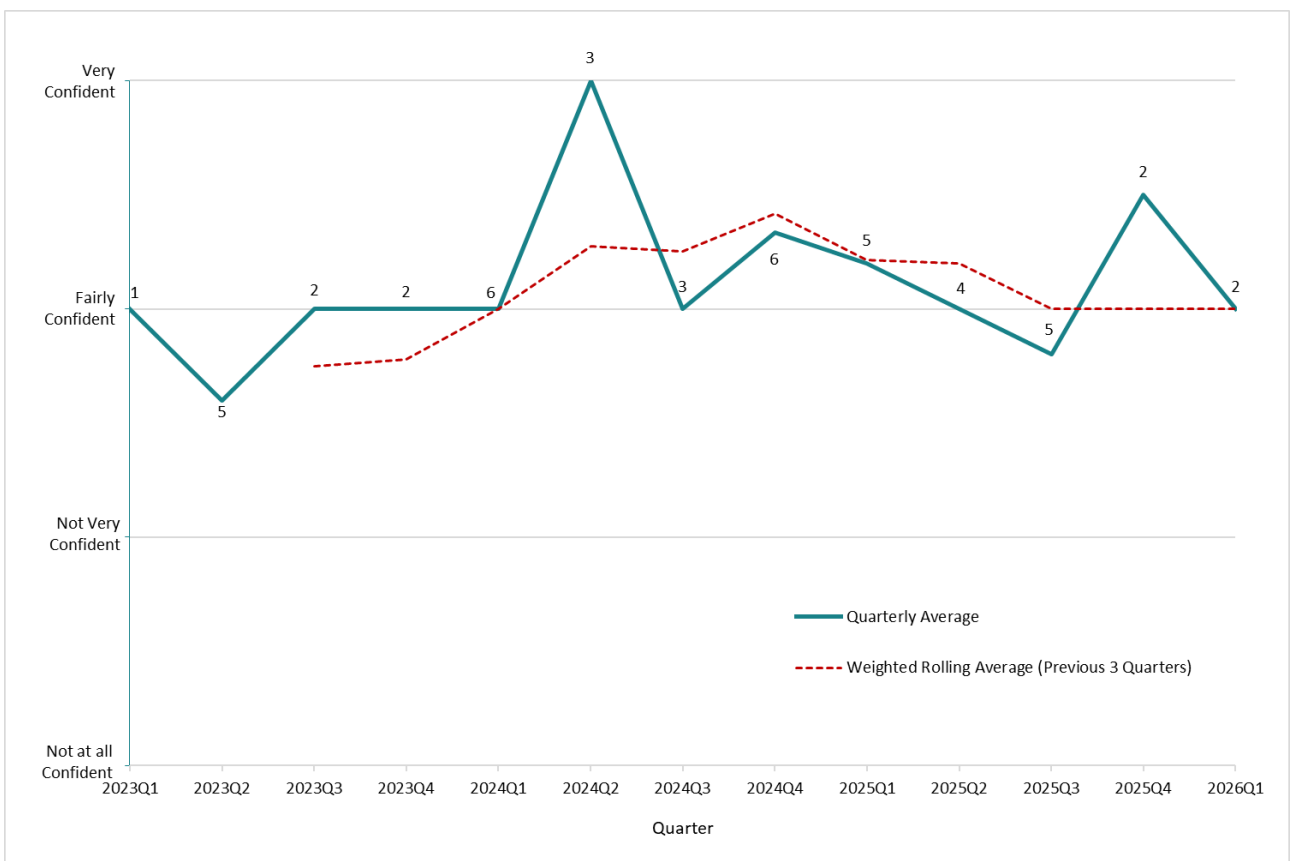
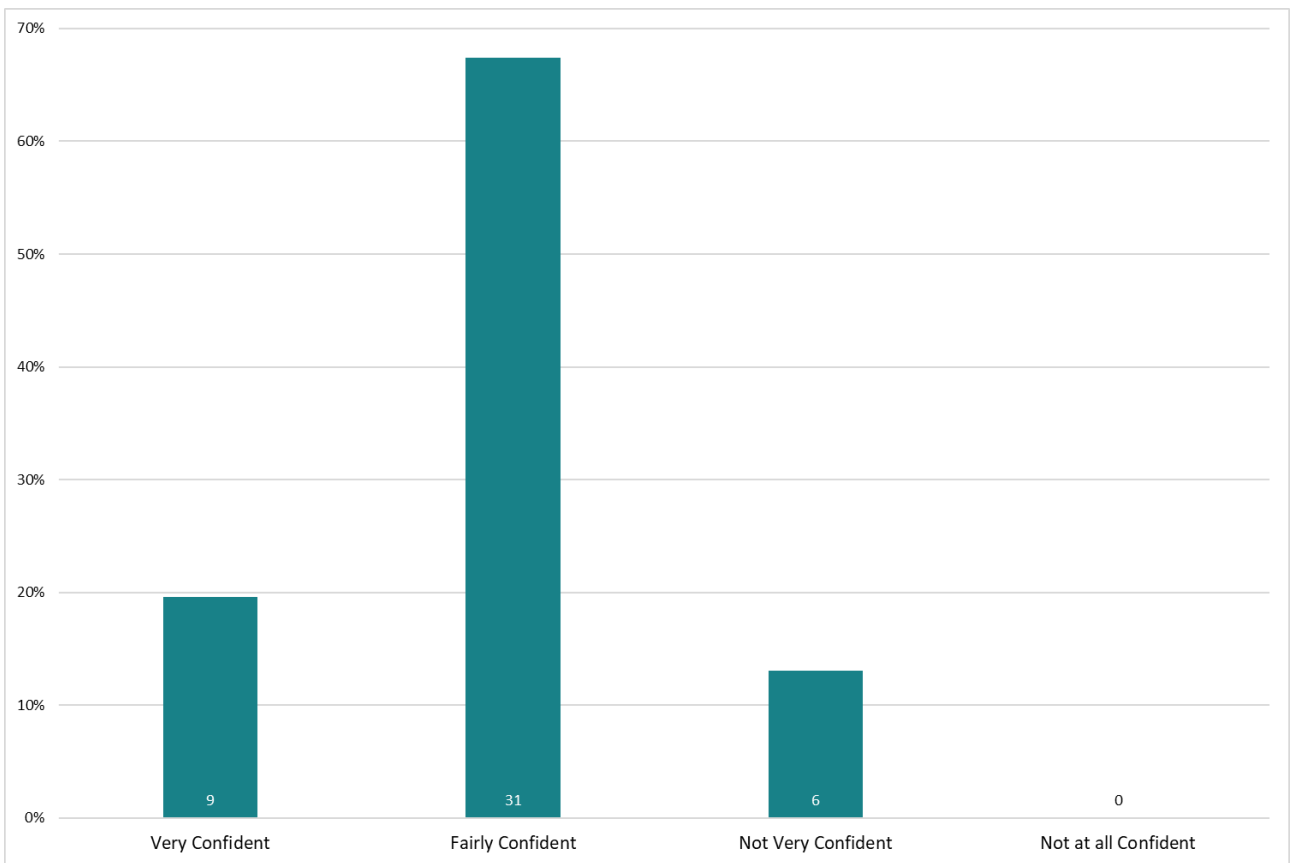
- (a) 20 were from UK government departments;
- (b) 15 were from Local Authorities;
- (c) 2 were from Devolved Governments; and
- (d) 9 were from public authorities defined as 'Other'.

## The subsidy control principles

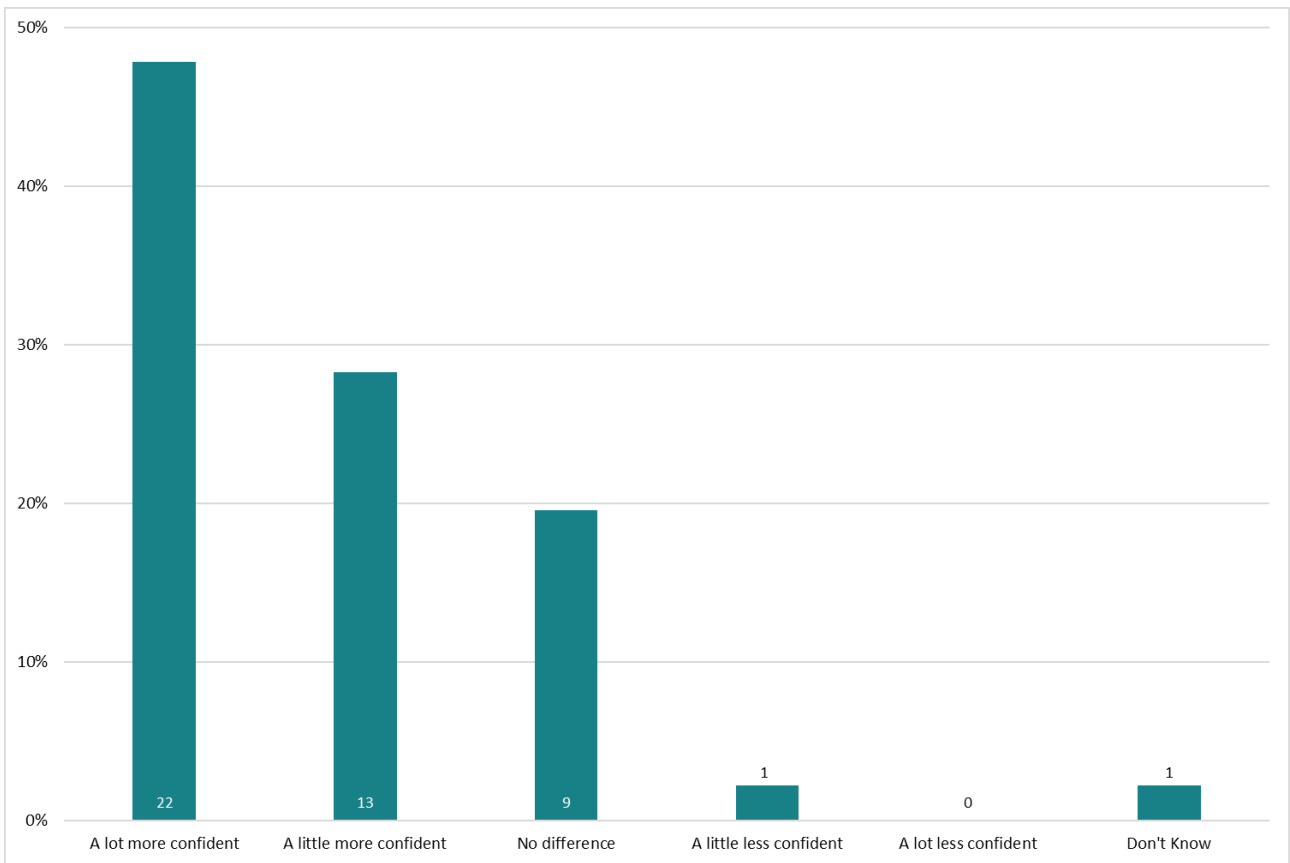
F.7 We asked public authorities to consider their confidence in understanding the subsidy control principles before and after engaging with the SAU and receiving the report.

F.8 Responses, set indicated that confidence was relatively high before engagement, and that a significant majority of public authorities felt more confident after receiving the report.

**Figure F.1: ‘Prior to engaging, how confident did you feel in understanding the subsidy control principles and being able to design the subsidy or scheme in a way that met them?’**



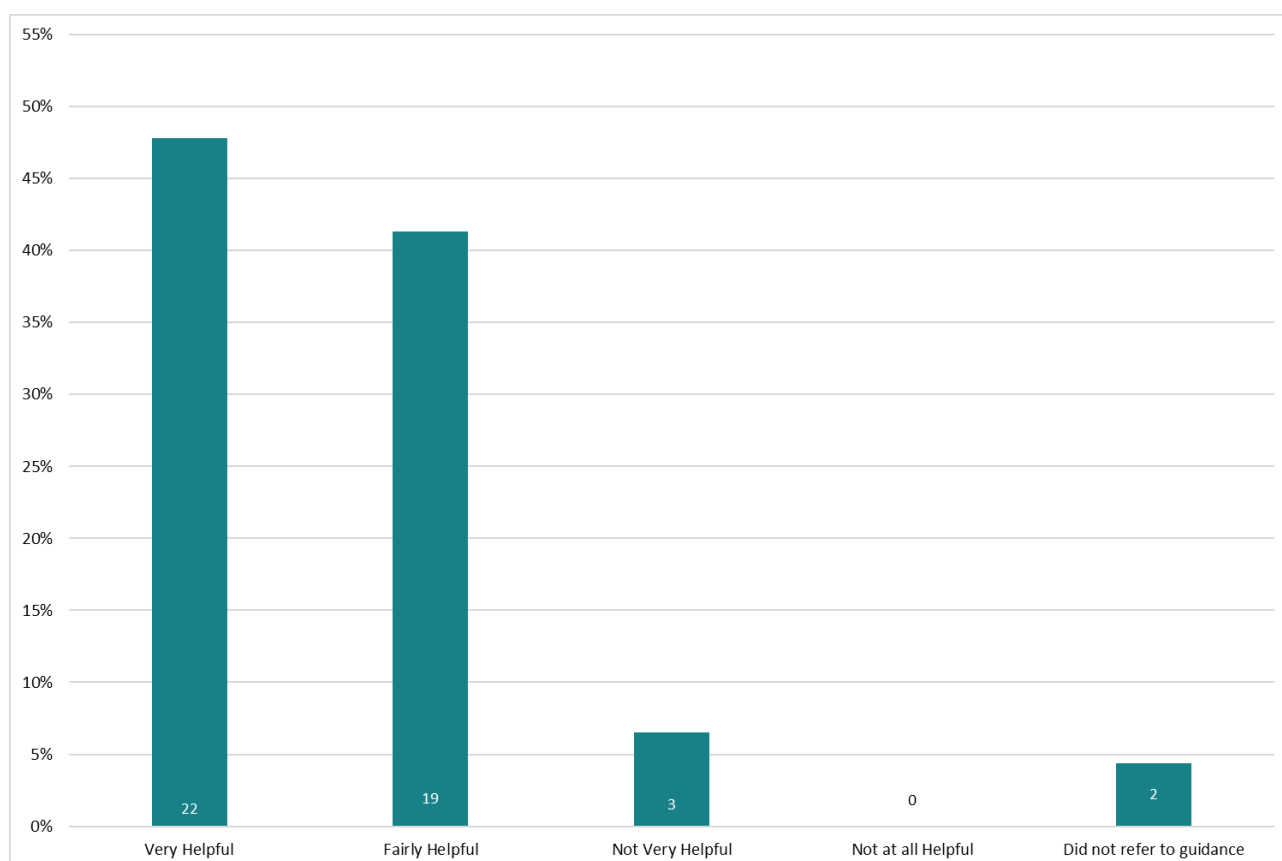
**Figure F.2: ‘Now that you have had our report, how confident are you about ensuring that any future subsidies or schemes are consistent with the subsidy control principles compared with the answer you gave earlier?’**



## Statutory Guidance and support

- F.9 Forty-four public authorities (96%) told us they referred to the Statutory Guidance when designing the subsidy or scheme and drafting the assessment. Almost all of them said they found the guidance ‘very’ or ‘fairly helpful’, with only three stating that it was ‘not very helpful’. Overall, there was a gradual but steady trend towards more positive responses during the review period.
- F.10 Several public authorities told us that the structure of the guidance was clear and helpful, and that the step-by-step breakdowns and suggested formats made it easier to draft assessments. Others stated that it was comprehensive and well-presented, with examples, definitions and supporting explanations helpful in understanding key concepts and evidential requirements. Supplementary materials, such as checklists, templates and analytical frameworks were also considered a valuable part of strengthening assessments.
- F.11 A small number of public authorities told us that the guidance sometimes felt long and difficult to navigate, and could be more concise, better signposted, and less repetitive across chapters. They also stated that the guidance felt too generic at points and needed greater specificity as to ‘what good looks like’. They suggested sector-specific examples and more realistic case studies as possible solutions to this issue.

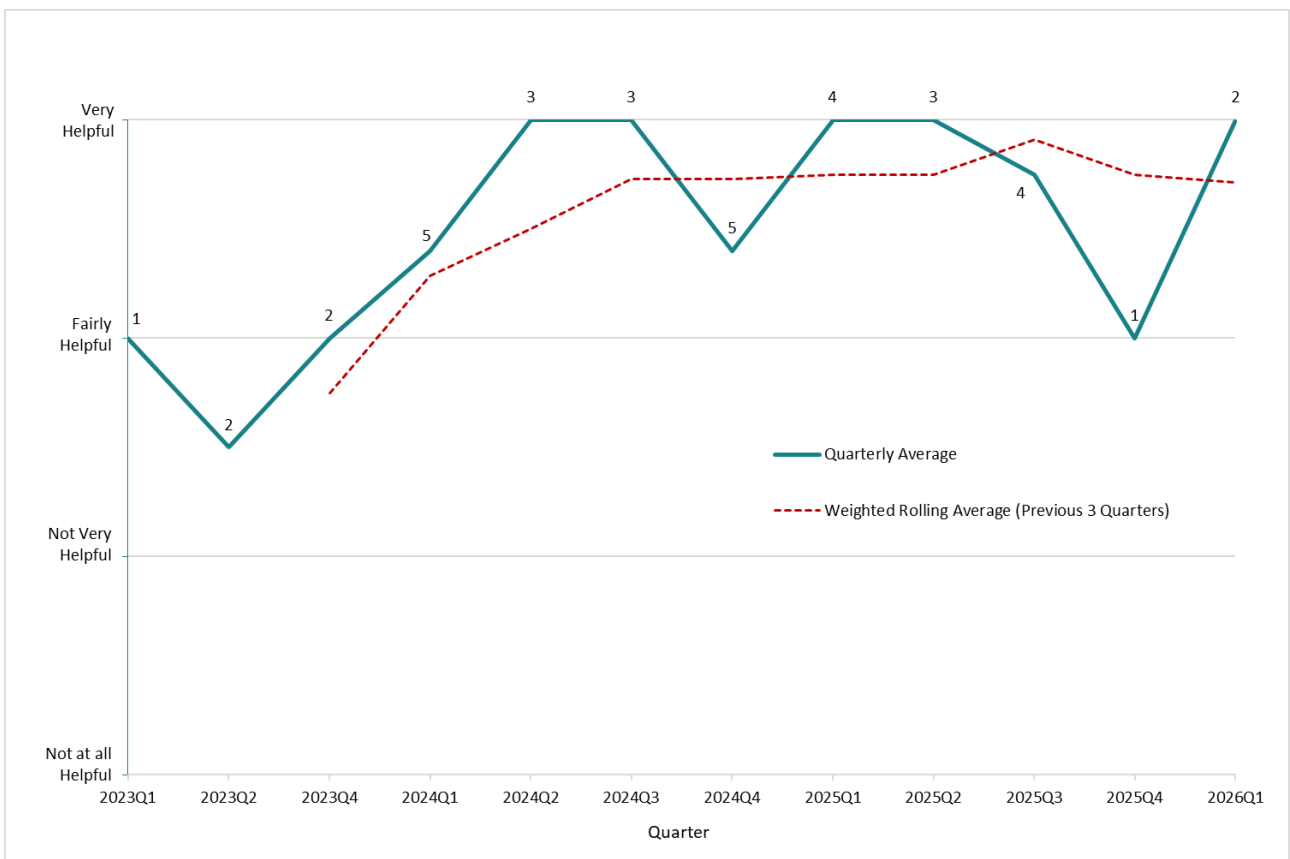
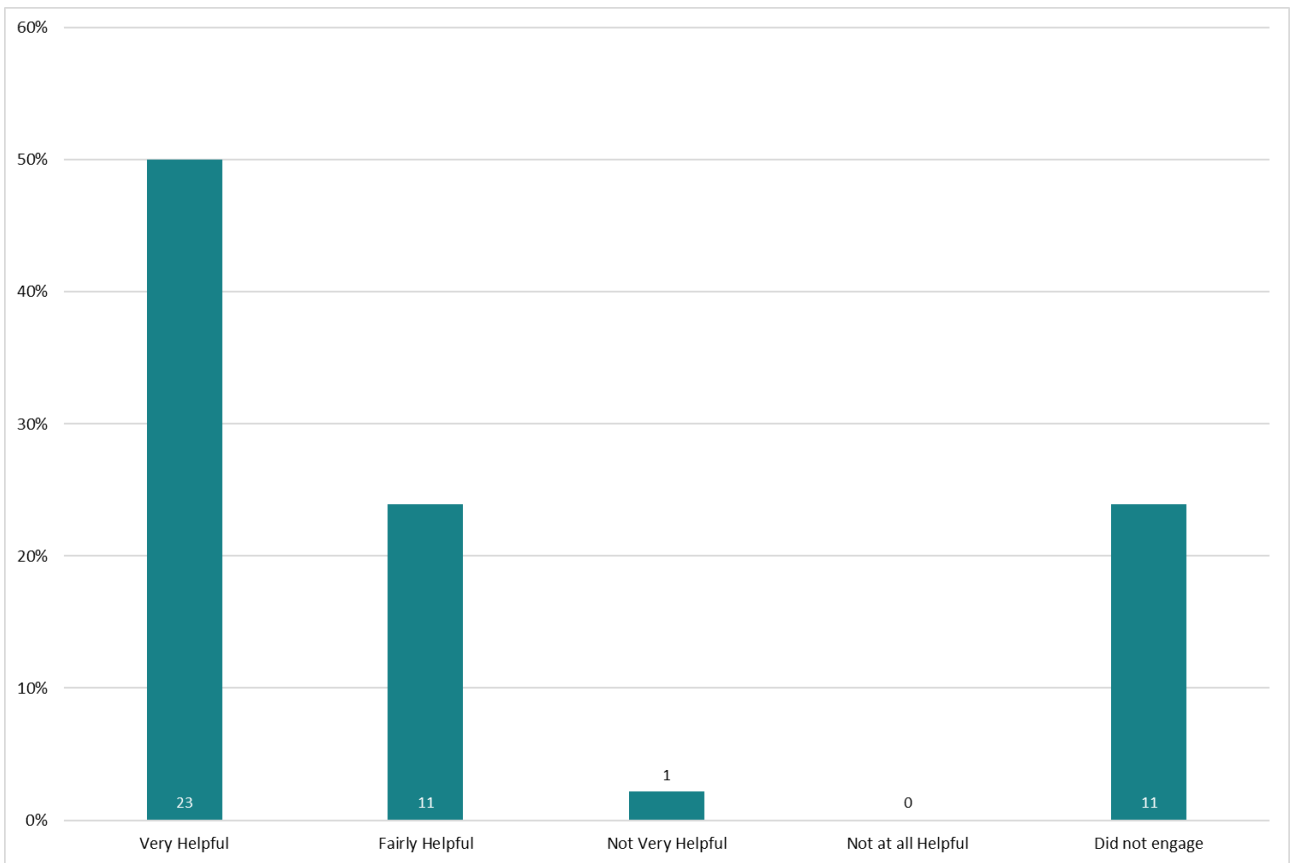
**Figure F.3: ‘To what extent did you find the DBT Statutory Guidance helpful?’**





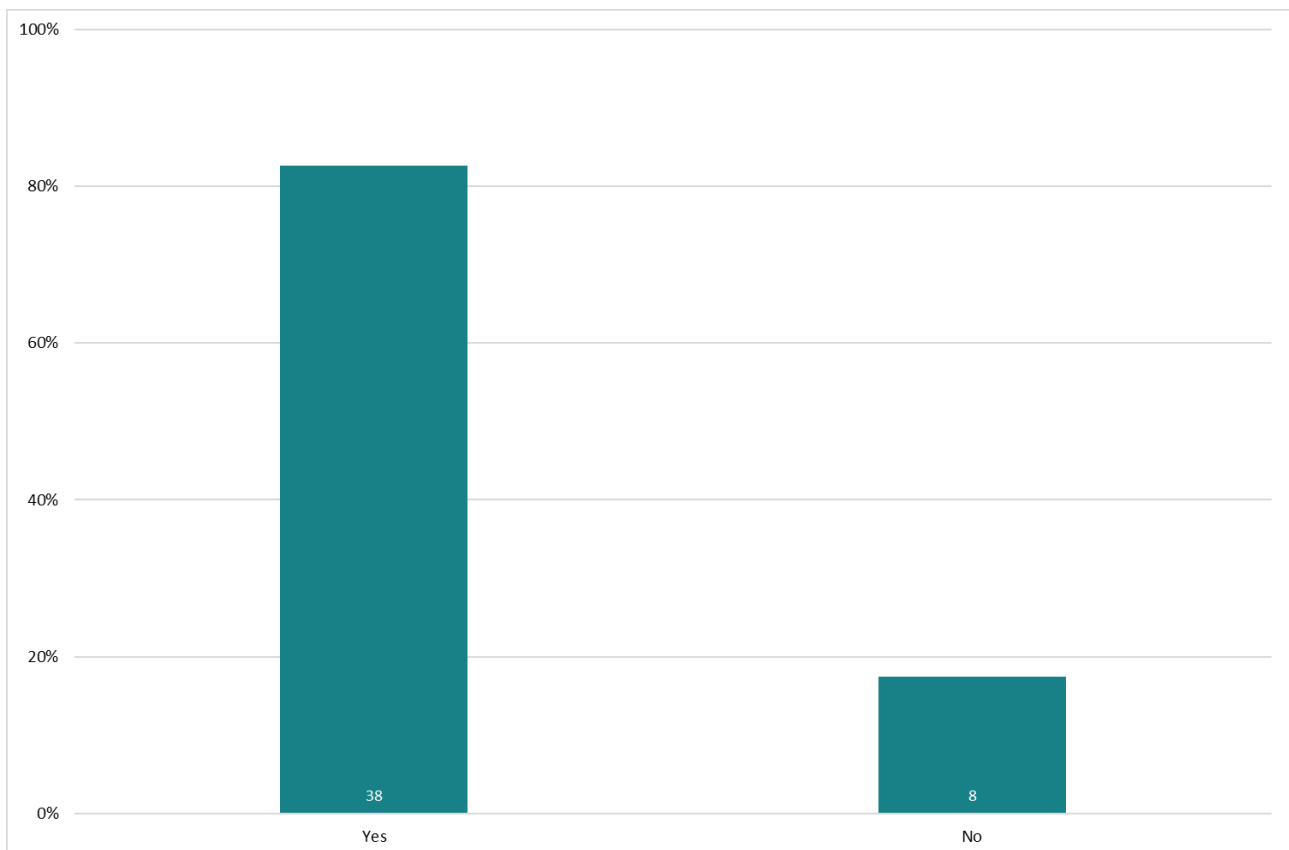
- F.12 The majority of public authorities told us that they found engagement with DBT and/or other relevant bodies either ‘very’ or ‘fairly helpful’, with only one stating that it was ‘not very helpful’. Overall, there was a gradual but steady trend towards more positive responses during the review period. Eleven public authorities told us that they did not engage, primarily due to lack of awareness or the view that this would not be beneficial to the scheme.
- F.13 Several public authorities told us that caseworkers were knowledgeable, responsive and helpful throughout, and that feedback on draft assessments was constructive and helped to refine certain areas.
- F.14 However, some considered advice to be inconsistent or conflicting at times, which was confusing and occasionally resulted in the need for redrafting. A small number also told us that DBT engagement was too reactive and could have been more structured or standardised.

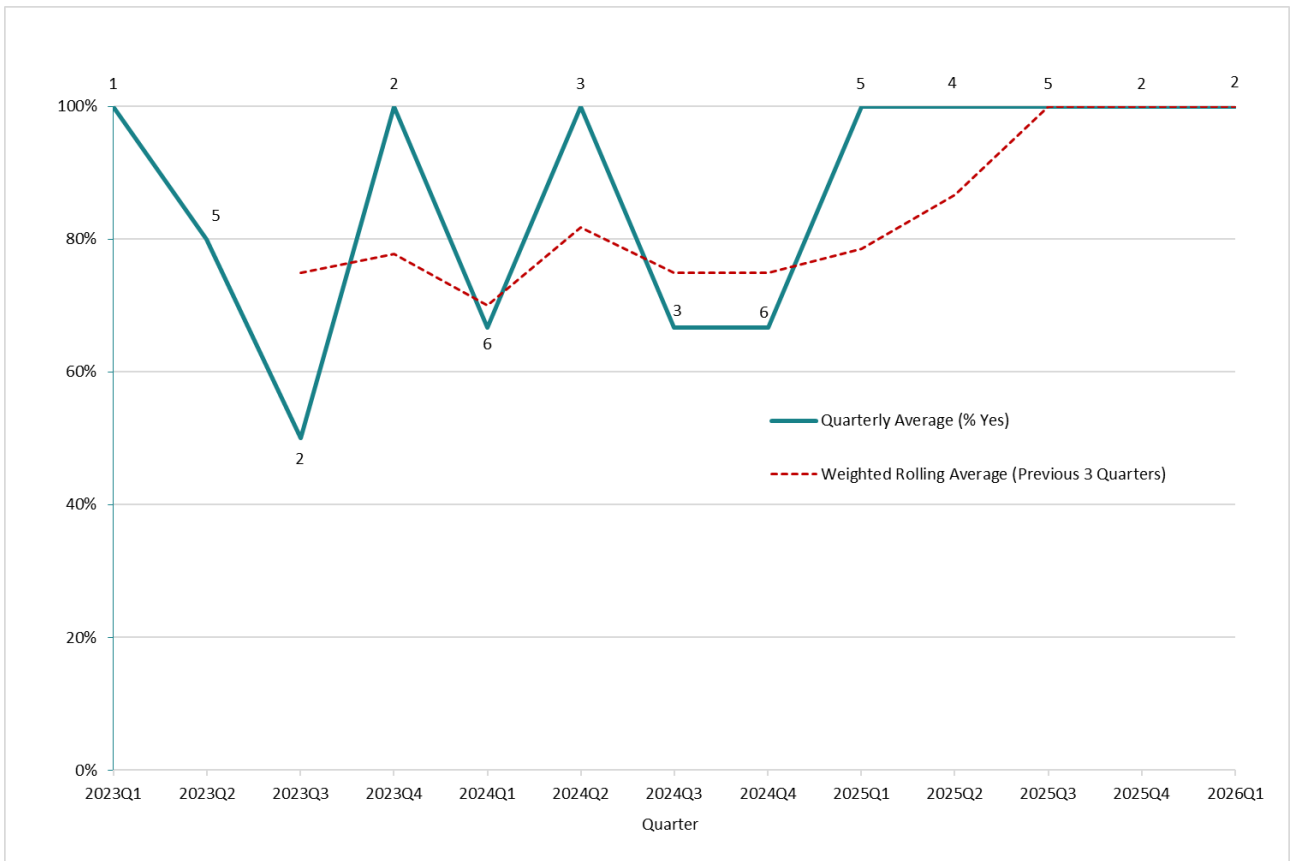
**Figure F.4: ‘Did you engage with DBT and/or any relevant body (including through the subsidy case teams) when designing the subsidy or scheme, or drafting the assessment and to what extent did you find this engagement helpful?’**



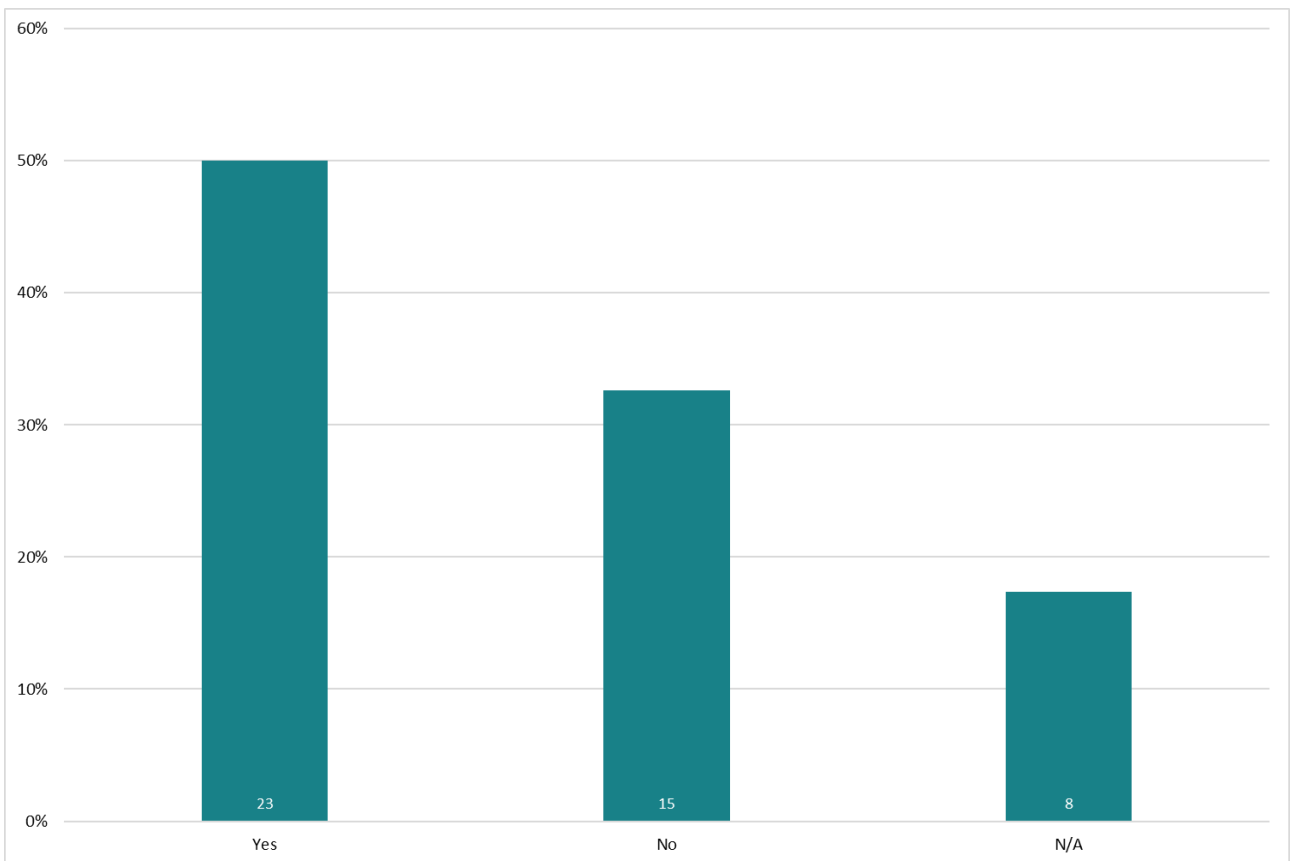
- F.15 A significant majority of public authorities (83%) told us that they felt they had access to sufficient resources and expertise to ensure that they were consistent with the requirements of the Act, with every public authority stating this for the final year of the review period.
- F.16 Of the public authorities that felt they had access to sufficient resources and expertise, over 60% told us that this access included consulting external professional advisers. Several noted the legal assistance offered by DBT as a key part of this expertise.
- F.17 A small number of public authorities felt that, even with external guidance, that without a clear benchmarking it was difficult to understand if the principles were satisfied. They suggested that there could be clear examples of good practice as a possible solution to this. Some also told us that they received contradicting advice from legal experts, which made the process harder to navigate.

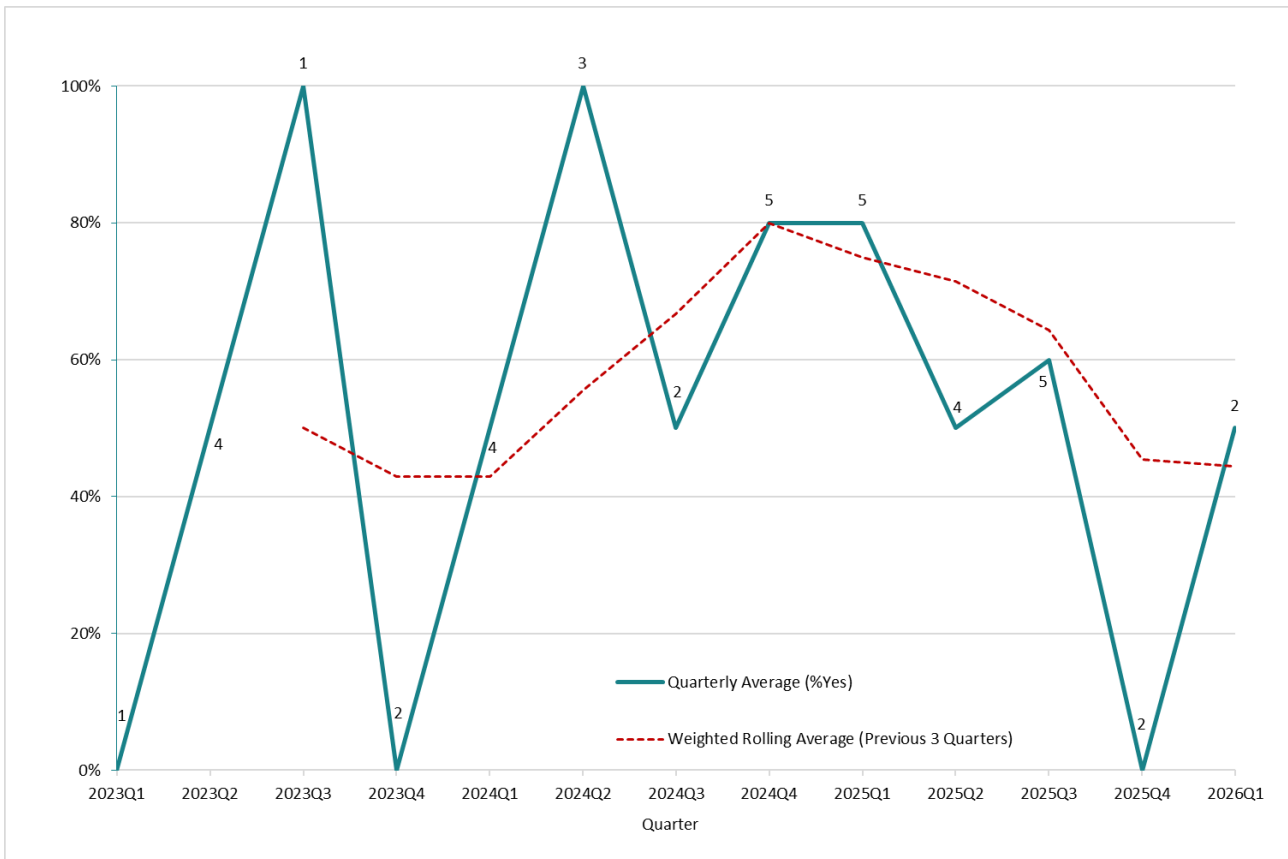
**Figure F.5: ‘Did you feel you had access to sufficient resources and expertise to ensure you could understand and be consistent with the requirements of the Subsidy Control Act?’**





**Figure F.6: ‘Did this include consulting external professional advisers (eg legal, economists etc)?’**

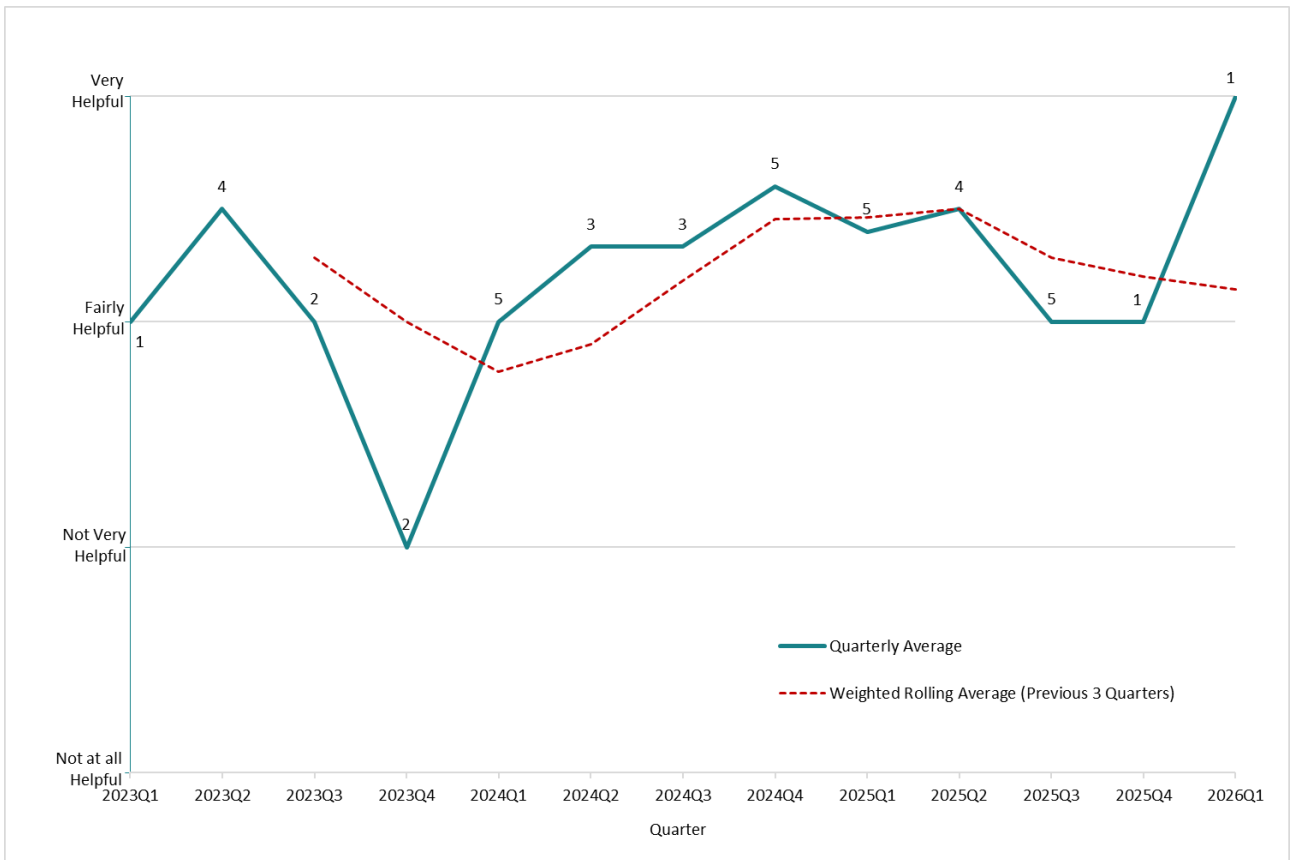
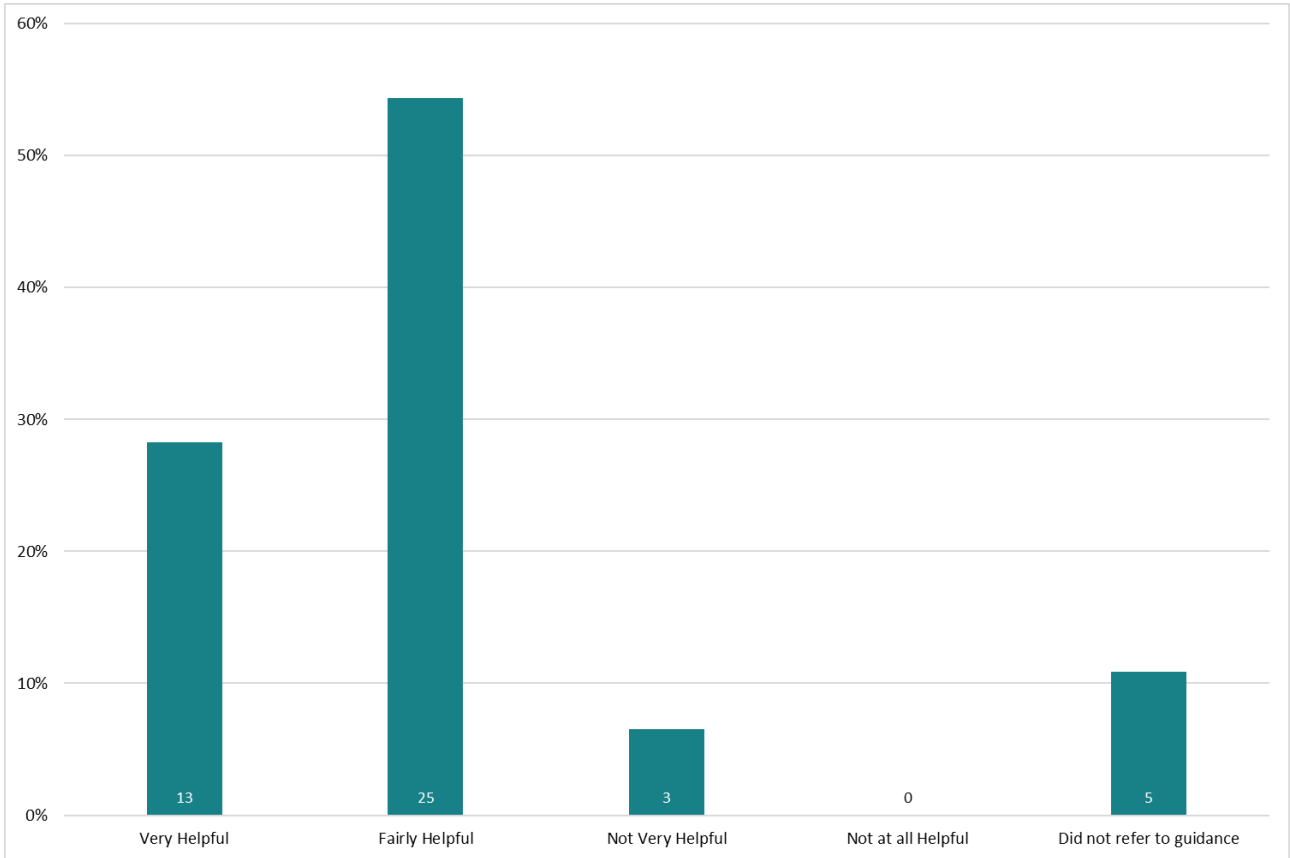




## The SAU and the referral process

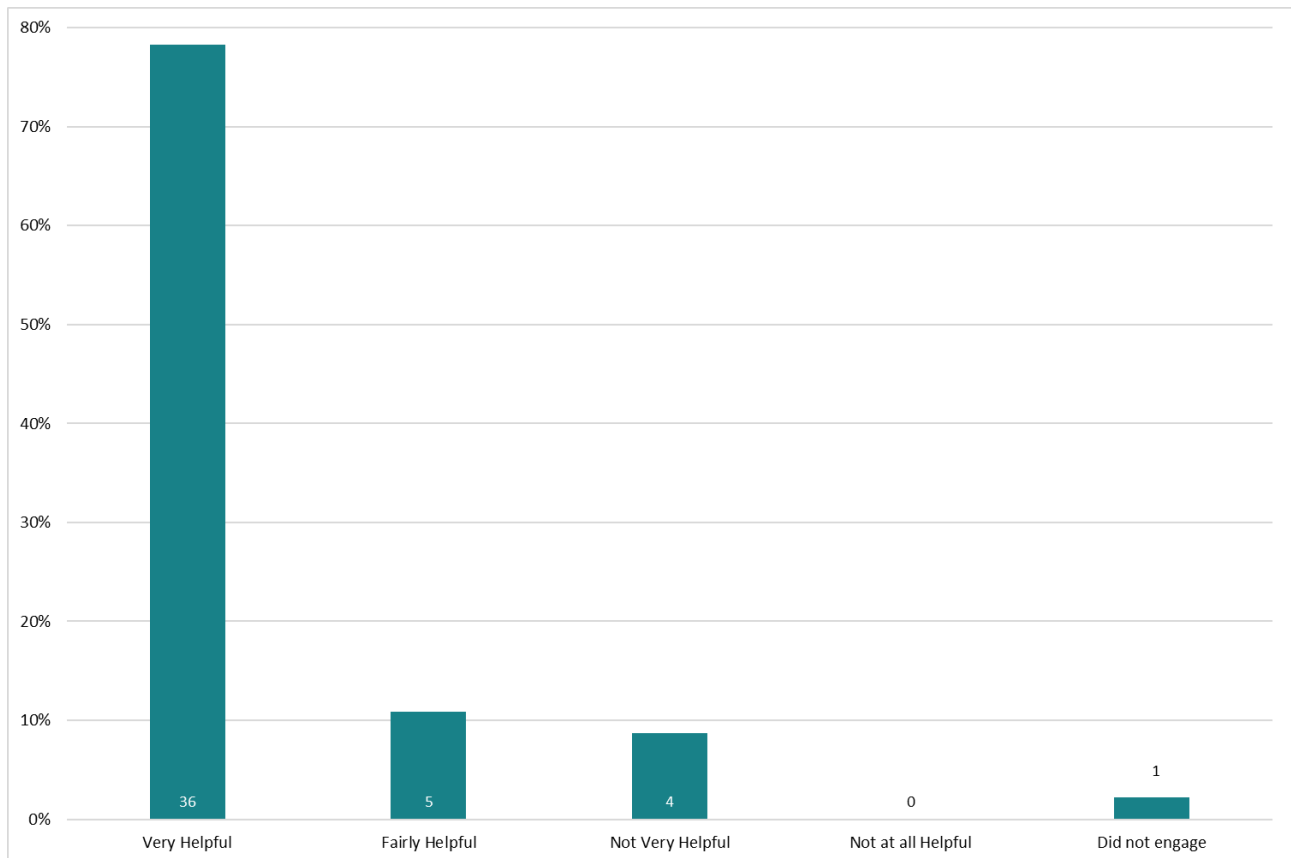
- F.18 Thirty-eight public authorities (86%) told us that they found the SAU Guidance either ‘very’ or ‘fairly helpful’, with only three finding it ‘not very helpful’. Many thought that the guidance was clear and succinct, and provided a useful framework for understanding what the SAU looks for in referrals.
- F.19 Several public authorities told us that the guidance and process maps were helpful to understand procedural steps and expectations, particularly around referral stages, timing, and evidential needs. They also told us that the SAU Guidance was a helpful addition to the Statutory Guidance, and aided in anticipating how the SAU would interpret requirements and where detail needed strengthening.
- F.20 For certain areas, such as market failure and competition and trade analysis, a small number of public authorities felt that more clarity and detail would have been helpful. Others also felt mentioned that the examples provided were basic compared to real subsidies, and so could not be applied in practice.

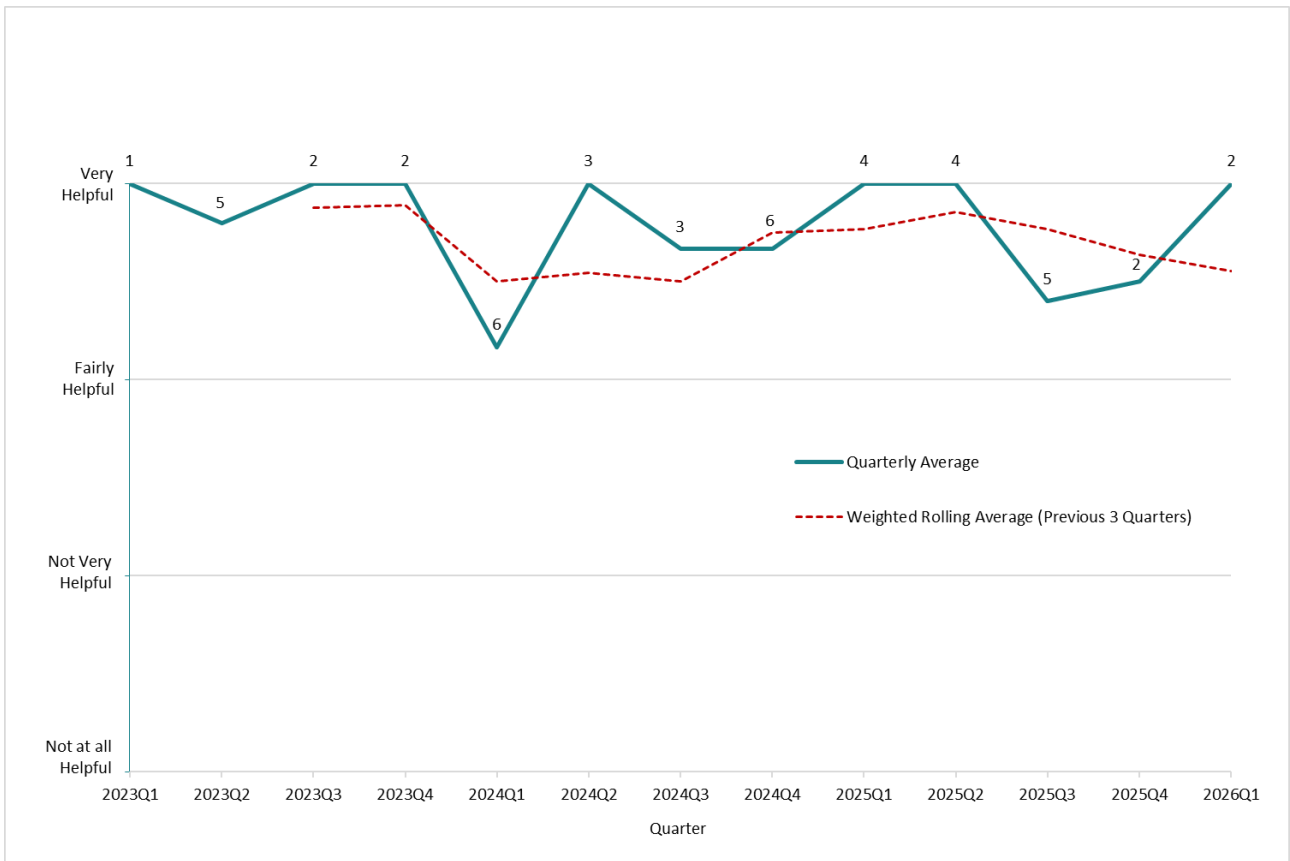
**Figure F.7: 'To what extent did you find the SAU guidance helpful?'**



- F.21 Forty-one public authorities (89%) said that engagement with the SAU in the lead up to the referral was either ‘very’ or ‘fairly helpful’, whilst only four found this ‘not very helpful’. Responses were generally positive throughout the entire review period, and public authorities found engagement to be highly valuable.
- F.22 In particular, they told us that pre-referral discussions helped to set expectations, refine draft assessments, and identify weaker areas requiring improvement, and that SAU staff were supportive, knowledgeable and responsive, with clear expertise of subsidy control.
- F.23 A small number felt that the SAU lacked sector-specific knowledge in some areas, for example energy markets, which limited the value of engagement.

**Figure F.8: ‘To what extent did you find engagement with the SAU helpful in the lead up to your referral (including any pre-referral discussions)?’**

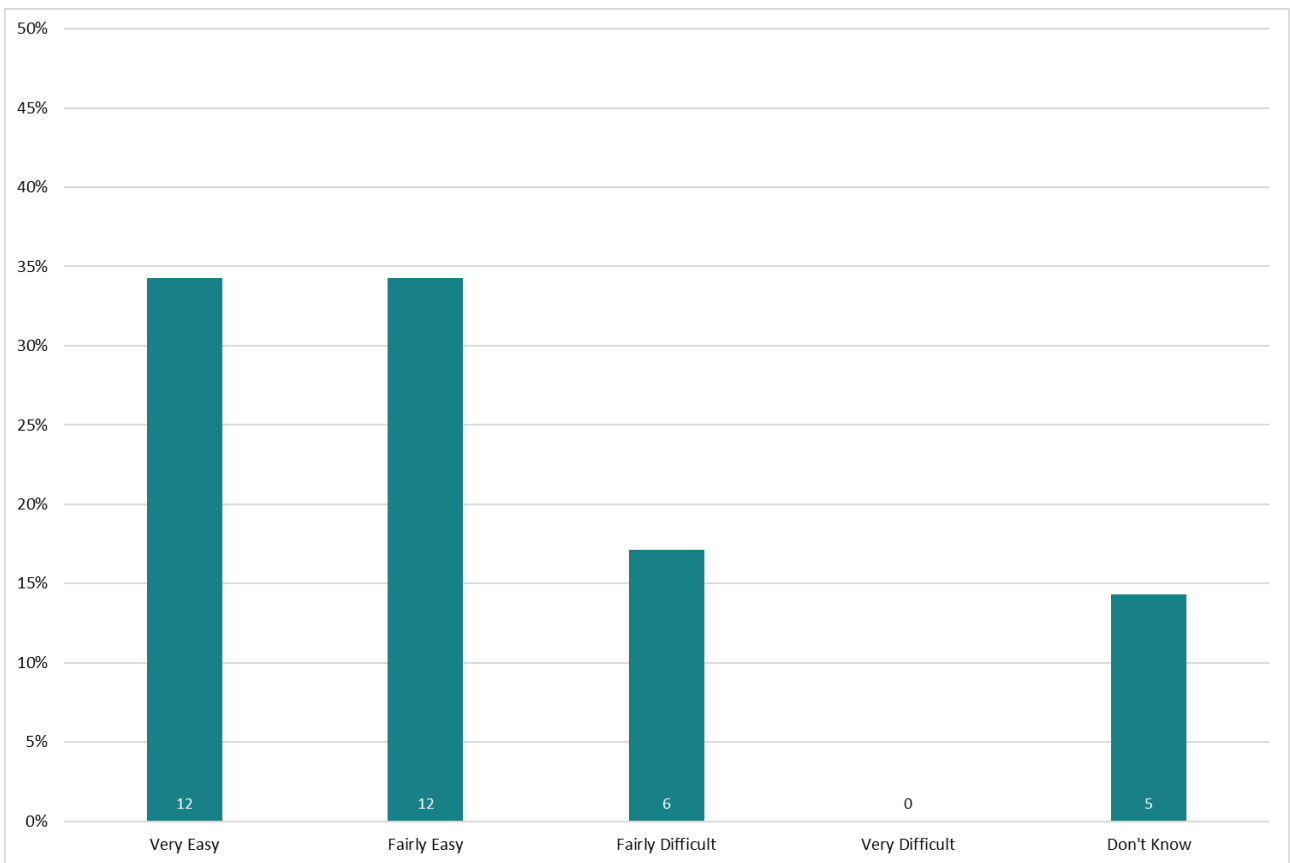




- F.24 Twenty-four public authorities (68%) told us that they found the Public Authority Portal (PAP) either ‘very’ or ‘fairly easy’ to use, whilst only six told us that they found this ‘fairly difficult’.<sup>4</sup> Several told us that the PAP was simple and intuitive, with a straightforward upload process, clear navigation, and a smooth onboarding. They also found features such as draft save very helpful.
- F.25 A small number of public authorities suggested that the PAP could be improved by containing a checklist or template outlining the details required in advance, and avoiding duplication with the questions already asked in the assessment.

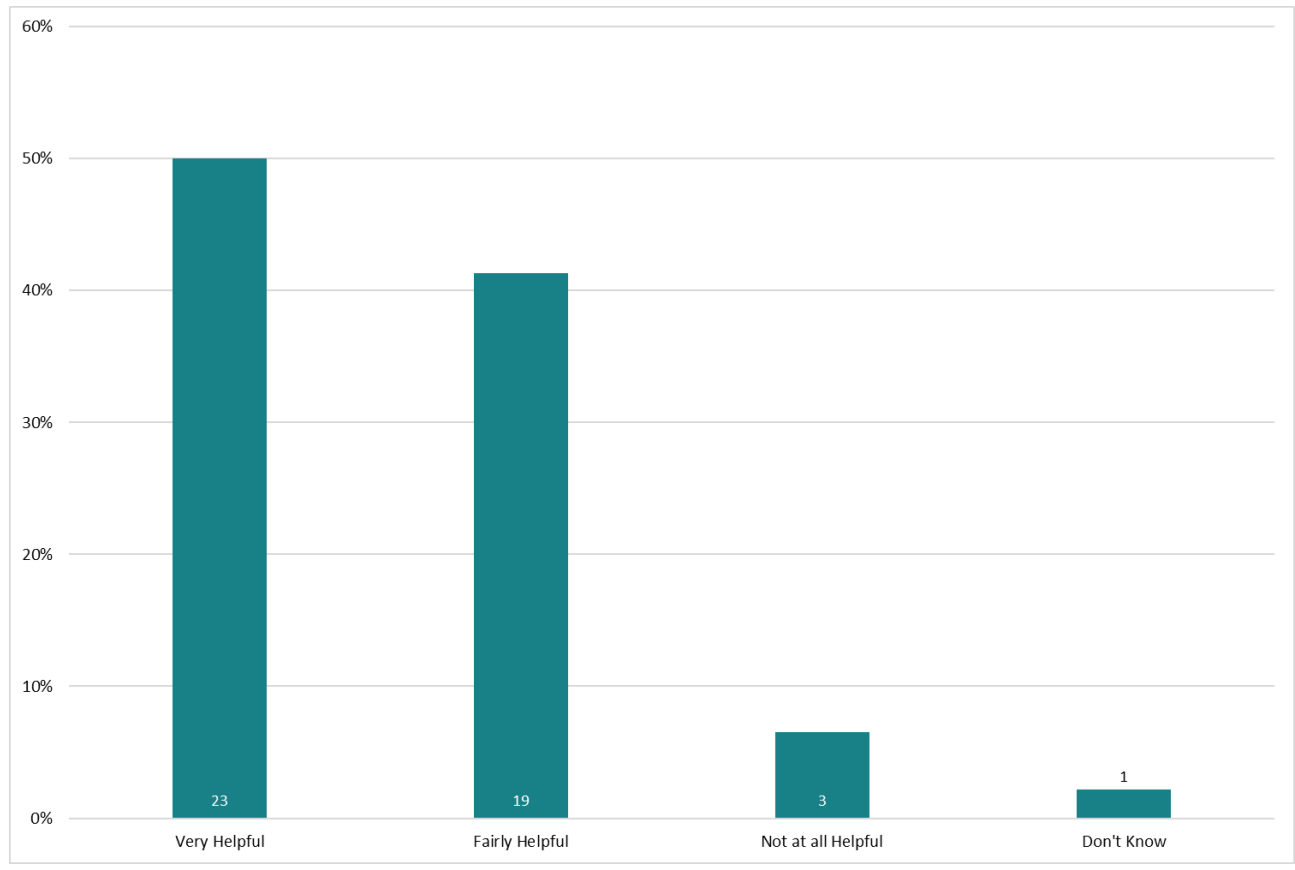
<sup>4</sup> Note that this question was removed from the PRQ in 2025Q2 and as such there are only 35 responses.

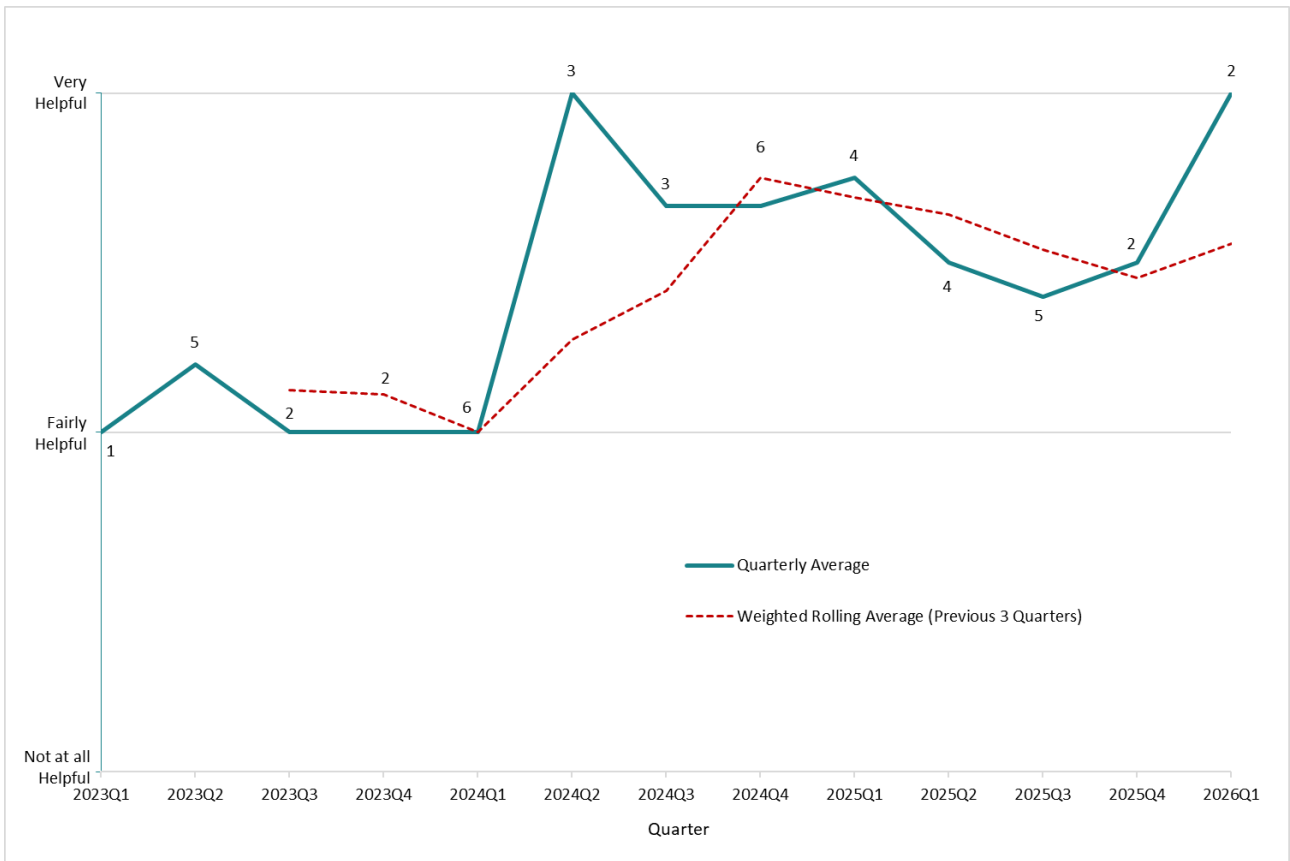
**Figure F.9: ‘On balance, how easy or difficult did you find it to use the PAP (eg registering, submitting information, uploading documents)?’**



F.26 Almost all public authorities (91%) told us that they found the final report either 'very' or 'fairly helpful', with only three finding it 'not at all helpful'. There was a sustained increase in more positive responses following the first year of the review period. Many public authorities said that the report enhanced learning for future work, and helped them to understand SAU expectations, evidential requirements, and how to refine policy and assessment design.

**Figure F.10: 'To what extent did you find the report helpful?'**

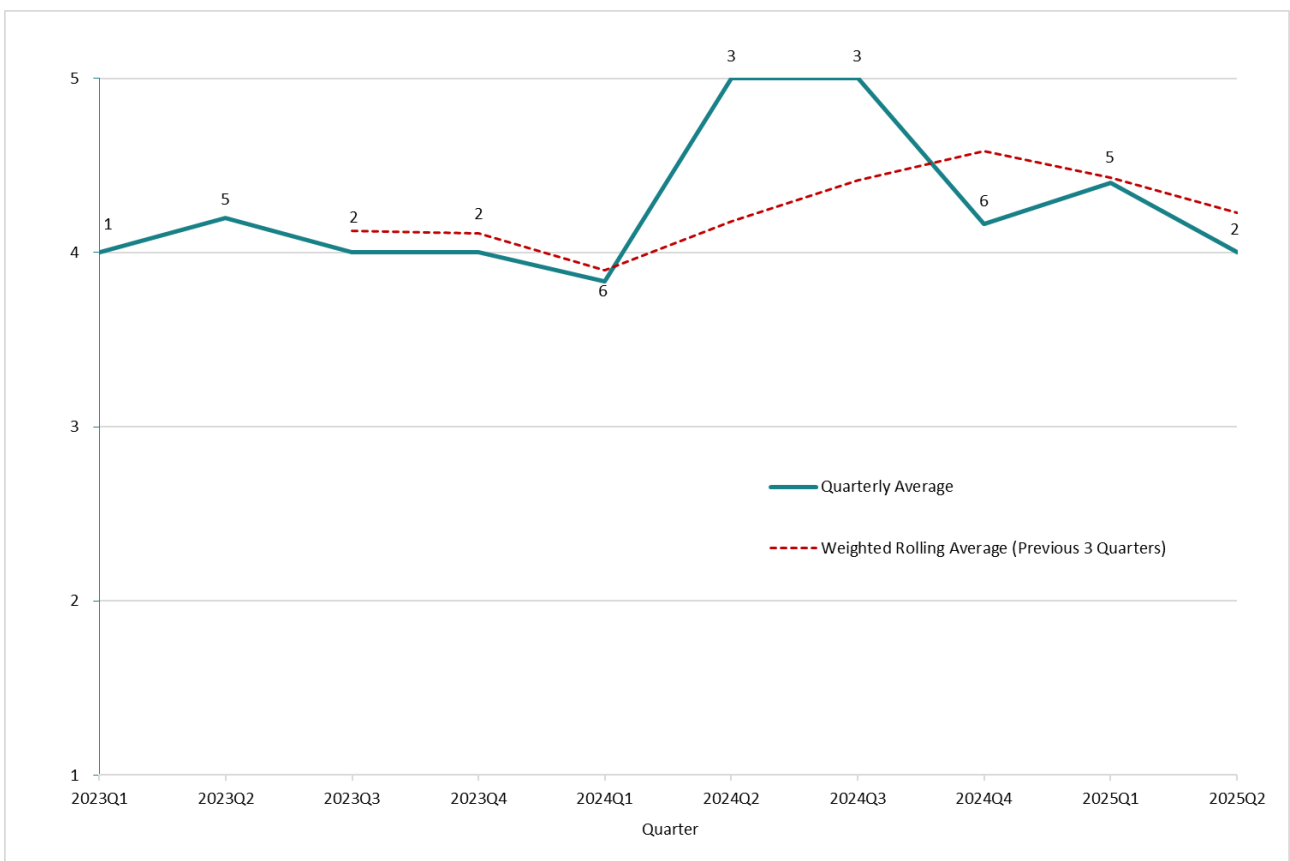
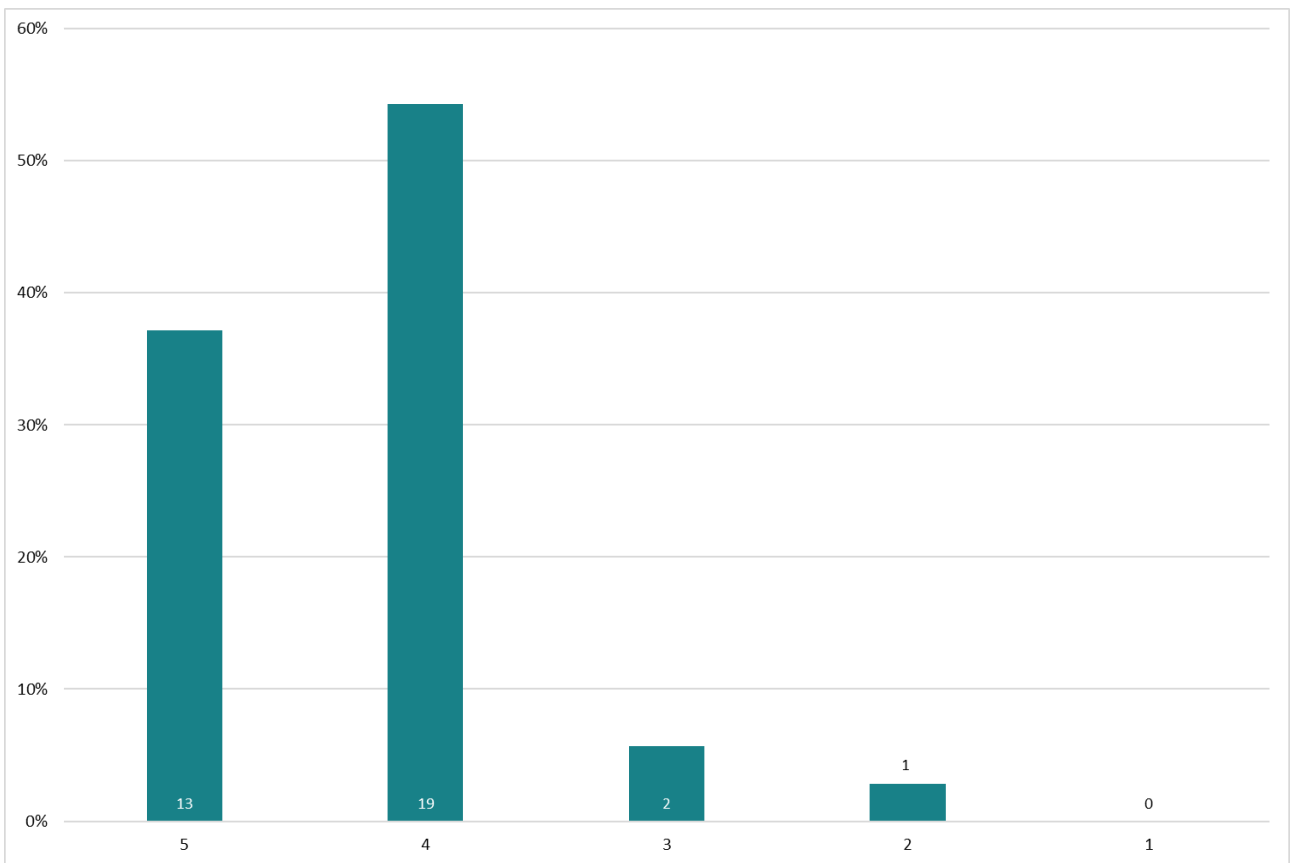




F.27 Public authorities gave an average score of 4.3 out of 5 when considering the content, length and clarity of the report, with this score remaining largely consistent throughout the review period.<sup>5</sup> In general, they told us that the report was clear, concise and actionable, and followed a logical structure with recommendations that could be easily implemented. A significant amount also found the distinction between what ‘should’ and ‘could’ be improved very useful.

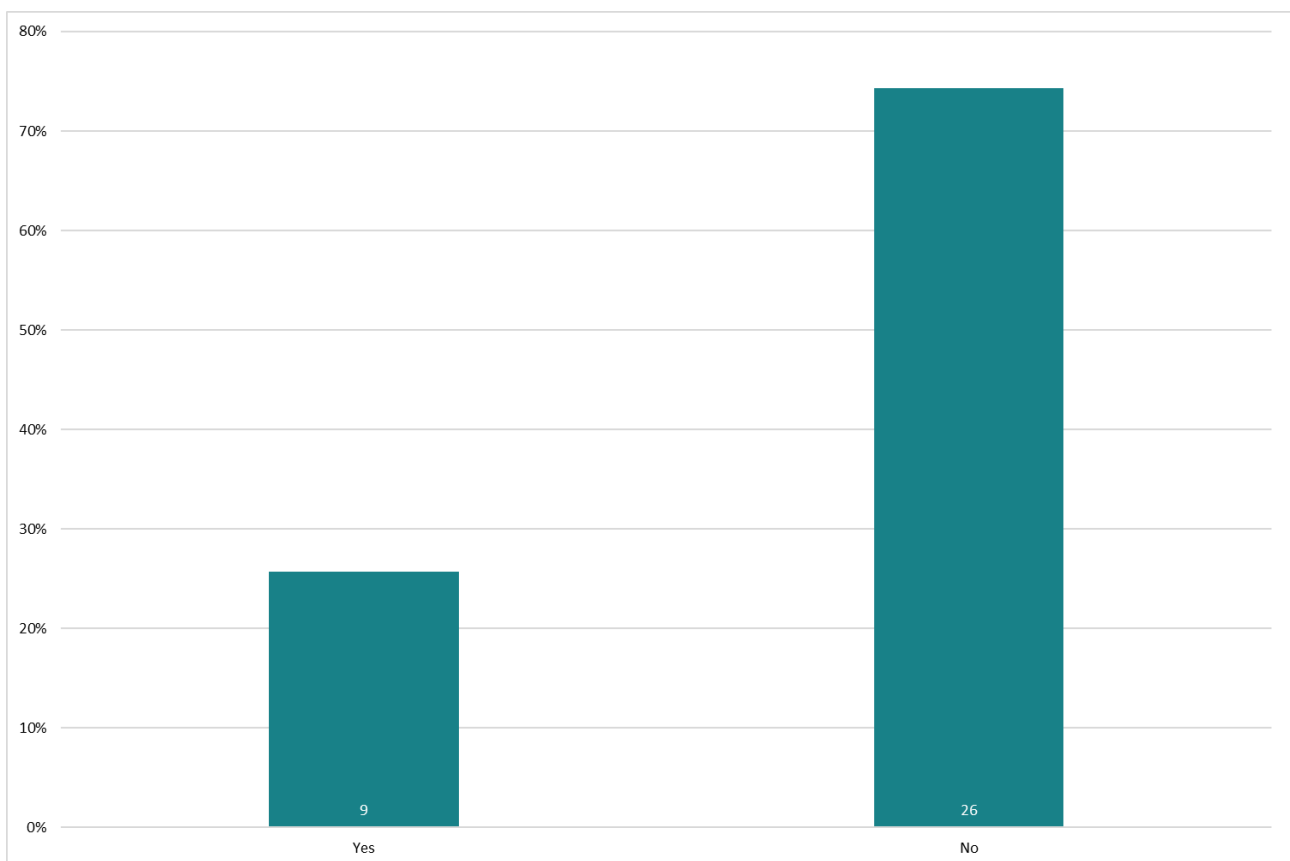
<sup>5</sup> Note that this question was removed from the PRQ in 2025Q2 and as such there are only 35 responses.

**Figure F.11: ‘From 1 to 5, how would you rate the content, length and clarity/ease of understanding of the report?’**



- F.28 Only 9 public authorities (20%) told us that the process of carrying out the assessment changed their view of how their subsidy or scheme would impact competition and investment in the UK. This was largely constant throughout the review period.
- F.29 Similarly, 9 public authorities (26%) told us that they planned to modify the subsidy or scheme following the report.<sup>6</sup> This number declined sharply during the first year and remained low throughout the remainder of the review period.
- F.30 A small number told us that a lack of an overall judgement or conclusion left elements of uncertainty, and that the report would have benefitted from offering more specific suggestions for improvement. Having said this, a significant number told us that they did revise the assessment documents to address concerns.

**Figure F.12: ‘As a result of the report, did you modify – or do you plan to modify – the subsidy or scheme in any way?’**



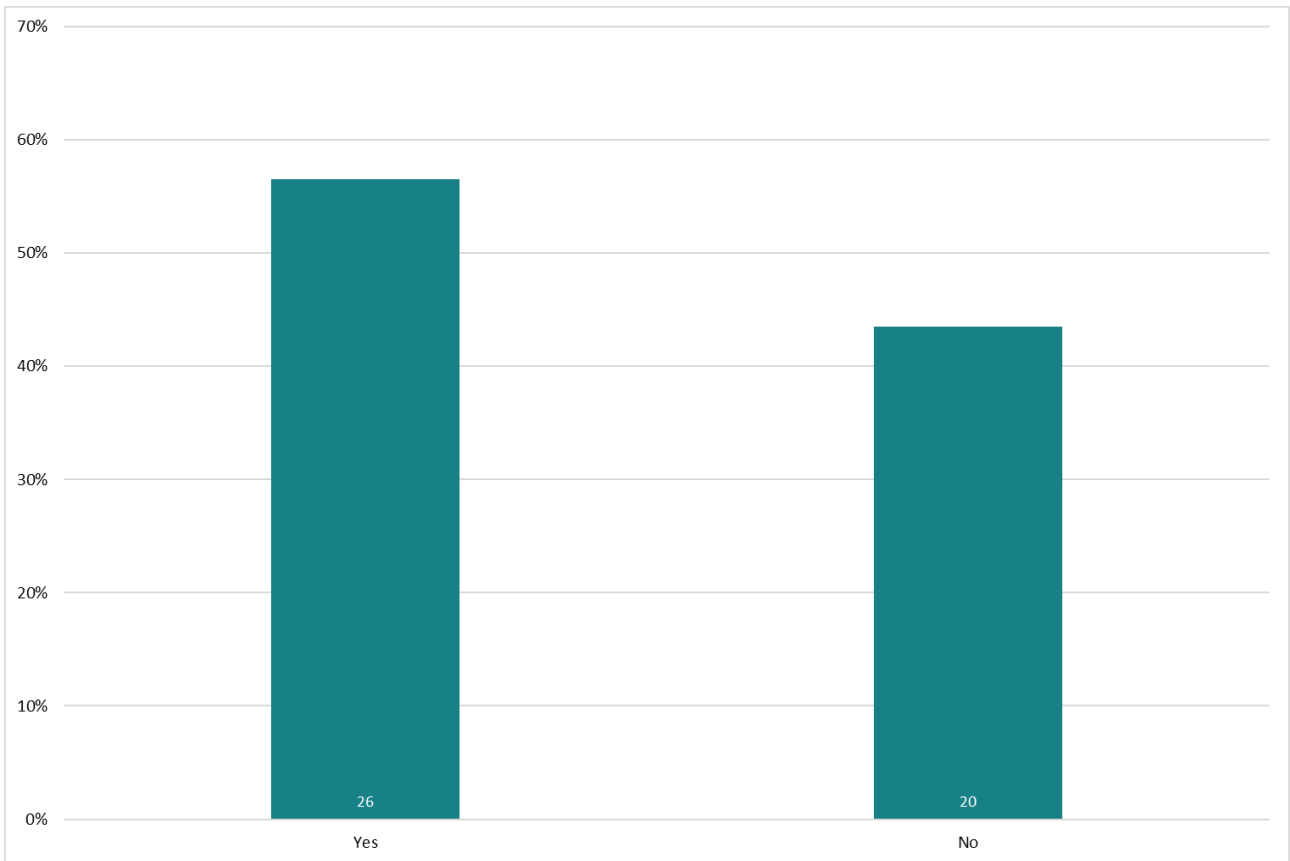
<sup>6</sup> Note that this question was removed from the PRQ in 2025Q2 and as such there are only 35 responses.



F.31 Twenty-five public authorities (54%) told us that, having now gone through the entire process of engagement, they would do something differently next time. Despite some variation, this remained largely constant during the review period.

F.32 Similarly, 26 public authorities (57%) told us that, as a result of the report, they would do something different with respect to future subsidies or schemes, although there was steady decline throughout the second half of the review period.

**Figure F.13: ‘As a result of the report, is there anything different you plan to do with respect to future subsidies or schemes, or any changes you intend to make to your policy development process?’**



- F.33 50% of public authorities told us that they made changes to their subsidy or scheme as a result of their engagement with the SAU, with responses becoming increasingly more 'positive' throughout the review period.
- F.34 A significant number told us that going through the process increased capability and confidence, with repeated referrals making future assessments more straightforward. They also said that they felt clearer on the expectations relating to evidence on their side and the way that the assessment would be analysed, having carried out the process for the first time.
- F.35 50% of public authorities told us that the process of engagement with the SAU was influential in action they took subsequently: this may be engagement at pre-referral and referral stages.

**Figure F.14: 'Did you make any changes to your subsidy or scheme as a result of your engagement with the SAU?'**

