Office of the MARA
Registered Migration Agents
Continuing Professional Development
Survey Report

April 2012

Contents

Executive Summary

In Australia, those wishing to provide immigration assistance must be registered with the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (the Authority). Registered migration agents (RMAs) can use their knowledge of Australia's migration procedures to offer advice or assistance to a person wishing to obtain a visa to enter or remain in Australia.

As part of its commitment to ensuring that RMAs maintain appropriate knowledge levels, the Authority oversees the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme. CPD ensures the level of professionalism and knowledge of RMAs is improved and enhanced on an on-going basis.

The Authority engaged Andrews Group to benchmark the satisfaction levels of RMAs with CPD.

The objective of the research is to provide the Authority with an in-depth understanding and benchmark of RMAs' perceptions of the CPD scheme and activities, referencing in particular the changes made to the framework since 2010.

The findings of the CPD Survey highlight a CPD framework that is valued by RMAs. The majority of agents are completing CPD activities to better the way they, and their business, assist customers and give relevant and effective migration advice.

Based on the results, the agent sample can be broken up into three broad categories:
- those engaged and who see value in completing CPD (around 55 percent of the sample);
- 30 percent who are really driven to maximise the educational and business value of their CPD; and
- those who are neutral and perhaps "going through the motions" in relation to the completion of CPD (approximately 15 percent of the sample);

Overwhelmingly, this means that 85 percent of agents are engaged and/or driven when it comes to completing CPD. This is an extremely positive result and is likely to be the optimum level of engagement that can be achieved within any profession as diverse as immigration services. This is further evidenced in the finding that a lower proportion of respondents only think about CPD just prior to renewing their registration in the 2012 Survey compared to the 2010 Survey (23 percent in 2010 and 16 percent in 2012).

Essentially, the overarching feedback from agents in relation to the CPD program is to continue "as is" with no major issues identified. With overall satisfaction levels at 82 percent for CPD activities generally, 83 percent with CPD providers and no overarching issues identified, the results from this survey show a significant increase in satisfaction levels from the 2010 survey and will be a useful benchmark for future years.

Furthermore, a comparison between the 2010 CPD Survey and the results of this survey shows that in the 2012 Survey a higher proportion of respondents:

- value CPD for keeping their knowledge and skills up-to-date (78 percent in 2010 and 86 percent in 2012);
- agree that the CPD activities maintained and improved their knowledge and skills (73 percent in 2010 and 81 percent in 2012);
- agree that CPD activities allow them to meet other agents and share experiences (46 percent in 2010 and 64 percent in 2012); and
- agree that CPD activities enhanced their understand of ethical responsibilities (54 percent in 2010 and 67 percent in 2012).

An important challenge for the Authority is to ensure that the agent population is both engaged and committed to CPD, given the diverse demographics of RMAs. Culture, education, duration of registration, and location differences drive the need for a diverse CPD activity offering, incorporating activities that cater for:

- different learning styles and preferences;
- emphasis on relevant case studies and practical learning environments;
- experienced and newly registered RMAs; and
- those seeking advanced content, especially as the profession "matures" and more RMAs seek competitive difference through knowledge.

Currently, activities such as mentoring, pro bono work, developing and presenting CPD and authorship have low levels of engagement (not many prefer these activities and not many are completing these activities). If these are to continue as CPD options, another challenge for the Authority will be encouraging agents to engage in these activities. These activities will allow for experienced agents to contribute to the development of the profession, yielding long term benefits for the individual and the profession.

Several other minor improvements that the Authority may wish to consider include working with CPD providers to ensure:

- enhanced use of case studies and scenarios; and
- technical support to agents completing online or distance learning is enhanced.

The results suggest it may also be valuable for the Authority to continue engaging with RMAs on CPD issues and to identify opportunities for improving quality and timeliness of communication.

Office of the MARA
Registered Migration Agents Continuing Professional Development Survey
April 2012
Background

Since its establishment in 1945, the federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has managed the arrival and settlement in Australia of nearly seven million migrants.

In Australia, those wishing to provide immigration assistance must be registered with the Authority, a discrete office attached to the DIAC. Registered migration agents (RMAs) can use their knowledge of Australia's migration procedures to offer advice or assistance to a person wishing to obtain a visa to enter or remain in Australia.

The Authority commenced operations in July 2009, and looks to ensure, among other duties, that RMAs maintain appropriate knowledge to enable them to provide accurate advice to consumers.

As part of its commitment to ensuring that RMAs maintain appropriate knowledge levels, the Authority oversees the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme. CPD ensures the level of professionalism and knowledge of RMAs is improved and enhanced on an on-going basis.

The Authority engaged Andrews Group to benchmark the satisfaction levels of RMAs with CPD.

Research Objective and Methodology

The objective of this research is to provide the Authority with an in-depth understanding and benchmark of RMAs' perceptions of the CPD scheme and activities, referencing in particular changes made to the framework since 2010.

Given the objectives of the research, the project used a quantitative methodology. The research consisted of an online survey of all RMAs. A link to the questionnaire was sent to respondents by Andrews Group via email. Each email address was issued with a separate survey link to ensure no duplication of responses.

The questionnaire was approved by the Statistical Clearing House and sent to 4,580 agents. It was open from Monday 19 March 2012 to Wednesday 11 April 2012. During this period, 679 questionnaires were completed (including 641 completed in-full and 38 partially completed to greater than 50 percent of total questions). This equates to an overall response rate of approximately 15 percent. Although this represents a five percent drop in the response rate compared to the 2010 survey, it is nonetheless a highly positive result when compared with similarly-sized surveys and audiences.

Agents were given the option to "pre-populate" their questionnaire with the demographic data supplemented by the Authority's database. Nine respondents entered invalid MARNs, which is why Figures 1-6 and Table 1 show a "no response" rate.

In relation to survey questions where respondents were given the option to enter an "Other" response, the "Other" response data has only been referenced in the report in instances where multiple respondents left a similar comment or answer.

A copy of the online questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Key Quantitative Research Findings

Respondent Profile

The findings of the research show that respondents are:

- by a slight majority male (58 percent of respondents, as shown in Figure 1 on page 9);

- quite likely to have been born overseas (67 percent of respondents, as shown in Table 1 on page 10);

- likely to have been an RMA for one to six years (53 percent of respondents, as shown in Figure 3 on page 12);

- typically employed as an RMA in only one business (80 percent of respondents, as shown in Figure 4 on page 13); and

- operate mainly in New South Wales or Victoria (36 percent and 25 percent of respondents respectively, as shown in Figure 6 on page 15), although 25 percent of respondents operate outside Australian capital cities.

Thus, we have a research sample that demonstrates:

- diversity – in terms of culture, educational background, duration of registration and location. These factors are critical to considerations of the development and communication of the CPD scheme; and

- relative maturity (in terms of years worked as an RMA, when compared to the total RMA population) – meaning that analysis exploring any differences in behaviours and perceptions by length of employment as an RMA is important.

Overall, the demographic profile of the 2012 CPD Survey sample mirrors that of the overall RMA population and the sample who completed the 2010 CPD Survey.

Figure 1 shows 58 percent of respondents are male and 41 percent are female. This strongly reflects the findings from the 2010 CPD survey (in 2010, 58 percent of respondents were male and 42 percent were female), and mirrors the general population gender breakdown of RMAs, as listed in the 2010-11 Office of the MARA Annual Report.
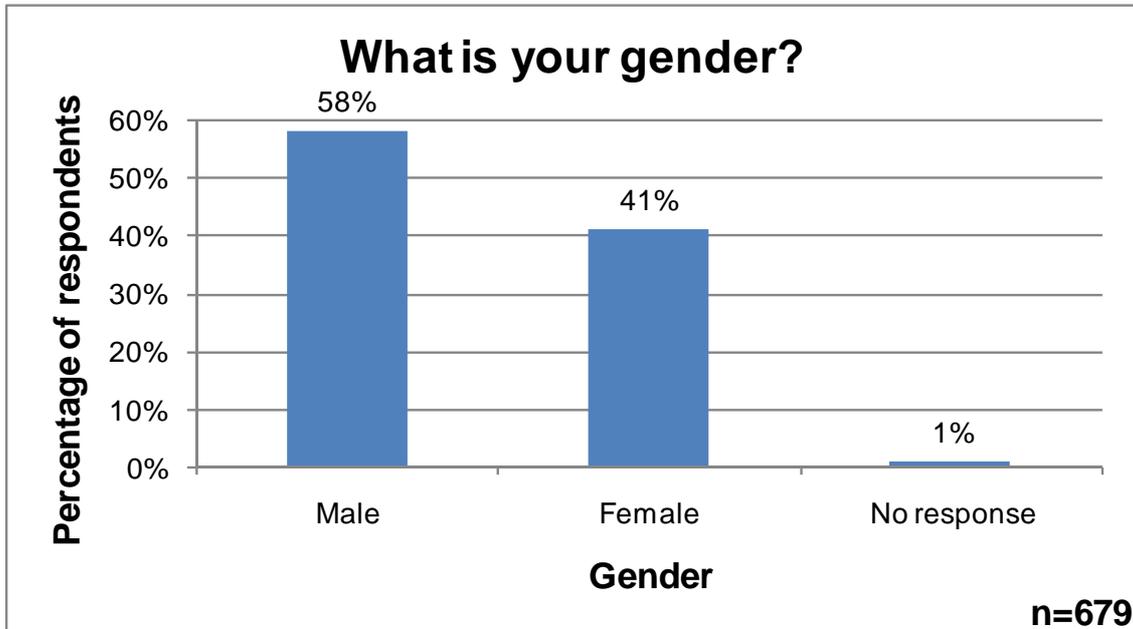

Figure 1: Gender of respondents

31 percent of respondents were born in Australia and 67 percent were born outside of Australia, as shown in Table 1 below. This indicates a diverse range of cultures exists within the respondent sample. These findings strongly mirror the results of the 2010 CPD survey (where respondents from Australia accounted for 30 percent of the total responses received), except for a slight decrease in the proportion of respondents born in Asia in the 2012 Survey (46 percent in 2010, 40 percent in 2012).

Table 1: Country of Birth Breakdown

Birth Location	Percentage
Asia	40%
Australia	31%
Europe	12%
Africa	5%
Middle East	4%
Pacific	2%
North America	2%
South America	2%
No response	2%

Figure 2 shows most respondents are not legal practitioners or accountants. However, it is still important to consider this group when developing CPD activities. These results largely reflect the findings of the 2010 CPD survey (in 2010, 20 percent of respondents were Australian legal practitioners, three percent were Chartered Accountants (CAs), four percent were Certified Practicing Accountants (CPAs) and 73 percent held none of these three qualifications).
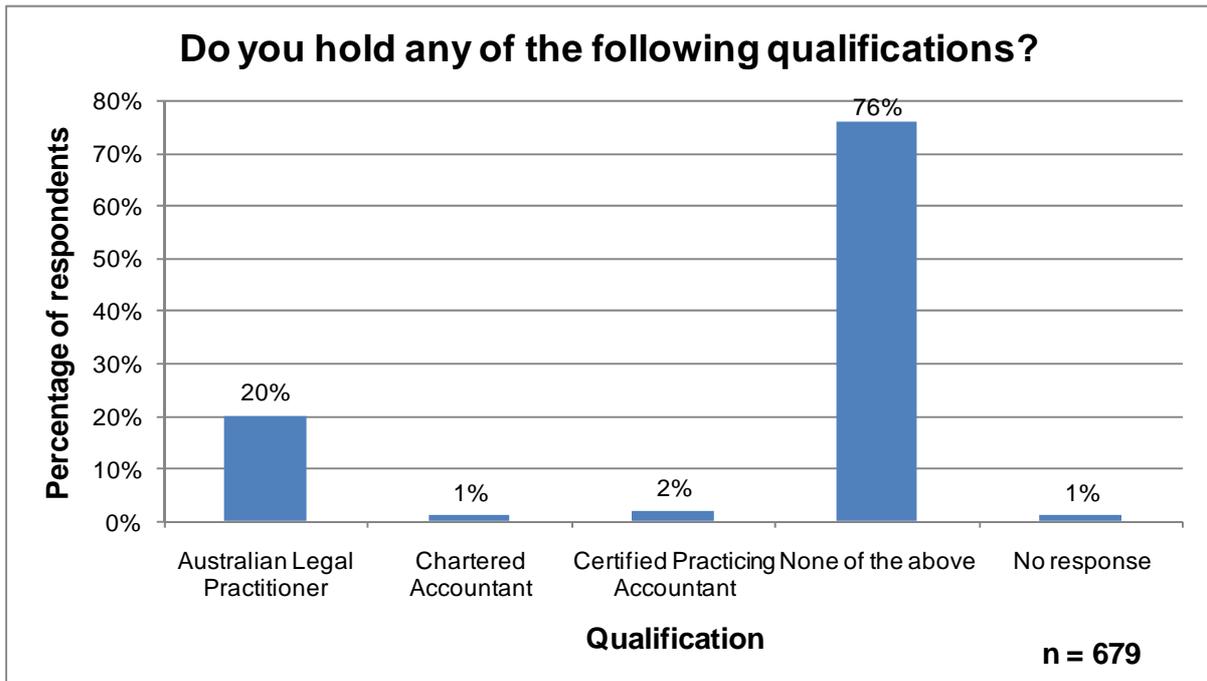
Do you hold any of the following qualifications?

Figure 2: Qualifications held by respondents

NB: Multiple responses could be selected in this question

Figure 3 shows 45 percent of respondents have been an RMA for seven or more years. This indicates a relatively mature respondent sample. There is an over-representation of mature agents in the respondent sample, with the Office of the MARA 2010-11 Annual Report finding that only 35 percent of all agents had been registered for seven years or more. This over-representation could indicate a higher level of commitment amongst more experienced agents in relation to providing feedback on CPD programs.

It is important to note that there was a sufficient amount of data collected in the survey to allow for results to be analysed for all categories of duration of registration as an RMA. Indeed, to avoid biased interpretation of results due to over-representation of more experienced RMAs, results were analysed by duration of registration throughout this report. This data is provided for key questions or, by exception, where meaningful differences were found.

The spread of experience indicates a need for a range of CPD programs that cater for newly registered RMAs and those who have been registered for a number of years.

A comparison to the results of the 2010 CPD Survey show a slight decrease in 2012 in the proportion of the sample who have been registered for less than one year (14 percent in 2010 and nine percent in 2012), and a slight increase in 2012 in the proportion of the sample who have been registered for one-to-three years (21 percent in 2010 and 28 percent in 2012).
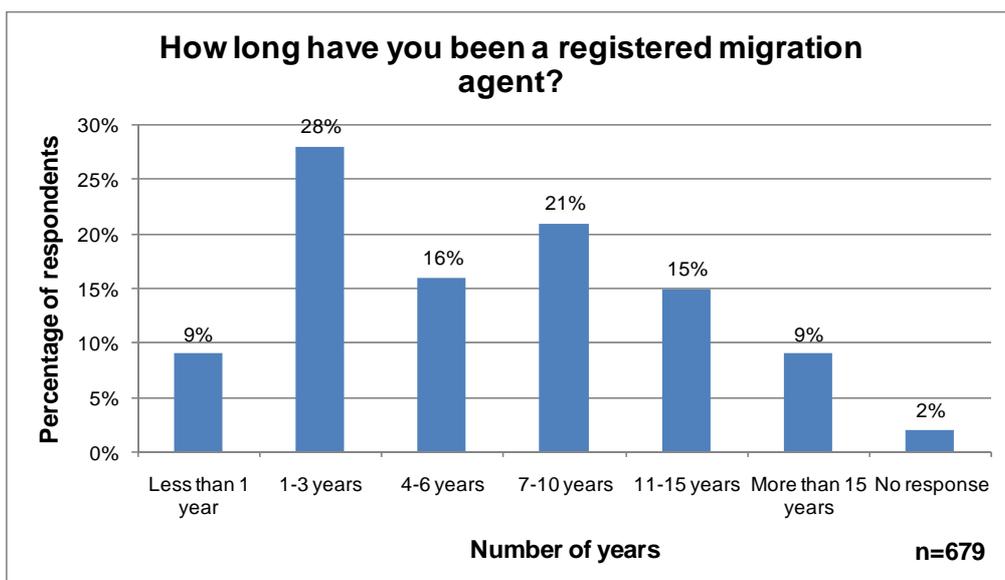

Figure 3: Number of years registered as a migration agent

Figure 4 shows the large majority of respondents (80 percent) are employed as an RMA in only one business. 14 percent of respondents are employed as an RMA in two businesses and three percent of agents work in three or more businesses. This is representative of the overall RMA population.
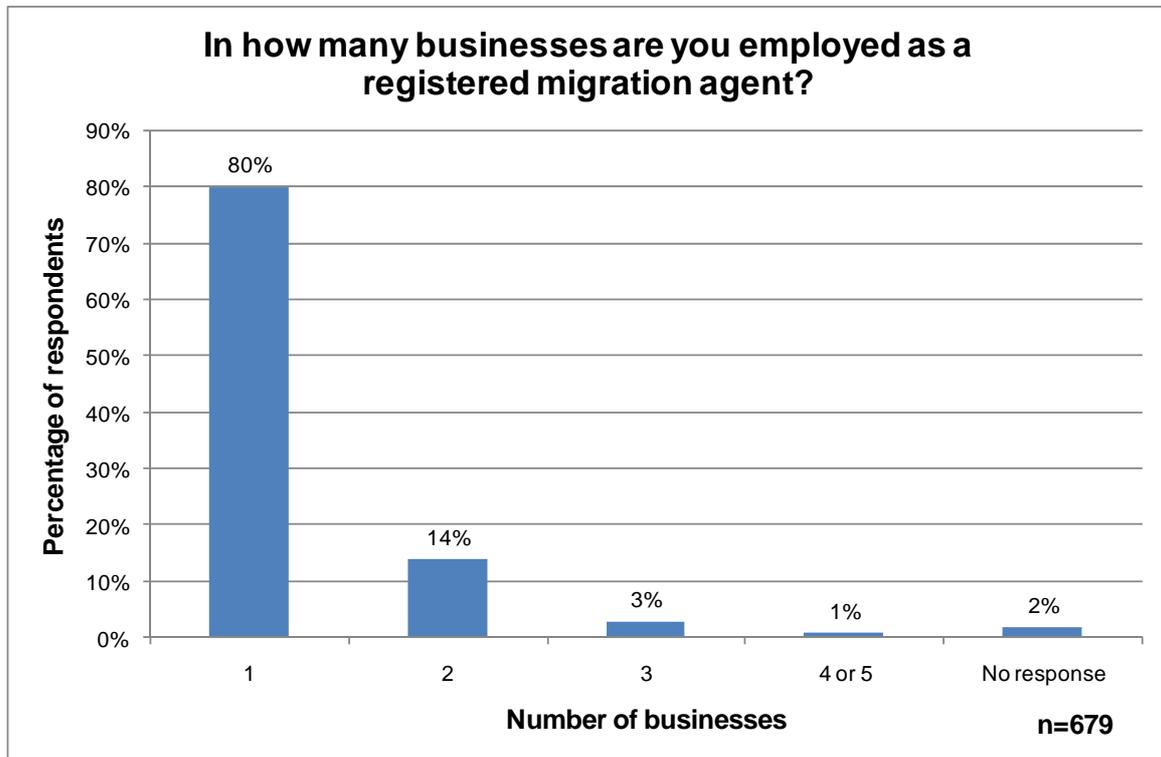
In how many businesses are you employed as a registered migration agent?

Figure 4: Number of businesses that respondents are employed by as a migration agent

Figure 5 shows 52 percent of respondents are sole practitioners. 32 percent of respondents work in a primary business with one-to-three other agents and 16 percent work with four or more other RMAs. A comparison with the Office of the MARA 2010-11 Annual Report (which states 76.5 percent of all RMAs are sole practitioners) shows a slight underrepresentation of sole practitioners in the survey sample.
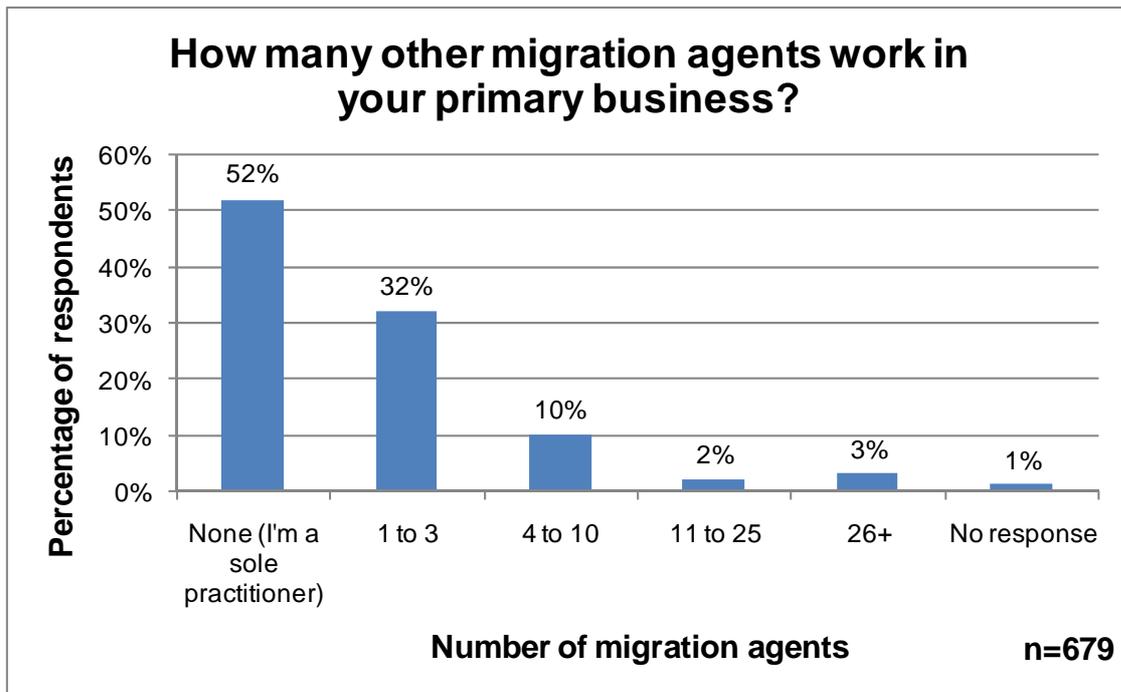

Figure 5: Number of RMAs working in primary business

Figure 6 shows the majority of agents are based in New South Wales and Victoria (36 percent and 25 percent respectively). 73 percent of respondents are based in Australian capital cities, with approximately half of the respondent sample based in Sydney or Melbourne. While this suggests a need for a comparatively greater number of CPD events in these areas, it is also important to consider the needs of agents based in other areas of Australia and overseas.

A comparison between these results and the Office of the MARA 2010-11 Annual Report shows the survey has captured a representative sample of agents. The results also reflect the findings of the 2010 CPD Survey.
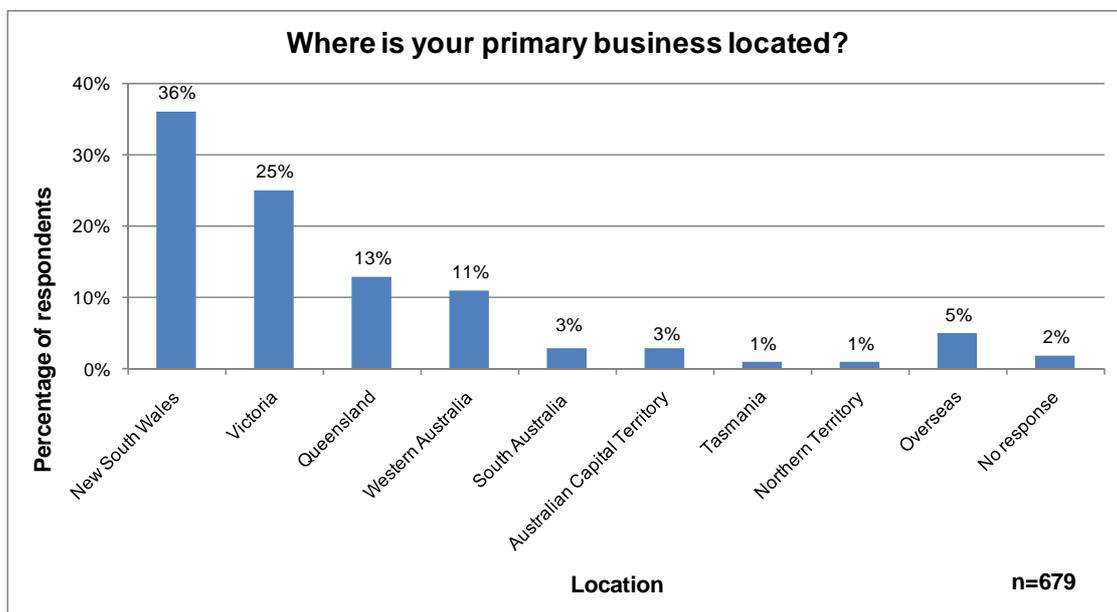
Where is your primary business located?

Figure 6: Location of primary business

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to select the course/qualification they undertook to become eligible to be an RMA. The data collected revealed some confusion among respondents around the nomenclature of certain pathways (notably sounds knowledge versus proven competency versus MAPKEE). To ensure integrity of the research, data on respondents' entry pathways were matched with the official MARN database. Among the 424 respondents who provided a MARN number, Figure 7 show 33 percent undertook the Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice to become eligible to practice as an RMA. This mirrors closely the finding in the 2010 survey where 34 percent had completed the Graduate Certificate. The data collected on the other pathways also closely reflect data gathered in the 2010 survey.
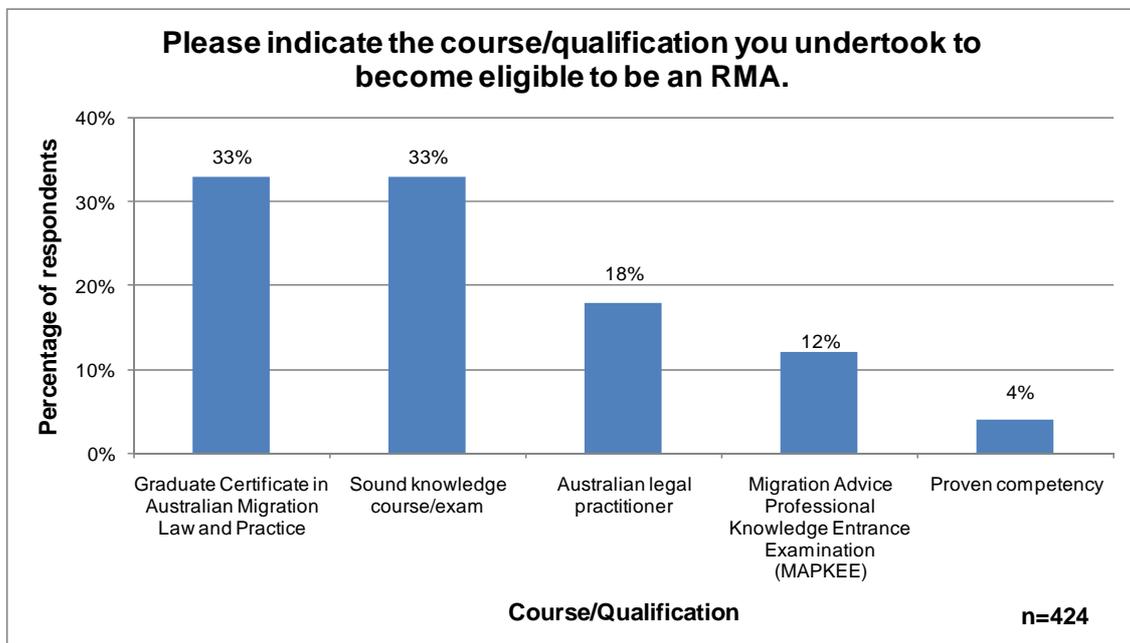

Figure 7: Course/qualification undertaken

Figure 8 shows 77 percent of those who completed the Graduate Certificate were "very satisfied" (31 percent) or "satisfied" (46 percent) with the Graduate Certificate program they completed to become a RMA. Eight percent of respondents were "dissatisfied" (five percent) or "very dissatisfied" (three percent).
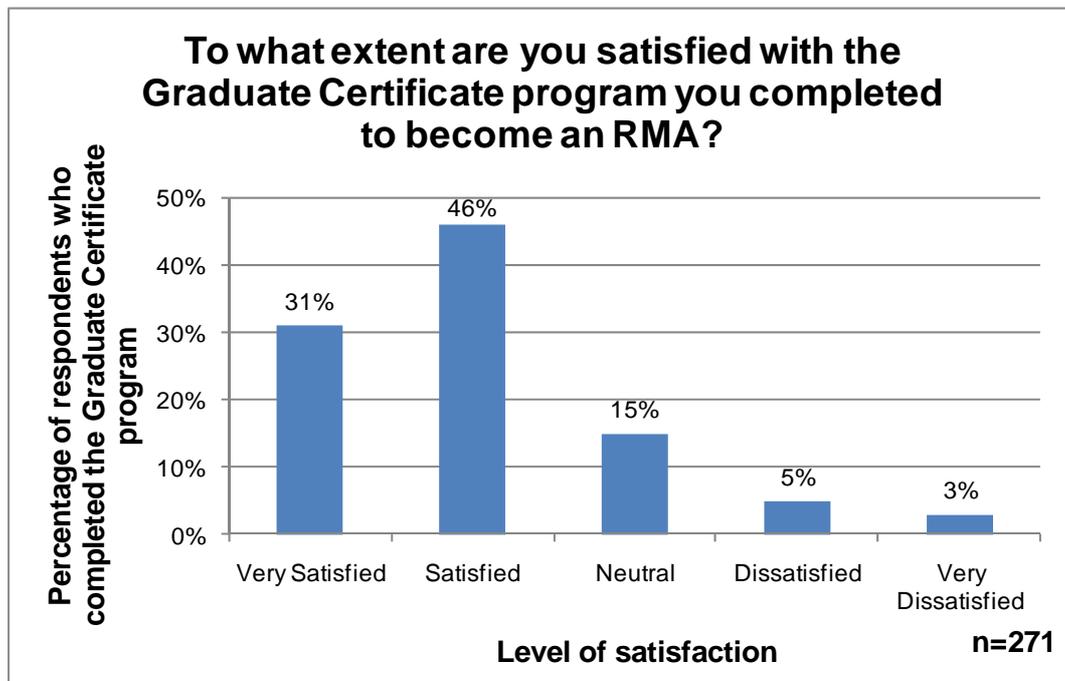

Figure 8: Satisfaction with Graduate Certificate program
NB: Note reduced sample size – question was only asked of those who completed the Graduate Certificate program, not the whole respondent sample.

While there appears to be a high rate of satisfaction, free text comments indicate there are opportunities to improve the Graduate Certificate program, including:

- course content and duration;
- examination administration; and
- quality of lecturers.

General Attitudes Toward CPD

Selection Factors

Figure 9 over the page shows that, overall, the three most important factors to respondents when selecting CPD activities is:

- the ability of the activity to assist with practice and business operations;
- the ability of the activity to improve service provision to clients; and
- the quality of the presenter.

Thus, this data suggests that in selecting CPD activities, RMAs are motivated by a need to improve their knowledge and capabilities, rather than completing CPD simply as a "tick-the-box" exercise to fulfil their CPD requirements.

Please select the three most important factors which impact on your selection of CPD activities

Factors impacting selection of CPD actitivity

- Most Important
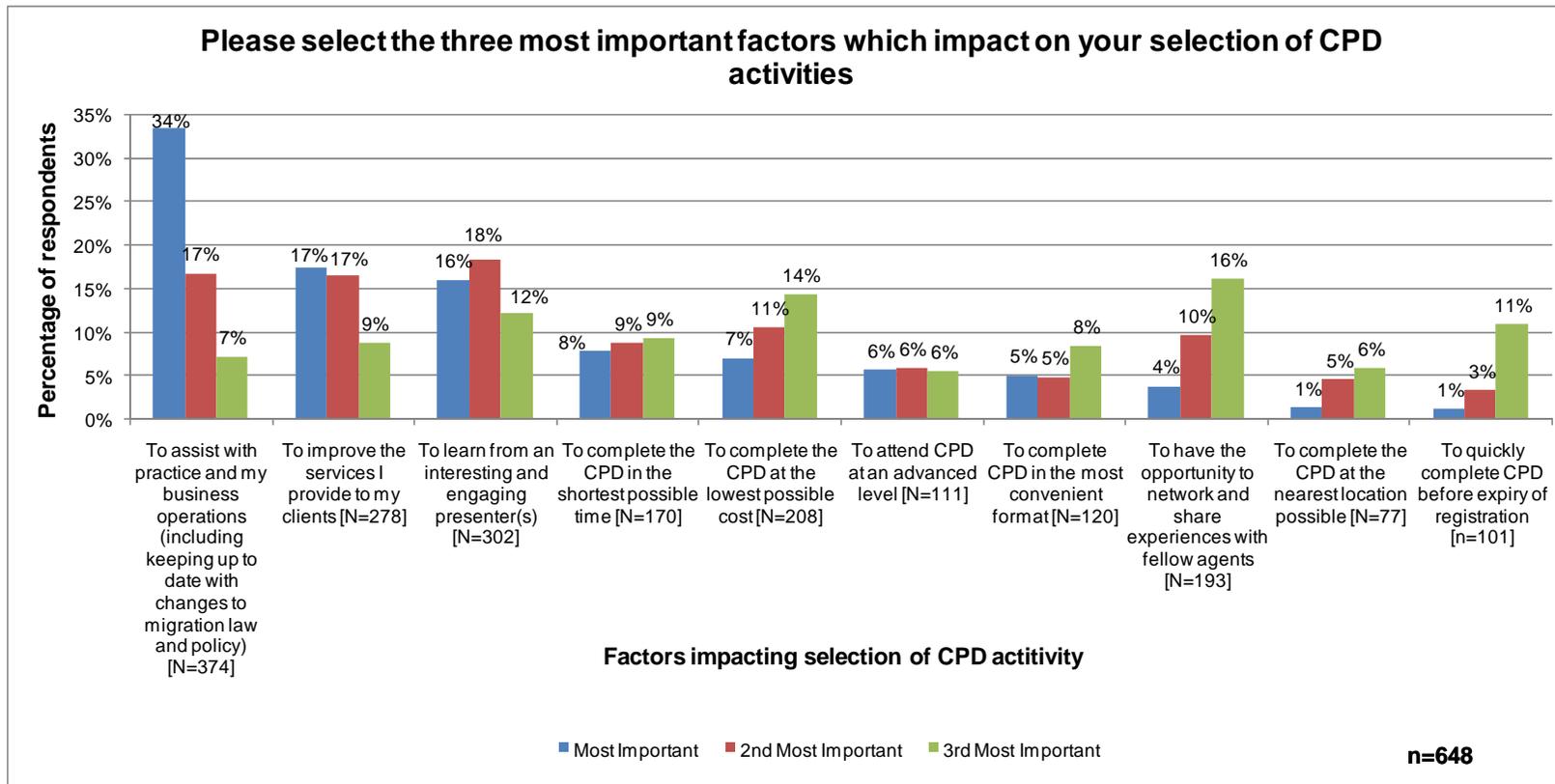- 2nd Most Important
- 3rd Most Important

n=648

Figure 9: Factors impacting selection of CPD activities

Figure 10 over the page reaffirms the notion that RMAs are motivated by more than the legal requirements associated with CPD. 50 percent of the respondent sample "strongly" value CPD and 67 percent are "very satisfied" with the CPD they have completed. Only ten percent do not give much consideration to CPD.

Interestingly, we see a comparatively higher rate of "neutrality" to the question regarding the range of CPD options available. That is, 25 percent of respondents neither agree nor disagree to being "very satisfied" with the range of options.

A comparison between these results and those obtained in the 2010 CPD Survey show:

- a higher proportion of respondents who value CPD for keeping their knowledge and skills up-to-date in the 2012 Survey (79 percent in 2010 and 86 percent in 2012); and
- a lower proportion of respondents who only think about CPD just prior to renewing their registration in the 2012 Survey (23 percent in 2010 and 16 percent in 2012).

That is, the results of the 2012 CPD Survey indicate higher levels of motivation amongst the 2012 respondent sample compared to those agents who completed the 2010 CPD Survey.
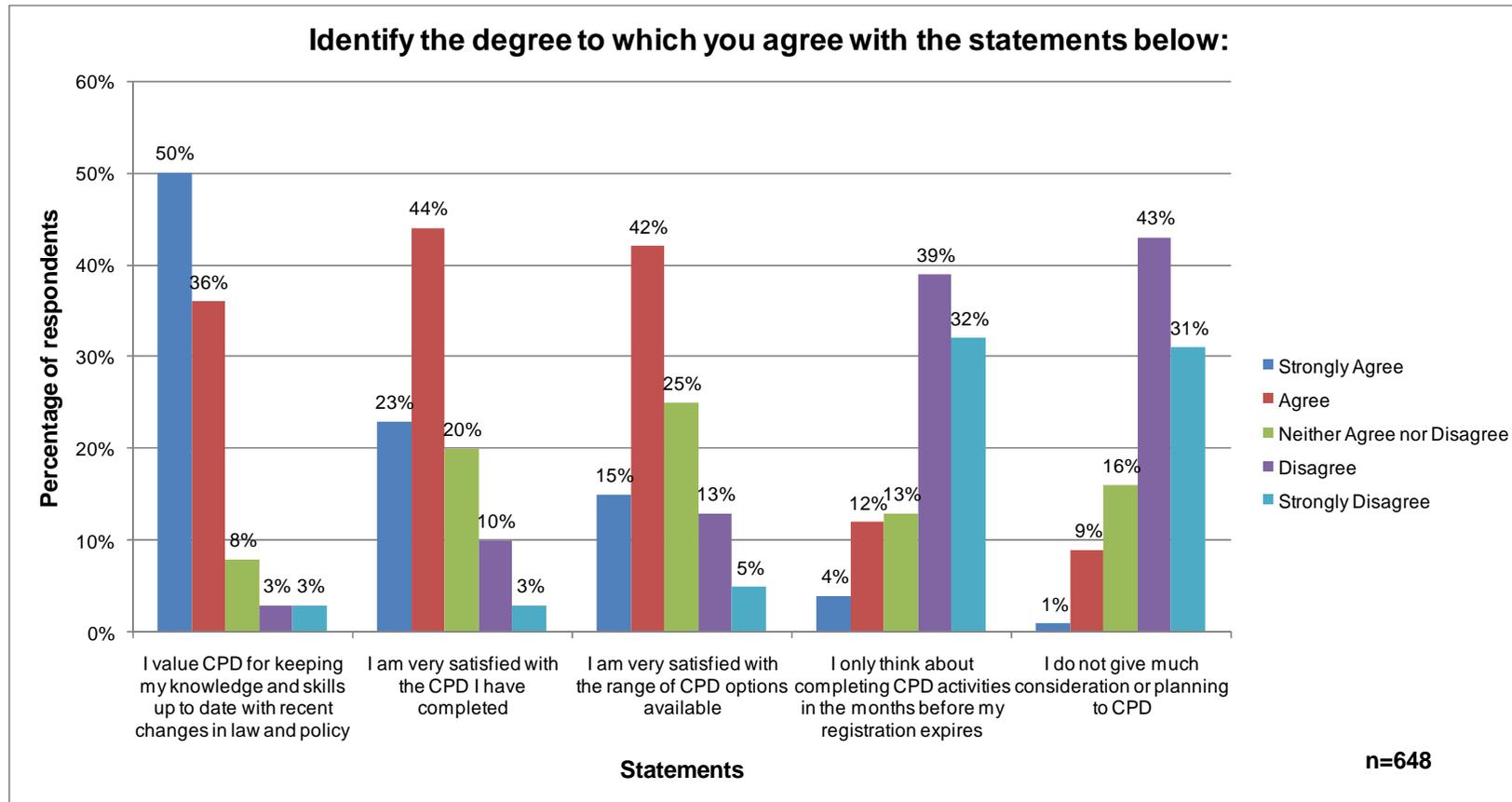
Identify the degree to which you agree with the statements below:

Percentage of respondents

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I value CPD for keeping my knowledge and skills up to date with recent changes in law and policy: 50%, 36%, 8%, 3%, 3%

I am very satisfied with the CPD I have completed: 23%, 44%, 20%, 10%, 3%

I am very satisfied with the range of CPD options available: 15%, 42%, 25%, 13%, 5%

I only think about completing CPD activities in the months before my registration expires: 4%, 12%, 13%, 39%, 32%

I do not give much consideration or planning to CPD: 1%, 9%, 16%, 43%, 31%

Statements

n=648

Figure 10: Level of Agreement with Statements

Use and Perceptions of CPD in 2011

Figure 11 shows 95 percent of respondents participated in CPD activities in 2011. Five percent (31 respondents) did not complete any activities in 2011.

While 31 respondents did not participate in CPD in 2011, only three respondents elected not to meet their requirements. That is, 28 of the 31 respondents who didn't participate in CPD in 2011 were not required to (either due to their registration expiry date or because they were newly registered). The three respondents who elected not to meet their requirements did so due to time, cost and/or location restraints.
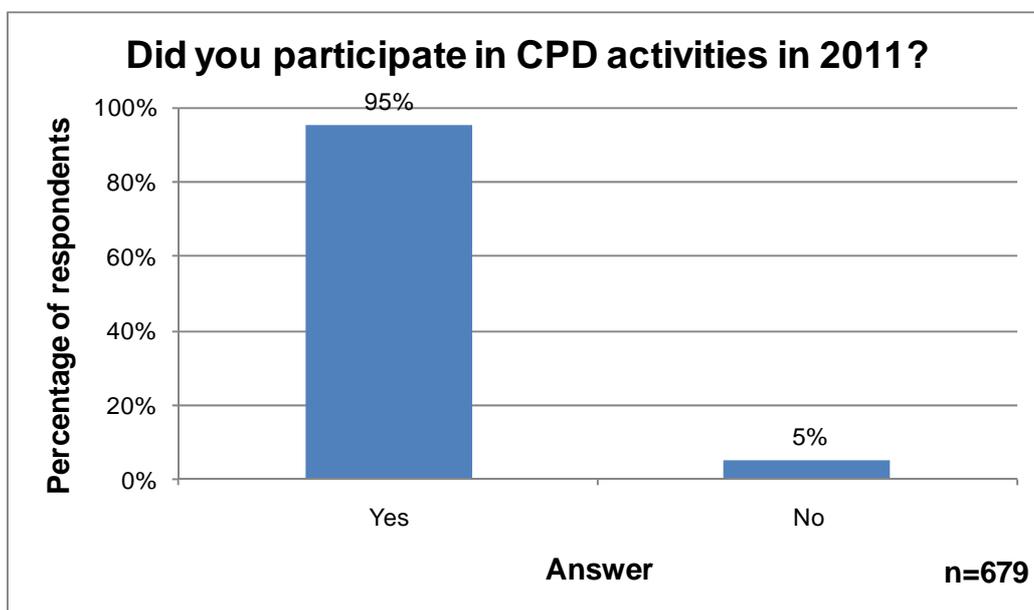

Figure 11: Participation in CPD activities in 2011

Figure 12 over the page paints an encouraging picture of the current health of the CPD program, with the CPD aspects that respondents are most satisfied with corresponding to the factors that respondents value most (from Figure 9). That is, in Figure 9 we find that the three most important outcomes from CPD for respondents are:

- CPD that assists with business practice and operations;
- CPD that improves service to clients; and
- the quality of presenter.

In Figure 12 we see that the most positively rated aspects of respondents' 2011 CPD activities were:

- CPD maintained or improved knowledge and skills;
- activities were presented in an interesting and engaging manner;
- CPD gave an enhanced understanding of ethical responsibilities; and
- CPD provided an opportunity for networking.

It could be expected that these four CPD activity aspects would most strongly contribute to the key outcomes that respondents seek.

Overall, Figure 12 suggests current CPD activities are meeting the needs of the large majority of respondents.

A comparison between the 2010 CPD Survey results and these findings show:

- a higher proportion of respondents in 2012 who agree that the CPD activities maintained and improved their knowledge and skills (73 percent in 2010 and 81 percent in 2012);
- a significantly higher proportion of respondents in 2012 who agree that CPD activities allow them to meet other agents and share experiences (46 percent in 2010 and 64 percent in 2012); and
- a higher proportion of respondents in 2012 who agree that CPD activities enhanced their understanding of ethical responsibilities in 2012 (54 percent in 2010 and 67 percent in 2012).

This again highlights an increase in satisfaction amongst the 2012 CPD respondent sample compared to those agents who completed the 2010 CPD Survey.

In relation to the CPD activities you completed in 2011, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:
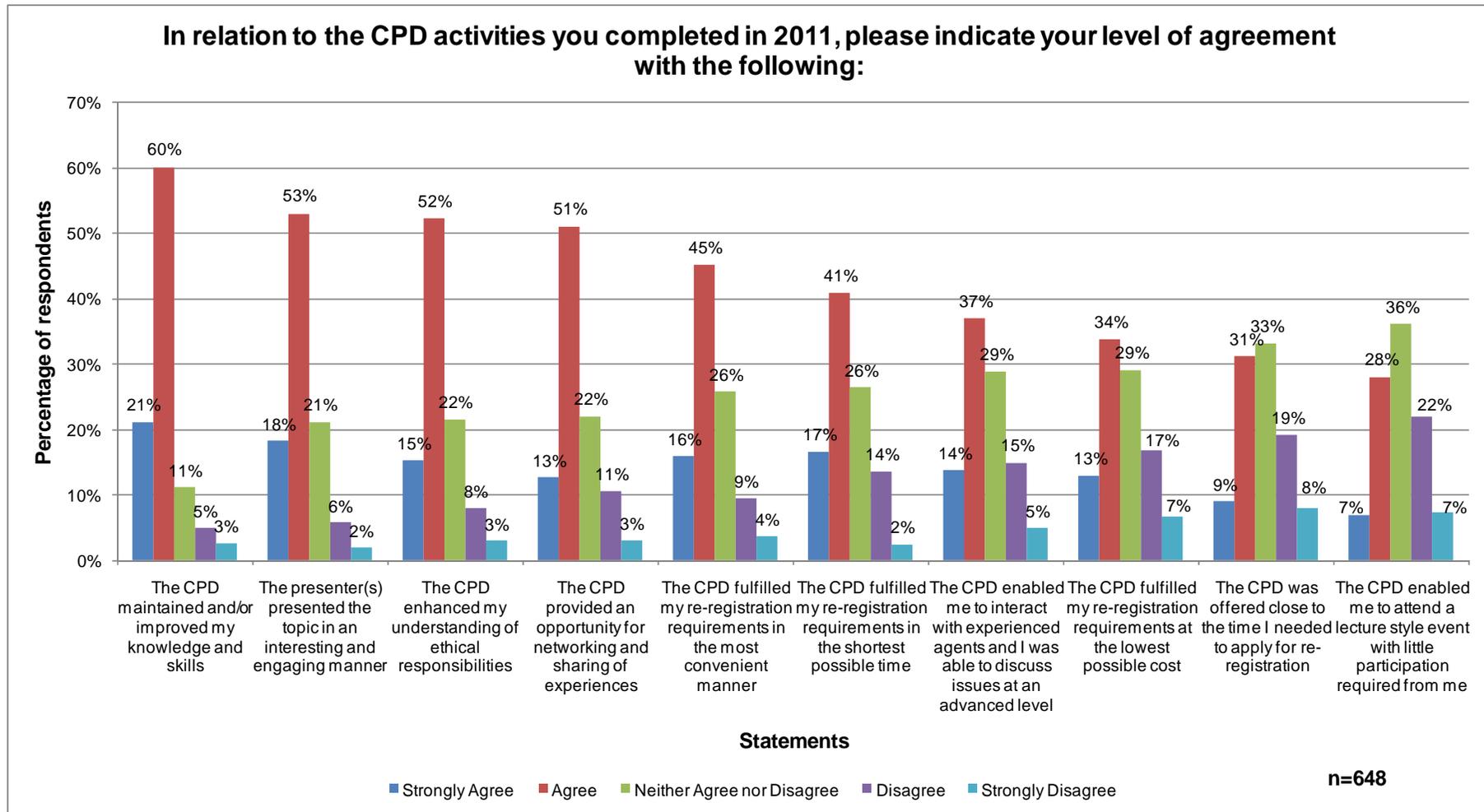
Figure 12: Level of Agreement with Statements

Figure 13 shows that seminars were by far the most attended CPD activity in 2011, with 74 percent of respondents indicating they had taken part in a CPD seminar.

In total, 43 percent of respondents undertook distance learning in 2011 (25 percent of respondents completed private study and 18 percent completed online learning activities). Comparatively, respondents have attended substantially more face-to-face activities than online/distance learning activities in 2011, which could be explained by:

- base rates of the activity types (ie less online options available to agents); or
- education or cultural reasons (ie respondents, either due to learning or language requirements, wanting to participate in face-to-face rather than online activities to optimise their learning outcomes).

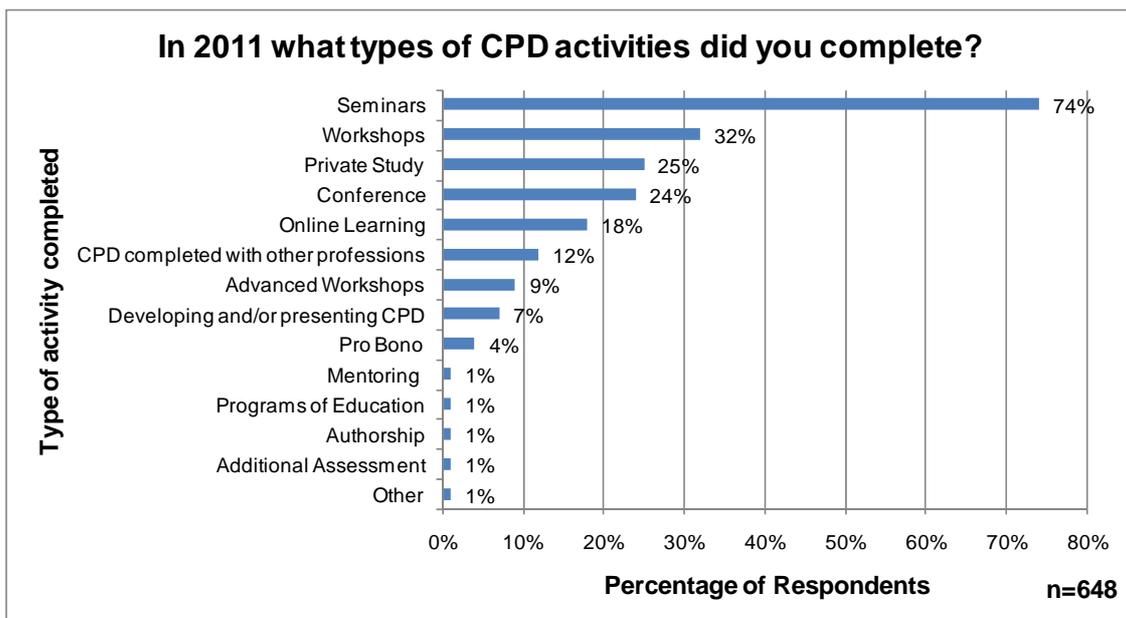A brief description of each of the CPD activity types can be found in Appendix B.

In 2011 what types of CPD activities did you complete?

Type of activity completed	Percentage of Respondents
Seminars	74%
Workshops	32%
Private Study	25%
Conference	24%
Online Learning	18%
CPD completed with other professions	12%
Advanced Workshops	9%
Developing and/or presenting CPD	7%
Pro Bono	4%
Mentoring	1%
Programs of Education	1%
Authorship	1%
Additional Assessment	1%
Other	1%

n=648

Figure 13: Types of CPD activities completed

NB: Multiple responses could be selected in this question

Figure 14 below shows respondents are more likely to complete advanced workshops as duration of registration increases, and completion of online learning activities decreases with duration of registration.
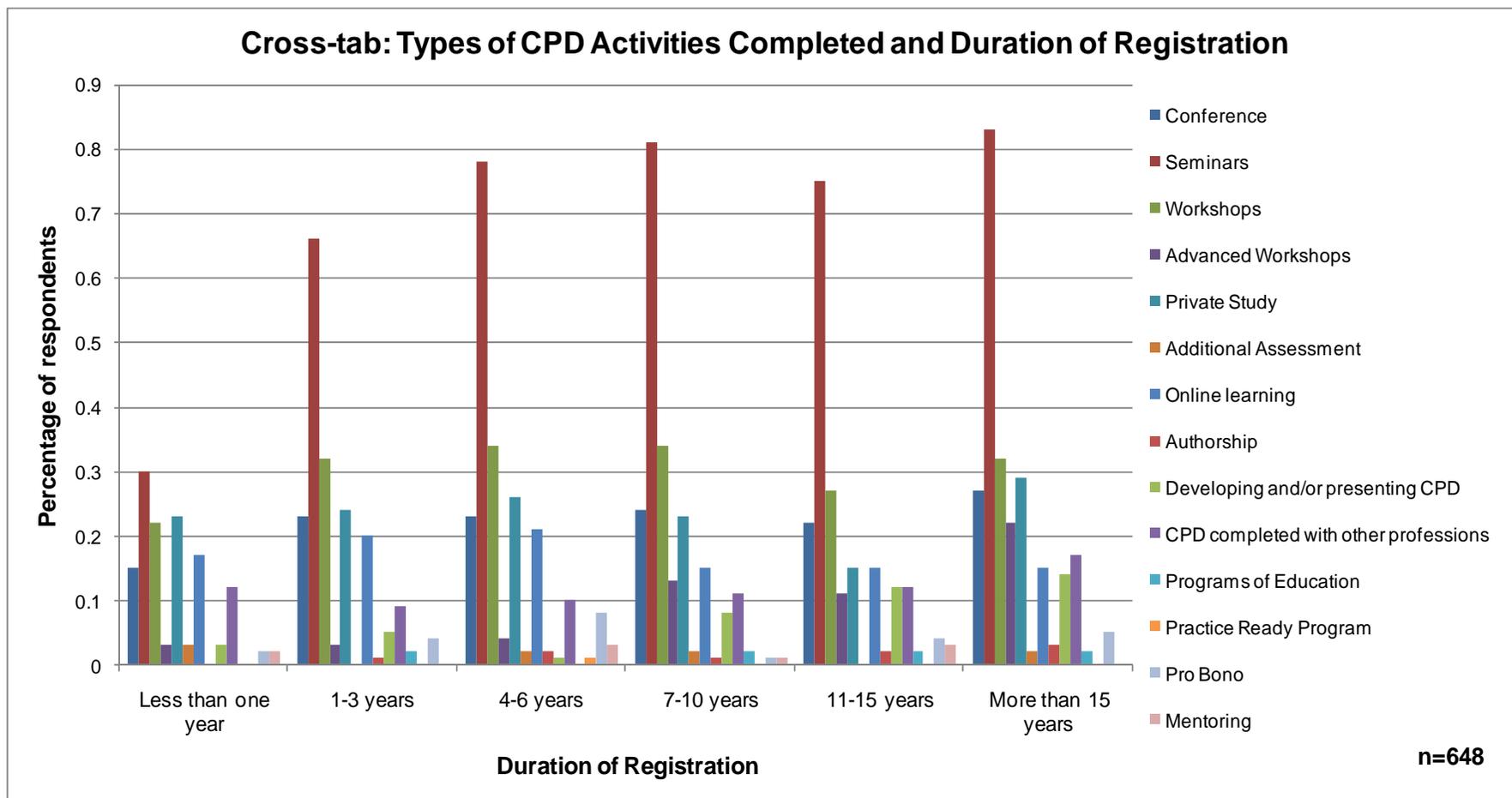

Figure 14: Cross-tab of Types of CPD Activities Completed and Duration of Registration

Face-to-Face CPD Activities

Figure 15 shows respondents perceive the quality of the CPD presenter (their knowledge, engagement and delivery) to have the greatest impact on the ability of face-to-face CPD activities to meet their needs. The practicality of content is also important, with 43 percent of respondents stating that the inclusion of case studies and scenarios was key to the effectiveness of face-to-face activities.
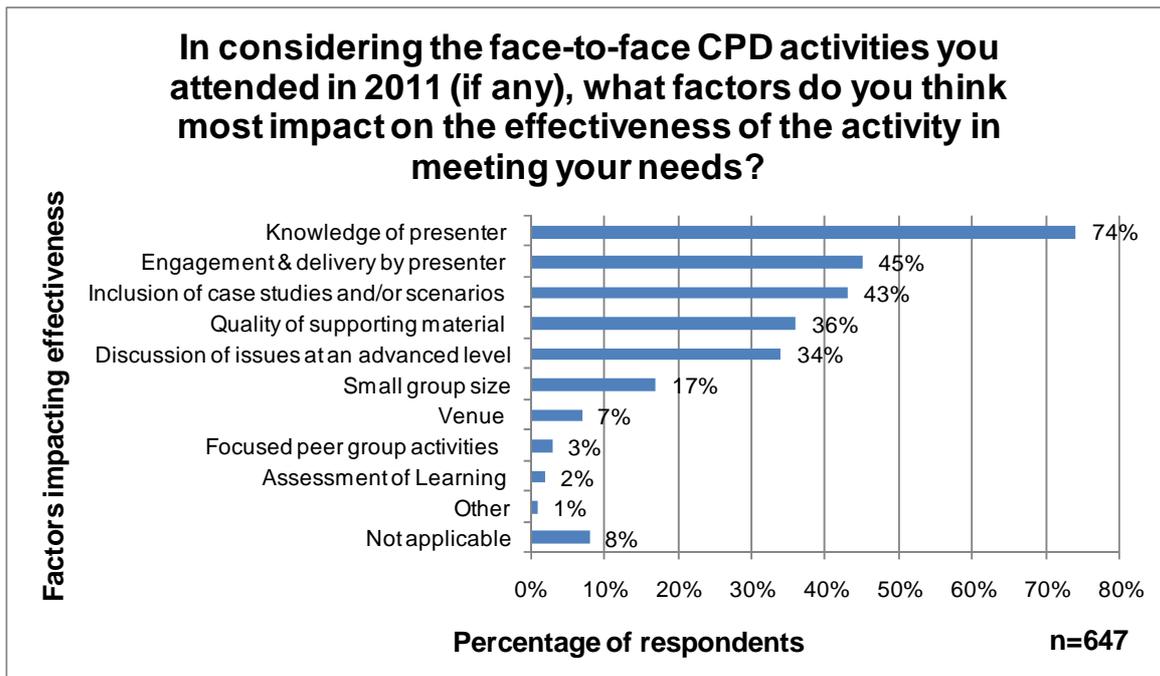
In considering the face-to-face CPD activities you attended in 2011 (if any), what factors do you think most impact on the effectiveness of the activity in meeting your needs?

Factor	Percentage
Knowledge of presenter	74%
Engagement & delivery by presenter	45%
Inclusion of case studies and/or scenarios	43%
Quality of supporting material	36%
Discussion of issues at an advanced level	34%
Small group size	17%
Venue	7%
Focused peer group activities	3%
Assessment of Learning	2%
Other	1%
Not applicable	8%

n=647

Figure 15: Factors impacting on the effectiveness of face-to-face CPD activities

NB: Multiple responses could be selected in this question

Importantly, Figure 16 over the page shows that respondents are most satisfied with the knowledge of and engagement and delivery by the presenter. That is, respondents' highest levels of satisfaction occur on the very feature that they also describe as most important to them (ie the presenter).

Figure 16 also suggests that there may be some room for improvement in the use of case studies and scenarios. This aspect was rated as highly important by 43 percent of respondents, but 17 percent of respondents were neutral in their satisfaction with the actual content provided and a further 13 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

How would you rate your satisfaction with these factors in relation to the face-to-face CPD activities you attended in 2011?

n=593
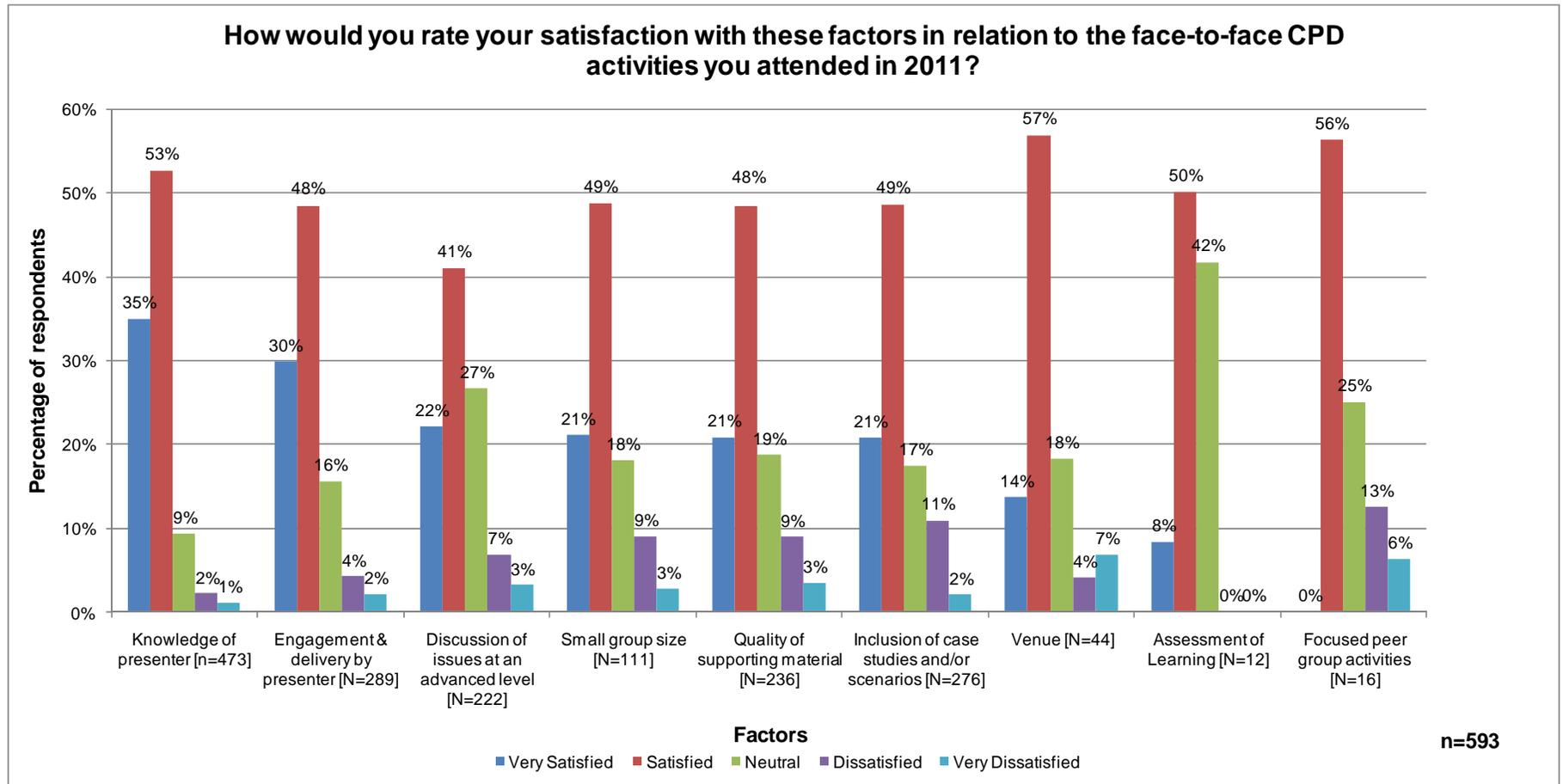
Figure 16: Satisfaction with factors relating to face-to-face CPD activities

Online CPD Activities

Figure 17 shows the two most important factors that respondents believe impact on the ability of an online learning activity to meet their needs are:

- easy to use technology and software (39 percent of respondents); and
- the provision of quality supporting material (39 percent of respondents).

Quality supporting material and the inclusion of case studies and scenarios are perceived to be important factors for both face-to-face and online activity types.

Of the 14 "Other" factors given, those mentioned by more than one respondent include:

- relevant, current, interesting activity topics;
- engaging and knowledgeable presenter; and
- convenience.
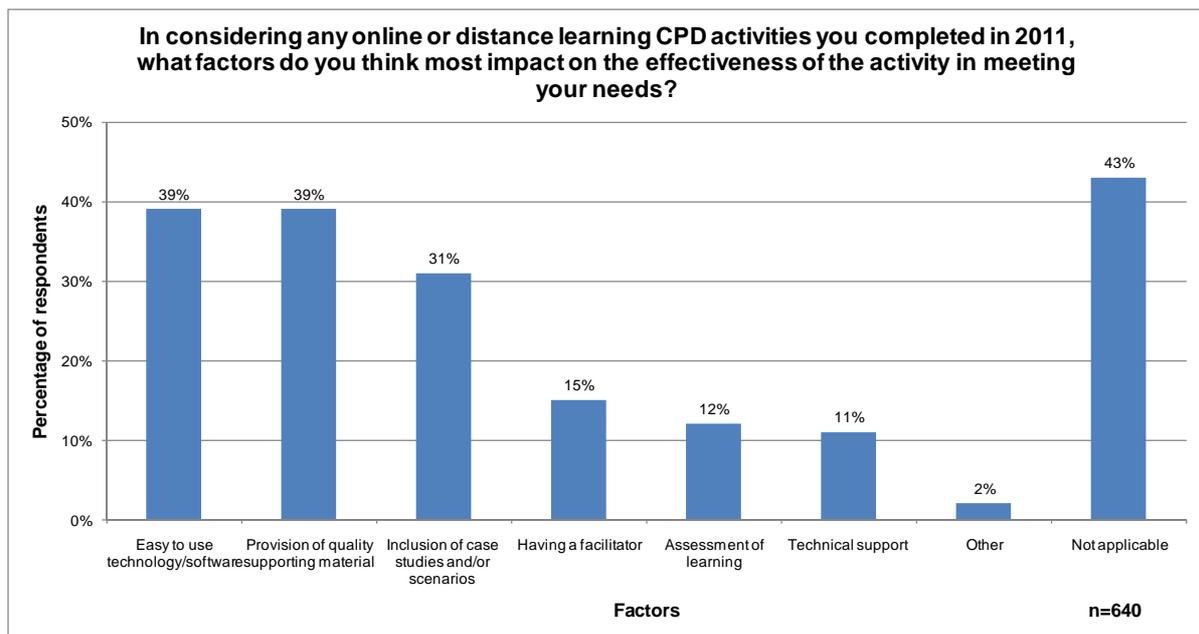
Figure 17: Factors impacting effectiveness of online learning CPD activities

NB: Multiple responses could be selected in this question

Figure 18 over the page shows online activities achieve high levels of satisfaction in the areas that are most important to respondents. Of the two factors that respondents believe most impact on the effectiveness of an activity, 69 percent are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with technology and 61 percent are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the provision of quality supporting materials.

While these results in Figure 18 are positive on the whole, areas for potential incremental improvements could include:

- inclusion of further case studies and scenarios in online activities (36 percent of respondents having a neutral level of satisfaction and 10 percent being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied); and
- technical support (34 percent of respondents had a neutral level of satisfaction and 22 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).

How would you rate your satisfaction with these factors in relation to online CPD activities completed in 2011?

Legend:
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied

n=364

Having a facilitator [N=98]: 23%, 52%, 17%, 4%, 4%
Easy to use technology/software [N=248]: 19%, 50%, 22%, 7%, 2%
Provision of quality supporting material (if supplied) [N=249]: 13%, 48%, 28%, 8%, 3%
Assessment of learning [N=76]: 19%, 47%, 24%, 5%, 5%
Inclusion of case studies and/or scenarios [N=195]: 13%, 41%, 36%, 9%, 1%
Technical support [N=70]: 6%, 38%, 34%, 13%, 9%

Figure 18: Satisfaction with factors in relation to online CPD activities

Satisfaction Ratings

Dissatisfaction with CPD Activities

Figure 19 shows 16 percent of respondents attended a CPD activity in 2011 that they were not satisfied with.

Respondents' reasons for dissatisfaction again centre on either the CPD presenter or course material. Respondents cite "poor" presentation skills and a lack of subject knowledge in relation to presenters, and "low level" or "basic" content in relation to the course.
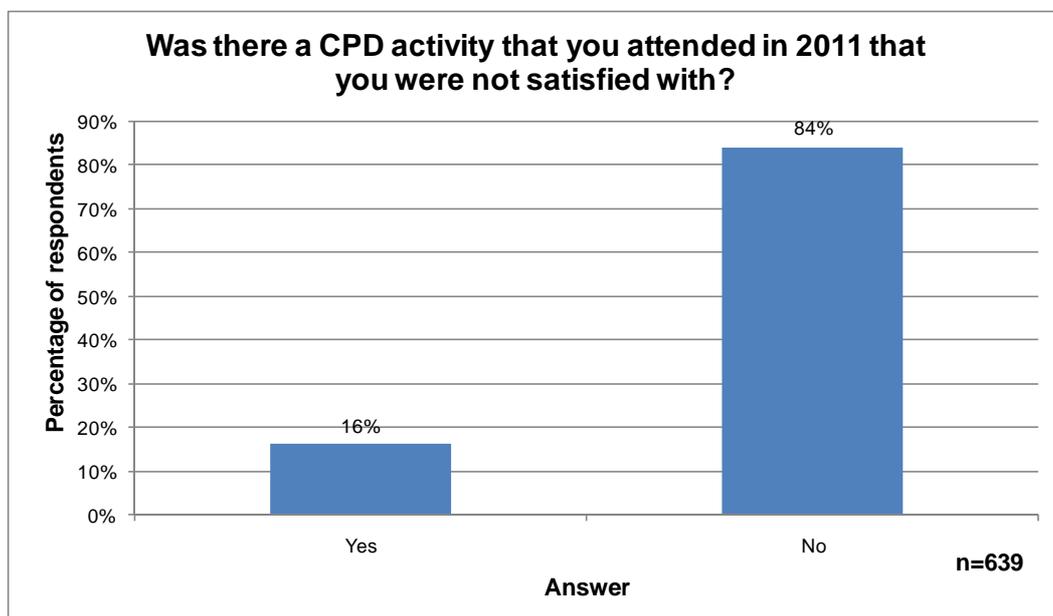
Figure 19: Dissatisfaction with CPD activities attended in 2011

In Figure 20, a cross-tab of duration of registration and dissatisfaction with a 2011 CPD activity shows that agents registered for less than one year are more likely to be dissatisfied with 2011 CPD activities than more mature agents. This may suggest that those entering the system have higher expectations, while those in the system have become accustomed to the style of CPD delivery. Alternatively, it could be reflective of the "mature" agents being more selective about which activities they choose based on learned experiences and networking with colleagues about which activities met their needs.
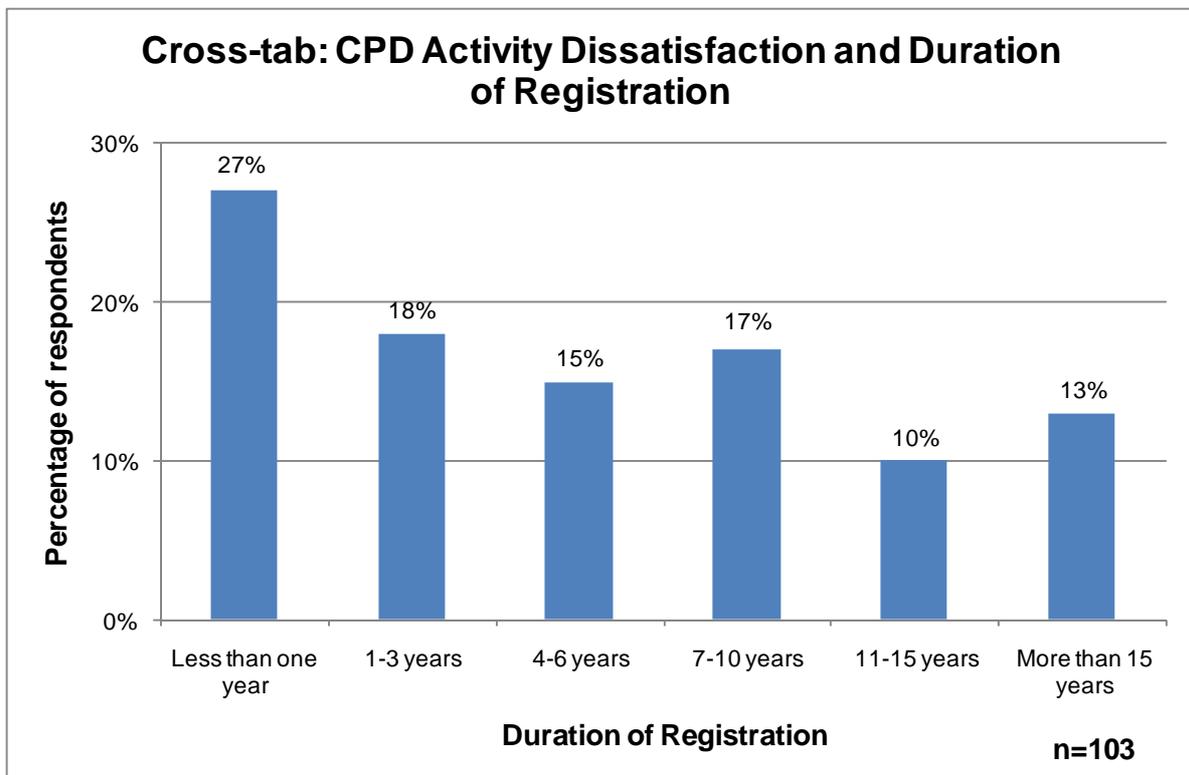
Figure 20: Cross-tab of CPD Activity Dissatisfaction and Duration of Registration

Satisfaction with CPD Providers

Figure 21 shows 83 percent of respondents are "very satisfied" (29 percent) or "satisfied" (54 percent) with the providers who delivered CPD activities in 2011. Common words used by respondents when detailing why they are satisfied include "personable", "practical", "professional", "engaging", "knowledgeable" and "well prepared".
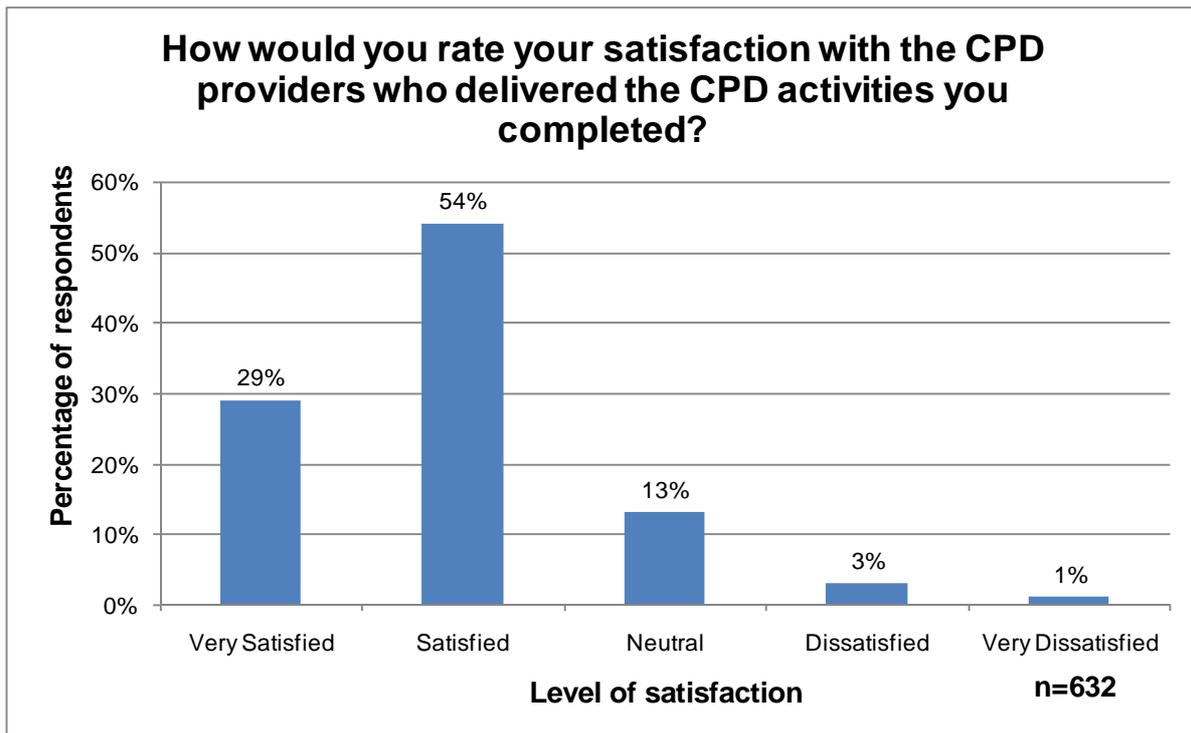
Figure 21: Satisfaction with CPD providers

In Figure 22, a cross-tab of respondents' duration of registration and satisfaction with providers shows agents with seven or more years registration are most likely to be "very satisfied" with CPD providers.
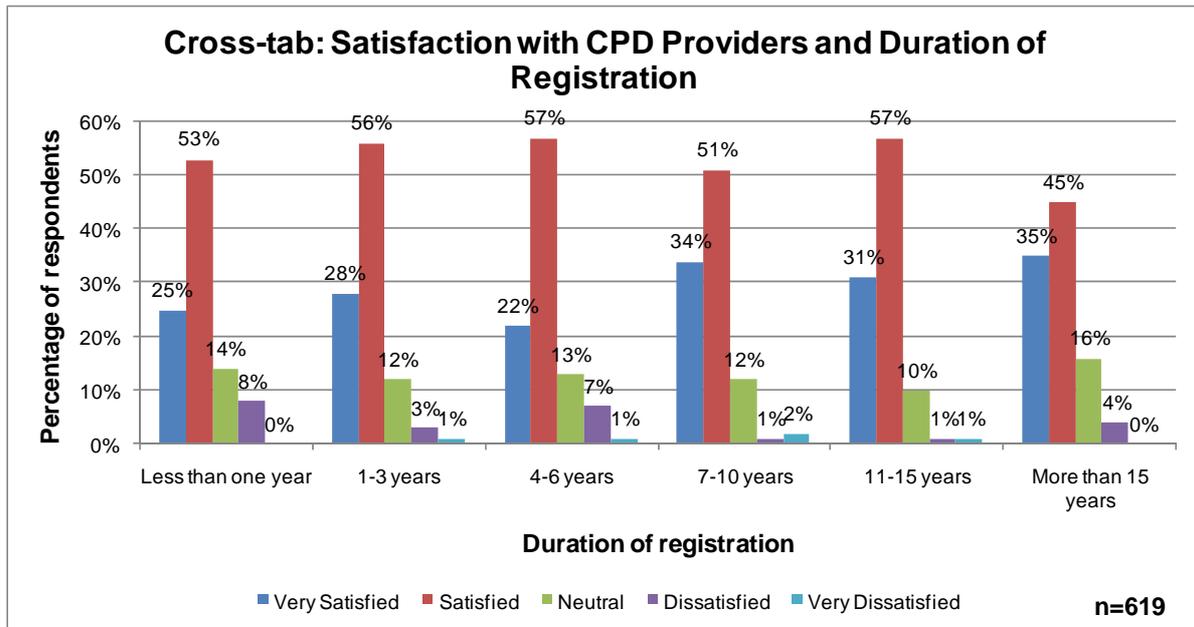
Figure 22: Cross-tab of Satisfaction with CPD Providers and Duration of Registration

The difference in sample size between Figure 21 and Figure 22 is due to 13 no responses being recorded for the Duration of Registration question.

Overall Satisfaction

Figure 23 shows an overall high level of satisfaction in relation to the activities respondents completed in 2011. Just under one quarter of respondents are "very satisfied", and 82 percent of respondents are either "very satisfied" or "satisfied". Only four percent are dissatisfied overall with the CPD activities they completed. These results show a significant increase in satisfaction levels from the 2010 survey (61 percent) and will be a useful benchmark for future years.

The four most common reasons given by respondents for their satisfaction are:

- satisfaction with course content;
- quality of presentation;
- knowledgeable presenters; and
- the activity improved knowledge and practical skills.

These four reasons mirror closely the factors rated as most important to respondents when selecting CPD activities (see Figure 9). It again indicates that the CPD scheme is meeting the needs of the large majority of respondents.
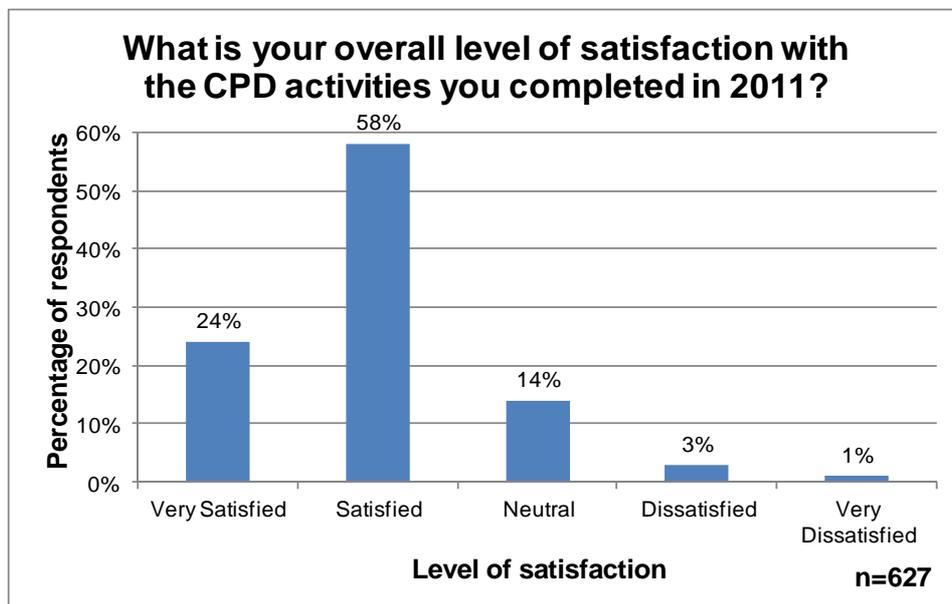
Figure 23: Overall satisfaction with CPD activities completed in 2011

In Figure 24, a cross-tabulation of duration of registration and overall satisfaction shows agents who have been registered for seven or more years are more likely to be "very satisfied" with the CPD activities they completed in 2011 than agents who are more newly registered. This again could be due to the "mature" agents being more selective about which activities they choose based on learned experiences and networking with colleagues about which activities met their needs.
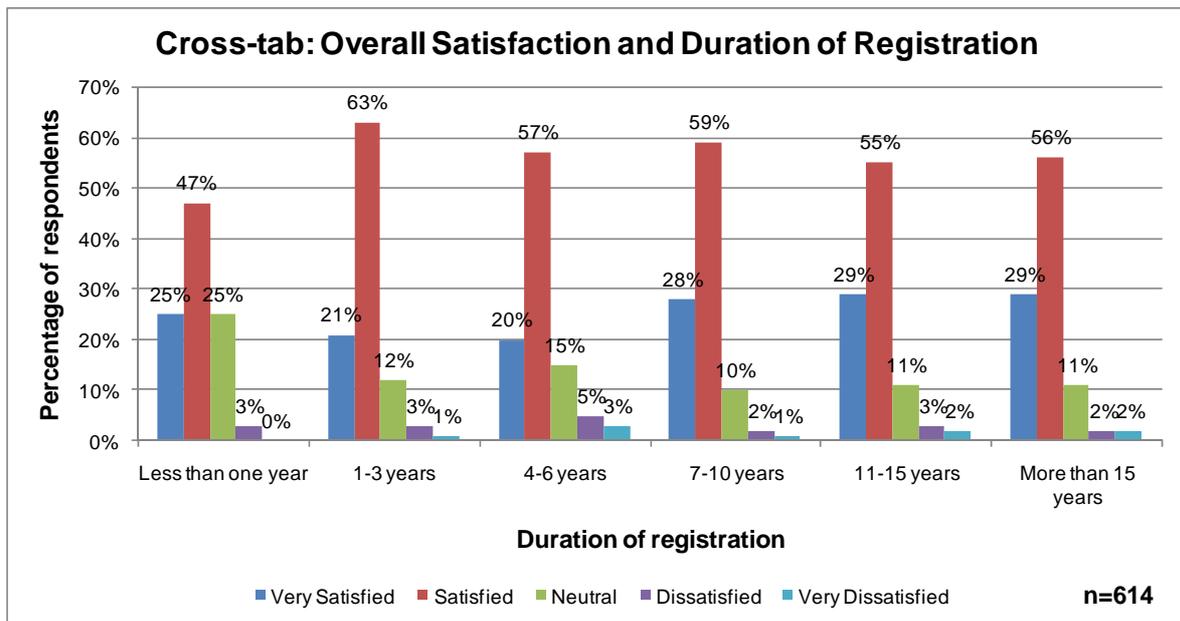

Figure 24: Cross-tab of Overall Satisfaction with CPD Activities in 2011 and Duration of Registration

The difference in sample size between Figure 23 and Figure 24 is due to 13 no responses being recorded for the Duration of Registration question.

CPD Preferences

Figure 25 over the page shows the majority of respondents prefer to complete their CPD requirements in a seminar format, with 67 percent preferring this type of activity. This reflects the findings of the 2010 CPD Survey.

Respondents also show a preference for:

- completing ten seminars in two days;
- advanced workshops; and
- workshops.

Respondents' preferences again highlight a need amongst respondents for practical learning formats. It also exposes a potential emerging trend toward "advanced" CPD content, especially when considered in conjunction with the finding shown in Figure 15 that 34 percent of respondents see discussing issues at an advanced level as a factor that contributes to a face-to-face CPD activity meeting their needs. This is not to suggest that advanced CPD activities are the most popular, but does indicate there may be a growing market. A growing demand for "advanced" CPD could be expected in an environment where agents are remaining in the profession for longer and are seeking business/service improvement through CPD, as we see here.

Authorship, Private Study, Developing and Presenting CPD are the activity formats most avoided by respondents.

The Practice Ready program is a CPD activity mandatory only for agents in their first year of practice and therefore also collected a high number of respondents who would avoid this activity.

In relation to the "Other" responses received, four respondents indicated a preference for a ten-seminars-in-one-day format.
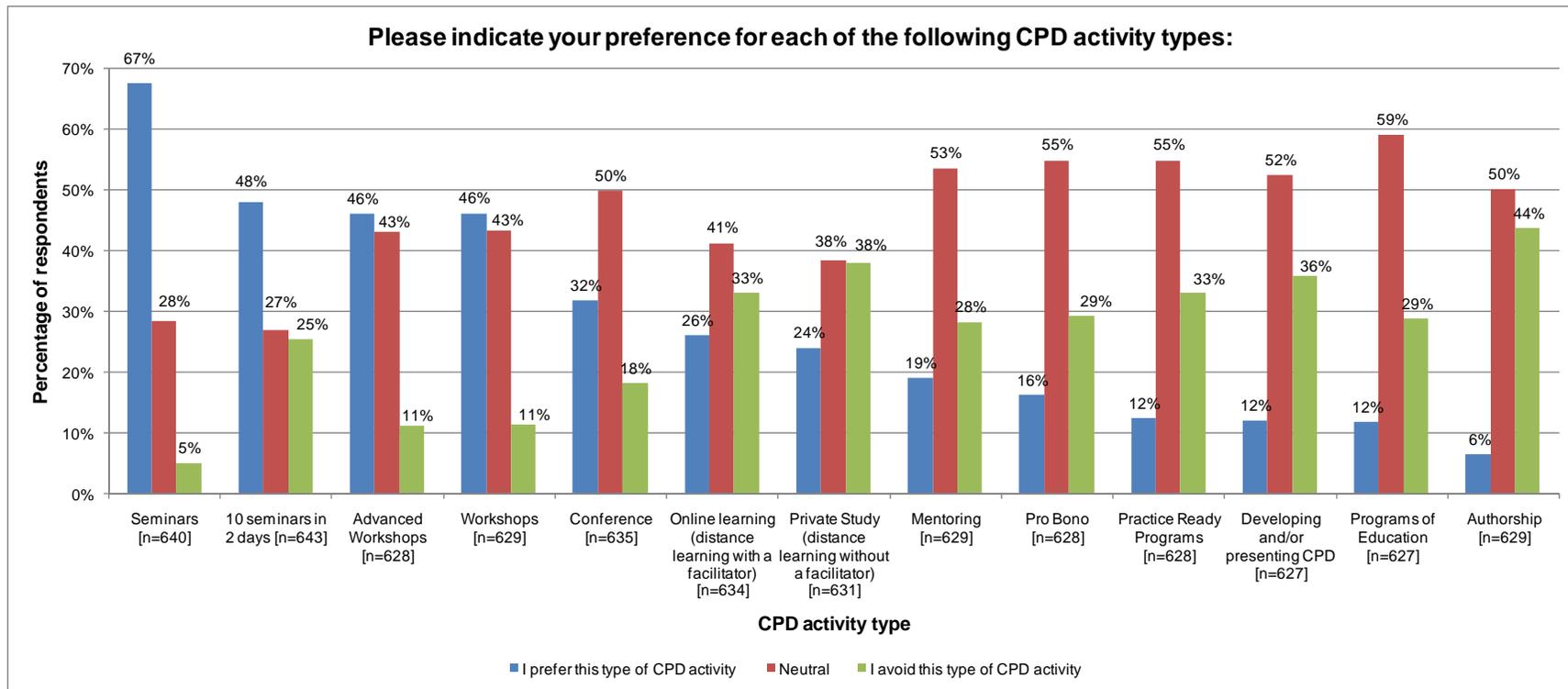
Figure 25: CPD activity preference

Office of the MARA Communication and Resources

Figure 26 shows that almost three quarters of respondents are satisfied with the communication they receive from the Authority. Respondents describe receiving "regular" and "comprehensive" email updates from the Authority, an "easy-to-navigate" website and "efficient" service when on-the-spot (ie via phone) is required. Essentially, respondents describe being able to access the information they require in a timely manner.

Overall this is a very positive result. It suggests that communication is, on the whole, acceptable, but with 21 percent of respondents having a neutral level of satisfaction toward the Authority's communication and a further seven percent being dissatisfied, there may be an opportunity to improve communication further. The results support the continuation of the present policy of engaging with RMAs on CPD issues and to identify opportunities for improving quality and timeliness of communication.

A cross tab of satisfaction with communication from the Authority and length of time registered showed no meaningful differences.
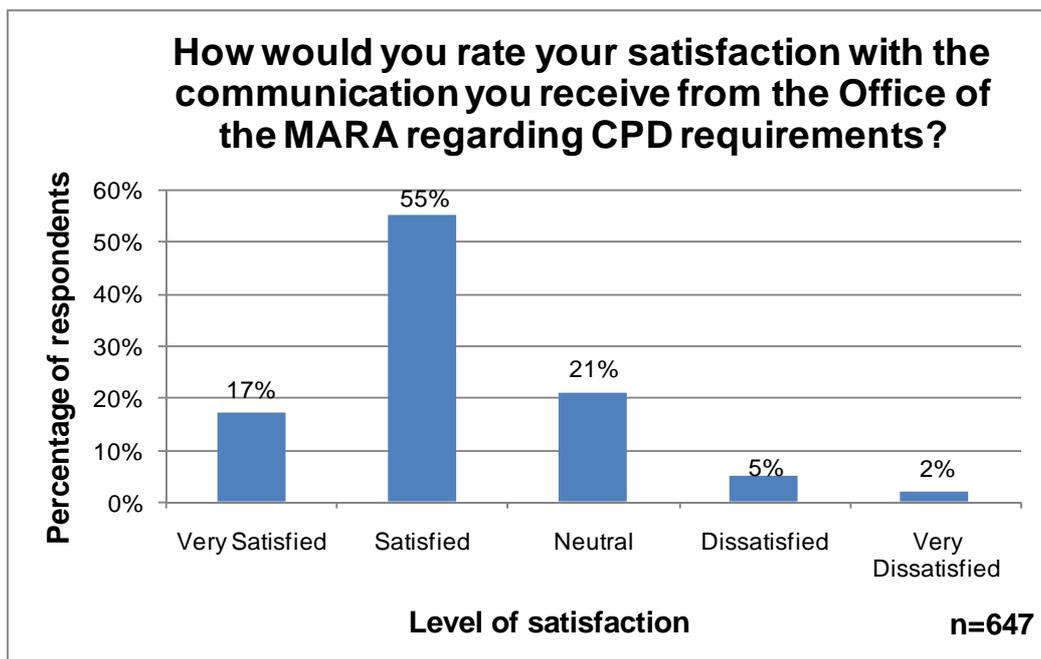

Figure 26: Satisfaction with communication from the Authority

Figure 27 shows an overall high level of use of the Authority's tools and resources, with 78 percent of respondents having used a tool or resource in 2011. 43 percent of respondents used the "Search for an Upcoming CPD" functionality on the Authority's website, and 41 percent used the Ethics Toolkit. 24 percent of respondents used the recently finalised occupational competency standards in 2011.

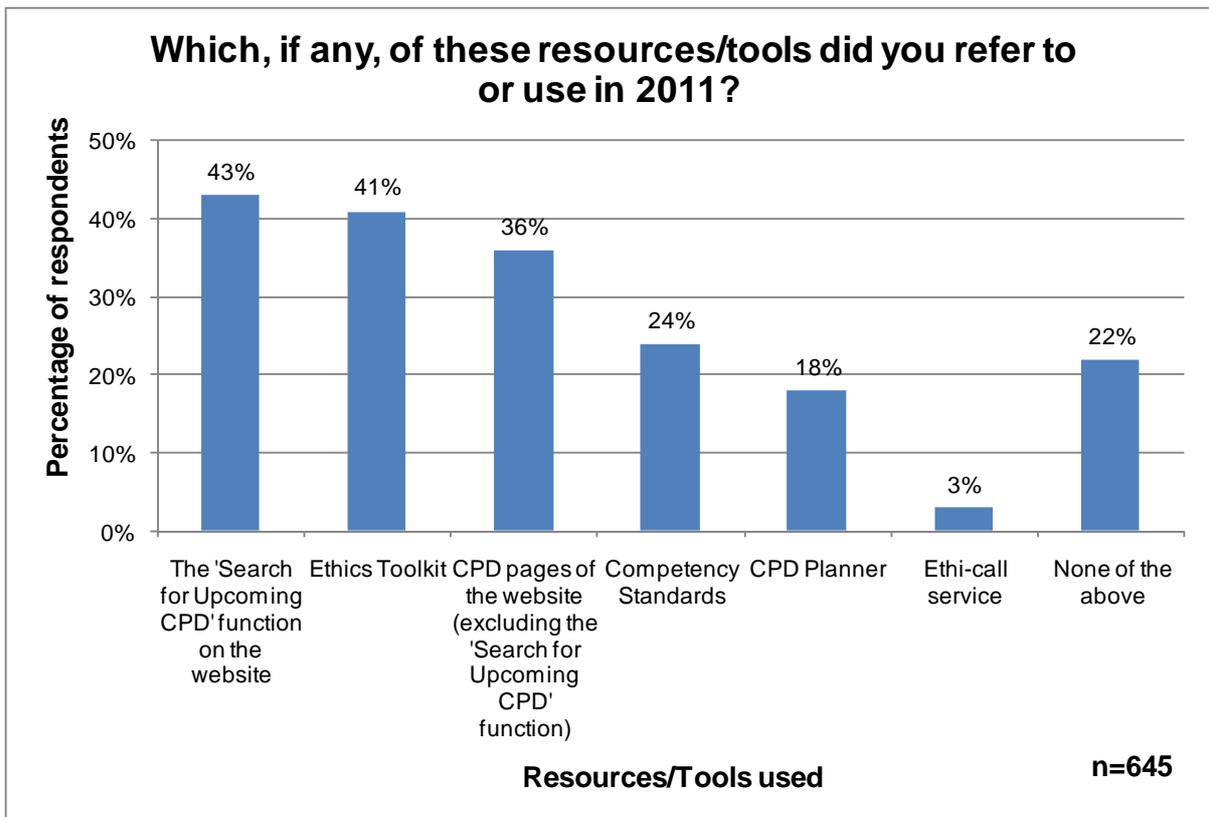A cross-tab of resources used and duration of registration showed no meaningful differences.

Figure 27: Resources utilised

NB: Multiple responses could be selected in this question

Figure 28 shows a high level of satisfaction with the Authority's tools and resources. However, in 2013 it will be valuable to test the *need* respondents have for these tools, which will help to determine whether changes are needed (ie whether there is a lack of awareness, or if there is only a select sample of the population that have a need to use the resources).
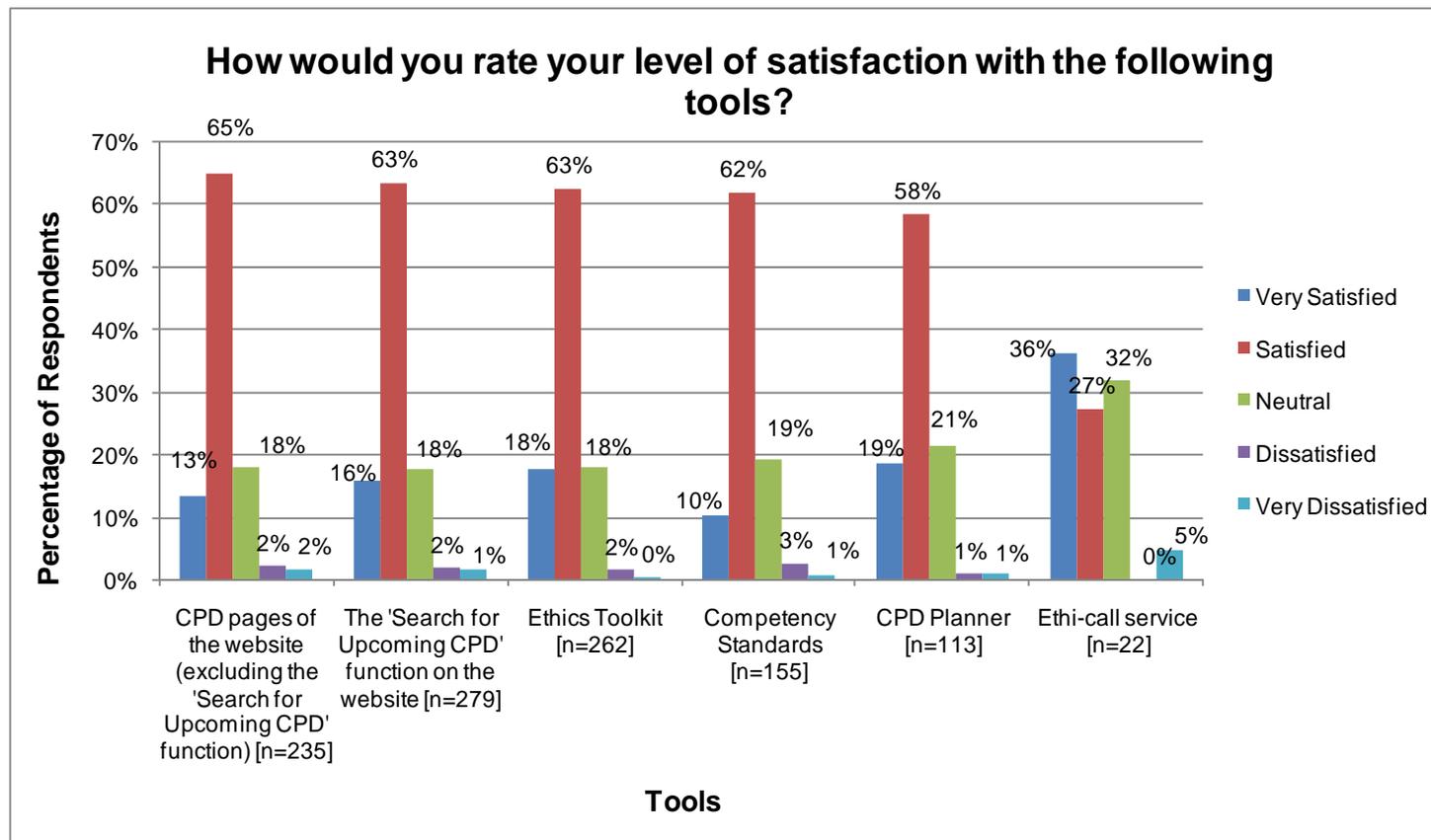

Figure 28: Satisfaction with resources

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the CPD Survey highlight a CPD framework that is valued by RMAs. The majority of agents are completing CPD activities to better the way they and their business assist customers and give relevant and effective migration advice.

Based on the results it appears the agent sample can be broken up into three broad categories:

- those engaged and who see value in completing CPD (around 55 percent of the sample);
- 30 percent who are really driven to maximise the educational and business value of their CPD; and
- those who are neutral and perhaps "going through the motions" in relation to the completion of CPD (approximately 15 percent of the sample).

Overwhelmingly, this means that 85 percent of agents are engaged and/or driven when it comes to completing CPD. This is an extremely positive result and is likely to be the optimum level of engagement that can be achieved within any profession as diverse as immigration services.

The findings in this survey also compare favourably with responses in the 2010 CPD survey.

Essentially, the overarching feedback from agents in relation to the CPD program is to continue "as is" with no major issues identified. With satisfaction levels at 82 percent with CPD and 83 percent with CPD providers and no overarching issues identified, the results from this survey can serve as an ideal benchmark for future years.

An important challenge for the Authority is to ensure that the agent population is engaged and committed given the diverse demographics of RMAs. Culture, education, duration of registration and location differences drive the need for a diverse CPD activity offering, incorporating activities that cater for:

- different learning styles and preferences;
- emphasis on relevant case studies and practical learning environments;
- experienced and newly registered RMAs; and
- those seeking advanced content, especially as the profession "matures" and more RMAs seek competitive difference through knowledge.

These points could help to address the perceptions of the range of CPD options seen in Figure 10.

Currently, activities such as mentoring, pro bono work, developing and presenting CPD and authorship have low levels of engagement (not many prefer these activities and not many are completing these activities). If these are to continue as CPD options, another challenge for the Authority will be encouraging agents to engage in these activities. These activities will allow experienced agents to contribute to building up the profession and could yield long term benefits for the individual and the profession.

Several other minor "tweaks" that the Authority may wish to consider include working with CPD providers to ensure:

- enhanced use of case studies and scenarios, based on the findings shown in Figure 15 and Figure 17. The theory of adult learning may help in part to explain the value agents place on practical activities. Knowles (1980) states that adults become ready to learn when "they experience a need to learn in order to cope more satisfying with real-life tasks or problems". Moving forward, it is important for RMAs to receive meaningful learning experiences that are clearly linked to relevant issues faced by agents. The Authority could work with CPD providers to ensure the continued correct and effective use of case studies as part of the CPD framework, which corresponds with Knowles' notion that adult learners are practical and goal-oriented;
- technical support to agents completing online or distance learning is enhanced; and
- improving communication between agents and the Authority in relation to CPD.

We suggest in future research that the quantitative CPD survey be supplemented with qualitative research to gain *in-depth* insight into:

- what agents think about CPD, why they think that way, and, importantly, what the implications of their attitudes and perceptions are – how their attitudes influence behaviour; and
- any differences that exist between different sub-populations.

Appendix A – Online Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey about the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities you have attended.

This survey is being undertaken as part of the Office's commitment to maintain a relevant and effective CPD framework for registered migration agents in Australia.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete, and relates to your CPD experiences in the 2011 calendar year. To complete the survey quickly, you have the option of filling in your MARN so that demographic information can be pre-populated.

Please note that all information collected via the survey will remain confidential and the results, including free text comments, will only be reported to the Office as aggregate data and trends and not attributable to any one individual.

As you are completing the survey, if you wish to go back to a previous question/page please use the Back button located at the bottom of each page.

You can also save your responses and complete your questionnaire at a later date. Your survey responses will automatically be saved when you close your web browser. Clicking on the survey link that was emailed to you will allow you to resume the survey at any time.   The survey closes at 12 pm on 10 April 2012.

Australian Government Statistical Clearing House Approval Number 02244 - 01.

Questions
Do you wish to provide your MARN instead of completing the demographic questions?   Please note that all information collected via the survey will remain confidential and the results, including free text comments, will only be reported to us as aggregate data and trends and not attributable to any one individual.
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please enter your MARN number in the box provided.
What is your gender?
- ○ Male
- ○ Female

What is your country of birth?
- ○ Australia
- ○ Other, please specify _____

What is the main language spoken in your home?
- ○ English
- ○ Other, please specify _____

The following questions relate to the qualifications you currently hold.

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- ○ Year 10
- ○ Year 12
- ○ Vocational qualification
- ○ Graduate degree
- ○ Post-Graduate degree
- ○ Other, please specify _____

Do you hold any of the following qualifications? (please select all that apply)
- ❑ Australian legal practitioner
- ❑ Chartered Accountant
- ❑ Certified Practicing Accountant (CPA)
- ❑ None of the above

How long have you been a Registered Migration Agent?
- ❍ Less than 1 year
- ❍ 1-3 years
- ❍ 4-6 years
- ❍ 7-10 years
- ❍ 11-15 years
- ❍ More than 15 years

The following questions relate to the size and structure of your business. If you work in more than one business, please answer the questions based on your primary business - that is, the business where you spend the majority of your time.

Do you work as a migration agent in more than one business?
- ❍ Yes - in how many businesses are you employed as a registered migration agent?
  _____
- ❍ No

How many other migration agents work in your primary business?
- ❍ None (I'm a sole practitioner)
- ❍ 1-3
- ❍ 4-10
- ❍ 11-25
- ❍ 26+

What is the total number of staff working in your primary business (including yourself, administration staff, other migration agents and any other employees)?
- ❍ 1 (myself)
- ❍ 2-5 staff
- ❍ 6-20 staff
- ❍ More than 20 staff

Where is your primary business located?
- ❍ Adelaide
- ❍ Brisbane
- ❍ Canberra
- ❍ Gold Coast
- ❍ Melbourne
- ❍ Perth
- ❍ Sydney
- ❍ Other Regional Area, please specify _____
- ❍ Overseas, please specify the country _____

Please indicate the course/qualification you undertook to become eligible to be a Registered Migration Agent.
- ❍ Australian legal practitioner
- ❍ Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice
- ❍ Migration Advice Professional Knowledge Entrance Examination (MAPKEE)
- ❍ Sound knowledge course/exam
- ❍ Proven competency
- ❍ New Zealand licensed immigration adviser
- ❍ Other, please specify _____

In what year did you complete the Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice?

To what extent are you satisfied with the Graduate Certificate program you completed to become a Registered Migration Agent?
- ○ Very Satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very Dissatisfied

What are the reasons for your answer?

The following questions relate to CPD activities completed in 2011.

Did you participate in CPD activities in 2011?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Why did you not participate in CPD in 2011? (please select all that apply)
- ❑ I didn't know it was required
- ❑ Time constraints
- ❑ Cost constraints
- ❑ Difficulty in accessing CPD activities due to location
- ❑ I am a newly registered migration agent and I am waiting to complete the Practice Ready Program
- ❑ My registration expiry date means that I completed all my required CPD activities in 2010 OR have them scheduled for 2012
- ❑ I don't know where or how to find CPD activities
- ❑ Content of CPD activities is not relevant
- ❑ I am not planning on continuing to be registered
- ❑ Other, please specify _____

In 2011 what types of CPD activities did you complete? (please select all that apply)   To see a brief description of a particular activity, place your cursor over that activity.
- ❑ Conference
- ❑ Seminars
- ❑ Workshops
- ❑ Advanced Workshops
- ❑ Private Study (distance learning without a facilitator)
- ❑ Additional Assessment (distance learning without a facilitator)
- ❑ Online learning (distance learning with a facilitator)
- ❑ Authorship
- ❑ Developing and/or presenting CPD
- ❑ CPD completed with other professions (eg legal practising certificate, CPA, CAA, NIA)
- ❑ Programs of Education
- ❑ Practice Ready Program
- ❑ Pro Bono
- ❑ Mentoring
- ❑ Other, please specify _____

The following questions relate to your reasons for participating in CPD activities.

Please review the below list and select the three most important factors which impact on your selection of CPD activities.

	Most Important	2nd Most Important	3rd Most Important
To complete the CPD in the shortest possible time	○	○	○
To learn from an interesting and engaging presenter(s)	○	○	○
To complete the CPD at the lowest possible cost	○	○	○
To attend CPD at an advanced level	○	○	○
To complete CPD in the most convenient format	○	○	○
To improve the services I provide to my clients	○	○	○
To complete the CPD at the nearest location possible	○	○	○
To assist with practice and my business operations (including keeping up to date with changes to migration law and policy)	○	○	○
To quickly complete CPD before expiry of registration	○	○	○
To have the opportunity to network and share experiences with fellow agents	○	○	○
Other, please specify	○	○	○

Identify the degree to which you agree with the statements below:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I do not give much consideration or planning to CPD	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I only think about completing CPD activities in the months before my registration expires	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I value CPD for keeping my knowledge and skills up to date with recent changes in law and policy	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am very satisfied with the range of CPD options available	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am very satisfied with the CPD I have completed	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

In relation to the CPD activities you completed in 2011, please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The CPD maintained and/or improved my knowledge and skills	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The CPD provided an opportunity for networking and sharing of experiences	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The CPD enhanced my understanding of ethical responsibilities	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The presenter(s) presented the topic in an interesting and engaging manner	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The CPD fulfilled my re-registration requirements in the shortest possible time	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The CPD fulfilled my re-registration requirements at the lowest possible cost	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The CPD fulfilled my re-registration requirements in the most convenient manner	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The CPD was offered	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

close to the time I needed to apply for re-registration					
The CPD enabled me to interact with experienced agents and I was able to discuss issues at an advanced level	○	○	○	○	○
The CPD enabled me to attend a lecture style event with little participation required from me	○	○	○	○	○

In considering the face-to-face CPD activities you attended in 2011 (if any), what factors do you think most impact on the effectiveness of the activity in meeting your needs? (please select up to three responses that you think are most important)
- ❑ Small group size
- ❑ Knowledge of presenter
- ❑ Engagement & delivery by presenter
- ❑ Focused peer group activities
- ❑ Quality of supporting material
- ❑ Inclusion of case studies and/or scenarios
- ❑ Venue
- ❑ Assessment of Learning
- ❑ Discussion of issues at an advanced level
- ❑ Other, please specify _____
- ❑ Not applicable (I did not complete any face-to-face CPD activities in 2011)

How would you rate your satisfaction with these factors in relation to the face-to-face CPD activities you attended in 2011?

In considering any online or distance learning CPD activities you completed in 2011, what factors do you think most impact on the effectiveness of the activity in meeting your needs? (please select up to three responses that you think are most important)
- ❑ Easy to use technology/software
- ❑ Having a facilitator
- ❑ Provision of quality supporting material (if supplied)
- ❑ Inclusion of case studies and/or scenarios
- ❑ Technical support
- ❑ Assessment of learning
- ❑ Other, please specify _____
- ❑ Not applicable (I did not complete any online or distance learning CPD activities in 2011)

How would you rate your satisfaction with these factors in relation to the online or distance CPD activities you attended in 2011?

Was there any CPD activity/ies that you attended in 2011 that you were not satisfied with?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Why were you not satisfied with the activity?
      Name of activity/ies
      Date/s
      Reason/s for dissatisfaction

How would you rate your satisfaction with the CPD providers who delivered the CPD activities you completed?
- ○ Very Satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very Dissatisfied

What are the reasons for your answer?

What is your overall level of satisfaction with the CPD activities you completed in 2011?
- ○ Very Satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very Dissatisfied

What are the reasons for your answer?

The following questions relate to your preferences in relation to CPD activities going forward.
Please indicate your preference for each of the following CPD activity types.

	I avoid this type of CPD activity	Neutral	I prefer this type of CPD activity
10 seminars in 2 days	○	○	○
Conference	○	○	○
Seminars	○	○	○
Workshops	○	○	○
Advanced Workshops	○	○	○
Private Study (distance learning without a facilitator)	○	○	○
Online learning (distance learning with a facilitator)	○	○	○
Authorship	○	○	○
Developing and/or presenting CPD	○	○	○
Programs of Education	○	○	○
Practice Ready Programs	○	○	○
Pro Bono	○	○	○
Mentoring	○	○	○
Other, (please specify)	○	○	○

Are there any topics that are not currently covered by CPD activities that you would like to see included? If Yes, please list the topics that you would like to see included in the program below. If there are no new topics that you would like to see included, please click Next.

We would now like to ask you some questions about the Office of the MARA.

How would you rate your satisfaction with the communication you receive from the Office of the MARA regarding CPD requirements?
- ○ Very Satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very Dissatisfied

What are the reasons for your answer?

Which, if any, of these resources/tools did you refer to or use in 2011? (please select all that apply)
- ❑ Competency Standards
- ❑ Ethics Toolkit
- ❑ Ethi-call service
- ❑ CPD Planner
- ❑ CPD pages of the website (excluding the 'Search for Upcoming CPD' function)
- ❑ The 'Search for Upcoming CPD' function on the website
- ❑ None of the above

How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the following tools?

Thank you for completing this survey. Before submitting your answers, if you have any further comments about your experiences with or preferences of CPD activities, or would like to provide feedback on the survey, please do so briefly in the text box below.
Otherwise, please click 'Next' to submit your answers.

Appendix B – Definitions of CPD Activity Types

Conference	A face to face activity where participants are physically present at one specific location, no limit on attendees
Seminar	A face to face activity where participants are physically present at one specific location, a maximum of 45 attendees
Workshop	A face to face activity designed for intensive learning of specific subject matter in an interactive way, a maximum of 25 participants
Advanced Workshop	A workshop which includes a marked assessment where learning can be individually assessed
Private Study (distance learning without a facilitator)	Includes an assessment completed individually. In order to receive CPD points for this type of activity, participants are required to confirm they have completed the study and assessment unassisted eg. reading prepared written materials or structured e-learning
Additional Assessment	Optional activities completed after undertaking an approved face to face seminar ie distance learning without a facilitator
Online learning	Where participants are learning with a facilitator or presenter who is in a different physical location eg webinars or live streaming ie distance learning with a facilitator
Authorship	Having an article or book published which contribute to the development and practice of immigration law
Developing and/or presenting CPD	Presenting or developing material for activities approved by the Office of the MARA
CPD completed with other professions	CPD completed as part of an RMA's obligation to other CPD programs in other professions eg legal practising certificate, CPA
Programs of Education	Conducted by Australian universities, higher education providers or registered training organisations under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Programs of education include the Graduate Certificate in Australian Migration Law and Practice
Practice Ready Program	A practical and highly interactive program to equip registered migration agents in their first year of practice
Pro Bono	The provision of immigration assistance without charge for an authorised voluntary organisation
Mentoring	A structured support relationship established between a trained mentor RMA and a newer agent who is in the first five years of practice. It is based on an individual 1 to 1 agreement that provides expert guidance on issue resolution and skill development