

Patent Examination Board
2025 Qualifying Examinations
Candidate Survey Report

Summary

This report consolidates candidate feedback from the 2025 session of the Patent Examinations Board (PEB) Qualifying Examinations from 112 survey respondents.

Candidate feedback has continued to show consistent increase in satisfaction as a result of improvements made by the Patent Examination Board in recent years.

Technical arrangements relating to online examinations continue to be smoother each year. Satisfaction with PEBX, ProctorExam and Zoom invigilation was high at 95%. Overall, 82% of survey respondents would like to keep the exam online either from home or their workplace, though a few candidates expressed a strong preference for returning to in-person examinations, as in previous years.

Satisfaction with the examination content was also high. Between 85% and 100% of candidates felt that the Foundation Certificate question papers gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge (from a moderate to a great extent). Satisfaction with the Final Diploma examinations has continued to increase each year, particularly for FD4 where 80% of candidates are now satisfied that they had a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

Overall, candidates welcomed improvements in a number of areas including the drawing tool, more appropriate amount of content and less reliance on subject specific technical knowledge. Recommended areas for ongoing improvement included:

- Technical requirements are still quite onerous, and there is a lot of information for candidates to navigate in different places
- Errors in the papers were a major concern for candidates who felt that the issues could have been better handled and communicated
- Changes to the format / style of FC3 and FD1 were challenging and some questions felt vague
- Some formatting issues with the Word / PDF documents
- Still some concerns about relevance of the examinations to testing fitness to practice and calls for open book exams, though significantly fewer than in previous years
- Consistency of invigilation including management of video / microphones and time announcements and appropriate enforcement of technical requirements to prevent malpractice
- The examinations require considerable physical and mental endurance which could be eased by breaks between examination days.
- Though the majority of candidates said there is enough time for the Foundation Certificate exams, only around half of candidates felt there was enough time for the

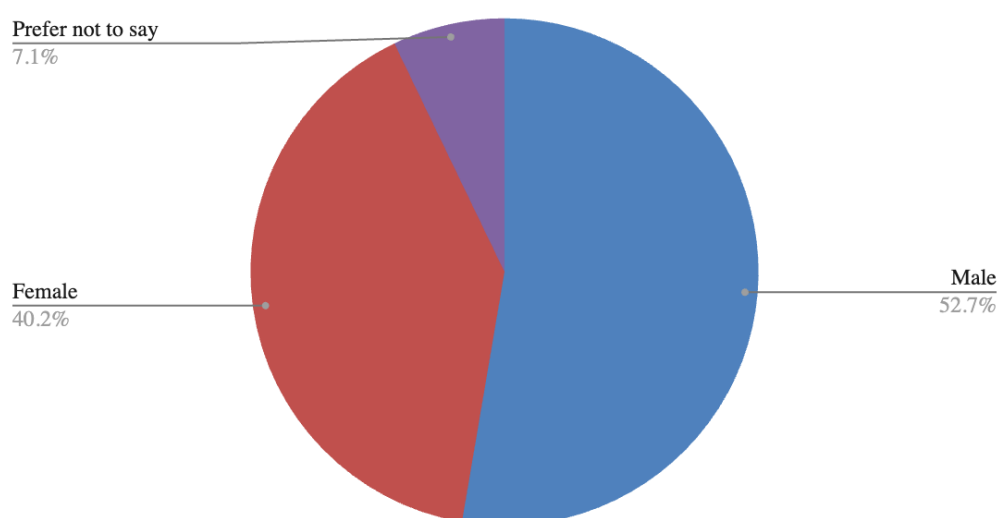
Final Diploma exams, and many candidates would still prefer to have more time to give considered answers.

Section 1: Profile of respondents

- **Personal characteristics**

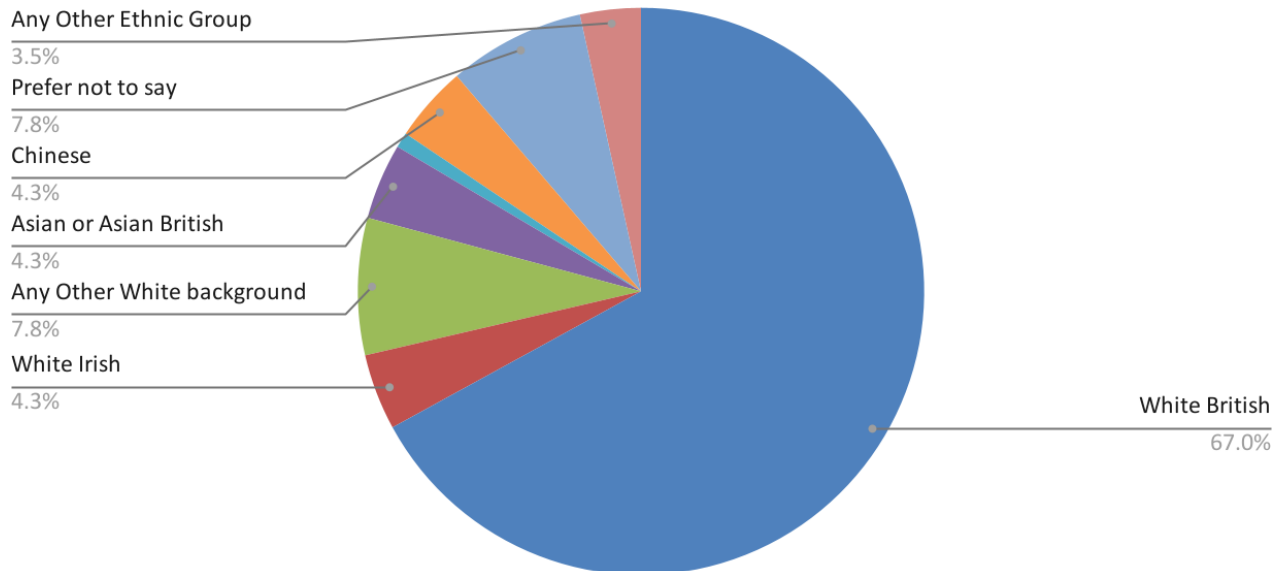
Slightly more men than women participated in the PEB Qualifying Examinations last year (on the basis of survey respondents), with 53% male and 40% female, and 7% preferring not to say.

What is your gender?



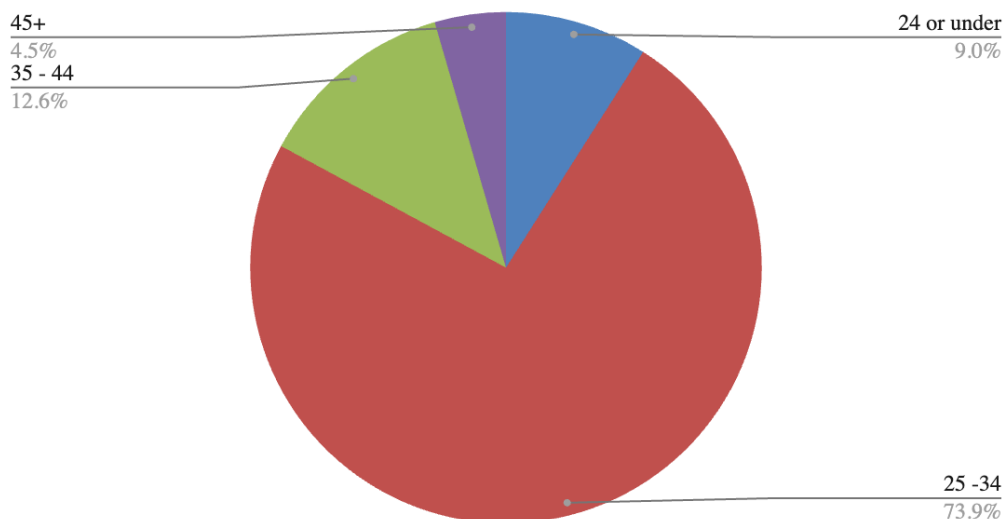
Survey respondents were predominantly White (British or other) (79%). 'Prefer not to say' was the second most selected option (8%) with Asian or Asian British (4%) and Chinese (4%) the next most commonly selected. English was the first language for 90.1% of candidates, broadly similar to previous years.

What is your ethnic origin?



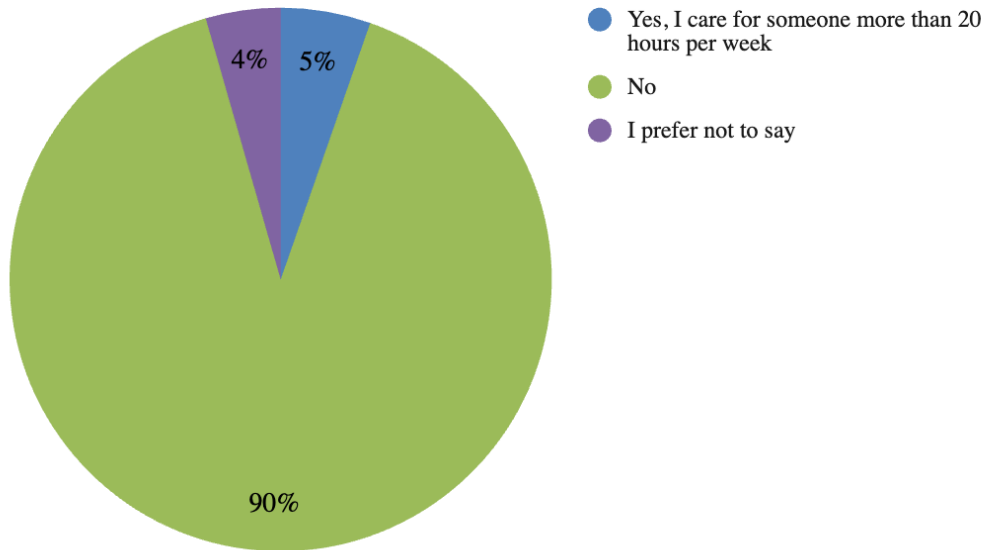
The majority of candidates are aged 25 - 34 (74%) similar to previous years.

What is your age group?



7% of respondents said they have a disability and 6% prefer not to say. 5% of respondents care for someone for more than 20 hours a week, and 4% prefer not to say.

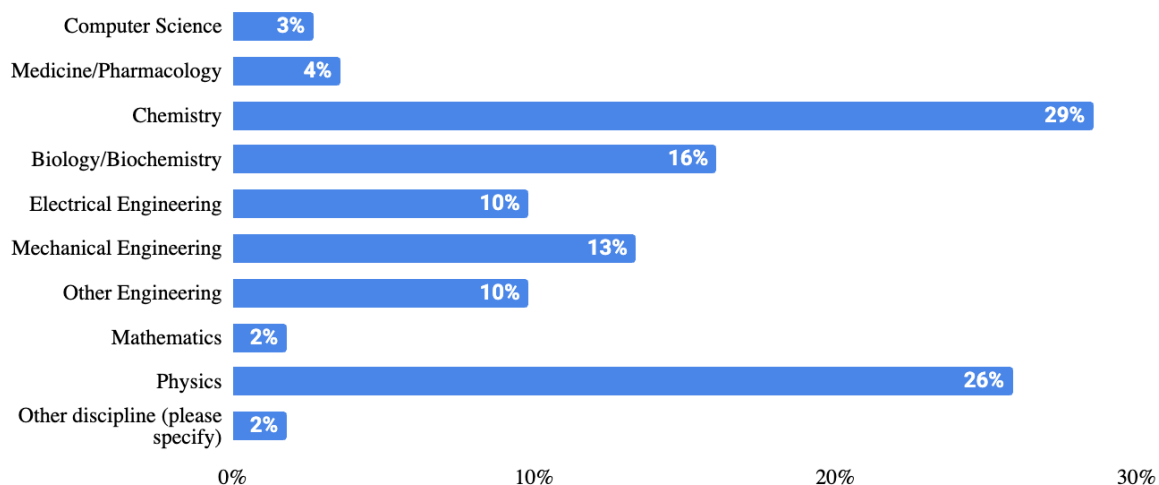
Do you have caring responsibilities?



- **Academic Background**

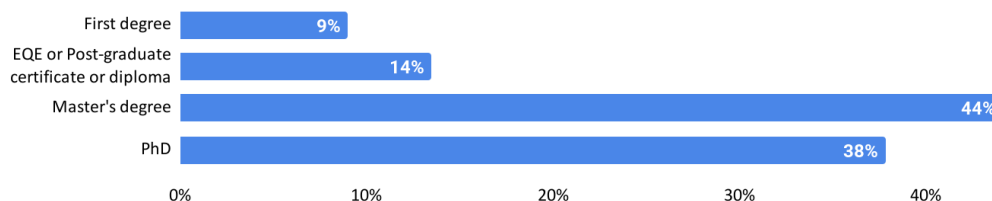
In 2025, there were more candidates with a background in Chemistry (29%), followed by Physics (26%) and Biology / Biochemistry (16%).

What is your academic background?



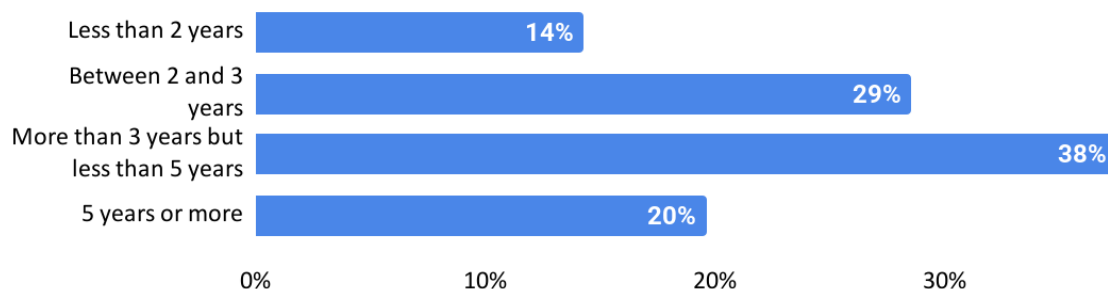
Similar to previous years, just under half of candidates have a Master's Degree (44%), 38% have a PhD and 14% have the EQE / Post-graduate qualification.

What is your highest level qualification?



Broadly similar to the previous year, 38% of respondents had three to five years' experience, and 20% had more than five years.

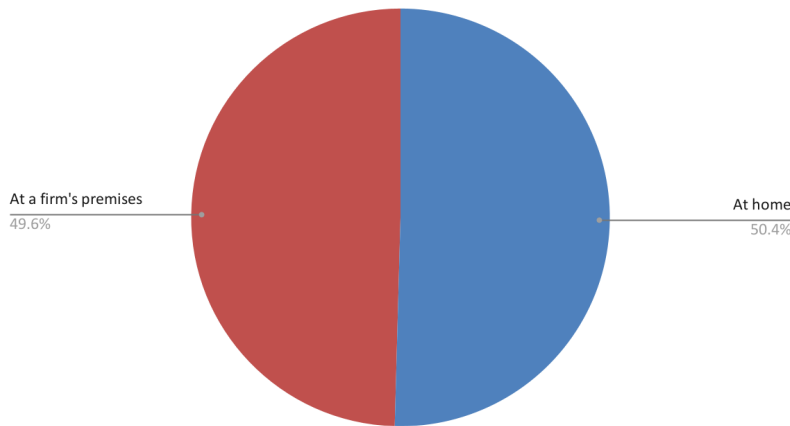
How long have you been working in the patent profession?



- **Exam location**

As in 2024, there was a broadly equal split between candidates taking examinations at home or at their office.

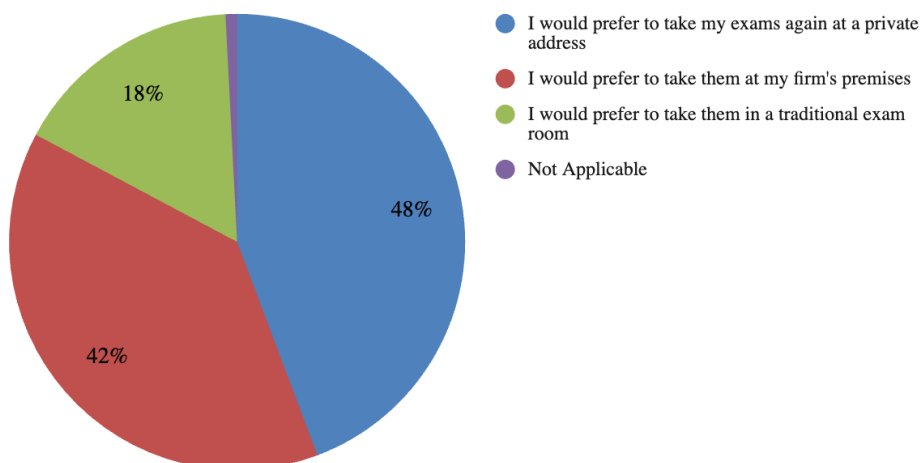
Where did you take your examination(s)?



Reflecting the split above and in line with responses from 2024, 48% of survey respondents would prefer to take examinations at home / private address and 42% at a workplace. 18% said they would prefer to take the examinations in a traditional examination room and four candidates made comments to this effect, saying that a traditional examination room would create a fairer environment for all.

“It would be great to have a dedicated location where people can sit the examinations instead of having to deal with the technical issues that arise when doing the examinations at home or at work. People study really hard and it is unfair when they are disadvantaged due to technical issues. These cause a lot of stress.”

If you take PEB examinations in the future, where would you want to take them?

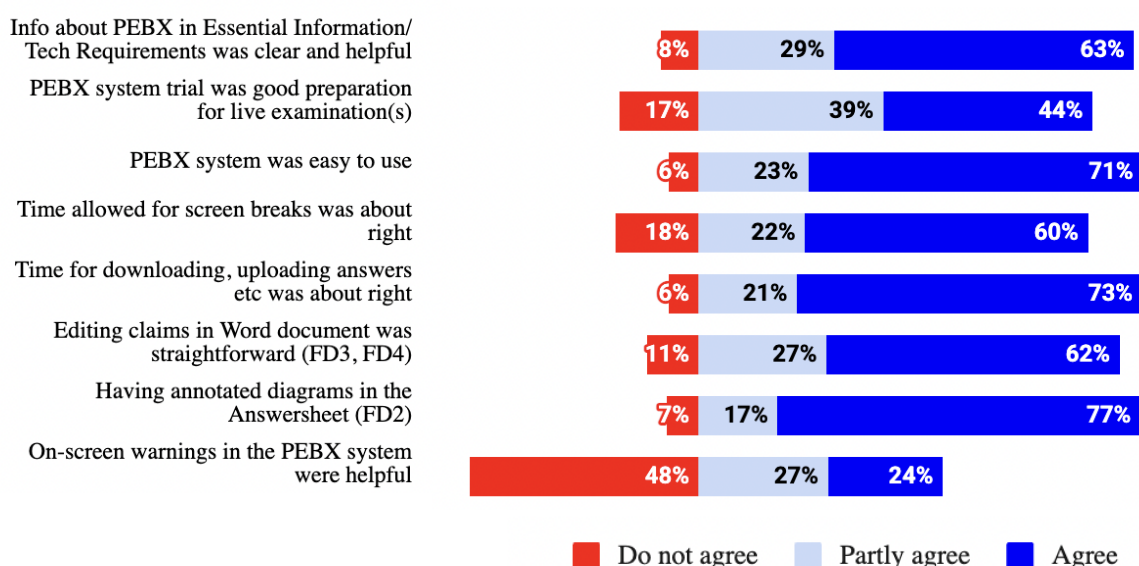


Section 2: Feedback on the examination process

• Views on the PEBX online examination system

Satisfaction with the PEBX online examination system was generally high, with 94% of respondents agreeing or partly agreeing that the system was easy to use. Previous issues with the tool for amending diagrams have been resolved, though still 48% of candidates were dissatisfied with the on-screen warnings and 18% of respondents felt that the time for screen breaks was insufficient.

Please evaluate the PEBX online system



The main issues reported in the comments were:

- Not seeing the on-screen warnings or chat notifications
- Delays in opening PEBX at the start of the exam
- Difficulties / uncertainties in the upload function
- More opportunities to trial the system would be helpful

Concerns included:

“The system trial was not smooth at all. Students could not access the system on the day of the trial, leading to lots of anxiety about whether or not the system was going to work on the day of the exam.”

“I think the PEBX system worked well - I could not view chat notifications so had to keep the zoom window open rather than minimized, as I was nervous I would miss a message in the chat function. It would be useful to be able to test whether chat notifications are visible in the task bar, without needing to keep the zoom screen open.”

“It was useful having two technical trials this year (due to an error), as I was unable to make the first one. If it isn’t a huge burden on resources, doing this again going forward would be useful in case of immovable commitments.”

“PEBX does appear to struggle with user traffic at the start of an exam, which can be a little stressful when trying to get stuck in and not being sure that the system is working properly. ProctorExam works very well - could this platform be extended to the Finals exams? The trial for the Finals exams seemed to not bear much purpose given that there was no Zoom room for candidates to test equipment, try change display name, or test message the invigilators. There also did not appear to be any guidance about how to (or that it was even required to, until the day of the exam) change Zoom display name to candidate number. The fact that candidates could see each other in the Zoom room was also not communicated beforehand and this felt a little strange. The use of ProctorExam for the finals would seem to solve these issues.”

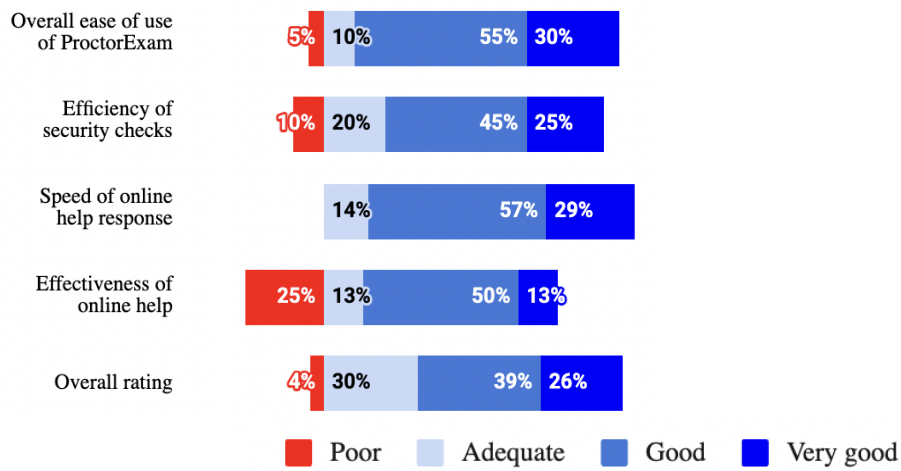
“Someone in my firm had trouble uploading to PEBX. Clearer guidance on what to do if pebx doesn’t work (eg “email your answer straight to X email address”) would be helpful for peace of mind.”

“The PEBX system would not allow me to upload during the upload time. I was doing the Exam on my firm’s ‘exam laptop’ and so couldn’t have my work email logged in. Luckily I had a ‘back up gmail account’ ready to send off my answer just in case. I think the documents published in August should include a sentence telling candidates to be prepared to have to email their answers in case the PEBX system fails, if I had not had the foresight to have the pre-made gmail account I may have missed the upload time deadline.”

- **Views on the ProctorExam system**

Satisfaction with ProctorExam was higher than previous years with 85% of respondents saying that the overall ease of use was “Good” (55%) or “Very Good” (30%). Satisfaction was lowest for the effectiveness of online help, as in 2024, but no respondent was dissatisfied with the speed of online help. 10% of respondents felt the efficiency of the security checks was poor.

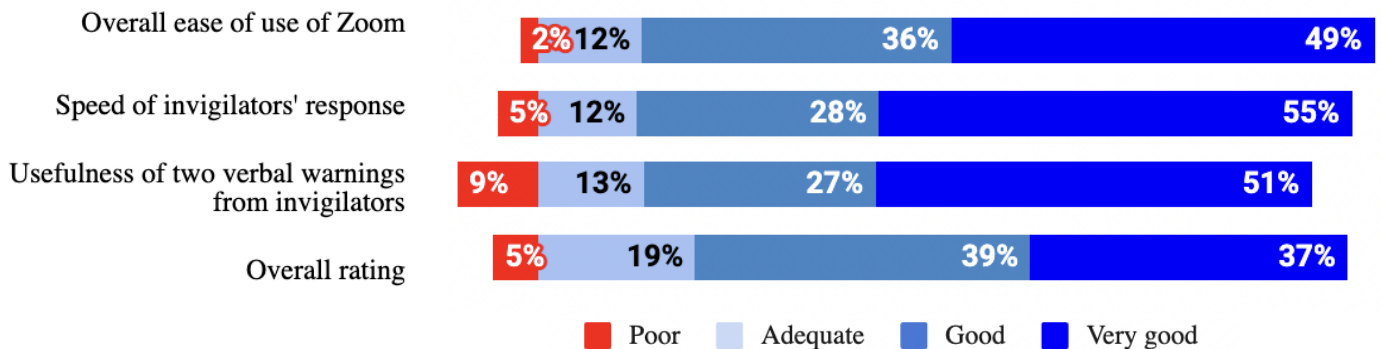
Please rate the ProctorExam system



- **Views on the Zoom invigilation**

76% of respondents gave an overall rating of “very good” or “good” for the Zoom invigilation, similar to previous years. Overall the majority (85%) found Zoom very good or good, in terms of ease of use. 78% of respondents found the speed invigilators’ response times very good or good. 5% of respondents said that the Zoom invigilation was “poor”.

Please rate the Zoom invigilation



Issues raised by candidates include:

- Zoom messages not being seen or answered by invigilators
- Distracting having cameras and microphones on and seeing / hearing other candidates, but also unclear what was expected
- Consistent invigilation to prevent cheating

Several candidates raised concerns that the strict invigilation arrangements laid out in the technical requirements were not actually followed in practice, in which case they present an excessive burden on candidates, but if not enforced, still leave room for cheating.

“The strictness (or lack thereof) of the zoom invigilation’s seems at odds with the severity of the restrictions suggested in the essential information to candidates.”

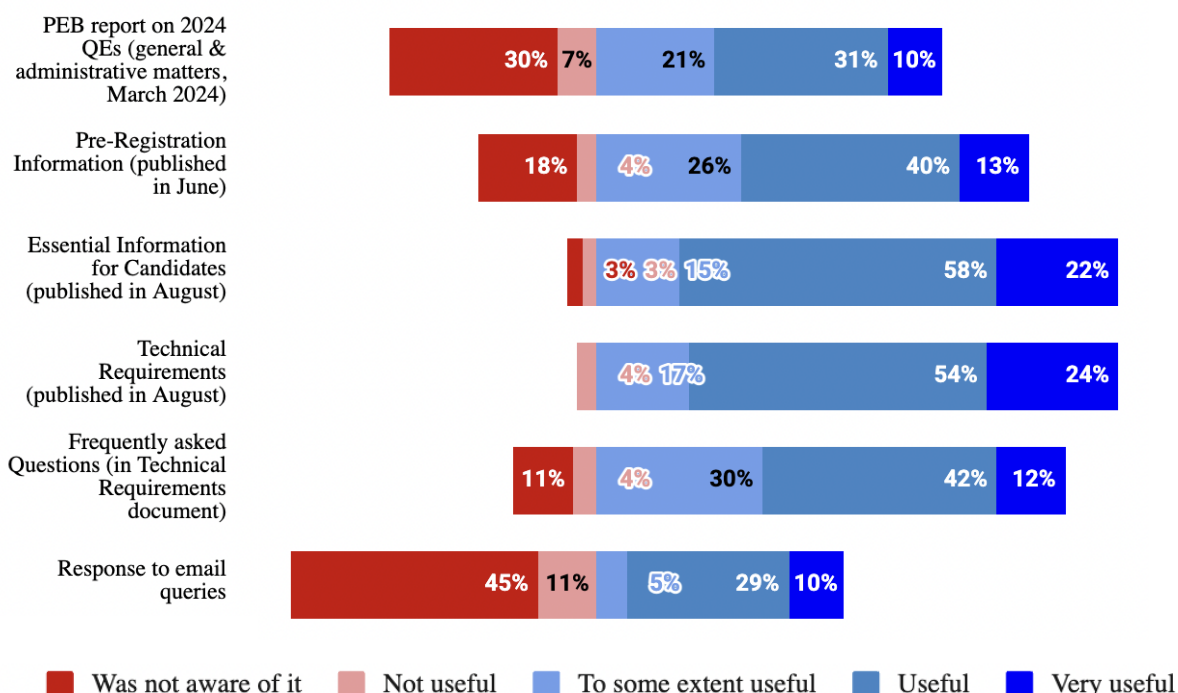
“Overall I believe that the Zoom invigilation is not acceptable for a professional exam of this importance, if the PEB exams continue to be closed book. There are no checks whether candidates have unpermitted items and the invigilators would have no idea what a candidate has open on their screen etc. It is frustrating from the point of view of someone who prepared well and followed the rules that it would have been so easy to cheat, and I am quite sure people take advantage of the lax approach to the invigilating.”

“In my opinion the volume of information in the technical info and essential info for candidates is excessive. There are seemingly a lot of requirements which are excessively restrictive and not actually verified in the exam (ID, printed out letter from PEB, we’re not allowed to read out loud despite the fact that audio isn’t even recorded in Zoom, not allowed to wear earplugs, not allowed jackets or coats (but jumpers are fine), no books in the room etc). It’s a significant extra demand at a stressful time to read through these docs, I think they could be streamlined.”

- **Evaluation of PEB communication with candidates about the online examinations**

Overall, respondents were satisfied with communication from the PEB. As in previous years, most appreciated were the Essential Information for Candidates and the Technical Requirements which 80% and 78% of candidates respectively found useful/very useful. As in previous years, candidates were least familiar with the PEB report on the previous year’s Qualifying Examinations, which 30% of respondents were not aware of.

Please evaluate the different ways in which PEB communicated with candidates about the online examinations



Several respondents called for the key information to be made more concise and combined in one document. Two candidates were dissatisfied with the communications from PEB. Others also requested that an email address be designated at the start of the process so that key communications were not spread across personal and professional emails, and also notifications when new information was posted on the website.

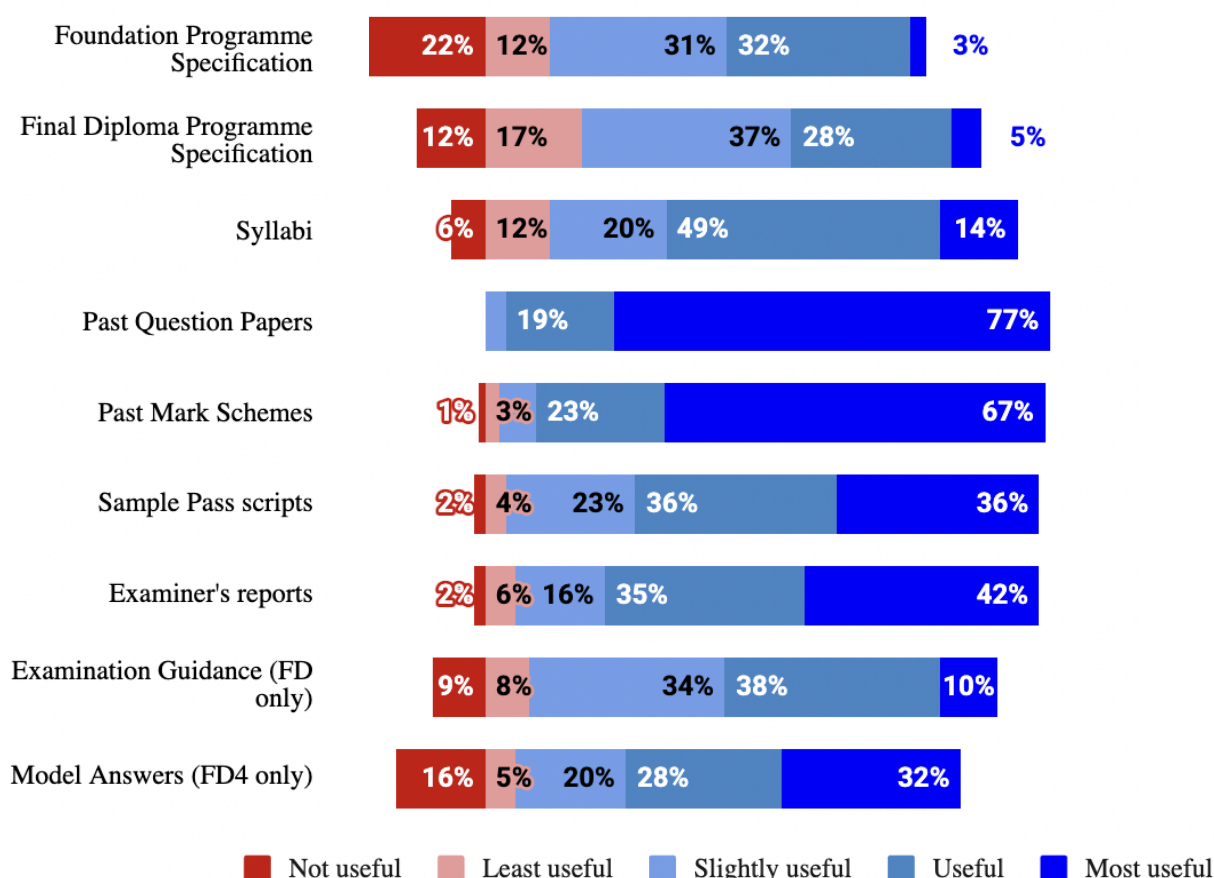
“A more streamlined guidance on the system and what to do on the day would be appreciated. For example, a single central document that is easily found or even sent to the candidates in advance. I found that, particularly with the stress of preparing for the exams themselves, trying to find all information in the days leading up to the exam was not easy.”

“It would be helpful if PEB's communications were somehow emailed to candidates - I often wasn't aware that there was something on the website that I was supposed to be looking at, and different documents were on different pages that sometimes I couldn't find again. Even the link to the scarboroughcloud system could only be found in an obscure document somewhere rather than just in an email or on the website.”

8. Satisfaction with the published PEB support materials

As in previous years, respondents found the Past Question Papers and Sample Pass scripts the most useful, with 77% and 67% respectively saying they were 'most useful'. Also as in previous years, the Programme Specifications and sample answers were ranked lowest, though with a lower proportion of candidates saying they "not useful" compared with 2024.

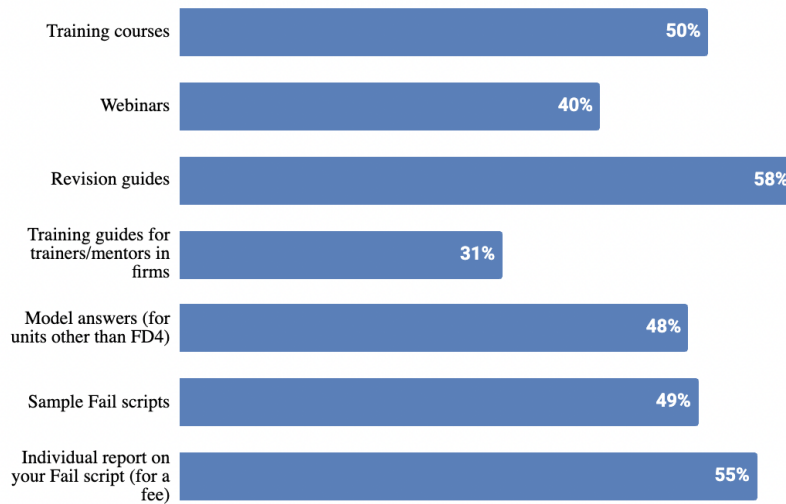
Please rank the usefulness of the published PEB support materials



Only 25% of respondents said they were familiar with the document - "How Qualifying Examinations are Marked", which was slightly lower than 2024. Of these, 17% were very confident and 57% had some confidence that the process leads to fair outcomes. Though, only 30 respondents answered this question so this cannot be taken as a measure of overall candidates' satisfaction with the examination process.

Candidates were asked about other forms of support they would appreciate in preparing for the examinations. As in previous years, the most mentioned additional forms of support were revision guides (58%), individual report on your fail script for a fee (55%) and training courses (50%).

What other support should be available?



- **Overall satisfaction with invigilation and recommendations**

The key issues raised about the overall arrangements were better handling of the errors and clearer instructions for the technical requirements.

Several candidates were dissatisfied with the fact that there were significant errors in the question papers which they considered had impacted their performance, and also with the way the issue was handled. If the error was only communicated on the Zoom chat function, it was possible for the candidates to miss the information, but if it was announced verbally, candidates could have missed it in a toilet break.

“Have qualified attorneys sit the exam in the time before releasing to students. Trainees spend many hours of effort preparing for the exams, often missing key life events as a cost. Mistakes in the exam paper are unacceptable and disrespectful to the candidate efforts, especially when bearing in mind the cost and significance of the result for a person’s career. A mistake in a paper can never be compensated for adequately but a few added minutes is most definitely inadequate.”

“Notwithstanding the fact that errors should have been spotted before the examination, the Invigilators in my Zoom channel did not announce the correction over voice chat. The Invigilators only sent a message in the 'Chat' function, which I did not see as the Zoom chat does not produce a sound nor send any notification to meeting attendees. I only realised the date correction at the end of the examination, when I was preparing to submit my answers. In future, if any such errors occur again, then Invigilators must do better to ensure all candidates are aware of corrections in a timely manner.”

Specific recommendations included:

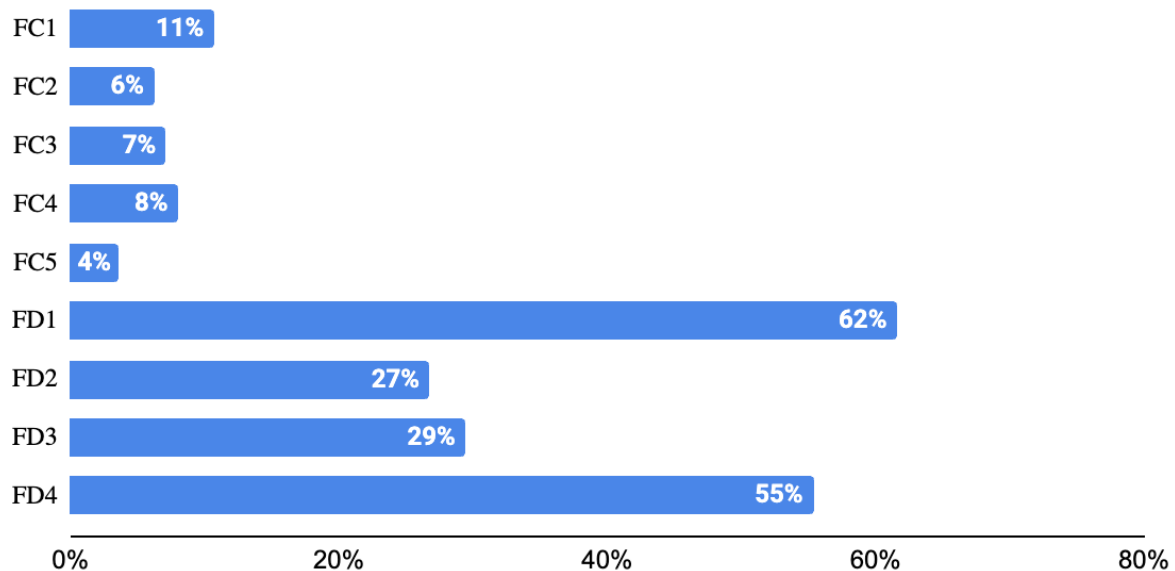
- Show in the marked script where the point gets marks
- To be able to answer in the PEBX system so that the answer will be autosaved, and eliminate the uploading step
- Allow candidates to enter into a zoom call in the trial exam just so that they know what that experience is like before.
- Clarify the difference between "no books in the room" and books not visible or out of reach " in the various rules.
- No delays in being able to download the exam paper and answer sheet would be great.
- Put all the info regarding policies, guidance etc in one location on the PEB website
- Make the deadline to change venue at least a week after the technical test.
- Allow submission of word documents. The conversion to PDFs so that track changes is visible is a little fiddly and a bit stressful at the end of a long exam!
- It would also be more clear and a bit less terrifying if the final button on the scarborough cloud system said "CONFIRM UPLOAD AND END EXAM" rather than just "END EXAM".
- It is unclear at the end of the upload whether or not your answer has been submitted successfully. It would be useful if either a confirmation receipt is sent to candidate email or something pops up on the screen.
- More time for the exams - and don't do them back to back, it's brutal and unnecessary

Section 3: Feedback on the examination content

9. Exams taken by survey respondents

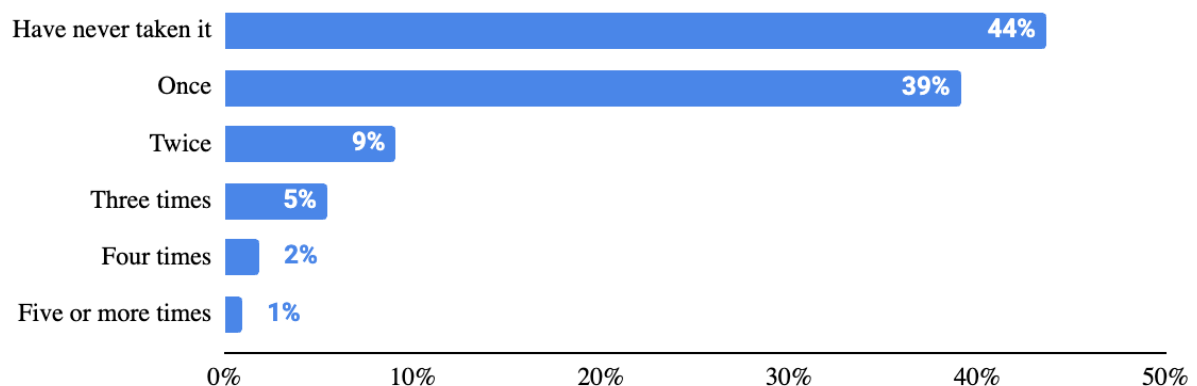
Most respondents (62%) were taking the FD1 exam, and 55% were taking FD4.

Which exams did you take?



9% of respondents were re-taking the FD4 exam for the first time, and in general the number of candidates doing retakes were lower than in previous years.

How many times have you taken the FD4 exam?



10. Satisfaction with exam content and time allowed

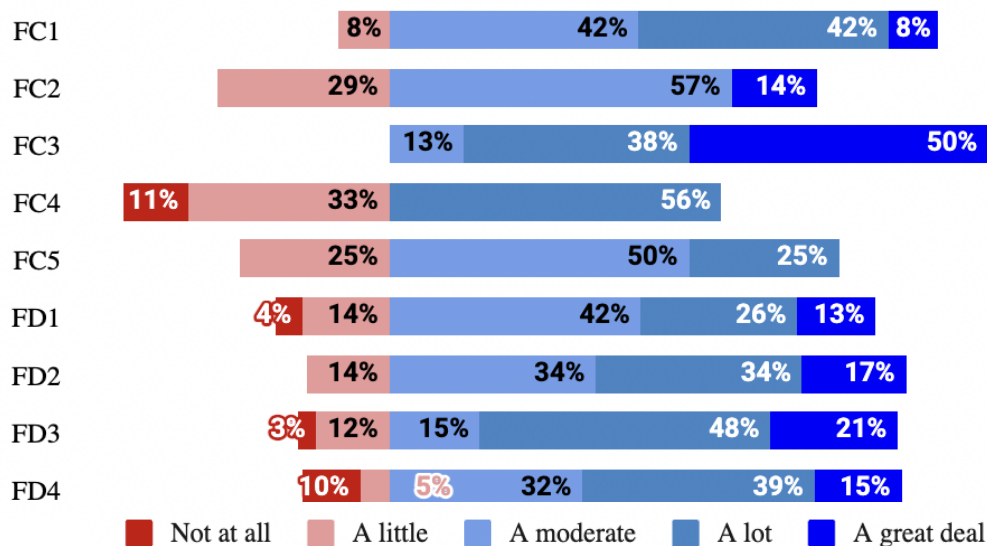
Examination content

For the Foundation Certificate papers, satisfaction levels were generally high, as in previous years.

Percentages shown are only of the candidates who took each paper, and the number of candidates for Foundation Certificate examinations is small. For example, for FC4 only 56% of respondents felt that the paper gave them adequate opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, but this represents only 5 candidates out of 9 who answered this question and took the FC4 paper.

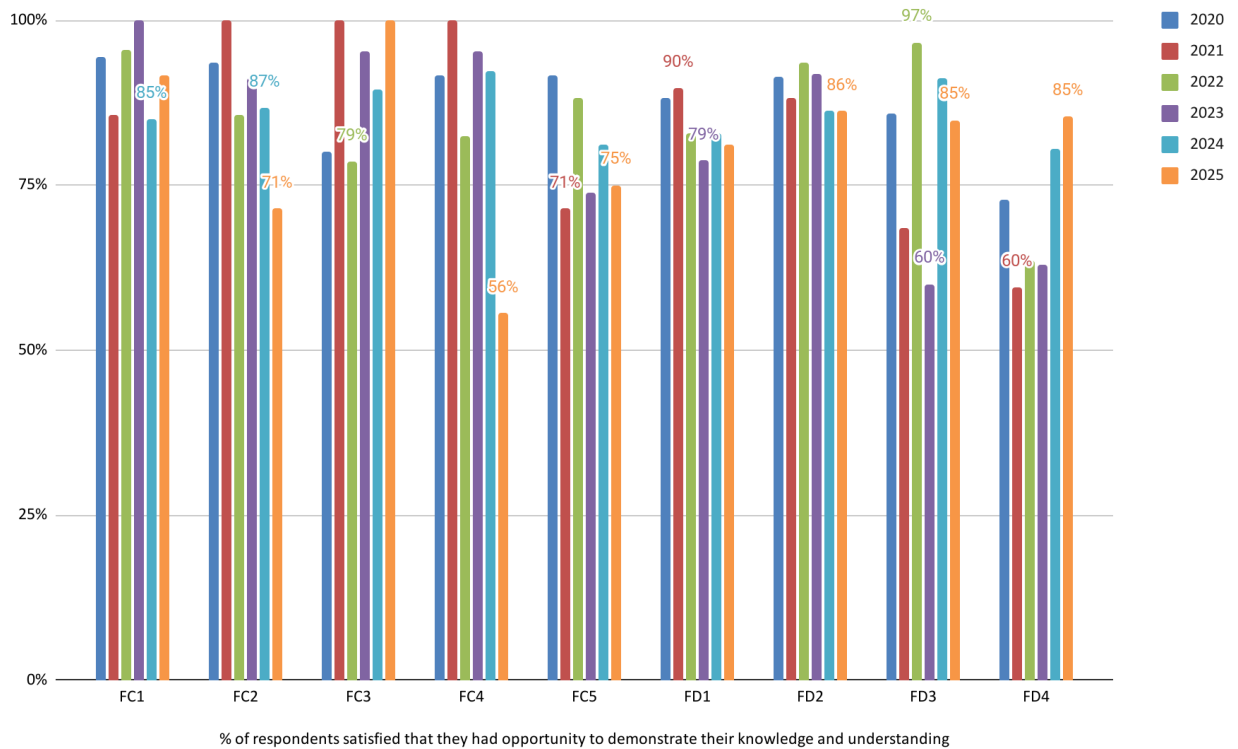
Satisfaction with the Final Diploma examinations has continued to increase each year, particularly for FD4 where 80% of candidates are now satisfied that they had a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

To what extent do you feel that the paper provided the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding?



The following chart shows the trend of satisfaction since 2020, with the percentage of respondents saying the examinations gave them “a moderate”, “a lot” or “a great deal” of opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

Trend of satisfaction 2020 - 2025



FC examinations

FC1: Consistently high levels of satisfaction, ranging from 85% - 100%

FC2: Satisfaction is dropping, and was the second lowest of the 2025 papers (FD and FC), with 71% of candidates reporting a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, though the small number of survey respondents taking this paper should be noted

FC3: High levels of satisfaction (100%) after lower satisfaction in 2020 and 2022

FC4: Consistently high levels of satisfaction from 2020 - 2024, but dropped to 56% in 2025 though as above, the small number of survey respondents should be noted

FC5: Some variation in years, but relatively high levels of satisfaction

FD examinations

FD1: Lower satisfaction than for the highest Foundation Certificate papers, but consistently high

FD2: Consistently high levels of satisfaction, with 86% of survey respondents in 2025 saying that they had a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

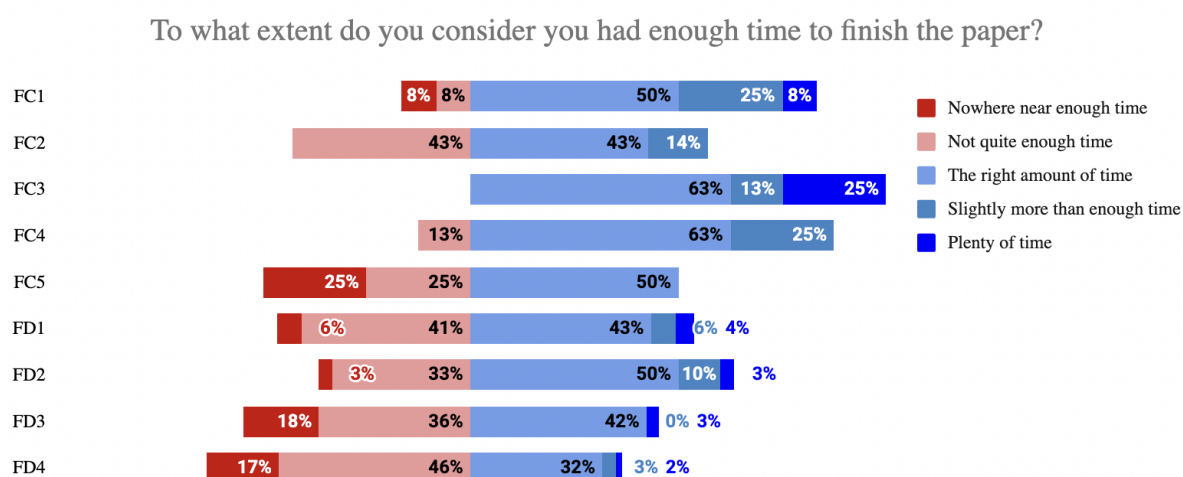
FD3: Variation between years, ranging from 60% satisfaction in 2023 to 97% in 2022. 2025 slightly lower than 2024, but in line with other FD papers

FD4: Trend of increasing satisfaction from 60% in 2021 to 85% in 2025.

Time allowed

For the Foundation Certificate papers, nearly all candidates were satisfied with the amount of time for FC1, FC3 and FC4. For FC2. For FC5 half of candidates felt there was not enough time, though the survey represents small numbers of candidates (between 4 and 12 for each examination).

Satisfaction with the FD4 exam (traditionally the most time pressured) improved, as over a third (37%) of candidates felt there was enough time (up from 28% in 2024). However, still 46% of respondents felt there was not quite enough time and 17% thought there was nowhere near enough time.



Thirteen candidates commented that the time allowed is still too short and the examination schedule is gruelling.

“For both exams felt there was more text than usual and as such exam became less a test of your ability and more your ability to type quickly - i.e. I felt more time for the same amount of exam would have allowed a more accurate representation of the skills being tested in the respective exams rather than how to apportion your time for marks.”

“Having the papers on consecutive days is incredibly exhausting, especially for the longer papers (I sat FD1-3, which was already tiring, but it was particularly bad for those I knew who sat all 4). Having a day in between papers would seem to be an obvious and far more sensible system. In addition, at least for FD1 (probably not feasible for other papers), perhaps the paper could be split into two sections with a break in between (similar to how the new EQE exams are) - for example, 2 hours for Part A, an hour's break, 2 hours for Part B. These changes would not reduce standards (they might even raise them by allowing candidates to be more refreshed) but would make the exam period far less cruel for candidates.”

11. Comments on the examination content and marking

Comments from survey respondents confirm a trend of increasing satisfaction with the examinations compared with previous years, and appreciation for the improvements made, including the fact that the FD4 exam was less overloaded and that there was less requirement for subject-specific technical knowledge which favours certain academic disciplines.

“I felt that the Exams were suitable and do not require improvement.”

“I think this year’s FD4 paper was much better than past years where there was simply too much to consider in the time available. I liked that this year, the paper did not require any specialist knowledge - in past papers, the terms used often require a significant familiarity with the subject matter, which is not what FD4 intends to examine.”

Key issues were:

- The need to memorise large amounts of material which is not realistic / relevant for everyday practice and also makes the exams feel more like a lottery if some very niche knowledge is tested
- The element of subjectivity in how marks are awarded, where good answers may not be awarded if they were not anticipated by examiners
- An unexpected change of format / approach for some papers e.g. for FD1 and FD3
- Some unclear questions
- Concerns about the errors in the examinations

“The knowledge of deadlines for UM, grace periods, excluded subject matter, and others, of FC3 resulted in roughly 400-500 entries in a table, which I think is not reasonable to remember in such an exam.”

“In general, I think FD1 is a very difficult examination to prepare for and to sit for two chief reasons - 1) it is not clear from the syllabus what is required to know and understand to be able to pass, and 2) it is often not clear from the question what you are required to demonstrate you know and understand to be able to pass. My perennial complaint with FD1 is that it becomes a game of guess what the Examiner is thinking. I do not think this is a good way to assess candidates’ fitness for practice. With all that in mind, I think this year’s paper was definitely one of the better ones, and I can see a clear improvement over time from my practice with past papers. The Examiner’s report also are less overtly scathing of candidates, which is appreciated. Still room to improve, though.”

“Have qualified attorneys sit the exam in the time before releasing to students. Trainees spend many hours of effort preparing for the exams, often missing key life events as a cost. Mistakes in the exam paper are unacceptable and disrespectful to the candidate efforts, especially when bearing in mind the cost and significance of the result for a person’s career. A mistake in a paper can never be compensated for adequately but a few added minutes is most definitely inadequate.”

“Also make the mark schemes more consistent/clear rather than wildly varying year to year (some years you might get a few marks if you use very specific wording for a specific concept,

while the very next year for an almost identical question there isn't a mark at all), resulting in us guessing what the examiner wants rather than focusing on providing sound advice as you would in real life. Also, provide marks in the marks scheme beyond the intended marks for the question, as it seems completely unfair that a candidate can provide important and relevant analysis, but because the examiner's wanted to focus on something else the candidate gets no marks."

"For questions that hinge on one niche element, it is much more realistic for attorneys to refer to the relevant law/rule to advise a client. This avoids penalising candidates for forgetting obscure deadlines or very specific wording similar."

"Some surprising material came up (e.g. stamp duty in FC1) but other than that, mostly ok. I don't think India was on the syllabus for patentability exceptions in FC3 but came up anyway. They tested some nicher areas of law than in previous years, some of which was not in the Doug Ealey green book. The exam is hard enough as it is, and does not need niche areas that we have not seen before coming up."

"Some of the questions were unclear as to what they were asking. In particular, question 7(b) of FC4 is not clear whether the question wants to know about what Sylvie can do or what the garden centre can do. Question 8(b) of FC4 is not clear about whether it wants advantages or disadvantages of registered designs in view of unregistered designs, or registered and unregistered designs in view of trade marks."

"The fixing formatting on the answer sheet can make writing the FD4 answers quite difficult. Even the mark schemes do not follow the fixed formatting as it is really difficult to fit tables with more than 2/3 columns in the fixed formatting answer sheet. The option to use landscape layouts would be particularly helpful in FD4 where many candidates rely on the use of tables for their answers."

"It would be helpful if PEB could upload at least one example word answer document to the CIPA past paper website for each exam that can be used when practicing. Particularly for fd2 and fd4, this would mean the formatting is not as unfamiliar on the day."

"Also for FD3 using tracked changes for claims can cause a weird pdf where it shows all the font, format changes etc - recommendations for how best to do tracked claims for FD3 could be useful."

"The style of FD1 Part B changed significantly compared to previous years. The questions were much longer and divided into multiple sub-parts, which was a format I had not practiced. As a result, I felt unprepared."

"FD3 felt a bit odd in comparison to a lot of the past papers"

"FD3 felt very unfair this year. The "main" amendment was not as obvious as it was on previous years, and therefore the paper was much more difficult."

12. Summary of key issues and recommendations highlighted by survey respondents

Significantly fewer recommendations were made this year, following a year-on-year trend of improvement:

- Ensure consistency of invigilation, but also simplify requirements and ensure information is easily accessible
- Better testing of exam papers to avoid errors, and more effective handling of any errors
- More time / less material to enable candidates to provide more considered responses
- Consider open book, or less niche / memorisation
- Resolve the formatting difficulties raised by candidates
- As much consistency as possible between years to enable candidates to prepare.