

In-Comm Barometer 2026

Employers



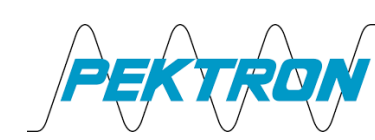
APPRENTICESHIPS / CONSULTANCY / UP-SKILLING



Thank you
to all of
those who
took part:



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Executive Summary

Engineering and manufacturing leaders have revealed the toughest 'skills' picture yet in our latest annual Training Barometer.

Nearly three quarters of businesses surveyed said they felt there was a lack of government support to address skills shortages following the budget last year, whilst only a third believe the Industrial Strategy is going to support their workforce development plans.

These concerns are reflected in an uncertain landscape, with less than half (46%) boosting training budgets and, worryingly, just 45% planning to take on an apprentice over the next twelve months.

This is the first time in the history of our findings that this number has fallen under half and is a massive 24% drop on recruitment intentions seen in 2025.

Staff retention has also been an issue for the 103 companies who responded. 58% of bosses have said they are struggling to keep employees, and this could be due to a difficult cocktail of circumstances, including an ageing workforce, wage inflation and changes to employment law.

3/4 of businesses
felt there was a
lack of government
support to address
skills shortages
following the
2025 budget

Executive Summary

Faith

Skills continue to be one of the pressing challenges for manufacturers and it appears the majority have lost faith in the government playing their part in helping them bridge the gap.

Changes to skills provision and the pace it is being delivered is damaging engagement due to a lack of industry understanding and a belief that they will not deliver the skill levels required.

It's not difficult to see where the lack of confidence stems from. The removal of certain qualifications, defunding of some standards and reducing the level of competency involved in apprenticeships has left firms feeling the system is unwieldy and not fit for purpose. There has also been no increase in

funding for engineering apprenticeships since 2020, whilst costs have risen astronomically in the same period of time. It begs the question, how are providers like In-Comm Training going to be able to maintain the same level of quality provision, whilst being squeezed from all angles?"

All of this is translating into less of an appetite to invest in apprentices. A 24% drop in the number of companies planning to take on a new apprentice is more than worrying and should send shockwaves through the corridors of Whitehall.

It feels that management teams are being battered at every possible turn with legislation, employment changes and then issues coming out of the conflict in Iran. There's very little financial wriggle room to invest in the future."

Executive Summary

Time is precious

The In-Comm Training Barometer is one of the UK's leading reports on the current skills and training landscape, providing critical data on provision, apprenticeships and company sentiment.

Releasing staff from core activities (55%) continues to be the biggest factor holding firms back from embarking on training and this is exacerbated with just under two fifths not considering modular training, once felt to be a preferred upskilling option for employers.

This could be down to the apprenticeship units in the Skills & Growth Levy being up to 16 weeks, which many firms feel is too long to lose valuable employees for.

Nearly a third of all companies questioned are looking to boost leadership and management training, yet the government's recent decision to de-fund Level 3 and above apprenticeship pathways in this area may reduce this demand over time.

55% of businesses said that releasing staff from core activities was the biggest training challenge

Executive Summary

Interestingly, 60% of respondents felt recent changes to the Skills & Growth Levy – particularly around modular, apprenticeship-aligned training – will add value to their organisations.

1/3 of businesses
are looking to
boost leadership
and management
training

As a provider, we are currently looking at the details of these courses, considering if we can deliver them and if they add value to companies based on the content, length, feasibility and funding levels available to us.

Our initial opinion is the government has chosen this route to try and deliver some quick impact, rather than attempting the hard yards of changing legislation to better enable non-apprenticeship aligned training.

There is little doubt that we face a complex and challenge skilling picture. However, if we are going to compete globally and in the modern-day world, we will still need apprenticeships, upskilling courses and, importantly, the right amount of funding – spent in the right places – to ensure we have access to skilled people to drive growth.

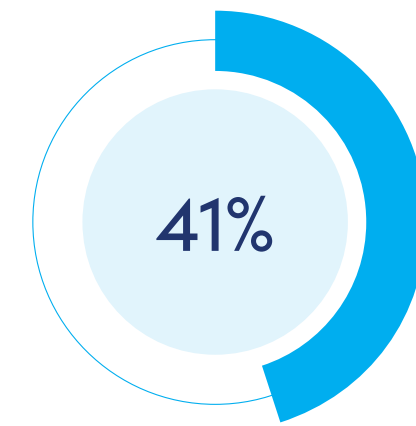
As an industry, we can't afford a lost generation of young people. We need to make our voices heard and lobby for better skills provision and more funding to develop the talent of the future.

Gareth Jones – Managing Director

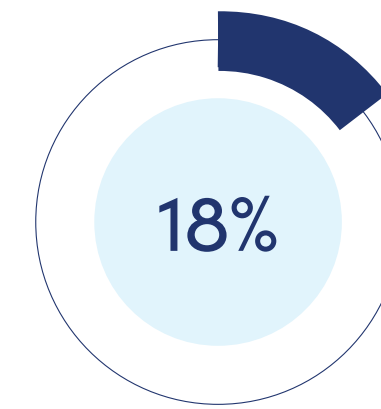
In-Comm Barometer 2026 Employers

For this year's In-Comm Training Barometer, 100 businesses answered the following 23 questions. The findings will be used to lobby Government about more targeted support for the sector and to inform future recommendations by trade bodies representing business and industry.

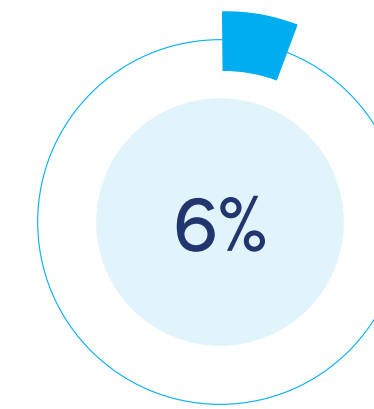
Question 1
What sector does your business operate in?



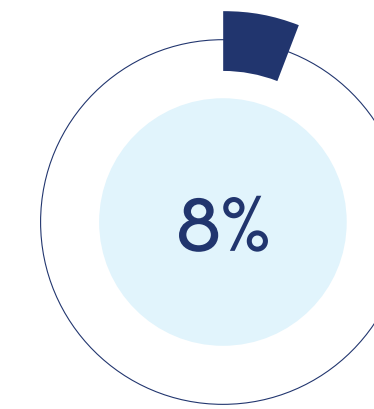
Other



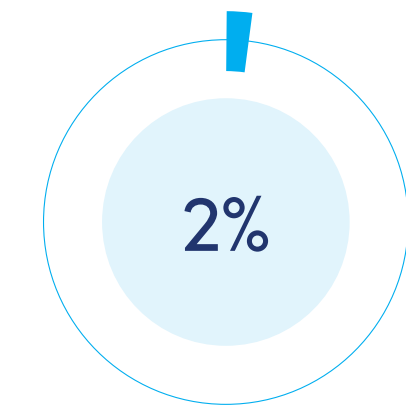
Automotive



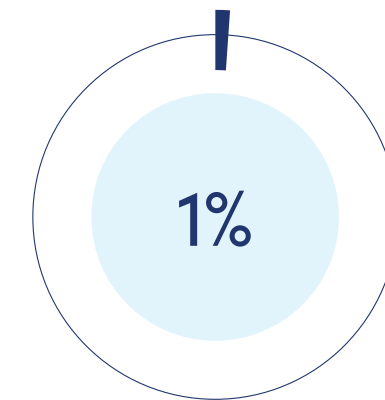
Aerospace



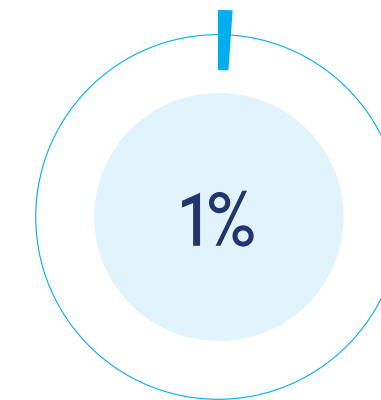
Construction



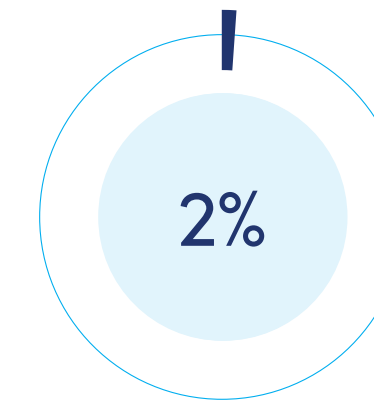
Contractor Services



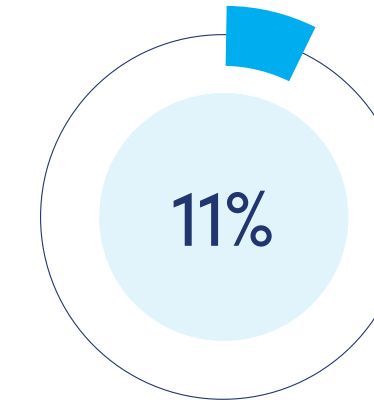
Defence



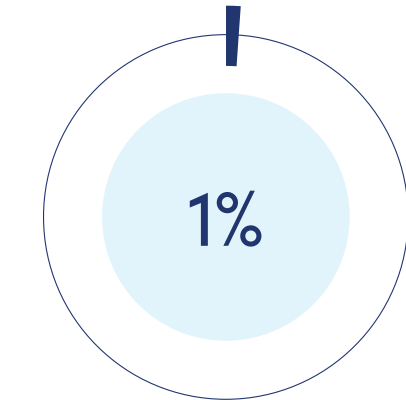
Food & Beverage



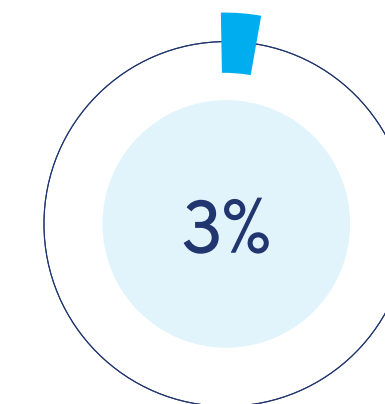
Medical



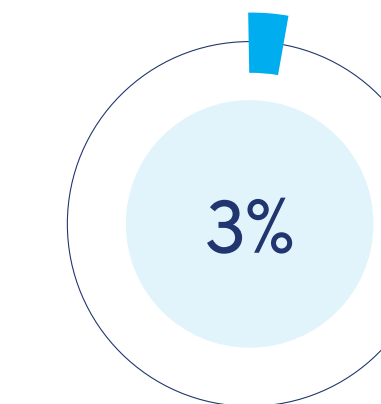
Metal Producers



Oil and Gas



Professional Services



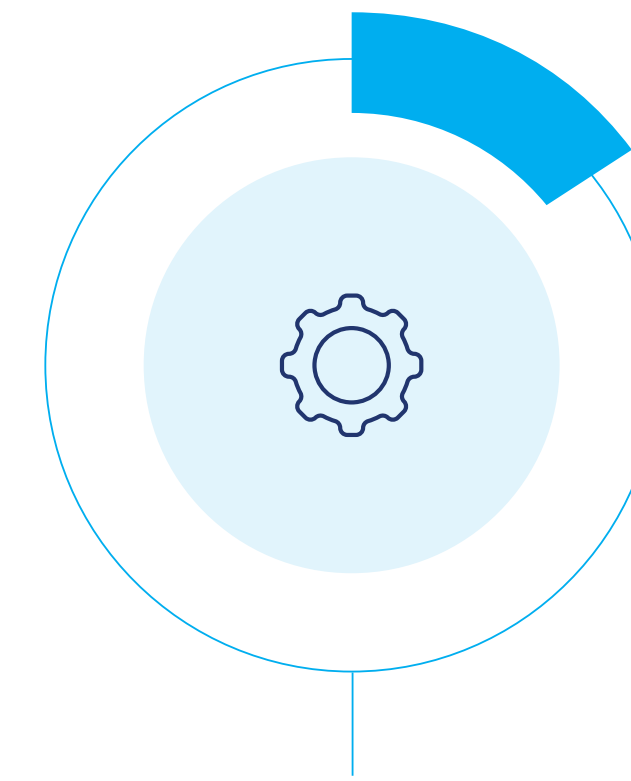
Warehouse and Distribution

Other sectors include:

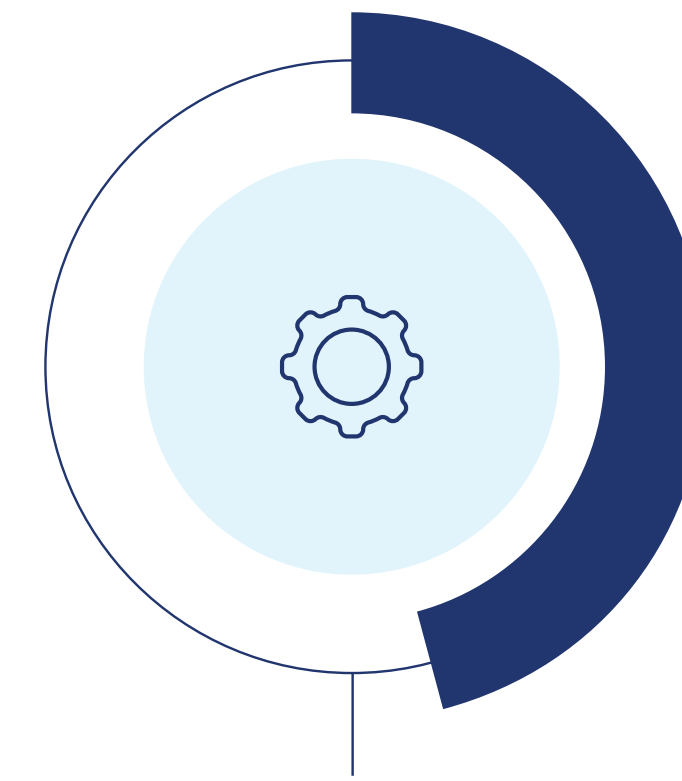
- Manufacturing
- Automation
- Utilities
- Plastic Moulding

Question 2

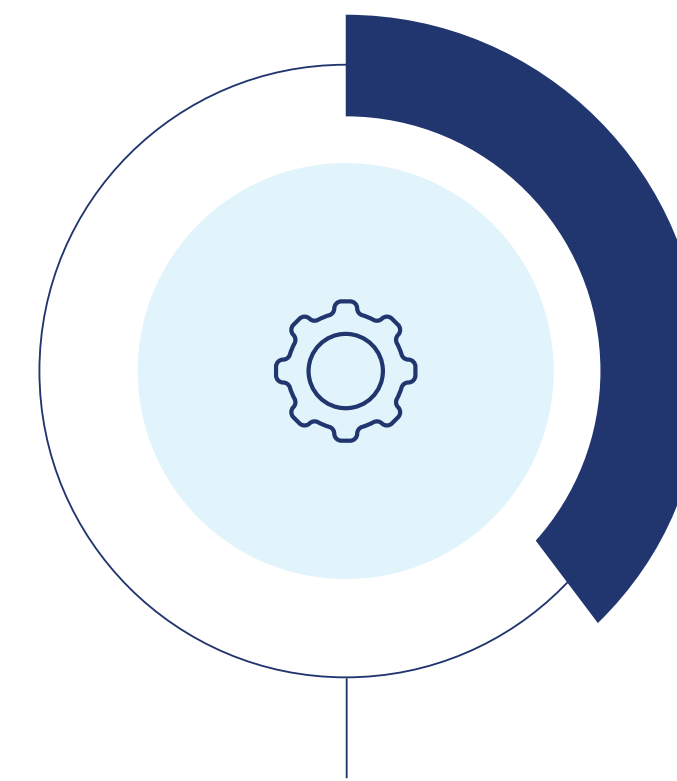
To what extent is your organisation currently experiencing challenges in retaining skilled staff?



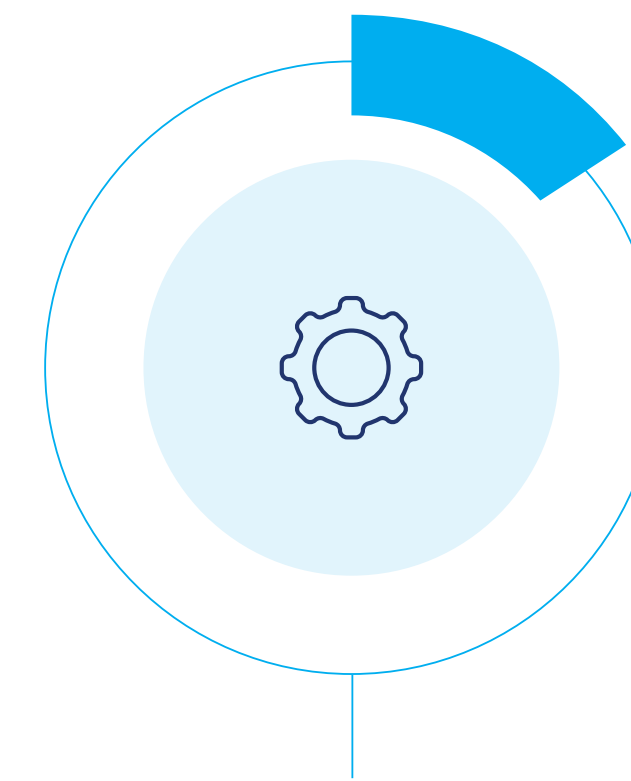
**Significant
Challenge (13%)**



**Moderate
Challenge (45%)**



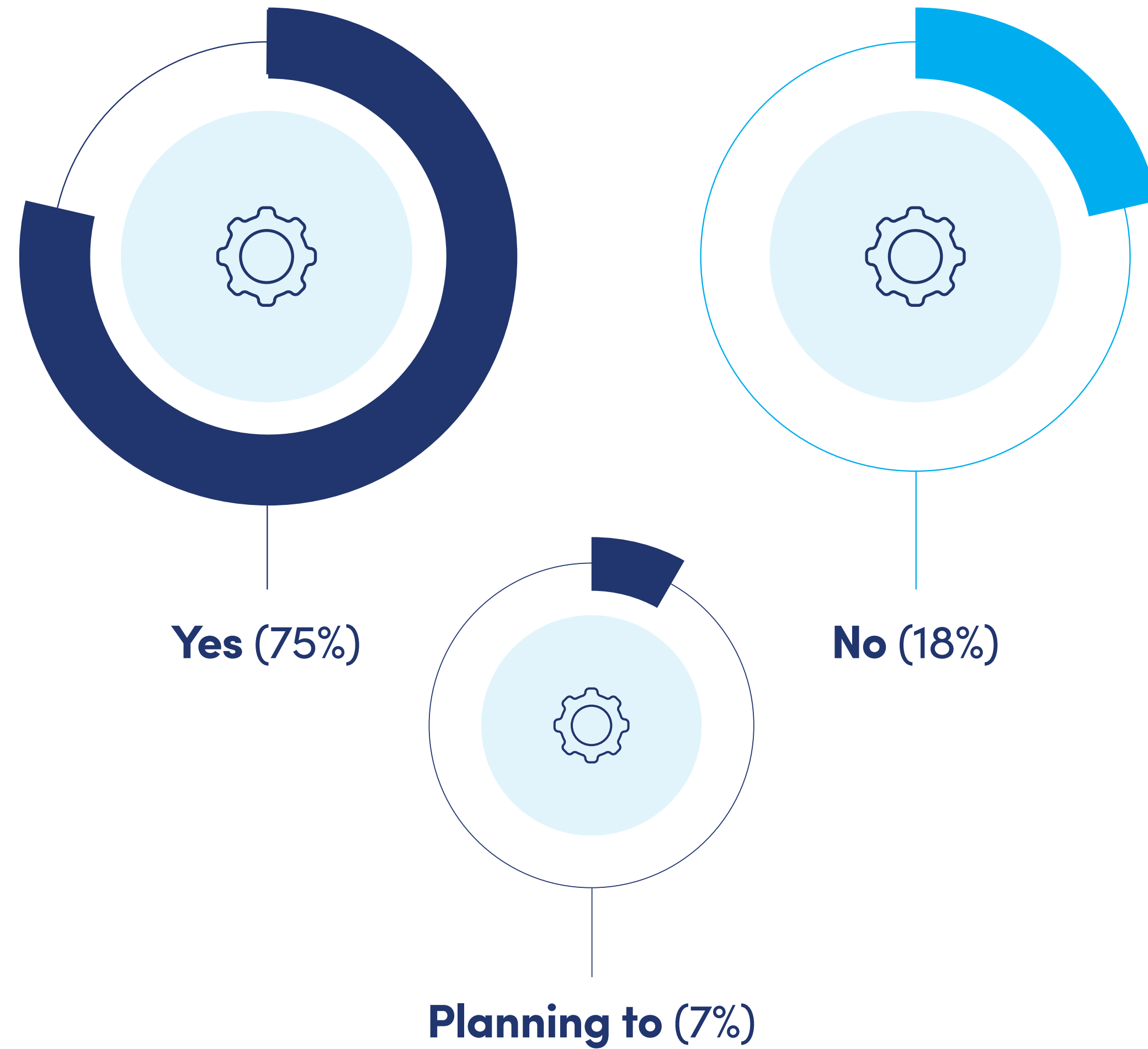
**Minor
Challenge (32%)**



**No
Challenge (10%)**

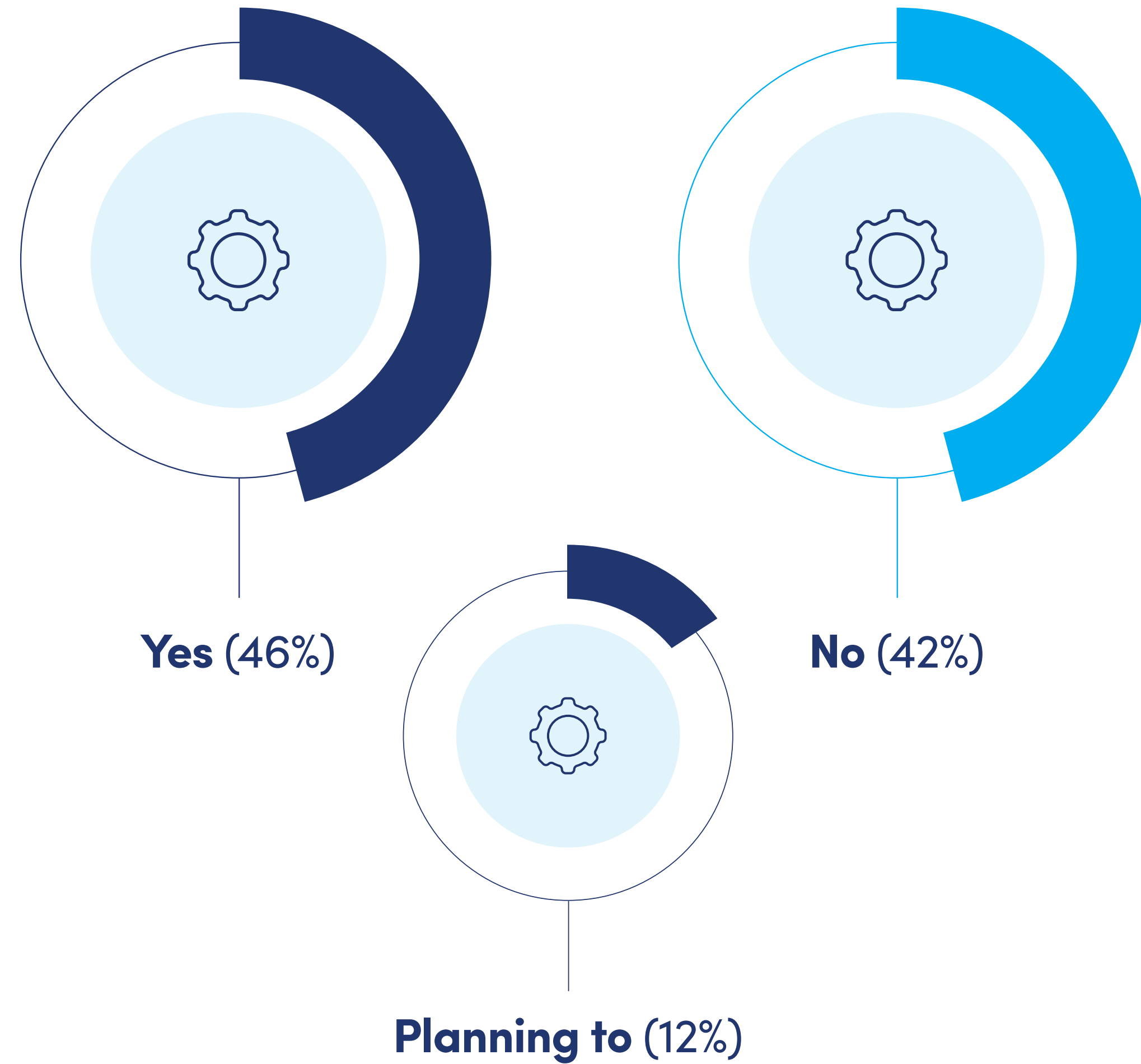
Question 3

Is your organisation currently engaged in apprenticeship programmes?



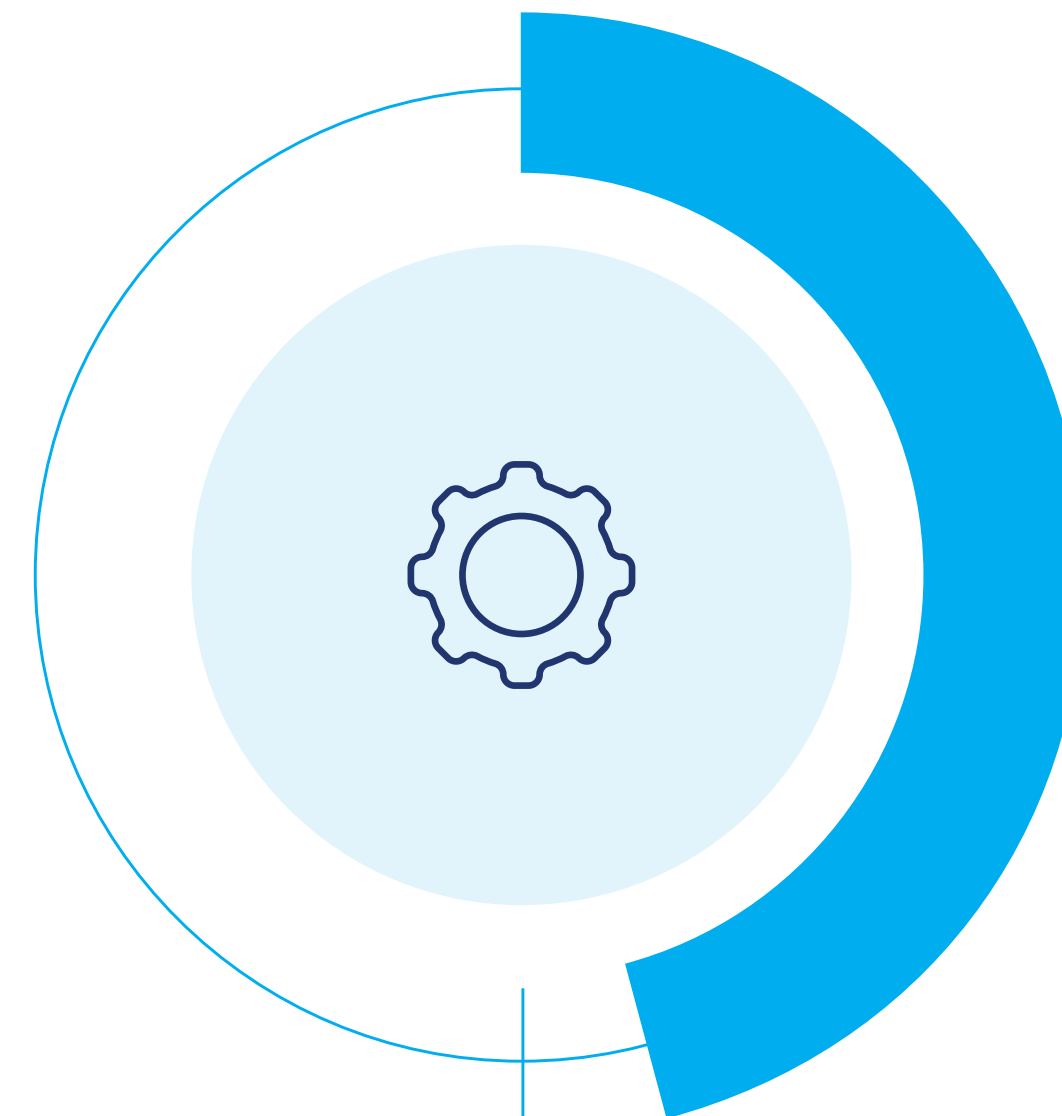
Question 4

Is your organisation currently engaged in modular or bite-sized training programmes?

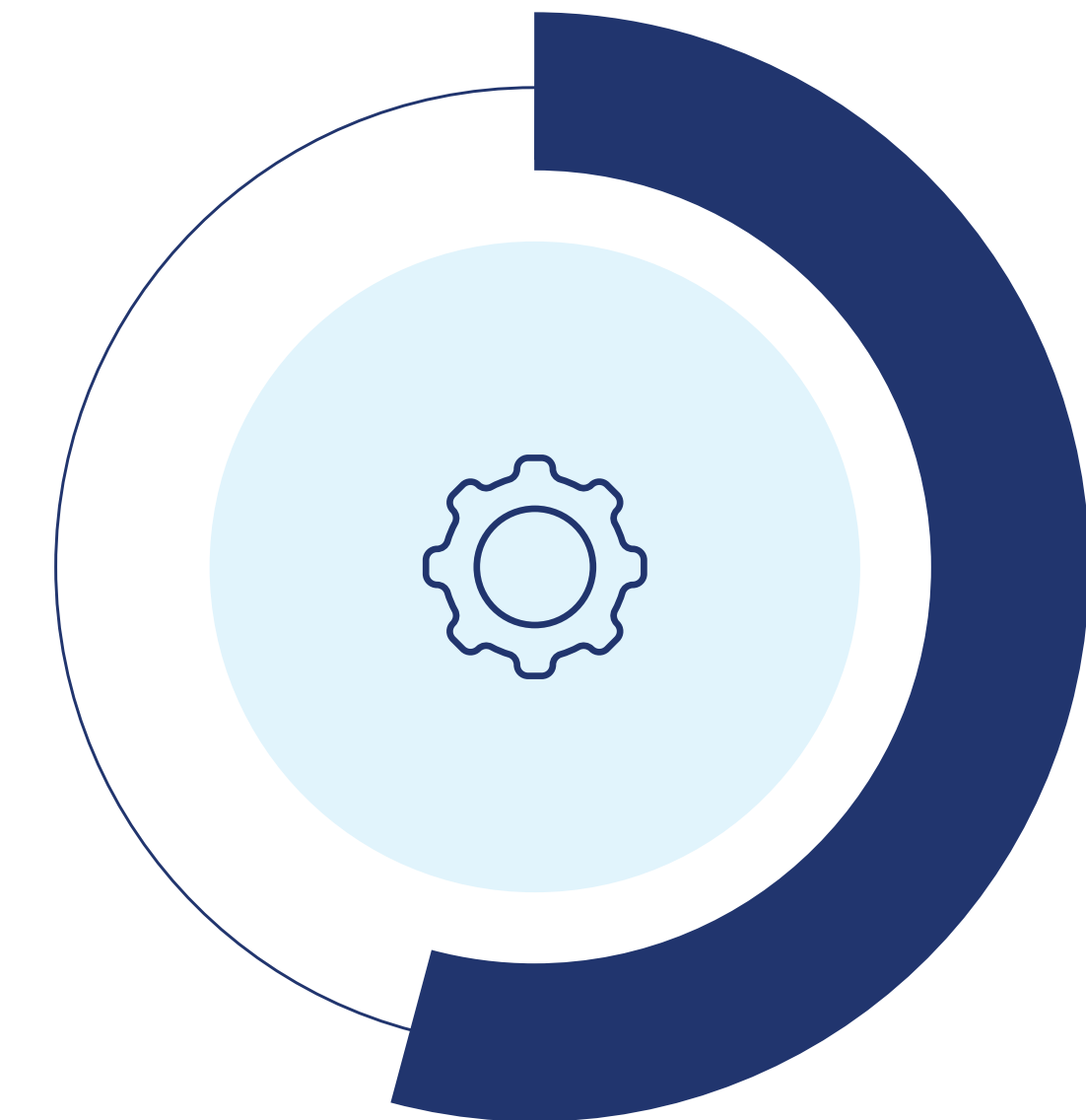


Question 5

**Has your organisation
increased its training
and development
budget in the last
12 months?**



Yes (46%)



No (54%)

Question 6

If yes, in which areas of the business has training investment increased?

(Multiple choice)

Business Support

13

Continuous Improvement

22

Quality Compliance

18

Engineering & Manufacturing

39

Health, Safety & Environmental

30

Leadership & Management

25

Warehousing & Distribution

4

employers that answered yes

10%
increase for
engineering &
manufacturing
from 2025

Question 7

What are the biggest challenges your organisation faces when delivering training and upskilling?

(Multiple choice)

Business Culture

14

Finance

27

Identifying the right training needs

33

Location of support

11

Releasing staff from core activities

55

Apprenticeship retention

11

Delivery models

9

Identifying the right course

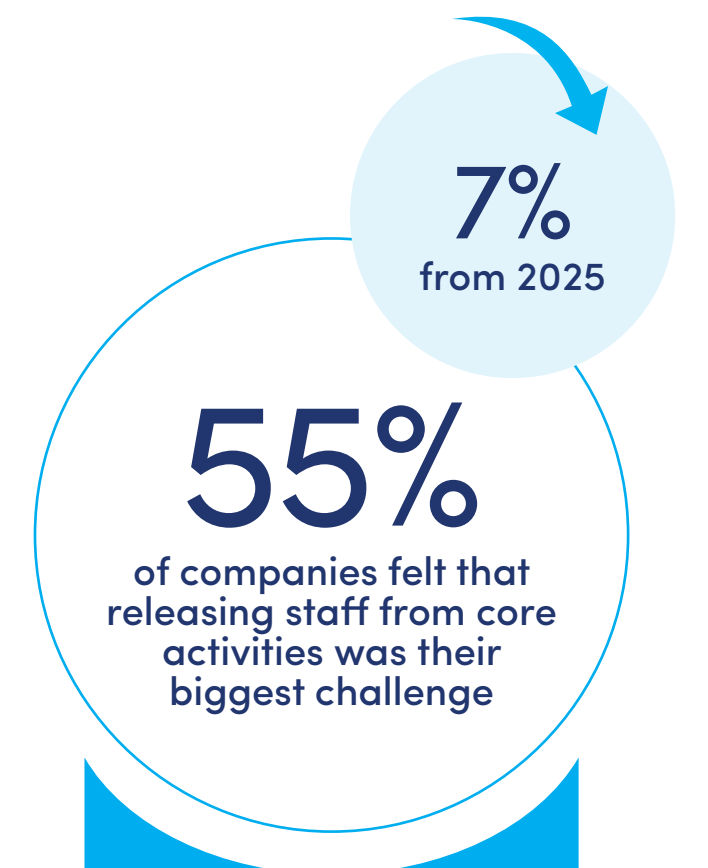
38

Identifying the right provider

17

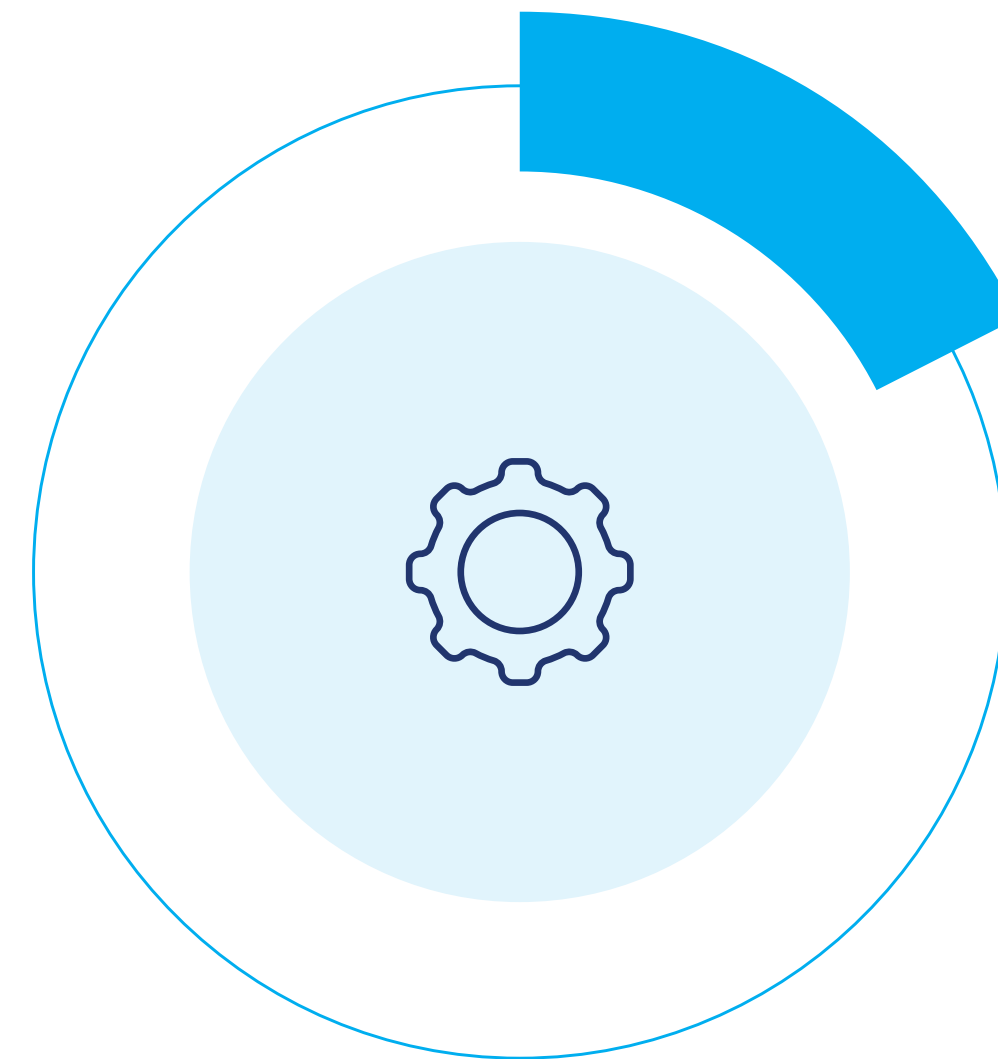
Other (please specify)

7

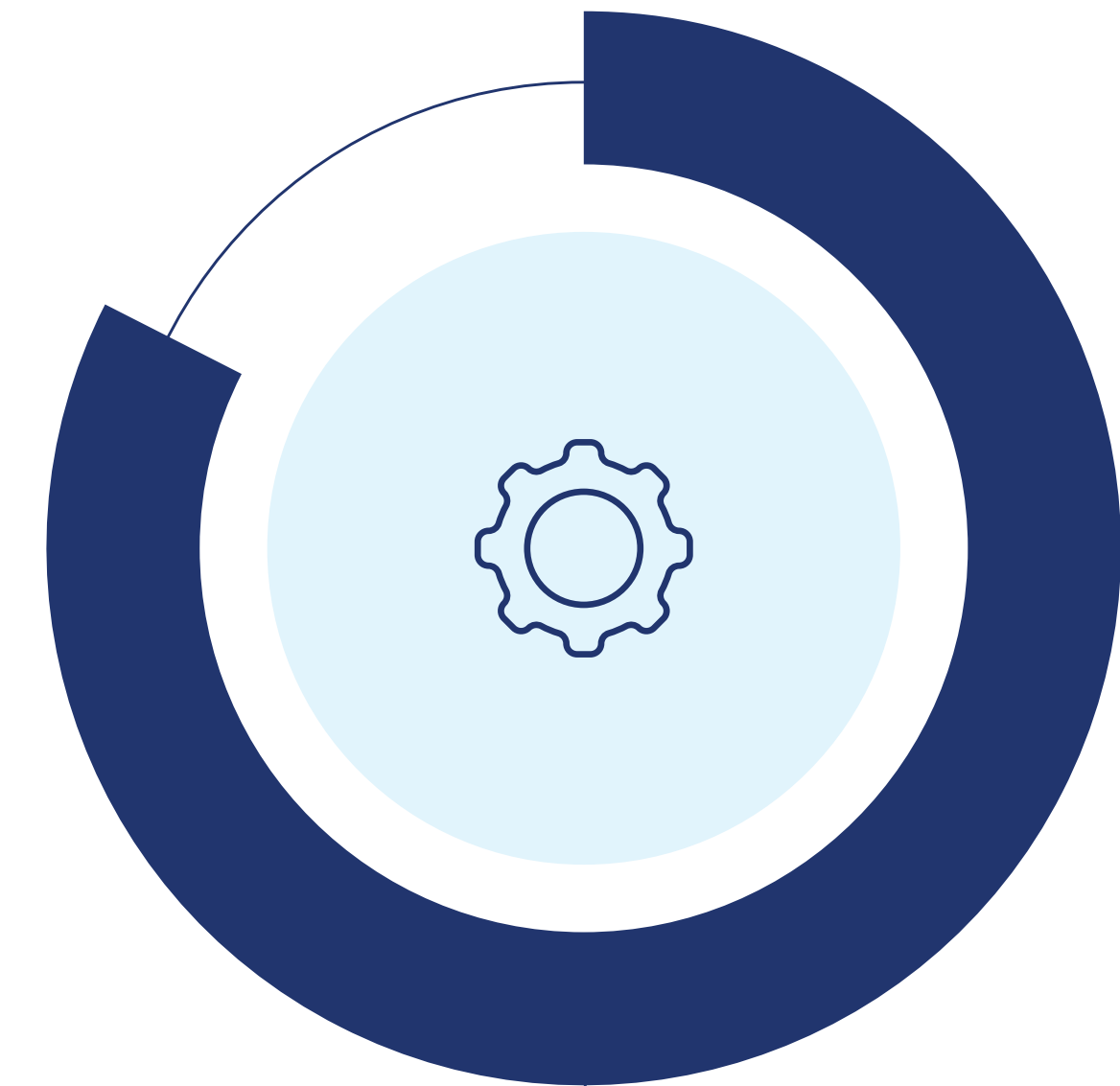


Question 8

Following the November Budget, do you feel there is sufficient Government support to help address skills shortages in the engineering sector?



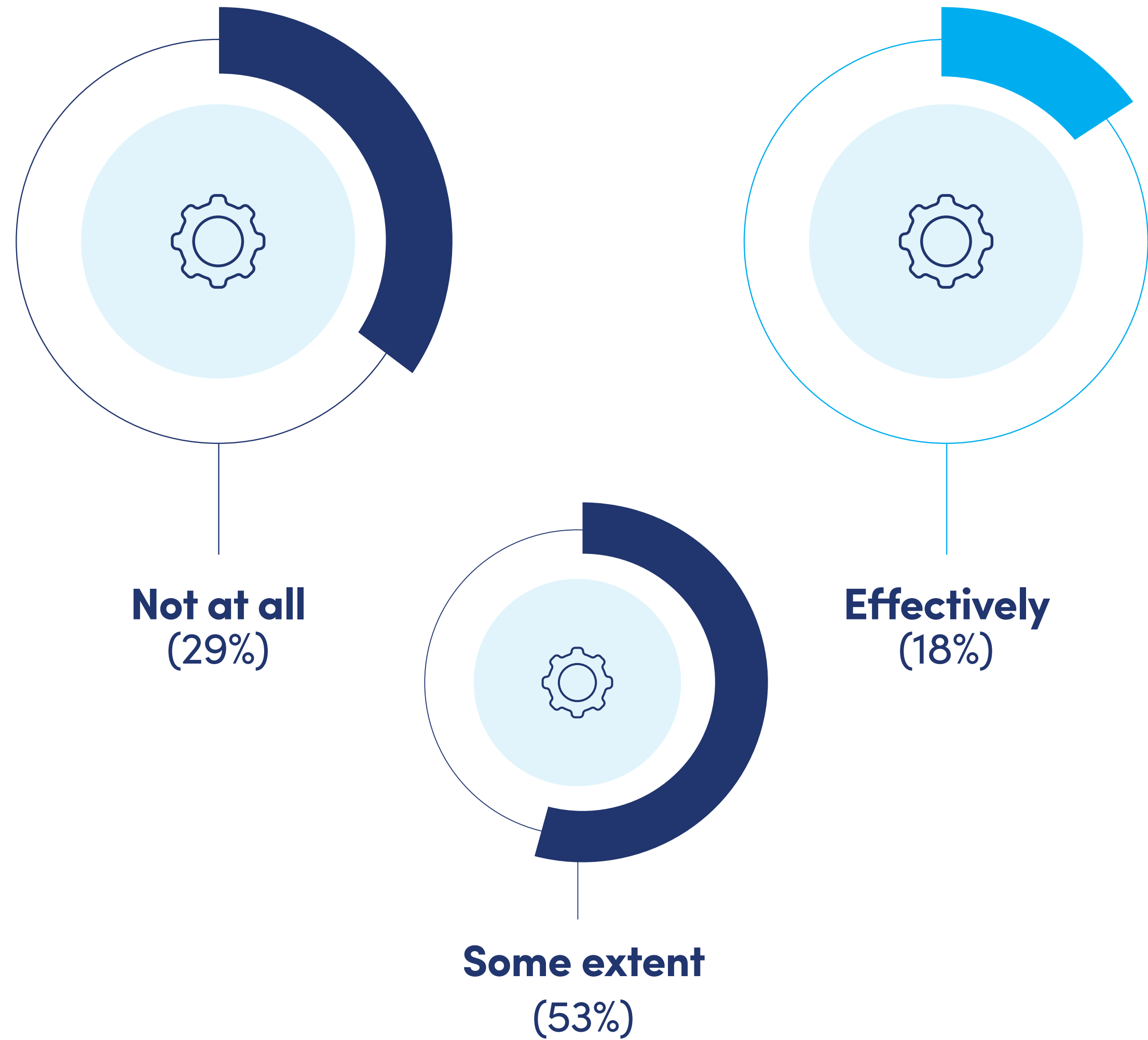
Yes (25%)



No (75%)

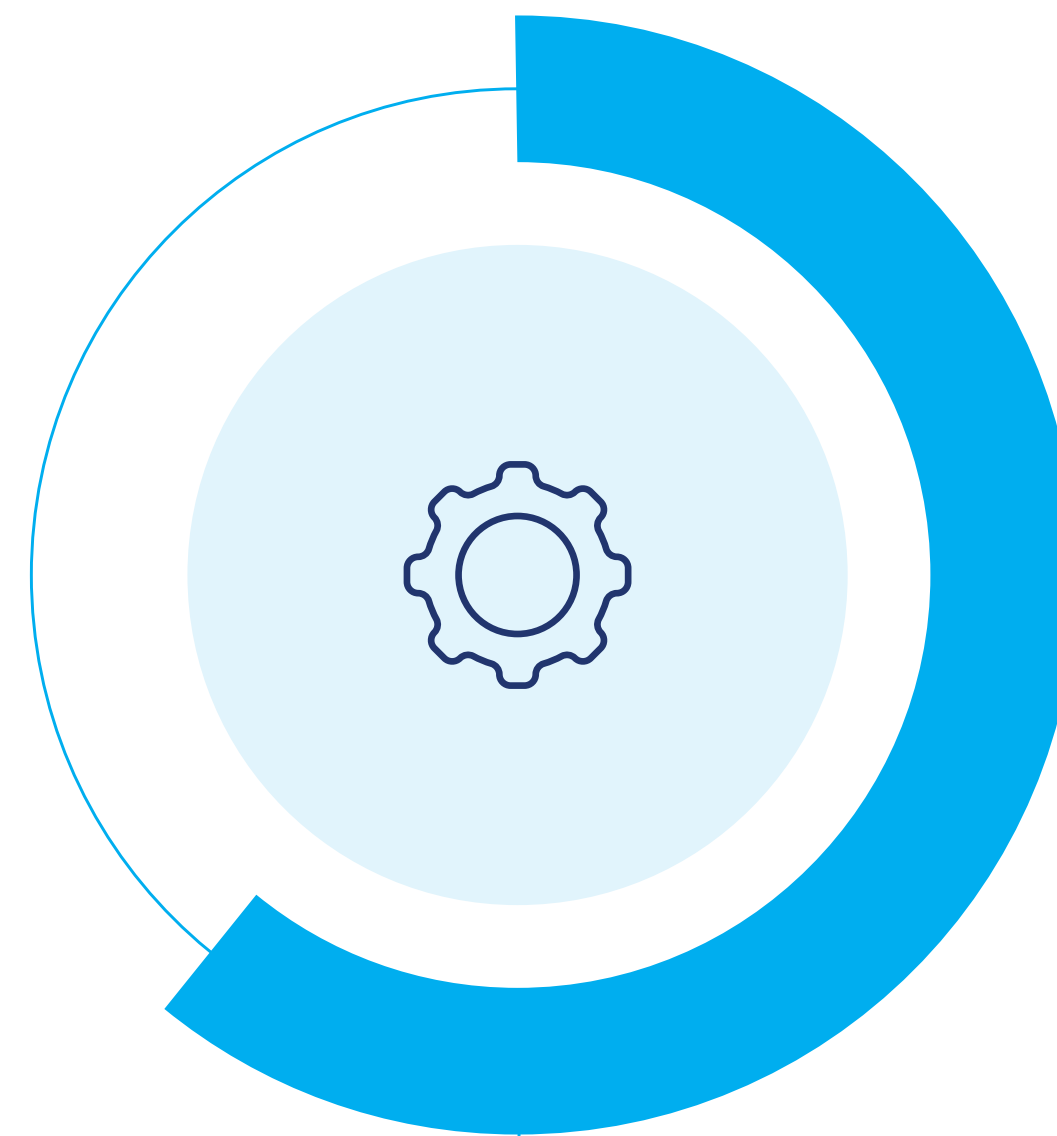
Question 9

To what extent is your organisation currently able to use its Skills & Growth Levy funding effectively?

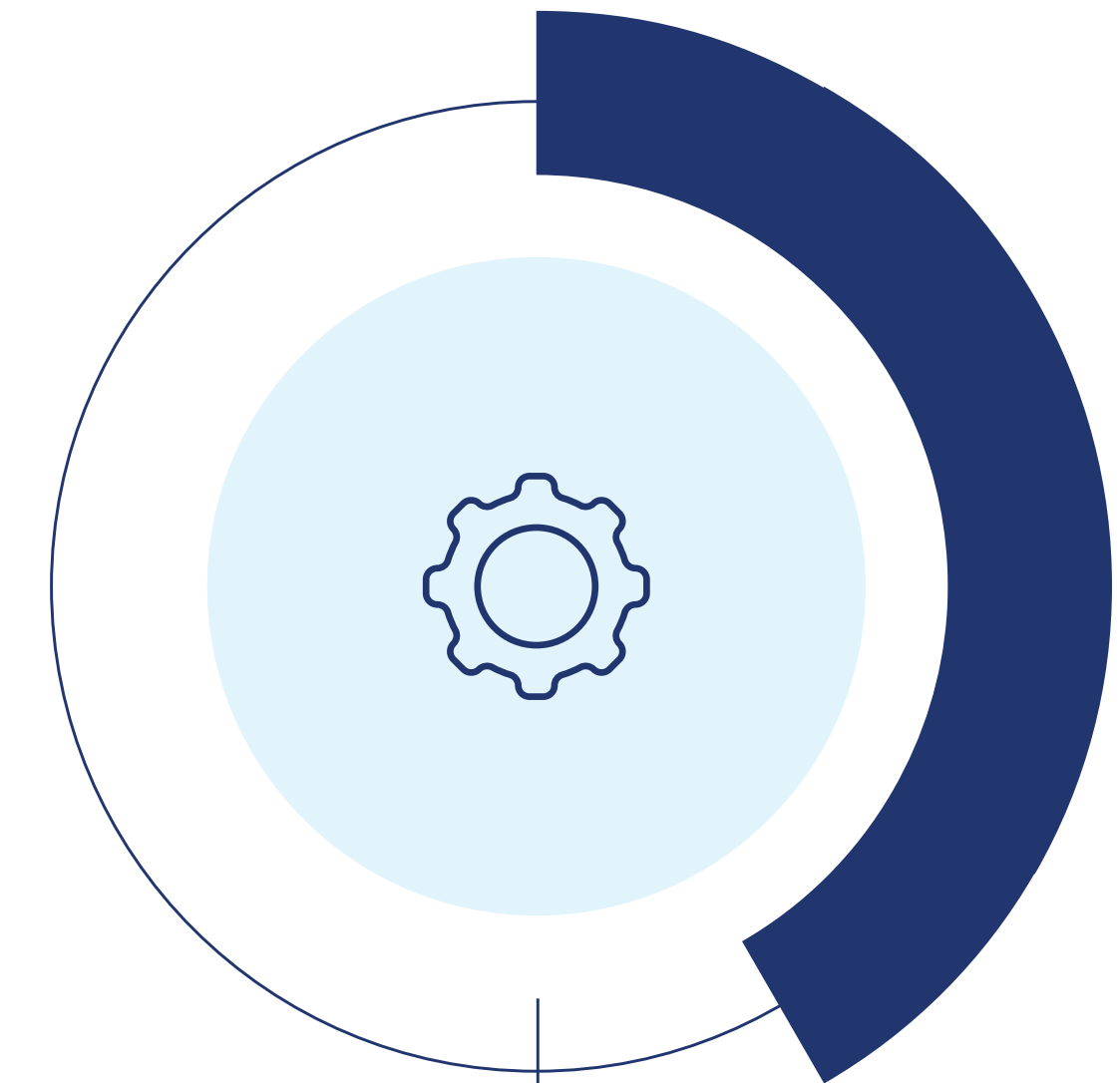


Question 10

Do you believe recent changes to the Skills & Growth Levy – particularly around modular, apprenticeship-aligned training – will add value to your organisation?



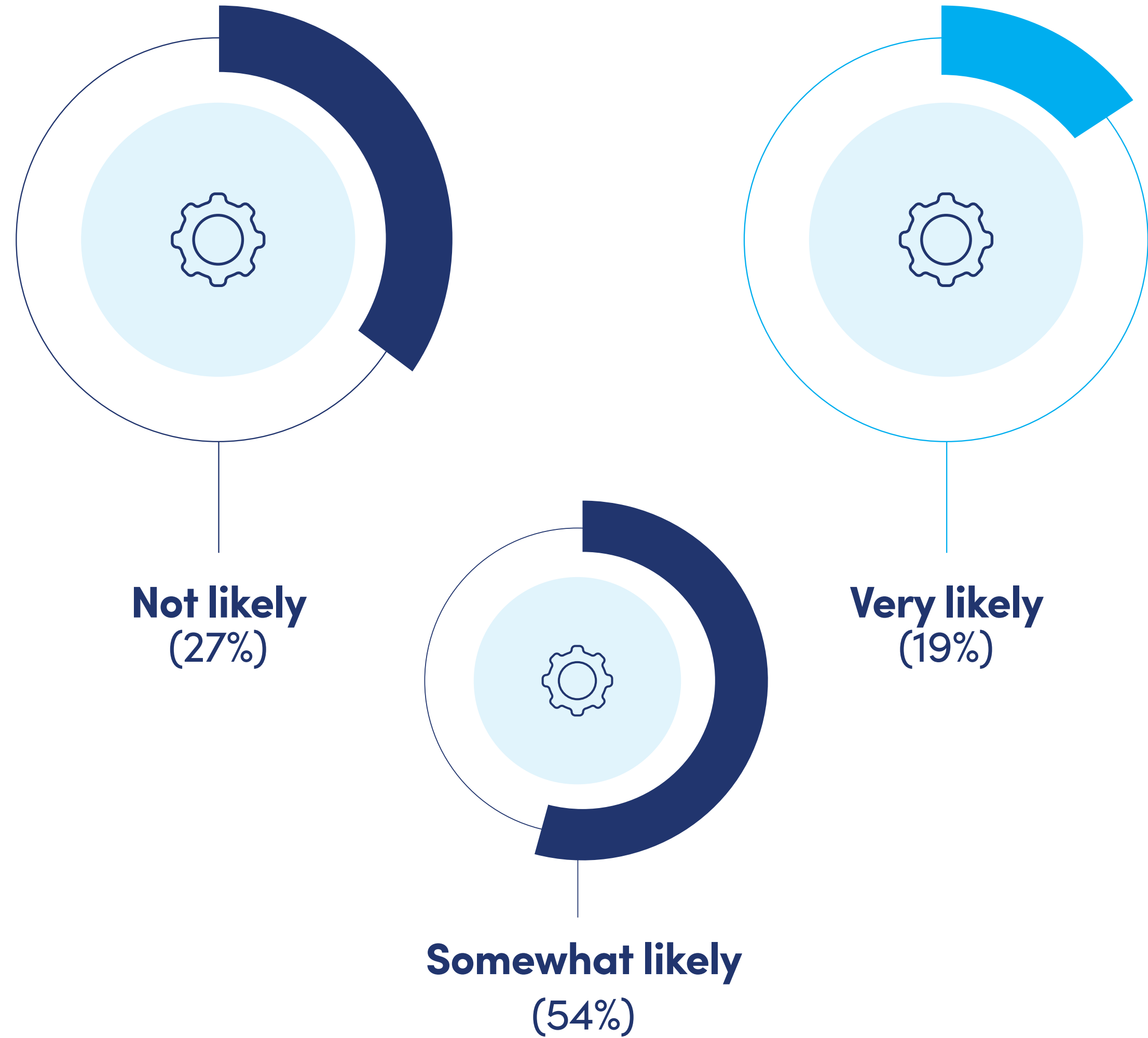
Yes (60%)



No (40%)

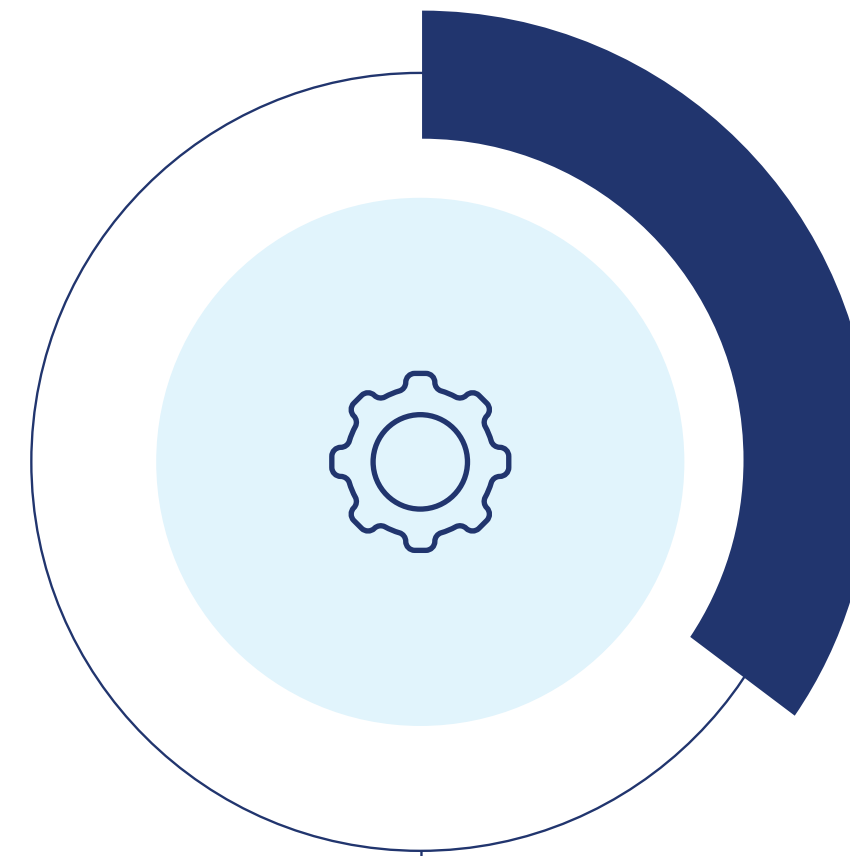
Question 11

How likely is your organisation to engage in modular training funded through the Skills & Growth Levy?

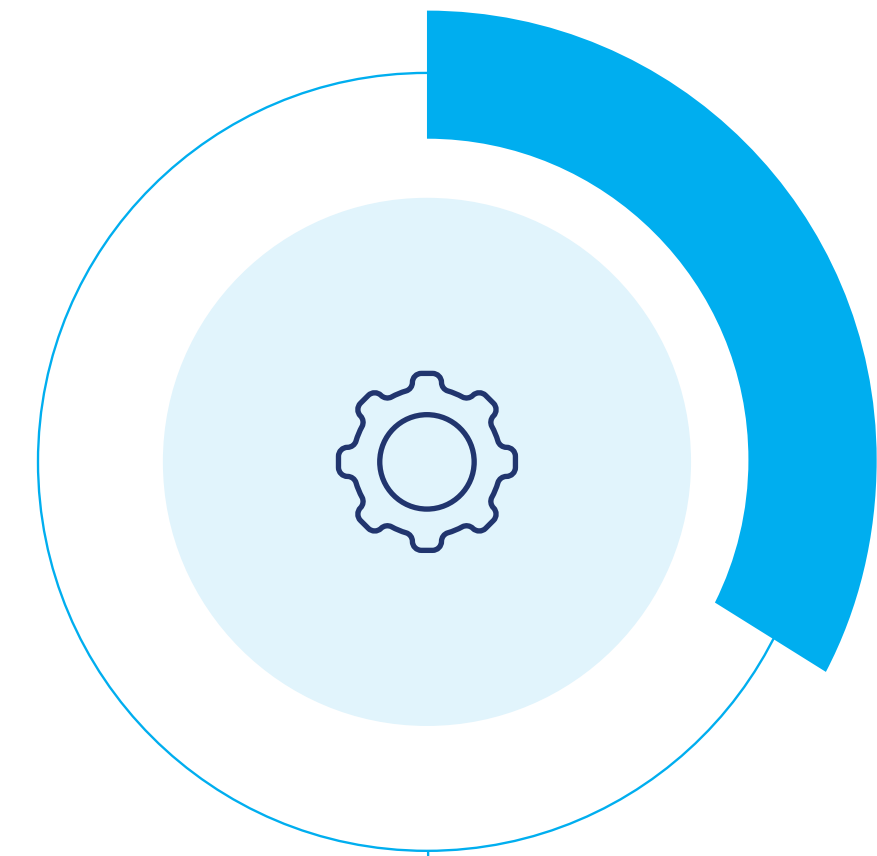


Question 12

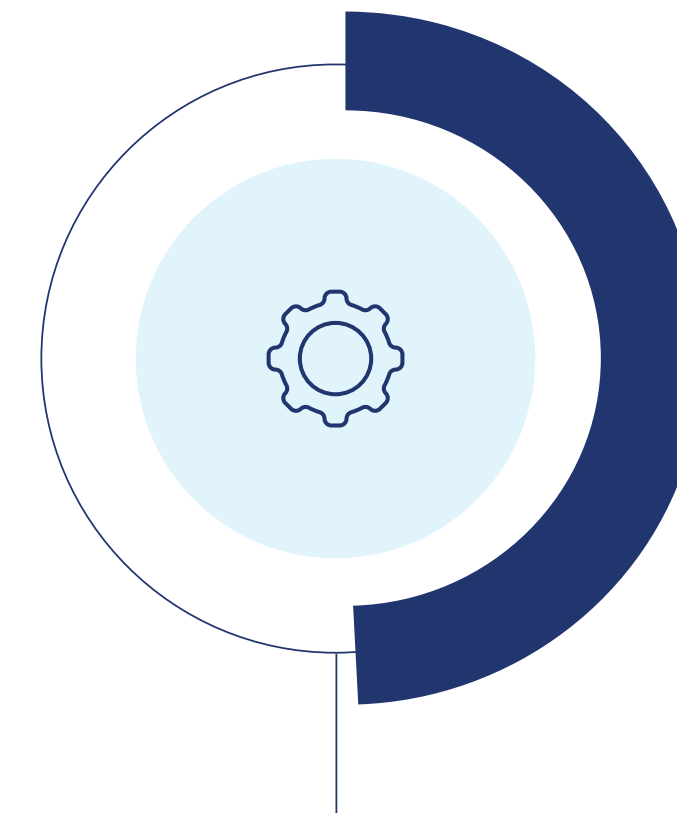
Will the new funding for under-25 apprenticeships make your organisation more likely to recruit an apprentice?



Yes (27%)



No (24%)

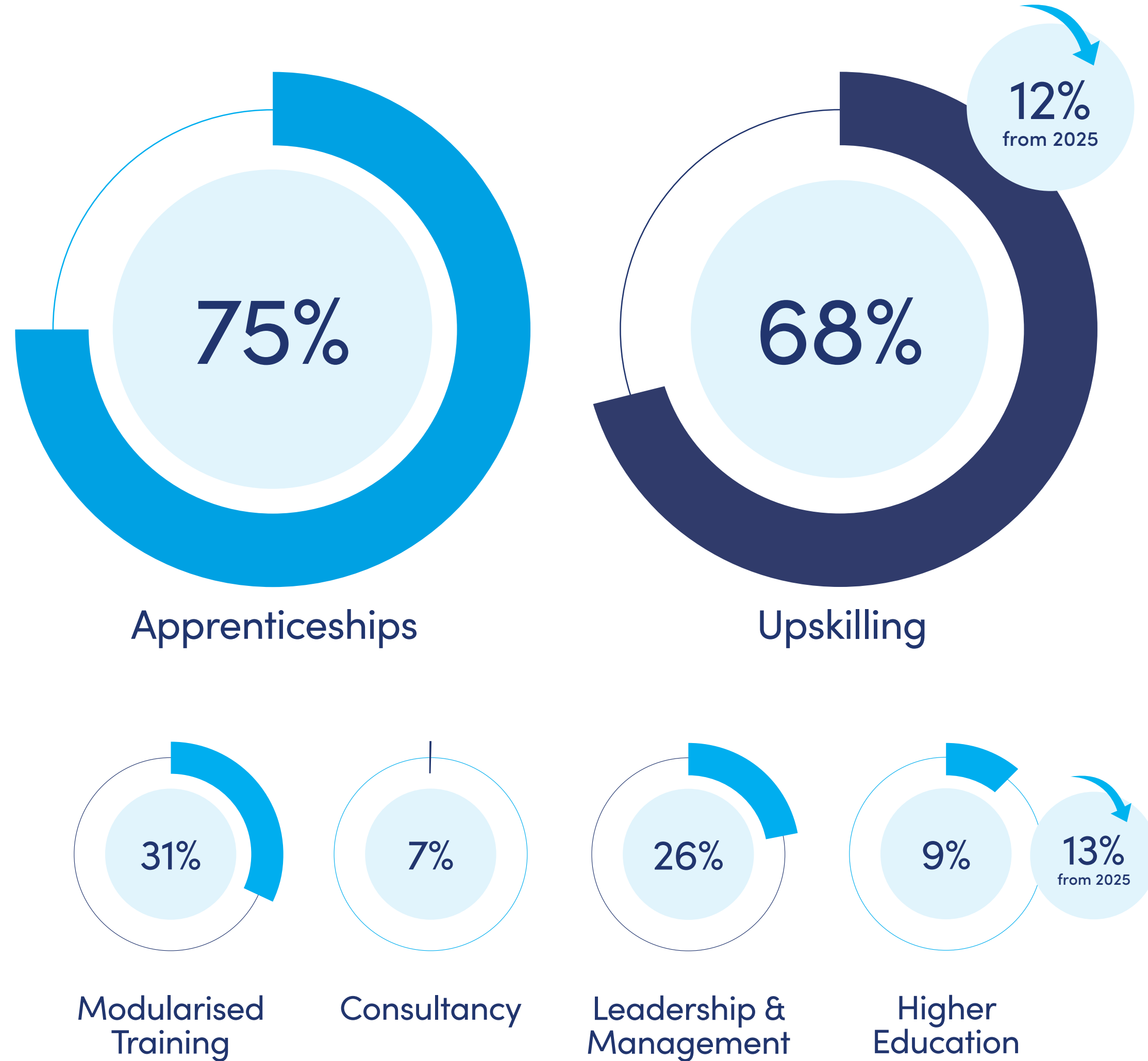


Maybe (49%)

Question 13

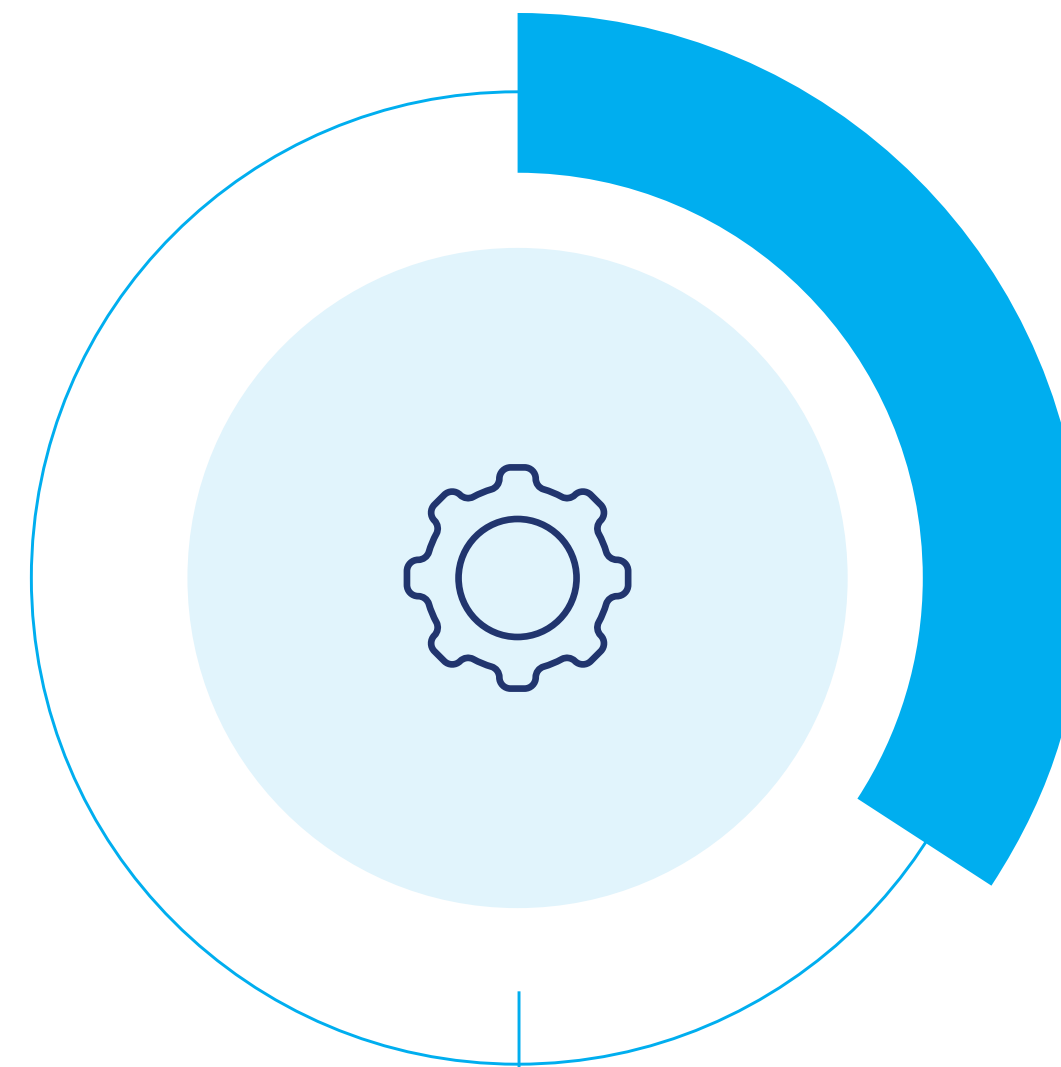
Where do you believe Government skills support should be most effectively targeted?

(Multiple choice)

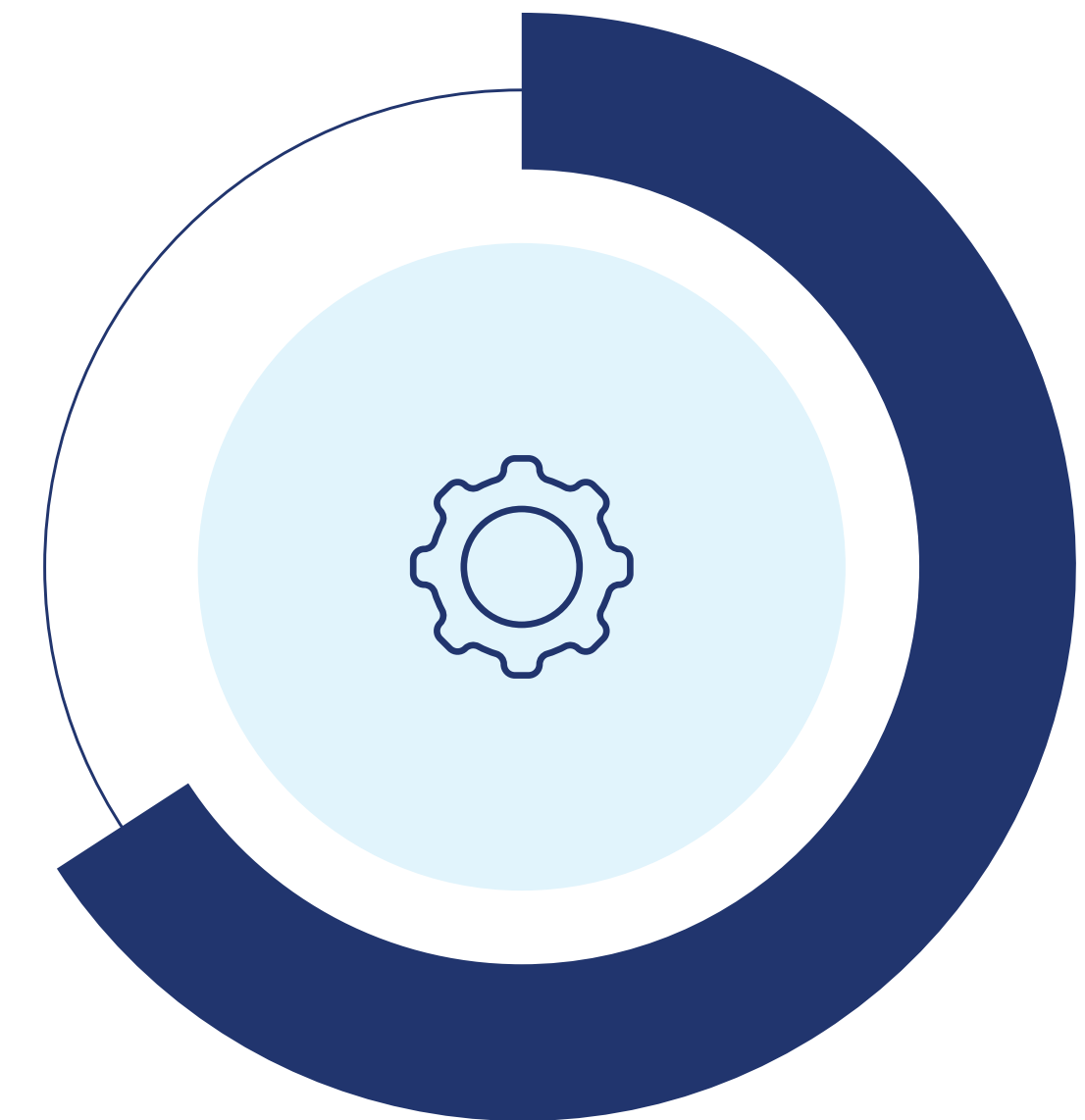


Question 14

Do you feel that skills and workforce development are sufficiently prioritised within the current Industrial Strategy?



Yes (33%)



No (67%)

Question 15

What are the primary reasons your organisation invests in apprenticeships?

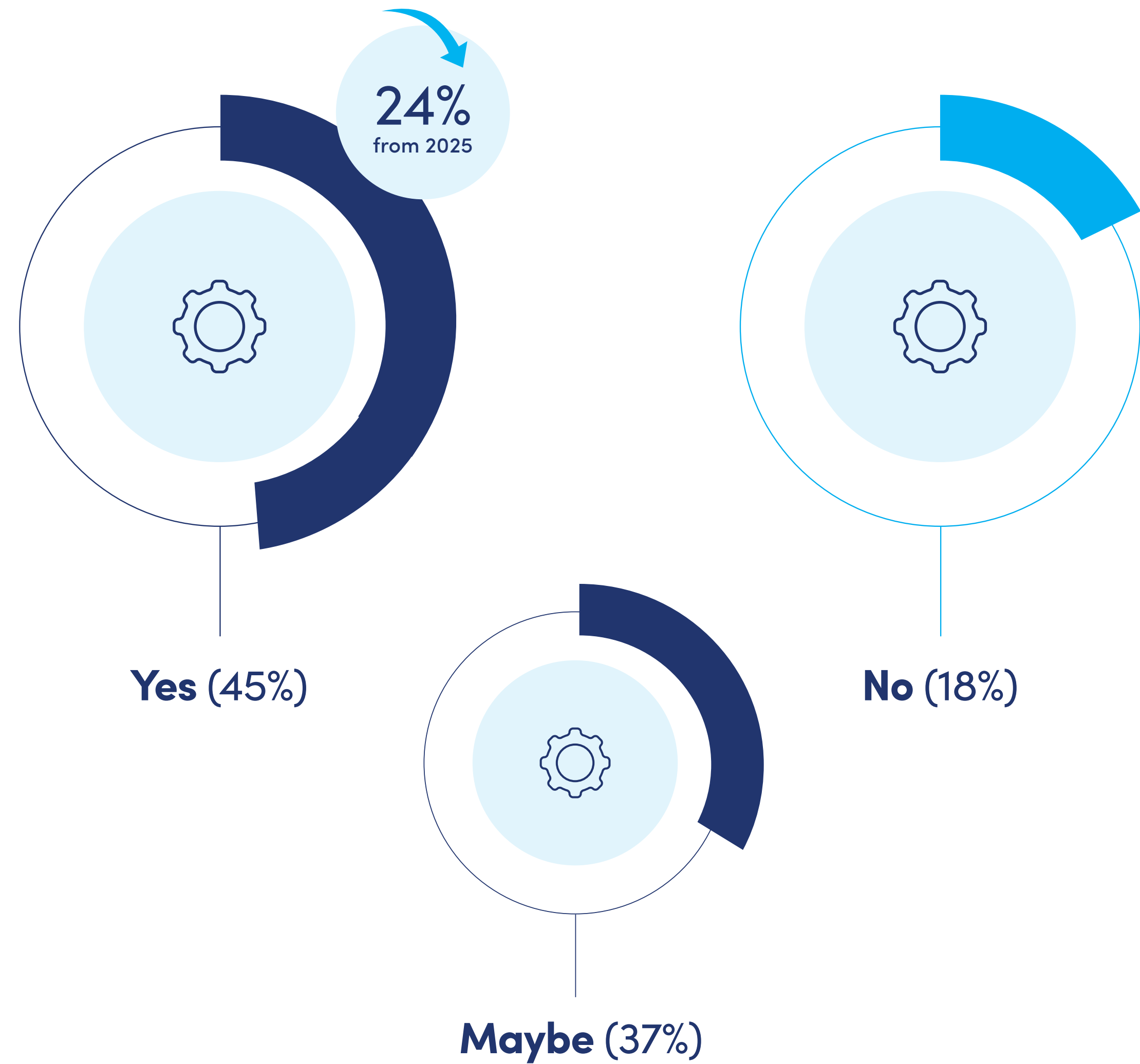
(e.g. talent pipeline, skills gaps, cost-effectiveness, succession planning)

TOP 5 ANSWERS:

SUCCESSION PLANNING
DEVELOPING FUTURE
WORKFORCE
SKILLS GAPS/UPSKILLING
COST-EFFECTIVENESS
PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Question 16

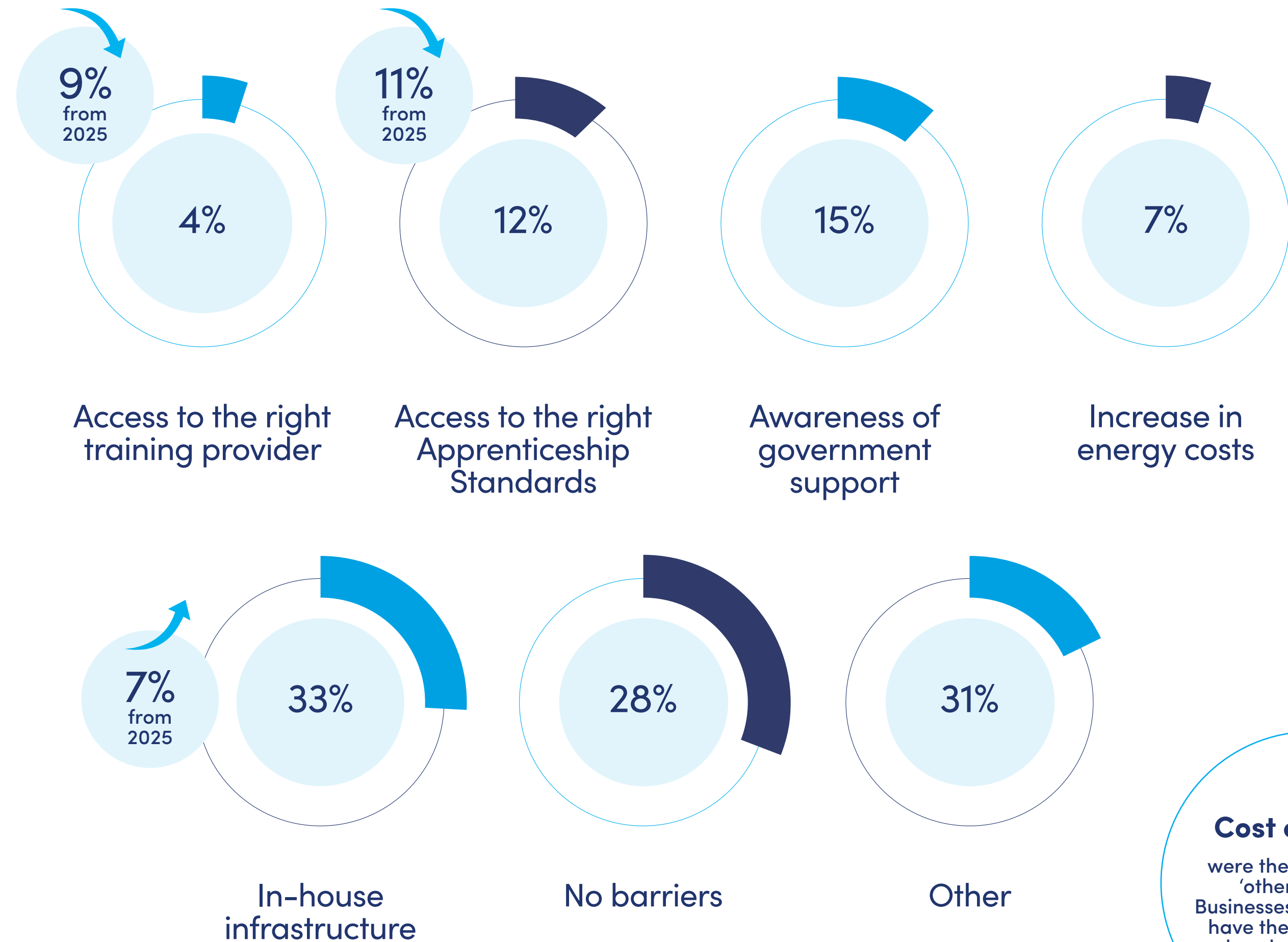
Are you planning to take apprentices on this year?



Question 17

What are the main barriers preventing your organisation from investing further in apprenticeships?

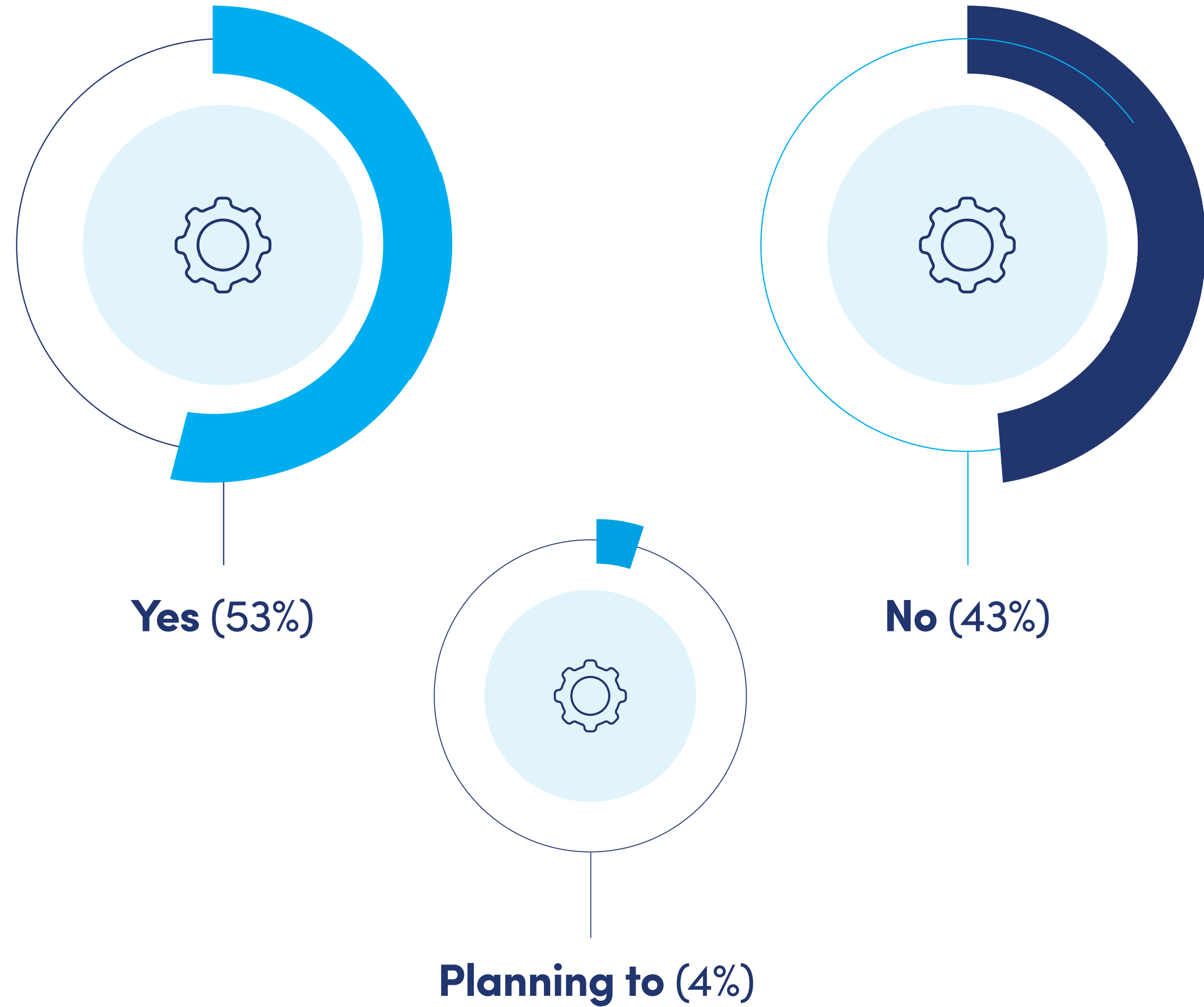
(Multiple choice)



Cost and Time
 were the most popular 'other' answers. Businesses feel they don't have the funds nor the bandwidth to train apprentices

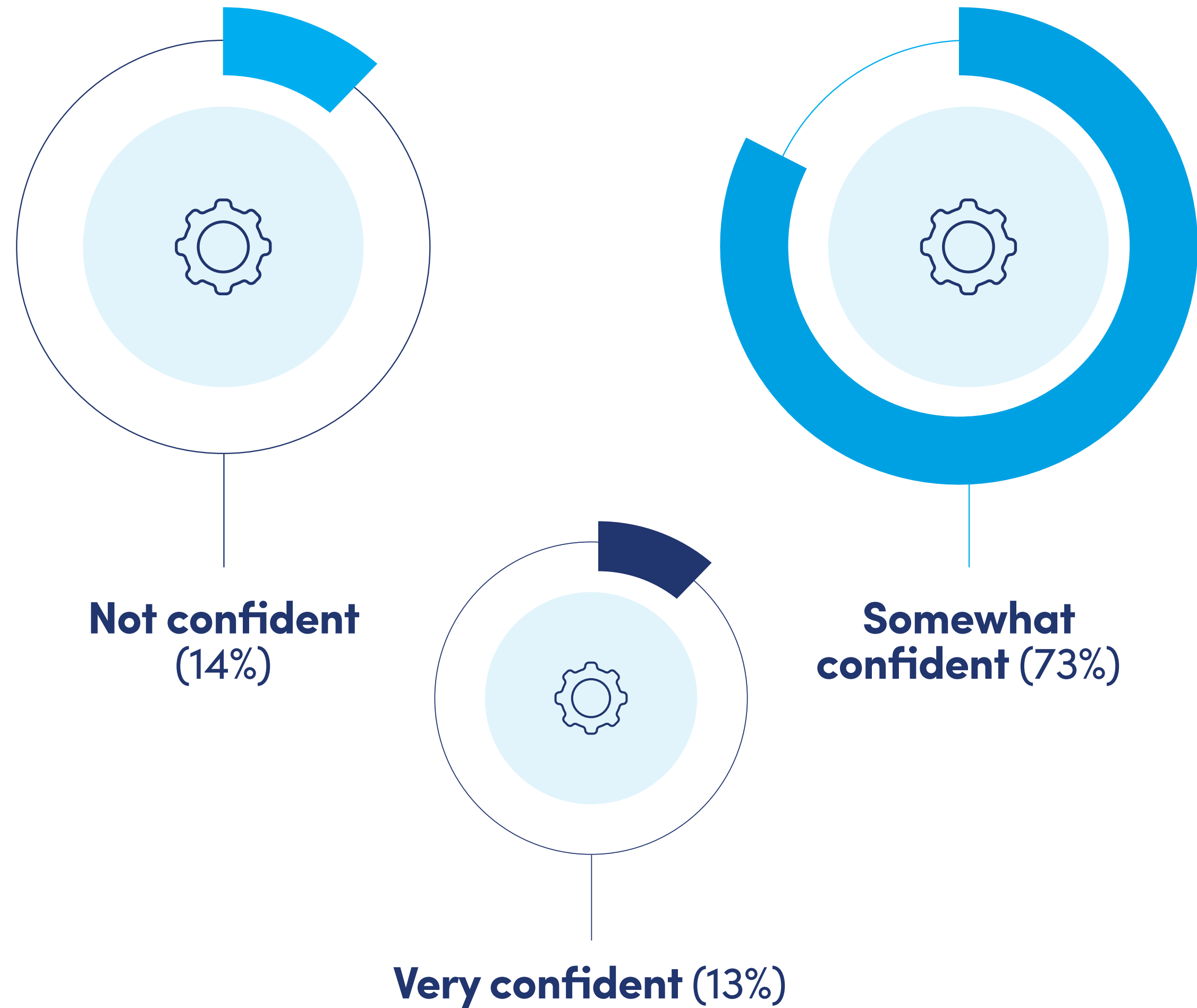
Question 18

Does your organisation use apprenticeships to upskill or reskill existing employees?



Question 19

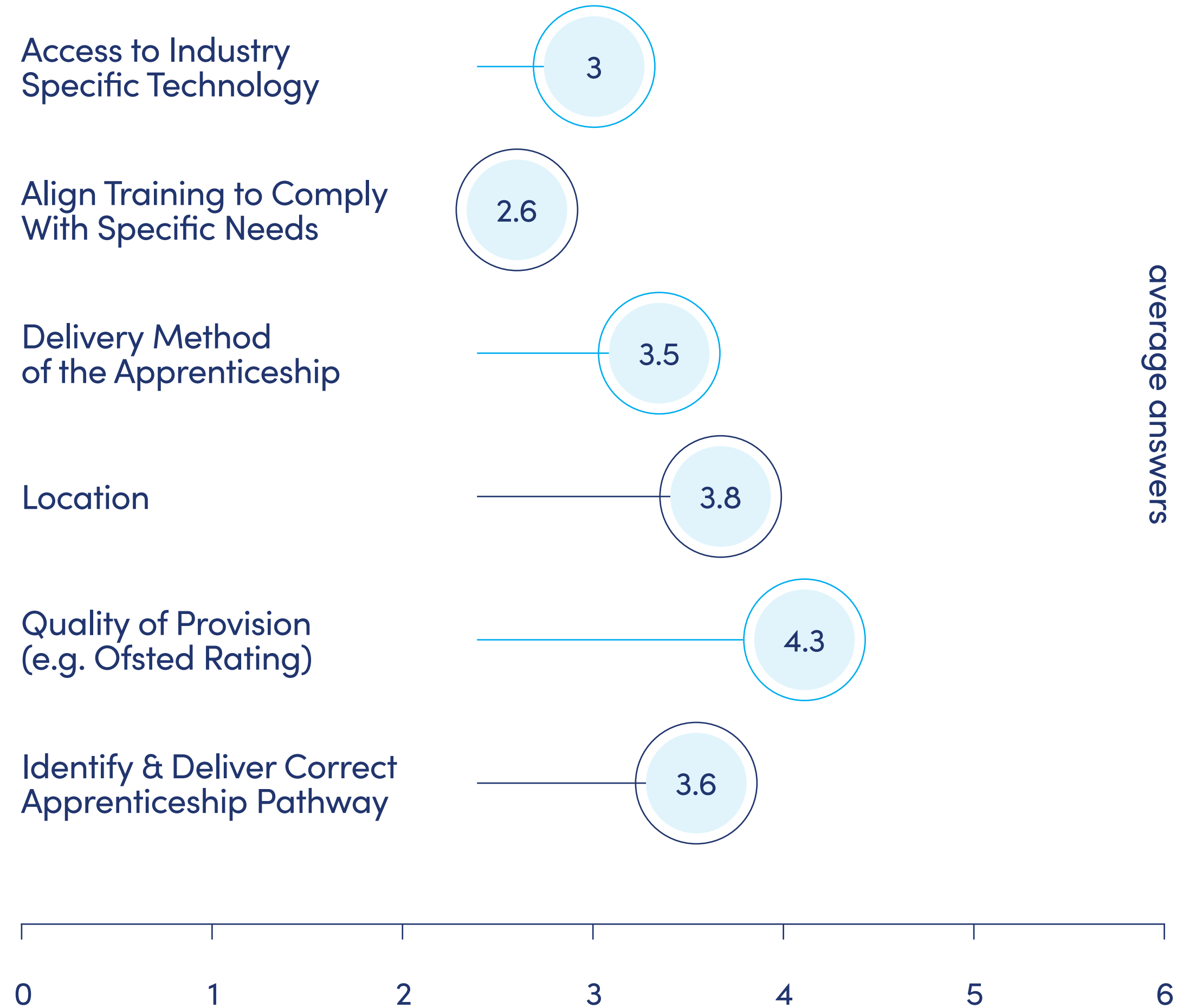
How confident are you that the current apprenticeship system can meet your organisation's skills needs over the next five years?



Question 20

What are the most important features you look for in an Apprenticeship provider?

Rank them in order of importance (6 being most important and 1 least)

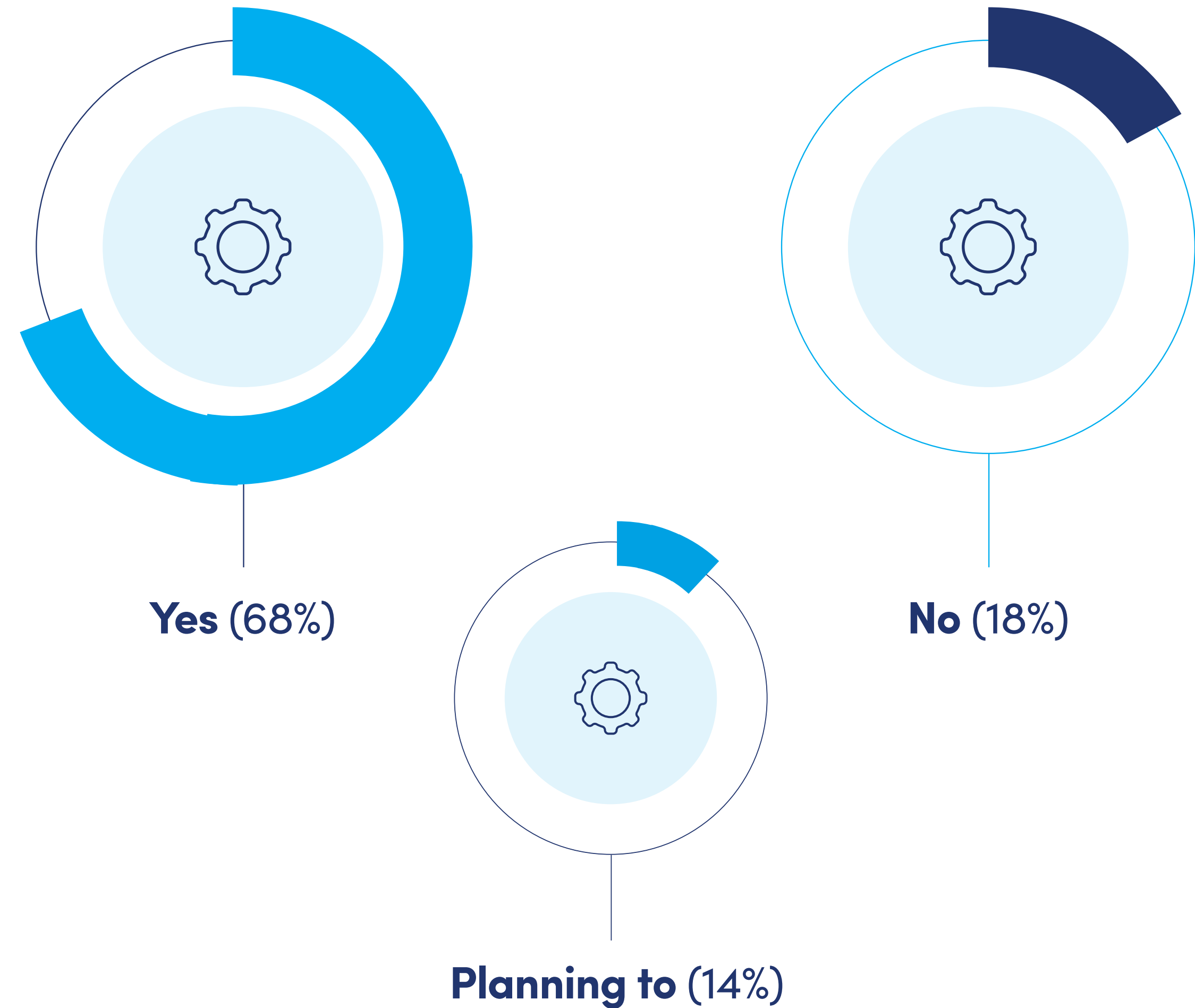


average answers

Quality of Provision
was deemed most important, compared to last year's top answer of 'align training to comply with specific needs'

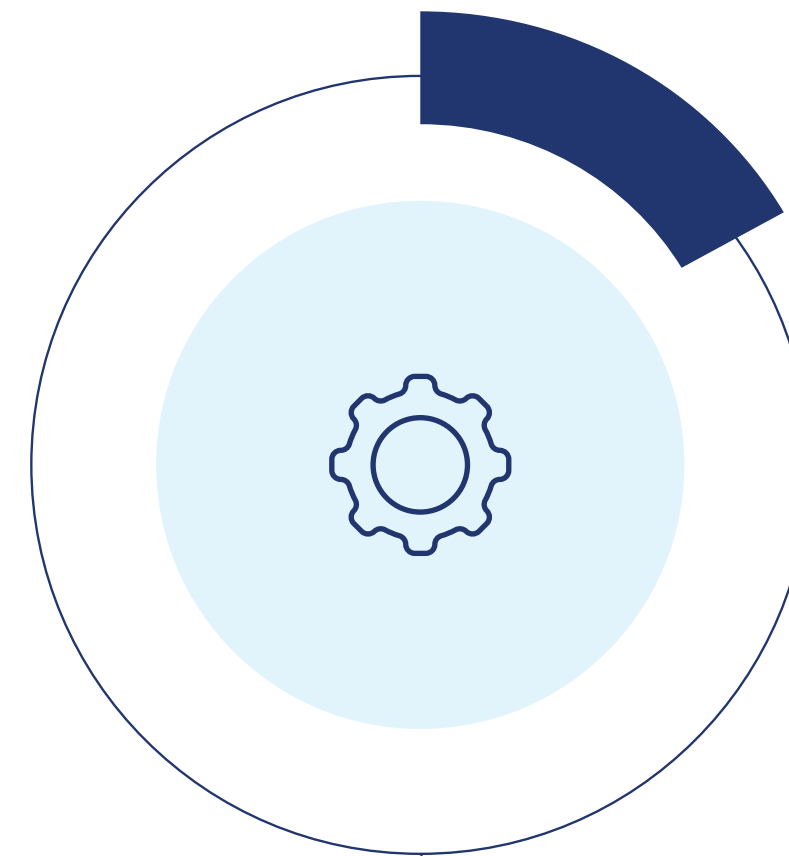
Question 21

**Has your organisation
invested in new
technologies to
improve productivity
in the last 12 months?**

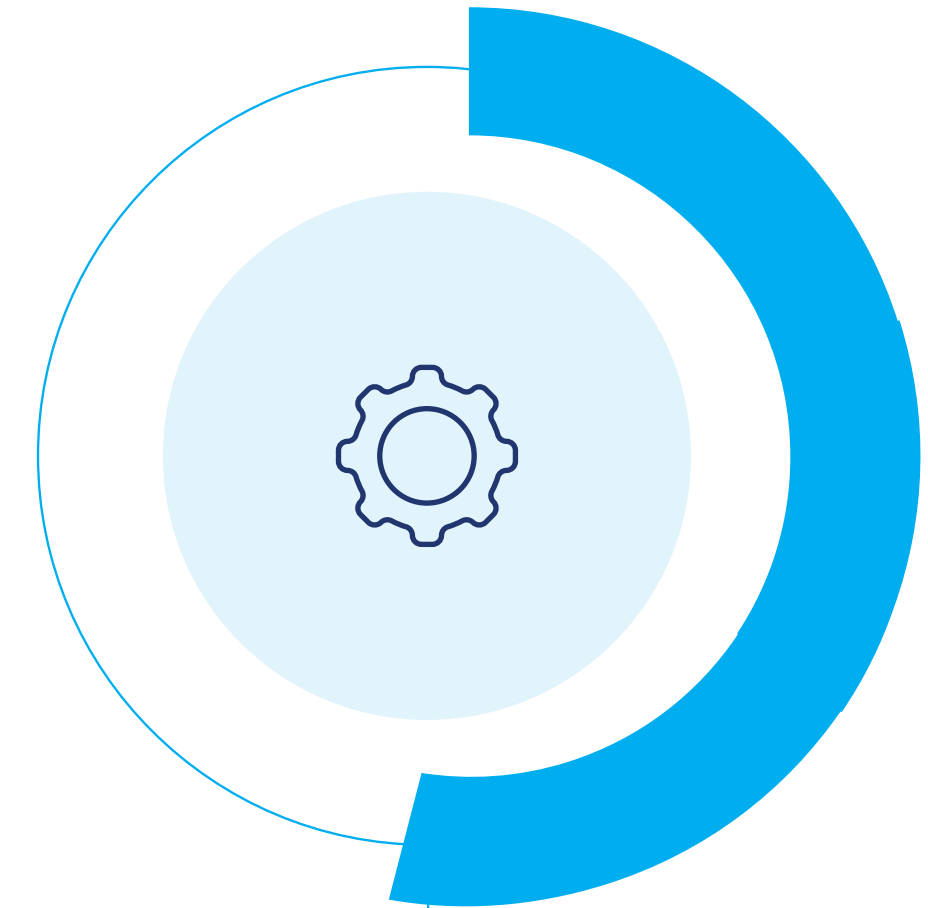


Question 22

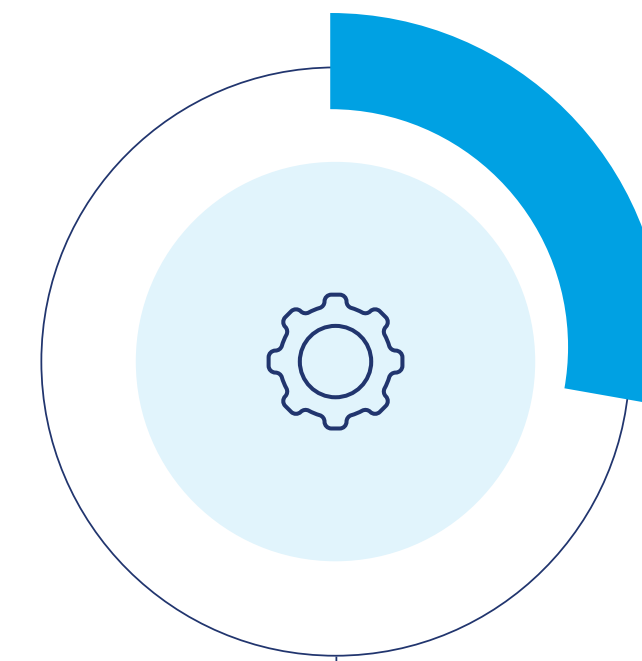
Is your organisation currently using artificial intelligence (AI) to support workforce development, training, or skills planning?



Yes (17%)



No (51%)

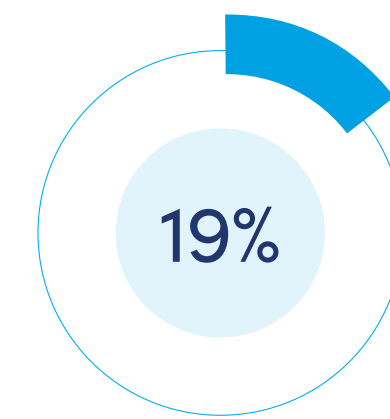


**Exploring options
(32%)**

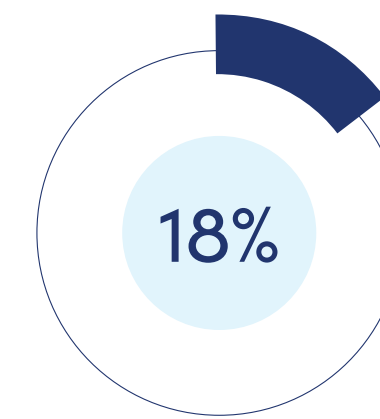
Question 23

Which of the following areas does your organisation currently require apprenticeships or upskilling in?

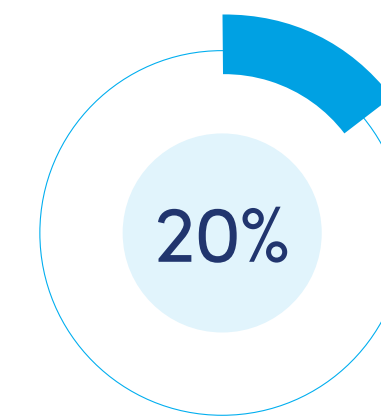
(Multiple choice)



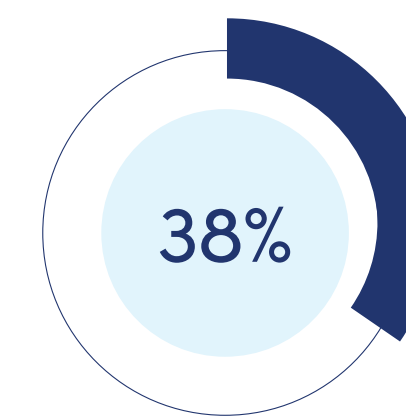
Fabrication



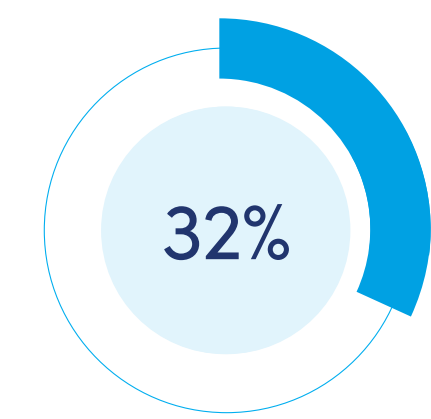
Electrical installation



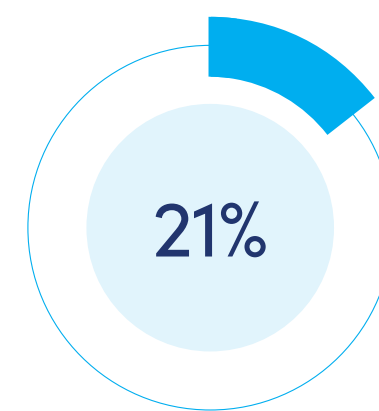
Robotics & automation



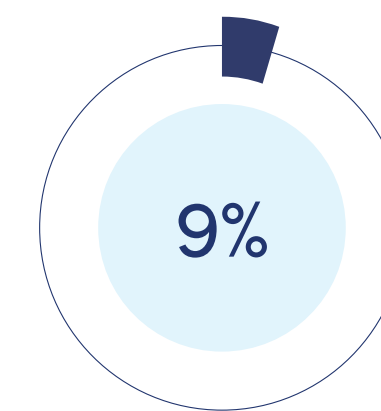
Mechanical & electrical maintenance



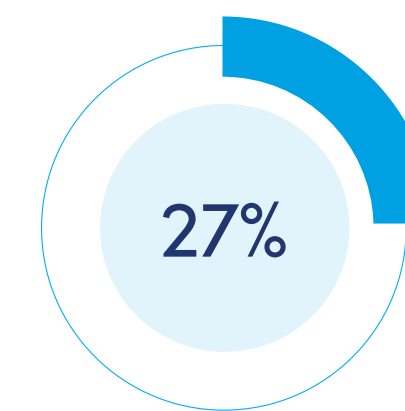
Leadership & management



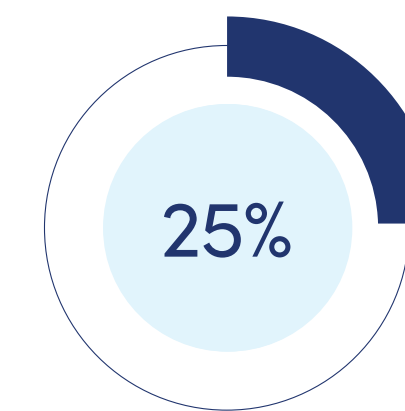
Project management



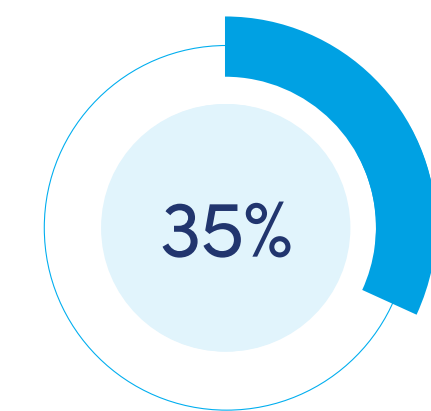
Supply chain & procurement



Safety, health & environmental (SHE)



Quality systems installation & management



Continuous improvement



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European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



European Union
European
Social Fund

