

Evaluation of the Business Ventilation Fund

December 2022

Executive Summary

- The evidence reviewed indicates that the Business Ventilation Fund (BVF) was successful in meeting its objective to help businesses to improve ventilation but for a lower number of businesses than was anticipated.
- It is likely that disruptions due to the Omicron variant may have played a role in the low uptake. However, business feedback suggests issues with the applications and claims process and the design of the fund may also have played a part. The high variation in acceptance rates across local authorities illustrated in the management information data may also indicate inconsistencies in the approach to assessing applications.
- The business survey findings suggest that the fund addressed a key business need and was fundamental to businesses improving their ventilation, with most businesses stating that they would not have made improvements to their ventilation without the funding.
- The BVF also appears to have had a positive impact on consumer confidence in the safety of business premises who received funding and on business awareness and monitoring of ventilation in their premises.

Introduction, background and methodology

- Following the easing of COVID-related trading restrictions in mid-2021, the Scottish Government (SG) introduced the BVF in September 2021 to support small and medium-sized businesses to improve ventilation to help reduce transmission of the virus, thereby supporting the sustained opening of society and contributing to Scotland's wider COVID recovery.
- This evaluation report seeks to understand the outputs of the BVF, in terms of numbers of businesses supported, and early outcomes, in terms of the extent to which the fund enabled businesses to improve their ventilation and therefore support their sustained reopening. It also seeks to understand businesses' perceptions of the processing of the fund in order to learn lessons for future business support measures.
- The report draws on management information data and data from an online survey of businesses who engaged with the scheme to understand the outputs and outcomes of the BVF.

Outputs

- The BVF received 1,363 applications, of which 577 were accepted (42%), 250 were rejected (18%), 514 were closed¹ and 22 were withdrawn (39% were closed or withdrawn).
- In total £981,130 was paid to recipients of the BVF. This was significantly lower than the total budget set aside for the fund (£25 million). Initial budget allocations for demand-led grant schemes such as this are not always paid out in full. Grants were paid to those businesses who met the fund criteria, however not all eligible businesses applied.
- A total of 1,647 ventilation items were purchased by businesses under the BVF scheme, with the most commonly purchased items being air filters/purifiers (20% of items), small mechanical vents/extractor fans (13%) and standalone CO2 monitors (12%)
- The cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh together accounted for over a quarter of applications, acceptances and the amount paid.

¹ Applications with a status of 'closed' did not provide additional evidence to progress their application before the fund closed on 31 March 2022.

- Acceptance rates varied significantly between local authorities which may indicate inconsistencies in the approach to processing and assessing applications across local authorities.
- Micro businesses (0-9 employees) accounted for over half of applications, acceptances and amount paid.
- By premise type, close contact services such as hairdressing and beauty services accounted for the greatest proportion (over a fifth) of applications, awards and amount paid, followed by hospitality premises.
- Whilst the expansion of the fund criteria to include business premises classed as medium and low risk settings (for people coming into close contact) did help these sectors to benefit from funding, the funding was overwhelmingly concentrated on high risk sectors, which accounted for almost 80% of applications, awards and the amount paid.

Impacts

- The vast majority (93%) of successful claimants surveyed said that the ventilation improvements made with BVF funding had 'some' or a 'strong' impact' on ventilation within their premises.
- The fund appears to have been integral to businesses improving their ventilation, with two thirds of surveyed businesses who had successfully made a claim stating that they would be quite or highly unlikely to have made improvements without the funding. This indicates that the fund had an 'additional' impact on business ventilation improvements.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of successful claimants believed that the funding amount was sufficient to make a positive improvement to their premises' ventilation.
- The BVF appears to have a positive impact on businesses' awareness of the importance of ventilation in closed spaces to guard against the spread of COVID-19, with almost half of businesses surveyed saying the fund had significantly or hugely increased their awareness.
- The fund also appears to have had a positive impact on the proportion of businesses monitoring the air quality of their premises, with the proportion of successful claimants surveyed measuring air quality increasing from 11% before the BVF to 50% after.
- The BVF appears to have addressed a key business need for recipients, with the majority of survey respondents stating that improving ventilation was a priority for their businesses and almost three quarters (74%) of successful claimants stating that the fund completely or significantly met their business needs.
- The BVF seems to have had a positive impact on consumer confidence in the safety of business premises who received funding. Of those respondents who received an award, 64% felt it has hugely or significantly increased consumer confidence in the safety of their business premises.

Process

- The majority (83%) of fund payments were made within the target four week window.
- Business perceptions on the ease of the application and claims processes were mixed. Around a third of businesses surveyed found the application process 'very easy' or 'easy' while 41% felt it was 'very difficult' or 'difficult'. Roughly the same proportion of respondents who proceeded to the claims stage in their application found it 'very easy' or 'easy' (40%) as those that felt it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' (36%).
- A significant proportion of businesses appear to have encountered issues with the application and claims processes. Almost two thirds of businesses surveyed (61%) stated that they had issues with the application process while just over half (53%) said they had an issue with the claims process.
- Feedback on the clarity of the BVF guidance was mixed with roughly the same proportion of businesses reporting that they found it unclear (41%), as those that found it clear (46%).
- Most businesses (73%) found the self-assessment tool useful to some extent.

- Most surveyed businesses had heard about the BVF via the Scottish Government website (37%), Business Groups/Organisations (18%) or the 'Find Business Support' website (12%).
- Over two thirds of businesses surveyed (69%) said they would be quite or highly likely to apply for future funding related to ventilation improvements.
- Business suggestions to improve similar business funding in the future included improving communication with applicants, reducing criteria restrictions to applications and providing funding in advance of businesses incurring the costs rather than on a reimbursement basis.

Introduction and Background

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation report is to understand the outputs of the COVID-19 Business Ventilation Fund (BVF), in terms of numbers of businesses supported, and early outcomes, in terms of the extent to which the fund enabled businesses to improve their ventilation to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and therefore support their sustained reopening. It also seeks to understand businesses' perceptions of the processing of the fund in order to learn lessons for future business support measures.

Background

Following the easing of COVID-related trading restrictions in mid-2021, the Scottish Government (SG) introduced the Business Ventilation Fund (BVF) in September 2021 to support small and medium-sized businesses to improve ventilation to help reduce transmission of the virus, thereby supporting the sustained opening of society and contributing to Scotland's wider COVID recovery. This followed recommendations from an expert advisory group, chaired by Professor Tim Sharpe from the University of Strathclyde.

The expert advisory group recommended that a £25 million fund was initially targeted at businesses operating in high risk settings where people come into close contact such as restaurants, bars and gyms. However, the eligibility was extended on 4 February 2022 to include medium and low-risk settings, such as essential retail, art galleries and museums².

Businesses were invited to undertake a self-assessment of the ventilation within their premises to identify if any improvements could be made and what costs may be claimed back through this fund. Eligible businesses could claim up to £2,500 per premise to cover improvements such as purchasing and installing CO2 monitors and vents or servicing and repairing windows.

The fund was administered by the Scottish Government and local authorities and opened to applications from 23 November 2021 to 11 March 2022. Any works or purchases had to be made by 31 March 2022. Claims could be submitted until 15 April 2022.

To successfully apply to the BVF, applicants were required to be actively trading in an eligible sector, be the main occupier of a physical premises and be responsible for paying non-domestic rates with a rateable value of under £51,000. Applicants with a rateable value of over £51,000 were able to apply if they had an annual turnover of no more than £43m and no more than 250 employees. For a claim to be successful, applicants were required to provide evidence of bank statements, an invoice for the improvement works and have proof of payment for the works.

² For further details of business eligibility see the [Business Ventilation Fund eligibility guidance](#).

Methodology

This evaluation report draws on two key sources of information to understand the outputs and outcomes of the BVF:

- management information data collected as part of the applications process; and
- an online survey of businesses who engaged with the scheme.

Management information data

A summary of the [management information data](#) collected as part of the administration of the fund was published on 8 June 2022. This provides information on the number of applications, awards and payments with breakdowns by sector and business characteristics. It also provides information on the processing of the fund, reasons for application rejections and withdrawals and ventilation items purchased. Data was collected at the premise level, with some businesses applying and receiving awards for multiple premises. The figures presented are at the premise level. Data is as of 6 June 2022.

Business survey

An online survey was conducted with businesses who engaged with the fund to further understand the outcomes of the fund and users' experiences of the application and claim process. The survey was targeted towards **all** businesses who had engaged with the fund - this included those who only completed the self-assessment tool through to those businesses who completed the application and claim process and received funding³.

The survey received 172 responses, of which, 152 had completed an application. Of the 152 respondents who completed an application, 104 had been accepted and 48 had been rejected. Of the 104 who proceeded to the claims stage, 76 were successful with 28 unsuccessful claims. Given the sample sizes involved, it has not been possible to disaggregate the survey findings by sector, number of employees, etc.

The management information data shows that the fund received 1,363 applications, of which 577 were accepted, 250 were rejected, 514 were closed and 22 were withdrawn. The 104 surveyed businesses that were accepted therefore account for approximately 18% of the total number of accepted applications (577) while the 48 surveyed businesses that had their applications rejected account for approximately 19% of the total number of rejected applications (250)⁴.

The success rate of survey respondents who completed an application and were successful in making a claim is 50%, slightly higher than the overall fund application success rate for completed claims of 42%.

The survey was hosted on the Citizen Space platform and was live for three weeks from 16 May to 6 June 2022. As a private survey, it only allowed those who had received the email link to be able to respond.

³ Applicants provided an email address as part of their application, which allowed for communication directly to all businesses who engaged with the fund.

⁴ These response rates are approximate as the survey responses are at the business level whereas the management information data is at the premise level and some businesses may have applied and received awards for multiple premises.

Using both multiple choice answer options and open text options, the survey provided a mix of qualitative and quantitative data for the evaluation. The survey used a skip logic design to allow respondents to only answer the questions that were relevant to them, depending on their previous answers.

Evaluation Results

Outputs

Summary

- The BVF received 1,363 applications, of which 577 were accepted (42%), 250 were rejected (18%), 514 were closed and 22 were withdrawn (39% were closed or withdrawn).
- In total £981,130 was paid to recipients of the BVF. This was significantly lower than the total budget set aside for the fund (£25 million). Initial budget allocations for demand-led grant schemes such as this are not always paid out in full. Grants were paid to those businesses who met the fund criteria, however not all eligible businesses applied.
- A total of 1,647 ventilation items were purchased by businesses under the BVF scheme, with the most commonly purchased items being air filters/purifiers (20% of items), small mechanical vents/extractor fans (13%) and standalone CO2 monitors (12%)
- The cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh together accounted for over a quarter of applications, acceptances and the amount paid.
- Acceptance rates varied significantly between local authorities which may indicate inconsistencies in the approach to assessing applications across local authorities.
- Micro businesses (0-9 employees) accounted for over half of applications, acceptances and amount paid.
- By premise type, close contact services such as hairdressing and beauty services accounted for the greatest proportion (over a fifth) of applications, awards and amount paid, followed by hospitality premises.
- Whilst the expansion of the fund criteria to include business premises classed as medium and low risk settings (for people coming into close contact) did help these sectors to benefit from funding, the funding was overwhelming concentrated on high risk sectors, which accounted for almost 80% of applications, awards and the amount paid.

This section provides an overview of the management information data on applications, acceptances, amount paid and ventilation items purchased. Breakdowns by local authority, premise type and business size are provided. While the scheme management information did not collect data on the protected equalities characteristics such as the gender, age and ethnicity of the business owners applying to the fund, this information was collected as part of the business survey and is presented below to supplement the management information data. The source data for all graphs and visualisations in this report is from [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Business Ventilation Fund experimental statistics](#), unless otherwise specified.

Applications, Acceptances and Amount Paid

In total, the fund received 1,363 applications, of which 577 were accepted (42%), 250 were rejected (18%), 514 were closed⁵ and 22 were withdrawn (39% were closed or withdrawn).

The most common reasons for rejection were 'failed business checks' (27%), 'not in an eligible sector as declared' (26%), and 'invalid/incomplete non-domestic rate number' (23%). Of the 22 applications that were withdrawn, the most common reasons were 'duplicate application' (59%) and 'no longer

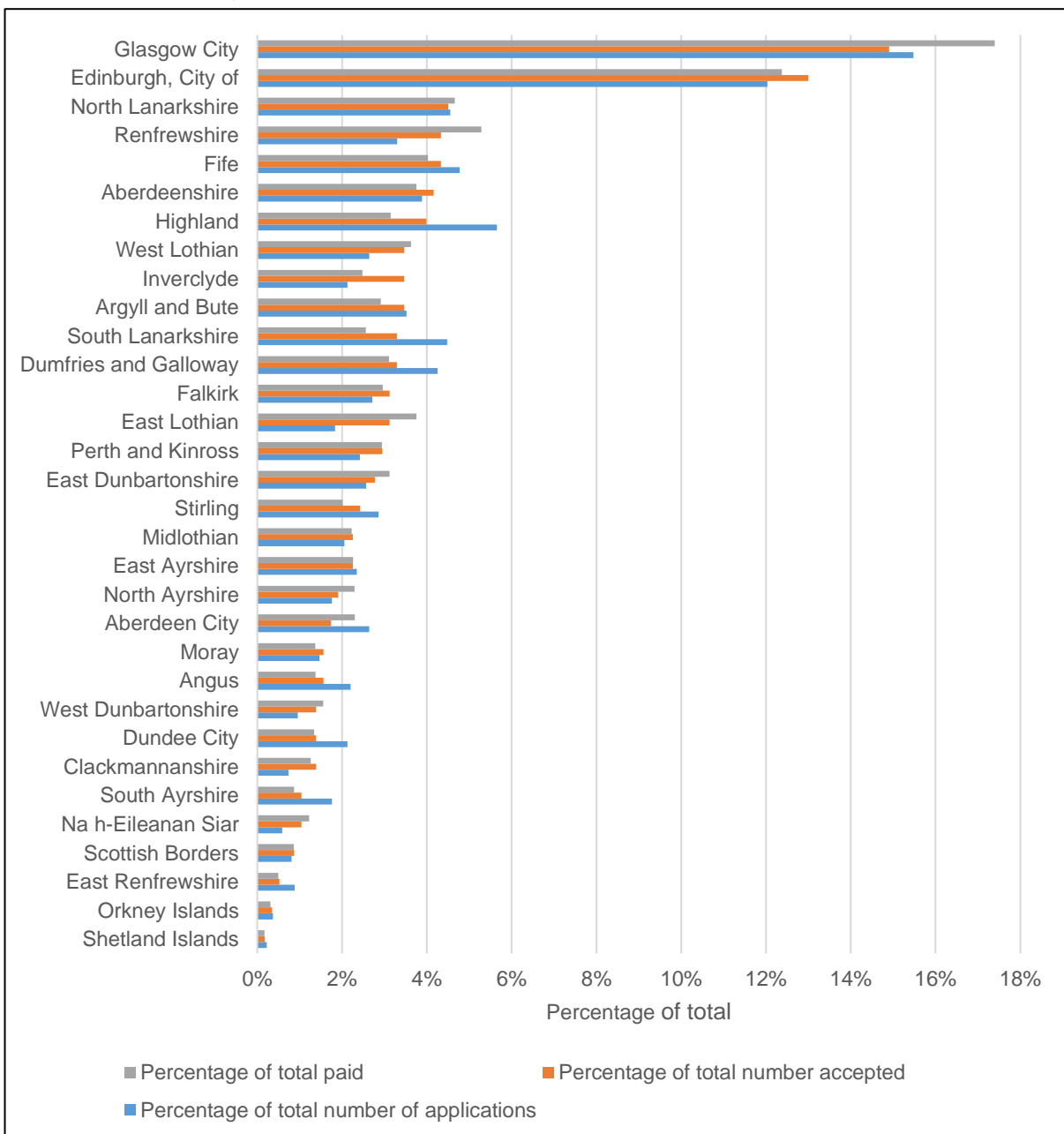
⁵ Applications with a status of 'closed' did not provide additional evidence to progress their application before the fund closed on 31 March 2022.

required' (41%). Local Authorities received 30 requests from businesses for their application decision to be reviewed, of which 25 decisions were revised (83%) and 5 were upheld (16%).

In total £981,130 was paid to recipients of the BVF, with an average (mean) award amount of £1,700.

The total amount paid was significantly lower than the total budget set aside for the fund (£25 million). Initial budget allocations for demand-led grant schemes such as this are not always paid out in full and each fund has criteria that requires to be met to ensure best value for public money. Grants were paid to those businesses who met the fund criteria, however not all eligible businesses applied. It is likely the disruptions due to the Omicron variant would have significantly impacted businesses' ability to improve their ventilation and claim these costs back.

FIGURE 1: ACCEPTANCES, APPLICATIONS AND TOTAL PAID BY LOCAL AUTHORITY

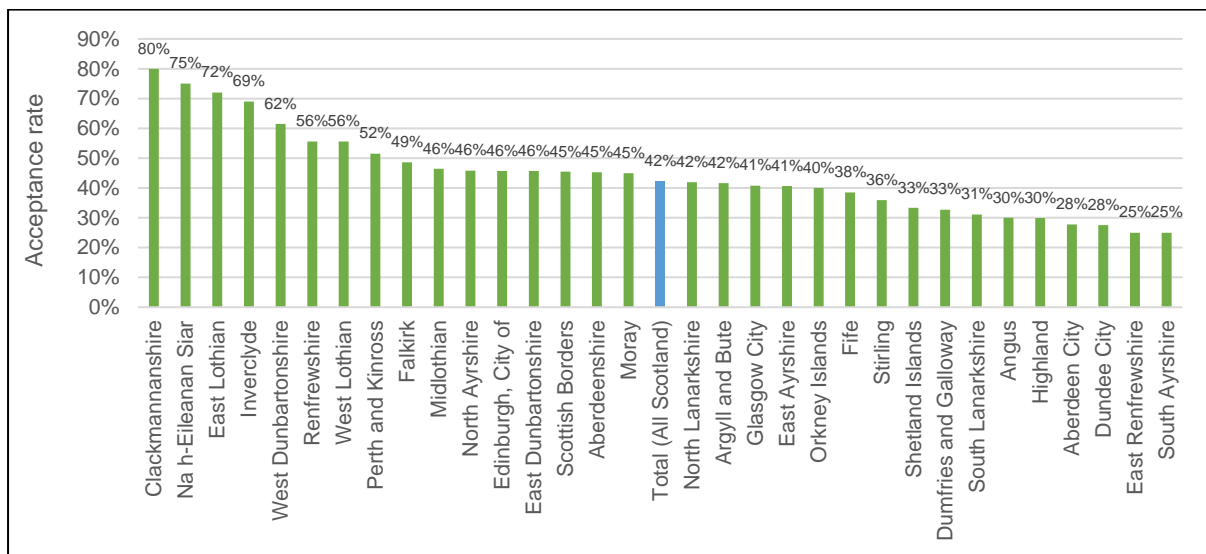


Local authority

Looking at the breakdown by local authority, the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh together accounted for over a quarter of applications, acceptances and the amount paid (Figure 1).

Acceptance rates (number of acceptances as a proportion of number of applications) varied significantly between local authorities from 25% in South Ayrshire (24 applications) to 80% in Clackmannanshire (10 applications) (Figure 2). The high variation in acceptance rates may be due in part to the relatively low numbers of applications numbers in some local authorities however it may also indicate inconsistencies in the approach to processing and assessing applications across local authorities.

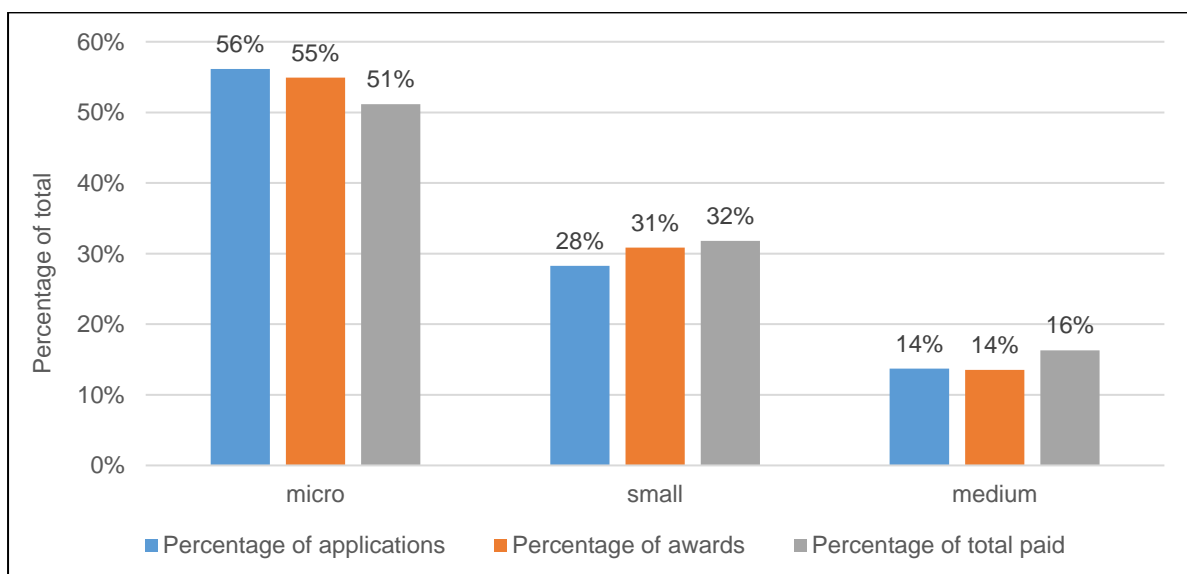
FIGURE 2: ACCEPTANCE RATE, BY LOCAL AUTHORITY



Business size band

By business size band, micro businesses (0-9 employees) accounted for over half of applications, acceptances and amount paid (Figure 3).

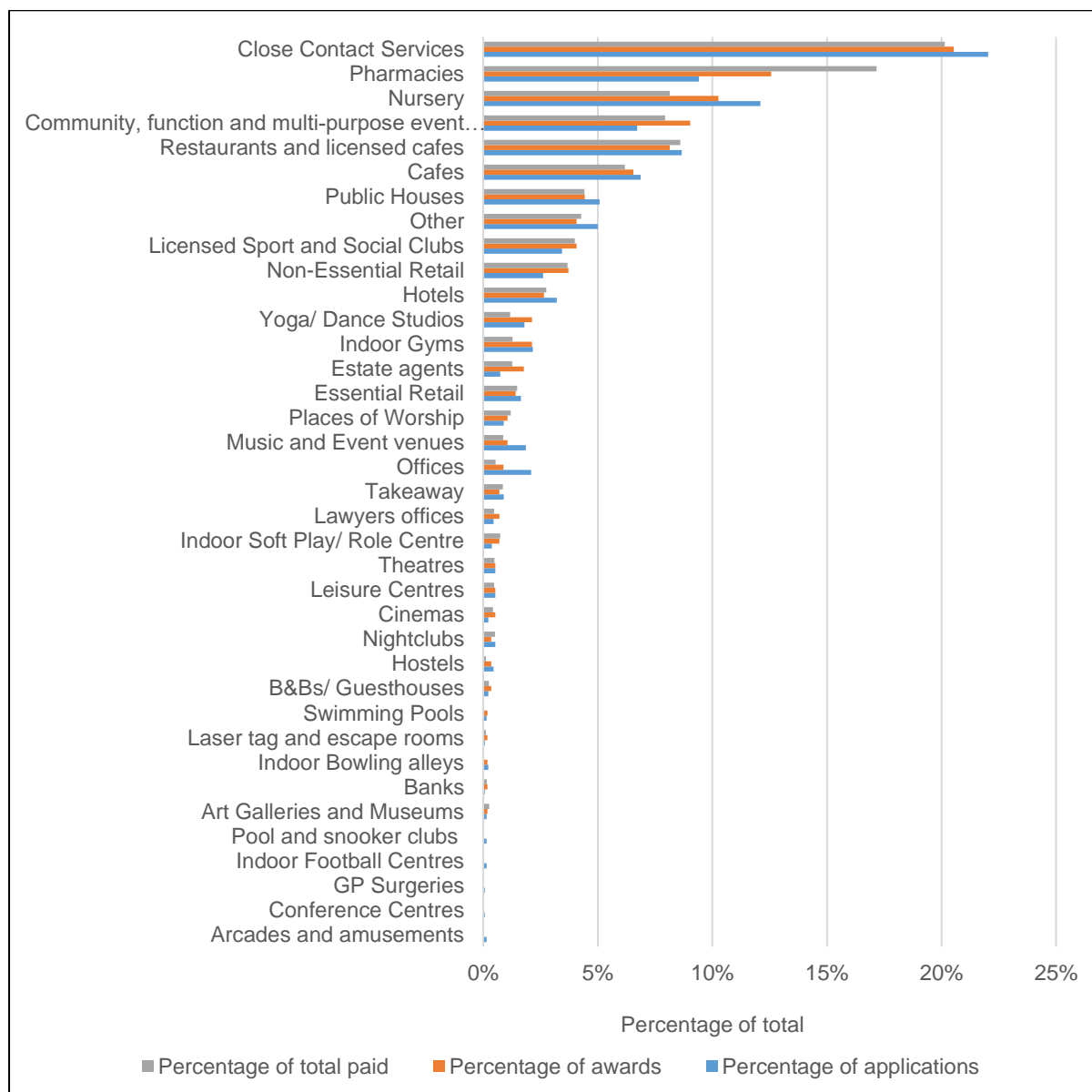
FIGURE 3: APPLICATIONS, ACCEPTANCES AND AMOUNT PAID, BY BUSINESS SIZE



Premise type

By premise type, close contact services such as hairdressing and beauty services and massage therapies accounted for the greatest proportion (over a fifth) of applications, awards and amount paid, followed by hospitality premises (cafes, restaurants, public houses and takeaways - shown separately in Figure 4) and pharmacies (Figure 4).

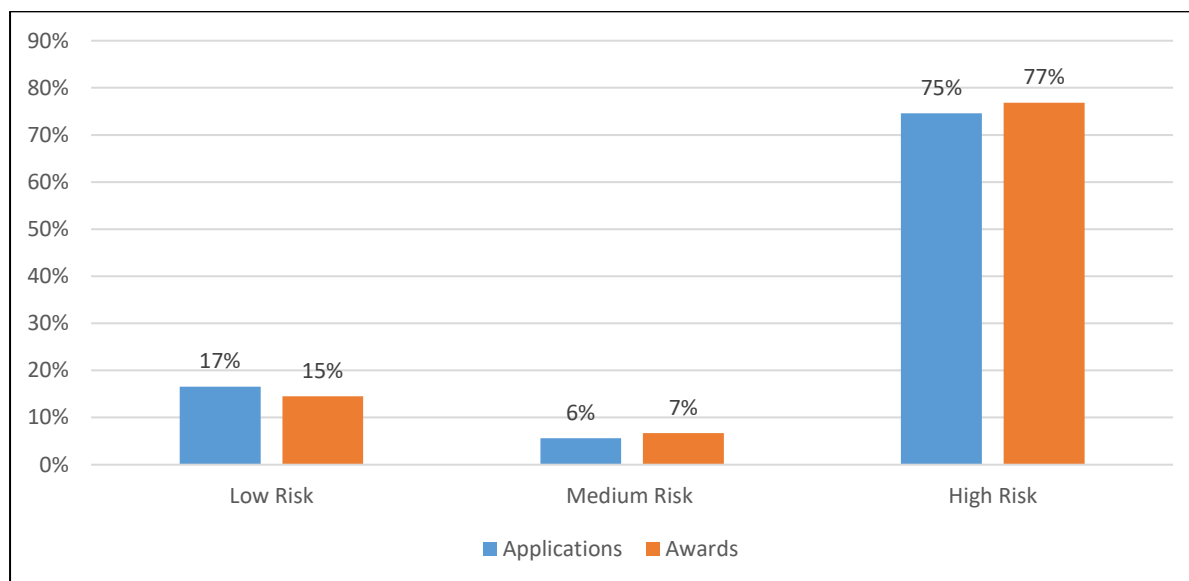
FIGURE 4: APPLICATIONS, ACCEPTANCES AND AMOUNT PAID, BY PREMISE TYPE



The sectors above can be classified into different risk categories (low, medium and high risk settings) in terms of the risk these settings pose for people coming into very close contact. The fund was initially aimed only at businesses operating in high risk settings however, the eligibility criteria was later extended to include medium and low-risk settings. High risk sectors accounted for 75% of applications, 77% of awards and 77% of the amount paid. Medium and low risk sectors, which became eligible for the fund at a later stage, accounted for around 23% of applications, 22% awards

and 18% of total amount paid (Figure 5)⁶. This indicates that whilst the expansion of the fund criteria did help medium and low risk sectors to benefit from funding, the funding was overwhelming concentrated on high risk sectors.

FIGURE 5: APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS BY SECTOR RISK LEVEL



Business age

Awards were made to businesses across multiple age categories. Over half of awards were made to businesses that had been operating for over 11 years (54%) and 42% were made to businesses operating from 1 to 10 years. Only 4% were made to new businesses that had been in operation for less than a year.

Business type

The majority of awards were made to limited companies (68%) and sole traders (13%). Businesses could be classified as a sole trader according to business size, but also operate as another business type e.g. a limited company.

Protected Equalities Characteristics

Information on protected equality characteristics such as the gender, age and ethnicity of the business owners was not collected as part of the scheme management information. This information was however collected from those businesses who completed the survey. This survey data can therefore be used to supplement the management information data to provide an indication of the likely equalities characteristics of those businesses that engaged with the fund. (Note that responses are for all those surveyed, not just successful applicants.)

⁶ The percentages here do not sum to 100 as it was not possible to categorise all respondents into high/medium/low risk sectors. 67 respondents stated that their sector was 'other'; it has not been possible to classify these 67 into the risk categories however they are included in the total number of applications/awards/amount paid and in the denominator used for these calculations.

- **Gender:** Of those businesses surveyed, 44% said that their business was woman-led. 31% said their business was equally led by men and women, and 16% said that their business was not woman-led⁷.
- **Ethnicity:** Of those surveyed, 67% responded that their business leader was 'White Scottish', 14% were 'White - Other British,' and 5% 'White – Other'. 3% of survey respondents said their business leader was 'Mixed White and Asian', 1% 'Pakistani', 1% 'Bangladeshi', 1% 'Any other Asian Background' and 1% 'Other'⁸.
- **Age:** Of those surveyed, the most common age groups for business leaders were 40-49 and 50-59 (both 27%). Business leaders under 30 or over 70 were a small minority at 3% and 2% respectively.

Ventilation Items Purchased

A total of 1,647 ventilation items were purchased by businesses under the BVF scheme⁹. The most common items purchased were air filters/purifiers (20% of items), small mechanical vents/extractor fans (13%) and standalone CO₂ monitors (12%) (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: VENTILATION ITEMS PURCHASED

Ventilation Item purchased	Total number of items	Percentage of items
Air filters/purifiers	328	20%
Small mechanical vent/extractor fan	214	13%
Standalone CO ₂ monitor (single spaces)	197	12%
Unblocking windows/small repairs/enhancements	148	9%
Window servicing	115	7%
Monitoring equipment	112	7%
Networked CO ₂ monitors (multiple spaces)	101	6%
Installation costs	89	5%
Additional sensors for networked CO ₂ monitors	80	5%
Gateway system for networked CO ₂ monitors	79	5%

⁷ A further 3% did not answer, 3% stated would rather not say and 2% did not know.

⁸ A further 7% stated they would rather not say and 1% did not know. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the 1% who stated 'other-please state' as this comprised only 1 respondent.

⁹ Businesses could purchase more than one ventilation item for each premise, so the number of items awarded is higher than the total number of awards.

⁹ The total number of businesses surveyed was 172 however 8 failed to answer this question.

Vents	62	4%
Undercutting/raising non-fire doors	43	3%
Airbricks	27	2%
Networked CO ₂ monitors (mechanically ventilated spaces)	23	1%
Window contact sensors	20	1%
Automatic openers for ceiling windows	9	1%

Impacts

Summary

- The vast majority (93%) of successful claimants surveyed said that the ventilation improvements made with BVF funding had ‘some’ or a ‘strong’ impact’ on ventilation within their premises.
- The fund appears to have been integral to businesses improving their ventilation, with two thirds of surveyed businesses who had successfully made a claim stating that they would be quite or highly unlikely to have made improvements without the funding. This indicates that the fund had an ‘additional’ impact on business ventilation improvements.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of successful claimants believed that the funding amount was sufficient to make a positive improvement to their premises’ ventilation.
- The BVF appears to have a positive impact on businesses’ awareness of the importance of ventilation in closed spaces to guard against the spread of COVID-19, with almost half of businesses surveyed saying the fund had significantly or hugely increased their awareness.
- The fund also appears to have had a positive impact on the proportion of businesses monitoring the air quality of their premises, with the proportion of successful claimants surveyed measuring air quality increasing from 11% before the BVF to 50% after.
- The BVF appears to have addressed a key business need for applicants, with the majority of survey respondents stating that improving ventilation was a priority for their businesses and almost three quarters (74%) of successful claimants stating that the fund completely or significantly met their business needs.
- The BVF seems to have had a positive impact on consumer confidence in the safety of business premises who received funding. Of those respondents who received an award, 64% felt it has hugely or significantly increased consumer confidence in the safety of their business premises.

Whereas the previous section focussed on the outputs of the fund in terms of numbers of businesses supported and ventilation items purchased based on the scheme management information data, this section draws on the business survey data to consider the impact the fund had on businesses.

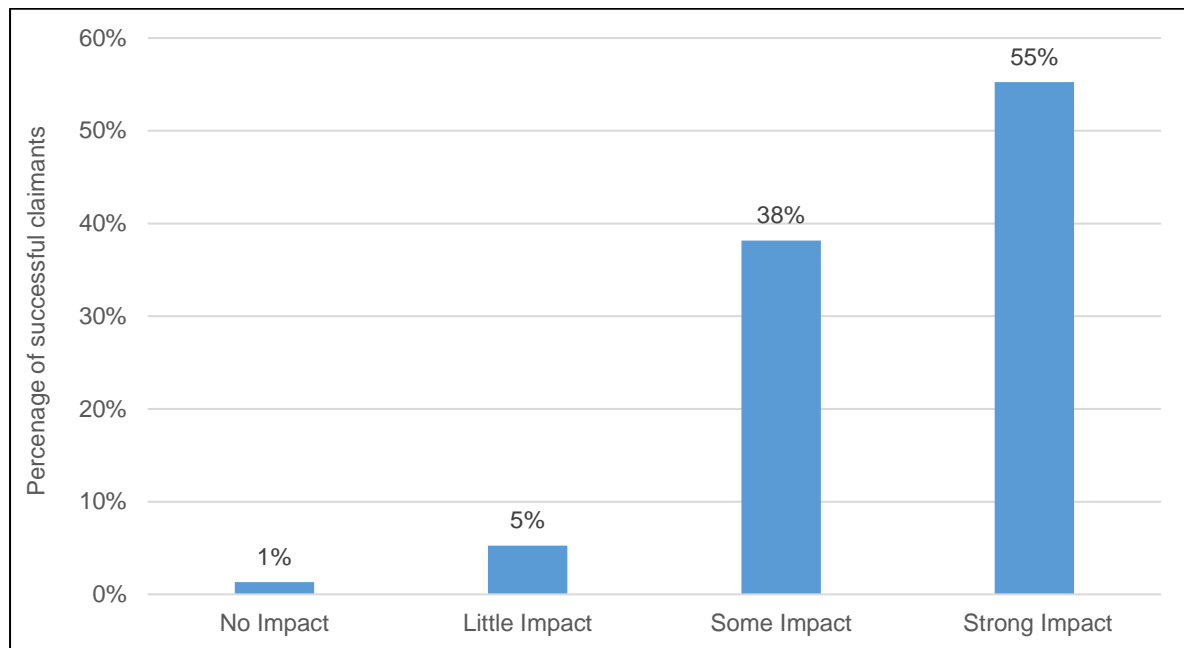
Impact on ventilation

As shown below in Figure 7, the vast majority of successful claimants surveyed (93%) said that the ventilation improvements made from BVF funding had ‘some’ or a ‘strong’ impact’ on ventilation within their premises. A small minority of respondents said that there was little (5%) or no impact (1%.)

The fund appears to have been integral to businesses improving their ventilation. Surveyed businesses who had successfully made a claim were asked how likely they would you have been to make improvements to ventilation without the funding. Two thirds (66%) said they would be quite or highly unlikely to have made improvements without the funding. This indicates that the fund had an ‘additional’ impact on business ventilation improvements.

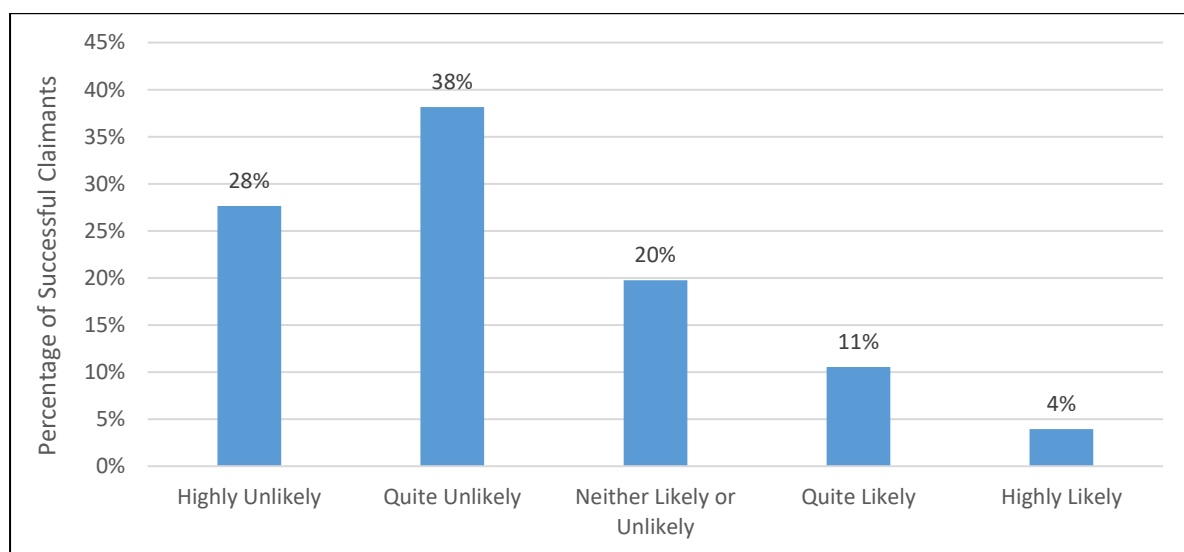
All surveyed businesses were also asked if they had made any ventilation improvements in the last three years. The majority (81%) said they had not, again indicating that the fund is likely to have been key to businesses taking measures to improving their ventilation.

FIGURE 7: IMPACT OF VENTILATION IMPROVEMENTS MADE THROUGH THE BVF ON VENTILATION WITHIN BUSINESS PREMISES



Base: All successful claimants: 76. Base minimum: 'no impact': 1.

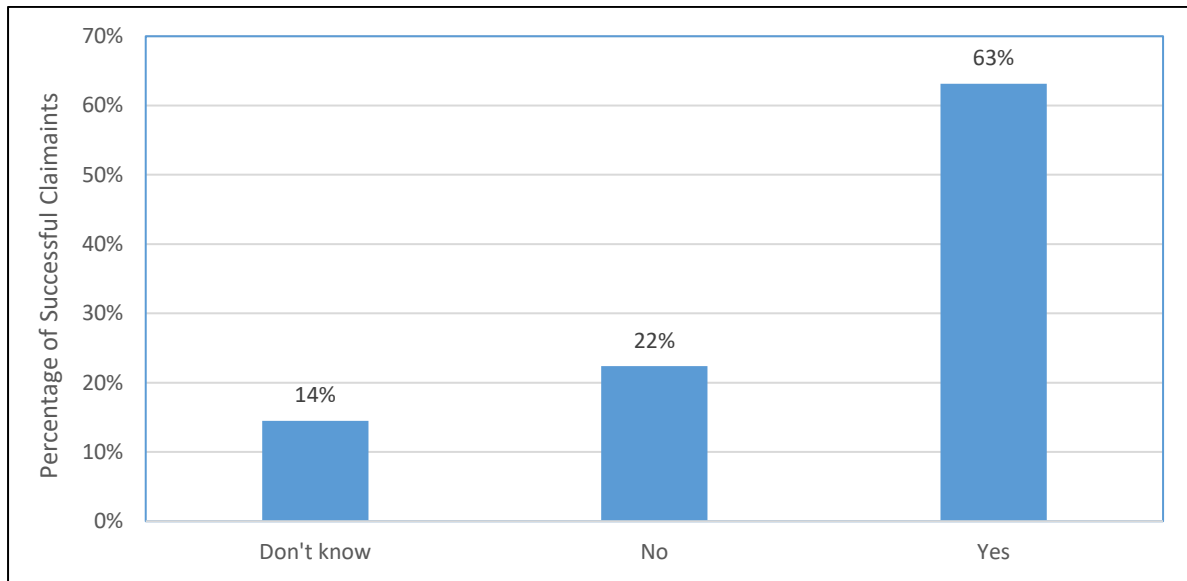
FIGURE 8: LIKELIHOOD OF BUSINESS TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO VENTILATION WITHOUT BVF FUNDING



Base: All successful claimants: 76. Base minimum: 'highly likely': 3.

Businesses that had successfully made a claim were asked whether the total amount of funding available (£2,500) was sufficient to make a positive impact on ventilation. Almost two thirds (63%) of successful claimants believed that the funding was sufficient while around a fifth (22%) felt it was insufficient (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: ADEQUACY OF AVAILABLE FUNDING AMOUNT TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON VENTILATION

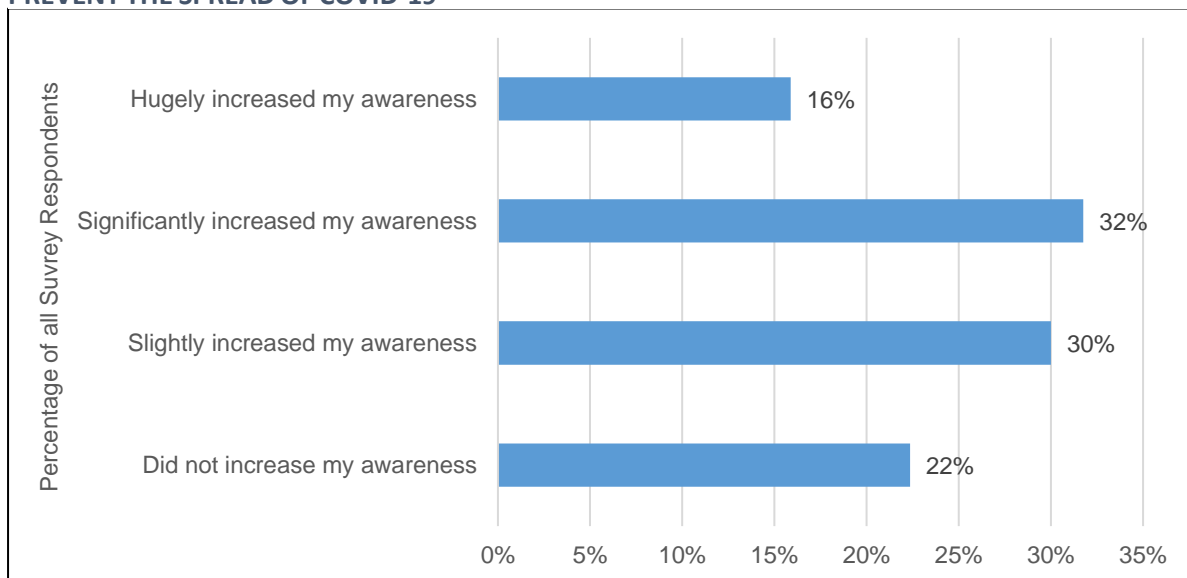


Base: Successful Claimants: 76. Base minimum: 'don't know': 11.

Impact on awareness of importance of and monitoring of ventilation

The BVF appears to have a positive impact on businesses' awareness of the importance of ventilation. All businesses surveyed were asked the extent the BVF had increased their awareness of the importance of ventilation in closed spaces to guard against the spread of COVID-19. Almost half of businesses surveyed said the BVF had either 'significantly increased' or 'hugely increased' their

FIGURE 10: WHETHER BVF INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF VENTILATION TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19



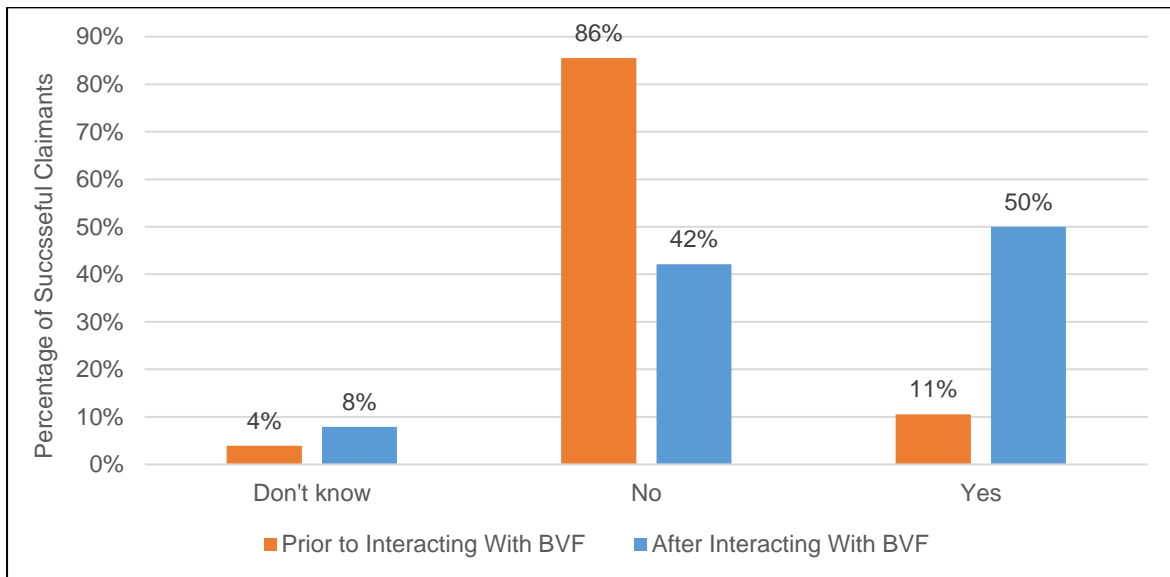
Base: All surveyed: 172 (2 Not Answered). Base minimum: 'Hugely Increased My Awareness' 27

awareness of the importance of ventilation. However just over a fifth (22%) said that it did not increase their awareness (Figure 10).

The fund also appears to have had a positive impact on the proportion of businesses monitoring the air quality of their premises. Businesses that had successfully made a claim were asked whether air quality was measured on their premises, before and after their interaction with the fund. The survey

results show a large swing towards businesses measuring air quality after accessing the fund. Prior to the BVF, only 11% of claimants measured air quality however this rose to 50% after accessing the fund (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: WHETHER BUSINESSES MEASURED AIR QUALITY BEFORE AND AFTER ACCESSING THE BVF

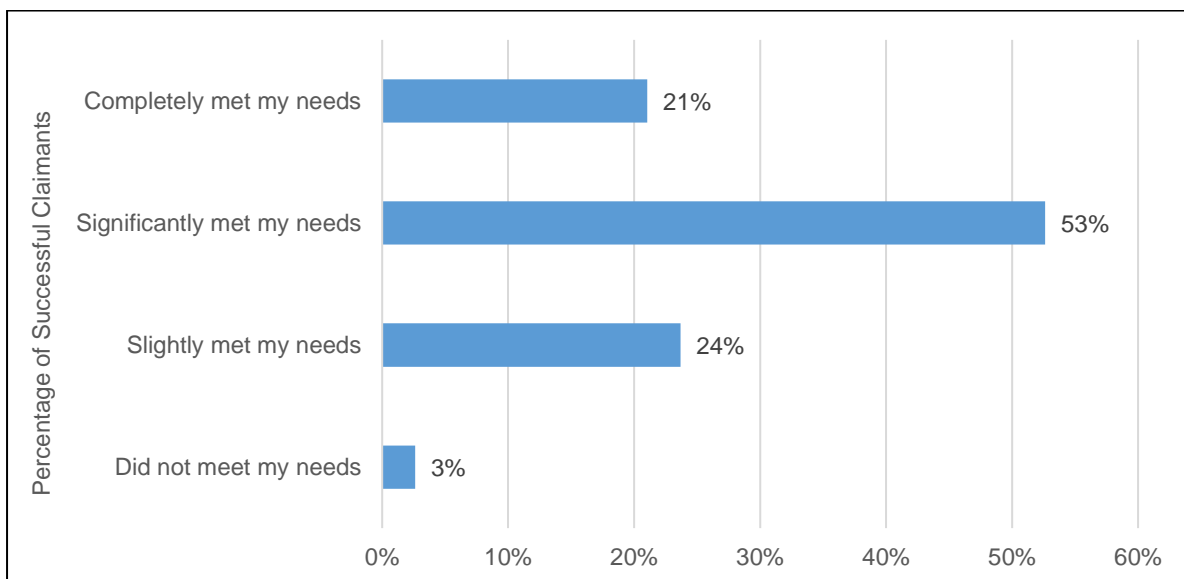


Base: Successful Claimants: 76 Base minimum: 'Don't Know': 3/6.

Extent to which the fund met business needs

The BVF appears to have addressed a key business need. All businesses surveyed were asked to what extent improving ventilation was a priority for businesses when they first applied for the BVF. The majority (97%) said it was a priority ('slight priority', 'somewhat priority' or 'high priority'), with 58% saying it was a 'high priority'. Only 3% stated it was not a priority. This is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of COVID-19 restrictions at the time and suggests that the fund addressed a key priority for businesses.

FIGURE 12: EXTENT TO WHICH THE BVF MET BUSINESS NEEDS



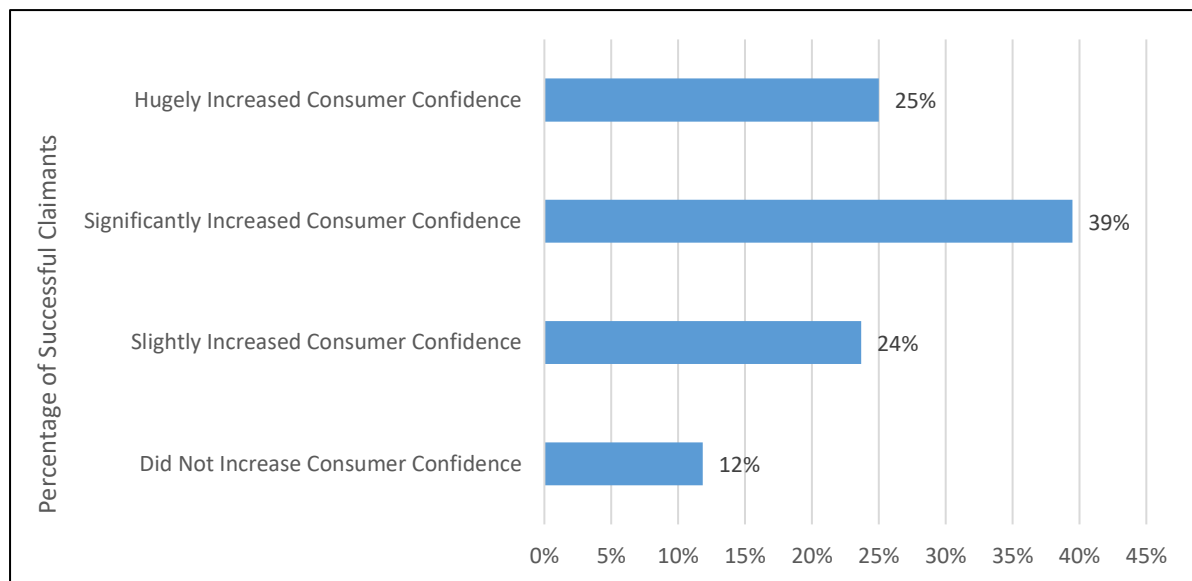
Base: All successful claimants: 76. Base minimum: 'did not meet my needs': 2.

Successful claimants were asked to what extent the BVF met the needs of their business. Almost three quarters (74%) said it completely or significantly met their business needs. Only 3% (2 respondents) said that the BVF did not meet their needs (Figure 12).

Impact on consumer confidence

The BVF seems to have had a positive impact on consumer confidence in the safety of business premises who received funding. Of those respondents who received an award (76 businesses), 64% felt it has 'hugely' or 'significantly' increased consumer confidence in the safety of their business premises. 24% felt it slightly increased consumer confidence while 12% stated that the BVF did not increase confidence (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13: WHETHER THE BVF IMPROVED CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN THE SAFETY OF BUSINESS PREMISES



Base: Successful Claimants: 76; base minimum: 'did not increase customer confidence': 9

Process

Summary

- The majority (83%) of fund payments were made within the target four week window.
- Business perceptions on the ease of the application and claims processes were mixed. Around a third of businesses surveyed found the application process 'very easy' or 'easy' while 41% felt it was 'very difficult' or 'difficult'. Roughly the same proportion of respondents who proceeded to the claims stage in their application found it 'very easy' or 'easy' (40%) as those that felt it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' (36%).
- A significant proportion of businesses appear to have encountered issues with the application and claims processes. Almost two thirds of businesses surveyed (61%) stated that they had issues with the application process while just over half (53%) said they had an issue with the claims process.
- Feedback on the clarity of the BVF guidance was mixed with roughly the same proportion of businesses reporting that they found it unclear (41%), as those that found it clear (46%).
- Most businesses (73%) found the self-assessment tool useful to some extent.
- Most surveyed businesses had heard about the BVF via the Scottish Government website (37%), Business Groups/Organisations (18%) or the 'Find Business Support' website (12%).
- Over two thirds of businesses surveyed (69%) said they would be quite or highly likely to apply for future funding related to ventilation improvements.
- Business suggestions to improve similar business funding in the future included improving communication with applicants, reducing criteria restrictions to applications and providing funding in advance of businesses incurring the costs rather than on a reimbursement basis.

Whereas the previous section considered the outputs and emerging impacts of the fund, this section draws on the management information and survey data on business perceptions of their engagement with the fund to understand the extent to which the application, claims and payment processes of the fund were executed successfully.

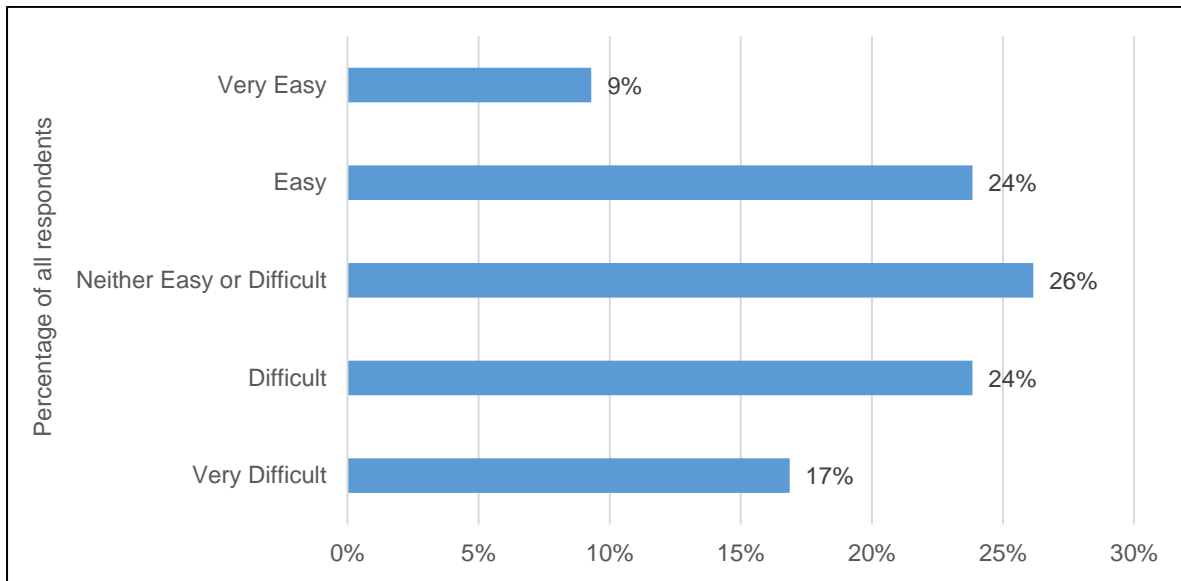
Payment process

The management information data shows that approximately 83% of payments were made within the target four weeks from when the completed application and supporting documentation were received, with an average of about two and a half weeks from documentation receipt to payment.

Application and claims process

Businesses' perceptions on the ease of the application process were mixed. Around a third of businesses surveyed found the process 'very easy' or 'easy' while 41% felt it was 'very difficult' or 'difficult'. A quarter felt it was 'neither easy or difficult' (Figure 14).

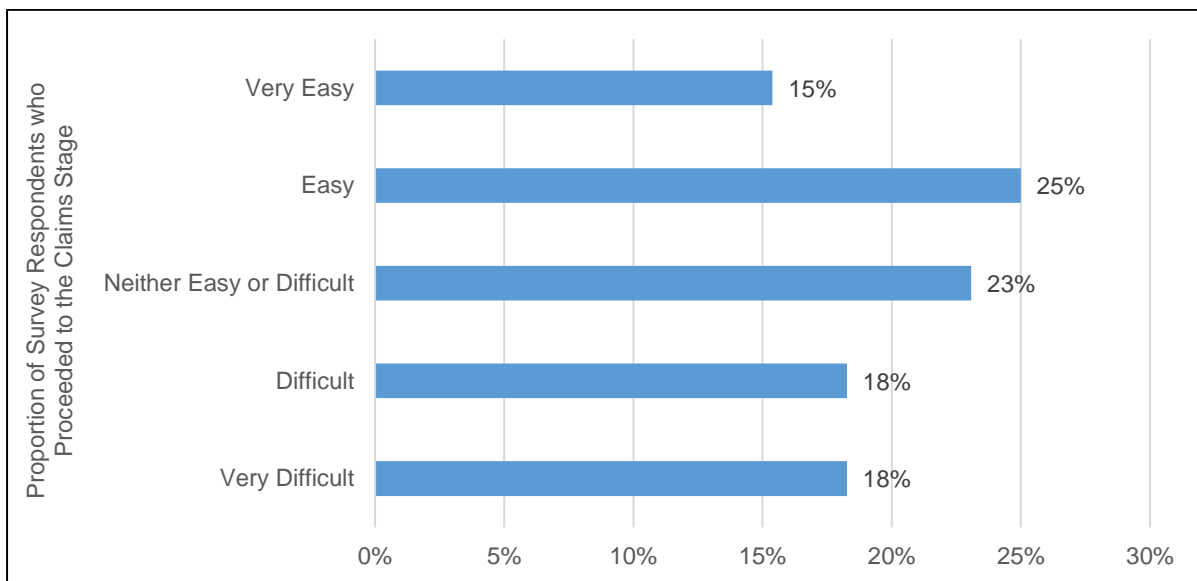
FIGURE 14: HOW EASY BUSINESSES FOUND THE APPLICATION PROCESS



Base: All respondents (172) Base minimum: 'Very Easy': 16

As with the application process, businesses' perceptions on the ease of the claims process were mixed with roughly the same proportion of respondents who proceeded to the claims stage in their application finding it 'very easy' or 'easy' (40%) as those that felt it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' (36%) (Figure 15).

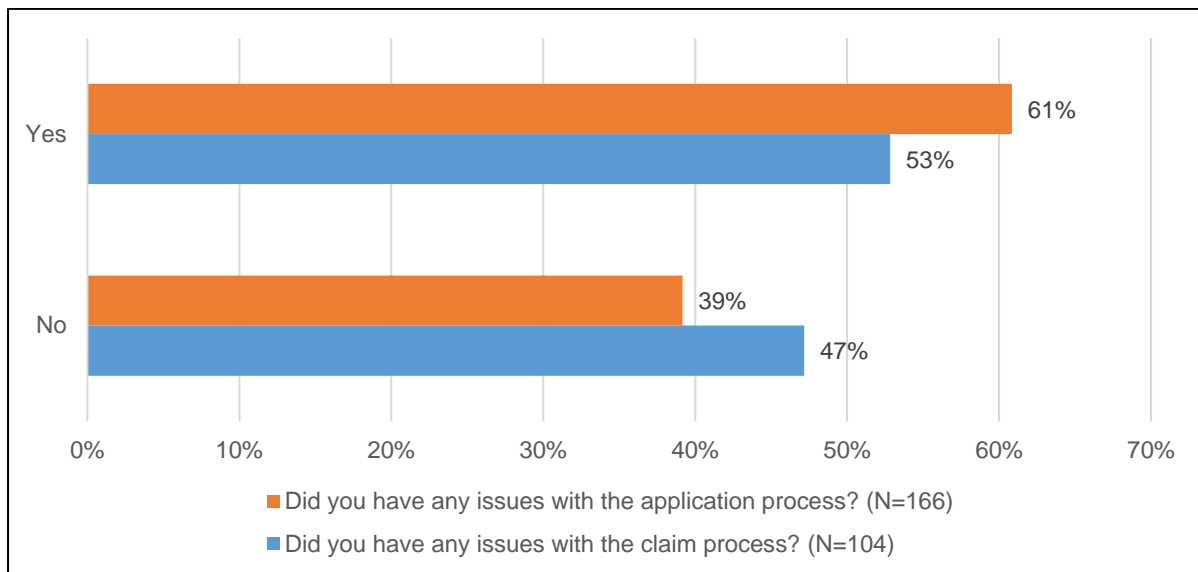
FIGURE 15: HOW EASY BUSINESSES FOUND THE CLAIMS PROCESS



Base: Surveyed businesses who proceeded to the claims stage (104) Base minimum: 'Very Easy': 16

A significant proportion of businesses appear to have encountered issues with the application and claims processes. As shown in figure 16 below, almost two thirds of businesses surveyed (61%) stated that they had issues with the application process. Just over half (53%) said they had an issue with the claims process.

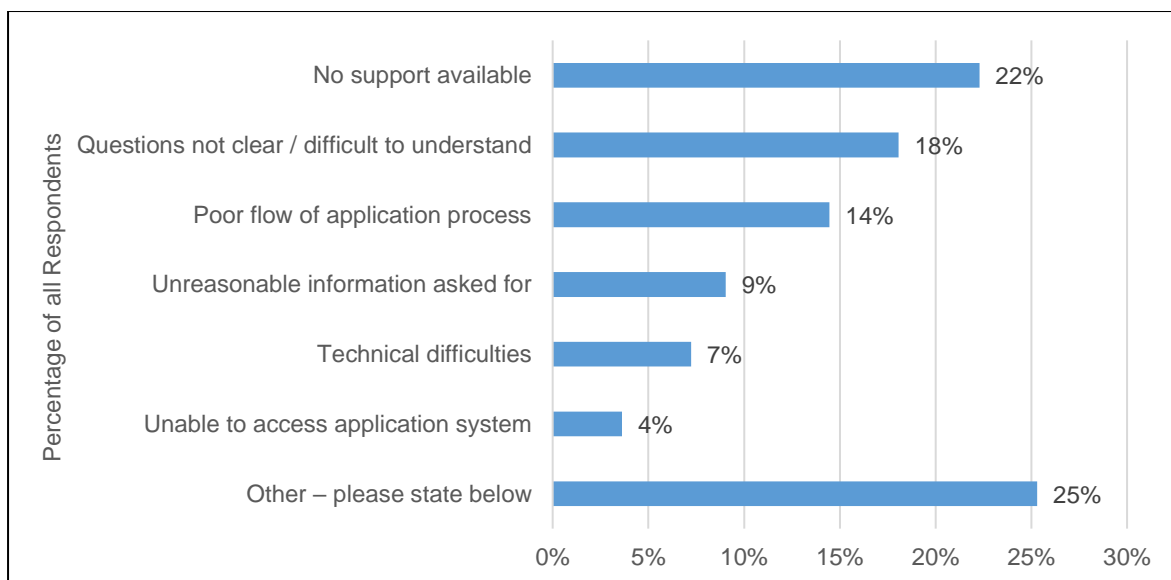
FIGURE 16: WHETHER BUSINESSES HAD ISSUES WITH THE BVF APPLICATION OR CLAIMS PROCESS



Base: All respondents (166, 6 did not answer); respondents who submitted a claim (104); base minimum: 'No': 50/65

Businesses were asked what issues they experienced with the BVF application process. The most commonly reported issue was 'other' (25%), followed by 'no support available' (22%) and 'questions not clear / difficult to understand' (18%) (Figure 17). While the issues noted within the 'other' category varied, key themes that emerged include: unclear or infrequent communication with staff regarding the fund; items were too expensive to purchase and then claim through the fund; difficulty in sending evidence/documents; and tight deadlines.

FIGURE 17: ISSUES EXPERIENCED WITH THE BVF APPLICATION PROCESS

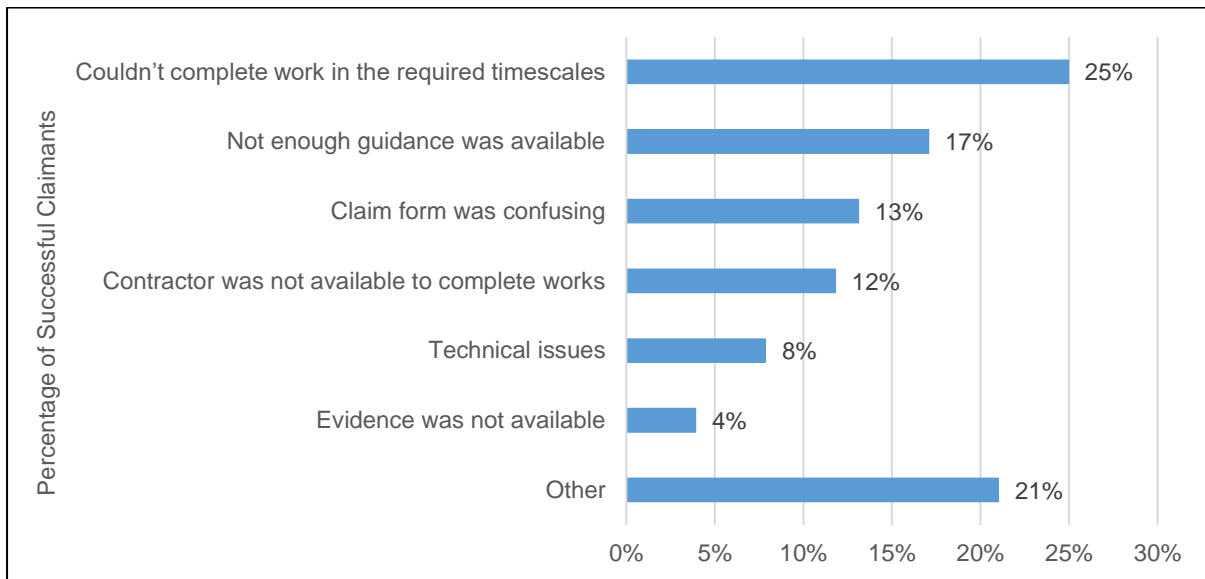


Base: All respondents (166, 6 did not answer) Base minimum: 'Unable to access application system': 6

The most commonly reported issue with the claims process was that businesses 'couldn't complete the work in the required timescales' (25%), followed by 'other' (21%) and 'not enough guidance was available' (17%) (Figure 18). While the issues noted within the 'other' category varied, key themes that emerged included: difficulties in gathering information required; tight timescales for completing

applications; tight timescales for completing upgrades and installations (also difficulties in finding available tradesmen at short notice); and lack of communication with the fund.

FIGURE 18: ISSUES ENCOUNTERED WITH THE BVF CLAIMS PROCESS

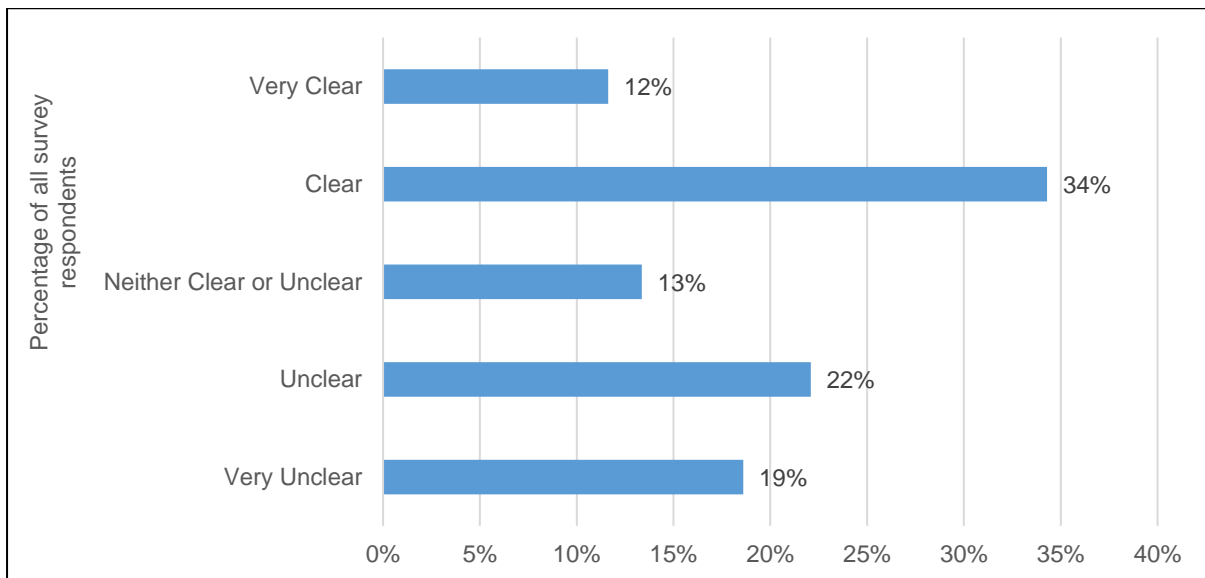


Base: Respondents who made a successful claim (76) Base minimum: 'Evidence Was Not Available': 3

Guidance

Feedback on the clarity of the BVF guidance was mixed with roughly the same proportion of businesses reporting that they found it very unclear or unclear (41%), as those that found it clear or very clear (46%) (Figure 19).

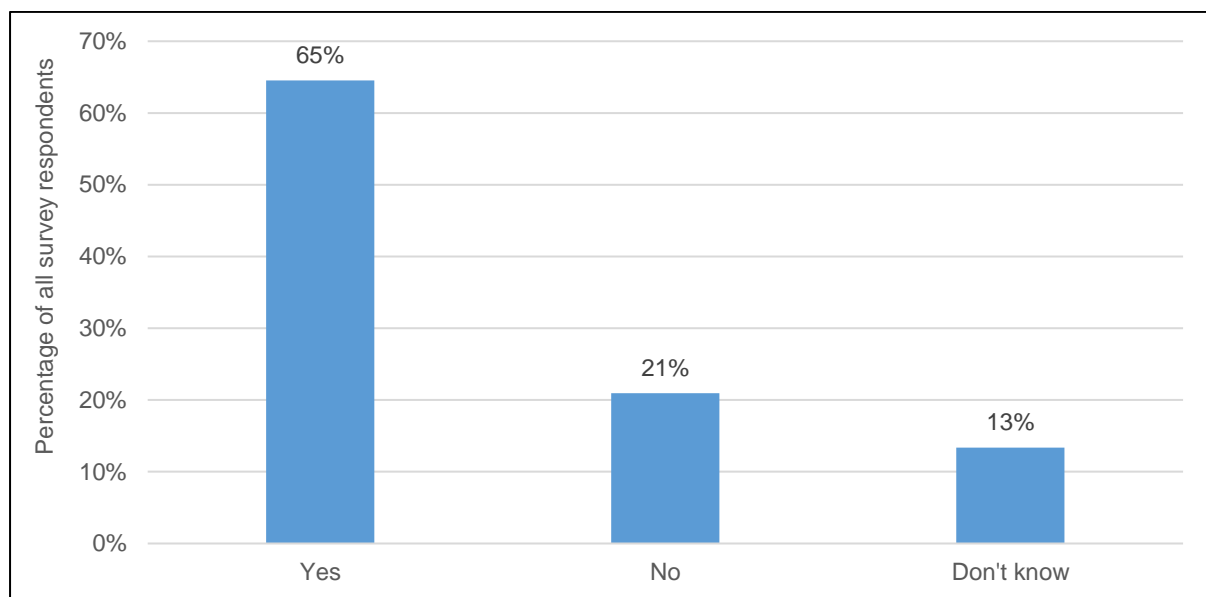
FIGURE 19: HOW CLEAR BUSINESSES FOUND BVF GUIDANCE



Base: All respondents: 172; base minimum: 'Very Clear': 20

Around two thirds of respondents (65%) felt that further guidance on the improvements available under the fund would have been useful (figure 20).

FIGURE 20: WHETHER FURTHER GUIDANCE FOR THE BVF WOULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL

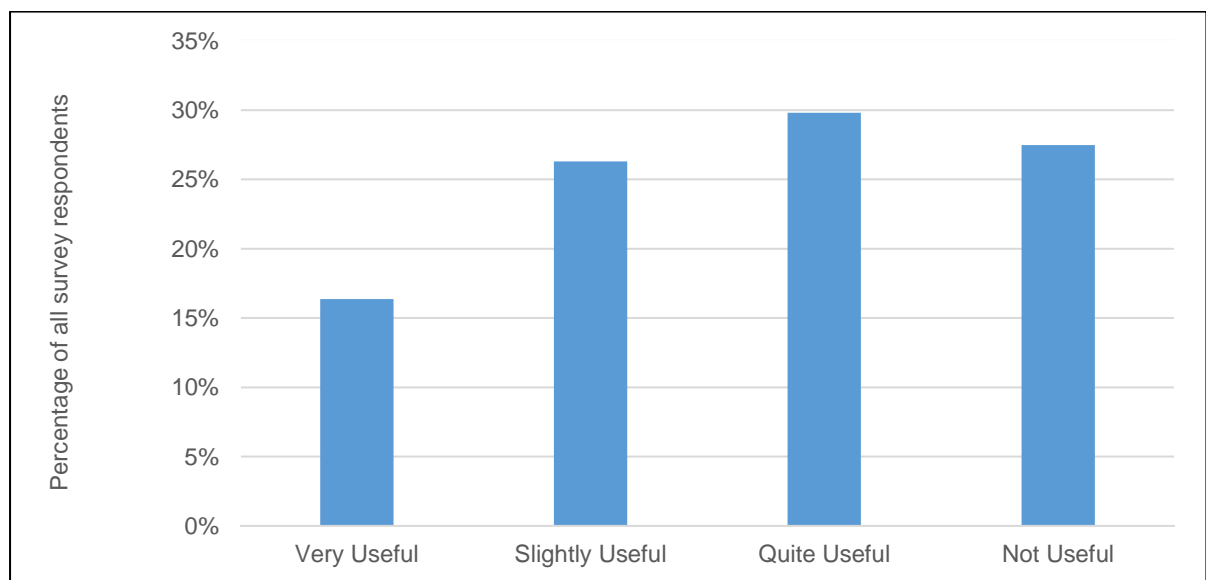


Base: All respondents: 170 (2 Not Answered); base minimum: 'Don't Know': 23

Source: Coronavirus (COVID-19): Business Ventilation Fund Evaluation Business Survey

Feedback from surveyed businesses on the BVF self-assessment tool suggested that most businesses (73%) found it useful to some extent ('slightly useful', 'quite useful' or 'very useful'). However, around a third (27%) felt it was not useful (Figure 21).

FIGURE 21: USEFULNESS OF SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

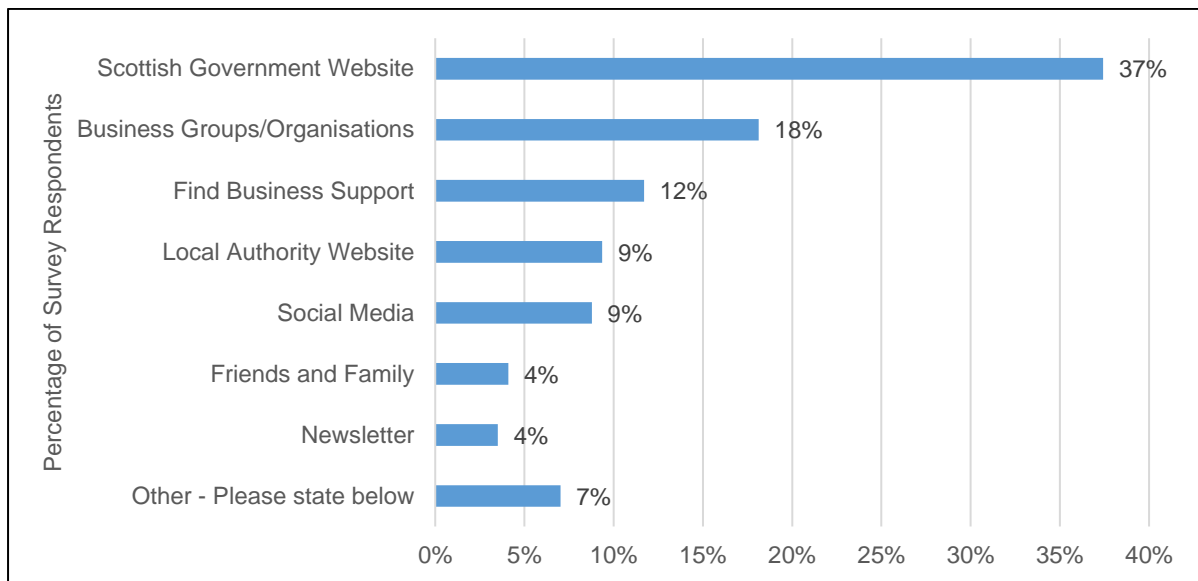


Base: All respondents: 171 (1 Not Answered); base minimum: 'Very Useful': 28

Communication

Survey respondents were asked how they heard about the BVF. The most common response was the Scottish Government website (37%) followed by Business Groups/Organisations (18%) and the 'Find Business Support' website (12%) (Figure 22).

FIGURE 22: SURVEY RESPONSES ON HOW BUSINESSES HEARD OF THE BVF

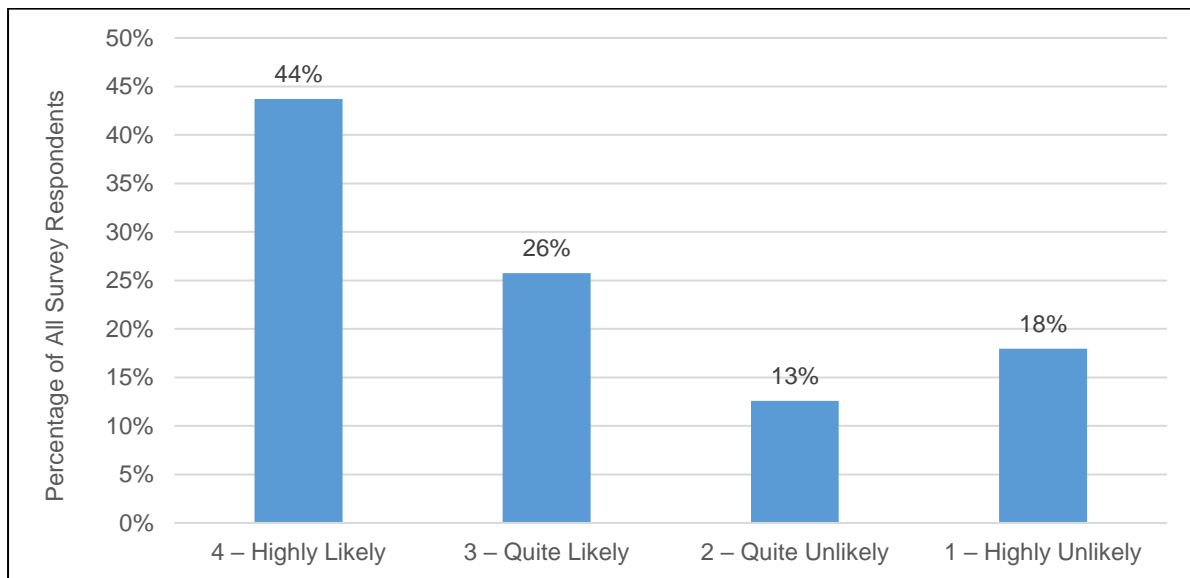


Base: All respondents: 171 (1 Not Answered); base minimum: 'Newsletter': 6

Future support

All businesses surveyed were asked how likely they would be to apply for future funding related to ventilation improvements. Over two thirds of businesses (70%) said they would be quite or highly likely to apply. 18% said that would be highly unlikely (Figure 23).

FIGURE 23: LIKELIHOOD OF APPLYING FOR FUTURE VENTILATION RELATED FUNDING



Base: All respondents: 167 (5 Not Answered) Base minimum: 'Highly Unlikely': 29 total

Respondents were asked what changes they thought could be made to future business funding aimed at improving ventilation. While respondents provided a wide variety of suggestions, the responses fell broadly into three main themes:

- Improve replies and reply timescales to applicant businesses, and general communication.
- Reduce restrictions to applications such as business type, resulting in fewer rejected applications.

- Reconsider the payment and reimbursement mechanism in place, which necessitated premises to pay for the improvements and then reclaim their costs, which caused hesitation for some applicants.

Conclusions

This report has brought together management information data and survey data to provide an assessment of the outputs and impacts of the Business Ventilation Fund and to learn lessons for future business support schemes.

The evidence reviewed indicates that the BVF was successful in meeting its objective to help businesses to improve ventilation but for a lower number of businesses than was anticipated. It is likely that disruptions due to the Omicron variant may have played a role in the low uptake. However, business feedback suggests issues with the applications and claims process and the design of the fund may also have played a part. The high variation in acceptance rates across local authorities illustrated in the management information data may also indicate inconsistencies in the approach to assessing applications.

The business survey findings suggest that the fund addressed a key business need for applicants and was fundamental to businesses improving their ventilation, with most businesses stating that they would not have made improvements to their ventilation without the funding.

The BVF also appears to have had a positive impact on consumer confidence in the safety of business premises who received funding and on business awareness and monitoring of ventilation in their premises.



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