



# **Standards Awareness Survey**

**Research Report for**

**The General Dental Council**

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**Enventure Research**

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# Executive Summary

## Research aims, methodology and survey output

All dental professionals registered with the General Dental Council (GDC) agree to adhere to a set of professional standards set by the GDC which aim to protect both patients and dental professionals. A new version of these standards came into effect in September 2013.

Enventure Research was commissioned to conduct an online survey of registrants to understand awareness and usage of the new standards and how registrants think they should be communicated to dental professionals.

Between 26 March and 10 April 2014, the survey was sent via email to a sample of 3,500 registrants, ~~broadly approximately~~ representative of the GDC register in terms of the split between dentists and DCPs and gender. This was followed up by a reminder email sent to those yet to respond.

In total, 843 GDC registrants took part in the Standards Awareness Survey. This provides a robust sample size to draw results from. Taking into account the number of invalid email addresses, this equates to a response rate of 25%.

## Key findings

### Awareness of the standards

All <sup>GR(731)</sup> registrants who took part in the survey were aware that the GDC sets standards that all registrants must abide by. Almost all were also aware that a new set of standards called 'Standards for the Dental Team' had come into effect on 30 September 2013 (93%).

The most common methods of being made aware of the new standards were when receiving a copy through the post (66%) or hearing about it through the GDC's Gazette newsletter (56%).

### Accessing the standards

By far the most popular suggested way of ever accessing the standards was via a hard copy of the booklet (75%), followed by a significant proportion who had also accessed the Standards document online on the GDC website (48%). The most common method for usually accessing the standards was also via a hard copy of the booklet (61%).

### Frequency of use

The most common frequency for referring to the standards was once every three months (25%) and over half of survey respondents said that they referred to them every four to six months or more frequently (a total of 58%).

Almost half said that they had referred to the standards within the last month (48%).

### Reasons for use

The majority of respondents said that they had last referred to the standards because they wanted to familiarise themselves with the standards to help improve their performance and competence as a professional (73%). A smaller proportion said that they had referred to them because they were unsure about what they should do in a particular situation (14%).

All Principles within the Standards document were consulted in some way. The most popular Principles were 'Principle 3 – Obtain valid consent' (48%), 'Principle 7 – Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills' (46%) and 'Principle 1 – Put patients' interests first' (42%).

### **Opinion of the standards**

Almost all survey respondents found the guidance in the standards in some way useful (43% somewhat useful, 52% very useful). When asked how far they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements, large proportions of respondents agreed that:

- The language in the document is clear and easy to understand (91%)
- The standards help me understand what is expected of me as a GDC registrant (92%)
- It is easy to find the information I need in the standards (82%)

The statements 'the standards helped me answer my question' and 'the standards still allow me to use my professional judgement' received slightly lower levels of agreement (76% each), with a larger proportion of respondents stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with these two statements.

### **Increasing awareness of the standards**

When asked what would make them refer to the standards more, the most popular suggestion was to have a smart phone/tablet application (36%). However, a quarter of respondents said that nothing would make them refer to the standards more (24%).

The majority of respondents said that offering CPD for completing a short questionnaire on the standards would make registrants more aware of the standards (73%) and a large proportion also suggested sending emails to registrants (50%). Offering CPD was also seen as the most useful way of making registrants more aware of the standards (49%).

## Introduction and Research Aims

The General Dental Council (GDC) is an organisation which regulates all practicing dental professionals within the United Kingdom, protecting patients and members of the public. All dental professionals, including dentists and dental care professionals (DCPs) are required to be registered with the GDC to practise.

As part of their registration with the GDC, all dental professionals agree to adhere to a set of professional standards set by the GDC which aim to protect both patients and dental professionals. A new version of these standards came into effect in September 2013.

To understand awareness and usage of the new standards and how registrants think they should be communicated to dental professionals, the GDC commissioned Enventure Research, an independent research agency, to undertake an online survey of registrants.

The research was conducted independently by Enventure Research to ensure a true and accurate reflection of registrants' views was achieved.

## Methodology

An online survey approach was chosen for this research in order to administer the survey to a large number of GDC registrants. A questionnaire was designed by the GDC and Enventure Research which aimed to ascertain levels of awareness and usage of the standards, with questions covering the topic areas of:

- Awareness of the new standards
- Method of accessing
- Frequency of use
- Reasons for use
- Usefulness of the standards
- Suggestions for increasing awareness and usage

For reference, a copy of the questionnaire can be found in **Appendix A**.

A sample of 3,500 registrants was drawn from a list of registrants who had previously opted in to take part in further research with the GDC and Enventure Research and from the overall GDC registrant database. The sample was approximately representative of the GDC register in terms of the split between dentists and DCPs and gender.

The survey was hosted online by Enventure Research between 26 March and 10 April 2014. All GDC registrants within the sample received a personalised email invitation which contained a unique link to take part in the survey. This was followed up by a reminder email sent to those yet to respond.

## Survey Output

In total, 843 GDC registrants took part in the Standards Awareness Survey. This provides a robust sample size to draw results from. Taking into account the number of invalid email addresses, this equates to a response rate of 25%.

## Interpretation of the quantitative data

This report contains several tables and charts that present survey results. In some instances, the responses may not add up to 100%. There are several reasons why this might happen:

- The question may have allowed each respondent to give more than one answer
- Only the most common responses may be shown in the table or chart
- Individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number so the total may come to 99% or 101%
- A response of between 0% and 1% will be shown as 0%.

As the online survey was undertaken with a sample of registrants (3,500 registrants), and not the entire population (102,800 registrants), all results are subject to sampling tolerances.

For example, when interpreting the results to a survey question which all respondents answered (843), where 50% of registrants in the sample responded with a particular answer, there is a 95% chance that this result would not vary by more than +/- 3.4 percentage points had the result been obtained from the entire registrant population.

Where not all survey respondents have answered a question, as not all questions were relevant to all respondents, the sample size is sometimes smaller. The smaller the sample size, the less reliable the result tends to be. For example, 684 respondents were asked to indicate which 'principle' of the standards they had consulted (Q9). Here, the sampling tolerance would be +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Subgroup analysis has been undertaken to explore the results provided by different registrant groups and other key subgroups such as the registrant type and gender. This analysis has only been carried out where the sample size is seen to be sufficient for comment (over 100). Where sample sizes were not large enough, subgroups have been combined (for example, age groups) to create a larger group.

## Weighting of survey sample

A stratified sample was used to ensure a representative sample was achieved in terms of registrant type and gender. Therefore, the returned sample was generally representative of the GDC registrant database. However, weights have been applied to the returned data to ensure that it is as close to the profile of registrants as possible, using the GDC registrant database supplied by the GDC to Enventure in November 2013. Weighting adjusts the proportions of certain groups within a sample to match more closely to the proportions in the target population. All results presented within this report are based on the weighted data.

A full set of data tabulations for this survey can be found in **Appendix B**.

# Research Findings

## Online survey respondent profile

In terms of registrant type, 39% were dentists and 61% were DCPs, accurately reflecting the make-up of the current GDC register. **Table 1** provides the breakdown of respondents by dental professional role. Respondents were able to select more than one role, meaning that the percentages in the table below add up to more than 100%. Of the 327 dentists who responded, 40 were specialists.

**Table 1 – Dental professional role**

Registrant type	Number	Percentage
Dental nurse	414	49%
Dentist	327	39%
Dental hygienist	60	7%
Dental therapist	39	5%
Dental technician	35	4%
Orthodontic therapist	7	1%
Clinical dental technician	6	1%

**Table 2** below provides a demographic breakdown of respondents and **Table 3** presents their country of residence.

**Table 2 – Demographic profile of respondents**

Demographic	Number	Percentage
Male	228	27%
Female	614	73%
Refused	1	0%
16-21	1	0%
22-30	150	18%
31-40	239	28%
41-50	234	28%
51-60	171	20%
61-65	24	3%
66+	17	2%
Refused	6	1%

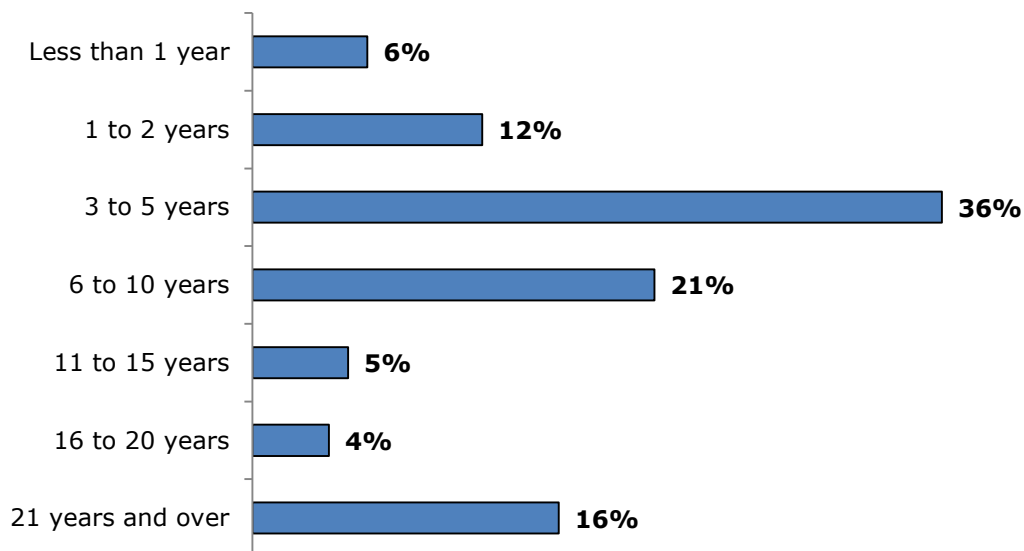
**Table 3 – Country of residence**

Country	Number	Percentage
England	666	79%
Scotland	84	10%
Wales	34	4%
Northern Ireland	25	3%
Other	33	4%



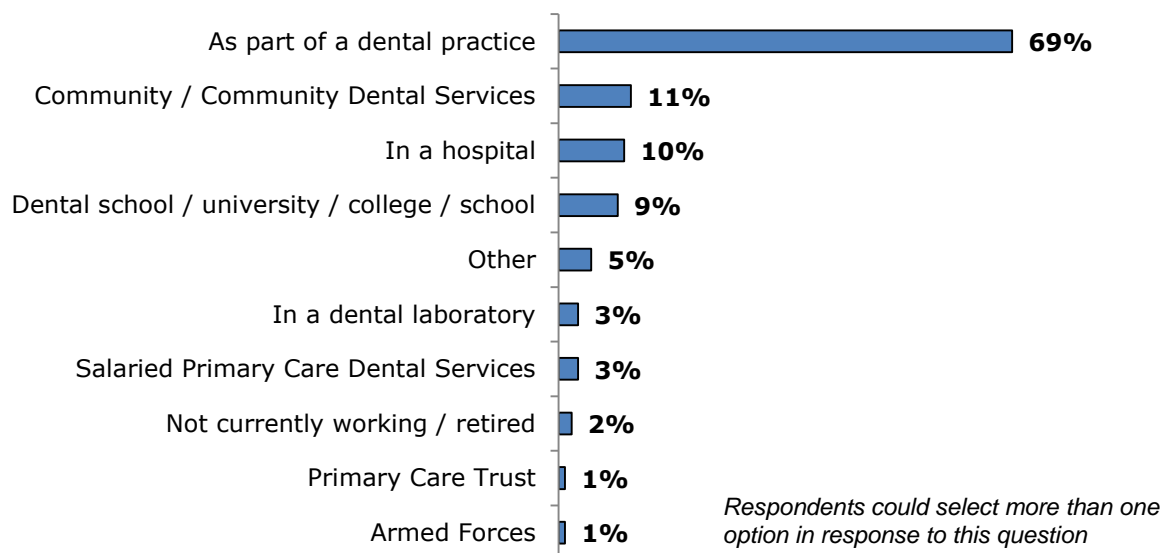
**Figure 1** below shows the number of years respondents had been registered with the GDC. Just over a third had been registered with the GDC for between 3 and 5 years (36%).

**Figure 1 – Length of time on the GDC register**  
**Base: All respondents (843)**



The majority of respondents indicated that they worked as part of a dental practice (69%). One in nine worked within the community / community dental services (11%) and a further 10% worked in hospitals. This is shown in **Figure 2**.

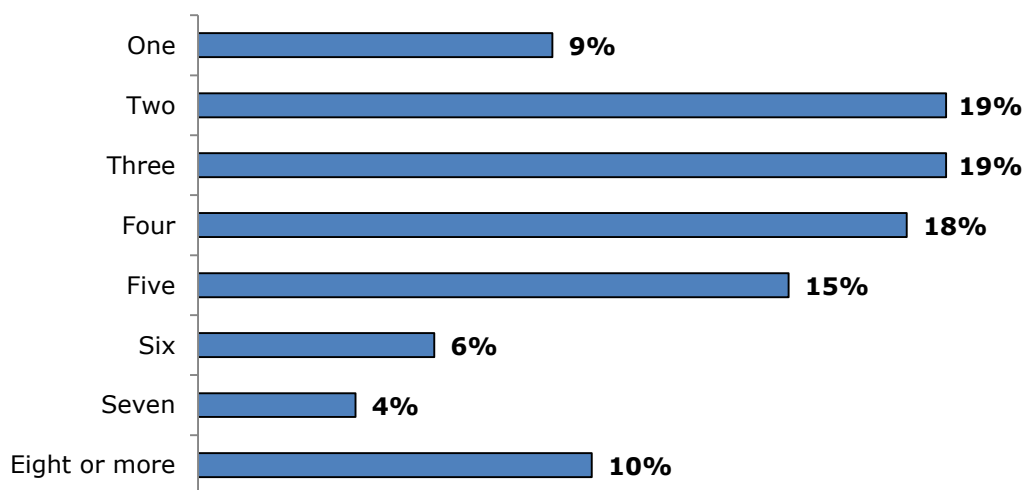
**Figure 2 – Where do you work?**  
**Base: All respondents (843)**



Respondents who indicated that they worked in a dental practice were asked how many dentists worked there. The range of responses can be seen in **Figure 3** below. Almost half indicated that there were three dentists or fewer where they worked (a total of 47%).

**Figure 3 – How many dentists (including yourself, if applicable) are there in the dental practice where you work?**

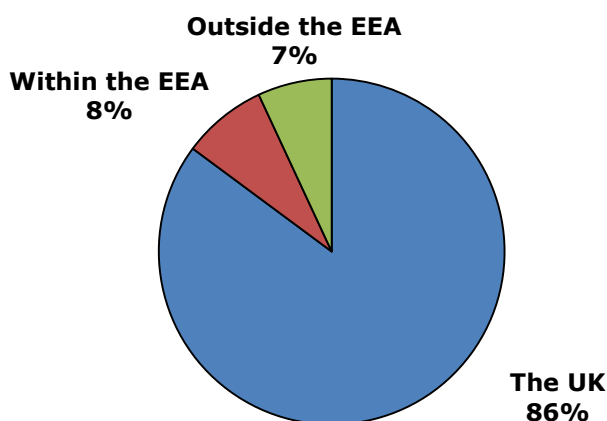
**Base: Respondents working as part of a dental practice (583)**



The majority of those who took part in the survey gained their primary qualification in the UK. 8% indicated that they had gained their primary qualification in a country within the European Economic Area (EEA)<sup>1</sup> and 7% had gained it in a country outside the EEA.

**Figure 4 – Where did you gain your primary qualification?**

**Base: All respondents (843)**



<sup>1</sup> The European Economic Area includes the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland

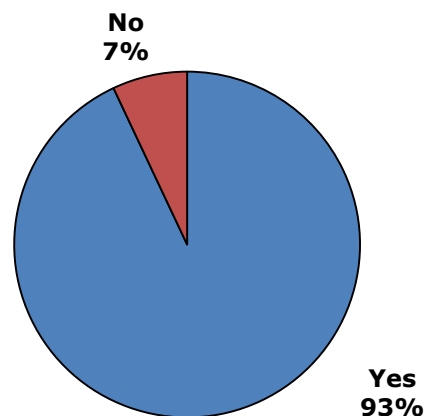
## Awareness of the standards

All [GR(732)] respondents who took part in the survey were aware that the GDC sets standards that all registrants must abide by. Any potential respondent who indicated that they were not aware of the Standards was asked not to take part in the survey.

Almost all respondents indicated that they were aware of the new set of standards called the 'Standards for the Dental Team' which came into effect on 30 September 2013 (93%), as shown below in **Figure 5**.

**Figure 5 – Are you aware that a new set of standards called the 'Standards for the Dental Team' came into effect on 30 September 2013?**

**Base: All respondents (843)**

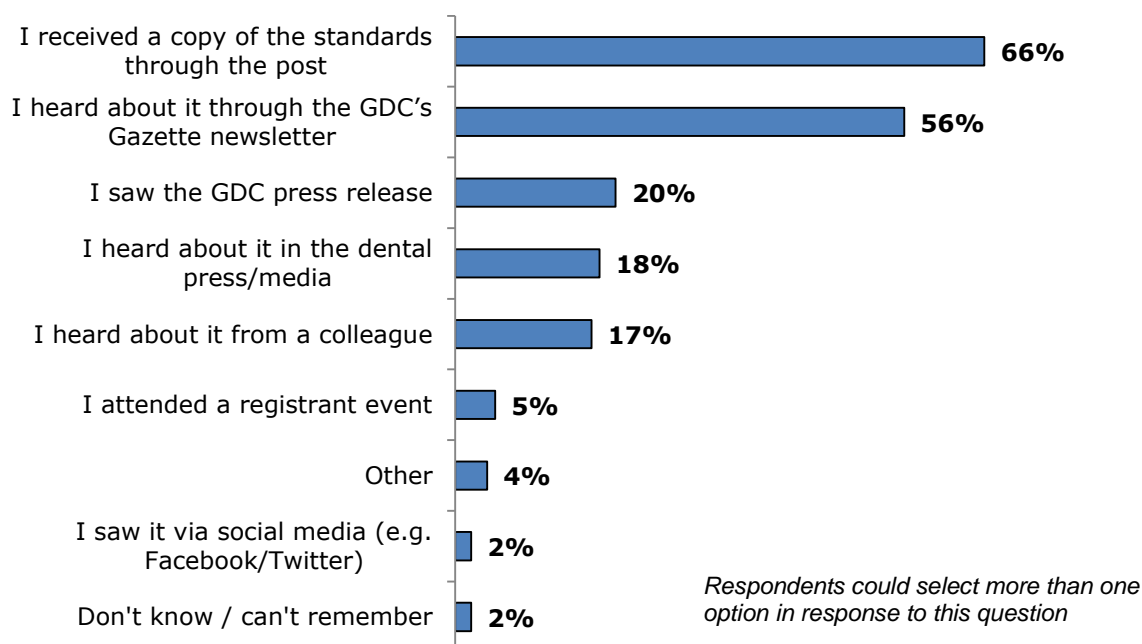


Analysis of the subgroups highlights that those aged 22 to 30 were slightly less likely to be aware of the new set of standards at 90% when compared to other age groups, particularly those aged 51 to 60 at 96%.

Those who were aware of the new set of standards were asked to state how they were made aware of them, selecting all options that applied. **Figure 6** presents the results to this question, showing that the majority of respondents were made aware when they received a copy of the standards through the post (66%). A quarter of respondents selected only this option (26%), indicating that this was the only way they had been made aware of the new version. A further 56% indicated that they had heard about the new version through the GDC's Gazette newsletter.

**Figure 6 – How were you made aware that there was a new version of the standards being launched by the GDC?**

**Base: Respondents who were aware of the new standards (783)**



'Other' ways of being made aware included via dental school/university, via dental journals and via training.

Subgroup analysis highlights that dentist respondents and male respondents were more likely to have been made aware of the new version of the standards via the Gazette newsletter, the GDC press release and via the dental press/media when compared with DCP and female respondents. These findings are shown in **Table 4** below.

**Table 4 – How were you made aware that there was a new version of the standards being launched by the GDC? By registrant role and gender**

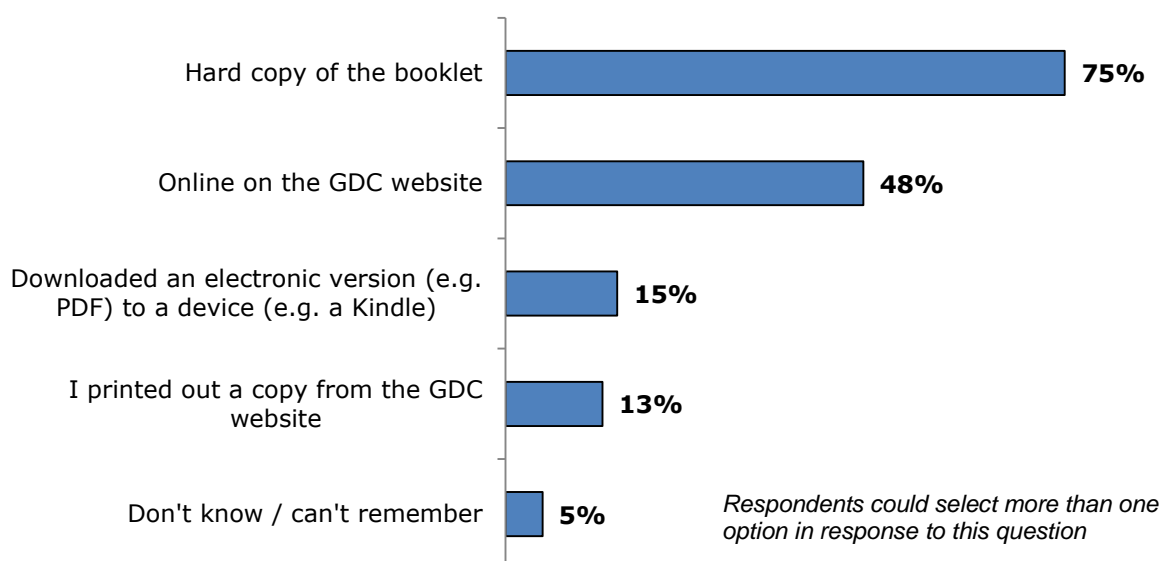
Method of awareness	Overall	Dentist	DCP	Male	Female
I heard about it through the GDC's Gazette newsletter	56%	61%	53%	64%	53%
I saw the GDC press release	20%	29%	14%	29%	17%
I heard about it in the dental press/media	18%	29%	12%	28%	15%

## Accessing the standards

All respondents were asked to indicate all ways that they had ever accessed the Standards document, selecting as many options as applied, shown below in **Figure 7**. Three quarters of respondents said they had accessed the standards via a hard copy of the booklet (75%), followed by almost half who said that they had accessed the standards online on the GDC website (48%). Smaller proportions indicated that they had accessed the standards via a downloaded electronic version (15%) or a printed copy from the GDC website (13%).

### Figure 7 – Which of these ways have you ever used to access the Standards document?

Base: All respondents (843)



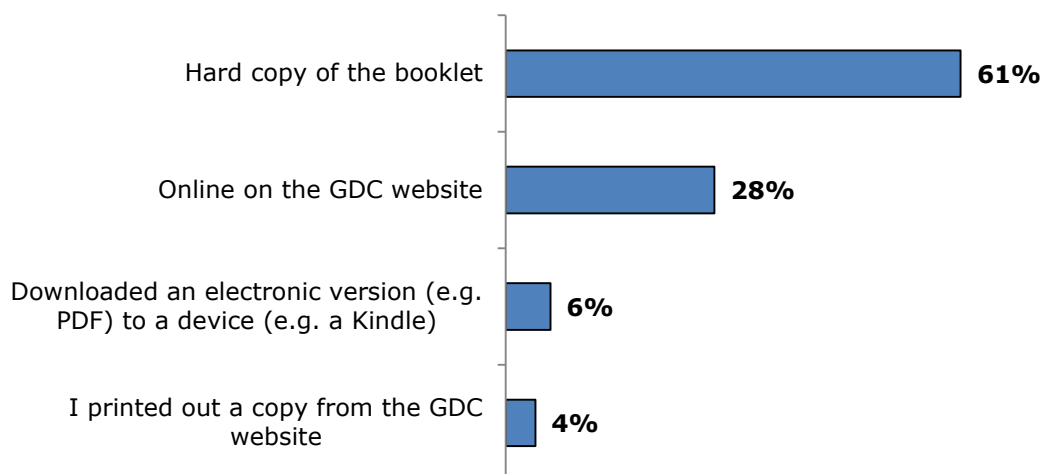
Subgroup analysis of the results to this question shows that a larger proportion of dentist respondents said that they had accessed the standards online on the GDC website at 55% when compared to DCP respondents at 44%, particularly dental nurses at 42%. By contrast, a larger proportion of DCP respondents indicated that they had printed out a copy from the GDC website at 15% (dental nurses at 16%) compared to dentists at 10%.

In terms of gender, a larger proportion of male respondents indicated that they had accessed the standards online on the GDC website (56%) and that they had downloaded an electronic version to a device (21%) when compared to female respondents (45% and 12% respectively).

The survey then asked respondents to state how they usually accessed the standards, selecting only one option of those they had indicated in the previous question. **Figure 8** shows that the majority of respondents usually accessed the standards via a hard copy of the booklet (61%), followed by 28% who usually accessed the standards online on the GDC website. One in sixteen said that they had downloaded an electronic version to a device (6%) and just 4% said that they had printed out a copy from the GDC website.

**Figure 8 – Of the options you have selected, how do you usually access the standards?**

**Base: Respondents who could recall how they had previously accessed the Standards document (795)**



The sample highlights that a larger proportion of DCP respondents and female respondents said that they usually accessed the standards via a hard copy of the booklet at 65% and 64% respectively when compared to dentist respondents and male respondents at 56% and 55% respectively. Dentist respondents were slightly more likely to access the standards online on the GDC website at 34% compared to DCP respondents at 25%.

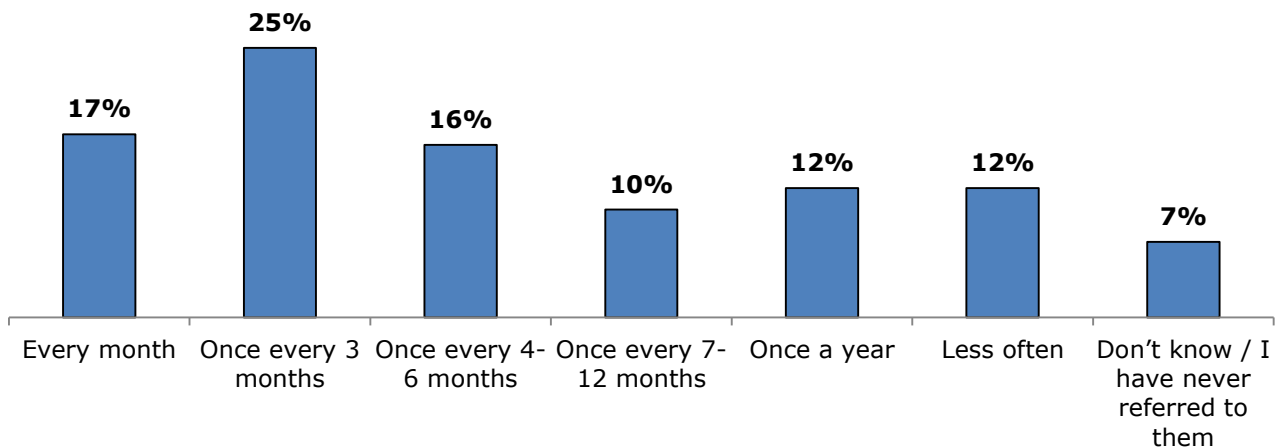
Those who had been registered with the GDC for 21 years and over were also more likely to access the standards via a hard copy of the booklet at 66% when compared to respondents who had been on the GDC register for a shorter amount of time.

In terms of age, younger respondents aged 22 to 30 were more likely to access the standards online at 38%, compared to those aged 51 and over at 24%. Those in the 51 and over age bracket were more likely to state that they usually accessed the standards via a hard copy of the booklet at 66%.

## Frequency of use

Respondents were asked to state how often they referred to the standards. As shown in **Figure 9**, the majority of respondents said that they referred to the standards once every 4 to 6 months or more frequently (a total of 58%). The most common frequency of referring to the standards was once every 3 months, suggested by 25% of all respondents, followed by a further 17% who said that they referred to them every month.

**Figure 9 – How often do you refer to the standards?**  
Base: All respondents (843)

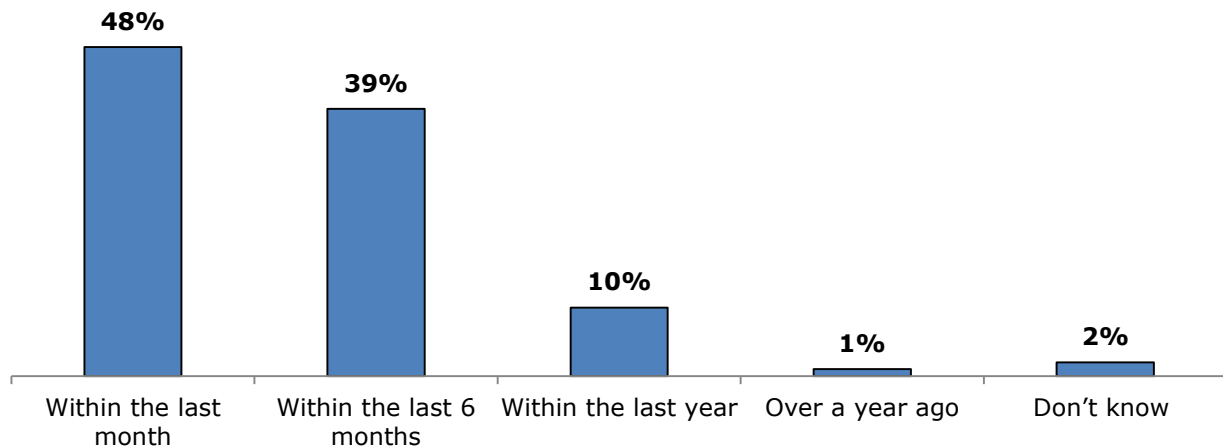


Subgroup analysis of the results to this question highlights that a larger proportion of those who had been registered with the GDC for 1 to 2 years said that they referred to the standards once every 3 months (36%) when compared to other respondents.

Also dentist respondents and male respondents were more likely to state that they referred to the standards once a year at 15% and 16% respectively when compared to DCP and female respondents at 10% and 11% respectively.

Respondents who indicated that they referred to the standards at least once a year were also asked to indicate when they last had referred to them. Almost half said that they had referred to the standards within the last month (48%), followed by a further 39% who had referred to them within the last six months. The results to this question are shown in **Figure 10** below.

**Figure 10 – When was the last time you referred to the standards?**  
**Base: Respondents who referred to the standards at least once a year (684)**



The sample highlights that a larger proportion of those who had been registered with the GDC for between 6 and 15 years and those aged between 41 and 50 said that they last referred to the standards within the last month at 53% and 54% respectively when compared with respondents who had been registered for a different length of time or of a different age group.

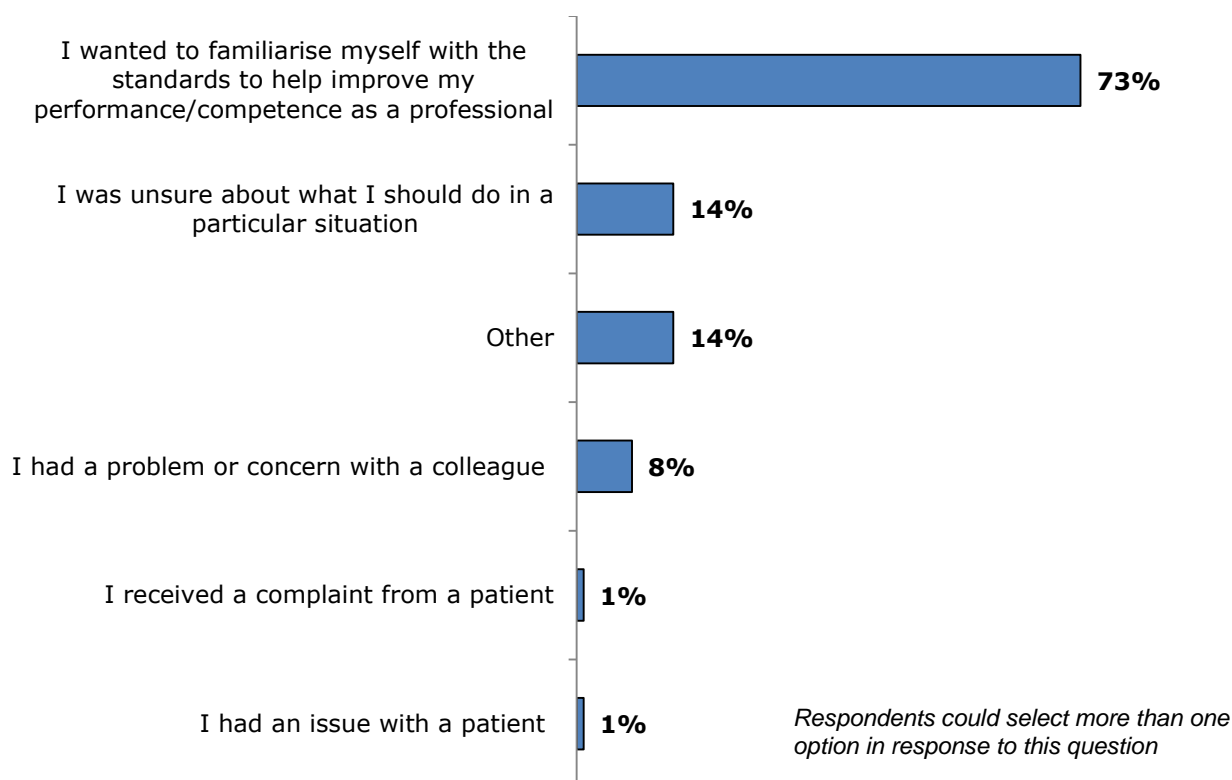


## Reasons for use

Respondents who indicated that they had referred to the standards at least once a year were asked to state the reason or reasons that they had referred to them. By far the most common reason for referring to the standards was 'to familiarise myself with the standards to help improve my performance/competence as a professional', suggested by 73% of respondents. A further 14% said that they referred to them because they were unsure about what to do in a particular situation. The full range of responses are shown in **Figure 11** below.

### Figure 11 – Thinking about the last time you referred to the standards, why did you refer to them?

Base: Respondents who referred to the standards at least once a year (684)

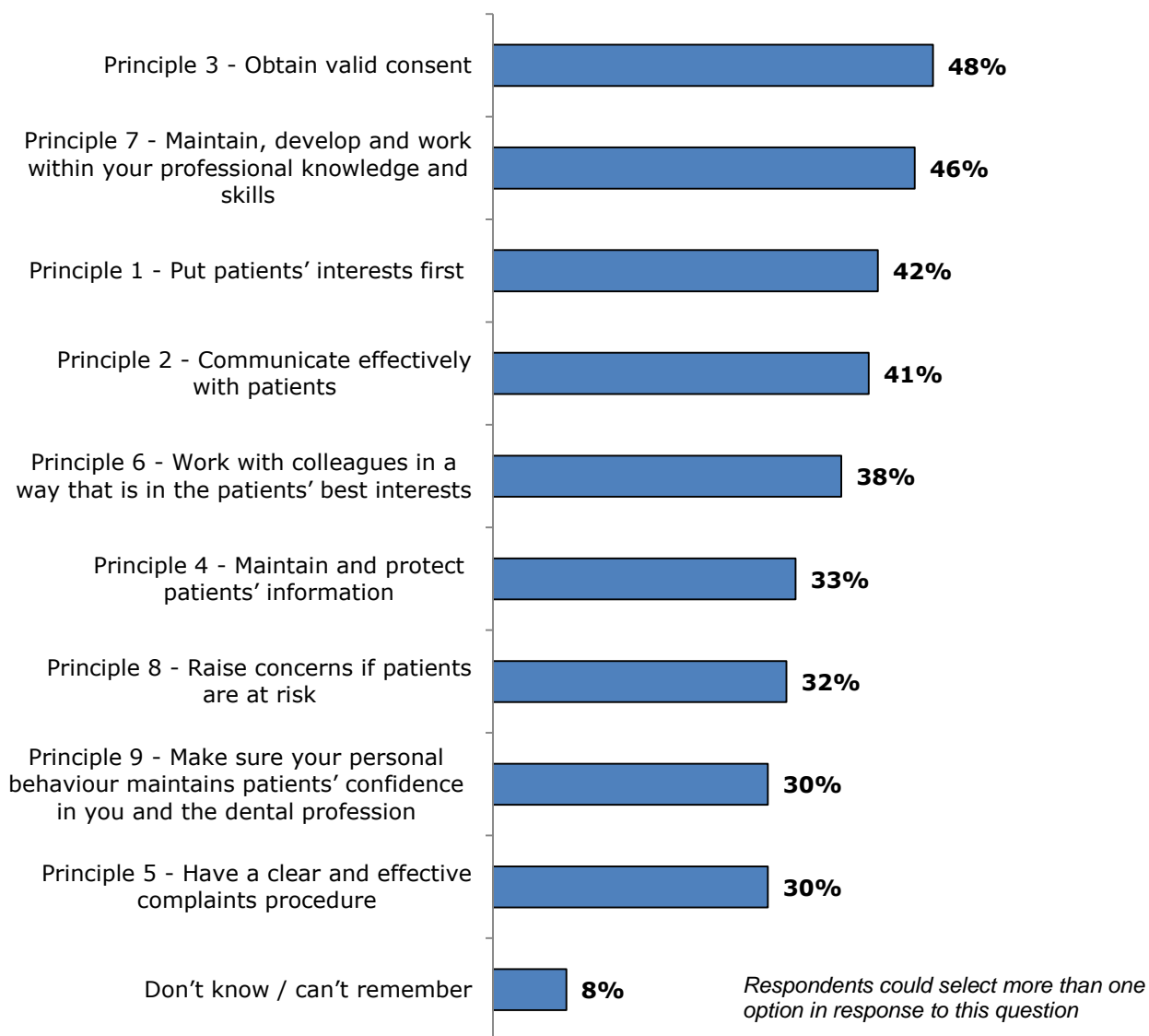


'Other' reasons suggested for last referring to the Standards generally related to the respondent's role as an educator, trainer or manager and their need to update others on the new standards or to formulate new policy.

Analysis of the subgroups shows that a larger proportion of those aged 31 to 40 had referred to the standards because they were unsure about what they should do in a particular situation at 19%. Also those aged between 41 and 50 and those who had been registered with the GDC for less than two years were more likely to have referred to the standards to familiarise themselves at 81% and 82% respectively.

The same respondents were also asked to state which principle or principles of the standards they consulted, selecting as many as applied. As can be seen in **Figure 12** below, all nine principles were consulted in some way. The most popular principles to be consulted were 'Principle 3 – Obtain valid consent' at 48%, 'Principle 7 – Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills' at 46% and 'Principle 1 – Put patients' interests first' at 42%.

**Figure 12 – Which 'principle' of the standards did you consult?**  
**Base: Respondents who referred to the standards at least once a year (684)**



Subgroup analysis highlights that a larger proportion of dentist respondents and male respondents suggested that they had consulted all principles within the standards when compared to DCP and female respondents. The only exception to this was 'Principle 7 – Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills' which was suggested by a slightly larger proportion of DCP respondents at 47% when compared to dentist respondents at 45%. These results are shown in **Table 5** overleaf.

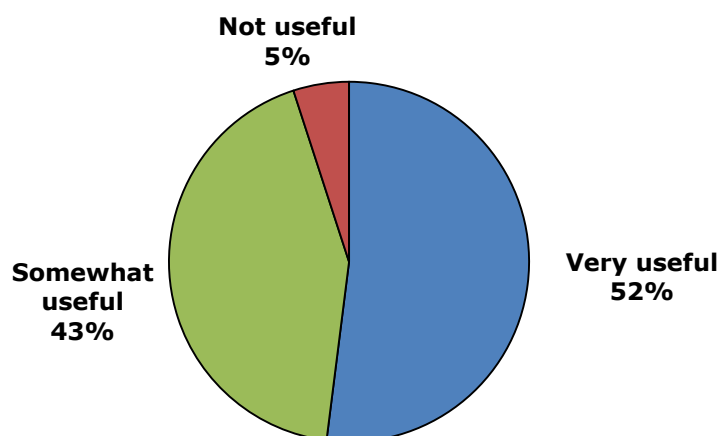
**Table 5 – Which ‘principle’ of the standards did you consult? by registrant type**

<b>Principle</b>	<b><i>Overall</i></b>	<b>Dentist</b>	<b>DCP</b>
Principle 1	42%	48%	39%
Principle 2	41%	50%	36%
Principle 3	48%	60%	41%
Principle 4	33%	40%	28%
Principle 5	30%	39%	24%
Principle 6	38%	43%	35%
Principle 7	46%	45%	47%
Principle 8	32%	40%	27%
Principle 9	30%	36%	27%

## Opinion of the standards

Respondents who had referred to the standards at least once a year were asked to indicate how useful they had found the standards on this occasion. Almost all respondents said that they found the guidance to be in some way useful (a total of 95%), with 52% stating that it was very useful and 43% that it was somewhat useful. Just 5% said that the guidance was not useful, and less than 1% that it was not at all useful (just 1 respondent). This result is shown in **Figure 13** below.

**Figure 13 – Did you find the guidance in the standards useful on this occasion?  
Base: Respondents who referred to the standards at least once a year (684)**

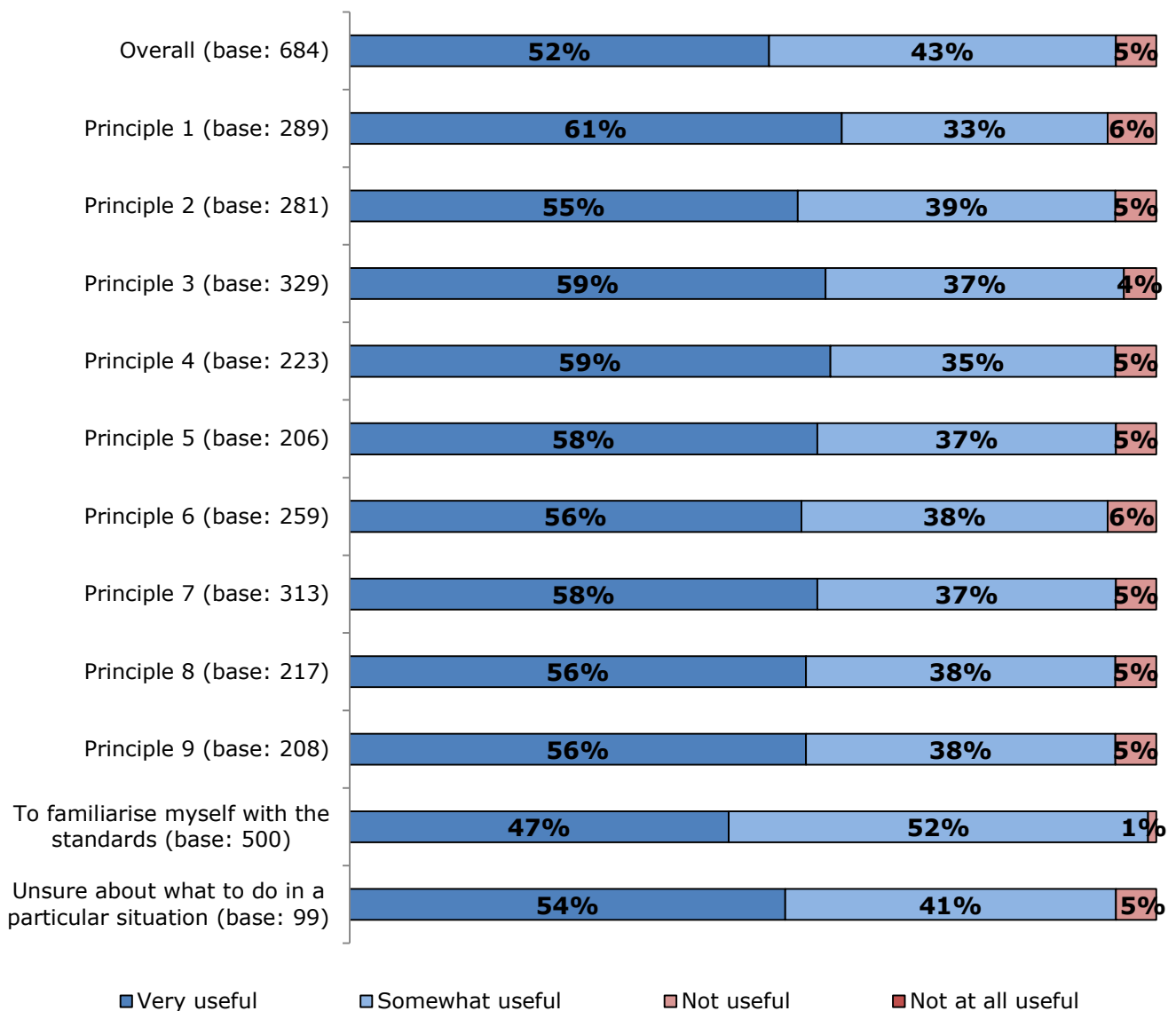


Little difference can be seen between the views of dentist and DCP respondents in answer to this question, with only a slightly larger proportion of dentists stating that the guidance was not useful at 7% compared to DCP respondents at 4%.

Slight variations in usefulness can be seen depending on what Principle respondents referred to. For example, a larger proportion of those who referred to Principle 1 said that they found the guidance very useful at 61% compared to those who referred to Principle 2 at 55%.

Levels of usefulness are also affected by reason for last referring to the standards, with 54% of those who referred to the standards to familiarise themselves stating that the guidance was very useful compared to 47% for those who referred to them because they were unsure about what to do in a particular situation. The results to this question are shown in **Figure 14** overleaf.

**Figure 14 – Did you find the guidance in the standards useful on this occasion?  
By Principle**  
Base: Respondents who referred to the standards at least once a year - various  
(see below)



The same respondents were then asked to state how far they agreed or disagreed with the following series of statements about the standards:

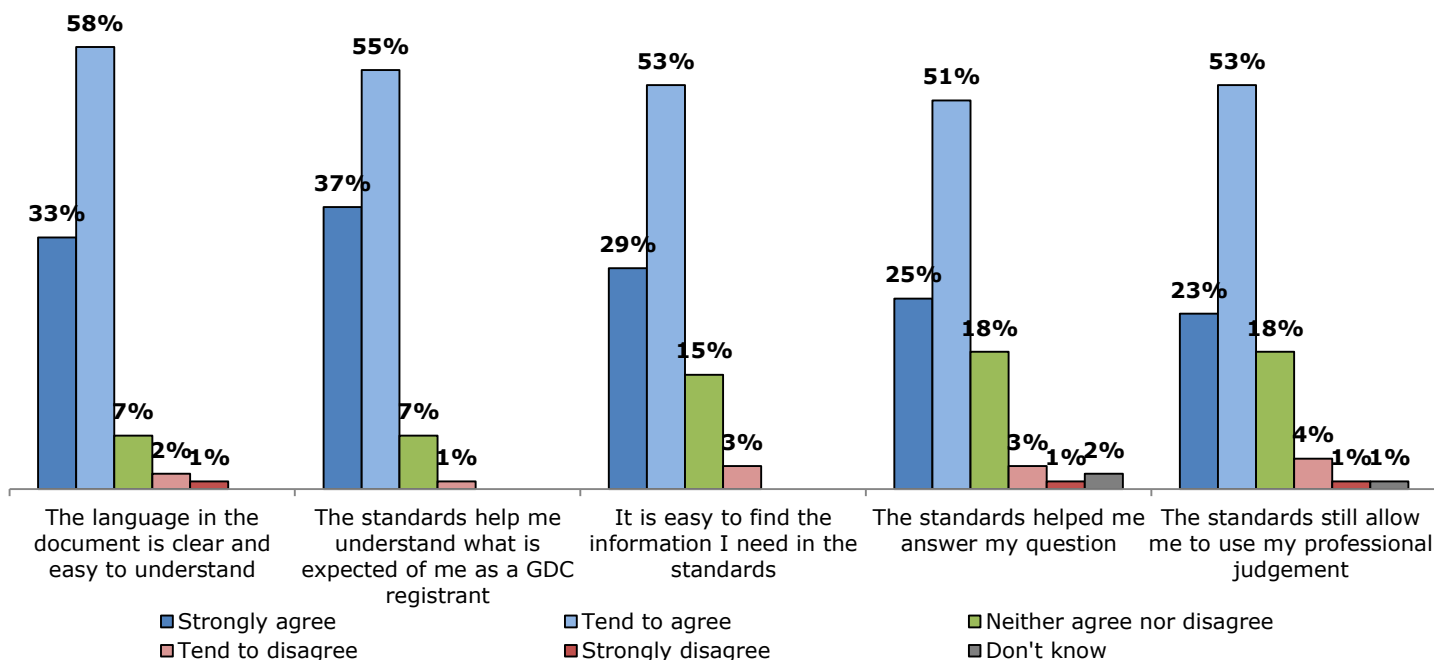
- The language in the document is clear and easy to understand
- The standards help me understand what is expected of me as a GDC registrant
- It is easy to find the information I need in the standards
- The standards helped me answer my question
- The standards still allow me to use my professional judgement

**Figure 15** presents the results to this question for each statement.

As can be seen, the majority of respondents agreed with each statement in some way, with over half stating that they tend to agree.

**Figure 15 – How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the standards?**

**Base: Respondents who referred to the standards at least once a year (684)**



**Table 6** overleaf presents the net level of agreement for each statement overall and by registrant type. The statement ‘the standards help me understand what is expected of me as a GDC registrant’ received the highest overall level of agreement at 92%, closely followed by the statement ‘the language in the document is clear and easy to understand’ with an overall level of agreement of 91%.

The two statements that received the lowest level of agreement ‘the standards helped me answer my question’ and ‘the standards still allow me to use my professional judgement’ (both at 76%) both recorded higher levels of respondents stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed (both at 18%). The sample highlights that DCP respondents were more likely to agree with both of these statements at 80% when compared to dentist respondents at 70%.

**Table 6 – How were you made aware that there was a new version of the standards being launched by the GDC? By registrant role and gender**<sup>[GR(734)]</sup>

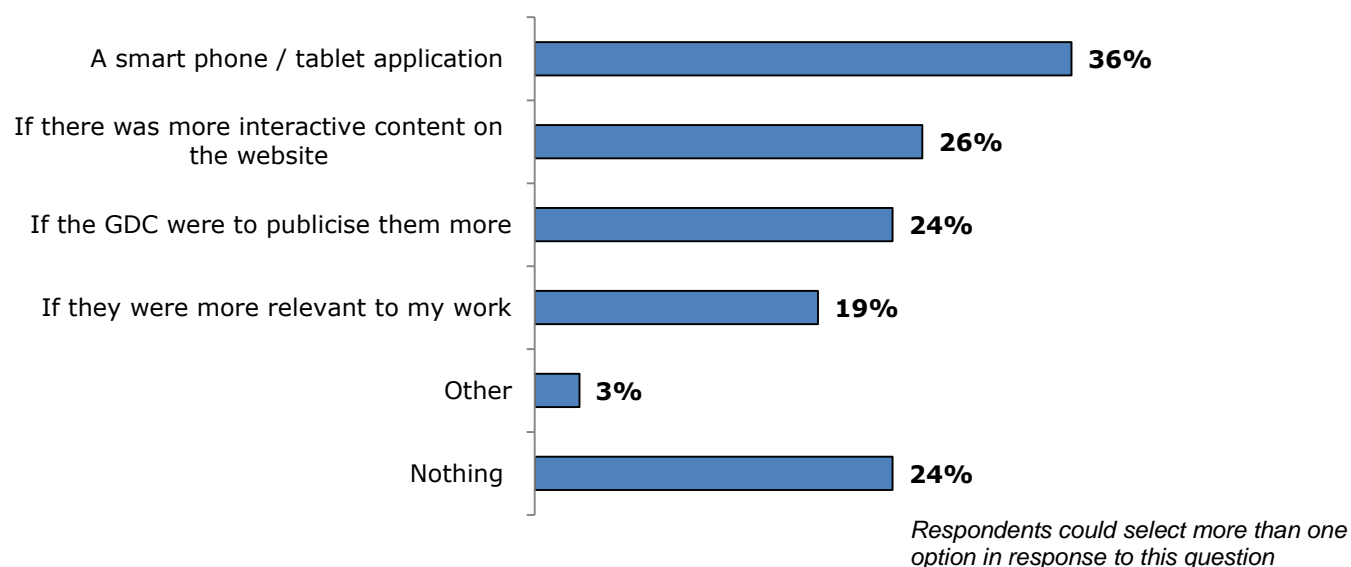
Statement	Overall	Dentist	DCP
The language in the document is clear and easy to understand	91%	89%	91%
The standards help me understand what is expected of me as a GDC registrant	92%	88%	94%
It is easy to find the information I need in the standards	82%	79%	84%
The standards helped me answer my question	76%	70%	80%
The standards still allow me to use my professional judgement	76%	70%	80%

## Increasing awareness of the standards

All respondents were asked what would make them refer to the standards more, selecting as many options as applied. A range of responses were selected, the most popular being a smart phone/tablet application at 36%, followed by more interactive content on the website at 26%. A quarter of respondents said that they would refer to the standards more if the GDC were to publicise them more (24%), but the same proportion also said that nothing would make them refer to the standards more (24%). **Figure 16** shows the results to this question.

**Figure 16 – What would make you refer to the standards more?**

**Base: All respondents (843)**

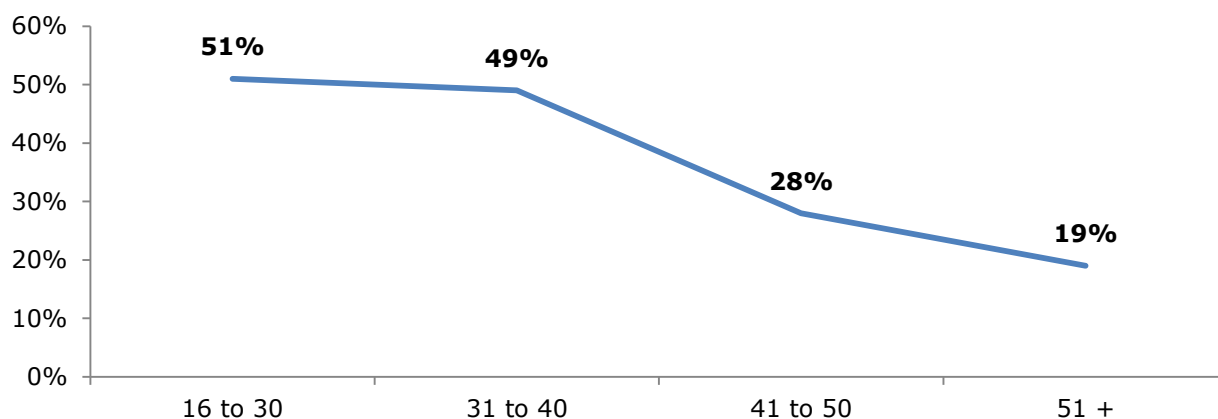


Subgroup analysis of the results to this question highlights that a larger proportion of dentist and male respondents stated that they would refer to the standards more if they were more relevant to their work at 24% and 28% respectively when compared to DCP and female respondents, both at 16%.

The sample also shows that the percentage of those who indicated that a smart phone/tablet application would make them refer to the standards more clearly decreases as the age of respondents increases, as shown in **Figure 17** below.

**Figure 17 – Selecting the option of a smart phone/tablet application by age**

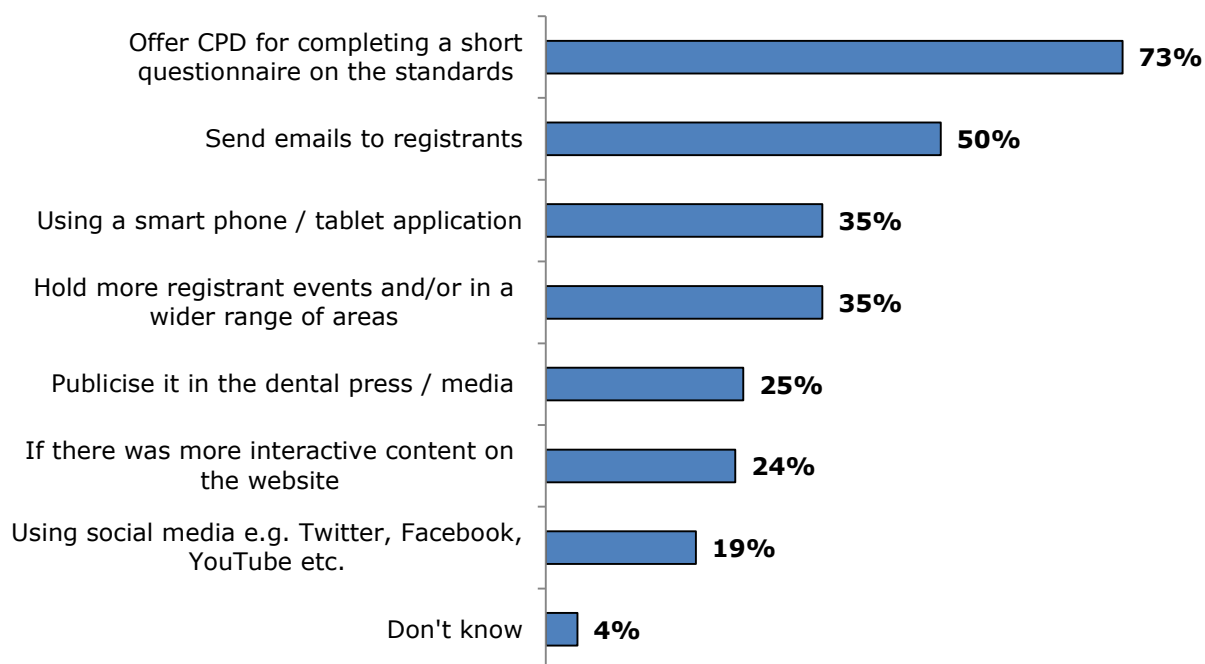
**Base: All respondents (843)**





All respondents were asked to state how the GDC could make registrants more aware of the standards, suggesting as many methods as applied. By far the most popular suggestion for making registrants more aware of the standards was to offer CPD for completing a short questionnaire on the standards at 73%. A further 50% suggested sending emails to registrants, followed by 35% who suggested both using a smart phone / tablet application and holding more registrant events and/or in a wider range of areas. The results to this question are shown in **Figure 18** below.

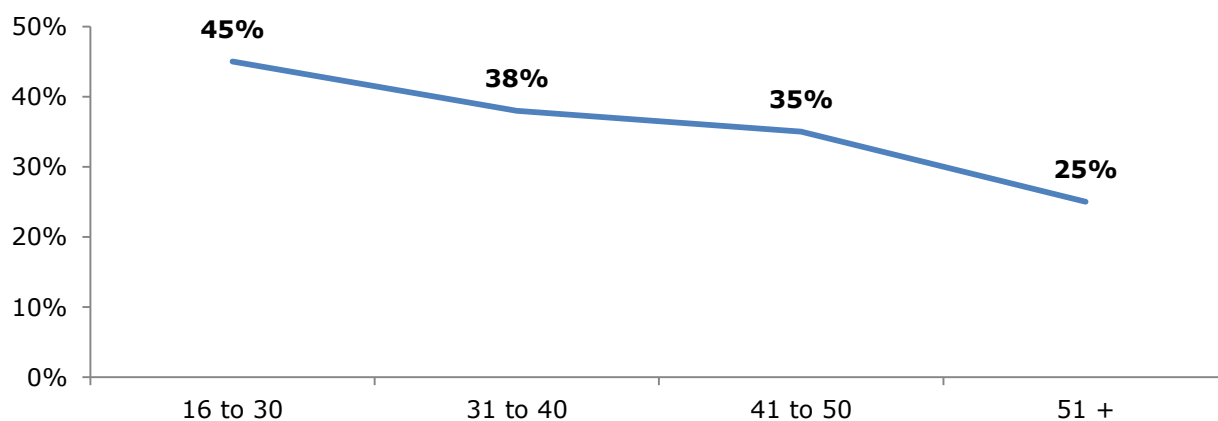
**Figure 18 – How can the GDC make registrants more aware of the standards?  
Base: All respondents (843)**



The sample shows that a larger proportion of DCP respondents suggested offering CPD for completing a short questionnaire at 76% and using social media at 23% when compared to dentist respondents at 69% and 13% respectively. By comparison, a larger proportion of dentist respondents suggested publicising the standards in the dental press/media at 31% when compared with DCP respondents at 22%.

Again, the proportion of respondents who suggested that using a smart phone/tablet application would make registrants more aware of the standards steadily decreases as the age of the respondent increases, as shown in **Figure 19** below.

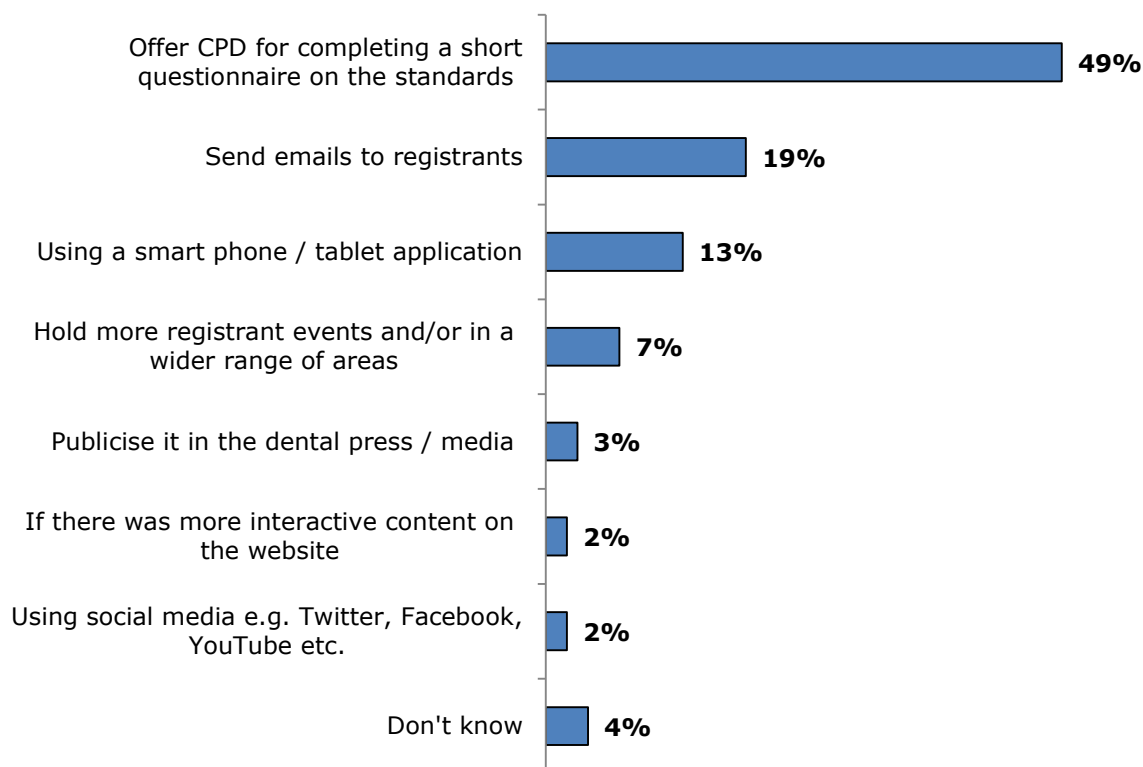
**Figure 19 – Selecting the option of using smart phone/tablet application by age  
Base: All respondents (843)**



Finally, respondents were asked to state which of these would be the most useful way of making registrants more aware of the standards. The ordering of results to this question follow those to the previous question, with offering CPD for completing a short questionnaire on the standards seen as the most useful way of making registrants more aware at 49%, followed by smaller proportions who suggested sending emails to registrants (19%) and using a smart phone / tablet application (13%). **Figure 20** presents the results to this question.

**Figure 20 – Which would be the most useful way of making registrants more aware of the standards?**

**Base: All respondents (843)**



Again, DCP respondents were more likely to suggest that offering CPD would be the most useful way of making registrants more aware of the standards at 52% when compared to dentist respondents at 44%. Dentist respondents, on the other hand, were more likely to suggest using a smart phone/tablet application at 16% when compared to DCP respondents at 11%.

A larger proportion of respondents who had been registered with the GDC for between 3 and 5 years suggested that offering CPD would be the most useful method at 54% compared to other respondents (49% overall).

A larger proportion of respondents aged under 40 suggested using a smart phone/tablet application as the most useful method at a total of 16%, compared to 9% for those aged 41 or over.