

Ruthless Research

The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey

Final report: May 2025

Submitted by

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About Ruthless Research

Ruthless Research is an Edinburgh-based independent research consultancy, through which Ruth Stevenson provides a range of qualitative and quantitative research solutions to organisations who work for the benefit of the community.

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Mental health and wellbeing peer support is happening across all 32 Scottish Local Authority areas.



In the last year, 18,548 individuals have participated in peer support in Scotland, supported by 235 paid and 1,155 unpaid Peer Workers.

Scottish Recovery Network foreword

Thank you to everyone who participated in The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey. By working together we can make sure that peer support gets the recognition it deserves.

The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey is an important part of our work to raise the profile of and value given to mental health peer support in services and communities. It was commissioned to provide a comprehensive snapshot of mental health peer support across Scotland. To improve our understanding of the range of peer support groups, services and activities and the number of people participating and working in peer support.

The survey results complement our wider efforts to showcase the impact of peer support. We will use these findings, together with inspiring examples of Peer Support in Action from Scotland and beyond, to shape a series of Insight Reports. These reports will explore the potential of peer support for mental health in Scotland, while also identifying the key enablers and barriers to its growth. The Insight Reports and our other work with you will feed into the Scottish Government and COSLA [Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan](#) which contains a Strategic Action (2.3) championing peer support in services and communities.

The information gained through the survey is invaluable. There are some clear themes and messages emerging from the wealth of data. They not only highlight the commitment and passion of peer support groups, services and Peer Workers but also the challenges that come with a poorly funded sector relying, to a great extent, on unpaid workers to deliver high quality, values based, intentional support. We will continue to work with you to explore ways to address these challenges.

It is important to identify priorities and actions we can work on together to support, sustain and expand mental health peer support across the country. The survey gives us some indications of possible actions and we look forward to working with others to make these a reality.

Peer support has a key role to play in creating a mental health system powered by lived experience. Let's work together to make it happen!

The Future is Peer

Louise Christie, Director, Scottish Recovery Network

www.scottishrecovery.net

Introduction

Background and context

Scottish Recovery Network is a national initiative which promotes recovery in mental health and has a track record of promoting and supporting the development of mental health peer support and peer roles in organisations and services.

The Scottish Government and COSLA [Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan](#) contains a strategic action (2.3) championing peer support in services and communities. Scottish Recovery Network is the lead delivery partner for this action. To support this work Scottish Recovery Network wished to undertake a research project to better understand current peer support activity and the related workforce in Scotland.

This research project was designed to comprise:

- A survey to map and understand the range of peer support groups, services or activities currently delivering peer support in Scotland;
- A series of interviews to explore some of the initial results;
- Workshops to explore the findings with key networks.

The report that follows discusses the findings from Phase 1 of the research (the survey), providing a snapshot of peer support provision in Scotland in 2024.

Methodology

Independent researcher Ruth Stevenson was commissioned to design, manage and analyse 'The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey!' The survey was available to complete online between 15 August and 13 October 2024 and took around 15 minutes to complete in full. Those that met the following definition were asked and encouraged to complete the survey:

Peer support is a mutual relationship where people with shared or similar experiences support each other especially as they move through challenging times. Peer support exists in different forms such as peer support groups and paid peer workers in mental health services. But all peer support is rooted in hope, sharing experiences and an equal, intentional relationship. Through this relationship people explore together and work towards recovery.

We would like to hear from you if your group, service or activity:

- Hosts one-to-one or group peer support as defined above
- AND the primary focus of this peer support is **mental health and wellbeing**
- AND you deliver some or all of this peer support in Scotland

Q: Are you able to provide detailed information about such a group, service or activity? Yes (continue), No (close)

In this survey and report they are hereafter referred to as 'peer support groups, services or activities'.

The survey was launched in the Scottish Recovery Network August e-newsletter and was further cascaded out by email and social media.

105 peer support groups, services or activities completed the survey in full and this data has been analysed in the report that follows.

The dataset contains the results of a focused search for peer support in Scotland and every effort was taken to make this dataset as complete as possible. However, it is acknowledged that some peer support groups, services or activities may have provided incomplete or incorrect information, and that others may not have filled in the survey at all.

Please note that throughout the report:

- Percentage totals may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding
- Percentages greater than 0 that cannot be rounded to 1% are represented by a *

A note on interpreting the findings

Our achieved sample of 105 peer support services is very strong and we are satisfied that it provides us with a useful snapshot of the sector as it currently stands. Along the way we worked hard to encourage the right services to respond, for example:

- We allowed a two-month period for completion;
- We provided a clear description of peer support and the type of services eligible to participate;
- We kept a weekly record of response by Local Authority area, and targeted communications to areas with low response;
- We kept a list of responders and host organisations, and targeted communications to known non-responders;
- We removed any duplicate or ineligible responses.

However, we acknowledge that our sample is unlikely to be complete. Some peer support services may not have heard about the survey, some may not have wanted to complete the survey, some may have found it too difficult of time consuming, and some may simply not recognise that the service they provide is peer support. This means that we may be under-reporting the scale of peer support in Scotland.

We are also aware that some services will have completed the survey just once to cover their full national provision, whereas others will have split their national provision into geographic or operational component parts and completed the survey once for each. This inconsistency is important to remember when interpreting any findings relating to scale of operation because it means that it makes some of the bigger services appear smaller.

We also know that it can be difficult for services to provide data, for example:

- Some more informal services may not have systems in place to collect data;
- Some services might collect data in a different format to the format that asked for;
- Services that deliver in partnership might not be able to access data easily.

We anticipated this and built mitigation mechanisms into the survey, for example:

- We reduced the survey length and only asked for data that we felt would be genuinely necessary and useful in understanding the sector;
- We did our best to only ask questions that would be realistic to expect services to answer, and we tried to present these in a clear and straightforward way;
- We provided multiple ways to express participation data;
- We included comment boxes allowing services to explain their answers or note queries or anomalies if they couldn't provide exactly what we asked for;
- We later approached some responding services by email to fill in questions left blank or answer questions about unclear or unusual responses.

We believe that our results are as accurate and complete as possible in the circumstances, but we feel that all of these challenges are important to keep in mind when reading the report that follows.

Peer support in Scotland in 2024

The words of the peer support groups, services or activities – gathered via open questions in the survey – provide context for the data that follows in this report.



About peer support

A powerful way for people experiencing mental health challenges to connect with others who really understand what it feels like.

It's the only thing that really changes people's lives in the long term! Connecting with others who know the path you've been on is life changing.

Peer support works

We see first-hand the positive impact peer support has on individuals.

Its positive impact is huge on individuals and the community.

We have endless examples of the amazing work of peers, the impact it has not just on participants but of those providing it - it's a win-win.

The sector has an enthusiastic workforce

I feel very privileged to be able to offer the opportunity for peer support to work its magic!

Peer support in Scotland is hard work but it is also so valuable and amazing. People working in this area are so passionate and motivated.

However, peer support may not be fully valued

I have concerns that peer support is not valued by some funders.

The value of the work is not widely recognised.

Peer Support is a valuable commodity that I don't think is taken seriously enough.

Which may have wider consequences across Scotland

Concerns that early intervention / low intervention peer work being lost will lead people to require more intensive services and reduce self-management capabilities which will be problematic across Scotland.

Peer support is an early intervention and prevention support mechanism that if funded appropriately could save £m's on unnecessary escalation of support required from statutory bodies at higher and more acute levels.

The sector feels that more investment is needed

Much more funding is needed for the demand to be met.

The evidence is there and peer work needs further investment.

It should be developed further and statutory bodies should invest more time and resources into it as it really helps people.

Describing peer support

As further context for our survey we asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us the terminology that they typically use to describe peer support.

The vast majority (82%) of the peer support groups, services or activities do use the term 'peer support' to describe what they do.

Others used a variety of terms, including mentors, fellowship, chat and connection.

We also asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how they typically refer to the people who deliver this peer support, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Peer Support Workers	32
Peer Volunteers	32
Peers	22
Peer Workers	18
Peer Mentors	7
We call them something else	34

The terminology used to describe the people who deliver peer support varies.

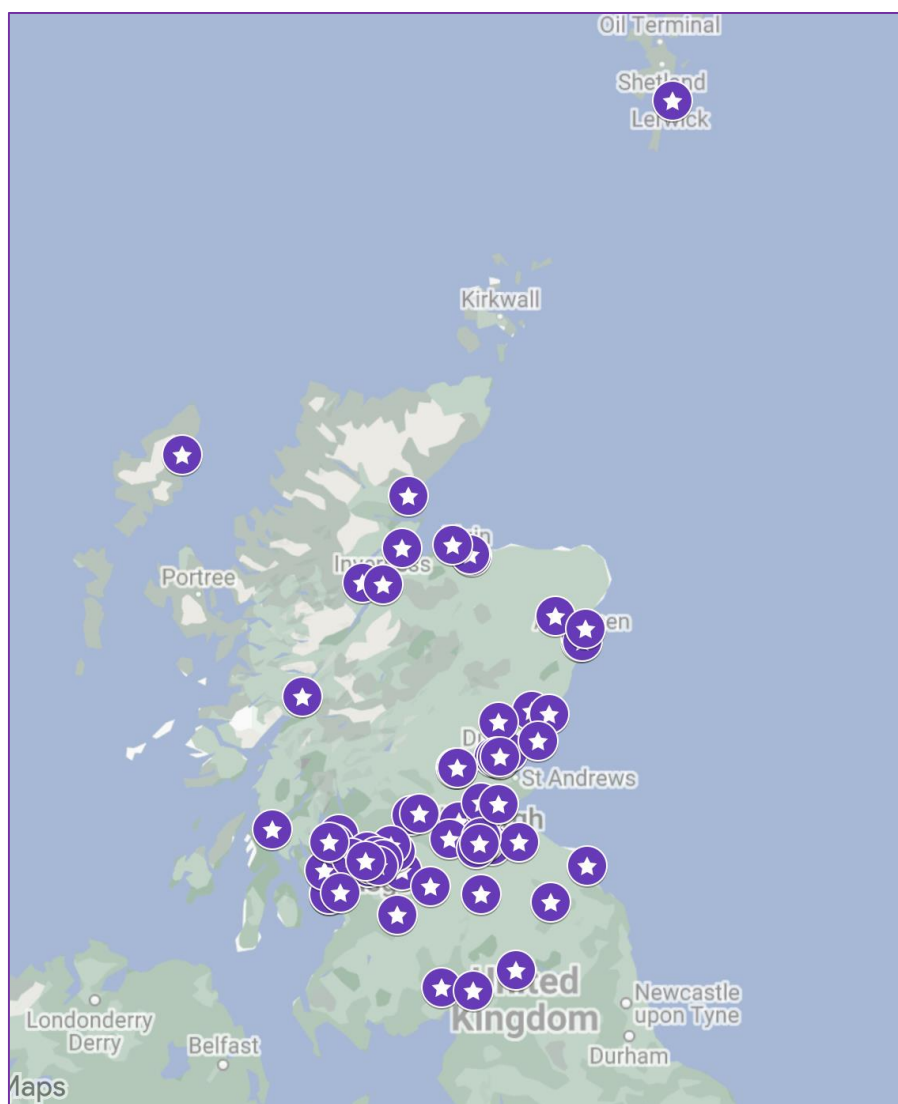
The peer support groups, services or activities most often used the term Peer Support Workers (32%) or Peer Volunteers (32%), followed by Peers (22%) and Peer Workers (18%).

Around a third (34%) of the peer support groups, services or activities used a different term, and this included Peer Support Volunteers, Recovery Workers, facilitators, supporters, befrienders, partners, practitioners, champions and friends.

For the purpose of clarity, we used the terms 'peer support' and 'Peer Workers' as catch all terms in our survey, and in acknowledgement that different organisations used different terms we asked for the understanding of the respondents in the survey text.

The geography of peer support

The following map shows the distribution of the peer support groups, services or activities across Scotland based on the postcode of their main headquarters:



The majority of the peer support groups, services or activities were headquartered in Scotland's urban centres, with the greatest proportions headquartered in Edinburgh (16%), Glasgow (11%) and Dundee (11%).

None of the responding peer support groups, services or activities were headquartered in Falkirk, Midlothian, Orkney or South Ayrshire.

Two of the groups, services or activities delivered peer support in Scotland but were headquartered outside Scotland (not shown on map).

We hoped to map a good geographic spread of peer support, and ultimately we recorded peer support being delivered across all 32 Local Authority areas of Scotland. The following table shows the number of peer support groups, services or activities that delivered peer support in each area in the last year:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	Number delivering in this area
Glasgow City	22
Edinburgh City	21
Dundee City	17
East Lothian	12
Fife	12
West Lothian	12
North Ayrshire	11
Perth and Kinross	10
Renfrewshire	10
Scottish Borders	10
Angus	9
Highland	9
East Renfrewshire	8
Inverclyde	8
Aberdeen City	7
East Ayrshire	7
Midlothian	7
Moray	7
Aberdeenshire	6
Argyll and Bute	6
Clackmannanshire	6
East Dunbartonshire	6
Falkirk	6
South Ayrshire	6
Stirling	5
West Dunbartonshire	5
Dumfries and Galloway	4
North Lanarkshire	4
Shetland Islands	3
South Lanarkshire	3
Western Isles (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)	3
Orkney Islands	2

Consistent with where the peer support groups, services or activities were headquartered, the greatest proportion had delivered peer support in Glasgow (where 22 had delivered), Edinburgh (where 21 had delivered) and Dundee (where 17 had delivered).

The average number of Scottish Local Authority delivery areas per peer support group, service or activity was 2.5 indicating that most delivered across multiple areas.

Notably, delivery was recorded in Falkirk (where 6 had delivered), Midlothian (where 7 had delivered), South Ayrshire (where 6 had delivered) and Orkney (where 2 had delivered) - although none of the peer support groups, services or activities were headquartered in those areas.

We also asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us whether they had delivered any participatory activities outside Scotland in the last year, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Yes, we also hosted sessions outside Scotland	3
Yes, we took our participants on trips outside Scotland	2
Some of our remote or online participants are based outside Scotland	10
No	85
Don't know	1

The vast majority of the peer support groups, services or activities (85%) had not delivered any participatory activities outside Scotland in the last year.

3% had hosted sessions outside Scotland in the last year, and 2% had taken their participants on trips outside Scotland in the last year. In addition, 10% had worked with remote or online participants based outside Scotland in the last year.

We also asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us whether they had delivered any peer support remotely / online in the last year, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Yes, we are fully remote or online	5
Yes, more than half of our delivery is remote or online (but not fully remote)	13
Yes, less than half of our delivery is remote or online	36
No	45
No response	1

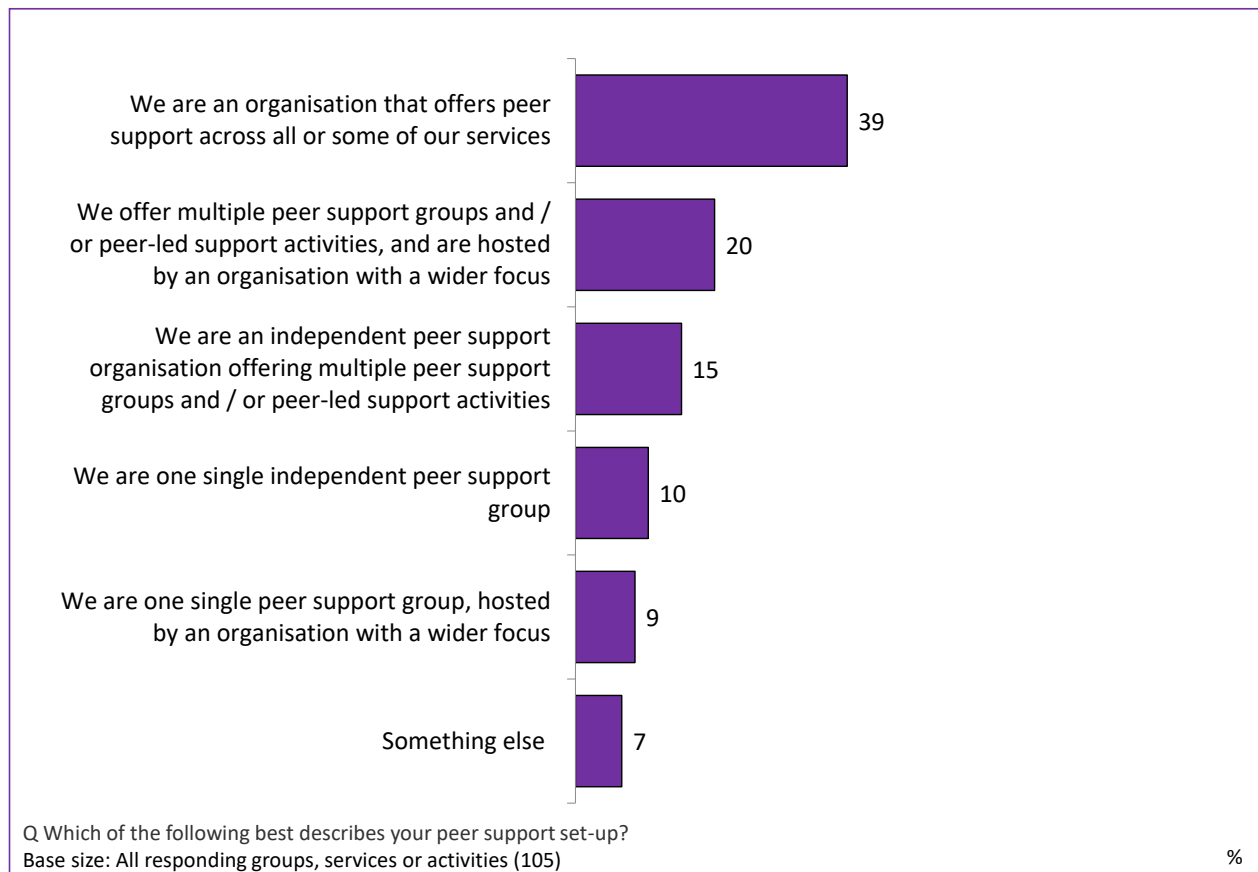
Just over half (54%) of the peer support groups, services or activities had delivered any peer support remotely / online in the last year, including 5% who were fully remote or online, 13% who delivered more than half remotely or online, and 36% who delivered less than half remotely or online.

45% of the peer support groups, services or activities had not delivered any peer support remotely / online in the last year.

Peer support structures and funding

Set-up of groups, services or activities

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how their peer support is set up, and findings are summarised in the graph below:

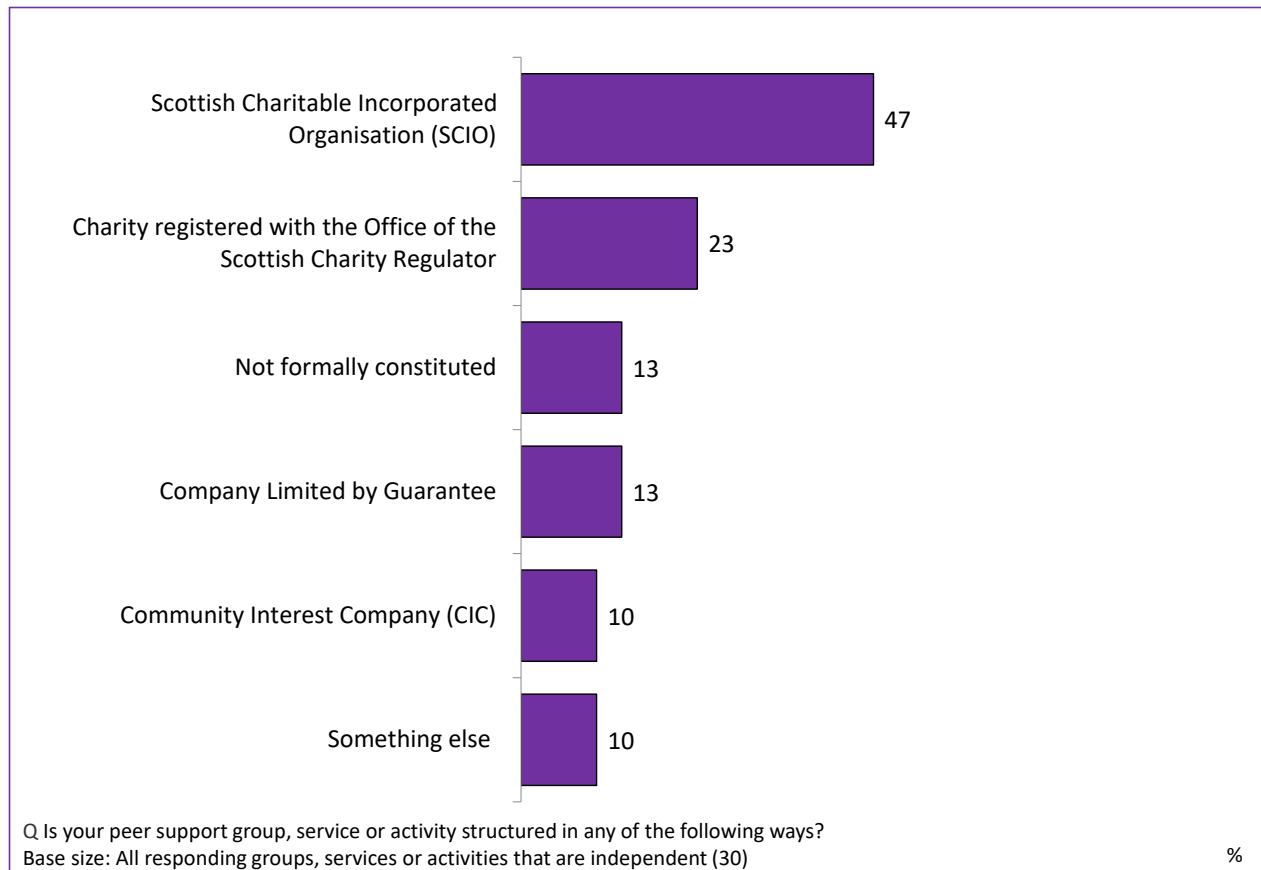


The greatest proportion of the peer support groups, services or activities were an organisation that offers peer support across all or some of their services (39%). Beyond this, 35% of the peer support groups, services or activities offered multiple peer support groups or activities, and 19% of the peer support groups, services or activities only offered one single peer support group.

Independent organisations

30 of the responding peer support groups, services or activities (29%) indicated that they were independent organisations.

We asked the independent peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how their organisation is structured, and findings are summarised in the graph below:



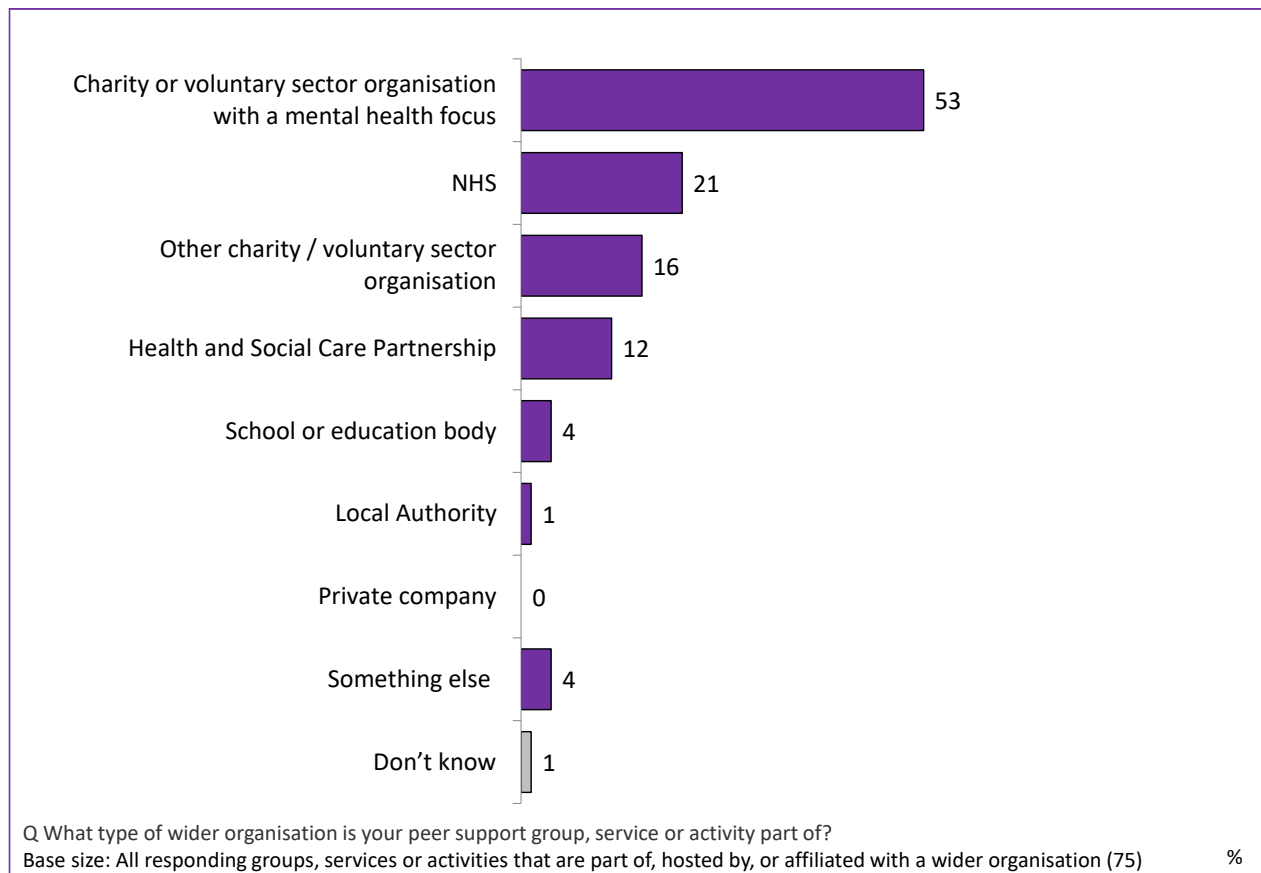
The greatest proportion of the independent peer support groups, services or activities were SCIOs (47%), and an additional 23% were charities.

Just over one in ten of the independent peer support groups, services or activities (13%) indicated that they were not formally structured.

Affiliated organisations

75 of the responding peer support groups, services or activities (71%) indicated that they were affiliated to a wider organisation.

We asked the affiliated peer support groups, services or activities to tell us what type of wider organisation they were part of, and findings are summarised in the graph below:



The greatest proportion of the affiliated peer support groups, services or activities were part of a charity or voluntary sector organisation with a mental health focus (53%). In addition, 21% were part of the NHS, 16% were part of another charity or voluntary sector organisation, and 12% were part of a Health and Social Care Partnership.

Peer leadership

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us the extent to which they were peer-led, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Our peer support service is wholly managed and delivered by peers	34
Elements of our peer support service are managed and delivered by peers	50
Our peer support service is not peer-led	9
Something else	7

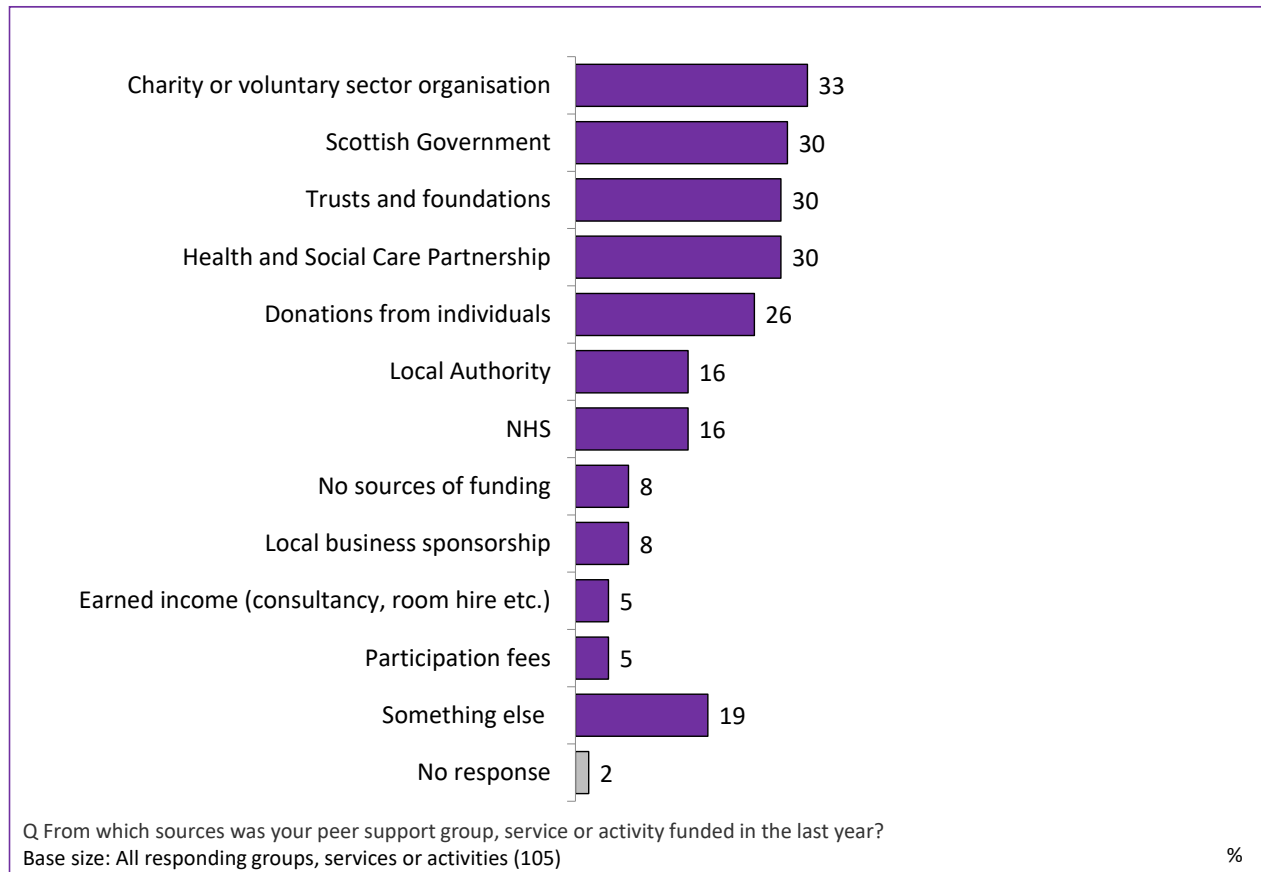
Around a third (34%) of the peer support groups, services or activities were wholly peer-led, and half (50%) of the peer support groups, services or activities were partially peer-led.

9% of the peer support groups, services or activities were not peer-led.

Notably, almost half (48%) of the independent support groups, services or activities were wholly peer led but only 29% of the affiliated support groups, services or activities were wholly peer led.

Sources of funding

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us their sources of funding in the last year, and findings are summarised in the graph below:



Sources of funding for the peer support groups, services or activities most often included a charity or voluntary sector organisation (for 33% of peer support groups, services or activities), the Scottish Government (for 30%), Trusts and foundations (for 30%) and a Health and Social Care Partnership (for 30%).

The average number of sources of funding per peer support group, service or activity was 2.2, indicating that many peer support groups, services or activities had received funding from multiple sources in the last year.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities whether they were primarily reliant on a single source of income in the last year, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Yes	30
No	43
Don't know	28

One in three (30%) of the peer support groups, services or activities had been primarily reliant on a single source of income in the last year. These sources of income varied but were most often the NHS, Scottish Government, Local Authority or a Health and Social Care Partnership.

Affiliated peer organisations (29%) and independent peer organisations (30%) were similarly likely to have been reliant on a single source of income.

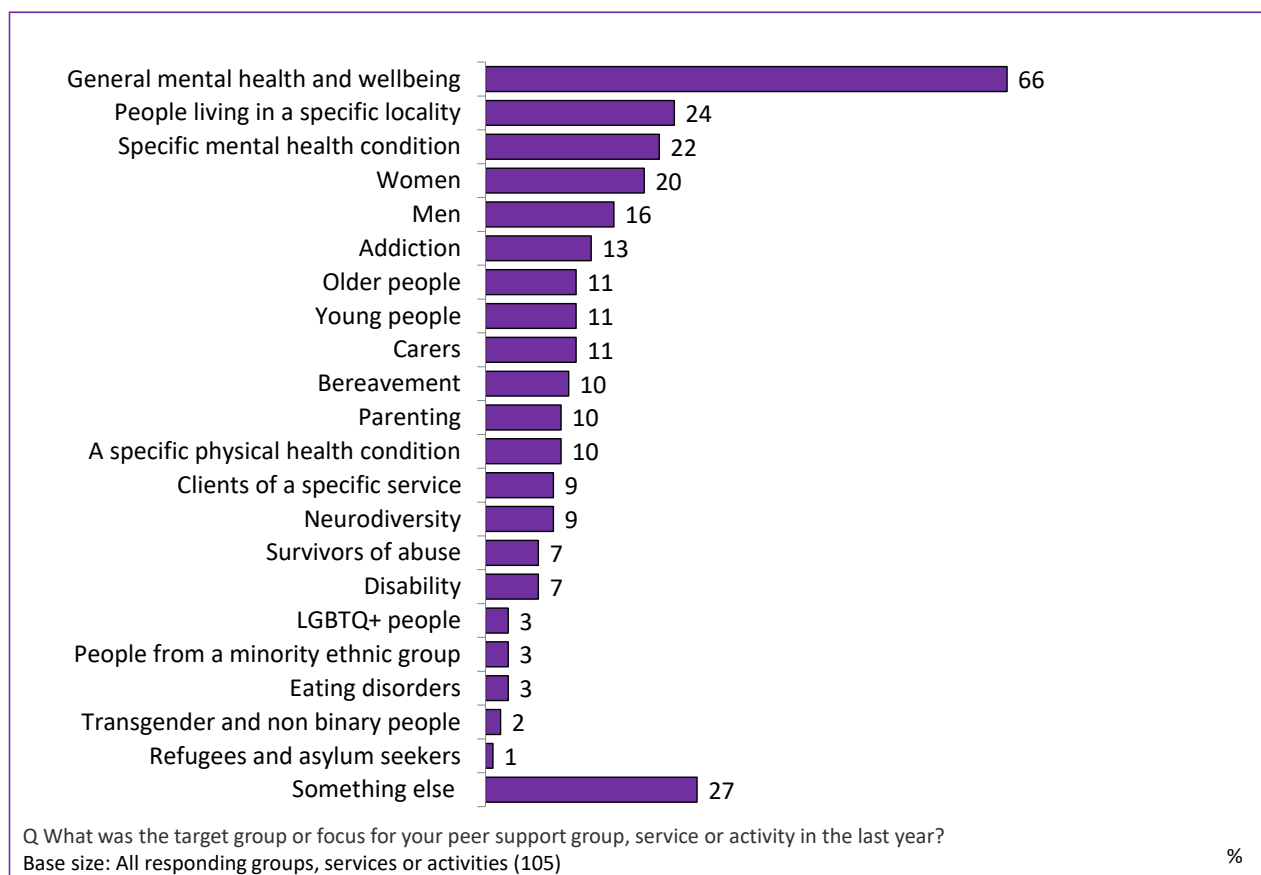
Peer support provision and participation

Provision

The total number of peer support groups, services or activities that responded to the survey was 105. With a Scottish population of 5,436,600 ¹, this amounts to one peer support group, service or activity for every 5,177 members of the Scottish population. It is however acknowledged that further provision is available in Scotland amongst peer support groups, services or activities that did not complete the survey.

Focus

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us about their target group or focus in the last year, and findings are summarised in the graph below:



¹ Census 2022 estimates: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-rounded-population-estimates/>

Consistent with the focus of this survey, the greatest proportion of peer support groups, services or activities had focused on general mental health and wellbeing (66%) in the last year.

Other focuses recorded by at least one in five of the peer support groups, services or activities were people living in a specific locality (24%), people with a specific mental health condition (22%) and women (20%).

'Other' focuses written in by the peer support groups, services or activities varied substantially, and included: veterans, mums, NEET young people, survivors of suicide, people bereaved by suicide, adoption, people with clutter and hoarding issues and people with housing support needs.

The peer support groups, services or activities selected an average of 2.9 areas of focus, indicating that they typically had multiple areas of focus or that focus was difficult to categorise.

The benefits of peer support

The peer support groups, services or activities were invited to describe the kind of benefits that people get from accessing their peer support group, service or activity, and 102 (97%) did so. This was a free-text box, and these responses have been summarised thematically below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Support / role modelling from someone with shared life experience	48
Feeling less isolated / connection / support network	41
Having a safe space to talk about own issues without judgement / feeling heard	35
Support with / improved mental health and wellbeing	27
Signposting / information	19
Support plan / coping techniques	19
Increased confidence / resilience	16
Empowerment / self-management	15
Hope	11

The benefits most often described by the peer support groups, services or activities were support / role modelling from someone with shared life experience (48%), feeling less isolated / connection / support network (41%), and having a safe space to talk about own issues without judgement / feeling heard (35%).

For example, the peer support groups, services or activities described offering:



Opportunity for people to speak, often for the first time, with someone with similar experience in a confidential supportive environment.

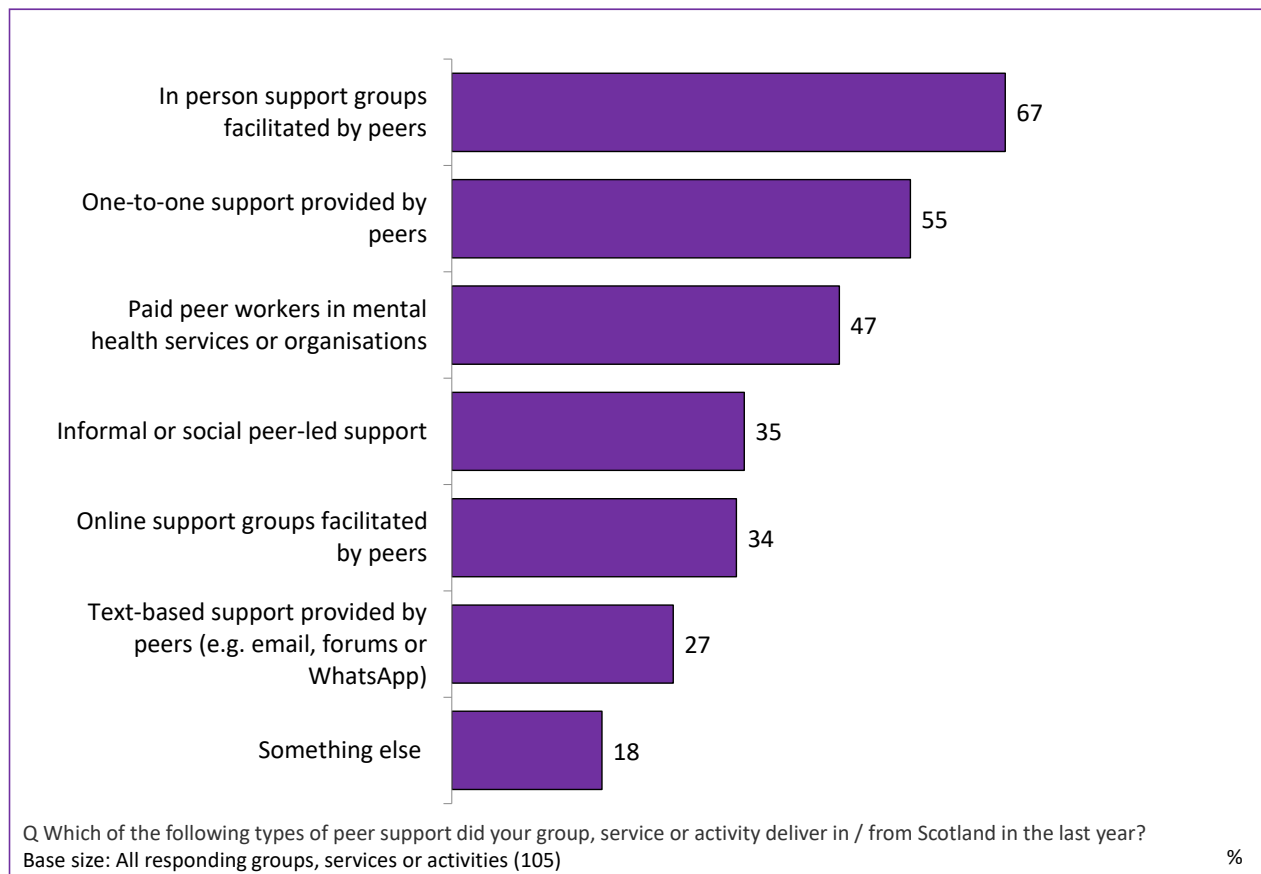
A chance to talk and not feel alone in their anxiety and stresses, a chance to learn from others who have gone through similar experiences and learn how they got through it.

Empathy and understanding from not only an entire Staff Team of compassionate and caring individuals- but an extra special level of insight and appreciation for the struggle they're experiencing from our Peer Workers.

Space to talk and have a voice, to share their experiences in a non-judgmental environment, shared understanding, empathy and equity within groups of individuals with similar experiences, space to be 'themselves without the mask'.

Methods of delivery

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us what types of peer support they had delivered in / from Scotland in the last year, and findings are summarised in the graph below:

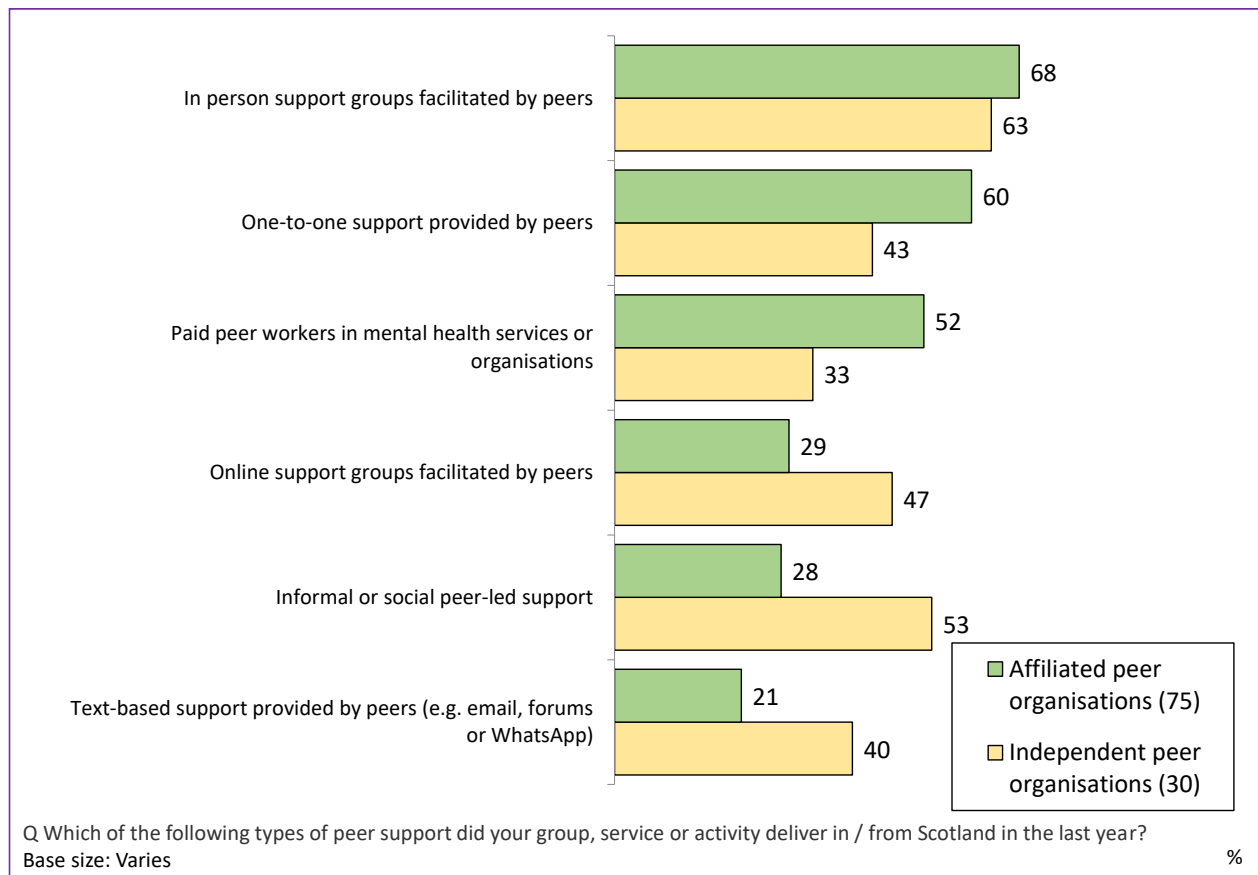


The peer support groups, services or activities most often delivered in-person support groups facilitated by peers (67%), one-to-one support provided by peers (55%) and paid Peer Workers in mental health services or organisations (47%).

Other types of peer support offered included friendship, crisis support, social activities, events and training.

The peer support groups, services or activities selected an average of 2.8 types of support from this list, indicating that many had used multiple methods of delivery.

Comparing methods of delivery that had been used by independent peer organisations as compared to affiliated peer organisations:



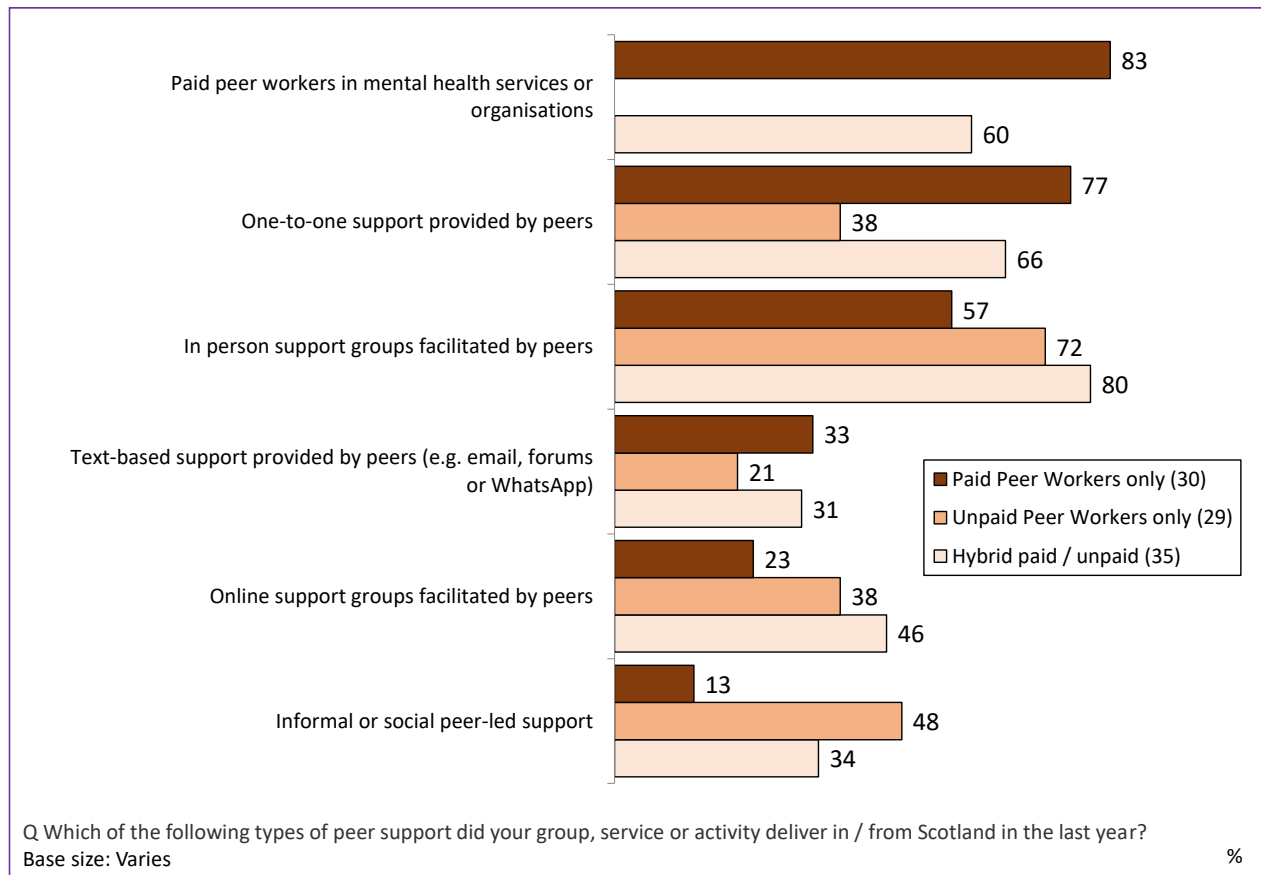
Affiliated and independent peer organisations were similarly likely to have used in-person support groups facilitated by peers.

Affiliated peer organisations were more likely than independent peer organisations to have used one-to-one support provided by peers and paid Peer Workers in mental health services or organisations.

Independent peer organisations were more likely than affiliated peer organisations to have used online support groups, informal or social peer-led support, and text-based support provided by peers.

This report later outlines staffing arrangements at peer support groups, services or activities.

Comparing methods of delivery that had been used by whether the peer organisations had paid Peer Workers only, unpaid Peer Workers only, or a hybrid of both:



Peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only were more likely to have used paid Peer Workers in mental health services or organisations and one-to-one support provided by peers.

Peer organisations with unpaid Peer Workers only more likely to have used in-person support groups facilitated by peers, online support groups facilitated by peers, and informal or social peer-led support.

Participant recruitment

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how people join their peer support group, service or activity, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Open access (e.g. drop-in or self-referral)	66
Referral by a third party (e.g. via Local Authority or Health Board)	54
Work within a fixed cohort (e.g. a youth club or people who attend a specific project)	20
Internal referral	5
Don't know	1

Two thirds of the peer support groups, services or activities recruited by open access (66%), and more than half received referrals by a third party (54%). One in five (20%) worked with a fixed cohort and 5% received internal referrals.

The peer support groups, services or activities selected an average of 1.5 participant recruitment methods, indicating that many used multiple participant recruitment methods.

Patterns in peer support participation

Acknowledging that participation figures were recorded by different peer support groups, services or activities in different ways, we asked the peer support groups, services or activities to provide us with participation figures as either:

- Total number of separate individuals last year
- OR total combined annual attendances

In total 91 peer support groups, services or activities (87% of all responding peer support groups, services or activities) provided any participant figures, which is a relatively complete dataset.

However, more specifically, 80 peer support groups, services or activities (76% of all responding peer support groups, services or activities) provided the total number of individual participants.

The table overleaf is based on individual participants – being the more useful figure for analysis purposes – and therefore true participation figures for our sample of responding peer support groups, services or activities is likely to be higher.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how many individual people received peer support via their peer support group, service or activity in Scotland in the last year, and findings are summarised in the table below:

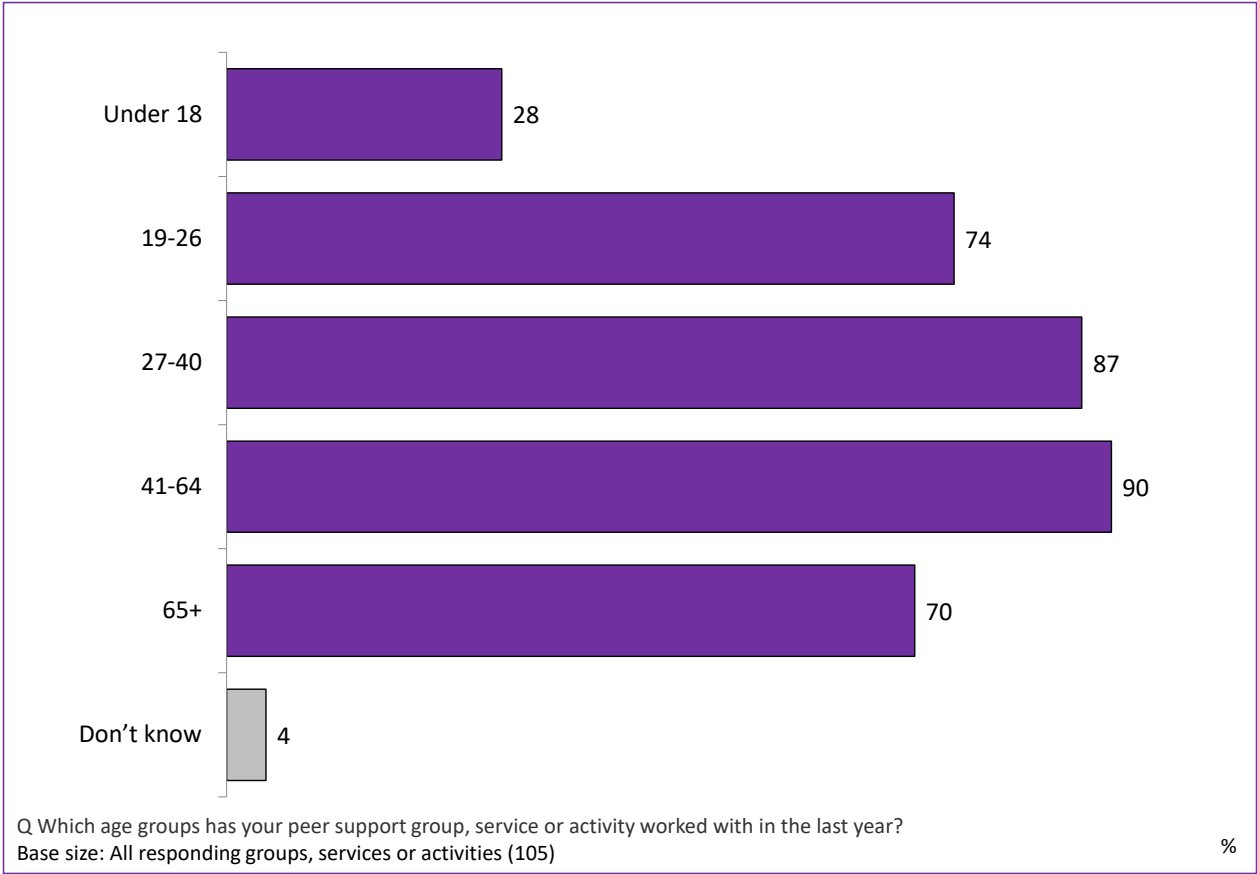
Base: All responding groups, services or activities that provided participation figures about individual participants (80)			
Total number of individual people	18,548		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Number of individual people	3	231.9	3,000

The total number of individual participants recorded by the peer support groups, services or activities last year was 18,548 individual participants.

The mean number of individual participants per group, service or activity was 231.9 individual participants with a range from 2 to 3,000.

About the peer support participants

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us what ages they worked with in the last year, and findings are shown in the graph below:



The peer support groups, services or activities typically worked across the spectrum of ages, most often with the 27-40 (87%) and the 41-64 (90%) age groups.

The peer support workforce

Paid Peer Workers

In total 62% of the peer support groups, services or activities currently employ any paid Peer Workers. This was much higher amongst affiliated peer organisations (67%) as compared to independent peer organisations (50%).

95% of the peer support groups, services or activities with paid Peer Workers provided more detailed information about their paid Peer Workers. This being the case, we can assume that the dataset around paid Peer Workers is relatively complete and representative.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how many (non-managerial) paid Peer Workers are currently on their payroll, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All Peer support groups, services or activities that have non-managerial paid Peer Workers and provided information about current non-managerial paid Peer Workers (58)			
Total number of non-managerial paid Peer Workers currently on the payroll	197		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Non-managerial Paid Peer Workers currently on the payroll	1	3.5 <i>(those with paid PW)</i>	18
		1.9 <i>(all)</i>	

In total 58 peer support groups, services or activities (55% of all responding peer support groups, services or activities) had paid Peer Workers and provided information about their paid Peer Workers.

The total number of paid Peer Workers currently contributing to the operation of these peer support groups, services or activities was 197.

The mean number of paid Peer Workers amongst those that had paid Peer Workers was 3.5 per peer support group, service or activity, with the lowest being 1 and the highest being 18.

If we include those that have no paid Peer Workers and assume that those who provided no data have no paid Peer Workers, the mean number of paid Peer Workers across all responding peer support groups, services or activities was 1.9.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how many paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles are currently on their payroll, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All Peer support groups, services or activities that have paid managerial Peer Workers and provided information about current paid Peer Workers (26)			
Total number of paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles currently on the payroll	38		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles currently on the payroll	1	1.5 <i>(those with paid PW in mgt roles)</i>	4
		0.4 <i>(all)</i>	

In total 26 peer support groups, services or activities (25% of all responding peer support groups, services or activities) had paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles and provided information about their paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles.

The total number of paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles currently contributing to the operation of these peer support groups, services or activities was 38.

The mean number of paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles amongst those that had paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles was 1.5 per peer support group, service or activity, with the lowest being 1 and the highest being 4. If we include those that have no paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles and assume that those who provided no data have no paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles, the mean number of paid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles across all responding peer support groups, services or activities was 0.4.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us the combined Full Time Equivalency of their current paid Peer Workers, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding peer support groups, services or activities that have paid Peer Workers AND provided FTE details (56)	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Combined Full Time Equivalency of their current salaried staff	0.1	2.5	16.0

The mean Full Time Equivalency of current salaried staff was 2.5, equivalent to two and a half full-time staff members per peer support group, service or activity that had paid Peer Workers.

With the mean number of paid Peer Workers being higher than this, this indicates that some paid Peer Workers work part time. Indeed, in total 22 peer support groups, services or activities (39% of responding peer support groups, services or activities that have paid Peer Workers AND provided FTE details) currently had a Full Time Equivalency of one or fewer (i.e. equivalent to one full-time staff member or fewer).

We also asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how their paid Peer Workers are contracted, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Salaried	92
Freelance	6
No response	3

The vast majority of the paid Peer Workers were contracted (92%), and 6% were freelance.

Unpaid Peer Workers

In total 61% of the peer support groups, services or activities currently worked with any unpaid Peer Workers. This was much higher amongst independent peer organisations (77%) as compared to affiliated peer organisations (55%).

92% of the peer support groups, services or activities with unpaid Peer Workers provided more detailed information about their unpaid Peer Workers. This being the case, we can assume that the dataset around unpaid Peer Workers is relatively complete and representative.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how many (non-managerial) unpaid Peer Workers currently volunteer with them, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All Peer support groups, services or activities that have non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers and provided information about current non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers (56)			
Total number of non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers currently volunteering	1,103		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers currently volunteering	1	18.7 <i>(those with vol PW)</i>	458
		10.5 <i>(all)</i>	

In total 56 peer support groups, services or activities (53% of all responding peer support groups, services or activities) had non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers and provided information about their non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers.

The total number of non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers currently contributing to the operation of these peer support groups, services or activities was 1,103.

The mean number of non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers amongst those that had non-managerial paid Peer Workers was 18.7 per peer support group, service or activity, with the lowest being 1 and the highest being 458.

If we include those that have no non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers and assume that those who provided no data have no unpaid Peer Workers, the mean number of non-managerial unpaid Peer Workers across all responding peer support groups, services or activities was 10.5. We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how many unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles currently volunteer with them, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All Peer support groups, services or activities that have unpaid managerial Peer Workers and provided information about current unpaid Peer Workers (19)			
Total number of unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles	52		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles	1	2.7 <i>(those with paid PW in mgt roles)</i>	12
		0.5 <i>(all)</i>	

In total 19 peer support groups, services or activities (18% of all responding peer support groups, services or activities) had unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles and provided information about their unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles.

The total number of unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles currently contributing to the operation of these peer support groups, services or activities was 52.

The mean number of unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles amongst those that had unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles was 2.7 per peer support group, service or activity, with the lowest being 1 and the highest being 12.

If we include those that have no unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles and assume that those who provided no data have no unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles, the mean number of unpaid Peer Workers in management or supervisory roles across all responding peer support groups, services or activities was 0.5.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us how many hours of peer support is provided by unpaid Peer Workers in their peer support service each week, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding peer support groups, services or activities that have unpaid Peer Workers AND provided detail about hours (51)			
Total number of hours of unpaid Peer Worker support per week	613.8		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Number of hours of unpaid Peer Worker support per week	0.25	12.0 <i>(those with unpaid PW)</i>	90
		0.5 <i>(all)</i>	

The total number of weekly hours of support provided by unpaid Peer Workers across Scotland was 613.8.

The mean number of hours of support provided by unpaid Peer Workers per week was 12.0 per peer support group, service or activity, with the lowest being 0.25 and the highest being 90.0.

If we include those that have no unpaid Peer Workers and assume that those who provided no data have no unpaid Peer Workers, the mean number of hours of support provided by unpaid Peer Workers per week was 0.5 per peer support group.

Total resourcing

Total resourcing across all peer support groups, services or activities is summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	Total number
TOTAL paid Peer Worker roles	235
- <i>Peer Workers</i>	<i>197</i>
- <i>Peer Workers in managerial or supervisory roles</i>	<i>38</i>
TOTAL Volunteer roles	1,155
- <i>Unpaid Peer Workers</i>	<i>1,103</i>
- <i>Unpaid Peer Workers in managerial or supervisory roles</i>	<i>52</i>
GRAND TOTAL	1,390
Mean number of paid staff roles / volunteer roles per peer support group, service or activity	13.2

In total the peer support groups, services or activities told us that 1,390 individuals contributed to their operation, including 235 paid Peer Workers and 1,155 unpaid Peer Workers. This is an average of 13.2 individuals per peer support group, service or activity.

It is important to note that this figure represents roles in the sector rather than separate individuals working in the sector, as it is possible that some individuals concurrently work across multiple peer support groups, services or activities.

Notably, 30 of the peer support groups, services or activities (29%) were only operated by paid Peer Workers, and 29 of the peer support groups, services or activities (28%) were only operated by unpaid Peer Workers.

Resourcing by type of organisation

The following table breaks down resourcing by type of organisation:

	SCIO or charity (51)	Public sector (24)	Other (30)
TOTAL paid Peer Worker roles	171	48	16
- <i>Peer Workers</i>	144	45	8
- <i>Peer Workers in managerial or supervisory roles</i>	27	3	8
% of total paid Peer Worker roles	73%	20%	7%
TOTAL Volunteer roles	1,045	49	61
- <i>Unpaid Peer Workers</i>	1,006	49	48
- <i>Unpaid Peer Workers in managerial or supervisory roles</i>	39	0	13
% of total paid Unpaid Peer Worker roles	90%	4%	5%
GRAND TOTAL	1,216	97	77
Mean number of paid staff roles / volunteer roles per peer support group, service or activity	23.8	4.0	2.6
% of total resourcing	87%	7%	6%

The vast majority of recorded resourcing (87%) was based in the third sector, with only 7% of recorded resourcing based in the public sector.

Regional resourcing

The following table breaks down resourcing by region of headquarters:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	Number of paid Peer workers			Number of unpaid Peer Workers		
	Managerial	Non-managerial	TOTAL	Managerial	Non-managerial	TOTAL
Edinburgh City	7	43	50	11	243	254
Dundee City	0	37	37	0	11	11
Perth and Kinross	2	13	15	4	41	45
Highland	3	10	13	0	33	33
Angus	3	10	13	1	25	26
North Ayrshire	1	11	12	0	15	15
Aberdeen City	4	8	12	0	15	15
Glasgow City	2	9	11	2	37	39
Renfrewshire	1	10	11	0	478	478
Moray	4	5	9	4	21	25
Scottish Borders	3	5	8	14	94	108
East Lothian	2	6	8	0	12	12
Fife	2	6	8	0	4	4
Western Isles	0	7	7	0	0	0
West Dunbartonshire	0	5	5	0	0	0
East Ayrshire	2	2	4	1	4	5
Argyll and Bute	1	3	4	0	0	0
Inverclyde	0	2	2	2	8	10
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	2	0	9	9
East Dunbartonshire	0	2	2	0	7	7
Aberdeenshire	0	0	0	3	22	25
South Lanarkshire	0	0	0	6	7	13
North Lanarkshire	0	0	0	1	5	6
East Renfrewshire	0	0	0	0	5	5
Clackmannanshire	0	0	0	1	4	5
Stirling	0	0	0	2	2	4
Shetland Islands	0	0	0	0	1	1
West Lothian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Midlothian	-	-	-	-	-	-
Falkirk	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Ayrshire	-	-	-	-	-	-
Orkney Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not specified	0	2	2	0	0	0

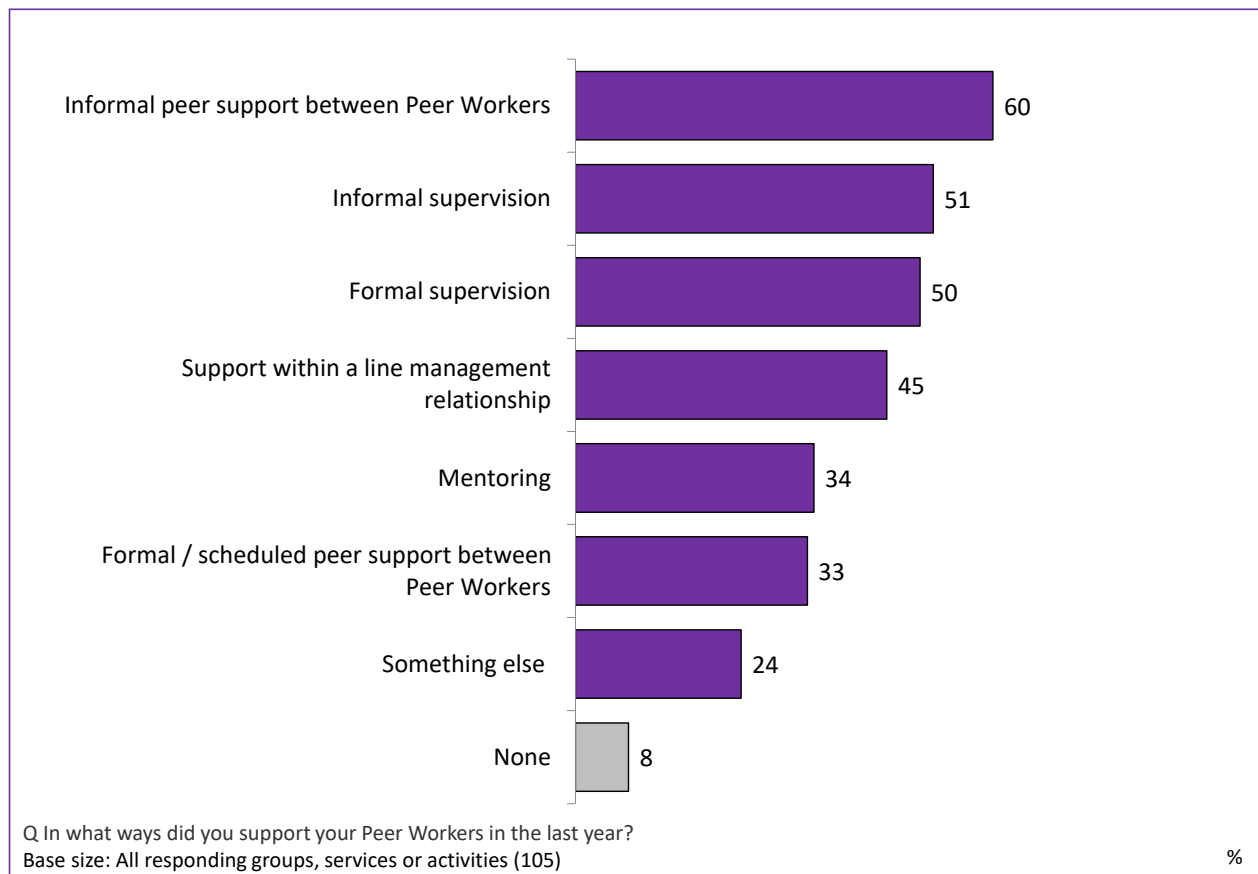
The Local Authority areas employing the most paid Peer Workers were: Edinburgh city (50), Dundee city (37) and Perth and Kinross (15).

The Local Authority areas working with the most unpaid Peer Workers were: Renfrewshire (478), Edinburgh city (254), Scottish Borders (108), and Perth and Kinross (45).

Supporting and training Peer Workers

Support and supervision

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us in what ways they had supported their Peer Workers in the last year, and findings are summarised in the graph below:



In total 92% of the peer support groups, services or activities had supported their Peer Workers in some way, and 8% had not supported their Peer Workers. This was higher amongst affiliated peer organisations (95%) as compared to independent peer organisations (87%).

The methods of support utilised most often were informal – informal peer support between Peer workers (60%) and informal supervision² (51%).

Half of the peer support groups, services or activities (50%) had utilised formal supervision.

² Supervision was defined within the survey as meaning: Protected time, usually scheduled every 6 to 8 weeks, to allow individuals to reflect on practice, receive guidance and support and share any difficulties in the role.

Other methods of support described by peer support groups, services or activities included reflective practice, training, meetings and friendship.

The average number of types of Peer Worker support utilised per peer support groups, services or activities was 3.0, indicating that many peer support groups, services or activities had supported their Peer Workers in multiple ways in the last year.

Comparing the support and supervision offered by independent peer organisations as compared to affiliated peer organisations:

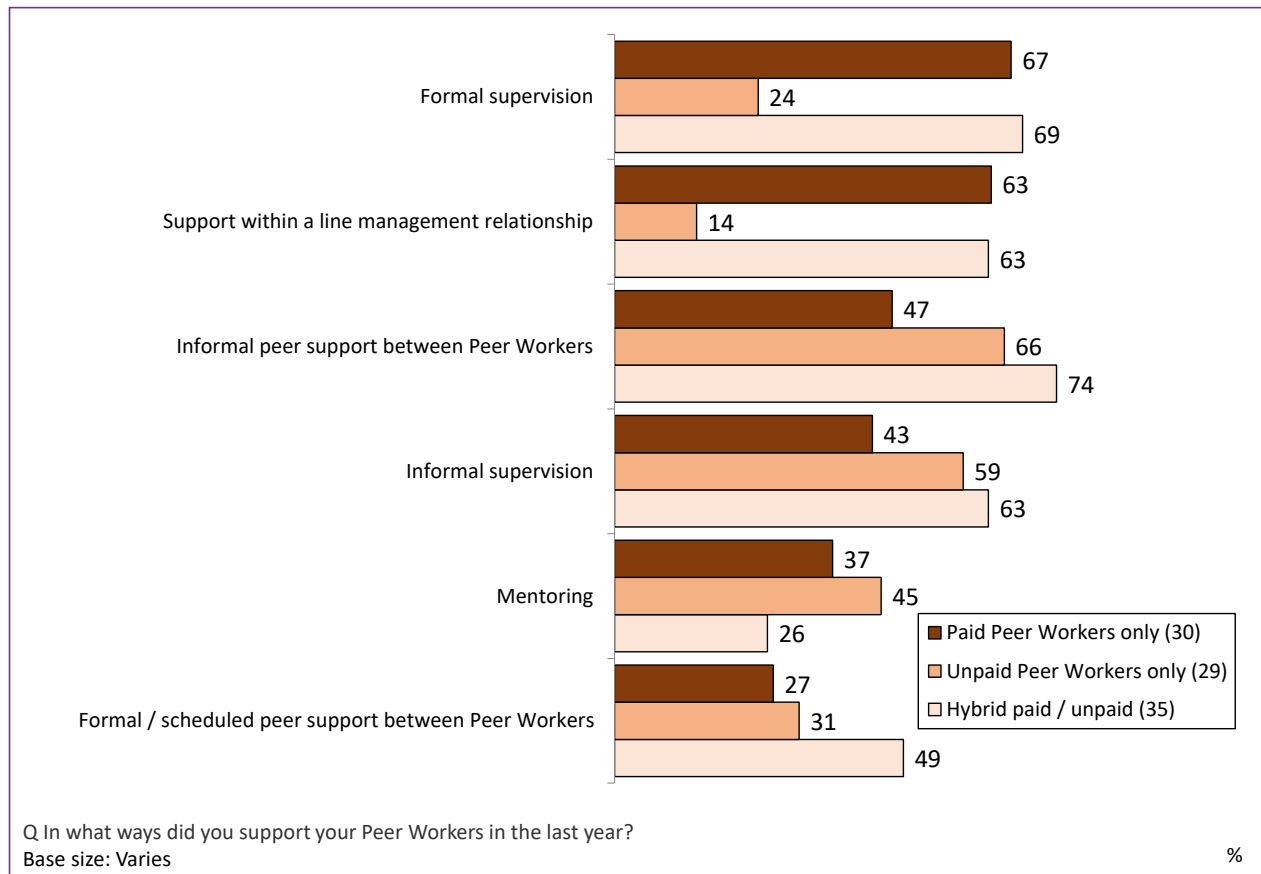


The greatest difference between independent and affiliated peer support organisations was that affiliated peer organisations were much more likely to offer formal supervision (56%) when compared to independent peer organisations (33%).

Slightly more independent peer originations offered informal peer support between Peer Workers (67%) when compared to affiliated peer organisations (57%).

Slightly more affiliated peer originations offered support within a line management relationship (47%) when compared to independent peer organisations (40%).

Comparing the support and supervision provided by whether the peer organisations had paid Peer Workers only, unpaid Peer Workers only, or a hybrid of both:



Peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only were much more likely than peer organisations with unpaid Peer Workers only to have provided formal supervision and support within a line management relationship.

Hybrid and peer organisations with unpaid Peer Workers only were more likely than peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only to have provided informal support between Peer Workers and informal supervision.

Hybrid peer organisations were much more likely to have offered formal / scheduled peer support between Peer Workers.

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities whether supervision that their Peer Workers received was provided by other peers, and findings are summarised in the table below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Yes, always	18
Yes, sometimes	29
No	36
The Peer Workers do not receive supervision	10
Don't know / no response	8

Supervision of Peer Workers was always provided by other peers at around one in five peer support groups, services or activities (18%) and was sometimes provided by other peers at 29% of peer support groups, services or activities.

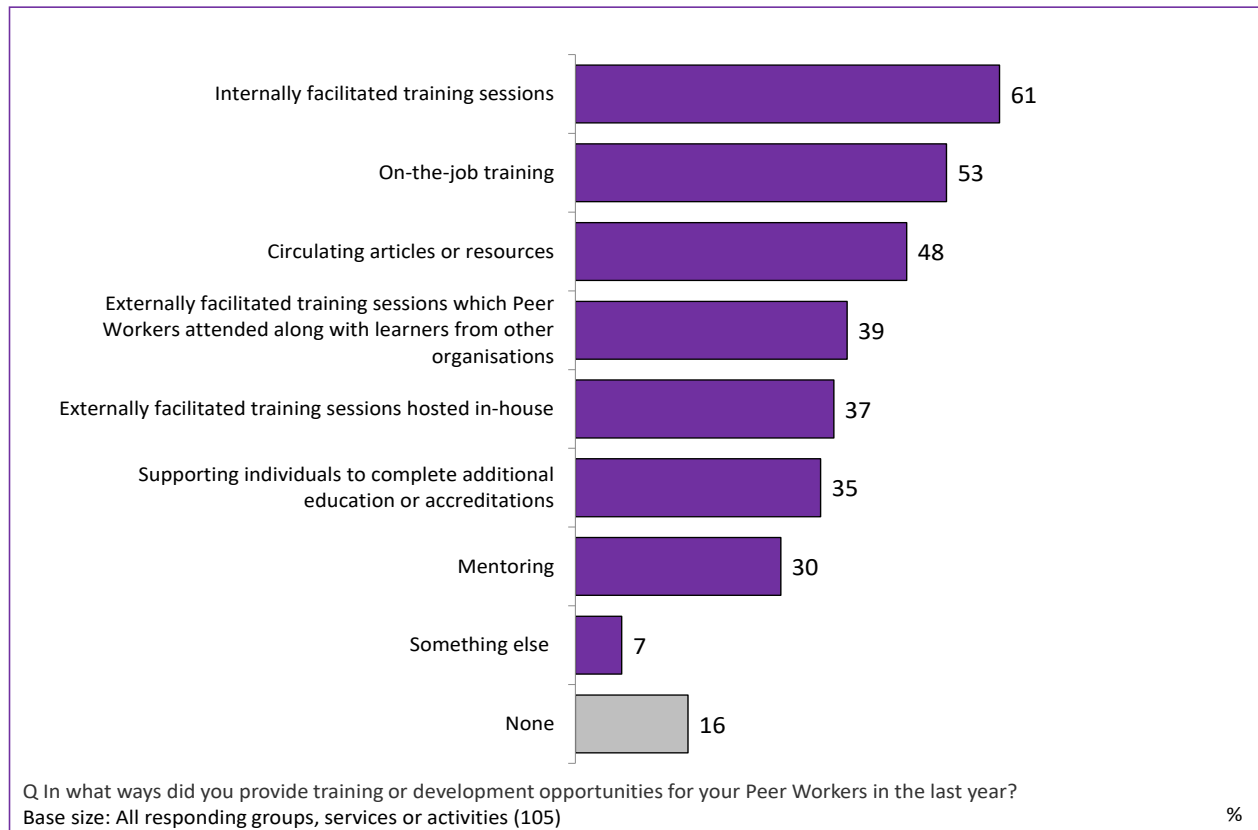
Supervision of Peer Workers was always provided by other peers more often at the independent peer organisations (28%) as compared to the affiliated peer organisations (15%).

Supervision of Peer Workers was not provided by other peers at around a third of the peer support groups, services or activities (36%). This was fairly consistent across affiliated peer organisations (37%) and independent peer organisations (35%).

The Peer Workers do not receive supervision at 10% of the peer support groups, services or activities. This was consistent across affiliated peer organisations (9%) and independent peer organisations (10%).

Training

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us in what ways they had provided training or development opportunities for their Peer Workers in the last year, and findings are summarised in the graph below:



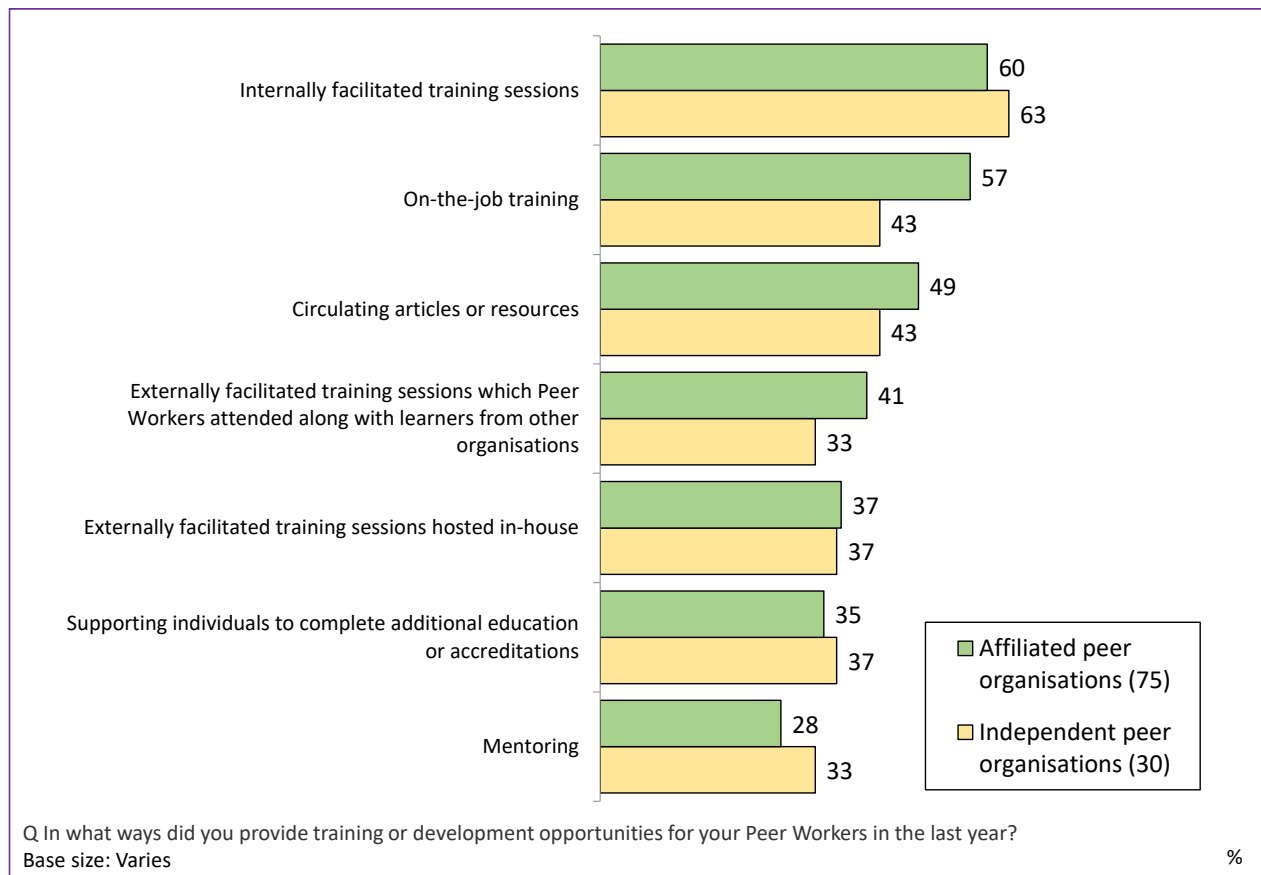
84% of the peer support groups, services or activities had provided any training or development opportunities for their Peer Workers in the last year. This was slightly higher amongst affiliated peer organisations (85%) as compared to independent peer organisations (80%).

The peer support groups, services or activities had most often provided internally facilitated training sessions (61%), on-the-job training (53%) and circulation of articles or resources (48%) in the last year.

53% had offered any externally facilitated training, and 35% had supported individuals to complete additional education or accreditations.

In total 16% of the peer support groups, services or activities had not provided any training or development opportunities for their Peer Workers in the last year.

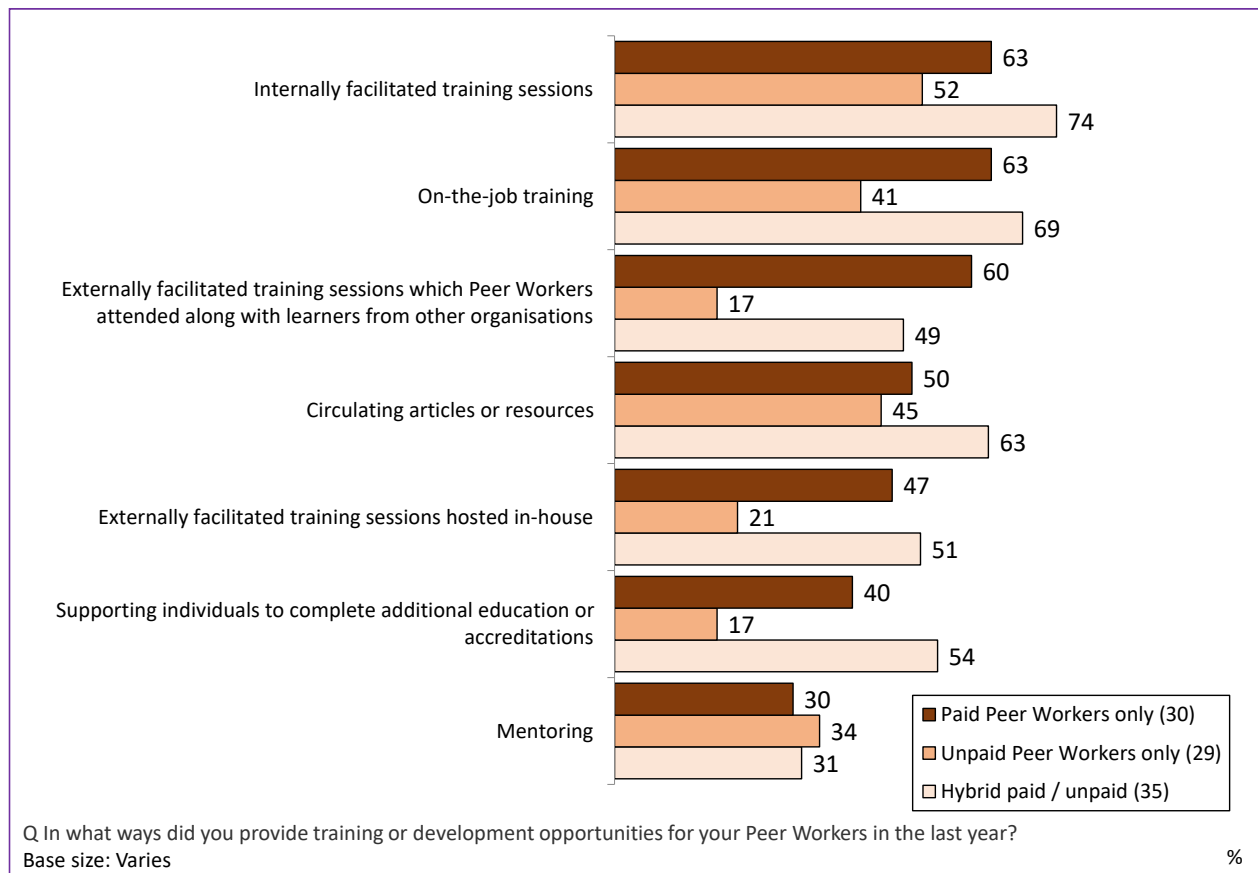
Comparing the training provided by independent peer organisations as compared to affiliated peer organisations:



Slightly more affiliated peer organisations offered on-the-job training (57%) when compared to independent peer organisations (43%), and slightly more affiliated peer organisations offered externally facilitated training sessions which Peer Workers attended along with learners from other organisations (41%) when compared to independent peer organisations (33%).

Otherwise, patterns in provision of training were similar.

Comparing the training provided by whether the peer organisations had paid Peer Workers only, unpaid Peer Workers only, or a hybrid of both:



Mentoring was provided at similar levels across the three types of peer organisations. For all other types of training, peer organisations with unpaid Peer Workers only were least likely to offer that training when compared to hybrid peer organisations or peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only.

Peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only were more likely to have provided externally facilitated sessions which Peer Workers attended along with learners from other organisations.

Hybrid peer organisations were more likely to have used internally facilitated training sessions, circulating articles or resources, and supporting individuals to complete additional education or accreditations.

The peer support groups, services or activities were asked to provide more information about the topics or areas that they had covered in training, and 68 (65%) did so. This was a free-text box, and these responses have been summarised thematically below:

Named courses:

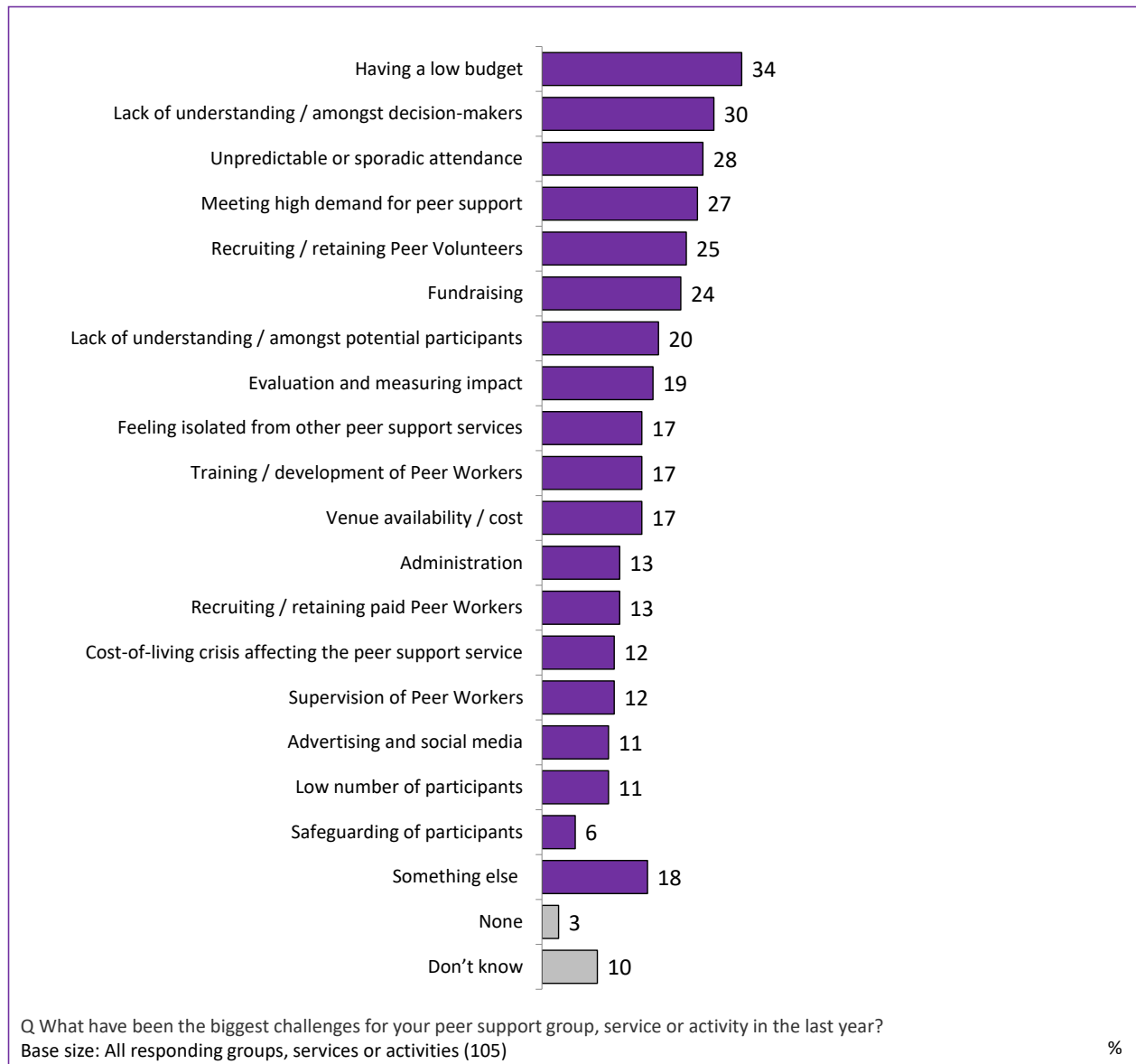
Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Peer2Peer	10
Scottish Mental Health First Aid	9
ASSIST	7
PDA	3
CHIME	2

Topics covered:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Topics related to mental health	35
Topics related to working with a specific stakeholder group	27
Facilitation skills	22
Self-care	9
Office and workplace skills	9
Boundaries	8
Safeguarding	7
Health and safety	3
First aid	2

Key challenges

We asked the peer support groups, services or activities to tell us their biggest challenges experienced in the last year, and findings are summarised in the graph below:

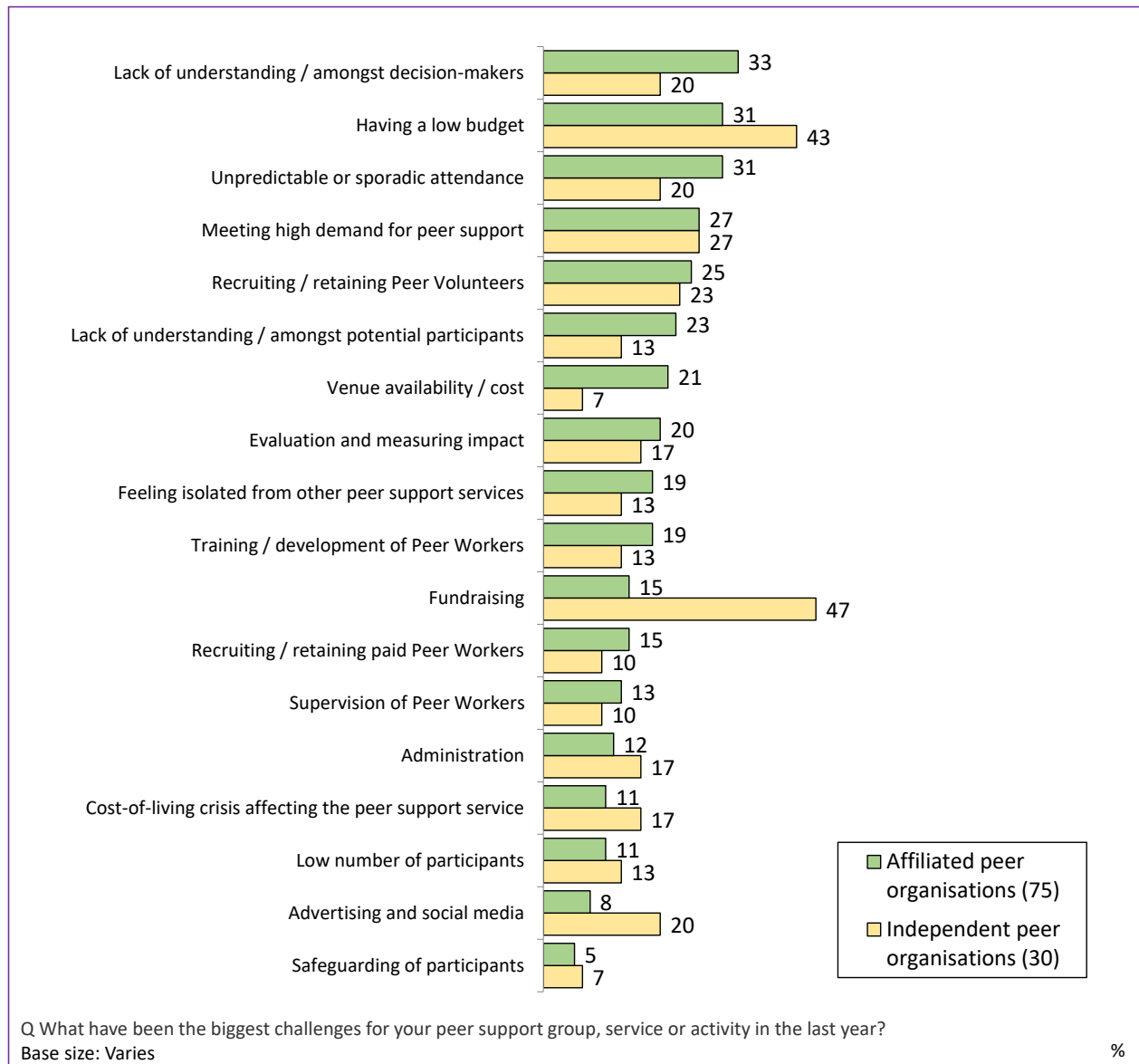


Overall, 87% of the peer support groups, services or activities indicated that they had experienced challenges in the last year, with only three individual peer support groups, services or activities stating that they had not experienced any challenges.

The challenges most often faced by the peer support groups, services or activities were having a low budget (34%), lack of understanding about peer support amongst decision-makers (30%), unpredictable or sporadic attendance (28%) and meeting high demand for peer support (27%). Other

challenges written in by multiple peer support groups, services or activities were: peer worker sickness absence, peer worker supervision, and peer worker career progression.

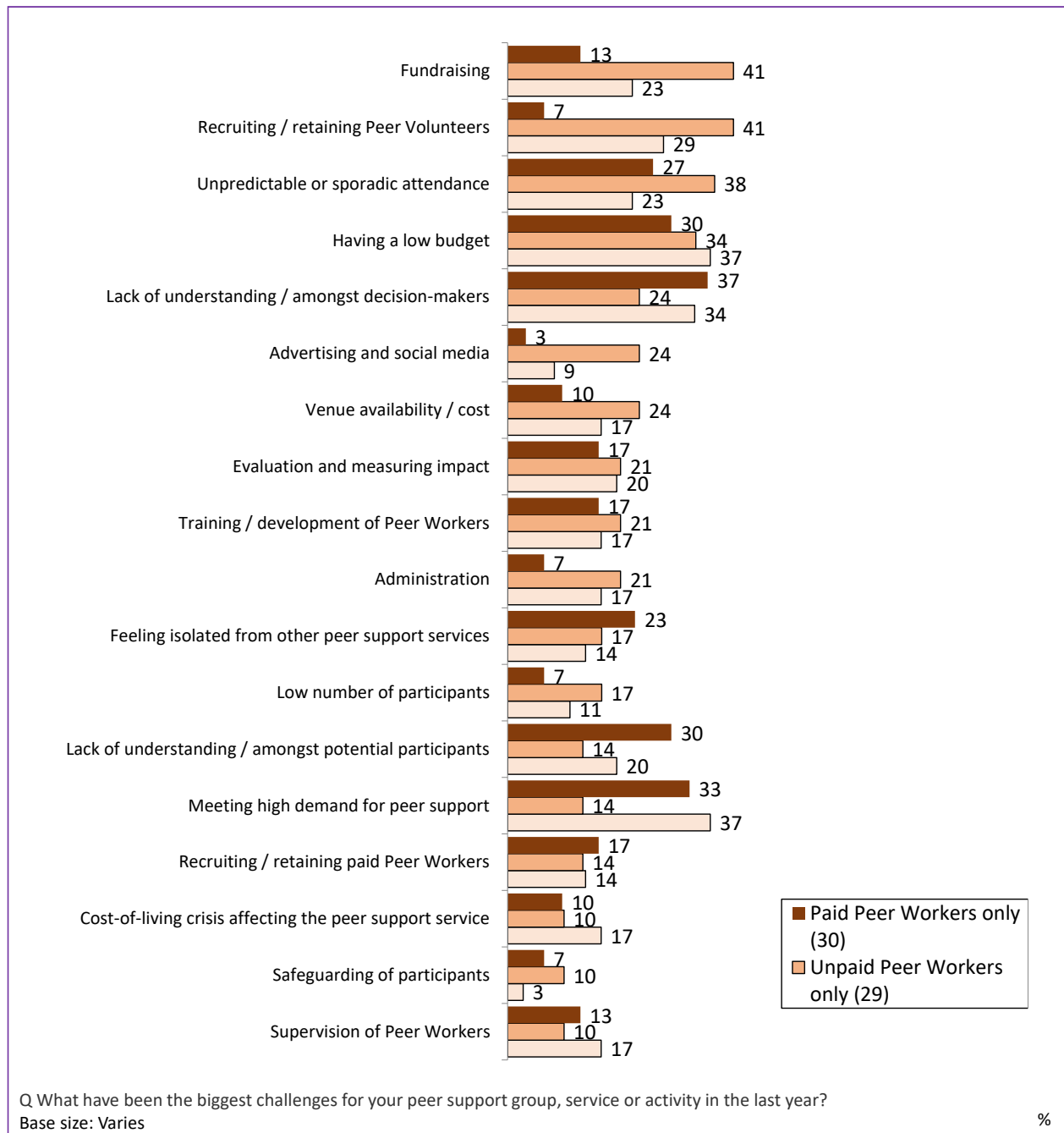
The peer support groups, services or activities selected an average of 3.6 challenges from the list, indicating that many had faced multiple challenges. Comparing the challenges faced by independent peer organisations as compared to affiliated peer organisations:



The challenges faced by affiliated peer organisations in greater proportions than independent peer organisations were venue availability / cost, lack of understanding amongst decision-makers, and unpredictable or sporadic attendance.

The challenges faced by independent peer organisations more in greater proportions than affiliated peer organisations were fundraising, having a low budget, and advertising and social media.

Comparing the challenges faced by whether the peer organisations had paid Peer Workers only, unpaid Peer Workers only, or a hybrid of both:



Peer organisations with unpaid Peer Workers only were much more likely to have faced challenges around fundraising, recruiting / retaining volunteers, unpredictable or sporadic attendance, and advertising and social media.

Peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only were much more likely to have faced a lack of understanding about peer support amongst potential participants.

Hybrid and peer organisations with paid Peer Workers only were more likely than peer organisations with unpaid Peer Workers only to have faced a lack of understanding about peer support amongst decision-makers and meeting high demand for peer support.

Looking ahead

The peer support groups, services or activities were asked to tell us what would help them to sustain and develop their peer support group, service or activity in the future, and 77 (73%) did so. This was a free-text box, and these responses have been summarised thematically below:

Base: All responding groups, services or activities (105)	%
Increased / longer-term funding	44
Influencing decision-makers / the value of peer support	13
Training for Peer Workers	11
Reference to addressing local challenges	10
Better pay and conditions for Peer Workers	9
Networking for Peer Workers	7
Measuring impact	3

Almost half (44%) of the groups, services or activities felt that increased or longer-term funding would help them to sustain and develop their work, for example:



More funding to facilitate the growth of our service. We have high demand, but not enough capacity to deliver.

Multi-year funding opportunities instead of spending all our management time reapplying for funding. This loses us valuable time which could be spent improving services and widening engagement.

Funding tends to be short-term which means you risk losing committed, knowledgeable and passionate peer support staff due to the lack of job security.

13% of the groups, services or activities felt that influencing decision-makers around the value of peer support would help them to sustain and develop their work, for example:

Assisting our partners understand the value of peer support and the difference it makes to people.

A cull of the dinosaurs with antiquated views towards peer support might work. In our experience it is sadly the case that peer has no voice or value.

11% of the groups, services or activities felt that training for Peer Workers would help them to sustain and develop their work, for example:

More structured training and / or system in order to support peer workers internally and not be over reliant on management who sometimes cannot provide that additional support.

Access to training / support specific to peer volunteer/workers e.g., in supporting their own resilience, coping, mental health, working within boundaries etc. Unfortunately, it comes down to small training budgets and less to invest in staff and volunteer development.

Regularly updating Peer Workers' skills in areas like mental health intervention, trauma-informed care, and leadership would ensure they remain equipped to handle evolving challenges. Access to both internal and external training would be beneficial.

9% of the groups, services or activities felt that better pay and conditions for Peer Workers would help them to sustain and develop their work, for example:

If peer workers would be paid for their incredible role.

Peer Support Workers not at the bottom of the salary scale for the organisation and increments in salary scale actually increase rather than flat. Paid more than £12 per hour.

Career and development opportunities for Peer Workers.

Our service does not promote Peer Support Workers working flexibly/ or working from home, many paid Peer Support Workers are by definition lower paid and have caring responsibilities and health issues to contend with. This inflexibility is not conducive to recruitment or retention. If you become a Peer Support Worker in NHS Scotland you would have to change roles to be promoted.

7% of the groups, services or activities felt that networking for Peer Workers would help them to sustain and develop their work, for example:

More support, including groups and forums for Peer Workers.

Maybe establishing closer links with wider peer support community.

Opportunities for peers to network.

3% of the groups, services or activities felt that assistance with measuring impact would help them to sustain and develop their work, for example:

More effective evaluation and measuring impact of service.

Better understanding of how to measure outcomes.

Systems to help measure that outcomes of peer support that's not just generic feedback forms.

Sense testing and emerging issues

In order to explore emerging issues in more depth, a number of additional sessions were held in December 2024:

- 'Sense testing' workshop 1, attended online by representatives of 7 peer services;
- 'Sense testing' workshop 2, attended online by representatives of 5 peer services;
- 3x one-to-one in-depth discussions with representatives of larger peer services.

Key themes arising from these conversations

The representatives of peer services felt that the number of peer workers recorded in Scotland was positive, but they were surprised that such a large proportion of these were unpaid and non-managerial. The representatives of peer services emphasised the importance of thinking more strategically about how roles and career pathways for both paid and unpaid peer workers are set up and supported because if this is inadequate it could "do more harm than good" for potentially vulnerable peer workers.

The representatives of peer services reiterated that there can be a lack of recognition and understanding around what peer support involves, and the unique skill-base that underpins the peer worker role. They felt that some decision-makers could be very risk-averse to the extent that they were unwilling to support a service that is an early intervention with the potential to save time and resource elsewhere. They described the difficulties that they faced in "being heard" when attempting to rectify this, exacerbated by the limited influence that peer workers typically have - individually or as a sector - because so few hold paid or senior roles. They also wondered whether decision-makers might perceive the sector to have lower value because it was largely operated by volunteers and tended to present its approach as being informal. The representatives of peer services felt that it would be helpful to have support to "make the case" for peer support, and to engage decision-makers with evidence of the value of peer support.

Those representing larger organisations felt that it was important to implement consistency across their peer worker roles, putting "some kind of shape around it" in order to ensure that expectations of responsibilities are managed and that safeguarding is prioritised. However they acknowledged various tensions arising from this, including:

- That this could feel overly formalised and could limit the potential for taking bespoke localised approaches;
- Understanding and holding the boundaries between peer roles and roles held by people with lived experience;
- The difficulty in securing internal and external support to fund roles dedicated to managing, supporting and the development of peers;
- The challenge of negotiating all of the above when working in partnership with multiple external organisations;
- A risk that the “professionalisation” of peer support could lead to the dilution of its value as a radical challenge to traditional systems and clinical services.

What is needed for peer support to grow and thrive?

- The representatives of peer services called for a culture where peer support can thrive, driven by grassroots-up peer leadership alongside a commitment from decision-makers.
- They would like to see the following actions:
 - Lived experience to be heard and acknowledged;
 - The skills base of peer support to be articulated with more clarity;
 - A consistency of approach to the development, implementation and delivery of peer support;
 - Peer leadership in strategy and services;
 - Training for managers to improve their understanding of peer support and peer working and how best to manage and lead peers and develop peer support;
 - Calls for more peer support and peer workers to be acted on;
 - Funder understanding of the value of peer support and peer working to be improved, including greater engagement with peer support generally;
 - The value and role of peer support to be genuinely recognised, and backed up by action and investment – ideally including a formal commitment at a national and local policy level with associated investment;
 - Peer services to be more connected with one another;
 - More joined-up working to take place nationally, to ensure that effort is not duplicated.

Concluding remarks

Mental health and wellbeing peer support is happening across all 32 Scottish Local Authority areas. In the last year, 18,548 individuals have participated in peer support in Scotland, supported by 235 paid and 1,155 unpaid Peer Workers.

The data described within this report provides a snapshot of mental health and wellbeing peer support in Scotland in 2024.

Whilst it is acknowledged that we have not identified all mental health and wellbeing peer support groups, services or activities in Scotland, our wide spread of 105 peer support groups, services and activities is a strong sample.

We therefore have recent evidence about the scope and breadth of mental health and wellbeing peer support structures, delivery and participation across Scotland. This can be used to better understand the peer support sector and advocate for sectoral needs.

The survey highlights:

- Peer support is delivered across Scotland by a dedicated workforce of at least 1,390. This is even more impressive when we acknowledge that only 235 Peer Workers are paid with the remaining 1,155 Peer Workers unpaid.
- 73 percent of paid Peer Workers and 87 percent of unpaid Peer Workers work in the third sector, primarily in SCIOs or charities registered with OSCR.
- 87 percent of those delivering peer support were formally constituted organisations such as SCIOs, charities, CICs or a Company Limited by Guarantee.
- 34 percent are wholly peer led with a further 50 percent being partially peer-led.
- Peer support is provided in a range of ways including in-person and online support groups, one-to-one support and text-based support. Just over 50 percent of peer support groups, services and activities had delivered any support remotely or online in the last year with 5 percent being fully remote or online.

- The challenges most often faced by peer support groups, services or activities are having a low budget (34%), lack of understanding of peer support amongst decision-makers (30%), unpredictable or sporadic attendance (28%), meeting high demand for peer support (27%) and recruiting and retaining volunteers (25%).

Scottish Recovery Network should consider these findings and identify key areas of support needed, areas requiring more examination or discussion and work with others to plan next steps.

Key areas for development and support may include:

- A coordinated approach to peer support learning and development opportunities
- Working with others to build structures for peer-led supervision and peer leadership
- Expanding the range of peer working roles including in supervision, learning, service development and leadership
- Connections and opportunities for shared learning for groups, services, organisations and Peer Workers

Scottish Recovery Network should also work with peer support groups, services and organisations and others to:

- Communicate and improve understanding of the value of peer support to decision-makers and funders
- Highlight and showcase examples of peer support in different settings and areas
- Explore how to expand peer support to new groups of people and in areas of low provision.