

SLU Supervisor survey 2017 - results

Background

All SLU supervisors, i.e. those who were registered as principal or assistant supervisor in Ladok in the autumn 2017 (in total 1005 persons), were invited to answer questions about their mission and situation as supervisor, as well as questions related to SLU:s doctoral education. After 15 weeks and two reminders 224 had answered all questions. Additional 43 persons started to answer but didn't complete. 738 persons never opened the link to the survey!

Abstract

Keeping in mind that the results only are representative for those who answered – we don't know anything of the opinion of those not answering the survey – the results may be complementary to other knowledge and information.

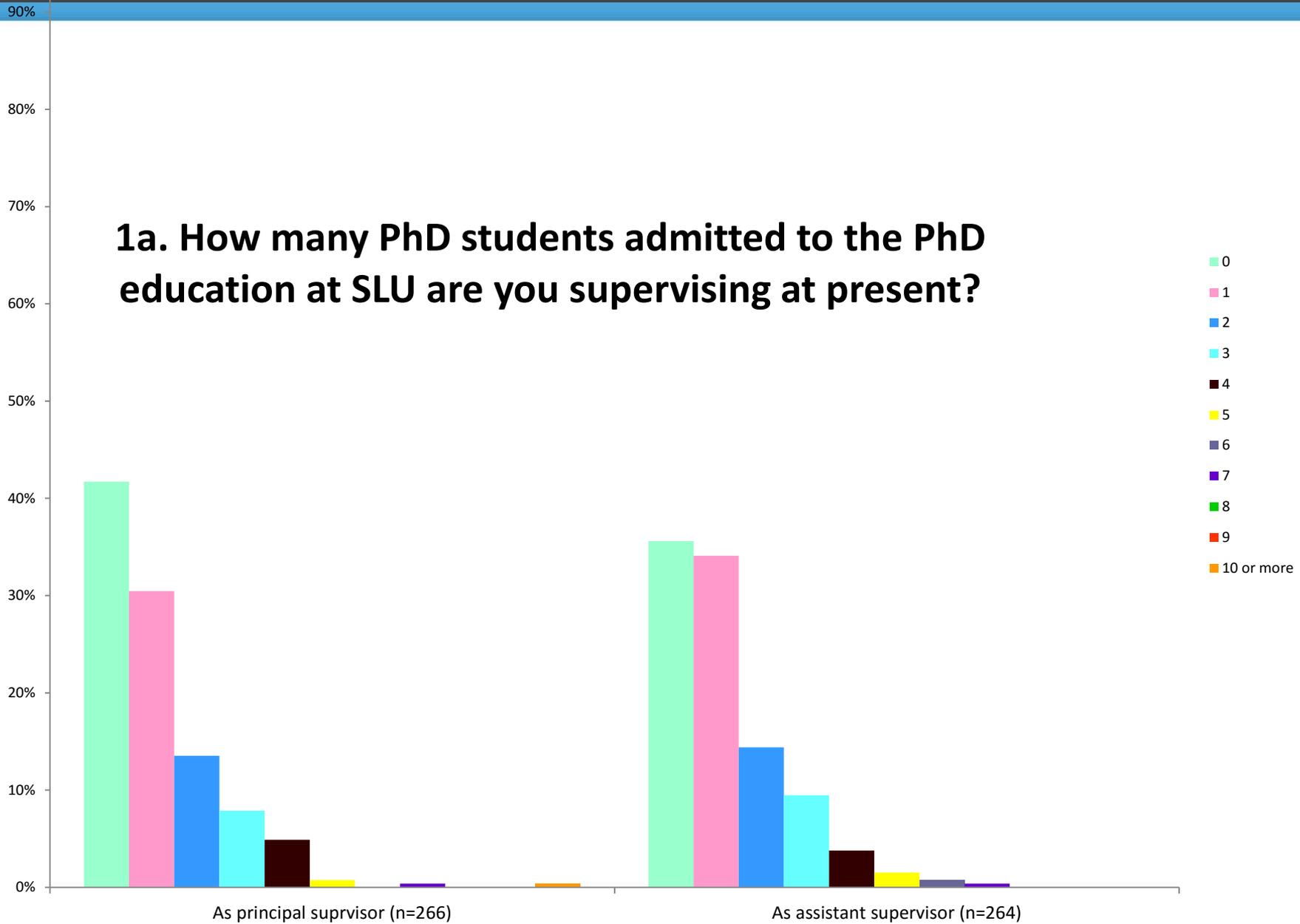
From the answers in the survey it can be concluded that a majority of those who answered are satisfied with their own contribution, the preconditions in terms of being prepared, and the education where they are active as supervisors.

However, both answers on questions and open answers emphasize a too heavy workload and fragmented work situation. In the open answers the educational administration is described as overly complex, extensive and in continual change. However, when asked in question no 3 if difficulties as supervisor are due to too much educational administration, administrative systems or unclear guidelines a majority answers not very much. One aspect to keep in mind regarding these apparent contradictory results is that assistant supervisors are not involved in the educational administration.

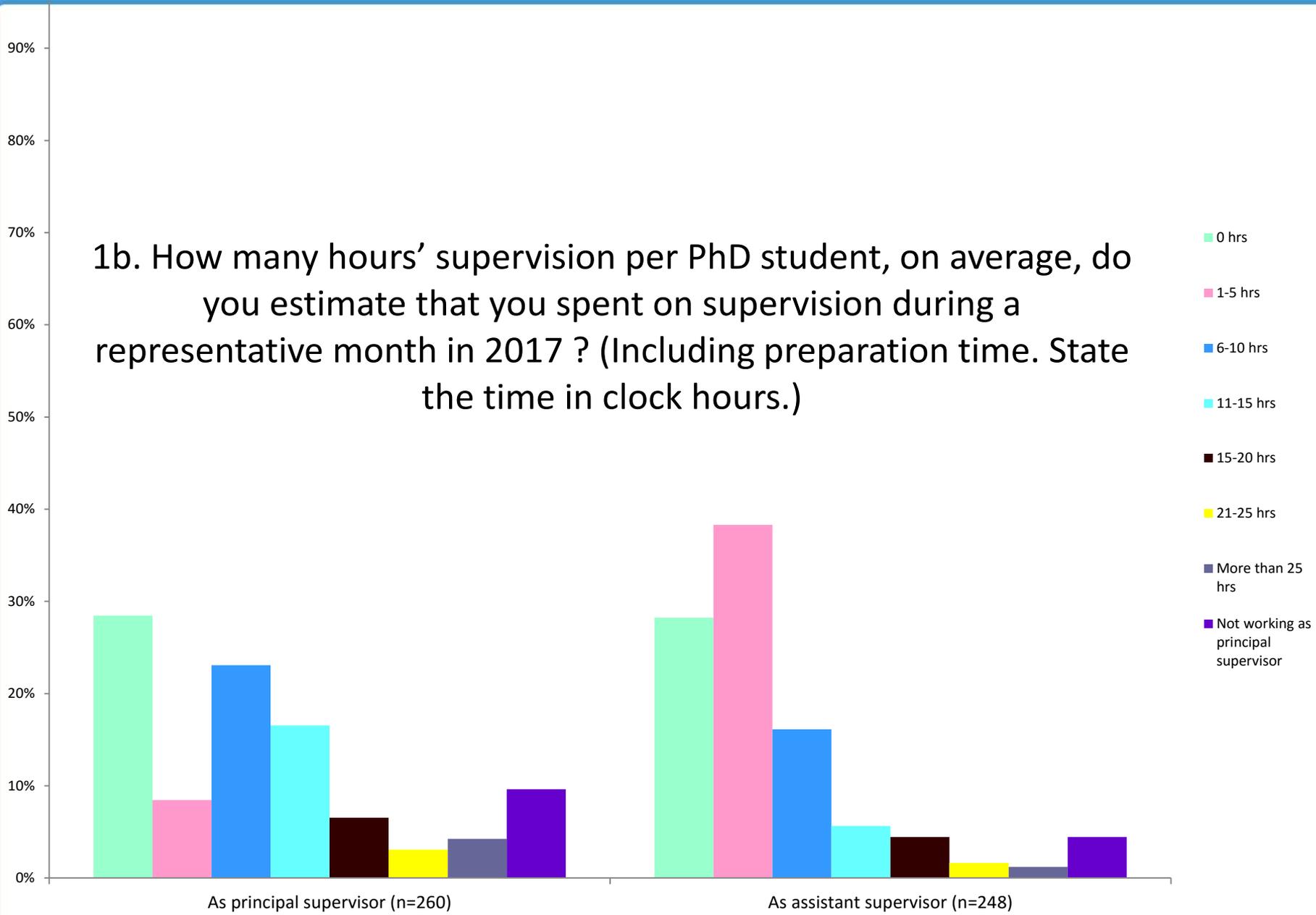
Except for presenting and discussing research outside academia; supporting other people's learning, and making ethical assessments, the PhD students opportunities to develop knowledge and skills are considered to meet the needs to a great extent. In the open answers, a concern regarding the development of independent, critical researchers is raised – does the educational system at SLU (Sweden) support or hinder the doctoral student's development?

A majority answers that they to a great deal have access to colleagues to discuss supervision issues with. Support in the form of supervisor forums at departments as well as follow-up courses for supervisors are suggested in open answers as improvements.

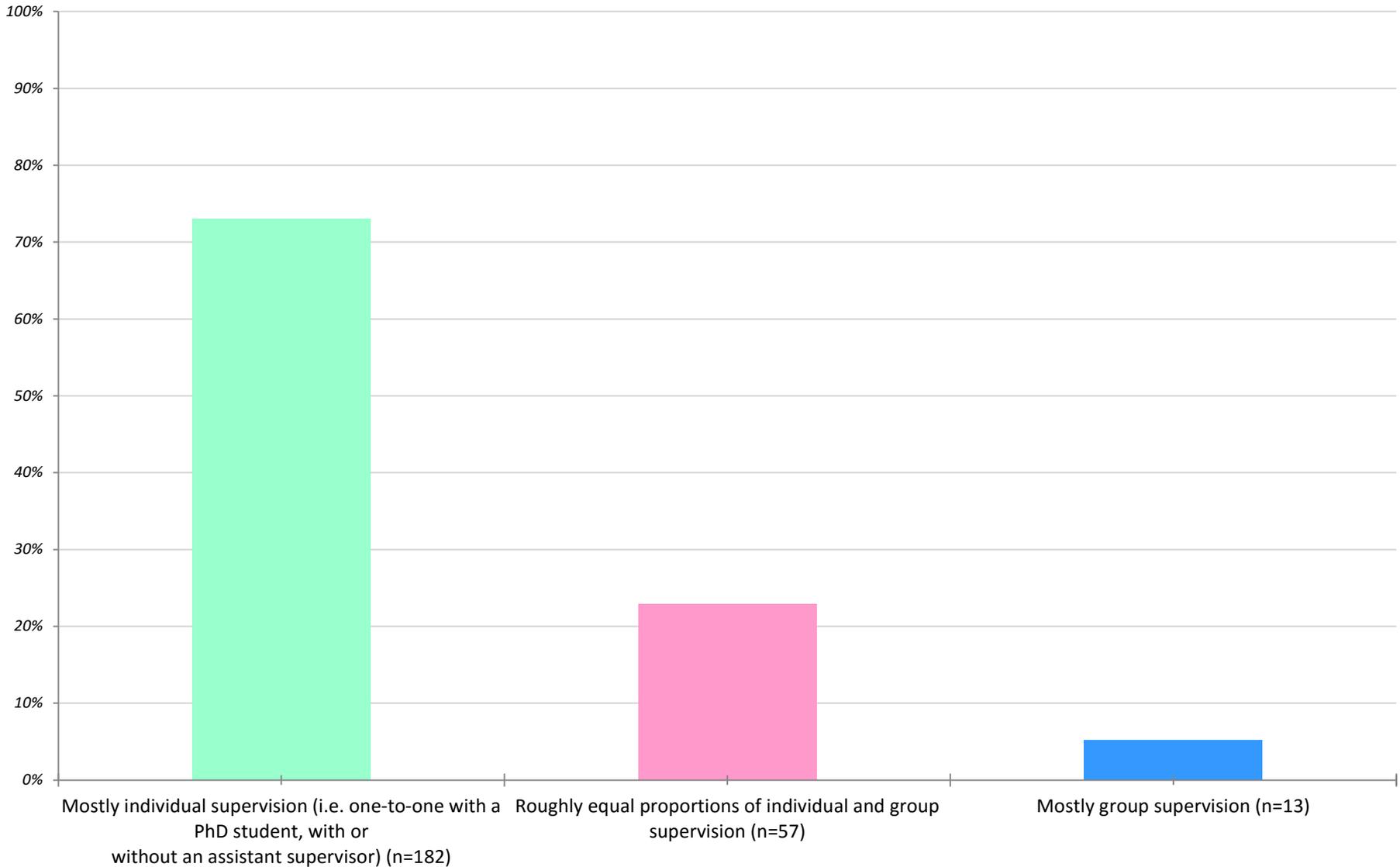
1a. How many PhD students admitted to the PhD education at SLU are you supervising at present?



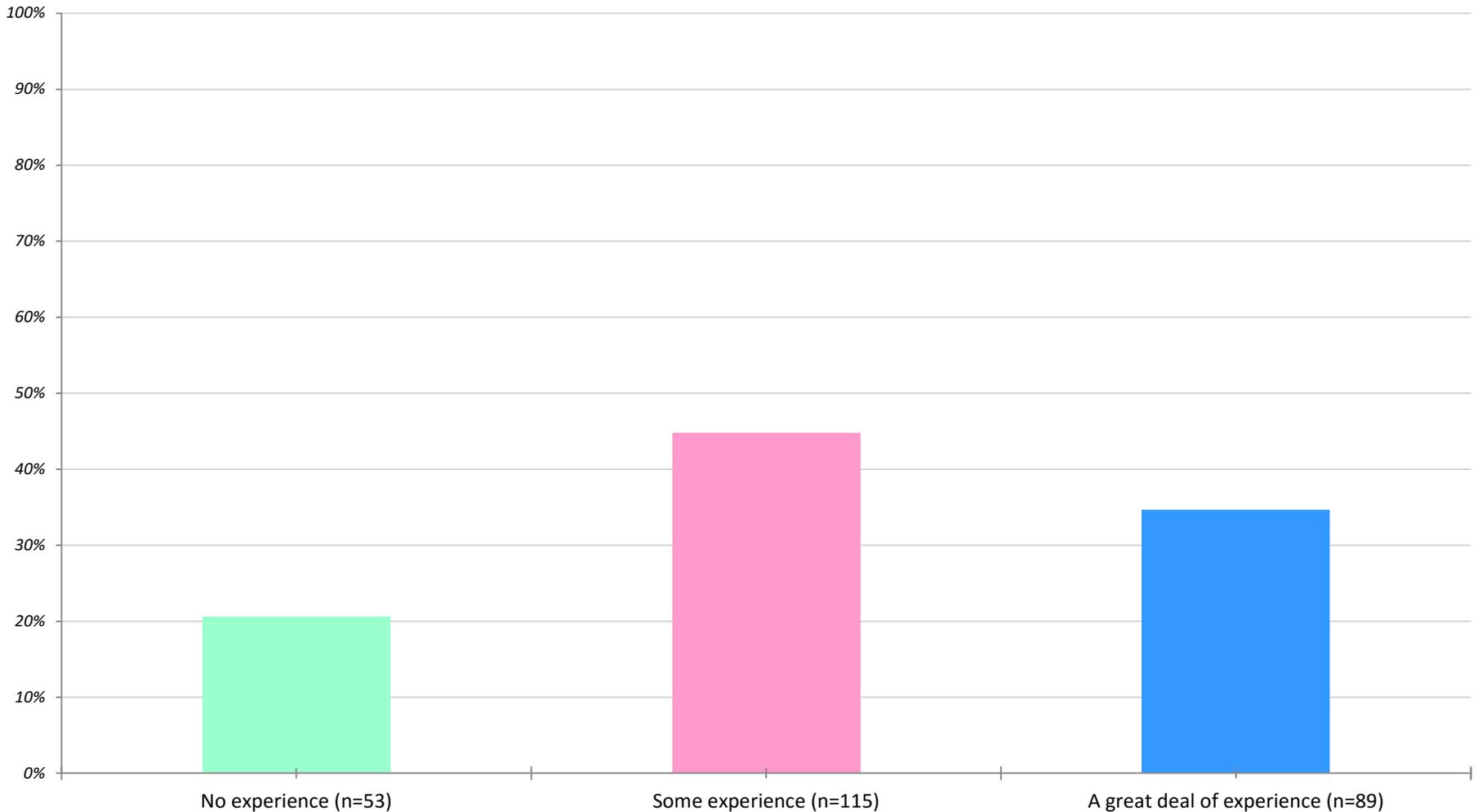
1b. How many hours' supervision per PhD student, on average, do you estimate that you spent on supervision during a representative month in 2017 ? (Including preparation time. State the time in clock hours.)



1c. What form does your supervision take?



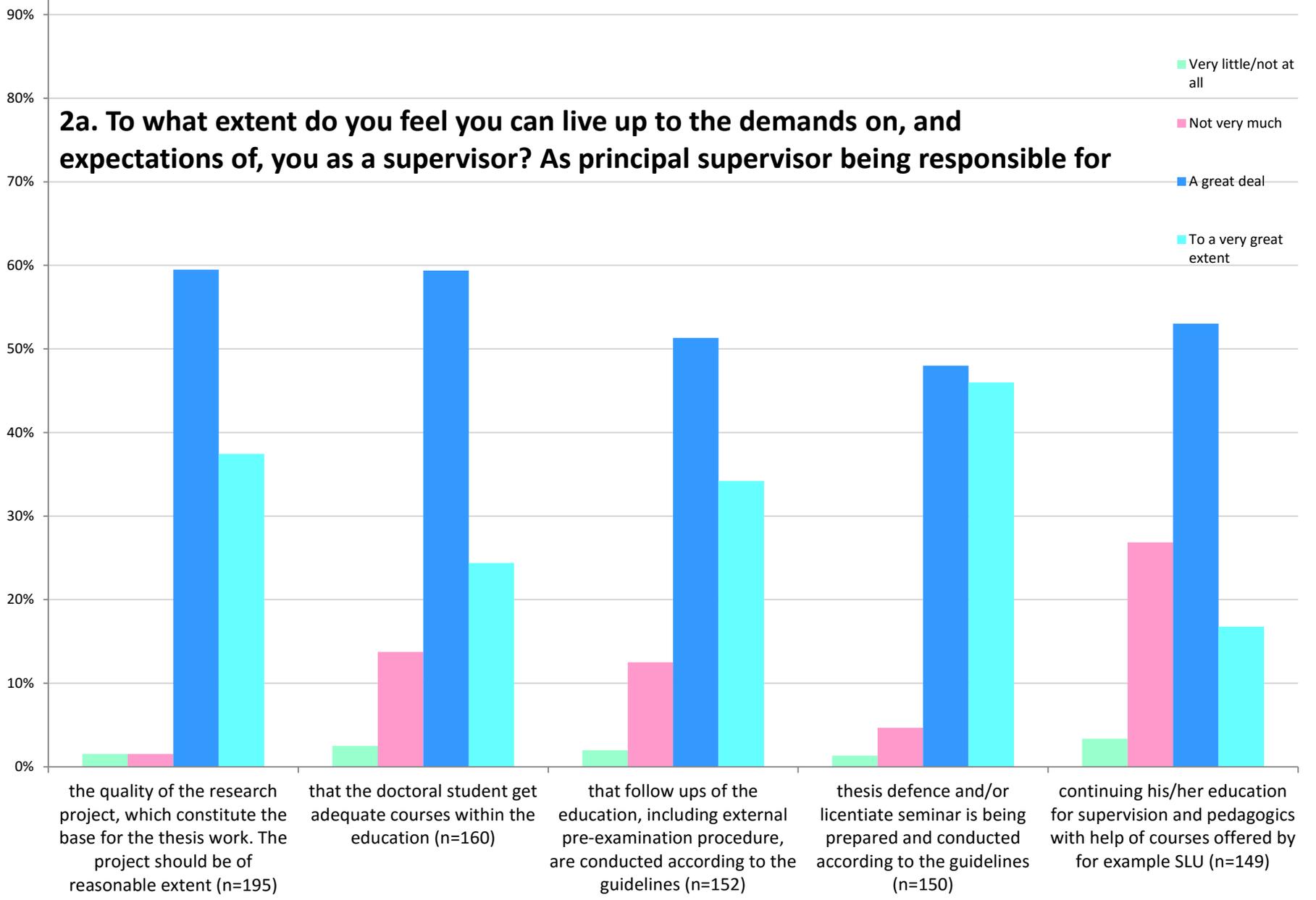
1d. How much experience do you have of supervising international PhD students (i.e. those with undergraduate degrees from countries other than Sweden)?



1e. If you have experience of supervising international PhD students, what opportunities and challenges do you see in this?

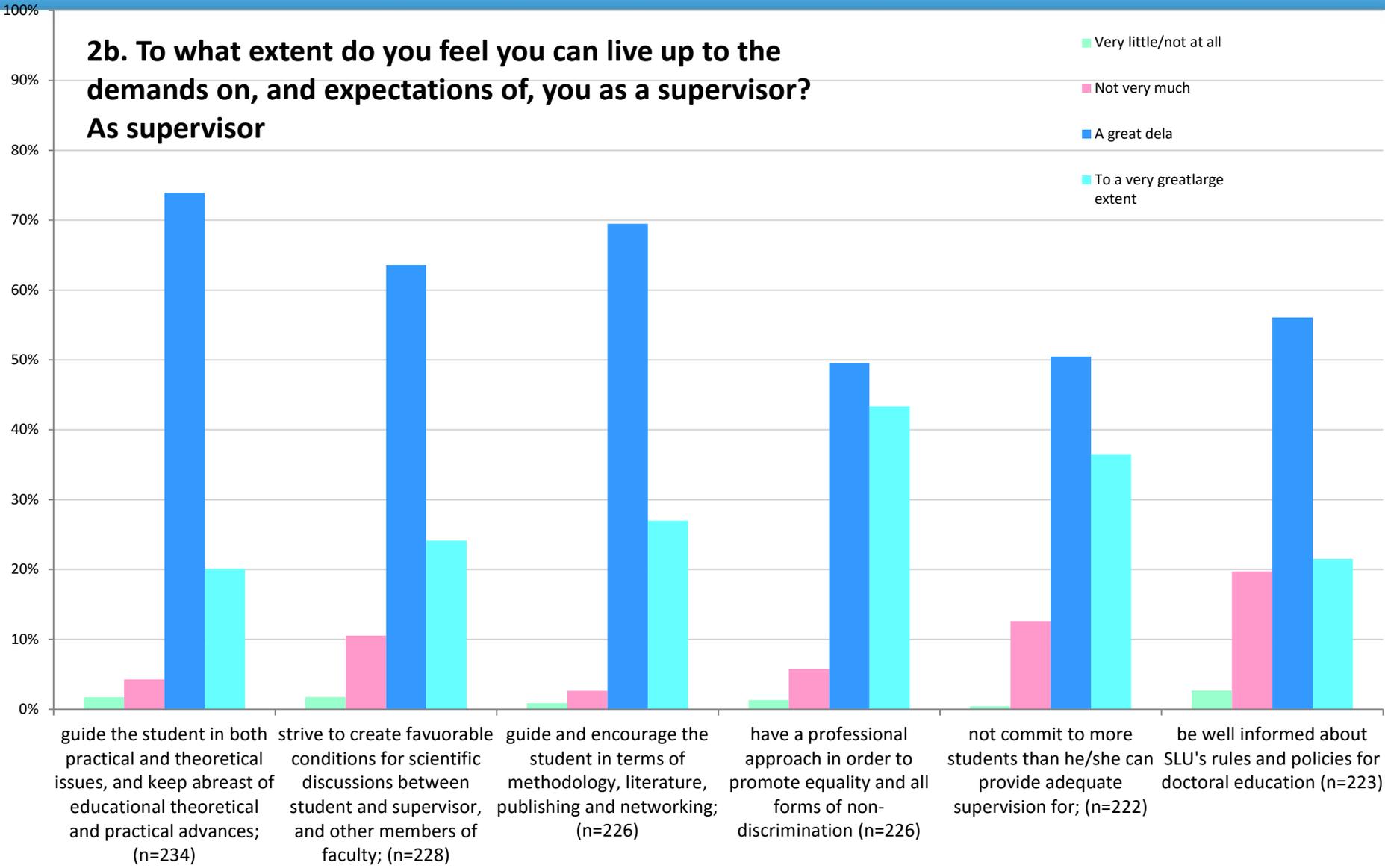
In conclusion, 130 persons answered:

- International PhD students are generally highly motivated and hardworking; open, flexible; enhanced international perspectives on research; vitalization of the research topic, research unit, department; bring with them scientific connections to other countries
- A cultural gap to bridge (country and individual characteristics matters). It consists of:
 - Language difficulties
 - Differences in the basic view of knowledge; teaching, responsibilities, independence, quality; value systems
 - Difficulties to understand the Swedish education system
 - Difficulties to find a social context/life
- Sandwich students need more time (>4 ys) since it sometimes is hard for them to do research full time in their home countries.
- The main challenge for the supervisor relates to practicalities and administration concerning migrations authorities etc.

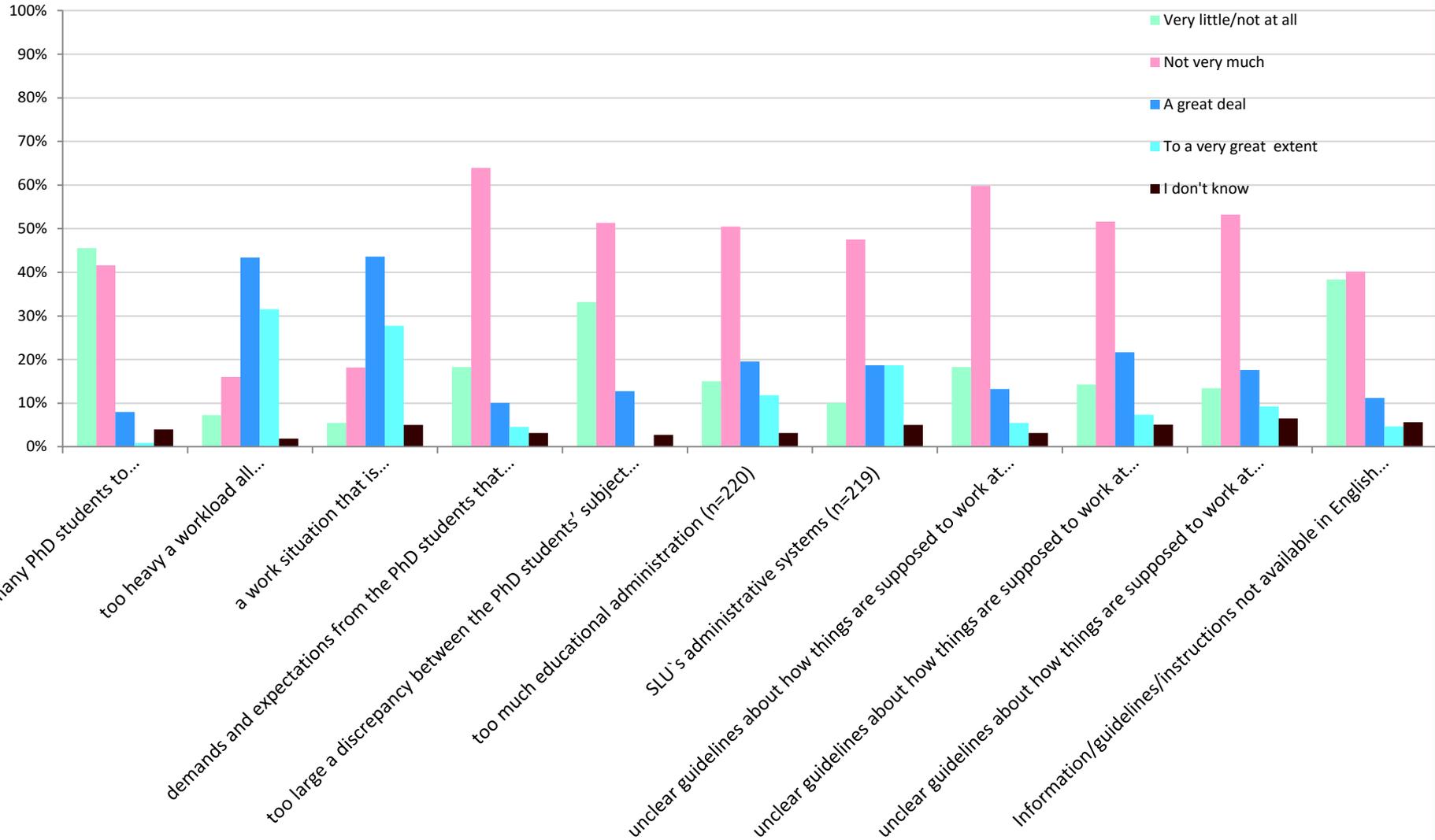


2b. To what extent do you feel you can live up to the demands on, and expectations of, you as a supervisor? As supervisor

- Very little/not at all
- Not very much
- A great dela
- To a very greatlarge extent



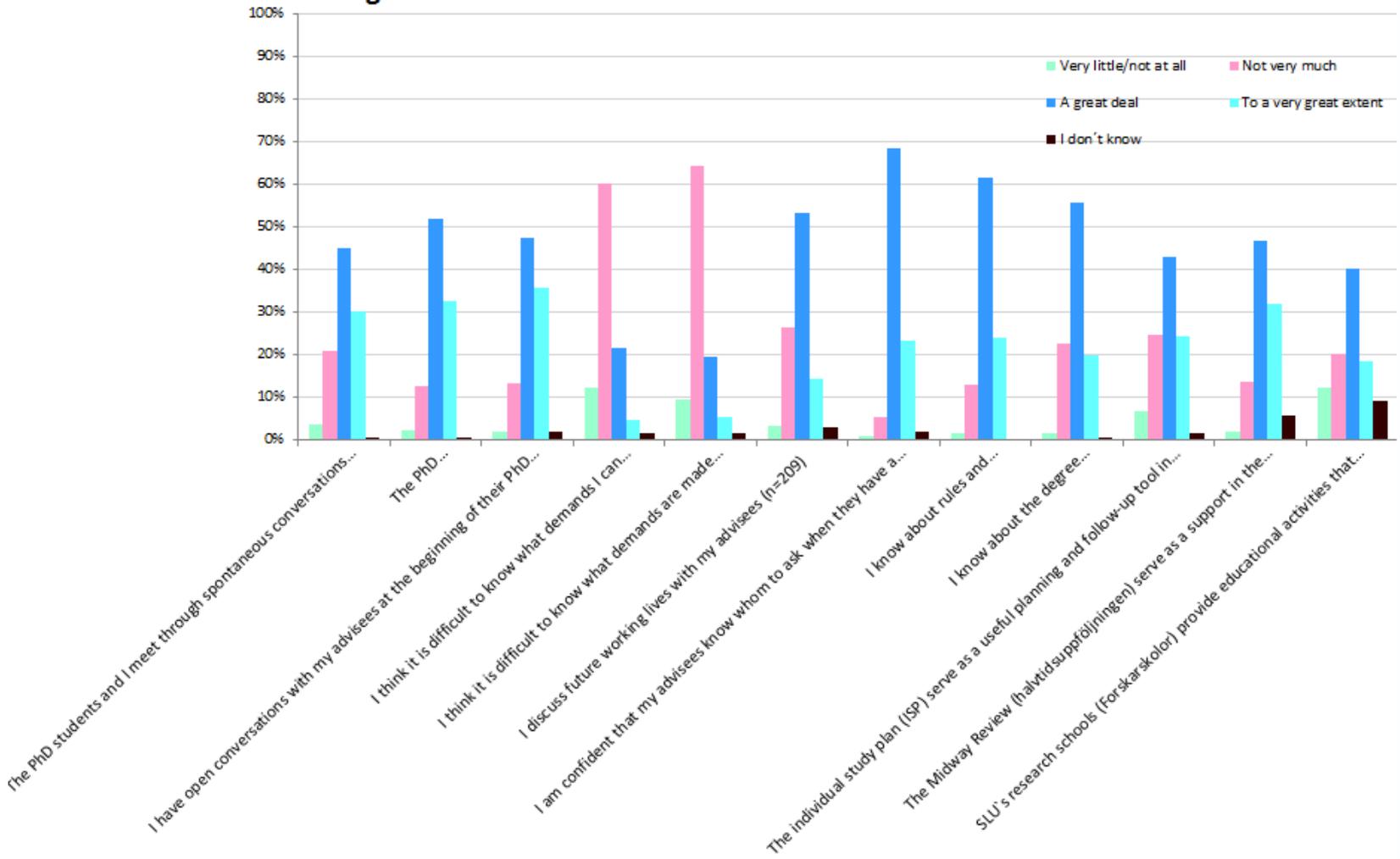
3. If you experience difficulties, to any extent, in living up to these demands and expectations, to what extent do you think the difficulties are due to:



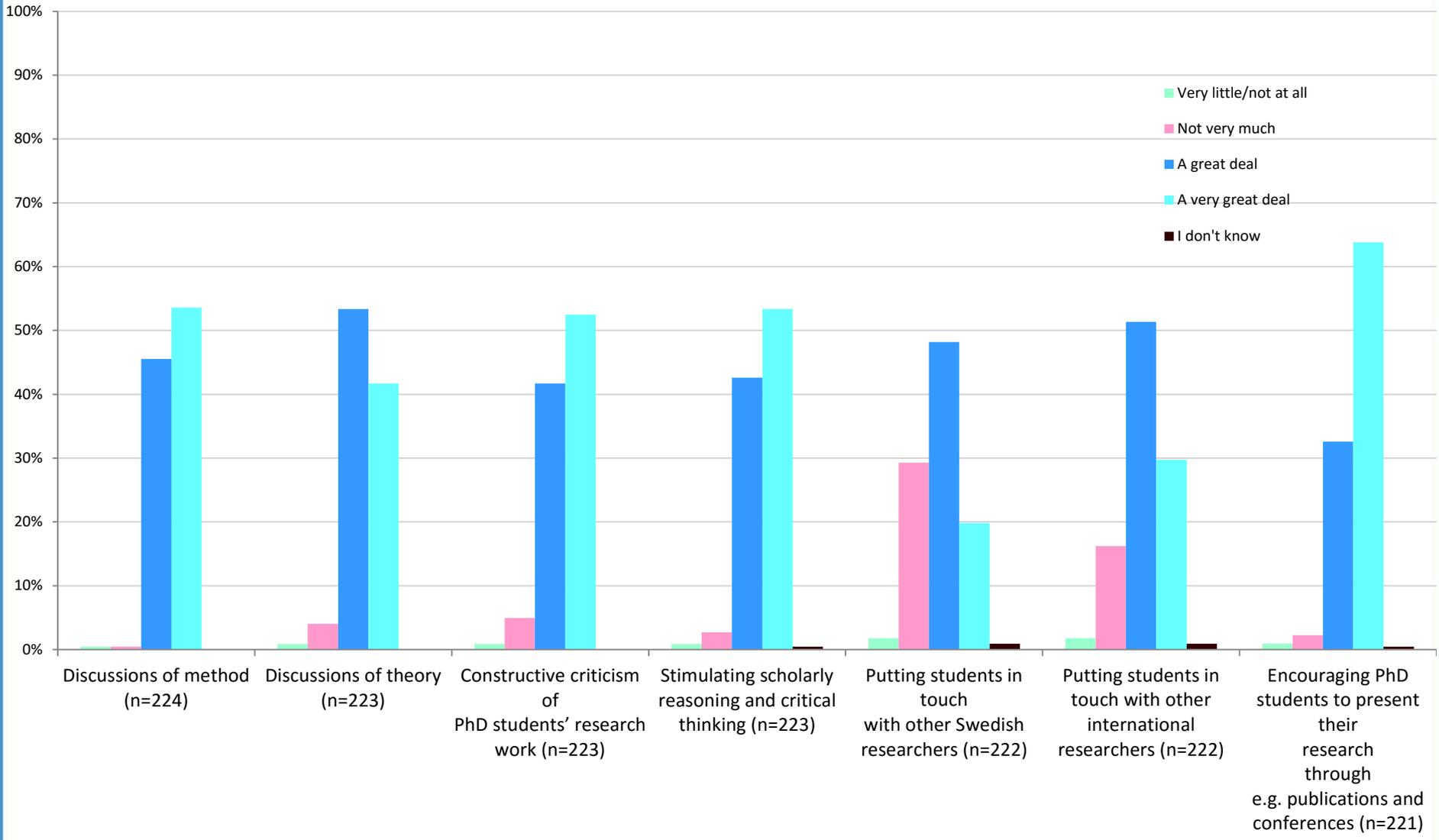
Summarized comments from 35 persons in connection to the preceding question 3:

- Lack of time for supervision due to
 - Too many other responsibilities
 - an overly complex, extensive administration with continual changes and modifications
 - It is done in spare time. There is no time granted for supervision

4a. Your opinion of your supervision - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

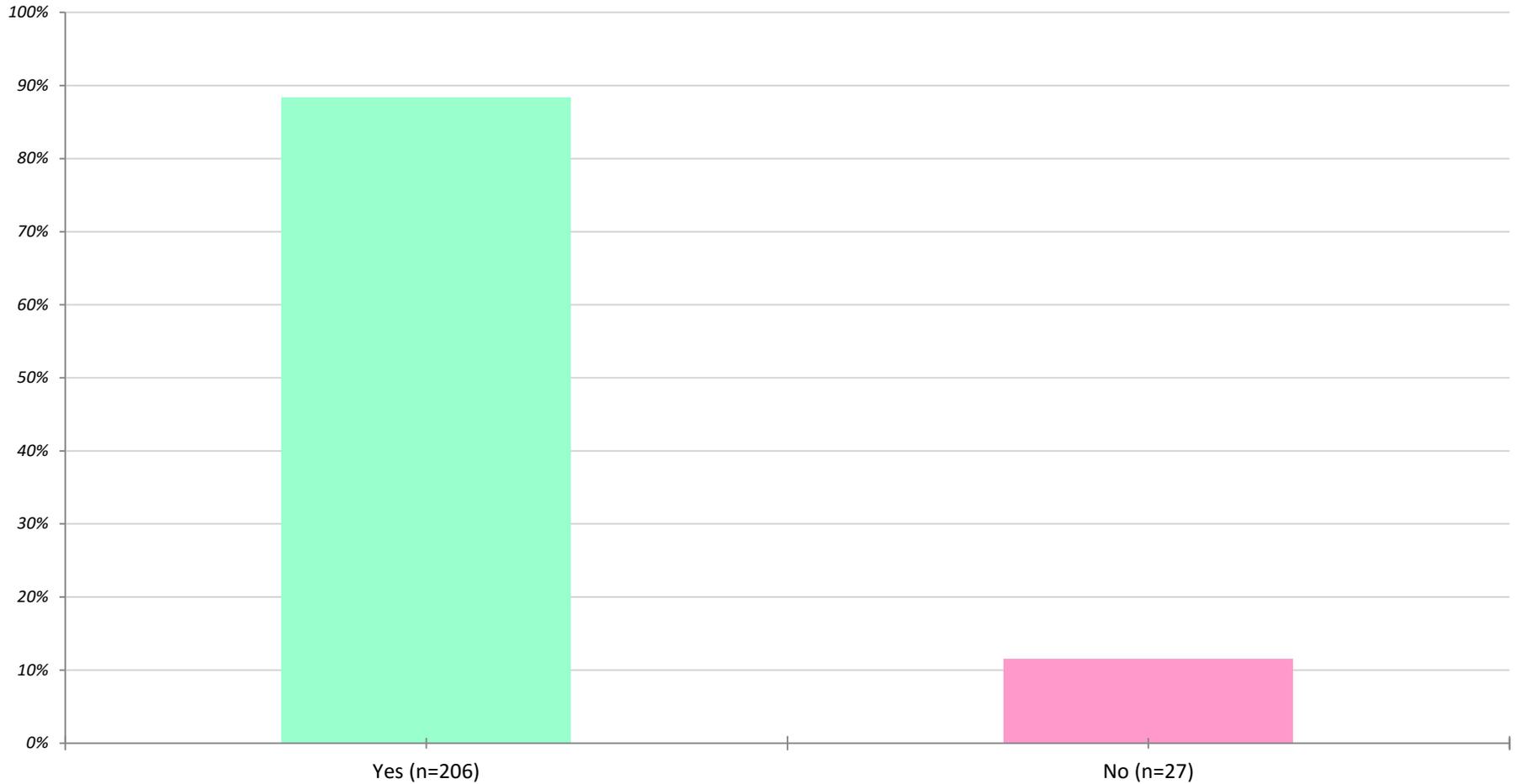


4b. Your opinion of your supervision - How much importance do you attach to the following aspects of your supervision?

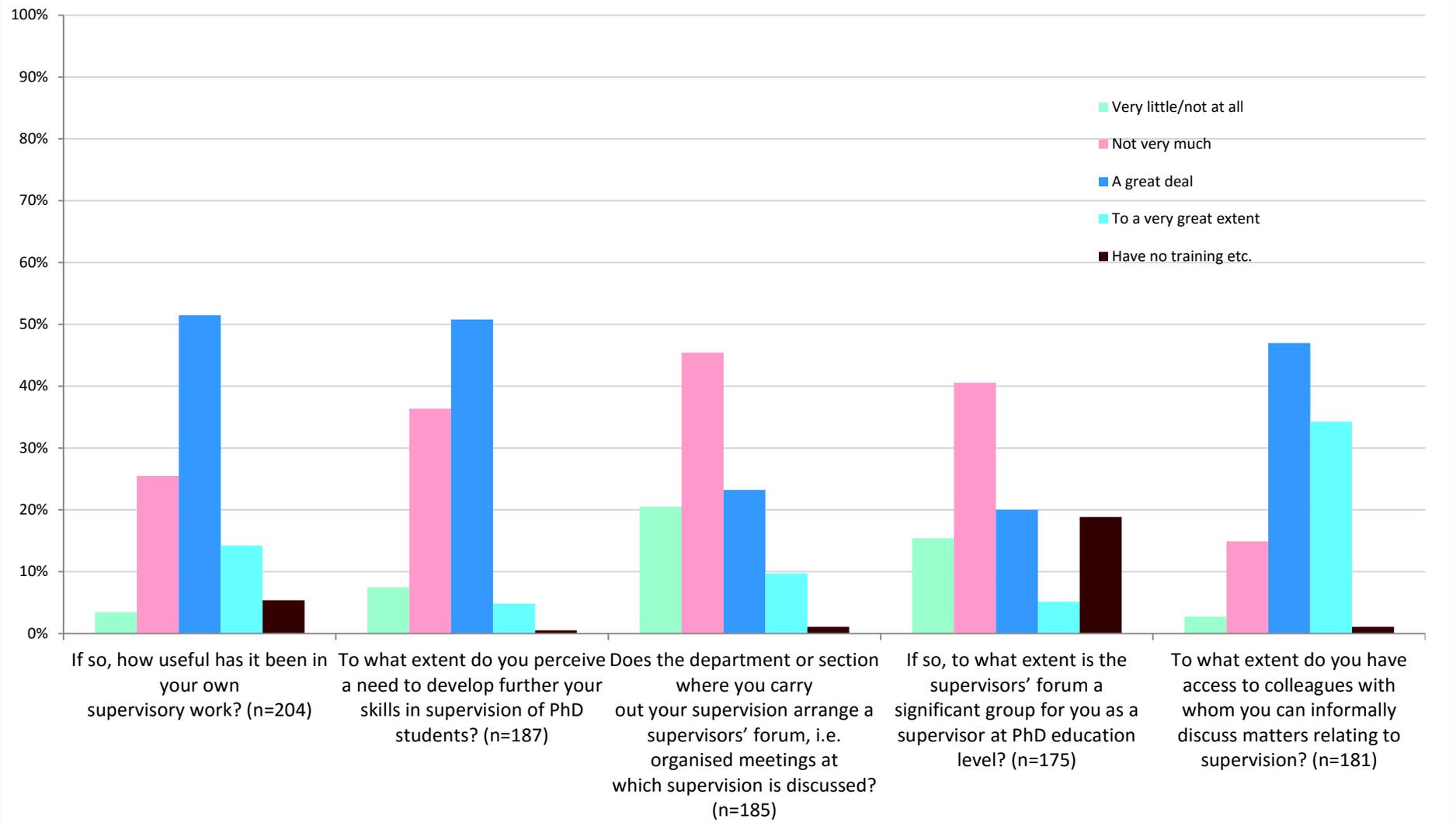


5. Training and support in the supervisory role

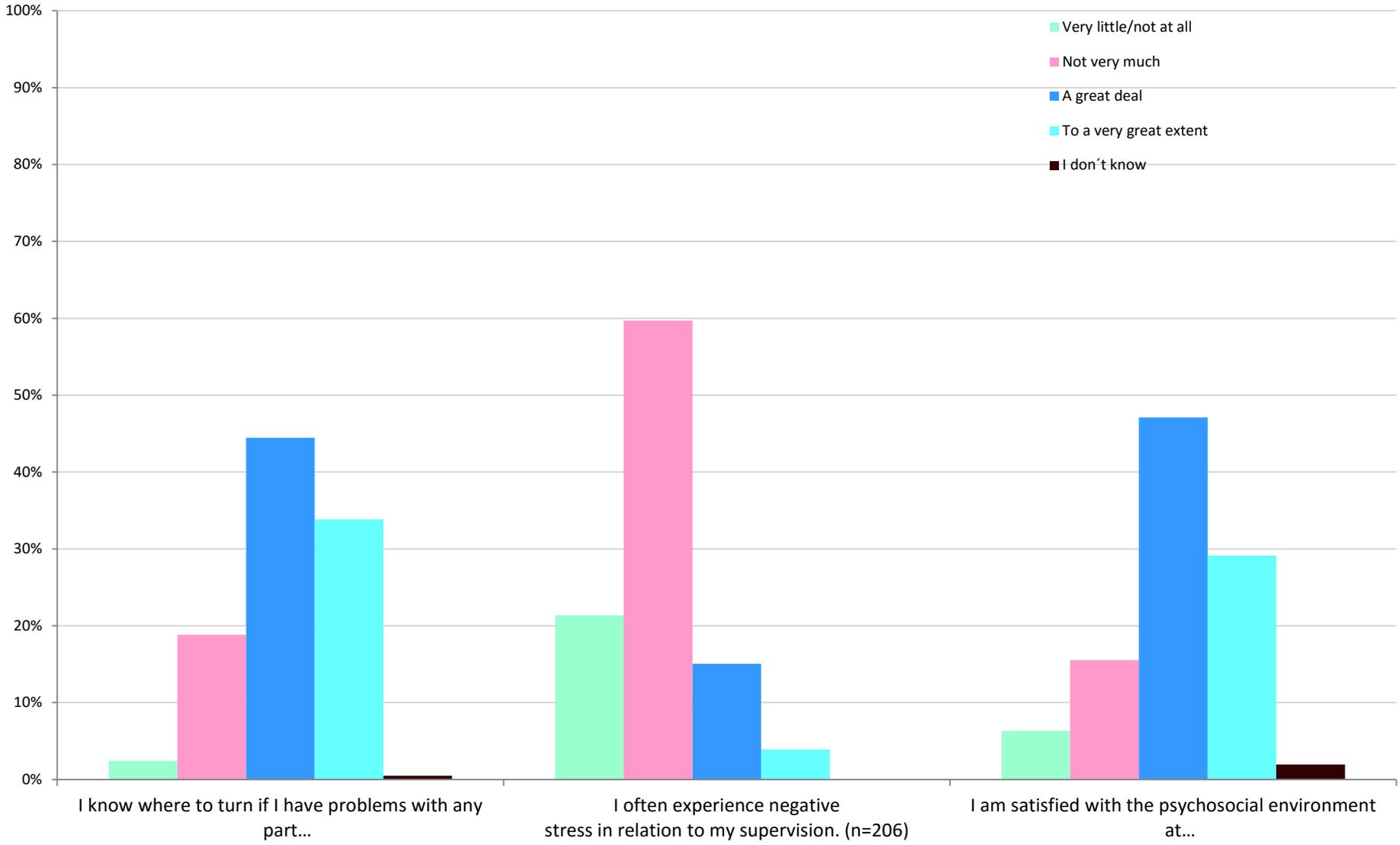
a. Have you attended any supervisor training?



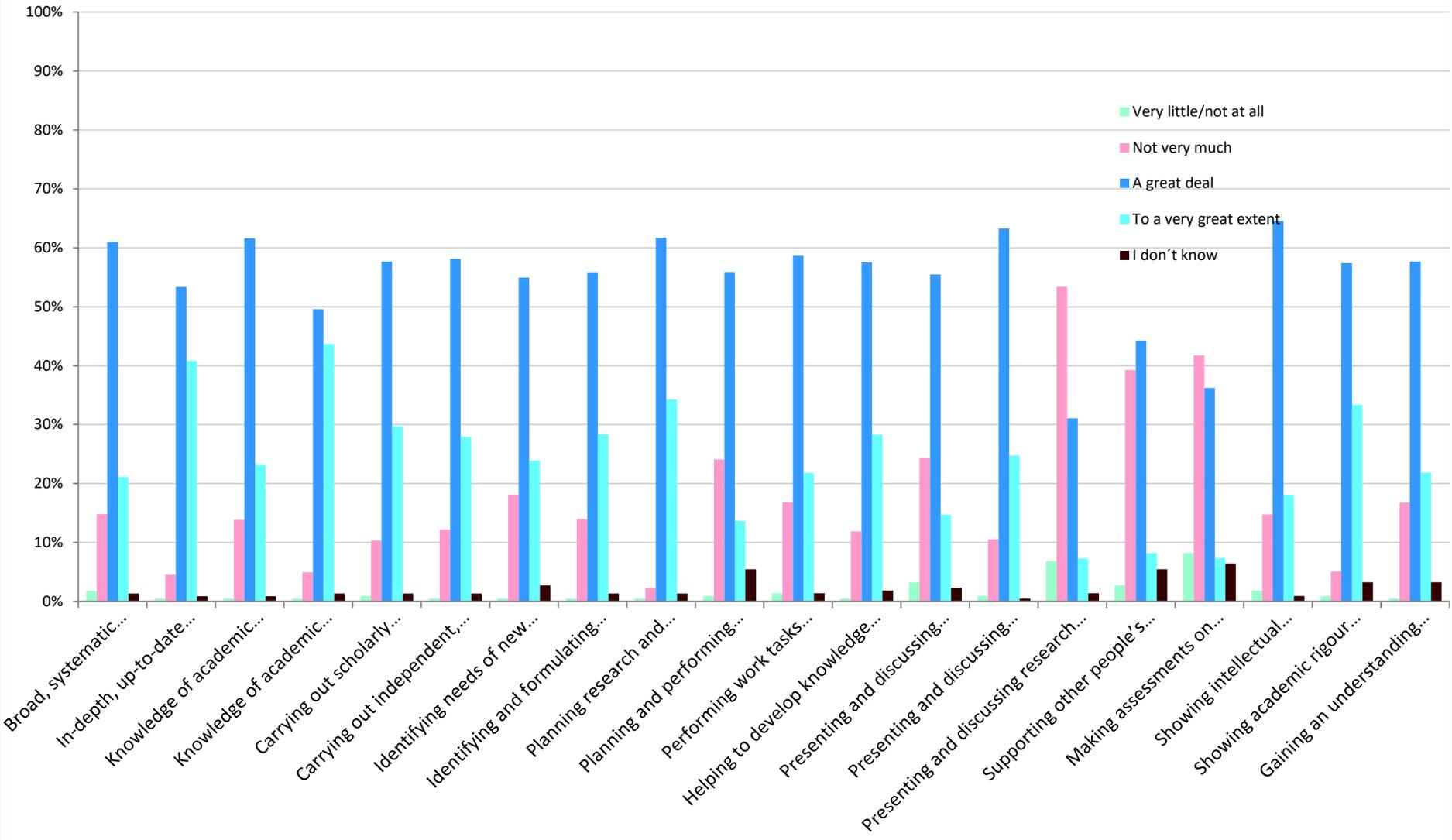
5b. Training and support in the supervisory role



5c. Training and support in the supervisory role - To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



6. The Swedish Higher Education Ordinance defines a number of **learning outcomes for third cycle (doctoral) education** (described at next slide in order to facilitate understanding of x-axis). To what extent do you think the PhD students are given opportun



The Swedish Higher Education Ordinance defines a number of learning outcomes for third cycle (doctoral) education

Broad, systematic knowledge in the research field

In-depth, up-to-date knowledge of a limited part of the research field

Knowledge of academic research methodology in general

Knowledge of academic research methodology in the specific research field

Carrying out scholarly analysis and synthesis

Carrying out independent, critical scrutiny and assessments

Identifying needs of new knowledge

Identifying and formulating academic research questions

Planning research and conducting it with adequate methods

Planning and performing other skilled work tasks

Performing work tasks within given time limits

Helping to develop knowledge in my research field

Presenting and discussing research results in Sweden

Presenting and discussing research results abroad

Presenting and discussing research outside academia

Supporting other people's learning

Making assessments on research ethics

Showing intellectual independence

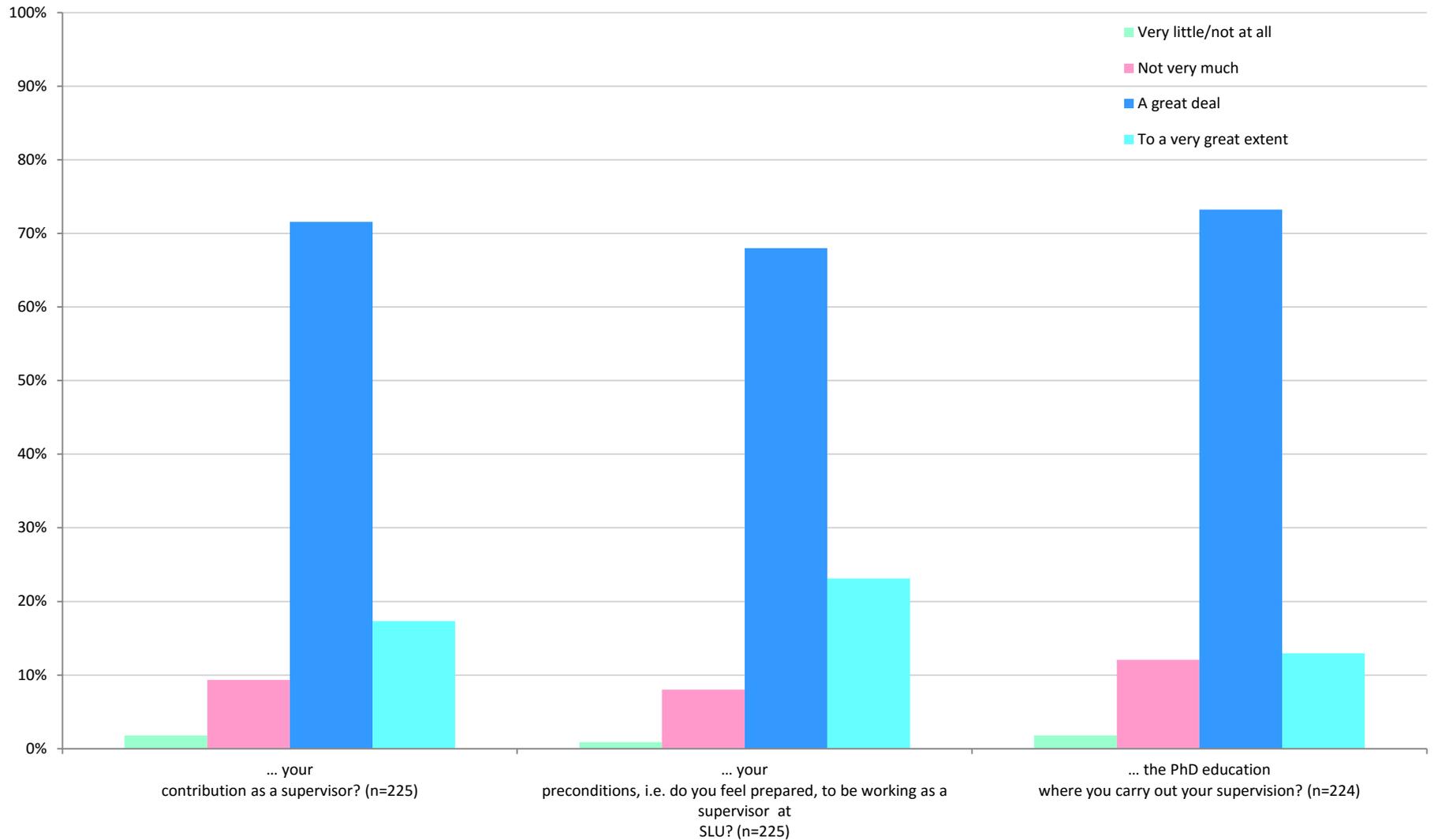
Showing academic rigour (honesty)

Gaining an understanding of the potential and limitations of academic research

Summarized comments from 20 persons in connection to the preceding question 6:

- There are options to give the students a large amount of freedom, which some are using in an excellent way, but other are scared by it.
- How far the PhD-student reaches in different areas asked for here differs A LOT between the students.
- The outcome of PhD-education is problematic as today's education is not an education of highest order, it is organised in small details
- The ISP that forces us to map out every activity over 4 years is counterproductive. All activities are simply checked off as a to do list and the time for reflection, overview of scientific thought and critical evaluation is absent on the ISP

7a. How satisfied are you with...(This question is mandatory. - you have to answer it to be able to continue.)



7b. Describe the strengths of the PhD education where you work as a supervisor

In conclusion, 150 persons answered:

- Friendly, informal atmosphere with open and trustworthy discussions, supportive social climate; creative and multidisciplinary environment characterized by generosity and inclusiveness;
- good research environment and good working conditions at department; good access to supervisor/mentors/senior colleagues for informal meetings, science discussions and interactions;
- good possibility to learn how research works by being part of a research group and taking part in real research; good possibilities to present PhD projects to stakeholders outside academia;
- critical mass of PhD students;
- Freedom for doctoral student and supervisor to make the project individual adapted, to become their 'own';

7c. Describe the weaknesses of the PhD education where you work as a supervisor

In conclusion, 150 persons answered:

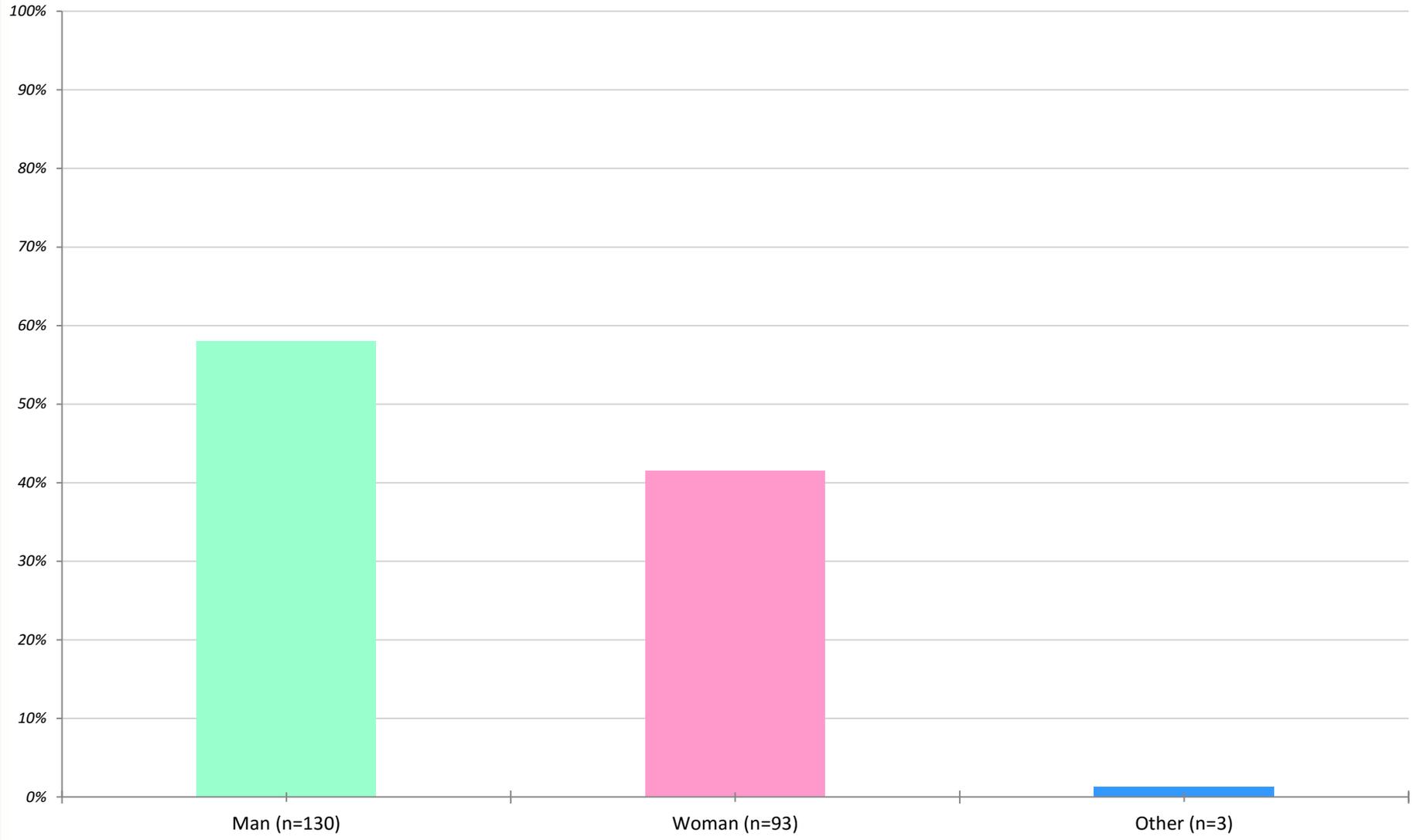
- High workload due to fragmented work schemes; unrealistic time optimism; oversized PhD projects; complex bureaucracy;
- Difficulties both with the 4th year funding and with funding for future PhD students
- Uncertainties of employment and funding - the economic situation of the supervisors is often more insecure than for the PhD student. Many supervisors have short term positions.
- Too few Ph.D. students leads to a vulnerable situation both as a whole and for the individual students. Too weak critical mass of researchers if small groups/departments; Weak academic culture and quality
- The educational process is too liberal and students too powerful - once enrolled it is very unlikely that a student will not successfully finish. The defense system is terrible, the evaluation committee is practically a hostage, we need to start with a pre-evaluation.

7d. Describe any suggestions you have for improvements

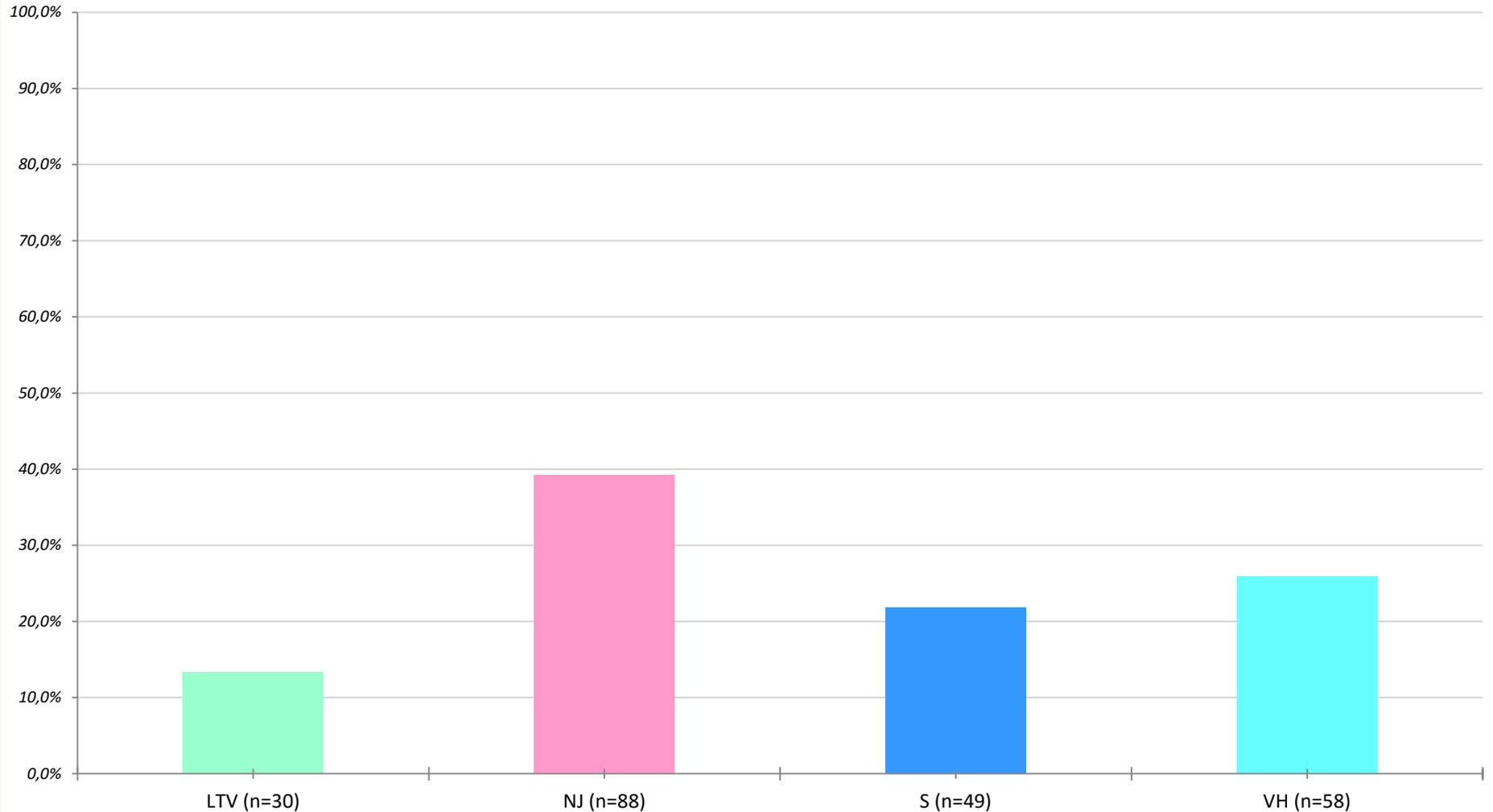
In conclusion, 120 persons answered:

- Reduce administrative burden (let the administrators help us; improve the administrative tools); Simplify ISP and admission process
- SLU financial support for supervision and central funding for the fourth year after external funding three years as well as central funding for child leave to avoid using up project funding.
- Support to supervisors
 - More follow-up courses for supervisors; regular mandatory 'supervisor coaching' at a departmental (and maybe even faculty) level.
 - a forum for discussion with supervisors of all levels of experience - supervisor is still left largely alone.
 - More discussions concerning conditions for foreign doctoral students
- Formal upgrading system after a year to determine whether a PhD candidate would make the grade or not
- Easier to terminate program at halfway point or when the student is not motivated or simply not made for this kind of education

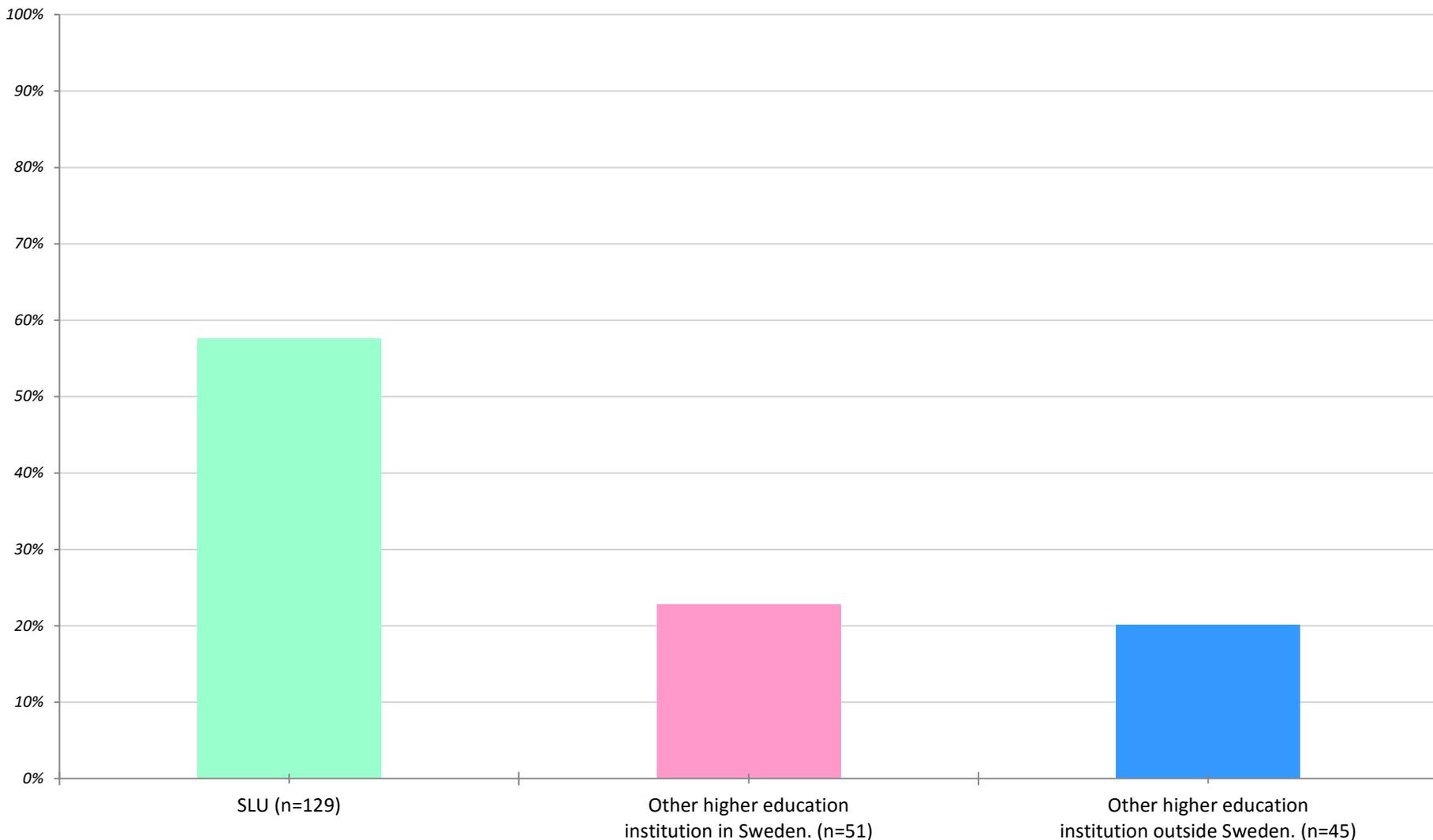
7e. I am...(This question is mandatory. - you have to answer it to be able to continue.)



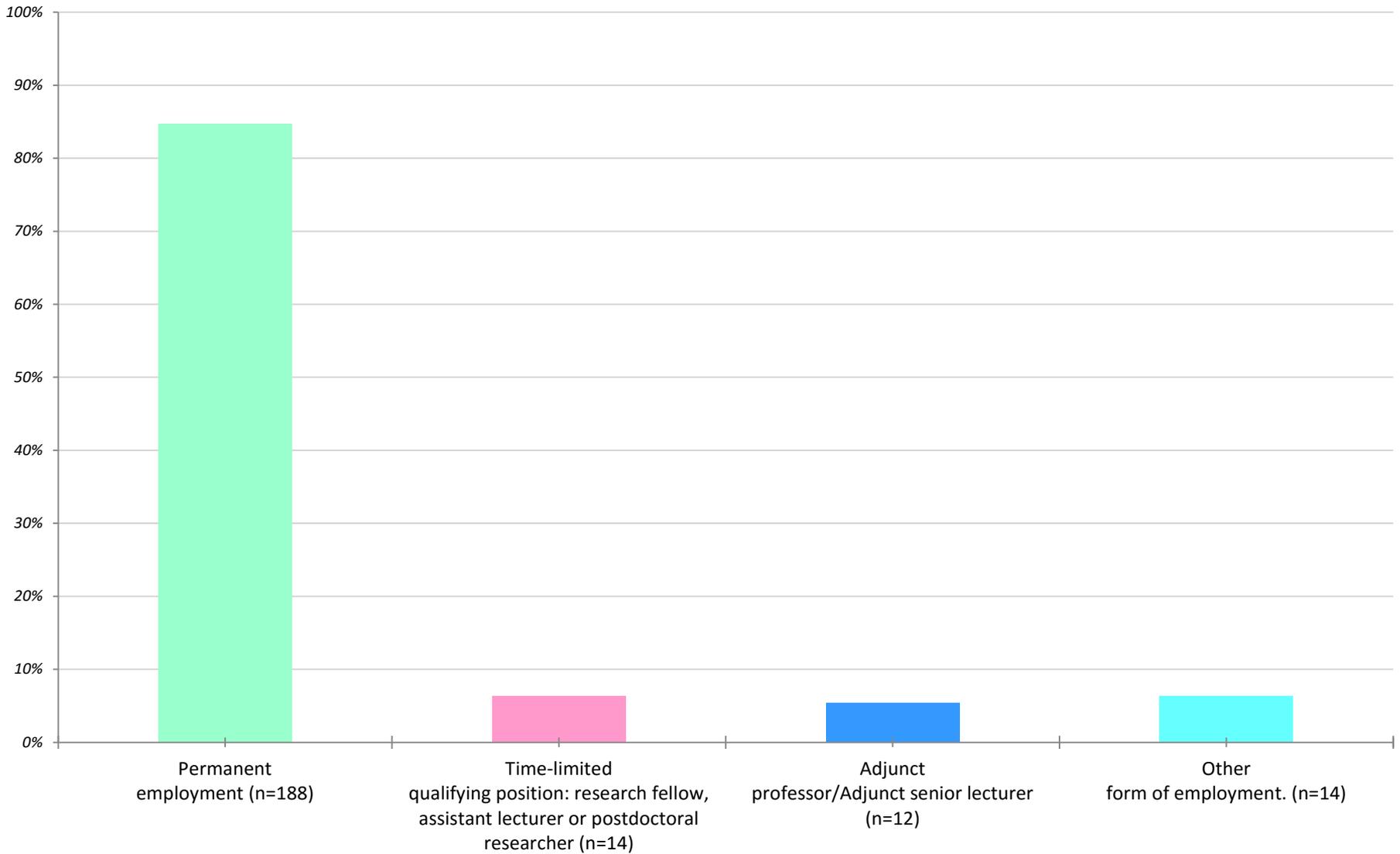
7g. At which faculty are you mainly active as a supervisor of PhD students? (This question is mandatory. You have to answer it to be able to continue.)



7h. Where did you take your doctoral degree? (This question is mandatory. You have to answer it to be able to continue.)



7i. What is your current form of employment at SLU?



7j. What is your academic title? (This question is mandatory. You have to answer it to be able to continue.)

