EQE 2024 – survey summary

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1. Executive summary

The European qualifying examination (EQE) took place from 5 to 15 March 2024, for the fourth time as a fully digital exam.

To better understand candidates' experience and improve forthcoming editions, 1 937 candidates were invited to share their experience of sitting the exam in a dedicated survey, conducted from 15 March until 7 April 2024. This report summarises the key findings of the survey and addresses developments since the uptake of a fully digital EQE in 2021.

Overall, candidates demonstrated greater proficiency with online examinations, with over 92% participating in the technical tests and over 76% indicating prior experience in online exams. Key advantages of the digital format - such as convenience of sitting the exam from any place, reduced travel time and costs as well as better balance of personal and professional commitments - continued to receive strong ratings from the participants, with an average of over 80% of respondents expressing favourable feedback on these aspects.

Notably, the positive assessment of infrastructure indicators has remained consistently high since 2023 with around 90% of participants providing positive feedback on tutorials, FAQs, exam documentation, chat functionality, access to digital documentation and activation of examination flows. This reflects the significant improvements since 2021 for both first-time and returning candidates, given that over 50% of respondents were taking EQE for the first time. Most technical support cases during the examinations involved candidates using corporate settings with limited administrator rights and corporate security applications, contrary to guidance provided in the instructions for candidates. Consequently, stricter measures may be needed to ensure compliance and safeguard candidates, by restricting the use of devices with limited administrator rights which can impact their performance during this key exam for qualifying as European patent attorney.

The scheduling of five exam days over two weeks with at least one day between the main papers was considered effective by candidates. Time constraints are always underscored as a challenge by EQE candidates, with 55% of respondents expressing in 2024 that more time during the exam would have improved their performance, a percentage similar to those of previous editions.
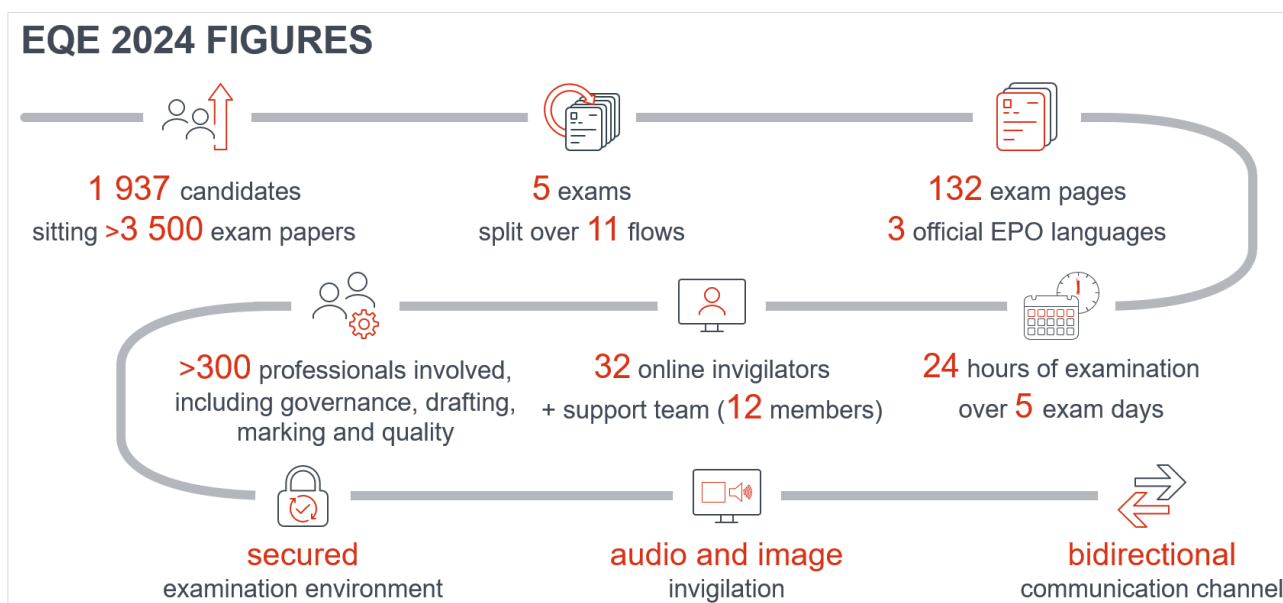
Service and support during the exams received high ratings, with effective bidirectional communication channels and prompt assistance by a large team of invigilators and first- and second-line support.

For the second year, the survey addressed diversity and inclusion with specific questions. 46 candidates reported conditions requiring specific accommodations, a number consistent with 47 in 2023. The three main categories were medical conditions, mental health difficulties and pregnancy, while specific accommodations included use of diabetes device, wearing special glasses or a veil.

In conclusion, the feedback from candidates in EQE 2024 confirmed their robust preparation and ability to navigate the fully digital examination format, building on solid foundations since the adoption of a fully digital EQE format in 2021.

2. Introduction to the EQE 2024

- 1 937 candidates sat one or more exams within EQE 2024
- 5 fully digital exams split over 11 examination flows
- 132 exam pages in each of the three official EPO languages
- 24 hours of examination over 5 exam days
- 32 online invigilators and a deployment force of 12 members for first- and second-level support
- Approximately 300 professionals involved in drafting the papers and marking the answers
- Secure examination environment
- Audio and image invigilation
- Bidirectional invigilator/candidate communication channel

EQE 2024 FIGURES

1 937 candidates
sitting >**3 500** exam papers

5 exams
split over **11** flows

132 exam pages
3 official EPO languages

>**300** professionals involved,
including governance, drafting,
marking and quality

32 online invigilators
+ support team (**12** members)

24 hours of examination
over **5** exam days

secured
examination environment

audio and image
invigilation

bidirectional
communication channel

3. Assessment of the EQE 2024[1]

3.1 Preparation of candidates

Ahead of EQE 2024, there were several steps taken and various documents provided to assist candidates in preparing for the fully digital EQE, including:

- Compendium/mock exams available on WISEflow from mid-October 2023 onwards, enabling the candidates to familiarise themselves with the examination environment without time constraints or other restrictions.
- Four technical test sessions: 25 January and 20 February 2024, in the morning and afternoon, to allow all candidates to find a suitable slot.
- Supporting documentation, including:
  - a comprehensive dedicated EQE section on epo.org with extensive FAQs
  - instructions to candidates
  - a code of conduct

Considering the importance of preparation and training, four technical test sessions were offered in January and February 2024. An average of 92% of survey participants attended at least one of the technical tests providing an opportunity to test the proper functionality of their video and audio settings.
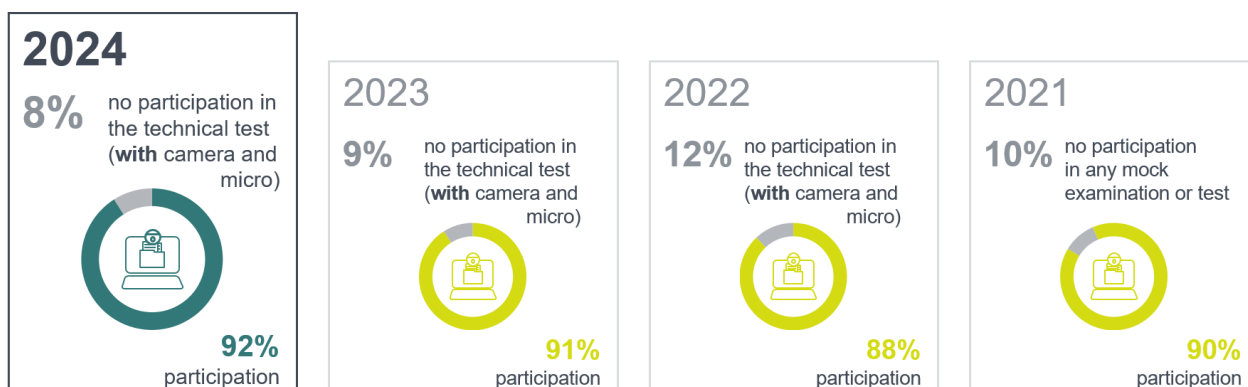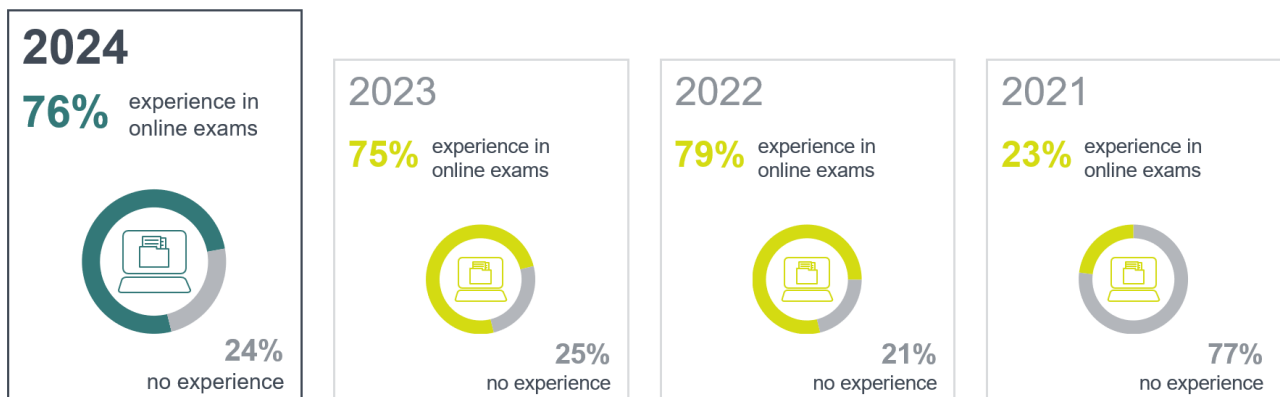

While most candidates participated in one of the technical tests, 36% considered that such participation should not be compulsory (vs 37% in 2023).

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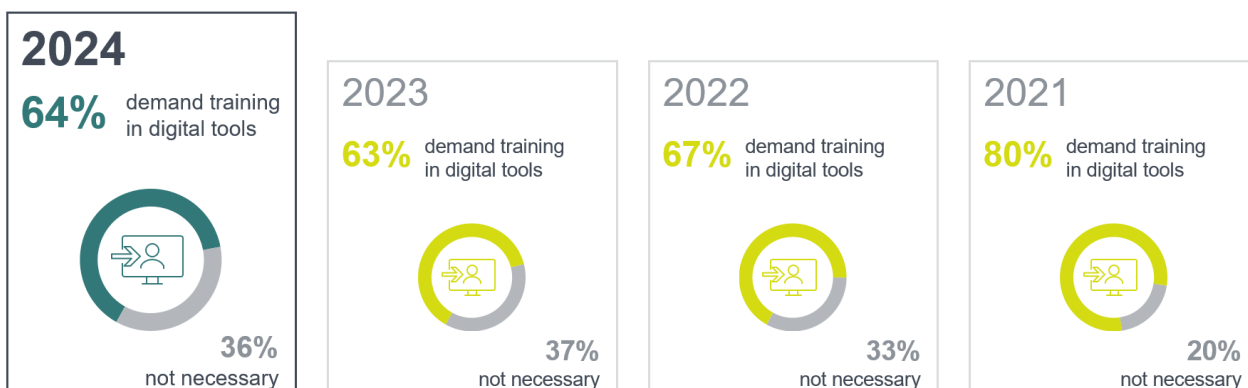
[1] These figures are based on the results of 601 candidates that replied to the survey.

76% of survey participant indicated having prior experience in online exams in 2024, remaining similar since 2022.

2024
76% experience in online exams

24% no experience

2023
75% experience in online exams

25% no experience

2022
79% experience in online exams

21% no experience

2021
23% experience in online exams
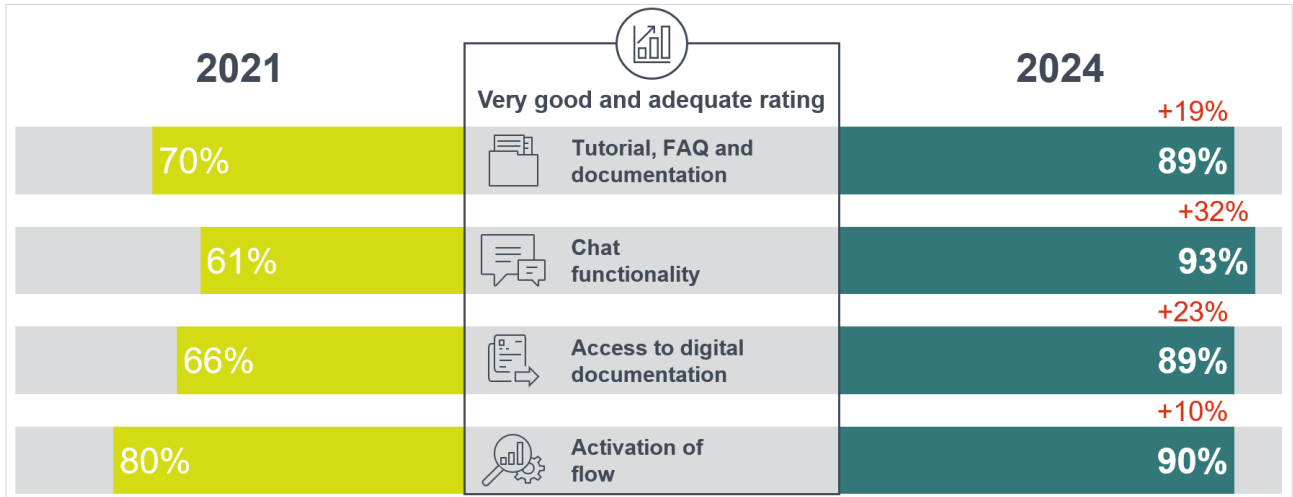
77% no experience

3.2   Time constraints

55% of respondents felt that having more time would have enabled them to perform better (vs 48% in 2023). This did not apply to the duration of the breaks, which were considered adequate by 73% and insufficient by 22% of survey participants, but rather to the time allotted for answering the papers.

2024	more than sufficient	sufficient	borderline	not sufficient	by far not sufficient
Pre-Exam	12%	27%	40%	18%	3%
Paper A	11%	27%	38%	16%	8%
Paper B	5%	4%	7%	16%	68%
Paper C	4%	7%	18%	28%	42%
Paper D	4%	10%	24%	37%	25%

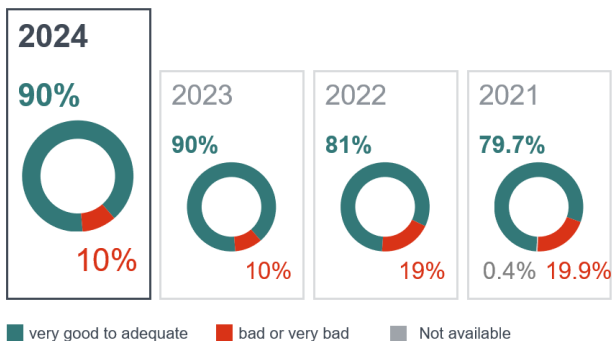| 2023	more than sufficient	sufficient	borderline	not sufficient	by far not sufficient
Pre-Exam	13%	37%	31%	15%	4%
Paper A	9%	27%	41%	16%	7%
Paper B	5%	15%	40%	28%	12%
Paper C	5%	3%	12%	27%	53%
Paper D	6%	8%	30%	32%	24%

3.3   Infrastructure

Candidates rated all infrastructure indicators better for the EQE 2024 since the first edition of the fully digital EQE in 2021. This is clearly indicated by the participants in their assessment of the setting of the examination framework:

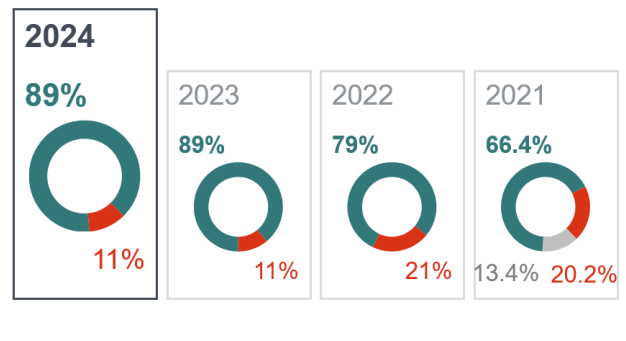| 2021	Very good and adequate rating	2024
70%	Tutorial, FAQ and documentation	89% (+19%)
61%	Chat functionality	93% (+32%)
66%	Access to digital documentation	89% (+23%)
80%	Activation of flow	90% (+10%)

Robust positive assessment – around 90% since 2023 – for all indicators reflects the significant improvements since 2021, considering over 50% of first sitters participating in the survey in 2024.
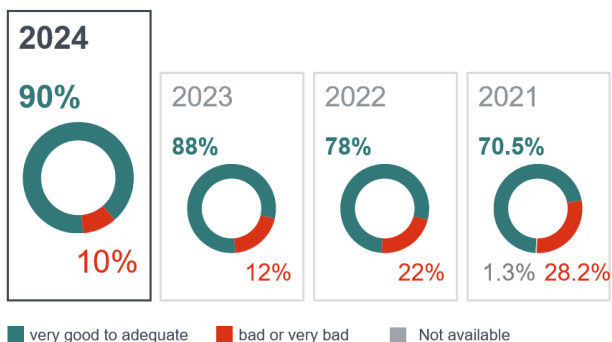
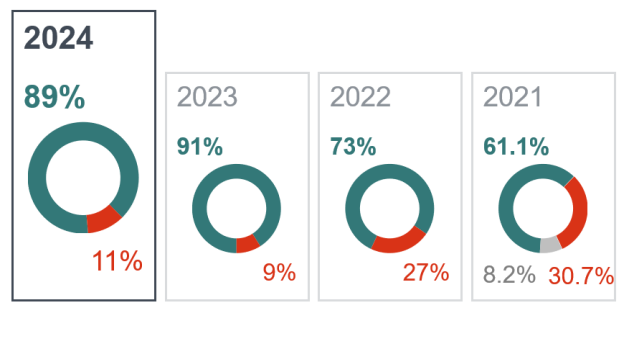### Activation of the flow/launch of lockdown browser

2024	2023	2022	2021
90% / 10%	90% / 10%	81% / 19%	79.7% / 0.4% / 19.9%

■ very good to adequate   ■ bad or very bad   ■ Not available

Access to digital documentation

2024	2023	2022	2021
89% / 11%	89% / 11%	79% / 21%	66.4% / 13.4% / 20.2%

Tutorial, FAQ and documentation

2024	2023	2022	2021
90% / 10%	88% / 12%	78% / 22%	70.5% / 1.3% / 28.2%

■ very good to adequate   ■ bad or very bad   ■ Not available

Chat functionality

| 2024	2023	2022	2021
89% / 11%	91% / 9%	73% / 27%	61.1% / 8.2% / 30.7%

**Use of corporate computers for the examination:**

In previous years, as with the EQE 2024, guidance was provided to candidates explaining that corporate environments might include security features impacting the system's performance. Candidates were encouraged and provided opportunities to test their systems in advance along with the recommendation to use private computers for the exam.

46% of candidates indicated that they used a corporate computer for sitting EQE 2024.

2024	2023	2022	2021
46% corporate computer	**42%** corporate computer	**54%** corporate computer	**52%** corporate computer
54% private computer	**58%** private computer	**46%** private computer	**48%** private computer
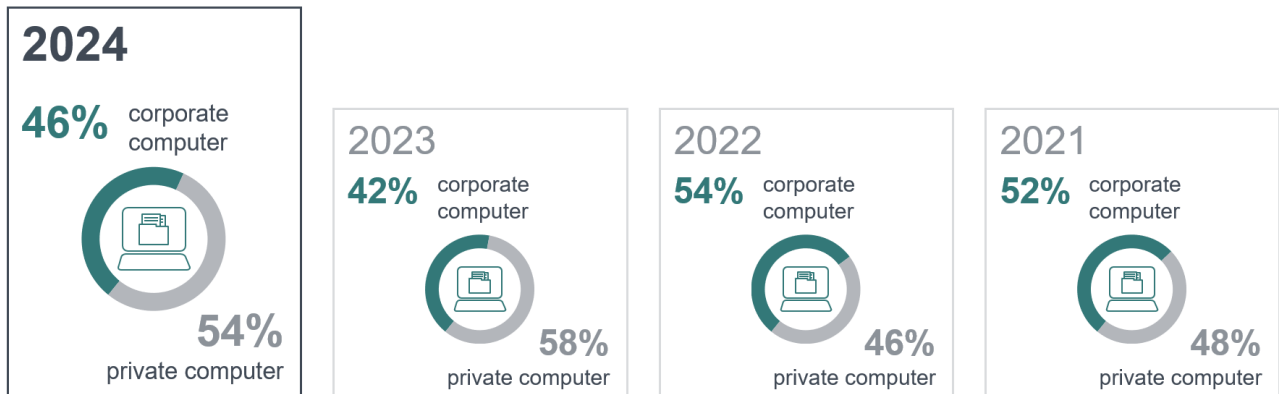
Among the survey respondents, 23% of candidates who sat their exam in a corporate environment reported problems due to corporate settings, such as limited administrator rights and corporate security features, requiring the support of their company's IT department.

The deployment force observed that most individual technical issues experienced during the exam were reported by candidates who sat the exam in a corporate environment.

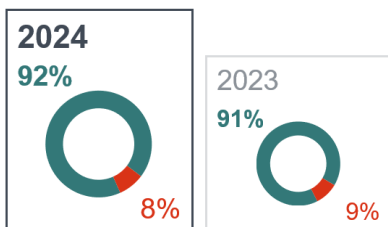| 2024	2023	2022	2021
77% No	**93%** No	**80%** No	**66%** No
23% Yes	**7%** Yes	**20%** Yes	**34%** Yes
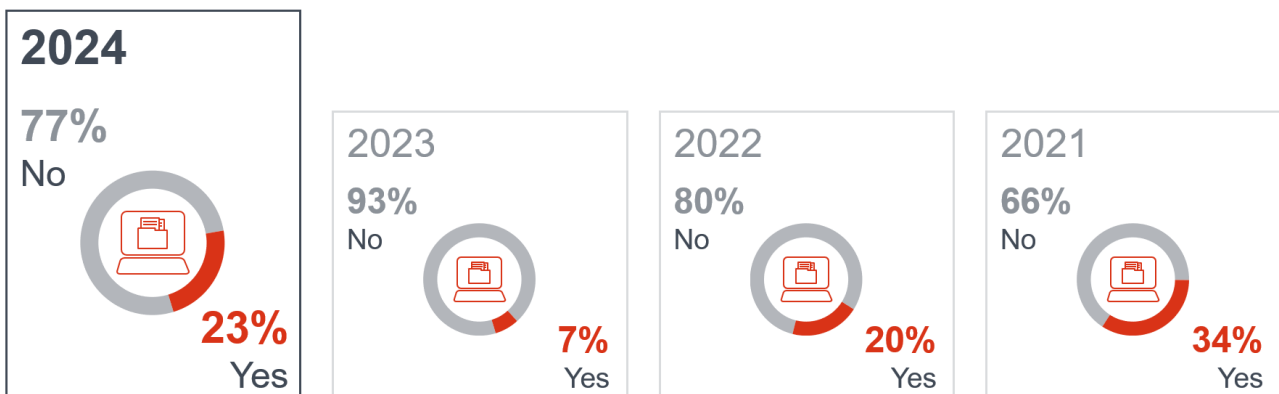
3.4   Service

Throughout the exams, a bidirectional communication channel was available to address candidates' situations and to establish contact whenever support was needed, or suspicious situations arose. Comprehensive support has been available via three lines of support:
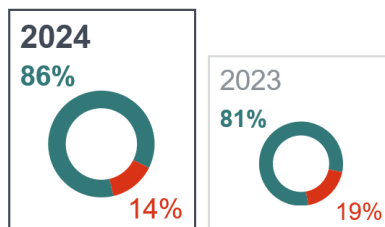

Invigilators

1st line – EQE

2nd line – technical

Most candidates rated their interaction with the support teams positively.

Support by the invigilators

2024
92%
8%

2023
91%
9%

Support by the 2nd line

2024
86%
14%

2023
81%
19%

Technical support

2024
80%
20%

2023
75%
25%
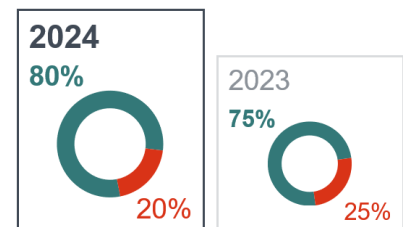
■ very good to adequate   ■ bad or very bad

3.5   Diversity and Inclusion

2024

1 937 received the survey and **601** replied

46 with a particular condition (vs 47 in 2023)

16 with a long term or permanent disability (vs 19 in 2023)
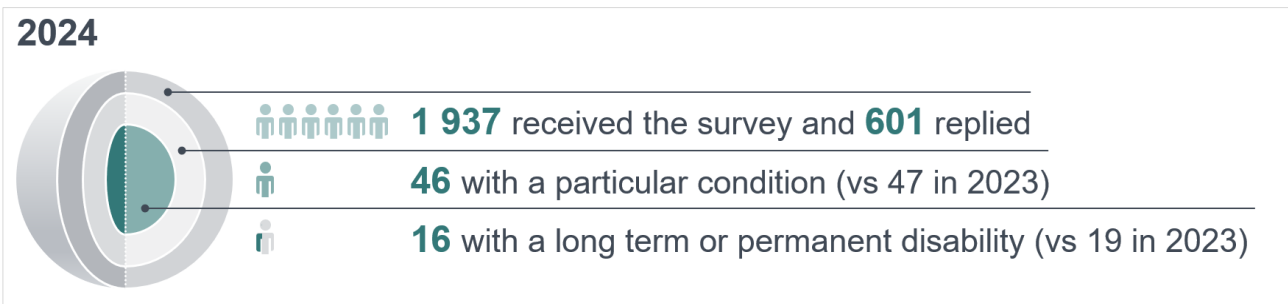
46 candidates indicated that at the time of the examination, they suffered from a particular condition that impacted their ability to participate in the examination.

Less than half of these candidates stated that they benefit from similar adjustments in their workplace.
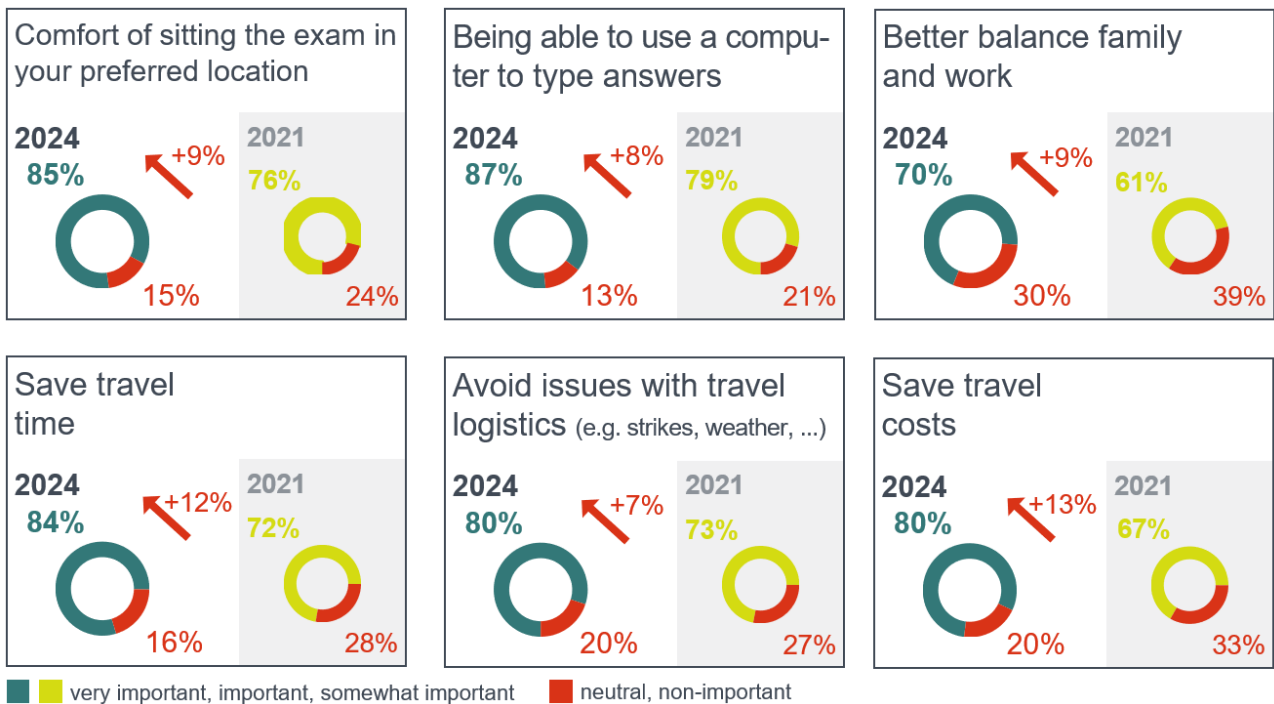
The three major conditions indicated were: medical conditions (21 candidates vs 18 in 2023), mental health difficulties (10 candidates vs 9 candidates in 2023) and pregnancy (6 candidates, same as in 2023). Specific accommodations were required for some candidates, such as the use of a diabetes device, wearing special glasses or a veil.

4. General advantages of online examinations as indicated by survey participants

Survey participants were also asked for their assessment of online examinations in general, including potential advantages, such as the comfort of sitting the papers at a place of one's choice, being able to use a computer to type answers, saving travel time and costs, avoiding travel logistics issues (e.g. strikes, weather) and better balancing family and work-related commitments.

In summary, candidates rated most of the advantages consistently better since the first fully digital EQE in 2021 arriving to over 80% for the majority of questions.
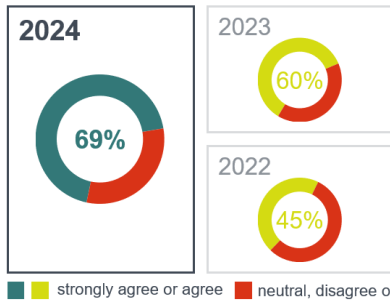
The evolution since the first fully digital EQE is reflected as follows:

Comfort of sitting the exam in your preferred location	Being able to use a computer to type answers	Better balance family and work
2024 85% +9% **2021** 76% / 15% 24%	**2024** 87% +8% **2021** 79% / 13% 21%	**2024** 70% +9% **2021** 61% / 30% 39%
Save travel time	Avoid issues with travel logistics (e.g. strikes, weather, ...)	Save travel costs
2024 84% +12% **2021** 72% / 16% 28%	**2024** 80% +7% **2021** 73% / 20% 27%	**2024** 80% +13% **2021** 67% / 20% 33%

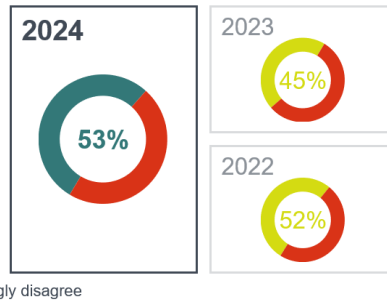■ ■ very important, important, somewhat important   ■ neutral, non-important

5. Improvements

Following the positive feedback on the format of the previous year, the EQE 2024 schedule was comfortably spread across two calendar weeks, with at least one day between the main exams. Among the areas candidates felt should be improved were the duration of papers, the text editor and the format of the papers.
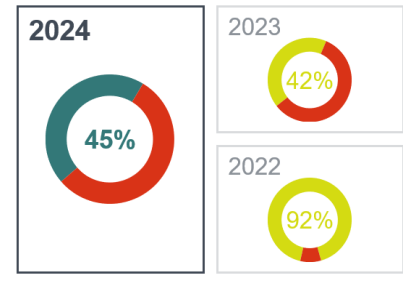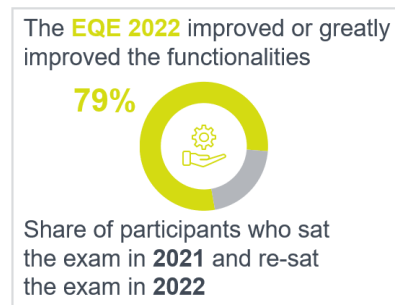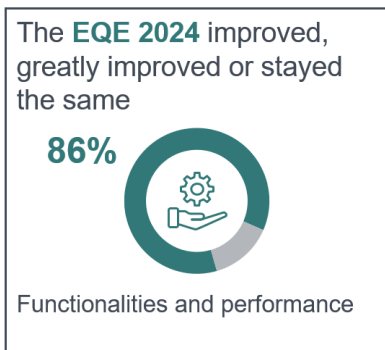
Duration of the papers

2024 69%
2023 60%
2022 45%

Text editor

2024 53%
2023 45%
2022 52%

Format of the papers

2024 45%
2023 42%
2022 92%

■ ■ strongly agree or agree   ■ neutral, disagree or strongly disagree

In conclusion, 86% of candidates who re-sat the examination in 2024 rated the functionalities and performance positively with 67% of respondents expressing that the functionalities and performance of the system compared to the previous year are the same with 19% grading them as "improved" or "greatly improved".

The **EQE 2024** improved, greatly improved or stayed the same

86%

Functionalities and performance

The **EQE 2023** improved, greatly improved or stayed the same

93%

Functionalities and performance

The **EQE 2022** improved or greatly improved the functionalities

79%

Share of participants who sat the exam in **2021** and re-sat the exam in **2022**

■ ■ improved, greatly improved or stayed the same compared to previous year   ■ worsened