



Introducing an innovative approach to upskilling: A Pathology Practice Educators' initiative

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Keywords

Specialist Diploma, Biomedical Scientist, Practice Educator, training.

Background

During the spring of 2021, NHS England introduced new Pathology Practice Educator roles regionally to help address the challenges faced by the Pathology workforce due to the increased demand for services during the pandemic. The Practice Educators conducted a skills gap analysis and surveys to better understand the Pathology workforce challenges at a local, regional, and national level. They identified recruitment and retention of Specialist Biomedical Scientists as a significant challenge across England. The National NHS Pathology workforce data showed a substantial shortage of Specialist Biomedical Scientists across England, with 432 unfilled Agenda for Change Band 6 positions in 20/21. This high number of vacancies poses a threat to the provision of Pathology services, and departments often rely on bank and agency staff to fill these positions, resulting in high costs.

A significant number of services require the Specialist Diploma provided by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) as a prerequisite for career progression. However, the Pathology training survey conducted in 2021 revealed that 58% of laboratories do not offer Specialist Portfolios to their staff, and 98 out of 102 respondents identified the lack of protected training as a significant challenge. To address this issue, Practice Educators took a collaborative and innovative approach to develop a training programme for Specialist Portfolios.

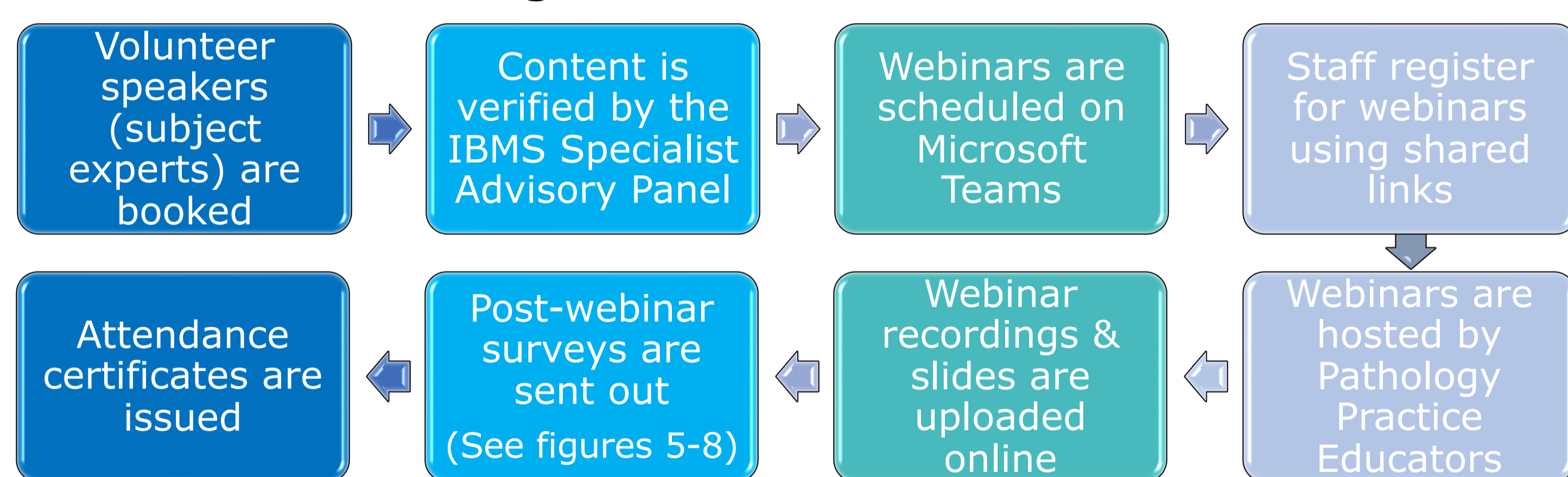
Aim

To increase the uptake of the IBMS Specialist Diploma and support specialist training for Biomedical Scientists.

Methods

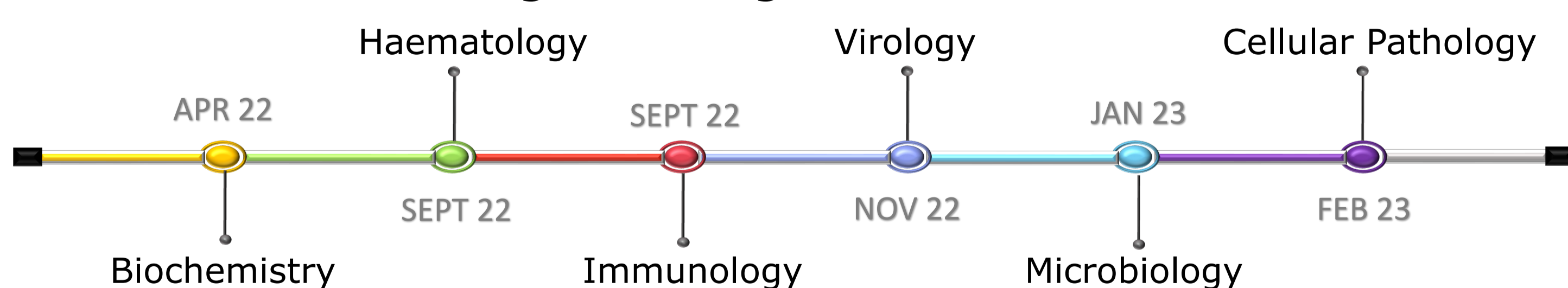
In April 2022, a comprehensive 12-month training programme was launched to expertly support the knowledge components of the Specialist Diploma, starting with Clinical Biochemistry. The pilot project was spearheaded by London Pathology Practice Educators and delivered by Biomedical Scientists and clinical staff from the Pathology Networks. The training was made readily accessible to all Pathology staff in London through open access to live webinars and recordings.

Figure 1. Process flowchart



Following the tremendous success of the pilot, the initiative has been meticulously expanded across all UK Pathology networks, encompassing 6 major disciplines, with the assistance of the National Pathology Practice Educator Network.

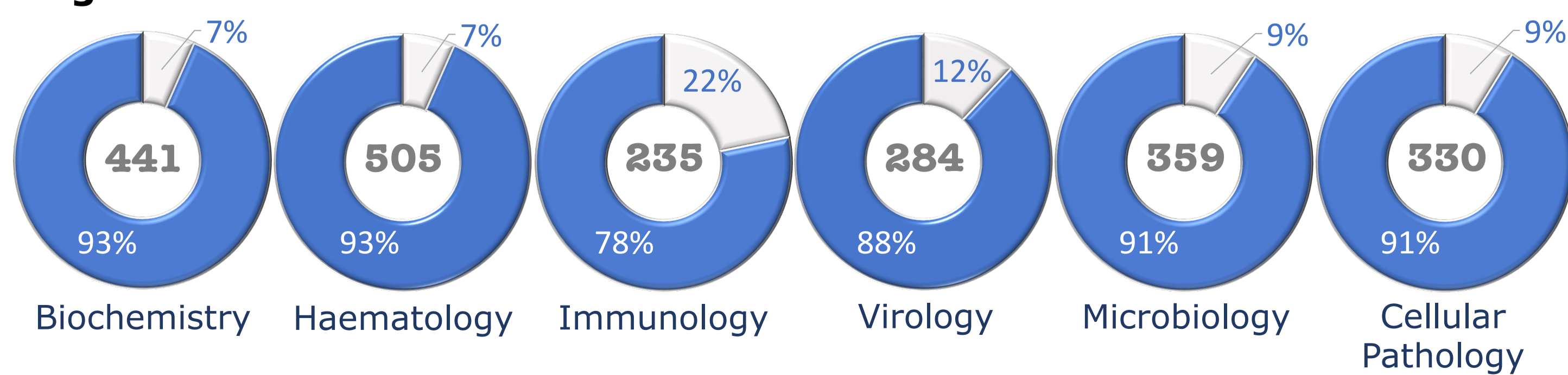
Figure 2. Programme timeline



Results

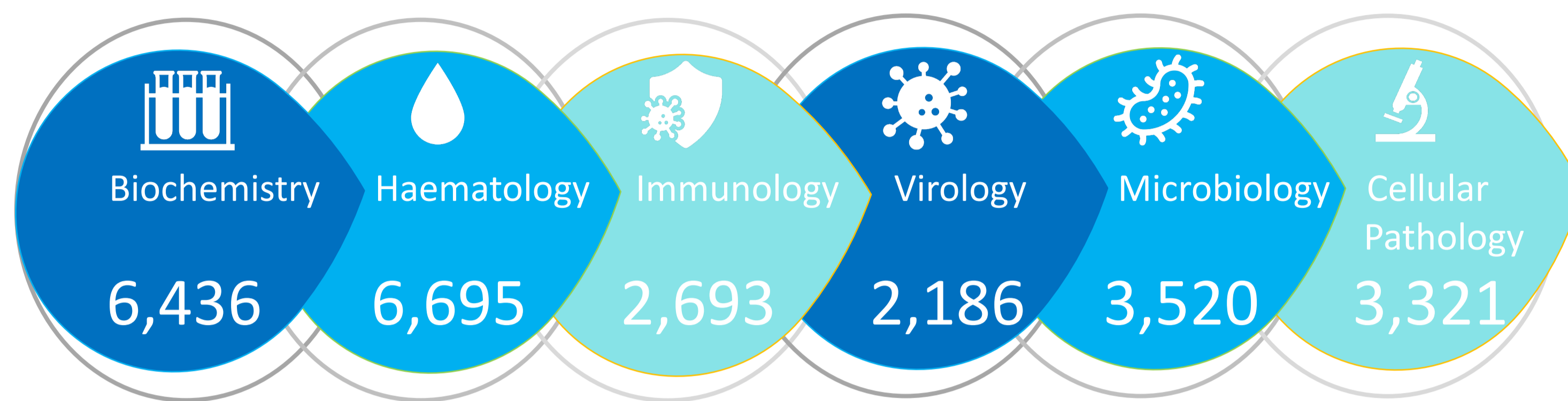
Uptake and engagement

Figure 3. The number of users who accessed live and recorded webinars



Key: ■ Live ■ Recorded

Figure 4. Total number of views of webinar recordings since the launch of the training programme



Post-webinar survey results

Figure 5. Survey respondent proportions by discipline

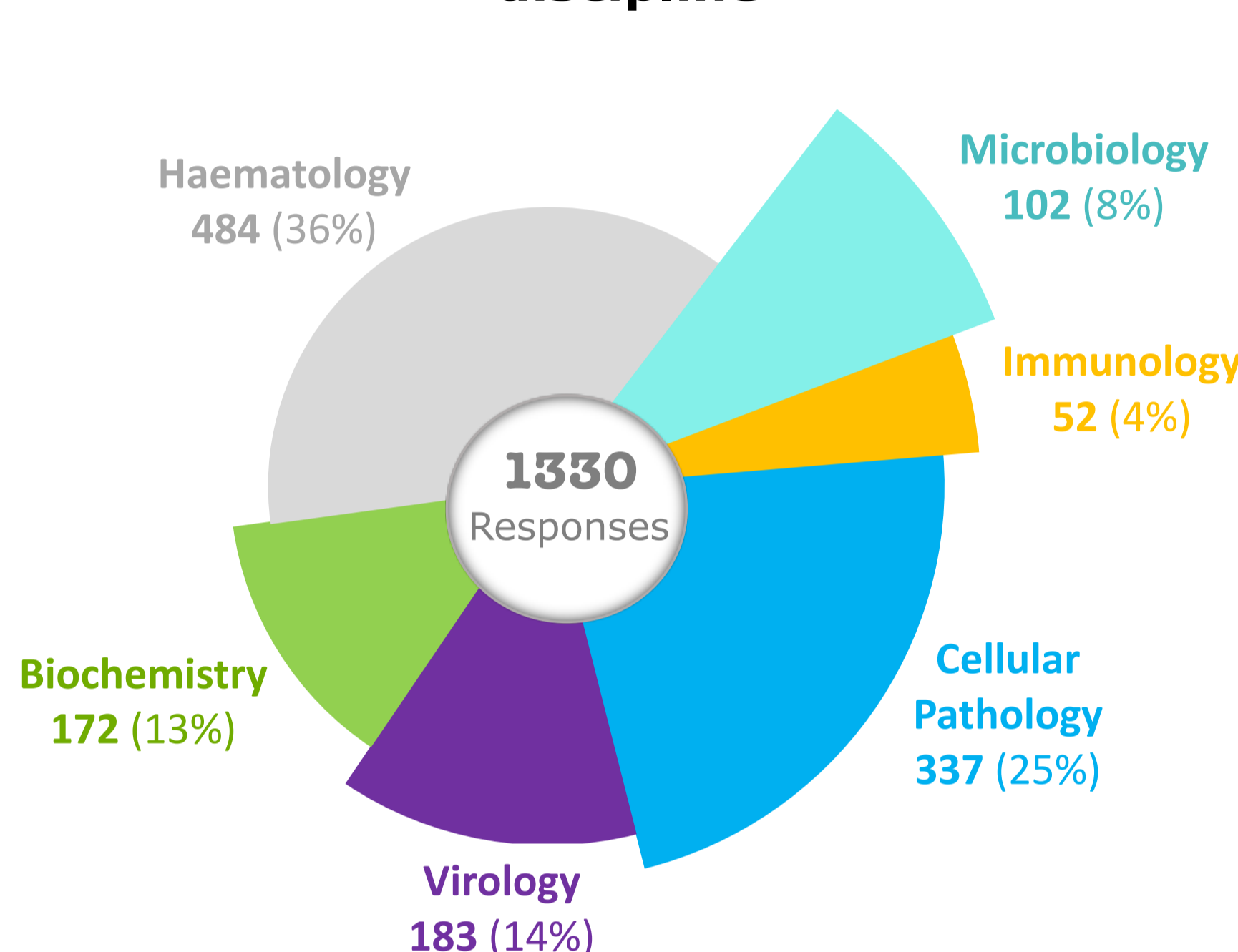


Figure 6. Survey respondent proportions by attendance reason

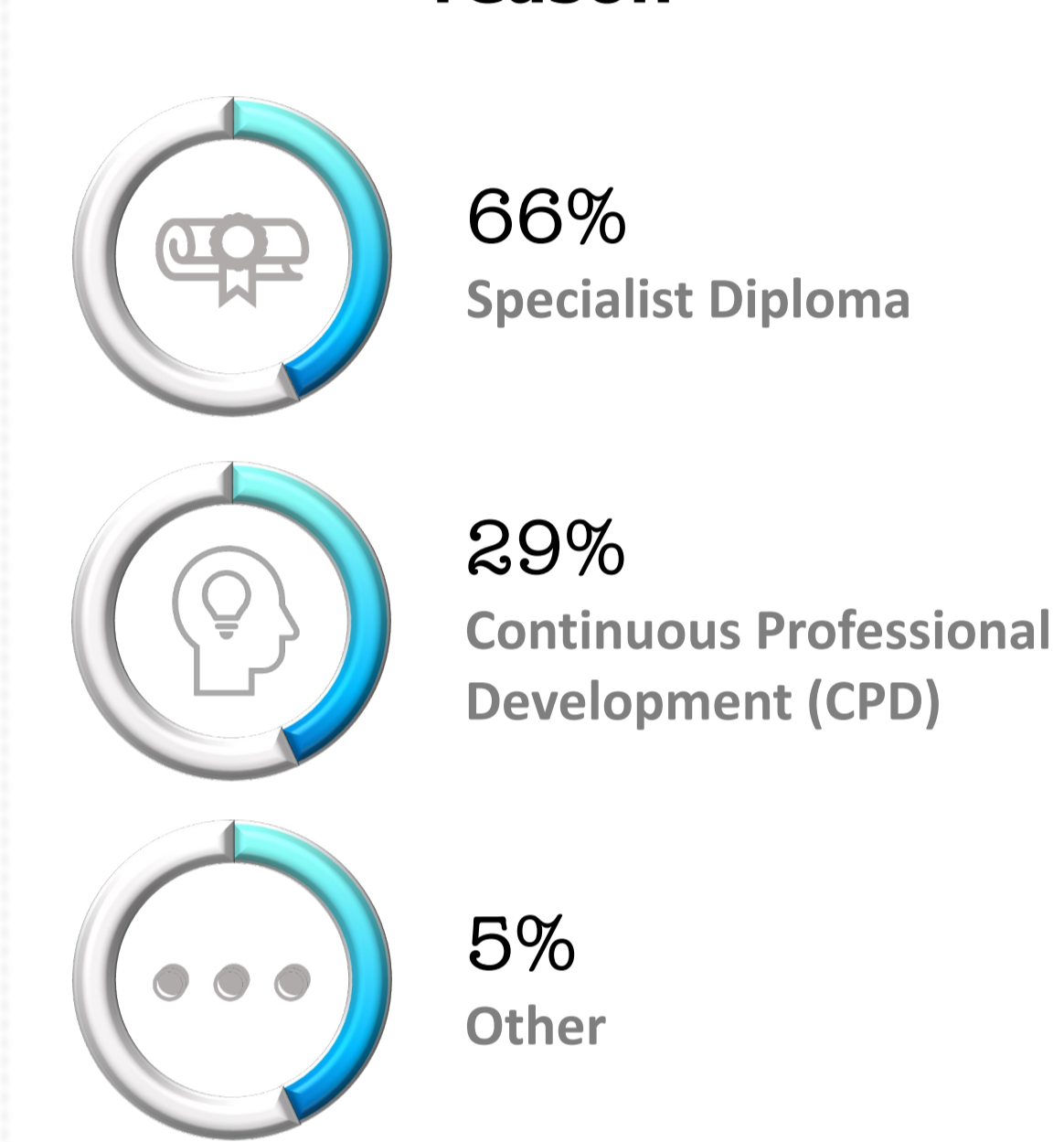
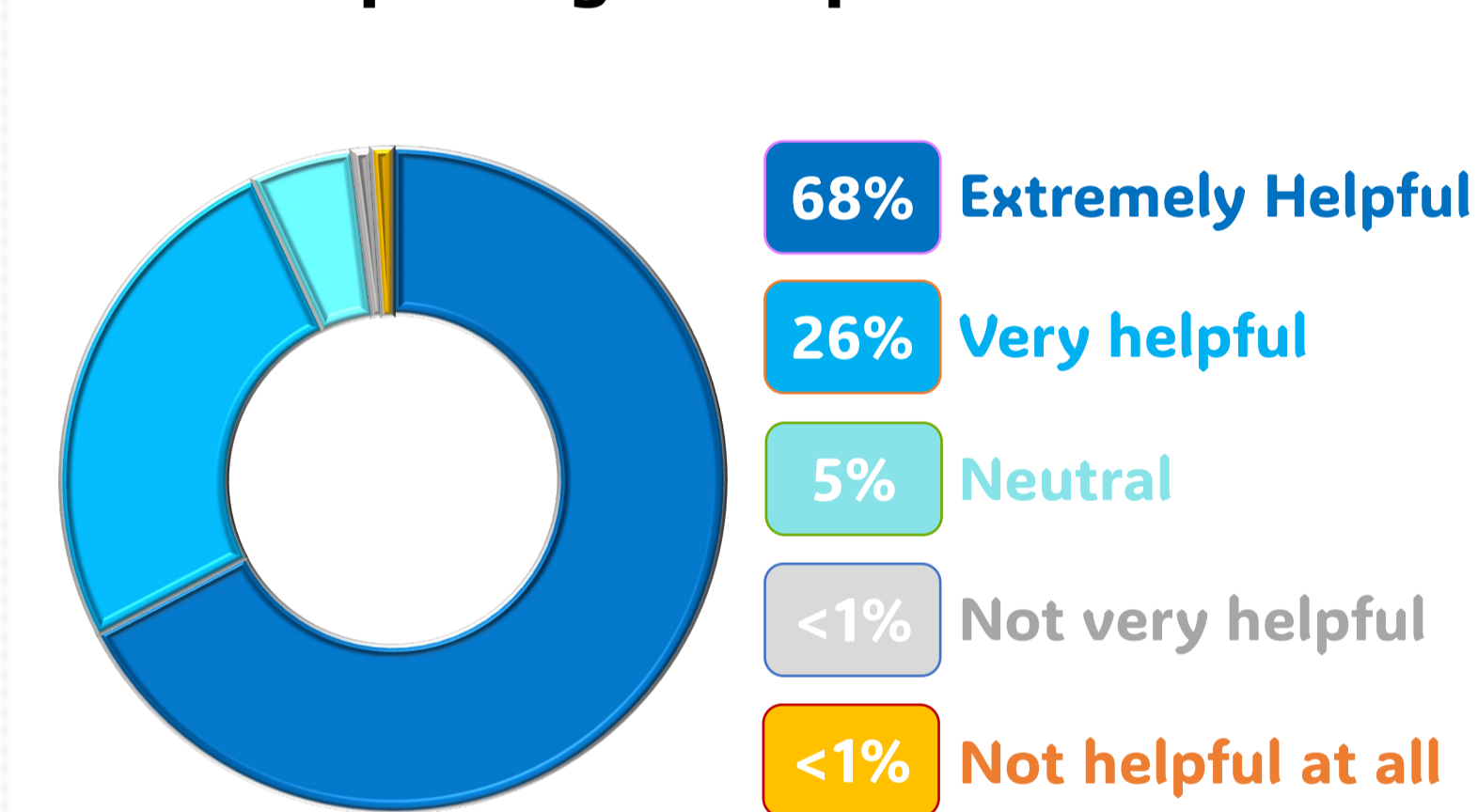


Figure 7. User ratings given to Specialist Portfolio training initiative on a scale of 1 to 5

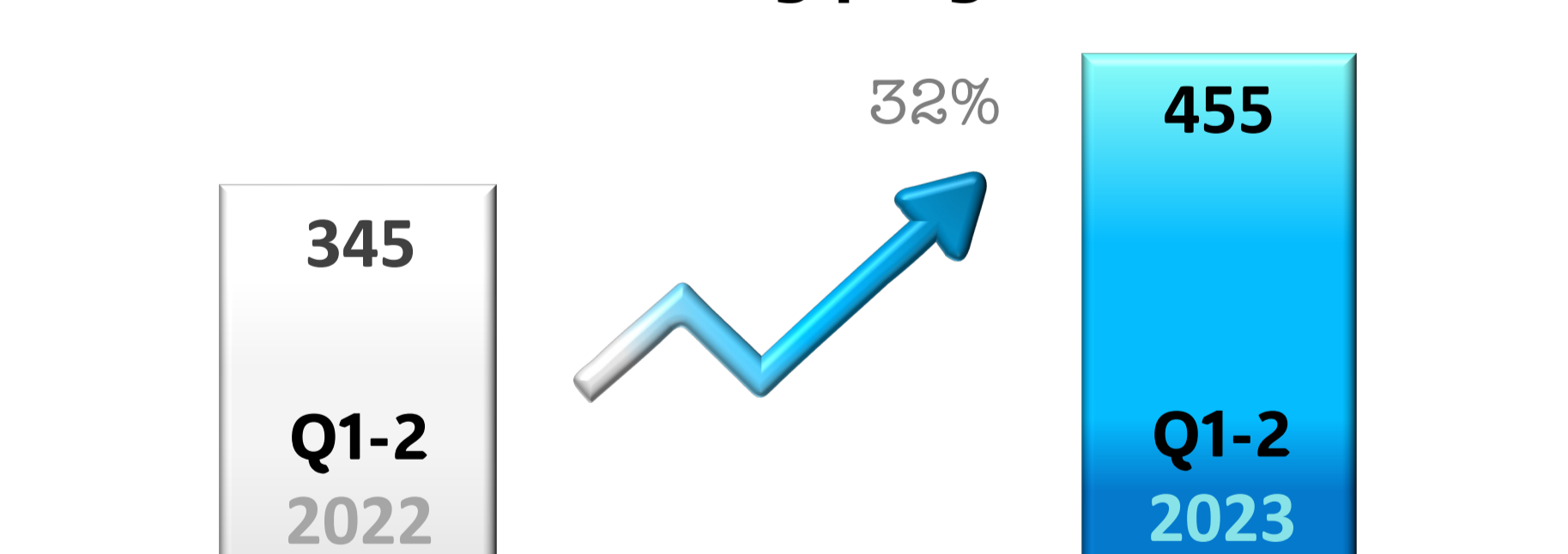


Figure 8. User ratings on the usefulness of webinars in progressing and completing the Specialist Portfolio



Project outcome

Figure 9. Increase in the number of Specialist Diplomas issued since the Specialist Portfolio training programme launch in 2022



Summary

The webinars have been a resounding success, with more than 2000 staff members across the UK accessing them and the recordings garnering over 24,000 views. Webinars have been proven to be a helpful resource for Specialist Portfolios, as reported by a staggering 94% of survey respondents. Additionally, survey results showed that webinars have been used as a CPD resource by 29% of attendees. Both trainees and trainers have unequivocally praised this innovative approach to upskilling staff.

Thanks to the unwavering support of the IBMS and Practice Educators, there has been a remarkable 32% increase in Specialist Portfolio take-up in a year. This collaborative approach to delivering specialist training online has had a far-reaching impact nationally, underlining the importance of innovative solutions for workforce challenges. Plans are already in motion to expand this initiative to other Specialist Diplomas and Higher Specialist Diplomas, further cementing its success.

Acknowledgements

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