



SHIFT LEARNING

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Newcastle University
Policy Academy: Policy
Engagement Research

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Executive summary

Background and method

This report presents finding from an online survey conducted by Shift Learning on behalf of the Newcastle University Policy Academy Alumni and collaborators. The survey sought to explore the engagement with policy across the sector and influence change at local, national and international levels by providing evidence of the levels of engagement with policy from diverse groups.

The findings are based on a sample of 286 responses. This research should be treated as explorative rather than providing definitive answers as, due to relatively small sample size and self-selection of respondents, the statistical significance of the findings is difficult to assess and the trends might not be representative of the sector more widely.

Engagement and interest in policy

The reported levels of engagement were high, with the majority of respondents already engaged and interested in further involvement. 87% indicated they took part in some policy engagement activity in the last 3 years, and 84% were interested in getting involved.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, policy areas of interest correlated with job role and specialisms. Minority ethnic groups, women and disabled respondents showed high levels of interest in policies around ED&I and employment policies compared to their counterparts. This highlights a likely interest in policies which may have a direct impact on an individual.

Experiences of policy engagement

Experiences of those who in recent years have engaged in policy activities were mixed. Respondents tended to be happier with the clarity of activities (63% agreed the process was clear, well communicated and informative) than with their accountability and impact, with only 43% agreeing that they were subsequently informed of the response to, or the impact of, the activity. Minority ethnic groups were less likely to perceive policy engagement activities as inclusive and disabled respondents were less likely to see them as inclusive, accessible and effective.

Executive summary

Policy engagement training

74% of respondents were interested in receiving more guidance and training on policy engagement. Despite the majority being keen, more than half (55%) have received no training in the last three years. A third (35%) reported receiving informal training – such as guidance from a colleague or simply access to information resources. Only 13% took part in structured, multi-session training.

In general, those who received some policy training, perceived the activities they took part in as effective and impactful – agreeing they gave them the knowledge and tools, and increasing their confidence and interest in being involved in policy engagement. However, opinions were divided about how inclusive and open to diverse roles the training activities were.

The main barrier preventing more respondents from taking part in policy engagement training was simply a lack of opportunity – 73% of respondents reported that no policy training was offered and 41% said they weren't even aware they could receive it.

Barriers to policy engagement

The biggest barrier was a lack of opportunity followed by lack of awareness that they could be involved. Some indicated potential self-exclusion or disenchantment issues. Despite the majority taking part in some policy engagement, 38% felt overlooked or excluded from policy activities that were relevant to their sector or work. 83% of respondents agreed that people in roles similar to theirs had valuable contributions and 74% agreed they understood the policy landscape relevant to their sector of work, which suggests knowledge or self-belief are not the main barriers to policy engagement. It's more likely that the feeling of being overlooked stems from the perception that policy engagement activities were not always effective, either because they didn't have sufficient impact or respondents were not informed of their impact.

Support and solutions

Respondents were asked to comment on what could be done to support their policy engagement. The most frequently mentioned recommendations included making policy engagement more inclusive to different groups of people, providing training to enable respondents to make effective contributions to policy, engaging with a wider cross-section of the workforce, communicating available opportunities better and recognising that lack of time and high workload make it difficult for many to take part in policy activities.

BACKGROUND

Background and objectives

Shift Learning was commissioned to support the development and dissemination of an online survey to explore engagement with policy across the sector. The project sought to influence knowledge exchange and policy engagement, as well as change at local, national and international level by providing evidence of the levels of interest to engage with policy and KE activity from more diverse knowledge sources. The research also set out to understand the current barriers to this, as well as the solutions.

- Diverse knowledge is increasingly being valued and encouraged across the HE sector, with Newcastle University leading with a vision and mission which encourages all to have the freedom and opportunity to succeed. Funders, when reimagining the research landscape, are reviewing who they consider to be key players in HE research culture. More focus is being placed on diverse career pathways and creative outputs in team science and scholarship. The parity of esteem between different job families is gaining increased currency in this space.
- The project set out by Newcastle University looks at a situational analysis of the current Professional Services and Technician engagement with policy initiatives across the country's HE sector. It aims to highlight experiences of policy engagement and barriers to engagement amongst the allied-academic community.
- A survey was co-designed with policymakers and commissioned to engage with the widest possible audience, which will lead to a panel discussion with local, national and regional policy stakeholders. This will then contribute to capacity building, local growth regeneration and public and community engagement. Increasing the capacity and diversity of the community which engages with policy will directly increase avenues to influence on UK Industrial Strand Grand Challenges, and University Strategic HEIF focus areas.

Research objectives were as follows:

To explore
experiences with
policy engagement

To explore the drivers
and barriers to policy
engagement

To gain understanding
from across the sector

To consider support
and solutions needed
to encourage policy
engagement

Methodology

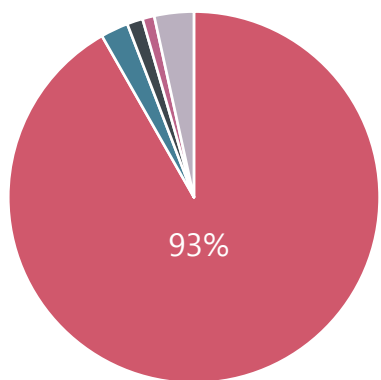
- An online survey was developed in close collaboration with Newcastle University and other stakeholders. The survey consisted of 25 questions, with a completion time of approximately 10 minutes.
- A number of recruitment channels were utilised, including direct mailings and social media advertisements. The majority of respondents were sourced via Shift Learning's research panel, AUA and Newcastle University Policy Academy.
- The survey was engaged with 461 times, including partial responses. Following data cleaning and removal of incomplete responses, a final **usable sample of 286 responses** was used for analysis.
- Processing of the data included coding of open questions, using a code frame devised in collaboration with Newcastle University. No weighting was applied to the data to avoid any unintended skewing.
- The sample was treated as self-selecting, and differences between respondent types are pulled out where relevant throughout this report. Cautions are noted where sample sizes are small.



Profile of survey respondents (based on 286 usable responses)

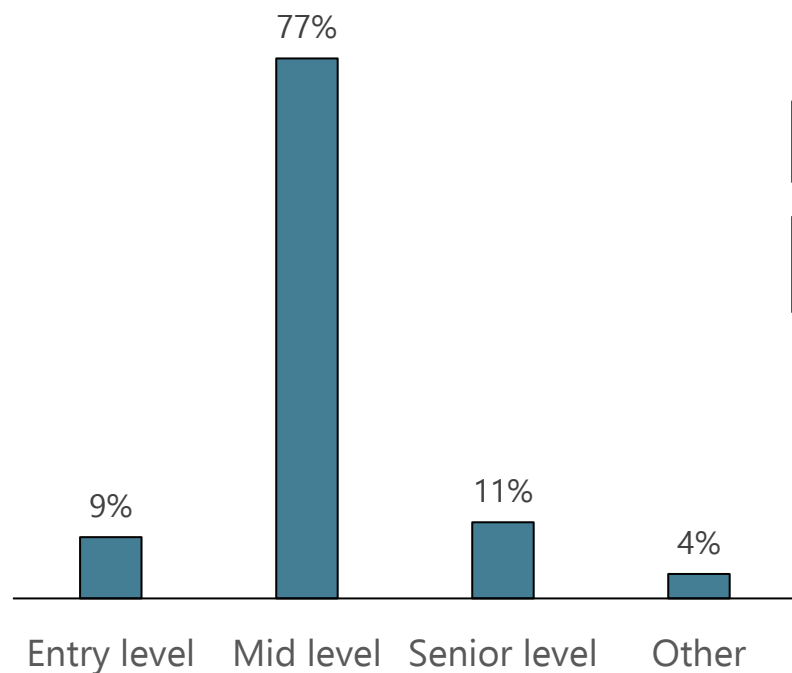
- The majority of responses came from individuals working in academia (93%) and based in England (87%). There was more spread in terms of job family. More than half of respondents came from non-academic roles, and three quarters worked at levels between associate and middle management. While we tried to capture different views and include various roles, the sample falls somewhat short of representing all dimensions of diversity of staff employed in the sector.

Workplace

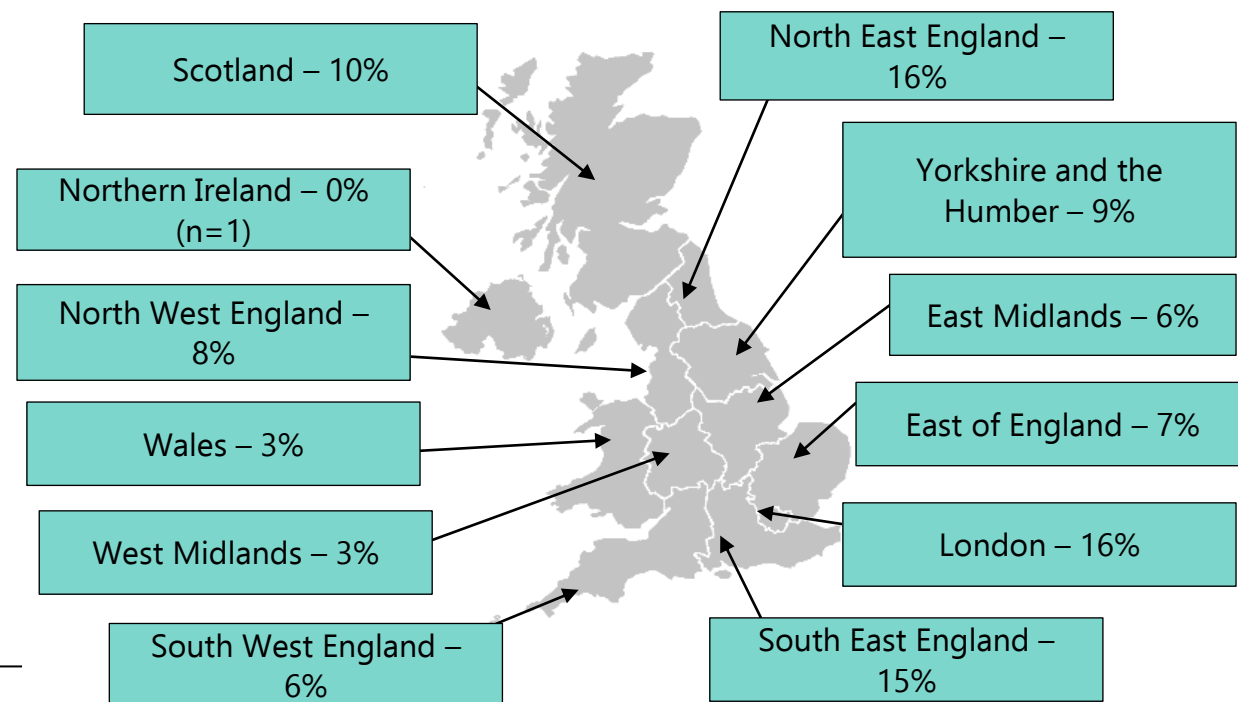


- Academia / university
- Industry
- Not-for-profit
- I am a student
- Other

Seniority

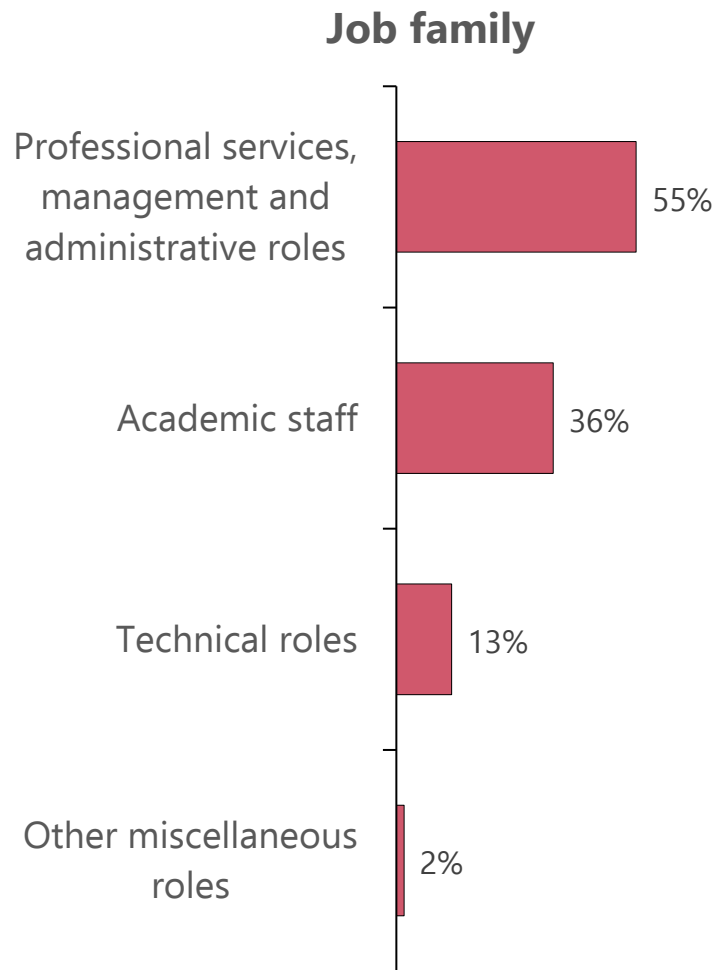


Regions



Profile of respondents | job roles

A word cloud based on common job titles of respondents:

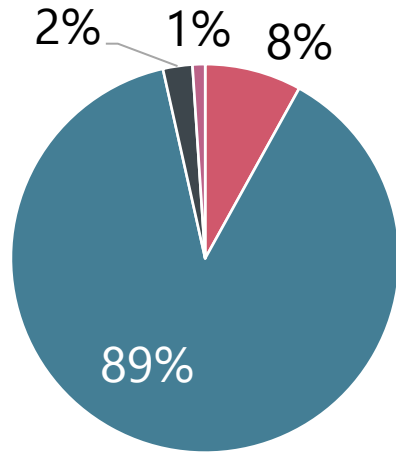


Base n = 268

Profile of respondents | some Equality, Diversity and Inclusion metrics

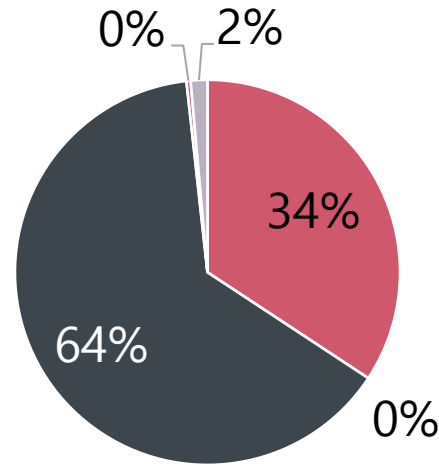
Ethnicity

- Minority ethnic
- White ethnicities
- I'd prefer not to say
- Other



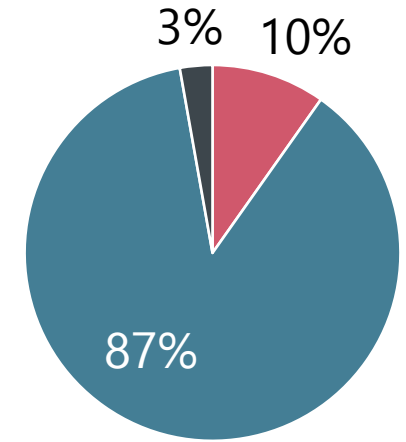
Gender

- Man
- Non-binary
- Woman
- Prefer to self-describe

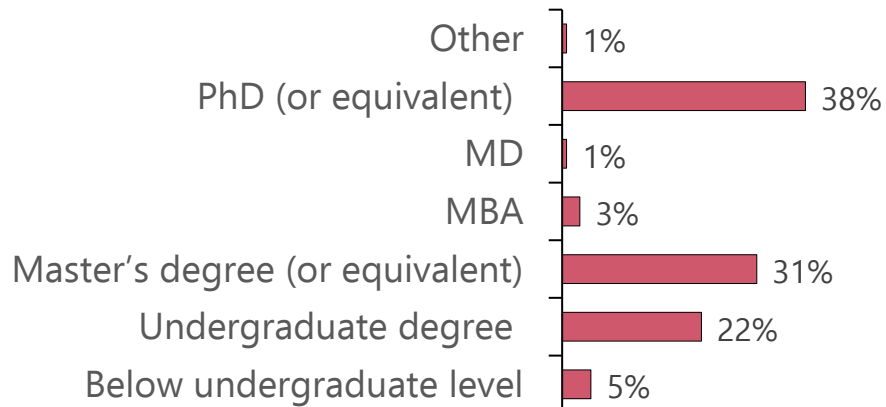


Disability

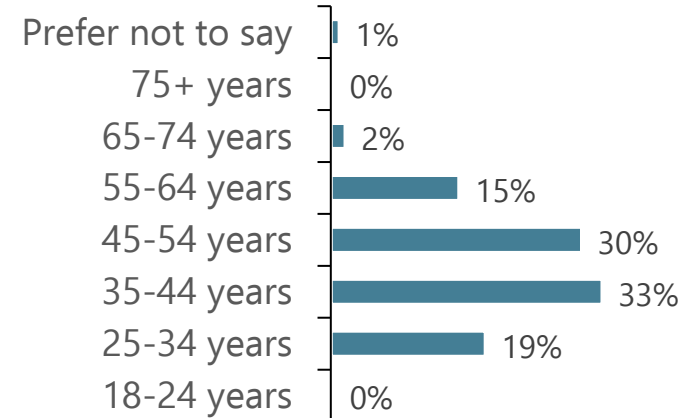
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say



Education level



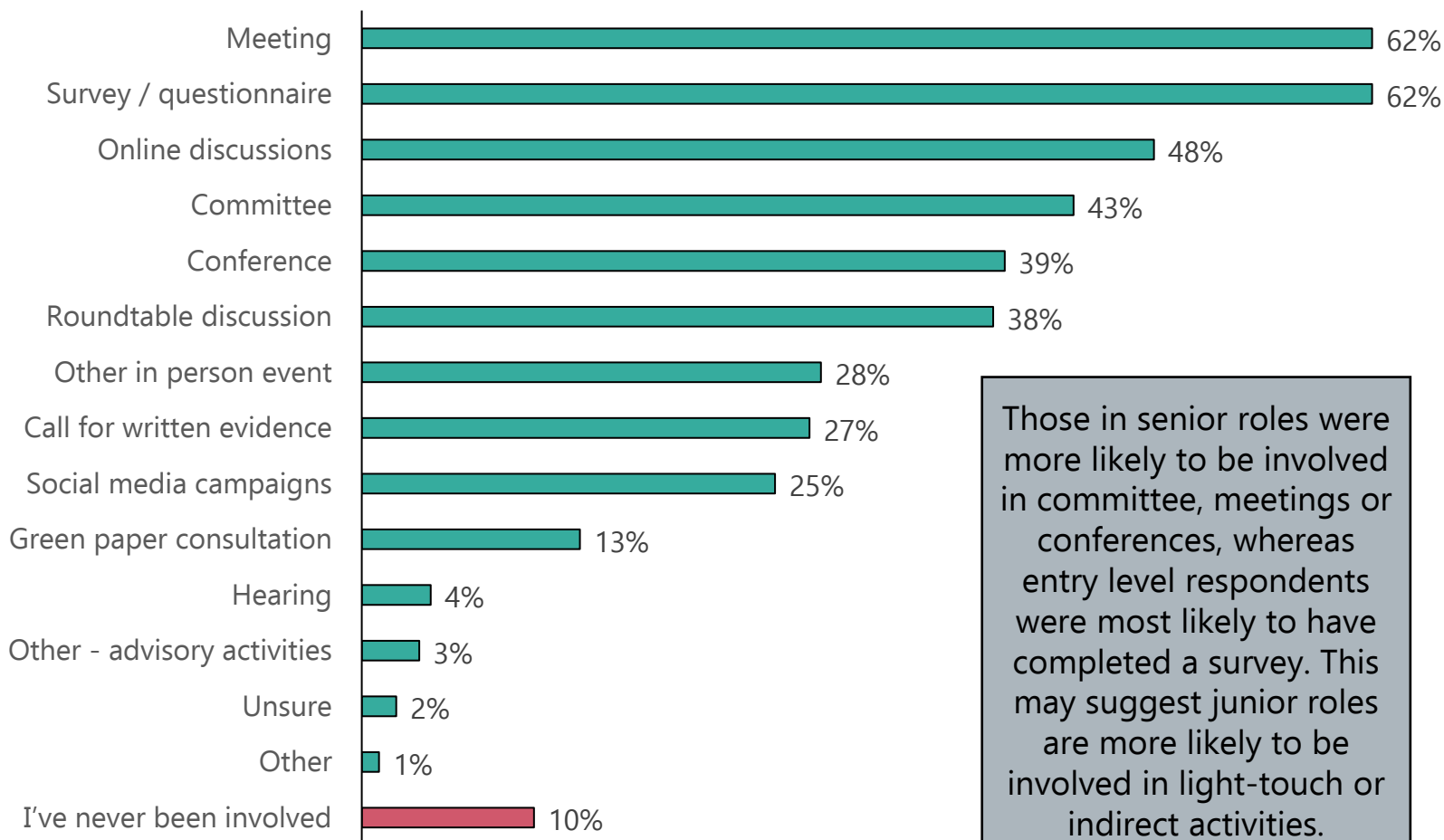
Age



EXPERIENCES WITH POLICY ENGAGEMENT

87% of respondents indicated policy engagement activity in the last 3 years

Q: What kinds of policy engagement activities have you been involved in within the last 3 years, if any?



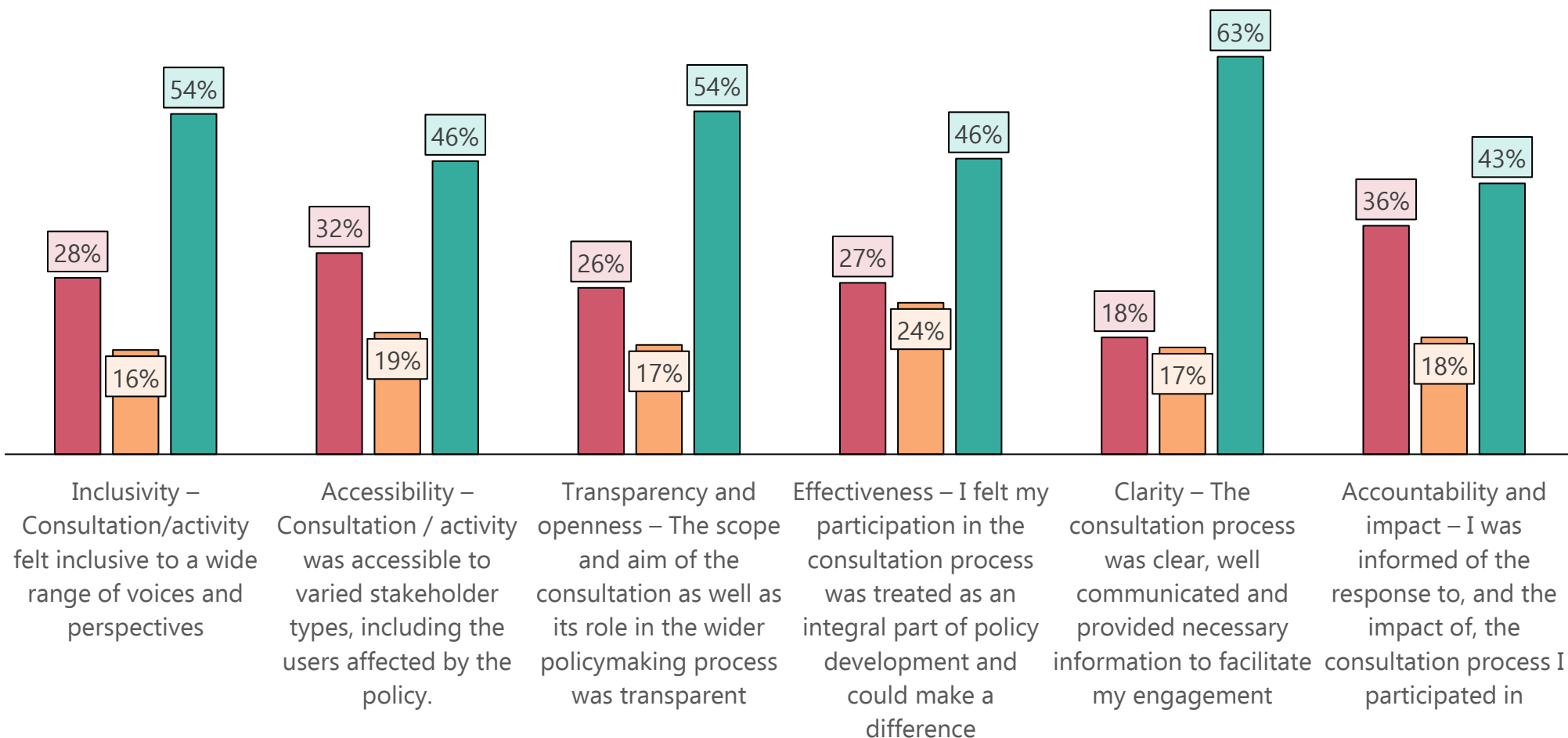
Those in senior roles were more likely to be involved in committee, meetings or conferences, whereas entry level respondents were most likely to have completed a survey. This may suggest junior roles are more likely to be involved in light-touch or indirect activities.

- The most common activities amongst respondents were meetings or a survey.
- While 87% of respondents had engaged in policy engagement activities within the last 3 years, 10% reported that they had never been involved within this time frame.
- Those in junior roles were far less likely to report policy engagement than those in senior roles. 17% of those at either PhD, assistant or associate level reported no involvement, compared to 7% at mid to top-level management.
- Some differences were identified by job area – although significant differences are difficult to establish due to small sample sizes. It appears that those working in planning and strategy as well as education and teaching faculties were likely to be involved in policy engagement activities.
- However, those working in information services, estates and facilities and technical or experimental roles were less likely to be.

Experiences with policy engagement were varied

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree

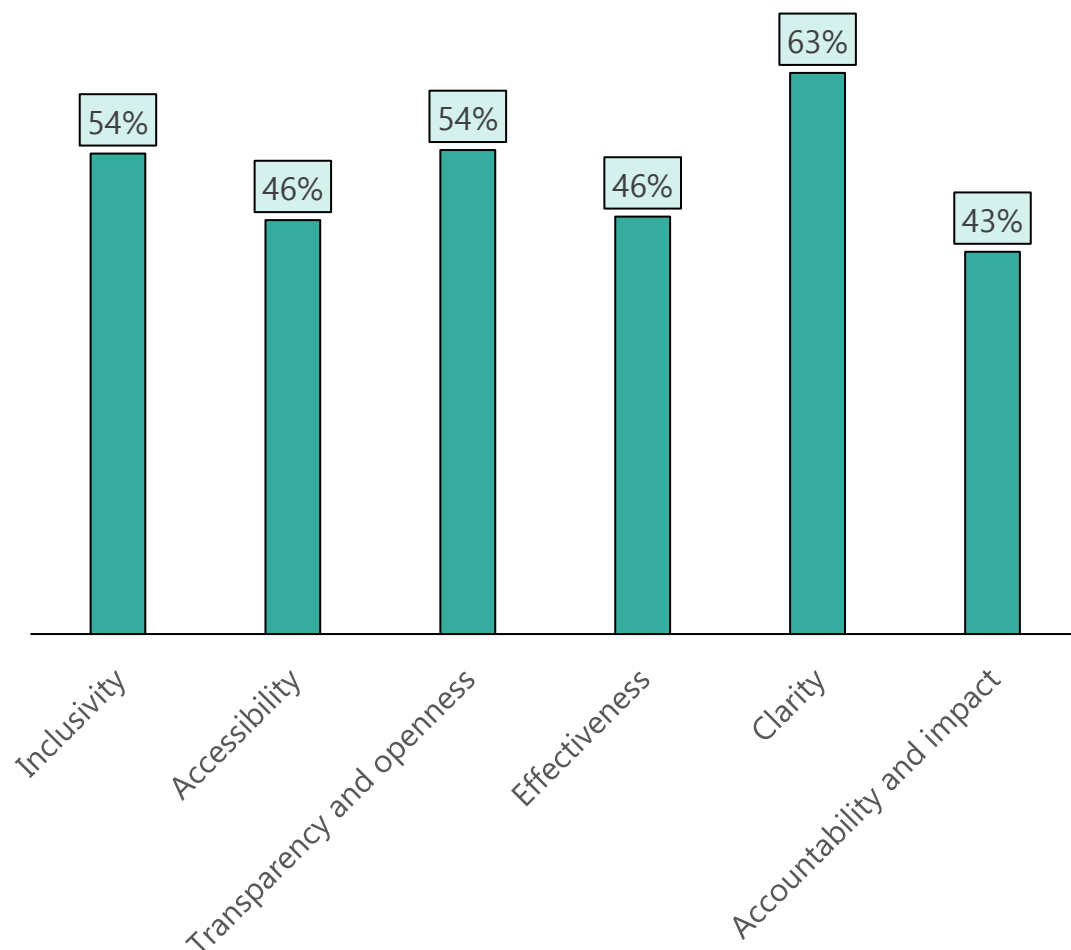


- Respondents who had engaged in a policy activity were asked to provide an indication of their experience.
- The clarity of activities seemed to be most well-received amongst respondents, with 63% agreeing the process was clear, well communicated and informative.
- Accountability and impact was less likely to be recognised in experiences, with only 43% agreeing that they were subsequently informed of the response to, or the impact of, the activity.

Base n = 256. Only those involved in policy engagement activities in the last 5 years.: 'If you were involved in more than one policy engagement activity, please consider your overall experience.' Not applicable – 2-3%.

Minority groups were less likely to report inclusivity, accessibility and effectiveness

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (% agree)



- Respondents in entry level roles were less likely to agree that their experiences with policy engagement activities had been effective (29%), compared to those in senior roles (47%). This may suggest that this group feel their contributions are not effectively recognised or valued.
- Similar differences in perceptions around effectiveness were found for those in technical roles (29%), compared to academic staff (46%). Respondents in technical roles were also less likely to agree that activities had been inclusive (39%), than other job categories.
- Only 35% of minority ethnic groups agreed that activities had been inclusive, compared to 55% of white ethnic groups. Those who identified themselves as disabled in the survey were less likely to agree with statements relating to inclusivity, accessibility and effectiveness compared to their counterparts. Note these sample sizes are small, so significance cannot be established.



"Involve a broader cross-section of the workforce so that policy is not generally being set by those outside the situation by virtue of their seniority."

"Recognition of the time involved is important, as is covering the costs e.g. of commuting to meetings in London. Ironically, thanks to the pandemic, there is a much greater realisation that working remotely on these issues is possible and that meetings do not always have to be in person."



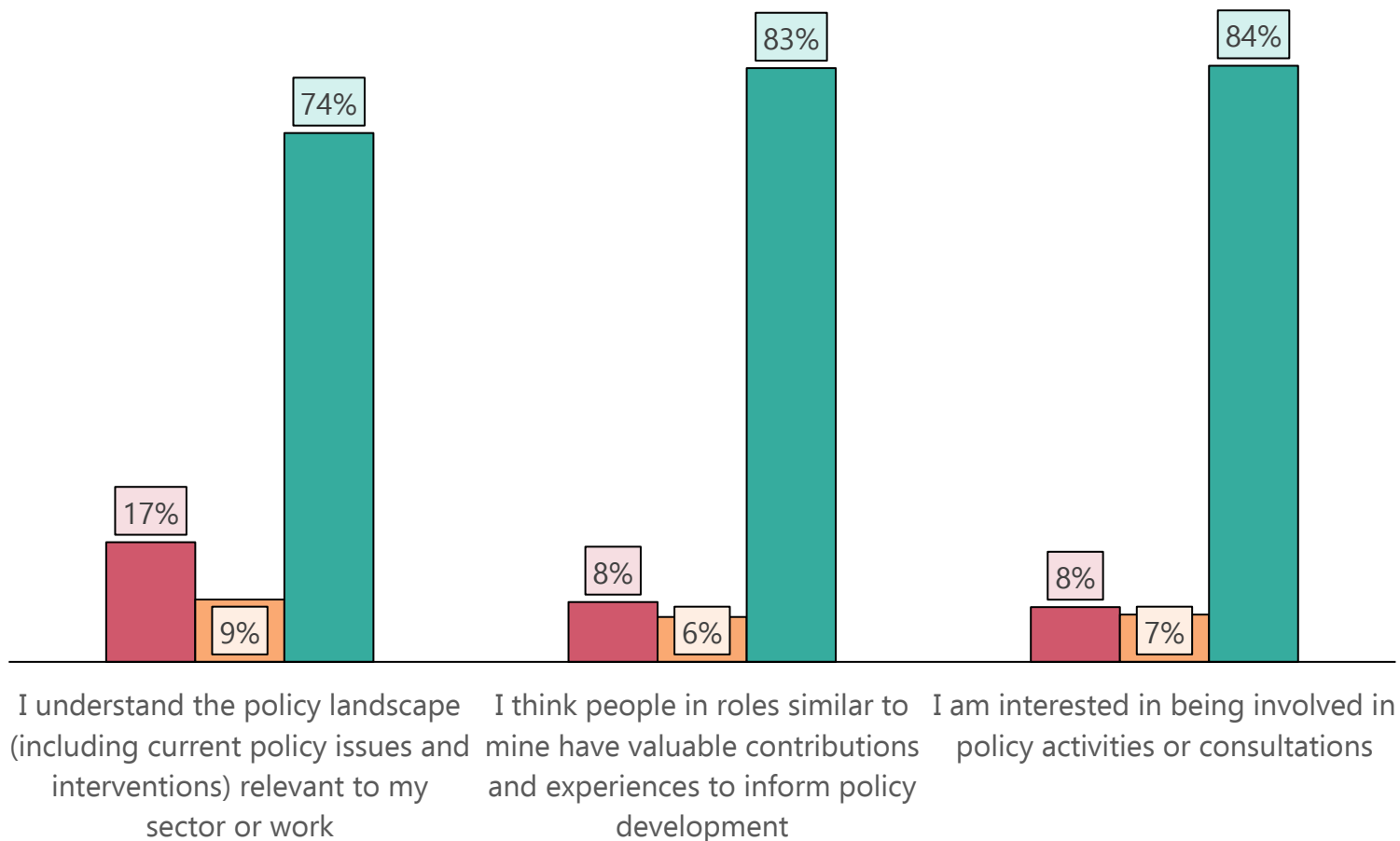
"Very often when issues are raised they are just ignored. If I felt like the issues were dealt with / taken seriously I would be more inclined to engage more."

DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

84% of respondents were interested in getting involved in policy activities

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree

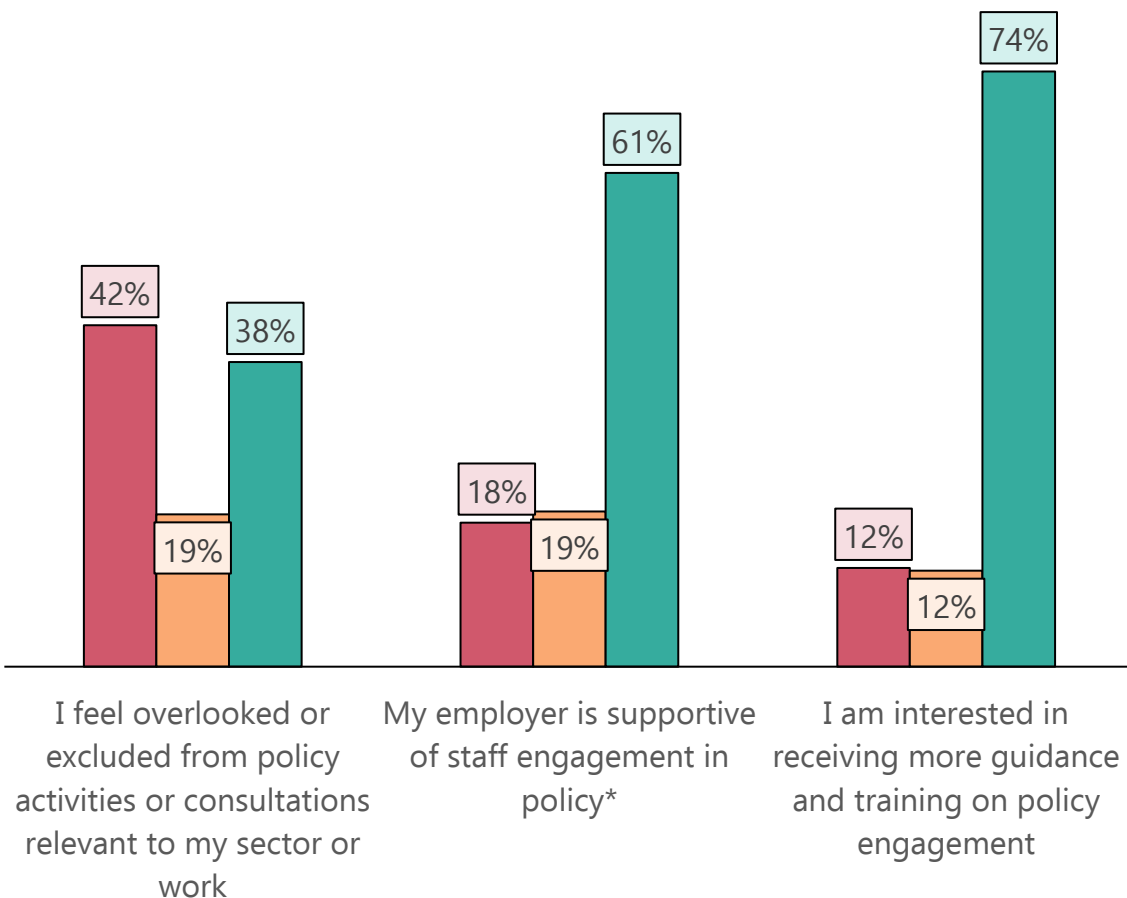


- 57% of respondents who reported they had not engaged in policy in the last 3 years indicated that they would be interested in getting involved in activities.
- This may suggest that a lack of awareness of opportunities has been a barrier to engaging in policy activities previously.
- While 83% of respondents agree that people in roles similar to theirs have valuable contributions and experiences to inform policy development, only 76% of those in entry level roles agreed. This may suggest a lack of confidence amongst this group.
- Respondents working in academia were more likely to agree that people in their roles have valuable contributions to policy (83%) compared to those working in other sectors, such as industry and not-for-profits. Note, this finding is based on a small sample size of those not working in academia.
- 74% agreed that they understood the policy landscape relevant to their sector of work. This increased to 81% when looking at those in senior roles. However, only 52% of entry level respondents agreed here. This knowledge gap is likely impacting upon participation.

38% of respondents felt excluded from policy activities

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree

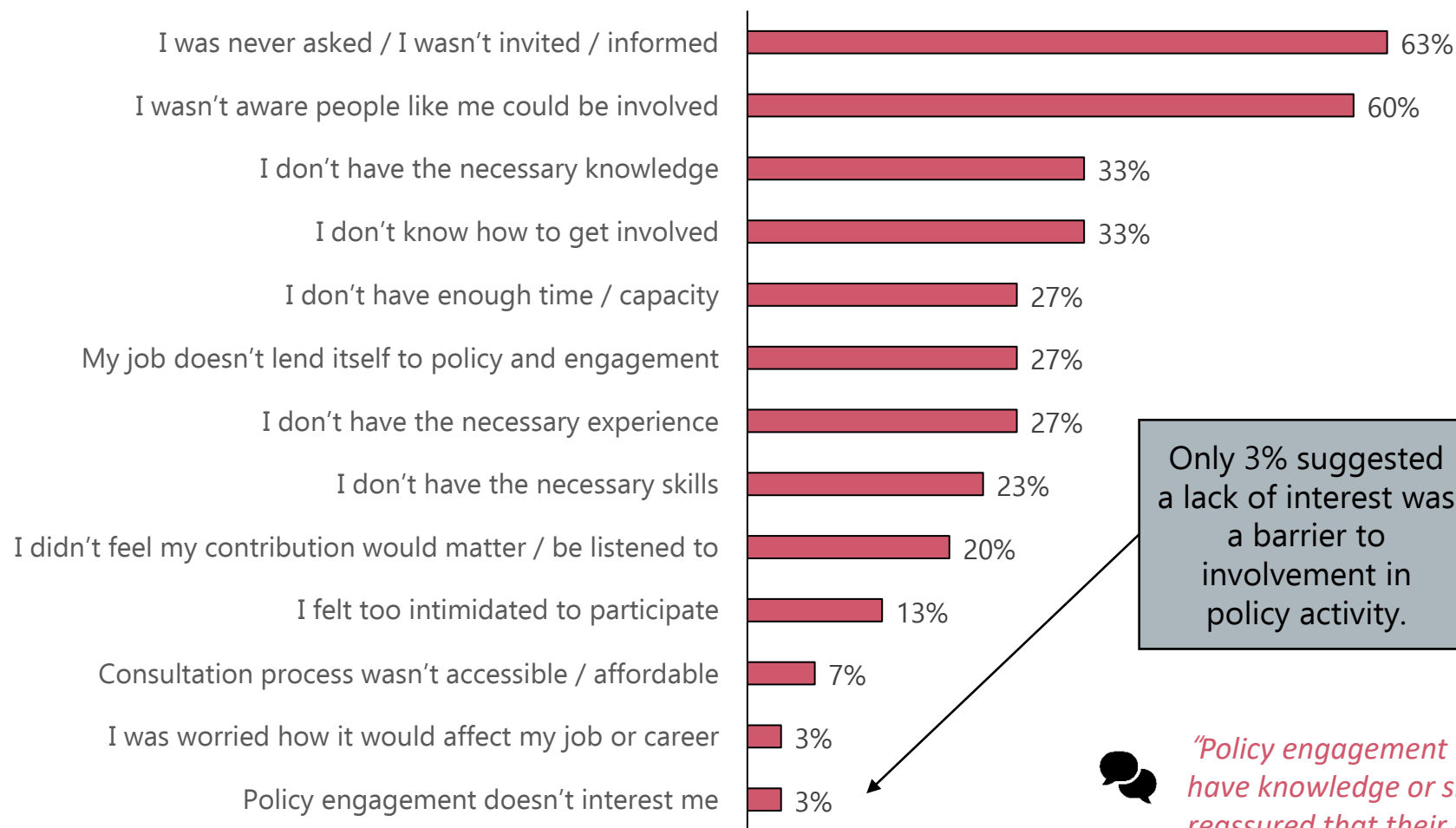


- 44% of respondents in entry level roles agreed that they felt overlooked or excluded from policy activities relevant to their work, compared to 39% of those in senior roles.
- Similarly, 50% of respondents who identified themselves as disabled felt excluded, compared to 36% of their counterparts. More could perhaps be done to ensure all voices felt welcome and heard to ensure policy takes into account diversity of thought and experiences.
- 61% of all respondents (also 61% of those working in Academia specifically) agreed that their employer was supportive of staff engagement in policy, whilst 18% disagreed.
- Significantly fewer respondents in technical roles suggested their employer was supportive (39%), compared to those working in professional services, management and administrative roles (71%).
- 74% of respondents are interested in receiving more guidance and training on policy engagement. Those working in subjects allied to medicine were likely to indicate interest (91%).
- Women appeared to be more interested in receiving training (79%) than men (65%). Findings outlined later in the report indicate key barriers to training include a lack of awareness and a lack of opportunity.

Base n = 268. Not applicable = 0-2%. *(this might include providing training, consultation opportunities, giving time for policy engagement or other forms of support).

Opportunities and awareness were key barriers

Q: Why haven't you been involved in any policy engagement activities?



Only 3% suggested a lack of interest was a barrier to involvement in policy activity.

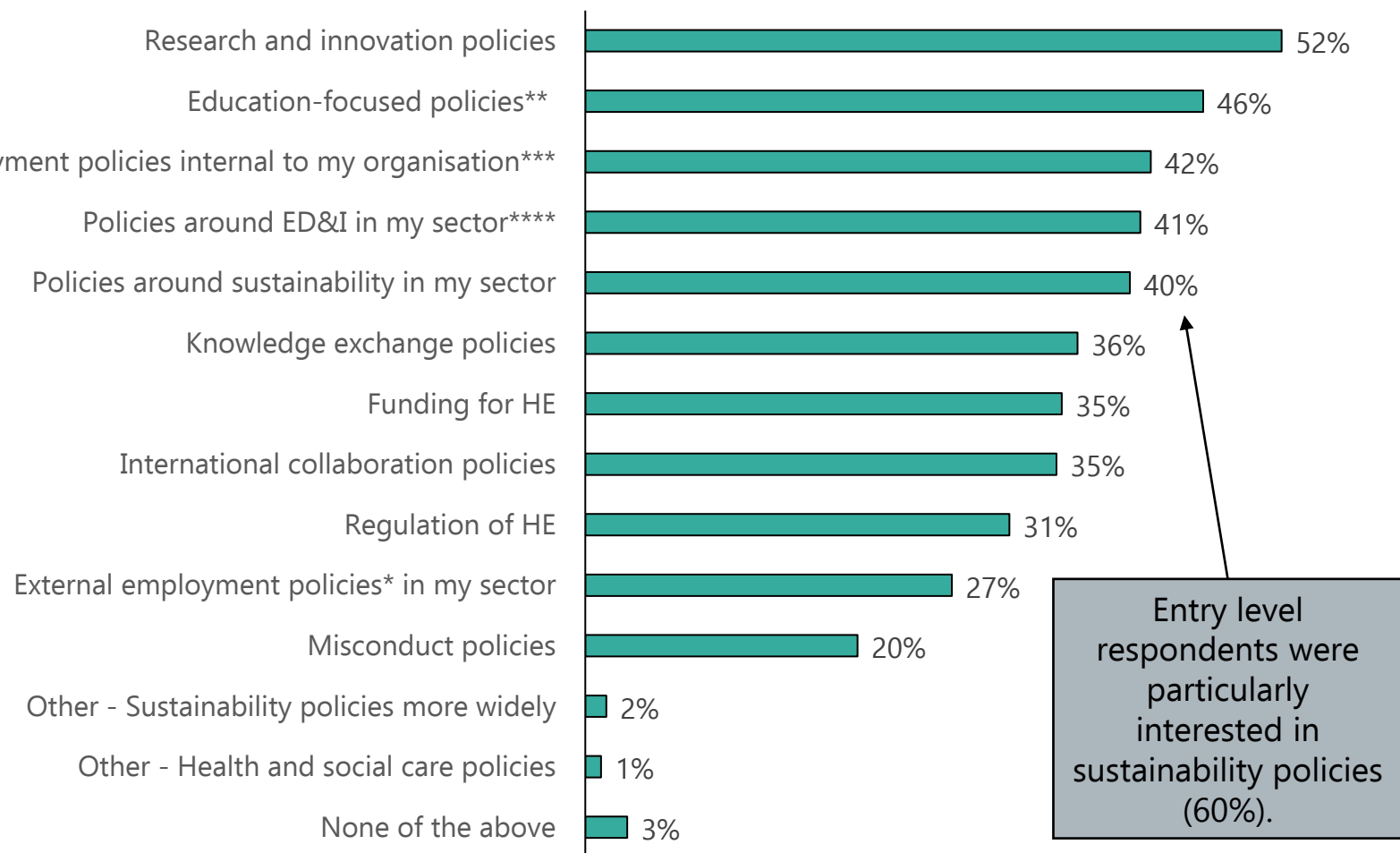
- Respondents who had not engaged in policy in the last 3 years were asked for their reasons why.
- The biggest barrier included not being asked or informed of opportunities (63%), followed by a lack of awareness that they could be involved (60%).
- 53% of respondents indicated some level of self-exclusion – including intimidation, a perception they lack the skills or knowledge, and a perception that they would be overlooked.
- These findings are in line with previous questions around potential divers and barriers – in which knowledge and awareness, as well as self-belief and fears of being overlooked clearly impact participation. This seems to be particularly the case for those in junior roles, and some minority groups.

"Policy engagement can seem too top-level or it can seem that staff need to have knowledge or skills they don't currently have - people need to be reassured that their experiences are valid and their voices need to be heard."

Base n = 30. Multi choice. Only those who have not engaged in policy in the last 3 years. Other = 3%.

Interest tended to align with current specialisms

Q: What policy areas are you interested in being actively involved in or consulted on, if any?



- Perhaps unsurprisingly, policy areas of interest correlated with job role and specialisms.
- For example, 76% of those in academic research roles and 84% in enterprise, research and innovation management were interested in research and innovation policies.
- Nonetheless, there was still interest identified in areas which might sit outside of respondents' obvious remit.
- Minority ethnic groups, women and disabled respondents all showed high levels of interest in policies around ED&I and employment policies compared to their counterparts. This highlights a likely interest in policies which may have a direct impact on an individual.
- 44% of respondents who had not engaged in policy in the last 3 years were interested in employment policies, and research and innovation policies.

Base n = 258. Only those who were neutral or agreed that they were interested in policy. *(incl. staff wellbeing, workplace culture). **(incl. teaching and learning, student experience). *** (incl. staff wellbeing, workplace culture). **** (incl. widening participation to HE)

TRAINING

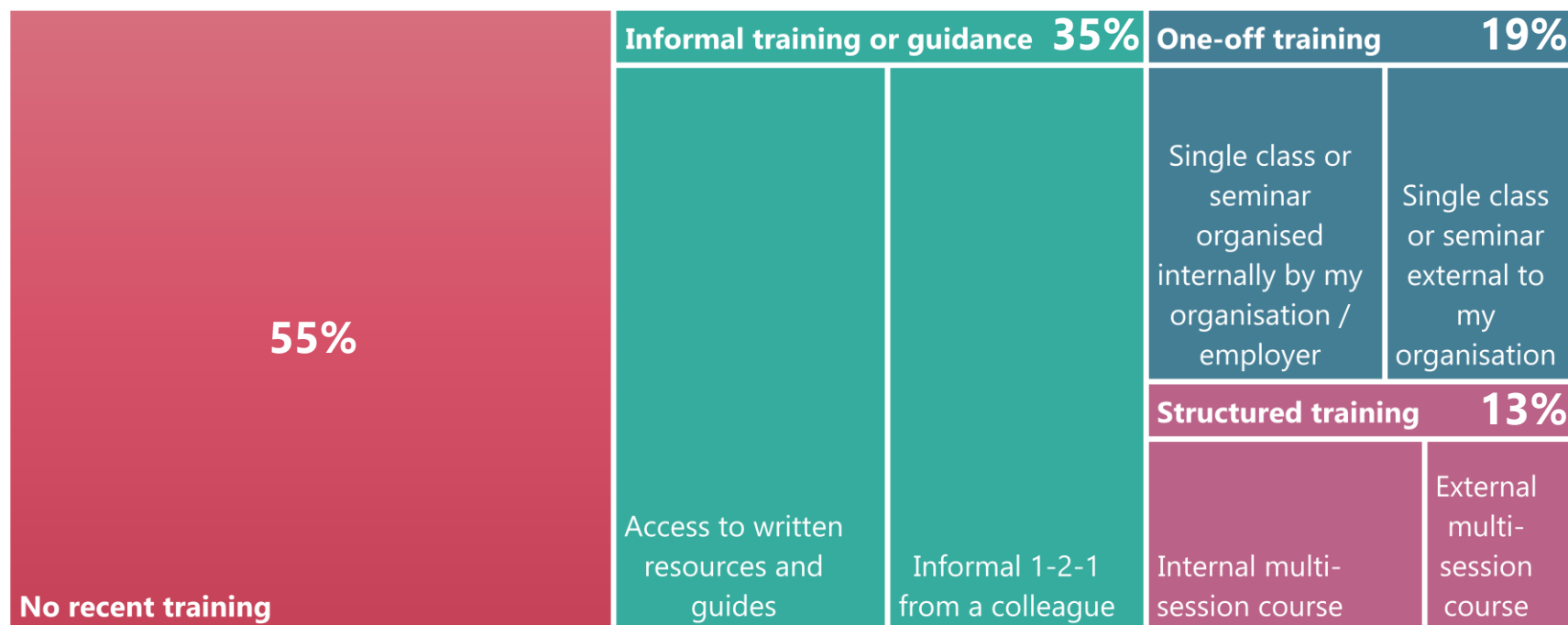
More than half of respondents reported no recent policy engagement training

The majority of respondents were interested in policy activities and in receiving more training about policy engagement, but more than half (55%) have received no training in the last three years. A third (35%) reported receiving informal training – such as guidance from a colleague or simply access to information resources. Structured, especially multi-session training was much less popular, accounting for only 13% of responses. The chart below presents the relative proportion of different policy-related training formats respondents reported receiving in the last 3 years.

- It appears that less than a third of respondents in technical roles received any policy training in the last three years, whereas more than half of those in academic faculty did.
- Similarly, around half of respondents with a PhD-level qualification received some training, in comparison to only a third of those with qualifications at undergraduate level and below.
- Those who took part in courses organised externally to their workplace tended to work in professional services area.

Relatively small sample sizes here mean that some of these differences might not be statistically significant.

Q: What kinds of policy engagement training have you received within the last 3 years, if any?

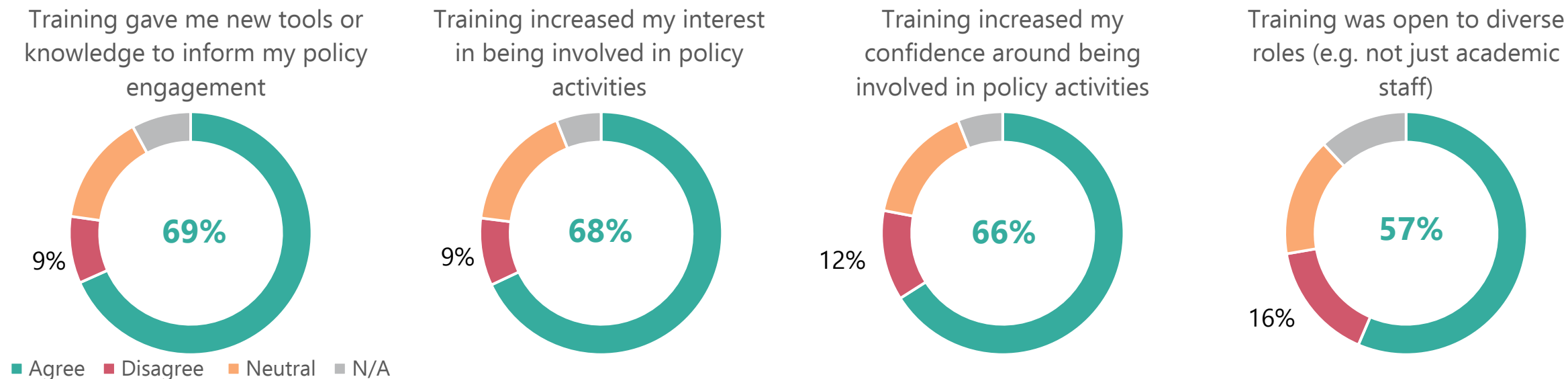


Base n = 286. Multiple choice question. The size of squares reflects the relative proportion of different training activities undertaken.

Policy engagement training was perceived as effective but not always inclusive

In general, those who received some policy training perceived the activities they took part in as effective and impactful – giving them the knowledge and tools they needed and increasing their confidence and interest in being involved in policy engagement. However, opinions were divided about how inclusive and open to diverse roles the training activities were (57% agreed that was the case).

Proportion of respondents agreeing with the following statements about policy engagement training they took part in*



- It appears that professional services, management and administrative roles were more likely to agree training was open to diverse roles, compared to academic staff. Technical roles tended to be more divided on whether the training increased their confidence and interest in policy engagement.
- Fewer respondents (51%) who were members of professional bodies agreed training was open to diverse roles, compared to those who weren't affiliated (65%).
- Minority ethnic respondents were less likely to agree with the positive statements about policy engagement training, compared to respondents of white ethnicities.

*Q13. We'd like to find out more about your experience with policy training. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following

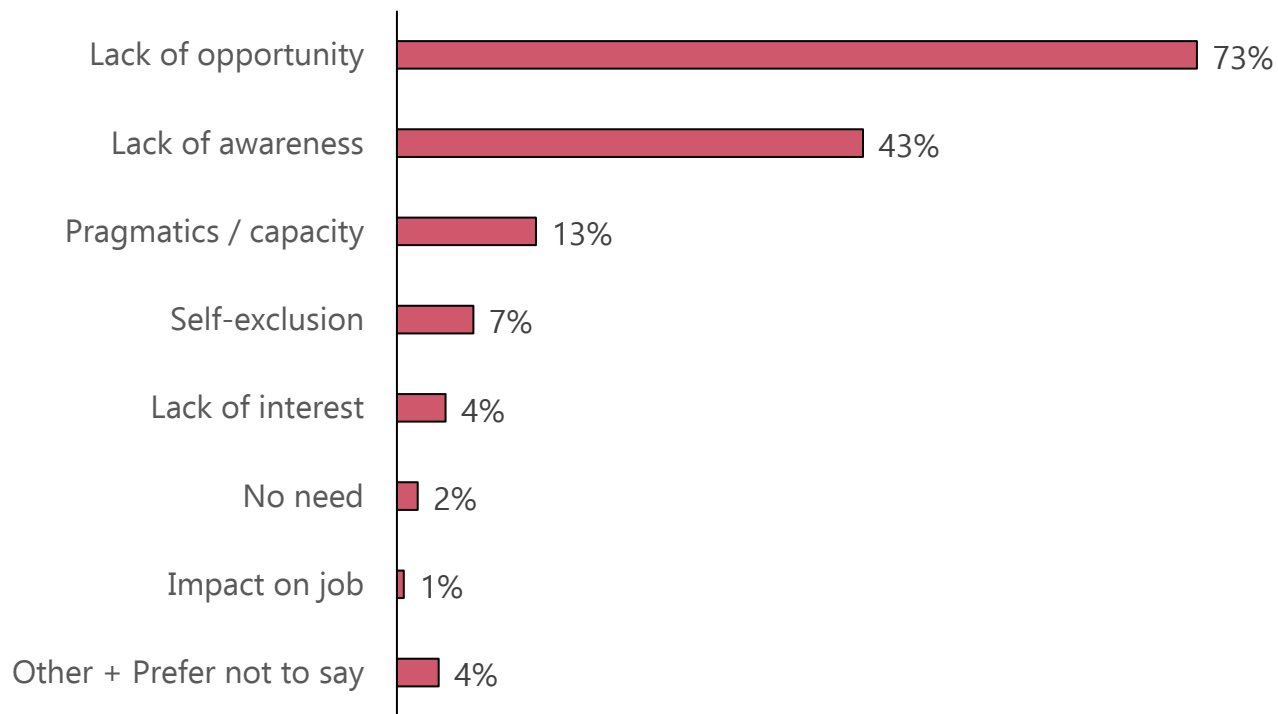
©SHIFT INSIGHT 2021 statements? Base n = 129, asked only to those who took part in any policy engagement training in the last three years.

Many didn't get an opportunity to take part in policy engagement training

The main barrier preventing more respondents from taking part in policy engagement training was simply a lack of opportunity – 73% reported that no policy training was offered and 41% said they weren't even aware they could receive it. In general, respondents thought their employers supported policy engagement training, and the potential impact of engagement on jobs didn't emerge as a prominent concern.

This demonstrates that a well advertised training provision that is easy to take part in is likely to attract a lot of interest.

Q: Why have you not received any policy engagement training?



- More women tended to report lack of opportunity and lack of awareness as barriers compared to men. Minority ethnic respondents were more likely to report they didn't know how to participate compared to white ethnicities.
- Only a minority self-excluded themselves from policy engagement training due to a feeling it wasn't something for them (6%) or because they felt too intimidated to participate (2%).
- However, 9% felt they didn't have time for training and 5% thought it was not accessible or affordable, suggesting more could be done to lower the pragmatic barriers to training and make it easier for individuals to take part.
- Those who felt they didn't have time for policy engagement training tended to hold academic roles.
- Interestingly, nearly half of respondents working at supervisory, low or middle management levels were unaware they could receive training in this area.

There is appetite for online primers on effective policy engagement

Respondents were asked to list any topics areas they wanted to be trained in. The list below presents the most frequently mentioned topics. This list suggests the sector is primarily interested in understanding the policy landscape and its processes better, as well as knowing how to effectively contribute toward it.

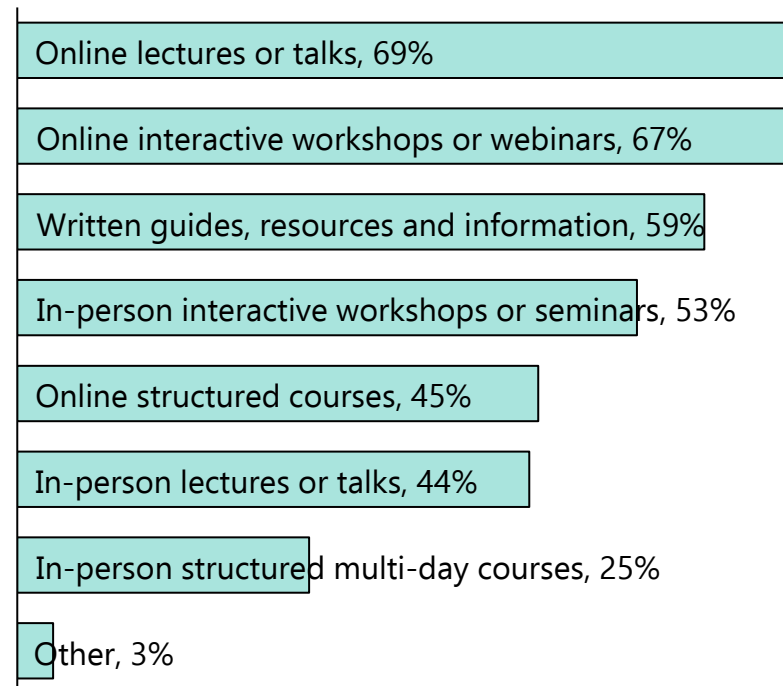
Q: What policy training topics would you be interested in, if any?



IN DESCENDING ORDER

Training delivered online was the format that would work best for most respondents. This reinforces comments and responses to other questions about the need for policy engagement to be accessible and affordable. It indicates that concerns about the time, cost or effort required to attend in person events created barriers to participation.

Q: What formats of delivery of policy training would work best for you?



Entry level respondents were more interested in attending in person training compared to those in more senior roles.

SUPPORT AND SOLUTIONS

Respondents want their voice to matter and to be included in policy processes

This section focuses on what support and solutions are needed to encourage policy engagement. The survey findings indicate an existing capacity for policy engagement in the sector. However, this capacity could be better tapped into to include underused talent and expand the range of contributions and perspectives. This suggests that efforts should concentrate more on supporting and facilitating access to policy engagement rather than increasing interest levels in policy engagement.



Interest

There appears to be a lot of interest in policy engagement

- 84% of respondents are interested in getting involved in policy activities and 83% agreed that people in roles similar to theirs have valuable contributions and experiences to inform policy development. Three quarters were also interested in receiving more guidance and training.



Engagement

The majority recently took part in some policy activities

- 87% of respondents indicated policy engagement activity in the last 3 years. Levels of interest or engagement might not be representative of the sector more widely as those not interested or involved in policy were probably less likely to fill in the survey in the first place.



Experience

Respondents' experiences of participation are mixed

- Around half of respondents agreed that policy engagement activities they took part in were inclusive, accessible, effective and impactful, showing that there are opportunities for improvement so that more people feel they are worthwhile.



Barriers

Some are not given the opportunity to take part

- A significant proportion of disengaged respondents (38%) felt excluded from policy activities. The biggest barrier included not being asked or informed of opportunities (63%), followed by a lack of awareness that they could be involved (60%).

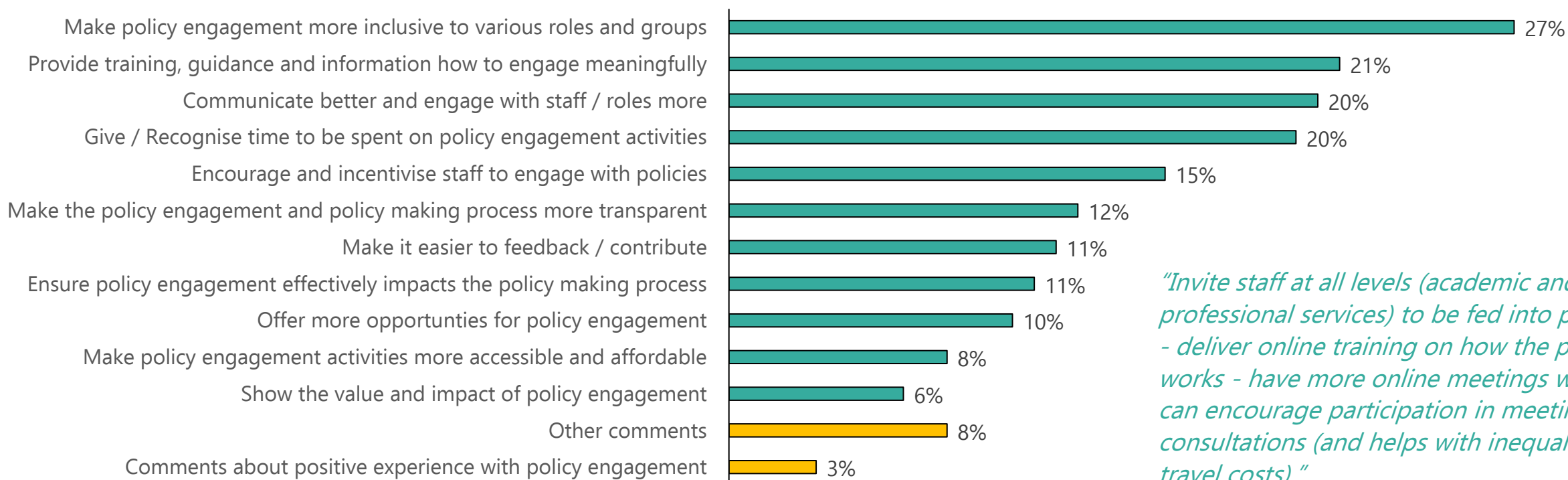
There is potentially a sizeable and engaged audience in the sector, open to new opportunities and keen to get involved and trained in policy topics.

However, more needs to be done to make sure respondents feel their contribution matter. Communication and outreach needs to be improved so that more individuals have the opportunity to engage.

Respondents want actions that would make policy engagement easier to take part in, more open and inclusive

Respondents were asked to comment on what could be done to support their policy engagement. The most frequently mentioned recommendations focused on actions that would make it easier for more individuals to engage. This included making policy engagement more inclusive to different groups of people, equipping individuals with tools and knowledge to make effective contributions, and engaging with a wider base of people from the start.

Q: What could employers / policy groups / professional groups / government do to support your policy engagement?



"Invite staff at all levels (academic and professional services) to be fed into policies - deliver online training on how the process works - have more online meetings which can encourage participation in meetings and consultations (and helps with inequality in travel costs)."

Base n = 133. Open field responses coded into thematic codes.

Suggested improvements for boosting inclusion and widen representation

Respondents were asked to provide suggestions for policy engagement support. There was a lot of overlap between respondents' most frequently mentioned recommendations, and the top suggestions share an underlying theme of ensuring the policy engagement activities are more open. First of all, this means making them more open to diverse roles and groups that might feel overlooked in policy processes.

INCLUSION

There were various suggestions as to how the voices and perspectives included in policy engagement could be broadened. Recommendations included:

- ✓ A parity of esteem between the voices of academic faculty and that of professional services, arguing that professional services and administrative staff often have a broad perspective of how a policy might affect multiple stakeholders and the broader implications.
- ✓ Better recognition of the role of allied roles could also involve fellowships for non-academic staff to work in relevant institutions to impact policy.
- ✓ Opening up policy engagement to staff at less senior positions would help ensure policy is not set by stakeholders by virtue of their seniority alone.
- ✓ Opening up policy development to external stakeholders outside of academia and considering their inputs
- ✓ Facilitation of policy engagement activities that ensured everyone had a chance to speak, power dynamics didn't discourage people from expressing their views and the make up of sessions were diverse and representative.
- ✓ Reassuring people their experiences are valid and that they don't need specialised knowledge to take part.
- ✓ Supporting the policy engagement of minority ethnic groups and encouraging those from non-minority backgrounds to engage in EDI policies.



"I am conscious that I am white and I would like to be able to engage more on issues related to race in HE but very conscious of my privilege - how to support Black people and importantly Black women in this? "

Suggested improvements for open communication and time recognition

Ensuring the policy engagement activities are more open also means communicating in a way that reaches those with a lower awareness level and engages with a broader cross-section of the workforce. Many also suggested opening up opportunities for taking part in policy activities by making it easier for individuals to justify spending the time on policy engagement activities.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

Comments here suggested a need to keep the communication simple, engaging and two-way, including:

- ✓ Making the policy documentation clear and concise, avoiding any jargon and acronyms.
- ✓ Summarising the relevant policy material, recognising not everyone has the time to read multiple very long documents to prepare for policy consultation.
- ✓ Investigating why some roles or groups don't tend to respond to a policy consultation to identify the barriers to engagement they face
- ✓ Publishing consultation responses and making the preparation of those outputs more collaborative
- ✓ Encourage staff to engage with white papers and debates around key policy issues

RECOGNITION OF TIME

Open responses suggest women were more likely than men to request that employers recognise time spent on policy engagement activities. Suggestions included:

- ✓ Providing workload models that allowed for the time and space needed for policy engagement.
- ✓ Taking advantage of the change in behaviours created by remote working and increasing the online opportunities for getting involved in working on policy issues in a more time efficient manner.
- ✓ Incentivising staff to dedicate time to policy engagement by recognising those activities as part of an employees' duties.

"Investigate why some staff may not have responded to a policy consultation. Just because you haven't heard from them doesn't mean that they don't have a valid or important contribution to make... They may just be overburdened with work or feel uncomfortable or disengaged from the process."

Opening up the world of policy engagement to more people through training

Training plays an important role in opening the world of policy engagement for those who feel they lack the skills or knowledge to make meaningful contributions.

TRAINING GAPS

This survey suggested a gap around training provision and promotion. Despite the majority of respondents being interested in receiving more training, more than half of them (55%) have received no training in the last three years.

Many didn't get opportunities to take part in policy engagement training (either because no policy training was offered or they weren't even aware they could receive it.)

Many wanted to understand the policy landscape and processes better as well as how to effectively contribute to it. Delivering such training and guidance online would work best for most.

Open comments provided more details as to how those needs and gaps could be addressed. Recommendations for training and guidance-oriented support for policy engagement included making sure training available for a range of job families, and tailored to different roles.

"I was invited to do this, took all the documents, read through, did background reading, wrote notes... when I finally saw our combined response I felt like I'd been completely out of my depth."

SKILLS GAPS

Respondents wanted support with gaining the following skills and practical knowledge:

- ✓ How to prepare for policy consultation
- ✓ How to apply to be on advisory committees
- ✓ How to align research to policy
- ✓ How to word consultation responses
- ✓ What lobbying techniques are effective
- ✓ What guidance is already available and where to access it
- ✓ How to support academics in embedding policy matters into research applications.
- ✓ How to engage with policy around research and innovation funding.
- ✓ How to make yourself heard

A quarter of women (compared to 13% of men) requested more training and guidance in their recommendations for supporting policy engagement.

Interestingly, a bigger proportion of respondents holding a PhD (28%) compared to those with qualifications at the level of Masters and below (16%) requested training and guidance.

CONCLUSION

Recommendations

The survey findings indicate there is an existing capacity for policy engagement in the sector. There is potentially a sizeable and engaged audience, but this capacity could be better tapped into to include underused talent and expand the range of contributions and perspectives that inform policy processes. More needs to be done to make sure respondents feel their contribution matter, whilst communication and outreach needs to be improved so that more individuals have the opportunity to engage.

Transparency, effectiveness and impact: Ensure a sense of being listened to.

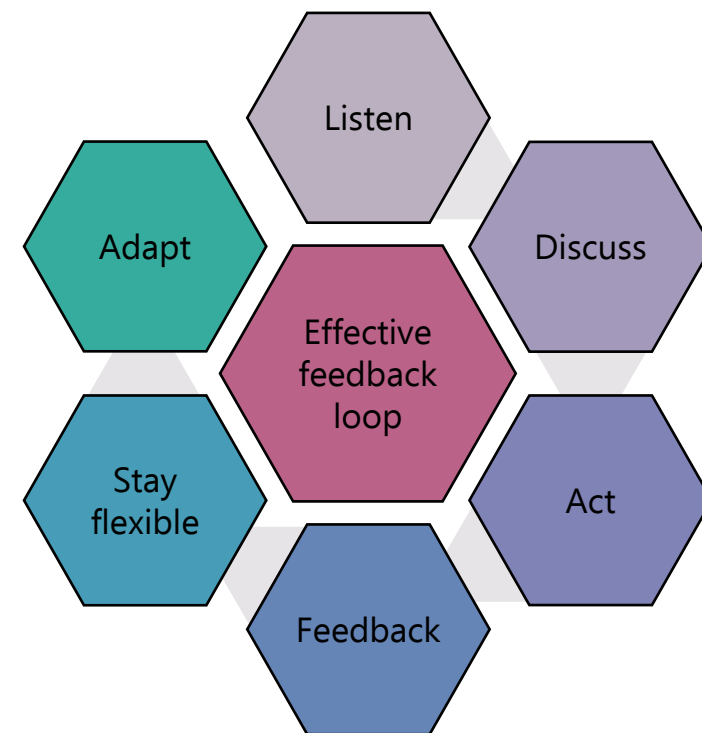


The majority might not need convincing that policy engagement matters and that their voice is valuable. But some have a perception that policy activities can be tokenistic – they will need to be convinced that their contributions are taken seriously and can make a difference. They are likely to appreciate:

Being told what the consultation can lead to and whether there are real options or actions that the policy activity can influence or change.

Being convinced the policy consultation they are invited to has more value than just to say there was a consultation.

Being informed of consultation responses - especially if the feedback was gathered remotely without them having a chance to listen to what others were saying.



A feedback loop proposed by one respondent to ensure that taking part in policy engagement matters.

Recommendations

Incentives, accessibility and affordability: Create real and realistic opportunities



Responses to this survey suggest that sometimes an opportunity to take part in policy engagement is just not a realistic option due to pragmatic reasons, mostly a lack of time. Incentivising engagement and improving accessibility and affordability of opportunities would lower those pragmatic barriers to participation.

Staff would appreciate if employers linked policy engagement to work duties, e.g. treating it as CPD, acknowledging it in appraisals, or giving and recognising time needed for policy activities, creating incentives that would make it easier to justify the engagement.

Researchers wanted a better acknowledgement of policy engagement in research funding models and recognition that creating policy engagement activities around research requires additional resource and effort.

Organisers of policy engagement events or employers could consider covering the costs of commuting to events often held in London as well as creating more online events or feedback opportunities that can be completed asynchronously.

Inclusion and representation: Give everyone a chance to speak



Respondents wanted to see policy engagement being more inclusive to diverse voices, and activities open to wider roles and more perspectives. This would include making sure more roles are informed of and invited to policy activities and different groups are represented and given a chance to speak. This will mean considering the following criteria in the make-up of those invited to policy engagement activities:

Demographics (gender, ethnicity, age, location)

Job seniority (including entry level positions and those on temporary and insecure contracts)

Job family (academic, professional services or technical, administrative, managerial roles)

Disability and factors that might make individuals feel excluded or make it more difficult for them to participate

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