THE NETWORK RESPONSE
Weathering the COVID-19 outbreak
April 2020

This survey asks professional bodies to give insight on how they are weathering the COVID-19 crisis, covering issues such as:

- Facilitating working from home
- Platforms used for virtual meetings and collaborative working
- Problems professional body members are facing regarding their membership and practice, and the support professional bodies are offering to remedy these issues
- The ways professional bodies are supporting other stakeholders
- Topics professional bodies' COVID-19 policies cover
- How PARN and government can support the sector

Thirty-five organisations responded to this survey.

Summary of Key Findings

Most frequently, professional bodies are facilitating working from home by organising regular phone/video meetings (35 organisations), providing a virtual meeting platform (34 organisations) and providing staff with a work laptop (32 organisations).

The most commonly used platforms for virtual meetings is Zoom , used by 20 organisations. Other commonly used virtual meeting platforms include:

- Microsoft Teams (17)
- Go to Meeting (8)
- Skype (3)

The most commonly used platform for collaborative working is Microsoft Teams, used by 20 organisations. Other commonly used platforms for collaborative working include:

- Office 365/The Cloud (4)
- SharePoint (3)
- Zoom (3)

Seventeen organisations note their members are having trouble paying their membership fees. Twenty-one organisations note they are supporting their membership with fee paying by introducing relaxations on payments, or have changed their concession rate policy to be more generous.

Ten organisations note their members are concerned about job prospects and a loss of clients due to the crisis, and seven note members are finding it difficult to move to remote working. Common ways professional bodies are supporting their members practice are:

- Sharing best practice (12)
- Creating webinars (9)

Thirty-four organisations mention working from home and social distancing in their COVID-19 policy. Thirty-three organisations mention the cancellation/postponement of all upcoming events and courses in their COVID-19 policy.

Twenty-one organisations want PARN to support the sector through providing case studies and best practice. Other ways PARN could support the sector include:

- Developing webinars and resources (5)
- Lobbying government (4)

Twelve organisations noted they would like the government to support the sector by providing more grants and loans.
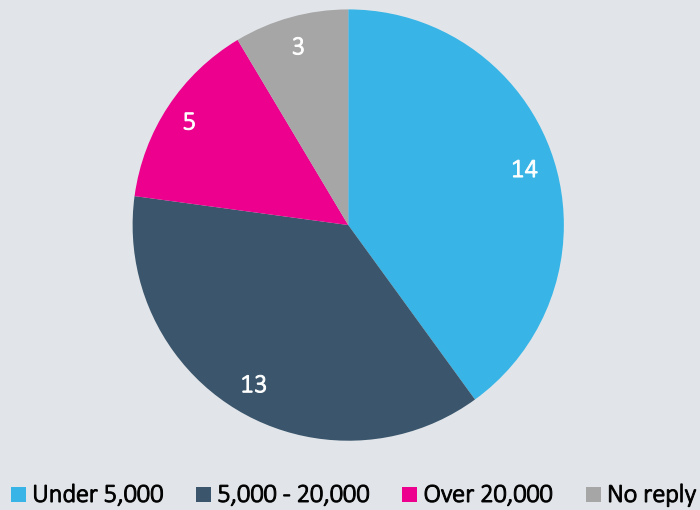
Survey Sample

Charts below show the survey sample distribution by sector and number of members.

Sector
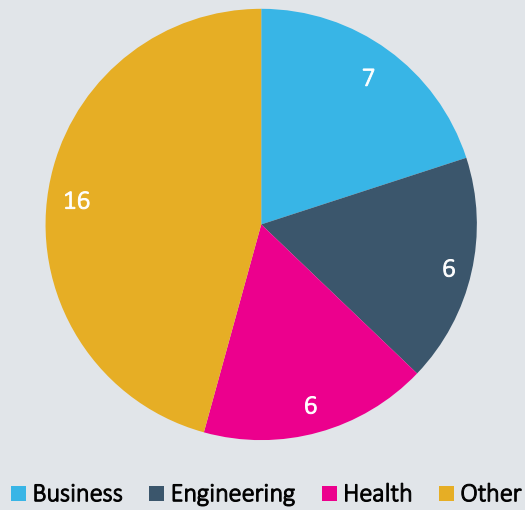
Base: 35

Number of members
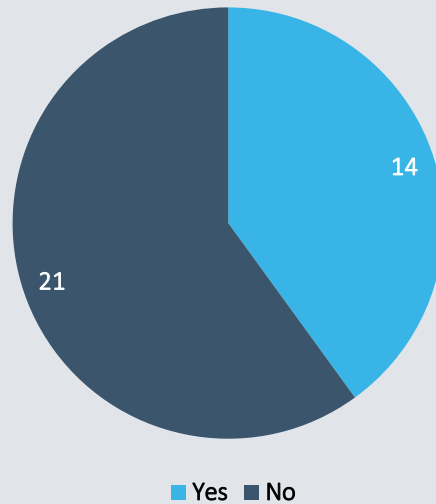

Base: 35

Detailed Survey Responses

Below are the detailed responses and additional comments from this *Ask the Network* survey.
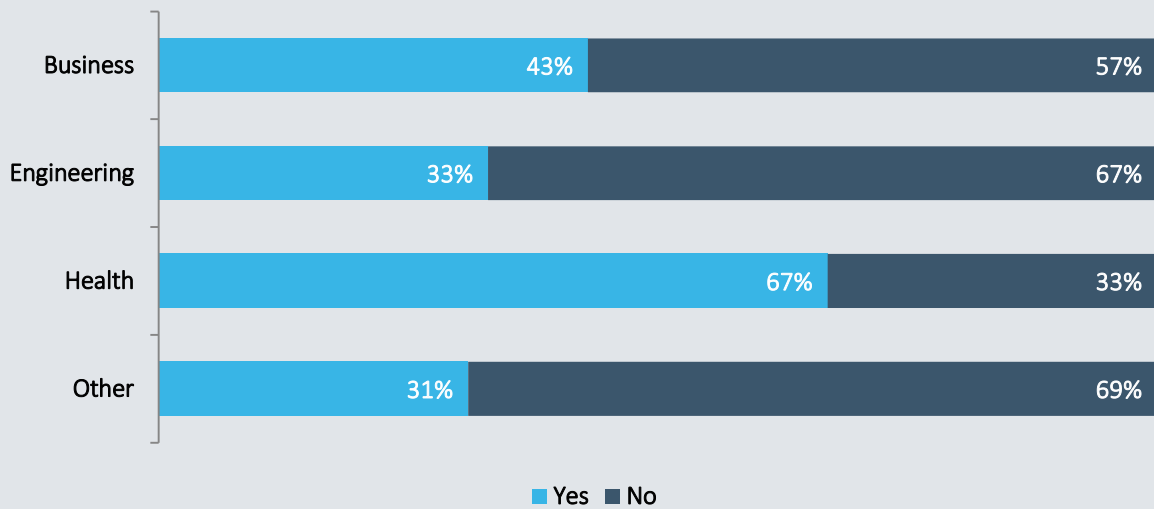
Q1 Are you still allowing members of staff to attend the workplace if absolutely necessary?

Base: 35

Fourteen (40%) of the responding organisations are still allowing some staff to attend the workplace if necessary, while 21 organisations (60%) are not.

Q1 Are you still allowing members of staff to attend the workplace if absolutely necessary? – By Sector

Bases:

Business: 7   Engineering: 6   Health: 6   Other: 14

Health sector professional bodies are much more commonly allowing some staff to come into work when needed. This could be due to the sector they represent. Many health sector workers are still working due to being key workers, with many being employed by the NHS. This likely requires more professional bodies from this sector to run skeleton staff in the office to ensure their members are supported, due to the unique situation of Health sector workers in this crisis.

Q1 Are you still allowing members of staff to attend the workplace if absolutely necessary? – By Size
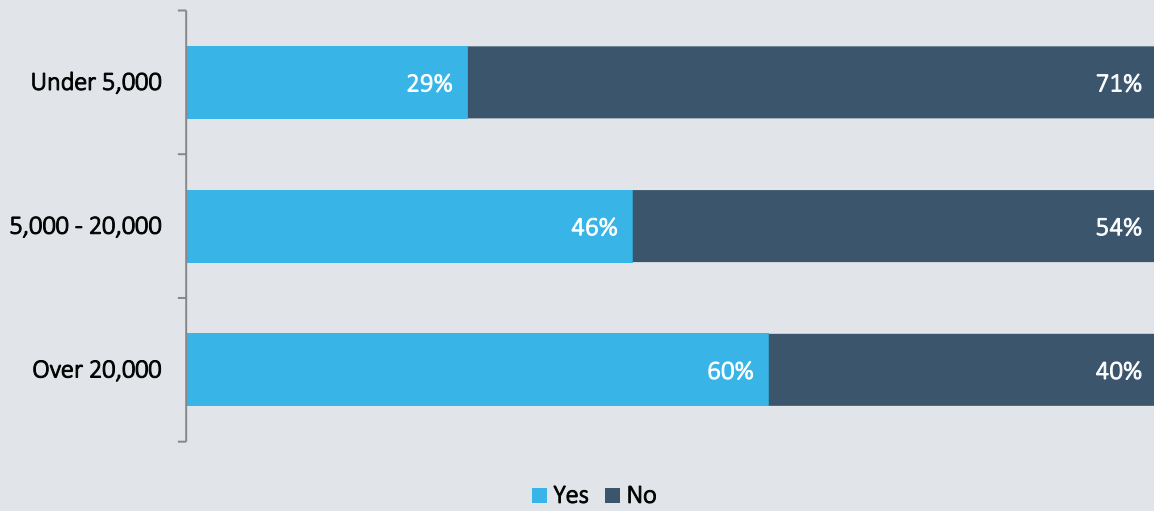
Bases:

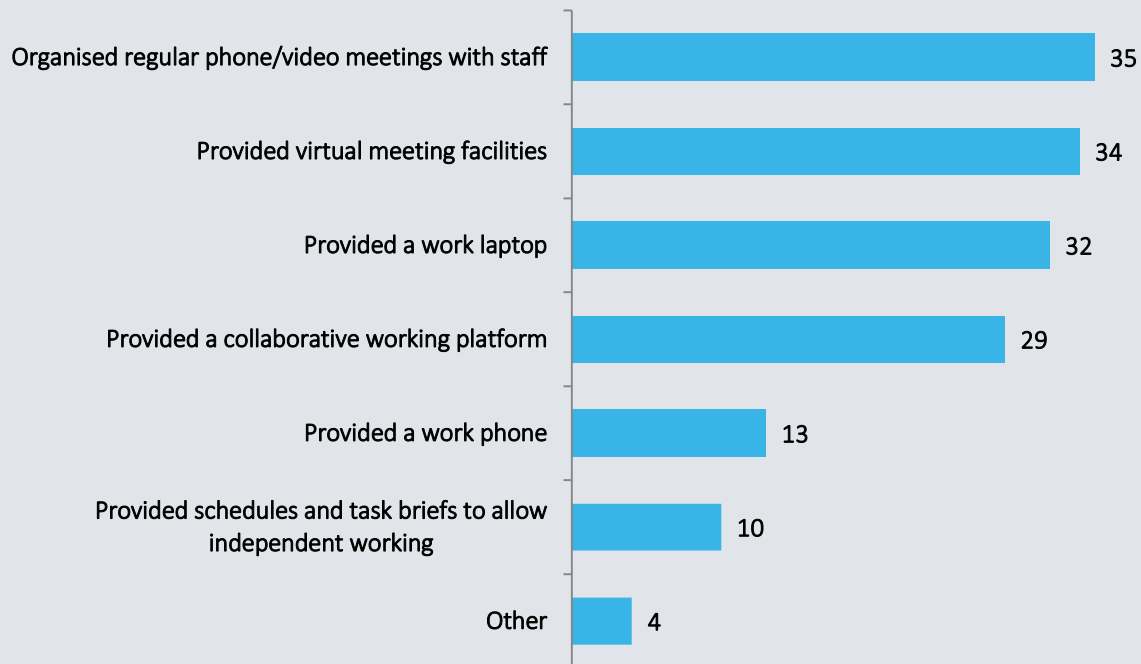Under 5,000: 14   5,000 – 20,000: 13   Over 20,000: 5

Larger organisations are more likely to still be allowing some staff to come into the workplace where necessary.

Q2 How has your organisation facilitated working from home?

Category	Value
Organised regular phone/video meetings with staff	35
Provided virtual meeting facilities	34
Provided a work laptop	32
Provided a collaborative working platform	29
Provided a work phone	13
Provided schedules and task briefs to allow independent working	10
Other	4

Base: 35

All 35 responding organisations are organising regular phone or video meetings with staff. Furthermore, all but one of the responding organisations (34 organisations/97%) are providing virtual meeting facilities for staff. Thirty-two (91%) of responding organisations are providing staff with a work laptop and 29 (83%) of organisations are providing a collaborative work platform for staff. Conversely, only 13 organisations (37%) are providing their staff with work phones and only 10 (29%) are providing schedules and task briefs to allow independent working.

Four organisations listed other ways in which they are facilitating working from home. These are:

- Providing extra pc equipment (e.g. monitors)
- Sending staff newsletters containing both operations information and lifestyle content
- HR support app
- Hosting virtual pub drinks

What platforms does your organisation use to facilitate...

Virtual meetings

The most commonly used platform for virtual meetings among responding organisations is Zoom, used by 20 organisations. Seventeen organisations use Microsoft Teams for virtual meeting, and eight use Go to Meeting. Other platforms used among responding organisations are:

- Skype (3)
- WebEx (1)

- MiCollab (1)

Collaborative working

The most commonly used platform for collaborative working is Microsoft Teams, used by 20 of the responding organisations. Four organisations use Office 365 and its cloud capabilities. It is worth nothing that Microsoft 365 is most commonly associated with Microsoft Teams in terms of collaborative working. Zoom and SharePoint are used for collaborative working by three organisations each. Other platforms used for collaborative working include:

- WhatsApp (2)
- Remote desktop (2)
- Go to Meeting (2)
- Basecamp (1)
- Skype (1)
- Slack (1)

Organisations generally found the platforms they use for virtual meetings and collaborative working to be effective, as no organisations felt they would not recommend their chosen platforms.

Q3 What concerns have your members expressed regarding...

Their Membership of professional body

Seventeen organisations told us that their members are having difficulties with paying membership fees; this can be exemplified by the quote below.

Ability to pay subscriptions, outstanding customer invoices are key issues. Member benefits have been largely moved online and this is less of a concern.

One organisation specifically noted that their members are demanding payment holidays due to the difficulty of paying fees.

Five organisations noted their members are having issues with the completion of their CPD. Concerns about the cancellations of events and a demand for more virtual resources are issues mentioned by three organisations each. One organisation in the Health sector noted their members are expressing specific demands due to their roles as emergency workers:

Our Members are A&E doctors who are focussed on the clinical emergency. Concerns about support for trainee doctors and postponement of our examinations.

Other membership issues expressed include:

- Members not being able to draw on member benefits (2)
- Demands for support for member networks (2)

Their practice

Ten organisations stated that their members are expressing concerns regarding job prospects and the loss of clients during the crisis. Seven expressed that their members are having issues with the process of moving their practices to remote working, as exemplified by the response below:

Practical difficulties in moving clients' work to and from premises. Issues about keeping artefacts at studio or returning to client. Those working in museums, galleries and libraries mostly cannot access their collections and cannot do much work at home. They are worried about the condition of the artefacts they care for.

A further five organisations stated there are concerns due to members being in industries where it is difficult to work remotely at all.

Certain segments of our profession are really struggling as circa 30% of all activities are face to face. These activities can't move online or very few of them can. For these companies they are furloughing via the Job Retention Scheme and/or claiming Self-employment Income Support (depending on their corporate structure). We are collating comments and concerns via our legal and ethics helpline service.

Three organisations stated their members are expressing general issues with not being able to see clients face to face. Other issues regarding member's practice include:

- Issues of unsafe working/ethical issues (2)
- Financial worries (2)
- Furlough (2)
- Keeping teams engaged during lockdown (1)
- Juggling work and childcare (1)

Q4 How are you addressing these concerns?

Membership of professional body

Twenty organisations stated that to support members with paying membership fees, they have introduced some form of reduced or relaxed fee policy, or have changed the criteria for their concession rate to support more members. An example of a relaxed fee policy is exemplified below:

We are offering payment holidays for corporate accreditation and individual membership fees of 3 months by extending membership to cover a 15 month period rather than a 12 month period.

Four organisations note they are promoting and providing online resources for their members to use to encourage members to renew their subscriptions. Furthermore, three organisations note they are offering more free activities for members. Other steps professional bodies are taking to address membership concerns include:

- Relaxed CPD requirements (3)
- More social media engagement (2)
- More frequent communications (1)
- Raising awareness of the situation (1)

- Move to online events (1)
- Providing wellbeing support (1)

Members' practice

To support their members' practice, 12 organisations are sharing guidance and best practice with members, as exemplified below.

We are increasing relevant content, using case studies and best practice to help others. We also are putting together a programme of webinars covering relevant topics for members.

Nine organisations are supporting members' practice by providing webinars and other virtual content for members. Five organisations are taking steps to lobby the government to give more support to their members; one such respondent is lobbying government for business rates reliefs, as shown below.

We are lobbying government for more favourable conditions for our sector such as those being offered to hospitality and tourism e.g. business rates relief etc. We are liaising weekly with the government department BEIS to discuss any individual queries which are not being addressed by the current government guidance to try and get complex queries answered and to help the government refine its advice.

Other steps professional bodies are taking to support members' practice are:

- Surveying members and member networks to get ideas for support (2)
- Volunteer register for furloughed professionals (1)
- Changes in code of ethics (1)
- Senior Leadership Team meetings to provide advice (1)
- Encouraging online CPD (1)
- Increase communications and marketing (1)

Q5 What measures have you introduced to support other stakeholders?

Suppliers

Steps taken by respondents to support their suppliers include:

- Online sign off (2)
- Flexible pay (2)
- Continuing supplier contacts even when not in use (1)
- Quicker pay (1)
- Including suppliers in meetings (1)

Sponsors

Steps taken by responding organisations to support their sponsors include:

- Updates and letters (5)
- Webinars and conferences for sponsoring (2)
- Offering alternative opportunities (e.g. annual sponsorship) (2)
- Speaking to sponsors who had meetings cancelled (1)

- Flexible payment (1)

Clients

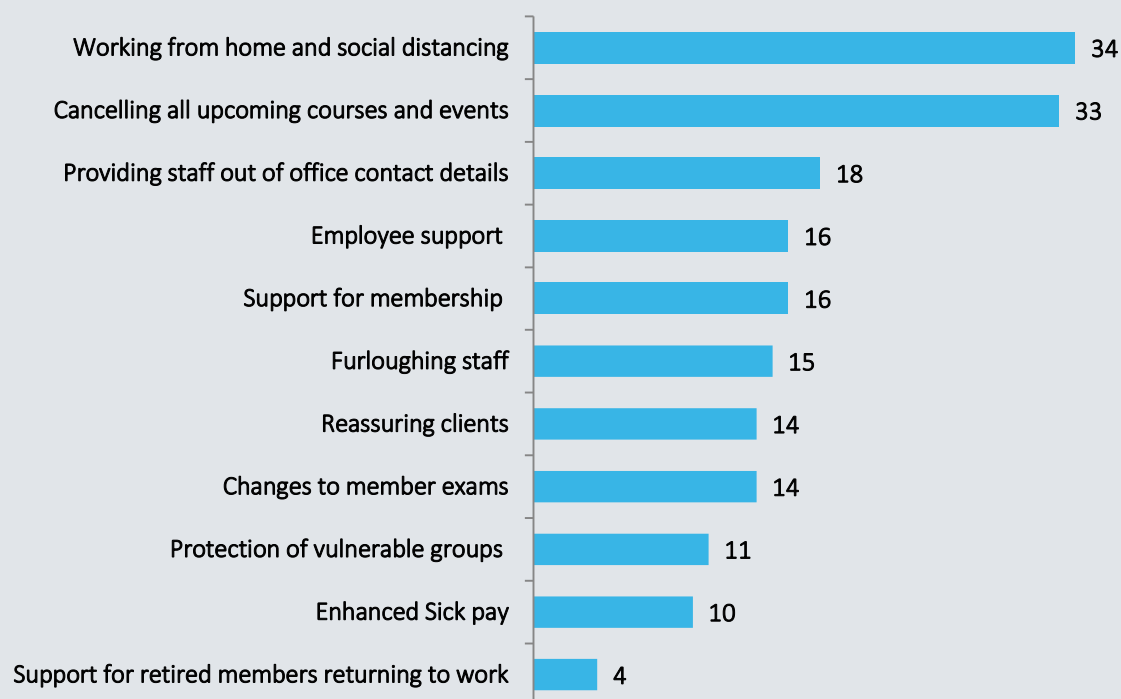Steps responding organisations are taking to support clients include:

- Flexible delivery (e.g. online courses) (4)
- More information bulletins (2)
- Relaxed payment deadlines (1)
- Online resources (1)

Other Service users

Steps professional bodies are taking to support other service users include:

- Updates and enhanced communications (6)
- Phased payments (1)
- Online training (1)
- Regular virtual meetings (1)

Q6 Which of the following issues does your organisation's COVID-19 policy cover?

Issue	Value
Working from home and social distancing	34
Cancelling all upcoming courses and events	33
Providing staff out of office contact details	18
Employee support	16
Support for membership	16
Furloughing staff	15
Reassuring clients	14
Changes to member exams	14
Protection of vulnerable groups	11
Enhanced Sick pay	10
Support for retired members returning to work	4

Base: 35

All but one of the responding organisations (34 organisations/97%) includes working from home and social distancing in their COVID-19 policy. Furthermore, 33 organisations (94%) mention the cancellation of all upcoming courses and events. Eighteen organisations (51%) provide staff out of office contact details within their COVID-19 policy. Conversely, the protection of vulnerable groups, such as those with health conditions is only included in the policies of 11 organisations (31%) and enhanced Sick pay policy is only included in the policies of 10 responding organisations (29%). Only four organisations (11%) state their policy mentions support for retired members returning to work. This small number is unsurprising as the issue of retired members being called on to work is very specific to the Health sector due to demands on the NHS.

Q7 What can PARN do to support the professional body sector through this crisis?

Twenty one organisations feel PARN should support the sector by sharing best practice and case studies of how other professional bodies are responding to the crisis.

More information about how others are responding. Some concept of best practice to communicate with members during this time. What could we say, what are others saying that is being well received.

Furthermore, five organisations feel PARN could develop webinars and resources for the sector as a way to support sharing of best practice and key information. Four organisations noted they want to see PARN lobby government to help the sector get more access to grants, loans and other forms of financial supports. Other ways organisations noted they would like to see PARN support the sector include:

- Supporting the reputation and professionalism of the sector during and after the crisis (2)
- Monitoring the sector (1)
- Supporting members with accessing government support (1)

Since going live with this Ask the Network, PARN has conducted a range of activities to benefit our members during this time:

- PARN has compiled comments from members and added suggestions relating to the professional bodies sector to the government submission by the Professional and Business Services Council (PBSC). PARN will continue to represent the needs of the sector to the government through PARN CEO, Andy Friedman's, participation in the PBSC.
- Andy Friedman chaired two CEO Forum webinars, in which he shared results of the PARN COVID 19 survey, providing a platform for CEOs of professional bodies to share challenges due to the lockdown as well as practical solutions found.
- Due to the quick and stark change to remote working, PARN has adapted its event offerings and will facilitate the first CPD Forum webinar, to discuss the changes to CPD engagement and services during this time, as well as to hear case studies from PARN's members. Other meetings and events are being developed for transmission via virtual group meetings and webinars.
- PARN has established a COVID-19 LinkedIn Group for members, to act as a space where professional body staff, volunteers and members can share experience and ignite discussion on the topic affecting us all. Join here: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13847169/

Q8 What can central & local government do to support the professional body sector through this crisis?

Twelve organisations noted they would like the government to provide more grants and financial support for professional bodies, as exemplified below:

Access to CBILS or other funding - many of our members are in private practice, so their livelihoods are in jeopardy. We are likely to lose significant numbers of members over time, and therefore will need to let staff go if that happens.

Other ways professional bodies would like central and local government to support the sector include:

- Encouraging banks to be more flexible with loans and grants (2)
- Providing clarity on advice and policy for professional bodies (2)
- Working with professional bodies through the crisis (2)
- Supporting specific groups in the professional body sector (e.g. self employed, SME) (2)
- Restrictions easement (1)
- Promote professional bodies for CPD (1)