Professional Associations
RESEARCH NETWORK

Influencing Government

May 2015

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The Royal College of Emergency Medicine

The SOCIETY of CHIROPODISTS & PODIATRISTS

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context for PARN Research

For many professional bodies, influencing government has long been high on the agenda, not least because the sector as a whole is highly influenced by government policy. Moreover, because professional bodies have an important role to play in the representation of their members' interests, as well as the interests of their profession and the wider public good, the need to facilitate good relations with government is particularly acute. When needed, many professional bodies feel that their members expect them to be able to affect change positively in line with organisational goals. It is within this context that the Influencing Government research project was conceived.

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions to be investigated were determined by PARN in consultation with the project steering group, made up of representatives of the funding professional bodies. These include:

- What techniques do professional bodies consider to be successful when attempting to influence government?
- How do they define and measure success?
- How can professional bodies present themselves as valuable partners for government?
- How are members involved in the influencing effort?
- Are traditional news media and social media important when attempting to influence government?
- What are the challenges of forming and sustaining coalitions?

2. Methods

2.1. About our methods

The project was launched in July 2014 and was completed May 2015. A survey of professional bodies was employed in order to answer the aforementioned research questions. The survey was emailed out to 447 different professional bodies, learned societies and regulators on the PARN database, which asked questions about their influencing government strategy. It was launched on the 7th November and closed on the 18th Friday December 2014. Given the cross-national differences in political systems and opportunities for organisations to exert influence on the policy process, responses from non-UK based professional bodies were excluded from the survey analysis. The survey received 45 usable responses, yielding a response rate of approximately 10%. The information collected in this stage was analysed, and is presented here in this report.

3. About the Respondents

84% of the organisations within the sample are based in England, with the remainder being based in either Scotland or Ireland. As seen below in Figure 1, the majority of the sample belong to the 'Other Health' sector, 13% are from 'Engineering and Technology' and 11% from 'Law'. The 'Other Health' category included professional associations whose members work in counselling, alternative therapy and environmental health.

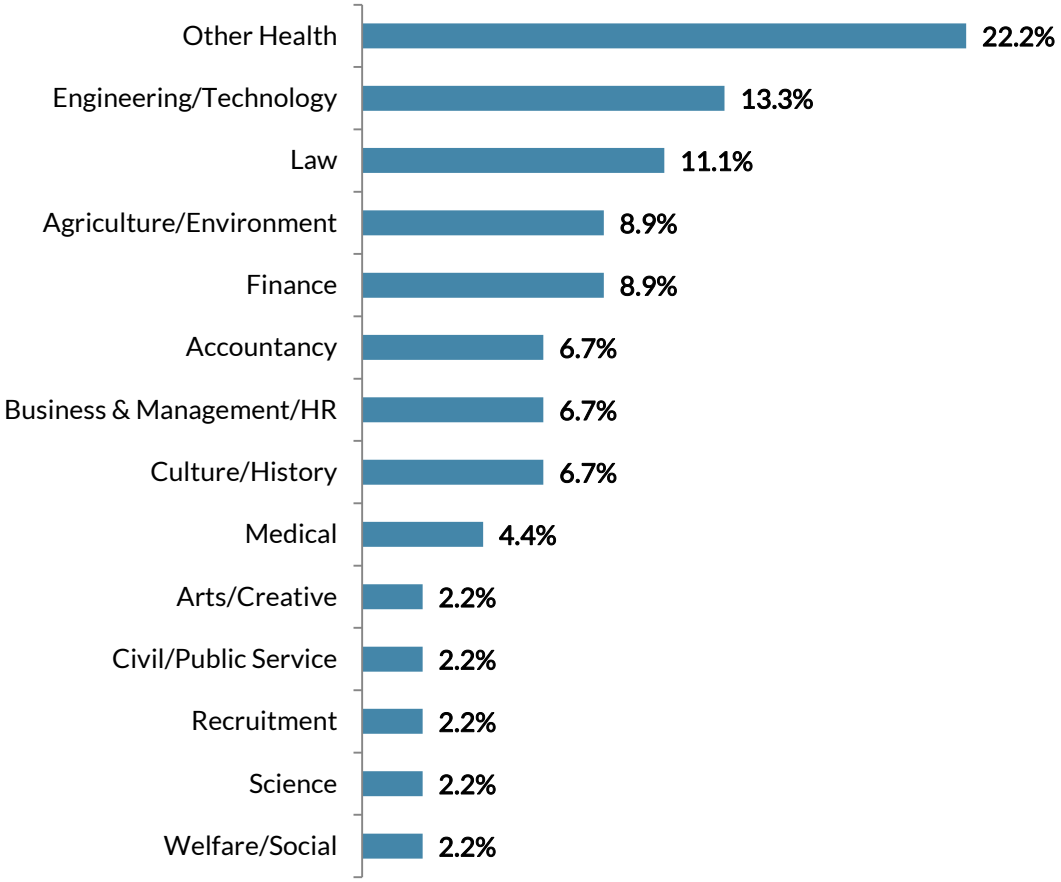


Figure 1: Sample by sector

The mean average membership size amongst the sample was 21,437. The sector with the most members is *Accountancy*, and the smallest sector is *Recruitment.* Figure 2 below shows the distribution of organisations according to their membership size.

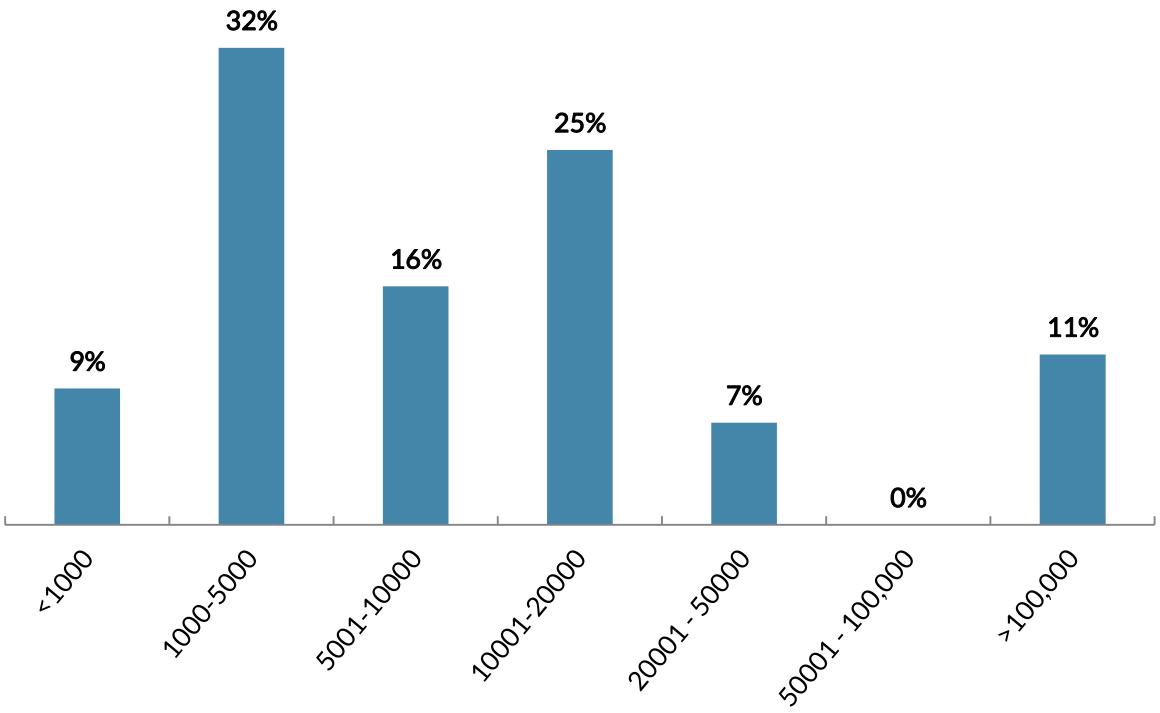


Figure 2: Sample by size

56% of the organisations in the sample are professional bodies without regulatory functions and there were no regulatory bodies in the sample. The vast majority (89%) of the sample have no trade union function.

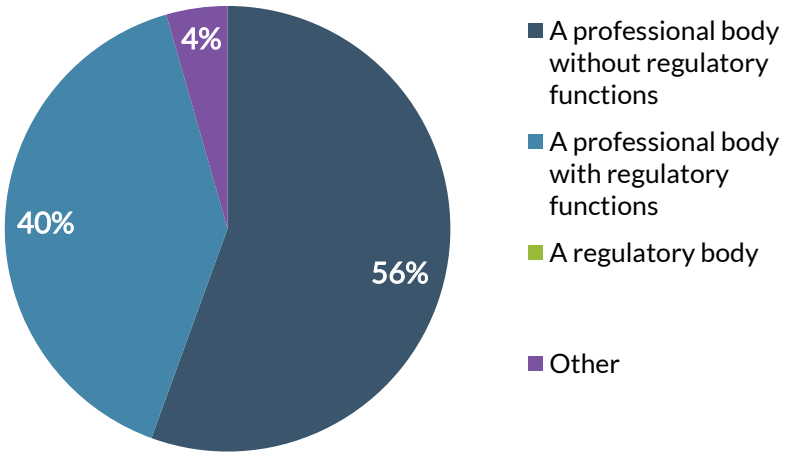


Figure 3: Is your organisation...?

4. Findings

4.1. Influencing Strategy

The sample was asked which area of policy their organisation had focused their efforts on the most to date. As seen in Figure 4, around a third of the sample attempt to influence government on matters concerning *Health*, with a further 30% focusing on *Education*. No respondents claimed an attempt to influence government on issues concerning transport.

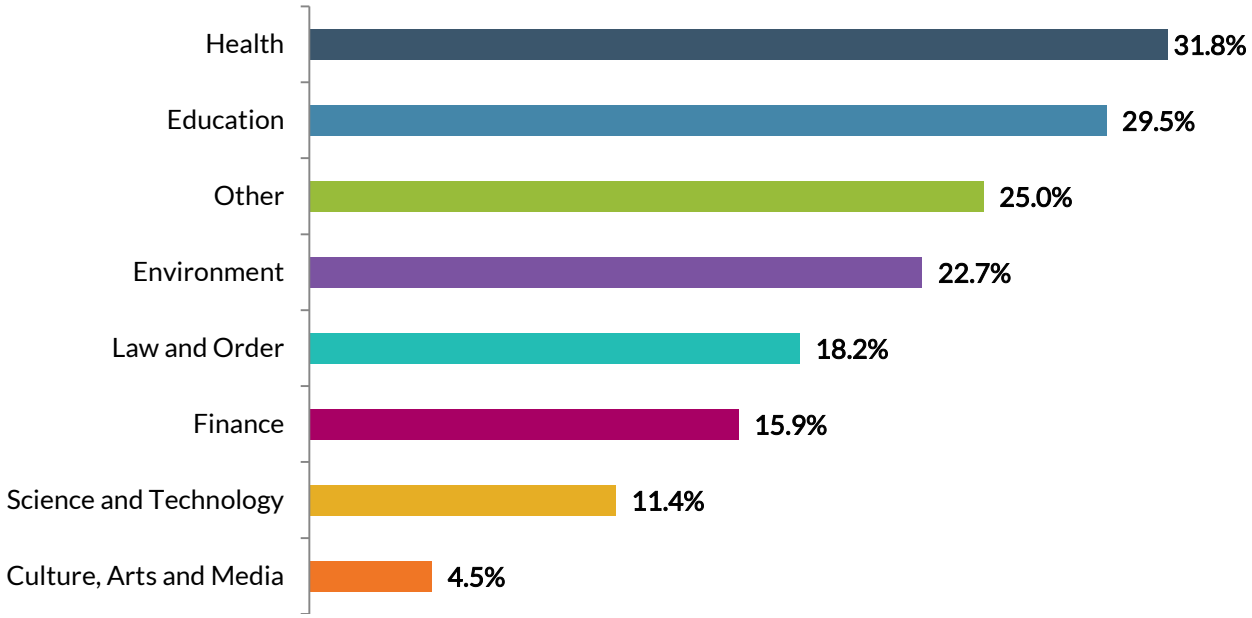


Figure 4: Policy areas in which responding professional bodies are most active?

Those that answered 'Other' were asked to specify which area of policy the organisation focused on. The results are contained in the list below:

- Employment legislation
- Trade
- Housing
- Animal health and welfare; medicines; public health
- Governance
- Legal interpreting
- Tax law, policy and practice
- Agricultural property law, CAP, tax, telecom property law, compulsory purchase, other agriculture
- Gas industry including Shale gas
- Risk management
- Tax

Figure 5 shows the levels of government that organisations in the sample attempt to influence. The majority of the sample attempts to influence the national Westminster Government. Interestingly, a large number also attempt to influence the EU.

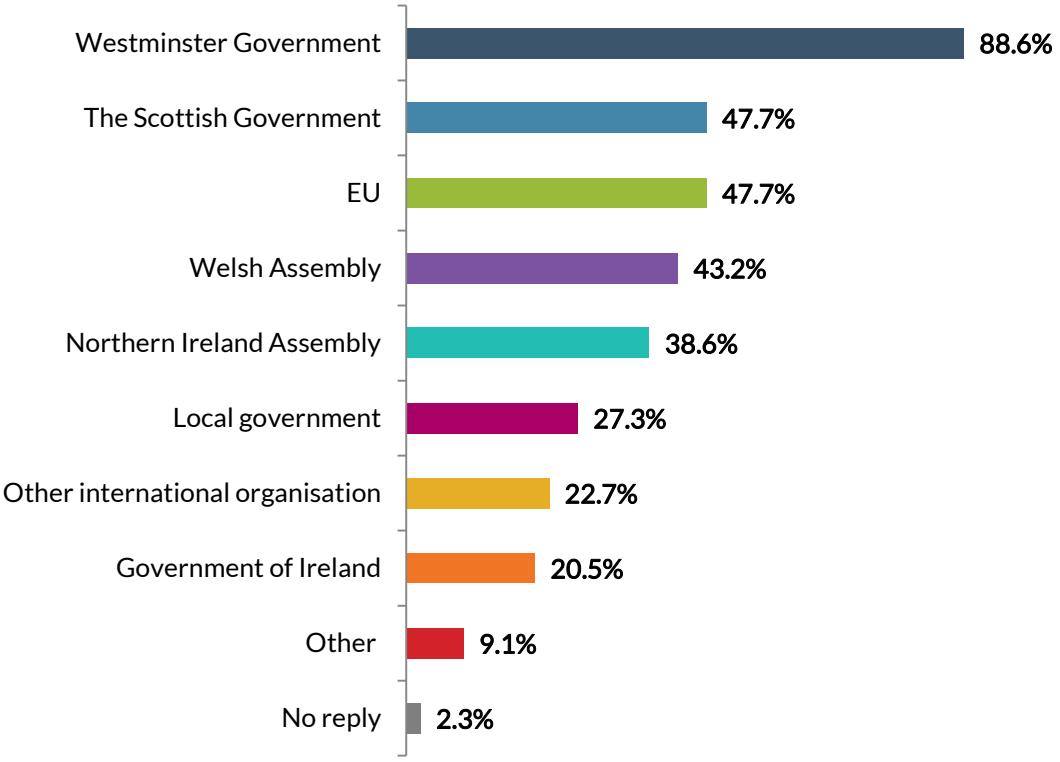


Figure 5: Levels of government professional bodies attempts to influence

We asked whether professional bodies tended to focus on one or a few specific issues at a time or take a broader approach to influencing government with several issues. 59% said they focus on one or a few specific issue, while 41% said they focus on several topics broadly associated with the organisation.

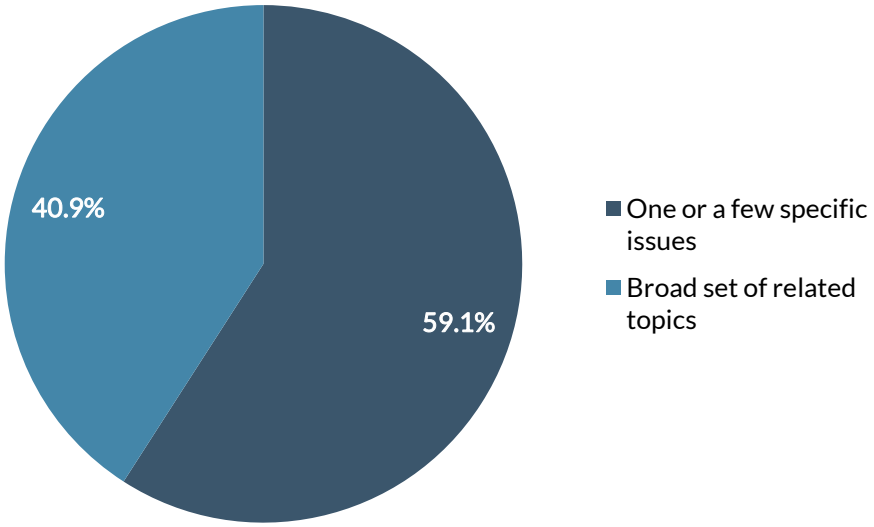


Figure 6: Which of the following best reflects the focus of your influencing government strategy?

We then asked the sample how many individual staff members are involved with influencing government. The mean number of staff involved was 3.6 with a median of 2.5. We also asked about budget allocation. In this survey, the mean budget was £134,845 with a median of £20,000. As a percentage of the organisations total incomings, the mean was 2.5% with a median of 1% of the total income.

Respondents were asked where responsibility for influencing government sits at the organisation. The responses to this question can be organised into seven different categories. These can be seen in Figure 6.

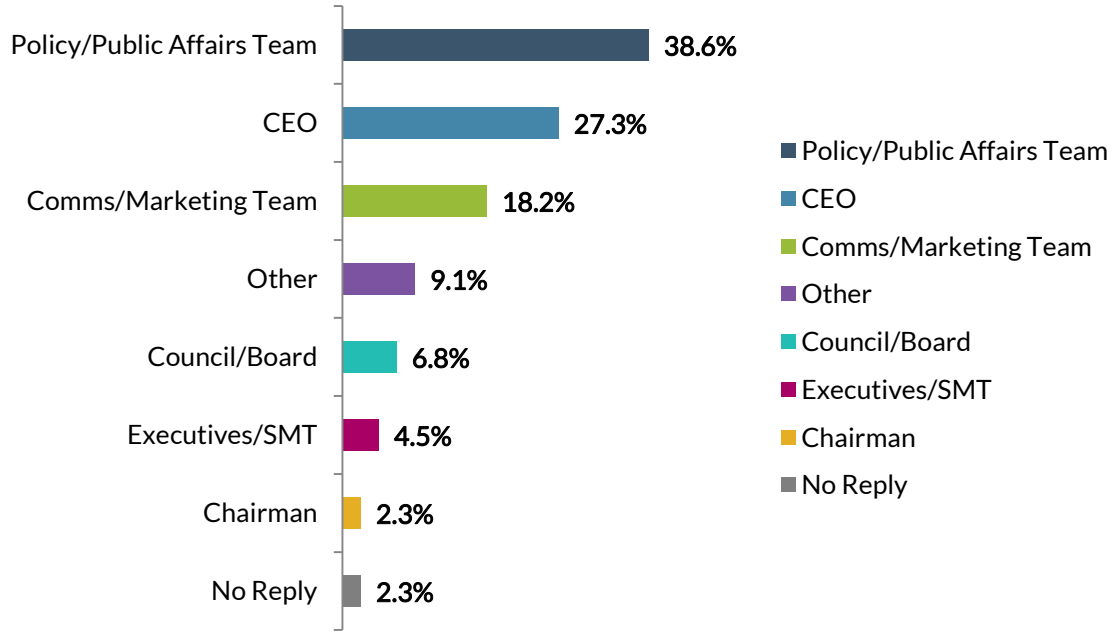


Figure 7: Where does responsibility for government relations/influencing sit within your organisation?

For over a third of the sample, responsibility for attempts to influence government lies with the *Policy or public affairs team.* For others, (27%), the CEO of the organisation is responsible for the organisation's attempts to influence government.

4.2. Influencing Government Techniques

Figure 8 shows which techniques are used by professional bodies in their attempt to influence government. Almost the entire sample *Meet with politicians* and *Respond to consultations*. Only one organisation in the sample claims not to attempt to influence government, and one did not reply.

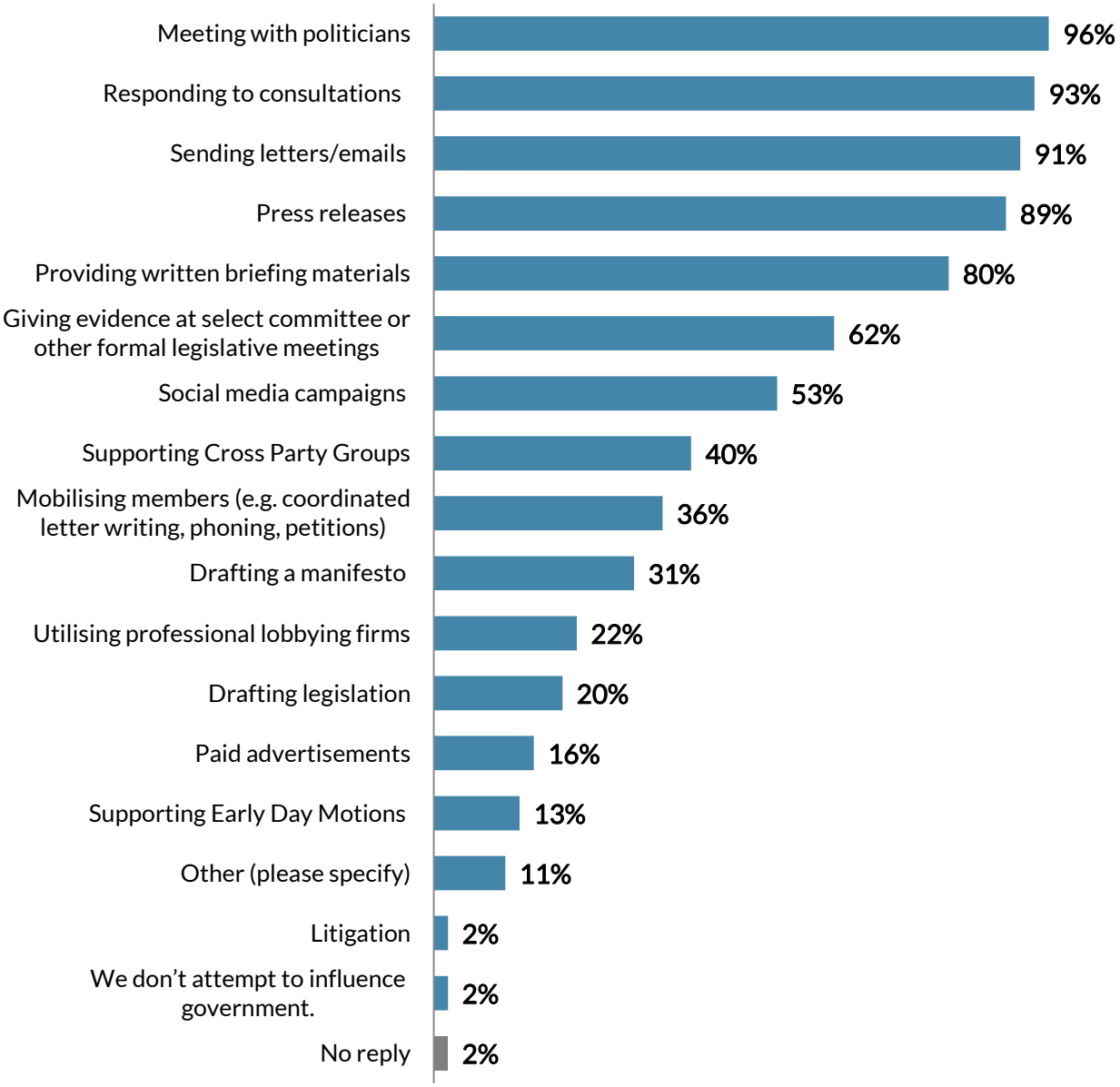


Figure 8: Do you use any of the following techniques in your attempt to influence government?

The respondents were also asked how often they gain access to certain political figures. Policy level civil servants appear to be the easiest political figures to gain access to; over half of the sample meets with them either weekly or monthly. Over a third of organisations manage to meet with ministers at least every few months.

	Weekly	Monthly	Every few months	Twice a year	Once a year	Less than once a year	Never	*No reply*
Ministers	0%	7%	**38%**	23%	16%	2%	7%	*7%*
Policy level civil servants	18%	**34%**	27%	14%	0%	2%	0%	*5%*
Shadow/opposition cabinet	0%	7%	**41%**	11%	16%	7%	7%	*11%*
Backbench MPs	0%	16%	**32%**	11%	18%	7%	5%	*11%*
Members of the House of Lords (not Ministers)	2 %	9 %	**32%**	18%	14%	2%	14%	*9%*
MPs' researchers	2%	18%	**25%**	5%	5%	9%	18%	*18%*
Special Advisor	2%	9%	**21%**	11%	16%	7%	18%	*16%*

Table 9: How often do you meet with political figures?

When asked how this access to political figures has changed over the past five years, 86% of the sample said it had increased.

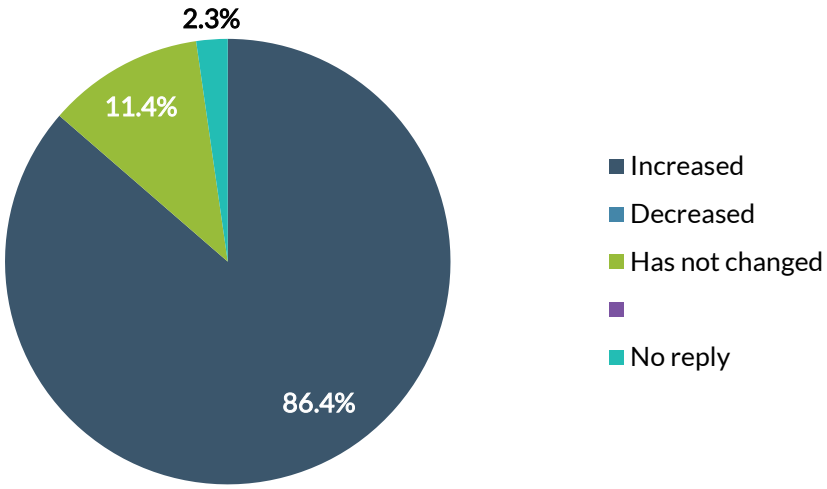


Figure 10: How has your access to political figures changed in the past 5 years?

79% of the sample attributed this increase to changes in resourcing within their organisation. A third of the sample attributed this increase to fortuitous circumstances e.g. an issue related to the profession becoming a significant news story.

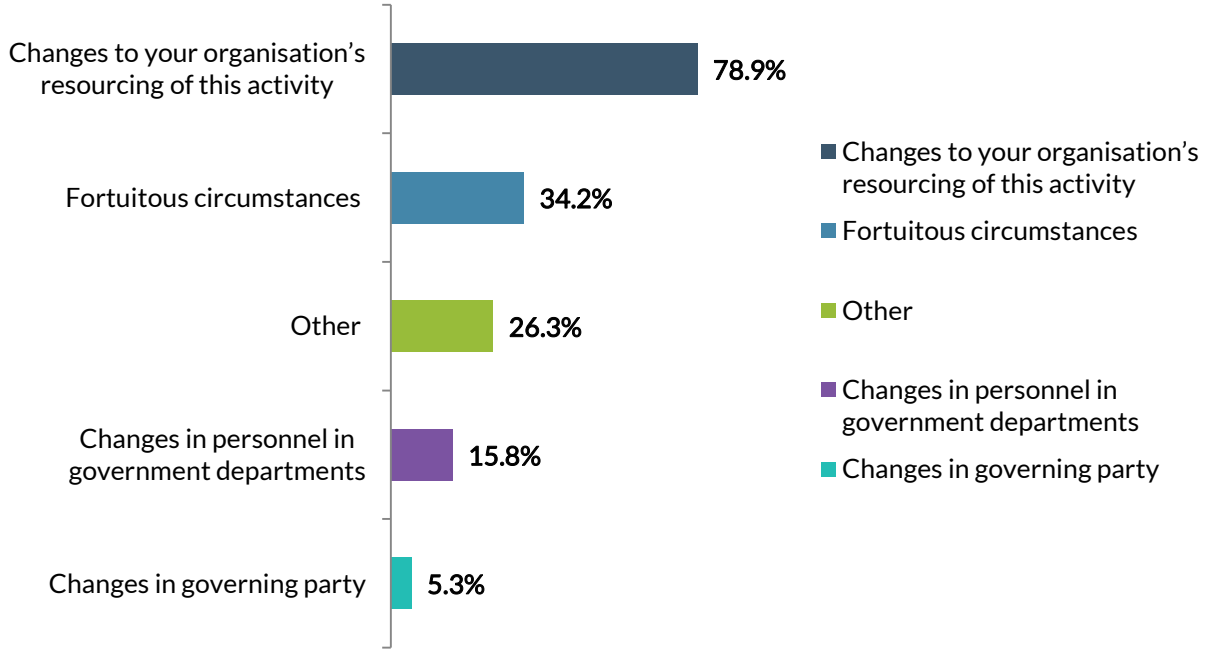


Figure 11: What would you attribute this increase in access to?

Those that selected 'other' were asked to specify. The results are contained in the list below:

- Changes to strategy/focus (2 mentions)
- Recognition of the need to influence by organisation
- Greater willingness in Government to engage with us
- Greater response from civil servants
- We are seen to be engaged
- Devolved powers in Wales, Scotland and NI
- Being granted a Royal Charter
- Stronger leadership

4.3. Mobilising members

Only 36% of responding organisations stated that they attempt to influence government by involving their membership. This is perhaps surprising, given that professional bodies are uniquely positioned in their capacity to represent their sector, and often have a dedicated membership which already volunteers and who might further assist in the organisations influencing effort. Professional bodies might therefore emphasise the fact they represent a significant number of people, who in many cases, service a large segment of the public.

4.4. Media

As seen in Figure 12, around 43% of the sample considers traditional news media to be either *Important* or *Very Important* when it comes to attempts to influence government.

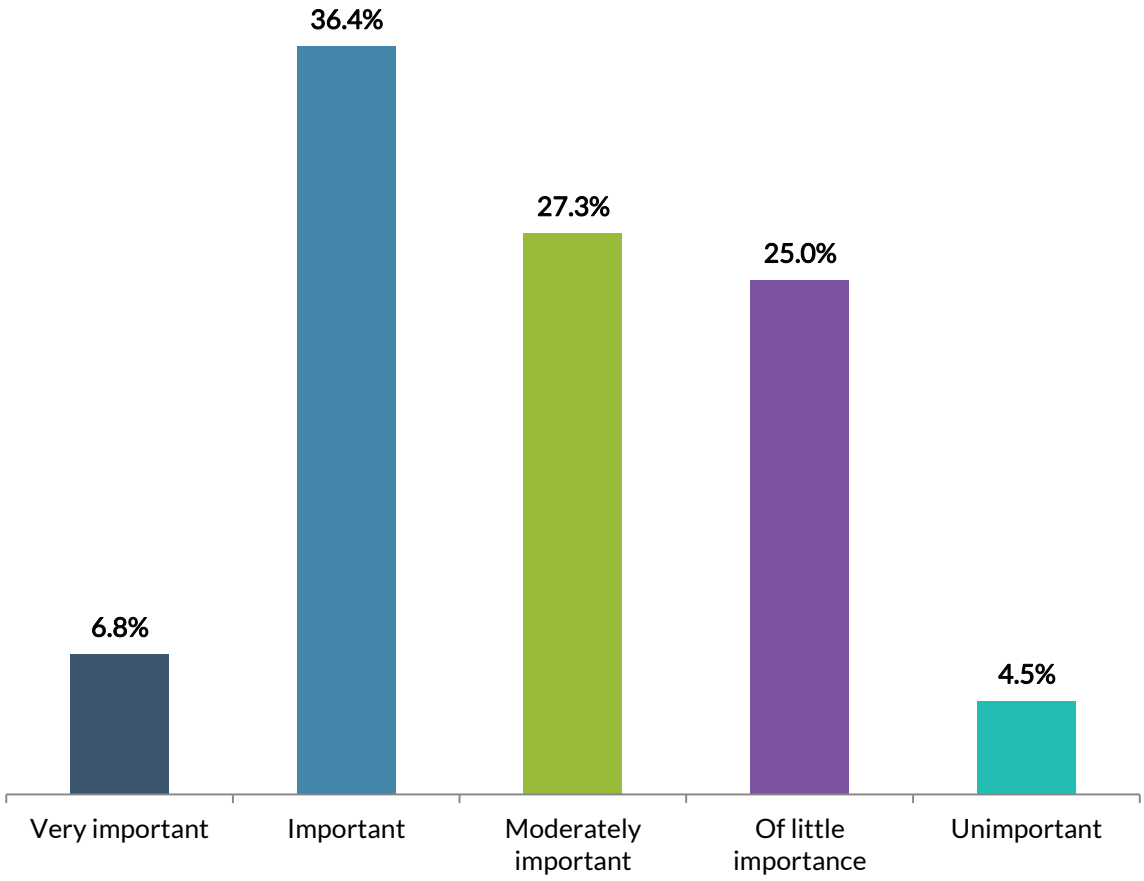


Figure 12: How important is traditional news media to your influencing government strategy?

In comparison, the sample generally views social media as less important for their influencing government strategy than traditional news media, with only 18% finding it either *Important* or *Very Important.* This suggests that although professional bodies are increasingly having a presence on social media, they are still relying more heavily on traditional media outlets in their influencing government efforts.

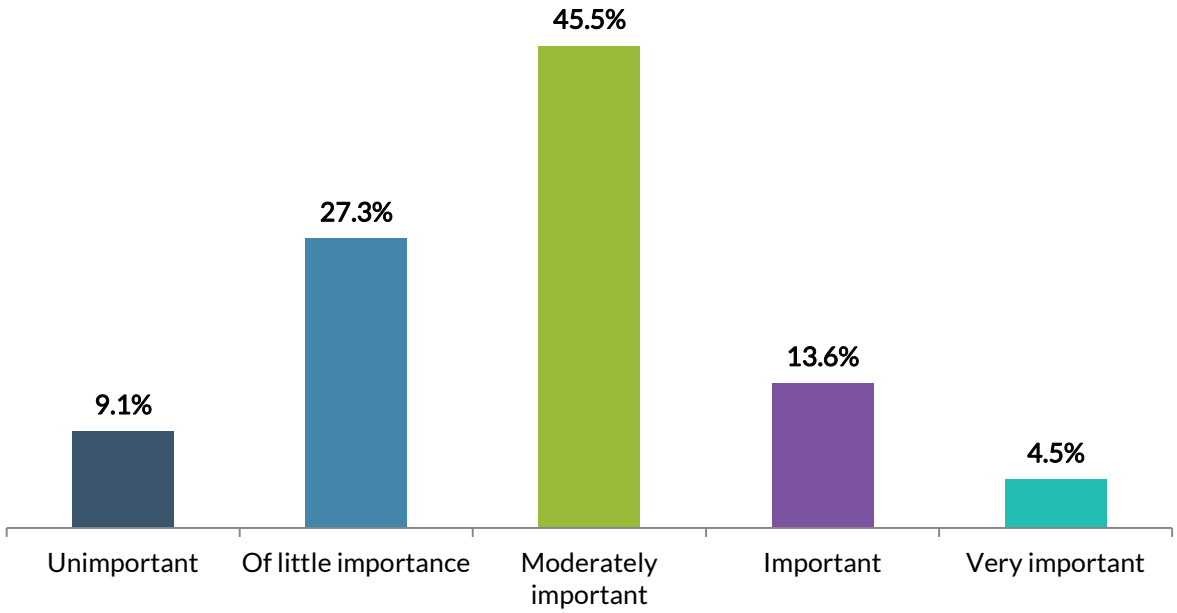


Figure 13: How important is social media to your influencing government strategy?

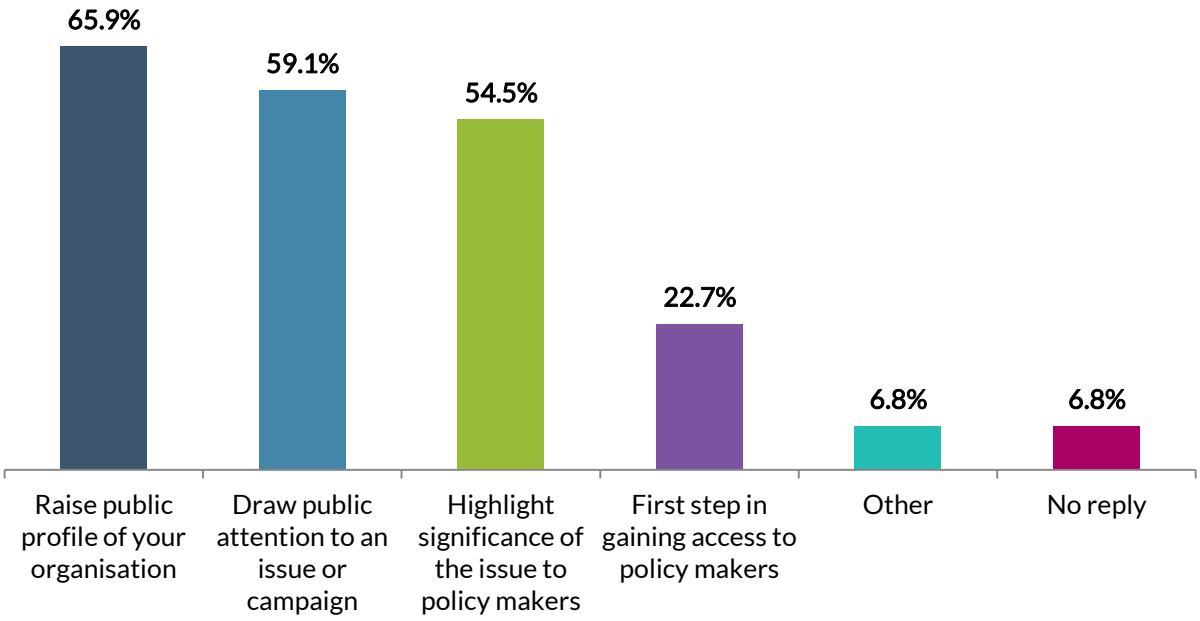
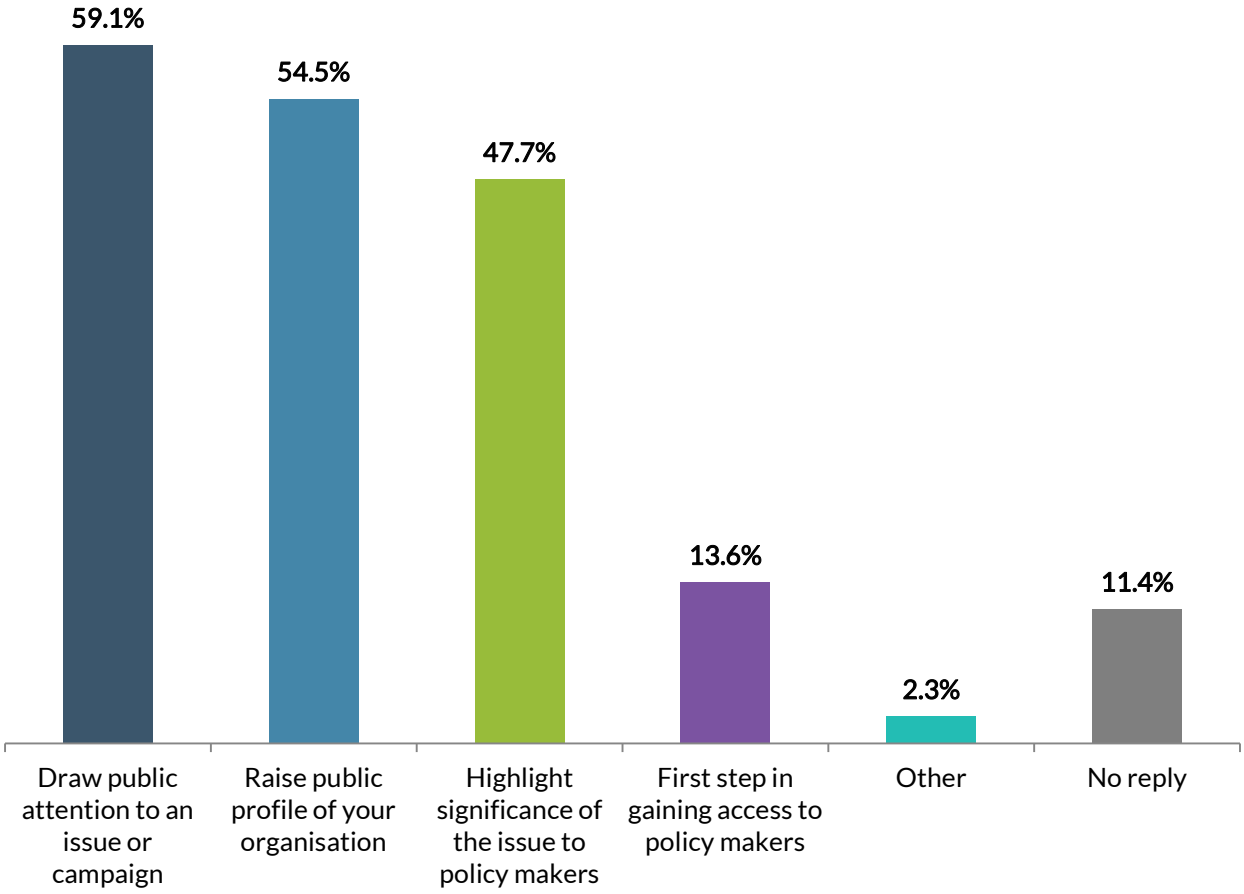


Figure 14- What role does traditional news media play in your organisations?

We then asked the sample how in particular traditional media and social media aided their influencing government strategy; respondents could select all possible answers that applied. *Raise public profile of the organisation* (66%) was the most common response for traditional news media. For those that responded 'other', two organisations said that news media does not play a substantial role in their influencing government strategy and one organisation stated that media attention is often negative.

The distribution was slightly different for social media. The majority (59%) said they used it to *Draw attention to a campaign* whereas 55% used it to *Raise the profile of the organisation*.



4.5. Measuring Success

We asked the sample how they measure their success at influencing government. The results can be seen in Figure 16. The most common method of measuring success amongst the sample is by *Changes in policy stance*.

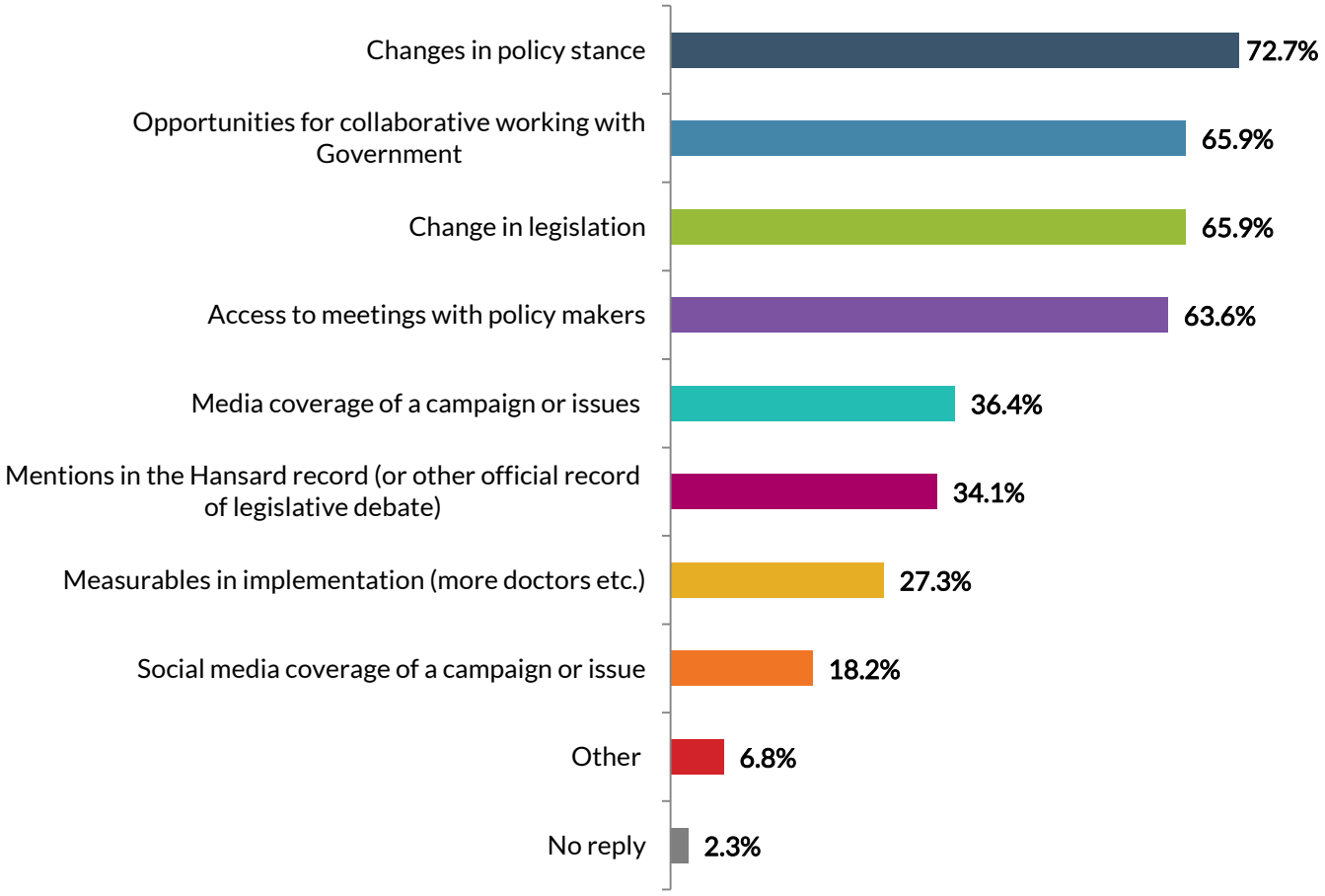


Figure 17: How do you measure the success of your efforts to influence government?

We then asked the sample to describe their most recent campaign to influence government, and then rank how successful they think the campaign was; 1 being unsuccessful, 5 being very successful. The results can be seen in Figure 18.

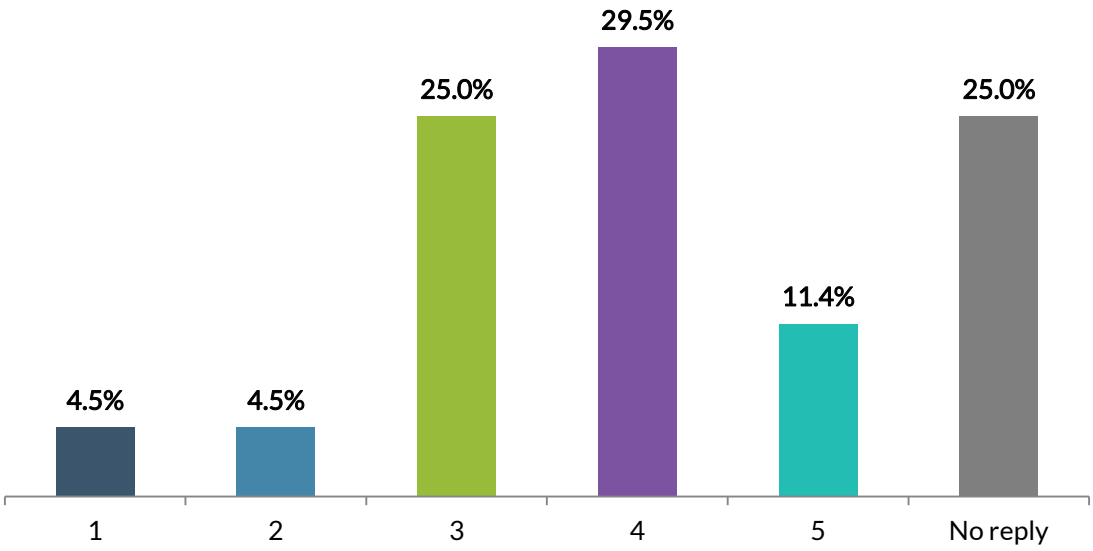


Figure 18: How successful do you think your most recent campaign to influence government was?

Approximately one third of the sample considers their campaign somewhat successful, with only a small proportion of the sample considering a particular influencing government campaign to be unsuccessful. This suggests that in general professional bodies are relatively positive about their influencing efforts. This might be because, as mentioned previously, even if the campaign does not result in the desired policy or legislation change, it has still has been beneficial in some way. This might include increased awareness of the professional body amongst government and the general public or the development of important relationships which may help in the future.

4.6. Coalitions with other organisations

The sample was asked whether they have ever been part of a coalition or formal alliance with other groups for a particular campaign to influence government. 61% of the sample said that they have.

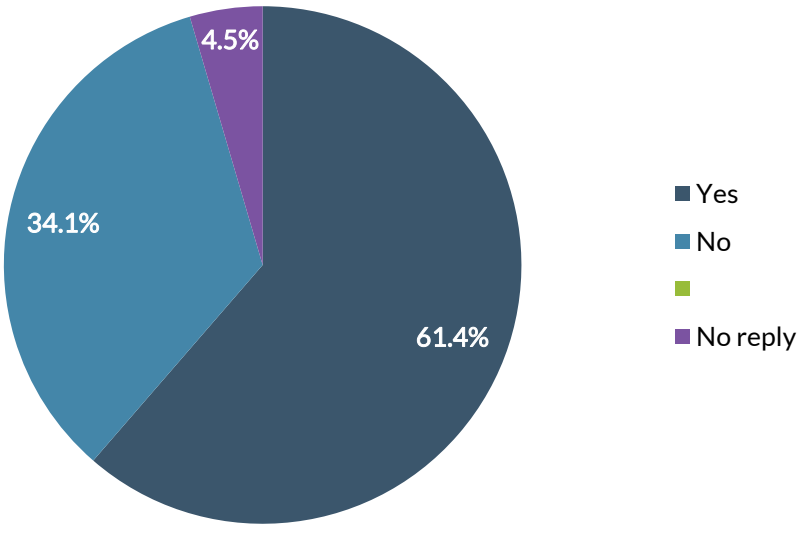


Figure 19: Has your organisation been part of a coalition or formal alliance with another group for a particular issue or campaign?

Those that *do* work with other organisations for a particular campaign to influence government were asked to give reasons why. The most commonly cited reason was that a *Unified Front* was more likely to have an impact with 15 respondents making this claim. Ten respondents said that *Shared Interests* was what motivated them to work together, and one organisation claimed that the ability to *Pool resources* was the reason behind the coalition.

The principle challenges of working with another organisation from the sample can be seen below in Figure 20.

Figure 20: What are the main challenges of working with other organisations when influencing government?

Coordination (78%) is the biggest challenge amongst the sample, followed by *Negotiation of different priorities* (56%).

4.7. Member Interest/Public Good

The sample was asked where the organisation's responsibility lies in when attempting to influence government, Figure 21 contains the results. The majority of the organisations in the sample (46%) see their main responsibility as sitting firmly with the public interest.

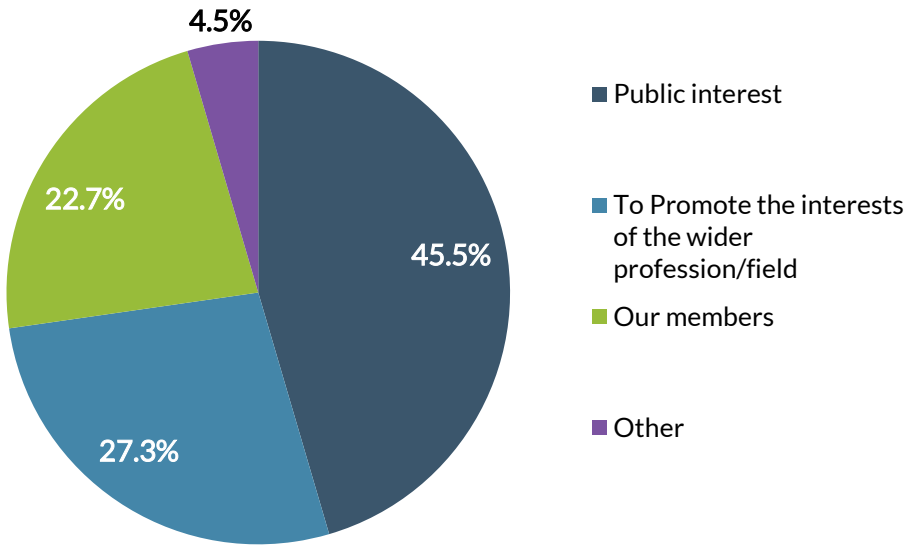


Figure 21: When attempting to influence government, where does your organisation's main responsibility lie?

5. Conclusions

One of the main findings in this report was that a large proportion of professional bodies which responded to our survey attempt to influence government in a bundle of different ways. Almost all respondents organise face to face *meetings with politicians* (96%), while *responding to consultations* (93%), *sending letters or emails* (93%), and *creating press releases* (89%) were also very popular means used to influence government. Interestingly, only one professional body (2% of the sample) does not endeavour to influence government in any way.

Furthermore, our research offered insights into whether or not it is common for professional bodies to mobilise their members when influencing government is on the agenda. As seen in *Figure 8*, only 36% of responding professional bodies seek to involve their members in their attempts to influence government.

Additionally, it was found that the most common ways to measure the success of an effort to influence government were *changing their policy stance* (73%), *changes in legislation* (66%) and *opportunities for collaboration with the government* (66%). Of course, attempts at influencing government *vis-à-vis* policy and legislation may not always elicit a response from government. In our sample, almost third of the respondents perceived their last endeavours to be somewhat successful. This may because even if an influencing attempt fails to prompt a change in policy stance or legislation, it could also be deemed successful if it creates more government awareness of the professional body and/or improves its access to members of government.

This survey also provided interesting insights into the weight professional bodies attach to traditional news and social media as a means to influence government. The majority of respondents indicated that they view traditional news media to be of importance when making such efforts. In spite of professional bodies increasingly using social media, it was mostly found to be of less importance to them than traditional news media. Another interesting finding regarding the two different types of media was how they differed with respect to the role they commonly play when influencing government. With regard to traditional news media, its predominant role in the sample was raising the public profile of their organisation whereas the most common role of social media was to raise awareness of a particular campaign.

This research also demonstrated that 61% of professional bodies enter into collaborations or alliances to attempt to influence government. The most common challenges associated with these relationships, as was seen in *Figure 19,* are *Coordination* with 78% citing this as an issue and *Negotiating different priorities* with 56% finding this a challenge.

Finally, it was revealed that 43% of professional bodies in the sample stated that their underlying motive for influencing government policy and legislation was for the public's interest while 23% prefer promoting just the interests of a small subset of the public i.e. their members. On the other hand, 27% choose that advancing the wider interests of the profession/field are their main responsibility they try to honour when influencing the government.

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