



# Professional Staff in Graduate Research Schools

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# Evolving Landscape of Graduate Research Support

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- Graduate research has significantly evolved since DDOGS/ACGR began in 1995
- Increasing complexity, professionalisation, and specialisation in research management
- Professional staff play a critical role in supporting graduate research
- This session explores:
  - How ACGR can better support professional staff
  - How professional staff can contribute to ACGR's mission
- A survey was conducted to understand professional staff engagement with ACGR
- First time this question has been formally since ACGR became incorporated 10 years ago

# DDOGs and ACGR origins

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- Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (DDoGS) first meets in 1995
- Australian Council for Graduate Research incorporated in 2015
- Professional lead in each institution included in attendance at meetings since 2015





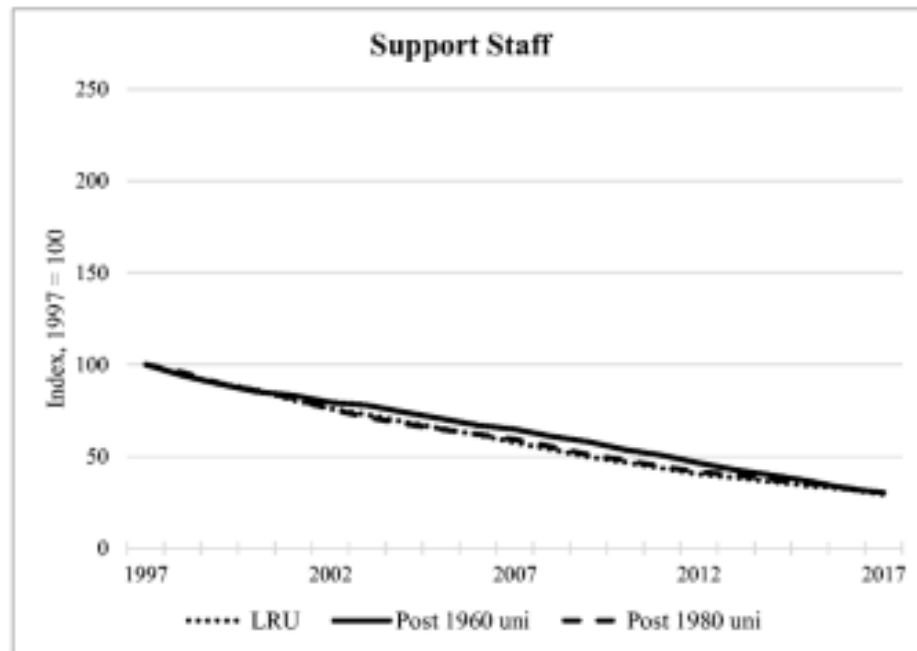
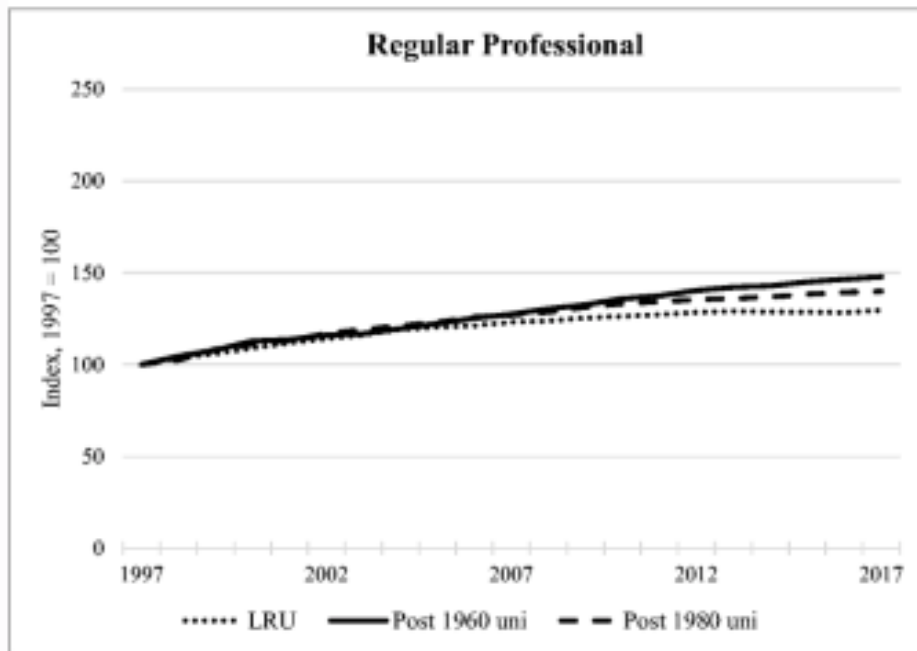
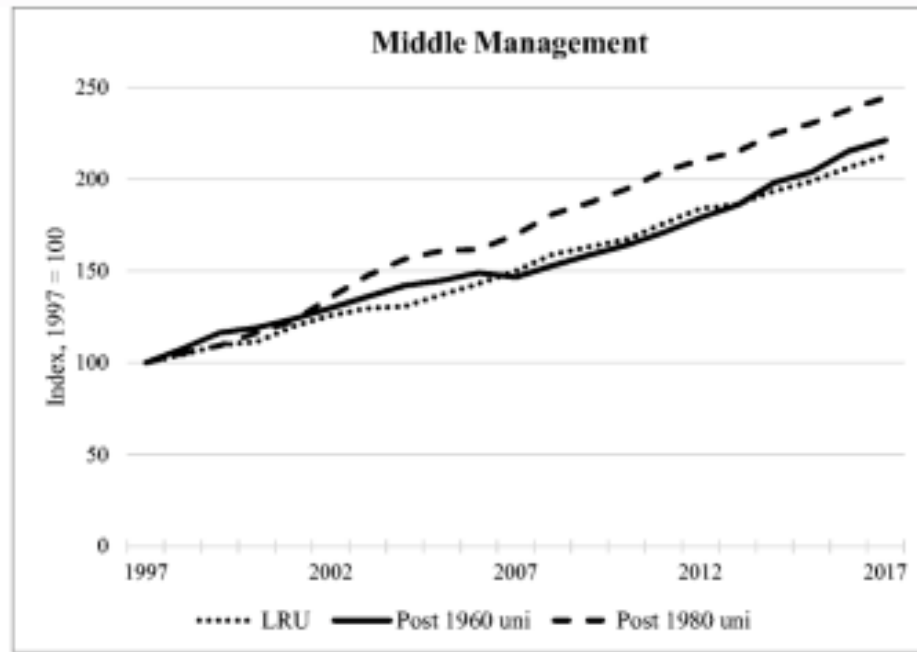
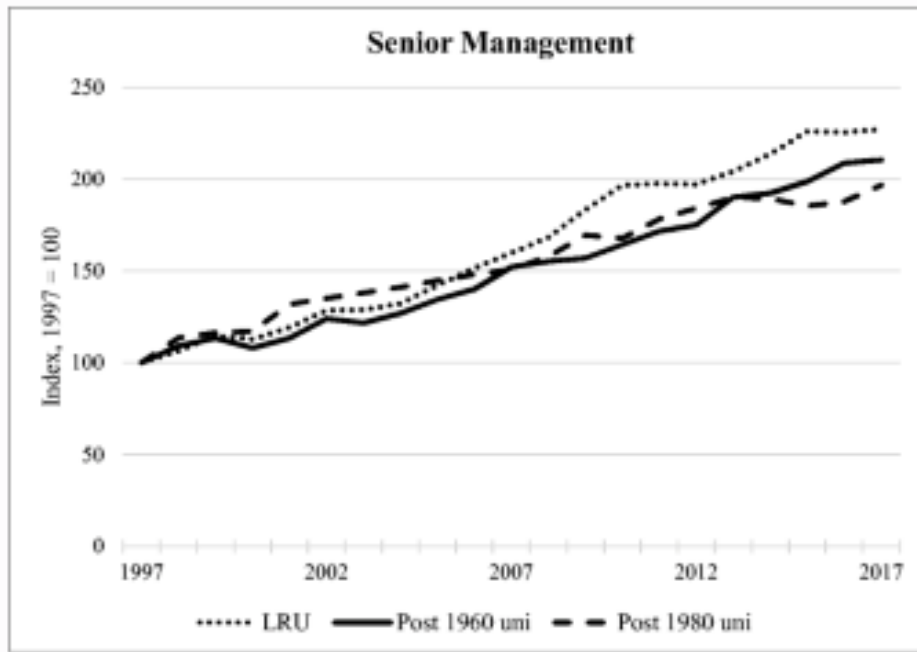
Administrative staff of the University of Melbourne 1894

# Academic & Professional staff

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- Professional staff usually move up from one position to another
- Classification is based on the position and not the person
- task level, complexity, knowledge/skill required, independence, organizational impact
- Authority is based on work role
- Promotion is based on potential to perform in the future (not a reward for past performance)
- Increasing specialisation → higher level positions





**Source:** G. Croucher & P. Woelert (2022) "Administrative transformation and managerial growth: a longitudinal analysis of changes in the non-academic workforce at Australian universities", *Higher Education*, 84 pp. 159-175

# Increased Specialisation in Graduate Research

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- Navigating the Legislative Environment (TEQSA, ESOS, Sanctions, Defence Exports, RTP, etc )
- Systems
- Industry Engagement and Internships
- Internal complex policy environment
- Balancing power dynamics with Academic Staff
- Supporting diverse and vulnerable student cohorts
- Being the Institutional memory
- Global research partnerships
- **Operationalising Strategy**

# Graduate Leadership and Support Structures Survey

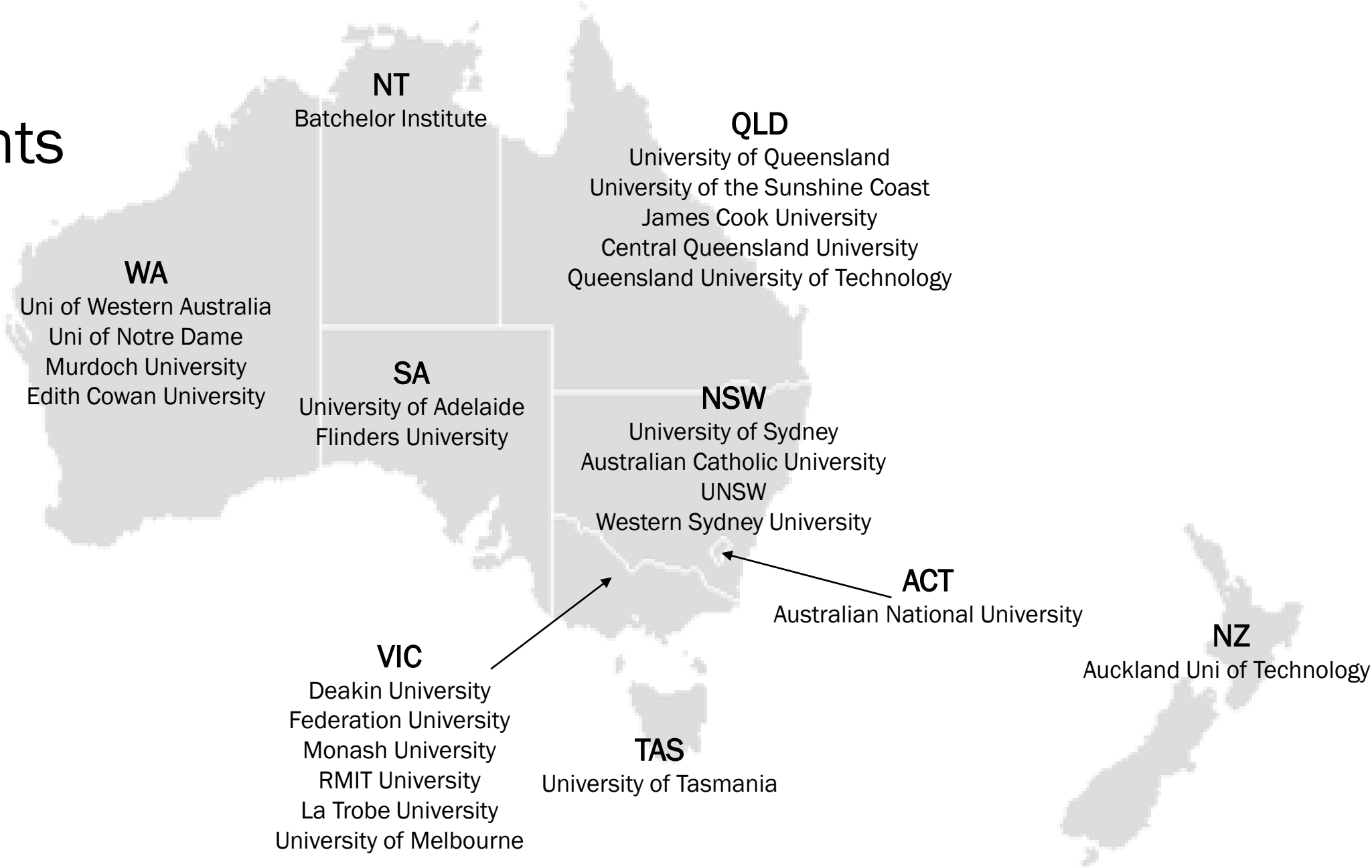
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- Conducted over a two-week period March 2025
- Sent to the Professional staff lead on the ACGR membership list
- Sent to 44 member institutions in Australia and 8 associate member institutions in NZ
- 48% response rate

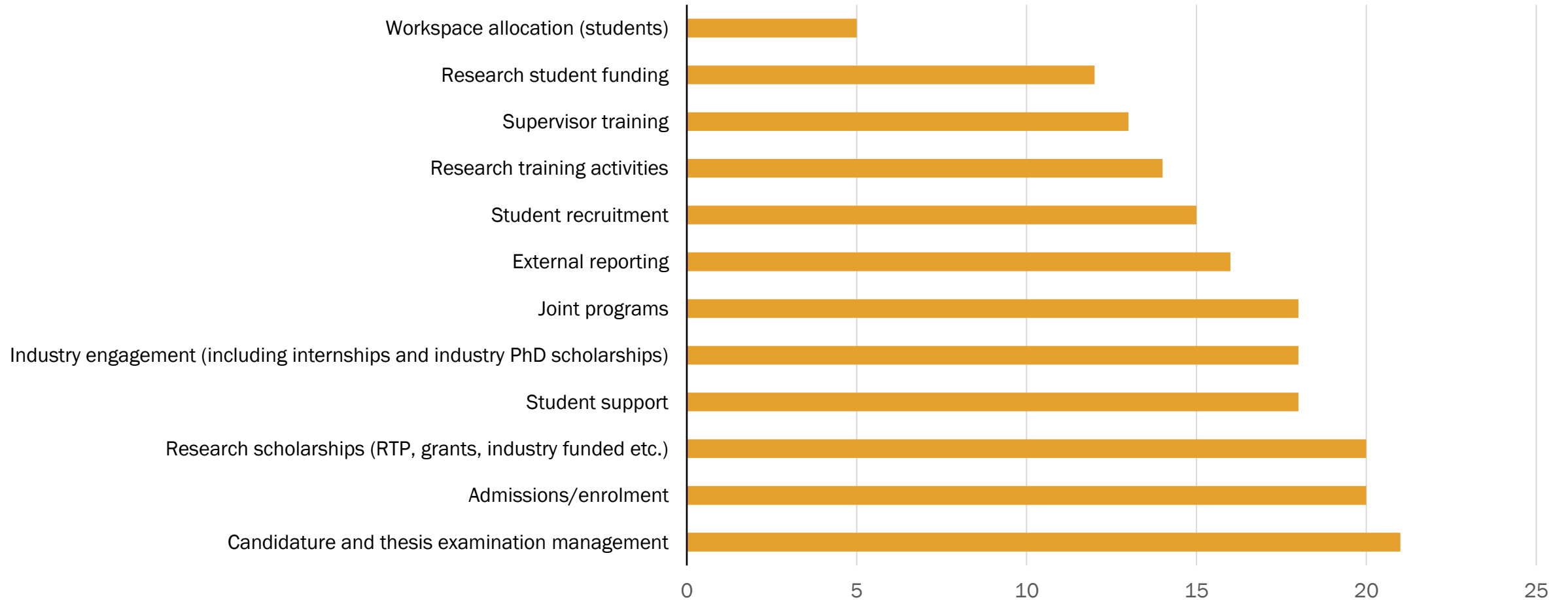


# 25 Survey Respondents

48%  
Response  
rate



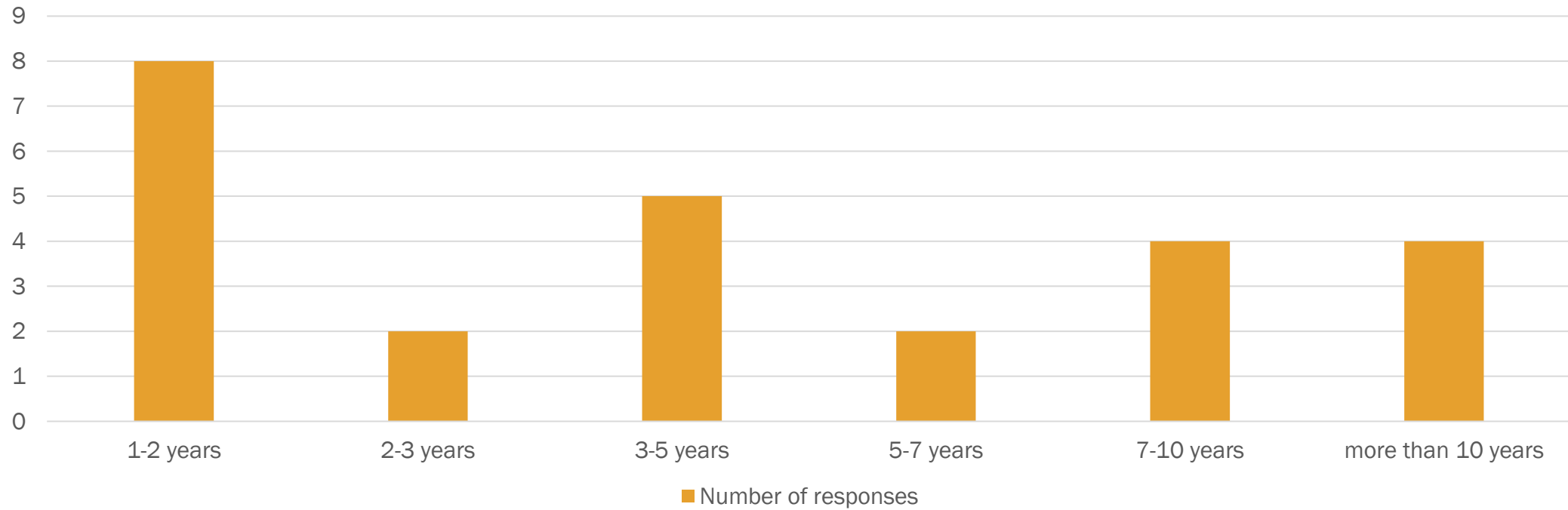
# What functions does your position manage?



# Experience and expertise

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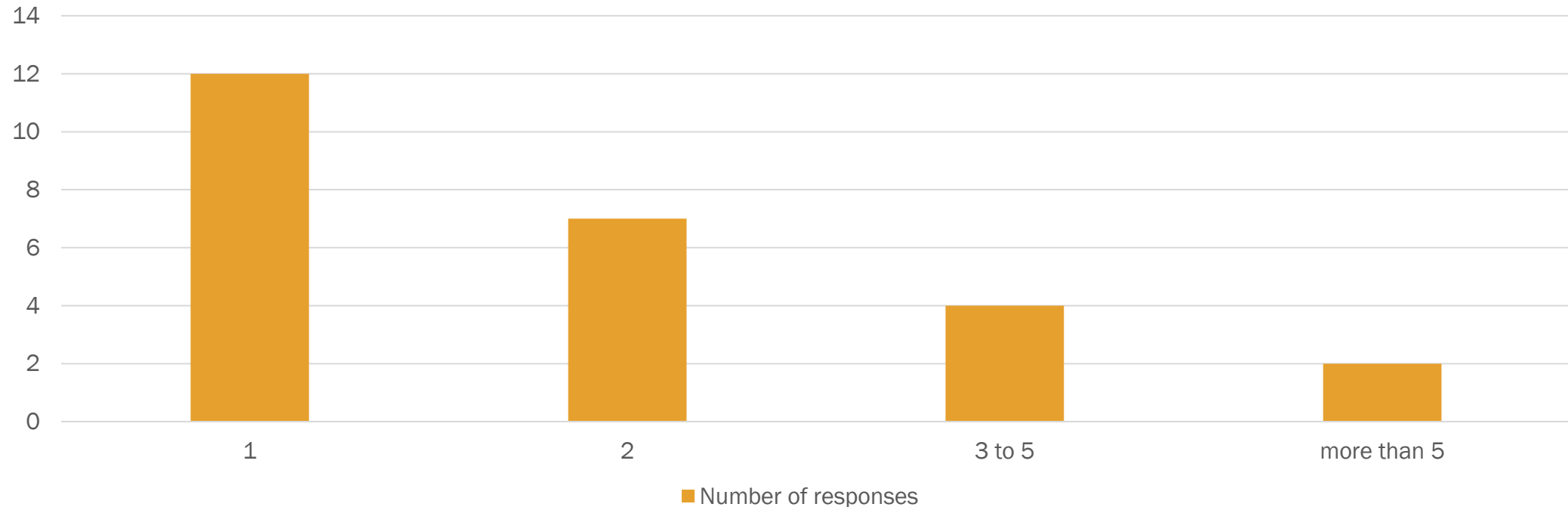
How long have you been in your position?



# Experience and expertise

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How many Academic leads have you worked with?



**More than 50% of respondents have worked with more than one Dean. (over 40 PVCs/Deans)**

# ACGR as professional development

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**92%** have attended an ACGR meeting, majority in person

**72%** have attended other ACGR events (eg webinars, forums, workshops, seminars)

**100%** find it 'highly relevant' or 'somewhat relevant' to their role

# Networks for professional staff in Graduate Research

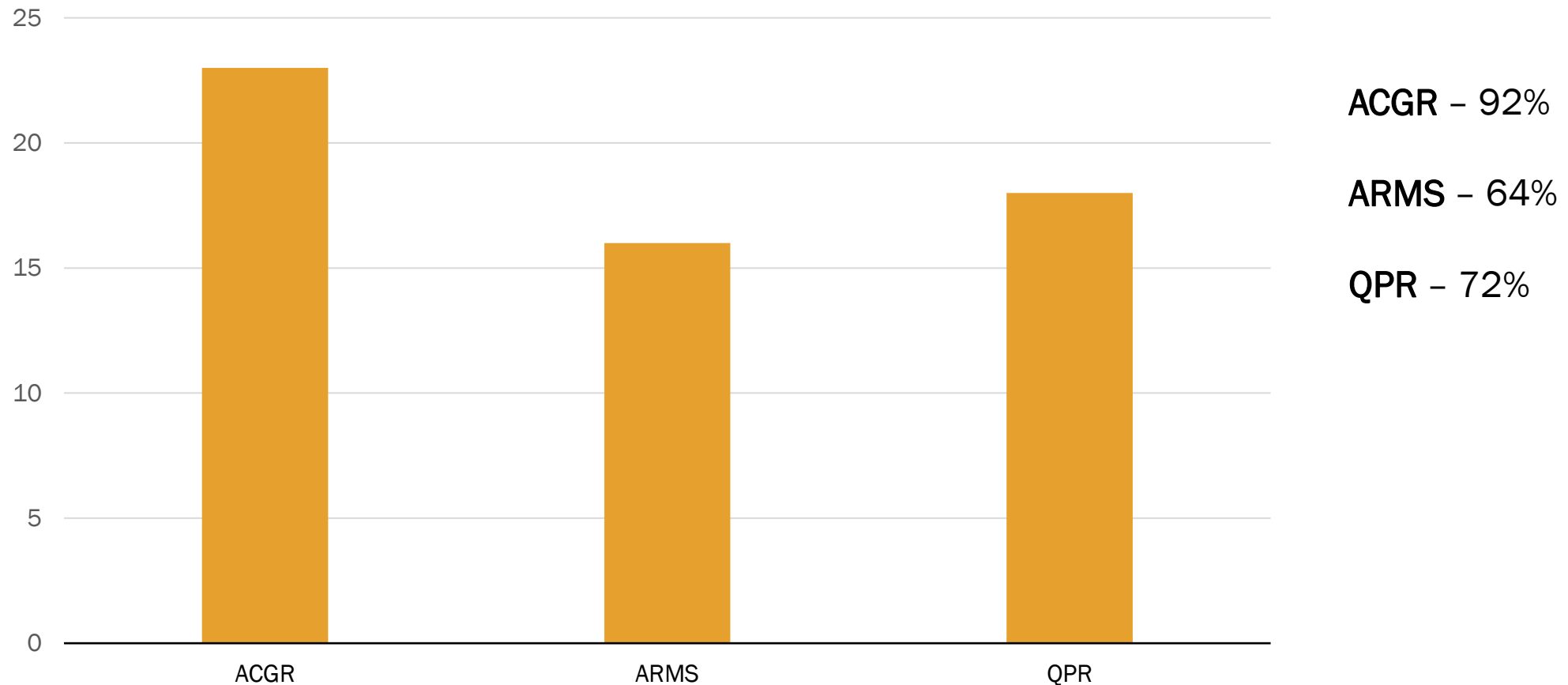
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- **Australian Research Training Administrators (ARTA) 2000s - 2015**
  - Professional staff members attending DDOGS since 2010 or earlier
  - There would often be ARTA specific meetings, sometimes a day of workshops for ARTA related content
  - Also Quality in Postgraduate Research (QPR) conference often had an ARTA stream
- **Australian Research Managers Society (ARMS)**
  - Has a Special Interest Group for Graduate Research Matters called the ARTN
  - Has an annual conference but only occasionally has a Graduate Research Stream, despite the SIG
  - Did/Does run accreditation programs in Graduate Research Management
- **Australian Research Training Network (ARTN) 2015 – date**
  - Officially a Special Interest Group of ARMS
  - No conference or annual meeting
  - Relies on enthusiasm and lobbying to try and get a Graduate Research stream for the ARMS conference
- **Quality in Postgraduate Research conference (QPR) every 2 years**
  - QPR often had an HDR management/administration stream, used to ARTA badged



# What professional forums have you attended?

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# What is the forum most useful to you?

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72%



4%

**QPR  
Conference**

8%

# Why is this the most important forum to your role?

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*ACGR holds significant value for a Director of Graduate Schools in several ways:*

- 1) Benchmarking and best practice around strategic and operational matters relating to higher degree research*
- 2) Policy influences and advocacy*
- 3) Professional development and networking*
- 4) Resources and guidelines*
- 5) Opportunity for sector-wide initiatives and collaborations*

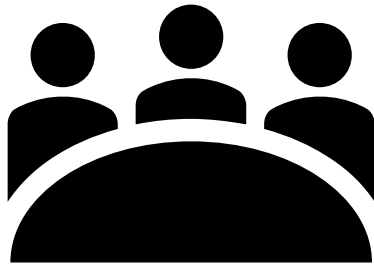
# Why important?

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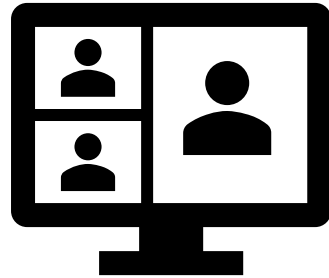
*As someone who has been in the role for 10 years ARMS offers some useful information but is much more relevant to my team. I find the information at ACGR to be more strategic, have a more national focus and a greater depth than what is offered at other forums.*

# Other ways we network

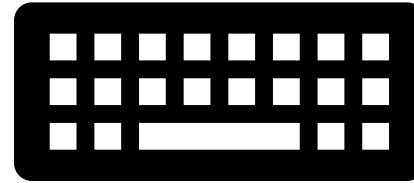
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**Communities of Practice**  
(eg Industry COP)



**Network meetings**  
(eg G08 Directors, RUN, NZ Directors)



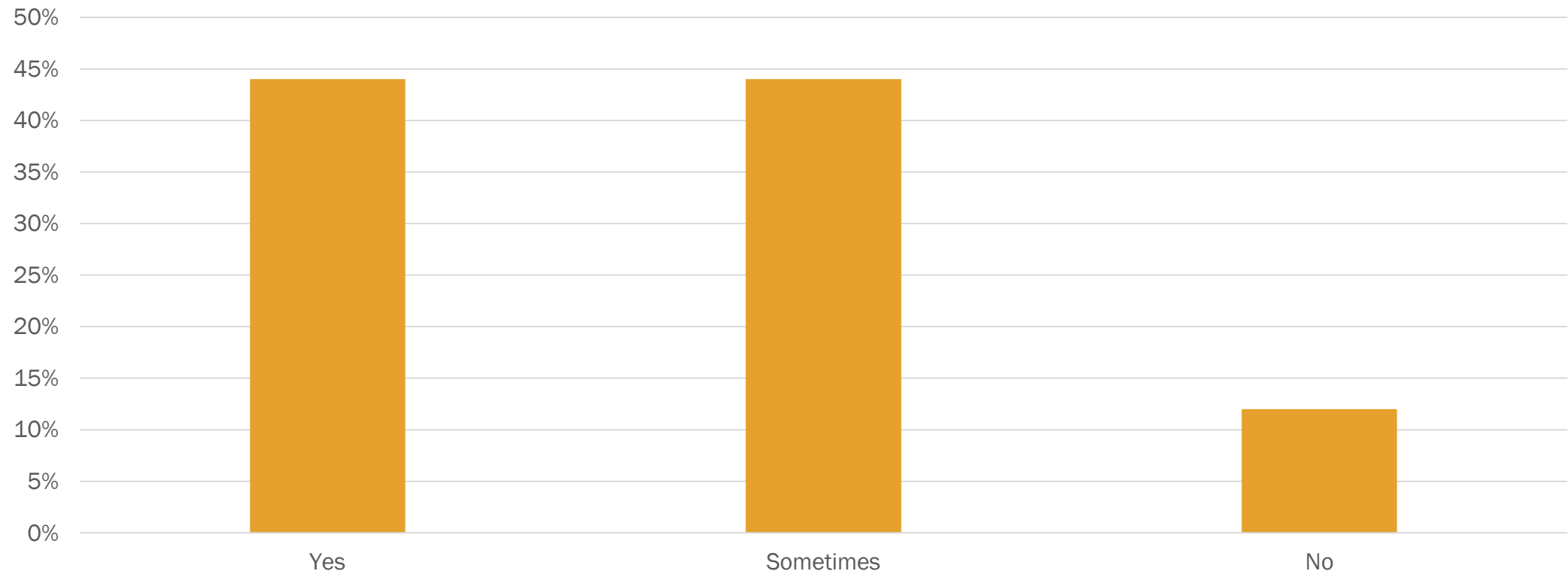
**GSNET**  
(benchmarking listserve)



**Email and LinkedIn**

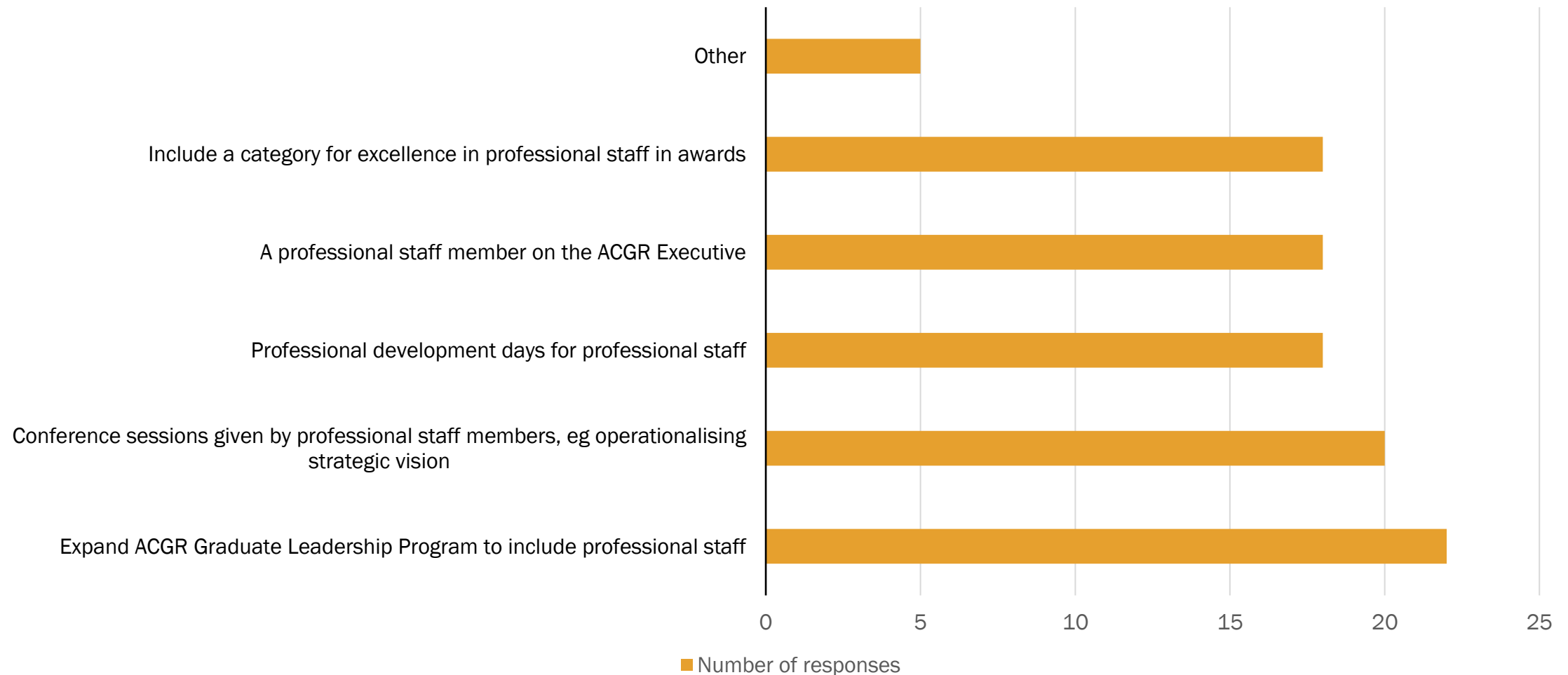
# Do you feel part of the ACGR community?

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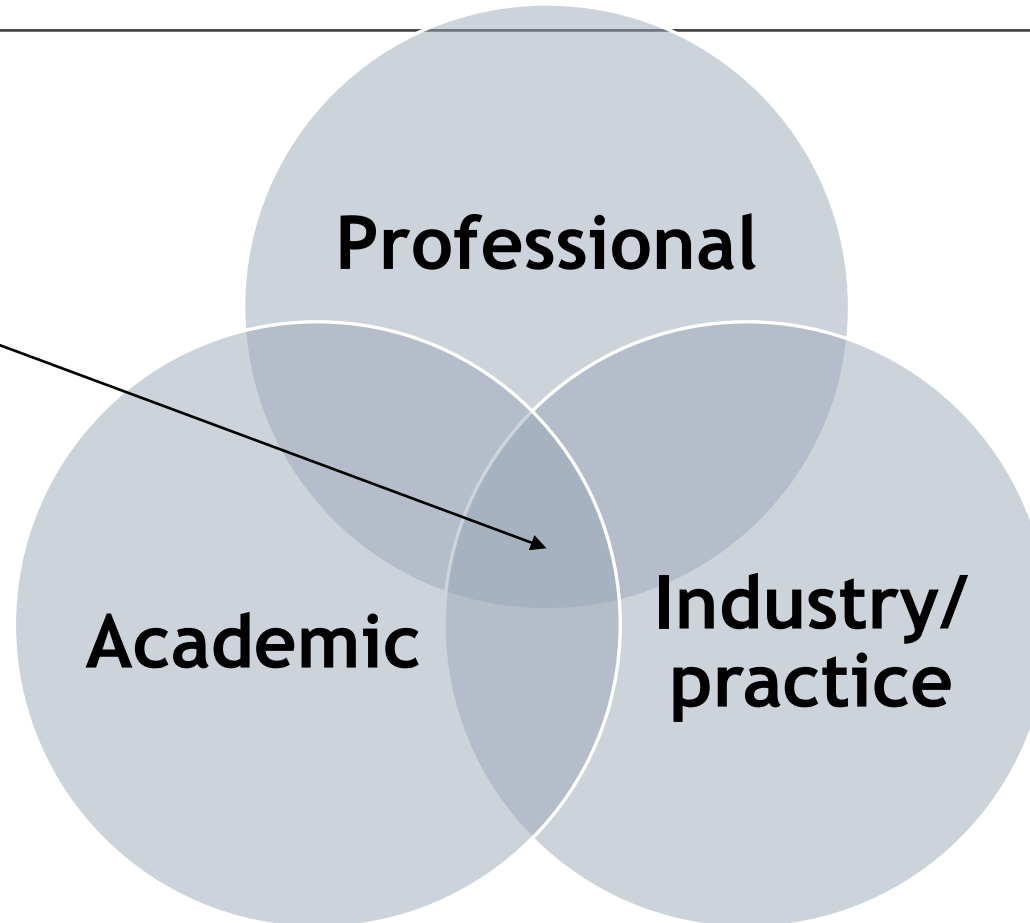
# What would assist in your sense of belonging in ACGR?



# Third-space professionals

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Third space  
'blended'  
integrated  
practice



# How can ACGR Support Professional Staff

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- ACGR sets the National PhD agenda and standards but those standards are implemented and sustained by professional staff
- ACGR can act as a bridge by acknowledging and supporting these roles through recognition of the **operational and strategic expertise** professional staff bring to graduate research
- With more representation, ACGR can help **elevate the status** of HDR professionals across the sector.
- Facilitate clearer and more consistent **two-way communication** between national HDR policy discussions and the professionals enacting them
- Development opportunities help build **sector knowledge, networking, and leadership development**—especially for aspiring third space professionals.





Ways forward?