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Risk Control

Higher Education

Risk Profiling 2021

UNRESTRICTED VERSION



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1 Risk Profiling Overview

Following the 'Emerging Risks' Webinar that was delivered in June 2021, we developed a Risk Profiling Survey which expanded upon the webinar themes we discussed during the session, and invited all of our higher education contacts to participate. The survey was available for completion from the 12th July 2021 to the 6th August 2021 and we received a healthy number of responses. This report summarises the outcomes of that survey.

The Risk Profiling Survey comprised of 26 questions covering the following topic areas:

- Student Consumerism
- Health and Wellbeing
- Social Media
- COVID-19 Preparedness
- Emerging Risk Management
- Priority Risks
- Future Webinars and Resources.

The intention of the survey was to learn about how this sector approaches to a number of emerging risk areas and how they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will assist us in shaping and directing our risk control service offering to more closely address identified areas where further support is required.

This report draws together the responses received and analyses the results. Using these results as an indicative sample of the sector; we can use these outputs to highlight pockets of best practice across the sector, areas for collective improvement and ways that we can support you - our higher education clients in strengthening your risk profile and raising defensibility.

We thank you for your contribution to the risk profiling process.



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2 Risk Profiling High Level Summary

Institutions need to have processes in place to manage the risks arising from student consumerism. From the survey responses provided; the balance is 'tipped' in support of the students with all respondents having systems in place for students to raise complaints and to measure or record their levels of satisfaction with the service being provided to them.

The area that is slightly lacking is that 25% of respondents do not have a clear scope of their provision and not all institutions track the student journey throughout their time with them. These are fundamental elements in managing student expectations, protecting the institution and raising their defensibility should a dispute or claim later arise. Getting these two elements right from the outset could also reduce complaints and raise satisfaction levels.

All institutions that responded have a Health and Wellbeing Policy in place for both staff and students. There was also a high positive response rate on the provision of wellbeing training and access to health and wellbeing resources and signposting for external support for both staff and students.

The social media responses from the survey are interesting and show a level of immaturity in this area. The fact that a number of responders chose not to answer the social media related questions could indicate that they don't know the answer in which case the institutions have gaps that need to be plugged here. There is work to be done in ensuring effective social media policies are in place and more importantly that monitoring is taking place to identify and address harmful content. This should be a risk high on the agenda and yet a number of respondents do not recognise this within their current risk register.

The COVID-19 pandemic was unknown territory for all of us to navigate through and the higher education sector was no exception. There were significant challenges for the sector to overcome including the welfare of their students and staff, a shift in delivery model from in person teaching to virtual learning and accommodation / isolation difficulties for students.

Two thirds of respondents were aware that 'pandemic' was a known/identified risk on their register prior to COVID-19 but all have said there was an impact from the pandemic on their strategic objectives and that it had prompted a review of the risk register. This will assist in raising the profile of risk management as a key performance management tool across the institutions. It was clear from the responses that some had undertaken scenario testing but this is clearly a gap area for much of the sector. It is evident that the experience of teaching differently during the pandemic has provided the sector the opportunity to 'do things differently' and that the future delivery model has been transformed.

When it came to emerging risks, we were provided with great insight from within the sector of the areas sparking concern and attracting attention. All of the responders stated that they had policies and processes in place to manage existing risks and to horizon scan for future/emerging risks; however for some institutions this was only partially in place and so this is an area that needs further attention. Positively risks are reviewed at a strategic level and to some degree are subject to external challenge – a strong starting position for any institution requiring further development to their risk management framework.

As part of the survey, we asked responders to indicate their priority risk areas of focus and this is helpful to understand where they are targeting their resources and attention at the current time. The top 5 were:

1. Cyber Security
2. Mental Health and Wellbeing
3. Building and Estates
4. Funding/Financial Stability
5. Research and Staff Recruitment/Retention.

We also closed the survey by asking what topics institutions would like to have future webinars and events delivered on. Positively those with the highest interest align with the areas where further support should be concentrated, namely:

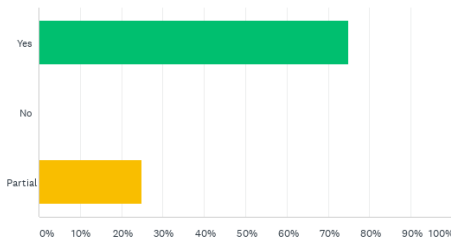
- Business Continuity Management
- Risk Management – including treatment/control
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Reputation.

3 Student Consumerism

The higher education (HE) sector has experienced a fundamental cultural shift in recent years with students viewing themselves as consumers. This has brought an increased level of scrutiny to institutions, requiring them to demonstrate 'value for money' and quality of education. As we begin another academic year of higher education in pandemic times, universities still have to respond to Government changes and requirements, as well as increasing digitalisation of learning. In the past 18 months student demands on institutions have been greater than ever and look set to continue in this way. For institutions this is difficult to manage. Universities are businesses and run on a profit and loss basis. They need to actively manage the risk of 'over promising' and 'under delivering' in order to thrive.

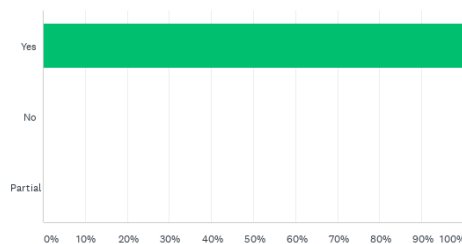
Survey Responses: Student Consumerism

Q3 The institution sets out a clear scope of its provision to help manage student expectations



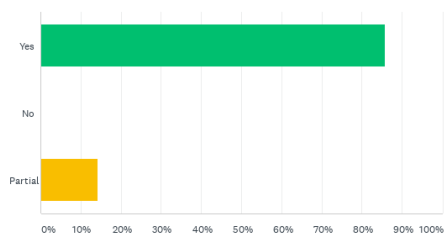
3. Of the respondents – 75% said that they set out a clear scope of their provision, whilst 25% said this was partially undertaken.

Q4 The institution has a documented and communicated student complaint process



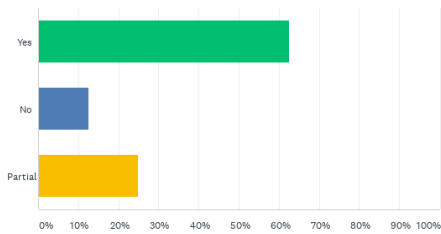
4. All respondents have a documented and communicated student complaint process in place.

Q5 There are systems in place to identify and track student satisfaction



5. 85% of respondents have systems in place to identify and track student satisfaction. The remaining 15% have this partially in place.

Q6 There is an auditable trail which documents the student journey



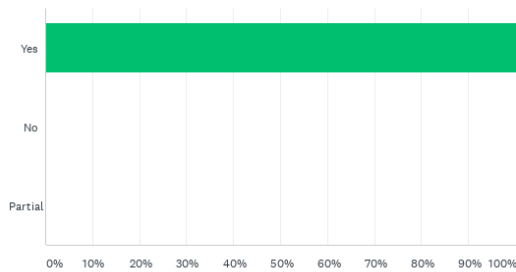
6. One respondent stated that they did not have an auditable trail in place to document the student journey. The remaining respondents did have this in place either fully or partially.

4 Health and Wellbeing

Students experience higher levels of anxiety than the general UK population – research tells us so. If we add to this - a deterioration in their level of social interaction and different teaching methods that have been deployed since the COVID-19 pandemic struck - it inevitably and considerably alters the wellbeing risk profile of both our student population and also the academics that serve them. Institutions face a complex blend of commercial imperative, reputational risk and legal duties in managing the health and wellbeing of their students and workforce.

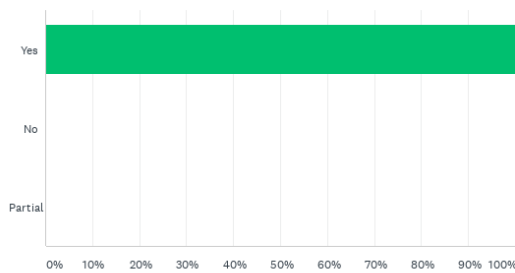
Survey Responses: Health and Wellbeing

Q7 The institution has a health and wellbeing policy in place for students



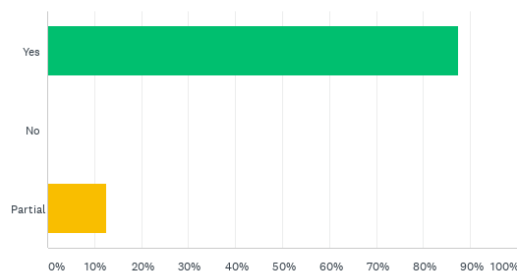
7. 100% of respondents have a health and wellbeing policy in place for their students.

Q8 The institution has a health and wellbeing policy in place for employees



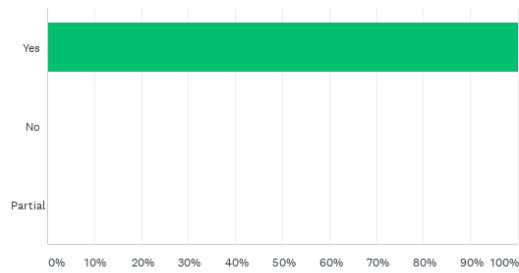
8. 100% of respondents have a health and wellbeing policy in place for their employees.

Q9 The institution provides training to staff and students on health and wellbeing matters



9. Training is provided to staff and students.

Q10 The institution provides access to health and wellbeing resources and signposts to external support



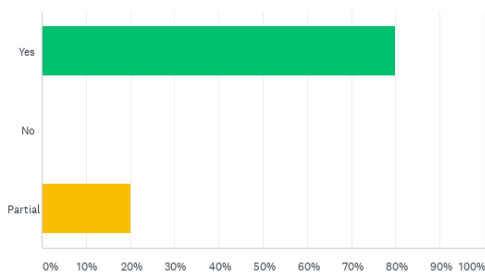
10. 100% of respondents provide access to health and wellbeing resources and signpost to external sources of support.

5 Social Media

Social media is a double edged sword. On one hand it can help spread the message of the positive achievements of an institution, encourage followers, generate a buzz and raise enrolment figures. On the other hand, where abused, it can lead to claims where defamatory comments may have been posted on social media platforms and the individual is seen to be a representative of the institution or representing the views of their institution. Negative statements or hate offences online can significantly impact on reputation and brand – bringing the institution into disrepute. There is also the risk of these platforms being used for alternative and destructive purposes. UK legislation to better protect in our new digital world is on its way.

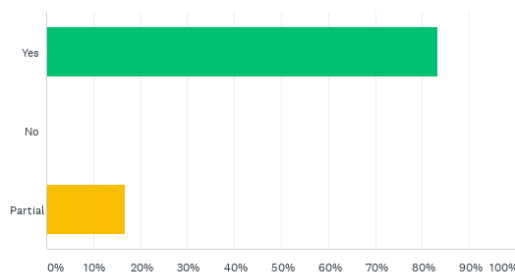
Survey Responses: Social Media

Q11 The institution has a Social Media Policy in place



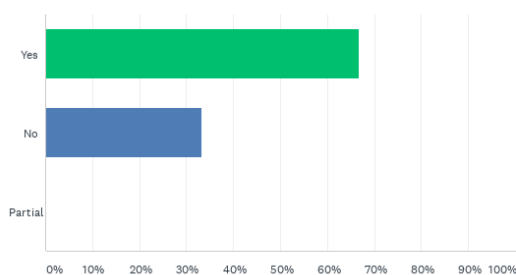
11. 80% of respondents stated that they had a social media policy in place.

Q12 Social Media is actively monitored for content which might result in foreseeable harm



12. Over 80% of responders stated that they monitored content on social media.

Q13 Social Media is a risk captured within the institutions risk register



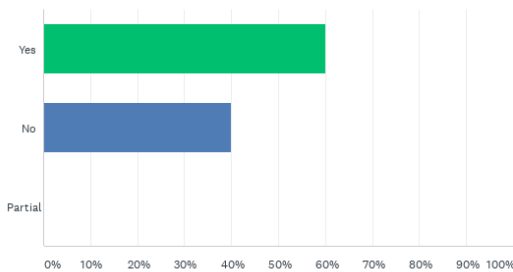
13. Over 60% of responders captured social media as a risk within their risk register.

6 COVID-19 Preparedness

The shift in teaching method to distance learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was necessary to minimise the impact on the education of students. This was a challenge for students to adapt to but also for employees who were more used to talking to a room full of students than to a screen. The pandemic is not over. Decisions made and recorded now could support a future defensibility strategy should it be called upon. Institutions will undoubtedly be scrutinised on how they responded to the Government Guidelines and Directives at defining points in our pandemic journey and it is vital that their record keeping of the timeline of decisions taken is accurate and available to support a defence.

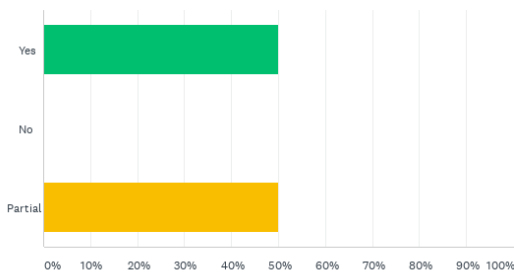
Survey Responses: COVID-19 Preparedness

Q14 The risk of a pandemic was identified within our organisational risk register



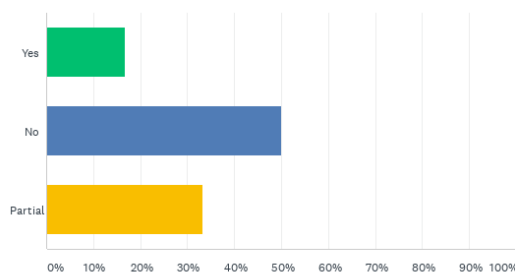
14. 60% of respondents had identified 'pandemic' as a risk on their register before we were struck by COVID-19. Some responders were unsure.

Q15 Existing Crisis Management policies and procedures were implemented to structure our response to the pandemic



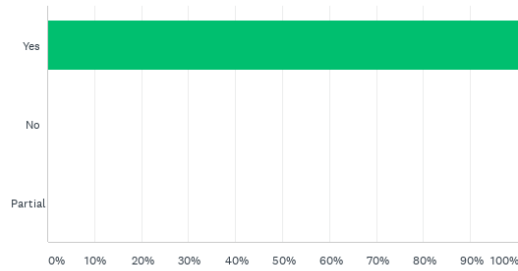
15. For all respondents, this was either fully or partially how they responded to the pandemic.

Q16 Pandemic-based scenario exercises had taken place and tested our planning and risk control effectiveness



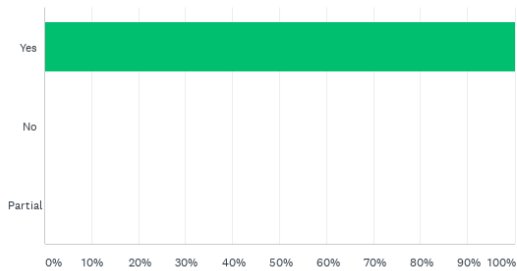
16. There was a mixed response to whether pandemic scenario testing had been undertaken.

Q17 Existing communication channels were used to engage with staff, students, local communities and other stakeholders



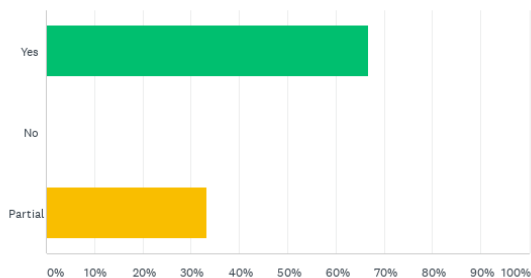
17. All responders used their existing communication channels to keep engaged with others.

Q18 COVID-19 has prompted a review of and impacted our organisational risk register



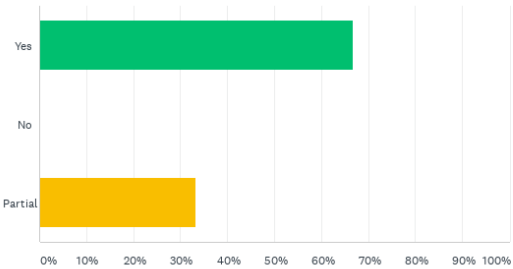
18. For all responders, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a review and impacted their organisational risk registers.

Q19 COVID-19 has impacted our strategic objectives



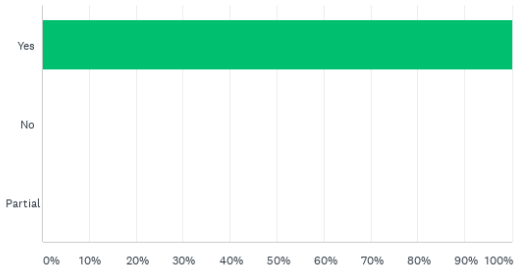
19. Strategic objectives were impacted by the pandemic for all responders – either fully or partially.

Q20 COVID-19 has transformed the future delivery model of our teaching/learning/research/central services



20. All of the responders felt that the pandemic has transformed their future delivery model.

Q21 COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to 'do things differently'



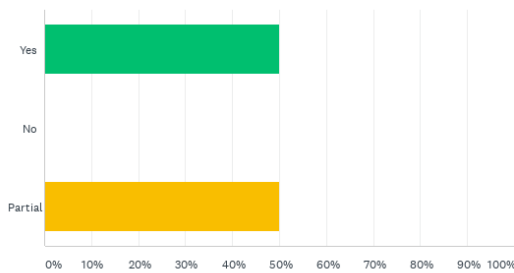
21. All responders felt that COVID-19 had provided them with the opportunity to 'do things differently'.

7 Emerging Risk Management

Higher education institutions more likely to 'thrive' than just 'survive' when we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic are those with embedded risk management practices who are alive to emerging threats, adaptable to change and demonstrate a willingness to embrace new technological advances. The Emerging Risks Webinar in June concentrated on three key areas – student consumerism, mental health and wellbeing and social media. However, this is only the 'tip of the iceberg' there are many more areas of embryonic risk that the sector is and needs to be actively managing in order to stay ahead and develop and implement control strategies early.

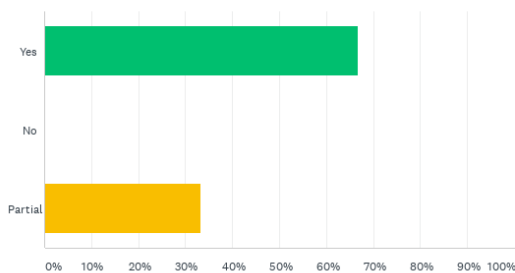
Survey Responses: Emerging Risk Management

Q22 Risk Management policies and processes are well established to manage new and emerging risks



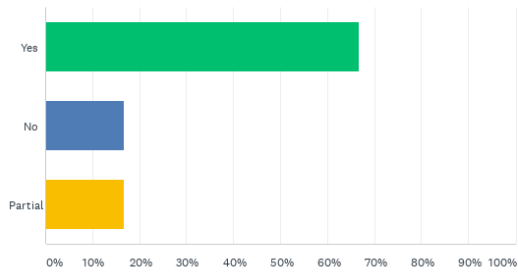
22. All of the responders have risk management policies and processes in place.

Q23 We are actively scanning the landscape for new and emerging risks



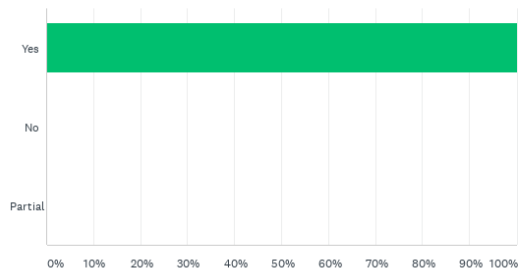
23. Horizon scanning for new and emerging risks is taking place by all responders.

Q24 The pandemic has identified new and emerging risks



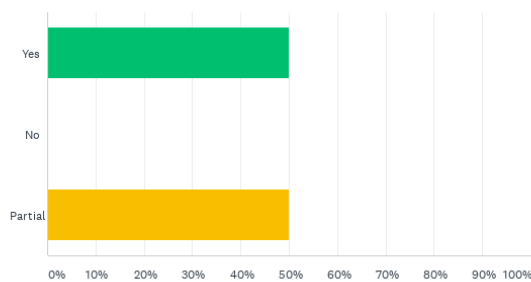
24. The majority of responders felt that the pandemic had identified new and emerging risks.

Q25 The risk register is regularly reviewed at a strategic level



25. 100% of responders stated that their risk register is regularly reviewed at a strategic level.

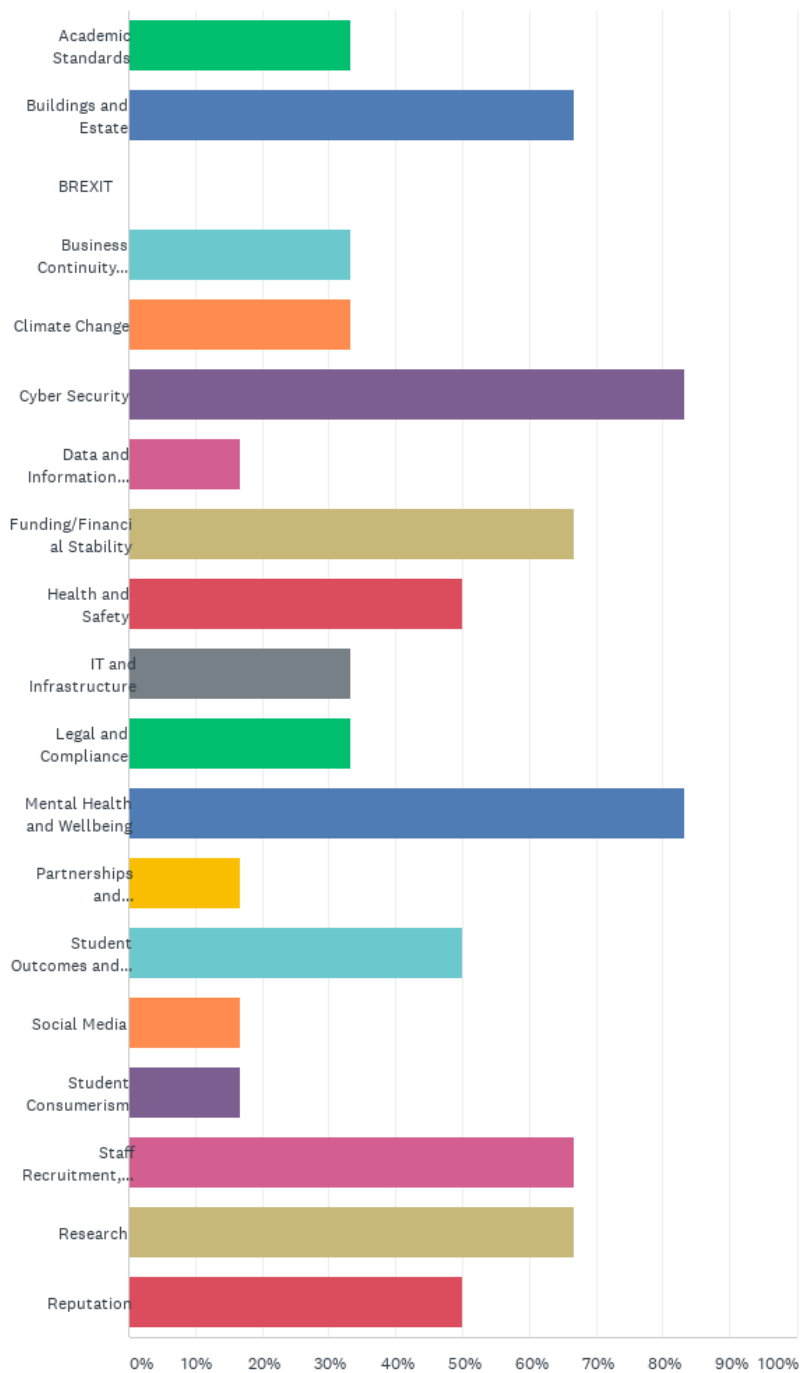
Q26 The risk register is subject to regular external challenge



26. All risk registers are subject to regular external challenge either in full or in part.

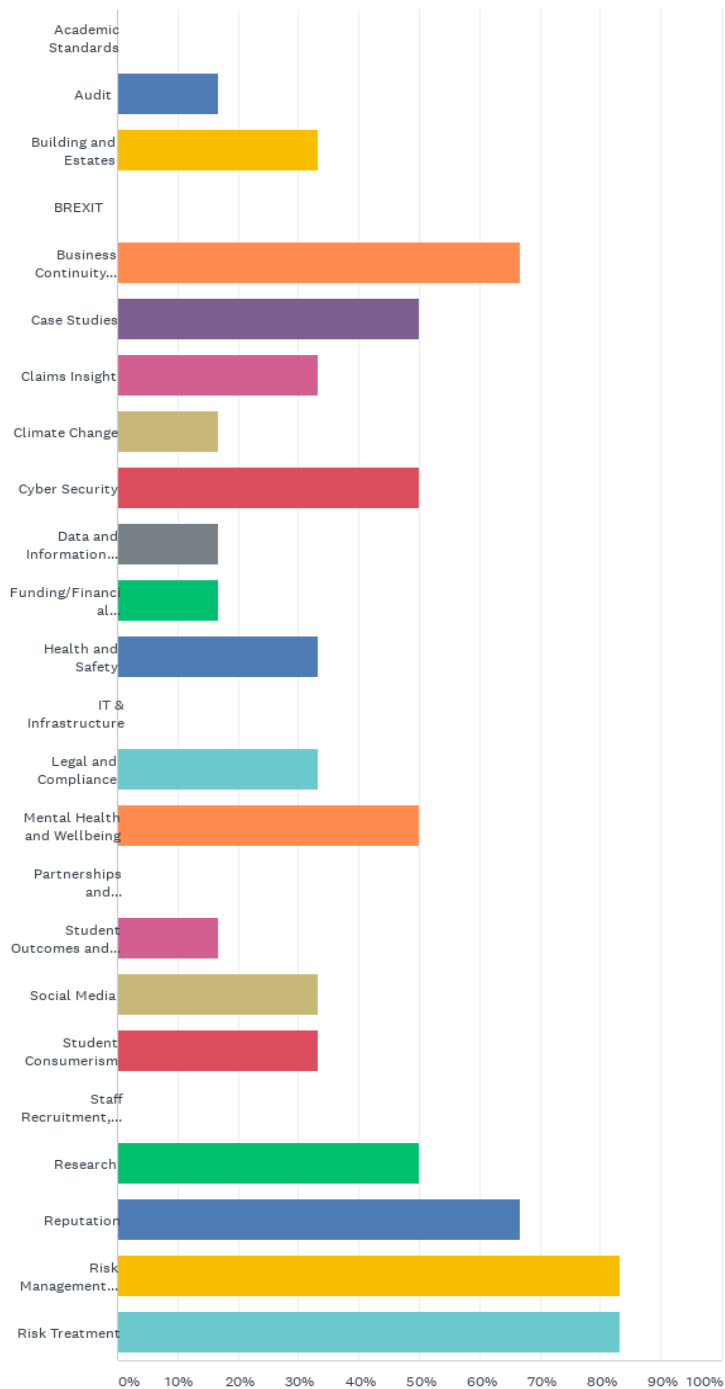
8 Priority Risks

Q27 What are your institutions key risks for 2021/22?



9 Future Webinars and Resources

Q28 What topics would you like future webinars or resources to focus on?



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