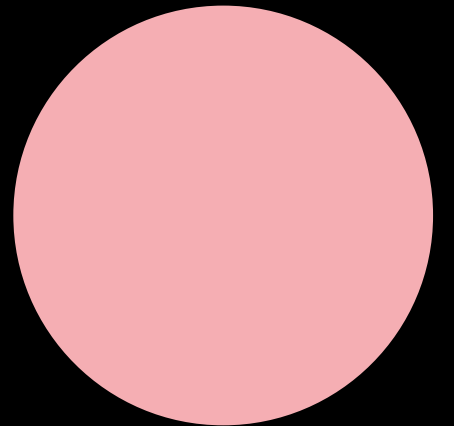
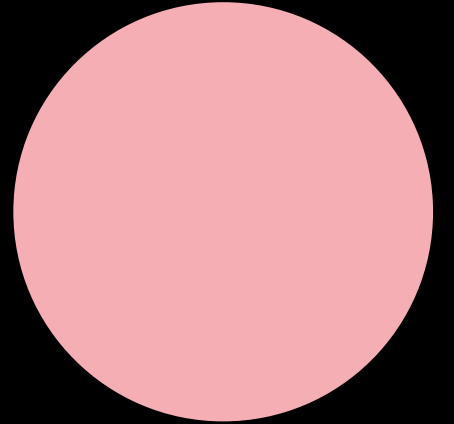


Nominet – Savanta Listening Process Final Report

October 2021



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1.0 Background and methodology

A person is shown from the chest down, wearing a light blue shirt with 'KRA' on the sleeve. They are sitting at a dark wooden table, drawing architectural plans on a large sheet of paper. They are using a blue pen and a yellow ruler. A roll of paper is unrolled next to them. The background is dark and out of focus.

Background to the research

For the last 25 years, Nominet has run the .UK registry – a critical part of the national digital infrastructure.

Nominet is accountable to its Membership, a diverse community consisting primarily of domain name registrars. In addition to this, Nominet also has a diverse pool of Stakeholders that it is responsible to. These Stakeholders tend to reflect its three key strands of work, domain solutions, cyber security and public benefit work, and include Government, Law Enforcement Agencies, public benefit partners and civil society, independent and academic experts.

On 22nd March a campaign group of Members tabled a resolution removing five of Nominet's Board. This resolution passed by a margin of 740 in support and 632 in opposition.

Following this Nominet has resolved to review and reset the relationship between the organisation and its Members to ensure a constructive partnership going forward. As part of this wider process Nominet commissioned Savanta, an independent research agency, to carry out a *listening process* as an independent third party to better understand the views of Nominet amongst different audiences, explore the origins of their concerns as well as any actions that would support trust building, and to feed this back to Nominet.

Research aims

Having clear, independent insight into the views of Nominet Members and Stakeholders is essential for creating a set of next steps that Members and Stakeholders support.

The purpose of this piece of research is to listen to views and concerns from all sides, synthesise the findings and feed this back to Nominet. This is intended to contribute to a wider process of exploring the relationship and improving the conditions for all parties in order to inform a more collaborative approach going forward.

As part of this, Savanta engaged with three audiences, Nominet's Members, other key Stakeholders*, and Nominet's Employees. The aim of this is to ensure all groups can contribute, find areas of consensus, and to explore ways to move forward proactively where there are differences of opinion. The data from these groups is not intended to be measured against each other, but rather to create a wide net of information to build a more complete picture for Nominet.

This report covers off the findings from this research, providing a summary of the data collected to give Nominet a better understanding of the views of these audiences, in order to contribute to Nominet's strategy moving forward.

Methodology overview (1/2)

It was crucial to ensure that the listening process was fully independent, transparent and inclusive at every stage. Our approach involved engaging with Members at relevant stages throughout the process, including early on to establish the relationship and to improve our understanding of the current situation, and then through feedback webinars to encourage transparency and the integrity of the findings.

During the immersion phase we used Members' EGM voting data to ensure that our research had an opportunity to reach members with a variety of viewpoints, by speaking to a combination of those that voted for EGM resolution, those that voted against, and those that either abstained or were not present.

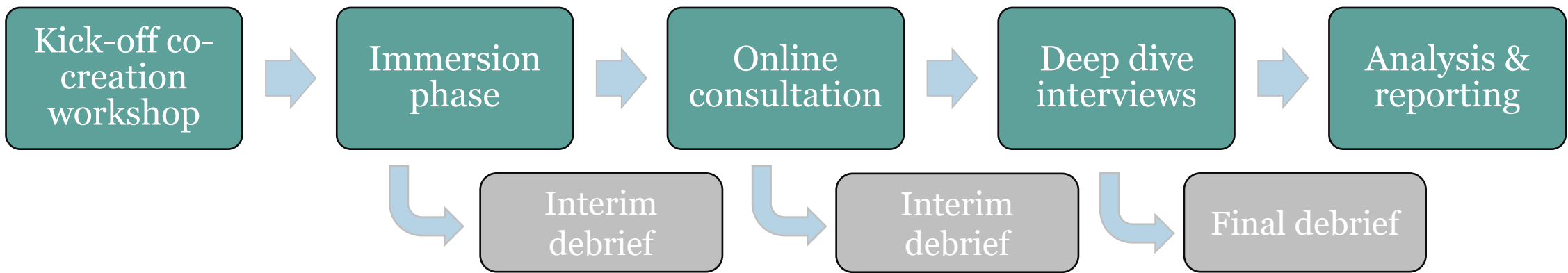
As part of the listening process, Savanta also spoke with non-Member Stakeholders as they have a key professional relationship with Nominet. These individuals and groups have a close relationship and are directly impacted by the work and direction of the organisation; as such Nominet has a responsibility to support them and to take their views into account.

As part of this research we spoke to the following Stakeholder groups: Special Interest Groups, (e.g. Business, Consumer, Intellectual Property, Industry Peers); Internet Organisations, Groups, and Committees, e.g. Other Registries; UK Government – Customers and relevant departments; Registry Services (gTLD) customers; Dispute Resolution Service (DRS) Experts.

We also included Nominet Employees in our sample for the online consultation phase of the research. This was in order to get the perspective of those working directly on the areas that we were discussing, and to obtain a fuller picture.

Methodology overview (2/2)

The listening process was split into three main phases, an immersion phase intended to build our understanding and establish the core areas to explore in the main consultation, a detailed online consultation to add more depth, and finally follow up, deep dive interviews to explore the responses further, and start to identify solutions put forward.



Please note that while the sample size gives us an indicative steer on Members' views, it cannot be said to be representative of all Members. For the sake of brevity throughout the report, we refer to 'Members' but this should be interpreted as 'Members who responded to the listening process'. In our recruitment for the online consultation we mailed out the survey to all 1789 Members who had provided their details and indicated they were happy to be contacted.

Base sizes vary across different questions as respondents were not forced to answer every question. In the footnotes where we have written 'All Members/Stakeholders/Employees', this should be interpreted as 'All Members/Stakeholders/Employees who gave a response on this question'.

Methodology details (1/3)

Purpose

Given the diversity of Members and Stakeholders, and the sensitive nature of the research, it was important that both groups were able to be involved in the early stages, to inform the direction of the listening process. We decided to use an immersion phase both to familiarise the research audience with Savanta as an independent party, and to allow us to better understand the topic areas that would form the research materials going forward.

Methodology and sample

There were two stages to the immersion phase, first Savanta undertook a straw poll to start to build a picture of the key areas of concern for Members only. We then ran a series of online one-to-one interviews and focus groups amongst both Members and some Stakeholders, which allowed us to engage with each audience in more detail.

The sample selection process was randomised. Nominet provided Savanta with a contact list of Members and Stakeholders and this list was then randomised and grouped into batches. Savanta then contacted respondents from this list in batches until the target had been reached.

Straw poll	240 Members
Interviews	7 Members; 2 Stakeholders
Focus groups	21 Members

Fieldwork dates: 19th April – 24th May

Methodology details (2/3)

Purpose

The second phase of the research consisted of a detailed consultation, with the aim of understanding Members, Stakeholders and Employees' views on a wide range of issues relating to Nominet as an organisation currently and in the future.

Based on the immersion phase, there were several key areas that both Members and Stakeholders wanted to give feedback on. It was therefore important that the consultation covers these area in detail, while also allowing respondents the opportunity, through open-ended questions, to share their views more broadly. Members had the option of skipping questions if they did not want to provide an answer or did not feel the question was relevant.

Methodology and sample

The consultation was conducted online. The links to access the consultation were distributed via email to a list of contacts provided by Nominet which included all Members, Stakeholders and Employees who had provided their contact details to be shared with a third party. Anyone who was not included was able to contact Nominet or Savanta in order to be included.

Members	185
Stakeholders	54
Employees	163

Fieldwork dates: 21st June – 23rd July

Methodology details (3/3)

Deep dive
interviews

Purpose

Following the online consultation Savanta identified several key topics to explore in further detail, as well as some challenges to put to Members and Stakeholders, to hear their suggestions in further detail. In order to gather this detail, we undertook one-to-one interviews which covered these areas as well as added depth to Members and Stakeholders’ views for the future direction of Nominet.

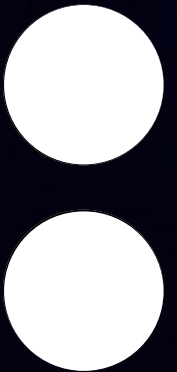
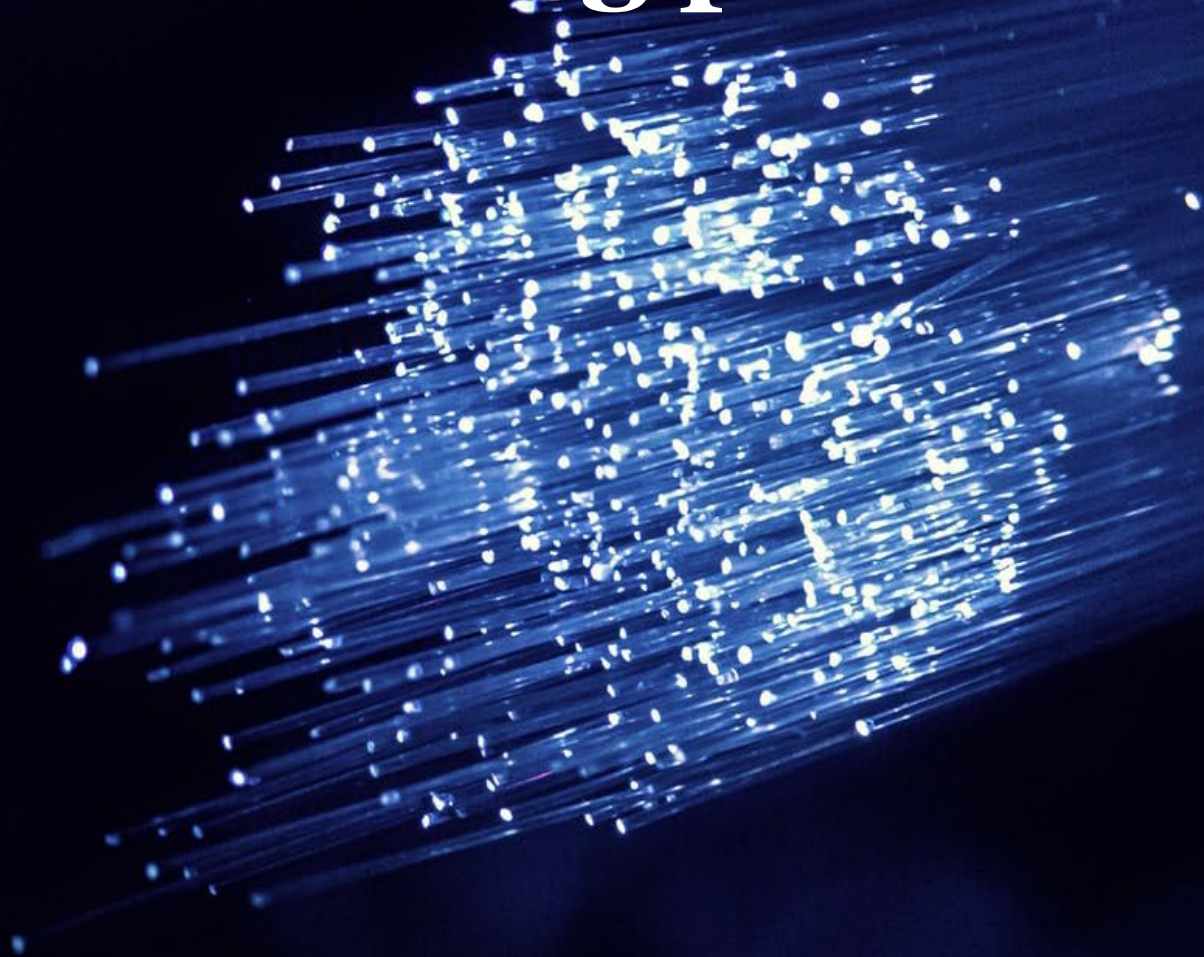
Methodology and sample

We conducted 30 deep dive interviews amongst a combination of respondents who completed the consultation and indicated they were happy to be recontacted, as well as individuals who had not taken part in any of the previous phases in order to understand as broad a perspective as possible. Interviews were conducted both online and via telephone.

Members – sourced from consultation	10
Members – sourced from fresh sample	10
Stakeholders	10

Fieldwork dates: 16th August – 8th September

2.0 Listening process at a glance



Listening process at a glance

1. The disagreement that led to the EGM vote came from negative perceptions amongst some Members, particularly around the Board ignoring Member interests and taking the organisation in what they view to be the wrong direction. These have built up over time as Nominet's role has evolved.
2. Some can understand why Nominet's role has evolved over the years. That an organisation in Nominet's position as part of the UK's Critical National Infrastructure (CNI), has a responsibility to use its oversight of the .UK domain space to contribute to public good and have involvement in cyber security activities.
3. However, a significant subset of the Members we spoke to have strong views that Nominet should act as a registry only. They comment that other activities are not being pursued in Members interests, but to further those of the executive, and suggest that Nominet should run a lean operation, generating less profit.
4. There is a perception that the reasons behind Nominet's changes in aims have historically not been communicated well, this includes the justification behind why decisions are made, transparency over the generation and allocation of funds, and lack of Member involvement in major decisions. This has led to a view amongst some Members that Nominet is intentionally keeping back some information that they perceive should be open to them.
5. Both Members and Stakeholders agree that addressing the issue of trust will create a more constructive relationship, and help to preserve the stability of the organisation which will ultimately benefit all parties. They comment that this can primarily be achieved by building transparency into the fabric of the Membership structure, fostering a two-way dialogue with the executive, allowing Member input, and justifying all decisions that impact Members and Stakeholders.

3.0 Findings



Trust in Nominet

3.1



Trust is a major issue impacting perceptions of Nominet amongst some Members

“Engaging with Members at the earliest possible opportunity allows for transparency and the feeling that we are part of a decision making process, rather than being 'done to'.”

Member, Retail

One of the key findings of the listening process has been the **erosion of trust in Nominet amongst some Members** over recent years, and the key to ensuring a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship going forward will be to rebuild that trust.

The feedback suggests that there is still a high level of trust in Nominet to carry out certain responsibilities, for example **managing the technical aspects of the domain name registry**. The loss of trust tends to be in regards to Nominet not taking into account **Members’ views in its decision making**, as well as the **transparency** in decision making and actions taken.

The term “trust” is heavily nuanced and means various things to different people. Ultimately many Members feel that **restoring trust in the Board needs to be the starting point** to then build trust in other areas and activities.



The term '*Trust in Nominet*' is interpreted in different ways

Through all phases of the process, trust was one of the most common issues raised, and there is agreement that building a relationship with mutual trust is the most essential next step for the organisation.

For Members, trust primarily relates to Member engagement, and that they can trust Nominet to act in the interests of Members. Another important part of trust is that Members and Stakeholders can trust Nominet to run a stable, successful and transparent registry. Trust and transparency are closely linked, for many Members transparency is the cornerstone that determines whether they feel they can trust Nominet.

For Stakeholders, trust relates more to aspects directly related to Nominet's role, such as capabilities around protection, legality and integrity. Some also mention transparency and a consistent approach with partners.

What does the term 'trust' mean to you?

"Trust would mean believing that Nominet is following Members' wishes, and is being transparent and honest in its decision making rather than being self-serving."

Member, Other

"To act in the best interests of the Membership and for any and all actions to be transparently communicated to the Membership, with frequent consultation."

Member, Wholesale

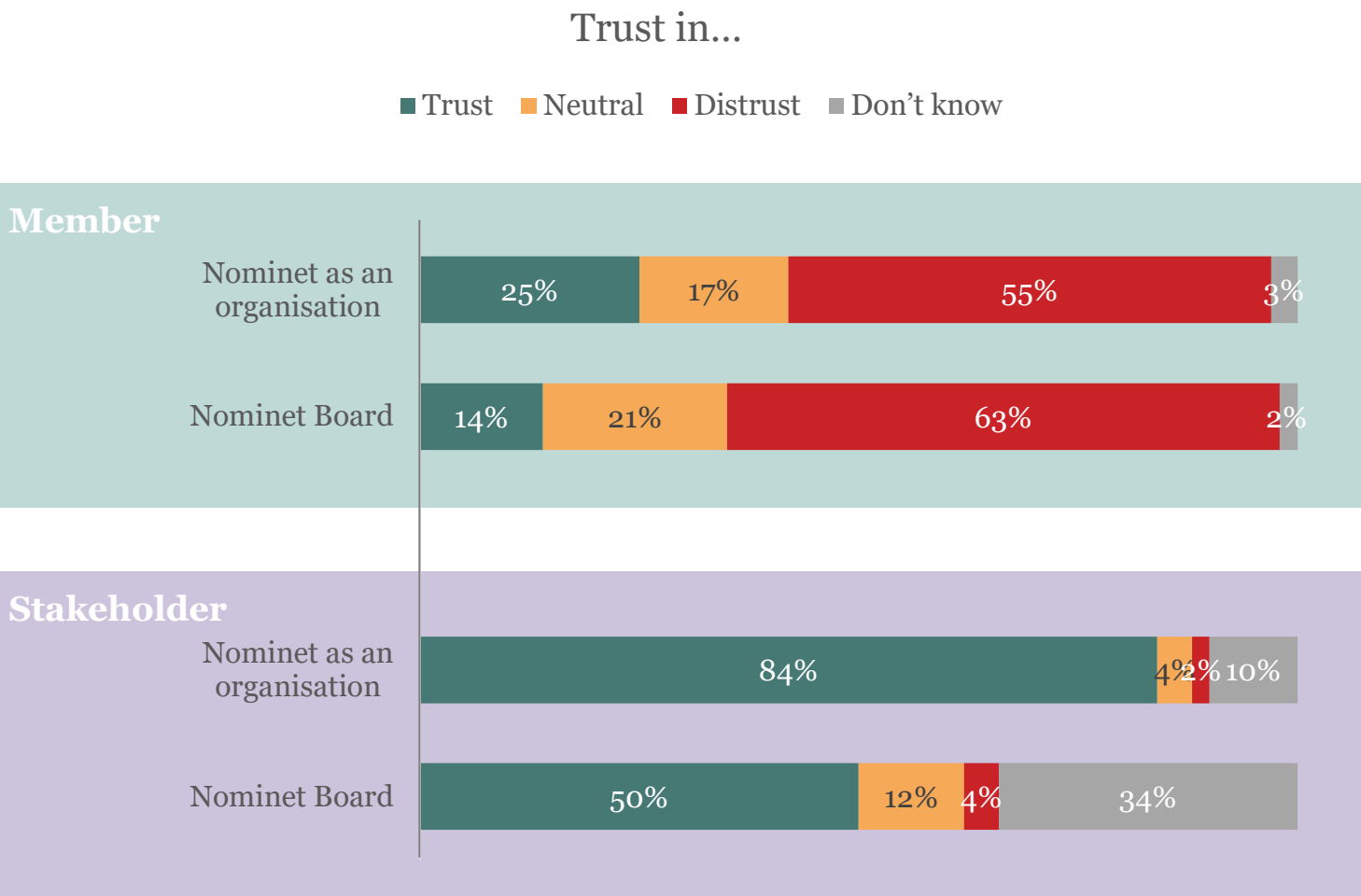
"Nominet builds and maintains trust first and foremost by operating secure, high availability, state of the art registry, DNS, and cyber security infrastructure. Doing this is the basis of earning the trust of the community."

Stakeholder, Tech Peer

"Trust means that Nominet adheres to its terms of reference with and for users."

Stakeholder, Tech Peer

Amongst Members, there has been a loss of trust in both Nominet as an organisation, and the Board

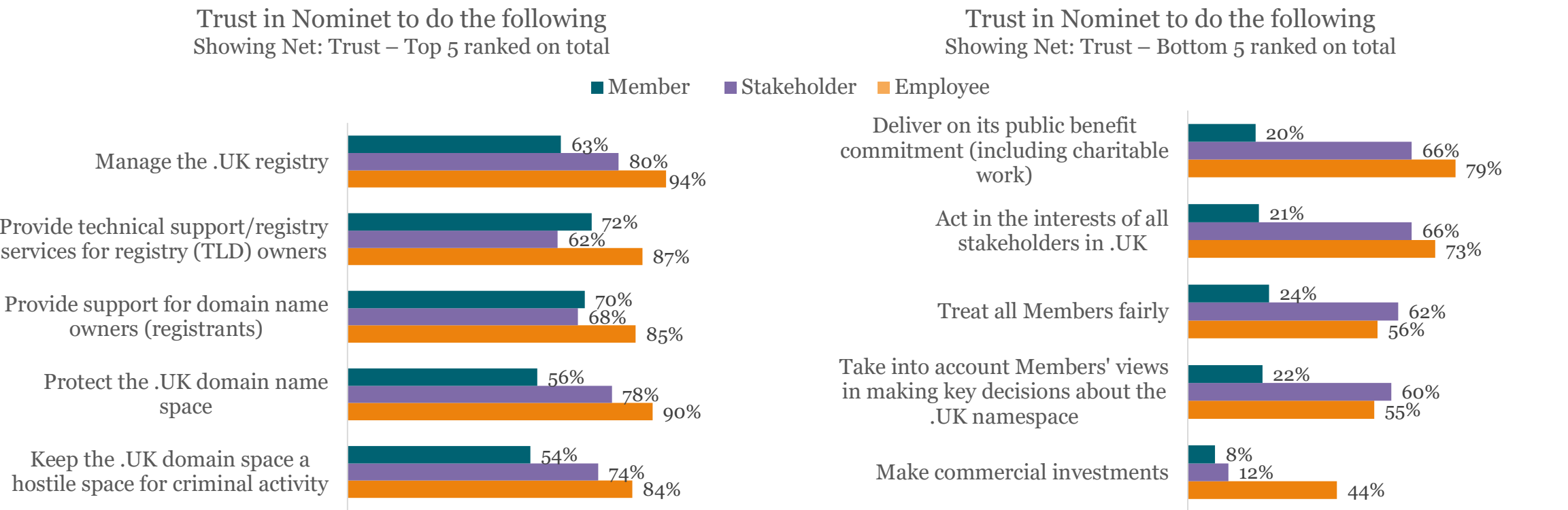


A quarter of the Members (25%) say they trust Nominet as an organisation, and one in seven (14%) say they trust the Nominet Board to make good decisions. Distrust tends to be more prevalent amongst Members with fewer domains under management.

Conversely, Stakeholders are more likely to say they trust both Nominet as an organisation and the Board to make good decisions (84% and 50%, respectively). It is worth noting that the level of distrust in the Nominet Board is low amongst Stakeholders, with a third (34%) saying they do not know enough to give a response.

When asked what would improve their trust in Nominet’s decision making, the most common themes were better and more open explanation of decision making, and increased Member involvement in decision making. Those with a more critical view of Nominet were more likely to suggest that following the actions at the EGM, changing current Board composition would improve trust.

There is a higher amount of trust in Nominet to provide technical services and support for domain name owners, and to protect UK domain space



Feedback is supported by the evidence from the qualitative findings, where Members generally trust Nominet to carry out its operational and technical responsibilities to a high standard. Conversely, both Members and Stakeholders are less likely to trust Nominet to communicate effectively with Members, and to make sound decisions when it comes to diversification, and delivering on its public benefit commitments.

“I have to say I think Nominet set the standard if I'm honest. They've really set the benchmark and I think we want other registry bodies to follow Nominet.”

Stakeholder, Legal

Transparency is one of the key areas impacting trust in Nominet

Members tend to interpret transparency as making more information on Nominet's activities and decision making processes openly available to them. As part of this, some Members would like to see Nominet publish Board meeting minutes and having more open financial reporting, making information available by default, rather than an approach which many deem to be “*unnecessary secrecy*”. For Stakeholders, transparency is more interpreted as Nominet communicating openly on operational issues.

A key element, which both Members and Stakeholders agree would be an improvement in Nominet’s approach to transparency, is more proactive explanation and justification of major decisions. Where appropriate, Members would like the opportunity to be consulted, but in the very least, expect to have the rationale for major decisions explained to them.

Additionally, both Members and Stakeholders agree that Nominet should restate and clarify its overall mission and purpose with regards to its responsibilities, as this has become unclear. This would be a positive step acting as a starting point for a new, more transparent, approach.

What does the term ‘transparency’ mean to you?

“Transparency simply means that Nominet should publish information about what it does and how it does it (within the limits of IPR/copyright) so that any Member who is interested can find out.”

Member, Retail

“Regular dialogue with all Stakeholders. Publishing of robust minutes of Board meetings. Clearly articulated and available long term strategic plan as well as annual budget and plans.”

Stakeholder, DRS Expert

“Can see what is being discussed, what the outcome was, and why the decision was reached, and how different stakeholder group's views were incorporated.”

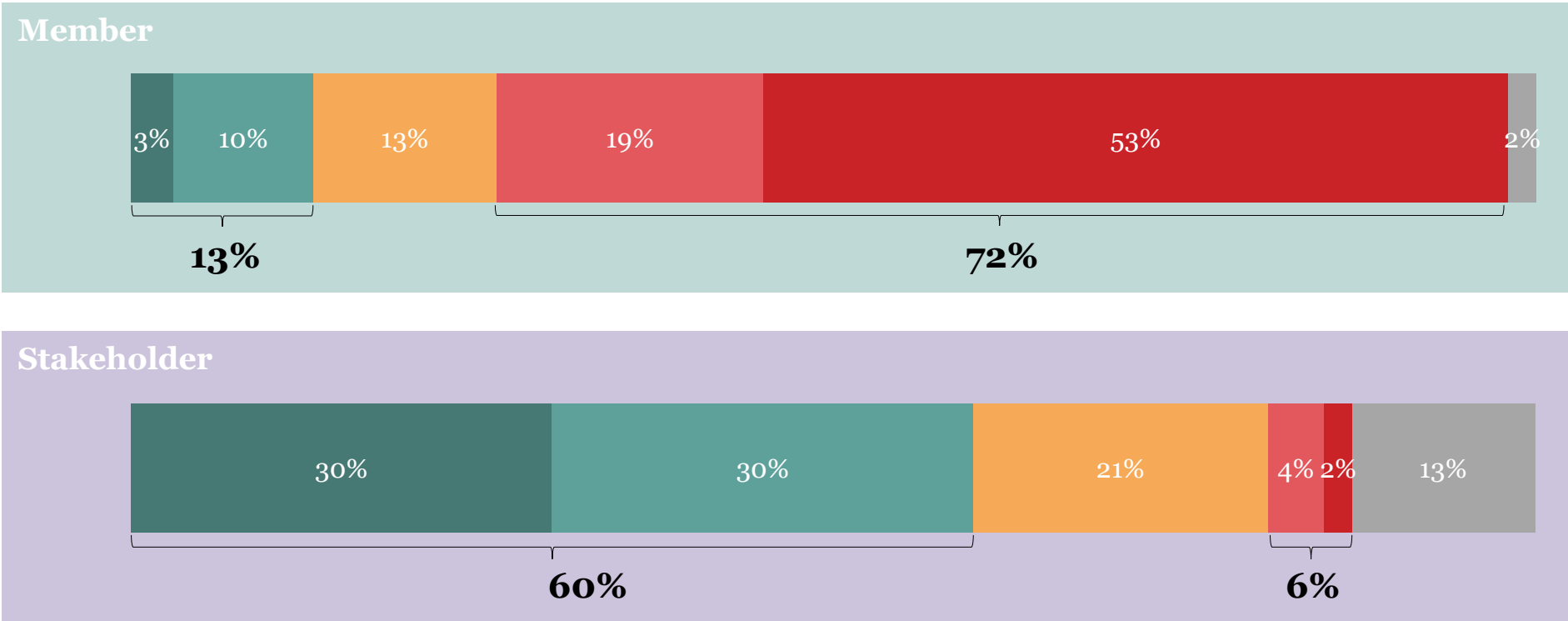
Member, Retail

“Transparency means that it discloses to the fullest extent its policies and protocols for safe and effective management of the registry.”

Stakeholder, Tech Peer

An increase in transparency would have the greater impact for Members, almost three quarters of whom are dissatisfied with Nominet’s current approach to transparency

Satisfaction with Nominet’s approach to transparency



“Transparency is many things: A clear and well communicated director selection process; Following best practices in corporate governance; Publishing of robust minutes of Board meetings; Clearly articulated and available long term strategic plan as well as annual budget and plans; Regular published reporting on key metrics and activities; Regular dialogue with all Stakeholders.”

Stakeholder, Tech Peer

Very satisfied Quite satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Quite dissatisfied Very dissatisfied Don't know

Feedback from the deep dive interviews supports the view that improving transparency will have a big impact on restoring trust

Both Members and Stakeholders agree that increased transparency would help to establish a more open collaborative relationship, and to demonstrate that the actions Nominet is taking are in Members and Stakeholders' interests. Calls for greater transparency tend to focus on a desire for opportunities for a two-way conversation between the Nominet executive, and Members and Stakeholders so that all parties are well informed on the direction of the organisation.

The publication of Board meeting minutes and financial reporting is another area that would improve perceptions of transparency, while some Members and Stakeholders comment that they appreciate not all financial details are appropriate to share, a regular update (e.g. at least annually) would demonstrate a commitment to keeping Nominet's key audiences informed.

"I think transparency is important, more regular, open meetings, at least once a quarter or something. It just allows for something that lasts an hour and a half for 2 hours that will then continue this open exchange on where Nominet is going."

Stakeholder, Legal

"I would definitely agree with [sharing] meeting reports, I think it's very important for such a large and significant registry to publicise where the meetings go, and what is discussed."

"The financial reports you do have to be a little bit more careful. I value transparency but I think releasing too much information, especially when people aren't able to interpret, could be an obstacle. It's important to have some financial reporting of course, at least on an annual basis."

Member, Other

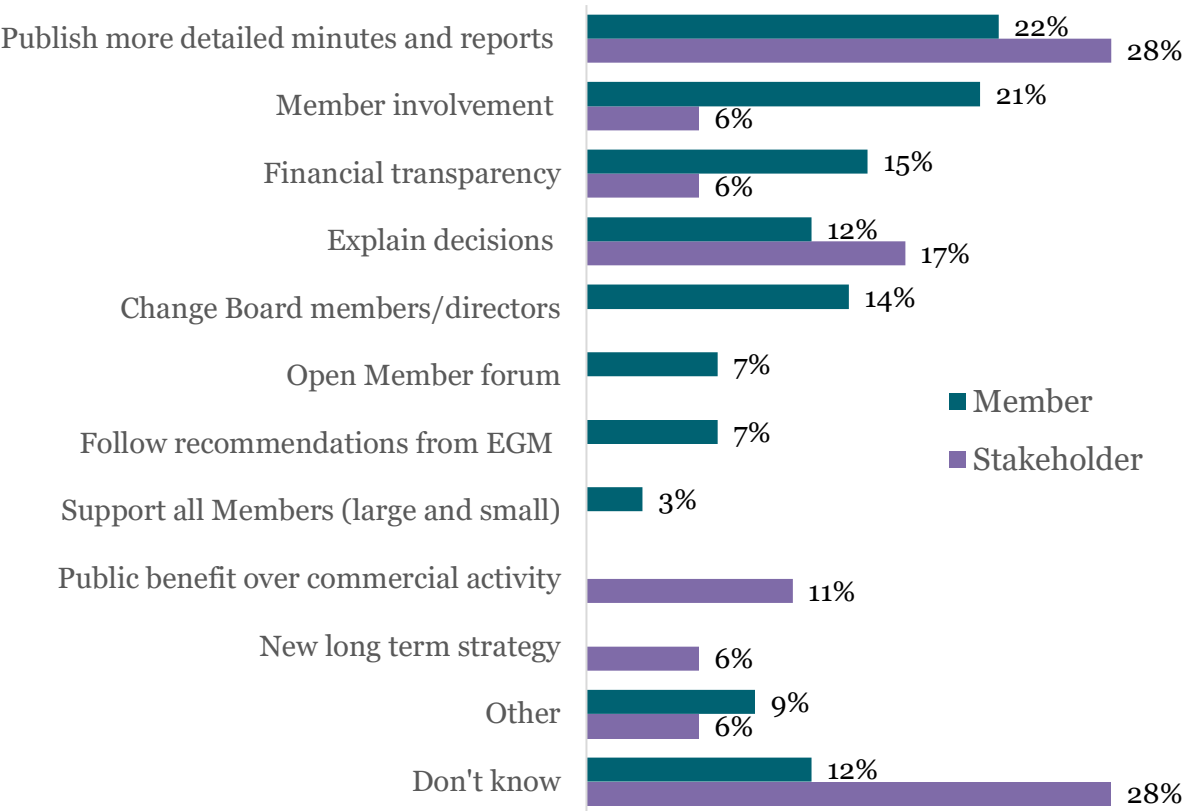
More transparency over the use of profits, and general decision making would improve perceptions amongst all audiences

Members would like to see Nominet explain plans early, and be open and honest on its decision making process. There is a view that currently some things are unnecessarily kept behind closed doors. The publishing of Board meetings and financial reporting is viewed as a tool to help overcome this.

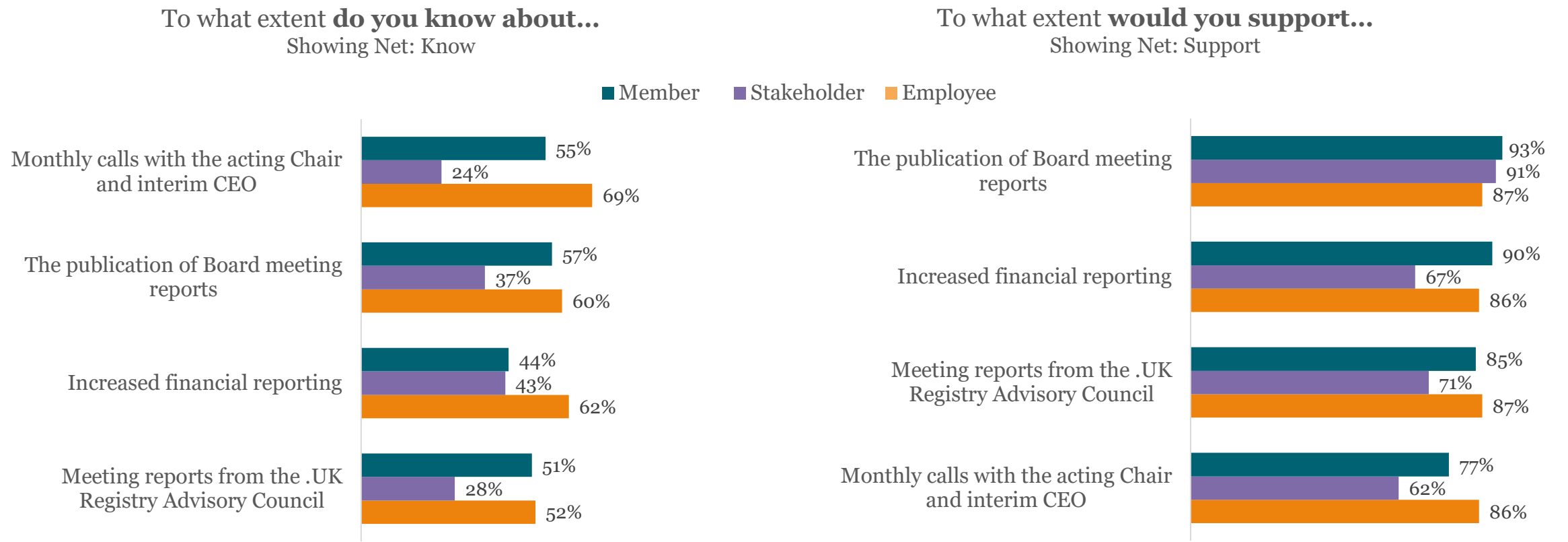
The key areas where more transparency is desired are on diversification (justifying and explaining decisions), remuneration and Board selection.

In our deep dive interviews some Members comment that they understand that on the more sensitive or technical discussions there might not be ability for full detailed transparency. In these cases, even top level information provided to Members and Stakeholders, such as “*Nominet met with the Government to discuss issue X.*” would be appreciated.

What could Nominet do to be more transparent?



Of the actions Nominet has committed to following the EGM, the publication of Board meeting reports, has the greatest overall support



Monthly calls with the acting Chair and interim CEO currently have the greatest overall awareness. Stakeholders are the least informed of the three groups and have the lowest support for the majority of suggested transparency improvement actions, apart from the publication of Board meeting reports, which has strong support across all three audiences.

Members in particular comment that greater transparency would remove concerns that information is being intentionally held back

Some Members comment that they are surprised that more operational decisions are not communicated clearly to them either before or after being made. They comment that not sharing information openly and regularly feels like it is being withheld unnecessarily and that this can in turn foster suspicion that Nominet has something to hide, even if this is most likely not the case.

This desire for increased openness includes some Members wanting Nominet to provide quicker and more complete responses when questions are raised.

“Unfortunately, too often, it's been a case of you ask a question and the people in charge say, ‘We'll have to get back to you on that.’ which makes it sound like they're trying to hide something.”

Stakeholder, Other

“Obviously, it is much better if everybody knows what's going on, there should be nothing to hide. If you drop the ball, it happens, but it's much better to be open and say, ‘We got this wrong, we'll try to do better.’ If you try to hide it, I think that [makes things] worse.”

Member, Other



3.2 Communications and effective collaboration



Regular, open and honest communication will help to foster a collaborative relationship

“[Collaboration means] two-way communication and sharing of information that is mutually beneficial.”

Member, Retail

While **day-to-day Member engagement is deemed to be positive**, there is a consensus across the audiences who took part in the listening process that the **communication on wider strategy has been poor**. Members comment that decisions have not been communicated openly and regularly, which has generated a lack of transparency.

There is a broad consensus that a shift in the relationship to a more **regular, open dialogue would build respect from both sides**, and help to create a culture change whereby Nominet is “*open by default*” and not closed or secretive. Many, including both Members and Stakeholders, feel this would lead to improved transparency, therefore improving trust and **ultimately generating more buy in and support for Nominet’s responsibilities** outside of the domain name registry.

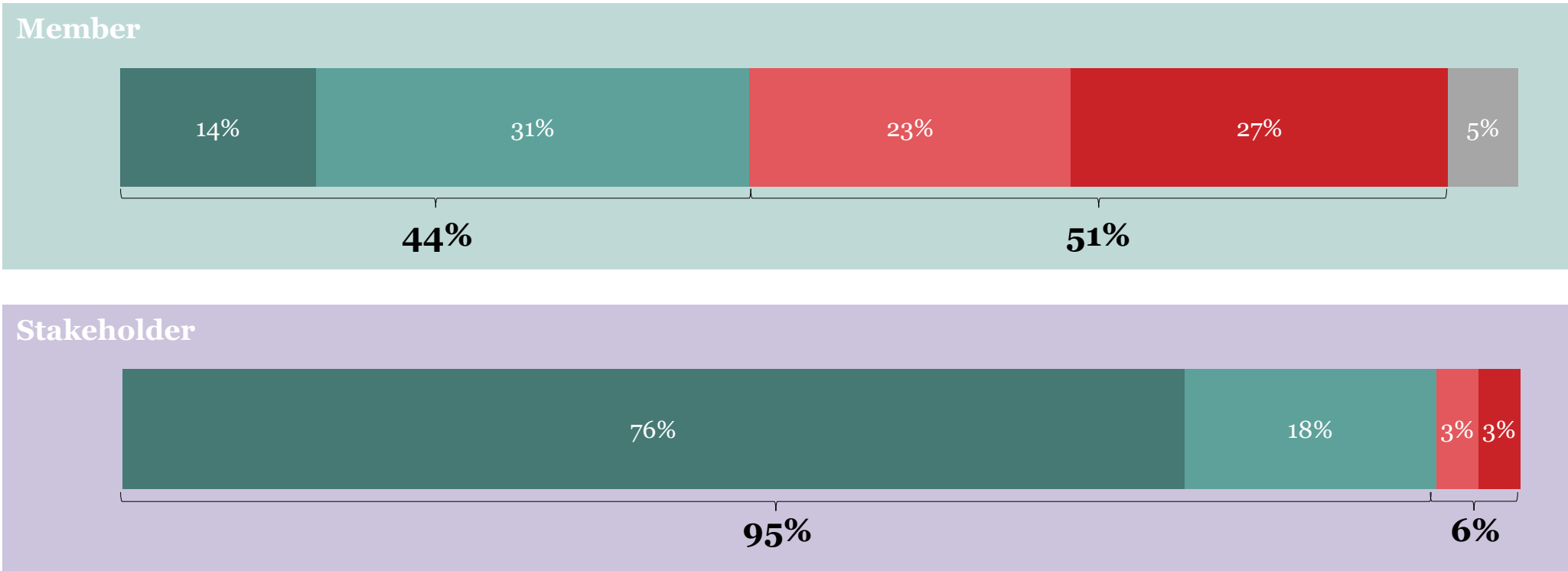
Better communication would involve a genuine desire to listen to Members and Stakeholders, allowing more Member input, explaining decisions in a timely fashion, and a regular two-way dialogue.



The majority of Stakeholders and four in nine Members are satisfied with the engagement they have with Nominet

This, and the feedback from our deep dive interviews suggests that the day-to-day Member and Stakeholder engagement from Nominet on operational issues is positive, and that concerns tend to come more from the top level communication and information sharing.

Satisfaction with engagement with Nominet



■ Very satisfied ■ Somewhat satisfied ■ Not very satisfied ■ Not at all satisfied ■ I have no engagement with Nominet

Satisfaction with perceptions on Member engagement can be improved by allowing more Member input, and demonstrating that their views are taken into account in major decisions

Those dissatisfied with Nominet’s engagement, are most likely to say that there is currently a feeling of disconnect between Members and the Board, or that they would like to see more regular engagement and a two-way dialogue.

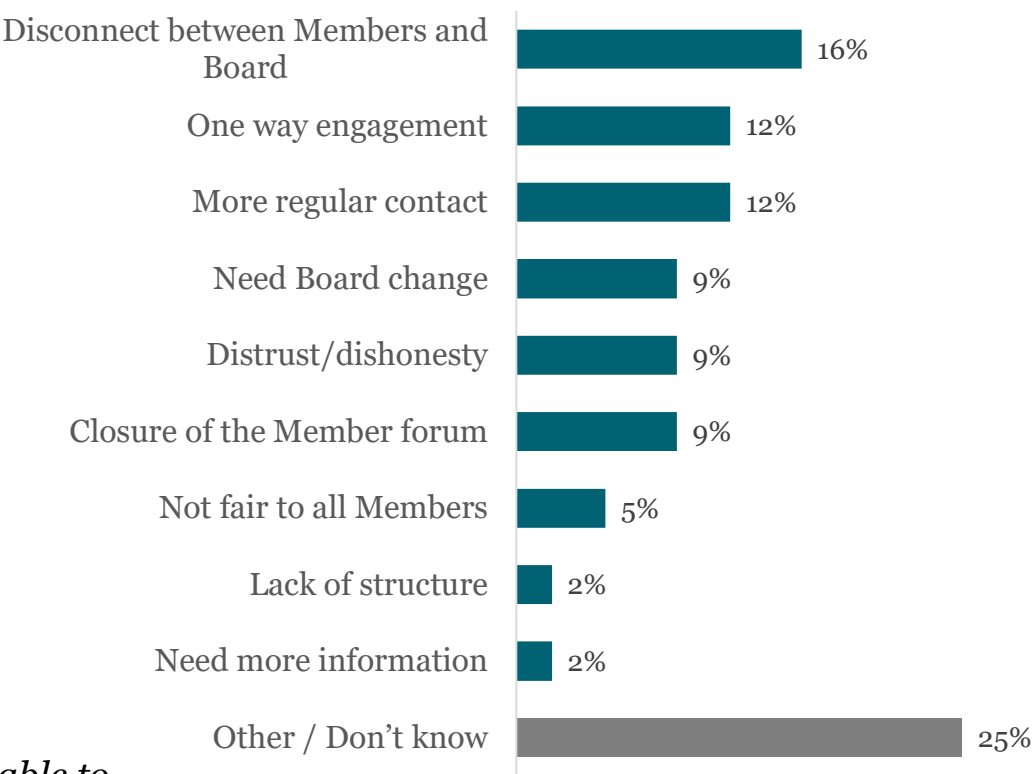
This is supported by the deep dive interviews where Members suggest that increased contact which allows them to respond to Nominet would allow them to have more input into the direction of the organisation. Some suggest that there should be more direct involvement with Member representation on the Board itself, or more opportunities to input into Board composition.

Criticisms of Nominet’s communications to Members includes the perception that they have historically not listened to Members’ views, or taken their interests into account. Some Members cite the example of their requests from the EGM not being acted on sufficiently.

“If there's somebody who is in the rotating basis comes from Membership and is able to contribute to the board the right way, I think they'll be very helpful.”

Member, Other

Reason for dissatisfaction with Member engagement



There is a consensus amongst all audiences that a regular, open dialogue would foster a more collaborative relationship, and bring the Nominet Board closer to both Members and Stakeholders

Some comment that currently the relationship feels very “*one sided*”, with little opportunity for Members and Stakeholders to respond or engage with the Nominet executive in a more conversational way. There is a perception that this limits the relationship. Members in particular would prefer more regular opportunities to engage, which would make the two parties seem less disconnected. This could be in the form of regular virtual or face-to-face meetings, or an online forum, but also with the Nominet executive attending other industry meetings and events to engage with Members in a less formal setting.

Some Members say that the lack of regular communication between the two sides contributed significantly to the EGM resolution, as the Nominet Board was not aware of the scale of Members’ concerns soon enough to react pre-emptively.

“Its a two-way process. Present Members with an honest, clear and simple overview of the reporting period, breaking down areas of investment, income, plans for future etc.”

Member, Other

Generally both Members and Stakeholders agree that it would be beneficial if there was a renewed culture of open feedback, where concerns are listened to, respected and acted upon. With some citing negative examples where this has not happened in the past, such as the EGM, or closing the Member forum.

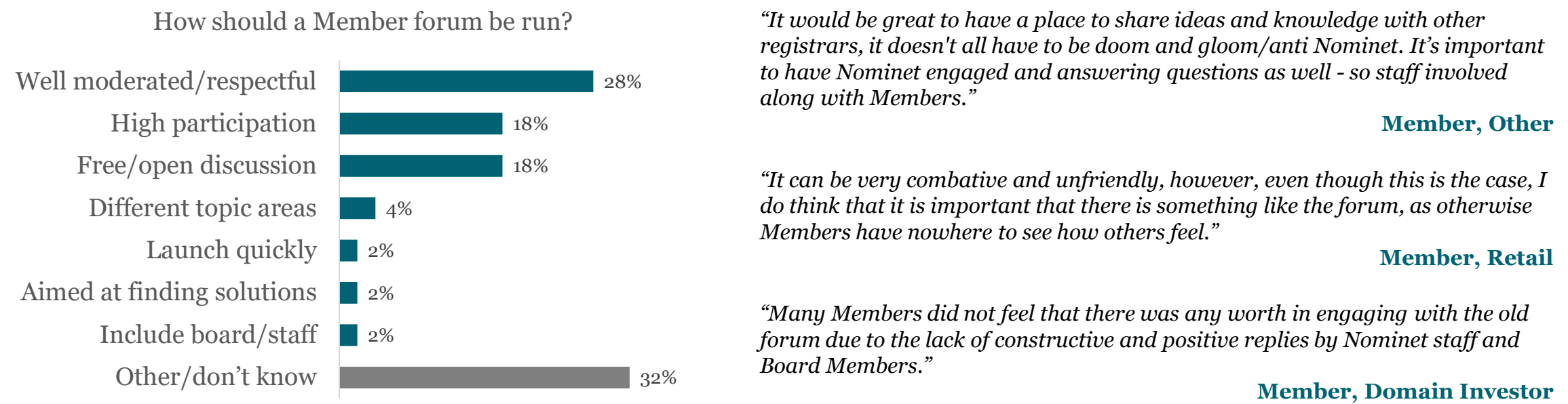
“I would love to see the executives of Nominet attending industry events. They meet people to speak in person [and develop a relationship].”

Member, Other

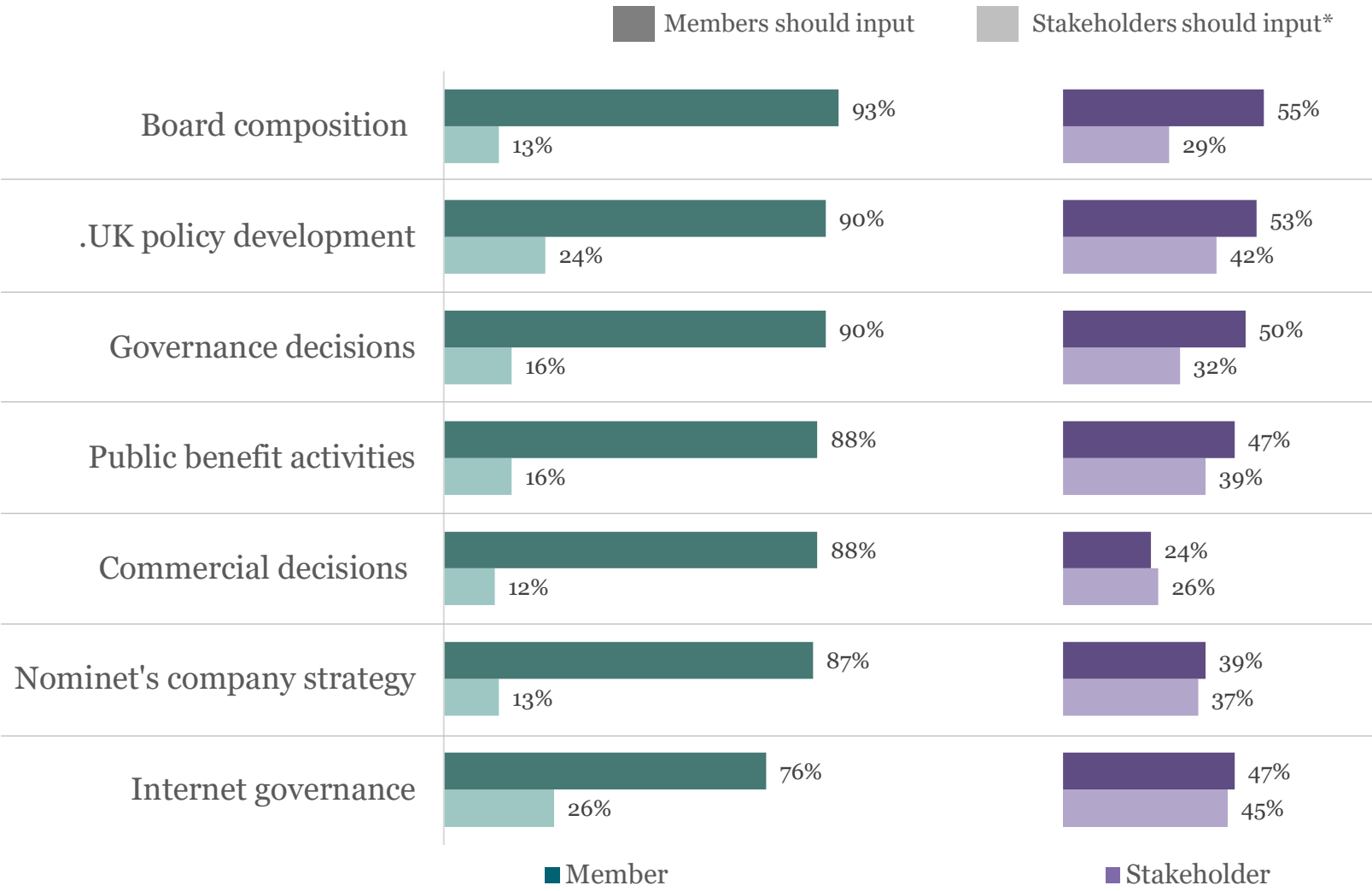
To facilitate effective collaboration, more than three in five Members would like Nominet to relaunch a Members forum

Out of the actions we tested, relaunching a Member forum ranked fourth amongst Members, with 63% saying they would like Nominet to do this*. Members comment that they would like the forum to be well moderated with a respectful tone, to allow for open discussion and to have involvement from Nominet executives and Employees. Active participation and responses to concerns raised from Nominet is deemed to be essential to encourage participation and reassure Members that they are being listened to.

Members feel that the proposed forum should not just be used to raise concerns, but also to share knowledge and ideas. Full transparency on inclusivity and moderation is also essential.



The majority of Members would like to have an input into all major aspects of the future direction of Nominet



Given their view of Nominet as a member organisation, Members generally do not think that other Stakeholders should have a say in key Nominet decisions. The slight exception to this is .UK policy development and internet governance, where a quarter of Members think Stakeholders should have a say (24% and 26% respectively).

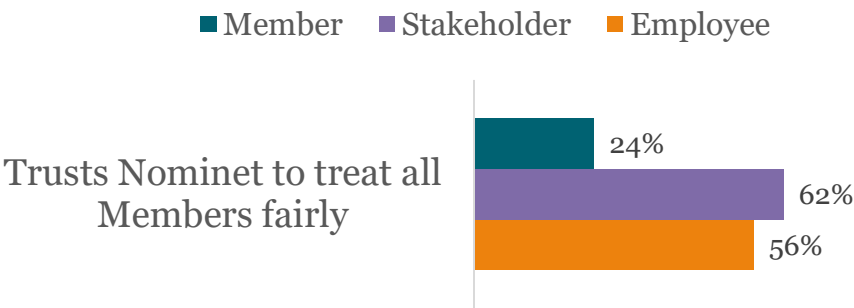
While other Stakeholders are less likely to say that Members should have an input on all decision areas, they are most likely to agree that Members should have a say on Board composition, .UK policy development and governance decisions.

A concern raised by some Members is a sense that different Member groups are treated unequally

There is a view that Nominet’s current structure and outreach favours Members from larger organisations. Some observe that trust has primarily been lost between the smaller Members and the Board, and would like to see the Board take into account a wider range of views, acting in *all* Members’ interests in order to restore their trust.

Some Members comment that there is an unlevel playing field, with smaller organisations facing larger overheads, and being more greatly affected by price increases than larger domain name owners. Furthermore there is a view that the current governance structure is more favourable to Nominet’s bigger Members.

One solution put forward by Members is more representation for smaller Members on the Board, while others suggest that a ‘one Member one vote’ system would be more fair. While there is less broad agreement on these ideas, there is a consensus that Nominet should be engaging with all types of registrar on a regular and open basis to ensure a constructive relationship going forward.



“The organisation has neglected small Members for many years. It should reconsider the relationship it has with community Members and recognize that many long term Members feel disenfranchised.”
Member, Other

“Nominet doesn't trust it's smaller Members and appears to try and workaround [their concerns]. It cares more about selling domains and has a closer relationship with the larger registrars.”
Member, Retail

“I'd like to see more representation of small companies Members on the Board, perhaps in the style of the recent UKRAC terms.”
Member, Domain Investor

To address this, some Members and Stakeholders comment that Nominet could learn from organisations in a similar position

Respondents suggest that Nominet could learn lessons from organisations who face similar challenges mediating different Member and Stakeholder groups with varying interests, for example LINX or ETSI.

Members would be open to having conversations with Nominet to advise where other organisations have certain strengths, and this conversation can work both ways with Nominet sharing their own operational strong points, leading to a more collaborative approach.

“Perhaps look at how similar Member led organisations achieve inclusion of Member voice and influence on strategy.”

Member, Brand Protection

3.3 Nominet's remit and strategy



Generally, all audiences believe that Nominet's principal role should be running the UK domain registry

“Nominet has one core reason for existing: to operate the UK registry in the best interests of all the people who rely on and benefit from the domain name system.”

Member, Other

While there is a broad consensus that managing a stable and secure registry should be Nominet's primary focus, there was a **lack of consensus amongst the different audiences as to what role Nominet should play beyond this.**

As Nominet's role has developed to include elements such as providing protective DNS to the UK Government, some of both Members and Stakeholders comment that this is right and logical, whereas this has led to a view amongst others that Nominet should **run a more lean operation** that focuses solely on running the registry.

Broadly, both Members and Stakeholders comment that Nominet should **outline a clear plan for their purpose going forward**, communicate what their remit is for the various responsibilities and projects they work on, and keep to this.



Protecting the UK domain space is a higher priority for both Stakeholders and Employees when compared to Members

Member		Stakeholder		Employee	
Act as registry - only	49%	Protect .UK domain space	50%	Act as registry - with other responsibilities	71%
Act as registry - with other responsibilities	23%	Act as registry - with other responsibilities	38%	Protect .UK domain space	47%
Profit for purpose	15%	Profit for purpose	31%	Profit for purpose	47%
Member input/act in interests of Members	15%	Bring stability	19%	Diversify outside remit	19%
Protect .UK domain space	9%	Act as registry - only	6%	Other	8%
Not for profit	9%	Diversify outside remit	6%	Act as registry - only	5%
Other	6%				

Don't know and options below 5% excluded*

There are differing views on Nominet’s general purpose, both between groups but also across Membership. A significant proportion of Members would like Nominet to act solely as a registry, and to remove all other responsibilities. Behind this, around a quarter of Members (23%) say that Nominet should act as a registry along with other responsibilities. Stakeholders are more likely to mention aspects that relate to its work such as providing protective DNS services, while Employees are more likely to recognise the need for Nominet to diversify.

The challenge for Nominet will be to bring together differing views along in a constructive way, whatever the future direction looks like. Members felt this can be done by Nominet communicating the aims and reason behind decisions more openly and more clearly, being more transparent and by allowing increased Member input at every stage.

While some Members and Stakeholders recognise the need for other responsibilities outside of running the .UK registry, there is consensus that Nominet should not be a commercial entity

Some Members comment that Nominet's sole aim should be to run the registry as this was the original purpose of the organisation at its inception. However, others say that a body in Nominet's unique position, with an oversight of the .UK cyberspace, a deep understanding of its technical challenges, and a large amount of available funds, should have responsibility to take on other roles including protective services, and using its expertise to make improvements for the wider public.

Generally, there tends to be more support for Nominet's cyber security work for the UK Government, than involvement in private entities such as CyGlass.

Some comment on the need for Nominet to diversify in order to secure long term funding to be able to invest in .UK infrastructure should the value of domain names reduce. However, there is a broad agreement that while diversification may be needed, Nominet should not be a commercial entity, rather using any profit for the betterment of Members or the wider UK internet community. There is a feeling amongst some Members and Stakeholders that Nominet's approach to investments has changed to become more focused on profit generation, rather than supporting Members or the public.

"The Nominet registry should be the best in breed of country code registries, meaning that it operates smoothly and securely. We rely upon it and best practice means that it should be investing a lot of money in its infrastructure and in its systems."

Stakeholder, Other

"I don't have an interest in private companies making lots of money out of registration of domain names. I care about the stability of the internet and the good regulation of the internet."

Stakeholder, DRS Expert

"If you're operating in that [registry] capacity, you are influencing the whole of the landscape. There's a lot of rigour and quality assurance that comes with being a registry. For someone who has that oversight, and understands that landscape, I think they do have a philanthropic role, to support things that are going to improve that landscape for everyone."

Stakeholder, Charity

"I think the main focus should be on running the registry, everything that Nominet considers as core services. I don't mind them running a back-end provider that makes sense, why shouldn't they be doing it? But I don't think that Nominet should be turned into a commercial enterprise."

Member, Other

Many recognise that Nominet's changing responsibilities could cause an issue for some Members, and that an open, transparent approach will be best to ensure a constructive relationship

Many observe that Nominet's role has shifted over time, and that this poses a significant challenge as naturally many Members will expect a more lean and focused operation. Therefore, both Members and Stakeholders comment that Nominet has a responsibility to better inform Members as to why these new responsibilities, in particular cyber security, diversification and social impact programmes, are important, if they are going to become more than "just a registry".

Those we spoke to feel that in order to best support Members through these changes, an open, transparent approach by Nominet is needed. This includes providing an avenue for all parties to raise criticisms when issues arise, Nominet being up front with decisions and justifying any changes to its general purpose.

A minority of those we spoke to suggested that the current Membership model has become inappropriate for Nominet's changing role, and that its domain registry and public benefit arms could be decoupled.

"Nominet is a complex being, it's not simply going to serve the needs of just registrars. There's public interest, charitable causes, cyber security which will continue to play an increasing role moving forward, that's just the reality of things. But, allowing registrars to voice concerns directly, either on the board or directed to it, I think would be helpful."

Member, Other

"It's being honest and transparent about what you're doing. If you're upfront, and you own up to your faults and your flaws when they're pointed out to you, then there's nothing that they can go after. It's when you're not answering the question that you're asked, being disingenuous about how you handle it [that problems occur]."

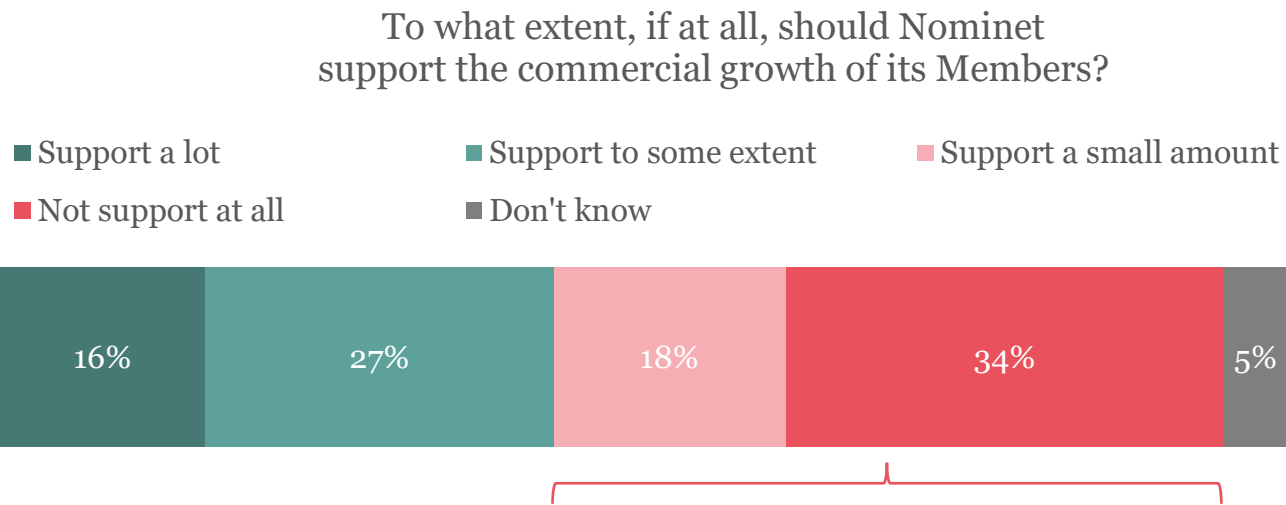
Member, Retail

"[Nominet's increasing responsibilities] are going to pose a real problem because Nominet needs to pass on knowledge that domain registry business is now so much more than just providing this technical service. The registrar has a very clear interest in keeping that very tight and simple, but Nominet can't keep up that position of a registry only providing a technical service anymore, it's obsolete. It doesn't exist anymore."

Stakeholders, Tech Peers

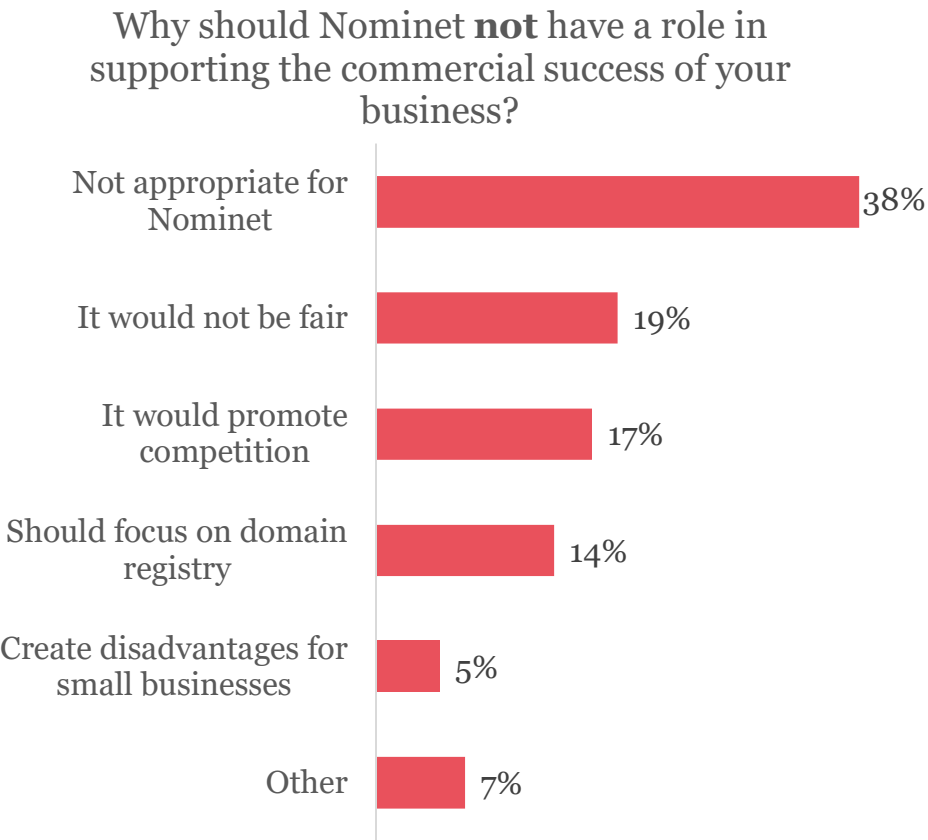
The majority of Members believe Nominet’s role should not include providing support for the commercial growth of its Members

This is primarily because they see this as falling outside Nominet’s role as a registry operator, or that they fear it would result in unequal support for all Members.



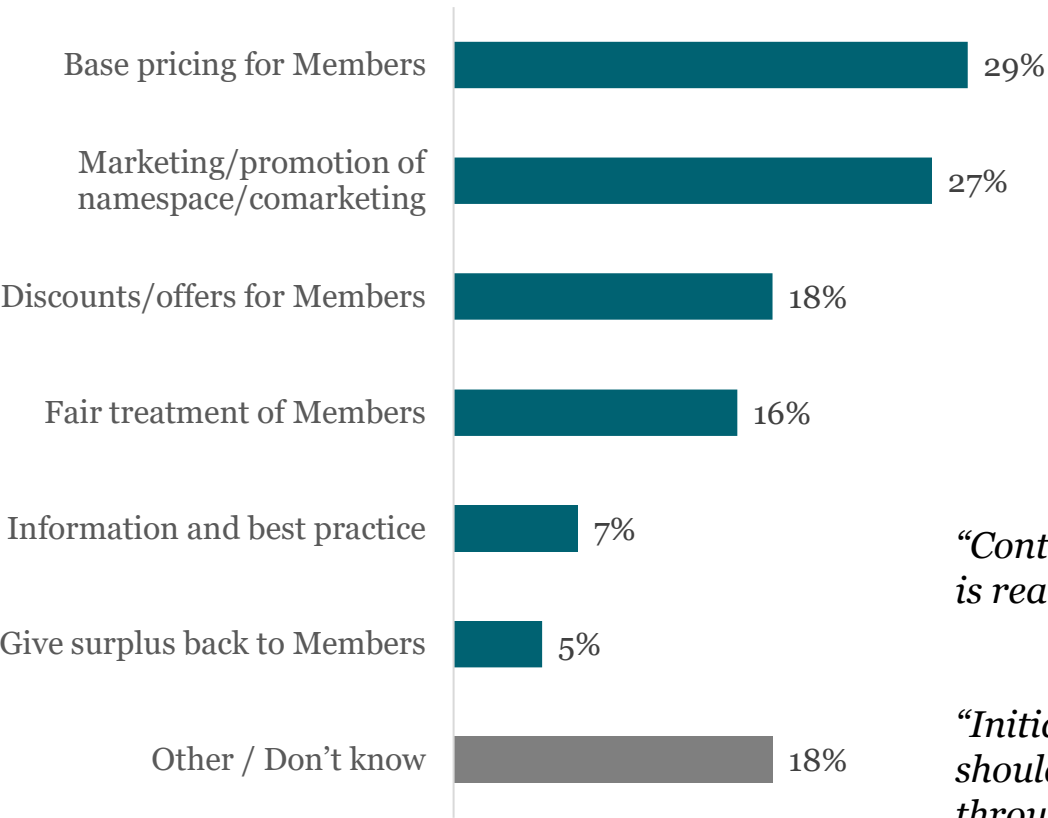
“Nominet needs to be impartial. Members often compete against each other, therefore supporting commercial success could interfere with competition law.”
Member, Domain Investor

“It is a registry not business advisor, other places offer these things.”
Member, Brand Protection



Those who would like Nominet to support their commercial success would primarily like to see better pricing and domain promotion

What role would you like to see Nominet play in helping to support the commercial success of your business?



Three in ten Members that would like Nominet to support commercial success of businesses (29%) say that simply lowering domain name pricing would be the best way for Nominet to offer support. A similar proportion of Members would like to see Nominet use its position to better promote the .UK namespace (27%).

These are seen as the areas that Nominet has the most expertise to provide support, while also being appropriate for an organisation in its unique position.

The argument that Nominet should support Members through lower pricing is often in line with the belief that Nominet should run a more lean operation focused on registry only.

“Continue to offer support and promotional resources for Members, the support is really key for a well run and stable registry.”

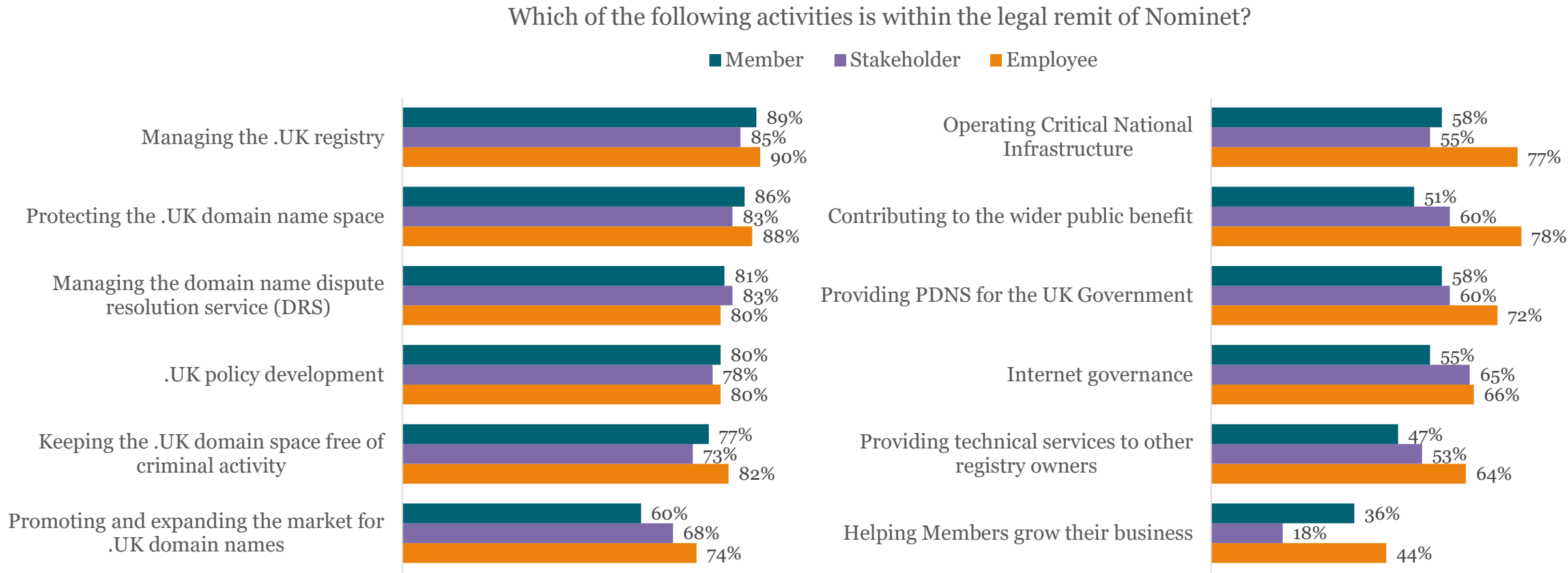
Member, Retail

“Initiatives to support the growth and popularity of the name space. Nominet should have a dedicated team there to provide support for partner growth through a shared service concept.”

Member, Domain Investor

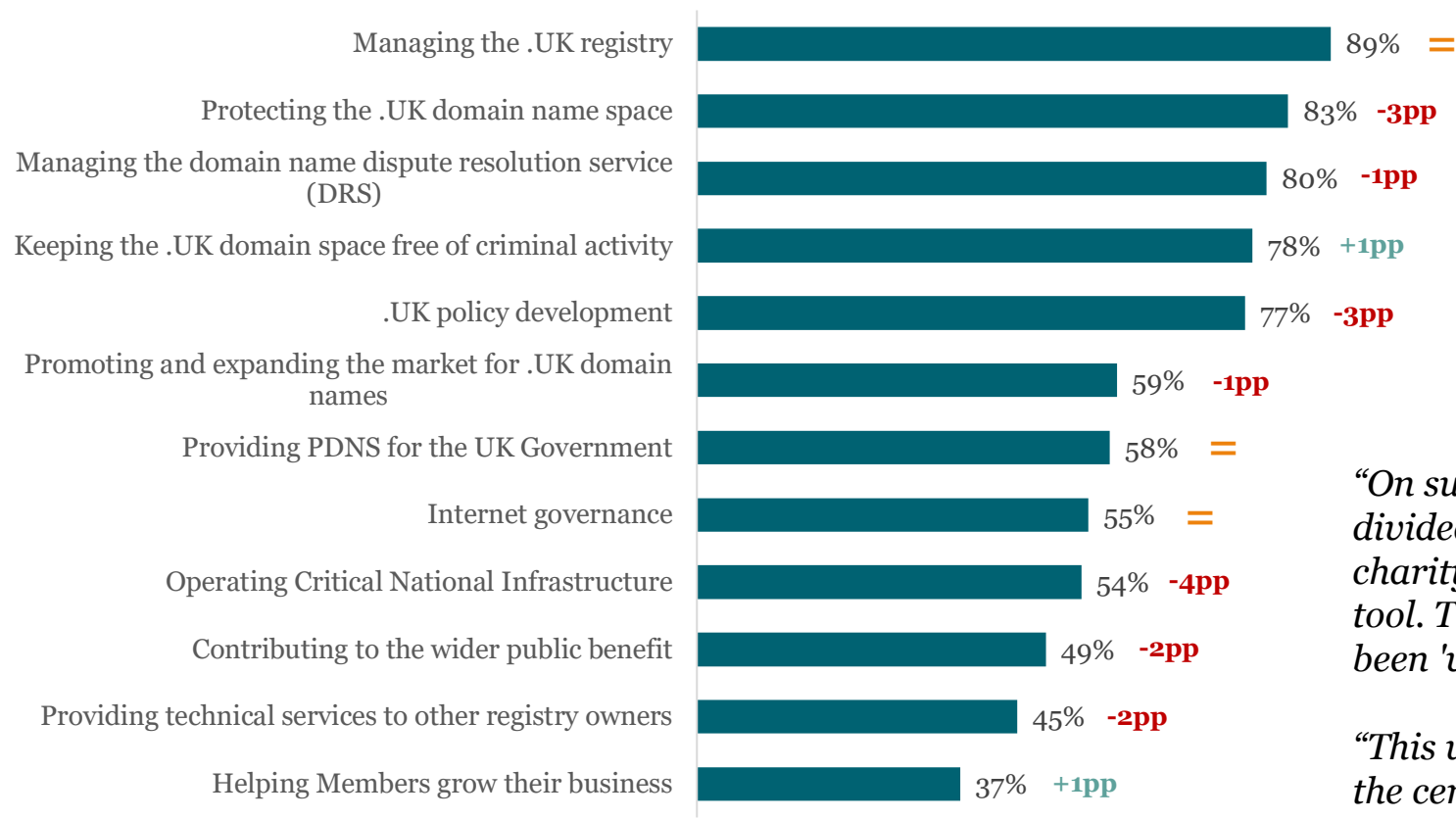
Amongst Members, views on what Nominet’s Memorandum and Articles of Association currently covers differ

Members are less likely to think that supporting their own commercial growth, public benefit activities, PDNS, and general internet governance is within Nominet’s remit under the Memorandum and Articles of Association. Generally, Members feel that Nominet’s articles outline a more lean operation, relating to the stable and secure running of the registry.



Members are broadly aligned on what they think is currently, and what should be, within Nominet’s legal remit

Which of the following activities should be within the legal remit of Nominet?



Members are 4 percentage points less likely to say that operating CNI should be in Nominet’s legal remit than they are to say that it is currently (54% vs 58% respectively).

Similarly, they are 3 percentage points less likely to say that protecting the .UK domain name space, and .UK policy development should fall under Nominet’s Memorandum and Articles of Association.

“On support for charities with excess revenues, there are divided opinions on this. Nominet does not exist to be a charity. Nor should charity be used as a PR/Marketing tool. There is a worry at times that Nominet might have been ‘virtue signalling’.”

“This work should be peripheral in nature, compared to the central public benefit of Nominet doing what it exists for: maintaining and operating the UK registry.”

Member, Other

3.4 Governance and use of reserves



There is limited consensus with regards to any major governance changes

“[Nominet should focus on] putting in place governance and communication structures to support Members.”

Member, Corporate

One of the key areas discussed as part of the listening process was Nominet’s governance. **There is little consensus** on any wholesale changes, however there were a range of suggestions that Members, Stakeholders and Employees put forward to address their concerns.

Some Members suggested changing the voting rights to be more in favour of smaller Members, some called for more Member involvement on the Nominet Board, while others would like to see changes to the Board composition. However, none of these receive support from a significant majority.

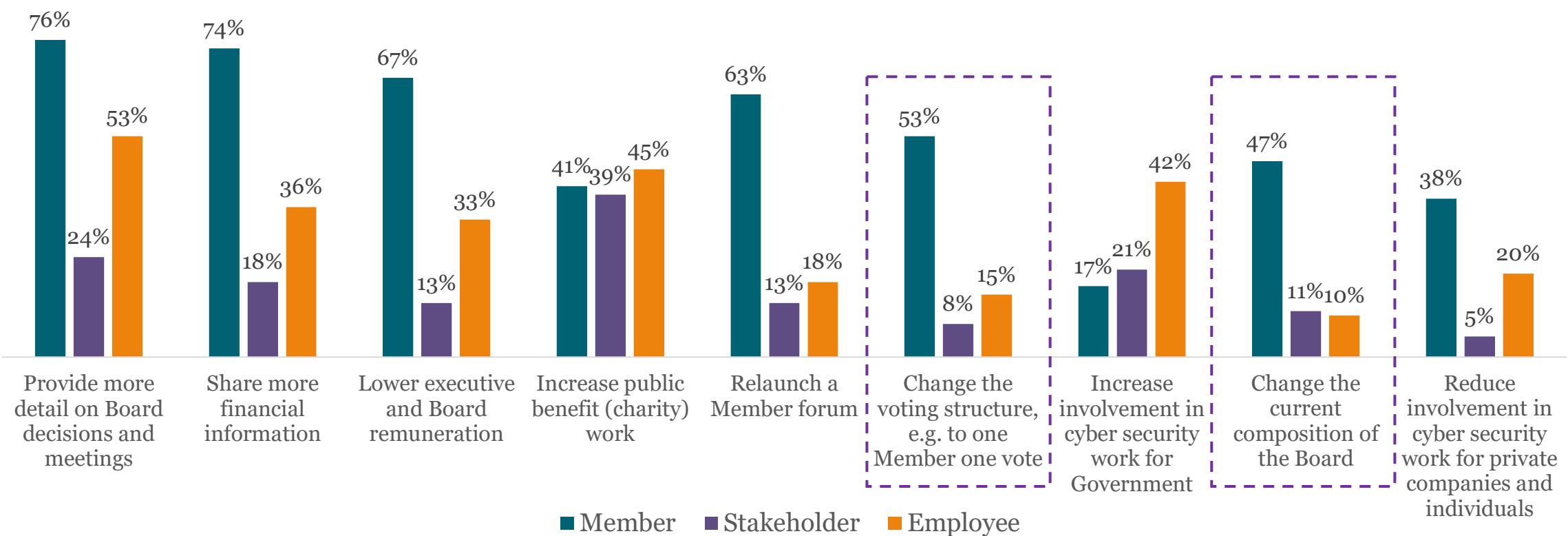
The most common concerns amongst both Members and Stakeholders were that the **current governance structure is not as stable as they thought previously**, citing the disagreement that led to the EGM. Therefore many from all audiences comment that any structural change should have the primary aim of **shoring up the stability and protecting the .UK registry**.



Out of the actions tested, Members are most likely to desire greater transparency, and changes to Board remuneration

A call for more transparency also rates highly amongst Stakeholders and Employees. Around half of Members would like Nominet to make a change to the voting structure (53%), or to change the current composition of the board (47%).

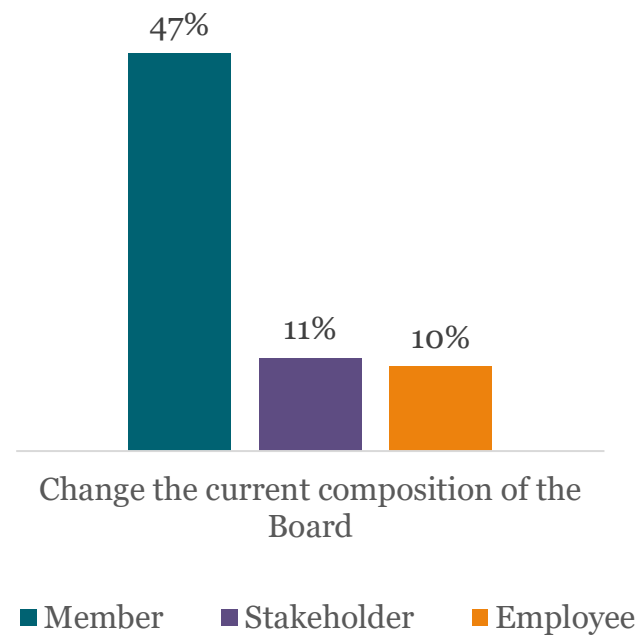
Which, if any, of the following would you like Nominet to do?



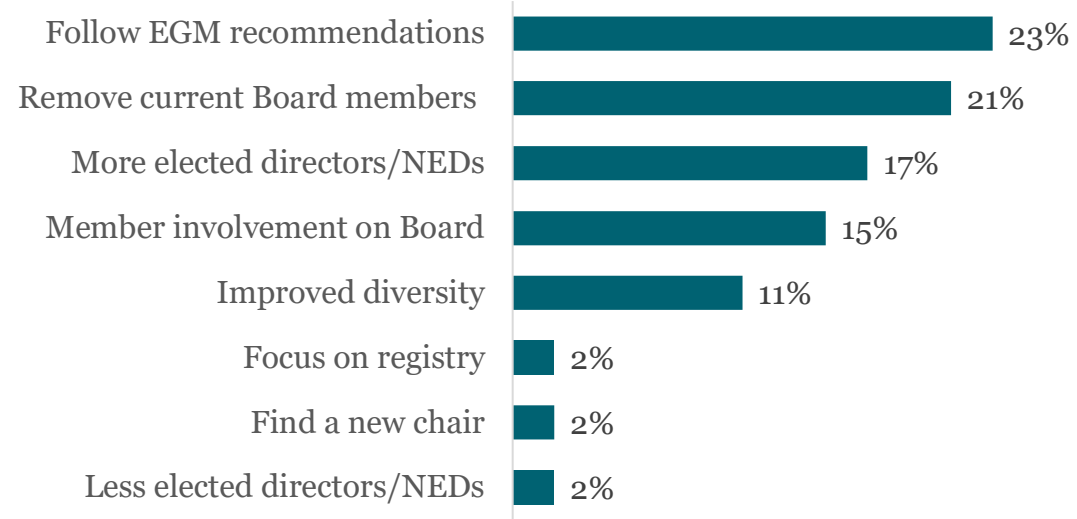
Options that received more than 25% at an overall level included*

Of those who would like to see Nominet make changes to the Board composition, most say they would like to Nominet to follow up on the recommendations given at the EGM

Which, if any, of the following would you like Nominet to do?



What changes would you like to see to the Board composition?



“Remove those who were explicitly named within the EGM for removal. Not following this Resolution shows a disingenuous culture.”

Member, Retail

“[I would like to see an] executive along the lines voted for by the Membership at the EGM.”

Member, Corporate

Several suggestions were made on governance reform, however, there was no clear consensus from the data collected

Members, Stakeholders and Employees put forward several suggestion for ways that they feel Nominet’s governance structure should be revised, largely relating to Board composition. These include:

- More Member involvement either electing or approving Board Members, or actual Member representation on the Board;
- The removal of Board Members as voted for by Members in the EGM;
- A move to “One Member one vote”, or a hybrid system that reduces the favourability of larger Members;
- Fewer non-elected directors (NEDs);
- More regular conversations between NEDs and Members.

Some Members commented that a move towards a one Member one vote system would be a more fair approach, giving smaller Members a larger voice. However, not all agreed, with other Members arguing that this would not be effective. All tend to agree that allowing Members to vote in some way on more important decisions, and increasing the transparency around the process would be a useful next step for Nominet.

“I would prefer more of the NEDs to be from different parts of the market. You also need more UK infrastructure directors, like LINX for example.”
Member, Retail

“Member representation on the Board is important and should reflect the wide and diverse Membership. Representation or influence should not be skewed in favour of the larger Member organisations and any future voting system / allocation of votes must be seen to be fair.”
Member, Brand Protection

“All appointed directors should be subject to reappointment every three years, which includes Members’ approval of Directors’ long-term service contracts. Remove appointed Non-executive directors and increase number of Member elected Non-executive directors.”
Member, Domain Investor

“The voting structure should be simplified but perhaps one Member one vote is a bit too far. It should certainly be a lot more transparent than it is at the moment.”
Member, Other

“There needs to be a [voting] structure that gives smaller Members more of a voice, but that at the same time, doesn’t allow for people to register as Members just to cause problems or attempt a takeover, which one Member one vote could.”
Member, Retail

There are differences between Members and Employees' views on the best use of Nominet's profits

Around half the Members that responded tend towards the view that Nominet should run at the lowest possible cost (47%), rather than making a profit to spend on public benefit or cyber security activities (26%).

Similarly around half (52%) think that Nominet should be an efficient administrator of the registry systems, investing *only* when necessary, as opposed to investing regularly in new technology and innovation (25%).

Members are more conclusive in their view that if domain name revenues decline, Nominet's revenues and reserves should decline (72%) as opposed to the view that if domain name revenues decline, Nominet should diversify so that it can sustain its revenues and reserves regardless of domain name revenue (10%).

Going forward, Members want to see more open communication over decisions on where profits are spent, and scope for Members' to share their views on both public benefit and commercial diversification.

The vast majority of Employees feel that Nominet should make a surplus to invest in the .UK infrastructure and public benefit activities (91%) over running at the lowest cost possible (1%).

Seven in ten (72%) say that if domain name revenues decline, Nominet should diversify so that it can sustain its revenues and reserves regardless of domain name revenue, conversely 11% say that if domain name revenues decline, Nominet's revenues and reserves should too.

3.5 Social impact programmes



Programmes focusing on technology and young people are seen as the most positive way for Nominet to contribute to society

“Supporting activities that have a link to technology related charity work, support of children, internet safety, cyber security, for the good of the UK and it's citizens.”

Member, Retail

Amongst those aware there is a relatively high level of satisfaction for Nominet’s charitable programmes, in particular the **Countering Online Harm tech innovation fund and accelerated mobile capacity for the Samaritans**.

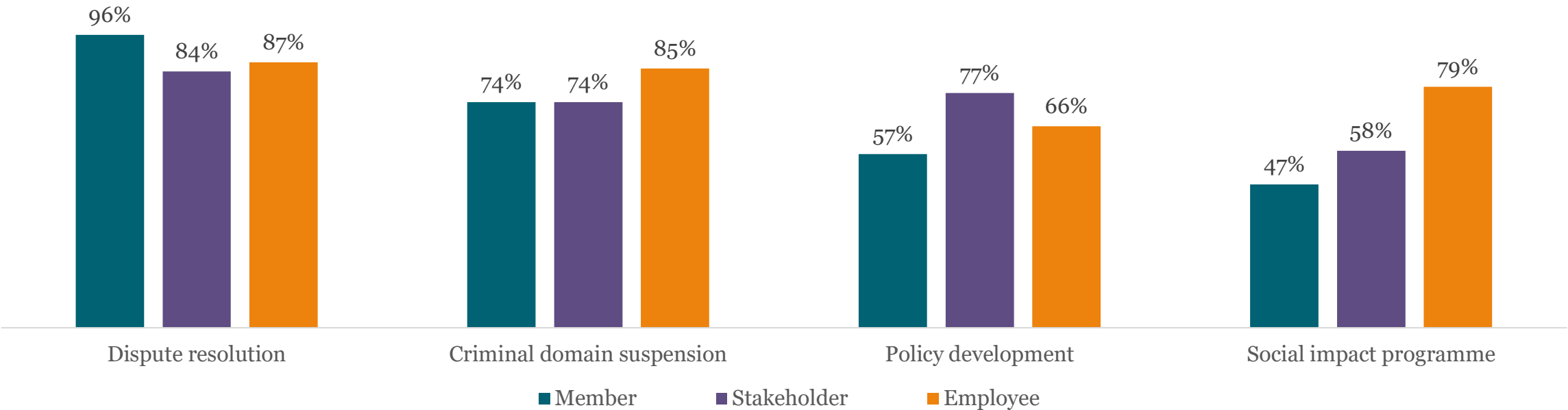
The majority of those we engaged with agree that if Nominet are to fund social impact programmes as part of their wider responsibilities to the UK public, they would like to see Nominet contribute through funding social impact programmes **relevant to the organisation**, where it is best placed to impact. However, as discussed a proportion of Members would prefer that Nominet do not fund these programmes, **limiting their remit** to just running the registry.

Some Members raised concerns that Nominet’s charitable activities **could have been communicated to them more effectively**. They comment that funding decisions have not been well justified to Members, and feel that some figures have been misrepresented.



Of Nominet’s public benefit activities, social impact programmes have the lowest awareness amongst Members

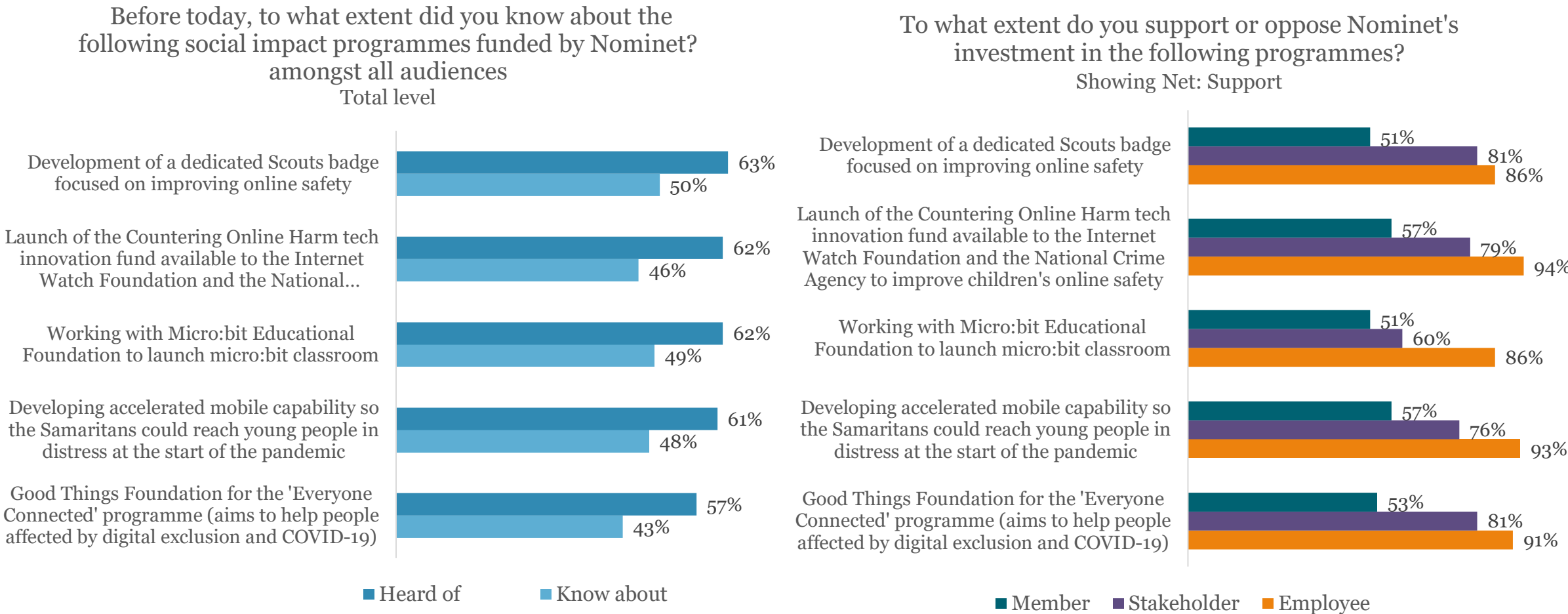
Before today, to what extent, if at all, did you know about the following public benefit activities carried out by Nominet?
Showing Net: Know



Levels of awareness varies between stakeholder type; less than half (47%) of Members know that Nominet carry out social impact programmes, but this rises to four in five (79%) amongst Employees. Awareness is higher amongst all audiences for Nominet’s activities in dispute resolution and criminal domain suspension.

However, there is a relatively high level of support for Nominet's investment in social impact programmes amongst those aware

Support is particularly high for programmes focussing on youth safety and engagement. Aligning with awareness levels, satisfaction is highest amongst Employees and lowest amongst Members.



While social impact programmes are seen as having merit, there is demand for investment to be focussed in areas of Nominet's expertise

There is a view held by some Members and Stakeholders that Nominet's investment in social impact programmes can have a positive impact in relation to supporting the wider internet community and the UK public. This group feel that Nominet has a responsibility to be involved in these programmes, due to its position in the sector.

There is a general consensus amongst those interviewed if Nominet is funding social impact programmes, they should be relevant to the organisation and where they have unique expertise. In particular, there is demand for Nominet to invest in programmes focussing on technology and youth internet safety. Programmes which were particularly praised were the acceleration of mobile capability for the Samaritans and the launch of the Countering Online Harm Tech Innovation Fund.

In addition to its positive social impact, there is some enthusiasm amongst Members and Stakeholders for Nominet to be involved in these social impact programmes to raise its profile.

"I like the idea of increasing public benefit if it is properly defined with objectives that can be measured."
Stakeholder, Customer

"Nominet need to contribute and feedback into the area that they regulate to make it a much more positive place, particularly for the next generation coming through"

Member, Other

"Nominet does have a public responsibility in terms of acting in its UK domain name registry. It's not a mad leap to move from that public role into supporting some of the aspects within that ecosystem. It's changing the landscape for the better. Even from a promotional or reputational point of view for the organization. Raising its philanthropic profile is really important."
Stakeholder, Charity

There is also a call for Nominet to be more transparent in its rationale behind funding for social impact programmes

Amongst those aware of Nominet's social impact programmes, there has been concern about them being politically motivated and that this has been used as a communications tool to generate positive headlines and PR content for Nominet. There is a perception among some Members that some of the communications of the outcomes of Nominet's charitable work have been misrepresented at times.

Transparency is important for Members to counter scepticism around social programmes. There is a call for Nominet to explain its public benefit decisions and be transparent about how they feel the funds would be beneficial, and who the beneficiaries would be. This would reduce scepticism, but also be beneficial in promoting the good work which Nominet does in this sphere.

"It's difficult to know how much of it is going to unknown costs, including spiraling salaries and how much of it has gone into the actual UK internet projects and how much of it is going to worthwhile projects and not just projects that are done politically. We would like to see projects that don't have a political response to it that also get funded"

Stakeholder, Legal

"[I'd like to see more financial reporting and meeting reports across the board]. When was the last time I got a set of accounts that I could actually understand? I've never had a set. I don't even know where the charity money's coming from."

Member, Retail

3.6 Commercial investments



Nominet's approach to diversification has caused frustration; an open and focused approach will be appreciated

"Investments over recent years have given this feel of a 'conspiracy' taking place behind closed doors. Unfortunately the lack of transparency fuels this narrative."

Member, Other

Many raised concerns over how Nominet's attitude to commercial investments have developed over recent years, from initially being focused on benefiting Members and the public, **to a more commercial focus**. There is a perception that the aims of this change are increased growth and executive remuneration.

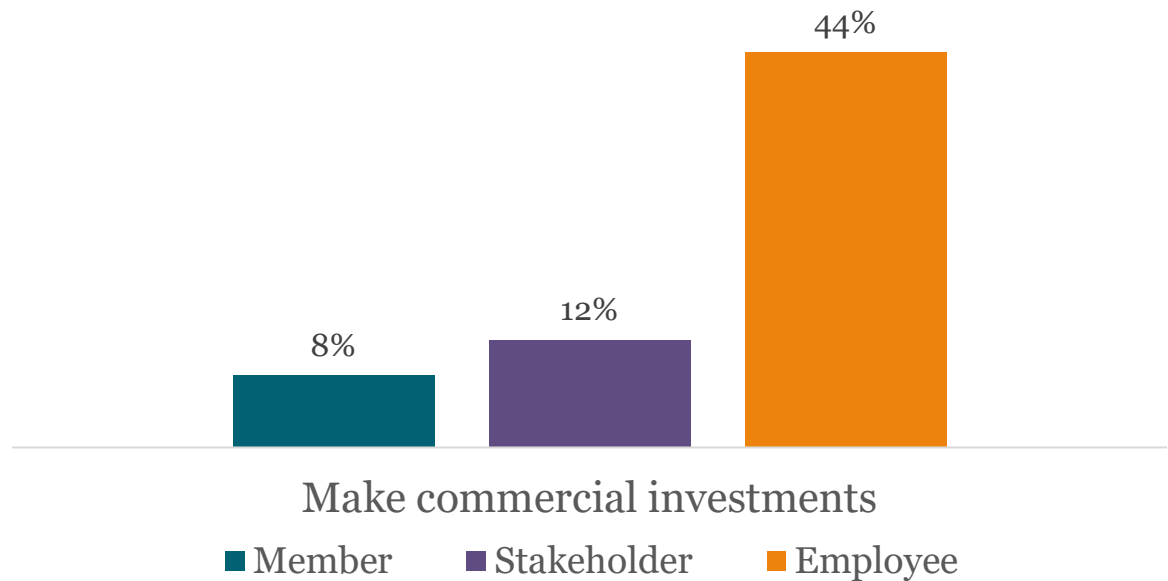
One challenge is that some Members have a firm belief that domain name prices and revenue are stable, and therefore do not see a need for diversification. Conversely, others expect domain name revenue to decrease over time, meaning Nominet would need to secure alternative funding to manage both the registry and its other obligations.

Generally, there is **agreement that Nominet "should diversify enough"**, however there is a varied view on where this boundary lies. Ultimately, there is a view that Nominet could do a better job of communicating the justification of commercial decisions, where appropriate, and **establish a more clear strategy** in this area.



Generally, there is a lack of confidence in Nominet to make commercial investments effectively

How much confidence do you have in Nominet to do each of the following effectively?
Showing Net: Trust



Out of the activities tested, all audiences are least likely to have confidence in Nominet to make commercial investments. This lack of confidence, in part, stems from their view that there have been too many unsuccessful investments made by Nominet, in electric vehicles and TV White Space.

Scepticism also stems from a perceived lack of Member input, and transparency around commercial investment decisions. This has led to the view that the purpose of Nominet’s diversification portfolio has shifted from intending to benefit its Members and the public, to being used to increase Executive pay and grow the business in areas that some Members disagree with.

“I think part of the problem is how they handled some of the stuff around the transparency, around the sourcing, around the resources they were putting into that. It made it easier for people to attack Nominet, saying, 'You're investing in all these things, but we're all losing loads of money.'”

Member, Retail

Nominet's approach to diversification has caused frustration amongst both Members and Stakeholders and they are split on its merits

The deep dive interviews revealed there is a view that Nominet needs to diversify its offering to some extent.

The case for diversifying Nominet's interests is supported by the need for reserves to fund its core registry role. Some Members and Stakeholders support the generation of additional funds to support the longevity of the business, protecting Nominet in the event of a depletion of funds in the future.

However, there are also a number of Members and Stakeholders who have been unhappy with Nominet's attitude towards commercial investments because they perceive the domain name revenue to be stable, and therefore, do not perceive any need to diversify its investments.

Many Members and Stakeholders feel that while Nominet can profit from some investments which better the internet space, this should not become its primary aim. They are clear that if diversification occurs, this must not be at the cost of Members or Stakeholders' interests.

"They should try to make as little money as they need. Any business needs reserves. They should make enough money, so we never have to worry about it. Currently, they do that. They have plenty of reserves."

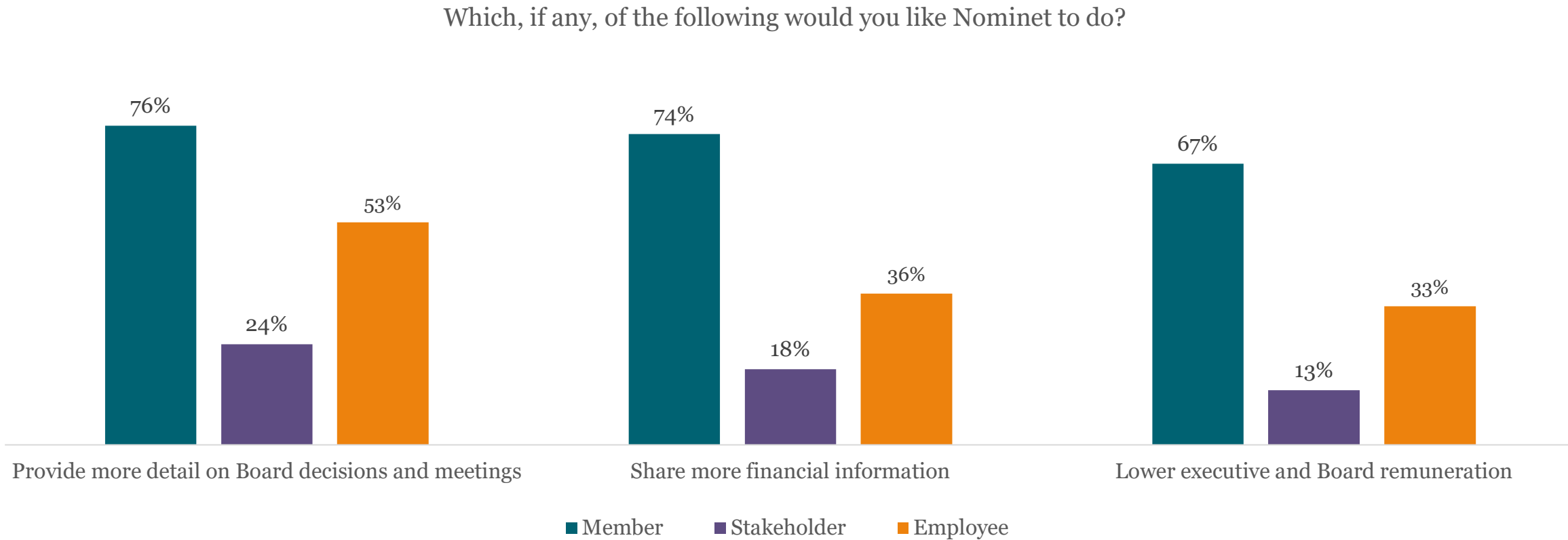
Member, Other

"If the board comes up with an agreement with the Membership saying, 'This is what we want to fund, and this is the business case' then that makes sense. If you have the Membership is saying, 'That makes sense, please do that'. But just accruing money for the sake of it is not the right way."

"If we want to set it up as a private company that has commercial shareholders, then we need to change the way Nominet is run and we definitely need to change the constitution."

Member, Retail

There is a call for Nominet to improve its financial transparency around Nominet’s commercial investments



There is demand for Nominet to be more transparent in its decision making. Three quarters (76%) would like Nominet to provide more detail on Board decisions and meetings or share more financial information (74%). Aligning with perceptions that profits mainly benefit Board Members, two in three want Nominet to lower executive and Board remuneration (67%).

The desire for increased financial transparency, particularly relating to diversification, is supported by feedback from deep dive interviews

Scepticism over Nominet's commercial investments, in part, stems from a lack of financial transparency. There is confusion over the destination of the profits from the commercial investments and who the funds are benefitting.

This lack of awareness has led to a perception that the profit from commercial investments is being used to supplement Executive's remuneration. This contrasts from the historical view that profits from these commercial projects would benefit its Members and the public. Members in particular comment that there should be more communication on desired outcomes in order to reduce scepticism and break the perception that Nominet is increasingly profit driven.

In addition, Stakeholders suggest that there should be more educational communication to inform Members of the reasons behind certain commercial decisions, including private investments and involvement in cyber security.

"Some of the cyber defence work is a bit outside the box, it's probably not the worst idea, it's just not the most logical way to go. I think part of the problem is how they handled the transparency, around the sourcing, around the resources they were putting into that'."

Member, Retail

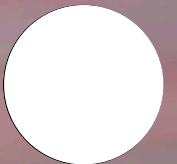
"If [other investment options] were discussed, where as a Member can I find out about that? Why have they decided against it? If don't have information telling me why it's not a good idea, what I will think, obviously, is, 'They didn't think about it.'"

Member, Retail

"There has to be some educational level content saying, 'we're going to be involved in cyber security, here's why' and explain that Nominet's responsibility. I think most people will get it."

Member, Other

4.0 Conclusions



Conclusions (1/3)

(1) Trust

1.1 – Transparency is a key issue impacting trust

The consultation and deep dive depth interviews revealed that Members and Stakeholders want Nominet to focus on re-building their trust in them. To do this, there are calls for more transparency in decision making, particularly in relation to explaining and justifying the allocation of its funds, and explaining why a certain decision is the best use of money.

1.2 – Establish and communicate a clear strategy

Specifically, both Members and Stakeholders want to see Nominet develop and explain an organisation strategy for the use of its profits. They want justification and transparency surrounding this to re-assure those who are against the principle of Nominet's profit making. They also highlight how improving transparency will avoid unnecessary suspicion, as this would remove any concern among Members and Stakeholders that important information is being hidden.

1.3 – Open a regular, two-way dialogue between Nominet and Members

There is a consensus that a regular, open dialogue would benefit both parties. Members would like more opportunities to communicate with the Nominet executive, and comment that this would improve the relationship, making them more likely to trust decision making. A key element of this is Nominet keeping Members informed on what actions they are taking. However, many feel that this alone is not enough, and that there should also be more opportunities for Members to respond and engage in a two-way conversation, with their views being listened to and taken into account.

Conclusions (2/3)

(2) Nominet's remit

2.1 – Nominet's registry function should remain its primary focus

Outside of this, opinions are mixed on the extent to which Nominet's remit should stretch, however, there is broad consensus that if Nominet's interests are expanded, then these activities should be limited to areas relating to Nominet's work. There is more support for Nominet's work for the UK Government, such as providing protective DNS services, as opposed to private sector investment. This is seen as a more important contribution to the UK public benefit.

2.2 – Transparency would improve perceptions on Nominet's social impact programmes

Most are satisfied with Nominet having a philanthropic role, in some form. However, there is a clear call for increased financial transparency in its public benefit activities, specifically social impact programmes. This is particularly important to change perceptions that Nominet's work involvement in social impact programmes is motivated by generating positive press.

2.3 – Some are concerned about Nominet becoming too commercially focused

There has been discontent over Nominet's attitude to commercial investment in recent years. The lack of financial transparency about the allocation of funds has led to Nominet being perceived by Members as too commercially focussed, with limited benefit to Members. They comment that they would appreciate more communication either before or after decisions are made, while some Members would like to be able to have more of an input into conversations around diversification.

Conclusions (3/3)

(3) Governance

3.1 – There was no clear preference for any specific governance changes

The feedback gathered across the listening process demonstrated that while many have a view on Nominet's governance, there is no consensus for any specific governance change. The views that received the highest level of agreement among Members are that there should be more opportunities for them to input into the future direction of Nominet, and that Nominet should follow recommendations from the EGM in order to avoid any further disruption. Some Stakeholders raised concerns that any continued disruption will ultimately endanger the stability of the registry, and Nominet's role as part of the UK's CNI.

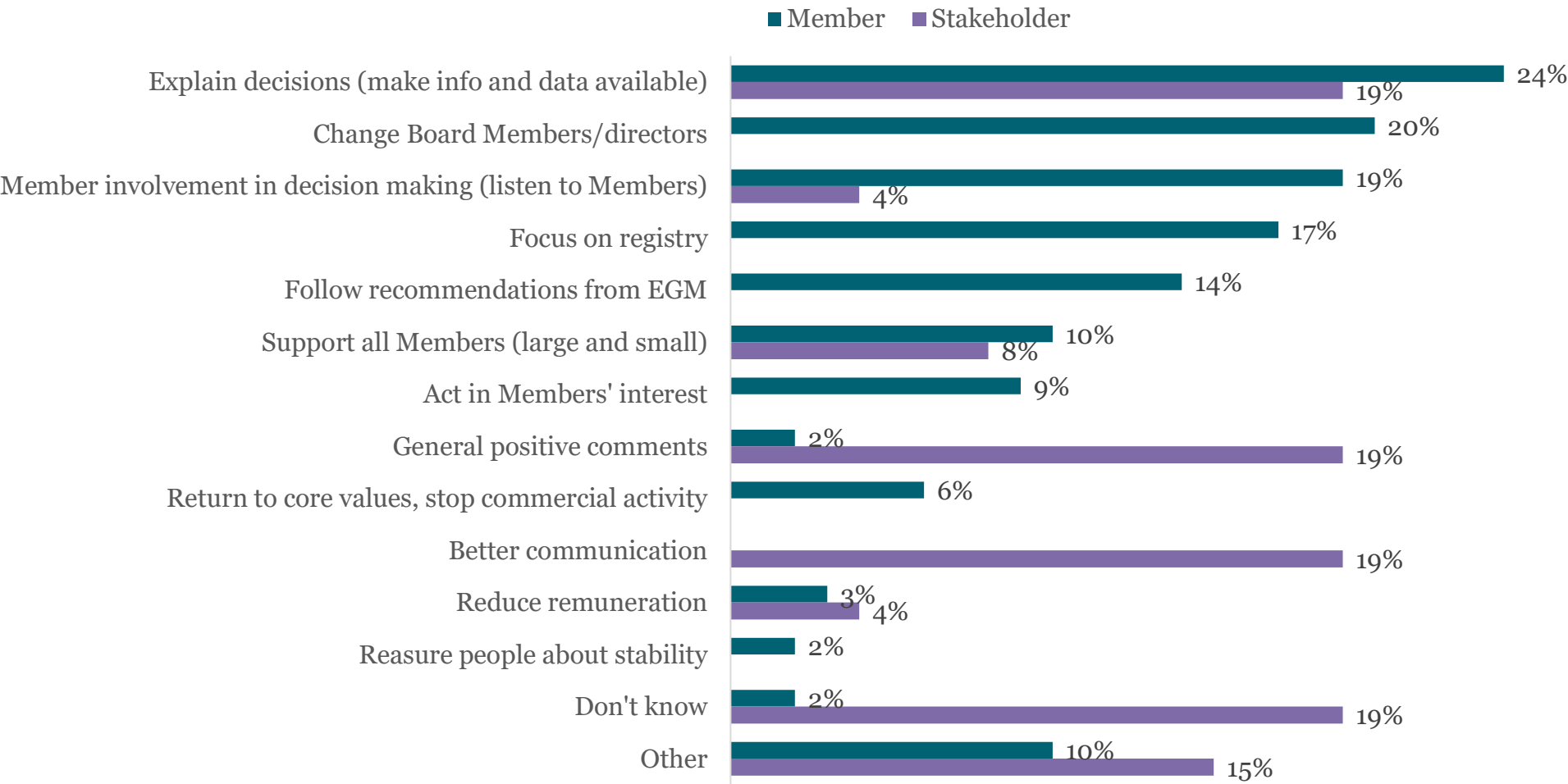
3.2 – Any governance change would need to prioritise trust and stability

While there was no consensus amongst Members and Stakeholder for any major changes, there was a broad agreement that the foundations of trust need to be laid as an immediate priority. Therefore any governance considerations need to be based on improving trust with all of Nominet's key audiences, and achieve buy in from Members in order to ensure a positive outcome for all groups.

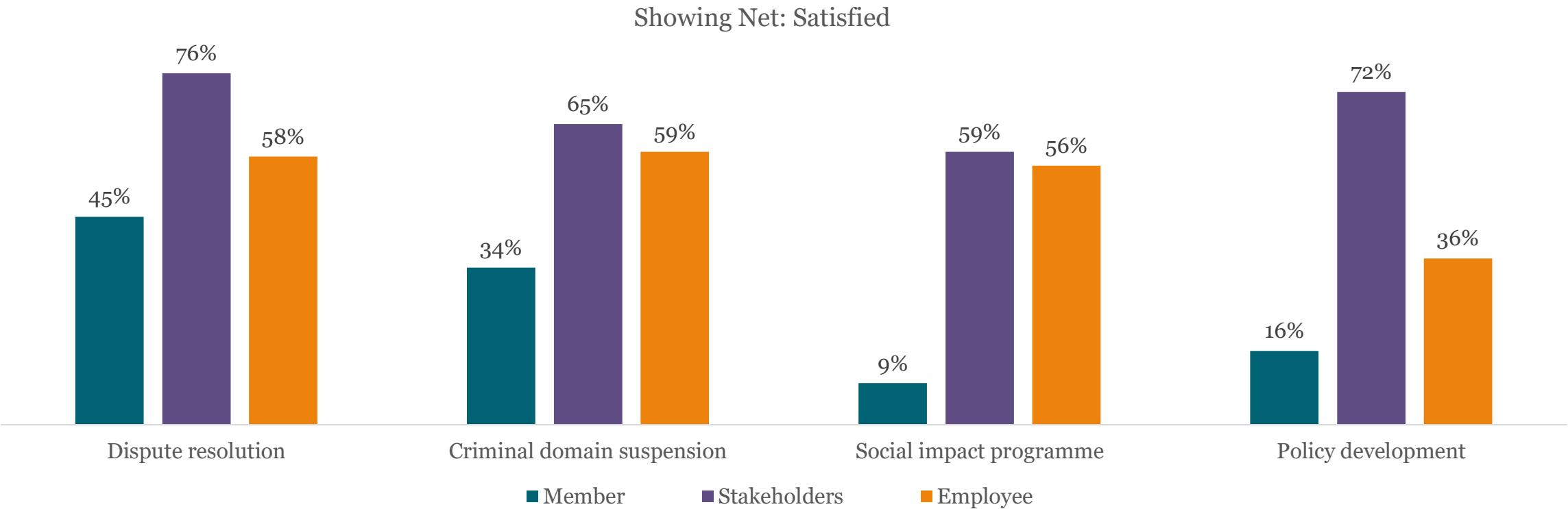
5.0 Appendix



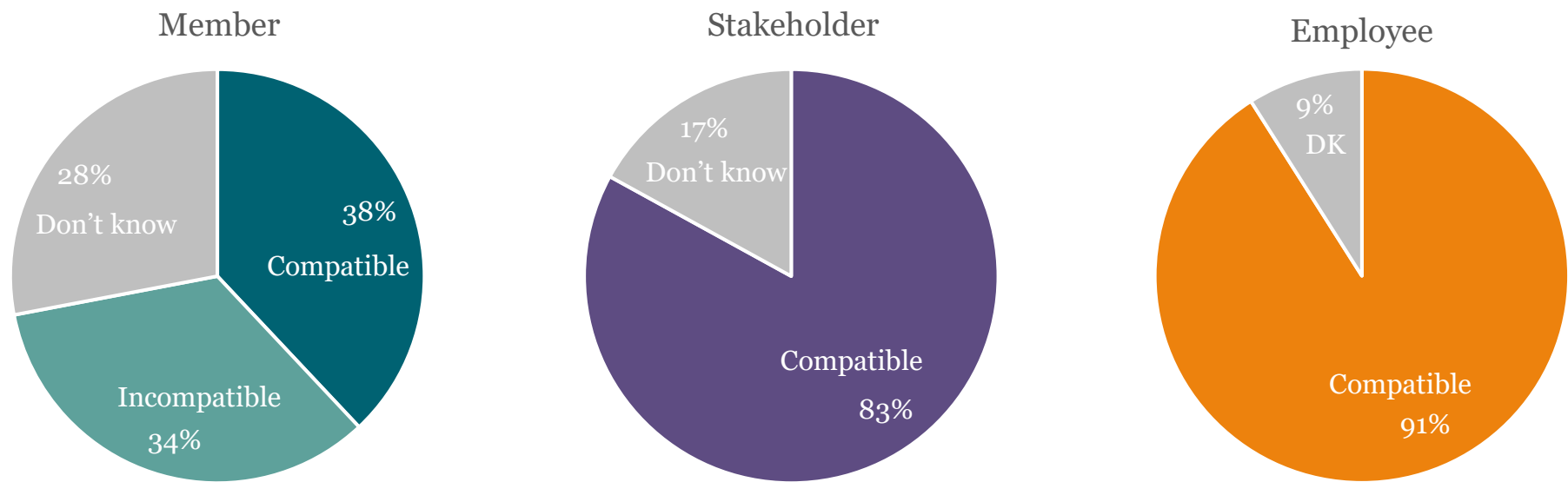
What, if anything would improve your trust in Nominet's decision making?



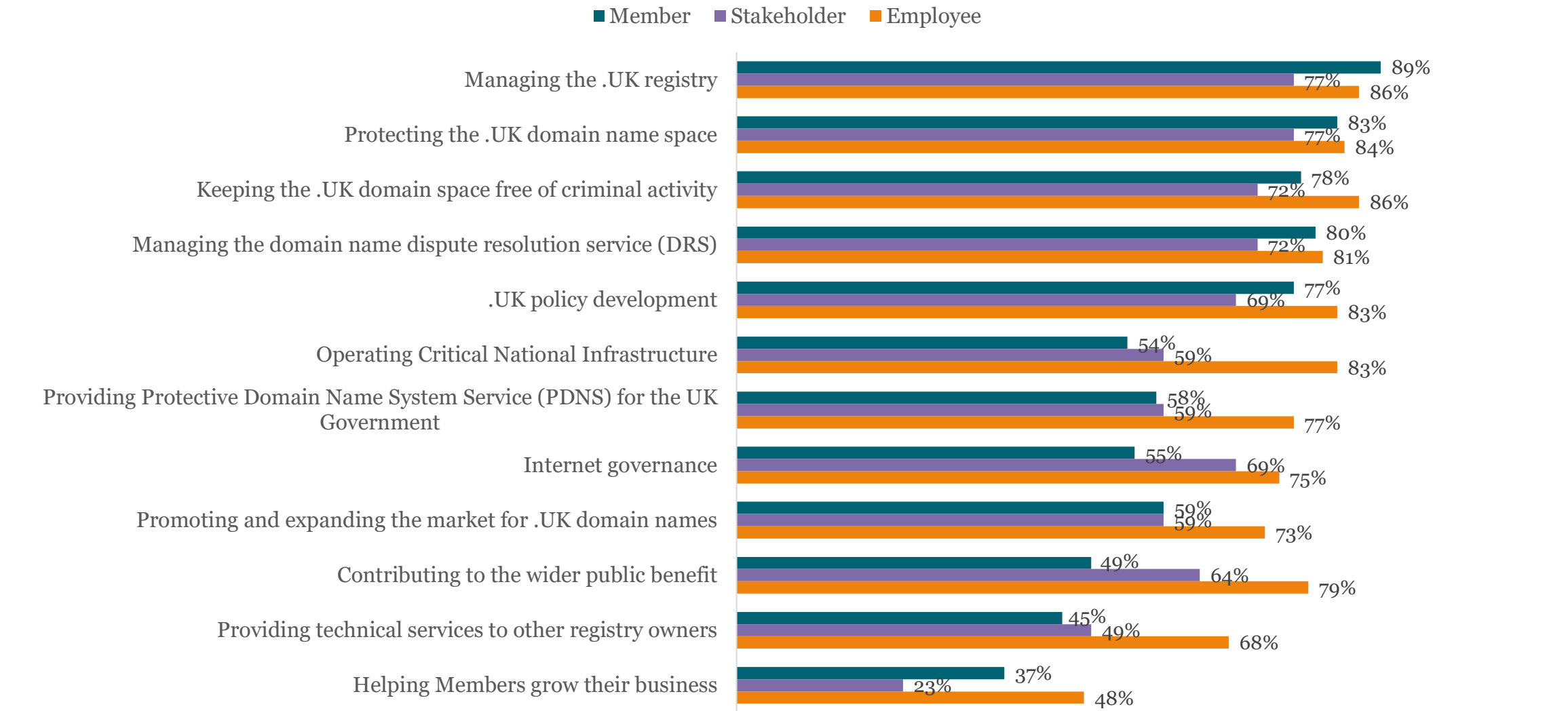
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with different elements of Nominet’s public benefit work?



Is Nominet's role compatible or incompatible with its public benefit activities?

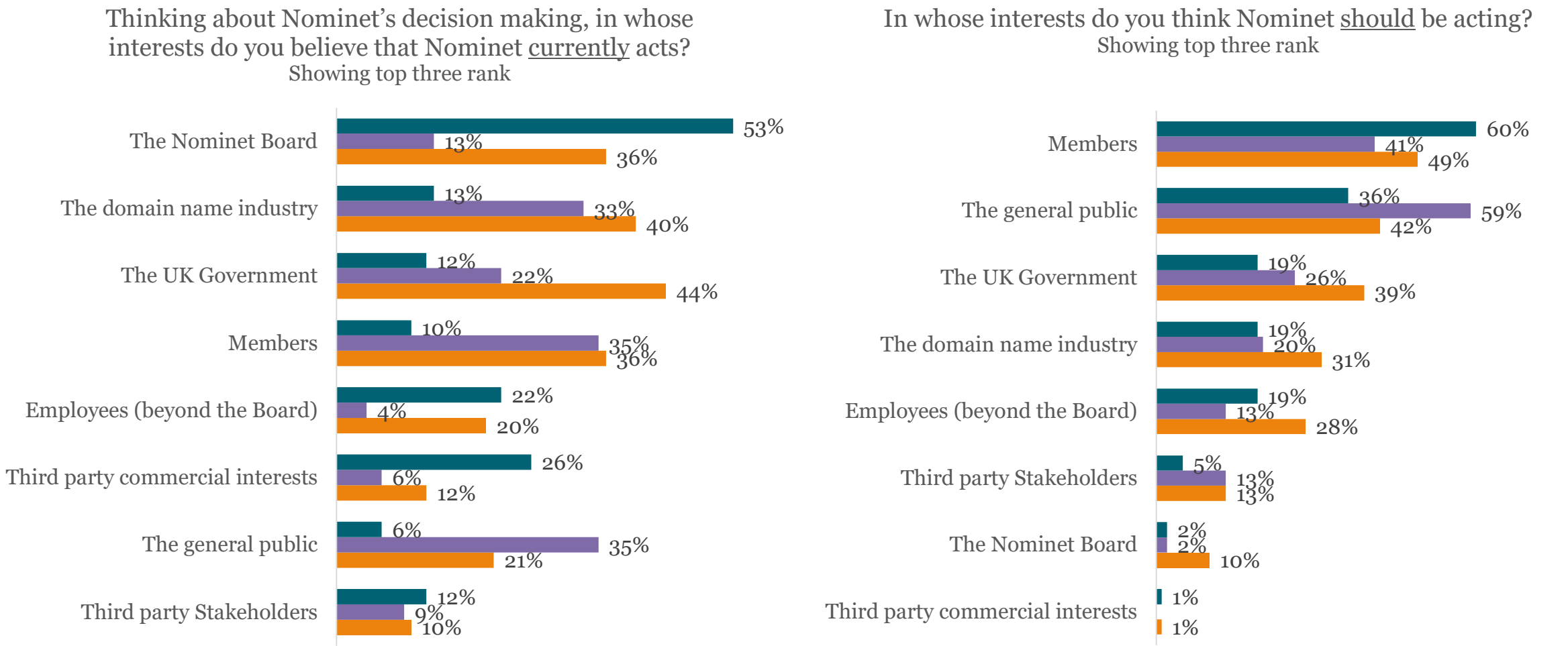


Which, if any, of the following do you think should be within Nominet's legal remit?



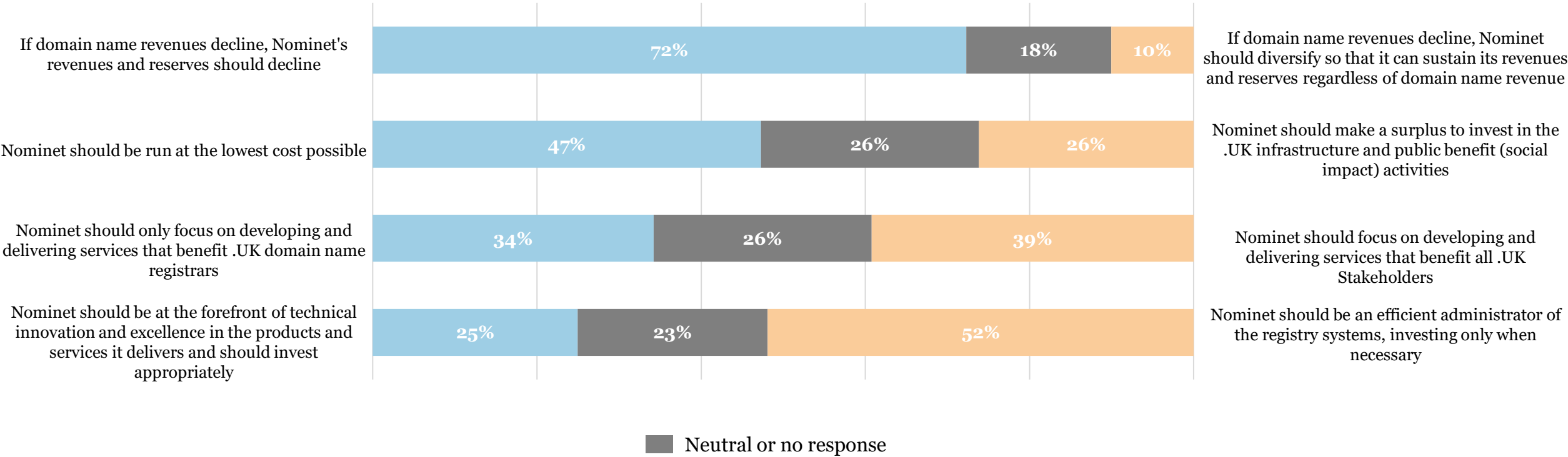
In whose interests do you believe that Nominet currently acts, and in whose interests should Nominet act?

■ Member ■ Stakeholder ■ Employee

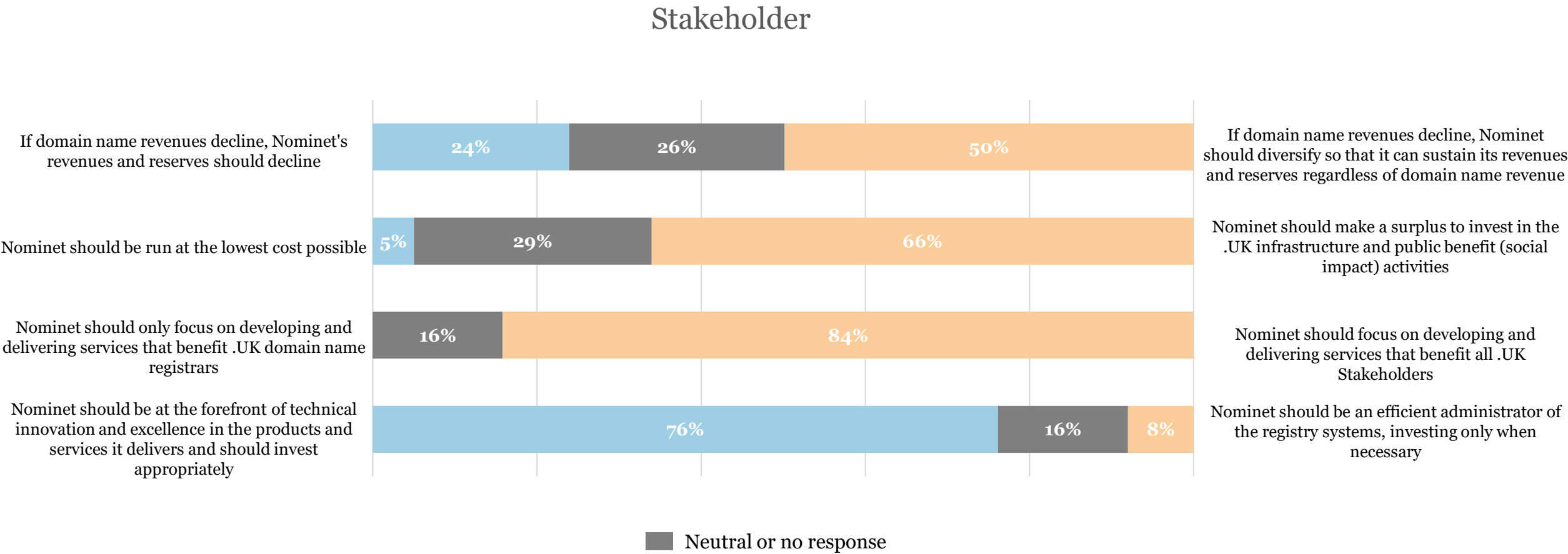


Which of the following statements regarding Nominet’s governance best fits your view?

Member

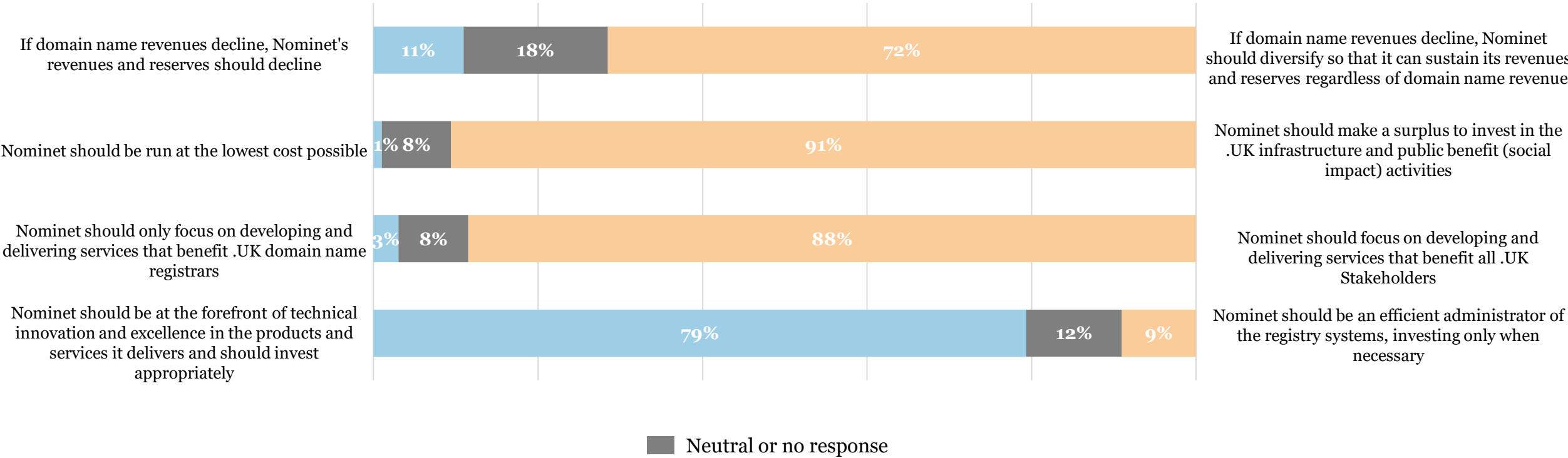


Which of the following statements regarding Nominet’s governance best fits your view?

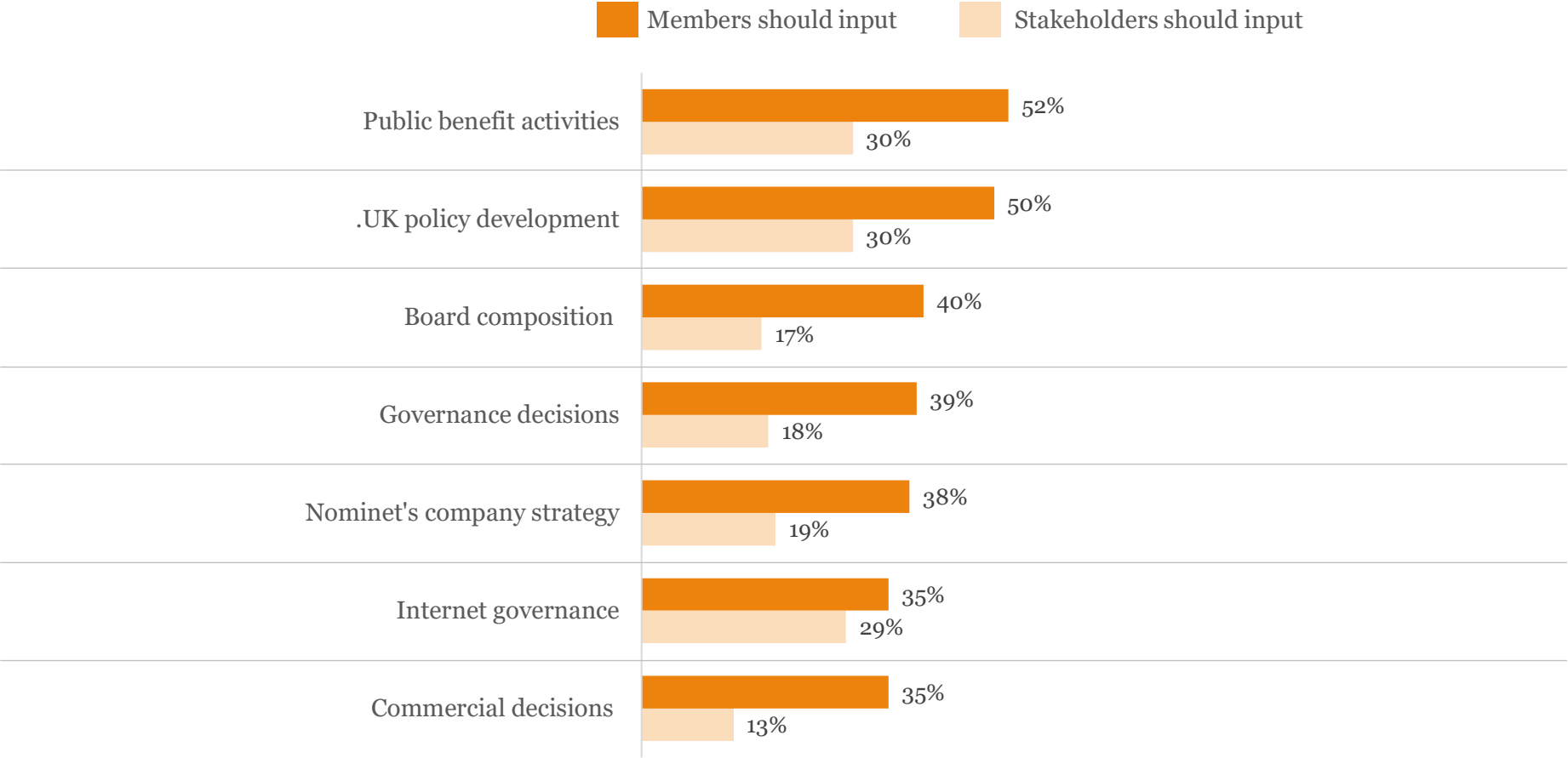


Which of the following statements regarding Nominet’s governance best fits your view?

Employee



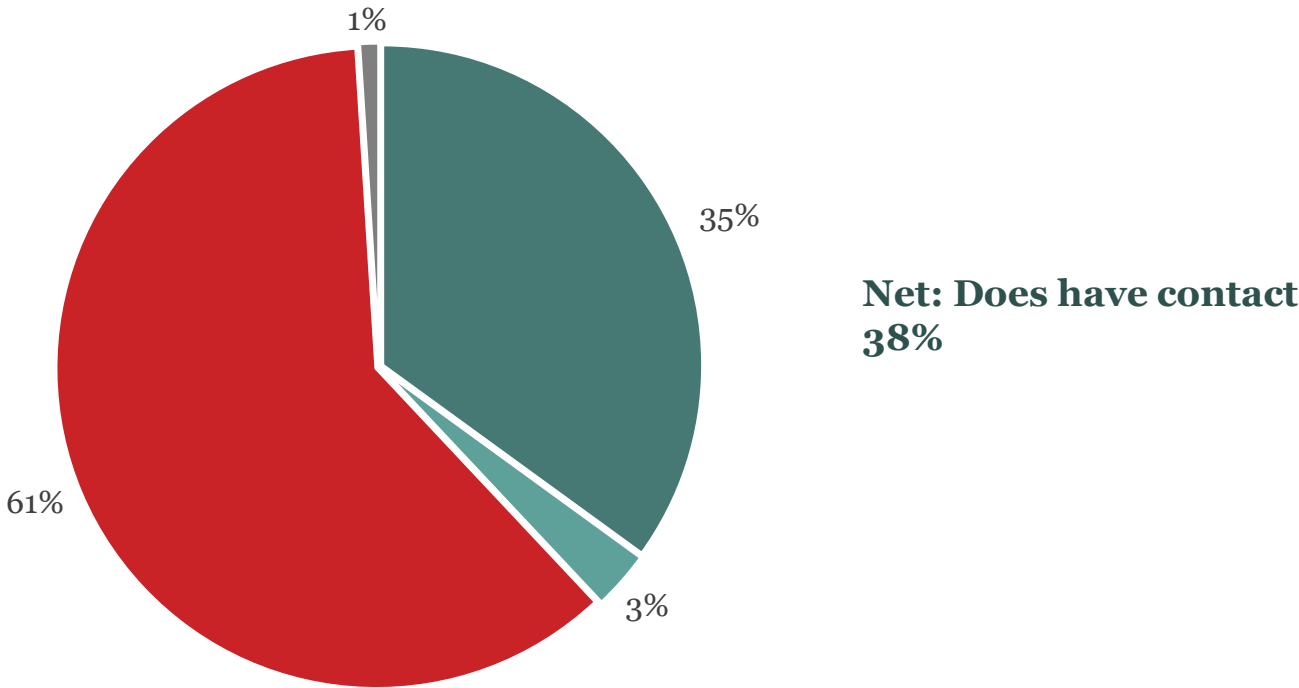
To what extent should Nominet's Members and Stakeholders have a say in the following decisions



In your role, do you currently have any contact with Nominet Members?

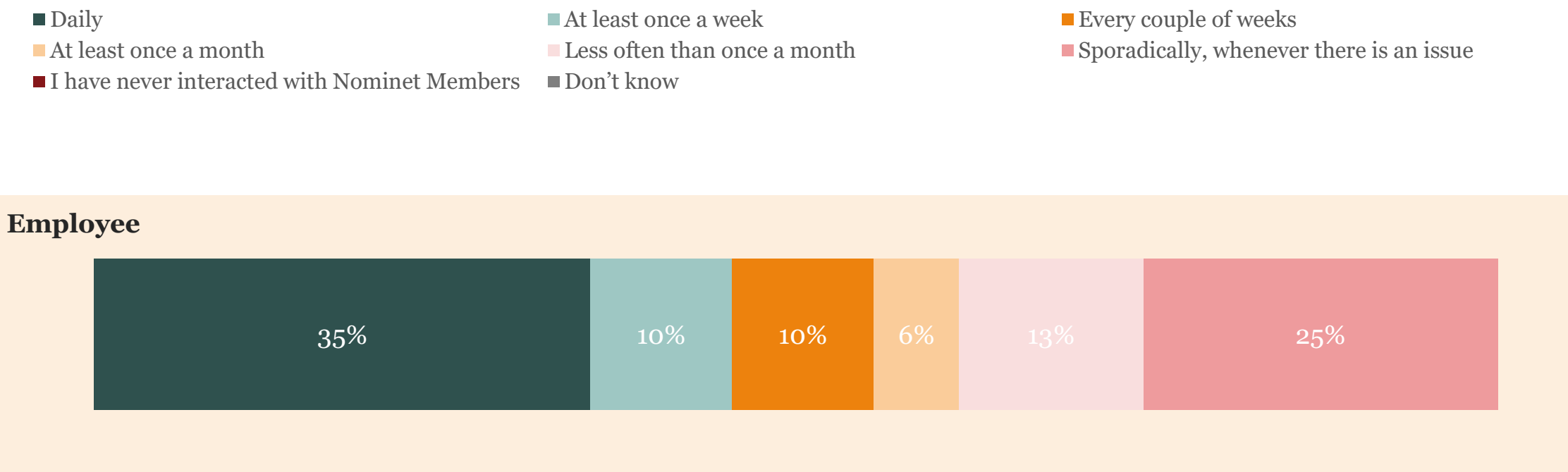
Employees only

- Yes, I come into contact with Nominet Members in my current role
- Yes, I come into contact with Nominet Members, but not as part of my role
- No, I do not come into contact with Nominet Members in my current role
- Don't know



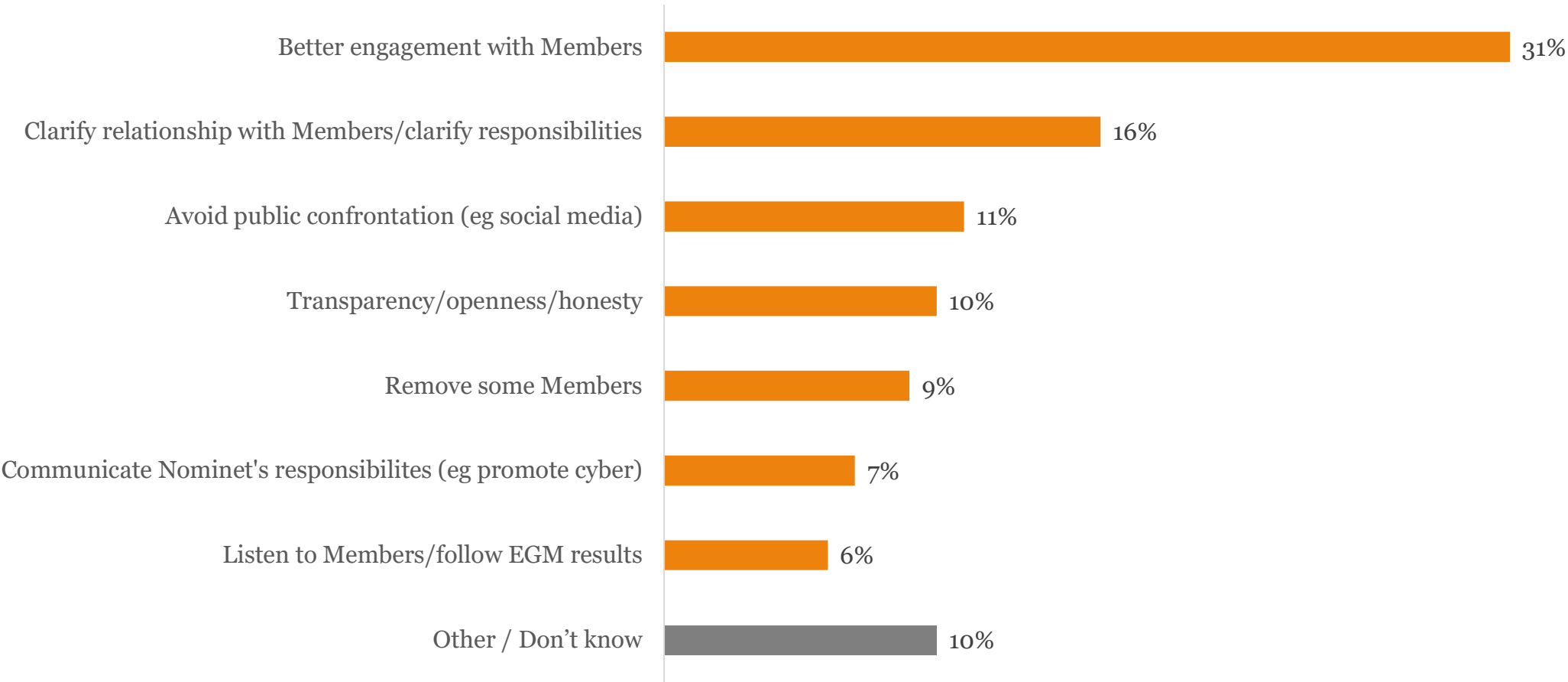
How often do you come into contact with Nominet Members?

Employees only

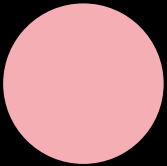


What positive steps can Nominet and Members take to work together moving forwards?

Employees only



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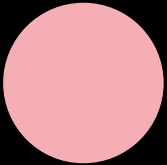
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