



AUSTRALIAN

**EVALUATION**

SOCIETY



Improving the theory, practice and  
the use of evaluation

# ENGAGEMENT SURVEY 2020

Final Report  
31 August 2020

This project was overseen by the AES Vitality Committee and managed by Duncan Rintoul  
from Rooftop Social

# THE SURVEY ATTRACTED A STRONG RESPONSE

The survey was launched on 17 July, via:

- direct email to all email addresses in the AES database
- promotion in the AES email newsletter
- promotion through AES social media channels.

The survey link was open for 1 month:

- The advertised end date was 10 August; the survey was closed for analysis on 17 August.
- Most responses (83%) were received between 17 July and 31 July.

A total of 474 complete responses were received:

- This excludes partial responses (89) and responses submitted during the pilot.

*Notes:*

*Percentages in this report have been rounded to zero decimal points, so may not add exactly to 100.  
Crosstabs with significance testing have been provided to the AES for further analysis as required.*

# THE SURVEY DRAWS ON A BROAD SAMPLE

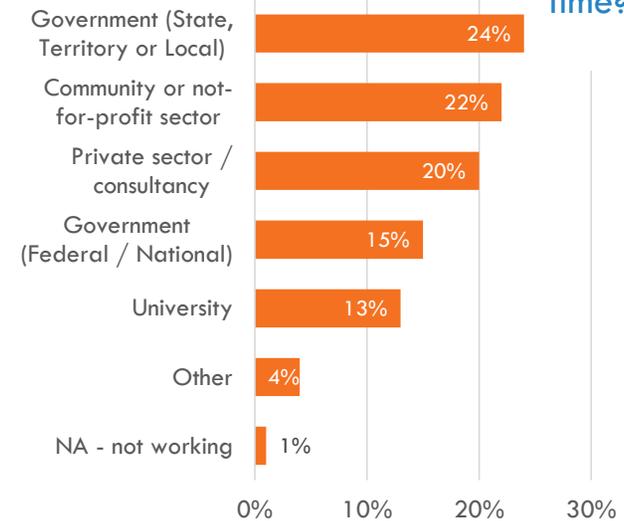
Responses came from across government (39%), the community sector (22%), the private sector (20%) and universities (13%).

Seven in ten responses (69%) came from people who design and conduct evaluations.

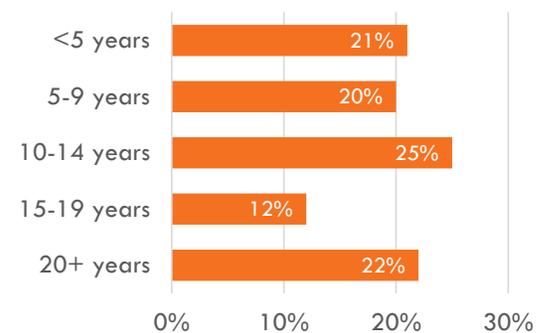
- The sample also included a mix of trainers and capacity builders (18%), evaluation users (17%), commissioners (16%) and students (14%) (a multiple response questions; categories overlap).

Experience in evaluation ranged from relative newcomers (21%) to those who have been interested/involved in the field for 20 years or more (22%).

## What sector do you work in most of the time?



## How long have you been interested/involved in evaluation?



# THE SURVEY DRAWS ON A BROAD SAMPLE

Responses came from every state and territory in Australia, as well as from people based outside Australia (17%).

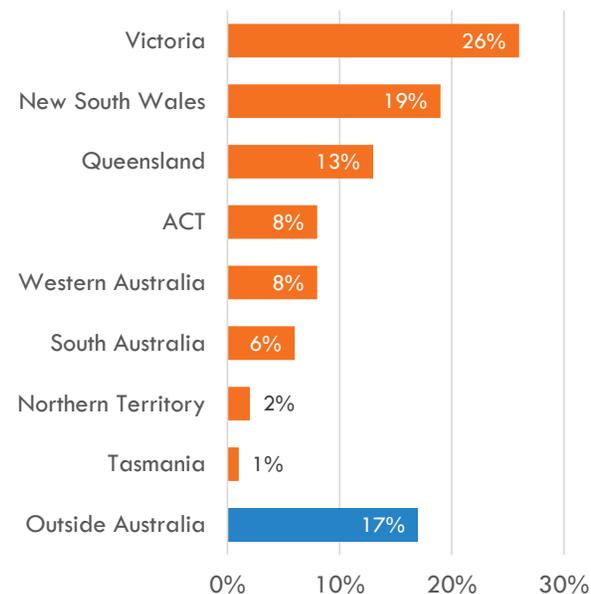
Just under three in four people (73%) said they were based in a capital city.

Almost two in three (64%) had current AES membership ties

- 55% current AES members.
- 23% work somewhere with an organisational membership; this crosses over with personal membership
- If we include former members (12%), the proportion with membership history goes up to 74%.

18 respondents (4%) identified as a First Nations person.

Whereabouts are you based?



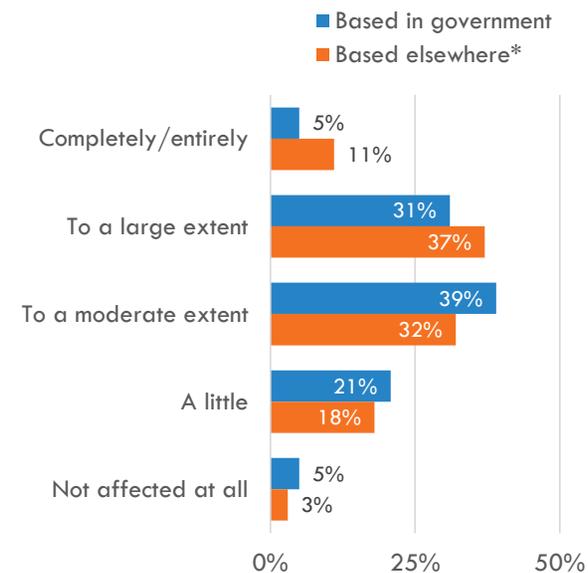
# COVID HAS CERTAINLY MADE ITS MARK

Three in four people (76%) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has had at least a moderate effect on their evaluation work/study, triggering:

- adjusted scopes, timeframes and approaches (59%)
- deferral (44%) or cancellation (12%) of evaluations
- new COVID-specific evaluation projects (26%)
- various other impacts (14%), including to people's place of work, workload, forward workflow and job security.

The reported impact of the pandemic is stronger outside of government (particularly in the private sector) than in the public sector.

Since the start of the year, and particularly since mid-March 2020, nations around the world have been responding to a global pandemic. To what extent has your evaluation work/study been affected by COVID-19 and the response to the pandemic?



\*'Elsewhere' includes the community sector, the private sector and universities

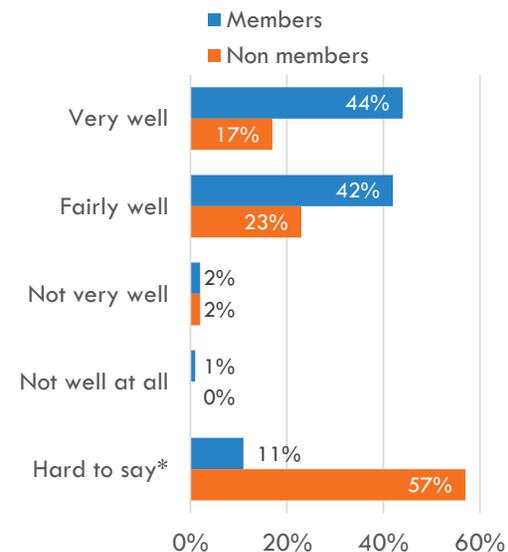
# THE AES HAS DONE ITSELF PROUD DURING THIS PERIOD

Among those familiar with the AES's activities during COVID, almost everyone felt that the Society had responded fairly well or very well to the circumstances.

People particularly appreciated:

- the timely switch to online delivery and virtual events
- the focus on keeping the evaluation community connected and engaged with each other
- providing services at reduced or no cost
- communication – regular, clear, lots of it, staying visible
- the demonstration of commitment, perseverance, flexibility, responsiveness and creativity
- content specific to evaluation under COVID-19 conditions.

During the COVID-19 response period, how well do you feel the AES has responded to the circumstances of the evaluation community in your part of the world?



\*Not aware of what the AES has been doing

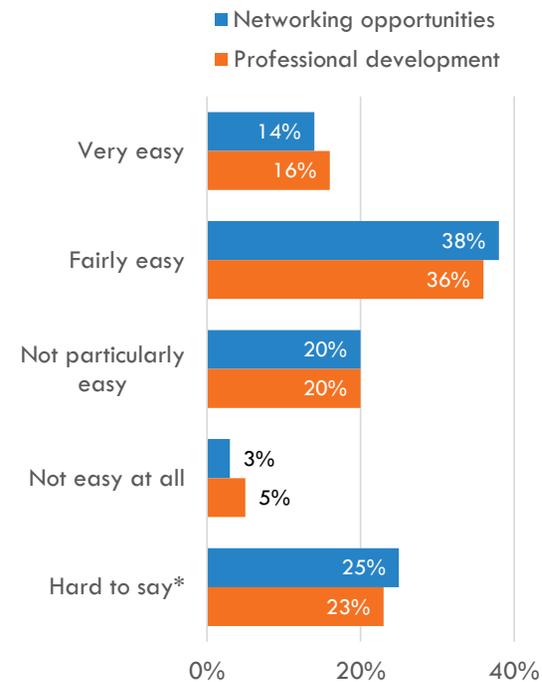
# EQUITY OF ACCESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CHALLENGE

Pre-COVID, around one in four said it was hard for them to access the AES networking (23%) or professional development opportunities (25%).

There are various reasons for this, including:

- events not being available in their local area
- the location or venue being unsuitable / inconvenient
- cost
- timing not being convenient (work hours, evenings)
- being busy, having competing priorities and prior commitments, traveling a lot for work
- not being aware of what's available
- not getting approval from their employer/manager.

During 2019, how easy was it for you to access \_\_\_\_ opportunities offered by the AES?



\*Unsure what those opportunities were / don't know how accessible they were

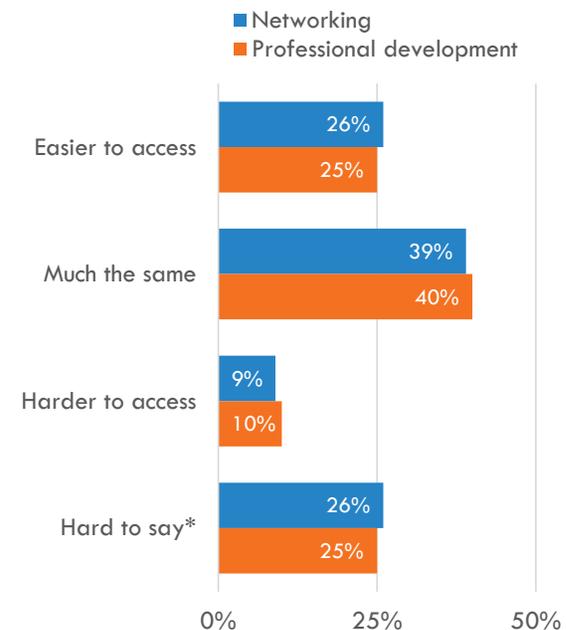
## BUT ACCESS HAS IMPROVED DURING COVID (FOR SOME)

As part of its response to the pandemic, the AES has launched online networking and training.

This has improved access for around one in four people.

*"I can now attend events and training without having to pay for expensive travel and accommodation in a city. I live in a regional area... I can access much more than before, so have re-joined AES now."*

During the COVID-19 response period, have you found it any easier or harder to access \_\_\_ opportunities offered by the AES?



\*Not aware of what the AES has been offering during this period

# VIRTUAL MEETINGS ARE A NEW TRICK (FOR SOME)

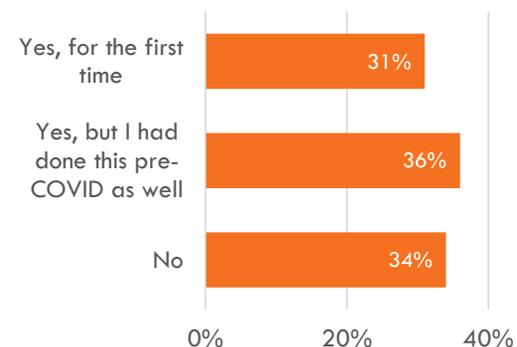
Two in three (67%) said they had used an online/virtual platform to access evaluation-related networking or professional learning during COVID.

- This online experience was new for half of these participants (31% of all respondents) .

One in five (18%) said that there are video conferencing platforms that their organisation prevents or discourages them from using while at work or using work computers

- This was much more prominent for people working in government (38%) then elsewhere (6%).
- The main issue here is with ZOOM, due to security concerns.

During the COVID-19 response period, have you participated in any evaluation-related networking or professional learning delivered online/in a virtual meeting environment? (e.g. via ZOOM, Webex, Teams, Google Meets, Skype etc.)



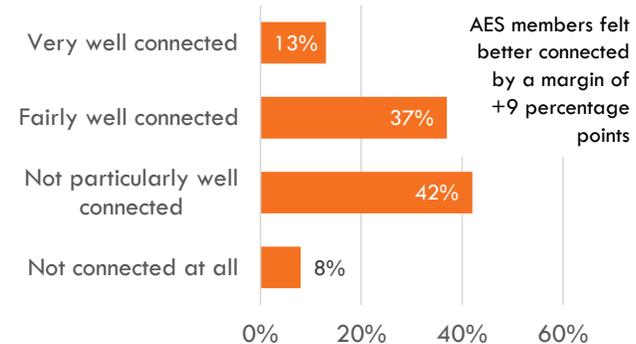
# SOME PEOPLE ARE NOW FEELING BETTER CONNECTED

One in five people (22%) say they have felt more connected with the evaluation community during COVID than they have in the past.

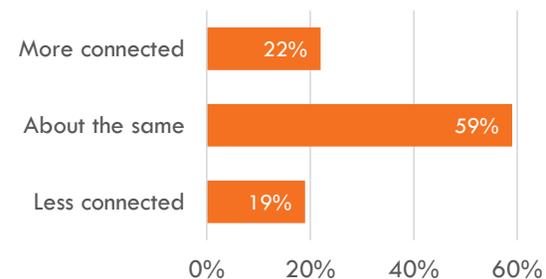
*"I feel like I have more opportunities to connect. I'm very isolated in my organisation (very few evaluators and very limited understanding). I'm really enjoying the variety and I think that [because] they are often in a short format makes it easier to manage with a busy work schedule."*

However, a similar proportion (19%) have felt the opposite, growing less connected during this period.

During 2019, how well connected did you feel to the evaluation community outside your organisation?



During the COVID-19 response period, have you felt any more or less connected with the evaluation community outside your organisation?



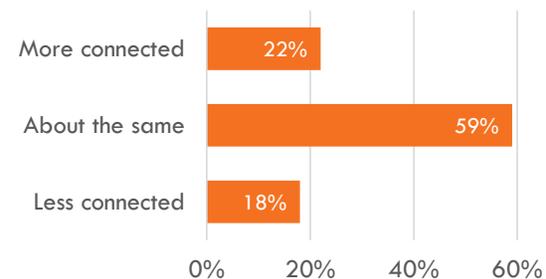
# SOME PEOPLE ARE NOW FEELING BETTER CONNECTED

## Who is feeling more connected?

This response was more common among:

- People who have taken part in **online/virtual evaluation-related networking or professional learning** (29%, compared with 5% for those who had not)
- People living **outside of a capital city** (28%, compared with 20% for city dwellers)
- **AES members** (26%, compared with 18% for non-members)

During the COVID-19 response period, have you felt any more or less connected with the evaluation community outside your organisation?

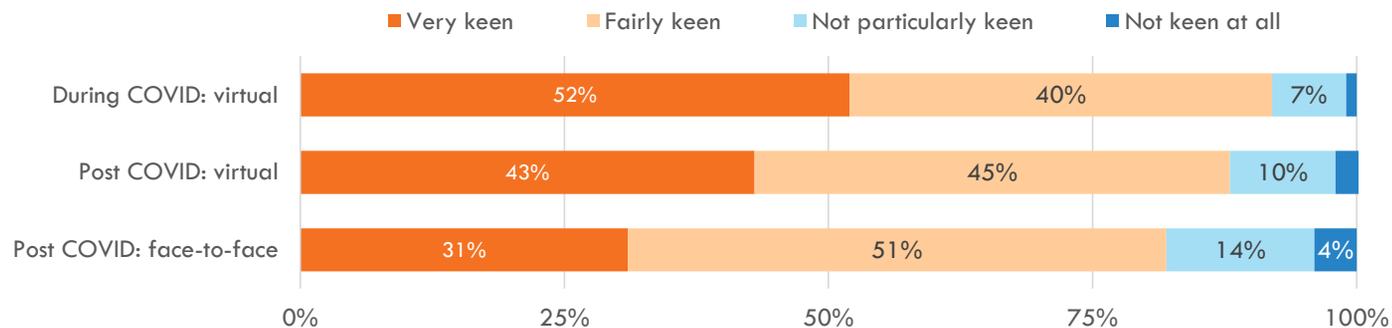


# SEMINARS: STRONG ONGOING DEMAND FOR ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE OPTIONS

There is broad interest in the online seminar format, not just during COVID but also in the longer term.

The prospect of face-to-face seminars (down the track) also has broad appeal.

How keen are you to attend (or send colleagues to) free 1.5hr seminars on evaluation topics?



During COVID = 'During the next 6-9 months, while the pandemic is evolving'.

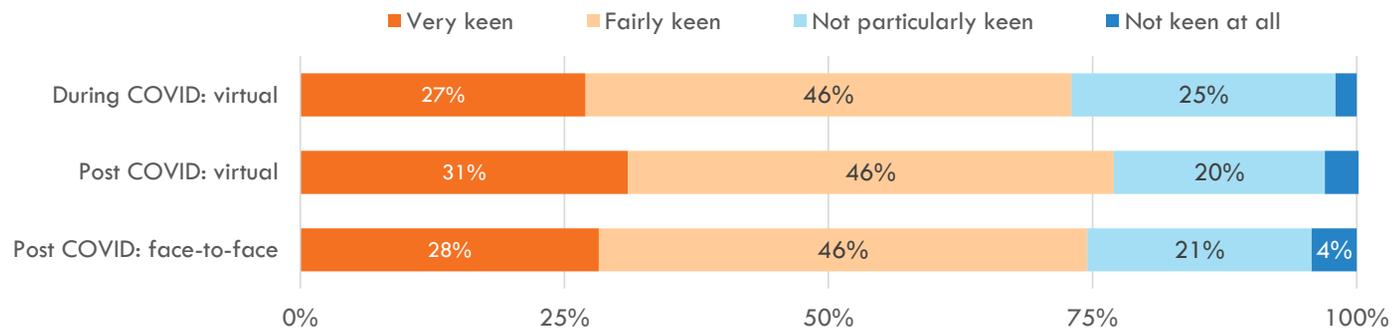
Post COVID = 'Once restrictions have eased and major gains have been made in prevention and treatment (hopefully at some point in 2021)'

# NETWORKING GATHERINGS: HERE TO STAY?

There is also clear interest in networking gatherings, both online and (once restrictions have eased) in-person. These have slightly less appeal than seminars.

- The concept behind 'networking meetings' may require development or clearer communication.
- Alternatively, it could simply be that audiences are a little more limited for this kind of thing.

How keen are you to participate in networking meetings with people in the evaluation community?



During COVID = 'During the next 6-9 months, while the pandemic is evolving'.

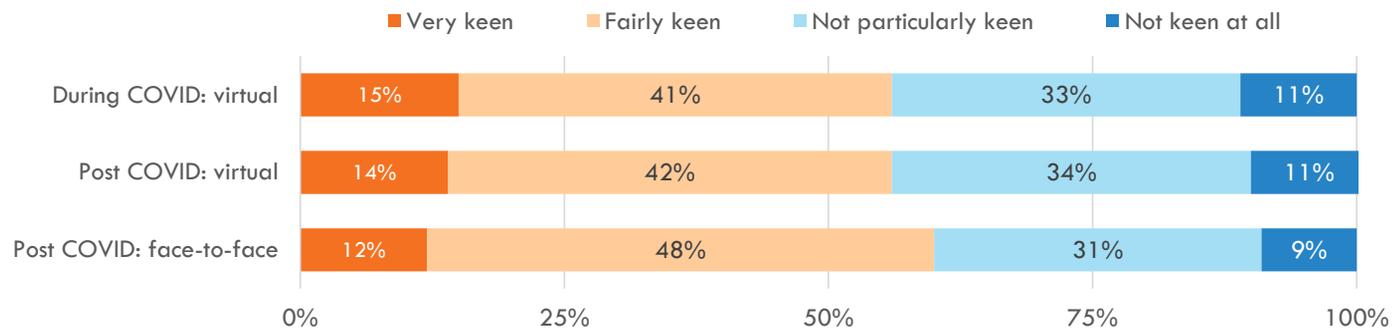
Post COVID = 'Once restrictions have eased and major gains have been made in prevention and treatment (hopefully at some point in 2021)'

# TRAINING WORKSHOPS: MIXED APPEAL

The appetite for training workshops is more subdued than seminars and networking.

- The appeal of conventional 1-2 day face-to-face workshops is no greater (and perhaps even less) than virtual delivery spread over a few sittings.
- No trend data is available to show whether these interest levels are in decline, stable or on the rise.

How keen are you to attend (or send colleagues to) paid evaluation training workshops?



During COVID = 'During the next 6-9 months, while the pandemic is evolving'.

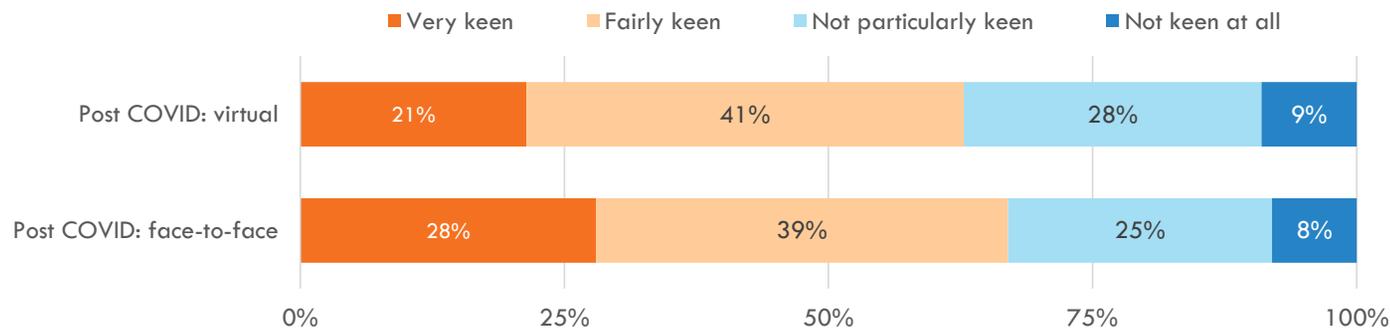
Post COVID = 'Once restrictions have eased and major gains have been made in prevention and treatment (hopefully at some point in 2021)'

# CONFERENCE: APPETITE FOR A VIRTUAL OPTION, BUT STRONGER FOR FACE-TO-FACE

Post COVID, the notion of a face-to-face conference in a capital city is attractive to around two in three people.

- This is on level pegging with the appeal of networking gatherings and face-to-face seminars.
- The appetite for a virtual conference may change following the upcoming FestEVAL.

How keen are you to attend (or send colleagues to) an evaluation conference?

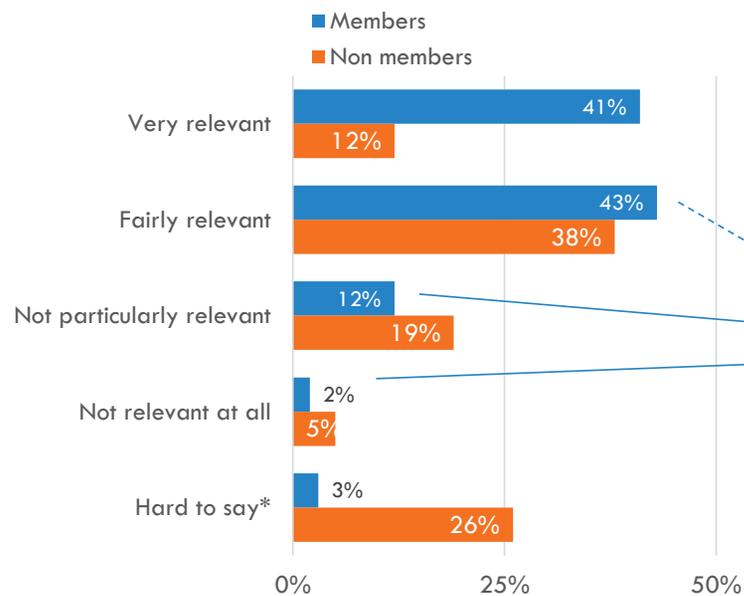


During COVID = 'During the next 6-9 months, while the pandemic is evolving'.

Post COVID = 'Once restrictions have eased and major gains have been made in prevention and treatment (hopefully at some point in 2021)'

# OTHER QUESTIONS ASKED

During 2019, how relevant was the work of the Australian Evaluation Society for you?



\*Don't know enough about the AES to comment

This warrants further investigation. Two possible explanations:

- Evaluation is only part of these members' role or interests.
- The focus of the AES is at least a little out of alignment with the needs, interests and priorities of these members.

# OTHER QUESTIONS ASKED

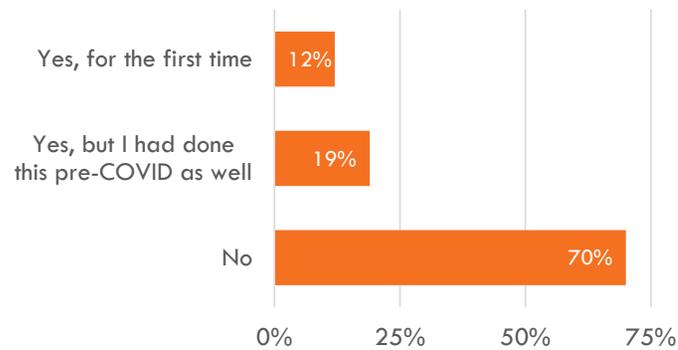
During [timeframe], have you engaged in any of these evaluation-related activities?

	During 2019	During the COVID-19 response period
Read articles on evaluation – Evaluation Journal of Australasia	47%	36%
Read articles on evaluation – AES blog	34%	36%
Read articles on evaluation – other	69%	61%
Read the AES email newsletter	56%	55%
Went to AES conference (in Sydney, September 2019)	26%	-
Went to other conference/s on evaluation	12%	-
Attended networking events / seminars run by AES*	43%	34%
Attended networking events with other evaluators – not run by AES	22%	-
Attended virtual networking events / seminars / conferences on evaluation – not run by AES	-	29%
Undertook formal study in evaluation, delivered by a tertiary education provider	12%	8%
Accessed training on evaluation – run internally at my organisation*	10%	6%
Accessed training on evaluation – run by AES*	19%	16%
Accessed training on evaluation – run by other external trainers*	16%	14%
None of the above (exclusive code)	7%	11%

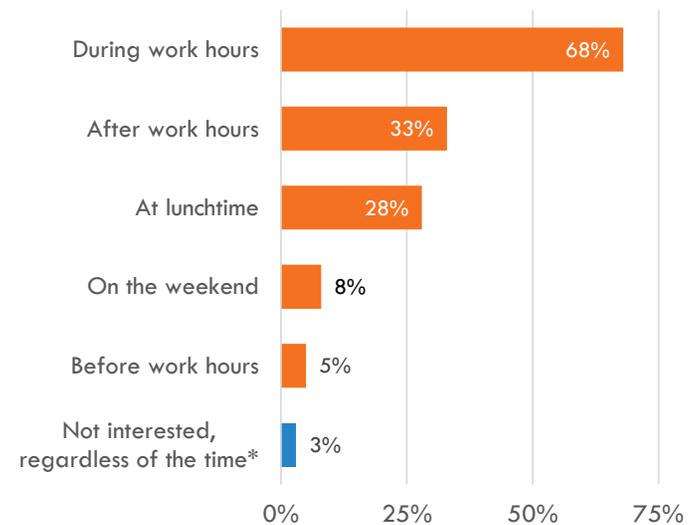
\*Specified as 'virtual' events/sessions during the COVID-19 response period

# OTHER QUESTIONS ASKED

During the COVID-19 response period, have you accessed any evaluation-related networking or professional learning developed overseas? (e.g. by global NGOs, Evaluation Associations in other countries)



For virtual networking meetings or seminars, what would be the best time of day for you?



\*Exclusive code