



What services would enable NNECL members to most successfully support the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers?

A stakeholder consultation

FINAL REPORT

A report by Tiller Research Ltd
on behalf of The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers

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Executive Summary

- A consultation exercise was undertaken with professionals whose role includes supporting the education or progression of looked after children or care leavers. The consultation focussed on the main challenges faced by practitioners, and their views on what support could be provided by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) that would be most effective in overcoming these challenges. An online questionnaire receiving 225 analysable responses was combined with 24 semi-structured telephone interviews in order to obtain both a breadth and a depth of responses.
- The challenges and support needs identified by respondents were very similar regardless of which sector a practitioner worked in. The strategic themes identified from the consultation were consistent across those working in Higher Education (HE) settings and non-HE settings. Different roles undertaken by practitioners, e.g. HE practitioners working in Widening Participation or Outreach compared with HE practitioners working in Student Services, did not appear to affect the fundamental challenges faced. Where there were differences in responses, this was around the detail of specific information or knowledge needs.
- Four key areas of support were identified that encompass the full range of practitioner responses regarding what would enable them to overcome their main challenges. These are:
 - **Facilitate the sharing of best practice**
understanding ‘what works’ through case studies and networking;
 - **Provide practical support services**
e.g. directory of contacts; information library;
 - **Facilitate the building of relationships between agencies**
enabling practitioners and organisations to work effectively with local, regional and national contacts in order to improve mutual understanding of how to best enable looked after children and care leavers to progress to and succeed in HE;
 - **Develop a stronger evidence base**
the knowledge base around the progression of looked after children and care leavers is somewhat sparse, both in terms of data tracking the progress and outcomes of this group, and in terms of robust evaluation of ‘what works’ in terms of providing effective support to this group. Practitioners identified a role for NNECL in filling this gap, and using it to raise awareness of relevant issues and best practice.
- Thinking about the specific services that NNECL could provide, practitioners recognised the benefits both of a range of ‘on-demand’ resource and information services, and ‘face-to-face’ engagement opportunities. A key issue is that the majority of practitioners have diverse roles, and so the time and resources available to engage in activities specifically related to this area of work is limited, in particular for non-HE respondents. This suggests that NNECL will offer most value by building a foundation of services that provide a timely and straightforward solution to their key challenges. However, there is considerable scope for building ‘added value’ services on this foundation, which practitioners may select from based on their specific needs and the time and resources they have available to engage.

- A number of strategic recommendations are made, based on the consultation results, that would support the future development of NNECL:
 - **adopt an outcomes focus**
practitioners will be more likely to engage where there is a clear link between the services provided and the delivery of evidenced outcomes demonstrating tangible benefits to looked after children and care leavers;
 - **agree a set of strategic priorities**
the consultation results suggest possible strategic priorities that would enable NNECL to provide a valued service to members;
 - **agree a set of service values**
the consultation suggests possible 'service characteristics' that would give members confidence in the service provided;
 - **aim to develop a model that enables engagement with non-members without compromising the value of membership**
practitioners clearly value the opportunity to connect with a wide range of people through a single point of contact, and so it is important that membership is not perceived as being devalued by the absence of non-members. It may be desirable to create a 'tiered offer' where some services are offered free of charge in order to promote engagement, and provide a trusted foundation on which additional services can be built;
 - **prioritise the development of knowledge and understanding**
practitioners and stakeholders were agreed that work to support the educational progression and success of looked after children and care leavers requires a more robust body of evidence than is currently available;
 - **review strategic partnerships**
members and stakeholders were agreed that most value can be provided by NNECL collaborating with other networks and organisations on areas of shared interest, and so it would be advisable for NNECL to review its work with other organisations to ensure that all appropriate links and opportunities for joint working have been identified.

- The key finding of this research is that there is a significant need for a trusted source of information and guidance on best practice in supporting the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers, along with a need to further develop the knowledge base regarding what is effective in securing positive outcomes for this group. Respondents from all sectors believe that there is a clear need for the services provided and proposed by NNECL. There was clear agreement on the main challenges faced by practitioners, and the nature of support that would be most effective in enabling positive outcomes to be achieved for this group.

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Section 1- Introduction

1.1 Context

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation exercise with professionals whose role includes supporting the education or progression of looked after children or care leavers.

The research objective was to identify what services would be most valued by NNECL members, in order to inform NNECL's selection of priorities for its short-term development and longer-term aspirations. This was explored using the following question themes:

- What are the main challenges faced by respondents in relation to this area of work?
- What would enable respondents to overcome these challenges?
- Which current NNECL services have enabled respondents to be more effective in their roles?
- Which potential future NNECL services do respondents believe would enable them to be more effective in their role?

This report outlines the challenges faced by respondents when supporting the educational progression of looked after children or care leavers, before considering the type of support that respondents suggested NNECL could provide to help address these challenges.

Consideration is given to the services that NNECL currently provides, and could potentially provide in the future. The report concludes by highlighting key points from the consultation that it is suggested should be considered when planning the future of NNECL.

1.2 Data Collection

Two methods of data collection were used in this consultation:

- **Online questionnaire:** promoted via email invitation to those on NNECL contact lists, and distributed more widely by partner organisations. The questionnaire was comprised of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions. The full set of questions used can be found in Appendix 1;
- **Semi-structured telephone interviews:** one-to-one interviews were undertaken with 24 participants representing a cross-section of consultation participants, to explore key themes in more depth. The interview topic guides can be found in Appendix 2.

1.3 Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

Of the 291 responses received to the online questionnaire, 225 contained usable data and 175 were complete. Responses from practitioners working in a Higher Education (HE) setting represented 48% of the total responses, with 26% of responses from practitioners working in a Local Authority (LA) setting, and 26% from other settings, including Further Education (FE) colleges, charities and third sector organisations.

Two-thirds of respondents had previously engaged with at least one NNECL service. Respondents from an HE setting were more likely to have previously engaged with NNECL (80%) when compared to respondents from non-HE settings (54%).

The analysed sample of 225 responses included:

Sector Representation:

| | |
|--|------------|
| - Higher Education- Widening Participation or Outreach | 34% |
| - Higher Education- Student Services | 14% |
| HE total: | 48% |
| - Local Authority- Virtual School | 17% |
| - Local Authority- Care Leavers' Support | 9% |
| - Further Education or Sixth Form College | 13% |
| - Charity or Third Sector Organisation | 8% |
| - Other | 5% |
| Non-HE total: | 52% |

Region:

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| - East of England | 5% |
| - East Midlands | 6% |
| - London | 13% |
| - North East | 4% |
| - North West | 14% |
| - South East | 22% |
| - South West | 9% |
| - West Midlands | 9% |
| - Yorkshire and the Humber | 9% |
| - Devolved Nations | 3% |
| - England/UK-wide | 5% |

Previous Engagement with NNECL:

- 150 who have previously engaged with at least one NNECL service or activity (67%)
- 75 who have not previously engaged with NNECL services or activities (33%)

1.4 Data Analysis

Rating scale questions were analysed to produce descriptive statistics. Responses have been split into subsets to allow comparison of different groups:

- 'HE' respondents and 'Non-HE' respondents;
- 'Currently Engaged' with NNECL and 'Not Currently Engaged' with NNECL.

Qualitative data from free-text questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed to identify key themes. Questionnaire responses and interview responses were analysed separately, but the results were subsequently combined as the themes identified were consistent across the two data sets. Themes were not pre-determined, but emerged from the data. For the purposes of this report, themes are divided between 'HE respondents' and 'Non-HE respondents', as this division represents the strongest contrast in the data. Reflections on the responses received from different subgroups are provided in section 4.4.

Section 2- Main challenges

Both HE and non-HE respondents identified broadly similar challenges in supporting the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers. The specific detail of the challenge experienced by each group was often slightly different. In addition, the frequency with which themes were cited differed between each group e.g. 'being able to talk to the right people' was the most commonly cited challenge by HE respondents, whereas non-HE respondents were most likely to talk about issues related to 'meeting individual needs'.

2.1 Challenge Theme: 'Being able to talk to the right people'



Getting the right information to the right potential students at the right time."

HE questionnaire respondent

HE respondents reported challenges in identifying and engaging both young people and their support infrastructure. Challenges are often compounded by a lack of local authority capacity to engage and changes in staffing structure, meaning setting up and maintaining sustainable networks and channels of communication can be difficult. In addition, respondents reported that the disparate nature of the group meant that holding dedicated events was logistically challenging.

Non-HE respondents reported challenges in trying to get foster carers and social workers to 'buy in' to the concept of a looked after child going to university. Reasons cited for this lack of 'buy in' included lack of personal experience of university, and perceptions that it's not practically or financially possible for this cohort to go to university. Both HE and non-HE respondents noted the importance of providing support early enough to raise aspiration amongst this group.

Non-HE respondents also noted the challenge of identifying the right contacts in HE institutions, particularly non-local universities. This results in difficulties in obtaining information on visits and accurate information about the practical and financial support available at each institution.

Both groups of respondents identified challenges around identifying older care leavers, suggesting that individuals in this group may no longer identify themselves or want to explicitly label themselves as such. This issue results in 'knock on' challenges around tracking progress for this group and ensuring that adequate support is provided to them.

2.2 Challenge Theme: 'Keeping up to date with policy and best practice'



There is a changing landscape and I am constantly encountering new issues in relation to local authorities, asylum seeking young people and mental health issues for example."

HE questionnaire respondent

Both respondent groups reported challenges around keeping up to date with policy changes and best practice, including:

- knowing about policy developments and priorities;
- understanding the most effective practice, e.g. which activities will have the most impact;
- finding robust evidence of interventions to enable care leavers to see HE as a viable option;
- national legislation changes, e.g. knowledge of 'rights and entitlements'.

2.3 Challenge Theme: 'Navigating the diverse systems of different organisations'

“ Local authorities have different packages available, as do HE institutions. The level of complexity is challenging for a care leaver and they don't necessarily have the support network to help them navigate this.”

HE interview participant

HE and non-HE respondents shared many similar practical challenges in supporting looked after children and care leavers to access and continue in HE. In particular, there is significant variation in terms of financial and/or practical support provided to this cohort by both HE institutions and local authorities. This poses a significant challenge for practitioners in understanding the entitlements and support available to individuals they are supporting.

This challenge is compounded because, as noted by both HE and non-HE respondents, work in this area is only a small part of most practitioners' roles. This means that the capacity of individual practitioners to navigate the diverse systems of different universities/local authorities is limited, which risks adversely affecting the quality of the advice and guidance that they are able to provide to looked after children and care leavers.

2.4 Challenge Theme: 'Meeting individual needs'

“ Someone at university was telling me, 'You're the only person who ever thought I could manage this'. You do kind of feel the burden of responsibility as you drive away.”

Non-HE interview participant

Respondents identified two key areas where the individual needs of looked after children and care leavers while at university are often more complex than those of other students:

- **Practical considerations:** such as who will take them and their belongings to university, and where they will stay during holiday periods (especially where university accommodation is only available during term time);
- **Psychological and/or social support needs:** this group was identified as more likely than the general population to experience challenges related to confidence or self-esteem, perhaps as a consequence of having a less developed informal support network.

HE respondents identified that providing support was often difficult due to insufficient communication and resource to identify needs in a timely fashion. Challenges were also identified with providing 'joined up' support, both within institutions and with a wider support network. While the retention and attainment rate of this cohort in HE was deemed by some to be comparable with the 'general population', it was suggested that individuals are more likely to take longer to complete their studies. This has a 'knock on' effect on financial and other support arrangements (e.g. student finance only being available for a set period of time).

For the majority of non-HE respondents, raising aspirations both with young people and their wider support structure was a key challenge. Respondents cited challenges in addressing several perceived barriers to looked after children and care leavers progressing to and succeeding in HE:

- the cohort tends to lack role models who have been to university, and are even less likely to know of a care leaver who has been to university;
- they often lack confidence and resilience and may have low self-worth;
- it is not uncommon for individuals to have had a chaotic and disrupted education journey, and may be pursuing a 'non-traditional' route to HE, which can lead to added complications;
- the perceived financial implications are seen as a daunting prospect.

Section 3- How NNECL can most effectively provide support

Four themes were identified for what NNECL could offer that would enable practitioners to overcome their main challenges. The themes were identified with similar frequency both within and between the HE respondent and non-HE respondent groups.

3.1 Support Theme: 'Facilitate the sharing of best practice'



If we know something else has worked well elsewhere, it makes it easier to engage local authorities in the activity... it gives it some legitimacy."

HE interview participant

Respondents were keen to see NNECL supporting the sharing of information on best practice and 'what works'. Areas of interest included approaches to:

- raising aspirations amongst young people (e.g. video case studies/speakers by care leavers who are in/have experience of HE);
- joint working including strategies to engage and liaise with other agencies;
- identifying and communicating with young people (e.g. effective practices relating to outreach events and activities);
- tracking the progress and support needs of this group once at an HE institution.

A range of modes of sharing best practice were advocated including: case studies and guides hosted on the website; conference sessions; speakers at regional meetings; training; and other opportunities for networking and discussion (e.g. webinars).

3.2 Support Theme: 'Provide practical support services'



Being a primary source of information... so you can trust NNECL as a key source of information."

Non-HE interview participant

Both HE and non-HE respondents suggested that NNECL could provide a range of practical support services for both practitioners and young people. The collation of **up to date** information resources in **one place** is seen as a valuable service, with many respondents commenting that currently such information can be spread out and is often out of date.

Suggested resources for practitioners include:

- directory of key contacts in HE institutions;
- information on policy changes;
- events directory;
- information on financial entitlements;
- awareness raising materials to be used with foster carers, teachers and social workers;
- distilling effective practice from across the network into guidance;
- induction support for practitioners new in post/working with this group.

Suggested resources for young people include:

- materials such as case studies to raise aspirations;
- guides on a range of topics (e.g. difference between campus and city universities, 'what is a sandwich course', clearing and 'what to expect on the first day at university').

3.3 Support Theme: ‘Facilitate the building of relationships between agencies’

“Networking is a key activity that works in terms of linking up with other people doing similar roles locally and regionally.”

Non-HE interview participant

Both HE and non-HE respondents felt that NNECL had a key role in helping to build networking capability and capacity across practitioners and organisations working in the area at the local, regional and national level. A key outcome of this would be to improve mutual understanding of:

- the opportunities for young people in HE;
- the support needs of the cohort and work undertaken by other agencies to address these;
- non-traditional routes to HE;
- the statutory obligations of local authority care teams.

In addition, relationship building would also facilitate opportunities for sharing best practice and joint working/collaborative opportunities.

3.4 Support Theme: ‘Develop a stronger evidence base’

“Fund research that looks at what works for this group of young people so that they can reach their true potential.”

HE interview participant

There was a consensus of opinion that NNECL could provide support by undertaking a research role. There was broad agreement that the evidence base of what constitutes the most effective practice in supporting looked after children and care leavers to access and succeed in higher education is not well-developed, and that to strengthen this would enable practitioners to work more effectively.

Non-HE respondents suggested that NNECL could help add to the evidence base relating to: the positive effects of education on all aspects of young people’s lives; the most effective way of HE institutions engaging with the cohort; and the expectations of the minimum levels of support offered to young people by HE and FE institutions. HE respondents tended to favour impact focussed research looking at, for example, tracking progression to assess the effectiveness of different models of support provided to this cohort.

There were some differences of opinion on how a stronger evidence base should be used. HE respondents were generally keen to use evidence of effective practice at the institutional level to help ensure that recognition of the specific needs of this cohort are included in policies and strategies, with resources allocated accordingly. Non-HE respondents were more likely to suggest that NNECL should use this evidence base at the national level to lobby government to raise and sustain awareness of the importance of funding effective support for care leavers. However, others cautioned that, while they wanted NNECL to have a ‘dialogue’ with government, they were wary of a lobbying role, suggesting this could potentially lead to conflicts of interests for members.

A number of respondents suggested that NNECL could undertake awareness raising with national organisations such as the Children’s Commissioner, British Association of Care Workers, Fostering Network and National Association of Virtual School Heads to ensure that HE opportunities for care leavers feature on their agendas. The Buttle quality mark¹ was mentioned by both HE and non-HE respondents as a good framework for raising awareness and implementing standards. Respondents suggested the extent to which the framework has bedded in to individual HE institutions has varied. There is some support for NNECL to build on its legacy, in particular by providing a clear statement of what constitutes best practice, and updating this as the evidence base grows.

¹ <http://www.buttleuk.org/areas-of-focus/quality-mark-for-care-leavers>

Section 4- Views on NNECL's current and potential services

Questionnaire respondents were asked to provide their views on four services currently provided by NNECL (website, regional groups, newsletter and conference) and four potential future services (training/continuing professional development (CPD), research and policy briefings, quality standards and themed working groups). The questionnaire comprised a set of Likert-type rating scales and a free text response question for each current and potential future service.

The full set of quantitative response data is provided in Appendix 3. This section highlights the key results from the quantitative data, and the themes identified from interviews and the free-text response questions.

Key messages provided by respondents included:

- those currently engaged with NNECL **value the mix** of 'face-to-face' networking opportunities and access to 'on-demand' information;
- **HE respondents were more likely than non-HE respondents to identify the conference and regional groups as having enabled them to be more effective in their role.** Non-HE respondents often suggested that these networking opportunities are designed primarily to meet the needs of HE practitioners;
- when asked about potential future services, the proportion of respondents who 'mostly' or 'completely' agreed that they would make use of a service was directly related to the proportion who 'mostly' or 'completely' agreed that this would enable them to be more effective in their role. This emphasises that, for NNECL to fully engage practitioners, it is important to be able to **demonstrate the impact of services on the outcomes achieved for looked after children and care leavers.**

4.1 Views of currently engaged respondents on current NNECL services

Questionnaire respondents who are currently engaged with NNECL were asked the extent to which they felt that each of four services had enabled them to be more effective in their role. There were some differences in the views expressed by HE and non-HE respondents. Figure 1 shows the extent to which each service has enabled practitioners to be more effective in their role, ordered by weighted average. HE respondents rated the usefulness of the conference and the website a little more highly than regional groups and the newsletter, whereas non-HE respondents rated the website and newsletter as somewhat more useful than the conference and regional groups.

Overall, HE respondents were more likely than non-HE respondents to 'mostly' or 'completely' agree that the conference and regional groups had supported their effectiveness. Several non-HE interview respondents suggested that the focus and content of the conference programme and regional group discussions is primarily designed to meet the needs of HE practitioners, although in the case of regional groups there is evidence of considerable variation in different areas. Non-HE practitioners were much more likely to cite time and resource constraints as barriers to attending face-to-face networking activities, favouring local opportunities to develop collaborative working.

Views on the website and newsletter were broadly similar, with both groups requesting shorter more frequent newsletters that highlight key developments, and a regularly updated website acting as a one-stop shop for reliable up-to-date information on policy, good practice and practical information to support (often non-specialist) practitioners, and materials to use with young people.

More detailed suggestions made by respondents on how the current NNECL services could be developed are provided in Appendix 4.

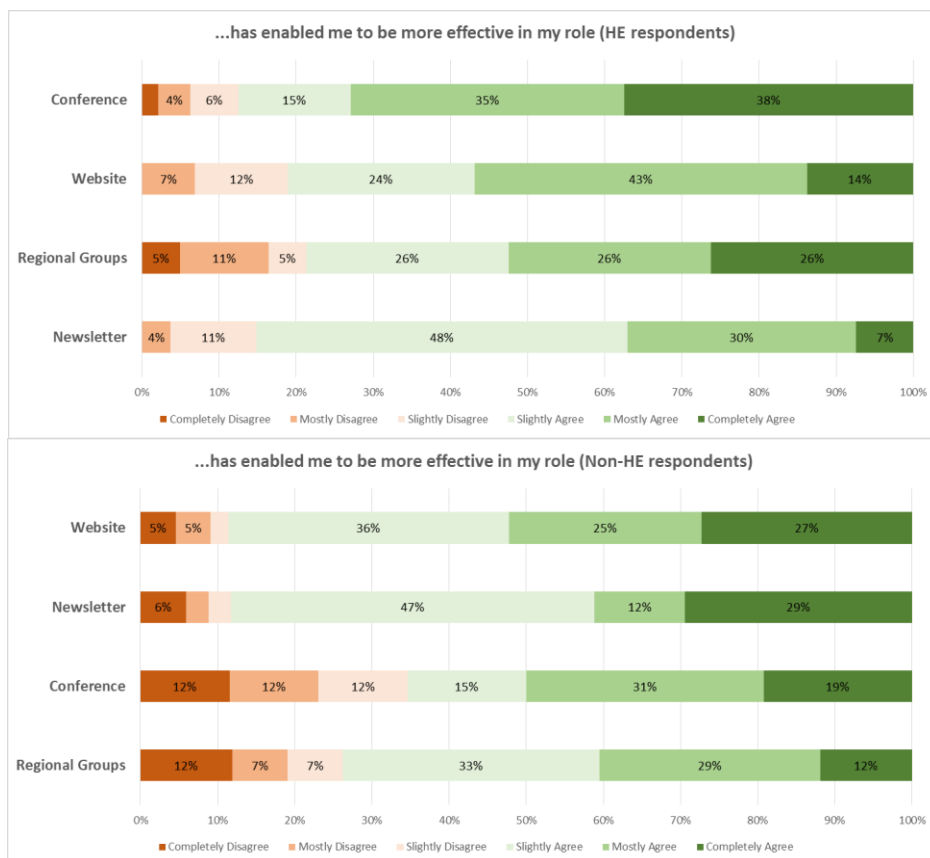


Figure 1: The extent to which currently engaged HE and non-HE respondents feel that current NNECL services have enabled them to be more effective in their role, ordered by weighted average (most effective at top).

4.2 Views on current NNECL services from those not currently engaged

Overall awareness of NNECL services was low among those not currently engaged, with 71% disagreeing that they were aware of the NNECL conference, and 49% disagreeing that they were aware of the nnecl.org website. Awareness of all services was higher among HE respondents than among non-HE respondents.

Overall interest in current services was high, with 76% of respondents ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreeing that they would be interested in making use of the NNECL online resources, with similarly high levels of interest in the NNECL newsletter (74%) and regional groups (71%). Interest in the annual conference was lower, but with 53% of respondents ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreeing that they would be interested in attending this event, it still appealed to more than half of respondents.

This suggests that lack of awareness of the services on offer, rather than lack of interest or perceived lack of usefulness, is the main reason for professionals not currently engaging with NNECL.

However, it should be noted that the majority of respondents who are not currently engaged (72%) were non-HE respondents. This group were more likely than their HE counterparts to cite barriers to participating such as time and resource constraints, and care leaver progression to HE being a minor part of their role. This perhaps suggests a need for high value, low commitment services such as access to an online resource bank.

It is interesting to consider the difference between the expectations that non-users have of a service from the experiences of those who have engaged. Figure 2 illustrates the sharp contrast between the proportion of currently engaged respondents who ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agree that a NNECL service offers something that is not available elsewhere, and the expectations of those not currently engaged about the ‘uniqueness’ of the service offered.

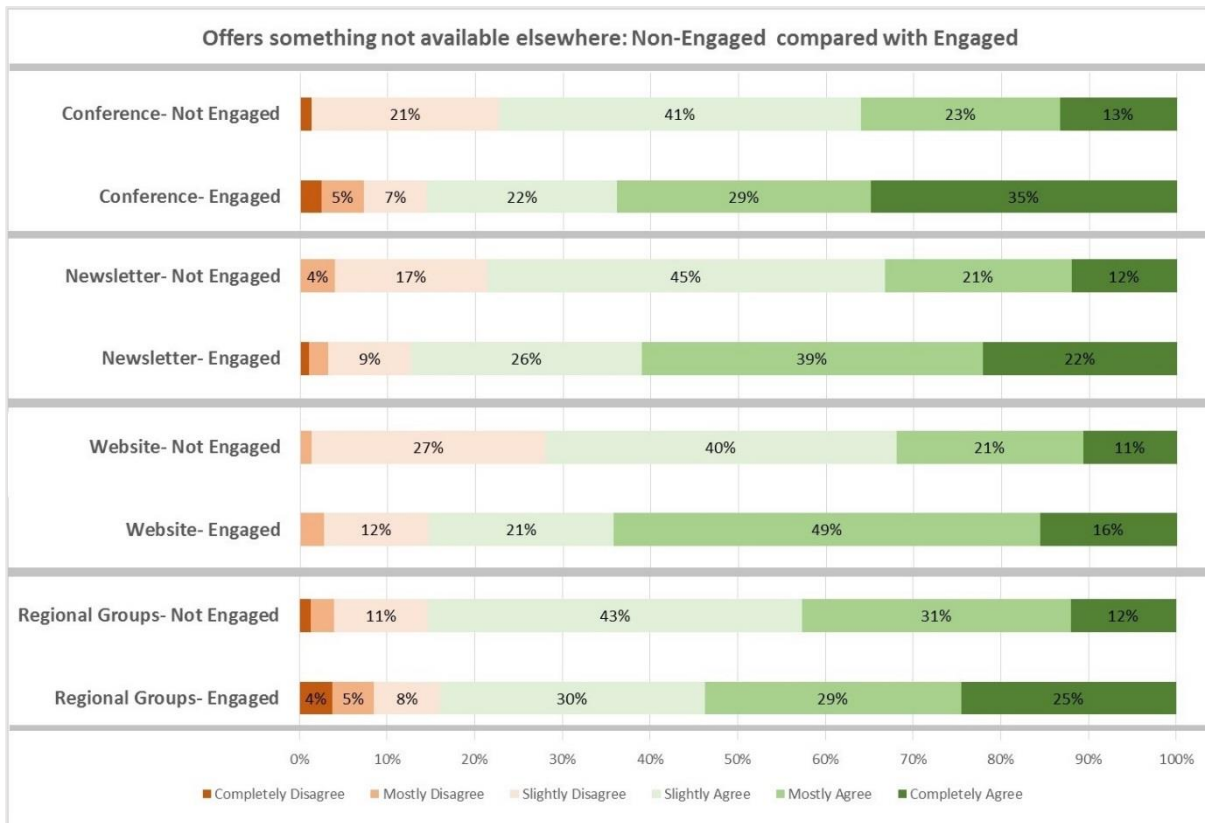


Figure 2: The extent to which respondents not currently engaged with NNECL expected a service to offer something not available elsewhere, compared with the experience of those who are currently engaged.

Less than a third of respondents not currently engaged (32%) ‘completely’ or ‘mostly’ agreed that the NNECL online resources offered something not available elsewhere, compared with almost two-thirds (65%) of currently engaged respondents who thought the same. Similar differences were seen regarding the conference and newsletter. It is possible that those not currently engaged with NNECL are more aware of other available services, but it is more likely that the distinctiveness of the NNECL services is not fully recognised by those who have not made use of them. This suggests that, in order for practitioners to fully understand the distinctiveness of the NNECL offer, it is important to ‘show’ people what is available, for example by providing specific examples of resources, rather than relying on descriptions of services that may fail to communicate the uniqueness of the NNECL offer.

4.3 Views on potential future NNECL services

Questionnaire respondents were asked their views on four potential future NNECL services. Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which respondents indicated that they were minded to make use of each potential service. The proportion of respondents who ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreed that they would make use of a service was directly related to the proportion who ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreed that this would enable them to be more effective in their role. This indicates that practitioners will place most value on those services which offer evidence of effective outcomes.

Overall, there was strong support for each of the four potential services, with more than 60% of respondents indicating that they ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreed that they would make use of each option. However, there was some variation in the views between HE and non-HE respondents, and some key points raised in the free-text responses.

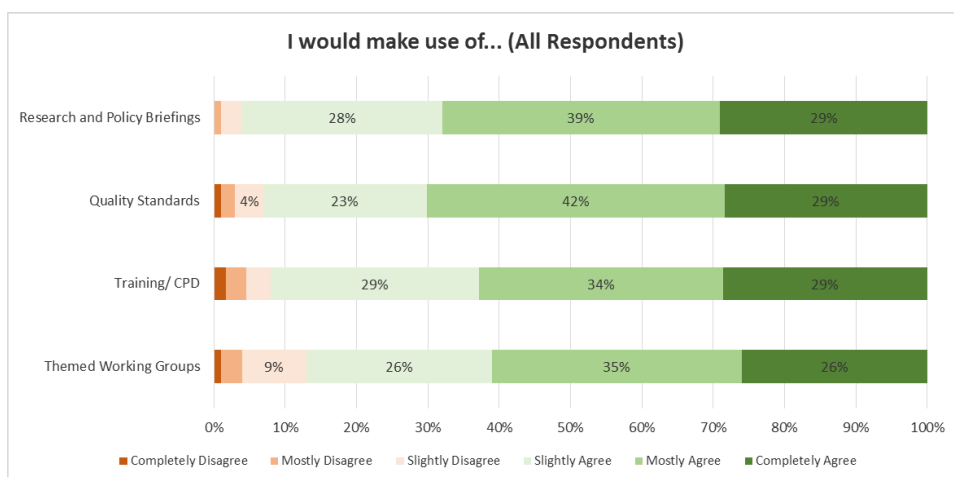


Figure 3: The extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that they would make use of a selection of potential future services, ordered by weighted average (highest rated at top).

Access to information preferred to direct engagement

Despite all four potential services receiving strong support, there was a modest preference for being able to access timely and relevant information on research, policy briefings and best practice over engaging with ‘face-to-face’ services such as training or working groups.

Focus on development and promotion of an evidence base

Both HE and non-HE respondents highlighted the importance of developing a clear understanding of the complexity of challenges faced by looked after children and care leavers, and of ‘what works’ by undertaking consistent impact evaluation to identify effective practice.

Lack of consensus on Quality Standards

Whilst there was general support for the idea of promoting quality standards, often linked to ‘building on Buttle’, opinions diverged on what form this should take. The role of a quality standard in promoting best practice and giving confidence to practitioners was widely acknowledged, but the idea of this being a formal assessment, rather than provision of guidance, raised some concerns.

What is already provided elsewhere?

There was a general consensus that the proposed activities would offer something not available elsewhere with the exception of Training/CPD, which 30% of respondents thought was already available. This suggests that, whilst there is a need for training in this area, NNECL would need to consider carefully how any offer would be distinctive. Figure 4 illustrates the strength with which respondents thought that the potential service would offer something distinctive, with around 60% of respondents ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreeing that a service would offer something not available elsewhere, excluding Training/CPD. This is very much in line with the views of those currently engaged on the distinctiveness of NNECL’s current services (Figure 2). Qualitative responses identified potential overlaps with the work of other organisations, and so it would be advisable to ensure that NNECL remains mindful of complementing the work of others, perhaps by collaborating on areas of shared interest.

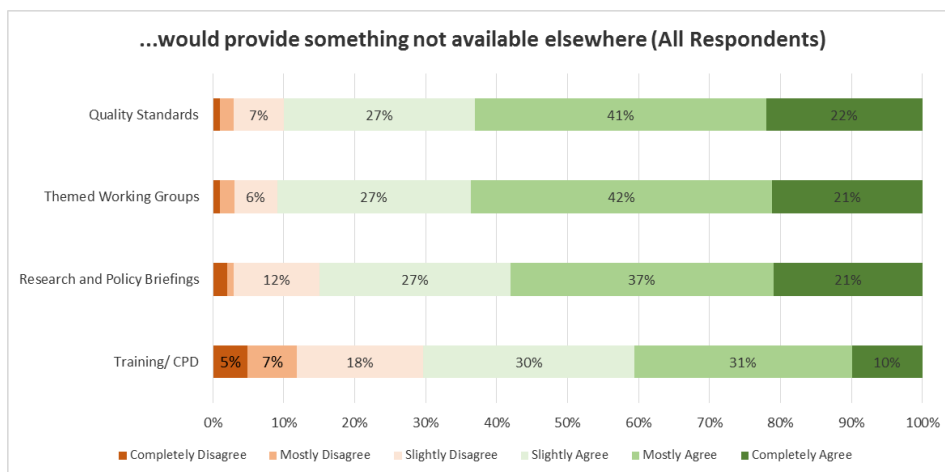


Figure 4: The extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that a potential future service would offer something not available elsewhere, ordered by weighted average (highest rated at top).

4.4 Reflections on the responses of different subgroups

Much of the analysis in this report has focused on the difference between the responses received from professionals working in an HE environment, and those working in a non-HE environment. This is because the clearest differences in opinions, where they existed at all, grouped along this division. However, it is recognised that distinct subgroups exist within these divisions. For example, HE professionals working in Student Services have a very different role to those working in Widening Participation or Outreach; and the role of those working in FE Student Support is similarly very different to that of Virtual School professionals. Therefore, there is value in NNECL considering any variations in support needs within each of these subgroups, in addition to the overall results.

Caution must be exercised when looking at subgroup data, as the number of respondents in some groups is too small to undertake statistically robust comparisons. When looking at percentage figures, apparently large differences may result from just one or two people expressing a slightly stronger response. Appendix 3.4 provides the subgroup responses on possible future NNECL services. These graphs illustrate that, broadly speaking, the proportion of respondents in each subgroup ‘mostly’ or ‘completely’ agreeing with each statement are very similar.

Comparing HE respondent subgroups

Within the group of HE respondents, those working in a Widening Participation or Outreach role are consistently more likely than their Student Services colleagues to provide a strong positive response indicating that they thought the service would offer something not available elsewhere, or that they would make use of the service. Those working in Widening Participation or Outreach were more likely to favour Research and Policy Briefings over the other possible future services, with their Student Services colleagues expressing greater preference for Training/CPD. However, these differences are not large enough to suggest that these groups of professionals have fundamentally different needs.

Comparing non-HE respondent subgroups

Within the non-HE group of respondents, those working in FE and those from a Virtual School provided very similar responses in line with the overall response received to each question. FE respondents were more likely than other groups to 'Completely Agree' that possible future services would enable them to be more effective in their role. This perhaps suggests a more acute need within this group, but it is important to note that this difference disappears once those 'Mostly' and 'Completely' agreeing are combined. In addition, the views of FE respondents on which services would offer most benefit were in line with the overall response.

Similarity of qualitative response themes

The qualitative responses received had a similar lack of subgroup variation to the quantitative responses. The themes identified in sections 2 and 3 of this report regarding challenges faced and desired support were present within all subgroups. Where variations did occur, these were on the specific detail of, for example, what type of information people would like to access, which was dependent on the focus of their role.

Conclusion on subgroup variations

The evidence suggests that the challenges faced by professionals working to support the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers, and the type of support that would be most effective in overcoming these challenges, remains remarkably consistent across the different stakeholder subgroups.

This suggests that strategic priorities that are based on the overall data set from this consultation would not inadvertently exclude the needs of a particular subgroup. In order to ensure that the needs of all subgroups are met, it is suggested that attention is paid to the detail of the support provided, for example by ensuring that all stakeholder viewpoints are addressed, and recognising the limited time and resources that many professionals (in particular those working in a non-HE environment) have to focus on this area of work.

Section 5- Views of Stakeholders

In addition to the consultation with members, nine semi-structured telephone interviews were undertaken with stakeholders who either currently work with NNECL, or have expressed interest in working with NNECL in the future. These stakeholders represented organisations that have a strategic role in developing or supporting services working with looked after children or care leavers.

5.1 Benefits to stakeholder organisations of engaging with NNECL

Stakeholders who had been engaged with NNECL reported a number of ways in which that involvement has contributed to their work:

- complementing their organisation's activities, e.g. NNECL representation on working groups;
- facilitating networking nationally and regionally, in particular linking up different organisations, identifying key contacts in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
- intelligence gathering, e.g. providing up to date information on legislative changes and developments in practice.

In addition, several stakeholders commented on the benefits of having a 'powerful' body to raise the issues of this group. A small number of stakeholders suggested that the future development of NNECL would benefit from a greater clarity of strategic objectives, noting that some of NNECL's previous activities had been initiated more by responding to opportunities such as availability of funding than they had been by a long-term strategy. Clarifying clear strategic objectives would, in the view of stakeholders, make it easier to identify opportunities for collaboration, and so enhance the value to their organisation of working in partnership with NNECL.

5.2 Key challenges identified by stakeholders

Stakeholder interviewees were asked to identify the key challenges faced in supporting the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers. Responses were broadly similar to the challenges identified by members delivering direct services:

Being able to talk to the right people

The most common challenge identified was developing good links with HEIs so that there is awareness of support, procedures and outreach events. In addition stakeholders felt it was key to ensure that professionals understand and have aspirations for young people, but that they need to know where they can find support to help them do this.

Practical challenges

Issues around the availability of financial support were cited, as was the need to address the lack of financial management skills of young people and address common concerns around the practical issues of going to HE (e.g. accommodation outside of university term time). It was also noted that 'providing the right support at the right age' can be a difficult, for example raising aspirations early enough, and the challenge of identifying care leavers who enter HE at an older than average age so that they can be adequately supported.

Meeting individual needs

Issues around meeting individual needs were complex and linked to needs of the wider support network as well as the needs of looked after children and care leavers, for example:

- aspirational issues were identified as a key challenge and often compounded if a young person's support network has low levels of understanding of HE;
- stakeholders noted that young people require different levels and types of support depending on their history;
- attainment is crucial and there is a need to ensure that professionals understand the negative impact that moving children around can have on receiving a good quality education.

Keeping up to date with policy and best practice

Stakeholders noted variability in understanding and awareness of different groups and challenges in getting key information to the right people.

The challenge of maintaining focus on care leavers in the wider policy environment

Some stakeholders reported that there were many competing issues on the widening participation agenda. This presents a challenge around sustaining momentum to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care leavers receive adequate resources and appropriate attention in light of competing issues. This reflects the feedback from members that, for a large proportion, supporting this group forms only a small part of their role.

5.3 How NNECL could help stakeholders address challenges/support their work

Stakeholders reported broadly similar themes to those raised by the membership in terms of how they thought NNECL could address the aforementioned challenges and support them in their work:

Facilitate sharing of best practice

Stakeholders felt that NNECL has a key role in sharing best practice on a range of issues including: what works in terms of supporting care leavers to access HE; working with primary school age to develop aspirations; templates/case studies on good pathway models.

Build relationships between agencies

Various opportunities were seen for NNECL in terms of linking with other organisations at the national and regional level including: partnerships with other national organisations, e.g. The Care Leavers Association, National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH); creating economies of scale by collaborating and joint working nationally (e.g. contributing to national carers week, conferences) and regionally (e.g. linking up groups of universities and virtual school head groups).

Undertake research and awareness raising

Stakeholders made a number of suggestions regarding research and awareness raising work for NNECL particularly at the national/strategic level, for example: to challenge the narrative around care leavers' educational prospects by collating best practice stories of care leavers who have been through HE; to keep these issues on the agendas of relevant institutions and agencies; campaigning

work with the Department for Education to ensure good practice is disseminated from the centre; building on the legacy of the Buttle quality mark.

However, a number of stakeholders voiced words of caution regarding NNECL adopting any specific lobbying role. In particular there was a suggestion that there could be a risk of saturation relating to campaigning and lobbying for this group, as well as concerns about conflicts of interest with any potential members. It was suggested that NNECL should adopt an approach that informs the development of policy through development of the knowledge base and research into best practice, rather than developing its own policy.

Provide practical support to practitioners

Suggestions for practical support were similar to those suggested by members. A role for NNECL as a central information resource for practitioners was advocated. Key areas of practical support included: contacts at HEIs; information on changes in funding and other legislation; information on finance and repayments; and training for all groups of practitioners.

In addition, some stakeholders felt NNECL had a role in developing or supporting ongoing work to develop frameworks to better track care leaver progression. Stakeholders suggested that better tracking would improve intelligence on the types/scope of needs of the group so that support can be based more on evidence than on assumptions.

Stakeholders were asked if they thought there was any risk of duplication or overlap with the work of other organisations who work in this field. While some possibility of duplication was acknowledged, this could be avoided by good mutual understanding of the work of other organisations. Stakeholders saw far more opportunities for collaboration not least because there is seen to be a great deal of work remaining to be done in the field.

5.4 Stakeholder suggestions for NNECL priorities

Stakeholders were asked what they saw as the key priorities for NNECL over the next two years. Priorities included both strategic and operational activities:

Strategic activities included:

- identifying 'what success looks like', e.g. what impacts are NNECL looking to achieve?
- identifying NNECL's audience, e.g. practitioner/young people; HE/all organisations;
- identifying a sustainable legal structure and operating model;
- improving links with the FE sector;
- improving awareness of Local Authority (LA) teams, foster carers etc.

Operational activities

- look at best practice in devolved regions;
- become a central information point;
- develop/support projects that track the progression of care leavers through HE and beyond;
- increase awareness/change narratives around care leavers and access HE.

Section 6- Key Points for Consideration

The consultation has identified that both HE and non-HE respondents believe that there is considerable work required to support the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers, and a clear need for the services provided and proposed by NNECL. This section discusses in more detail some key points arising from the consultation that should be considered when developing NNECL's future strategy.

6.1 Linking with other organisations

Many respondents indicated that NNECL should develop or build on links with other organisations to help deliver services. This would minimise the risk of duplication, and also increase confidence that NNECL was providing a point of contact with all relevant work in this area. Organisations such as the Fostering Network, Who Cares? Trust, British Association of Social Workers, and National Care Benchmarking Forum were among those suggested as potential supporters of NNECL's activity, e.g. by providing access to networks, research evidence and practical resources.

6.2 What will offer value to members?

The consultation identified a number of 'service characteristics' that would increase the likelihood of practitioners having confidence in the value of engaging with NNECL:

- **Evidence based**- ultimately, practitioners are looking for services that enable them to be more effective in their role. It is important that NNECL services reliably lead to the delivery of positive outcomes by being based on robust evidence and routinely evaluated;
- **Easy to access**- for most practitioners, this area of work is only a small part of their role. NNECL will provide value if practitioners feel that they can easily access the specific information/support they require when they need it;
- **Reliable**- many practitioners highlighted the complexity and ever-changing nature of information in this area. NNECL can provide value by being a trusted source of accurate, up-to-date information;
- **Complete**- there is a strong desire among practitioners to have a single place where they can access all of the information they require. NNECL will provide value if a comprehensive 'single point of contact' can be offered;
- **Continuous Learning**- there is widespread recognition of the need to develop a better understanding of the educational progression needs of looked after children and care leavers. NNECL can provide value by enabling the development of knowledge in this area.

6.3 Importance of information and resources

The majority of practitioners have diverse roles and, whilst recognising that this area of work is important, many have very limited capacity to engage with the perceived complexity of information and practice within this area of work.

The consultation suggests that all eight current and potential future NNECL services could make a significant contribution towards meeting the needs of practitioners. Services such as conferences and regional meetings are highly valued by many members, in particular those from an HE

institution. However, access to these types of services will naturally be limited both in scope and availability, and so may limit practitioner engagement.

This suggests that it is important for NNECL to offer 'on-demand' support in the form of easy access to relevant, up-to-date information and resources, if the most benefit is to be offered to the widest range of potential members. Additional services, such as conferences and regional meetings, can then be built on this foundation to add value for those who have the time and resources to engage further.

6.4 The consistency of the strategic support themes

Section 3 outlined four themes identified from the consultation as central to the support that they were looking for NNECL to provide:

- facilitate the sharing of best practice;
- provide practical support services;
- facilitate the building of relationships between agencies;
- develop a stronger evidence base.

It is worth highlighting the consistency of these themes across all sub-groups. This suggests a set of common challenges for professionals working to support the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers. Providing support based on these themes should, therefore, be an appropriate starting point for engaging with practitioners.

These strategic themes will be delivered through specific services. Different services may offer different levels of depth or breadth in meeting members' needs around each theme. For example, conferences can be a good way of exploring possible relationships between different agencies in depth, whereas an online directory is likely to be more effective in raising awareness of the overall membership of a network.

For NNECL to develop the most valued membership offer, it may be useful to consider the ways in which each individual service supports outcomes related to each of the strategic support themes. This would assist in showing how each service addresses the identified needs of members, and perhaps could also be used to offer different 'levels' of service that members could use to tailor to their own needs.

6.5 'One-to-many' networking

A key challenge for practitioners from all sectors was 'being able to talk to the right people'. Many identified the practical challenges of needing to understand the different processes and support available: non-HE respondents identifying the very different approaches taken by different universities, and HE respondents identifying the different structures, resources and policies of different local authorities. Each practitioner only needs to be aware of their own university or local authority practice, but will need to be aware of many different approaches in the 'other' sector.

NNECL is seen as offering a valuable service in facilitating the building of relationships between agencies. It may be useful to consider how to integrate 'local networking', which is particularly useful for raising awareness about university visits and general aspiration-raising activities, with 'national contacts' that are often needed to support students once they enter HE.

Section 7- Recommendations for Future Actions

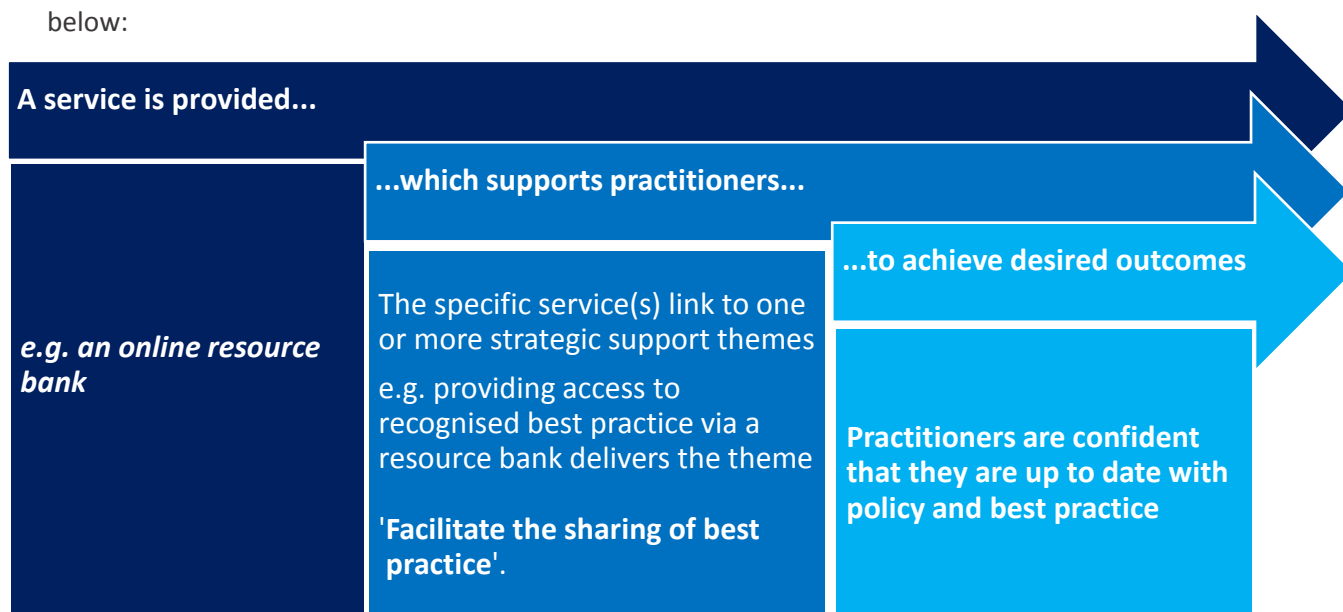
This report has identified the challenges and support needs of practitioners working to support the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers. The key finding of this research is that there is a significant need for a trusted source of information and guidance on best practice in this area, along with a need to further develop the knowledge base regarding what is effective in securing positive outcomes for this group.

This section provides strategic recommendations to support the future development of NNECL, based on the consultation results.

7.1 Adopt an outcomes focus

The consultation identified that practitioners will be most likely to engage with services that directly enable them to be more effective in their role. This means that NNECL will offer most value if individual services are designed to support the outcomes practitioners wish to achieve, rather than as an end in themselves, and are able to evidence that services deliver the desired outcomes.

An example of the possible relationship between intended outcomes, the strategic themes that lead to these outcomes, and the specific services used to deliver these strategic themes is provided below:



Once a set of intended outcomes is identified, an evaluation framework can be produced to assess progress against these outcomes. This will provide evidence of the effectiveness of NNECL's services in delivering what is important to members.

Adopting an outcomes focus enables progress in achieving strategic priorities to be monitored, and provides a means of assessing and communicating the value of the services provided to members and stakeholders.

7.2 Agree a set of strategic priorities

The consultation identified a set of strong themes for the support desired by NNECL members:

- facilitate the sharing of best practice;
- provide practical support services;
- facilitate the building of relationships between agencies;
- develop a stronger evidence base.

It is recommended that these are used as a starting point for NNECL to identify a set of strategic priorities around which specific services will be designed.

7.3 Agree a set of service values

Section 6.2 outlined possible 'service characteristics' identified from the consultation as offering value to practitioners. It is suggested that these are used as a starting point for defining a set of 'service values' on which all NNECL services are based.

7.4 Aim to develop a model that enables engagement with non-members without comprising the value of membership

There is a potential tension between developing a membership model, which may be seen as 'exclusive', and ensuring an 'inclusivity' that gives members confidence that the service offered by NNECL is 'complete', and enables members to engage with best practice from across the whole sector. What is important is that NNECL membership is not devalued by the absence of non-members, but also that there are clear benefits to membership.

A 'tiered offer' may be an appropriate way to provide added value to members without excluding non-members to the detriment of all. It may be desirable to provide some services free of charge in order to promote engagement with NNECL, and provide a trusted foundation on which additional (charged for) services can be built.

7.5 Prioritise the development of knowledge and understanding

There is a clear need for practitioners to have access to information and resources, and for these to be based on a more robust body of evidence than is currently available. There are many routes that could be explored- from dissemination of best practice to undertaking primary research- that would meet a diversity of needs identified by practitioners and stakeholders. It is suggested that a resource bank that provides regularly updated information would provide a valuable foundation for NNECL's membership offer, from which other 'added value' services that deliver the full range of identified support needs could be developed.

7.6 Review strategic partnerships

It is clear that both members and stakeholders identify a need that NNECL is well placed to meet. Many emphasised the importance of linking with other organisations to benefit from collective effort and avoid duplication. It would be advisable for NNECL to review its work with other organisations to ensure that all appropriate links and opportunities for joint working have been identified.

Appendix 1- Online Survey Questions

Introduction

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is asking all professionals with a stake in the education and progression of looked-after children and care-leavers to complete a short questionnaire to inform our future strategy and activity plans.

NNECL is the national organisation supporting professionals working to improve further and higher education participation and success for young people in or leaving care. Since its inception in 2010, NNECL has grown considerably in membership, activity and impact. Now we want to build on these foundations so that NNECL's future strategy and activity provides the best possible support for professionals whose role includes supporting the education or progression of looked-after children or care-leavers in some way.

If this includes you, please spare a few minutes to tell us how we can make our work helpful to you.

1. What is your area of work?

- Higher Education- Widening Participation or Outreach
- Higher Education- Student Services
- Further Education or Sixth Form College
- School or Academy
- Local Authority- Care Leavers Support
- Local Authority- Virtual School
- Charity or Third Sector Organisation
- Other (If you choose this option a box will appear for you describe your area of work)

2. In which UK region does your work mainly take place?

3. Have you previously participated in any NNECL activities (e.g. attended a regional group or conference), or made use of our online or newsletter resources?

- Yes
- No

Current Services

[if 'Yes' to Q3]

4. Regional Groups

NNECL has regional groups covering most of England. These groups meet a few times each year to allow practitioners in universities, colleges and other stakeholder organisations to share challenges and effective practice, and to plan collaborative activities.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree | N/A |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I regularly attend a NNECL regional group | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The NNECL regional groups offer information or support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The NNECL regional groups have enabled me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. What would make the **NNECL regional groups** most useful to you in your role?

6. Online Resources

NNECL's website (nnecl.org) provides resources including guides, film, research and links to websites useful for practitioners and the looked-after children and care leavers they support. The website also lists hundreds of events run by universities and colleges designed to support looked-after children and care leavers on their journeys into higher education.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree | N/A |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The event and activities listings are useful to me (found in the Activities section of nnecl.org) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The resource guides and materials are useful to me (found in the Resources section of nnecl.org) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The news about research and best practice is useful to me (found in the News section of nnecl.org) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The regional network information is useful to me (found in the Partners section of nnecl.org) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| nnecl.org offers information and support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| nnecl.org has enabled me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

7. What would make the **nnecl.org website** most useful to you in your role?

8. NNECL Newsletter

NNECL publishes a quarterly newsletter via email that keeps subscribers up to date on the work of the National Steering Group, features highlights from different regions' activities, and promotes useful opportunities.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree | N/A |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I find the NNECL newsletter useful | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The NNECL newsletter offers information and support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The NNECL newsletter has enabled me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

9. What would make the **NNECL newsletter** most useful to you in your role?

10. Annual Conference

NNECL runs an annual conference that brings stakeholders from a wide variety of organisations together to consider shared challenges and solutions, learn from research and expert practitioners, and build useful networks to support their work.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree | N/A |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I am aware that NNECL runs an Annual Conference | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I regularly attend the NNECL Conference | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The NNECL Conference offers information and support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The NNECL Conference has enabled me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

11. What would make the **NNECL Conference** most useful to you in your role?

Current Services

[if 'No' to Q3]

NNECL currently provides a range of services to support professionals whose role includes supporting the education or progression of looked-after children and care-leavers. We would like to know the extent to which these services are relevant to you, and what would make them most useful in supporting your work.

12. Regional Groups

NNECL has regional groups covering most of England. These groups meet a few times each year to allow practitioners in universities, colleges and other stakeholder organisations to share challenges and effective practice, and to plan collaborative activities.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I am aware of the NNECL regional groups | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of group would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of group offers information or support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would be interested in making use of this service | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What would make the NNECL regional groups most useful to you in your role?

13. Online Resources

NNECL's website (nnecl.org) provides resources including guides, film, research and links to websites useful for practitioners and the looked-after children and care leavers they support. The website also lists hundreds of events run by universities and colleges designed to support looked-after children and care leavers on their journeys into higher education.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I am aware of the nnecl.org website | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The event and activities listings would be useful to me in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The resource guides and materials would be useful to me in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The news about research and best practice would be useful to me in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of information and support is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would be interested in making use of this resource | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What would make the NNECL online resource bank most useful to you in your role?

14. NNECL Newsletter

NNECL publishes a quarterly newsletter via email that keeps subscribers up to date on the work of the National Steering Group, features highlights from different regions' activities, and promotes useful opportunities.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I am aware of the NNECL newsletter | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of newsletter would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of newsletter offers information and support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would be interested in receiving this newsletter | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What would make the NNECL newsletter most useful to you in your role?

15. Annual Conference

NNECL runs an annual conference that brings stakeholders from a wide variety of organisations together to consider shared challenges and solutions, learn from research and expert practitioners, and build useful networks to support their work.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I am aware that NNECL runs an Annual Conference | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of conference would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This type of conference offers information and support that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would be interested in attending the NNECL Annual Conference | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What would make the NNECL Annual Conference most useful to you in your role?

Possible Future Services

NNECL is considering developing a number of other services. We would like to know your opinion of how useful these would be in supporting your work with looked-after children and care leavers to help us select the right priorities.

16. Training/CPD

NNECL plans to support members to access good quality professional development. This could be signposting to training from trusted partners or delivering training directly where gaps exist.

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Training to support the educational progression of looked-after children and care leavers is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I think that I would make use of this service | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please use this box if you would like to expand your answer:

17. Research and Policy Briefings

NNECL members have identified many gaps in knowledge, and by pooling funds we can commission the research that will directly support our members' work. We could also publish summaries of policy changes and research findings relevant to the educational progression of looked-after children and care leavers, to enable members to keep up to date with important developments in this complex area of work.

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| This would provide a service that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I think that I would make use of this service | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please use this box if you would like to expand your answer:

18. Themed Working Groups

NNECL members identify various themes within their varied work that could benefit from closer attention and provide enhanced opportunities for discussion, learning and development. One example might be 'Evaluating approaches to supporting looked-after children and care leavers to develop transferable skills'. Themed groups would allow members to engage in the areas most important to them.

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| This would provide a service that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I think that I would make use of this service | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please use this box if you would like to expand your answer, or suggest a working group theme that would be of particular value to your work:

19. Quality Standards

Developing guidance and supporting materials that promote what we collectively know to be effective practice could help to improve the quality of work nationally and provide helpful opportunities for staff and organisations to improve their work.

| | Completely Disagree | Mostly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Mostly Agree | Completely Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| This would provide a service that is not available elsewhere | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| This would enable me to be more effective in my role | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I think that I would make use of this service | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Please use this box if you would like to expand your answer:

20. What are the main challenges you face in relation to your role supporting looked-after children and care leavers to participate and succeed in further and higher education?

21. [Currently Engaged] How would you like NNECL to help you overcome these challenges?/ [Not Currently Engaged] What would most help you overcome these challenges?

Appendix 2- Semi-Structured Interview Topic Guides

A2.1 NNECL members (currently engaged)

Introduction

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is developing their future strategy and activity plans. They are keen to hear the views of those involved in work supporting looked after children and care leavers to identify how NNECL can most effectively support the educational progression to further higher education of looked after children and care leavers, and ensure their success when they do.

Role and Background

Please describe:

- Your role in relation to supporting looked after children and care leavers to access further and higher education and to benefit from this experience;
- Your previous involvement with NNECL

What are the main challenges you face in relation to your role supporting looked after children and care leavers to participate and succeed in further and higher education?

[e.g. communication with institutions, continuity of support throughout a young person's life journey, knowledge of available support]

Experience of NNECL

How has being involved with NNECL benefitted:

- You in your role
- Your organisation more widely

Thinking about future possibilities

What are the key ways in which you think NNECL could support your work?

[e.g. Information and resources to overcome identified challenges?]

Are there other areas of your work that align with NNECL's aspiration to support the educational progression of looked after children and young people, or any potential duplication with other support in this area that NNECL should avoid?

[Distinguish risk of duplication from opportunity for collaboration]

What, in your view, should be NNECL's top priorities for the next two years? [and why?]

A2.2 Potential NNECL members (not currently engaged)

Introduction

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is developing their future strategy and activity plans. They are keen to hear the views of those involved in work supporting looked after children and care leavers to identify how NNECL can most effectively support the educational progression to further higher education of looked after children and care leavers, and ensure their success when they do.

Role and Background

Please describe:

- Your role in relation to supporting looked after children and care leavers to access further and higher education and to benefit from this experience;
- To what extent are you aware of NNECL and their aims? [Provide overview if required]

What are the main challenges you face in relation to your role supporting looked after children and care leavers to participate and succeed in further and higher education?

[e.g. communication with institutions, continuity of support throughout a young person's life journey, knowledge of available support]

Views on possible role for NNECL

What are the key ways in which you think NNECL could support your work?

[e.g. Information and resources to overcome identified challenges?]

Are there other areas of your work that align with NNECL's aspiration to support the educational progression of looked after children and young people, or any potential duplication with other support in this area that NNECL should avoid?

[Distinguish risk of duplication from opportunity for collaboration]

If NNECL is to achieve its aspiration to increase the number of looked after children and care leavers progressing to further and higher education, and being successful once there, what, in your view, should be NNECL's top priorities for the next two years? [and why?]

A2.3 Strategic partners (currently engaged)

Introduction

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is developing their future strategy and activity plans. They are keen to hear the views of those involved in work supporting looked after children and care leavers to identify how NNECL could:

- support the priorities of strategic partners;
- collaborate with strategic partners on shared objectives;
- work in the most effective way to support the educational progression and success of looked after children and care leavers.

Role and Background

Please describe:

- Your role in relation to supporting looked after children and care leavers to access further and higher education and to benefit from this experience;
- Your previous involvement with NNECL

Experience of NNECL

How has being involved with NNECL benefitted:

- You in your role
- Your organisation more widely

Thinking about future possibilities

What are the key ways in which you think NNECL could support your work?

- Specific organisational priorities that working with NNECL would support
- Possible areas for collaboration on shared objectives

What are the key challenges in supporting the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers?

[e.g. communication with institutions, continuity of support throughout a young person's life journey, knowledge of available support]

How could NNECL be most effective its aspiration to address these challenges?

[e.g. developing communication channels; developing resources for policy makers/front line professionals; research into effective support strategies; campaigning and/or awareness raising]

Are there any potential overlaps with the work of other organisations that NNECL should avoid? [Distinguish risk of duplication from opportunity for collaboration]

What, in your view, should be NNECL's top priorities for the next two years? [and why?]

A2.4 Strategic partners (not currently engaged)

Introduction

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is developing their future strategy and activity plans. They are keen to hear the views of those involved in work supporting looked after children and care leavers to identify how NNECL could:

- support the priorities of strategic partners;
- collaborate with strategic partners on shared objectives;
- work in the most effective way to support the educational progression and success of looked after children and care leavers.

Role and Background

Please describe:

- Your role in relation to supporting looked after children and care leavers to access further and higher education and to benefit from this experience;
- To what extent are you aware of NNECL and their aims? [Provide overview if required]

Views on possible role of NNECL

What are the key challenges in supporting the educational progression of looked after children and care leavers?

[e.g. communication with institutions, continuity of support throughout a young person's life journey, knowledge of available support]

What in your view would be of most support for those working to enable looked after children and care leavers to access further and higher education?

[What is available that helps; what else is needed?]

Thinking about future possibilities

Are there any specific priorities of your organisation that would be supported by collaborating with NNECL? [shared objectives]

Are there any potential overlaps with the work of other organisations that NNECL should avoid? [Distinguish risk of duplication from opportunity for collaboration]

If NNECL is to achieve its aspiration to increase the number of looked after children and care leavers progressing to further and higher education, and being successful once there, what, in your view, should be NNECL's top priorities for the next two years? [and why?]

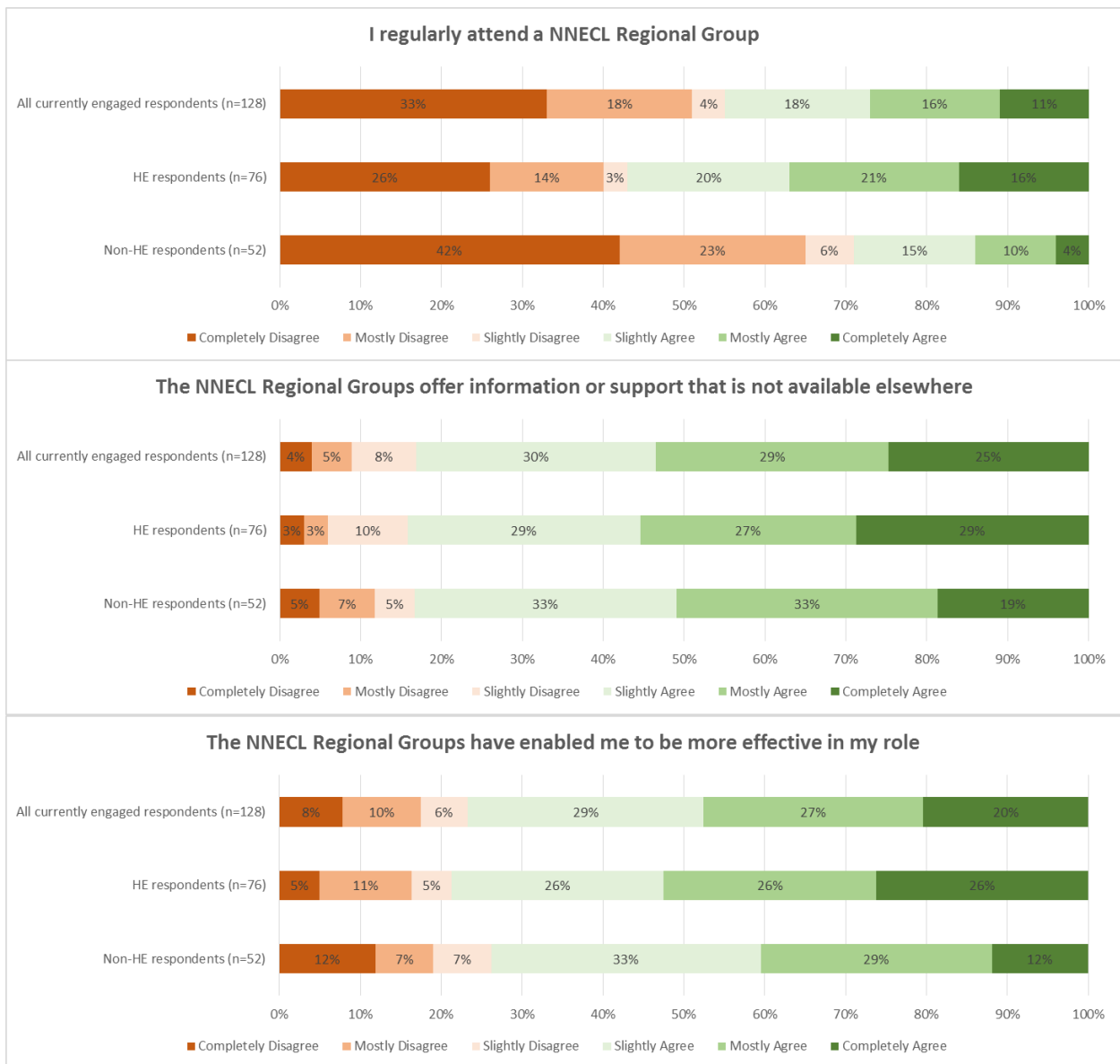
Appendix 3- Quantitative Questionnaire Responses

The quantitative responses to the online survey are presented in question order. Please refer to Appendix 1 for full question wording. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number for legibility, but may result in line totals that do not equal 100%. Segments without a data label are 2% or lower.

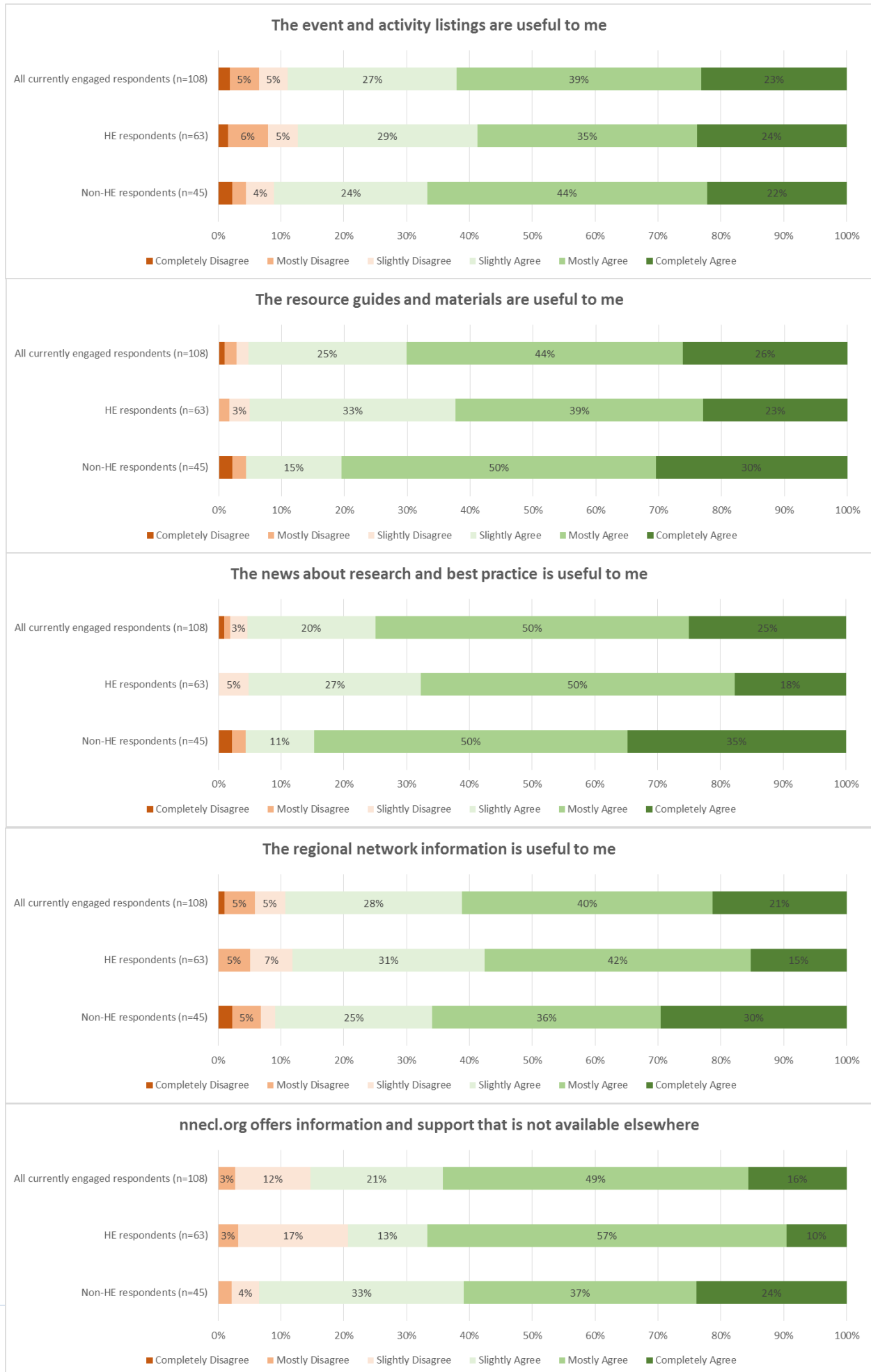
The total number of ‘currently engaged’ respondents was 150. These people have engaged with various combinations of current NNECL services, resulting in a different number of respondents (‘n’) for each service in section A3.1. Respondent numbers for questions presented later in the questionnaire are lower due to incomplete responses.

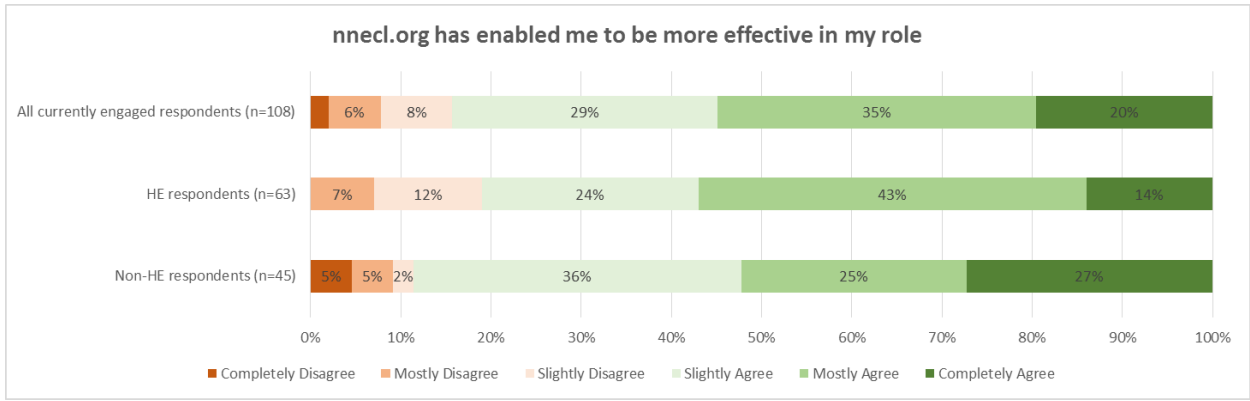
A3.1 Views on current services- currently engaged respondents

Q4: Regional Groups

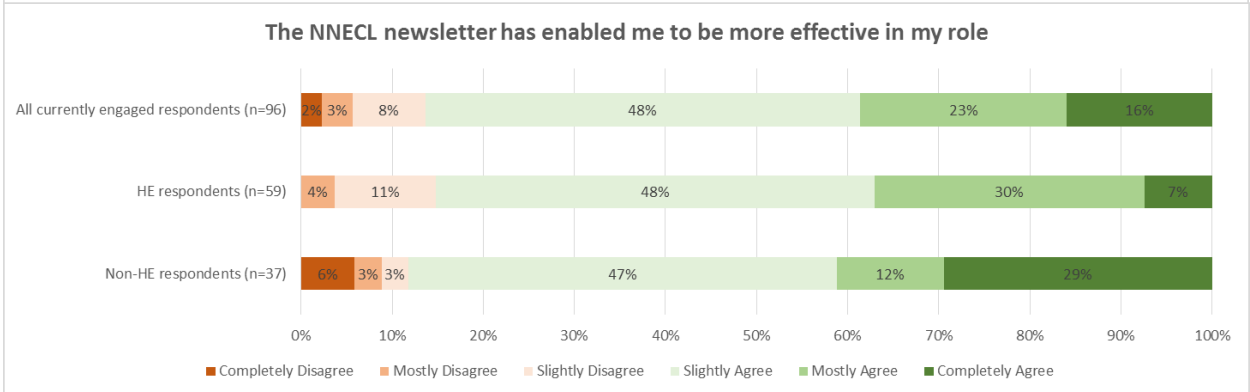
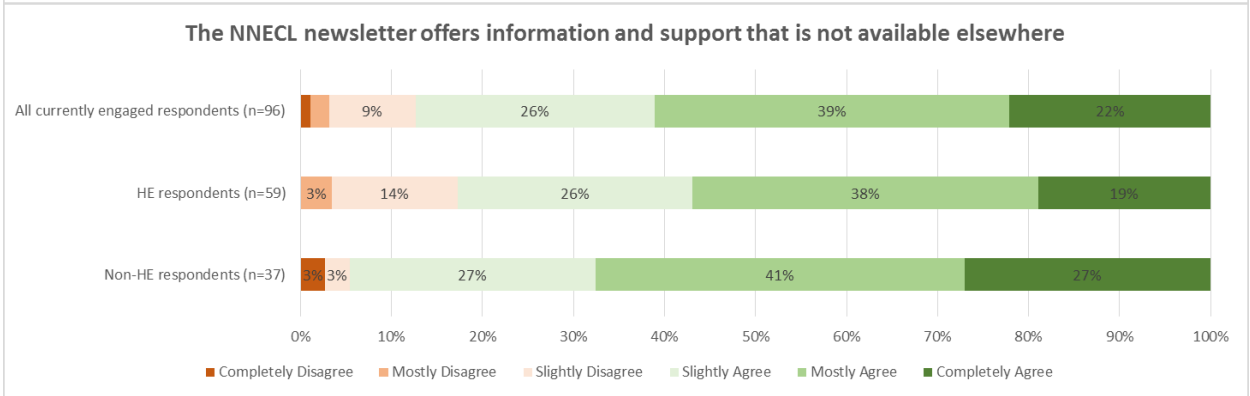
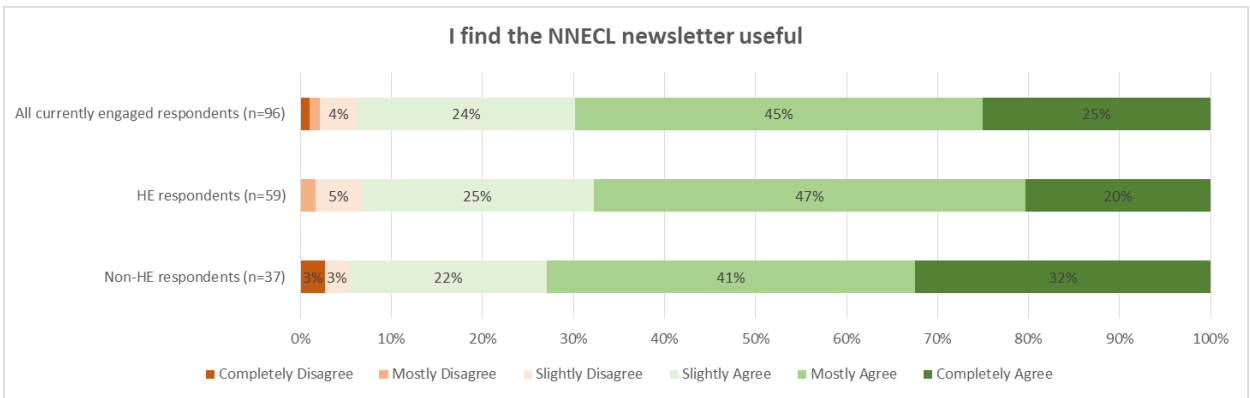


Q6: Online Resources

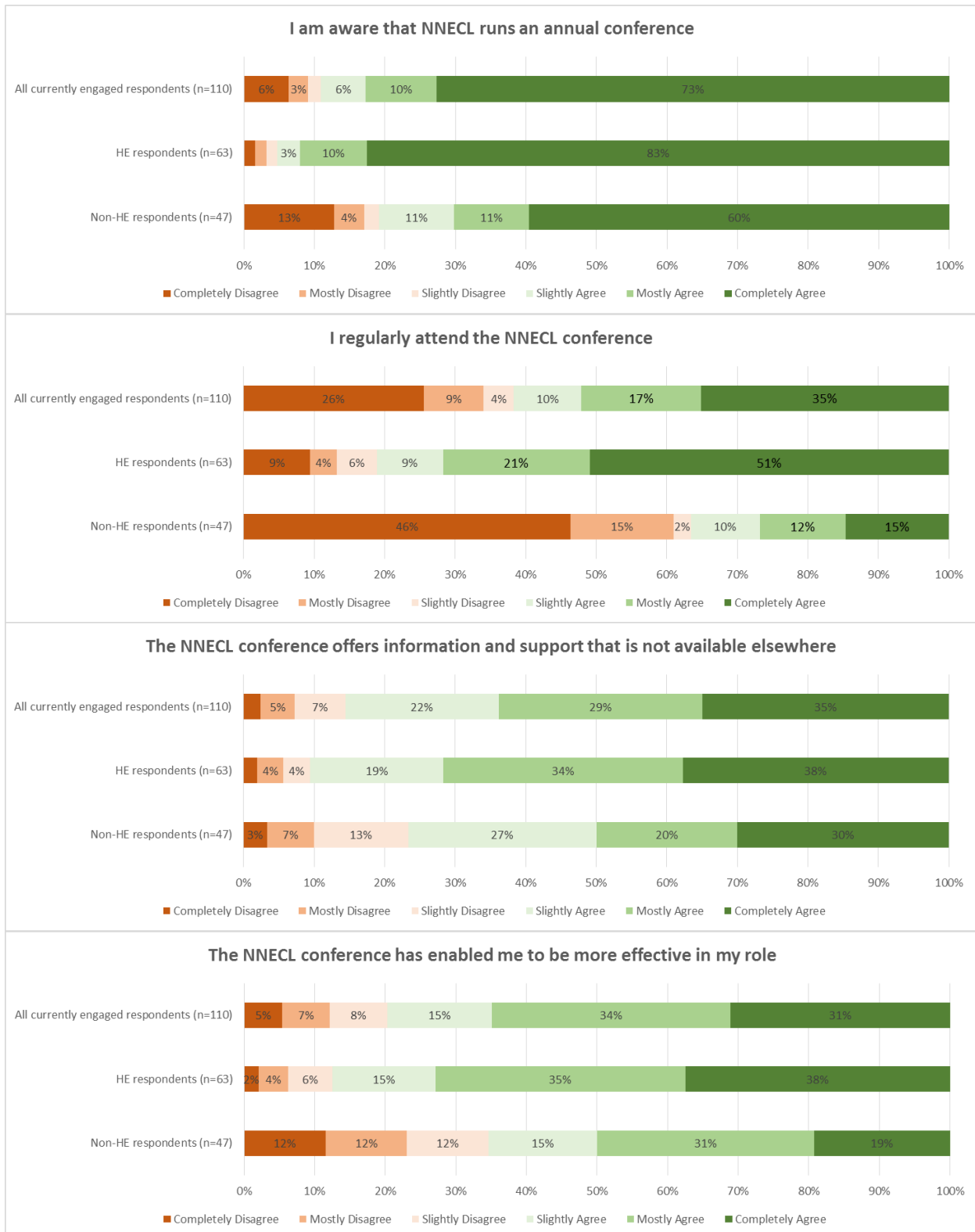




Q8: NNECL Newsletter

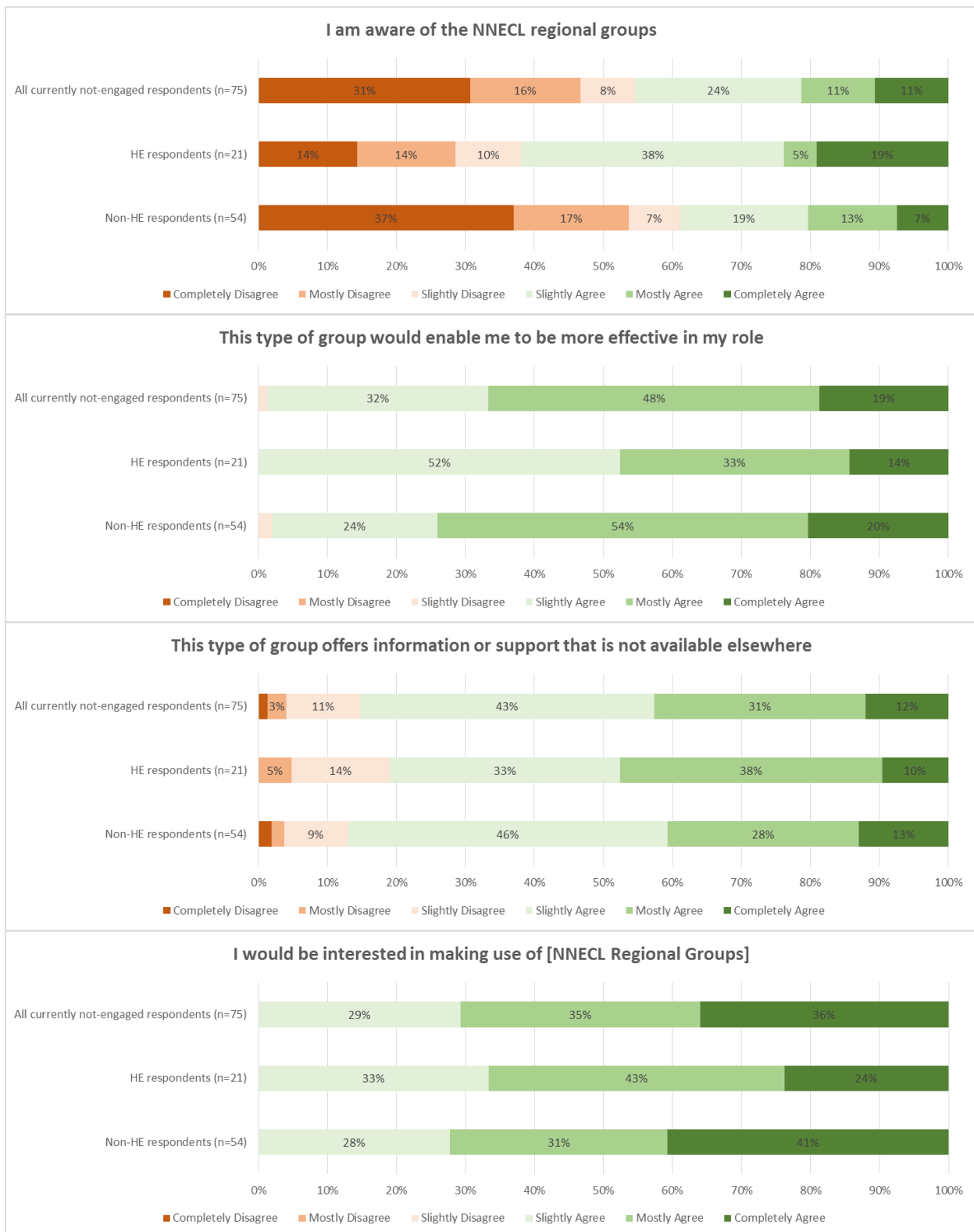


Q10: Annual Conference

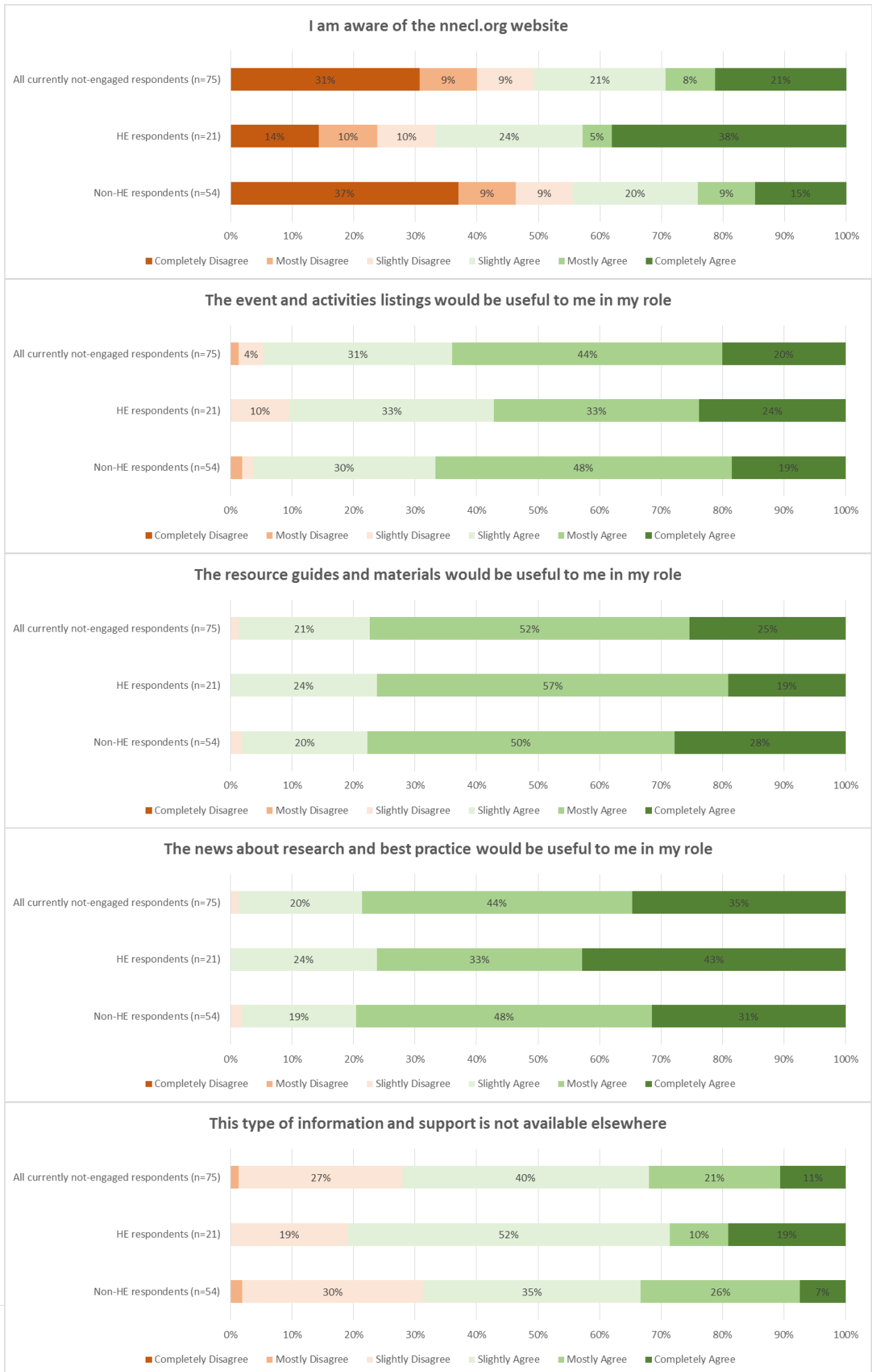


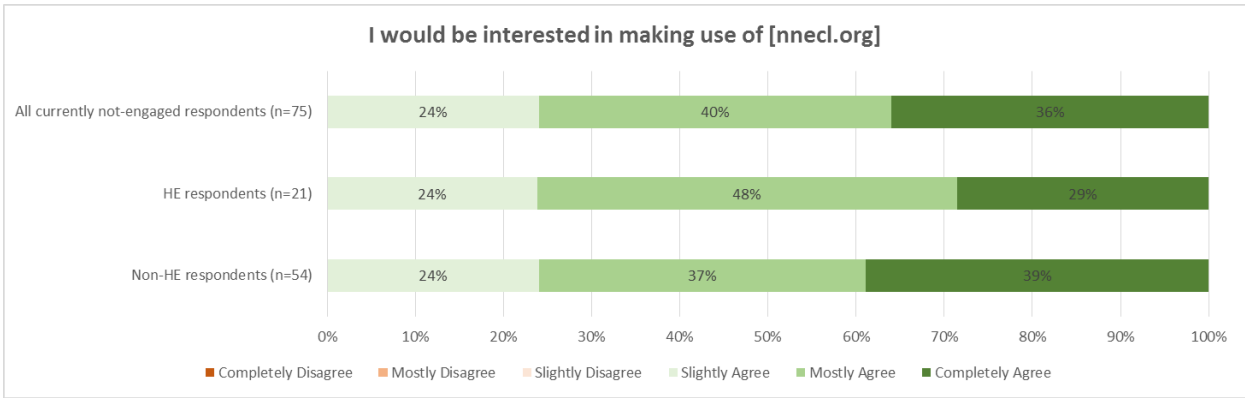
A3.2 Views on current services- respondents not currently engaged

Q12: Regional Groups

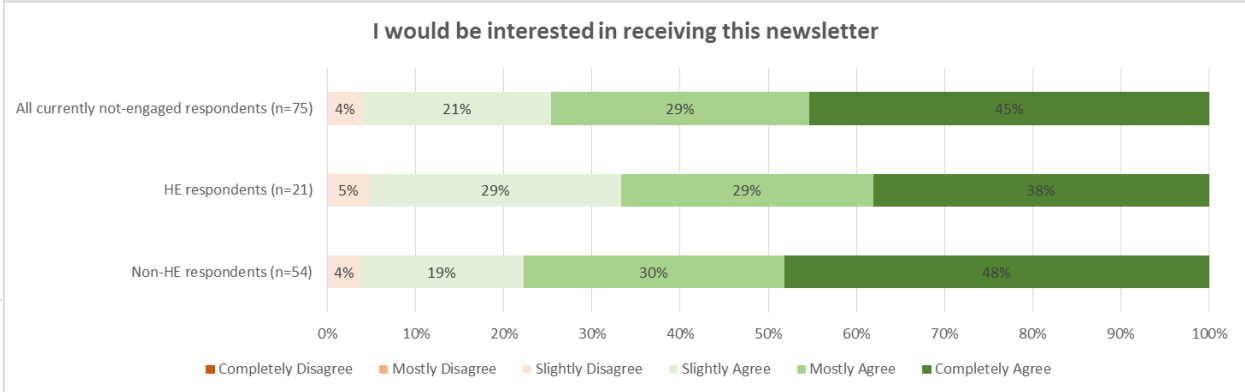
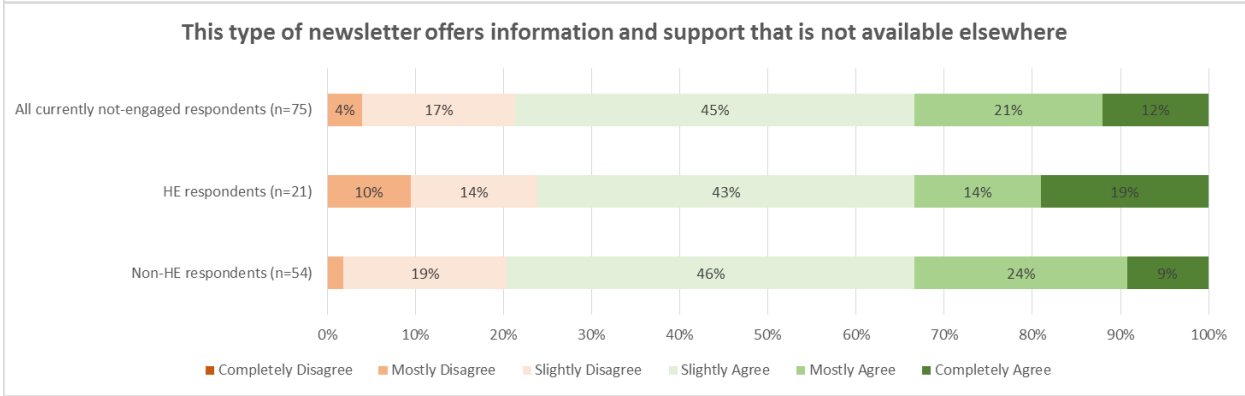
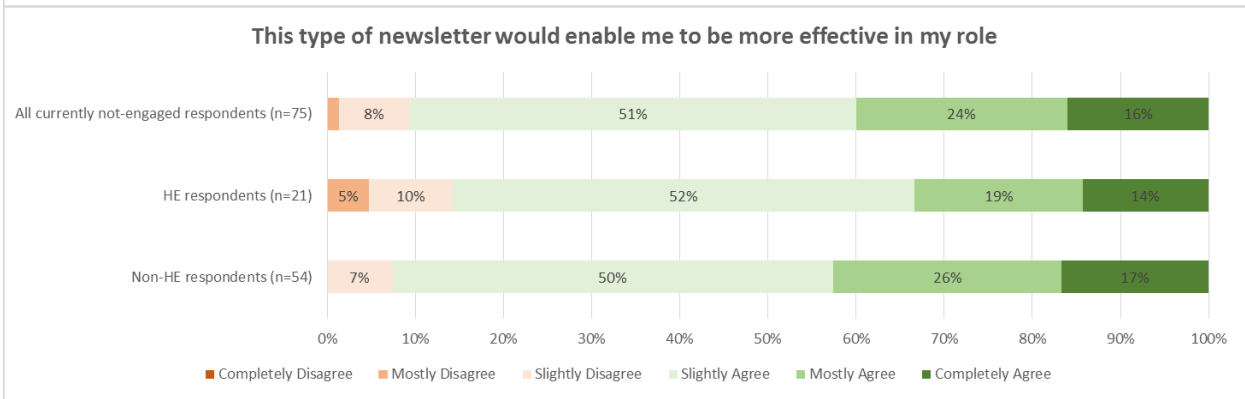
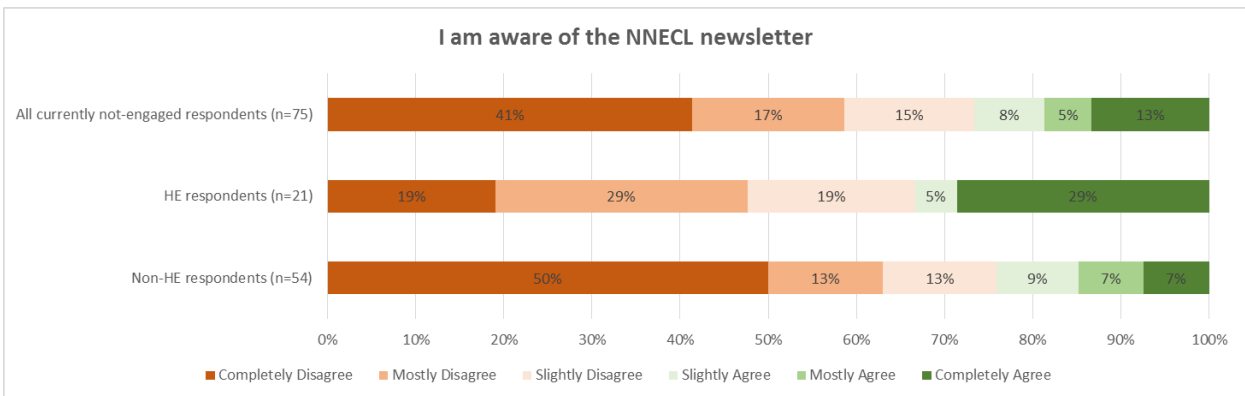


Q13: Online Resources

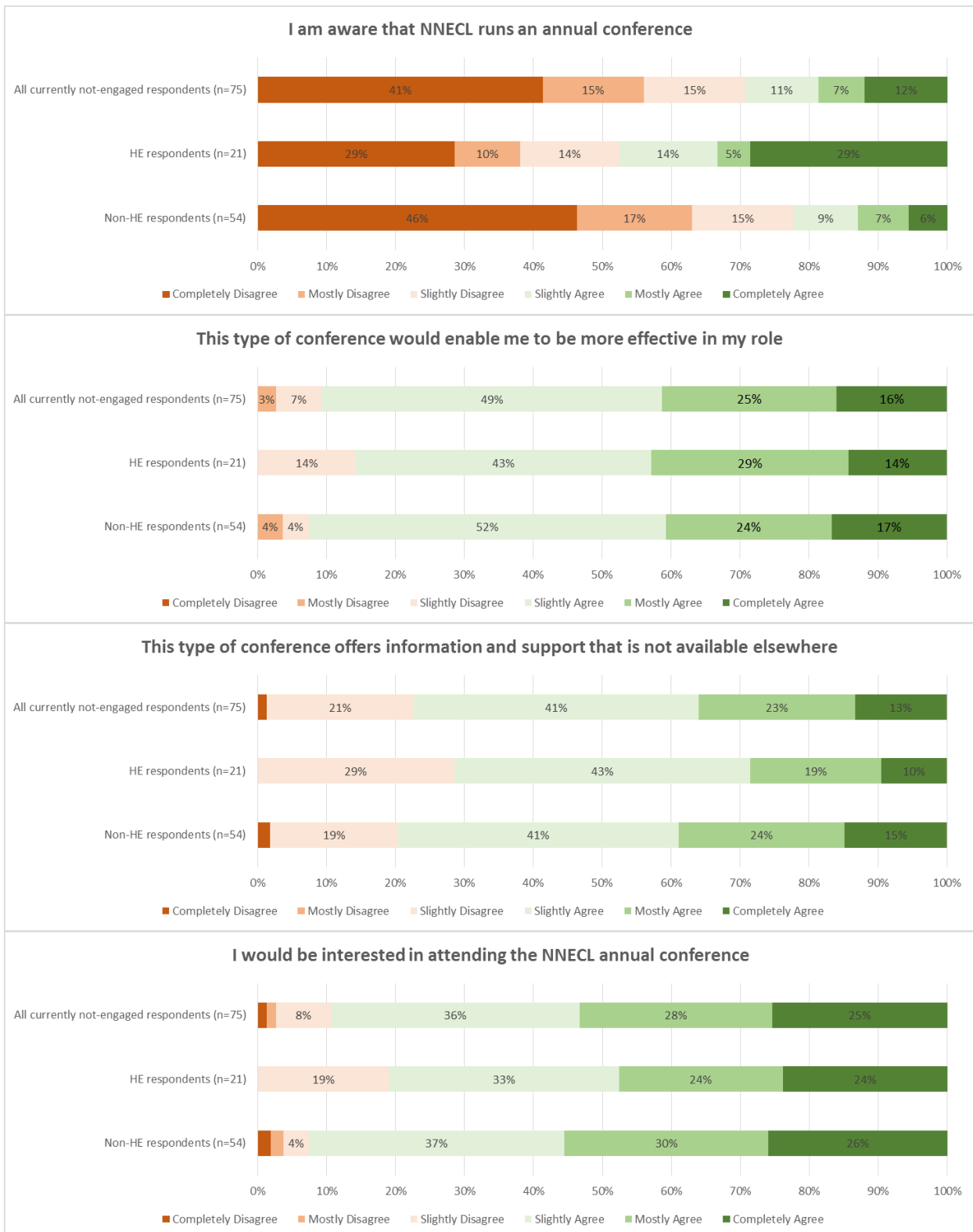




Q14: NNECL Newsletter

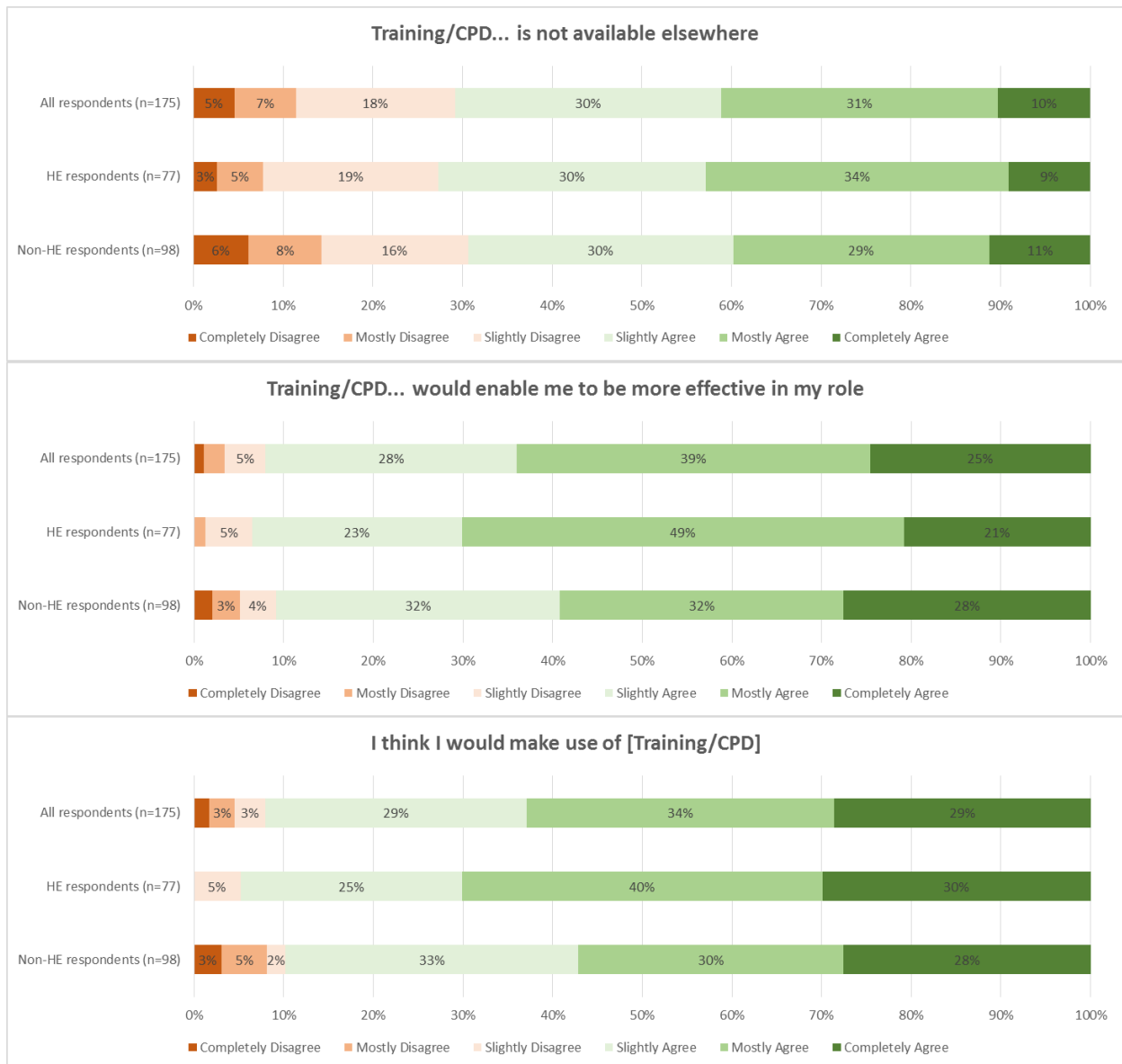


Q15: Annual Conference

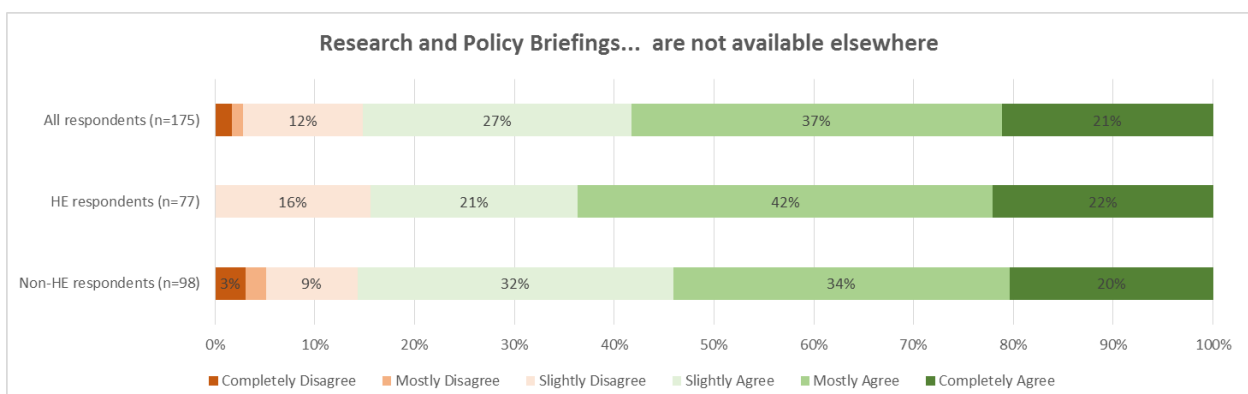


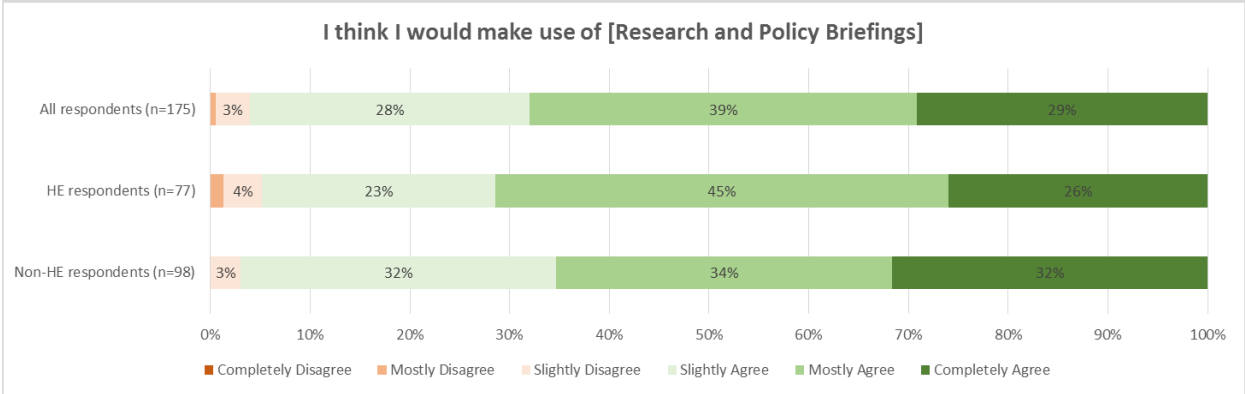
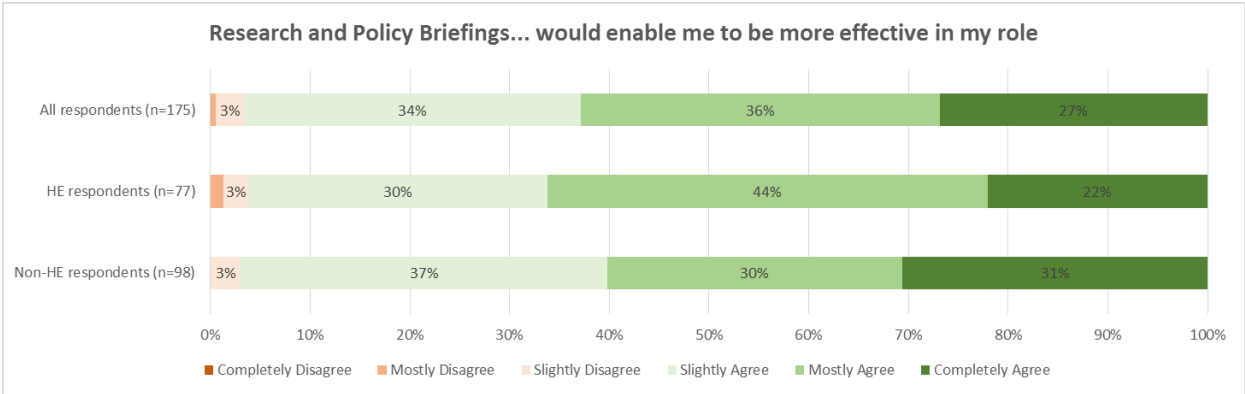
A3.3 Views on possible future services (all respondents)

Q16: Training/CPD

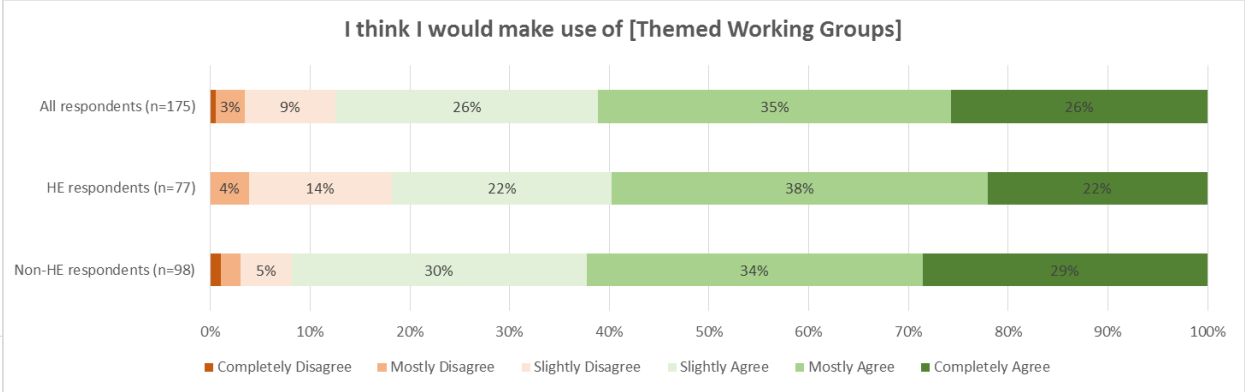
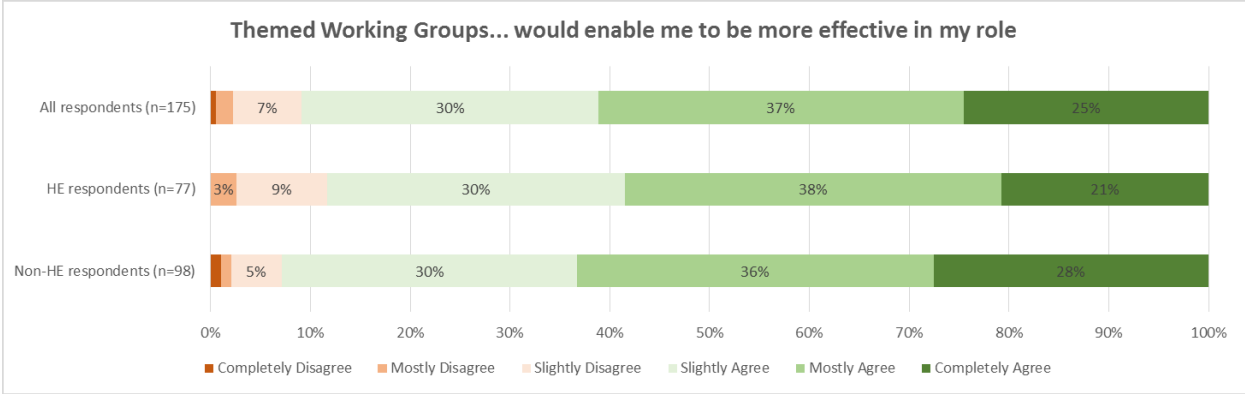
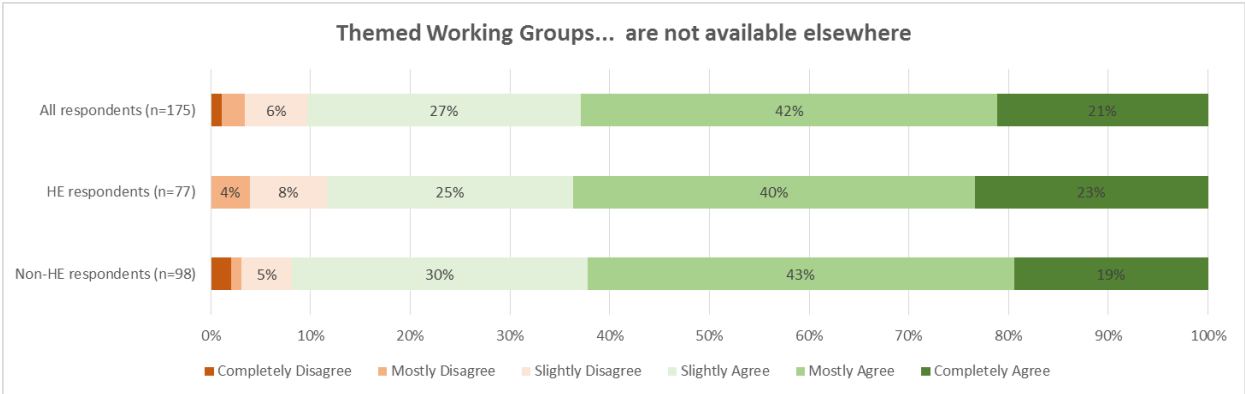


Q17: Research and Policy Briefings

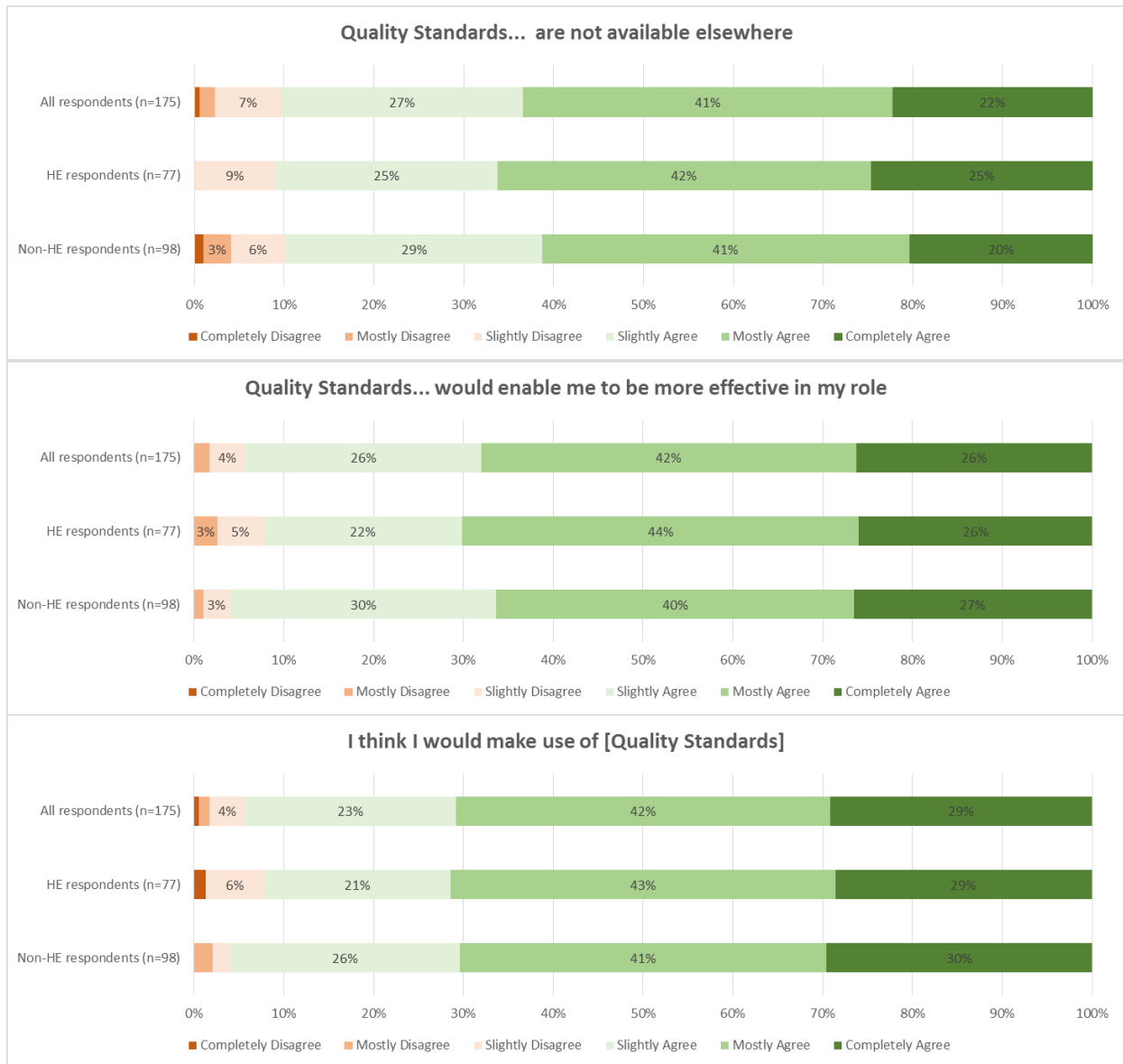




Q18: Themed Working Groups

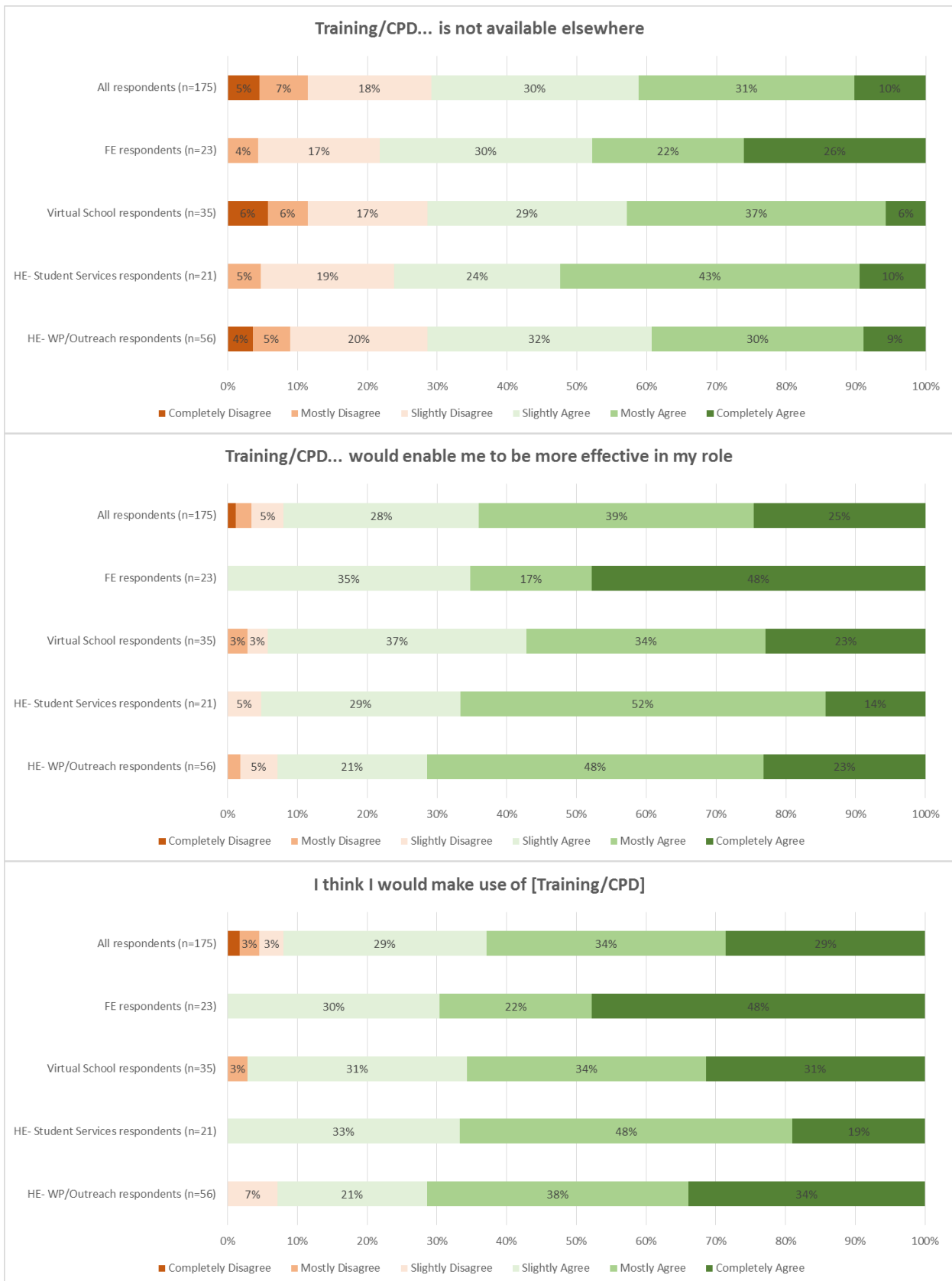


Q19: Quality Standards

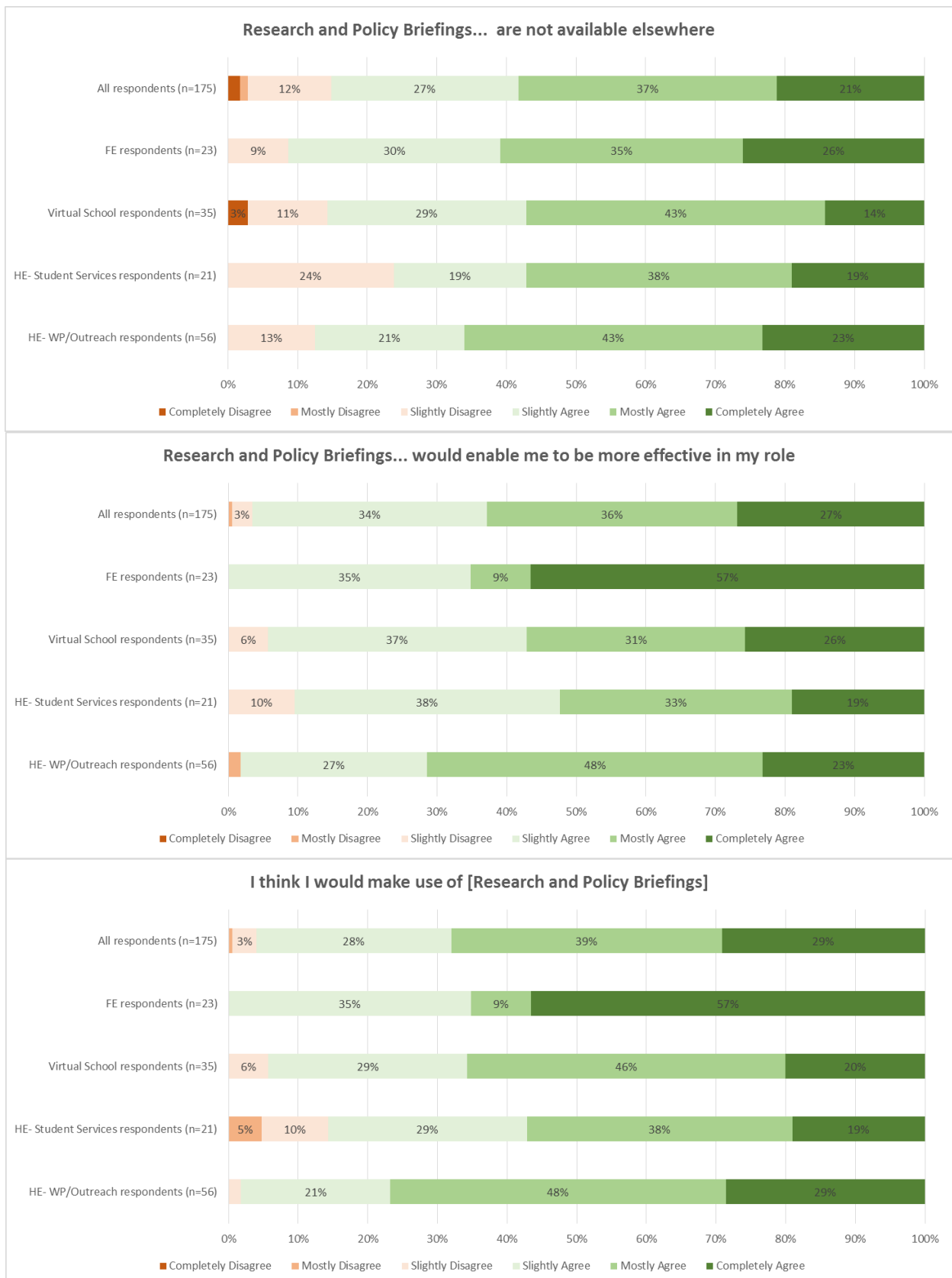


A3.4 Views on possible future services (subgroup responses)

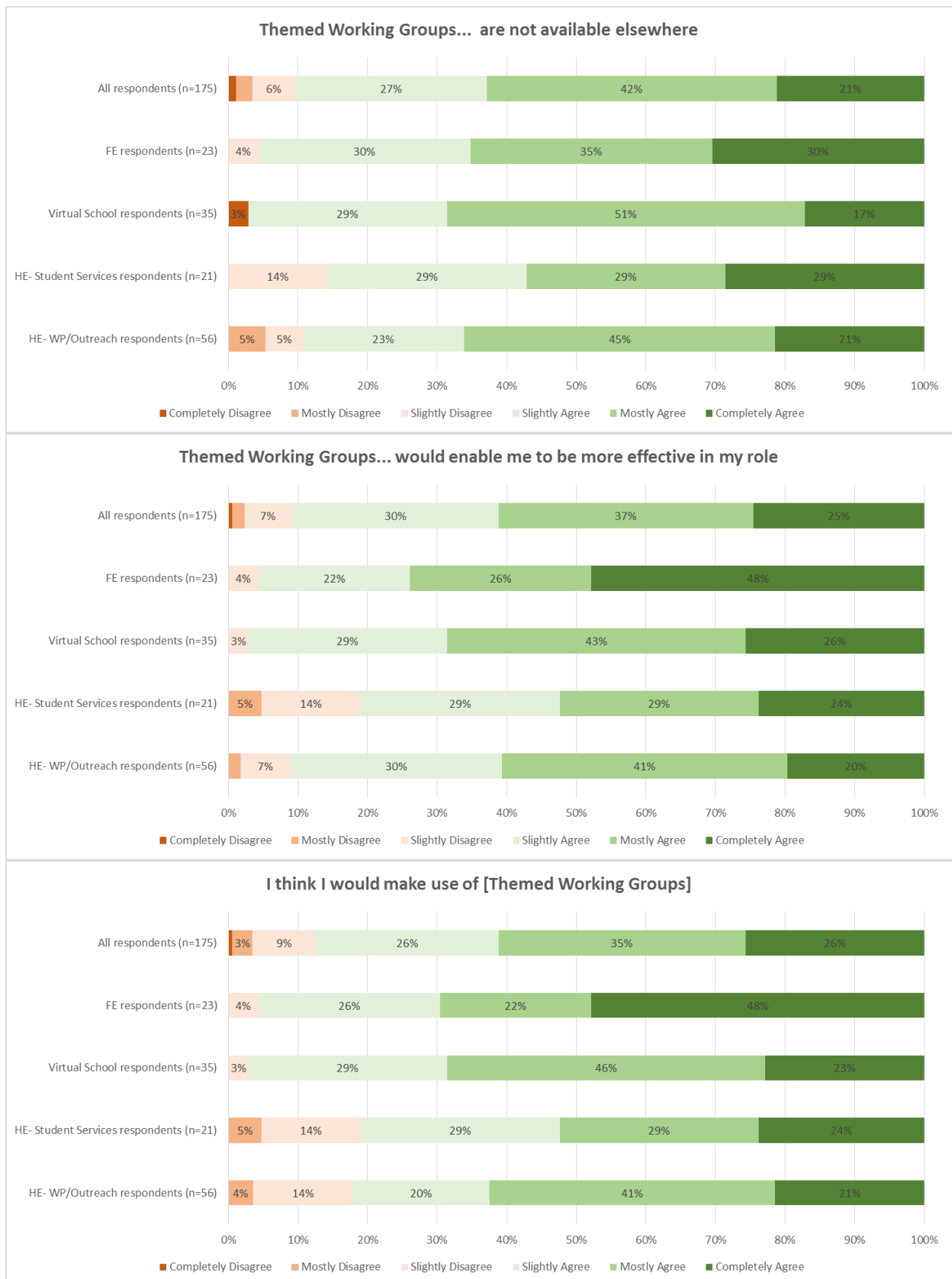
Q16: Training/CPD



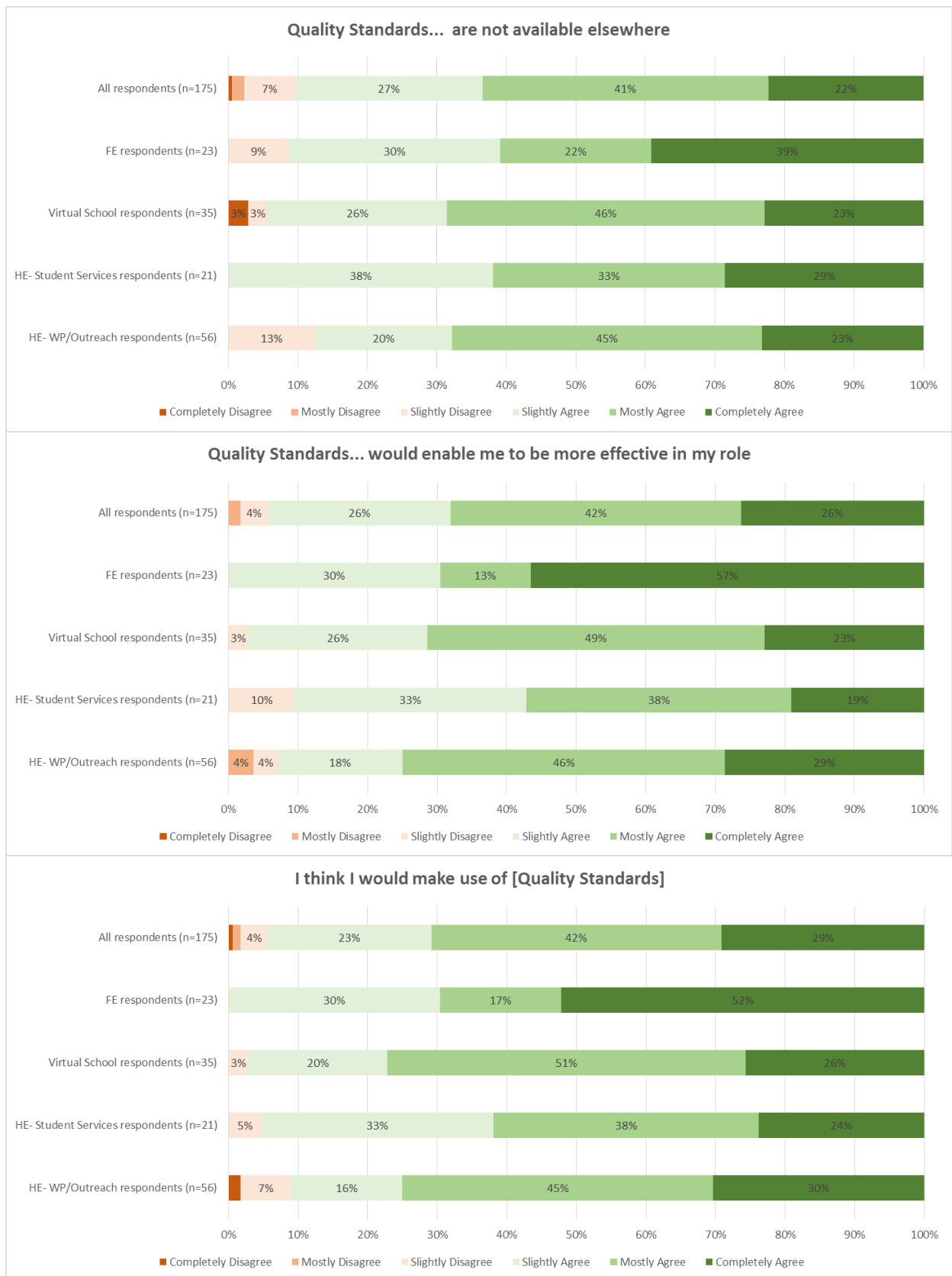
Q17: Research and Policy Briefings



Q18: Themed Working Groups



Q19: Quality Standards



Appendix 4- Member Views on Services

This appendix outlines the key themes identified in the semi-structured telephone interviews and free text online questionnaire questions regarding NNECL’s current and potential future services. For current services, respondents were asked ‘*What would make the [NNECL service] most useful to you in your role?*’. Potential future service descriptions were followed by a free-text response box for respondents to provide their views.

Responses were analysed to identify key themes. The tables provide an overview of responses received, summarising the overall data to avoid repetition.

A4.1 Views on current services- qualitative responses

| Conference | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Attendance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased input from local authorities in development/design of conference and attendance. • Central location; consider changing venues each year. • Provide convincing rationale for attendance to address time and financial barriers to attendance. • Make conference materials available electronically. • Promotion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - across sector/practitioners in advance; - to allow individuals to plan in advance. • Suggestion of joint conference with complementary network or organisation to reduce time/resources requirement and increase networking opportunities. |
| Content and format | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased opportunities for Q&A. • Opportunities for networking. • Variety of speakers including input from experts and researchers in the field. • Sessions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - differences in LA support for LAC; - estranged children, refugees and asylum seekers; - NNECL’s strategy; - transition between services; - support available: bursaries, 1:1 support, UCAS requirements; - promoting aspirations. • Practical workshops, suggested topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - best practice; - how to run a residential; - mentoring and support for older care leavers; - outreach and activities for LAC/care leavers; - funding support. |

Regional Groups

Improving awareness of and attendance at regional groups

- Ensuring that all sub-groups are aware of the:
 - regional groups in their area;
 - relevance of the meeting to all practitioners.
- Circulating dates of meetings in advance so individuals can plan attendance into their workflows.
- Consider virtual groups/hosting online discussion forum/resources related to each group's meeting to be accessed by members who can't attend.
- Increase geographical coverage of groups e.g.
 - devolved regions;
 - English regions without group;
 - split London/other large regions to ensure more local relevance?

Scope and membership of regional groups

- Clearer remit and distinction from local groups.
- Joint meetings with other groups e.g. regional leaving care forums, NAVSH groups etc.
- Membership should cover FE, HE, LA.
- Encourage links with social workers, foster carers and other stakeholder groups.

Suggested format and areas covered

- Share good practice drawing on input from across the sector, suggested topics include:
 - addressing common challenges e.g. targeting care leavers;
 - materials (e.g. consent forms, codes of practice for visits);
 - measuring impact/benchmarking.
- Development of shared events and information sharing with other local groups.
- Information, suggested topics include:
 - policy changes and impact;
 - institutional updates;
 - research evidence;
 - progression routes;
 - university offers for care leavers e.g. 1:1 support and mentoring;
 - local authority support for care leavers;
 - role of designated leaders in FE for LAC and care leavers;
 - practitioner FAQ for people new to sector.
- Networking opportunities.
- Horizon scanning.
- Training (delivery in meeting and external opportunities).
- Regional representatives disseminate national level information; regional issues disseminated at the national level.
- Opportunity to input into NNECL national strategy
- Feedback on activities of other regional groups.

Website

Awareness and use

- Improve visibility of website across the sector.
- Communicate when new content has been added.
- Ensure relevance to practitioners across the sector and all regions.
- Keep information up to date.
- Act as a 'one stop shop'.
- Good quality search function.
- Specific sections for HE, FE, LA carers, schools and LAC/care leavers.
- Evaluation of website analytics to monitor usage patterns.

Content

- Best practice, suggested topics included:
 - effective events and activities provided by HEIs for LAC/care leavers;
 - safeguarding practices for events;
 - improving outcomes;
 - partnership working;
 - early interventions to encourage participation in HE.
- 'Real life' case studies on care leavers/LAC who have accessed HE regarded as being particularly effective in terms of raising aspirations amongst this group.
- Information on:
 - funding packages available;
 - charitable organisations that may provide funding for LAC/care leavers;
 - contacts at HE;
 - resource guides for practitioners and young people (emphasis on practical information e.g. 'what to expect when you go to university', 'the difference between campus and city' universities etc.);
 - outreach programmes;
 - post-16 support;
 - legislation and case law;
 - training resources;
 - up to date research;
 - funding and partnership opportunities.
- Ensure content is in a printable format.
- Webinars of use of those who can't attend regional group meetings and conference.

| Newsletter | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Awareness and use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure mailing list is up to date. • Promote to practitioners across the sector. • More regular and shorter updates. |
| Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News about involvement with other national organisations (e.g. NAVSH). • Information/articles on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finance available; - post-18 transition to higher education for care leavers; - policy developments; - regional/national events and initiatives; - benchmarking data and key trends. • Best practice, suggested topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - outreach events and activities; - how HEIs are supporting LAC/care leavers at pre-entry stage of the student cycle. • Summaries of/links to latest research evidence. • Contributions from those working with LAC/care leavers across the sector (more of a LA focus?). • Job opportunities. • Training/CPD opportunities. • Lists of key contacts. |

A4.2 Views on potential future services- qualitative responses

| Research and Policy Briefings | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Key issues to consider | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination method (e.g. suggestion that group e mails may get 'lost'). • Format should aim to be succinct. • Avoid duplication and look for opportunities for collaboration with other groups (e.g. NAVSH, National Care Benchmarking Forum, Catch 22 etc.) • Research on monitoring and benchmarking needed. • Consider role influencing policy, acting as a 'leader' in the field. |
| Quality Standards | |
| Issues to consider | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to build on Buttle 'legacy' – seen as having good 'brand awareness'; but the extent to which it has been embedded into HEI processes varies. • Add value to additional provision rather than duplicate (consider what is provided by HEFCE/Ofsted frameworks/guidance). • Distil effective practice from network into guidance. |
| Training | |
| Demand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training needs/gap analysis required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training seen as applicable to practitioner 'frontline staff', care professionals and individuals new to the sector; - provision already available in some regions (provided by HEIs, LAs, charities). • Cost of training identified as main barrier to access. • Consider online and face-to-face training as options. • Endorsement of external training by NNECL seen as a quality mark. |
| Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with post 16 group; supporting care leavers/LAC beyond compulsory education age identified as a gap in training and information provision. • Outreach/widening participation provision. • LA, virtual school perspective; in particular the issues faced and the impact on young people. • Support for care leavers/LAC within HE; overcoming communication barriers. |

Themed Groups

Key issues to consider

- Suggested themes:
 - effective pathways plans for those going to HE;
 - supporting the development of mentors for care leavers;
 - vocational learning;
 - link with NCOP proposals;
 - helping carers raise aspirations.
- Consider:
 - existence and feeding in/integrating with other groups/networks e.g. NEON;
 - how groups would feed into national group/strategy and outputs disseminated;
 - barriers to attendance (e.g. time/location).

Other Suggestions

- Regional roadshows.
- Up to date handbook.
- Greater consideration of 'non-traditional' routes to university; FE activities.
- Improve links with other organisations e.g. joint activities, speaking at conferences.
- Improve social media e.g. more visual Twitter presence.
- Evaluation of the impact of support in this area