



Effect of COVID-19 on REF2021 Impact Case Study Preparations

Survey by ARMA Special Interest Group for Impact

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- This survey was created in response to the effect of the COVID-19 on REF 2021 Impact Case Study preparation
- The purpose of the survey was to assess the nature and level of disruption being experienced by the Impact Professionals
- It was designed, circulated and analysed by the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) Special Interest Group (SIG) Leads
- The survey was circulated to the ARMA SIG for Impact and REF and distributed via Twitter to a wider audience on 6/4/20
- The survey remained open for approximately 10 days and received 165 responses
- Due to the demand for results from the survey, the first 152 responses were taken and analysed to provide a rapid overview of the developing situation as quickly as possible
- These slides summarise the survey responses received and will be circulated to the relevant SIGs and shared with the REF2021 team

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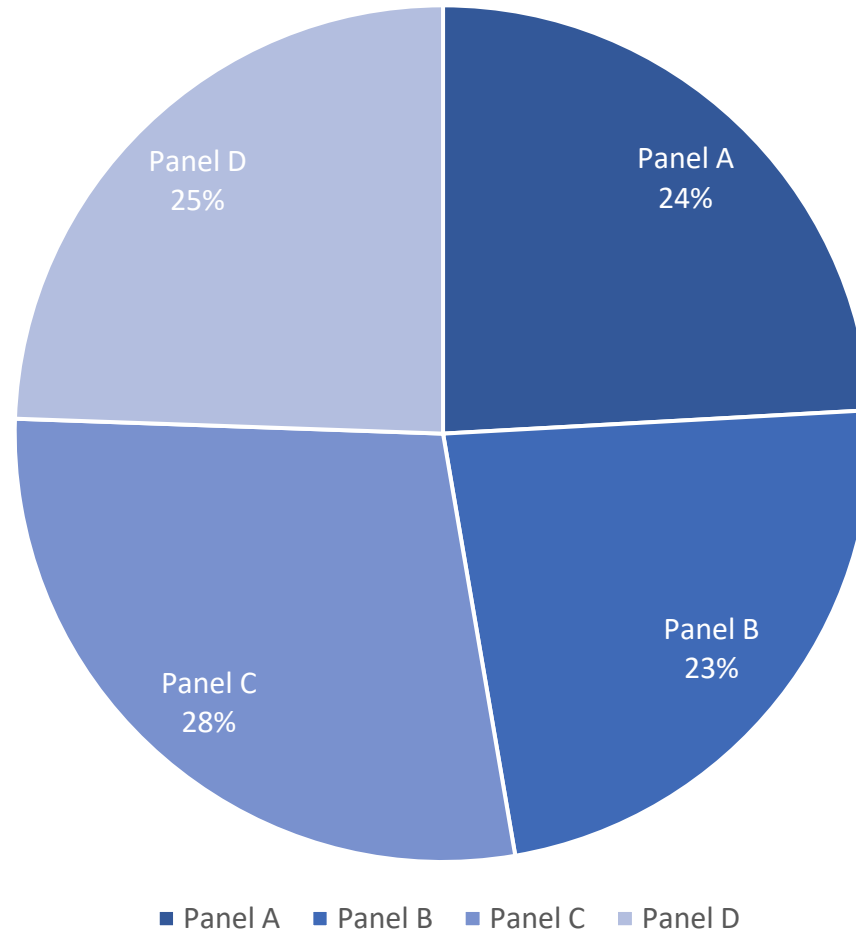
Overview of Results (1)

- **Respondents (Q1-3).** The survey attracted 165 responses. Represented within these responses was a range of perspectives spread evenly across the four panels. These included those working across REF Panels looking after very large submissions who represent the 'REF Manager or Institutional Impact Manager' role, those who are looking after one or more panels and multiple UoAs in a 'Faculty Impact Manager' type role, those who are working within a Panel providing support to a smaller number of UoAs (School/Department Impact Manager) and some responses from individuals working on one case study. The survey responses therefore encompass the different management levels working on impact in the HEI sector. In total, respondents represented between 3000 and 6000 impact case studies.
- **Disruption to individual aspects of ICS (Q4-5).** The most disrupted section is the Impact Evidence/Sources to Corroborate sections where 83% indicated 'significant' or 'very significant' disruption. This was followed by the impact section (61% significant/very significant), Overall Narrative (44%), administrative data (20%), underpinning research section (4%) and references to research (3%). **Disruption to staff (Q6).** 'Significant' and 'Very Significant' Staff/personnel disruption is being experienced in the availability of external partners by 80% of respondents. Corresponding levels of disruption is being experienced in academic staff availability (46% significant/very significant) and professional service staff (13%). The levels of engagement of these staff were approximately equivalent to their availability.
- **Disruption to specific UoAs (Q7).** Systematic disruption as a direct result of COVID-19 is reported across all panels. Particularly affected are UoAs in Panel A (UoAs 1, 2, 3, 4) who are being drawn into front line care. Panels B, C and D are providing support to these efforts.
- **Disruption to internal processes (Q8).** 'Significant' and 'Very Significant' disruption is being reported by the following % of respondents: Internal Deadlines (49%), Internal Review Processes (29%), External Review processes (26%) and Internal Selection processes (18%).

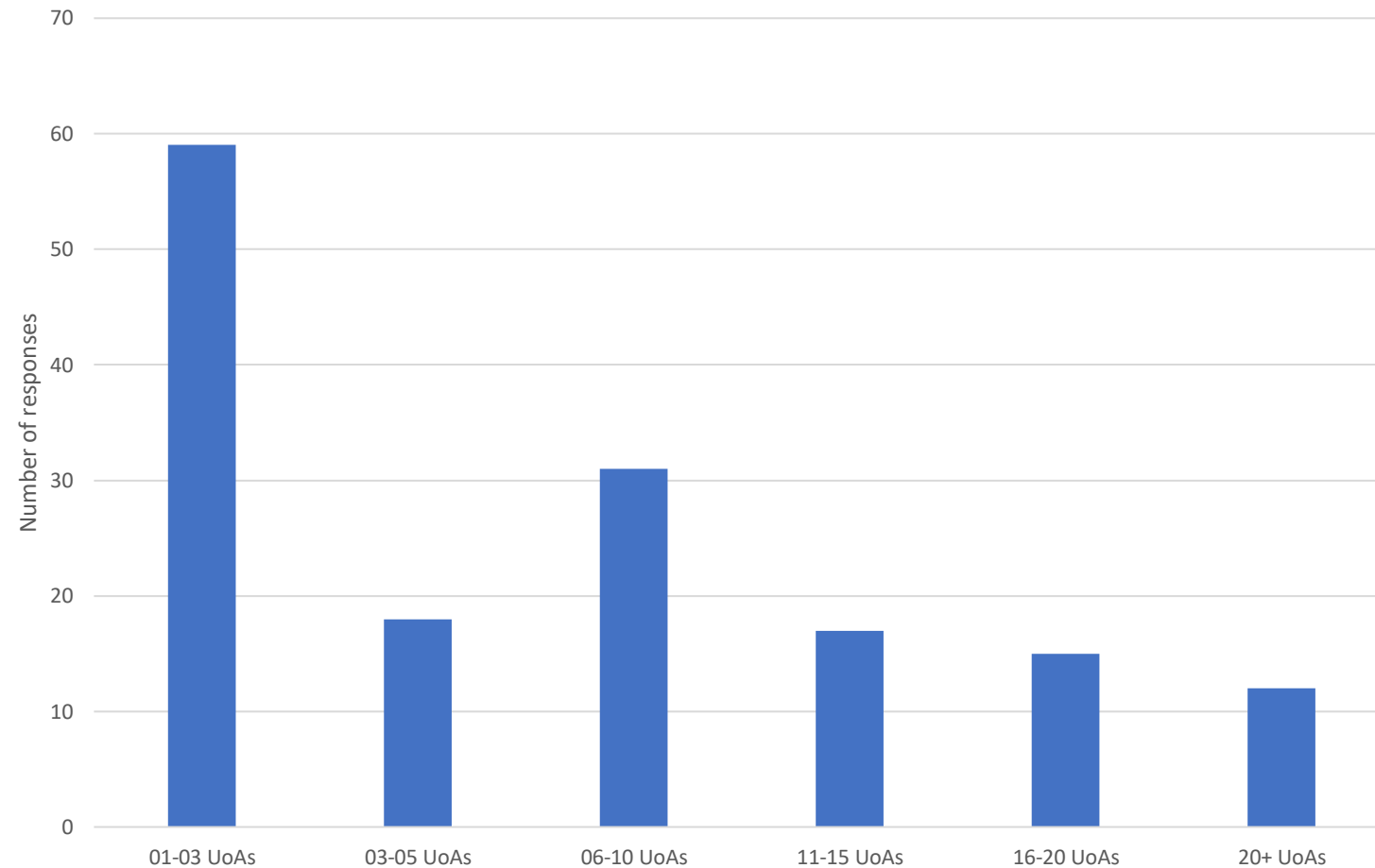
Overview of Results (2)

- **Nature of disruption to specific aspects of cases (Q9-12).** Respondents identified challenges to Evidence, Impact Activities and Publishing underpinning research. 94% of respondents identified that the evidence issues were ‘important’ or ‘very important’ to the completion, eligibility, and quality of cases. Similarly 74% of respondents identified that the issues with impact activities and 23% said the research issues were ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- **Overall assessment of disruption (Q13).** Overall, 66% of respondents were experiencing ‘very significant’ or ‘significant’ disruption to the preparation of their REF impact case study submission.
- **Mitigating factors being taken (Q14).** A range of mitigating factors are being taken from adjusting internal deadlines to focusing more effort and conducting risk assessments.
- **Mitigating action that might be taken (Q15).** There was strong support for the impact deadline to be extended with some arguments put forward for mitigating statements to describe the effect of COVID-19 to justify reductions in submissions or relaxing of guidelines.
- In addition to the points above, short term contracts of professional services (REF and Impact Professionals) were highlighted and warrants further attention given the changing REF deadline and the significant financial effects universities are expecting to experience as a result of COVID-19.

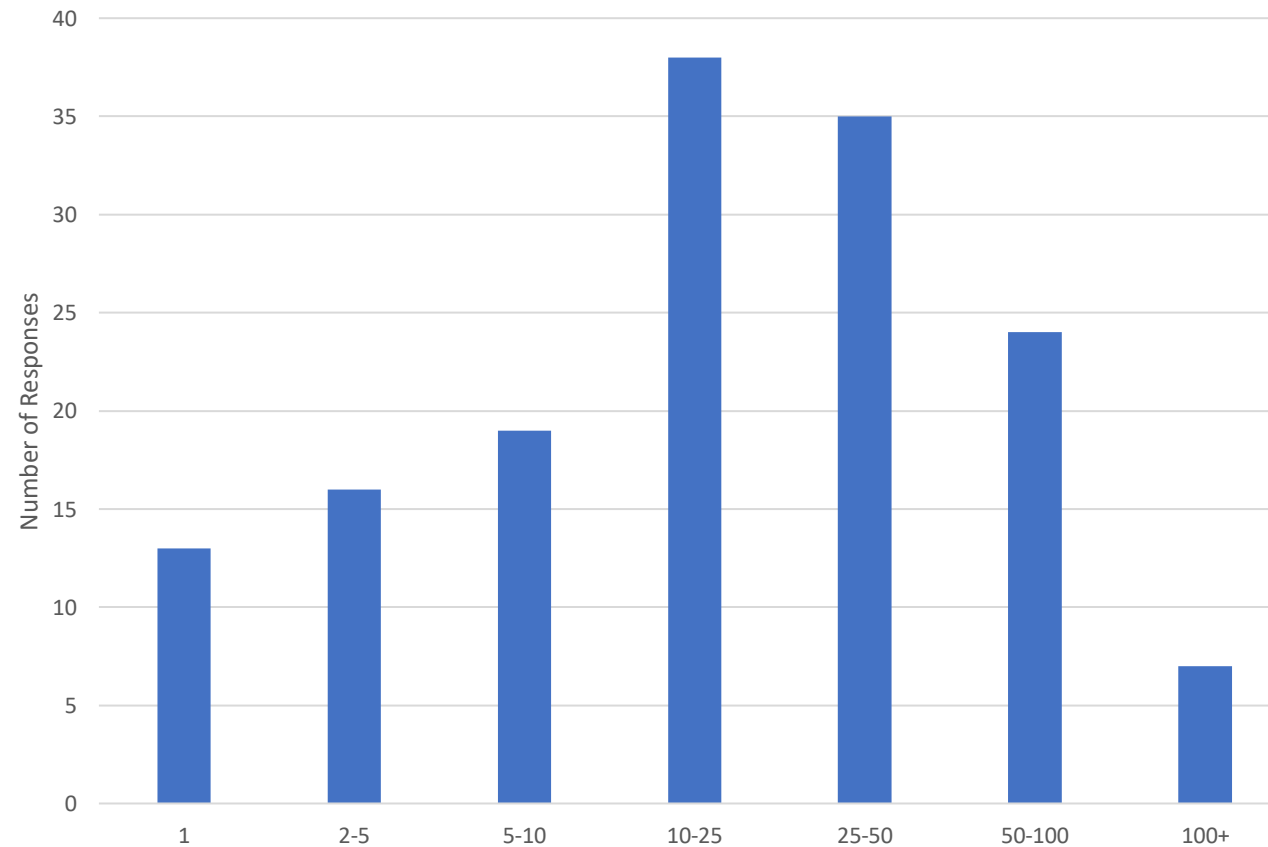
Q1. Please indicate which Panels you are overseeing, managing or supporting. (152/152 response rate)



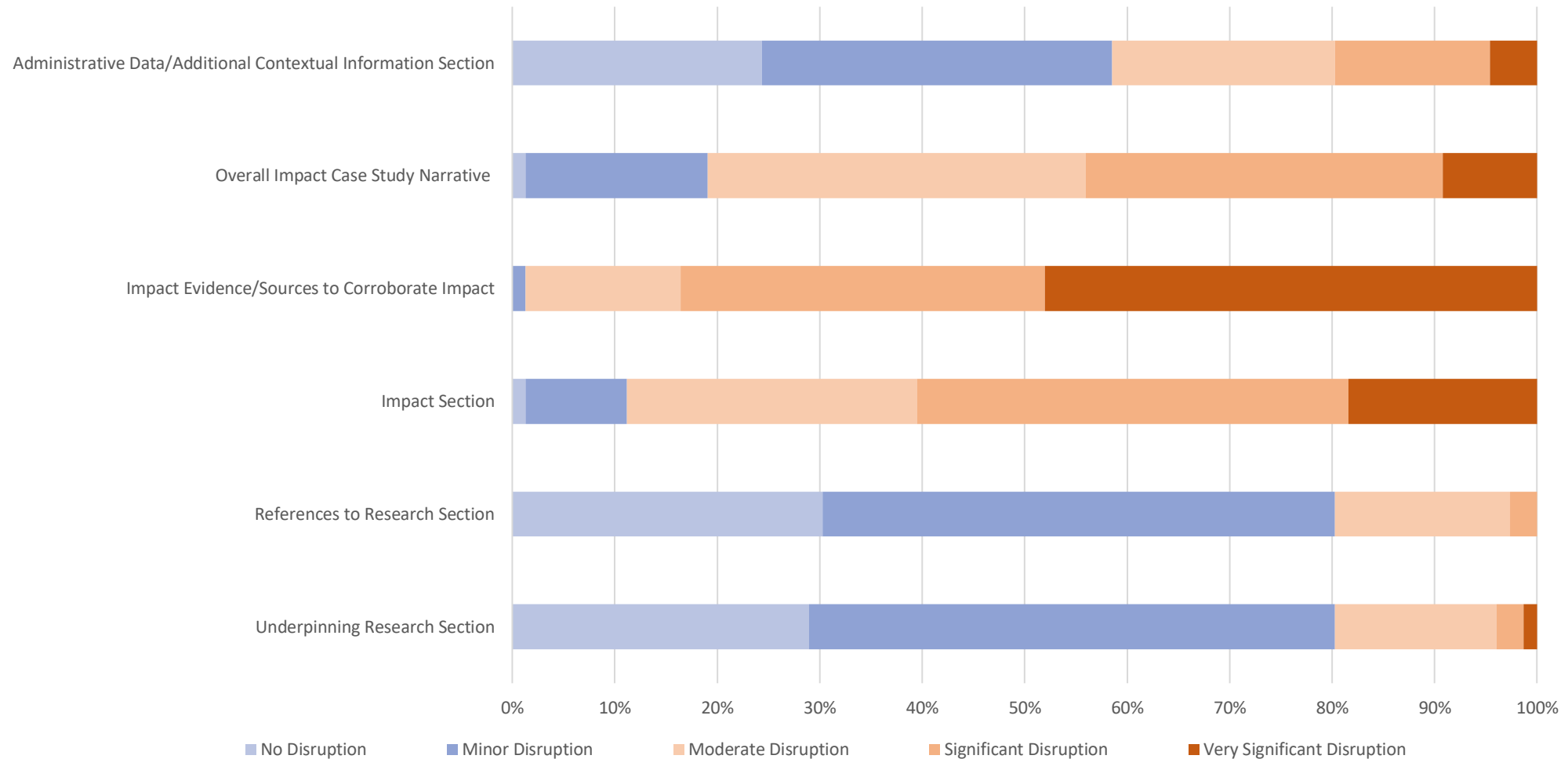
Q2. Please indicate the total number of UOAs you are overseeing, managing or supporting.
(152/152 response rate)



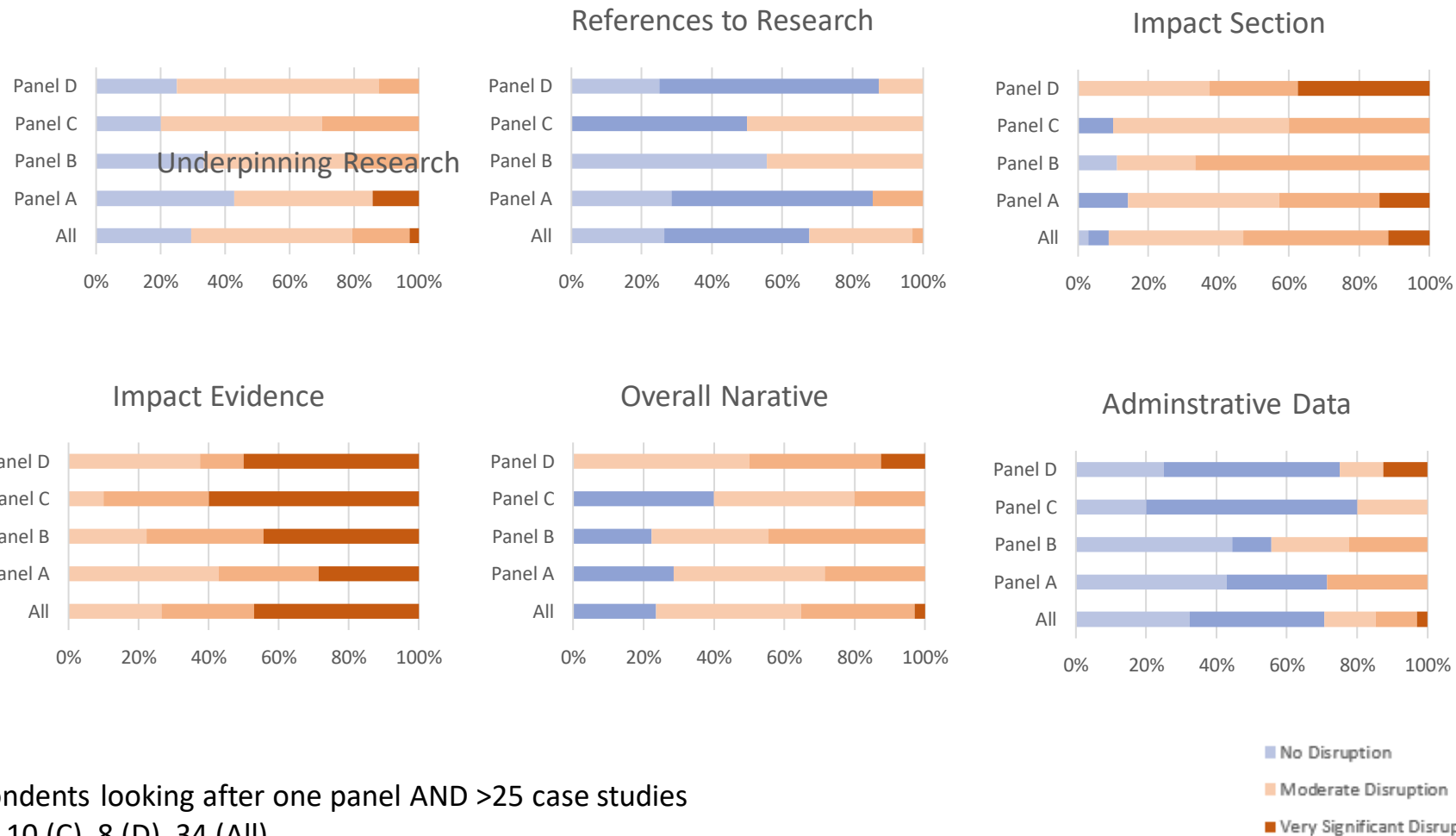
Q3. Please indicate the approximate number of Impact Case Studies that you are overseeing, managing or supporting. (152/152 response rate)



Q4. Please indicate the level of disruption that you are experiencing in completing each of the elements of the cases across your portfolio as a result of COVID-19. (152/152 response rate)

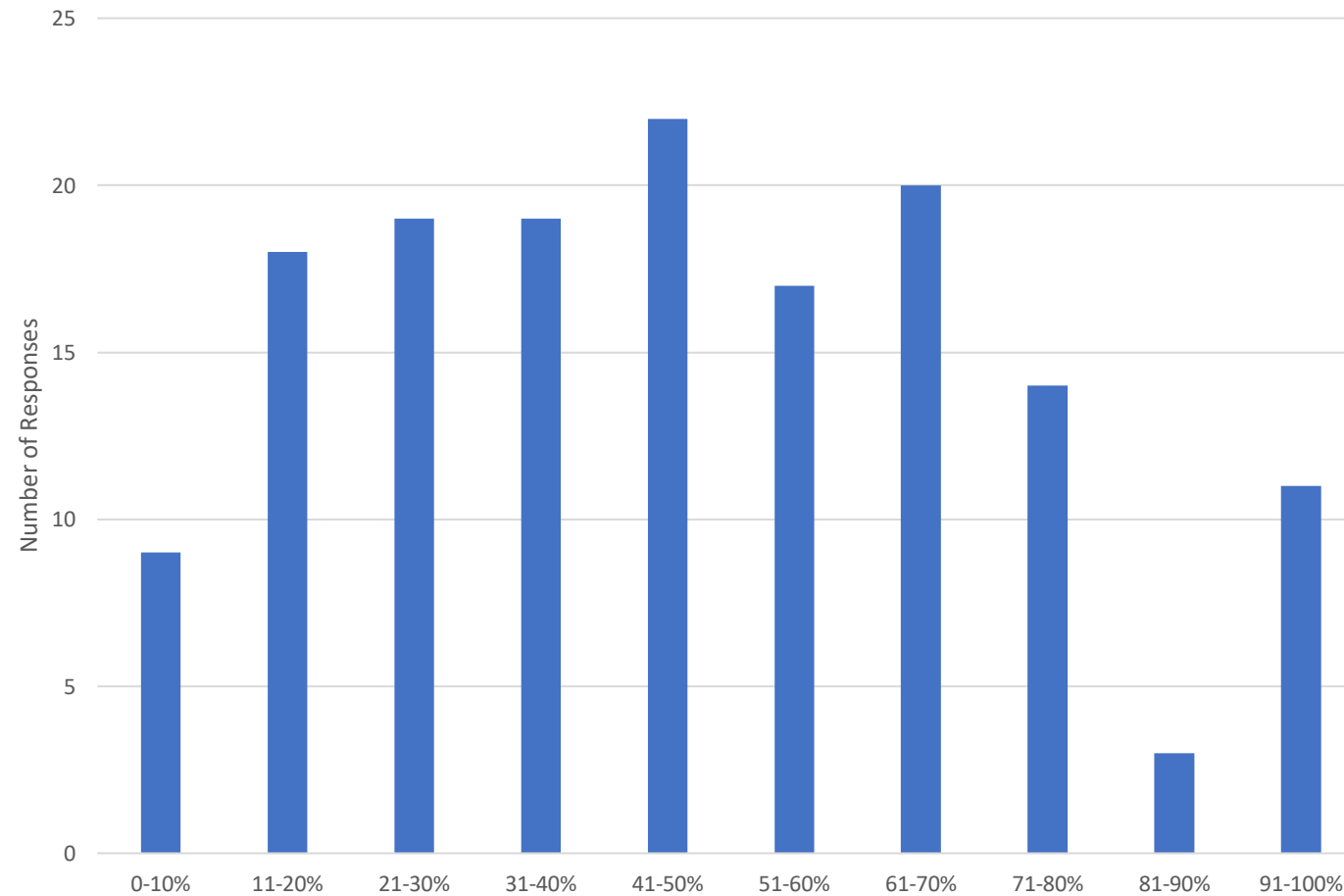


Q4 (Additional Analysis): Panel Specific Disruption

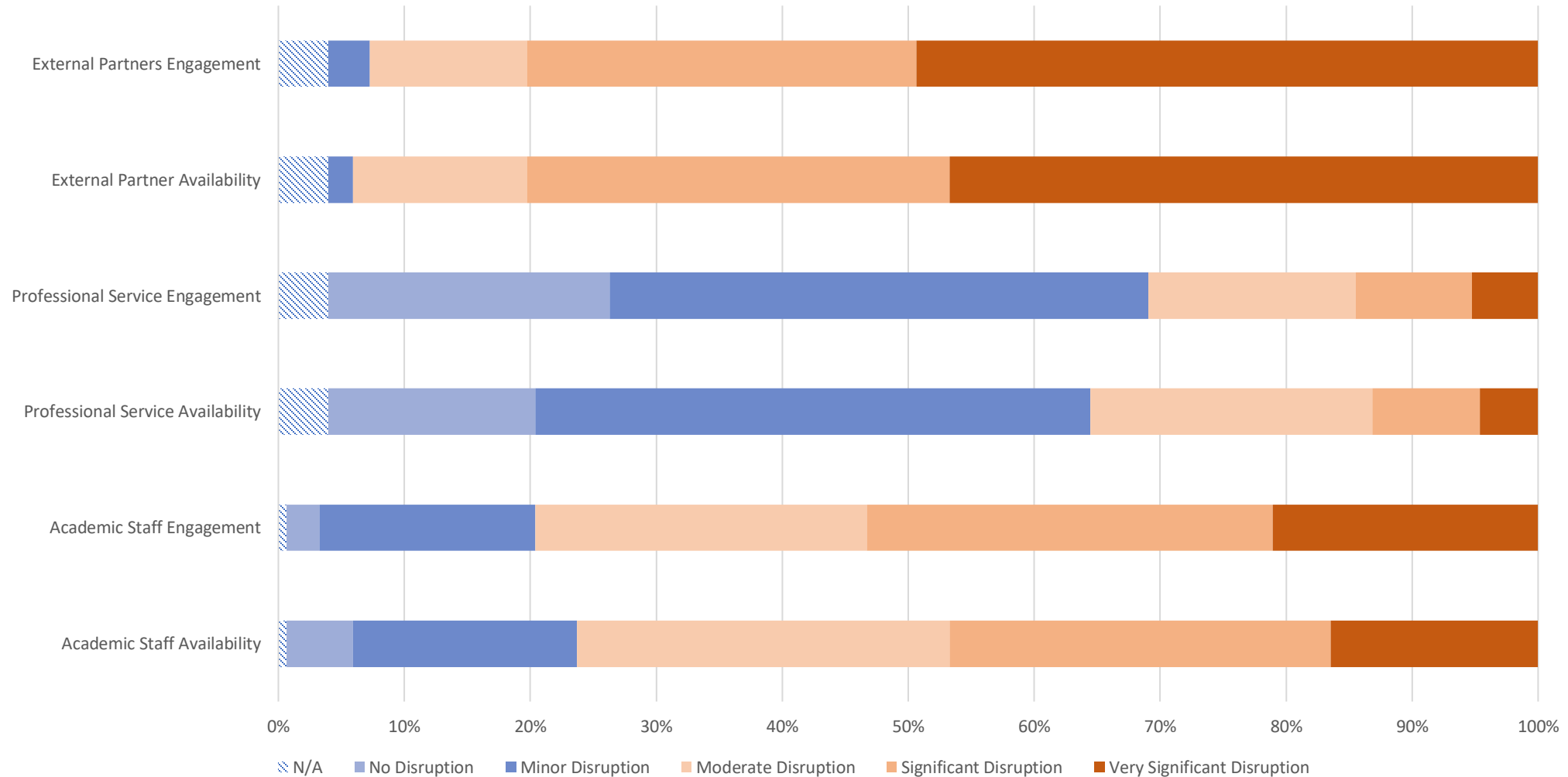


Subset of data: respondents looking after one panel AND >25 case studies
 n = 7 (Panel A), 9 (B), 10 (C), 8 (D), 34 (All)

Q5. Please indicate the approximate proportion of cases in your submission where you judge there to be 'significant' or 'very significant' disruption. (152/152 response rate)

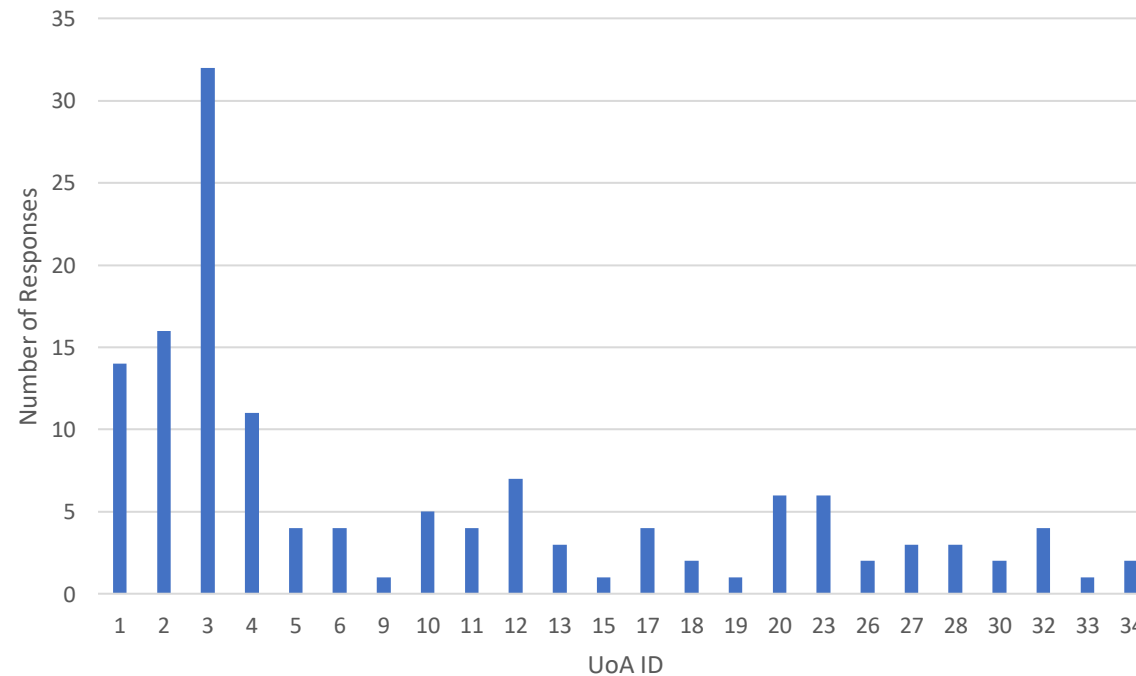


Q6. Please indicate the nature and level of staff/personnel disruption you are experiencing as a result of COVID-19. (152/152 response rate)

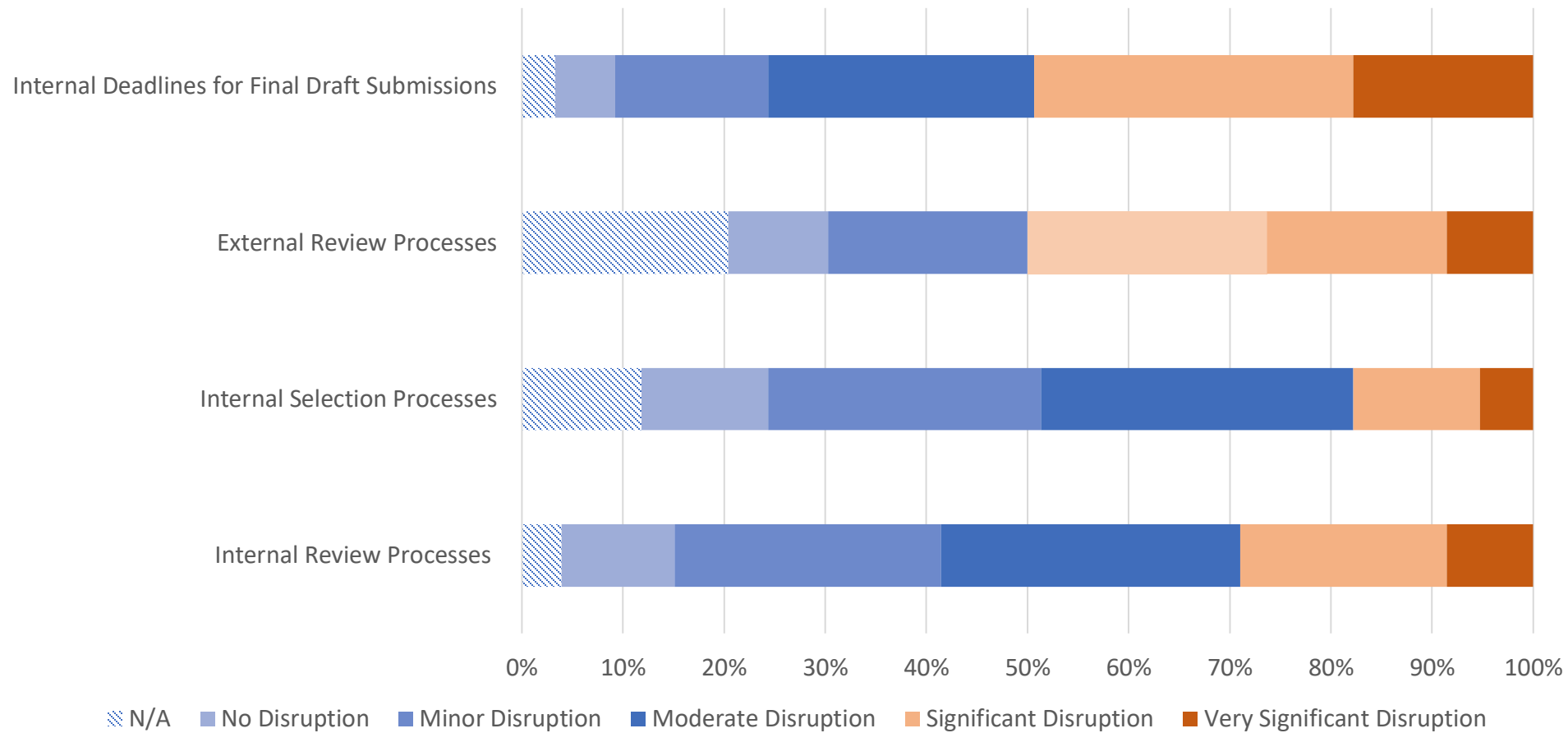


Q7. Please indicate any specific UoAs where COVID-19 has had a direct and systematic effect on staff availability. (79/152 response rate)

- 69/79 responses identified specific UoAs which met this criteria
- Specific reasons included being drawn into front line care (~24), providing secondary support to the COVID-19 response (e.g.) (~5), prioritising teaching (~7), or conducting new, COVID-19 related, research (~5).



Q8. Please indicate the level of disruption that you are experiencing to your institutional processes as a result of COVID-19. (152/152 response rate)



Q9. Please outline any particular issues that you are experiencing around evidence collection as a result of COVID-19. (143/152 response rate)

- List of partners where issues were identified included healthcare (~26), companies (~20), government/policy makers (~11), education (~6), with NGOs, charities, international organisations (e.g. WHO), emergency services, heritage/creative organisations also represented.
- The disruption has been to the collection of testimonials (~40), general/non-specific contact (~16), particular evidence collection activities (~6), international travel (~10), surveys/trials/data collection/demonstrators/field work (~11). In one case a large scale evidence collection programme has been disrupted (multiple impact cases)
- The work has been disrupted by a lack of availability of partners due to changing personal work arrangements (working from home), reprioritising of work, redeployment of staff, furloughing of staff, temporary or permanent closure of organisations
- The work has been disrupted by actions by HEIs choosing not to approach partner organisation as it is not practical, appropriate or ethical to do so at this time. HEIs are conscious of the reputational damage that could be caused as a result of pursuing this information.

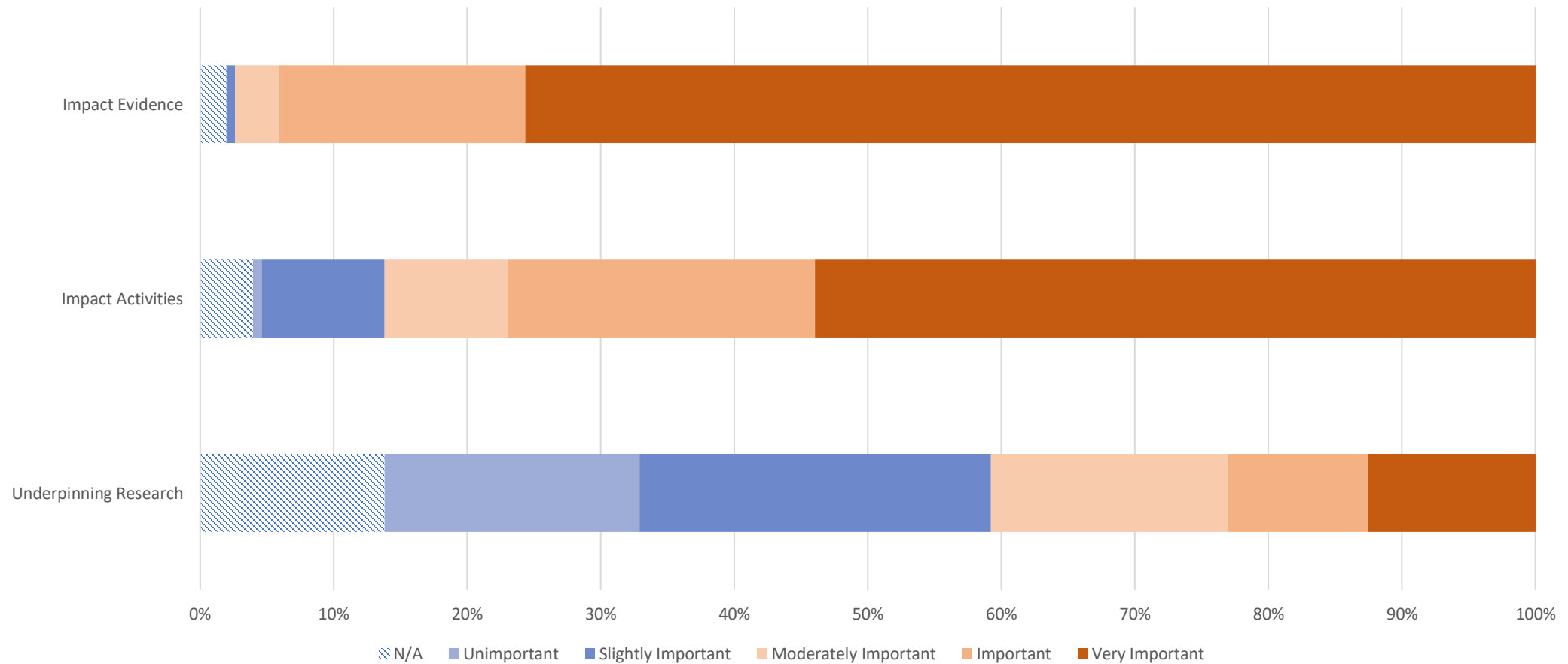
Q10. Please outline any particular issues that you are experiencing around impact activities that can no longer be undertaken as a result of COVID-19. (132/152 response rate)

- Respondents reported the following categories of impact activities that have been disrupted
 - Public engagement activities (~28)
 - Decisions pending or deferred/Long-term programme of activity paused (~25)
 - Cumulative impact e.g. sales data stalled (~5)
 - Non specific (~30)
 - Reiteration of evidence collection issues summarised in the previous question
- A small number of financial/procedural aspects around disruption of contracts have been identified (e.g. contract completion) (~5)
- 24 respondents also reported no issue with impact activities

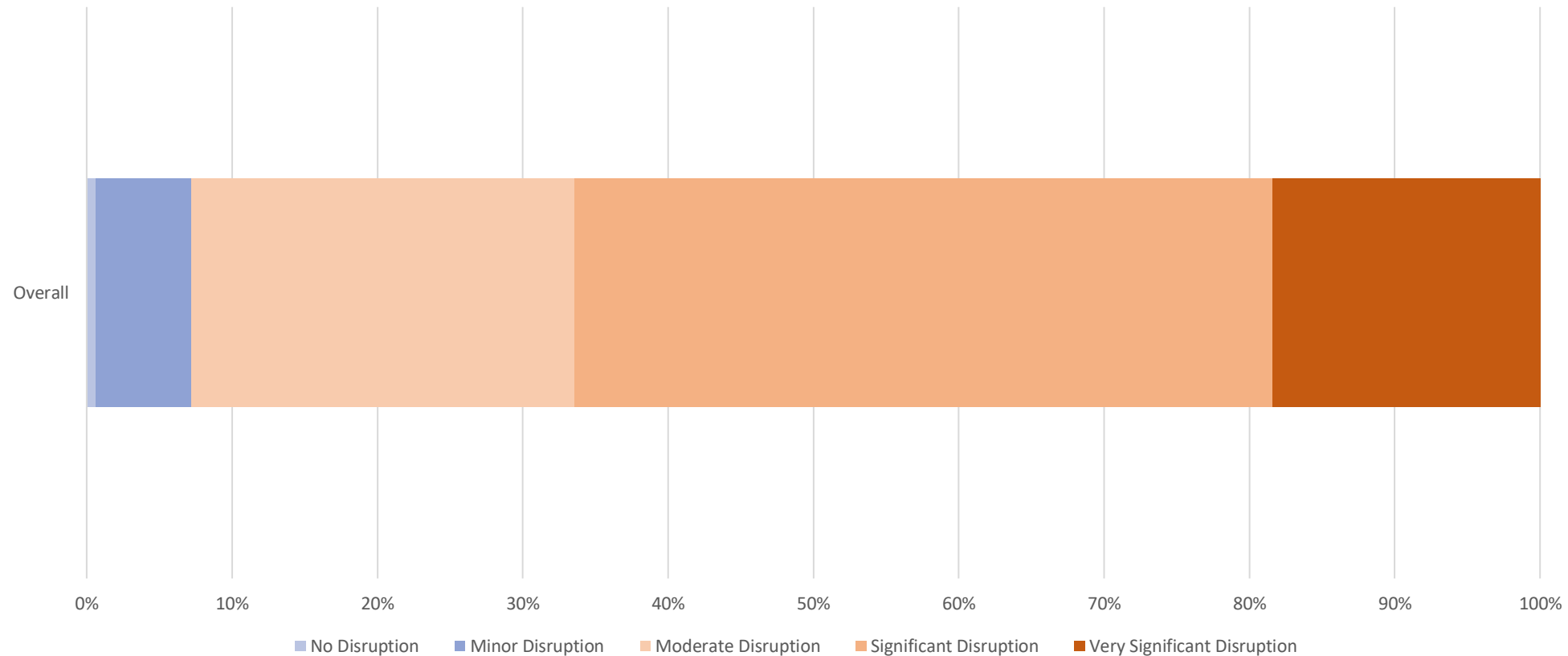
Q11. Please outline any particular issues that you are experiencing around the publishing of underpinning research as a result of COVID-19. (55/152 response rate)

- Several responses noted that there has been a delay to publishing schedules (~41)
- Of these some went on to state that this has had/will have an impact on the underpinning research for their cases (~20)
- There was particular reference to Panel C, where there are long timelines, or where publishing of research happens alongside impact and Panel D, where final stages of monograph publishing (including binding) and practice based research is affected.
- Some respondents noted that they were not yet aware of any issues or had not assessed it (~9)
- Many respondents either identified no significant issue or did not answer this question, likely indicating no issue (97)

Q12. Please indicate how important these issues identified above are to the completion, eligibility and/or quality of the final case study/studies? (152/152 response rate)



Q13. Taking all the factors in previous questions into account, please indicate the overall extent of disruption you are experiencing in the preparation of your REF Impact Case Study Submission. (152/152 response rate)



Q14. Please identify any mitigating action you are taking to reduce the effect of COVID-19 on your REF 2021 Impact Case Study Submission. (128/152 response rate)

- The following mitigating action was identified by respondents:
 - Adjusting internal deadlines to accommodate disruption (~26)
 - Providing additional support to develop cases (~24), for example additional funding, time, support, advice, guidance.
 - Adapting work to accommodate the disruption e.g.:
 - Moving events and activities online where practical (~21)
 - Rewriting cases to accommodate changes to impact (~8)
 - Adjusting evidence collection plans to address new circumstances(~3)
 - Reassessing case study long lists to identify alternative impact case studies for submission (~7)
 - Conducting risk assessments across the portfolio (~6)
 - Carry on as well as possible (~10)

Q15. Please identify any mitigating action that others might take (e.g. Research England) to reduce the effect of COVID-19 on your REF 2021 Impact Case Study submission. (125/152 response rate)

- Strong support for extension of the impact deadline (~60). However some (~5) noted that established impacts are likely to be largely unaffected as they will have occurred so extension should not be necessary. Others (~7) noted an extension would need to be substantial to allow things to 'settle' after COVID 19
- Support for extension of evidence submission deadline (~10)
- Length of an extension was described in terms of things 'returning to normal' with 12 months being common answer
- Argument for a reduction in the following aspects (~10)
 - Reduction to evidence quality
 - ICS numbers (across the whole submission or with justification for example in 'new/young/small UoAs' and healthcare UoAs)
 - Relaxation of guidelines around underpinning research
- Some support for a mitigation statement (~7) for how COVID-19 has affected preparations as part of a justification for reduced quality
- Special circumstances necessary for Panel A due to the COVID-19 disruption (~2) and Panel D due to disruption of public engagement (~1)
- Clarity and quick communication of changes with a accompanying clear guidance necessary for good organisational response from HEIs (~9)
- Cancel the REF (1)

