

#FUTUREPROOF COVID-19 SURVEY

An analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the UK public relations industry

1. Introduction

[#FutureProof](#) has asked PR industry leaders to characterise how COVID-19 is impacting their organisations.

The survey results are being shared with membership body the [CIPR](#) and trade association the [PRCA](#) to help provide interventions that will support business resilience and sustainability. The data has also been sent to HM Government and the Treasury as part of industry lobbying efforts.

The initial results covered in this report are based on **115 responses to an online survey on 21 and 22 March**. The survey remains open and further updates will be provided by the #FutureProof team throughout the crisis.

According to the PRCA PR Census 2019 the UK PR industry is worth £14.9 billion and employs 95,000 people.

2. Executive summary

Three key issues face the UK PR industry as industry bosses rush to mitigate issues caused by COVID-19.

Access to domestic customers (57.4%) and loss of income (80.9%) are the biggest immediate challenges and longer-term, more than a third of respondents (31.3%) are worried about cessation of trading.

Following the introduction of emergency financial measures by the Chancellor of the Exchequer it is also clear that one group still needing urgent support remains freelancers and sole traders.

Contingency measures being put in place by PR practitioners include new flexible working methods and patterns and prospecting for new business.

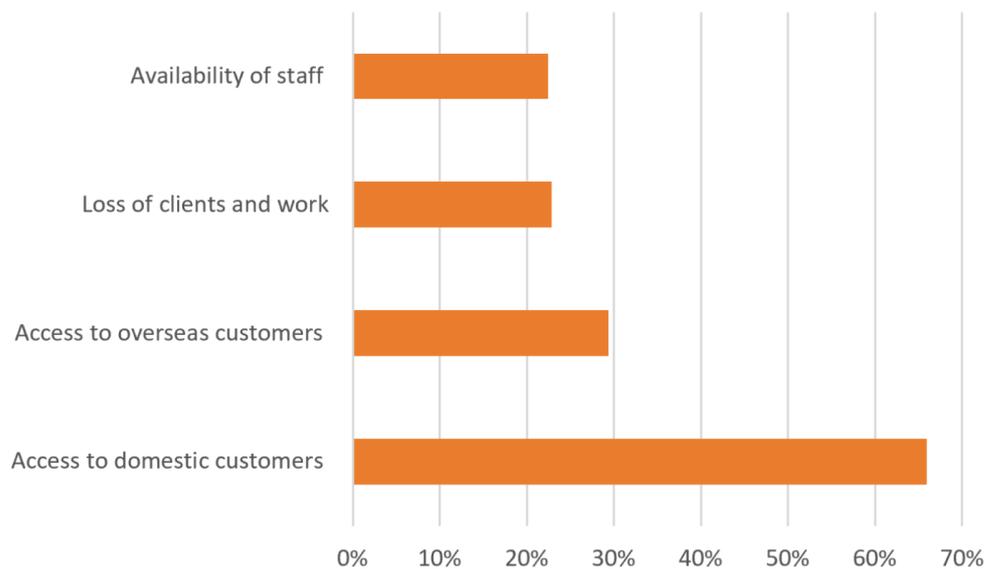
Areas of resilience include public health information and healthcare communication; crisis communications support; IT security and communication; education and learning; home entertainment and gaming; and home delivery. There has been a jump in government and public sector work.

Respondents recognised that the Government is dealing with a fast moving crisis and communicating a tough, unprecedented message as best as it can.

Other notable comments within the survey responses relate to uncertainty over the length of time COVID-19 will impact; a current lack of longer-term planning; and the impact that disinformation has had on public behaviour.

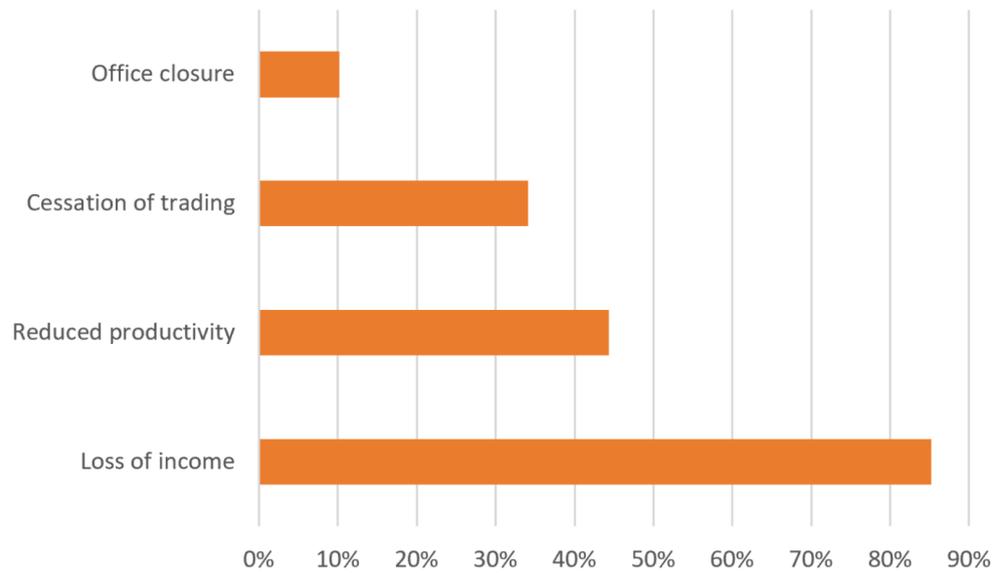
3. Immediate impact of COVID-19

The ways in which COVID-19 is impacting the public relations industry are:



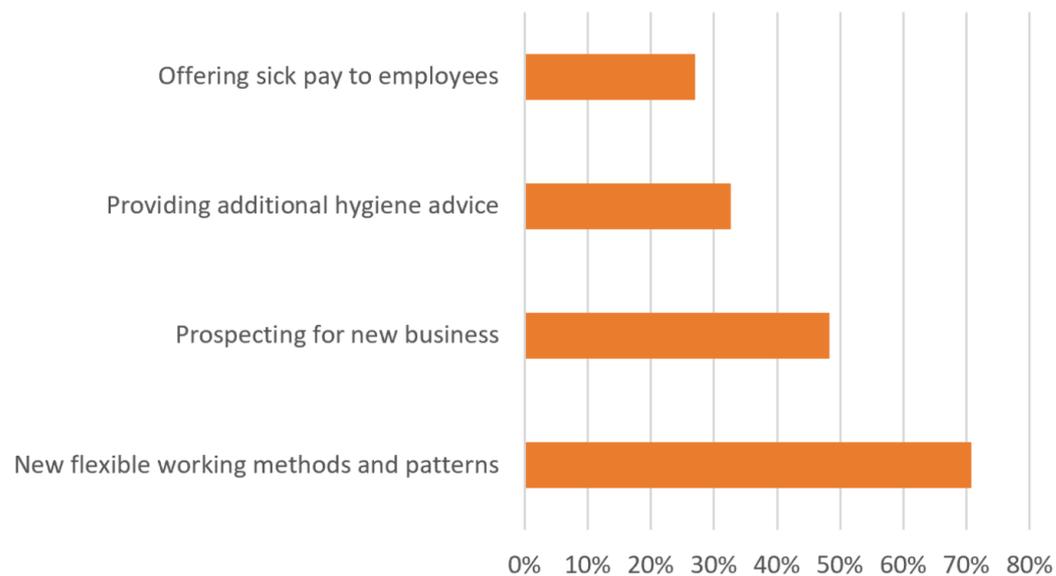
4. Medium term impact of COVID-19

The following issues were cited as concerns for the public relations industry over a two to three month horizon:



5. Contingency measures

Public relations practitioners are focusing on the following short term contingency measures to address the crisis:



6. Areas of resilience throughout COVID-19

As a professional service industry the public relations industry has been impacted by COVID-19. However, practitioners are responding to the crisis by providing organisations with services in the following areas:

- Public health information and healthcare communication
 - Crisis communications support
 - IT security and communication
 - Education and learning
 - Home entertainment and gaming
 - Home delivery
 - Government and public sector
-

7. The Government response

Almost half (48.7%) found the government response useful or somewhat useful. 11.3% found it neither useful nor not useful. 40.0% found it not so useful or not useful at all.

Income protection for freelancers and sole traders is the biggest issue that the Government must address. These roles have been the first to be cut where budgets have been impacted. Measures for salaried employees were introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 20 March.

The increased frequency of press conferences and use of experts has been welcomed. There was a broad call for greater clarity in Government communications. Several respondents criticised a slow and vague approach.

The financial incentives introduced by the Chancellor aimed at keeping the economy moving have been welcomed but respondents called for detail quickly so that they could plan.

Respondents recognised that the Government is dealing with a fast moving crisis. They recognised that it is communicating a tough unprecedented message as best it can.

8. Impact on personal wellbeing

The immediate impact of the crisis following a wholesale move to virtual working and school closures include: isolation and juggling multiple demands including childcare, uncertainty and unemployment. These have led to respondents reporting mental health and wellbeing issues including anxiety and stress.

Organisational leaders said that keeping morale high was their key challenge. Helping staff to build mental resilience was also cited as a challenge.

9. Other issues

Other issues cited by respondents to the survey that haven't been included elsewhere are:

- Information about how long the crisis is expected to last
- The impact of disinformation communicated via the media and social media on communication and mental wellbeing
- Organisations are dealing with the immediate crisis. Longer term planning needs to happen.

- Availability of practitioners to support national and local government campaigns, and the NHS
 - Planning for the future and the upturn. What will the industry look like after the crisis?
-

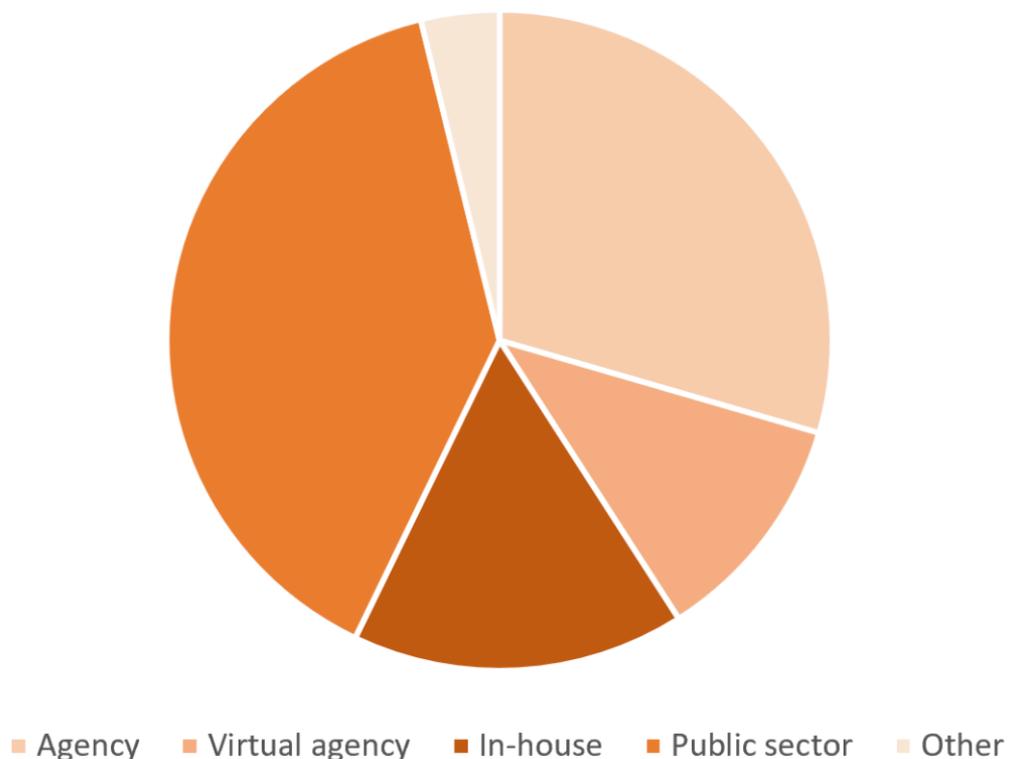
10. Methodology

115 people responded to an online survey on 21 and 22 March. The survey remains open and further updates will be provided by the #FuturePROof team throughout the crisis.

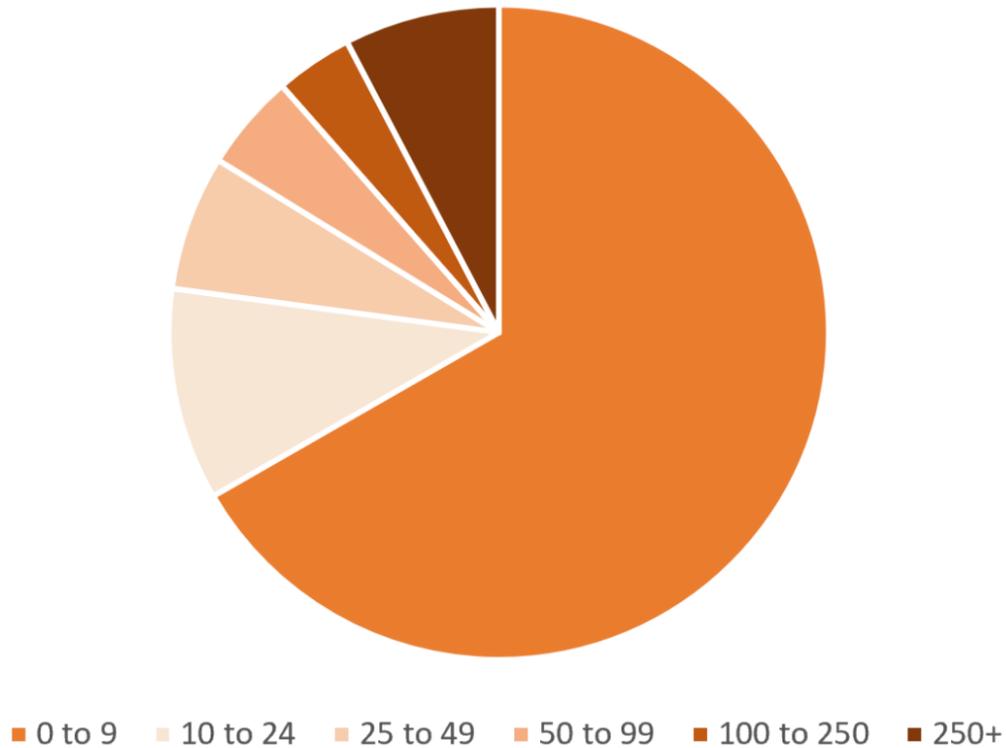
11. Profile of respondents

The profile of respondents is broken out below.

11.1 Type of organisation



11.2 Size of organisation



11.3 Market sectors

Respondents cover a broad range of sectors. These include but are not limited to:

- Charity
 - Business-to-business: aerospace, construction, professional services, and technology
 - Business-to-consumer: arts, beauty, drink, entertainment, food, leisure, and toys
 - Public sector: education, health, and local government
-

12. About #FuturePProof

#FuturePProof was launched in November 2015 to remind public relations practitioners and the wider business community of the value of PR and assert its role as a strategic management discipline.

All costs associated with the design, production and marketing of #FuturePProof are paid for by [Astute.Work](#) as part of managing director Sarah Waddington's mission to improve social mobility within the PR industry by making thought leadership and best practice accessible to all.

For more information visit www.futureproofingcomms.co.uk, join the [#FuturePProof Facebook group](#) and follow [@weareproofed](#).