

FAD / **FUNDING AND DISCLOSURE REFORM**

AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025

Interim Report – Group A (Political Actors)

Prepared for the Australian Electoral Commission
Roy Morgan | December 2025
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Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

Purpose

This interim report presents early findings from Group A: Political Actors following completion of Group A fieldwork for the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025. It provides an evidence-based snapshot of awareness, understanding, confidence and support needs ahead of the commencement of the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025 on 1 July 2026.

Findings are preliminary and directional, based on interim self-reported data from Group A only. They are intended to inform early planning for communication, education and ICT readiness within the FAD Program, rather than to assess compliance outcomes or implementation effectiveness. A full, integrated report covering Groups A, B (Donors) and C (General Public) will be provided in February 2026, following completion of the remaining fieldwork and detailed sub-group analysis.

Interim Findings

Awareness, understanding and confidence

Awareness of the reforms among Group A stakeholders is relatively high, particularly in relation to headline changes such as donation and expenditure caps. However, depth of understanding remains uneven. Fewer stakeholders report strong confidence in how the reforms will operate in practice, especially where timelines, definitions and reporting processes intersect.

Across the findings, confidence to comply exceeds confidence in understanding or preparedness. This suggests that many stakeholders expect to meet their obligations through prior experience, established practices or anticipated AEC support, rather than through detailed familiarity with the new framework at this stage.

Compliance responsibility and operating context

Responsibility for funding and disclosure reporting is highly concentrated, with most organisations relying on a single individual to manage compliance. This increases dependence on individual knowledge and capacity and heightens sensitivity to complexity, ambiguity and error.

As a result, stakeholders favour guidance and systems that reduce interpretation risk and administrative burden, particularly for time-poor users who may engage with reporting obligations infrequently but carry full accountability for accuracy.

Interim Findings

Communication, education and ICT preferences

Stakeholders strongly trust the AEC as the authoritative source of information. Engagement with guidance and support is largely task-driven, intensifying around reporting events rather than occurring as ongoing learning. Preferences consistently favour early, proactive communication; plain-English explanations; and step-by-step guidance.

ICT preferences reflect this context. Stakeholders prioritise systems that minimise cognitive load and error risk over advanced functionality. The most valued characteristics include clear visibility of obligations and due dates, guided workflows, simple navigation, and confidence that information has been saved and submitted correctly. While integration with common tools such as spreadsheets or bulk uploads is expected, practical usability and certainty are rated more highly than technical sophistication.

Interim Findings

Implications

The interim findings suggest that implementation risk is less about stakeholder willingness to comply and more about how effectively that intent is supported in practice. While confidence in eventual compliance is high, it is not yet consistently grounded in a clear understanding of how the new requirements will operate, particularly where timelines, definitions and reporting processes intersect.

This risk is amplified by the concentration of compliance responsibility within organisations. With reporting typically managed by a single individual, gaps in clarity or usability are less likely to be absorbed internally, increasing the impact of ambiguity, late awareness, or difficulties using the system during early implementation.

Timing and sequencing also emerge as critical factors. Stakeholders tend to engage with guidance when obligations arise rather than well in advance, meaning any misalignment between policy commencement, system readiness and communication roll-out may have a disproportionate effect on confidence and perceived burden. In this context, ICT design and guidance that reduce cognitive effort, make obligations visible and prevent errors will be central to supporting an effective transition.

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1. Overview

Reform Context

Overview of the legislative reforms

Australia's federal electoral funding and disclosure framework is changing. The Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025 introduces lower disclosure thresholds, donation and expenditure caps, more frequent reporting, and revised reporting periods. Together, these changes will increase both the amount of information that must be reported and how often reporting is required.

The reforms are scheduled to commence on 1 July 2026, creating a defined period for communication, education and system preparation. How this period is used will directly affect how well the reforms are understood and implemented in practice.

Group A: Political Actors, including registered political parties, candidates and candidate agents, associated entities and third-party campaigners, are directly responsible for meeting the new requirements. These stakeholders interact most frequently with AEC guidance and online systems and will experience the earliest practical impacts of the reforms.

As primary users of the funding and disclosure framework, Group A stakeholders are a key audience for understanding readiness, likely challenges and support needs ahead of commencement.

Background and Research Objectives

This interim report forms part of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey program and presents early results from the Group A component following completion of fieldwork. Its purpose is to support implementation planning, rather than to assess compliance outcomes or system performance. The report provides an early, evidence-based view of awareness, preparedness and anticipated support needs to help the AEC plan communication, education and system development during the lead-in to reform commencement.

Research Objectives

The Group A component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey is designed to provide an evidence base to support implementation of the 2025–26 reforms. The research objectives are to:

- **Assess awareness and understanding of the reforms**
Examine the extent to which political actors are aware of the legislative changes and understand how the new requirements will apply to their reporting obligations.
- **Explore perceived preparedness and anticipated challenges**
Understand how prepared stakeholders feel ahead of commencement and identify areas where they anticipate difficulty in meeting the new requirements.
- **Identify communication, education and system support needs**
Identify the types of guidance, information and system features stakeholders consider most useful to support compliance.
- **Inform future AEC implementation planning**
Provide insight to support the AEC's planning for communication, education and online service development ahead of commencement.

How to Read this Report

Interpretation guidance

This interim report provides the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) with an early, evidence-based view of findings from the Group A (Political Actors) component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025.

The findings presented in this report should be read with the following in mind:

- Findings are directional and interim in nature, and are reported ahead of integrated analysis across Groups B (Donors) and C (General Public).
- The emphasis is on identifying patterns, emerging risks and support needs, rather than drawing final conclusions.
- Measures of confidence and preparedness reflect self-reported perceptions, not observed compliance behaviour.
- This report does not make final recommendations or prescribe actions. Its purpose is to inform planning and further analysis.

Further analysis will examine differences within Group A, explore sub-groups with distinct compliance profiles, and integrate findings across donors and the general public. This will strengthen the evidence base for final implementation decisions ahead of the July 2026 commencement.

2. Methodology and Interpretation

Method Overview

Survey approach

The Group A component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey was conducted as an online self-completion survey (CAWI). This approach enabled respondents to complete the survey at a time and pace that suited their availability, and supported the inclusion of detailed and technically focused questions relevant to funding and disclosure obligations.

Fieldwork timing

Group A fieldwork was conducted in two stages

- a pilot conducted from 5–7 November 2025
- main fieldwork conducted from 10 November to 2 December 2025

This timing was designed to maximise participation among time-poor stakeholders with varying levels of engagement in funding and disclosure activities.

Recruitment approach

Participants were recruited from AEC-identified Group A stakeholders, including registered political parties, candidates, agents, associated entities and third-party campaigners. Invitations were issued directly to eligible contacts to ensure the survey reached individuals with responsibility for, or direct involvement in, funding and disclosure obligations. In total, 1,685 eligible stakeholders were invited to participate. 293 respondents commenced the survey and 144 completed it, representing an 8.5% overall response rate and a 49% completion rate among those who commenced the survey..

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the AEC and structured to capture evidence across the following key areas:

- awareness and understanding of the legislative reforms
- clarity, confidence and perceived preparedness
- anticipated compliance challenges
- communication and education needs
- experience with existing AEC systems and expectations of the new online service

Notes for Interpretation

The findings in this report should be interpreted with the following considerations in mind:

- The results are based on self-reported perceptions, rather than direct observation of behaviour or compliance-readiness.
- Reported preparedness reflects self-assessed readiness ahead of commencement and does not predict how stakeholders will perform once the new requirements are in effect.
- Analysis at this stage focuses on overall patterns, with subgroup analysis limited to high-level differences where appropriate.
- The results are intended to inform planning and further analysis, not to evaluate performance or assess compliance outcomes.

3. Fieldwork Snapshot and Data Quality

Fieldwork Snapshot

Fieldwork period	Pilot: 5–7 Nov 2025; Main: 10 Nov–2 Dec 2025
Participation outcomes	1,685 eligible participants invited; 293 started (17%); 144 completed (8.5%); 49% completion among starters
Survey length	Median duration: 20 minutes

8.5%

response rate
49% completion among starters

Fieldwork for Group A was completed successfully, with participation outcomes consistent with expectations for a time-poor, compliance-focused stakeholder group.

Response rates are calculated using AAPOR Response Rate 3 (RR3), which accounts for estimated eligibility among cases of unknown eligibility.

Participation Context

Device Usage

Survey completion occurred predominantly on desktop devices (85%), with 15% completed on mobile.

Implications for interpreting digital findings

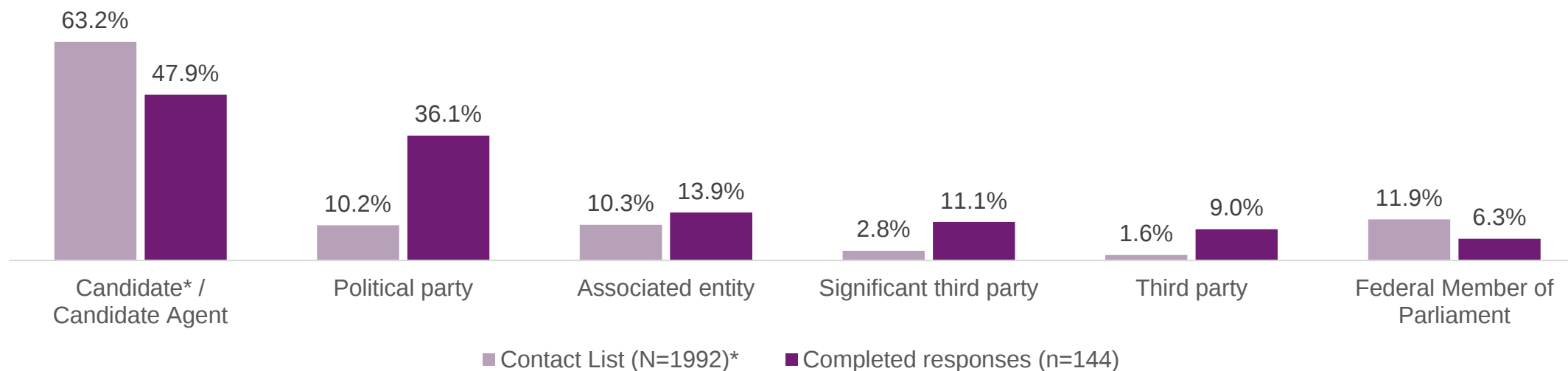
The preference for desktop completion is consistent with the administrative and compliance-focused nature of Group A roles, which often involve accessing records, documentation and reporting systems.

This participation context suggests that:

- responses reflect considered engagement with survey content
- findings relating to online systems are informed by desktop-based workflows
- low mobile completion reflects task context rather than barriers to survey participation

4. Respondent Profile and Context

Profile of Respondents: Contact List vs Completed Responses



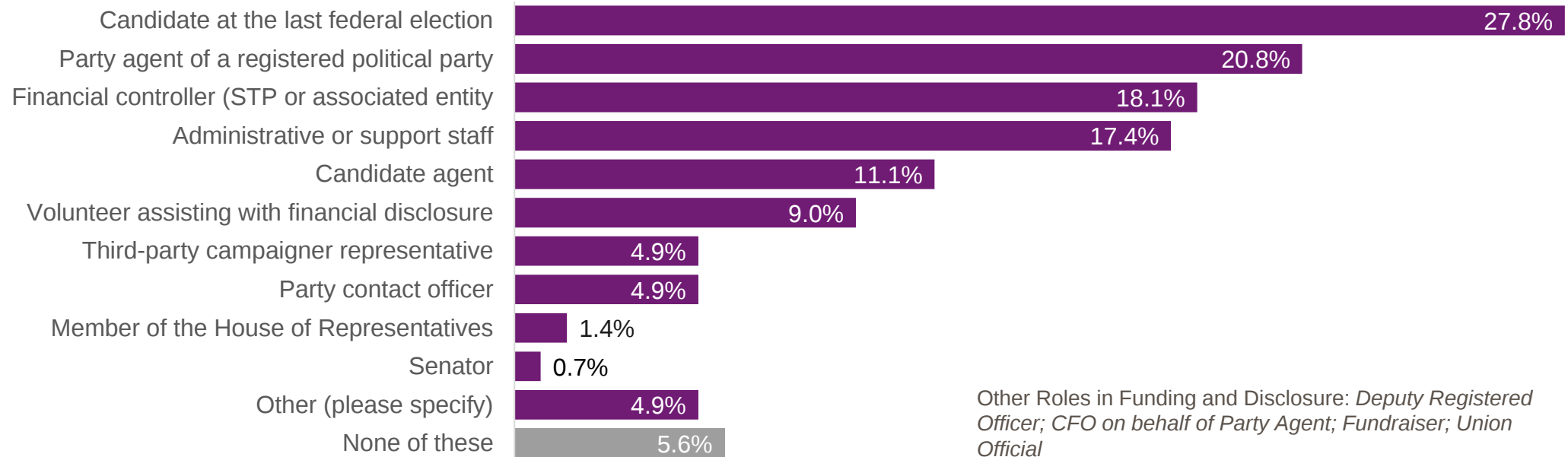
Q S1a Which of the following best describes the organisation or individual you represent in relation to federal political funding and disclosure?

- Completed responses are concentrated among candidates and political parties, which together account for approximately 73% of completions.
- In contrast, candidate agents make up the largest proportion of the AEC contact list, reflecting administrative responsibility for compliance rather than survey self-identification.
- Differences between the contact list and completed responses likely reflect a combination of self-identification by respondents and variation in engagement with a survey focused on funding and disclosure obligations.

*Some individuals listed as candidate agents in the AEC contact file identified themselves as candidates when responding to the survey. This reflects differences between administrative contact classifications and respondents' self-identification.

The contact list N includes all records provided by the AEC at the time of invitation, including cases later identified as ineligible or out of scope.

Profile of Respondents: Role in Funding and Disclosure



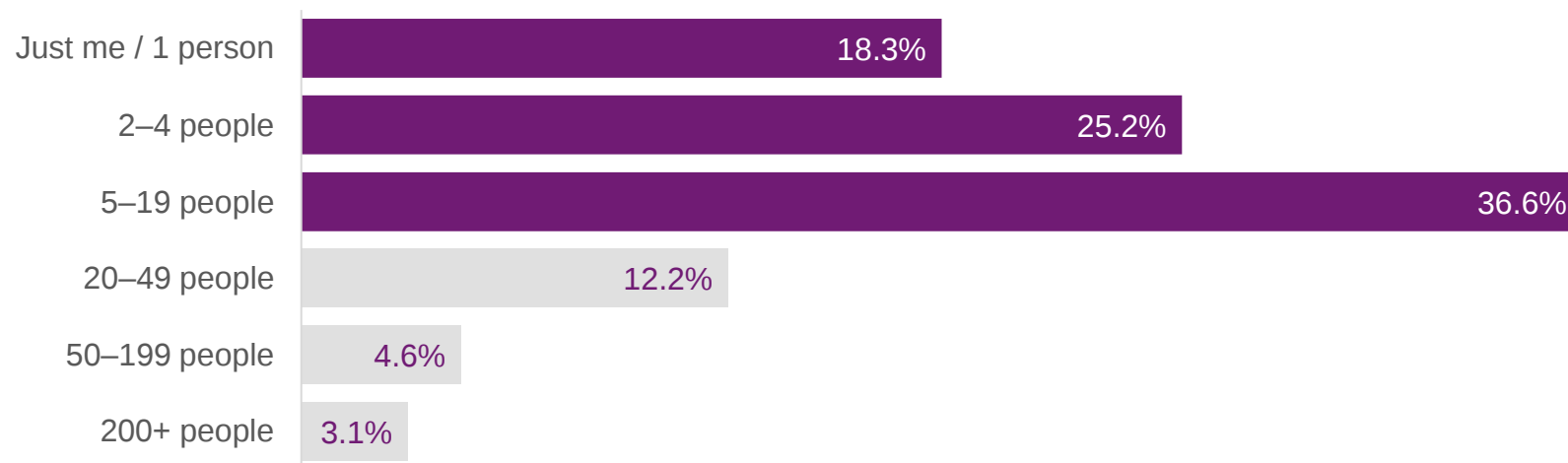
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q S1b Which of the following best describes your role in relation to funding and disclosure?

- Respondents occupy a range of roles across funding and disclosure activities, with many holding direct or primary responsibility. 27.8% were candidates at the most recent federal election; 20.8% were party agents of registered political parties; 18.1% were financial controllers for significant third parties or associated entities; 17.4% were administrative or support staff involved in disclosure; and 11.1% identified as candidate agents.
- This mix indicates that responses largely reflect perspectives from individuals actively engaged in disclosure decision-making or administration.

Profile of Respondents: Number of paid staff or regular volunteers in the organisation

80.2% of stakeholders represent **small organisations** with fewer than 20 paid staff or regular volunteers.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q F1. About how many paid staff or regular volunteers does your organisation have (including yourself if applicable)?

- Most respondents represent small organisations with limited staff or volunteer capacity with 80.2% representing organisations with fewer than 20 paid staff or regular volunteers
- This profile highlights the prevalence of resource-constrained operating environments among Group A respondents.

Affiliation at the Last Federal Election

Survey participation

36.8% of respondents (n=53) identified as candidates at the most recent federal election. 6.3% (n=9) identified as Federal Members of Parliament.

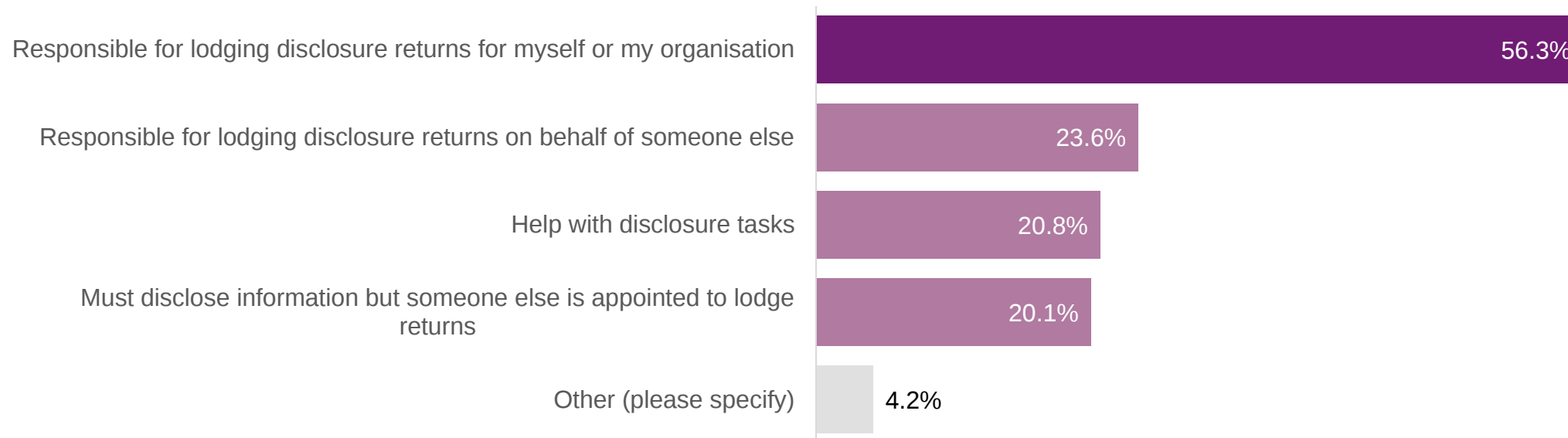
Affiliation at the last federal election

Among respondents who were candidates or Federal Members of Parliament, affiliation at the most recent federal election was almost evenly divided:

- 51.5% stood as independent candidates
- 48.5% were endorsed by a registered political party

This near-even split indicates that perspectives in the Group A sample reflect both party-affiliated and independent political actors.

Profile of Respondents: Personal Involvement in Lodging Disclosure Returns

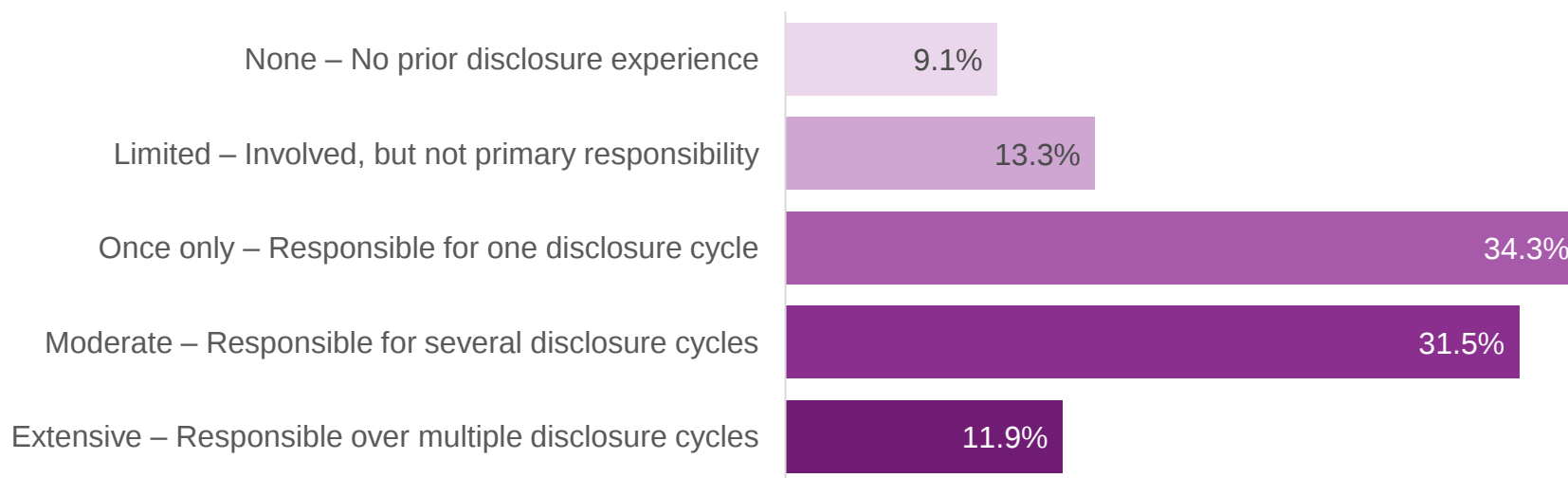


Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q 53 Which of the following best describes your personal involvement in lodging disclosure returns?

Most respondents report direct responsibility for lodging disclosure returns, indicating that the findings largely reflect hands-on experience with funding and disclosure requirements. Others are involved through support or delegated roles, highlighting variation in depth of engagement and exposure to compliance processes.

Profile of Respondents: Experience with Funding and Disclosure and Expectation regarding the Future Obligations



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q S4 How much experience do you have with political funding and disclosure requirements?

- Respondents reported mixed levels of prior experience with funding and disclosure, with no single experience level dominating the sample. While 43.4% report moderate or extensive experience, a substantial proportion have limited or one-off exposure to disclosure processes.
- This spread suggests that Group A includes both stakeholders with established familiarity and those for whom disclosure has been episodic or peripheral, with implications for how requirements are interpreted and where guidance may need to be more explicit or practical.
- Importantly, despite variation in prior experience, the vast majority of respondents (90.4%) expect to have future funding and disclosure obligations, indicating that the findings are relevant to stakeholders who anticipate ongoing engagement with the framework.

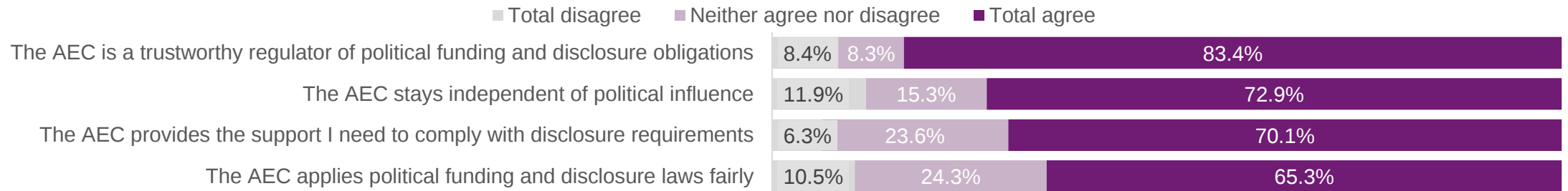
5. Insights

5.1 Attitudes towards the AEC

Attitudes Towards the AEC

General opinions of the AEC

Strong trust in the AEC provides a solid foundation for reform implementation



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q A3. "Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)"

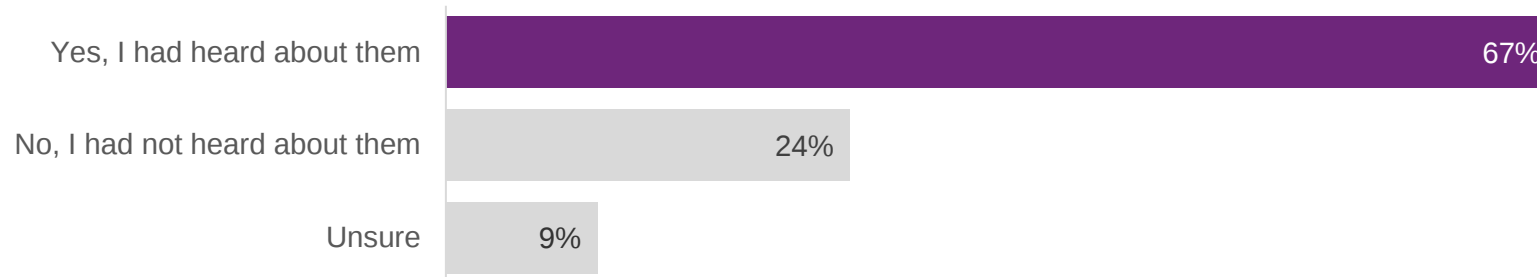
- Political actors report high levels of trust in the AEC, particularly as a trustworthy and independent regulator. Agreement is strongest on the AEC's overall integrity and role.
- Perceptions are more mixed on whether funding and disclosure laws are applied fairly, driven mainly by neutrality rather than disagreement.
- The AEC begins reform implementation from a position of strong institutional trust, providing a solid foundation for engagement and compliance.
- However, neutrality around fairness highlights the importance of transparent, consistent application and clear guidance to maintain confidence as new requirements take effect.

5.2 Awareness & Understanding

Awareness & Understanding

Recent reforms

Most stakeholders are aware of recent reforms



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

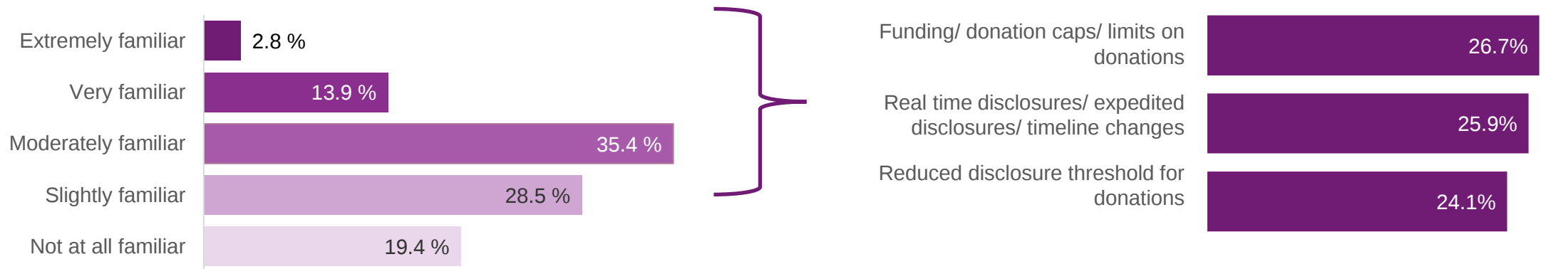
Q B1a. "Before today, had you heard about recent changes to the requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral

- Around two-thirds of Group A stakeholders (67%) reported having heard about the recent reforms prior to participating in the survey, indicating relatively high baseline awareness within this group.
- However, one-third (33%) had either not heard about the changes or were unsure, suggesting that awareness is not yet universal, even among stakeholders with direct compliance responsibilities.
- This establishes an important baseline for interpreting subsequent findings, particularly in relation to understanding of the reforms, confidence to comply, and the level and type of information and support stakeholders may require.

Awareness & Understanding

Overall familiarity

Very few stakeholders are extremely familiar with the changes coming into effect. Donation caps are the change they are most likely to say is most relevant to participants or their organisation



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q B1b. "Before today, how familiar were you with the changes to the requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025)?"

Base: Group A respondents at least slightly familiar with the changes to requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (n=116)

Q B1c. "Which of the new requirements is most relevant or important to you or your organisation?" (top 3 coded themes)

- Familiarity with the reforms is generally limited. Only a small minority report being very or extremely familiar (17%), with most stakeholders indicating moderate or lower familiarity.
- Among those aware of the changes, attention is concentrated on a small number of practical impacts. Donation caps (26.7%), real-time or expedited disclosure (25.9%), and reduced disclosure thresholds (24.1%) are cited at similar levels.
- This suggests stakeholders can identify what matters most, but many lack a clear understanding of how the reforms will work in practice, highlighting the need for clear, implementation-focused guidance.

Awareness & Understanding

Stakeholder-identified priorities within the reform package

Donation and spending caps

Stakeholders frequently highlighted changes to donation and spending caps, particularly where requirements differ across participant types and have implications for system configuration and compliance.

“Donation and spending caps that differ for different participants (e.g. independents vs major parties).”

“Both the expedited disclosure requirements and the donation/expenditure caps are, in my view, the most important to the organisation. Both will require significant technological development to allow our systems to comply with the requirements.”

Disclosure thresholds

Updates to disclosure thresholds were identified as a key area of awareness, with respondents noting implications for reporting frequency and compliance effort.

“Update of disclosure threshold for \$5,000 and requirements.”

Expedited disclosures and real-time reporting

Expedited disclosure and real-time reporting obligations were consistently cited as significant changes requiring early clarity and practical guidance.

“Expedited disclosure of donations. Federal accounts. Calendar year reporting. Changing annual returns.”

“Reduced disclosure threshold, real-time disclosure obligations, as well as potential for other parties to become third party / have increased disclosure obligations at the next election.”

“New disclosure limits, real-time reporting.”

Other implementation considerations

A range of additional reform elements were raised, particularly relating to administrative funding, account separation, and impacts for candidates and associated entities.

“Political party compliance, donation thresholds and ceilings, application of admin funding.”

“The requirement to have dedicated Federal and Administrative accounts – there is still a lack of clarity around how we will be able to separate administrative and campaign income and expenditure.”

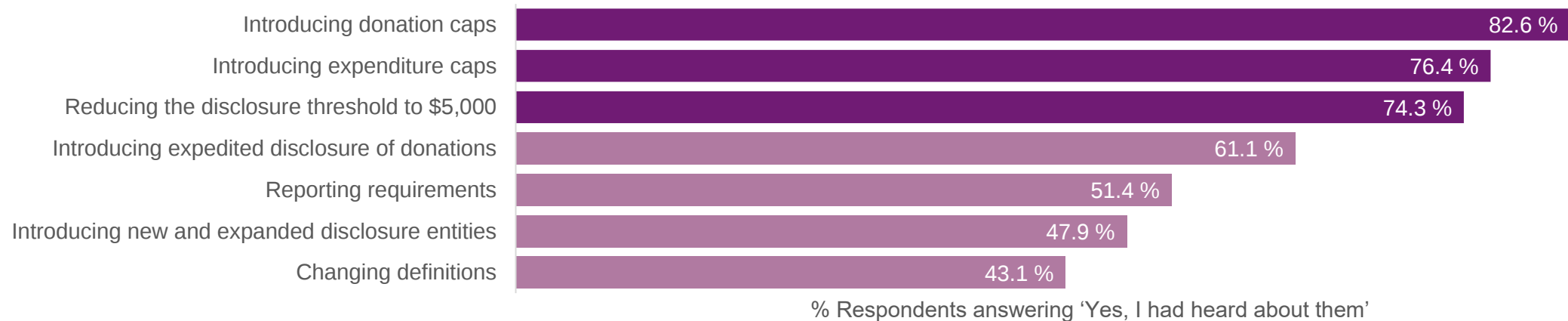
“Reporting requirements and changes in funding arrangements for candidates and associated entities.”

Q B1c Which of the new requirements is most relevant or important to you or your organisation?

Awareness & Understanding

Key reforms

New donation caps are the change stakeholders are most aware of



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

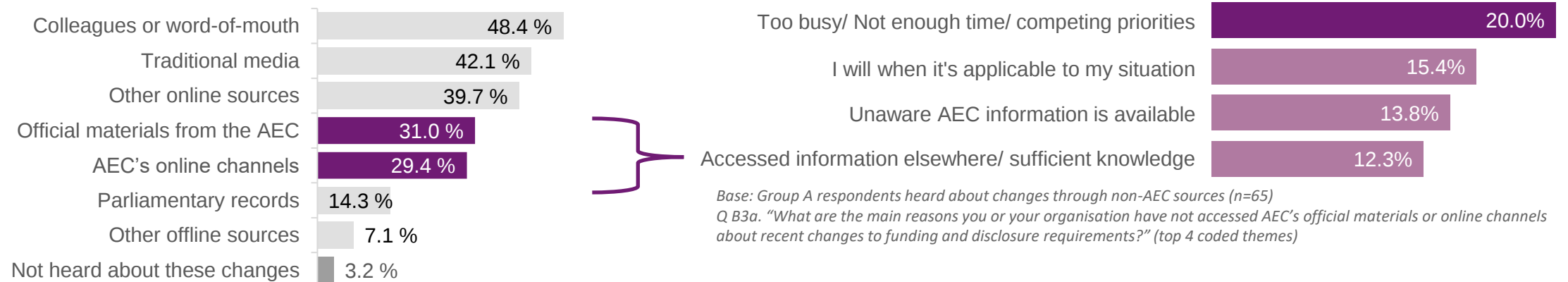
Q B2. Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026

- Awareness is highest for high-salience changes such as donation caps (83%), expenditure caps (76%) and the reduced disclosure threshold (74%).
- Operational and definitional changes are less well recognised, with lower awareness of reporting requirements (51%), expanded disclosure entities (48%) and changes to definitions (43%).
- This creates a risk gap: stakeholders may feel informed about the headline reforms while being less prepared for the practical reporting and compliance implications that will shape day-to-day implementation.

Awareness & Understanding

Information sources

Stakeholders were most likely to have heard about the changes through word-of-mouth



- Awareness of the reforms is driven primarily by informal and external channels, particularly colleagues/word-of-mouth (48%), traditional media (42%) and other online sources (40%), rather than AEC-owned channels.
- AEC materials currently have more limited reach, with fewer than one-third of stakeholders citing official AEC materials (31%) or AEC online channels (29%) as a source of information.
- This suggests a distribution and timing challenge rather than an information gap: stakeholders who are time-poor are relying on sources they already engage with, indicating that proactive, succinct and well-timed AEC communications will be critical to improving reach and consistency of understanding.

Awareness & Understanding

Reasons for not accessing AEC official materials or online channels

Respondents who had not accessed AEC official materials most commonly cited time constraints, reliance on alternative sources of advice, or uncertainty about the availability of guidance following the introduction of new legislation.

“Lack of time and resources – focus fully on other urgent priorities at this time. It would be expected that the AEC sends emails, even mail clearly and succinctly outlining the changes. Perhaps in bite-size portioned communications that educate into this.”

“I reviewed the laws and commentary directly.”

“Sufficient detail provided through internal channels.”

“We took our advice from our external lawyer.”

“Websites become too confusing to navigate. Print media is more succinct.”

“I didn’t realise the resources were available yet. When I checked the website it said advice was pending as the legislation was new.”

- These responses suggest that non-use of AEC materials does not necessarily reflect disengagement. Rather, stakeholders often rely on parallel information sources, prioritise immediate operational demands, or perceive official guidance as not yet finalised or easily accessible.

Base: Group A respondents who haven’t accessed AEC official materials or channels (n=65)

Q B3a. “What are the main reasons you or your organisation have not accessed AEC’s official materials or online channels about recent changes to funding and disclosure requirements?”

Awareness & Understanding

Areas where stakeholders require the most information about the new requirements

Overall scope and compliance planning

“All of it – especially caps, thresholds, declaration / disclosure requirements. Want to ensure that we are fully compliant and have time to plan.”

Timing, definitions and transitional arrangements

“Changes to the definitions. How will it work if changes are implemented from 1 July, but reporting will be calendar year. How will we report on the period from July till December 2026?”

Account structures and election-period reporting

“Methods of disclosure during election periods, and more clarity around the use of Federal vs Administrative accounts and funds, particularly given that Federal revenue surpluses have historically been used to fund the operation of our Party in non-election years by offsetting our administrative budget deficit.”

- Stakeholders most frequently requested clarity on how the new requirements will operate in practice, particularly where changes intersect with reporting timeframes, account structures, disclosure thresholds and expedited reporting obligations.
- Requests for information are primarily practical and operational in nature. Stakeholders are seeking clarity on how the reforms will be implemented, how transitional periods will be managed, and how to correctly apply the new rules across different account types, donation categories and reporting timeframes.

Expedited disclosure processes and systems

“Expedited disclosure requirements, definition of donors and entities forms and software for submitting returns ensuring suitable record keeping.”

Donations, fundraising and classification

“Donations disclosure including gifts and how to handle fundraising events & receipts for net proceeds.”

“Short time frame reporting of donations. Disclosure of political donations. Information regarding whether the same disclosure rules apply to non-political donations, i.e. donations made to our organisation with the explicit instructions that they are for our advocacy account, not our political account: do the same disclosure, threshold and reporting timeframe rules apply to those non-political donations as they do to political donations?”

Base: Group A respondents who have heard about the recent changes (n=122)

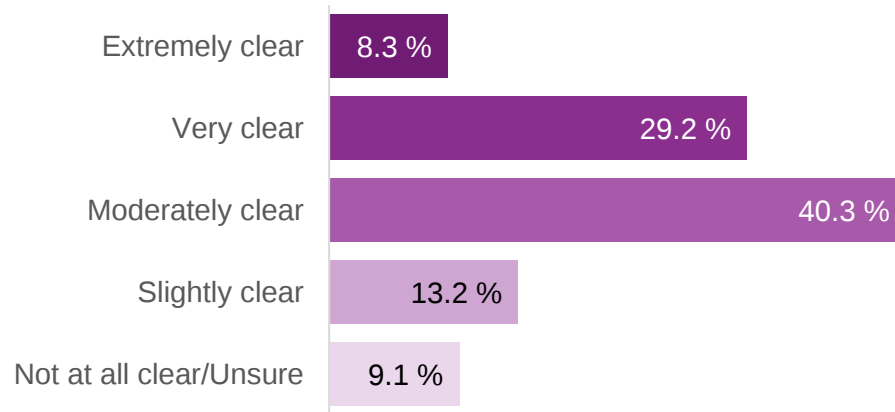
Q B3b. “Which of the new requirements do you feel you will need the most information about?”

5.3 Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Existing funding and disclosure scheme

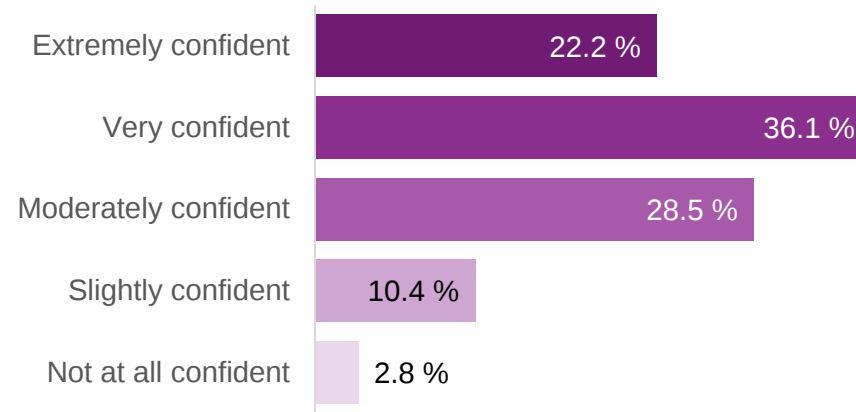
Most stakeholders find the existing funding and disclosure scheme very or moderately clear



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q A1. "How clear are the requirements relating to the existing federal political funding and disclosure scheme to you?"

Stakeholders are confident in their ability to comply with the existing funding and disclosure requirements



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

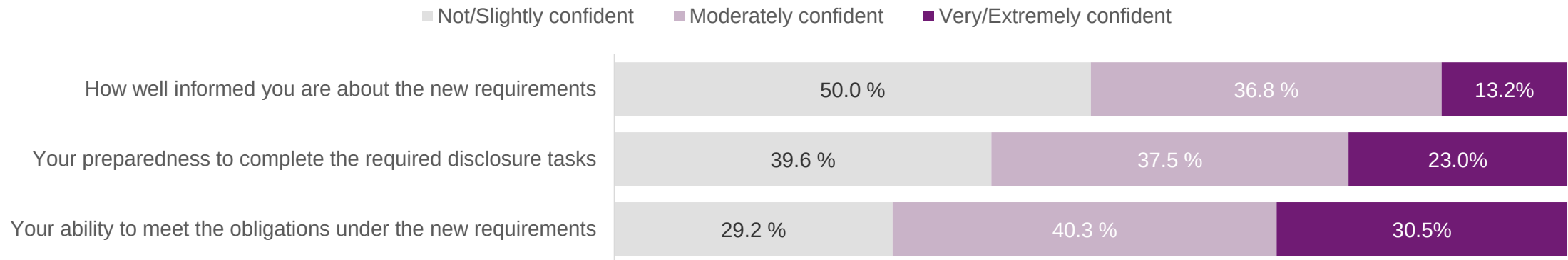
Q A2. "How confident are you in your/your organisation's ability to comply with the existing federal political funding and disclosure requirements?"

- Clarity is generally strong, but not universal: around four in five stakeholders find the existing funding and disclosure scheme at least moderately clear, though relatively few describe it as extremely clear (8.3%).
- Confidence is higher than clarity: a larger proportion report being at least moderately confident in their ability to comply than report high levels of clarity about the scheme itself.
- This suggests compliance has become proceduralised: stakeholders appear to have developed practical ways of meeting requirements, even where aspects of the scheme remain complex or open to interpretation.

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Confidence responding to changes

Stakeholders are more confident in their ability to meet new obligations than they are about being informed of those requirements and their current preparedness to complete disclosure tasks



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

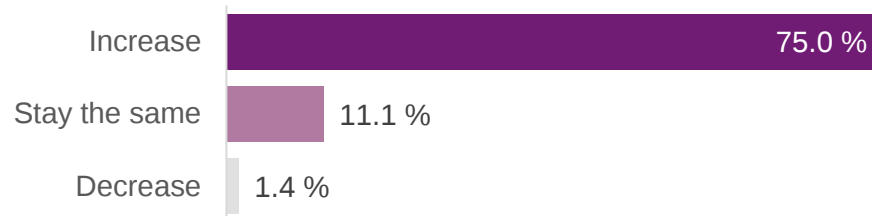
Q B7. "How confident are you about the following aspects of meeting the new requirements?"

- Stakeholders report lower confidence in how well informed they are about the new requirements than in their preparedness to complete tasks or their ability to comply once the changes take effect.
- Confidence appears to be driven more by general compliance experience than by detailed understanding of the reforms, highlighting the importance of timely, practical guidance to support effective implementation.

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Time, effort and actions

Stakeholders expect increased time and effort required to comply with new requirements

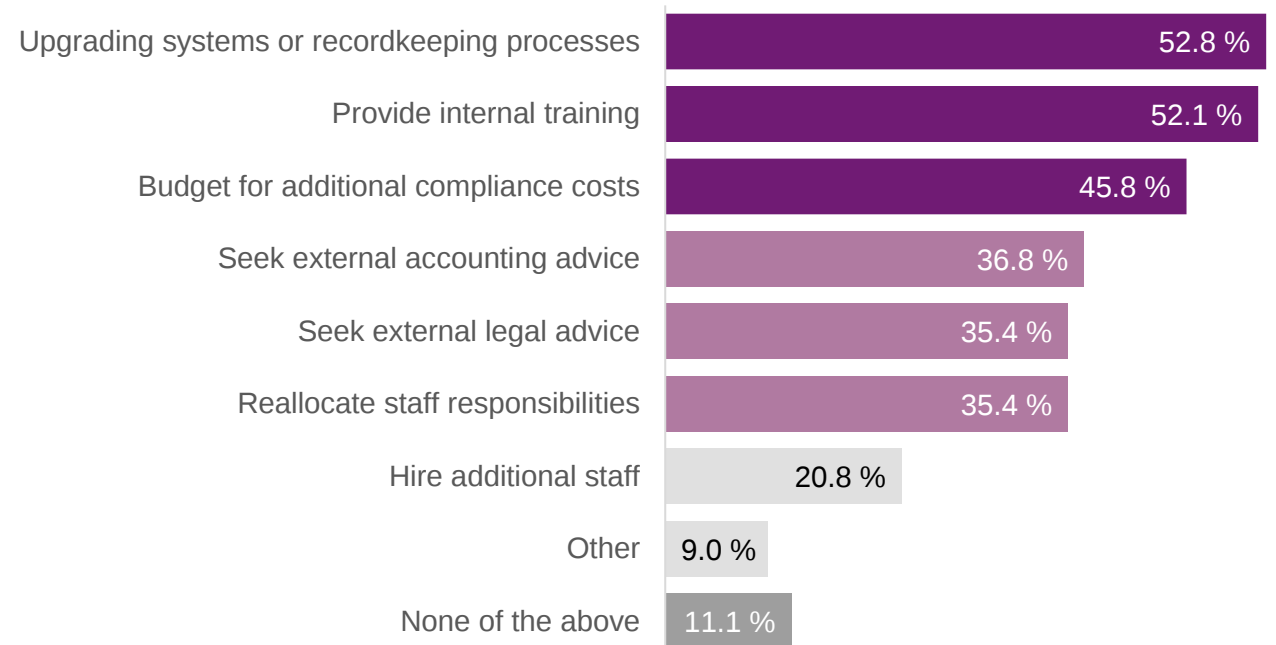


Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q B4. "Do you expect the amount of time and effort required to comply with the new requirements will increase, stay the same, or decrease?"

- Most stakeholders expect compliance with the new requirements to require more time and effort, with system upgrades and internal training the most commonly anticipated actions.
- Implementation is expected to place a practical and resourcing burden on organisations, reinforcing the need for clear guidance, fit-for-purpose systems, and support that reduces duplication and rework during transition.

Upgrading systems and providing internal training are the two most anticipated actions required to comply with new requirements



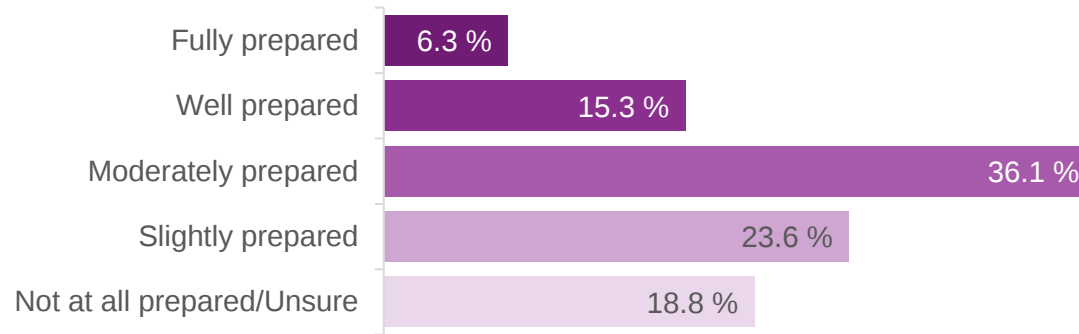
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q B5. "What actions might you or your organisation need to take to comply with the new requirements?" (multiple choice)

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Overall preparedness to comply

Less than a quarter of stakeholders feel that they are fully prepared, or well prepared



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q C10. "How prepared do you feel you or your organisation are to comply with the new funding and disclosure requirements?"

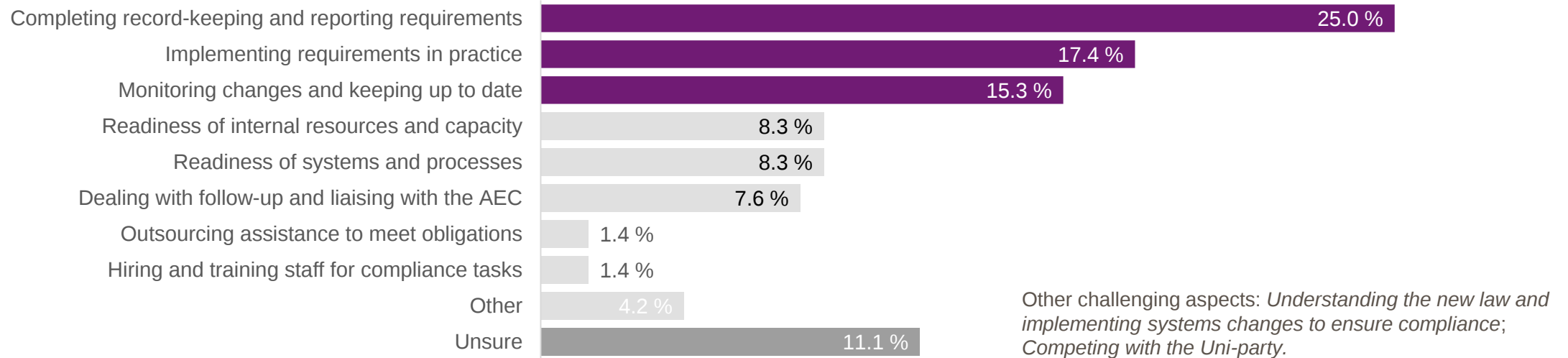
- Fewer than one in four stakeholders feel well or fully prepared to comply with the new requirements, with most describing themselves as only moderately or slightly prepared.
- While stakeholders may feel confident they can ultimately meet the obligations, many have not yet translated that confidence into concrete readiness, indicating a need for practical, implementation-focused support ahead of commencement.

5.4 Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Expected challenges

Record-keeping and reporting requirements are the aspect of compliance stakeholders most expect to be challenging or time-consuming.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

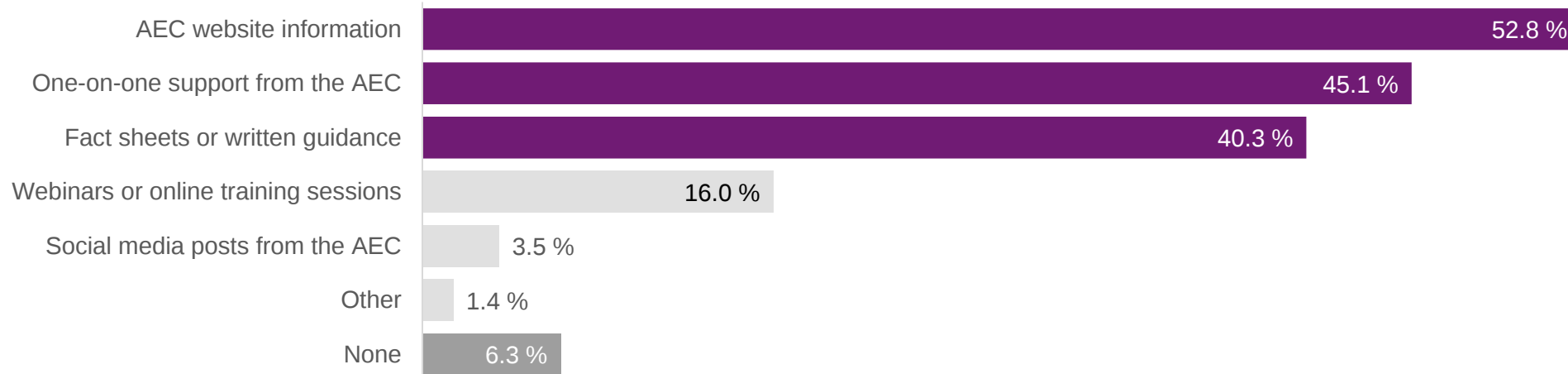
Q B6. "What aspect of complying with the new requirements do you expect will be most challenging or time-consuming?"

- Record-keeping and reporting are the most frequently cited challenges, followed by implementing the requirements in practice and keeping up with ongoing changes. Fewer stakeholders identify staffing, outsourcing, or resourcing as primary challenges.
- The anticipated burden is concentrated in process complexity and ongoing administration, rather than workforce capacity. This points to a need for clear guidance, streamlined reporting processes, and practical tools to reduce time and effort, rather than a reliance on additional staffing or external support.

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

AEC provided support and guidance

The AEC website is the AEC provided support resource most used by stakeholders in the last 12 months to understand funding and disclosure requirements



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

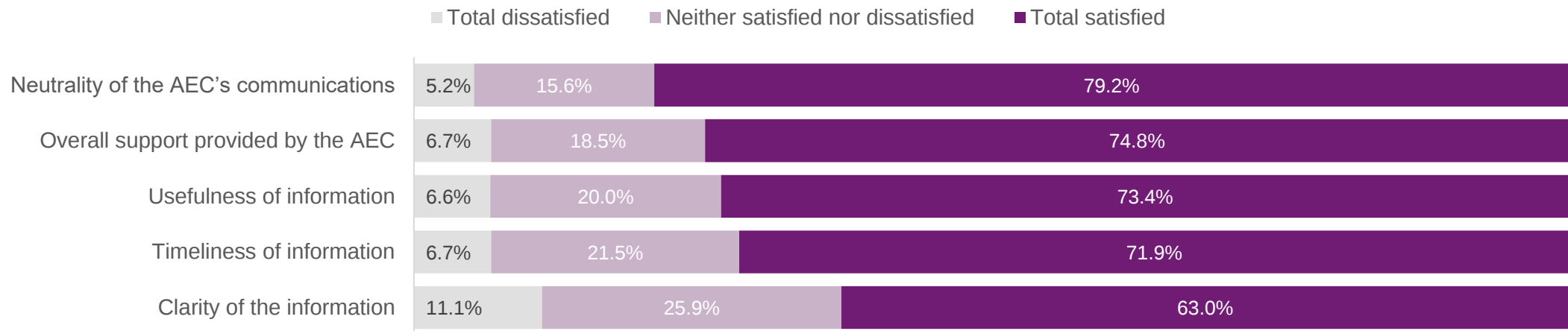
Q C1. "In the past 12 months, which types of AEC guidance or support have you or your organisation used to understand or meet your federal funding and disclosure obligations?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

- The AEC website is the most commonly used support channel, cited by just over half of stakeholders, followed by one-on-one support and written guidance. Webinars and social media are used by comparatively few stakeholders.
- Stakeholders tend to engage with AEC support when they have a specific compliance need, favouring authoritative, task-focused channels over broadcast or promotional formats. This suggests the website and direct support play a central role in compliance, while social media is best positioned as a signposting tool rather than a primary guidance channel.

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Evaluation of AEC provided support

Stakeholders on average are most satisfied with the neutrality of AEC's communications, and least satisfied with clarity of the information



Base: Group A respondents that have used at least one type of AEC guidance or support to meet federal funding and disclosure obligations in the past 12 months (n=135)

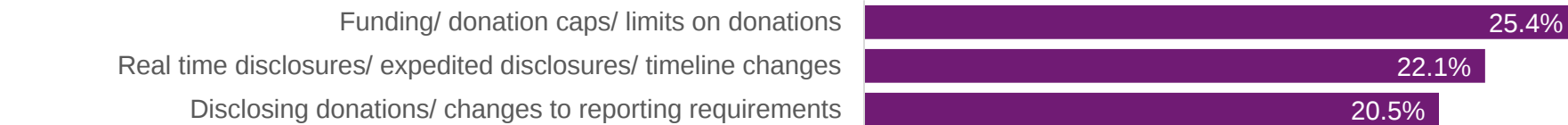
Q C2. "Thinking about the guidance or support you have used from the AEC, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following?"

- Satisfaction with AEC support is consistently high across all measures, particularly for neutrality of communications and overall support. Clarity of information, while still rated positively by a majority, is the lowest-rated dimension relative to timeliness and usefulness.
- Stakeholders broadly trust the AEC and value the support provided, but clarity represents the primary opportunity for improvement. Enhancing how information is explained and structured is likely to deliver the greatest gains in perceived effectiveness, without undermining confidence in the AEC's neutrality or intent.

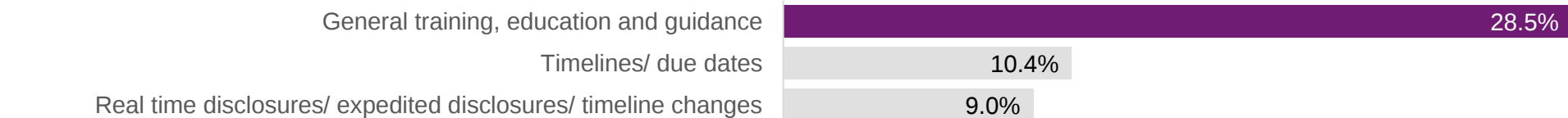
Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Support requirements - themes

The new requirements stakeholders feel they need most information about are the limits on donations, and the support they most commonly expect to need is general training, education and guidance



Base: Group A respondents that have heard of at least one of the recent changes to federal political funding and disclosure (n=122)
Q B3b. "Which of the new requirements do you feel you will need the most information about?" (top 3 coded themes)



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)
Q C11. "Looking ahead to the new requirements, which areas do you feel you will need the most support from the AEC to understand or comply?" (top 3 coded themes)

- The most common information needs relate to donation caps and limits, followed by real-time or expedited disclosure requirements and associated timeline changes. Stakeholders most frequently expect to require general training, education and guidance, with a smaller focus on timelines and due dates.
- While stakeholders can identify the key reform areas, there is ongoing uncertainty about how these changes will operate in practice, particularly where faster reporting and new limits intersect.
- Support will be most effective if it prioritises practical, scenario-based guidance and training that helps stakeholders translate new rules and timelines into day-to-day compliance processes.

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Areas requiring the most support from the AEC

Interpreting new requirements in practice

“Interpretation of definitions (changes from old to new definitions).
Nominated entities. Guidance on gift-in-kind.”

“Definitions of organisation types and whether and how we need to report,
written in plain English, not legalese.”

“We’ll mainly need support in understanding how the new requirements
translate into day-to-day practicalities.”

Timelines, triggers and disclosure mechanics

“How the different timings of disclosures will work. The caps and how they
are to be applied.”

“I need to know when and how to submit a return. What event triggers
action, and what steps I then need to take.”

Expenditure caps, accounts and entity structures

“How compliance regarding expenditure caps will work in practice, and the
treatment of transactions between associated entities and parties.”

“Clarity around the use of Administrative vs Federal accounts and whether
surplus Federal revenue can be used between elections.”

Preferred forms of support

“A single point of contact within the AEC to answer questions would
reduce frustration.”

“Step-by-step guides, reminders and checklists would be of benefit.”

“Pro forma examples in the updated scheme.”

- Support needs are framed primarily around practical application rather than policy intent or awareness.
- Stakeholders seek clarity on how new definitions, caps and account structures operate in day-to-day compliance.
- Disclosure timing, triggers and step-by-step processes emerge as consistent pressure points.
- Desired support focuses on reducing interpretation risk and administrative uncertainty, particularly for time-poor and volunteer-led organisations.

Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

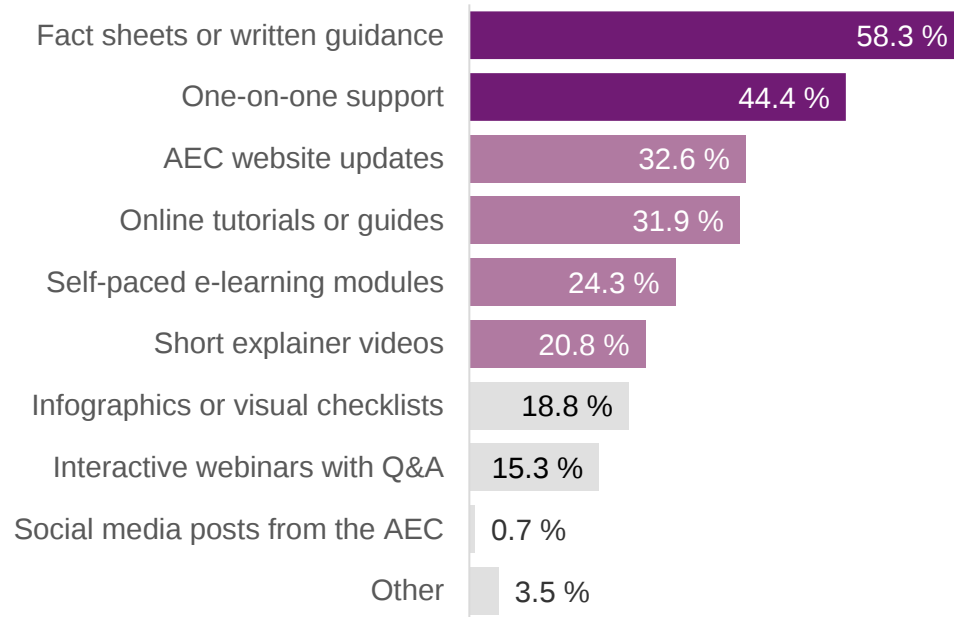
Q C11. “Looking ahead to the new requirements, which areas do you feel you will need the most support from the AEC to understand or comply?”

5.5 Communication & Education Preferences

Communication & Education Preferences

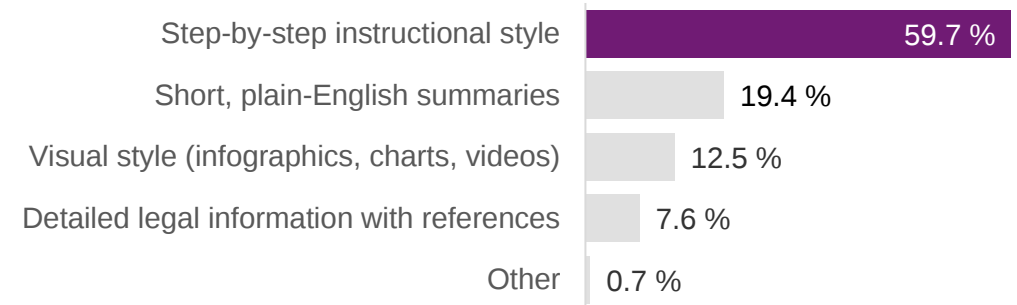
Preferred formats

Fact sheets are the most popular format for AEC information about funding and disclosure



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)
Q C3. "In future, through which formats or channels would you prefer to receive AEC information or support about funding and disclosure?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

A step-by-step instructional presentation style is favoured by the majority of stakeholders



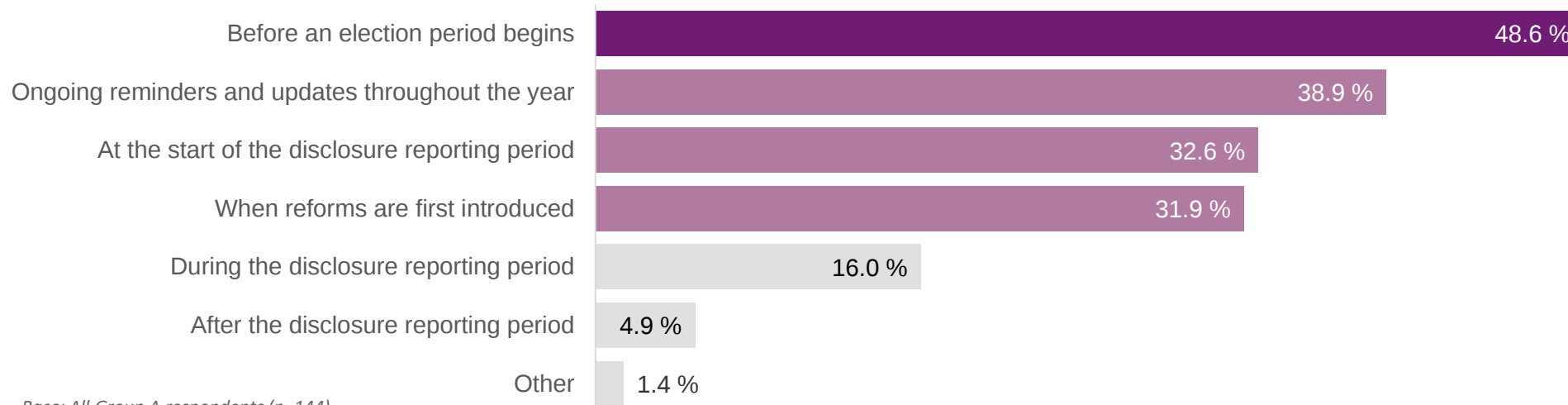
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)
Q C4. "When receiving information from the AEC, which presentation style is most helpful to you?"

- Stakeholders strongly prefer fact sheets and written guidance, particularly when presented in a clear, step-by-step format.
- Plain-English explanations are valued far more than legal detail or highly visual formats.
- AEC communications will be most effective when they focus on practical, sequential guidance that supports direct compliance action.

Communication & Education Preferences

Preferred timing

Stakeholders are most likely to prefer receiving information about funding and disclosure obligations before an election period begins.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

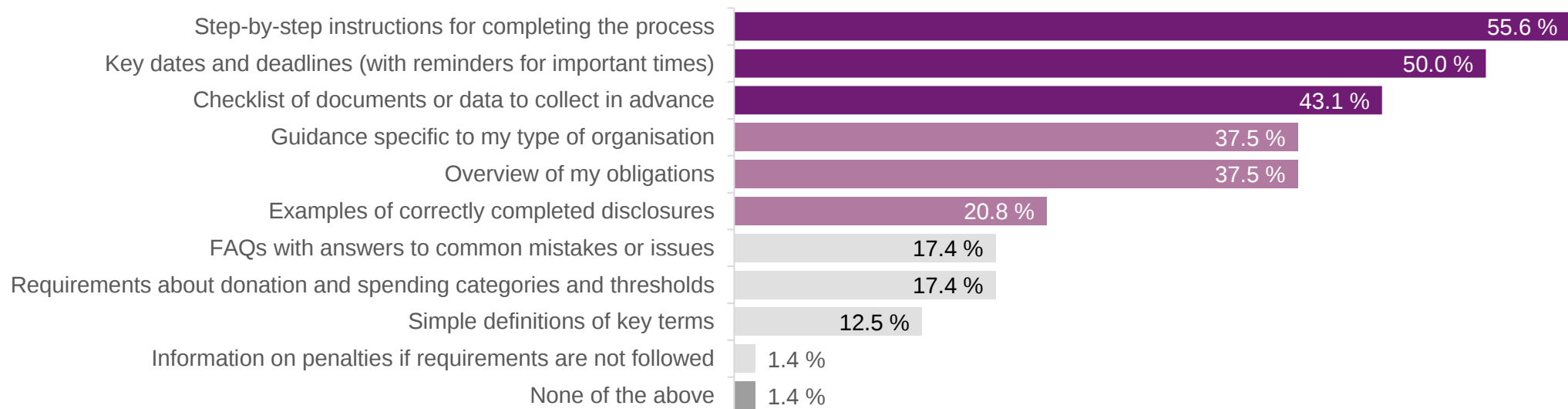
Q C8. "When would it be most useful for you to receive information and guidance about funding and disclosure obligations?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

- Stakeholders clearly prefer to receive guidance before an election period begins (48.6%), with strong secondary support for ongoing reminders throughout the year (38.9%) and at the start of reporting periods (32.6%). Very few see value in communications after reporting has concluded (4.9%).
- Communications will likely be most effective if they are front-loaded and proactive, with early notice ahead of election periods supported by periodic reminders, rather than relying on post-reporting guidance when compliance pressure has already passed.

Communication & Education Preferences

Preferred timing

The information that stakeholders would find most useful to help prepare and lodge their disclosure return is step-by-step instructions for completing the process



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

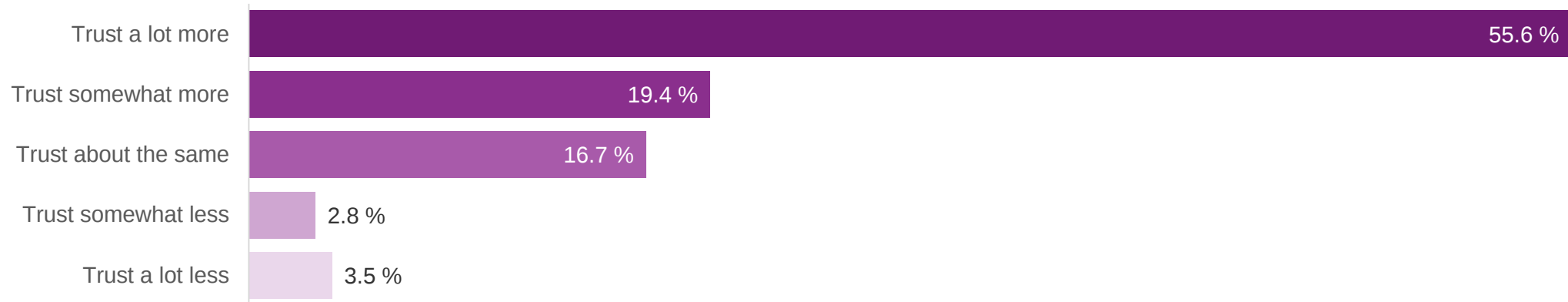
Q C7. "Which three types of information would be most useful to help you prepare and lodge your disclosure return?" (maximum 3 multiple choice)

- Stakeholders prioritise practical, task-oriented guidance, with clear demand for step-by-step instructions (55.6%), key dates and reminders (50.0%), and checklists of required information (43.1%), ahead of explanatory or legal detail.
- Support materials should be designed to reduce cognitive and administrative load, focusing on actionable tools that help stakeholders do the task correctly and on time, rather than expanding conceptual or technical explanations.

Communication & Education Preferences

Trust in AEC communications

Most stakeholders trust AEC communications about funding and disclosure obligations more than other sources such as their colleagues, media, and political networks.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q C9. "Compared to other sources of information about funding and disclosure obligations (e.g. colleagues, media, political networks), how much do you trust AEC guidance?"

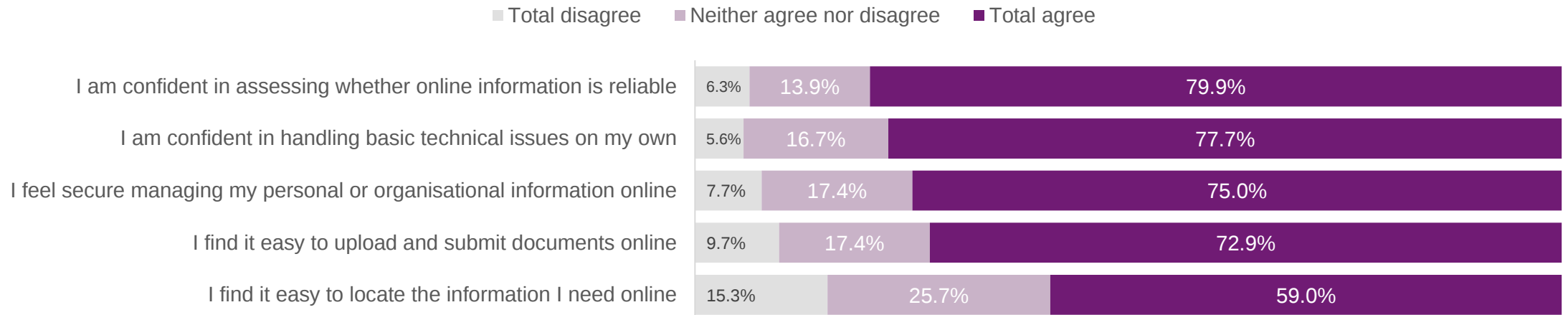
- A clear majority of stakeholders trust AEC communications more than alternative sources, with over half saying they trust the AEC a lot more than colleagues, media or political networks, and only a very small minority expressing lower trust.
- The AEC holds a strong credibility and authority position on funding and disclosure obligations, creating a clear opportunity to act as the primary, trusted source for definitive guidance and to correct or pre-empt misinformation from informal channels.

5.6 ICT & Systems

ICT & Systems Findings

Digital confidence levels

Locating information online is the digital skill stakeholders are least likely to agree they find easy



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

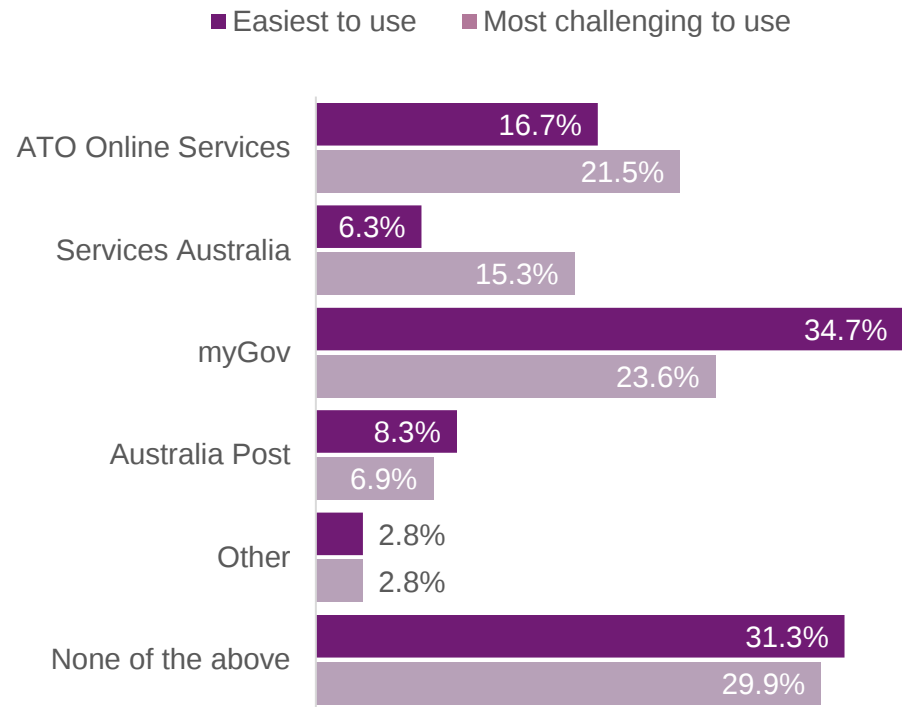
Q D1. "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your ability to use digital tools and navigate online environments?"

- Stakeholders report high confidence across most digital skills, particularly in assessing information reliability, managing security, and handling basic technical tasks, but comparatively lower confidence in locating information online.
- Barriers are less about digital capability and more about information architecture and findability, suggesting improvements to navigation, signposting and search will deliver greater benefit than additional digital skills training.

ICT & Systems Findings

Other online government services

More respondents consider myGov both the easiest to use, and most challenging to use government service



- myGov is most frequently identified as both the easiest and the most challenging online government service, pointing to highly variable experiences rather than a consistently difficult system.
- Log-in and access are the most common sources of difficulty, while clear navigation is the main reason myGov is described as easy to use.
- Perceptions of usability are shaped most strongly by the first moments of interaction. When access feels confusing or effortful, it colours the entire experience, even if the underlying system works well.
- Designing around how users actually enter and orient themselves, through simpler sign-in, clearer pathways and early reassurance, is likely to improve confidence, trust and overall usability more than changes made deeper in the system.

Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

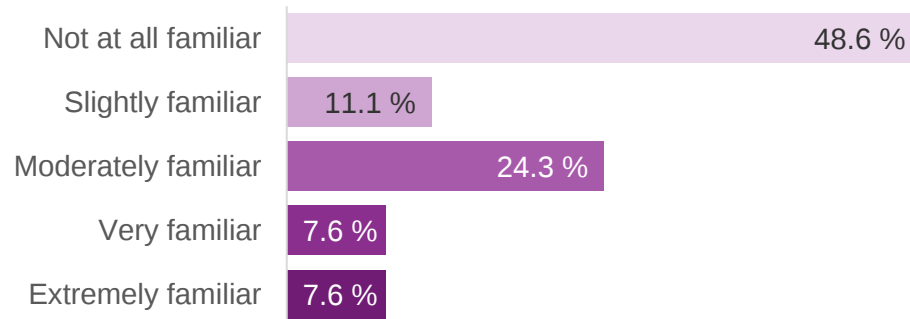
Q D2a. "Which of the following online government services do you find the easiest to use?"

Q D3a. "Which of the following online government services do you find the most challenging to use?"

ICT & Systems Findings

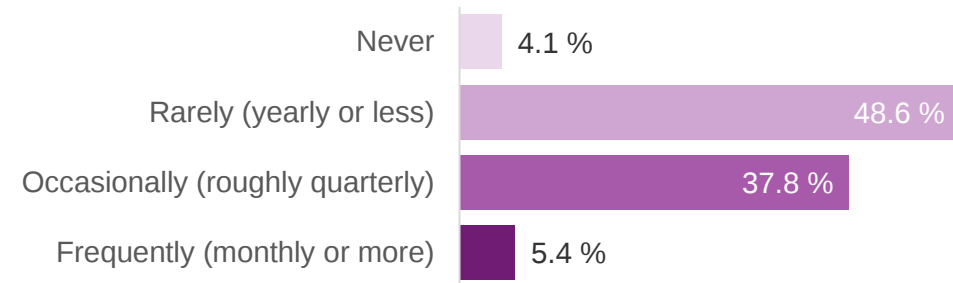
AEC Transparency Register

Familiarity with the AEC Transparency Register is low



Base: Group A respondents that have heard of the AEC Transparency Register (n=74)
Q D4b. "How familiar are you with the Transparency Register?"

Users of the Transparency Register tend to do so at most a couple times per year



Base: Group A respondents that have heard of the AEC Transparency Register (n=74)
Q D4c. "How often do you or your organisation use the Transparency Register?"

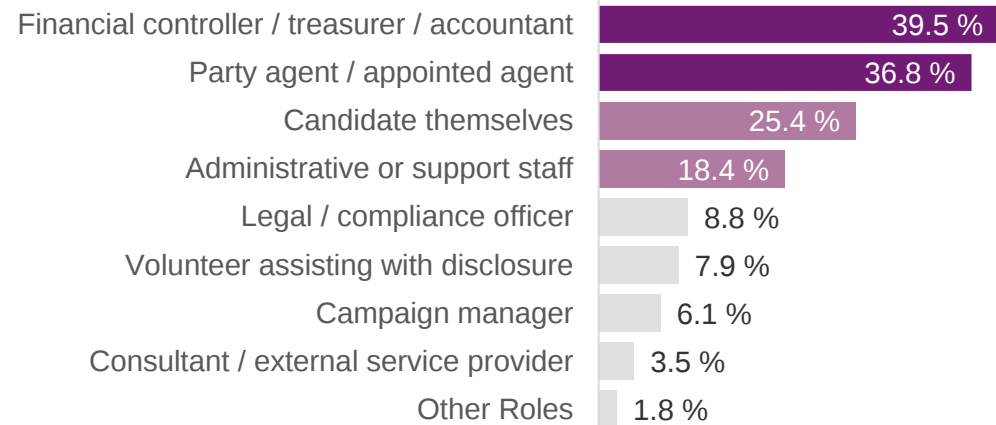
- Familiarity with the AEC Transparency Register is low. Around half of stakeholders who are aware of it report being not at all or only slightly familiar, and very few describe themselves as very or extremely familiar.
- Use of the Transparency Register is infrequent. Even among those aware of it, most report using it only rarely (once a year or less), with very limited regular engagement.
- The Transparency Register is experienced as an occasional, task-specific tool rather than a day-to-day system, which limits opportunities for learning through repeated use or building confidence over time.
- For low-frequency users, usability is likely to depend less on advanced features and more on clear orientation, quick reassurance and easy re-entry. Designing for people who return after long gaps, rather than assuming familiarity, is likely to have the greatest impact on effectiveness and confidence.

ICT & Systems Findings

eReturns usage

Most stakeholder/organisations have one person responsible for all reporting requirements, and that person is most likely to be the financial controller or appointed agent

- Reporting responsibilities among Group A stakeholders are largely centralised, with most organisations relying on a single individual to manage funding and disclosure obligations (**54.9%**). Smaller proportions report more distributed arrangements (**14.6%** divided across defined roles; **13.9%** shared equally), while **16.7%** are unsure how responsibilities are currently managed, indicating some reliance on informal or evolving arrangements.



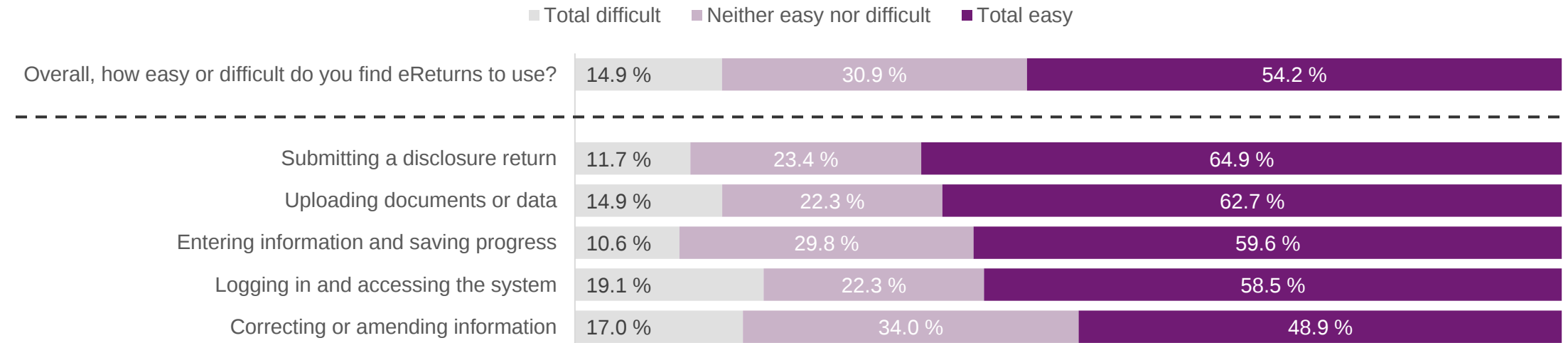
Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns, or someone from their organisation (n=114)
Q D6. "Who in your organisation usually uses eReturns?"

- eReturns usage is highly centralised. Most Group A organisations rely on a single individual to manage reporting, most commonly a financial controller, treasurer, accountant or appointed agent.
- Distributed or shared responsibility models are uncommon, and a notable minority are unsure how responsibilities are managed, suggesting informal or evolving arrangements in some organisations.
- Compliance is heavily dependent on individual knowledge, availability and confidence, rather than embedded organisational processes or shared capability.
- From a system and support perspective, eReturns needs to work exceptionally well for solo, time-poor users. Clear guidance, error prevention and reassurance are critical, as there is often no internal quality assurance to address issues.

ICT & Systems Findings

eReturns ease of use

Users of eReturns are more likely than not to consider the system easy to use



Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)

Q D8. "Overall, how easy or difficult do you find eReturns to use?"

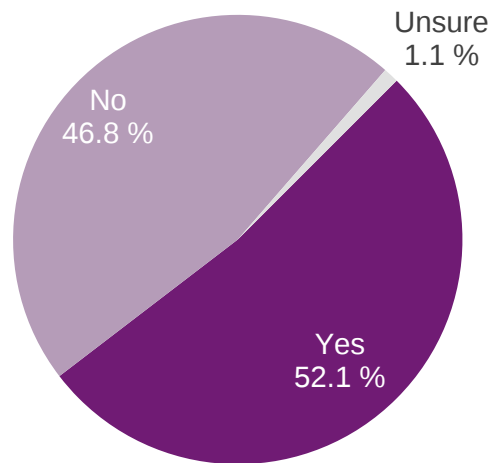
Q D9. "Thinking about your most recent use of eReturns, how easy or difficult was it to do each of the following?"

- A majority of users find eReturns easy to use overall (54.2%), particularly for core tasks like submitting returns (64.9%), uploading documents (62.7%) and entering information (59.6%). Correcting or amending information is the least easy task, though still more often rated easy than difficult.
- The system broadly supports routine compliance tasks well, but amendment workflows represent the main friction point. Improving clarity and reassurance around corrections would likely deliver the greatest usability gains for experienced, time-poor users.

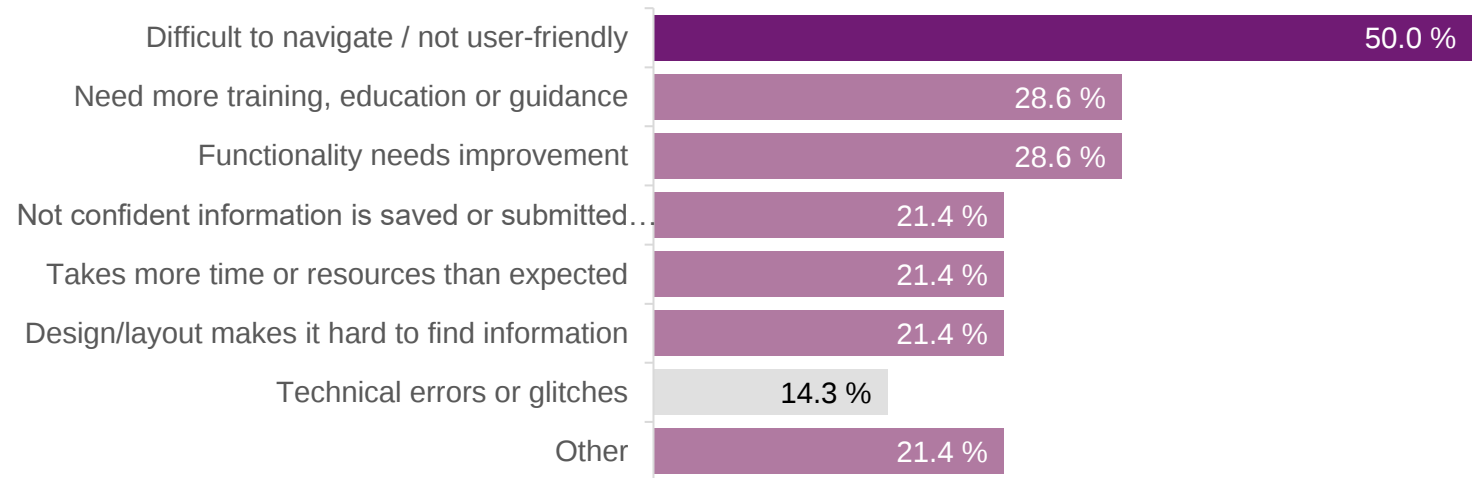
ICT & Systems Findings

Challenges using eReturns

Roughly half of stakeholders needed help from someone else to use eReturns. The most likely aspect of eReturns stakeholders found difficult to use was navigating the solution



Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)
Q D10. "Did you need help from someone else (e.g., a colleague, accountant, or AEC staff) to use eReturns?"

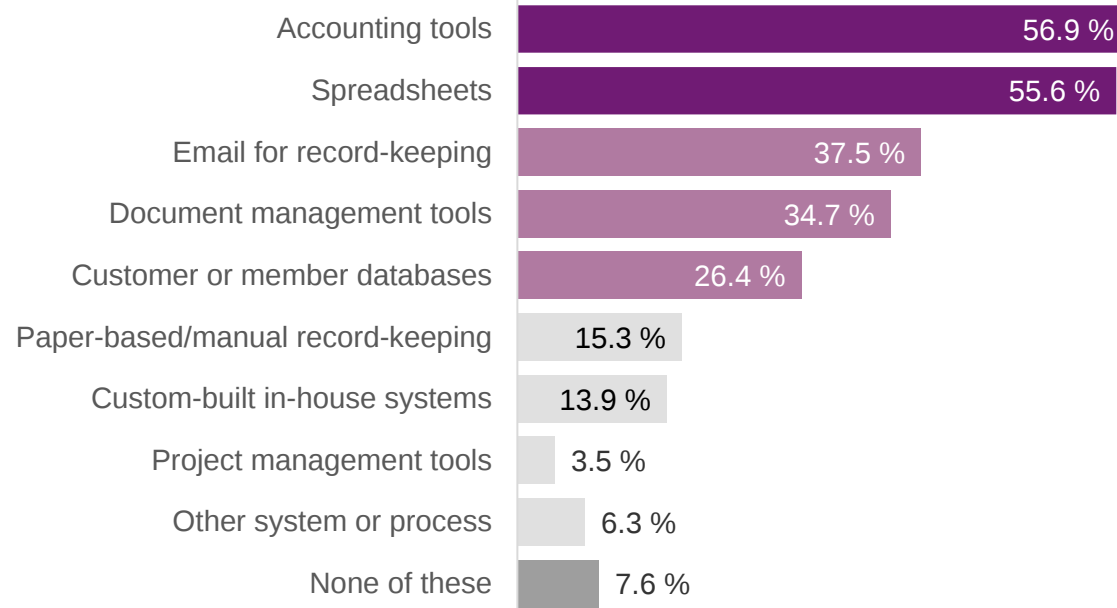


Base: Group A respondents that found eReturns 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to use (n=14)
Q D11. "Which aspects of eReturns created challenges for you?" (maximum 3 multiple choice)

- Around half of eReturns users required help to use the system (52.1%). Among those who experienced difficulty, the dominant issue was navigation and usability (50.0%), alongside a need for clearer guidance and confidence that actions had been completed correctly. Technical performance itself was not a concern.
- eReturns' challenges are primarily about navigation and clarity, rather than technical performance. Making it clearer where to go next, what each step is doing, and confirming actions have been completed would likely reduce reliance on external help, particularly for infrequent or time-poor users.

ICT & Systems Findings

Existing ICT tools for reporting

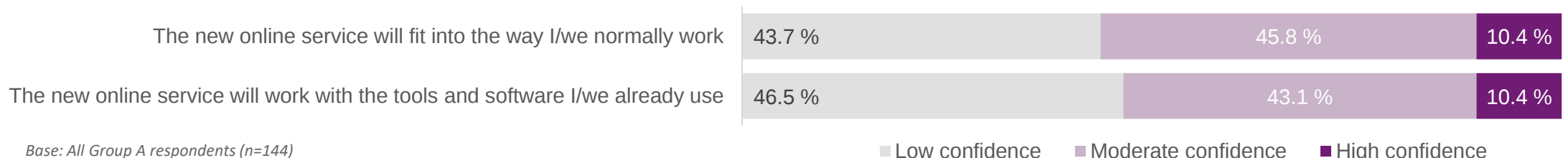


Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D18. "Which of the following tools do you/your organisation currently use to manage financial or reporting information?" (multiple choice)

Accounting tools and/or spreadsheets are the most common tool used for managing financial or reporting information

- Most stakeholders rely on familiar, well-established tools like accounting software and spreadsheets to manage reporting, but only a small minority feel confident that a new online service will fit smoothly with their existing tools or day-to-day workflows.
- The data indicate a clear confidence gap between current reporting practices and expectations of the new system. While stakeholders are already using structured digital tools, uncertainty about how the new service will integrate with existing tools and workflows suggests a risk to uptake unless compatibility and practical fit are clearly demonstrated.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

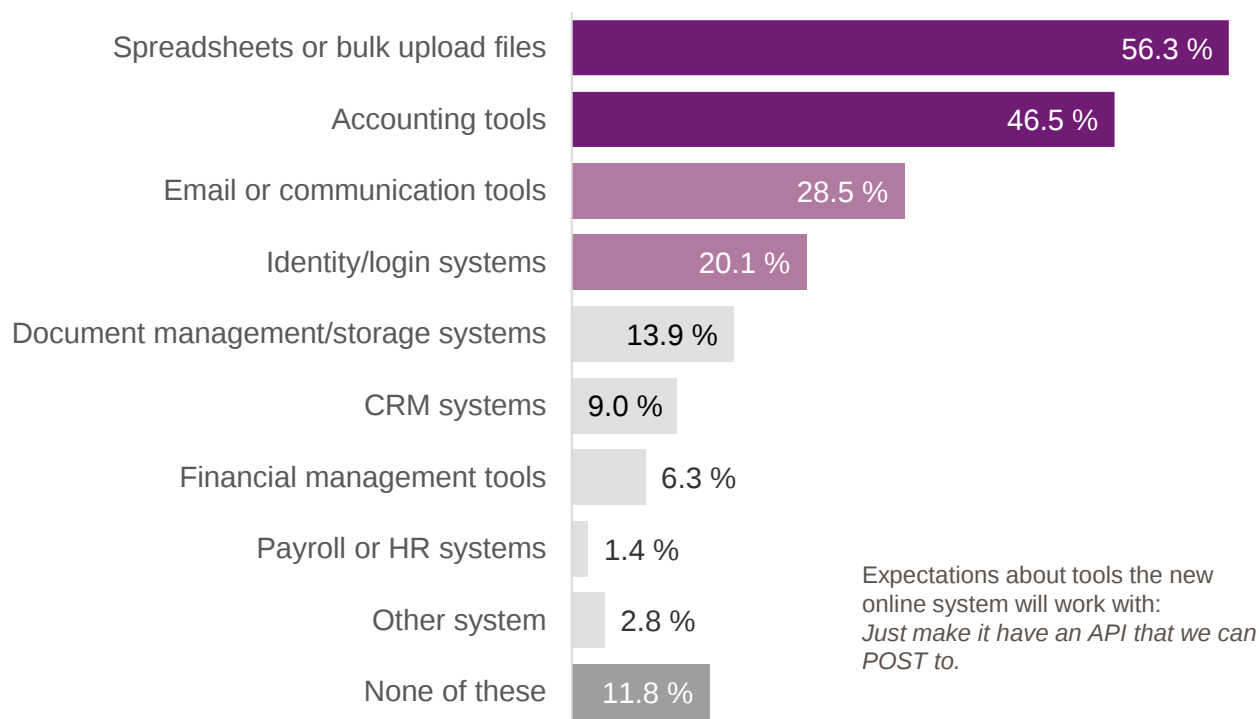
Q D19. "How confident are you that the new online service would fit with your current way of working?"

■ Low confidence ■ Moderate confidence ■ High confidence

ICT & Systems Findings

Software integration

More stakeholders expect the new online service to work with spreadsheets and bulk uploads than accounting tools



- A majority of stakeholders expect the new online service to work with spreadsheets or bulk upload files (56.3%), compared with fewer expecting integration with accounting tools (46.5%). Expectations drop sharply for other systems such as CRMs (9.0%) or financial management tools (6.3%).
- Expectations are most strongly aligned to spreadsheet-based workflows rather than direct integration with specialist software. This suggests stakeholders anticipate preparing data outside the system and uploading it in standard formats, rather than relying on automated system-to-system integration.
- Given spreadsheets are both widely used for reporting (as shown in earlier findings) and most frequently expected to integrate with the new service, support for common spreadsheet formats (e.g. CSV, XLSX) would directly align with the dominant user expectation indicated in the data.

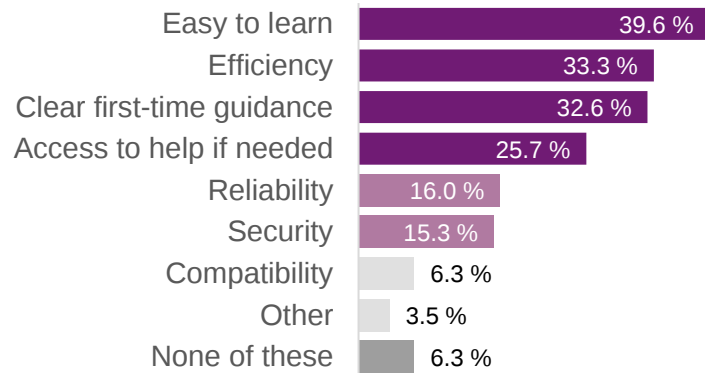
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D17. "Which of the following tools would you expect the new online service to work with?" (maximum 3 multiple choice)

ICT & Systems Findings

Facilitating new online service adoption

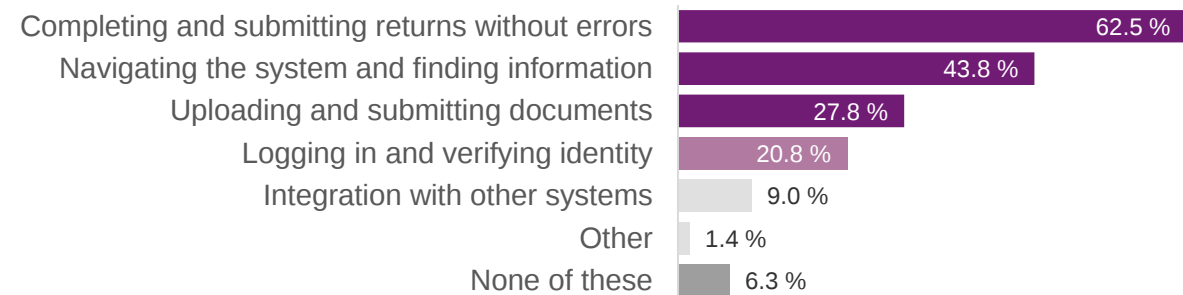
Stakeholders want the new online service to be easy to learn, efficient to use, and to get clear first-time guidance on how to use it.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D14. "Which of the following would be most important in helping you or your organisation feel confident and ready to start using the new online service?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

It's most critical to stakeholders that they can complete returns without making errors.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D15. "While all parts of the online service need to function well, which steps are the most critical for you or your organisation?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

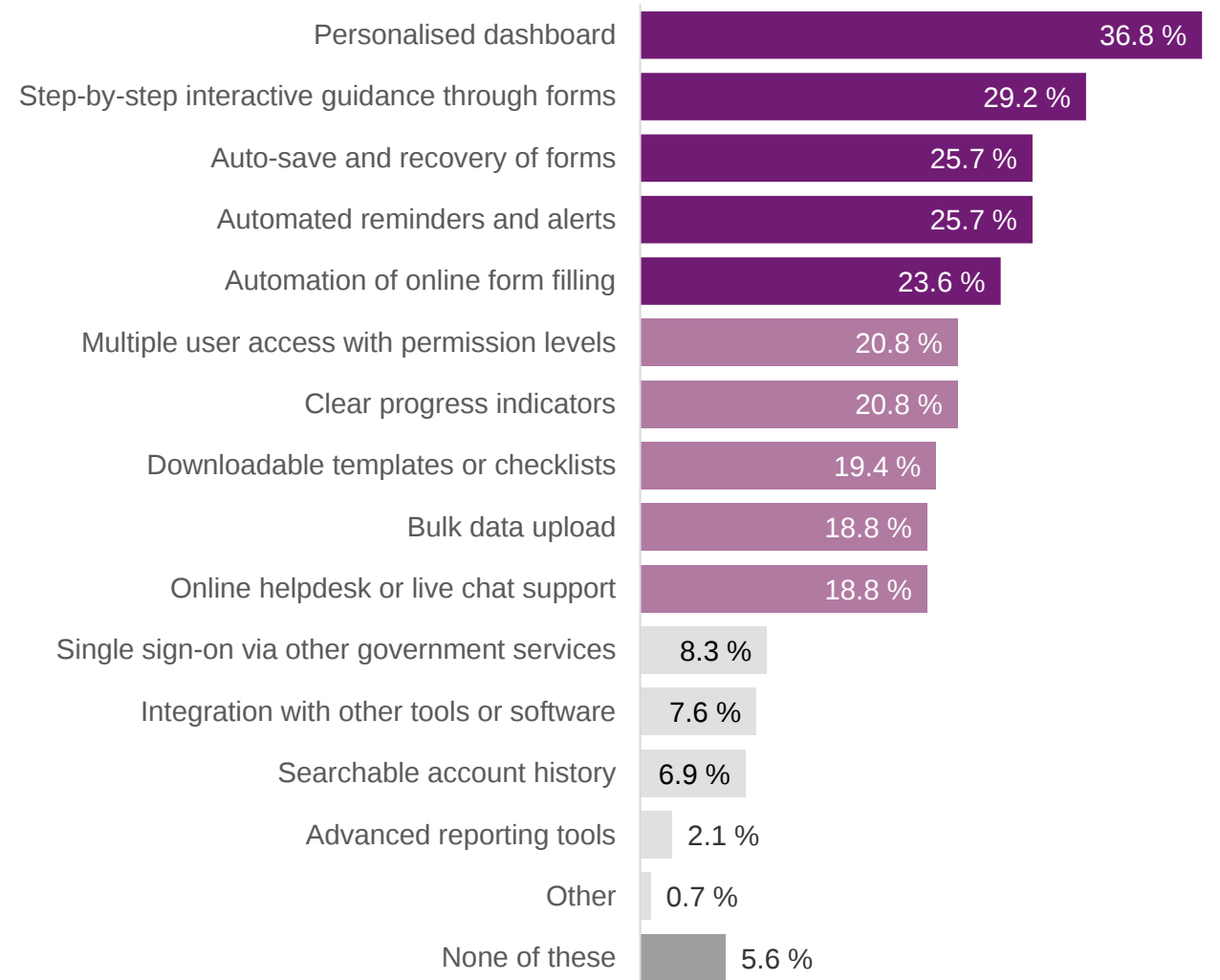
- Stakeholders most often prioritise the new service being easy to learn (39.6%), efficient to use (33.3%), and supported by clear first-time guidance (32.6%) when preparing to adopt it.
- The single most critical functional requirement is the ability to complete and submit returns without errors (62.5%), well ahead of navigation and finding information (43.8%) or document upload (27.8%).
- System adoption is most likely to be driven by confidence in accuracy and error prevention rather than technical integration or advanced functionality, indicating that stakeholders place highest value on getting returns right the first time.
- These findings suggest that learning support and guidance matter most at the point of initial use, suggesting early interactions with the system will disproportionately shape perceptions of usability and readiness to adopt.

ICT & Systems Findings

New features

From a range of potential new features, stakeholders were most likely to be interested in a personalised dashboard

- Interest is highest in a personalised dashboard (36.8%) that shows status, deadlines and tasks, followed by step-by-step interactive guidance (29.2%), auto-save and recovery (25.7%), and automated reminders (25.7%).
- Features that directly support task completion and orientation (dashboards, guidance, progress indicators) attract more interest than advanced functionality such as system integration (7.6%) or advanced reporting tools (2.1%).
- Stakeholders place greater value on features that help them understand their current obligations and progress than on automation or advanced tooling, indicating a preference for clarity and oversight over efficiency gains.
- Demand for complex integrations and advanced reporting is limited, suggesting the new service does not need sophisticated feature depth to meet most users' needs, provided core visibility and guidance are well designed.



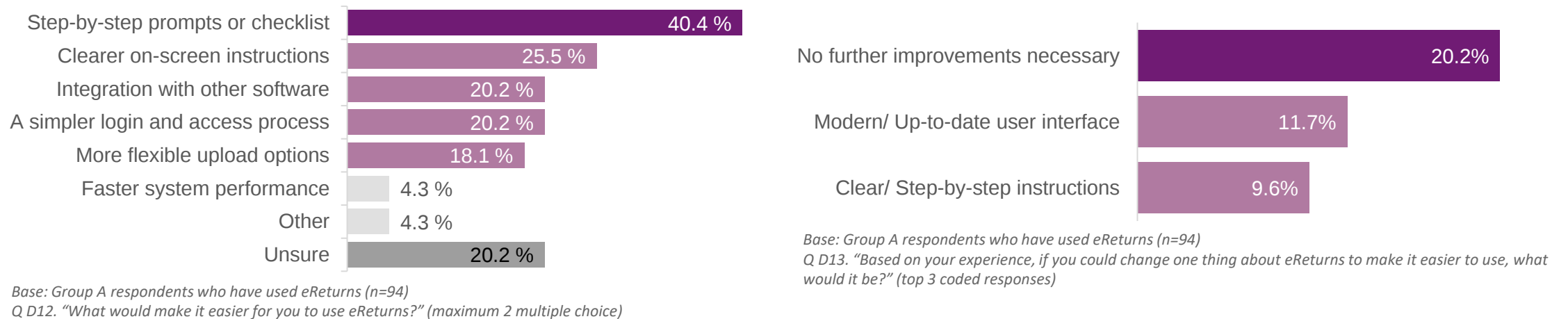
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D16. "Which of the following features would be most useful for you or your organisation when using the new online service?"
(maximum 3 multiple choice)

ICT & Systems Findings

Improving eReturns usability

Step-by-step prompts are those most common thing stakeholders believe would make it easier to use eReturns



- When prompted, stakeholders most often identify step-by-step prompts or checklists as the change most likely to make eReturns easier to use (40.4%), followed by clearer on-screen instructions (25.5%).
- When asked openly to name a single change in their own words, the most common response was that no further improvements were necessary (20.2%), with fewer spontaneously calling out guidance or interface changes.
- Structured guidance emerges as the strongest usability improvement when users are prompted to reflect on specific enhancements, even though many do not perceive usability issues without prompting.
- This suggests targeted, in-context guidance (such as step-by-step prompts) would likely improve ease of use without disrupting existing users who already feel the system is adequate.

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Improving eReturns usability - quotations

Interface

“One simple area that shows all outstanding reporting obligations. Each title is a hyperlink that takes you straight to the form. That is what the ATO does.”

“Modern interface and being able to enter directly into the system first-time input rather than uploading forms.”

“Make it user friendly and use plain English.”

“More modern interface.”

Instructions

“Better point-to-point explanations and examples of what information is required.”

“Easier upfront explanation on the process and who needs to submit what.”

Other

“Integrate with our accounting firm’s system to allow them to lodge.”

“Simple terminology.”

- Requests cluster around a more modern, simpler interface; clearer, plain-English instructions; and better visibility of outstanding obligations.
- Several stakeholders reference other government systems (e.g. ATO) as benchmarks for clarity, navigation, and task completion.
- Usability improvements are less about new functionality and more about reducing cognitive load through clearer structure, language, and task signposting.
- A single, consolidated view of obligations combined with plain-English, point-by-point guidance would align strongly with user expectations and expectations formed by other government services.

Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)

Q D13. “Based on your experience, if you could change one thing about eReturns to make it easier to use, what would it be?”

6. Major Early Themes

Summary of Early Themes

- **Stakeholders want clarity early, and guidance that is practical rather than abstract.**

Across communication, education and system use, stakeholders consistently favoured early, proactive information and clear, step-by-step guidance that helps them understand what to do, when to do it, and how to do it correctly.

- **Trust in the AEC is high, but usability drives confidence in practice.**

While stakeholders strongly trust the AEC as the authoritative source on funding and disclosure obligations, their day-to-day confidence is shaped by how easy systems are to navigate, how clearly obligations are presented, and whether errors can be avoided.

- **Compliance is highly individualised, increasing reliance on clear system support.**

Reporting responsibilities are often concentrated with a single person, meaning systems and guidance need to support time-poor users who may engage infrequently but carry full accountability for accuracy.

- **Navigation and orientation matter more than technical performance.**

Challenges with eReturns are less about speed or reliability, and more about finding information, understanding status, and knowing what remains outstanding. Users respond positively to visible structure, progress cues, and plain-English explanations.

Summary of Early Themes

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- **Navigation and orientation matter more than technical performance.**

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Summary of Early Themes

- **Stakeholders expect new services to fit existing ways of working.**

Most manage reporting using spreadsheets, accounting tools or simple document systems, and confidence in the new service is closely tied to whether it aligns with these established practices rather than requiring major process change.

- **Features that reduce cognitive load are valued over advanced functionality.**

Interest was strongest in personalised dashboards, clear prompts, reminders and guided workflows, while advanced reporting or complex integrations were lower priority. Stakeholders value tools that make compliance easier, not more sophisticated.

7. Next Steps

Next Steps

- **Undertake detailed sub-group analysis**

Analyse key findings by stakeholder type, organisational size, reporting role, and system usage to identify materially different needs, risks and support requirements across cohorts.

- **Refine implications for reform delivery and sequencing**

Assess how sub-group differences affect the timing, format and targeting of communications, guidance and system readiness activities across the reform program.

- **Translate findings into actionable requirements for future phases**

Consolidate evidence into clear, prioritised requirements to inform system design decisions, education strategies and implementation planning in subsequent program stages.

Governance Implications

- A targeted, risk-based approach to reform delivery that recognises different stakeholder capacities and constraints.
- Clear governance decisions on where to focus effort, investment and support to maximise compliance and minimise unintended burden.
- Stronger alignment between policy intent, system design and stakeholder readiness as the reform program progresses.