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What value do forums and associations offer professionals and the wider security sector

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WHAT VALUE DO FORUMS AND ASSOCIATIONS OFFER PROFESSIONALS AND THE WIDER SECURITY SECTOR

ABSTRACT

Forums and associations provide a platform for professionals to broaden perspectives, grow knowledge, leverage experience, develop standards, conduct research, interrogate risks, benchmark best practice, network, and signpost credible resources. For school leavers or those transitioning from a foundational career they offer guidance and support; for established practitioners they support career development. Where stakeholder engagement with government agencies, companies, vendors, employers, or higher education occurs they influence policy, shape perception, promote business, and link theory to practice. Their services range from networking, job postings, education, special interest groups, research, intelligence sharing, publications, and speaking opportunities; serving members who are either consumers of – or contributors to – their services. As the role of security rapidly evolves to address the polycrises that companies and agencies increasingly face, forums and associations are essential in providing the advice, resources, direction, and the relationships needed to advance careers, professionalize the sector, inform educators, and help organizations manage risks.

Keywords

Forums and associations, security, resilience, crisis management, stakeholder, professionalization.

INTRODUCTION

Forums and associations act as collaborative hubs for professionals to share knowledge and experience, debate security strategies, network, and develop standards and best practices. They act as repositories of knowledge, change behaviors, create communities of practice (1), and advance the professionalization of the sector. Organizations come in many shapes and sizes, offering a broad spectrum of services. Associations are typically formed by individuals sharing a common interest with rules and membership criteria, while forums are commonly informal spaces where ideas are exchanged. Organizations may operate as standalone entities, or may partner with commercial companies, government agencies, or universities. They may be owner-operated with limited funding, or may have significant revenue streams, an international footprint, and permanent staff augmented by volunteers. Organizations may be for profit or not for profit; drawing revenue from membership fees, paid services, advertising, sponsorships, donations, or government funding. Their remit may be sector or geography focused or agnostic, and their offerings may be unique and focused or broad and overlapping. Some publish trade magazines or academic journals, offer learning and technical resources, act as a conduit between members and educators, or convene long-term or issue-driven special interest groups.

Where organizations serve a niche requirement, their membership may reflect a specific industry or sector, such as the *Food and Drink Security Association* or the *Pharmaceutical Industry Security Forum*. Others, like *Bootnecks in Business*, support a specific demographic of career transitioning professionals. Conversely, groups like the *Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum* or the *Overseas Security Advisory Council* bridge the private and public sectors. Some are government focused or funded, such as the *National Defense Industrial Association* which drives

strategic dialogue in national security, the dismantled United States Agency for International Development (USAID) *Partner Liaison Security Operations* programs which created fusion points for humanitarian security in high-risk countries, or the *National Infrastructure Crime Reduction Partnership* which brings together business and law enforcement. Other groups concentrate on specific outcomes, like the *Security in Complex Environments Group* which focuses on international security standards through private and public sector collaboration. Although most organizations operate independently, partnerships can significantly expand the reach and value offered to both members and the wider security community, such as collaboration between the *Security Industry Authority* and the *Security Skills Board* whose "Private Security Profession Map" (2) strategy aims to elevate sectoral standards and formalize career pathways.

Efforts made to coordinate strategies between organizations such as the *UK Security Commonwealth* offer umbrella organizations to unite independent security membership bodies and advance sectoral professionalism. Beyond forums and associations, special interest groups, podcasts, publishing outlets, event organizations, commercial companies, social media, and individual influencers increasingly provide knowledge, shape standards, signpost valid learning resources, create networking opportunities, design competency frameworks, advertise jobs, challenge established practice and assumptions, and elevate the brand of individual security professionals. Mapping the plethora of groups against the value they offer can be difficult in a highly saturated market. While not all employers have interest in what professional body their security team belongs to, some organizations offer credibility through recognized peer vetting processes, such as the *Security Institute's* recognized professional membership grades; or provide

valued training, such as the *American Society of Industrial Security International's* (ASIS) 'Certified Protection Professional' program.

RESEARCH METHOD

Three instruments are used to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the value forums and associations offer security professionals, the sector, higher education, and national security: a literature review, an online survey, and semi-structured interviews. The literature review encompassed academic and grey literature on how different groups, including forums, associations, podcast outlets, event companies, publishing houses, influencers, and social media platforms support career transitioning, advancement, and sectoral professionalization. The online surveys and semi-structured interviews included two groups: Group 1 comprised forum and association leaders, while Group 2 was comprised of organizational members. Participating organizations were commercial, humanitarian, government sponsored, and industry vendor groups. A mixed methods online survey collected both statistical data and observations from 15 Group 1 participants and a total of 141 Group 2 participants, of which 98 represented eight organizations. An open survey of 43 members from multiple unspecified organizations was also conducted. Of the Group 1 participants, 48 per cent represented organizations with fewer than 500 members, 20 per cent represented groups with between 501 and 5,000 members, and 31 per cent represented groups with more than 5,000 members. All surveyed groups had an international remit; five were sector agnostic, three were sector focused, and one was an open survey with members from non-attributed organizations. The findings were amalgamated, rather than being representative of a specific organization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 Group 1 participants representing 27 organizations, and 20 Group 2 senior security participants

who were members of one or more groups. Participating organizations were selected based on membership size, geographic coverage, sectoral focus, revenue sources, and breadth of services.

THE ROLE OF FORUMS, ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER GROUPS

Given the absence of universally applied standards, consistent practices, defined career pathways and associated qualifications, and an authoritative claim on knowledge; security practitioners are – arguably – professionals without a profession. While isolated pockets of defined standards, competency frameworks, and certified qualifications exist, these are not globally applied; this lack of consistency can negatively impact employer and government perceptions (3) of security. The diversity of goals, strategies, funding sources, revenue levels, and services creates a broad range of organizational roles in advancing practitioners and the security sector; core amongst these is the distillation and distribution of knowledge and experience. Forums and associations also address emergent or long-term needs, help professionals connect, bridge the private and public sectors, signpost credible resources, advocate for and legitimize (4) the profession, and elevate the brand of aspiring leaders. As a fusion point for interdisciplinary expertise, they can be pivotal in leading on research, shaping standards, benchmarking best practice, and mapping career pathways (5). They serve as repositories of knowledge and expertise – and where collaboration occurs – they fortify opinions and expand the threat horizon at the individual, company, community, and national levels through the timely sharing of ideas and intelligence. Security is rarely seen as a competitive advantage, and these organizations act as a unifying point where professionals can coalesce around long-standing or point-in-time critical issues. As a gathering-place for experts, they bridge sectors, expertise, and geographies, with one director positing:

> "Forums and associations provide the opportunity to connect with leaders across physical, cyber, life-safety, investigations, intelligence, loss prevention, and business continuity planning; and to engage in thought leadership."

Organizations like the *Defence and Security Circle* act as a nexus between defense and national security, the *Defence Research Network* connects researchers and act as a conduit between the sector and government on defense and security issues, and organizations like the *Security and Resilience Industry Suppliers Community* and the *British Security Industry Association* bring together trade associations and suppliers. Other groups like the *International NGO Safety and Security Association* (INSSA) and the *Global Interagency Security Forum* (GISF) focus on the humanitarian sector, while the *Association of University Chief Security Officers* addresses the needs of higher education.

Security at the managerial level or for specialist fields is not often a professional's first career choice; most practitioners have historically come from law enforcement, the military, or the intelligence services. Forums and associations – holding a trusted advisory status – can help ease career transitioning and translate knowledge and expertise for use within a second career field. Organizations can also support established professionals and aspiring leaders better communicate with their executive leadership teams and provide demonstrable value to their employers (6). Where they host special interest groups or events, or where they hold community directories, organizations can connect professionals based on specific technical, sector, geographic, or role interests. In the words of one director:

> "Our organization offers access to a global community of academics, practitioners, and institutions."

Where professionals are forced to seek new knowledge or validate assumptions, organizations can offer a safe place for collaboration, benchmarking, accessing expertise, and mentoring. This role is becoming increasingly important as the flood of commoditized synthetic knowledge can complicate the curation, interpretation, validation, and application of intelligence. **Figure 1** is taken from a combination of semi-structured interviews and open-source information on the services different groups offer their members, illustrating both areas of commonality and niche services. The range of options available to security professionals can be overwhelming, especially where offerings are unclear or overlap, with participants from both groups suggested that organizations could do better in advertising what is available and explaining why and when it is of value.

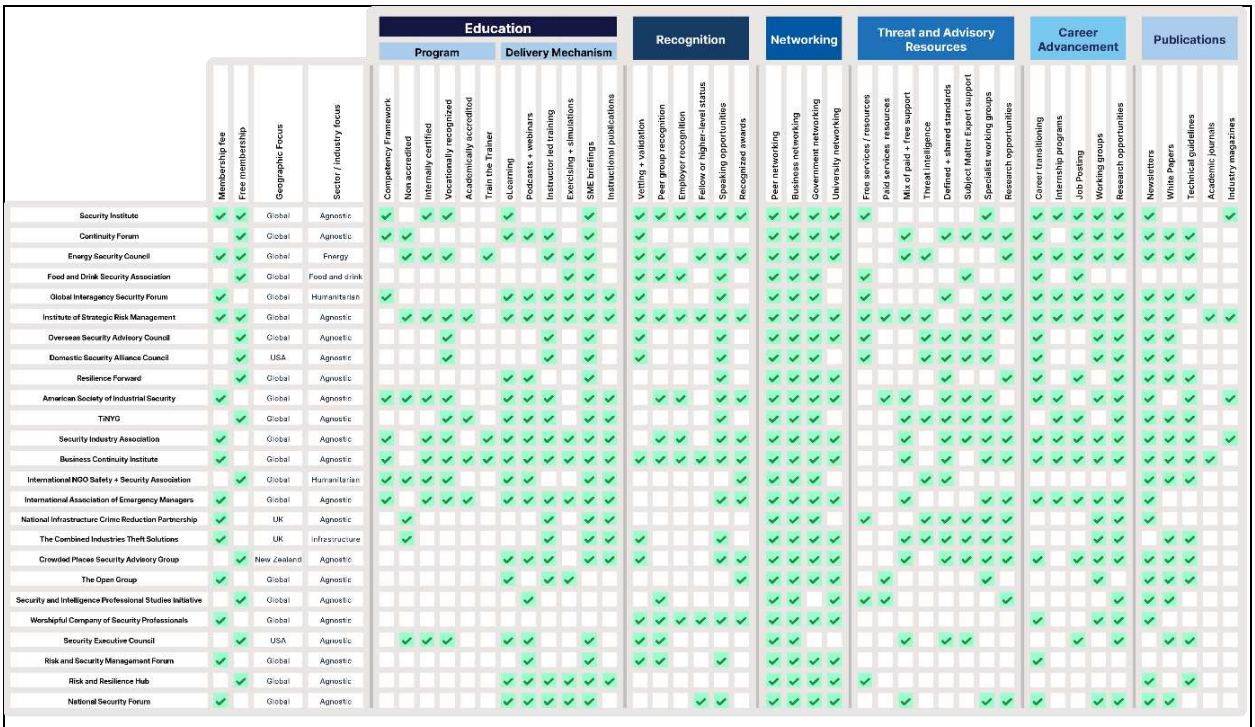


Figure 1 *Mapping the services and products offered across the forum and association community.*

Source: *Dr. Blyth Protective Security and Government Conference Briefing 2026*

Outside of forums and associations, other groups contribute to knowledge sharing, networking, and elevating a professional's reputation. Event organizers bring together security professionals, and offer podcasts, speaking events, and journal or magazine publications. Social media offers an easily accessible platform where knowledge can be shared, research support can be requested, and employment opportunities can be advertised; albeit with a risk of oversaturation and with few quality controls in place. Magazines and journals offer mechanisms where knowledge can be codified for long-term use, with some using podcasts and speaking events as an alternative vehicle for knowledge dissemination. Influencers, such as the *Security Circle,* use podcasts to address critical needs through narrative-based mediums, leveraging productive 'dead space' (such as when individuals are commuting) to advance knowledge sharing. Publishing companies play a different role from academic journals and industry magazines by consolidating practical knowledge into professional manuals, while spotlighting the author as an expert in their field. Where relationships span different thematic areas, individual entity value can be amplified; including prioritizing research needs, expanding knowledge distribution, and advancing sectoral professionalization. According to one editor:

> "Where possible I act as a broker, identifying authors in various specialist areas for book projects, while also connecting them to magazine, podcast, and other speaking opportunities to broaden the distribution of their expertise. I also look for partnership opportunities to ensure their knowledge reaches the widest possible readership."
>
> *Dan Swanson, Series Editor for the Security, Audit and Leadership Series | CRC Press*

Professional bodies also offer a collaborative platform where employers can better map security roles, define competency frameworks, and best position security to achieve optimal organizational value.

EVIDENCING VALUE

The absence of substantive longitudinal research on the benefits organizations offer their members and the wider security community makes evaluating individual organizations, and more broadly the combined value to the security community, problematic. Anecdotal observations underpin the perceived value to individuals, the sector, employers, communities, or national security; but are rarely evidenced through defined and measured performance metrics (7). Some studies (8) on the value of associations suggest that core benefits to members include professional development, education, industry updates, networking, certification, recognition, and advocacy; however, no empirical research addresses the value such organizations offer the security sector. While professionals agree on the value these organizations offer, the challenge rests in determining what services offer the most value – and when – through a professional's career lifespan. One Chief Executive Officer observed:

> "Professional bodies have a unique role in bridging research and practice. It is critical that forums and associations support work that challenges thinking, advances knowledge, and contributes to the continued professionalization of security. Through collaboration between practitioners and academia, we help ensure that research informs practice and that practice, in turn, shapes future research."
>
> *Sarah Austerberry, the Chief Executive Officer of the Security Institute*

Where knowledge needs are diverse and fluid, organizations can offer a platform to unify technical, geographic, industry, and leadership expertise to address both long-term and point-of-need requirements. According to one member:

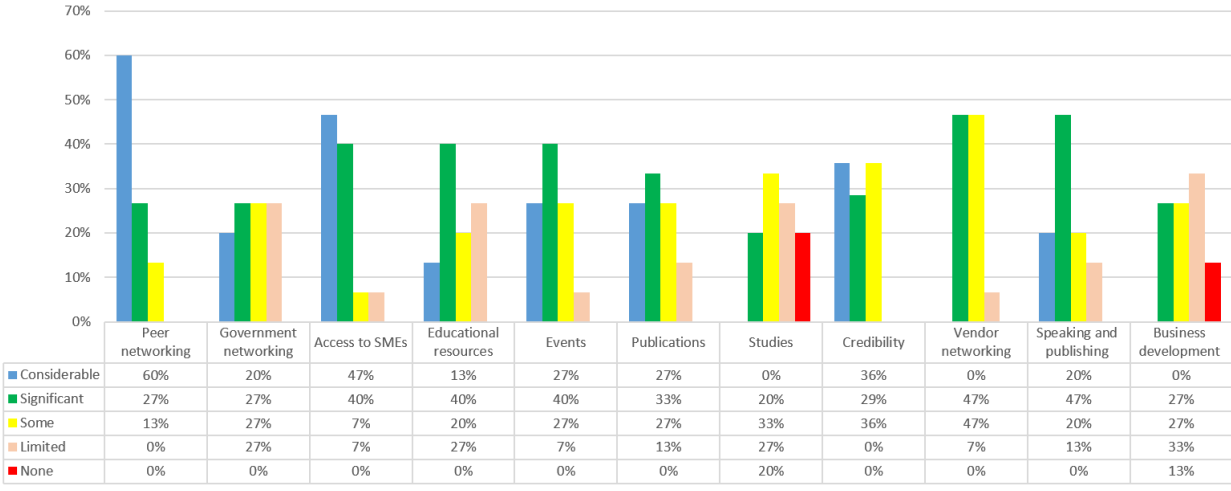
> "Professional associations are valuable not simply because of certifications or events, but because they create trusted professional networks that support knowledge sharing, mentorship, operational collaboration, and professional growth over time. In security specifically, relationships built through such groups frequently become important during crises, cross-border coordination, or emerging risk situations where practitioners rely on trusted peers for insight and perspective."

The cross-pollination of knowledge, ideas, and experience offers a fast-track to career advancement, while reducing instances of catastrophic error for a sector whose remit includes addressing physical security risks. Associations like the *Institute of Strategic Risk Management* offer their members a wide range of services but also extend support to the wider community through a publicly accessible library, with one member offering:

> "The association provides direct access to essential resources that are often difficult to find alone. These can be critical when a crisis occurs and where gaps in knowledge and experience are identified."

The value organizations bring can be measured in terms of baseline services, such as networking, publications, and brand development opportunities; point-in-career support, such as career advancement resources, mentoring, and niche working groups; and for just-in-time support, such as coalescing around a crisis to share knowledge, experience, and resources. Not all organizations are the same and the value offered across these thematic areas varies significantly. **Figure 2** is drawn from the combined survey responses of organizational leaders, illustrating the perceived value offered to members. The findings illustrate that 86.67 per cent felt that peer networking and access to Subject Matter Experts (SME) was highly beneficial, 66.67 per cent felt events and speaking opportunities offer material value, 60 per cent rated publications highly,

64 per cent felt membership enhanced credibility, and 53.33 per cent felt that either virtual or in-person educational resources offered significant to considerable value. Conversely, vendor networking, academic studies, and business development opportunities were viewed as offering less value. While the value scoring of government networking support was low, this data is distorted as some organizations do not connect members with the public sector; however anecdotal evidence suggests that this function offers considerable value to members.

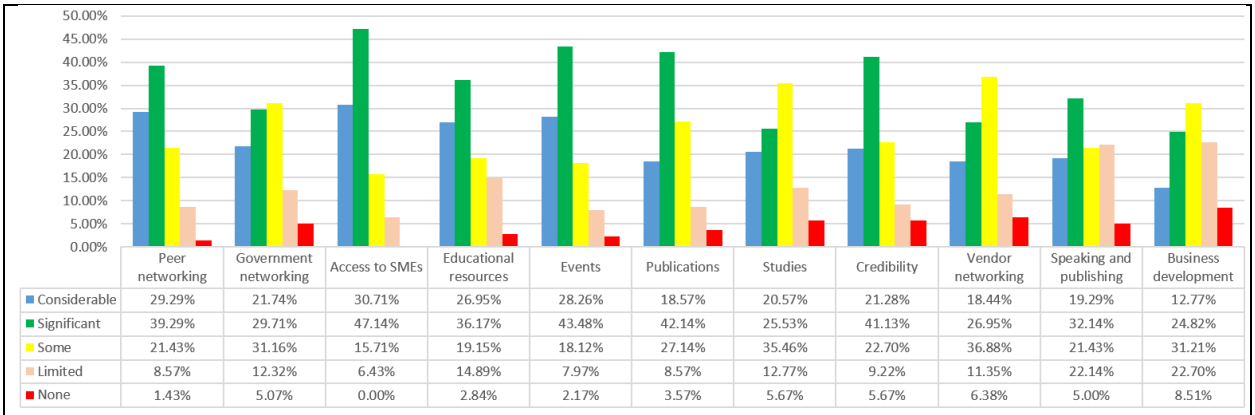


	Peer networking	Government networking	Access to SMEs	Educational resources	Events	Publications	Studies	Credibility	Vendor networking	Speaking and publishing	Business development
Considerable	60%	20%	47%	13%	27%	27%	0%	36%	0%	20%	0%
Significant	27%	27%	40%	40%	40%	33%	20%	29%	47%	47%	27%
Some	13%	27%	7%	20%	27%	27%	33%	36%	47%	20%	27%
Limited	0%	27%	7%	27%	7%	13%	27%	0%	7%	13%	33%
None	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	13%

Figure 2 *Organizational leader survey results for: what value does your forum or association provide to members?*

Figure 3 illustrates the results of the same questions being asked of organizational members, highlighting divergent opinions in some areas. Both participant groups found that peer networking, expertise access, events, credibility, and educational resources offered the greatest value; however, material differences occurred in how leaders and members scored peer networking value, with members rating networking 18.10 per cent lower than organizational leaders. Additionally, speaking or publishing opportunities was also scored 15.24 per cent lower by members than by leaders. Conversely, members ranked business development opportunities

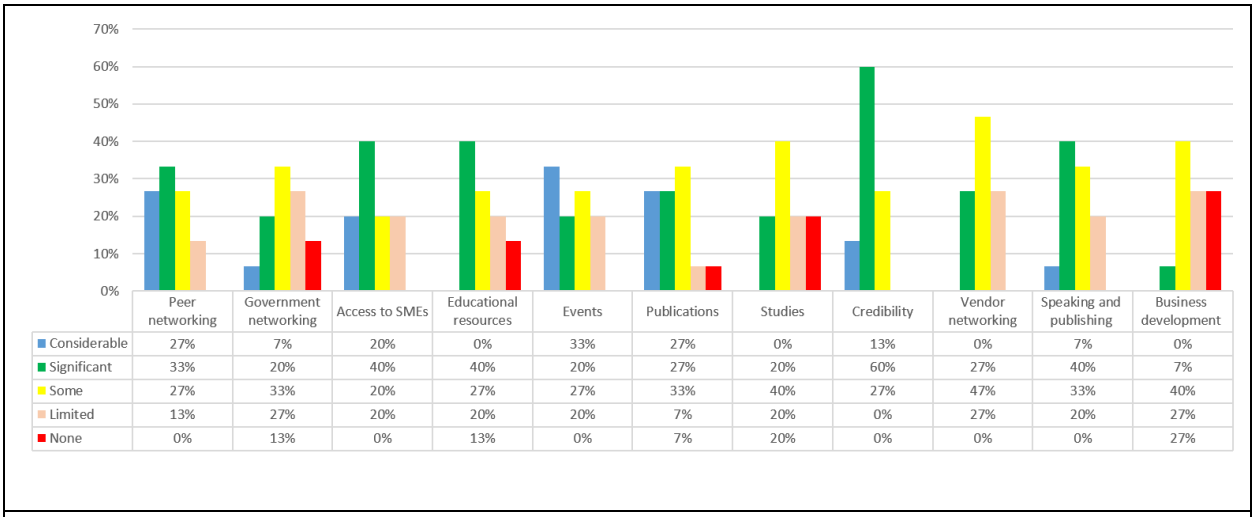
10.92 higher than organizational leaders, with professional and academic studies also being scored 26.10 per cent higher by members.



	Peer networking	Government networking	Access to SMEs	Educational resources	Events	Publications	Studies	Credibility	Vendor networking	Speaking and publishing	Business development
Considerable	29.29%	21.74%	30.71%	26.95%	28.26%	18.57%	20.57%	21.28%	18.44%	19.29%	12.77%
Significant	39.29%	29.71%	47.14%	36.17%	43.48%	42.14%	25.53%	41.13%	26.95%	32.14%	24.82%
Some	21.43%	31.16%	15.71%	19.15%	18.12%	27.14%	35.46%	22.70%	36.88%	21.43%	31.21%
Limited	8.57%	12.32%	6.43%	14.89%	7.97%	8.57%	12.77%	9.22%	11.35%	22.14%	22.70%
None	1.43%	5.07%	0.00%	2.84%	2.17%	3.57%	5.67%	5.67%	6.38%	5.00%	8.51%

Figure 3 *Organizational member survey results for: what value does your forum or association provide to members?*

Figure 4 is drawn from organizational leaders who were asked how fully members utilize organizational services. The responses illustrate a disparity between value perception and practical engagement. The biggest gaps occurred between peer, vendor, and government networking perceived value and actual utilization, with utilization being 20-26 per cent lower than value perception. Accessing expertise ranked 26.67 per cent lower than perceived value, while speaking and business development opportunities were utilized 20 per cent lower than their valuation score. The gap between value and how actively members engage services suggests that communication between leaders and members could benefit from improvement, or that services need to be formally mapped to role requirements to improve utilization.



	Peer networking	Government networking	Access to SMEs	Educational resources	Events	Publications	Studies	Credibility	Vendor networking	Speaking and publishing	Business development
Considerable	27%	7%	20%	0%	33%	27%	0%	13%	0%	7%	0%
Significant	33%	20%	40%	40%	20%	27%	20%	60%	27%	40%	7%
Some	27%	33%	20%	27%	27%	33%	40%	27%	47%	33%	40%
Limited	13%	27%	20%	20%	20%	7%	20%	0%	27%	20%	27%
None	0%	13%	0%	13%	0%	7%	20%	0%	0%	0%	27%

Figure 4 *Organizational leader survey results for: how well do your members utilize core organizational services?*

Some organizations offer formal job postings to support members identify employment opportunities, while others provide informal support through peer-to-peer networking. This strategy can help specific groups transition between careers more efficiently and confidently; and can aid in the translation and recontextualization of knowledge, experience, and qualifications. Organizations, such as the *Security Institute's* early careers network initiative, the *Institute of Security Risk Management's* student network and university chapter strategies, or the *National Security Forum's* annual youth security forum conference specifically address the needs of school and university leavers, promoting security as a start-point rather than follow-on career, with one member saying:

> "The biggest issue I have seen is that when individuals want to begin their career in safety and security, there are no resources for them to see a possible career trajectory."

Formalized strategies and supportive resources include documented guidelines, events, podcasts, round tables, working groups, and mentoring programs which help clarify entry and advancement pathways, while also shaping employer expectations and recruitment strategies for both school leavers and transitioning professionals, with one member positing:

"The forums create training opportunities for members who are transitioning from a field of occupation to security."

Figure 5 reflects the survey responses of leaders when asked how their organization supports entry into the security sector, illustrating that all groups were assessed as offering some level of value; whether through informal and personality-led efforts by individuals, or through structured and resourced programs. Of the participants representing multiple organizations, 53.33 per cent felt their organization offered significant to considerable value for those looking to enter the security sector. While over half of participating organizations offer structured resources, most participants suggested more could be done to create structured, consistent, well-resourced, and communicated support. As one director said:

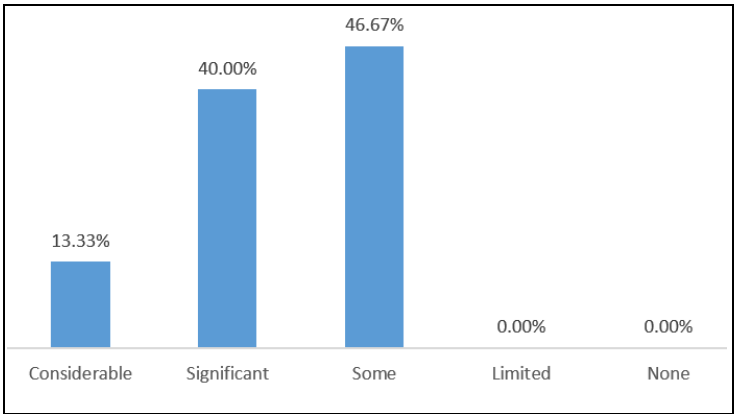
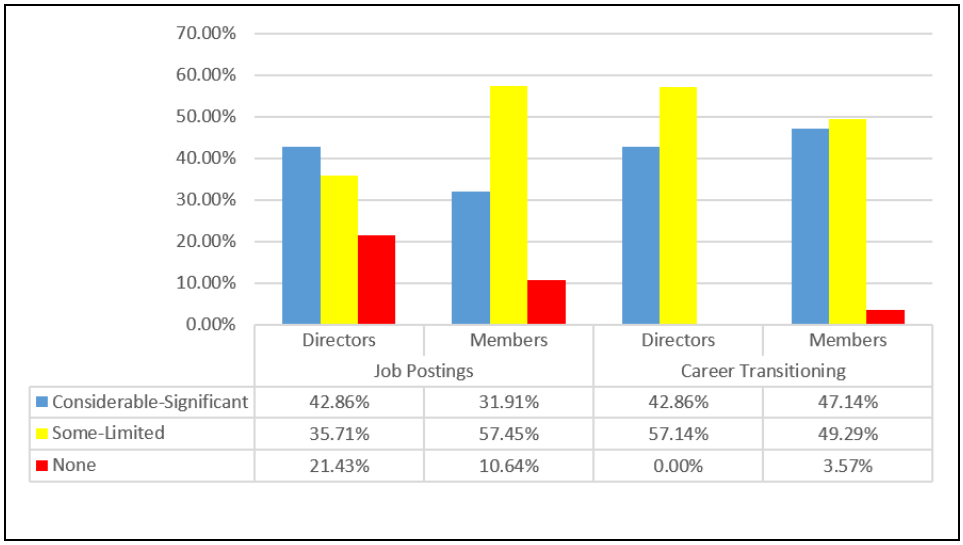


Figure 5 *Organizational leader survey results for: what value does your forum or association provide to those seeking to enter the security sector?*

"More focus is needed to help those joining the industry and keep them engaged- including more mentorship support to help those who want to advance their careers. There is no formal framework for either at present."

CAREER TRANSITIONING AND ADVANCEMENT

Forums and associations offer invaluable support to those looking to enter the security sector, whether from a foundational career or straight from school. Career transitioning is supported through either altruism or structure, including informal guidance from established peers or focused organizational effort. Both mechanisms help reduce ambiguity, build confidence, and enhance speed and ease to employment. **Figure 6** is drawn from organizational members and directors when asked what career transitioning and job posting value organizations offer to those entering or advancing in the sector. Of the participants, 47.14 per cent of members felt career transitioning was well supported, compared to 42.86 per cent of directors. For entry level to executive job postings, 31.91 per cent of members felt their organization signposted individuals to employment opportunities, compared to 42.86 per cent of directors. Directors went on to say that only 27.67 per cent of members materially utilized the available job posting resources, and only 20 per cent fully leveraged the organization for career transitioning and job hunting.



	Job Postings		Career Transitioning	
	Directors	Members	Directors	Members
Considerable-Significant	42.86%	31.91%	42.86%	47.14%
Some-Limited	35.71%	57.45%	57.14%	49.29%
None	21.43%	10.64%	0.00%	3.57%

Where transitioning professionals have relevant preexisting knowledge, skills, and experience the absence of defined employer expectations complicates the process of identifying and showcasing competencies in resumes and job selection interviews, with one director saying:

Figure 6 *Organizational leader and member survey results for: what career transitioning and advancement value does your organization provide members?*

> "We recently received over 170 applications for a corporate investigation role, 75% of whom were leaving the police service. A large proportion didn't know how to write a resume and of the 20 we interviewed for the role most didn't understand the importance of researching the role and company they were applying for; doing badly in articulating what value their experiences and qualifications offered the position. Forums and associations could help individuals transitioning between careers be better prepared and more effectively present their value to employers."

Figure 7 illustrates how transitioning professionals are required to identify what knowledge, experience, and qualifications are directly relevant as they transition from a primary career into the security sector; or where competencies need to be adjusted or discarded as individuals progress in their career. With no universally agreed job definitions and accompanying competency requirements, guidelines such as the *ASIS* and *Security Industry Association's* "Security Industry Careers Pathways Guide" (9) seeks to formalize job descriptions, educational expectations, credentialing, and consistent career pathways for security management and supplier personal. As a contribution to transitioning and onward advancement, organizations offer opportunities to elevate practitioners' profiles through speaking events, directorship and mentoring roles, research and publication opportunities, and leading on brand-raising projects;

with members falling into the categories of *consumers* who leverage the services on offer, or *contributors* who give back to the organization and their peers.

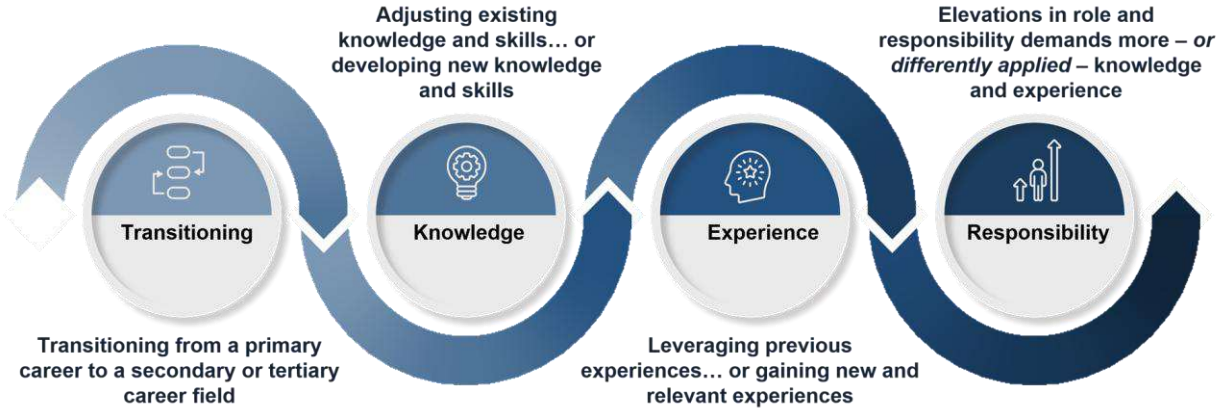


Figure 7 *The application and evolution of knowledge and experience across the career spectrum.*

Source: *Dr. Blyth Food and Drink Security Association Briefing 2026*

Evans (10) explores the use of ladder career pathways for promotions, and the lattice approach for lateral moves into specializations. Organizations are well positioned to prioritize, shape, partner on, or conduct the research needed to formalize career advancement or specialization pathways and then disseminate the findings. Of the directors surveyed, 60 per cent noted that their organization offered material value for career advancement, while 40 per cent thought the organization offered limited or some value. Organizations can broaden a professional's expertise beyond the traditional field of physical security to encompass organizational resilience and business continuity, cyber and AI threats, supply chain resilience, crisis communications, risk and resilience auditing, anti-terrorist financing compliance, family liaison, and crisis management (11); with one member saying:

> "Associations also play an important role in helping practitioners broaden their understanding beyond their own organization or region. This becomes increasingly

> important as security challenges grow more interconnected across geopolitical risk, resilience, workplace safety, cyber concerns, and organizational culture."

The diversity of organizational remits and member expertise provides a mechanism for professionals to develop relationships laterally across geographies and specializations, and vertically with senior professionals who can provide experience-based guidance. Working groups, such as the *ASIS* 'Chief Security Officer Huddle' or the *Security Institute's* 'Frontline Operators Special Interest Group' invite specific demographics to share ideas and experiences, explore emergent needs, and collaboratively solve problems. Organizations can also be instrumental in advancing the profession through research, such as the '2026 Annual Chief Security Officer Survey' (12) developed in partnership between the *ASIS* and the *Clarity Factory*. Organizations play an important role in codifying career pathways through stakeholder collaboration, competency frameworks, and the publication of practical guidelines, with one member saying their association:

> "Offer[ed] clearer, step-by-step professional development paths or journeys for new members, early professionals, and seasoned professionals."

Some organizations formally recognize members through annual awards, such as the 'Global Outstanding Security Performance Awards', or the *INSSA* and *GISF* 'Lifetime Achievement Awards'. Others offer professionally recognized vocational certifications or partner with training companies and institutions of higher learning to validate, certify, and publicize their programs.

Organizations can offer a mechanism for collaboration between the public and private sectors, influencing policy, standards, and new regulatory requirements which contribute to sectoral professionalization and career mapping. Increasingly, event organizations and publishing outlets

also contribute to the same goals found with many forums and associations, with the *Pulse Conference* CSO 360 Congress bringing senior security professionals together; while *Henry Stewart Talks* offer podcasts to disseminate knowledge, further academic careers, and raise specialist profiles. Seeded throughout these organizations are mentoring programs which offer the exchange of knowledge and experience across practitioner generations:

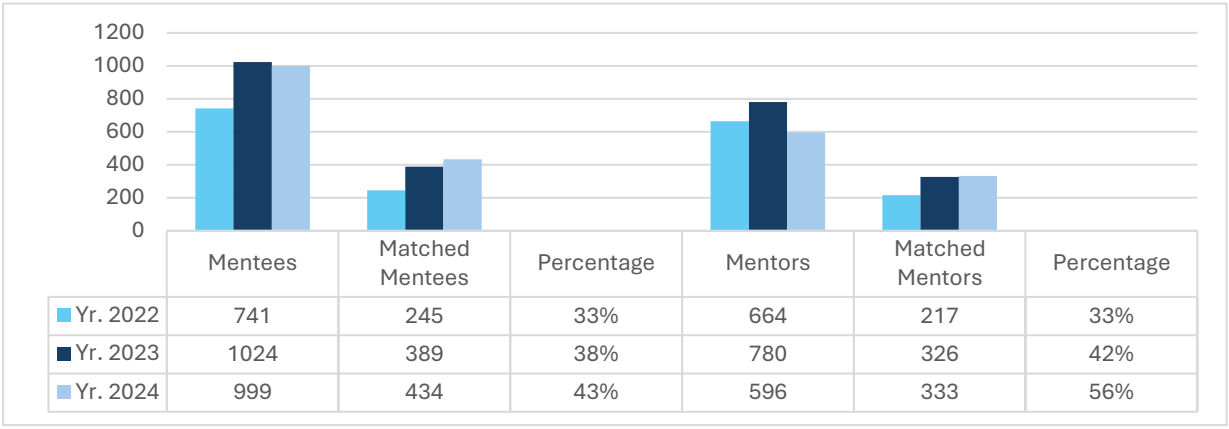
> "Mentoring programs offer significant value in connecting members with experienced security professionals for both career development and networking. Effective programs provide flexibility in terms of focus and scheduling… and critically allow mentees to choose mentors based on their unique personal and professional goals. Flexible mentoring structures and virtual meetups foster valuable connections that support long-term career growth."
>
> *Lina Forero, ASIS Engagement Manager for Latin America Caribbean*

Conversely, many associations do not provide formal mentoring programs, with one member suggesting:

> "It would be a value-add if mentorship programs were available to support individuals looking to advance their careers in the security sector."

Where programs are offered, awareness of the available resources and their value to career advancement is frequently limited, and services are frequently underutilized. Where associations offer well-resourced and communicated mentoring programs, where volunteers are mentors, and where members actively engage, these programs can prove significant in advancing individual and sectoral goals. **Figure 8** illustrates the number of mentees and mentors participating in the *ASIS* mentoring program between 2022 and 2024. These strategies can be transformative,

reaching large numbers of individuals seeking to accelerate their careers through focused competency growth.



	Mentees	Matched Mentees	Percentage	Mentors	Matched Mentors	Percentage
Yr. 2022	741	245	33%	664	217	33%
Yr. 2023	1024	389	38%	780	326	42%
Yr. 2024	999	434	43%	596	333	56%

Figure 8 *ASIS Mentee and Mentor Statical Engagement Outcomes*

Source: *ASIS Security Leaders Mentoring Program 2022 – 2024 Briefing PowerPoint*

Forums and associations also enable leaders and specialists to showcase their expertise while supporting the professional development of others. As one director observed:

> "Speaking opportunities play an important role in professional development, visibility, and knowledge sharing. They also create opportunities to discuss emerging risks, operational lessons, leadership challenges, and evolving expectations with broader audiences. Increasingly, there is value in creating space for more diverse voices and experiences, including perspectives from different regions, operational contexts, and career stages. Some of the most meaningful conversations emerge when practitioners speak candidly about real-world challenges, uncertainty, and lessons learned, rather than presenting only polished success stories."

Publishing opportunities can similarly elevate personal brand through the dissemination of codified knowledge, with a member saying:

> "Associations can provide valuable opportunities for practitioners to contribute operational insights, lessons learned, and leadership perspectives through magazines, journals, newsletters, and conference publications."

While many organizations offer some form of publication; whether a newsletter, industry magazine, blog postings, or academic journal article, many members felt these opportunities were poorly communicated, with a member offering:

> "These opportunities for publishing could be more clearly communicated and accessible. Introducing mechanisms such as open calls, volunteer registers, or member interest polls would encourage wider participation."

The diversity of membership expertise can be invaluable if applied through speaking or publishing strategies, with a member adding:

> "The considerable diversity of our members and their professional standards helps our members in their ambitions."

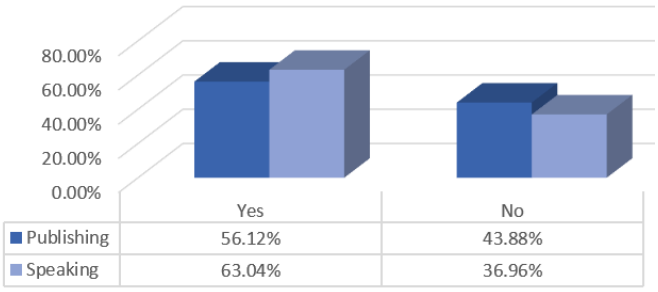


Figure 9 *Organizational member survey results for: does the organization offer publishing or speaking opportunities?*

Figure 9 is drawn from members who were asked if their organization offered speaking or publishing opportunities; illustrating that more than 56.12 per cent of organizations offer publishing opportunities and more than 63.04 per cent offer speaking opportunities. Comparatively, 100 per cent of organizational leaders stated that organizations offer some level

of speaking and publishing opportunities; highlighting up to a 43.88 per cent difference in opportunity awareness.

Despite the range of services offered, the absence of a universally agreed career pathways, job descriptions, and qualification requirements – coupled with gaps between resource awareness and engagement – makes effectively advising and supporting career planning and advancement difficult. In the words of one director:

> "In my opinion we do not have any pathway or framework to properly support career advancement. While we have some scholarships and relationships with universities, there is no clear pathway, and it is very much a case of you know, which determines how you progress in your career."

ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL LEARNING

In a sector with few regulatory controls, specific knowledge, skills, and experiences are rarely role mandated with any degree of consistency by either employers or regulators, making academic or vocational learning more an elective priority than found in formal professions. Some associations seek to develop formal competency frameworks and offer internally developed training and examination materials. Others collaborate with universities or vocational training companies (13) to provide, or signpost, credible learning resources. Competence can be provided through podcasts, speaking events, guides and manuals, special interest groups, instructor-led courses, immersive exercising, or digital mediums. As a provider of – or conduit to – competence, organizations both shape curricula and provide ease of access to expertise and credible qualifications. One member claimed:

> "Associations provide valuable exposure to emerging topics, industry trends, case studies, and perspectives that can complement formal academic learning. They can help bridge some of the divide between theory and operational practice by creating opportunities for dialogue between academics and practitioners. There is an opportunity for stronger collaboration between academic institutions and associations to ensure research findings are practical, operationally relevant, and accessible to practitioners."

Despite the obvious benefits collaboration between educators and organizations offers, few forums and associations have a relationship with institutions of higher education; and fewer still have productive relationships which advance the interests of both parties. As one director asserted:

> "We have a memorandum of understanding in place, but we have yet to see any traction or any of the many discussions turn into anything useful for our association or members."

Schools and universities not only provide accredited educational programs; they are also well positioned to provide career guidance to students and security professionals. With a student population ranging from emerging adults to mature professionals seeking to start or continue an academic career, universities have a receptive and captive audience. However, the absence of effective collaboration between professional bodies (with their pracademic members) and higher education undermines the provision of timely and effective career guidance; with Quinlan and Corbin (14) exploring the role of the university in career guidance, and Fraguas-Sanchez et al. (15) discussing the lack of employability training offered to doctoral students. Where universities fail to effectively engage forums and associations – or professionals and pracademics – on the applicability of education to employment roles and organizational success, a valuable opportunity is lost. This affects the ways that the sector recruits its talent, how professionals plan

their future, and how employers value and position security. The absence of a symbiotic relationship diminishes value to both parties; universities fail to access practitioner expertise and experience, while professional bodies struggle to codify and distribute research evidenced knowledge. According to one member:

> "The association offers some support for academic learning, but this could be strengthened through clearer links with universities, colleges, and endorsed academic programs. Greater visibility of academic pathways would help individuals understand how to enter and progress within the profession."

Of the leaders surveyed, 29.63 per cent stated their organization had a relationship with a university to help advance their members' academic careers, while 70.37 per cent had no such relationship. Despite the obvious synergistic value of collaboration, a significant gap remains between higher education and the sector. This undermines the quality and applicability of academic programs, as well as how employers value security as an integral component of organizational success (16). The lack of outcome focused collaboration between professional bodies and academia contributes to professionals prioritizing vocational learning above academia (17). The scarcity of organizational funding, staffing, and expertise dilutes the ability for many associations to implement fully researched and resourced educational strategies. This creates a dependency upon either academia or commercial learning providers to fully address the needs of the security community, with one member saying:

> "Learning materials related to security certification exams are valuable, but very limited and self-directed and no instruction is offered."

Figure 10 draws from organizational leaders and members when asked what value their relationship with academia offers members; less than 7 per cent of both groups believed that academia offered considerable value, 20 per cent or less said it offered significant value, and less than 47 per cent thought the relationship offered some value. Where relationships do exist, several directors stated that their university counterparts struggled to translate ideas into action, and that little to no tangible value came from collaborating with universities. Research by Blyth et al (18) suggests that this is not reflective of how academia is valued in the security sector, with 82.5 per cent of security professionals claiming that academic qualifications offer either significant or considerable value.

Comparatively, where organizational leaders and members were asked what value vocational learning providers offer, almost 11 per cent replied these groups offered considerable value, compared to a score of less than 7 per cent assigned academia; while over 26 per cent said vocational educators offered significant value, compared to a 20 per cent score for academia (**Figure 11**).

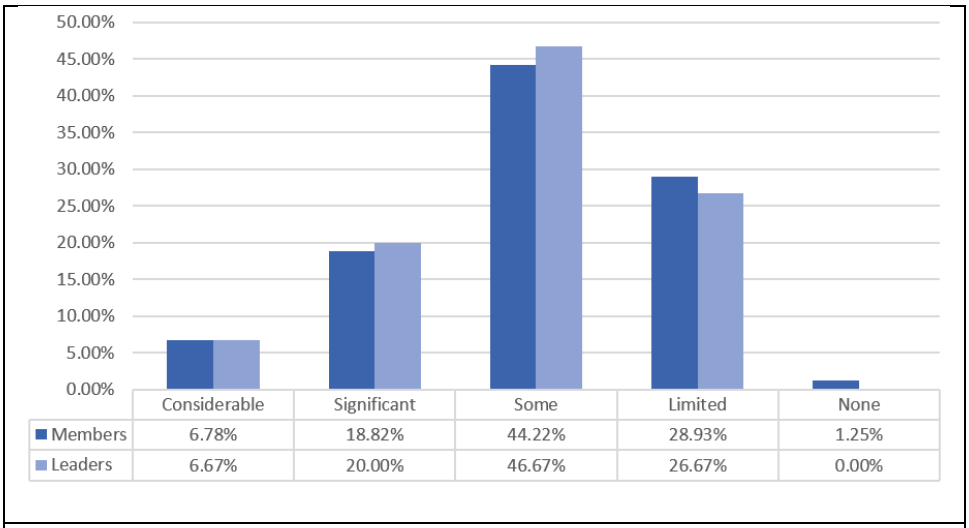
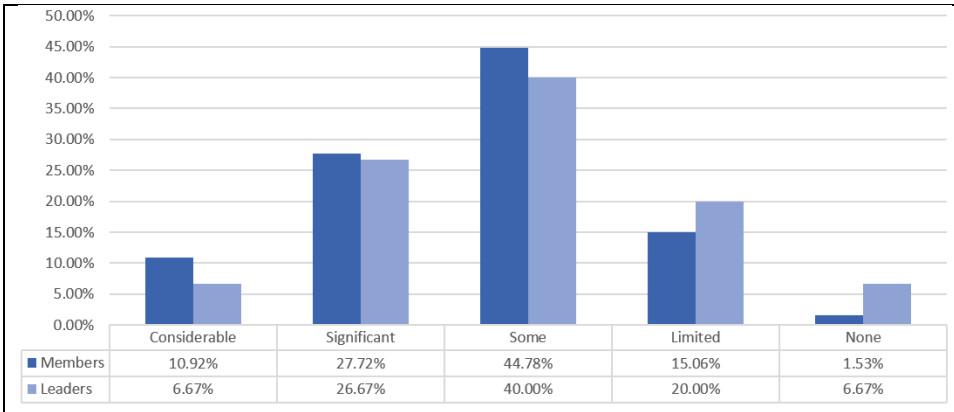


Figure 10 *Organizational leader and member survey results for: what value do academic institutions offer your members?*

Despite the overall lack of productive engagement, some organizations have been successful in establishing mutually beneficial relationships with academia, with one director saying:



	Considerable	Significant	Some	Limited	None
Members	10.92%	27.72%	44.78%	15.06%	1.53%
Leaders	6.67%	26.67%	40.00%	20.00%	6.67%

Figure 11 *Organizational leader and member survey results for: what value do vocational learning providers offer members?*

> "The existing relationship with universities has been hugely beneficial, providing members with direct access to academia. The challenge tends to be a lack of awareness or engagement from the members to fully utilize these partnerships."

While organizations and their members benefit from collaboration, academia can also benefit from effective relationships with professional bodies; leveraging real-world experience to shape curricula and research priorities. As stated by one director:

> "Cooperating with academia to link certification competencies with continuing education credits would benefit both sides. Academic institutions get access to field practitioners to inform and validate their curriculum and offer research opportunities."

Conversely, vocational learning providers tend to be more motivated to engage in accelerated action-outcome based relationships as commercial incentives drive focus, effort, and timeline urgency. Vocational learning also offers more immediate and obvious value to members, and so is more readily engaged. One director said:

> “Particular vocational courses are often specified as a condition to gain a license to work in security.”

Where associations do provide recognized certifications, this can evidence credible and consistent competence to employers. As noted by one director:

> “ASIS is a global organization for individuals and their certifications are the same no matter where you complete them in the world, meaning that if you deal with a CPP in the USA you know they have met the same educational and integrity standard of those in the UK.”

THE CHALLENGES FACING FORUMS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Most forums and associations depend on their members to deliver programs and services, even when groups have permanent staff, large membership populations, and multiple revenue streams. Whether commercially structured with paid employees, or philanthropic and volunteer-staffed, capital is required to fund staff, back-office requirements, marketing, and services. Most leaders interviewed noted difficulties in monetizing their services and the negative impact this had on their ability to be futurists; anticipating and addressing both current and emerging needs. Where organizations are unable to attract or retain members as contributors to, or consumers of, their services, they face the risk of downsizing, delayed or diluted strategies, unrealized programs, diminished services, or eventual bankruptcy; with one director saying:

> “I feel the next one to five years will see a dramatic shift and potential drop off of members, which could end seeing some organizations become a causality of not moving with the times, and not offering the members real value for money.”

Where revenue comes from corporate contracts then both employers and members need to see measurable returns on investment, with another director adding:

> "A significant factor will be how many corporates will renew their memberships. They need to feel they are getting a worthwhile return on their investment and sponsorship."

Some members noted that organizations offer diminishing value over time due to service stagnation or the declining career relevance for some services. Exacerbating this risk to the viability of the organization is a consistent failure to effectively communicate (19) offerings which compounds recruitment and retention challenges. One director suggested:

> "Forums and associations should become more responsive and provide clearer, easier-to-understand information. Many feel lost due to a lack of guidance and timely updates. Faster responses and more personalized support would greatly improve their experience."

Communication challenges are most pronounced where organizations offer a substantive array of services. Greater efficiency and clarity in structuring portals, signposting capabilities, and articulating value could increase awareness, value propositions, and service utilization, with one member saying:

> "The forum provides strong support for vocational learning and professional certifications. However, this could be enhanced by consolidating available courses into a structured, easily navigable framework, and segmented by specialism. This would improve usability and support more targeted professional development."

The leaders and specialists who lead forums and associations, shape strategies, or deliver on services can also materially impact value perception. This is challenging where professional

bodies are reliant on volunteers who often work with little to no supervision, and who could inadvertently harm the organization's reputation or derail strategic goals. One director said:

> "Other than one organization, I cannot think of any particularly useful security related forum or association. I have been part of several and have not renewed my membership. Often, I find the associations are places with entrenched views, or who are run by people who have not excelled in their careers. I have not found them to be innovative or energetic places."

CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

To avoid stagnation, organizations must encourage their members to identify evolving needs, priorities, and expectations. They must also monitor the security landscape and anticipate immediate, near-term, and long-term needs. Societal instability, economic uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, regulatory changes (20), climate change, intra-state conflict and war, unchartered AI threats, and dramatic changes to global alliances all impact government agencies, communities, commercial companies, and humanitarian organizations. Coupled with changes to the risk landscape are growing role expectations, financial constraints, and a saturation of professional bodies practitioners can select from. One director stated:

> "I believe there will be considerable changes over the next 1–5 years due to the ever-evolving landscape of global security and emerging safety challenges worldwide."

Figure 12 reflects organizational member responses when asked what degree of change is anticipated for how organizations will support members over the next 5 years. Of those surveyed, 53.90 per cent expected significant or considerable change, 36.17 per cent thought there will be some level of change, and 9.93 per cent foresaw little to no change. To stay current and competitive, leaders need to be cognizant of the stimuli for change and the associated priorities and time-urgencies. Competition among organizations drives either specialization or diversification; forcing leaders to adopt a business mentality regardless of the level of commerciality of their organization. As posited by one director:

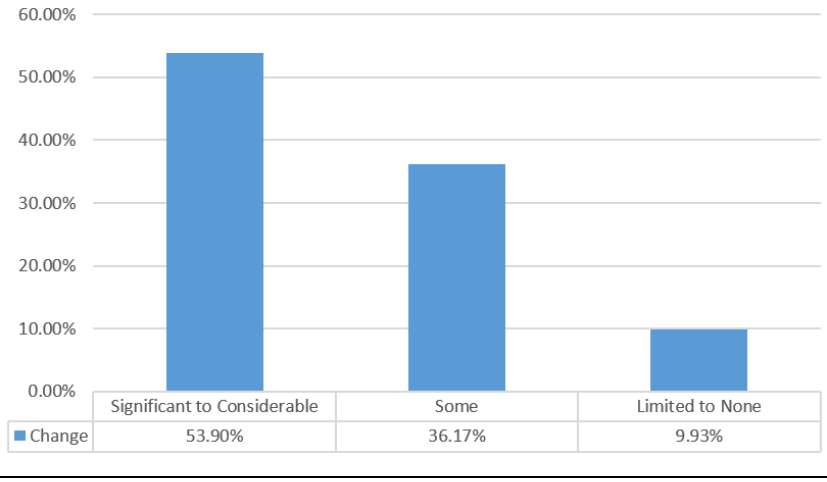


Figure 12 *Organizational member survey results for: what changes do you think will occur over the next 1-5 years in how organizations support their members?*

> "The mindset is changing from one of being a 'members' focused business club, to it becoming a commercial business for the benefit of the members."

While outside of the security community associations can attract significant membership and revenues (21), in the security sector organizations often struggle with funding and resourcing. Meeting both member and sectoral priorities in the face of dynamic needs and limited resources can be a challenge even for larger and comparatively well-resourced groups who are invariably reliant on a small pool of often overburdened part-time leaders and specialists. This can lead to services becoming outdated or needs not being addressed. Combined, these hinder opportunities

for transformative change. As services increasingly overlap and create decreasing value through repetition or dilution, the risk of market saturation will drive organizations either to specialize in niche markets, broaden offerings to appeal to a wider membership demographic, engage with other groups on areas of complementary collaboration, or merge to create economies of scale. One director said:

> "The number of different groups associated with the security industry are increasing. This occurred in the engineering industry and eventually a point was reached where a number of these had to merge to create larger, more viable organizations. If the security industry is not careful this will occur; it is better to have fewer but more powerful organizations."

Changes in technology and the potential opportunities and threats posed by artificial intelligence will further blur the lines between physical and cyber security professional membership bodies, with one member remarking that organizations:

> "Are expected to evolve significantly, shifting toward more digital, data-driven, and professionally structured models that deliver deeper expertise, stronger career pathways, and more responsive member engagement. The increasing impact of AI will also have a profound impact on the field."

As the role of security evolves to meet increasingly interconnected risks and a broadening remit beyond the field of traditional security, forums and associations are pivotal in helping professionals navigate the route to, and beyond, the role of Chief Security Officer (22); as well as shape how security is organizationally positioned to influence or lead on holistic resilience strategies (23). Changes to the global security environment and marketplace (24) also affect the sector and the professionals operating in it. Governmental regulatory requirements such as

"Martyn's Law" (25) and the associated stipulations placed on companies; the dismantling of USAID; the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine and Middle East; simmering tensions between China and Tiawan; and escalating threats from cyber-attacks, proxy terrorist groups, and supply chain disruptions will force companies to become High Reliability Organizations (26) capable of withstanding complex, blended, and cascading threats. These stressors will shape the priorities employers place on security, and by extension, how forums and associations support their members.

CONCLUSION

Forums and associations stand at the nexus of interdisciplinary competence and knowledge sharing for a sector which faces increasingly complex and interconnected threats from social disorder, weakened rule of law, climate change, disrupted supply chains, economic uncertainty, AI and cyber-attacks, and escalating global conflict. These organizations are critical in not only helping individuals enter the sector, but also in preventing professional stagnation. They comprise a storehouse of hard-won knowledge and experience which – if effectively applied – can be transformative in shaping standards, defining practice, influencing policy, demonstrating the value of security, and bridging theory and practice. Through collaboration, leaders can help prioritize research goals with universities and government agencies; providing and disseminating studies which offer demonstrable and applicable value. They provide employers a mechanism to define consistent employment roles and routes, articulate expectations, and enable career development; while concurrently offering a platform where professionals – as contributors – can elevate their brand through leadership roles, speaking events, and publications.

While the research findings found that all services offered some degree of value, some areas are currently underserviced. Advertising employment opportunities offers measurable value to the individual, while better relationships with academic and vocational partners could improve access to credible learning resources; especially through online mediums which address the needs of a highly disbursed and economically constrained community of practitioners. The concept of convergence will force more professional bodies to expand their portfolio beyond physical security and into the realms of resilience, business continuity, AI, cyber, technology, and crisis management, as interdisciplinary expertise is needed to address interwoven risks as the lines between resilience strategies become more blurred.

Organizations cannot act in isolation and must form effective action-based relationships with government agencies, commercial vendors, institutions of learning, and their current and future members. These stakeholders should also understand and embrace the potential value of a symbiotic relationship, investing time and effort to turn ideas into outcomes. The needs of the member population are quickly changing as positional roles become more dynamic and expand beyond traditional security to address polycrisis threats. Organizations must be aligned with the needs of the security community, be competitive in a crowded space, and their services must reflect both current and future needs. Similarly, members cannot only be consumers of services; they have a role and responsibility to engage, communicate, and drive change. Absent significant funding streams and large full-time teams, the next generation of security professionals is heavily reliant on current members to assume leadership and specialist positions to prioritize strategies, codify knowledge, create productive stakeholder relationships, and deliver on the vision and goals of forums and associations.

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