

## “Assessing Information Needs” survey results

### Introduction

The on-line survey was hosted by JISC infoNet as part of our Strategic Management Information programme [www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/smi](http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/smi). The survey was run between March 25<sup>th</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

These findings are based on 116 validated responses.

The purpose of this survey is to ascertain what information key decision-makers within universities and colleges would most like access to in order to assist them in their duties. This information will now be used to inform a more detailed process of information gathering with a view to achieving a greater understanding of how institutions can best utilise ‘business intelligence’ to deliver demonstrable organisational benefit.

The results of a second survey, designed to look in greater detail at current levels of ‘business intelligence’ activity within the sector will be published in July.

For further information on this survey or the project to which it relates please contact [steve.bailey@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:steve.bailey@northumbria.ac.uk)

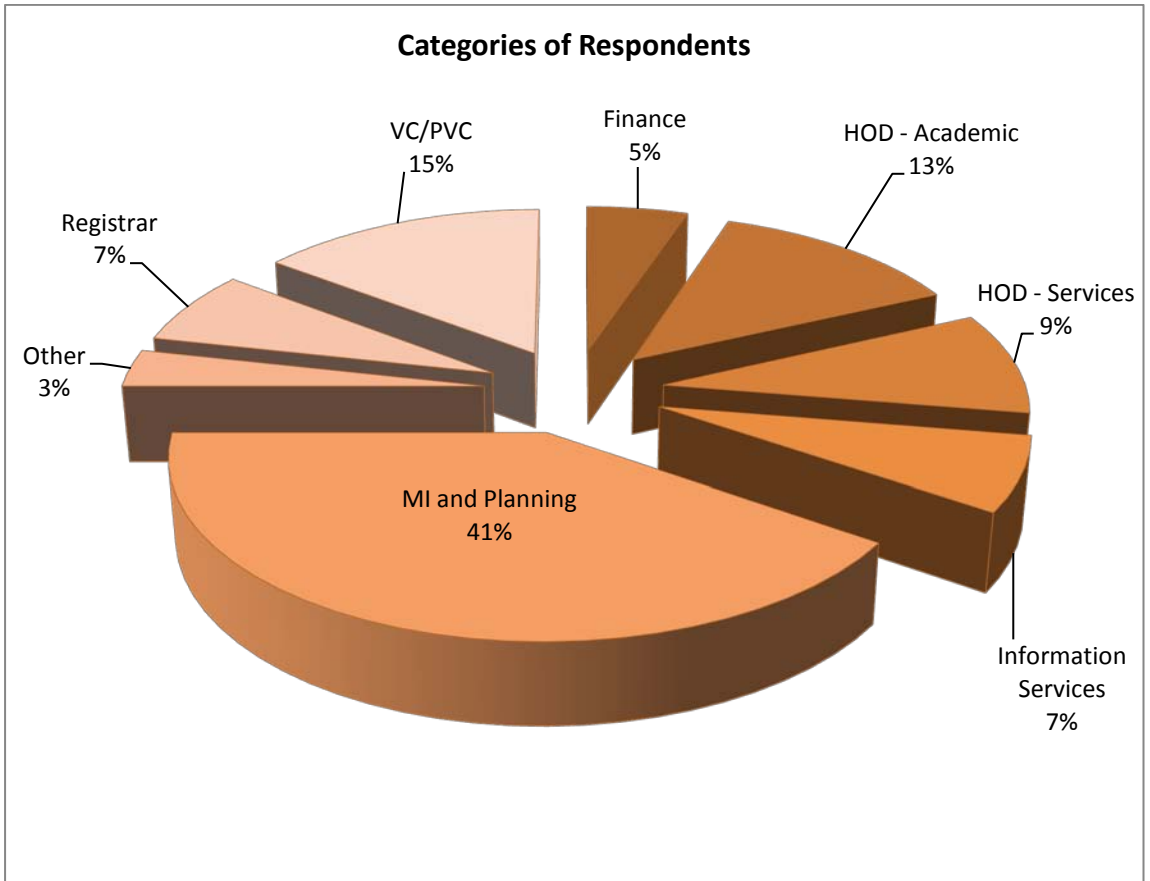
### Categorisation

Two of the questions (Questions 2 & 4) provided the opportunity for open-ended answers. In order to meaningfully analyse the data provided we have adopted the following approach to categorisation.

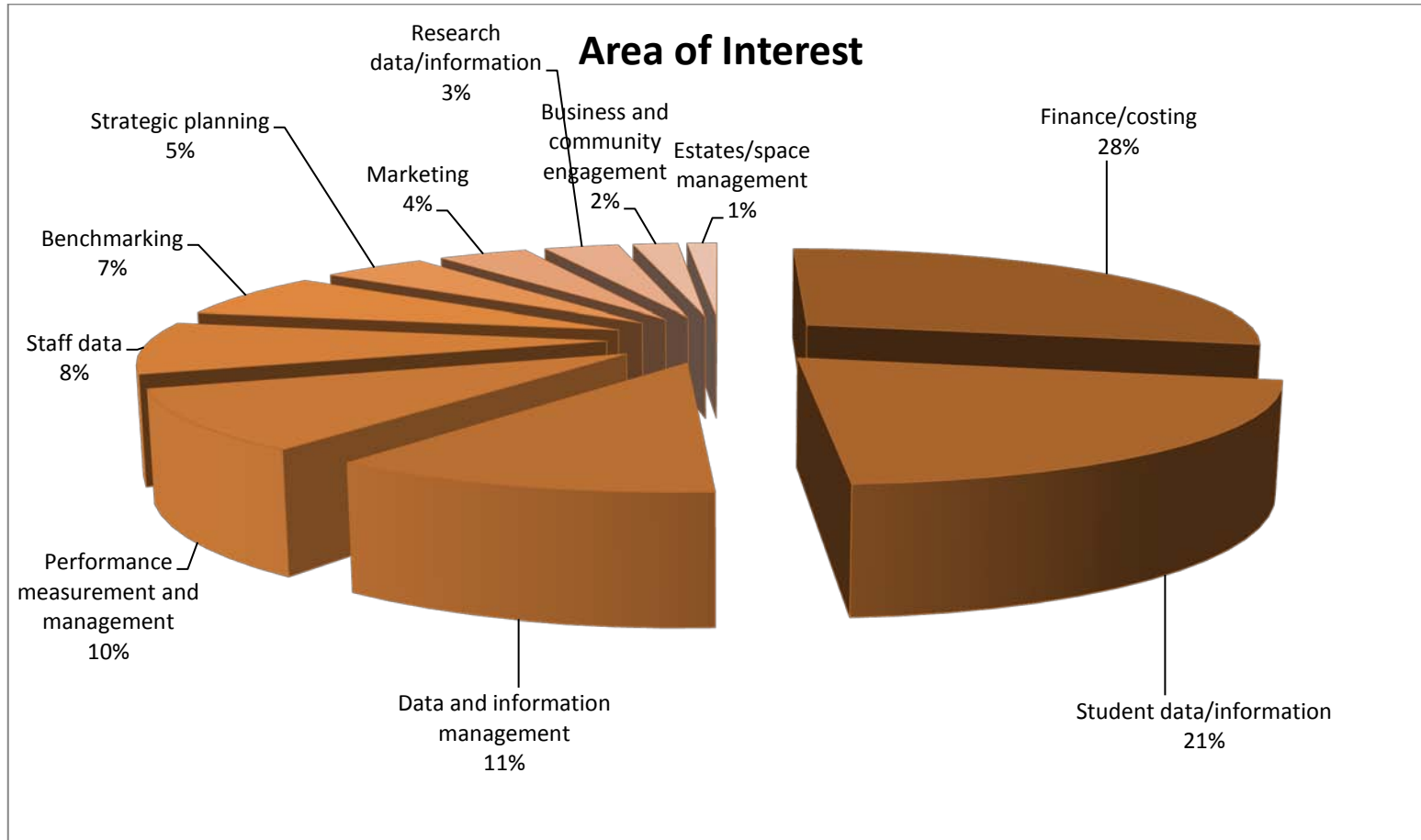
Categories	Definition	Question 2: Interest categories	Shared categories	Question 4: project categories
Finance/costing	Funding, income and expenditure by activity, cost effectiveness, sustainability		★	
Student data/information	Life cycle data, SSR, student numbers		★	
Performance measurement and management	KPIs, added value		★	
Research data/information	PIs, REF data		★	
Estates/space management	Estate and space information		★	
Data and information management	How do institutions manage their data and information, data quality, common definitions and sources?	★		
Staff data	SSR, profile, retention, workloads, costs	★		
Benchmarking	How do institutions compare with others within the sector?	★		
Strategic planning	Portfolio planning, strategic planning, international strategy	★		
Marketing	Market trends, area of growth, market share	★		
Business and community engagement	External engagement, managing external contacts, collaboration	★		
Workload planning model	Academic workloads			★
New technologies	Flexible Service Delivery Programme, Enterprise Architecture, New learning technology, ITIL			★
TRAC data analysis	Collecting and analysing data contributing to TRAC returns			★
Improving business processes	Improving business processes within student systems, change management, process review			★
Development of data warehouse	Development of a repository of an organisation's electronically stored data			★
Data quality	Data accuracy and timeliness, common definitions			★
Scoping information needs	Finding out about management information needs, problems and solutions, missing data			★
Integrated business reporting	Management reporting based on integrated IT systems, use of a data warehouse, provision of current information			★
Effective systems already in place				★
Project unspecified				★
None				★

### Question 1. Personal Details

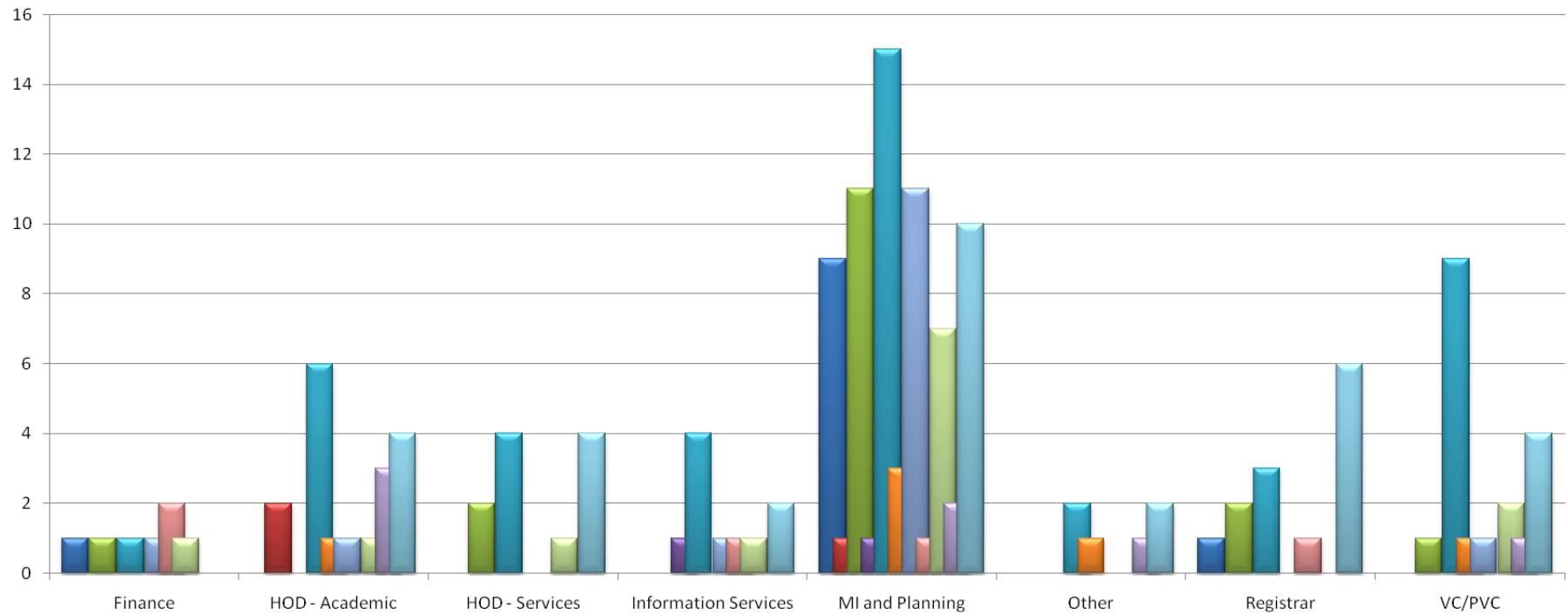
The participants have been divided into several categories depending on their job title/position. It's not surprising, that majority of respondents (41%) were from management information and planning departments, followed by members of the executive (15%).



**Question 2.** "In relation to your current role what is the most burning question that you would most like to be able to answer within your institution which you are not currently able to? In short: *What would you most like to know?*"

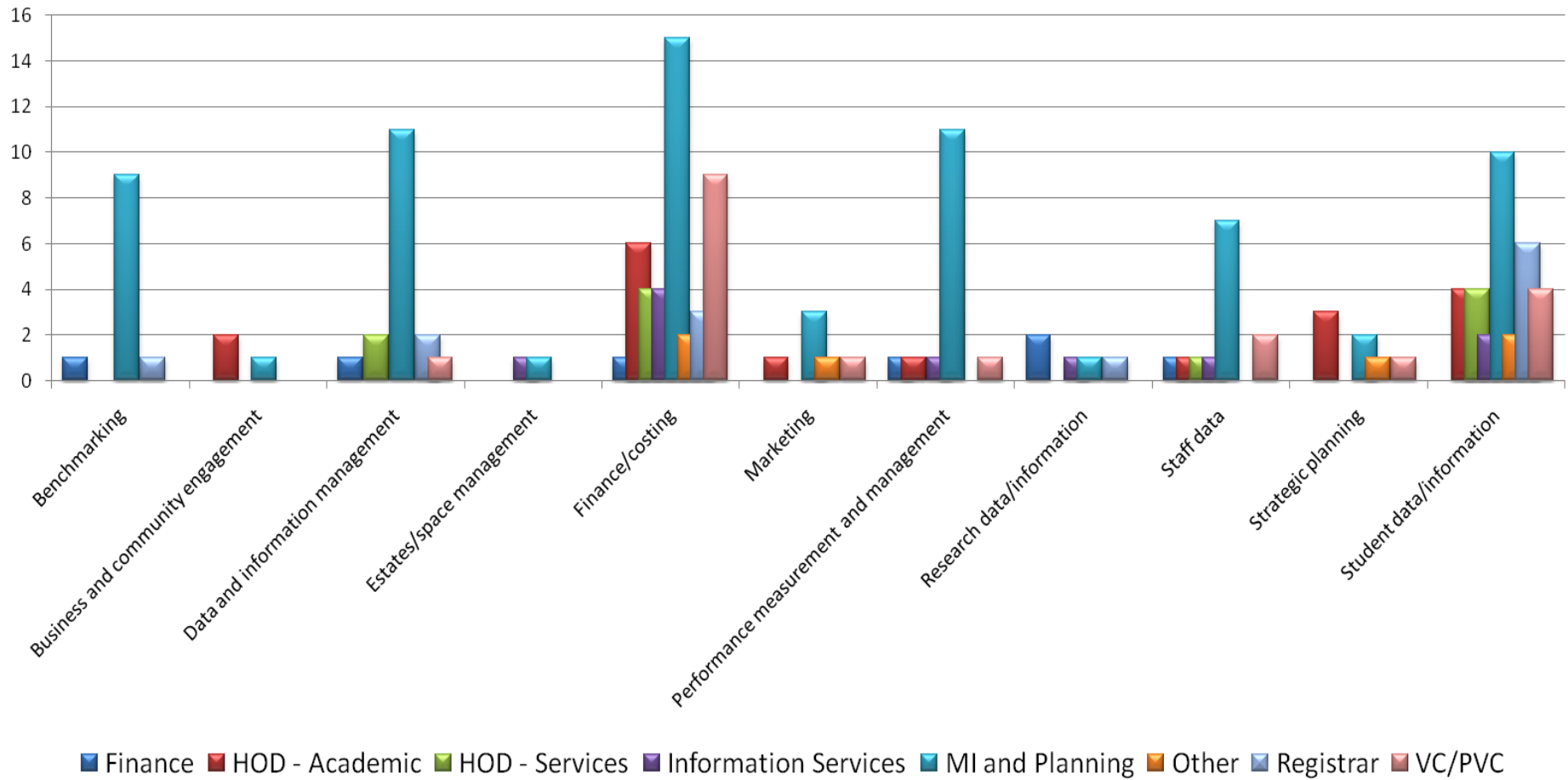


### Area of Interest by Job Profile



- Benchmarking
- Data and information management
- Finance/costing
- Performance measurement and management
- Business and community engagement
- Estates/space management
- Marketing
- Research data/information

## Area of Interest by Subject



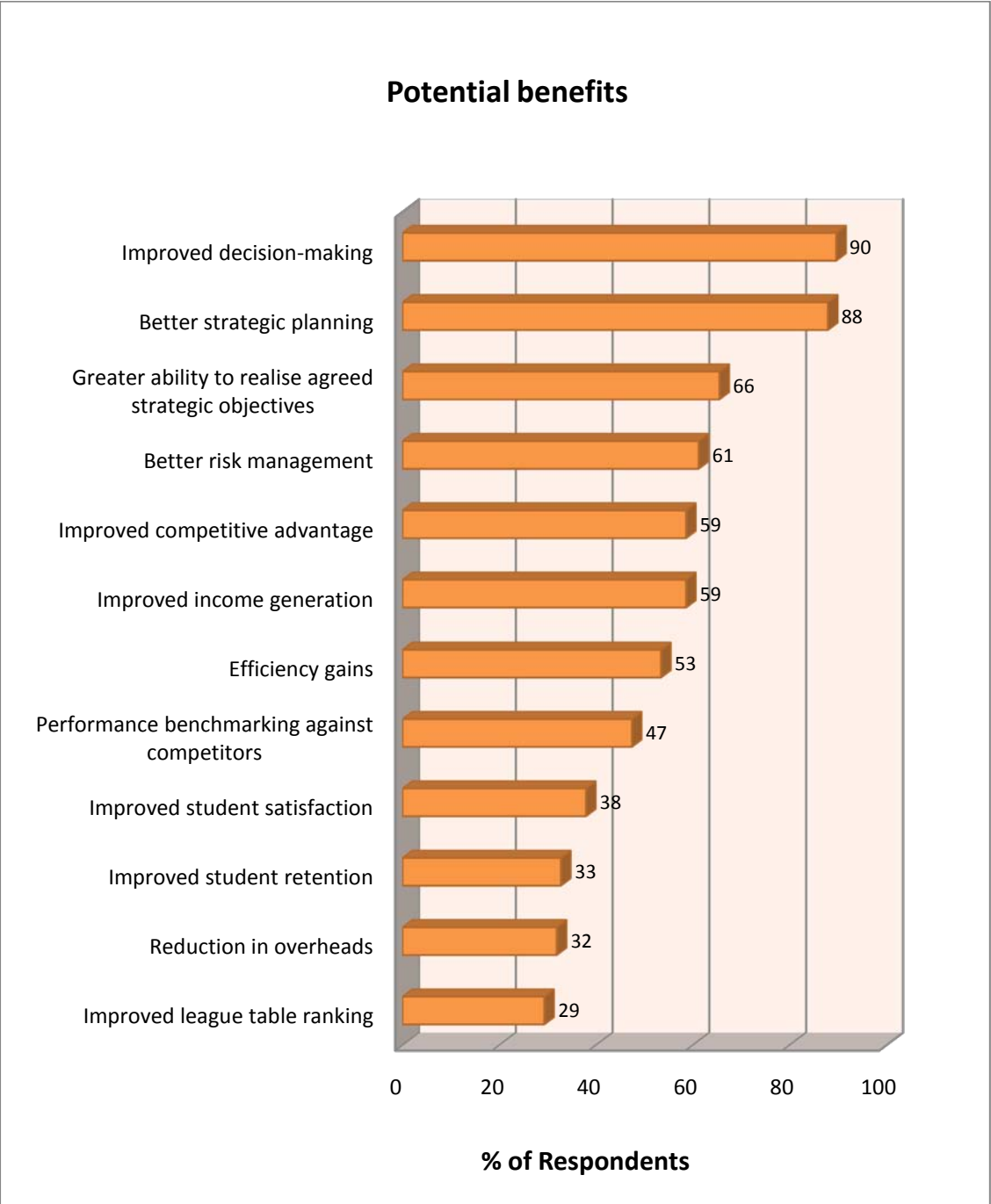
## **Additional Commentary**

In terms of the high level results from Question 2 it is little surprise to see Finance/Costing (28%) and Student Data/Information (21%) as by far and away the most popular areas of interest; reflecting not only the 'core business' of higher education but also the uncertain economic climate in which it now operates. Though these results might be considered largely predictable they still provide valuable data to the rest of the Strategic Management Information programme by confirming where the perceived need is and where effort should be focused.

The breakdown of this data by job profile offers some further interesting food for thought; not least the clear preference from Vice Chancellors and Pro Vice Chancellors for benchmarking data; an interest also shared by Heads of Department in both academic and service departments. It is worth noting that the Benchmarking category as defined for this analysis refers specifically to "How institutions... compare with others within the sector" and does not include issues relating to benchmarking current performance which are included within the 'Performance measurement and management' category thus suggesting a clear demand for access to comparative data from across the sector.

With the sector keenly anticipating the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework and the impact this could have on their future funding it is surprising not to see a greater appetite for 'Research Data/Information' – especially within Heads of Academic Departments where it did not register a single entry. This result is also out of kilter with the findings emerging from other work that JISC infoNet is currently involved with in relation to [Research Information Management](#) which indicates that internal drivers (such as improved service delivery to end users and improved management information about what research is being carried out within the institution) are actually major drivers for investment in Research Information Management.

**Question 3. If you were able to answer the question you suggested in Question 2 above, which of the following benefits do you think it would help contribute to?**

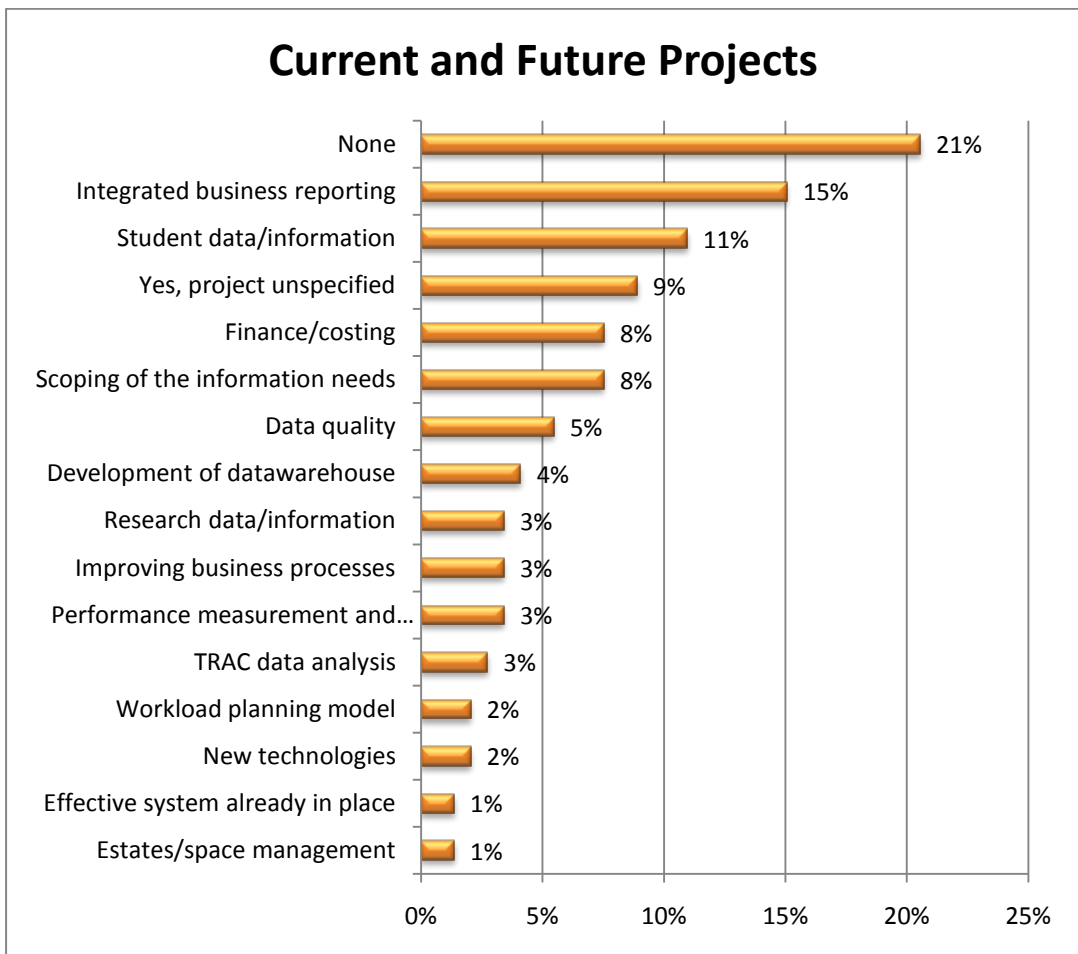


## **Additional Commentary**

The basic assumption underlying the JISC infoNet Strategic Management Information Programme: that “it is essential that senior managers have access to timely, accurate and relevant information about their institution, its stakeholders, its competitors and the wider context in which it operates in order to facilitate effective evidence-based strategic decision-making” is certainly borne out by the results to Question 3 with ‘improved decision-making’ and ‘better strategic planning’ the most keenly anticipated benefit expected from investment in this area.

Given the overwhelming interest in information which provides finance and costing data it is surprising that perceived benefits which could be seen to directly flow from such data (for example ‘improved competitive advantage’; ‘improved income generation’; and ‘efficiency gains’) did not rank higher. Though perhaps it was understandably felt that these and other more specific benefits are all ultimately reliant on sound decision-making and good strategic planning.

**Question 4. Do you have any BI projects or initiatives either planned or underway**



**Additional Commentary**

Although it is initially tempting to focus on the fact that 'None' was the single largest response received to the question 'Do you have any BI projects or initiatives underway or planned?' this, of course, masks the fact that an overwhelming majority of those institutions who responded to the survey (79%) are either planning or are actively engaged in activity in this area; albeit in a range of different areas.

The appetite for 'integrated business reporting' (15%) is particularly telling and is consistent with the belief that the most widely perceived potential benefits anticipated from such work as cited in responses to question 3 are 'improved decision-making' and 'better strategic planning'; both of which require holistic access to data which may be stored in multiple business systems.