

A photograph of a nightclub interior. The scene is dimly lit with a warm, golden-brown color palette. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a crowd of people are visible, many with their arms raised. In the background, a large, glowing spherical light fixture hangs from the ceiling. The ceiling structure, including metal trusses and cables, is visible. The overall atmosphere is that of a busy, vibrant nightclub.

SAFERSOUNDS
PARTNERSHIP

**London Nightclub
Reopening Roundtable
Report May 2021**

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This report has been produced by the Safer Sounds Partnership, part of the Safer Business Network.

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About the Safer Sounds Partnership

Safer Sounds was established in March 2019 and is an arm of the Safer Business Network supported by the Greater London Authority and Metropolitan Police and funded by Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). Safer Sounds signifies a shift to a more partnership focused approach to licensing across London.

Safer Sounds are a partnership across the events and music industry promoting consistency of operations, sharing best practice, supporting businesses to implement better working practices and risk management, and facilitating information sharing whilst supporting venues, promoters, and artists to create safer events for all.

Background

Following publication of the Government's Reopening Roadmap, nightclubs have been given a provisional reopening date of June 21st. However, it is recognised that staying in business until reopening, and adapting to operations in a COVID-19 world, will be challenging. That is why the industry in London has recognised the importance of working in partnership with local authorities and the police to start planning for the safe reopening of London's nightclubs.

Safer Sounds, in partnership with the Met Police, London Councils, SIA and the Night Czar, hosted a Nightclub Reopening Roundtable and invited owners and operators to share their concerns with colleagues from across the sector and London's police and local authorities.

The outcomes of this roundtable are contained within this short report on nightclub reopening in London which Safer Sounds will use to brief local authorities, the police, and other strategic partners across London on nightclub reopening. The findings of this report provide a framework for the police and local authorities to work in partnership with nightclubs.

173 people attended the event, 133 owners and operators and 40 representatives of the Police and local authorities.

The Roundtable addressed the following questions, and several polls were conducted. The questions were:

The Current State of the Sector

- What are the needs of venues now and in the run up to reopening?
- How will nightclubs manage the processes of reopening?
- What best practice exists and how can nightclubs use it to reopen safely?

Rent & Supplier Concerns

- What are the current challenges with landlords?
- What are the current challenges with suppliers?
- How can nightclubs resolve these issues, and how can the authorities support?

Licensing, Regulation & Safety

- What challenges will nightclubs face when reopening?
- What safety measures will need to be in place when nightclubs reopen?
- How can we ensure vulnerable staff and customers are kept safe?
- How will nightclubs operate successfully in a COVID-19 world?
- Working with the Police and local authorities.

Thank You

We would like to take this opportunity to thank nightclub owners, operators, and partners for attending this event and contributing their views and opinions.

Key Issues

Every effort should be made to allow nightclubs to open on June 21st - any delay could threaten the future viability of venues.

30%
of venues at
risk of closure

Nightclubs need Government guidance as soon as possible – venues have been closed for 15 months and planning is taking place **now** to reopen them. Venues should not have the burden of having to guess what regulations may be.

Financial support should be given to venues beyond reopening – financial assistance may be required to support businesses during the initial reopening period due to a potential lack of confidence in returning to venues.

50%

have delivered
vulnerability training

Customer safety and welfare should remain a key focus of venues, the Police and Local Authorities – customer safety and welfare is at the heart of how nightclubs operate, but there should be a renewed focus on welfare and vulnerability to ensure that those returning to venues are as safe as possible and feel comfortable to bring issues to the attention of venues.

The Police and Local Authorities should work in partnership with nightclubs to deal with the issues that may arise after reopening – venues have been closed and there is potential for complaint from residents and a return to normal crime levels. Partnership working should be encouraged to address these issues.

Support should be given to venues to recruit, refresh and upskill staff and security teams – venues are concerned about a potential lack of availability of skilled staff and security that can deal with the range of issues that will present themselves when venues reopen. Refresher training around welfare, vulnerability and conflict should be encouraged and supported by the Police, GLA and Local Authorities.

84%

concerned about
potential lack of
door supervisors

Since the Roundtable

Since the Roundtable took place, the discussion of postponing the June 21st reopening date has become a very real threat to nightclubs and late-night venues. The impact of moving this date cannot be understated.

There are a number of concerns nightclubs have expressed to Safer Sounds through various meetings that it has held and support work it has been carrying out.

Nightclub reopening takes significant planning and investment. The planning and expenditure is time sensitive, for example stock purchases, and a delay would threaten cash flow of venues.

There are a number of other concerns which threaten the viability of nightclubs as they ultimately affect cash flow significantly.

Nightclubs are often event led and rely on advance ticket sales and external promoters. Any change to the reopening date would inevitably mean that events would need to be cancelled or postponed. This has a significant effect on cash flow as the venue may have to refund customers who have purchased advanced tickets and promoters who may have paid hire fees. The knock-on effect for promoters would also devastate their sector as they would also have to look at offering refunds for events.

It is vital that should the date change, additional financial support is offered to nightclubs to ensure they can be supported in their future viability.

The Current State of the Sector

What are the needs of venues now and in the run up to reopening?

Venues felt that the number one priority in terms of their needs was clear guidance on reopening, released as soon as possible to allow them to plan reopening with the relevant Government restrictions in place.

Venues were concerned that June 21st could see the release of all legal restrictions as:

- There is a duty of care from an employer to employee, and it was felt that employers would have to have appropriate mitigation in place to continue to protect employees from COVID-19.
- Venues believed there would still be need for local mitigation, for example if there was an outbreak of a new strain.

It was still possible that nightclubs would not be able to operate as they did prior to COVID-19, and therefore there may be additional financial pressure on a business with new mitigations in place. It is critical, therefore, that there is adequate financial support in the run up, and into, the reopening period. Support with staff recruitment may also be necessary.

How will nightclubs manage the processes of reopening?

As a highly regulated sector, attendees felt that nightclub operators are very experienced in managing risk and implementing procedures to keep their customers safe – something they have a clear track record of doing as part of their operations.

Venues were planning to manage the reopening process through:

- Appropriate risk assessments which would be updated regularly.
- Additional staff and security training programmes covering issues such as COVID-19 safety, vulnerability and managing conflict.
- Adherence to the prevailing COVID-19 regulations
- Working in partnership with other venues, residents, Police, and local authorities
- Appropriate financial planning to ensure future financial viability (note that venues are unsure of the numbers of customers that will return immediately)
- Examining the potential of diversifying their business until they can reopen properly as a nightclub.

Partnership working was identified as essential to ensure reopening goes smoothly – it was noted that local radio network schemes and intelligence sharing systems assisted with the reduction of crime, violence, and anti-social behaviour.

What best practice exists and how can nightclubs use it to reopen safely?

There was a clear view that there is a distinct lack of UK best practice on opening nightclubs safely as they have not been able to open at all since March 2020. It was felt that the Government's Event Pilots should be representative of the nightclub sector and ensure that any best practice from these is shared widely.

Rent & Supplier Concerns

What are the current challenges with landlords?

Venues, on the whole, were positive about their relationship with landlords, stating that most landlords have been receptive to discussing ways in which they can work together to get through the crisis.

This does not mean however that venues are not concerned about the potential impact of action by landlords once the lease moratorium ends. There was a concern about the mounting debt which has accrued and would take a significant amount of time to pay off.

It was also noted that once landlords have heard that venues have received grants, they have pushed for rent payments.

Venues who have TfL as landlords reported that they were generally very supportive and understanding and went out of their way to support their business.

Tenants of ArchCo reported some issues with rent negotiations and some individual venues have been referred to the Mayor of London Culture at Risk Office.

What are the current challenges with suppliers?

Venues spent the initial period of lockdown negotiating with suppliers, and on the whole, this was a positive process with suppliers recognising the difficulties for venues. Rationalisation of contracts and in some cases negotiation of additional payment terms or debt had been possible.

It was felt that other than rent, cash flow was potentially the biggest concern for venues, so they can start planning how they will finance reopening from April 2021. This concern is exacerbated by some suppliers trying to change payment terms from credit to payment before or on delivery. This has a huge impact on businesses who require stock to open but may not have the funds to support this until they are trading.

Whilst on the whole suppliers have been supportive, venues were concerned that once suppliers are aware that venues have received grants, they may push for payment of debts owed.

The accrual of debt is a significant concern and support and protection for venues when they reopen, so debt cannot be enforced immediately, would be welcomed by nightclub operators.

How can nightclubs resolve these issues, and how can the authorities support?

Venues felt that the most important ways they can be supported is via:

- Protection from potential landlord action which covers a period of time into reopening.
- Ongoing financial support until opening and continuing for a period until numbers return to normal and to support potential mitigation measures.

Again, in order assist businesses with financial planning, Government should release regulations as soon as possible so venues can assess their cash flow requirements for reopening.

Licensing, Regulation & Safety

What challenges will nightclubs face when reopening?

There was a great deal of discussion and feedback on this point, so responses have been categorised as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a) Communities & Residents | d) Guidance & Regulation |
| b) Council and Police | e) Venue Operation & Security |
| c) Customer Attitudes & Behaviour | f) Testing |

a) Communities & Residents

Venues are concerned about the potential for complaints from local residents once nightclubs reopen. As nightclubs have been closed throughout the pandemic, their customers and any associated nuisance issues have largely disappeared, and it has been much quieter for residents.

There is potential, therefore, for residents to be much less tolerant than previously of issues such as noise, litter, and other disturbance.

It was strongly recommended that nightclubs engage with local residents prior to re-opening and ensure they are mitigating any potential risk of complaint. It was noted that the Safer Sounds Partnership will be releasing community engagement best practice in early June.

b) Council and Police

Venues have found that enforcement has varied across London and enquired whether a pan-London approach might be easier for businesses to follow and for Councils to enforce. It was recognised that there are a number of groups convened by the Mayor of London which promote a consistent approach to enforcement across all London Boroughs.

It was observed that the Police approach to enforcement was consistent across London and Licensing Officers have been engaging and positive when working with businesses. It was perceived to be more difficult dealing with Local Authority Enforcement teams and sometimes discussions between venues and managers within Councils haven't been communicated to front line enforcement officers.

c) Customer Attitudes & Behaviour

Venues raised concerns around customer attitudes and behaviour once they reopen. The "removal of legal limits" on June 21st could cause conflict for venues if they choose to have mitigation in place, or if legal limits did indeed exist.

Key concerns raised included:

- Attitudes towards safety measures such as wearing face coverings.
- Maintaining hygiene standards through handwashing and hand sanitising
- Attitudes to PPE or staff wearing PPE.

It was also felt that customers may be overly sensitive to closer contact with other customers which could lead to conflict on dancefloors and in busy areas of venues.

Venues also felt that younger customers may be more willing to return to nightclubs before older people, which could undermine viability during the initial reopening period.

d) Guidance & Regulation

Venues identified two important challenges with regards to guidance and regulation:

- That it is released in a timely manner so venues can plan their reopening
- That it is drawn up in consultation with the industry

Nightclub operators will seek to integrate COVID-19 regulations into their current procedures along with appropriate training. They see COVID-19 as something they will have to consider in their operations for years to come.

They saw a potential challenge with the use of NHS Test & Trace when venues are already required to use an ID scanner for example. A level of integration, or indeed being able to use ID scanners as part of the test and trace system, would be helpful and reduce the time it takes to process customers on entry.

It is important to note that venues felt that integration of safety measures, such as additional cleaning, is very different to having restrictions such as social distancing. Measures such as the latter and restrictions on capacity would make businesses unviable.

There were also concerns expressed around vaccine passports, as many nightclub customers are younger and therefore may not be vaccinated by June 21st.

e) Venue Operation & Security

The main concerns raised in relation to venue operations and security related to the entry and dispersal of customers.

Due to the location of many London venues, queuing systems will be a challenge if venues have to implement one way entry systems or have to hold customers whilst additional measures such as testing, or test and trace are in place.

It was felt that partnership working with Business Improvement Districts, and other organisations, could help with dispersal in the night-time economy by supporting venues with wardens and schemes like Soho Angels.

Venues are also concerned about the loss of experienced bar staff and security and recognise the need for training to address this. Recruitment was likely to be an issue, and venues would like support for recruitment back to the industry. It is important to note that many security door staff have been re-deployed outside the night-time economy and there is a concern that a significant proportion may not wish to return to the sector.

Finally, there were significant concerns raised by venues in relation to dispersal of customers in the absence of the Night Tube and early information from TfL on when it will re-open would be welcomed. In the absence of the Night Tube, venues are encouraged to work with local authorities to ensure dispersal plans are appropriate and mitigate any potential risk.

f) Testing

Discussions on testing highlighted a number of potential challenges from venues. They felt that testing in principle could work well for some events and types of venues but wasn't an appropriate solution for all venues.

London venues, who tend to be in high street and urban locations highlighted a number of challenges with regards to testing:

- There is a lack of space to hold customers for testing prior to entry, or to simply queue customers whilst they wait,
- Concern that pre-event testing would mean venues would lose walk-up trade as it relies on events being fully ticketed which is not how many venues operate.
- If venues have to meet the costs of testing, this is an additional strain on finances which is already stretched.
- Passing the cost onto the customer may put them off attending venues, which may discourage customers from returning to venues.
- The logistics of testing a full capacity event would be a lot for venues to plan for, especially independent venues.
- The reality of a customer testing positive, and the impact that has on people they have had contact with, needs to be considered.

What safety measures will need to be in place when nightclubs reopen?

Venues were confident in implementing COVID-19 safety measures and adopting them into operating procedures, but highlighted specific issues which they may need to consider when reopening, for example:

- Addressing welfare and vulnerability
- Addressing women's safety
- Adhering to licensing conditions
- CCTV training
- Conflict Management
- Corrosive Substance Attacks
- Counter Terrorism

How can we ensure vulnerable staff and customers are kept safe?

Venues highlighted a number of issues in relation to vulnerability when they reopen. There were three key concerns:

- The safety of women at night
- Vulnerability due to intoxication and other factors
- The number of 18/19 year olds who had not experienced nightclubs before as a result of the pandemic and therefore may be more vulnerable.

Venues confirmed that they will be looking to have welfare and vulnerability training delivered in their premises either internally or using an external trainer.

There was concern expressed by venues about customer behaviour once nightclubs reopen after their closure. Concerns related specifically to:

- Intoxication due to drugs
- Intoxication due to alcohol
- Potential conflict due to close personal contact

There are a range of measures that nightclubs are planning to put in place to tackle the issue of vulnerability which include:

- COVID-19 Safety Officers
- Welfare Officers
- COVID-19 Safety Training
- Welfare and Vulnerability Training
- Engagement with local universities around vulnerability
- Implementation of Ask for Angela

Regarding Ask for Angela, it was agreed that this campaign needed renewing and that the imagery should be gender-neutral to appeal more widely to customers as this is a barrier for use in the LGBTQ+ community for example.

Venues highlighted the need for a consistent stream of information, ideally from one source like the NEXSTART group during the release of the first lockdown, around issues that affect them rather than lots of different strands – there is a lot of information and sources.

How will nightclubs operate successfully in a Post COVID-19 world?

The most important issue raised by venues was, once again, that they need as much advance notice on any regulations that will affect them when they reopen. Having to plan for multiple eventualities will create a resource demand and affect a venues ability to open on the relevant date.

Most venues made the point that *any* restrictions such as social distancing or capacity limits would mean opening would be unviable for them. Measures such as additional cleaning, requiring Test & Trace data etc would be manageable but venues should have the freedom to implement their own measures based on their risk assessments.

Some venues were concerned about certain licence conditions which may need to be relaxed in order for businesses to be financially viable and they would like understanding from the authorities in this respect.

Partnership working and networking between venues, the Police, Councils, and residents was seen as integral to successful reopening from both a business perspective and in terms of venues remaining a positive part of their communities. Pubwatch meetings and other schemes other schemes that bring venues together should continue to operate and work with premises to ensure best practice is shared and issues affecting multiple venues in an area are addressed.

Working with the Police and local authorities.

The venues in attendance recognised the importance of having a good relationship with local authorities and noted that on the whole engagement has been positive. Attention was drawn to some inconsistency in local authority enforcement, which seems primarily to be a lack of communication between managers and officers on the ground – but it was recognised that this may be due to issues out of the control of the licensing teams that venues usually work with.

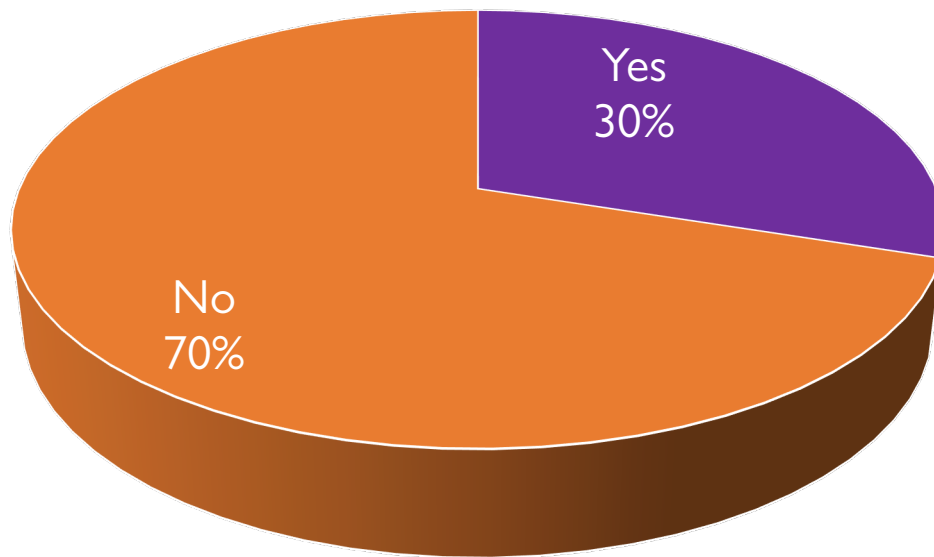
It is crucial that venues engage with the Police and local authorities as soon as possible to ensure that any issues which need discussing and addressing, such as onerous licensing conditions for example, are dealt with.

Venues are also concerned about a spike in crime statistics and complaints following Step 4 reopening in June. They recognised the need for authorities to address these but asked that they support venues through this process and respond in a measured way, working in partnership with them.

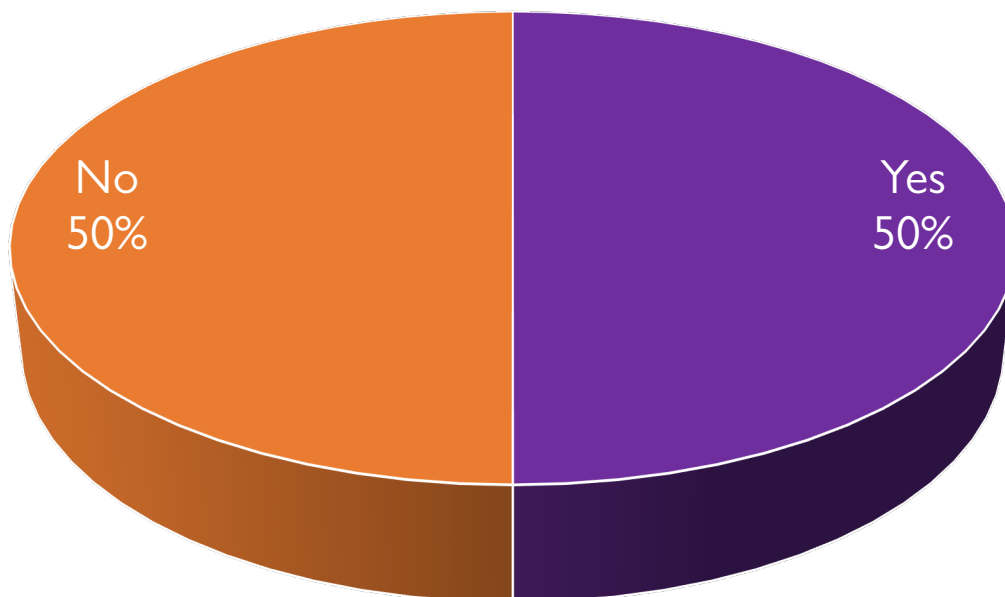
Nightclub Reopening Polls

A number of polls were undertaken by nightclub owners and operators who attended the roundtable, the results of which are in this section.

At present, do you feel that your venue is at risk of closure?

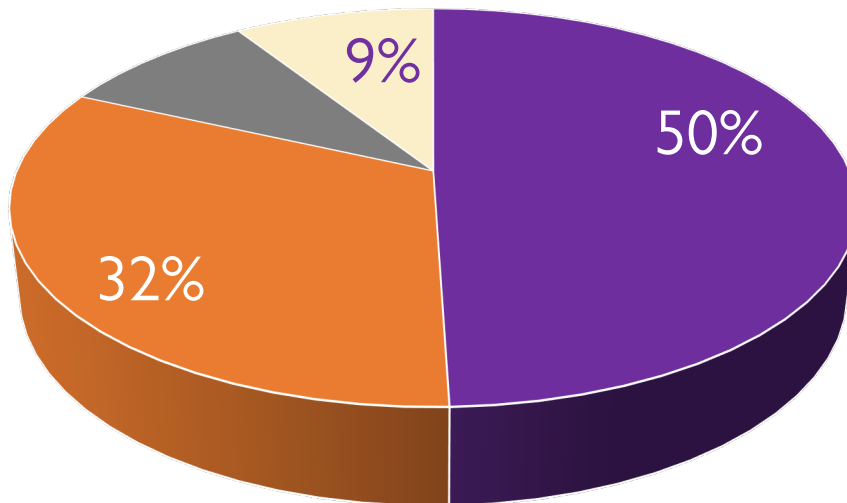


Do you feel that you have enough information on the financial support available to your business?

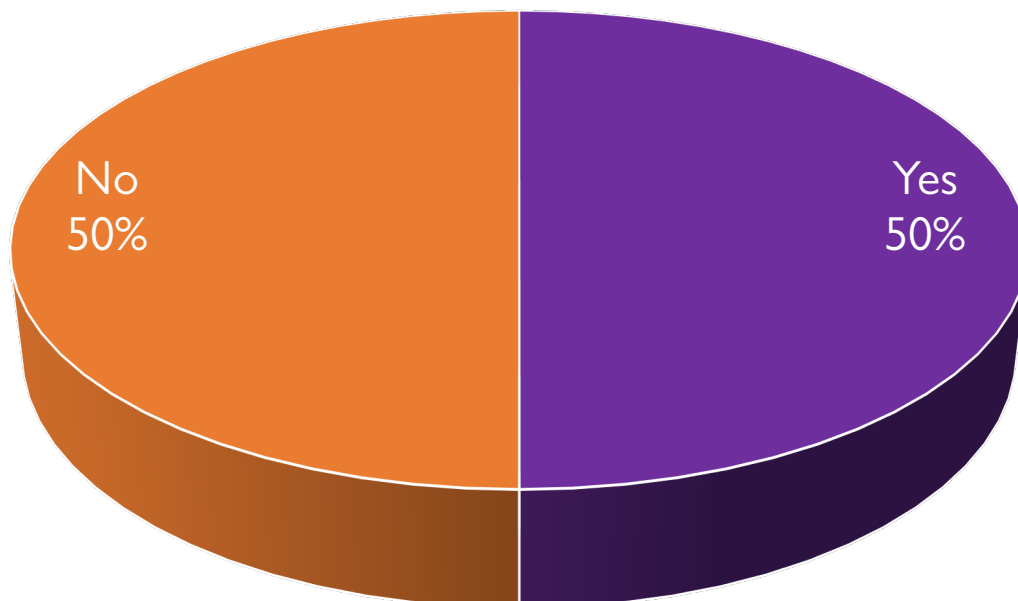


How confident do you feel in the ability of your staff team to deal with vulnerability?

- Extremely confident
- Somewhat confident
- Neutral
- Somewhat not confident
- Extremely not confident

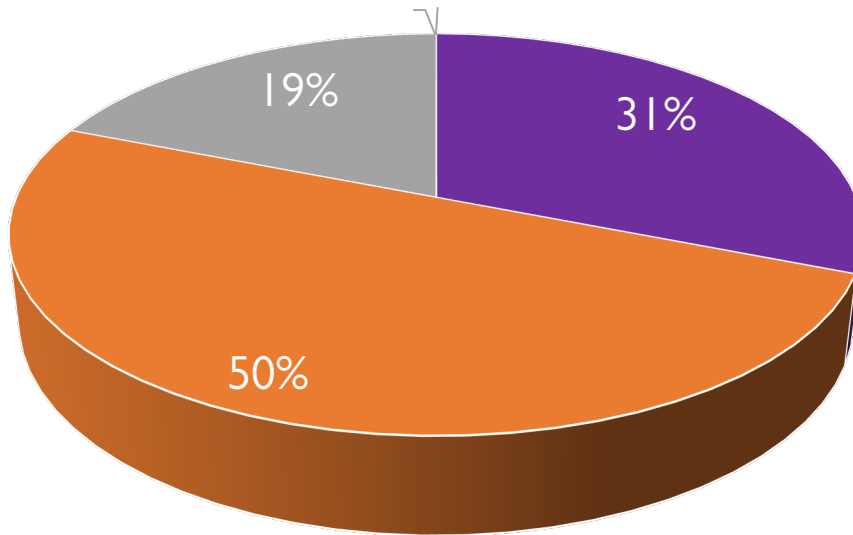


Have you previously delivered vulnerability training in your premises including WAVE training?



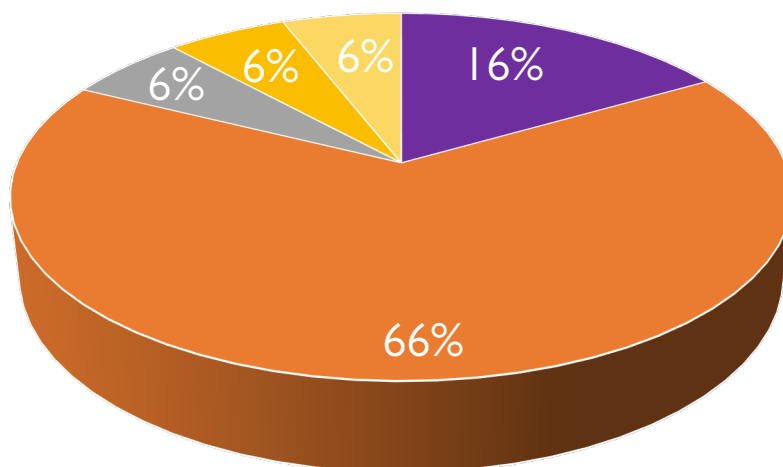
How confident do you feel in the ability of your staff team to deal with conflict after your venue reopens?

- Extremely confident
- Somewhat confident
- Neutral
- Somewhat not confident
- Extremely not confident



How concerned are you with the potential lack of door supervisors available to your venue?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Neither concerned nor unconcerned
- Somewhat unconcerned
- Very unconcerned



Have you heard of the Women's Night Safety Charter?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not before this meeting, I'm now considering signing up my organisation

