

MEMBER SURVEY

Results & Insights Report

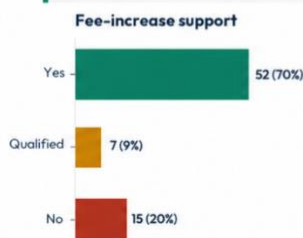
September 2026

ESSA Member Survey 2026 — Results Dashboard

n = 77 respondents

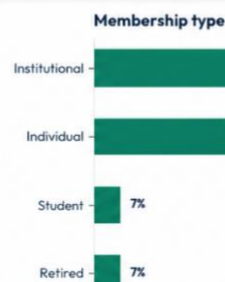
70%

of members support a membership fee increase



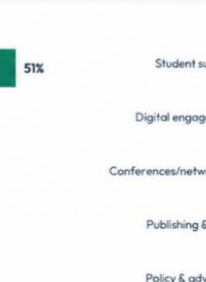
83%

rate the Biennial Conference as "valuable or very valuable"



37%

offered no further suggestions — satisfied with current offering

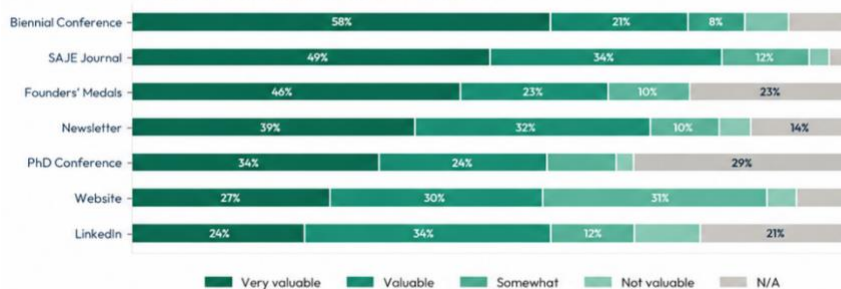


61

of 77 members attended a ESSA conference (2025 or earlier)



Perceived value of ESSA resources & activities



Source: ESSA Member Survey, August 2026 (n = 77). Prepared for ESSA Council.

Introduction

Following an increase in membership numbers, and renewed debate about the future direction of the Economic Society of South Africa, the Council commissioned a Member Survey in 2026. This brief report, compiled by the Executive Committee of ESSA, provides a baseline for future planning and proposals.

Method and Respondent Profile

This report is based on 77 responses to the ESSA Member Survey 2026, which was circulated to all members in August 2026. Data were collected via an anonymous online form and analysed in aggregate, consistent with the confidentiality assurance given to members in the survey invitation. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and are calculated against the number of members who answered each specific question.

The report was prepared with AI assistance (Claude) for chart production and drafting, using ESSA's own survey data; all figures were verified against the source spreadsheet.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Membership type (n=75)	Regular member – Institutional	38	51%
	Regular member – Individual	27	36%
	Student member	5	7%
	Retired member	5	7%
Length of ESSA membership (n=75)	<1 year	11	15%
	1–5 years	19	25%
	6–10 years	14	19%
	11–20 years	12	16%
	21–30 years	11	15%
	30+ years	8	11%
Age group (n=76)	18–25	2	3%
	26–35	22	29%
	36–50	27	36%
	51–64	18	24%
	65+	7	9%
Gender (n=77)	Male	41	53%
	Female	35	45%
	Prefer not to say	1	1%
Race group (n=77)	White	39	51%
	Black African	34	44%
	Indian	3	4%
	Coloured	1	1%
Home language (n=77)	English	36	47%
	Afrikaans	12	16%
	isiZulu	6	8%
	Other (13 languages)	23	30%
Sector of employment (n=77)	Staff in Higher Education	48	62%
	Private Sector (Industry)	11	14%
	Student in Higher Education	7	9%
	Public Sector (Government)	6	8%
	Other / Consulting	5	6%

ESSA Activities and Resources

The first part of the survey asked respondents to rate the value of ESSA's current activities and resources. Results show that the Biennial Conference and the SAJE are ESSA's strongest assets: 79% of members rate the conference as “very valuable” or “valuable”, and 83% say the same of the journal. Note that these percentages would be larger if those who responded “Not applicable” were excluded. (The N/A category is likely to be capturing people who had not made use of the resource or activity.)

The website, LinkedIn and the PhD Conference carry the largest “N/A, not used” shares (21–29%), which points to an awareness and reach gap rather than dissatisfaction. Among members who have used these resources, ratings remain solidly positive.

How valuable members find ESSA's resources and activities

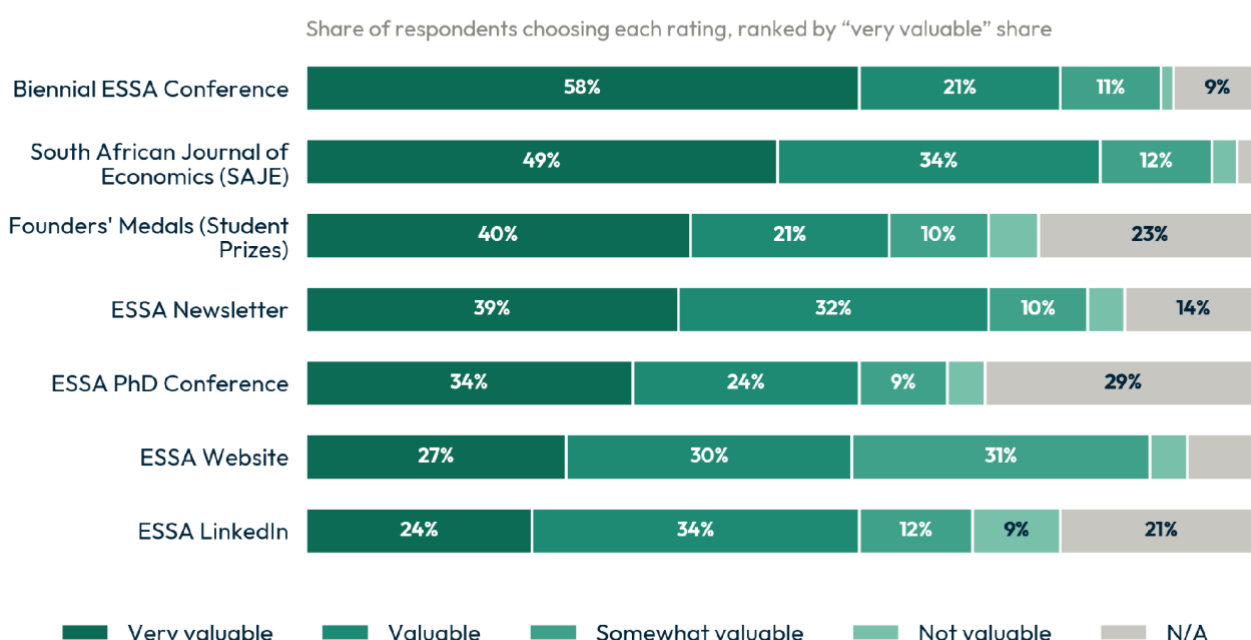


Figure 1. *Rating of ESSA resources and activities*

Written feedback confirms this: Of the 49 members (64% of all respondents) who commented on what ESSA should focus on next, 18 (37%) said, unprompted, that they had no further suggestions or that ESSA is already doing well. A further set of comments explicitly praised the Society's core functions:

“At the moment, I think that ESSA is doing its core functions well.”

“No, I think doing these core functions even better should be the focus for now — better promotion of SAJE articles to grow interest in publishing there, more non-academic involvement in ESSA conferences, bigger student prizes.”

Conference engagement

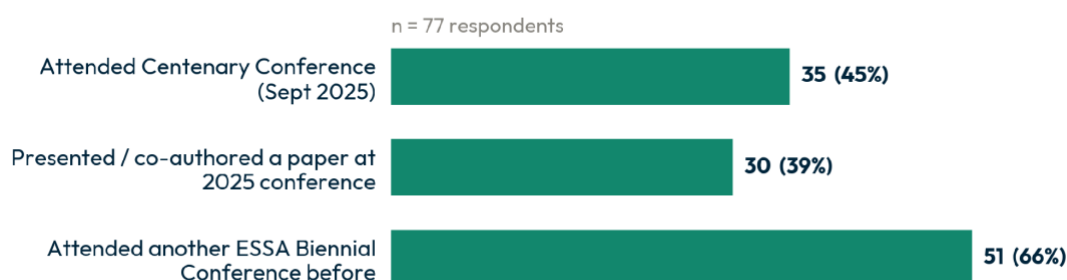


Figure 2. Conference engagement across the membership (n = 77).

Nearly half (46%) of the respondents attended the ESSA Centenary Conference in Somerset West (September 2025), and 66% have attended an ESSA Biennial Conference at some point, which is a strong indicator of engagement given that many respondents are early in their ESSA membership (30% joined within the last five years). The Biennial Conference is also rated as one of the most valuable ESSA activities, justifying the time and resources devoted to this event.

Asked about the 2027 ESSA Conference in Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), 40% of the respondents said they will definitely attend and a further 39% indicated that they may attend, a combined 79% expressing some intent to attend, against 21% who will not.

The South African Journal of Economics (SAJE)

35% of the respondents (27 of 76) have published in the SAJE. Among all respondents, 69% (52 of 75) rate the journal's academic prestige in the African context as 4 or 5 out of 5. This is a strong reputational base for ESSA to build on and reinforces the importance of the SAJE as a core Society activity.

Perceived academic prestige of the SAJE

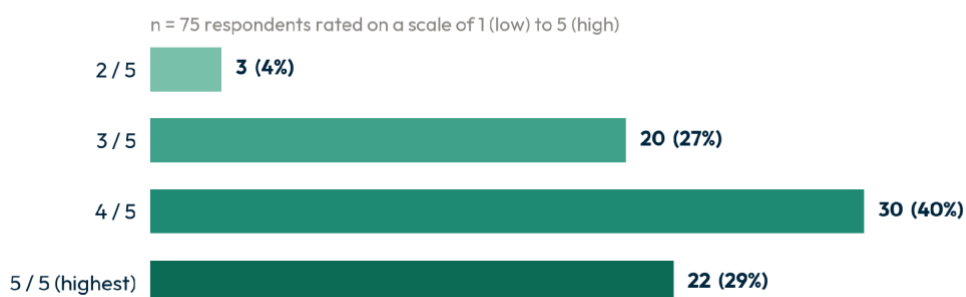


Figure 3. Perceived academic prestige of the SAJE (1 = low, 5 = high; n = 75).

The PhD Conference

ESSA has so far hosted three PhD Conferences (2023, 2024, 2026). 32% of the respondents (24 of 76) have actively engaged with it by supervising, reviewing, presenting or submitting an abstract. 49% are aware but have not participated, and 20% are not yet aware it exists at all, indicating that communication about the PhD conference could be improved in the future.

Engagement with the ESSA PhD Conference

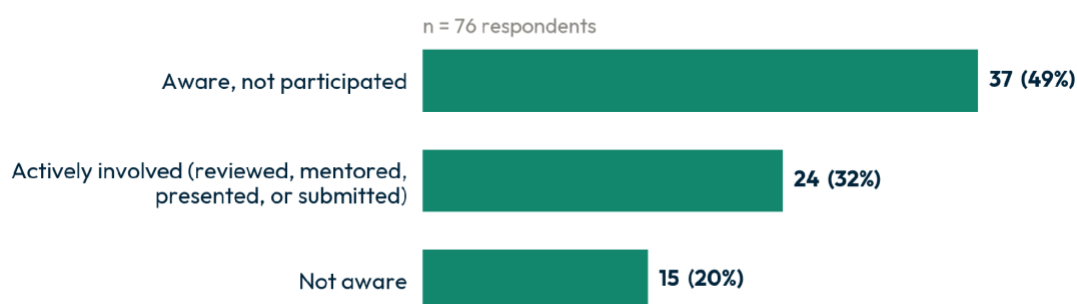


Figure 4. Member engagement with the ESSA PhD Conference (n = 76).

ESSA Communications

Direct email from the Executive Secretary and the ESSA newsletter are, between them, the most-used and most-valued communication channels. The website and word-of-mouth from colleagues play a secondary but meaningful role; LinkedIn has the smallest current reach, which indicates an area for development.

How members currently get ESSA news

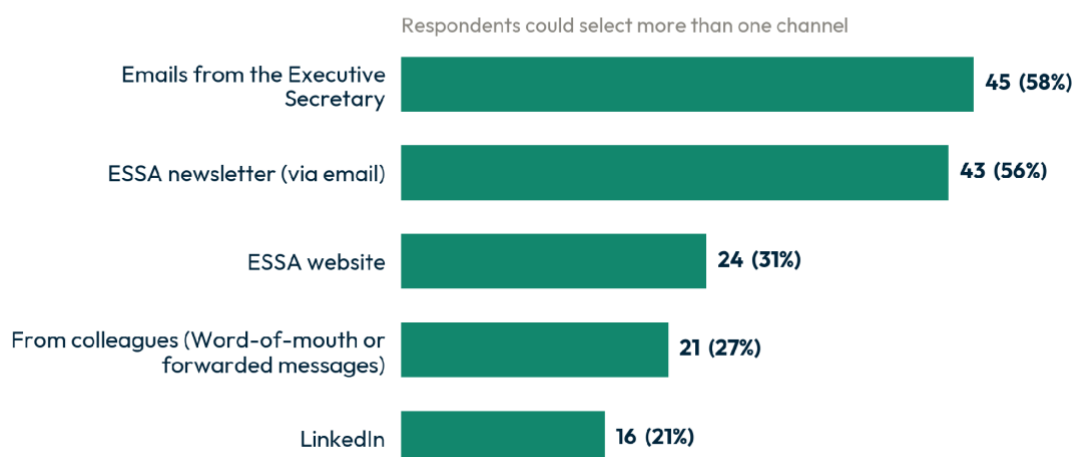


Figure 5. How members currently get ESSA news

Note: more than one option could be selected.

When asked to indicate the single most important news channel, 45% of the respondents chose emails from the Executive Secretary, and 39% chose the ESSA newsletters. This result reinforces the importance of keeping ESSA membership email records current.

New activities

What Members Suggest for ESSA's Future

Members were asked: “Taking into account the activities and resources that ESSA already provides, are there any other activities that you think it would be useful for ESSA to engage in?” The 49 substantive responses were organised into themes; a response could only be coded to one primary theme to keep counts from double-counting the same idea.

What members suggested for ESSA to focus on next

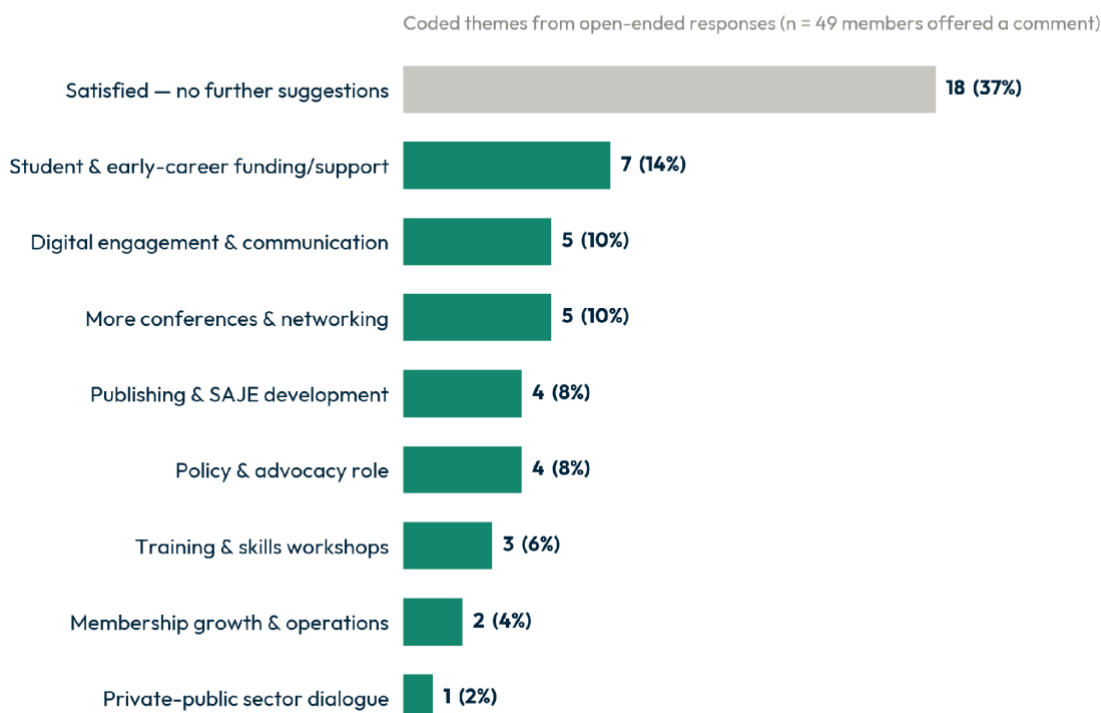


Figure 6. Coded themes from open-ended suggestions

The most common suggestion was to provide more student and early-career researcher support. This could include funding for Founders' Medal winners to attend the conference, PhD scholarships, student chapters at universities, and more undergraduate opportunities:

“Funding for founders medal winners to attend the conference (incl. travel)”

“ESSA can have student chapters in different universities to make students aware of their existence and to support Economics students in institutions of learning.”

10% of respondents suggested that ESSA supplement its conferences and newsletter with more frequent digital content, such as webinars, recorded talks on recent papers, and reaching younger members through channels they already use:

“YouTube channel or TikTok account (for the younger students to know more about ESSA)”

“Maybe monthly online talks on the latest and most relevant new paper published”

A small group of respondents (5) suggested more frequent or more specialised events, such as separate student networking events, closer collaboration with ERSA, and conferences aimed specifically at economists working outside academia:

“Organising conferences for economists in the private sector to share more relevant, business/consulting-related research that is not client sensitive (aligned to something like the NABE in the USA).”

A few (4) respondents raised the idea of ESSA taking a more visible policy or advocacy role, such as issuing policy position statements, or establishing a dedicated unit to link researchers with government departments:

Smaller themes included:

- Publishing & SAJE development (4 comments): flexible acceptance processes, circulating working papers, and a directory of South African economists' research interests to help identify reviewers and examiners.
- Training & skills workshops (3 comments): grant-writing workshops, data-analysis training, and proposal to completion" support for PhD candidates.
- Membership growth & operations (2 comments): multi-year membership options to reduce administrative friction with universities, and growing membership into the rest of Africa.

Willingness to Support Higher Membership Fees

Members were told ESSA's current fees (R1,100 regular, R500 student, R550 retired, rising with inflation) and asked whether they would support a fee increase to fund the new activities they had just been asked to suggest.

Would members support a fee increase to fund new activities?

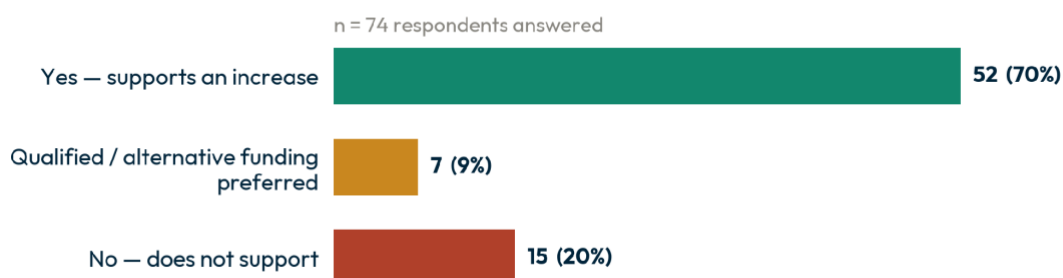


Figure 7. Overall willingness to support a fee increase

70% of members who answered (52 of 74) said yes. 20% (15) said no. A further 9% (7) gave a qualified answer, preferring that new activities be funded through sponsorship or fundraising rather than higher fees.

Among those who answered, how large an increase would members accept?

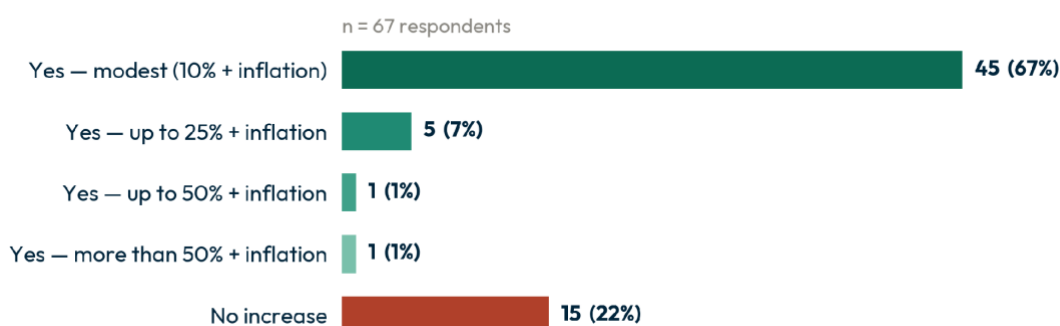


Figure 8. Size of the membership fee increase

Of the 52 respondents who support an increase, 45 (87%) capped their support at a modest 10% plus inflation. Only 7 members (13% of those in favour) would accept a larger increase.

Fee-increase support by membership category

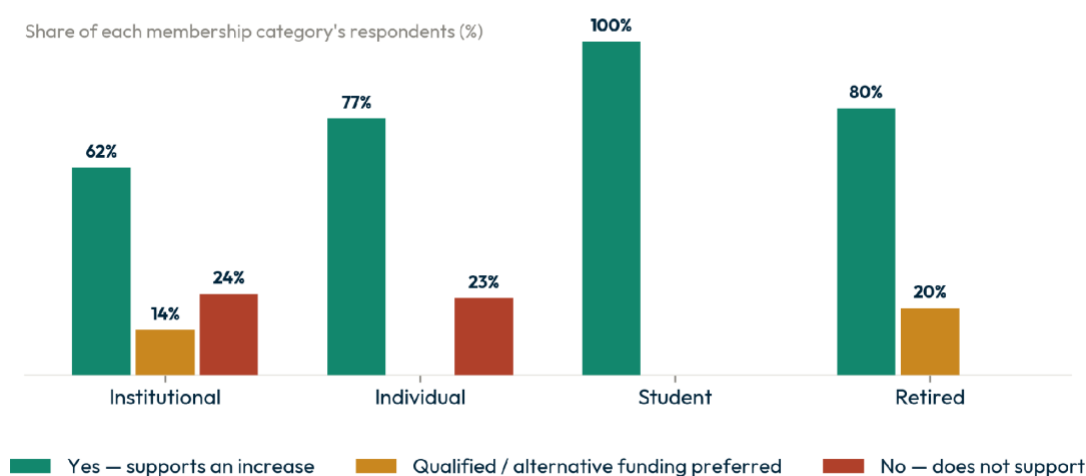


Figure 9. Fee-increase support by membership category

Interestingly, individual regular members and students are the most supportive of a fee increase (note the small sample of student respondents - 5). Institutional members, who might be expected to be less price sensitive because their fees are paid for by their institutions on their behalf, were least supportive of a fee increase (62% yes). This reflects on constrained budgets of many institutions. As one member notes, UKZN has become reluctant to pay membership fees under a new internal policy and suggests that tying membership more closely to conference-fee discounts could help retain institutional support.

A recurring debate amongst members is whether ESSA should become a professional society and play a more of institutionalised role that provides accreditation to members based on their qualifications and/or experience.

Two respondents alluded to this in their comments about possible future activities:

“[Consider] Becoming a Governing Body such as the one that Chartered Accounts have.”

“Certification of economists as a scarce [scarce] skill for employment of foreign nationals in South Africa.”

However, given that most respondents would only support an increase in current membership fees of 10%, there may be limited uptake of such a system amongst the current membership. As a benchmark, the annual membership fees for the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants in 2026 was R9 213 and there is also a once-off entrance fee for new members of R7 318. It could still be explored as a potential avenue for expansion in the future, but the focus at present seems to be on continuing to strengthen our core activities and on expanding support for PhD students and early career researchers.

Concluding Remarks

ESSA is currently breaking even, in terms of covering the annual costs of running the society, providing the existing services and activities. Except for the Executive Secretary, all leadership and Council positions are voluntary. Expansion of ESSA activities and services would thus depend on increased membership fees, or successful and sustainable external fundraising (currently usually associated with the Biennial conference and the PhD Conference).

A modest membership fee increase (broadly in line with the ~10%-plus-inflation level) was supported by 87% of respondents. A fee increase on this magnitude for individual and institutional members would provide additional income per year, which could be used to some new activities. Continuing efforts to grow the membership base, especially amongst public sector and industry economists, would also support the financial sustainability of the Society.

The most common theme in member suggestions was to continue to prioritise student and early career support, as ESSA already does through the Founders' Medal awards, the PhD Conference, and lower student membership rates and conference fees. Additional suggestions are to pilot lower-cost digital engagement (recorded talks, webinars, a stronger presence on channels younger members use) to extend the reach of ESSA's already well-regarded content between conferences and newsletters. Other suggested activities, such as providing travel support to conferences, and student bursaries, would depend on available funding.

In terms of communication, ESSA will continue prioritising direct email (Executive Secretary emails and the newsletter) as the primary channels, while building awareness of under-used resources, such as the website (which has recently been updated) and LinkedIn.