What will it take to enhance perceptions of the work of security professionals?

Security Research Initiative (SRI)

Charlotte Howell
Prof Martin Gill
Dr Janice Goldstraw-White

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Executive Summary

The aim of the research was to explore the actions needed to enhance perceptions of private security. It is based on the views of security professionals from in-house and contract positions, as well as other security experts, collected via an online survey and through one-to-one interviews.

Key findings from the survey

- Less than half (45%) of participants indicated they had a positive view of private security and less than half (46%) thought the level of 'professionalism' was improving over time.

- Only a fifth (20%) thought the general perception (in society) of private security is positive (almost half thought it is negative) and in terms of specific groups, participants thought the police, politicians and the general public would have the most negative view.

- The greatest barrier to improving perception of private security was considered to be 'a lack of interest in / recognition of the value of private security' (79%), although this was closely followed by 'actual weaknesses/limitations/poor performance that exists within private security' (75%). 'Inaccurate perceptions' of private security were considered less significant, albeit still notable (at 65%).

- Looking across the range of roles within and relating to private security, none (of those explored) were considered to be well recognised for the value of their work; and frontline security officers, guarding companies, and regulator(s) were thought to be the least recognised.

- Respondents highly valued all (24) of the specific 'actions' that we explored for addressing quality, raising recognition of the value of security, and correcting perceptions. Those rated particularly highly included:
  ⇒ Demonstrate that security leaders are as competent as other business leaders (90%)
  ⇒ Demonstrate that private security is an 'enabler' (90%)
  ⇒ Raise a better awareness of the range of work/skills across private security' (89%)
  ⇒ Demonstrate that private security does not only address/protect 'business/private' interests (89%)
  ⇒ Raise the skills sets of frontline workers (89%)
  ⇒ Promote procurement practices that prioritise obtaining good quality security products and services (88%)

- Given that differences in the perceived importance of many of the actions explored were slight, a full list is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: All actions explored ranked in order of the proportion of respondents rating each as 'important' or 'very important' to improving image

Action	%	Theme
Demonstrate that security leaders are as competent as other business leaders	90	Addressing quality
Demonstrate that private security is an 'enabler'	90	Correcting perception
Raise a better awareness of the range of work/skills across private security	89	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Demonstrate that private security does not only address/protect 'business/private' interests	89	Correcting perception
Raise the skill sets of frontline workers	89	Addressing quality
Promote procurement practices that prioritise obtaining good quality security products and services	88	Addressing quality
Highlight that private security offers a capable & affordable frontline response to a range of threats	87	Correcting perception
Demonstrate that private security professionals are principled	87	Addressing quality
Raise a better awareness of the purpose of private security	87	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Highlight that private security fills a gap in the overall resources available to protect people & places	86	Overcoming a lack of recognition
More effectively articulate the value private security offers	86	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Educate key stakeholders about just how good private security personnel are	85	Overcoming a lack of recognition
More effectively articulate how good security can improve a (client) organisation's profit margin	85	Correcting perception
Share stories on how the private security sector positively impacts people's daily lives	85	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Show that the sector is progressive and innovative	84	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Forge meaningful partnerships with the police	83	Addressing quality
Raise awareness that private security uses sophisticated technology & techniques to address key threats	83	Correcting perception
Demonstrate the sector's commitment to ethical practices	81	Correcting perception
Ensure the media has more 'good news' stories to publish	81	Correcting perception
Ensure that all segments of the security sector speak with a united voice	79	Correcting perception
Tailor messaging to different audiences	78	Correcting perception
Develop a sector-wide public relations campaign	75	Correcting perception
Introduce more stringent regulation	73	Addressing quality
Publicise initiatives involving security personnel that support good causes	70	Correcting perception

Key findings from the interviews

Where are we with 'image'?

- Interviewees generally felt that, while image of private security has improved over time, it remains a problem to some degree. Some thought there was at least as much ground still to gain as had been achieved so far. They felt images such as 'bouncers', 'guards' and 'gates' persist, which do not generally garner respect and certainly do not capture the breadth of the work of frontline security, nor the many other aspects and roles within private security, nor the collective value of private security.

The positives that should be highlighted

- Many interviewees talked about the role private security plays in keeping people safe, and the key role played in managing risks by preventing and responding to incidents.

- While private security may 'shine' in a crisis, the positives are not in fact rare, but are everyday occurrences, which enable organisations to operate.

- Specific skills that private security offer were also flagged as key strengths, not least, customer service, conflict management and counter terrorism awareness.

- Interviewees also noted several positives to highlight in order to attract people to a career in security, namely, that it offers opportunities for people with a range of skills and experience, can be varied and interesting, and that there is considerable satisfaction to be gained from keeping people and places safe.

How is private security different or unique?

- Interviewees highlighted the unique role that private security plays in providing a different, and often a first response, to incidents, and one that focuses on helping people. They noted that they respond quickly and provide an essential resource by filling a gap that would otherwise exist, given the limitation of public resources. That they offer a visible presence and are adaptable to different sectors and requirements bolsters their effectiveness. Further, the technology used as part of private security provision was considered a key differentiator and a way to draw interest in their work.

Why is there a problem with image?

- At a conceptual level, interviewees noted that it is difficult to demonstrate the value of security and that this inhibits the extent to which security can be viewed positively (even when it is good). They highlighted that security is seen as a 'cost' where success equates to 'nothing' bad happening, but when no problems are occurring, it leads to questions as to whether the level of security in place is actually needed. This can

cause security to slide down the list of priorities within an organisation, and only garner attention when things go wrong.

- At a practical level, interviewees noted two stand out problems:
  ⇒ The first, was that the quality of individuals working in frontline roles is damaging to the perception of security. Aspects such as poor recruitment practices, lack of training, lack of skills (including poor communication skills), lack of career path, and lack of action, and also conversely heavy handedness, all contributed to the perception that security is low skilled, and consequently does not attract high calibre individuals and is not considered a 'profession'. There was concern that at times the quality of frontline workers falls below the minimum required standard (i.e. that should be present in order to have obtained a licence). There was also a sense, that a lack of distinction is made between different types of frontline roles (for example, the different skills and training for nightclub door supervisors as opposed to security officers protecting a supermarket). Further, it was highlighted that the perception of frontline roles as being low skilled did not always match the actual expectations and responsibilities conferred on those individuals, who frequently work in difficult environments (often dealing with abuse and violence) and play a critical role in keeping people and places safe from both minor and major (and potentially catastrophic) incidents.

  ⇒ The second, was the nature of how private security officers are procured, and particularly the tendency for some organisations to want to buy 'cheap' because they cannot tell the difference between the good and the bad, undervalue security, or have a limited understanding of what they need. It was observed that there are always some security supplier companies willing to cut corners to offer the service at a lower cost, which perpetuates poor quality provision, and consequently a poor perception of security.

The actions needed to improve image
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, given both the key survey and interview findings detailed above, interviewees felt there was a need to make real improvements to the standard of frontline security. Here, training was considered to be the main solution – not only tightening control of the process to ensure candidates actually reach the standard required, but also other improvements, such as increasing the length and depth, creating an 'enhanced' level, and clarifying current areas of confusion, such as appropriate techniques for physical intervention.

- Many interviewees also felt that better promotion of the value of private security would improve its image, and that coming together to promote a unified message may be powerful. Further, that there is a need to develop mechanisms for ensuring such messages reach beyond the

security community (particularly to organisations, police and the public), as well as within it.

- Interviewees also talked about the importance of leadership – that there is a need for leaders, as the ones with the power and resources at their disposal, to agree a course of action and take up the mantle for improving quality, and to promote the value of security within organisations. The need for better engagement with the police was also seen as an important part of improving image. Finally, interviewees suggested action was needed to strengthen the structures in place to prevent and take action against malpractice in order to remove the poor-quality security companies from hampering progress. Some specifically noted that introducing business licensing merits further consideration.

Concluding comment

Overall, the research demonstrates that the perception of private security continues to pose a challenge. There is no simple solution to the issue, indeed the many actions explored within the research for improving the image were all considered important, highlighting the complexity of the challenge. Nonetheless, they also shine a light on what needs to happen. We have also seen that there is much to be proud of, but that much of this goes unrecognised. Clearly, tackling the weak points in the quality of security delivered is a prerequisite to enhancing perception, but this should not stand in the way of, nor undermine the need for security personnel to say why the work they do is valuable. A law-abiding society, an overburdened police service, and a thriving commercial sector depend on it.

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Section 1.   Introduction

1.1   The perception of private security has long been lamented, one scholarly paper[1] referred to it is a 'tainted trade', and stereotypes abound reflected in images of men in ill-fitting uniforms, sometimes appearing 'macho', and often seen as hapless. These negative perceptions are fuelled when, for example, in the UK we learn that serious offenders like Gavin Plumb, who was sentenced on 12th July 2024, to life in imprisonment for incitement to murder (and encouraging or assisting both kidnap and rape of a celebrity), was employed as a 'security guard'.[2] Furthermore, while the security regulator pursues malpractice, its reports highlight abuses,[3] which are deemed more newsworthy than successes.

1.2   For those in the know, it is easy, to counter these arguments, and there is a growing body of evidence of the professionalisation of security, albeit too often this remains under the public, and for that matter, the government radar. For instance, as one previous SRI report noted[4], there may be little surprise that most employees of the security sector never intended to work in security and often end up in security by chance. However, it may be surprising to learn that these employees remain in security because of the interesting and varied work; the enticing career prospects; the enjoyment of undertaking work that they consider worthwhile; and – for senior levels at least - the good pay. Indeed, this latter point is important, the image of security is often forged on impressions of those on the frontline with many unaware that professionalism and expertise are high across diverse roles and levels.

1.3   Similarly, there may be little surprise that the public has not seen security officers as essential, not even during the pandemic. One survey reported that the role of the security officer was ranked 9th out of 10 essential services, just ahead of traffic wardens.[5] Yet, more recent research conducted for the Security Industry Authority (SIA)[6] found that: 6 in 10 members of the public said they trust security professionals; a similar proportion believed security professionals undertake their duties competently and effectively, and act with integrity; and 7 in 10 that

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[1] Thumala, A., Goold, B. & Loader, I. (2011) 'A tainted trade? Moral ambivalence and legitimation work in the private security industry', *British Journal of Sociology*, 62:2, p283-303.
[2] https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/R-v-Gavin-Plumb-sentencing-remarks-final-version.pdf. The are other examples, for example, a security guard in Portland USA found guilty of second degree murder: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=DouSndVI4gI.
[3] See, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sia-enforcement-report#full-publication-update-history
[4] 'Understanding the influences on security as a career/job choice' (2020) https://www.perpetuityresearch.com/2020/11/03/understanding-influences-on-security-as-a-career-job-choice-what-those-working-in-the-security-sector-think/
[5] https://www.bsia.co.uk/blogs/131/perception-of-security-officers-as-an-essential-role-ranked-slightly-ahead-of-traffic-wardens-/. 4th December 2021.
[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/6-in-10-uk-adults-have-trust-and-confidence-in-private-security-professionals, 31st January 2024.

security professionals are necessary to maintain order and improve public safety. Moreover:

> *Most felt safer due to a private security presence in various settings such as music concerts, sporting events, banks, hospitals, night-time economy venues and retail premises.*

1.4 In previous SRI projects we have documented, in different ways, the value and benefits of security[7]; they are many and varied. The essential work the sector does has a fundamental role to play in protecting the public, and the national infrastructure and reducing the burden on the police. Policing society as effectively would be impossible without the contribution of the security sector.

1.5 There are multiple consequences of such a tarnished image which include; difficulties in attracting the right number of capable recruits at different levels; not being engaged as partners in initiatives to protect society, even when the prima facie case would indicate that it is to the public detriment not to do so; being undervalued by procurers who, in not seeing the value of good over poor security choose the cheapest option; and heads of security being seen as having less status than other professionals in the corporate hierarchy, to name but a few.

1.6 The key question is then, what does it take to change the perceptions of a sector? The research sought to understand:

- What are the ways to improving image that have been employed by other sectors, and would these approaches help security?
- What initiatives or activities are already being adopted within private security to address image?
- What types of security professionals are most and least appreciated?
- What do security professionals consider to be their Achilles' heel and why?
- What are the positives and what is distinct about the work of security professionals?
- What needs to change to have the most positive impact on perceptions of the work of private security?

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[7] For example, 'Demonstrating the value of Security' (2007); 'Organisational perspectives on the value of security' (2008); 'The Broader benefits of Security' (2015) - https://www.perpetuityresearch.com/category/publications/security-research-initiative-publications/

Section 2.   Thinking about image

Why image matters

2.1   There is a wealth of research which seeks to understand how images of such diverse entities as individuals, organisations, sectors and countries are formed and then transformed.[8] Managing a sector's image is about controlling the perceptions of different stakeholders so they are positive rather than negative.[9] And research in a range of environments – public, private and voluntary - has identified a myriad of benefits which have a relevance and application to the security sector. A review of a diverse range of literature[10] reveals different types of benefits to an industry that enjoys a positive image, for example it can:

- instil public trust
- improve talent acquisition
- render it more attractive to inward investment
- make it easier to differentiate from sectors that have a poor image
- facilitate the opportunity for more public support in a crisis
- encourage trade, including more lucrative business locally, nationally and internationally
- elevate awareness of its contribution to society encouraging more (key) stakeholders to engage
- operate with higher levels of public support
- enable the formation of valuable partnerships
- reduce regulatory interest and provide for more freedom to operate

2.2   This list is illustrative rather than definitive. Logically, an adverse image risks attracting the worst consequences in each of these (and potentially other) cases.

Examples of the value of image

2.3   The military has long recognised that taking control of its image is important in ensuring its actions receive as much support as is possible, but crucially in avoiding adversaries doing so for their nefarious aims.[11] Similarly, the automotive industry has shifted its focus towards producing more environmentally friendly vehicles, such as electric cars and hybrids. In a different way it was this industry that used security measures to

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[8] For example, there is a well-established *Journal of Public Relations Research* published by Taylor and Francis (https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/hprr20) and numerous books.
[9] Lysychkina, I. (2017) **The Image of Security Sector Agencies as a Strategic Communication Tool**. Connections. *The Quarterly Journal* (English ed.), 07, Vol.16 (3), p.5-22.
[10] For example, Reis, I, Sousa, M. and Dionisio, E. (2021) Employer Branding as a Talent Management Tool: A Systematic Literature Revision. *Sustainability* 2021, *13*(19), 10698; https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910698.
[11] Holtzhausen, D and Zerfas, A. (2014) (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*. New York: Routledge.

improve its image. In response to a high number of car thefts different security measures were included at the manufacturing stage so vehicles were harder to steal, and this became a key part of the sales strategy; security was directly linked to improving sales and profits.[12]

2.4   In a different way the hospitality sector has, in response to growing concerns about obesity and unhealthy eating habits made changes to menus including offering healthier options and providing calorie information. In the energy industry the shift towards renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydro power is evidence of a commitment to reducing the impact on the environment and show support for sustainability.

2.5   It is of course common sense and intuitively obvious that a positive image is not just conducive to good business but an essential requirement of it. What is perhaps more of an issue is understanding the specific characteristics of negative images in a sector and the remedies to them.

Responding to a negative image

2.6   There is a range of approaches that sectors can take in order to rectify a negative image. As with any strategy the starting points are to be clear on the aims and purpose and the target audience and then measuring the results as a basis for learning and improving. The following, which have a particular relevance to security, merit particular consideration.

Ensure a unified message: all stakeholders (companies, associations, and key players) speaking with a unified voice allows industries to shape policy directions more effectively while ensuring that decision-makers receive consistent information[13] regarding sector challenges and needs[14].

Clarify the value proposition: defining what the sector stands for, its value to society, and how and why this is distinct.[15] The process of clarifying a value proposition represents a strategic initiative that can transform how industries, sectors, and professions are perceived by stakeholders, enabling them to differentiate themselves in increasingly competitive marketplaces.

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[12] Farrell, G, Tseloni, A, Tilley, N. (2011) The Effectiveness of Vehicle Security Devices and their Role in the Crime Drop. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Volume 11. No. 1. Pp21-35.

[13] A different interpretation of this point is the need within sectors to effectively communicate with clients and the public in a timely, ethical and competent way, and this includes communicating some matters (in banking and healthcare for example) securely. Indeed, poor communication in the wake of security breaches can be a major contributor to tarnishing the image of companies and sectors, see for example: Kuipers, S and Schonheit, M. (2021) Data Breaches and Effective Crisis Communication: A Comparative Analysis of Corporate Reputational Crises, Corporate Reputation Review 25 (3):1-22, DOI:10.1057/s41299-021-00121-9.

[14] For an example from another sector, see: Awasthi, A.K. and Kumar, S. (2024) 'Unified advocacy for social innovation: Challenges, opportunities, and strategic guidance', *World Economic Forum Global Agenda Series*, 8(2), pp. 116-132.

[15] One discussion of value that has a broader relevance is: Payne, A. and Frow, P. (2014) 'Developing superior value propositions: a strategic marketing imperative', Journal of Service Management, 25(2), pp. 213-227. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-01-2014-0036.

Focus on professionalisation and training: the process of developing recognised competence and ethical standards, structured training, and ongoing continuous professional development are the cornerstone of enhancing trust and building credibility.[16]

Recognise the contribution of technology: key to modernising the image and creating efficiencies. In this area AI is revolutionising practice and this extends to a range of sectors and industries.[17]

Collaborations: Building collaborations with other sectors and industries can foster a more positive image, albeit understanding the benefits and drawbacks of different forms of working with others, and what needs to be in place to make these work effectively are key.[18]

Understand the challenges: Showing transparency on both successes and challenges can help build trust. By openly sharing successes and challenges, sectors can foster accountability, enhance stakeholder engagement, and improve public perception.[19]

Effective communication: When properly implemented, strategic communication practices can build trust, foster positive relationships with stakeholders, and improve overall perception in the public eye. The key it seems is to create meaningful connections with stakeholders, addressing their concerns, and demonstrating professional competence and integrity.[20]

Thought leadership: involves the creation and dissemination of original and expert insights that address industry challenges while demonstrating deep knowledge and forward-thinking approaches. When done well it helps position a sector as trustworthy, innovative, and committed to advancing knowledge rather than merely promoting services or products. [21]

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[16] For a discussion of how this can be undertaken and its impact, see this example from the teaching sector: Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. *Learning Policy Institute*. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_REPORT.pdf

[17] See for example, the impact of AI on urban planning, Tahir, F. (2025) The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Urban Transportation for Smart City Development and Sustainable Transportation Planning, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.33756.09607

[18] Howell, C. Gill, M. and Goldstraw-White, J. (2024) Optimising Joint Working between the Police and Private Security, Perpetuity Research. https://www.perpetuityresearch.com/2024/11/14/optimising-joint-working-between-the-police-and-private-security/; Goldstraw-White, J. Gill, M. and Button, M. (2024) *Enhancing police resources in the fight against economic crime cost effectively: harnessing the potential of the private and not-for-profit.* Perpetuity Research: Report for Dawes Trust.

[19] For an example of the value of transparency in the extraction industry, see: EITI (2022). *Independent Evaluation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative*. Available at: https://www.eiti.org (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

[20] See, for a discussion in the school environment: Eger, L., Egerová, D. and Pisoňová, M. (2018). Assessment of School Image. CEPS Journal, 8(2), pp.97-122; and in healthcare advice is offered that has a more general application, Strategies for Effective Communication in Health Care. (2024). Tulane University School of Public Health. Available at: https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/communication-in-healthcare/. For a different take, see Duckwitz, A. and Zabel, C. (2024) 'For Good's Sake: Strategic Social Media Influencer Communication'. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *18*(4), 291–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2024.2341232.

[21] Academia has been the focus of thought leadership, with an interesting if not altogether speedy trend of moving beyond academic papers, aimed at academics, to outputs more aligned to informing practice,

Emphasise ethical approaches: The integration of ethical frameworks into operational practices, for example by encompassing transparency and meaningfully showing social responsibility, help build stronger emotional connections and trust with stakeholders. As such this has become a cornerstone for sectors seeking to enhance their public and professional credibility.[22]

Show readiness for a crisis: to security professionals this is very much home territory and involves at least risk identification, resilience building, internal and external coordination, but the key is to have the essential components of crisis readiness in place. Given the remit of the sector this provides an enormous opportunity for security professionals to show value.[23]

Generating goodwill: the key is to undertake substantive actions that address societal needs while aligning with core industry functions; in essence showing commitment to people beyond profit, and supporting public causes related to the sector's work.[24]

Storytelling: a potentially transformative tool that can help to differentiate the good from the bad, foster engagement, and build consumer trust by creating memorable/emotional connections with audiences. It can lead to increased consumer loyalty and long-term relationships.[25]

Stay close to key public values: showing that the sector is progressive and responsive by highlighting a commitment to issues such as trust, integrity,

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see as an example: University of Liverpool (2024) *Thought leadership and opinion - Faculty of Science and Engineering*. Available at: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/science-and-engineering/our-research/thought-leadership/.   For an interesting discussion on the role and impact of both internal and external thought leaders on an organisational (as opposed to sector) growth, see: Brady, U., Kuria, K., & Bell, R. L. (2025). Thought Leadership on the Revolutionary Developments in Organizations. *American Journal of Management*, *25*(1). https://doi.org/10.33423/ajm.v25i1.7530.

[22] The marketing sector has sought to promote ethical approaches, not least with social media, see, Islam, S. & Rahman, Z. (2016). The Role of Ethical Marketing Issues in Consumer-Brand Relationships in Social Media Marketing. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, 10(1), pp. 45-56. Available at: https://www.ejbmr.org/index.php/ejbmr/article/view/2565; adding transparency to the supply chain has been seen as commercially beneficial, see, Villena, V.H. & Gioia, D.A. (2020). Ethics in Supply Chains: An Illustrated Survey. *Oxford Research Archive*, [Online]. Available at: https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8f8d889a-4eb6-4bb1-a0a4-4428d635ac2b/files/r8c97kq829; in a different way dData management and privacy are often key issues here, for a recent discussion on the key principles, in this case the finance sector, see: UK Finance (2025) *Ethical Use of Customer Data in a Digital Economy*. London: UK Finance.

[23] For evidence of the benefits of good crisis management in the area of cyber security see: Ruohonen, J. & Hjerppe, K. (2022). GDPR Compliance in Data Breach Crises. *Journal of Cybersecurity*, 15(3), 45–67; and for a discussion of the importance in the chemical industry, see, CHEMTREC (2023) 'One third of companies not ready for chemical emergency', *Chemical Industry Journal*. Available at: https://www.chemicalindustryjournal.co.uk/one-third-of-companies-not-ready-for-chemical-emergency

[24] The legal profession facing allegations of excessive charge rates set about conducting pro bono work where the same standards of service are ensured, see, University of Open (2022) 'Exploring what pro bono means to lawyers in England and Wales?', *Open Research Online*. Available at: https://oro.open.ac.uk/73320/3/73320.pdf; The Higher Education sector has long recognised the benefits of the concept of the "civic university", where institutions support local communities by sharing expertise and attracting philanthropic funds, see: UPP Foundation (2024) 'Role of university philanthropy to support places'. Available at: https://upp-foundation.org/essay/role-of-university-philanthropy-to-support-places/.

[25] For a discussion see, Thounaojam, Y. (2025) 'The Role of Storytelling in Brand Building', *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 6(2), pp. 3127-3142.

transparency, and social responsibility are key. The emphasis is on being effective in developing approaches such as: enforcing ethical standards, promoting strategies such as whistleblowing, continuing professional development (CPD), and recognising the public good over commercial interests.[26]

2.7   There is now a wealth of evidence that the security sector is effective at what it does. Any review of chapters in the *Handbook of Security*,[27] or articles published in the leading scholarly outlet, the *Security Journal*,[28] provide examples of the effectiveness of different security measures in different environments. The much-quoted authoritative source for such evidence can be found in a study that looked to explain the key factors behind the 'prolonged and unexpected crime drop in most high-income countries from the 1990s' onwards which found the adoption of physical security measures to be key. The authors concluded: 'The findings are unambiguous … security reduces risks'.[29]

2.8   The authors of this article, Nick Tilley and Graham Farrell are in good company in noting that there are a variety of factors that contribute to good security, beyond effectiveness. Measures need to be, for example, specified correctly, be designed to be fit for purpose, be effectively implemented, implemented proportionately to risk and not used oppressively, then they need to be effectively managed.

2.9   Indeed, that is in part the issue, it is not that security measures have not proved valuable, they have. But the real problem appears to rest in that sometimes they have not proved effective, sometimes security fails, and when it does it is much more newsworthy than the majority of occasions when it works well. After all, there is nothing especially fascinating for a public audience (albeit vital for security sector clients) in security being effective and preventing anything from happening.

2.10   One other point worthy of note here is that the factors that contribute to security work being seen by some as having a negative image will to some extent vary by stakeholder. For example, amongst the concerns the police service have is the commercial imperative of security suppliers

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[26] For an interesting example of how civil servants can transform stereotypes of their role, see, Döring, M. & Willems, J., 2020. Processing stereotypes: professionalism confirmed or disconfirmed by sector affiliation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(4), pp. 678-695. Available at: https://research.wu.ac.at/ws/files/16996026/Processing%20stereotypes%20professionalism%20confirmed%20or%20disconfirmed%20by%20sector%20affiliation.pdf; in a different way the fashion industry has responded to public demand for sustainability by adopting eco-friendly practices such as ethical sourcing, recycling programs, and transparency in supply chains, for a more general discussion see: Exclaimer (2024). *Aligning brand values with customer expectations*. Available at: https://exclaimer.com/blog/aligning-brand-values-with-customer-expectations/.
[27] Gill, M. (2022) (ed) *The Handbook of Security*, Third Edition. London: Palgrave.
[28] http://www.palgrave.com/gp/journal/41284.
[29] Tilley, N. and Farrell, G. (2022) Security and International Crime Drops. In Gill, M *Handbook of Security*, third edition.

and the concern that they will exploit public sector's workers' lack of business acumen and pursue profit at the expense of the public good.[30]

2.11   A key driver for this work then is to better understand precisely what the image of the security sector is perceived to be by those who work in and/or with it. And to identify their understanding of the characteristics and drivers of that image. This then lends credence to understanding the roots to providing remedies, or more accurately, remedies that are likely to work.

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[30] Gill, M. (2015) Senior Police Officers' Perspectives on Private Security: Sceptics, Pragmatists and Embracers. *Policing and Society*. 25(3): 276-293. DOI:10.1080/10439463.2013.865736; White, A. and Gill, M (2013) The Transformation of Policing: From Ratios to Rationalities. *British Journal of Criminology*. 53, 1, January, pp. 74-93.

Section 3.   How security professionals believe the sector is seen: a survey

The sample

3.1   Acknowledging that perceptions of private security may be limited by factors such as stereotypes, outdated perceptions and a lack of understanding of the true value of security, we sought to generate a better understanding of the issues that need to be tackled, and the actions needed to bring perceptions in line with reality and to create a positive image. We therefore carried out a survey of security professionals covering the following key themes:

- The current perception of private security
- How this differs among different groups and in respect of different aspects of private security
- What actions would help improve perception

3.2   The findings are based on 371 responses.[31] The majority of questions were multiple choice, some of which posed statements which respondents were invited to score to reflect their own opinion. A small number of questions invited open text responses.

3.3   In addition to the frequency responses to questions, analysis was undertaken to assess whether views differed by specific characteristics/sub-groups of respondents. Only those issues that were statistically significant are included in the discussion, evidencing a relationship between the variables (i.e. not occurring by chance). Key points are included within the main analysis and include perspectives by:

- Role
- Level of seniority
- By whether the respondent personally had a positive, negative or neutral view of private security

3.4   Overall, it was notable that there were relatively few differences (that were statistically significant) based on the respondents' role type (i.e. whether 'in-house', a 'supplier' or 'other') or by level of seniority (i.e. whether in a 'senior' level security role, an 'operative' level role or 'other' type of role). It was also notable (if unsurprising) that those that had a 'positive' view of private security tended to also be positive in other ways (and vice versa) such as believing security is improving, being more positive about the general perception of private security, and more highly valuing the actions and messages explored within the survey for improving image.

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[31] The number of responses to each question varies as some respondents dropped out part way through and some chose not to answer certain questions.

Background

3.5 The majority of respondents had been working in the security sector long-term – 79% (n=291) for more than 10 years. The sectors most commonly worked in (respondents could tick all that apply) were Property (37%, n=139), Public Admin, Other Services and Government (32%, n=120), Retail (29%, n=108) and Leisure and the Night-time Economy (25%, n=92). Over three quarters of respondents worked for organisations based in the UK (78%, n=265). Full breakdowns for length of time working in security, sector and country are provided in Appendix 2 (Table 2, 3 and 4 respectively).

3.6 Over half of the respondents (57%, n=211) worked for a supplier; while over a quarter (29%, n=107) indicated they worked for a buyer/customer (in-house).

3.7 The remaining respondents were other security experts (e.g. academic, regulator, security association etc) at 12% (n=43) of respondents, or another interested party linked to security at 3% (n=10). Table 2 displays these roles.

Table 2: Breakdown of respondents by role % (n=371)

Role	Type	% , N	Total
Supplier	Director, Manager, Consultant	30%, n=110	57%, n=211
	Contracted operative	27%, n=101	
Buyer/ Customer	Security Lead/Manager	13%, n=48	29%, n=107
	Intermediary	1%, n=5	
	In-house operative	15%, n=54	
Other	Other security expert	12%, n=43	14%, n=53
	Other interested party	3%, n=10	

General Perception

3.8 We asked participants a number of questions to understand how they themselves view private security and how they believe it is viewed.

3.9 Strikingly, less than half (45%, n=167) of the participants indicated they had a positive or very positive view of private security; the rest were fairly evenly split between a negative view (29%, n=107 negative or very negative) and a neutral view (25%, n=94). This is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Respondents' perception of private security % (n=369)
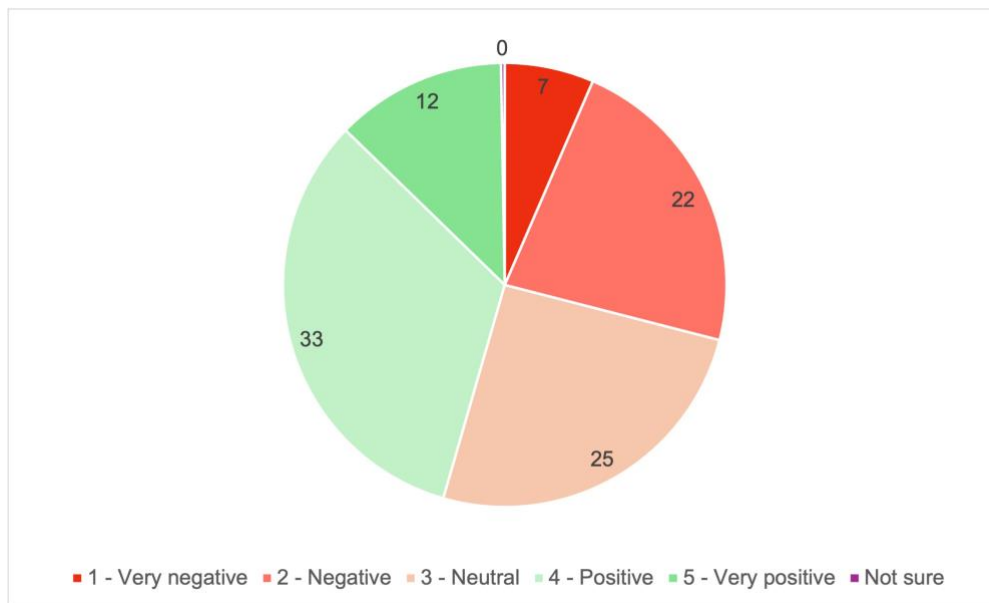
3.10 When asked their view on whether the level of 'professionalism' of private security is changing over time, opinions were somewhat mixed – with less than half (46%, n=168) indicating it is improving, but 39% (n=143) indicating it is worsening; 15% (n=57) thought it was staying roughly the same. This is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Respondents' perception of whether the 'professionalism' of private security is changing over time % (n=369)
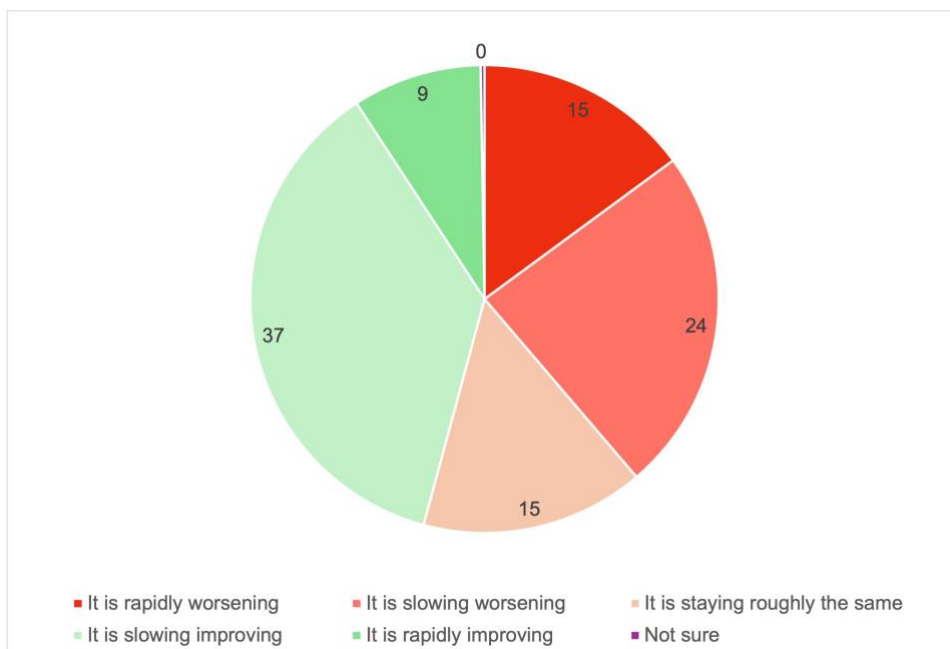
3.11 Notably those in a more junior 'operative' role were more inclined to view professionalism as worsening (45%) than those in a more 'senior' role (33%). Perhaps unsurprising, respondents that held a 'positive' view of private security, were much more likely to believe professionalism is

improving (74%), than those with a 'neutral' (32%) or 'negative' (13%) view.

3.12 Almost half (49%, n=183) of respondents thought that the general perception (in society) of the private security sector is negative or very negative. Close to a third (29%, n=109) thought it is neutral, and only a fifth (20%, n=74) thought it is positive or very positive. Figure 3 displays the results.

Figure 3: Respondents' view of the 'general' perception of private security % (n=370)
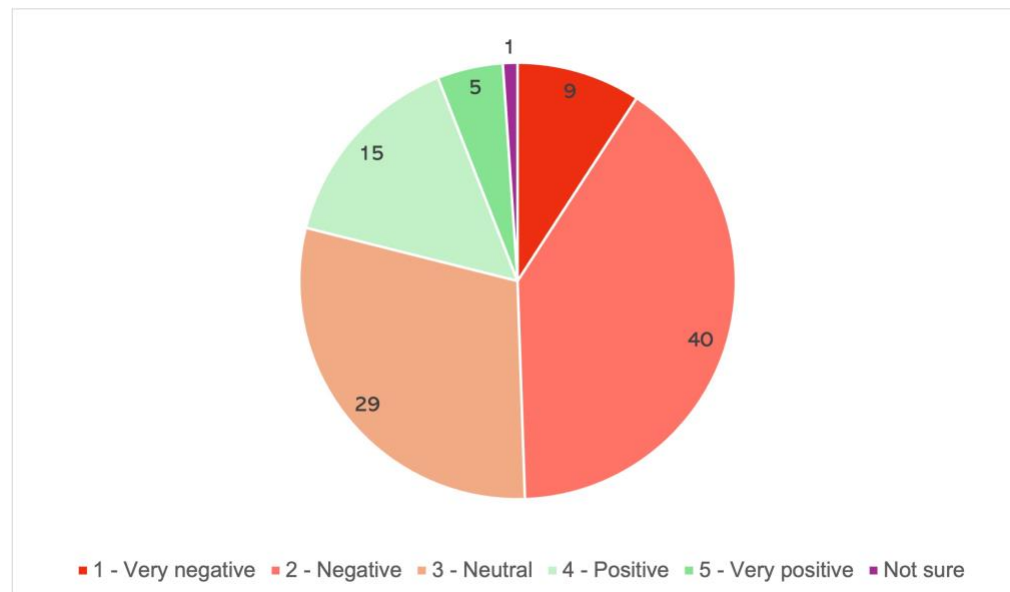
3.13 Respondents that personally held a 'negative' view of private security were much more likely to believe the general perception was also negative (79%) than those with a 'neutral' view (61%) or those with a 'positive' view (24%) of private security.

3.14 Views were however, very evenly split as to whether and how the general perception may be changing over time; 34% (n=126) thought general perception was worsening, but the same (34%, n=125) thought general perception was improving. Almost as many (31%, n=115) thought it was staying roughly the same. The breakdown is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Respondents' view on how the 'general' perception of private security is changing over time % (n=368)
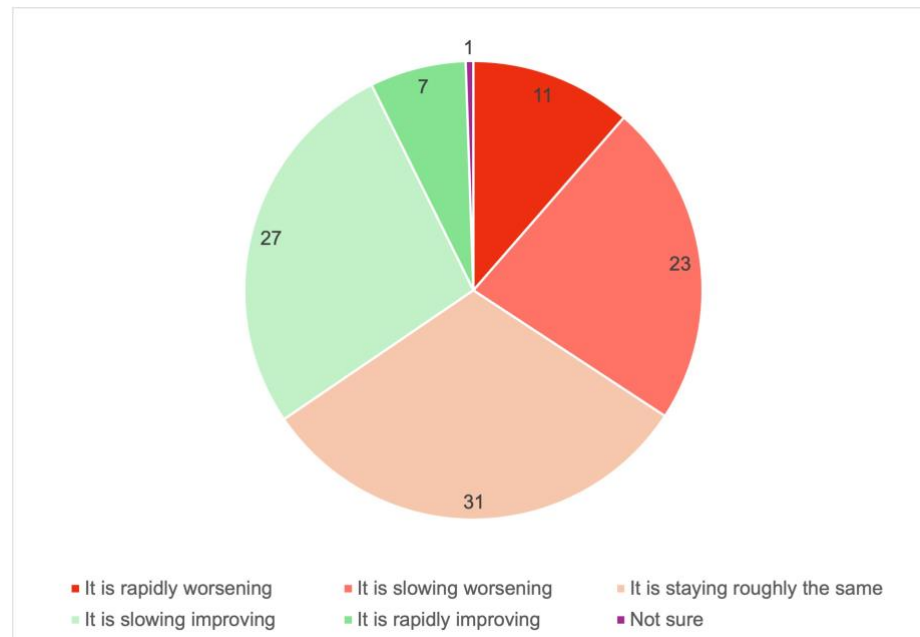
3.15 Notably, respondents working in an 'in-house' role were a bit more positive that the general perception is improving (40%) than those in a 'supplier' (32%) or 'other' role (28%). Respondents that held a 'positive' view of private security were much more likely to believe that the general perception is improving (59%) than those with a 'neutral' view (23%) or 'negative' view (5%).

3.16 Respondents were also asked how accurate they thought the general perception of private security is, compared with the reality on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very 'far' from reality and 5 means very 'close'. They tended more towards the view that perception is accurate, with 41% selecting '4' or '5', compared with 28% selecting '1' or '2'. That said, close to a third (31%) rated the accuracy of perception neutrally (selecting a '3'). The results are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Respondents' view on how accurate the general perception of private security is % (n=366)
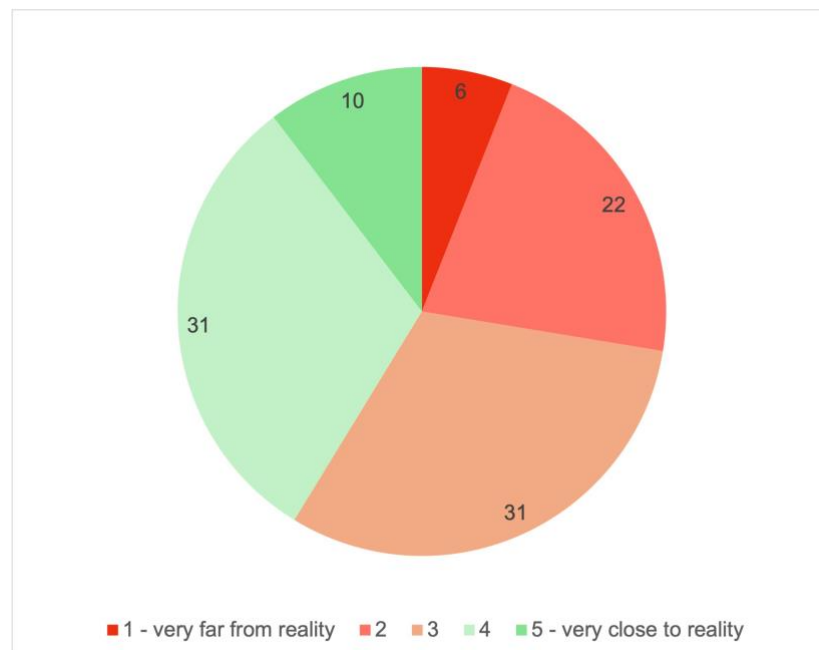
Perceptions among different groups

3.17   The survey explored whether respondents felt that specific groups may view private security positively, negatively or neutrally, in order to understand how views may differ.

3.18   Perhaps unsurprisingly 'senior security professionals' were the group that respondents thought were most likely to have a **positive** view of security (55%, n=195 of respondents thought they would view private security positively or very positively). Meanwhile only a third (34%, n=122) of respondents thought that 'frontline security professionals' would have a positive view.

3.19   Respondents believed that professionals that 'procure cyber security services' for an organisation were more likely to have a positive view of private security (52%, n=185) than those that 'procure installers/integrators' (40%, n=143) and those that 'procure guarding services' (37%, n=135).

3.20   Police, politicians and the general public were thought to be the groups with the most **negative** view of security. Just over half of respondents thought 'lower ranked police officers' would have a negative view of private security (52%, n=187 of respondents thought they would have a negative or very negative view).[32] Close to half of the respondents thought that 'politicians' (48%, n=172) and the 'general public' (47%, n=172) would have a negative view. Two fifths of respondents (41%,

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[32] Respondents in more 'senior' roles more commonly thought lower ranked police officers have a negative view (57%) than those in an 'operative' level role (43%).

n=149) thought that 'senior police officers' would have a negative view of private security, although almost as many thought they would have a **neutral** view (39%, n=141).

3.21 The full results are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Respondents' view on how different groups perceive private security % (n=354-363)
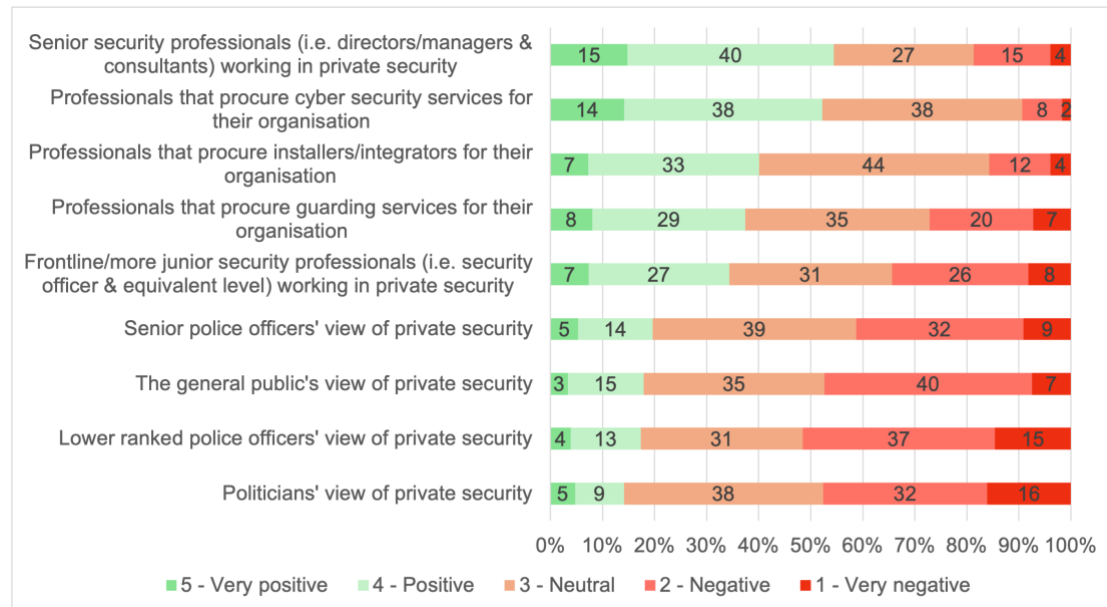
Barriers to improving perception

3.22 Respondents were also asked to what extent they consider three key issues to form a barrier to improving perception of private security.

3.23 The greatest barrier was considered to be 'a lack of interest in / recognition of (the value of) private security' (almost four fifths of respondents – 79%, n=272 considered this to be a barrier or a major barrier).

3.24 This was closely followed by 'actual weaknesses/limitations/poor performance that exists within private security' (75%, n=256).

3.25 Less, although still a considerable proportion of respondents (65%, n=227) thought that 'inaccurate perceptions of private security' posed a barrier or major barrier.

3.26 The results are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Barriers to improving the image of private security % (n=341-347)

Barrier	5 - A major barrier	4	3 - Neutral	2	1 - Not a barrier at all
Lack of interest in / recognition of (the value of) private security	38	41	12	6	3
Actual weaknesses/limitations/poor performance that exists within private security	37	38	19	5	1
Inaccurate perceptions of private security	25	40	23	7	5
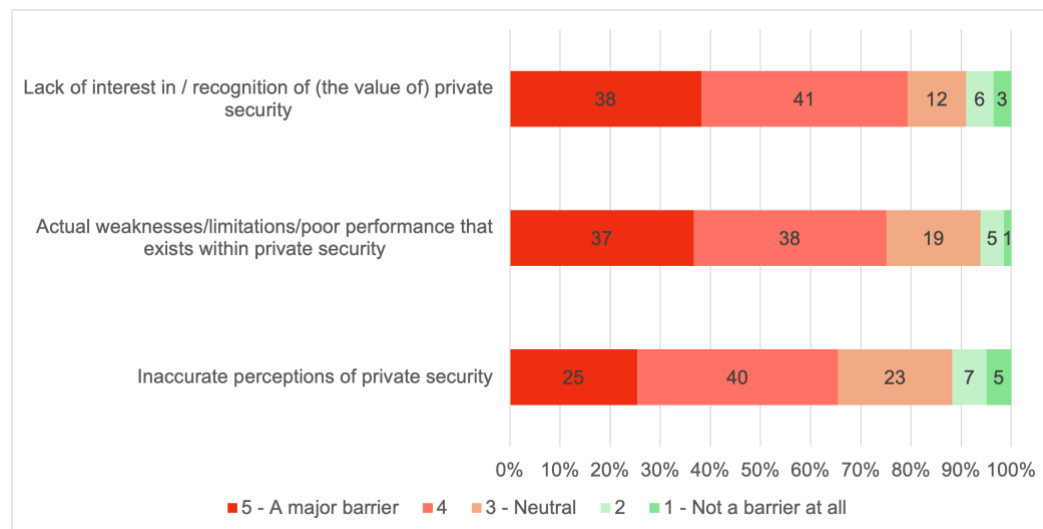
Recognition given to different contributors within and relating to private security

3.27 Respondents were asked the extent to which they felt the **value/importance of the work** of different contributors within and relating to the private security sector **is recognised by society generally**.

3.28 Generally speaking, none of the groups explored were considered to be well recognised for the value of their work, in the respect that for each, less than half of respondents thought they were 'recognised' or 'very much recognised'. Generally then, there is a view that 'security' is undervalued.

3.29 Respondents thought that those working in a related role, were better **recognised** than those working directly within private security; 47% of respondents (n=160) thought that 'cyber security professionals' were recognised or very much recognised, and 41% (n=138) thought the same of 'police officers'.

3.30 Respondents were more **ambivalent** in respect of 'installers/integrators' and 'security consultants' with a notable proportion indicating a **neutral** rating (47%, n=158 and 40%, n=136 respectively).

3.31 For 'security associations and professional bodies' (*which we described to respondents as those that focus on supporting security professionals and developing standards*) views were very **evenly split** between believing they are recognised (33%), a neutral view (34%) and believing they are not recognised (33%).

3.32   The groups that respondents thought were the **least recognised** for their contribution (i.e. they were rated as 'not recognised' or 'not recognised at all') were:

- Frontline security officers (54%, n=185)
- Guarding companies (46%, n=155)
- Regulator(s) (43%, n=83)[33]

3.33   This was followed by 'in-house security departments' at 37% (n=125); however, almost as many - 36% (n=123) rated their level of recognition as 'neutral'.

3.34   A full breakdown is provided in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Respondents views on the level of recognition given to the work of different contributors % (n=336-343)
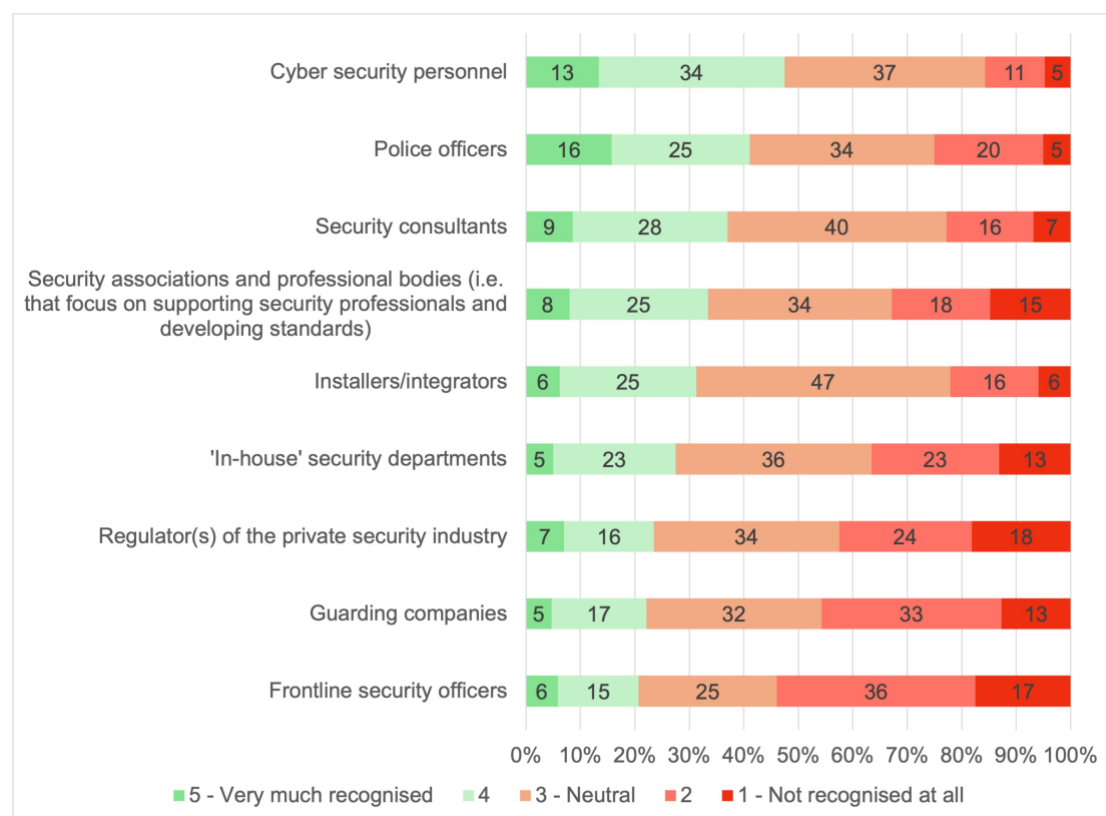
Addressing quality

3.35   Respondents were asked whether a number of potential actions relating to addressing the quality of private security provided/procured would have merit in respect of meaningfully improving its image.

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[33] Respondents in more 'senior' roles were more inclined to view the regulator(s) of private security as lacking recognition (49%) than those in 'other' (39%) or in 'operative' level roles (37%).

3.36   Notably, for each 'action' explored a **large majority** of respondents (over 70%) considered it to be 'important' or 'very important' to improving image. The strength of feeling was also somewhat unusual with high proportions of respondents selecting the **very** important answer option.

3.37   The actions considered most important (i.e. most commonly rated as 'important' or 'very important') were:

- 'Demonstrate that security leaders are **as competent** as other business leaders' (90%, n=304) (of which 61% said 'very' important)
- 'Raising the **skill sets** of frontline workers' (89%, n=301) (of which 62% said 'very' important)
- 'Promote **procurement practices** that prioritise obtaining good quality security products and services' (88%, n=297) (of which 61% said 'very' important)
- 'Demonstrate that private security professionals are **principled**' (87%, n=293) (of which 55% said 'very' important)

3.38   As noted above, the other actions explored also received considerable support:

- 'Forge meaningful **partnerships** with the police' (83%, n=274)
- 'Introduce more stringent **regulation**' (73%, n=245)

3.39   Notably, respondents working in an 'in-house' or an 'other' role were more supportive of introducing more stringent regulation (for both role types 81% rated this as important or very important) than those in a 'supplier' role (67%).

3.40   The full breakdown is provided in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Level of importance (to improving image) of actions addressing the quality of private security % (n=329-338)

Correcting perceptions

3.41   A number of actions relating to correcting inaccurate perceptions that may exist were explored.

3.42   The overall picture was similar to that above in respect of addressing quality. For each 'action' explored a **large majority** of respondents (over 70%) considered it to be 'important' or 'very important' to improving image. Once again, there were notably high proportions of respondents selecting the **very** important answer option.

3.43   The actions considered most important were those that focused on **highlighting specific benefits** that security has to offer which in the past have not been well articulated or understood:

- 'Demonstrate that private security is an '**enabler**' (i.e. allowing organisations, events and sites to operate/be successful)' – 90% (n=302) (of which 56% said 'very' important)
- 'Demonstrate that private security does not **only** address/protect 'business/private' interests (i.e. it also **protects the public**)' – 89% (n=298) (of which 57% said 'very' important)
- 'Highlight that private security offers a **capable and affordable** frontline response to a range of threats and challenges' – 87% (n=291) (of which 52% said 'very' important)

- 'More effectively articulate how good security can **improve** a (client) organisation's profit margin' – 85% (n=282) (of which 55% said 'very' important)
- 'Raise awareness that private security implements **sophisticated** products/technology/equipment/techniques to stay ahead of key threats' – 83% (n=277) (of which 46% said 'very important')

3.44   These were however closely followed by aspects that focused on the **types of communication** needed – publishing more '**good news**' stories (81%, n=269), speaking with a **united voice** across all segments of private security (79%, n=264), **tailoring** messages to different audiences (78%, n=258) and developing a **sector-wide public relations campaign** (75%, n=251) – were all considered important in improving the image of private security.

3.45   There were also two actions explored that focused on **social responsibility**. Again, both were considered important, but 'demonstrating the sector's commitment to **ethical practices**'[34] (81%, n=270) more so than 'publicising initiatives involving security personnel that **support good causes**'[35] (70%, n=235).

3.46   A full breakdown is shown in Figure 10.

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[34] Such as fair treatment of employees, environmental sustainability, and data privacy
[35] For example, charitable work, public safety campaigns etc

Figure 10: Level of importance (to improving image) of actions to correct perceptions of private security % (n=329-335)

Figure 10: Level of importance (to improving image) of actions to correct perceptions of private security % (n=329-335)
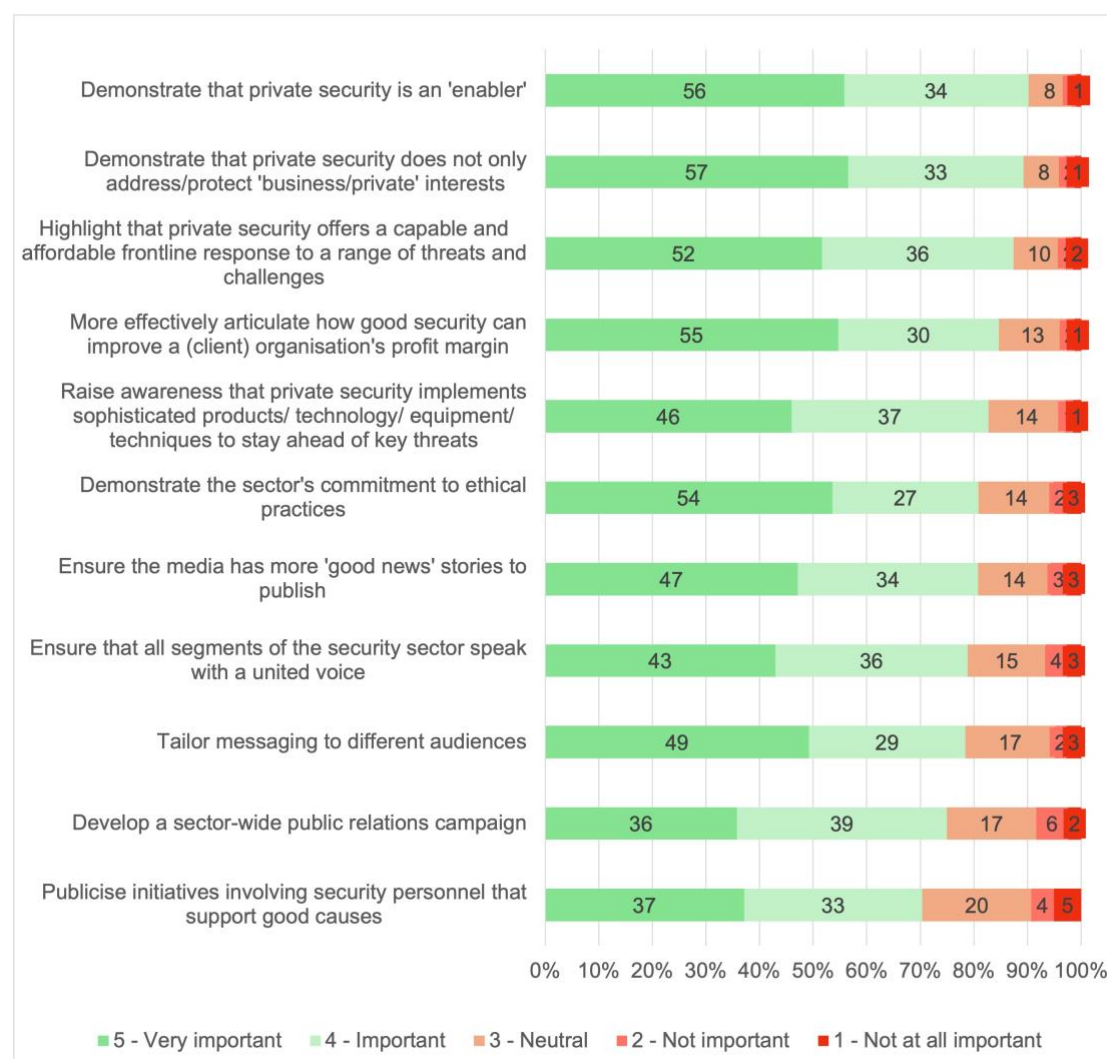
Overcoming lack of recognition

3.47 Respondents were also asked for their view on a number of actions relating to overcoming the lack of recognition of the value of private security.

3.48 Here, the **vast majority** of respondents (84% or higher) considered each 'action' explored to be 'important' or 'very important' to meaningfully improving the image of private security. And once again, there were notably high proportions of respondents selecting the **very** important answer option.

3.49 Raising a better awareness 'of the **range of work/skills** across private security (i.e. **beyond** the work of frontline officers/guards)' (89%, n=297) and 'of the **purpose** of private security' (87%, n=287) were particularly valued by respondents.

3.50 But this was very closely followed by the other aspects explored:

- 'Highlight that private security **fills a gap in the overall resources** available to protect people and places' (86%, n=285)
- 'More effectively **articulate the value** private security offers' (86%, n=284)
- 'Share stories on how the private security sector **positively impacts people**'s daily lives (i.e. keeps people safe)' (85%, n=280)
- 'Educate key stakeholders about just **how good** private security personnel are' (85%, n=278)
- 'Show that the sector is **progressive and innovative**'[36] (84%, n=271)

3.51 Figure 11 displays the full results.

Figure 11: Level of importance (to improving image) of actions to overcome a lack of recognition of private security % (n=322-332)
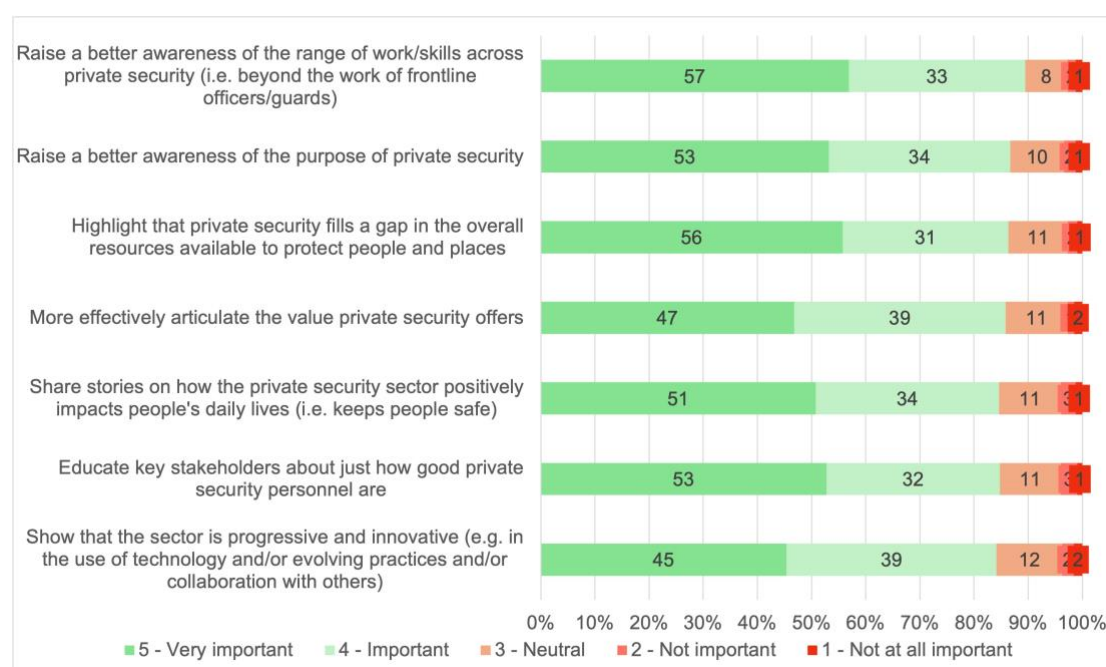
Ranking all of the actions explored

3.52 Ranking (by importance) all of the actions explored across all three of the themes described above indicates that while there is variation and some exceptions, it is generally apparent that:

- A number of the actions focused on **addressing the quality** of private security appear **higher up** the ranking;
- Many of the actions focused on overcoming a **lack of recognition** of the value of private security fall in the **middle** of the ranking;

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[36] For example, in the use of technology and/or evolving practices and/or collaboration with others.

- And many of the actions focused on **correcting perceptions** of private security appear **lower down** the ranking.

3.53 Nonetheless, it should be re-emphasised that **all** were highly valued (all were rated as important or very important by between 70% and 90% of respondents) and that the margins, particularly between the top and the middle of the ranking, are small.

3.54 This observation broadly tallies with the earlier question explored about which of these issues created the greatest barrier to improving the image of private security – where all three were thought by a majority to pose a 'barrier' or a 'major barrier'; but lack of recognition (79%) and weaknesses in quality (75%) were viewed as more of a barrier than inaccurate perceptions (65%).

3.55 While the actions appearing higher up the ranking may indicate the top priority areas for future activity to tackle the image of security, the fact that respondents did not single out a particular activity suggests that there is no single solution to the issue of tackling image and that there are a lot of activities that merit attention.

3.56 Table 3 (below) presents all of the actions explored above, ranked by how important each was considered by the survey respondents. It should be noted that some wording has been shortened to aid brevity.

Table 3: All actions explored ranked in order of the proportion of respondents rating each as 'important' or 'very important' to improving image

Action	%	Theme
Demonstrate that security leaders are as competent as other business leaders	90	Addressing quality
Demonstrate that private security is an 'enabler'	90	Correcting perception
Raise a better awareness of the range of work/skills across private security	89	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Demonstrate that private security does not only address/protect 'business/private' interests	89	Correcting perception
Raise the skill sets of frontline workers	89	Addressing quality
Promote procurement practices that prioritise obtaining good quality security products and services	88	Addressing quality
Highlight that private security offers a capable & affordable frontline response to a range of threats	87	Correcting perception
Demonstrate that private security professionals are principled	87	Addressing quality
Raise a better awareness of the purpose of private security	87	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Highlight that private security fills a gap in the overall resources available to protect people & places	86	Overcoming a lack of recognition
More effectively articulate the value private security offers	86	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Educate key stakeholders about just how good private security personnel are	85	Overcoming a lack of recognition
More effectively articulate how good security can improve a (client) organisation's profit margin	85	Correcting perception
Share stories on how the private security sector positively impacts people's daily lives	85	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Show that the sector is progressive and innovative	84	Overcoming a lack of recognition
Forge meaningful partnerships with the police	83	Addressing quality
Raise awareness that private security uses sophisticated technology & techniques to address key threats	83	Correcting perception
Demonstrate the sector's commitment to ethical practices	81	Correcting perception
Ensure the media has more 'good news' stories to publish	81	Correcting perception
Ensure that all segments of the security sector speak with a united voice	79	Correcting perception
Tailor messaging to different audiences	78	Correcting perception
Develop a sector-wide public relations campaign	75	Correcting perception
Introduce more stringent regulation	73	Addressing quality
Publicise initiatives involving security personnel that support good causes	70	Correcting perception

Messaging

3.57 A number of key points about private security, drawn from previous research, were presented and respondents were asked to indicate whether wider awareness of these points would enhance the image of security.

3.58 Respondents were generally in favour, with 57% or higher indicated each 'message' is 'important' or 'very important'. The proportion of respondents selecting the **very** important answer option were again notable, but generally speaking, not quite as high as in regard to the 'actions' explored above.

3.59 The most highly rated messages (i.e. considered 'important' or 'very important') related to the **significance** of security - in playing 'a major role in protecting the country's critical infrastructure' (82%, n=268) and at 'deterring offenders' (80%, n=263); and the **expertise** of private security personnel - that they are 'experts in responding to a crisis' (77%, n=254) and 'at protecting people' (76%, n=249).

3.60 These were followed by the role of security personnel during covid – 'designated as '**essential** workers'' (74%, n=242); that 'frontline security officers are **regulated** by government' (71%, n=231); that 'there are approx. **three times** as many private security personnel as police officers (68%, n=222)[37]; and finally by key **motivations** for working in private security – 'protecting people/organisations' (61%, n=192) and 'the activities and challenges involved' (57%, n=189).

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[37] Respondents in more 'senior' roles (76%) and 'other' roles (72%) valued the statement (i.e. that there are three times as many private security personnel as police officers), more than those in operatives level roles (57%).

Figure 12: Level of importance (to enhancing image) of raising awareness of key messages from previous research % (n=322-330)
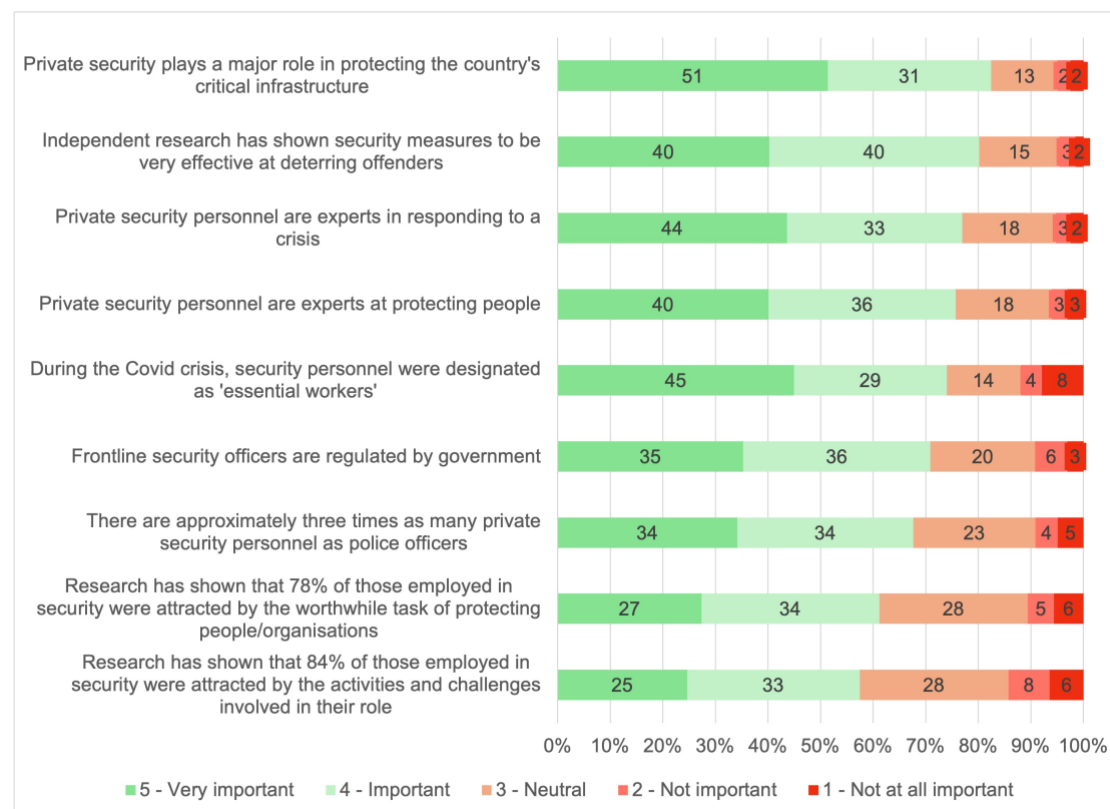
Other factors to address

3.61 Respondents were asked to state any other factors, that had not already been explored within the survey that needed to be addressed.

3.62 While the 'skills' of security officers was a theme that had already been explored, numerous respondents emphasised that the overall **standard of security officers** needs to be addressed in order to improve image. They noted a number of issues such as with appearance/presentation, confidence, motivation, professionalism, skills and abilities that needed to be improved. Key points that were commonly highlighted included:

- **Language capabilities** – many respondents noted that security officers must be proficient in the language of the country they are working in (i.e. in the UK that they are English speakers) as this is crucial to effective performance but is often lacking. They also noted, that in the UK, despite language proficiency being a requirement for obtaining a licence, many licenced individuals cannot communicate sufficiently. They noted that enforcement of this requirements needed to be addressed.
- **Better pay** and working conditions was flagged by many respondents as the way to attract higher calibre candidates and move away from security officers being 'low skilled'. Suggestions included setting

wage bandings based on skills and experience to encourage and reward competence.

- **Better recruitment processes** that ensure candidates are of a suitable standard
- **Better training** – many respondents noted a need to address the lack of training and career pathways for security professionals, particularly at the frontline/officer level.
- **Better differentiation/explanation between the different types** of security officers (for example how the role and skills of nightclub door supervisors differs from officers guarding a shopping centre). Linked to this, it was suggested that high profile public facing locations should only be guarded by competent and highly professional security officers (both to maintain security and to present a more appropriate image of security).

3.63   In respect of the work of security officers it was also highlighted that 'non-intervention' policies can make security officers appear powerless (at best) or incompetent (at worst) and that **better awareness was needed of the limitations/requirements** that security officers work within. Further it was noted by a number of respondents that private security generally **lack powers and legal protections**, and that this needs to be addressed, in order for them to be more effective and therefore for their work to be better respected.

3.64   Other themes included:

- Review and update Private Security Industry Act to develop/improve the regulation in place
- Specifically introduce regulation of security companies (i.e. in addition to licensing individuals)
- Engage with the government and Police to be supportive of security and promote better recognition of the contribution of private security
- Ensure action is taken against corrupt security companies and corrupt (SIA licence) training providers that are enabling poor quality security staff to get work
- Introduce a register of security professionals that records their abilities, qualifications and any misconduct/terminations
- Develop a unified mission for the whole security sector; although caution was also sounded as to how far this could extend – one respondent noted there was not enough overlap between guarding, cyber and built environment security to facilitate a unified campaign across all strands of security
- Find a way to stress the importance of security for human safety without scaring people
- Terminology – that the use of the word 'guard' and 'private' were demeaning/negative and that 'security professional' is preferable. Another noted that 'expert' should not be used in respect of security officers, as such messages would then be undermined by interactions with poor performing security officers

Unique benefits of private security

3.65   Respondents were asked their view on the unique or main benefits of private security that differentiate it from other sectors. The purpose of the question was to identify key factors that may be worthy of greater promotion in order to improve image.

3.66   A small number of respondents noted their view that there aren't any benefits, and some respondents did not provide an answer, however among those that did, the main themes included:

- Adaptability and flexibility
- Immediate response
- Ability to promote a positive security culture
- Potential to progress from the frontline to executive
- Enables business (an asset to business)
- Keeps people safe (saving lives)
- Plays an important role every day in protecting critical national infrastructure, but also in high profile events such as global sporting events, heads of government and royal events
- Provides a visible physical presence (and in some situations a 24/7 presence)
- Diverse range of roles, settings and career options
- Fill gaps that are not covered by the police
- An important part of an organisation's risk management programme

Summary of survey findings

3.67   While more respondents held a positive view of private security (45%) than a negative one (29%), it was striking that the proportion that were positive was not higher. Similarly, while more thought the level of 'professionalism' within private security is improving (46%) than worsening (39%) the figures are somewhat close together. These findings alone suggest that improvements are needed within the sector to raise perceptions internally and ensure those within the sector feel equipped to advocate to improve its image.

3.68   Respondents tended towards believing the general perception of private security within society is negative (49%) or neutral (29%). Relatively few (20%) thought it was positive. Thinking more specifically about perception, respondents thought the police, politicians and the general public would be the groups (of those explored) with the least positive view of private security. Respondents generally did not think those working in private security received sufficient recognition for the value of their work, and particularly frontline security officers, guarding companies and the regulator(s). Again these findings suggest that there is an argument for taking action to improve perception.

3.69 A lack of interest in / recognition of the value of private security (79%) and actual weaknesses within private security (75%) were considered to be greater barriers to image than 'inaccurate' perceptions of private security (65%). Moreover, all the actions for improving image that we explored were considered to have a high value, suggesting that there is no single solution to the issue of tackling image and that various activities are needed in order to have an impact. Actions that were rated particularly highly included, for example: demonstrating that security leaders are as competent as other business leaders, that private security is an 'enabler' and that private security does not only address/protect 'business/private' interests (but protects the public too); raising better awareness of the range of work/skills across private security (i.e. beyond the 'frontline' roles) but also raising the skill sets of frontline workers and promoting procurement practices that prioritise obtaining good quality security products and services.

Section 4. Exploring the challenges and the way forward: interview findings

Background

4.1   This section contains findings from interviews carried out with 24 security professionals and also draws on some of the more detailed comments provided by survey respondents, and issues raised in webinars/talks relating to the topic. Interviewees held a variety of positions, including in-house security and suppliers of security goods/services as well as consultants and other security experts. We also sought to include views from those involved in security recruitment, training, marketing and media. For context, an indication of the role of the interviewee is provided against quotes in this section. It should be borne in mind that while the individual's current role is stated, interviewees often had experience in a variety of roles and were drawing on various experiences within security.

4.2   The semi-structured interviews covered a number of topics relating to the image of security and are organised as follows: where we are now with image, the positives of private security and the differentiators that should be highlighted to improve image, existing initiatives on image, why there is a problem with image, and the actions needed to address the image of private security.

Where are we with 'image'?

4.3   We asked interviewees for their overarching thoughts on where private security currently sits in terms of its 'image'. Views varied as to how much of an issue remained, but the vast majority thought that while image has **improved** over time, it **remains a problem** to some degree. The introduction of regulation in the UK, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, and the global Covid-19 pandemic, along with other recent social trends, were identified as 'triggers' that have impacted on the profile of security:

> *'If I look at pre licensing, under the private security act 2001 – has things improved? Yes. Leaps and bounds compared to what it was. But we have a long way still to go.'*
> *(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)*

> *'I think there has been some improvement. I've seen a more positive uptick. But there's a lot of complacency.'*
> *(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

> *'I think we still have a problem but is has gotten better – since 9/11. That really changed peoples view of security in a way that before had not happened. The subsequent war on terror. That was a big move forward for security and making its way to the board room. I'm slightly pessimistic about the mood [to improve the image of security]. But I'm*

optimistic we can change it. On a scale of horrendous to brilliant, I'm a five.'

(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

'People are more security aware. Security is much more in the news. There are social trends that are gaining more attention, people are thinking more about physical security – drink spiking, the risk of understanding of violence against women and girls. Security is getting a bit more traction. But in terms of the strategic worth – it's getting better but it's not where it needs to be.'

(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

'Since the pandemic, it brought security into the public eye. They became more visible and since then they have been viewed as a positive rather than a negative. We notice them more, they are more visible.'

(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

4.4   Some noted specifically that there was at least **as much ground still to gain**, as had been achieved so far, or that overall progress had been **underwhelming**:

'As a barometer I think we've still got more significant ground to move than has been achieved already. I don't think the public's view is a positive one.'

(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'The police were worried about private security, they thought it would take their jobs but it hasn't. They think it's a bit of assistance but also a bit of an issue. Some like it, some don't. It's not swallowed totally by the public. Some [clients] are still sceptical about security. They know they need it, but they don't know what they need correctly. The image is improving but we are probably not 50% of the way there yet. We're at a plateau. It's a good industry and good business that assists a lot of other businesses in their job. There's still a lot of bad in it unfortunately. That's true in any industry, in any organisation and you've got to try and sort those bits out.'

(Interviewee 15, Security Consultant)

'You've got good organisations out there. Businesses trying to be professional, training their teams within reason. [When licensing was introduced] it led to the belief that it would be the panacea that would change the industry and it would become a career. But I don't think that's happened It has removed the cowboys. But it hasn't professionalised the industry in the way everyone was expecting.'

(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)

4.5   A number highlighted that perceptions did not reflect the reality. That images of '**bouncers**' and '**male dominated**', and security being about '**guards**' and '**gates**' persist, and that these aspects do not generally garner respect:

'I think if you ask people it still has the big guy image and is male dominated. There is a trend towards a customer facing image where some of our clients want more of that concierge approach, the more welcoming approach where security is a place to go for safety and the customer experience.'

(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'My opinion is that we have an image of two male muscly night club bouncers ready to have a fight. Security is massively different to that now. The challenge is to get people to understand what it really does and to see the value in the impact that it can have.'

(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)

'I think security on its own is still a problem. If people morph it into one role – combining security, risk and resilience or business assurance, then it comes up [in importance]. Security has an element of manned guards, gates, doormen. Inside a corporate someone like me is trying to push security as a strategic value add. But part of my portfolio is the security guards.'

(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

'From a contract point of view security includes doormen, venue management, dealing with drunk people, refusing entry. Low level stuff. An element is your basic guarding a door. Those are things people look down on.'

(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

4.6   Interviewees pointed to how such images do not represent **the full picture** of the door supervisor or security officer roles, nor do they represent the **many other aspects** of private security or the **collective value** of private security:

'People have no idea what security is. I was at an event where a global head of physical security for [a globally renowned company] was presenting. Someone said to him, "how do you chase people at your age?". That's not what we do. They don't get the depth of the role. Even for security officers – people don't know the skills involved.'

(Interviewee 1, Expert in security recruitment)

'I still think we've got a lot of negative impact when people mention security. Driven a lot by our language. People associate security with the guards at the pubs and clubs. [When people find out I work in security] I get asked if I look after guards or if I do cyber.'

(Interviewee 2, Security Consultant)

'When I say [what my role is] people assume I'm a spy, a private investigator or its to do with airports. There is that misconception that its shrouded in secrecy.'

(Interviewee 3, Other Security Expert)

'There is a lack of definition – it is a massive umbrella. I'd like to think we are professionals [security design for the built environment] and that we are regarded as equal partners in design things. We work quite hard on how we present ourselves to be on an equal footing.'

(Interviewee 4, Security Design Consultant)

'I would say image is a problem, because it is not recognised for the contribution it makes to the way it creates a safe environment. People don't understand what the sector does.'

(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)

'One of the things I would do if I was Home Secretary, is to demonstrate, that despite the fact that private security is employed by private businesses, collectively what we have as a whole. The situational awareness, the hostile reconnaissance, reporting to ACT. It's not an organised interwoven service, but it is providing this all-seeing eye that's everywhere. When you walk down a street, there is an all-seeing eye that sees everything from one building to the next. The industry of private security is providing an interlocked service that is monitoring and protecting everyone. We need to demonstrate that.'

(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)

4.7 Some felt that the '**language**' of security did not help matters – with terminology such as **'security' and 'guards'** presenting a very limited image of the sector:

'I do think we need to add the word "risk" to our terminology. When you say risk, people ask what you do – it opens a conversation.'

(Interviewee 2, Security Consultant)

'That terminology [guard] has to be wiped out.'

(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'I never say 'manned guarding'. Both words are dated. Officer gives a more accurate reflection. It is more than just checking people coming and going.'

(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)

4.8 One interviewee highlighted that in respect of security technology, there could be a perception that the technology **can do more** than it really can because of the way it is shown in popular culture:

'People are pretty aware [of security technology] now from movies and television series. If anything, they expect it to do a lot more than it can.'

(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)

4.9 Notably, one interviewee highlighted that the image was '**deserved**':

'In the end I think private security has the image it deserves. The reality is the image. The public is not getting fooled.'

4.10 Another did **not** think the sector was on the right track:

'My personal view is I think we are going backwards. Some of the big companies have very motivated people, great security. But if you want to generalise the industry it's still a race to the bottom – who will do for cheapest.'

The positives that should be highlighted

4.11 We asked interviewees what the positives of private security are, that if they were better highlighted could present a more positive image.

4.12 Many interviewees talked about the role private security plays in **keeping people safe**. They noted the key role that security play both in managing risks by **preventing** the types of incidents that would pose a danger, but also in **responding** to active incidents to help people in need:

'Incidents prevented, things noticed, people helped. Prevention of terrorism attacks. You see that in the news. A guard on duty, helped someone that fell down and did CPR. The added value of having people with such skill sets.

'People only hear about the bad stuff. They don't hear about people stopped getting mugged, fire alarms, not knowing if it's a real fire, hostile reconnaissance. That good stuff is happening all over the country but nobody ever hears about that.'

'Security put their own lives at risk and protect the public. Come in, enjoy yourself and go home safe. That's the job. We're there to make sure they are safe. They go home. I genuinely feel there isn't enough recognition for the good stuff.'

'The fact security is to keep people safe. Not everyone sees that. They often see security as a blocker. You can't do this or that. But everything is about keeping people safe.'

'How much they keep people safe. Security officers do that every day, they are excellent and they help people and

make life better and it is important. The way they share intelligence. Let's promote how much we deter [crime].'

(Interviewee 20, In-house – Security Lead)

'All the intricacies – assisting a member of the public with mobility issues, helping partially sighted people, being a point of contact in our environment. Assisting finding missing children. There is an awful lot of positives, we're not talking about enough.'

(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

4.13   It was flagged that while private security may 'shine' in a crisis, much of these positives are not rare, but are '**everyday**' occurrences and this should also be recognised:

'I used to run some … CCTV operations rooms. Day in day out, it was finding vulnerable missing people, dealing with major incidents, criminals, working closely with the police. Every day that operations centre was making a positive impact to that [location]. Every day we made a positive impact, but no one heard about it.'

(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

'I think the frontline heroes, day in and day out. They turn out for work, put themselves in harm's way. Where we embed ourselves in the client organisation, where we see problems and solutions as joint, the value for all parties including society is much better. It is not often measured but is the cornerstone.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

4.14   One interviewee specifically noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic, it would not have been possible for some essential services to **operate** at all without them:

'A prime example is security officers stepping forward in the pandemic. Without security officers most supermarkets or critical outlets would not have opened. Covid test centres too.'

(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)

4.15   Another noted the work that goes on **behind the scenes**, to facilitate the work of security officers, that is not recognised:

'You have the security officer but behind that there is a lot happening. The onion layer of defence. The security officer is one part. You need a lot of people to get that person there. There are people managing intel and working with police. People vetting officers, training them. There's CCTV officers, someone 24/7 on the end of the phone just to get that one officer out. People don't understand what goes in to putting that security officer there. There is an

image of a security officer but just to have that one officer takes all of this.'

(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

4.16 Some pointed to specific positives in terms of the **skills** private security had to offer, not least – customer service, conflict management including de-escalation, and counter terrorism awareness:

> *'Where we provide customer service we are enhancing an experience. We talk about the customer's customer – if it's a university, it is how to support students; if it is a hospital, it is how to provide mental and physical assurance to patients. In every sector there will be champions – stories of the positive impact of security.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

> *'Conflict management is strong, strong conversationalist and strong customer service and vigilance and knowing who is a threat and not a threat. Security officers are experts at managing conflict and know a lot.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 20, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'CT awareness is key and conflict management. The image is too focused on the physical side. The de-escalation is key.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

> *'Being alert and seeing things ahead of time and being ready to respond. Taking an interest in things you are suspicious about. We teach that and solving puzzles and behavioural detection which we have started to train people in.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

4.17 Meanwhile, a number of interviewees talked about the positives of private security that should be highlighted, in terms of **attracting people to security as a career.**[38] This included the opportunities for people with a **range of skills and experience**, that it can be **varied and interesting**, and the **satisfaction** to be obtained from keeping people and places safe:

> *'It is an open canvas for diversity of thought. I've always said it's not just security – there are four prongs – security, safety, customer service and technology. It's not just people from the police or military looking for another job. People from different backgrounds are coming into the private sector.*
>
> *(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

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[38] Security as a career was a specific focus of a previous SRI report – for a more in depth discussion please see: 'Understanding the influences on security as a career/job choice' (2020) https://www.perpetuityresearch.com/2020/11/03/understanding-influences-on-security-as-a-career-job-choice-what-those-working-in-the-security-sector-think/

'It has allowed me to work on all sorts of exciting projects. Security is spread across many different types – it throws up the weird and wonderful – we go to exciting buildings and sites. That's my big positive. We do genuinely get people that want to work with us because they care about making better places. We work on new residential estates and we can help make that a nicer experience – if we do our job well.'

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(Interviewee 4, Security Design Consultant)

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'Looking at the perspective of someone working within security, the job satisfaction and fulfilment at the end of the day. When you have been on shift, and you've made a difference. If you are passionate about safeguarding and keeping spaces and places safe for member of the public, there is that real element. When you've got well trained security officers working on a site, you've got people that are very capable at dynamic risk assessment. Very valuable.'

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(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

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'[working in security] is interesting. The training, the interaction with emergency services, ACT training, the terrorist situation. Security gets briefed on why they are doing what they are doing here. We try to break down to security why you are here, we take them round and show them. It's an important role. The job can be boring, but every job can be boring. A security officer is going to have dynamic situations to manage. People skills, conflict resolution, that grumpy person at midnight. You need to read the situation. It may sound corny, but that is skills for life. We need to repackage it.'

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(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

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'Flexibility. If you go into security, you can end up in all types of careers in vastly different sectors, in different buildings and environments and a range of technologies and job roles. A wide array and where that can take you. You can go from officer to CEO.'

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(Interviewee 18, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

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'What a job! I've seen things, had experiences I would never get in any other job! I've held back chaos in a crowd of 250,000 at a festival with a team of 4 good men. I've seen towns being built from nothing and torn down within the span of 2 weeks on film sets. I've protected vulnerable people in horrific situations on a Saturday night. Don't get me wrong I've seen a lot of really really bad stuff too, but in all of these situations, positive and negative, I remember, I could be sat behind a desk, entering data into Excel for 40 hours a week and, after all that I've experienced in this industry, absolutely no one can convince me there's any meaning in a desk job; There

simply isn't. I lived that life for 10 years before getting my badge. Joining the security industry was the worst decision I've ever made. And I've loved every minute of it. You will never find another job with such variety, diversity, challenge or self growth than a job in security.'

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(Survey Respondent – Security Officer)

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How is private security different or unique?

4.18 We asked interviewees about the ways in which private security is different to other sectors, that could provide a potential route for promoting its value and thereby improving image. It should be noted that many of the aspects raised are also 'positives' that could have been included under the heading above, however, to reduce repetition, we explore them here instead.

4.19 A number of interviewees talked about the unique role that private security plays in providing a **different and often a first response to incidents**. Key points included that security respond **quickly** (which is crucial in an emergency) and offers a **resource** by **filling a gap** that would otherwise exist given the limitation on public resources (and without which crime and disorder would be greater) and therefore play a key role within society:

> *'The speedy response to an incident. In most environments you won't see police, but you will see security officers. They are there. Mostly very effective and prepared for any eventuality.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)*

> *'When things go wrong, when you're trying to have fun, it's not the police or medic that turn up first, it's security. We are the front line. There is no other job that sees such expose to the extremes of humanity.'*
>
> *(Survey Respondent – Security Officer)*

> *'They are not seeing it for what it is. Security are first responders. There is a massive gap in the number of police and paramedics. Security officers bridge that gap. First line for keeping the public safe. There doesn't seem to be that awareness of it.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

> *'With police budgets the way they are. If it wasn't for private security, there would be a lot more chaos. If private security didn't exist and police numbers are how they are, society would be in a much worse place. Those resources alleviate pressure on police, ambulance service, taxi marshals, night-time economy. People might have ended up in hospital if no one was there to help them. It lowers*

criminality – the public aren't aware but every day it is happening.'

(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

'Through its work, it has the ability to mitigate incidents of terrorism and crime and without that, there is a high probability of increased incidence and risks of terrorist crime and other crime.'

(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)

'What security can do is mobilise at pace, and with incredible numbers. Although policing has mutual aid, where they are focused on their local issues then that depletes them. It is easier for the security sector and has become a dynamic resource to both government and the police.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'We are effectively one step down from the police. Bar the army, I don't think you could say that about any other job.'

(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'They are not warranted but can be the eyes on the ground, analyse quickly and disseminate factual information that is not distorted like social media can be. Taking that intelligence-led approach enables policing to apply a good response. We add a different value.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

4.20   Similarly, some interviewees noted that private security is unique in respect of **volume and visibility of presence** – elements that are essential to crime prevention:

'The volume of work. Go everywhere and you see a security officer. Every city and you will walk past places with security and it is unique and powerful. That's not the case with fire service personnel for example.'

(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'You see it visibly. When private security were positively encouraged to be outward facing and trained to look out at the vicinity so they can see any threats coming. That makes security more visible than it has been. That's the best advert – that you can see the private security person – its become part of the furniture of towns.'

(Interviewee 13, Security media professional)

'Security is interacting all the time with the public and other users. There's direct dialogue, direct action, with customers, staff, visitors, potential customers. All day, every day.'

(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)

4.21   A number of interviewees noted the **flexibility** and **adaptability** of private security; that it is adapted to every sector and to varying requirements:

'Security professionals operate across every sector across business. We're not one size fits all. We specialise in retail, railway stations, maritime, airport searching, events teams, door teams. Some people see some parts with more respect than others. I've had an amazing career – I've seen and done things I never thought I would. I wouldn't have believed how different it is.'

(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)

'It spans numerous sectors, what else does that? Everyone requires security in some state or form. It is a globally recognised profession.'

(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'Security people do a lot and undertake a wide variety of tasks. They cover sustainability and many environmental issues. It is the variance that attracts people. The real varied opportunities. For young people these things are important. They care about these things. They want things with meaning.'

(Interviewee 23, Expert in Security Recruitment)

4.22   Some interviewees highlighted the focus on people as a point of difference; that security focuses on **helping people** and not just on being safe, but on **feeling safe**:

'Security is focused on people. Take any other hourly and low paid sectors like construction, it's not about people. Not even retail. It is focused on people who have problems and that is what security do – give immediate assistance. That immediate focus in helping people, sometimes conflict situations.'

(Interviewee 18, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'That desire to help people. You have to want to do that. People who progress want to do this better, and they are caring and that is what is unique. It is like nursing.'

(Interviewee 18, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'If I compare security to the police, security is more approachable. If a police officer is involved, this is serious. Security is more of a helpful person.'

(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'One of the benefits is making people feel more secure and more safe. Some don't notice it and they would also benefit from it without knowing they benefit from it. Feeling safe or being safe is not the same.'

(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)

4.23   Another point raised was that the **technology** used as part of private security was a differentiator that offers a way to draw interest:

'AI and tech is flavour of the month. Ride on what's in fashion, on trend. Facial recognition, mobile credentials – ID on phones. My board are interested in that. I'm not sure

if I will get the money, but they get excited about that sort of thing.'

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(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)
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'Some of the tech stuff is very clever.'

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(Interviewee 1, Expert in security recruitment)
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'We had a nice example of a monitoring station preventing the theft of bicycles. The guy was caught, and the customer wanted to promote that. It showed the investment was not there for nothing. We should do that more often.'

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(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)
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Initiatives on image

4.24   To get a sense of work already underway, we asked interviewees about existing initiatives or strategies they were aware of or were using within their own organisations, that could help to present a positive image of private security.

4.25   A number of interviewees talked about the recent introduction of the **Security Skills Board**[39] (in the UK), and that while it is too soon to establish any outcomes, that it could have a positive impact on image by improving the skills of security officers:

> *'The Skills Board and the Momentum project – that's a shift in dynamic for the industry. Private security companies getting together to try to help professionalism. In the past they didn't want to discuss business openly. Now they are working together for a common purpose – coming together as a group to change the industry.'*
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> *(Interviewee 3, Other Security Expert)*
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>
> *'I think the Skills Board. If the initiative were to achieve an entry route that comes through the Skills Board with a centralised funnel of quality control. That's a big ambition goal.'*
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> *(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*
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>
> *'The Skills Board. [Leaders of security companies] need to invest in the Skills Academy and that will help a career pathway.'*
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> <div align="right">
>
> *(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*
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4.26   A number of interviewees talked about specific **practices** that they adopt within their own organisations to move away from bad practices and to improve standards.

4.27   For suppliers this included actions such as looking after their officers, improving sub-contracting processes, and trying to attract a range of people into the sector:

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[39] https://security-skills.org/

'From a supplier perspective, we are really trying to do the right thing and I see others doing the same, really trying. There are still some making a quick buck and buyers buy from them.'

(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'There is criticism of private security for using sub-contractors. We have reduced our supplier base and we are doing more of that and we audit them. Where we engage suppliers – with their security officers, we pay them our prices. We are using recruiters to help us get good people.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'We have lower staff turnover than our competitors. The value on placing onus of looking after people on the frontline. It raises perception internally.'

(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'The [dynamic] of customer to supplier relationship – making the officer feel part of the service. We need to make employees feel part of the family where they are delivering a service.'

(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'I make it a point to recognise an officer once a month with a certificate and gift card. But I think there needs to be more government acknowledgement.'

(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'We do positive PR campaigns. Women in security. With the hopes of attracting more into the sector. Speaking at events and trying to be more visible at shows. We have a big CSR project which is massively important for us.'

(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)

4.28 For in-house this included actions such as procuring higher standard officers, involving themselves in interviewing (to ensure standards) and rewarding and highlighting good work:

'We have officers interview [for the role]. As the client, we interview the officer level. We want to understand who will be working in our premises. A lot of clients won't do that.'

(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)

'We use officers trained to an enhanced level. You can tell they are trained to a higher level by their mannerisms. I don't think many companies have the money to do it though. Margins are so tight.'

(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

'We have a risk and reward KPI in place. The supplier has the opportunity to demonstrate the good things they've done. How many patrols, how many near miss incidents. We use that and score that. They can get an increase in

profit. That's a driver to the supplier to drive to workforce to pick these things up.

<div align="right">(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)</div>

'We try to highlight it in our organisation – the good job they do. We have an internal facebook, we put articles in there, what the security team are doing. That goes national. We pick up on international security officer day – we've had a good response – likes and reads.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)</div>

'One of our customers put together a video – it was about preventing addiction to gambling and it showed the role of the cctv system and the value of the system for making it a safe place. Things like that could show the value of technology.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)</div>

4.29 Other positive initiatives and examples noted by interviewees included:
- The potential impact that Martyn's Law (in the UK) may have on highlighting the value of private security
- Work by the regulator (in the UK) to promote good practice, dispel myths about security, and to encourage adherence to the code of conduct among licence holders
- High visibility initiatives with the police and private security patrolling an area as a show of strength

The Achilles Heel – why is there a problem with image?

4.30 The interviews highlighted that there are a number of issues that are damaging to the image of security, some of which related conceptually to what security is, and some of which related to the practicalities and limitations of how security is actually delivered/procured. Notably private security suffers from a number of paradoxes that complicate the issue of perception. These issues are explored in more detail below.

The conceptual issues

4.31 At a **conceptual level**, there were three main issues thought to inhibit the extent to which security could be viewed positively (i.e. regardless of how good or bad security actually is):

- that security is a '**cost**' incurred to generate an outcome of '**nothing**', (i.e. the paradox that 'success' is when '**nothing**' bad happens);
- that security is seen as **less important** than other things;
- that security only garners interest **when it goes wrong** – and not when it goes right.

4.32 These are explored in turn.

4.33 A number of interviewees highlighted the fundamental difficulty of **demonstrating the value** of private security, because it is a **cost** to an

organisation, and doing it well results in an **'absence' of problems**. Paradoxically though, when 'nothing' happens, there is a perception that security is not needed:

> *'The fundamental problem is they get paid to make sure that nothing happens and when nothing happens people think they are not doing anything. Why do you pay for them? It's not a production line – we can't churn out three times as much this week as last, like other sectors can.'*
> *(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'Security officers are good at resolving the problem without telling anyone. There is no record, no report. So you see nothing. Smile, check the pass, that's what people see, so why pay them a fortune to stand there. That's the mentality from the client side.'*
> *(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'The problem is that really good security is low profile, you don't know it's there.'*
> *(Interviewee 19, Other Security Expert)*

> *'The challenge now is that it is a victim of its own success. 'Do we need it?' they say, [If you remove security, crime] will increase again and it will take time to happen and then you will want it back. It will be too late.'*
> *(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)*

> *'The absence of problems usually means security is doing well, but it has the effect of clients thinking why are we paying for it, nothing goes wrong. A lot of buyers don't understand that culture. They don't want to understand. Apart from a few companies that have to have a high level of security.'*
> *(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)*

4.34   Linked to this, was the issue that because the value is not understood, security slides **down the list of priorities**:

> *'Part of the reason why security is not higher up the league table of importance in the corporate world is because it doesn't generally make money. It's a cost centre. Nearly always a supporting function. In a law firm, the stars are the high performing lawyers. In others the stars are sales people and the technologists creating the latest technology.'*
> *(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'Its difficult to try and improve the image. People talk about it after [a serious event or a failure], not before. A lot of people are so busy they don't consider security as a main priority.'*
> *(Interviewee 15, Security Consultant)*

> *'Security is still an afterthought. Partly because there aren't that many drivers towards having security in a new*

construction project. Some major developments that want to attract [high profile companies] know that for that to happen there will be questions about security, and they will need to have done a proper job of building security in during construction. For most others it will be driven by planning conditions, not by thinking about not wanting to suffer crime or mitigate the risk of a terror attack.'
(Interviewee 4, Security Design Consultant)

4.35 Interviewees also talked about the tendency to **focus on the bad**, and to overlook the good, not least within mainstream media, social media and popular culture:

'The whole crux of the problem is how do we create a positive perception to counter that people only hear about it when it's breached or goes wrong.'
(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)

'Security usually reaches the newspapers when something went wrong. Security or tech did not perform well enough to prevent something. That's the security paradox. It is too much until it is proved to be too little.'
(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)

'Social media is key, especially for security. No one says look how well that security officer is doing, so when an officer goes off track that does give the industry a bad name. Generally speaking you never see the positive side, such as stopping drugs and weapons in nightclubs and stopping people getting drunk and in fights and keeping people safe.'
(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'In popular culture whenever private security gets shown, which is seldom, it's really crass or unreal or uncomplimentary or all of them,'
(Interviewee 13, Security media professional)

4.36 One interviewee also noted the **in-fighting** that could perpetuate a bad (and unjustified) impression:

'Some organisations and individuals are openly criticising companies like mine, over labour exploitation, where they will post stuff on social media and say that this is an area where we are deploying officers below minimum wage. On every one we investigate thoroughly, and every one bar one has been unfounded and been maliciously made up. Where there was an issue it was down to a security officer farming out a shift himself. We terminated his contract for gross misconduct.'
(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

The practical issues

4.37 At a **practical level**, there were two main problems identified:

- the quality of frontline private security, including:
  - $\Rightarrow$ the 'skill' versus 'responsibility' paradox
  - $\Rightarrow$ a lack of career path
- the purchasing process

4.38   These are explored in turn.

4.39   The **quality of individuals working in a 'frontline'** private security role was considered to be a standout factor that is detrimental to the image of private security. Aspects such as poor **recruitment** practices, lack of **training**, lack of **skills** (including poor **communication** skills), poor **appearance** (in terms of uniform), **inattentiveness**, and even heavy-handedness/**aggression** all contributed to the perception that private security is **low skilled** and therefore **low paid**, does not **attract** high calibre individuals, and ultimately is **not** something that would be considered '**professional**':

> *'Poor recruitment practices, poor training, poor uniform and image, poor benefits and rewards. If we could solve those four.'*
> *(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

> *'A lot of people see security as easy work. They have no intention of working to the level they should be. And the monetary part – if frontline security workers are not being reimbursed accordingly, the people you would hope to work in the industry are not going to see it as a viable career choice. People see it as unskilled work – what you do if you can't do anything else.'*
> *(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

> *'Inattentiveness with cell phones. All it takes is one officer to be disengaged or not paying attention. Uniform mismanagement, it's the little things people look at. The wrong footwear colour or unkempt hygiene. A lot of the public perception is ignorance. They don't know any better. If they see one out of uniform that sullies the image for that building.'*
> *(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

> *'In the UK generally, the guarding companies are looking for 'shirt fillers' or to use the popular security vernacular "bums on seats", hence the acceptance of poor quality. The customers are happy because we are only contractors with whom they'll have minimal interaction.'*
> *(Survey respondent – Security Officer)*

> *'If security handles interactions badly – inappropriate language, use of force, breach of protocol – they are filmed and shared on social media. People hear about it very quickly and it tends to escalate fast.'*
> *(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)*

> *'Aggressive behaviour, excessive use of physical force, confrontational work. I had this recently, when someone said this of security, and I said they are better at de-escalation than intervention. It is what modern security is about.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)*

> *'There are times where I let someone go because they are not up to standard. Then we have to use an agency or sub-contractor to find a replacement. They are sending people that don't have any security experience. They have a badge, they show up, can't communicate. They are not in the correct uniform. They are unaware of the duties. When we go back in regard to it, they take the view that you should be training them on site. That's really damaging when you have an abundance of people that operate like that. Frontline officers that aren't proficient. People see someone that isn't able to fulfil the task.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

> *'One skillset is communication. The one area where things fall apart. That is often lacking, giving, receiving and understand the message.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

4.40   Some security officers (within the survey and via interview) noted that perception of their line of work was so bad that it would be 'embarrassing' if others knew what they did for a living, or that having the role on their CV would adversely affect their career prospects.

4.41   One interviewee even noted that the perception of security technology could be negatively impacted by its interaction with those in security officer type roles:

> *'There is this thing that our technology is implemented by a customer but operated by private security guards. They don't have a good reputation overall. They are seen as being cheap, less educated. But how they use our system, our technology will make a difference to whether its effective or not. We don't have control of that. It's a strange triangle. If something goes wrong, the guard blames the technology. We say its fine, it's the user. We need to try to have the end customer invest in making the technology effective. If they invest, security guards become more effective. That doesn't bring value, because he is there anyway. If his work becomes easier, they don't care, he is there anyway. There is no incentive to make security more effective.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)*

4.42   Some interviewees noted that there was considerable **variation in the quality** of frontline security and that not only was quality less than ideal,

it often fell **below the minimum standard** that has been set and should be in place:

> *'When you get down to boots on the ground and officers, you get the good, the bad and the how on earth did they enter the industry. All are licensed by the SIA, all have done that training. Some people come for interviews and I have no idea, how they can have got to that point. They are not able to answer basic questions. Someone must have told them what to put.'*
> *(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'We are still seeing WhatsApp groups advertising shifts at different festivals and arenas, offering work on a cash in hand basis. Are they vetted? Have they been trained in crisis management? Would they be able to respond and offer basic first aid to the public if they needed it? We invest a lot of time and money into training and development. A lot are not doing it.'*
> *(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)*

> *I get calls and texts from people saying they are available for shifts. They want to be added to a WhatsApp group to be notified of shifts. I don't want that. If you want to work, come and do an interview, bring your documents, we'll scan your documents, do our vetting. When you say that, they disappear. So many contractors don't care who they send to a site. They have WhatsApp groups and they post that there is a shift in this postcode, who can do it. Someone goes. I've seen stuff for [major supermarket brands] – no one is controlling the supply chain. Anyone can get a job because there isn't someone overseeing it.'*
> *(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)*

4.43   Interviewees also highlighted that the perception of frontline security is based on those that are least capable, but that in reality, there are **distinctions** within the security officer role that are not recognised or understood:

> *'More and more we talk about there being two different types of security officers. Half of the 500,000 licensed officers are in public space or public facing roles. The ones that sit in offices in [high profile spaces in London] are in a different environment. When we talk about how we promote positive security, they talk about the ones at supermarkets or events, not the other ones.'*
> *(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

> *'These days we have to recognise the difference in the types of security officer in bids. One is a concierge, a more welcome and greeter role. The second is caring, providing support and pastoral care. The third is security with stab vests and using handcuffs.'*
> *(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

4.44　While it was not a direct question that we asked interviewees, it was striking that many interviewees and survey respondents referred to a **paradoxical** quality within private security whereby **security officers are perceived to be low skilled**, poor quality and low paid, and **yet they carry significant responsibilities**. Their work prevents events and occurrences that could be extremely damaging to an organisation's ability to operate, to make money, to reputation and brand, and ultimately to the safety of their staff and customers:

> *'You are paying someone peanuts to do an important job when the wheels fall off.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'If you look at other low wage service sectors, I'm sorry to say that many enjoy a higher public perception, albeit they do not have the same responsibility for public safety. I can't think of a similar industry where so much trust is placed. Even the better paid guard doesn't earn more than what would be paid in hospitality and retail and yet the responsibility is much higher. It is much less than the reward.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 19, Other Security Expert)*

> *'Reputation costs a lot of money.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 21, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

> *'We need to consider the impact that frontline security personnel can have on their host organisation brand. Security are thought about last – often last in terms of customer service. Whereas often they are the first and last experience when people are physically attending a site, premises or passing through, therefore, the impact on the perception is huge. Its twisted logic to see them last – they should be front of the queue. We should be developing their skills, how they are dressed, acting in a way that matches our brand values to match how we are perceived. It's a function that interacts the most, yet in terms of support it gets the least recognition and support.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)*

4.45　Further, it was noted that many have to **deal with abuse and violence** as par for the course and that the scale of the issues they face are not proportionate to a 'low skilled', 'low paid' role:

> *'I tell [new recruits] about the injuries I've sustained – some of the horrible things I've witnessed. People have died in front of me. They don't understand what we do. People assault us on a daily basis. Threats with weapons. They think we just stand there and point fingers.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)*

'The perception is that security stand on a door or sit at a desk – that it is the easiest job in the world. For some it is. For others its difficult and dangerous.'

(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

'They've got to be polite all the time. That's a real skill. Paying someone a minimum wage. Giving them a level of training to work with emergency services and deal with dynamic incidents. Be polite all the time and take abuse.'

(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

'Most people who work in security deal with verbal and or physical abuse regularly. Unequipped people are dealing with people armed with knives, grabbing things. They are paid minimum wage. They could be putting themselves at risk for the profit of [major retailer]. In [other settings] there will be a sign saying abuse will not be tolerated – the police will be called and you will be prosecuted. There is nothing like that for security. It seems to be ok that security bears the brunt of people's anger. Security need respect – treat them like you would treat anyone else doing their job.'

(Interviewee 3, Other Security Expert)

4.46   One survey respondent in a security officer role commented in depth about the **disconnect** between the perception of security as low skilled and the reality of the challenges they face and the value of their role:

'There's a general misunderstanding about the skillsets of private security workers by the general public. Effective security operatives must have broad and varied skillsets as we are managing people, conflict and, quite often, extreme events. This is not a skill set that you could ever develop in conventional education settings. There is no degree in calming down a drunk 6ft4 steroid user who has just sniffed his 15th bag of coke that night and now wants to tear the head off the office administrator because he just knocked his pint over in spoons. There's no formal education route for supporting an 18-year-old female who can't see straight because she's had her 3rd WKD and is convinced those 4 guys who have been hanging outside your venue since 11pm are offering to give her a ride home "because they are just being kind". Security operatives deal with, quite literally, the worst of the human condition on a nightly basis. We prevent assaults, rapes, theft, robberies, kidnap, abuse, severe injuries, death, are the first people to rush to the aid of the public putting our own safety at risk and will then be called unintelligent, stupid and a whole plethora of other insults because our job doesn't require a degree. I'm not saying there should be a formal qualification for our role, in fact, a formal qualification would never work in this sector as the skills required to thrive can be gained only through experience, but we thrive in an environment where the guy sat behind

a desk and screen with a diploma that he will be repaying for the next 30 years of his life would absolutely fold in. If he messes up in his role, he and other people may have to work later or send a few extra emails, if we mess up in our roles people die or have to live with life changing negative consequences. The public absolutely do not understand the role and for 99% of them, it is something they could never do themselves nor truly understand unless they experienced it themselves.'

(Survey respondent – Security Officer)

4.47 It was also flagged that limitations placed on frontline security in terms of how they conduct their work could give the **appearance of a lack of ability**, when in fact their hands were tied:

'The way they stand from a legal perspective and powers. Those working in the night-time economy, and retail. It is like asking them to be a stand in for the police but with no additional rights than a member of the public has. Giving someone a job but tying their hands. When you are dealing with protestors coming into your building, as long as they don't do anything, all you can do is look at them. You can't physically pick them up and move them. Explaining that to CEOs, why you can't drag them out. They have not broken the law.

(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)

'There is a disconnect in what members of retail teams believe security officers can do. What their remit is. They may be expecting them to be more hands on, drag people out of stores – even if they've not done something that warrants it.'

(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'We don't tackle shoplifters to the floor because it is not safe.'

(Interviewee 20, In-house – Security Lead)

4.48 In respect of **quality,** it was also noted that private security is **not attracting** the right type of candidates (at the frontline level) in part because it does not offer a 'career'. Indeed, a **lack of clear career paths** was noted to be problematic across private security (i.e. not just at the frontline):

'One guy said, he came for interview because the job centre forced him. In his mind, he had no intention of doing the job well. I think if you are diluting the pool of people, you are really sacrificing on quality for the sake of quantity.'

(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'We need to try and work out how this becomes a sector that people want to join rather than fall in to. Do we see 17, 18, 19 year olds want to join security? Most fall into

[guarding] if they haven't got a job – they are offered an SIA licence to get them off benefits.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)</div>

'No career path, no understanding. The key is to get on the ladder and develop from there and must be driven by vision. You fall into it. It is not a welcoming sector. The start for minimum rate guards is not good and that carries a more general perception about what security is about. We need to link education and training to roles and we don't do that enough.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 23, Expert in Security Recruitment)</div>

'Security academia has come a long way but is still not there to the same extent [as other professions]. Career pathways and professional memberships are not there to the same extent.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 4, Security Design Consultant)</div>

4.49   Indeed, it was flagged that development opportunities could be purposely **limited** because when you do have a capable officer, promoting and therefore needing to replace them, creates a **problem**:

'I think there are a lot of missed opportunities for internal promotions with security officers – those gems – officers that are diamonds in the rough. They don't always have the opportunity. There's a lot of outside hiring. I've seen it many times – someone is ingrained in a site. Why fix something that's not broken – then you would have to replace that person.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)</div>

'One of the best things an individual said to me was I want somebody who wants my job. That's unusual. There's a lot of animosity and fear that people will be replaced. We should be finding our future replacements.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)</div>

'Additionally, promoting staff is problematic because you have to fill a vacancy – which takes time and money. So guarding is one of the few sectors where you could start your 'career' as a guard on a site and remain on that site for your entire working life; and I've seen this happen.'

<div align="right">(Survey respondent – security officer)</div>

4.50   The nature of how private security officers are **procured,** was the other main standout factor that was considered detrimental to the image of private security. The main issue interviewees highlighted here was that companies want to buy '**cheap**' because they can't tell the **difference** between the good and the bad, or don't understand the **value**, or they have a **limited understanding** of what they need:

'Choosing the cheaper option as a means to an end. If we don't understand what the customers are trying to achieve and provide with the best opportunities for solving that

through right means and solutions, we are failing. We have to continuously educate that cheaper is not always better. Setting up a proper standard is the challenge.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 2, Security Consultant)</div>

'You see some go to a major supplier who is then sub-contracting and sub-contracting. Some just go from a low price, there are always some.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)</div>

'Everything boils down to money. People don't want to pay a good wage or for the number of people they need. That impacts the perception of security. The base level of door work – a lot should have three or four guards but are doing it with two. They aren't effective so people think security is terrible but their hands are tied.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)</div>

'Demand is going up, customers see the need for security whereas in the past it was a grudge purchase. But they don't want to pay a lot for it. There's no differentiation between the good and the bad. How we bid. If you are really good and I'm terrible, we both get paid the same – its nonsense really. There's no motivation to do a good job. Another officer will get the same pay as you even if you do a much better job. Pay is an absolute need.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)</div>

'Some guarding companies provide people that are not [at the right level]. We don't help ourselves because we put that pressure that we need security now. Then we're arguing about them being the right standard. But if we are not paying enough money, they won't be the right standard. If we don't increase the wage a little bit, we will still get those people. Lower down, some companies, small companies don't invest in their people as much. With security officers it is down to behaviours and personal pride, but if they are not paid a good wage, if there is no opportunity for development, we are going to attract those sorts of people.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)</div>

'Some will pay the bare minimum and that's it. Half of the problem is driven by those purchasing and half by businesses that will take on work at ridiculous profit margins. There is no collective drive from the suppliers to up the pay and professionalise. There is no incentive from purchasers. That's why you end up where we are.'

<div align="right">(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)</div>

'It all comes down to the funding and money. Security officers blame the security companies. Clients want gold medal performance, but they pay a bronze level amount. That's the problem. You pay minimum wage – you're not going to get the best quality. There are times that we don't

have a choice – there can be overtime issues, staffing issues. You don't have a choice but to put someone into a position – they will be qualified, but they may not be ideal. I prefer someone with three year's experience in a corporate environment. If I've got someone just starting and with a good reference then I will give them a shot. I've heard it so many time – people are saying they can go to [a supermarket] and [earn the same]. The revolving door is never going to stop. Not everyone is a careerist.'

(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'The biggest issue that we face is that security technology is often purchased by people that don't know what they are buying or what the reason is.'

(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)

4.51   It was noted that even when responsible companies refuse to go low on price, there are always others that will:

'We are a high-quality company, we have standards to follow. It is easier to break your brand than to build it up. We have a long-term vision. We are not doing it for hit and run sales. We are a long-term technology partner. It's in our interest to sell something good. We try to influence and bring our knowledge. If they don't accept that, we walk away. Often, they have five others willing to do it.'

(Interviewee 5, Security Technology Professional)

'We had a five-star hotel chain approach us. They said their security was terrible. Can we quote. We quoted and they asked could we do it [for less]. Even if we pay someone minimum wage it costs that just to send them to work. We don't want to pay minimum wage and you don't want [minimum wage] quality. They didn't care – they said don't worry we'll find someone else. A lot of clients don't think about the financials – they just want to pay as little as possible. They will use companies that are not regulated, not following correct stuff, not paying tax – some of these are multi-national well-known brands – why do you want to be associated with that? It's a struggle. Charge rates are a struggle in the industry. It's that circle of anyone can get a job, clients don't want to pay – it leads to frontline perception being very poor.'

(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

The actions needed to improve image

4.52   We asked interviewees their view on the best way of having an impact on image. The two key themes that emerged were: the need to make **real improvements** to the standard of frontline security and here **training** was considered the be the main solution; and the need to **promote** the value of private security **more effectively** and particularly

to do so **outside** of private security (and not just 'internally'). Actions also related to **leadership**, **police engagement** and **enforcement**. These areas are explored in more detail below.

Improving standards

4.53   Many interviewees talked about the need to improve the **actual quality** of those in frontline security roles:

> *'We just need to improve the actual standards. We don't need to put good stories out about the 10% that are doing good work. The 90% are the ones the public see – the ones that don't help, or that look at their phone. [In the UK] there is too much focus on [whether officers meet the basic requirements of the regulation] and not enough on driving improvement. If that's all we have to do – supply someone, turn up, make sure they show their licence. We wouldn't need a perceptions campaign if everyone was working to a good standard.'*
> *(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

> *We need to go back to basics and fix the core standards. As a generalisation we will not increase perception more positively without doing that. The public will still be seeing those that are not good.'*
> *(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)*

> *'There's another label that doesn't exist yet, that we need to create, if we want to have security in that kind of support – there's got to be a quid pro quo, what they get in return.'*
> *Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*

4.54   Many commented that the training for frontline security roles was **limited** and therefore problematic:

> *'I think the root cause of it is training. The standards are very poor right from the get-go. If a person doesn't join a company that has their own standards and wants their officers to be the best they can be, they will fall into the whirlwind of covering shifts.*
> *(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)*

> *'We need a complete revisit. Changing perceptions will come from the classroom first. We need to revisit what we are teaching, how it needs to be taught, who can teach. That will improve the calibre. That will improve the perception among clients. That will over time, improve the perception of the public. There is so much poor quality.'*
> *(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)*

4.55   There were a number of issues here. Interviewees talked about elements they felt were **lacking** - within licence linked training (in the UK) but also more generally - such as the overall length of **time/depth**, and a need for an '**enhanced**' level; and that they felt were **confusing** – such as information relating to **physical intervention**:

If you are a close protection officer, if you train for a licence, you need a first responder certification. But if you are a door supervisor or security guard its emergency first aid at work. One day of work. But look at the range of incidents and it's not equipping people to deliver care on-site. There are bits that can be tweaked.'
(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'Much better, much longer, more intense training.'
(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)

'Maybe there should be an enhanced level [of officers]. If people want to develop further. If you publicise a doorman image, that's what you get. We want thinking people.'
(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

'More diverse training initiatives for people. Mandatory in-person training.'
(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'Something we no longer teach which I think is disappointing, is the founding principles of private security. The priority list – 1. preserve life, 2. protect people, assets, property, 3. Prevent crime, loss and waste. We don't teach that anymore. I think we should. If it doesn't comply with those three 'p's', they are not doing their job.'
(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)

'We have to be better at blending technology and people. People are expensive and that will only get worse. We need to come up with better solutions where we can use people adding value, and being more skilled at using technology and we are not there yet.'
(Interviewee 18, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'We're teaching in theory things that don't exist or that contradict other things. Arrest procedures – it talks about not putting someone in a conflict situation. If you tell them you are calling the police, that's a trigger. Physical intervention – breaking up fights. The advice is horrible. You teach to pull one person away and disengage. But you also teach crowded areas – if you go into a crowded area to disengage two people, you would be turning your back on the other customer, exposing yourself to the other. Another one is physical intervention and positional asphyxia. The training tells you what not to do, but doesn't show you. There are two restraint reduction techniques taught to NHS care homes that are perfect. They do not put anyone at risk. It raises the chest so it doesn't impede breathing. We should be teaching that – what we mean and what it looks like.'
(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)

4.56 Picking up on some of the concerns noted earlier that some frontline security did not meet the minimum baseline that should have been

achieved via licence linked training (in the UK), interviewees suggested a need to **tighten** control of the **training and testing** process:

> *'You need to get properly tested on the things you've learned. The training needs to be run under the tutelage of universities. There should be some educational oversight over how its delivered. I get the feeling, it's just some guys in a business centre, pushing through people who you've no hope of taking further. You have no hope of explaining hostile reconnaissance, Martyn's law. People have got to have the communication skills. You see comments on the internet saying there are loads of foreigners that can't speak English, can't communicate – what will happen when there is a major incident, and they can't communicate.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*

> *'One of the biggest concerns for me is the training side. I think it's the most corrupt part. There is very little oversight. It's very easy to get around the regulations. There are a lot of loopholes. I interviewed someone that had to bring a translator to be able to communicate. They had an SIA licence – part of the criteria is doing an English test. There is no way he did those exams and passed them himself. But he is now in possession of an SIA licence and looking for security work. I admire that he wants to work, but how will he keep people safe? He can't use a radio, he can't talk to the public. How will he do work? He will get a job though. Anyone can get a licence if they go to the right place.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)*

> *'Shoddy licence training is key.'*
>
> *(Interviewee 17, Supplier – Senior Leadership)*

4.57 One interviewee suggested that rules relating to who can conduct licence training (in the UK) should also be revised to improve the standard of teaching:

> *'Who can train. [In the UK] at the moment the SIA stipulates two years operational experience. But that could be a student working one shift a week for two years. Police officers can become trainers in door supervision or guarding but they've never done it. If you want to be a trainer, you should have at least 10 years' experience. Why are we allowing someone with little experience to teach something they know little to nothing about?'*
>
> *(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)*

Promoting private security

4.58 Many interviewees felt that **better promotion** of private security would improve its image:

'For us as a sector, we need to be better promoters of what we do and actively promote positive examples of what security does for people.'

(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)

'What we need to do, and this is tricky, given the lack of interest in the positive, but we must be positive and talk up what we do. And be conscious of the language and keep being positive. The public can be fickle and this has to be ongoing and must be consistent and constant and above the radar a bit at a time. Any progress is positive, it is a bit by bit and be realistic. You have to eat an elephant a mouthful at a time.'

(Interviewee 22, Other Security Expert)

'Shout as loud as you can about successes and respect that business and security is about risk. If mistakes are made, it is not about mal intent.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'I don't think we are advertising the benefits. In a shopping centre you are stopping someone stealing. Hopefully you are also a deterrent – an opportunist may not go there. If you haven't got security, you will have problems. The public should feel safe.'

(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

4.59 Some interviewees noted that coming together to promote a **unified** message may be powerful[40]:

'How do we discuss these things – what's the best way? Social media is the be all of everything. Things are blown up on TikTok now as well. Maybe if there was a consolidated industry approach to that – a central hub for reporting good news stories and putting them out to the public.'

(Interviewee 10, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'Security has a hundred and one trade associations. They are leading minds. Sometimes different associations compete. They don't have a unified message. How can collectivism push our message.'

(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

'There are too many security industry bodies with a lot of fragmented power. To help change the image, they should consolidate or work together on joint campaigns. By doing this, they would be able to make more noise. But in the current set up, there are too many, and individually they do not possess the resource or money and therefore are not making an impact [on image]. They could do 'did you

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[40] It should be noted that as our research was being finalised we became aware that a number of Security Associations are working together under the banner of 'United for Public Trust' to develop a plan to raise the level of trust in private security in the UK.

know', 'why security isn't what you think', '10 great things security do that you didn't know about'.'

'There needs to be some role models. The [UK security regulator] and [security associations] if there was between us a commitment that we all did something that would be good. There are too many associations, and they all have good intentions. There is a long list, and we are all doing the same thing. Why don't we become one? This is a big risk to nothing getting done.'

4.60 Some specifically noted the need to **counteract** negative representation in the media, with more positive and informative messages:

'It would be great to have a tv programme about security. One where they go out with security officers, see the patrols, cameras, stopping hostile reconnaissance. Going out there, engaging people. Show the positives of what they do. It is investigating, crime scene preservation, looking after people. Things to support lone workers, healthcare nurses, body-worn video. There are all sorts of stories that could be done. People like [security companies] who are these big global companies. They could do something – they have the resources.'

'How many news stories – negative stories in the press about security officers – pushes a man down the stairs, or tackles a fleeing shoplifter and injures them. Where's the good news stories. The security officers that heard someone go in the water. The ones that talk people down from bridge or the top of car parks. They save lives on a daily basis. If we see that in the mainstream media and increase public awareness of what security do, will build that forward facing image a bit.'

4.61 Although one interviewee sounded caution that raising awareness can be a double-edged sword:

'There can be negatives when you raise awareness. If you watch fly on the wall programmes about bailiffs for example, it does show what they deal with but it can also be negative.'

4.62 A major criticism in respect of promoting the positives, was that 'good news' stories rarely make it beyond the security community and into the **general public awareness**:

'What tends to happen if you research security collateral is it tends to be circulated within security – great articles,

blogs and everything else. It doesn't tend to get outside the security bubble. That's the hard part. In my consultancy I have deliberately partnered with someone that has no security background, to bring a different point of view.'
(Interviewee 2, Security Consultant)

'I really hope the industry can unite to effectively boost the image of private security. I for one regularly share the good news stories of my team members through internal channels to help boost the profile of our team - however having an outlet that more members of the public would see would be a massive step forward in recognition and building understanding of what the job is about.'
(Survey Respondent)

'[There are intelligence sharing initiatives] where intel is sent out to everyone every day, regular meetings, how businesses could work together as whole. All these companies working together but people don't see that. They don't understand the collaboration that goes behind that. It's a lot of work – filling incident reports, downloading CCTV footage, ensuring intel is getting to the right place.
(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

'There needs to be more public consultation – more guidance given to them on what we do. The police need to be educated as well.'
(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)

'Say a guarding company has a good story to tell. Their clients don't want them to seek publicity. They are constrained in what they can say about their job. The police are pumping out successes, arresting people and court sentences which is serving as publicity for the good work they do. Even if private security played a part in that, it is very seldom acknowledged. Even if a story mentions a security officer there's no mention of a particular security company. It just serves to make private security anonymous and not relatable.'
(Interviewee 13, Security media professional)

'As a security provider we end up challenging ourselves about this. We celebrate between ourselves, but what we haven't done is connected with the outside world and celebrated with them. We need to flip the dial.'
(Interviewee 16, Supplier – Marketing Lead)

4.63   Interviewees also noted the need to specifically **promote private security as a 'career'**:

'[Other roles like the army, navy, airforce, police, public sector and emergency jobs advertise publicly and] are outgunning private security in terms of reach and spend. Private security has never done any of this. For as long as I've known. It comes last in terms of competition for

eyeballs and people to pick up off adverts what job to go for.'

<div align="right">*(Interviewee 13, Security media professional)*</div>

'I can't recall seeing anything that says, 'fancy a career in security' – I honestly can't think of any supplier adverts.'

<div align="right">*(Interviewee 14, In-house – Security Lead)*</div>

'I think we should go out and educate at the school level, this is what security are, what they do. Some of the big companies could show that this is potentially a good career. We need to change perception from the start.'

<div align="right">*(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)*</div>

4.64   One interviewee emphasised that more could be done to **better educate organisations** on the value that private security officers:

'I think we should start targeting organisations – we've missed the opportunity to show people in organisations the benefits that the security profession brings into their day-to-day business operation. I attended an event to present security. It was great to see excitement and feeling comfortable and secure. They didn't know the camera could tell the number of people in a room, or alert guards. They never understood why badging in and out was important. They didn't understand security helps with the bigger risk portfolio. How do you tie that messaging together? That culture of driving it within an organisation. We can have messaging into organisations. Then that will go back into people's households and make sure people have the capability to understand why its key to turn that deadbolt.'

<div align="right">*(Interviewee 2, Security Consultant)*</div>

'The mindset is to try and hide security features to make it look more pleasing. We miss that opportunity to sell that and reflect back – we no longer have big gates – it looks good – but we still keep it secure and here's the data.'

<div align="right">*(Interviewee 2, Security Consultant)*</div>

Leadership

4.65   A number of interviewees felt that the issue needed **leaders** within private security to agree a course of action and take up the mantle for improving quality, and thereby image, as the ones with the **power and resources** to do so:

'I venture that it's not so much a question of how to improve the image, rather do those that could, want to?'

<div align="right">*(Survey respondent – Security Officer)*</div>

'We need people that want to make a difference, that have the clout and money to want to push it.'

<div align="right">*(Interviewee 1, Expert in security recruitment)*</div>

'We need a campaign about improving standards. If the top [guarding companies] got together we would do it. But we're in a short-term industry where people want to make money and retire early, sell their business.'
(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'The management of private security companies need to step up their game [to improve the industry]. The on the ground supervisors and managers need to step up and acknowledge their teams more to the clients.'
(Interviewee 7, Supplier – Contract Security Manager)

'We already have security events. There is nothing to stop us having a day where we say come and meet security professionals, ask questions, learn about a career in security. The larger companies would buy in to that if it would bring in new recruits. I don't see everyone working together to work on that though. Part of it is down to business model. A lot don't want to work with competitors. People on the ground look after each other. Business is all about money. Shareholders need to be paid. But they need to look at the bigger picture. So many are creating labour exploitation and are damaging the brand of security.'
(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)

4.66 The importance of strong leadership **within organisations** (i.e. among those with 'in-house' security and/or that purchase private security goods/services) to **promote the value** of security within their organisation was also highlighted:

'A lot of people in security management come up through the ranks. They are lacking in confidence. A lot of security aren't confident that they are important. 'Lean in'[41]. You are the expert. If we don't tell the board why its important, others will tell them why other things are more important. Each firm has its own DNA. In my firm, my managing partner is sort of a champion of security. My COO less so. Those personalities help what we achieve. That culture at the top drives change.'
(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

'There is not enough business savvy people. I can count on two hands those who have business acumen who also come from loss prevention and asset control. Good security expertise is bred in business not in security. People see themselves as security and not as business people.'
(Interviewee 23, Expert in Security Recruitment)

'Storytelling. Look at Obama and the amazing opportunity to tell people in 30 seconds what you think. You need to

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[41] The interviewee noted the relevance of the concept presented in Sheryl Sandberg's book '*Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*'

book a slot with the CEO and be connected. So you need to frame the story and that takes skill.'

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 23, Expert in Security Recruitment)

</div>

Police engagement

4.67   Interviewees also noted the importance of **better engagement with the police**. Given the increasing role that private security is playing in assisting and protecting the public, as well as the overlap in responding to incidents and investigating crime, it was suggested that developing this relationship and demonstrating that private security can be trusted, is an important part of improving image:

'There are three times as many private security as police and we are short of police. So much of that 'police' function is already played by private security. We need better engagement.'

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 1, Expert in security recruitment)

</div>

'Information regarding the private security act, should be added to the core police curriculum for new officers. It's the only way to change culture and beliefs. It starts with induction and training.'

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 9, Freelance Security Trainer)

</div>

'I think the relationship of trust has plateaued. The easy bits have been done. They know the officer has had some training and hopefully is the person on the badge [licence]. Do they trust them, to give a police radio? Is he vetted to a satisfaction that police would share sensitive information? No. That's the hard bit. I don't see that happening soon.'

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 13, Security media professional)

</div>

'Respect between the two is getting better. There is a realisation they are going to have to embrace private security more. There is more confidence, we just need more high-level chiefs saying positive things.'

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

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'I think it's very specific to certain companies, and in particular, certain sites. As a generalisation, police of any rank don't have a lot of faith in private security. Guys on the ground, if they know a good team, if they have proved they are a good trustable team, they will treat you differently. But overall, I don't think police trust and want to work with private security beyond what they have to.'

<div align="right">

(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

</div>

'Initiatives in the sector and within some organisations are improving that image. [The work in the UK to tackle shoplifting and organised retail crime] is demonstrating to policing that they can work more proactively with security companies and is starting to develop across other bodies. Policing recognise the foundation of security and now it is up to the two to carve out that value. Some [security

companies] are well equipped and have fostered good relations and are not afraid to voice their opinion and are not afraid to take risks.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

Enforcement

4.68 A number of interviewees noted that despite good practice among some security suppliers, it was still **too easy for security companies to be poor**. Creating a stronger structure that could **prevent and take action against malpractice** was thought to be essential. Some specifically suggested **business licensing** as a potential solution:

'There is too much supply. It is so easy to start up a business. We've got to close that. Supply is abundant.'

(Interviewee 6, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'With consultancy, anyone trying to sell a system is called a consultant. It upsets a bit of the industry [i.e. professional security consultants]. If you don't know anything about security you can provide the whole jargon and sound like you know about it, but not provide a lot.'

(Interviewee 15, Security Consultant)

'Security companies are some of the biggest criminals of labour exploitation – the dodgy supply chains. It impacts image. People are poor. They won't give a realistic view of the frontline. Speak to the smaller companies. Get a broader range of views. There is no bite to really want to improve things.'

(Interviewee 8, Supplier – Operations Manager)

'We need to be stricter when companies aren't delivering, or officers are overstepping the mark. That improves the image. We try and do it with our vetting and it is cascaded to all our sites that that person is not allowed. It should be that they can't jump from one company to another if they are not competent.'

(Interviewee 11, In-house – Security Lead)

'Making things better will depend on business licensing. That will wheedle out the less reputable organisation.'

(Interviewee 24, Supplier – Senior Leadership)

'In some industry and sectors, the importance of what they do is driven by a regulator. The security sector doesn't have the same type of regulator that other sectors have. If you can formulate around one standard, that is seen as the 'must have' standard, and that if you don't have that, you are not someone to do business with.'

(Interviewee 12, In-house – Security Lead)

Section 5.   Discussion

5.1   Workers in a specific sector are ostensibly well placed to have some credible insights on its strengths and weaknesses. It is therefore striking, and perhaps somewhat alarming, to find that less than half of our survey sample (of security professionals) had a positive view of private security; and similarly, that less than half thought that the level of 'professionalism' within private security is improving over time. This highlights the need to improve the perception of security within the sector, as well as outside.

5.2   Less surprisingly, respondents indicated that the police (especially those in the lower ranks), politicians, and the general public would have the most negative view of private security. In reality, such perceptions are interlinked; a key aspect of developing public trust, is the police having faith in security personnel. There are many operational advantages to collaborating with the police, but such confidence also sends a strong positive signal about the professionalism and status of the private security sector. Interviewees highlighted that it is not enough to share successes within the security sector, but that a route is needed to reach a wider audience.

5.3   There were two main sets of explanations for the lack of positivity that exists. The first could be described as conceptual; that even when it is done well, the work of private security is under-valued.

5.4   Our survey sample identified a lack of recognition of the value of private security to be a major barrier to improving perception, and none of the security roles we explored were considered to be well recognised for the value of their work (and least of all: frontline security officers; guarding companies; and the regulator). Further, our interviewees highlighted that there is an inherent difficulty in demonstrating the value of security when it is considered to be a cost to an organisation, where a job well done, means 'nothing' (bad) happens. The view is an oversimplification, but one that is commonplace and that is hard to challenge given the difficulty of meaningfully quantifying the benefits of private security in financial terms.[42] Added to which, 'nothing happening' is much less newsworthy than when things go wrong.

5.5   The fact that collectively, private security fills a critical gap in the overall resources available to protect people and places is similarly overlooked, yet this is an essential feature of maintaining good order. A lack of awareness of the different types of security professionals (such as in-house teams, security technology, security consultants and built environment specialists) and the good work that takes place beyond what happens on the frontline was also thought to be a missed opportunity.

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[42] For a more detailed discussion on this issue please see our previous SRI reports - 'Demonstrating the Value of Security' (2007) and 'Beyond the Protection of Assets: The Broader Benefits of Security' (2015) - https://www.perpetuityresearch.com/category/publications/security-research-initiative-publications/

5.6   The second set of explanations might be considered endemic; that the security sector itself has not taken sufficient action to put its own house in order. There were clear areas that respondents thought should be a focus, although all the actions we explored in the survey were supported by at least 7 in 10 respondents. Strikingly, the top two points (albeit by a tiny margin) reflected the need to address issues at both 'ends' of the spectrum - on the one hand, demonstrating security leaders to be as competent as other business leaders; and on the other, raising the skill sets of frontline workers.

5.7   This is important for at least two reasons. First, our respondents are clear that there is no single shortcoming of security that can be addressed to tackle its image issue; a multi-pronged approach is needed. Second, and contrary to where most traditional focus has been, while addressing the (reasons for the) negative perceptions of frontline officers is key, the perception of security leaders and their competence must also be addressed.

5.8   Addressing perceptions of the quality of security work, certainly those associated with frontline work, but more broadly as well, was a major focus of discussions with interviewees. When thinking about frontline services the usual concerns emerged, such as language capabilities, pay and training. The 'race to the bottom' dynamic that can occur during procurement of security, that serves to keep standards low, was also flagged. However, three less frequently discussed points were also raised. The first is the lack of a distinction among different types of security workers and how they are prepared and deployed according to the role undertaken (for example nightclub door supervisors differ from officers patrolling a shopping centre). Elaborating further, some respondents noted that the sector could usefully distinguish role and level of training so that buyers and the public could more easily distinguish a service that was basic, from one that was more advanced.

5.9   The second, highlighted the disconnect between the perception of frontline security as low skilled and the level of expectations (operating in often challenging working environments) and responsibility placed upon them (in playing a critical role in keeping people and places safe). The third, was that a better understanding was needed of the stance, taken by some, that security officers should avoid any situations with the potential for confrontation. Many felt that a lack of understanding on this issue undermined the true role of what security is recognised and valued for and undermined the real usefulness of security on the frontline.

5.10   Notwithstanding the need to better articulate the value of security and the need to address the quality of private security outlined above, our sample also highlighted the importance of correcting misperceptions that exist and serve to limit the perception of the value and quality of security. It was thought that counteracting negative attention with more positive and informative messages would attract more recruits and ultimately

influence buyers – something of a 'Holy Grail' in ensuring that only quality security is purchased. Here, there were a number of areas of specific focus.

5.11 Demonstrating that security is an 'enabler' (not a hindrance); that in keeping client's safe it often also protects the public (not just 'business/private' interests); mostly effectively and affordably; that it can in fact improve an organisation's profit margin; and that the sector uses intelligence products and technologies that provide a more robust challenge to those with malicious intent, were all messages that respondents considered important.

5.12 Another way to approach the question of what needs to be better communicated is to consider the types of issues that distinguish security from other areas of work. This is not to suggest that each aspect is entirely unique, but rather to note the distinct features which, collectively, are not provided by any single agency, certainly not outside the public sector, and arguably not even within.

5.13 Back in 2022, Martin Gill argued[43] that we should define security like this:

> *Security when practiced well is fundamental to protecting individuals, organisations, communities and countries from danger; it has been shown via research to be crucial in reducing risk and saving lives. Within organisations it serves an essential function with multiple purposes, primarily it: identifies major risks and is a focal point for managing them; it facilitates operations, including and especially in the most testing environments where it is the mainstay of building and maintaining resilience; it prioritises protecting people and other assets while supporting organisational goals; it is a focal point for expertise in responding to danger and in a crisis; it provides a check on practices to ensure they are legal and ethical; in this role it recognises and promotes the personal freedoms of individuals and protects the organisation's brand and its reputation. Security provides a coordinating function, marshalling relevant internal and external resources to provide a holistic response always guided by organisational objectives. In the commercial sector, security personnel help companies make profits and reduce loss, and in all sectors good security provides a value adding service.*

5.14 The aim of the statement was to emphasise the real value of security. Collating the points that have emerged from our current research, it seems our sample has suggested another more nuanced definition of

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[43] Gill, M. (2022) 'Thinking About the Benefits of Security, and the Barriers to Recognising Them', In, Gill, M, (ed) *The Handbook of Security* (3rd edition) Palgrave: Basingstoke, P999.

security, one that focusses on what makes it distinct. We therefore offer the following definition:

> *Security is focussed 24/7 on protecting people and places and keeping people safe and in a different way the critical national infrastructure. It does that by offering an omni present service, with more trained personnel - than any other singularly identifiable group - that are able to respond speedily (often instantly and most often far quicker than state agencies) and intervene to offer a range of support services which can result in many positive outcomes including identifying and apprehending offenders and saving lives. This prevents state agencies being called (unnecessarily) generating an enormous public cost saving. Moreover, when state response services are called it is because they are needed – their presence is worthwhile - and security can provide them with insights and intelligence ahead of time to render their attendance more valuable. Because security protects people and other assets, organisations are able to carry out their operations; this is not a nice to have it is an essential requirement of doing business. Moreover, by creating a positive security culture; by managing risks and reducing danger; in providing a speedy recovery to normal operations when adversity strikes, security is facilitating continuity, another condition of business success.*

5.15 At its best, what is there not to like and value about security? Yet here lies the rub. On the one hand, some of what security does and offers is not the best, far from it, and on the other, these shortcomings tend to attract far more attention than everything that is done well. When you add to this the sector's inability to speak with a united voice, then it becomes easy to understand how and why it has struggled to make itself heard.

Final comment

5.16 Our interviewees, in particular, noted that leadership is crucial. Media campaigns have their place but improving and promoting the security sector requires leaders to lead – both within organisations and across the wider industry. We have seen that there is much to be proud of, and much that is currently unsaid. Tackling the weak points is a prerequisite to progress but this should not stand in the way of, nor undermine the need for security personnel to say why the work they do is valuable. A law-abiding society, an overburdened police service, and a thriving commercial sector depend on it.

Appendix 1. Methodology and Sample

The approach

The study involved a review of existing literature on the significance of image. This was used to give context and to help identify key issues and themes to explore in the consultation with security professionals.

The review of the literature was followed by two main approaches: 1) an online survey on security professional views on partnership working; and 2) extensive discussions including semi-structured interviews with a range of security professionals to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic.

Survey

The survey examined the views of security professionals on a number of key themes: the current perception of private security; how this differs among different groups and in respect of different aspects of private security; the actions that would help improve perception.

The sample was, self-recruited and clearly those with an interest in the topic were most likely to respond. While no claims are made that the survey is representative of the security industry as a whole, responses were received from a range of roles and countries. Attempts were made to publicise the survey widely, including via participants from previous research who had elected to be contacted for future research; links in the Perpetuity newsletter and social media; security associations; security press; announcements made at conferences and other security events; and personal contact with a range of organisations who were informed about the survey and invited to publicise it and pass on the details to their members. We cannot be sure of the manner in which adverts were disseminated by these groups, but their contribution greatly enhanced the reach of our survey.

The survey ran from Thursday 24th April to Friday 23rd May 2025.

A total of 371 responses were received, although not every respondent completed every question in the survey. The data was analysed using SPSS. The data are categorical; therefore, it is not possible to assess the normality of data. It is important that this is borne in mind.

One to one interviews

The approach in this work was to engage with security professionals from a range of roles and sectors that may be able to add insight. We engaged both informally and formally with a wide range of professionals in conversations about the issues covered in this report. We contacted specific people by word-of-mouth, and they sometimes referred us to others. We drew upon personal

contacts and their networks; and some individuals who volunteered to offer more details after taking part in the survey.

Obtaining the sample in this way allows for potentially more valuable responses, as those taking part are more likely to be knowledgeable about the research. The interviews typically lasted thirty minutes and semi-structured interview schedules were used. The schedules were based on the information taken from the literature review as well as previous research. An advantage of a semi-structured schedule is that it gives the flexibility for interviewers to probe the issues raised.

We formally interviewed 24 professionals.

Appendix 2. Additional Data Tables

Table 4: Length of time respondents have worked in security (n=369)

Length of time	N	%
Less than 12 months	5	1
1-3 years	18	5
4-10 years	55	15
11-19 years	95	26
20-29 years	102	28
30 years or over	94	25

Table 5: Sector that respondents provide security in (all that apply) (n=371)

Sector	N	%
Property	139	37
Public Admin, Other Services, Government	120	32
Retail	108	29
Leisure & the Night Time Economy	92	25
Education	88	24
Finance	80	22
Health	74	20
Transport	66	18
Hotel & Catering	65	18
Manufacturing	65	18
Energy	60	16
Other	57	15
Pharmaceutical	52	14
Production	48	13
Post & Telecommunications	34	9
Mining, Quarrying & Utilities	32	9
ICT	31	8
Wholesale	29	8
Motor Trades	26	7
Agriculture	25	7

Table 6: Country where the respondent conducts the majority of their work (where they are based) (n=342)

Country	N	%
UK	265	77.5
USA	17	5.0
Canada	5	1.5
Ireland	5	1.5
South Africa	5	1.5
Australia	4	1.2
Kenya	4	1.2
Nigeria	4	1.2
Singapore	4	1.2
Germany	3	0.9
Switzerland	3	0.9
China	2	0.6
India	2	0.6
Iraq	2	0.6
Botswana	1	0.3
Cameroon	1	0.3
Finland	1	0.3
Ghana	1	0.3
Greece	1	0.3
Guyana	1	0.3
Haiti	1	0.3
Italy	1	0.3
New Zealand	1	0.3
North Macedonia	1	0.3
Norway	1	0.3
Panama	1	0.3
Rwanda	1	0.3
Saudi Arabia	1	0.3
Serbia	1	0.3
Ukraine	1	0.3
United Arab Emirates	1	0.3

About Perpetuity Research

Perpetuity Research is a leading research company with wide expertise in both quantitative and qualitative approaches. We have been extensively involved in evaluating 'what works' (and what does not). Our work has involved helping our clients to understand people's behaviours, perceptions and levels of awareness and in identifying important trends. Our mission statement is 'committed to making a difference', and much of our work has a practical application in terms of informing decision-making and policy formulation.

We work closely with our clients. This includes businesses, national and local governments, associations and international organisations as well as charities and foundations. Our aim is to exceed their expectations and it speaks volumes that so many have chosen to work with us repeatedly over many years.

About the SRI

The Security Research Initiative (SRI) started 20 years ago. It involves a rolling program of research; each year a separate study is conducted on the security sector to generate new insights, help develop the response and role of security and act as a guide to improving practice. The SRI is supported by ADS, ASIS International (UK Chapter), the British Security Industry Association, IFPO UK, IPSA, The SASIG, and the Security Institute, and includes membership from leading security suppliers and corporate security departments who share the commitment to the development of new knowledge.

Previous studies have focused, for example, on police views on private security; tackling cyber crime – the role of private security; the broader benefits of security; aspiring to excellence; the relative benefits and drawbacks of buying security as a single service or as part of a bundle; an industry wide survey; a study of the value of security. We have developed two toolkits, including one on developing a security strategy. The findings from the research are made available free of charge to all. More information on the SRI is available at: www.perpetuityresearch.com/security-research-initiative/

About the Authors

Charlotte Howell

Charlotte has over 15 years experience in crime and security research and holds a first class LLB (Hons) in Law and an MSc in Criminology. Charlotte's role as Research Manager encompasses responsibility for managing the delivery of research contracts, and our team of research staff. She also manages the Secured Environments scheme run by Perpetuity Research on

behalf of Police CPI, auditing organisations in respect of their security management practices. Charlotte is an accomplished project manager with experience of working with a range of clients including businesses, associations, police forces, government organisations and charities. Charlotte has delivered a range of projects for example relating to: the work of security officers, careers in security, women in security, offenders views of security measures, the benefits of security, security culture, prison security managers, the needs of victims of crime, hate crime, domestic abuse, financial investigation, serious acquisitive crime and violent crime. Charlotte has consulted with a range of individuals, including stakeholders (such as individuals from the police, security professionals, local authorities, service commissioners and staff), offenders (both in prison and in the community) and clients accessing services (such as drug and alcohol treatment services, domestic abuse services and support services for sex workers). Charlotte is adept at quantitative and qualitative analysis and has a wealth of experience analysing survey responses, client/service data, performance/outcomes data, literature and interview findings.

Professor Martin Gill

Professor Martin Gill is a criminologist and Director of Perpetuity Research which started life as a spin out company from the University of Leicester. He holds honorary/visiting Chairs at the Universities of Leicester and London. Martin has been actively involved in a range of studies relating to different aspects of security, private policing and business crime on topics including: organised crime and fraud; why offenders offend; the (in)effectiveness of different security measures; and the scope of security management. Martin has been extensively involved with evaluation research and with the offender's perspective looking at how they target certain people and premises and aim to circumvent security measures. He has published 15 books including the third edition of the 'Handbook' of Security' which was published in 2022. He is the organiser and Chair of the Security Thought Leadership webinar series. Martin is a Fellow of The Security Institute, a member of the Company of Security Professionals (and a Freeman of the City of London). He is a Trustee of the ASIS Foundation. In 2002 the ASIS Security Foundation made a 'citation for distinguished service' in 'recognition of his significant contribution to the security profession'. In 2009 he was one of the country's top 5 most quoted criminologists. In 2010 he was recognised by the BSIA with a special award for 'outstanding service to the security sector'. In 2015 and 2016 he was nominated and shortlisted for the Imbert Prize at the Association of Security Consultants and in the latter he won. In 2016 ASIS International awarded him a Presidential Order of Merit for distinguished service. In 2022 he was recognised by *Security Magazine* as one of the 'Most Influential People in Security' and also received the Mervyn David Award from the ASIS UK Chapter 'for his significant contribution to the security profession'. In 2016 he was entered onto the Register of Chartered Security Professionals. Martin is the Founder of the Outstanding Security Performance Awards (the OSPAs and Cyber OSPAs); the Tackling Economic Crime Awards (the TECAs); the Security and Safety Entrepreneurial Awards (the SSEAs); and the Fire and Resilience Awards (the FREAs).

Doctor Janice Goldstraw-White

Janice is a criminologist who has been affiliated with Perpetuity since 2010, with specialised expertise in crime, governance, audit, risk management, and security. Building on over two decades of prior experience as an accountant, her research particularly centres on workplace crime, offender behaviour, and the role of women in financial offending. Her primary research interest lies in economic crime, which she has investigated extensively in both the UK and Australia, with a specific focus on offender narratives. She has conducted over fifty interviews with incarcerated white-collar offenders and has substantial experience conducting qualitative research within custodial settings. Janice's methodological expertise is grounded in qualitative approaches, including literature and policy reviews, institutional and procedural mapping, interviews, and focus group facilitation. She also possesses a sound working knowledge of quantitative methods and data analysis. She has led and contributed to a wide range of research projects addressing issues such as fraud in local government, the case for mandatory fraud reporting in the UK, digital evidence challenges, responses to fraud victimisation, NFT fraud, and cross-sector collaboration to combat economic crime. She is currently researching the level of support to organisations for business crime and how to share data more effectively. Her work also extends beyond economic crime to include studies on organised crime in the private rental sector, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on security personnel, data centre security, the integration of AI into security practices, and the development of sector-specific key performance indicators. She is currently engaged in a study examining how the value of security can be effectively demonstrated to stakeholders. Janice has authored and co-authored multiple peer-reviewed publications and book chapters, most recently on female perpetrators of fraud. Her own book, White-Collar Crime: Accounts of Offending Behaviour, was published in October 2011.

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Perpetuity Research & Consultancy International Ltd
11a High Street
Tunbridge Wells
TN1 1UL
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1892 538690
www.perpetuityresearch.com
prci@perpetuityresearch.com