

Student Mental Health: Life in a Pandemic.

September 2021

Research Wave II

Looking ahead to the 2021/22 academic year, two-thirds of students were concerned about their mental wellbeing.



student
minds

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About the Research

In August 2021, we shared our report [University Mental Health: Life in a Pandemic](#), which included the findings of our first wave of research conducted in April/May 2021. Since then, all coronavirus restrictions have been lifted in England and a new academic year has begun. We have therefore undertaken a second wave of research to better understand how students feel, what their concerns are for this academic year and how they can best be supported.

The online survey was conducted between 3rd and 15th September 2021 by [Alterline](#). We received 1015 responses from a sample broadly representative of the UK student population. This includes both undergraduate and postgraduate students, new and continuing.

The findings provide a snapshot of how some students are/were feeling ahead of the new academic year. The sample is relatively small and we suspect there may be a self-selection bias, meaning students with experience of mental health issues might be over-represented, skewing results. As such, we encourage readers to view our findings critically, with consideration of the above limitations, as well as systemic inequalities, stigmas and biases which may impact our findings.

Headline Findings

- Mental health and wellbeing appears to have improved since April/May 2021.
- Returning students were less confident about returning to university than new students were about starting.
- The vast majority of students have been fully vaccinated. Opinions on vaccine passports are split.
- Students still have a big preference for in-person teaching and support.



Key Comparisons

April/May 2021 vs September 2021

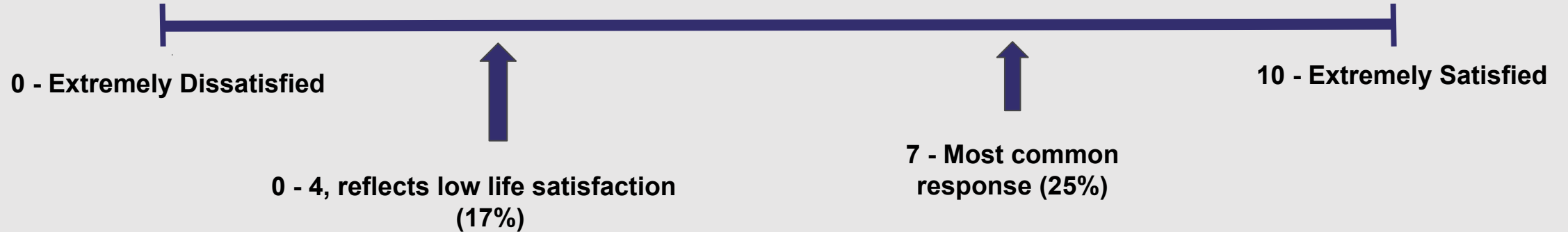
| Question | May 2021 (Wave I) | September 2021 (Wave II) |
|---|---|--|
| Life Satisfaction (% reporting low life satisfaction) | 27% | 17% |
| Covid-19's impact on mental health (% reporting a negative impact) | 74% | 63% |
| Top concerns (% concerned or v.concerned about ____) | Performing well academically (84%) Mental wellbeing (80%) Friends/family catching Covid (78%) | Performing well academically (79%) Keeping up with study commitments (69%) AND Friends/family catching Covid (69%) The possibility of the Gov reintroducing restrictions (67%) AND managing time (67%) |
| Experiencing mental health issues currently | 60% | 53% |

An illustration of a hand with a yellow sleeve holding the left edge of a light yellow rectangular sign. The sign is centered on a dark blue background.

Mental Health

Mental Health

Life Satisfaction



Life satisfaction scores have improved since Wave I in April/May 2021.

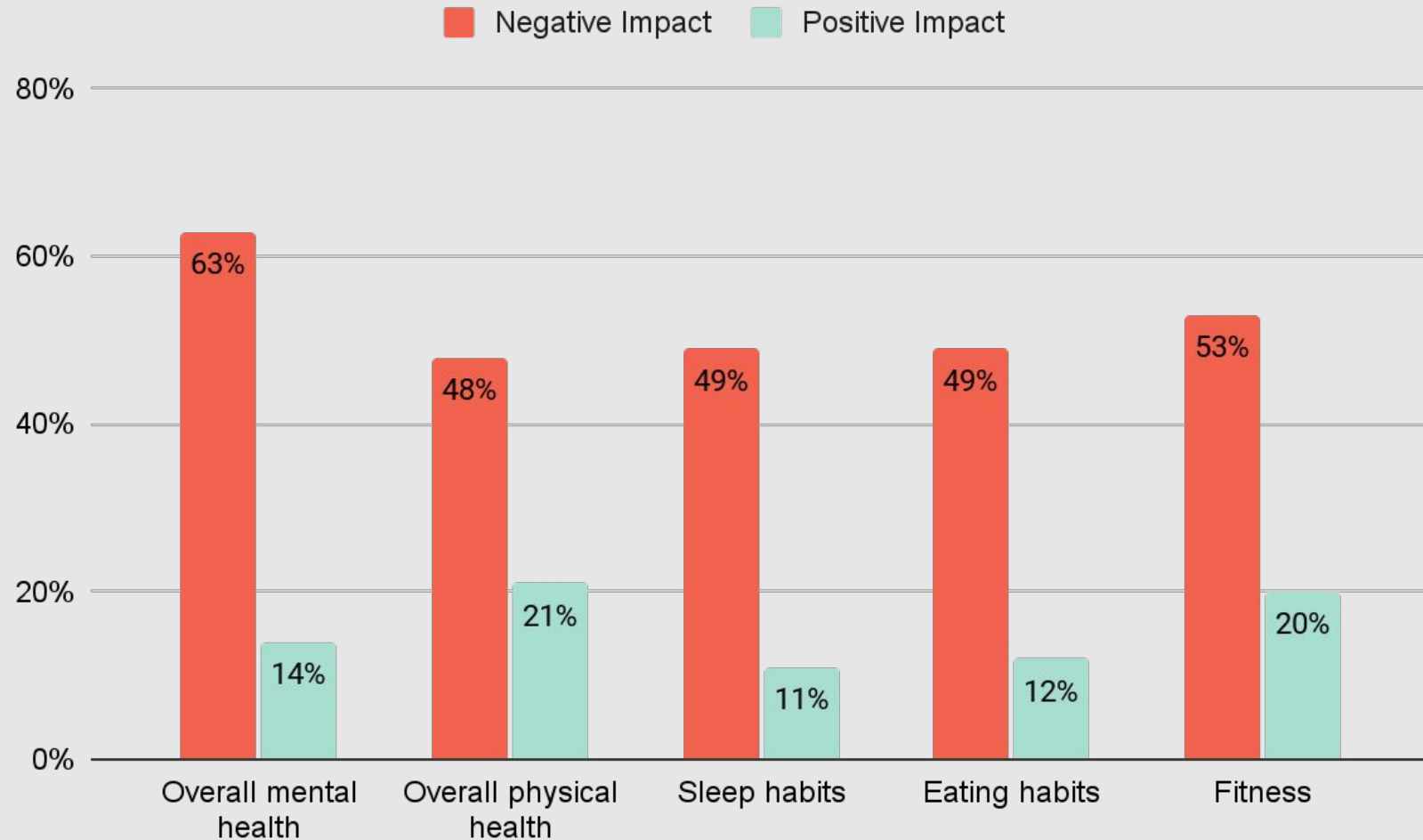
In Wave I, 27% reported low life satisfaction and only 40% reported satisfaction scores of between 7 and 10.

In Wave II, 17% reported low life satisfaction and 56% reported scores of between 7 and 10.

Mental Health

Impact of Covid-19

% reporting positive / negative impacts of Covid-19 over past month



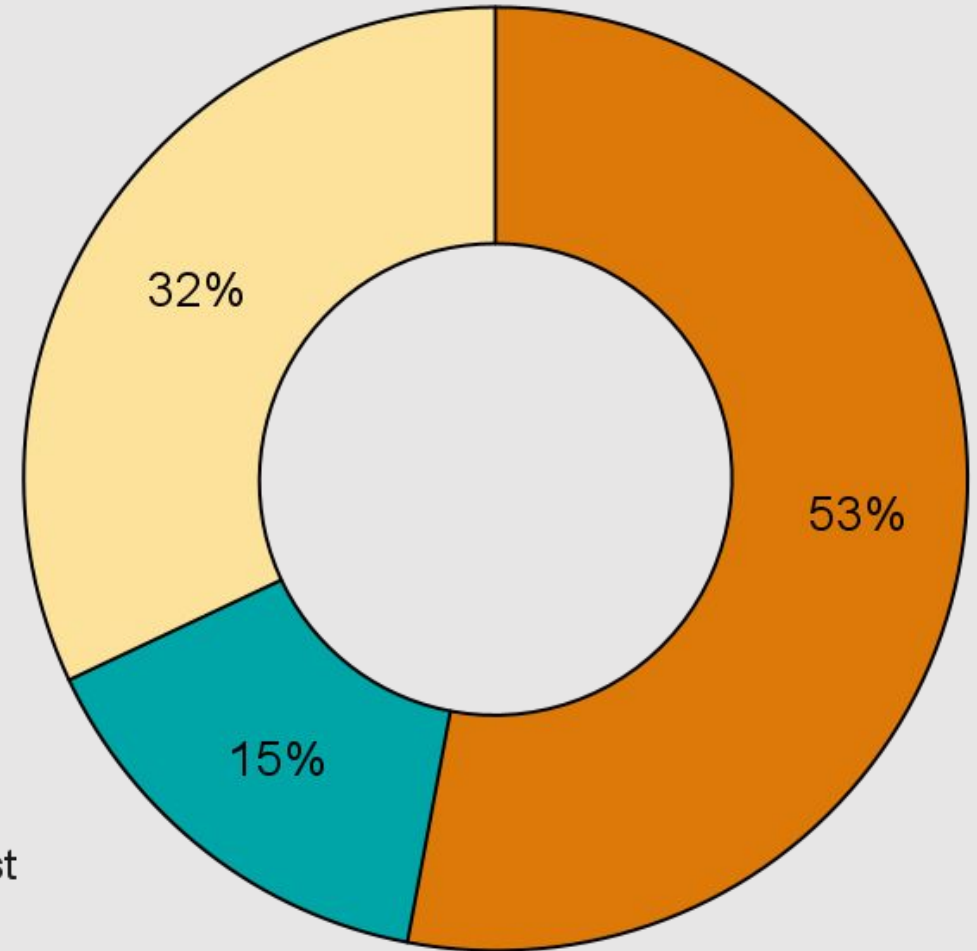
Mental Health

Experience of mental health issues

The proportion of students reporting that they **currently** have a mental health issue has decreased since April/May 2021, when this figure was 60%. It is now 53%

Remember: these figures may be skewed by a suspected self-selection bias.

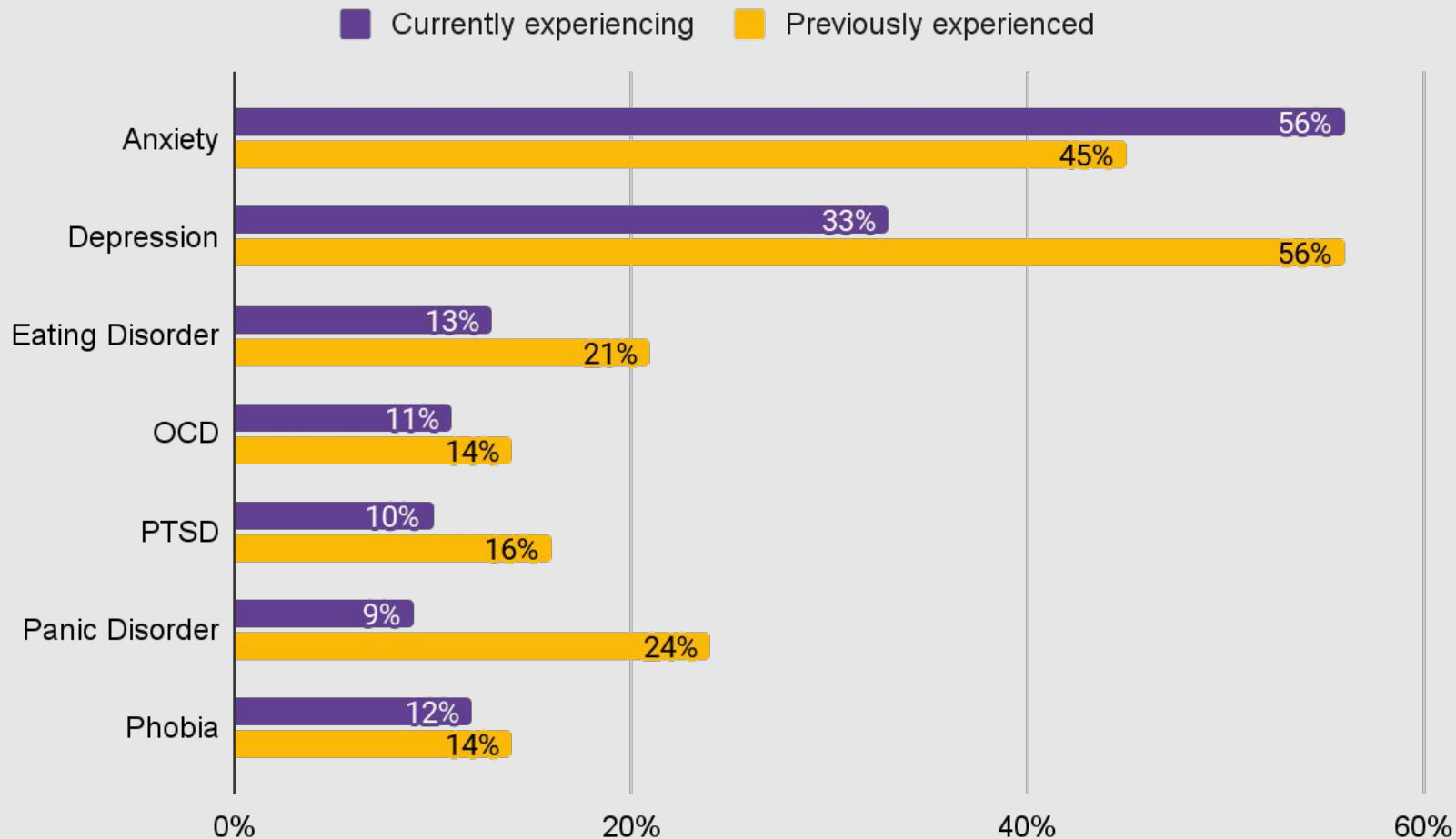
- Has a current mental health issue
- Has had a mental health issue in the past
- Never experienced a mental health issue



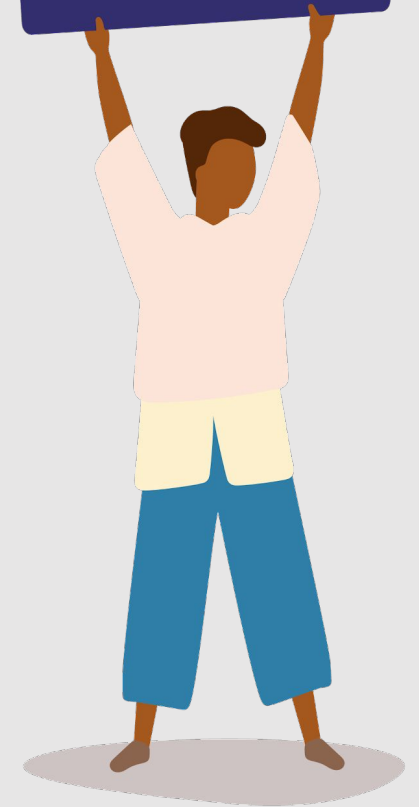
Mental Health

Most common mental health issues

Base: Students who currently have, or have previously had, mental health issues (n=693)



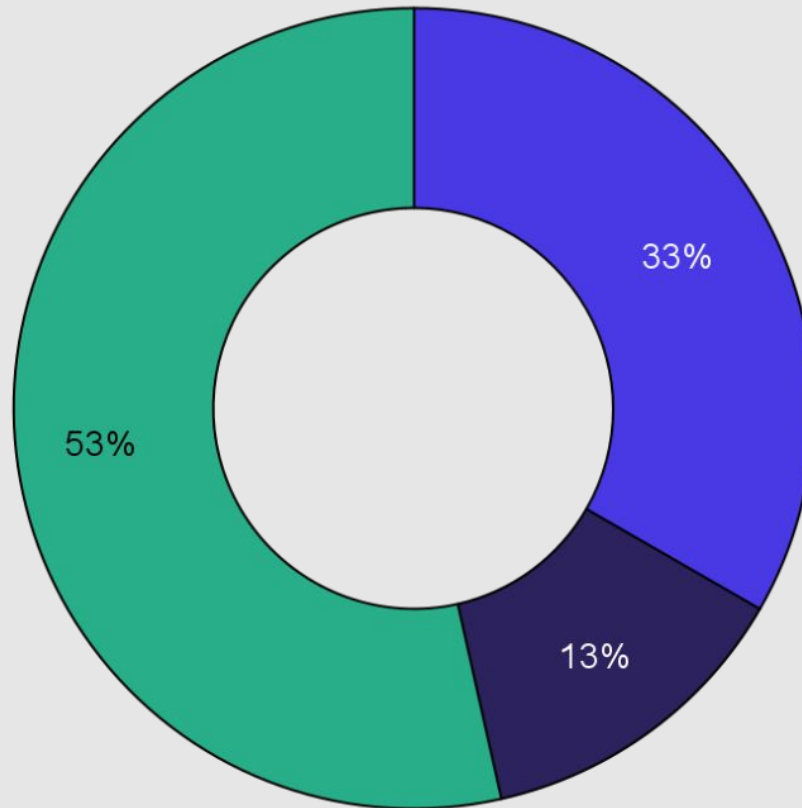
The most commonly reported conditions have not changed since Wave I, but the % reporting current experiences of anxiety and depression have decreased.



Mental Health

Disclosing mental health issues to university

Base: Students who currently have, or have previously had, mental health issues (n=693)



● Yes, I have disclosed my mental health issue(s) to my university ● Not yet, but I intend to ● No and I don't plan to

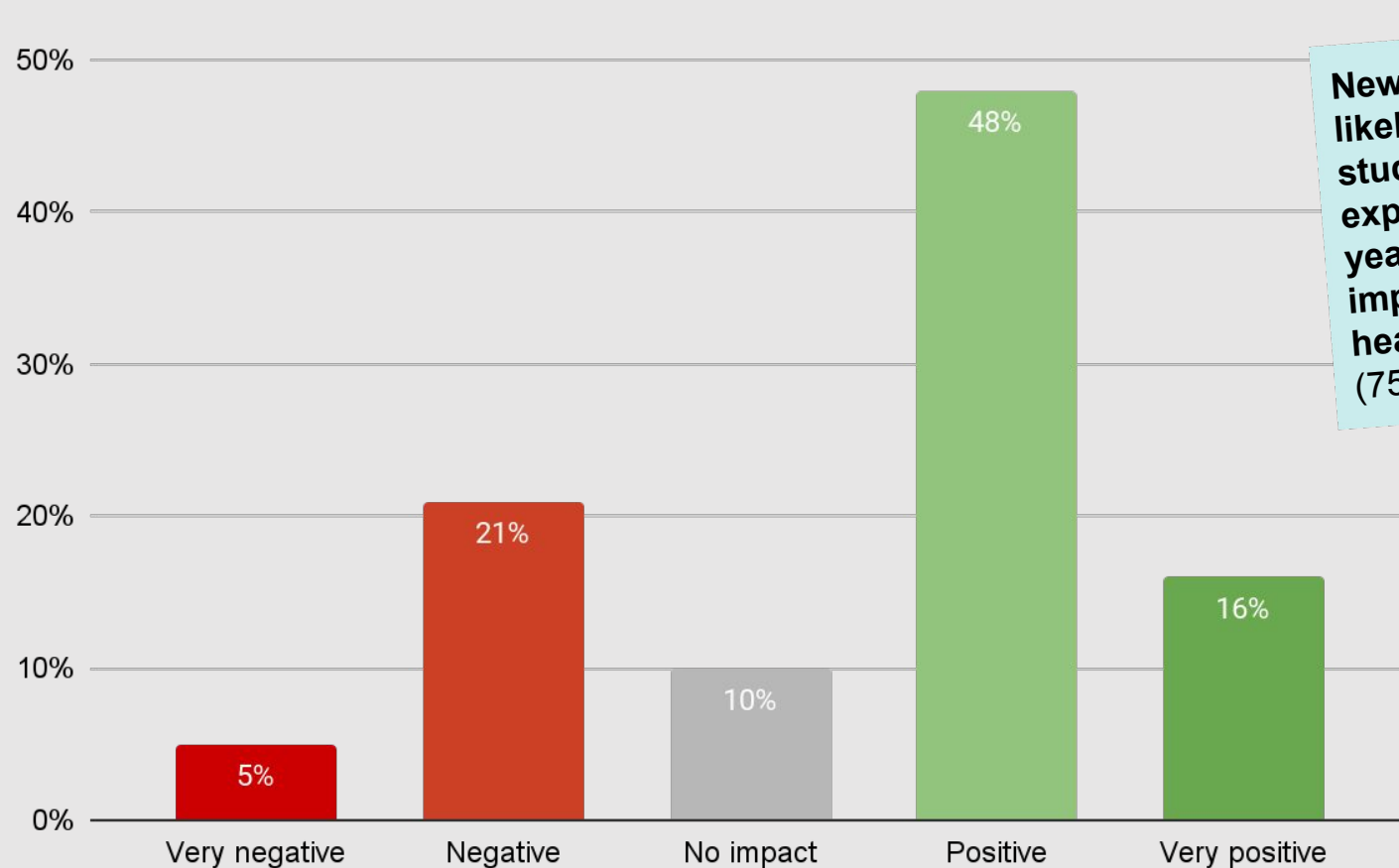
The most common reasons for not disclosing were: "I don't think it's serious enough" and "I don't feel they need to know"

A stylized illustration of a hand holding the left edge of a light green rectangular sign. The hand is rendered in a simple, flat style with a light skin tone.

Return to University

Return to University

Expected impact starting/returning to university will have on mental health



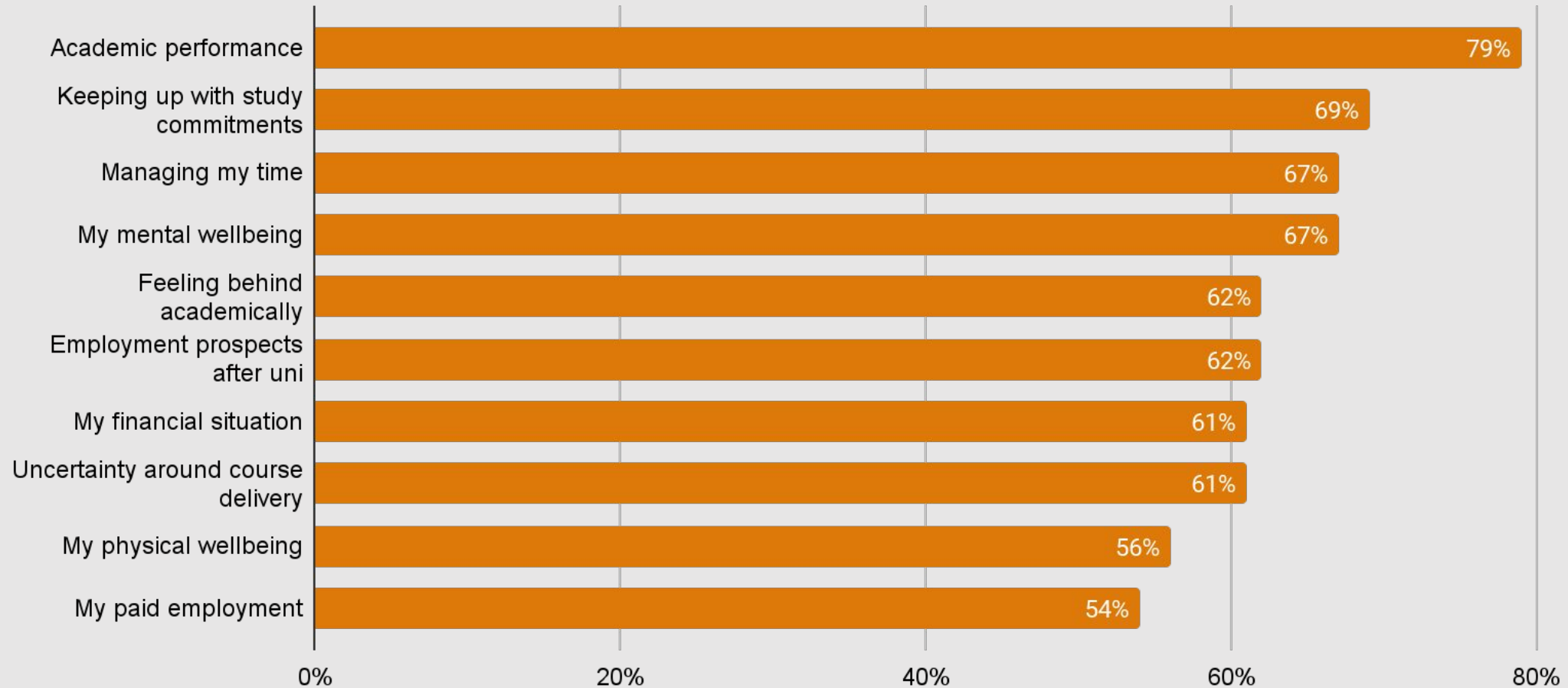
New students were more likely than returning students to say they expect the start of the new year to have a positive impact on their mental health. (75% vs 60%)

Returning students were more likely to say they expect the start of the new year to have a negative impact on their mental health compared to new students. (29% vs 19%)

Return to University

Student Concerns

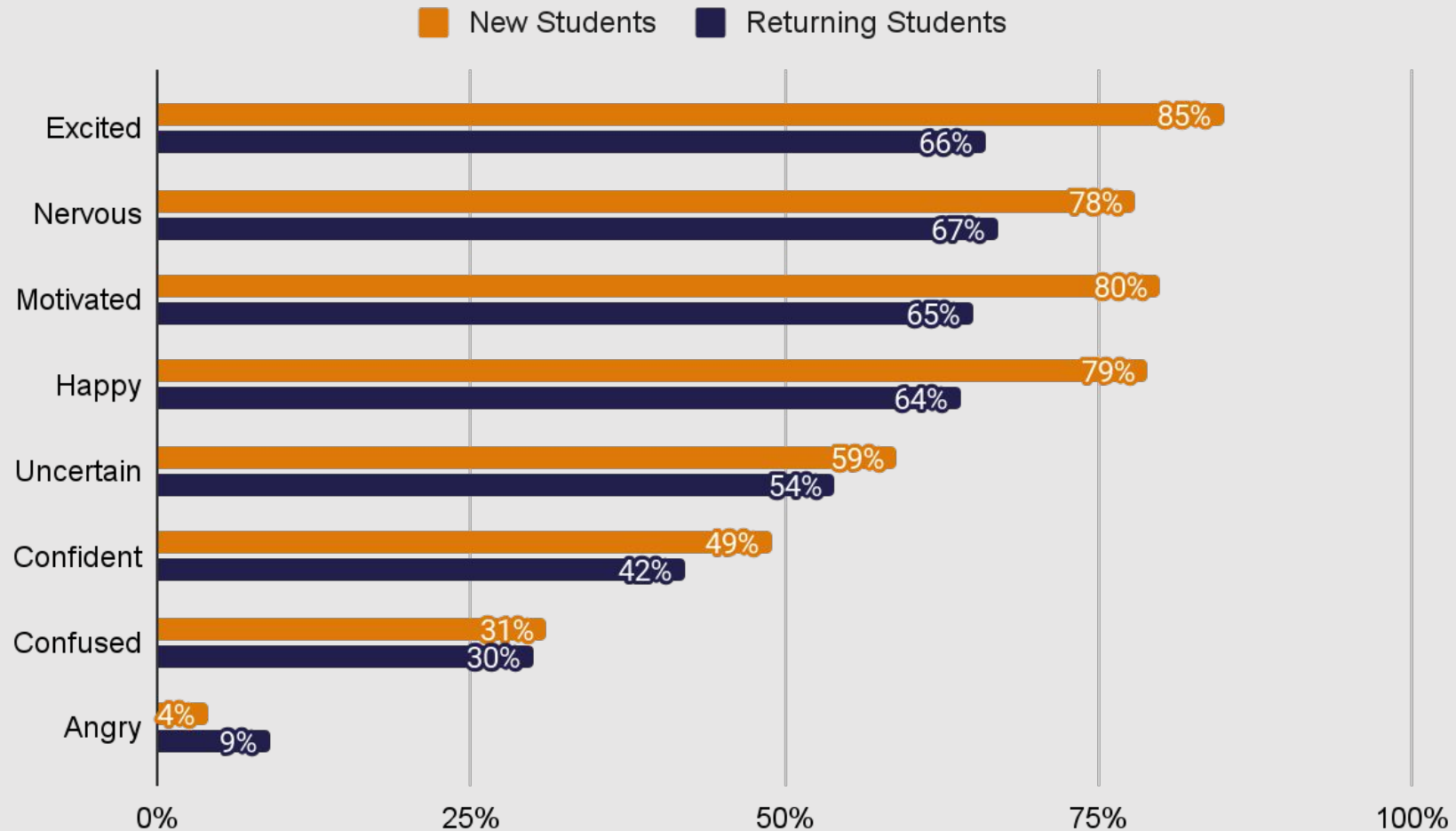
% Concerned or Very Concerned about issue in 2021/22 academic year



Return to University

Student Feelings

% agree they feel ____ about starting/returning to university.



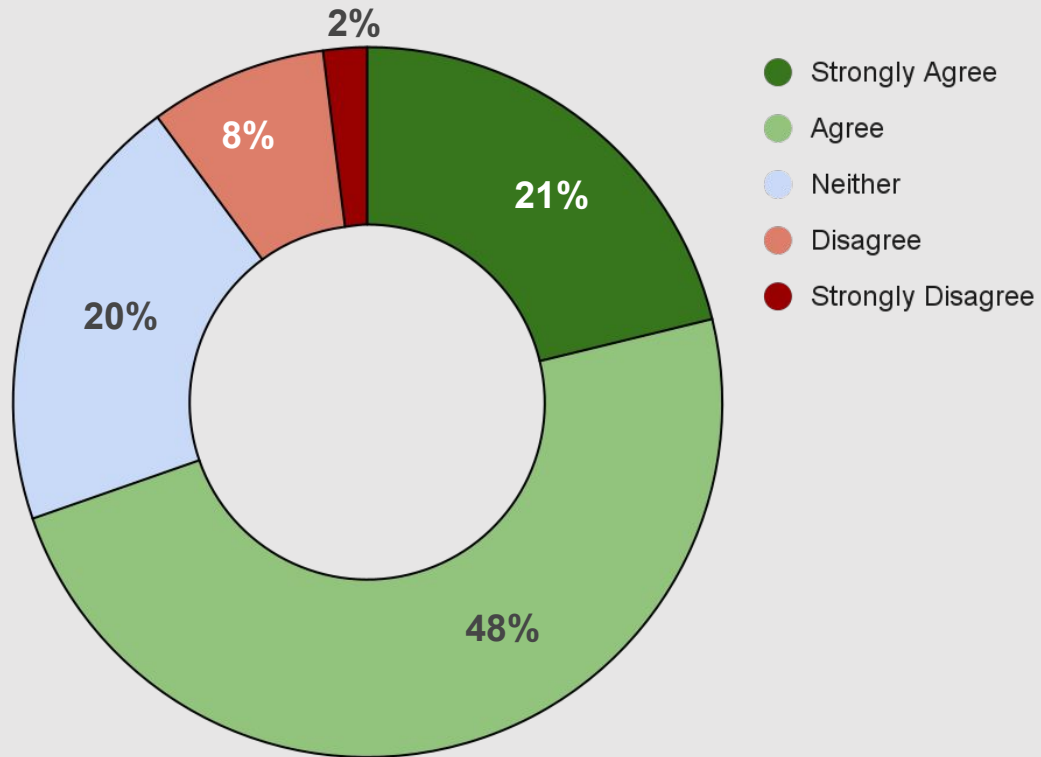
An illustration of a hand with a yellow sleeve holding the left edge of a light yellow rectangular sign. The sign is centered on a dark blue background.

Community, Relationships and Belonging

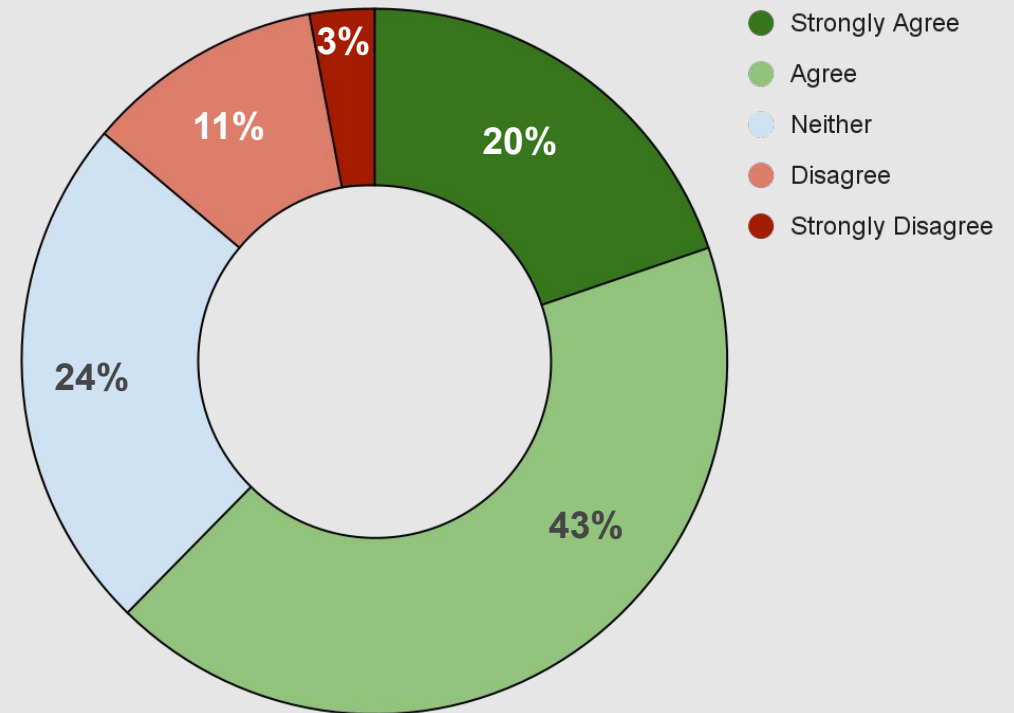
Community, Relationships and Belonging

Agree/ Disagree with following statements

“It is important that I feel part of the student community when I start/return to university”



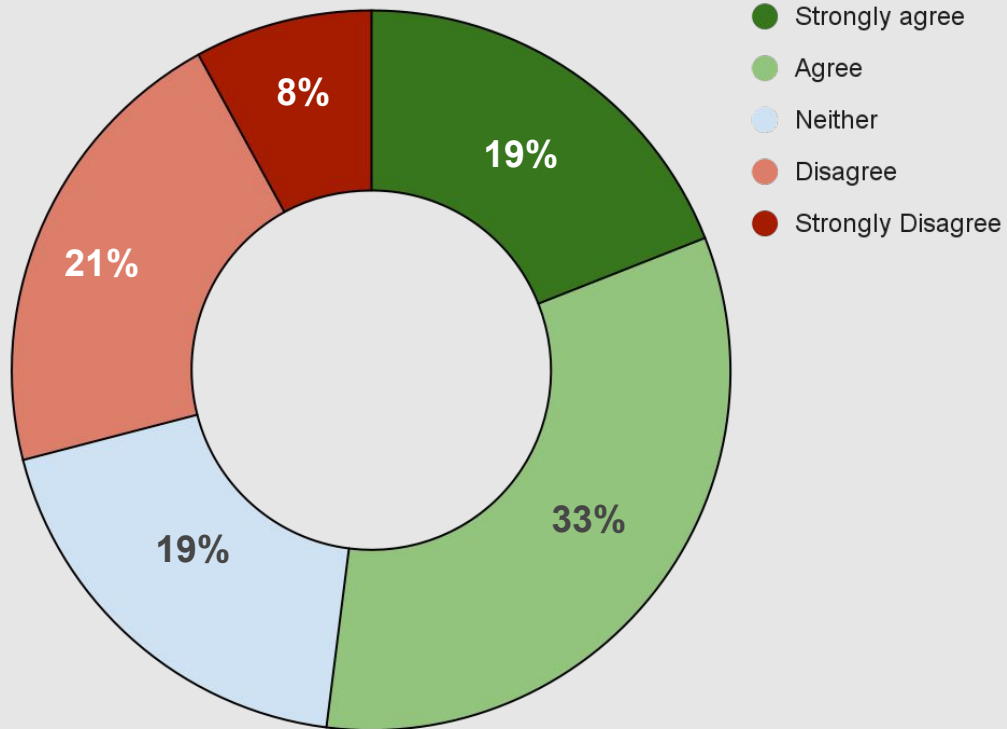
“I need a strong support network at university if I want to enjoy my university life”



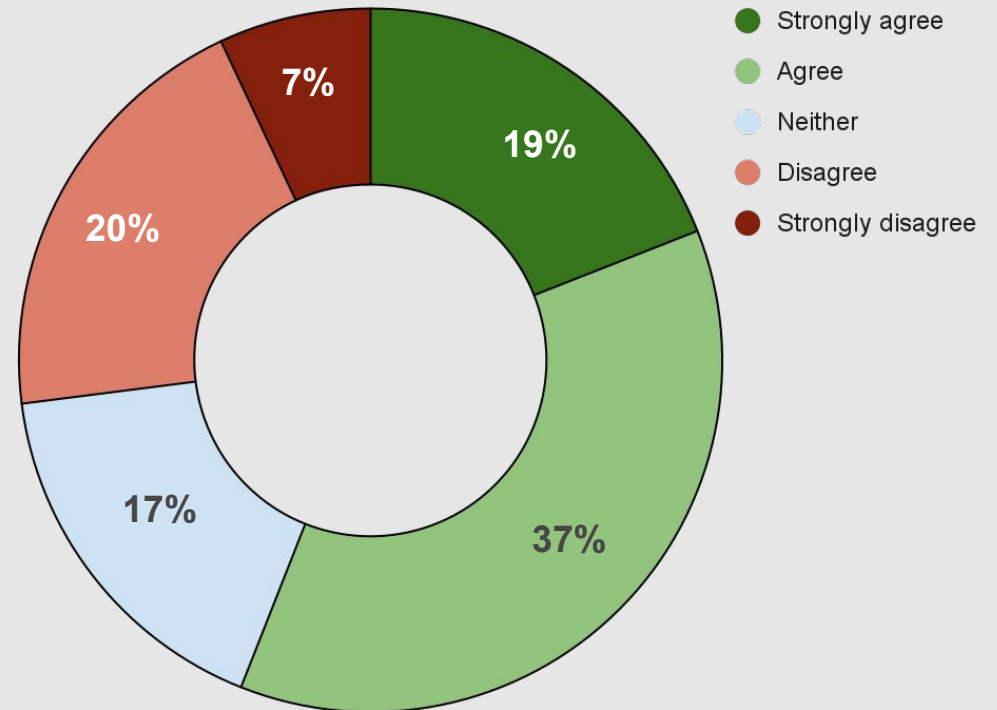
Community, Relationships and Belonging

Agree/ Disagree with following statements

“I worry about my ability to build/maintain friendships when I start/return to university”



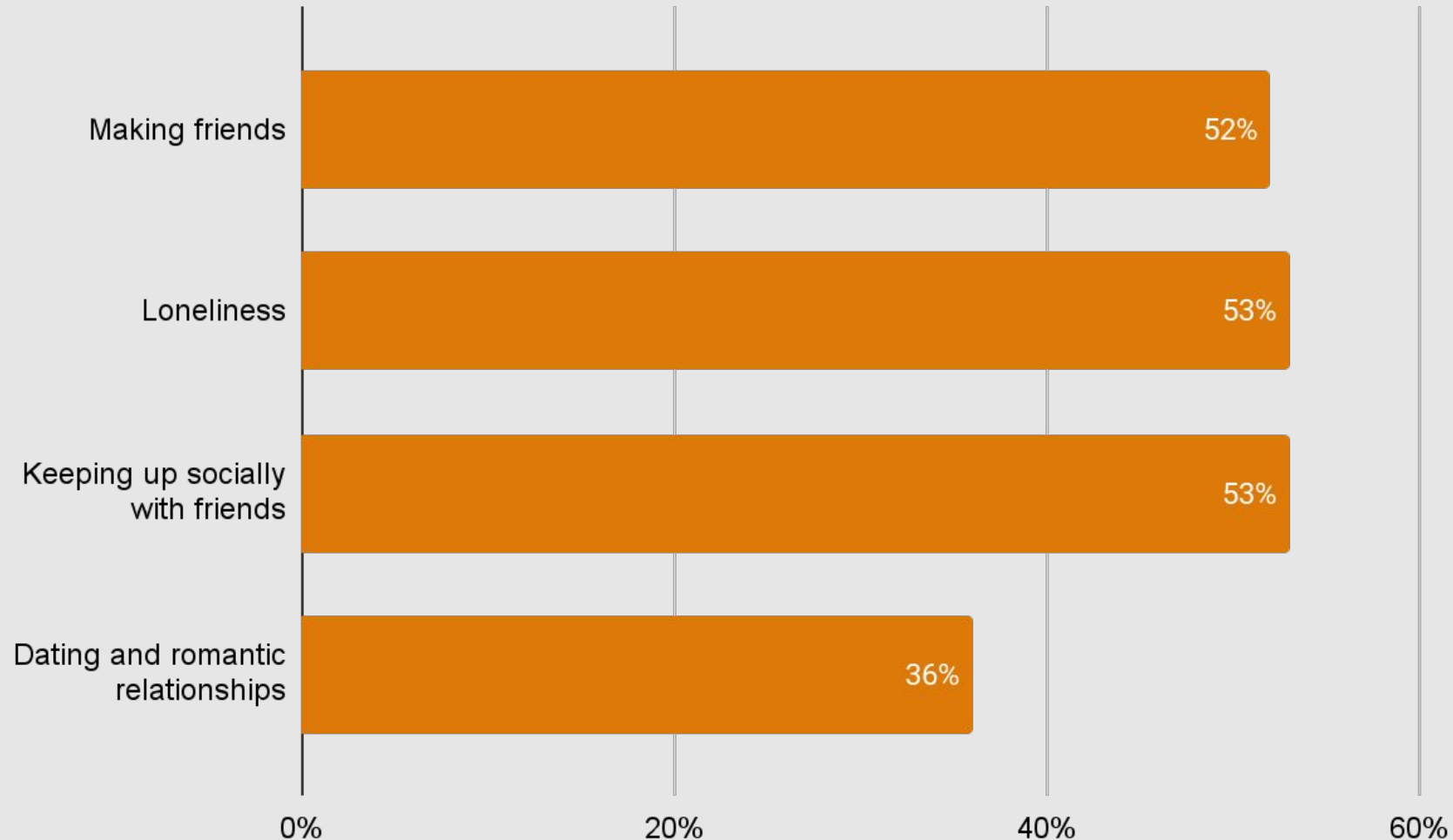
“I have a strong group of friends outside of university”



Community, Relationships and Belonging

Student Concerns

% Concerned or Very Concerned about issue in 2021/22 academic year



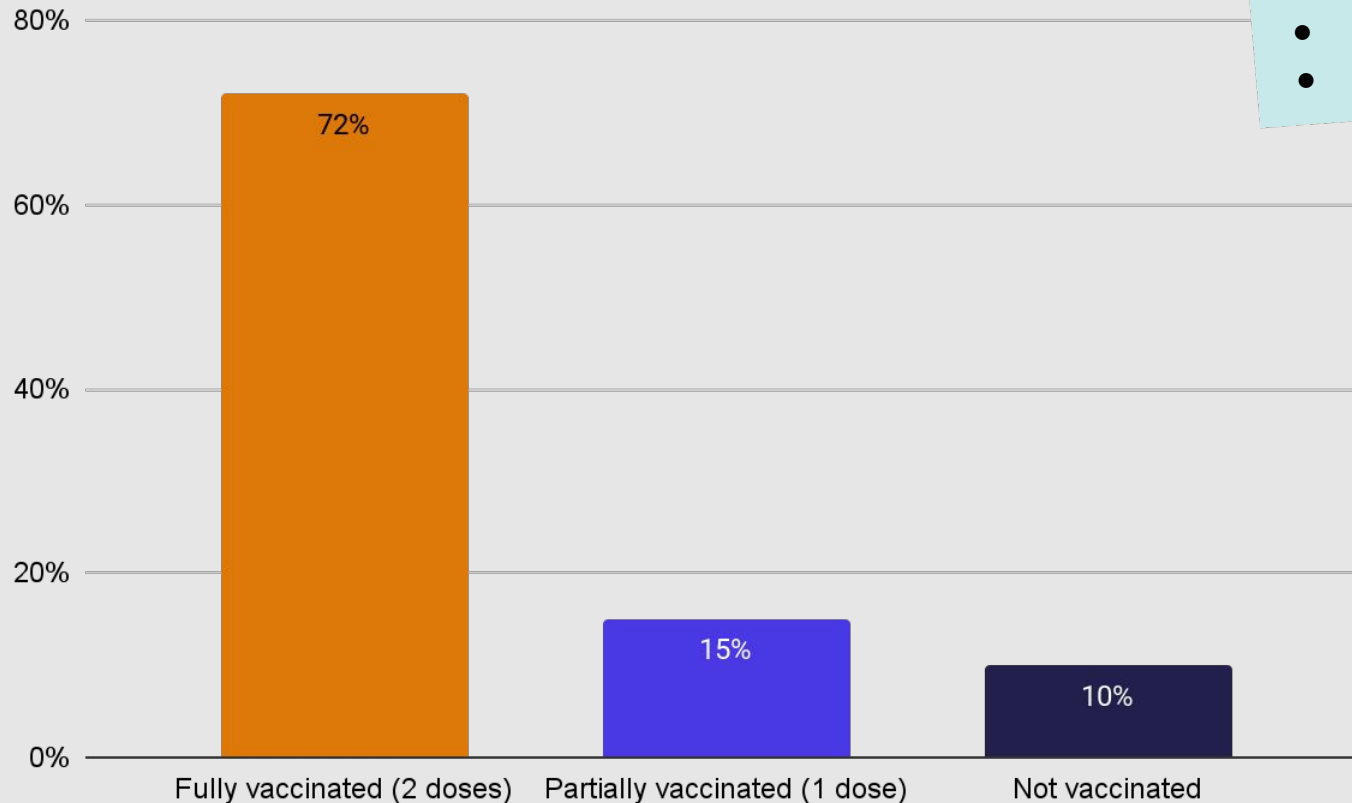
A stylized illustration of a hand holding the left edge of a yellow rectangular sign. The hand is brown and positioned on the left side of the sign.

Covid-19

Covid-19

Vaccine intentions / opinions

Vaccination status



- Of those partially vaccinated (n=153)
- Intention to get 2nd dose before university starts: 56%
 - Intention to get 2nd dose after university starts: 33%
 - Don't know: 6%
 - No intention to get 2nd dose: 4%

- Of those not vaccinated (n=98)
- Intention to get vaccinated after university starts: 22%
 - Intention to get vaccinated before university starts: 15%
 - No intention to get vaccinated: 21%
 - Don't know if/when they'll get vaccinated: 37%

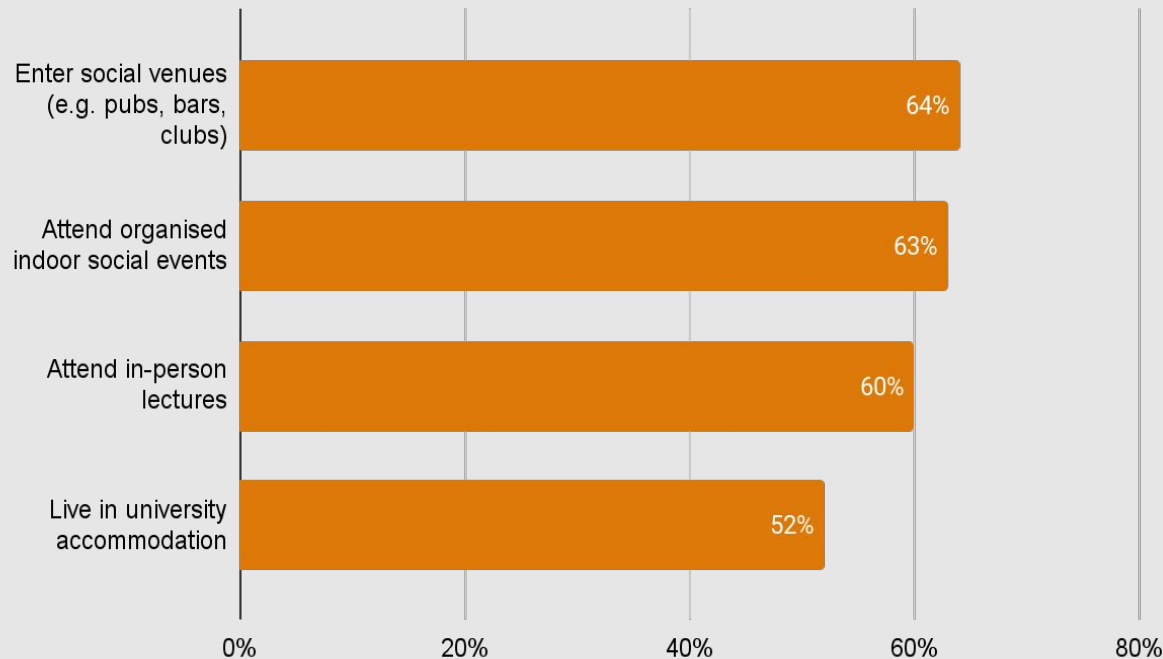
Overall, this means just 2% of all respondents have no intention to get vaccinated. A further 4% aren't sure if/when they will get vaccinated.

Covid-19

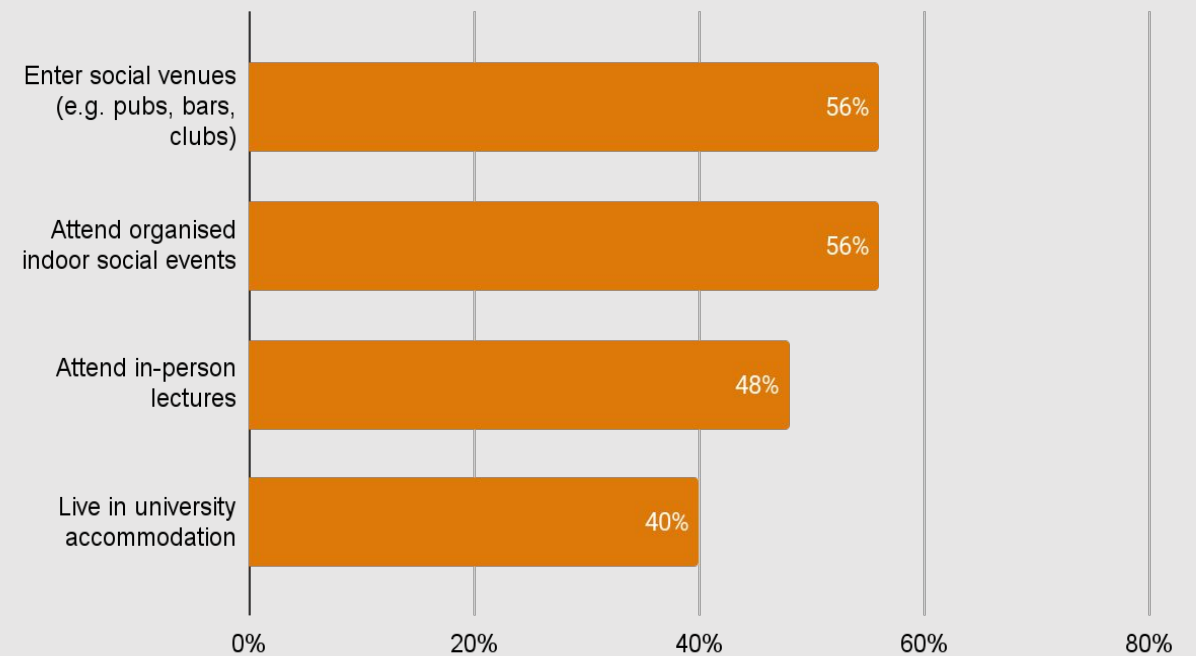
Vaccine intentions / opinions

Vaccine passports - % who agree they would feel safer / would support use of vaccine passports

Would feel safer if vaccine passports were used to _____



Would support the use of vaccine passports to _____

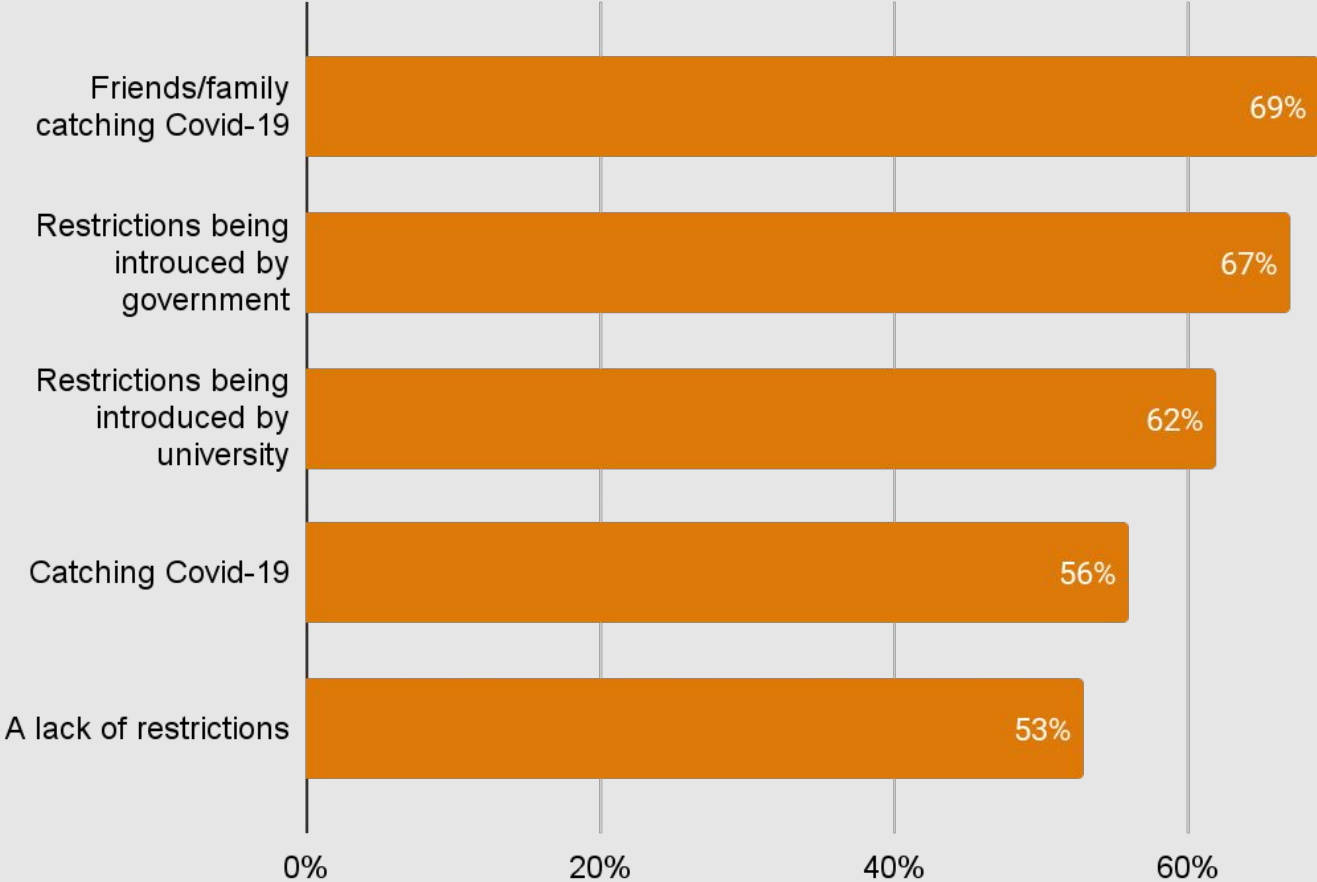


So broadly, most students would feel safer if vaccine passports were introduced, but don't necessarily support the use of them.

Covid-19

Student Concerns

% who are concerned/very concerned about _____



The % of students who are concerned about friends/family catching Covid-19 has decreased from 78% in April/May 2021.

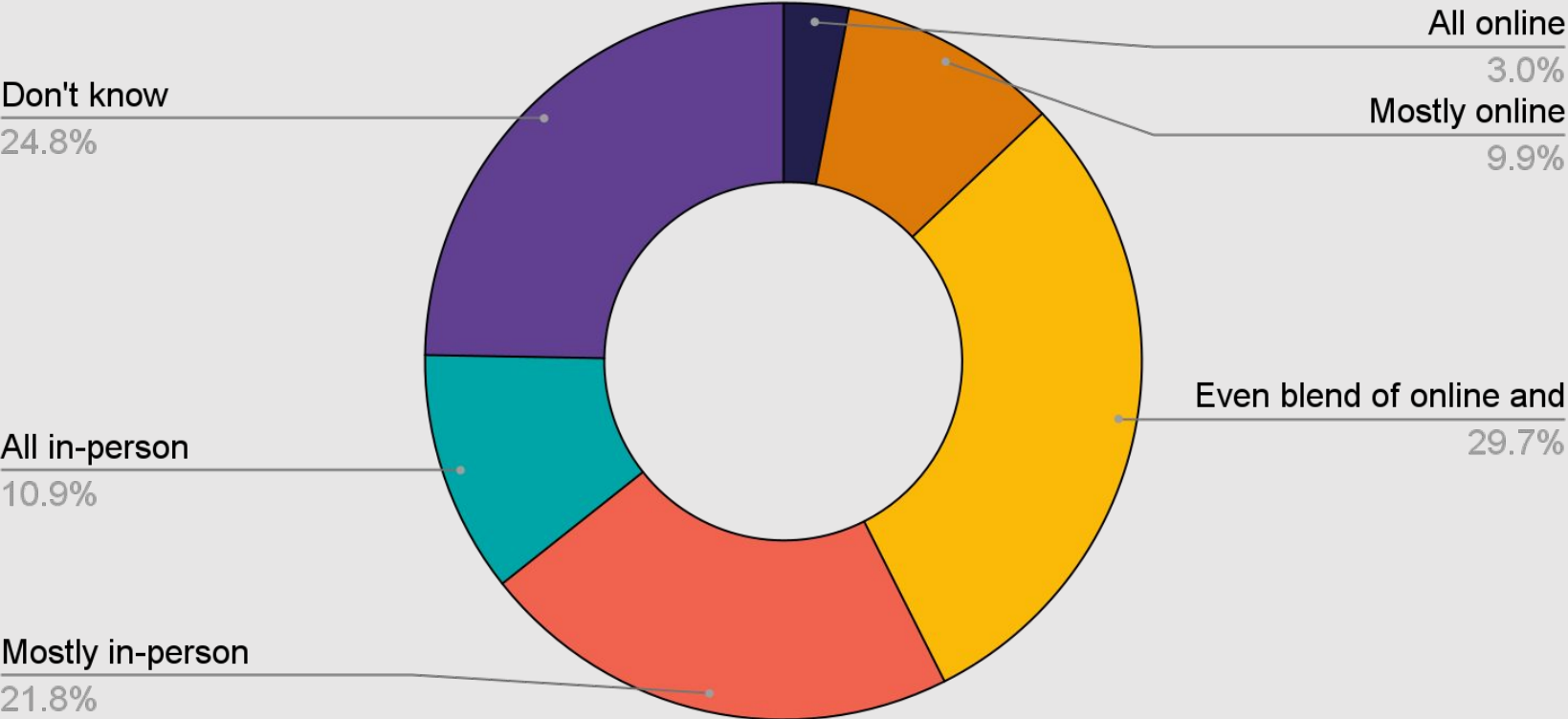
The % of students who are concerned about catching Covid-19 has decreased from 58% since April/May 2021.

A hand holding a sign that says "Education". The sign is a light green rectangle with the word "Education" written in black, sans-serif font in the center. The hand is on the left side of the sign, holding it from the edge. The background is a solid dark blue.

Education

Education

Expected course delivery method

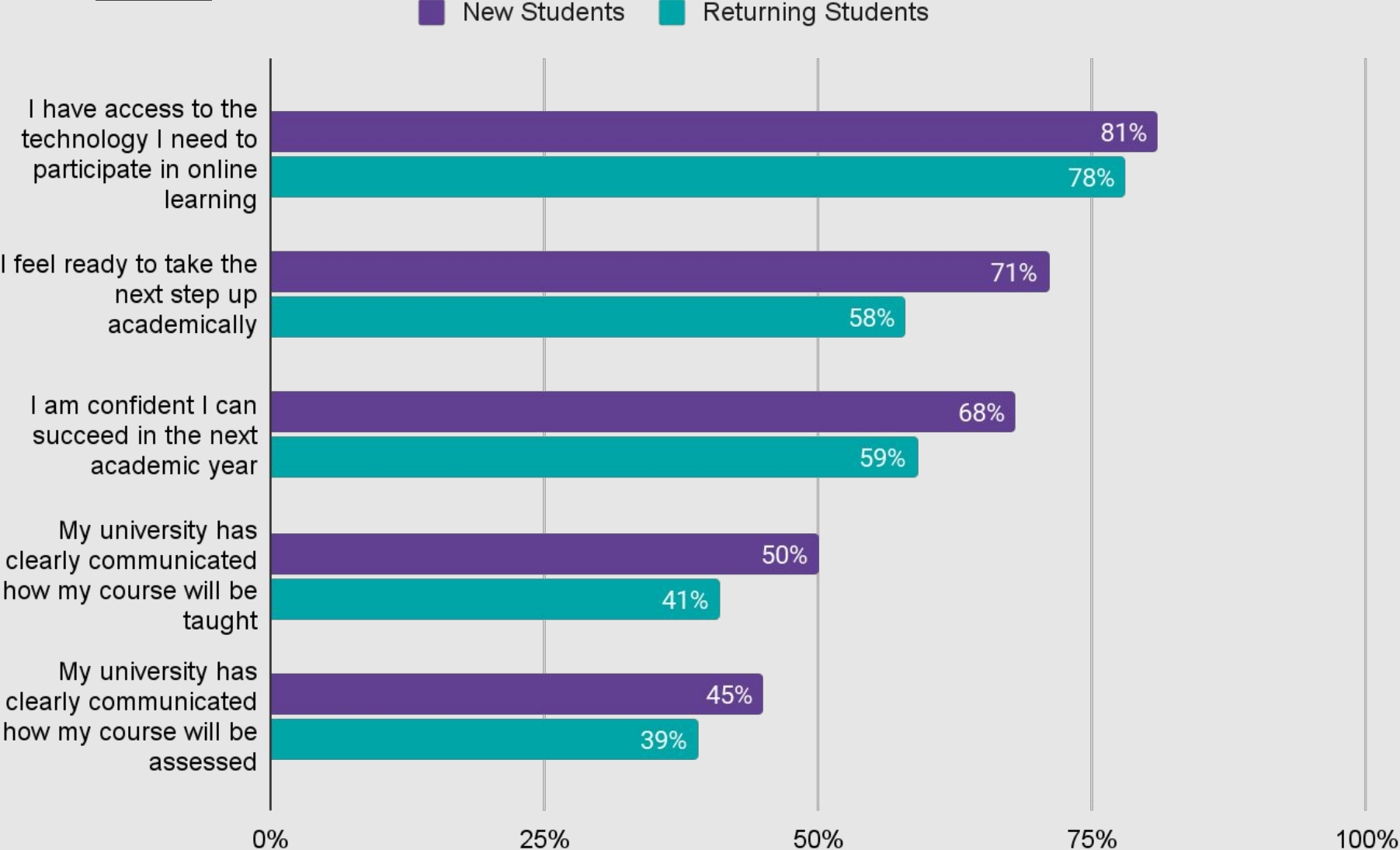


We also asked students how satisfied they were with their expected course delivery method. 58% said they were satisfied and 18% said they were dissatisfied.



Education

% agreement with _____



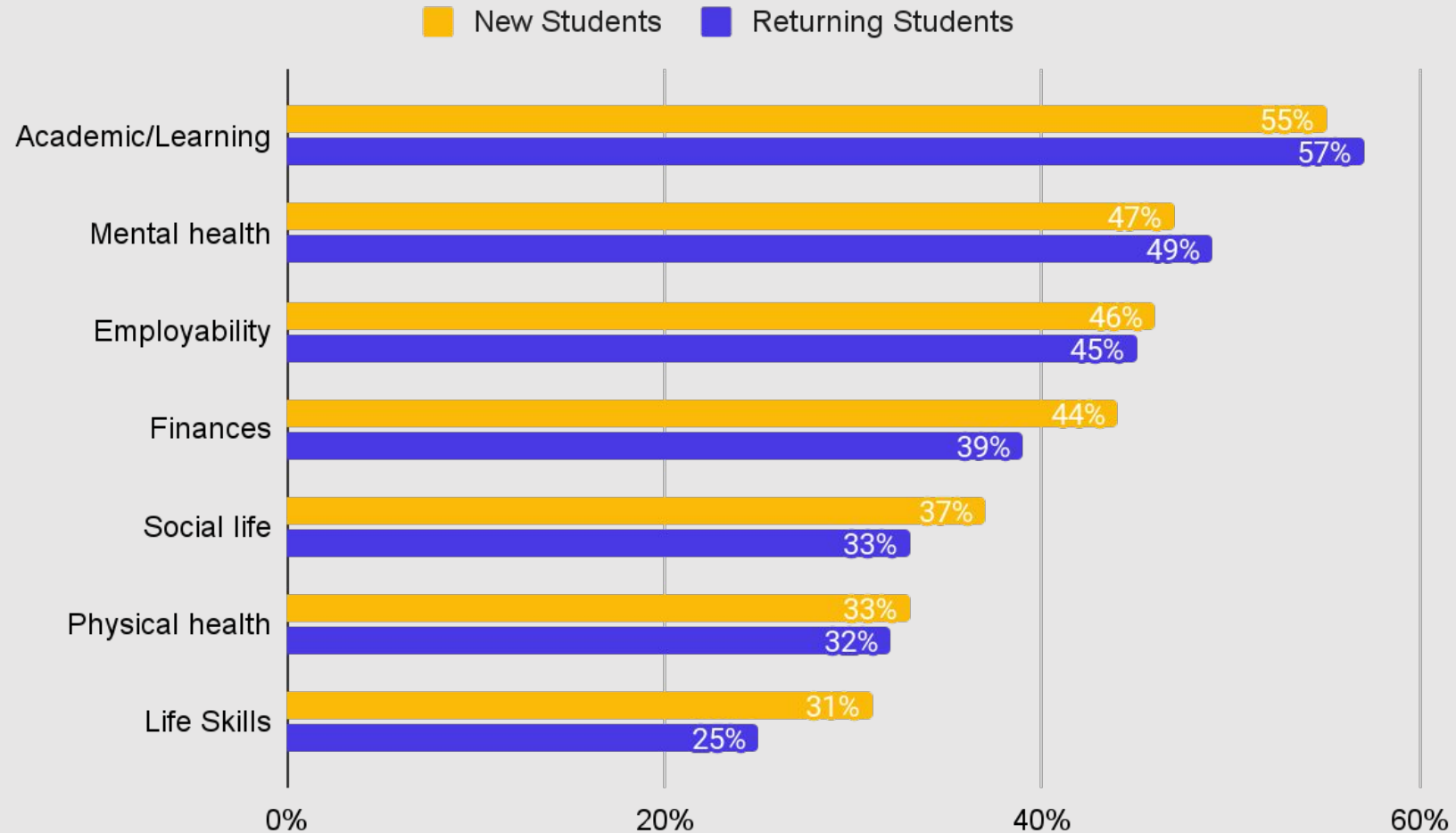
A hand with a brown skin tone is holding the left edge of a yellow rectangular sign. The sign is centered on a dark blue background and contains the word "Support" in a black, sans-serif font.

Support

Support

Areas students may need support in 2021/22

% students who selected _____ as an area they may need support in

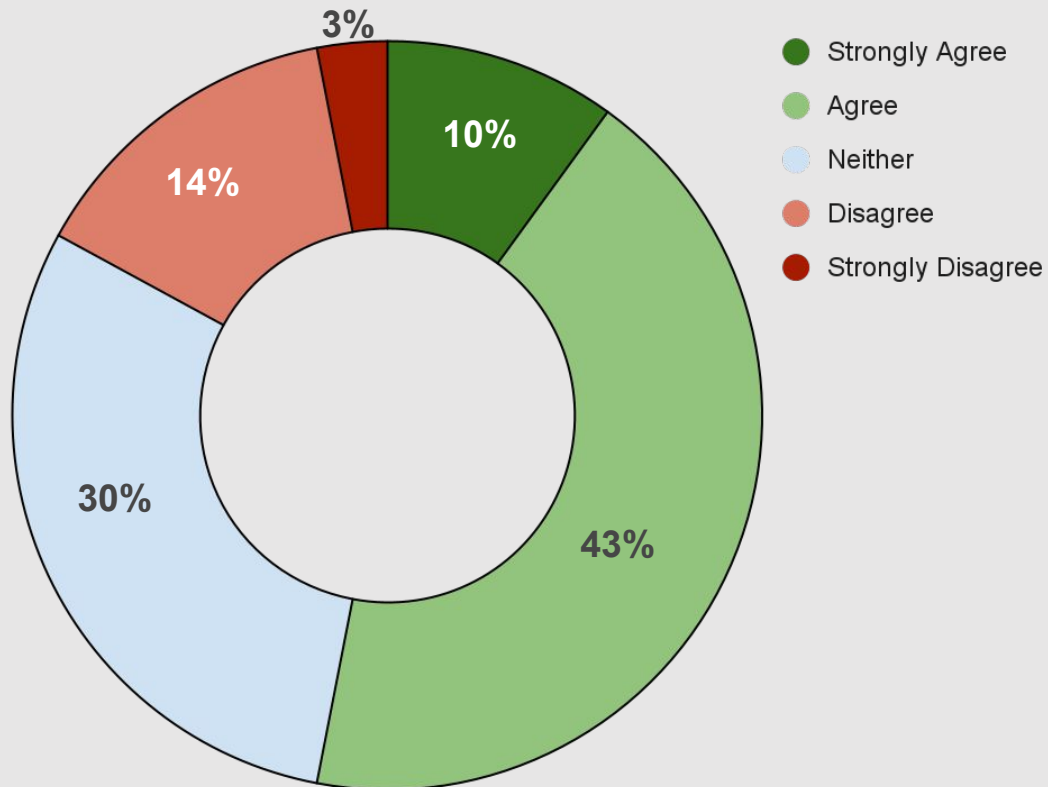


Support

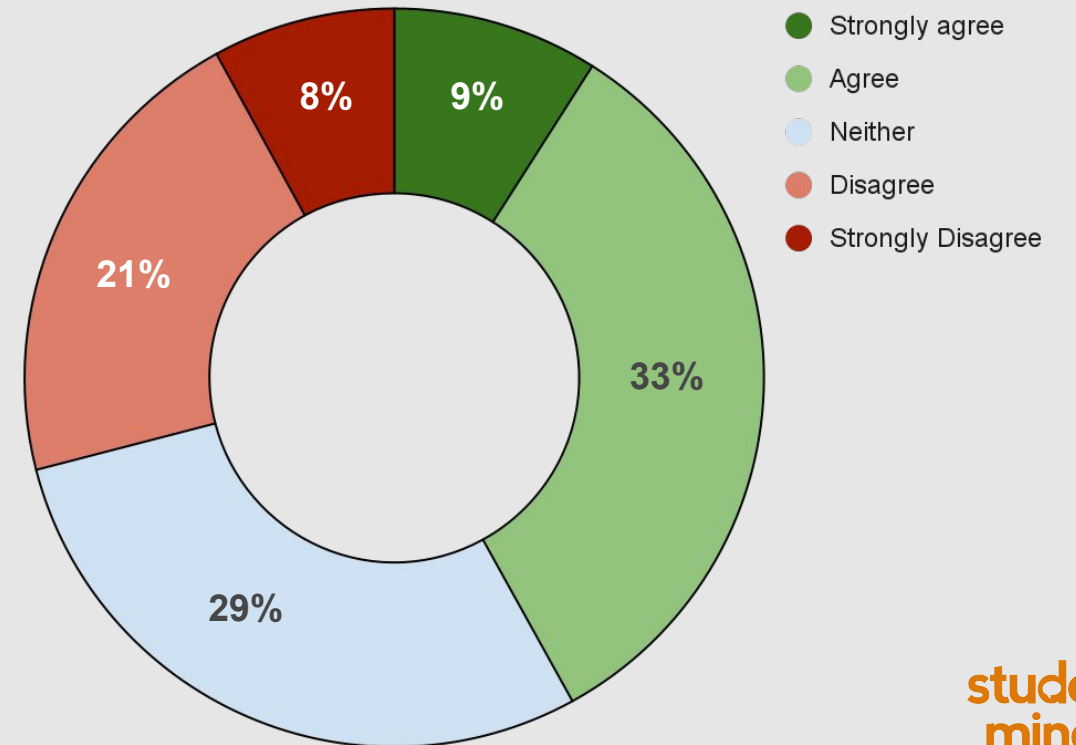
Perception of support needs

% students who agreed with _____ statement

“I have the tools and skills I need to manage my own wellbeing in the next academic year”



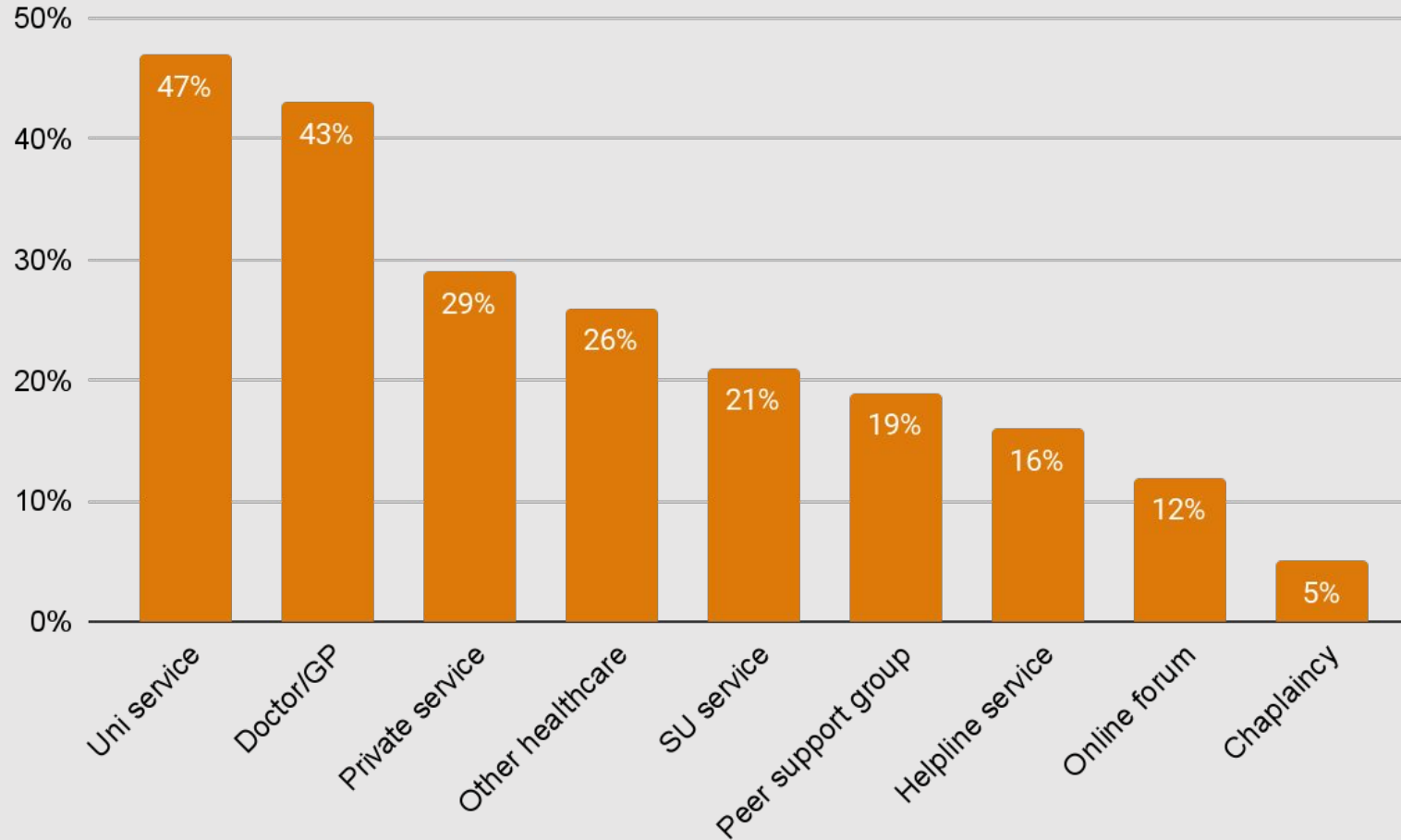
“I need support to manage my own wellbeing in the academic year”



Support

Support preferences

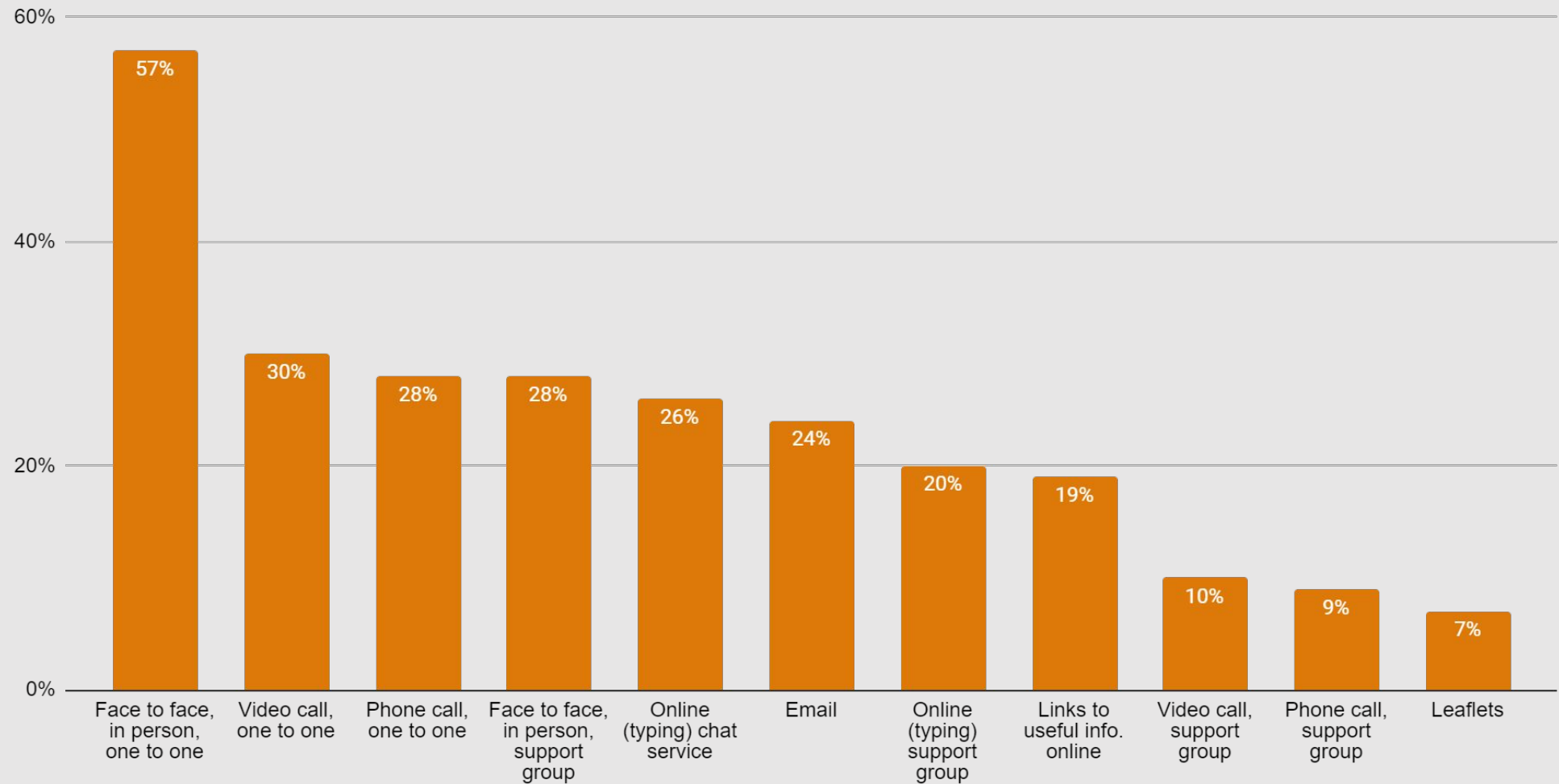
% who said they would access support this way



Support

Support preferences

% who said they would access support this way



If you have comments, questions or reflections, get in touch by emailing info@studentminds.org.uk

@StudentMindsOrg
www.studentminds.org.uk

A stylized illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved shirt, holding a rectangular sign on a wooden stick. The sign is white with black text. The background is a dark blue gradient with a large orange shape on the left side.

**Thank you
for reading.**