

# Student Device Usage Report

2021





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# Foreword

**Having been part of the Learning Innovation team since 2015, I’ve had the opportunity to be part of some exciting projects, some of which have involved smart devices and innovated methods of delivery that could help shape the student experience of the future.**

In April 2019, the Learning Innovation team at The Open University ran our first survey looking at how student’s smart device usage differed between study and non-study purposes. We continue to run this survey every 6 months to help us understand our student device usage trends. This report is a method of showing these findings and sharing them with the rest of the University and anyone with an interest in understanding the data we have collected.

With the increasing and diverse range of smart devices available, I hope that the discoveries we make from these surveys and reports can help to deepen the University’s understanding of our students’ smart device usage, and go on to develop new ideas and solutions to enable a smarter and seamless study experience for our students.



**Dean Collins**  
*User Experience Designer*  
Learning Innovation team  
The Open University

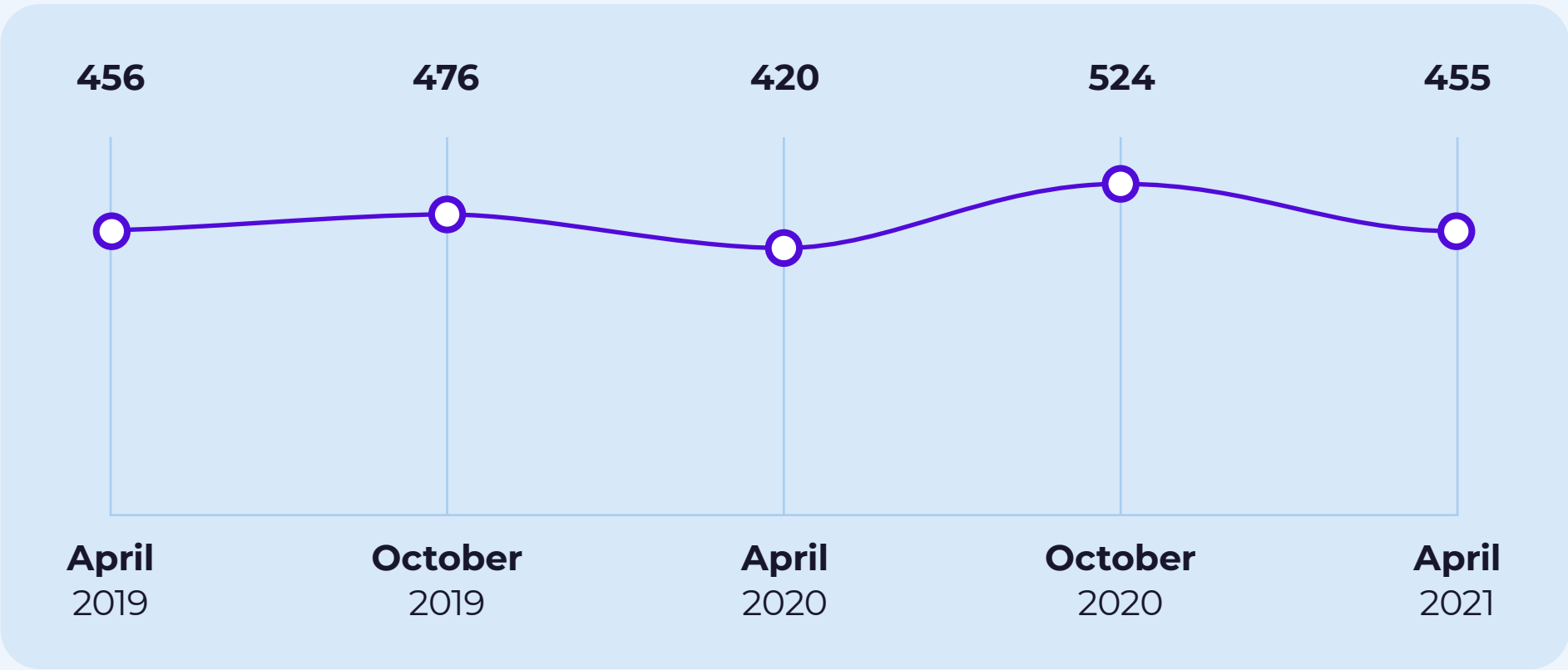
# Introduction

Here in the Learning Innovation team we regularly survey a cohort of students from The Open University's Curriculum Design Student Panel to establish trends and patterns relating to the usage of smart devices amongst our students.

The latest responses are in and now that we have crunched the numbers we've included the key highlights in this report. If you would like to explore the data that we collected for this report, this is available on our website.

## Survey respondents over time

Number of students that have responded to each run of the survey.



## Survey statistics

-  **6** questions
-  **466** average respondents
-  Runs every **6 months** with the CDSP



# Key findings and insights

**Overall the responses showed a marked consistency with previous results and close alignment with market and consumer trends.**

One key conclusion that we can draw from the data is that there remains a continued pattern of increased usage in the variety of smart devices for non-study purposes, but again, this is very much in line with consumer trends.

Perhaps a more important finding, however, is that there remains an opportunity to provide learning materials on smart devices that are not yet supported, but of which students have access to and regularly use, and which could offer greater flexibility for learning.

**While students own many smart devices, the majority of these are not currently used for study.**

The usage of these devices will be dependent on the materials that are available on them, and whether students have a desire to use these smart devices for study.

**Smartphone usage (90%) is the highest amongst all the other devices included in the survey.**

When we consider devices for study usage, then the use of a smartphone remains the second preferred option for study (37%), behind laptop PC (83%). Smartphone usage for study has shown a consistent decline over recent surveys.

**Students primarily use a laptop PC for study, and this shows a trend of increasing. Other typical devices have shown a trend of a decrease in study usage.**

This could be regarded as an indication that students are becoming more flexible in their location of study with the portability of a laptop PC and the ability to study from anywhere.

**There is a growing desire of students to use a Smart TV for studying. Access to Smart TVs has consistently increased over previous survey results, which is a trend that is set to continue.**

In our latest survey results, 57% of students have access to Smart TVs, with 13% of students having a desire to use one for study. Currently only 1% of students we surveyed use a Smart TV for study.

**Compatibility with course software and availability of study materials on devices were the top reasons that prevented students using devices for study.**

Availability of WiFi or mobile data has significantly decreased as a blocker to smart device usage in the past two years.

# 01

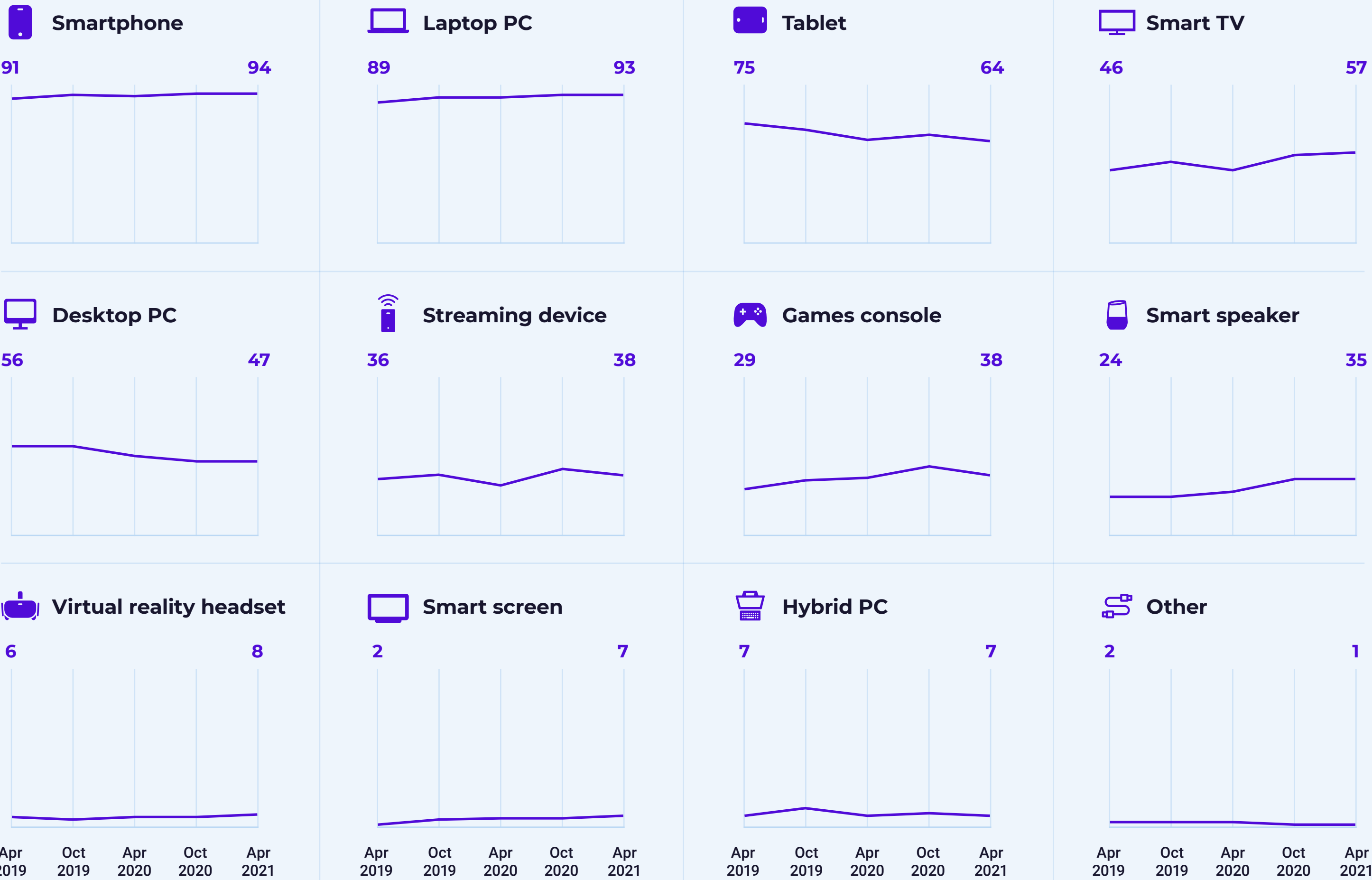
## Access to device types



Students have ever increasing access to a variety of smart devices

While access to the more traditional devices for study (e.g. laptop) has remained strong, the growing trend in students having access to a variety of smart devices has continued. For clarity, this includes devices that students are able to use or have access to, such as a device at home, place of work, place of study etc.

% of students that have access to the following devices



Question: **Which of the following device types do you have access to?**  
By access we mean that you are able to use, but do not necessarily own, the device either at home, place of work, place of study, etc.



456 (April, 2019) • 476 (October, 2019) • 420 (April, 2020)  
524 (October, 2020) • 455 (April, 2021)

# 02

## Usage of device types



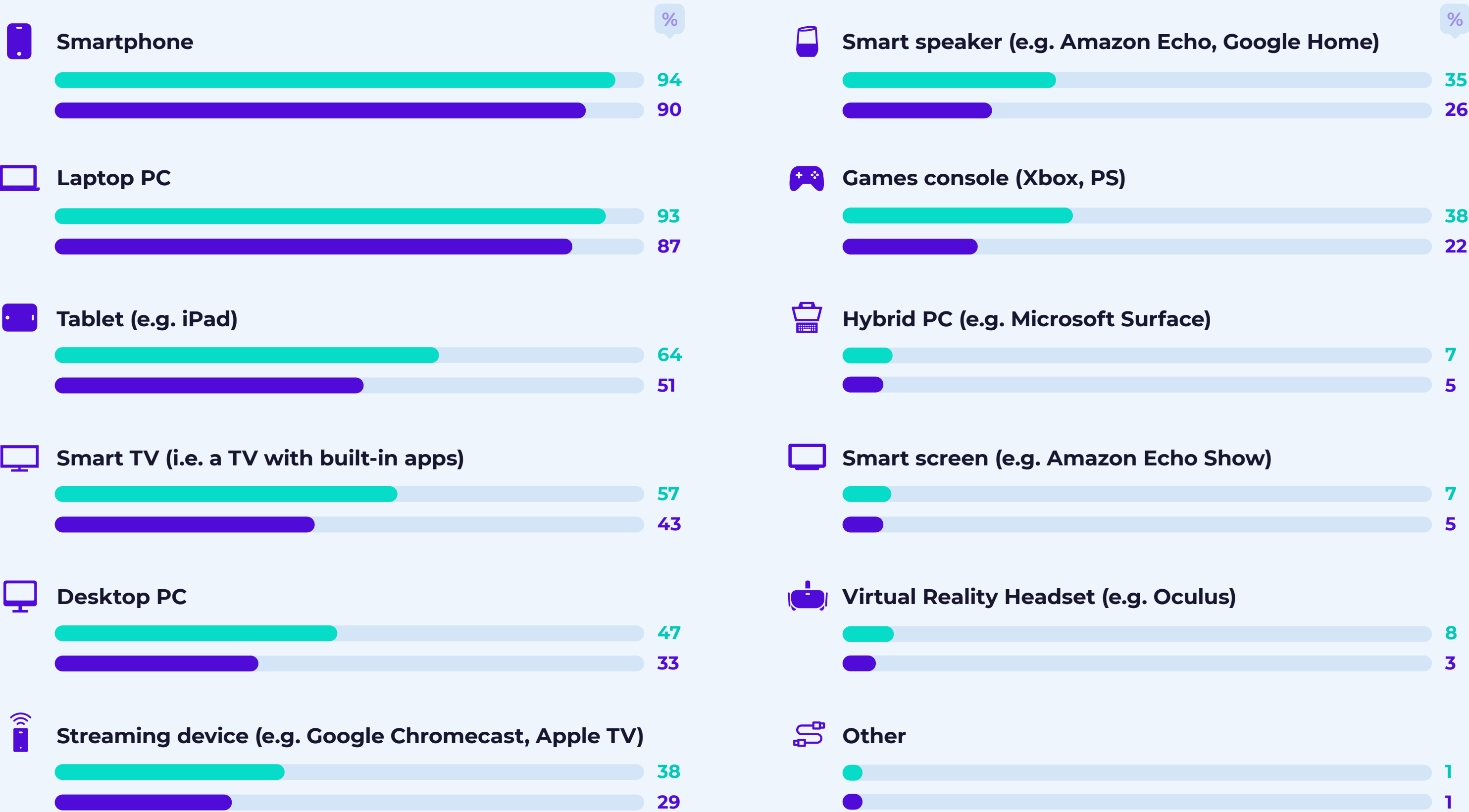
There are emerging trends in the types of devices being used by students

The usage of smart devices (smart TVs, smart speakers, etc.), has seen continual growth since the start of our surveys and this has continued.

Interestingly, there has been an even more marked decrease in usage in the number of students using a desktop PC or tablet, a decline that has continued at pace since our first survey in 2019.

### % of students that use the following devices

● Access to device    ● Usage of device



Question: Of the devices you have identified in Q1, which do you use personally?

455 (April, 2021)

# 03

## Device types for study usage



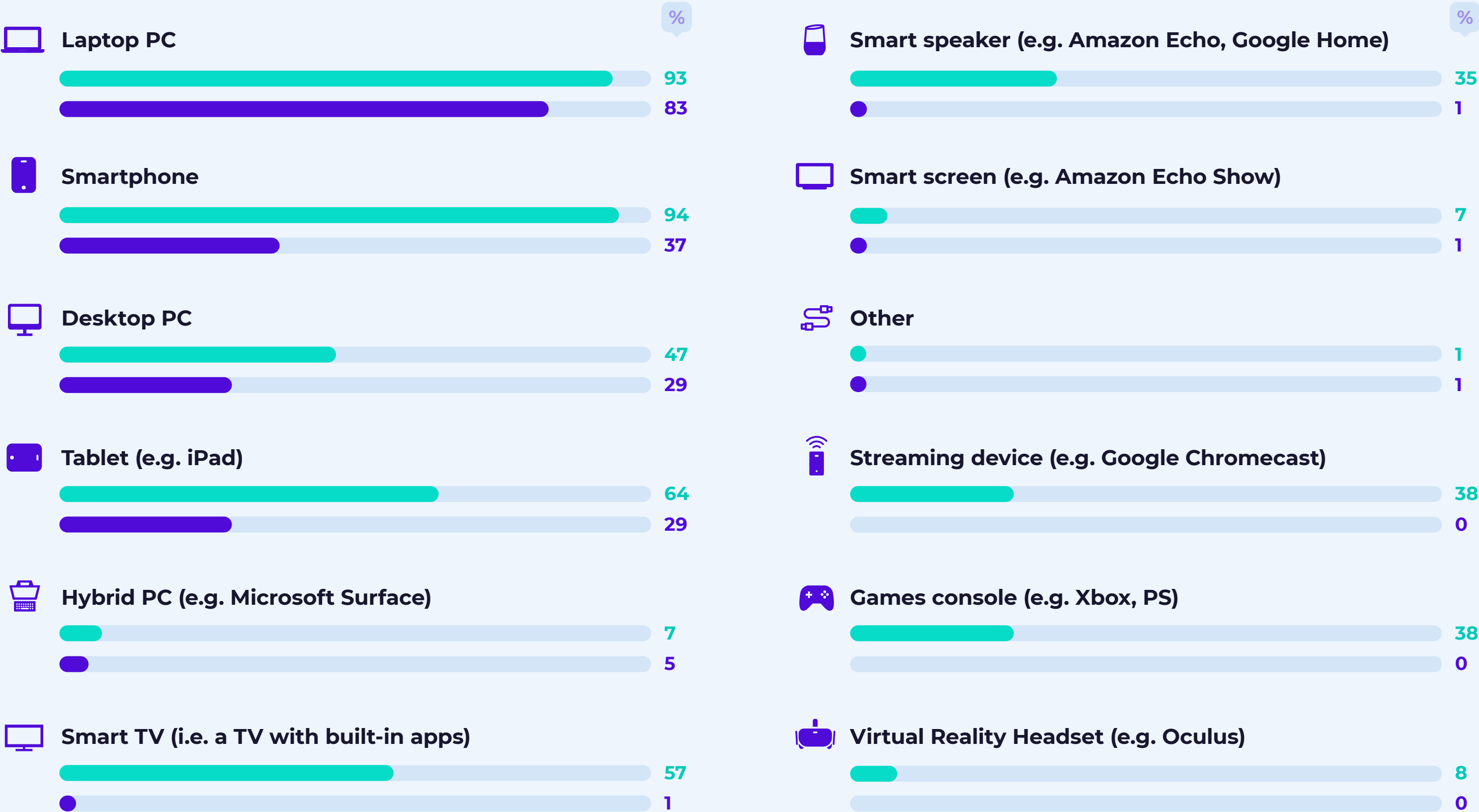
A laptop is still the preferred choice of device for students when studying

While desktop PC and tablet usage among OU students has slipped to just below a third, and is part of a longer term decline, laptop usage for study has remained very static at just over 80% since 2019.

Smartphone usage has stabilised at around a third in the same period.

### % of students that use the following device types for study

● Access to device   ● Usage of device for study



Question: Of the devices you have identified in Q1, which do you use for study?

455 (April, 2021)



# 04

## Smart devices for study



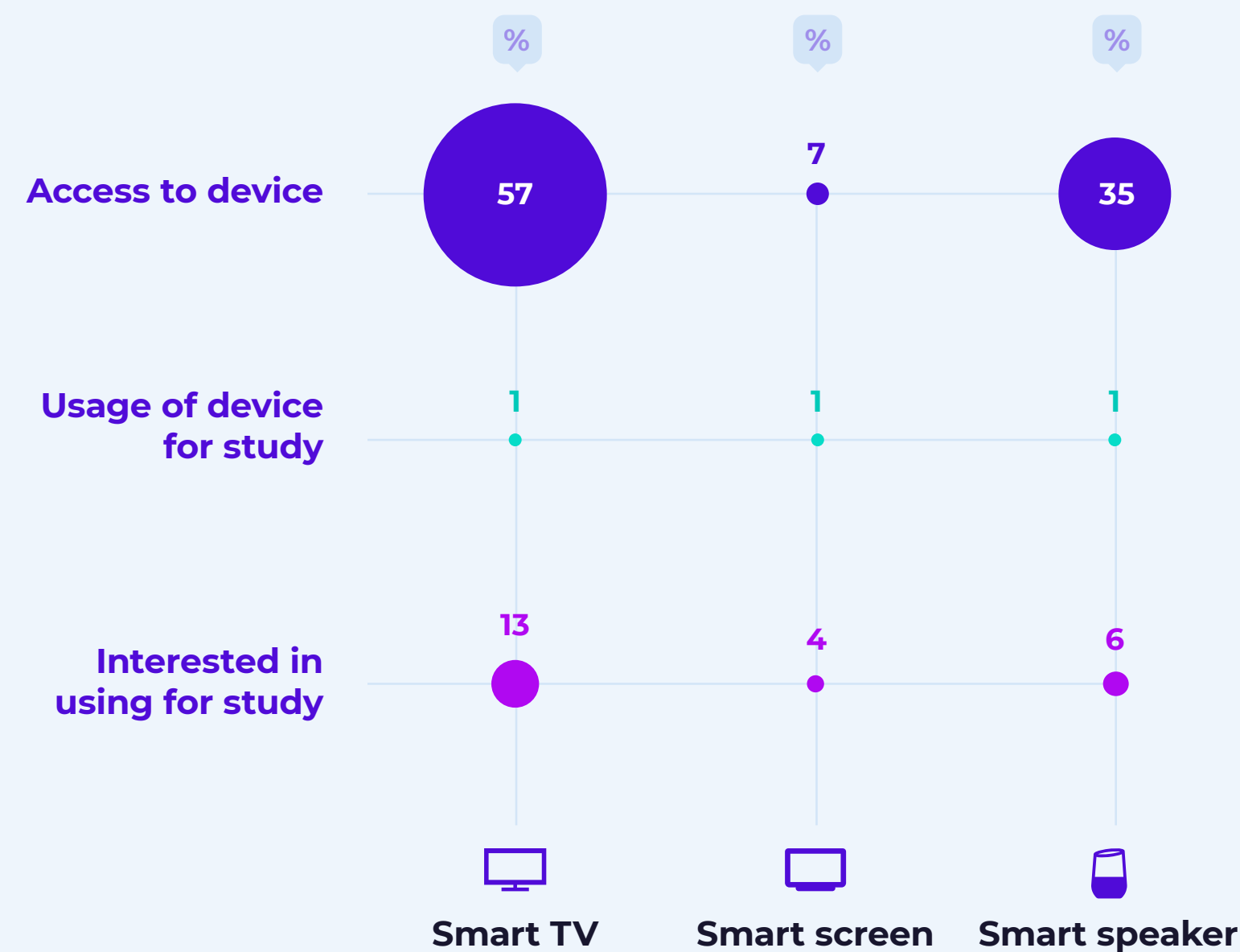
### Student usage of smart devices for study remains at trivial levels

In our most recent survey, the percentage of students currently utilising smart TVs, smart speakers, or smart screens for study remained consistent with previous findings, with almost zero use of these for study, despite strong growth in the access to and usage of such devices among students.

However, the usage of these devices for study can be reasonably linked to the provision of our learning materials and supporting systems on such devices, which has not yet been forthcoming.

### % of students with access, use for study and are interested in using smart devices for study

● Access to device    ● Usage of device for study    ● Interested in using for study



455 (April, 2021)

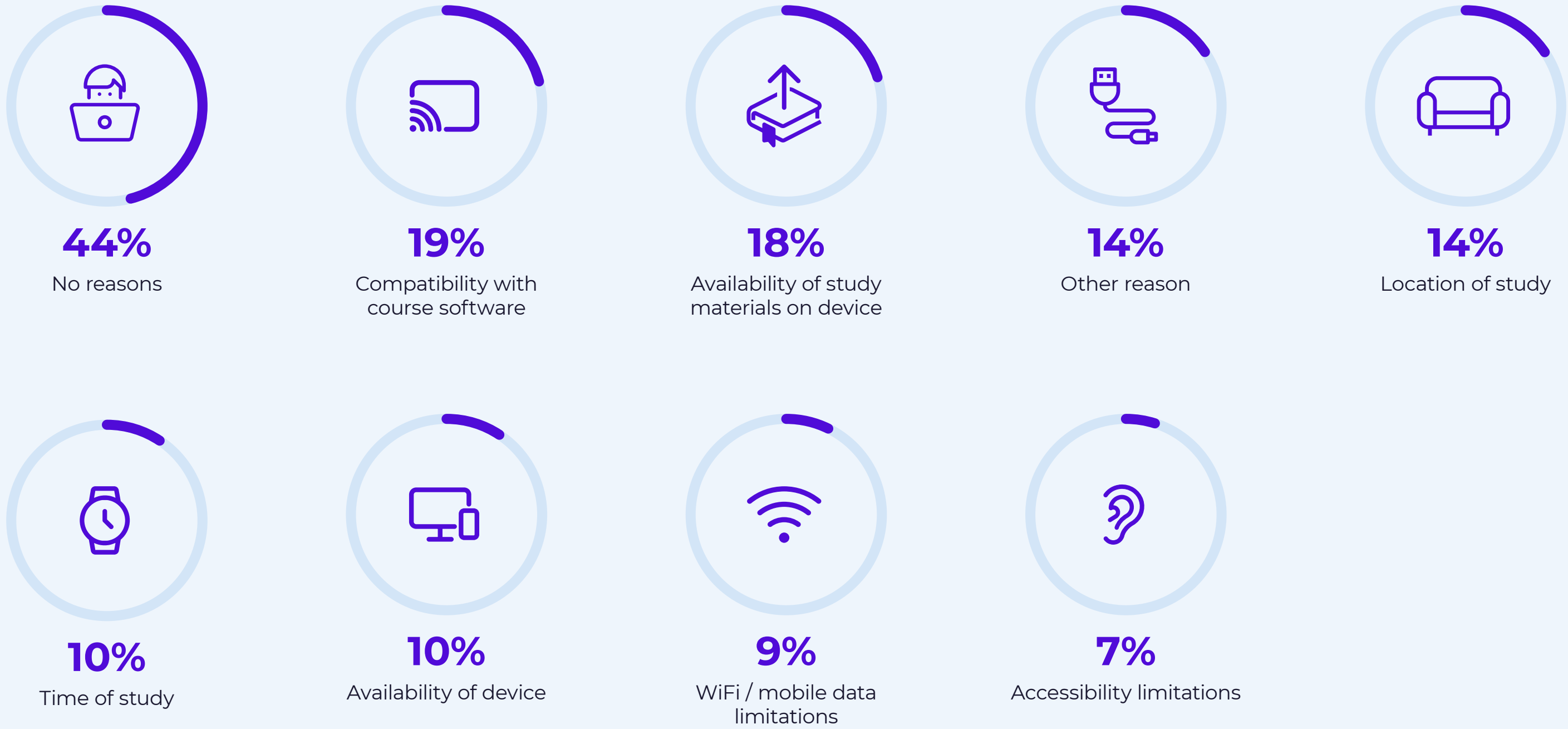
# 05


## Reasons preventing device types for study usage


 Software compatibility and availability of materials are key blockers of smart device usage

While the number of students identifying the availability of WiFi or mobile data as a blocker to smart device usage for study has decreased significantly in the past two years, the percentage of students stating that device support, in terms software compatibility or the availability of learning materials on smart devices, remains just as problematic as it was when we first ran the survey in 2019.

% of students that currently are prevented from using the device for study for the following reasons:



 Question: **Of the devices you have identified in Q1, are there any reasons that currently prevent you from using the devices for study purposes?**

 455 (April, 2021)

# 06

## Openness to alternative devices

 **Students remain open to using alternative devices for study**

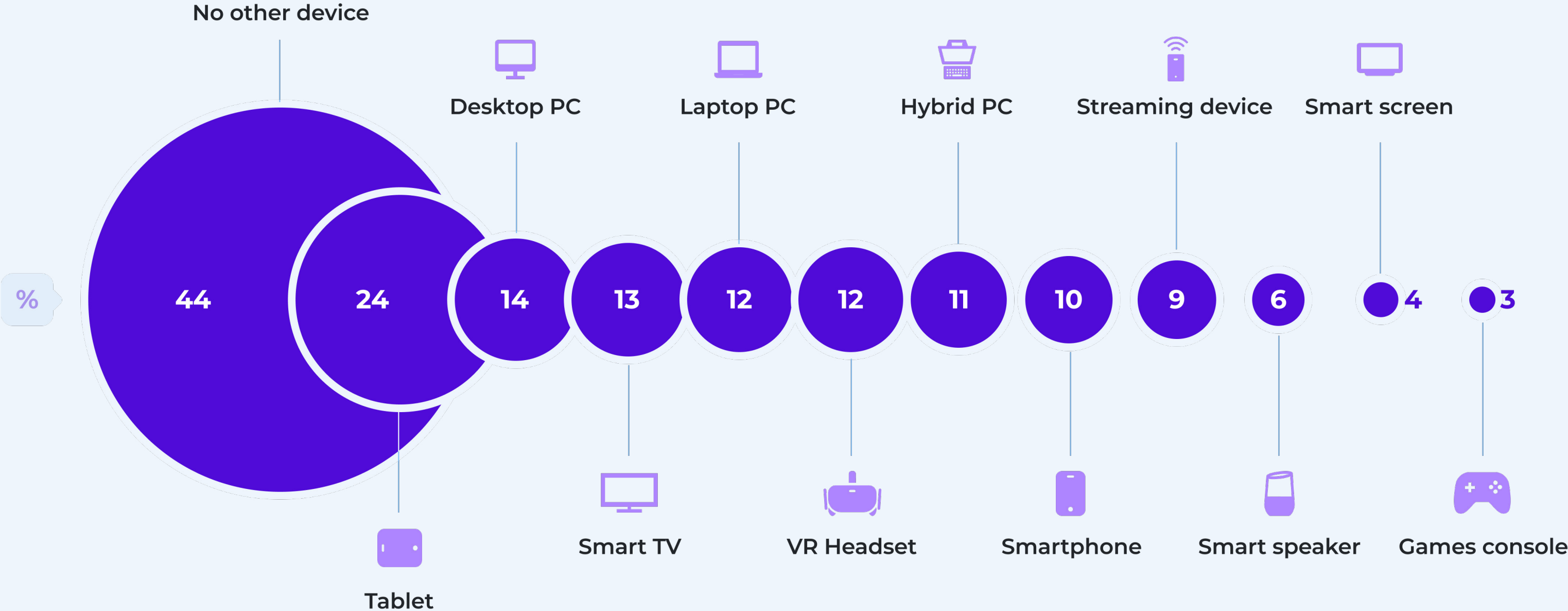
Data from our recent surveys has indicated that students are becoming more open to alternative device usage for studying and this has broadly continued in this most recent survey.


For example, while 43% of students that responded already use a Smart TV, only 1% of them use it for study. Yet, 13% of the same students have a desire to use a Smart TV for study.


It is worth noting that a third of all students that responded to the survey stated they would not change their behaviour even if the materials they require were made available on other device types.

Conversely two thirds stated they would consider using a device they already use for non-study purposes if we could provide materials for it.

% of students that use the following device types for study



 Question: **Including the devices you have identified in Q1, which devices might you be interested in using for study in the future that you currently do not use or have access to?**

 455 (April, 2021)

# 07

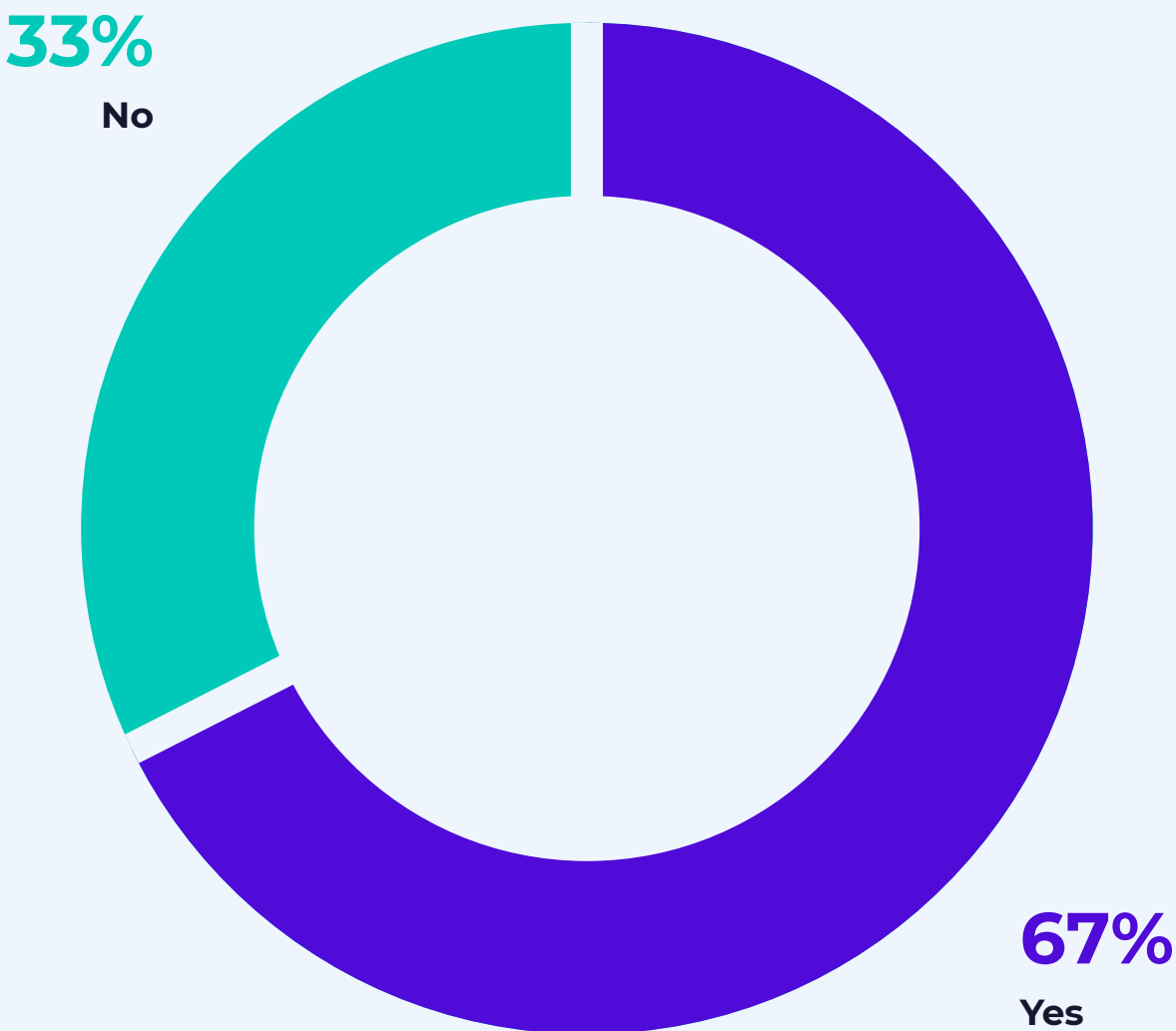
## Availability of materials



Students remain open to using alternative devices if study materials were made available

Indications from the results from this question shows that students would be willing to reconsider their device usage if study materials were made available.

% of students that would reconsider using the device for study if study materials were made available



Question: If the OU was to provide study materials on a device that you have access to but do not currently use for study, would this make you reconsider using the device for study?



455 (April, 2021)





**The Student Device Usage Report was prepared by Dean Collins based on research undertaken by the Learning Innovation team at The Open University.**

**If you would like to get in touch regarding this research, or you have any suggestions for future reports for this survey, please contact us at [ou-innovation@open.ac.uk](mailto:ou-innovation@open.ac.uk)**



**Dean Collins**

*User Experience Designer*

**[dean.collins@open.ac.uk](mailto:dean.collins@open.ac.uk)**