STUDENT DEVICE USAGE REPORT
APRIL 2022

The Open University | Learning Innovation

Contents

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
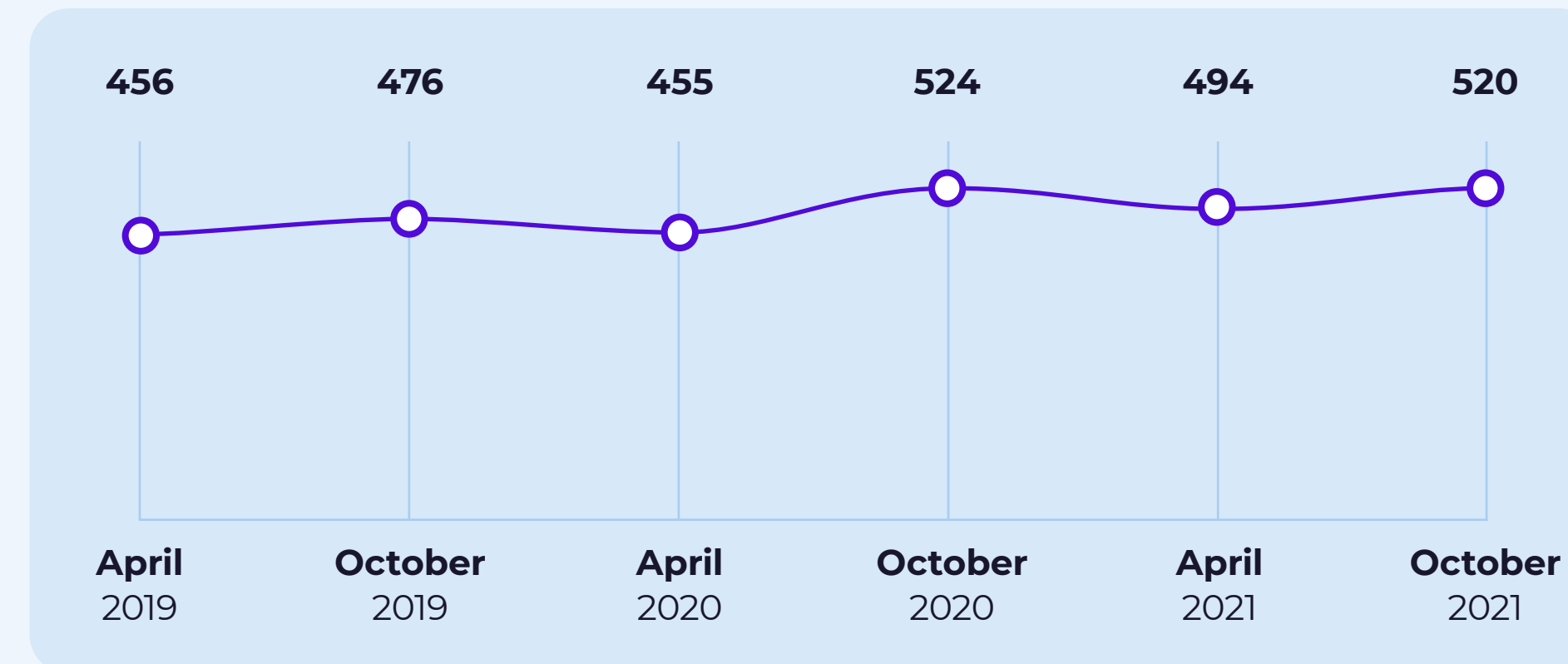Learning Innovation team
The Open University

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 responses from our sixth survey 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.

456	476	455	524	494	520
April 2019	October 2019	April 2020	October 2020	April 2021	October 2021

Survey statistics

6 questions

487 average respondents

Runs every **12 months** with the CDSP (as of October 2021)

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, consistent with our previous surveys, 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 and laptop PC usage (89%) 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 (42%), behind laptop PC (84%).

The declining trend of smartphone usage for study has now started to return to pre-pandemic levels after a continued fall in study usage over recent surveys.

Students primarily use a laptop PC for study.

Other trends for traditional devices have remained quite flat, showing that little is changing in preference for device usage for study from the students we survey.

There is a growing desire of students to use smart devices for study.

In our latest survey results, 54% of students we surveyed had access to a Smart TV, with 15% of students showing interest in using 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.

After a recent continued period of decline, WiFi or mobile data limitations has flattened out as a blocker for using devices for study.

01
Access to device types

Most device access remains relatively unchanged over the last year

The trend of access to the traditional devices of Smartphones, Laptop PC's, Tablets and Desktop PC's have remained flat.

Both streaming devices and games consoles continued a decline in their access. We can't make any conclusions from just looking at this data, but it could just be that the new students on the student panel cohort simply have a smaller access to these device types compared to our previously surveyed students.
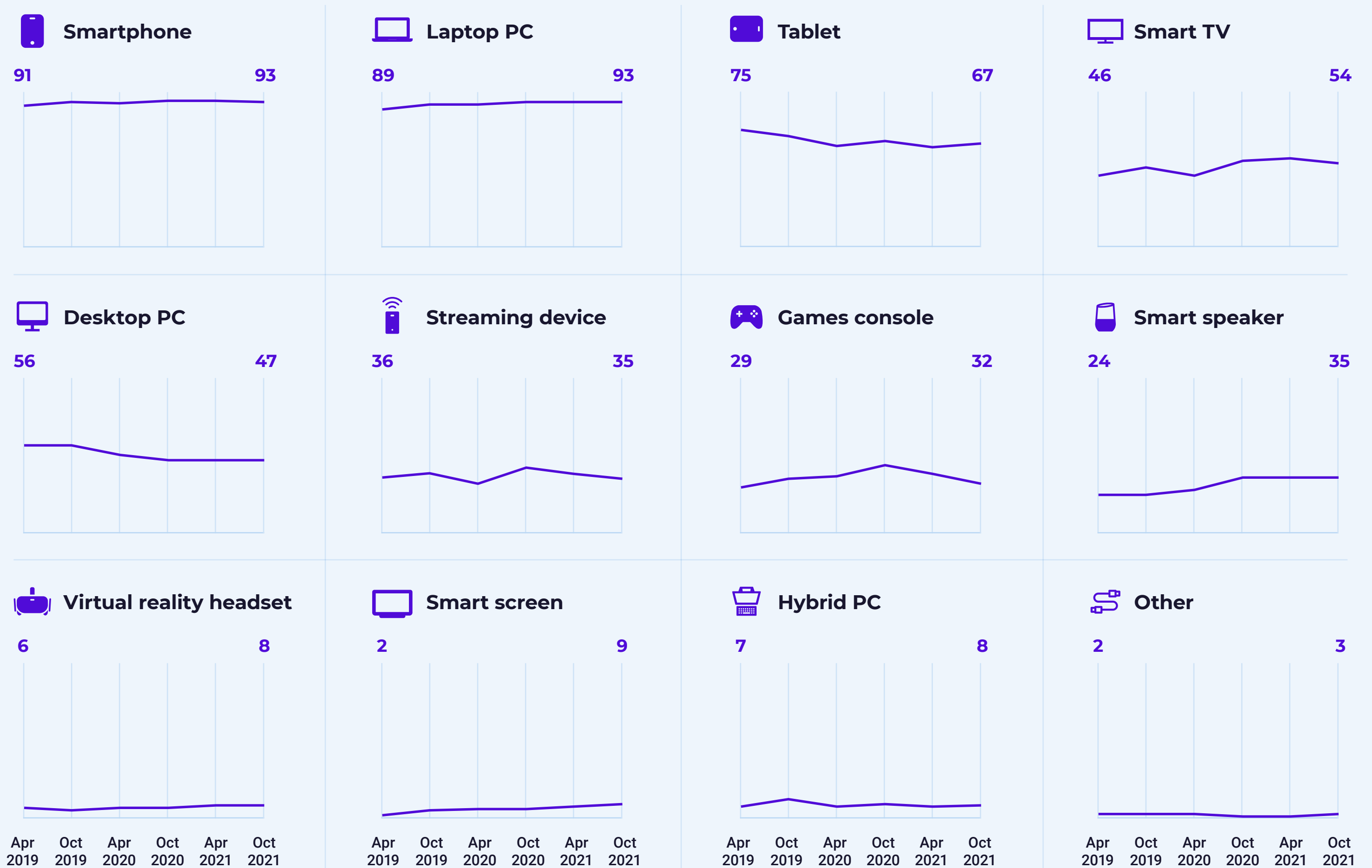
Impact of COVID-19

Smart device upward trend flattens out

Access to a variety of smart devices has flattened out in the last couple of couple of surveys (Smart TV, Smart speaker, Smart screen) after their recent growth, particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Games consoles saw a peak of access through the pandemic but has since fallen back to pre-pandemic access.

% of students that have access to the following devices

Smartphone
91 — 93

Laptop PC
89 — 93

Tablet
75 — 67

Smart TV
46 — 54

Desktop PC
56 — 47

Streaming device
36 — 35

Games console
29 — 32

Smart speaker
24 — 35

Virtual reality headset
6 — 8

Smart screen
2 — 9

Hybrid PC
7 — 8

Other
2 — 3

Apr 2019 · Oct 2019 · Apr 2020 · Oct 2020 · Apr 2021 · Oct 2021

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) • 455 (April, 2020)
524 (October, 2020) • 494 (April, 2021) • 520 (October, 2021)

02

Usage of device types

Desktop PC's and Tablets have flattened out their previous decreasing trend

Smart TV usage has seen a small continual growth since the start of our surveys. Smart speaker usage shows a trend of flattening out after their growth during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Smart screens have seen a very small continual growth for the last few surveys.

After their initial decreasing trend of usage at the beginning of the surveys, Desktop PC's and Tablet usage has flattened out it's trend line. With Tablets in particular, showing an early sign of an upward trend in usage.
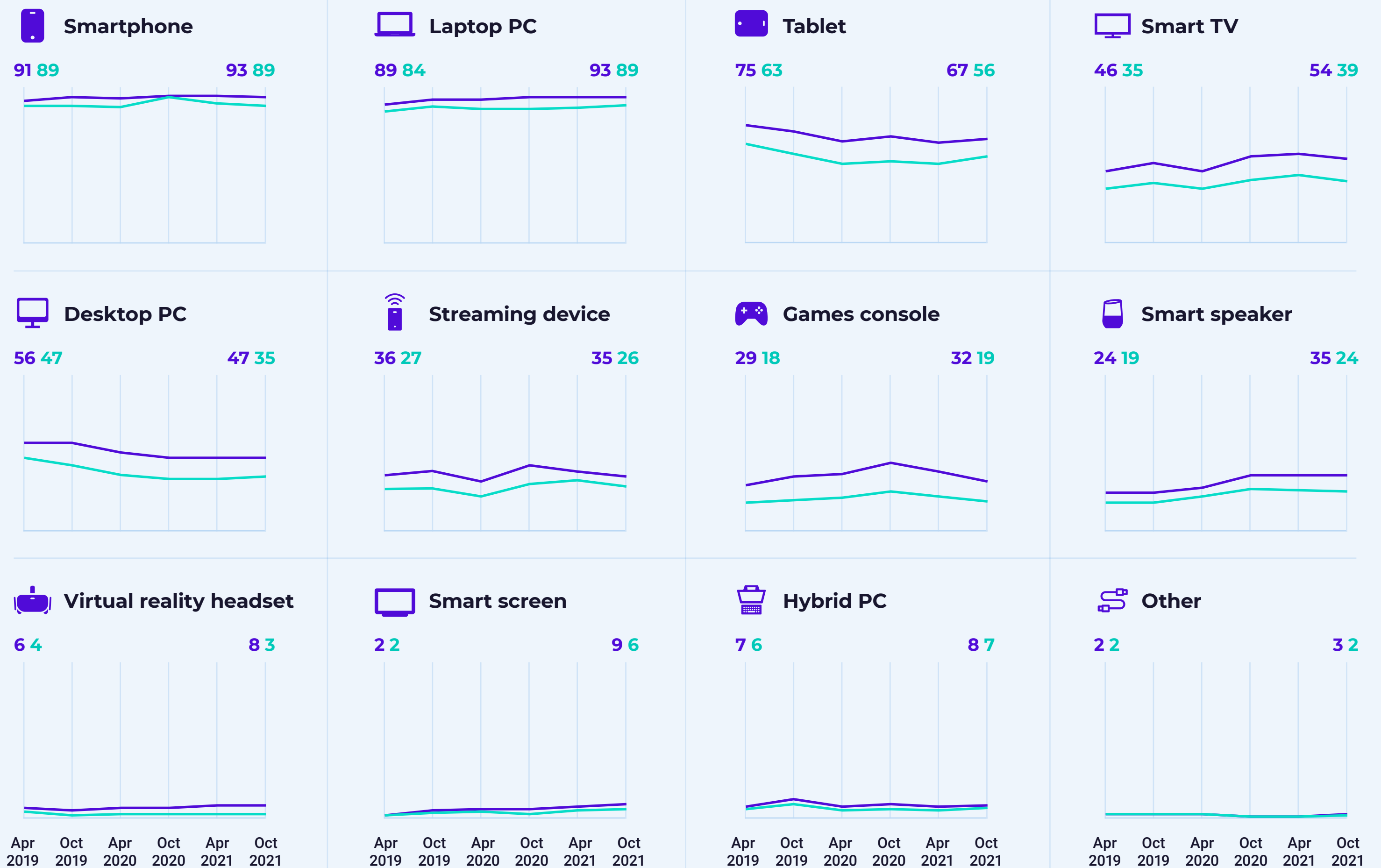
% change since April 2019

% increase		% decrease	
Laptop PC	**+4%**	Desktop PC	**-12%**
Smart TV	**+4%**	Tablet	**-7%**
Smart speaker	**+4%**	Streaming device	**-1%**
Smart screen	**+4%**	VR headset	**-1%**

% of students that has access to and use the following devices

● Access to device   ● Usage of device

Smartphone
91 89   93 89

Laptop PC
89 84   93 89

Tablet
75 63   67 56

Smart TV
46 35   54 39

Desktop PC
56 47   47 35

Streaming device
36 27   35 26

Games console
29 18   32 19

Smart speaker
24 19   35 24

Virtual reality headset
6 4   8 3

Smart screen
2 2   9 6

Hybrid PC
7 6   8 7

Other
2 2   3 2

Apr 2019 · Oct 2019 · Apr 2020 · Oct 2020 · Apr 2021 · Oct 2021

Question: **Which of the following device types do you have access to?**
Question: **Of the devices you have identified in Q1, which do you use personally?**

456 (April, 2019) • 476 (October, 2019) • 455 (April, 2020) • 524 (October, 2020) • 494 (April, 2021) • 520 (October, 2021)

03
Device types for study usage

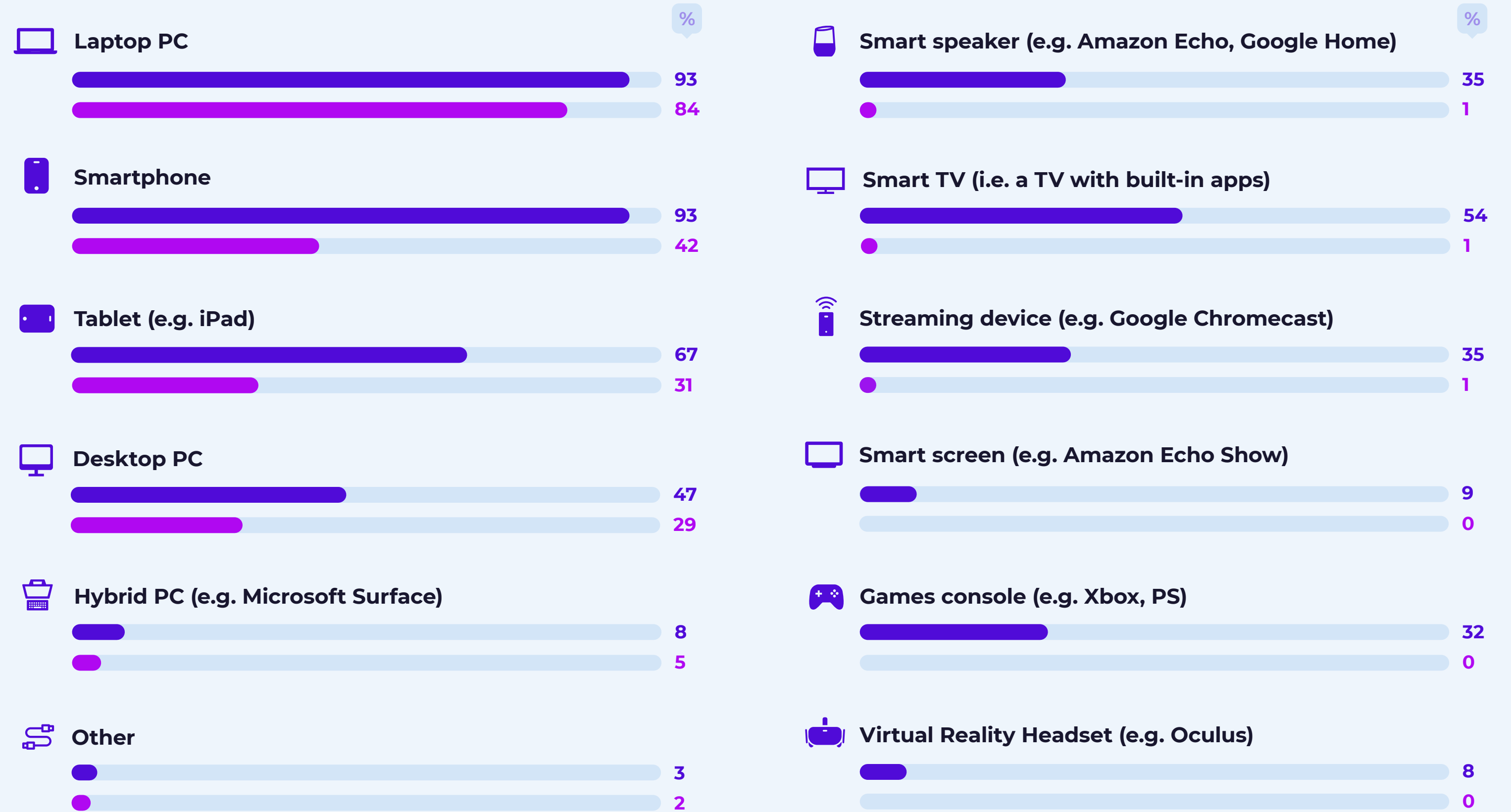**A laptop is the preferred choice of device for students when studying**

There are many devices that students have access to or have mentioned that they use of which they are not using for study.

Interestingly, of the students who personally use a smartphone (89%), only 42% use their smartphone for study. We intend to follow up on these findings in future surveys to understand more closely these relationships.

When we look at the responses for students that have access to devices such as smart speakers (35%), smart TVs (54%), streaming devices (35%) and games consoles (32%), it is interesting to note that these devices were only being utilised for study by less than 1%.

% of students that has access to and use the following device types for study

● Access to device   ● Usage of device for study

Laptop PC   %
93
84

Smartphone
93
42

Tablet (e.g. iPad)
67
31

Desktop PC
47
29

Hybrid PC (e.g. Microsoft Surface)
8
5

Other
3
2

Smart speaker (e.g. Amazon Echo, Google Home)   %
35
1

Smart TV (i.e. a TV with built-in apps)
54
1

Streaming device (e.g. Google Chromecast)
35
1

Smart screen (e.g. Amazon Echo Show)
9
0

Games console (e.g. Xbox, PS)
32
0

Virtual Reality Headset (e.g. Oculus)
8
0

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

520 (October, 2021)

A closer look at the traditional study devices

When looking at the correlation between the student responses for Laptop PC's and Desktop PCs from the first few questions, we can see that they showed only a small decrease in percentage between their use for study and their personal usage of that device.

The gap increases when we look at the difference between the usage of device and if they use the device for study when looking at the Tablet and Smartphone responses.
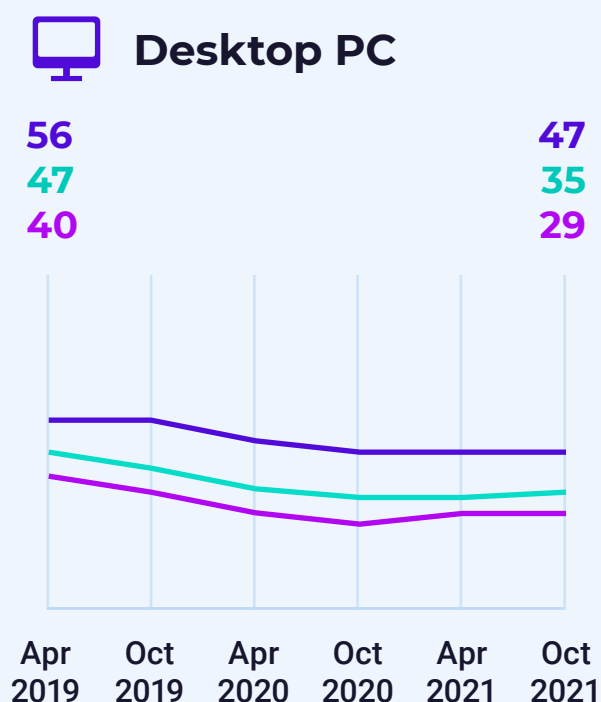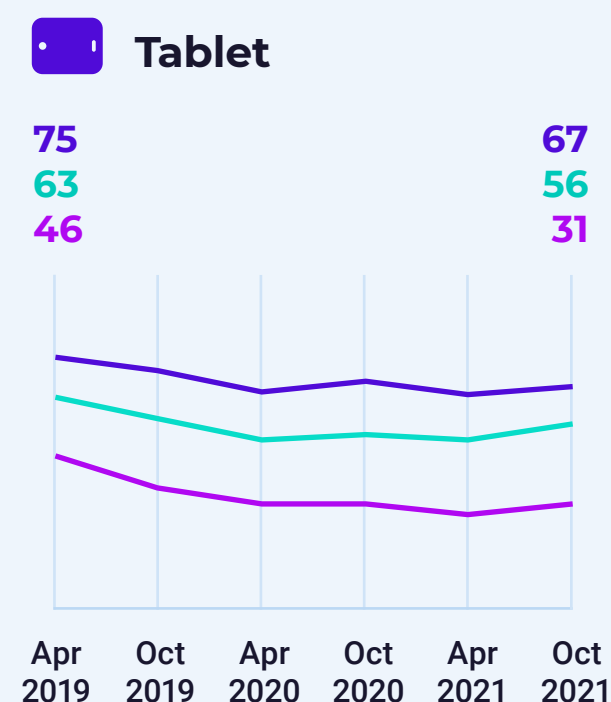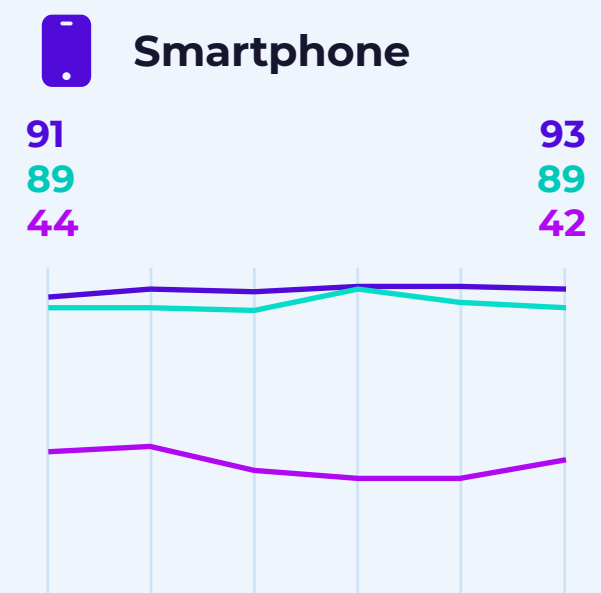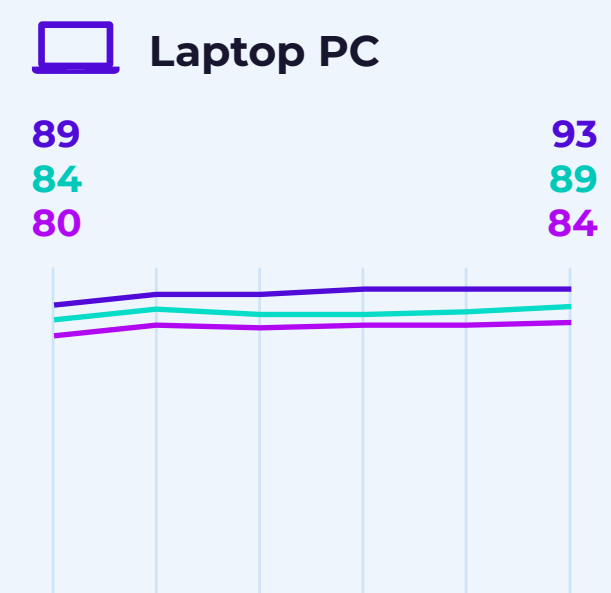
% of students that have access to, personally use and use the device for study

● Access to device ● Usage of device ● Usage of device for study

Laptop PC

89	93
84	89
80	84

Smartphone

91	93
89	89
44	42

Tablet

75	67
63	56
46	31

Desktop PC

56	47
47	35
40	29

Apr 2019 · Oct 2019 · Apr 2020 · Oct 2020 · Apr 2021 · Oct 2021

Questions:
Which of the following device types do you have access to?
Of the devices you have identified in Q1, which do you use personally?
Of the devices you have identified in Q1, which do you use for study?

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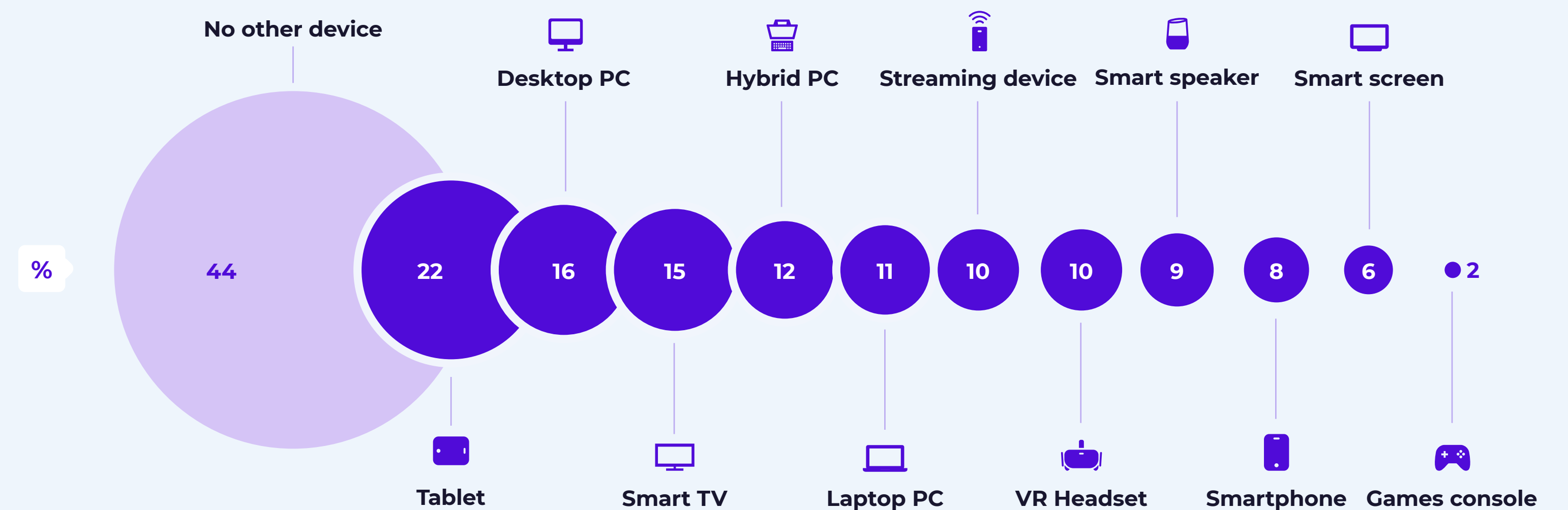
04
Openness to alternative devices

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 survey.

While 54% of students that responded had access to a Smart TV, only 1% used this device for study purposes. Interestingly, 15% indicated their openness to using a Smart TV for study. This could require some further analysis and follow up surveys to understand how students would like to use Smart TVs towards their study experience.

It is worth noting that 44% 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.

% of students that have interest in the following device types for study that they currently do not use or have access to

No other device

Desktop PC

Hybrid PC

Streaming device

Smart speaker

Smart screen

% | 44 | 22 | 16 | 15 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 6 | ● 2

Tablet

Smart TV

Laptop PC

VR Headset

Smartphone

Games console

📊 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?**
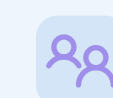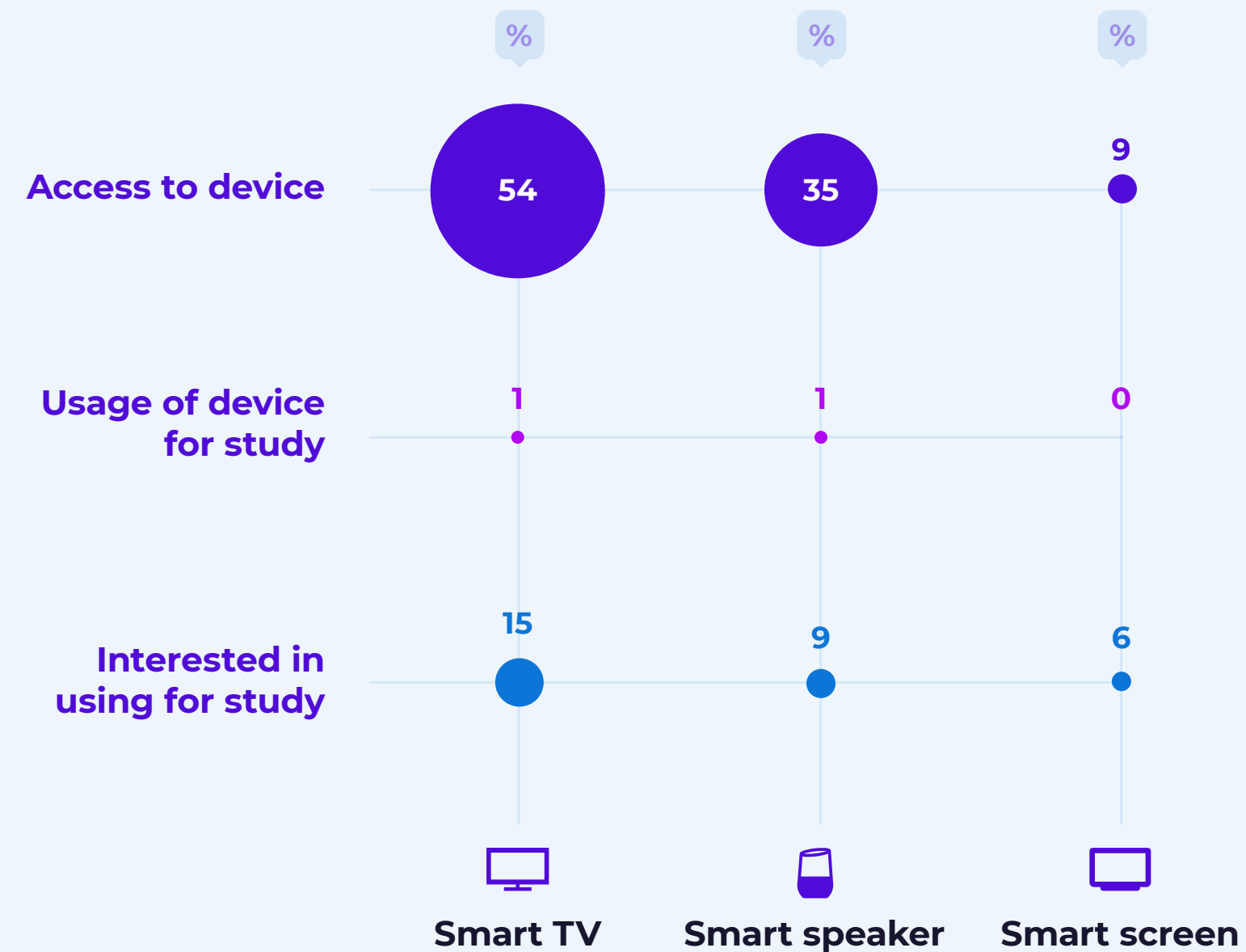
👥 520 (October, 2021)

05
Smart devices for study

Student usage of smart devices for study remains at trivial levels

In this most recent survey, the percentage of students currently utilising smart TVs, smart speakers, or smart screens for study remained consistent with previous findings. Despite access to these devices being at one of their highest levels since we began our surveys, there has been no change in their usage for study.

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

520 (October, 2021)

06

Reasons preventing device types for study usage

After a recent continued period of decline, WiFi or mobile data limitations has flattened out as a blocker for using devices for study but remains at its lowest levels since surveys began. This is encouraging to think that most of the students we surveyed do not consider this as a limitation to their studies.

The percentage of students stating that device support, in terms of software compatibility or availability of learning materials 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:

46%
No reasons

19%
Availability of study materials on device

16%
Compatibility with course software

16%
Other reason

11%
Accessibility limitations

9%
WiFi / mobile data limitations
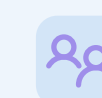
9%
Location of study

6%
Time of study

6%
Availability of device

Question: **Of the devices you have identified in Q1, are there any reasons that currently prevent you from using the devices for study purposes?**
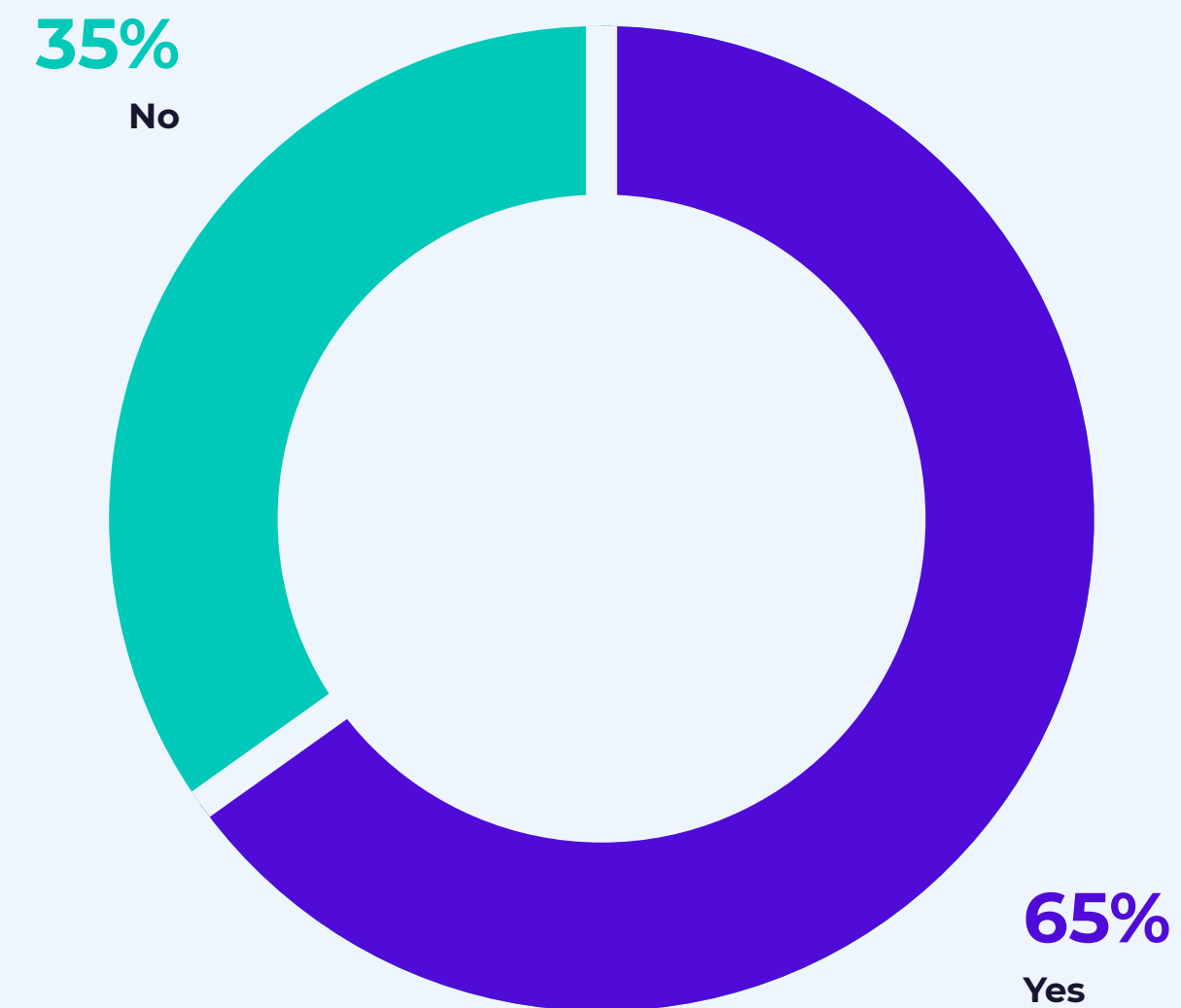
520 (October, 2021)

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 almost two-thirds of students would be willing to reconsider their device usage if study materials were made available on a device that they have access to, but don't currently use.

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

35%
No

65%
Yes

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?**

520 (October, 2021)

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Learning Innovation

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

Dean Collins
User Experience Designer

dean.collins@open.ac.uk