

SUSTAINABLE FOOD ON CAMPUS

Research with students and staff

2021



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In recent years, research has shown an increasing demand for ethical and sustainable goods, with consumers becoming more conscious of the impact of their purchasing habits. This includes purchases of food. Several studies have shown younger consumers to be the driving force behind these trends, tying in with significantly higher levels of concern about climate change and environmental issues amongst this population.

From our own research at SOS-UK, we've seen these levels of concern mirrored amongst student audiences. For example our [climate change tracker](#) survey results showed 90% of students in further or higher education across the UK to be concerned about climate change. Our research to support the [Student Eats](#) programme has shown that around half (51%) of students are willing to make changes to the food they buy to reduce their impact on the environment. Further research into student eating habits has shown that convenience of location is a key factor when deciding where to eat (e.g. food to go, eating out) and where to buy food shopping.

These findings show the importance of ensuring campuses offer sustainable food options, to support the desire for positive behaviour change amongst students, in a location that is commonly frequented by them. Additionally, leaving home and moving to independent living at university is a key moment of change in many students' lives. Habit discontinuity theory suggests that these key moments of change in life are when new habits and behaviours are likely to form, with the potential to last a lifetime.

Similarly, research completed with staff working within the further and higher education sectors has shown that over a quarter ranked their institution's commitment to taking action on local, sustainable food as poor or very poor. A fifth ranked their institution's commitment to ethical procurement in the same way suggesting that this area requires further attention across the sector.

In response to this, SOS-UK has been supported by the [Esmee Fairbairn Foundation](#) to deliver research that uncovers further understanding of student and staff attitudes and behaviours in this area along with their expectations for action on campus through a national research project.

This report presents the finding of the research, firstly from the perspective of higher education students, and secondly from the perspective of staff working within institutions providing higher education and who work in a role or with a remit involving food.

Note

It's worth noting that this research has been completed during a time of significant upheaval for the sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions implemented to address the spread of the virus meant that many student respondents had no 'in person' experience of food on campus during the current academic year and were reliant on referring to their pre-pandemic experiences. Similarly there were difficulties accessing appropriate staff members with many being placed on furlough by their employers as a result of the lack of students on campus and therefore requirement for food delivery.

Students

Research method

A two phase approach was used to uncover students' attitudes and experiences in relation to food and sustainability, both in general and in relation to food on campus.

Phase 1: Student online survey

This phase of the research focused on gathering insight on sustainable food across a range of student population sectors and segments. The online survey was designed to enable understanding of:

- Definitions and understanding of sustainable food
- Current behaviours and practices
- Awareness of existing action on sustainable food on campus
- Expectations and aspirations for action on sustainable food on campus

The survey was open for completion during February 2021 and was completed by 1007 students. Completion of the survey was incentivised by a cash prize draw of £750 would be offered, including a main prize and follow-up prizes. The survey was promoted by the National Union of Students (NUS) on behalf of SOS-UK to the TOTUM student discount cardholder database. Students' unions and institutions were also able to support promotion of the survey to the student population on their campuses.

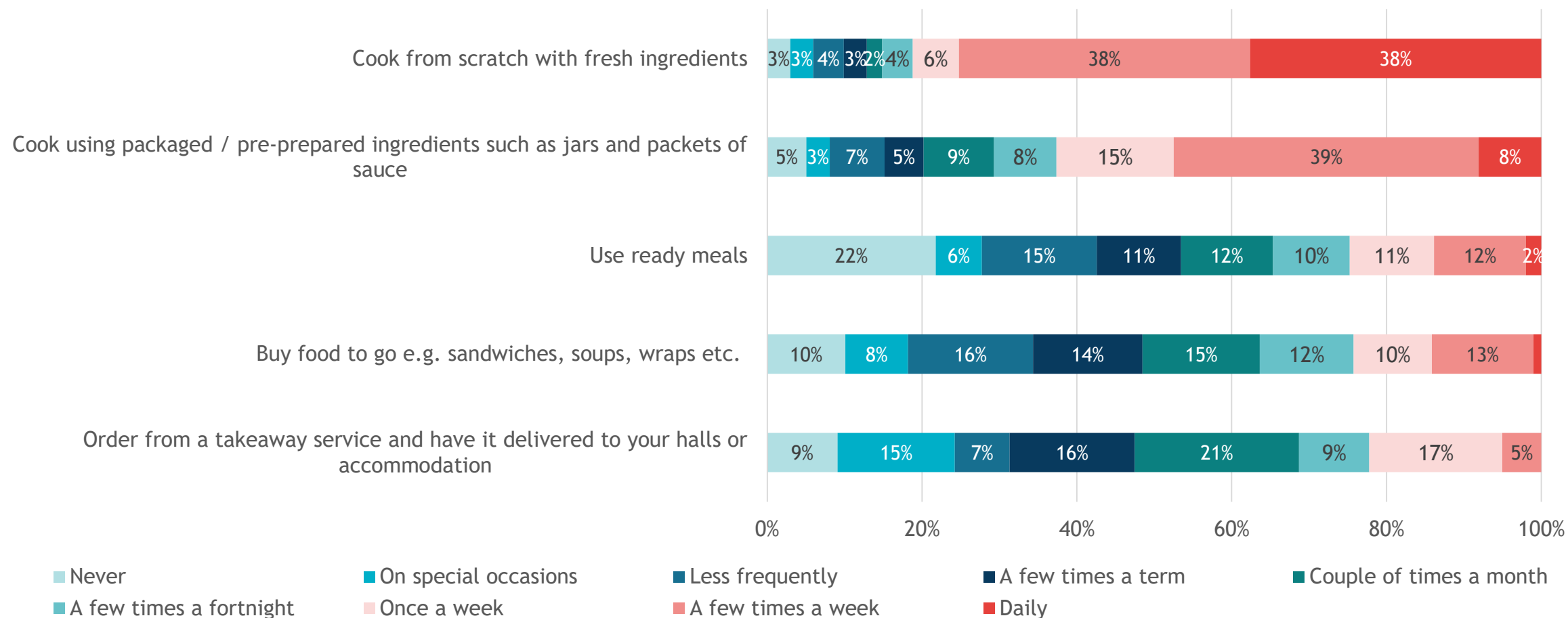
Phase 2: Student online focus groups

Following analysis of the survey, four online focus groups (23 participants) were held with students to understand their experiences in relation to sustainable food in further detail. Participants were selected from survey respondents who indicated they would be available for further research. Students expressing a range of opinions in relation to sustainable food and a range of dietary choices were selected to take part, as well as recruiting for representation from different study years and regions.

The findings from both phases of research with students are presented in this section of the report.

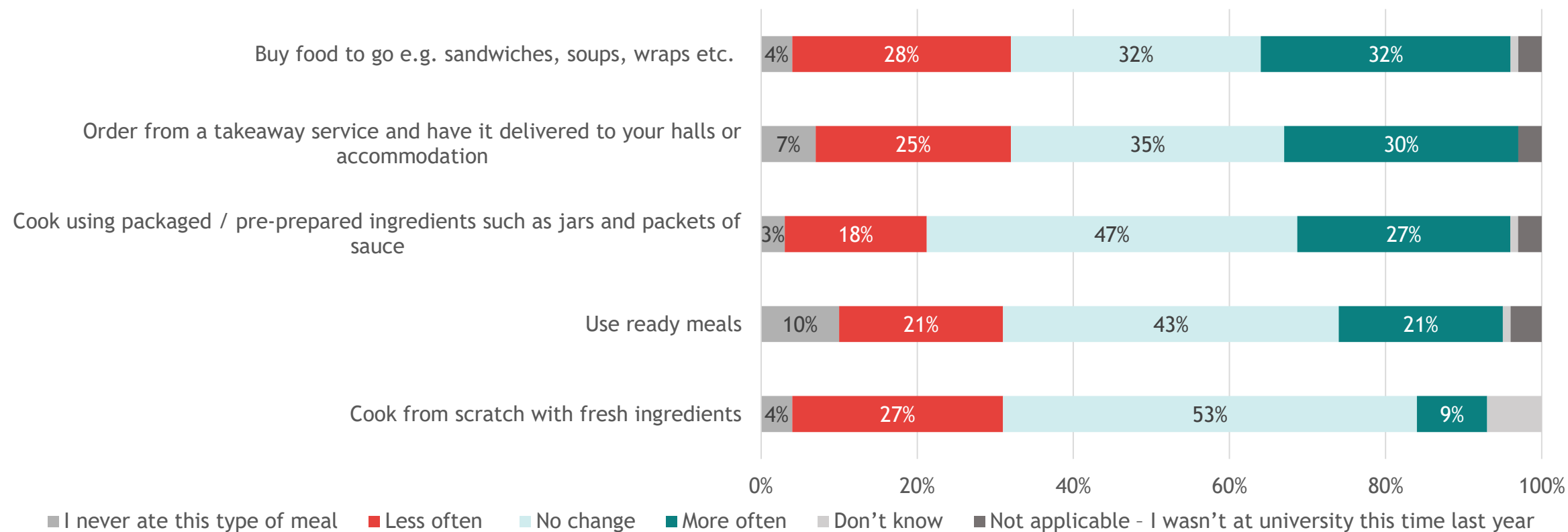
SUSTAINABLE FOOD - ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

The most commonly reported meals prepared by respondents are those cooked from scratch with fresh ingredients, with 38% saying they do this daily. Using packaged/pre-prepared ingredients is also common, with 47% saying they prepare meals this way a few times a week or more. 25% use ready meals at least once a week.



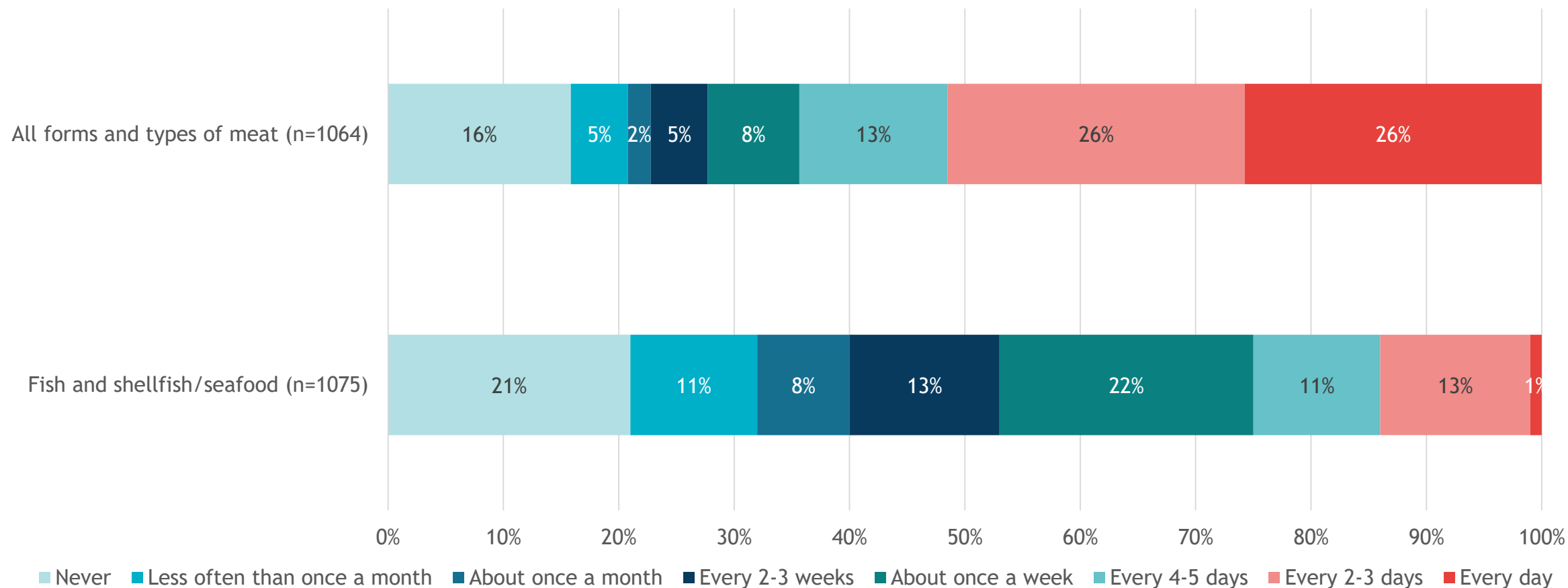
Firstly, please think about the meals you eat. Please tell us how often, if at all, you eat meals prepared in the following ways...[Weighted base: Balance: No response]

Thinking back to their meal preparation behaviour at the same time last year, respondents report increased consumption of convenience and takeaway foods, for example 32% say they're eating food to go options more often, and 30% say they're using takeaway services more often. However a similar proportion also report carrying out these behaviours less often (28% and 25% respectively).



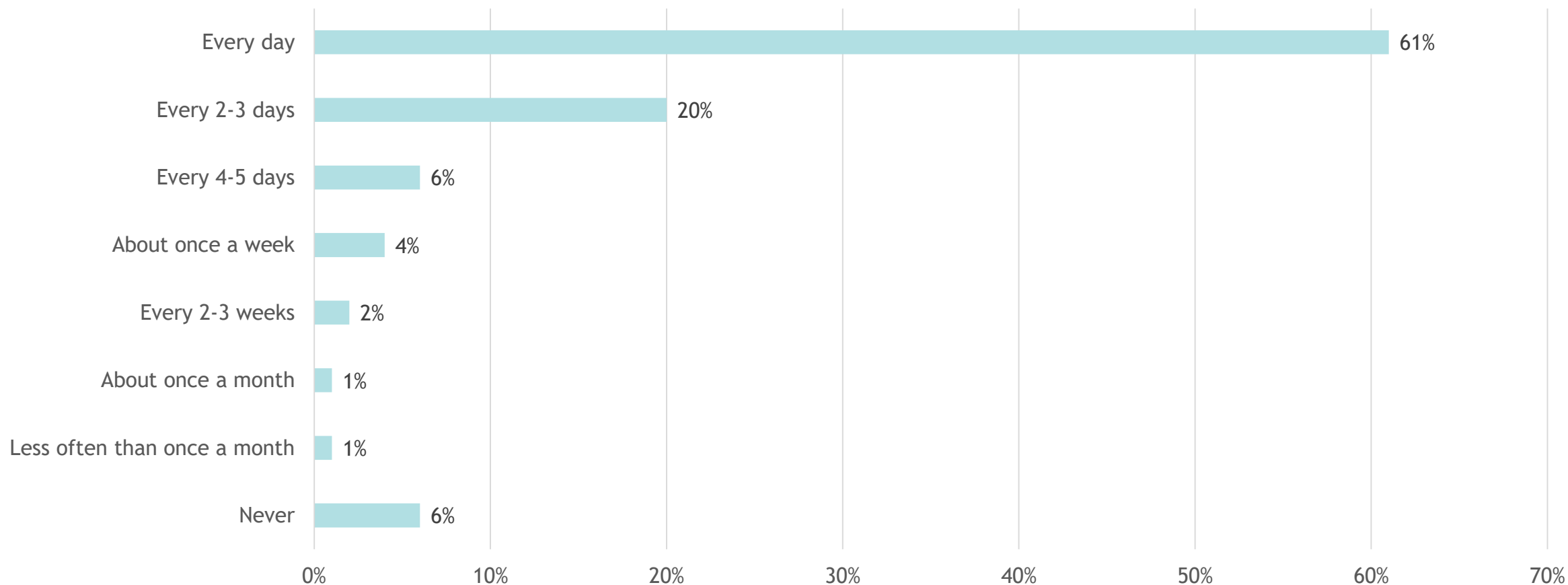
And how does this compare to the meals you were eating this time last year? Please think back to your time at university last year [Weighted base: Balance: No response]

A quarter of respondents (26%) say they eat a form of meat every day, with this increasing to over half (52%) reporting they do so every 2-3 days or more. 14% say they eat fish or shellfish/seafood every 2-3 days or more.



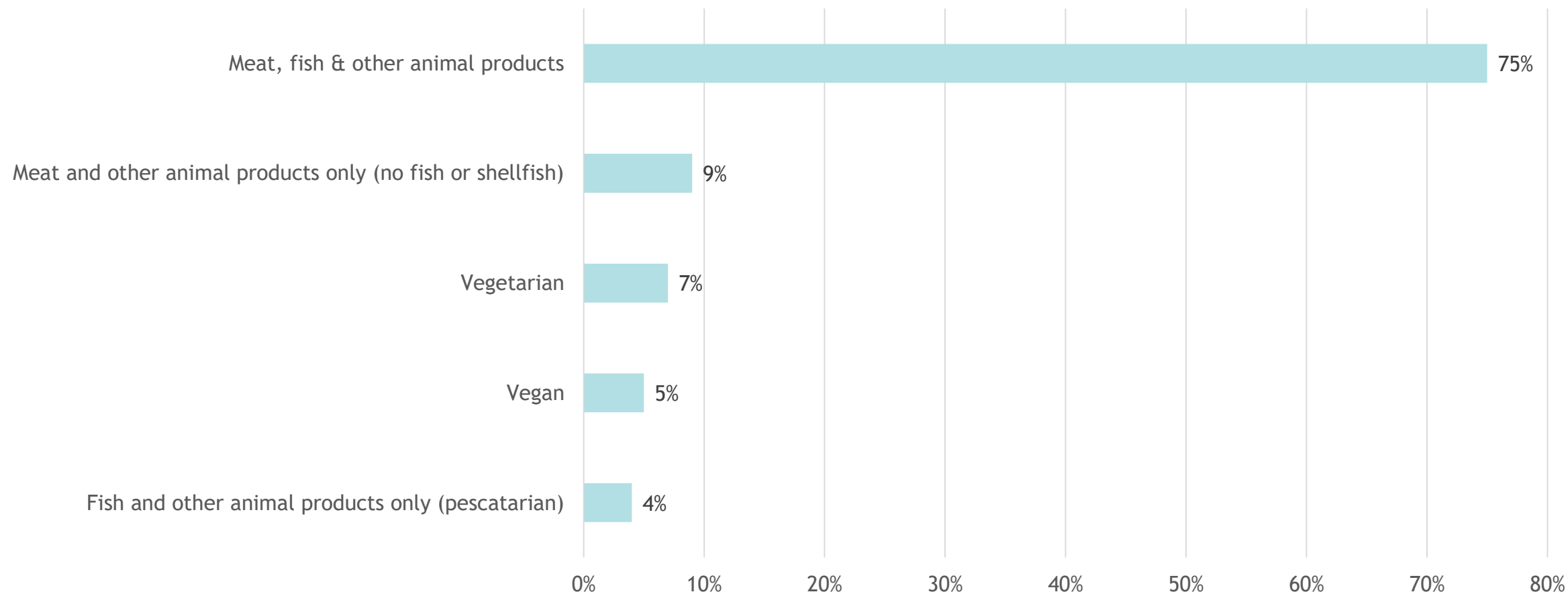
How often, if at all, do you personally eat any form of meat, fish or shellfish? This includes all forms and types of meat, fish or shellfish/seafood and dishes that contain these, even in small amounts. [Weighted base: c.1015 Balance: No response]

When including other animal products e.g. milk, cheese, eggs and honey, 81% of respondents say they consume these products every 2-3 days or more.



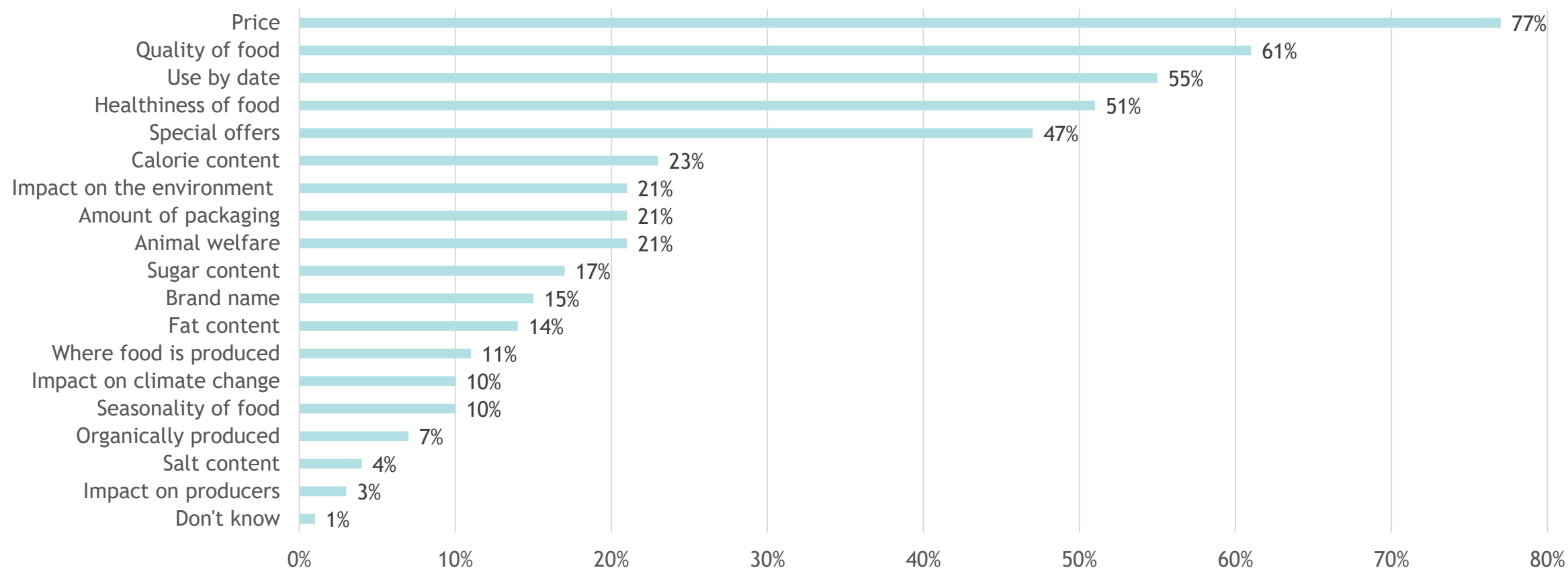
How often, if at all, do you personally consume any animal products other than meat, fish or shellfish? This includes any products produced or derived from animals, such as milk, cheese, eggs, honey etc. [Weighted base: 1016 Balance: No response]

75% of respondents eat all kinds of meat, fish and animal product. 7% can be described as vegetarian (avoid meat, fish and shellfish but consume products such as dairy, egg and honey) and 5% as vegan (avoid all animal products, meat, fish and shellfish).



[Weighted base: 996 Balance: No response]

Price is the overriding factor taken into consideration by respondents when choosing one food product over another, with 77% saying they take this into account. Quality (61%) and use by date (55%) are also important factors. 21% say they take the impact on the environment, the amount of packaging and animal welfare into account.



Thinking about the food you eat, which of the following factors do you consider when choosing one food product over another? Please think generally about different food products, including raw ingredients and ready-made products. [Weighted base: 1016 Balance: No response]

Focus group research also confirmed the prioritisation of price and value in making decisions over what food to buy amongst student participants

When describing the most important factors that affect their food purchasing decisions, focus group participants noted a prioritisation of price in order to fit in with tight student budgets. Price was described as being considered both in immediate terms, but also in terms of food storage and wastage with many participants reporting to opt for bulk buying or frozen food to reduce costs. Some felt their costs could be reduced if they were able to adopt these behaviours but were often limited by their accommodation. Alongside these considerations was a desire to 'eat well'.

“With limited income, its important to me to get good value in a meal. Normally I'd be more concerned about the nutritious value, but as a student I want to get as much food and as many meals as possible for my cash.”

“For me storage is such a massive issue. I only have one cupboard and a plastic storage box in my bedroom, but would buy in greater quantities if the space allowed.”

“I always think about how long its lasts because its a waste of money otherwise. I ended up spending money on fresh fruit and veg for it to only get wasted as I couldn't eat it quick enough.”

“As we are students, budget is important, therefore finding something that is good quality and good value for money is important. [quality means] Proper food, so for example, proper chicken and not reshaped mush.”



MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS

Focus group participants noted their ‘nice to have’ factors as foods that have specific qualities, are fresh rather than frozen, or that have are a treat from their normal purchase pattern.

When describing factors that are ‘nice to have’, participants frequently noted specific qualities, such as low-sugar or low-preservative, or more expensive ‘treat’ foods that don’t form part of their regular shopping habits or eating patterns.

Reflecting a preference for frozen produce for it’s longer life and cheaper prices, fresh fruit and vegetables were also described as ‘nice to have’.

Some participants also noted that they would seek products with environmental or ethical credentials, for example organic or ‘natural’ products, or items that support local producers.

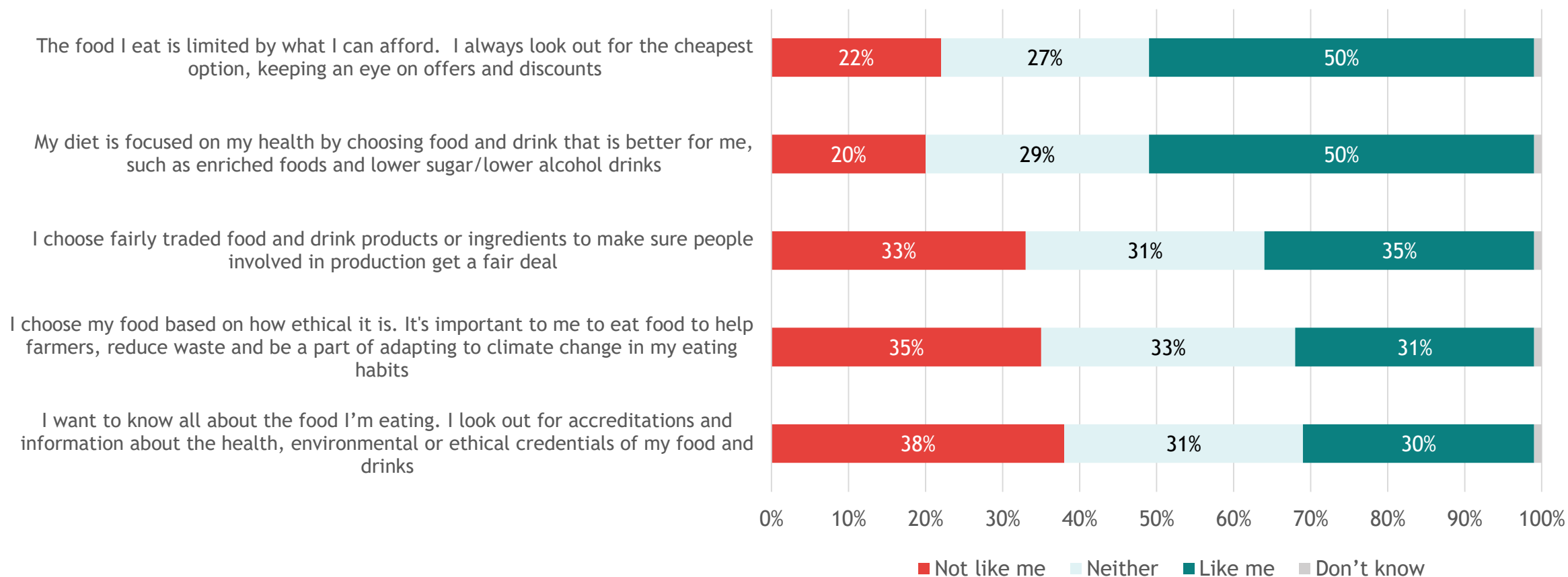
“I try to buy organic whole foods when I can but the cost was high so I will have phases.”

“Organic, helpful for farmers - sometimes, every now and then, I pay a little more for ‘better’ quality more natural foodstuffs.”



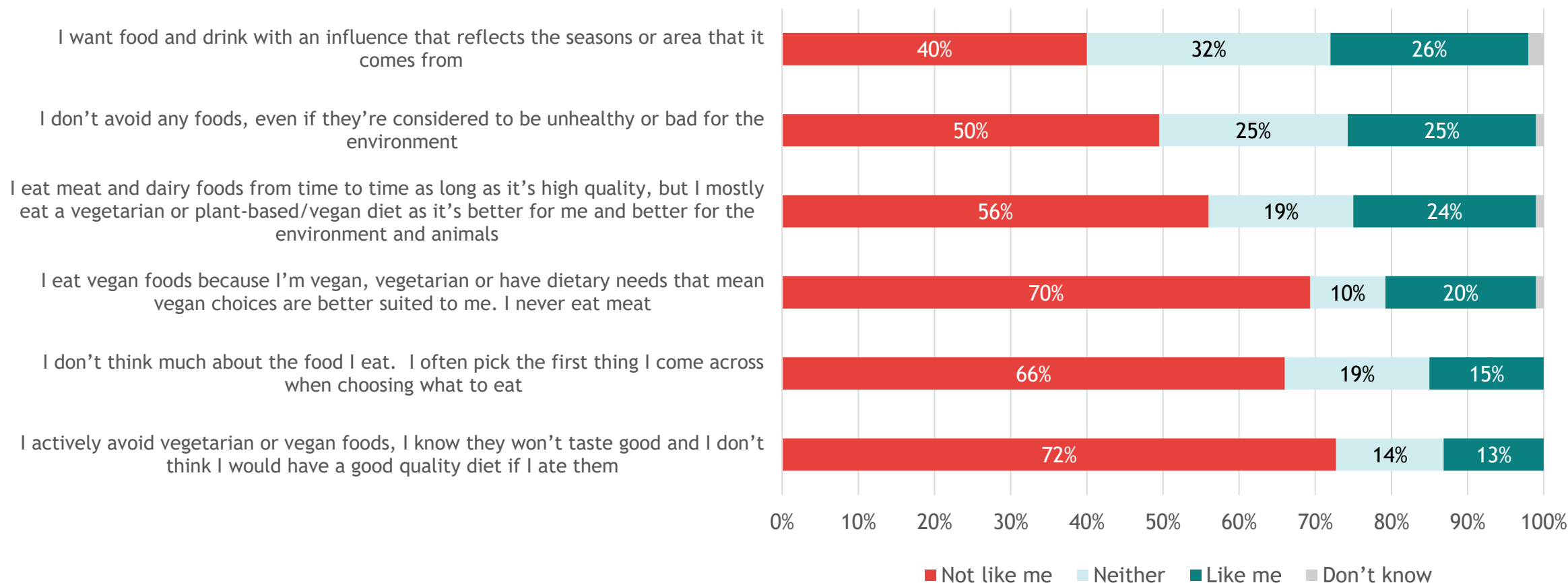
‘NICE TO HAVE’ FACTORS

Half of respondents say affordability limits the food they eat, and that they're always looking for the cheapest option. The same proportion say they are health-focused, choosing food and drink that is better for them.



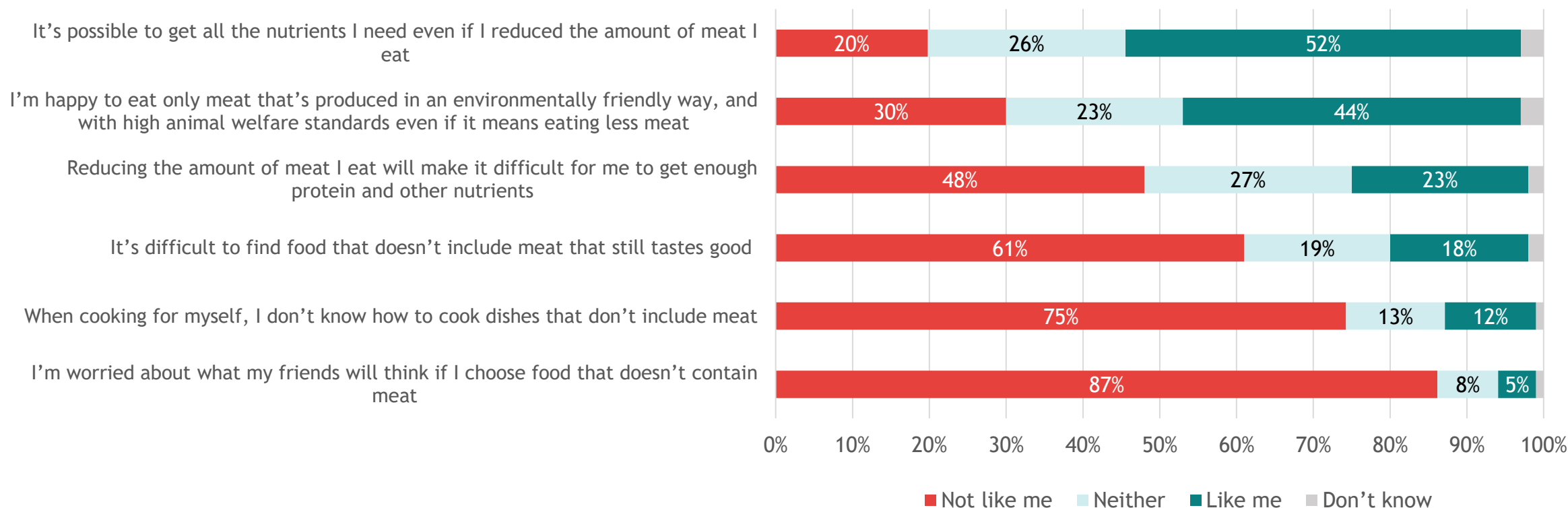
In the next few questions we'll ask you a bit more about your attitudes towards food. Please answer these questions assuming there are no restrictions related to what you eat that you may have experienced as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Please tell us how much, if at all, each of the following statements reflect your attitudes towards the food you eat.

25% say they don't avoid any foods for health or environmental reasons. Respondents generally report a positive view of vegetarian or vegan foods with only 13% saying they actively avoid them due to perceptions of taste or benefit for their diet.



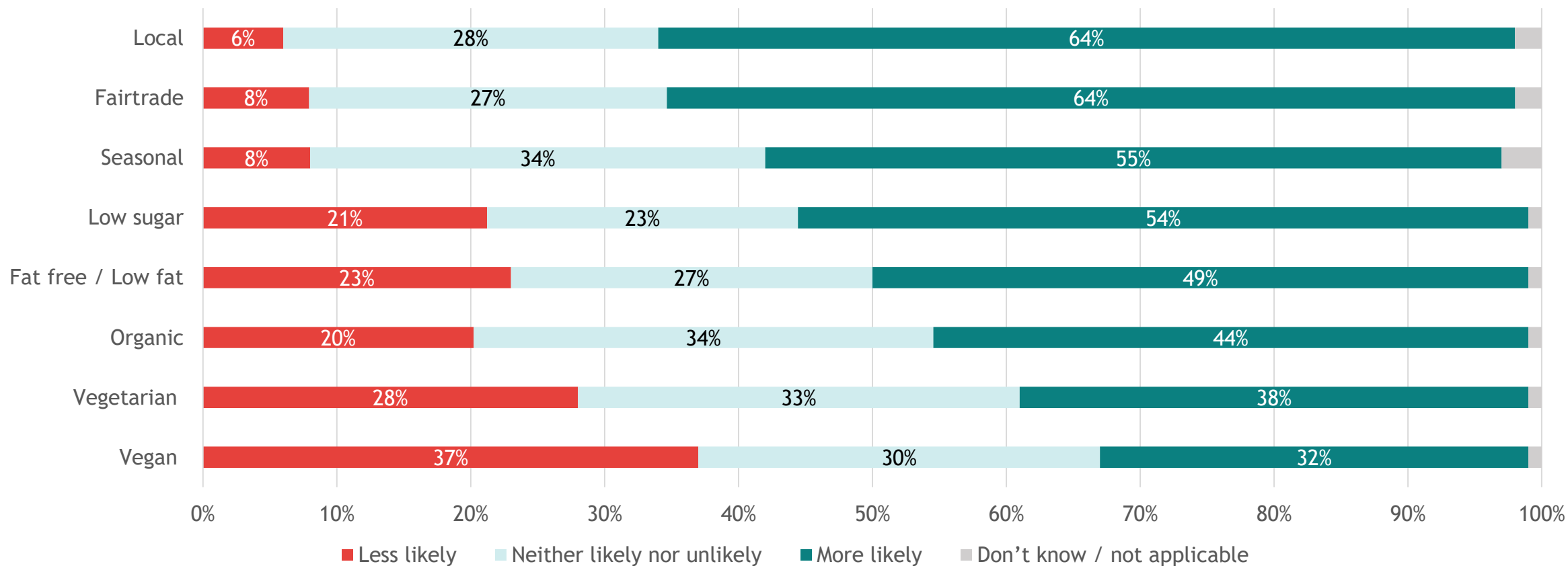
In the next few questions we'll ask you a bit more about your attitudes towards food. Please answer these questions assuming there are no restrictions related to what you eat that you may have experienced as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Please tell us how much, if at all, each of the following statements reflect your attitudes towards the food you eat.

Reflecting on meat consumption, respondents show a positive reaction towards reduced consumption (e.g. 52% think they can get all the nutrients they need even if they reduced their meat consumption, and 44% agree they're happy to limit their meat consumption to only eat high welfare meat that's produced in an environmentally-friendly way). However 18% of respondents say they find it difficult to find food without meat that tastes good, and 23% think reducing their meat consumption will make it difficult to get enough protein and other nutrients.



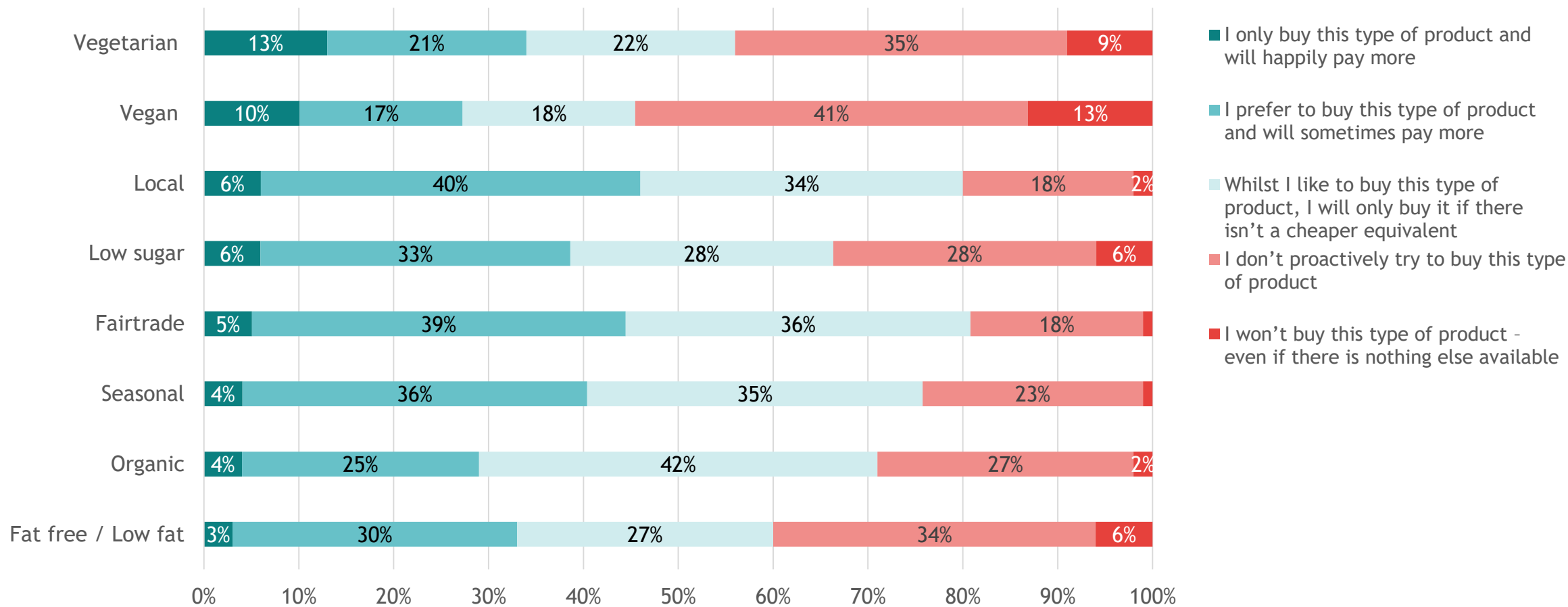
In the next few questions we'll ask you a bit more about your attitudes towards food. Please answer these questions assuming there are no restrictions related to what you eat that you may have experienced as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Please tell us how much, if at all, each of the following statements reflect your attitudes towards the food you eat. [Weighted base: c.1003 Balance: No response]

Respondents report a strong desire to support local and Fairtrade products, with almost two thirds (64%) saying they would be more likely to purchase these products over 'standard' versions. Around a third say they'd be more likely to choose vegetarian (38%) and vegan (32%) options despite only 7% and 5% of respondents identifying as adopting these diets.



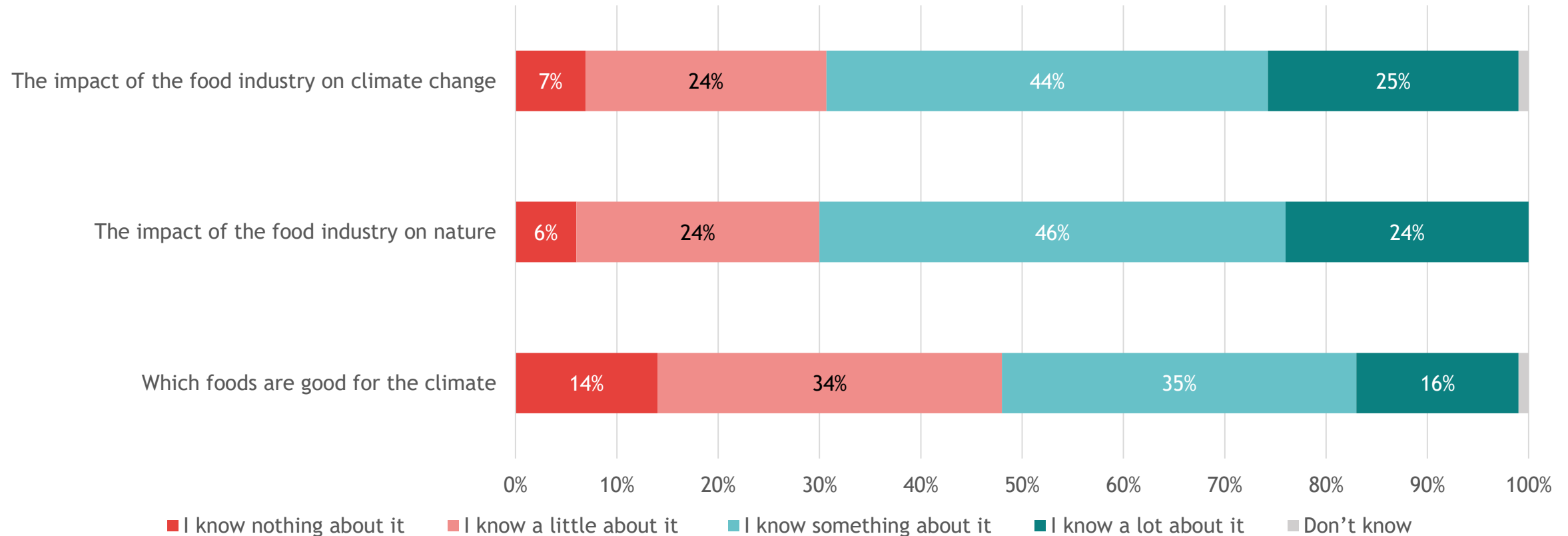
How much more or less likely are you to purchase the following over 'standard' versions of the same product? [Weighted base: c.1003 Balance: No response]

Despite expressing a desire to choose products with positive health, environmental and ethical characteristics, the limitations of budget are also clear, with 36% saying they only buy Fairtrade if there isn't a cheaper product available, and 42% say the same about organic products.



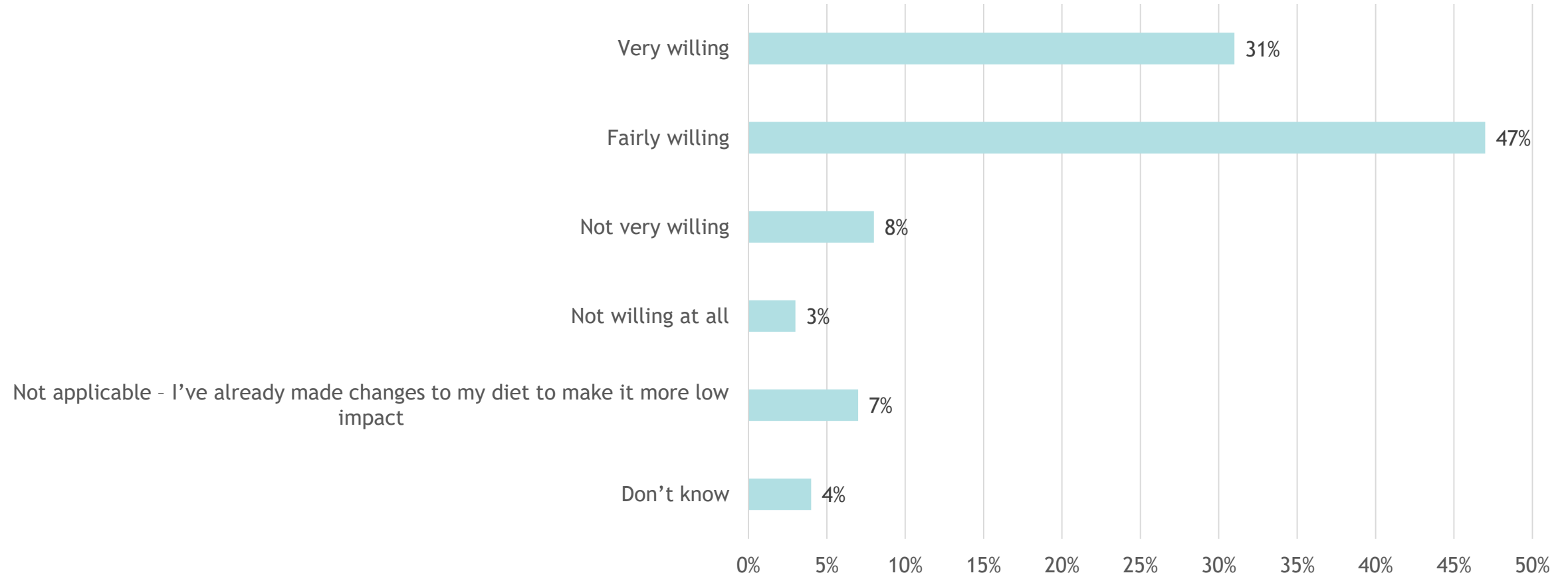
Which of the following best describes your behaviour around buying the following products? [Weighted base: 1003 Balance: No response]

Respondents report feeling fairly well-informed about the impacts of the food industry, with 69% saying they know at least something about the impact on climate change and 70% saying they know at least something about the impact on nature. There is lower awareness of which foods are good for the climate with 48% saying they know nothing or only a little about this.



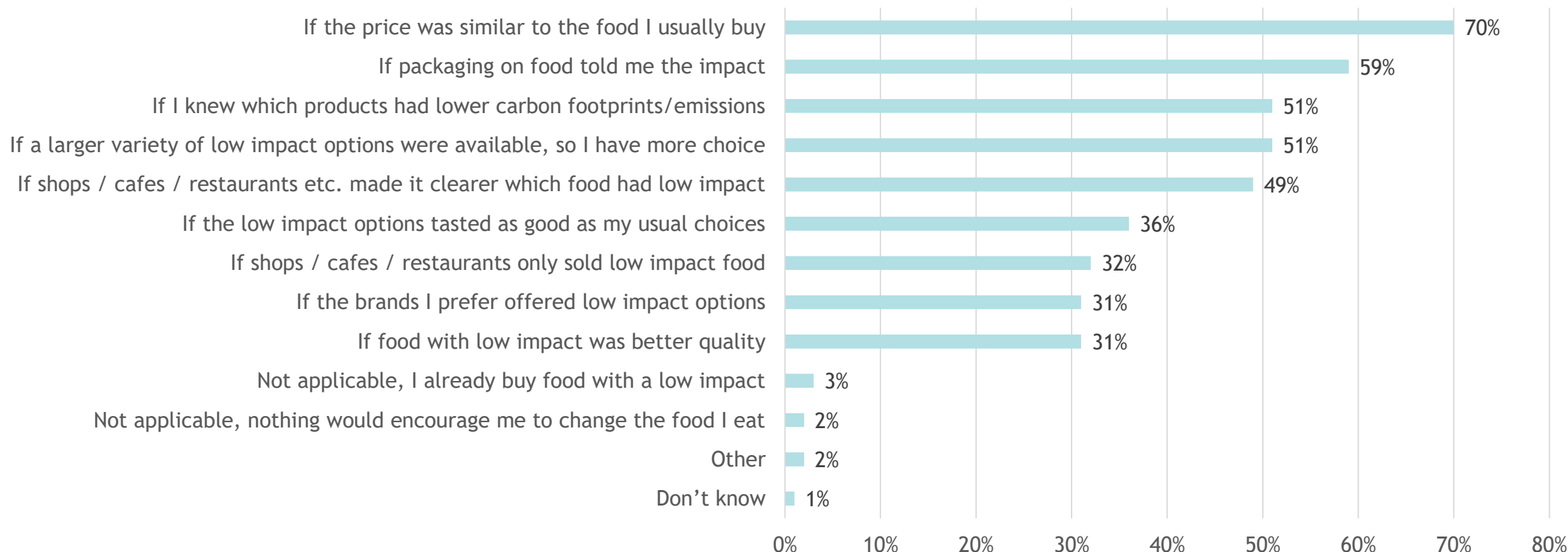
Which option best reflects what you know about the following issues? [Weighted base@ c.1006 Balance: No response]

78% of respondents say they're willing to change their diet to make it more low impact on the environment and people involved in food production.



Some food products have a higher negative impact on the environment and people involved in production than others. One way to adopt a low impact diet would be to change or eat less of certain foods. How willing would you be to change your diet to make it more low impact? [Weighted base: 1006 Balance: No response]

Being able to adopt a low impact diet at a price similar to their usual food purchases is the key factor identified by respondents (70%) when considering changes to their diet to help the environment and people involved in food production. Understanding more about which foods have a lower impact through packaging information is also noted as enabling changes in diet (59%).



What do you think would encourage you, if anything, to buy more food with a low negative impact on the environment and the people that produce it?

Focus group participants were asked to describe what sustainable food meant to them in three words.

The majority of participants focused on aspects of sustainable food associated with provenance, quality and production, as shown by this diagram.

In addition, some respondents added reflections on their relationship with sustainable food, noting an increase in importance but also difficulties in managing their views on sustainable food with their available budgets.

“I would say the importance has grown on me in the last 3 years. The media consumption, journals/ books that have made me more aware of climate change and the meat/dairy/seafood industries”

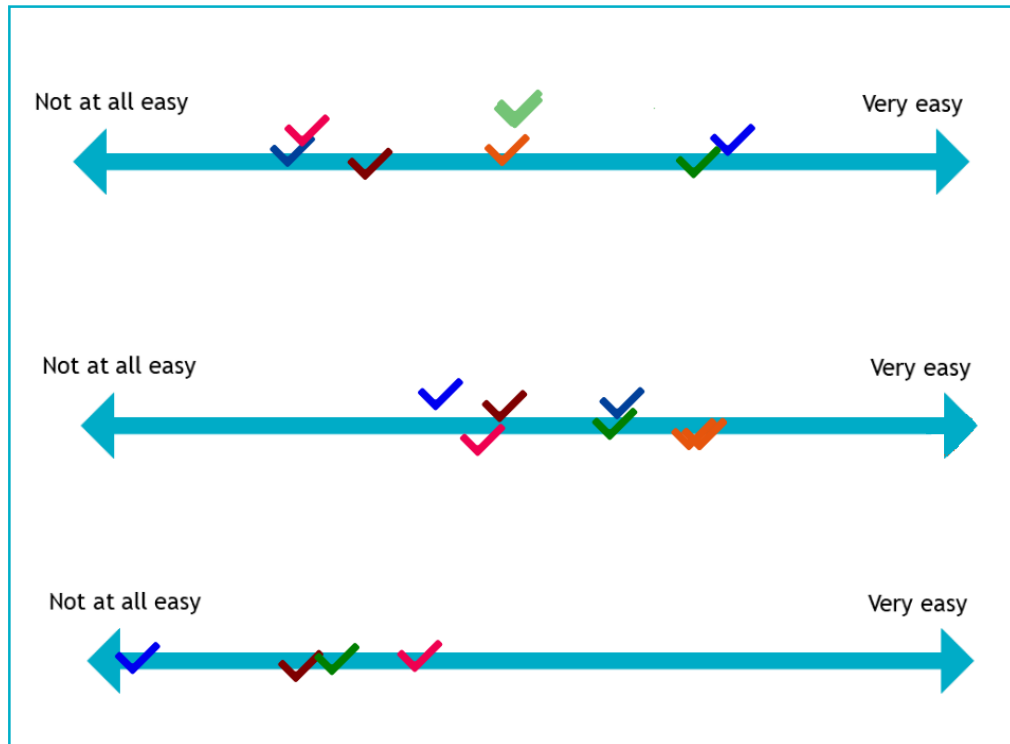
“I think it is extremely important. I would like to support it more but there is obviously a price which comes with this too.”

Other participants noted a need for further information on the issue, to support people in their choices in this area.

“I think it would be good if supermarkets published ways of being sustainable in terms of food on a budget. I feel like it's not spoken about nearly enough, and the benefits of it which may help to justify the price, even to students.”



Focus group participants were asked to feed back on how easy they found it to eat sustainably whilst being a student



- Perception that sustainable food requires more effort

“The not-so-sustainable foods are more convenient. I mean easier to prepare (or even no prep at all). Fast. Easy to obtain.”

The diagrams shown on the left, demonstrating respondents reflections on the ease of eating sustainably whilst a student, placing a tick on the arrow line to represent how easy or difficult they find eating sustainability on campus. The responses show a variety of perceptions however the majority of respondents situate their experiences from ‘neither easy nor not easy’ (middle response) to ‘not at all easy’.

Respondents noted a number of reasons for finding eating sustainably difficult. These include:

- Lack of certainty over which products/options are sustainable

“For me perhaps knowing what is sustainable. I probably need to know what to look for other than the organic label.”

- Lack of trust over labelling options and claims made by food producers

“There’s still trust issues with the package being entirely sustainable especially when it comes to meat and fish products.”

- Lack of availability, both in terms of products, but also a perception of the type of shop needed to eat sustainably

“Local availability, its a lot easier to buy junk food. Yes, local shops. Lots of fast food options. Lots of preserved ready meals in local shops.”

“The closest supermarkets for me are the generic UK stores. I know of one sustainable food store which is pricey. Apart from that I have no idea where to go and don't have transport to travel far.”

“At home I usually go to a farmers market but at uni there is not one near me.”

Focus group participants were asked to feed back on how easy they found it to eat sustainably whilst being a student

When it comes to what makes eating sustainably easy, similar aspects are also referenced:

- Labelling of sustainability credentials

“I find it easy to eat meat free and opt for Fairtrade as it is shown on packaging.”

- Availability of produce and shops

“There are many not too expensive local shops nearby, so I prefer to go there usually and support a small family business instead of a large group.”

Focus group participants were asked to complete an exercise that aimed to understand more about their prioritisation of sustainable food.

Choice	Option 1	Option 2
1	Making sure I can travel to university / college to keep my course commitments	Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me
2	Making sure I have enough food	Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me
3	Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me	Making sure I have the money to go out / socialise with friends
4	Making sure I can pay for things related to my course (e.g. printing, field trips)	Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me
5	Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me	Making sure I can pay my rent and bills
6	Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production	Making sure I can travel to university / college to keep my course commitments
7	Making sure I have enough food	Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production
8	Making sure I have the money to go out / socialise with friends	Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production
9	Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production	Making sure I can pay for things related to my course (e.g. printing, field trips)

When presented with a set of choices, respondents were asked to assess the importance of one option against the other and place a tick on the scale which represented their choice. The scale gave respondents the ability to give both options equal importance. The options assessed the prioritisation of sustainable food over other day-to-day choices related to their lives as students. Sustainable food was broken down into two elements in order to make choices more specific:

- “Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me”
- “Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production”

The full list of choices is presented to the right, and an example to demonstrate how the choices were presented to students and how they responded with ‘ticks’ is shown below.

Thinking about your day to day life, which is more important to you?
Using the scale 1-9, where 1 is both things are equally important, and 9 is extreme importance for one of the options, please select one option for each pair

Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

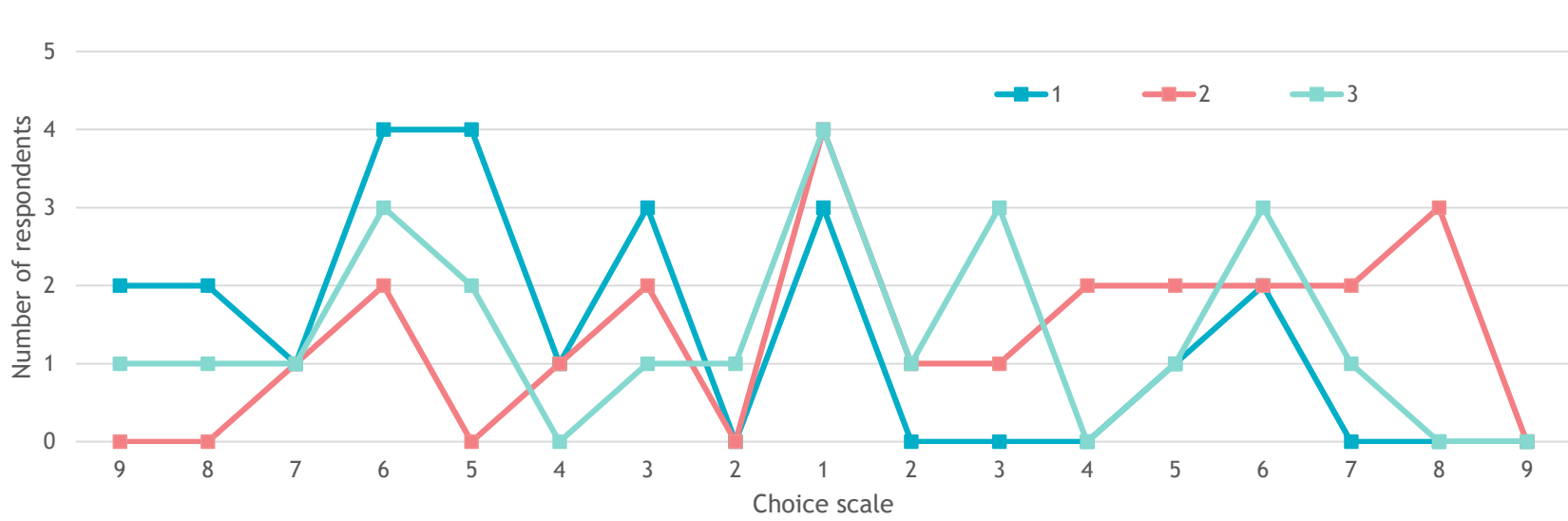
Making sure I have the money to go out / socialise with friends

The following diagrams show the choices made by participants in relation to sustainable food and day to day life spending.

Choice 1 option 1:
Making sure I can travel to university / college to keep my course commitments

Choice 3 option 1:
Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me

Choice 2 options 1:
Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me



Choice 2 option 2:
Making sure I have enough food

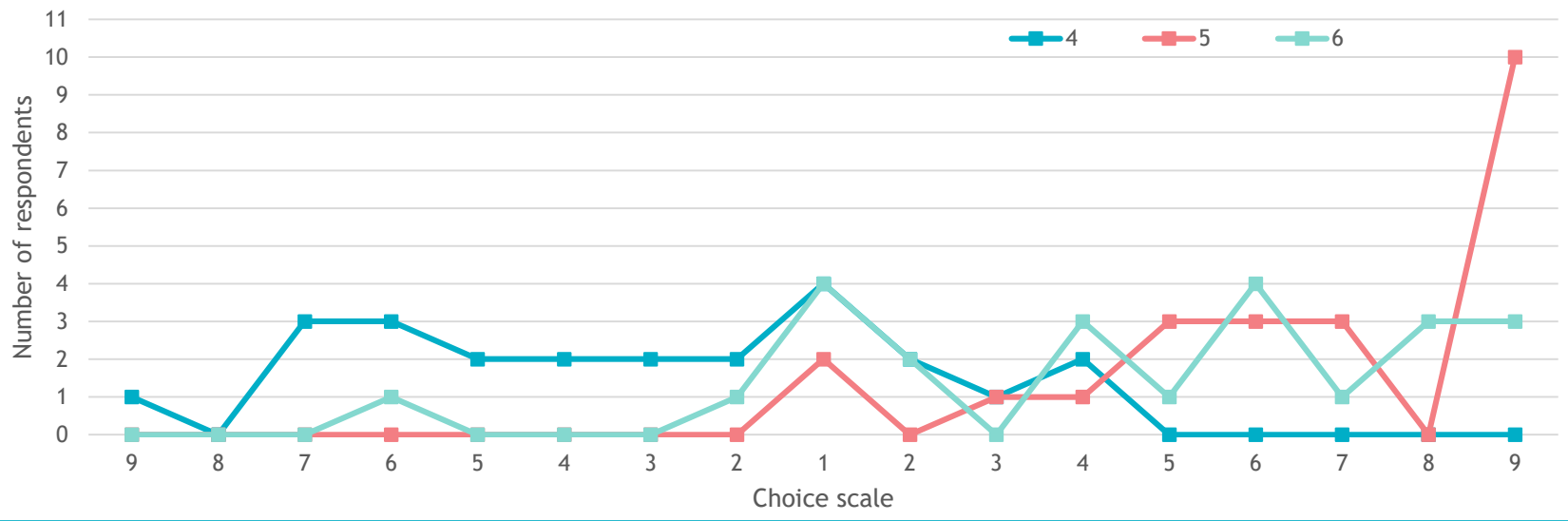
Choice 1 option 2:
Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me

Choice 3 option 2:
Making sure I have the money to go out / socialise with friends

Choice 4 option 1:
Making sure I can pay for things related to my course (e.g. printing, field trips)

Choice 6 option 1:
Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production

Choice 5 option 1:
Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me



Choice 5 option 2:
Making sure I can pay my rent and bills

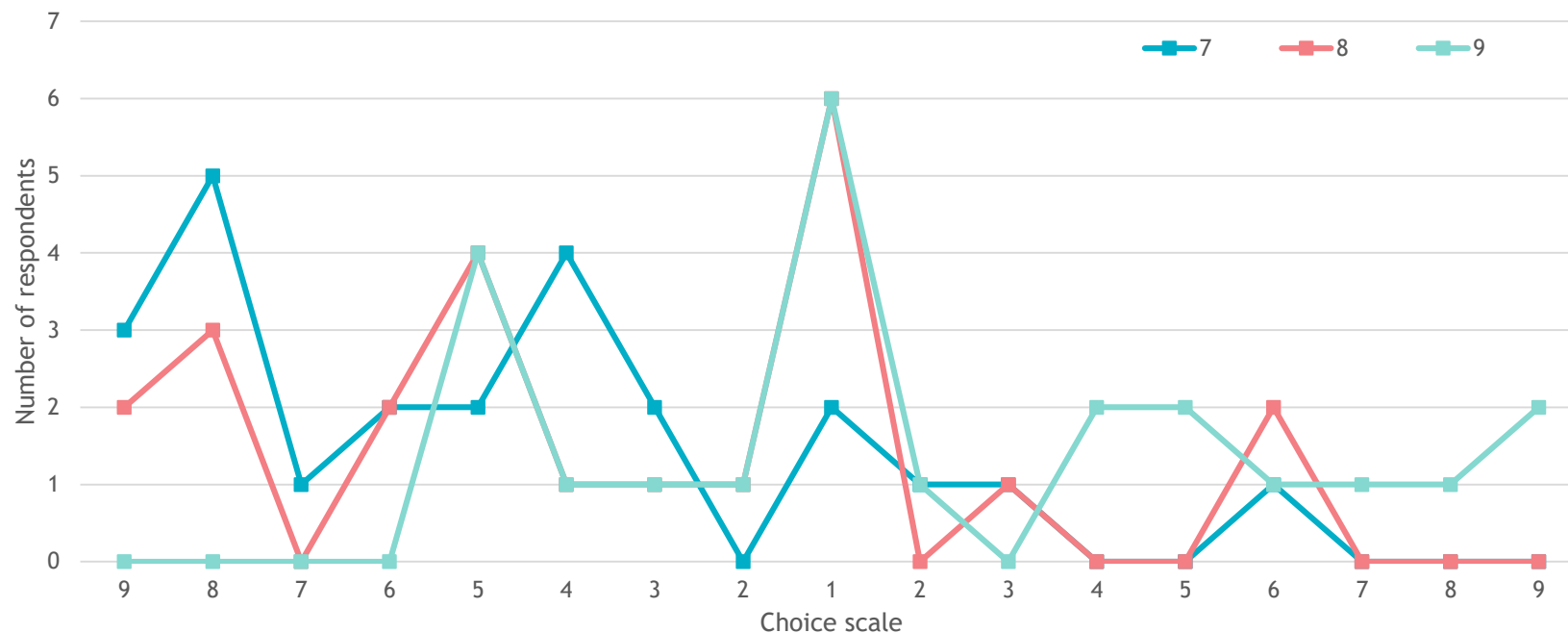
Choice 6 option 2:
Making sure I can travel to university / college to keep my course commitments

Choice 4 option 2:
Buying healthy food and drink that is better for me

Choice 7 option 1:
Making sure I have enough food

Choice 8 option 1:
Making sure I have the money to go out / socialise with friends

Choice 9 option 1:
Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production



Choice 9 option 2:
Making sure I can pay for things related to my course (e.g. printing, field trips)

Choice 7 option 2:
Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production

Choice 8 option 2:
Buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production

The charts show a mixed set of priorities for respondents. When considering the importance of buying food that is healthy and better for them in relation to meeting ‘basic needs’ the prioritisation is clear, with most respondents opting to place greater importance on ‘making sure they have enough food’ (choice 2) and ‘making sure they can pay their rent and bills’ (choice 5) than ‘buying healthy food and drink that is better for them’. Greater importance is placed by most on ‘making sure I can travel to university / college to keep my course commitments’ (choice 1) and ‘making sure I can pay for things related to my course (e.g. printing, field trips)’ (choice 4) in comparison with ‘buying healthy food and drink that is better for them’.

Similar patterns are seen when considering ‘buying food and drink with a low impact on the environment and people involved in food production’ with participants in general placing greater importance on meeting basic needs and also commitments associated with their courses. When making a comparison between making sure they have enough money to socialise with friends and buying food with low environmental and ethical impacts the picture is more mixed, with most participants placing equal importance on the two options (choice 8).

When reflecting on their choices, focus group participants noted that reducing spend on food was a key way to free up budget for other day to day spending, along with spending associated with their courses.

“I think I am more likely to purchase books etc. without thinking about costs but I try and budget food.”

“Yes I don't think twice about the cost of books/equipment but for food I'm very stingy.”

“I would prefer to eat cheap meals and use the money for other things, like paying the bus fare to a town on a weekend (they cut the free buses!), so this last year especially I've been more conscious about food prices. And trying to buy books useful for my dissertation.”

“And trying to save expenses on food so I can go out more and travel.”

Some participants reflected on how the exercise had made them feel, noting a sense of guilt that they placed more importance on other aspects than buying healthy, low impact food, but that their choices ultimately had to be ruled by their finances and education.

“I think the environment and health are both equally important and one definitely impacts on the other (especially considering I'm a Public Health student), but my priority is making it through my studies and getting basic nutrition at present.”

“I would love to be able to make my choices based less on finance, but I think that's difficult at present.”

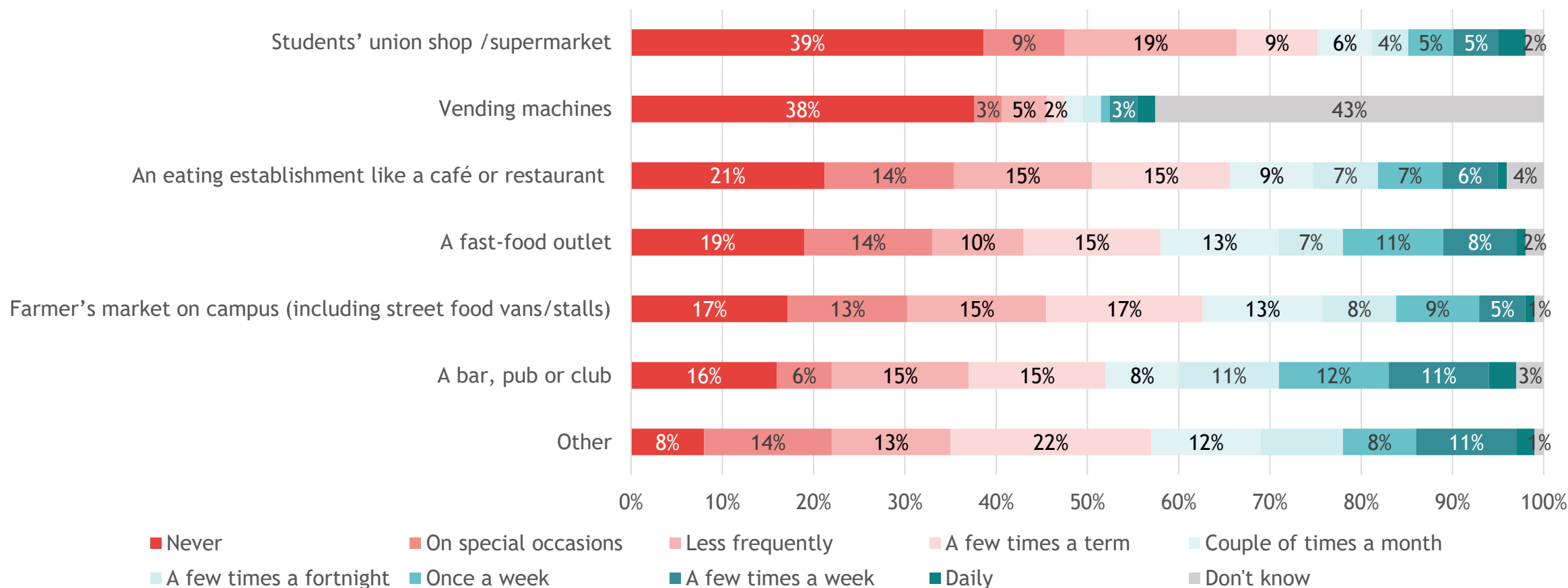
“I felt bad at quite a few of my choices. Like prioritising going out with mates over ethically sourced food.”

“I think it's difficult as a student with a limited budget. I would definitely spend on food, including going out to eat, but I would need to have enough money to spend on other essentials like rent and bills.”

SUSTAINABLE FOOD ON CAMPUS

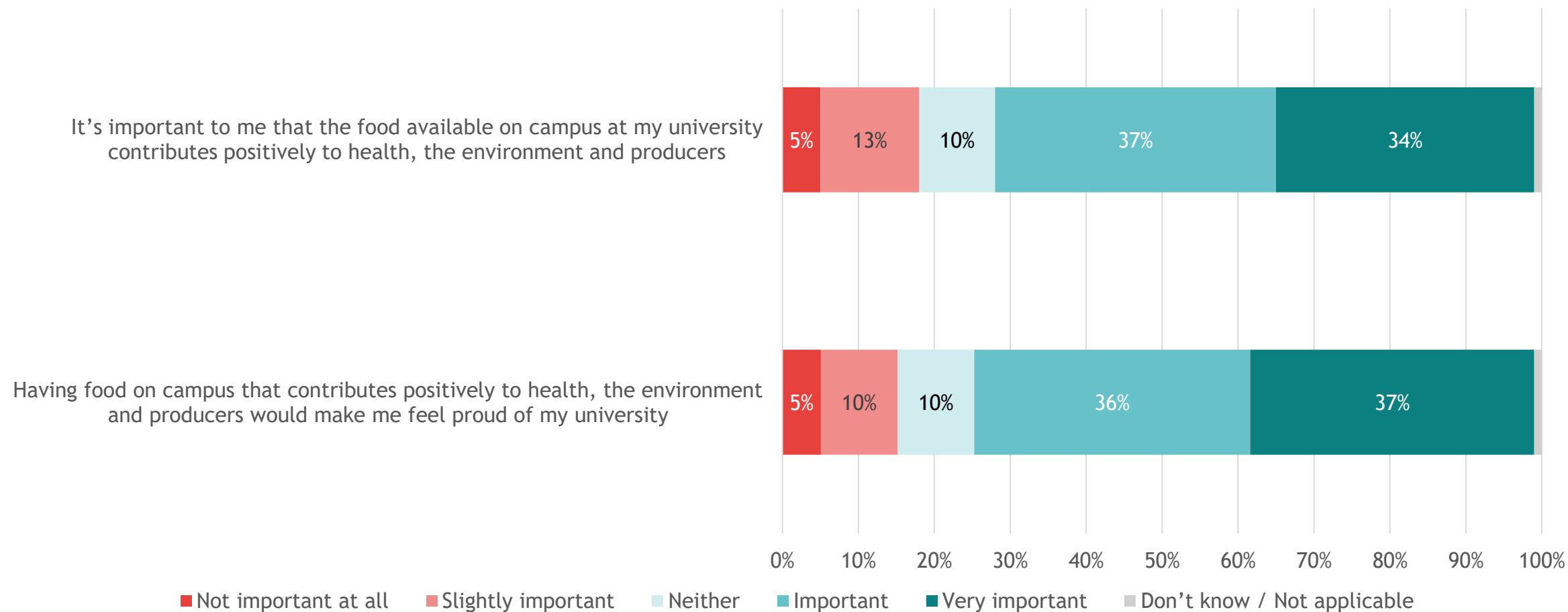


When considering food or catering venues on campus, 23% say they would use bars, pubs or clubs a few times a week or more. 19% said they would use fast-food outlets on campus at the same frequency.



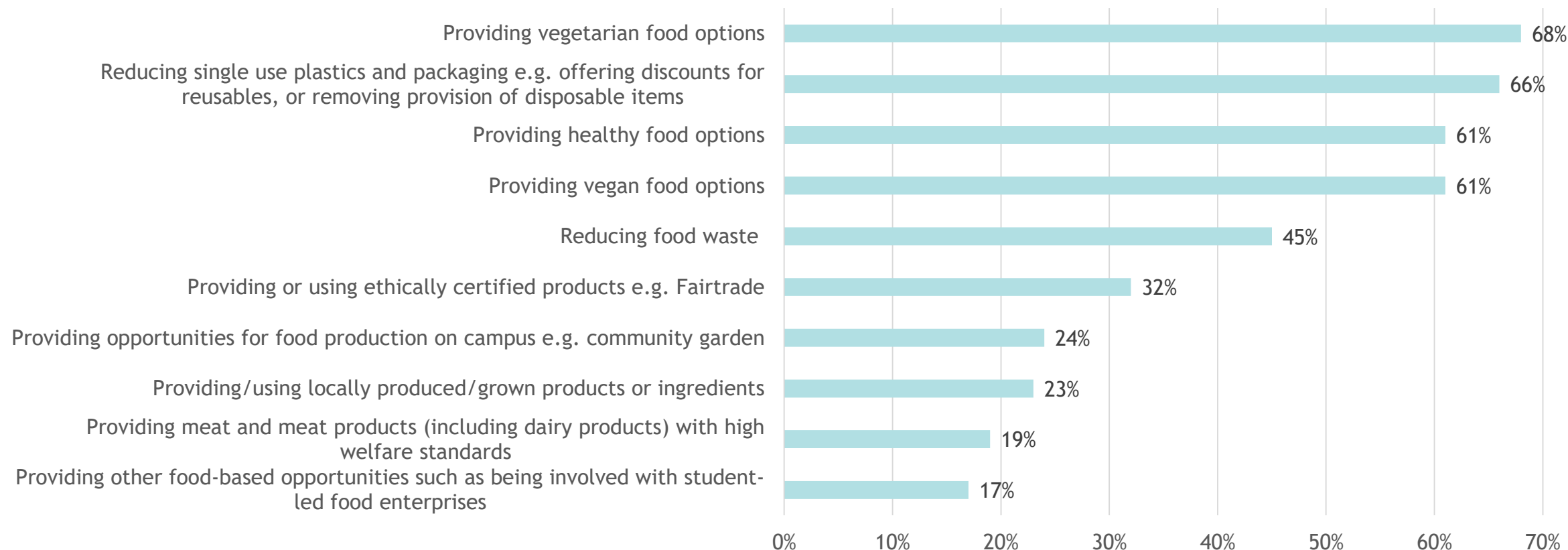
Please answer these questions assuming there are no restrictions related to what or where you eat that you may have experienced as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. How often, if at all, would you use any of the following food/catering venues at your university? [Weighted base: c.998 Balance: No response]

71% of respondents say it is important to the that the food available on campus contributes positively to health, environment and producers. 73% say having food on campus that contributes in this way would make them proud of their institution.



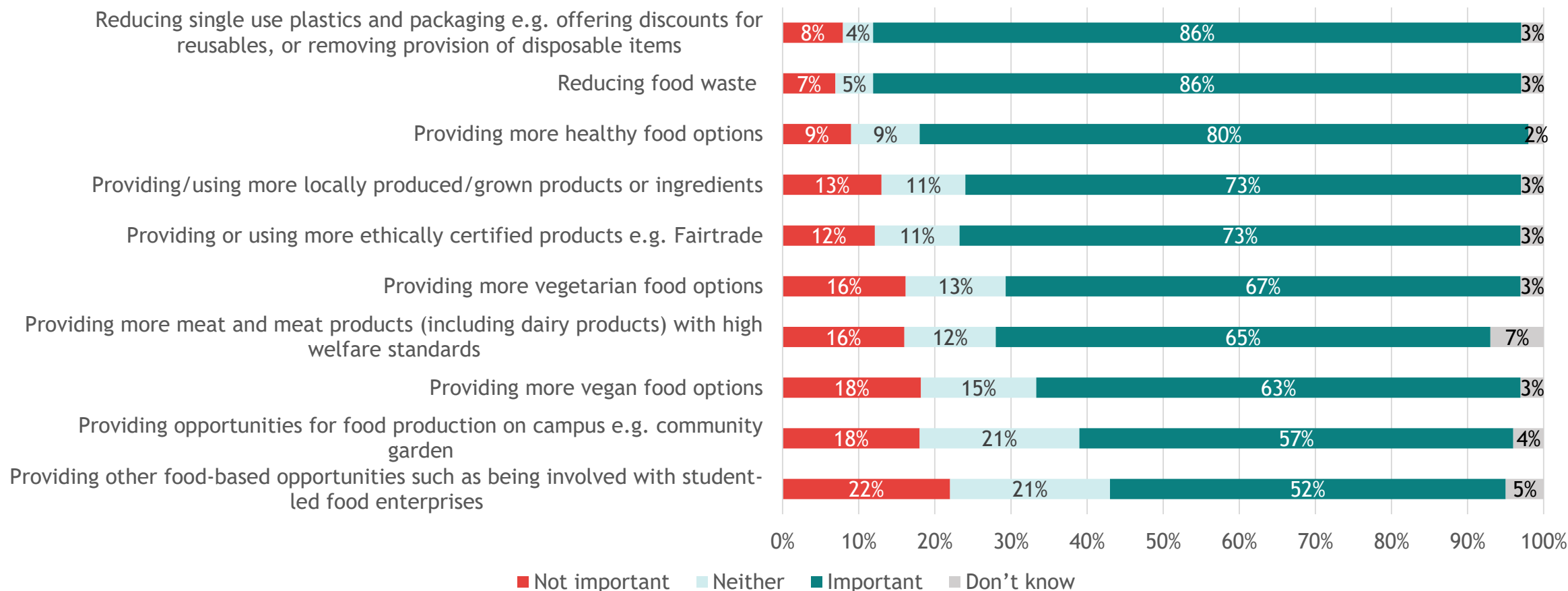
To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Weighted base: 1003 Balance: No response]

Reflecting on actions they're aware of at food or catering venues on their campuses, 68% are aware of vegetarian options and 66% have noticed action to reduce single use plastics and packaging. There is lower awareness of action to provide meat / meat products with high welfare standards or providing opportunities for students such as running food enterprises (19% and 17% respectively).



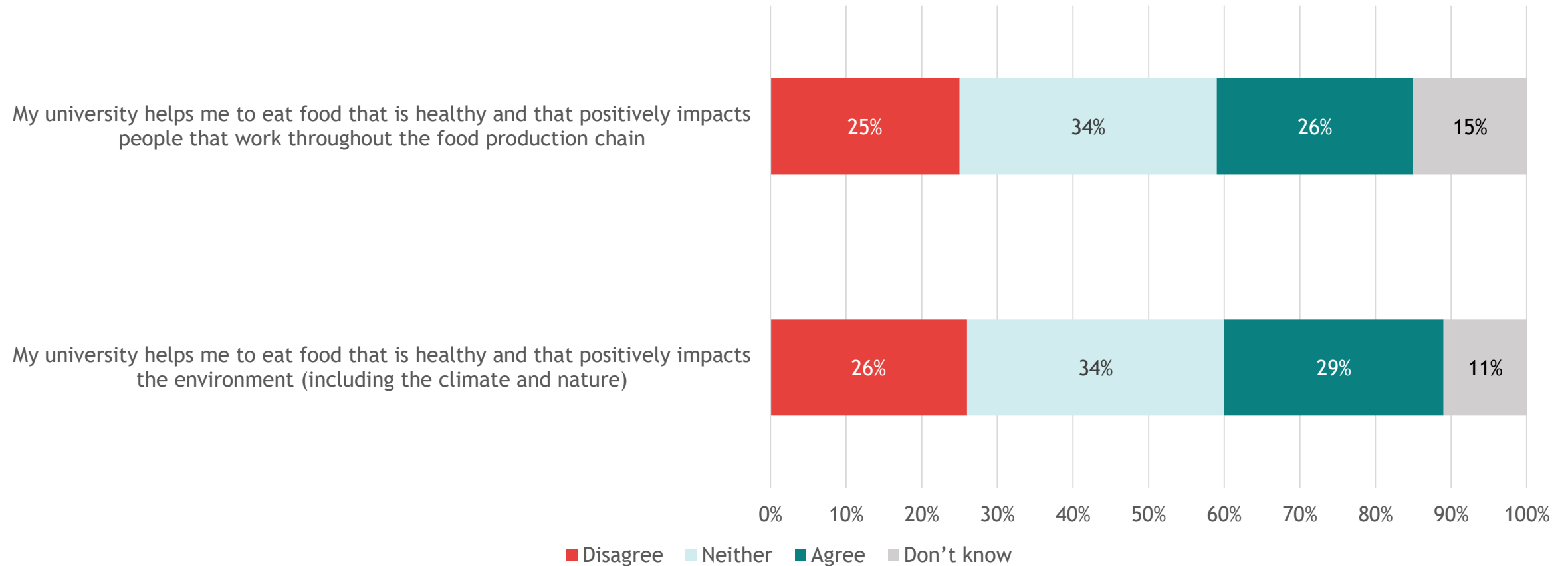
Which of the following issues are you aware of the food / catering venues at your university taking action on? [Weighted base: 888 Balance: No response]

When considering the action taken on campus, 86% say addressing single use plastics and packaging is important, with the same proportion identifying reducing food waste as important. Over 50% say they think it important to provide food-related opportunities for students either through food production (57%) or other opportunities such as enterprise (52%).



How important, if at all, is it that the food/catering venues at your university take action on the following issues? [Weighted base: 990 Balance: No response]

26% of respondents say their university helps them to eat food that is healthy and that positively impacts people working in food production, and 29% say that they think their university helps them to eat healthy food that positively impacts on the environment. Over a third show uncertainty around university performance (e.g. 34% say neither, and 15% and 11% respectively say they don't know).



To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [Weighted base: 997 Balance: No response]

Reflections on action for low impact food - what do respondents think their institutions are doing well?

Response	Number of responses
Offering vegan food	115
Offering vegetarian food	114
Action on single use plastic / packaging	84
Provision of local food (e.g. via market on campus)	35
Provision of food production opportunities	26
Provision of accredited food e.g. Fairtrade, organic	21
Offering zero waste initiatives	17
Catering for a wide selection of diets	16
Running events/ communications to raise awareness	14
Tackling food waste	13
Providing recycling facilities	9
Encouraging cooking from scratch	3
Reducing price of near to expiry food	1

“The SU shop has started selling package free dry food, and has always sold milk in glass jars that you can return for 5p off your next glass. There are always vegetarian options at every food outlet. They have the farmers market once a week that brings locally sourced food to campus. They also have a community garden.”

“LSE has an exclusively vegetarian/vegan cafe, which is great, but I try not to eat too much on campus due to cost.”

“The college cafes are very good at labelling what foods are vegetarian, vegan, etc... and they made sure to switch to recyclable takeaway boxes for students who wish to eat their meals elsewhere. The Trinity cafe have started to make their own sandwiches rather than ordering in pre-made ones. This means the ingredients can be more ethically sourced and it also brings the price down for students.”

“Lots of really strong initiatives around sustainability of food on campus. I love that there is a community garden, and also have heard the catering teams are working hard to implement more sustainable options for students such as plant based options.”

“Good choices for vegetarian, canteen cooking smaller amounts of food and running out rather than having waste.”

Reflections on action for low impact food - what do respondents think their institution could do better?

Response	Number of responses
More awareness-raising / information / initiatives on the impact of food	103
Take action to reduce packaging/plastic	80
Increase/improve vegan options	69
Provide less expensive sustainable options	67
More locally sourced produce / businesses	46
Increase/improve vegetarian options	45
Tackle food waste	14
More food growing opportunities	14
Provide more accredited food e.g. Organic, Fairtrade, accredited meat	13
More ethically produced food	11
Perception of low quality food to make profit	8
Increase range of sustainable options generally	2
Adopt a zero waste approach	2
More info on where to get sustainable food locally	1
Improve healthiness of plant-based options	1

“More choice and more information given. Staff could also do their bit in encouraging students to examine their eating habits - eating certain foods very often becomes habitual and we eat things without really giving it a second thought. More awareness is needed. We only have this planet on loan so we need to take care of it.”

“There are not enough vegan options - and the options in halls catered foods is not appealing to those who are not vegan/vegetarian therefore does not encourage people to reduce their meat and dairy consumption. There is not enough fresh vegetables / food offered nor is it in season or organic.”

“Meat products should be advertised whether they are locally or ethically sourced, as currently I do not know. There is a variety of vegetarian and vegan food available, but there should always be more.”

“The food options are not the healthiest and the quality is not very good, which makes you wonder where the food is coming from and so they could improve on using suppliers that specialise in food being from ethical places. There could be an improvement on vegetarian and vegan options and the price of these products as there tend to be very few animal free products and when there are, the price tends to be higher. They could also work on educating students about food and the environment as very few students know about how food impacts the environment.”

Reflections on action for healthy food - what do respondents think their institutions are doing well?

Response	Number of responses
Providing healthy options	99
Providing vegetarian/vegan (equated as healthy)	55
Promotion of healthy living	48
Fruit/veg/salad promotion	48
Variety of food options	29
Good quality food	2
Health and diet covered in course	1

“The SU shop offers fruit with the meal deal which is really nice. Plus, there’s a salad bar which is always chock full and delicious and healthy. They vary the foods on offer so it never gets boring, just stays healthy and exciting.”

“Regarding the hot meals that they prepare, they only provide unhealthy options like chips once a week. There has also been a big push to switch a lot of snacks like chocolate bars for cereal bars and healthier crisp options.”

“With the course I study we go in depth into nutrition as a team, however the university as a whole also promotes healthy living with active lifestyles and Fairtrade.”

“The uni is quite good at labelling food and having posters up around the cafes about 'getting your 5 a day' and offers on fruit etc. They have a range of options on display and stickers to show what is vegan or veggie.”

“Fresh veggies, fruited, and salads are provided in the supermarkets (Spar/ students union supermarket) but they are slightly more expensive than outlets outside university.”

“They definitely promote healthy eating and exercise - you see posters everywhere.”

Reflections on action for healthy food - what do respondents think their institution could do better?

Response	Number of responses
More healthy options / less unhealthy options in general	117
More information and advice	77
Healthy is overpriced	62
More healthy options of certain types of food e.g. snacks, fruit and veg, meat	34
Better information on healthy options - food labelling	21
Some outlets / franchises not focused on healthy provision	19

“Have healthier options available on campus. Have fruit and veg cheaper in the student shop, as it is much more expensive than supermarkets such as Sainsburys, etc.”

“They should offer more freshly prepared food instead of all of the mass produced rubbish they churn out.”

“Anything branded as a ‘healthy’ is ridiculously expensive. Students always go off site to purchase healthy food.”

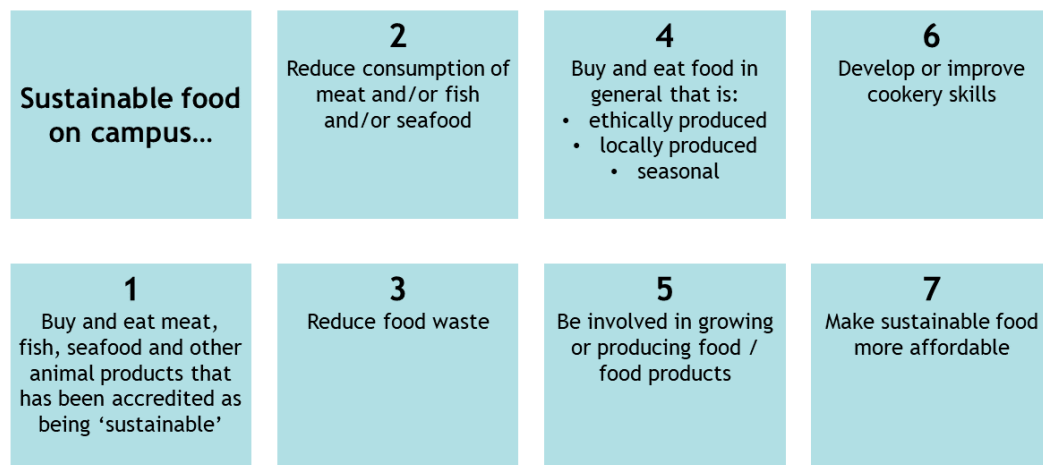
“Active support with nutrition, which is linked to health including mental health SU: more cook with lessons, tips on videos on a social media post basis which is more popular or attractive than checking a website.”

“The cafe, shop and restaurant all tend to focus on fried unhealthy foods and even the veggie options tend to have a lot of mayonnaise, cheese or fatty foods. There are way too many unhealthy snacks in comparison to an actual meal available.”

“Perhaps providing lunch meal deals which only allow the snack option to be something healthy like fruit or a cereal bar rather than chocolate?”

“Offers and awareness. Cheap prices on healthy food and moving healthy food to the front so you see it first.”

Focus group respondents were asked to reflect on a set of actions that could be taken by their place of study in relation to sustainable food.



The actions reflect a [set of asks](#) put to the tertiary education sector by SOS-UK to progress action on sustainable food, based on this current research as well as previous research by SOS-UK and experiences of delivering sustainable food programmes with students in higher and further education.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences of their institution in relation to each action, as well as offering thoughts on the potential for each.

In terms of general reflections on the list of asks, respondents suggested that the size of an institution may affect the likelihood of it taking action, and that the type of institution was also likely to impact student demand for action.

“At the minute, I think by being a small institution, and only having one real food place for our institution, options are potentially limited. They do have vegetarian and meat free options, and they do source local food with some items, but with the rest of the points, I am unsure.”

“I think ideas around sustainable food sourcing would be popular as many of the students at my campus are studying agriculture or are from farming backgrounds.”

For some, a perceived lack of action on food and sustainability at their institution was in contrast with action in other areas of the institution.

“I’d say this is something that is communicated verbally but not reflected in the choices of meals available. [Sustainability is communicated] in the context of our studies, not necessarily in the canteen.”

“My uni has a sustainable department but they do more environmental work. I’m not aware of any food related campaigns but I could be wrong.”

Others noted a need for further communication of action being taken in relation to food due to a lack of awareness.

“I’m sure our unis are doing a lot of positive actions but we seem to be largely unaware of what’s going on. So maybe promoting more awareness would be a good thing.”

Reflections on the importance of sustainable food to students in general varied, with some feeling that concern is widespread, in part thanks to their educational experiences. Others perceived a lack of concern amongst their peers.

“Students in general do care about issues like this as it is something I think we’ve been taught about our whole educations.”

“I do think that a lot of students don’t seem to care, so spreading more awareness would be great and advice on how to be both cheap and sustainable.”

“But so many people are looking to do their part so I can imagine on the whole there would be decent uptake of most of these if the options were available.”

Some actions attracted the most attention from focus group respondents. Their reflection on these actions are as follows.

Reduce consumption of meat and/or fish and/or seafood

Focus group participants reflected on the difficulty of taking action on this issue, given personal choice and preferences related to food.

“There is, I find, a fine line between cutting down on meat choices, and making omnivores feel like they are having their choices cut.”

“I would love to cut down my meat consumption but finding it hard.”

Barriers to this action noted by participants mainly focused on the range and ‘taste’ of meat/fish-free options.

“It is not just that everything has meat, just the options that done are very dull and just don’t feel like a more complete meal. I love cheese but not every vegetarian wants a cheese and onion sandwich.”

Suggestions for support needed to improve action in this area included:

- Labelling
- Improved choice and range of reduced meat / meat-free options
- Discounts and rewards for meat/fish-free options

“I would love clear labels on if things are sustainably sourced but its not easy to find out. I try reduce my consumption of animal products but at uni there isn’t a great deal of choice.”

“Universities are giving different vouchers on meat free products...Marketing discount card for students to buy sustainable food.”

Reduce food waste

Reactions to reducing food waste were mainly focused on collecting food waste, however in some cases, their awareness of existing action was focused on the packaging associated with food rather than food itself.

“The only thing I can say I have seen is the food waste bins in the flats, so that the food wastage is used for compost.”

“I’ve not seen food waste mentioned, they more talk about recycling to do with food packaging like coffee cups and such.”

One participant recalled lower food availability at the end of the day, seeing this as a positive step towards producing an appropriate number of portions therefore reducing waste.

“I have noticed that if you get to the canteen too late, then there’s just ‘slim pickings’ e.g. not copious amounts of food left. I think this is a good thing!”

Suggestions for additional action to address food waste were focused on adopting price reduction measures towards the end of trading.

“Putting a discount on foods that didn’t sell at the end of the day is a good way to reduce waste. I know some shops do it, but I don’t think there’s many around here.”

“Extra food to be advertised with alert on app for reduced price.”

Buy and eat food in general that is: ethically produced, locally produced, seasonal

Overall there was strong support amongst participants for their institution to support local suppliers and producers, but also a lack of awareness over whether this happened on their campus:

“I also think local farmers should be supported by the university but I don’t know if they are currently.”

Existing experiences of this action on campus focused on the difficulty of identifying products with these credentials:

“I think again labelling the food and where it has come from/ if it is sustainable would allow us to make a much more conscious choice, and would probably make restaurant more accountable for their food choices...No they don’t advertise, I just know from running some of the events at uni.”

Other participants noted provision of local produce through farmers’ markets held on campus:

“We have local farmers etc come and sell at our campus once a month which is nice.”

And this was seen as something that would be popular amongst the student population:

“Bring local produce to campus and offer student discount.”

Student activities - food growing or production and developing cookery skills

Awareness of opportunities for food growing were relatively high amongst focus group participants, and were seen as a positive offer for students even if they personally weren't involved.

“I know we have a student herb garden, but I'm not really sure how to get involved personally.”

“I think [developing or improving cookery skills] would be massively beneficial to many people, it was surprising how some people have not much clue about cooking at all.”

“If there was a student garden of fruit and veg I would love to help out with that.”

Action related to cookery skills by their institution was also well-received, and often linked to responses to the COVID-19 pandemic or for first year students.

“The university also gave out recipe calendars at the beginning of freshers.”

Both aspects were seen as something related to personal interest, rather than something that should be universally applied to students.

Make sustainable food more affordable

As has been highlighted throughout the research, cost is seen as a major barrier to eating sustainably, and therefore support was strong amongst focus group participants for action which made sustainable food more affordable.

“Making things more affordable would definitely be the key factor in getting people to make a change.”

Respondents noted that some elements of food provision were affordable on their campus, but others were not. This was particularly the case for shops on campus, which were seen as offering poor value compared to 'high street' options, and only used in 'emergencies'.

“I think they do well with the hot meals- being healthy and affordable, however there are limited and overpriced snacks and cold food which I would never get.”

“There is a small shop but I never go there due to not being very affordable and not much choice.”

A number of suggestions were put forward as ways institutions could reduce costs for students, including loyalty/reward cards for sustainable purchases within on-campus sites.

“A food points system for those who do choose sustainable food options. Could be something simple like and add on to a meal. a sustainable/fair trade snack or plant based meal half price, just a little incentive to maintain the switch to being sustainable goes a long way.”

Other suggestions for action included facilitating reduced costs for off-campus, local food producers and outlets.

“Perhaps vouchers for local ethically producers.”

“My uni gives out a lot of vouchers for Dominoes etc, maybe they should do it for more local and ethical outlets.”

And in a similar line, bringing local providers which offer food at reduced costs on to campus was also suggested.

“Like we used to have small food trucks or other events and they were reasonably cheaper than the restaurants that are always open on campus.”

Staff

Research method

A similar two-phase approach was used to uncover the experiences of staff with a specific remit or responsibility for food on campus.

Phase one: Online survey

This phase of the research focuses on gathering insight on sustainable food from a staff perspective. The online survey will be designed to enable understanding of:

- Experiences of sustainability and food
- Sustainability and food within the institution
- Perceptions of students and sustainability
- Support for and barriers to action on sustainable food

The survey was promoted by SOS-UK's direct contacts within the sector as well as approaching networks operating on food and/or sustainability within the sector to secure their support for promoting the research to their audiences. Respondents were incentivised with a prize draw of £100 charitable donation to a charity of their choosing.

A total of 40 staff respondents completed the survey.

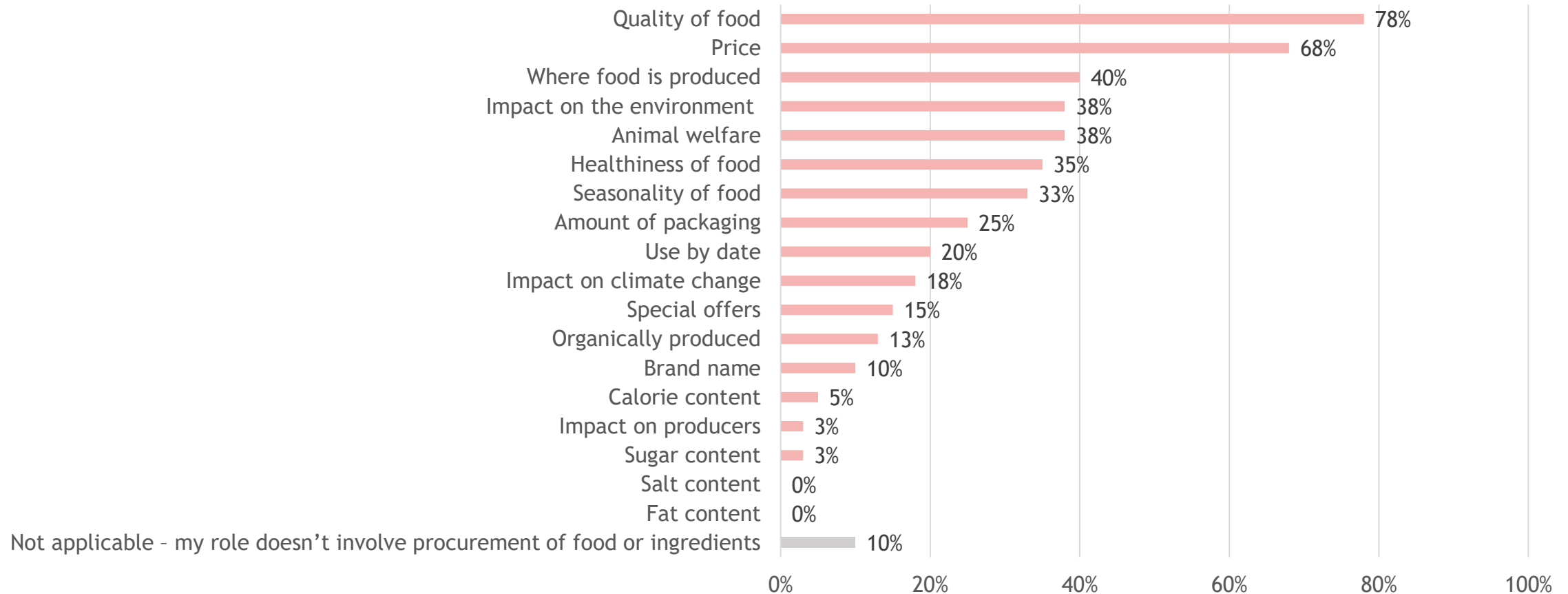
Phase two: Telephone interviews

A series of short one to one telephone interviews were completed following the closure of the survey, allowing for key findings to be investigated in further detail based on the direct experiences of the interviewees. A total of five survey respondents who indicated they were available for future research also participated in interviews.

This section of the report presents the findings from the survey and interviews with staff.

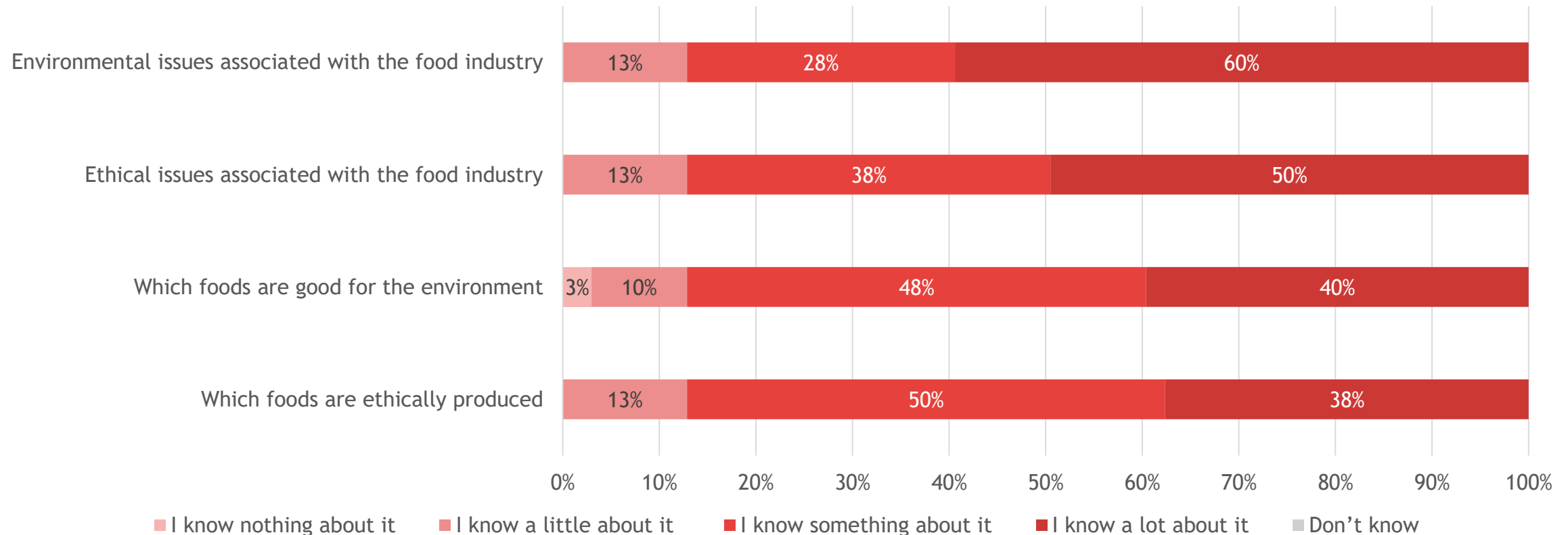
SUSTAINABILITY IN ROLES

Quality of food (78%) and price (68%) are the top factors taken into consideration when choosing food products and ingredients. Approximately two fifths say they consider where food is produced, impact on the environment and animal welfare.



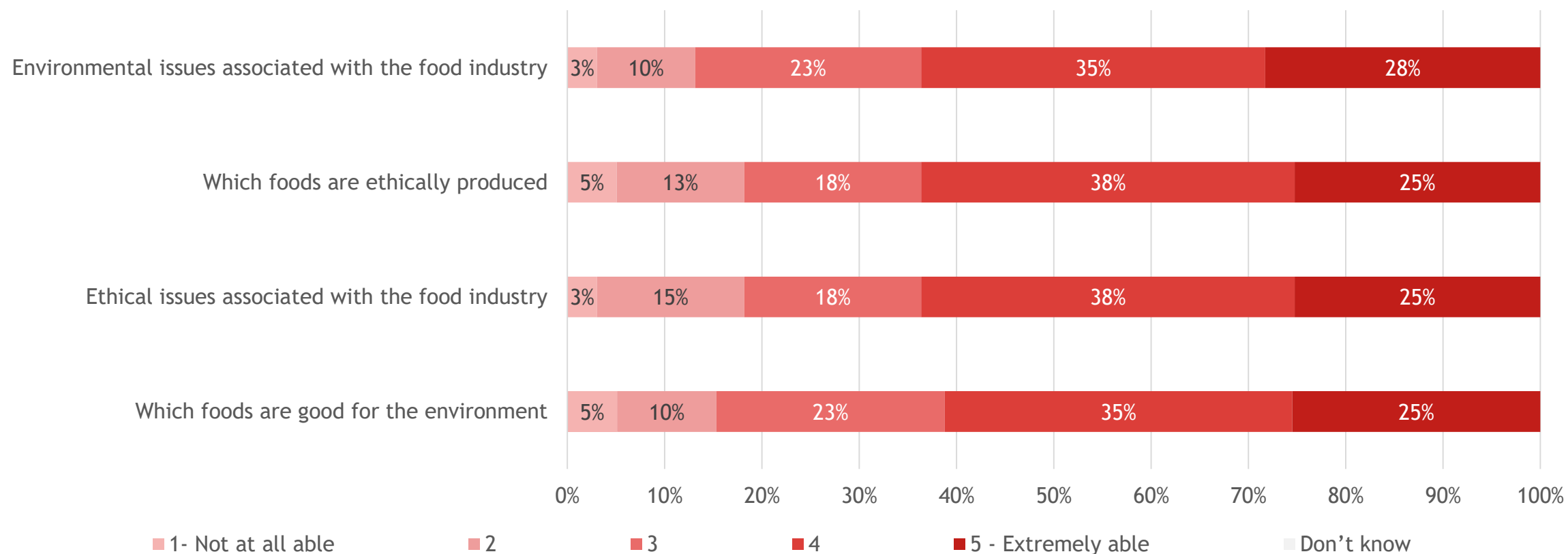
Thinking about the food products and ingredients you purchase or use in your role, which of the following factors do you consider when choosing one product / ingredient over another? Please think generally about different food products, including raw ingredients and ready-made products. Please pick the top five factors
 [Base: 40 Balance: No response]

60% of respondents say they know a lot about environmental issues associated with the food industry, however this reduces to 40% when thinking about which foods are good for the environment. The same relationship occurs when thinking about ethical issues, with respondents reporting stronger knowledge of issues facing the industry as a whole compared to individual foods.



Which option best reflects what you know in relation to the following issues? [Base: 40 Balance: No response]

Around two thirds (63%) of respondents feel able to incorporate their knowledge of environmental or ethical issues associated with the food industry into their role, and the same proportion feel able to do so in relation to knowing which foods are ethically produced.



And to what extent do you feel able to incorporate these issues into your role, in relation to food? [Base: 40 Balance: No response]

Reflections from interviews on awareness and understanding of sustainable food issues amongst staff, and supporting learning on these issues include:

The difficulty of organising training for staff with active roles in food, and how the approach may need to be through individual training:

“And there’s a lot of work that I need to do on how we keep training staff, and when capacity doesn’t necessarily allow for people to be in the same place....I think that’s a challenge that you that I underestimated when I didn’t work in a food business, under-estimating how difficult it is to get people in the same place with time. The shift patterns. And people at work, they’re actually really busy and so you know, you might get five minutes here and there, but you’re never going to be able to get an opportunity to sit someone down for an hour.”

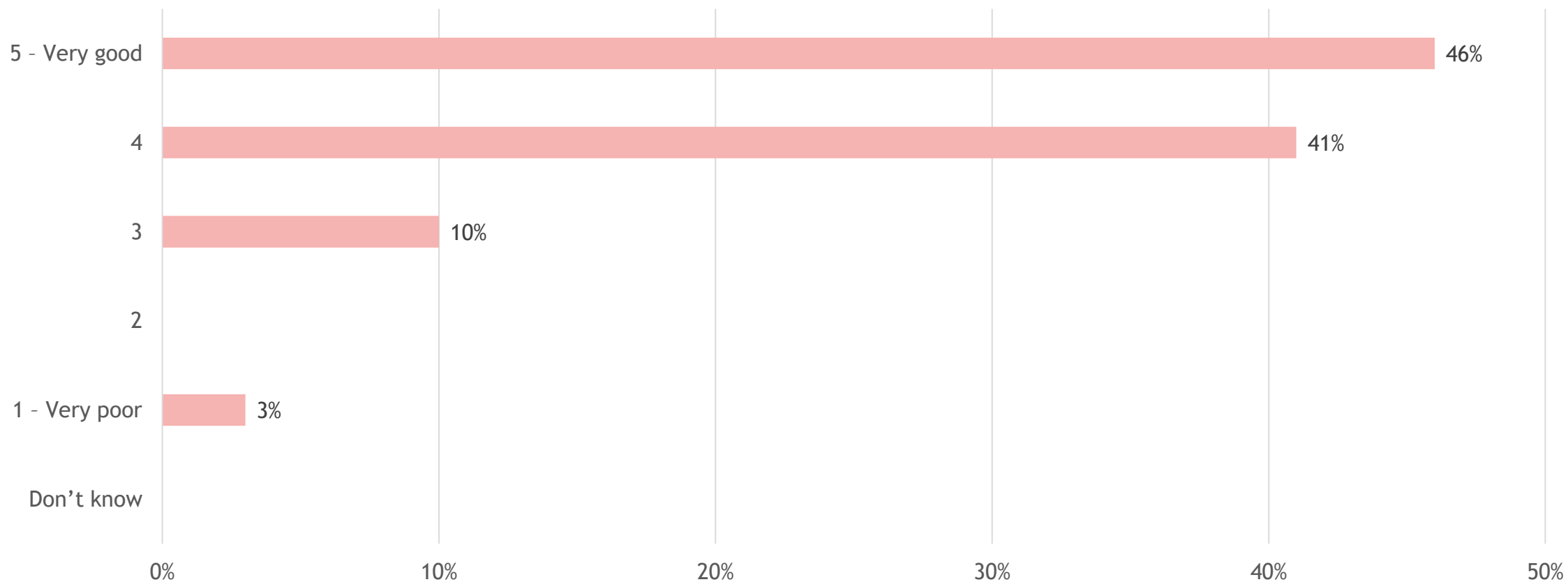
“I don’t think anyone can’t understand there’s an issue. But I think people really get confused about what the issue is. So some ways we’re trying to deal with that is that every so we’ve been going through a period of reintroducing people to the workplace over the last three or four months. And every single person who works for us has had an hour and a half with me giving them sustainability training.”

The difficulty for institutions without in-house expertise to identify the key actions that should be taken in relation to food, given the changing and varied landscape of opinions on the ‘right’ steps to take:

“Because there’s so much depth to all these [issues], like sustainable palm oil. Now they’re saying no, you should buy it, but just buy it responsibly sourced. I think it’s good to have that guidance as much as possible because if you don’t have the expertise in house.”

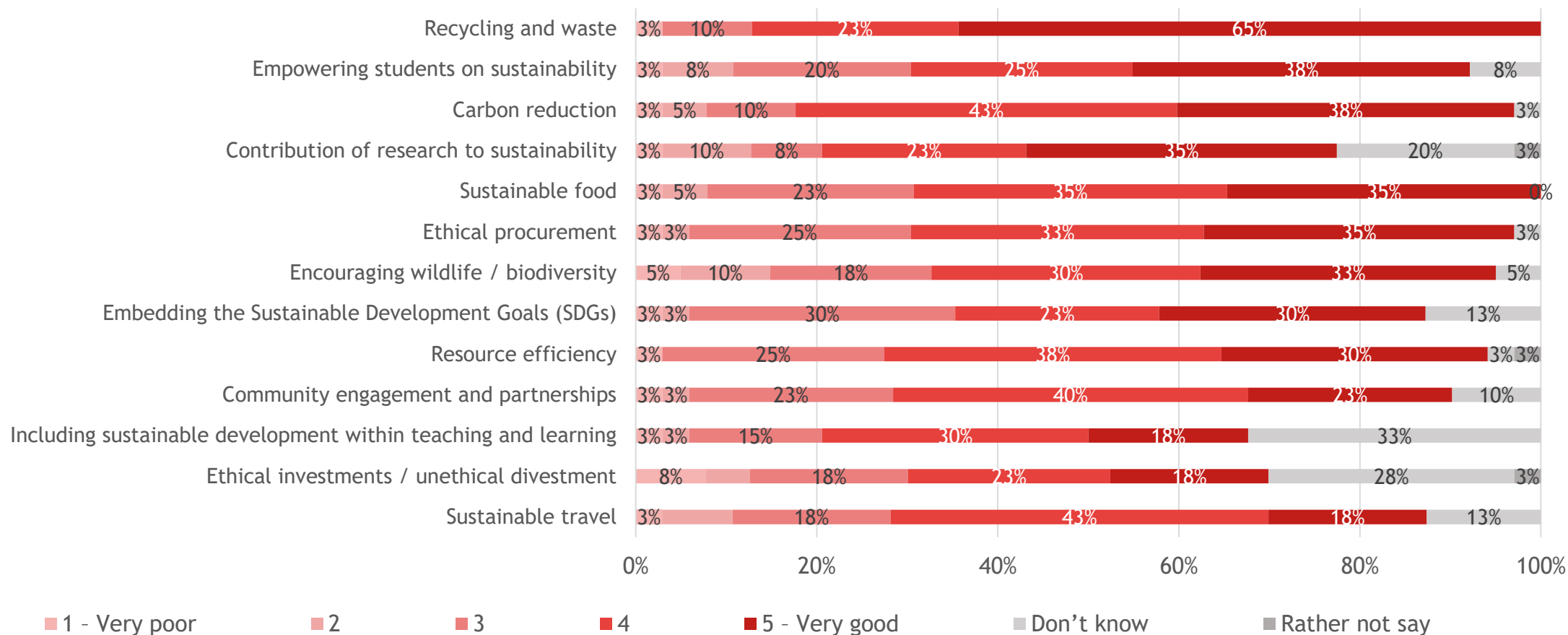
SUSTAINABILITY AND FOOD WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

87% rate their institution's overall commitment to environmental and social responsibility as good or very good.



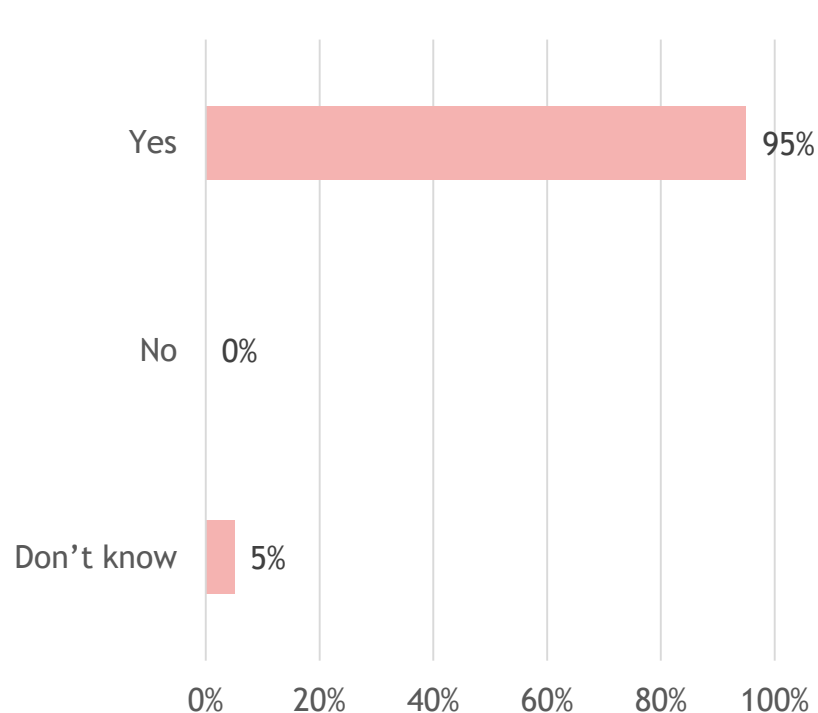
Overall, how would you rate your institution's commitment to environmental and social responsibility? [Base: 39 Balance: No response]

65% rate their institution's performance on recycling and waste as very good, however only 35% rate the performance in relation sustainable food and ethical procurement in this way.

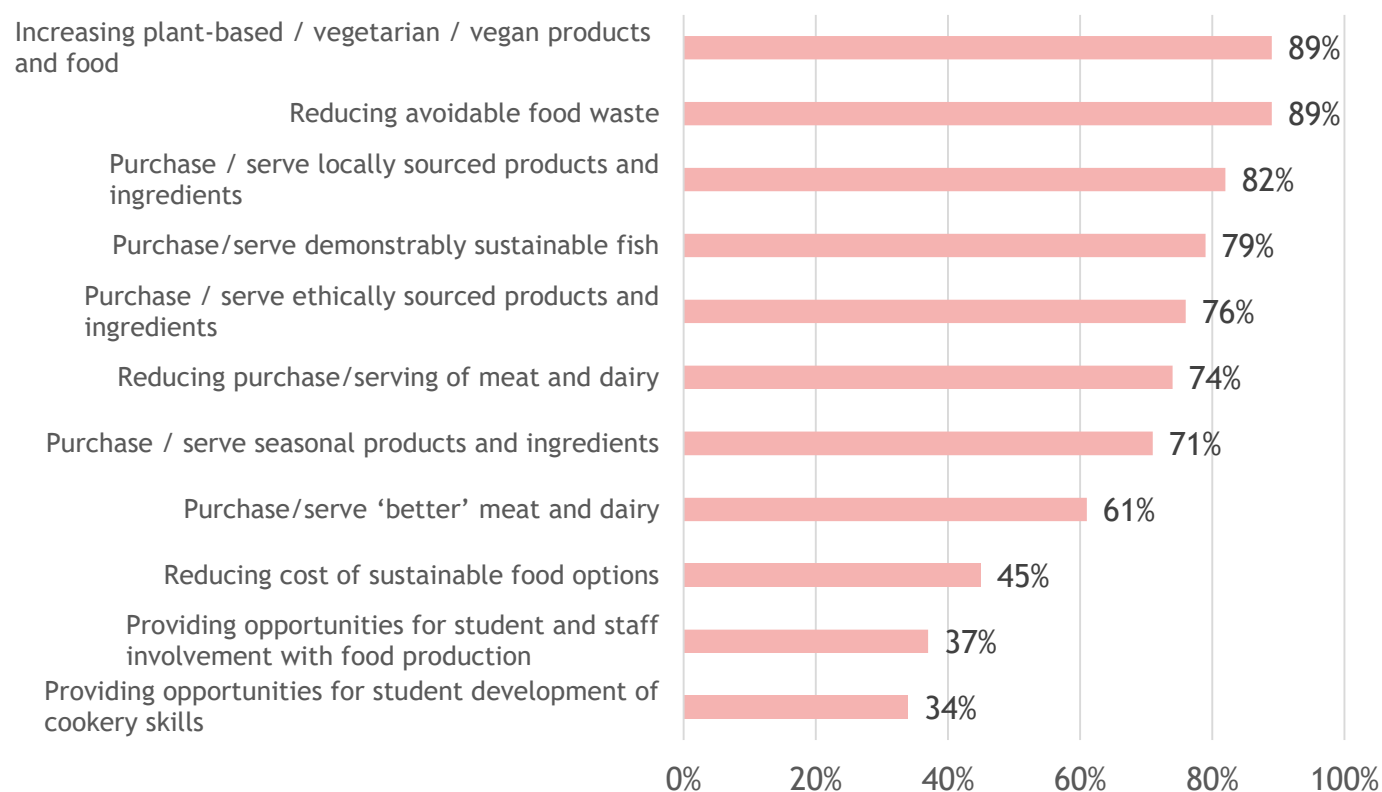


How would you rate your institution's commitment to addressing the following issues? [Base: 40 Balance: No response]

95% say their institution has a policy related to food and sustainability. 89% say this policy includes commitments or targets related to increasing plant-based/vegetarian/vegan products or food, and the same proportion say there is a target related to reducing avoidable food waste. Providing opportunities for student and staff involvement in food activities is less common e.g. 34% say the policy targets providing opportunities related to cookery skills for students.

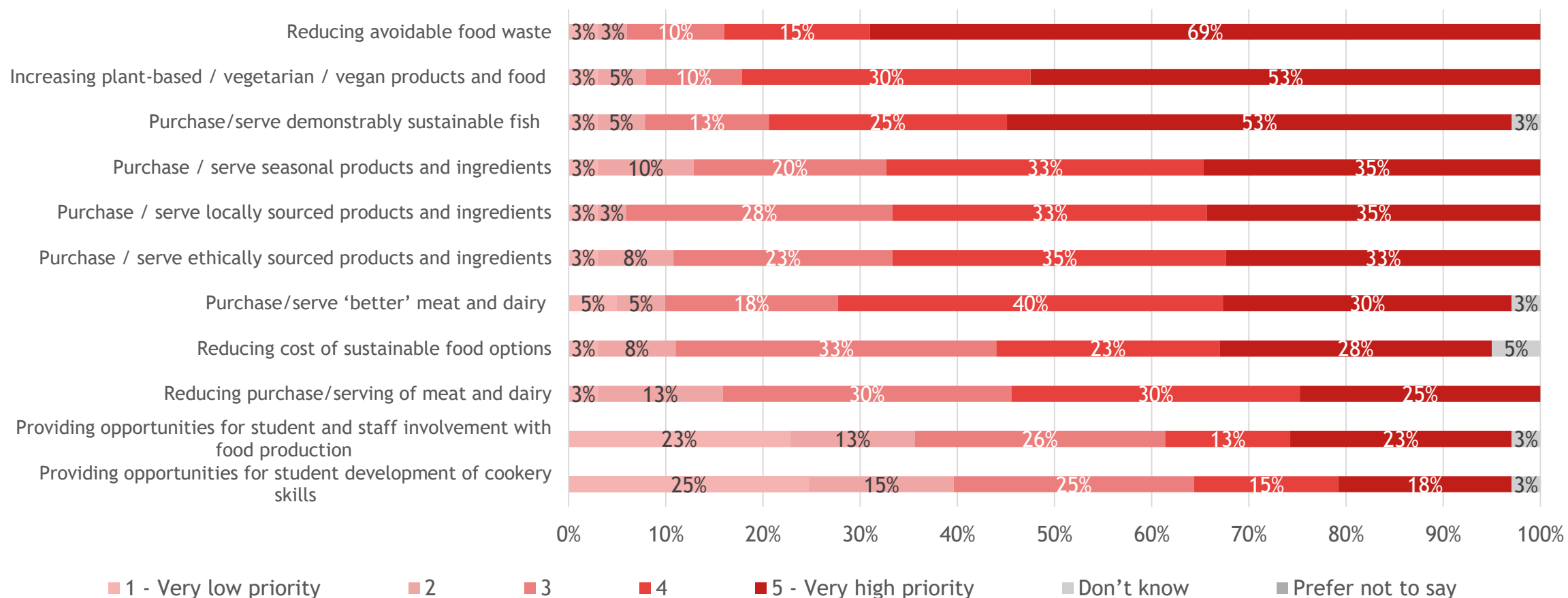


Does your institution have a policy related to food and sustainability? Please include standalone policies as well as instances where food is embedded into wider sustainability policies, or vice versa [Base: 40 Balance: No response]



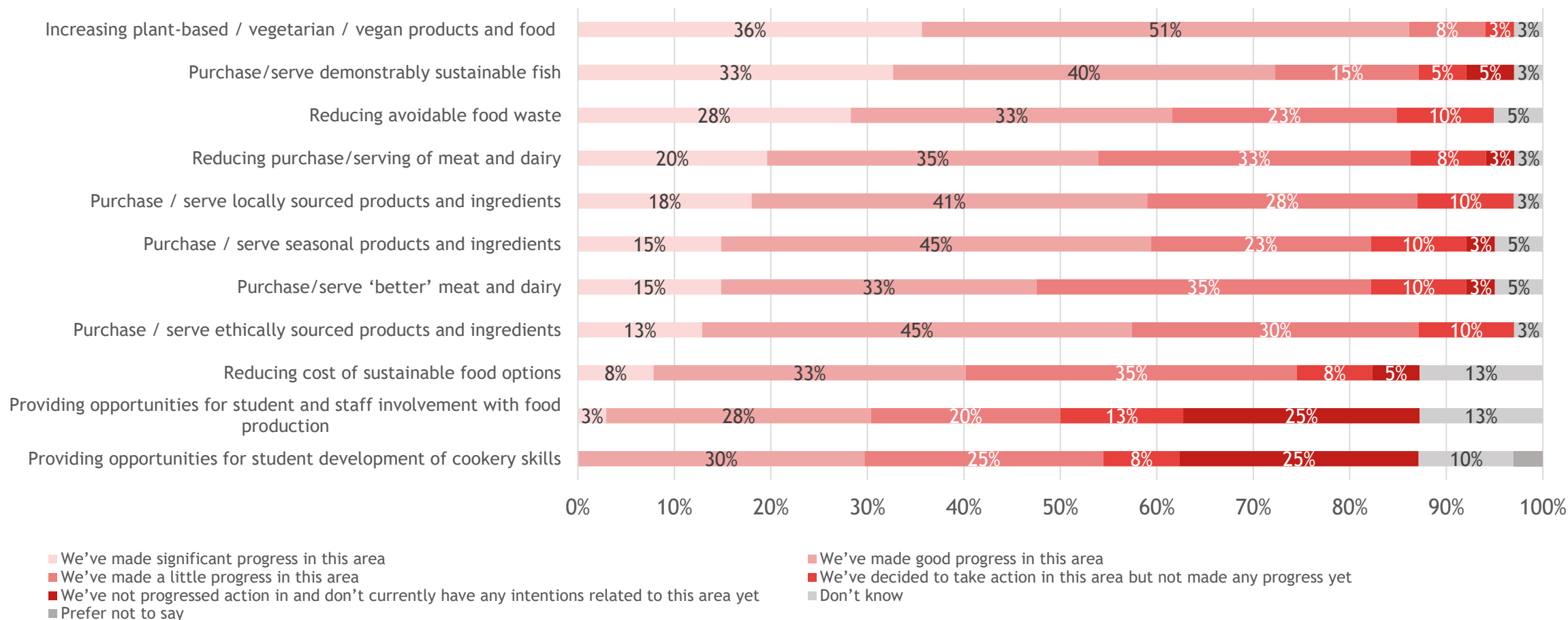
Does the policy related to food and sustainability, or any other policies or documents devised by the institution, include a commitment or target related to any of the following actions? [Base: 38 Balance: No response]

Sustainable food issues perceived as having the highest priority at respondents' institutions include reducing avoidable food waste (69%), increasing plant-based/vegetarian/vegan food and purchasing or serving demonstrably sustainable fish (53% respectively).



On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very low and 5 being very high, how do the following issues rank in terms of priority for food catering and / or retail at your institution? [Base:c.39-40 Balance: No response]

Areas respondents report making progress in include increasing plant-base/vegetarian/vegan options, purchasing/serving demonstrably sustainable fish and reducing avoidable food waste, however the progress made is more commonly reported as ‘good’ rather than ‘significant’.



And how far, if at all, has progress been made in relation to each of the following aspects? [Base: c.39-40 Balance: No response]

The most common action taken to provide healthy food on campus was identified as adding new healthy options to menus, or making sure an existing commitment to providing healthy menu choices was delivered.

Responses to the survey were coded to identify common themes on the action taken to provide healthy food on campus.

Action	Number of respondents
Adding to or making sure healthy options on menus	18
Adding vegan options	7
Improving vegetarian options	4
Adding calorie or nutrition information to menus	3
Changes to cooking methods	2
Increasing salads / fresh fruit and veg offered	2
Made healthy more price competitive	1
Amending dishes to improve nutritional value	1
Removing unhealthy options e.g. from meal deals	1

“Less fried and more baked and steamed.”

“Printed calorific count on menu, reduced the amount of carbs and increased the amount of fruit and veg.”

“Sourcing healthy options, removing unhealthy snacks from till point and replacing with healthier options, sandwich meal deal plans do not have unhealthy snacks attached to them, information on seasonal ingredients and what they benefit people with in terms of nutrition.”

“All third party suppliers who I look after contracts for, have a clause written into their contract that healthy food must feature of their menus. All out vending machines on campus are CQUIN compliant. Working alongside Sport and Exercise department to develop healthy eating menus.”

“Always stock healthier, fresh, options in the catering outlets (although spoilage is generally higher with these) and retail we stock healthier snacks (cold and wrapped).”

“We provide a fair balance of healthy and non-healthy food items for students; if they want chips there are chips but the vast majority of our food is made on site, is fresh and has vegetables you actually want to eat.”

When considering action taken to provide food that positively impacts the environment (including the climate and nature), using local and/or seasonal suppliers was the most common response, followed by accreditation marks e.g. MSC, Red Tractor, organic.

Responses to the survey were coded to identify common themes on the action taken to provide food that positively impacts the environment (including the climate and nature).

Action	Number of respondents
Local / seasonal suppliers	11
Follow framework and/or accreditations	8
Reduced meat offering	5
Increased plant-based/vegan offer	5
Packaging e.g. single use	3
Promotional menus/events	2
Food waste	1
Using more vegetables in cooking	1

“We have weekly themed days where the menu will try to be positive spin either climate or nature or both.”

“Our foods are MCS, Red Tractor. Member of the SRA. Signed up to the European Chicken Commitment - 100% cage-free shell eggs and egg products by 2025.”

“Reducing single use packaging with reuse schemes. Packaging used is compostable and food waste bins are provided.”

“We have a rule that at a maximum 50% of the food served can contain meat (including fish), the rest needs to be veggie and vegan, with vegan food being at least 25% of the offer. This is in an effort to provide lots of tasty sustainable options and reduce our carbon footprint. We are championing plant based milks and are strict around our meat and fish sourcing. We use a variety of fruit & veg, championing British & seasonal produce.”

“Switching butter portions in catered accommodation to dairy-free spread. Switching to large condiment bottles instead of individual sachets. Currently on the way to being MSC-accredited. Only purchase fresh RT meat and poultry.”

When considering action taken to provide food that positively impacts people that work throughout the food production chain, the most commonly reported action was to source accredited products such as Fairtrade. Working to support local sourcing is another common action.

Responses to the survey were coded to identify common themes on the action taken to provide food that positively impacts the people that work throughout the food production chain.

Action	Number of respondents
Source accredited products	10
Support local business through procurements	7
Follow frameworks addressing the issues	2
Rely on purchasing consortium action	1

“We follow the Menus of Change Principles and are research member of Menus of Change Universities Research Collaborative so are committed to an evidence based approach to improving both human and planetary health.”

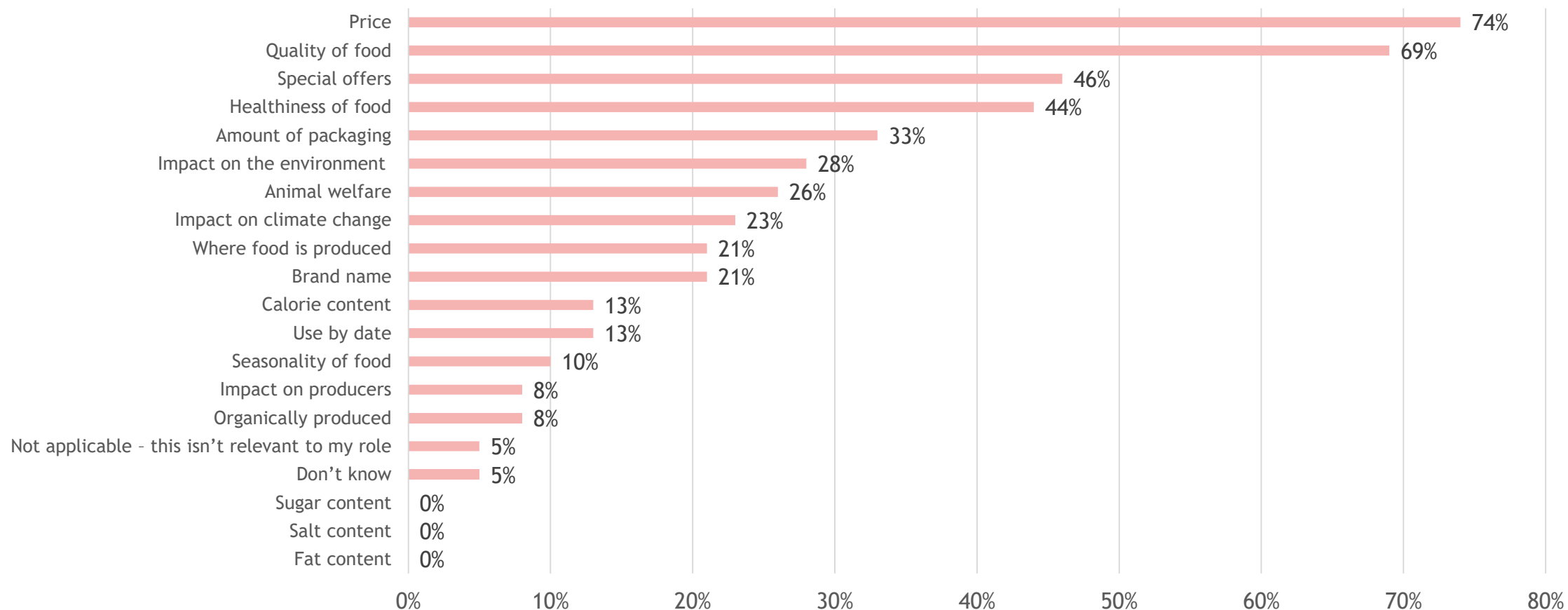
“Again we purchase through NUSSL so rely heavily on them to determine our most ethical suppliers.”

“Fairtrade and purchasing from Manchester Veg People - they are a local veg cooperative.”

“We’re a Fairtrade accredited university which means all our main/standard coffee, tea, sugar, banana & chocolate is Fairtrade. We’re prioritising UK and London based brands for retail to ensure fair wages and good production standards. Our University has strong ethical commitments that contracted workers should get the same pay and benefits as university employed staff, meaning that our staff are paid a very good wage.”

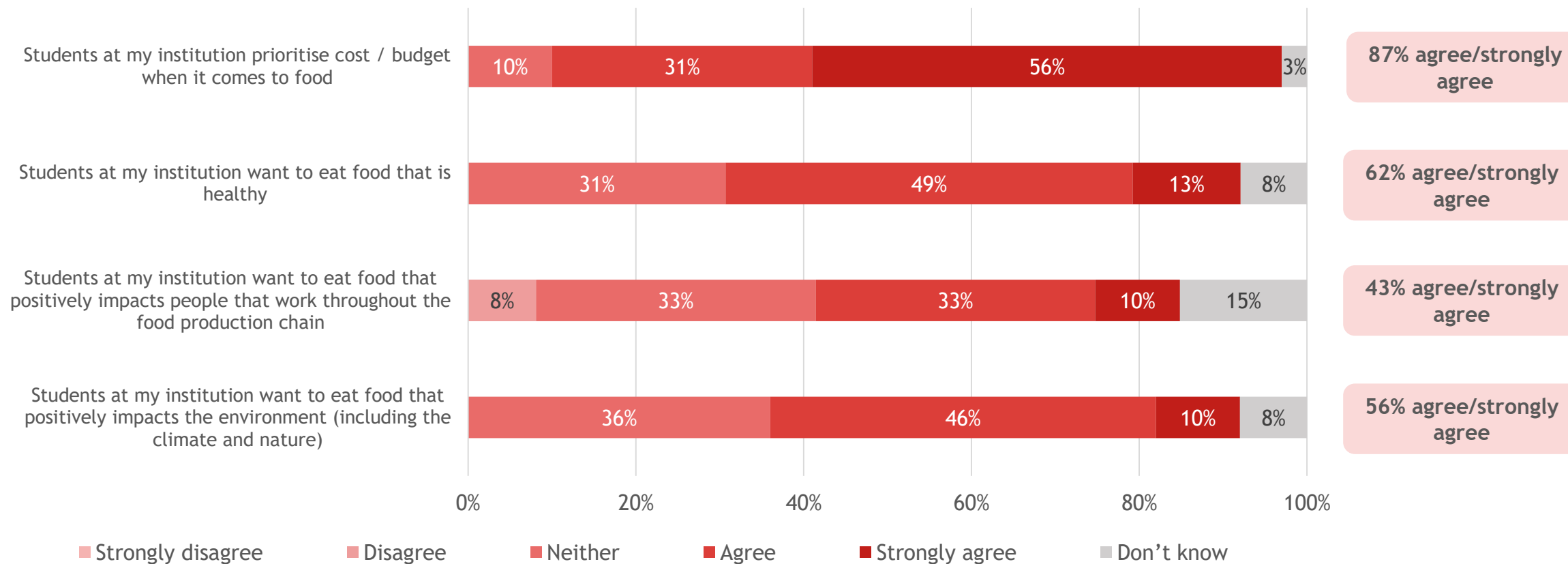
PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT DEMAND AND BEHAVIOUR

Staff respondents perceive price (74%) and quality of food (69%) to be the priority factors for students at their institution when it comes to food purchasing. This matches the responses given by students in the student-facing survey.



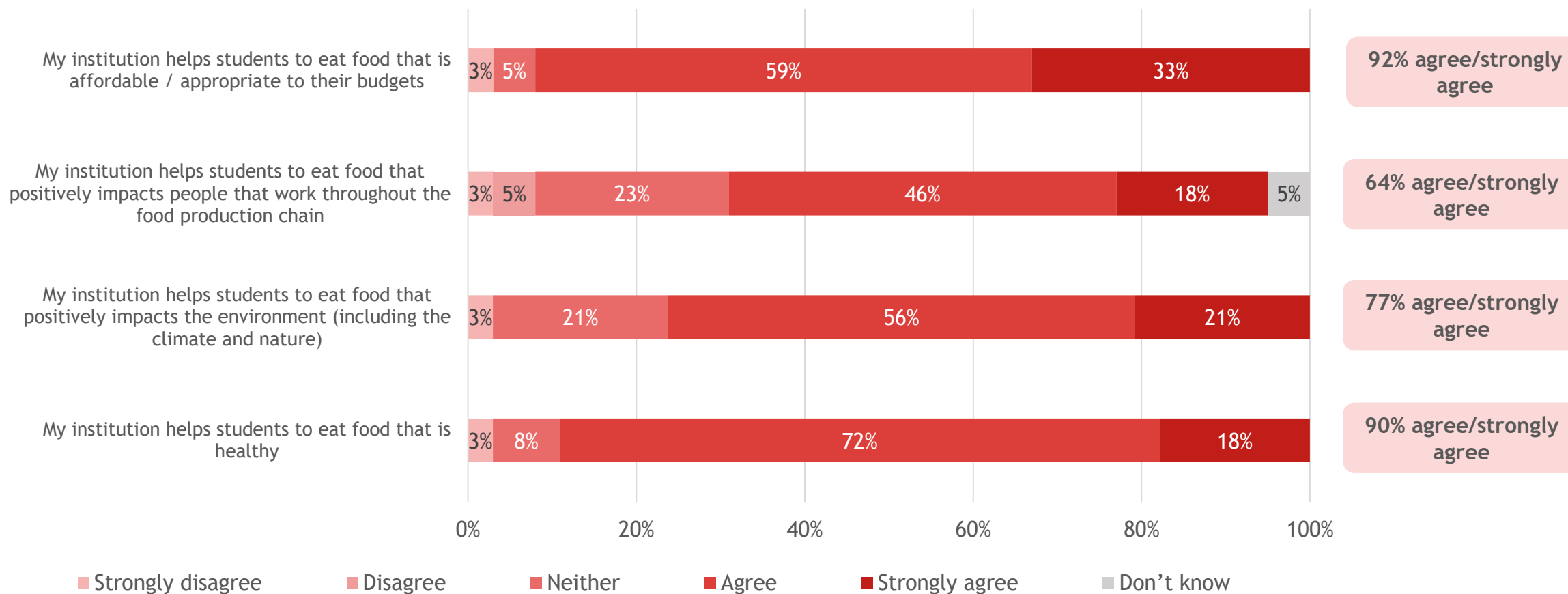
Thinking about the factors that affect food purchasing choices, what factors would you say are the top priorities for students at your institution? Please think generally about different food products, including raw ingredients and ready-made products. Please pick the top five factors [Base: 39 Balance: No response]

87% of respondents agree that students prioritise cost/budget when it comes to food. 62% agree that they want to eat food that is healthy. Just over half (56%) agree that students want to eat food that positively impacts the environment, and 43% agree they want to eat food that positively impacts people that work in the production chain.



To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [Base: 39 Balance: No response]

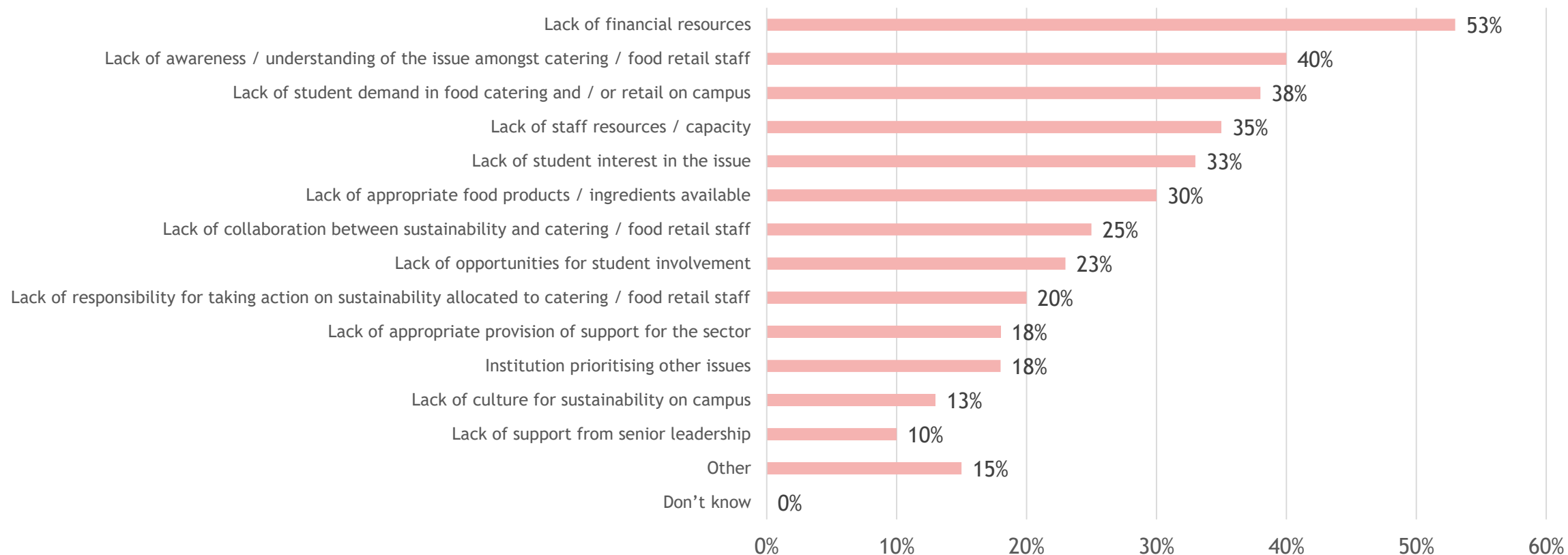
92% of respondents agree their institution helps students to eat food that affordable / appropriate to their budgets and 90% say their institution helps students to eat food that is healthy. 77% agree their institution helps students to eat food that contributes positively to the environment and 64% agree their institution does this in relation to people working throughout the food production chain.



To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [Base: 39 Balance: No response]

BARRIERS TO AND SUPPORT FOR ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD

53% of respondents identify a lack of financial resources as a significant barrier to their institution doing more on food and sustainability. 40% say a lack of awareness/understanding of the issues amongst catering/food staff is a barrier, and 38% say a lack of student demand is a barrier.



In your view, what barriers face your institution in doing more on food and sustainability? Please select the five most significant barriers in your opinion
 [Base: 40 Balance: No response]

Further reflections on barriers to action on sustainable food include...

Procurement restrictions

A number of respondents noted that frameworks and contractors used for procurement and food delivery could have a negative impact on their ability to take action on sustainability due to limitations on products and suppliers.

“I feel very lucky that the university fully supports sustainable catering and allows us to lead the way in the sector. The biggest problem I face is problems internal to my company in terms of procurement.”

“Nominated suppliers and only being able to purchase certain products.”

“National purchasing frameworks - restrict what suppliers can be used.”

“But, you know, the challenge of being contractor compared to an in-house caterer is that we don't control our procurement. And so, you know, it's like going to the supermarket, if you've got a pocket full of money, and no list, you can go wherever you want. And if you haven't got that much money in your mom's giving you a list, you can only buy from the list, you know, I mean, like, it's, yeah. So there's benefits, and also it has its challenges.”

Costs

A key barrier highlighted by respondents are costs in relation to sustainable food, either through procuring individual ingredients and products, or as a result of operating through purchasing frameworks and contractors.

“Higher level commitments on ethical purchasing through buying consortia - TUCO, NUS. How we make it financially viable as previous ethical decisions have had a negative impact on the cost of running the service (its a cost neutral service i.e. not run for a profit but there are subsequently limits on investments that can be made and sometimes this stifles innovation).”

“We try to introduce more sustainable ingredients and products, however the cost is an issue when we are trying to be competitive and charge low prices.”

“We are a contract caterer so we get a lot of support and wouldn't say there are any other barriers other than contract price which has a knock effect onto the prices charged to the customer.”

“Were we significantly subsidised to specifically produce healthier, more environmentally sustainable meals, we would have a chance to not lose money. As it is all of our efforts so far have borne little fruit, progress is made but very gradually. I'm afraid that without the core ingredients being subsidised.”

Further reflections on barriers to action on sustainable food include...

Supply/delivery

Also related to procurement, is the issue of supply and delivery, which was seen as a barrier to initiatives such as carbon labelling but also to procurement of sustainable products overall.

“The key issue for every single food business right now is suppliers, and supply deliveries. And that’s not necessarily sustainability issue. But it does impact sustainability significantly, because it’s the first consideration to go when you’re like “I actually just need some chicken and I really can’t afford to care where it’s coming from”. This is going to be it the constant struggle with supply chain. And also for us, we’re trying to implement carbon labelling. And to do that, you need a degree of pre-planning.”

Student demand

Understanding student demand for sustainable food across the population, and also the barriers to action for students were also identified as issues for staff working in food-related roles.

“We find that those who specifically want to eat / drink a particular life style shout a lot so people think we should go down this route only to find when you stock it, it then gets wasted as it isn’t bought.”

“Students are more aware than ever of sustainability in the food industry, yet there is a lack of action on students behalf to make a difference.”

In a similar light, one respondent reflected on the understanding of students of what sustainable food can look like in reality:

“I don’t know if that’s the case, they’re not necessarily seeing it sustainable because it’s just tomato pasta, it just seems like a cheap alternative rather than a sustainable alternative.”

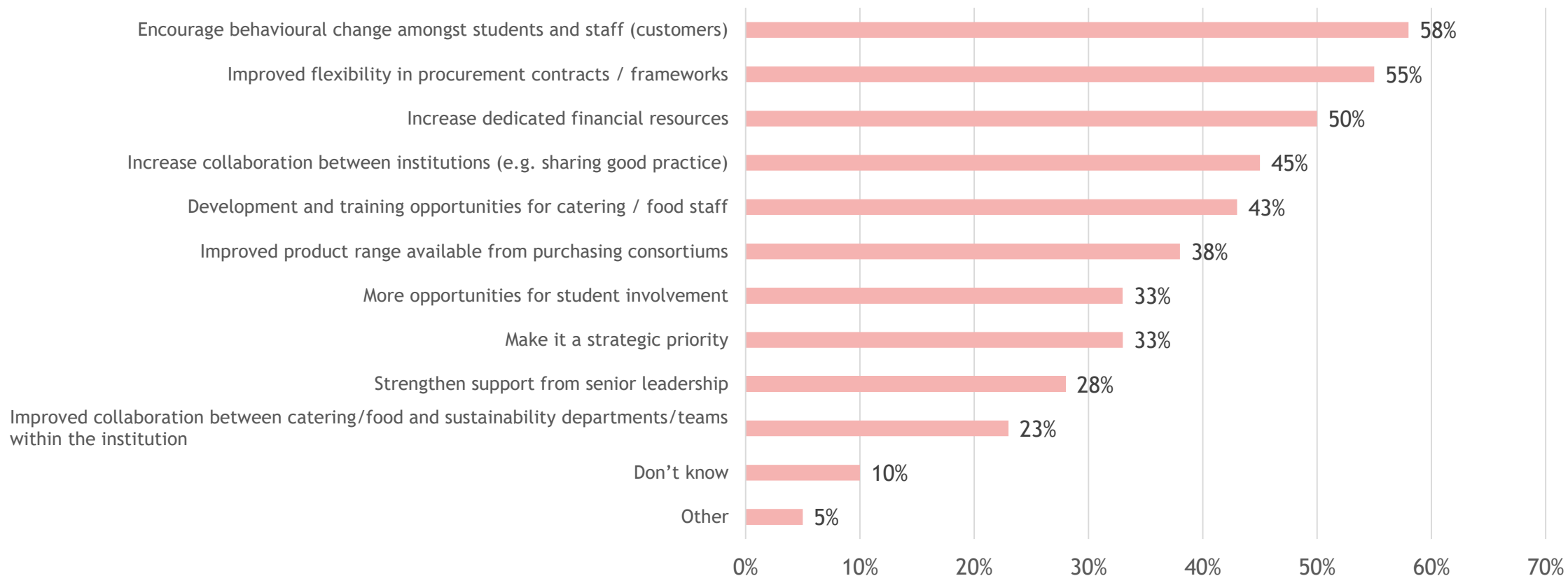
Where respondents had experienced a negative response from students in relation to a shift to more sustainable options, they noted a need for subtlety in communications and approach:

“So we try to be a little bit more innovative with what we do. So as opposed to operating, say, a Meat-free Monday, we just have several days where or several services, so it might be a lunch, or a dinner and there’s just no actual meat options. Actually, that seems to go under the radar, because no one really complains, right?”

Similarly one respondent noted that incorrect information on student desires and expectations can lead to a continuation of less-sustainable procurement:

“We shifted all our beer, 90% of our beer now is sourced locally. So the vast majority of our bars don’t have Carlsberg or any of those [big brands]. It’s research with students . “Apparently you really care about what brands are drinking”, and they’re like, ‘not really no’. Okay, great. So we’ll go local then. We can work with local suppliers on that. So yeah, we have a huge contingent of local suppliers supplying these drinks and which apparently they won’t drink.”

Encouraging behavioural change amongst students and staff (58%), improved flexibility in procurement contracts and frameworks (55%) and increasing dedicated financial resources (50%) are identified as the options that would most help institutions address food and sustainability on campus.



In your view, which of the following would help your institution the most to address food and sustainability? Please pick the top five options [Base: 40 Balance: No response]

Further reflections on action to support change in relation to sustainable food on campus

Procurement / managing contractor relationships

Staff interview participants reflected on how they had developed innovative and positive working relationships with contracted catering providers to ensure institution sustainability goals are met:

“I work at [institution], but I work for the contract caterer at [institution]...So [institution] stipulated in the contract that my role [Sustainability manager] existed. Because in the previous contracts, there was a feeling that their sustainability aims, they have very high sustainability aims, which is great, but previous contracts struggle because they didn't have an owner of that necessarily. So when they re-tendered, they basically put the requirement for my role in. [I sit in] the senior management level of the catering team, but I do work closely with the university sustainability team.”

“And we work very closely with [catering contractor], so we meet monthly with them. And kind of regularly chat in the meantime, because there's a lot going on, and then try and influence the students' union as much as we can. So really, we do work quite closely in regards to food, a lot of it follows [catering contractor], because that's such a big organisation, it's what we can do to support that.”

Running services in-house

Staff interview participants who working in institutions where all food provision is managed in house felt strongly that this enabled them to deliver on sustainability and food more effectively and comprehensively.

“So we're completely in house which is such a huge, huge benefit, we think, because then you can take into account all of those principles that we have in regard to sustainability.”

“In terms of sustainability, 100% its [in-house] much better. We are the masters of our own destiny, we want to change a policy or something, we can and we can move swiftly. And generally, I can make those decisions. So it gives me lots of more, more freedom to actually manage and run, as opposed to going through red tape, or requesting things that might never happen. In terms of sourcing, it means that we can choose who we procure from, that's of paramount importance. It means that yes, we can source seasonal, ethical produce. We know who our suppliers are, who our supply chain is. We can work with suppliers and third parties that have the same KPIs and ideals as us. So where if we can work with people when we can be a lot more critical. And if they're not, we can, we can change. We're not sort of tied into those models where people have the economies of scale, because it's a centrally produced menu or supply chain, we can, more or less chop and change. So if someone's not, and the people that work with us then understand that they deliver what we want them to deliver on every angle. So it's not just about getting the right price and the right quality.”

Further reflections on action to support change in relation to sustainable food on campus

Costs and sustainability - customers and pricing

Interview and survey respondents noted the potential for differential pricing approaches in order to encourage increased consumption of sustainable food choices, either through governmental action or applied by the institution itself. One respondent noted the difficulty this poses for items where there is less control over price, for example ready-made items.

“Triple bottom line taxation applied to any food product sold. Most would be nil additional but those products deemed to unhealthy to eat in even moderate excess (ratio calories/nutritional score weighting) and the revenue from this would be used to directly subsidise seasonal, healthy, raw ingredients.”

“Price being reduced on sustainable food.”

“We sell things like burgers and chips and, and what is regarded to be fast food options...so we, in effect, tax those products. So with bottled water, we couldn't do away with selling bottled water completely. But our price of bottled water has probably gone up 30-40% over the last few years, because I said, ‘Well, if we're going to sell it, we will sell it at this price to try and put people off.’ But we encourage by having more water fountains across campus, we give them reusable bottles when they're freshers weeks.”

“In our contract, it stipulates that our meat dishes need to be priced more expensive than our vegetarian dishes and vegan dishes. So definitely, that's something that we do across the board for most things. The difficulty is, when it comes to things like bought in sandwiches where, you know, we have so much less control over the price into artificially deflate some of those costs would mean a significant loss for us.”

However one participant felt that this approach wouldn't achieve the lasting, in-depth change needed.

“And the other minor thoughts with that is I don't think necessarily that programs people have the right message. If you're, you're bribing them, rather than educate them to make the correct decision, which means they're only doing it based on price. They're not based on anything else. And I'll still think if people want to eat a burger, they'll pay a premium for it.”

Costs and sustainability - procurement approaches

Building on the previous quote, other respondents also noted that maintaining control over procurement allowed their institution to price sustainable food more competitively, for example by adjusting the quantities of 'unsustainable' products in dishes, by delivering food services that facilitated purchasing in larger quantities, or by procuring items out of season.

“We make everything from scratch, so that gives us full control over the menu to manage nutrition but also the dealing with things like say pork, we're moving to free range pork, we can only do that because we fully control our menus. As in, we're not buying in, so we can reduce that quite heavily. We reduce the meat content so in effect we can pay double, which is fine, we can double our cost of an individual piece of meat. And then equally with like grains and pulses, we're using base ingredients. So to go from, say, standard rice to organic rice isn't that big a leap, its not like ready-made lasagne going from standard to organic.”

Further reflections on action to support change in relation to sustainable food on campus

“So instead of maybe using 20 kilos of beef mince to make cottage pies, you know, cutting it with maybe 30%, lentils, or mushrooms. And just reducing, still buying higher quality, reducing it in a way where the customer is, there's no negative impact. So you want to try and control the controllable - we can't control the food costs, but we can control how we distribute those food costs.”

“We're like, no, no, no, we don't want to go into cafes, we want to go into plated food, and want to sell more of it. But we want it to be desirable to the students. So we're fixing that first to get to the financial part. The university made a conscious decision that we are going to do it that way. So we're going to fix food, be really good at food, be able to explain all the backstory of food, how we've made it. And because we've got huge buying power, we can make sure it's reasonably priced.”

“So down here between March and September, that is peak holiday time. For me, that's quiet time. So then I'll pick it up in September and say, I want to buy this project product off, you give me your best price between now and next March when everybody else is quiet, and I'll keep you ticking over for the winter. And that's why we think about local businesses as well and think, how can we keep afloat particularly in these times that we've just had recently.”

Resources and guidance

Some respondents noted that a source of information and resources related to sustainability and food would be useful, accounting for roles that have more of an expertise in one area over the other. Within this guidance on the steps that can be taken to make an impact in this area was also felt to be missing.

“Just kind of having that overview of here are the big cases that you should focus on, the top 10 would be awesome. So that we can kind of line up with the saying, okay, we're kind of at this level, we need to complete those. So I suppose, a bit of a journey, and knowledge on what other people in the sector are doing to.”

“Maybe a resource hub, potentially, where all of the information is all kept in one place that we can all sort of buy into click on, you know, dial into share information on, so maybe a resource hub, which has got lots of great resources, ideas, menus, and things like that, as well, but also a bit of a sort of a chat room collaboration.”

“Because there's so much depth to all these [issues], like sustainable palm oil. Now they're saying no, you should buy it, but just buy it responsibly sourced. I think it's good to have that guidance as much as possible because if you don't have the expertise in house.”

Further reflections on action to support change in relation to sustainable food on campus

Messaging

Respondents noted the importance of messaging in relation to delivering sustainable food, both to secure buy-in but also as a means of encouraging shifts in behaviour.

“I did a bit of work with the Humane Society. And it was really interesting...ways of market meals and how you talk about them and the language you use. It's not about the pricing to get the best impact. It's actually about the sort of the language you use the adjectives and descriptive words when you're writing your menu, and that actually has a bigger impact, if you're trying to change habits then price, the price. Not so price doesn't it does, but it's kind of short lived. And people still make unsustainable choices. If that's the option, you've got the menu.”

“It's the idea of championing what you're doing, highlighting it and the reasons why. That's quite a big thing. So if you're using kale in season - why is this a good ingredient? Why using it now? Where did it come from? So one of the ideas that we've got for this academic year is essentially to have sort of maybe like an ingredient of the month to champion.”

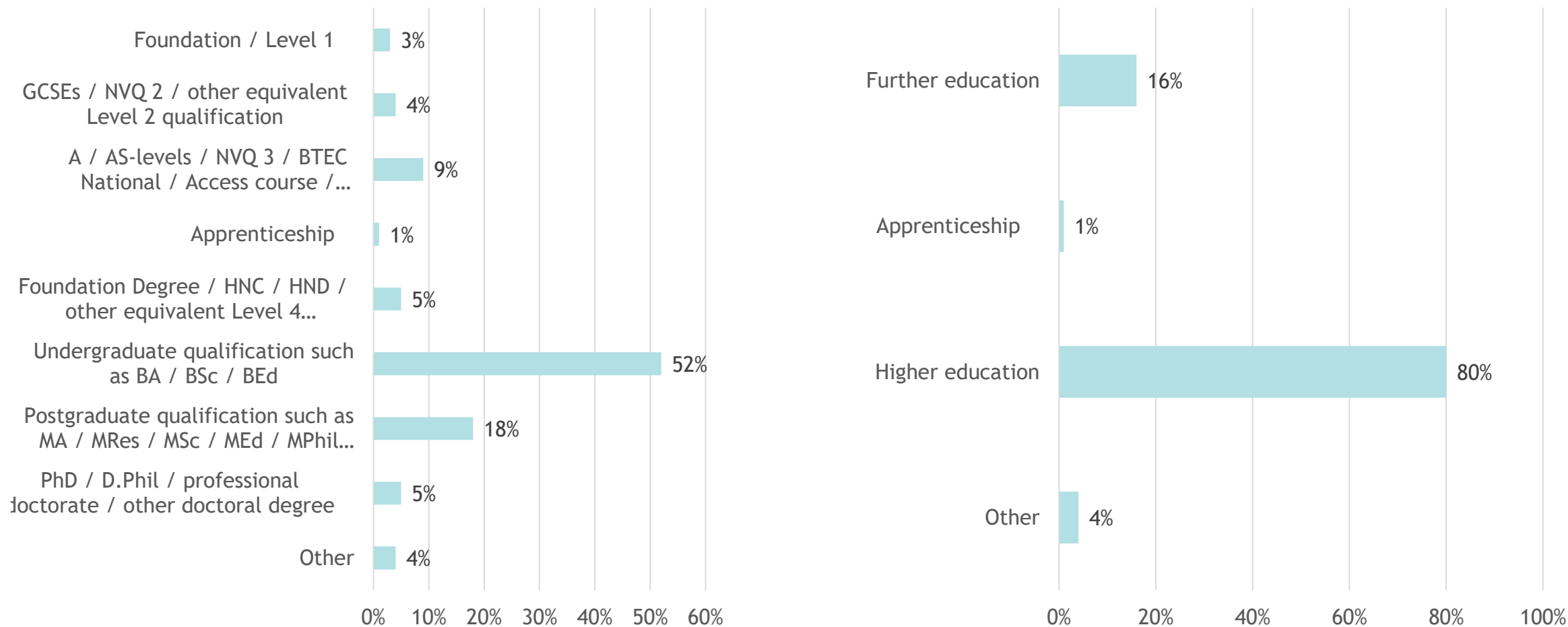
Appendices

ABOUT THE STUDENT SURVEY RESPONDENTS

1

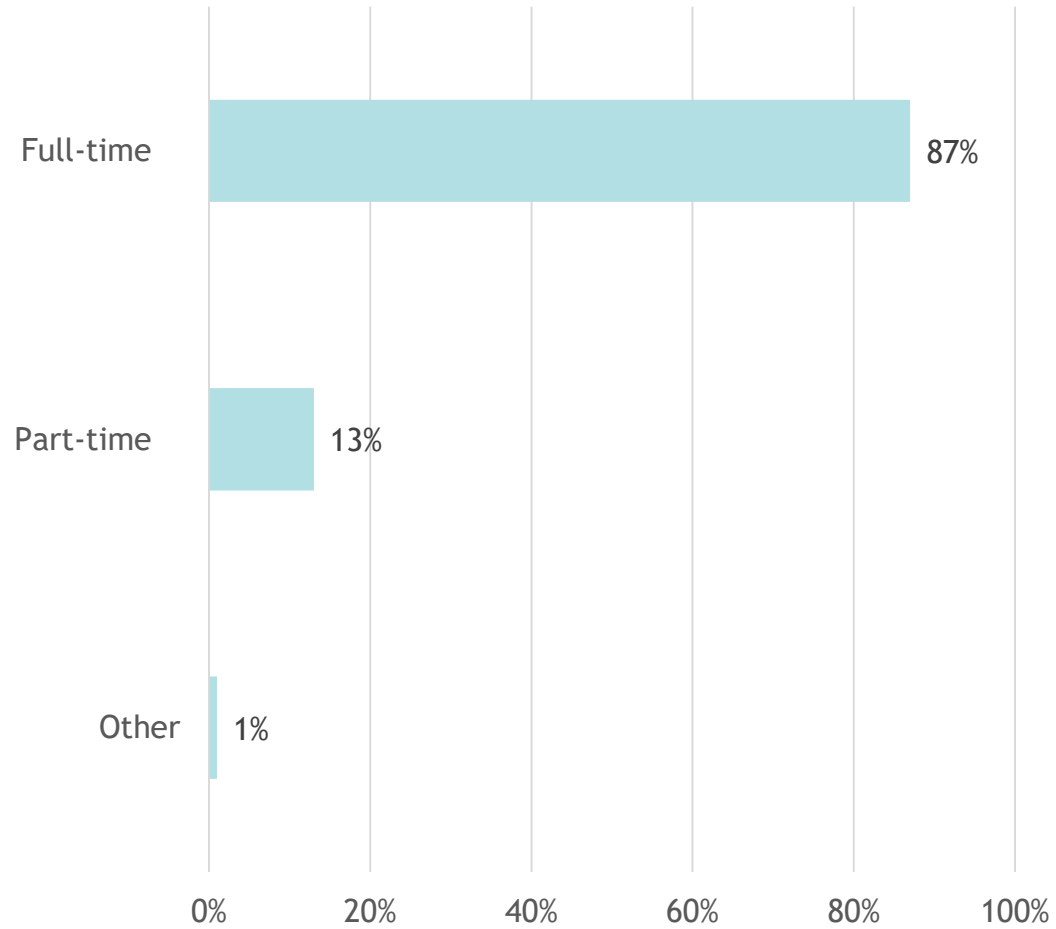
Demographics

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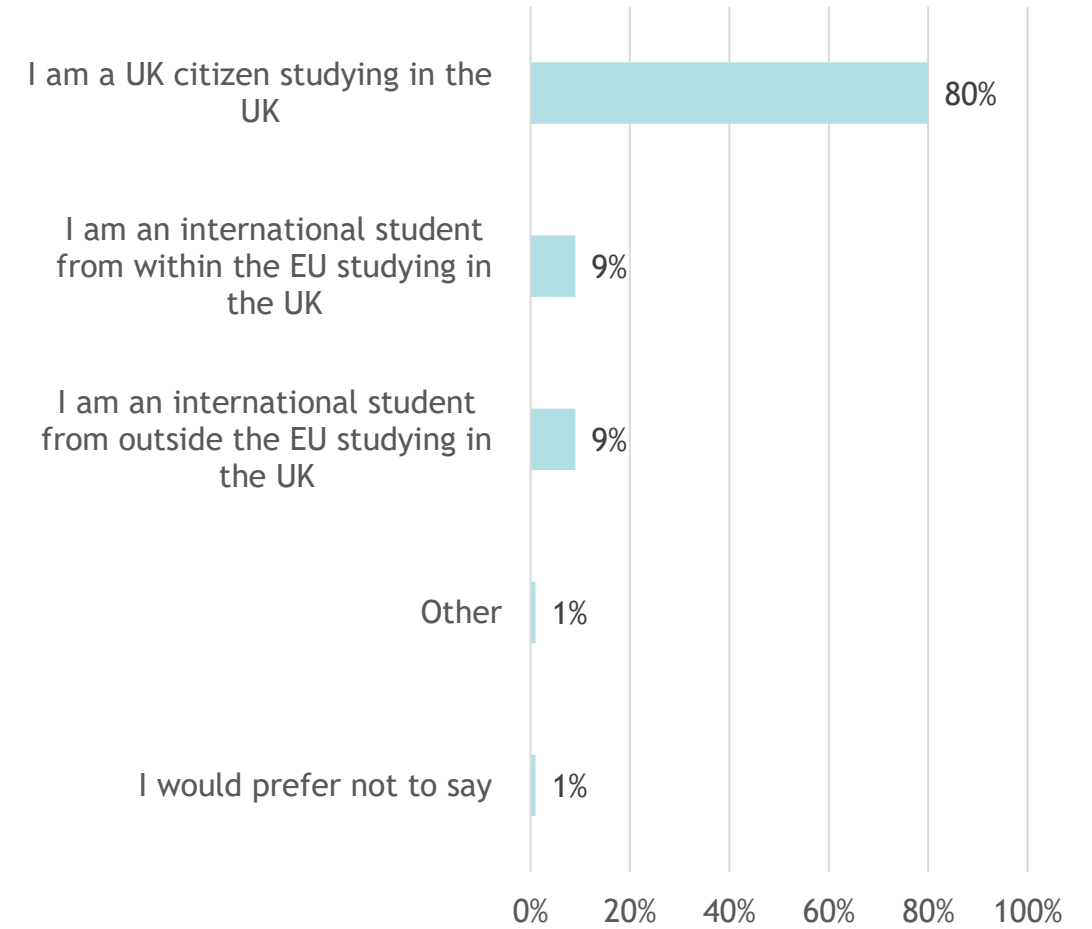


Demographics

STUDY STATUS

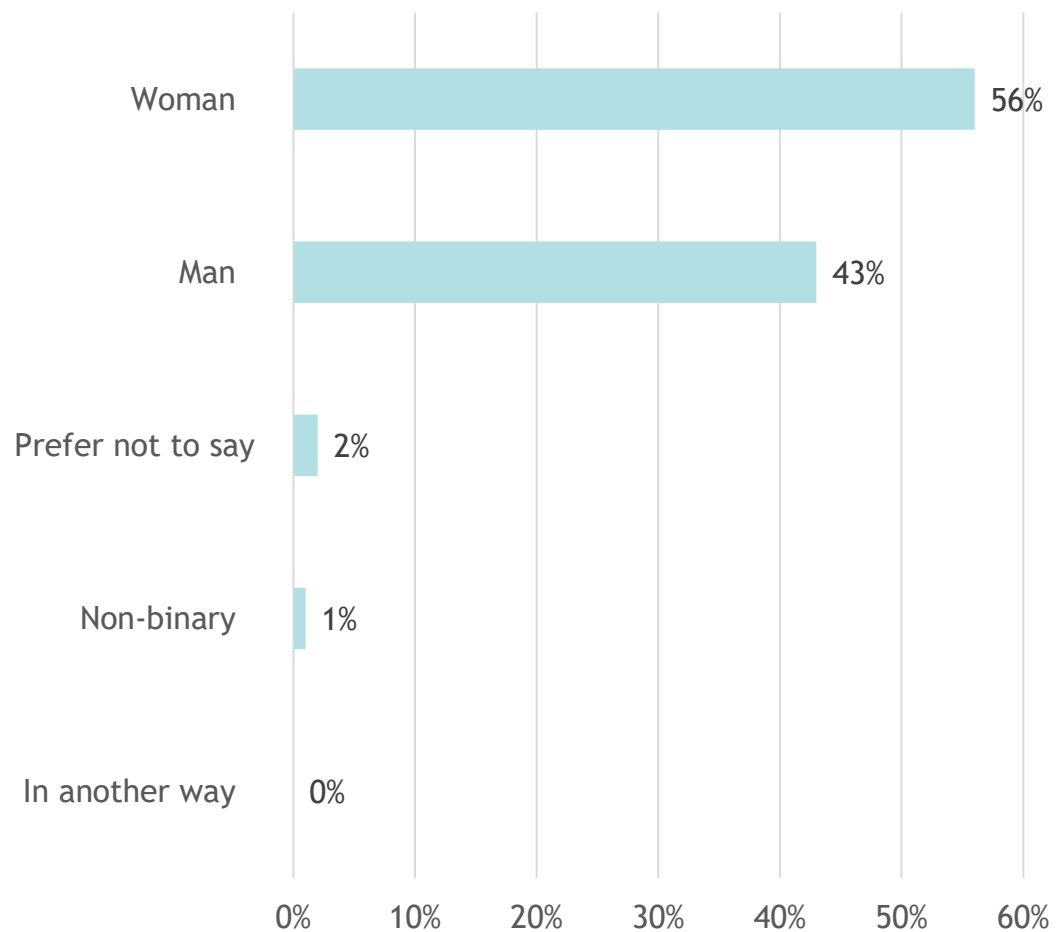


NATIONALITY

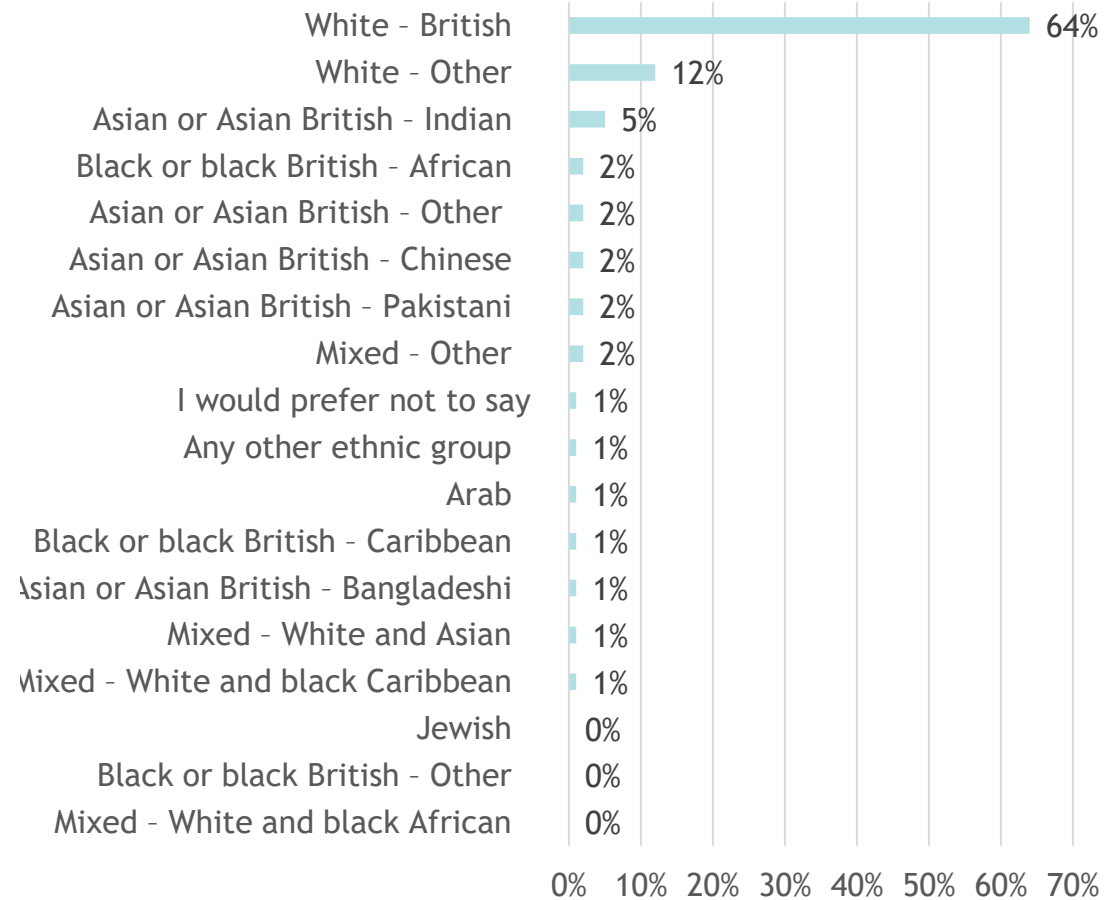


Demographics

GENDER IDENTITY

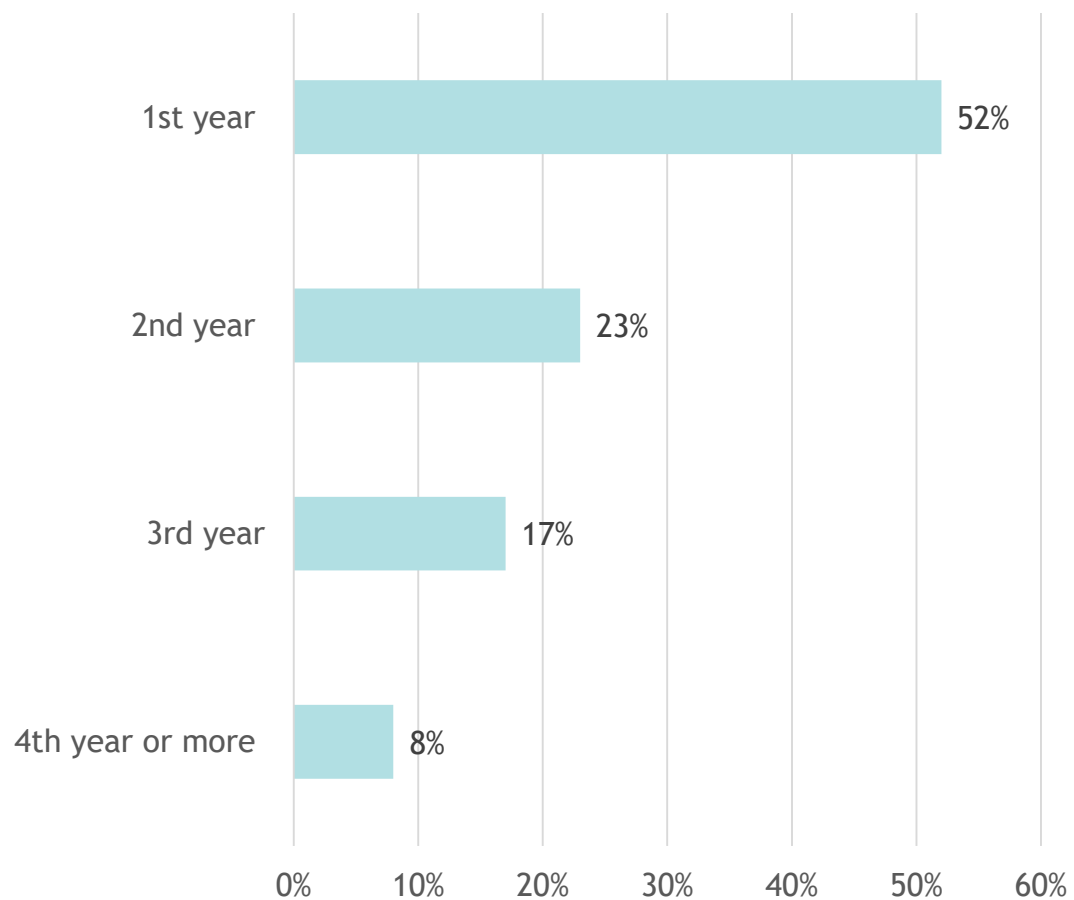


RACE / ETHNICITY

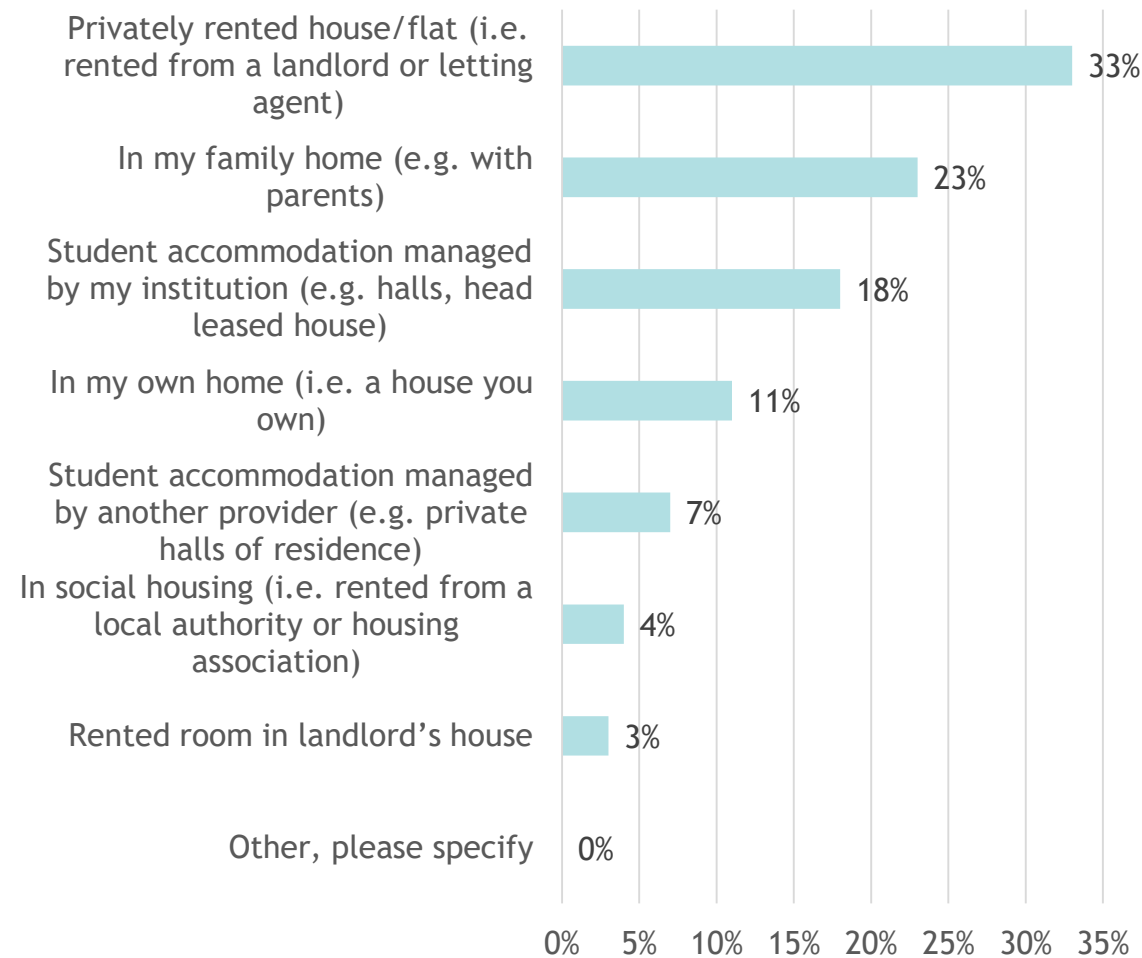


Demographics

STUDY YEAR

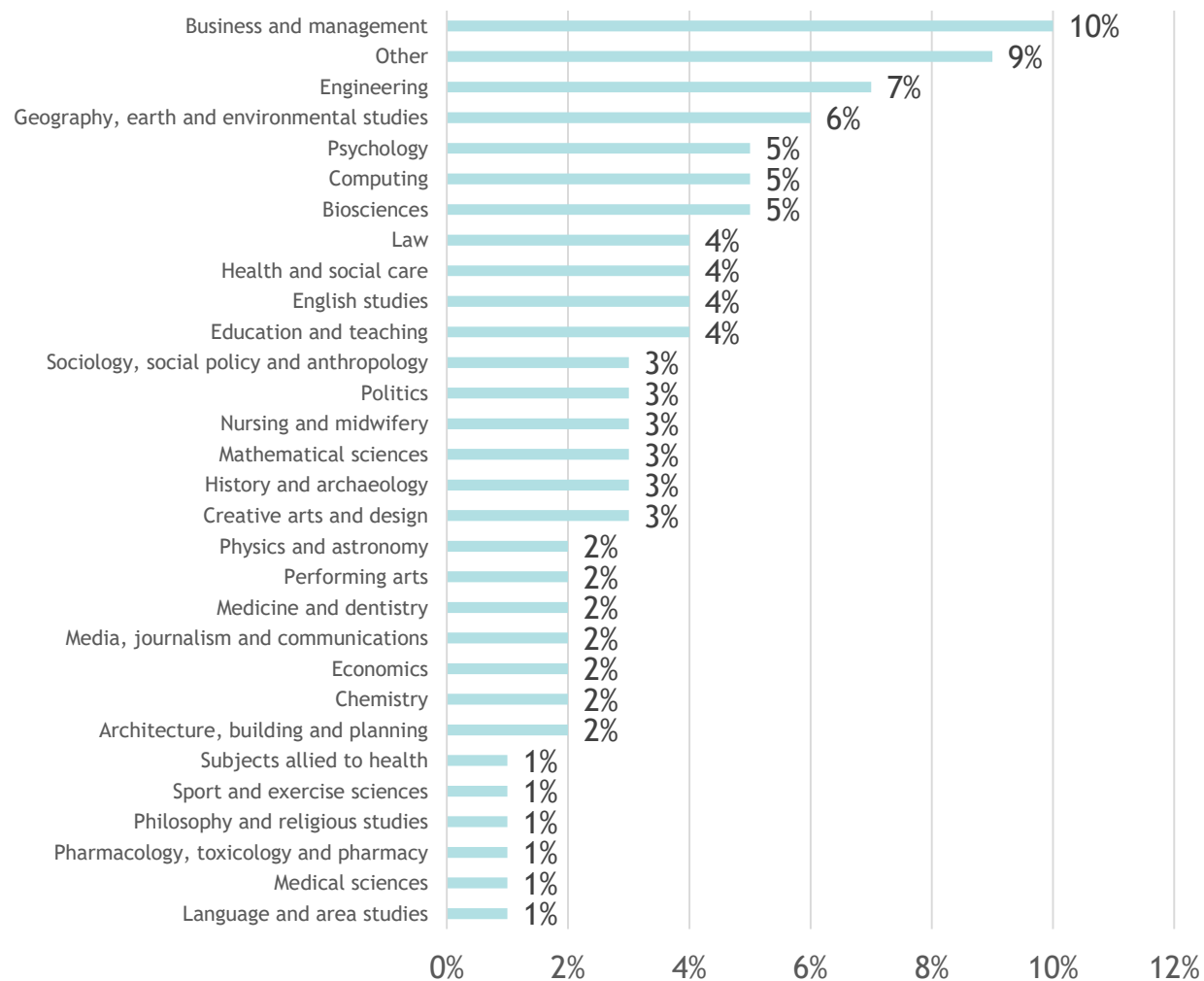


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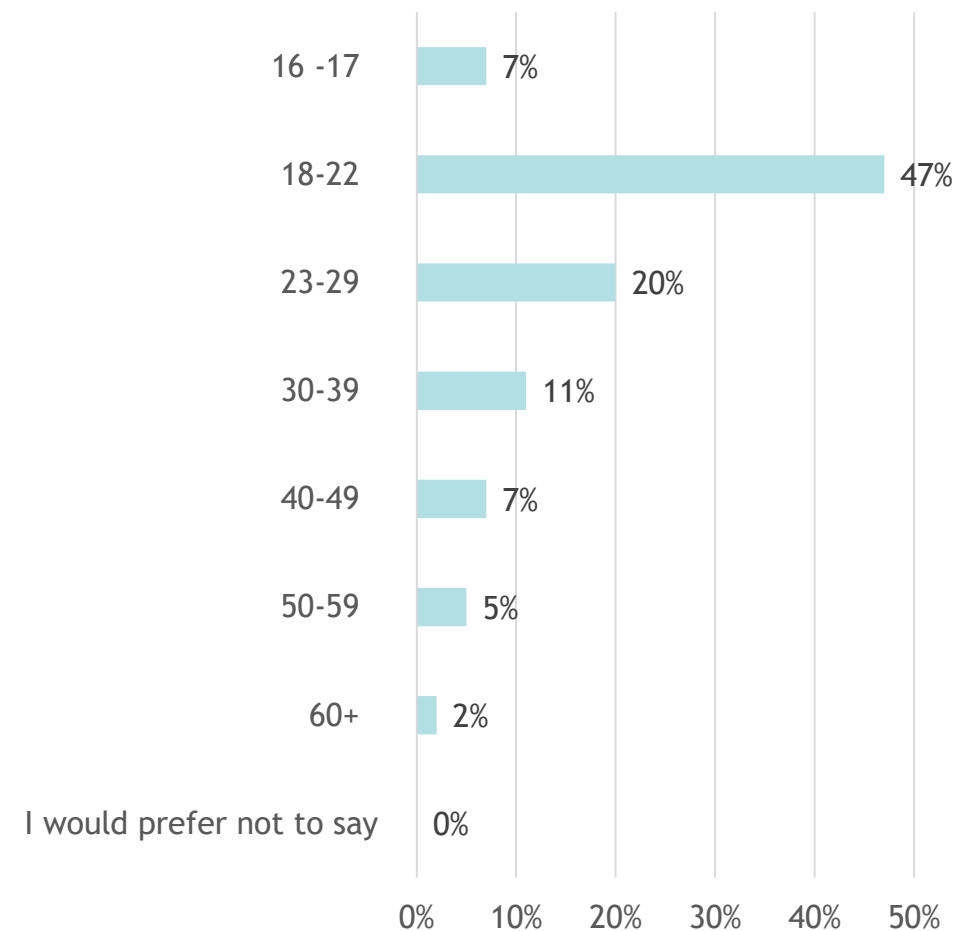


Demographics

SUBJECT



AGE

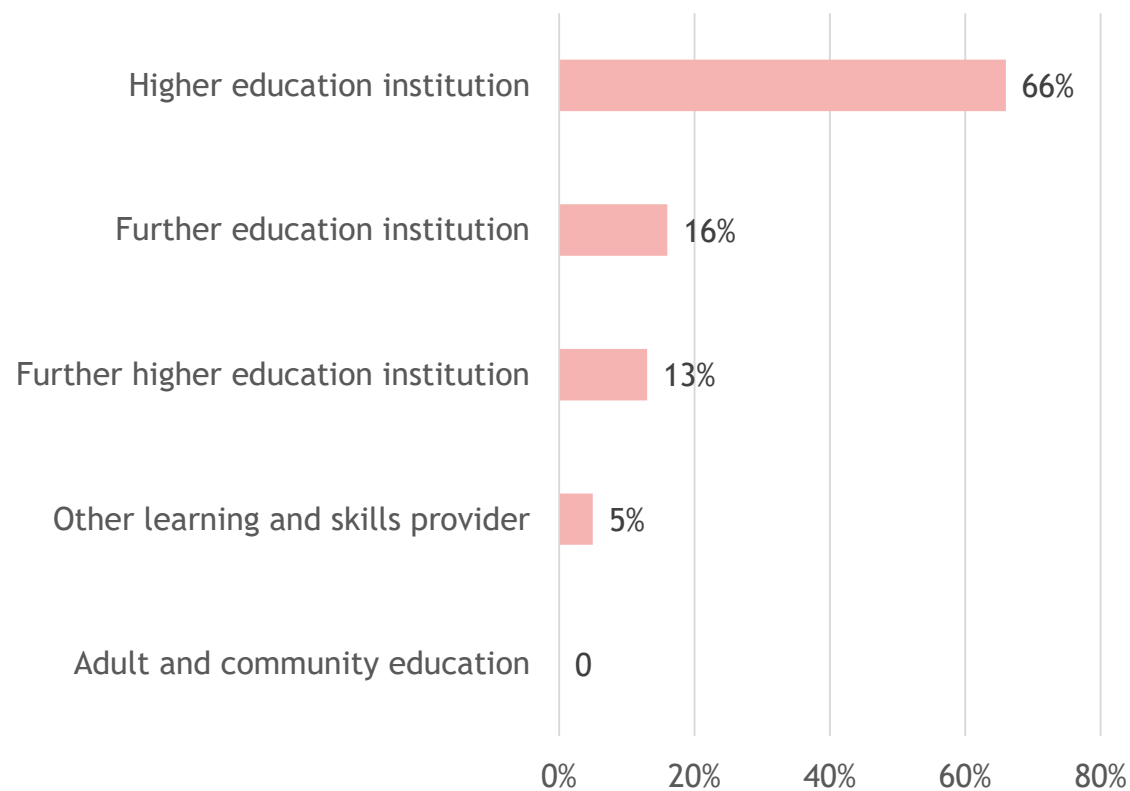


ABOUT THE STAFF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

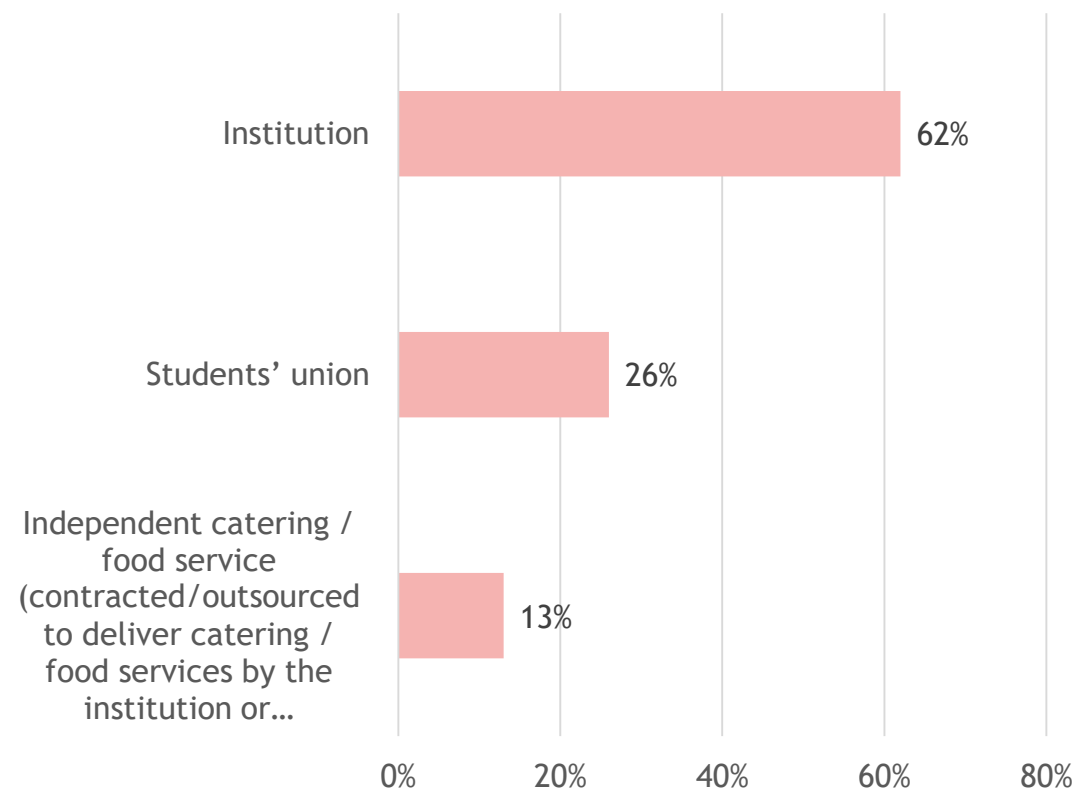
2

About the respondents...

INSTITUTION TYPE



INSTITUTION ROLE



For more insight into students and sustainability,
please visit our research library online: www.sos-uk.org/research

This research was funded by:

