

Annual Membership Survey October 2021

How did we conduct our
research?





Strategic aim

- The Annual Membership Survey is crucial to supporting our 4 year Strategy. The initial pilot of the survey in February 2020 was part of Strategic Project 1:
 - ***Overall Scope:** Improve our understanding of student needs, expectations and motivations. Conduct a regular review of our services, engagement activities and comms channels to identify improvement opportunities and increase participation.*
 - ***Workstream 1A: Conduct membership research and analysis***
 - *Develop and launch the Annual Membership Survey to gain membership feedback on: our activities & services,; member expectations; study and volunteering motivations; awareness levels and comms preferences; engagement interests; Association culture. The survey will provide valuable on-going data for strategic KPI tracking, provide inputs for service/activity reviews and help to inform business decision-making.*
- The survey now forms part of the ‘business as usual’ activities for the Association and is conducted each Autumn.



Research method

- An online survey hosted on Microsoft Forms and available to students who could log on using their OU Student Microsoft Office 365 account, with an open copy available on request.
- An email invitation was sent to our membership of 181,588 in w/c 1 November 2021.
 - A total of 3,883 students (**2.14%**) **completed** the survey.
 - An **increase of 33.22%** of participants based on our 2020 findings.
 - This is the **highest turnout on a member-wide survey** conducted by the Association but still falling a short of our 3% target.
- The survey was designed to last around 20 minutes depending on how much detail the participants decided to include in the free text fields.
- A mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions were used and covered; Association awareness, communications, services & resources, governance & democracy, volunteering and culture.
- Statistics from the Association's key performance indicators have been included throughout this analysis. This helps us to better understand the profile of the student filling out this survey and balance the results against students already engaged in Association activities.



Marketing

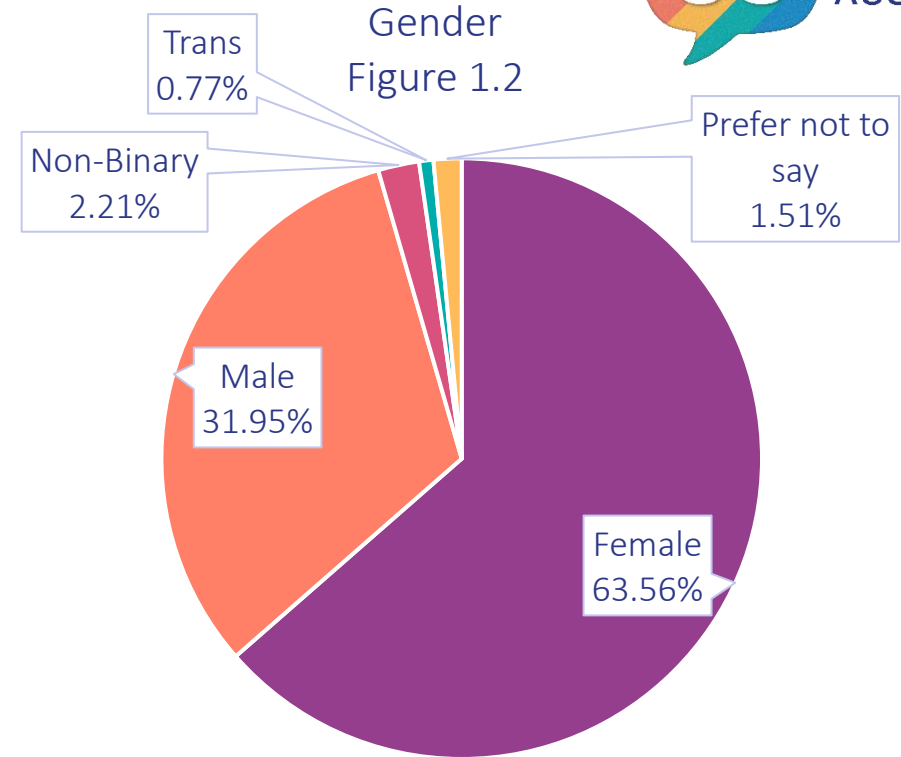
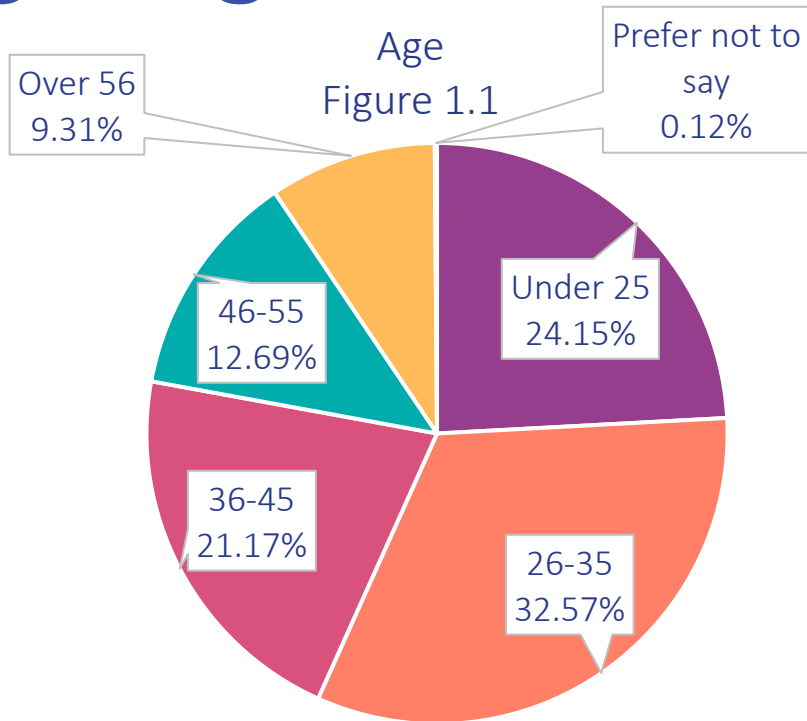


- In addition to an invitation e-mail, the **Student Experience team** arranged for 3 StudentHome bulletins to be posted at intervals for the duration that the survey was live. The Association's **Digi Comms team** assisted with a marketing campaign through various Association channels, including Hoot articles and regular social media posts.
- Sharing of our social media posts was encouraged by the **OU's faculty and regional accounts**. Messages were also included on Tutor Home and OULife encouraging engagement by staff students and asking student facing staff to promote the survey through their own channels.
- The survey was **incentivised to encourage participation** and included prizes sponsored by various OU units and faculties. The prizes were as follows:
 - 1st prize - a HP laptop worth up to £600
 - 2nd prize - 1 of 2 Microsoft Surface tablets worth up to £400 each (sponsored by the Vice Chancellors Office and the OU Marketing & Communications unit)
 - 3rd prize – 1 of 5 £150 shopping vouchers(sponsored by Faculty of Science Technology Engineering & Maths, Faculty of Business & Law, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Open & Access)
 - 4th prize – 1 of 10 £25 shopping vouchers
- A further opportunity to demonstrate impact and increase awareness will come from students being able to share their prize stories via formal channels (The Hoot, Association social media) and informal channels (friends, tutor, non-OU social media).

Participant demographics



Age & gender



The age groups in our membership sample have broadly stayed the same in the last year. However the **percentage of members completing our survey has seen a shift towards the younger student**. In 2020, 18% of survey participants were aged 25 and under and 2021 has seen this increase to 24%. This is counterbalanced by 4% reduction in those aged 46-55 years and a 5% reduction in those over 56.

The results on **gender identity** closely match the findings from 2020.

However, the **number of participants selecting non-binary or trans has nearly doubled..** These statistics cannot be compared to the sample data as the OU does only track cisgender.

Q34 - Please select your age range. Q35 - Please select your gender identity

Region of study

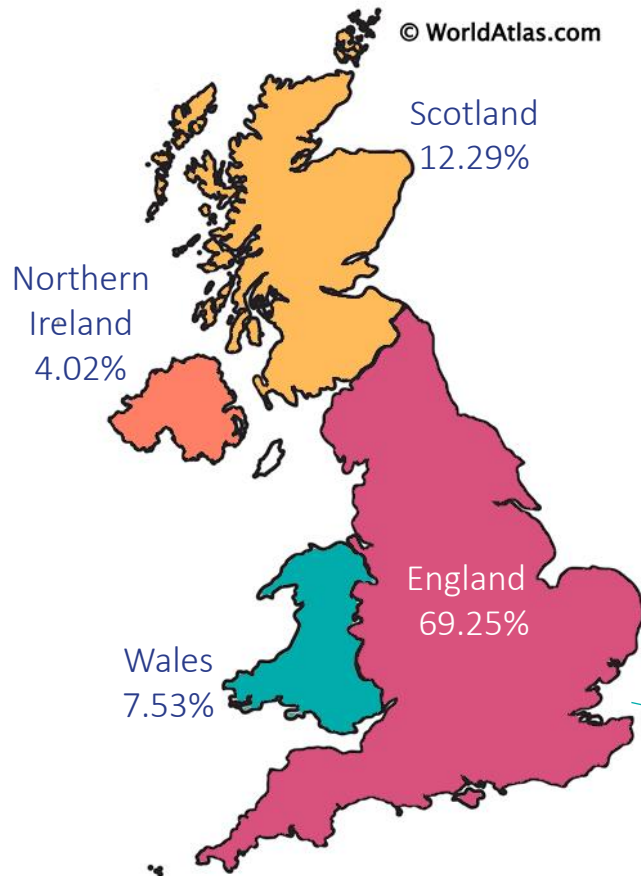
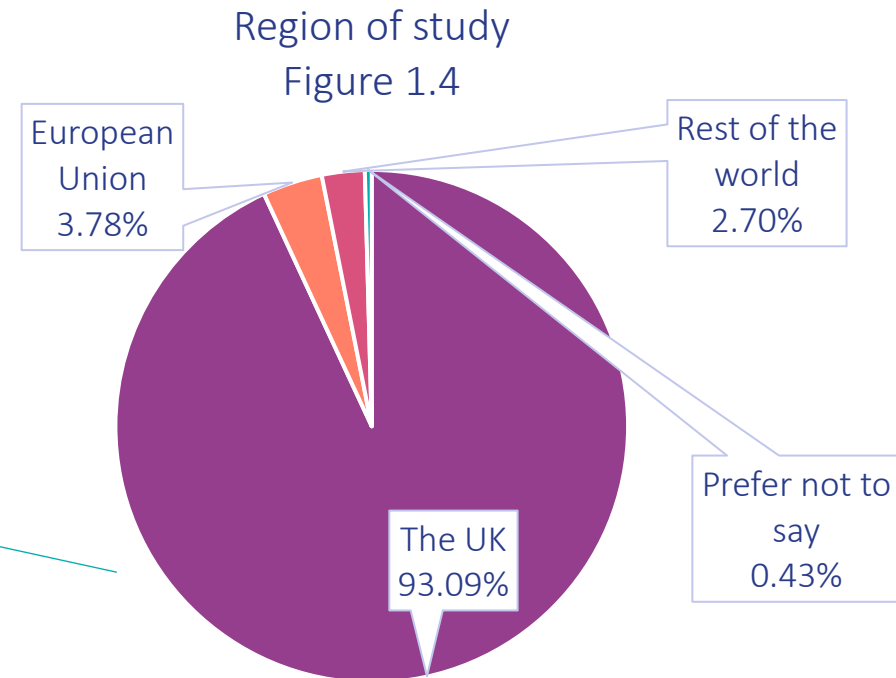


Figure 1.3

The region of study is comparable with the 2020 findings. We have seen a **slight increase (around 1%) in students from Northern Ireland** responding.

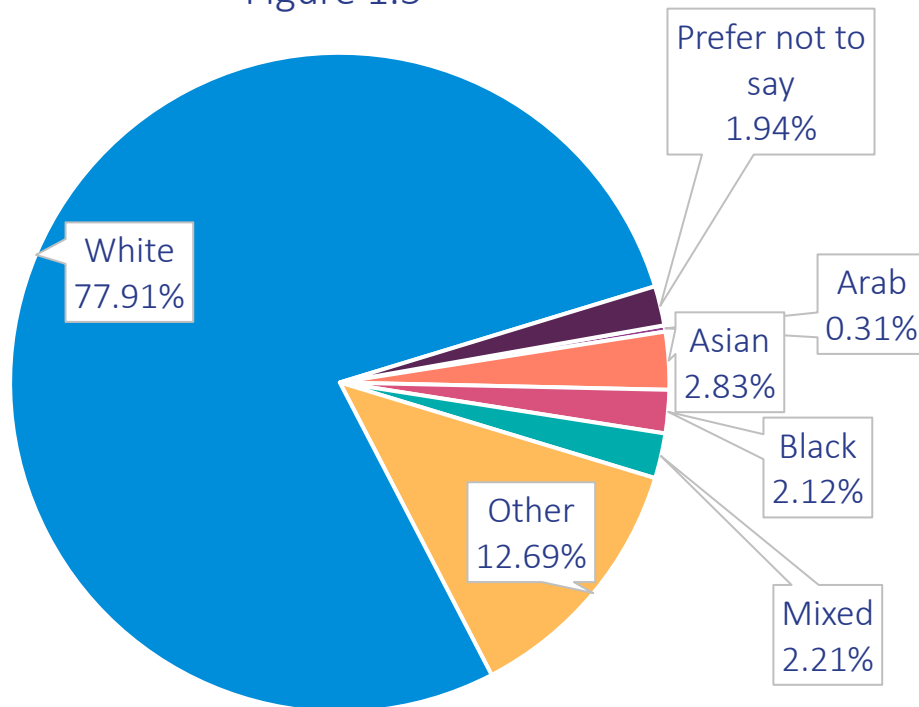
Conversely, there has been a **decrease of 1% in students from Scotland and Wales** completing the survey.



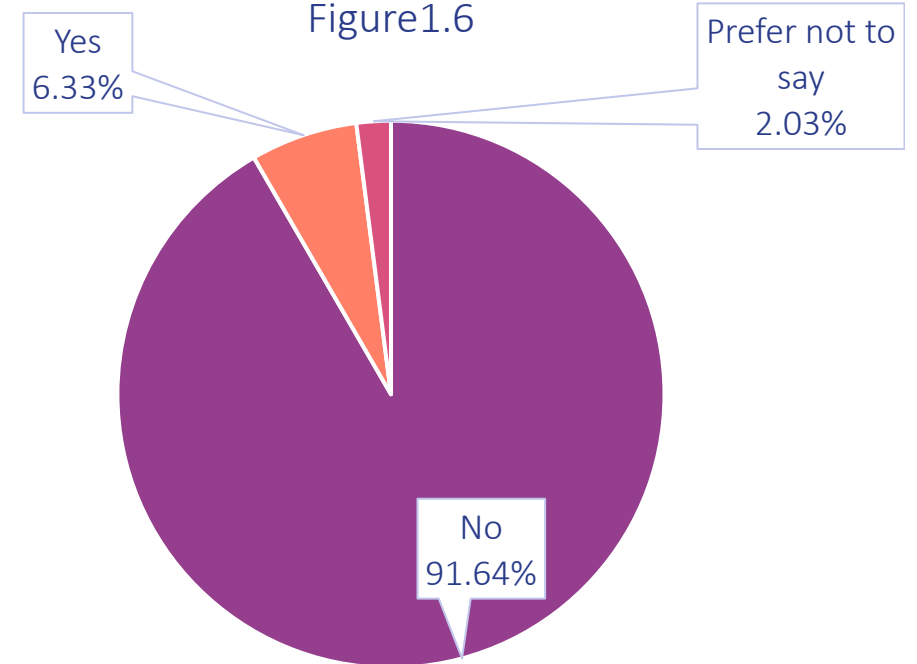
Ethnicity and care experienced

The ethnicity results for 2021 are largely comparable to the findings in 2020. Against the sample data in 2020, we saw underrepresentation of students selecting BAME ethnicities. Although there is **still an underrepresentation, the gap has closed slightly with an increase of around 1%** in participants selecting Arab, Asian, Black or Mixed.

Ethnicity
Figure 1.5



Care Experienced
Figure 1.6



A new question for 2021, we asked participants 'Do you consider yourself to be Care-Experienced?'. According to data from the Open University, around 5.5% of the student population in 2020/21 were care leavers. Our results show that we had **a high level of engagement in our survey from care leavers.**

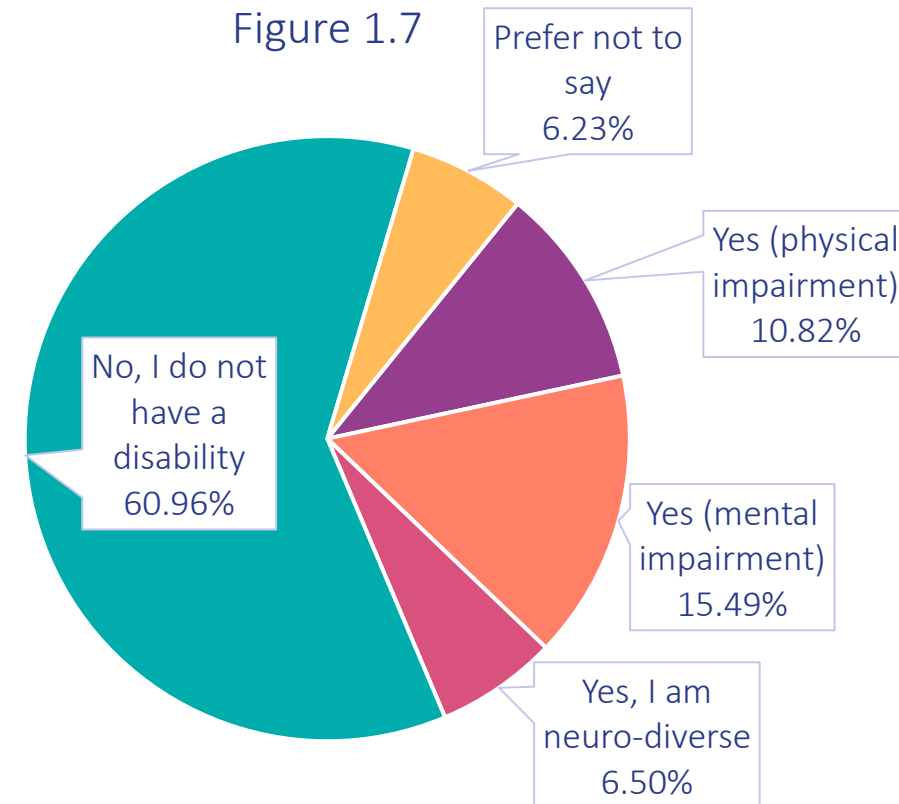
Disability

At the Association's EDI conference in May 2021, the OU's Mychelle Pride talked about how Covid-19 has intensified mental health issues whilst studying. We made the **decision to expand our disability question** to include the following responses; physical impairment, mental impairment and neuro-diverse. This **helps us to determine the level of support that students require and how to tailor our communications and resources.**

The 2021 findings has seen the 'prefer not to say' option being reduced by nearly two thirds to 6% and **an increase of over 10% of students advising that they have some form of disability.**

When comparing our results against the sample from the OU, where only 13.98% of students had declared a disability, it is important to note that **the OU does not split out the different disability types as we did in the survey.** There may also been some disparity due to students only feeling they need to record this information if it affects their studies or any grants the student may be entitled to as part of a disability.

Disability
Figure 1.7

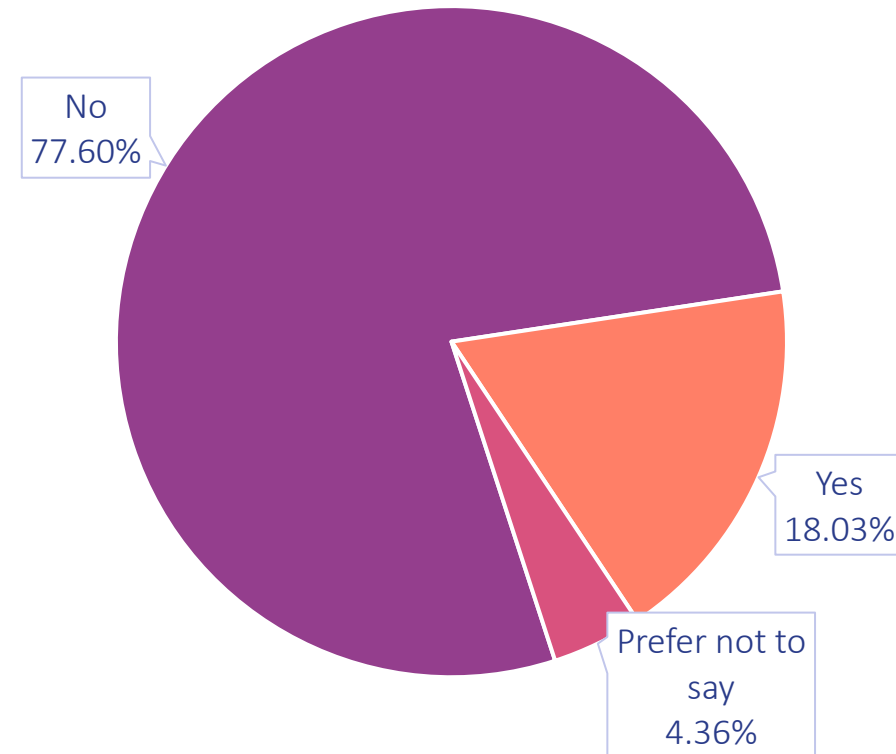


Do you identify as LGBT+

The 2021 findings show a large shift in numbers; the number of students selecting 'prefer not to say' has reduced from 16.90% in 2020 to 4.26% in 2021. This has been counterbalanced with another large shift in students who selected 'yes' to this question, from 13.49% in 2020 to 18.03% in 2021.

The OU does not hold comparable data, however we have seen an increase of 37.5% in our membership to the LGBT+ network, OU Pride, in December 2020 to December 2021. These figures show that we have a good level of representation within the LGBT+ community.

LGBT+
Figure 1.8



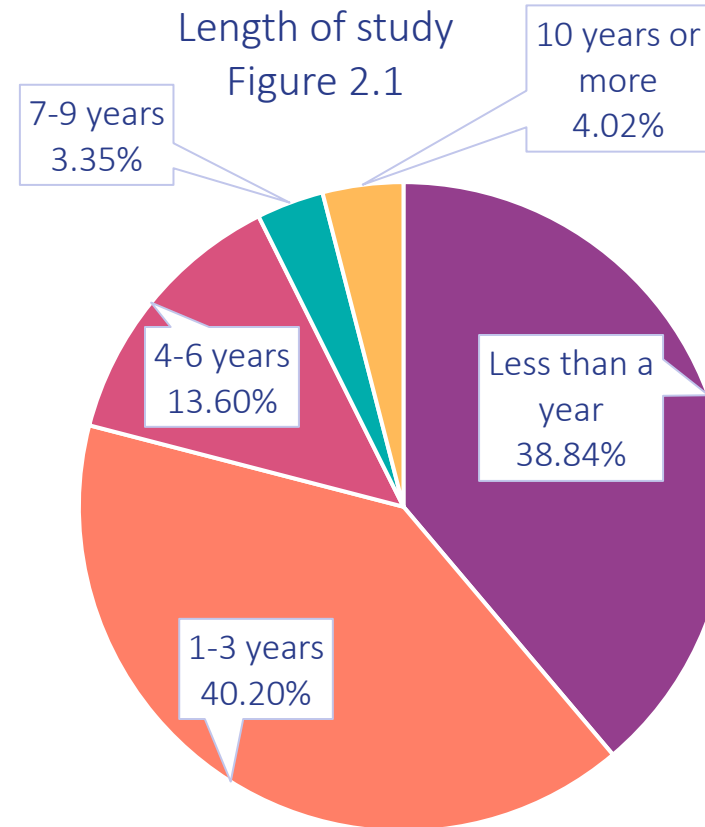
About your studies



How long have you studied with the OU?

The 2021 findings sees the study length profile shift to newer students. The number of students completing the survey who have **studying less than a year has increased by around 2.5 times** from 14.03% in 2020 to 38.84% in 2021.

Similarly, the total number of participants who have been **studying 7 years and over has decreased by 6.08%** in 2021.



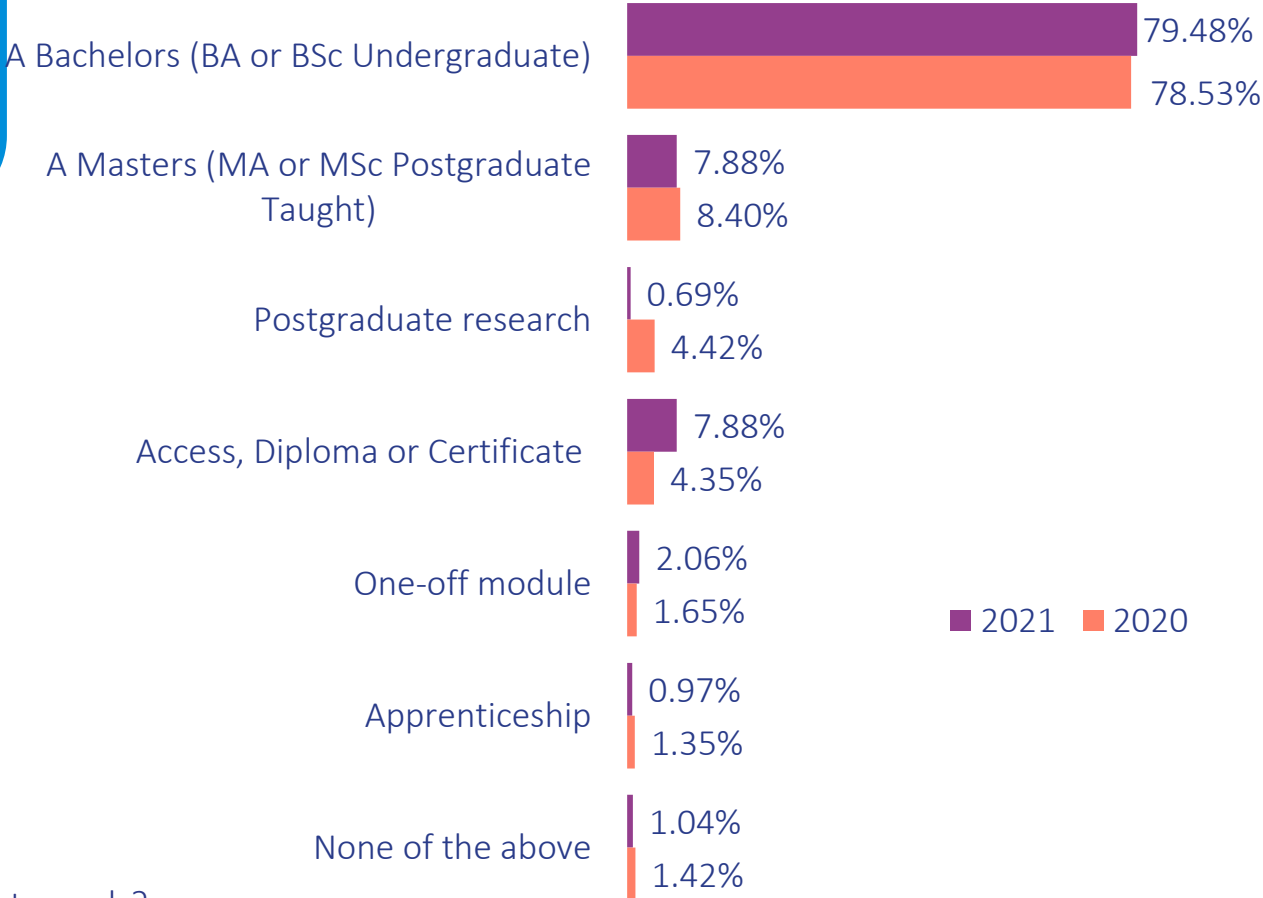
Level of study and faculty



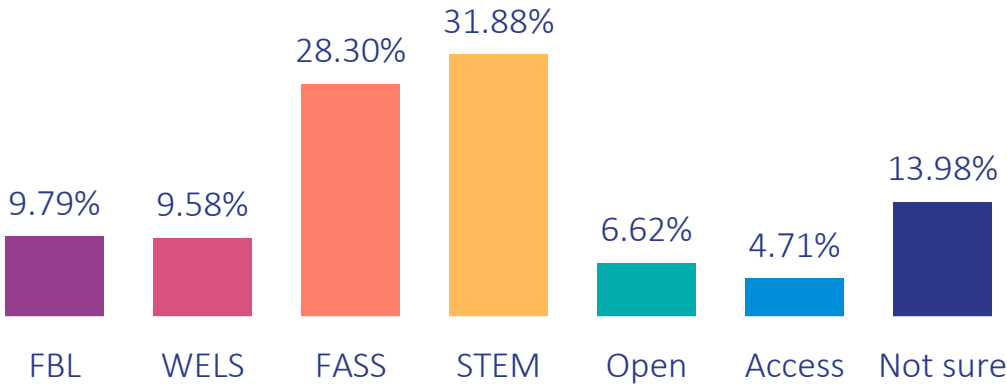
On the whole, the survey data matches the sample data, with the exception of WELS which is under represented. This anomaly was seen in the pilot survey and may be attributed to the cross over between WELS and Access modules.

There has been a large reduction in the amount of students studying at Postgraduate research level. This is likely to be as a result of the global pandemic.

Level of study
2021 vs 2020
Figure 2.2



Faculty
Figure 2.3



Q4 – What faculty are you currently studying with? Q3 – What are you studying towards?

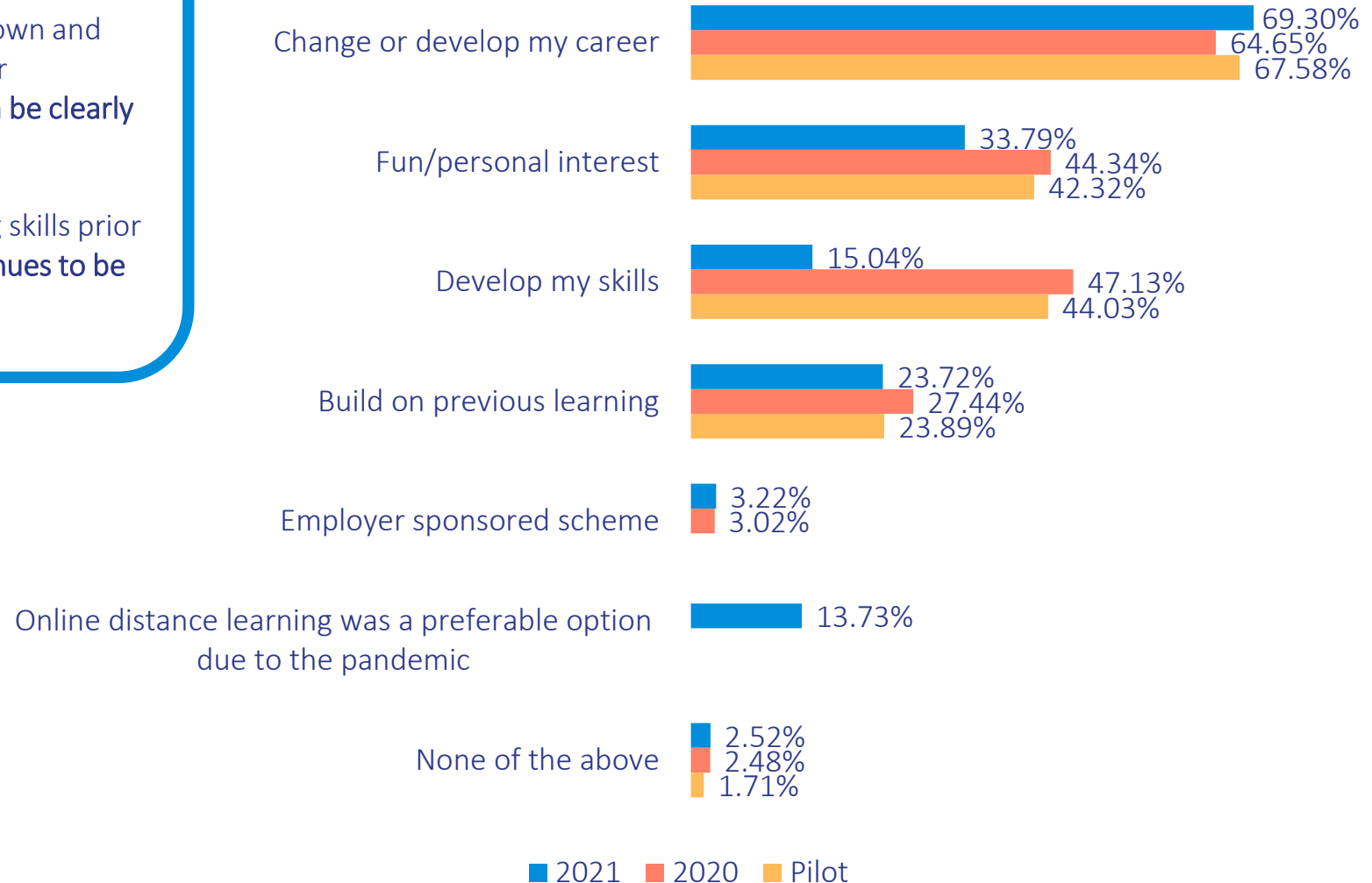
Motivation to study with the OU



Study motivation
Figure 2.4

The pilot survey took place just prior to the first UK lockdown and the 2020 survey took place as the UK headed into another countrywide lockdown, and the **change in motivations can be clearly seen.**

Students were more likely to study for fun and developing skills prior to the 2021 survey. **Changing and developing career continues to be the most popular motivation.**



Q5 – What motivated you to study with the OU?

Time demands outside of your studies

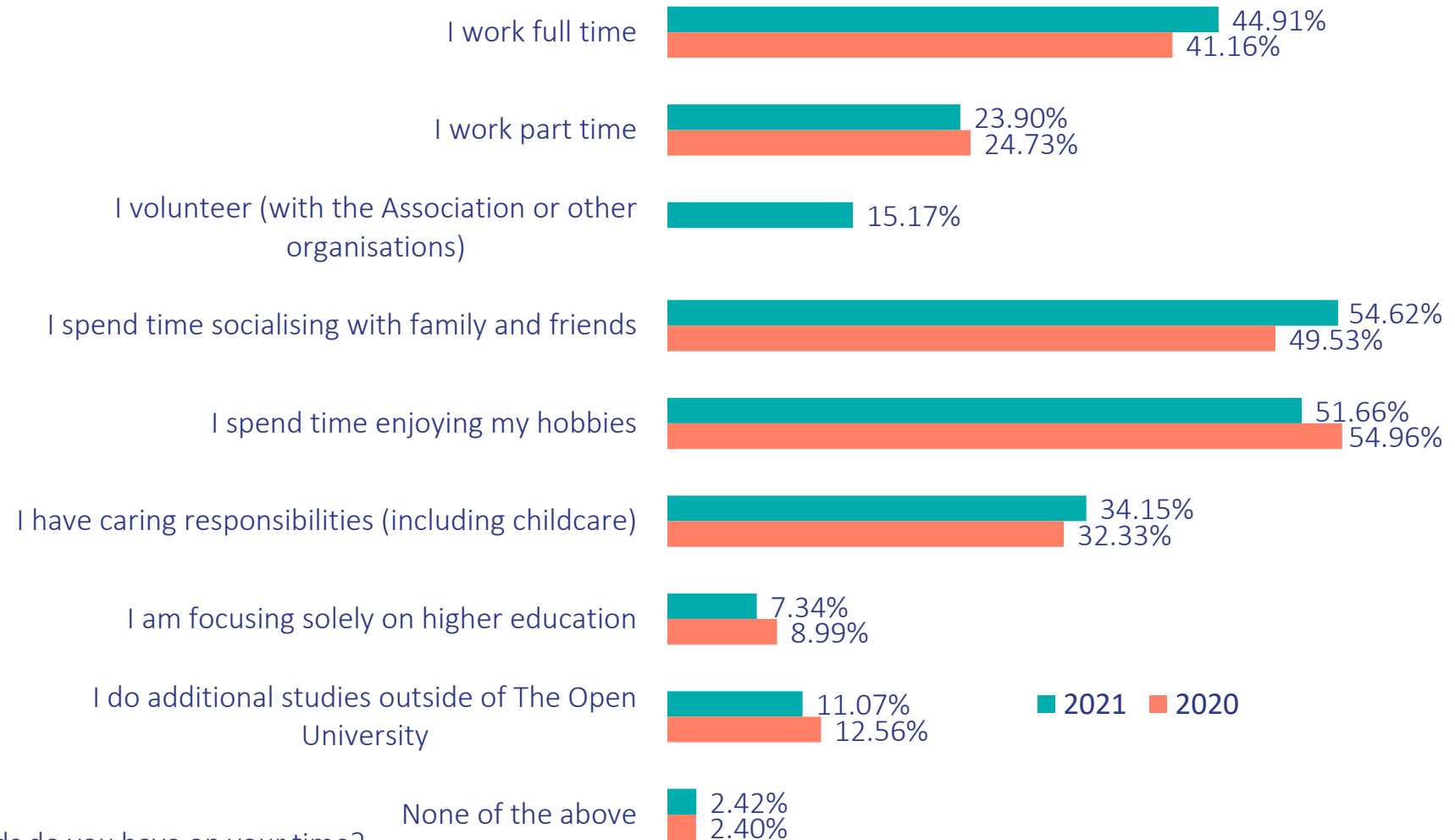


As with the study motivations, a **shift between the 2020 and 2021 time demands can be seen.**

One of the most interesting changes here is the **reduction in students selecting hobbies** as a demand outside of their study from 2020 to 2021. The **flipside of this trend can be seen in socialising with family and friends.** Both of these options could be attributed to the global pandemic.

The **increase in full time working of 3%** may have a knock on effect on students having available time to take up volunteering opportunities within the Association.

Demands on time
Figure 2.5



Q5 – Outside of your studies, what other demands do you have on your time?

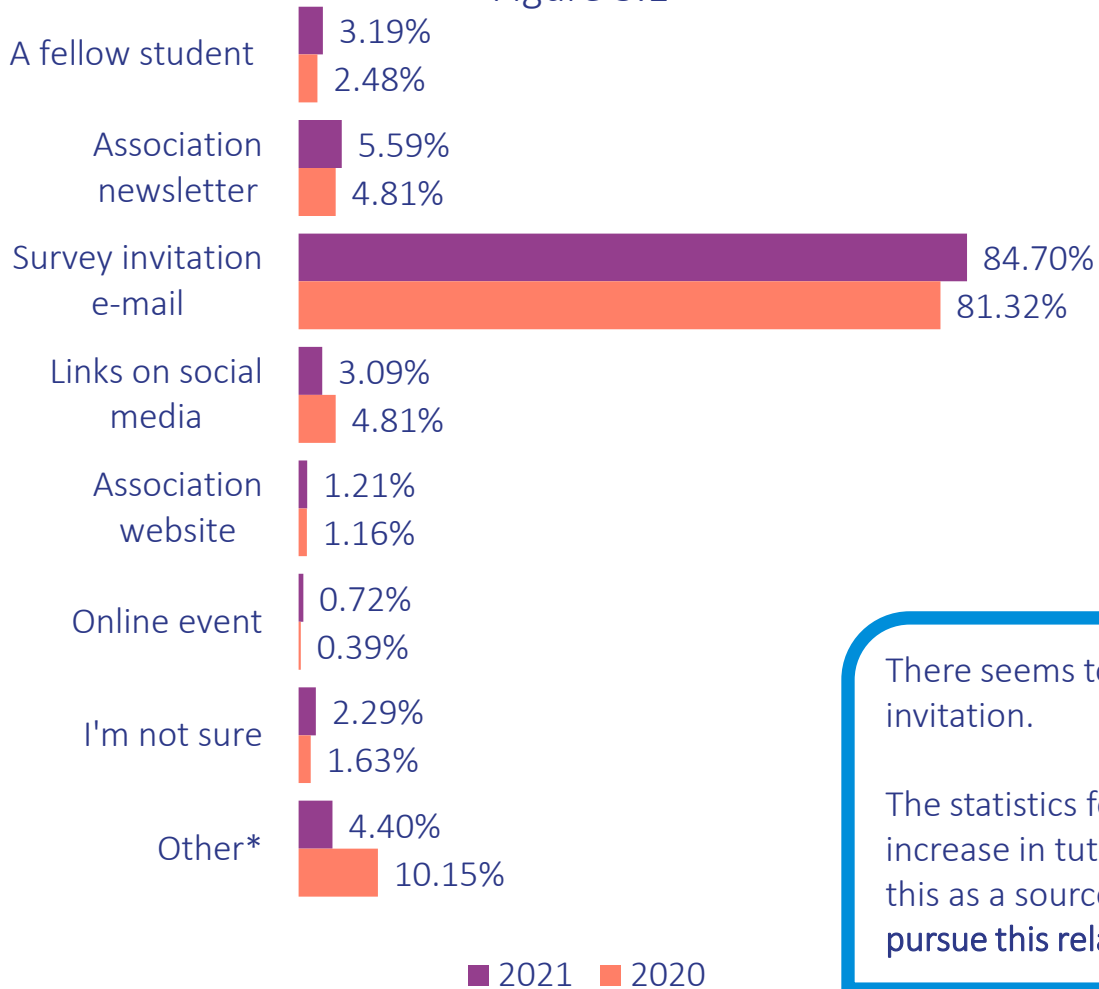
Awareness and Engagement



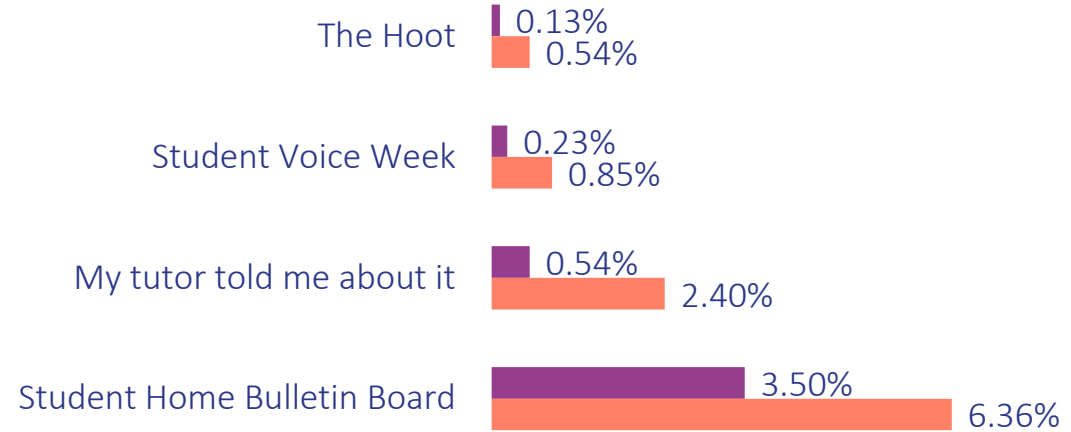
How did you hear about the survey?



Survey marketing
Figure 3.1



*Other
Figure 3.2



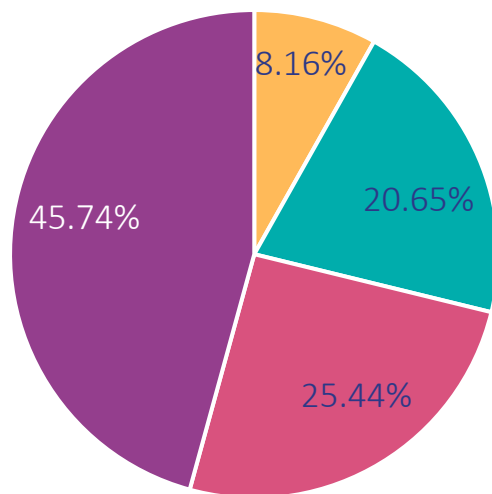
There seems to be an **overall reduction in many of the options** here, with the exception of e-mail invitation.

The statistics for the OU and Association's own communications channels is disappointing. We saw an increase in tutor engagement prior to the release of the 2021 survey but a reduction in students citing this as a source of information. **Tutor's are a valuable asset and it would be beneficial to continue to pursue this relationship.**

Awareness of the Association

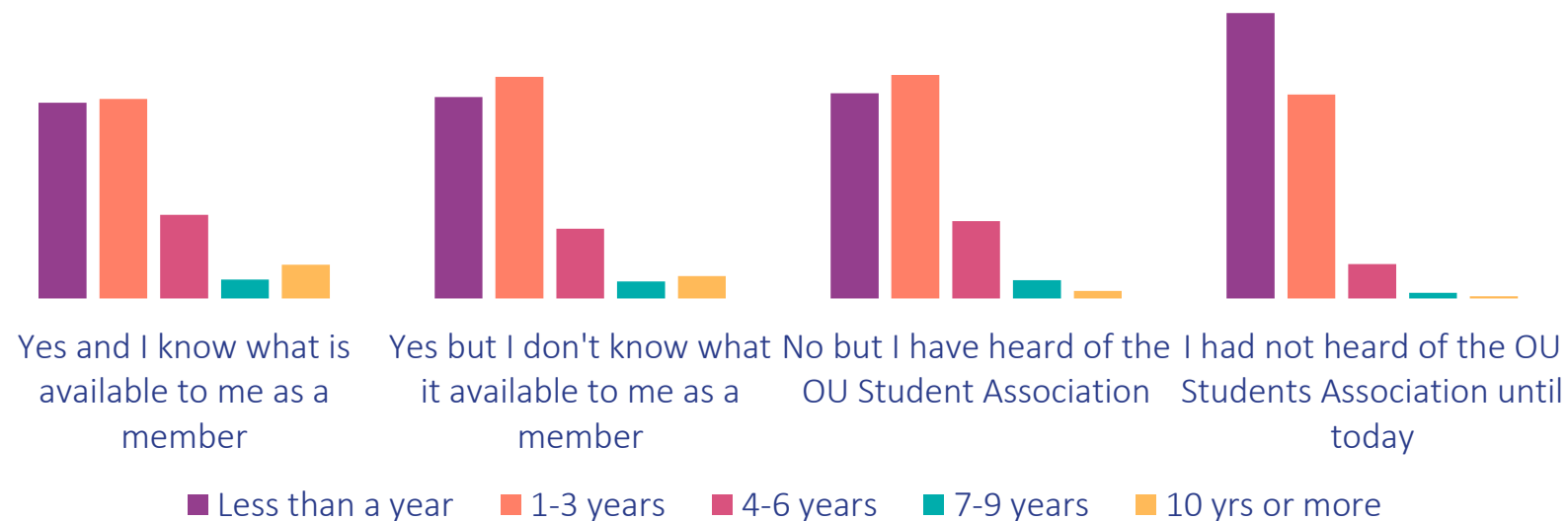


Association Awareness
Figure 3.3



- I had not heard of the OU Students Association until today
- No but I have heard of the OU Student Association
- Yes and I know what is available to me as a member
- Yes but I don't know what it available to me as a member

Figure 3.4



Broadly the same as the 2020 figures but with an **increase of just over 3% in students selecting 'I has not heard about the OU Students Association until today'**.

Figure 3.4 shows how long a student has studied with the OU versus their awareness. This show **us that the newer students (those studying 3 years or less) have better awareness.** This could be attributed to our increased presence at Freshers in the last few year.

Q8 Did you know that you automatically became a member of the OU Students Association when you registered to study with the OU?

How did you hear about the Association?



The most popular way to find out about the Association is via an e-mail from the Open University. This tracks with previous surveys. However there is often **confusion from students about the different between the Open University and the Students Association.**

Included in the despatch of the September 2021 course materials was an Association welcome leaflet. Only 12% of students selected this as an option, however **given the high proportion of students who had little to no awareness, this is a positive start.**

Figure 3.5

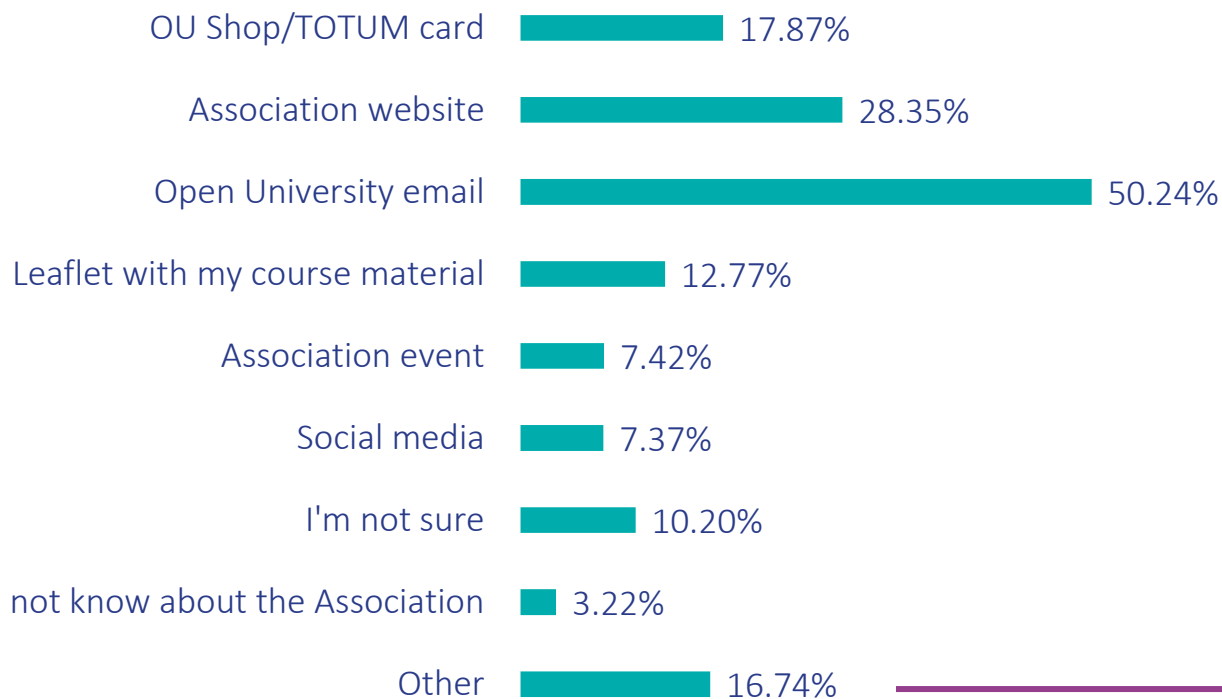
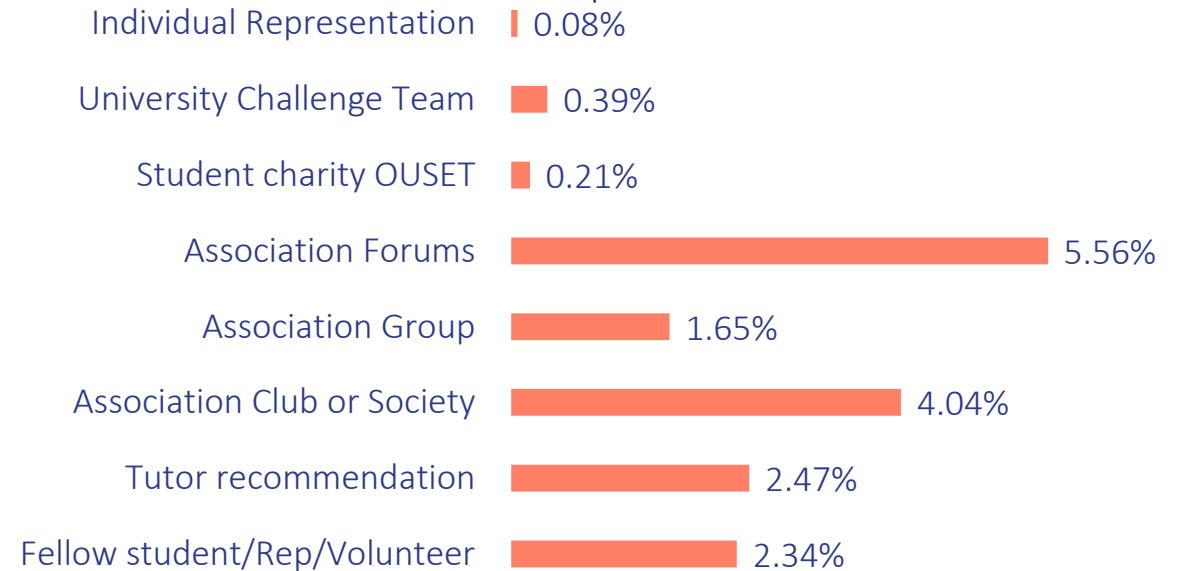


Figure 3.6

List of other options selected



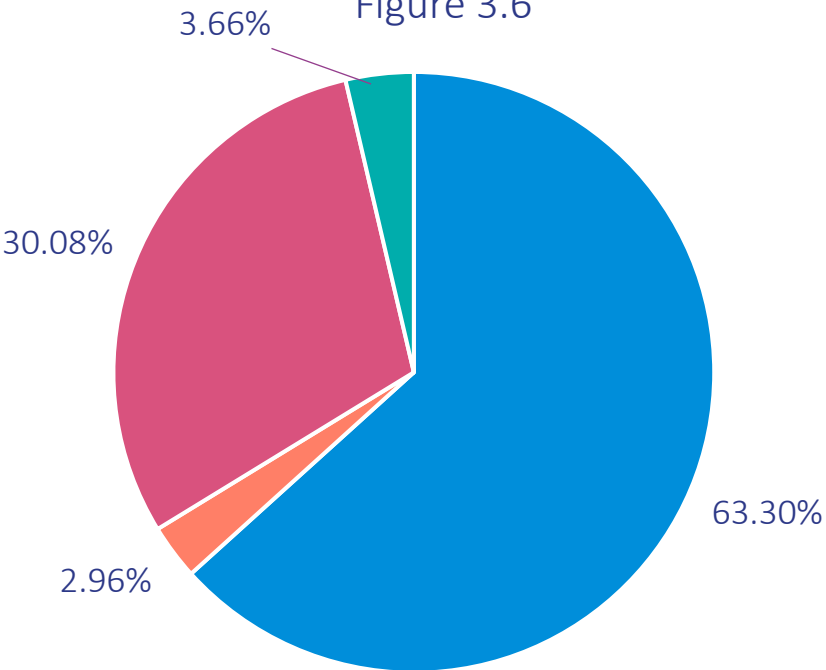
Q9 – If you were aware of the Association before today, please let us know how you found out about us?

Awareness of the Central Executive Committee and Board of Trustees



CEC awareness

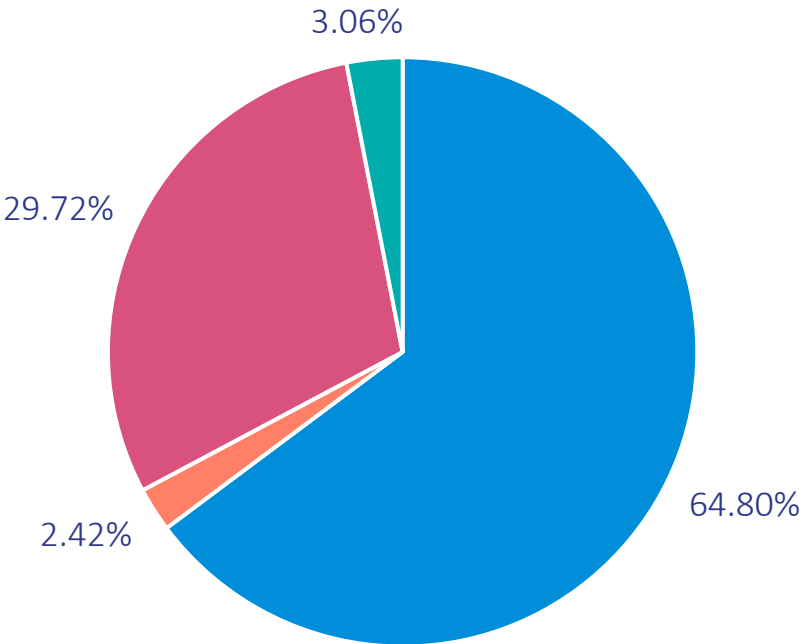
Figure 3.6



- I don't know about this
- I know of some members of the group, but not sure of their roles
- I know they exist but not what they do
- I know who they are and what they do

BoT awareness

Figure 3.7



This question has been modified for 2021 to split out awareness of CEC and BoT. Nearly two thirds of responders are unaware of the existence of the CEC and BoT, indicating that we have more to do to raise awareness and visibility of these teams. Almost another third are aware of them but not what they do indicating that we need to do more to promote their work and responsibilities.

Q19 – The Students Association is led by an elected student leadership team, CEC and BoT. Please tell us your awareness level?

Association awareness

Survey participants responded favourably to question 10 'What do you think we do?'. Many participants who were unsure of the Association's role were still able to provide a relevant responses, with the survey itself acting as a further marketing tool to promote the Association.

33.34% of comments were related to support services offered by the Association

'after visiting the Student Association website I was amazed to find out about the support that you can provide to students who are distance learning. I thought this was only available to on-site students'

'support for students struggling with their mental health, or have issues with the university itself.'

'help and support with queries about funding, learning support, ou website, fun activities, peer support'

'It is a one stop shop for support, signposting and accessing services that can assist with studies and to help us continue our studies'

25.08% of comments were about how the Association works to build a community

'A chance to mingle with other students via clubs on offer'

'Provide clubs/forums for particular student interests ie LGBTQ and disabled students'

'plenty of social activities to make the OU Family a community.'

'social activities for students to get the most out of their learning'

'provides a way of students connecting within a University that can feel quite isolated due to the nature of how it is run online'

17.12% of comments were about Association events (including meet-ups)

'Opportunity to talk to other students at events, elections and a voice on how things are being done'

'events such as Freshers Week; webinars such as StudentHubLive'

'Guidance to new students (freshers) through association events, along with events that help introduce students to like minded students.'

'There are various events for students (meet-ups, chat sessions, annual conferences'

'Virtual gatherings for students to meet'

8.33% of comments were about representing student interests
'Collect signatures to demand better conditions for students.'

'allow [students] to have and utilise their own voice for change or to be a part of something bigger '

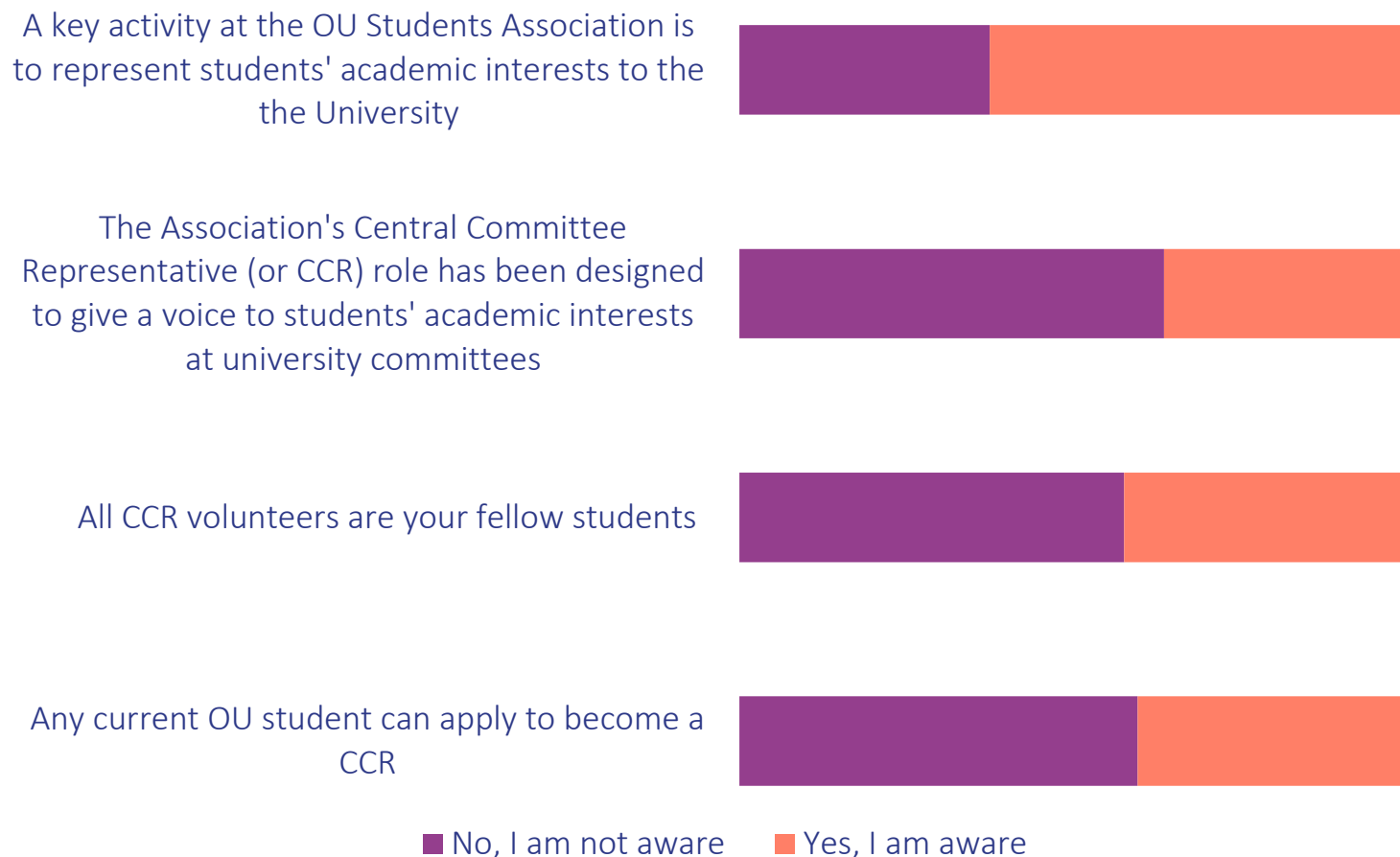
'An excellent voice/representation on how courses/materials are delivered'

'representation in discussions for improvements to any aspect of the university along with the board, represent individuals that may need it'

'represents students on different committees throughout the university to ensure that students needs are met'

Awareness of Student Voice activities

Figure 3.8



A new question for 2021 'Taking your student voice to the OU is part of what we do at the Students Association as we support you through your student journey'.

There is **high awareness of the representation of academic interests** at the University.

The **roles of Central Committee Reps (CCRs) has much lower awareness** with an average of 39.85% of students having no awareness of their roles. This is based on the average of the last 3 statements.

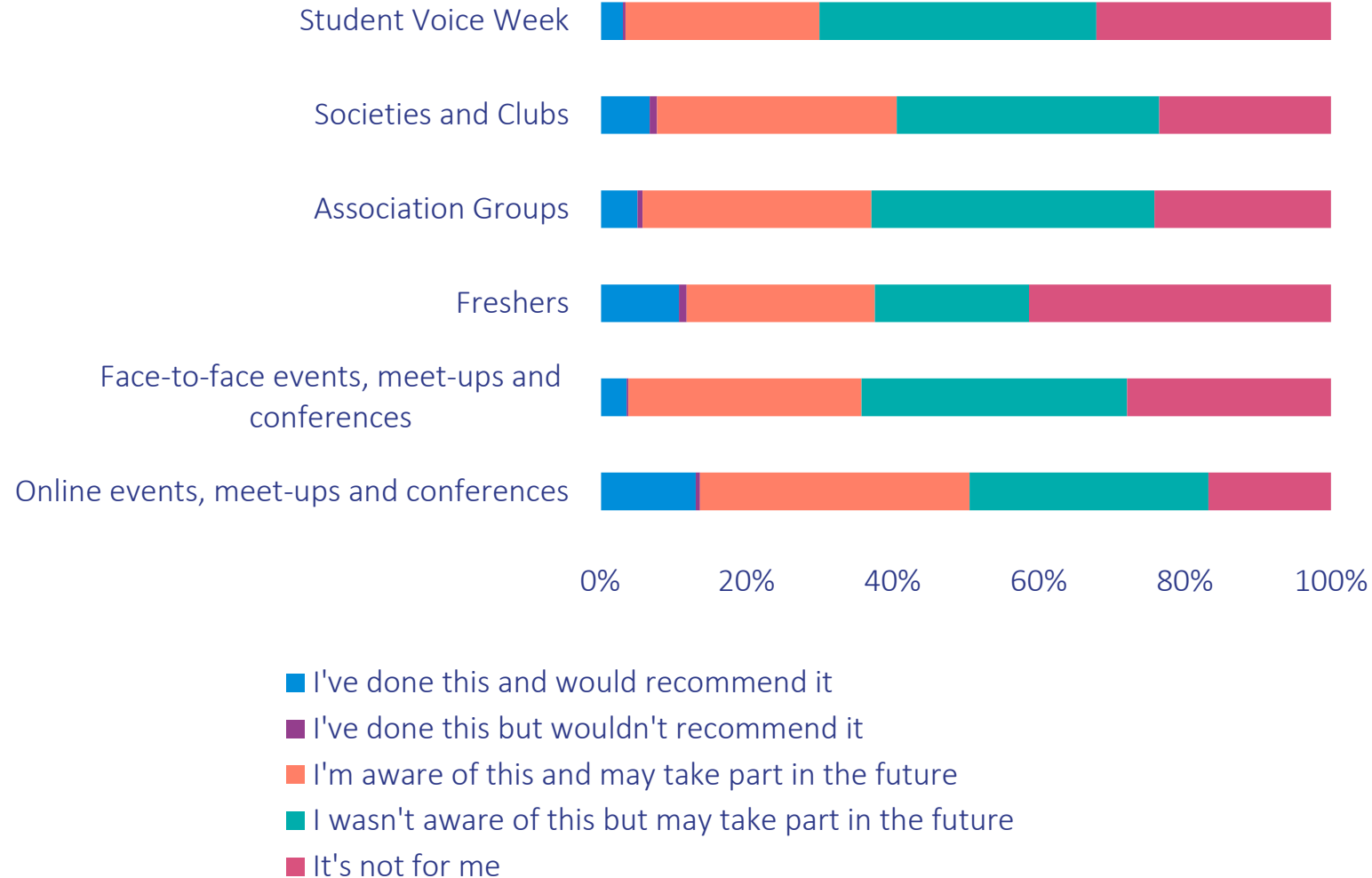
Q23 – Taking your student voice to the OU is part of what we do at the Students Association as we support you through you student journey. Please indicate your awareness if the following.

Services and activities



Activities

Association activities
Figure 4.1



The survey results show a reduction in the number of students who have taken part in Association activities when compared to the 2020 figures. It is worth noting here that these figures are dependent on the students completing this survey. For example, **our KPIs show that membership to Association clubs grew by 22% from September to December 2021.**

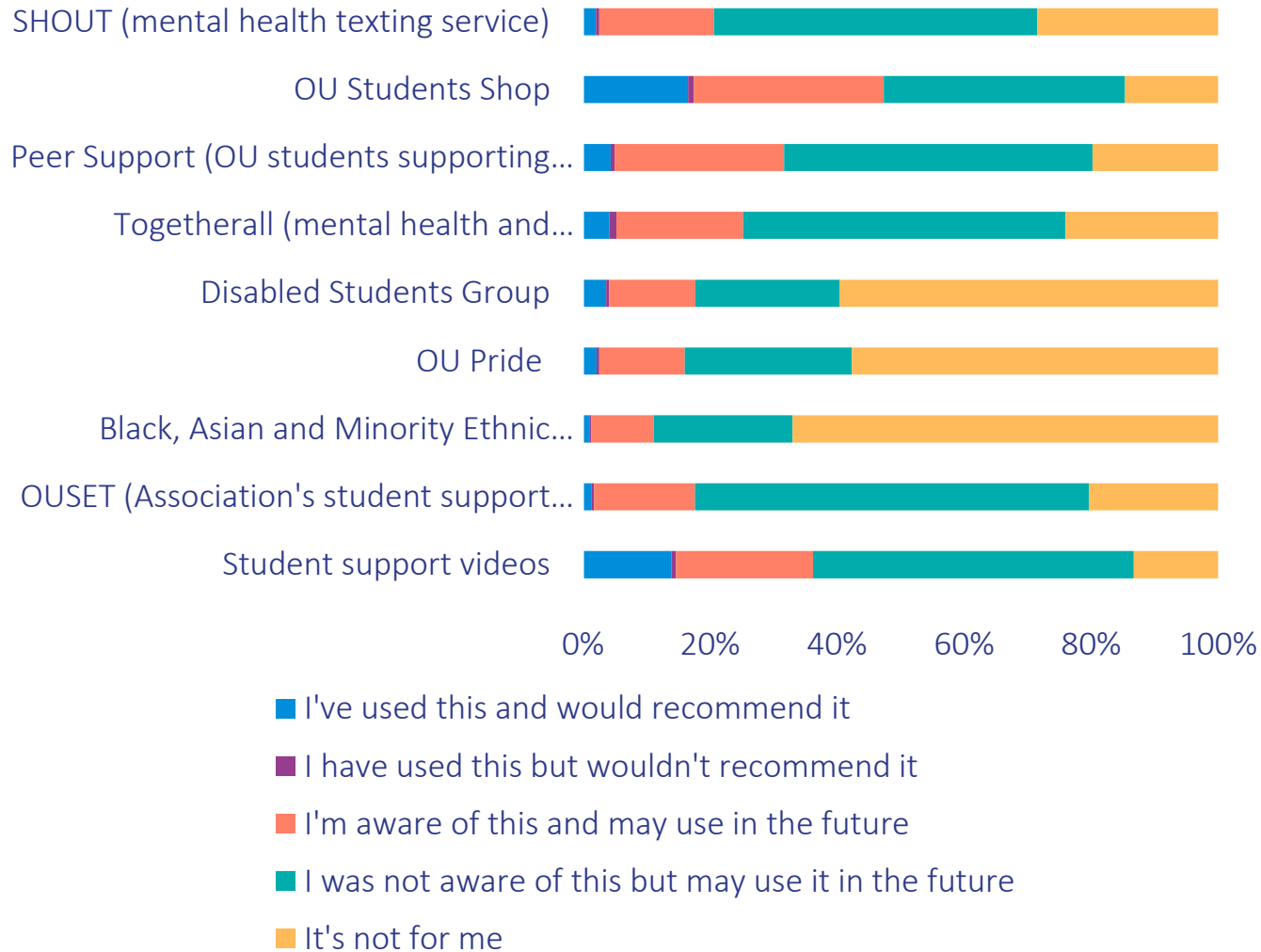
However, the median percentage of students who have undertaken Association activities and would recommend them, has **increased from 88% to 90.5%.**

Q14 – Here is a list of activities that the Association currently supports, what do you think of them?

Resources



Figure 4.2



At first look the figures can look a little disappointing, but there has been a **significant increase to the amount of students who would recommend the resources** to other students. In 2020, we had a median recommend rate of 71% and this has **increased to 93% in 2021**.

Our KPIs also show that engaging in resources is steadily increasing. For example, our OUPride, DSG and BAME groups have see a combined increase of 13% between September and December 2021.

Q15 – Here is a list of the services that the Association supports, what do you think about them?

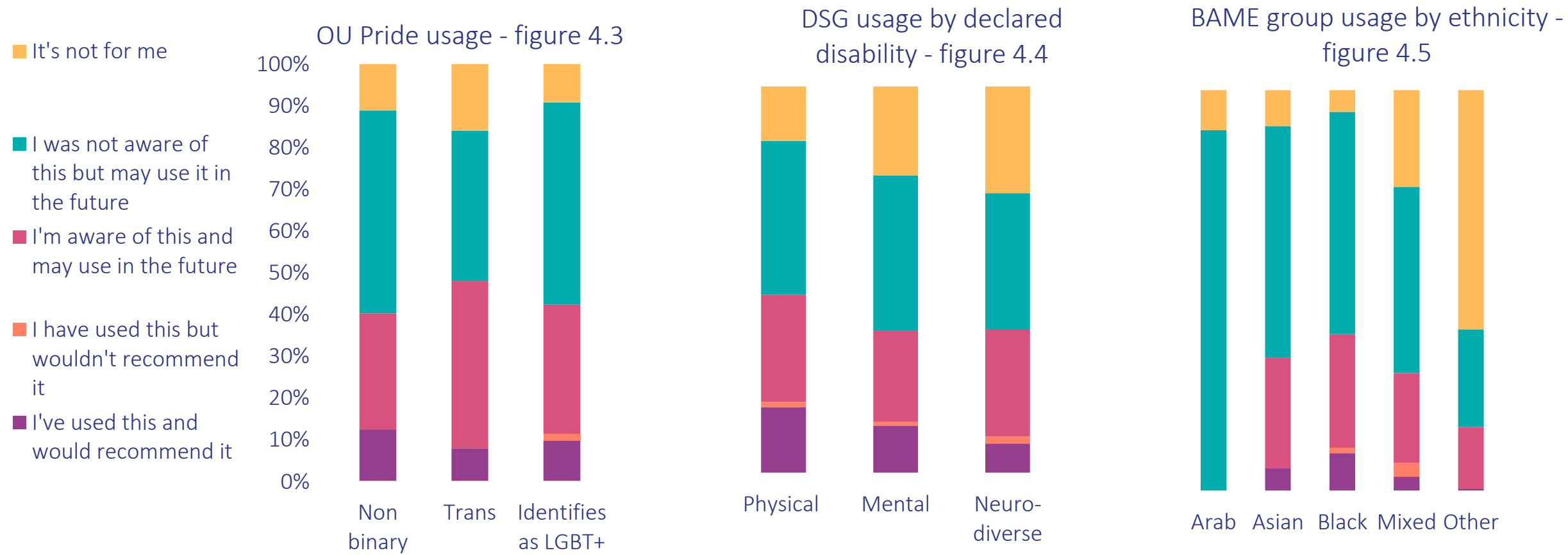
Awareness of resources by characteristic



BAME students - there has been a slight reduction in people who have used the service but the 'would recommend' still outweighs the 'would not recommend'. The number of mixed ethnicities has tripled in 'not for me'.

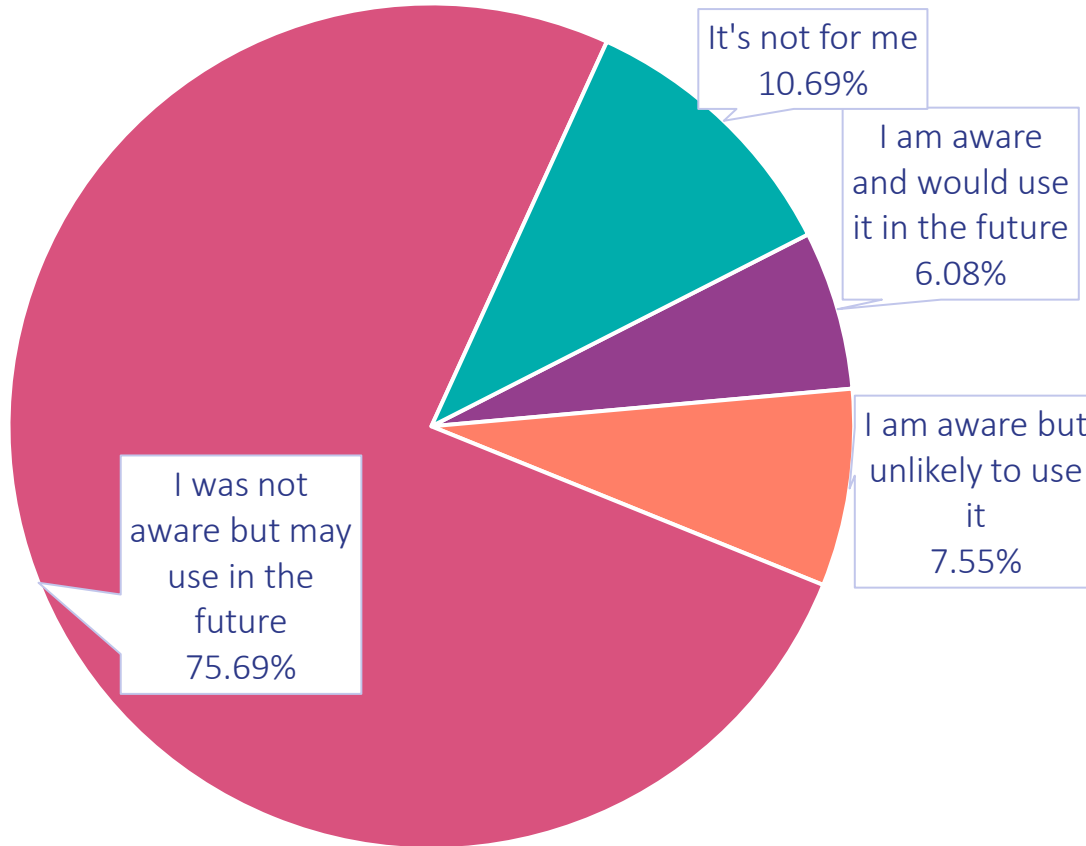
DSG - This year we added different categories of disability to select for this question. On average, the amount of students who 'have used and would recommend' has fallen by around 2%, however usage is still high. A high number of those selecting neuro-diverse and 'not for me', indicates students with a physical disability find the DSG more relevant.

OU Pride - On average, we have seen an increase in around 13% of students selecting am aware and may use in the future.



Individual Representation

Figure 4.6

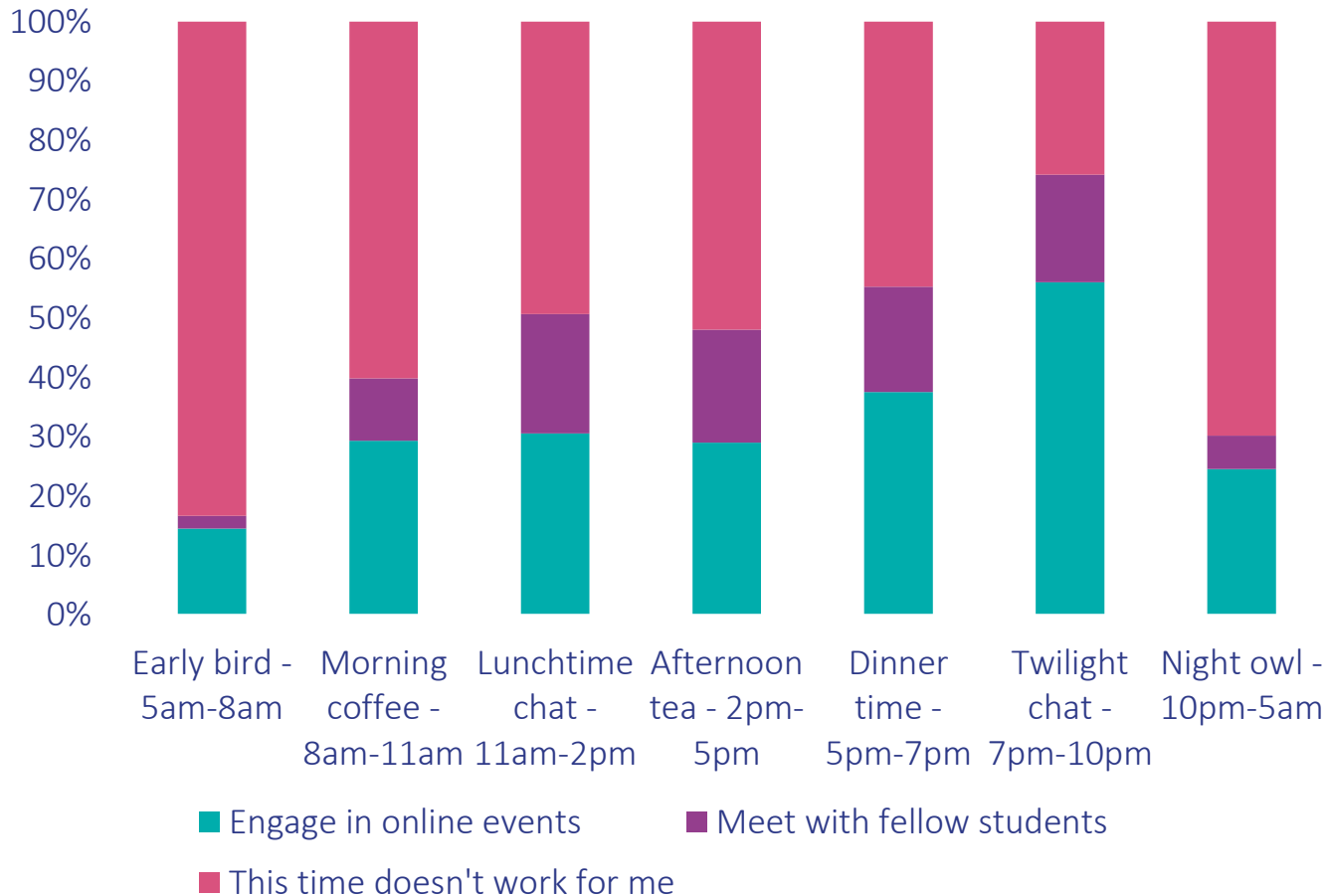


Over 80% of students would consider using Individual Representation in the future, with only 13.63% of students having awareness of the service prior to the survey.

A separate survey is due to launch to capture feedback from students who have already accessed the service.

Best time to engage with the student community

Figure 4.7



This question was altered for 2021 to ask what kind of activity students would like to engage with at various times of day. The **most popular for engaging with online events was 7-10pm** which is when many of our events take place. This is also the option with the lowest 'this time doesn't work for me' response.

Meeting with fellow students was most popular during the lunchtime period 11-2.

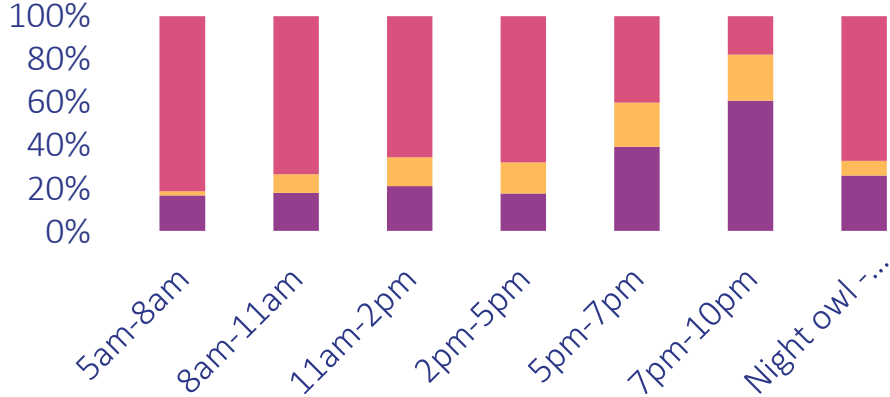
Early bird is the least popular with a high proportion of students selecting 'this doesn't work for me'.

A change for 2022 would be to ask which day of the week is best to engage.

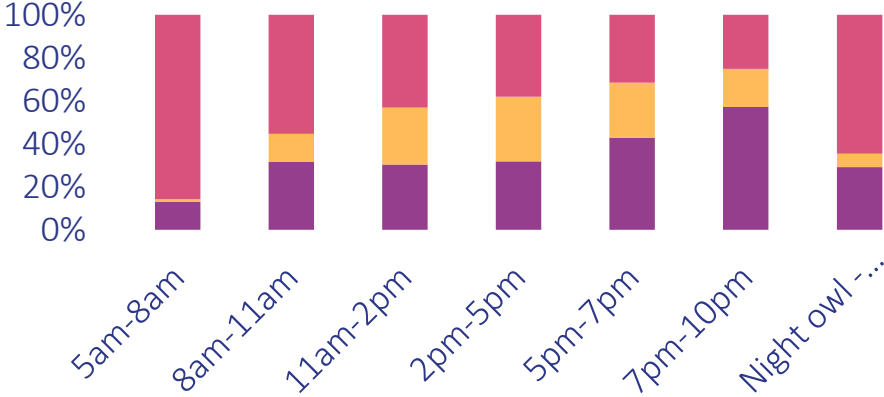
Best time to engage



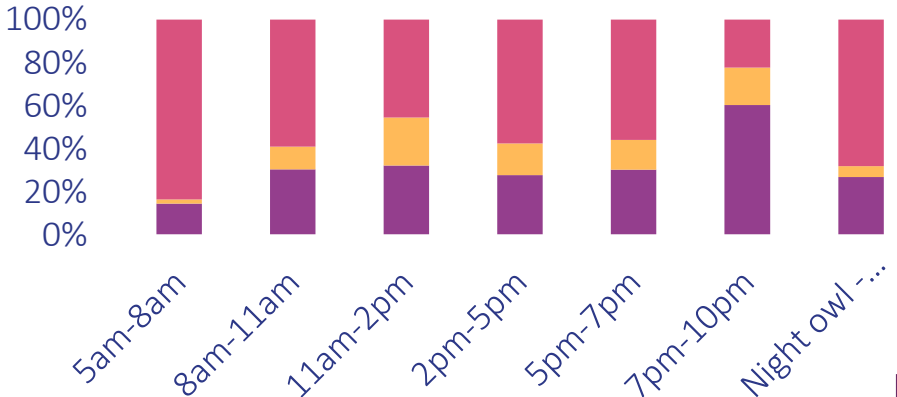
Full time workers
Figure 4.8



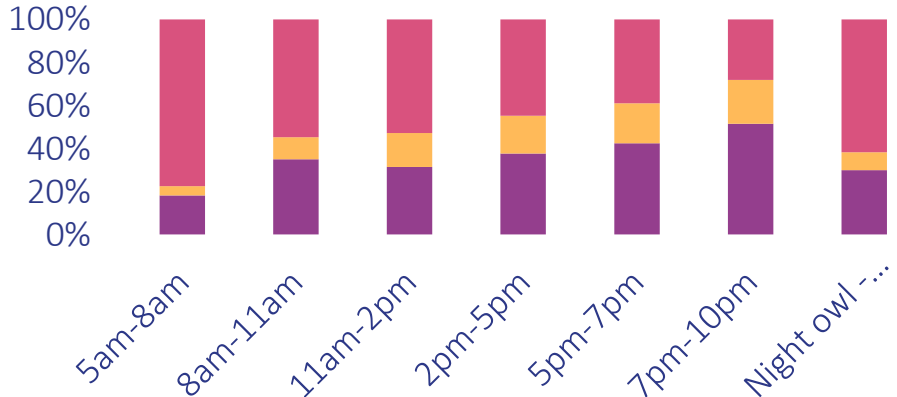
Under 25s
Figure 4.9



Caring responsibilities
Figure 4.10



Non- UK students
Figure 4.11



A closer look at some harder to engage groups shows that the **7pm-10pm** is still the best time to engage with our students in online events and with fellow students.

- This time doesn't work for me
- Meet with fellow students
- Engage in online events

Type of events

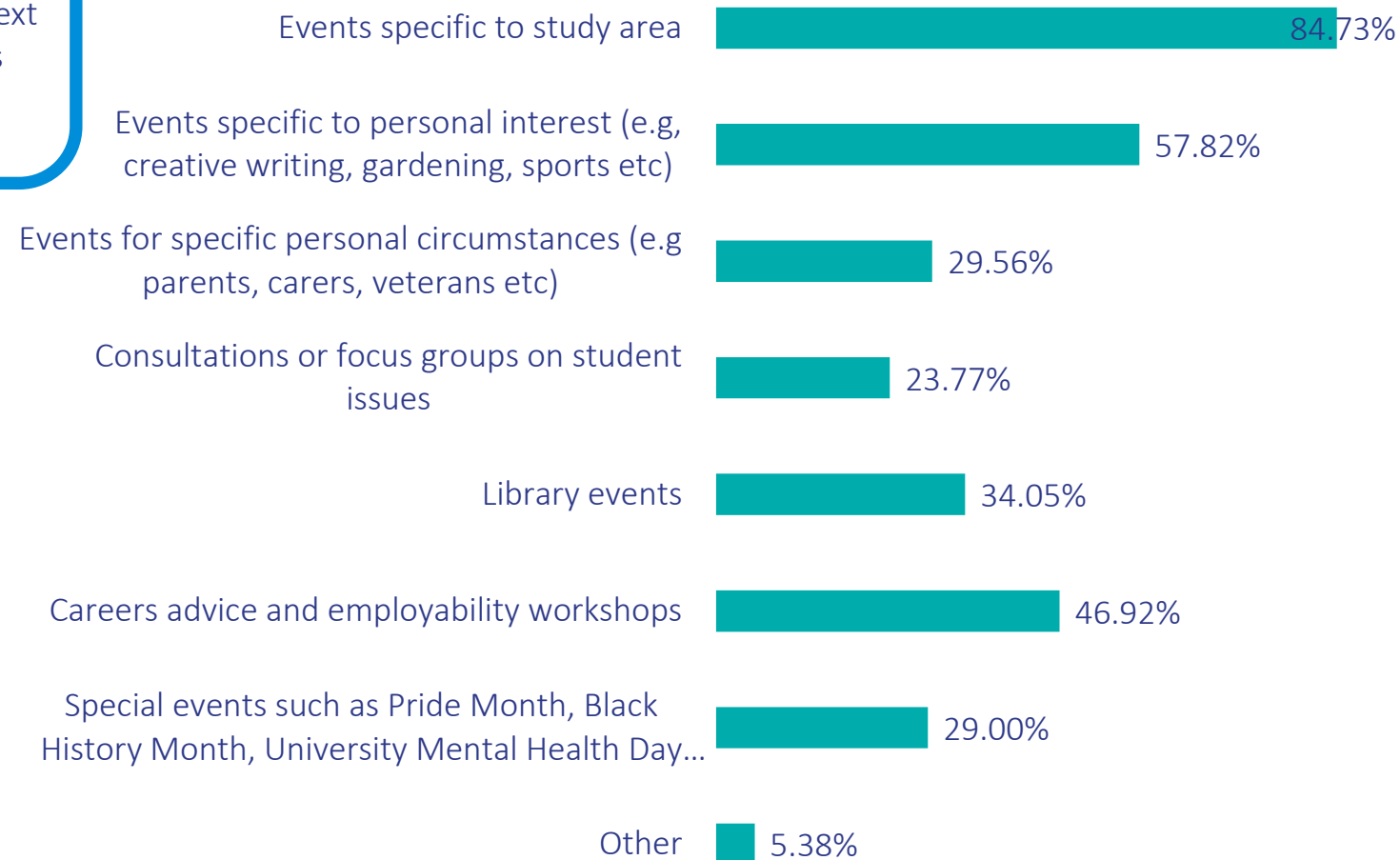
A new questions for 2021 asked students what type of students events they would like to attend. It is clear to see that **students would like to attend events related to their study area**. The free text comments suggest that students would be interested in lectures or seminars held by prominent figures in their study area.

Many **students welcome the return of face-to-face activity** from both the OU and the Association.

General **socialising between students was a running theme** in the 'other' free text box.

Another **popular event option was around fundraising** for charities and community action groups.

Types of events
Figure 4.12



Q18 – What sort of events do you want to attend?

Volunteering



Volunteering opportunities

Volunteering opportunities

Figure 5.1



There is not a great deal of change, however the trend is mainly in the popularity of these volunteering opportunities declining slightly. This may be due to the volunteering experience being different during Covid times.

In total we had 295 responses from students saying 'I do this/I have done this'. **At the time of the survey, we had 308 active volunteers.**

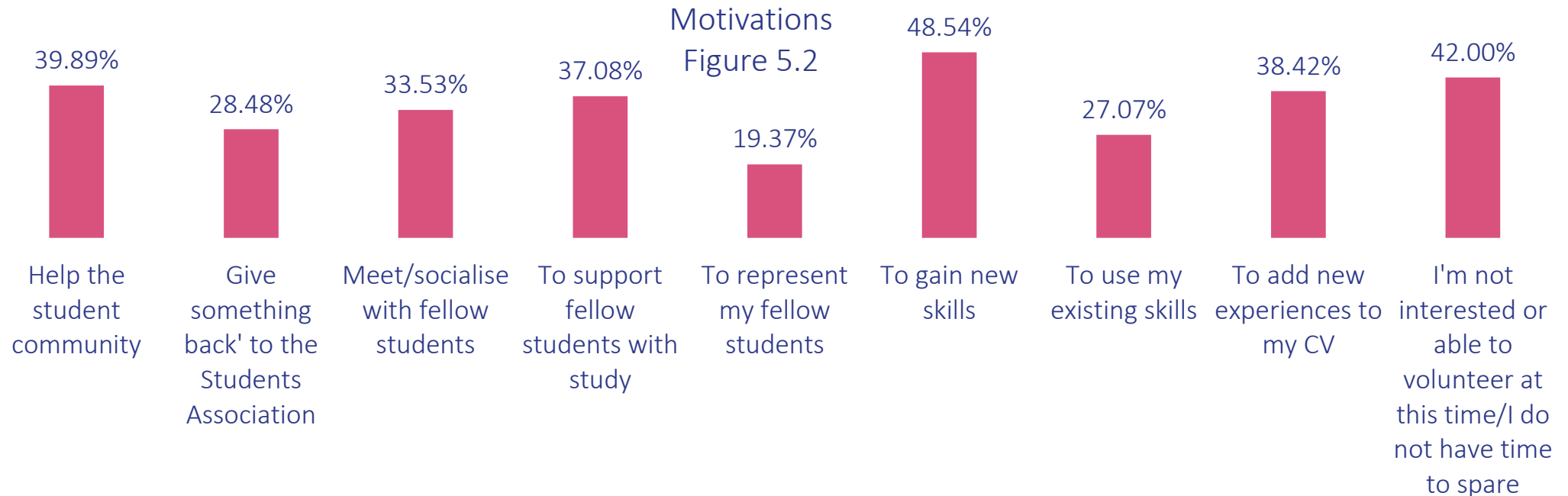
Motivation to volunteer



There has been a **slight decline across the motivations with the exception of representation** which has seen a 4% increase from 2020. This is a positive change and is echoed in the numbers of students who would consider standing in the elections.

Gaining new skills remains the highest motivation. Many of the free text comments were around the benefits of skills building that come with volunteering.

Mental health and social anxieties were mentioned as some of the top barriers to volunteering. However **many of the students felt that volunteering in a safe environment may help them** overcome some of these concerns. This highlights how we could use volunteers stories to demonstrate the mental health impact for getting involved.



Q26 – What has or might motivate you to volunteer with the Association?

Volunteering free text comment

The majority of free text comments expressed positivity about volunteering at the Association, however over 40% of comments were about time being a barrier. Some students are keen to volunteer on an informal or flexible basis, whilst others felt they would need support in terms of confidence and health barriers.

At the moment time is the biggest limitation to my ability to volunteer

Volunteering is vital for the continuation of services that might not otherwise be able to continue. At the moment, however, I do not have time.

I would love to volunteer in some capacity, not least to add to my own skills and CV

I work full time and don't have the time to commit to student volunteering

I work for a trade union and I am aware of the importance of 'having someone in your corner' to support you during the difficult times. It is also important to encourage students to be active in organisations that are there to represent them especially if those bodies are based on an organising agenda.

I enjoy volunteering with the Association. It is an opportunity to meet and interact with other students and be part of a community

face to face event volunteering sounds interesting. online volunteering also sounds interesting and may take less time

want to concentrate on my first module as I have been out of education for a long time.

Unfortunately I do not have the time at present to volunteer but political campaigning really appeals to me and if more information was shared on this via email I may be able to spare a day or two just not a year long commitment

I would struggle with some volunteering activities due to an array of disabilities and mental health troubles, but I like to help where I can. I'd like to think that I'm a competent writer and I would be quite happy assisting with running or moderating groups for shared hobbies and interests.

provide the confidence for students especially those like me that lack it i would love to volunteer but between my time and lack of confidence it is an issue.

I love the idea of socialising with fellow students and supporting their study, and I could do with gaining experiences to add to my CV

I have grown to be what I am because of others helping and guiding me along the way, i have seen people fail just because they lacked support and advice to push on when times are hard. Living and helping others is part of my daily life routines

Overseas students at the Association

A new question for 2021, we asked all students who selected Europe or Rest of the World to let us know how they would like to engage with the Association.

Out of the 211 students who selected an overseas location, 158 (74.89%) gave a response to this question. **Many students were keen to support other students who are based outside the UK.** The most popular ways to get involved were around small tasks, similar to the role of Microvolunteers.

Doing online events that are fun, and marketing it in a way that catches young peoples eyes.

I would be interested in getting involved in online content such as videos, social media posts, or virtual events.

Help improve online live classes, make international students more aware and more connected to their tutors and maybe even to each other

I would like to do anything I can - hosting an online event or getting involved in the newsletter/magazine would be perfect for me.

probably contribute to issues that affect international students or even be a students representative

Difficult for me to imagine, though probably in the context of overseas students who may feel less part of the community than those in the UK.

Elections

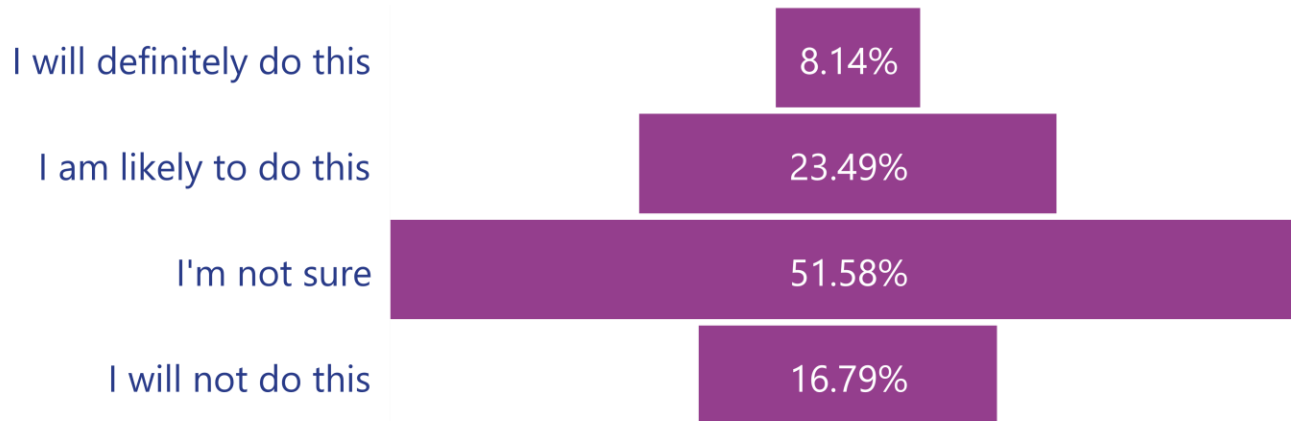


Voting in the elections

There has been a decrease in the number of students who would vote in the 2022 election which is disappointing, however we have seen a shift away from students selecting 'I will not do this' with an increase to the 'I'm not sure'. Work needs to be done to improve student awareness about elections as many of the free text comments suggested they did not understand the relevance of elections in relation to their studies.

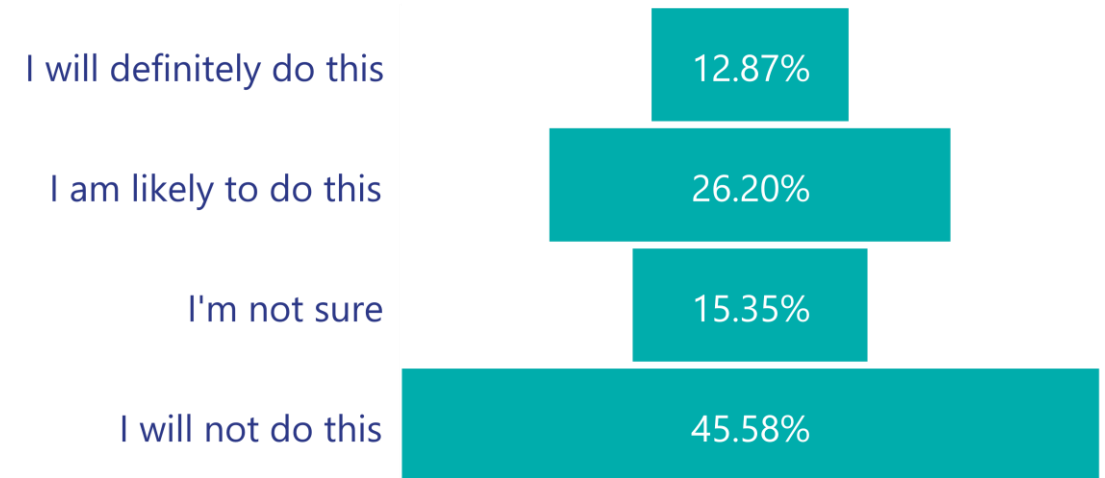
Likely to vote in next election – 2021

Figure 6.1



Likely to vote in next election – 2020

Figure 6.2



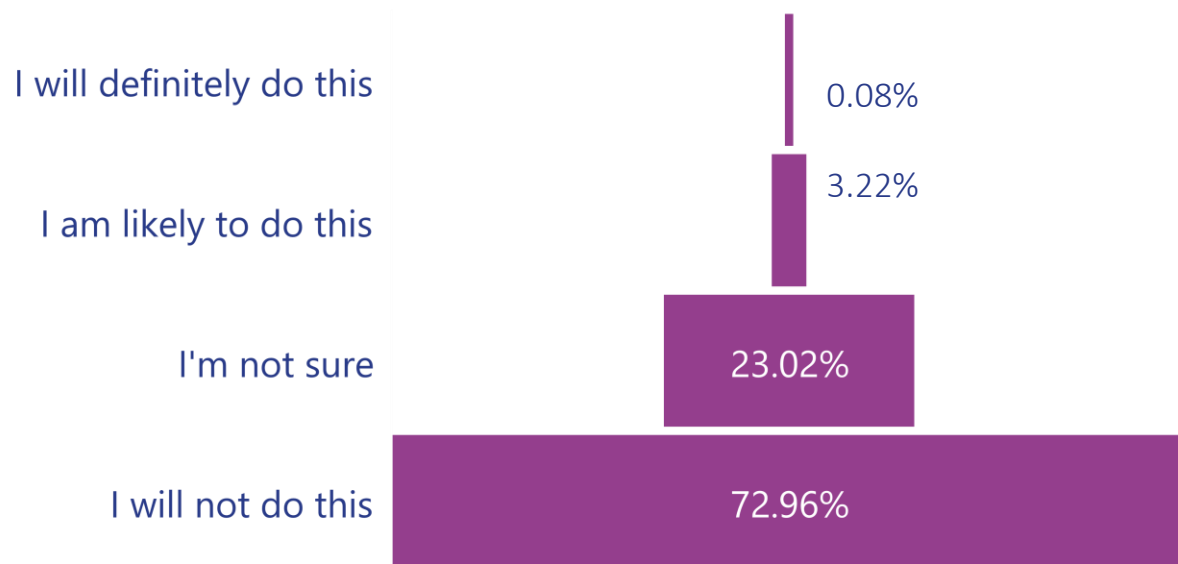
Q20 – How likely are you to a)stand in the elections, b)vote in the elections?

Standing in the elections

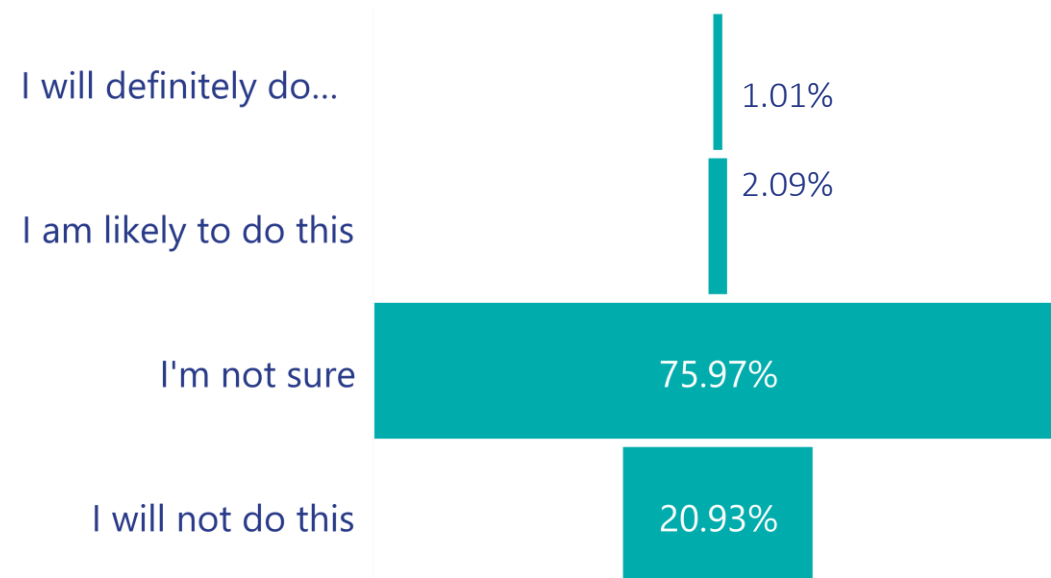
It is disheartening to see that the option 'I will not do this' has increased by 3.5 times when compared to the 2020 figures. Although there has been a slight, yet positive increase to those students who are 'likely' to stand, the 'will not' figures are a cause for concern particularly as the 2022 election season started 3 months after the survey closed.

Students with a good awareness of the Association are 2.25 times more likely to stand in the elections than those with poor awareness. As with the figures for voting in elections, more work needs to be done to show students the relevance of representation in their studies.

2021
Figure 6.3



2020
Figure 6.4



Q20 – How likely are you to a)stand in the elections, b)vote in the elections?

Elections comments

Students were asked to provide free text feedback about their thoughts on voting and/or standing in elections. The tone of the comments tended to be negative with regards to standing in elections due to time, understanding of the process and having the confidence and skill to become an Association rep. **Some students were unsure of the relevance that voting had in their student experience or did not understand the process.**

I want to be more involved and also gain experience

I feel a bit detached from it

I would like to stand for a position however need to know more about what it entails

Not sure if I would stand for a position due to travel and time commitments needed for the roles.

I enjoy voting but I almost never hear or see from the candidates once they are voted in so I forget who everyone is.

Greater awareness of what elected representatives do.

I think the elections are very important as the association is a vital part to students time in studying through the OU. Using our voices to choose decisions is important to empower and reassure us. I would not stand for a position due to my high anxiety, I am happy to use the services.

Greater awareness of what elected representatives do.

Voting enables me to select the person I believe would represent students' interests the best. My disabilities would prevent me from standing, due to not wanting to let anyone down if I am struggling.

As a former Unison Branch Official and of advanced age I prefer to allow younger voices to speak these days.

I would vote if it is relevant to me.

To ensure that the views of the minority students are heard, given space to share their experience

Representation of your Student Voice



We asked students what they would like to see elected student leaders doing to effectively represent their voice to the University.

23.32% of comments were about student support and building a sense of community

'Helping to build up community and facilitating peer support & networking'

'To grow the community spirit, the awareness of connection between students.'

'Moving forward into a more social experience coming out of covid'

'I think its important to help build connections within the student community, as we are an online school the social aspect of university can be lacking. Social events bring the students together and I think our peers are the best people to talk to about our struggles or worries when it comes to our experience of the OU.'

'I think students tend to struggle with the isolation and confidence and the support videos you do really do help.'

22.04% of comments were about the need for more awareness and support for wellbeing for distance learners

'They should be focusing on students mental well-being more often as so far they just recommend you to outside services and don't support inside the OU.'

'More encouragement for people with mental illness to feel they can tackle the challenges of study'

'Mental health is important all of the time but making sure as a student you are not in over your head and rapidly approaching burn out is extremely important. '

'Support for students experiencing difficulty, hardship or mental difficulty'

16.51% of comments were about effectively representing student issues to the OU

'Listen to praise and complaints to develop strategies for enhancing student academic attainment and satisfaction.'

'there is such a wide, diverse range of students that attend the OU that picking any one area of focus would help one but do a dis-service to others. I think the best thing the team could do is raise awareness, letting students know that they are there to help and assist'

'More representatives for people leaving SISE and studying in the community'

What does the term 'academic representation' mean to you?

A new question for 2021. Although some students were clear what the term meant, just over 65% of students gave a response of what they believe the term means.

15.16% of student comments were around student voice and advocacy

'A kind of buddy to help really.... for example, if I felt my opinion/needs had not been acknowledged/addressed properly by the University I could approach my academic rep who could potentially give a little weight and authority to my solitary voice. A kind of mediator in a way'

'It means giving a voice to students and a platform for them to express any concerns or issues they may have.'

'The elected member represents the students' voice in academic matters'

Diverse, multi-cultured study body. Representing all walks of life

19.10% of comments were about representing matters relating to study

'Being fairly represented by people who understand the constraints and difficulties in studying academically. The benefit of their studies and further development.'

'speaking for the student regarding studying and anything affecting our ability to do this'

'Awareness of the realities students face while studying and voiced clearly enough that the institution responsible for our learning is held to account'

'Everything pertaining to studies and how life affects, and is affected by, studying.'

11.25% of comments were about supporting and helping students

'Being supported through study to make sure that students are meeting their full potential'

'support students through a dispute with the university authorities if the relevant procedures are not proving fair and transparent. '

'someone supporting and co-ordinating the interests of, and raising the concerns of O U students.'

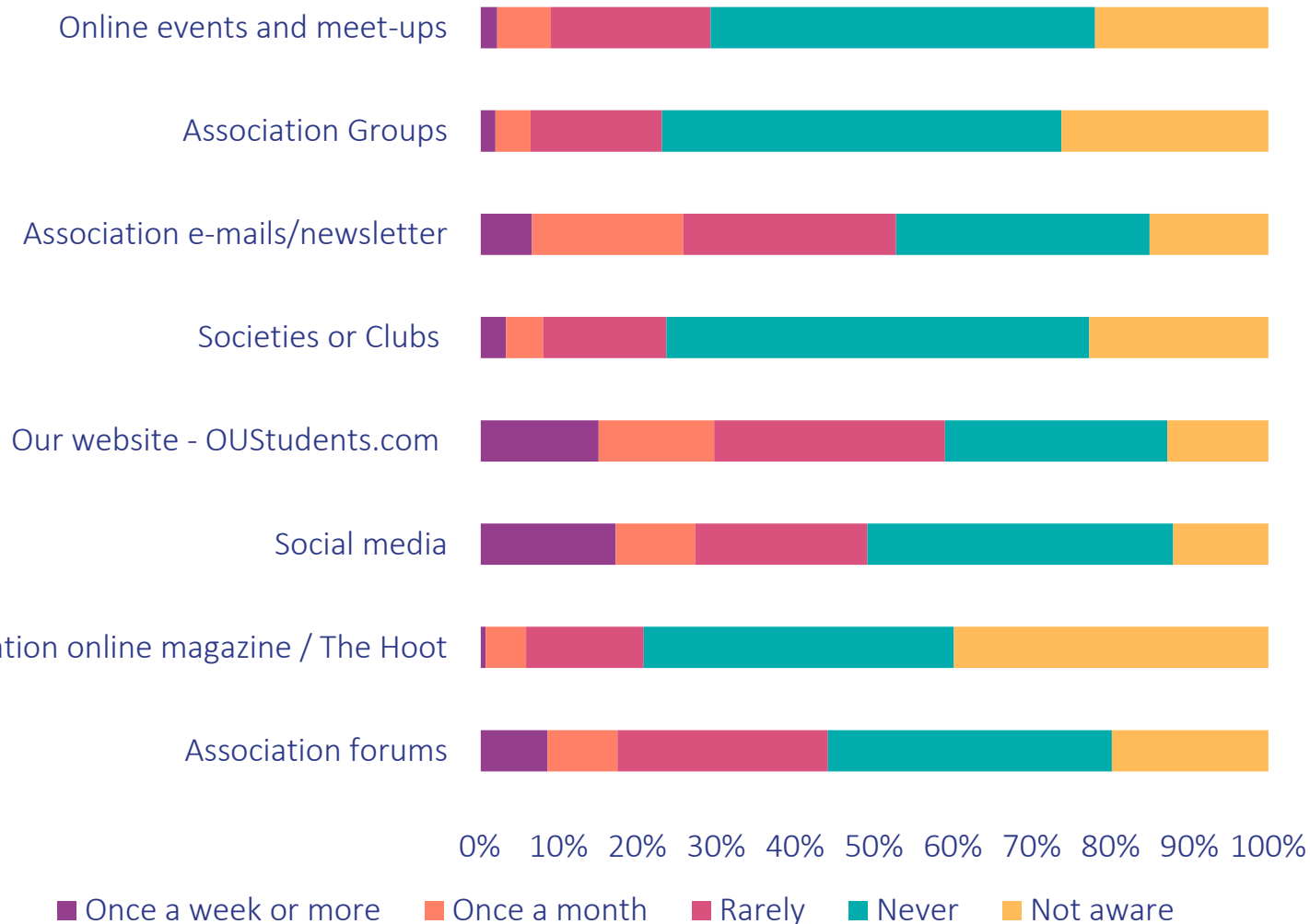
'entire community of academics banding together to support one another. This extends to those who are in the process of becoming the next academics'

Communication



Communication and social spaces

Using social spaces
Figure 7.1



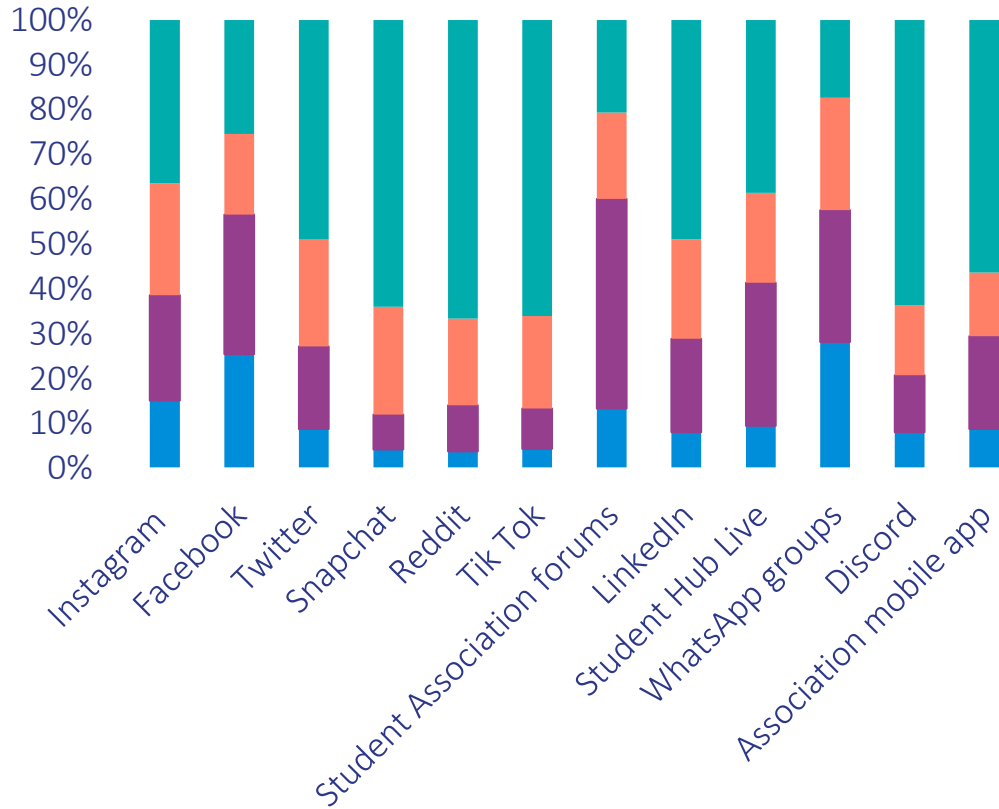
Generally favourable results here with all nearly all areas showing improvement. The **website usage showed the greatest improvement** with a increase from 8.33% of students in 2020 using it once a week or more to 15.07% in 2021!

Association forums and online meetups saw an increase in students selecting once a week and once a month whilst also showing a reduction in those selecting never and not aware.

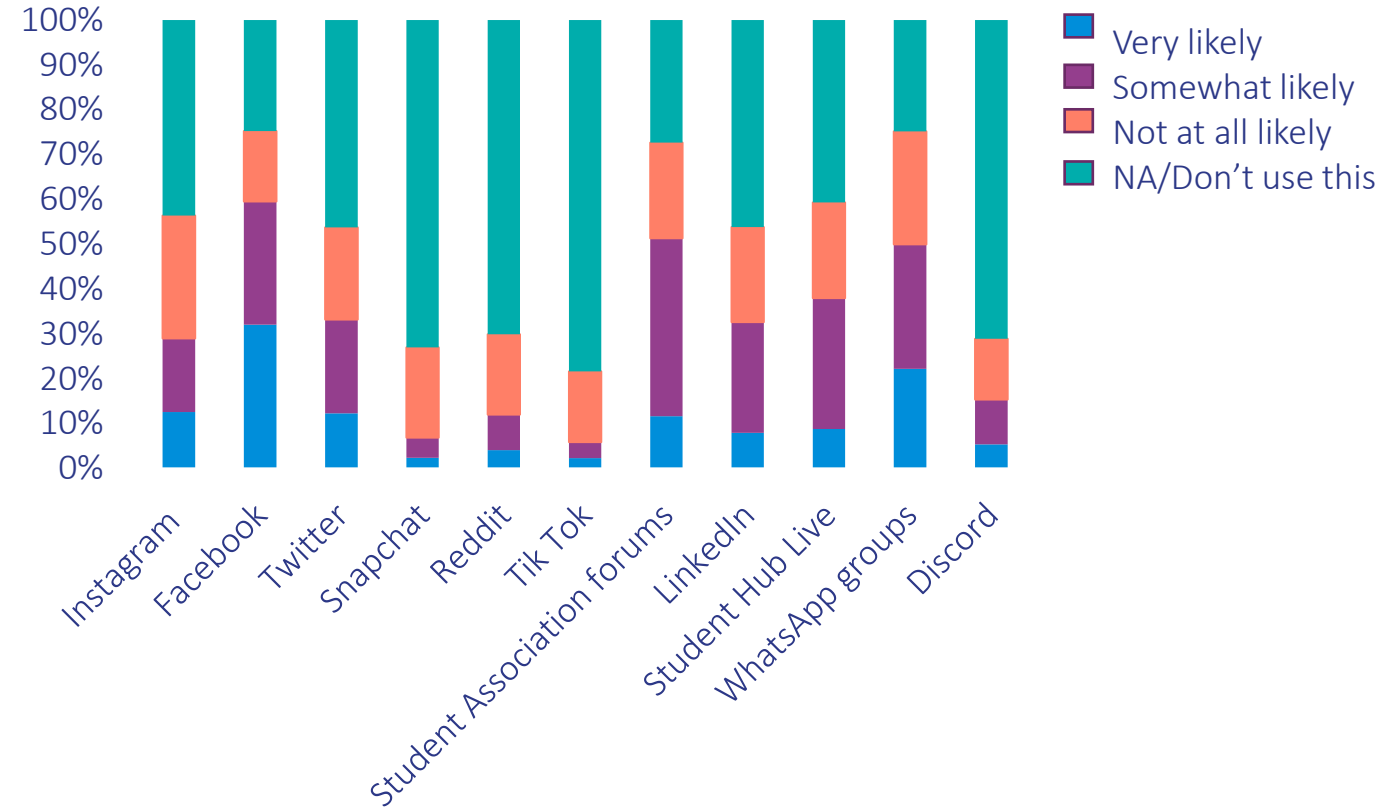
Societies were the lowest performing with a reduction in usage and an increase in never/not aware. Further research is being carried out with a review in February 2022.

Social spaces

2021
Figure 7.2



2020
Figure 7.3



Facebook and Whatsapp were the top performers again in 2021, with Whatsapp taking the lead this year. There has been an **increase in students using TikTok, Discord and Instagram**. This supports the Association’s vision to increase presence in other forms of social media. There is also **positive results to support the introduction of an Association app**.

Q12 – which of these platforms would you be likely to use to connect with fellow OU Students?

Communication preferences

Students were asked to give more information on their communication preferences in a free text box. **52.31% of the comments were generally positive about student communication options.** As with the previous survey, many students are reluctant to use social media to communicate with students with some students commenting that they do not want to use social media at all due to social anxieties or security worries.

In terms of preferred platform, comments were mixed. Many students are interested in using a specific Association app while other students would like to stick with familiar platforms.

Prefer a more visual platform via Instagram.

Would be nice to see more people use the forums to chat, most of the union forums seem empty or unused. Also too much is on Facebook. nearly all of it, and the other options are more difficult to find if any

Snapchat would be for personal use and friends but I use Twitter a lot for my OU studies and love connecting with other students there, a mobile app sounds great and would be convenient to use

I sometimes find social media platforms a negative distraction...However, they can also provide nuggets of info re related study resources (eventbrite lectures, podcasts etc) so I tend to be selective about which study related platforms I connect with

Too much social media fries your brain so I just do Facebook because that's how I keep in touch with distant family & friends.

For my first module, a whatsapp group made the studying much easier and allowed the students to know each other more closely

I purposely avoid seeking community because it suits me, but I know that there is a community there with lots of cool stuff

I really like the SHL channel. I think that they are BRILLIANT and I am a big fan. This is a very good and vibrant way of bringing in a whole community through their live events.

A mobile app would be very handy for me to communicate as it keeps it separate from my social media accounts and would be easy to find people or responses. I don't use a lot of social media platforms so I don't think I would use many of the above just for the ou association.

Facebook for ease of use and the social, colloquial side. LinkedIn for the more professional bias

A Student Association App would be great. Everything you need to know in one place rather than going between different social media apps, websites and forums.

Digi Comms word cloud



Culture

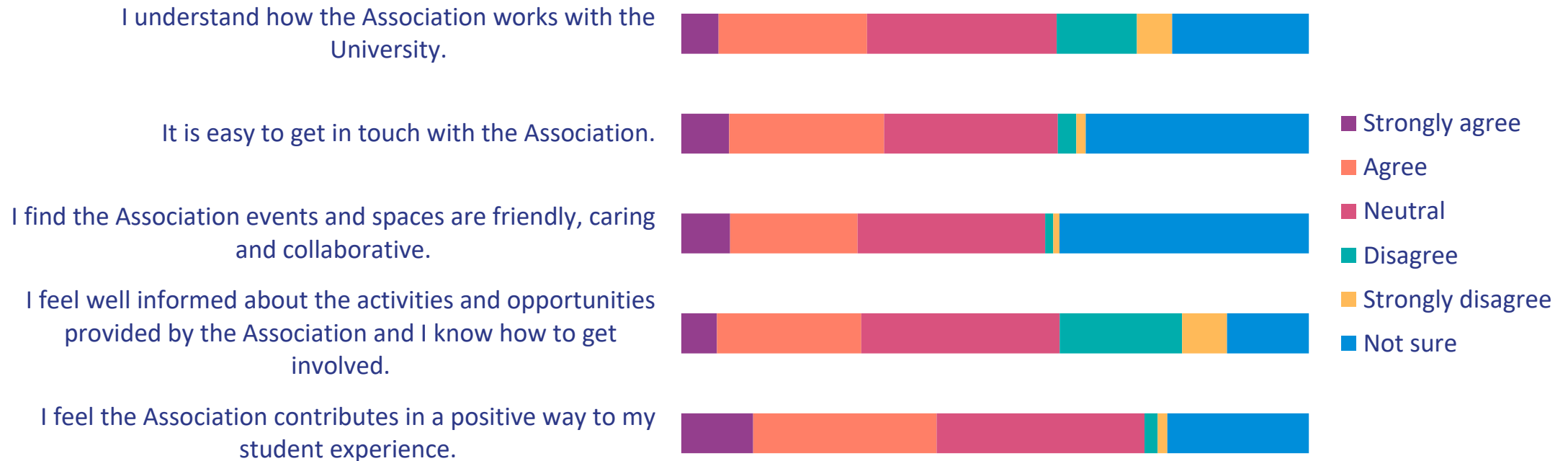


Association culture

The culture numbers for 2021 have shown an average increase in strongly agree and agree. The **biggest improvement was seen in student understanding of how the Association works with the University**. This has seen an increase of around 3%.

Feeling informed about the Association activities has seen the biggest drop in negative responses, dropping from 33.49% in 2020 to 12.36% in 2021. This may be contributed in part to the efforts of our **Freshers programme** which has gone from strength to strength in the last 12 months.

Culture
Figure 8.1

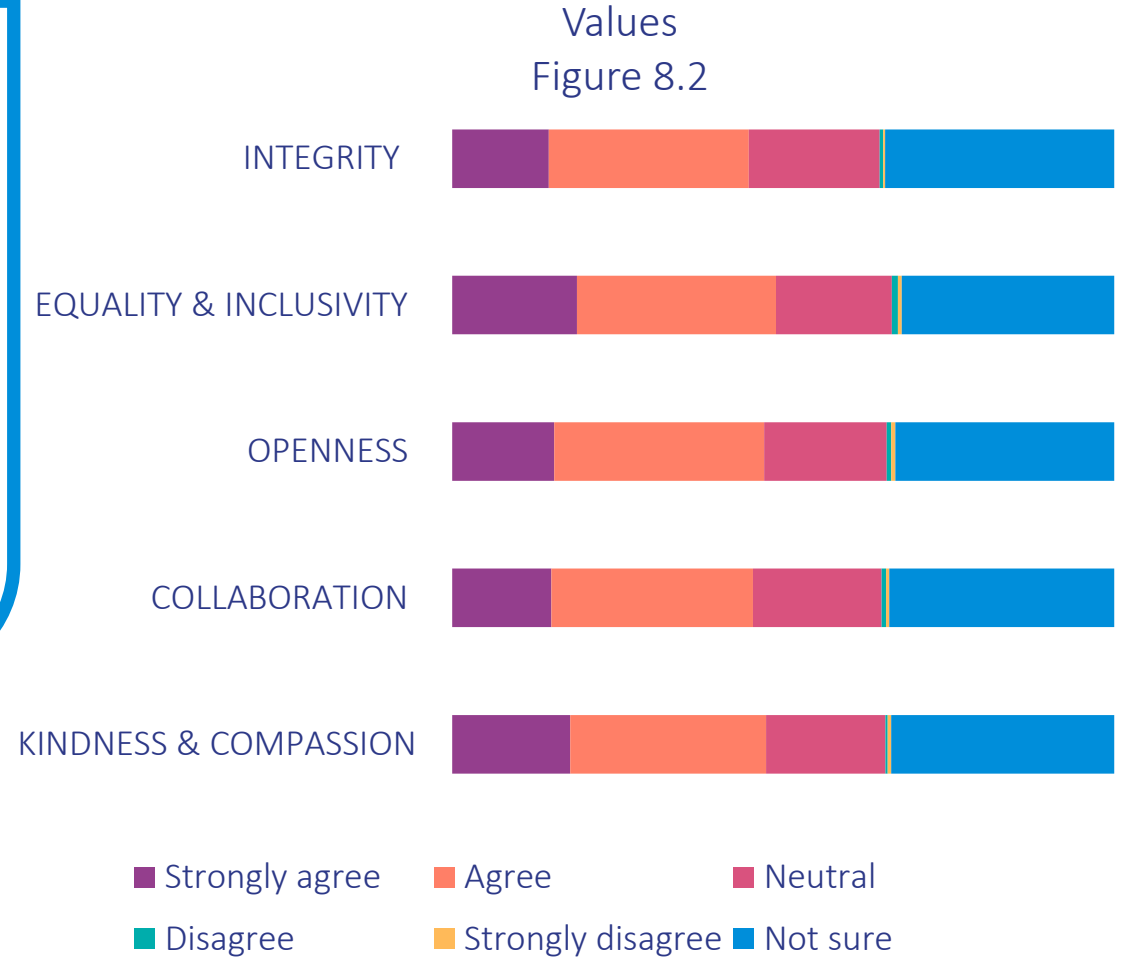


Association values

As with the culture numbers, the values have shown a good level of improvement in 2021. The value of kindness and compassion was added as a new value for this survey.

The biggest improvement was in **equality and inclusivity** which received a **3% increase** in positive responses.

The **number of students selecting disagree or strongly disagree showed significant improvement across all our values**. The average negative response in 2020 was 2.54%, falling to 1.13% in 2021. The results of the survey also shows an average reduction in the number of students selecting not sure of around 3%.



Q29 – The next session seeks to understand the degree to which the Association is living each of its values.

Culture and values – free text comments

Many students commented that they did not feel that they had enough awareness of the Association to comment on culture and values. As with the 2020 survey, some students felt that the survey gave them enough of an insight into the Association to answer positively to the statements. There were several comments both for and against the recent Governance Reforms which went to a vote at Conference 2022 in January.

It is clear that many students have had very different experiences when it comes to culture. Some students commented on their experience at the OU more than the Association.

the emails I receive are always informative, knowledgeable, friendly, caring, and respectful.

Equality is amazing as a student but there are still things that to be improved, maybe improve by using more ethnic content?

I'd say that the attempts to engage, involve and include suggests to me that the students association is striving to live up to those aims

I am neutral on the student association after having a bad experience during freshers week. I attended a few sessions and felt that a particular student rep was very standoffish with me.

how I feel about the association is only down to this questionnaire aside from this I am unaware of the association. That being said if the association is anything like the rest of open university I would say it upholds the values very well.

As a volunteer I know OUSA as a welcoming and supportive community, but to 'outsiders' the structure can seem incredibly opaque and I think it's this that contributes to the cliquiness image

All I've seen is kindness, friendliness and inclusivity since joining the OU

After watching videos, attending events and reading about the Association I have a very positive impression

I have no idea what the OUSA is doing. Perhaps it would be good if the tutors spoke about it from time to time, it feels like a clique and I am not sure how you get involved, and even though I would like to get involved, I am not sure it is for someone like me who has a job as well as studying.

there is a sense of openness as well as equality and inclusivity. I feel I have seen the inclusiveness with forums and groups aimed to support minority groups including BAME students, LGBTQIA+ students, and those with mental health needs - not to mention for all people of different family backgrounds and carer status

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) – community engagement



Following extensive EDI research, this question was added in for 2021 to enhance our findings.

Students selected options which show they are eager to keep informed about the EDI work at the Association. An **average of 31.93% of students would be interested in learning about campaigns or receiving regular updates.**

The number of students stating that they would be interested in proactive EDI work at the Association was encouraging.

EDI Engagement
Figure 8.3



■ Yes, I would be interested in this ■ Not sure, I would need more information ■ No, this is not for me

Q31 – We want to ensure that we offer all students the opportunity to engage with us and feel part of the student community. Please indicate if you would like to learn more about and/or engage with the Association around EDI-related activities?

Getting involved with EDI at the Association



Following from the questions about community engagement in our EDI work, we asked students 'Are there any other ways in which you would like to be involved'.

There were **many positive comments about wanting to get involved** by taking part in research, producing media content and other online/distance task.

Many students mentioned increasing awareness of mental and physical health issues while some students felt that their demographic was over represented and therefore did not feel comfortable getting involved

Collaboration with other universities

I am extremely passionate about EDI and I think so much needs to be done because to this day there are struggles with Equality and not feeling involved or supported. We need to be able to see everyone as one being and we are all trying to just do the same thing succeed and do our best everyday

Being part of the divisibility section of the purpose due to my autism and mental health issues, good to know our right to EDI is being seen too.

I do feel a bit like EDI isn't really "for" me because I'm a conventional, white, older woman (!) but that's probably not the right way to look at it!

Campaigning, competitions for people to show EDI eg a cartoon or a poem/spoken word or creative piece

I am an artist so would be interested in illustrating for the association

Becoming a voice of international activities.

I am neurodivergent and would be interested in helping where I can

i could blog write or write stuff for any platform under guidance from the leader



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