

Conference 2022 evaluation

Introduction and key findings



Conference overview



- Conference 2022 was held during **21-23 January**, organised by the Association's staff team and advised by the student-led Conference Steering Committee. This report presents an evaluation of the Conference 2022 weekend against the key objectives set for the event.
 - Our values of **integrity, equality and inclusivity, openness, collaboration, plus kindness and compassion**, are at the heart of everything we do as an Association, so we wanted to ensure that our sessions were a true reflection of this and showcase what underpins our commitments and decision making.
 - The use of '**voice**' is what being a community is about, and stands for value, opinion, inclusion, choice and equity. Representation of the Student voice is an integral part of ensuring our learners receive an outstanding educational experience, and that they feel empowered to be active in decision making. Which is why we wanted our Conference sessions to enable us to amplify this.
 - Finally, **sustainability** isn't just about being green, it is about adaptability and being fit-for-purpose long into the future. That is why it was important to ensure our sessions echoed this forward-thinking outlook.
- A total of **170 delegates and guests** attended Conference 2022. This evaluation is based on a survey sent to delegates (100 responses 58.82%), as well as other engagement metrics for the Conference weekend.
- Following increases in Covid cases at the end of 2021, it was decided to host Conference 2022 as an online-only event. Conference was brought forward from June 2022 following the 2021 Governance Review.

Conference highlights

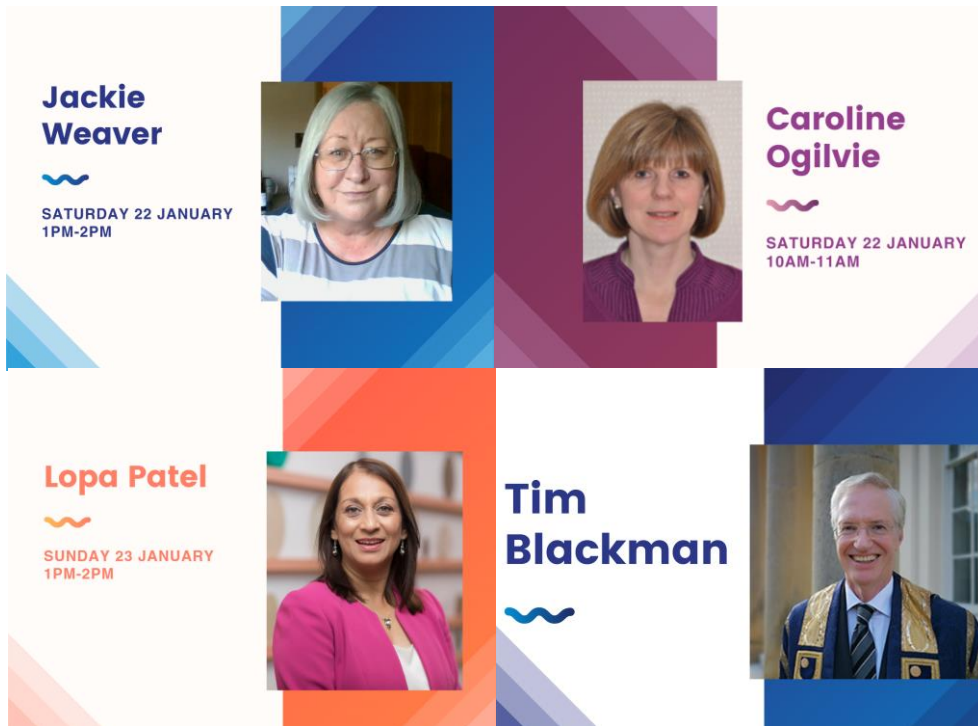
21 – 23 January
170 OU student delegates
34 guests
33 sessions

17 speakers joined the Association to lead or participate in sessions wide-ranging in subject and format. Some highlights included:

- **Jackie Weaver** discussing engagement and participation with democracy.
- **Caroline Ogilvie** sharing more about the partnership between the OU and the BBC.
- **Lopa Patel** describing her experience as a woman in STEM, and how we can encourage more women to enter that field.
- **Tim Blackman** joining Association President, Sarah Jones, to answer questions from student delegates.

The OU student voice at Conference...

In addition to speaker sessions, there were hosted student consultation events and sessions by student representatives. Issues discussed ranged from the benefits of volunteering to digital world connectivity.



Conference Communications



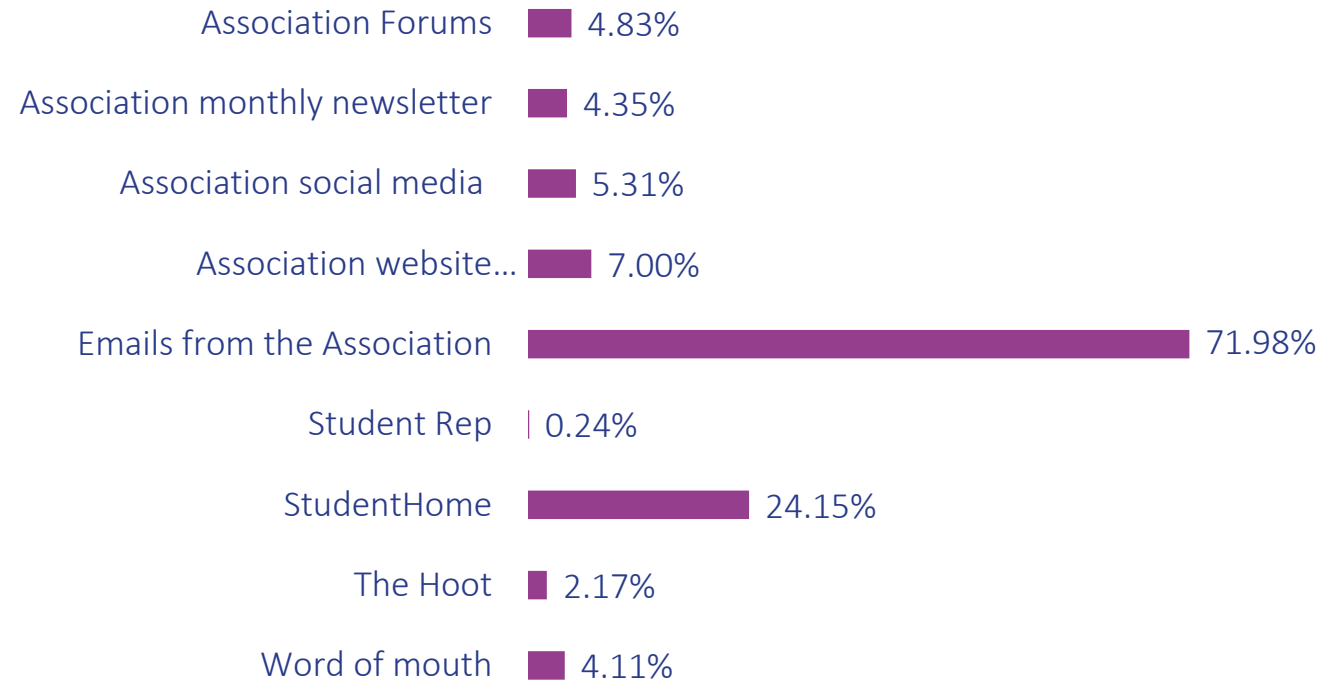
Conference awareness

To raise awareness of Conference 2022, the Association communicated with students through a variety of platforms. The official notice of Conference 2022 was advertised on social media on 9 November 2021, advising students that it would be held online.

This chart demonstrates that the **most popular channel which delegates heard about Conference through, was via e-mails** from the Association (71.98%). StudentHome was the second most popular way for students to find out about Conference (24.15%).

Very few students found out about Conference from Student Reps, showing that more needs to be done to **improve engagement and visibility**.

Figure 1



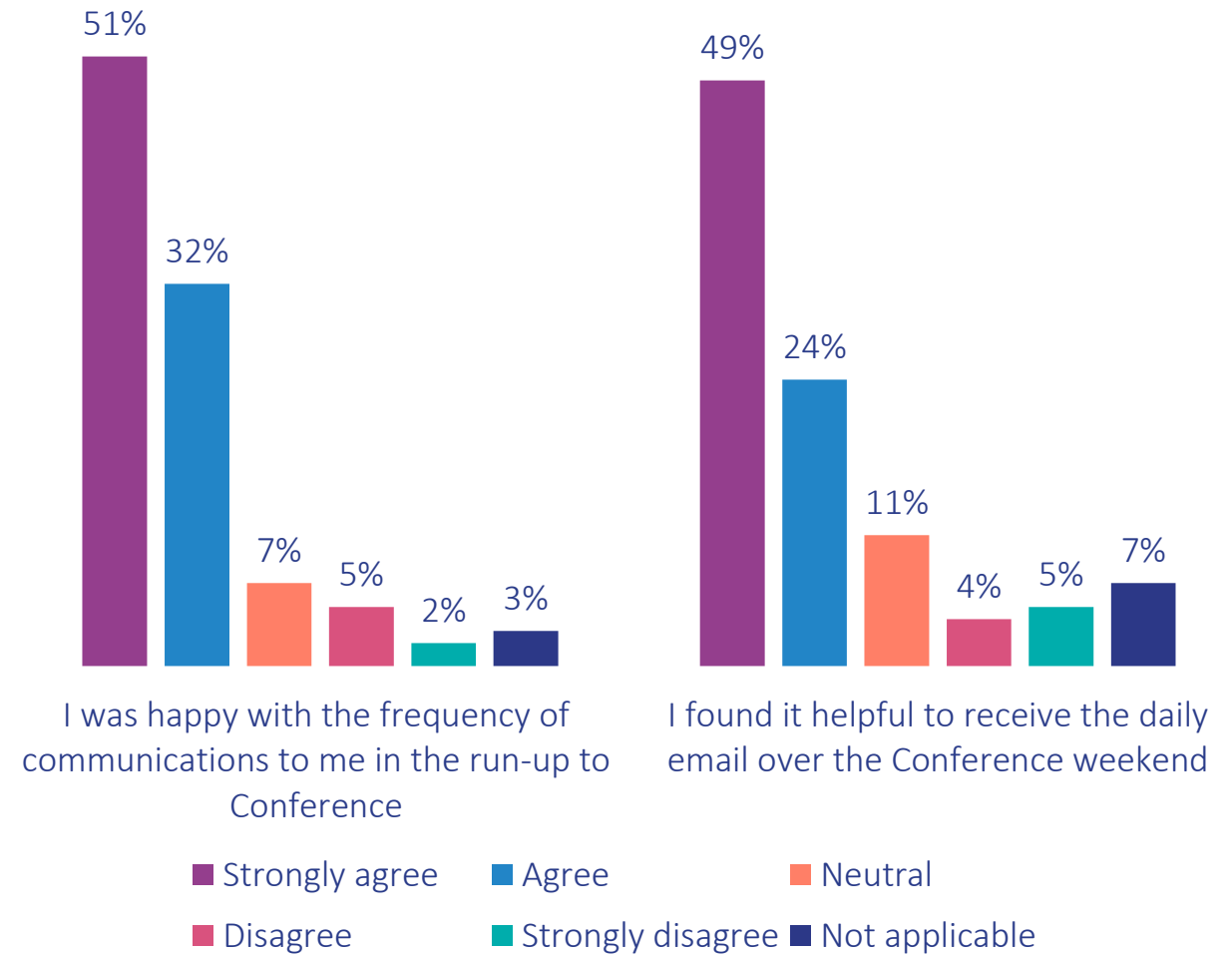
Delegate communications

Figure 2

Regular Conference Update Issues were sent to registered delegates via e-mail. This included a daily newsletter about external speakers, together with the opportunities that delegates would have to network with fellow OU Students and participate in discussions.

Each Conference update included a 'note on Business' **stating that a delegate place was conditional on the student having voted on Conference Business.**

The following chart shows a high level of satisfaction with communications around Conference.



Delegate newsletters

Students' **engagement with the weekly Conference newsletter** saw a slight decrease in click rates as the weekend drew closer (21.34% to 19.92%). The dedicated Conference weekend newsletter was sent to 170 delegates over the Conference weekend with a click-thru rate ranging between 10% and 28.24%.

The opening rates for the 2022 newsletters were much lower than those seen at Conference 2020. The weekly newsletter click-thru rate ranged from 45% to 85.8%. The weekend newsletter open rate ranged from 61.9% to 82.5%.

Figure 3

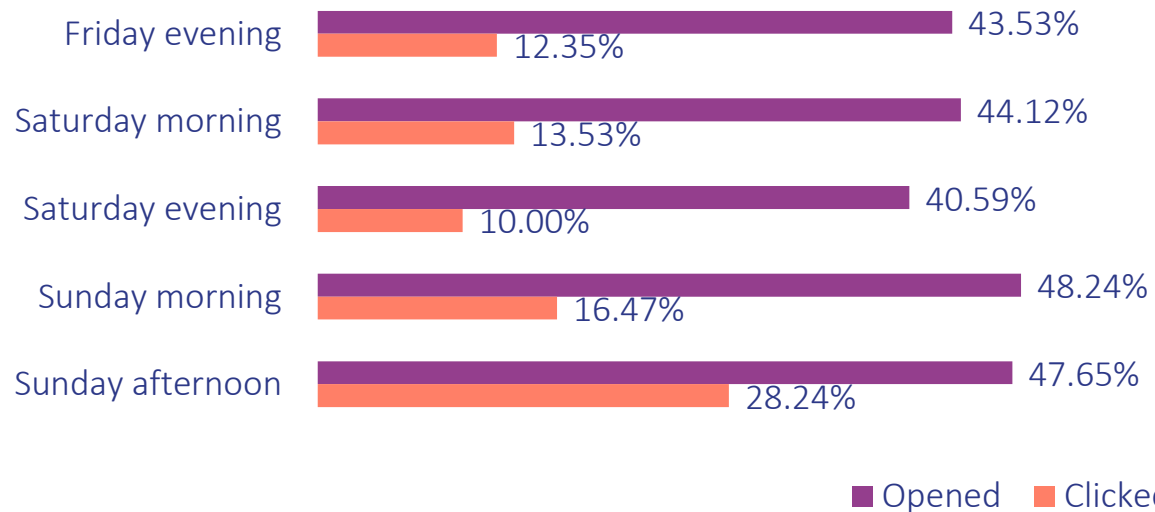
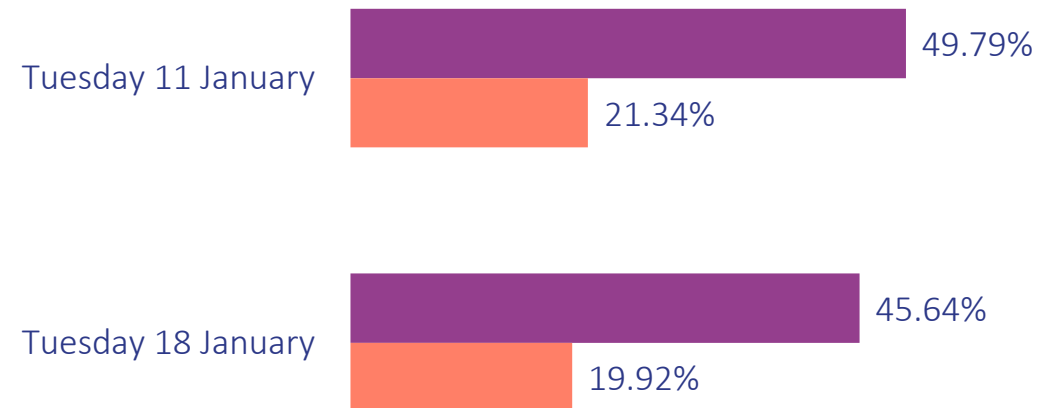


Figure 4

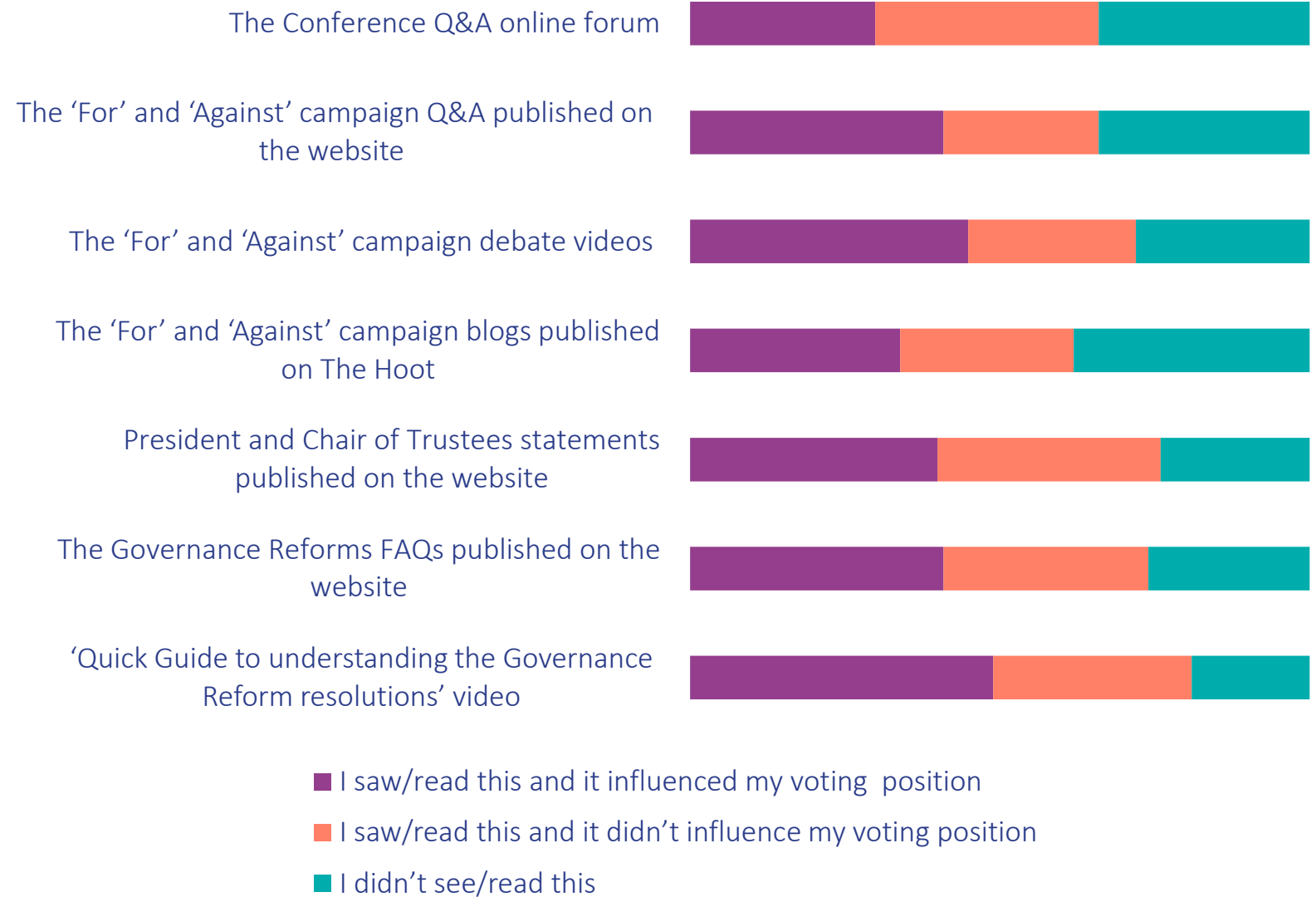


Governance Reform communications

Figure 5

Overall, the **majority of delegates utilised the communications packages** to assist them with their voting. There appears to have been an even split between delegates who felt that the communications influenced their voting position and those who felt that it did not influence them.

Nearly all students (**96%**) engaged with the **Governance Reform documents prior to voting**. The 'For' and 'Against' campaign information also proved to be popular with 87% of students engaging with the website, debate videos and Hoot articles.



Attending Conference



Attending Conference



Many of the delegates (**21.63%**) had attended Conference in the past, in contrast to Conference 2020 which attracted a larger proportion of newer students. At the point that students could register to enter the Conference ballot, we recorded **77% of students (out of 414 potential delegates) who had never engaged** in Association events.

Figure 6



Age and gender

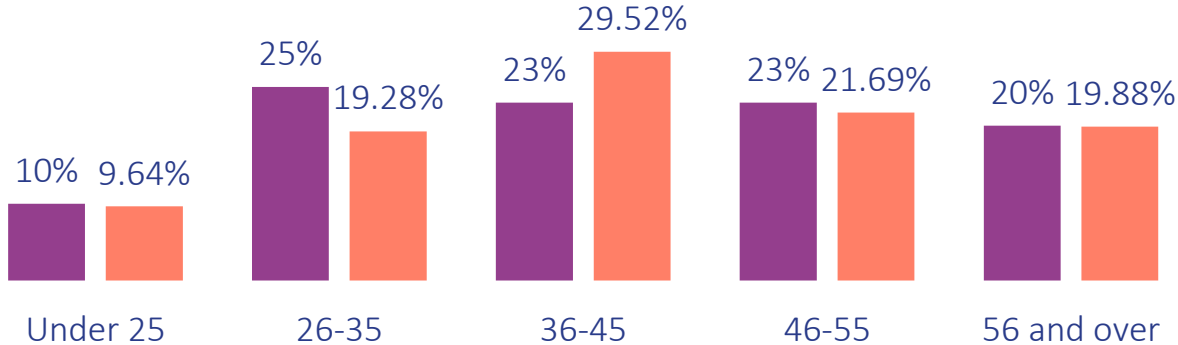


These charts show the delegate profile of those students who attended Conference, following a successful ballot application and having voted (which made them eligible to attend Conference). As you can see we have seen some large changes in age range and gender profiles.

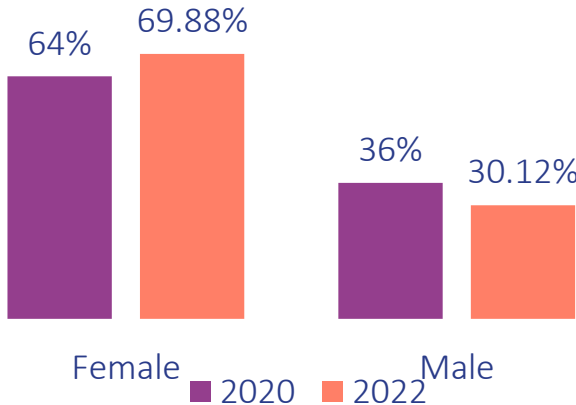
Previously, in age range; the 26-35 year olds were the highest represented age range at Conference 2020. Conference 2022 saw this **high representation moved to the 36-45 year olds** with a 6% reduction in 26-35 year olds.

With gender, we see a continued rise in the number of female delegates, with **male representation reducing by nearly 6%.**

Age range
Figure 5



Gender
Figure 6

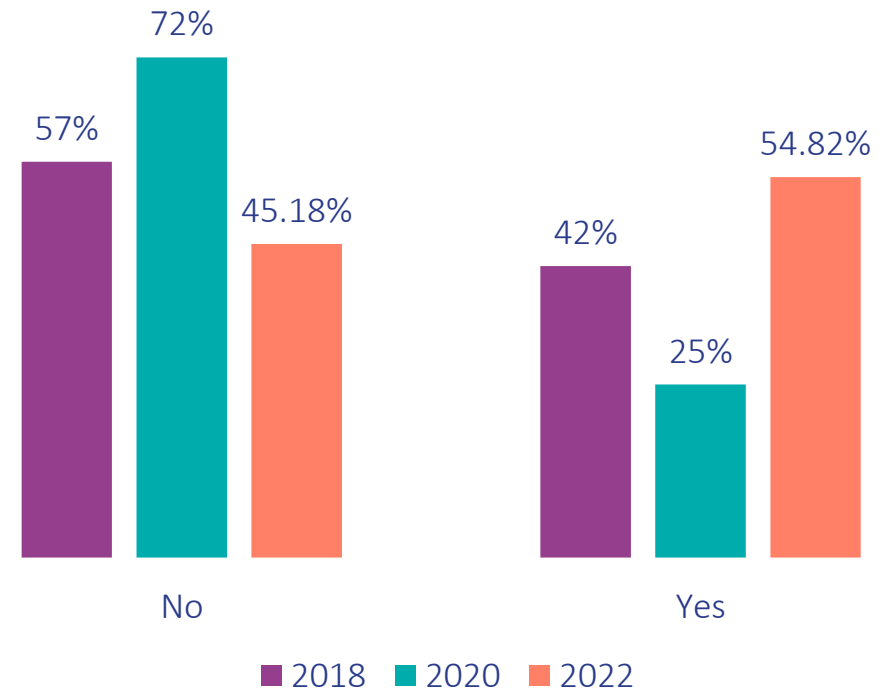


Disability profile

The most interesting demographic shift is seen in students with declared disabilities. The **number of delegates with a declared disability has more than doubled since 2020** and is more on par with the 2018 figures.

In 2020, the drop in delegates with disabilities was worrying and **prompted steps by the Association to sure that online events were accessible**. Accessible requirements ranged from ensuring streamed events had captions and slide decks were available in advance of Conference.

Figure 7



Attendance motivation



Figure 8

As part of the ballot registration, students were asked to indicate what motivated them to attend Conference 2022. Respondents chose **learning more about the Association (20.64%)** and **to meet fellow students (18.06%)** as their two key motivations.

A very small amount of students (0.07%) wanted to attend Conference to take part in the business and voting.

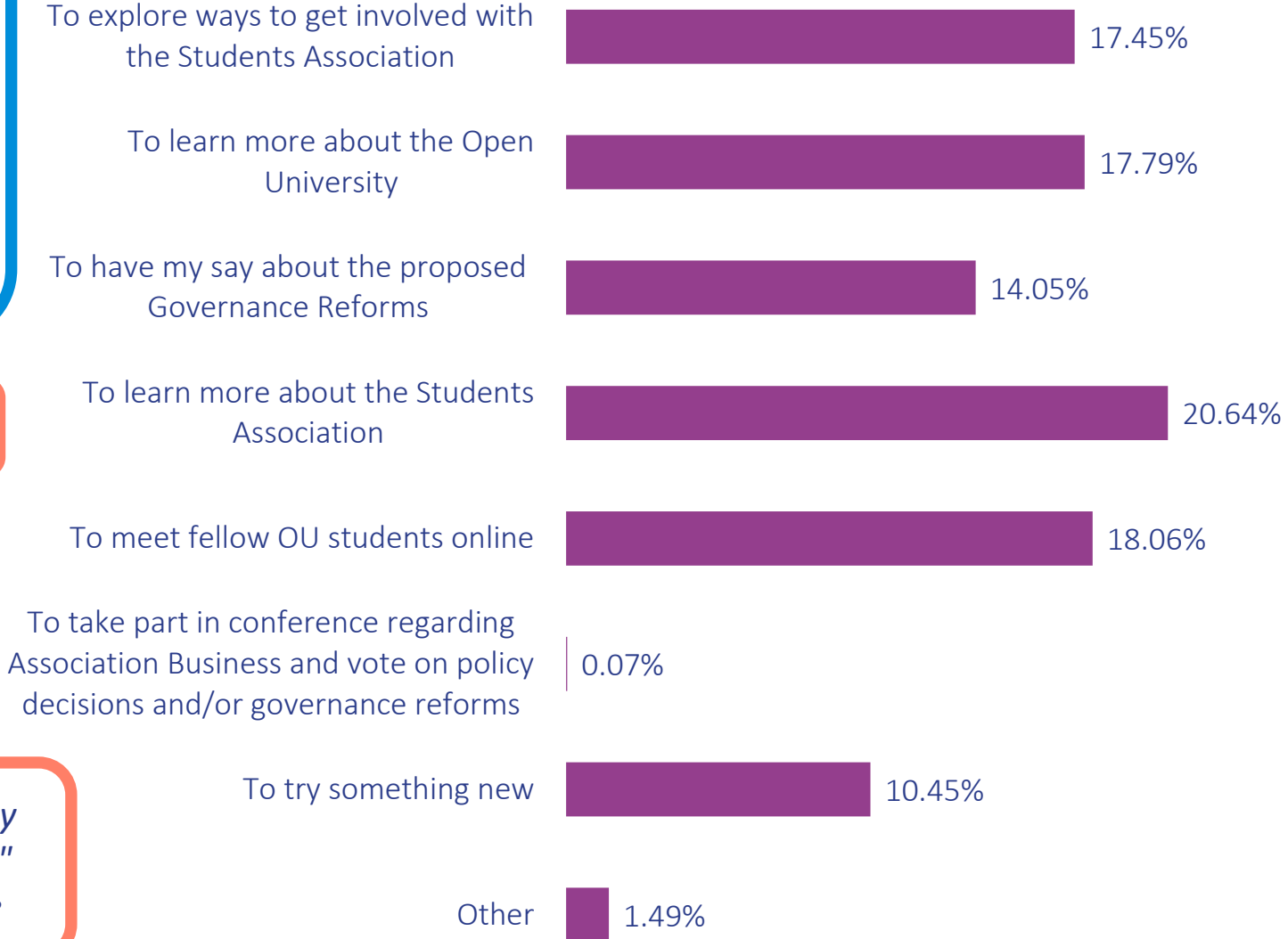
general learning experience: I am taking a leap of faith to try new things to better myself and knowledge whilst studying.

To increase my confidence

To contribute to conversations about how SA is run

I just love being a student at the Open University and I try to get involved as much as I can and this would be my last chance to attend

To enrich my "University" experience



Conference business



Conference Business - voting

Conference Business is a key element of all Association Conferences, and offers delegates the opportunity to have a say in important decisions about the running of the Association. The decisions to be voted on in 2022 were particularly important and followed on from the 2021 Governance Review.

The online voting for Conference Business opened on 12 January and closed on 19 January 2022. This year, **170 votes were cast, representing a 70.8% voter turnout**. The highest turnout the Association has seen at Conference business voting is 80.89% and this was at the Conference 2020.

A list of the resolutions and voting rates can be found in figure 11. In order for a resolution to be carried, 75% of voters must approve it.

Figure 10

Number of eligible voters	240
Votes cast online	170
Total number of votes cast	170
Turnout	70.8%

Conference business - resolutions

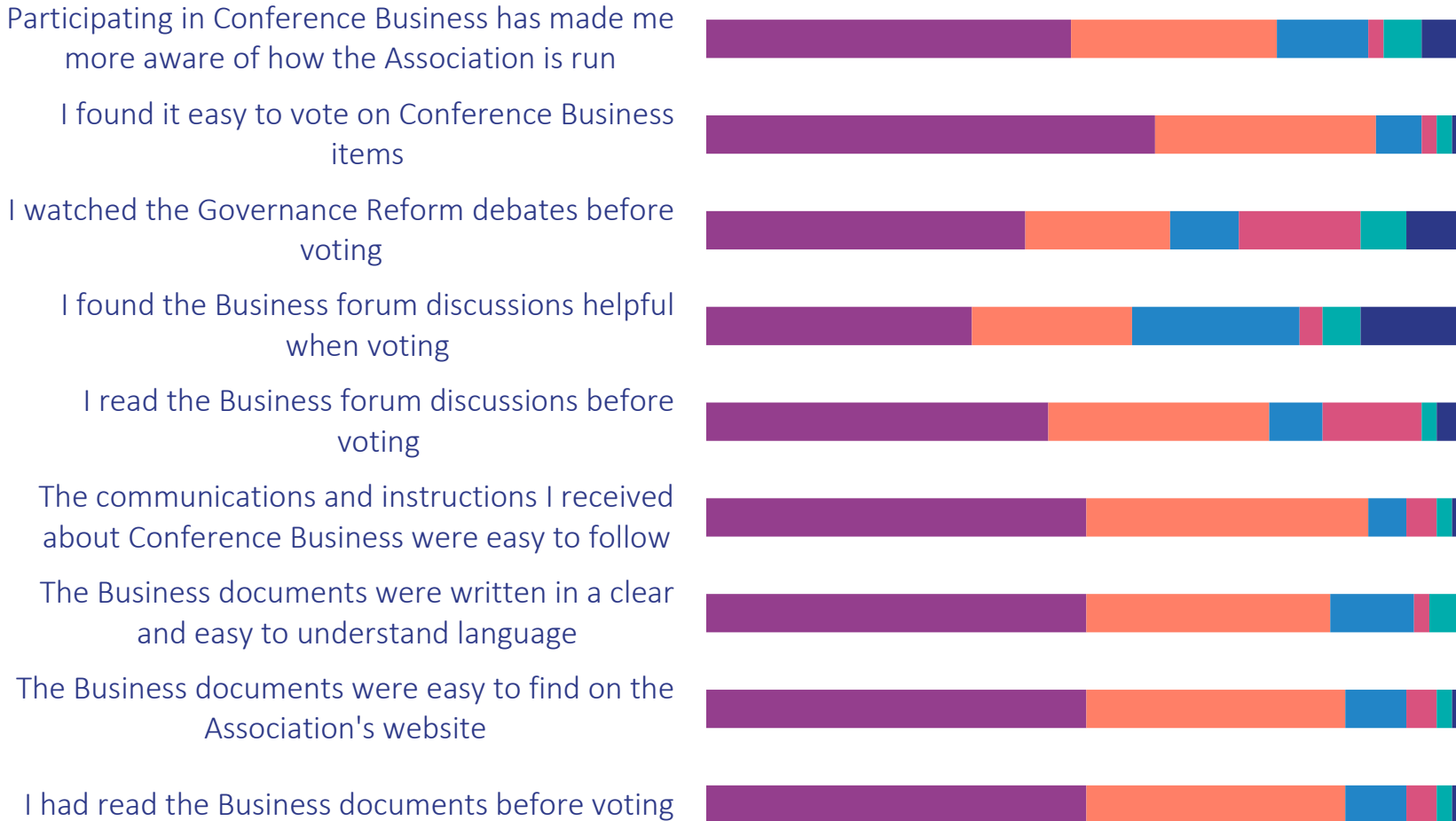


Figure 11

Resolution	Approve	Not approve	Carried
RESOLUTION A: Replace the biennial Conference with an Annual General Meeting	56.97%	43.03%	No
RESOLUTION B: Implement the recommended changes to the composition and appointment of the Board of Trustee	60.38%	39.62%	No
RESOLUTION C: Replace the Central Executive Committee with a new student leadership and representation structure featuring a Student Leadership Team and a Student Forum	70.73%	29.27%	No
SOLUTION D: Implement the recommendation of a new Scrutiny Panel to hold the Student Leadership Team to account	72.56%	27.44%	No
RESOLUTION E: Implement a range of minor and consequential changes to the Articles	85.03%	14.97%	Yes
RESOLUTION F: Approve the Minutes of the previous Conference	99.37%	0.63%	Yes
RESOLUTION G: Receive the report of the Board of Trustees	98.76%	1.24%	Yes
RESOLUTION H: Receive the report of the Central Executive Committee	98.76%	1.24%	Yes
RESOLUTION I: Receive the Association's 2019-20 and 2020-21 Accounts	99.38%	0.62%	Yes
RESOLUTION J: Approve the appointment of the Association's External Auditors from August 2022.	96.86%	3.14%	Yes
RESOLUTION K: Approve the continuation of the Association's membership of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and of the Charity Finance Group (CFG) (our affiliations)	99.39%	0.61%	Yes
RESOLUTION L: Approve the discontinuation of the Association's affiliation with London Nightline	99.11%	7.89%	Yes

Conference business - results

Figure 12



Similar to previous years, a key focus of Conference communications was to encourage delegates to participate in Conference Business. Content explain the Business element and how delegates could participate was hosted on the Conference microsite, together with regular update included as part of the Conference newsletters.

Delegate **feedback around different aspects of participating in the Conference Business was generally positive**. For 2022, for and against Governance Reform debates were filmed to support voters understanding of the matters.

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Not applicable

Conference programme



Conference programme - overview

The Conference 2022 programme was designed in line with **three key themes – Voice, Values and Sustainability** - with a range of events and activities offered under each theme. These three themes helped the Association offer a programme that would bring the most value to students.

The Conference programme **featured both formal and self-paced sessions**. These sessions were either offered by the student volunteers and staff team at the Students Association, Open University staff or featured external speakers.

The **format of the sessions were varied to offer delegates different levels of participation**, from listening to speakers, interacting with session facilitators and engaging in discussion with fellow students.

Over 30 sessions
were held over the
whole weekend

29% of sessions
were about
sustainability

22% of sessions
were a chance to
students to
socialise with each
other

38% of sessions
were about living
our values

13% of sessions
were related to
student voice

Conference programme – values theme



During Conference, the programme contained a variety of sessions for delegates on the theme of Values.

Association values

INTEGRITY - We will stay true to our vision, we will uphold the founding mission of the Open University (Be open to people, places, methods and ideas) and we will maintain an independent and fair representation of the student voice.

EQUALITY & INCLUSIVITY - We are committed to equality of opportunity for all in an inclusive and diverse student community that values, respects and celebrates difference.

OPENNESS - We believe in open, transparent and accessible democratic structures that are led by students, and welcome new people and new ideas.

COLLABORATION - We seek to build inspirational relationships and partnerships based on mutual trust, respect and shared goals.

KINDNESS & COMPASSION - We nurture a culture of compassion, support and inclusion. Practising positive intent and seeking to identify the best in each other.

Sessions at Conference

My student experience – current student volunteers talked about their experience with the Association, their role and how to get involved.

Women in STEM – Lopa Patel, a member of the OU's council, joined us to share her experiences as a woman working in the field of STEM. and how to encourage more women to get involved.

Coffee & Consultation – Inclusivity – an Association led event asking delegates for their views on what governments and the HE sector should be doing to ensure that life-long learning can be fully inclusive.

Question time with the Vice-Chancellor – Association President, Sarah Jones, asked delegate questions of the Open University Vice-Chancellor, Tim Blackman.

Conference programme – sustainability and voice themes



Sustainability sessions

DIY study space tips – DIY guru, Jo Behari showed delegates how to make the best use of small study spaces.

Lightening talks with Nick Braithwaite – Prof Braithwaite delivered lightening talks on the National Student Survey, student led sustainability and the Open Learn Carbon Calculator.

Coffee & Consultation – Digital World Connectivity and Sustainability – 2 consultations held for delegates to give their views on sustainable study and digital barriers.

Desk yoga – relaxation is just as important at learning, education and development. Students were invited to take a break for yoga with a professional instructor.

Voice sessions

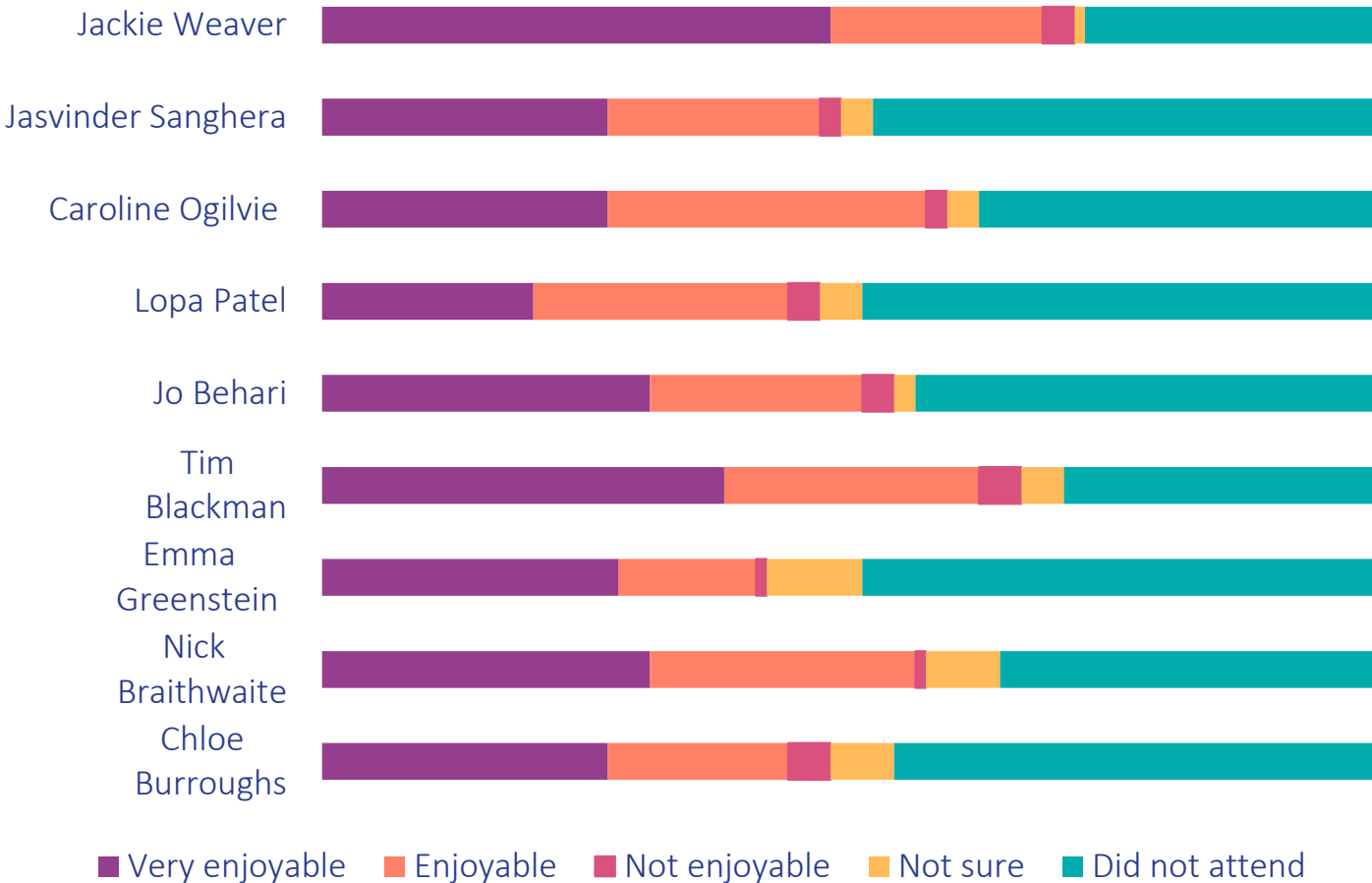
Life as a Postgraduate Research Student – 2 OU postgraduate research students shared their inspiring journeys from undergraduate OU study, with a chance to ask questions about life as an OU postgrad student.

Association societies – a session about the Association's wonderful societies and clubs, and how to set up your own society.

Coffee & Consultation – Exploring Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity – a student consultation to discuss the importance of collaboration and particularly how it can make our work in equality, diversity and inclusivity more effective.

Conference speakers

Figure 13



The delegates generally responded positively to the Conference speakers. Delegates selecting very enjoyable or enjoyable ranged from 41% to 68%. Jackie Weaver was the most popular speaker with the lowest 'did not attend' rate of 28%.

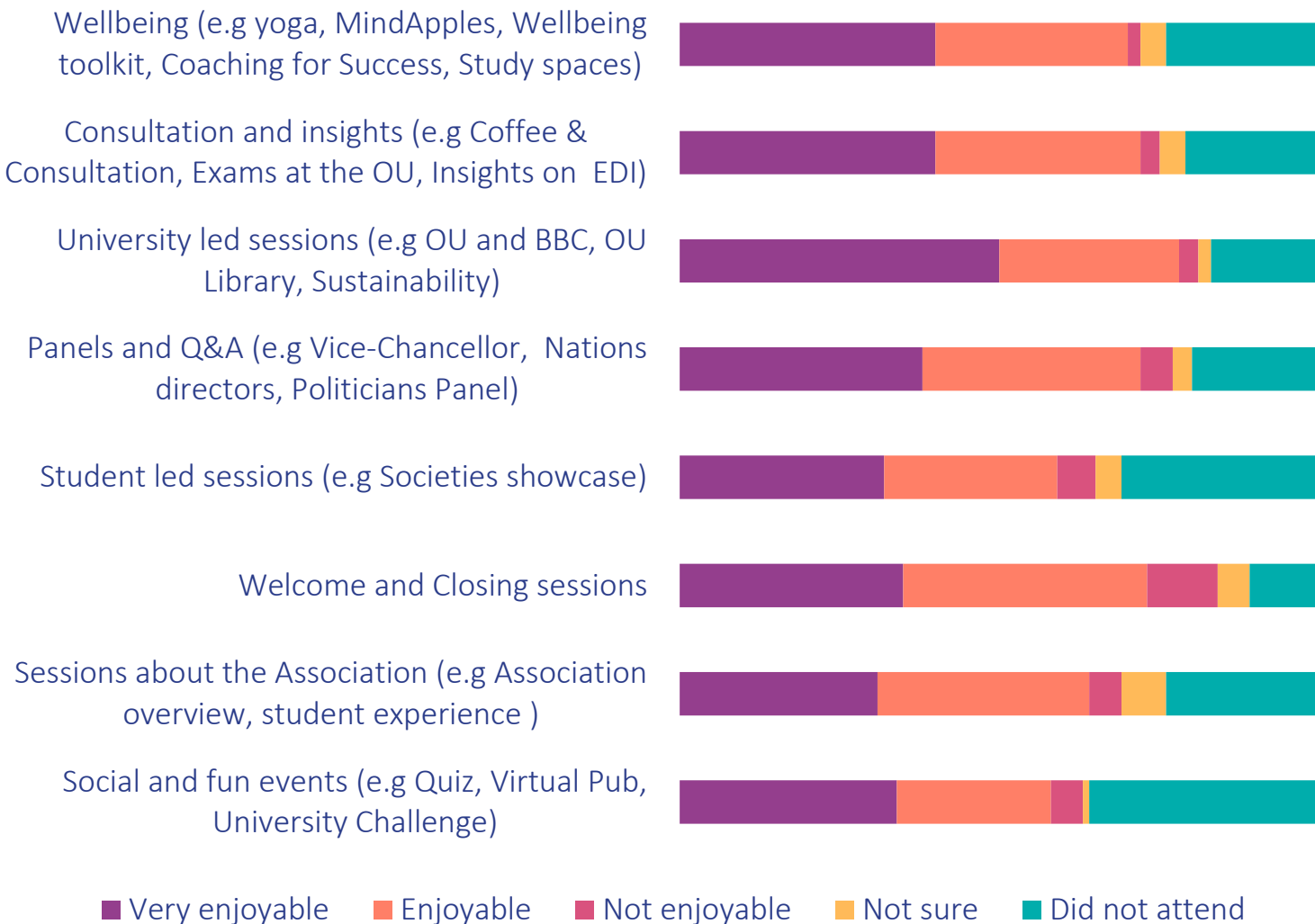
I enjoyed hearing from a variety of people and it gave me a sense of belonging.

A good mix of helpful and inspirational sessions that have connected me to more OU people and lifted my study motivation once again.

The guest speakers were excellent and hearing about what is happening around the OU and having a voice on that feels like a great opportunity.

Conference sessions

Figure 14



A high level of enjoyment for all sessions, ranging from 58% to 78% of delegates selecting very enjoyable or enjoyable.

The sessions that received the highest enjoyment rate were those led by the University.

The Welcome and Closing sessions were well attended with only 11% of delegates selecting did not attend.

Really enjoyed range of activities on offer & my weekend was worthwhile.

The conference also rekindled a sense of belonging to a bigger community that cares.

It was engaging, informative, open, enjoyable and most of all friendly and respectful.

It was lovely to see like minded people, whether the opinions were the same or not, but able to discuss each other's sides so to speak.

Quality of the sessions

Between 81% and 86% of delegates selected very satisfied or satisfied with the various aspects of Conference. While the free text comments were generally favourable, there were a handful of critical comments.

I think it's a great opportunity to understand what goes on. I felt it would be nice to have a continual break-out room throughout the day that people could go to, either to continue the discussion from a session or just to have relaxed conversations in.

Have more diversity - talk about disabilities affecting students.

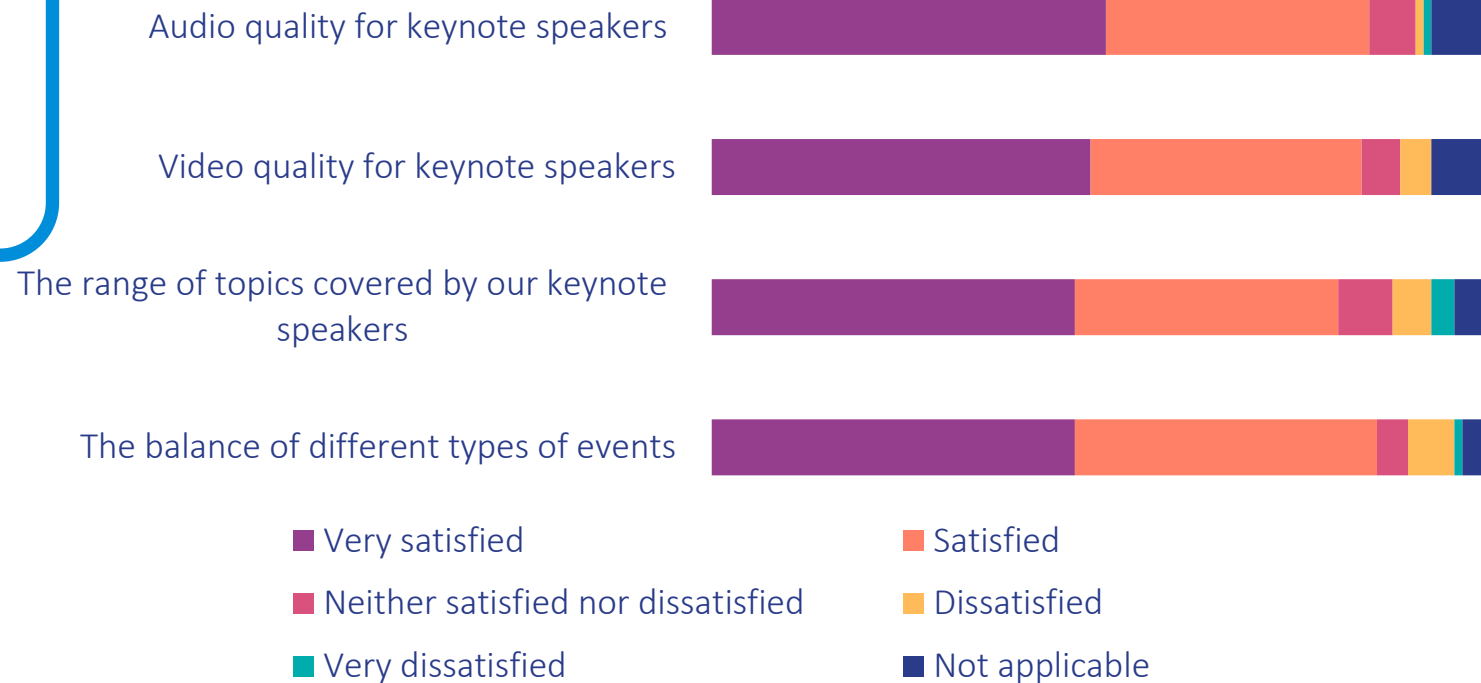
Because maybe next time, things are going to improve we won't use Microsoft teams anymore we will use any other streaming platform.

Even though there was technical difficulties it's always of great benefit to connect with students and staff.

I was especially pleased to see such a good representation of both EDI and Sustainability issues.

I recall my initial experience was seeing how the event was being headed by a group of women and that all the key speakers were women and it was initially a bit off-putting from a male perspective.

Figure 15



Conference online

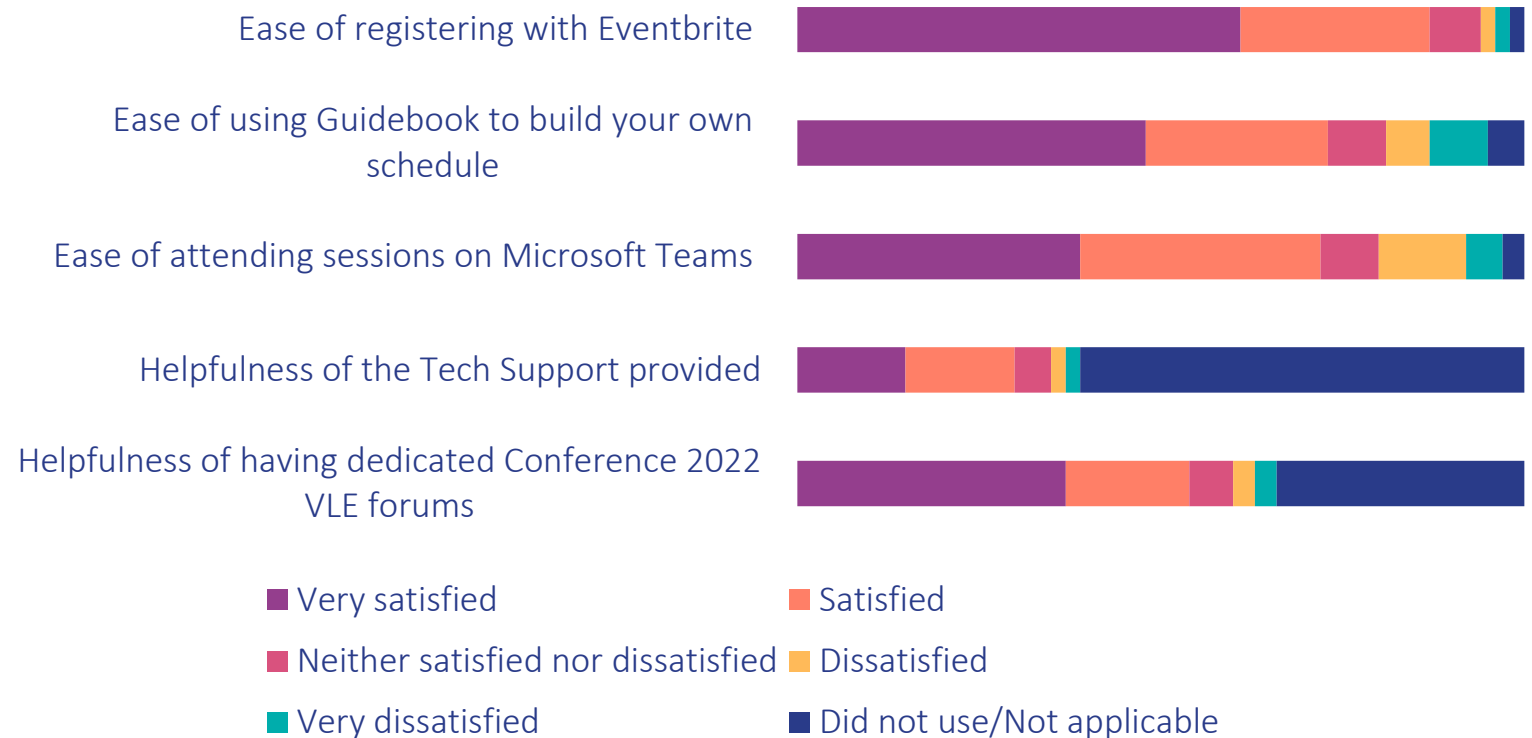


Conference online – technical overview

Conference 2020 saw the Association deliver the event in an entirely online format for the first time. With Covid-19 cases on the rise at the end of 2021, the decision was taken to hold Conference 2022 completely online once again. Students were invited to register for Conference using Eventbrite.

Microsoft Teams and Team Live were the two platforms used to host sessions. As with Conference 2020, delegates had access to the conference schedule planning platform, Guidebook. This **allowed delegates to build a customised schedule and receive notifications.**

Figure 16



Conference online – technical usage

To better understand delegates' experience of the event, the delegate survey also invited feedback on how students prefer to engage with online events.

The **majority of respondents preferred speaker/facilitators to use both audio and video (80%)** with only 29% opting for audio only.

The **use of the chat function was popular amongst delegates (66%)**. We also received feedback that delegates found they missed chatting with other delegates during events hosted on MS Teams Live where there is no interactive chat function.

Figure 17

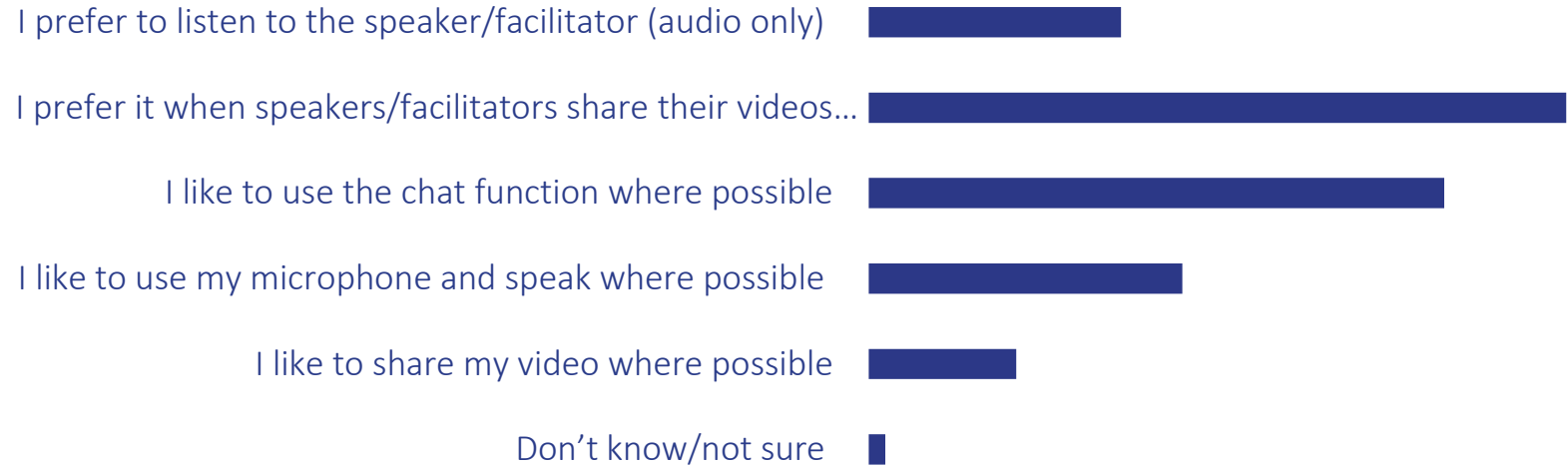
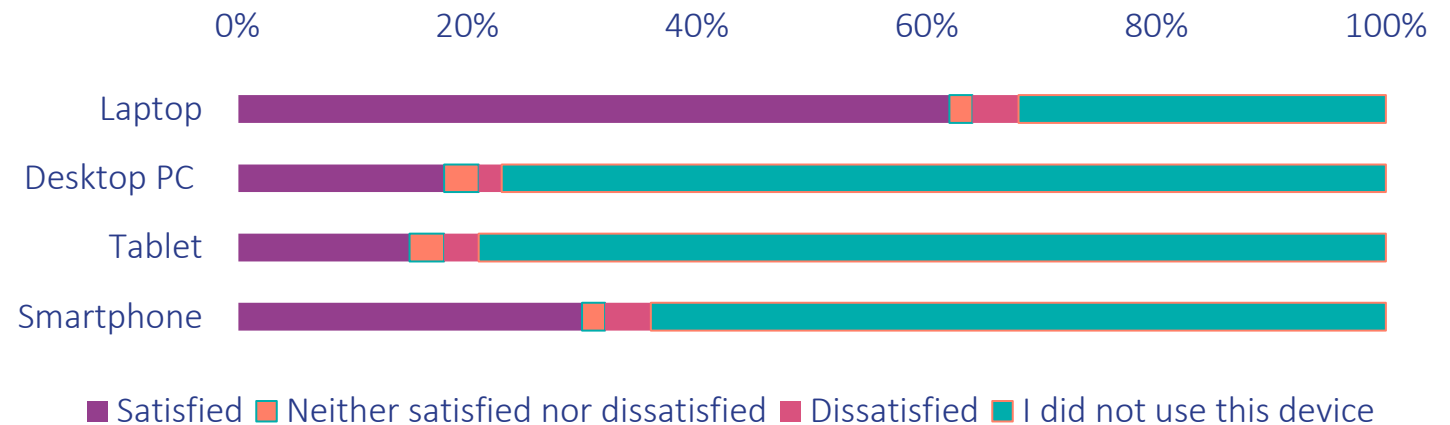


Figure 18

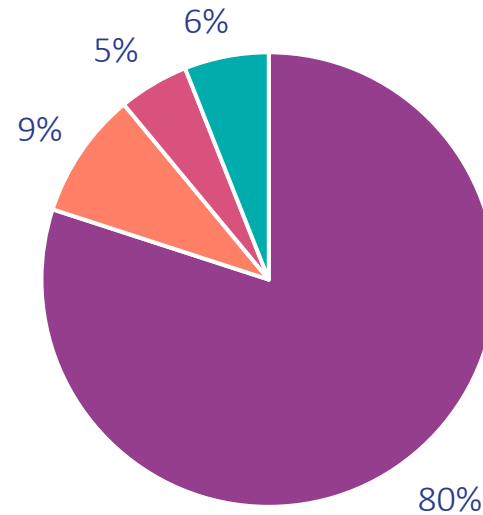


Conference online – accessibility

Upon registration, delegates were asked to inform us of any accessibility requirements. Just under 10% of those who registered, advised that they did have accessibility requirements.

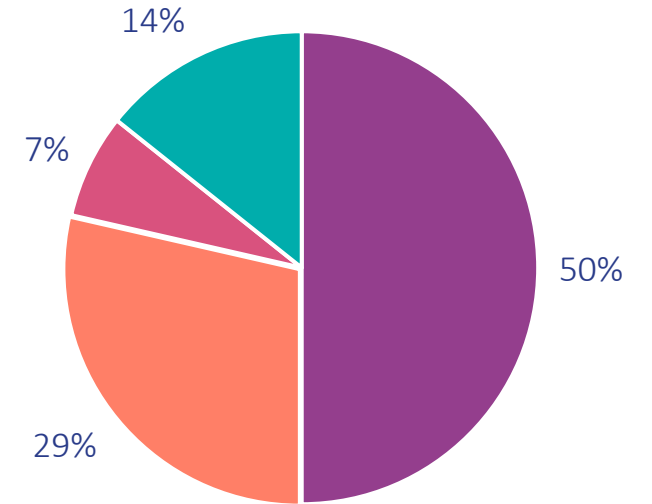
Delegates accessibility requirements ranged from needed advanced or adjusted copies of any Conference documentation, needed additional time for comfort breaks and consideration being made for physical, mental or neuro-diverse matters.

Figure 19



- I didn't have any
- I had accessibility requirements and informed the Association at registration
- I had accessibility requirements but did not inform the Association at registration
- Prefer not to say

Figure 20



- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied

Guidebook usage

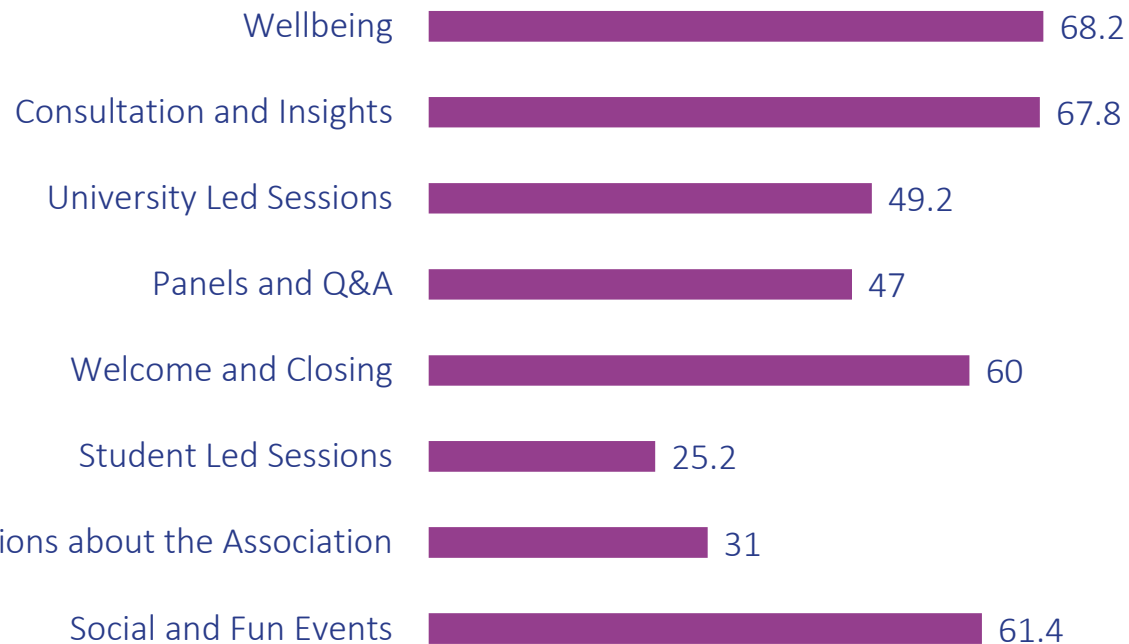


Guidebook usage

As with Conference 2020, the Association used Guidebook to allow delegates to organise their Conference schedule. Guidebook was downloaded by 121 delegates, with the Conference listing being accessed over 3,000 times during the weekend. The **most popular session to be visited was the speaker Jasvinder Sanghera, followed by Jo Behari. Well-being sessions were one of the most popular types of sessions to be accessed.** This coincides with free text comments from delegates about the importance of well-being.

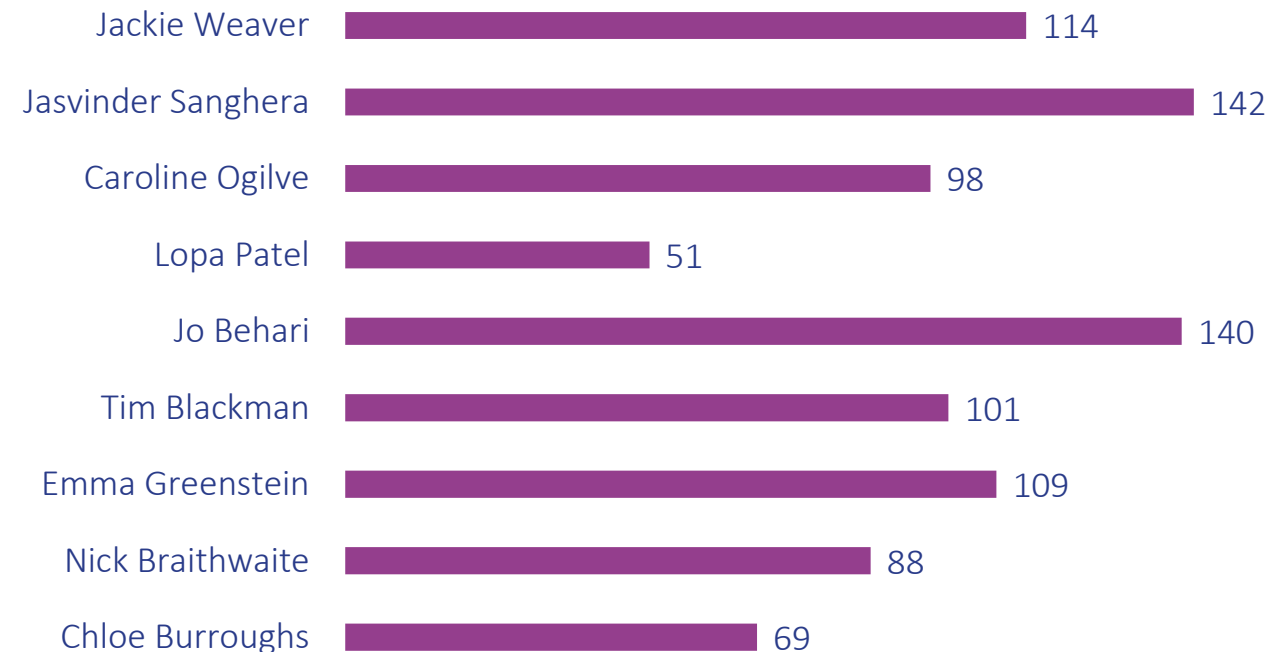
Average session visits from Guidebook

Figure 21



Guidebook session visits – speakers

Figure 22



Conference satisfaction



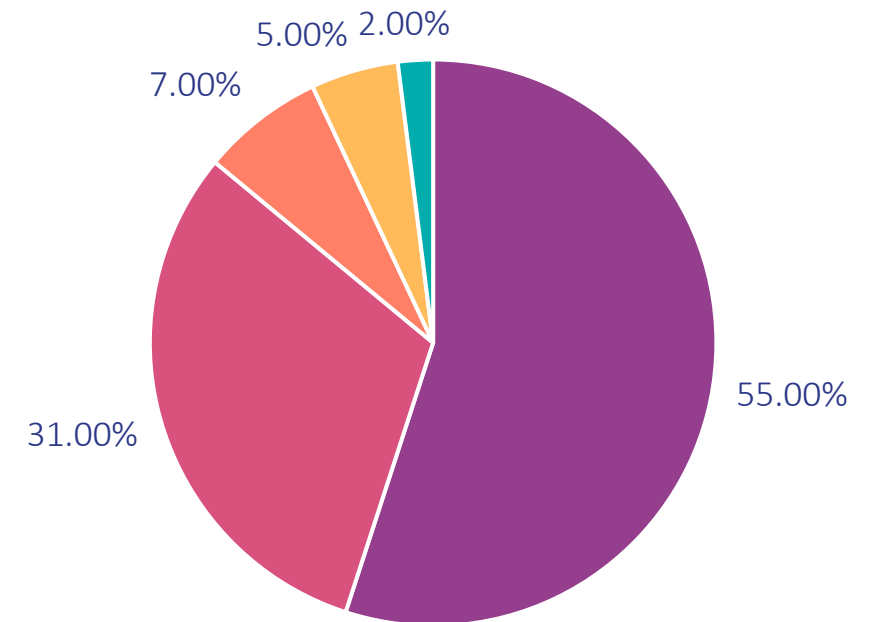
Meeting expectations

In response to the question 'how well did Conference 2022 meet your expectations?', **over half of delegates felt that Conference met all of their expectations.**

A further 31% of delegates felt their expectations were mostly met.

- Very well, it met all my expectations
- Moderately well, it met most of my expectations
- Not very well, it only met a few of my expectations
- Not at all, it did not meet my expectations
- Not sure

Figure 23



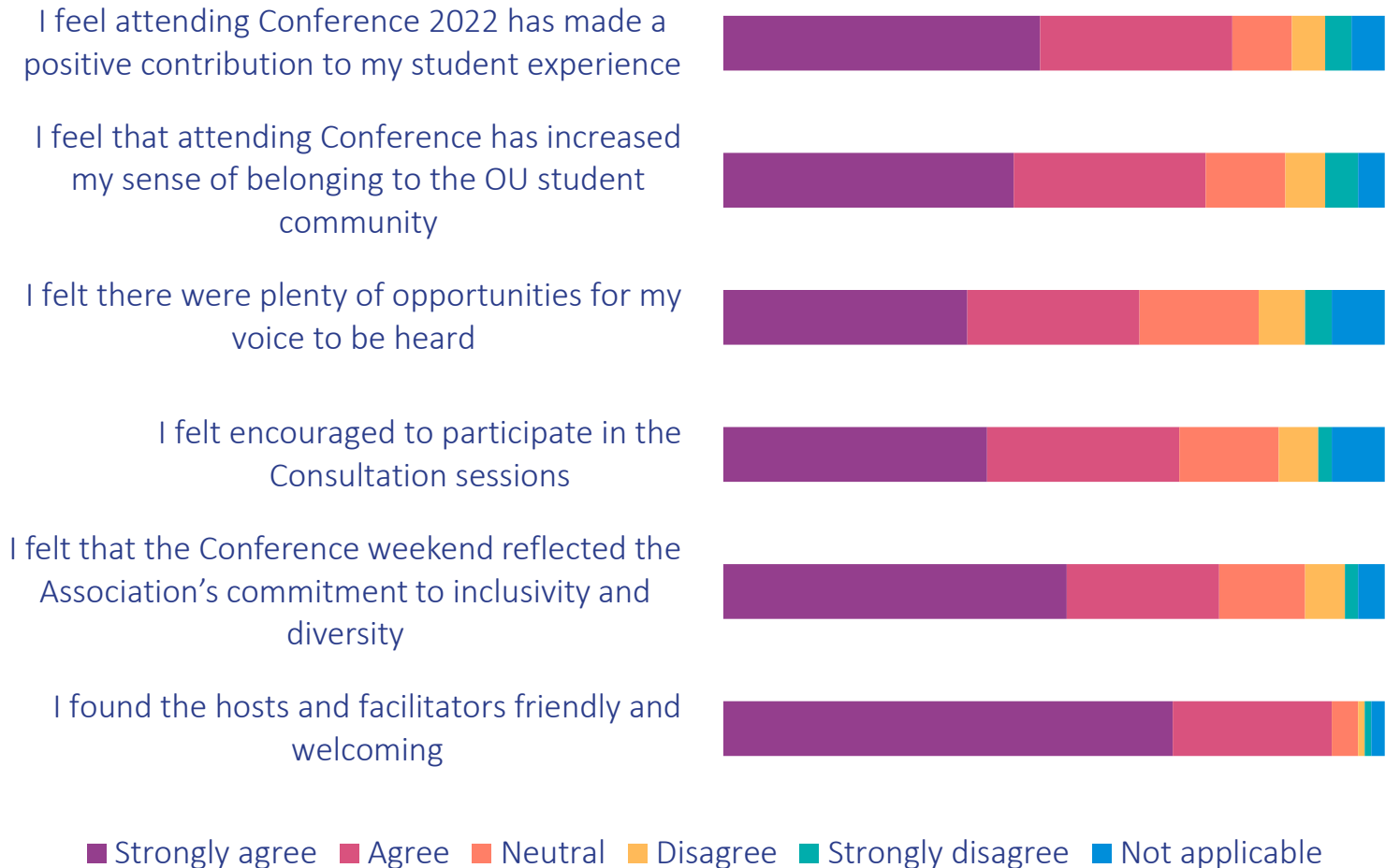
Conference experience

On average, 75% of delegates selected strongly agree and agree to the satisfaction statements. The best performing statement was related to hosts and facilitators being friendly and welcoming (92%).

'Opportunities for voice being heard' was the lowest performing option, with 63% of delegates selecting strongly agree and agree. This was followed by being 'encouraged to take part in consultations' (69%).

Although these are still high levels of satisfaction, some **improvement could be made to create opportunities for students to use their voice.**

Figure 24



Awareness and recommendation

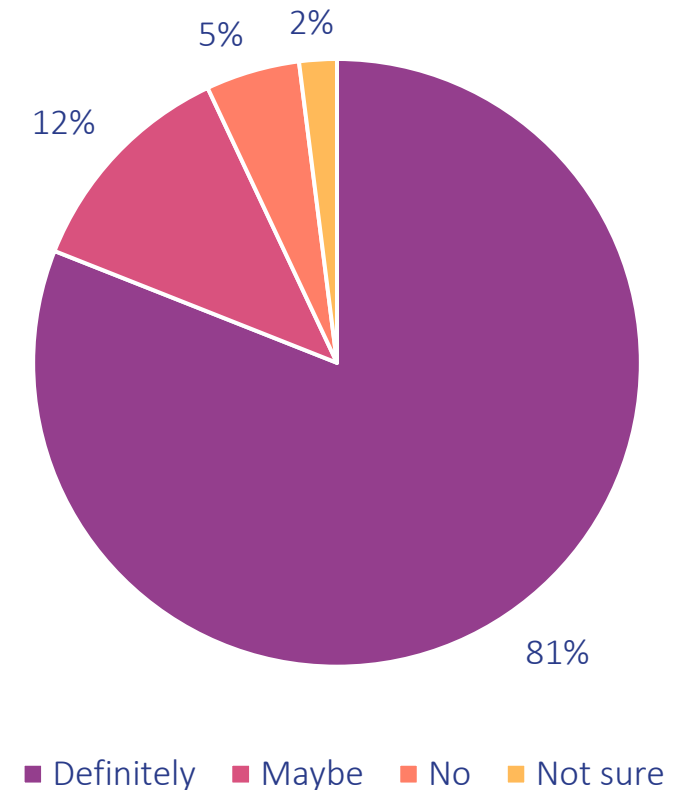
Figure 25 shows how **Association awareness has improved following Conference**. It shows that an average of 54% of delegates have more awareness following Conference. On average, around 35% of delegates already had some awareness of how the Association works.

Figure 26 shows that **81% of delegates would recommend Conference** to a fellow student. This is a minor decrease from 2020.

Figure 25



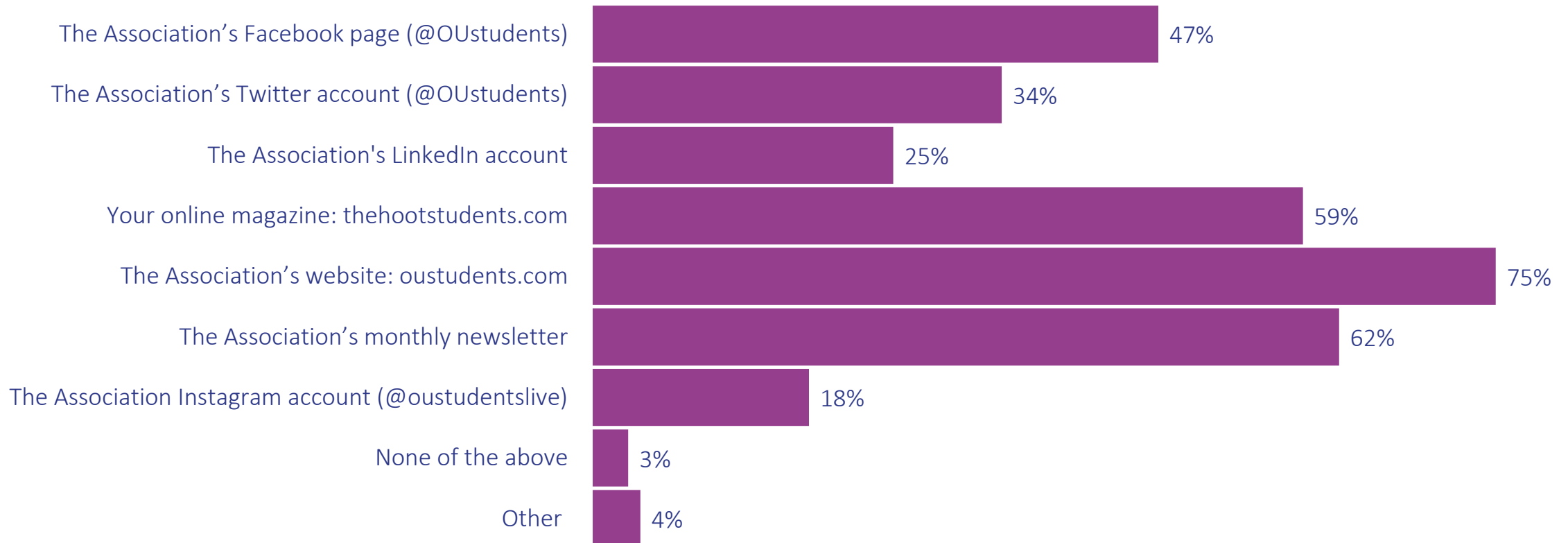
Figure 26



Keeping in touch

We asked delegates which way they are most likely to keep in touch with the Association after Conference. Most delegates are likely to use the Association website (75%). The Association social media platforms received the lowest hits with Facebook falling just below 50% and Instagram receiving 18%. This contrasts the Annual Membership Survey 2021 results which show that students are more likely to use social media platforms to keep up to date.

Figure 26



Non-voter analysis



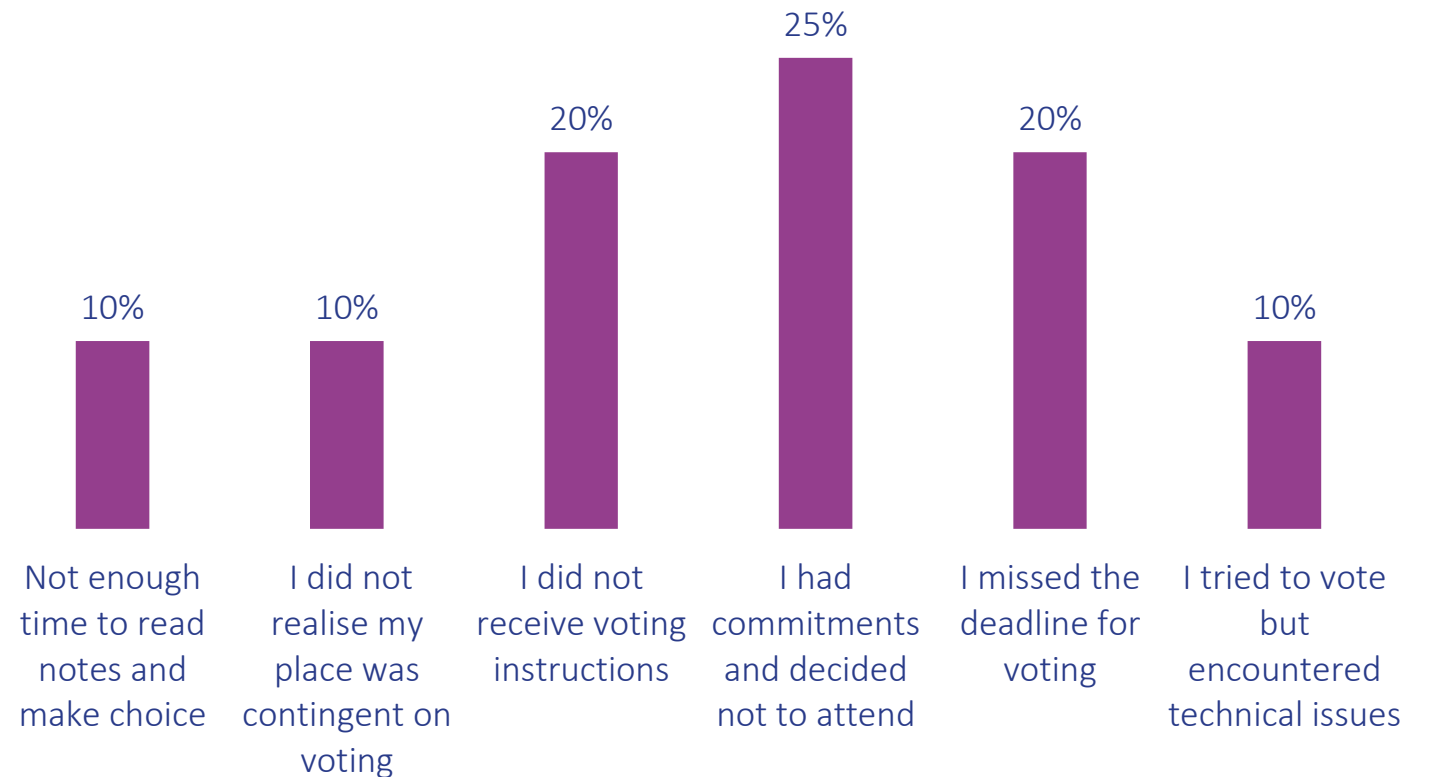
Reasons for not voting

As with Conference 2020, a condition to taking part in the Conference weekend, was that registered delegates were required to take part in voting on Conference Business. Once confirmation of voting had been made, delegates were sent joining instructions.

For 2022, nearly 30% of registered students did not take part in the business voting and where not eligible to attend Conference. As the percentage was so high, it was decided that a non-voter survey would be issued to gain further insight. Of the 70 non-voters, 20 students completed the survey (28.57%).

One in four non-voters stated that they had work/life/study commitments and decided not to attend. **40% of students surveyed encountered problems when trying to vote**, including not having enough time to read notes and make informed choice.

Figure 27



Recommendations



Recommendations



- **Networking**

- Delegates felt there was not enough occasions for them to interact with other students. Feedback that was received by staff included not being able to freely use the chat box during Teams Live events
- Forums were an unpopular platform for encouraging discussion between students. Preliminary work into an Association app is being carried out which will hopefully offer an alternate solution to forums which could be utilised at Conference 2024.

- **Conference content**

- Some students felt there was not enough diversity with the speakers and guests at Conference. Work needs to be done to show more balance and increase the inclusivity.
- Well-being sessions were the most popular during Conference 2022 with many of the survey's free text comments supporting this. This should be a theme for Conference 2024.
- On the whole, most students felt they had opportunity for their voice to be heard. However more work could be done here. For Conference 2024, we could introduce more light touch voice opportunities such as polls or encourage small and informal discussion.
- Feedback from staff suggested that some students struggled with the short comfort breaks scheduled into different sessions. There is an assumption that an online format would need shorter comfort breaks which is not the case. This is something to factor into future online events.
- Students enjoyed having a choice of events to attend but would like the ability to catch-up on missed sessions via a recording where possible.

- **Communications**

- Staff feedback indicated that some students may have missed out of the deadline to join Conference as they were not aware of the different cut-off dates and the implications of missing them. This was also echoed in the non-voter which showed a lack of understanding about voting being a contingent to take part at Conference and the voting deadlines. A way to overcome this would be to utilise text message reminders.
- Conference weekend newsletter opening rates were low when compared to 2022. For Conference 2024, we could look to integrate announcements into Guidebook and take advantage the notification feature.



**OU Students
Association**

PO Box 397
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
United Kingdom
MK7 6BE

Contact us at

-  www.oustudents.com
-  [@OUstudents](https://twitter.com/OUstudents)
-  fb.com/OUstudents
-  instagram.com/oustudentslive