Expectations for work | Views of final year undergraduates and recent graduates
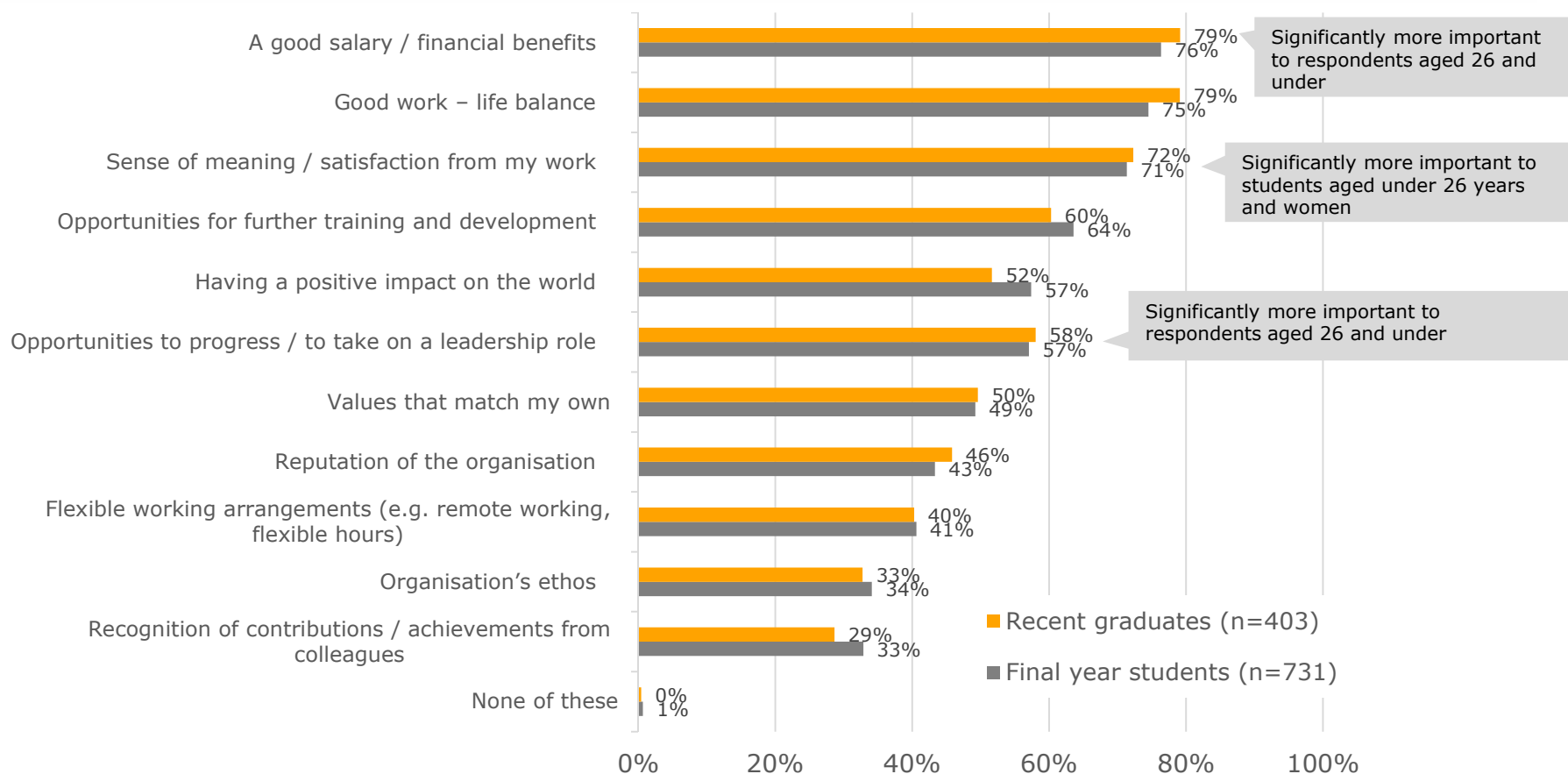
November 2017

Methodology

An online survey was distributed to final year undergraduates and as well as those who had recently graduated to understand their views about their job prospects and their expectations of their future workplaces and prospective employers. The survey was sent out via NUS' database of Extra cardholders.

403 responses from recent graduates and 731 from final year students were received. Responses have been weighted according to gender, matching data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Significant differences according to demographic characteristics are highlighted throughout the report, including those who may be defined as being part of 'Generation Z' – those aged 26 years and under.

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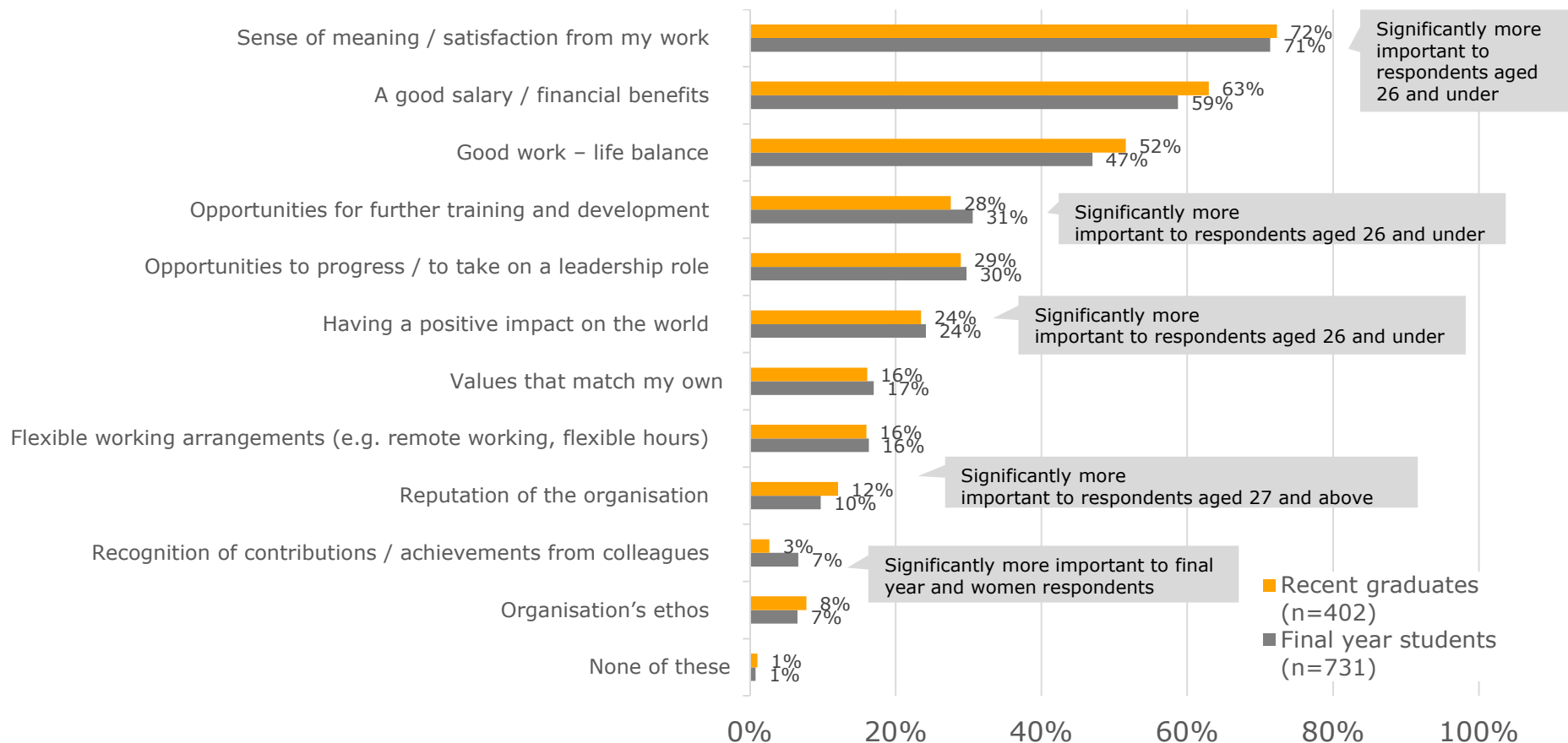
Aspirations for future employment

Having a job offering a good salary/financial benefits and a good work-life balance were mentioned by 3 in 4 recent graduates and final year students as being most important to them when applying for a job. Also important (mentioned by 7 in 10 of both groups of respondents) was having a sense of meaning and satisfaction from their work.

Factor	Recent graduates (n=403)	Final year students (n=731)
A good salary / financial benefits	79%	76%
Good work – life balance	79%	75%
Sense of meaning / satisfaction from my work	72%	71%
Opportunities for further training and development	60%	64%
Having a positive impact on the world	52%	57%
Opportunities to progress / to take on a leadership role	58%	57%
Values that match my own	50%	49%
Reputation of the organisation	46%	43%
Flexible working arrangements (e.g. remote working, flexible hours)	40%	41%
Organisation's ethos	33%	34%
Recognition of contributions / achievements from colleagues	29%	33%
None of these	0%	1%

Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Significantly more important to students aged under 26 years and women

Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

B1. Thinking about your job aspirations, how important, if at all, do you think the following factors will be when considering which jobs to apply for?
Base: In brackets

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When asked what the top 3 factors were that would have most influence when applying for a job the same 3 factors dominated, although in a different order. Of most influence was having a sense of meaning/satisfaction from their job (mentioned by 7 in 10), followed by a good salary and financial benefits (mentioned by 6 in 10) and a good work-life balance (mentioned by half).

Factor	Recent graduates (n=402)	Final year students (n=731)
Sense of meaning / satisfaction from my work	72%	71%
A good salary / financial benefits	63%	59%
Good work – life balance	52%	47%
Opportunities for further training and development	28%	31%
Opportunities to progress / to take on a leadership role	29%	30%
Having a positive impact on the world	24%	24%
Values that match my own	16%	17%
Flexible working arrangements (e.g. remote working, flexible hours)	16%	16%
Reputation of the organisation	12%	10%
Recognition of contributions / achievements from colleagues	3%	7%
Organisation's ethos	8%	7%
None of these	1%	1%

Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Significantly more important to respondents aged 27 and above

Significantly more important to final year and women respondents

B2. And what do you think will be the top three factors that will influence you the most when considering which jobs to apply for?
Base: In brackets

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Job location is the most important 'other' reason mentioned when considering which jobs to apply for, spontaneously mentioned by over half of comments analysed.

From analysis of 302 open ended responses the main 'other' factors mentioned included :

- Location of job (53%)
- Having a job I would enjoy (12%)
- Good team culture (12%)
- Rewards/benefits (10%)
- Having the right skills for the job (8%)

"Ultimately the job has to be something which interests me. Offering opportunities to further develop and progress; a constant challenging environment must be presented. Pay and benefits another desirable aspect."

"Location, a job where you're working as a team to achieve a common goal, jobs where community is involved (whether that be in the workplace or the wider public community)."

"I would only consider a job as a career if it's really something I want to do, I wouldn't settle for anything."

"I will take into account the location of the job when deciding to apply."

"The proximity to where I live and the people I will be working with on a regular basis."

"The description of the job role needs to be enticing and the location is also very important."

"Whether it matches my interests/will utilise my degree knowledge and skills."

B3. What other factors will you take into consideration when considering which jobs to apply for?
Base: 302 analysed responses

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When asked to describe their understanding of an organisation's ethos, the most commonly reported definitions included associations with 'what they stand for' and 'their core values'.

"What they stand for and believe in, like a set of morals and actions they promise to undertake."

"It's core values on how it operates."

"Usually centred around core values and beliefs the company stands for."

"The principles they stand for and the things they strive for."

"Their core values and views about how to operate/treat their staff and clients/customers."

"What they stand for and the atmosphere which they wish to convey."

"Positive and inclusive with a good set of core values that are relatable."

"The core values they ascribe to and how they demonstrate them in daily life."

B4. How would you describe an organisation's 'ethos'?
Base: 841 respondents

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Describing the 'ethos' they are looking for from their future employers, a 'positive' and 'fair' culture where employees are supported is most sought after.

"Sense of organisation, including everyone and fairness."

"Good solid foundations, good company reputation for being transparent in actions, fairness, integrity in everything."

"To promote a fair and tolerant workplace, engage with workforce on decisions in future."

"Commitment to justice and fairness."

"Wanting to make a positive impact, but also looking at things realistically."

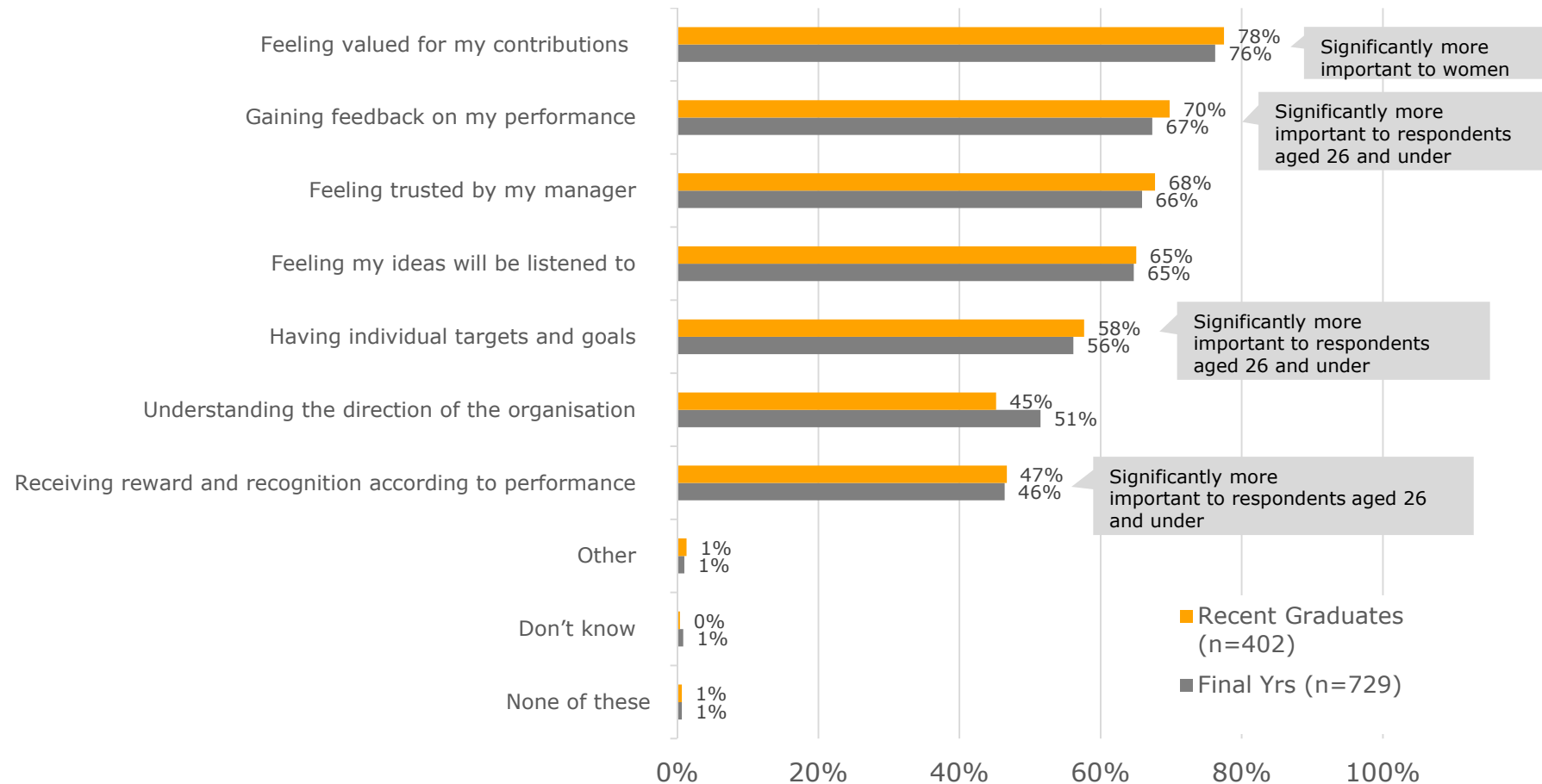"Something that positively impacts the local community/ young people."

"One that cares for its workforce and understands and acknowledges the demands placed upon them and welcomes feedback for positive change."

B4. What kind of 'ethos' would you be looking for from your future employers?
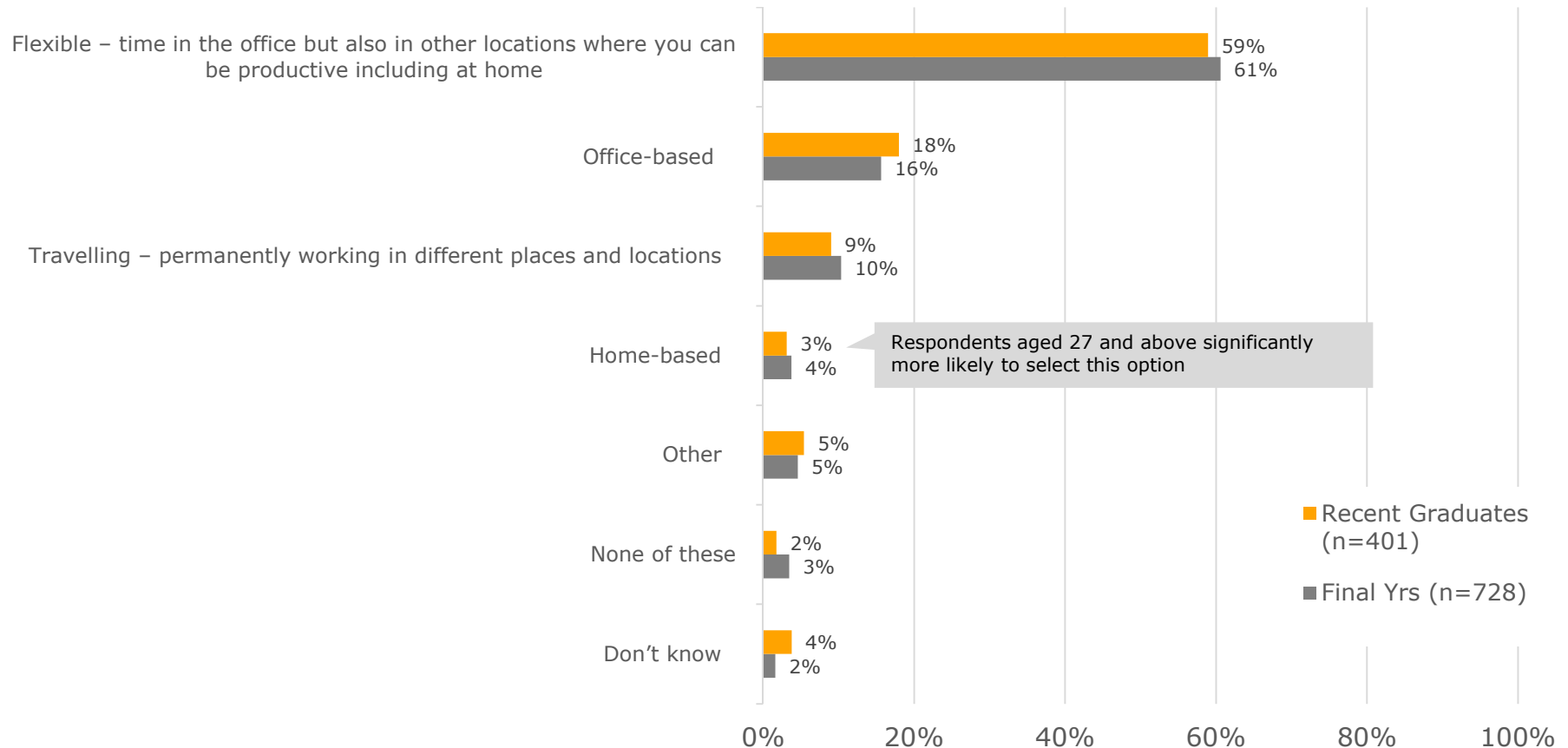Base: 825 respondents

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Organisations and ways of working

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3 in 4 recent graduates and final year students say that feeling valued for the contributions they made would empower them to carry out their role when starting a new job. Gaining feedback on performance, feeling trusted by their manager and feeling their ideas would be listened to would empower 2 in 3 respondents to carry out their role.

Feeling valued for my contributions — 78% / 76%
Significantly more important to women

Gaining feedback on my performance — 70% / 67%
Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Feeling trusted by my manager — 68% / 66%

Feeling my ideas will be listened to — 65% / 65%

Having individual targets and goals — 58% / 56%
Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Understanding the direction of the organisation — 45% / 51%

Receiving reward and recognition according to performance — 47% / 46%
Significantly more important to respondents aged 26 and under

Other — 1% / 1%

Don't know — 0% / 1%

None of these — 1% / 1%

Recent Graduates (n=402)
Final Yrs (n=729)

C1. Imagine you've started work in a new job. What do you think would empower you to carry out your role?
Base: In brackets

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6 in 10 say that a flexible working style is most preferred. Around 1 in 5 would prefer to be office based and 1 in 10 would like to travel around in their job.

Flexible – time in the office but also in other locations where you can be productive including at home
- 59%
- 61%

Office-based
- 18%
- 16%

Travelling – permanently working in different places and locations
- 9%
- 10%

Home-based
- 3%
- 4%

> Respondents aged 27 and above significantly more likely to select this option

Other
- 5%
- 5%

None of these
- 2%
- 3%

Don't know
- 4%
- 2%

■ Recent Graduates (n=401)

■ Final Yrs (n=728)

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

C2. Thinking about how you would work on a day to day basis, which of the following styles of working do you prefer?
Base: In brackets

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When it comes to the method of communications preferred when working, half say a mixture of methods works best for them – this is significantly more important to recent graduates (54%) than to final year students (46%).
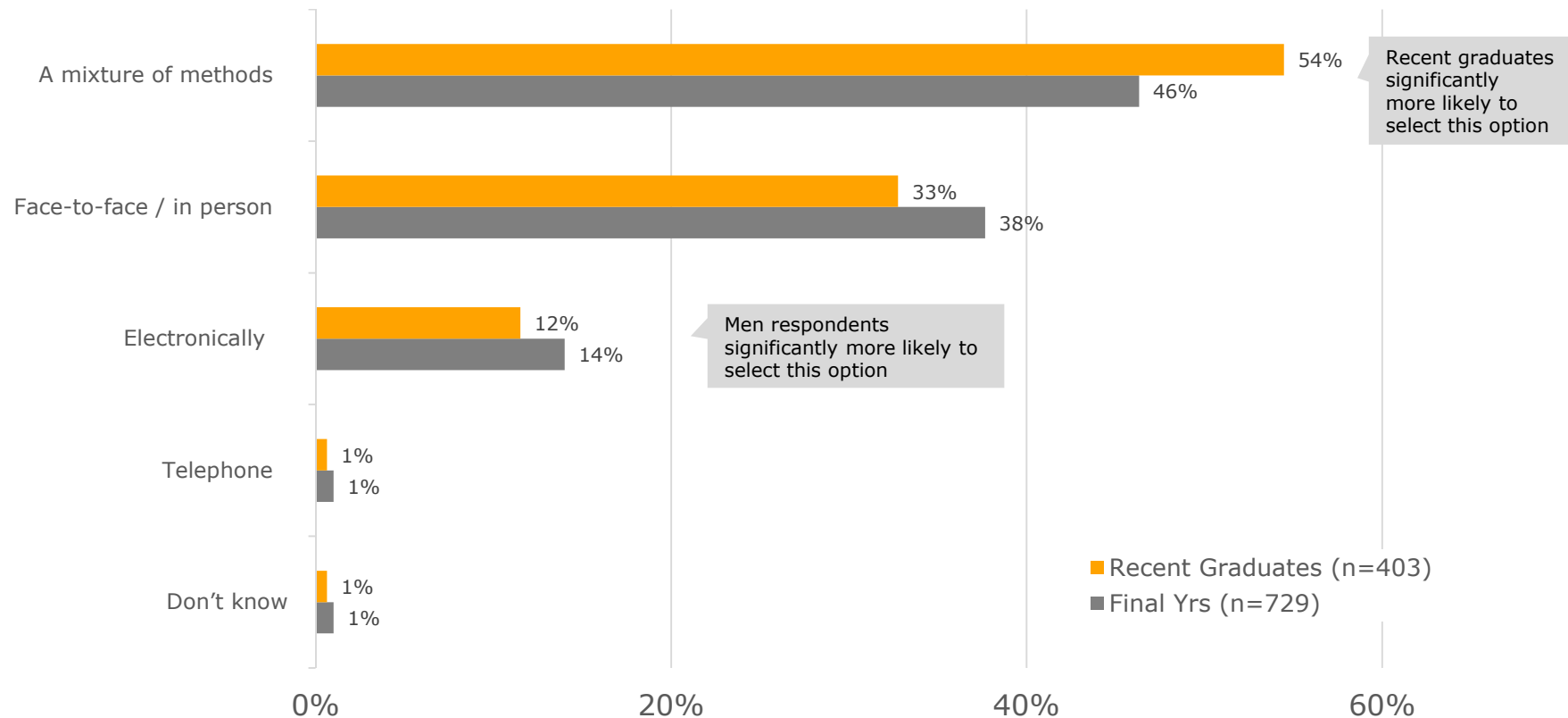

C3. Still thinking about how you would work on a day to day basis, which of the following methods of communication best fit with how you like to work?
Base: In brackets

Over 90% of final year students and recent graduates are in agreement with the statement 'I'm comfortable working with people from different generations'. Attitudes towards the statement 'I'm concerned my style of working will be different to my colleagues from older generations' were more mixed with around a quarter agreeing and 40% disagreeing.

I'm comfortable working with people from different generations
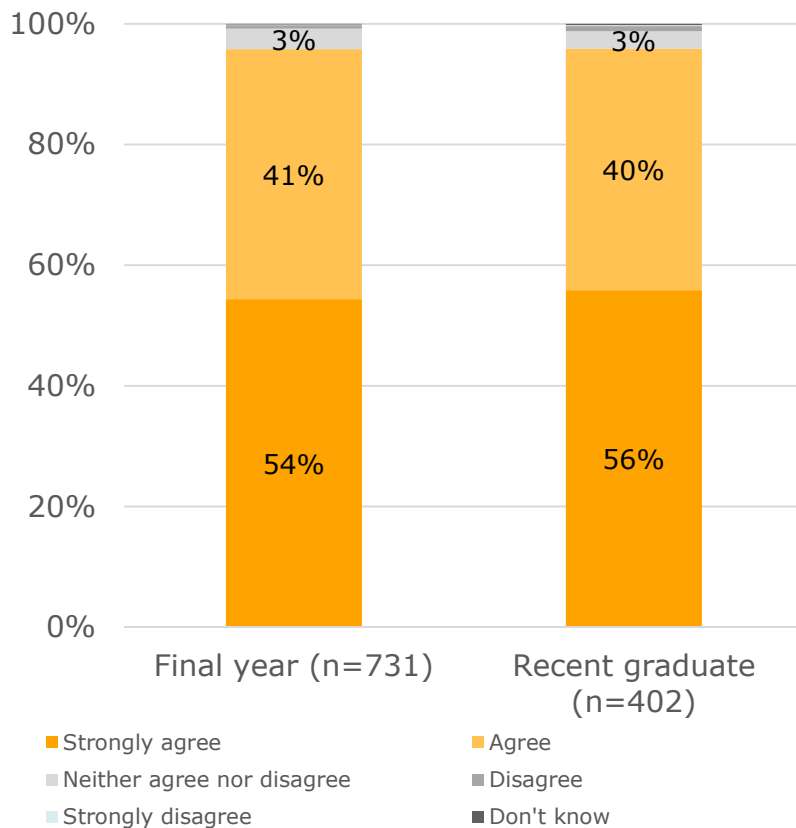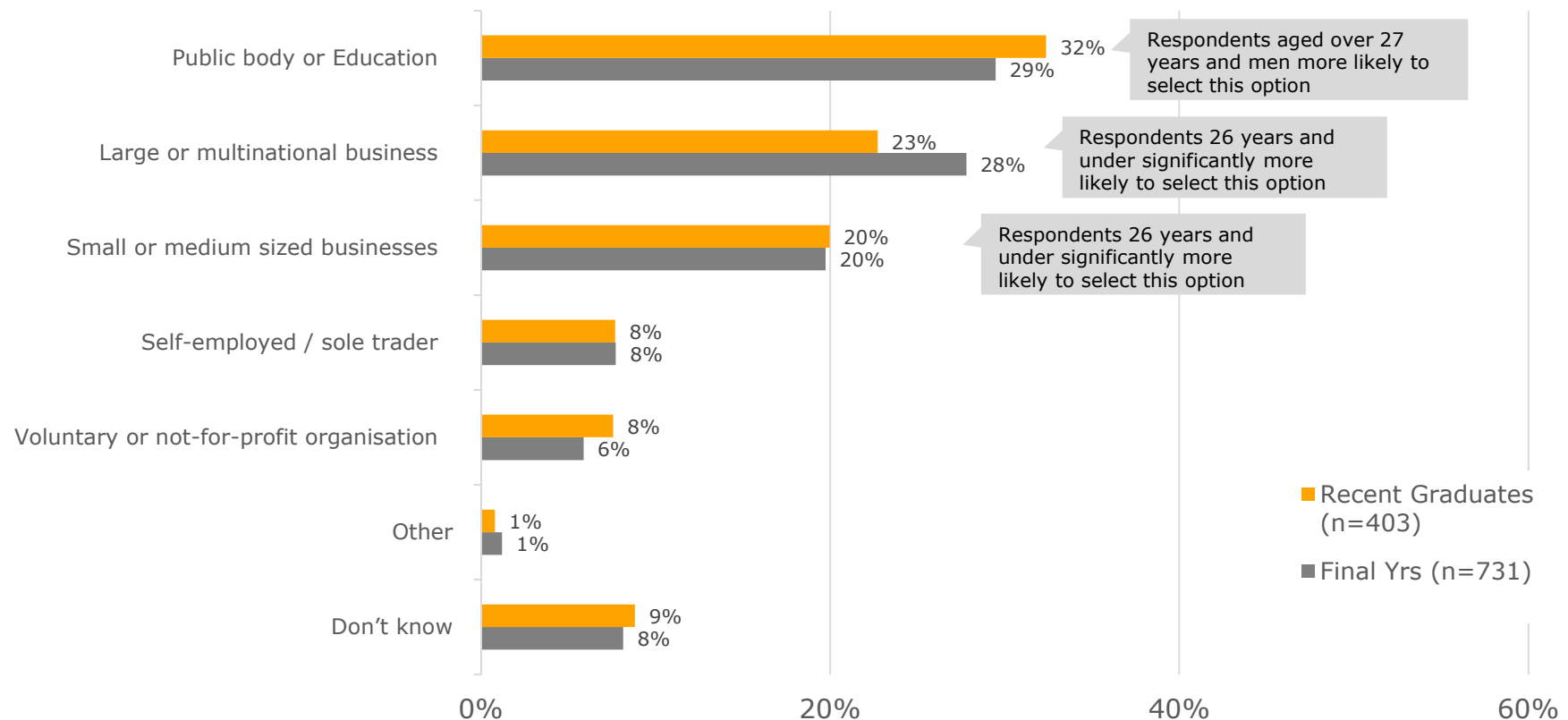

I'm concerned my style of working will be different to my colleagues from older generations
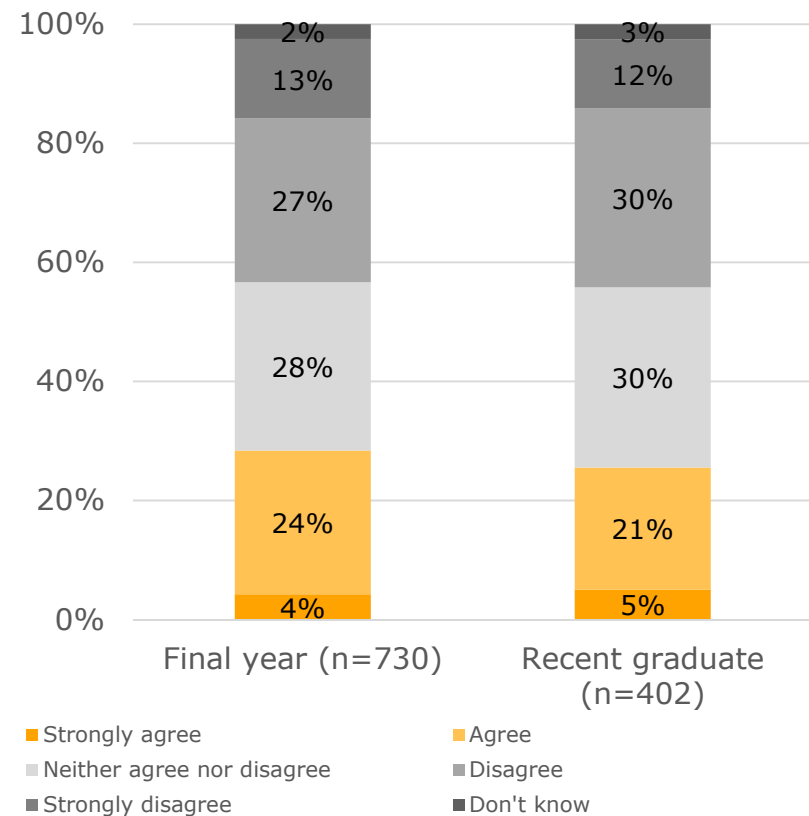
C4. We're also interested in your thoughts on your future colleagues. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

3 in 10 would prefer to work for a public body or an education organisation. Around a quarter would prefer to work for a large or multinational business.

	Recent Graduates (n=403)	Final Yrs (n=731)
Public body or Education	32%	29%
Large or multinational business	23%	28%
Small or medium sized businesses	20%	20%
Self-employed / sole trader	8%	8%
Voluntary or not-for-profit organisation	8%	6%
Other	1%	1%
Don't know	9%	8%

Respondents aged over 27 years and men more likely to select this option

Respondents 26 years and under significantly more likely to select this option

Respondents 26 years and under significantly more likely to select this option

C5. Which of the following types of organisation would you prefer to work for?
Base: In brackets

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For the majority a job would have to be close to not meeting expectations at all to make them consider handing in their resignation.

1 – Mostly meeting expectations
- 2% (Recent Graduates)
- 2% (Final Yrs)

2
- 4% (Recent Graduates)
- 5% (Final Yrs)

3
- 15% (Recent Graduates)
- 23% (Final Yrs)

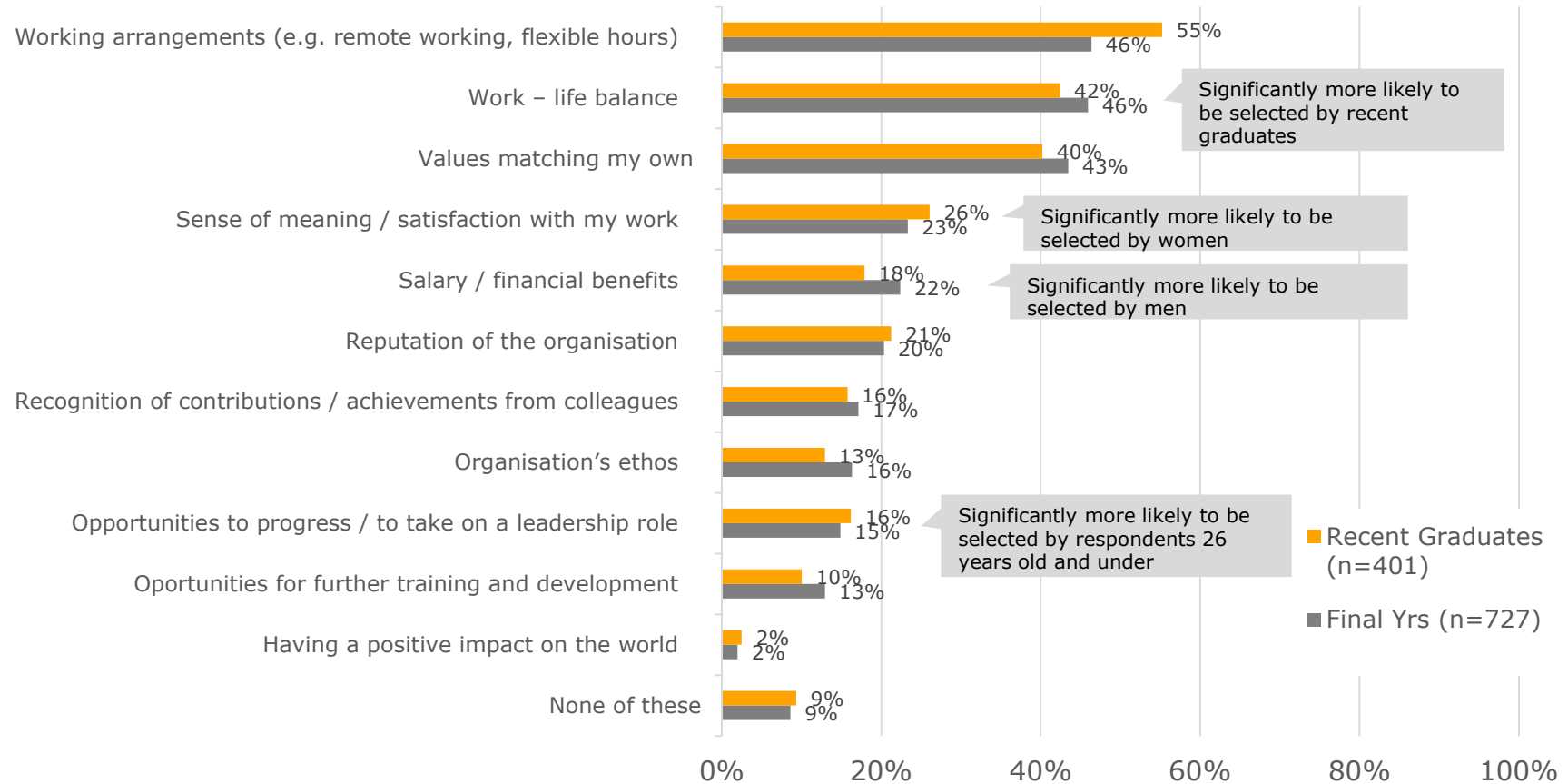**Significantly more likely to be selected by final year students**

4
- 42% (Recent Graduates)
- 35% (Final Yrs)

5 – Not meeting expectations at all
- 30% (Recent Graduates)
- 29% (Final Yrs)

Significantly more likely to be selected by women

Don't know
- 7% (Recent Graduates)
- 5% (Final Yrs)

Legend:
- Recent Graduates (n=402)
- Final Yrs (n=731)

X-axis: 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%

C6. Imagine you've started work in a new job, but unfortunately the job isn't meeting your expectations. How far below your expectations would the job need to fall in order for you to hand in your resignation?
Base: In brackets

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Around half of respondents would consider handing in their resignation if their working arrangements or work-life balance in a new job wasn't meeting their expectation. 4 in 10 said they would resign if values didn't match their own.

Working arrangements (e.g. remote working, flexible hours) — 55% (Recent Graduates), 46% (Final Yrs)

Work – life balance — 42% (Recent Graduates), 46% (Final Yrs)
Significantly more likely to be selected by recent graduates

Values matching my own — 40% (Recent Graduates), 43% (Final Yrs)

Sense of meaning / satisfaction with my work — 26% (Recent Graduates), 23% (Final Yrs)
Significantly more likely to be selected by women

Salary / financial benefits — 18% (Recent Graduates), 22% (Final Yrs)
Significantly more likely to be selected by men

Reputation of the organisation — 21% (Recent Graduates), 20% (Final Yrs)

Recognition of contributions / achievements from colleagues — 16% (Recent Graduates), 17% (Final Yrs)

Organisation's ethos — 13% (Recent Graduates), 16% (Final Yrs)

Opportunities to progress / to take on a leadership role — 16% (Recent Graduates), 15% (Final Yrs)
Significantly more likely to be selected by respondents 26 years old and under

Oportunities for further training and development — 10% (Recent Graduates), 13% (Final Yrs)

Having a positive impact on the world — 2% (Recent Graduates), 2% (Final Yrs)

None of these — 9% (Recent Graduates), 9% (Final Yrs)

■ Recent Graduates (n=401)

■ Final Yrs (n=727)

C7. Imagine you've started work in a new job, but unfortunately the job isn't meeting your expectations.
Which of the following factors would prompt you to hand in your resignation if they didn't meet your expectations?
Base: In brackets

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When asked for their views on leadership, respondents associated the concept with responsibility, exemplification, support and empowerment.

"Someone who respects the people they are leading, encourages them and helps them to improve."

"Being in charge in a positive way. Creating opportunity for others, leading people and showing them how to things in a correct manner. Supporting the team."

"A leader will help others to work to their advantages."

"Strong and leading by example. Someone who motivates and steps in to deal with issues effectively."

"Building a positive team and empowering individuals."

"Taking control of a situation and leading it to success."

"Being in charge but also part of a team and helping the others while maintain control as well."

C8. We're interested in your views on leadership within organisations. Please describe what 'leadership' means to you in the box below?
Base: 857 respondents

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The main advice that respondents would give a leader or chief executive of a future employer is to around empowering their staff and valuing their contributions.

"Make them feel like they belong, listen to their ideas and concerns."

"To value and listen your employees, give them an opportunity to give you feedback as well."

"Be a team with your staff members and listen to their ideas."

"To listen to your employees- undergraduates have a wealth of knowledge and opinion."

"A lot of great leaders can talk well, but know when to listen too."

"To take time to listen and offer the guidance they need, valuing their contribution and making them feel empowered."
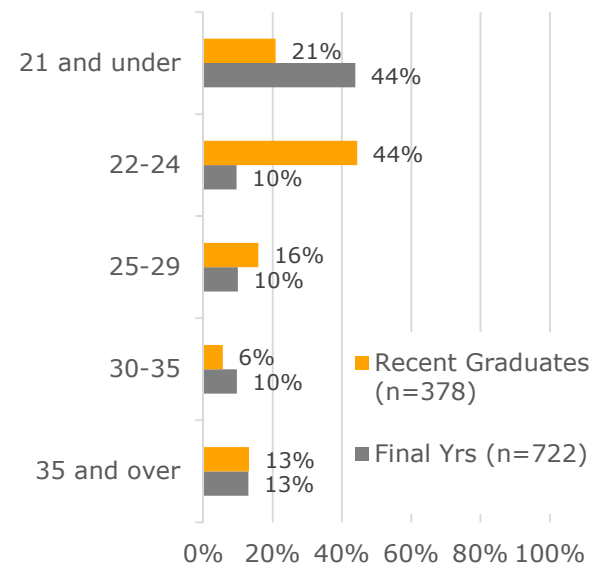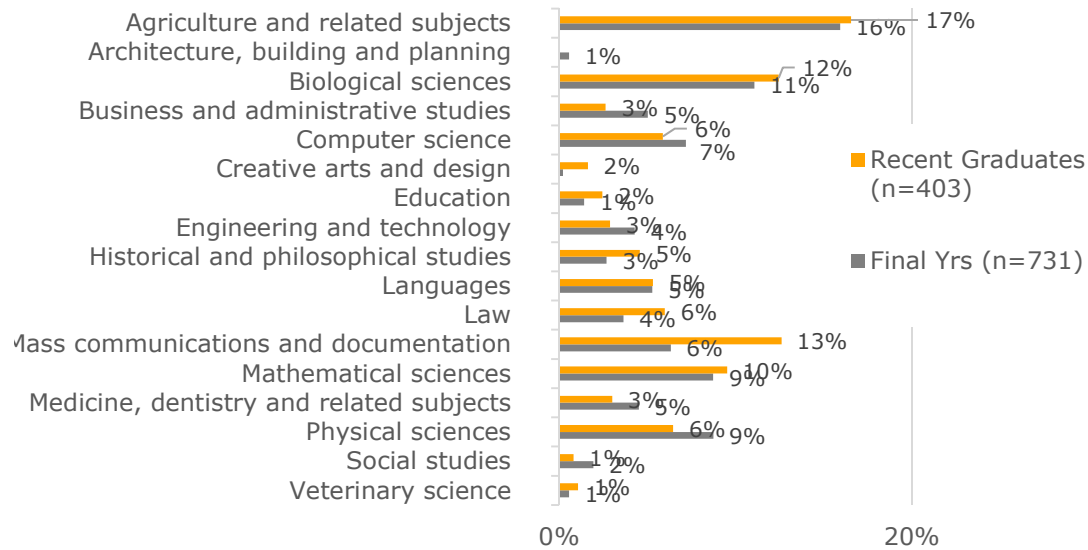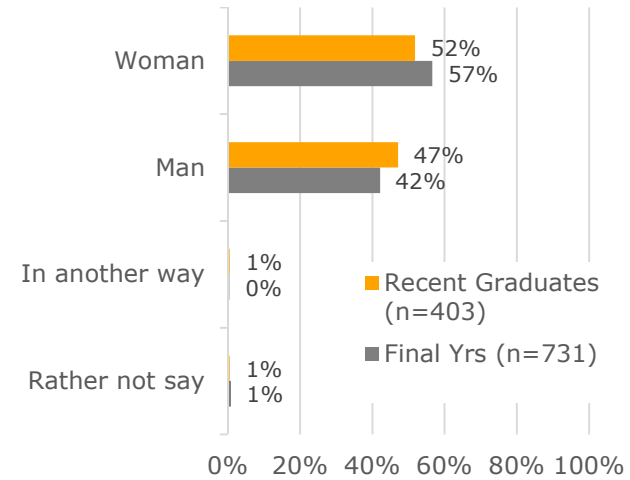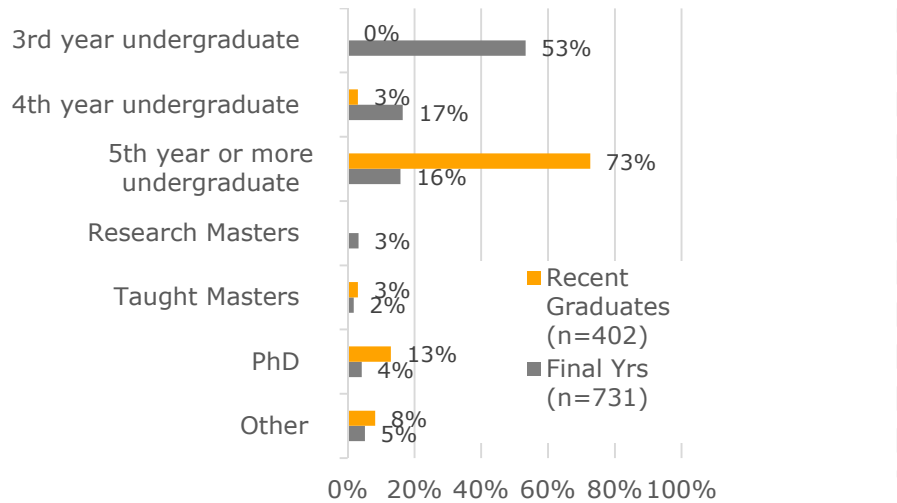
"Listen and value the voice of your employees , praise and feedback can go a long way."

C9. If you could offer the leader / chief executive of your future employer one piece of advice on how to lead and empower recent graduates with their workplace, what would it be?
Base: 837 respondents

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The respondents

Year of study

Year of study (top left)

Category	Recent Graduates (n=402)	Final Yrs (n=731)
3rd year undergraduate	0%	53%
4th year undergraduate	3%	17%
5th year or more undergraduate	73%	16%
Research Masters		3%
Taught Masters	3%	2%
PhD	13%	4%
Other	8%	5%

Gender (top right)

Category	Recent Graduates (n=403)	Final Yrs (n=731)
Woman	52%	57%
Man	47%	42%
In another way	1%	0%
Rather not say	1%	1%

Subject (bottom left)

Subject	Recent Graduates (n=403)	Final Yrs (n=731)
Agriculture and related subjects	16%	17%
Architecture, building and planning		1%
Biological sciences	12%	11%
Business and administrative studies	3%	5%
Computer science	6%	7%
Creative arts and design	2%	
Education	1%	2%
Engineering and technology	3%	4%
Historical and philosophical studies	3%	5%
Languages	5%	
Law	4%	6%
Mass communications and documentation	13%	6%
Mathematical sciences	10%	9%
Medicine, dentistry and related subjects	3%	5%
Physical sciences	6%	9%
Social studies	1%	2%
Veterinary science	1%	

Age (bottom right)

Category	Recent Graduates (n=378)	Final Yrs (n=722)
21 and under	21%	44%
22-24	44%	10%
25-29	16%	10%
30-35	6%	10%
35 and over	13%	13%

Expectations for work | Views of final year undergraduates and recent graduates

For further information about NUS sustainability research, please visit: https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/our-research/our-research