

HOMES FIT FOR STUDY

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF LIVING IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

2023



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

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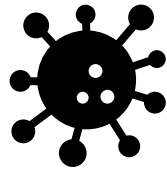
1. SUMMARY

Students living in private rented sector accommodation told us...



61%

say they're satisfied with their current accommodation



54%

say they've experienced damp or mould on walls or ceilings in their current accommodation



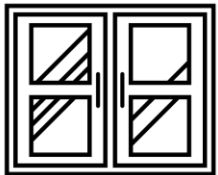
57%

have experienced condensation in their current accommodation



12%

have been unable to pay their energy bill at the final reminder due to a lack of money



49%

say their accommodation is poorly insulated/draughty



70%

agree they limit the length of time they have their heating on to save money on energy bills



59%

agree they have felt uncomfortably cold in their current accommodation



48%

who've been uncomfortably cold say it makes them feel anxious or depressed

2. ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Introduction

Students' experiences of the private rented sector are commonly associated with areas of poorly heated, low quality, dense, urban accommodation, accompanied by a widespread cultural expectation that it is acceptable for students to live in housing with these characteristics. SOS-UK has been tracking students' experiences of living in the private rented sector since 2013.

Between January and February 2023, we carried out a survey via the TOTUM card holder database and through local promotions by universities and students' unions, with the aim of understanding specific experiences related to energy use and experiences of cold homes across the UK. 2954 students completed the survey, 801 of these live in the private rented sector and are the focus of this report.

The survey was undertaken during a national [energy crisis](#) and [cost of living crisis](#) leading to inflated energy costs and other costs. It is worth noting that the average daily temperature in January 2023 at the time the survey was taken was 5.3 degrees Celsius.

The survey results have been weighted according to gender to reflect the latest available statistics for students in Higher Education available through the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

The report presents the findings in the following areas:

- Living in the private rented sector
- Student attitudes towards energy usage and temperature in their accommodation
- Costs associated with living in the private rented sector



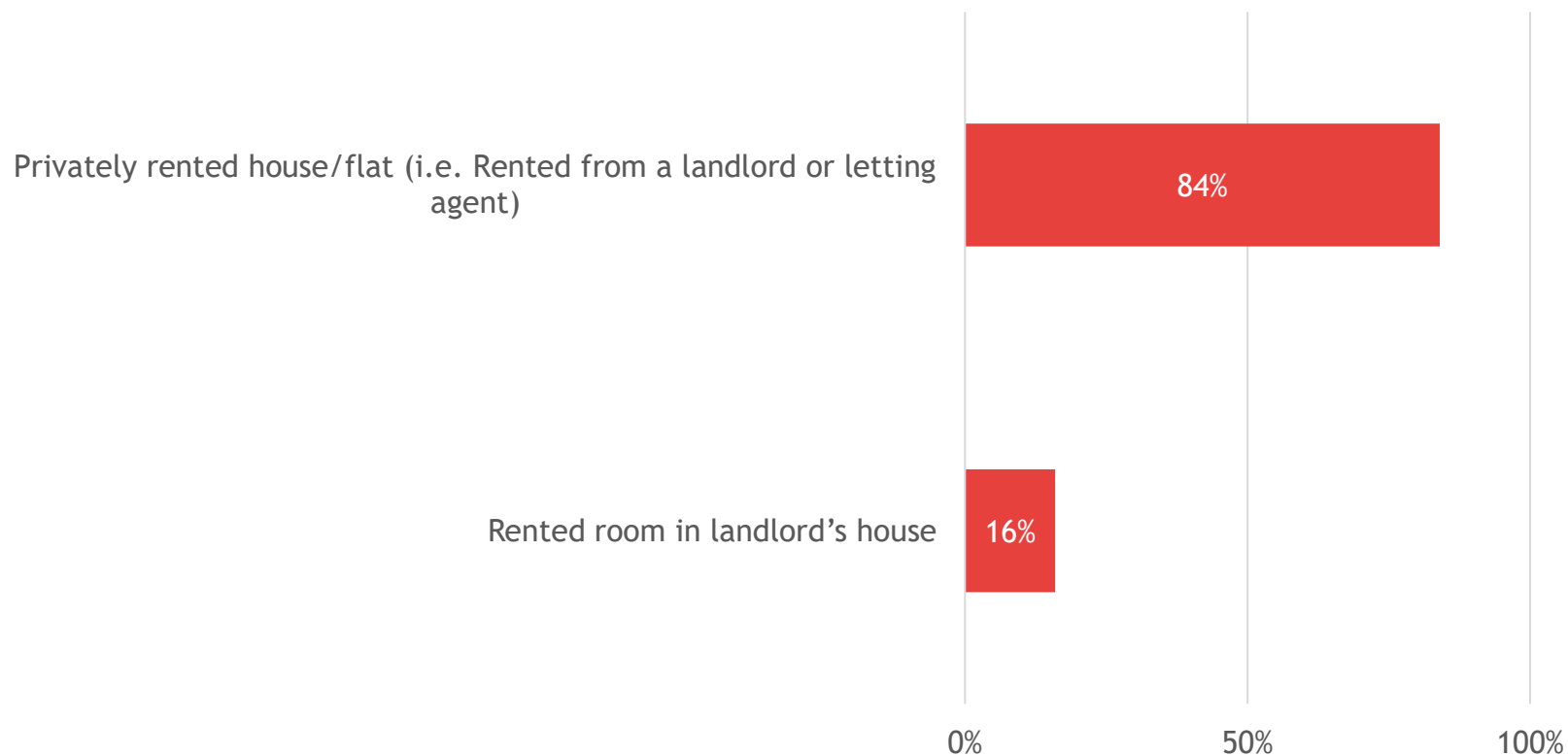
Universities
UK

This research has been funded and conducted in partnership with Universities UK.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 Living in the private rented sector

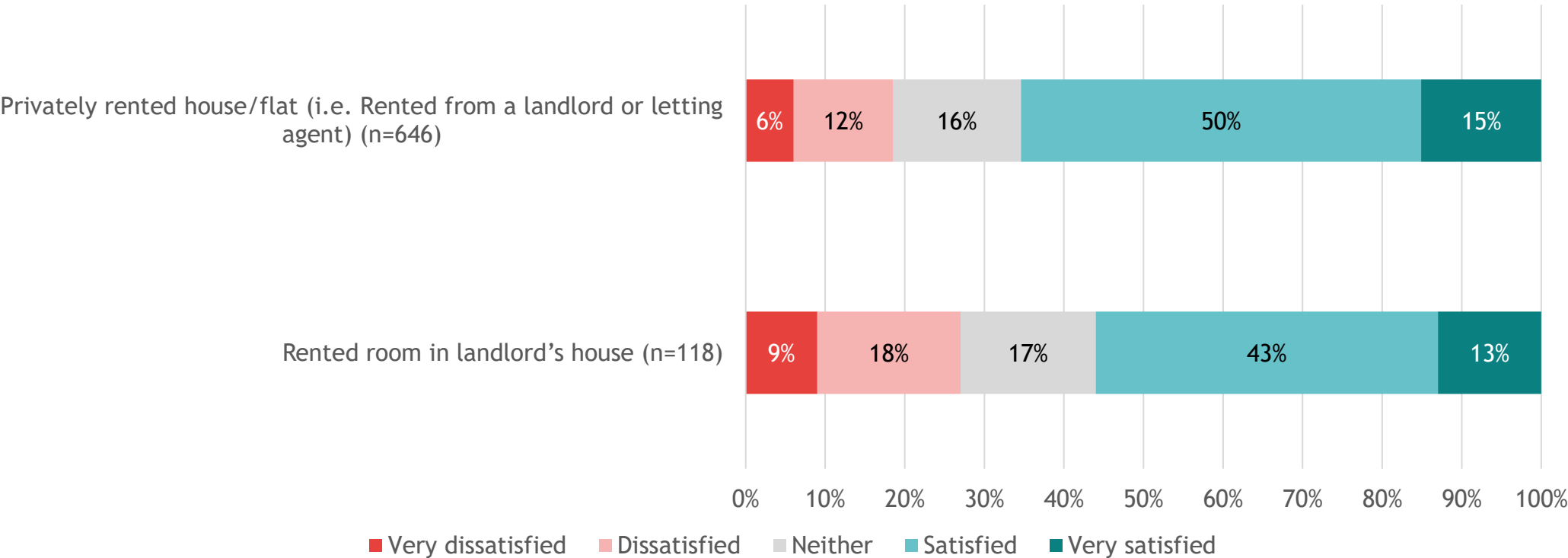
The majority of respondents living in the private rented sector do so in privately rented houses or flats from a landlord or letting agent (84%).



Q. Which of these best describes your current accommodation? Please select one only.

Weighted base: 766. Balance: No response and not living in private rented sector accommodation.

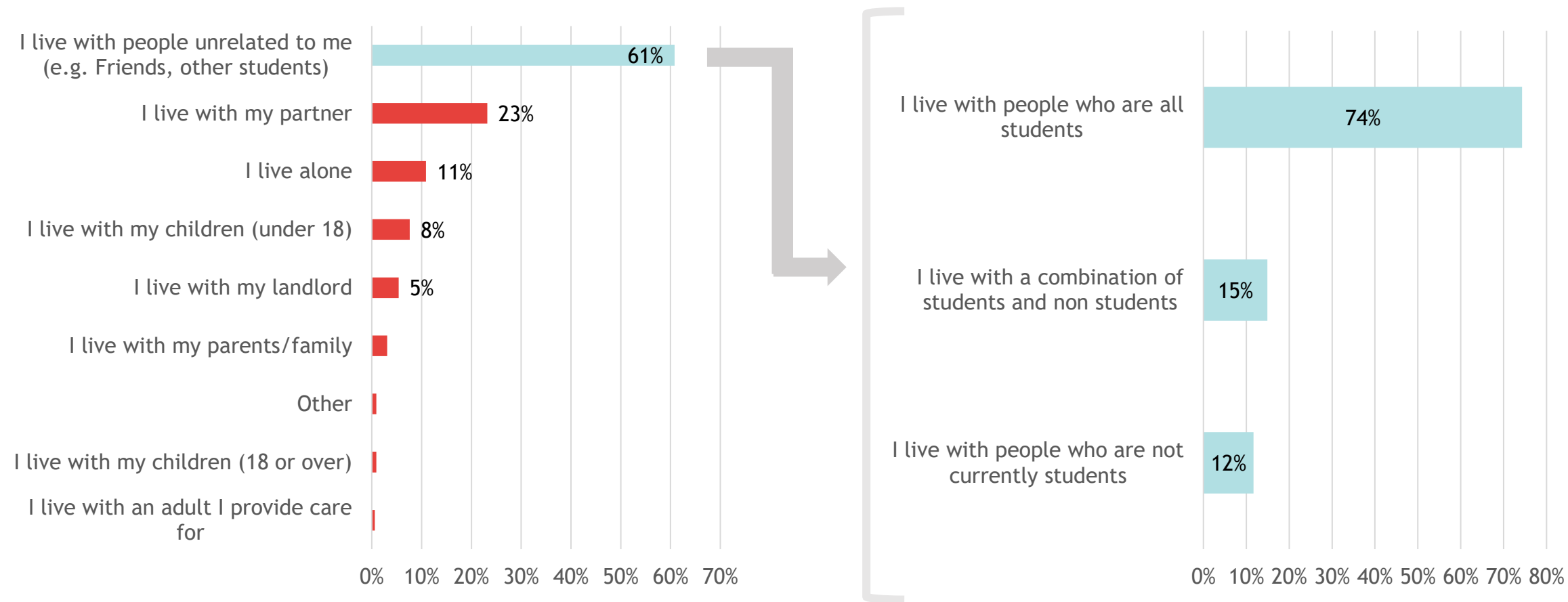
On the whole, respondents report being satisfied with their accommodation in the private rented sector, with 65% who live in privately rented houses/flats saying they're satisfied, and 56% amongst those renting a room in their landlord's house. On average, 61% of respondents in private rented sector accommodation are satisfied.



Q. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current term-time accommodation?
Weighted base: See chart. Balance: don't know, rather not say, no response.



Just under two thirds of respondents (61%) say they live with people unrelated to them such as friends or other students. 74% of these respondents live only with other students.

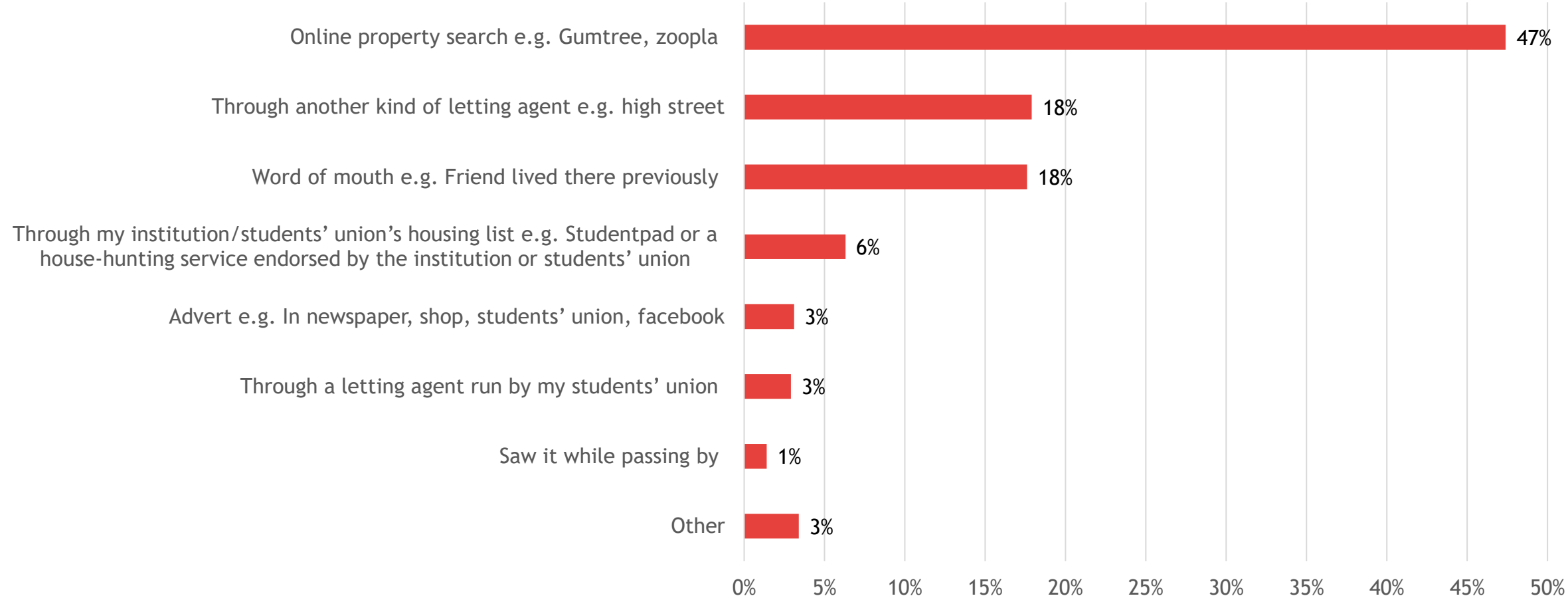


Q. Who else lives in your current accommodation? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: 763. Balance: No response.

Q. Which of the following best describes who you live with? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: 383. Balance: No response.



Just under half of respondents say they found their current house/flat through an online property search.



Q. How did you find your current house/flat?
Weighted base: 761. Balance: no response.



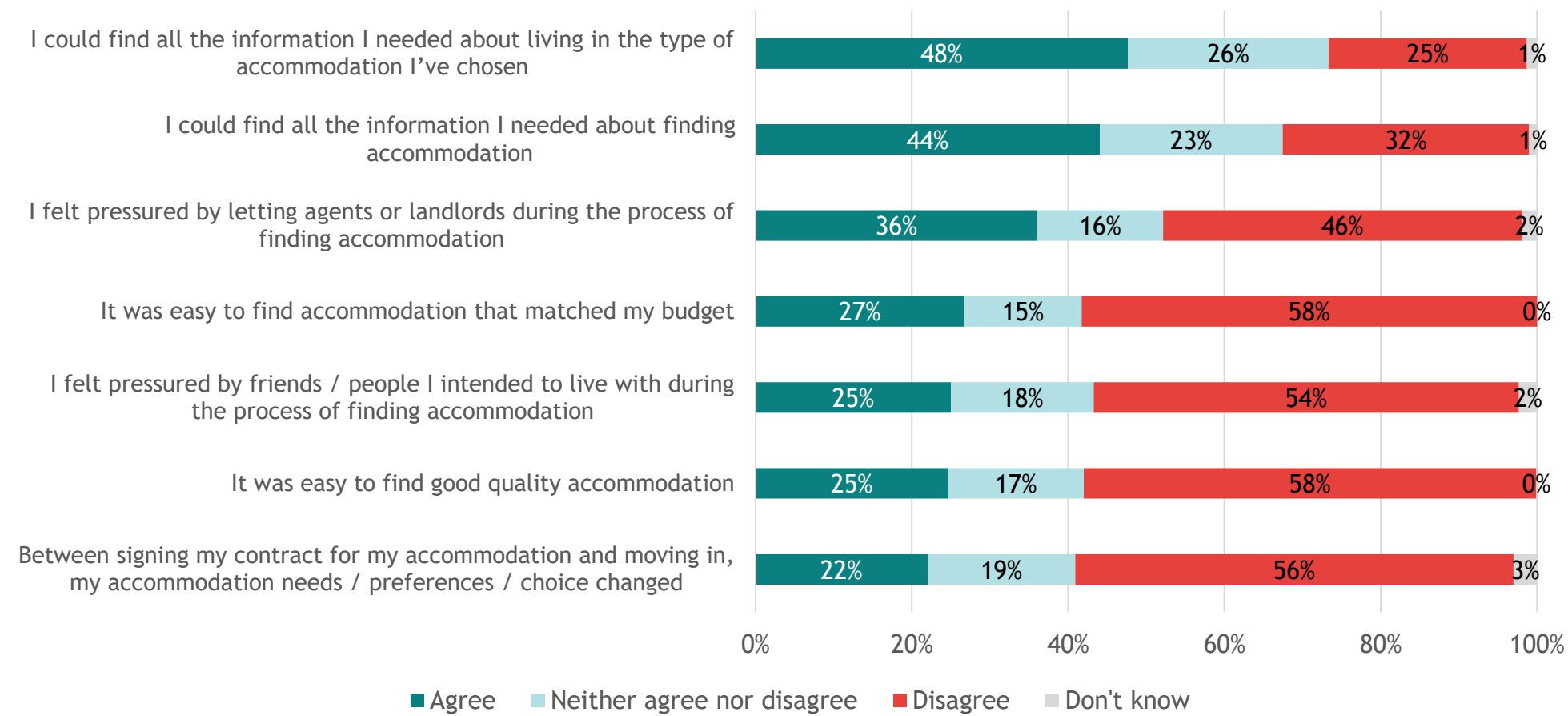
53% of respondents say they chose to live in private rented sector accommodation due to it being convenient to get to their place of study. Ease and affordability also contributed to their choice of accommodation.



Q. Why did you choose to live in this type of accommodation while you study? Please select the top three reasons for choosing your accommodation
Weighted base: 800. Balance: No response.



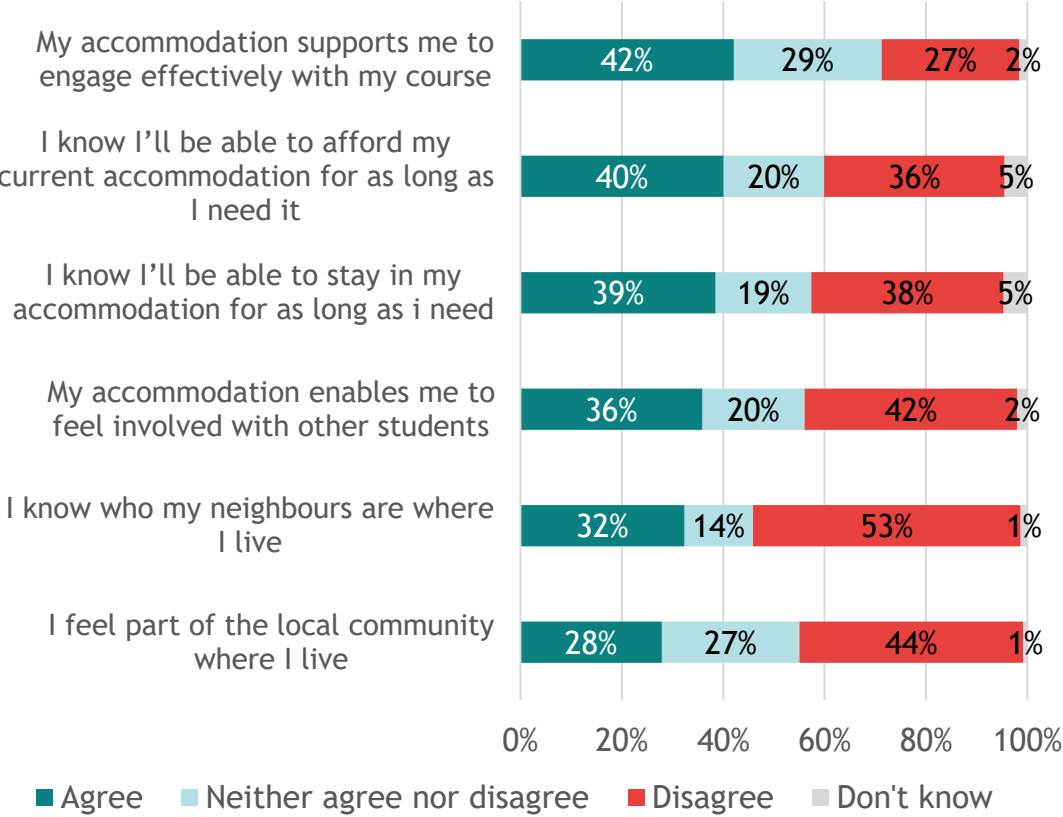
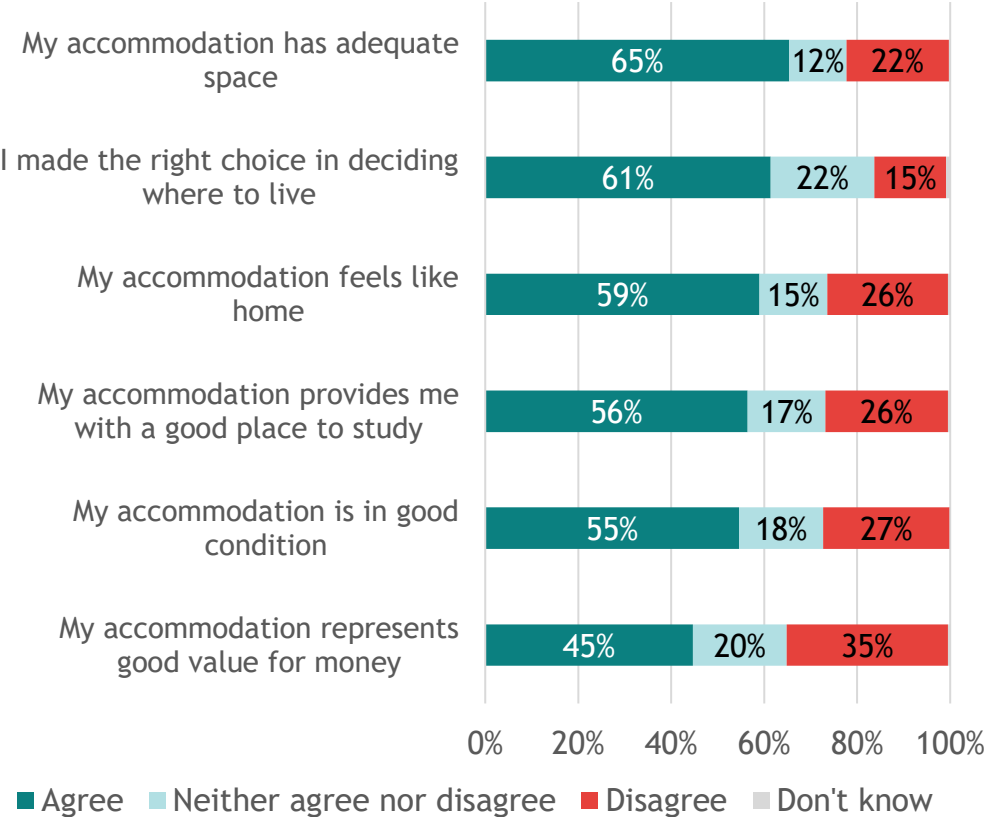
Only 25% of respondents agreed that it was easy for them to find good quality accommodation, and 27% agreed that it was easy to do so within their budget. Over a third of respondents (36%) said they felt pressured by letting agents or landlords during the process of finding accommodation.



Q. Thinking about the process of finding your current accommodation, to what extent do you agree, if at all, with the following statements? Please select one for each option.
Weighted base: c.730 Balance: no response, rather not say



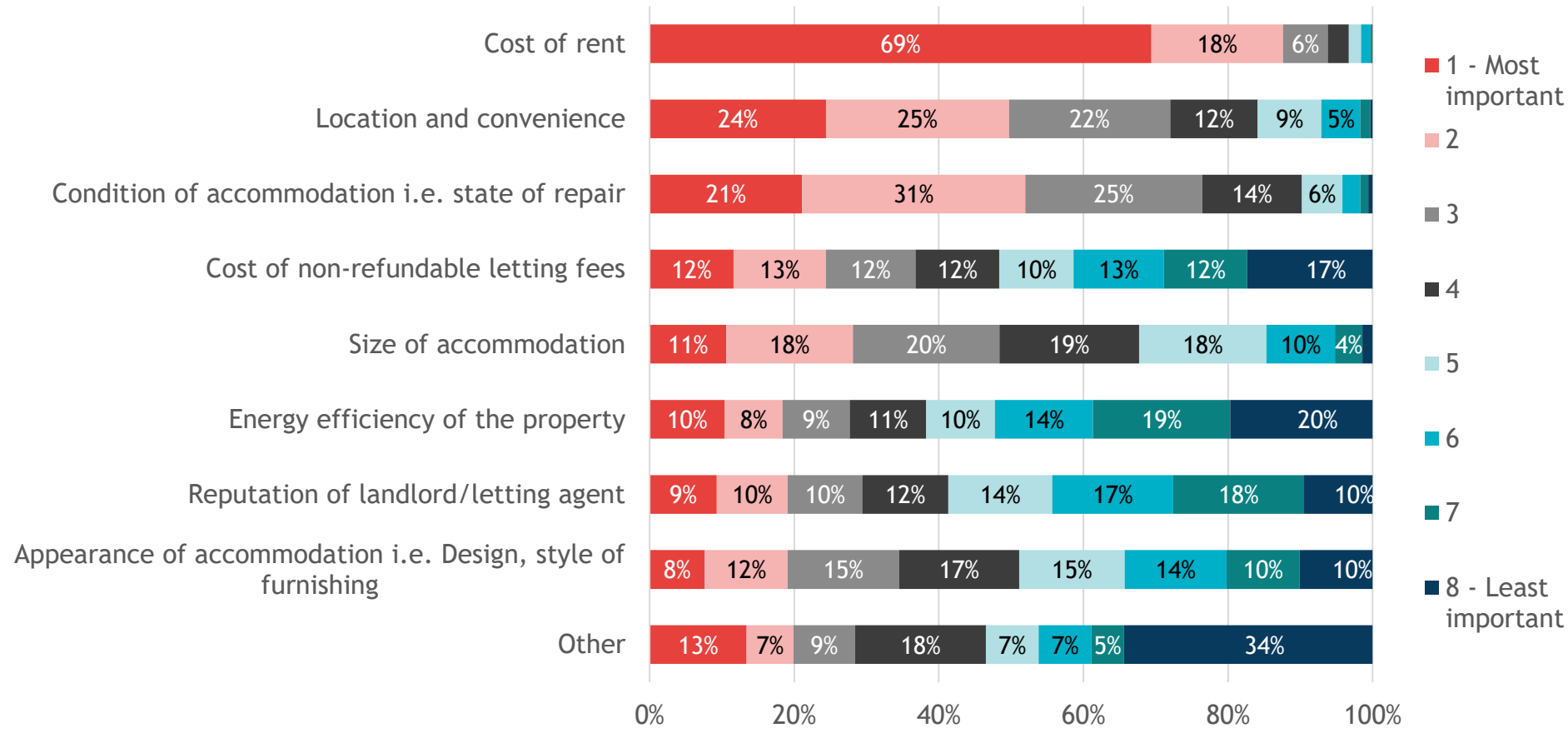
61% agree that they made the right choice in deciding where to live. Less than half of respondents agree their accommodation represents good value for money (45%) and that they'll be able to afford their current accommodation for as long as they need (40%). Fewer respondents report feeling part of their local community (28%).



Q. To what extent do you agree, if at all, with the following statements? Please select one for each option.
Weighted base: c.790 Balance: no response, rather not say.



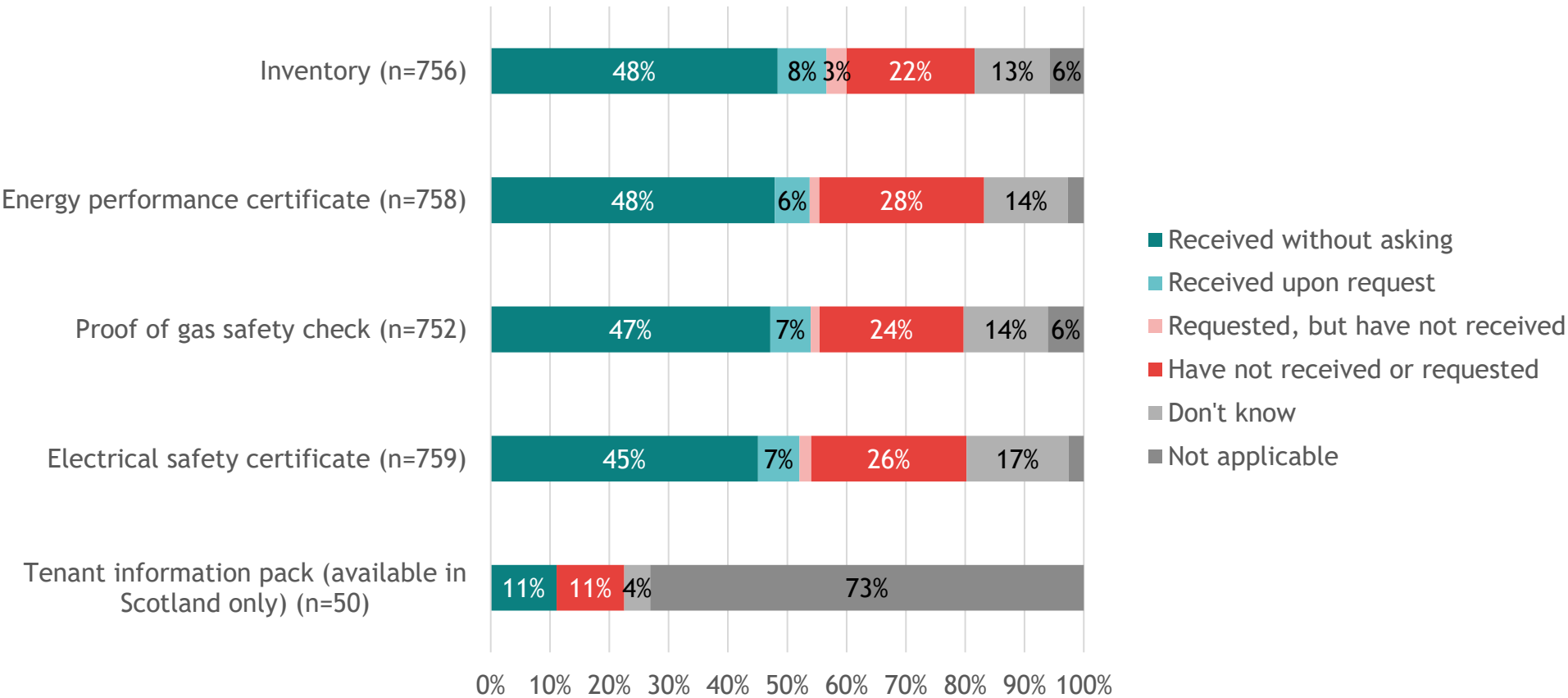
Over two thirds of respondents say that cost of rent was the most important criteria when looking for their accommodation. Only 10% rated energy efficiency of the property as the most important factor.



Q. How important, if at all, were the following criteria when you were looking for your current accommodation? Please rank in order of importance, where 1 is most important?
Weighted base: c. 705 Balance: no response.



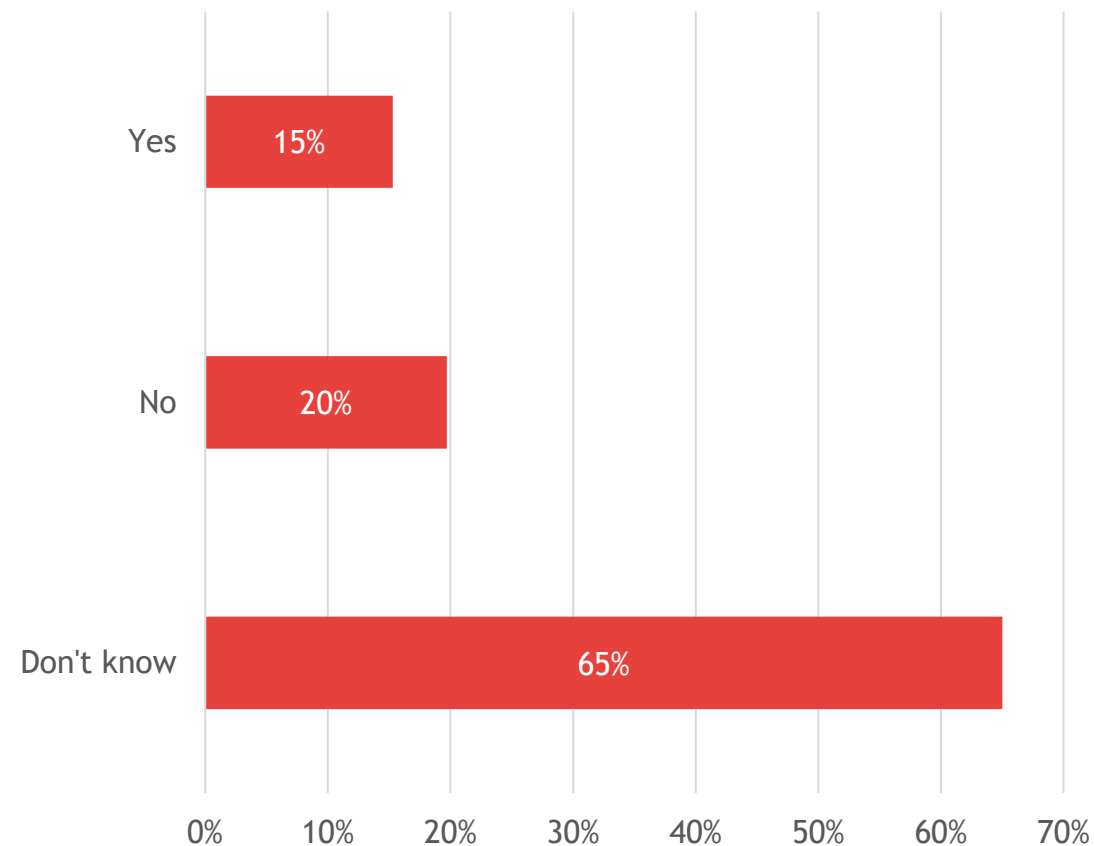
54% of respondents say they received an energy performance certificate or a proof of gas safety check when agreeing to rent their accommodation, with the majority stating they received these without asking.



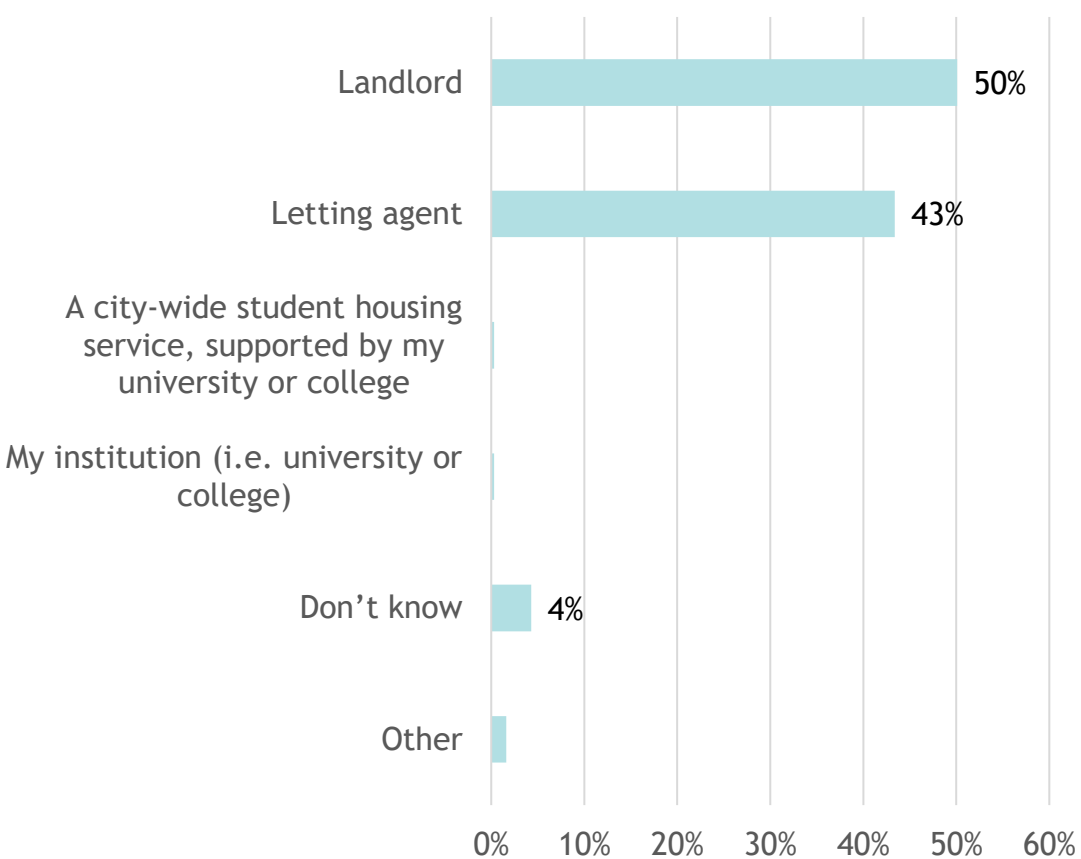
Q. Which of the following items, if any, did you receive or request for your current accommodation?
Weighted base: see graph. Balance: no response.



Almost two thirds of respondents (65%) don't know if their current property/landlord/letting agency is part of an accreditation scheme. Half of respondents said their landlord manages their house/flat on a day-to-day basis.



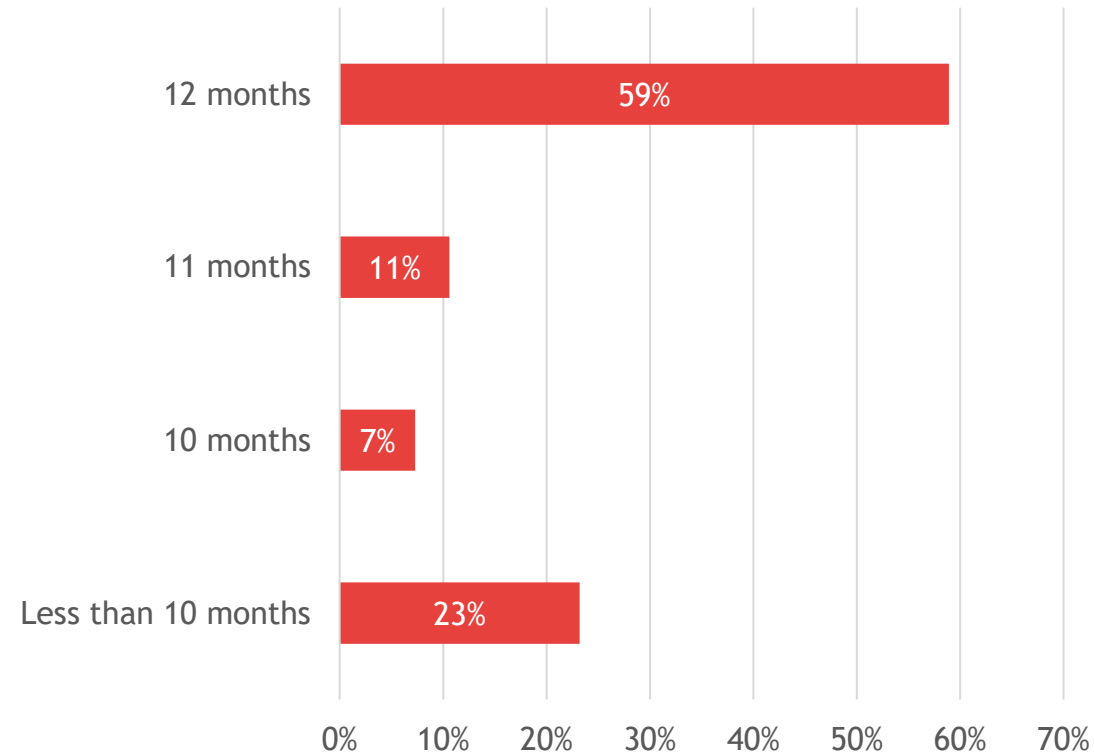
Q. Is your current property/landlord/letting agent part of an accreditation scheme?
Weighted base: 762. Balance: No response.



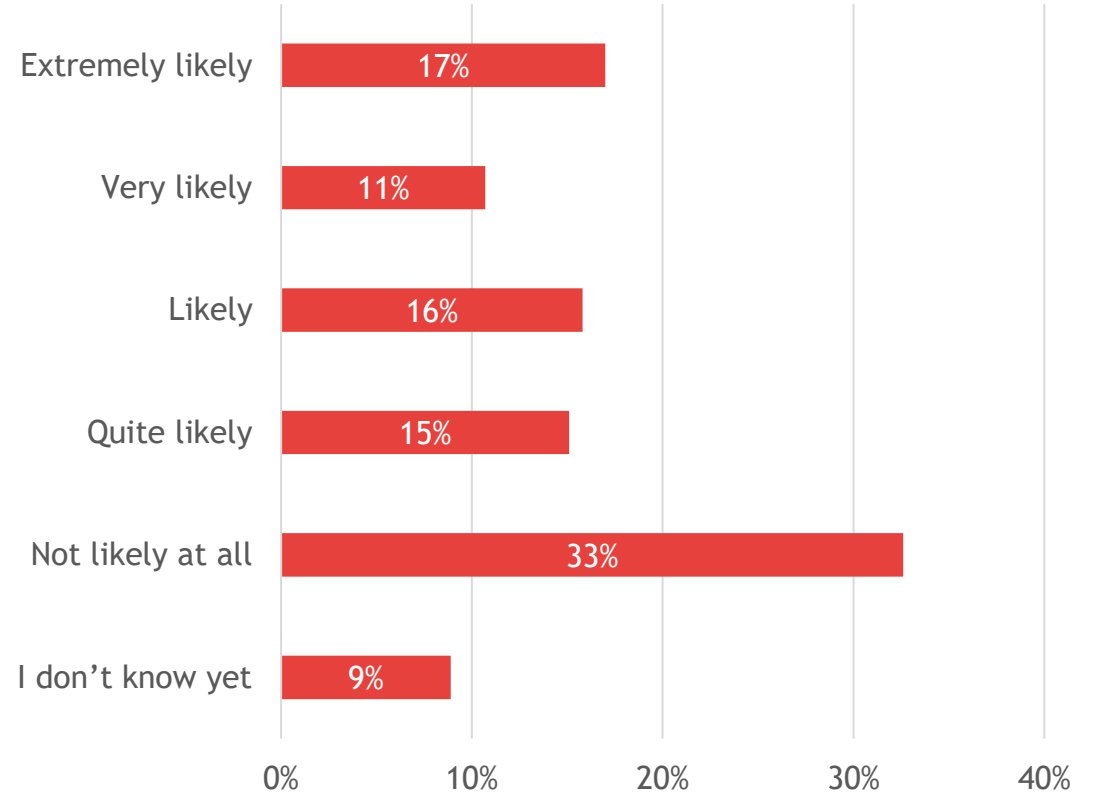
Q. Who manages your house/flat on a day-to-day basis? Please think about who you pay rent to, or contact for repairs etc.
Weighted base: 638. Balance: No response.



59% of respondents have a 12 month contract for their current accommodation. One third of respondents say they would not be likely at all to continue staying in their accommodation.



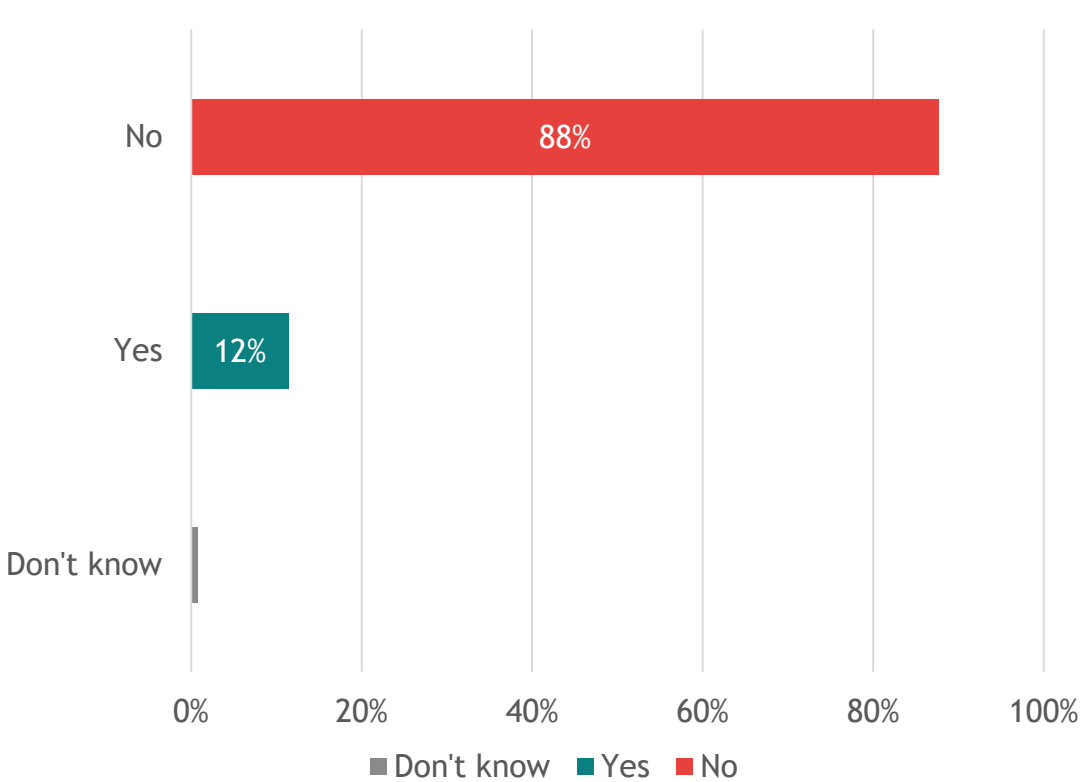
Q. How long is your current contract?
Weighted base: 638. Balance: No response.



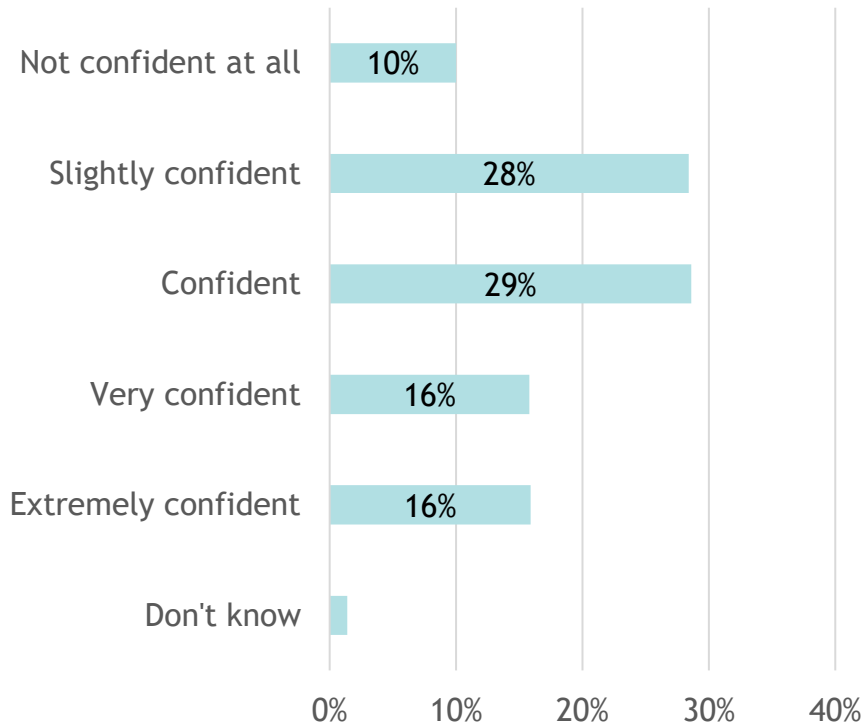
Q. If allowed, how likely would you be to continue staying in your accommodation on a rolling basis (i.e. longer than your current contract states).
Weighted base: 638. Balance: No response.



Over one in ten (12%) of respondents report experiencing homelessness to some extent since starting their studies. 38% report lacking confidence that they will continue to afford safe and secure accommodation for the duration of their studies.

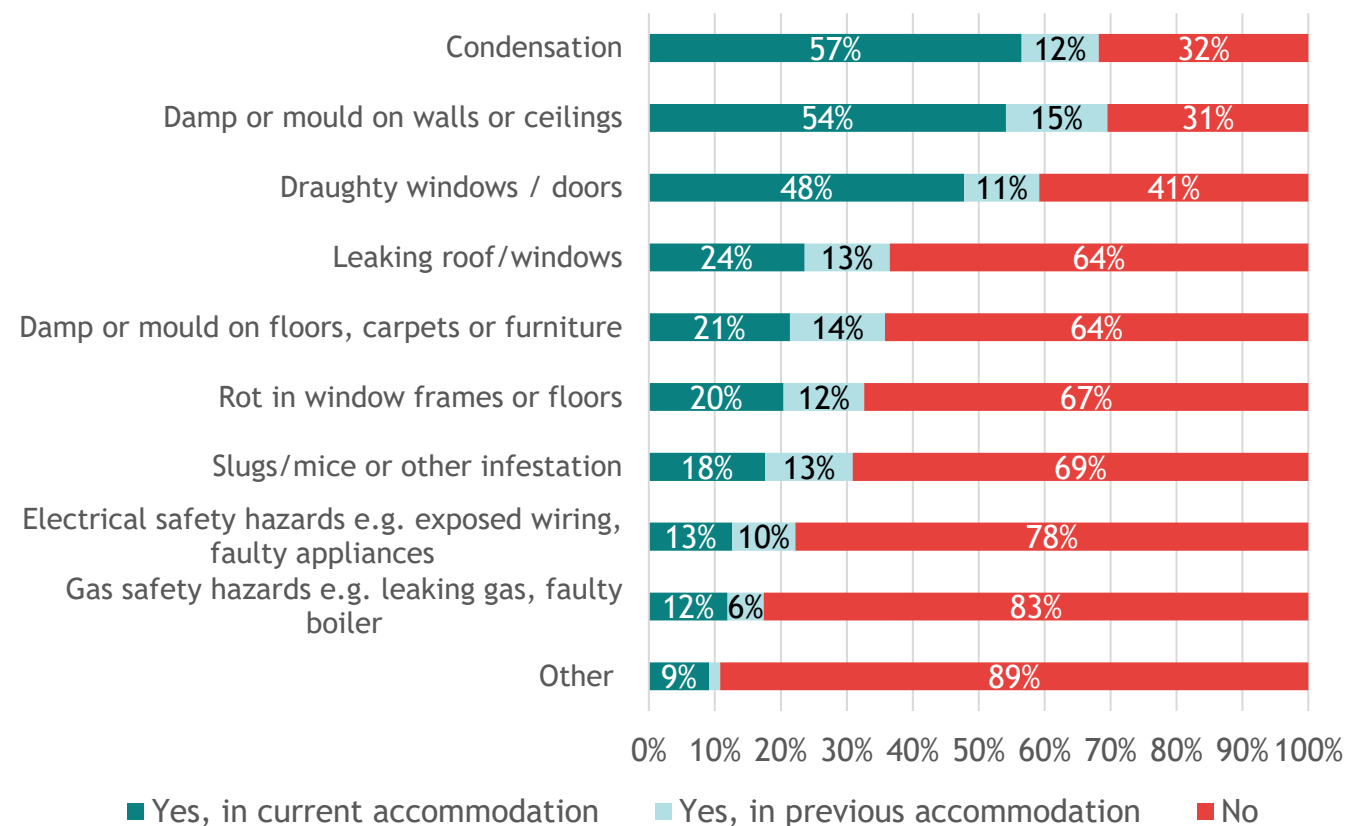


Q. Since starting your studies, have you ever experienced homelessness? This includes sofa surfing, staying in a hostel, staying with friends or extended family because of a lack of accommodation, etc.
Weighted base: 2180. Balance: No response.

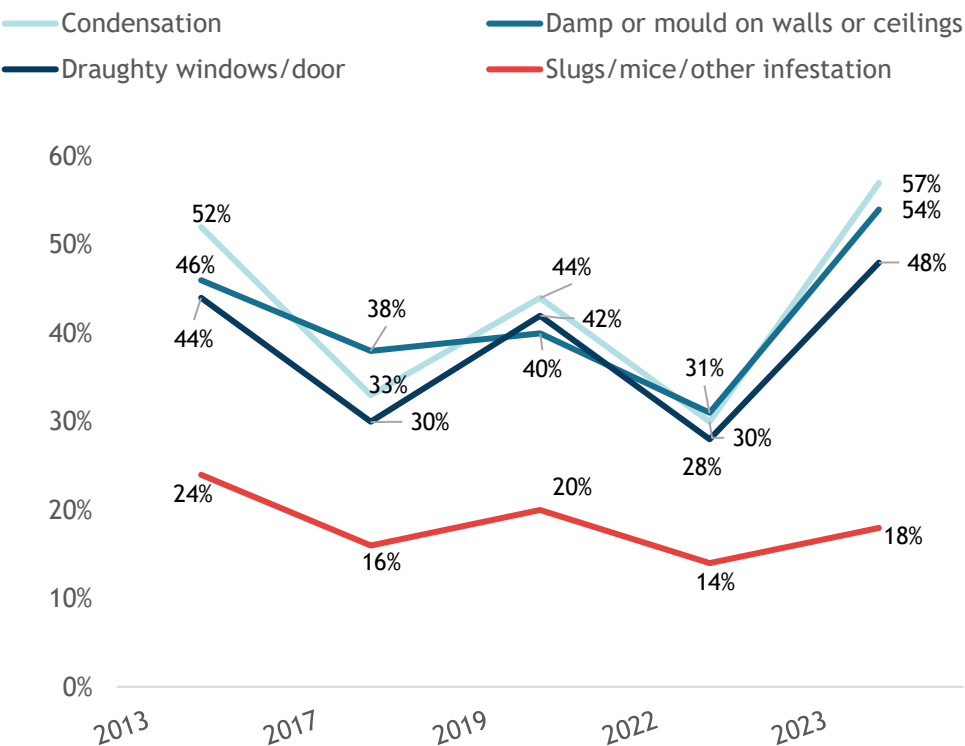


Q. How confident are you that you will continue to afford safe and secure housing for the duration if your studies?
Weighted base: 2184. Balance: No response.

57% of respondents report experiencing condensation in their current accommodation. Around half of respondents report experiencing damp or mould on walls/ceilings (54%), and draughty windows/doors (48%) in their current accommodation in the private rented sector overall. These figures have significantly increased from previous years' research.

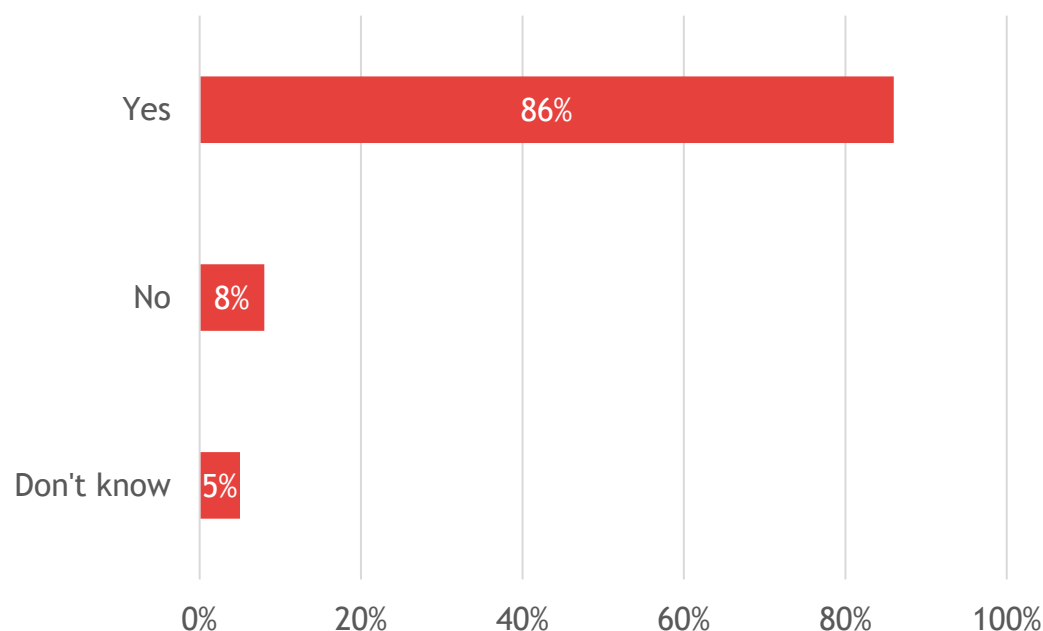


COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS RESEARCH



Q. Are/were the following present in your current, or previous homes you have rented whilst you have been a student? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: 693. Balance: No response

86% of respondents say they approached their landlord or property manager about the issues they were experiencing. Common reasons reported as to why respondents didn't approach their landlords are fears about being evicted or rent rises, delayed responses and feeling that the landlord would not take any action about the issues.



Q. Did you, or the people you live with, approach your landlord or property management regarding the issues you experienced with your accommodation?
Weighted base: 645

REASONS WHY RESPONDENTS DIDN'T APPROACH LANDLORD

"Because we were told in the beginning that they won't do anything, its on us"

"Not a big issue."

"Did not have time to."

"Because they're not good at solving the issues themselves so we just did it. Sometimes we contacted them if we needed a professional but other times we did it ourselves."

"It's too much effort and I know they would not help."

"They don't care most of the time."

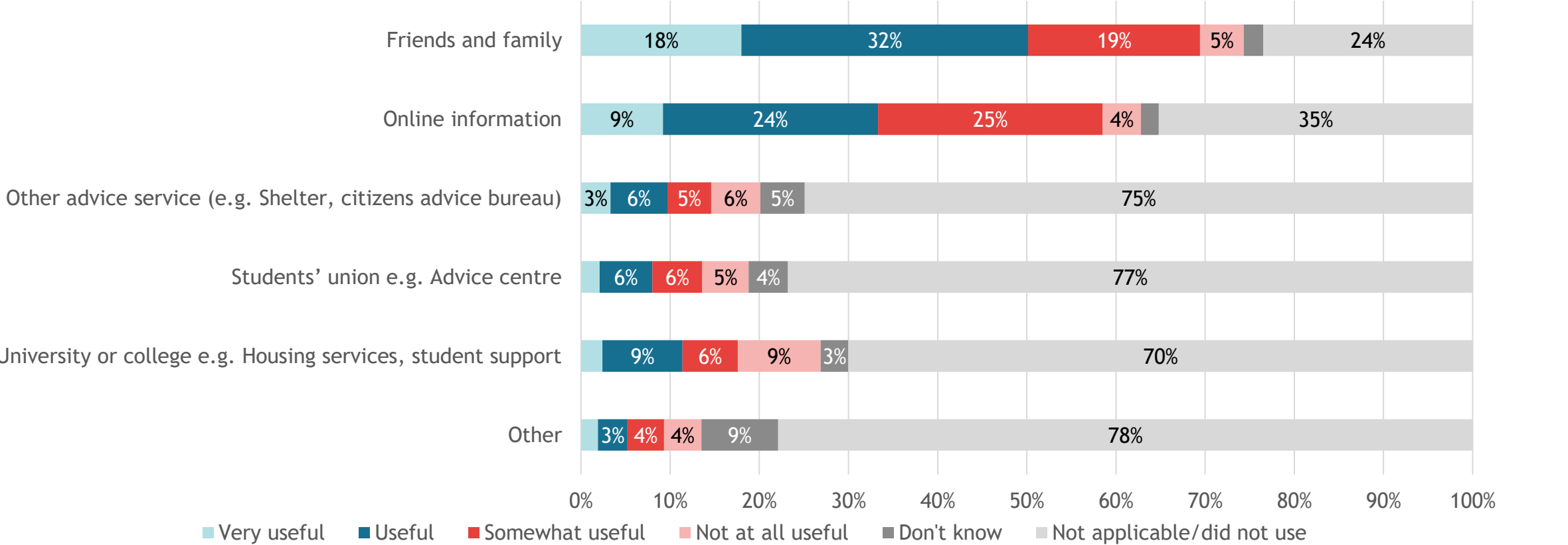
"It was easier to sort the problems myself, because the landlords response was slow and I didn't want the rent to be increased"

"Don't want to be evicted."

"Afraid to bother the landlord too much, concern about the future re-letting."

Q. Please tell us why you didn't approach your landlord regarding the issues you experienced with your accommodation.
Weighted base: 41

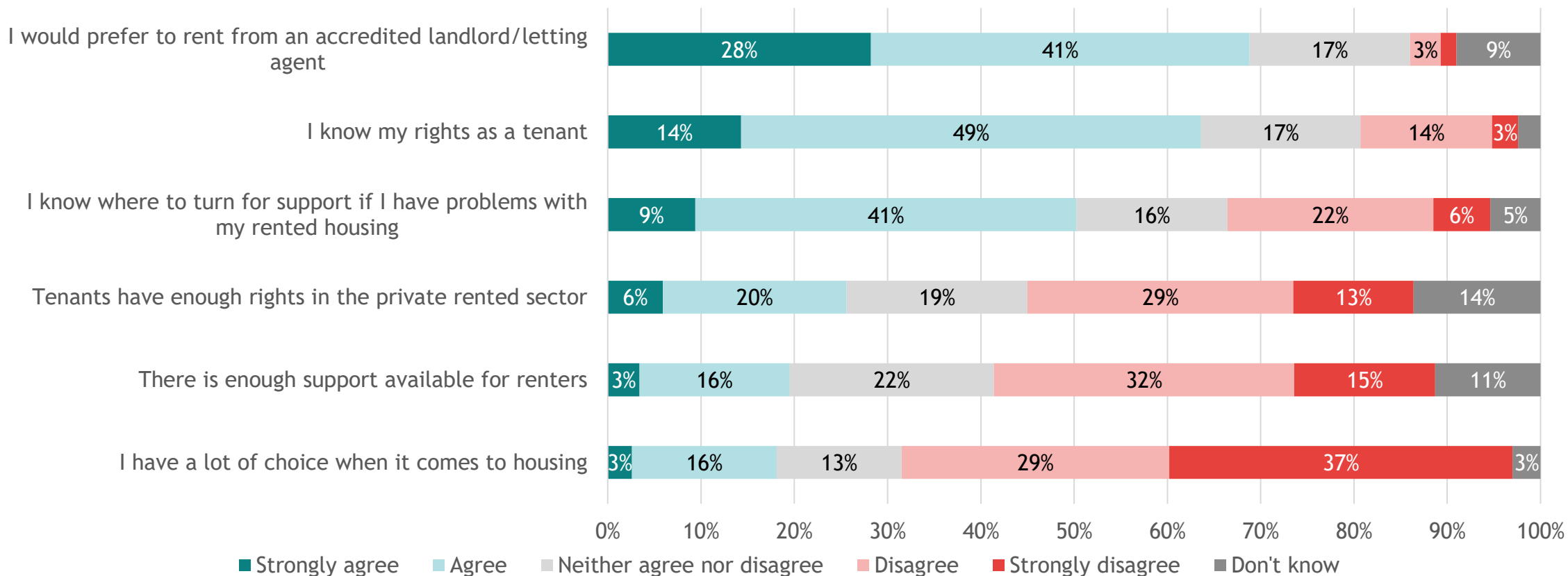
Half of respondents sought advice from friends and family and found it useful. 11% of respondents sought advice from their institution and found it useful.



Q. Did you seek advice from any of the below services regarding the issues you have experienced in your accommodation, and if so, how useful did you find them?
 Weighted base: c. 560 Balance: no response.



Over two in three respondents (69%) would prefer to rent from an accredited landlord/letting agency. Almost half the respondents (47%) disagree that there is enough support available for renters and 66% disagree that they have a lot of choice when it comes to housing.

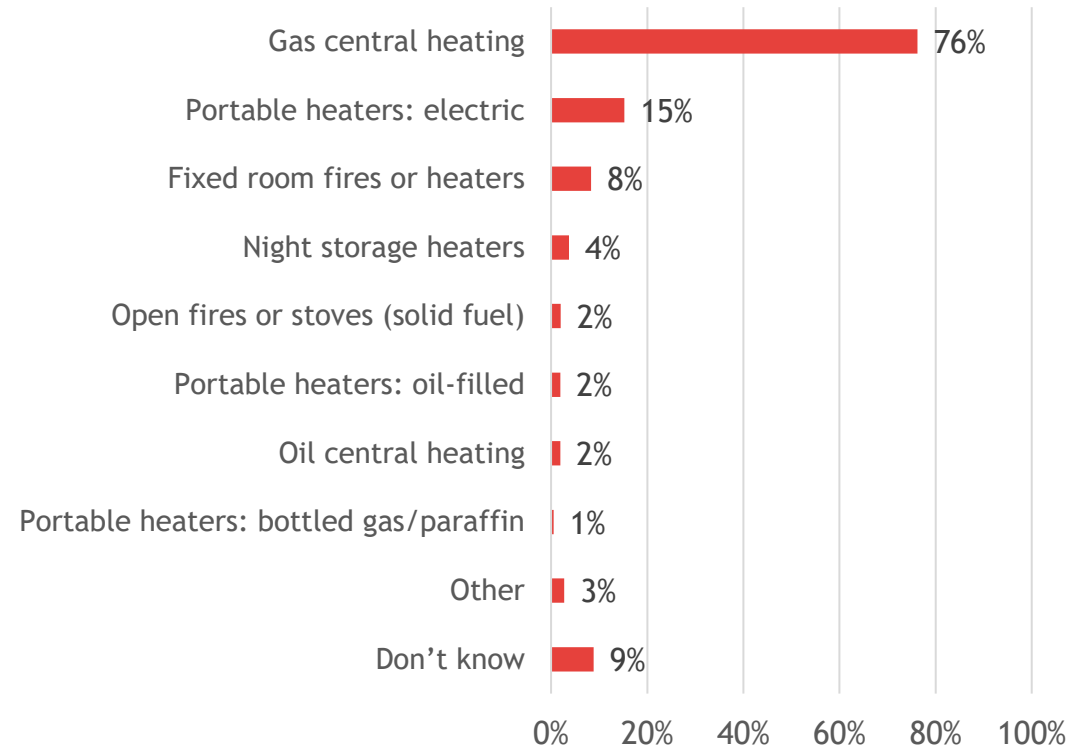


Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Weighted base: c. 758 Balance: no response.

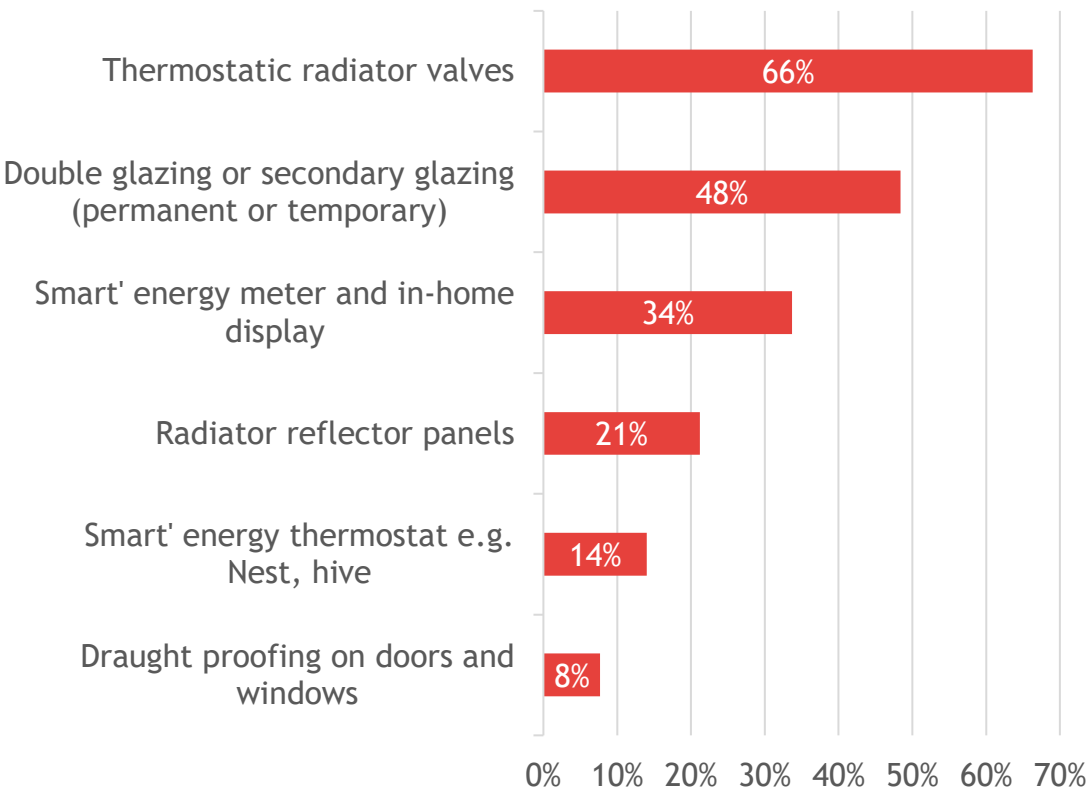


3.2 Energy use and thermal comfort in private rented sector accommodation

Three quarters of respondents (76%) have gas central heating in their accommodation. Features which support energy efficiency and conservation in the home vary. Whilst 66% say they have thermostatic radiator valves, only 48% have double glazing in their current accommodation and 34% have a smart energy meter and in-home display.



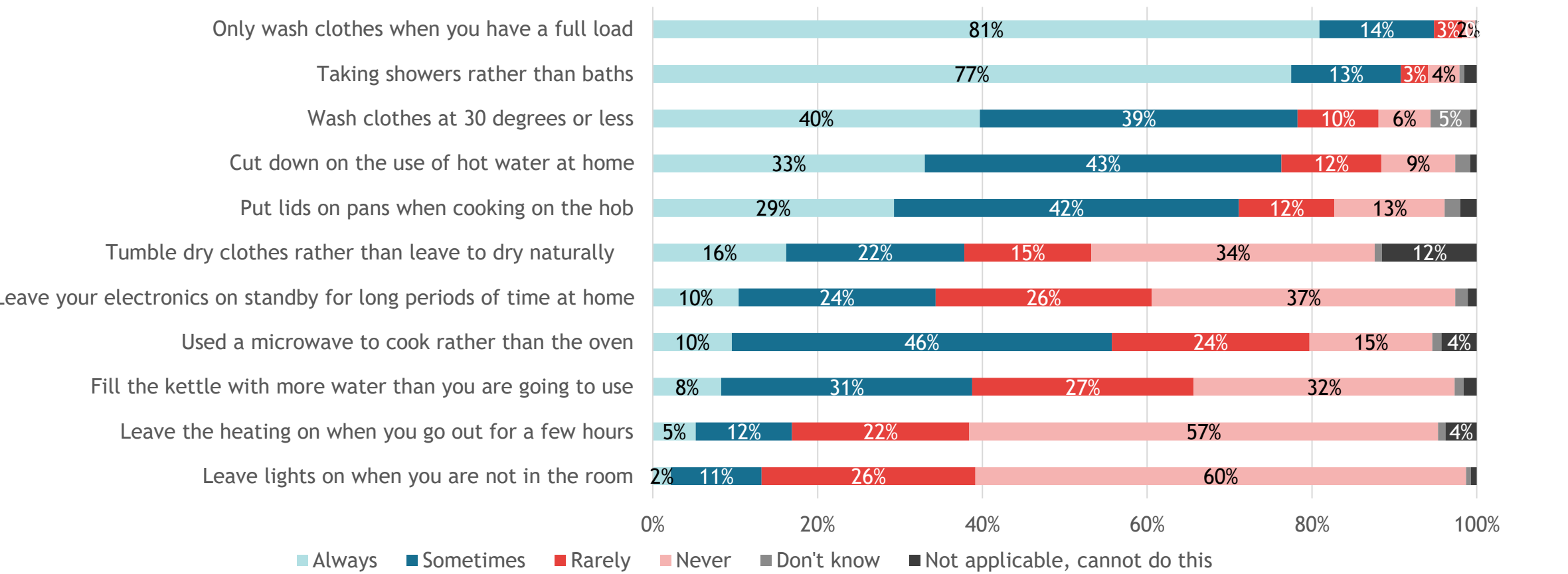
Q. What kind of heating system/s do you have in your term time accommodation? Please select all that apply
Weighted base: c. 760 Balance: no response.



Q. Does your property have any of the following? Please select all that apply
Weighted base: c. 652 Balance: no response.

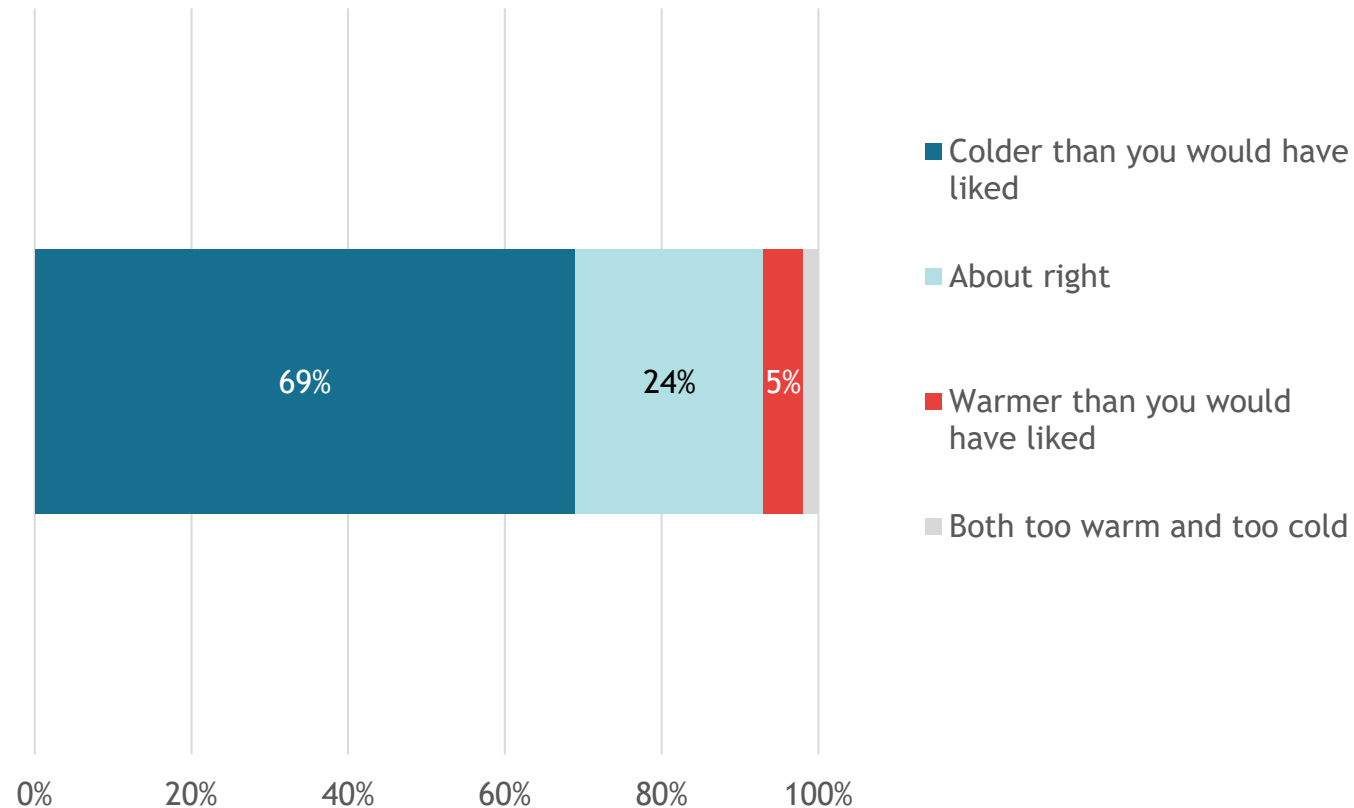


Respondents report a range of energy saving behaviours, for example, 81% always only wash clothes when they have a full load and 60% say they never leave lights on when they are not in the room.



Q. To what extent do you undertake the following actions?
Weighted base: c. 757. Balance: no response

Over two thirds of students (69%) living in privately rented accommodation describe the overall level of warmth this winter in their current accommodation as '*colder than they would have liked*'.



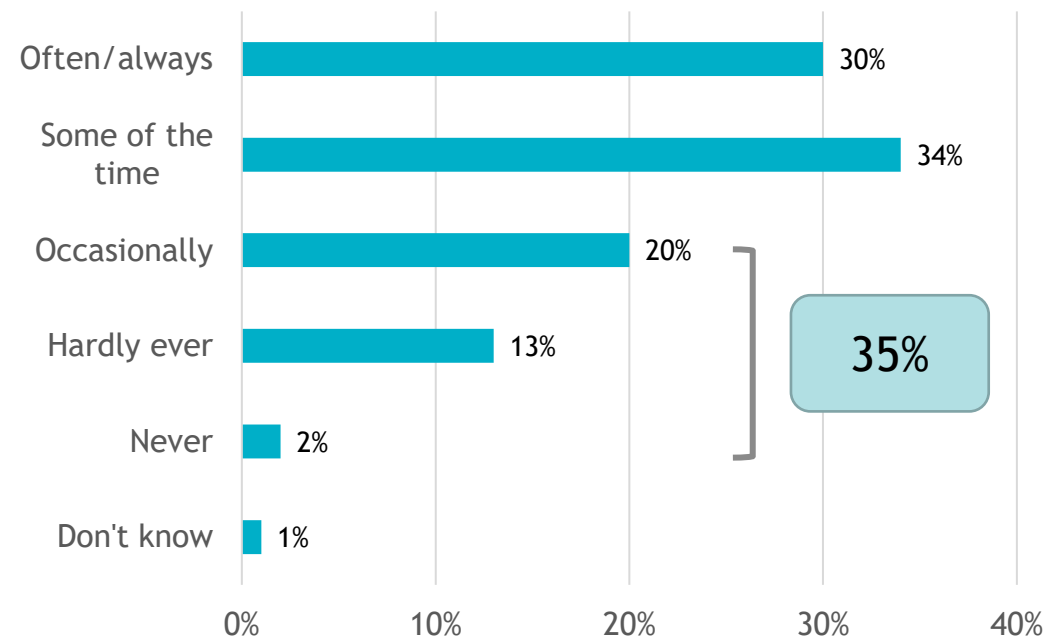
- 73% of respondents studying in the South West of England said they are colder than they would have liked whereas 60% of respondents studying in London said they are colder than they would have liked in their current accommodation.
- 77% of respondents who identify as disabled say they are colder than they would have liked in their accommodation and 67% of respondents who do not identify in this way say they are colder than they would have liked.
- UK/Home students are more likely to describe their accommodation colder than they would have liked than international student from outside the EU (74% compared to 56%).

Q. How would you describe the overall level of warmth in your current accommodation so far this winter? Is it...?

Weighted base: 760. Balance: no response, other

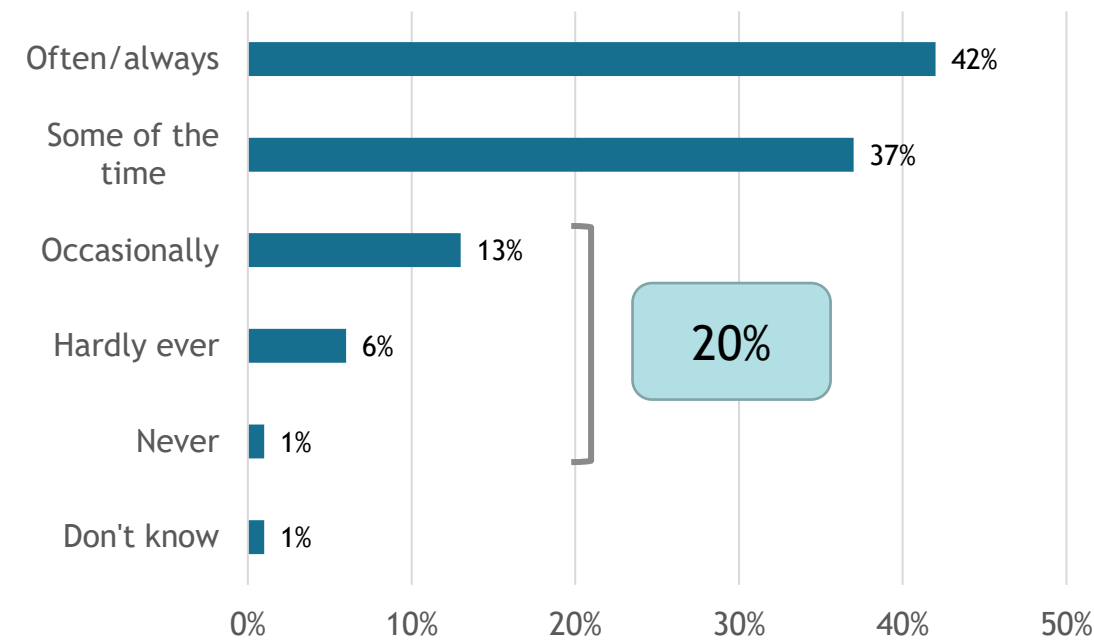
Respondents answered a question mirroring Office of National Statistics research with the UK adult population. A greater proportion (35%) of student respondents living in the private rented sector overall reporting to be never, hardly ever or occasionally comfortably warm, in their current accommodation, in the two weeks prior to completing the survey compared to 20% of UK adults.

SOS-UK RESEARCH WITH UK STUDENTS (JAN-FEB 2023)



Q. And in the past two weeks, how often were you able to keep comfortably warm in your home?
Weighted base 762. Balance: no response

ONS RESEARCH WITH UK ADULT POPULATION (JAN 2023)



Q. And in the past two weeks, how often were you able to keep comfortably warm in your home?
Sample size: 2990. Balance: Prefer not to say



Almost two in three students (60%) reported turning the heating off despite preferring to have it on out of concern about the costs. Two in five students reported washing clothing/other items less frequently than they would have liked.

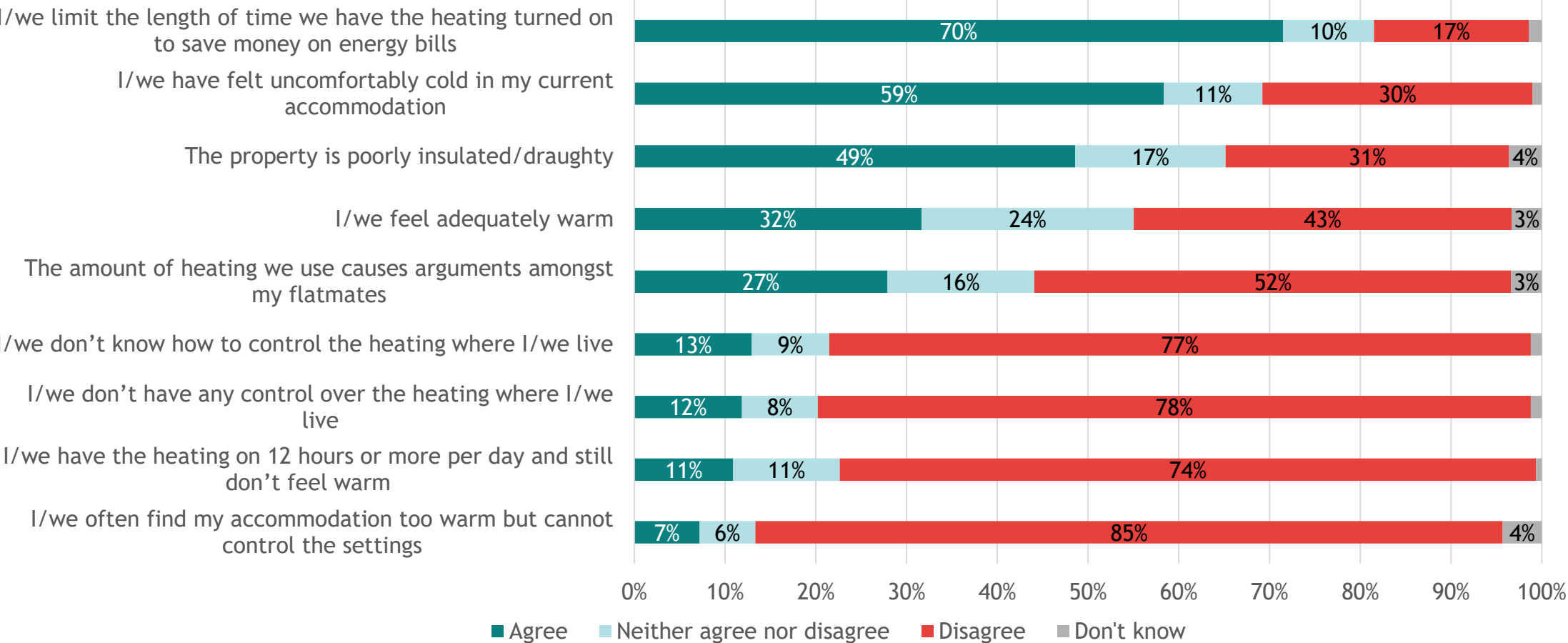


- 65% of respondents from the UK have turned their heating off despite preferring to have it on whereas 51% of international students report doing the same.
- Respondents identifying as women are more likely to say they've spent more time out of the house in better heated buildings than they would have liked compared to those identifying as men (32% and 20% respectively).

Q. Thinking about any time of day or night, have you (and the people you live with) cut back on energy use in your current accommodation in any of these ways this winter, because you were concerned about the costs? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: 756 Balance: no response



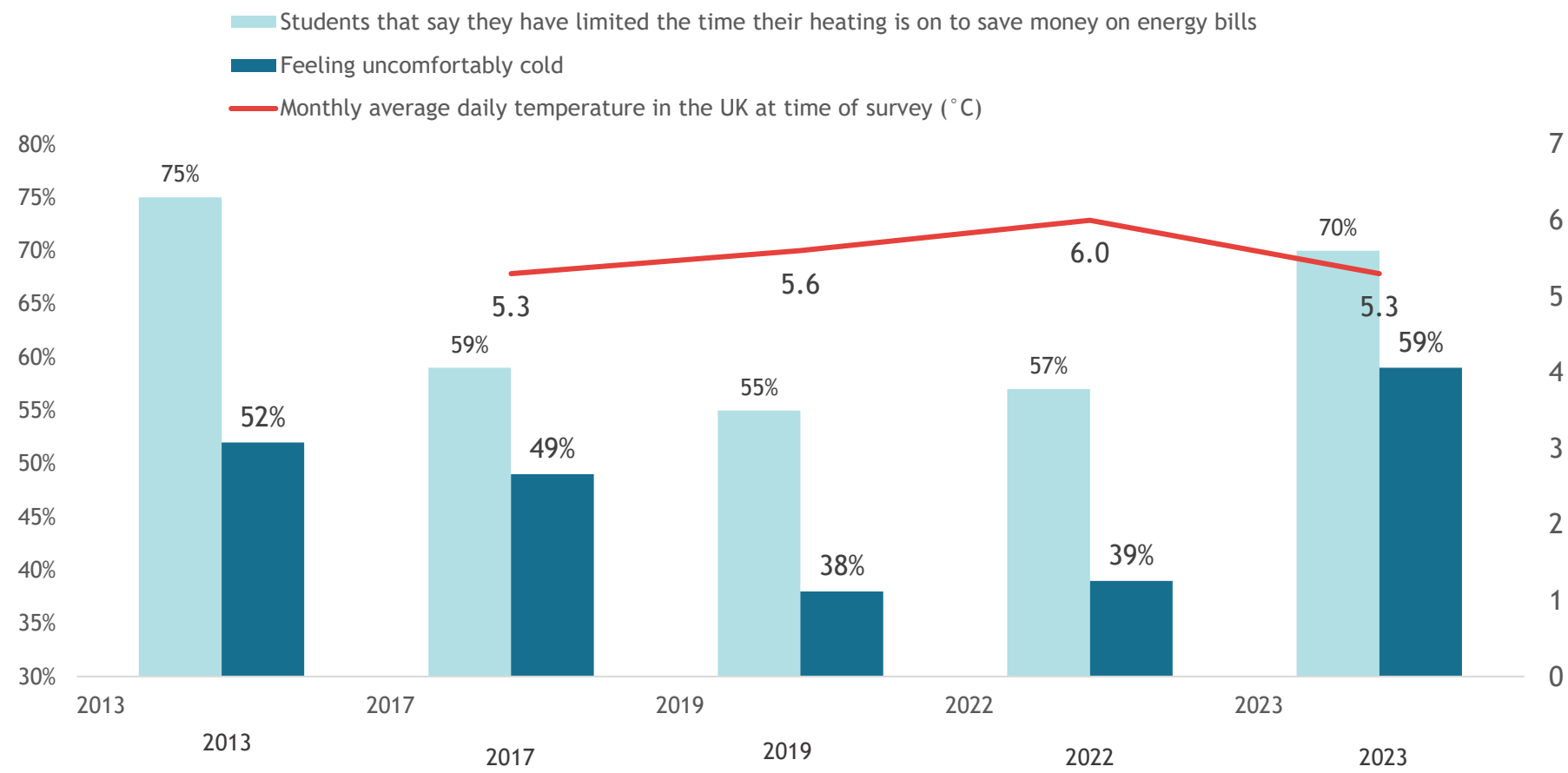
Over two thirds (70%) of respondents in privately rented accommodation limit their heating time to save money on energy bills. 59% say they have felt uncomfortably cold in their current accommodation.



Q. Thinking about the heating in your accommodation, please tell us to what extent do you agree, if at all, with the following statements?

Weighted base: c. 753. Balance: no response, don't know, rather not say

Comparisons with previous research show significant increases in the proportion of respondents reporting that they feel uncomfortably cold in their accommodation, and that they limit the time their heating is on to save money on their energy bills despite relatively consistent average temperatures during the research period.

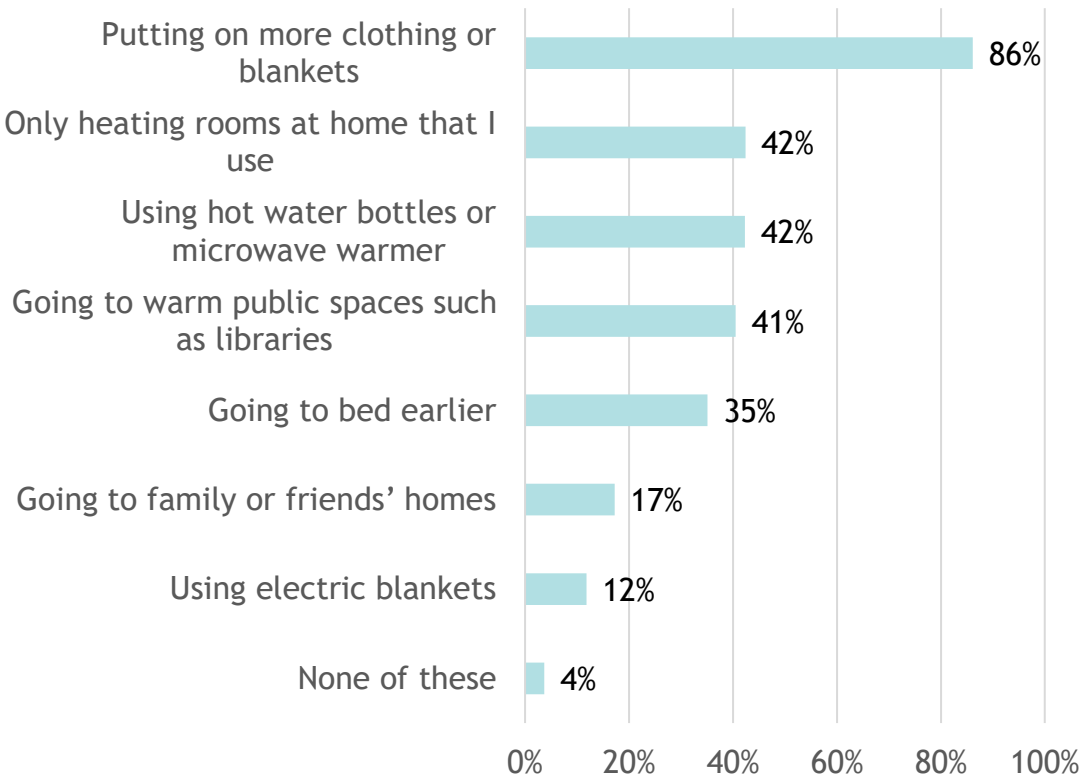


*No temperature data available for 2013 or February 2023 - figures presented are a January 2023 average.



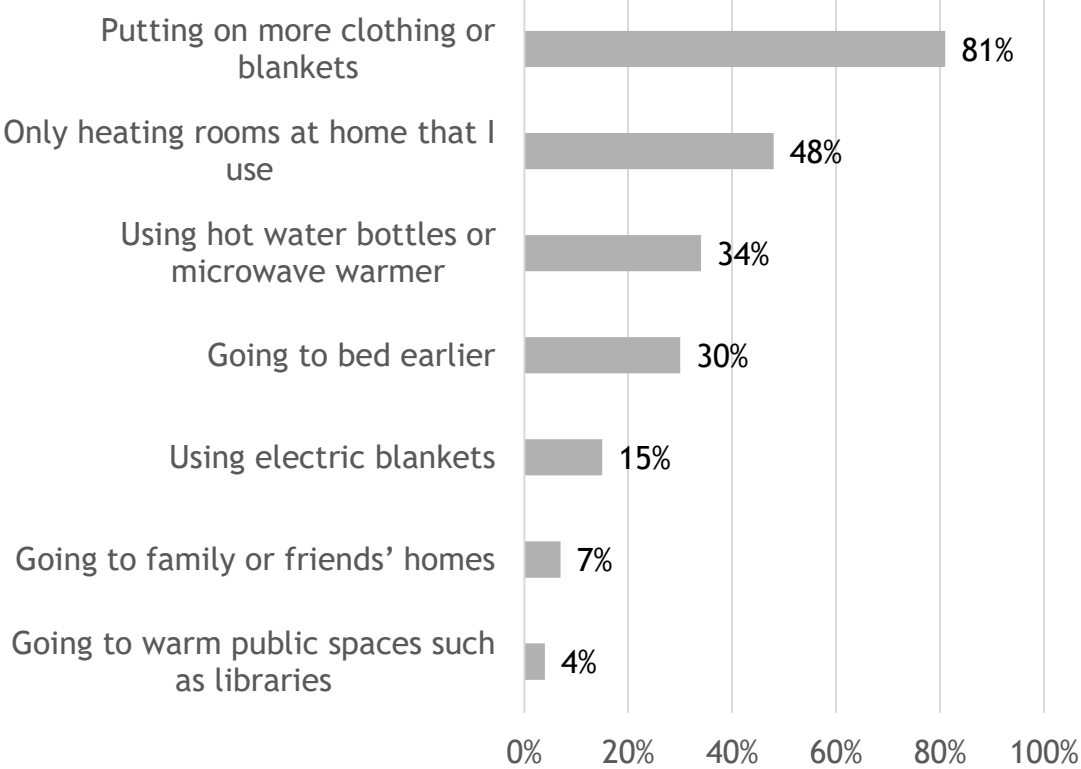
86% of respondents said they are putting on more clothes or blankets to keep warm over winter. Over two in five (42%) say are only heating rooms at home that they use. This largely matches the actions reported by UK adults in ONS research carried out during the same period, though the use of warm public spaces such as libraries is significantly higher for student respondents.

SOS-UK RESEARCH WITH UK STUDENTS (JAN-FEB 2023)



Q. Which of these, if any, are you doing to keep warm over winter? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: 759 Balance: no response

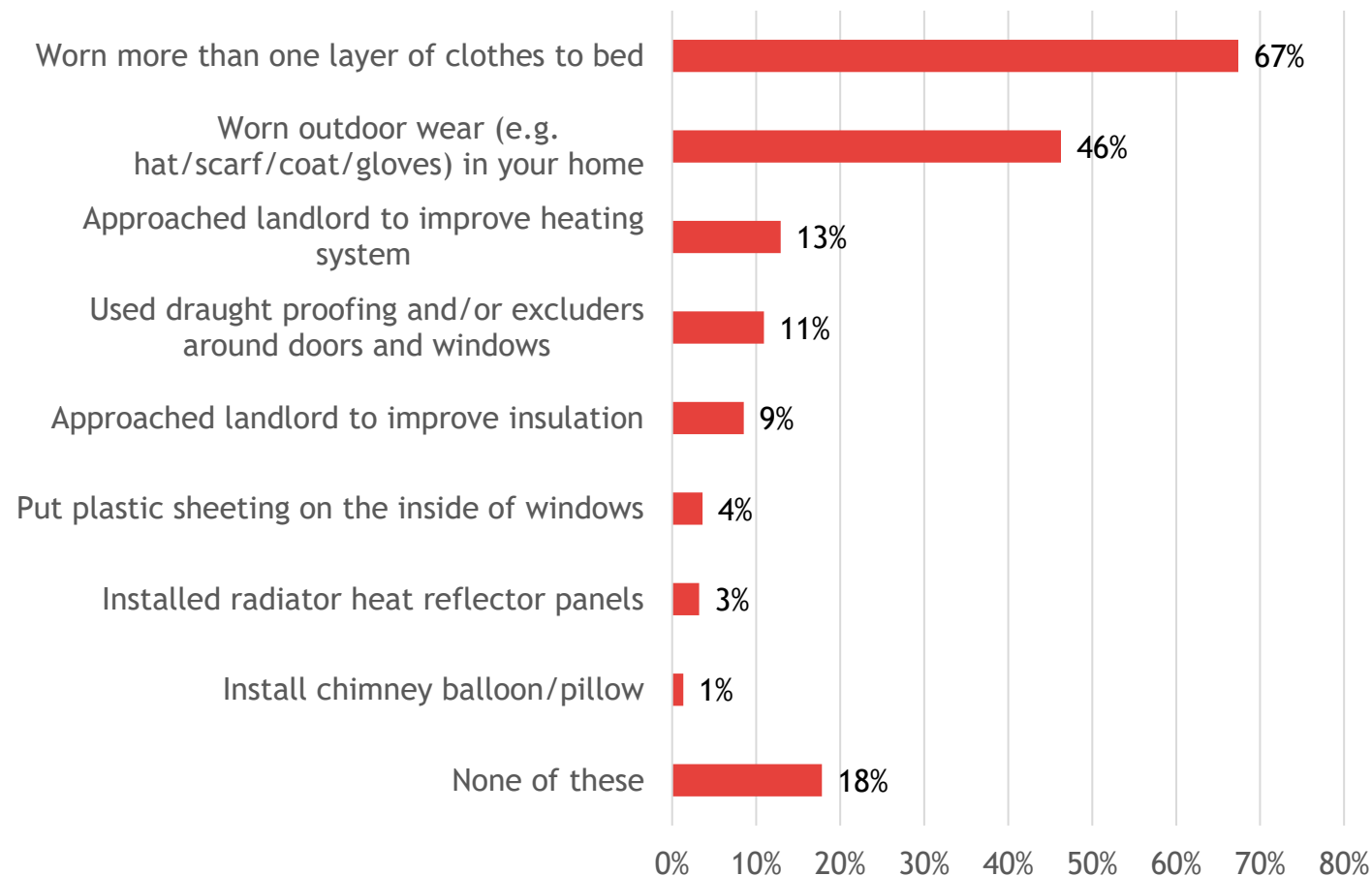
ONS RESEARCH WITH UK ADULT POPULATION (JAN 2023)



Q. Which of these, if any, are you doing to keep warm over winter? Please select all that apply.
Sample size: 2990



Two thirds of respondents (67%) say they wear more than one layer of clothes to bed. 46% say they have worn outdoor wear in their home.

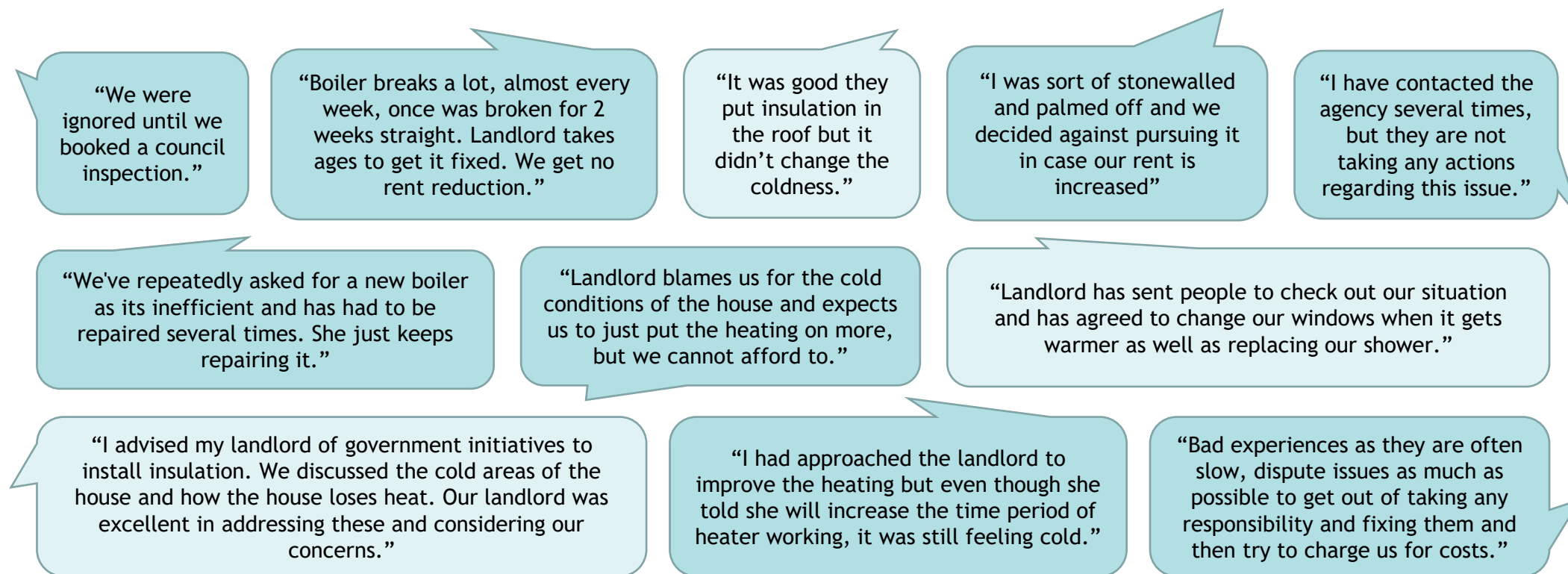


- 73% of respondents identifying as women report wearing more than one layer of clothes to bed whereas 60% of respondents identifying as men report doing the same.
- Respondents who identify as disabled are more likely to report wearing outdoor wear in their home than those that don't identify in this way (55% compared to 44% respectively).

Q. Which of these, if any, are you doing to keep warm over winter? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: 759 Balance: no response, other



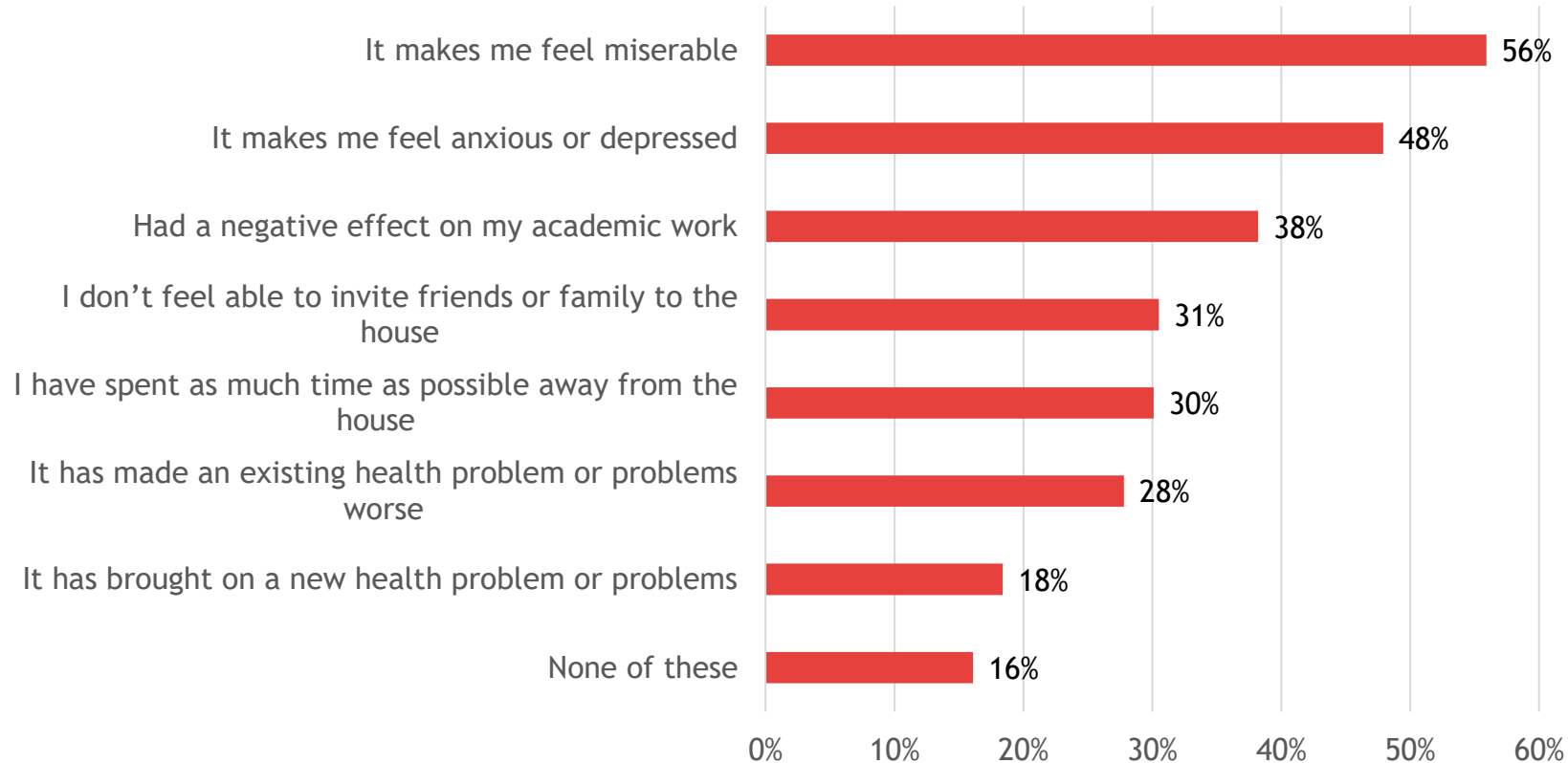
Whilst some reported a positive experience, the majority of respondents who said they had approached their landlord to improve the heating/insulation in their accommodation said their landlord had not taken effective action to improve heating or insulation.



Q. You said you’d approached your landlord to make improve the heating or insulation in your current accommodation. Please tell us more about your experience of seeking improvements in the box below.

Weighted base: 93 Balance: no response

Of those who reported feeling cold in their accommodation this winter, 56% said it makes them feel miserable. Almost two in five (38%) said it has had a negative effect on their academic work.



- Respondents identifying as men are less likely than women to say they have spent as much time as possible away from the house due to feeling cold in their accommodation.
- Respondents who identify as disabled are more likely to say that feeling cold in their accommodation this winter has made an existing health problem worse compared to those who do not consider themselves disabled

Q. You said that you've felt cold in your accommodation this winter. Does this affect you in any of the following ways? Please select all that apply.

Weighted base: 543 Balance: no response, other

Respondents described a range of financial, social, educational and health (mental and physical) impacts experienced as a result of living in a cold home.

“Disagreements with housemates due to bills, friendships lost. Possessions and walls getting damp and mouldy. Skin conditions worsened.”

“Because of the lack of insulation I feel like we're spending more than we need to on energy. Also our energy direct debit went up 70% before the winter.”

“There's been times where it's too cold to sleep. Drying clothes takes up to a week, I have been repeatedly ill all winter.”

“My room is always freezing even with the heating on. Its a loft room and has no insulation between the (sloped) ceiling and the external walls. I have constant damp problems all over my walls and my bedsheets often get wet from condensation. At times I find it uneasy to breathe in my room. I'm sure its added pressure on my already flakey mental health.”

“I am disabled and cold make my health worse which is why turning down my heating further is not an option. Equally because of my disabilities, I cannot go to campus more often as that also exacerbates the issue. Its a catch-22.”

“It just feels depressing and lonely.”

“I don't get much done because I spend a lot of time wrapped up in blankets in bed which has a negative effect on my mental health.”

“It is incredibly difficult to motivate yourself to leave a bed when you know you won't feel that warm again until you're back in it. The cold hurts, and sitting in your own home, layered up to the eyeballs and still cold, or my housemates coming home from a long day of work just to be cold when they get back- It's just miserable, not to mention completely unnecessary.”

“It has created huge arguments with the people that I live with and increased anxiety and tension in the house.”

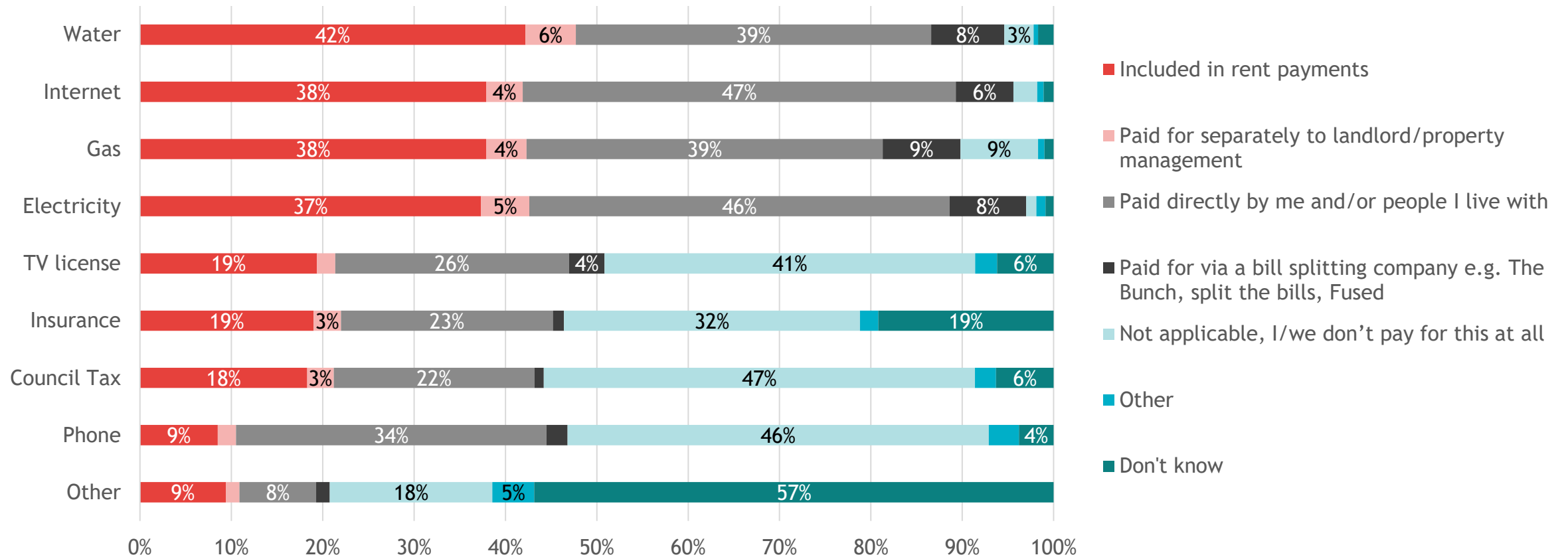
“With being an all inclusive rent, we do have a cap and so it has occasionally caused arguments with deciding if to put the heating on or not.”

“I find it hard to study when it is so cold, but as the price of rent is so expensive I can't have the heating on too high.”

“Due to remote academic working, this has meant working within my home more, which if cold (usually more so on windy days) means I struggle to work effectively.”

3.3 Costs associated with private rented sector accommodation

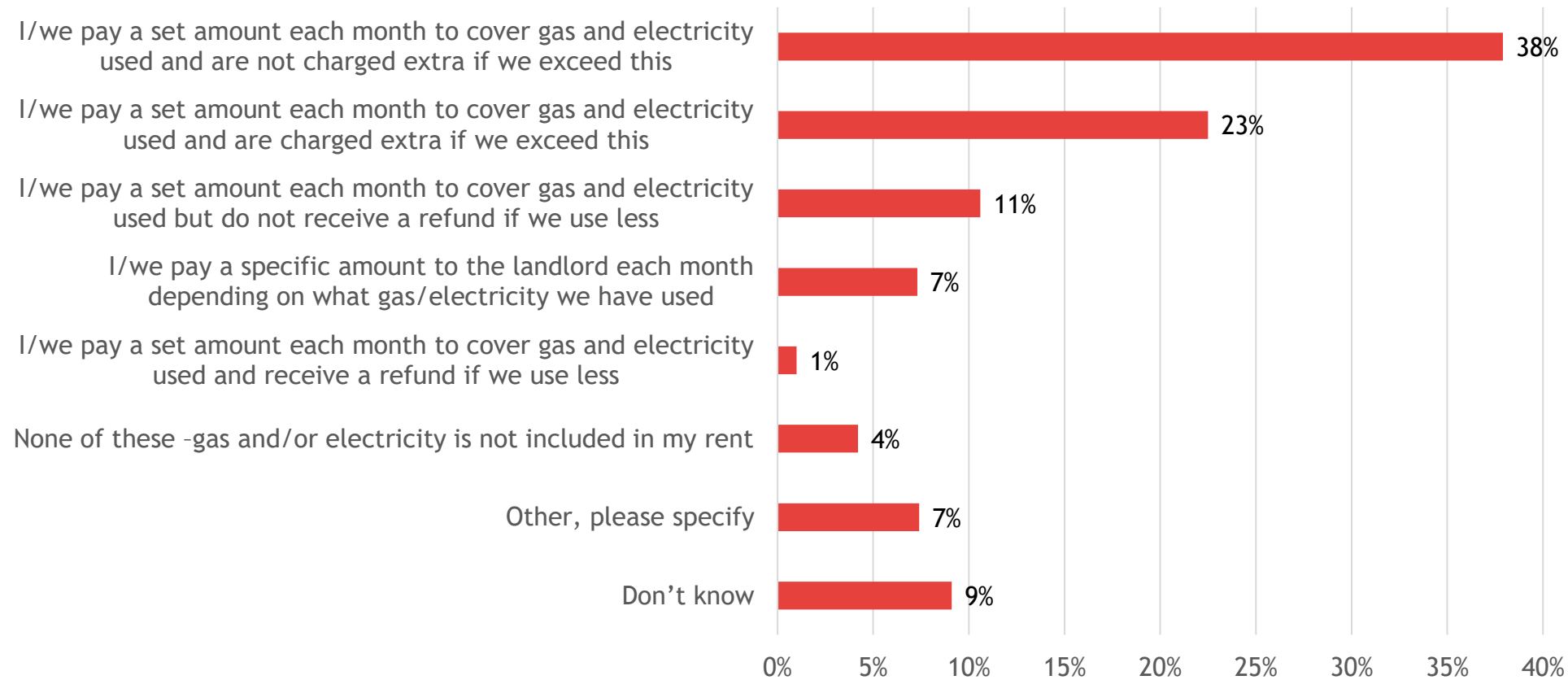
The most common way of paying energy bills is directly to the supplier (39% gas and 46% electricity). However, over a third of respondents say they pay their energy bills are included in their rent payments (38% and 37% say this for gas and electricity respectively).



Q. How do you pay for the following household bills? Please select all that apply.
Weighted base: c. 712 Balance: no response.



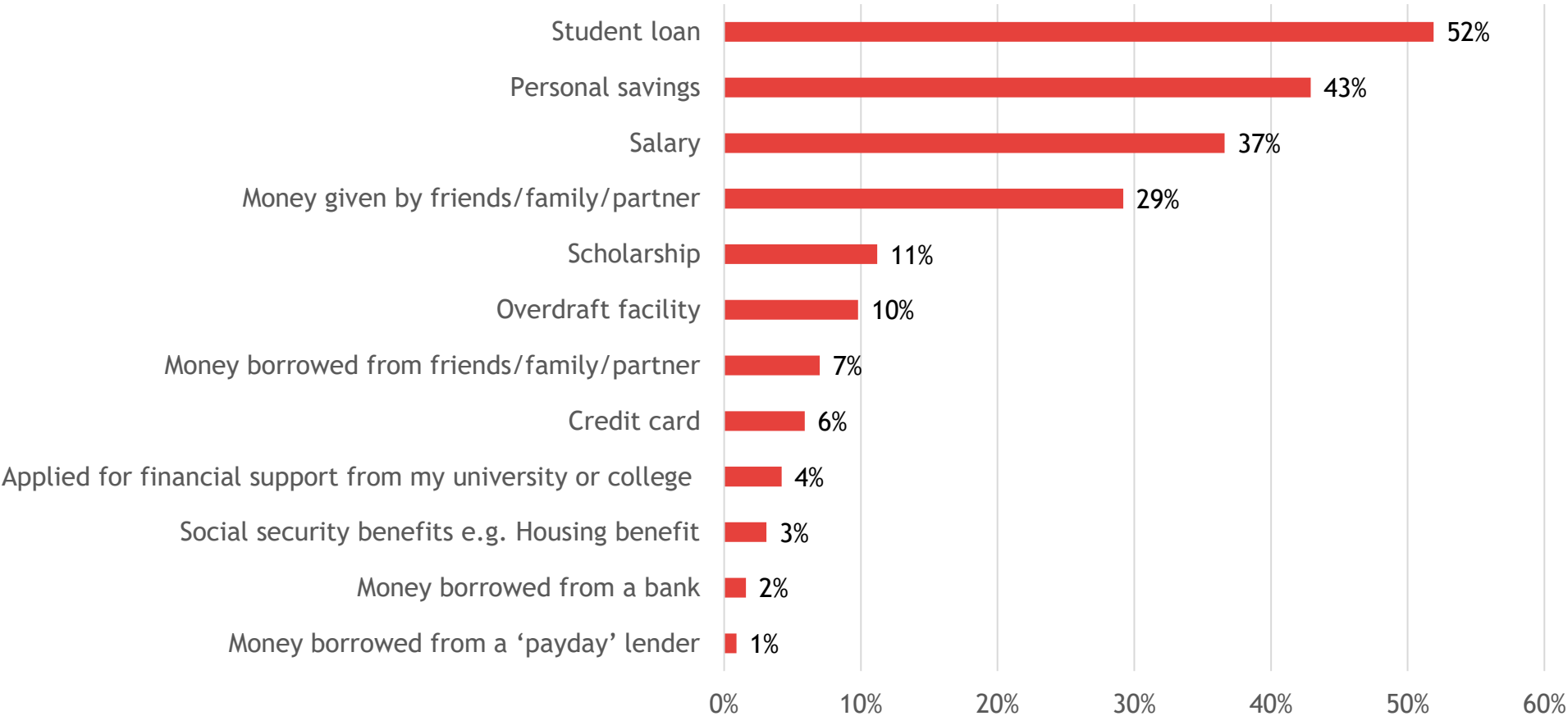
Of those whose energy bills are included in their rent payments, almost 2 in 5 respondents pay a set amount each month and are not charged extra if they exceed this. 11% of respondents who pay a set amount for gas and electricity each month but do not receive a refund if they use less.



Q. You said your energy bills (electricity or gas) are included in your rent payments or are paid separately to your landlord. Please let us know which of the following options describe your situation. Please select all that apply
Weighted base: c. 337 Balance: no response.



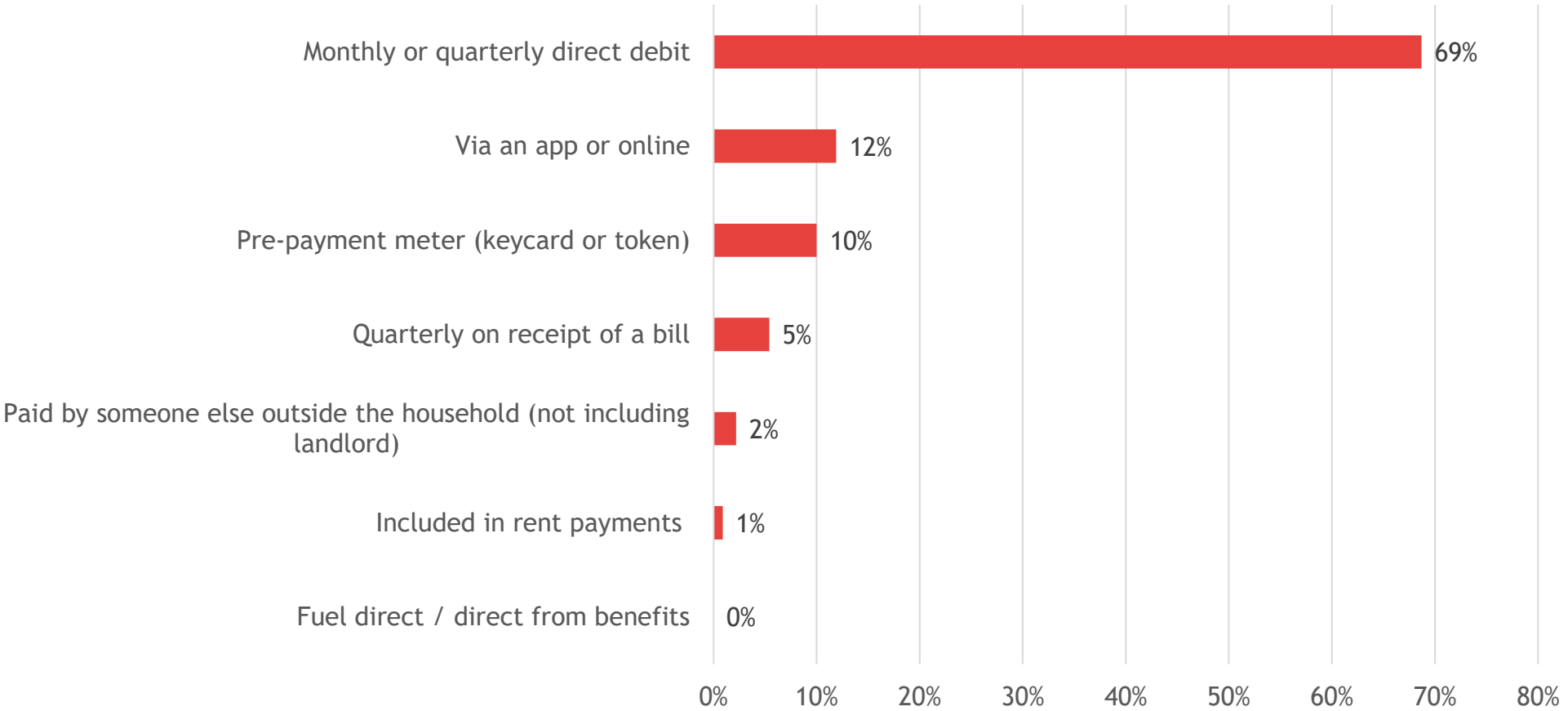
Over half of the respondents (52%) use their student loan to pay their energy bills. 43% say they use their personal savings to meet energy costs.



Q. Which of the following do you use to pay your energy (e.g., gas, electricity) bills? Please select all that apply
Weighted base: 757 Balance: no response, other

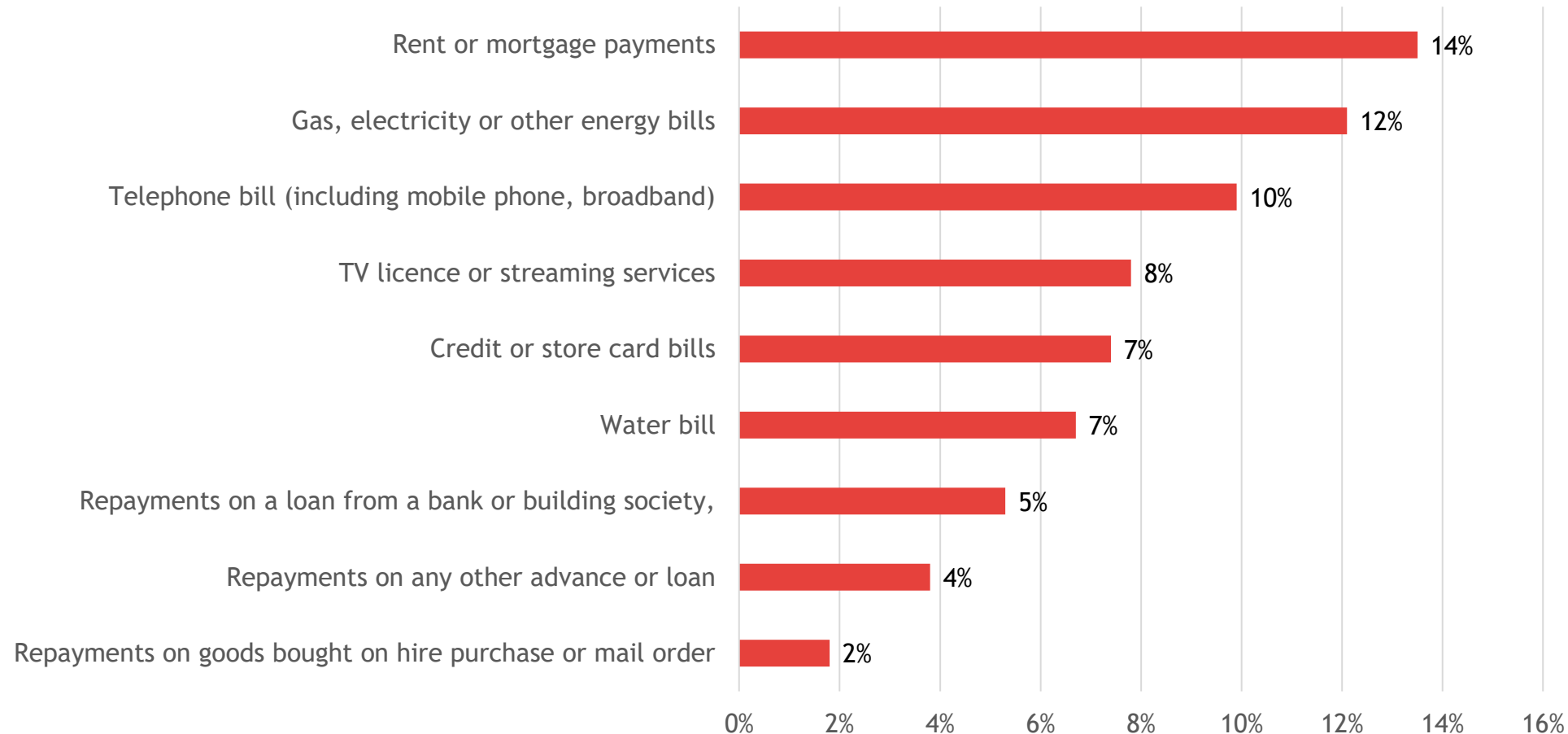


Of those who previously stated they have responsibility for paying their energy bills directly, over two thirds of respondents (69%) reported paying for their energy bill via monthly or quarterly direct debit.



Q. How do you pay for your energy bill?
Weighted base: 352. Balance: no response, other.

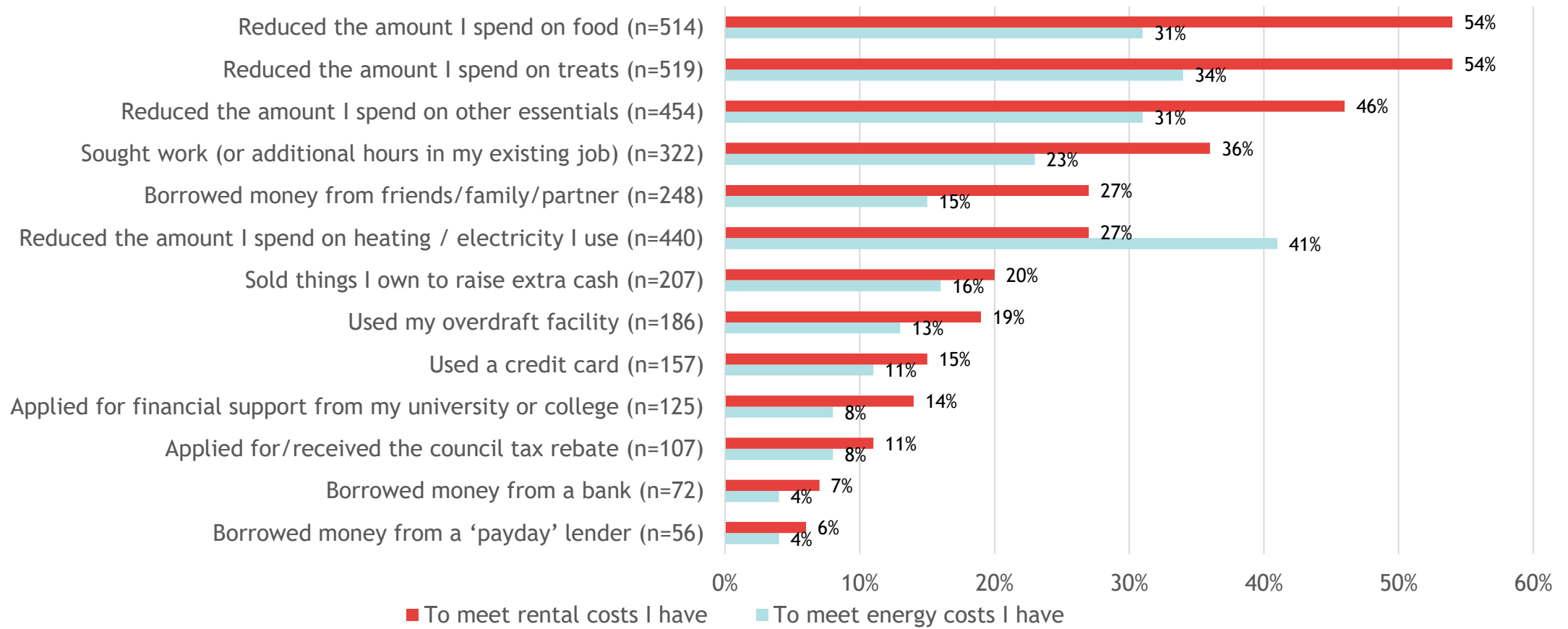
14% of respondents reported not being able to pay their rent or mortgage payments in the last 12 months. 12% said the same for their gas, electricity or other energy bills.



Q. In the last 12 months, have you been unable to pay any of these bills at the final reminder due to a lack of money? Please select all that apply
Weighted base: 681. Balance: no response, other, not applicable.



Respondents report taking action to ensure they can meet their rent and energy costs in a variety of ways, including reducing the amount they spend on food (54% and 31% respectively for rent and energy costs). A low proportion of respondents report riskier financial behaviours such as borrowing money from ‘payday’ lenders (6% and 4% respectively for rent and energy costs).



Q. Which of the following, if any, have you done any of the following to meet your rental or energy costs in the last 12 months? Please select all that apply
Weighted base: c. 265. Balance: no response, other.



Respondents were asked to provide details of their monthly outgoings for rent and energy costs, and also details for income in the form of their maintenance loan or other money received from sources such as employment or family support.

OUTGOINGS				INCOME			
	RENT	ENERGY	TOTAL OUTGOINGS		MAINTENANCE LOAN	OTHER INCOME	TOTAL INCOME
Monthly average per person	£580	£129	£709	Annual average per person	£7230	£602	£7832
Annual average per person	£6959	£1552	£8511				



Rent costs as a proportion of total income (annual):

96%

Respondents were asked to provide a figure for the following outgoings and income for them individually rather than for their whole household:

- Monthly rent
- Average monthly energy bill
- Maintenance loan amount for 2022-23
- Other income received (e.g. employment or family support)



Energy costs as a proportion of total income (annual):

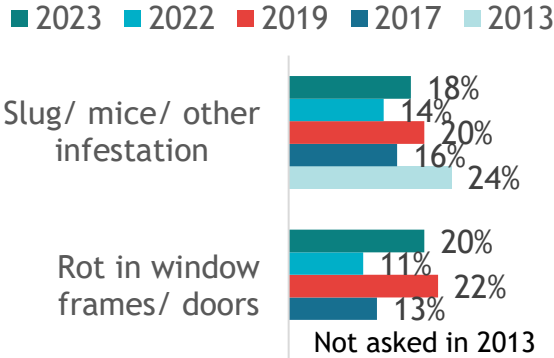
21%

Only responses where a figure was provided for rent, energy bills and maintenance loan were provided were included in the analysis.

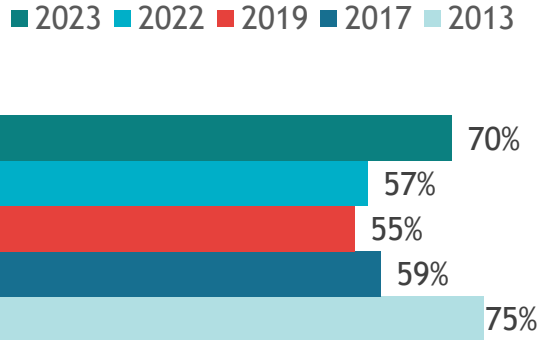
4. COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Notable changes and similarities over the years of Homes Fit for Study research

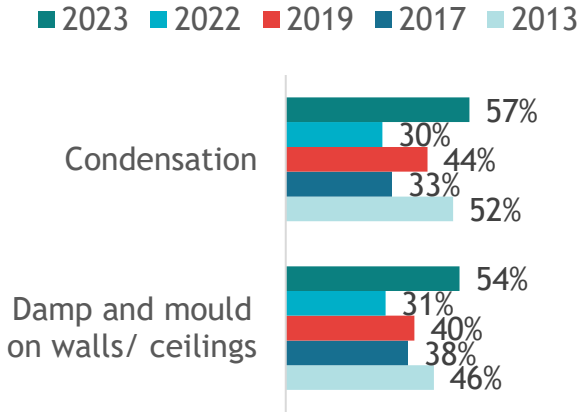
Issues such as slug, mice or other infestations and rot in window frames and doors have varied widely across the years of research but show an increase from 2022 figures in 2023.



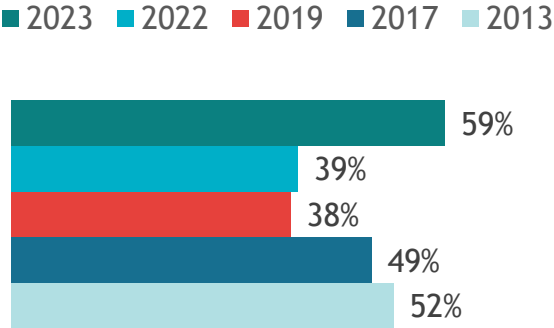
Over two thirds of respondents limit the time they leave their heating on to save money on energy bills, rising by 13% compared to 2022 survey results.



Respondents in 2023 report experiencing higher rates than all previous years of research of condensation and damp and mould on walls and ceilings.



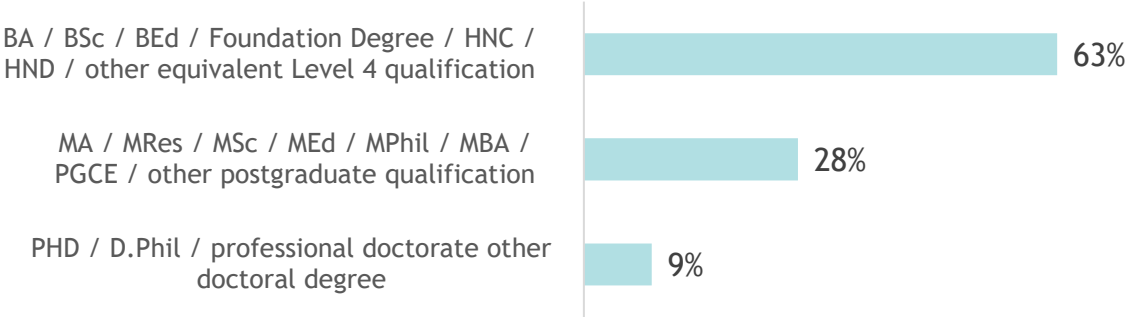
Experiences of feeling uncomfortably cold in their private rented accommodation are at their highest in 2023, rising by 20% on the figures reported in 2022.



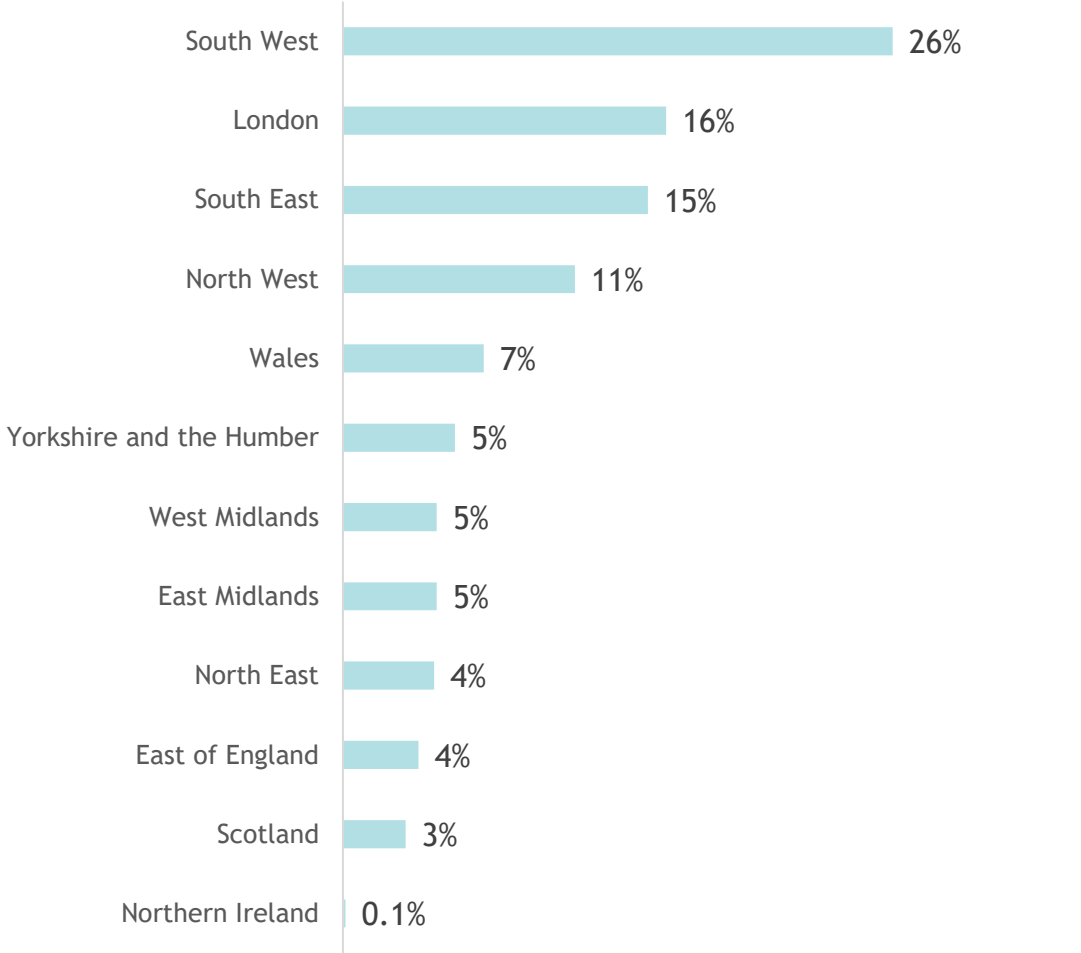
5. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The respondents

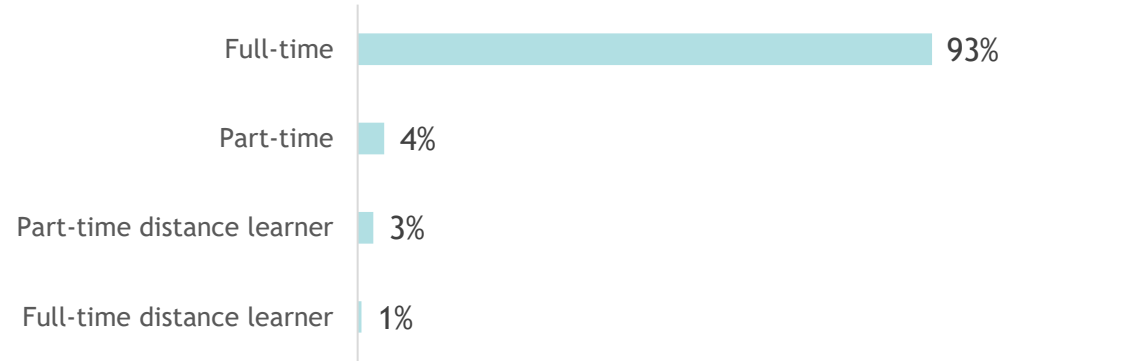
COURSE TYPE



UK REGION OF STUDY

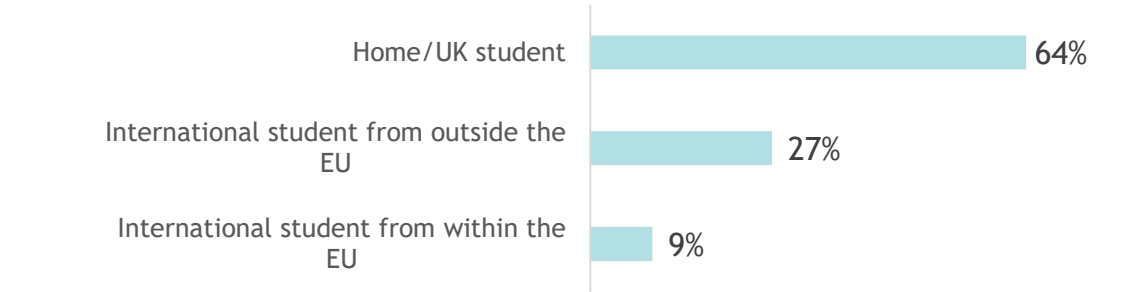


STUDY MODE

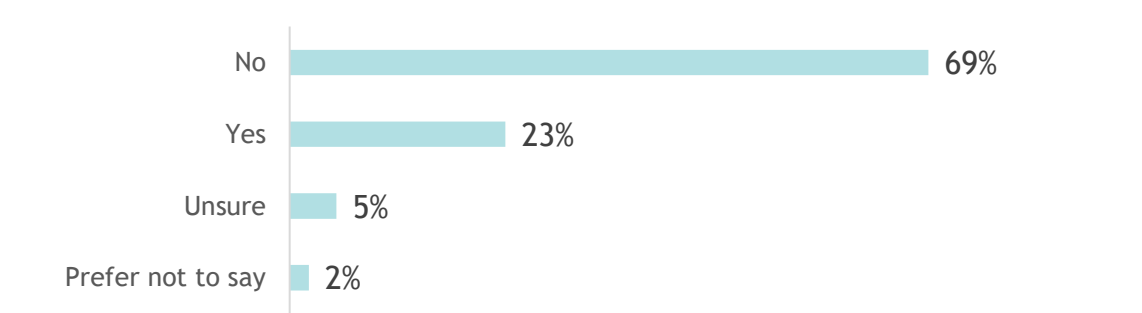


The respondents

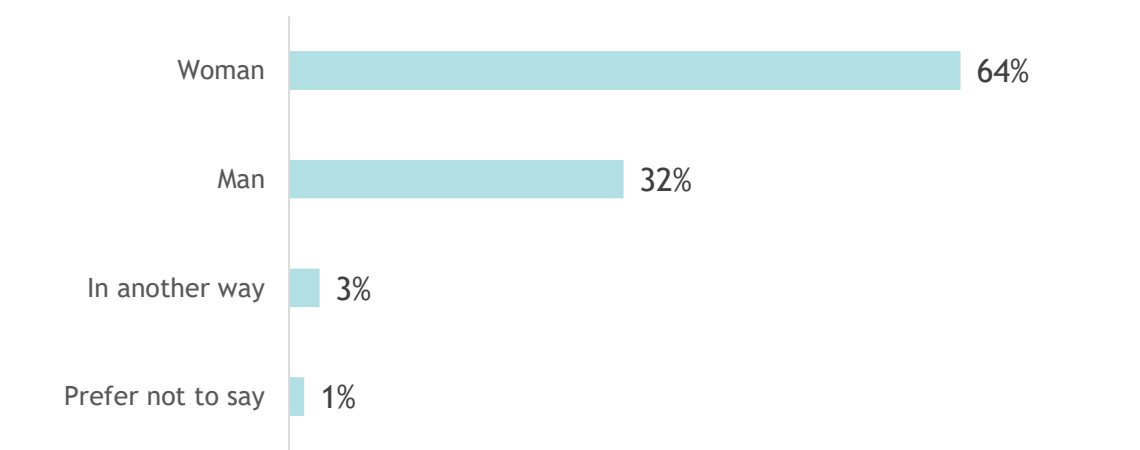
DOMICILE



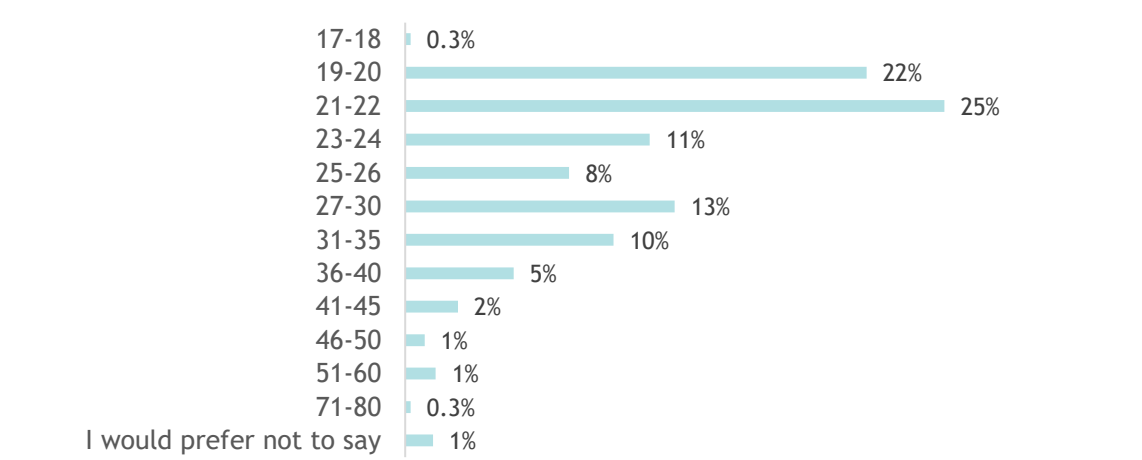
CONSIDER SELF DISABLED



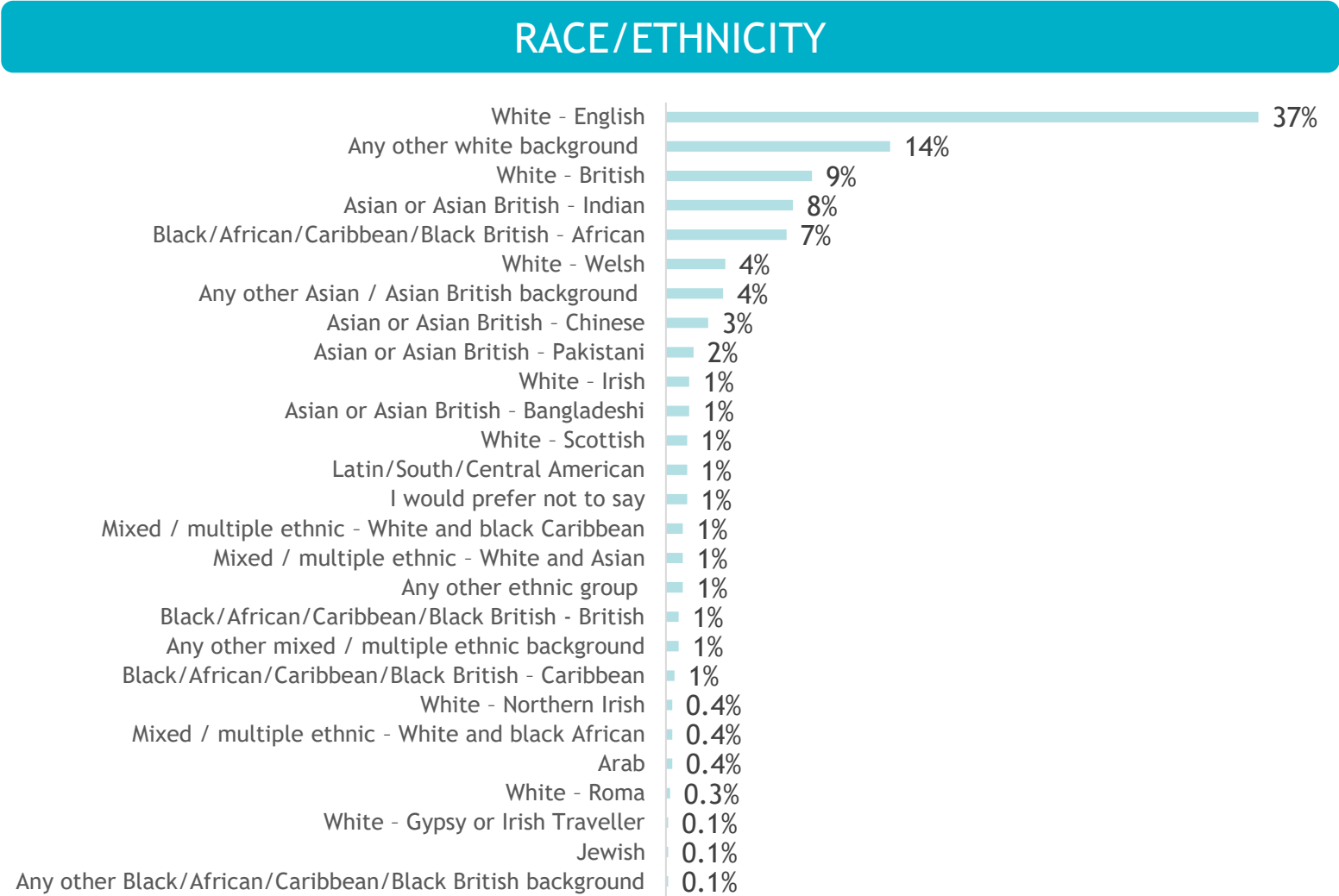
GENDER IDENTITY



AGE



The respondents



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