

Students, Alcohol and Drugs 2025-26

Research with students studying in higher
education in the UK

May 2026



Students Organising
for Sustainability
United Kingdom

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1. Summary



Key findings:



Student drug use perceptions, patterns and practices

20%

agree that taking drugs is part of **university culture**

19%

currently **use drugs** at any frequency

71%

who currently use drugs do so for **recreation/fun**



69%

who currently use drugs **use cannabis**

Key findings: Student drug use impacts during or following drug use

45%

made **new friends**
during or following
drug use

41%

became **closer to**
existing friends /
family

21%

missed a **university**
seminar / lecture /
class

19%

enjoyed the
experience of **having**
sex on drugs

12%

missed **social**
engagements

7%

got into an
argument with
people they know



Key findings: Student drug use university policy and support



77%

think that their **university should provide support** to students who take drugs

30%

don't know if their university has a **drugs policy**

25%

are aware of **communications** at their university **related to reducing the risk of harm** while using drugs

25%

don't know anything about the **advice and support** available at their university



Key findings:



Student alcohol consumption

perceptions, patterns and practices

78%

agree that drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture

73%

currently drink alcohol at any frequency

78%

currently drink alcohol for recreation/fun



41%

Regularly start drinking alcohol in their house/friend's house before they go out

Key findings: Student alcohol consumption impacts during or following drug use

64%

made **new friends** during or following alcohol consumption

44%

were **unable to remember what happened the night before**

40%

became **closer to existing friends / family**

39%

missed a **university seminar / lecture / class**

16%

missed **social engagements**

4%

caused **damage to the place they live**



Key findings: Student alcohol consumption university support



61%

think there are **enough social events** at university that **don't involve having to drink**

35%

are aware of **communications** at their university **related to staying safe** while drinking alcohol

20%

are aware of **events / stalls / stands** on campus or online related to alcohol consumption

11%

are aware of **training for students** at their university related to alcohol consumption



2. About the research



About the research



Aims

The report presents research completed as part of the **Drug and Alcohol Impact** programme. The programme is a **whole-institution approach** and embeds social norms of **responsible drinking** on our campuses, refocusing the conversation on drugs to be about **reducing harm, and building healthier, safer, more productive student communities**, involving action by local partnerships of students' unions, universities and community organisations.

Method

The programme **includes an annual survey**, designed to identify students' relationship with alcohol and drugs. The respondents are **studying higher education courses at institutions across the UK**, including at participating institutions in Drug and Alcohol Impact. The survey is intended to provide **a means for understanding changes in attitudes and behaviours**.

Analysis

A total of **10561 responses** from students in higher education were achieved in 2025-26 through promotion of the survey. The survey was **promoted by NUS** through their database and by **universities and students' unions** wishing to gather data on their students' relationship with drugs and alcohol.

The survey results have been weighted according to **gender, ethnicity and disability** to reflect the latest available statistics for students in higher education available through the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

When reading the results, it is worth bearing in mind the **characteristics of the respondents**, outlined in chapter 14 (pg 82). Variations between **different respondents' demographics, and between regions**, are also drawn out throughout the report.

Significant differences are reported where base sizes are **greater than 30** and are a valid at a **confidence level of 95%**.

Report

The report presents findings for both drugs and alcohol. Labels in the top left of each slide indicate which the data refers to.

About Drug and Alcohol Impact

SOS UK's student wellbeing programme [Drug and Alcohol Impact](#) is an accreditation programme for universities and students' unions working in partnership, which embeds **harm reduction** approaches to alcohol and drug use on campus, **supporting healthier, safer, and more supportive** student communities.

The programme **builds upon the success of Alcohol Impact**, which since 2015 supported 30 university and students' union partnerships to create lasting positive change around responsible alcohol consumption. Although progress has been made in improving drinking cultures on campus, there's still work to be done, and **institutions are supported to build on and improve practices in this area.**

Drug and Alcohol Impact recognises that **despite most universities taking a zero-tolerance approach to drug use, many students still choose to use drugs.** The programme supports institutions to explore their own students drug use and **design bespoke interventions to identify, educate and reduce harm.**

For more information visit [our website](#) or email hello@sos-uk.org

3. Drugs Research findings



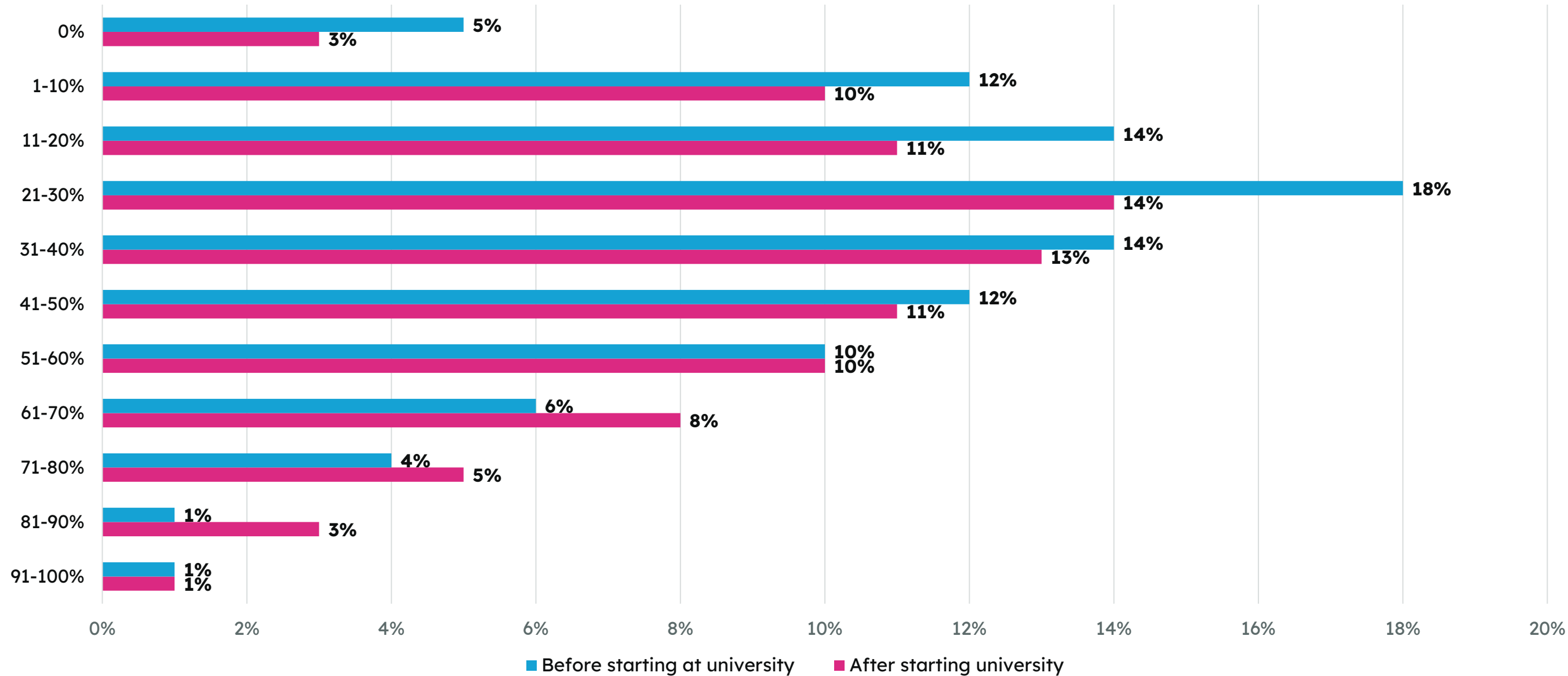
3.1

Perceptions of student drug use and campus culture



Perceptions of student drug use

When reflecting on perceptions of student drug use before starting university, a smaller proportion of respondents believed that more than half of students (51% and above) used drugs. After starting university, a higher proportion reported this belief. For example, 6% believed that 61–70% of students used drugs before starting university, compared with 8% after starting university.



Before starting at university, **92%** thought students used drugs at any frequency

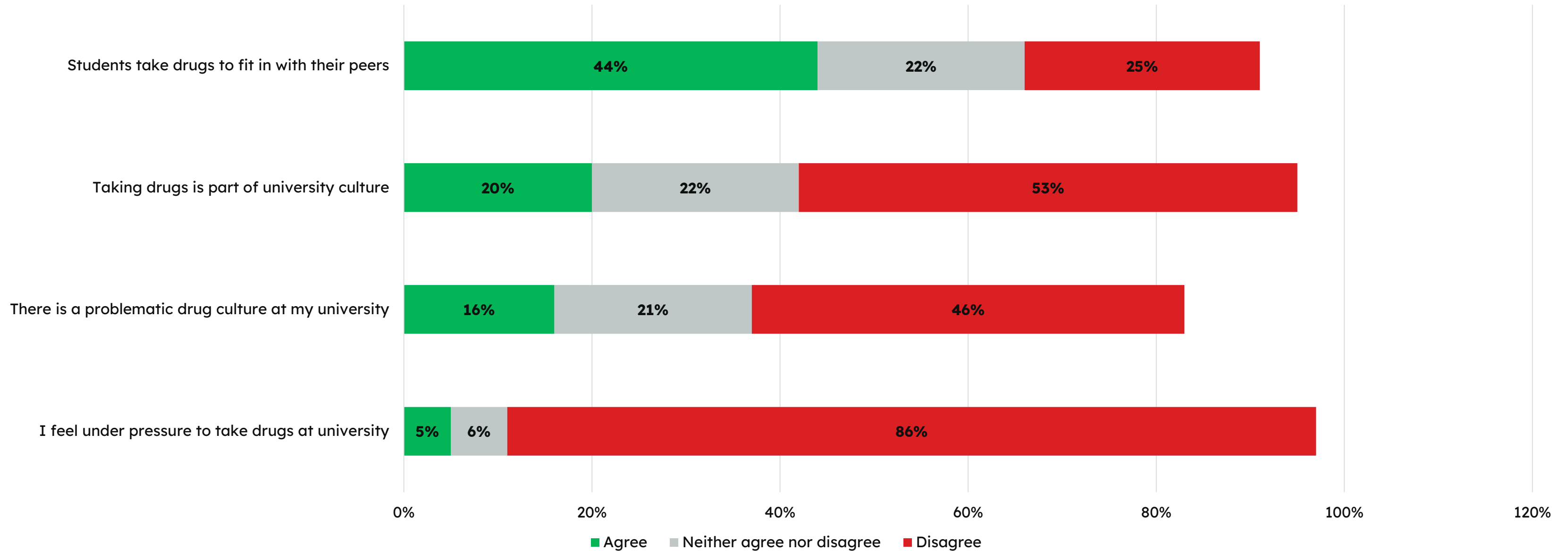
After starting university, **86%** thought students used drugs at any frequency

Q. Before you started at university, what percentage of university students did you think used drugs? [BASE: 10035 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]
 Q. And now you're a student at university, what percentage of university students do you think used drugs? [BASE: 9848 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]
 *Indicates statistically significant difference at a 95% confidence level



University culture and student drug use

The statement that attracted the **highest level of agreement** was 'students take drugs to fit in with their peers', with **44%** of respondents in agreement while a quarter (**25%**) who disagreed. The statement that attracted the **highest level of disagreement** was 'I feel under pressure to take drugs at university', with the majority (**86%**) of respondents disagreeing.

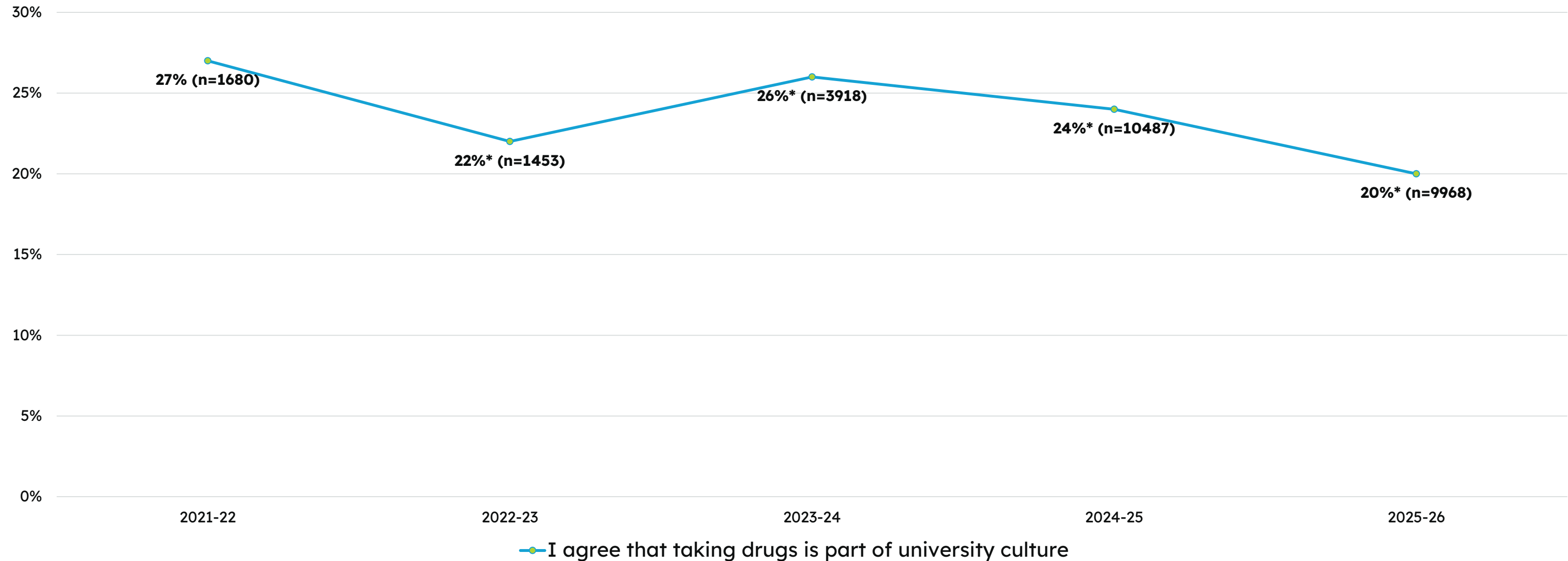


Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [BASE: c. 9968 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Rather not say', No response]



University culture and student drug use tracking changes

In 2025-26, respondents are less likely to agree that taking drugs is part of university culture, representing a **4%*** significant decrease in comparison to the previous year.



Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [BASE: See above]

*Indicates statistically significant difference in comparison to the previous year to a 95% confidence level



University culture and student drug use demographic and regional differences

Students take drugs to fit in with their peers

- Women respondents are **more likely** to agree (**67%**) than men respondents (**58%**).
- Respondents in the North of England are **more likely** to agree (**67%**) than those in London (**48%**), East of England (**63%**) and Wales (**53%**).
- Respondents with a Home fee status are **more likely** to agree (**66%**) than those with an Overseas fee status (**54%**).

Taking drugs is part of university culture

- Respondents who identify as Asian ethnicities were **less likely** to agree (**19%**) than those who identified as Mixed/multiple (**32%**), White (**29%**), Black (**29%**) and Other (**27%**) ethnicities.
- Disabled respondents were **more likely** to agree (**32%**) than non-disabled respondents (**26%**).
- Respondents in the South of England were **more likely** to agree (**33%**) than those in London (**20%**), East of England (**23%**), Wales (**15%**) and Scotland (**24%**).

There is a problematic drug culture at my university

- Women respondents are **more likely** to agree (**29%**) than men respondents (**23%**).
- Respondents who identify as Mixed/multiple ethnicities are **more likely** to agree (**31%**) than those who identify as Asian ethnicities (**22%**).
- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to agree (**30%**) than non-disabled respondents (**25%**).

I feel under pressure to take drugs at university

- Respondents aged 21-25 are **more likely** to agree (**7%**) than 17-18 (**3%**) and 19-20 (**5%**) year olds.
- Respondents who are studying for a doctorate are **more likely** to agree (**8%**) than those studying for an undergraduate degree (**5%**).
- Respondents with an Overseas fee status are **more likely** to agree (**7%**) than those with a Home fee status.

Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



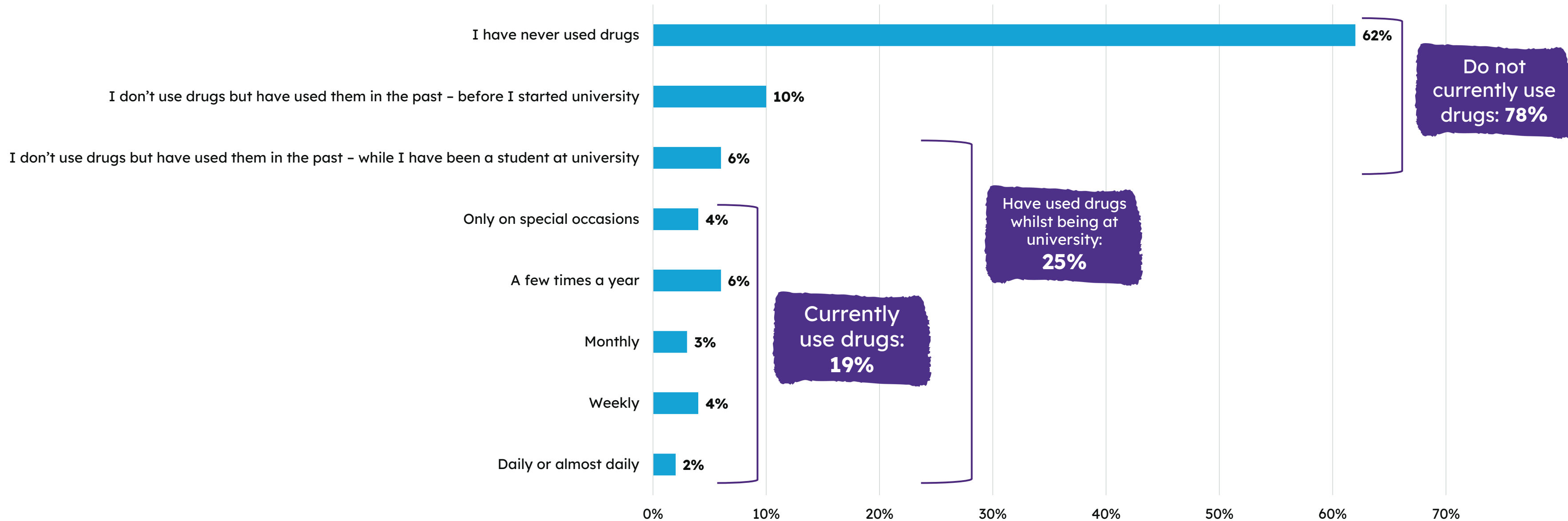
3.2

Student drug use



Frequency of student drug use

The majority (**78%**) of respondents currently do not use drugs. A quarter (**25%**) have used drugs whilst at university, and **19%** currently use drugs. Of this 19%, **2%** use drugs daily or almost daily.

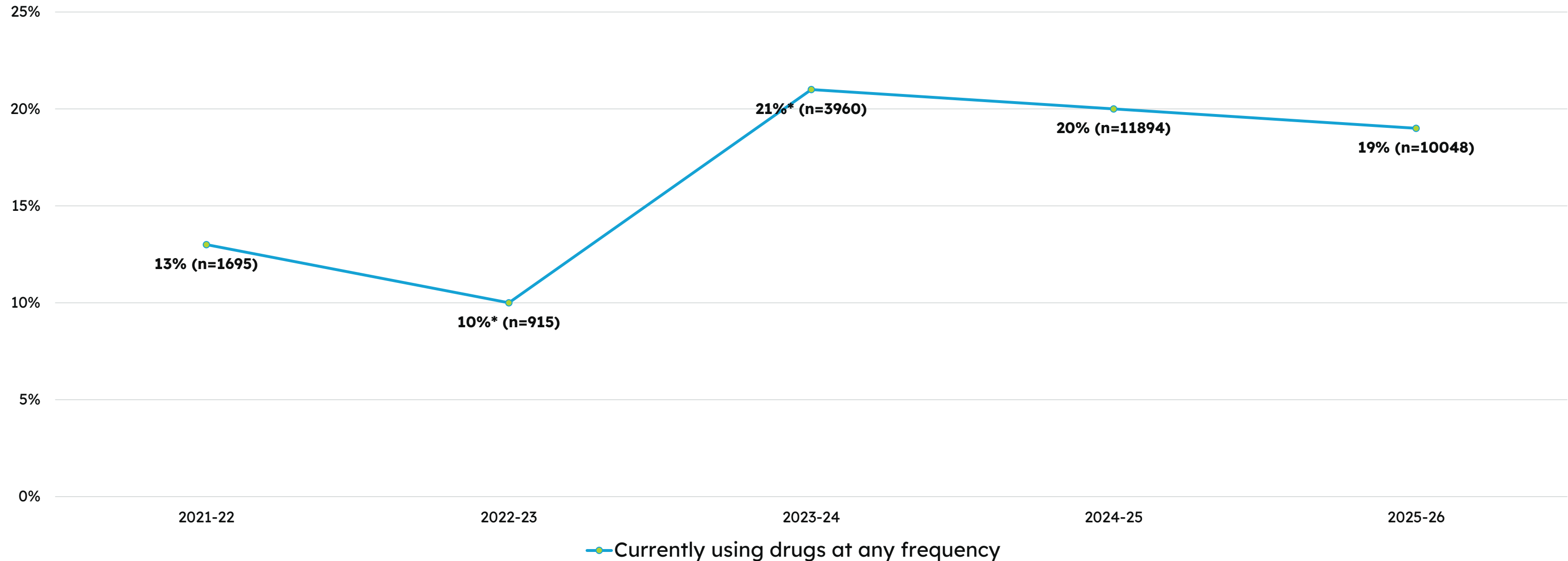


Q. Which of the following best describes your frequency of drug use in the last 12 months? [BASE: 10048 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]



Frequency of student drug use tracking changes

There are no significant fluctuations in students' frequency of drug use from 2023-24 to 2025-26. It is important to note the number of respondents vary year on year.



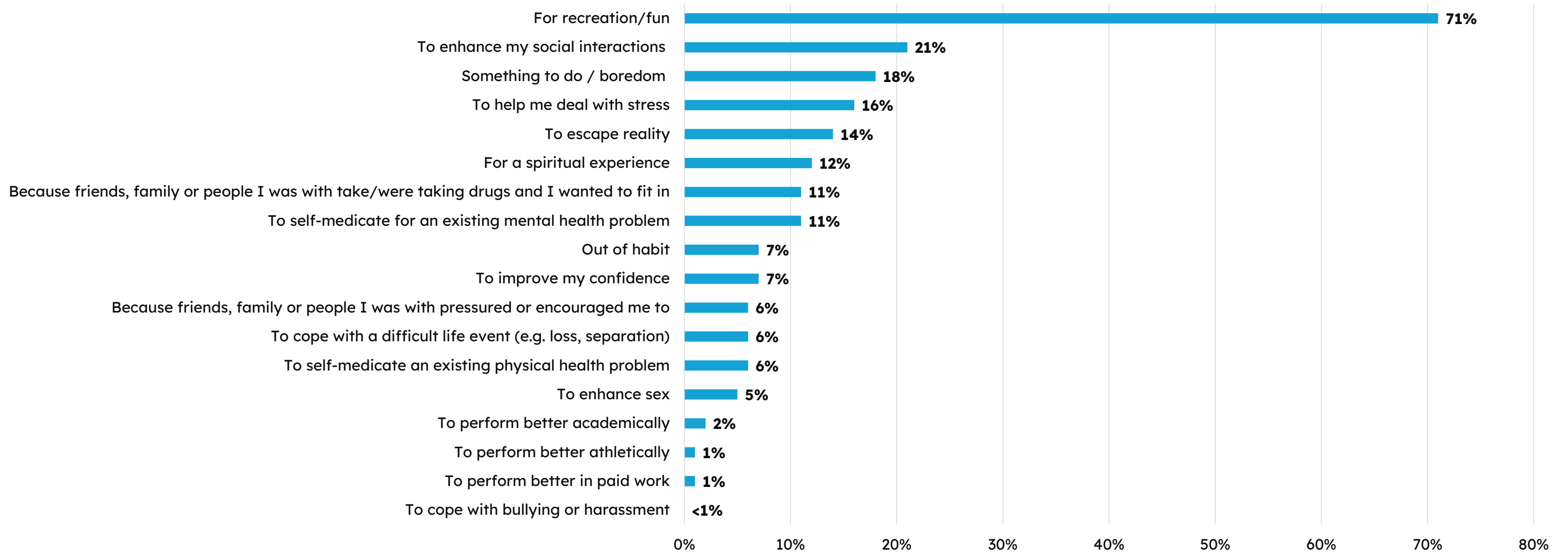
Q. Which of the following describes your current frequency of drug use? [BASE: See above]

*Indicates statistically significant difference in comparison to the previous year to a 95% confidence level



Reasons for student drug use

Most respondents (**71%**) reported that they used drugs for recreation, while 1 in 5 (**21%**) used drugs to enhance their social interactions. Using drugs to improve performance (academically, athletically or for paid work) is uncommon, as is using drugs to cope with bullying or harassment (between 0.5% and 2% report using drugs for these purposes).



Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs? [BASE: 2609 BALANCE: 'Other', No response]



Reasons for student drug use demographic differences

Gender

- Non-binary respondents are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **to self-medicate for an existing mental health problem (22%)** than men (9%) and women (11%) respondents.
- Men respondents are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **to perform better academically (4%)** than women respondents (1%).
- Women respondents are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **because friends, family or people I was with take/were taking drugs and I wanted to fit in (13%)** than men respondents (9%).

Disability

- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **to self-medicate for an existing mental health problem (26%)** than non-disabled respondents (6%).
- Non-disabled respondents are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **for recreation/fun (74%)** than disabled respondents (68%).
- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **to help me deal with stress (23%)** than non-disabled respondents (14%).

Ethnicity

- Respondents who identify as Black are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **to self-medicate for an existing physical health problem (11%)** than respondents from White (5%) and Mixed/multiple ethnicities (3%).
- Respondents who identify as Other ethnicities are **less likely** to report they use drugs **for recreation/fun (59%)** than respondents from White (75%) and Mixed/multiple (77%) ethnicities.
- Respondents who identify as White are **more likely** to report they use drugs **to enhance my social interactions (23%)** than those from Asian ethnicities (13%).

Age

- Respondents who are aged 31-25 are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **to self medicate for an existing mental health problem (23%)** than 17-18 (8%), 19-20 (9%) and 21-25 (13%) year olds.
- Respondents who are aged 19-20 are **more likely** to report that they use drugs **for recreation/fun (76%)** than 21-25 (69%), 26-30 (67%) and 31-35 (63%) year olds.
- Respondents aged 17-18 are **less likely** to report that they use drugs **to enhance sex (3%)** than 36-40 (15%) and 41-45 (17%) year olds.

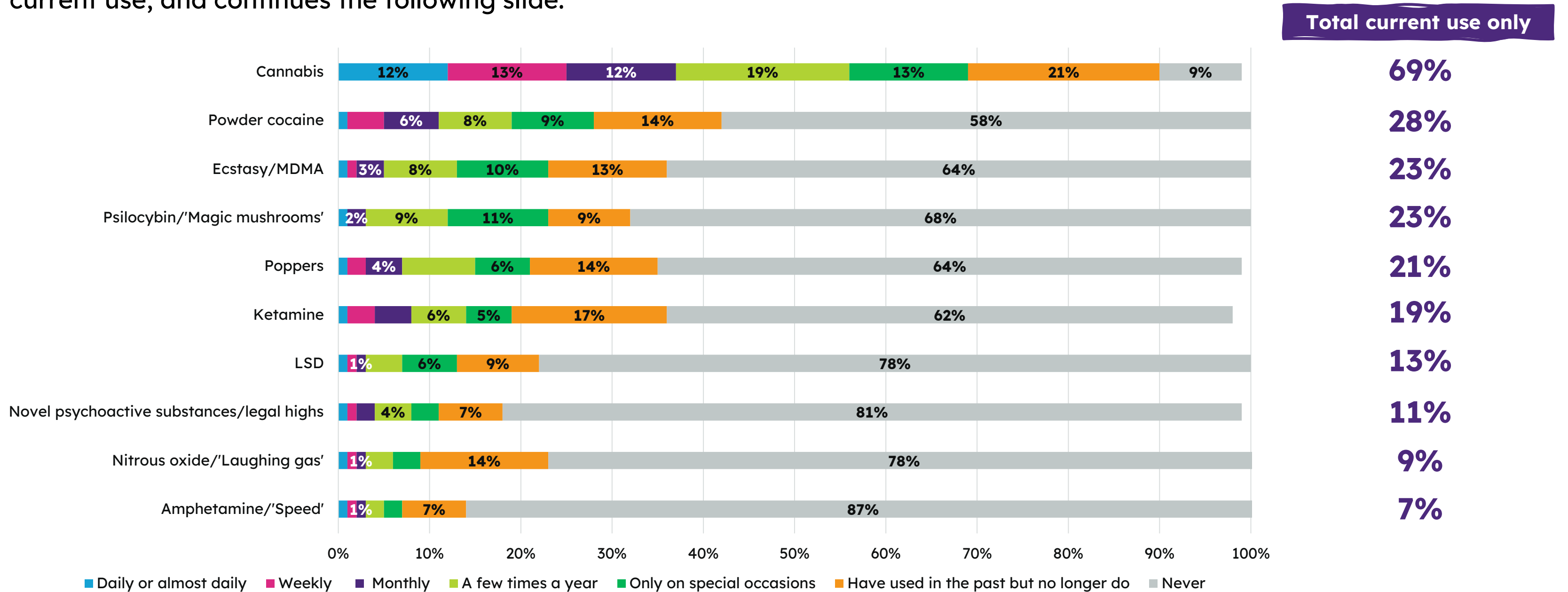
Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



Frequency of students' particular drug use

7 in 10 (69%) of respondents who currently use drugs report using cannabis, while 28% use powder cocaine. A quarter (23%) currently use ecstasy/MDMA and the same proportion use psilocybin/'magic mushrooms'. The chart is ordered in frequency of current use, and continues the following slide.

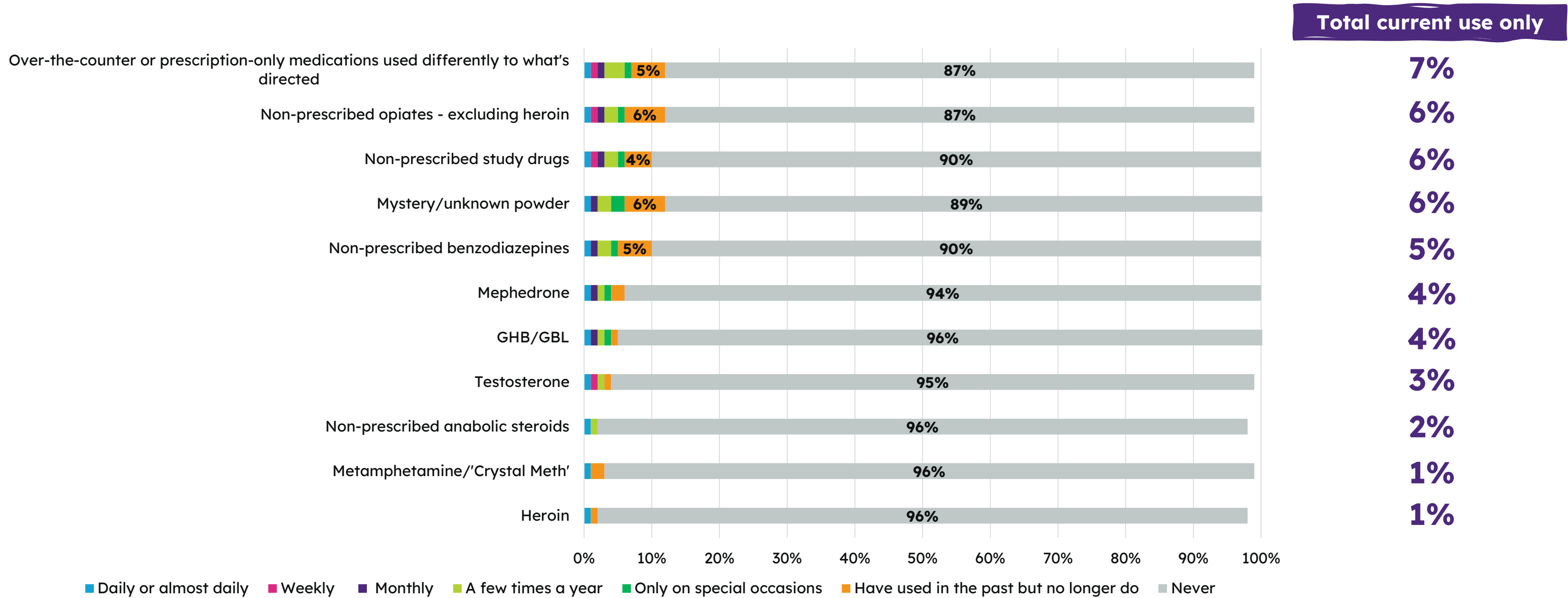


Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs? [BASE: c. 2702 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Frequency of students' particular drug use

7% of respondents reported currently using over-the-counter or prescription-only medications, while 6% use non-prescribed opiates - excluding heroin, non-prescribed study drugs and mystery/unknown powder.

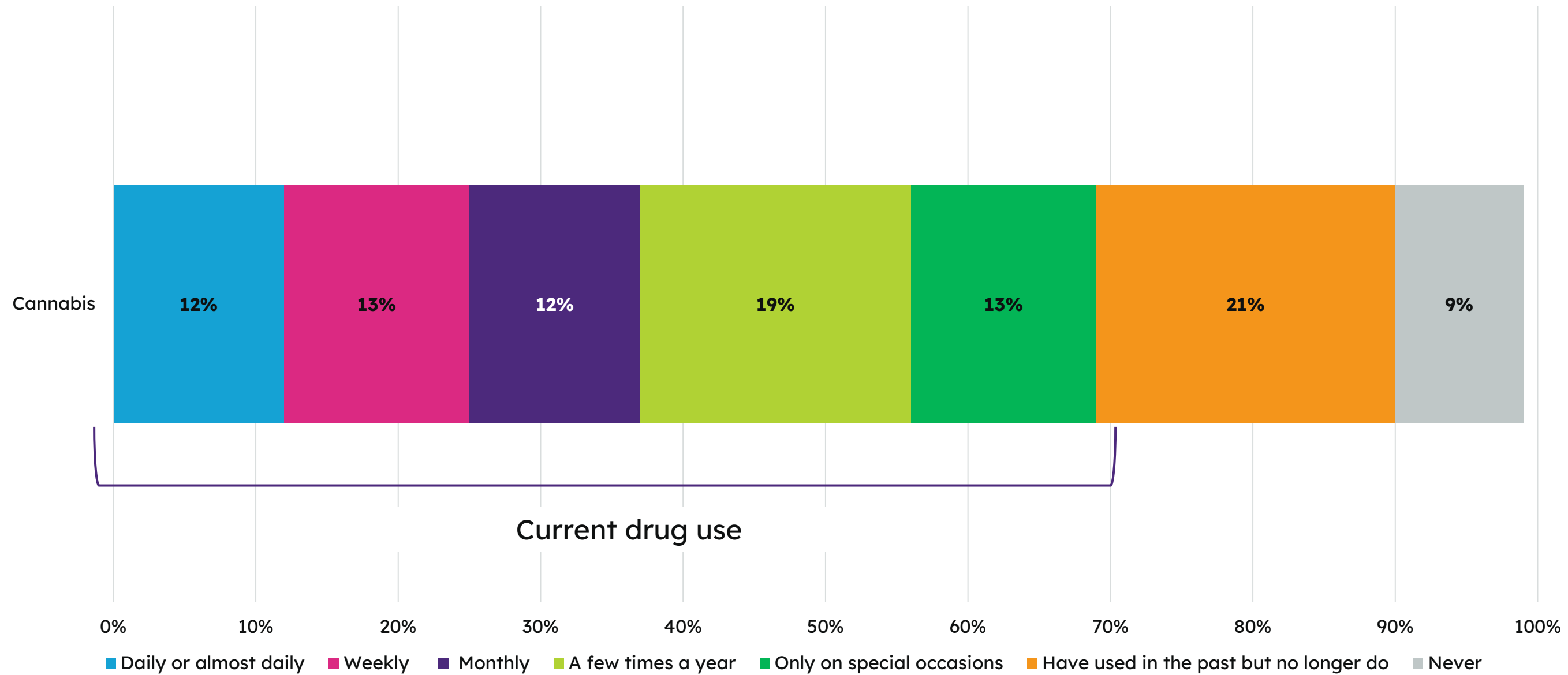


Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs? [BASE: c. 2702 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Students' cannabis use

Cannabis is the most frequently reported drug for those who currently or have used drugs in the past as a student, with over two thirds (69%) saying they use the drug. 12% of respondents report using cannabis daily or almost daily.



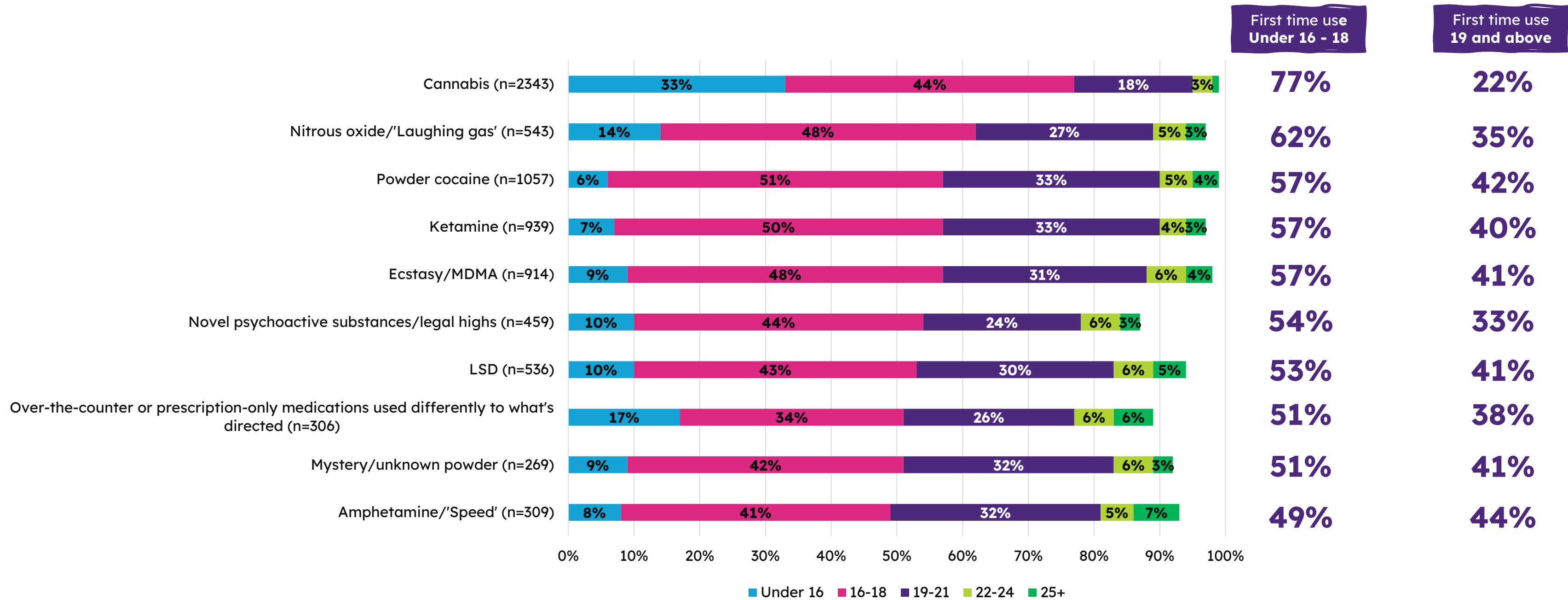
69%
of respondents who currently use drugs are using cannabis

Q. Still thinking about your time at university so far, which option best describes how often you use the following drugs? [BASE: 2610 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Age and students' particular drug use

Over half of respondents' report using the following drugs before aged 18 or below.



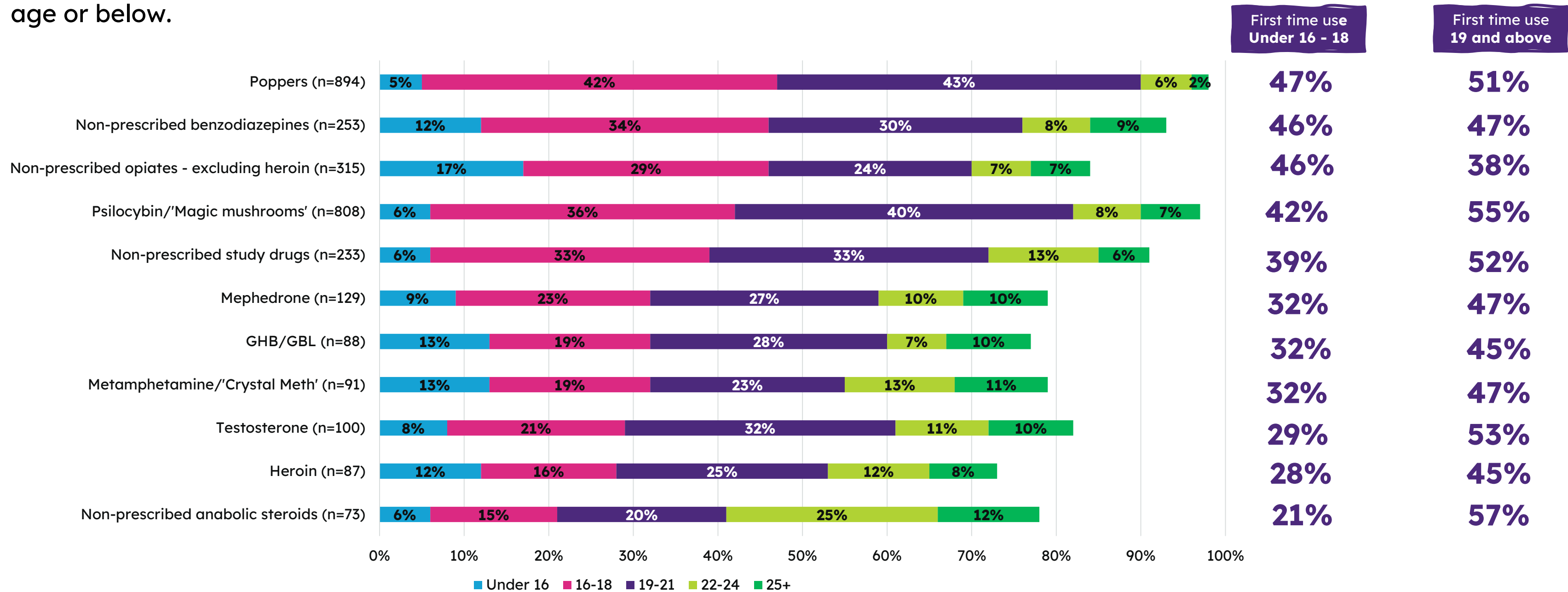
Q. How old were you when you first used these graphs? [BASE: see above BALANCE: 'Not applicable', No response]

Base sizes vary as respondents were only shown the particular drugs that they previously reported to be currently using, or have used in the past but no longer do.



Age and students' particular drug use

Nearly half report using poppers (47%), non-prescribed benzodiazepines (46%) and non-prescribed opiates - excluding heroin (46%) for the first time aged 18 or below. 1 in 5 (21%) say they used non-prescribed anabolic steroids for the first time at this age or below.



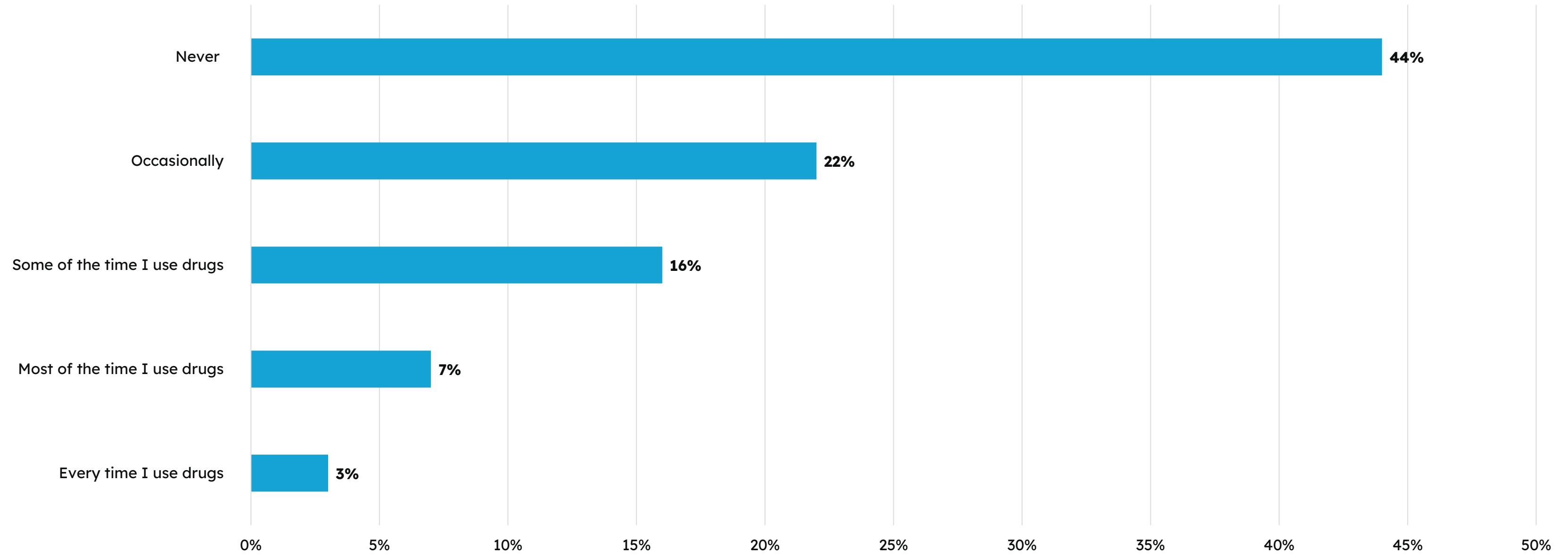
Q. How old were you when you first used these graphs? [BASE: see above BALANCE: 'Not applicable', No response]

Base sizes vary as respondents were only shown the particular drugs that they previously reported to be currently using, or have used in the past but no longer do.



Students' polydrug use

Polydrug use refers to the use of two or more drugs, either at the same time or in close succession. Respondents were asked to include alcohol in their answer. **44%** of respondents have never used two or more drugs at one time. 1 in 5 (**22%**) do occasionally, and **3%** every time they use drugs.

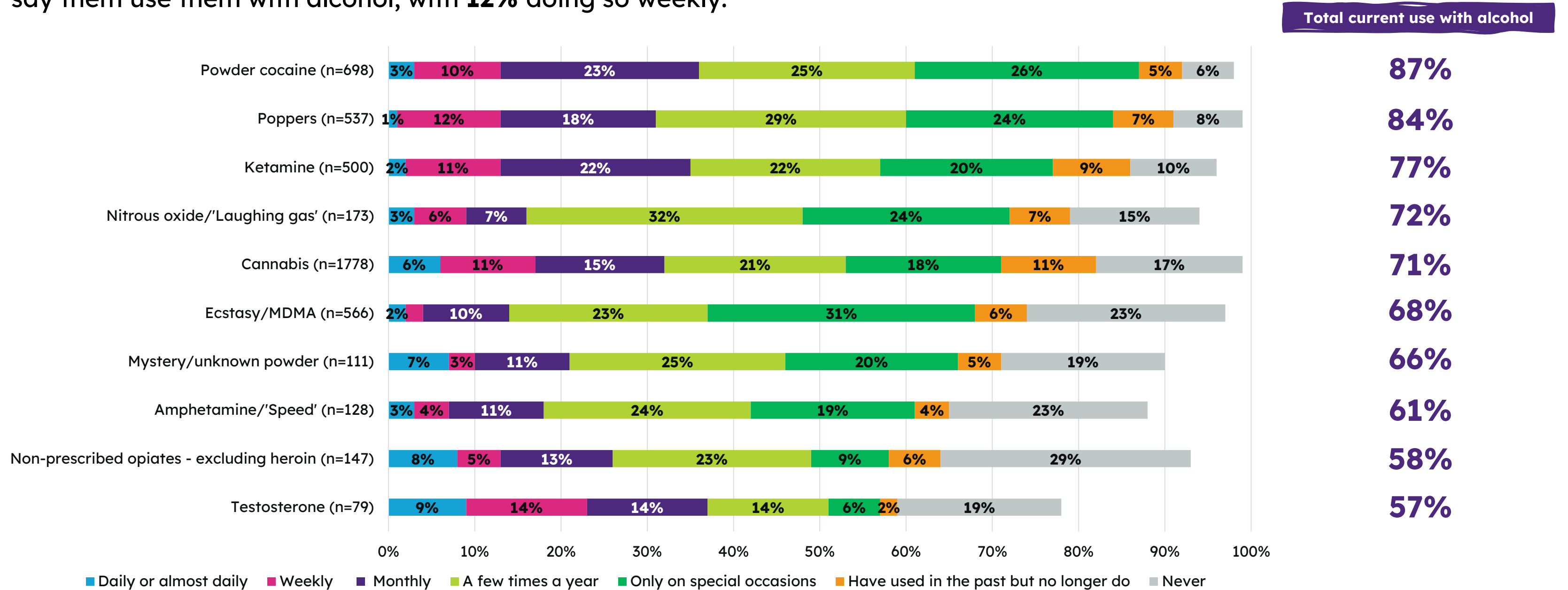


Q. Approximately how often, if at all, do you use/have you used two or more drugs at one time? When thinking about the drugs you use, please include alcohol in your answer. [BASE: 2619 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Rather not say', 'Not applicable - I haven't used drugs since I've been a student at university', No response]



Students' drug use with alcohol

Powder cocaine and **poppers** are the most common drugs respondents report using in combination with alcohol. **87%** of respondents who currently use powder cocaine report using it with alcohol, with **10%** doing so weekly. **84%** who use poppers say they use them with alcohol, with **12%** doing so weekly.



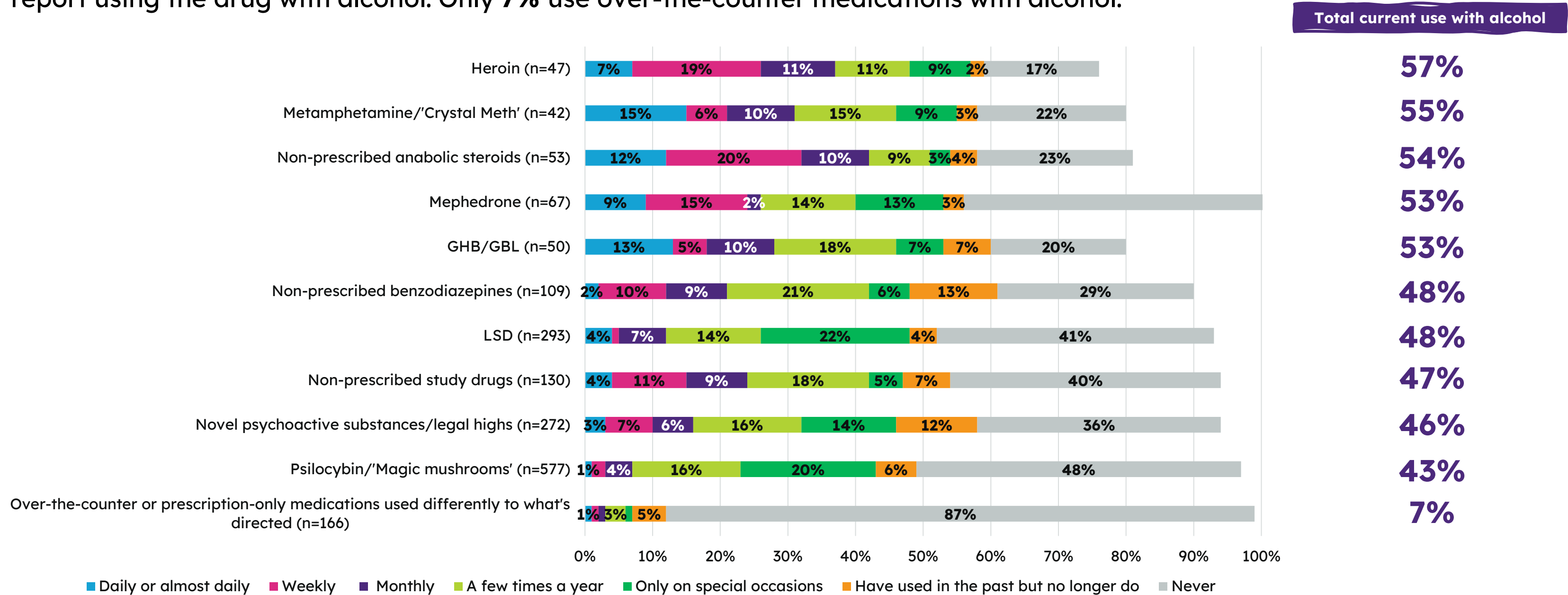
Q. Still thinking about your time at university, approximately how often do you use the following drugs with alcohol? [BASE: see above BALANCE: 'Rather not say', 'Not applicable', No response]

Base sizes vary as respondents were only shown the particular drugs that they previously reported to be currently using, or have used in the past but no longer do.



Students' drug use with alcohol

57% of respondents who currently use heroin report using it with alcohol. Over half who currently use methamphetamine/'crystal meth' (55%), non-prescribed anabolic steroids (54%), mephedrone (53%) and GHB/GBL (53%) report using the drug with alcohol. Only 7% use over-the-counter medications with alcohol.



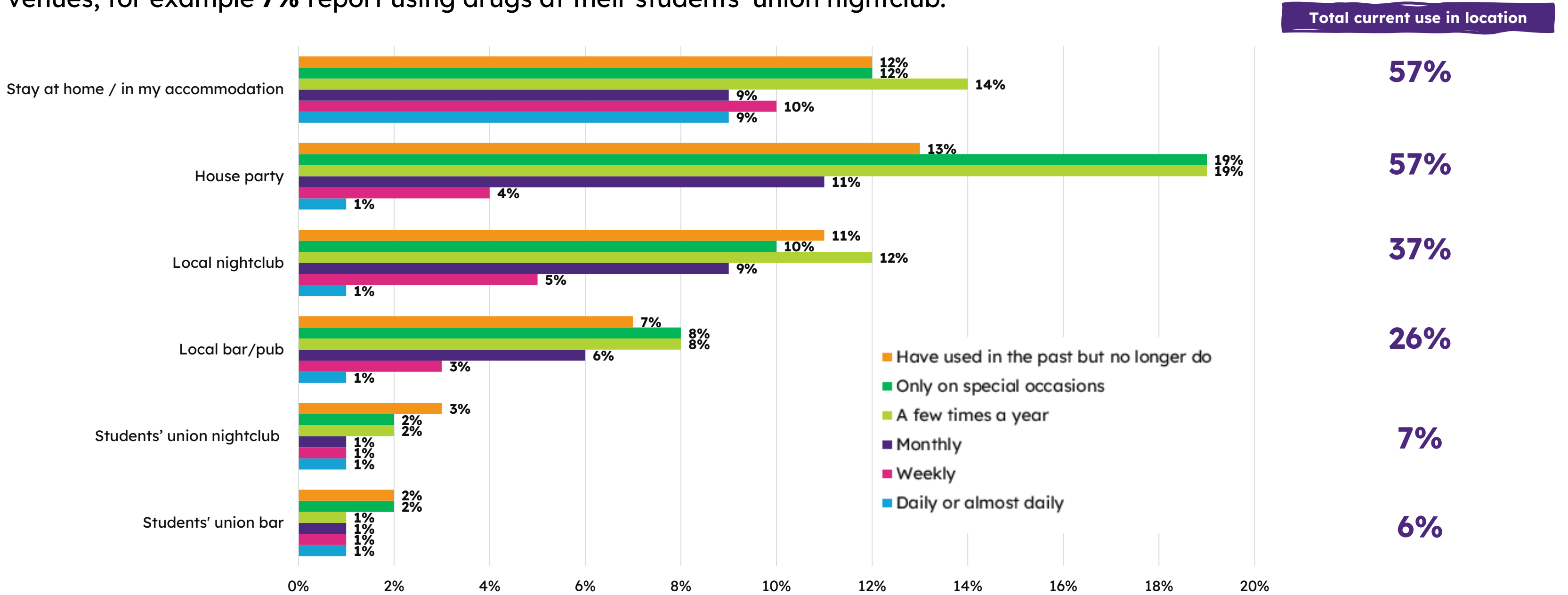
Q. Still thinking about your time at university, approximately how often do you use the following drugs with alcohol? [BASE: see above BALANCE: 'Rather not say', 'Not applicable', No response]

Base sizes vary as respondents were only shown the particular drugs that they previously reported to be currently using, or have used in the past but no longer do.



Location of students' drug use

57% of respondents who currently use drugs report using them at home/in their accommodation, and at house parties. 9% say that they use drugs in their accommodation daily or almost daily. Low levels of drug use are reported in students' union venues, for example 7% report using drugs at their students' union nightclub.

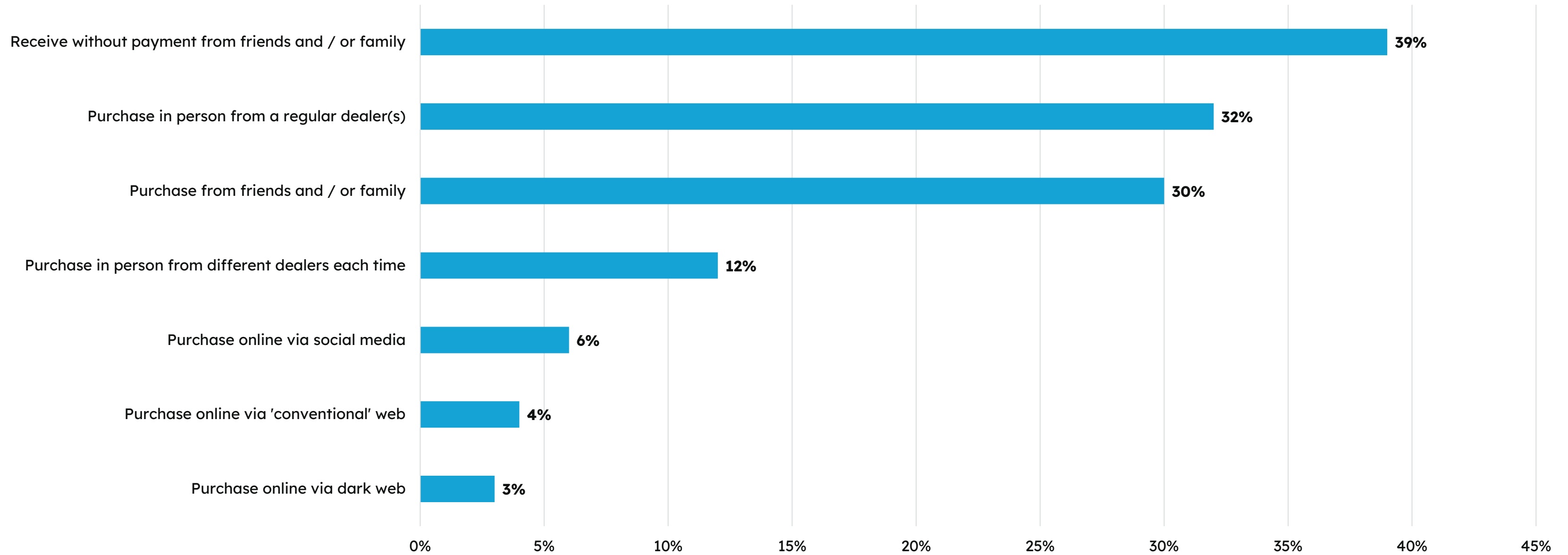


Q. Approximately how often do you take drugs in each of the following places? [BASE: 2574 BALANCE: 'Never', 'Rather not say', No response]



How students acquire drugs

The most common way students acquire drugs is through friends and/or family without payment (**39%**), followed by purchased in person from a regular dealer(s) (**32%**). Lower levels (**13%**) report purchasing via online channels, for example purchasing online via social media (**6%**).



Q. Thinking of your experiences since you started at university, which of the following describes where or how you acquire drugs? [BASE: 2600 BALANCE: 'Other', 'Rather not say', 'Not applicable', no response]



Ways in which students acquire drugs demographic and regional differences

Receive without payment from friends and/or family

- Women respondents are **more likely** to report this (**43%**) than men respondents (**34%**).
- Respondents who identify as White ethnicities are **more likely** to report this (**41%**) than respondents who identify as Black (**26%**) and Asian (**23%**) ethnicities.
- Respondents in London are **less likely** to report this (**35%**) than those in Scotland (**53%**).

Purchase in person from a different dealer each time

- Respondents in the North of England are **more likely** to report this (**15%**) than those in the East of England (**12%**).
- Respondents who identify as gay or lesbian are **more likely** to report this than bisexual (**11%**) and heterosexual (**12%**) respondents.
- Men respondents are **more likely** to report this (**15%**) than women respondents (**10%**).

Purchase in person from a regular dealer(s)

- Respondents aged 21-25 are **more likely** to report this (**34%**) than those aged 17-18 years old (**26%**).
- Respondents in the North of England are **more likely** to report this (**36%**) than those in London (**25%**) and the East of England (**27%**).
- Respondents with a Home fee status are **more likely** to report this (**35%**) than those with an Overseas fee status (**18%**).

Purchase from friends and/or family

- Respondents in London are **less likely** to report this (**27%**) than those in Scotland (**45%**).
- Bisexual respondents are **more likely** to report this (**35%**) than heterosexual respondents (**29%**).
- Respondents with a Home fee status are **more likely** to report this (**32%**) than those with an Overseas fee status (**20%**).

Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



Ways in which students acquire drugs demographic differences

Purchase online via 'conventional' web

- Men respondents are **more likely** to report this (6%) than women respondents (2%).
- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report this (7%) than non-disabled respondents (3%).
- Respondents aged 46-50 years old are **more likely** to report this (18%) than 17-18 (3%), 19-20 (4%) and 21-25 (4%) 21-25 year olds.

Purchase online via dark web

- Respondents in London are **more likely** to report this (6%) than those in the East of England (2%).
- Men respondents are **more likely** to report this (4%) than women respondents (2%).
- Respondents aged 56-60 year olds are **more likely** to report this (16%) than those 17-18 (2%) and 19-20 (2%) year olds.

Purchase online via social media

- Men respondents are **more likely** to report this (7%) than women respondents (4%).
- Respondents aged 21-25 years old are **more likely** to report this (8%) than 19-20 year olds (5%).

Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



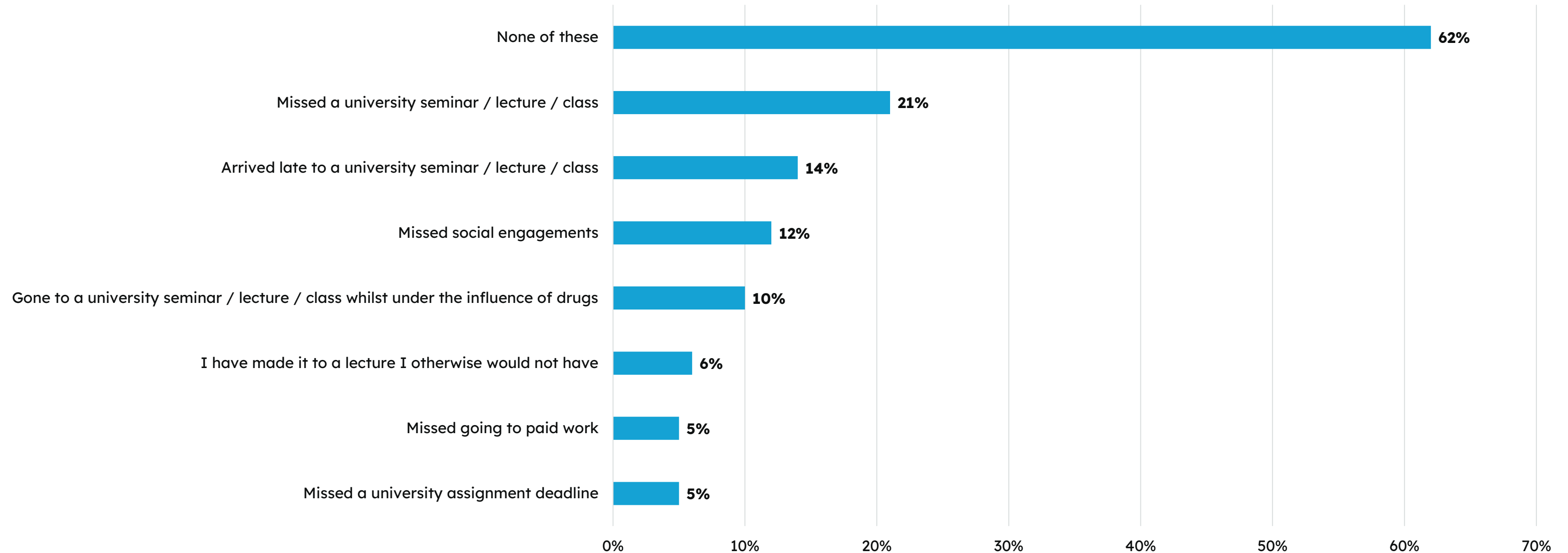
3.3

Impacts of student drug use



Impacts on academic life, paid work, and socialising

While most respondents report experiencing none of the impacts (**62%**), 1 in 5 (**21%**) have experienced 'missed a university seminar/lecture/class' and **14%** 'arrived late to a university seminar/lecture/class'.

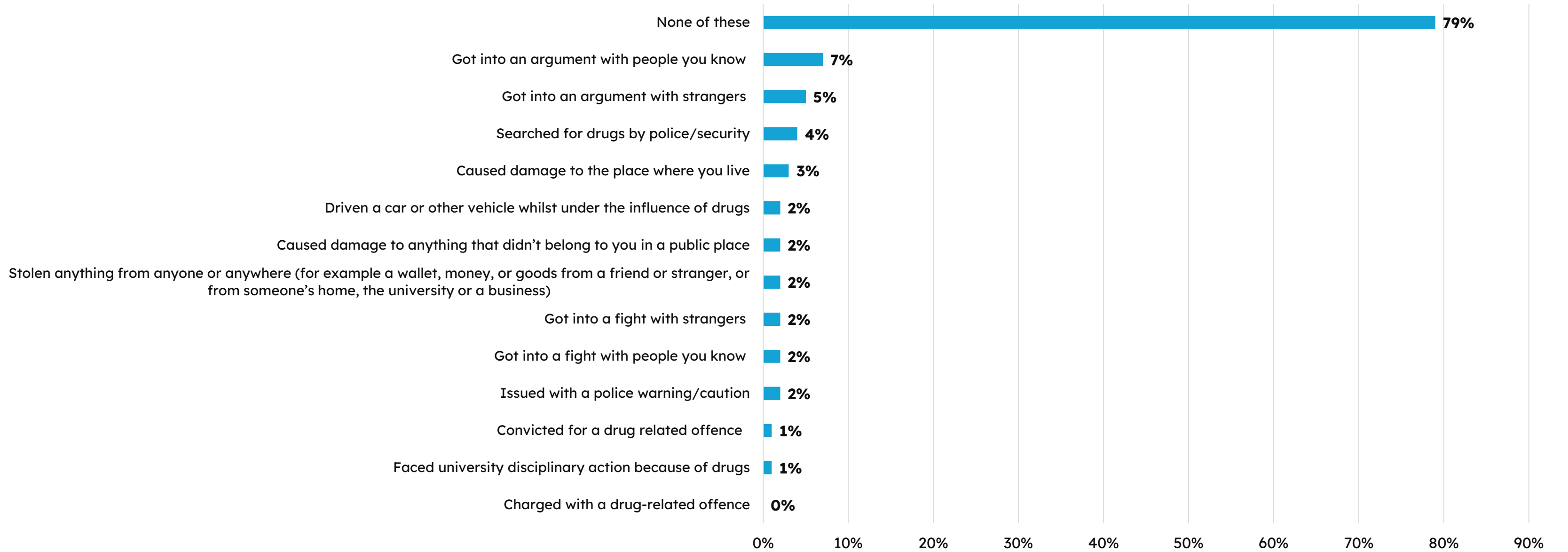


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following taking drugs? [BASE: 2584 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', no response]



Drug use and antisocial behaviour

79% of respondents report experiencing none of these impacts linked to antisocial behaviour. A small proportion have say they have ‘got into an argument with people they know’ (7%) or ‘...with strangers’ (5%).

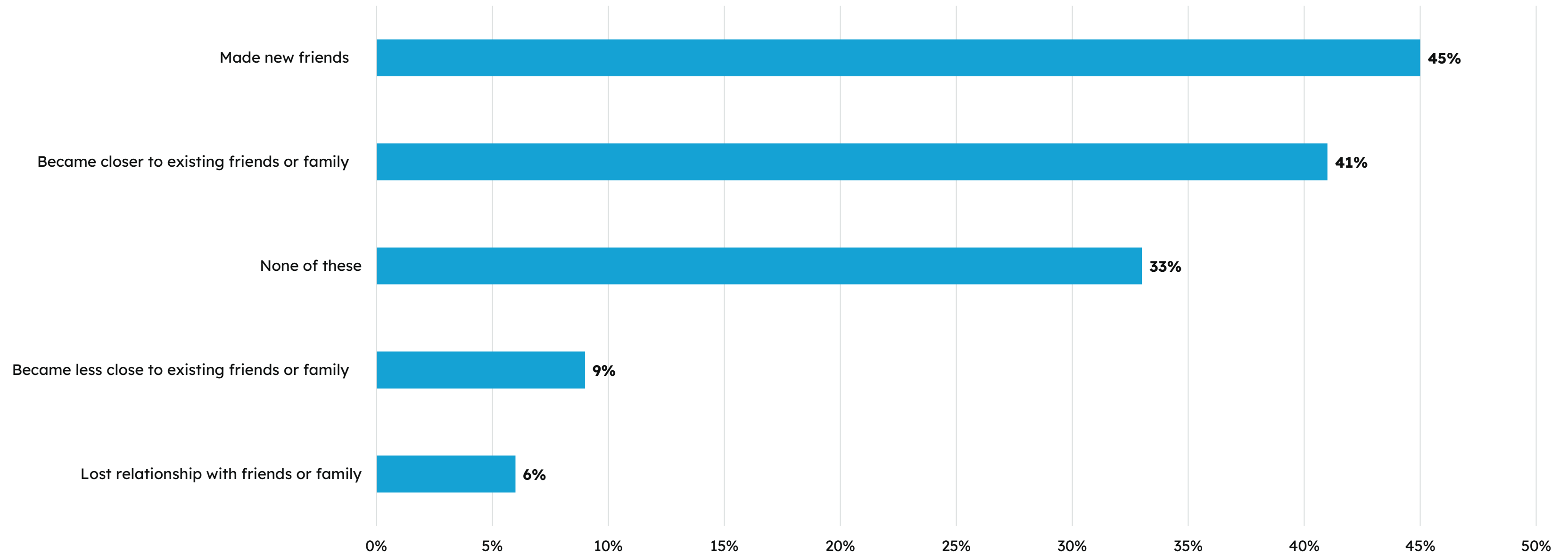


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following taking drugs? [BASE: 2553 BALANCE: ‘Rather not say’, no response]



Impacts on relationships

45% of respondents have experienced 'made new friends' and **41%** 'became closer to existing friends or family' during or following drug use.

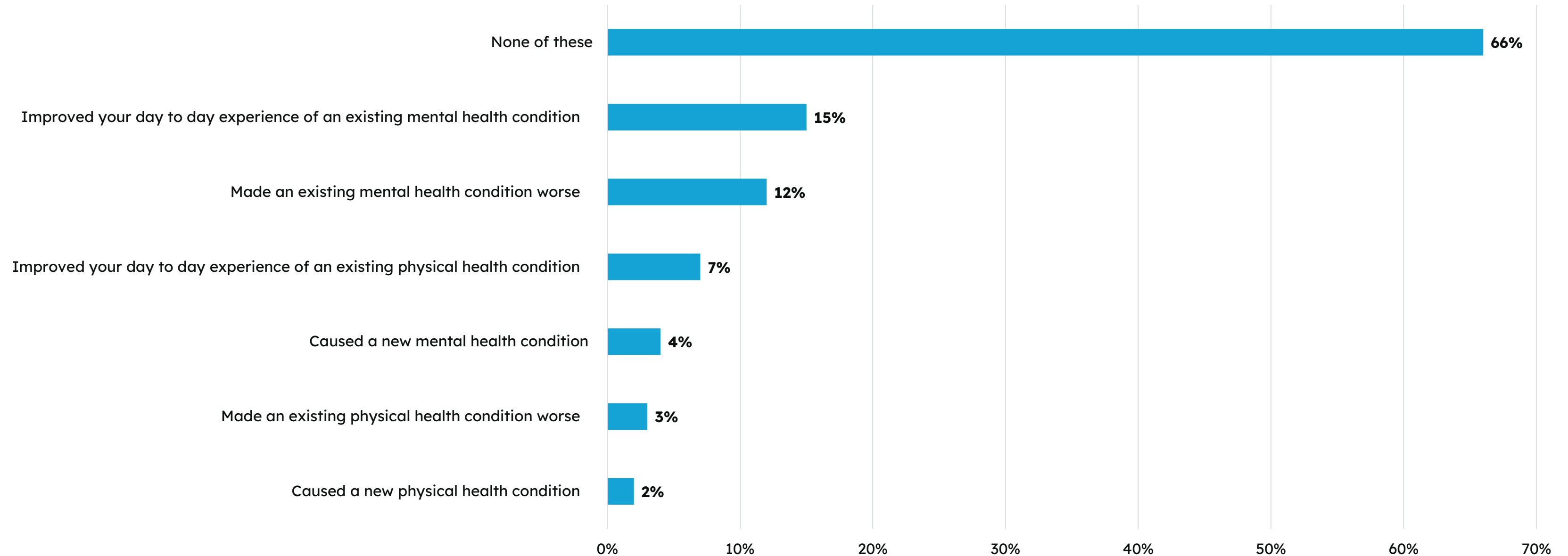


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following taking drugs? [BASE: 1516 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', no response]



Impacts on wellbeing

65% of respondents have experienced 'none of these' impacts during or following alcohol consumption. **15%** said it 'improved your day to day experience of an existing mental health condition', while **12%** said it 'made an existing mental health condition worse'.

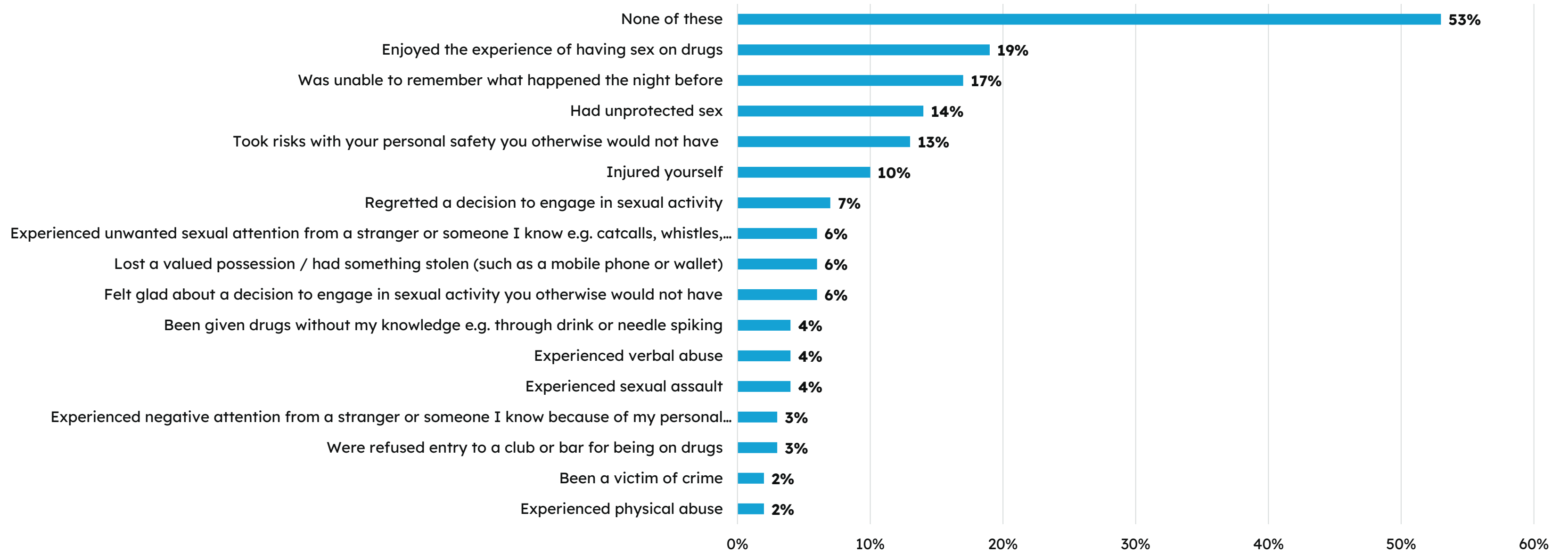


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following taking drugs? [BASE: 2591 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Social, behavioural and safety impacts

Over half (**53%**) of respondents report experiencing none of these impacts. 1 in 5 (**19%**) report ‘enjoying the experience of having sex on drugs’, and **17%** ‘were unable to remember what happened the night before’.



Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following taking drugs? [BASE: 2549 BALANCE: ‘Rather not say’, no response]



Impacts of student drug use demographic differences

Gender

- Men respondents are **more likely** to report **gone to a university seminar/lecture/class whilst still under the influence of drugs (12%)** than women respondents (7%).
- Women respondents are **more likely** to report **experienced sexual assault (6%)** than men respondents (3%).
- Non-binary respondents are **more likely** to report **improved your experience of an existing mental health condition** than men (14%) and women (14%) respondents.

Ethnicity

- Respondents who identify as White ethnicities are **more likely** to report **was unable to remember what happened the night before (19%)** than those who identify as Black (6%) and Asian (9%) ethnicities.
- Respondents who identify as Asian ethnicities are **less likely** to report **took risks with your personal safety you otherwise would not have (7%)** than those who identify as White ethnicities (14%).
- Respondents who identify as Black ethnicities are **less likely** to report **became closer to existing friends or family (15%)** than those from White (44%) and Mixed/multiple (28%) ethnicities.

Disability

- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report **I have made it to a lecture I otherwise would not have (9%)** than non-disabled respondents (5%).
- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report **improved your day to day experience of an existing physical health condition (18%)** than non-disabled respondents (4%).
- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report **been a victim of crime (4%)** than non-disabled respondents (2%).

Sexuality

- Respondents who identify as queer are **more likely** to report **I have made it to a lecture I otherwise would not have (12%)** than bisexual (5%), gay or lesbian (4%) and heterosexual (5%) respondents.
- Respondents who identify as gay or lesbian are **more likely** to report **got into an argument with people you know (12%)** than heterosexual respondents (6%).

Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following taking drugs?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



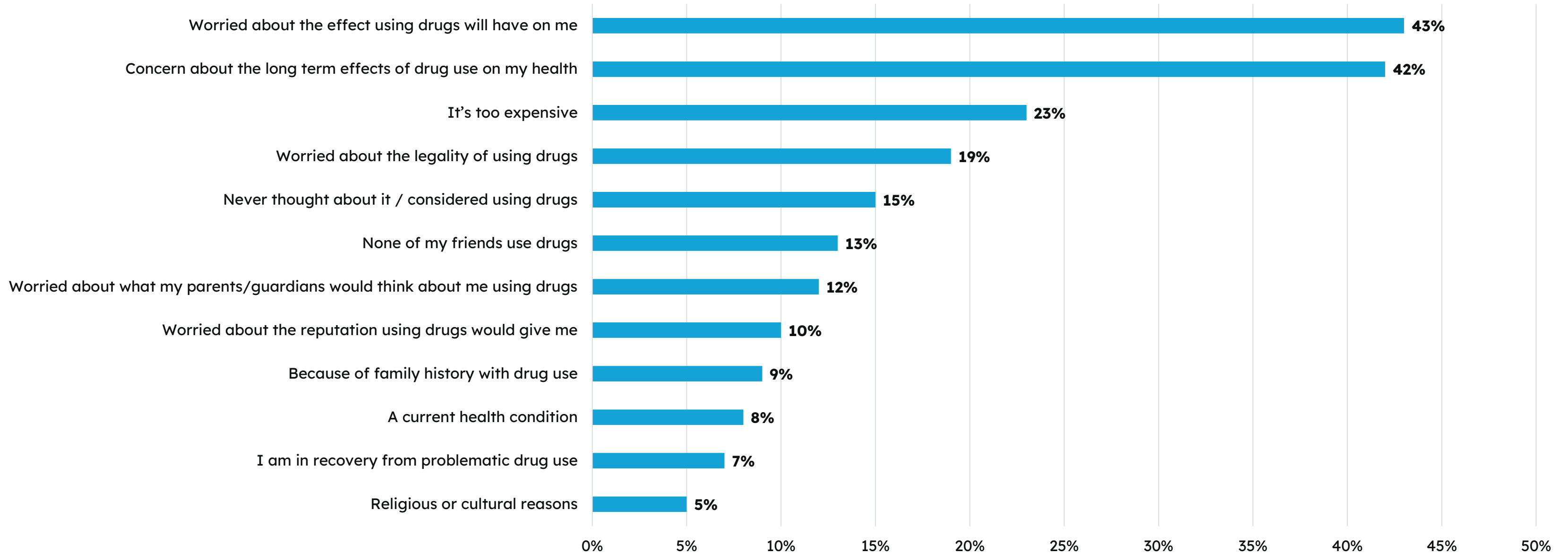
3.4

Students who have stopped using drugs



Reasons for stopping drug use

For respondents who do not currently use drugs but have done so previously, the most common reasons for stopping are being 'worried about the effect using drugs will have on them' (43%) and 'concern about the long-term effects of drug use on their health' (42%). The least common reason selected is 'religious or cultural reasons' (5%).

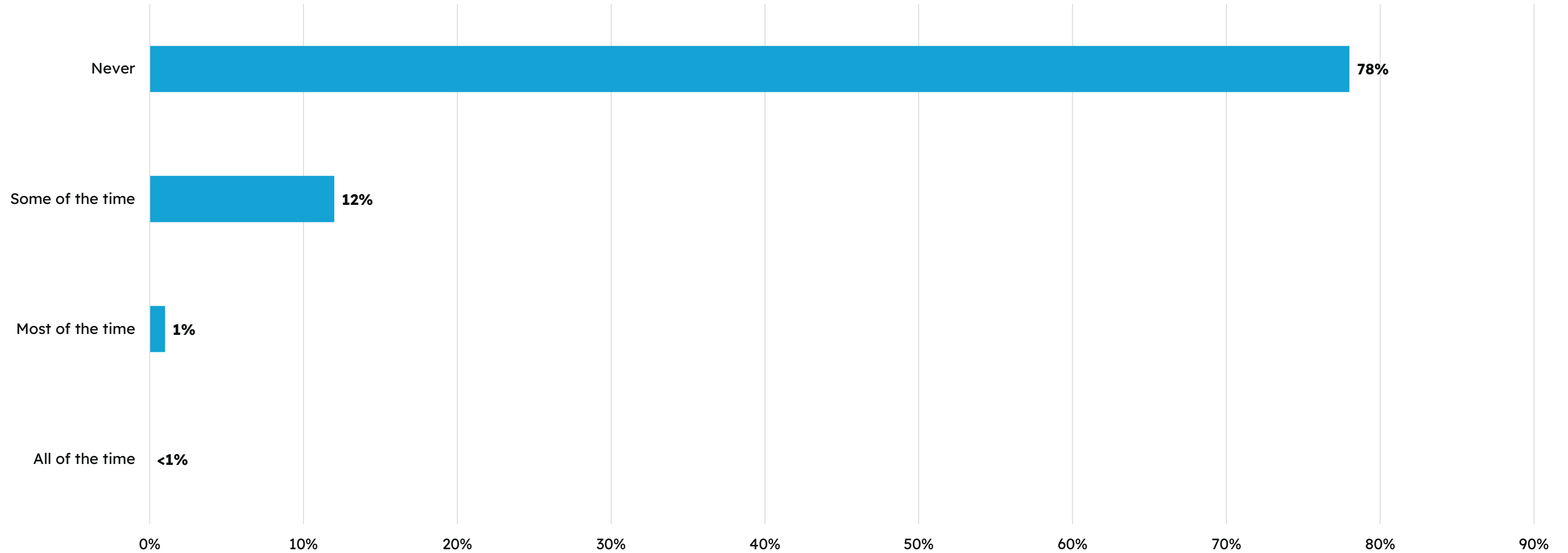


Q. What would you say are your main reasons for not using drugs or stopping using drugs? [BASE: 1599 BALANCE: 'Other', no response]



Peer expectations and drug use

Most respondents (**78%**) reported that they ‘never’ felt like their friends expected them to use drugs. 1 in 10 (**12%**) said they felt this ‘some of the time’, and **1%** ‘most of the time’.



Q. Thinking about the most recent university term, when you were socialising with other students, how often did you feel that your friends expected you to use drugs?
[BASE: 1599 BALANCE: ‘Don’t know’, ‘Rather not say’, ‘No response’]



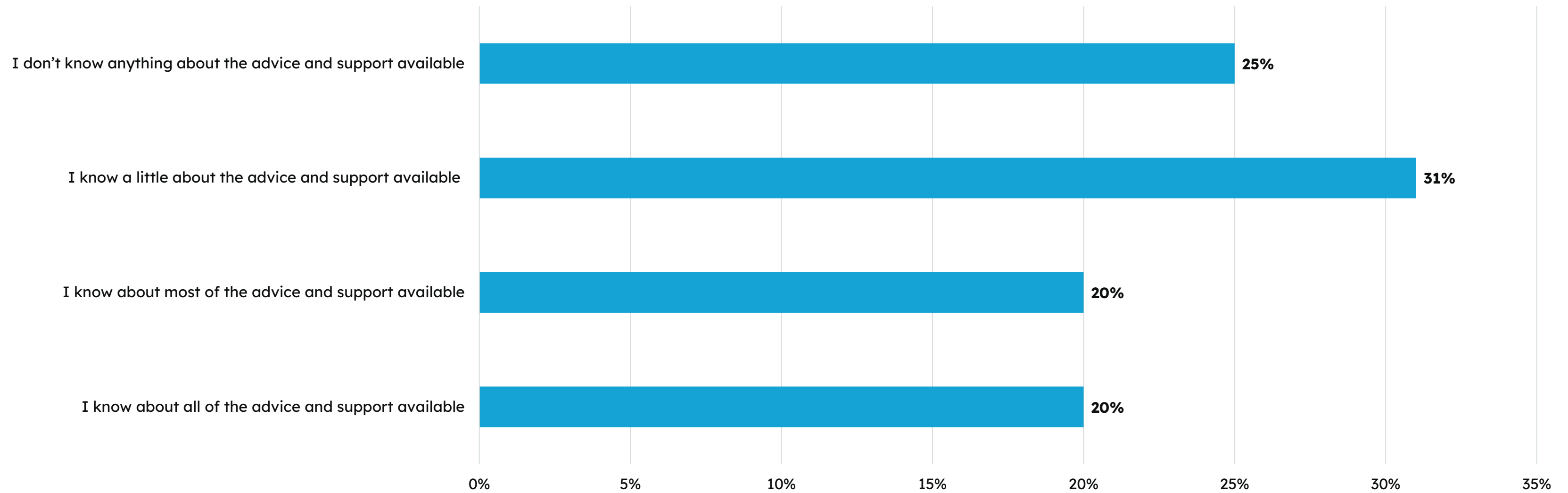
3.5

Drug harm reduction and support



Students' awareness of university advice, information and support

Thinking about the advice, support and information available at their university, 3 in 10 (**31%**) of respondents said that they '...know a little about the advice and support available', while **25%** '...don't know anything about the advice and support available'.

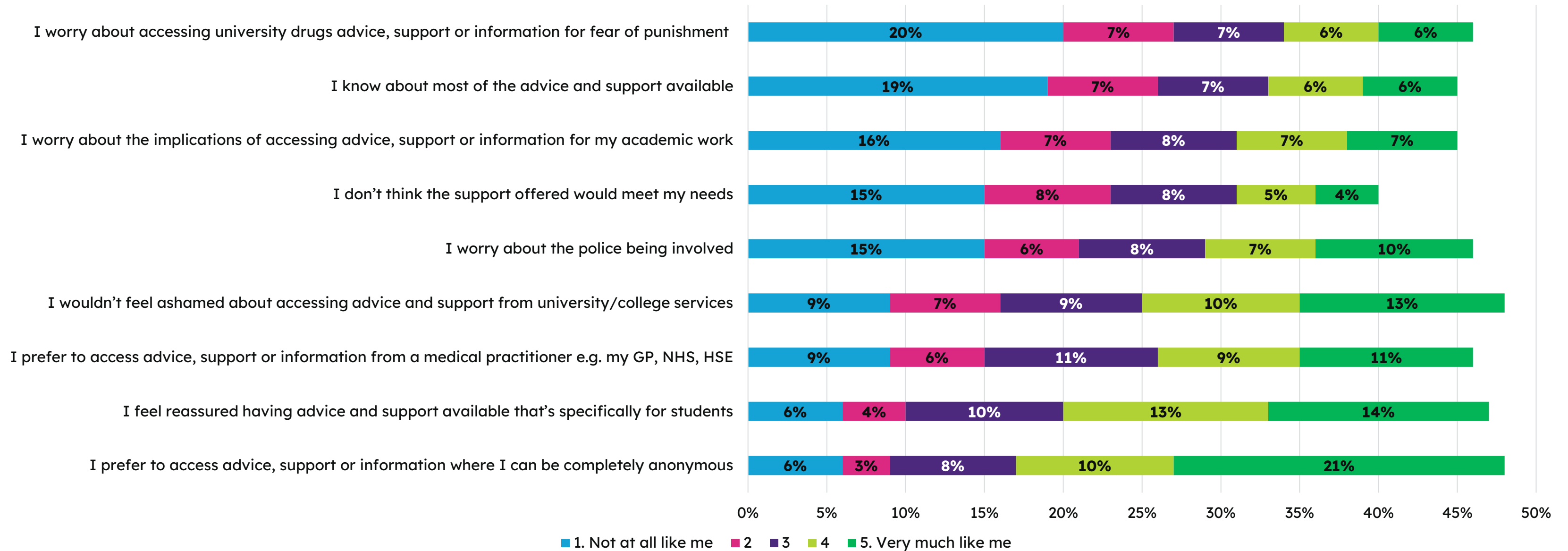


Q. Which of the following statements best describes your awareness of advice, information and support on drugs at your university? [BASE: 9999 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', no response]



Students' views on university advice, information and support

1 in 5 said it was not at all like them to ‘...worry about accessing university drugs advice, support or information for fear of punishment’ (20%) nor ‘...know about most of the advice and support available’. In comparison, 21% said it was very like them to ‘...prefer to access advice, support or information where I can be completely anonymous’.

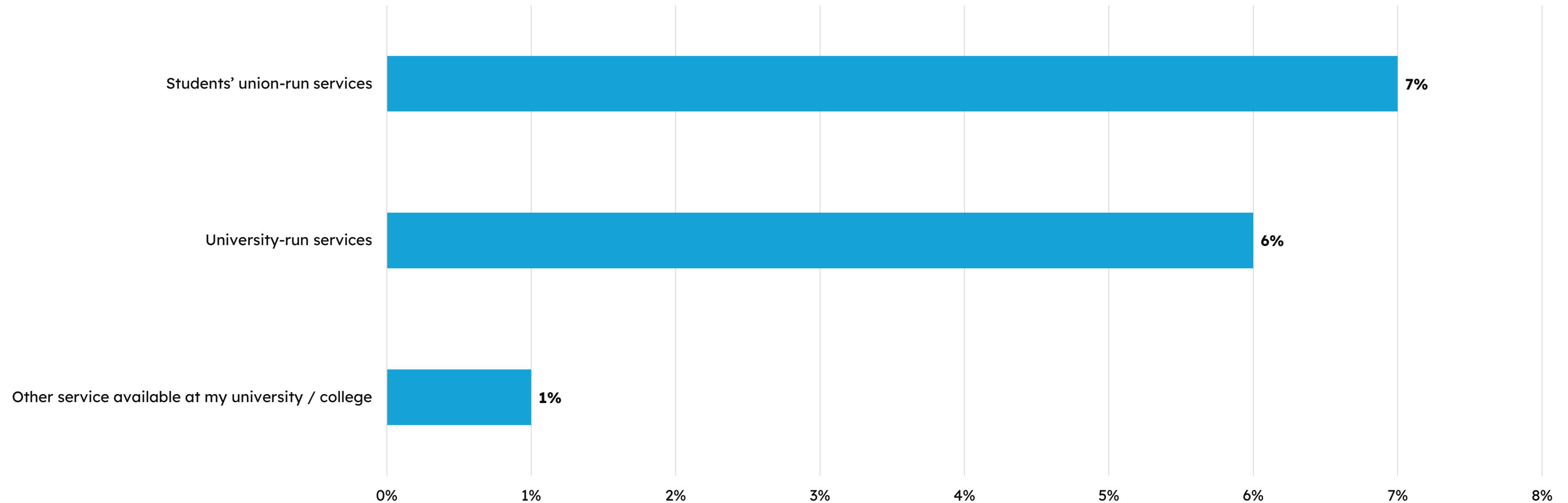


Q. Which of the following statements best describes your awareness of advice, information and support on drugs at your university? [BASE: c. 9804 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Not applicable', No response]



Students' use of advice, information and support services at their university

7% of respondents report that they have used students' union-run services for advice, information and support on drugs. 6% have used university-run services, and 1% other service available at their university.

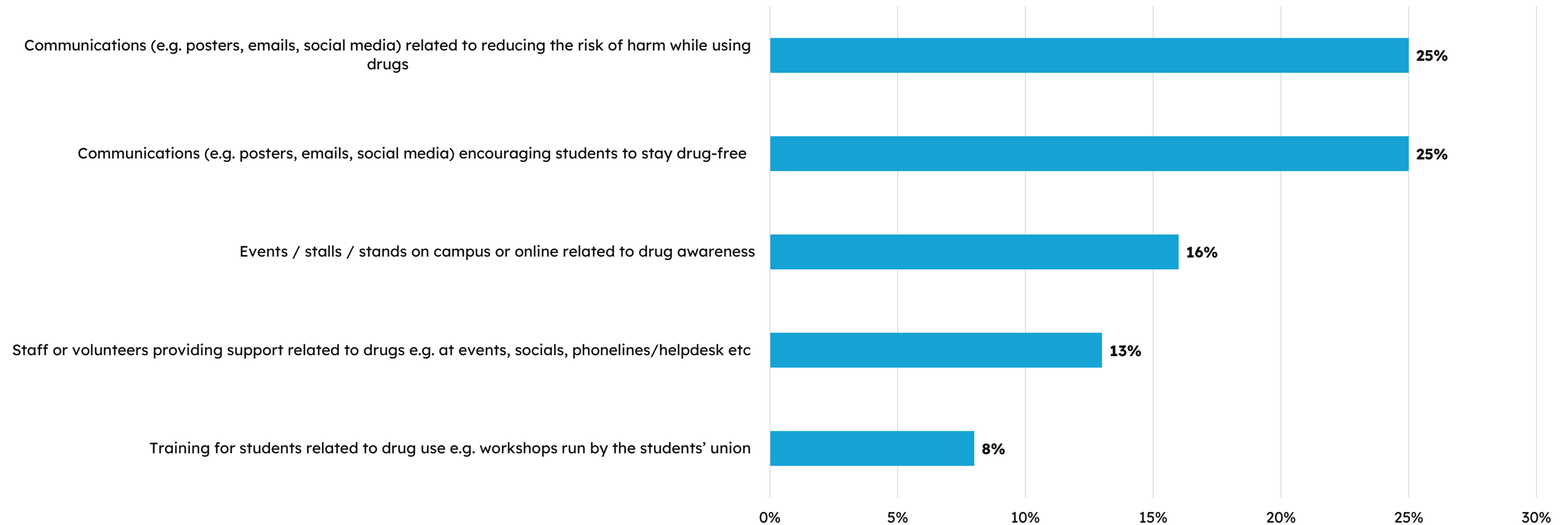


Q. Which of the following sources, if any, have you used for advice, information or support on drugs? [BASE: 9926 BALANCE: 'Not applicable, I've not accessed drug advice, support or information', No response]



Students' awareness of university campaigns, projects and activities

7% of respondents report that they have used students' union-run services for advice, information and support on drugs. 6% have used university-run services, and 1% other service available at their university.



Q. Are you aware of any campaigns, projects or activities at your university related to drug use? [BASE: 9879 BALANCE: 'Other', 'Don't know', No response]



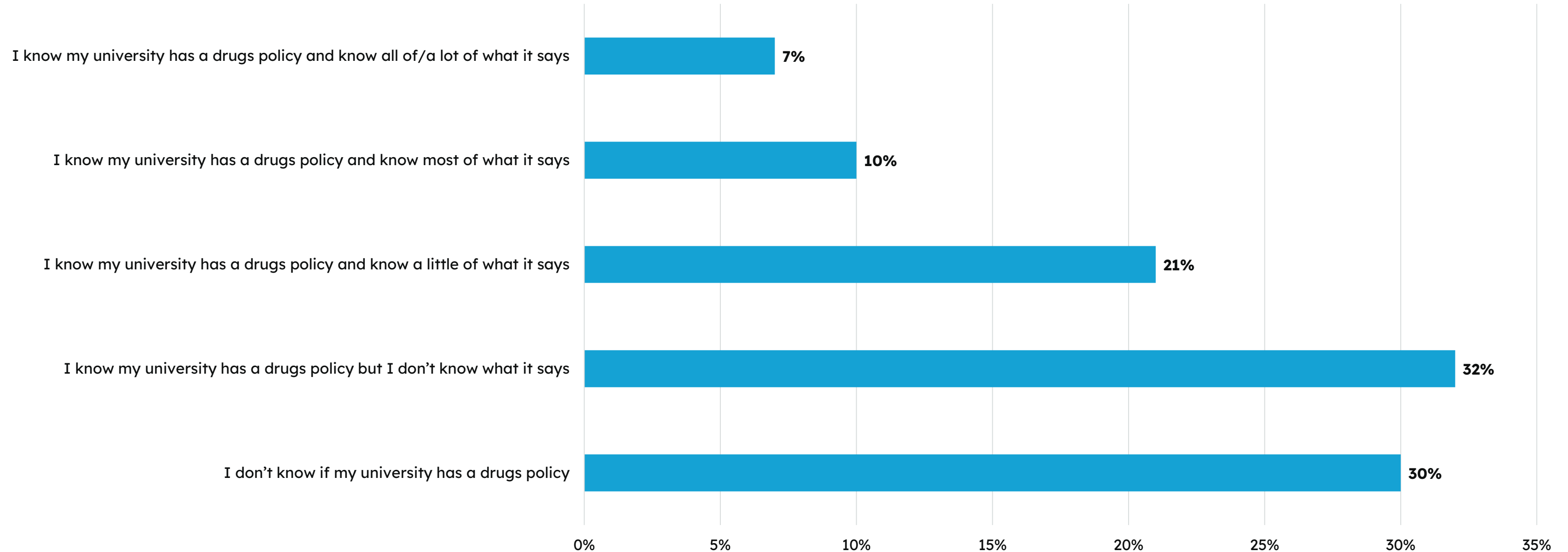
3.6

Drug policies



Students' awareness of university drug policy

Respondents' most common response when asked about their awareness of their university's drug policy was 'I know my university has a drugs policy, but I don't know what it says' (32%). The least common was 'I know my university has a drugs policy and know all of/a lot of what it says' (7%).

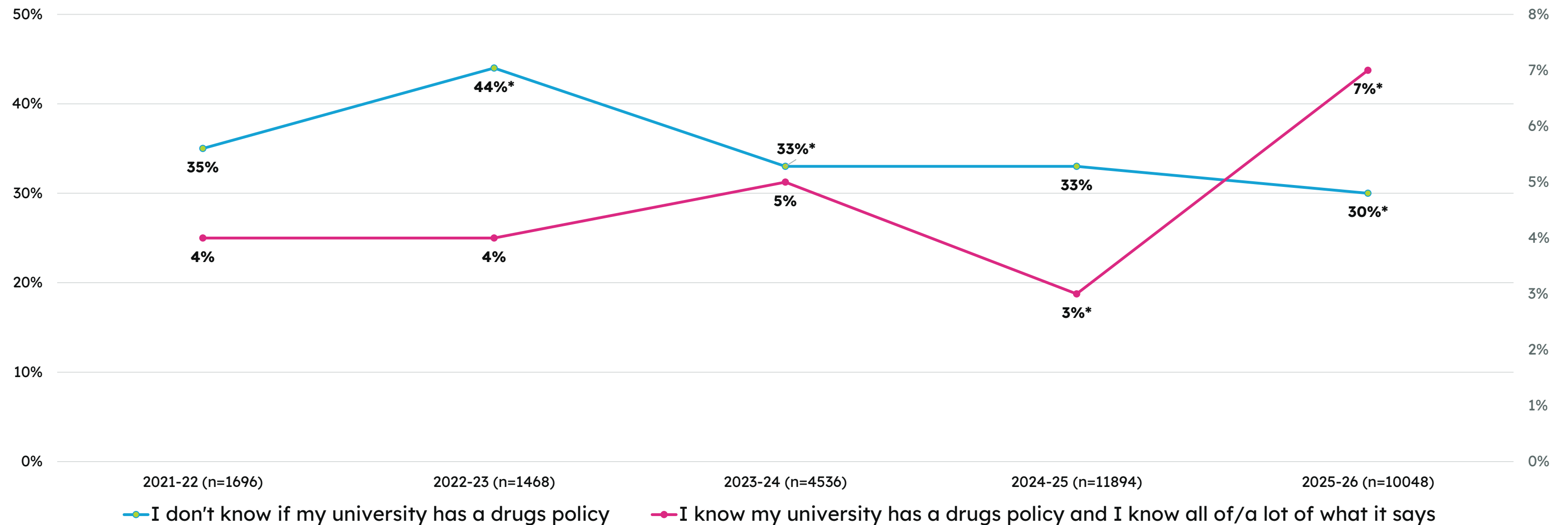


Q. How much, if anything, do you know about the policy/policies your university has on drugs? [BASE: 10048 BALANCE: No response]



Students' awareness of university drug policy tracking changes

The proportion of respondents who say that they don't know if their university has a drugs policy has significantly decreased by **3%*** from the previous wave of research in 2024-25. In comparison, the proportion who say they know their university's drug policy has significantly increased by **4%***.



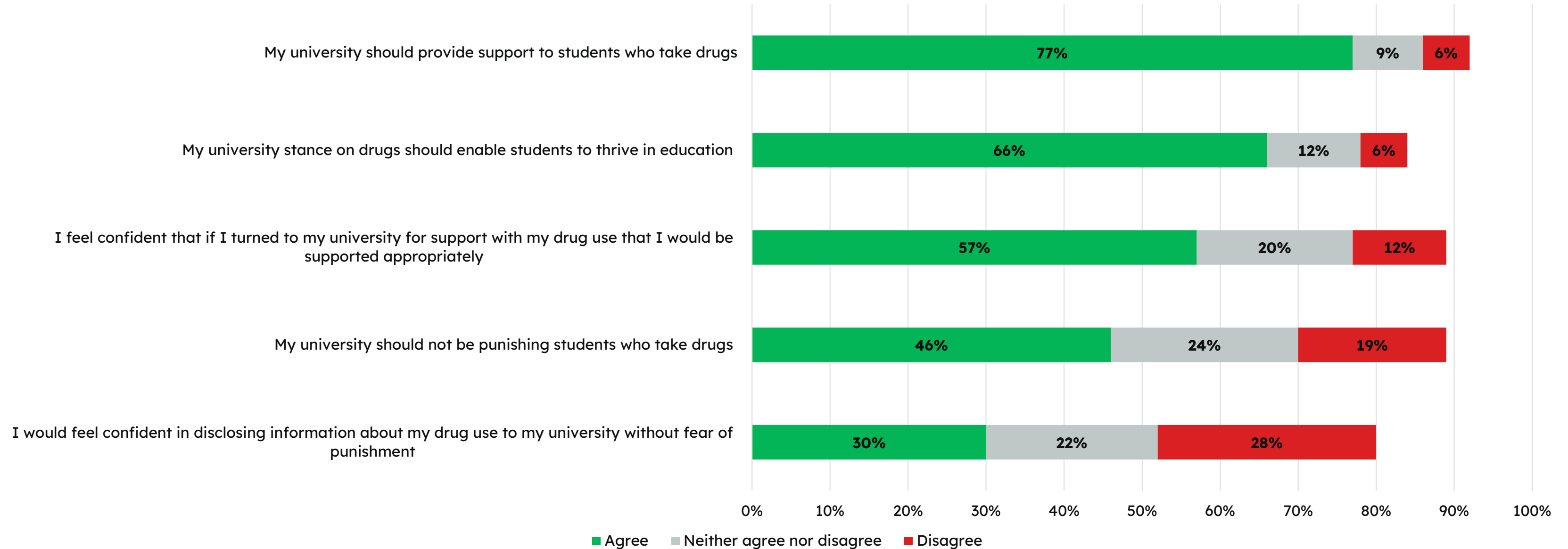
Q. How much, if anything, do you know about the policy/policies your university has on drugs? [BASE: 10048 BALANCE: No response]

*Indicates statistically significant difference in comparison to the previous year of research at a 95% confidence level



Students' views on university drugs policy

The statement that attracted the highest level of agreement was 'my university should provide support to students who take drugs' (77%). In comparison, the statement that attracted the highest level of disagreement was 'I would feel confident in disclosing information about my drug use to my university without fear of punishment' (28%).



Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? [BASE: c. 9804 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Rather not say', No response]



4. Alcohol Research findings



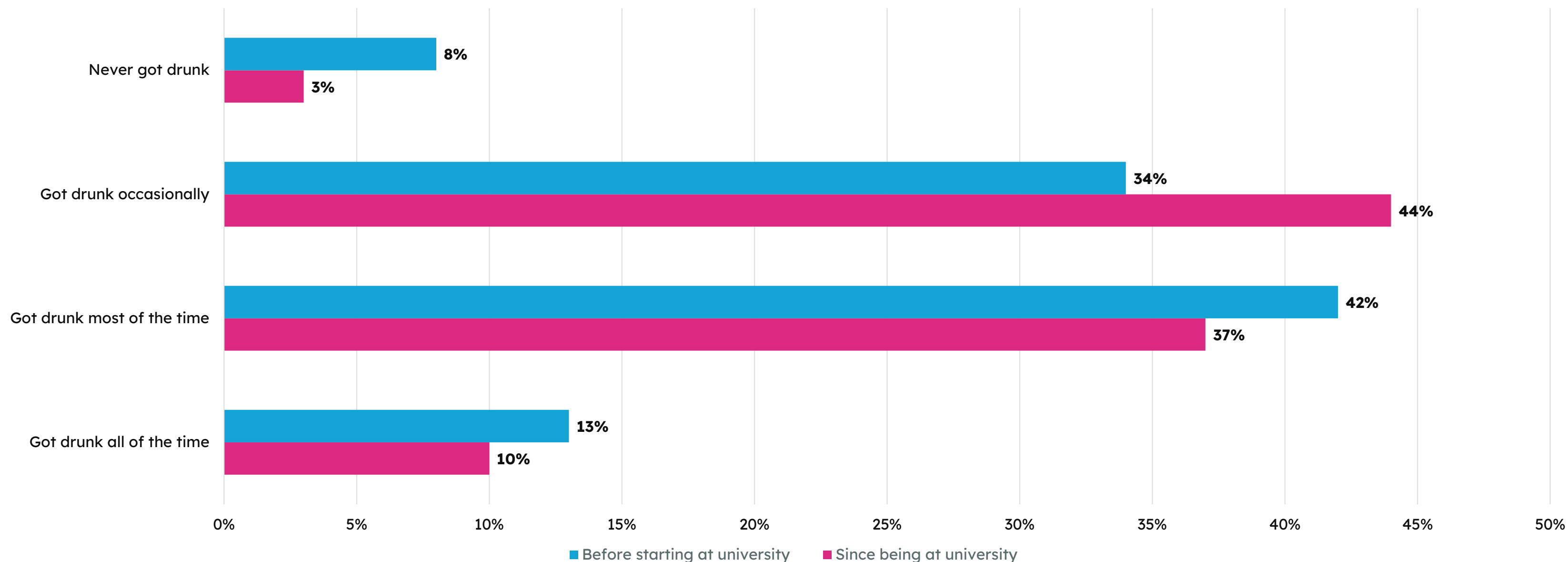
4.1

Perceptions of alcohol consumption on campus



Perception of students' alcohol consumption

Before starting university, 2 in 5 (**42%**) believed that students got drunk 'most of the time'. Since being at university, this decreases to **37%**, with the most common belief being that students get drunk occasionally (**44%**).



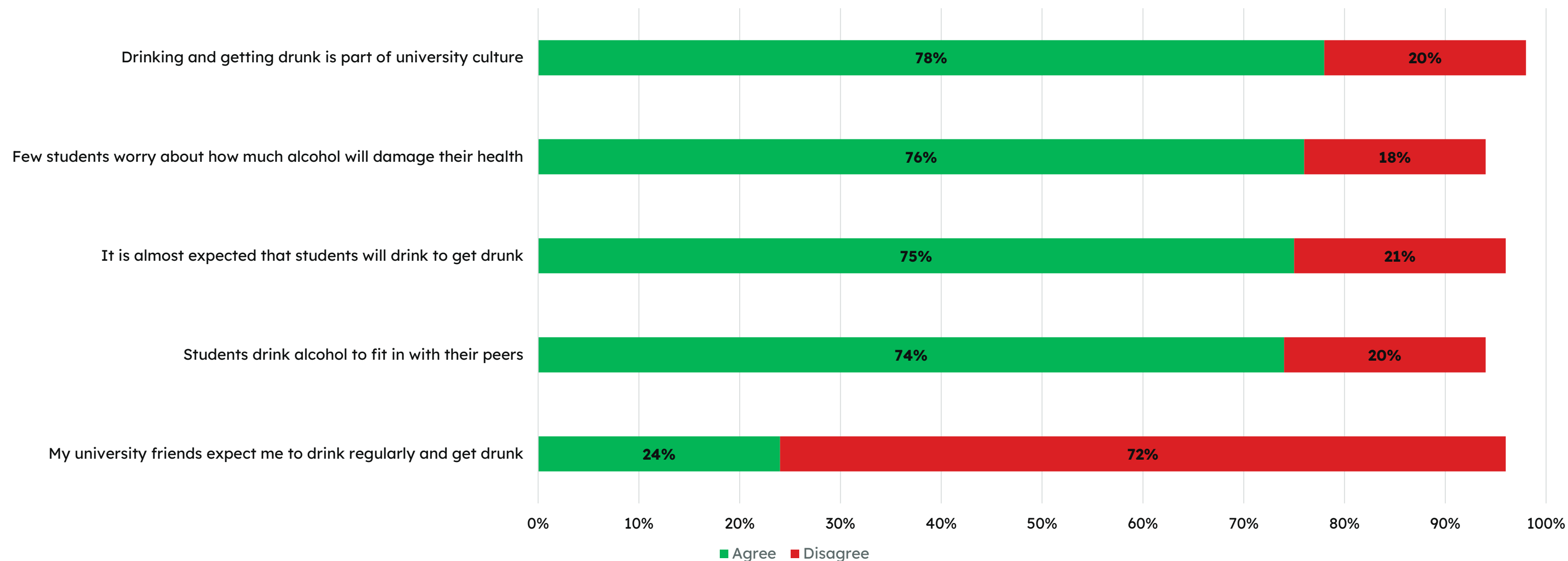
Q. Before arriving at university, did you believe that students... [BASE: 10033 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Rather not say', No response]

Q. And now you're a student at university, which of the following best matches your experiences of students? [BASE: 10031 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Rather not say', No response]



Students' views on alcohol and university culture

Most respondents agree that 'drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture' (78%), 'few students worry about how much alcohol will damage their health' (76%) and 'it is almost expected that students will drink to get drunk' (75%). In comparison, most (72%) disagreed that 'my university friends expect me to drink regularly and get drunk'.

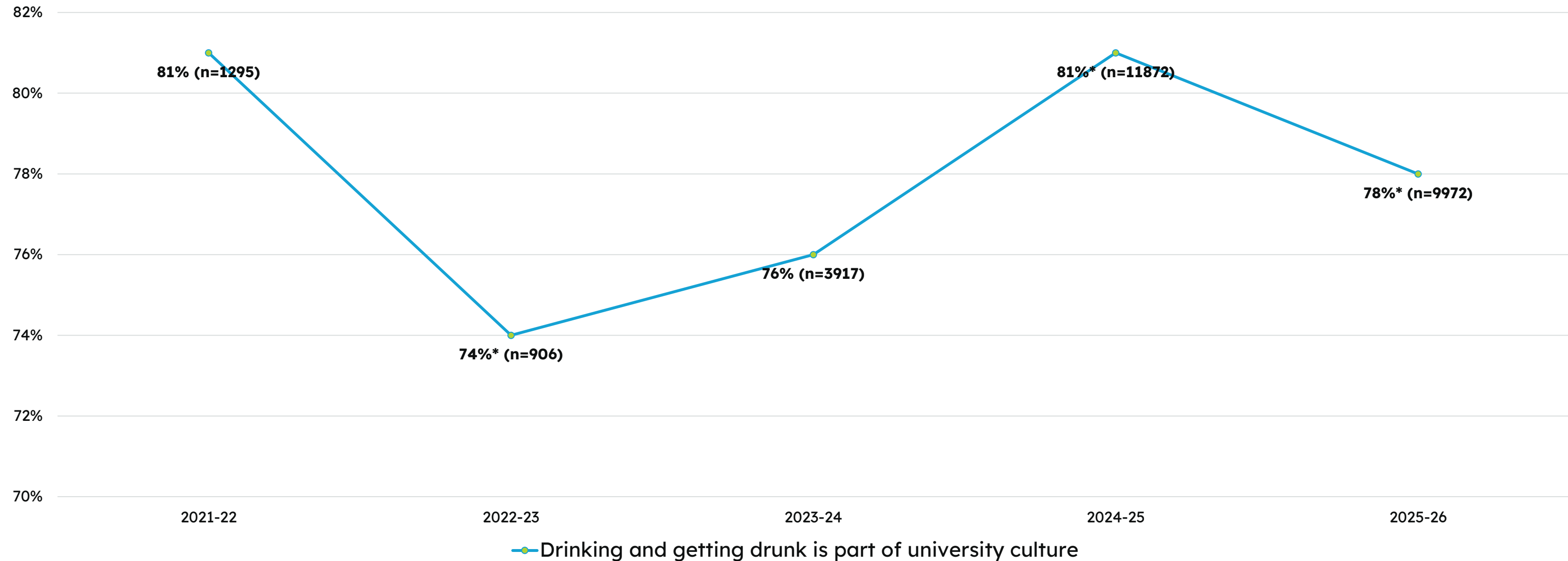


Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree, if at all, with the following statements? [BASE: 9972 BALANCE: 'Don't know', 'Rather not say', No response]



Students views on alcohol and university culture tracking changes

In the latest wave of research in 2025-26, significantly less respondents agree that 'drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture' compared to 2024-25.



Q. Thinking specifically about drinking alcohol at university, how much do you agree or disagree, if at all, with the following statements? [BASE: See above]

*Indicates statistically significant difference to a 95% confidence level



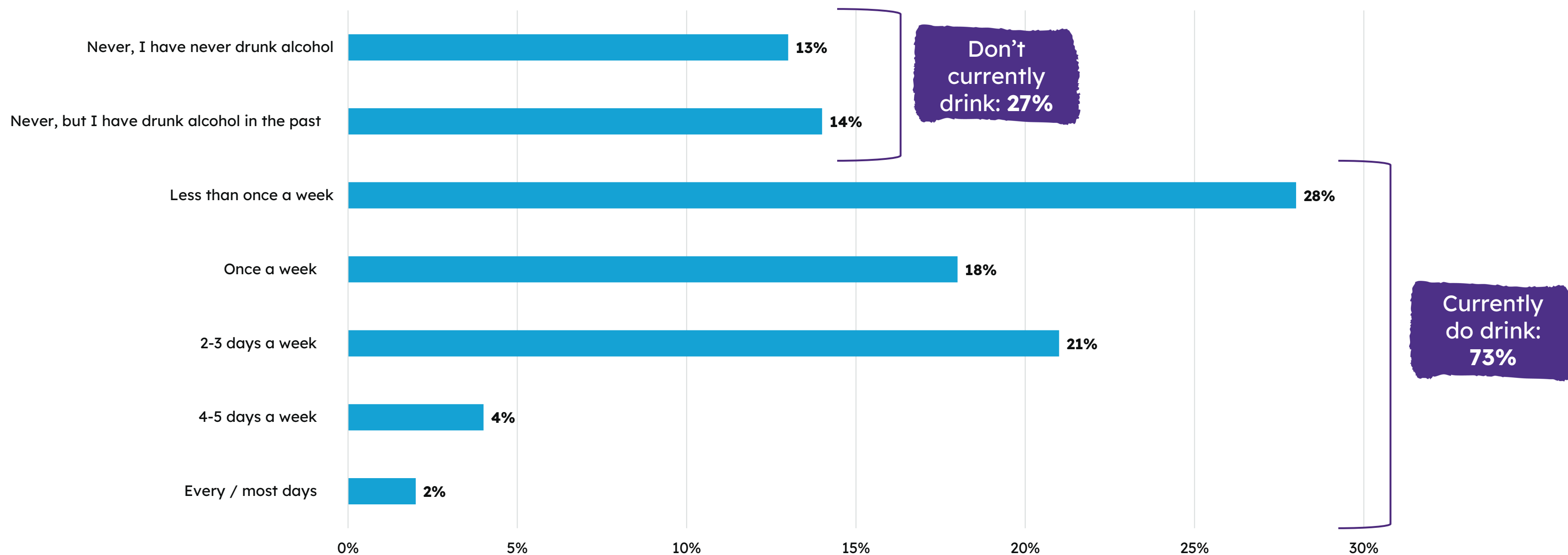
4.2

Students' alcohol consumption



Frequency of student alcohol consumption

Over a quarter (**27%**) do not currently drink alcohol. Nearly three quarters (**73%**) currently drink alcohol, with **2%** doing so every/most days.



Q. How often, if at all, do you drink alcohol? [BASE: 10037 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]



Frequency of student alcohol consumption demographic differences

Every / most days

- Women respondents are **more likely** to report this (**3%**) than men respondents (**2%**).
- Respondents in the East of England are **less likely** to report this (**1%**) than South of England (**2%**) and North of England (**3%**).
- Respondents with a Home fee status are **more likely** to report this (**2%**) than those with an Overseas fee status (**1%**).

Less than once a week

- Non-binary respondents are **more likely** to report this (**37%**) than men respondents (**22%**).
- Respondents who identify as Mixed/multiple ethnicities are **more likely** to report this (**34%**) than those who identify as Black (**23%**), Asian (**23%**) and Other ethnicities (**20%**).
- Respondents who identify as queer are **more likely** to report this (**34%**) than heterosexual respondents (**25%**).

Never, but I have drunk alcohol in the past

- Respondents who identify as Black ethnicities are **more likely** to report this (**26%**) than those from White (**12%**), Asian (**16%**), Mixed/multiple (**12%**) and Other (**14%**) ethnicities.
- Disabled respondents are **more likely** to report this (**17%**) than non-disabled respondents (**12%**).
- Respondents with an Overseas fee status are **more likely** to report this (**18%**) than those with a Home fee status (**13%**).

Never, I have never drunk alcohol

- Men respondents are **more likely** to report this (**16%**) than women (**11%**) and non-binary (**8%**) respondents.
- Respondents who identify as Asian ethnicities are **more likely** to report this (**38%**) than White (**5%**), Black (**28%**) and Mixed/multiple (**11%**) ethnicities.
- Non-disabled respondents are **more likely** to report this (**14%**) than disabled respondents (**10%**).

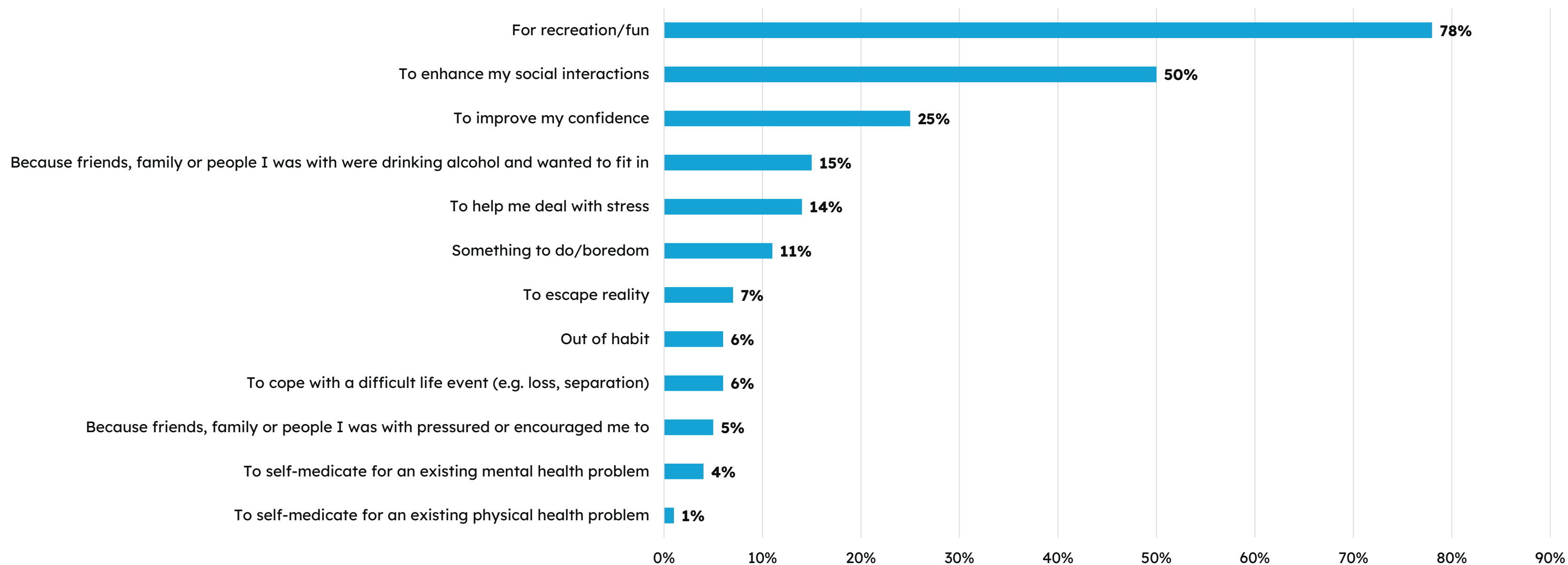
Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



Reasons for student alcohol consumption

Most respondents reported that they drunk alcohol for recreation (78%), while half (50%) did so to enhance their social interactions. Only 1% of respondents said they drunk alcohol to self-medicate for an existing physical health problem.

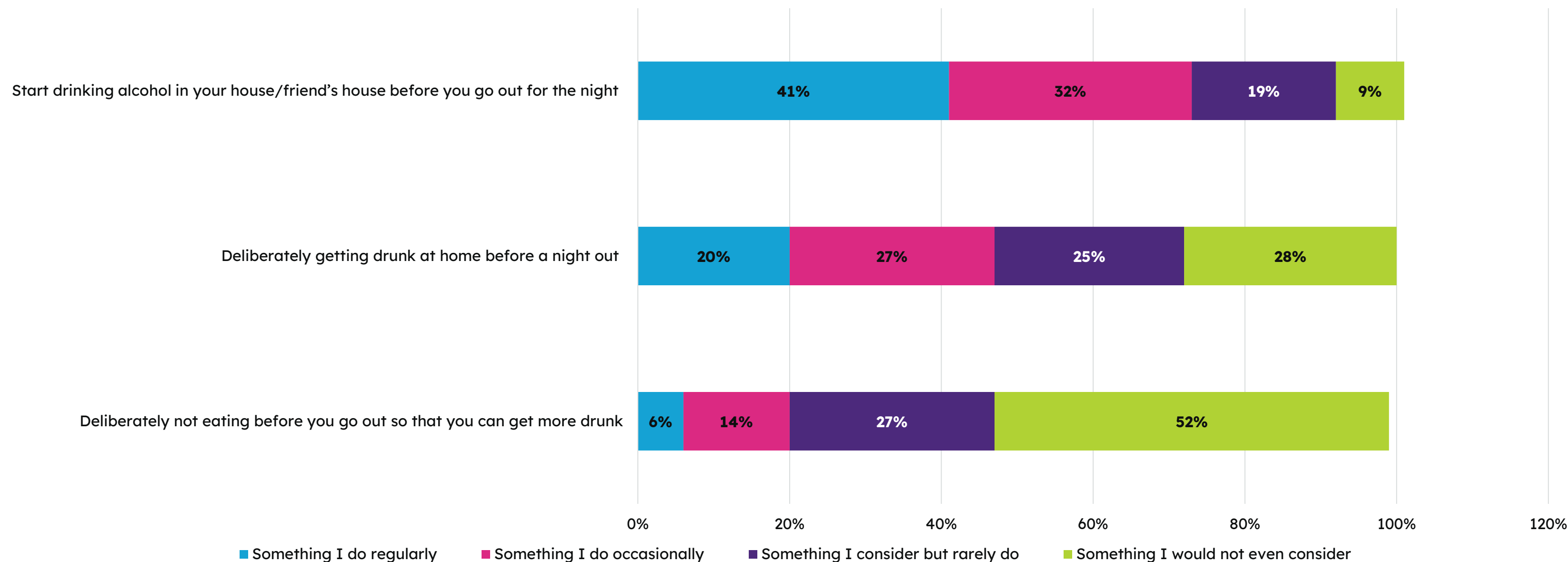


Q. Which of the following best describes why you drink/have drunk alcohol? [BASE: 7337 BALANCE: 'Other', No response]



Students drinking behaviours

2 in 5 (**41%**) of respondents said that drinking alcohol in a house before they go out for the night is ‘something I do regularly’, while **9%** said this is ‘something I would not consider’. Over half (**52%**) said that deliberately not eating before you go out so that you can get more drunk is ‘something I would not consider’.

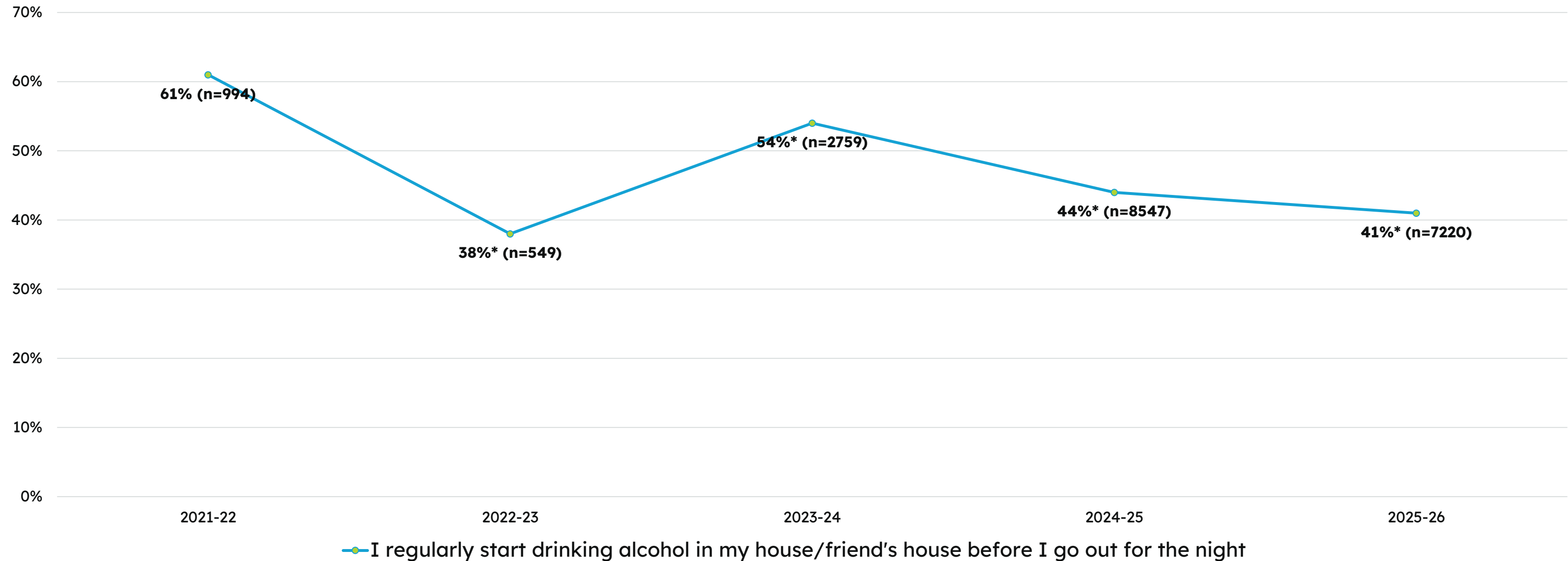


Q. Do any of the following describe your drinking behaviour? [BASE: c. 7220 BALANCE: No response]



Students drinking behaviours tracking changes

Since the research began, we've tracked patterns in pre-drinking behaviours. In 2025-26, **41%** of respondents said that they regularly start drinking alcohol in their house/friend's house before they go out for the night. This represents a significant decrease from **44%** in 2024-25.



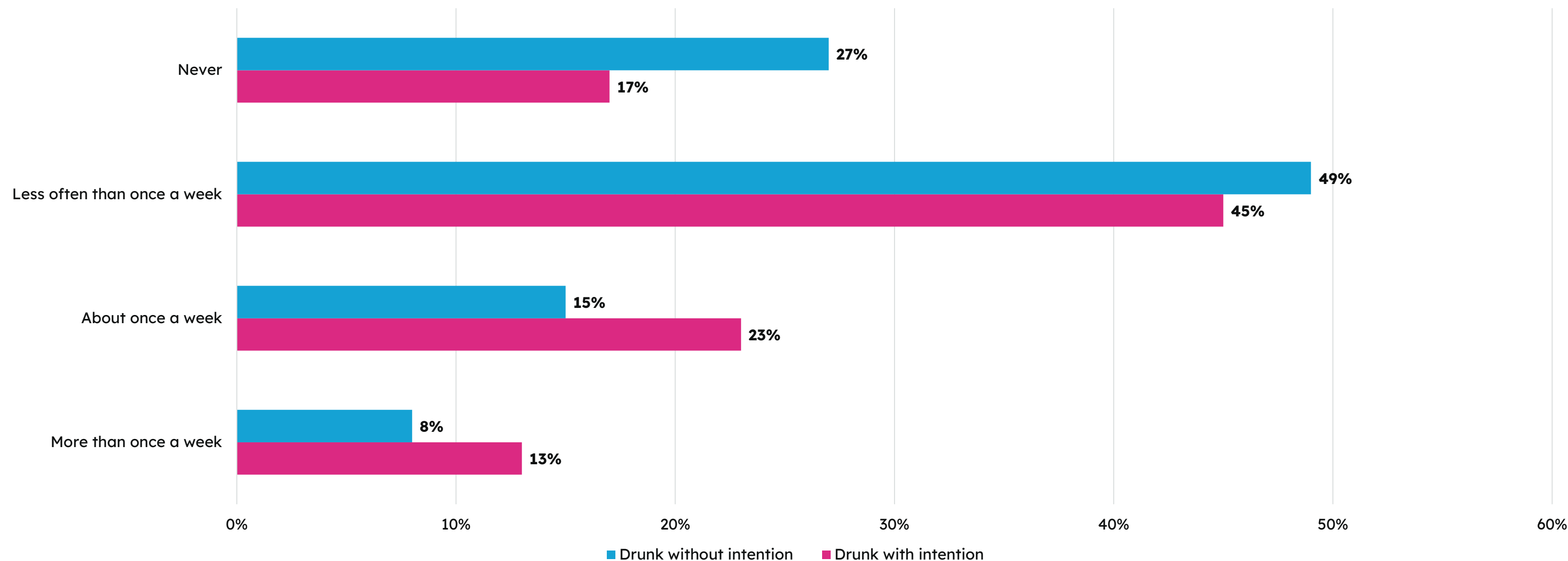
Q. Do any of the following describe your drinking behaviour? [BASE: See above]

*Indicates statistically significant difference to a 95% confidence level



Students' intentions and getting drunk

Nearly half of respondents report drinking without the intention of getting drunk but getting drunk anyway (**49%**) less often than once a week. Around the same proportion say they drink with the intention of getting drunk less often than once a week (**45%**). **36%** say they drink with the intention of getting drunk at least once a week.



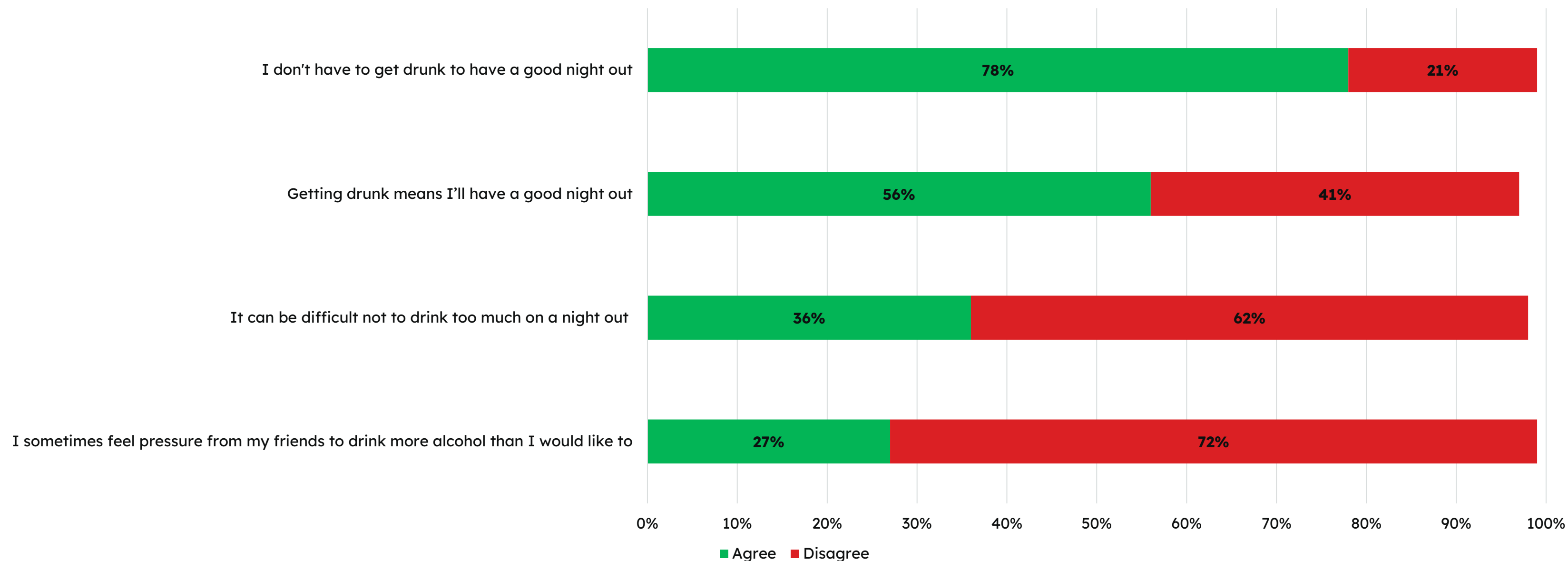
Q. Approximately how often do you drink alcohol with the intention of getting drunk? [BASE: 7336 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]

Q. And approximately how often do you drink alcohol, not necessarily with the intention of getting drunk, but end up getting drunk anyway? [BASE: 7311 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]



Students' views on drinking behaviours

The majority (78%) of respondents agree with the statement 'I don't have to get drunk to have a good night out'. Conversely, over half (56%) agree that 'getting drunk means I'll have a good night out'.

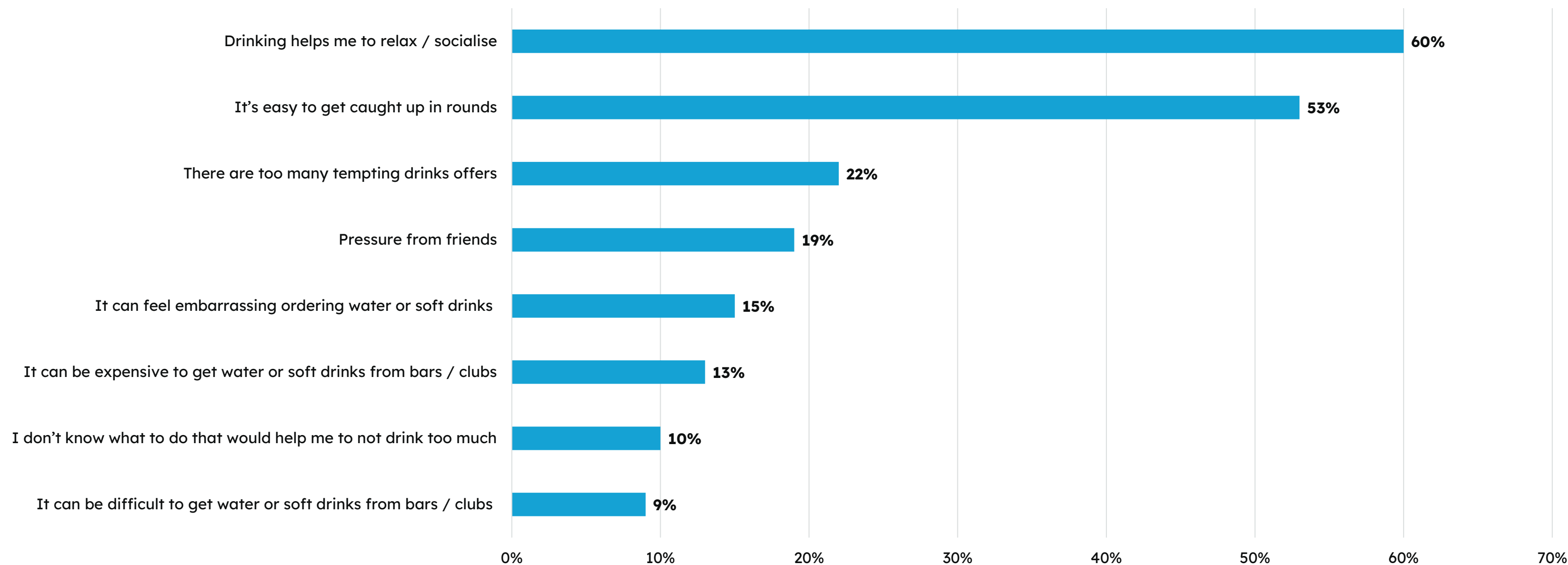


Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [BASE: 9111 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]



Students' reasons for finding it difficult not to drink too much

36% of respondents who currently drink alcohol agree that 'it can be difficult not to drink too much on a night out'. Of these, 3 in 5 (**60%**) report that this is because 'drinking helps me to relax/socialise', while **53%** report 'it's easy to get caught up in rounds'.



Q. You agreed it can be difficult not to drink too much on a night out – why do you think that? [BASE: 2610 BALANCE: 'Other', 'Don't know', No response]



Students drinking behaviours demographic differences

Gender

- Women respondents are **more likely** to report **start drinking alcohol in your house/friend's house before you go out for the night is something I do regularly (44%)** than men respondents (**38%**).
- Women respondents are **more likely** to agree **cutting back on alcohol, or going alcohol free, is something I'm interested in exploring (79%)** than men respondents (**76%**).

Sexuality

- Respondents who identify as heterosexual are **less likely** to agree that **it is almost expected that students will drink to get drunk (78%)** than those who identify as bisexual (**81%**), gay or lesbian (**83%**) and queer (**84%**).
- Respondents who identify as gay or lesbian are **more likely** to agree that **drinking and getting drunk is part of university culture (87%)** than heterosexual respondents (**79%**).

Ethnicity

- Respondents who identify as White ethnicities are **more likely** to agree **getting drunk means I'll have a good night out (59%)** than those who identify as from Black (**49%**) and Asian (**50%**) ethnicities.
- Respondents who identify as Black ethnicities are **more likely** to agree that **students drink alcohol to fit in with their peers (84%)** than those from White (**78%**), Asian (**77%**) and Other (**77%**) ethnicities.

Age

- Respondents aged between 19-20 are **more likely** to agree **getting drunk means I'll have a good night out (66%)** than those aged 21-25 (**56%**) and 26-30 (**42%**) years old.
- Respondents aged between 26-30 are **more likely** to agree that **it can be difficult not to drink too much on a night out (82%)** than those aged 21-25 years old (**78%**).

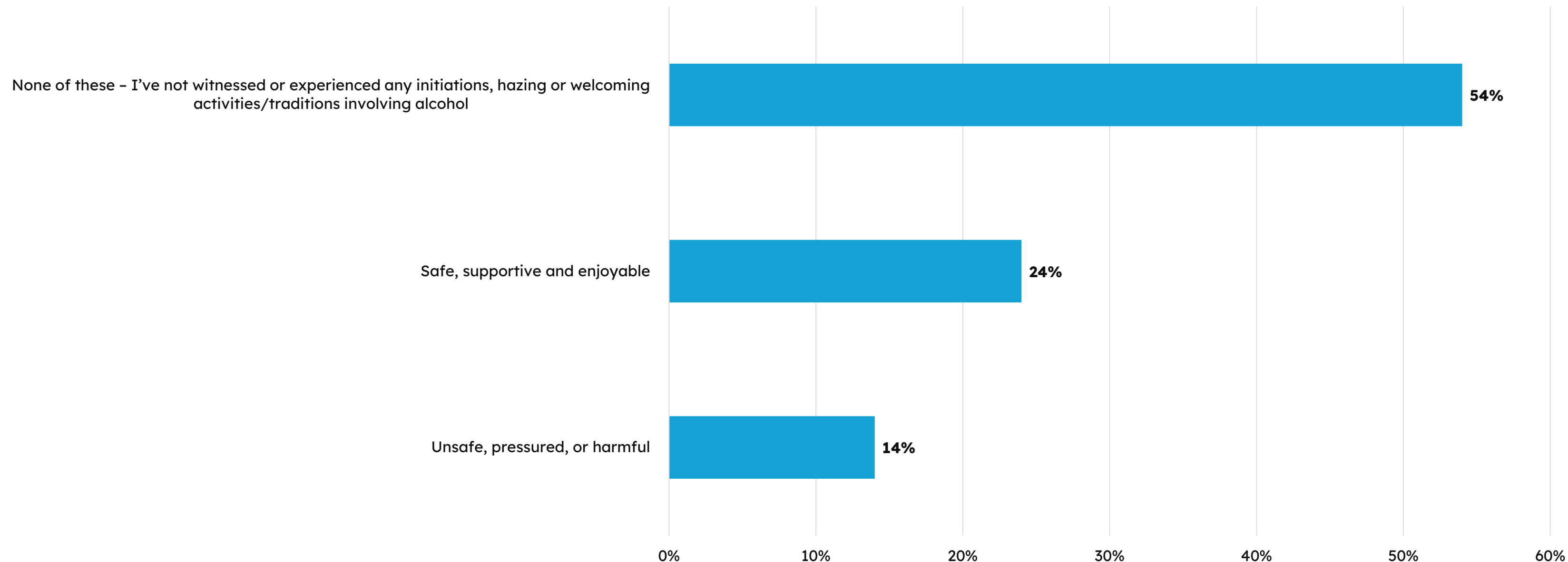
Q. Which of the following best describes why you use/have used drugs?

Differences are reported between groups where they are significant to a 95% confidence level.



Students' experiences of welcoming activities and traditions

Over half (**54%**) of respondents have not witnessed or experienced any initiations, hazing or welcoming activities/traditions involving alcohol. A quarter (**24%**) have found these events or experiences 'safe, supportive and enjoyable' while **14%** said these felt 'unsafe, pressured or harmful'.



Q. Since you started your current course... have you ever experienced or witnessed initiations, hazing or other welcome activities or traditions involving alcohol that felt...?
[BASE: 5564 BALANCE: 'I'm not sure', 'I would prefer not to say', No response]



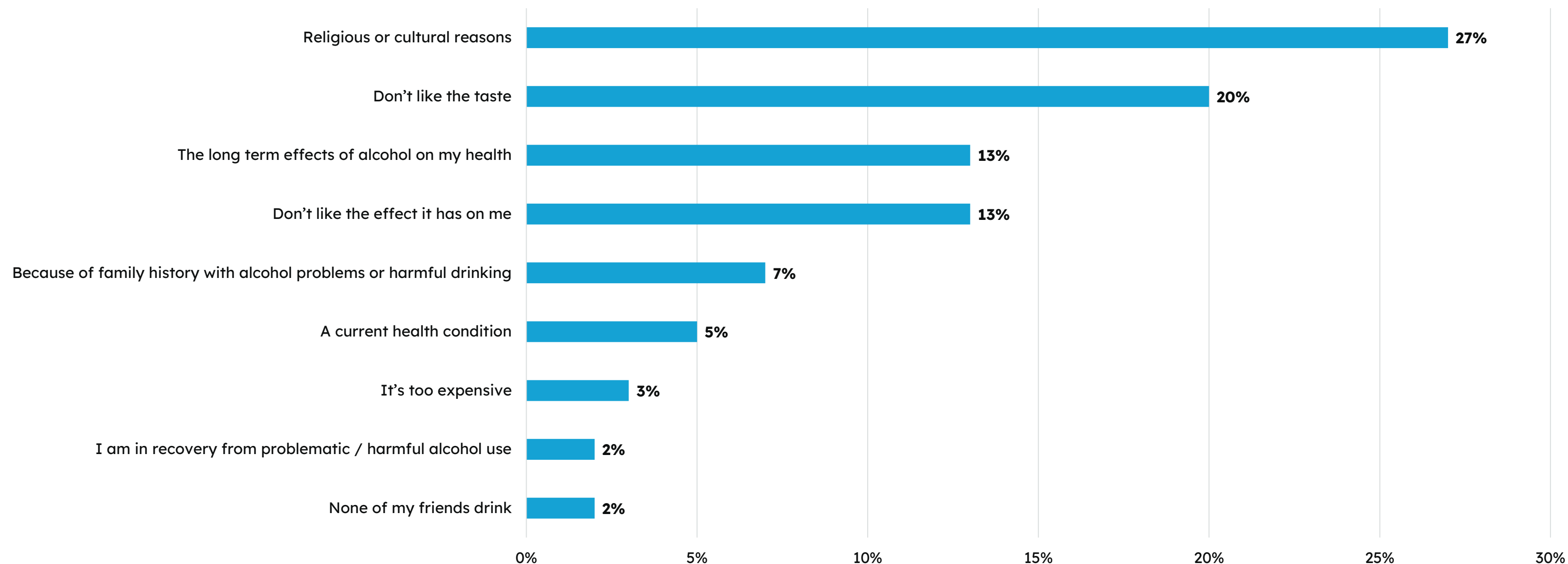
4.3

Students who do not drink alcohol



Students' reasons for stopping drinking alcohol

A quarter (27%) of respondents currently do not drink alcohol. Respondents most common response for not drinking or stopping drinking alcohol is religious or cultural reasons (27%), followed by not liking the taste (20%).



Q. What would you say is your main reason for not drinking or stopping drinking, alcohol? [BASE: 2682 BALANCE: 'Other', No response]



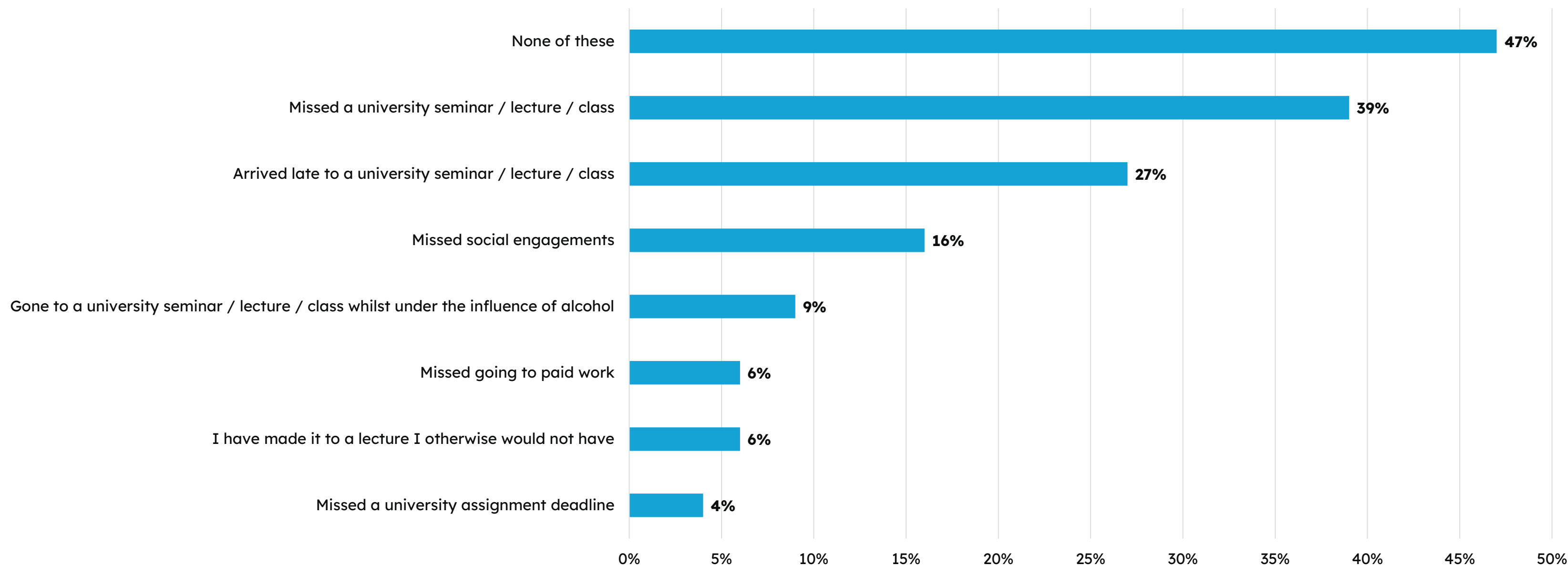
4.4

Impacts of alcohol consumption



Impacts on academic life, paid work, and socialising

Nearly half (**47%**) of respondents report none of these experiences. **39%** say they have 'missed a university seminar/lecture/class' and **27%** 'arrived late to a university seminar/lecture/class' during or following drinking alcohol.

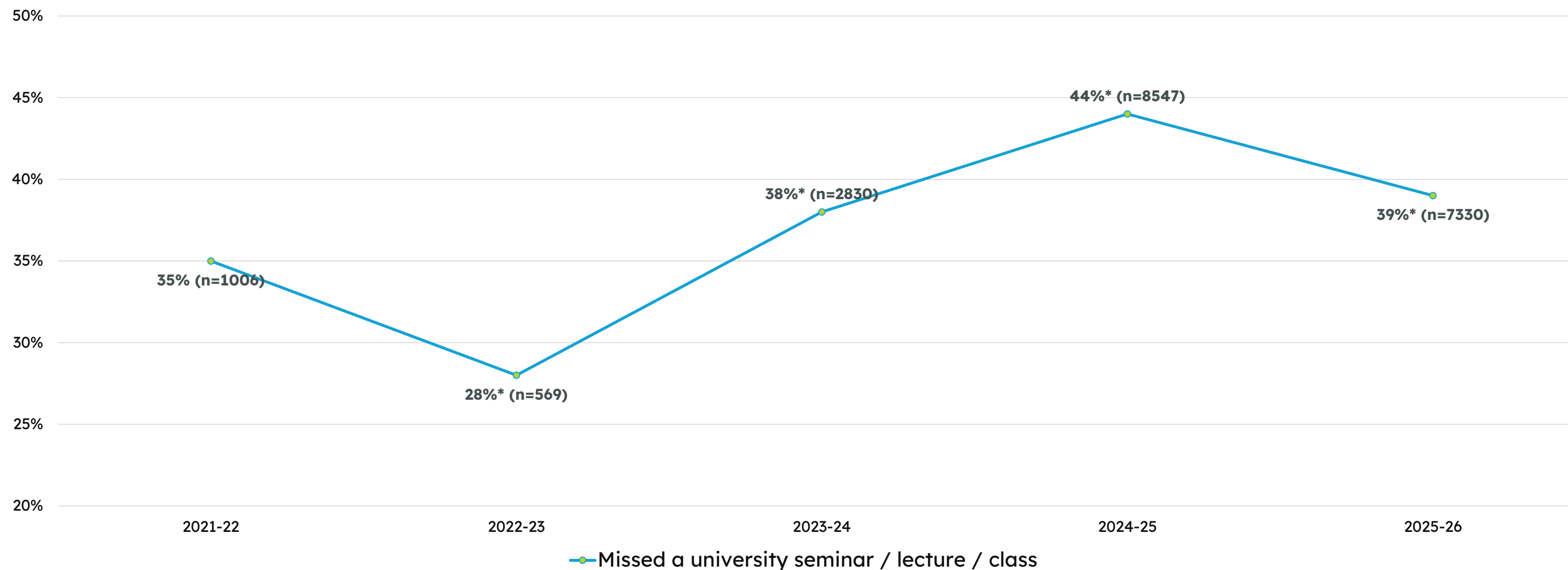


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following the consumption of alcohol? [BASE: 7330 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Impact on academic work tracking changes

There was a significant decrease of 5% of respondents who report they have missed a university seminar/lecture/class during or following the consumption of alcohol from 2024-25 to the latest wave of research.



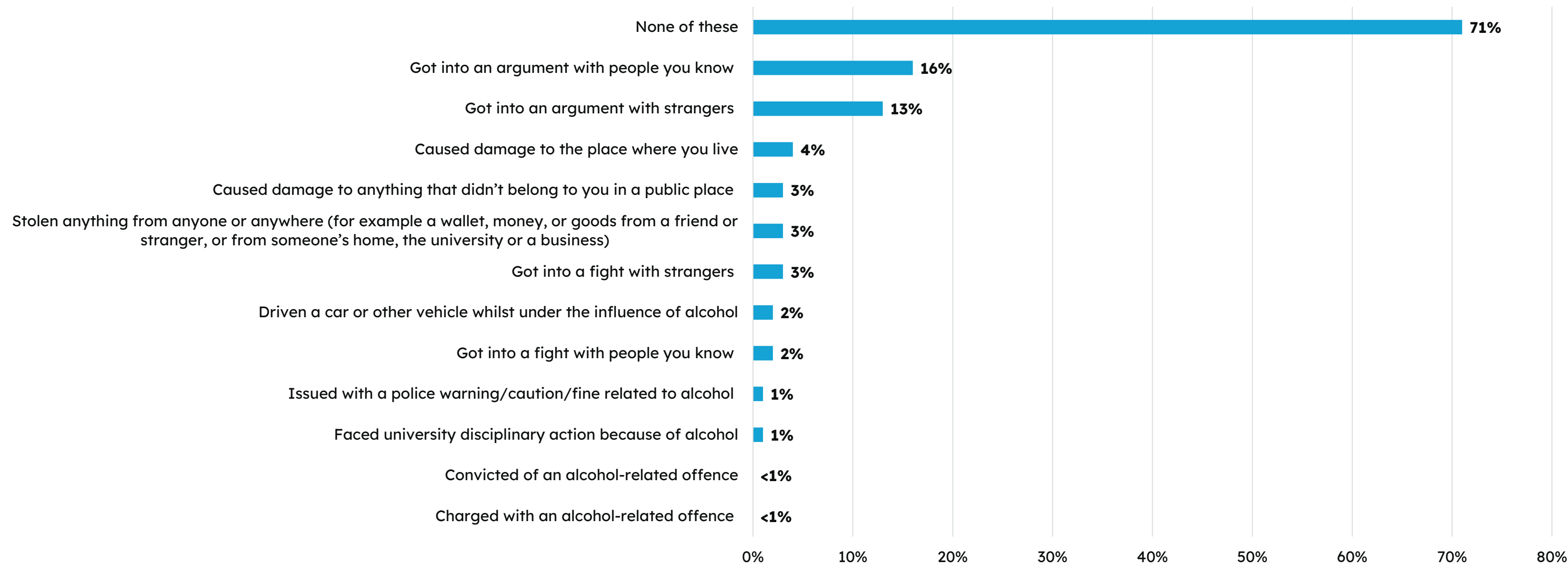
Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following the consumption of alcohol? [BASE: See above]

*Indicates statistically significant difference in comparison to the previous year to a 95% confidence level



Alcohol and antisocial behaviour

A small proportion respondents have experienced 'got into an argument with people they know' (**16%**) and/or '...strangers' (**13%**).

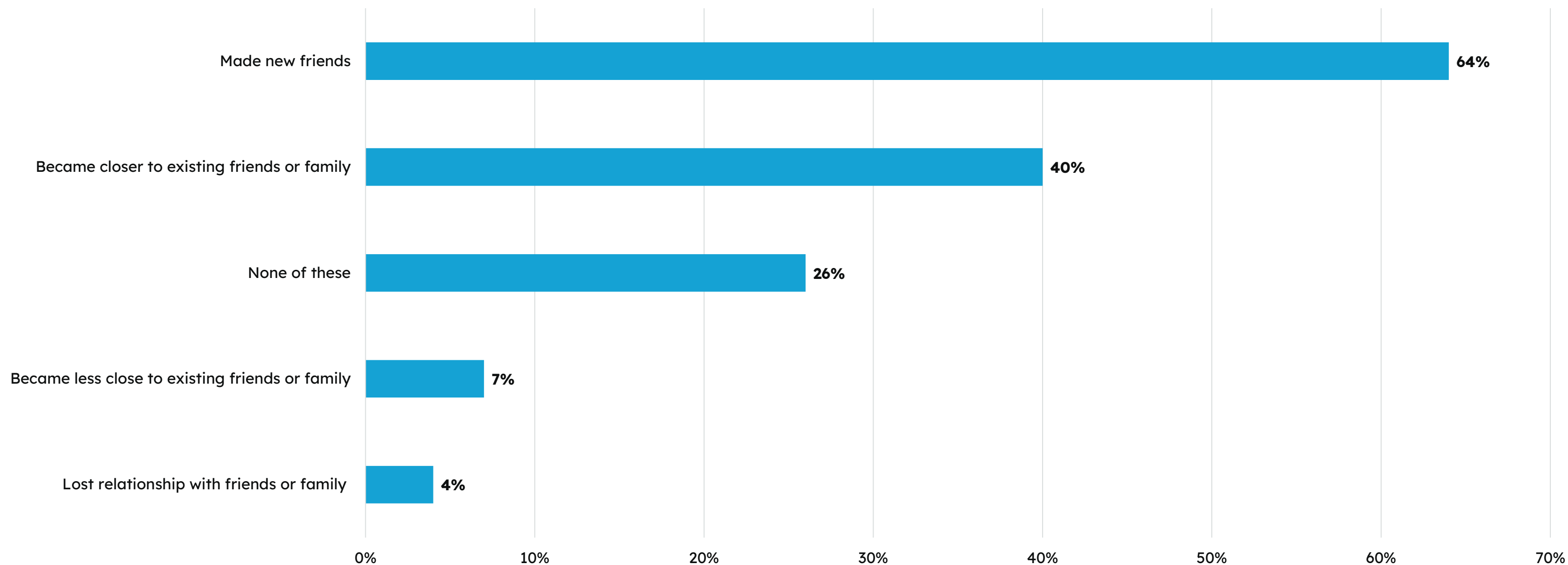


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following the consumption of alcohol? [BASE: 7280 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Impacts on relationships

64% of respondents have experienced 'made new friends' during or following the consumption of alcohol, while 2 in 5 (40%) have 'became closer to existing friends or family'.

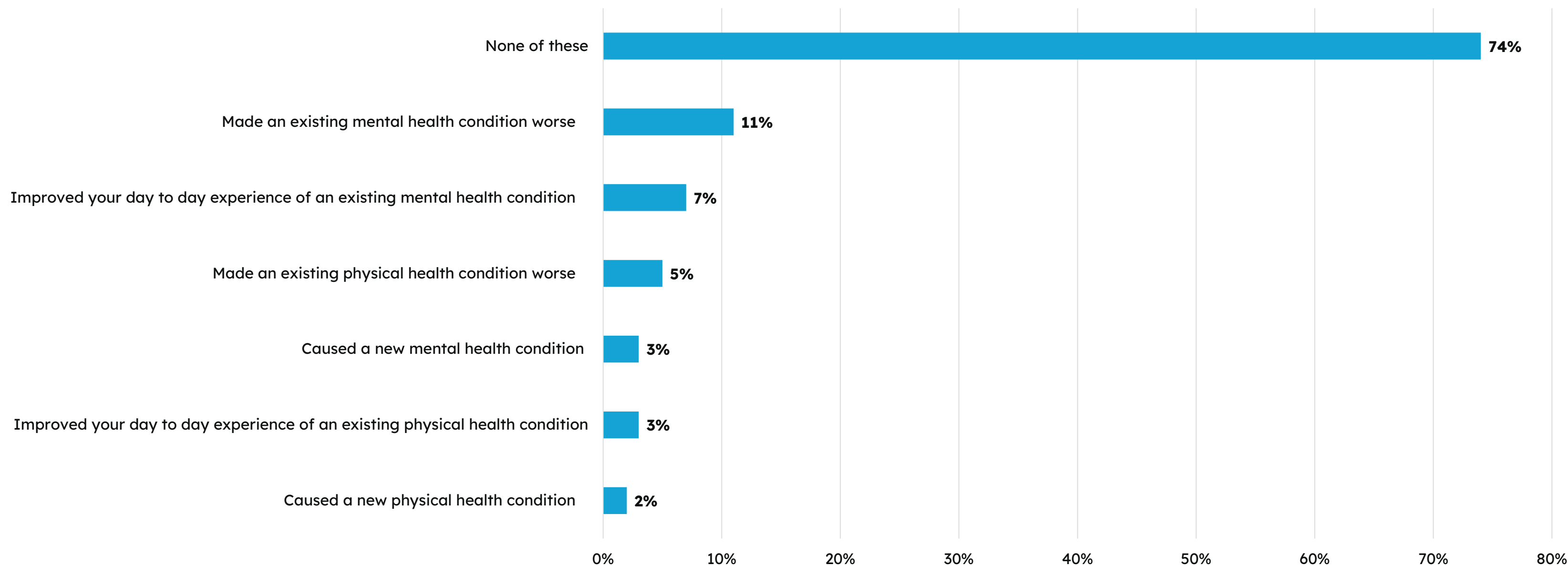


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following the consumption of alcohol? [BASE: 7330 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Impacts on wellbeing

74% of respondents have experienced 'none of these' impacts during or following alcohol consumption. **11%** said they experienced 'an existing mental health condition was made worse' during or following the consumption of alcohol, while **7%** said alcohol had 'improved their day-to-day experience of an existing mental health condition'.

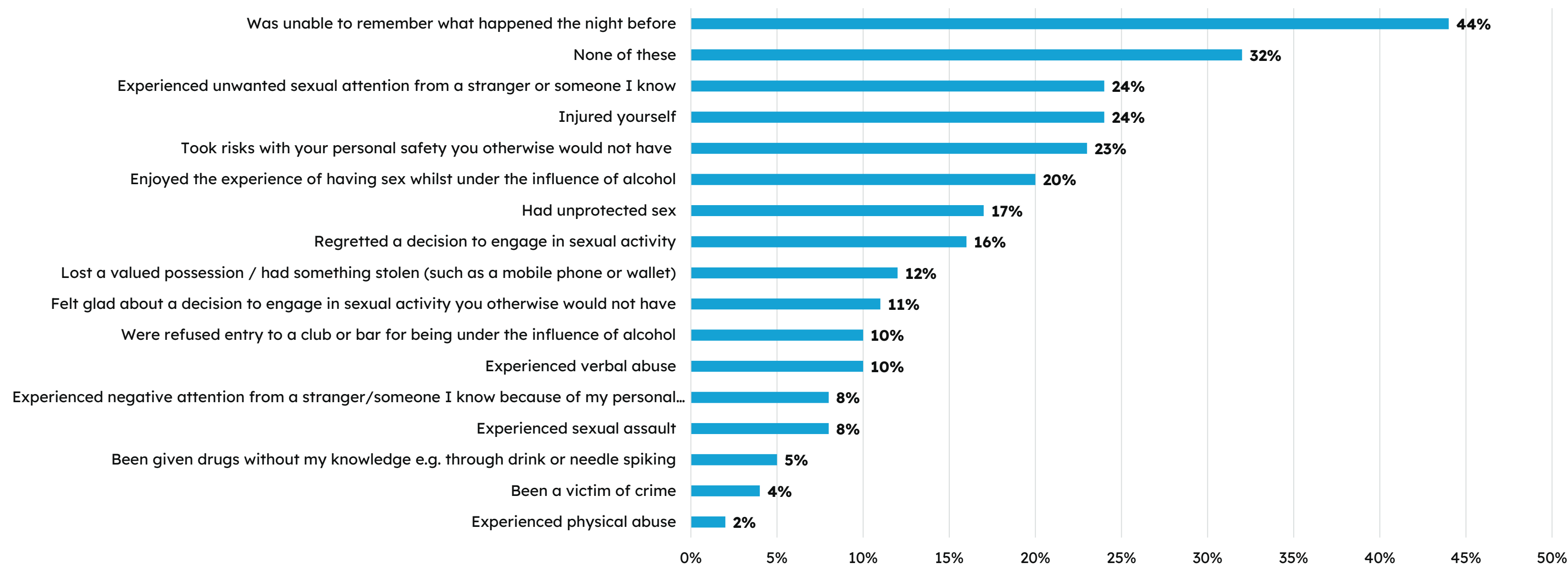


Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following the consumption of alcohol? [BASE: 7284 BALANCE: 'Rather not say', No response]



Social, behavioural and safety impacts

44% of respondents reporting they were ‘...unable to remember what happened the night before’ during or following alcohol consumption. Nearly a quarter have experienced ‘...unwanted sexual attention from a stranger or someone I know’ (**24%**), ‘injured yourself’ (**24%**), and ‘took risks with your personal safety you otherwise would not have’ (**23%**).



Q. Which of the following have you experienced since you have been at university during or following the consumption of alcohol? [BASE: 7302 BALANCE: ‘Rather not say’, No response]

Respondents were shown the following text before the question: These questions are designed to understand experiences people may have had during or after drinking alcohol. We are not suggesting that anyone is to blame for harm they experience - responsibility always lies with the person who causes it.



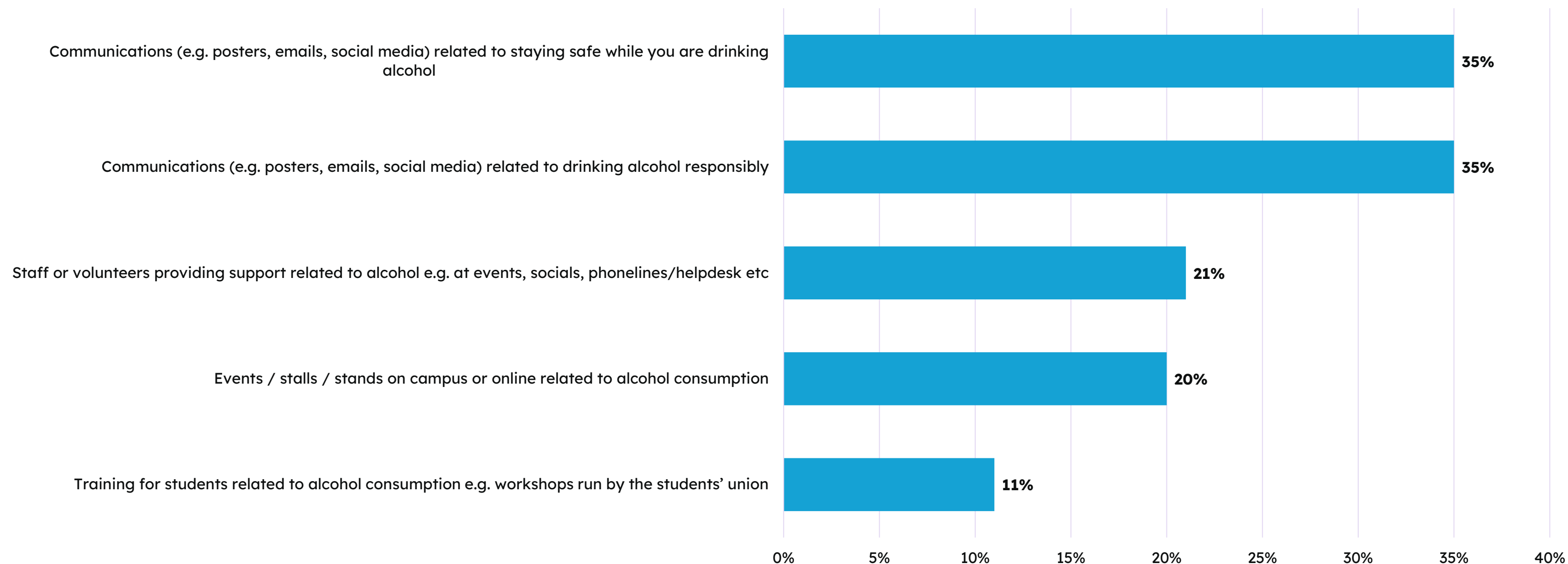
4.5

Responsible alcohol consumption



Students' awareness of university alcohol-related campaigns

35% of respondents said they were aware of communications related to staying safe while drinking alcohol, and those related to drinking alcohol responsibly at their university.

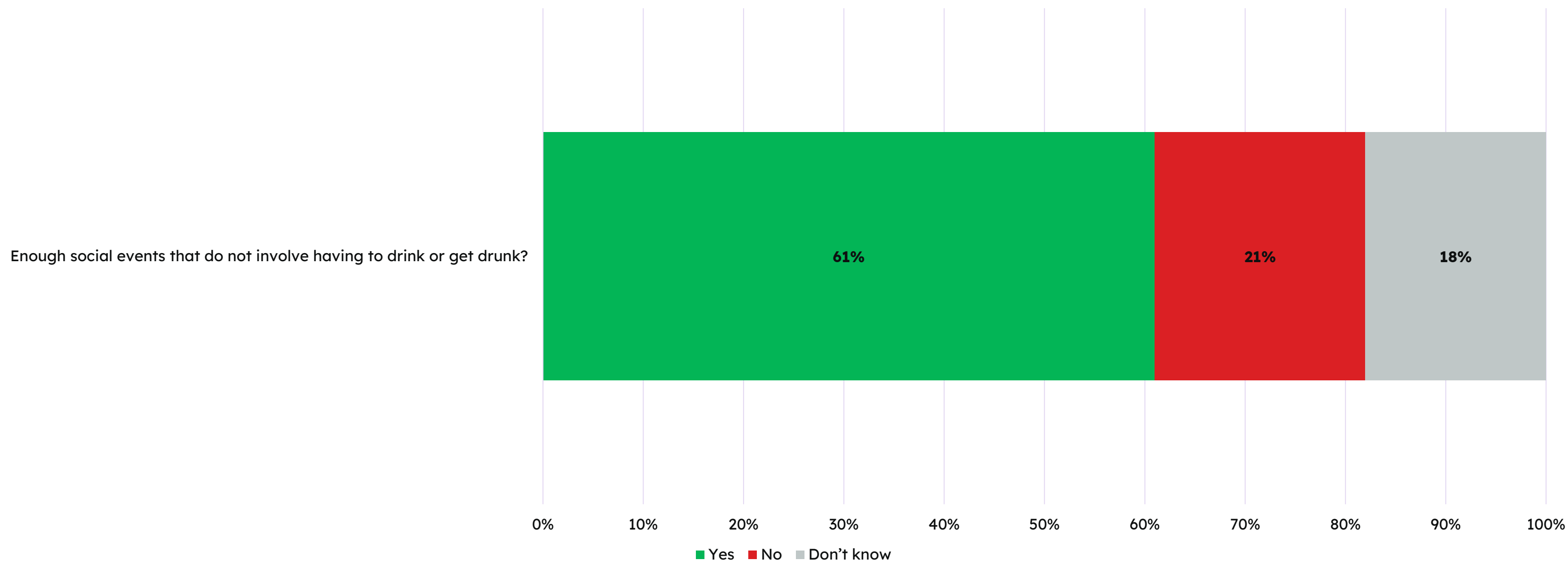


Q. Are you aware of any safe or responsible drinking campaigns, projects or activities at your university? [BASE: 9962 BALANCE: 'Other', 'Don't know', No response]



Alcohol-free social events at university

3 in 5 (**61%**) of respondents believe that there are enough social events at university that do not involve having to drink alcohol or get drunk, while 1 in 5 (**21%**) disagree.



Q. Do you feel that there are enough social events for you at university that do not involve having to drink or get drunk? [BASE: 10022 BALANCE: 'Don't know', No response]

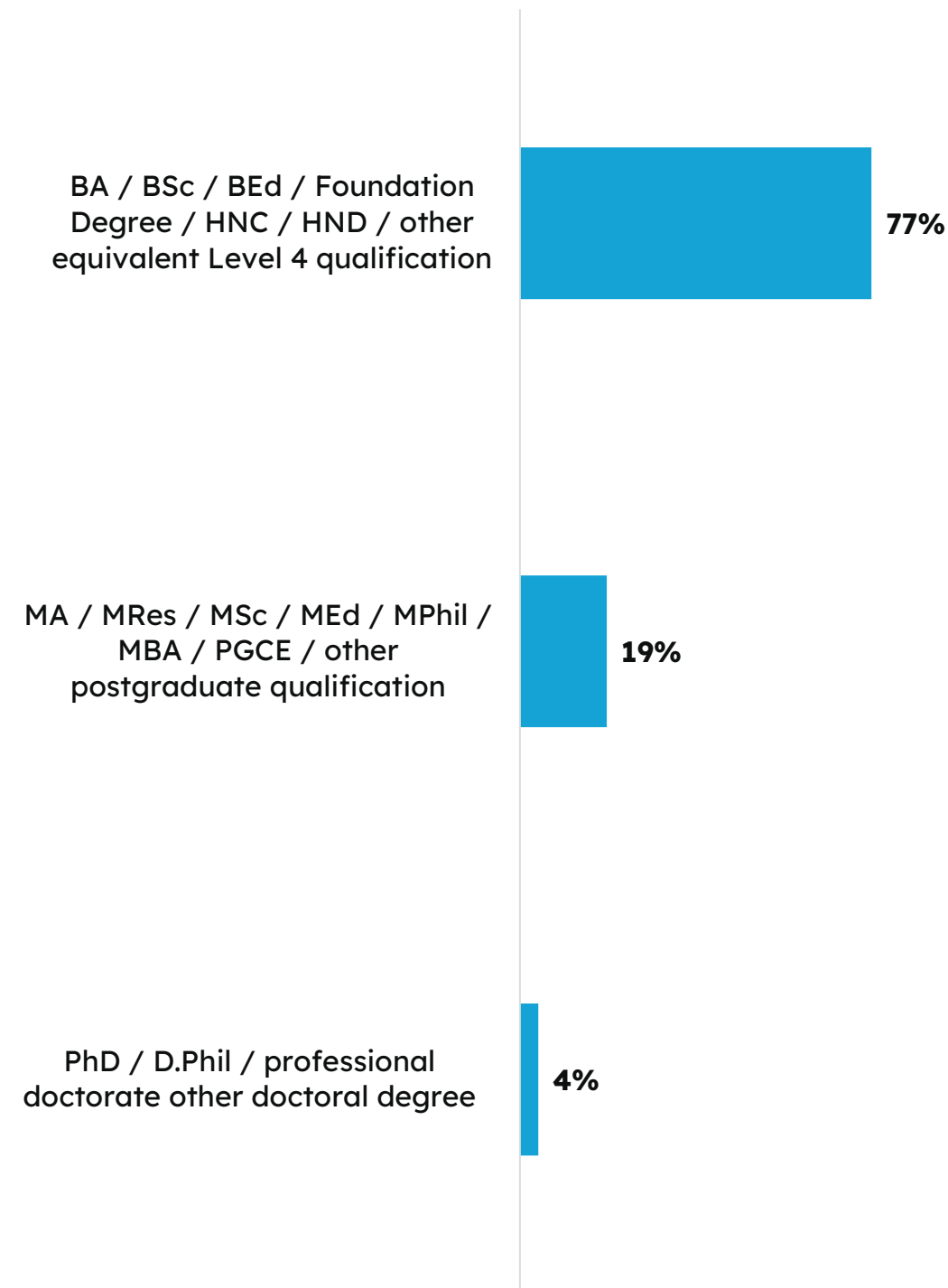




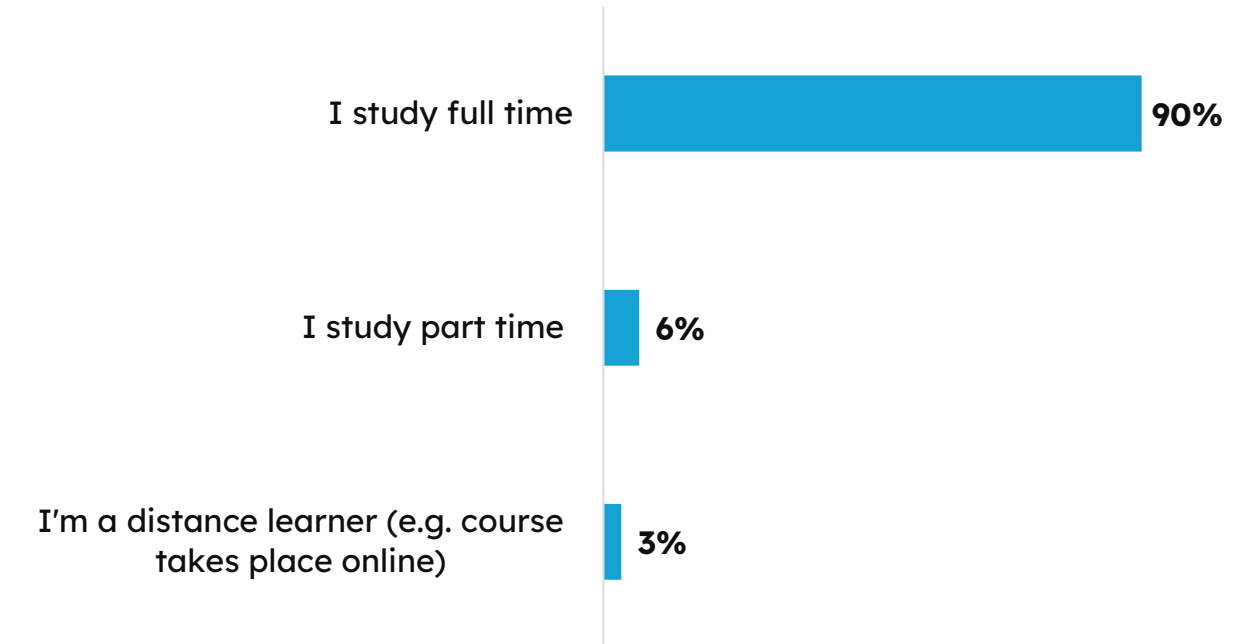
Respondents' demographics



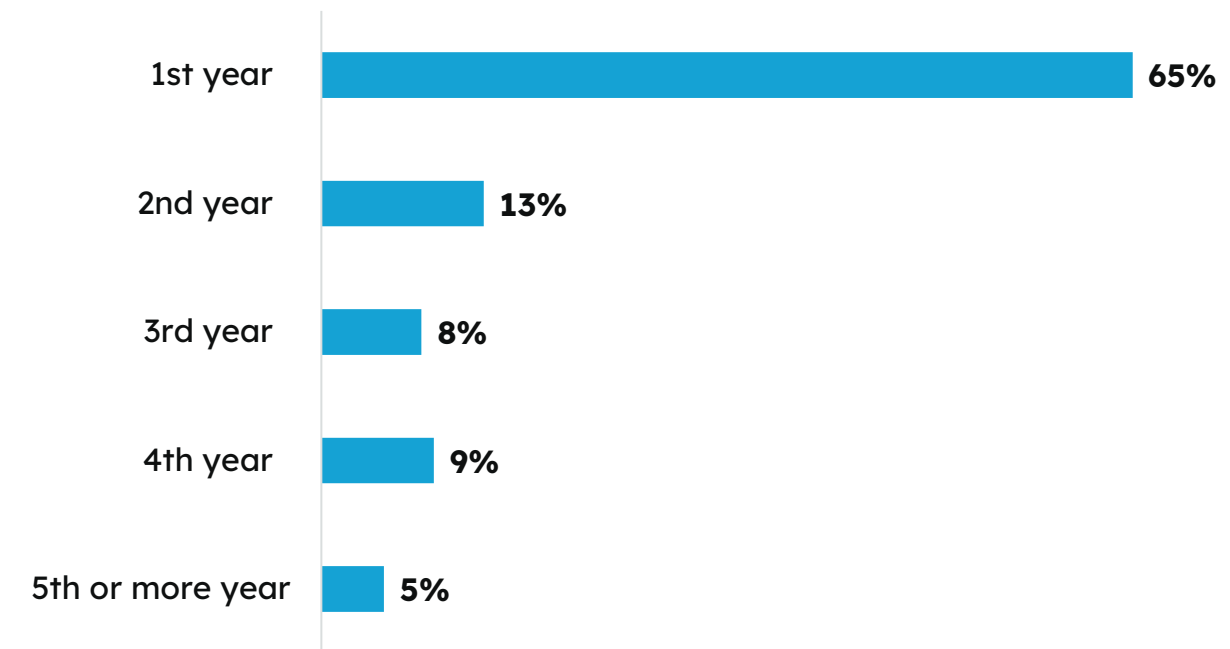
Study level



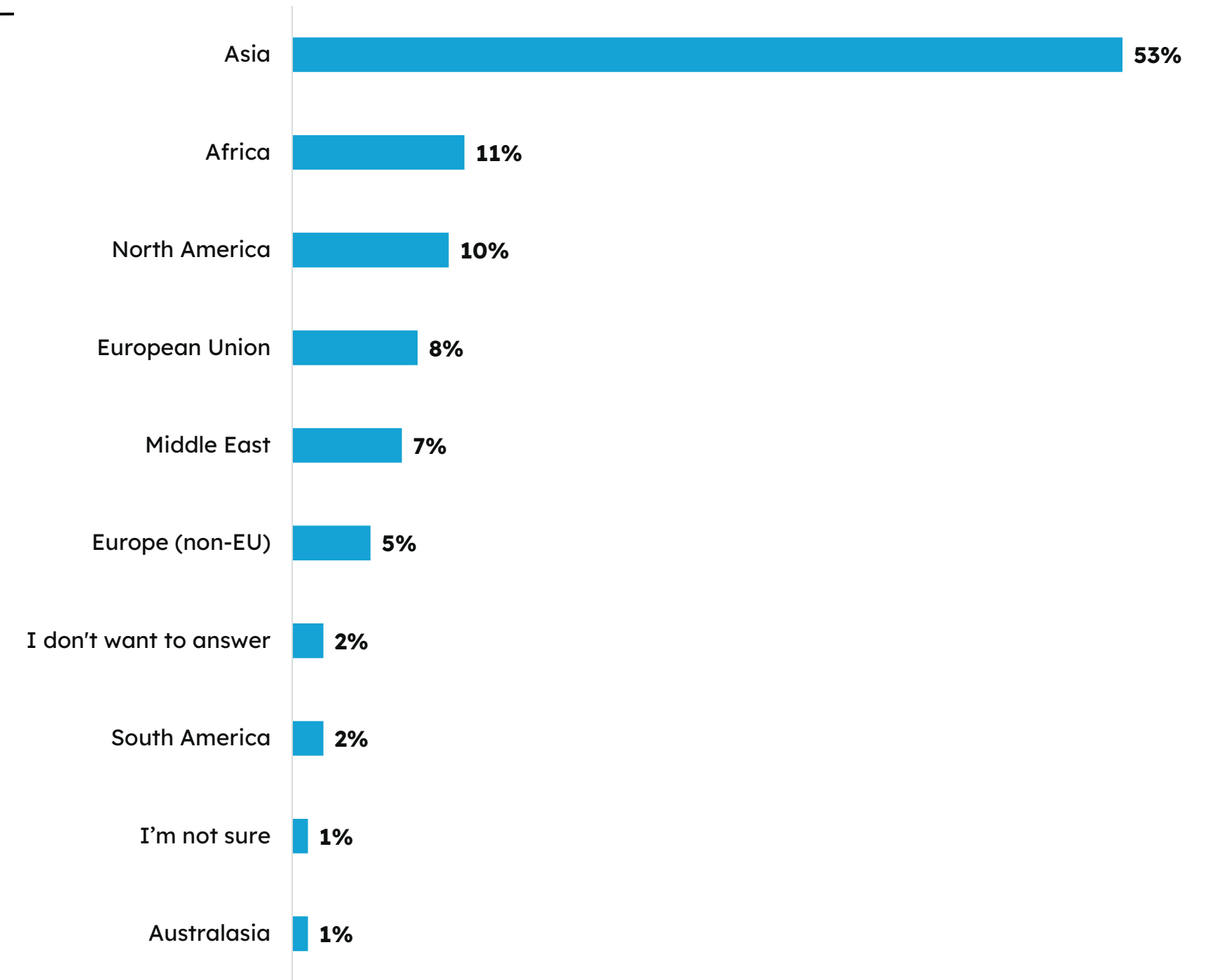
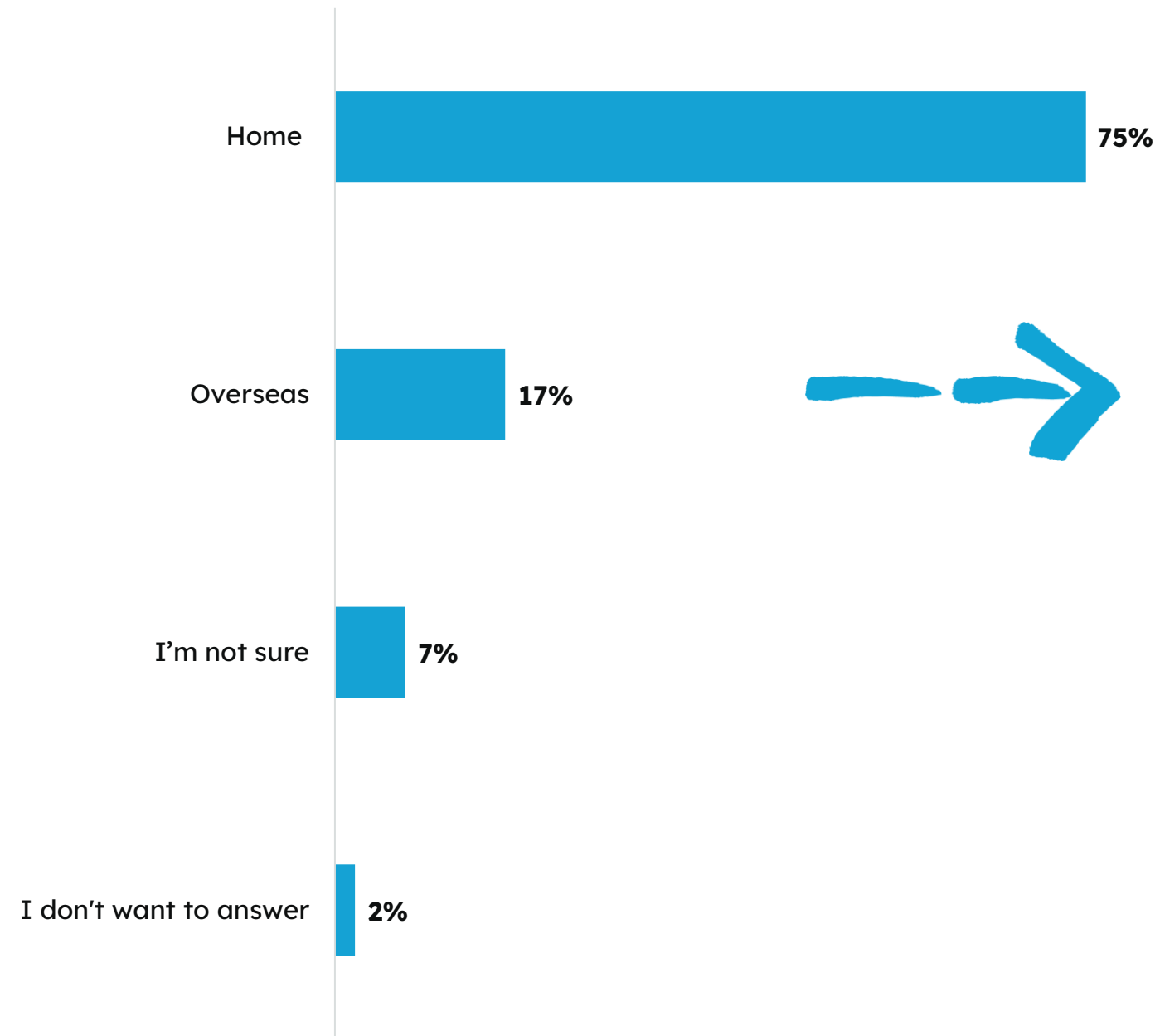
Mode of study



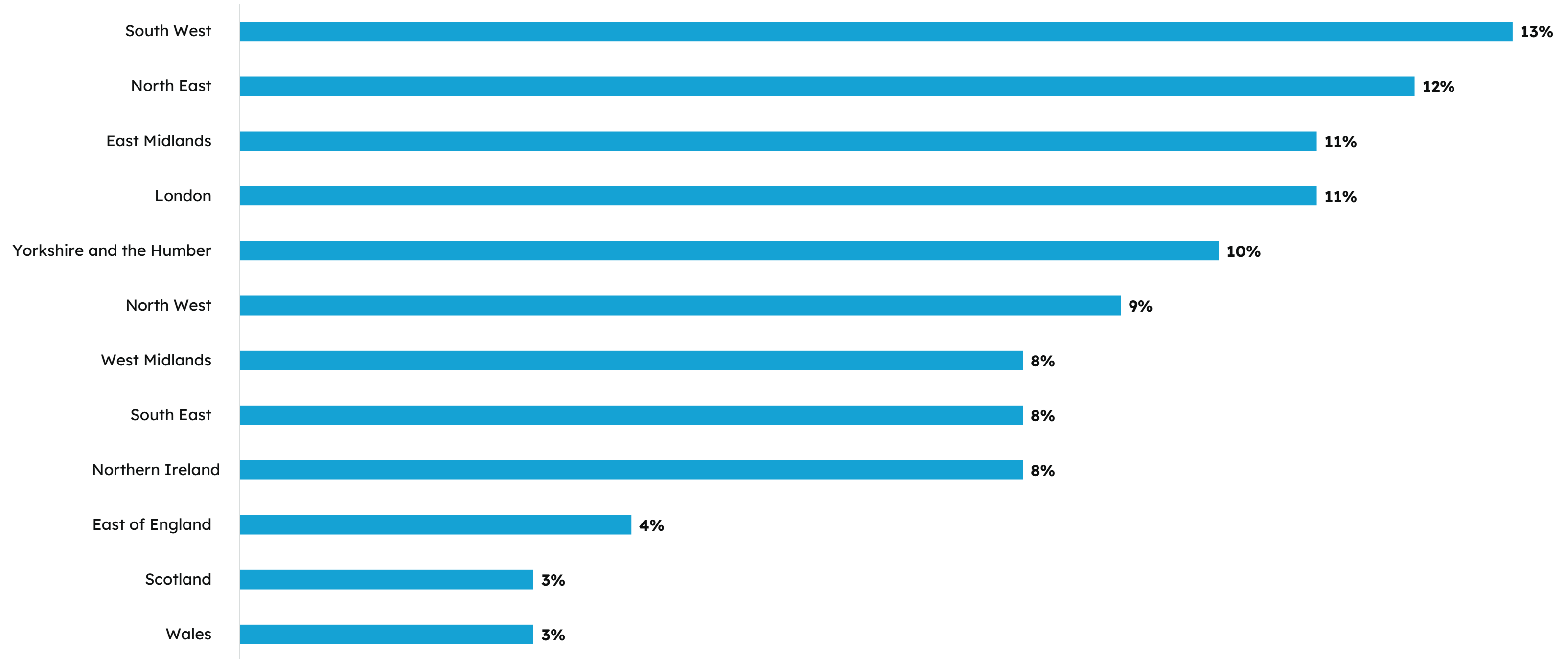
Year of study



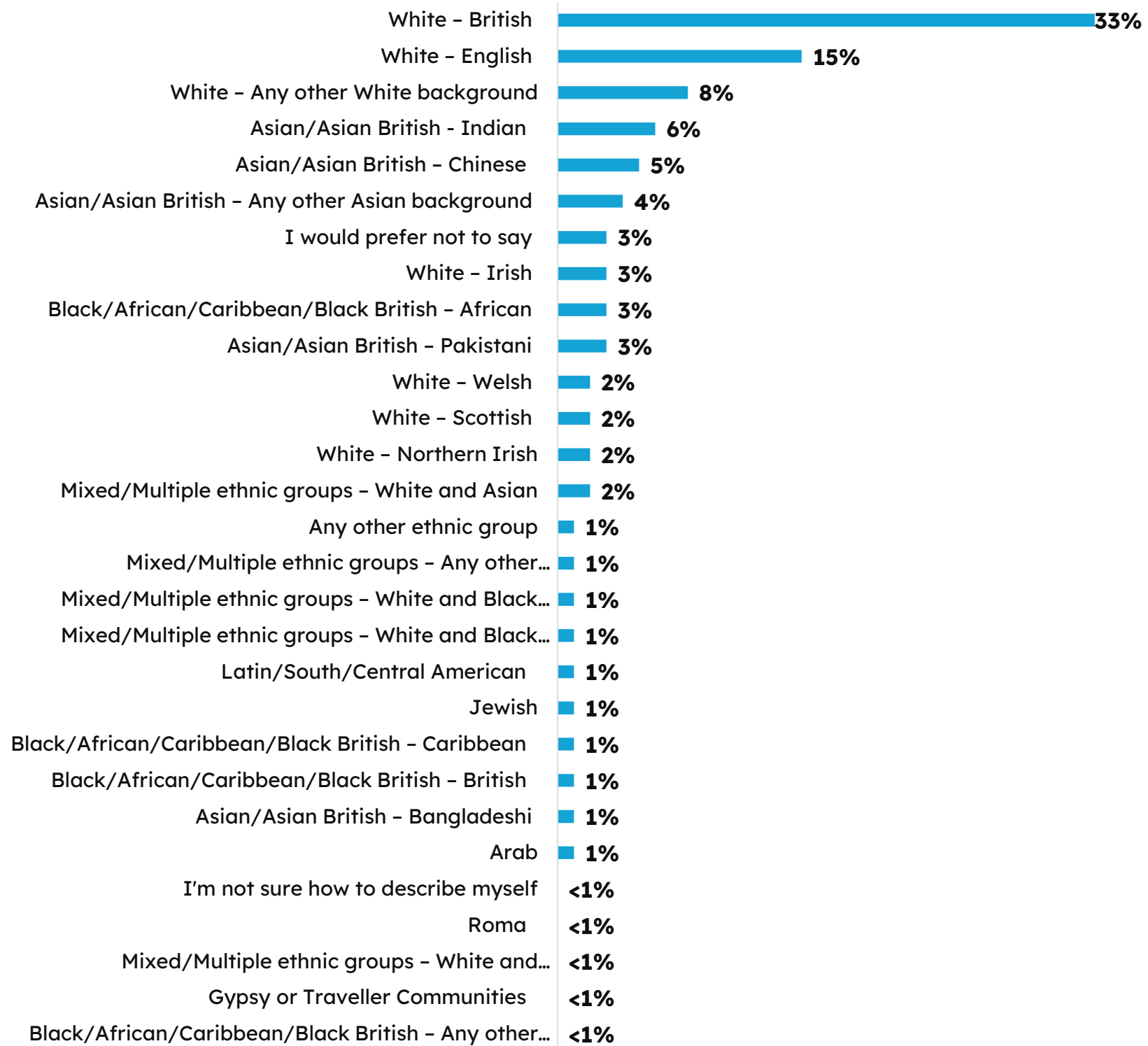
Student status



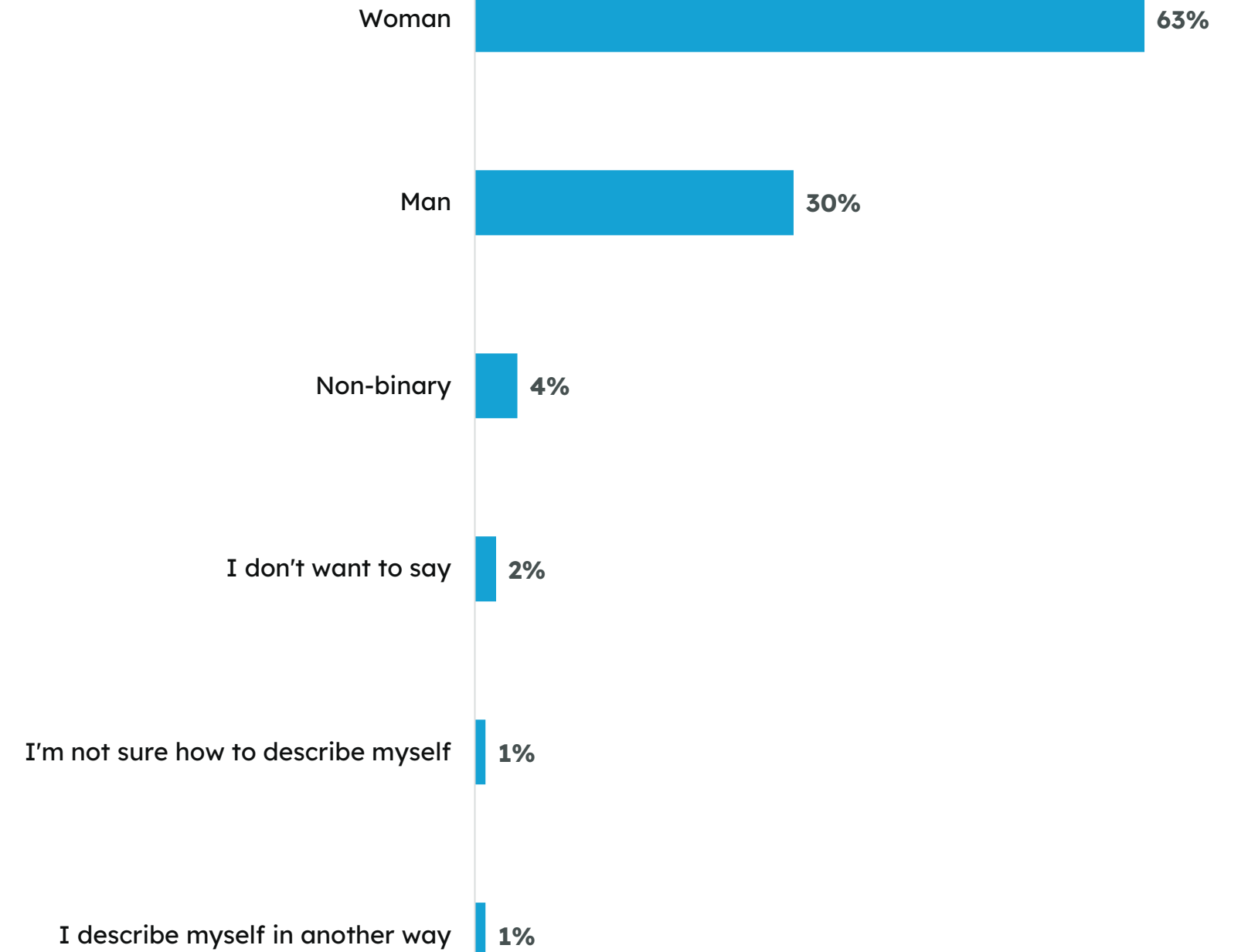
Region of study



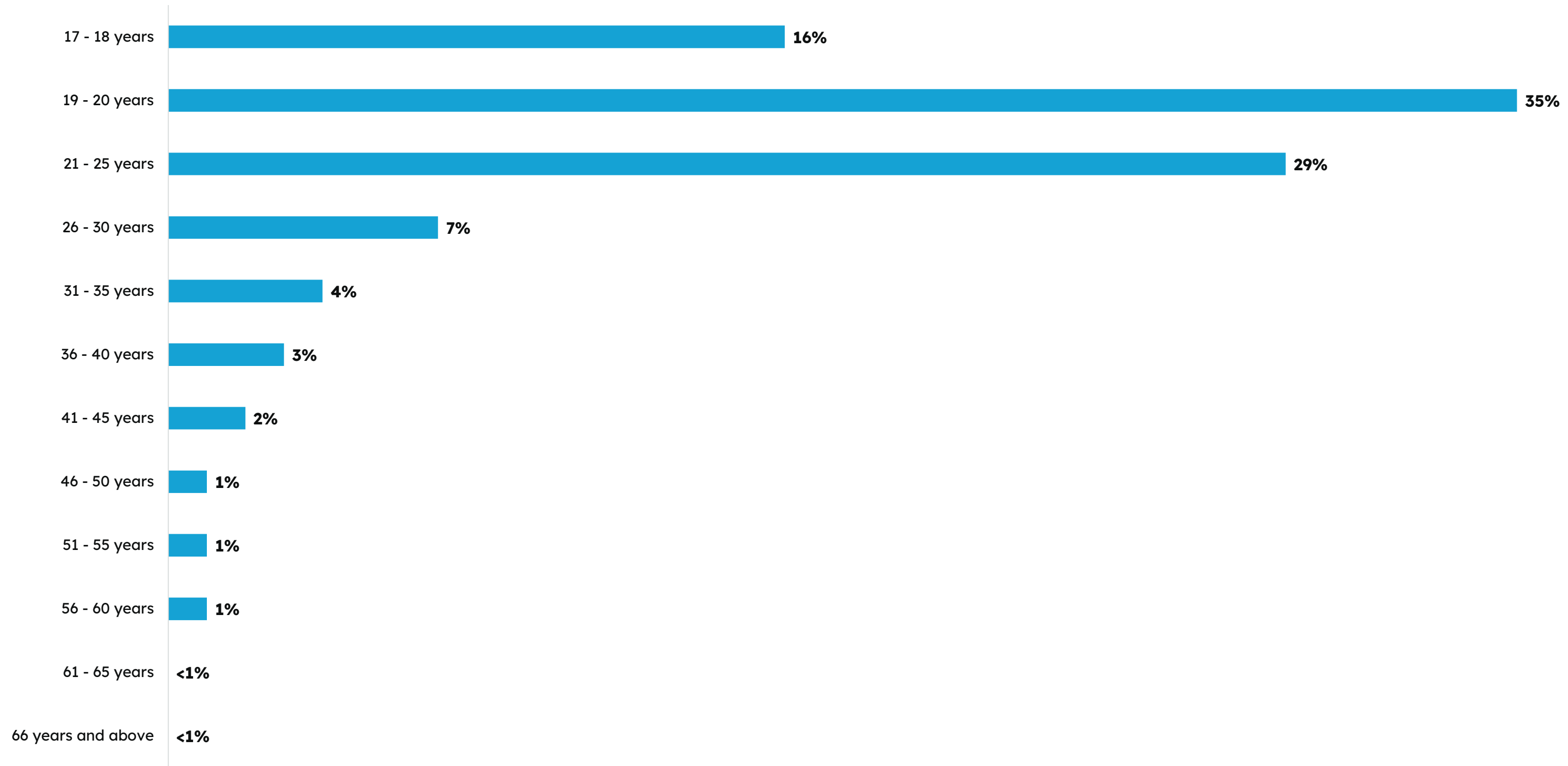
Ethnicity



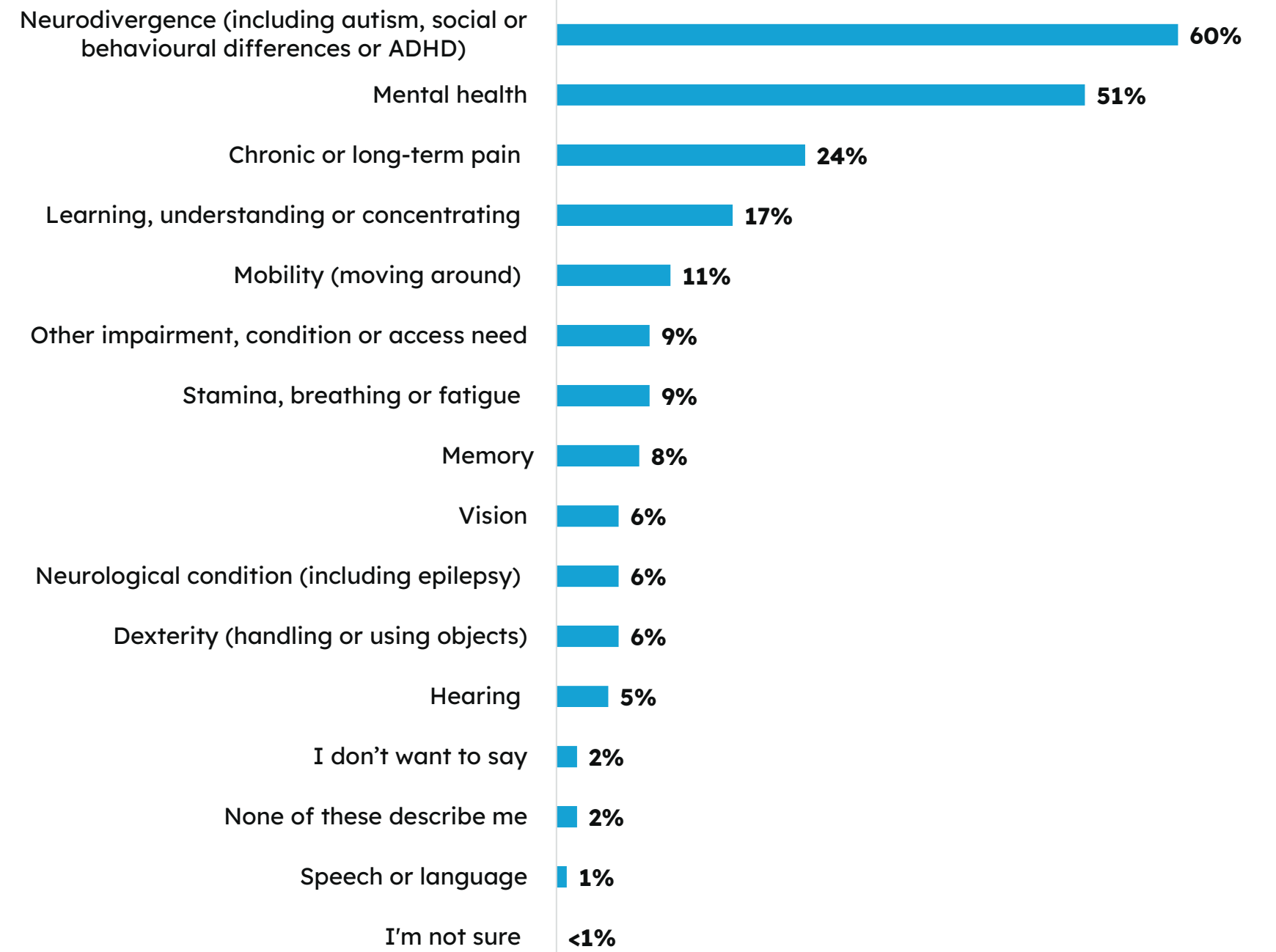
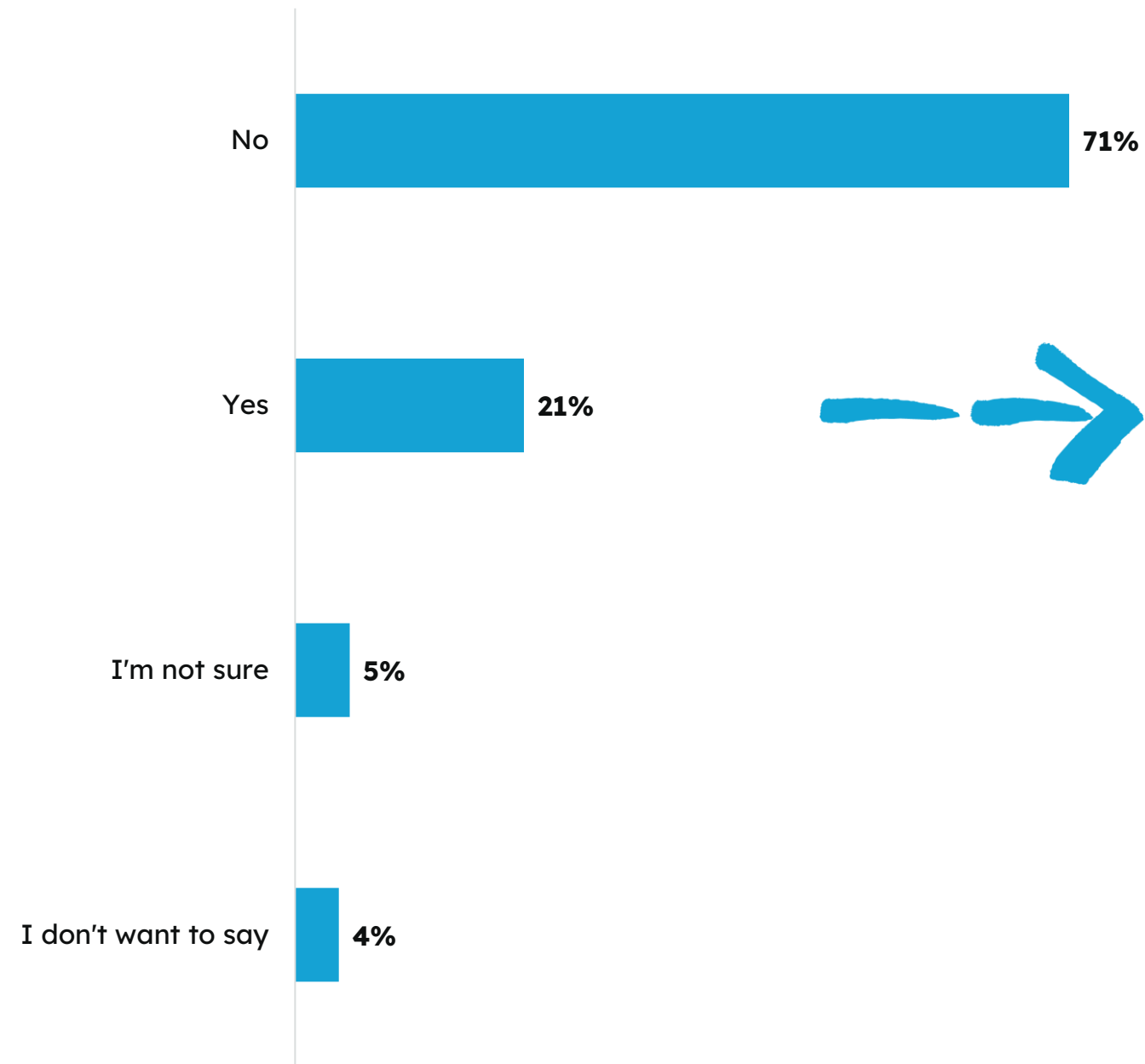
Gender identity



Age



Disability





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