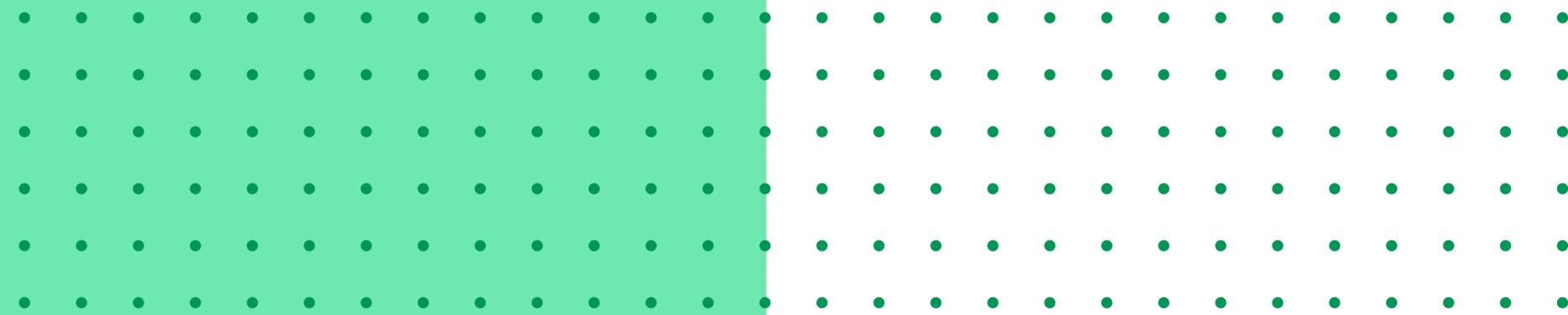


# Students' perceptions of belonging and inclusion at university

February 2022



# Contents

03: Key findings

04: Introduction

05: Methodology

06: Analysis and reporting

07: Demographics

08: Overall belonging

11: Happiness, and loneliness

14: Feeling settled at university

17: Priorities and academic confidence

21: Course provision

26: Connection on the course

31: Inclusion on the course

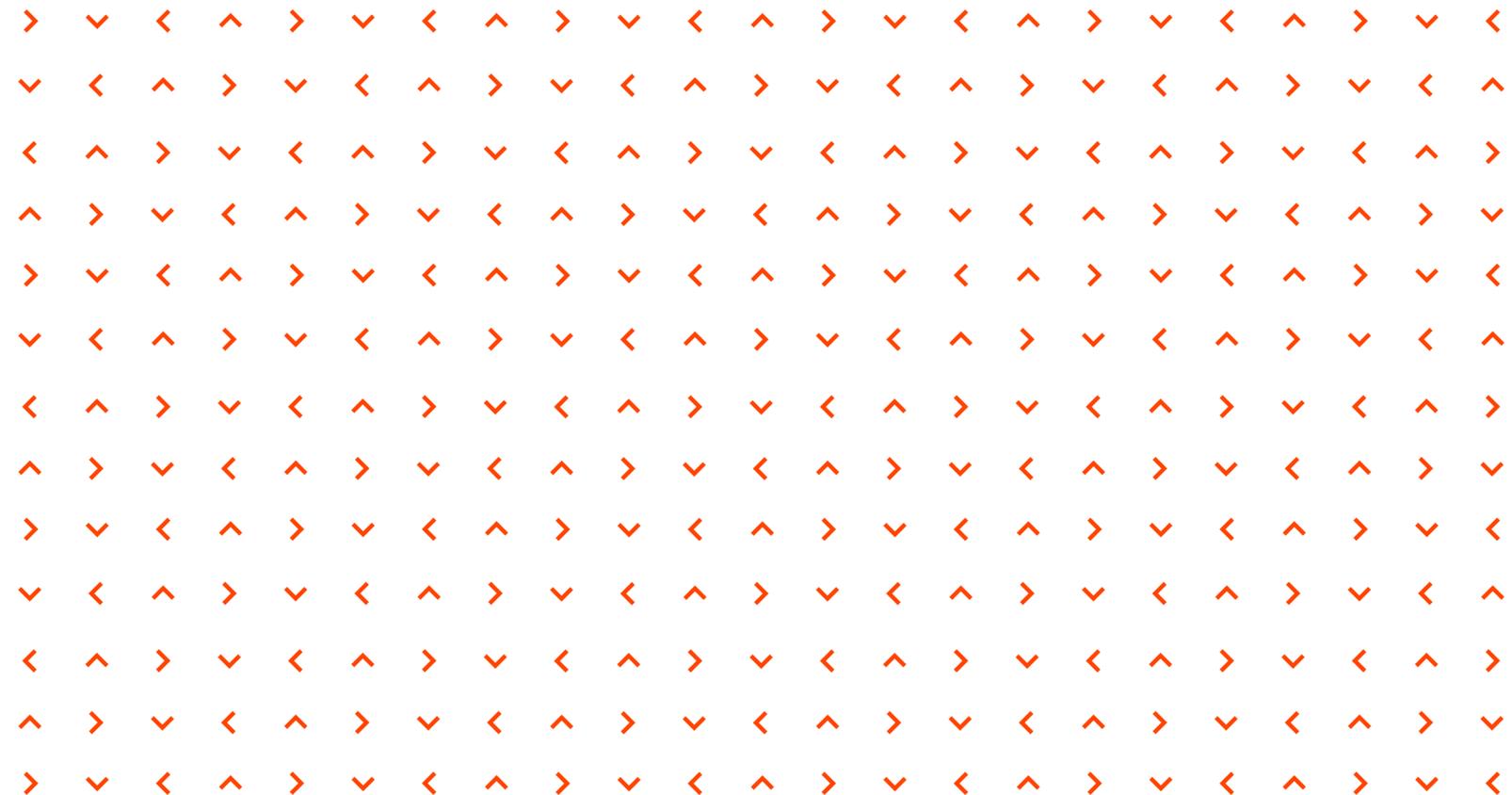
37: Connection outside the course

41: Connection at university

45: Inclusion at university

49: Safety, respect, and empowerment

54: What would help students to  
feel a greater sense of belonging?



# Key findings

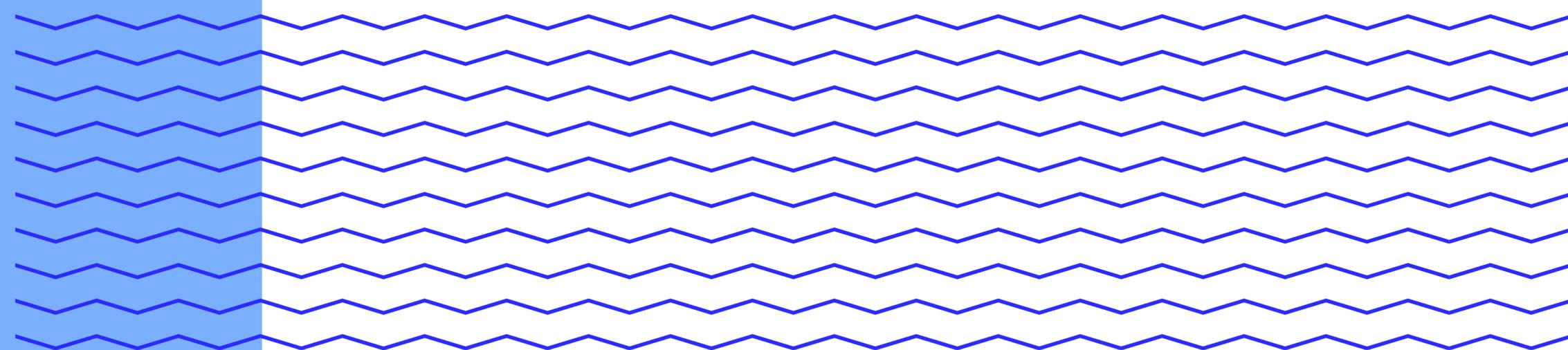
Respondents' overall sense of belonging interacts with multiple aspects of the university experience, including:

- Feelings of happiness and loneliness
- How settled in respondents feel at university
- Personal priorities
- Academic confidence
- The sense of how flexible and accessible the course is
- Sense of connection on the course and to the wider university
- Engagement in extra-curricular activities
- Sense of inclusion on the course and at university as a whole
- How safe, respected, and empowered respondents feel

The state of students' self-assessed mental health was most consistently associated with their sense of belonging across all the different dimensions we explored, much more so than other factors including demographic identity or mode of study.

For demographics we found that students who are disabled, non-binary students, gay and lesbian students, and students who identify their sexuality as something other than heterosexual, bisexual, or gay or lesbian, report lower overall belonging as well as lower agreement with many of the various aspects of belonging explored throughout the survey.

For mode of study international and postgraduate students report a higher sense of belonging than home and undergraduate students - which gives some context to reporting for ethnic differences. Students who study fully online report lower belonging, but this is less the case for students who are studying a mix of face to face and online.



It has long been known that feeling a “sense of belonging” while at university can make or break students’ overall experience, as it is strongly associated with academic and social engagement while at university.

In the field of education studies, there has been research into the ways that “belongingness” is produced and sustained in various pedagogical contexts, as well as the role it can play in policing boundaries and reinforcing inequities among different social groups.

But it’s not always very clear what those responsible for supporting student success - university leadership, academic and student support staff, students’ unions - can do to foster a sense of belonging in students, especially those who are from marginalised or minoritised groups or whose circumstances or mode of study may affect their ability fully to engage in university life.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, these questions became more urgent, as - despite the heroic efforts of universities and students’ unions - the experience of disconnection, disengagement, and loss of academic confidence became much more widespread.

**“Student engagement has long been a challenge for universities but the crisis appears to have crystallised the concept of ‘belonging’ as a more inclusive and affiliative framing of the idea. Many universities will be thinking hard about how to foster this sense of belonging.”**

Mary Curnock Cook, chair, UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission, 2021.

In the autumn of 2021 Wonkhe and Pearson conceived the idea of a year long study of student belonging and inclusion, to contribute to the national conversation and support the sector in its efforts to apply the lessons of the pandemic and “build back” student experience and engagement.

These are the findings of a major survey of 5,233 students, undertaken in partnership with 15 students’ unions across the UK.

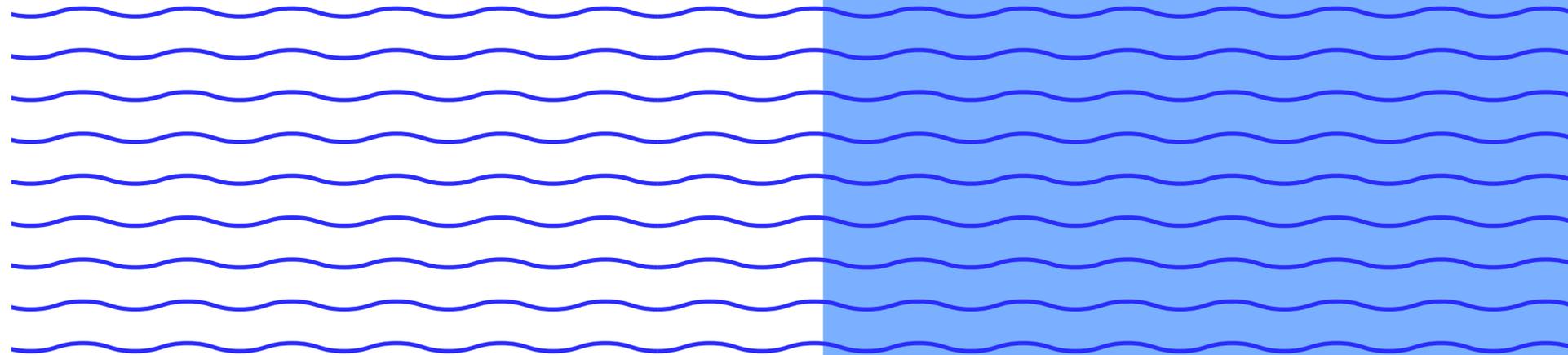
We’re also collecting monthly diary entries from students on an anonymous basis, and planning student focus groups to explore some of the themes that are emerging. We’re keen to hear your feedback and suggestions for next steps.



# Methodology

The survey was open during November 2021. Our 15 partner students' unions promoted the survey to their students. Of the students' unions who were involved, 13 are in England, one in Scotland, and one in Wales. Nine are located in research intensive institutions and the remaining six in modern institutions.

The overall response rate was 5,233 students, self-selecting. We have not weighted the responses.



# Analysis and reporting

We asked to what extent respondents agreed with the statement “I feel like I belong at my university” and tested various demographic dimensions for variation in response to this statement. Throughout we have reported, unless otherwise indicated, variation among those who responded “agree” and “strongly agree”.

At a demographic identity level we found differences by: gender, transgender identity, disability, ethnicity, and sexuality.

For ethnicity we reported for white, black and Asian students.

Caveats: Overall numbers are very low for trans-identified (N=114) and non-binary (N=148) respondents and for students who define as a sexuality other than heterosexual, bisexual or gay or lesbian (N=198). We felt that given the very small numbers of these students enrolled at individual universities and the associated challenge of gathering representative data it would be valuable to report on their perspectives, especially as we found consistent differences throughout the various areas of the survey.

At mode of study level we found differences by: undergraduate and postgraduate, home and international, and whether the course is delivered face to face or online.

We did not find differences for age, year of study, or length of commute to campus, or the last type of education attended, so to reduce complexity we have not reported on these dimensions in the body of the analysis.

The most significant area of difference we found was in reported levels of mental health, and we discuss this further later on.

Overall, while we believe our sample is sufficient to give meaningful insight into the contributing factors to belonging and inclusion, we’d avoid drawing fixed conclusions about any individual demographic, or making too much of any reported difference lower than five percentage points.

For each area of investigation we report the differences for belonging and mental health, splits by demographic identity, and splits for modes of study.

# Demographics

**All:** N=5,233

**Gender:** Male 34% | Female 61% | Non-binary 2% | I use another term 0% | Prefer not to say 2%

**Transgender identity:** Yes 2% | No 94% | Unsure 1% | Prefer not to say 3%

**Disability:** Disabled 14% | Non-disabled 81% | Prefer not to say 5%

**Sexuality:** Heterosexual/straight 70% | Bisexual 14% | Gay or lesbian 4% | I use another term 4% | Prefer not to say 9%

**Ethnic background:** White 64% | Mixed ethnicity 6% | Black 7% | Asian 19% | Arab 1% | Other 1% | Prefer not to say 3%

**Age:** 17-22 59% | 23-30 25% | 31-40 9% | 41-50 3% | 51+ 2% | Prefer not to say 1%

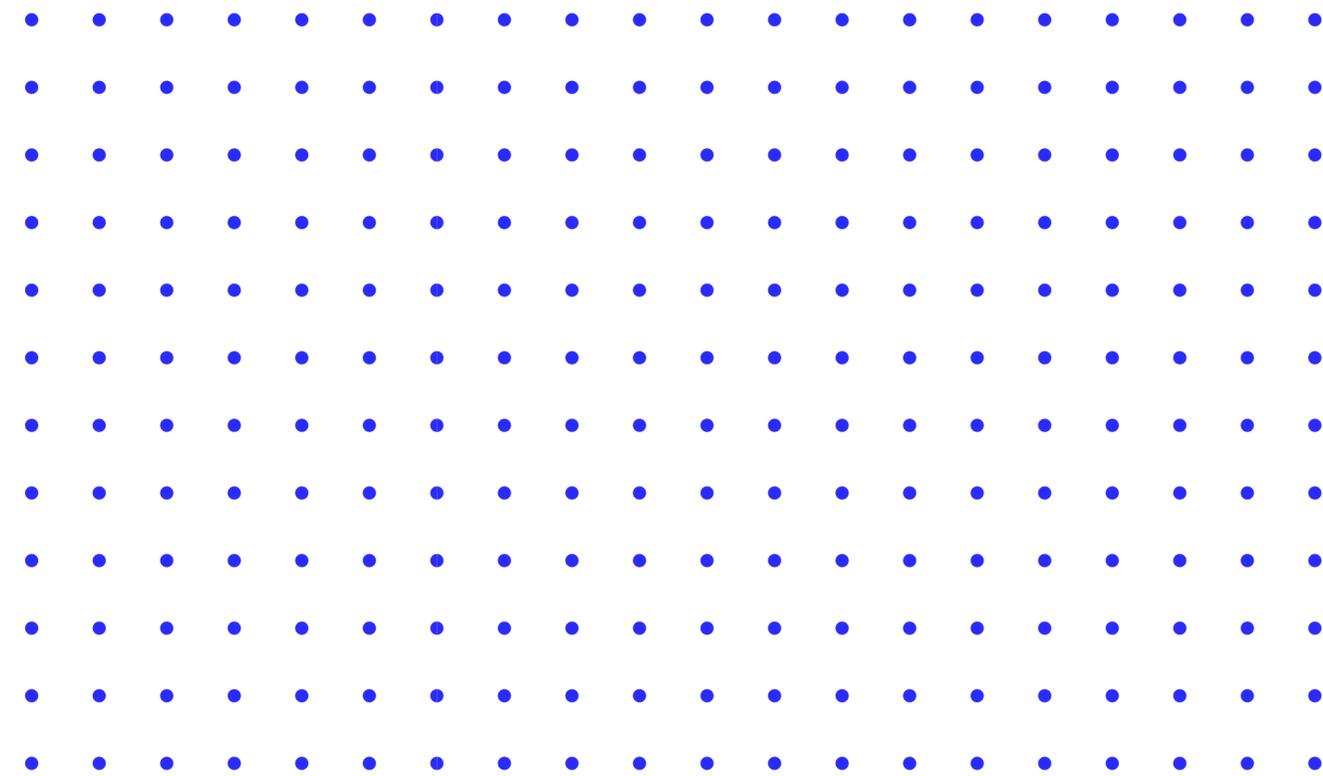
**Year of study:** First 43% | Second or middle 28% | Final year 29%

**Level of study:** Undergraduate 67% | Other qualification (postgraduate taught) 33%

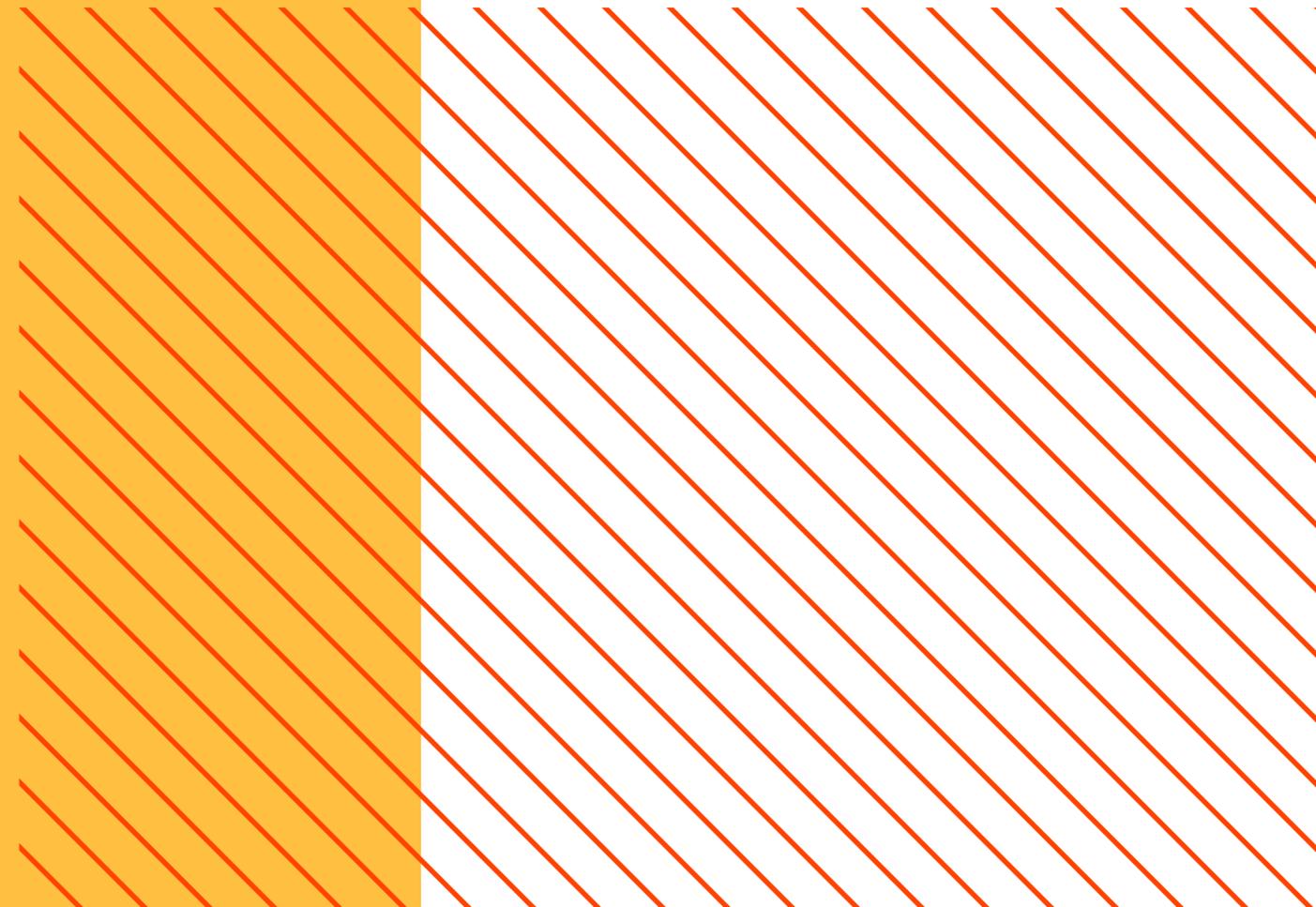
**Average length of commute to campus:** Live on campus 9% | 5-10 minutes 28% | 11-30 minutes 32% | 31 minutes-an hour 16% | 1-2 hours 8% | 2+ hours 3% | Not relevant - I study fully online 5%

**Course delivery this semester:** All face to face 20% | Primarily face to face with some online 31% | Mix of face to face and online 37% | All online 11% | Started with some face to face but has moved online 1%

**Home/international:** Home 70% | International 30%

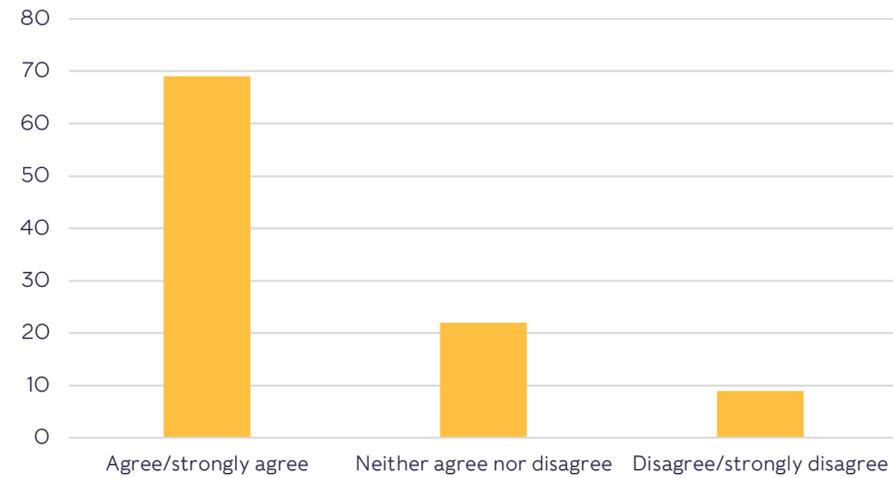


Overall  
belonging

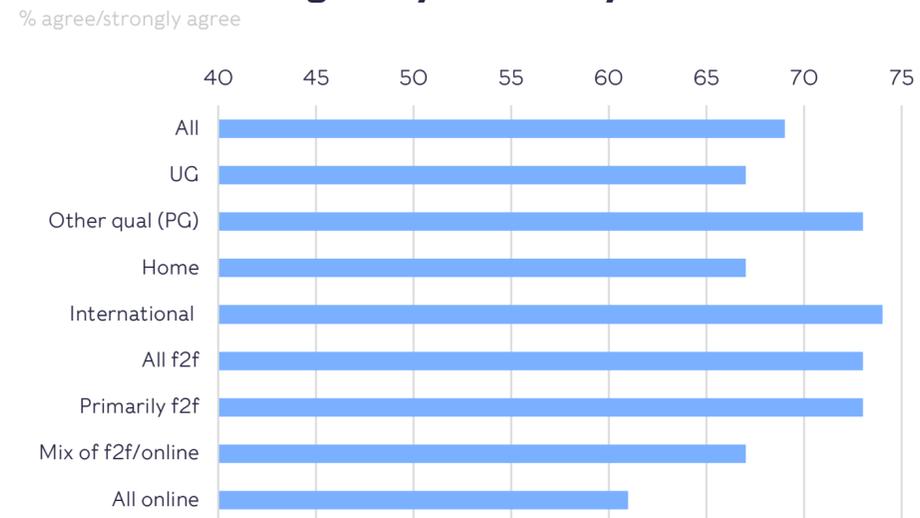


# Overall belonging

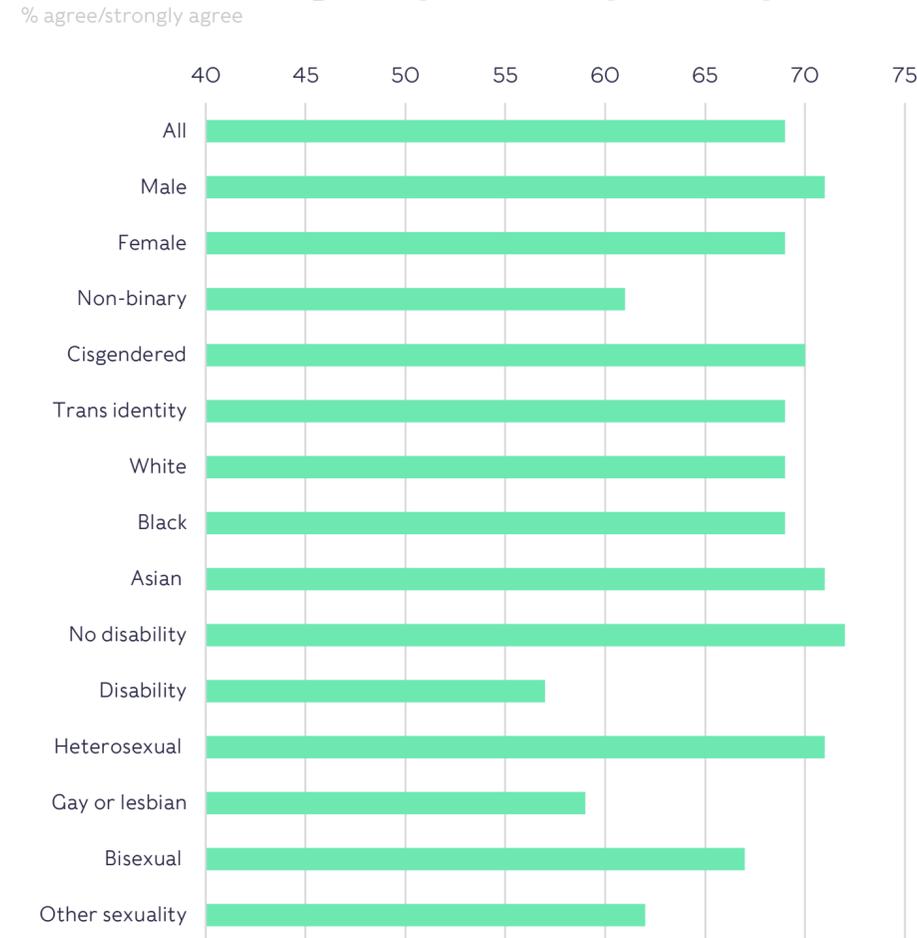
## I feel like I belong at my university - demographics



## I feel like I belong at my university - modes



## I feel like I belong at my university - all respondents



**“Mature, disabled and part time student. Nope, I definitely feel like an outsider.”**

Throughout the survey reporting, we have represented the responses of those who selected “agree” or “strongly agree” as “Agree they belong” and those who selected “disagree” or “strongly disagree” as “Disagree they belong”

Within the demographic splits, students who are disabled, non-binary, gay and lesbian students, and students who identify their sexuality as something other than heterosexual, bisexual, or gay or lesbian, report lower overall belonging within their comparator groups.

Within mode of study splits students studying a postgraduate (taught) qualification, international students, and those studying entirely or primarily face to face report somewhat higher levels of belonging within their comparator groups.

**69 per cent** of respondents agree they feel like they belong at their university

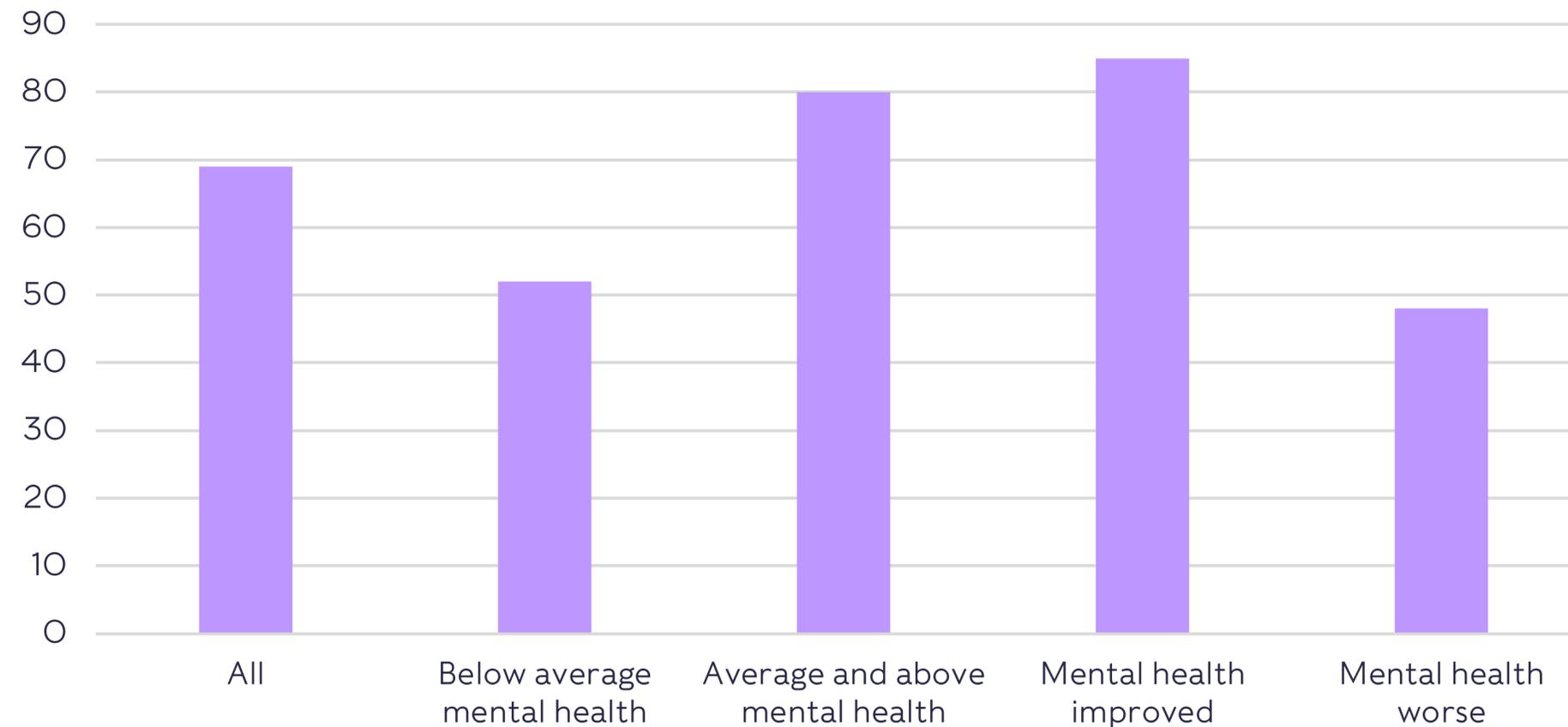
**22 per cent** neither agree nor disagree

**9 per cent** disagree or strongly disagree

# Mental health and belonging

## I feel like I belong at my university - mental health

% agree/strongly agree



## We asked two questions on students' mental health:

- After a period of disruption to “normal life” how would you describe your mental health coming into university this year? (on a scale of 1-10)
- In your opinion, how has your mental health changed since coming to university this year? (It's improved/no change/it's worse)

The mean average response to students' self-assessed mental health was 5.99 and the median was 6, so we took 6 as the “average”.

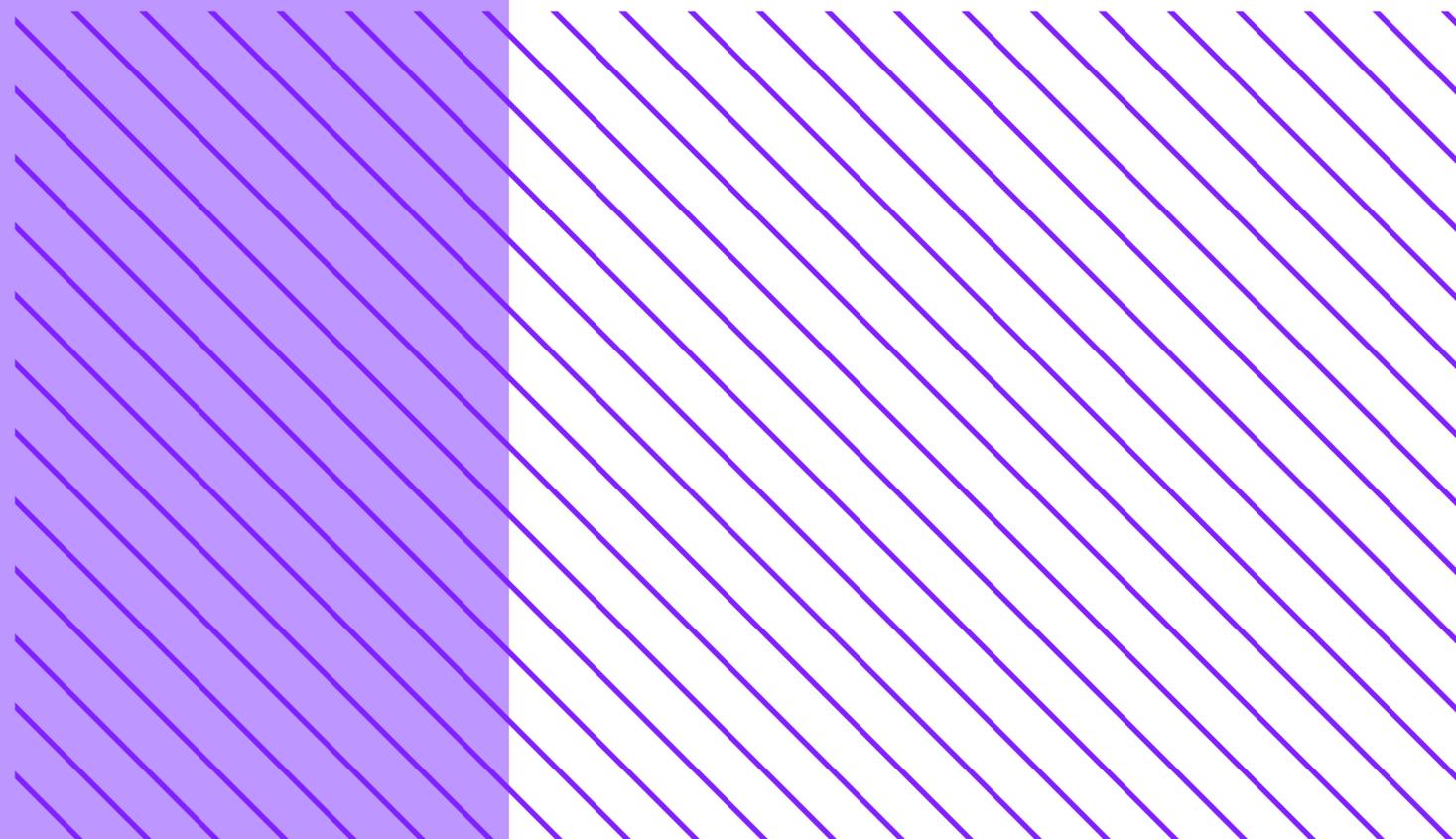
40 per cent of respondents self-assessed their mental health at 1-5 so we called this group “Below average mental health” and the remaining 60 per cent “Average and above mental health.”

38 per cent of students reported their mental health had improved since coming to university this year and throughout the survey we compare the responses of this group to those who say their mental health has got worse (26 per cent of respondents).

52 per cent of students with below average mental health agree they belong at university compared to 80 per cent of those with average and above mental health.

48 per cent of students whose mental health has got worse agree they belong at university compared to 85 per cent of students whose mental health has improved.

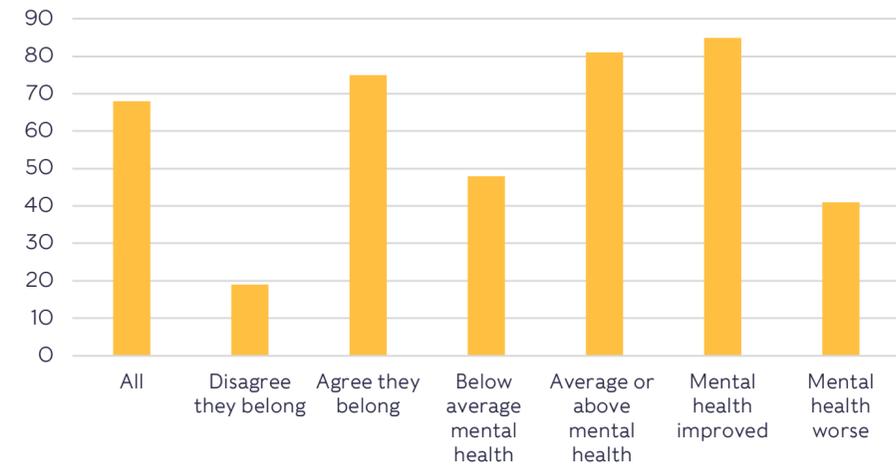
# Happiness, and loneliness



# I feel happy at university

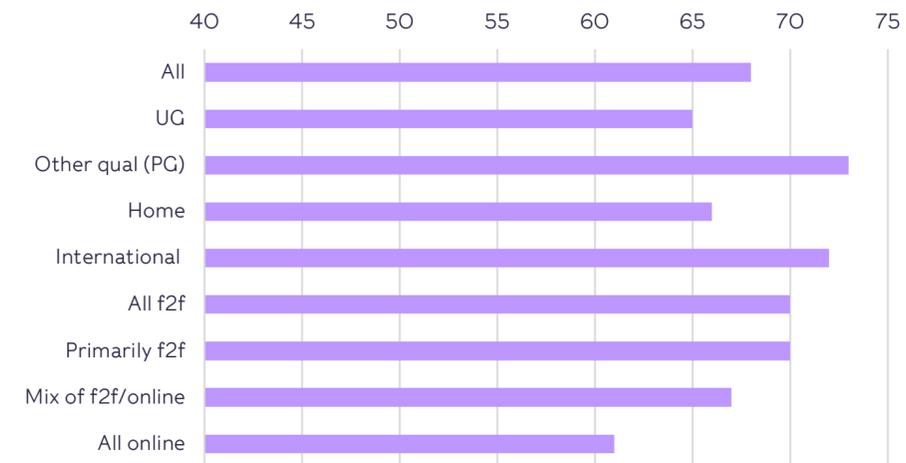
## I feel happy at university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



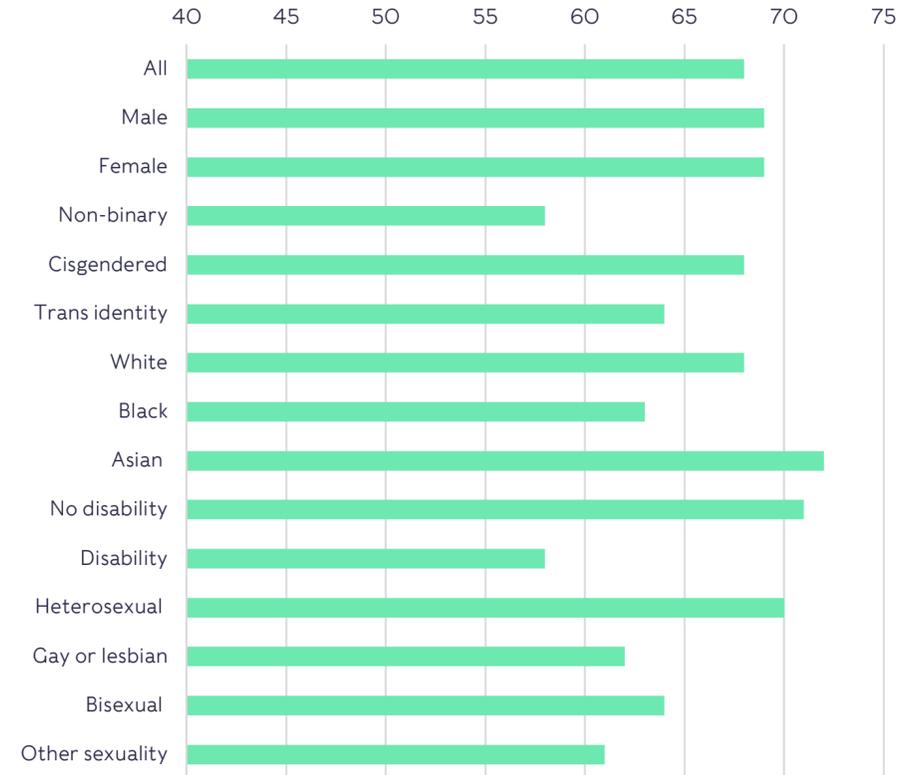
## I feel happy at university - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel happy at university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



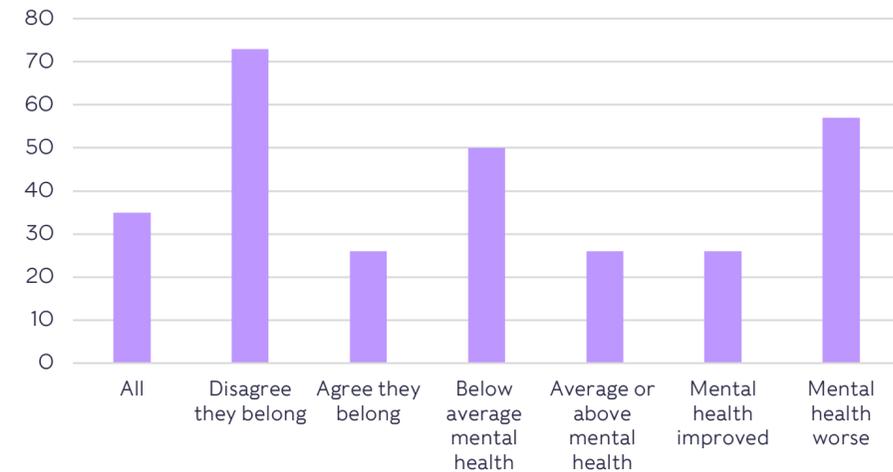
68 per cent of respondents agree they feel happy at university, rising to 75 per cent of those who rate their mental health as average or above and 85 per cent for those whose mental health has improved.

Only 19 per cent of those who feel they do not belong say they feel happy at university, 48 per cent of those who rate their mental health below average, and only 41 per cent of those who say their mental health has got worse.

# I feel lonely at university

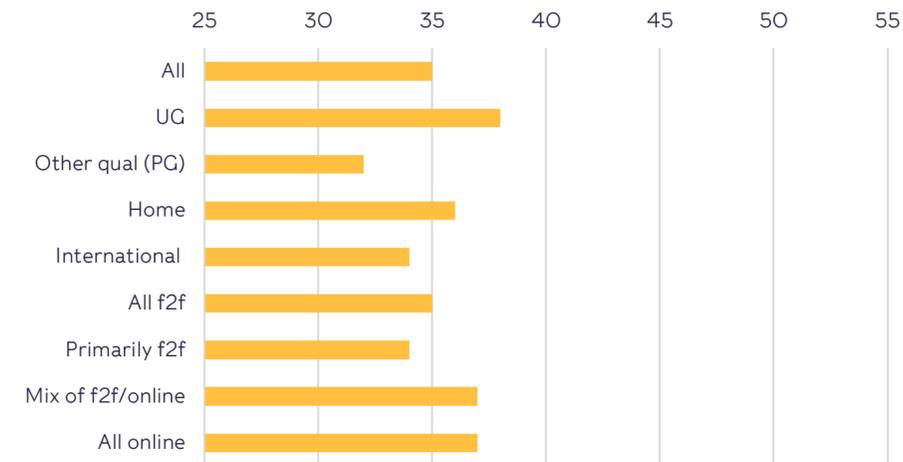
## I feel lonely at university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



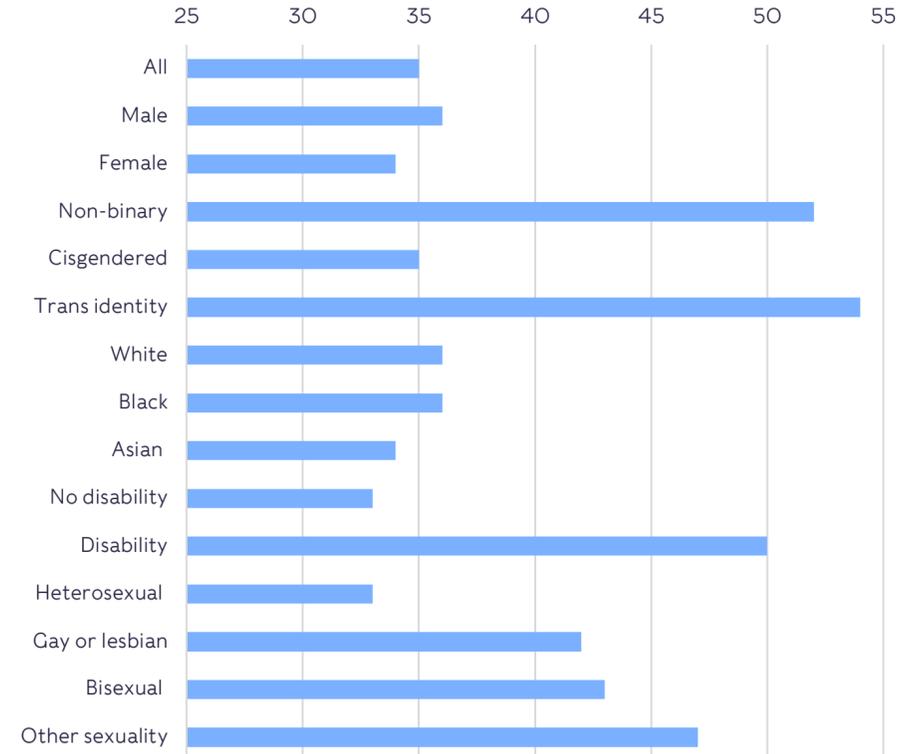
## I feel lonely at university - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel lonely at university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



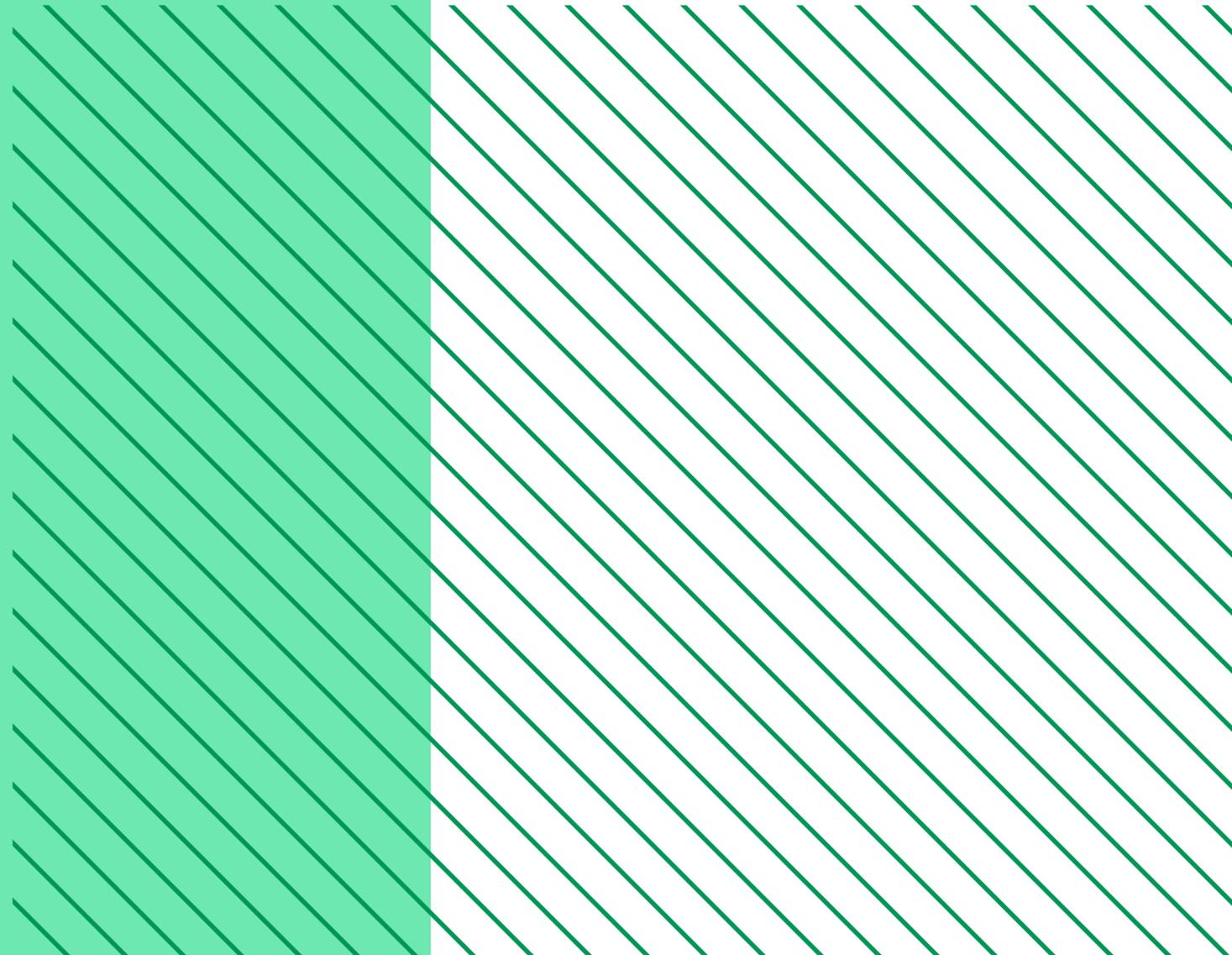
***“It is an incredibly lonely university. Very little effort is made to help people meet each other.”***

***“I feel like university is the right place for me to be, however I feel very lonely sometimes.”***

35 per cent of respondents report feeling lonely at university, rising to 73 per cent of those who do not feel they belong, 50 per cent of those with below average mental health, and 57 per cent of those whose mental health has got worse.

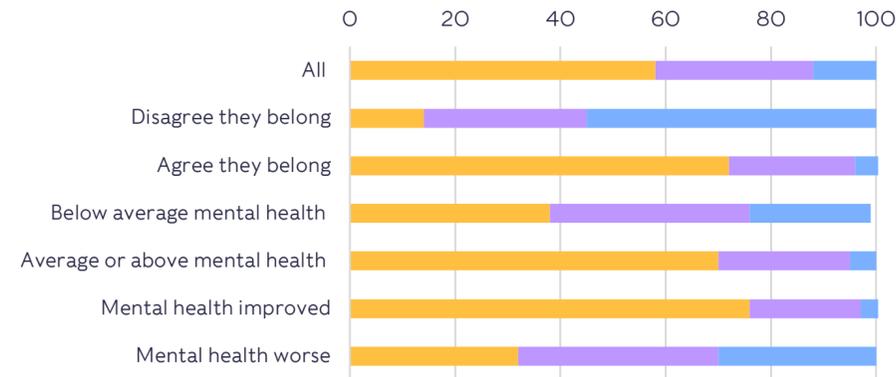
A quarter (26 per cent) of those who feel they belong still agree they feel lonely at university, and the same proportion for those with average and above mental health, and for those whose mental health has improved.

Feeling  
settled at  
university

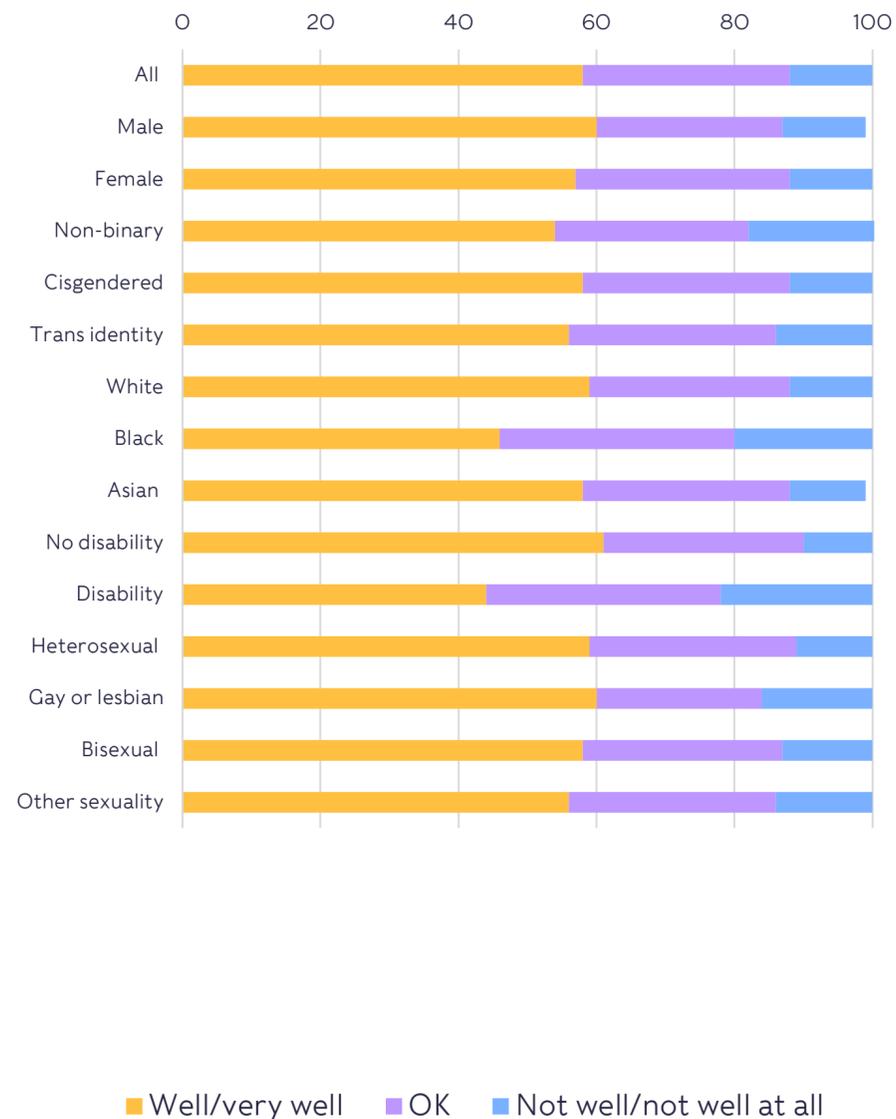


# How well do you feel you have settled (back) into university this year?

**How well do you feel you have settled (back) into university this year? - belonging**



**How well do you feel you have settled (back) into university this year? - demographics**



*“I no longer feel welcome on campus. I feel expendable and unsafe. This is causing me to be isolated at home.”*

58 per cent of respondents say they have settled well or very well into university this year, and a further 30 per cent say they have settled OK.

Only 14 per cent of those who feel they do not belong have settled well or very well into university, compared to 72 per cent of those who feel they belong.

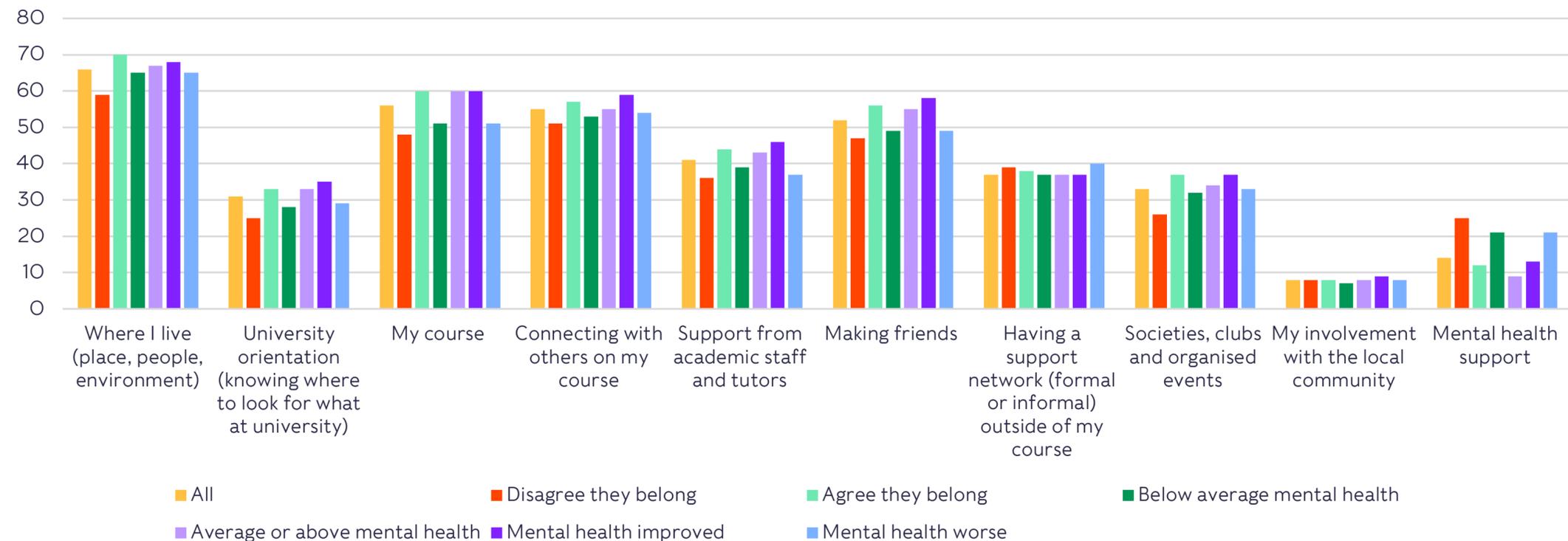
38 per cent of those with below average mental health and 32 per cent of those whose mental health is worse say they have settled well or very well into university this year, compared to 70 per cent of those with average and above mental health and 76 per cent of those whose mental health has improved.

**How well do you feel you have settled (back) into university this year? - modes**



# What helps students to feel settled?

**Which of the following areas have played a significant part in how “settled” you feel at university?**

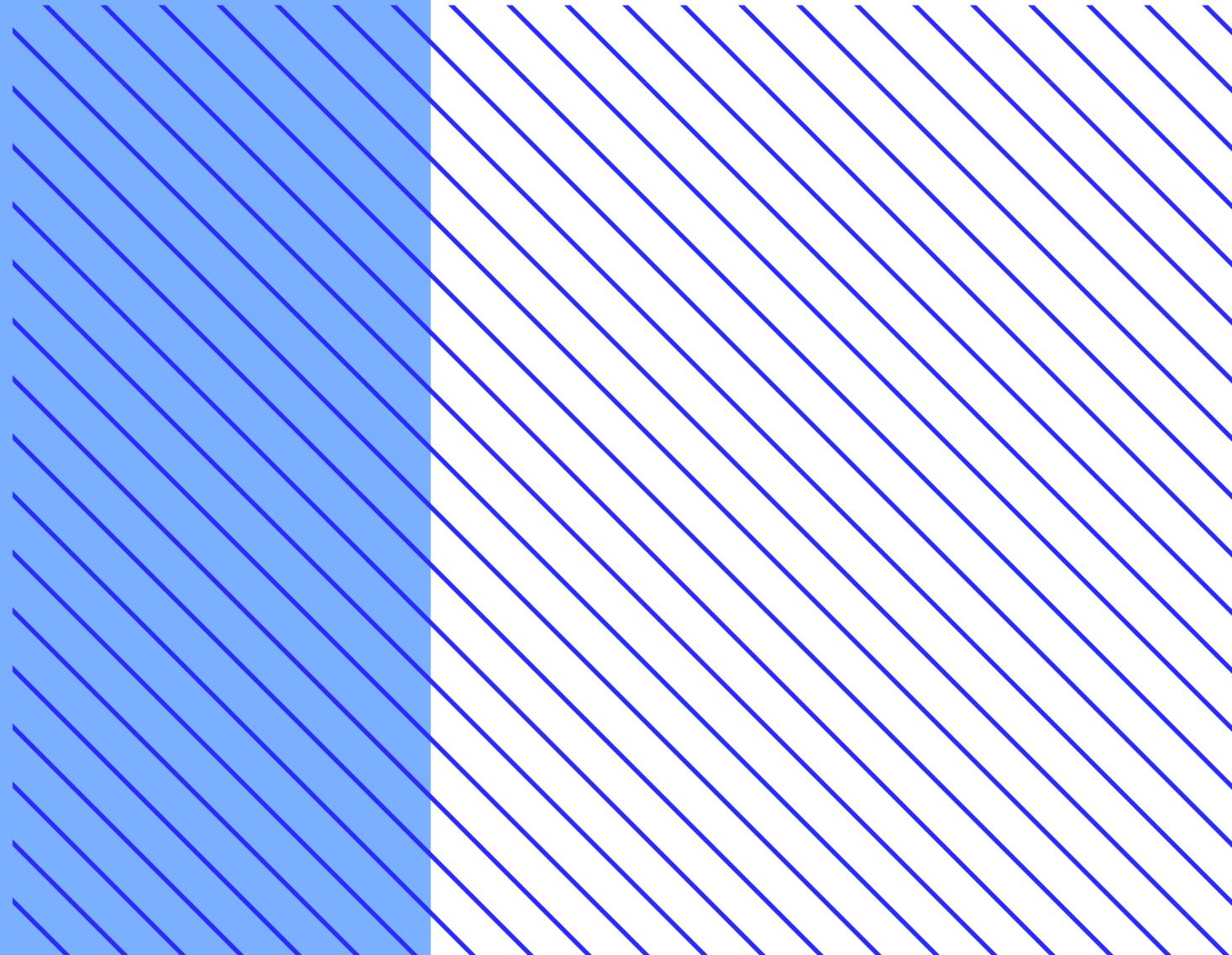


Students’ living circumstances plays a significant role for two thirds (66 per cent) of respondents in how settled they feel, followed by the course, (56 per cent), connecting with others on the course (55 per cent) and making friends (52 per cent).

Among students who disagree they belong, a quarter cite mental health support as playing a significant part in how settled they feel, compared to 12 per cent of those who feel they belong.

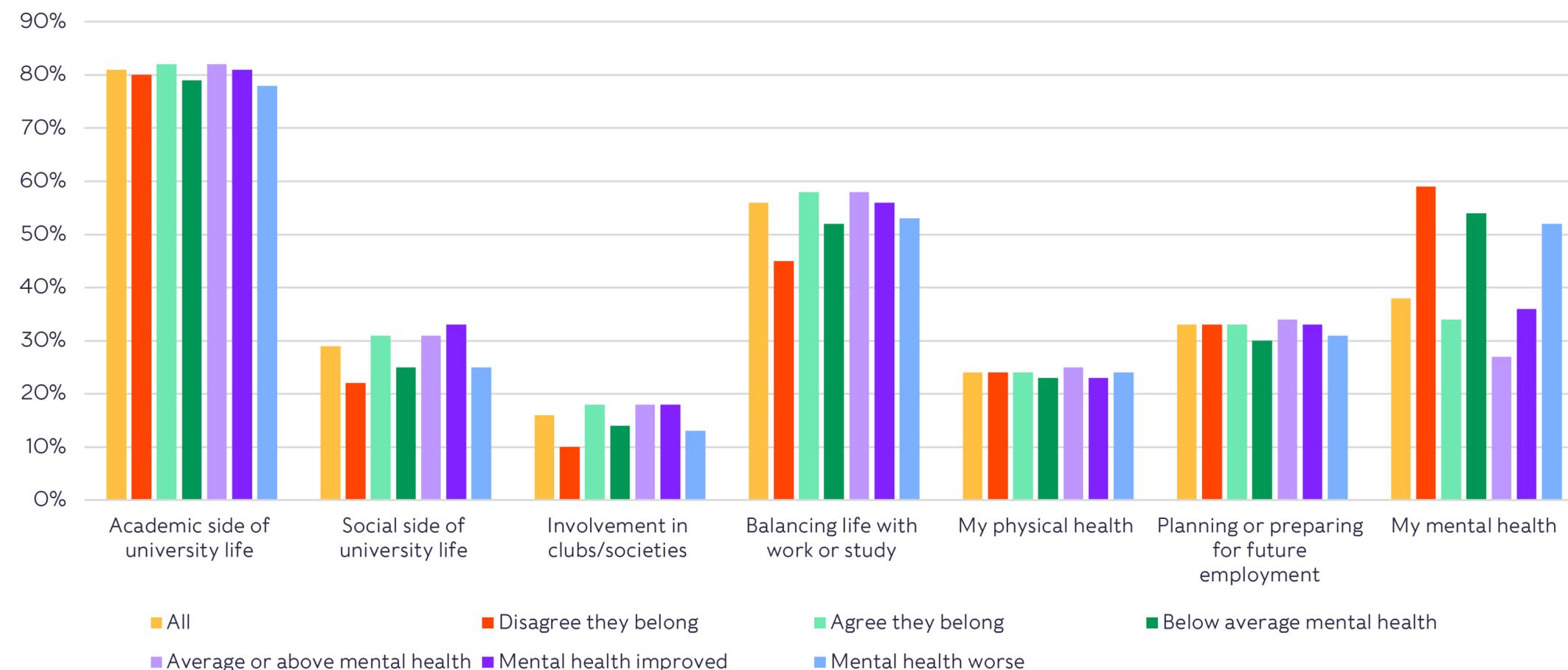
Students who rate their mental health below average and students whose mental health has got worse are also more likely than their comparators to select mental health support.

**Priorities and  
academic  
confidence**



# Which of these areas are priorities for you this year?

**Which of these areas are priorities for you this year?**



Respondents could select up to three priorities.

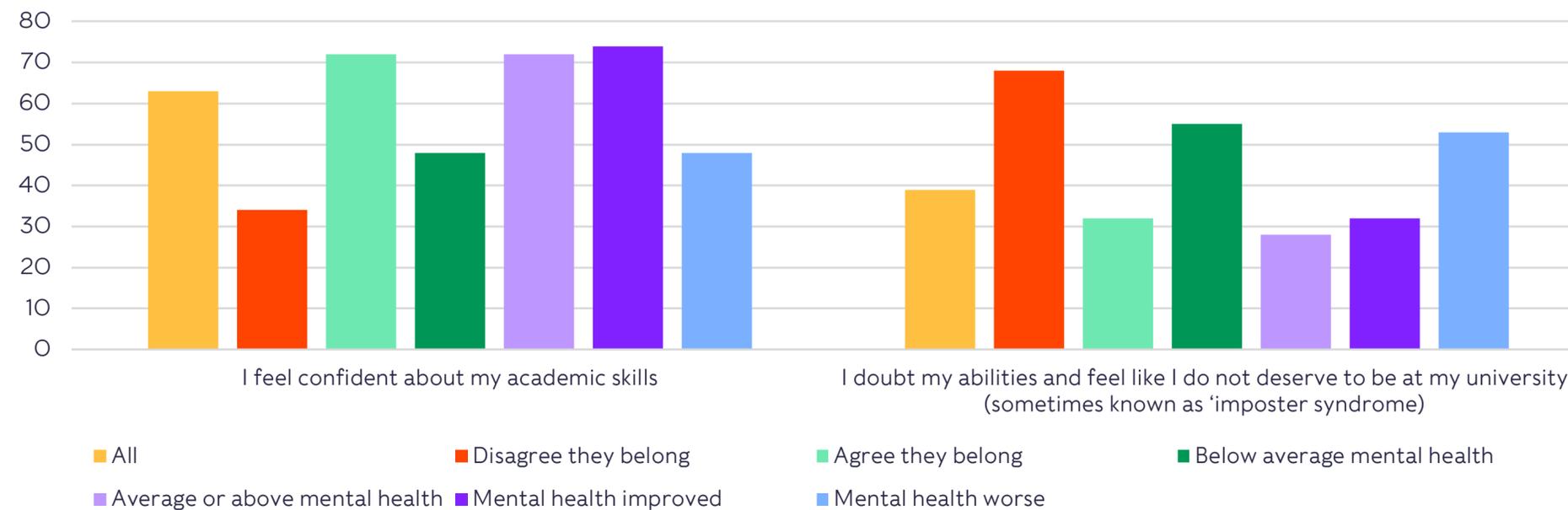
The most popular choice was the academic side of university life (81 per cent of respondents) followed by balancing life with work or study (56 per cent).

“My mental health” was the third most popular response overall with 38 per cent of all respondents selecting this, rising to 59 per cent of those who say they do not belong, 54 per cent of those with below average mental health and 52 per cent of those whose mental health has got worse.

Undergraduates are more likely than postgraduates to select “the social side of university life” (33 per cent versus 21 per cent) and for postgraduates “planning for future employment” is their third most selected priority (45 per cent vs 27 per cent of undergraduates) pushing mental health to fourth place for postgraduate students.

# Academic confidence and belonging

**Academic confidence and belonging**



*“Sometimes I do get a feeling of “imposter syndrome” but I have a great support network of friends, classmates and lectures to support me and encourage me to feel I belong.”*

*“I didn’t get the grades in order to get into my university so I constantly feel as if I am not good/intelligent enough to belong.”*

Around two thirds (63 per cent) of all respondents agree or strongly agree they feel confident about their academic skills.

39 per cent of all respondents agree that “I doubt my abilities and feel like I do not deserve to be at my university (sometimes known as ‘imposter syndrome)’”

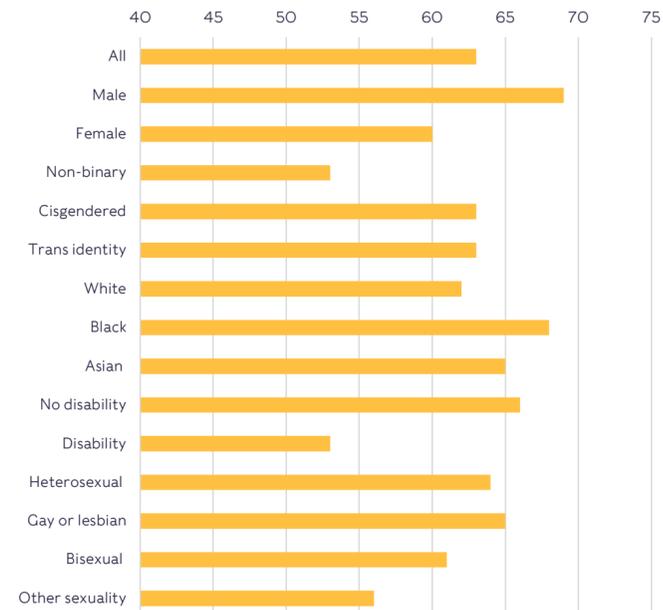
34 per cent of those who do not agree they belong agree they feel confident about their academic skills, versus 72 per cent of those who agree they belong.

68 per cent of those who do not agree they belong agree they experience “imposter syndrome” compared to 32 per cent of those who agree they belong.

# Academic confidence - splits

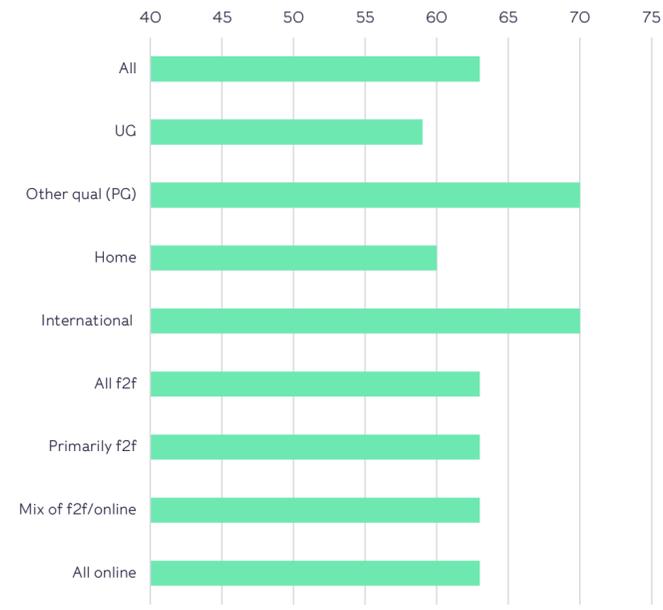
## I feel confident about my academic skills - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



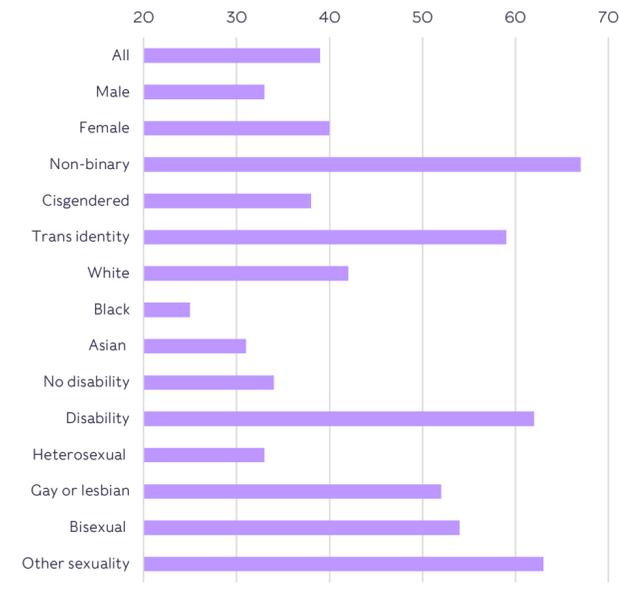
## I feel confident about my academic skills - modes

% agree/strongly agree



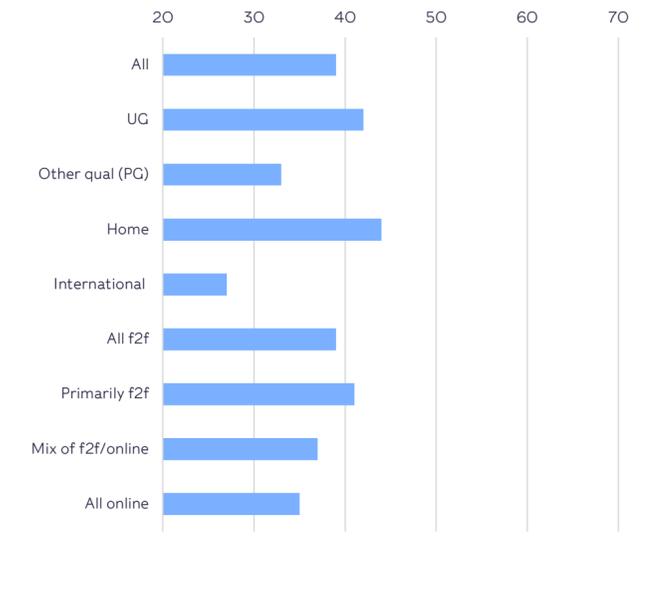
## I doubt my abilities/imposter syndrome - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



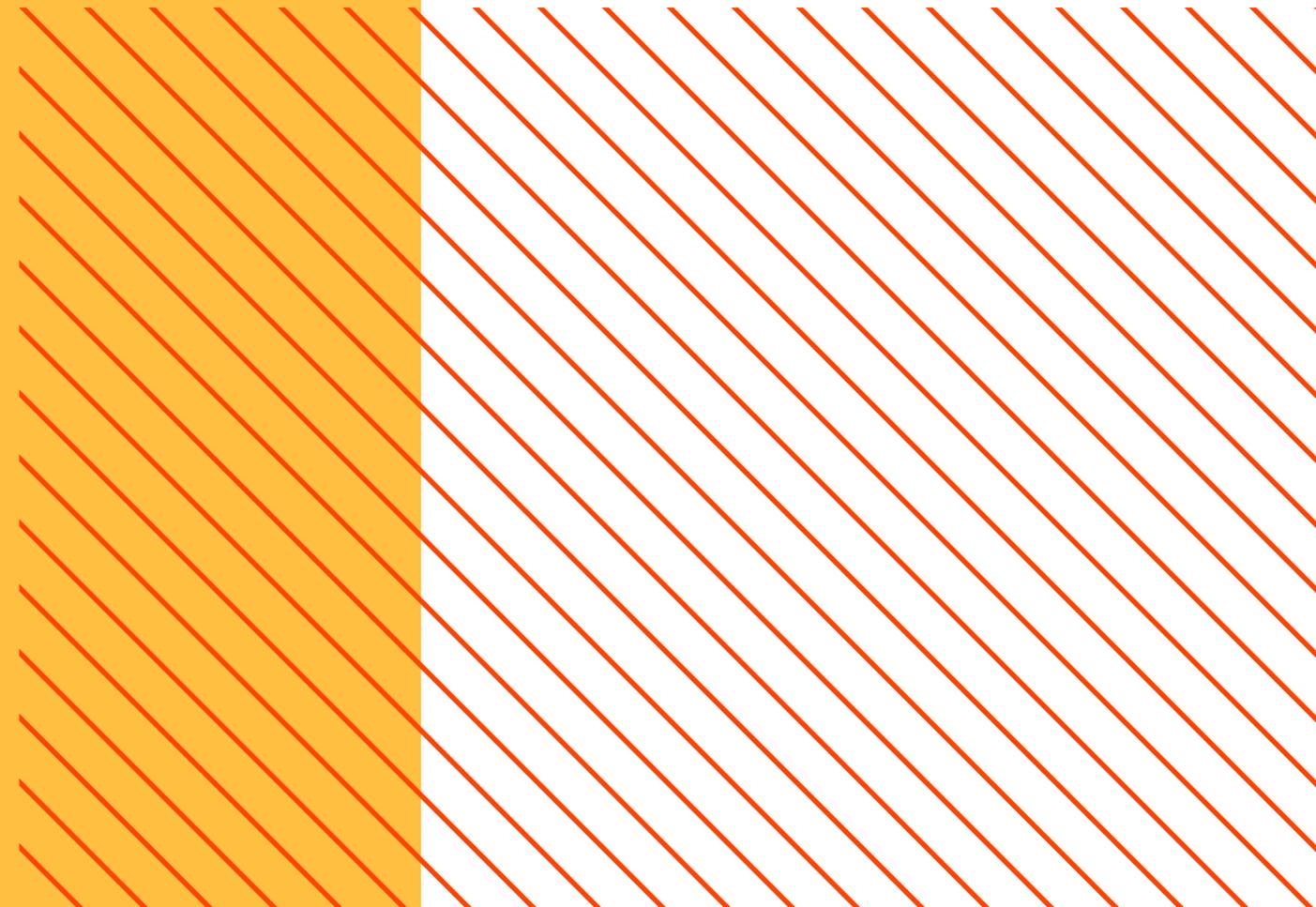
## I doubt my abilities/imposter syndrome - modes

% agree/strongly agree



*“My ADHD wrecked some havoc on my studies, so I often feel some amount of impostor syndrome or feeling like I lack basic knowledge, but I have been given every opportunity to fix that.”*

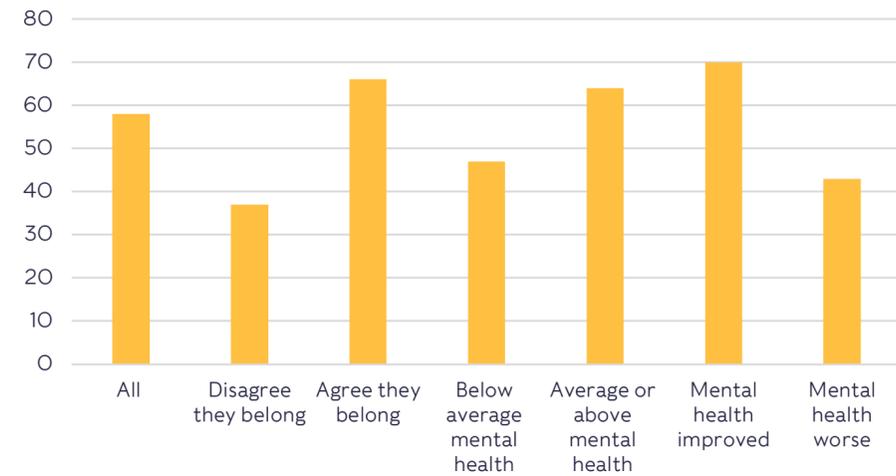
# Course provision



# My course offers me the flexibility I need

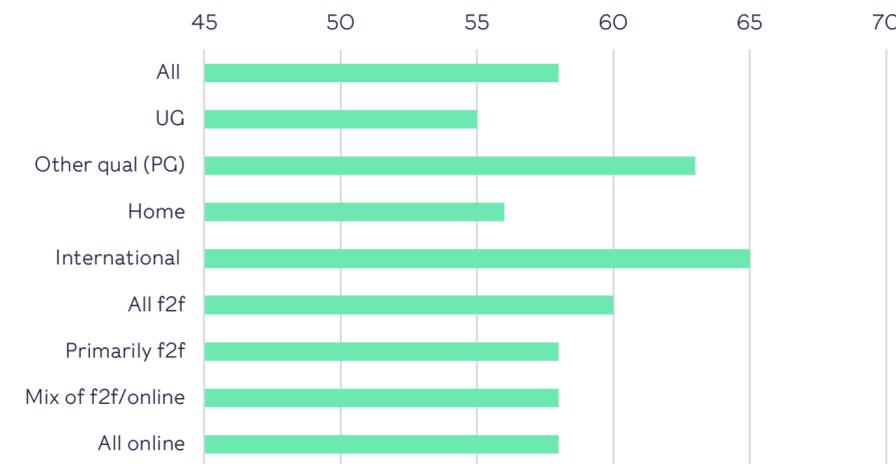
## My course offers me the flexibility I need - belonging

% agree/strongly agree



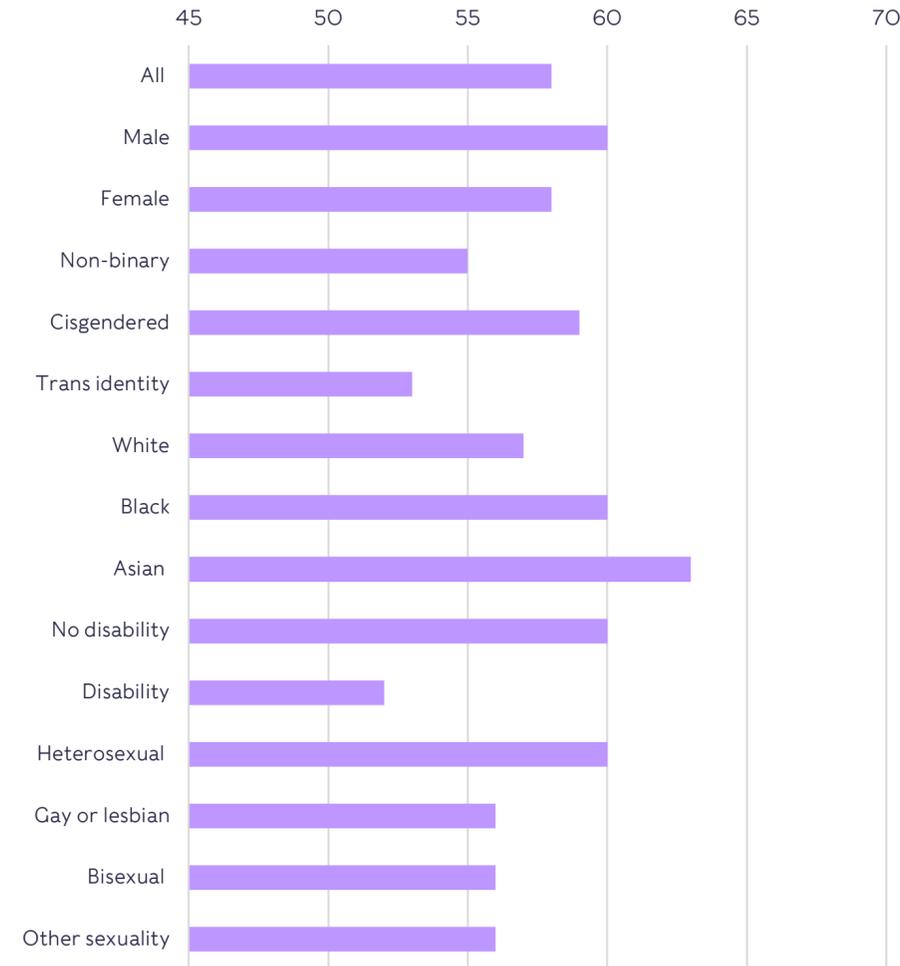
## My course offers me the flexibility I need - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## My course offers me the flexibility I need - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



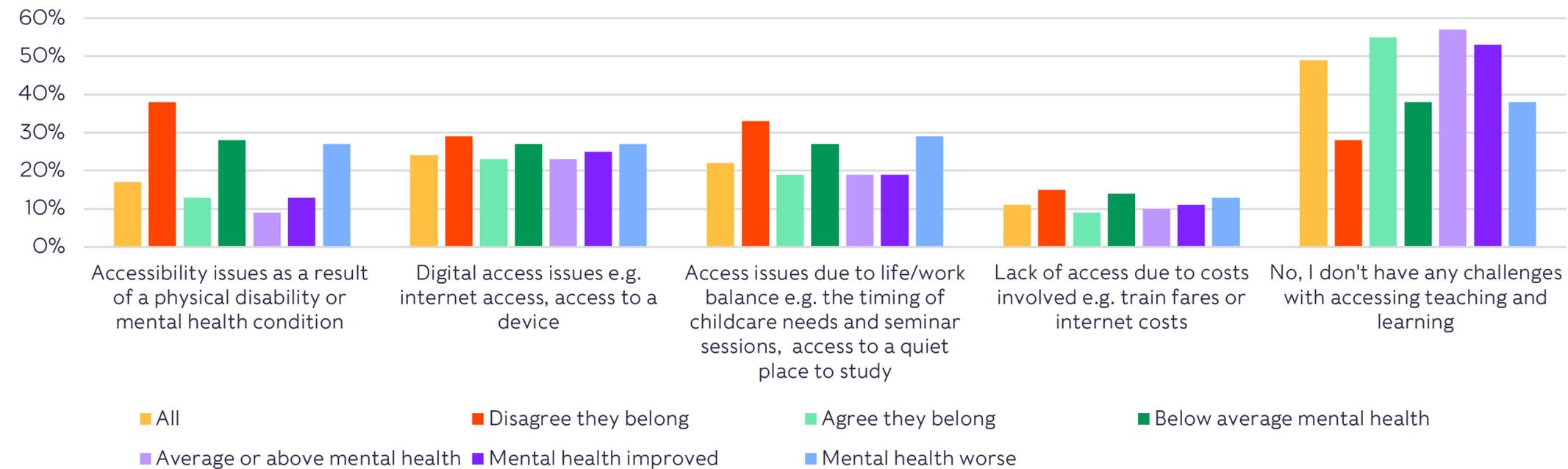
58 per cent of all respondents agree their course offers the flexibility they need.

37 per cent of students who do not feel they belong agree, compared to 66 per cent for those who feel they belong.

47 per cent of those with below average mental health agree, compared to 64 per cent of those with average and above mental health; of those whose mental health is worse 43 per cent agree and among those for whom it has improved 70 per cent agree.

Disabled and trans students are less likely to agree their course offers the flexibility they need, and international students are more likely to agree.

## Have any of these things affected your ability to access teaching and learning? - belonging



We asked what, if anything, had affected students' ability to access teaching and learning either in a physical or virtual setting.

Only half of all students (49 per cent) say they do not have any issues with accessing teaching and learning), falling to 28 per cent for those who do not feel they belong.

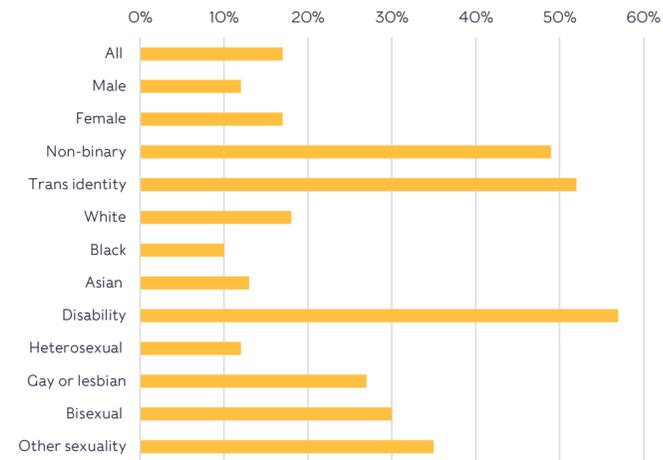
A quarter (24 per cent) report digital access issues, slightly higher (29 per cent) for those who do not feel they belong.

One in five (22 per cent report access issues due to work/life balance), rising to 33 per cent for those who do not feel they belong, and 27 per cent for those with below average mental health.

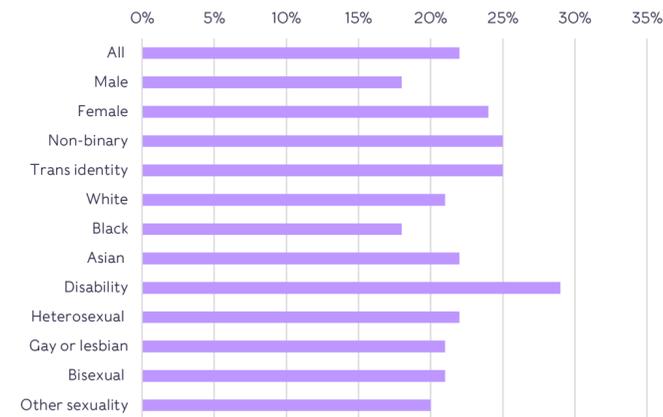
17 per cent report access issues due to physical disability or mental health condition - rising to 38 per cent for those who do not feel they belong. For those with below average mental health it is 28 per cent.

# Accessibility and demographic splits

## Accessibility issues as a result of a physical disability or mental health condition - demographics



## Digital access issues e.g. internet access, access to a device - demographics



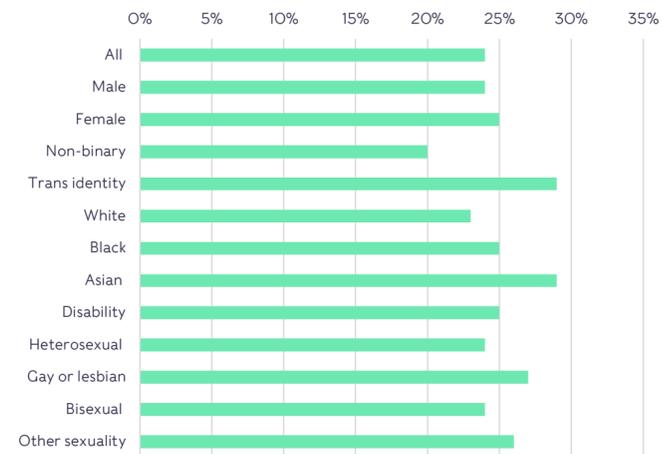
*“The hostility to wheelchair users makes me feel like the university doesn’t think I belong here.”*

Non-binary (28 per cent), trans (24 per cent) and disabled students (22 per cent) are much less likely to say they do not have any issues with accessibility.

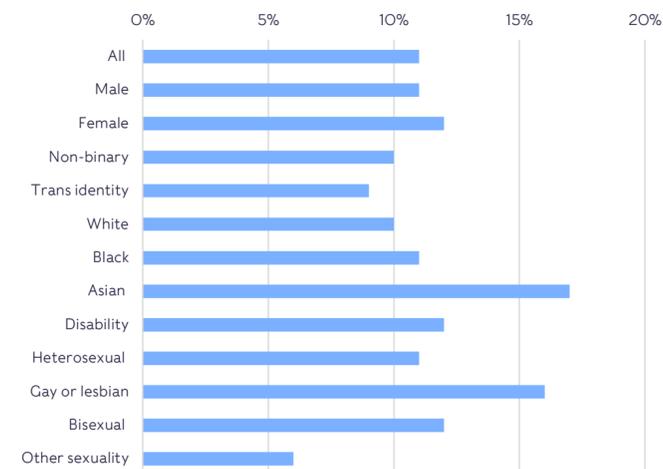
A full 57 per cent of students with a disability report access issues due to a physical disability or mental health condition.

For non-binary students it is 49 per cent, and for those with trans identity it is 52 per cent.

## Access issues due to life/work balance e.g. the timing of childcare needs and seminar sessions, access to a quiet place to study - demographics

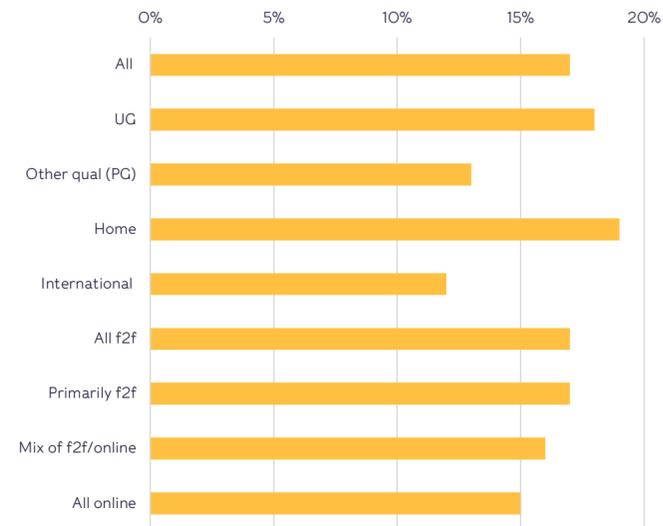


## Lack of access due to costs involved e.g. train fares or internet costs - demographics

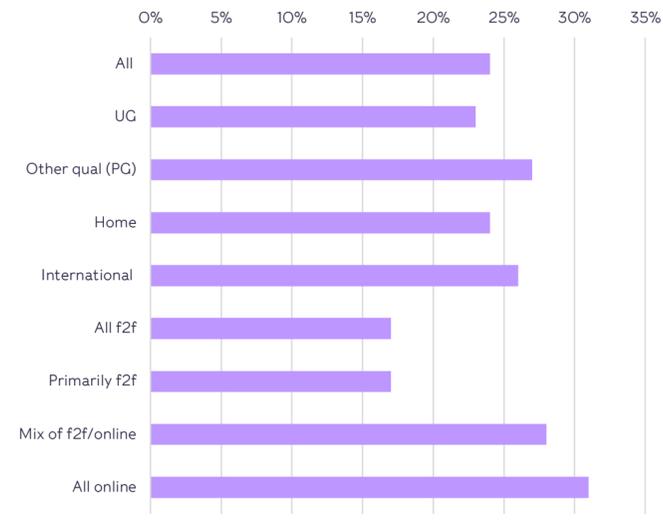


There are differences by sexuality here too with only 12 per cent of heterosexual students reporting access issues due to physical disability or mental health condition compared to 27 per cent of gay or lesbian students, 30 per cent of bisexual students, and 35 per cent of students with another sexuality.

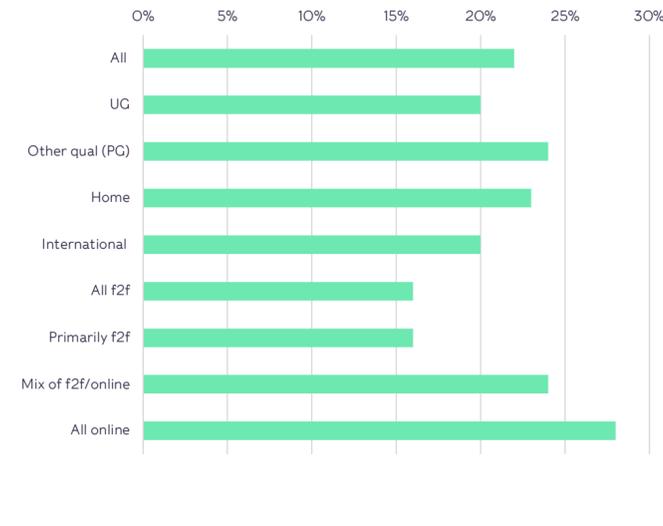
**Accessibility issues as a result of a physical disability or mental health condition - modes**



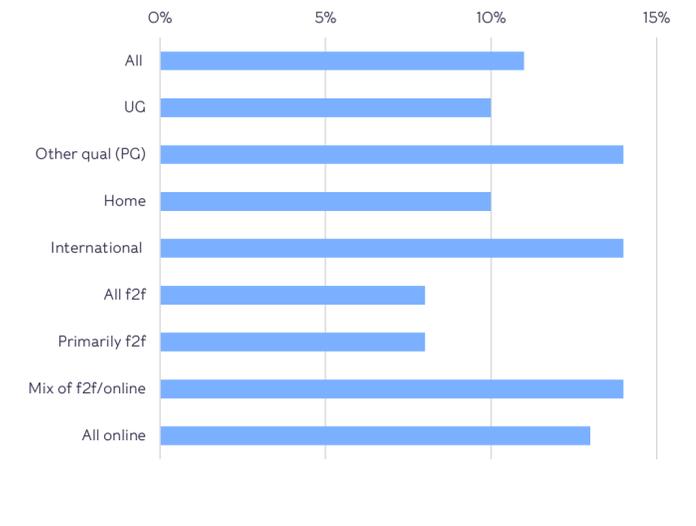
**Digital access issues e.g. internet access, access to a device - modes**



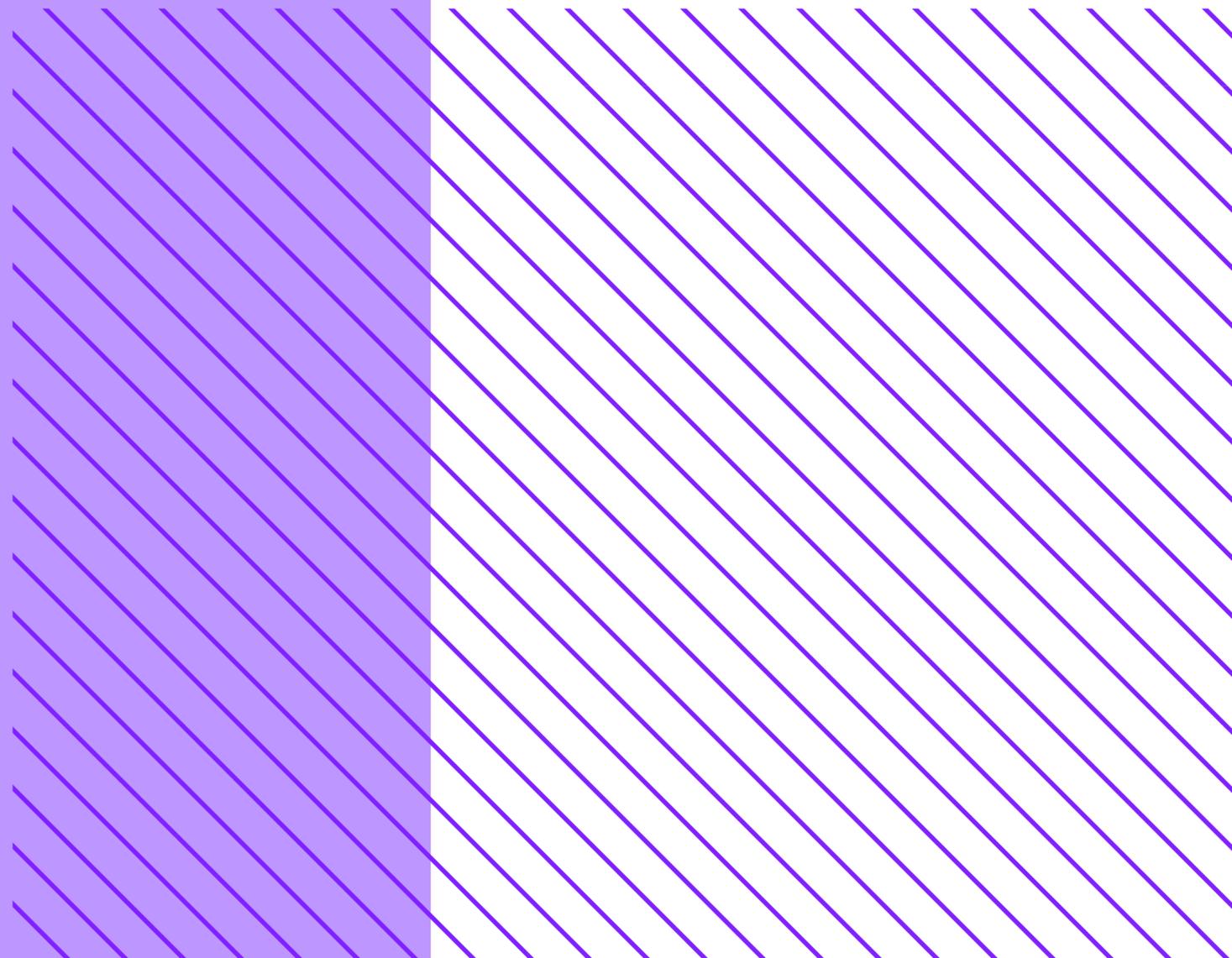
**Access issues due to life/work balance e.g. the timing of childcare needs and seminar sessions, access to a quiet place to study - modes**



**Lack of access due to costs involved e.g. train fares or internet costs - modes**

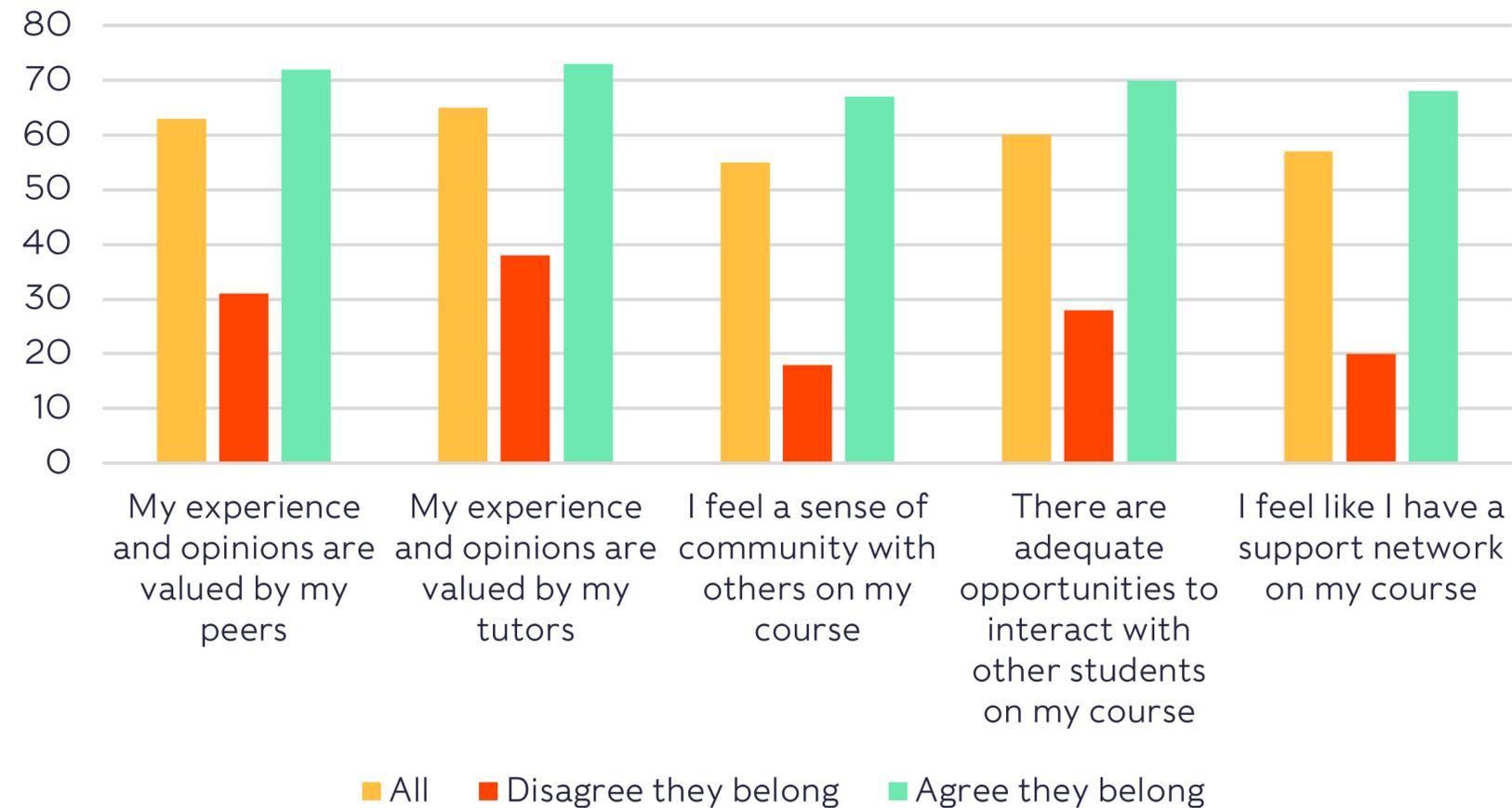


# Connection on the course



# Course connection and belonging

## Connection on the course - belonging



***“Always feel the endless support from staff and lecturers wanting the best for us and our future.”***

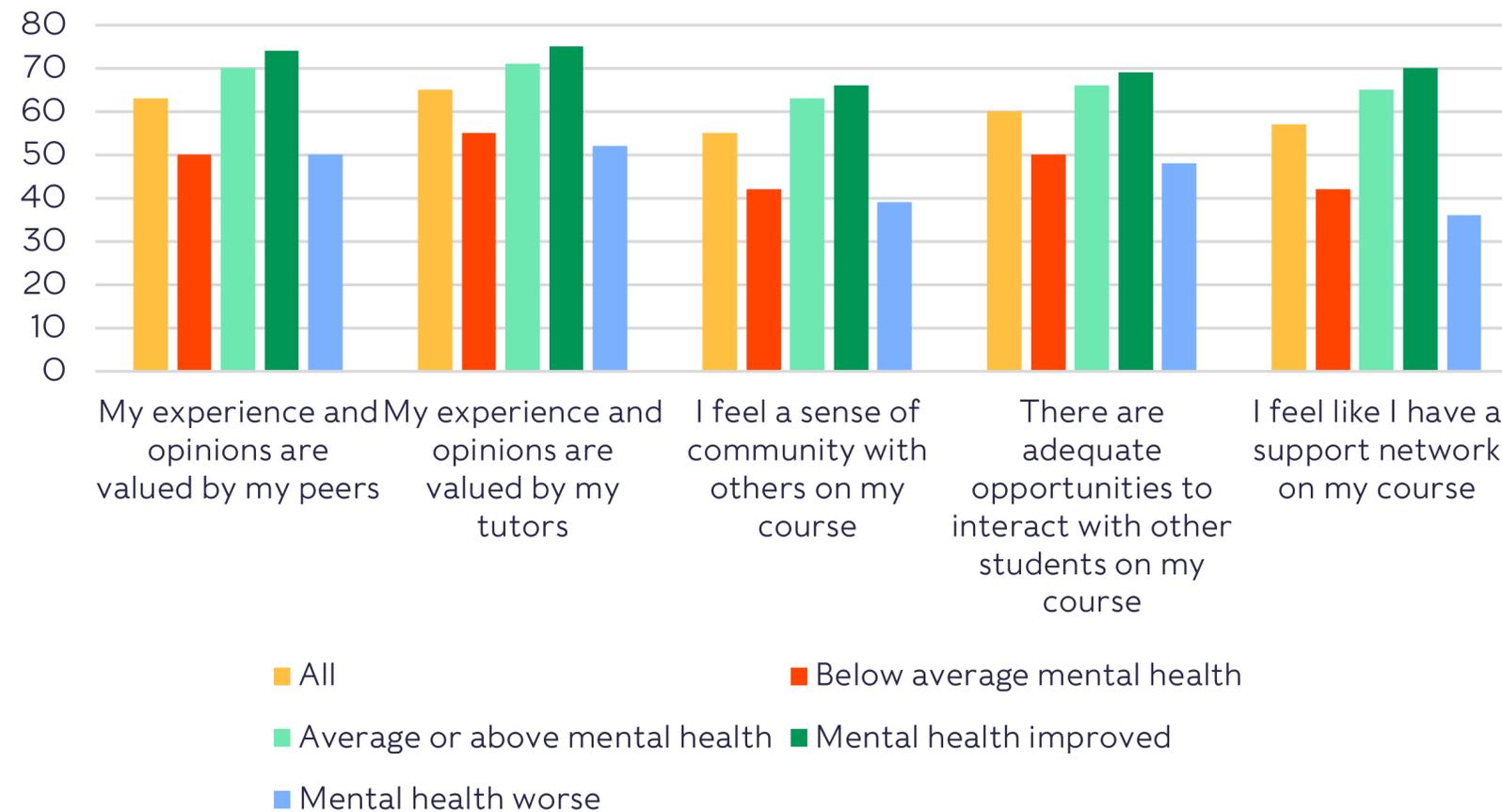
Around two third of respondents agree their opinions are valued by peers (63 per cent) and by tutors (65 per cent). Students who do not feel they belong are less likely to feel their opinions are valued both by peers (31 per cent) and tutors (38 per cent).

Only 55 per cent overall say they feel a sense of community with others on their course. This rises to 67 per cent for those who say they belong, and falls to 18 per cent for those who do not.

Three in five (60 per cent) agree there are adequate opportunities to interact with other students and 57 per cent agree they feel like they have a support network on their course.

Only 28 per cent of those who do not agree they belong agree there are adequate opportunities to interact with other students and only one in five (20 per cent) agree they feel like they have a support network on their course.

## Connection on the course - mental health



Half of students who report below average mental health agree their opinions are valued by peers, and 55 per cent agree that their opinions are valued by tutors.

70 per cent of students whose mental health is average or above agree their opinions are valued by peers, and 75 per cent agree that their opinions are valued by tutors.

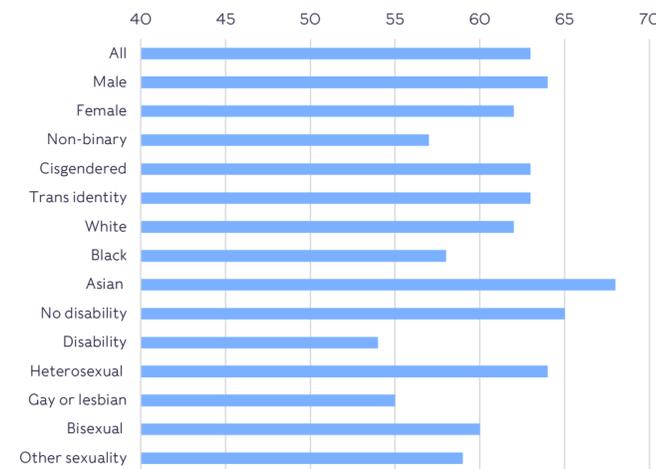
42 per cent of students whose mental health is below average agree they feel a sense of community with others on their course, and 39 per cent whose mental health has got worse feel this way.

50 per cent of students whose mental health is below average agree there are adequate opportunities to interact with other students, and 42 per cent agree they have a support network on their course.

# Course connection - demographic splits

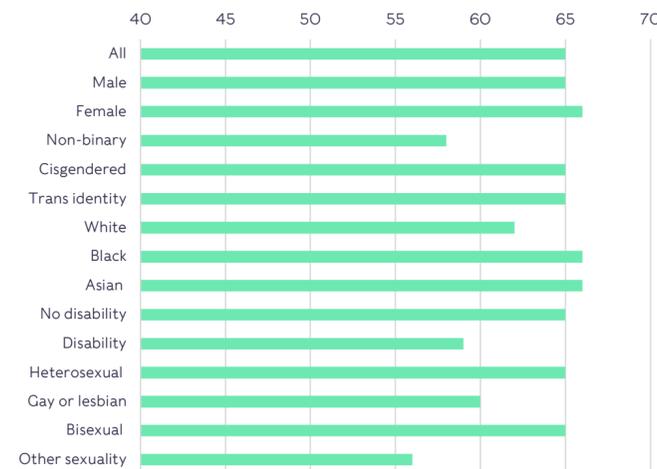
## My experience and opinions are valued by my peers - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



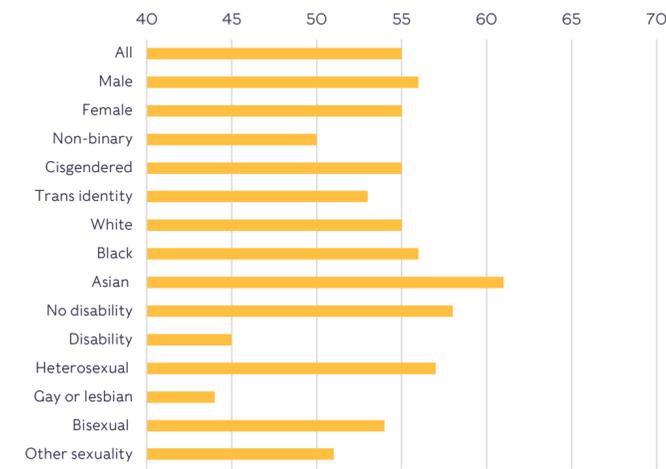
## My experience and opinions are valued by my tutors - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel a sense of community with others on my course - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



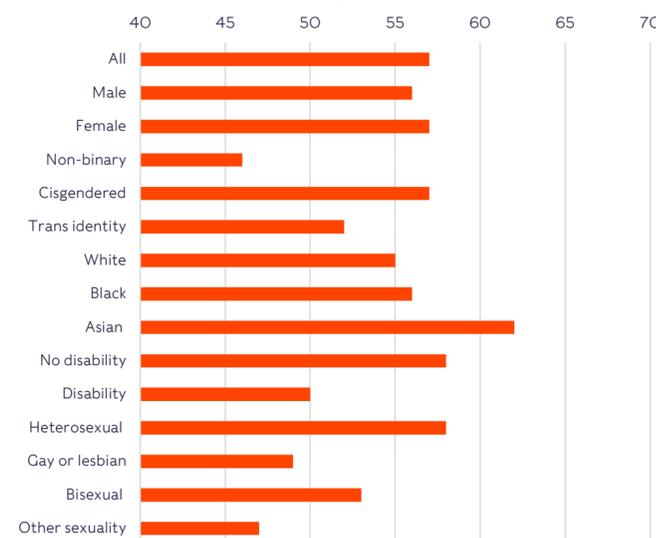
Disabled students are less likely to feel their opinions are valued, to feel a sense of community, to feel there are adequate opportunities for interaction, and to feel they have a support network on the course.

Non-binary students are less likely to feel valued, a sense of community, and to feel they have a support network.

Gay or lesbian students, and students who define their sexuality another way are less likely to feel a sense of community on the course and to say they have a support network.

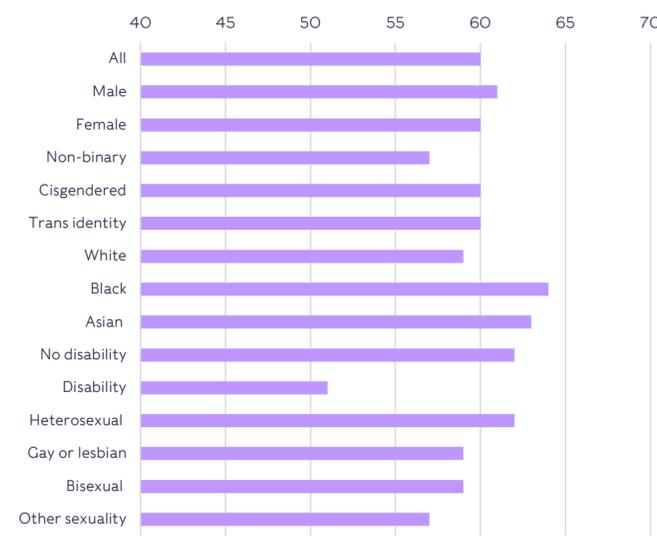
## There are adequate opportunities to interact with other students on my course - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel like I have a support network on my course - demographics

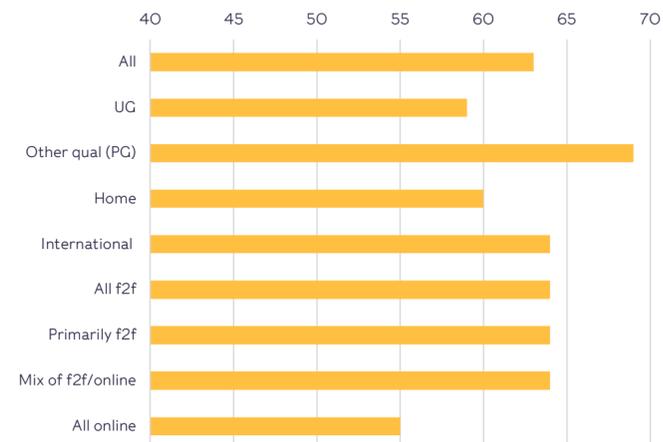
% agree/strongly agree



# Course connection - modal splits

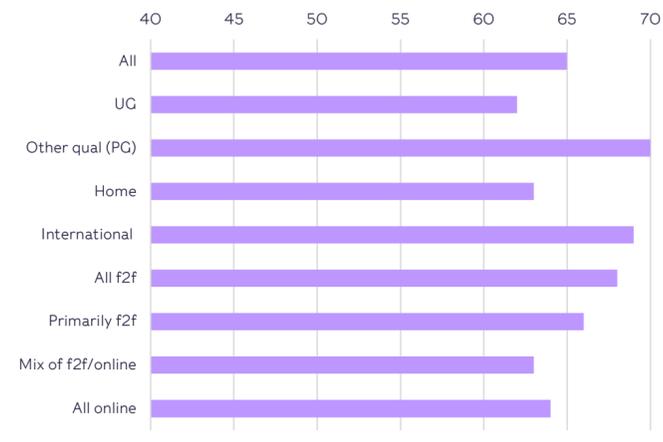
## My experience and opinions are valued by my peers - modes

% agree/strongly agree



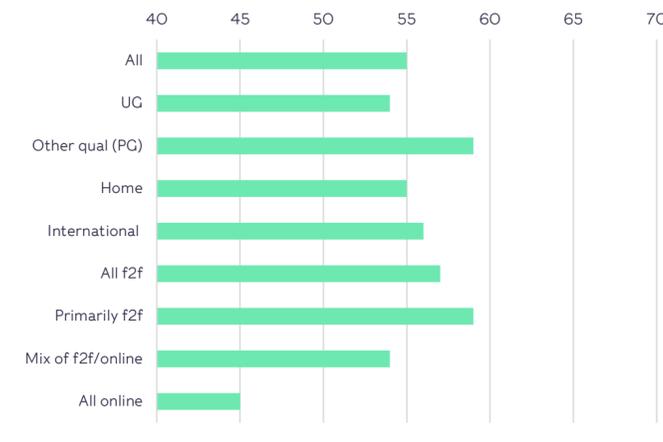
## My experience and opinions are valued by my tutors - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel a sense of community with others on my course - modes

% agree/strongly agree

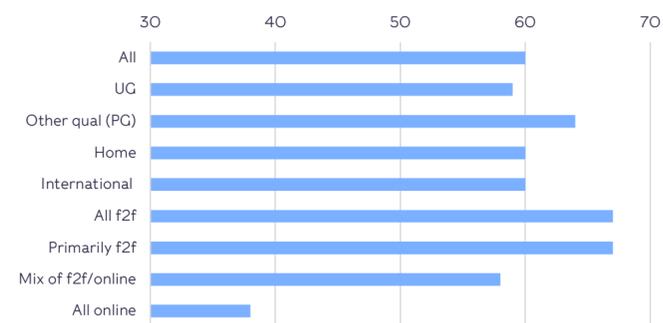


Postgraduates are more likely to feel their opinions are valued, a sense of community, and like they have a support network than undergraduates.

Students whose course is entirely online are less likely to feel their opinions are valued by peers - but as likely to feel they are valued by tutors. They are also less likely to feel a sense of community, agree there is sufficient opportunity for interaction, or that they have a support network.

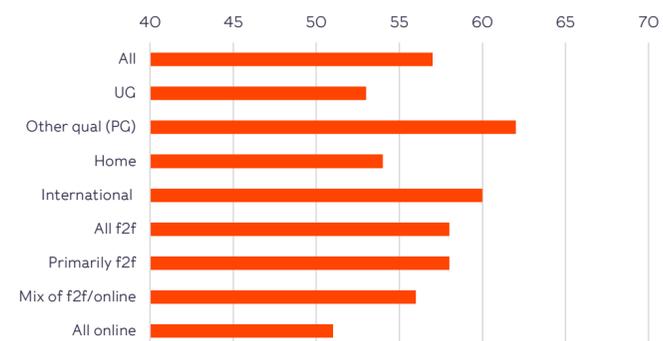
## There are adequate opportunities to interact with other students on my course - modes

% agree/strongly agree

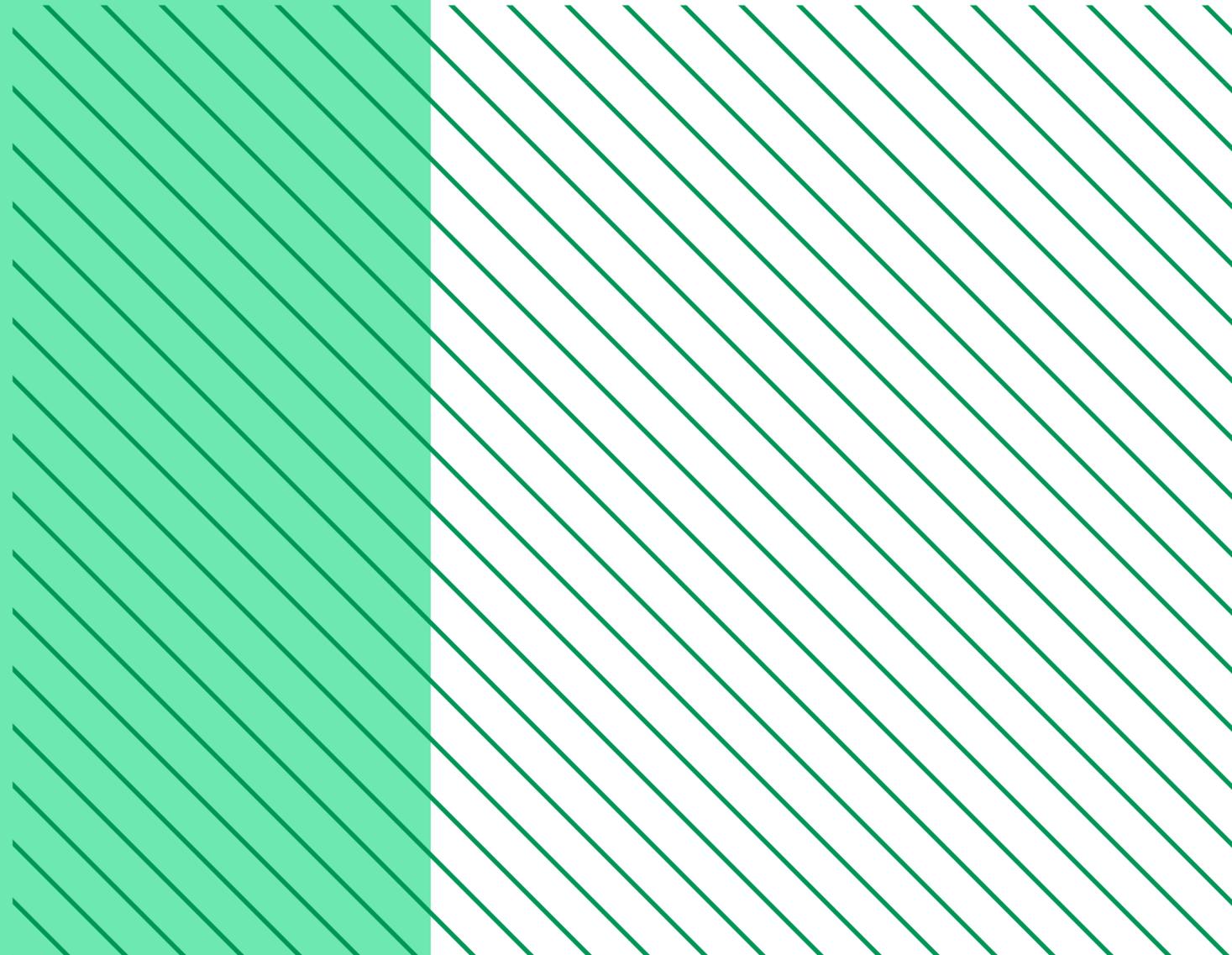


## I feel like I have a support network on my course - modes

% agree/strongly agree

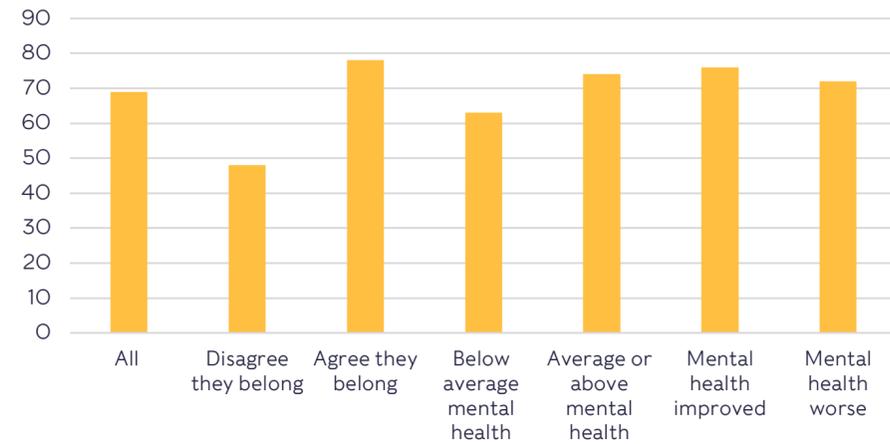


# Inclusion on the course



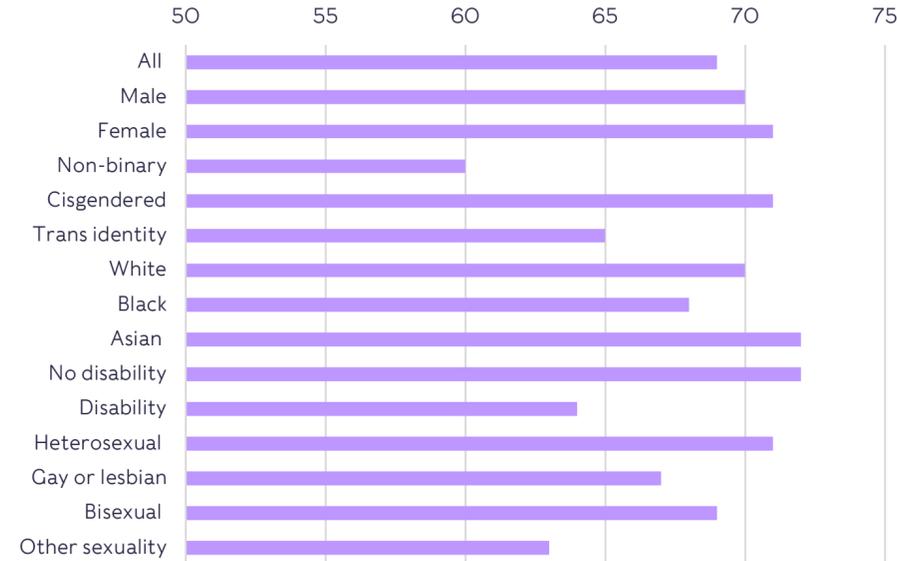
## The content being taught on my course includes varied, diverse voices in this field - belonging

% agree/strongly agree



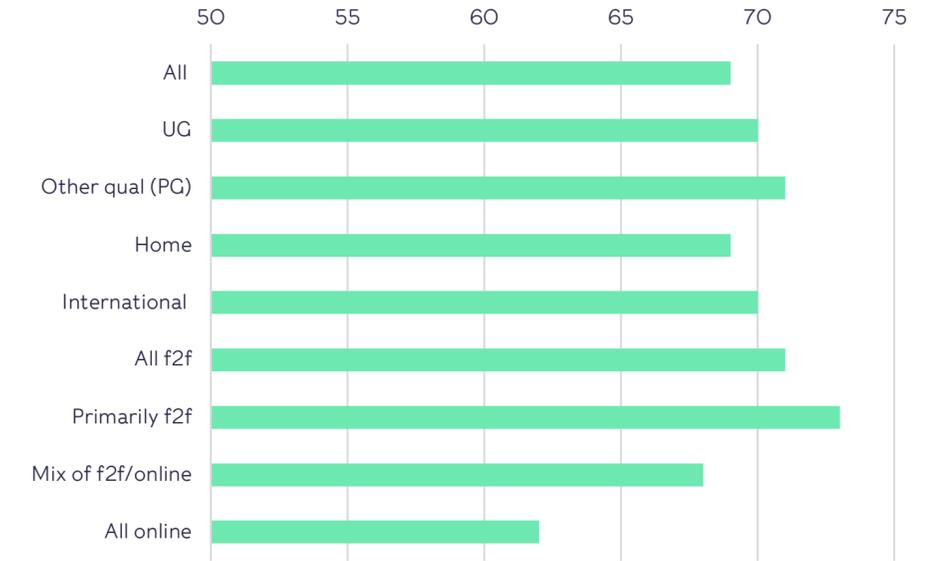
## The content being taught on my course includes varied, diverse voices in this field - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## The content being taught on my course includes varied, diverse voices in this field - modes

% agree/strongly agree



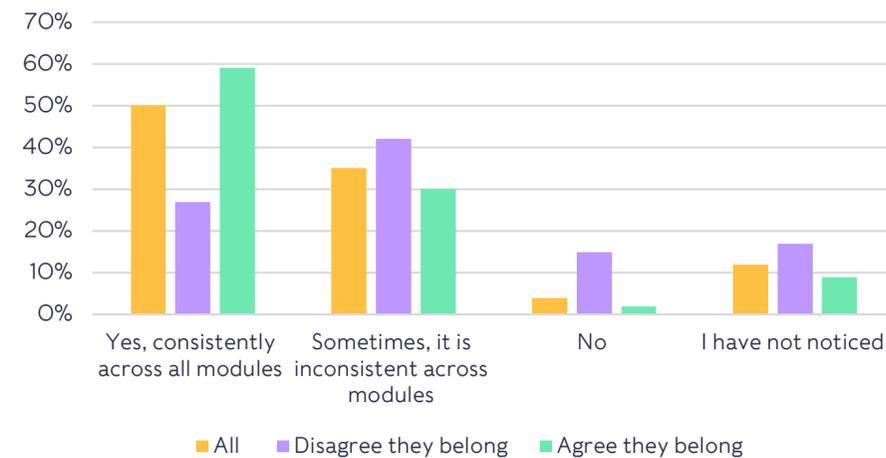
We asked respondents whether they agree that the content on their course includes varied, diverse voices in their field, and 69 per cent agreed.

78 per cent of those who feel they belong agreed, compared to 48 per cent of those who do not feel they belong.

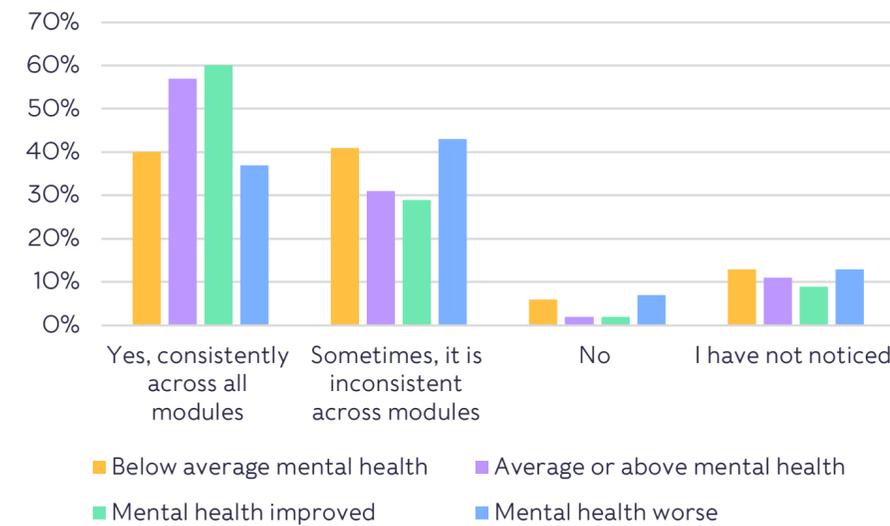
Women, non-binary, and trans-identified students were less likely to agree, as well as disabled students and students who identify their sexuality a different way.

# Inclusive content - belonging and mental health

## In your opinion, is the content being taught on your course inclusive - belonging



## In your opinion, is the content being taught on your course inclusive - mental health



We defined “inclusive” as “help[ing] to create a space in which you feel comfortable and confident to be yourself” for this question and for the following question on inclusive teaching style.

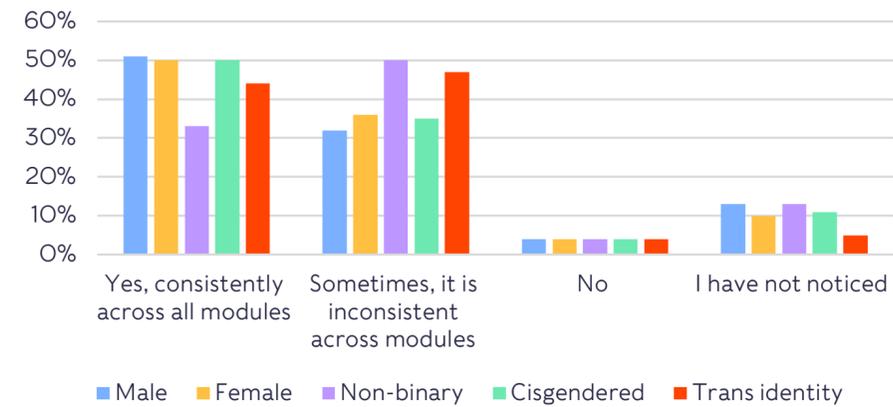
Half of all students agree their course content is consistently inclusive - 27 per cent for those who do not feel they belong and 59 per cent for those who do. A further 35 per cent say inclusive content is inconsistent across modules.

40 per cent of those with below average mental health and 37 per cent of those whose mental health has got worse agree their course content is consistently inclusive.

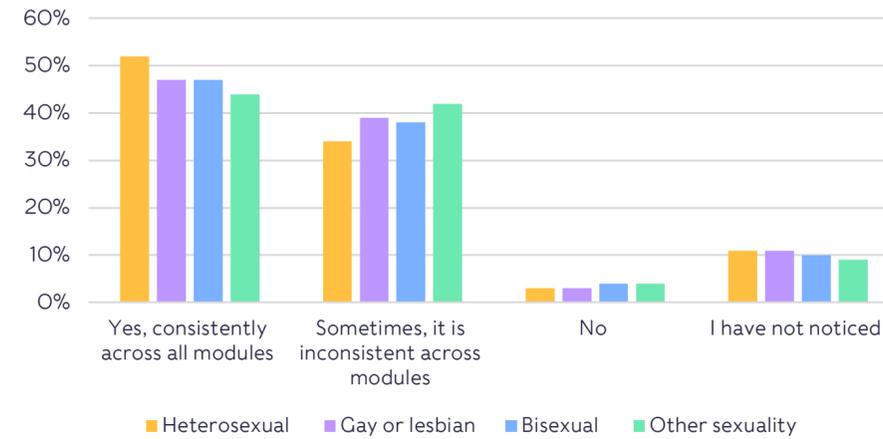
57 per cent for those with above average mental health and 60 per cent of those whose mental health has improved agree their course content is consistently inclusive.

# Inclusive content - demographic and modal splits

**In your opinion, is the content being taught on your course inclusive - gender identity**

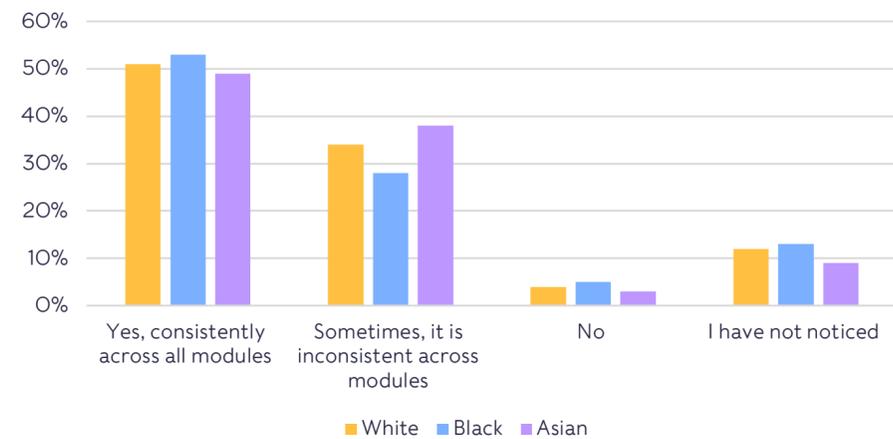


**In your opinion, is the content being taught on your course inclusive - sexuality**

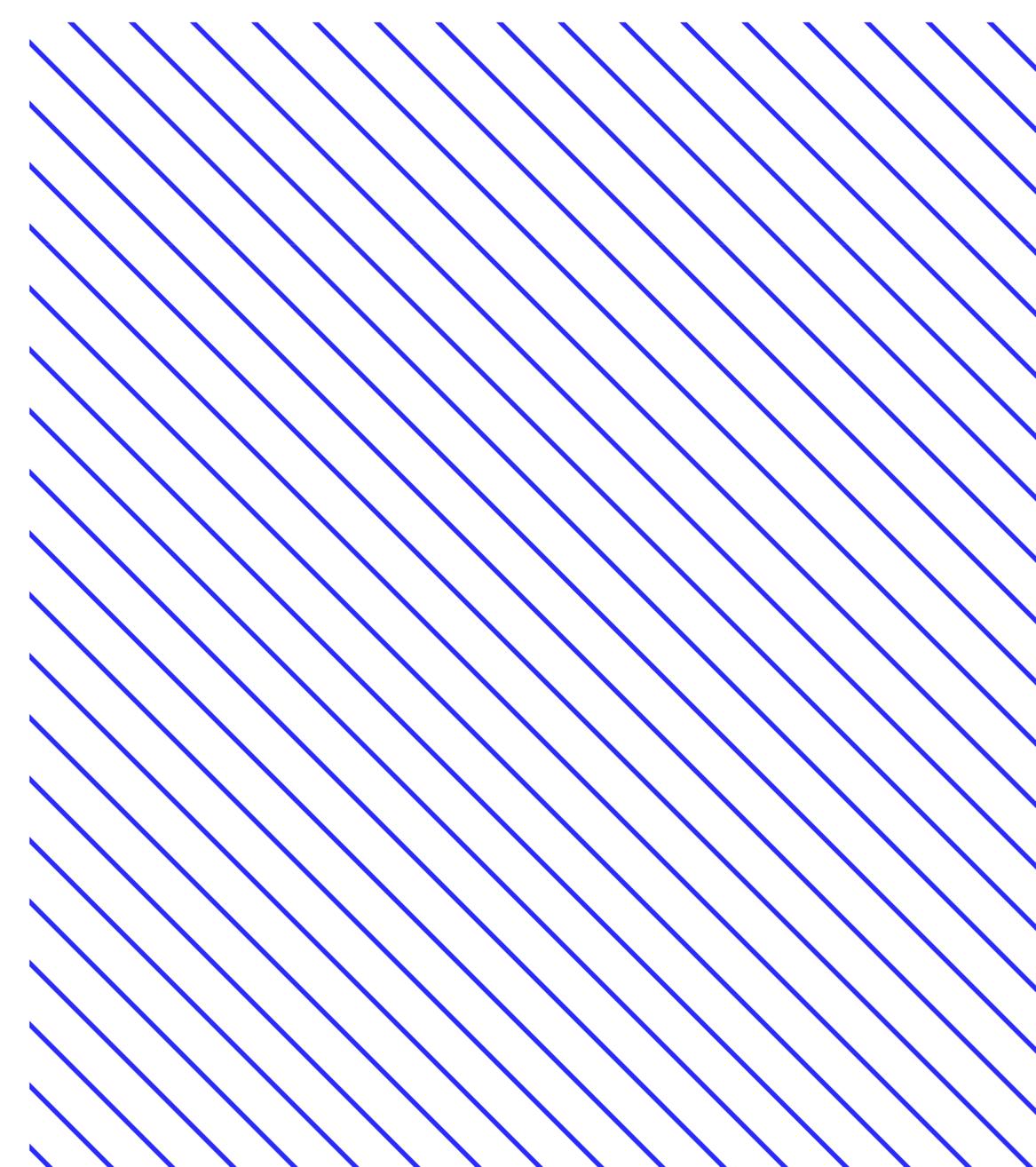
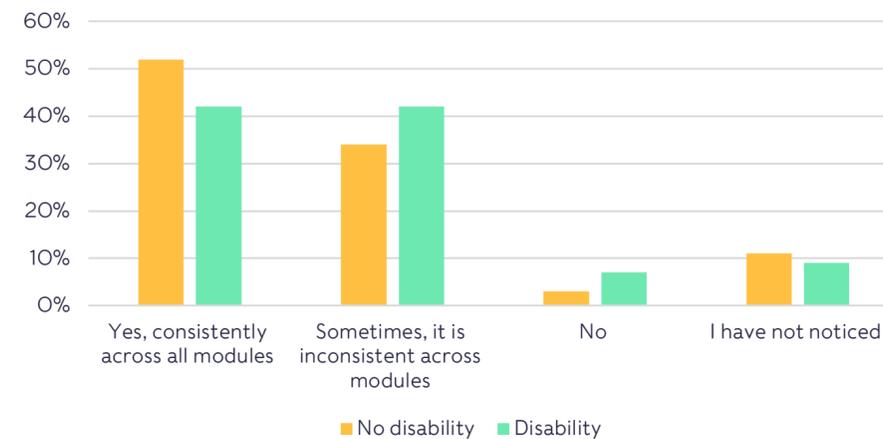


Non-binary (33 per cent), trans identified (44 per cent), disabled (42 per cent), and those with another sexuality (44 per cent) are less likely to agree their course content is consistently inclusive.

**In your opinion, is the content being taught on your course inclusive - ethnicity**

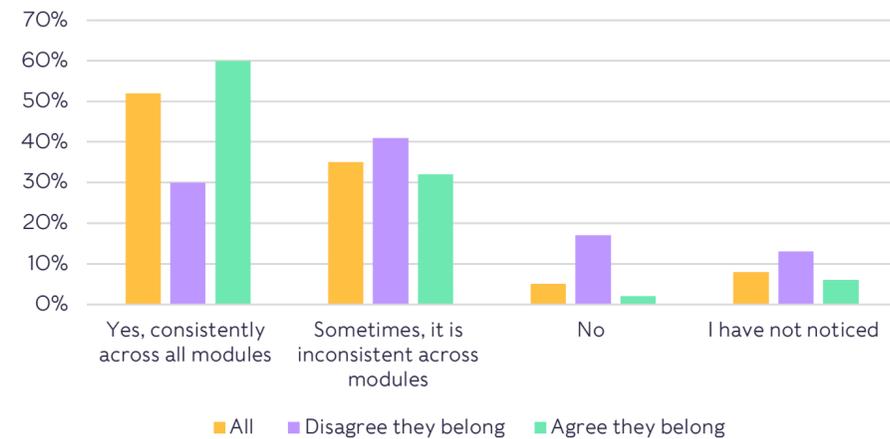


**In your opinion, is the content being taught on your course inclusive - disability**

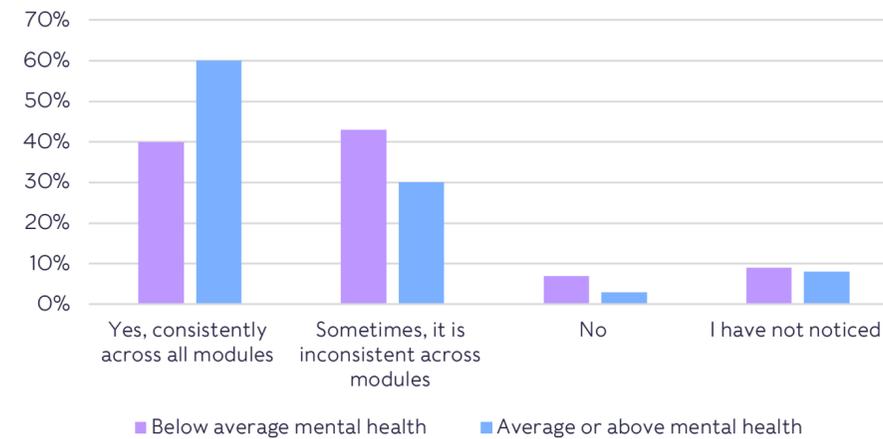


# Inclusive teaching style - belonging and mental health

**In your opinion, is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style? - belonging**



**In your opinion, is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style? - mental health**



***“The tutors within my course are all very welcoming and truly make you feel like that want every last one of us to succeed.”***

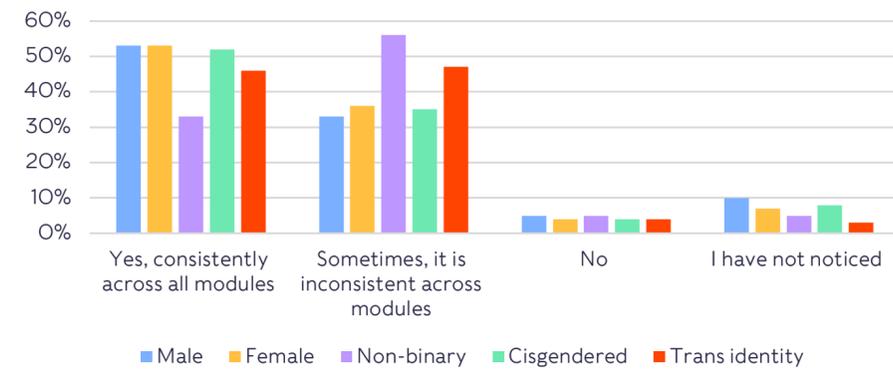
52 per cent of all students agree the teaching on their course is delivered in an inclusive style. This falls to 30 per cent for those who feel they do not belong and rises to 60 per cent for those who feel they do.

40 per cent of those with below average mental health and 39 per cent for those whose mental health has worsened agree.

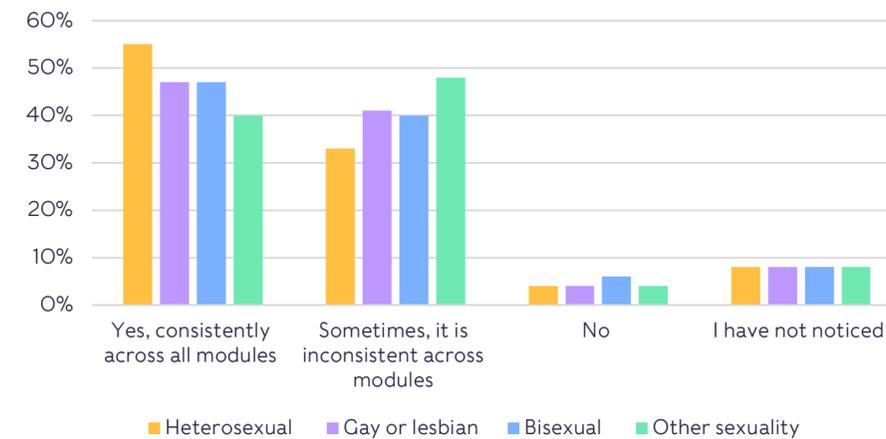
60 per cent of those with average and above mental health and 61 per cent of those whose mental health has improved agree.

# Inclusive teaching style - demographic and modal splits

**In your opinion, is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style? - gender identity**



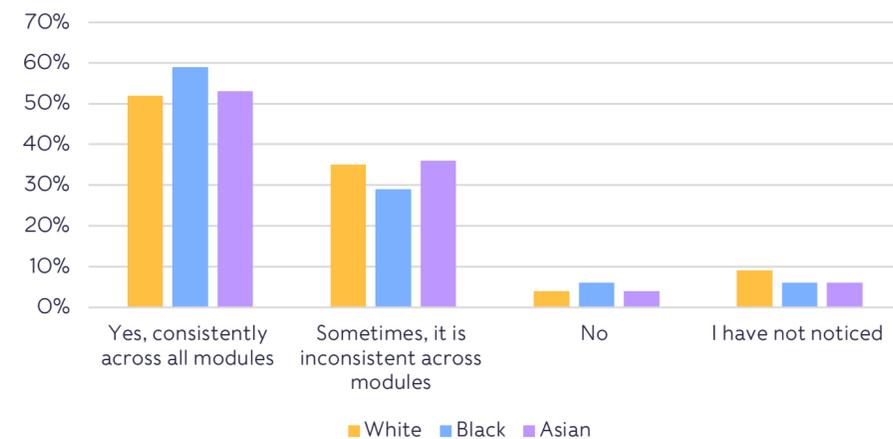
**In your opinion, is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style? - sexuality**



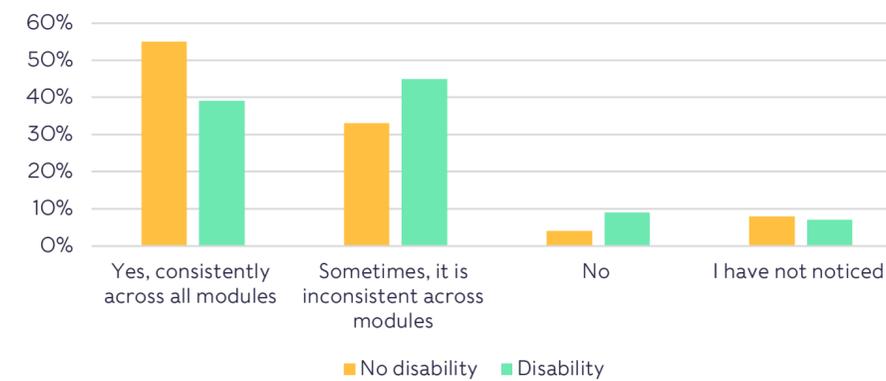
There are similar patterns of agreement for the question on inclusive course content, with non-binary (33 per cent), trans (46 per cent), disabled (39 per cent), gay and lesbian (47 per cent), bisexual (47 per cent) and other sexuality (40 per cent) less likely to agree.

There are slightly larger differences for undergraduate (49 per cent) and postgraduate (58 per cent) for inclusive teaching style than for inclusive content, where the difference is only six percentage points.

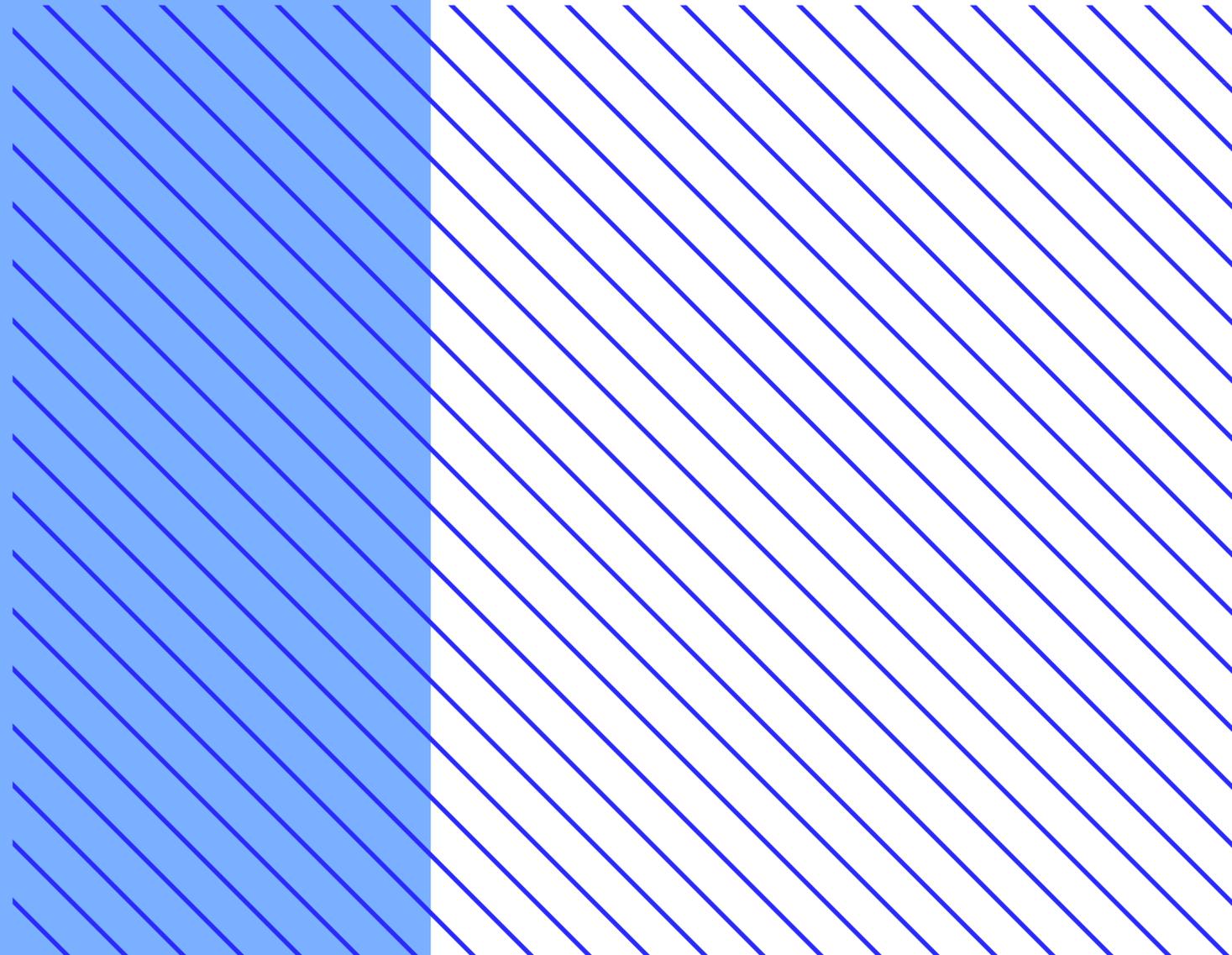
**In your opinion, is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style? - ethnicity**



**In your opinion, is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style? - disability**

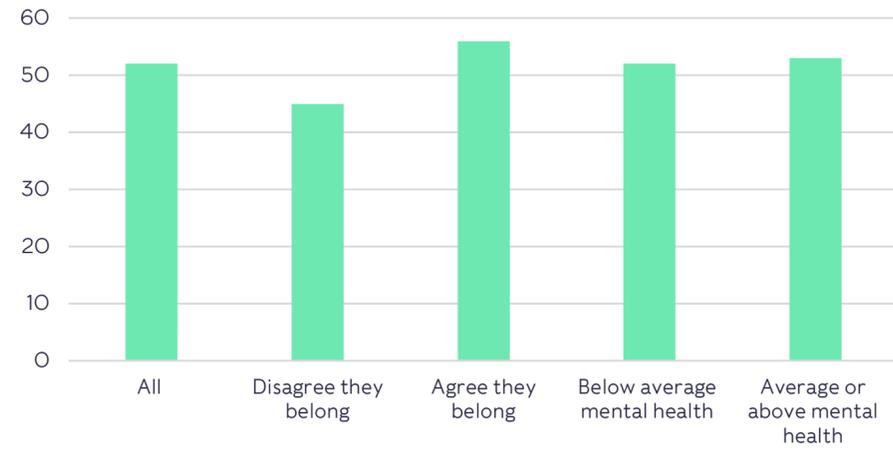


# Connection outside the course

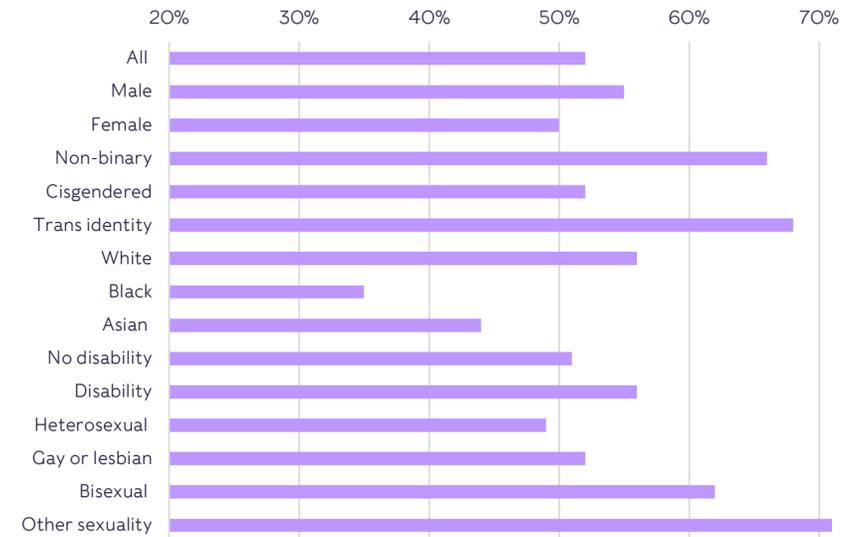


# Participation in extra-curricular activities and belonging

## Have you been involved with any clubs, groups or organisations since starting university? - belonging



## Have you been involved with any clubs, groups or organisations since starting university? - demographics

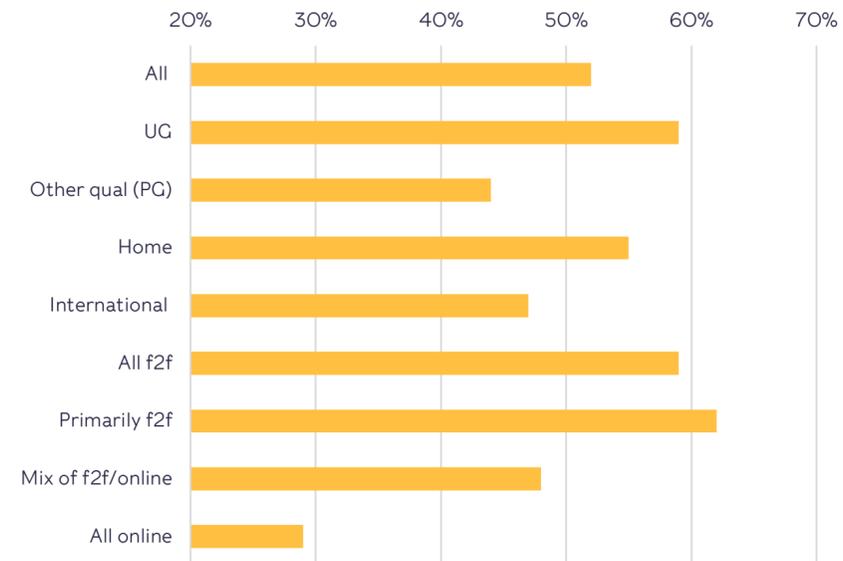


Just over half (52 per cent) of respondents have been involved with clubs, groups, or organisations since starting university.

Difference for sense of belonging is lower in this area than elsewhere: 45 per cent of those who do not feel they belong have joined a club, compared to 56 per cent of those who agree they belong.

Non-binary, trans, bisexual and those with a different sexuality seem especially likely to join clubs and societies. Undergraduate and home students are more likely than postgraduate and international students, and those whose course is fully online are less likely to join.

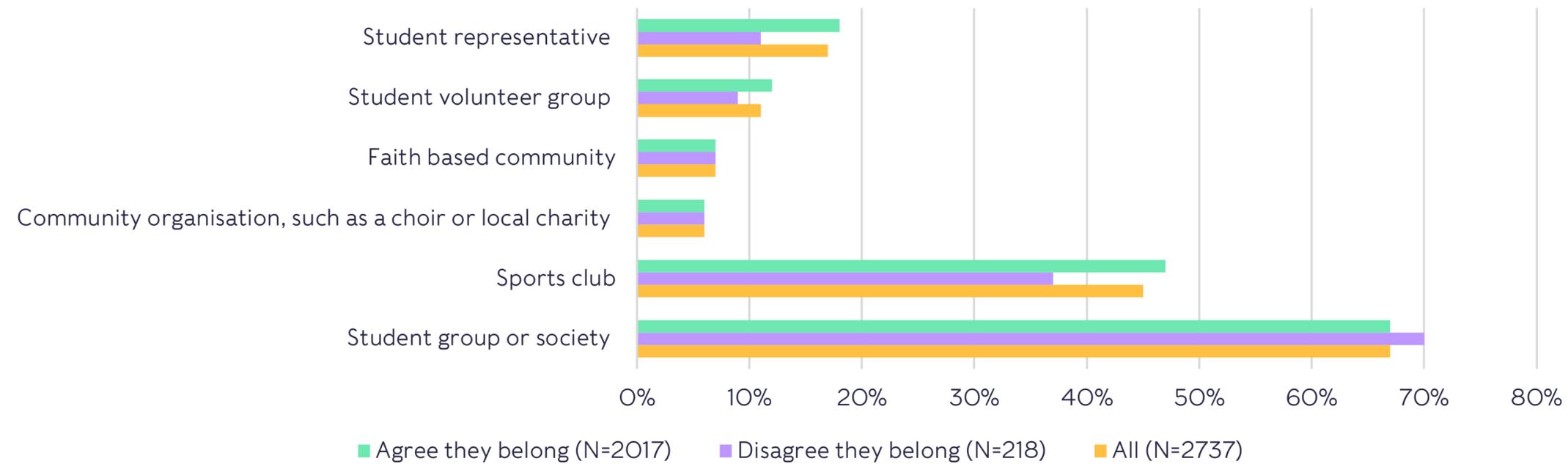
## Have you been involved with any clubs, groups or organisations since starting university? - modes



*“Especially after my involvement in more societies this year, I have really felt that I do belong at my university.”*

# What clubs and societies are students getting involved with?

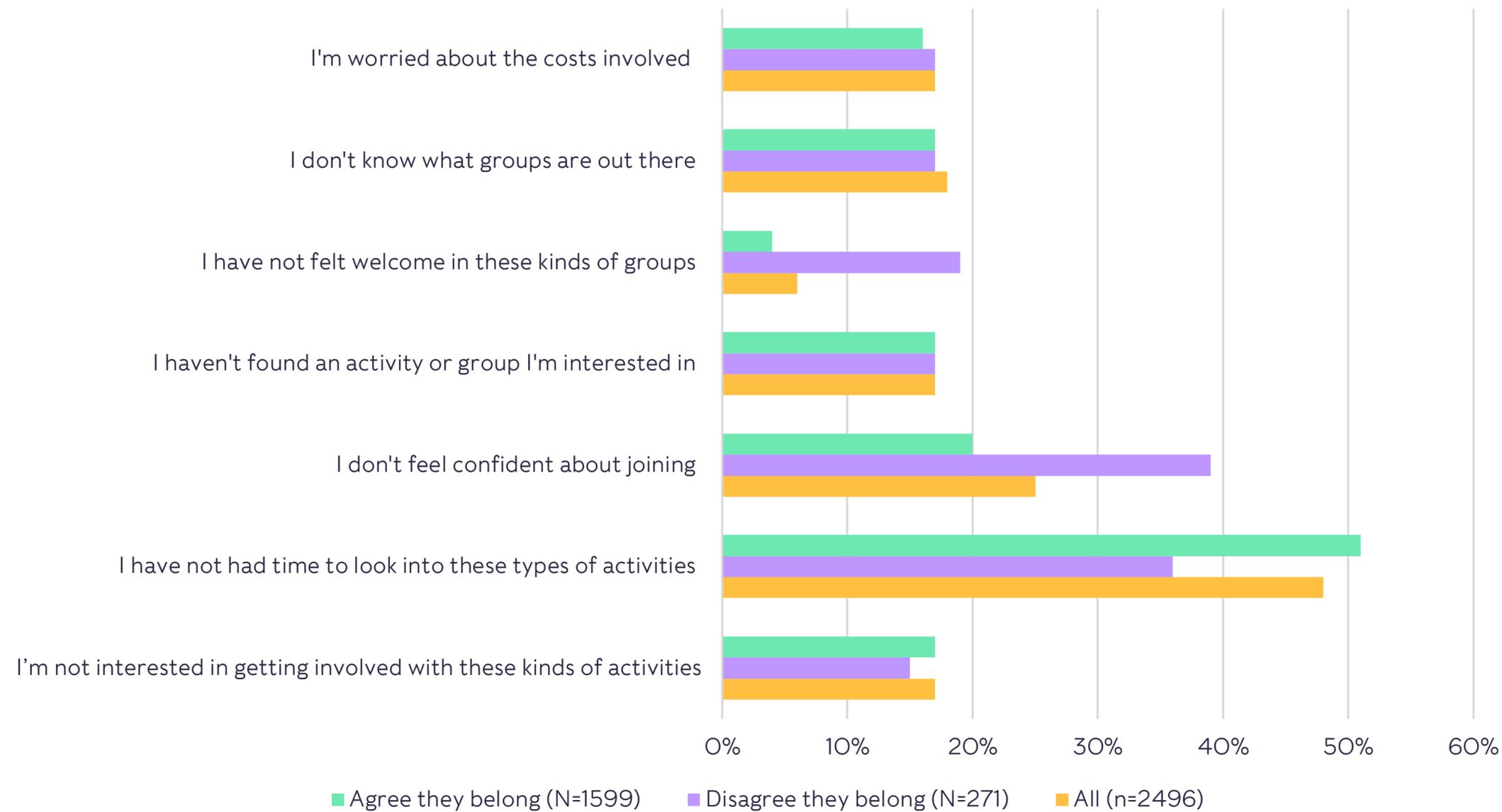
## Which of these have you been involved with?



Among students who have got involved, student groups or societies are the most popular choice, followed by sports clubs. Students who do not feel they belong seem slightly more likely to join a student group or society and less likely to join a sports club or be a student representative, but numbers are small at this level.

# Why aren't students getting involved with clubs and societies?

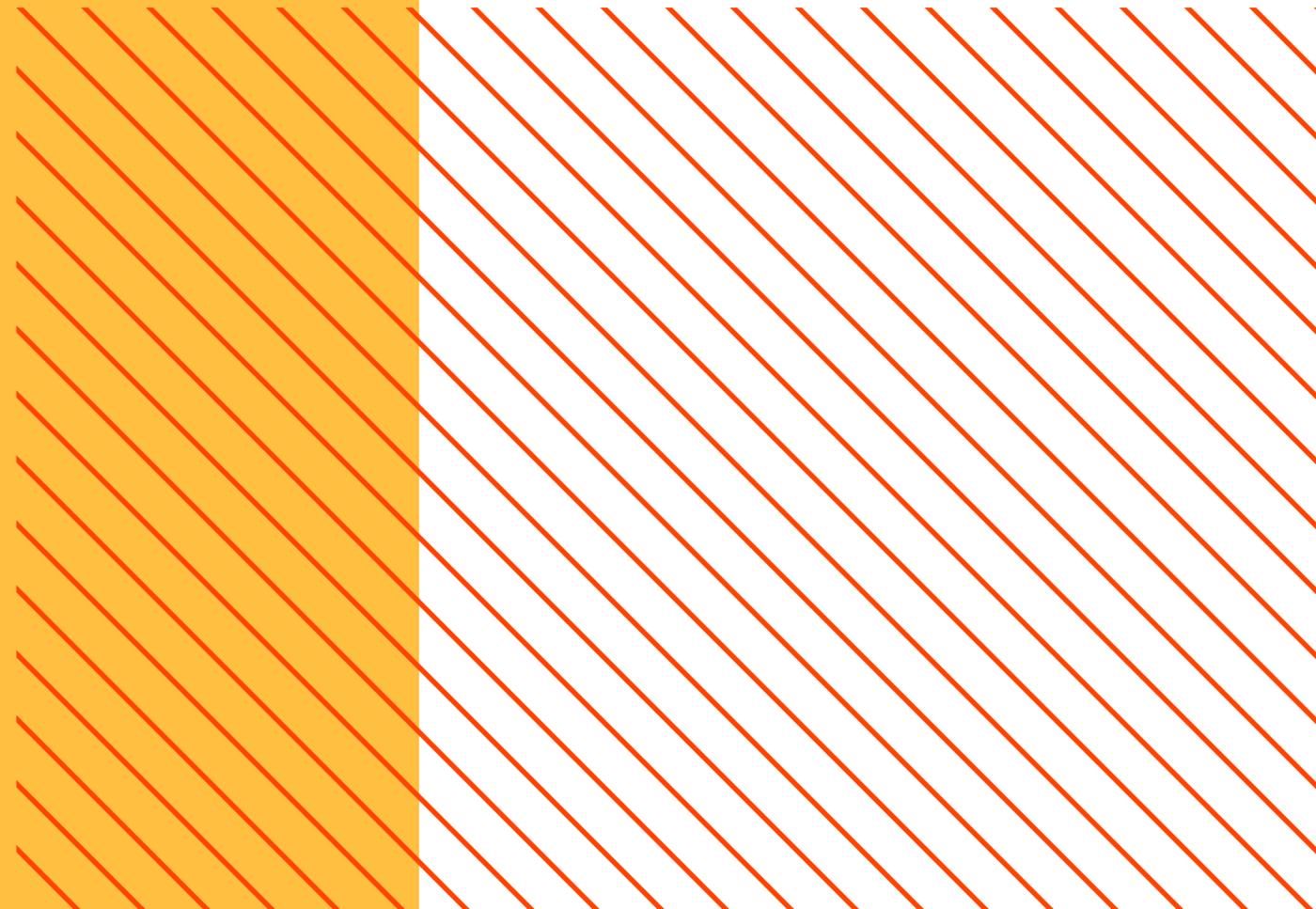
## You've selected no, please explain why not



Of those who have not joined, overall the most popular reason for not joining a club is lack of time (48 per cent of those who have not joined a club), followed by lack of confidence (25 per cent).

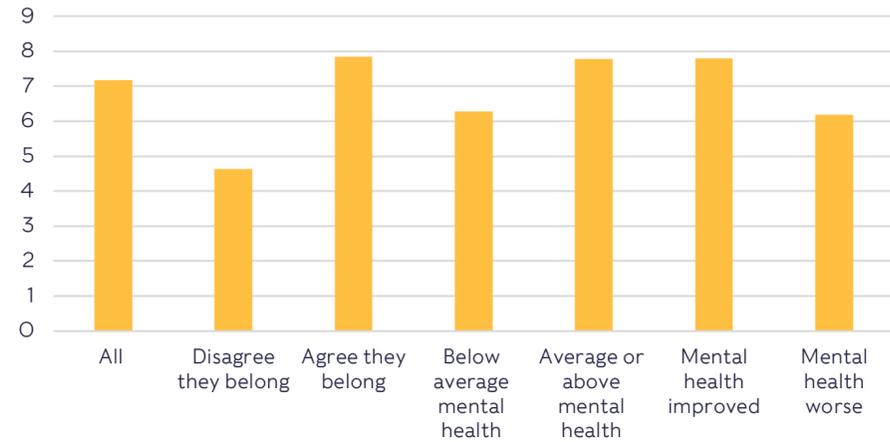
There are differences between those who have not joined a club but still feel they belong and those who have not joined, and feel they do not belong: students who feel they belong are more likely to report they do not have time to get involved (51 per cent) while students who do not feel they belong are more likely to say they don't feel confident to join (39 per cent).

# Connection at university



# How welcoming have you found your university to be?

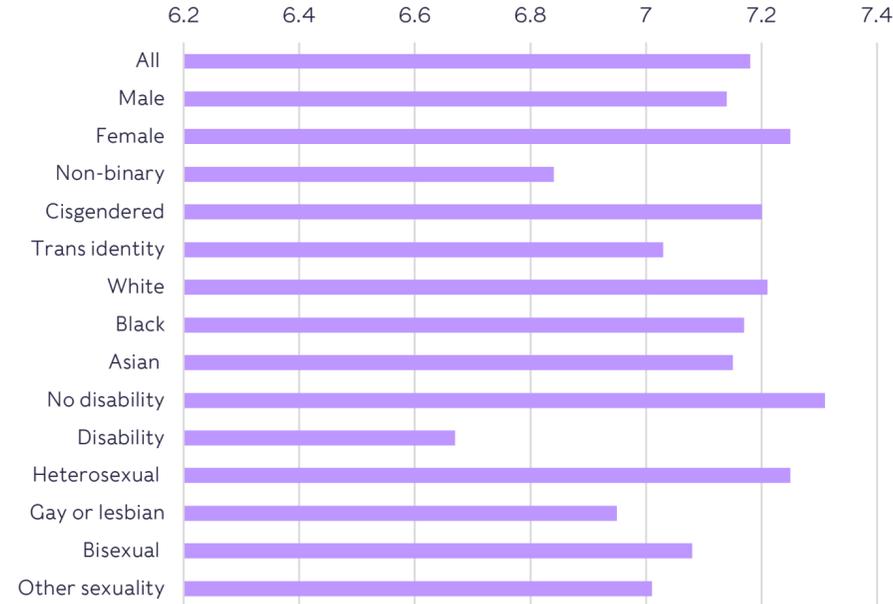
## How welcoming have you found your university to be? - belonging



## How welcoming have you found your university to be? - modes



## How welcoming have you found your university to be? - demographics



***“I don’t feel welcomed. Additionally I don’t feel any connection to the university itself.”***

Asked to rate how welcoming they found their university, the mean response for all respondents was 7.18.

For those who do not feel they belong the mean is 4.64 compared to 7.84 for those who do.

The mean response is 6.28 for those with below average mental health and 6.18 for those whose mental health has got worse.

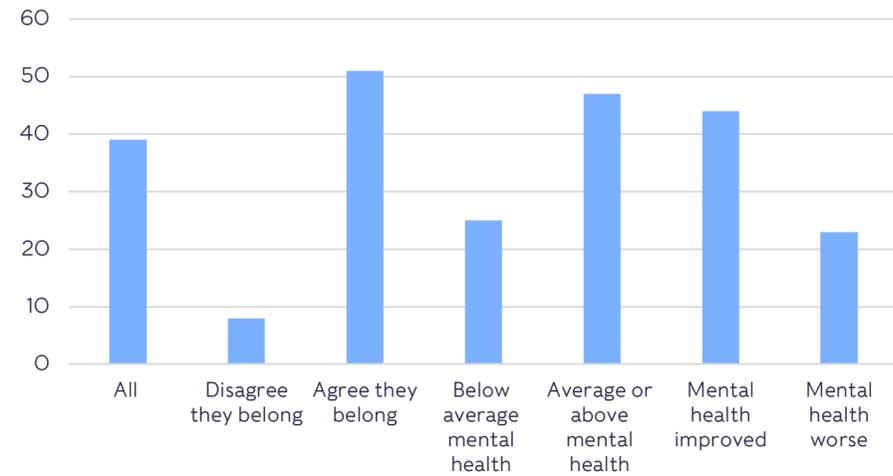
The mean response is 7.78 for those with average and above mental health and 7.8 for those for whom it has improved.

The mean response is slightly lower for non-binary (6.84), disabled (6.67), and gay or lesbian students (6.95).

# I feel connected to my university community

## I feel connected to my university community - belonging

% agree/strongly agree



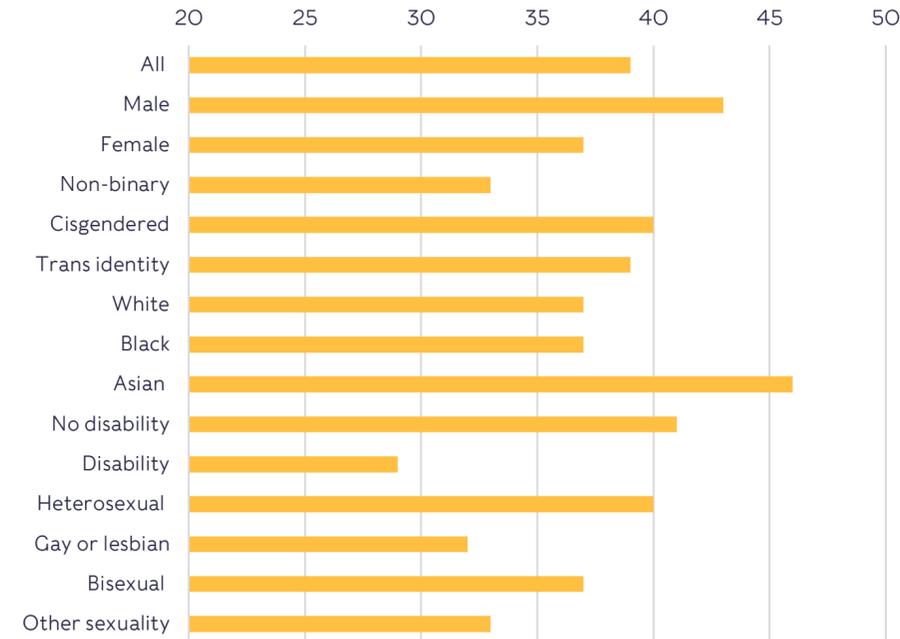
## I feel connected to my university community - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel connected to my university community - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



39 per cent of all respondents feel a sense of connection in their university community compared to 55 per cent who agreed they feel a sense of connection on their course.

Only eight per cent of those who do not feel they belong agree they feel a sense of connection in university, compared to 51 per cent of those with strong belonging.

25 per cent of those with below average mental health agree they feel a sense of connection in their university community; it is 23 per cent for those who say their mental health is worse

47 per cent of those whose mental health is average and above agree, and 44 per cent for those whose mental health has improved agree.

Non-binary students (33 per cent), students with a disability (29 per cent), gay or lesbian students (32 per cent), and studentd with a different sexuality (33 per cent) are less likely to agree they feel a sense of connection in their university community.

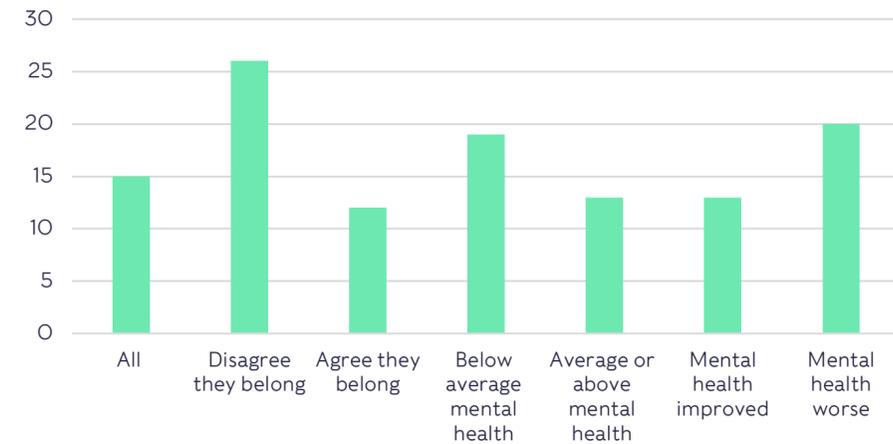
Postgraduates (44 per cent) are more likely to agree than undergraduates (37 per cent), and those who study fully online are less likely to agree (29 per cent).

***“Coming from a working class background it can feel like I’m from another world to some of my peers.”***

# I feel excluded from my university because of my financial circumstances

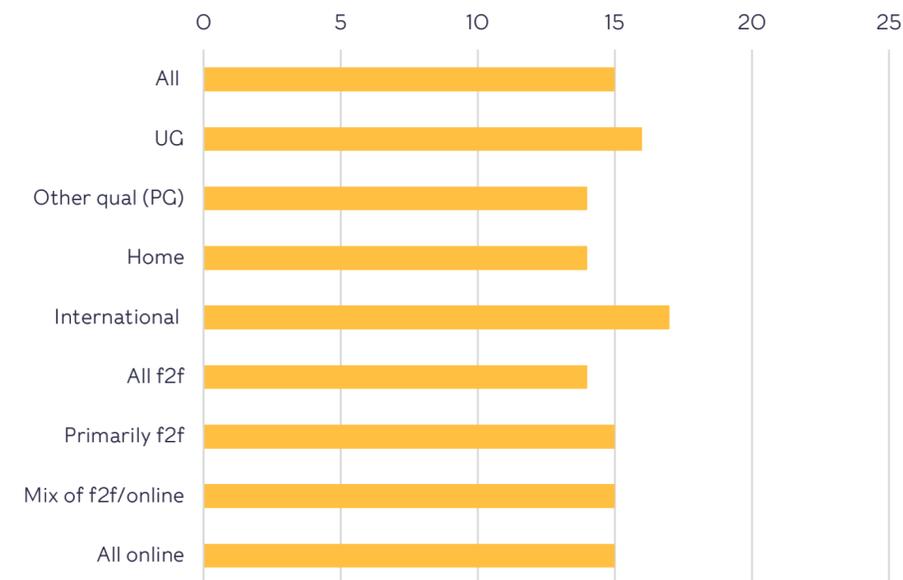
## I feel excluded from my university because of my financial circumstances - belonging

% agree/strongly agree



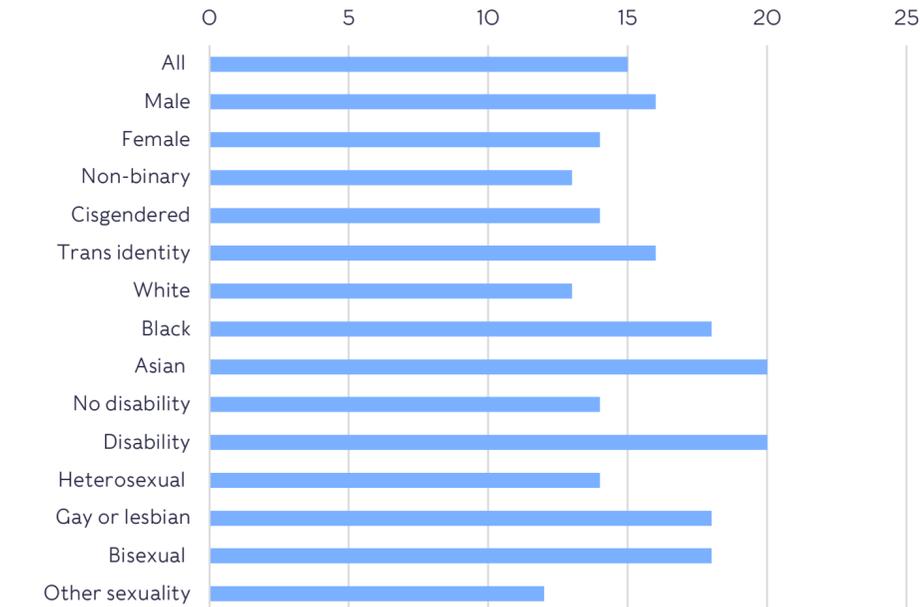
## I feel excluded from my university because of my financial circumstances - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel excluded from my university because of my financial circumstances - demographics

% agree/strongly agree

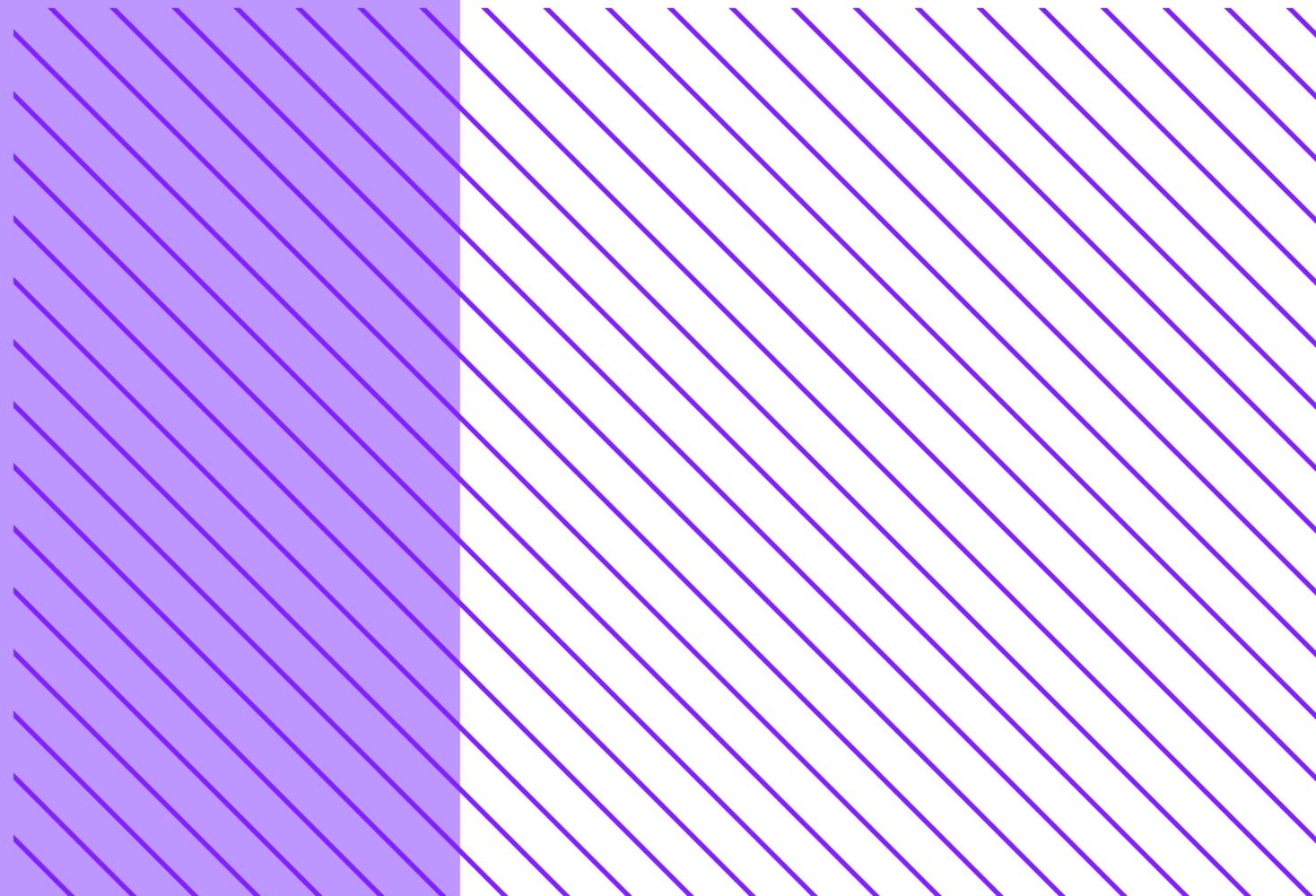


***“Everyone is really supportive of each other and feels like a good community to be a part of. But there have been times I’ve felt out of place because I am from a lower class family and can’t afford the resources other people have access to.”***

15 per cent of all respondents agree they feel excluded from their university due to their financial circumstances. For those with weak belonging this increases to 26 per cent.

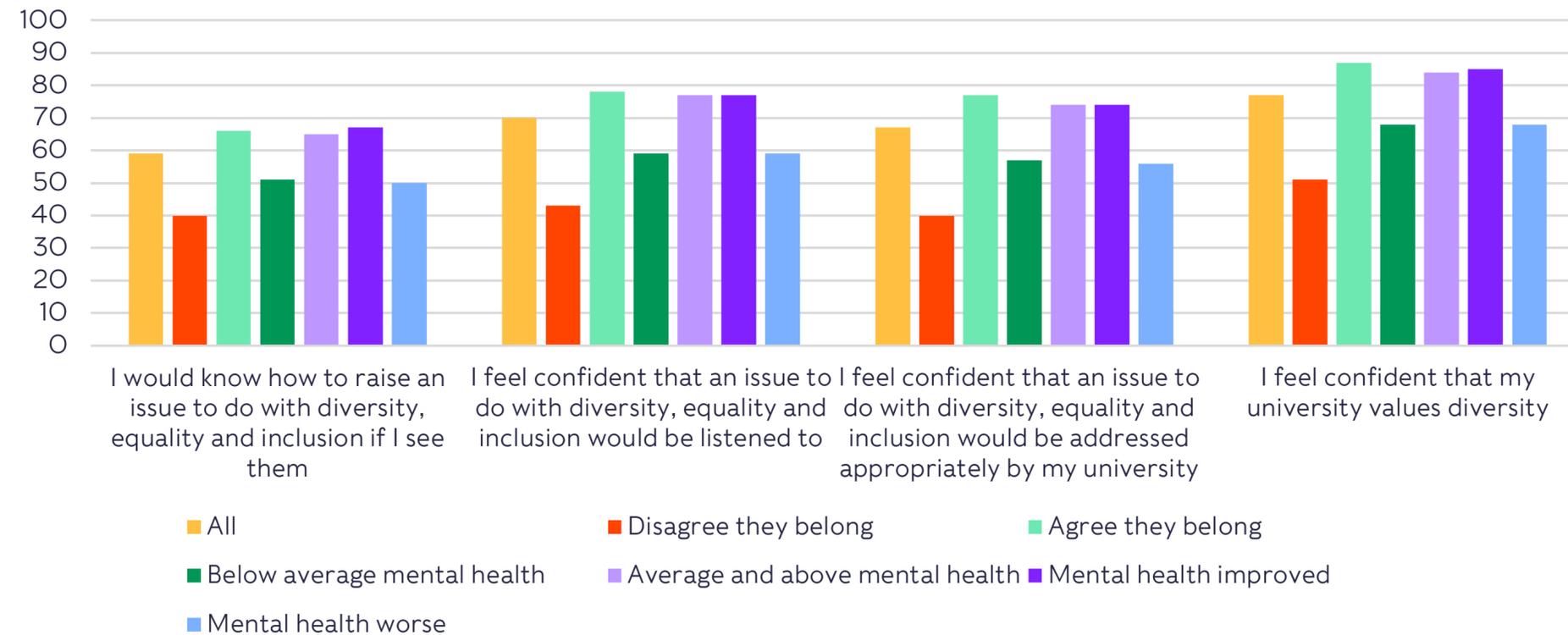
There is not a noticeable variation by demographic or mode of study but black (18 per cent), Asian (20 per cent), and disabled (20 per cent) respondents are slightly more likely to agree they feel excluded because of their financial circumstances.

# Inclusion at university



# Inclusion at university - belonging

## Inclusion at university - belonging



We asked about respondents’ awareness of, and confidence in, universities’ provisions for equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Respondents were generally confident their university values diversity, with 77 per cent agreeing to this - but only 51 per cent of students who do not feel they belong agreed.

59 per cent of respondents agree they would know how to raise an issue of EDI if they saw it, but only 40 per cent of those who do not feel they belong.

70 per cent of respondents feel confident that an issue to do with EDI would be listened to, but only 43 per cent of those who do not feel they belong.

67 per cent of respondents feel confident that an issue to do with EDI would be addressed appropriately by their university, but only 51 per cent of those who do not feel they belong.

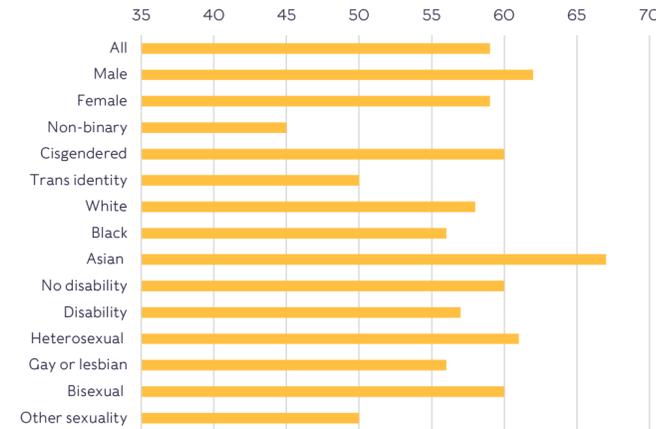
There is also an association between sense of inclusion and mental health with, for example, 68 per cent of those with below average mental health agreeing their university values diversity, 51 per cent agreeing they would know how to raise an issue, and 57 per cent agreeing an issue would be handled appropriately.

***“As a transgender woman, I have been treated with nothing but kindness by the university. Not only socially, but also with accessibility of changing name and gender marker on official documents.”***

# Inclusion at university - demographic splits

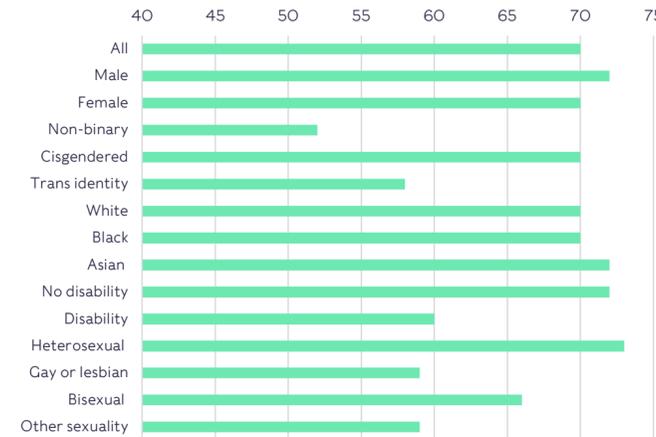
## I would know how to raise an issue to do with diversity, equality and inclusion if I see them - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel confident that an issue to do with diversity, equality and inclusion would be listened to - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



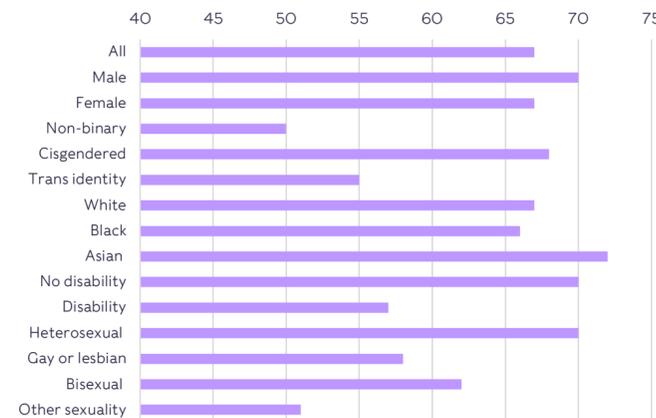
***“This university provided me with a safe and inclusive space where I can be myself (a mature, BAME woman).”***

Non-binary (62 per cent), disabled (67 per cent), gay or lesbian (68 per cent), and students with a different sexuality (67 per cent) are less likely to agree their university values diversity.

These students are also less likely to believe an issue would be listened to or addressed appropriately.

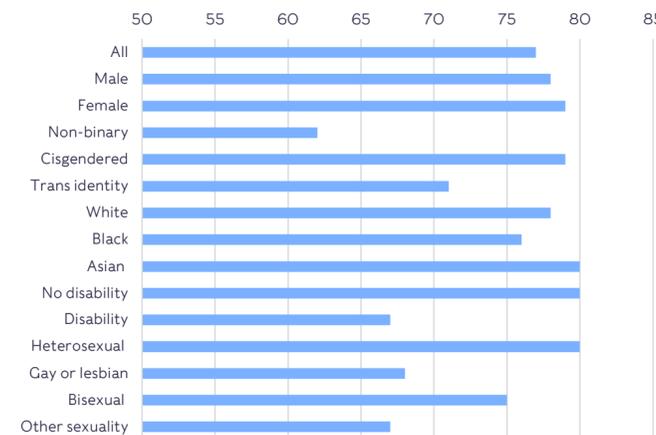
## I feel confident that an issue to do with diversity, equality and inclusion would be addressed appropriately by my university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel confident that my university values diversity - demographics

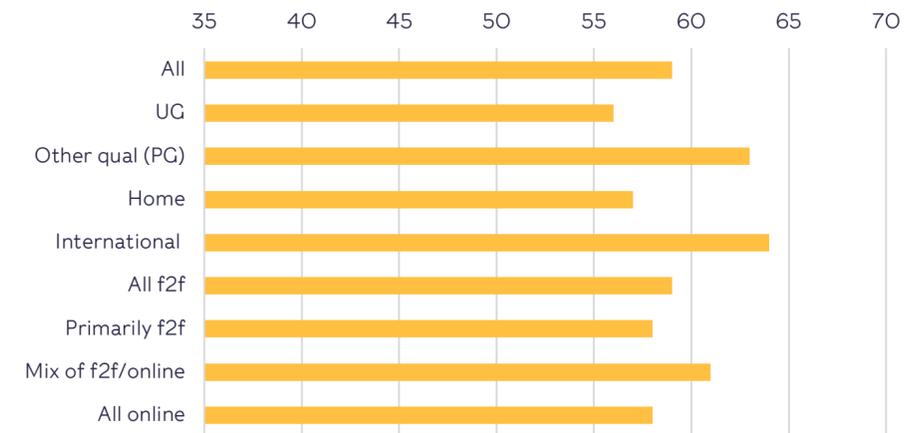
% agree/strongly agree



# Inclusion at university - modal splits

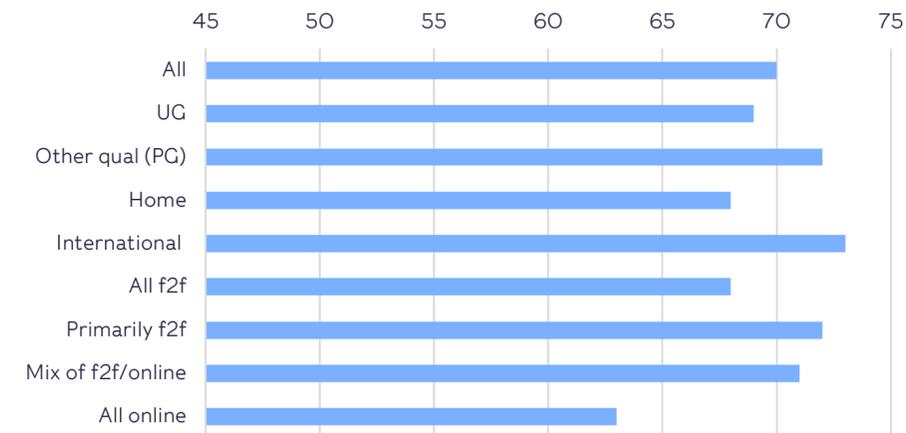
## I would know how to raise an issue to do with diversity, equality and inclusion if I see them - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel confident that an issue to do with diversity, equality and inclusion would be listened to - modes

% agree/strongly agree



Mode of study does not seem to make much of a difference to whether students have confidence in their university's approach to inclusion.

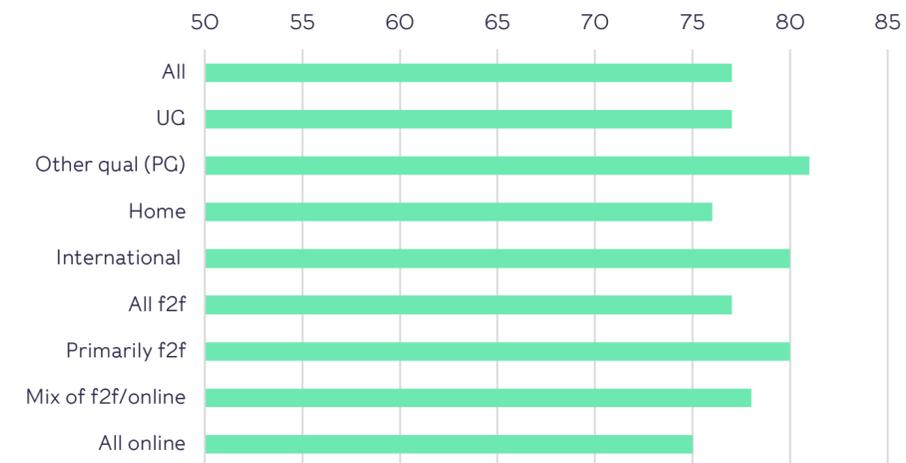
## I feel confident that an issue to do with diversity, equality and inclusion would be addressed appropriately by my university - modes

% agree/strongly agree

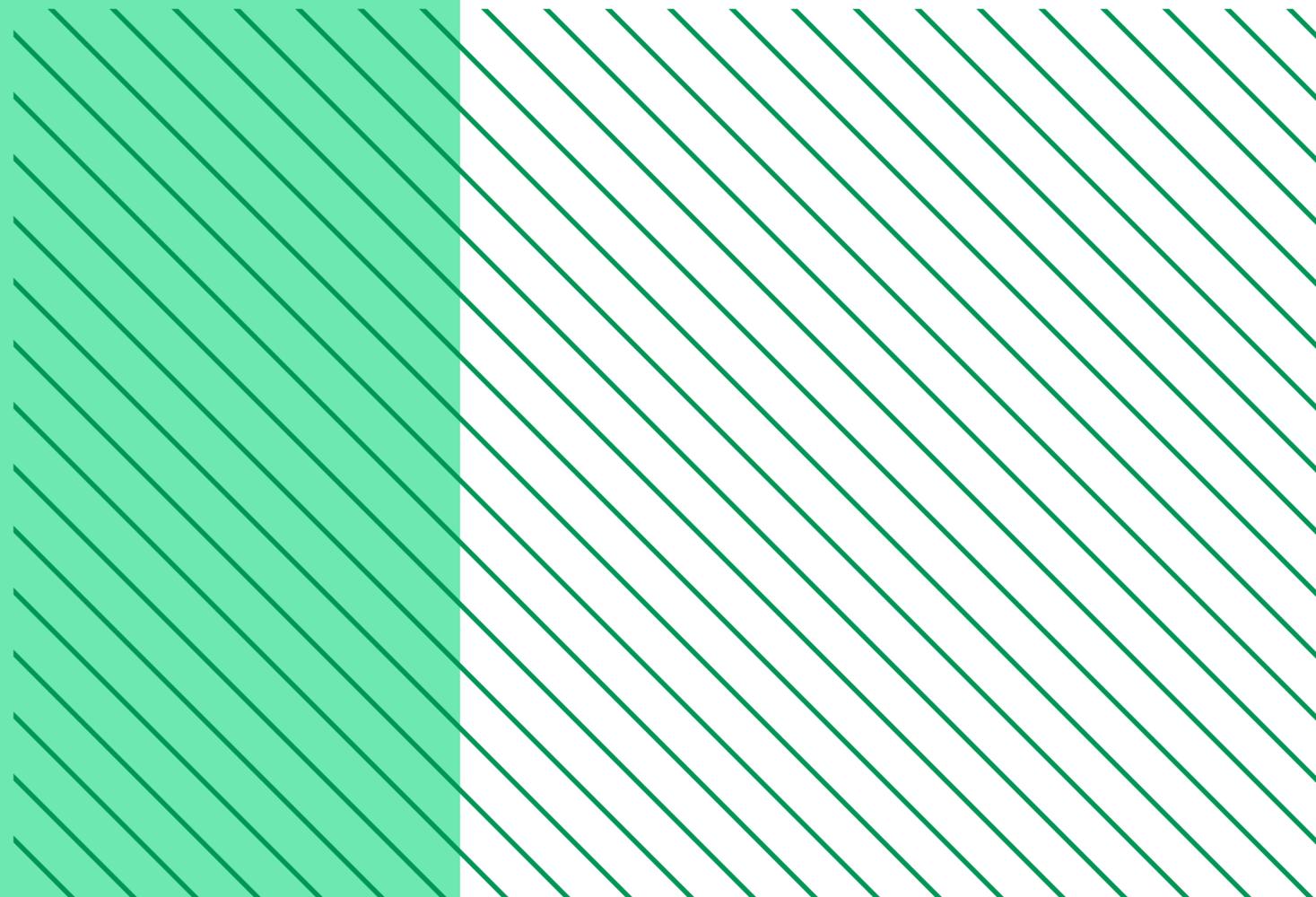


## I feel confident that my university values diversity - modes

% agree/strongly agree

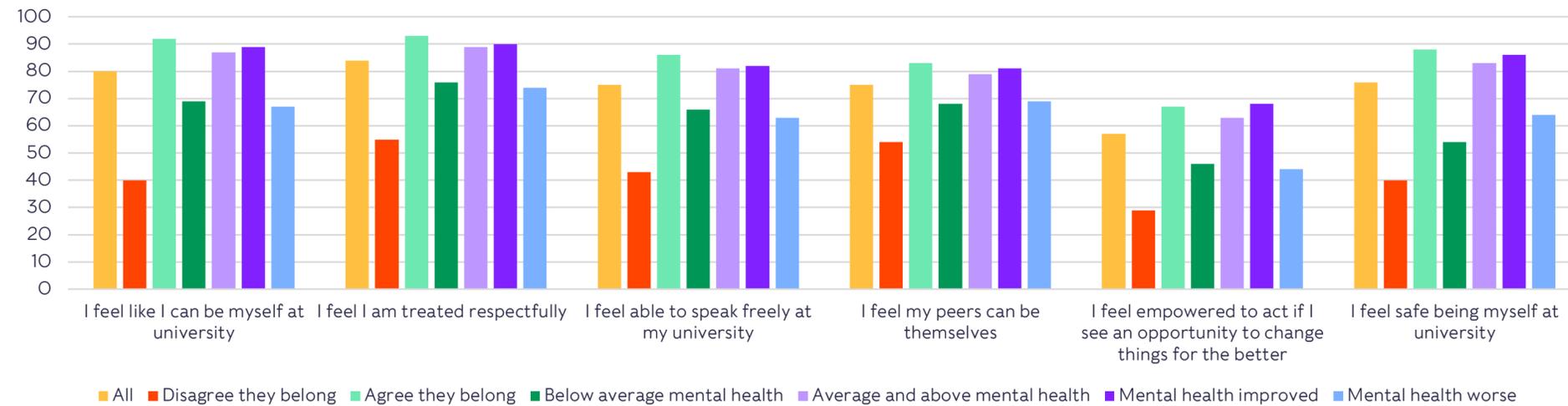


**Safety,  
respect, and  
empowerment**



# Safety, respect, and empowerment - belonging

## Safety, respect, and empowerment - belonging



***“I feel like I can be myself and that my peers accept me for who I am.”***

Overall, most respondents agree they feel they are safe to be themselves at university (76 per cent), that they are treated respectfully (84 per cent), and that they are able to speak freely (75 per cent).

However, responses are much lower for those who do not feel they belong:

- 40 per cent agree they feel safe to be themselves
- 55 per cent feel they are treated respectfully
- 43 per cent agree they feel able to speak freely

Overall, fewer students (57 per cent) agree they feel empowered to act if they see an opportunity to change things for the better, falling to 29 per cent of those who do not feel they belong.

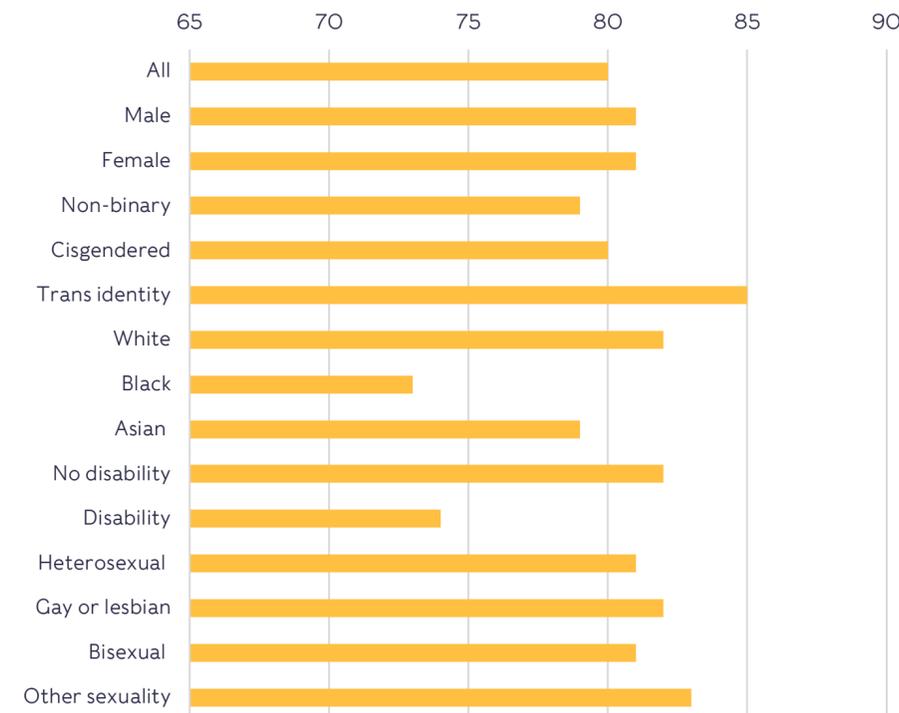
Students with above average mental health and those whose mental health has improved are more likely to agree they feel safe, respected, and able to speak freely.

68 per cent of those whose mental health has improved agree they feel empowered to change things for the better, but only 44 per cent of those whose mental health is worse.

# Safety, respect, and empowerment - demographic splits

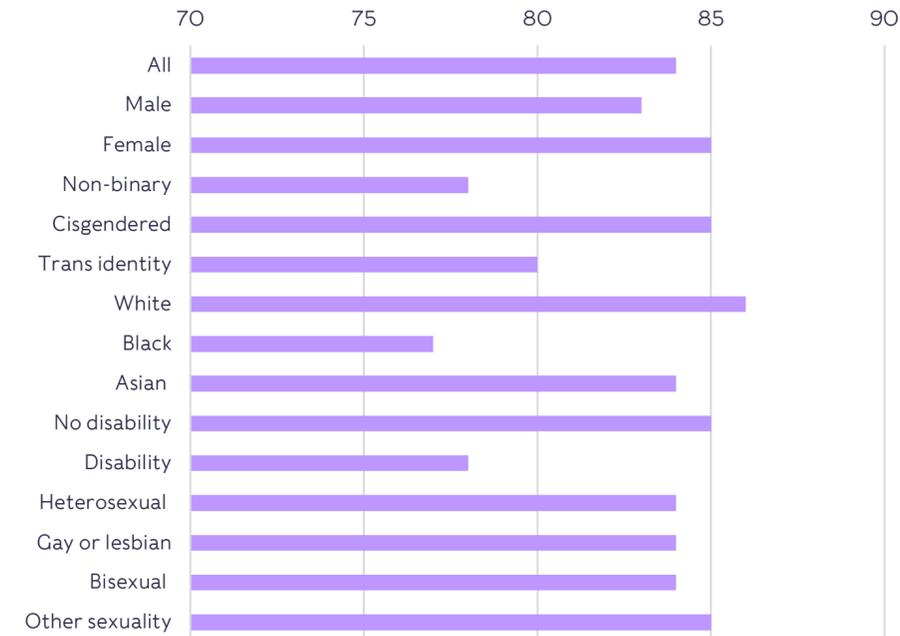
## I feel like I can be myself at university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



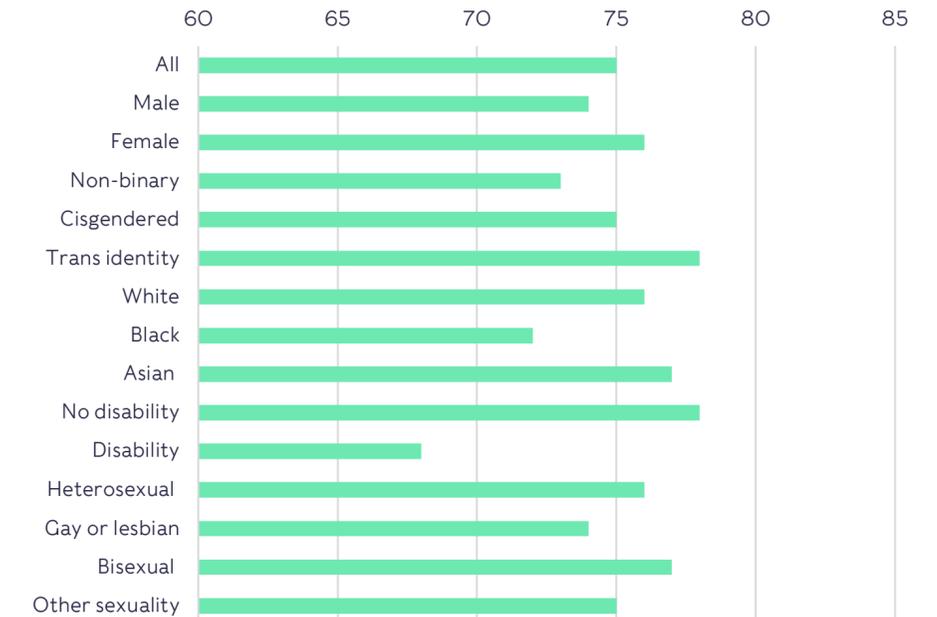
## I feel I am treated respectfully - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel able to speak freely at my university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree

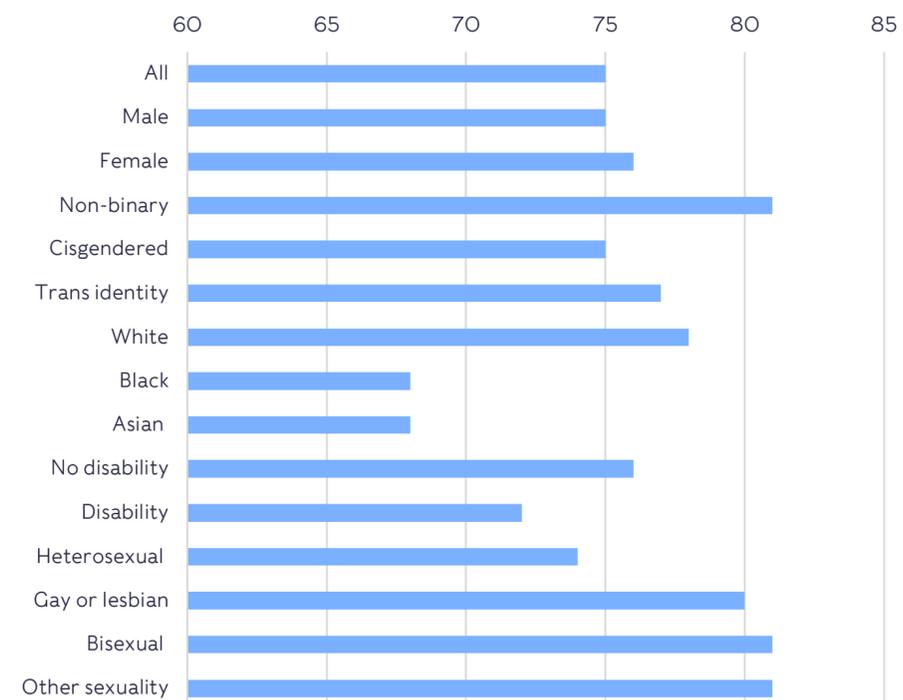


*“I feel like I belong at university with my tutors as they understand my mental health conditions and disabilities without my having to behave differently, but I hide my disability from peers who don’t really know me. Sometimes I feel like I don’t belong because I’m not clever enough.”*

# Safety, respect, and empowerment - demographic splits

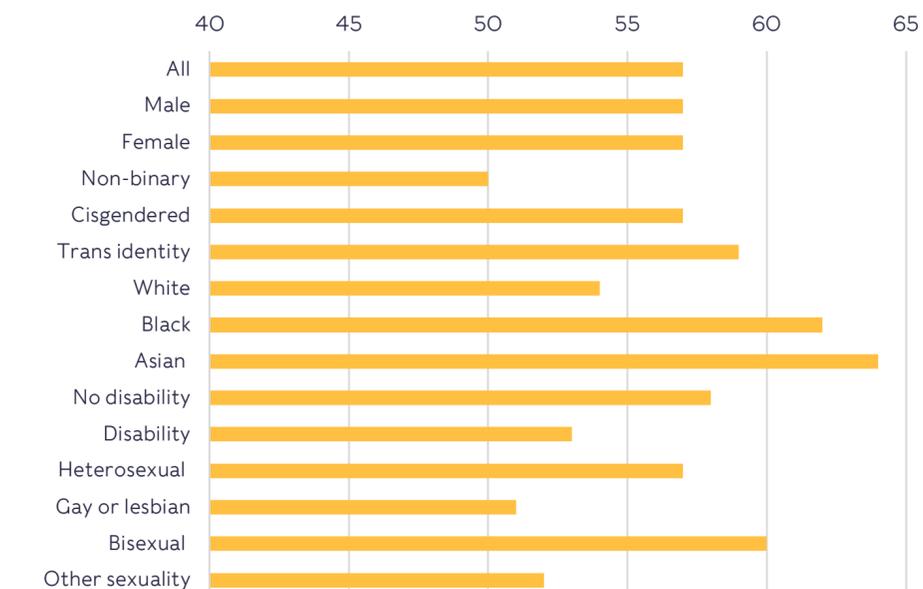
## I feel my peers can be themselves - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



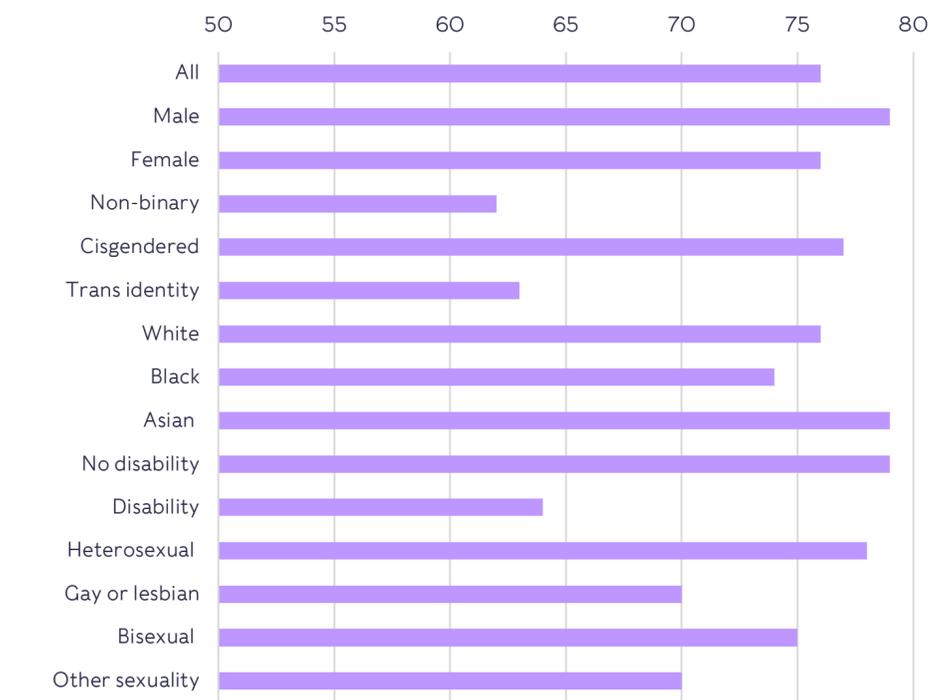
## I feel empowered to act if I see an opportunity to change things for the better - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel safe being myself at university - demographics

% agree/strongly agree



Students with a disability are slightly less likely to agree across all these questions, with 64 per cent agreeing they feel safe being themselves at university, 78 per cent agreeing they are treated respectfully, and 68 per cent agreeing they are able to speak freely.

It is noticeable that in this area differences are emerging by ethnicity, particularly between black and white students; whereas in the other areas differences were not as large.

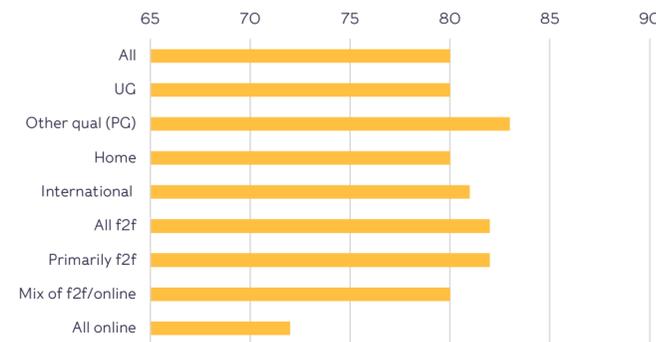
- 73 per cent of black students agree they can be themselves at university compared to 82 per cent of white students
- 68 per cent of black students agree their peers can be themselves compared to 78 per cent of white students
- 77 per cent of black students agree they are treated respectfully compared to 86 per cent of white students

However, black and Asian students report feeling slightly more empowered than white students to change things, which may be related to more of them being postgraduate students, who report overall higher levels of empowerment.

# Safety, respect, and empowerment - modal splits

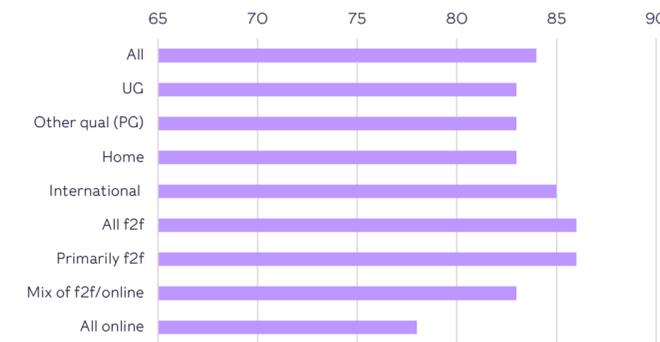
## I feel like I can be myself at university - modes

% agree/strongly agree



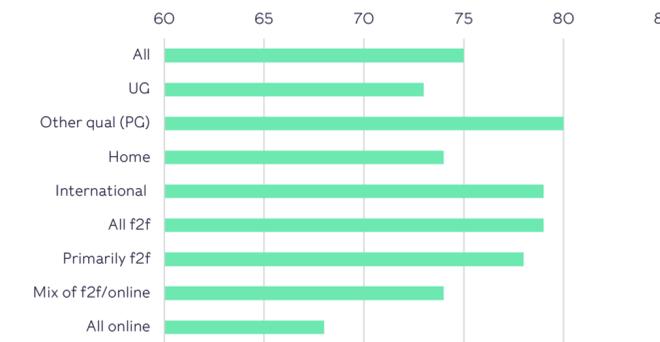
## I feel I am treated respectfully - modes

% agree/strongly agree



## I feel able to speak freely at my university - modes

% agree/strongly agree

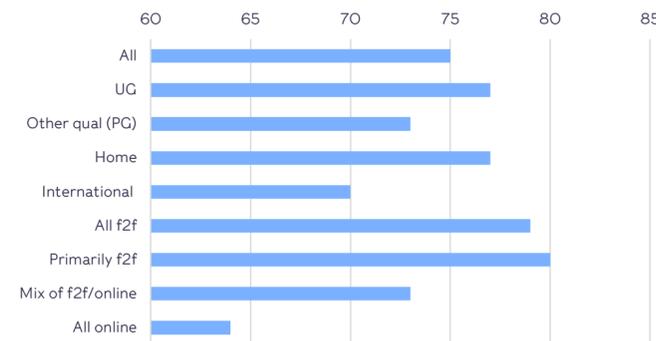


**“Our tutors seem to dislike my quiet personality and apparently I need to change which I disagree with.”**

Students who study fully online are generally less likely to agree to these questions: 70 per cent agree they feel safe being themselves, 52 per cent agree their peers can be safe being themselves, 68 per cent agree they are treated respectfully, and 64 per cent agree they can speak freely.

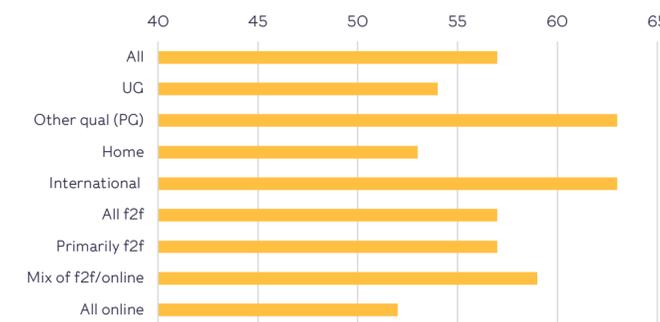
## I feel my peers can be themselves - modes

% agree/strongly agree



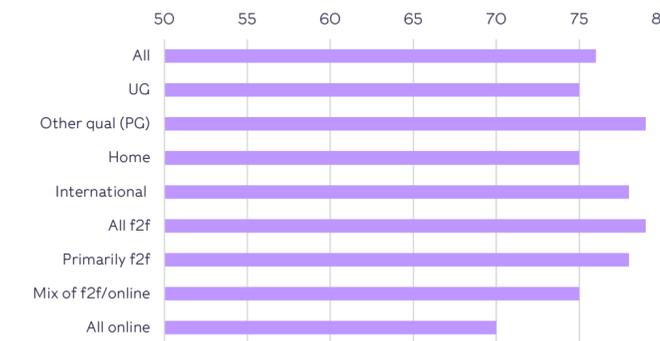
## I feel empowered to act if I see an opportunity to change things for the better - modes

% agree/strongly agree



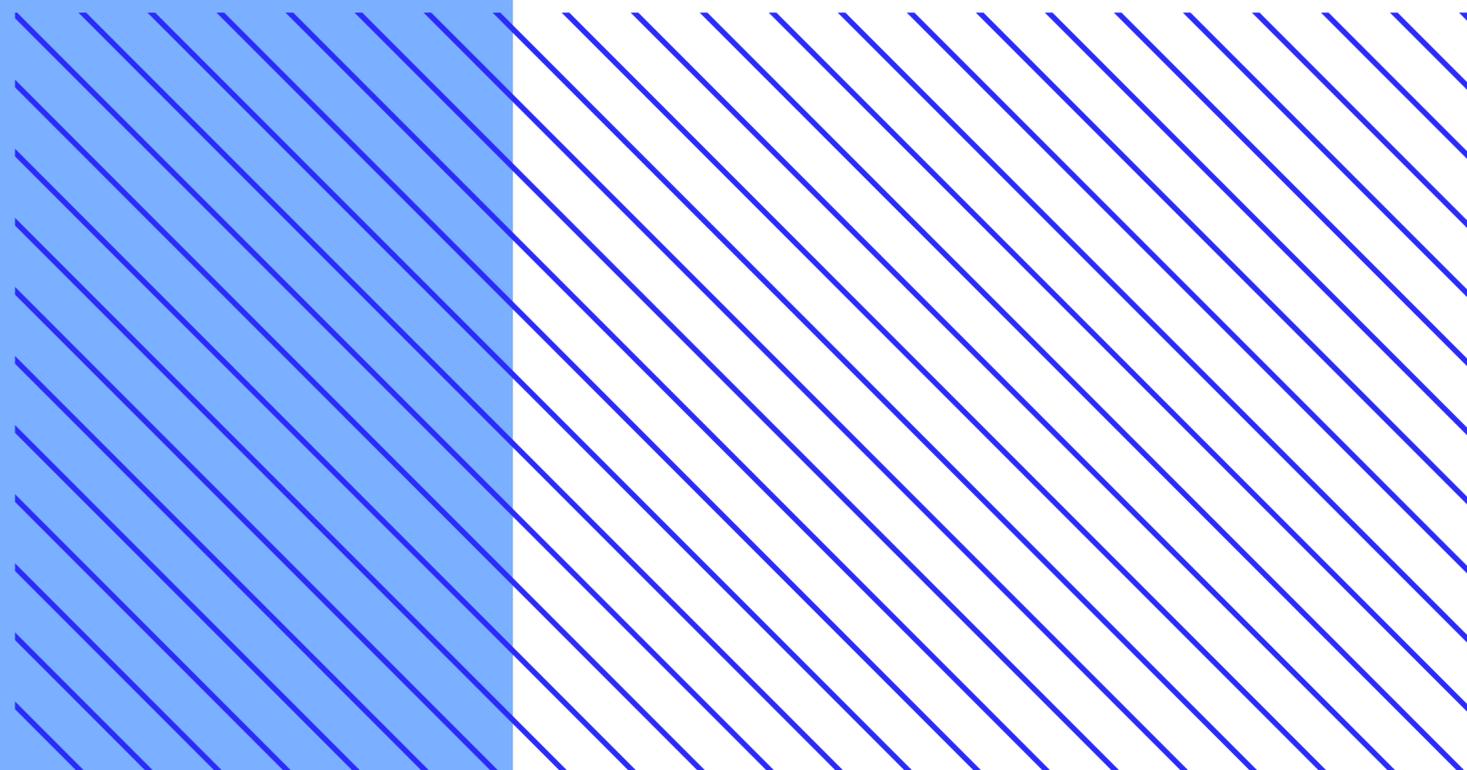
## I feel safe being myself at university - modes

% agree/strongly agree



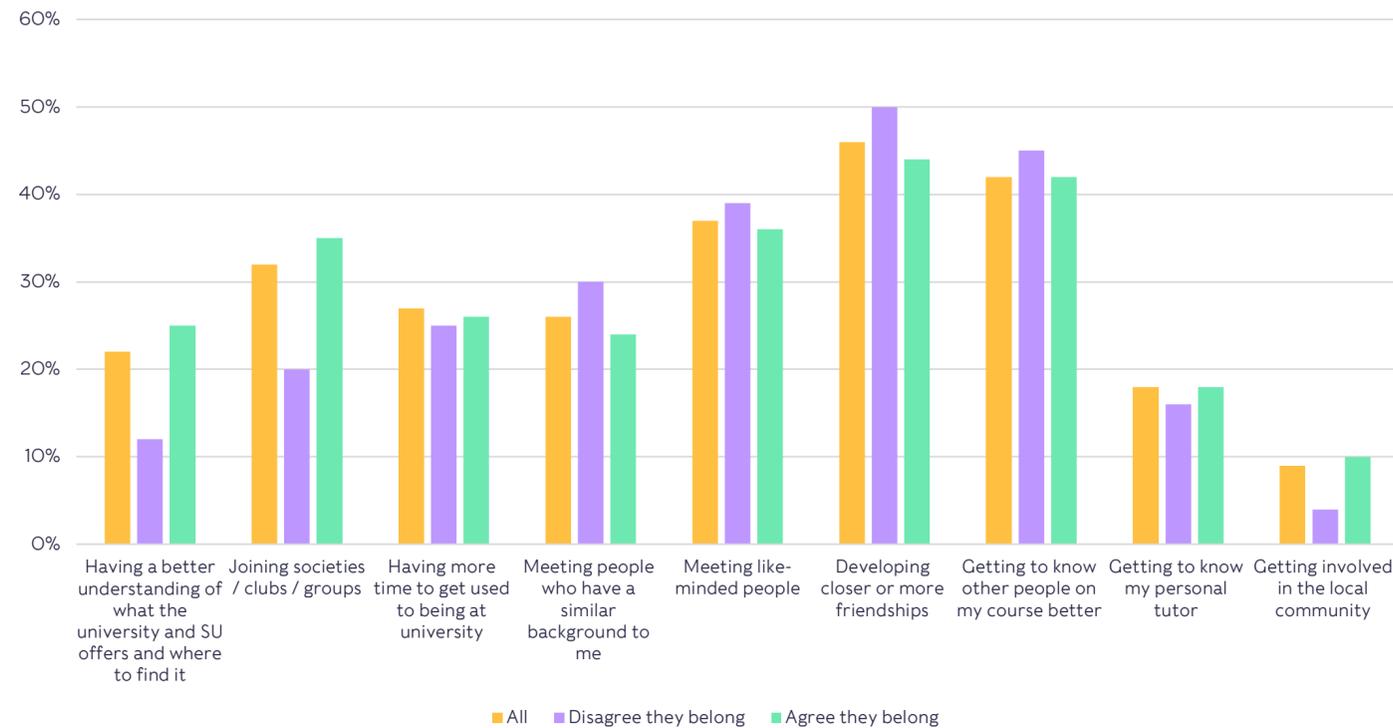
Postgraduates and international students are more likely to agree they are empowered to change things than undergraduate and home students, and students who study online are less likely to agree they feel empowered.

What would help  
students to feel a  
greater sense of  
belonging?



# What would help students with belonging?

## What would help you feel a greater sense of belonging at your university?



When asked what would help students feel a greater sense of belonging at their university friendship and peer connection came out strongly across all demographics and modes.

46 per cent of all respondents said “developing closer or more friendships”, 42 per cent said “getting to know other people on my course better,” and 37 per cent said “meeting like-minded people.”

Though one third of all respondents said that joining more societies and groups, and around a fifth (22 per cent) said having a better understanding of what is on offer would help, students who do not agree they belong were less likely to select these options, suggesting that friendship is likely to make more of a difference to these students than taking up extra-curricular opportunities.

There was very little variation here by whether people had above or below average mental health, or by demographics.

But it is noticeable that even among students who agree they belong and those with better than average mental health friendship is still valued: 44 per cent of students who agree they belong said closer or more friendships would help their sense of belonging, with a similar level of agreement among those with average and above mental health and those whose mental health has improved.



# Thank you

Wonkhe and Pearson would like to thank all the students who took part in this survey.

## CONTACTS

Debbie McVitty, Wonkhe | [debbie@wonkhe.com](mailto:debbie@wonkhe.com)

Anna Jackson, Pearson | [anna.jackson@pearson.com](mailto:anna.jackson@pearson.com)

Gail Capper, Pearson | [gail.capper@pearson.com](mailto:gail.capper@pearson.com)

Dan Ramsden, Pearson | [dan.ramsden@pearson.com](mailto:dan.ramsden@pearson.com)

**WONKHE**