

How to persuade students to complain before it's too late

Jim Dickinson

Southern SUs Feb 2026



Polling on rights (as consumers)

1. Public first polling
2. 2001 students weighted for provider, PG/UG, age etc
3. Focus groups
4. Understanding of their rights
5. Promises made to them
6. Extent to which those promises met

Students are partners not consumers

Ideology, language,
standards

They should put up
and shut up

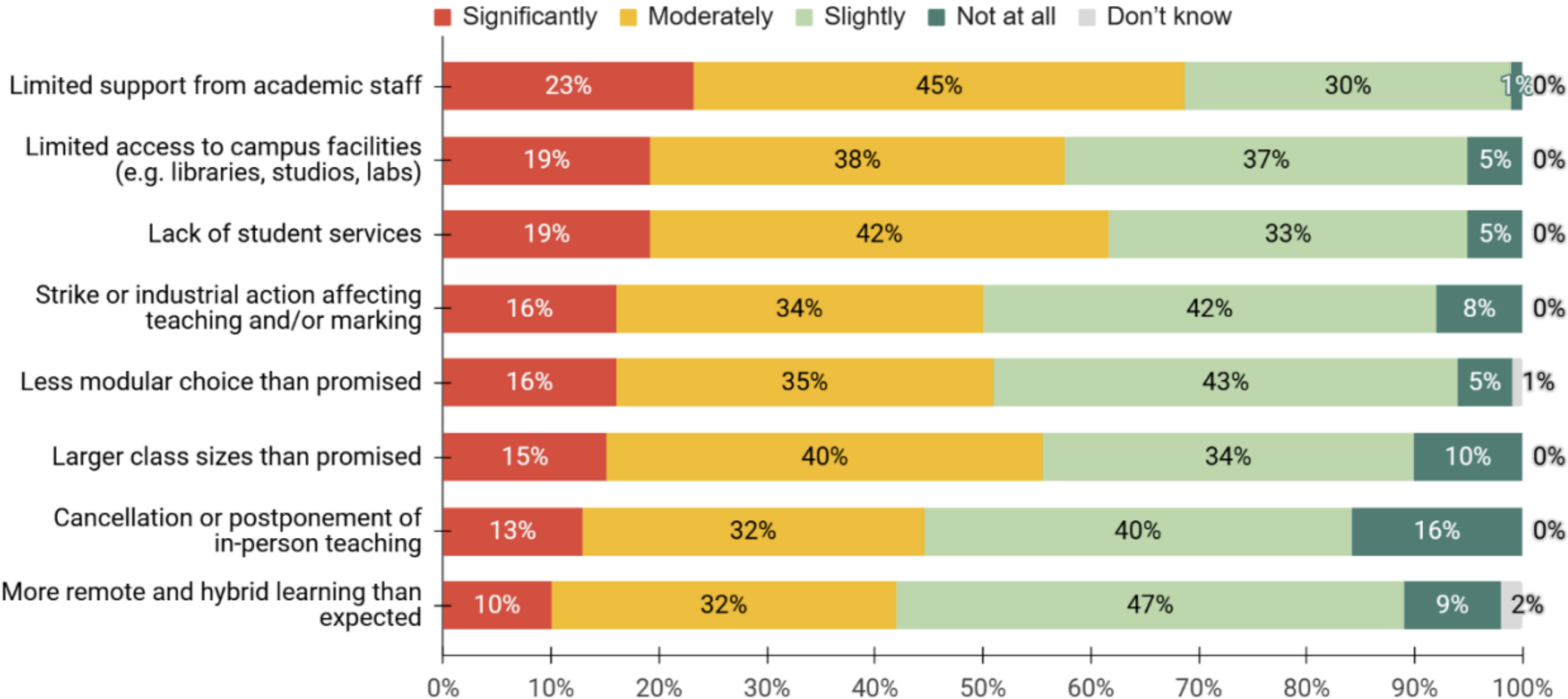




Figure 6: The significance of different barriers and disruption to university study

How significantly did the following impact your academic experience? [Base: Those who said that they had experienced the following during their time at university]

Public First | Students Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



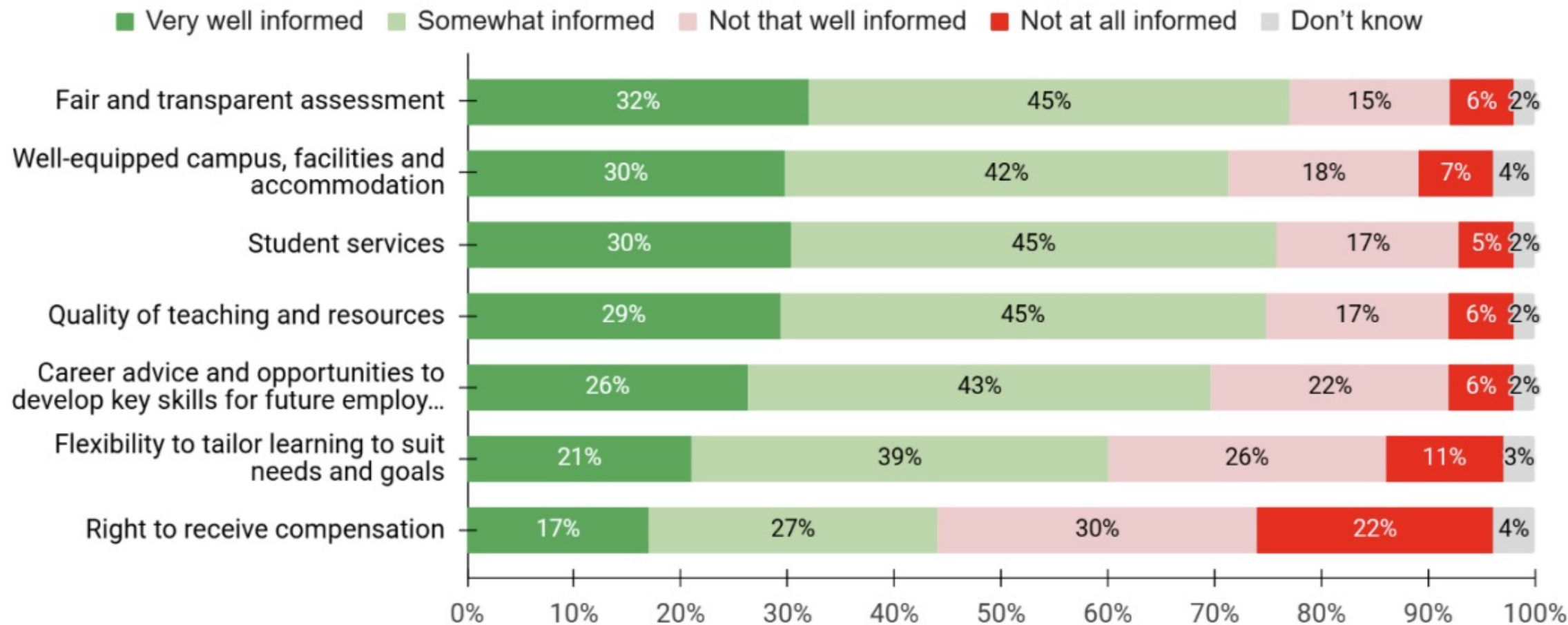
Half of students can't describe their rights

Only 50 per cent of students said they understood and could describe their rights and entitlements as a student, while 40 per cent said they could not

Figure 10: Abilities to understand and describe rights and entitlements among students

How well informed do you feel about your rights as a student on the following topics?

Public First | Students Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



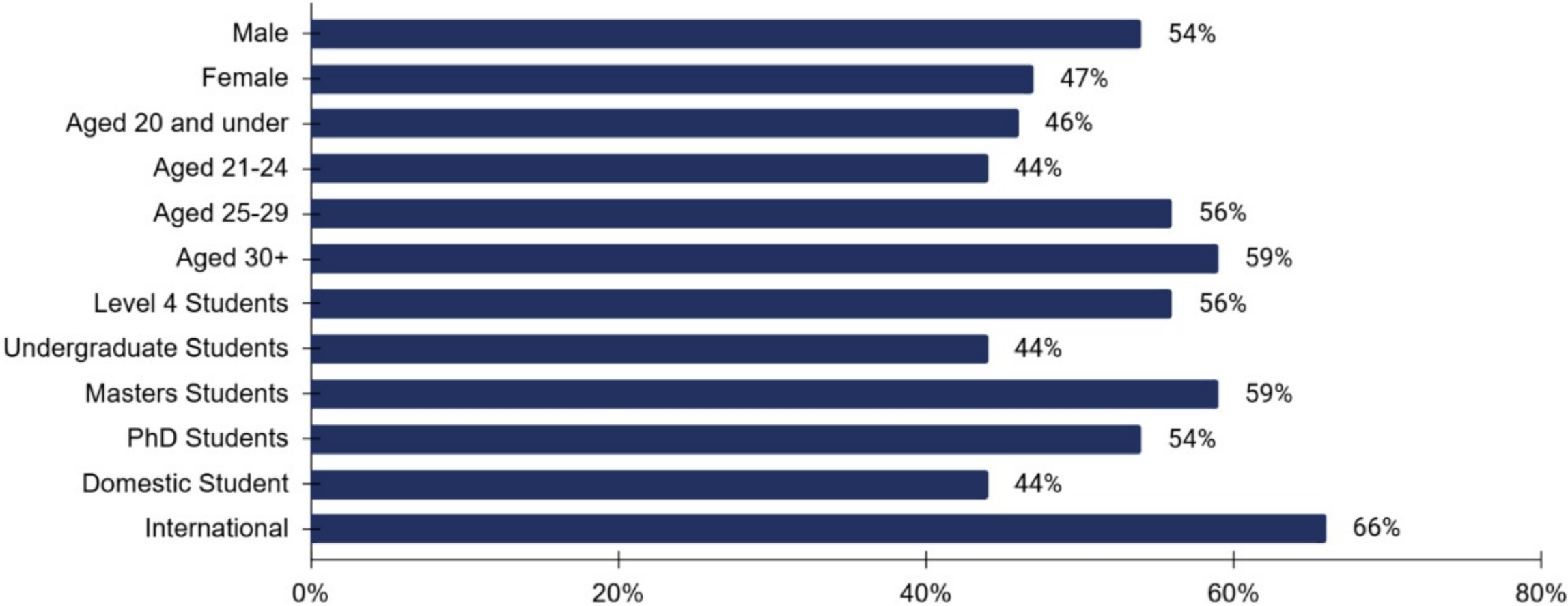
Students are most clueless about their right to compensation

More than half of students – 52 per cent – said they felt “not that well informed” or “not at all informed” about their right to receive compensation if they are let down or the university in breach of its contract

Figure 9: Perceptions of information about rights as a student by demographic

Would you say the following statement applies to you? “I understand and could describe my rights and entitlements as a student.” [BASE: Those who selected 'Yes]

Public First | Students Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



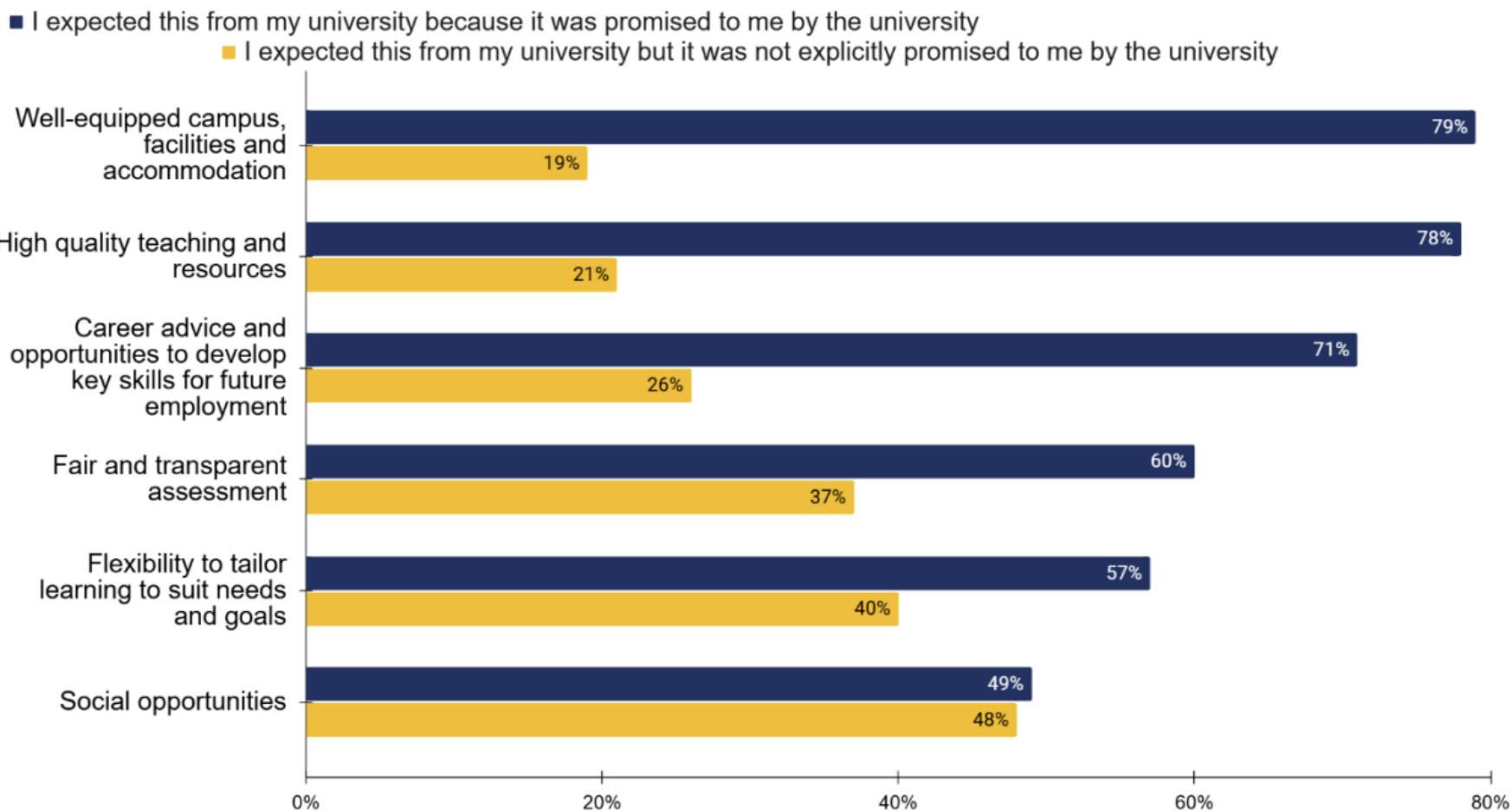
Students struggle to distinguish between expectations and promises

The research found that students did not consistently draw clear distinctions between their wider expectations of higher education and the specific promises their institutions made to them

Figure 2: Expectations and perceived promises from universities

For the things that you expected ahead of going to university, which of the following comes closest to your view? [Base: Students who selected the following as expectations that had before university]

Public First | Students Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



Three-quarters of students say promises weren't fully met

Over three-quarters of students – 76 per cent – said the promises they believed their university had made had not been fully met.

Only 24 per cent believed promises had been fully met.

Among those whose promises weren't met, 59 per cent said they were mostly met, 14 per cent partially met, and 1 per cent not met at all.

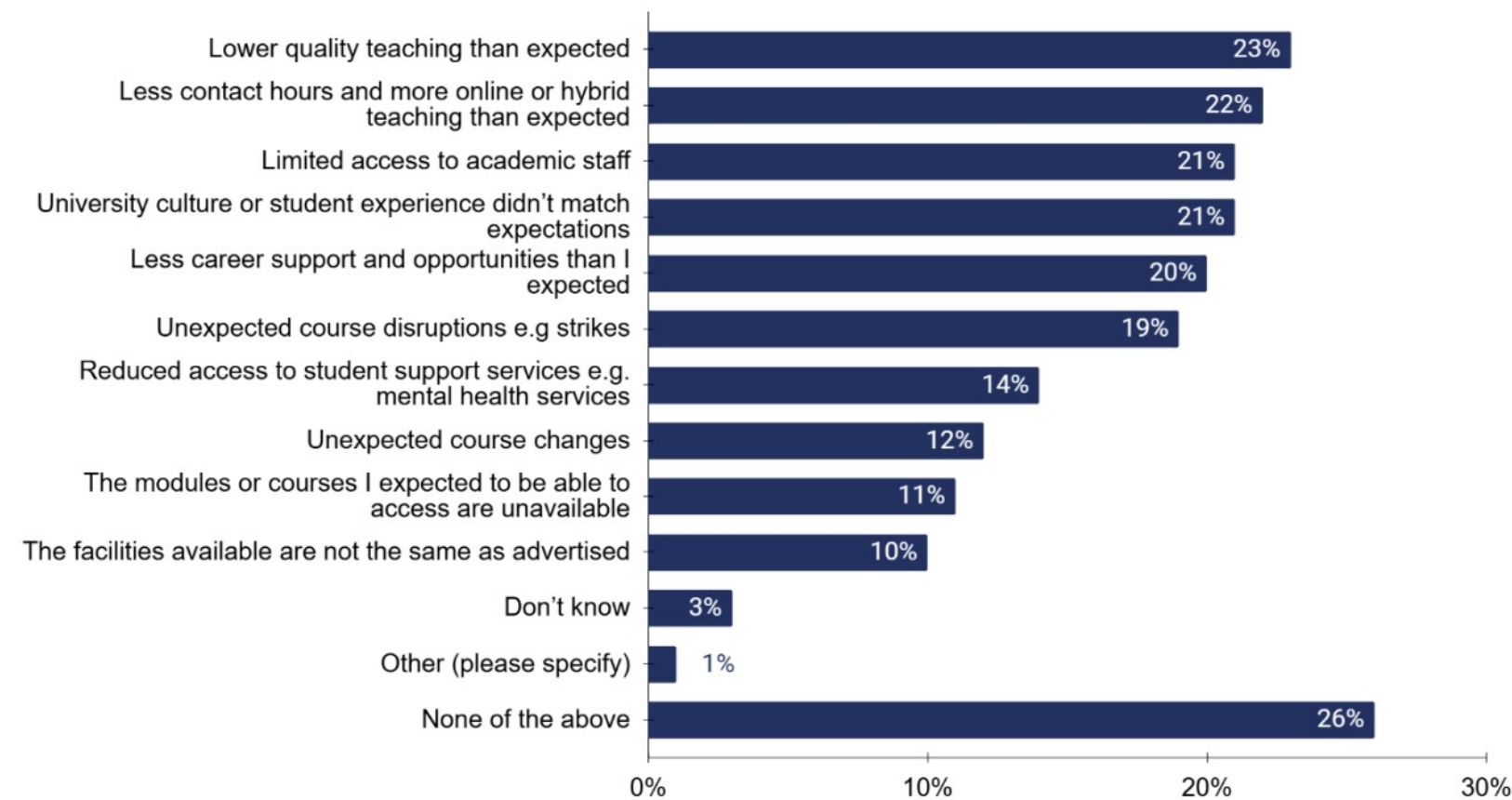
The gap between promise and reality

Though 79 per cent of students identified “well-equipped campus, facilities and accommodation” as a promise and 78 per cent identified “high quality teaching and resources,” fewer than half said these were clear and consistent parts of their actual university experience.

Figure 4: Differences between what was advertised about courses and respondents’ experiences

Have you observed any of the following differences between what was advertised about your course and your experience, if any? Select all that apply.

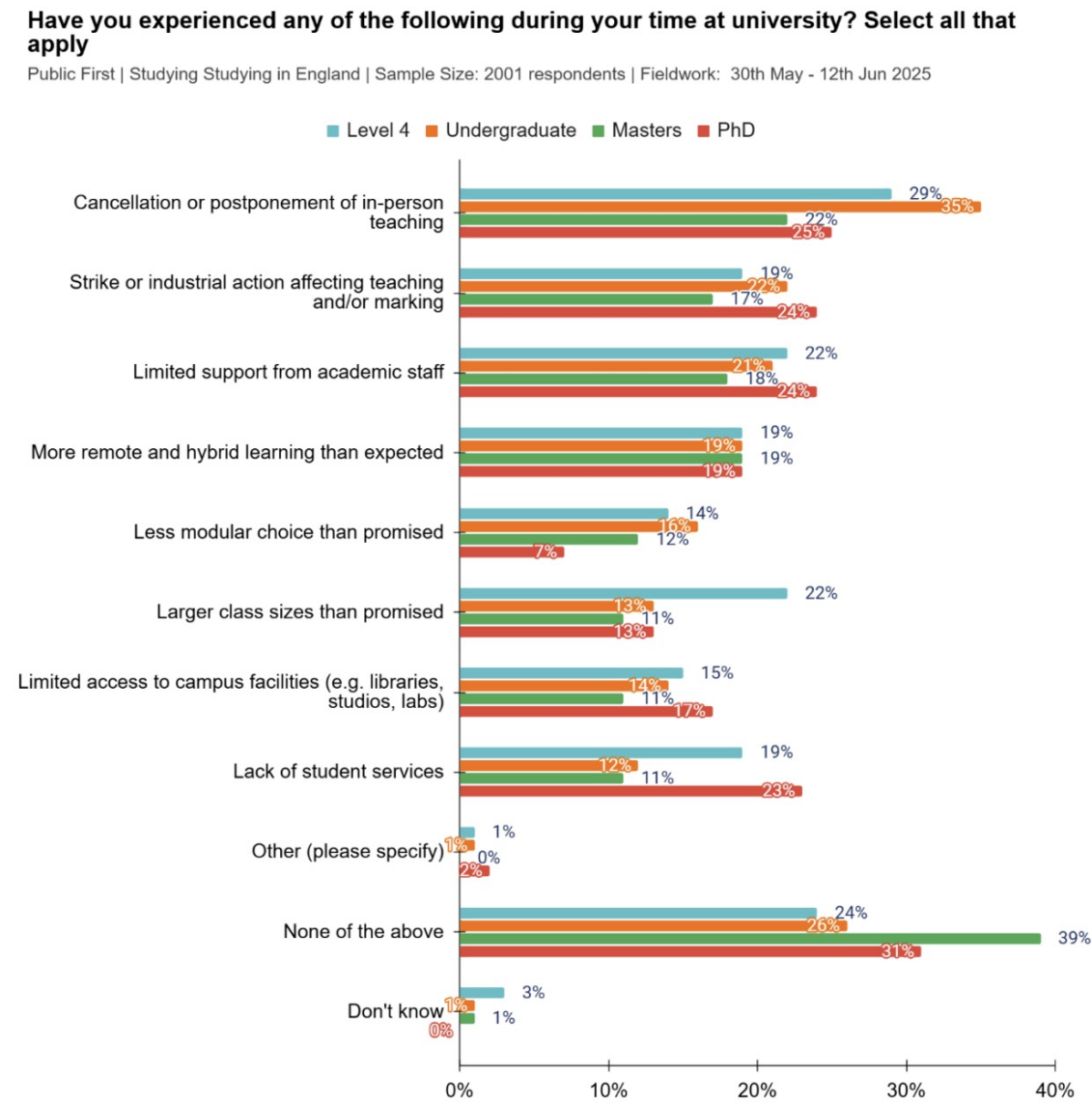
Public First | Students Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



Disruption is now the norm, not the exception

When presented with a list of possible disruptions and asked whether any had occurred, 70 per cent of students identified at least one type of disruption to their university experience.

Figure 5: Experiences of barriers and disruptions to university study



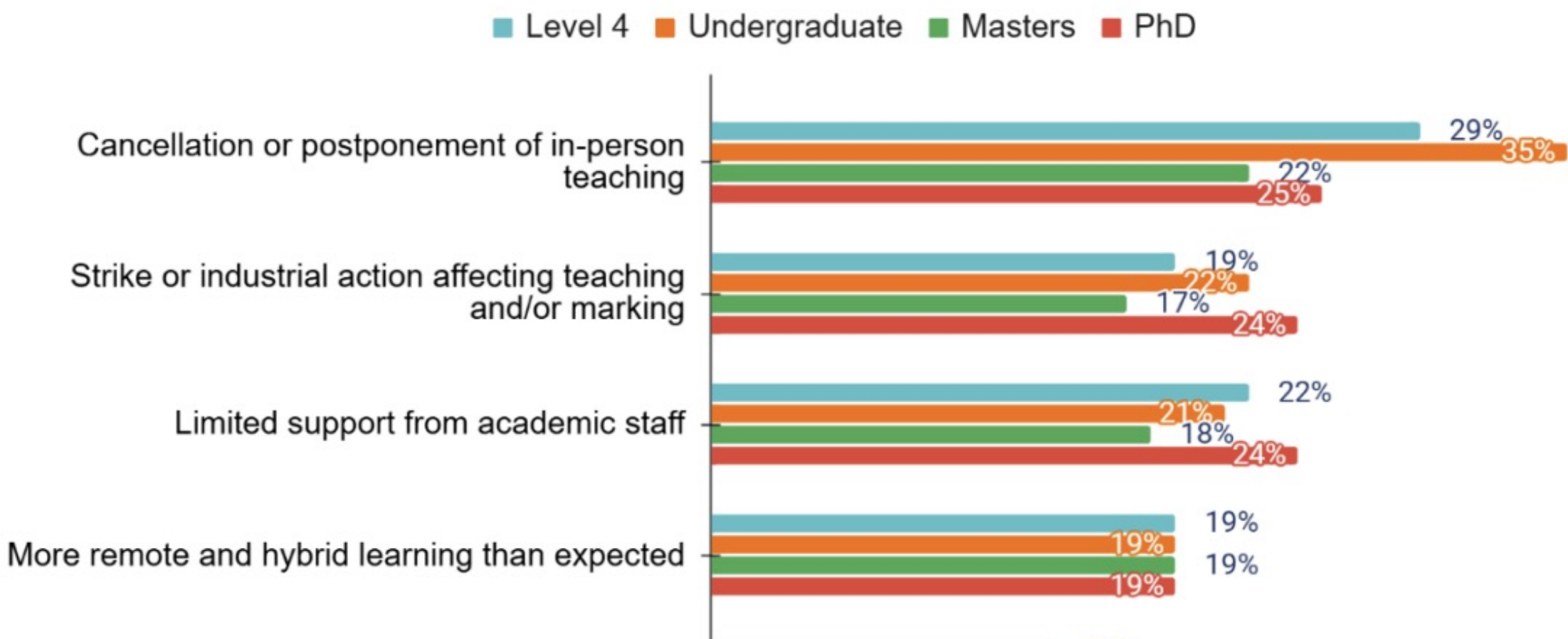
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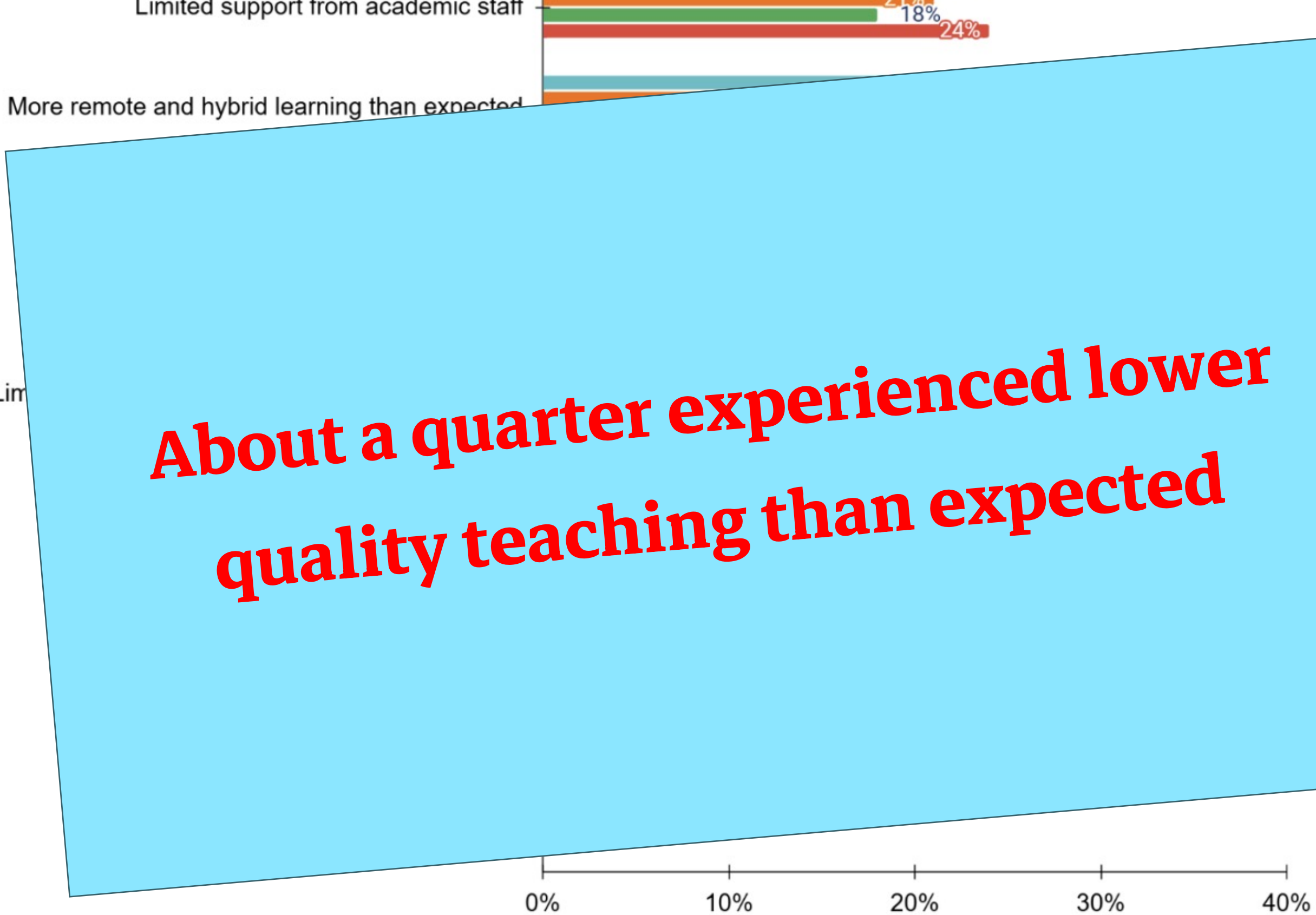
Have you experienced any of the following during your time at university? Select all that apply

Public First | Studying Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



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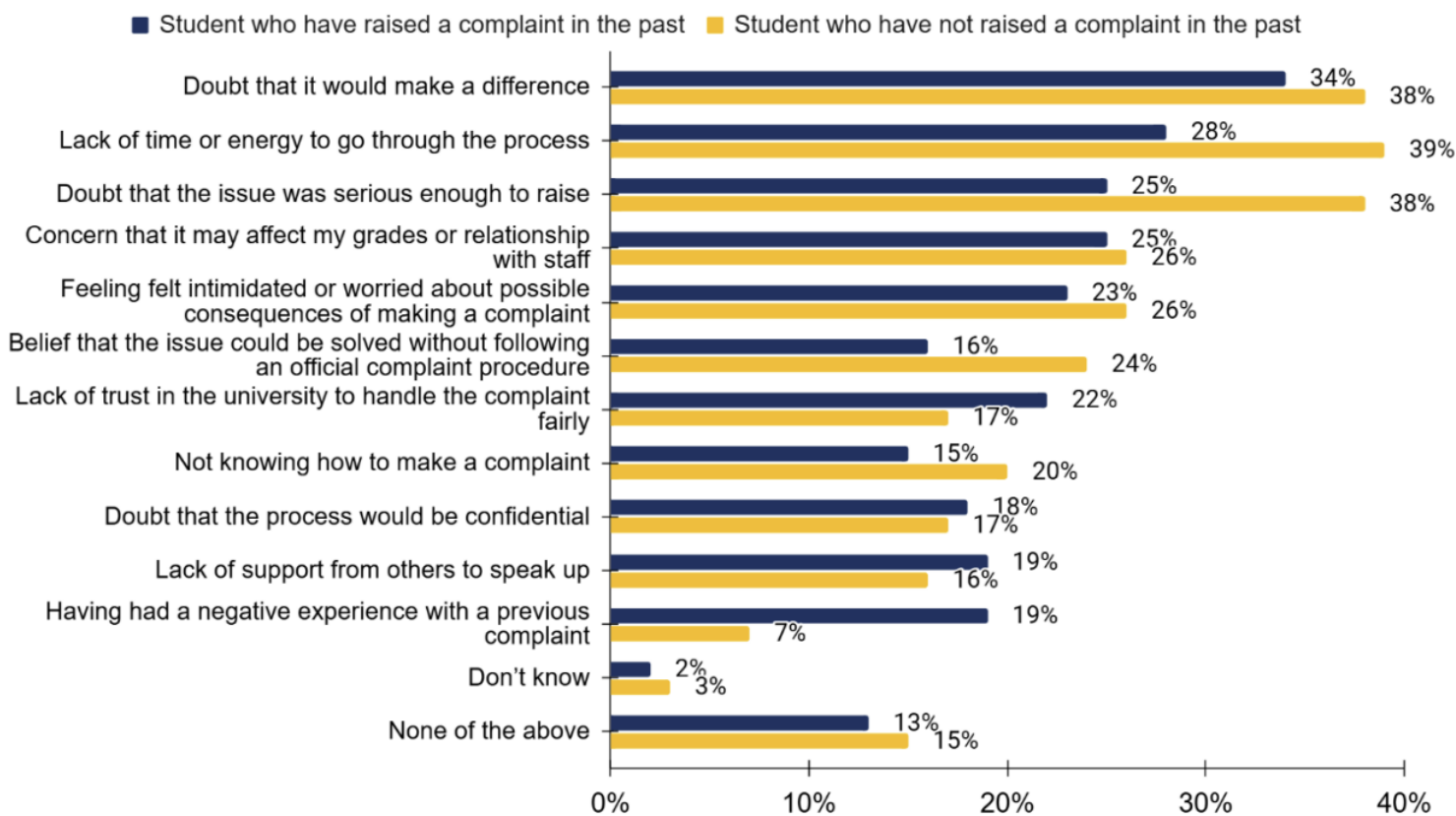
Most have never complained, a quarter wouldn't know how to complain

When asked about the biggest barrier to making a complaint, most cited doubt that it would make a difference at 36 per cent and lack of time or energy to go through the process at 35 per cent. This isn't about students being lazy or apathetic – it's rational actors making cost-benefit calculations about power imbalances and concluding that the effort required exceeds the likelihood of success.

Figure 8: Barriers to raising complaints with universities

Would you consider any of the following barriers to you raising a complaint with your university? Select all that apply

Public First | Students Studying in England | Sample Size: 2001 respondents | Fieldwork: 30th May - 12th Jun 2025



The most likely source of information for students on the topic of their rights was their university website.

More than half (53 per cent) said that they would look there or simply search online (51 per cent) for the answers.

Just 42 per cent said that they would look to their students' union or student representative body for this information.

The most wonderful time of the year

1. Experience of democratic participation
2. Reconciliation of competing interests in public
3. Issues facing students are aired and exposed
4. Students gain skills in running campaigns and debating
5. Universities take the SU more seriously
 - High turnout (+diversity)
 - High no candidates (+diversity)

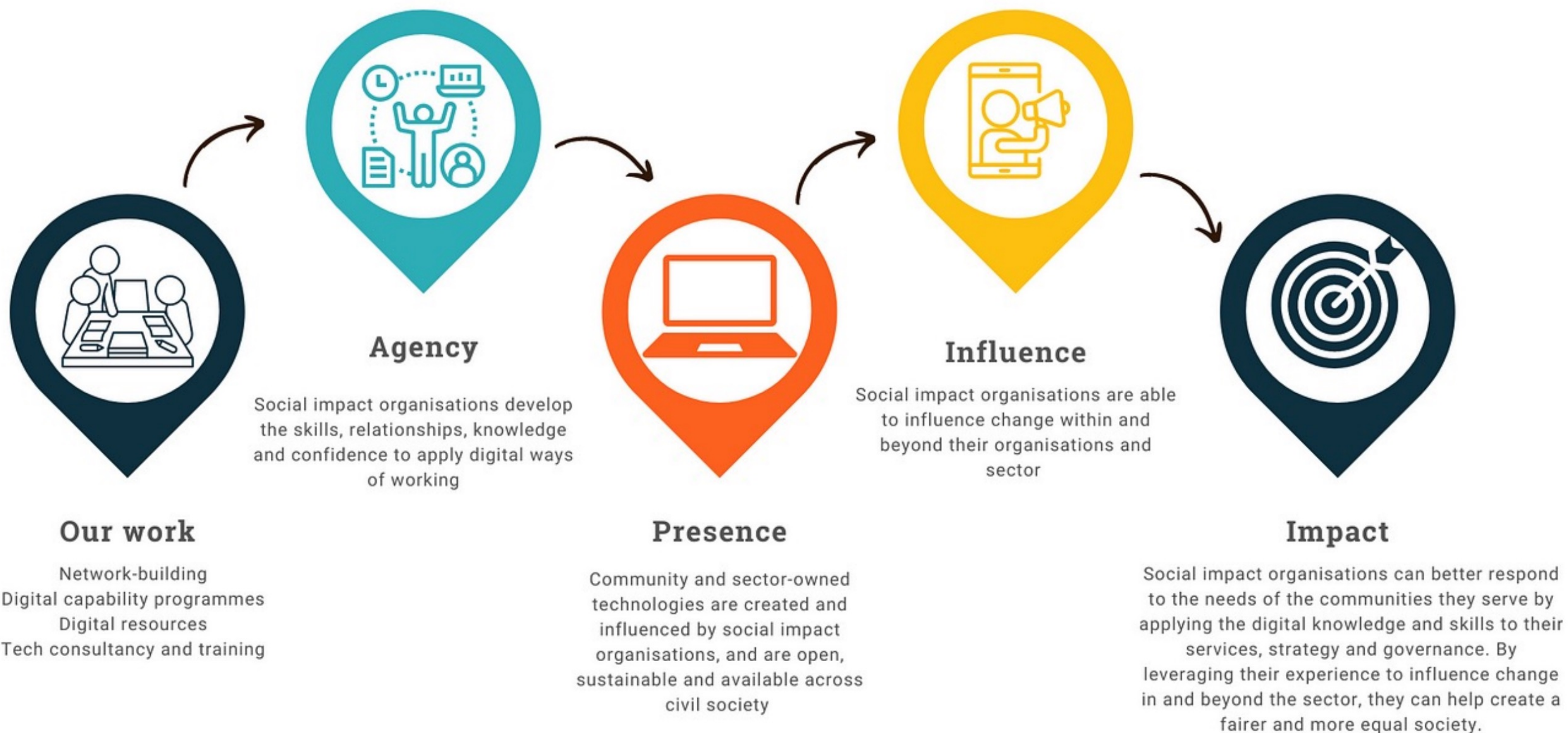
= Impact of the work

BUT

1. Chasing the KPI may distort
2. Potential harms
3. Opportunity costs
 - Experience of democratic participation
 - Reconciliation of competing interests in public
 - Issues facing students are aired and exposed
 - Students gain skills in running campaigns and debating
 - Universities take the SU more seriously via credible turnout

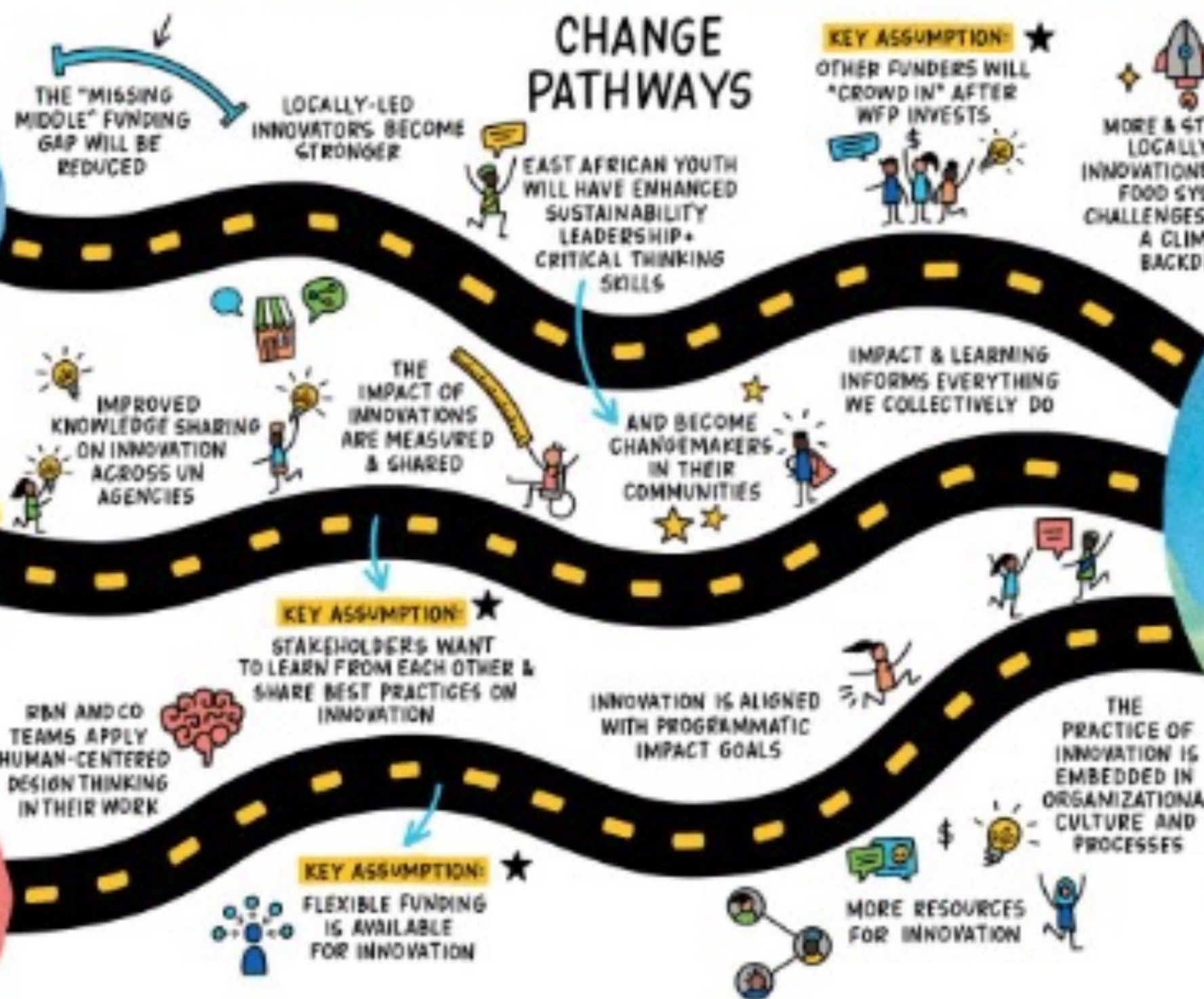
THEORY OF CHANGE

CAST is a charity helping social impact organisations use digital for social good. We work to accelerate their agency, presence and influence in technologies that affect us all.



THEORY OF CHANGE

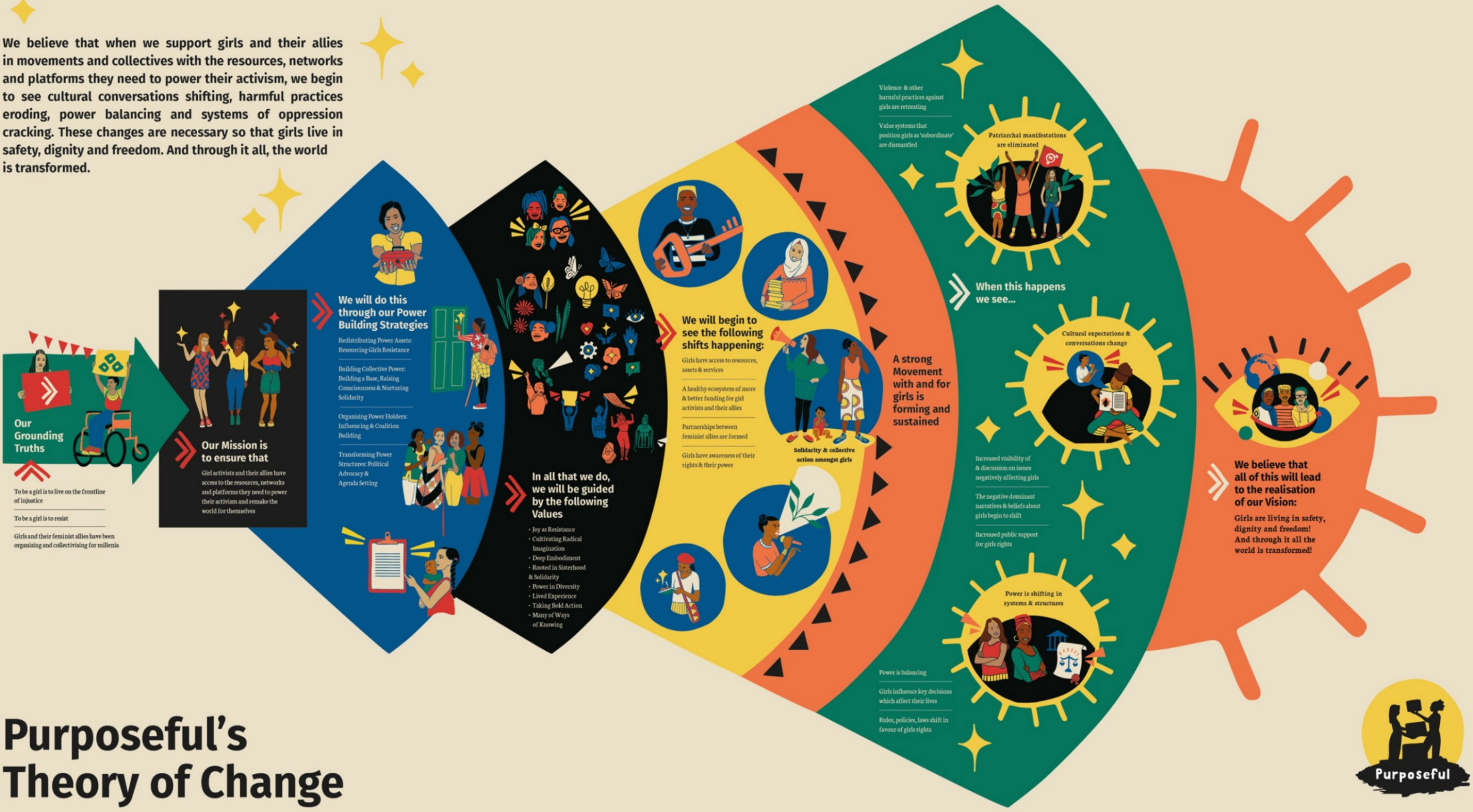
HUB'S ACTIVITIES



IMPACT



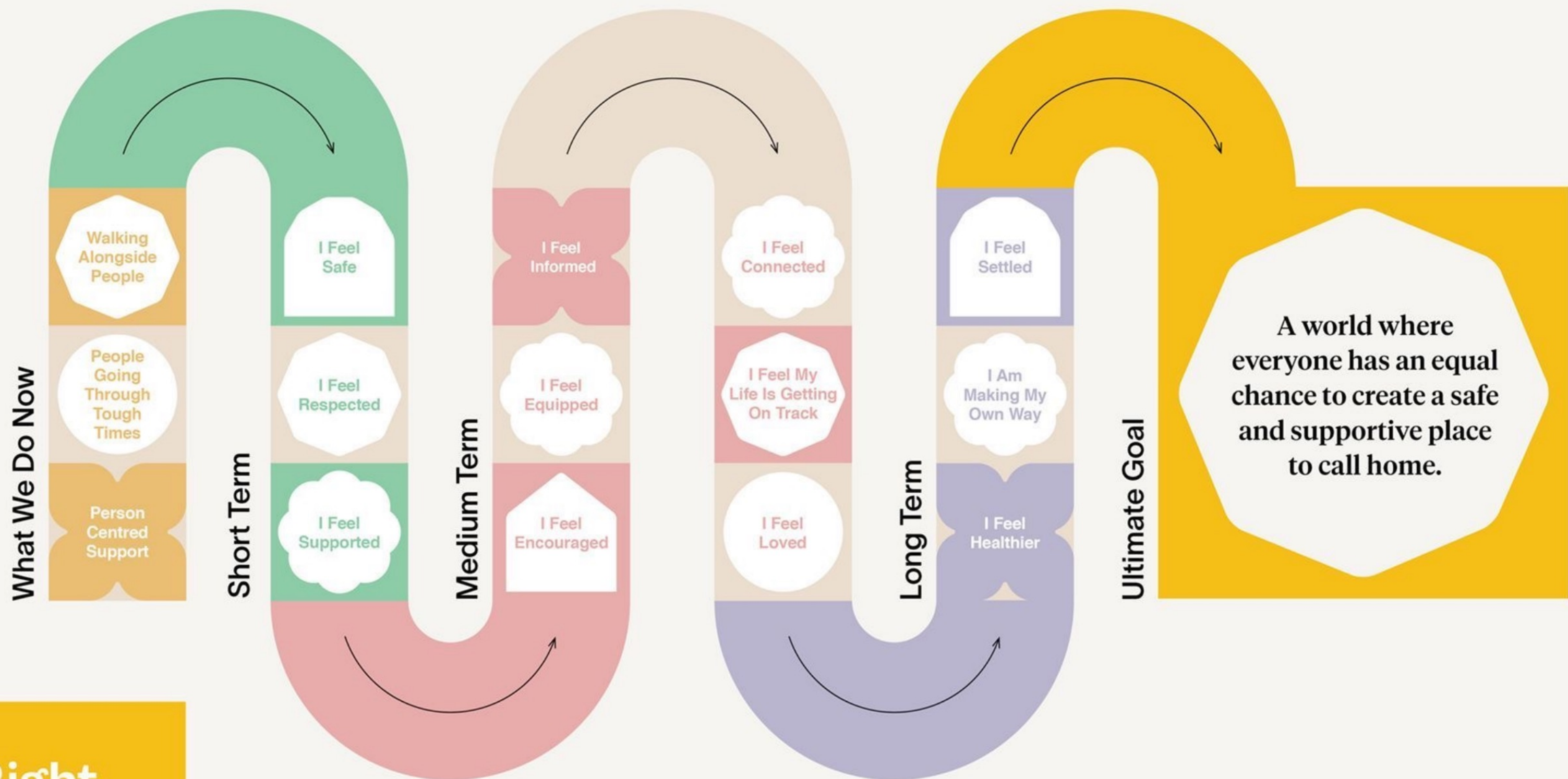
We believe that when we support girls and their allies in movements and collectives with the resources, networks and platforms they need to power their activism, we begin to see cultural conversations shifting, harmful practices eroding, power balancing and systems of oppression cracking. These changes are necessary so that girls live in safety, dignity and freedom. And through it all, the world is transformed.



Purposeful's Theory of Change



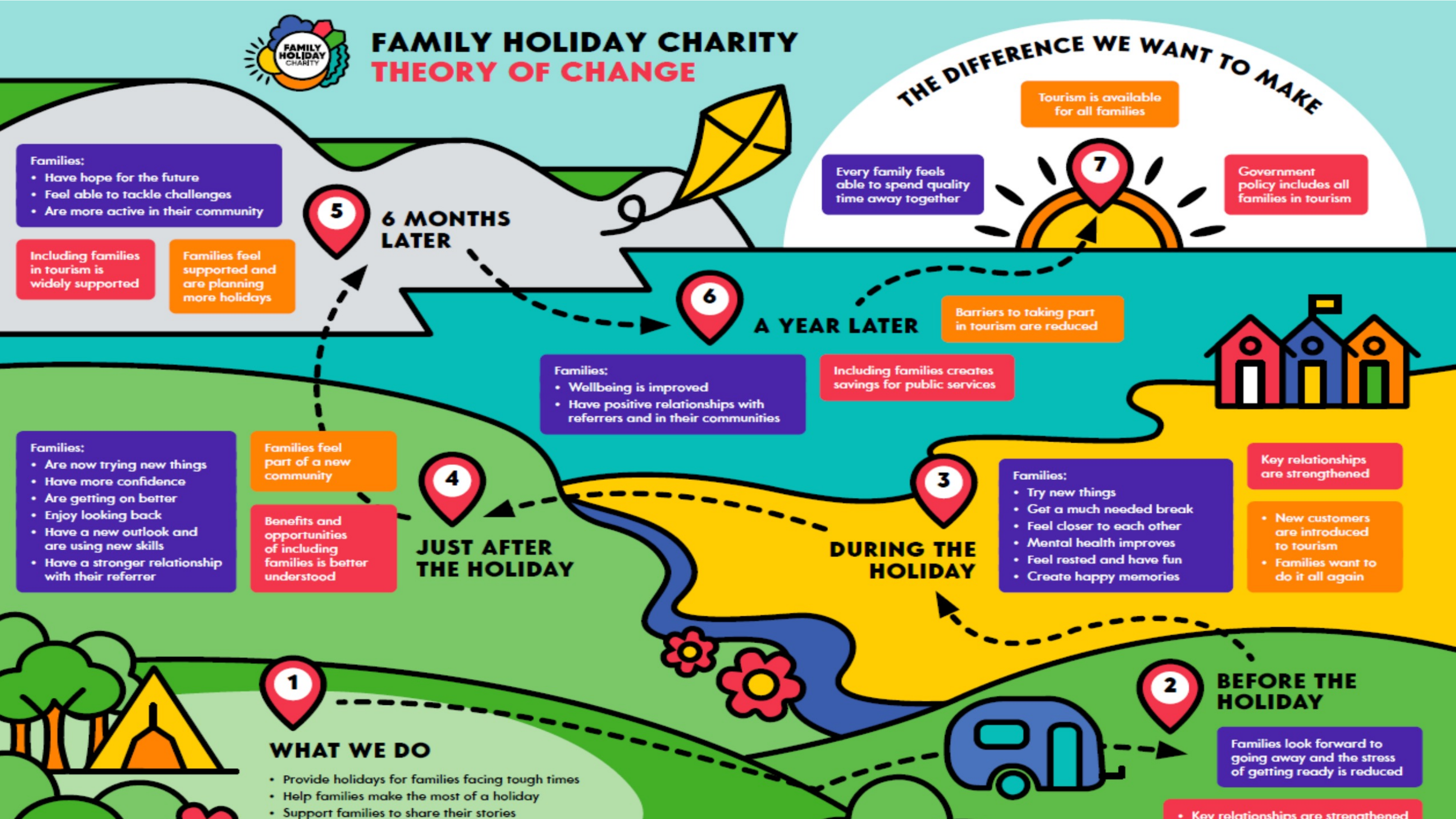
Right
There



Theory of Change



FAMILY HOLIDAY CHARITY THEORY OF CHANGE



**Deadline
bunching**

**Feedback
late**

**Lack of
availability of
placements**

**Group
assessment
unfair**

**Lack of
diversity
of food on
campus**

**Mental
health**

**Black
mould
and mice**

**Housemate
issues**

**Lack of
support on
placement**

**Inflexible
timetables**

**Optional
modules
cancelled**

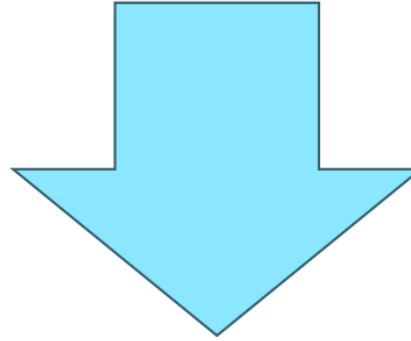
**Lack of
disability
support**

**Buses
always full
or late**

**Cost of
living**

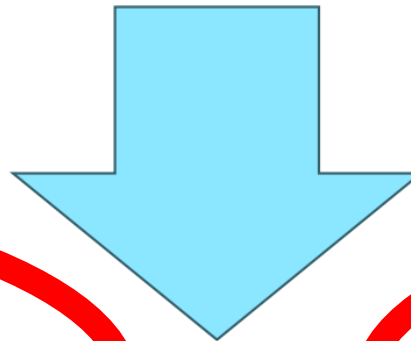
Snog Help them cope	Marry Eradicate the issue	Avoid Warn them
Cost of living: Hardship funds Free breakfasts	Cost of living: Loan students more money Take active steps to reduce student costs	Cost of living: Warn them about costs with accurate information Decent budgeting support
Deadline/exam bunching: Chillout tent Pop up revision spaces	Deadline/exam bunching: Don't over-use exams Don't bunch their deadlines up	Deadline/exam bunching: Nudge progress on revision and continuous assessment all year

Students experience problems



Students take part in SU research

Students choose their representatives



**SU uses access and evidence to persuade
university to change**

**SU uses campaigns to cause prioritization of its
issues**

Fewer students experience fewer problems and when they do they're not as problematic

Problems

- Efficacy of insider tactics
- Difficulty of deploying outsider tactics (related to position during good times)
- Size of student body
- Complexity of student body – issues and programmes
- Complexity of student body – cohesion and confidence



APPEALS

If you're unsure whether your results are published, check your LEARN Results page, before checking with your School's Administration team.

ARE YOUR RESULTS PROVISIONAL OR HAVE THEY BEEN PUBLISHED?

PUBLISHED

PROVISIONAL

You cannot appeal whilst your results are still provisional, so should wait until they are published.

WERE YOUR RESULTS PUBLISHED IN THE LAST 10 WORKING DAYS?

YES

NO

Late appeals can only be submitted if there is a good reason and evidence for why you were not able to do so within the processes time scales.

Appeals cannot be made by challenging the academic judgement of the marker.

DO YOU HAVE ELIGIBLE GROUNDS TO APPEAL ON?

PROCEDURAL IRREGULARITIES

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

PREJUDICE OR BIAS

DO YOU HAVE EVIDENCE OF THE BASIS OF THE APPEAL?

YES

NO

LSU Advice may be able to support you in thinking of options for evidence. Appeals without evidence cannot be considered.

Appeals based on being dissatisfied with the outcome of a claim or complaint are unlikely to be successful. Unless there is compelling new evidence to add (that you have good reason for not providing previously) the appeal will not be successful.

HAVE YOU MADE THE UNIVERSITY AWARE OF THESE CIRCUMSTANCES PREVIOUSLY? (I.E. BY SUBMITTING A MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCE CLAIM OR A COMPLAINT)

YES

NO

Unless you have compelling reason for not having made the University aware previously, your appeal is unlikely to be considered.

YES, YOU SHOULD SUBMIT AN APPEAL. YOU SHOULD EMAIL YOUR FIRST DRAFT AND EVIDENCE TO LSU ADVICE FOR FEEDBACK

MAYBE. IT IS LIKELY TO BE CHALLENGING TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL. YOU SHOULD CONTACT LSU ADVICE TO DISCUSS YOUR ELIGIBILITY.

Chance

**THIS CARD MAY BE KEPT
UNTIL NEEDED, OR SOLD**

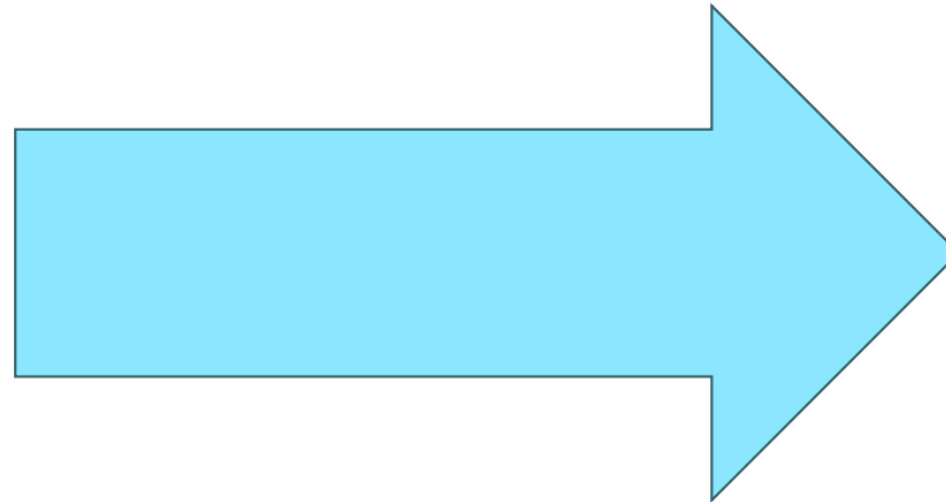
**GET OUT OF JAIL
FREE**



An academic appeal

I had a mental health problem
I had a car crash
I suffered a family loss
My car broke down

That's why I did badly
Can I have another try please



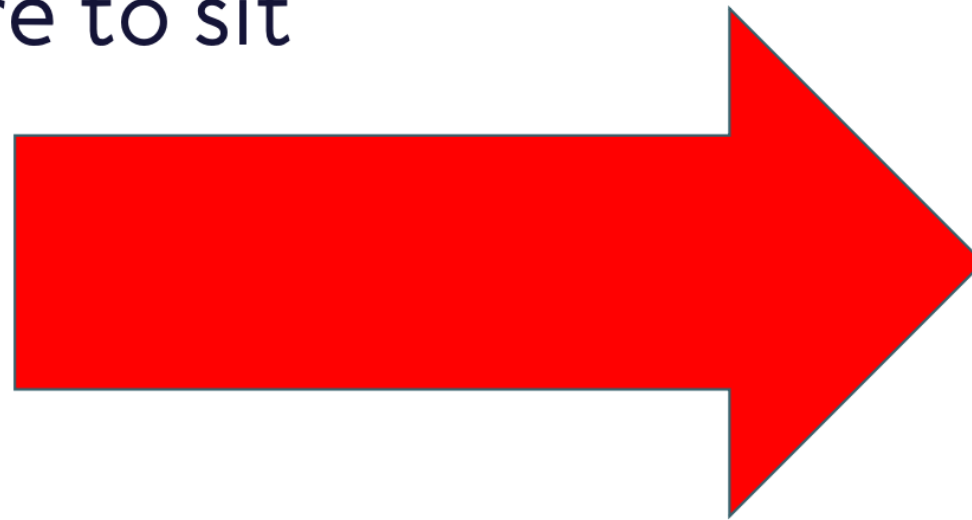
Another academic appeal

The library had no resources
My diss supervisor was never
available

There was never anywhere to sit
on campus

The teaching was awful

That's why I did badly
Can I have another try please



**Crap
teaching**

**Feedback
late**

**Feedback
not
helpful**

**Lack of
library
resources**

**No water
fountains**

**Course
out of
date**

**Counselling
wait times**

**Reasonable
adjustments
not being
followed**

**Unfair group
assignments**

**Lectures
not
recorded**

**Lecturers
never
responding to
emails**

**Can't pay in
installments**

**Inflexible
timetables**

**Optional
modules
cancelled**

What goes into a quality experience?

The academic experience	Resources and support	Student outcomes
Assessment and awards	Equality of opportunity	University-wide issues and services

B1: Academic experience

What goes into a quality experience?

The academic experience	Resources and support	Student outcomes
Assessment and awards	Equality of opportunity	University-wide issues and services

- **Up-to-date:** Material representative of current thinking and practices in the subject, profession or industry;
- **Educational challenge:** Most students should neither find the course too hard nor too easy;
- **Coherent:** Learn the important foundations in the subject before tackling more complex areas, chance to choose specialist options, practical aspects related to the theory;
- **Effectively delivered:** Engaging learning activities, good opportunities to engage directly with teaching staff, regular and effective supervision where the course involves research, and professional or practice-based elements integrated with academic elements'
- **Relevant skills:** Develop and demonstrate intellectual skills like evaluating evidence, mobilising an argument, and solving problems - and if course designed to lead to a particular profession, develop and demonstrate the skills necessary for success in that profession.

The quality six pack		
1. Academic Experience ● Up-to-date ● Effectively delivered ● Appropriate challenge ● Coherent ● Relevant skills	2. Resources and support ● Good staff ● Learning resources ● Academic support ● Academic integrity ● Careers support ● Feedback and engagement	3. Student outcomes ● Continue to the second year if there is one ● Complete their studies ● Progress <u>into graduate job, or further study.</u>
4. Assessment and awards ● Effective assessment ● Avoiding misconduct ● Valid and reliable ● Credible ● Tests English	5. Equality of opportunity ● Harassment and sexual misconduct prevention and complaints ● Identification of gaps and work to tackle them ● Involvement of students impacted	6. University-wide issues and services ● Course timetable and changes ● Student mental health support ● Freedom of speech ● Student cost of living

Student outcomes

University-wide issues and services

B1: Academic

- **Up-to-date:** Mater profession or indu:
- **Educational challe** easy;
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Your education

Not meeting the minimums?

- Raise with a student rep or SU
- Describe where the course is falling short
- Explain what you think might help



How to get even better?

- Raise with a student rep or SU
- Describe what you think could improve
- Explain the impact you think that would have

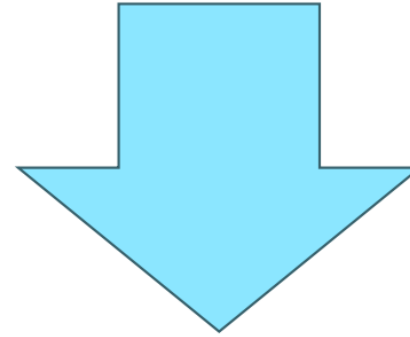


Problems

- Assumption was that all provision is at or above the baseline
- When it dips nobody is keen to admit it (fear of OfS)
- Students don't know it, reps don't know it
- Few encouraged to audit against it
- SU doesn't know

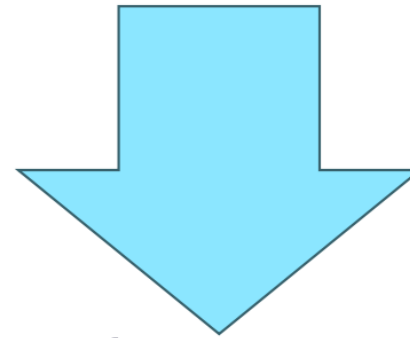


Students experience problems



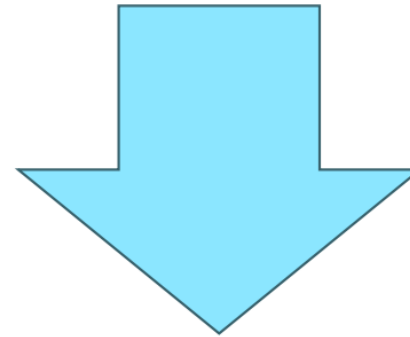
Students raise informal complaints

Students raise formal complaints



Staff resolve to fix to avoid student going formal

**University takes action to protect from claims or
regulatory action**



Fewer students experience fewer problems and when they do they're not as problematic

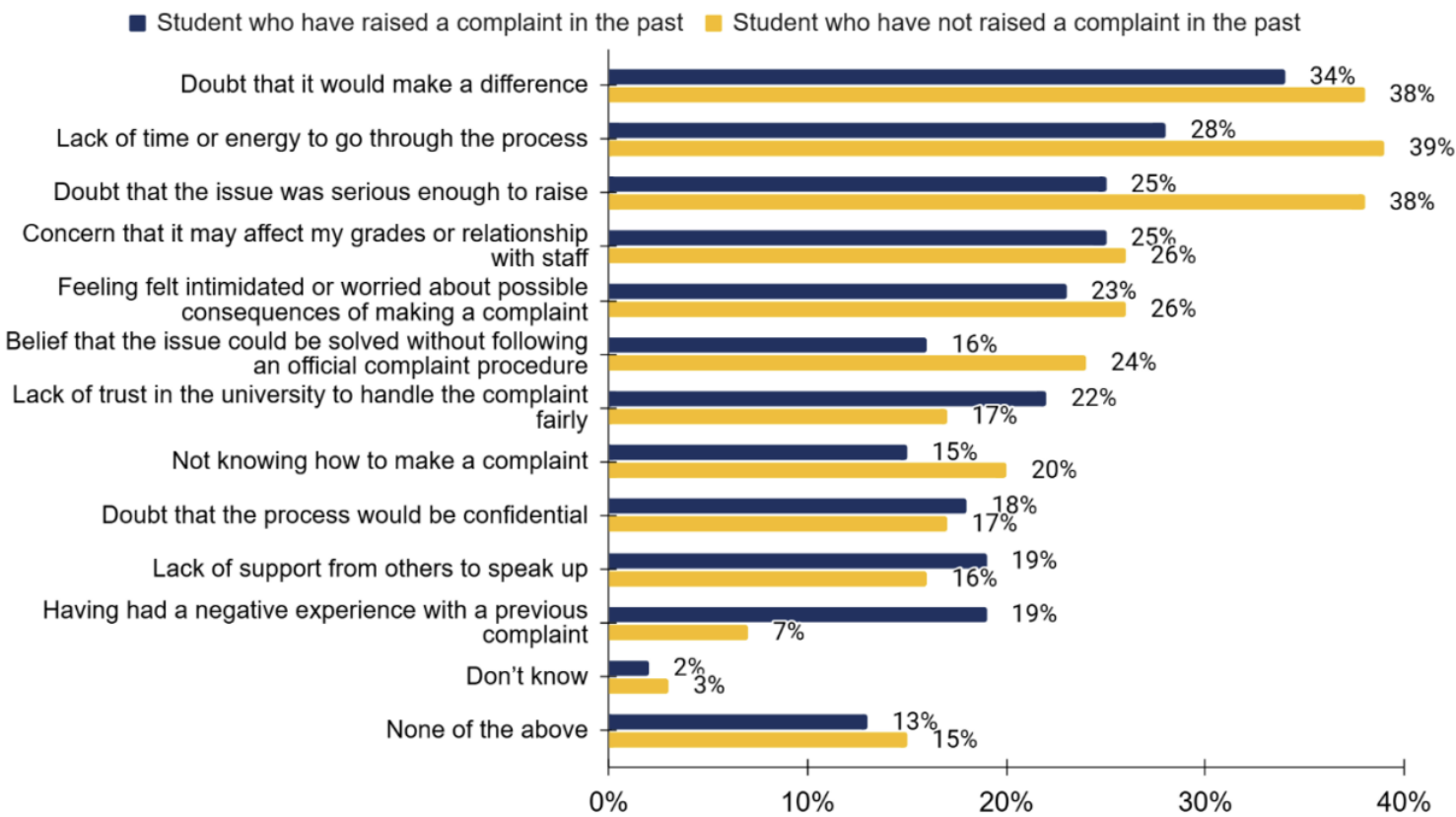
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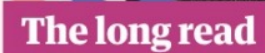
Advice

Thank you for visiting our Advice Service website. Please take some time to review our online advice. You can use the tabs above to find information on academic, finance, student life and housing issues. If you need some extra help and support after following this initial advice or you can't find the answer to your question, please contact us using our enquiry form below.

Service Update 24th May 2024

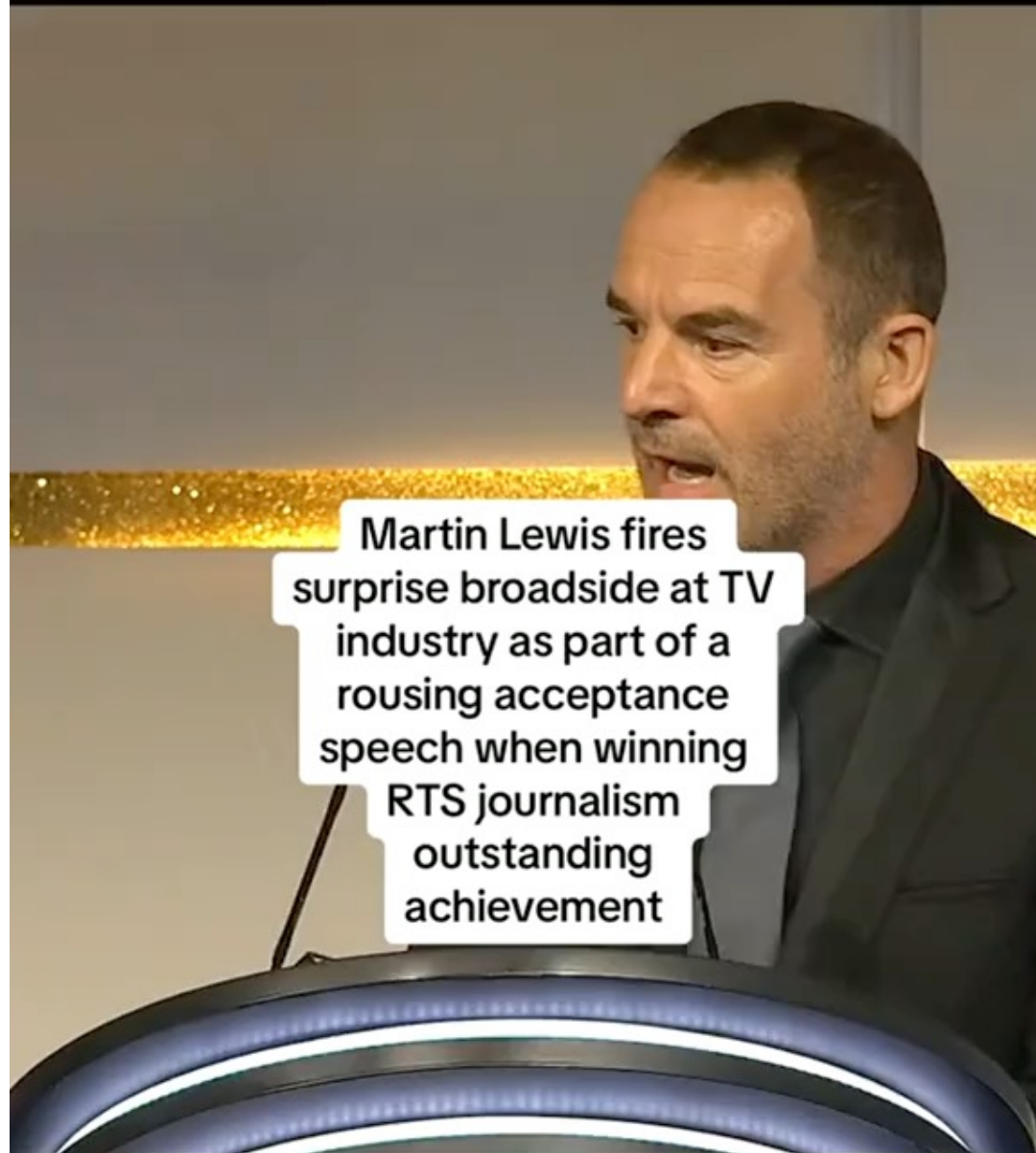
As a result of short staffing, we currently have reduced availability for appointments. We will book appointments where we have availability but may only be able to offer advice by e-mail. Our e-mail response time is currently between 2-5 working days. We are very sorry for any inconvenience caused.

[**MAKE AN ENQUIRY**](#)[**OPENING HOURS**](#)[**OUR SERVICES**](#)[**OTHER WAYS TO CONTACT US**](#)[**E-MAIL RESPONSE TIMES**](#)[**CONFIDENTIALITY**](#)[**YOUR DATA**](#)



The Money Saving Expert: how Martin Lewis became the most trusted man in Britain

Illustration: ITV/Bratislav Milenkovic



Martin Lewis fires surprise broadside at TV industry as part of a rousing acceptance speech when winning RTS journalism outstanding achievement

The five key barriers

OPPORTUNITY COSTS	CONFLICT AVERSION	CONFIDENCE/CAPITAL	IGNORANCE	RETRIBUTION
How can we reduce the opportunity costs of complaint?	How can we reduce the sense of conflict in the process - or cause students to be comfortable with it?	How can we boost students' (differential) confidence to complain?	What steps can we take to make sure that students know and understand their rights?	How can we protect students from retribution or prove the fear is unfounded?

01 Flip the Verb

FROM REPORTING TO ENABLING

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

WHAT YOUR SU DID

"Your officer attended the Academic Experience Committee and raised concerns about feedback turnaround times in the Engineering faculty."

→ Passive. SU as actor.
Student as audience.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

WHAT YOU CAN DO

"If your feedback hasn't come back within 3 weeks of submission, you're entitled to chase it. Here's a template email — just add your module name and send it today."

→ Active. Student as actor.
Clear next step.

02 Translate the Rules

FROM POLICY DOCUMENTS TO EXECUTABLE KNOWLEDGE

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

POLICY PAGE ON THE SU
WEBSITE

"Students are advised to consult the university's Academic Regulations (Section 7.3, subsections a–f) for information regarding assessment feedback timescales and the formal complaints procedure."

→ Bureaucratic. Requires prior knowledge. Daunting.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

WHAT YOU'RE ENTITLED TO

"The university must return your feedback within 3 weeks. If they don't: 1) Email your module leader. 2) No response in 5 days? Escalate to your Department. 3) Still nothing? File a formal complaint. Here's how →"

→ Plain language. If-then logic. Rights made visible.

03

Guide, Don't Choose

FROM RECOMMENDATIONS TO DECISION STRUCTURES

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

SU ADVICE PAGE

"We recommend all students experiencing difficulties with their accommodation speak to our Advice Centre, where our trained advisors can help you find the best solution for your situation."

→ SU as gatekeeper. Student must come to you. Dependency model.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

HOUSING PROBLEM? HERE'S HOW TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO

"Is it a repair issue? → Email estates, template here. Is it a contract dispute? → Check if you're in cooling-off period (first 14 days). Is it uninhabitable? → You may be entitled to a rent reduction. Not sure? → Take our 2-min quiz →"

→ Decision tree. Student as own choice architect. SU as tool, not gatekeeper.

04 Trust the Maths

FROM OFFICER OPINION TO EVIDENCE AND METHOD

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

OFFICER STATEMENT

"As your VP Education, I believe the university needs to do much better on feedback and I am committed to raising this as a priority in my term of office."

→ Authority rests on officer.
Evaporates every July. Vague.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

THE DATA SAYS SO

"The university's own policy (Section 4.2) says feedback within 3 weeks. Our survey of 847 students shows 43% waited longer on this course. Here's the policy. Here's the data. Here's what you can do about it →"

→ Authority in evidence.
Survives officer turnover.
Actionable.

05 Kill the Friction

FROM SIGNPOSTING TO PRE-LOADED ACTION

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

SU WEBSITE

"If you are unhappy with your feedback, you may wish to consider making use of the university's formal complaints procedure, details of which can be found in the student handbook."

→ Vague. High effort. Student must find the handbook, find the form, write from scratch.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

FEEDBACK RETURNED LATE? SEND THIS NOW

"Copy this email, add your name and module: 'Dear [Module Leader], I submitted [assignment] on [date]. The university's policy commits to feedback within 3 weeks. It has now been [X] weeks. Please advise when I can expect to receive it.' If no reply in 5 days, here's what to do next →"

→ Template ready to send. Friction eliminated. Implementation intention built in.

06 You're Allowed to Ask

FROM DEPENDENCY TO RIGHTS-HOLDER IDENTITY

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

SU HOMEPAGE STRAPLINE

"Your Students' Union is here to support you through every step of your university journey. Our team of trained advisors and elected officers are ready to help whenever you need us."

→ Student as dependent. SU as helper.
Passive framing throughout.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

YOU HAVE RIGHTS. HERE THEY ARE.

"You're entitled to feedback within 3 weeks. You're entitled to 12 weeks' notice of timetable changes. You're entitled to complain — and to get a response within 28 days. You do not have to accept the first no. Here's what to do if your rights aren't being met →"

→ Student as rights-holder. Entitlement language. Agency centred.

07 Show the Wins

FROM SU ACHIEVEMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

SU SOCIAL MEDIA POST

"Great news! After months of negotiation, your VP Education has successfully secured a commitment from the university to review feedback turnaround times. We'll keep you updated on progress. 🎉"

→ SU as hero. Officer as agent. Student as passive recipient of good news.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

STUDENT WIN 🏆

"A second-year Biology student used our template complaint last month. Result: formal apology, feedback delivered, and the university has now updated its departmental policy. That's what happens when you use the process. Download the same template →"

→ Student as hero. Vicarious evidence of efficacy. Normalises action. Drives next download.

08 Name the Incentive

FROM INDIVIDUAL SYMPTOM TO STRUCTURAL CAUSE

✗ WHAT NOT TO DO

CAMPAIGN MESSAGING

"We know many of you are struggling with late feedback and we hear your frustration. We are working hard to make sure the university takes this issue seriously and delivers improvements."

→ Problem unnamed. Cause invisible. Students left to assume it's just bad luck.

✓ WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

HERE'S WHY FEEDBACK IS LATE — AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

"This department cut 6 marking staff last year while student numbers rose 12%. That's why your feedback is late — it's not an accident, it's a staffing choice. The policy still requires 3 weeks. Here's how to enforce it, and here's how to tell the university the staffing decision isn't acceptable →"

→ Structural cause named. System made legible. Individual action + collective critique.

following feedback from students the SU and University have been working in partnership to make sure that assessment and feedback at UEA is fair, timely, and useful.
here's a quick guide to what you can expect in your modules:



turnaround:

you will get timely results and feedback, ideally within 15 days but always within 20 days.



criteria:

you will know the criteria in advance - it will be discussed in class, and loaded onto the module's blackboard page.



formative:

if your assessment for your module is a 100% piece of coursework, you can expect formative assessments that help you learn and get feedback ahead of that summative.

if your experience falls short of these expectations, contact your course rep, pop into the SU office to speak to an officer, or drop them an email:
union.info@uea.ac.uk and we'll work with your school to get it fixed



fairness:

your school will discuss with you the multiple methods that UEA uses to make sure that marking is objective and fair



useful:

when you get feedback, it will include content on how specifically your work could be improved



anonymity:

your work where possible will be anonymously marked to prevent unconscious bias

working in partnership on your academic interests

UEA

SU



Laura Flowers
@DSU_Academic

!! KNOW YOUR RIGHTS !! - Personal Tutoring

11:44 AM · Aug 7, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

3 Retweets 8 Likes



Laura Flowers @DSU_Academic · Aug 7

Replying to @DSU_Academic

All students MUST have a designated personal tutor, new students should preferably be made aware of who this is before they start studying at DMU 🌸🌺

1



1



Laura Flowers @DSU_Academic · Aug 7

personal tutors must meet with first year students at least twice a term, and at least once a term after first year 🇬🇧

1



1



Laura Flowers @DSU_Academic · Aug 7

It is your personal tutors responsibility to initiate, facilitate and review personal development 🍰

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Laura Flowers @DSU_Academic · Aug 7

You CAN go to your personal tutor with any issues and they can signpost you to any services you may need 🏠

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You will USUALLY have the same personal tutor throughout your degree, however when this isn't appropriate it is the faculties responsibility to find you an alternative tutor as fast as possible 🚗

Student identities

- 1. members** of a university community with responsibilities to others
- 2. clients** of a set of support services
- 3. learners** that have to expend effort to generate educational outcomes
- 4. consumers** with the right to have educational services carried out with reasonable care and skill, have promises kept and rights to redress if the other side of the partnership fails



The passivists

THE MAJORITY OF STUDENTS ARE PASSIVISTS

1. Passivists engage minimally when dissatisfied.
2. When issues arise, such as delays or discrepancies, passivists often fail to notice or choose not to act.
3. At most, they may avoid future engagement from the same source or express mild dissatisfaction within their immediate circles, but generally, they do not take significant action in response to their experiences.
4. Few are active due to five key factors:
 - Opportunity costs (ie time)
 - Conflict aversion
 - Confidence and cultural/social capital
 - Ignorance of their rights.
 - Fear of retribution in future service delivery
5. Remaining passive is often rational, as standing up for one's rights involves immediate costs such as social discord and time, with uncertain benefits.
6. Effort required to complain often outweighs the potential value of any remedial action, leading to widespread rational apathy.



Ben Edelman's tale

1. Ben Edelman, a Harvard Business School professor, ordered takeout from Sichuan Garden and noticed a \$4 overcharge compared to the online menu prices.
2. He complained via the restaurant's website and email, to which the owner responded, explaining that the online menu was outdated but the in-restaurant menu prices were accurate.
3. The owner did not offer compensation for the overcharge, leading Edelman to demand \$12 in compensation, citing a local consumer protection law that trebles damages for unfair practices.
4. When the owner refused, Edelman filed a complaint with the relevant regulator, and the story reached local media, where Edelman's actions were largely mocked as petty.
5. The public failed to recognize the important public service Edelman provided by deterring overcharging, despite the high opportunity cost of his efforts compared to the \$12 sought.



Meet the Nudniks

WHAT ARE NUDNIKS AND HOW DO THEY DIFFER?

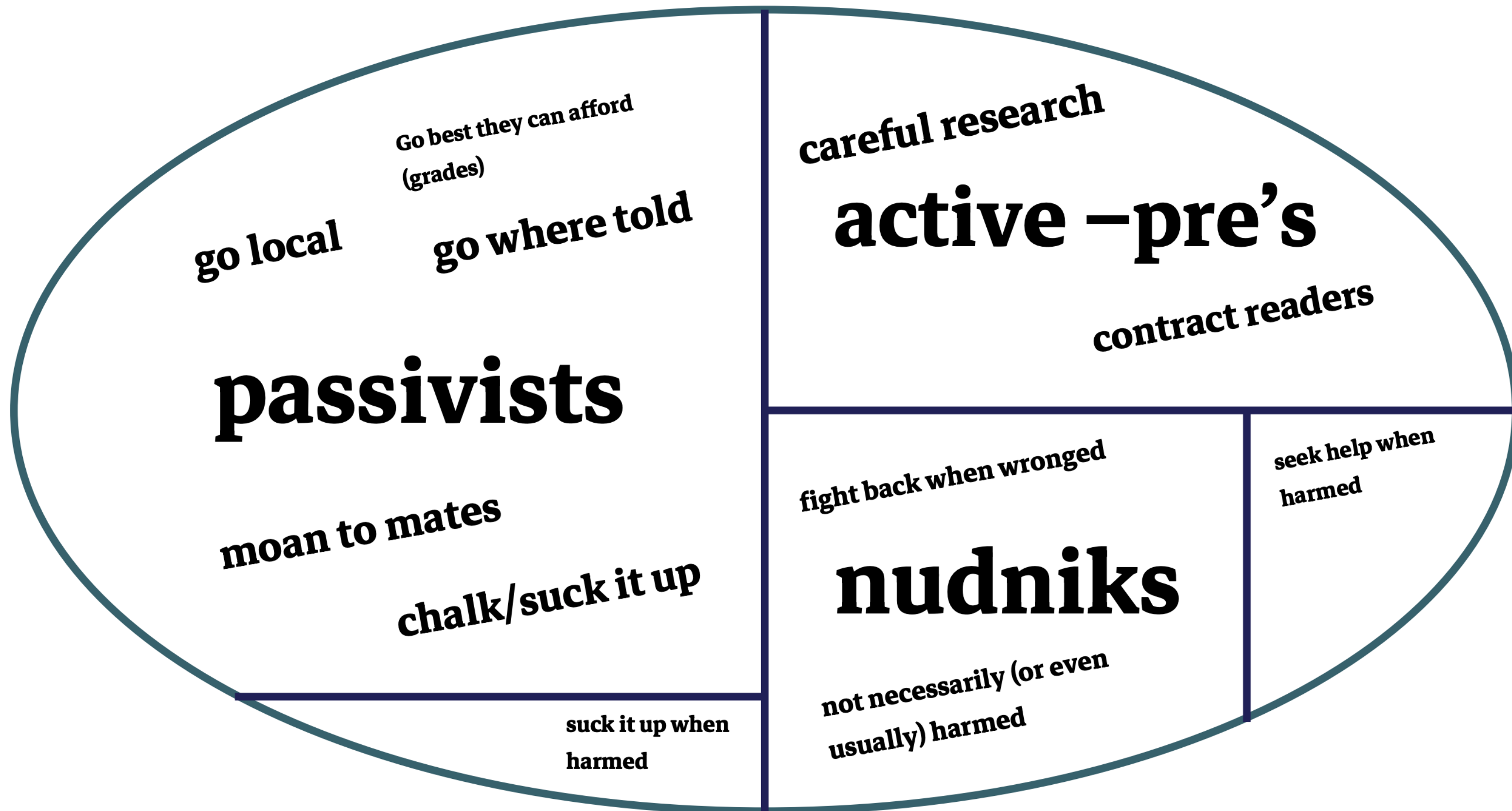
1. The term "nudnik" comes from Yiddish and translates to "a bore, a nag, a jerk," or "a busybody" and "pest."
2. Chosen for its relative unfamiliarity, avoiding the strong negative connotations of similar terms.
3. A "nudnik" is an active consumer who consistently pursues action when their transactional expectations are violated, even in minor cases.
4. The definition of a "nudnik" includes two main traits:
 - (1) being an active consumer, and
 - (2) acting despite a cost-benefit analysis suggesting it may not be worth it.
5. Nudniks are part of a broader group known as "willing punishers," who incur personal costs to punish those who misbehave.



Nudniks – what are they like?

- Nudniks possess unique values and innate personality traits that distinguish them from typical consumers/clients/users.
- Psychology studies show that some individuals are naturally more eager to complain, while others dislike complaining.
- Serial complainers tend to be more assertive, aggressive, or highly committed to principles, such as the belief that agreements should be honoured.
- Some nudniks are driven by spite, feeling disrespected when receiving inferior service.
- Economically, nudniks have an "idiosyncratic utility function," making actions like fighting a minor overcharge seem "rational" to them, even if it wouldn't be for most people.





Are officers/ reps ideal nudniks?

High profile

Students expect “bravery”

Know what to raise and what not to raise

“On students’ side”



The passivists

THE MAJORITY OF OFFICERS/REPS ARE PASSIVISTS

1. Passivists engage minimally when dissatisfied.
2. When issues arise, such as delays or discrepancies, passivists often fail to notice or choose not to act.
3. At most, they may avoid future engagement from the same source or express mild dissatisfaction within their immediate circles, but generally, they do not take significant action in response to their experiences.
4. Few are active due to five key factors:
 - Opportunity costs (ie time)
 - Conflict aversion
 - Confidence and cultural/social capital
 - Ignorance of their members' rights.
 - Fear of retribution in future funding/treatment
5. Remaining passive is often rational, as standing up for students' rights involves immediate costs such as social discord and time, with uncertain benefits.
6. Effort required to complain often outweighs the potential value of any remedial action, leading to widespread rational apathy.



The five key barriers

OPPORTUNITY COSTS

How can we reduce the opportunity costs of complaint?

CONFLICT AVERSION

How can we reduce the sense of conflict in the process - or cause students to be comfortable with it?

CONFIDENCE/CAPITAL

How can we boost students' (differential) confidence to complain?

IGNORANCE

What steps can we take to make sure that students know and understand their rights?

RETRIBUTION

How can we protect students from retribution or prove the fear is unfounded?



Evidence
of rights
not being
met

Evidence of
students
complaining

Evidence of
students
winning

Extend

Enforce

Discover

Defend

Establish

Promote

WONKHE
SUs



Jim Dickinson
Southern SUs Feb 2026

