University staff experience of digitally-enabled learning during Covid-19

March 2021

WONKHE

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About the survey and respondents

Survey and demographics

The survey was open January-February 2021.

630 people responded

90.7 in England; 6% in Scotland; 2.5% in Wales; and 0.8% in Northern Ireland

41.4% pre-92 institution; 47.9% modern institution; 4.4.% specialist institution; 3.3% independent provider; 3.3% FE college

4.7% senior manager; 17.2% senior academic; 24% middle manager; 49.8% intermediate; 3.6% early career

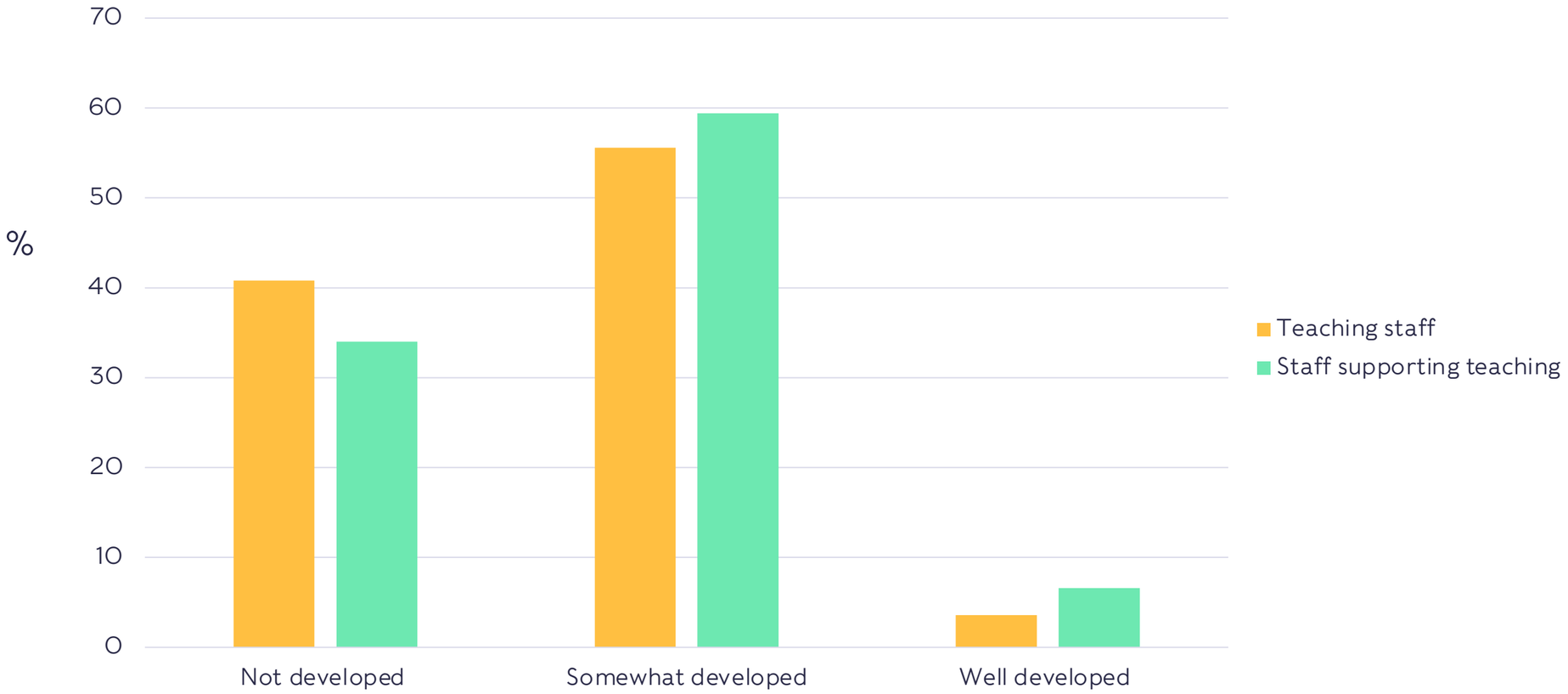
19.7% medical and health sciences; 8.5% STEM; 34.4% social sciences; 8.4% humanities; 7.6% creative and performing arts; 19.6% learning and teaching professional

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic I mostly undertook the following:

Teaching, supporting or advising students including through digitally-enabled means: 66.3% (n=418)

Supporting delivery of digitally-enabled, online and blended teaching and learning (eg through strategy, policy, operations, provision of CPD, technological support): 33.7% (n=212)

Before the Covid-19 pandemic how would you describe the digital learning and teaching provision for students at your institution?



Experience of teaching staff

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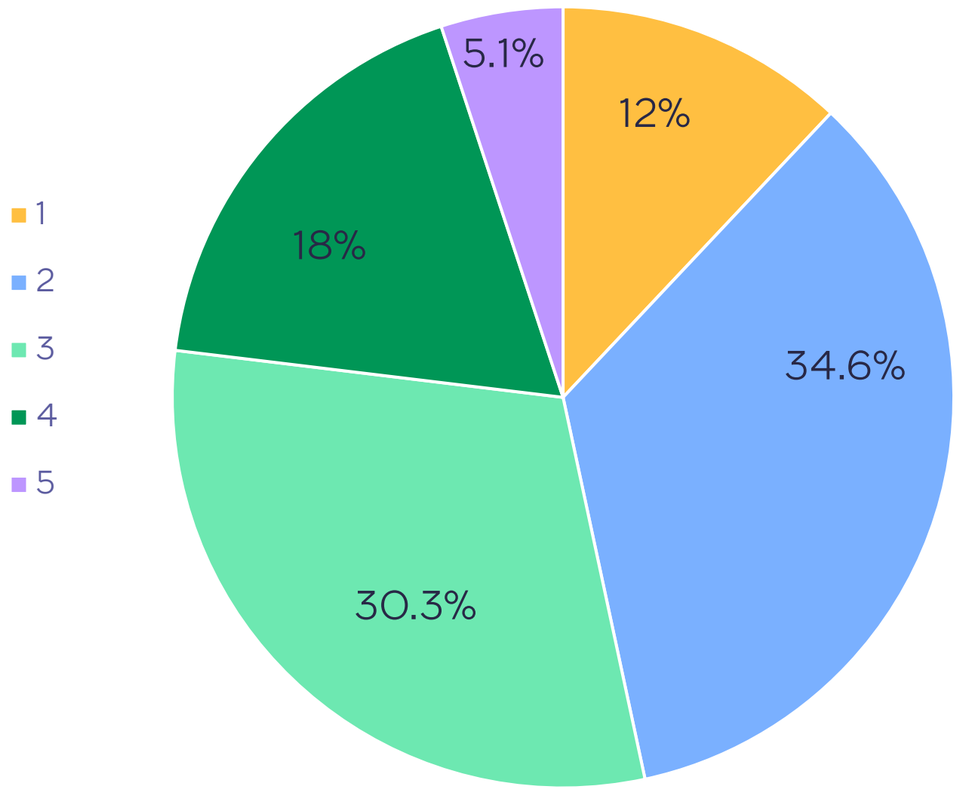
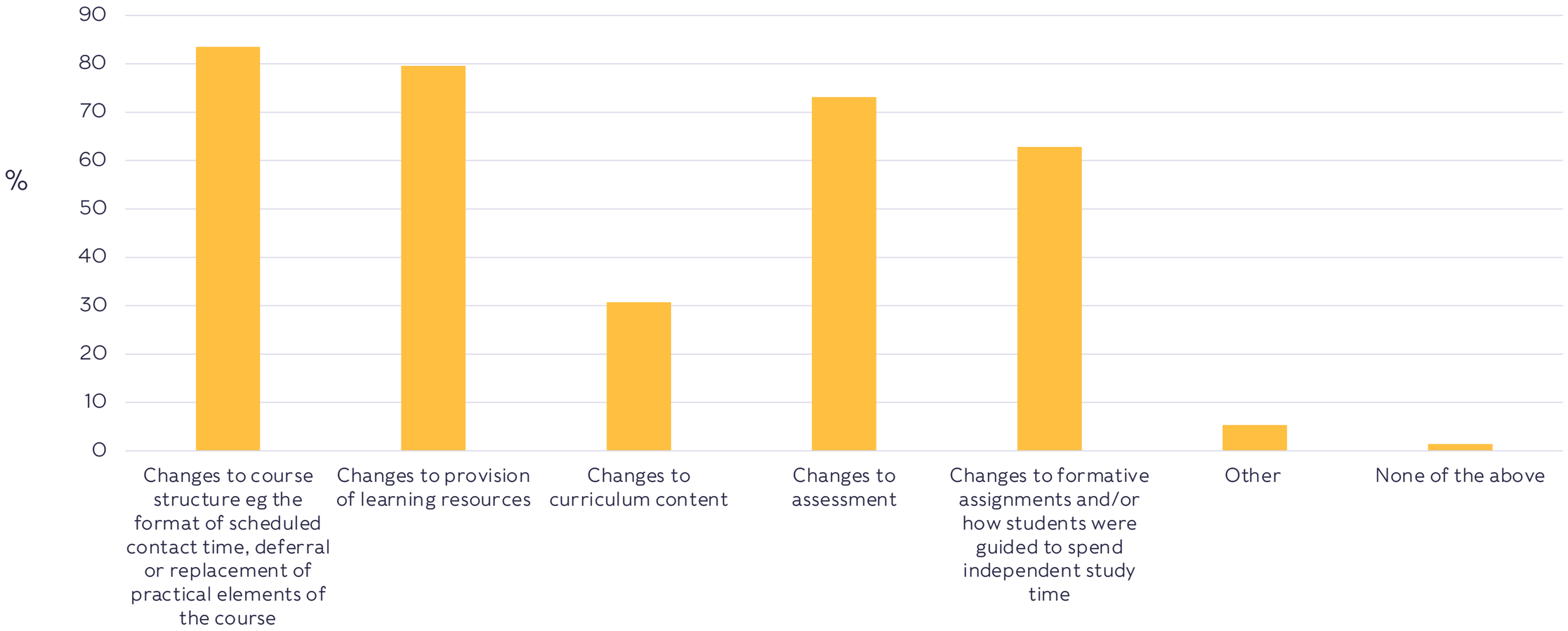
How would you rate your proficiency in digitally-enabled teaching and learning before the Covid-19 pandemic?



1= not at all proficient

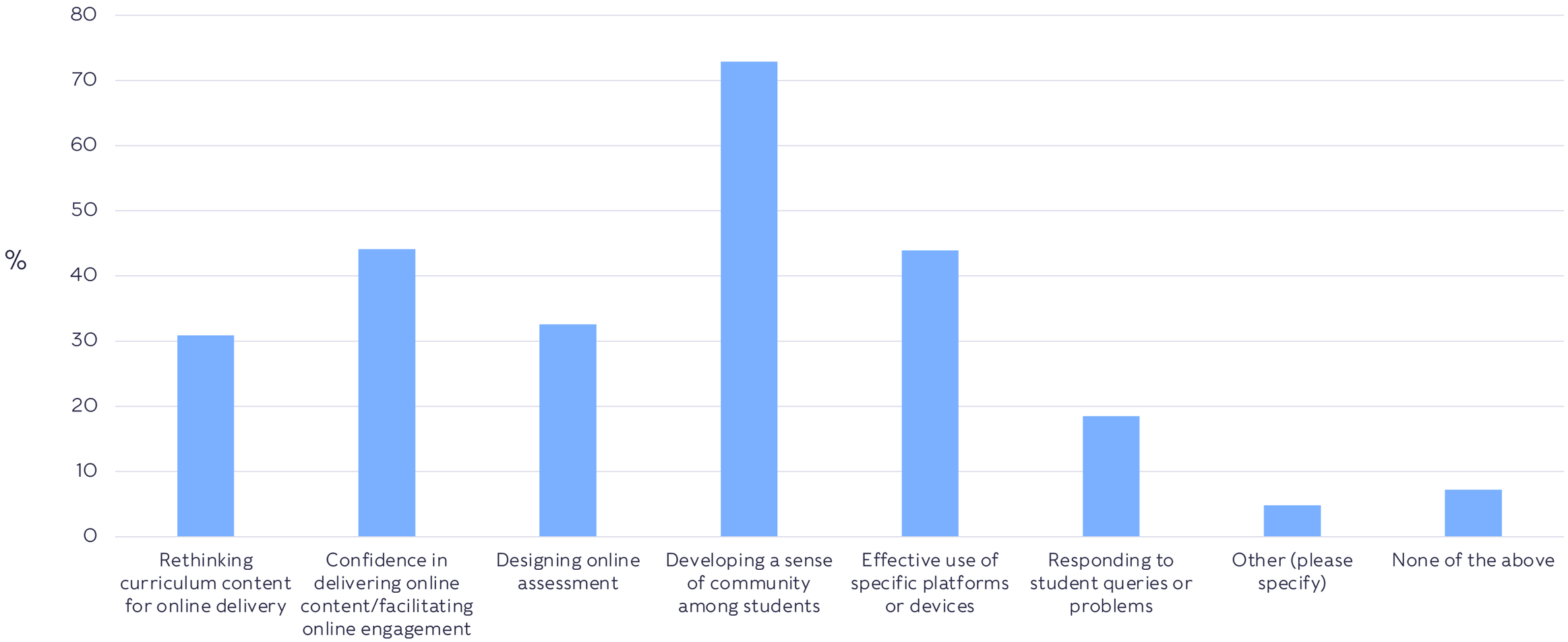
5= highly proficient

How, if at all, did the course(s) you taught change to make the curriculum suitable for online and blended delivery of teaching and learning during Covid-19?

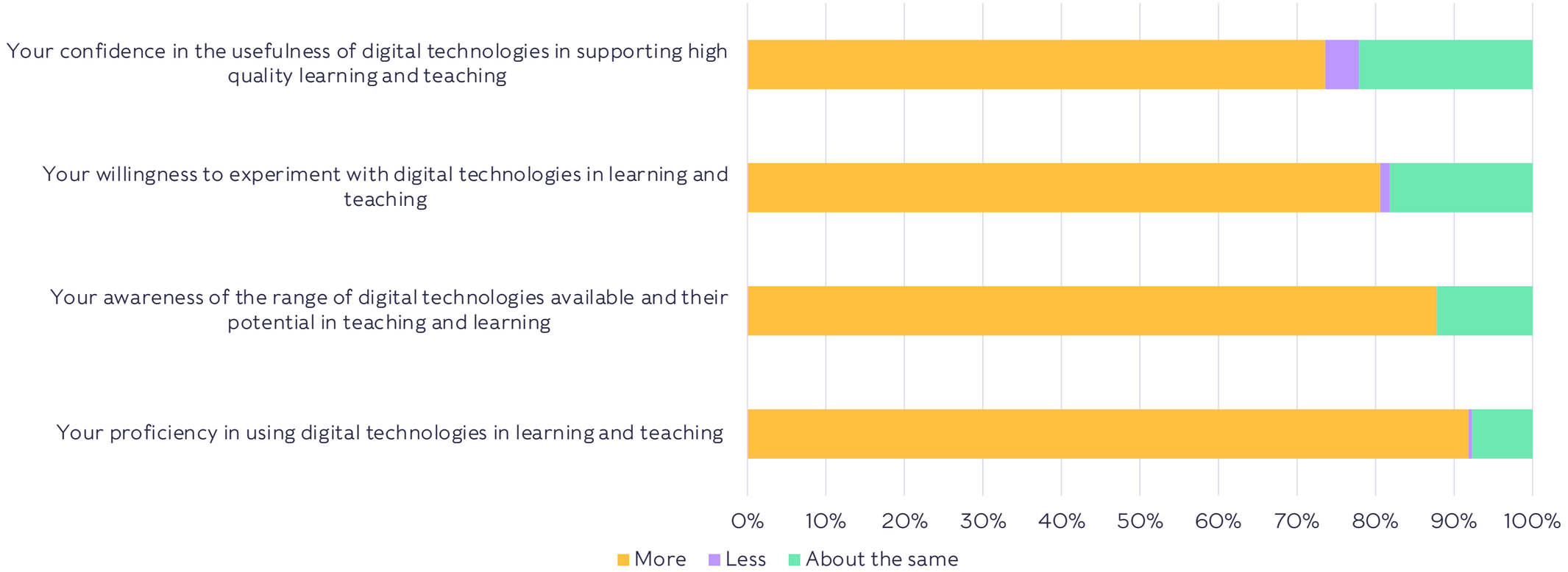


What have been the most significant sources of advice and support throughout your time teaching during Covid-19?

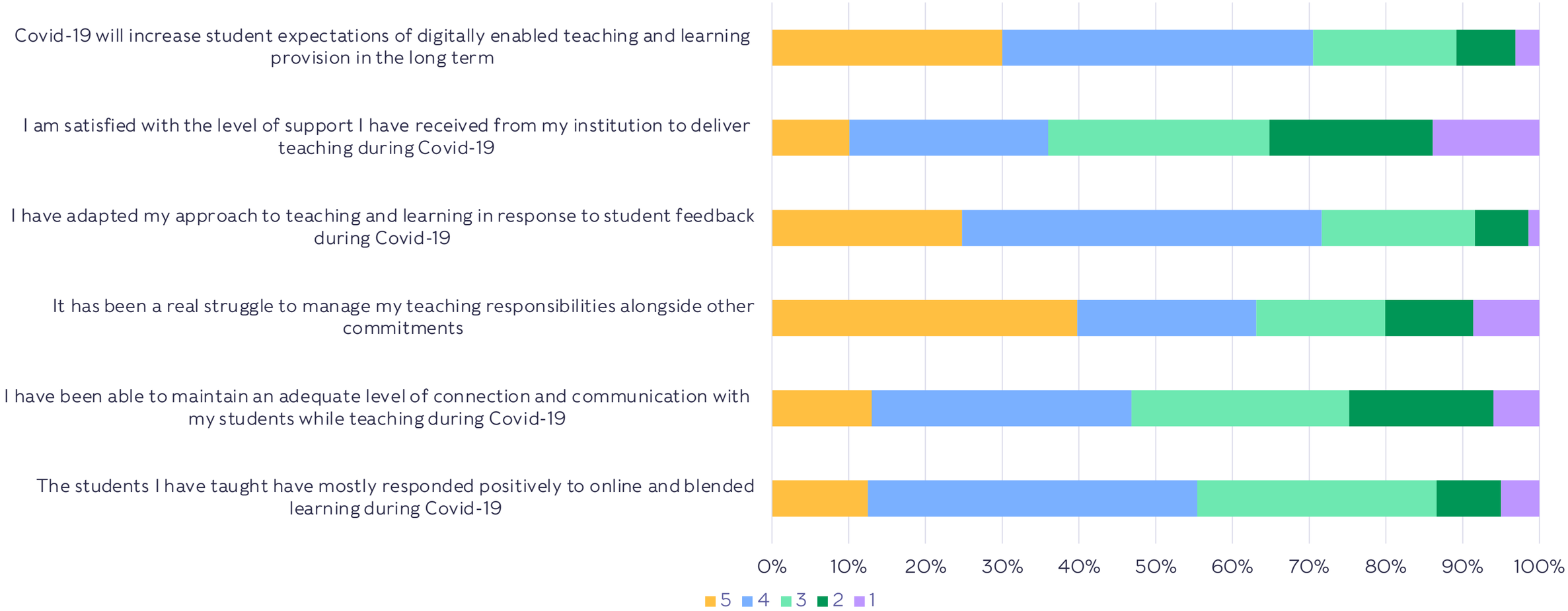
Were there particular areas where you would have welcomed additional advice or support?



To what extent has your experience of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic affected...



To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



5= strongly agree
1 = strongly disagree

Experience of staff supporting teaching

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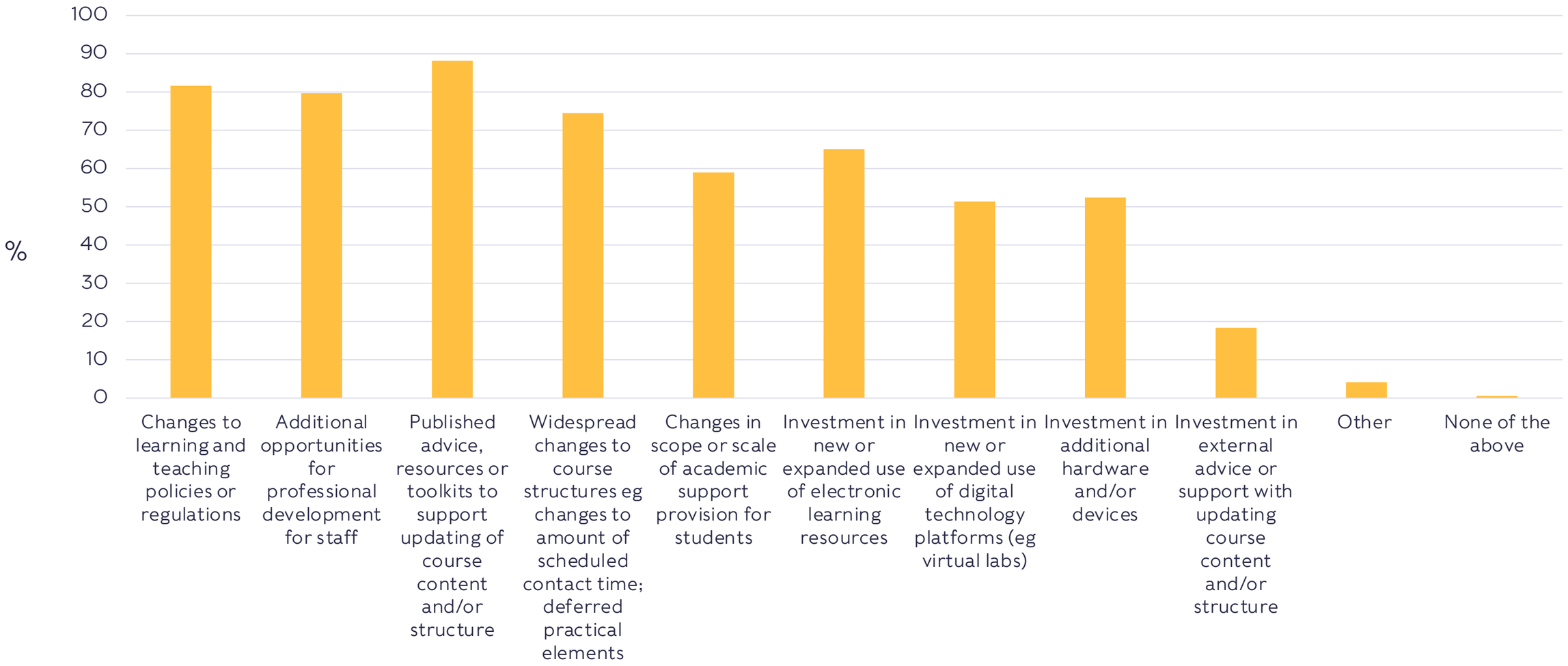
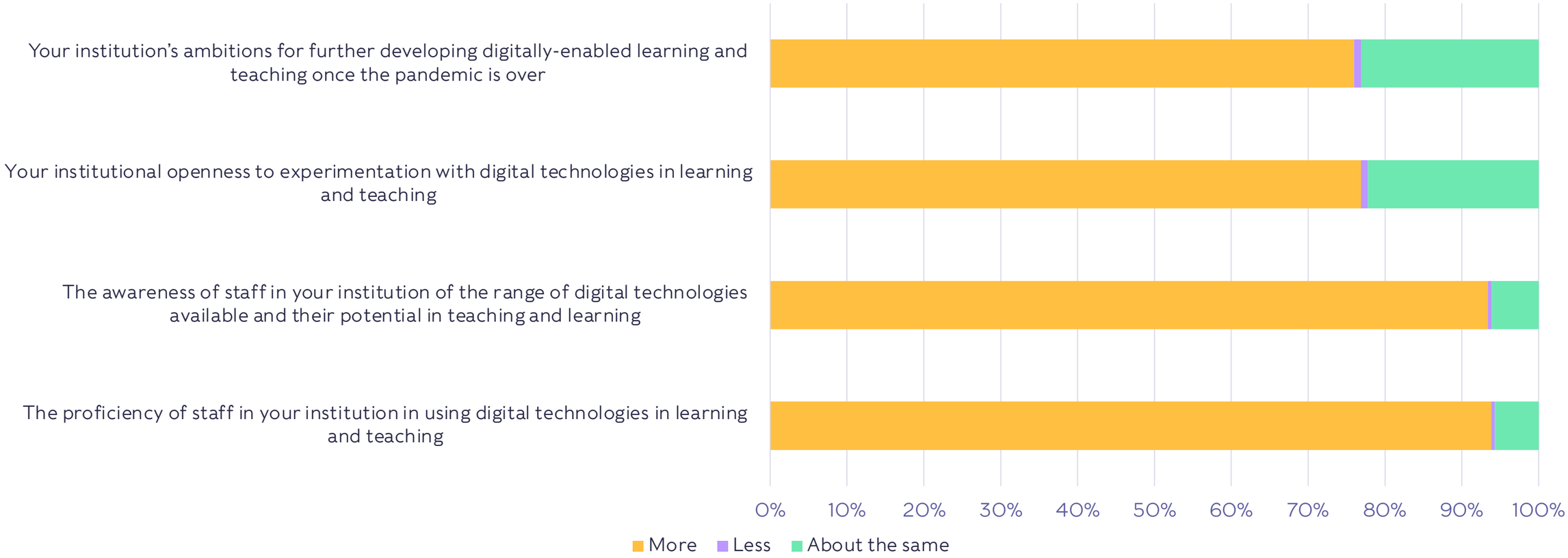
What institution-wide changes were implemented to enable delivery of online or blended learning during Covid-19?



To what extent, in your view, has the experience of learning and teaching during Covid-19 affected...



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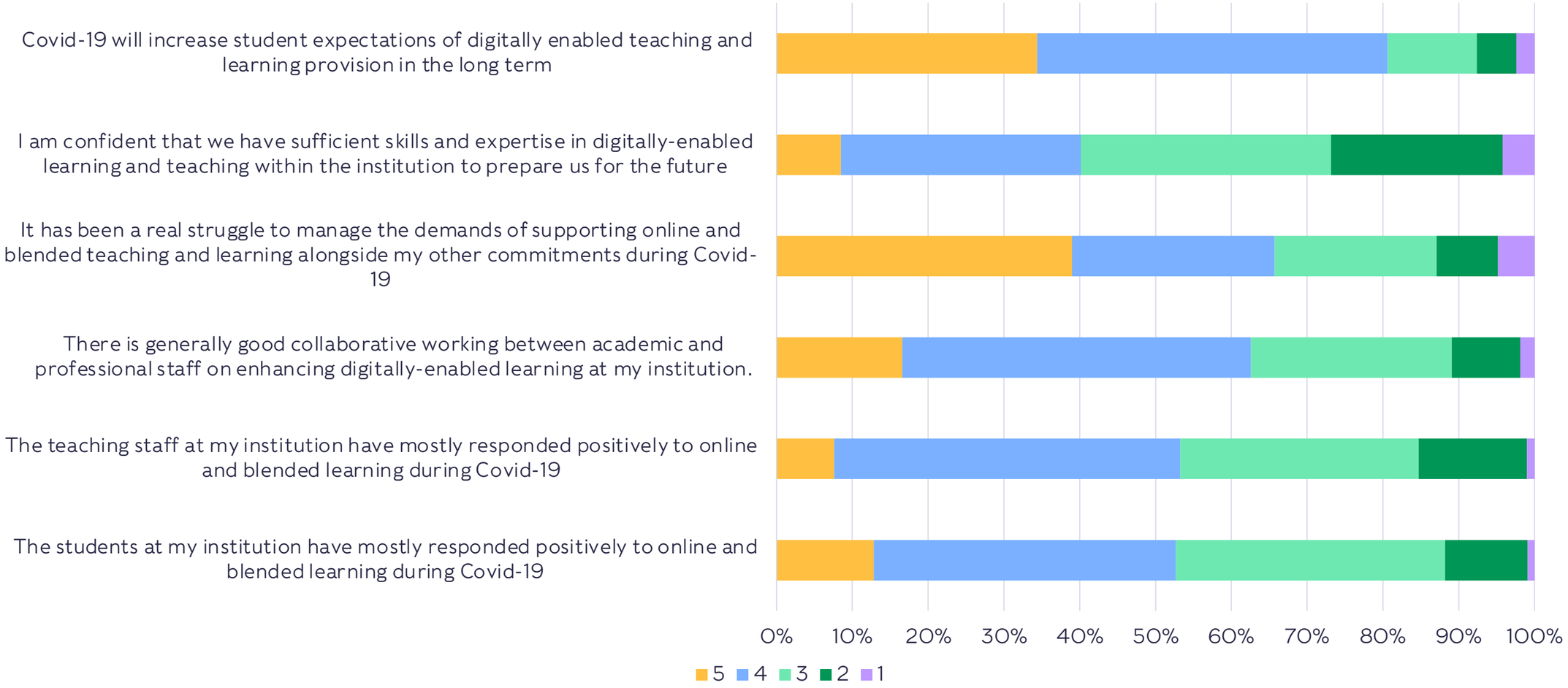

What is working well and what are the barriers?

What is working well, or better than expected?

Student engagement: improved attendance and participation; students taking more ownership; independent work; more engagement with optional content; peer and small group learning.

Pedagogy: more diverse activity; more formative assessment and fewer exams; flipped activity; larger bank of learning resources; more thought put into curriculum design; opportunities for guest speakers.

Technology: recorded lectures; interactive platforms with breakouts; chat function; delivering to large groups; use of technology as communication platform; pace at which content produced and published.

Student access: access to resources, flexible working at own pace; different ways of communicating with students; 121 meetings improve relationships.

Working culture: flexible; collaborative; better meeting attendance; less presenteeism; more trust of academics; innovation/freedom to experiment.

What has been the biggest challenge or barrier to making things work?

Student engagement: students logging in but not doing the work; developing group cohesion; creating a student community; getting interaction in sessions; student confidence with technology; student wellbeing.

Time: the additional time taken for creating and adapting content for digital learning environment; impact on workload.

Meeting student expectations: student scepticism of technology and online learning; greater expectation of 121 support.

Inclusion: the digital divide; lack of financial support for struggling students; increased pastoral load; inclusion of diverse students (eg providing captioning for lectures)

Technology issues: connectivity; lack of right kit; not enough choice of tools; lack of tech; too many platforms - digital noise; VLE doesn't support interaction; bad underlying digital infrastructure; platforms not designed for teaching

Wellbeing: isolation, lack of time with colleagues; loss of motivation; digital fatigue; homeschooling/childcare; lack of clarity and information from government and regulators; coping with speed of change

Lack of institutional support: siloed working; poor communications from leadership; lack of technical support; lack of investment; lack of training; lack of flexibility with timetabling and policies; not mitigating impact of increased teaching efforts; too many meetings.

Priorities for after the pandemic

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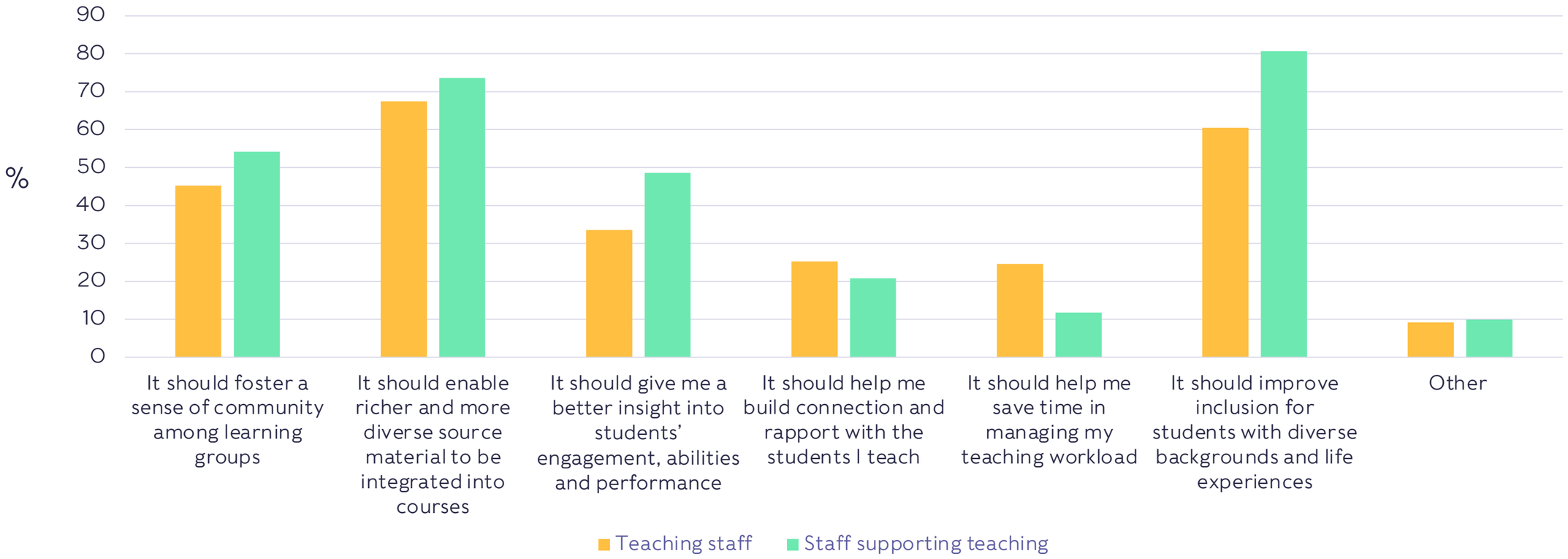
Once the pandemic is over, which of the following are your top three priorities for using technology to enhance students' learning?



Your one great hope for learning and teaching post-Covid

Blended learning that embraces "the best of both": for diversity and inclusion; community building; flexibility for students and staff; widening access; more sustainable; wider range of tools to engage students; push mundane elements to digital; blended for interaction; responsive to student needs.

Modernising pedagogy: fewer lectures and more small group teaching; more authentic assessment/ditch exams; more rounded and effective online community; more student engagement; more active learning; more individualised approach; more staff-student community interaction; more online learning materials; better facilitation of collaboration; no more death by powerpoint; more imaginative delivery.

But...

This is by no means universal - significant numbers long for **a return to the classroom**, and to live lectures.

Respondents want the demands on staff to be acknowledged and **academic workload reform** to facilitate a blended future - some worry that embracing blended could be seen as an opportunity for cost-cutting.

They also want **freedom and flexibility to innovate**, and for university managers to display faith in programme leaders.

Thank you

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