Only the lonely?
Understanding student loneliness and belonging

WONKHE SUs | SUMMER PROGRAMME 2023 | WONKHE.COM/SUS
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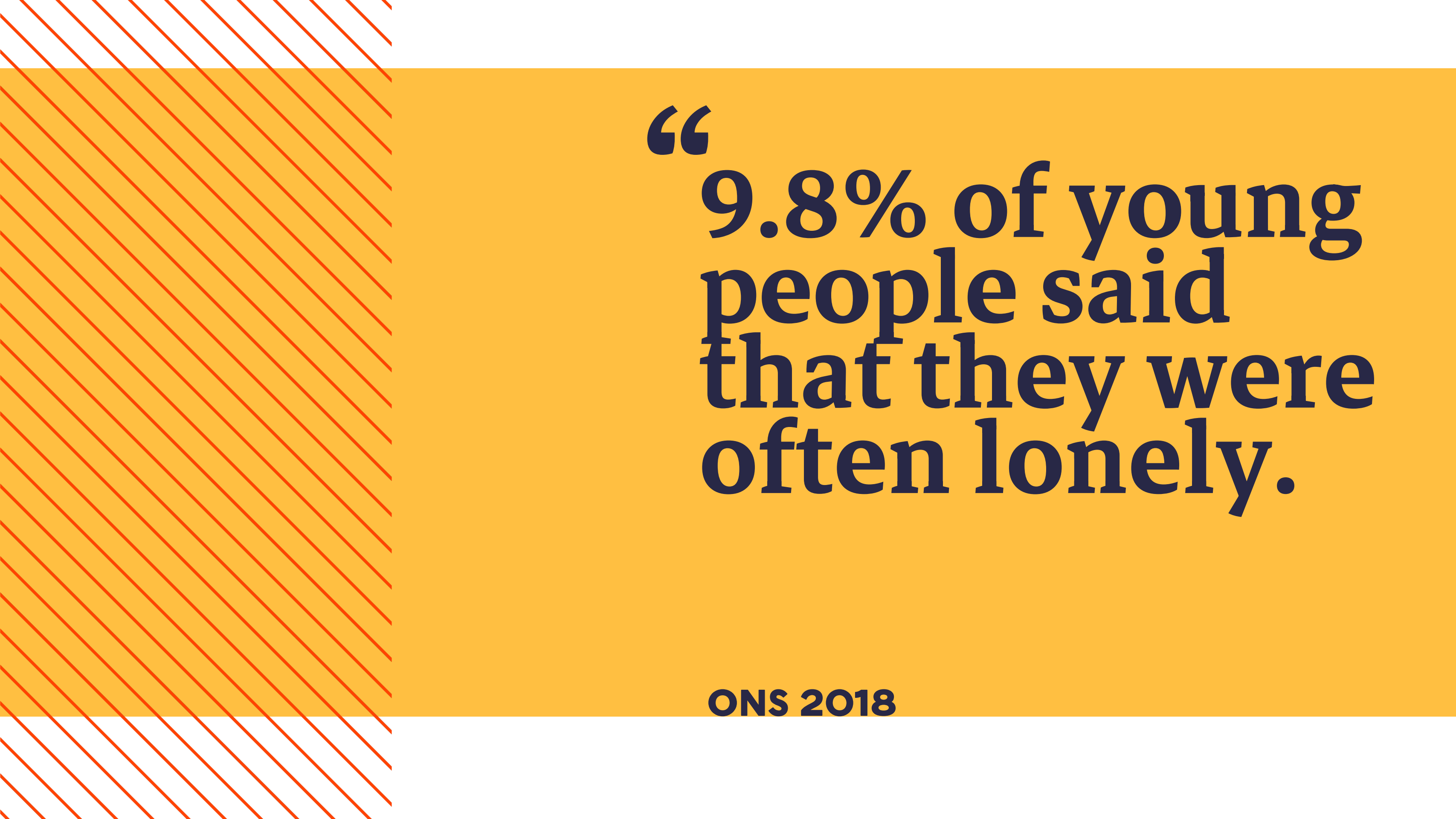# Only the lonely?
Understanding student loneliness and belonging

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Student mental health

- Single biggest public policy challenge facing HE outside of funding
- Decade long rise in demand for counselling services and significant drop in self reported mental health perceptions
- Problem is shifting from "treatment" to "prevention" and from "wicked" to "tame"
  - Wicked – Long term, complex, multiple factors
  - Tame – Straightforward, best practice, fixable
  - Critical – Crisis, commanding, no dissent

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"9.8% of young people said that they were often lonely.

ONS 2018

YouGov 2018

- People in cities surveyed had a higher incidence of reporting feeling lonely than the UK overall (56% v. 44%)

- 25% of adults have reported feeling lonely on weekends.

- Over the weekend, the evenings are the most likely time for people to feel lonely (16%).

- Young people aged 18-24 are most likely to say they have felt lonely (75%).

- In contrast, 63% of people aged 55 and over said they never feel lonely.

- Previous research shows nearly three quarters (74%) of people said when they felt lonely, they didn't tell anyone despite most having someone they could count on.

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Lockdown - one in four adults (24%) said they had feelings of loneliness in the "previous two weeks".

When the same question was asked shortly before lockdown, just one in ten people (10%) said they had these feelings.

Young people aged 18 to 24 were most likely to experience loneliness since the lockdown began.

Before lockdown, one in six (16%) said they felt lonely.

In lockdown, young people were almost three times more likely to have experienced loneliness, with almost half (44%) feeling this way.
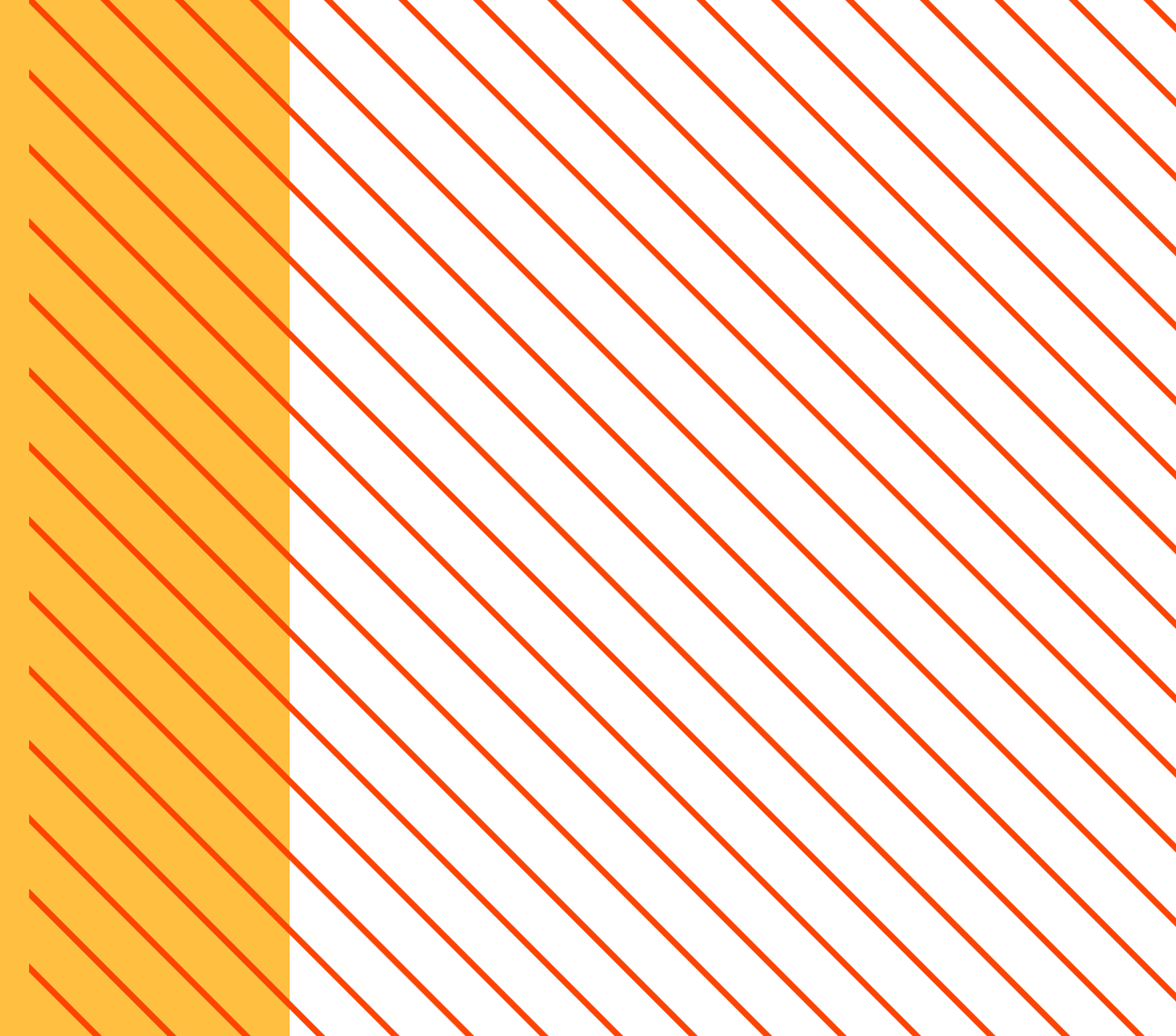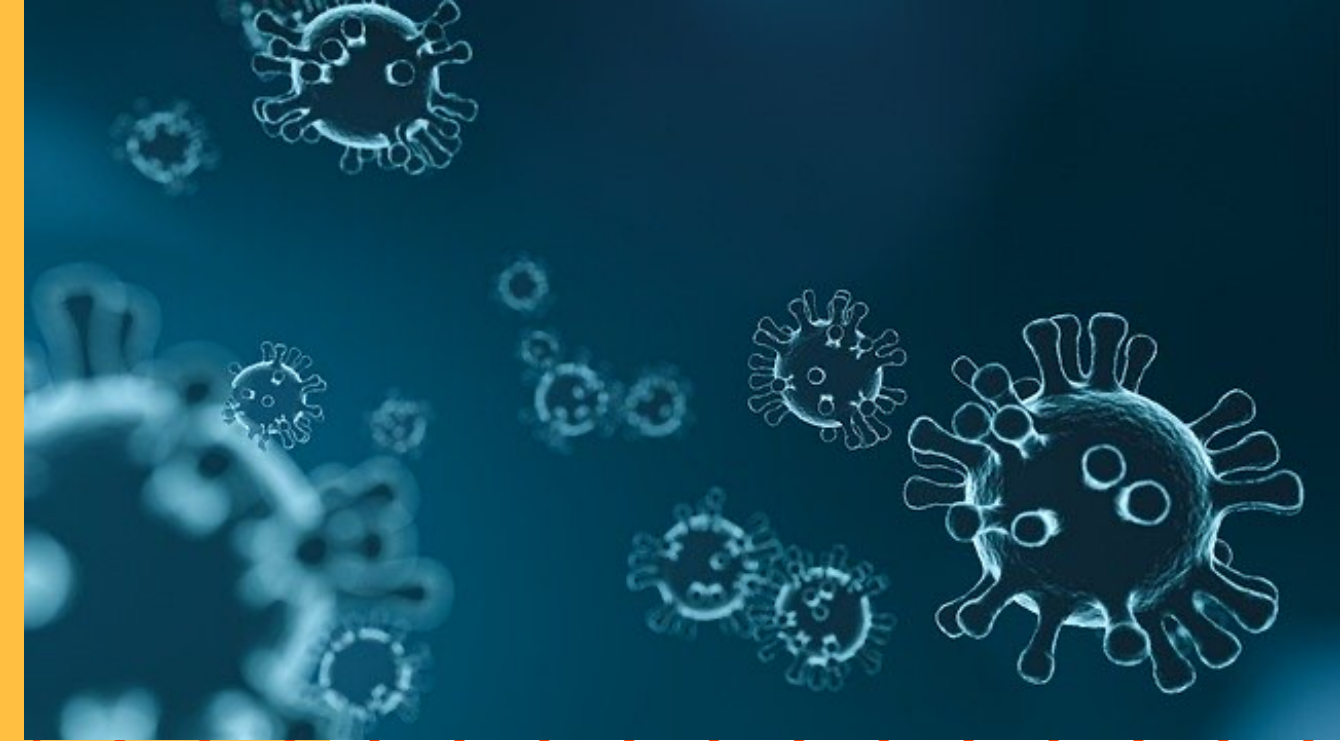
Loneliness

- A hidden issue?

- SU officers (and often their staff) inherently "popular" and "social"

- If they're lonely and don't participate, do their voices ever show up (or if they do in surveys, does that get noticed)

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Only the lonely

ONLINE SURVEY
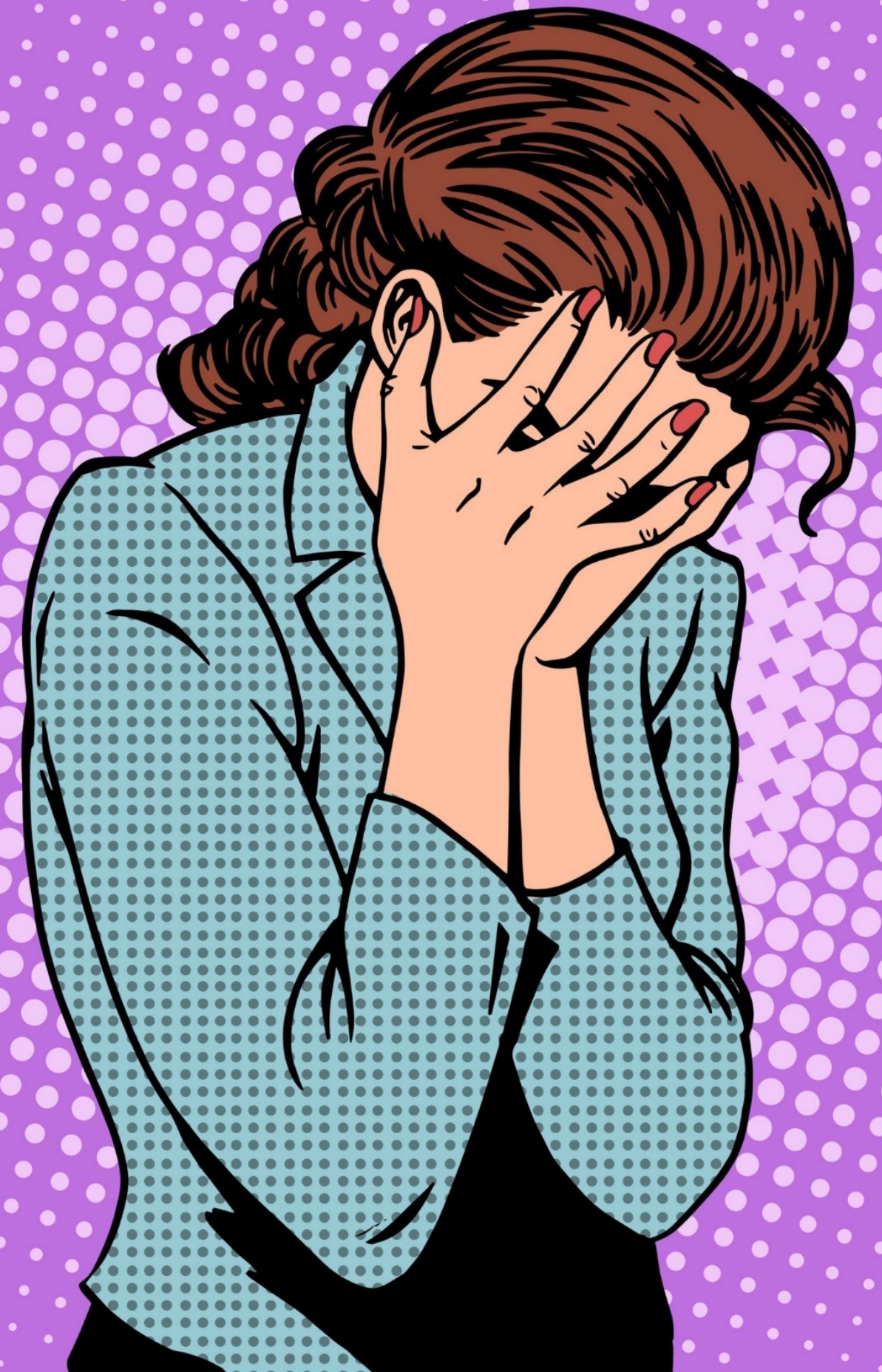
JAN/FEB 2019

1,615 RESPONSES, 103 UNIVERSITIES

WEIGHTED BY GENDER

SURVEY HEADLINED "STUDENT LIFESTYLE"

BROADLY REPRESENTATIVE

NOW EXPANDED AND REPEATED BY A GROUP OF SUS

Value of SUs

ONLINE SURVEY

JUNE/ JULY 2019

17,359 RESPONSES, 145 UNIVERSITIES

WEIGHTED BY UNIVERSITY & GENDER

SURVEY HEADLINED "STUDENT LIFESTYLE"

BROADLY REPRESENTATIVE

ONLY THE LONELY

INSERT IMAGE

General wellbeing

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
7.35 (ONS YP 7.7)

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
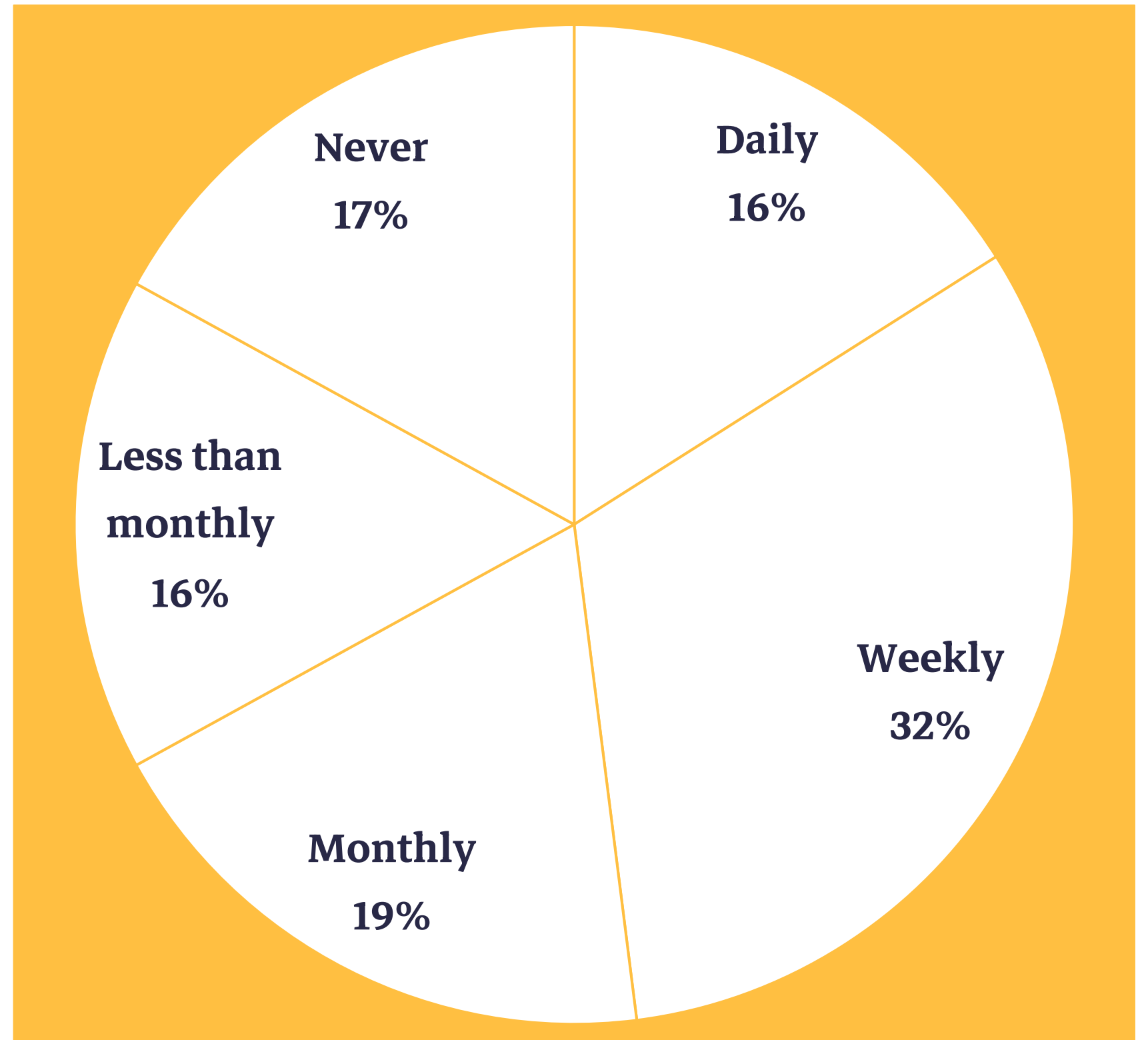7.41 (ONS YP 7.8)

Disability, Gender, Ethnicity, Commuting, Bursaries all lower scores

How often do you feel lonely at university?

16% of students feel lonely every day

ONS says 9.8% of young people (16-24) said that they were "often" lonely.

Disabled students are twice as likely to be lonely on a daily basis
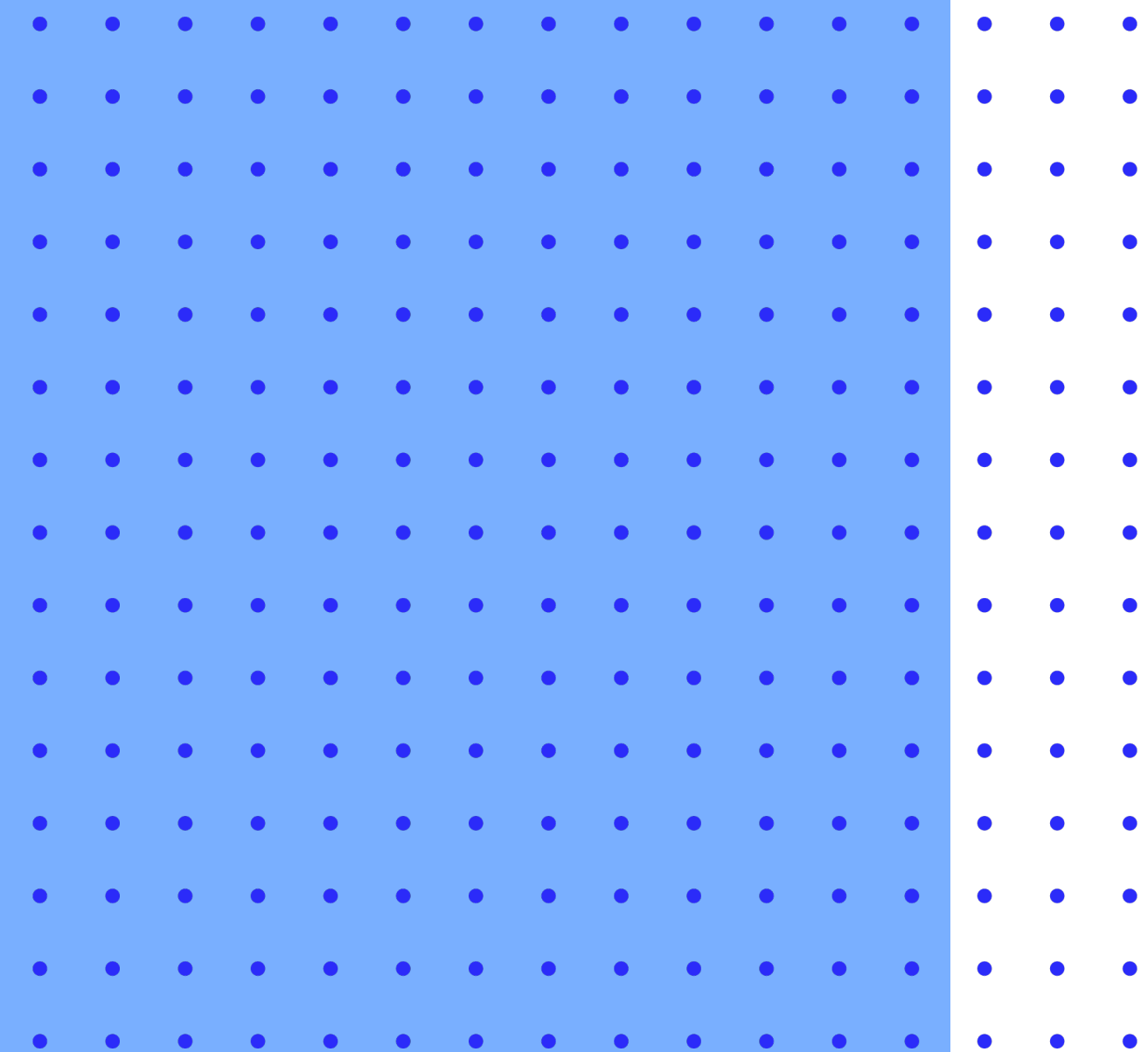
If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me
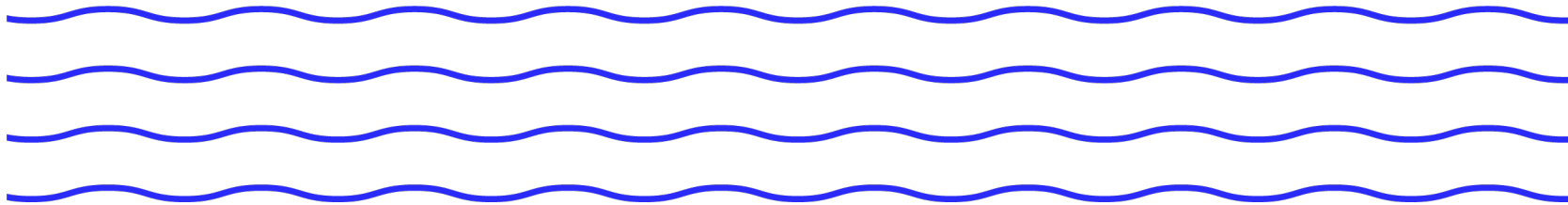
77% 17% 6%

AGREE **NEITHER** **DISAGREE**

If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on
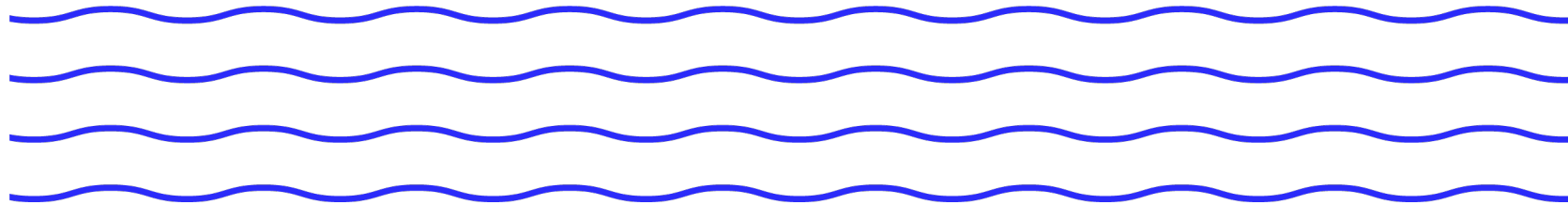
75% 15% 10%

AGREE   **NEITHER**   **DISAGREE**

Non-EU students are almost 10% points less likely to agree that there are people they can call on.
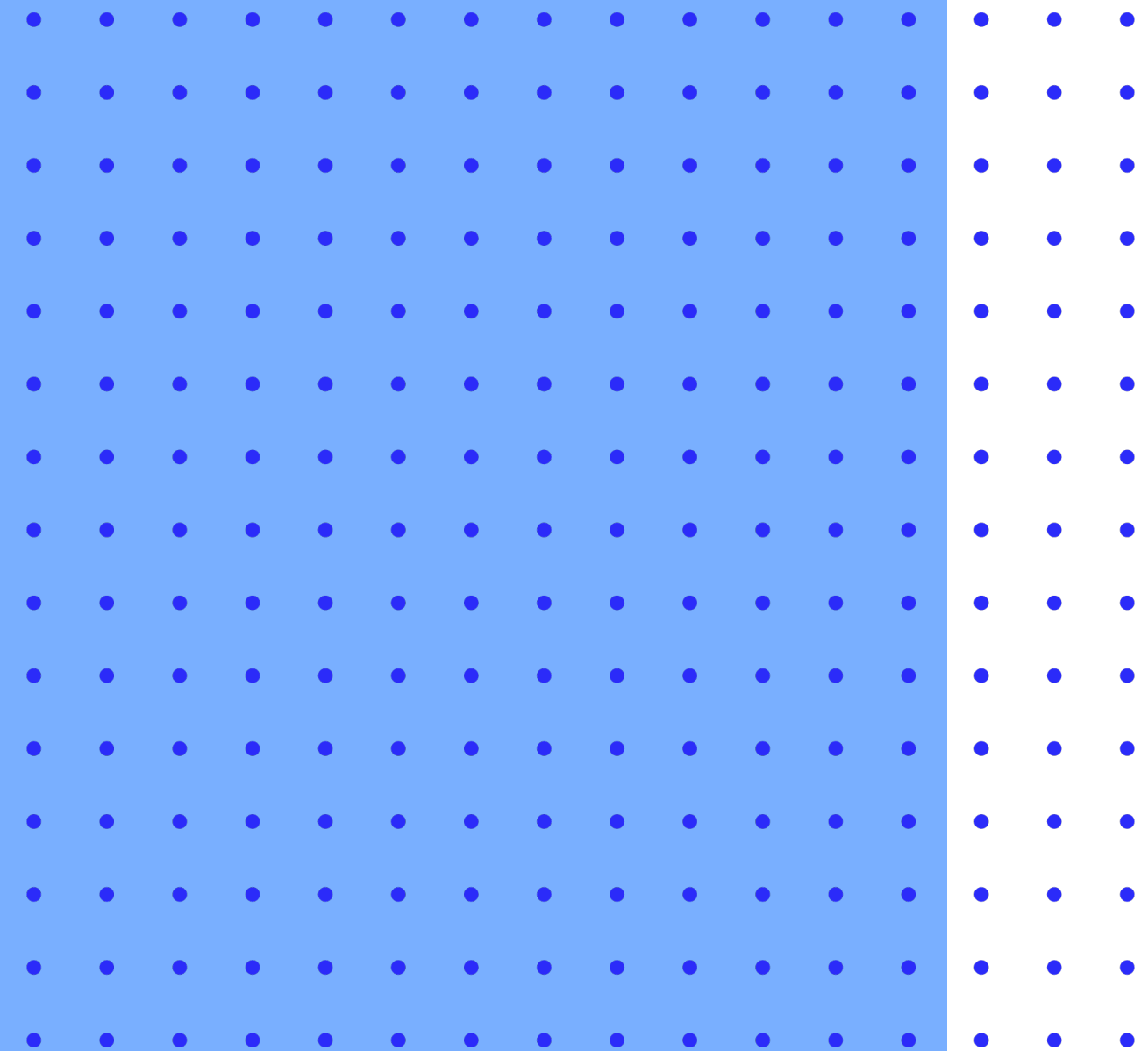
Which of the following statements is most like you at university?

21.4%

LOTS

I have a large group of friends at university

61.9%

SOME

I have a small group of friends at university

16.6%

NONE

I do not consider myself to have any true friends at university

How often, if ever, do you feel lonely at university?		Av	Uni	PHall	Parent	Own	HMO
	Daily	12.4%	12.2%	14.0%	16.0%	13.3%	10.8%
	Weekly	26.4%	30.4%	27.4%	21.9%	18.4%	26.4%
	Monthly	20.6%	22.0%	21.1%	15.9%	10.0%	22.2%
	Less than monthly	22.0%	21.3%	20.4%	18.7%	19.0%	24.1%
	Never	18.6%	14.2%	17.0%	27.5%	39.3%	16.5%

Summer 2019

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20% of international students say they have "no true friends"
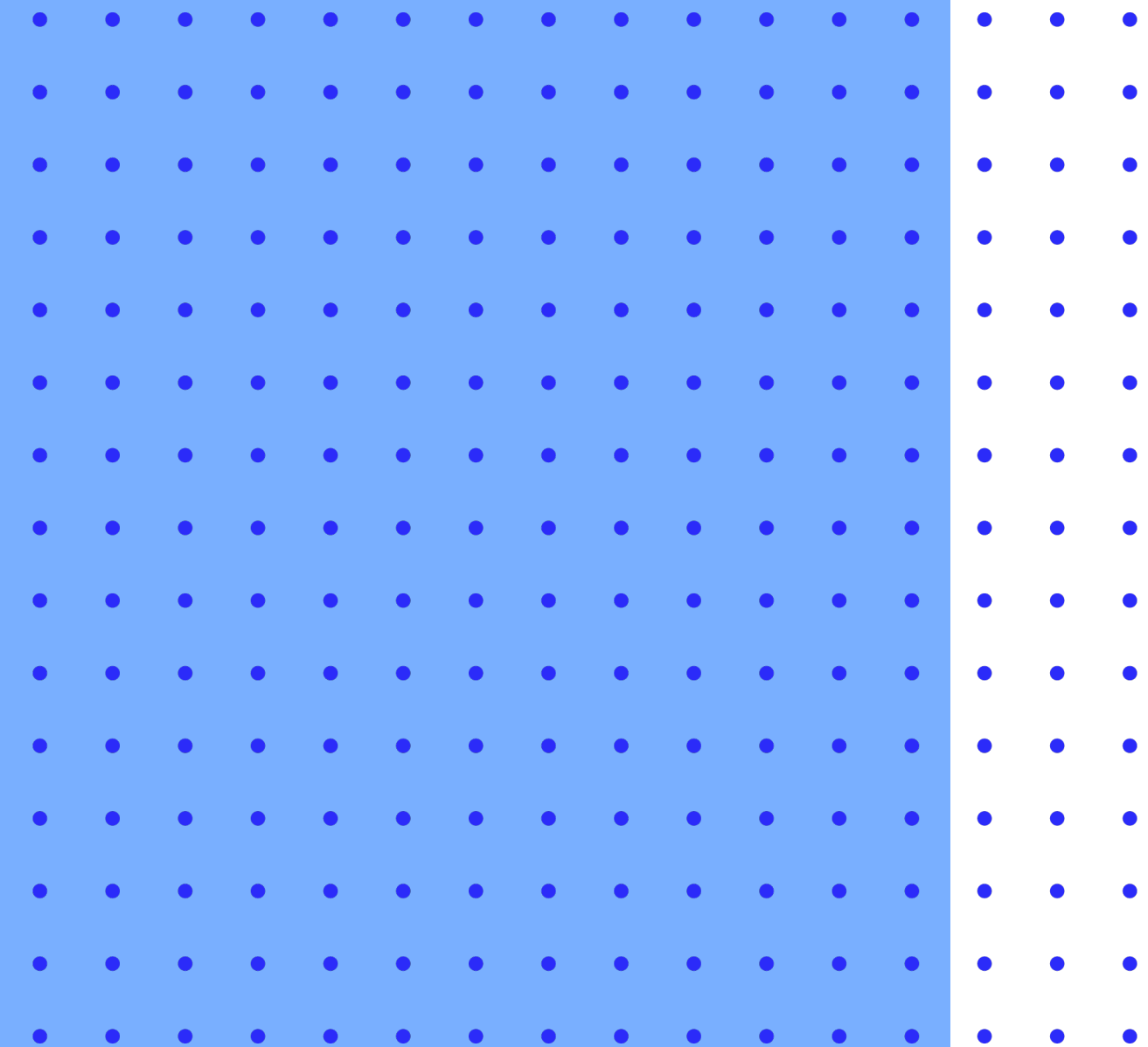
Top concerns

Coping with the course	55.1%
Making the most of my time at university	48.6%
My mental health (including stress / anxiety)	45.5%
Having enough money to get by	45.3%
Gaining skills / experience for career	41.6%

NOTE
International students much more likely than average to worry about accommodation and transport and finding part time work

Life cycle

There are clear student life stage effects, but friendship still an issue for some all way through - 12.6% of final year students list meeting new people / making friends in their top three

	All	1st	Mid	Final
Meeting new people / making friends	18.7%	29.6%	17.0%	12.6%
Gaining skills / experience for my career	41.6%	27.1%	38.9%	41.1%
Finding a job after graduation	46.3%	22.7%	38.4%	57.7%

Who's most lonely?

- Almost half (44%) of the students in their first year of study report feeling lonely on a daily or weekly basis compared to 40% of those in their middle year(s) and 35% of finalists.

- 15% of first year students do not believe that they have any true friends at university. While the percentage drops by the time students reach their final year, still more than 1 in 10 respondents (12%) feel that they did not make any true friends by the end of their studies.

(Summer 2019 results)

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General wellbeing

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
7.35 (ONS YP 7.7)

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
7.41 (ONS YP 7.8)

Disability, Gender, Ethnicity, Commuting, Bursaries all lower scores

Involvement and wellbeing

Involvement in activities is related to better wellbeing

	All	Socities	Sports	Rep'n	Night	Day evnt
Satisfied	7,35	7,60	7,81	7,76	7,80	7,83
Worthwhile	7,41	7,69	7,82	7,86	7,72	8,06
Happy	6,98	7,22	7,37	7,48	7,31	7,62
Anxious	6,33	6,26	5,99	6,07	6,09	6,18

Friendship and involvement

Which of the following statements is most like you at university?

	All	Soc	Spo	Rep	Nite	Day
I have a large group of friends	21.4%	29.6%	31.8%	33.2%	34.6%	34.0%
I have a small group of friends	61.9%	62.4%	59.7%	55.8%	60.7%	60.8%
No true friends	16.6%	8.0%	8.5%	11.0%	4.7%	5.2%

Social capital

- Friendship *acquisition* differs by student group
- Chinese students are among the UK's loneliest students (but often treated as a "bonding" social capital lump)

We also asked students about the sources of their friendships:

	ALL	White	BaME
People from my hometown	53.3%	58.3%	45.6%
People from my course / faculty / department	66.4%	64.8%	68.8%
People I share my hobbies / interests with	35.1%	34.1%	36.7%
People I play sport with	14.7%	16.4%	12.3%
People I work with	13.8%	16.1%	10.1%
People I volunteer with	2.8%	3.2%	2.3%
People I was allocated accommodation with	33.0%	37.8%	25.3%
The local community I live in (if different from hometown)	3.2%	3.5%	2.8%
People that share my faith	7.0%	3.3%	12.5%
A group I share my identity with	4.1%	2.9%	5.9%
International students, (own country or another)	16.8%	11.3%	25.4%
The student population as a whole	5.3%	5.7%	4.7%

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"I feel part of a community of staff and students (NSS Q21)"		Avg	Agree	Disagree
How often do you consider dropping out of your course?	Every day	15.3%	12.3%	31.0%
	Every week	29.6%	34.1%	38.0%
	Every month	28.6%	27.6%	18.5%
	Less than monthly	17.7%	18.7%	11.3%
	Never	8.8%	7.2%	1.2%

"I belong at my university"		Agree	Disagree
How confident do you feel about completing your current university degree?	Very confident	48.0%	19.3%
	Mostly confident	42.7%	31.4%
	Neutral	6.1%	18.0%
	Not very confident	2.9%	22.4%
	Not at all confident	0.3%	8.9%

"I belong at my university"		Avg	Agree	Disagree
How often do you consider dropping out of your course?	Every day	15.3%	13.7%	27.5%
	Every week	29.6%	28.3%	30.7%
	Every month	28.6%	24.1%	24.9%
	Less than monthly	17.7%	17.1%	15.8%
	Never	8.8%	16.8%	1.1%

"I belong at my university"		Agree	Disagree
Which of the following statements is most like you at university?	I have a large group of friends at university	32.6%	8.1%
	I have a small group of friends at university	60.2%	52.5%
	I do not consider myself to have any true friends at university	7.2%	39.4%

Loneliness and M/H

- Loneliness is linked to happiness and life satisfaction.

- The lonelier the students are, the more likely they are to feel unhappy and anxious and less likely to feel that the things they do in their lives are worthwhile.

- Those that self-identify having a disability, LGBT students and students living with their parents have lower wellbeing scores compared to the average.

Summer 2019

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Implications

- Students feeling lonely are more likely to thinking about dropping out of their course.

- Only half of all students 55% believe that their university cares about their mental health and a similar proportion of students (56%) believe that there has been sufficient provision of student wellbeing and support services at their university.

- Black/African/Caribbean ethnicity are less likely compared to white ethnicity students to believe that their university cares about their mental health and wellbeing.

- 2 out of 10 final year students do not believe that there is sufficient provision of student wellbeing and support services to meet their needs at their institution.
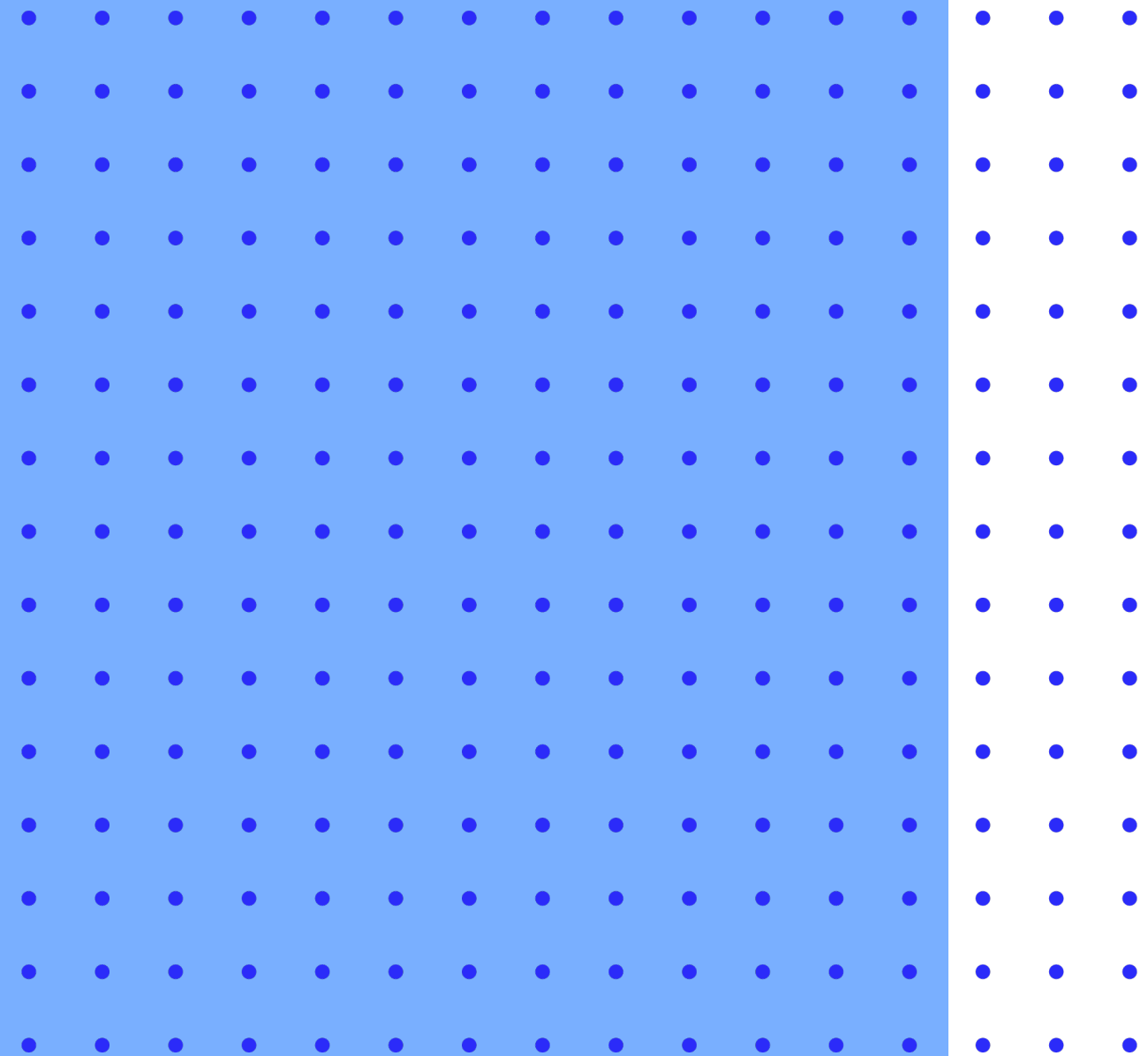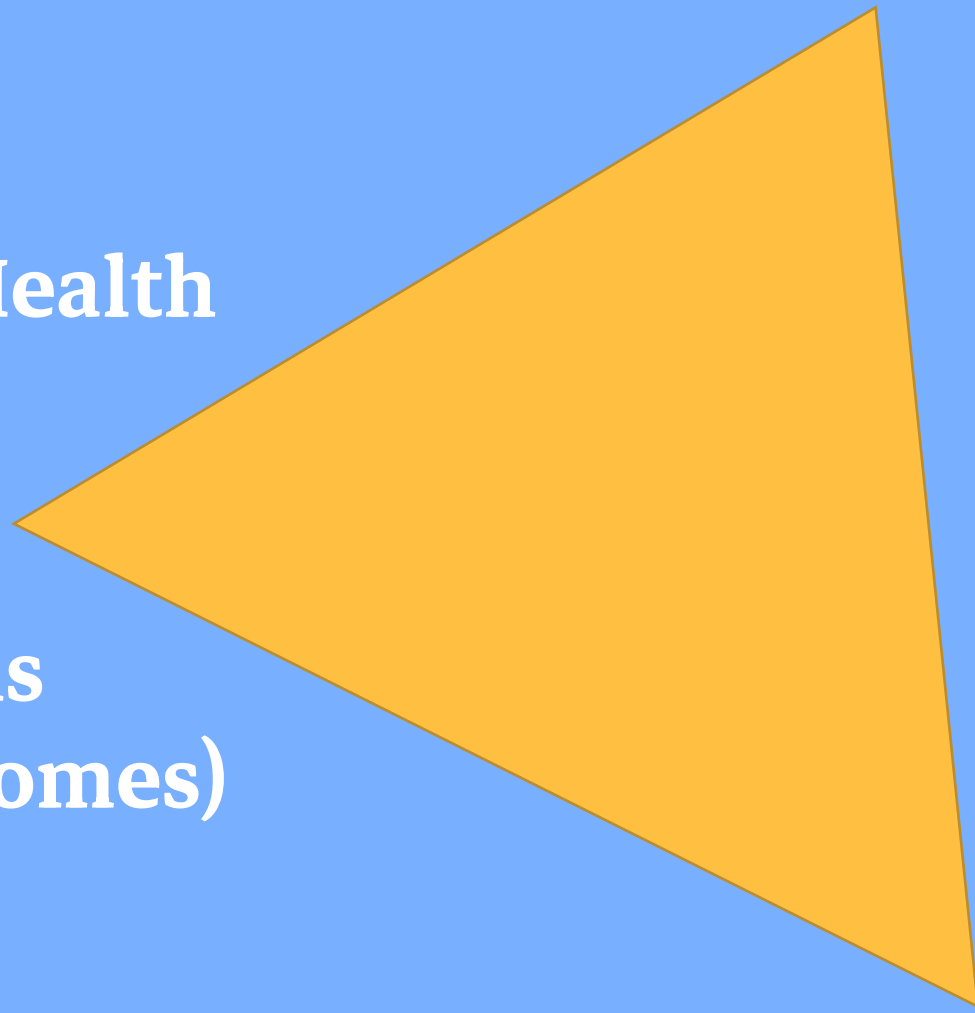
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Loneliness/Friendship

Mental Health

(Concerns
and outcomes)

Involvement

Why consider drop out?

- Because I'm lonely and miss my dogs and mum
- Because I'm struggling with the workload and my mental health is not at its bad right now
- Feel completely isolated, have not been able to meet anyone
- No friends. Hard course. Lonley
- I have no human interaction with anyone and I understand this is mostly because of COVID-19
- The isolation associated with living away from home with few opportunities to build new and meaningful friendships
- It's lonely and depressing. No student support for depression/suicidal ideation
- Because my university experience this year is awful and very detrimental to my mental health
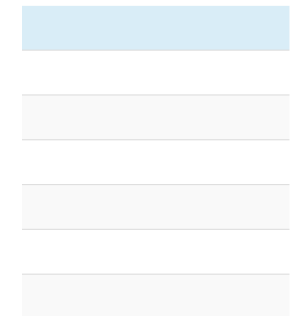
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d-19 which reveals a

red with 8 per cent of the adult
ere, compared to 47 per cent for

ite a bit about this –
government should be

ts they'll probably think "well

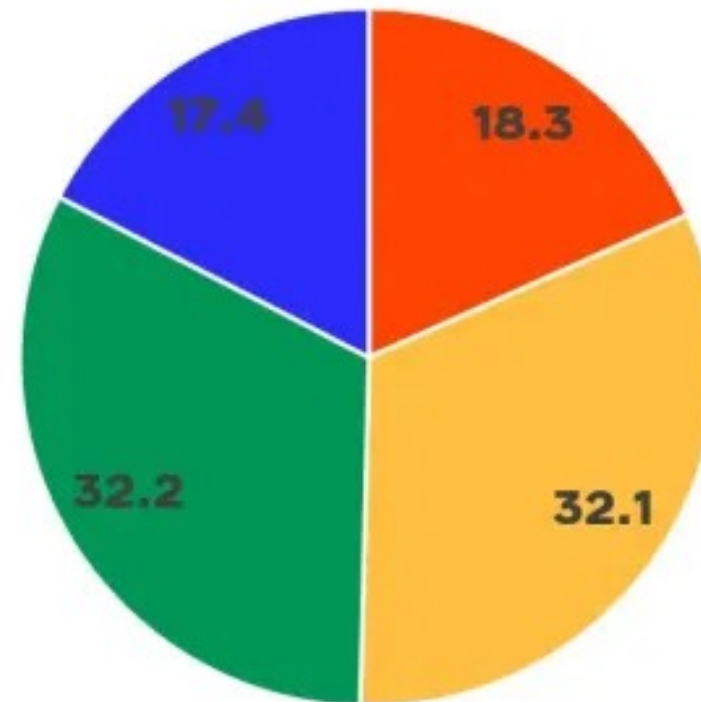dip in January 2021 from 4.8 to
ion scores for the adult

E would say "well we've asked
blame game is what it is – but

■ **Daily**   ■ **Weekly**   ■ **Less than weekly**   ■ **Never**

Why consider drop out?

- Beca
- Beca
  its ba
- Feel
- No fi
- I hav
  beca
- The
  oppo
- It's l
  idea
- Beca
  to m

How often, if ever, do you feel lonely? Oct 2020

18.3 Daily
32.1 Weekly
32.2 Less than weekly
17.4 Never

■ Daily   ■ Weekly   ■ Less than weekly   ■ Never

- Because I'm lonely and miss r
- Because I'm struggling with t its bad right now
- Feel completely isolated, hav
- No friends. Hard course. Lon
- I have no human interaction because of COVID-19
- The isolation associated with opportunities to build new a
- It's lonely and depressing. No ideation
- Because my university exper to my mental health

WONK CORNER
10/03/21

Jim Dickinson
Jim is an Associate Editor at Wonkhe

Tags
COVID-19
STUDENTS

More than one in four students feel lonely often or always

There's a new batch of survey results out today on students and Covid-19 which reveals a remarkably lonely student body.

In the ONS release, over a quarter (26 per cent) reported feeling lonely "often or always", compared with 8 per cent of the adult population in Great Britain over a similar period. "Hardly ever" or "never" runs at 18 per cent here, compared to 47 per cent for GB adults.

Given the links between loneliness, mental health and student outcomes, we ought to worry quite a bit about this – universities and SUs should be considering how to address the issue over the summer, and the government should be considering a specific strand for students in its loneliness work.

(As ever, given that strategy owned by Culture, Media ands Sport, even if the officials see the stats they'll probably think "well that's Gavin's problem", a recurring theme during the pandemic).

Nevertheless, average life satisfaction scores for students have improved a little bit following a dip in January 2021 from 4.8 to 5.1 out of 10 – but the figure is still statistically significantly lower than the average life satisfaction scores for the adult population in Great Britain at 6.4 over a similar period:

	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happy	Anxious
ONS Students February 2021	5.1	5.8	5.5	5.1
ONS Students January 2021	4.8	5.2	5.2	5.2
ONS Student Pilot Nov 2020	5.3	6	5.6	5.3
Students SAES Spring 2020	7	7	6.6	4.3
ONS General Population Feb 2021	6.4	7	6.6	4.1
ONS General Public Nov 2020	6.5	7.2	6.7	4.3
ONS General Public Jan 2021	6.4	7	6.5	4.6

Edit

Universities UK has a quote out in response calling for mental health funding, and doubtless DfE would say "well we've asked universities to prioritise this and we've also invested in Student Space" like it always does. That blame game is what it is – but

Covid-19
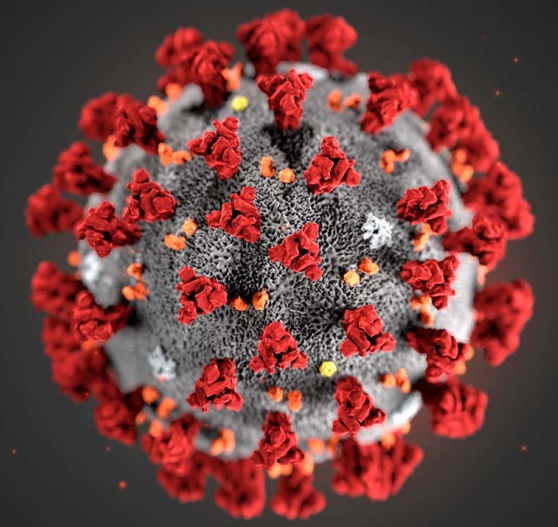
- Major exacerbation effect
- Several surveys confirm problem and worsening of problem esp for groups we would normally be worried about
- Cybil - 24% of students don't have a single friend at university, even into their second and third years
- Links to year, diversity and contact hours

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Post-pandemic recovery?

- One-in-four students were feeling lonely "all" or "most" of the time

- Black and LGB+ students on 3 in 10, disabled students 36 per cent and and trans students on 47 per cent.

What's going on?

What stopped you?

University only seem to care for the wellbeing of on campus or in the city students, if you're a commuting student nobody seems to care if you struggle to make friends due to not being able to participate in normal student events in order to meet people and make friends

In the past, my family did not support my activities as they thought it would hinder me from my studies. Working alongside studying due to the financial limitations of my situation and the cost of living in London means I have not been able to fully immerse myself in the student experience.

My classes are 9-5, Monday to Friday. Then I have to study and work on the projects. Every 3 or 4 weeks I have exams. I must also travel back home, cook, clean, rest. Whenever there is "free time" I am either in bed trying to rest, or occasionally working out.

The stigma and the competitiveness and judging from societies. Although it is not overt it does need to be tackled as it is a large stigma and for those around me have reported the same things

Having to come home from these activities on my own at night because our student village is highly unsafe (selly oak). Also fear of not being good at them.

I often felt too nervous to join in group activities and stopped attending as a result. I would only go to events with people I knew that were also going. I also was not motivated during my first or second year to socialise as I often felt lonely and depressed. It was a never-ending cycle.
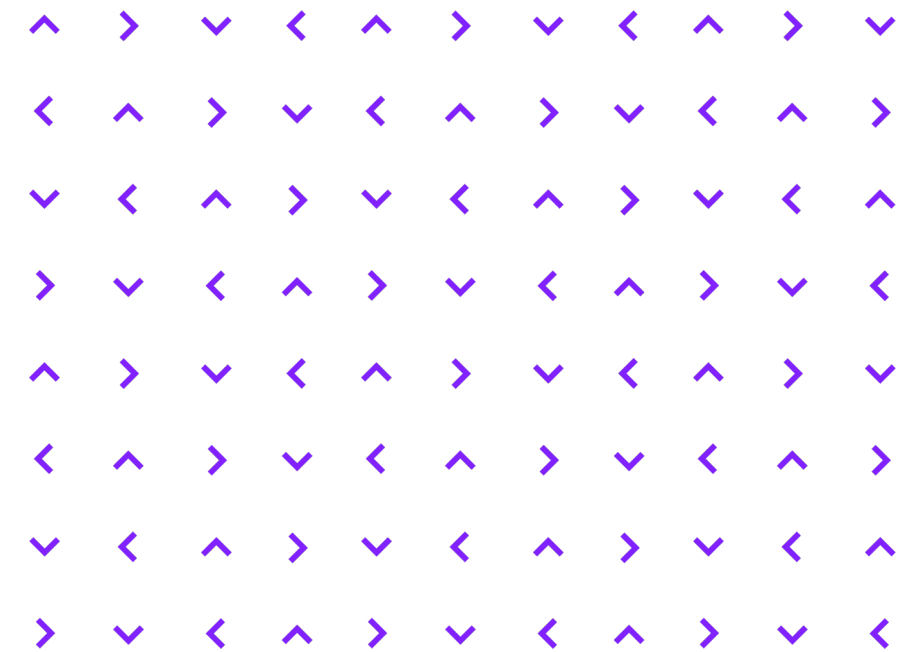
What stopped you?

Lots of sports societies tend to have a drinking and party culture which meant because I don't enjoy those events frequently I felt I couldn't join.

When I first arrived I struggled to get involved as all the information was so overwhelming. But even as I moved through university, I always felt like I wasn't good enough at sport/hobbies to join the societies. I think this stems from the fact that many people who are educated in private/independent school also are able to invest in their hobbies/extra curricular is provided for them at a much higher standard than in many state schools.

Private schooled students tend to have better sports training, so are too difficult to play against. Most musical societies have people who went to paid music lessons, I did not have that money or opportunity.

I have not found activities that that I would really like to be more involved in like, Afro dance, dancehall etc.

My faith- as a Muslim woman there are so many events at night and involves alcohol that I can't attend. Which is why I felt that I didn't make as many friends as some who does drink alcohol would have.
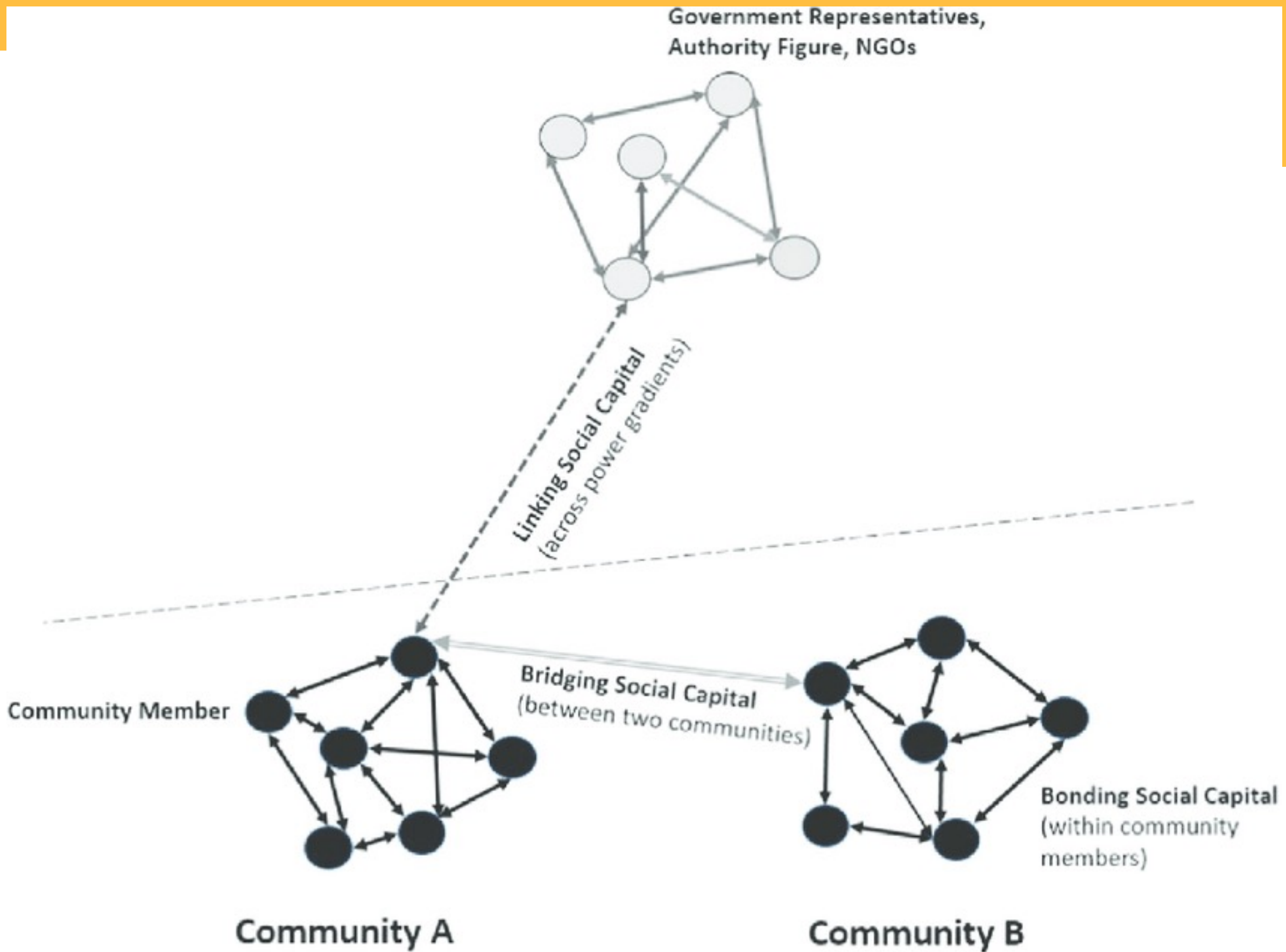
Commuting Living at home (If I lived on campus I would be able to go these events but as I live at home with my parents I have to ask them first before I go to an event. This includes telling them where it is, what time it ends etc and most of the time I can't go because some events are held at night like 6pm onwards or they're at times I have to go home as I go home straight after lectures :(

Not being able to afford my way through university due to having a shit student maintenance loan. This caused me to have to get a job and I worked behind a bar until 5am and it messed everything up for me.
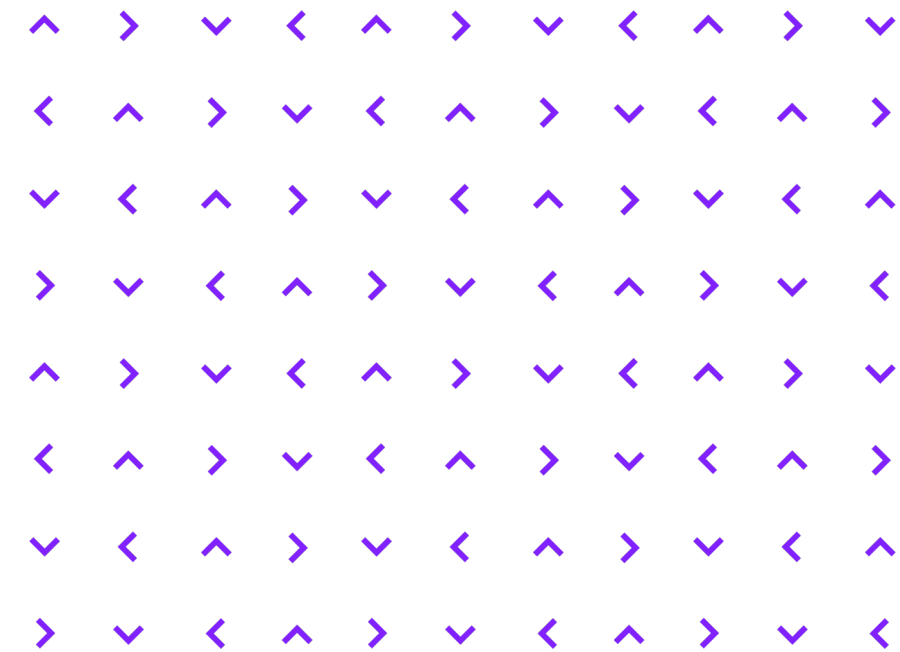
What's going on?

- Confidence in "joining in" – narrower entry points

- Timing of joining in – scarcity of entry points

- Barriers theory – cost, time, course etc

- Large cohorts and class sizes

- Course is important

- Mixed motivations around bonding and bridging social capital

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Government Representatives,
Authority Figure, NGOs

Linking Social Capital
(across power gradients)

Community Member

Bridging Social Capital
(between two communities)

Bonding Social Capital
(within community
members)

Community A

Community B

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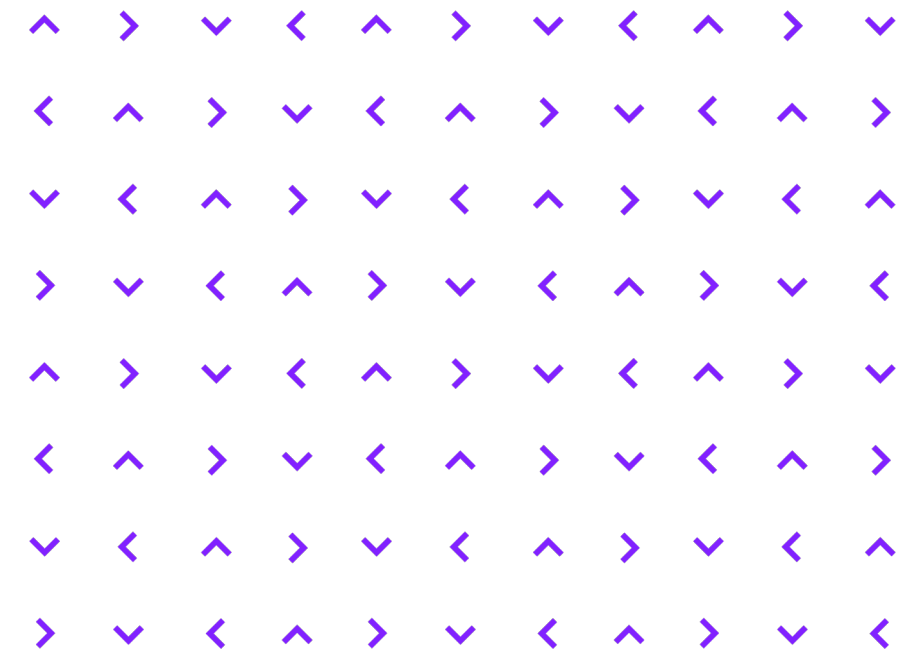# Policy Considerations

Whose job is this?

Often the "responsibility" for creating social activity falls on central services or SUs, but it is clear that social activity at course level and with programmes is crucial, particularly for day trippers and those considered (erroneously, these days) to be "non traditional".

Institutions and SUs would want to consider how this can be facilitated in partnership with academic departments, particularly for students that day trip and for those with demanding practice-based programmes.

When and what?

Social activity is often assumed (particularly within the UK system) to be something that must be organised at the start of an academic year but this research suggests that a sustained effort is required.

In addition it is clear from free text comments that students want more of a focus on basic activity, the facilitation of friendship and less of a focus on formal participation or having to pay for or join groups.

Policy Considerations
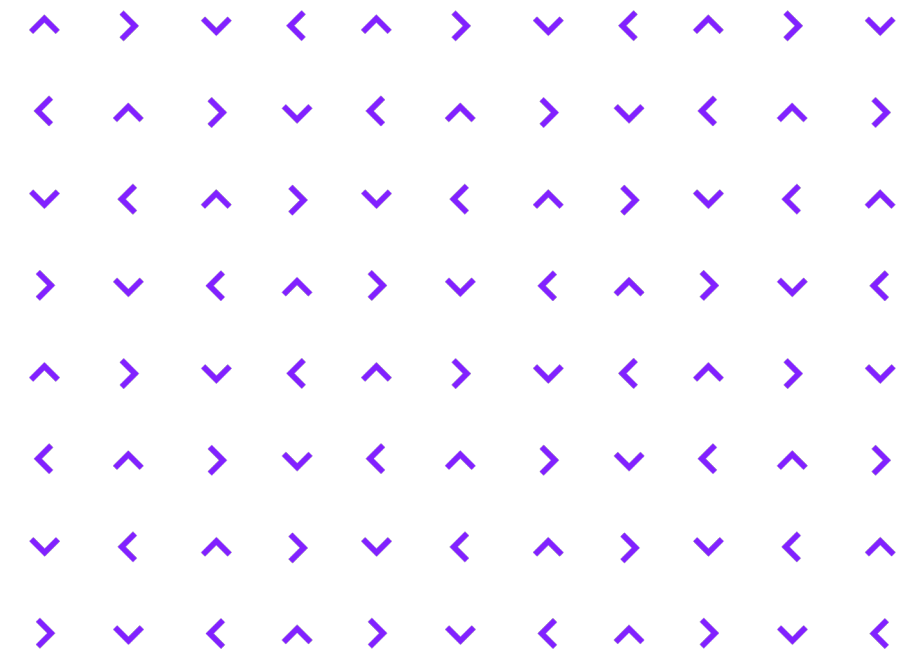
Access and Participation

It is clear that many of the issues surrounding class, barriers, comfort, aspiration etc are just as applicable to extra-curricular student activities as they are to academic programmes.

Students' unions, sports departments and other services organising such activity may want to consider the issues of participation from an access and participation perspective, and the OfS might usefully develop an agenda in this area given the links in this research to wellbeing and other research on the employability benefits of student activity.

Social capital

In the folklore, university is a place where social capital is acquired. But there is a clear risk that this does not happen.

We might theorise that both bonding social capital (where students fund those like them) is much easier for some students to acquire than others; and bridging social capital requires real effort to develop on the part of universities and SUs, particularly for anyone not young, white, full time and affluent.

Critical is activity that requires less formal commitment than more traditional activity

Non con

How often do you consider dropping out of your course?		Avg	Disability	No Disab
	Every day	15.3%	28.2%	13.5%
	Every week	29.6%	34.0%	30.9%
	Every month	28.6%	28.6%	26.1%
	Less than monthly	17.7%	8.0%	20.3%
	Never	8.8%	1.2%	9.1%

		Avg	Het	LGBT
How often do you consider dropping out of your course?	Every day	15.3%	14.9%	20.1%
	Every week	29.6%	31.5%	32.1%
	Every month	28.6%	26.7%	26.3%
	Less than monthly	17.7%	18.7%	18.7%
	Never	8.8%	8.2%	2.8%

"I belong at my university"		Agree	Disagree
Which of the following statements is most like you at university?	I have a large group of friends at university	32.6%	8.1%
	I have a small group of friends at university	60.2%	52.5%
	I do not consider myself to have any true friends at university	7.2%	39.4%

		Avg	Selective state school	Non-selective state school	Private school
How often do you consider dropping out of your course?	Every day	15.3%	23.7%	17.9%	3.6%
	Every week	29.6%	23.2%	39.8%	30.9%
	Every month	28.6%	27.5%	28.7%	15.4%
	Less than monthly	17.7%	16.5%	11.2%	45.3%
	Never	8.8%	9.1%	2.4%	4.9%

"I feel part of a community of staff and students (NSS Q21)"		Avg	Agree	Disagree
How often do you consider dropping out of your course?	Every day	15.3%	12.3%	31.0%
	Every week	29.6%	34.1%	38.0%
	Every month	28.6%	27.6%	18.5%
	Less than monthly	17.7%	18.7%	11.3%
	Never	8.8%	7.2%	1.2%

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Belonging

"I belong at my university"		Agree	Disagree
Do you take part in any of the following activities?	Student society	47.3%	37.3%
	Sports club	32.9%	21.8%
	Course/department/faculty/school rep	15.6%	12.6%
	Student media	5.6%	5.0%
	Volunteering/charity fundraising	21.6%	16.0%
	Student social events (night time)	39.0%	26.0%
	Student social events (day time)	27.9%	16.8%
	Liberation/equality networks, forums or groups	3.2%	4.4%
	Student enterprise	2.1%	1.9%
	Working for the SU	6.1%	4.2%
	Leading/running a student campaign	2.4%	1.7%
	Voting in SU elections	37.9%	24.1%
	Standing in SU elections	2.8%	2.5%
	None of the above	17.0%	31.5%

WONKHE
SUs

Research

- **Student services professionals** could offer events where there are informal opportunities to interact, particularly for those who have recently started at university (first years) who may not already have social networks established themselves.

- Similarly, **academics** could be allowing space within formal taught programming for informal social interaction and connection, as well as openly talking about feelings of loneliness and social disconnection in the pandemic context.

- **Students unions** can also play a role in normalising feelings of loneliness and encouraging and providing opportunities for informally (re-)connecting virtually, and actually once virus containment measures allow.
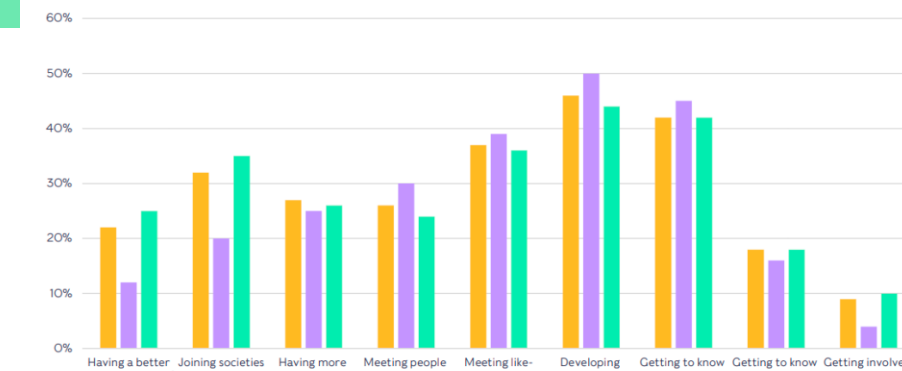

WONKHE
SUs
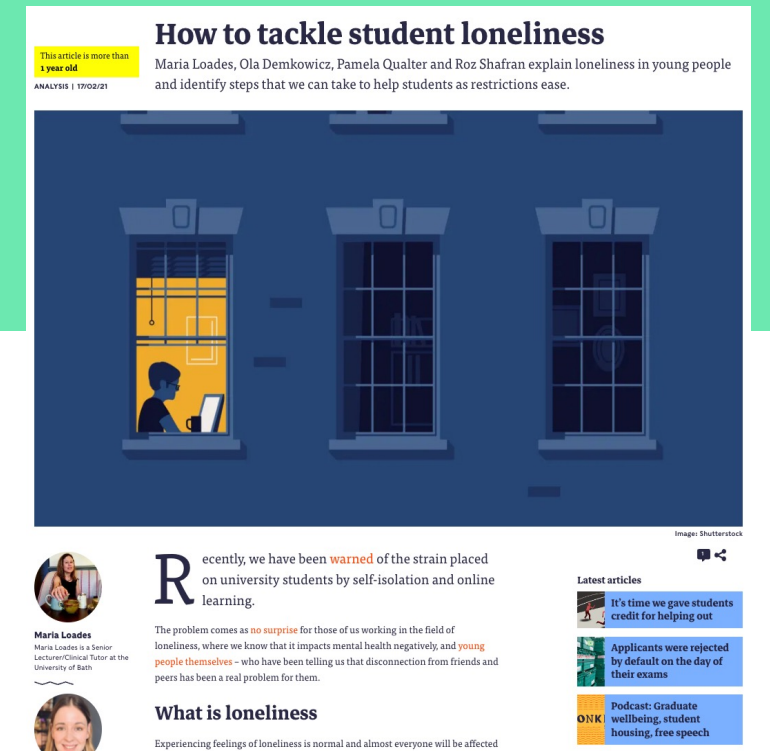
Belonging

- Important link to continuation – B3 and TEF

Belonging
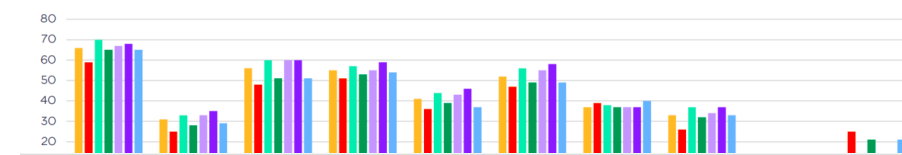
I feel lonely at university - demographics
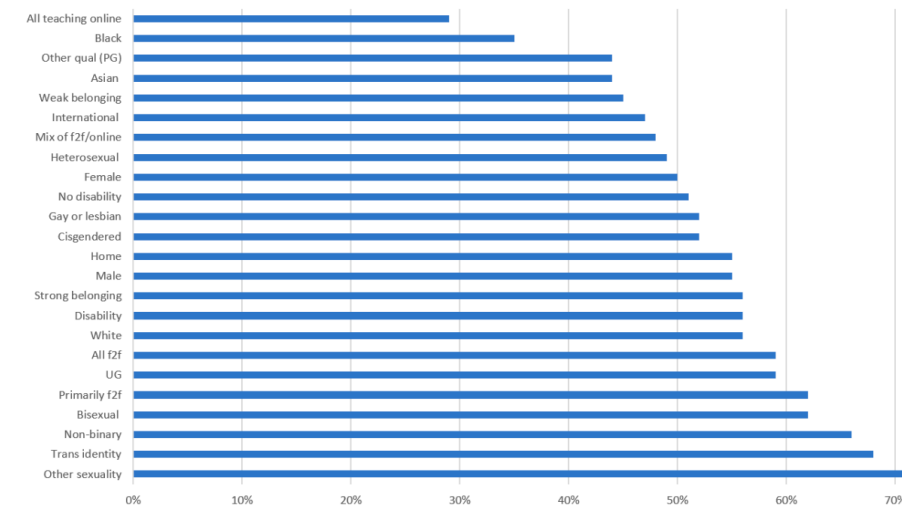% agree/strongly agree

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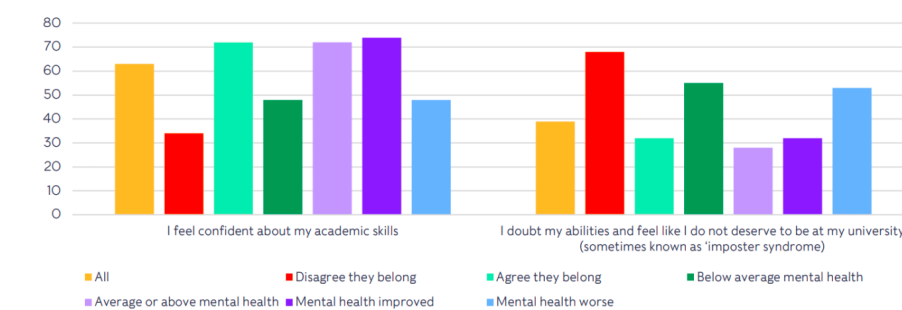

Which of the following areas have played a significant part in how "settled" you feel at university?

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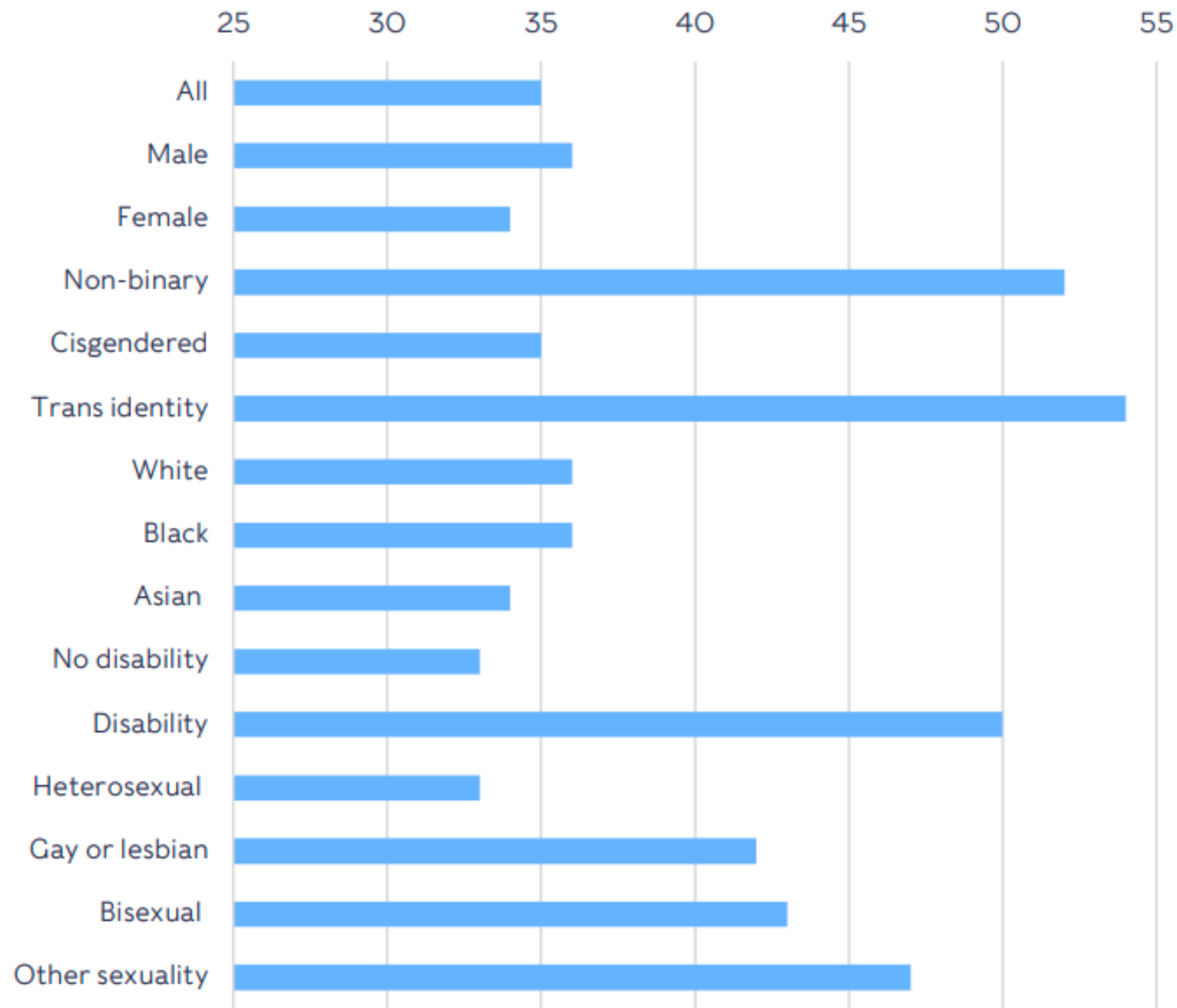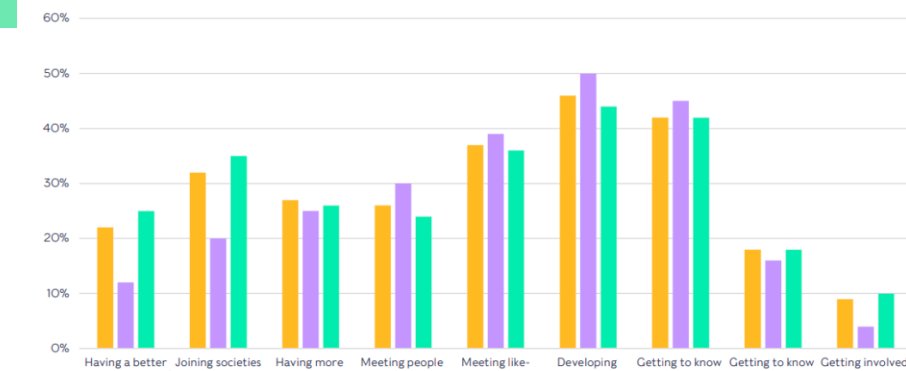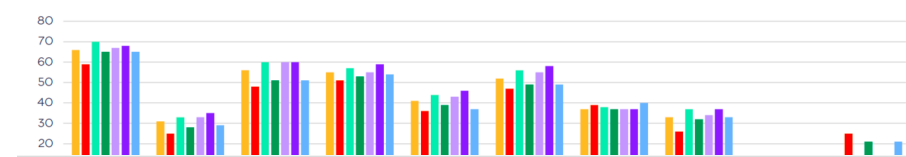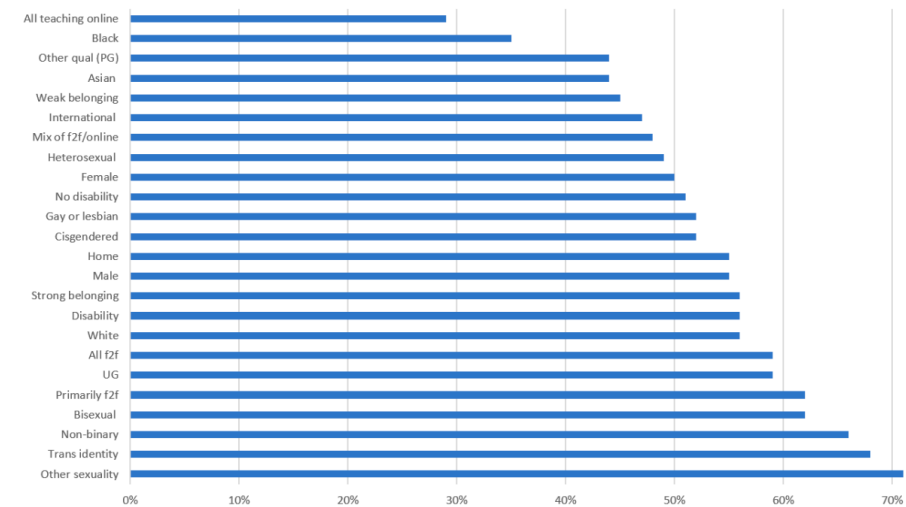

Academic confidence and belonging

Belonging

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

(Chart categories, left to right)
- Having a better understanding of what the university and SU offers and where to find it
- Joining societies / clubs / groups
- Having more time to get used to being at university
- Meeting people who have a similar background to me
- Meeting like-minded people
- Developing closer or more friendships
- Getting to know other people on my course better
- Getting to know my personal tutor
- Getting involved in the local community

Legend: All — Disagree they belong — Agree they belong

I feel lonely at university - demographics
% agree/strongly agree

(Demographic categories: All, Male, Female, Non-binary, Cisgendered, Trans identity, White, Black, Asian, No disability, Disability, Heterosexual, Gay or lesbian, Bisexual, Other sexuality)
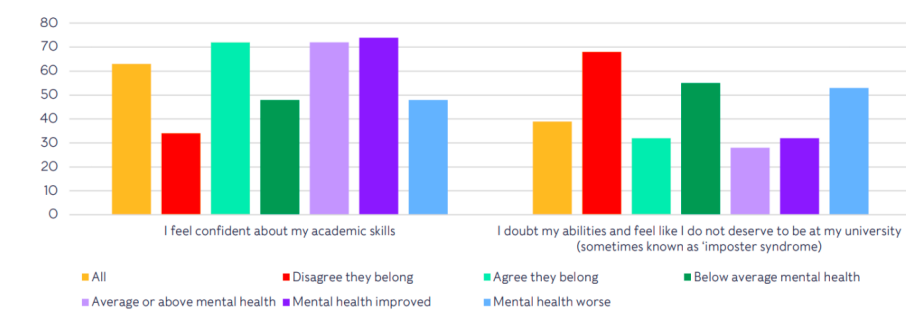
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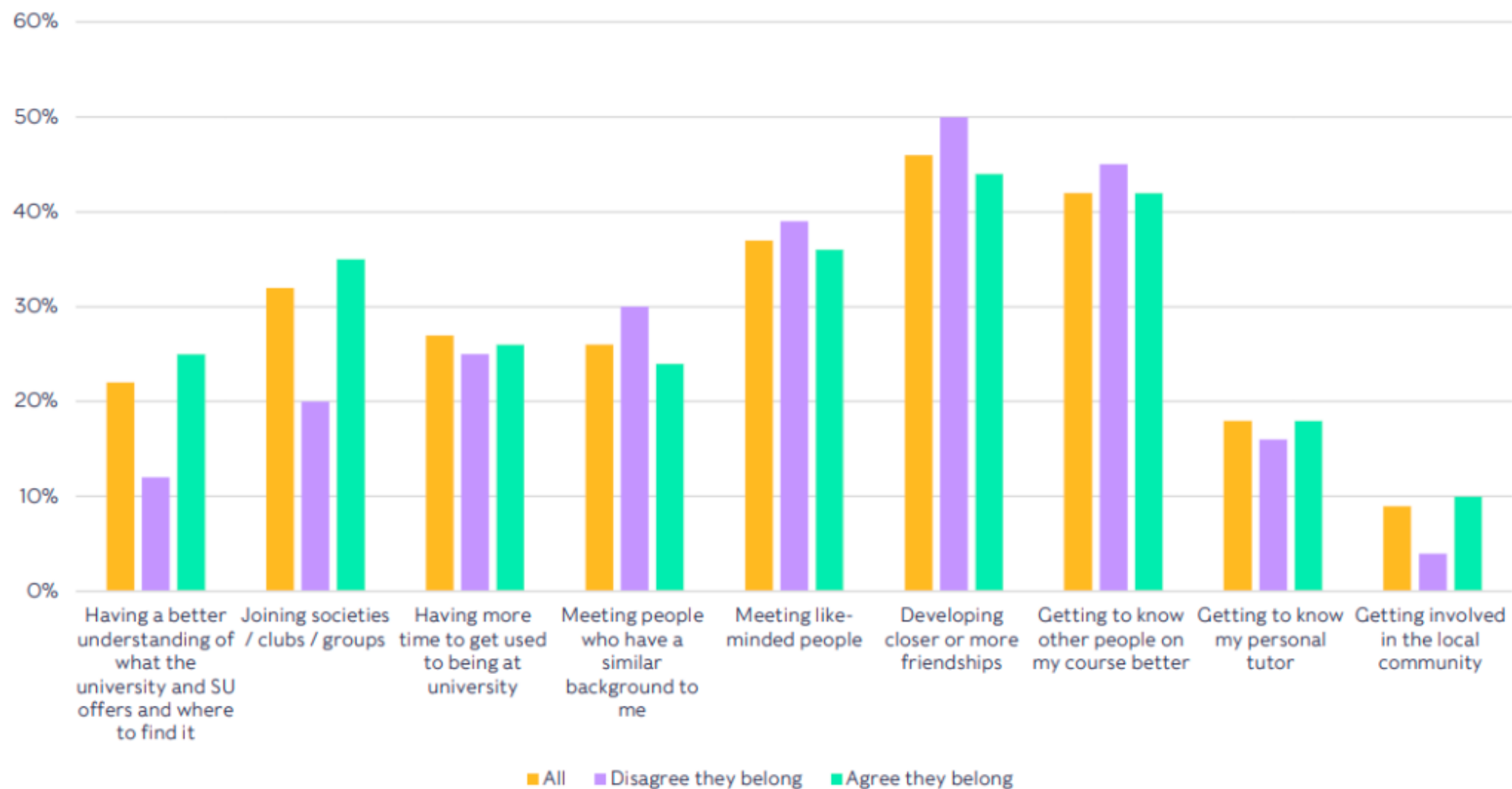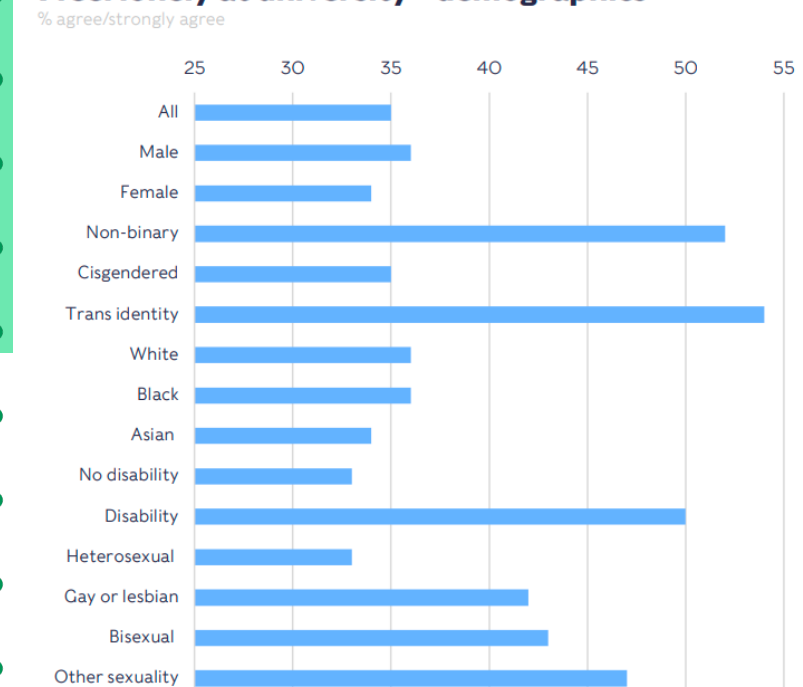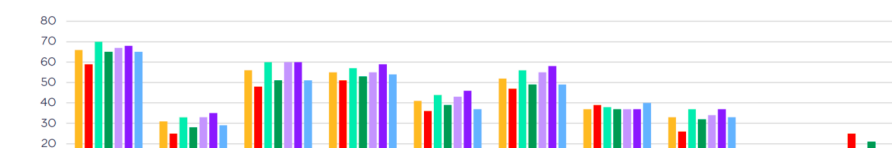

Academic confidence and belonging

(Categories: I feel confident about my academic skills; I doubt my abilities and feel like I do not deserve to be at my university (sometimes known as 'imposter syndrome'))

Legend: All — Disagree they belong — Agree they belong — Below average mental health — Average or above mental health — Mental health improved — Mental health worse

Belonging

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

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

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

Academic confidence and belonging

Belonging

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

Legend:
- All
- Disagree they belong
- Agree they belong
- Below average mental health
- Average or above mental health
- Mental health improved
- Mental health worse

I feel lonely at university - demographics
% agree/strongly agree

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

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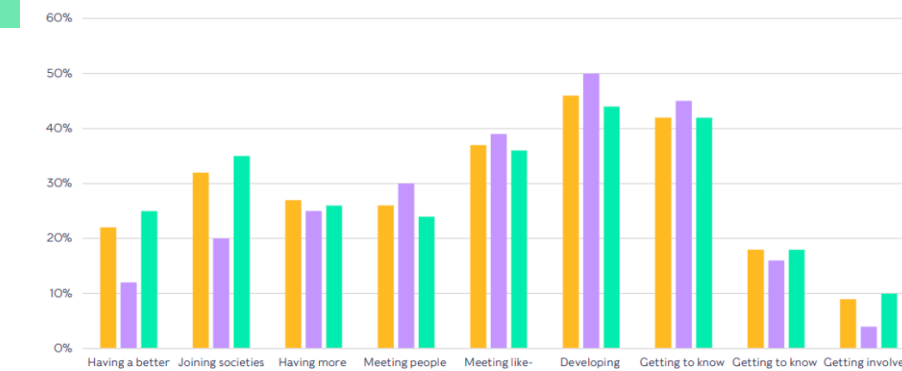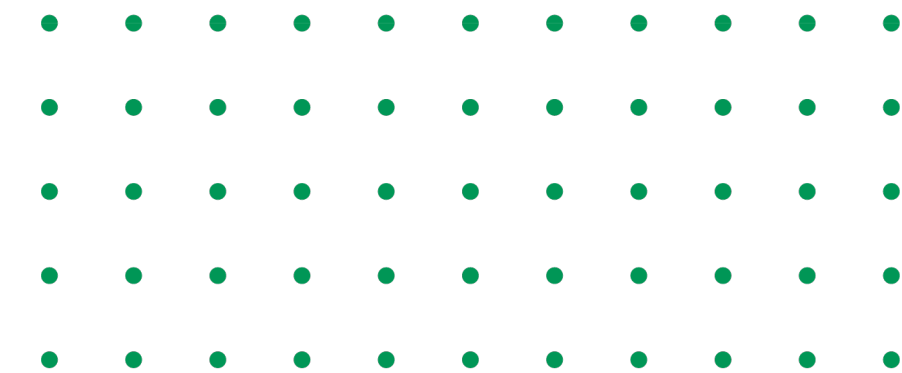

Academic confidence and belonging

Belonging

Academic confidence and belonging

I feel confident about my academic skills

I doubt my abilities and feel like I do not deserve to be at my university (sometimes known as 'imposter syndrome)

- All
- Disagree they belong
- Agree they belong
- Below average mental health
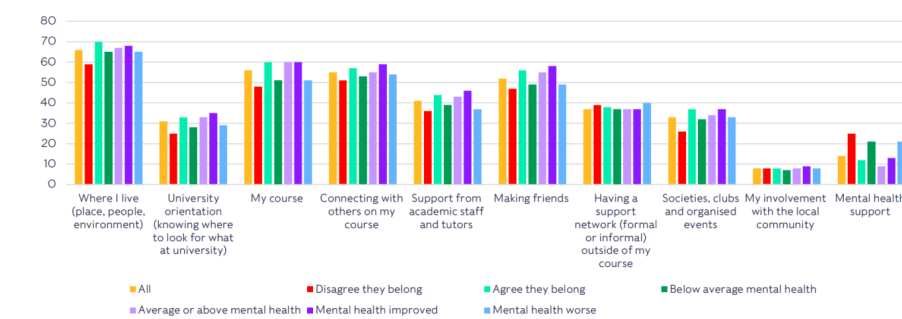- Average or above mental health
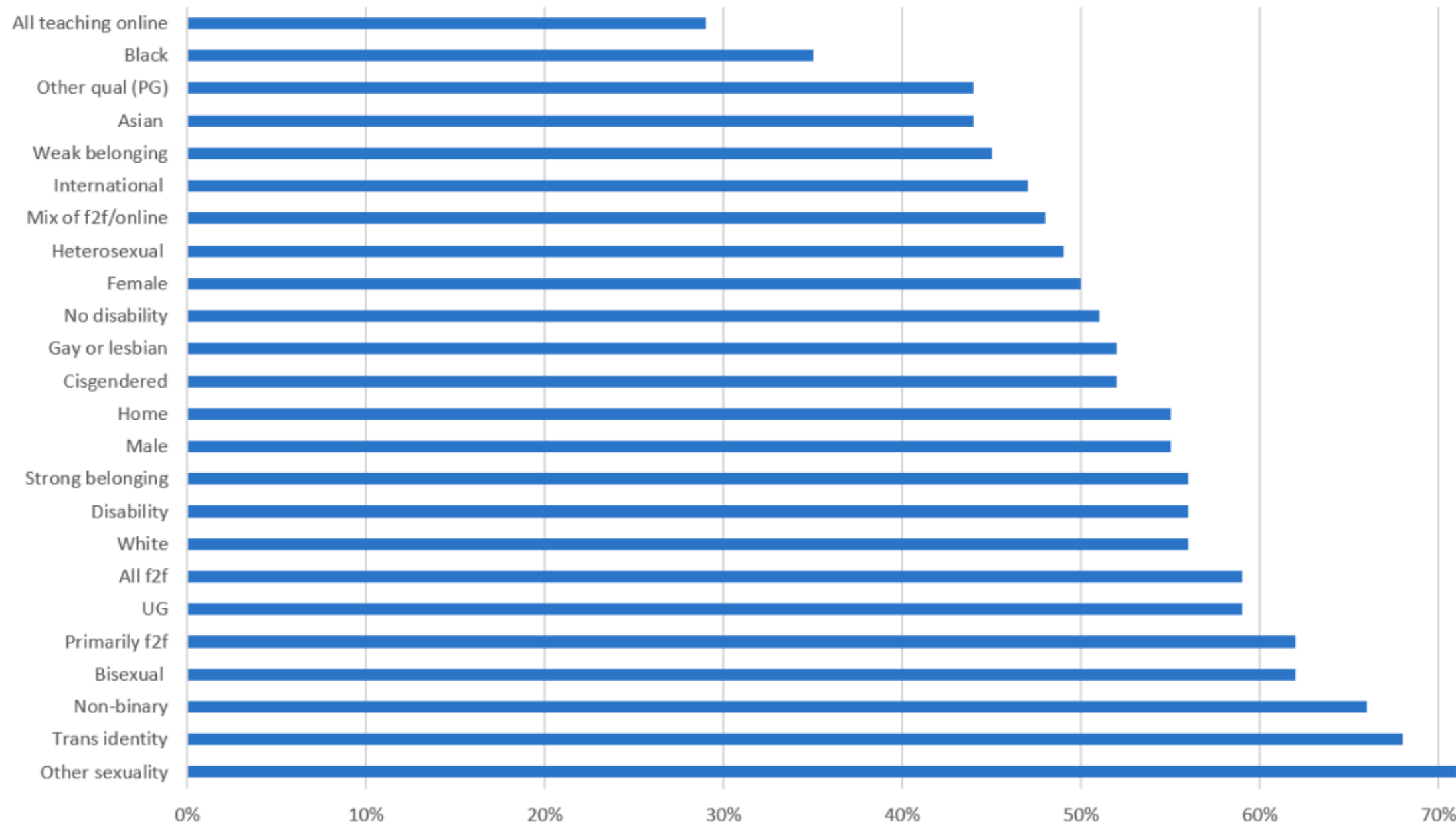- Mental health improved
- Mental health worse

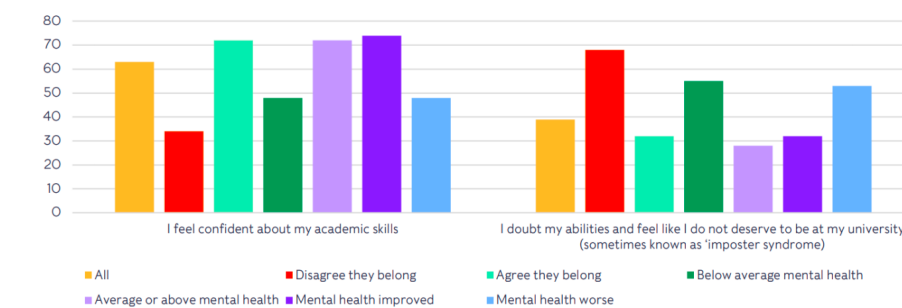What would help you feel a greater sense of belonging at your university?

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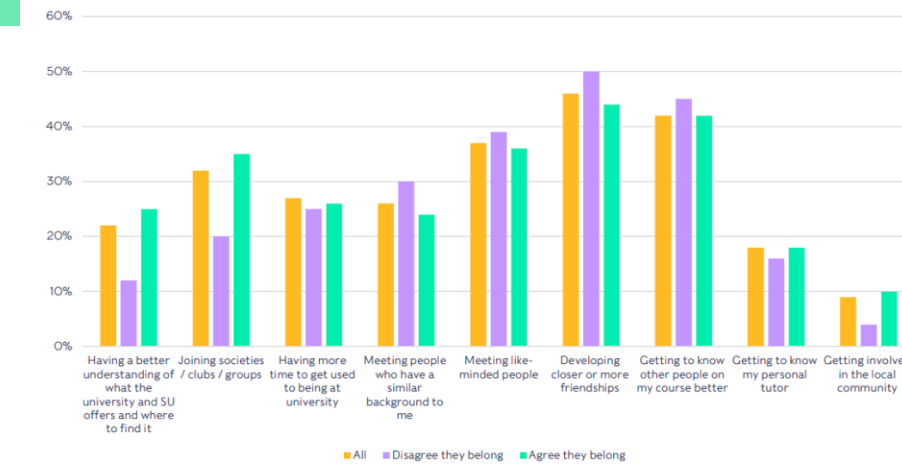
Academic confidence and belonging

Six key lessons

1. NSS Question 22 and targeting. Mine the data to prevent "sharp elbows" from general opps.

2. Whose job is this? Identifying cross institutional responsibilities.

3. Never ending opportunities throughout the academic year.

4. Access and Participation agenda in student activities (and learning from that sector). Data?

5. Opportunities that reduce commitment (financial, opportunity, emotional).

6. Devolve or direct? Incentivising types of activity?

WONKHE
SUs

Only the lonely

- Pre-pandemic, in the loneliness research we carried out back in 2019, 6 per cent of students specifically disagreed with the statement, "if I needed help, there are people who would be there for me".

- Students that lived further away, those with more responsibilities, those spending less time together in student groups and those that were more anxious were less likely to respond positively to that question.

- (All the figures doubled during the pandemic and haven't recovered)

- In many ways, the basic model of higher education assumes that students become "adults" at 18 and can then be left alone. But maybe that was possible in the kind of contexts of class (and class sizes) that were in the past. What about in today's context of hyperdiversity and "middle stage" of adulthood?

- Has the system been able to scale the community intimacy and immersion assumed in the boarding school model

- Many of the risks are about "noticing"

WONKHE
SUs

Building belonging

- One of the threads that links conclusions in the Abrahart case and the Harry Armstrong Evans recommendations is a reach by the judge for "someone" to notice and act when a student is struggling.

- So folks (judges, politicians) reach for the personal tutor – however unfair in the modern context.

- Building belonging and community at programme level becomes a safety concern as much as it is a pedagogical issue.

- Should every student should get a dedicated academic coach?

- An actual person who tracks progress, helps a student navigate and generally looks after a student becoming a student should still to be powerful.

WONKHE
SUs

"Commuter students aren't looking for friends – they're looking for qualifications"
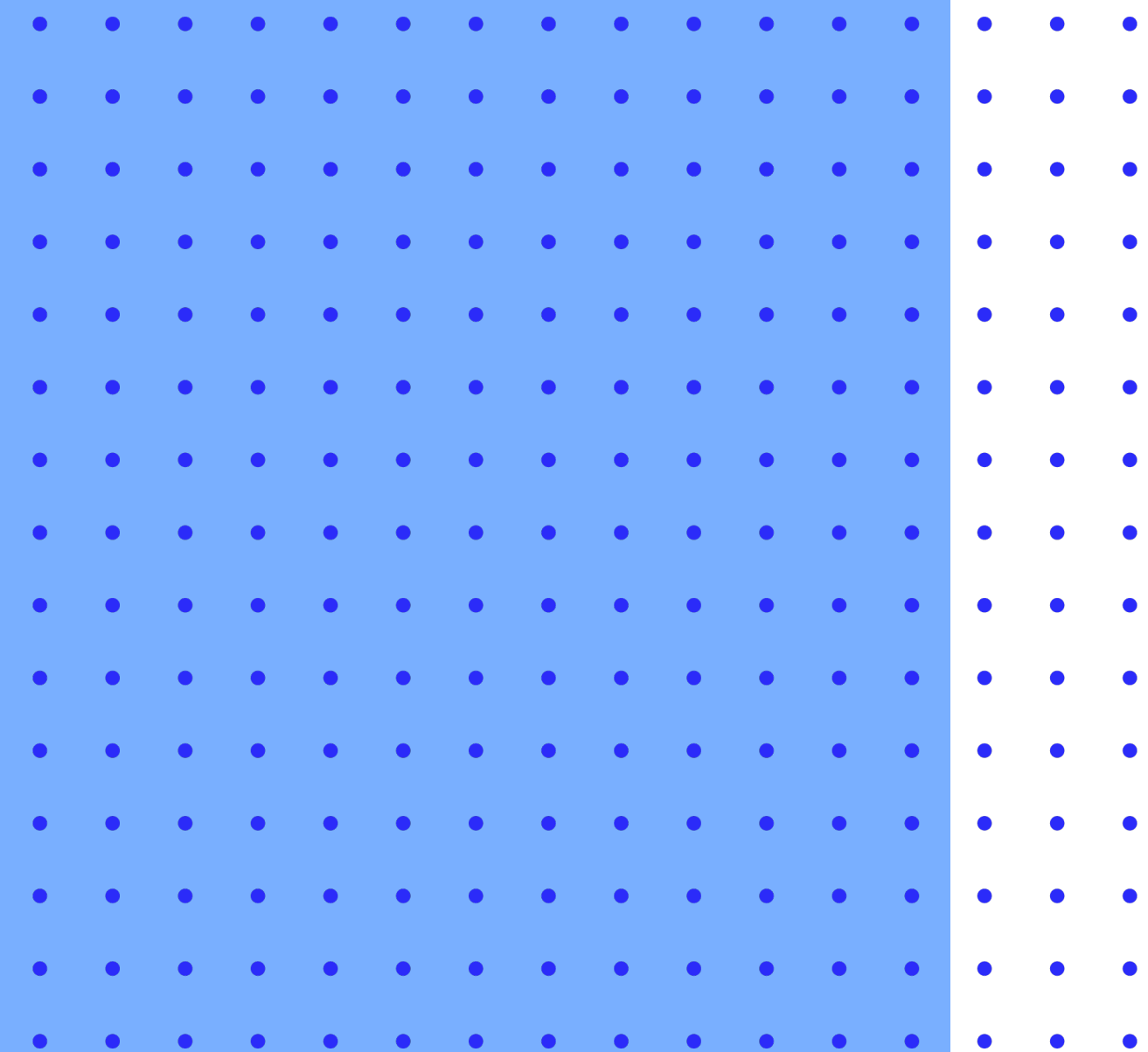
- Continuation
  - Getting to the second year
    - Belonging
- Completion
  - Getting to the end of the course
    - Confidence
- Progression
  - Getting a graduate job
    - Skills
- Plus awarding (gaps), NSS teaching, NSS A&F, NSS AS, NSS Feedback, NSS Learning resources

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	I feel part of a community of students and staff			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Very fair	46% ↑	21% ↓	15% ↓	10% ↓
Fair	49% ↓	67% ↑	61%	52%
Not very fair	5% ↓	11%	20% ↑	22% ↑
Not at all fair	0% ↓	1% ↓	5% ↑	16% ↑

Belong

2022 National Student Survey

Percentage of respondents who gave the two most positive answers ('definitely' or 'mostly' agree) on:

2022	**The teaching on my course**	**80%**
2021		80%
2022	**Learning opportunities**	**79%**
2021		79%
2022	**Assessment and feedback**	**69%**
2021		69%
2022	**Academic support**	**74%**
2021		74%
2022	**Organisation and management**	**70%**
2021		70%
2022	**Learning resources**	**81%**
2021		74%
2022	**Learning community**	**68%**
2021		67%
2022	**Student voice**[1]	**67%**
2021		66%
2022	**Students' union**[1]	**53%**
2021		53%
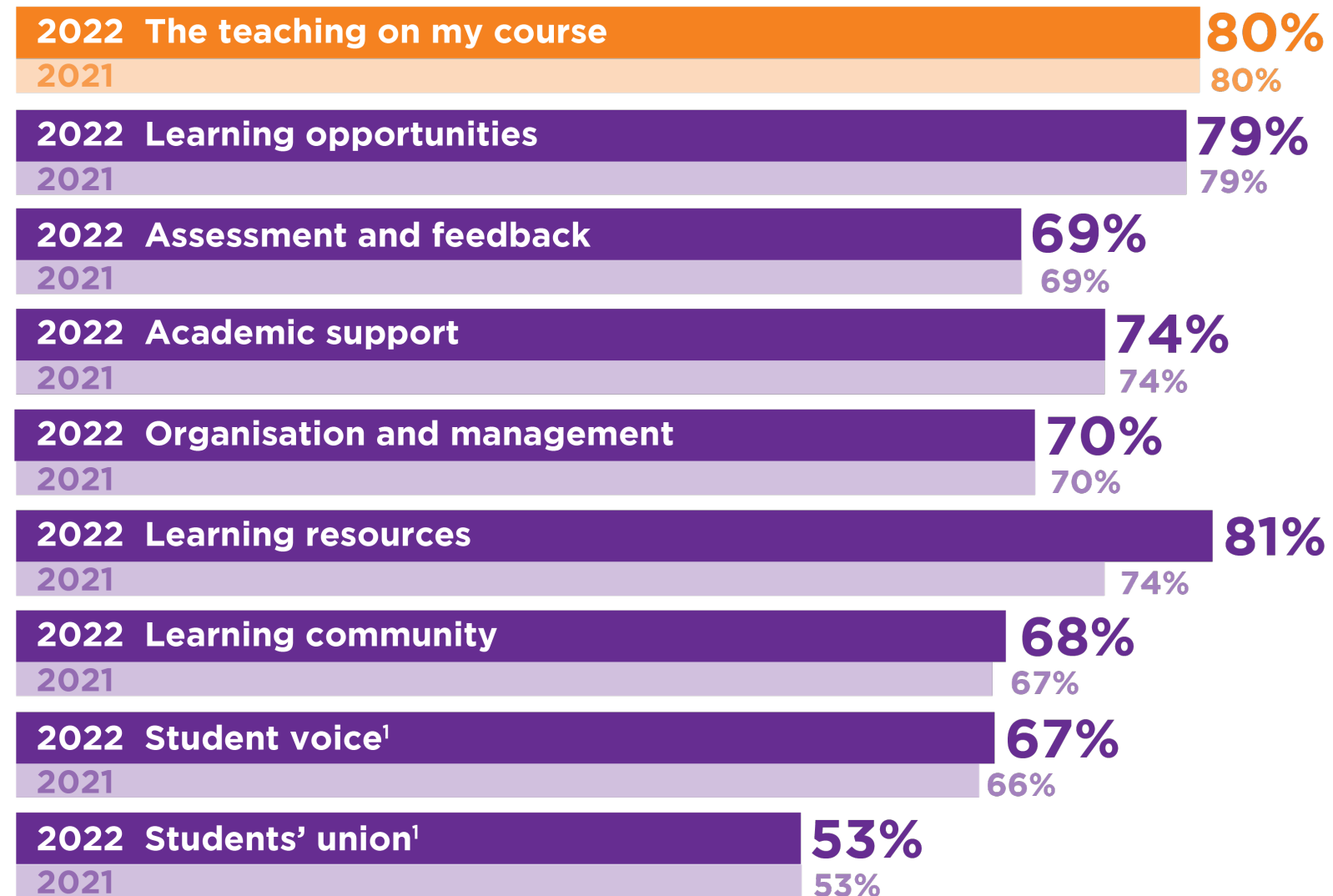
[1] *The data for the 'student voice' scale does not include responses to Q26 on the students' union, which is reported separately in this table.*

Achillies heel of NSS...

Assessment and feedback:

8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance. 73%

9. Marking and assessment has been fair. 68%

10. Feedback on my work has been timely. 84%

11. I have received helpful comments on my work. 91%

Also highest active disagree (14%)

WONKHE
SUs

What matters?

- Continuation
  - Getting to the second year
    - Belonging
- Completion
  - Confidence
    - Getting to the end of the course
- Progression
  - Getting a graduate job
    - Skills
- Plus awarding (gaps), NSS teaching, NSS A&F, NSS AS, NSS Feedback, NSS Learning resources

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Achillies heel of NSS...

Assessment and feedback:

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- 9. Marking and assessment has been fair. 68%

- 10. Feedback on my work has been timely. 84%

- 11. I have received helpful comments on my work. 91%

- Also highest active disagree (14%)

- (SU NAND was 19%)

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Achillies heel of NSS…

Three themes:
1. Link to criteria being clear in advance
2. Demonstrable application of that criteria
3. Consistency of marking

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	I feel part of a community of students and staff			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Very fair	46% ↑	21% ↓	15% ↓	10% ↓
Fair	49% ↓	67% ↑	61%	52%
Not very fair	5% ↓	11%	20% ↑	22% ↑
Not at all fair	0% ↓	1% ↓	5% ↑	16% ↑

Achillies heel of NSS...

Five themes:

1. Link to criteria being clear in advance
2. Demonstrable application of that criteria
3. Consistency of marking
4. Hadn't taken into account their circumstances fairly (best of ability)
5. They have personal connections, I don't

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Why is assessment unfair?

- I had to take the first half of my course online due to visa issues which caused a huge gap in my experience and relation to the material in comparison to my class.

- Poor brief and not a good idea of what they want.

- I'm not one of the favourites.

- Often feels like a score for participation mark – very unfair as not all of us can be there all of them time.

- We've been told that multiple lectures go over to confirm the results. Nobody believes this.

- I feel like for some people is harder to get higher scores due to the differences in age (work experience, other further studies).

- I think I was severely under marked for an essay that I don't think was that bad, and others agree.

- It can sometimes feel as though we are thrown into the deep end with assessment. We have no exemplar work to study and understand, therefore it feels as though we're being graded on a skill that we haven't properly developed or understood.

Concrete Experience
(doing / having an experience)

Reflective Observation
(reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualisation
(concluding / learning from the experience)

Active Experimentation
(planning / trying out what you have learned)
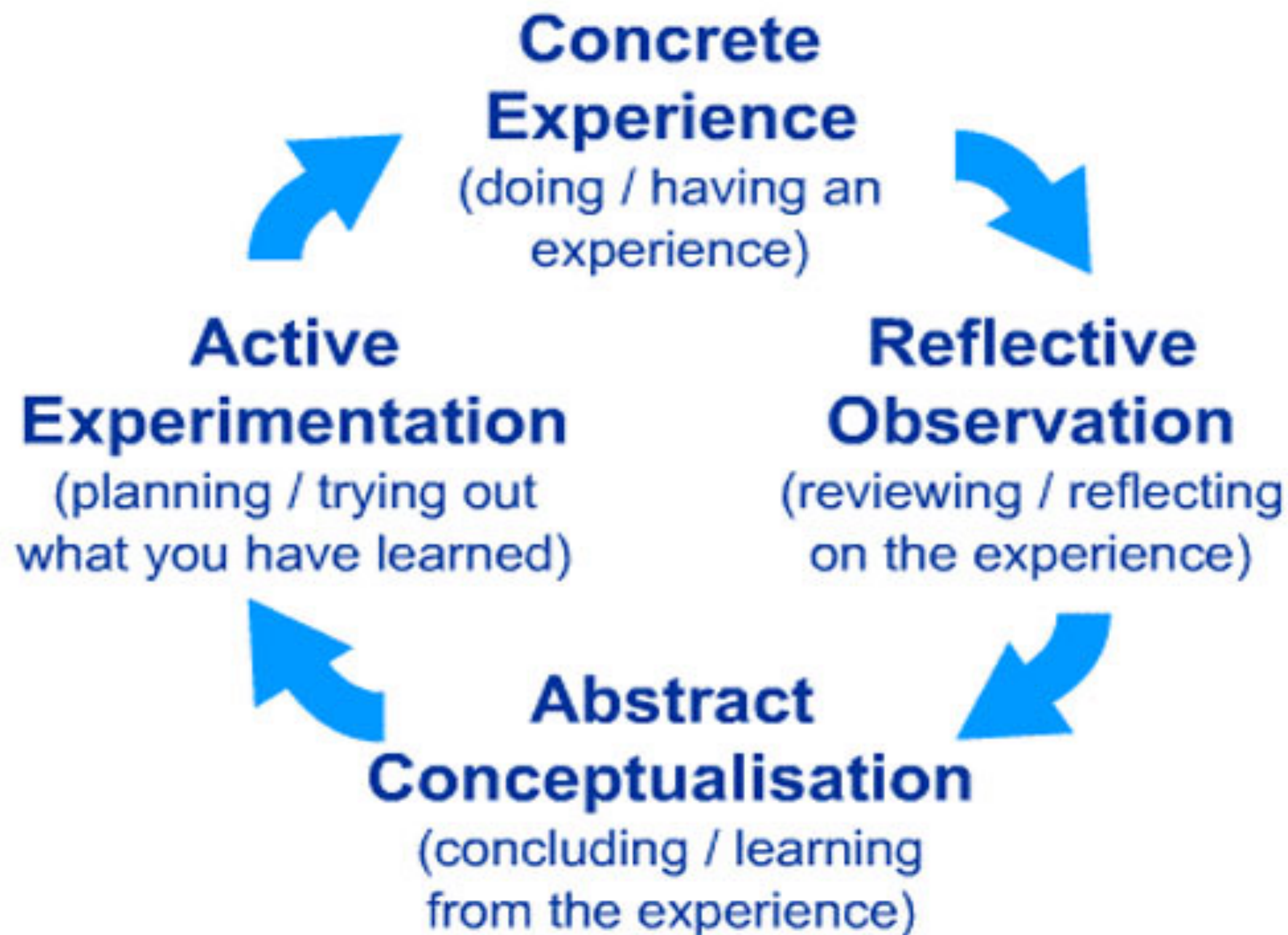
| | Which of the following best describes your gender identity? | |
I feel part of a community of students and staff		Man	Woman
	Strongly agree	30% ↑	20% ↓
	Agree	51%	54%
	Disagree	15%	19%
	Strongly disagree	4%	7%

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Disability/long term condition etc			
I feel part of a community of students and staff		Yes	No
	Strongly agree	18% ↓	26% ↑
	Agree	43% ↓	55% ↑
	Disagree	26% ↑	15% ↓
	Strongly disagree	13% ↑	4% ↓

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

I feel part of a community of students and staff	Prior schooling		
	Private/independent education	State education	School outside UK/Ireland
Strongly agree	32% ↑	20% ↓	27%
Agree	48%	52%	57% ↑
Disagree	15%	21% ↑	13% ↓
Strongly disagree	5%	8% ↑	2% ↓

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

I feel part of a community of students and staff	Home domicile		
	UK	EU/EEA	Outside EU/EEA
Strongly agree	21% ↓	11% ↓	31% ↑
Agree	50% ↓	60%	55%
Disagree	21% ↑	22%	11% ↓
Strongly disagree	8% ↑	8%	2% ↓

Belong

Power of community

		I feel part of a community of students and staff			
		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am good enough to be here	Strongly agree	41% ↑	18% ↓	14% ↓	24%
	Agree	45% ↓	64% ↑	49%	32% ↓
	Disagree	11% ↓	14%	29% ↑	20%
	Strongly disagree	3% ↓	4% ↓	8%	24% ↑

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

I feel part of a community of staff and students

Headline 2022: 61.8%

- Computing: 48%
- Media and comms: 74%
- Allied to medicine: 45%
- Psychology: 51%
- Social sciences: 46%

Over the last month, how often have you felt lonely?

Daily	19%
Weekly	31% ↑
Monthly	22%
Once/twice	12% ↓
Never	16% ↓

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Community and loneliness

I feel part of a community of students and staff	Over the last month, how often have you felt lonely?				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Once or twice	Never
Strongly agree	23%	18% ↓	22%	33% ↑	36% ↑
Agree	33% ↓	60% ↑	61% ↑	56%	47%
Disagree	31% ↑	17%	13% ↓	9% ↓	14%
Strongly disagree	14% ↑	5%	3%	2%	2% ↓

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Community and time

I feel part of a community of students and staff	I am able to devote most of my time to being a student		
	Totally	Mostly	Not really
Strongly agree	41% ↑	19% ↓	13% ↓
Agree	48% ↓	59% ↑	44% ↓
Disagree	9% ↓	17%	32% ↑
Strongly disagree	2% ↓	5%	11% ↑

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Distance...

I am able to devote most of my time to being a student	Round trip to campus in minutes					
	O	1–15	16–30	31–45	46–60	60+
Totally	35%	35% ↑	27%	30%	22%	18% ↓
Mostly	48%	55%	61%	55%	56%	55%
Not really	17%	11% ↓	12%	15%	21% ↑	27% ↑

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Burdens

I am able to devote most of my time to being a student		Term time part time work					
		0	1–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21+
	Totally	34% ↑	30%	25%	26%	25%	15% ↓
	Mostly	57%	60%	54%	58%	54%	37% ↓
	Not really	9% ↓	11%	21% ↑	16%	20% ↑	48% ↑

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Doing our best

I am able to devote most of my time to being a student	I am performing to the best of my ability on this course			
	Totally	Mostly	Not really	Not at all
Totally	62% ↑	17% ↓	15% ↓	7% ↓
Mostly	31% ↓	72% ↑	58%	45%
Not really	7% ↓	11% ↓	27% ↑	48% ↑

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Best of my ability		Man	Woman
	Totally	30%	27%
	Mostly	46%	46%
	Not really	15%	19%
	Not at all	5%	4%

Best of my ability		Disabled	Not
	Totally	18% ↓	31% ↑
	Mostly	42%	48%
	Not really	26% ↑	15% ↓
	Not at all	10% ↑	3% ↓

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Why aren't students attending?

- 1. Health (esp mental health)
- 2. Paid employment
- 3. Public transport and/or long journey
- 4. Teaching quality/format
- 5. Busy with assignments/independent study

Time is more precious now – students are weighing up best use of their time, and that is often not coming to campus

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Why not (last 3)

- Combination of a waste of time, depression hitting hard, my physical state being ignored by the university with regards to walking back and forth from campus (it's too painful sometimes).

- Because the other lectures by that staff member had been very dull and about very simple concepts, so I felt I would be better served by just reading the content in my own time.

- Work, I'm come from a low social economic family and therefore have to work to afford living in Brighton (expensive city without the London maintenance loan).

- I either felt unmotivated, depressed, unprepared or anxious – scared to be asked questions and have to speak

- Sometimes staff are funny about lateness – I commute an hour by car and occasionally would be 10 minutes late , if they were rude in class about it I just wouldn't turn up next time I was late because I don't see the point when it's our money paying them they shouldn't really care.

Belonging qual

- I still don't really know anyone on my course
- There was a session when we talked about our ideas and home lives that we all bonded over
- Thew rep for our course organizes sessions in the LRC where we work together
- We worked on a project together in the first week and were put in groups of people we would npt normally sit with
- There should be organized mixing between students from different countries

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

	Confidence		
To what extent do you feel confident about	Very confident + Confident	NCNNC	Unconfident + Very unconfident
Navigating the campus	82% ↑	12% ↓	6% ↓
How to avoid academic misconduct	84% ↑	12% ↓	4% ↓
Using the library and learning resources	81% ↑	13% ↓	6% ↓
Accessing and using the IT equipment and software I need to succeed	76% ↑	16%	8% ↓
The foundational skills and knowledge needed to do well on the course	74% ↑	15% ↓	10%
Working with other students in groups	74% ↑	15% ↓	11%
Making the most of lectures	76% ↑	15% ↓	9% ↓

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Home domiciled school

What I have to do to get a good grade on my course		Private	State
	Very confident	25%	16% ↓
	Confident	42%	48%
	NCNU	28%	24%
	Unconfident	5%	9%
	Very unconfident	1%	3%

Belong

What I have to do to get a good grade on my course	I feel part of a community of staff and students			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Very confident	43% ↑	16% ↓	9% ↓	8% ↓
Confident	45%	56% ↑	31% ↓	22% ↓
NCNU	9% ↓	21%	37% ↑	37% ↑
Unconfident	3% ↓	6% ↓	19% ↑	16% ↑
Very unconfident	0% ↓	1% ↓	4%	18% ↑

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Becoming

- All the inform,ation in one place

- Support for state school students who lack the foundational knowledge lecturers presume you'll have

- I feel I am a person that needs a lot of reassurance, and this is hard when there is so many people within each school, so no one gets known on a personal level.

- Before the semester begins, more time to introduce how to adapt to university.

- Making people feel like they belong.

- Make small student groups where we can support each other, among peers

Power of community

		I feel part of a community of students and staff			
		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	Very well	70% ↑	35% ↓	21% ↓	17% ↓
	Well	28% ↓	55% ↑	56% ↑	53%
	Not very well	1% ↓	9%	19% ↑	15%
	Not at all well	1% ↓	2% ↓	5%	16% ↑

Belong

By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Qual on PTs

- There are supposed to be personal tuors but I've never met mine
- We have sessions with staff other students but I have to work
- I said about childcare and my job but he said I need to treat my studies as full time
- The lecturers are all quite intimidating
- I keep myself to myself and don't feel comfortable talking to staff
- I asked for help but felt quite patronized
- We all support eachother rather than going to staff for help

Belong
By Cibyl & Wonkhe

Netherlands

- Netherlands' Expertise Centre for Diversity Policy – extensive quantitative and qualitative research on both the access and participation of students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

- Academic integration was important – introductory programmes familiarising students with the degree course seemed effective.

- Having accessible staff who created an environment in which "a student feels part of the course and is challenged", was also seen as a major positive factor in increasing student motivation.

- Small student associations "appeared to be the best means of bridging the gap" between isolated ethnic minority students – having a "positive impact" on student retention.

- Key to reducing differences in study success between student characteristics was summarised as "learning communities" where "small scale" was "consistently implemented".

- Small groups, short projects, associative activity, rotated student involvement with each other and staff, and opening out only when all students were ready – leading later to more independent and autonomous study.

WONKHE
SUs

VU Amsterdam

Student mentors are trained to meet with their group and plan activity that causes students to

- Become acquainted with their degree programme and fellow students;

- Be familiar with the campus and the city;

- Participate in activities performances staged by other students;

- Participate in workshops that help students prepare for their studies;

- Understand more about the associations and activities on offer in the city.

WONKHE
SUs

- "You will no longer feel awkward: when you walk into the lecture hall a few weeks later, you already know everyone."
- There are versions for master's students, adaptions for international students, and even a parallel programme led by students for students who are first in the family.

WONKHE
SUs

DTU Studiestart

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0nHtQ3xqUo

WONKHE
SUs

Student delivery

What are students responsible for?

- Getting to know the landscape

- Getting to know one another

- Introduction to course PDP tracking system (eportfolio system)

- Getting connected/ critical connections

- Preparing for success

- Enhancing your future

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Coach trip

What about personal tutoring and academic support?

- "We would not expect the staff to give us that. That is what we students do"

How are study skills done here?

- "Students do that we have four projects

What is your course rep system?

- "We don't have a system like that but every student signs up to do something for other students, like coffee or jobs and business liaison

How do students find the time if they have jobs

- "When we organize it we make it work, often times it happens in the evening or in the city"

Coach trip

- Deep ends - large group lectures on dos and don'ts, large class sizes, reduced contact hours, big parties, intimidating campuses and student bodies in multiple cities of 50, 60 even 70,000 students.

- BUT subject and programme associations (not reps) were important. Students were consistently more enthusiastic about collaboration and group work. Spaces were cosier.

- It's not that getting new students into "family groups" of between 5 and 15 students, to be mentored by more experienced students, is something that can't be found from time to time in the odd medical school or international office in the UK.

- Scale and ambition of those programmes right across the countries we've seen – almost always led by students' associations whose concerns include both social and academic integration – puts what is done in the UK to shame.

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Netherlands

- Possible and tempting to improve non-continuation or even success rates by assuming that the "shallow end" is about things being easy.

- But making academic activity itself less challenging, while leaving the environment around it hard to navigate might be misreading what a necessary "shallow end" is – and it may well be that swapping around those assumptions is what leads to happier and more successful students.

- And more fundamentally, it's starting to become clear that while European HE has massified along with the UK, the idea of retaining the "small" in that massified system has come to be regarded as disproportionately important to transition, satisfaction and attainment.

Shallow ends and students

- Finding ways to make small happen – in groups, teams, encounters, projects, and orientation – rather than hoping that throwing people into the massive will result in anything other than isolation.

- Finding ways to support students to support students is good for belonging, good for activity design, good for outcomes and good for workload

- Mass participation and the complexities of corporate governance cause a drift to centralisation and the professionalisation of programmes – when it's communities, collegiality, reciprocity and informality that make us feel better.

- The number one issue in the youth mental health crisis is anxiety, and "feeling part of a community of staff and students" is a demonstrably good predictor of academic confidence and high levels of wellbeing.

- And for all of us that survived and thrived as students in higher education earlier in our lives, it's about remembering that we almost certainly did so in contexts that were less intimidating, less overwhelming and well just smaller than they are today.

SHALLOW END

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Community

- Massification creates deeper ends
- But community, reciprocity, care for the success of others doesn't have to be in our past

Only the lonely?
Understanding student loneliness and belonging

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