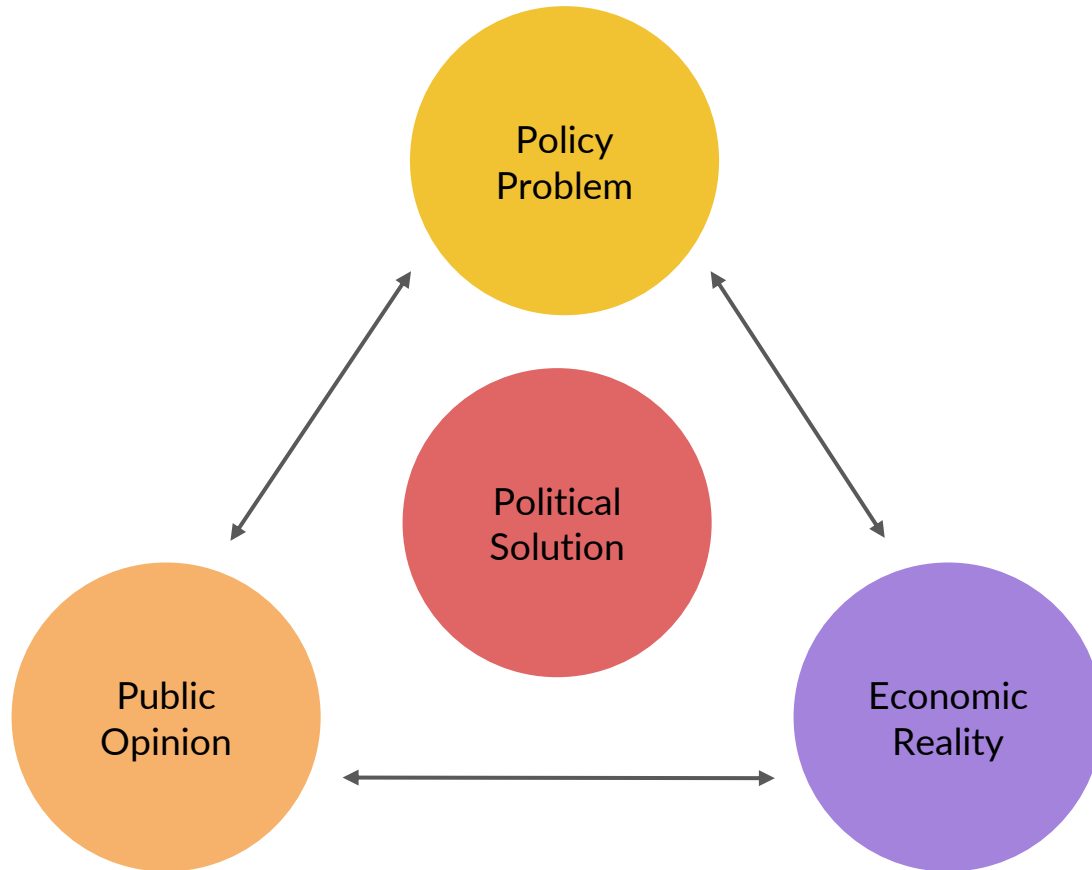


What do people think about tuition fees?

November
2023



Why bother with public opinion?



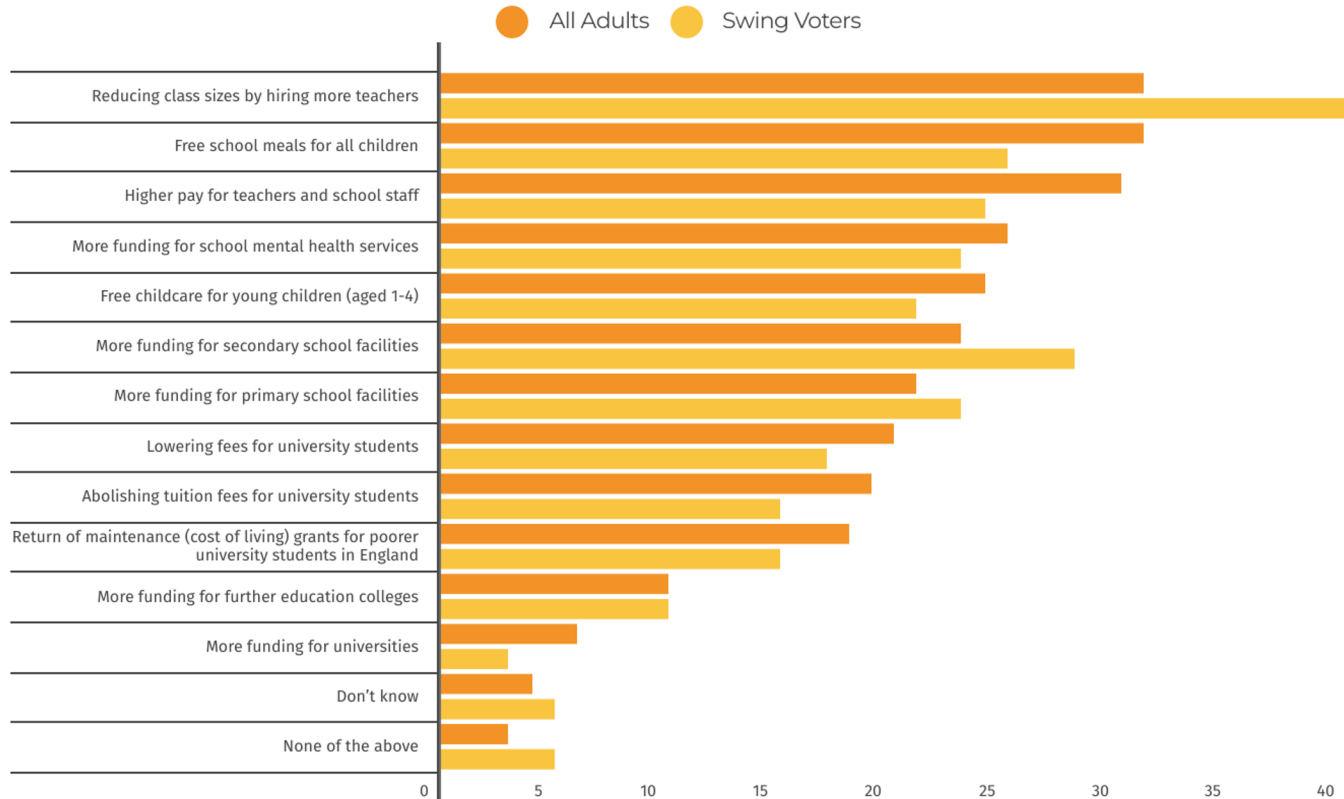
Methodology



- Public First polled 8,333 English adults online from the 19th May - 4th June
- We then ran 8 focus groups across England: 2 with student and recent graduates in **Sheffield** and **Birmingham**; 3 with CD2 parents (2019 Con, now undecided) in **Hartlepool**; **Dudley North**; and **Wycombe**; and 3 with ABC1 parents (undecided, previously Conservative) in **Exeter**, **Wimbledon** and **Bristol**
- Full report: <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/public-attitudes-to-tuition-fees.html>

Higher education ranks poorly against other education spending priorities

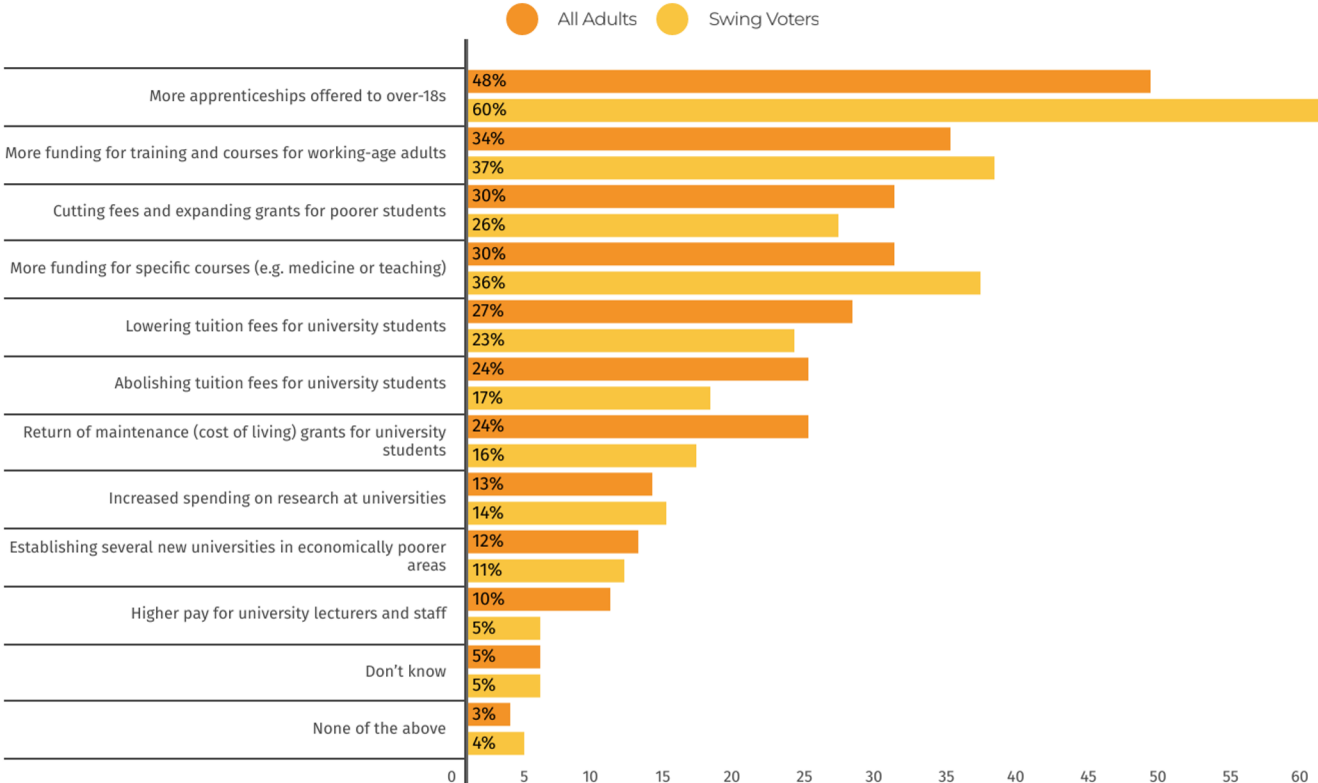
Imagine a political party had decided to spend more money on education in England. Which, if any, of the following areas do you think should be prioritised? Please select up to three.



*“Funding (for schools) is a big thing - teachers are obviously striking because of pay...they’re not getting paid enough for what they’re really doing, they’re not paid really for the amount of work they’re actually putting into it. I think that’s a massive issue” - **21 year old male university student, Sheffield.***

*“What exactly is [the money] going on... in eight years they’ve [universities] had a six-thousand pound increase per student. You know, that’s quite a substantial amount of money to have had. Where is it going?” **32 year old female teacher, Hartlepool***

And imagine a political party had decided to spend more money on higher education (post-18 education) in England. Which, if any, of the following areas do you think should be prioritised? Please select up to three.



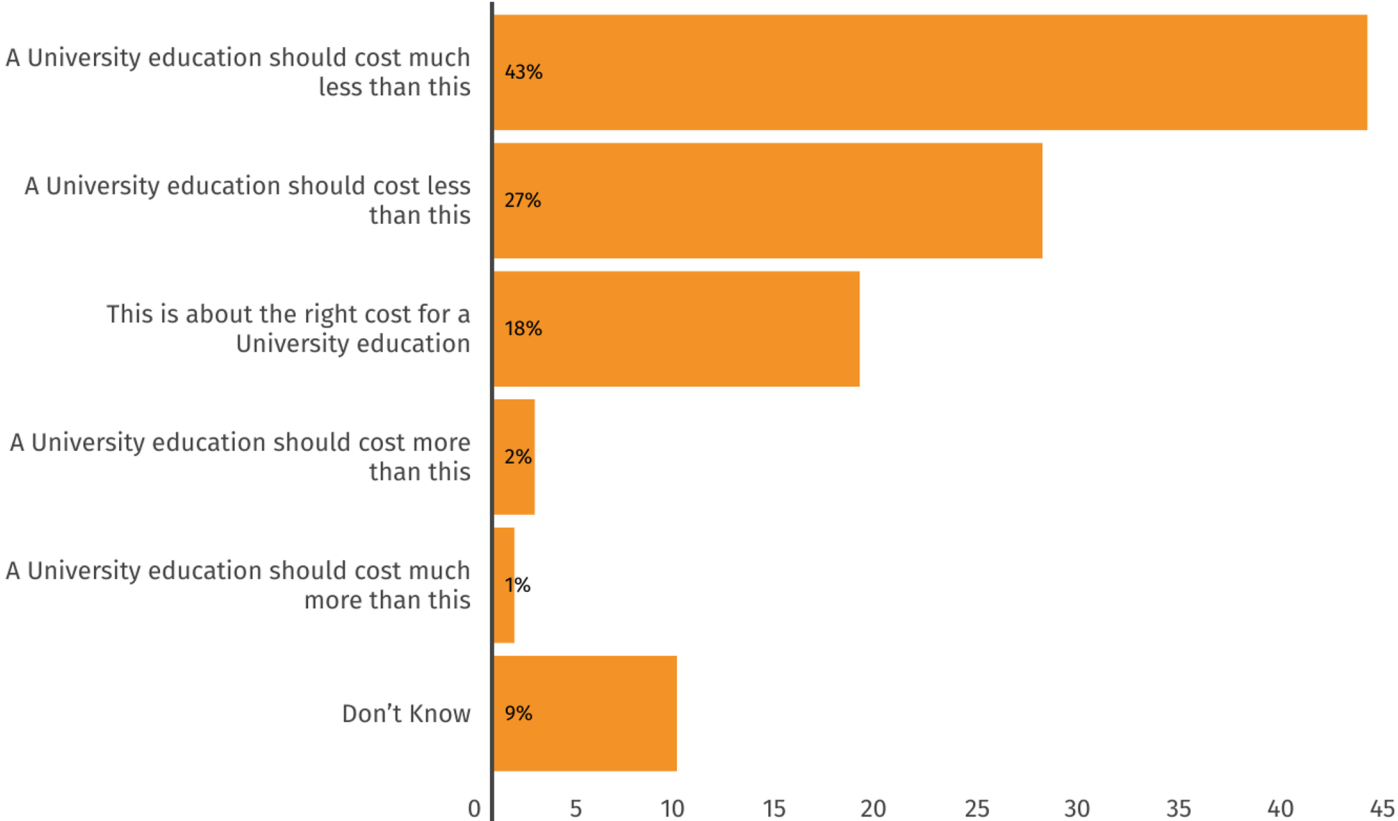
Apprenticeships and workplace training are favoured ahead of all other post-18 spending areas - particularly among swing voters

"I think a lot of people are put off [going to university] and are looking at other routes where you could save money, save that nine grand a year, you've got your house deposit there haven't you rather than getting into crippling debt." - 42 year old male, retail manager, Exeter.

"It strikes me now that you can go for the sake of going, it's nine grand a year minimum, £40 or £50 grand worth of debt all in by the time you've got loans and borrowed and done everything, and you don't necessarily use your degree anymore" 43 year old male company director, Bristol.

At the moment, tuition fees for students in England are £9,250 a year, meaning a typical 3 year university course will cost a student £27,750 for the tuition. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

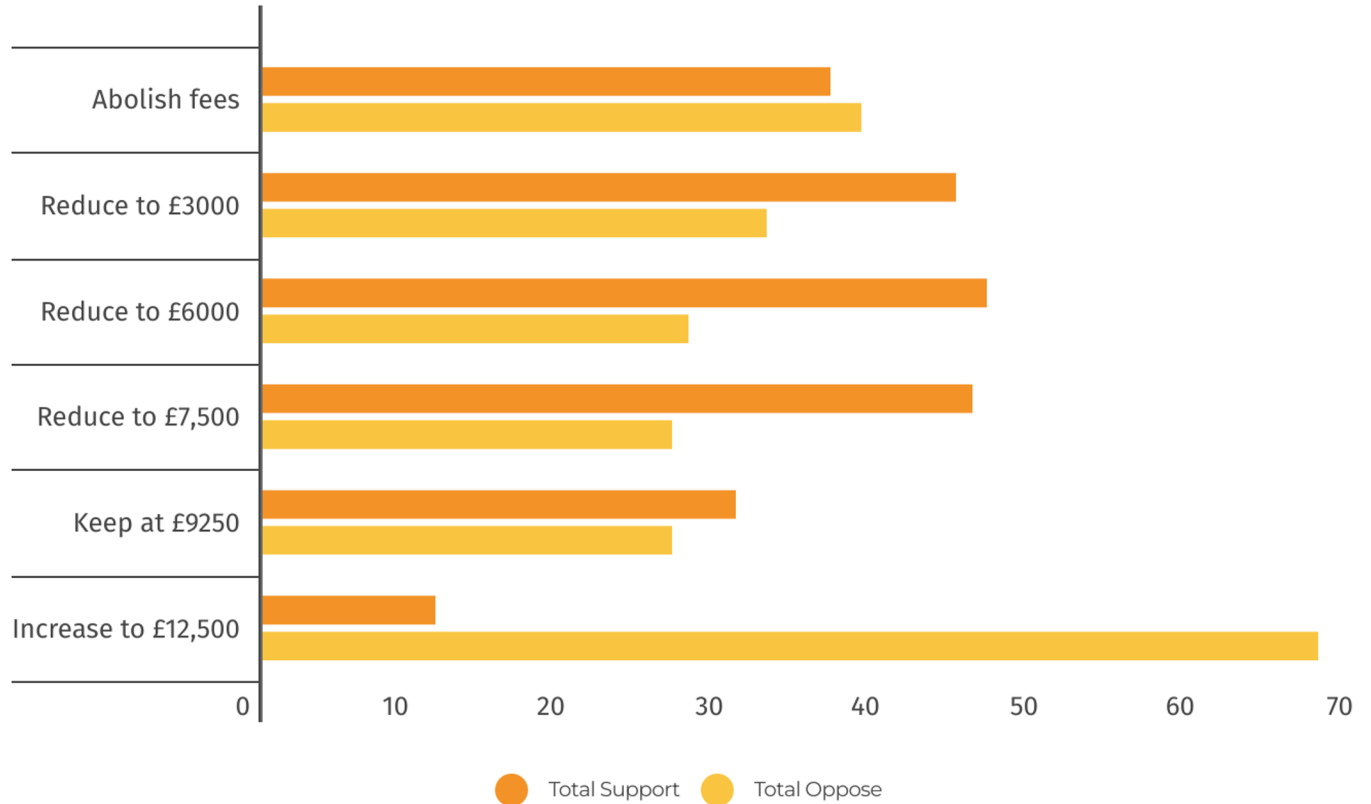
There is a strong consensus that a university education should cost less than £9250; and that the current cost of a university education was too high for students.



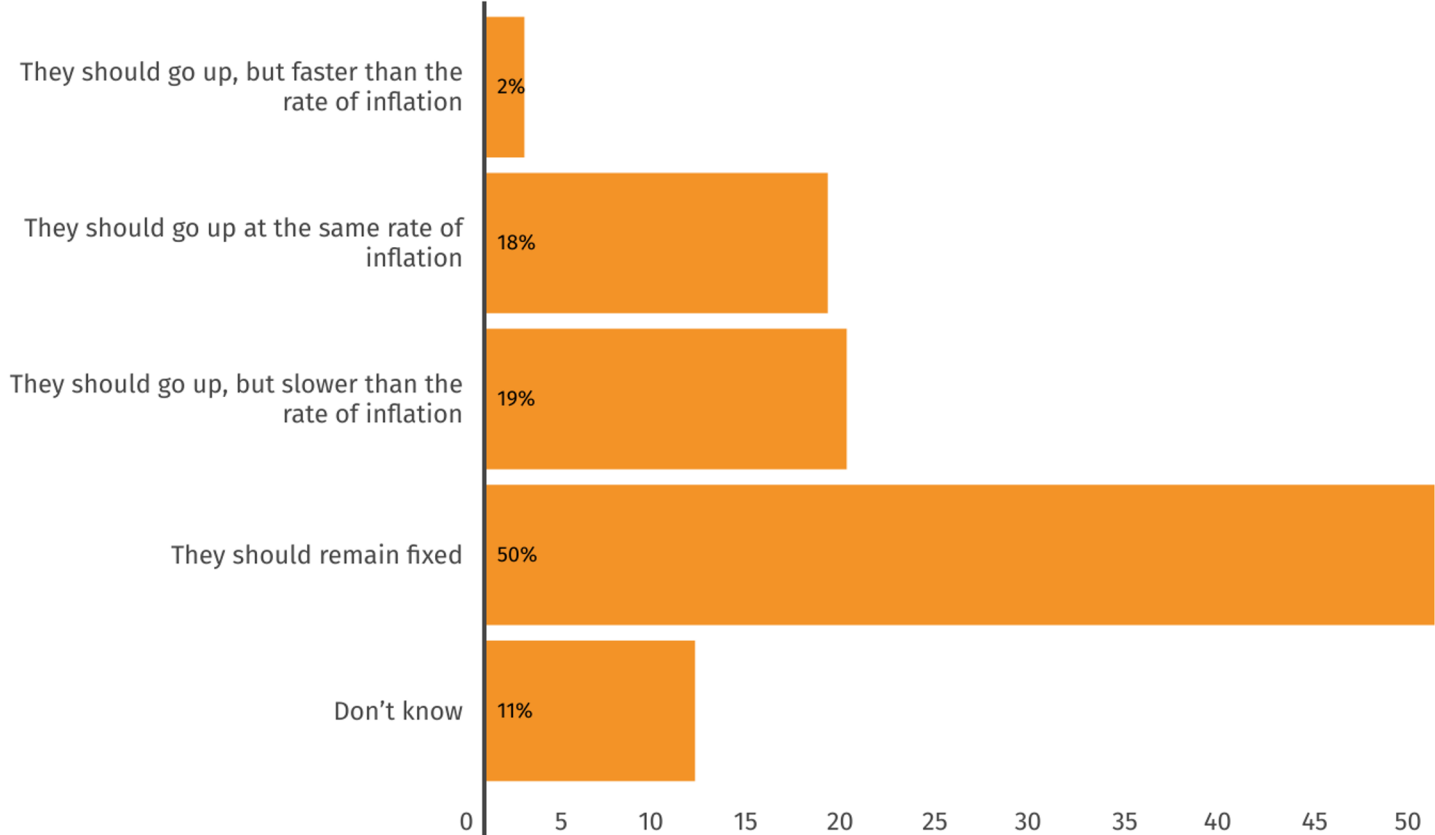
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Support/Oppose for different tuition fee levels (assuming difference is made up through government/taxpayer spending)



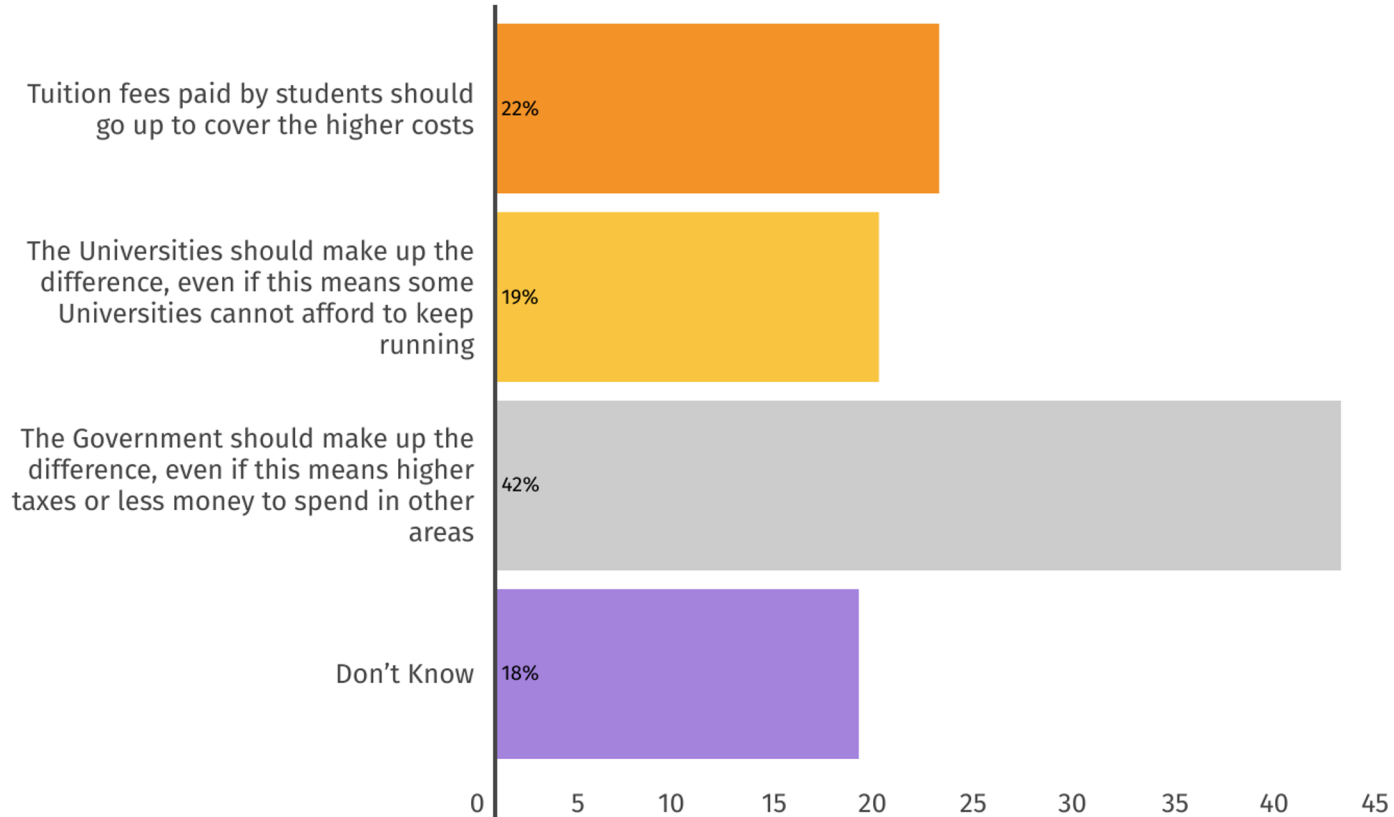
At the moment, tuition fees for students in England are fixed at £9,250 a year. Assuming tuition fees will not be reduced, should tuition fees in England rise with inflation (go up each year) or remain fixed?



50% of respondents believe that tuition fees should not increase with inflation....

... though were more likely to want government to cover an increase in teaching costs than students or universities themselves

If the costs to Universities of providing a degree go up, which of the following do you think you would most like to see happen?

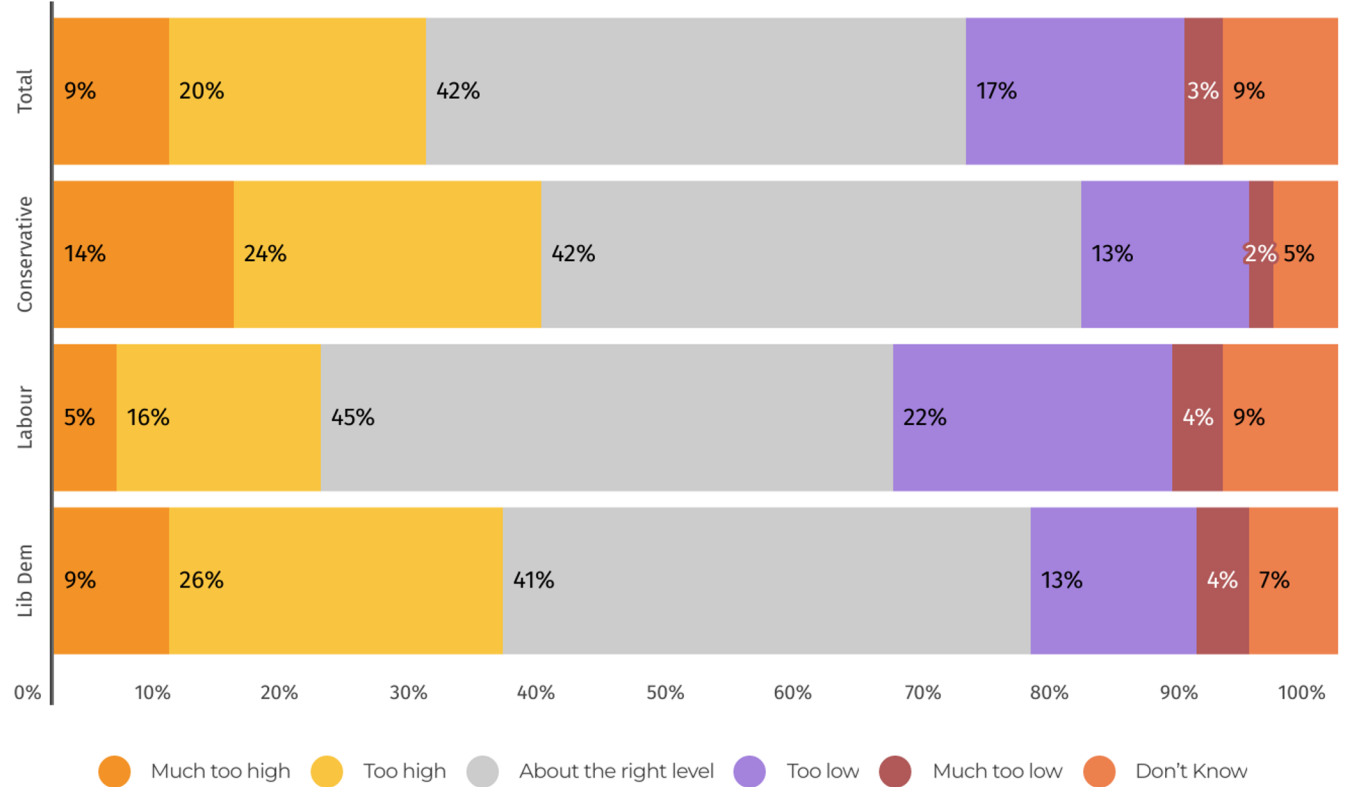


“Universities pay so much money. Some staff earn hundreds of thousands a year. Why are they not cutting their salaries? It doesn't make sense for a president - I don't even know what they do - why are they earning £400 or £600k. They have money for other things but still want more money.” - **24 year old female postgraduate student, Sheffield**

I just think the fees are way too high. I don't know what they should be. I mean, 3k sounds more reasonable. But again, it does depend, I guess, on the course. I mean, should we expect our doctors to be paying £9000 pounds a year and paying all that back when they're saving lives? Probably not.’ - **36 year old female, energy sector manager, Wimbledon.**

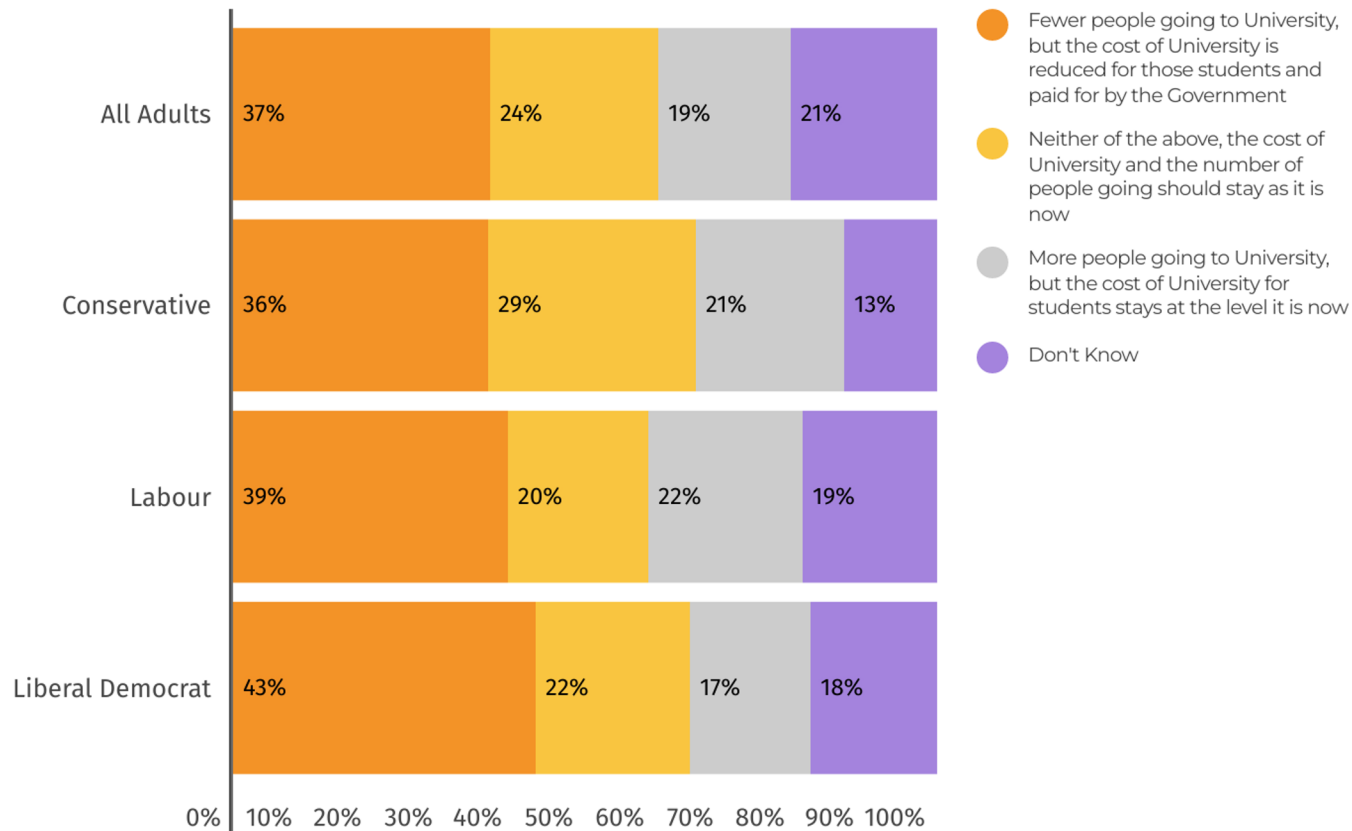
People think that 50% of school leavers pursuing HE is “about right” - with Conservatives most likely to think it is “too high”

Currently, around 50% of school leavers pursue higher education. In your view, is that too high, too low, or about the right level?



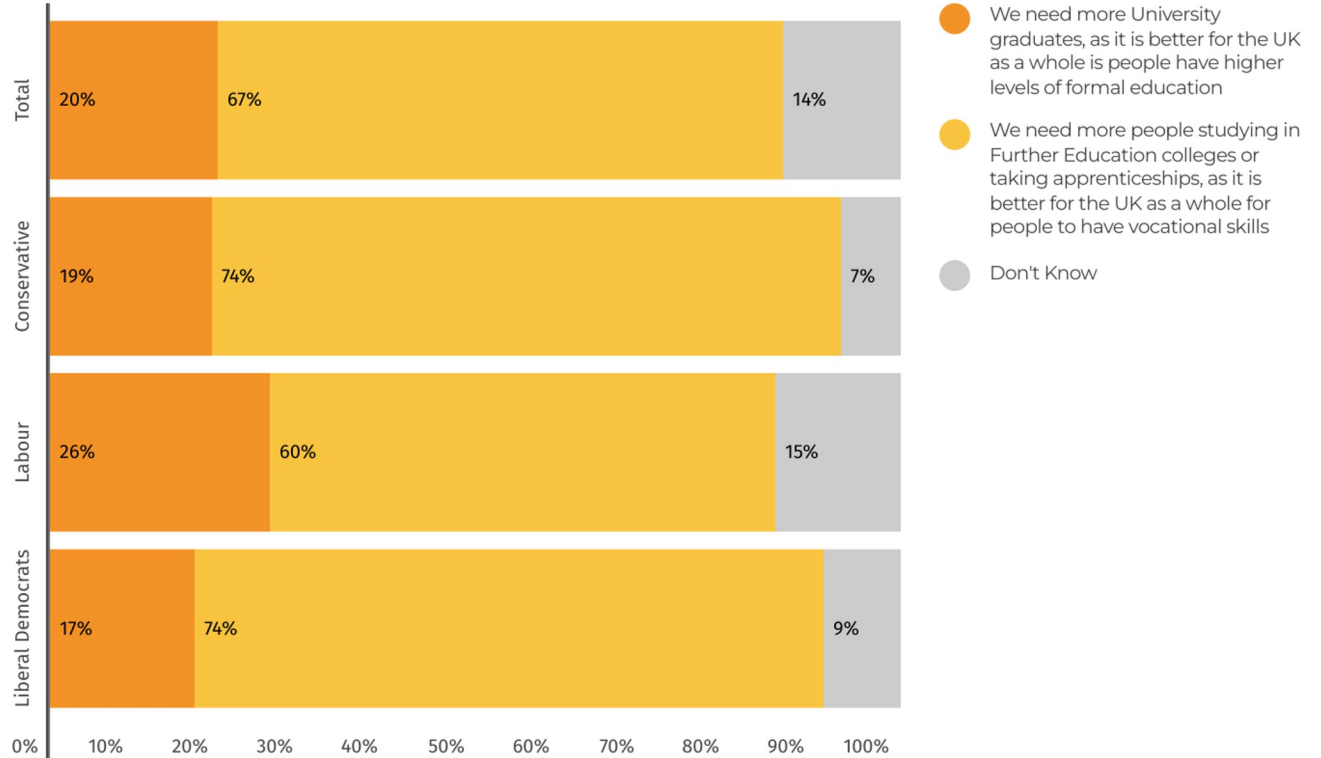
But across the board, the public is more interested in cutting the cost of university, rather than increasing the number of students who attend university

Which of the following would you prefer?



When given a forced choice, people would like to see more students studying in FE rather than expanding HE

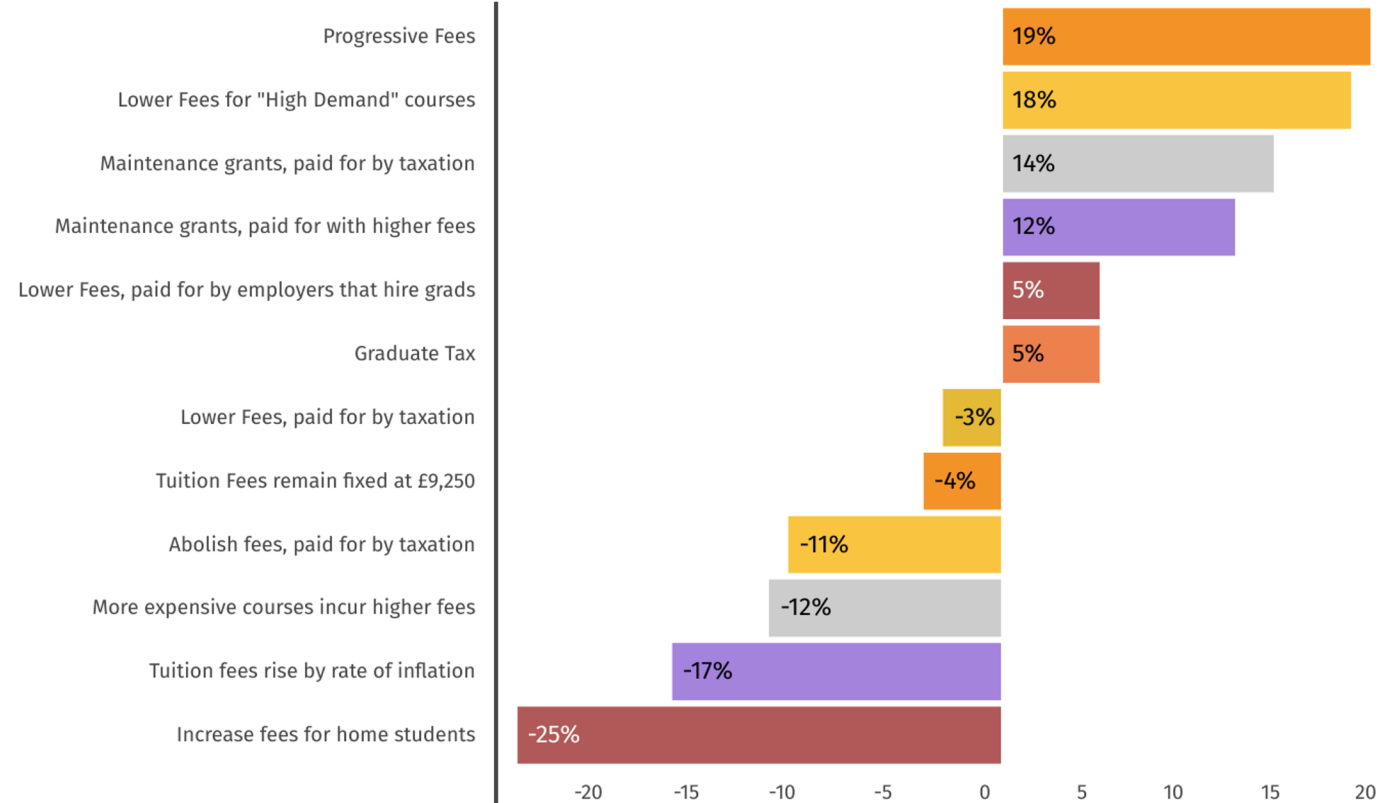
Which of the following comes closest to your view?



"I don't think there's any point in making a small change. Either make a big change and a big impact or don't bother at all and just leave as it is." 32 year old female healthcare manager, Wimbledon

It shouldn't matter what you think, like the student loan debt isn't really debt. So it wouldn't really matter what they say it was because it'd be easier if they just turned it into a levy like, that's what it is essentially anyway, you pay 9% of what you earn. Because you're a graduate it's just like a graduate tax is how you should look at it really."
- 22 year old male, accounting and finance student Birmingham

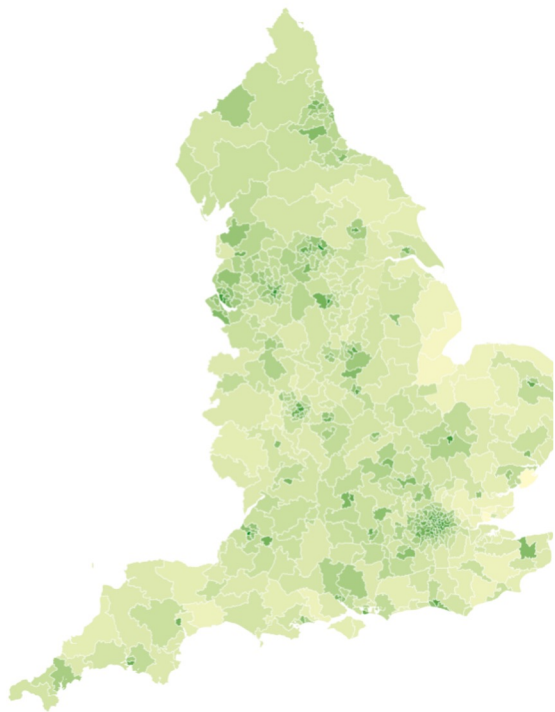
Imagine 4 political parties running for election in your local area put forward announcements on their policy around tuition fees. Look at the following proposals, which party would you be most likely to vote for, and which you be least likely to vote for?



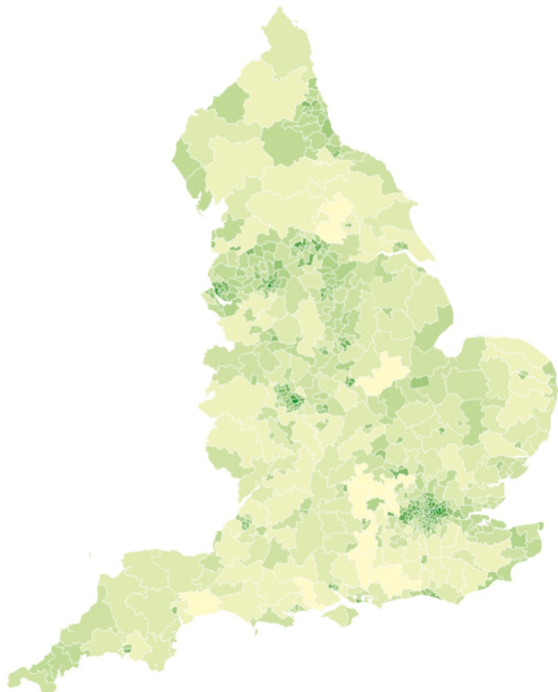
Progressive options for reform were most popular, including all options which restored maintenance grants. Abolishing fees, and increasing fees, received negative net scores.

The options for reform which are most likely to win Labour votes in key seats are those which prioritise reducing the cost burden on students - not those which increase funding to institutions

Impact of reintroducing maintenance grants (% who say they would be MORE LIKELY to vote for party)

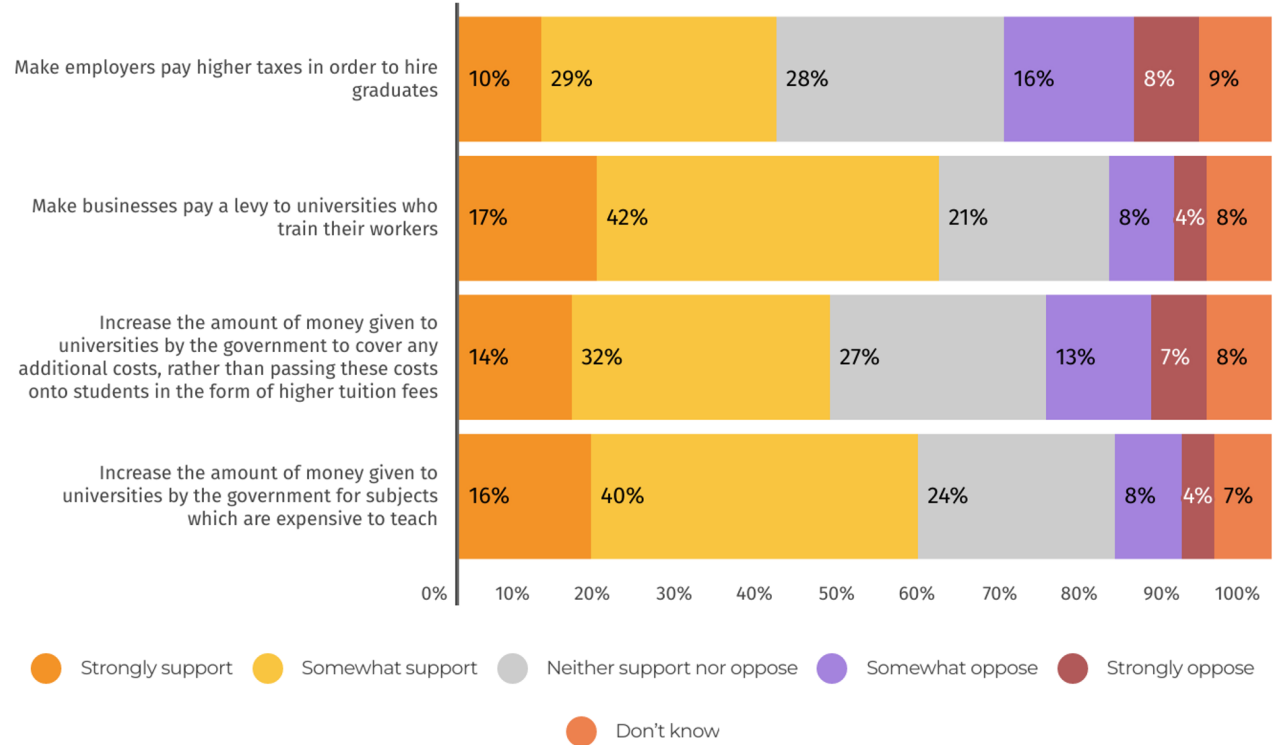


Impact of introducing a graduate tax (% who say they are MORE LIKELY to vote for party)



There was a high degree of support for employers contribution to the HE funding system - more so than additional government funding

Would you support or oppose any of the following proposals to provide increased funds to universities and maintain tuition fees at their current level?



*“There's enough philanthropy in this country really: say, you've got Microsoft, you've got Apple, you've got Jaguar Land Rover and so forth. They could actually fund talented people to go to university at no cost.” - **60 year old, father of college aged student, Dudley North.***

*Leading businesses and enterprises should be engaged in universities to kind of nurture and develop kind of leading talent.... rather than just relying on, you know, the taxpayer pair entirely” - **50 year old, male, parent of secondary aged children, Wycombe.***

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