

# Future Students

**Research to gain insight into the understanding of Higher Education, and the aspirations and ambitions of those aged 14-17 years in key locations in Scotland and opportunities for Students' associations and unions**

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# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

**This report contains the insight from Future Students research. The aim of this report is to gain an indicative understanding of aspirations and ambitions for the future of 14-17 year olds in Scotland.**

At the time of the research, almost 80% knew that they already wanted to go to university and their desire to do so is driven by their interest in a particular subject and wishing to expand their knowledge in that area, hopefully leading on to gaining employment in a related field and ensuring a prosperous life. Even those not yet certain of their career path believe a degree would lead to better work opportunities in the future. There is also hope that university will make one more confident in meeting others and equip the attendee with independent life skills. Although university isn't the chosen route for others, their aims and aspirations are the same, to have a successful career which affords a comfortable lifestyle. For these respondents, a college course or direct workplace experience seems the best choice for that, particularly if they do not believe they will get the grades to enter university.

The Student's Association and Unions are viewed very positively by those that are informed about what they provide but not all are aware of the services available and an increased presence in school (via literature/informed teachers/representatives) could ensure the SA/SU are the go to sources when questions need to be answered by potential students, building a relationship from an early stage. Uncertainty about career prospects open to those completing a degree in a specific subject, the day to day living expenses and what university life is actually like creates barriers that could be tackled with the provision of the correct information at an early stage from the SA/SU.

# About the Research

# Aims and Objectives

NUS Services have worked with a team of Scottish Students' Associations, the University of Strathclyde Students' Association, Glasgow Caledonian University Students' Association, Heriot Watt University Students' Union, the Students' Association of the University of West Scotland, the University of Stirling Students' Union and NUS Scotland. The key research aim was:

- 1: Understanding the aspirations and ambitions for the future of those aged 14-17 in key locations in Scotland

Underlying research aims addressed by the research included:

- Gaining insight into the understanding of HE and additionally of students' associations and unions, to provide insight into early engagement strategies
- Providing insights into the next steps for the movement in targeting those across demographic and location in terms of who will most benefit from information about students' associations and unions in order to impact aspirations and ambitions, and support the transition to HE
- Identifying the top opportunities for students' unions and associations in providing for their future members

# Methodology

This research consisted of an online survey with school students aged between 14 and 17 in Central Scotland.

## Online survey

A total sample of **259** responses was gathered in an online survey, carried out between May 2014 and January 2015. A number of methods of promotion were attempted to capture this unknown and difficult to reach sample of school students.

A number of schools were contacted for support, with further information leaflets distributed to schools to give out to their students. The leaflet contained the survey link. Young Scot also promoted the survey on their website, and this method resulted in the most responses.

The majority of respondents in the sample were aged 16 (59%) or 17 (32%) and still studying at school for their Higher (45%), National Grade Qualification (29%) or Advanced higher (16%) qualifications.

The vast majority (96%) live at home with parents and 42% were based in and around Edinburgh, with Glasgow accounting for the next major hub with 23%. A minority have care responsibilities for dependent children under 18 (9%) or a person of 18 years of age (5%). The majority (82%) did not consider themselves to have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition whilst 7% refused to respond.

The gender split was female biased at 67% vs. 29% males, of which 81% indicated that they were Heterosexual or straight and another 10% claimed they were Bisexual or Gay / Lesbian, with the remaining declining to respond.

56% of the respondents identified their ethnic group as white Scottish; the other major group was white British (23%).

# Reading this report

**The full findings are detailed in specific named sections; however, they are often preceded by a section summary presented in this bold text.**

The report presents the findings of the quantitative online survey. Figures clearly indicate which stage of the research findings they are demonstrating.

The small base size means that any findings in this report are indicative only because they are not representative of the 14 – 17 year old student population in Central Scotland. However, they can shed some light and provide some indication and findings into the experiences and expectations of this cohort.

The small base size also means that at times, certain findings are reported as the 'whole' number rather than the percentage.

## *Indicative differences*

A number of questions have been broken down and compared with each other, according to key demographics and identified segments.

Because of the small base size, any difference pulled out are indicative only, in that they are not statistically valid; they can only provide a flavour of what school students in central Scotland believe.

# Research Findings

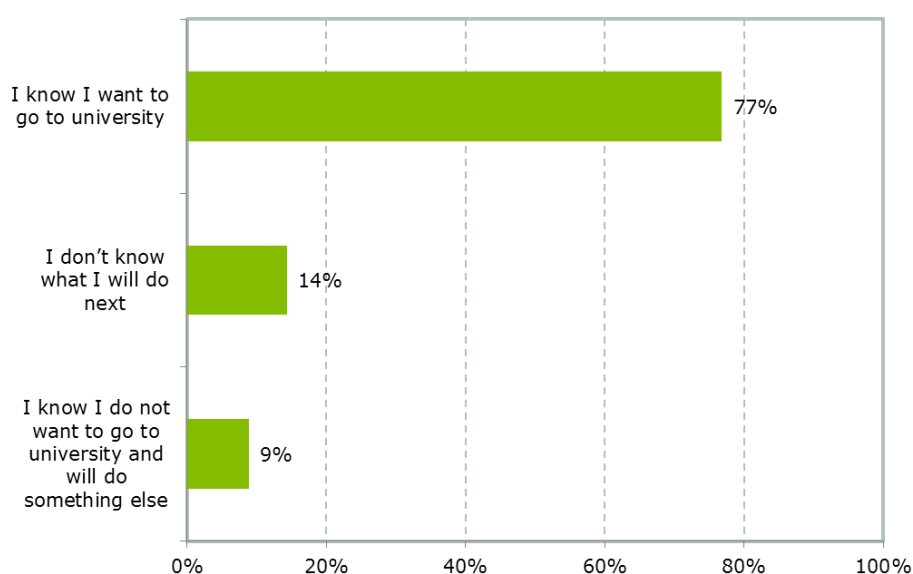
## A. About the respondents

This section introduces the respondents and their plans for the future in more detail.

Over three quarters of the sample intend to go to university and the majority of these expect to go straight from school. Expanding their knowledge and skill set to achieve personal goals and career prospects are the main reasons to choose university, those not choosing university believe college or immediate employment would better suit them.

### Intentions for the future

**Figure 1: Intentions for the future, next steps**



Base: 259 respondents

**B1. Which of the following best describes your 'next steps' in life?**

As Figure 2 demonstrates, over three quarters of the sample (77%) want to go to university in the future whilst 14% are still undecided and just less than 1 in 10 (9%) claim to already know that university isn't a path for them.

**Figure 2: Reasons why respondents wish to go to university in the future**

- **Required for employment in chosen field**
- **General perception that a degree can lead to better employment opportunities**
- **Wish to develop and expand skill and knowledge base**
- **Aiming to reach personal goals and potential**
- **Trying to ensure a more prosperous life**
- **Chance to experience university life**

*"I know that going to university will be the best path for me to take in order to progress towards my desired career choice(s)"*

*"I want to reach my full potential and I feel that going to university will help me to do so and set me up with a steady career"*

*"Because I feel I will have more of a chance at a prosperous future if I choose to go to university"*

*"Because having a university degree highly increases the chances of getting a well paid job"*

*"Because I would like study medicine and become a doctor and I must do so through university"*

The main reason for choosing the university route, as indicated in Figure 2 is to gain the qualifications required for their chosen field or the notion that a degree qualification can lead to better employment opportunities in general, affording a better work situation and a more prosperous life. There is also a desire to continue in education to learn more about the subject of interest so personal goals may be achieved and also to experience university life.

**Figure 3: Reasons why unlikely to go to university in the future**

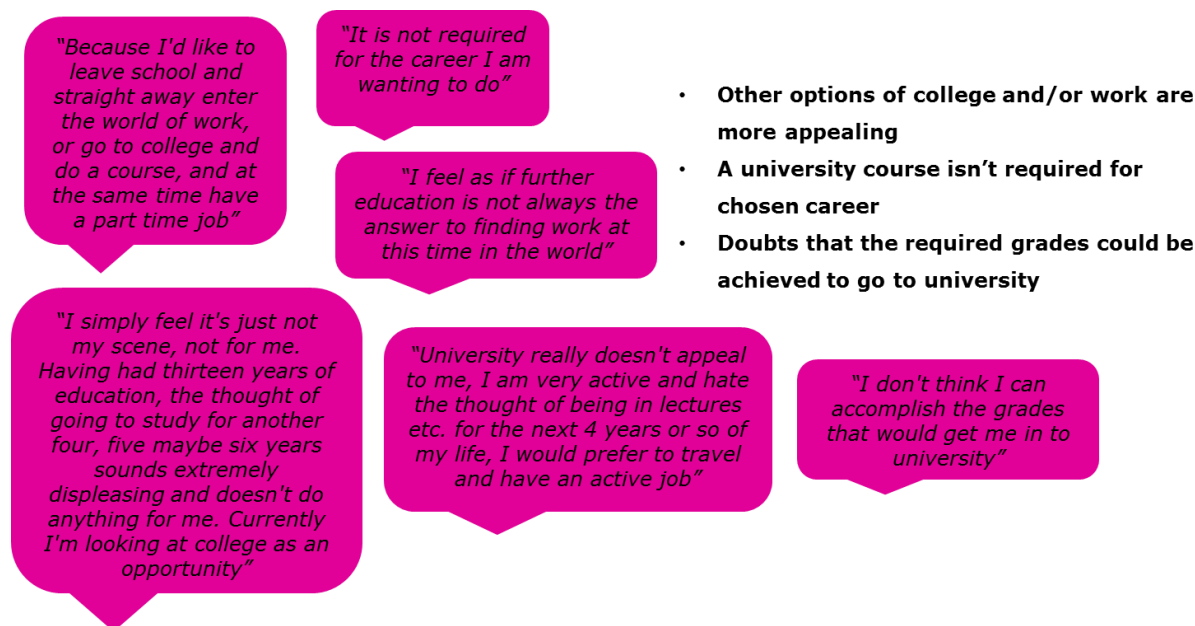
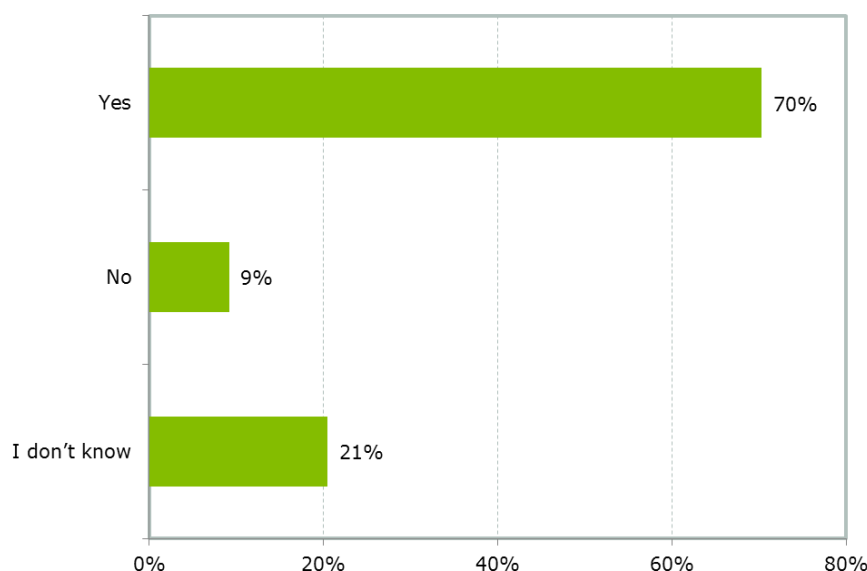


Figure 3 illustrates that those unlikely to go to university either feel that they would be better suited to a college environment or course which may also allow more time for employment or simply do not believe further education is required for their chosen career.

**Figure 4: Intentions of going to university straight from school/college**

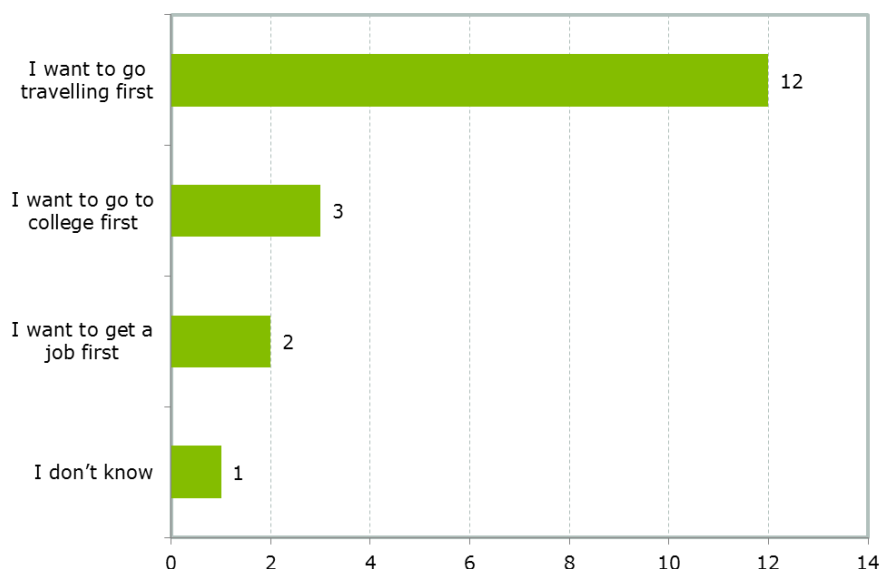


Base: 195 respondents: Those who know they want to go to university

**B4. Do you intend to go to university straight from school or college?**

Most of those who intend to go to university expect to go straight from school (70%); others are undecided (21%) or anticipate taking some time out first (9%), as demonstrated in Figure 4.

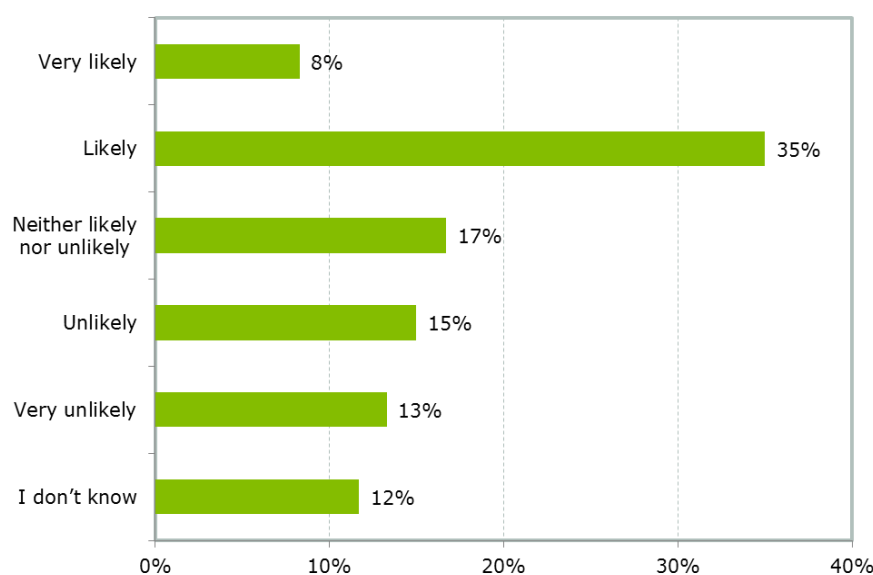
**Figure 5: Intentions before going to university**



*Base: 18 respondents: Those not going straight to university \*Note very small*

**B5. What do you intend to do first, before going to university?**

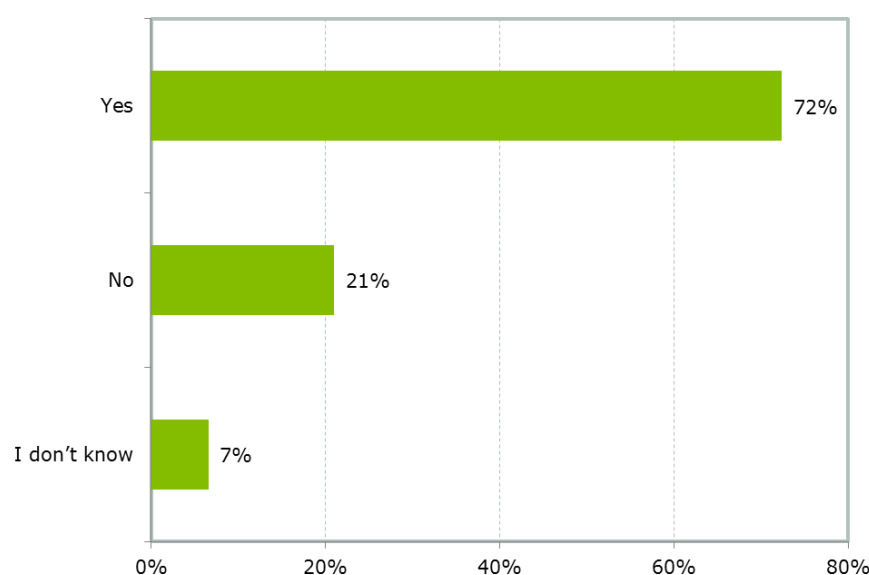
Figure 5 shows that a third of those expecting to take some time before going to university wish to travel first, a college course or a job are on the agenda for others.

**Figure 6: Likelihood of going to university at some point in the future**

Base: 60 respondents (Those who know they do not want to go to university or are undecided)

**B2. How likely, if at all, is it that you would want to go to university at some point in the future?**

Of the respondents that are currently undecided on their next steps, Figure 6 indicates that 43% believe university might be an option for them at some point in the future.

**Figure 7: B6. Close family enrolment at university**

Base: 257 respondents. Balance: No answer

**B6. Have any of your close family members been to, or are going to, university?**

7 out of 10 (72%) respondents have family members that have either been or will go to university, as demonstrated in Figure 7.

### *Indicative differences*

Those based in Edinburgh appear more likely to have family members whom have attended or will attend university.

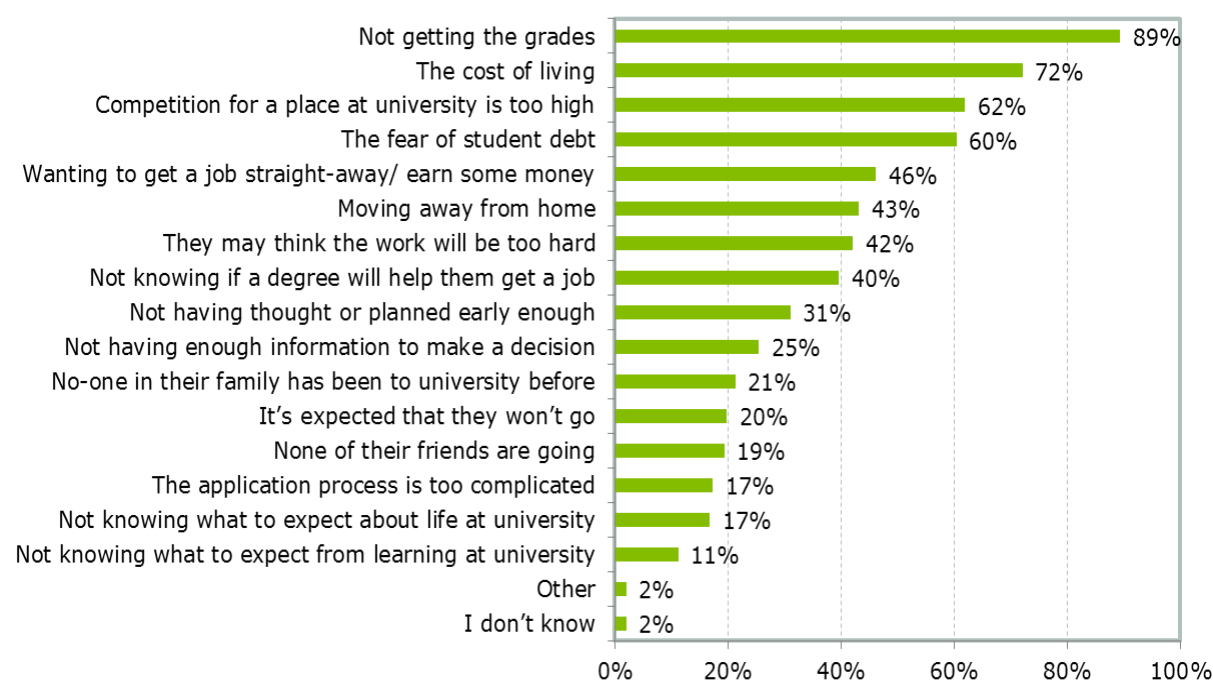
## B. University barriers and challenges

**This section explores the barriers that may exist which prevent people from going to university and the challenges presented when transitioning from their current situation to university.**

**The biggest barriers to enrolment for those that have already decided that they will not attend university, or are yet undecided are achieving the required grades and the financial implications that university can bring, which may not guarantee a better employment role in the future. Similarly both this audience and those who know already that they will go to university identify the shift to financial independence as the key challenge when moving from their current situation to university, expectations of harder work and the thought of moving away from home can also be concerning.**

### **Barriers to attending university**

**Figure 8: Barriers preventing those who do not intend to go or are unsure if they will go to university**



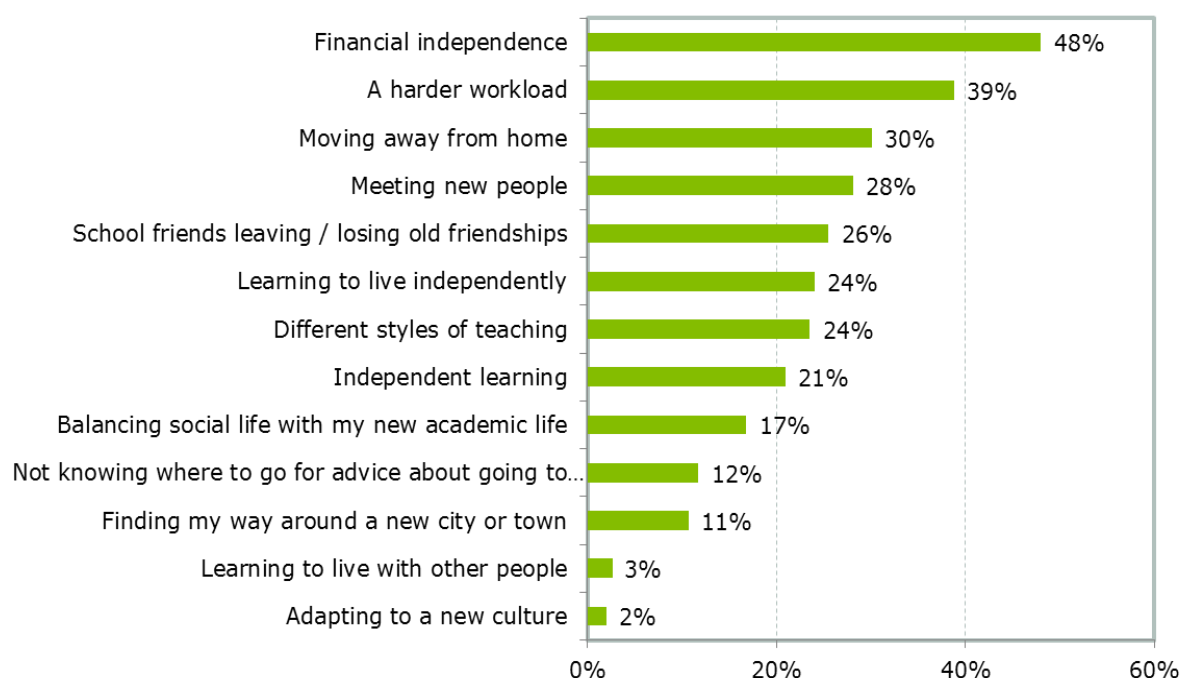
*Base: 197 respondents. Balance: Those who don't plan to, or don't know if they will, go to university*

**B7. Thinking about university, what barriers, if any, do you think exist for people who may want to go to university but don't?**

Figure 8 illustrates that almost 9 out of every 10 respondents (89%) claimed not achieving the required grades for university is a main barrier to enrolment; the cost of living (72%) and the fear of student debt (60%) are also key factors as is the perception that competition is too high to gain a place (62%). Others are keen to get in to the work place and start earning money (46%), moving away from home (43%), the work difficulty level (42%) and not knowing if this will all result in a better job (40%) are also concerns. Not having had friends (19%) or family members (21%) attend university may also make them feel that they are not expected to go either.

## Challenges in going to university

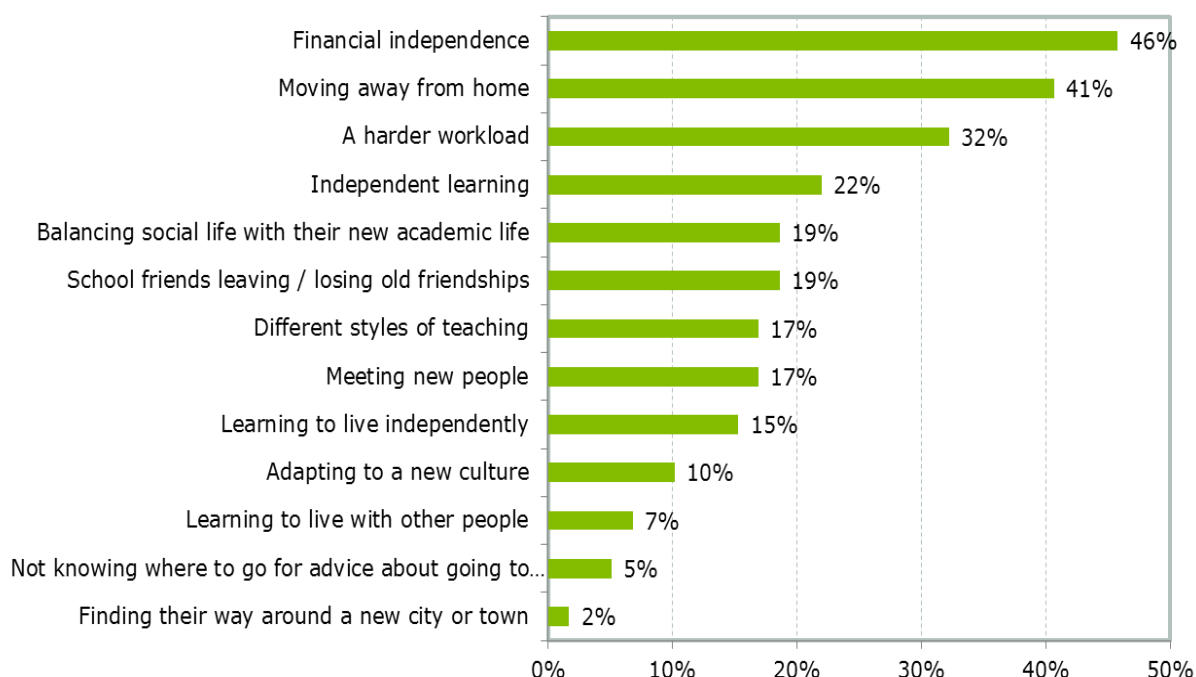
**Figure 9: Biggest challenges, expected in the move to university**



*Base: 196 respondents. Balance: Those who don't plan to, or don't know if they will, go to university*

**B8a. Now thinking about going to university, what do you think would be the biggest challenges, if any, you will face in the move between what you are doing now to attending university?**

Although a potentially harder workload (39%) will be a challenge it's the change in financial situation which is considered to be most challenging (48%), as Figure 9 determines. The changes in relationships, potentially losing old friendships (26%) and having to make new ones (28%) are also noted and almost a quarter feel learning to live independently (24%) will be a challenge as will being taught with different styles of teaching (24%) and having to work independently (21%).

**Figure 10: Perceived biggest challenges, expected in the move to university**

Base: 59 respondents. Balance: Those who know they want to go to university

**B8b. Thinking about people at your school or college who may go on to university. What do you think would be the biggest challenges, if any, they would face in the move from school or college to university?**

Figure 10 shows that the three biggest challenges expected in the transition from school or college to university by those that know they will go mirrors what we have already seen with those not expecting to go. Financial independence is a concern for almost half of the respondents (46%); moving away from home (41%) and the work being harder (32%) are also cited.

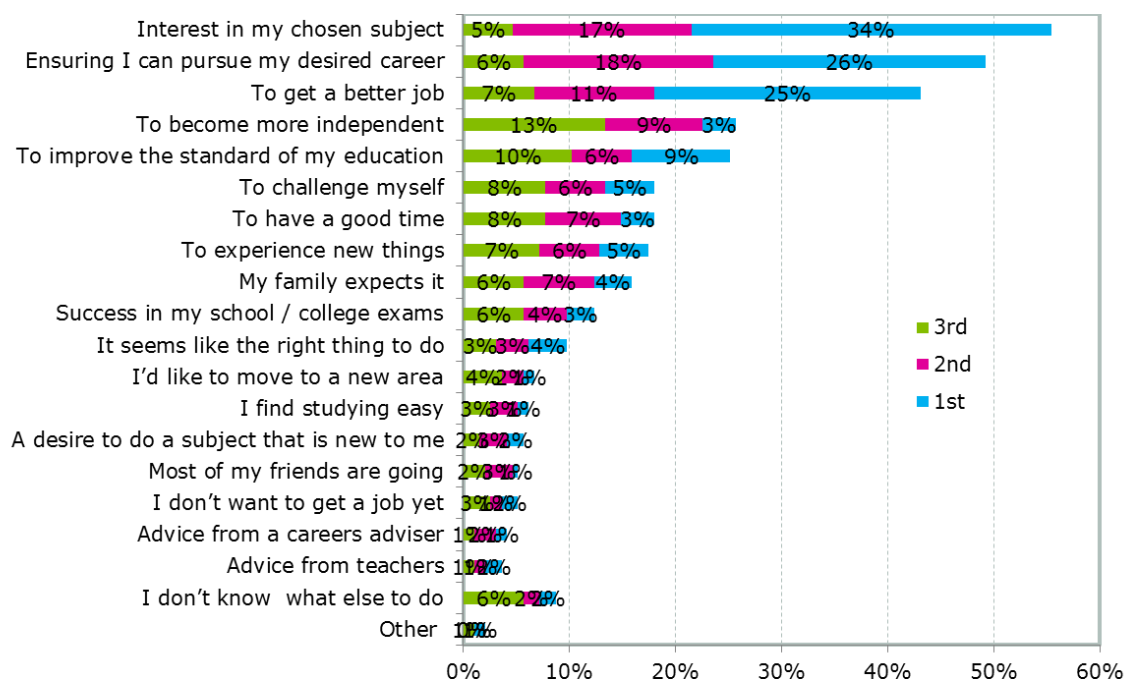
## C. Focus on university – those intending to go to university

**This section aims to understand why university is the chosen route and what factors are taken in to account when choosing a university, where potential students expect to reside and how day to day costs of living will be met. We will also look at the impact of course fees in England on intention to enrol and what their long term expectations are having attended university.**

**The key drivers for wanting to go to university either as a next step or in the future are to study a subject of interest which will hopefully enable the opportunity to work in this or a related area on graduation. Expectations of course enjoyment and the learning environment are key factors when considering which university to choose and social aspects such as course related clubs and societies, which offer the chance to meet other students, are important to help with the transition to university life as are the provision of advice and support services. Financial restraints (current or future debt) mean obtaining a place at a university within commutable distance is important for at least a third of respondents, especially given that over half of the sample expect to have to work part time during the course to finance everyday living costs. The cost of tuition fees will have an impact on most, but it will only deter a minority from attending as those still intending to enrol feel the benefits of a degree will outweigh the debt or financial stress that they or their parents may incur. As well as gaining a well-paid job in a chosen field, university is also expected to equip the student with the skills required to manage an independent life and to boost confidence levels in meeting and working with new people.**

## Motivations for going to university

**Figure 11: Main reasons for wanting to go to university**

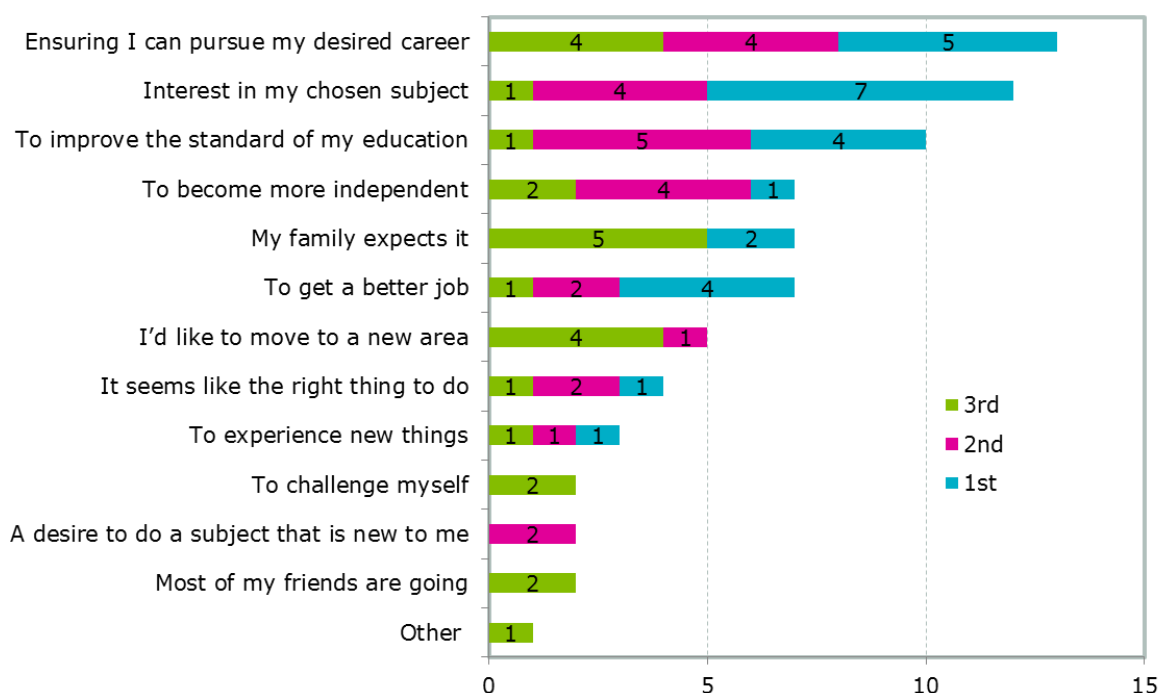


Base: 199 respondents. Balance: Those who know they want to go to university

### C1a. What are your main reasons for wanting to go to university?

A third (34%) of all respondents said the number one reason why they want to attend university is to study a subject of interest, when taking into account 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> reasons noted, over half of the sample (56%) mentioned this, as indicated in Figure 11. The ultimate aim is to ensure that they can pursue their desired career, a primary reason to attend for 26% of respondents, with 50% of the sample overall listing this as a reason and the chance to get a better job in general is the driver for 43% of respondents.

**Figure 12: Main reasons for wanting to go to university – at some point in the future**

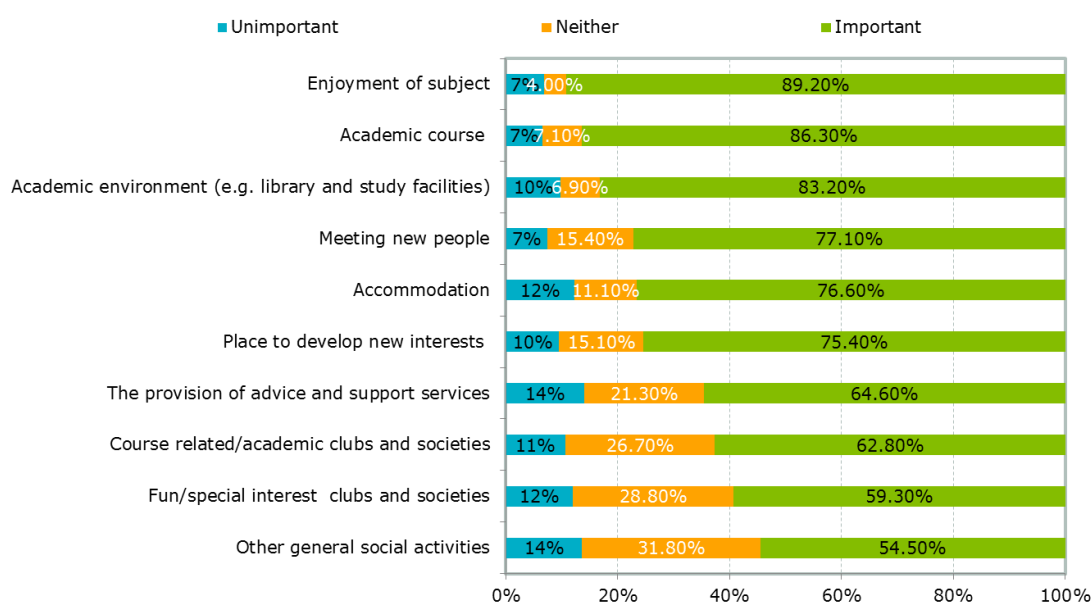


Base: 26 respondents. Balance: Those who plan to go to university at some point in the future

### C1b. What are your main reasons for wanting to go to university in the future?

Figure 12 illustrates that those intending to go to university in the future gave the same reasons as to why they wish to attend, namely to be able to gain a role in their chosen field and to study a subject of interest.

**Figure 13: Importance of the following in the decision of which university to choose**

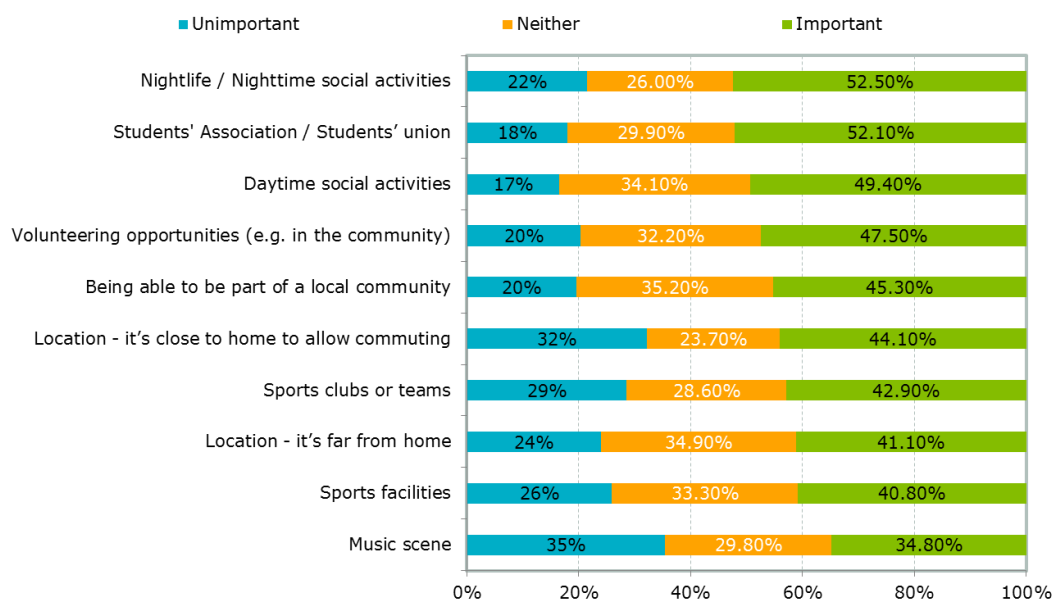


*Average base: 175 respondents. Balance: Those who know they want to go to university*

## **C2. Thinking about which university you would like to study at, how important are the following in your decision?**

Given that studying a subject of interest is a key driver to attending university, it's unsurprising that for almost 90% of respondents, the enjoyment of the subject and the academic course itself (86%) are highlighted as the most important factors when thinking about which university to attend. Fitting with this, the academic environment (83%) is also key. The chance to meet new people (77%) is a key consideration and meeting likeminded people on course related/academic clubs and societies (62%) would help with that as would fun/special interest clubs and societies (59%).

**Figure 14: Importance of the following in the decision of which university to choose**



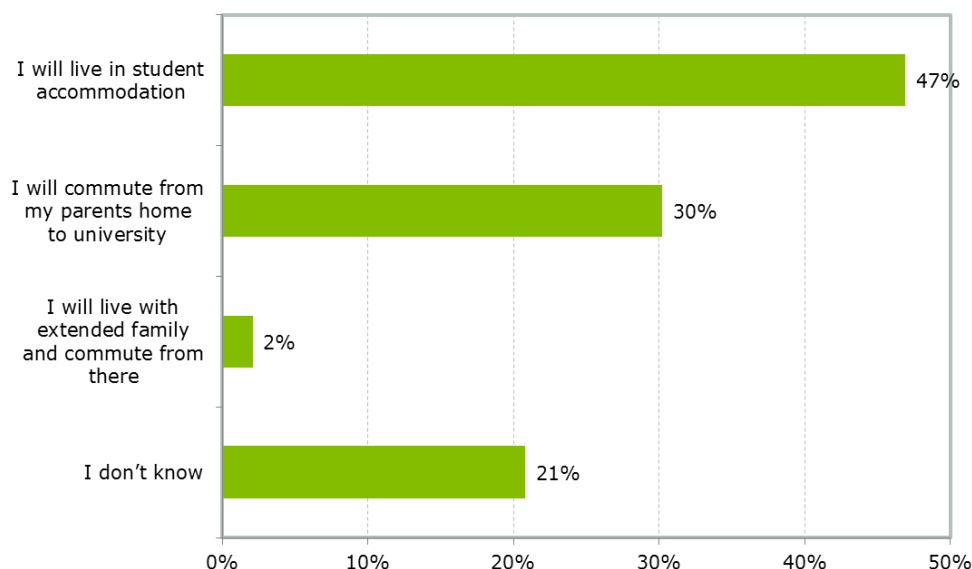
Average base: 175 respondents. Balance: Those who know they want to go to university

## C2. Thinking about which university you would like to study at, how important are the following in your decision?

Comfortable accommodation (76%) may help with the transition away from home which was previously noted to be a challenge, 44% of respondents will be looking for a university within commuting distance but in contrast 41% are looking to get far away, as shown above in Figure 14. The provision of an advice/support service is important for 64% and may provide reassurance about the transition and introduction to university life. More general socialising aspects of night/day time activities and nightlife are important for around half of the sample.

## Accommodation considerations

**Figure 15: Intended living situation at university**



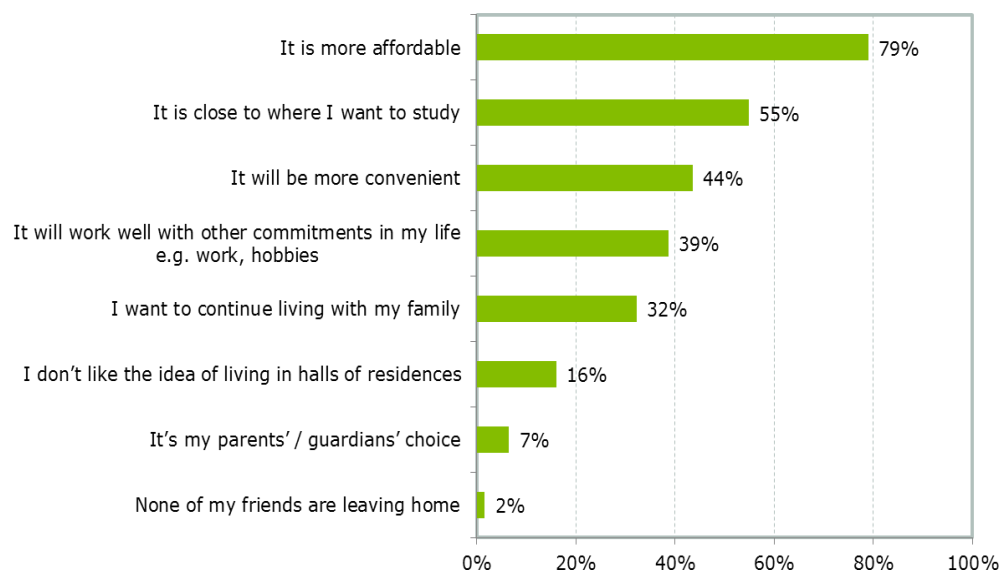
*Base: 192 respondents. Balance: Those who know they want to go to university*

### **C3. Which of the following best describes where you intend to live whilst at university?**

Figure 15 indicates that less than half (47%) of the respondents expect to live in student accommodation, a third (32%) expect to commute from parents or family homes and the rest do not yet know what they will do.

#### **Indicative differences**

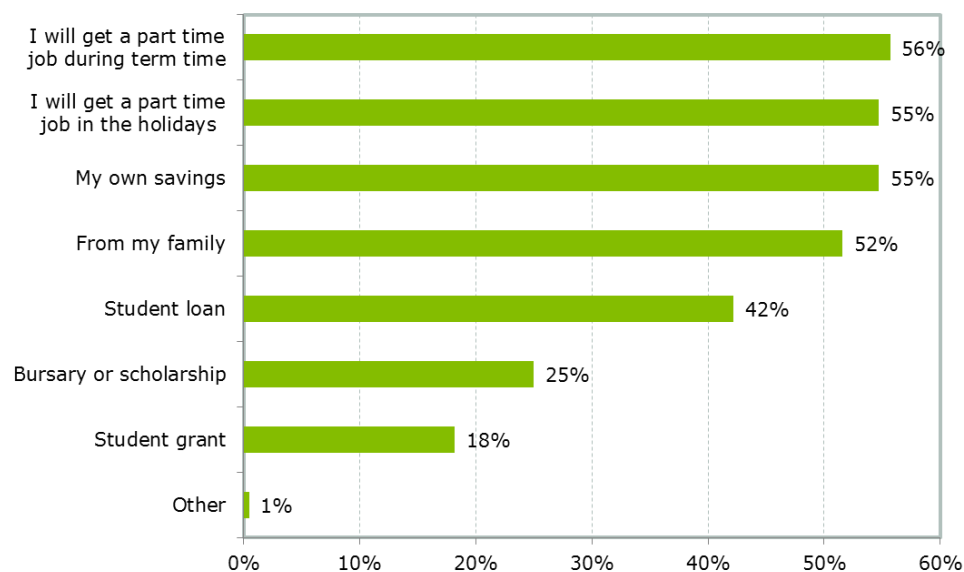
Those aged 17 are more likely to think they will live at home with parents and commute, perhaps they have looked more in to their options than the younger members of the sample. Those with caring responsibilities are also slightly more likely to live at home and commute.

**Figure 16: Reasons why commuting is the best option**

Base: 62 respondents. Balance: Those who say they plan to commute

#### **C4. And why will you choose to live at home or with extended family?**

Affordability is the key reason to live at home and commute to university for 77% of respondents, especially if the chosen place is close to home (55%), as demonstrated in Figure 16. This would make it more convenient (44%) allowing the student to meet other commitments (39%) and be around family (32%).

**Figure 17: How the general cost of living will be financed**

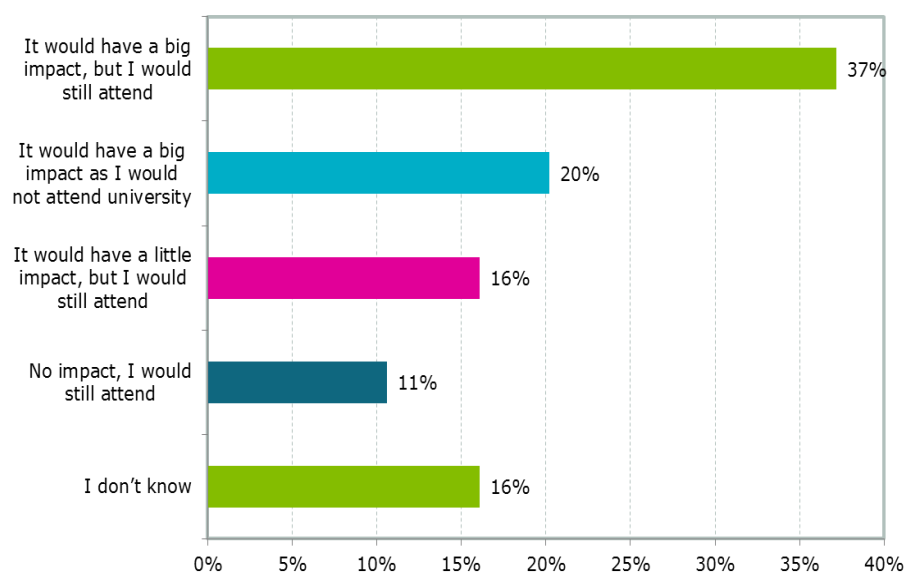
*Base: 192 respondents. Balance: Those who know they want to go to university*

**C5. Now to think a little about finances. Where do you think you will get the money to fund your cost of living (but not including your accommodation or course costs)?**

Figure 17 shows that a part time job either during term time (56%) or holidays (55%) will be required to pay for day to day living expenses at university for over half of the respondents. Savings (55%) and help from family (52%) will also help and 42% expect to take out a student loan.

## Financial considerations

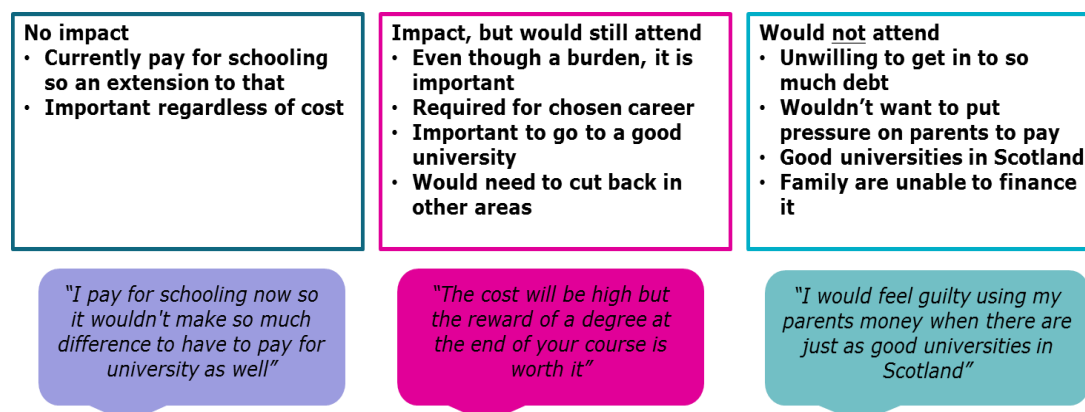
**Figure 18: Impact of tuition fees on intention to go to university**



*Base: 218 respondents. Balance: Those that intend to go to university as a next step or in the future*

**C6. Thinking about course costs now, we'd like you to think about the tuition fees that students going to university in England have to pay. Which of the following statements best describes the impact, if any; paying tuition fees would have on your intentions to attend University?**

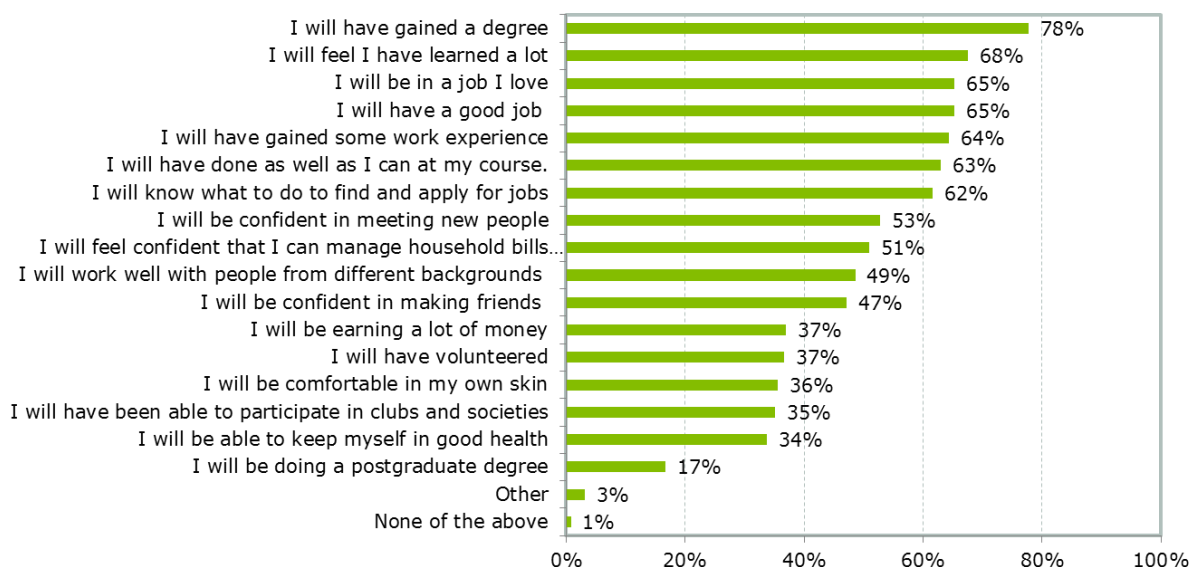
Although 73% said the tuition fees would have at least some impact on their intention to go to university, only 20% claimed it would deter them from going all together, as indicated in Figure 18.

**Figure 19: Impact of fees on intention to attend****C7. Why do you say that?**

In Figure 19, those that claim the course fees won't have any impact on their decision to attend university have the financial means (themselves or via family) to pay, they may also be paying for private schooling currently. Others accept that they or their parents may struggle financially for some time but they feel the benefits of obtaining their qualification will outweigh the initial costs and they will reap the rewards with a well-paid job, in a chosen career. But some are unwilling to get in to debt themselves or put financial strain on their parents and because of this they would only opt for a course in Scotland and if the system was similar to England then university would not be an option.

## Expectations from attending university

**Figure 20: Long term expectations from having attended university**



Base: 216 respondents. Balance: Those whom intend to go to university as a next step or in the future

### **C8. Thinking to beyond university graduation, what are your long term expectations from having attended university?**

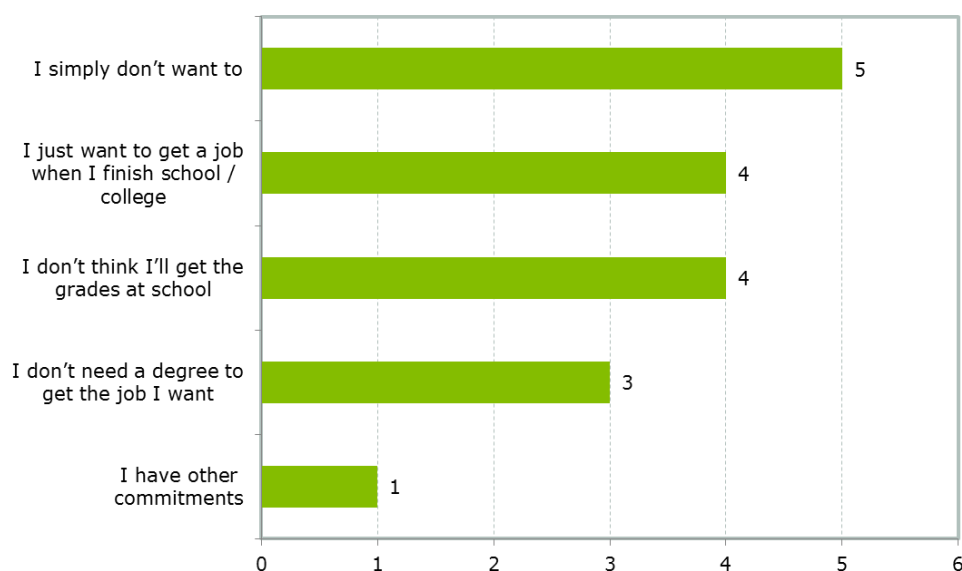
Figure 20 determines that almost 80% expect to earn a degree and to have learnt a lot (68%) from their university course which will hopefully translate into gaining a good job, ideally one they love (65%). 64% are expecting to have gained some work experience and 62% mention that they should know what they have to do to find and apply for a job. From a personal growth perspective over half (53%) expect university to make them feel more confident about meeting new people and working with people with different backgrounds (49%) and on a practical level they hope university will prepare them for managing household bills (51%) and to be earning a lot of money to pay them (37%). Just 17% expect to go on to do a postgraduate degree.

## D. Intentions for the future – those not intending to go to university

This section explores the reasons why some are choosing not to go to university, what they intend to do instead and their long term expectations after school or college.

Amongst those not intending to go to university, the key barriers are not expecting to get the grades and the desire to start employment sooner rather than later to gain experience and a level of financial freedom. Their expectations of the future are the same as those that do intend to go to university, to have a good job that they enjoy and to be more knowledgeable with boosted confidence levels.

**Figure 21: Reasons for not going to university**

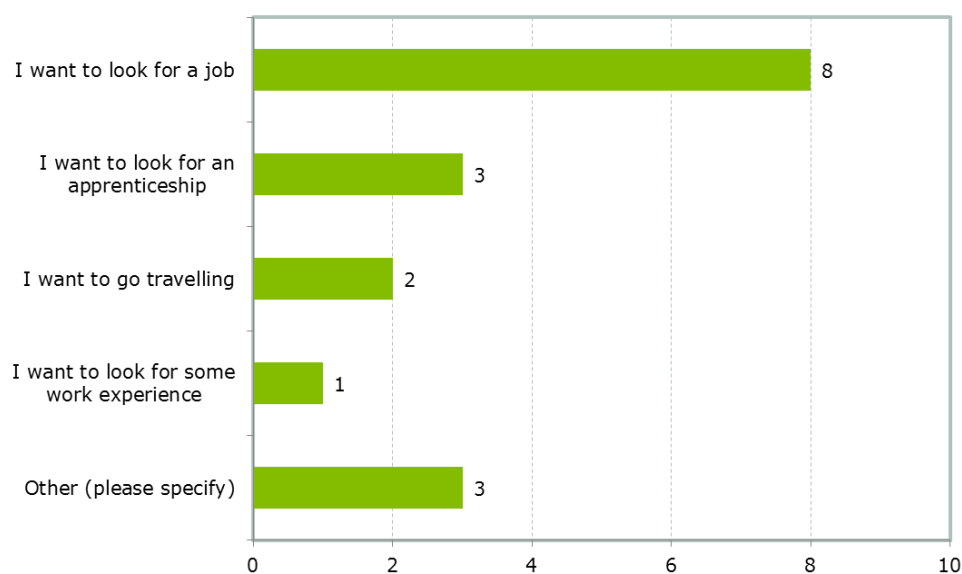


Base: 17 respondents.\* Balance: Those who do not plan to go to university. \* Note very small base size and absolute values

**D1. Which of the following best describes your reasons for not wanting to go to university?**

Figure 21 demonstrates that the small number of people in the sample that are unlikely to go to university said they would either prefer to go straight in to the work place, perhaps they do not need a degree for their chosen career or do not believe that they will get the grades required.

**Figure 22: Next steps for those not planning to go to university**



*Base: 17 respondents.\* Balance: Those who do not plan to go to university. \*Note very small base size and absolute values*

## **D2. What do you think you'll do next?**

Figure 22 indicates that the minority not wanting to go to university plan to look for employment.

**Figure 23: Why is that the chosen route, instead of university?**

- **Already earning and like the freedom and responsibility**
- **Wanting to gain employment experience**
- **Wanting to travel**

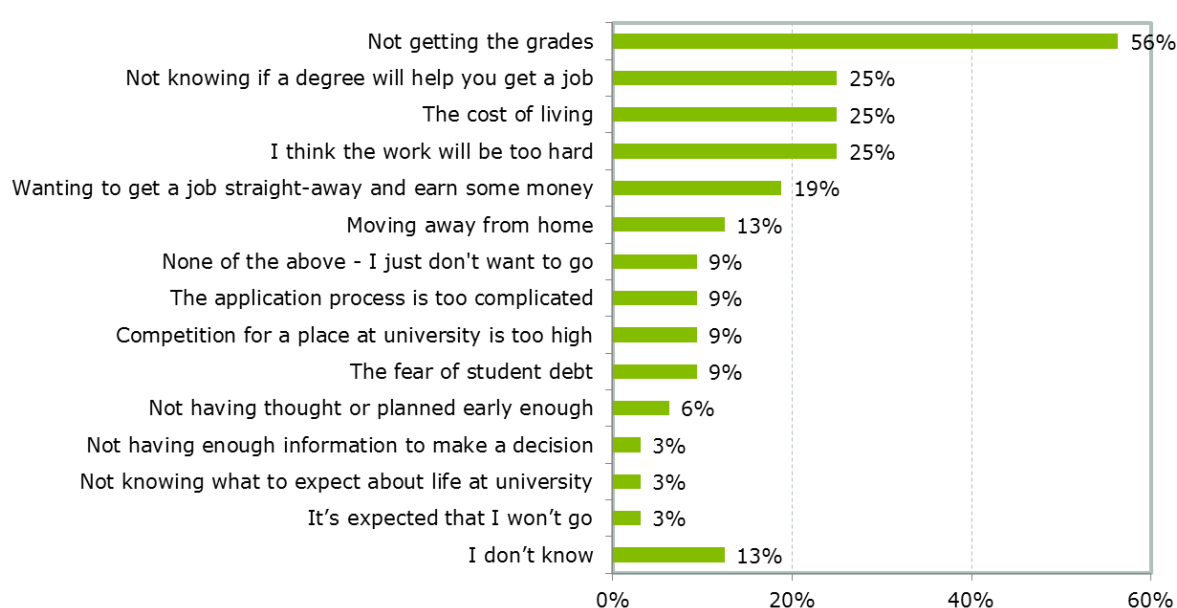


### D3. And please tell us a little about why you're going to do this next.

A taste of earning money and being independent has encouraged some that they do not want to give that up, while it's also considered important to gain experience in the work place, as illustrated in Figure 23.

## Barriers to attending university

**Figure 24: Barriers preventing university attendance**



Base: 32 respondents. Balance: Those unlikely to go or as yet undecided about going to university in the future

#### D4. Which of the following, if any, are barriers to you attending university?

Over half (56%) of the 32 respondents in the sample do not believe they will get the grades required to attend university, as Figure 24 shows. A quarter of respondents are also concerned with the difficulty of work and whether a degree will help them to get a job. On top of this, they are also concerned about the cost of living, while 1 in 5 (19%) would prefer to gain employment straight away to start earning money.

### Expectations of the future

**Figure 25: Long term expectations beyond school or college**



Base: 16 respondents.\* Balance: Those who do not plan to go to university. \*Note small base size and absolute values

#### D5. Thinking to beyond school or college, what are your long term expectations for the future?

Of the relatively small sample of 16 at Figure 25, 10 said their long term expectations are to have a good job, ideally one that they love. 8 respondents hope to have learnt a lot and 7 hope to be more confident and comfortable in their own skin.

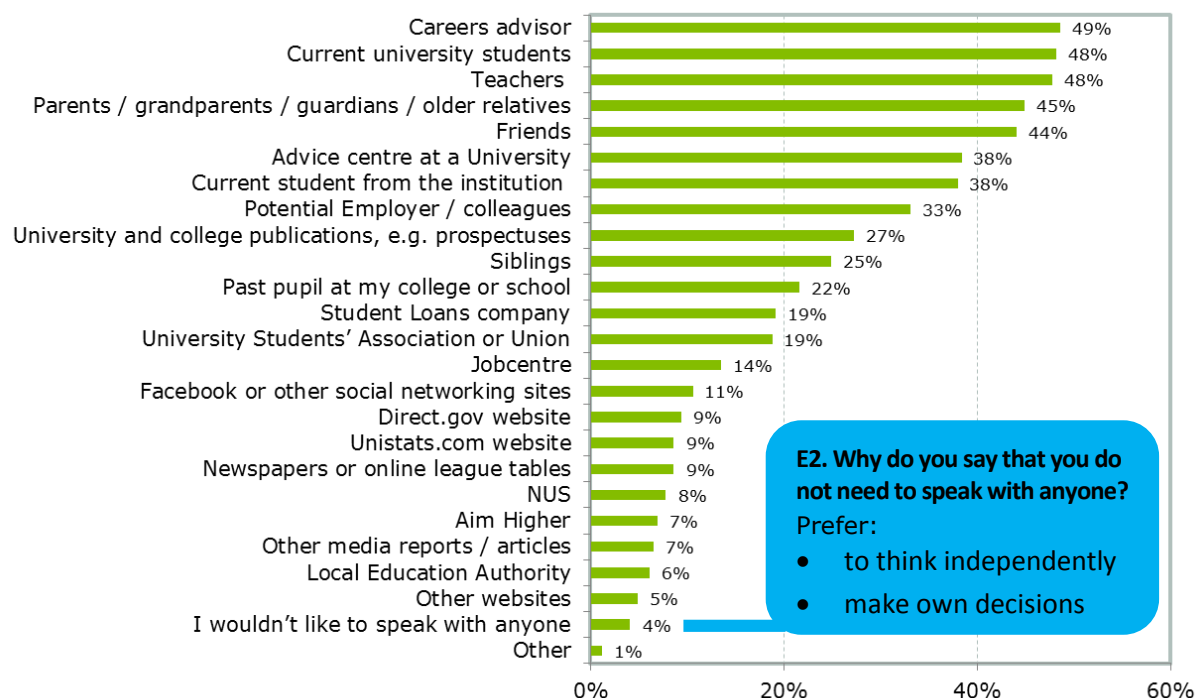
## E. Information seeking behaviours

**This section aims to understand which sources are important in helping to make the decision about going to university or not and what information is required.**

**Many have already spoken with teachers, friends and family for advice about potentially going to university and whilst some have also spoken to a careers advisor, this is still on the list for others. The advice centre at university as well as current students are also key contacts and in speaking to an employer, potential students would hope to understand what type of role they could achieve with a certain degree, this understanding is considered to be missing which provides uncertainty about a future after university, and thus a barrier to attendance. 1 in 5 would contact the Student's Association or Union for real life knowledge and experience from someone that they feel they could relate to and key on the list of information required is the student accommodation options and associated costs, another area that can put some off considering attending university or living away from home. Help in deciding which university and course to choose,, along with understanding how the course is taught and the environment and materials required also give a fuller picture of their potential next step.**

## Sources of information

Figure 26: Helping students make their decision about the future



Base: 245 respondents.

**E1. Thinking about making these decisions about your future, which of the following, if any, would you like to speak with or use for help?**

Figure 26 demonstrates that career advisors (49%), current university students (48%), teachers (48%), friends (44%) and family (45%) will most likely be the go to sources of help and information when trying to decide on their future path. 38% would like to make use of the advice centre at university and students currently attending that institution and a third would find it useful to speak to a potential employer. A look at the university prospectus would be important for 27% and the students' loan company could help 19% to understand what their financial options are. Less than 10% are interested in stats and league tables and only 8% would expect to contact the NUS at this stage, however 19% would contact the University Students' Association or Union.

**Figure 27: Reasons to speak to the Students' Association or Union when making the decision about going to University**

- In invaluable source of information for real life experience
- Knowledgeable and experienced in what university life entails

*"They would be able to give good advice and answer any questions about the topic I am asking about"*

*"They are similar to me, people in them have gone through similar process and so I can relate to them"*

*"They are the most experienced and have the best advice from the student's point of view. Which can provide a much higher quality of information than other sources"*

*"Because they will be able to inform me of the facilities and practicality of choosing their university"*

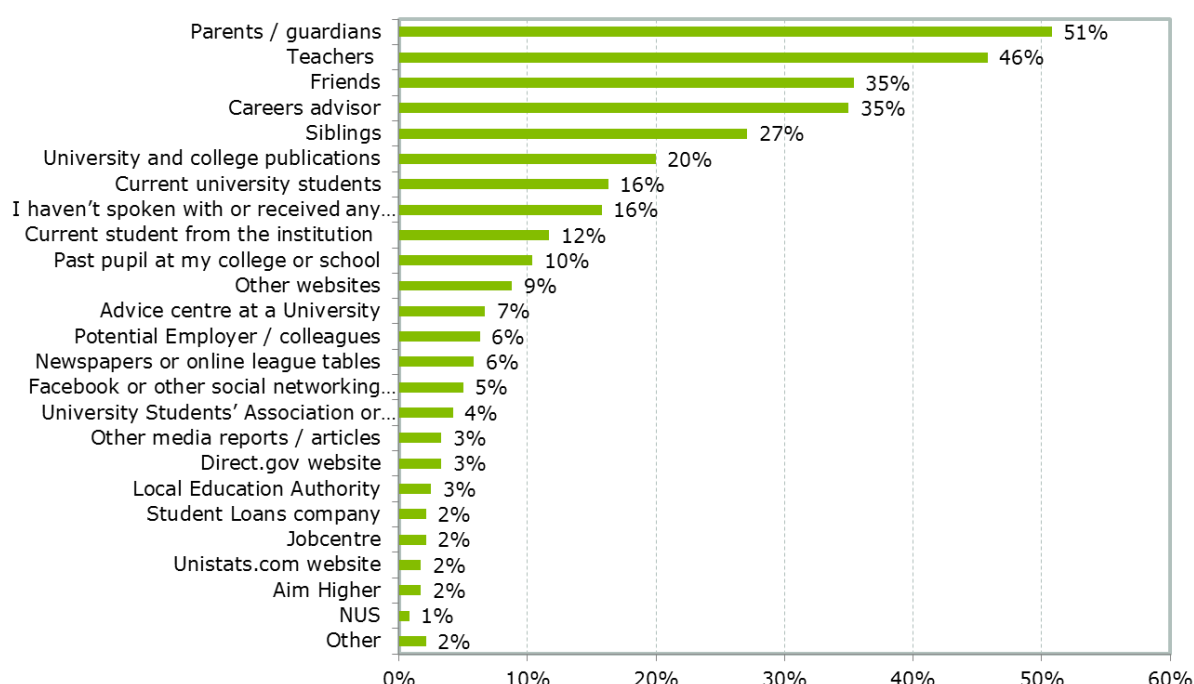
*"Because they will have a knowledge of what university is like and be able to give me advice on university"*

*"Because they would understand first hand what uni life is like and have experienced the same"*

**E3. Why would you like to speak with a Students' Association or Union to help you make a decision with regards to going to University?**

Those indicating they would speak to a students' union (19%), highlighted in Figure 27 that they would find it really helpful to speak with such an organisation as they feel they would be speaking with someone that they could relate to. They also claimed it would be useful to talk with someone who has walked the steps that they are about to take, giving a real insight in to the practicalities and life experience of that university.

**Figure 28: Persons or services already spoken to, in order to help in the decision making process**



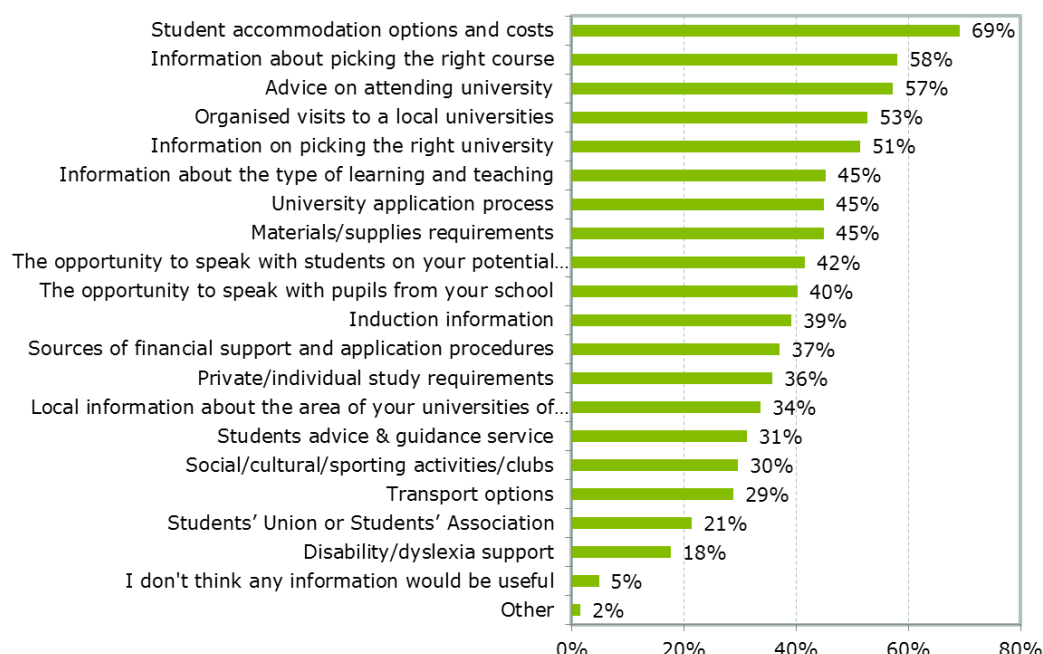
Base: 240 respondents.

**E4. And which of the following, if any, have you spoken with, or received advice from to help you make your decisions on what to do next?**

Around half of the sample have spoken to parents (51%) or teachers (46%) already about what to do next and just over a third (35%) have already spoken to friends or a career advisor, so 14% are still yet to speak to an advisor that wish to do so. As Figure 28 further demonstrates, although 20% have looked through university/college publications only a minority have had contact with the university thus far, which was either through the advice centre (7%) or the students association (4%). 16% haven't yet discussed their next steps with anyone.

## Types of information

**Figure 29: Information and/or support that would be useful to help make the decision about whether to go to university or not**



Base: 243 respondents.

### E5. What kinds of information or support do you think would be useful for you and your friends to receive to help make the decision about whether to go to university or not?

Figure 29 indicates that perhaps the biggest cost outside of potential tuition fees is the student accommodation, which explains why almost 7 out of 10 (69%) respondents are keen to find out about what the options are and the associated costs. Advice on which course to choose (58%) and on attending university in general (57%) are also important for helping them to make their decision. Having organised visits to universities (53%) and guidance on how to pick the right institution (51%) are mentioned by over half of the respondents and on a practical level they wish to understand the type of learning and teaching (45%), the teaching style and environment was also mentioned earlier as being important when choosing a university.

Potential students want to feel knowledgeable about the whole application process (45%) and also expectations in terms of materials/supplies (45%) that they will be expected to

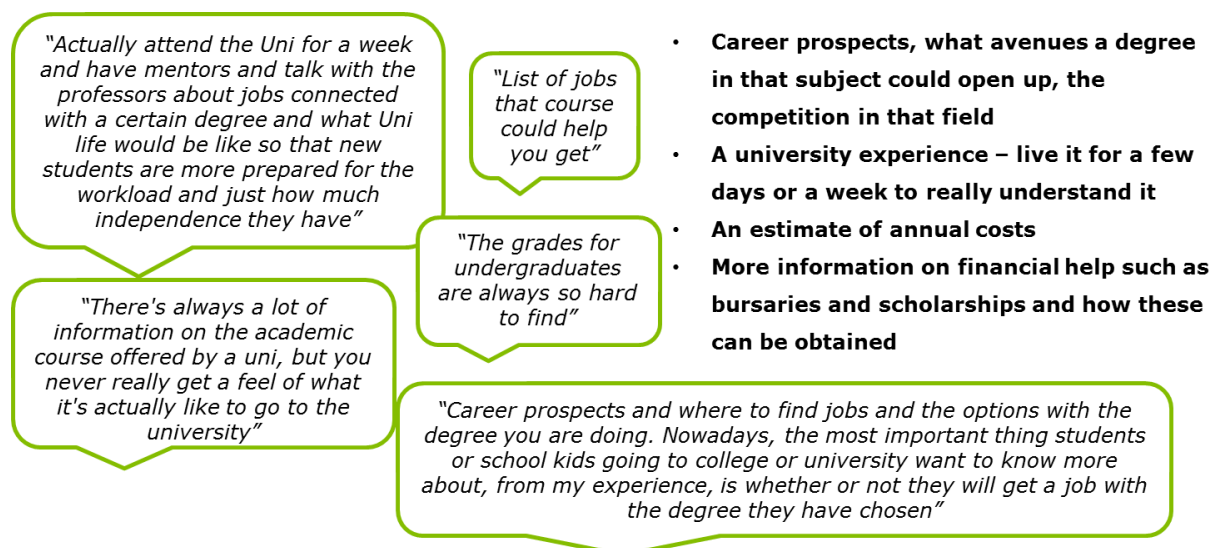
have for the course. As mentioned previously, hearing about the course and university life from students already studying the course (42%) or from students that have gone to the selected university from the same school (40%) can provide a deeper understanding of the 'actual' rather than the 'prospectus' version. Understanding the whole application process for financial support (37%) could help them to make an informed decision on feasibility of attendance and in detailing expectations of private/individual study requirements (36%) the university could be addressing a barrier to attendance noted earlier.

Confirming that there is a student's advice and guidance service (31%) is important, perhaps it offers reassurance that they are not yet sprung out in to the world alone and the mention of cultural/social/sporting clubs (30%) provides a wider view of life in general at university.

### Indicative differences

As a general overview, the younger audience, 15-16 would find the information sources more useful than those of 17 years of age, perhaps because they are still at the deciding stage, whereas those at 17 may be closer to making their decision.

**Figure 30: What information or advice is missing**



### E6. What sort of information or advice, if anything, is missing?

Figure 30 reveals that it's key that potential students have an understanding of potential job prospects from gaining a degree in the given subject. They not only want to know about

the course but also what type of roles this could open up for them in the workplace and to what extent the applications for that field are oversubscribed, uncertainty about this was earlier highlighted as a barrier to enrolling. There is some call for open days to go a step further and be a couple of days, or even a week so one can have an immersive experience of what university will actually be like. Clarity on expected costs of university and any information on help via grants would also be helpful.

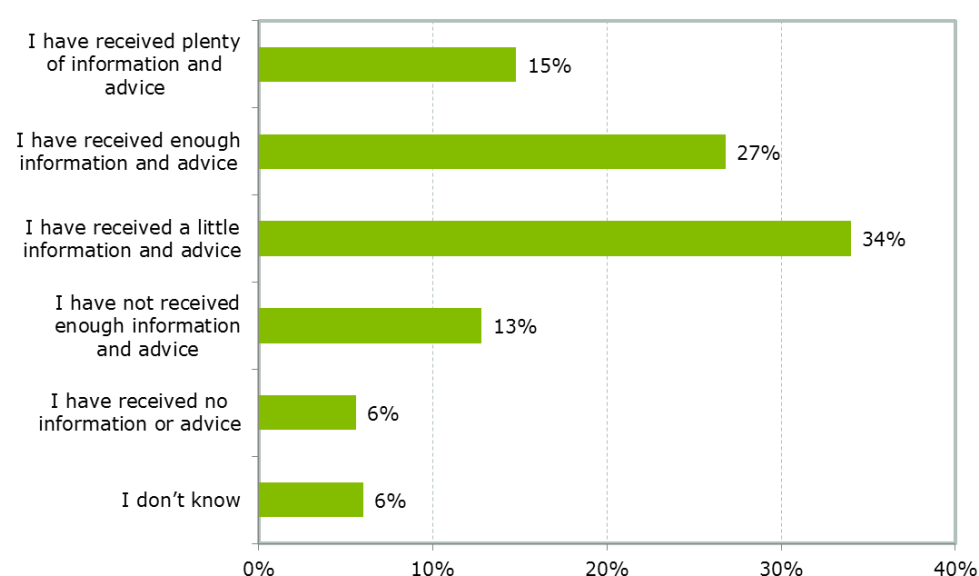
## F. Communication

This section looks into which communication methods are most effective when communicating with potential students about attending or applying to university and also their thoughts on the amount of information received and the best time to receive it.

Less than half of those asked said they had either received 'plenty' or 'enough' information and advice to help make their decision about university. A third claimed to have received a little information but the others said they had not received enough or any to date and whilst the younger audience of 14 to 15 year olds were more likely to say this, we also had some 16 and 17 year olds agreeing too. Information and advice giving could start from the 3rd year of High School, which may help students digest the information over the subsequent years before they have to make their decision and the most effective route of communicating with them is via their teachers. Advertisements and online video could also be effective and posters situated in the school were considered a better approach than the likes of Facebook and Twitter.

### Volume of information received

Figure 31: Thoughts towards the amount of information or advice received



Base: 250 respondents.

### F1. Which of the following statements, if any, best describes your thoughts towards the amount of information or advice you have received?

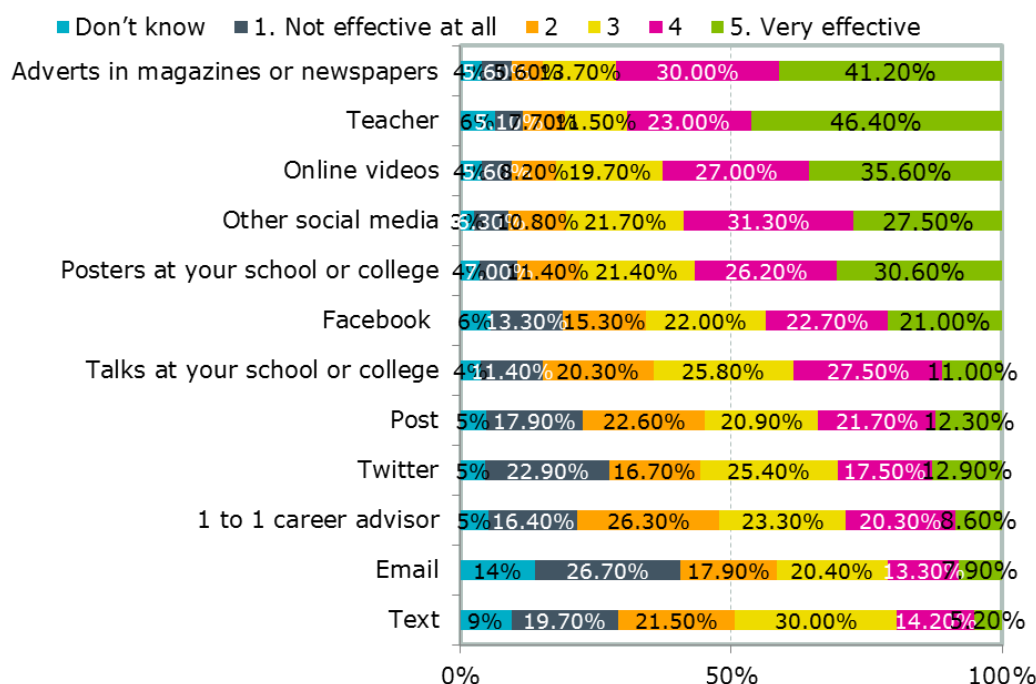
Figure 31 determines that 42% said they have received enough advice and information to help them make their decision, and a third have received a little amount, however, almost 20% have either not received enough advice (13%) or haven't received any at all (6%), whilst the younger audience of 14 to 15 year olds account for some of this, 26% of all 16 year olds in the sample and 14% of all 17 year olds are also in this pot.

#### Indicative differences

Those aged 14 or 15 are most likely to say that they have not received enough information and advice

#### Communications methods

**Figure 32: Effectiveness of communication methods**

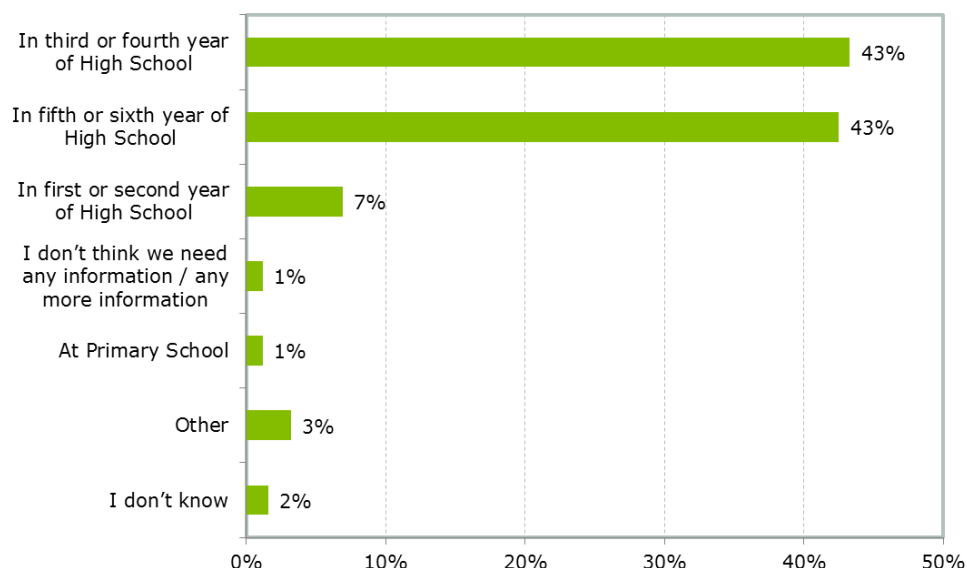


Average Base: 234 respondents.

**F2. Thinking about how you would receive any information or advice, how effective do you think these methods of communication are on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is very effective and 1 is not effective at all?**

Given that teachers are one of the first points of contact, it is unsurprising that this route gains the highest score for being very effective (46%) and almost 70% in total mention this as an effective path of communication, as demonstrated in Figure 32. Adverts in magazines or newspapers are cited next for being very (41%) or somewhat effective (30%) although suggesting an increase in the advertising budget is often a default choice of respondents in many research projects regardless of their actual readership, so this finding should be taken with a note of caution. With a likely population of high internet users, online videos (63%) were mentioned next as an effective platform then it was 'other social media' platforms (59%), Facebook (44%) and Twitter (30%) were further down the list of effective communication means than posters in their schools (57%), with the latter of course taking the information to the reader as opposed to the reader looking for it online.

**Figure 33: Best time to receive information about attending or applying to university**



Base: 247 respondents.

**F3. When do you think it would be best to receive information, if at all, about attending or applying to university?**

Figure 33 reveals that equal numbers (43%) suggest 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> year as those suggesting 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> year as the best time to receive information about attending or applying for university. Given that it was the younger sample (14 & 15) that was more likely to claim that they had not received enough information this would suggest that an introduction to their options from the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, would be welcomed. This may also mean that attending university is a less daunting prospect for some when the time arises if they have been familiar with what it entails from the age of 14.

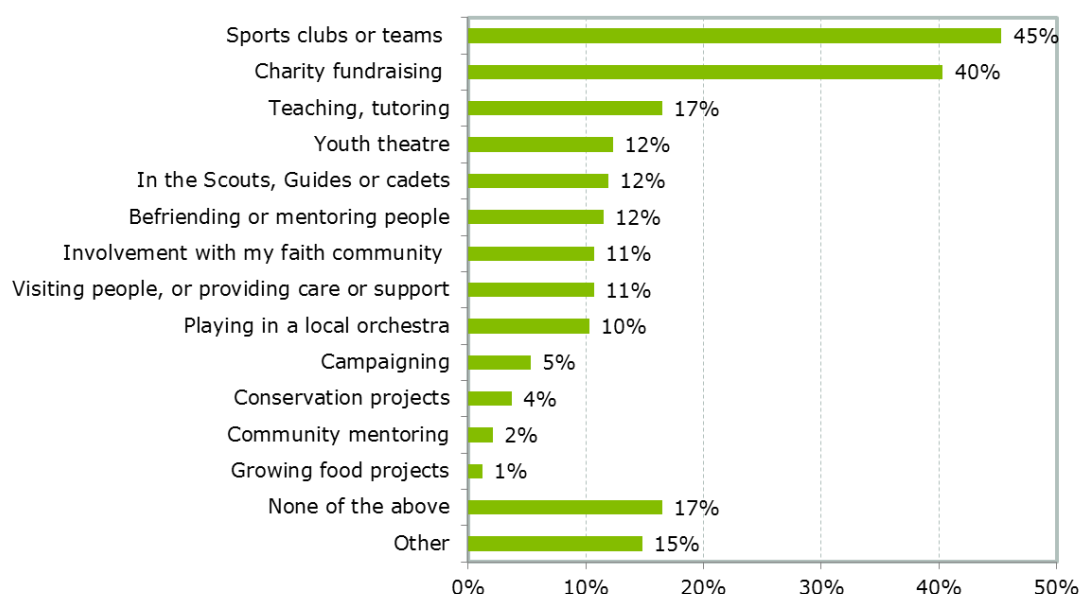
## G. Involvement in the community

This section will briefly aim to understand a little more about the respondents in terms of what activities they are involved in currently in the community and how important it is to have the opportunity to get involved in issues such as Environmental and Academic issues at university.

Sports clubs and charity fundraising are the things that are mentioned most when asked about their current involvement in the community and the opportunity to get involved in all activities presented at university is welcomed, but in particular in academic issues.

### Community involvement

Figure 34: Students are currently involved in...



Base: 243 respondents.

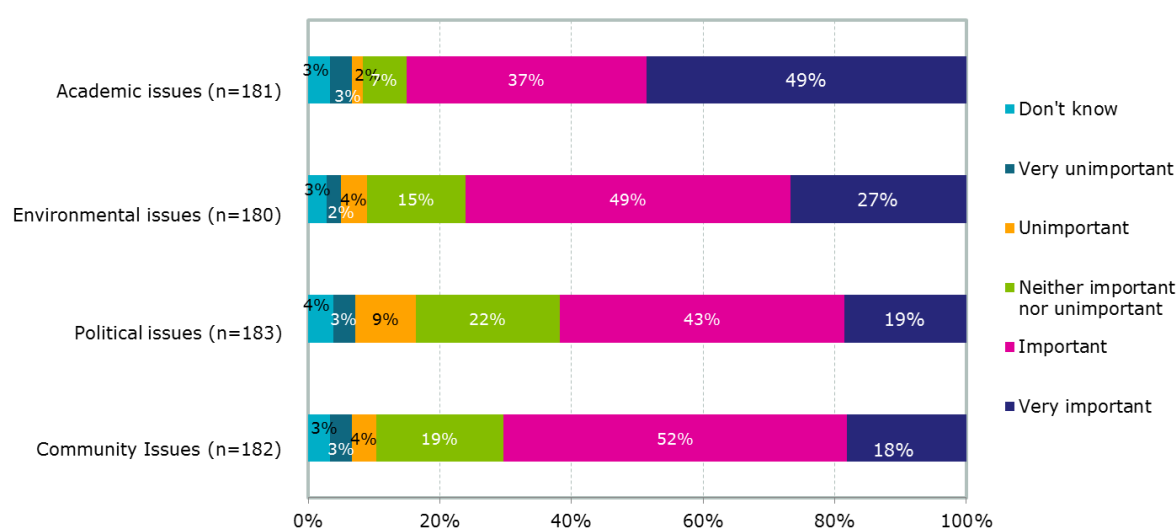
### G1. Which of the following, if any, are you currently involved in?

Nearly half (45%) of the sample, indicated in Figure 34, are currently involved in a sports club or team and 40% take part in charity fundraising and, these are the two main activities

that respondents are involved in. A smaller number of respondents (17%) are involved with teaching/tutoring and a further 12% are befriending or mentoring others. The youth theatre and the Scouts or Guides are attended by 12% and 11% are taking on a caring role and/or getting involved with their faith in the community.

### Importance of involvement at university

**Figure 35: Importance of having the opportunity to be involved in the following at university**



Base: (In brackets). Balance: Those intending to go to university

### G2. How important, if at all, do you think it is that opportunities to be involved in the following activities are available for people at university?

Being able to get involved in the range of activities presented at university is important for potential students, as shown in Figure 35. The involvement in academic issues is the most important with almost 9 out of every 10, respondents (86%) mentioning this, followed by the environmental issues (76%) and the community (70%). 6 out of every 10 respondents (62%) feel it is important to have the opportunity to get involved with politics.

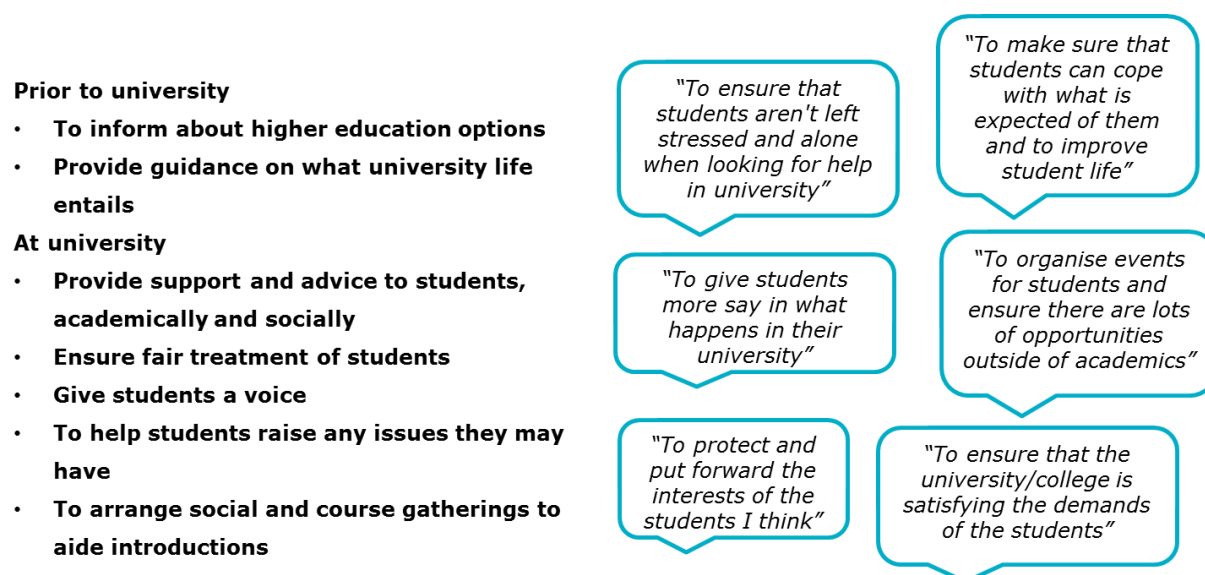
## H. Students' unions & associations

**This section looks at the perception of the Students' Association and Students' Union role and the importance of the services that they are expected to provide. It will also look at expectations with regards to how involved students are in shaping their university education, the agreement level with the statements included in the 'student movement' definition and final thoughts on anything else that could help the potential students to make the decision about university.**

**The main expectation of the Students' Association or Students' Union is to provide advice and support to the students both before and after enrolling on all elements of university life. The priority is to be an information source and support network, to reassure students. Beyond this providing options for introductions (socially) and opportunities for community involvement could help the new student to settle in. When prompted with statements about what the student movement entails the feedback emulated that already given spontaneously which saw the movement in a positive light. It is expected that students will have the opportunity to shape their own university education and building on earlier suggestions when asked about missing information, informal Q&A's, provision of annual cost estimates and more information on the transition to the workplace were suggested as ways to help them make the decision about attending university.**

## Awareness of Students' Association and Students' Union

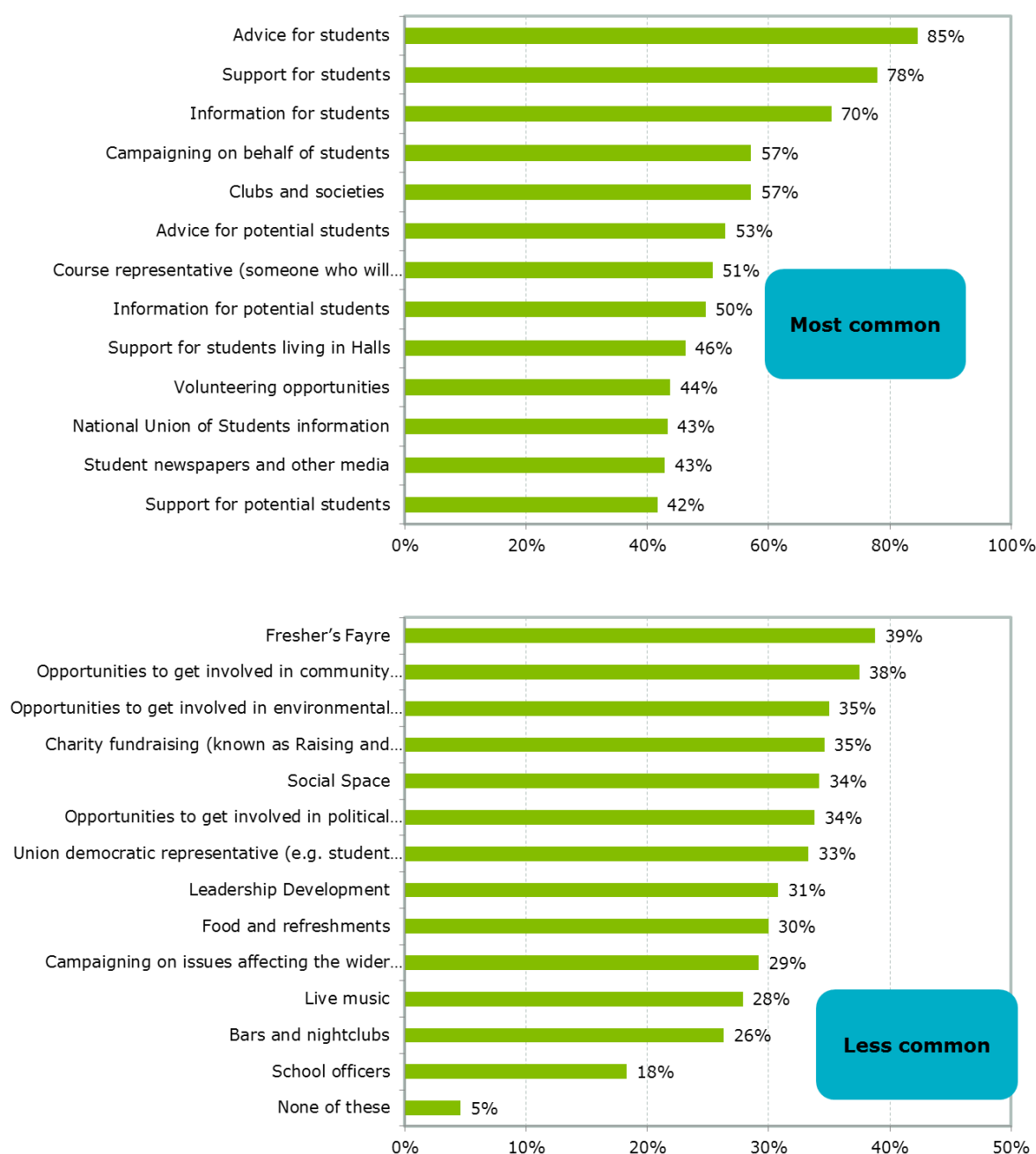
**Figure 36: Purpose of the Students' Association or a Students' Union**



### H1. What do you think the purpose of a Students' Association or a Students Union is?

Figure 36 demonstrates that those with an understanding of what the Students' Association or Union is believe that it offers advice before enrolment on the options available and what university life is like. Then once enrolled it is expected that the SA/SU will provide a platform for the student voice, to enable any issues to be aired and to ensure fair treatment. It is also expected that the SA/SU will offer a general support and advice role and to help form new relationships by organising social gatherings.

**Figure 37: Services which are expected to be provided by the Students' Association or a Students' Union**



Base: 240 respondents.

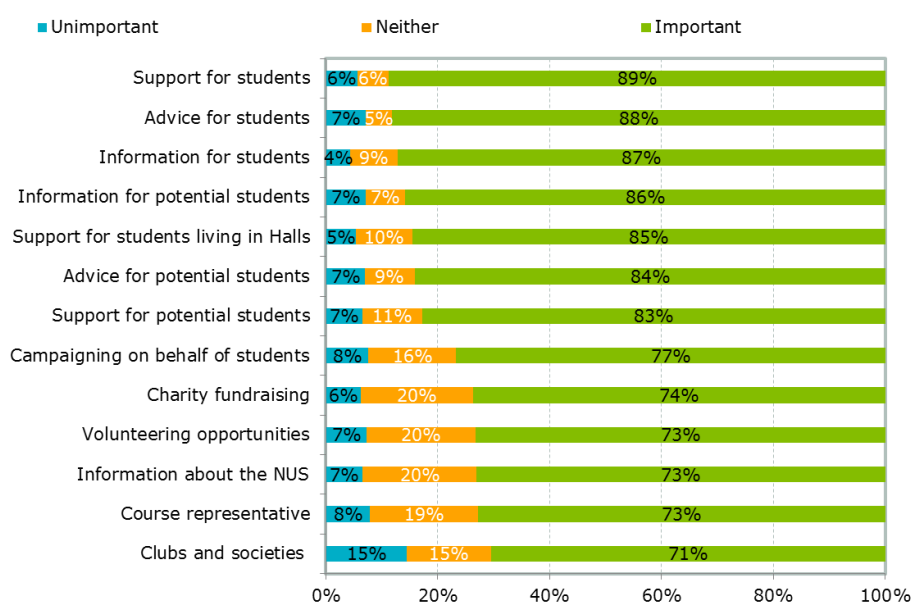
**H2. Which of the following services would you expect a Students' Association or a Students' Union to provide?**

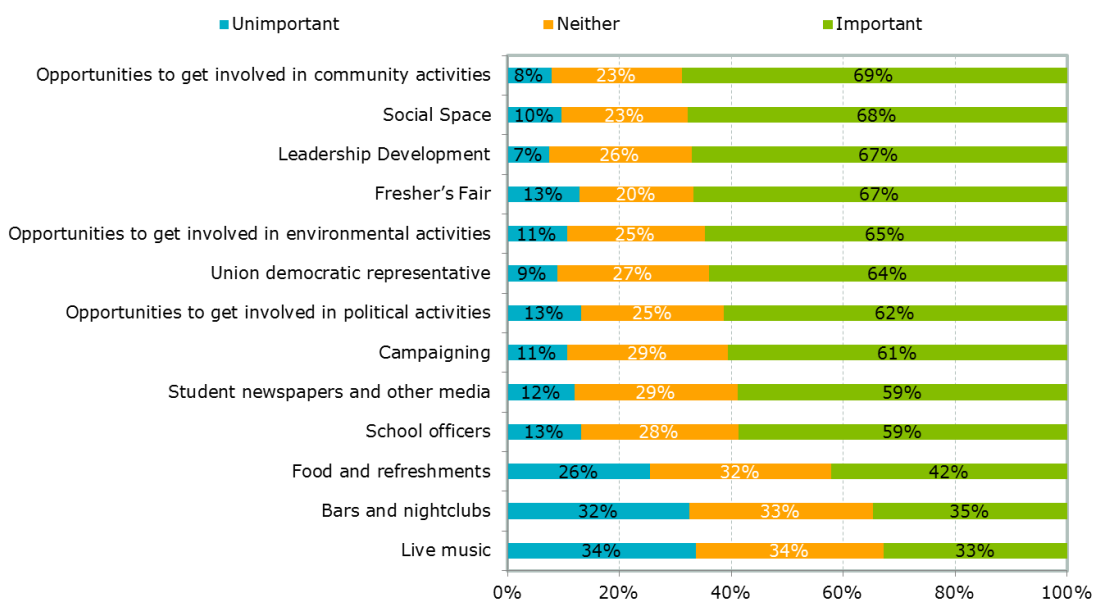
The students Association or a Student Union is primarily seen as an advice and support service for everything to do with university, accessible pre-university (53%) and after enrolling, as shown in Figure 37. When prompted, 85% of the sample said they expected provision of an advice service, offering support (78%) and information (70%) for the student and 57% extended this to campaigning on behalf of the students and having a course representative (51%). On a day to day living side of things, it's expected that the SA/SU can be approached about living in halls (46%) and ways to get involved in volunteering opportunities (44%), the community (38%) and in environmental issues (35%).

The volunteering and community aspects are something that many are involved with at present. To help with the new introductions and socialising, 57% expect to access clubs and societies via the SA/SU and to be greeted with a Fresher's Fayre (39%). Information on all of the above could be pushed out via a student newspaper and other media (43%).

### Importance of services

**Figure 38: Importance of providing such services**





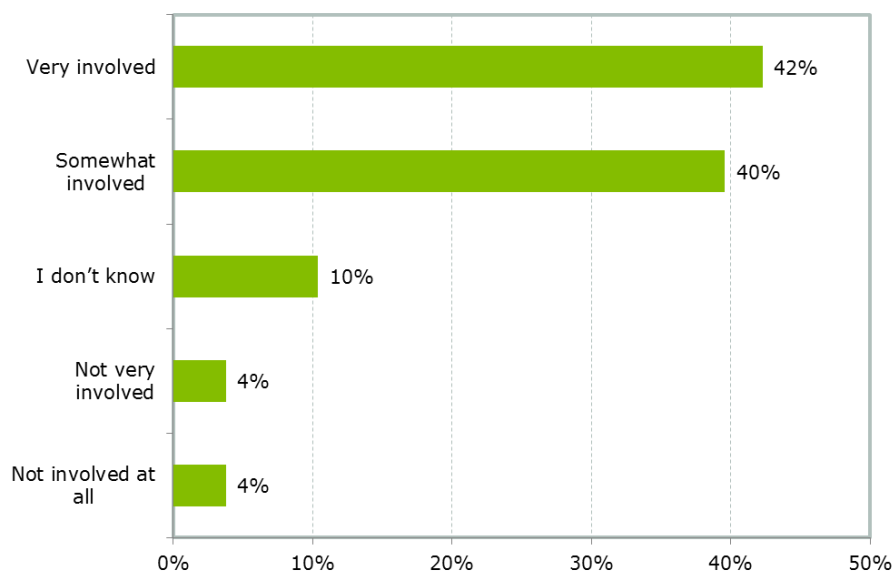
Average base: 213 respondents.

### H3. How important, if at all, do you think it is that a Students' Union or Association provides the following services?

The most important service aspects to be supplied from the Students' Association or Students' Union, as demonstrated in Figure 38, are: general support (89%), advice (88%), information for students (87%) and potential students (86%) and campaigning on their behalf (77%). All can offer reassurance for those nervous about leaving home and/or school. The other aspects of providing volunteering (73%) and fundraising (74%) opportunities are still important and it provides continuity for those already doing those things now, but they are not as vital as the support elements already mentioned here, nor is the provision of clubs and societies (71%). However, 7 in 10 is still a figure to be taken note of and these aspects would help enormously with the student settling in. In terms of the services that are least important for the SA/SU to provide, these are food and refreshments, important for 42%, bars and nightclubs (35%) and live music (33%).

## Involvement in shaping education

**Figure 39: Involvement of students in shaping their university education**



*Base: 182 respondents. Balance: Those intending to go to university*

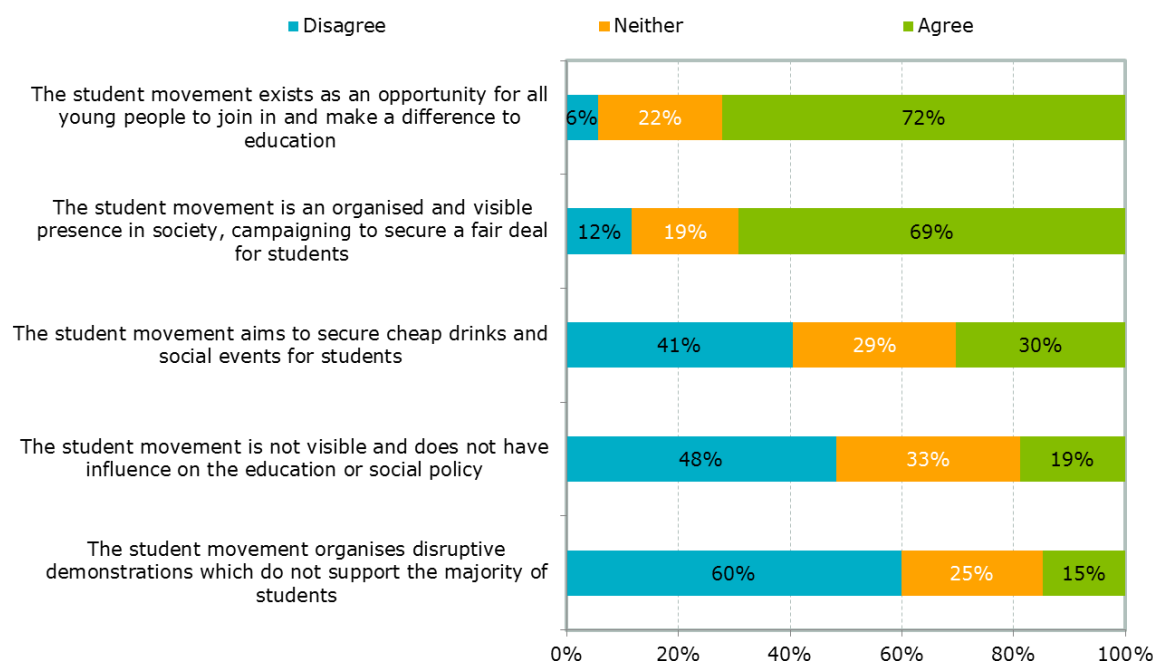
**H5. Thinking about those who are at university, how involved do you expect students to be in opportunities to shape their university education, similar to the opportunities you get at school?**

Figure 39 shows that a large percentage (82%) expects students to be involved in opportunities that could shape their university education.

## Opinions of the student movement

**Figure 40: Strength of agreement with characterising statements about the student movement**

*The student movement is a network of students' unions who represent students at their institution, and who are committed to defending, extending and promoting the rights of students. They also help and support students with advice, guidance, social events, clubs and societies and campaigning. Here are a number of statements about the student movement.*



Average base: 229 respondents.

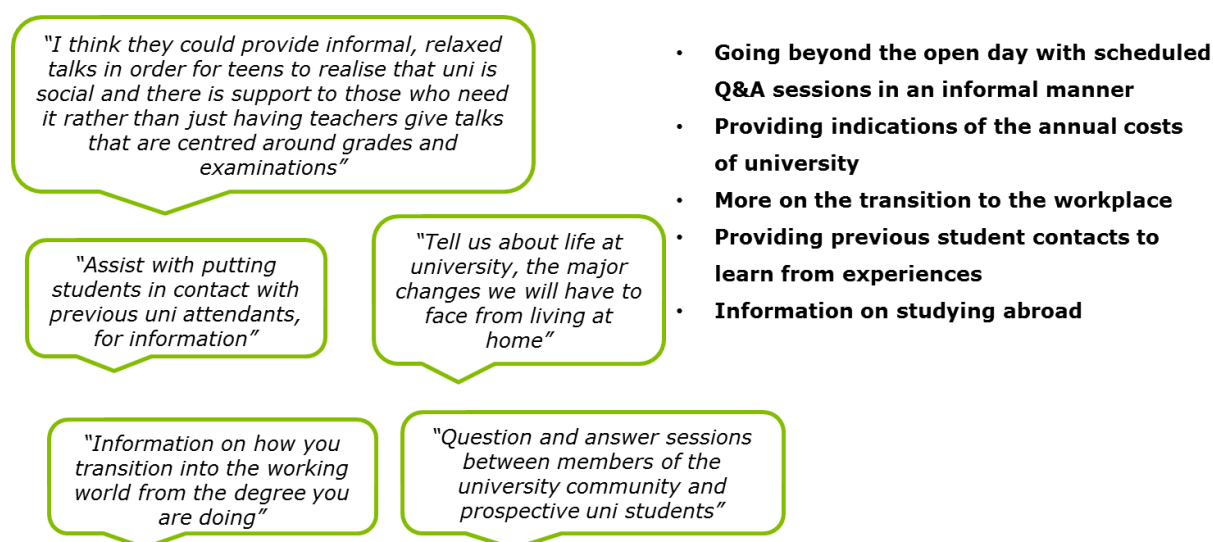
**H6. We would now like you to think about something called the 'student movement'. Please use the scale below to let us know how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.**

In Figure 40, it's clear that around 7 in 10 agreed with the two positive statements, that the student movement exists as an opportunity for all young people to join in and make a difference to education (72%) and that the student movement is an organised and visible presence in society, campaigning to secure a fair deal for students (69%).

The numbers that disagreed with these statements were minor in comparison and the latter in particular echoes the unprompted view already provided when asked about the student association/union. Just under a third (30%) agreed that the student movement aims to secure cheap drinks and social events for students, but more disagreed with the statement (41%).

There was more disagreement with the two negative statements than agreement, 48% disagreed with the student movement not being visible and not having influence on the education or social policy and 60% disagreed with the statement about the movement organising disruptive demonstrations and not appearing to support students. Although neither of these gained a high majority of disagreement, most of those remaining in the sample said they neither agreed nor disagreed rather than agreeing with it.

**Figure 41: Final thoughts on helping with the decision about university**



#### **H7. Finally, what one thing do you think a Students' Union or Association could do to help you, and others like you, in making your decisions about university?**

The final requests shown in Figure 41 were in the main covered earlier when asked about what is missing in helping potential students make the decision about attending university but a little more detail came out here. Scheduled Q&A sessions could assist before and after the open days and conducting these in an informal manner where all topics are on the agenda in terms of life at university, not just the grades expected to get in should be covered. These could be co-hosted by teachers and students to give both perspectives. As

previously mentioned, any help with understanding the associated costs would be helpful, an indication of annual costs was requested, even if this is a ballpark on a scale of lifestyle. Finally, information is being supplied on the transition from school to university but the next step into the workplace could be covered in more detail.

# Conclusions and recommendations

# Conclusions & Recommendations

## Employment and career focused support

The majority expect to go to university straight from school and a key driver to attending is to expand upon their knowledge and skill set to allow personal goals to be achieved and to enable their chosen career path. But not knowing if their chosen course could result in employment of their choice is a barrier to attendance which could be addressed.

### Recommendations:

- More information on the transition from university to the workplace in terms of the type employment a course would lead on to could help to address a barrier to attendance.
- Working with the institution to include a 'typical careers' section at the end of the course information in the prospectus as well as imparted information from career advisors, teachers and university representatives.
- Sound bites from employers would add weight to this.

## Cost of living support

There is uncertainty about what the day to day living costs accumulate to and this leads some into thinking that they could not afford to go to university, especially not without commuting from home. This uncertainty is on top of the concern that their time and expense may not be rewarded with a good career. They need help with making an informed decision, which could help to address this barrier.

### Recommendations:

- Provide projections of likely annual costs of attendance to help manage expectations.
- Give a sliding scale for different lifestyles (low, mid, high).

### Give an indication of the work (level/hours) at university

Not knowing what is expected of the student in terms of the work level and the number of hours of study is a barrier to attendance which scares some away. Potential students want to know up front what they are signing up for so they can make a decision about their own capability and dedication. An immersive week at the university 'living the life' was suggested but logistically and financially this could be prohibitive but hearing a student's story could be a simpler way to address this. It is important that the information come from a student, not a lecturer because they want to hear from someone that has walked in their shoes.

#### Recommendations:

- Provide a document/article 'a typical week at university'.
- It should cover:
  - The typical level of work, for the first year and how it differs in year 2 etc. If possible relate it to the course completed e.g. A 'Levels.
  - Typical number of hours of study (in and out of class).
  - The way the course is taught (how different it is from school) and the environment in which it is taught in.
- The tone should be light hearted from the perspective of the student, either currently studying the course or whom has just completed it

### Closer alignment with schools/colleges

Not all students were aware of what the Student's Association and Union were responsible for or what it provided but those that did thought it to be an invaluable source of advice and support, prior and during university. The SA/SU is primarily considered to be an advice and information resource that offers support to students in all matters relating to university. Exactly the source that could answer many of the questions that potential students have. When asked to agree or disagree with statements about the student movement, the results were positive. If the SA/SU could have a closer link with the schools, even just by ensuring that they are mentioned when options are being discussed, it would help to build up the profile amongst those that are less aware. Many of the services which the SA/SU are expected to provide would help at the decision making stage.

School/college teachers are the first point of contact for discussing university courses and institutions, ensuring that they are kept up to date on what the Student's Association and Union is offering and on any new information sources available for informing students will provide the best chance of the information being filtered through to the target audience correctly.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Have regular information exchanges, Q&A sessions with teachers so they are kept up to date
- Promote the availability and information offered from the SU / SA advice centre in schools/colleges via the teachers and posters.
- The advice centre should have representatives from both staff and students.
- Provide a list of names and topics covered for each available contact to the teacher ensuring the student is quickly directed to the right person.

#### **Start informing school students about their university options from age 14**

Information about attending university should be provided from the age of 14, this could encourage potential students to be considering university from a young age and by the time that they need to make the decision they would have hoped to have digested the information required and be informed enough to make the decision.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The most effective route of communication is via the teachers.
- Online video could help to bring university to life.
- Posters around the school could work on a subconscious level, taking the information to the target audience rather than them seeking it out on the internet.
- Include the student view, not just that of the lecturers/organisational staff.
- An informal approach could be more welcoming during these early stages.