

UNIVERSITY OF WEST LONDON STUDENTS' UNION

Strategy Development Report

2024-2028





OUR 2024-2028

Strategy Development

How we got here

Overview

UWLSU's strategy for 2018–23 has concluded with some excellent results. UWLSU as an organisation has been ranked #1 Students' Union in the country for 4 of the last 5 years and consistently engaged high numbers of students in initiatives and support programmes.

The development of a new strategy for 2024–2028 is defined within this document: it encompasses a comprehensive review of past performance, higher education sector insights and student & staff consultation.

The stages of this strategy development are as follows:

STAGE ONE

Scope and Review of
18–23 Strategy

STAGE TWO

CounterCulture external
research into higher education
themes and issues

STAGE THREE

PART A

UWLSU Student Consultation

PART B

UWLSU Staff Consultation

STAGE FOUR

Strategy Development
and Stakeholder
Engagement

STAGE FIVE

Finalisation and Marketing

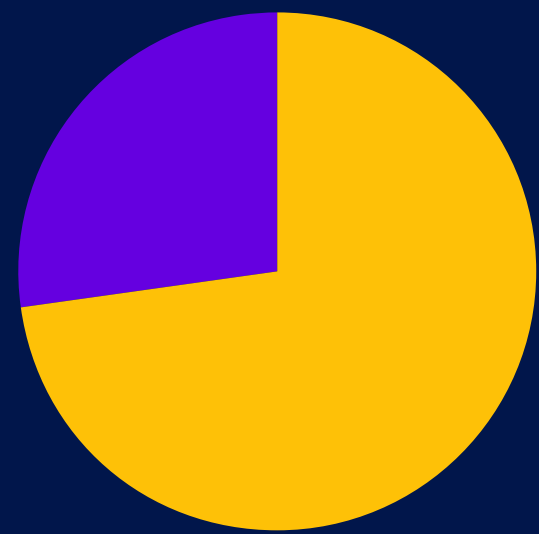
Strategy 2018–2023

UWLSU's mission for the previous strategy was 'Disrupting Inequality' and centred on engagement as a key driver to enhance student experience.

The key areas of the strategy tied into the ERASE outcomes identified as key drivers for student experience. These are Engagement; Retention; Attainment; Satisfaction and Employability. Each of the outcomes directly link into the organisational KPIs that have been assessed as part of this strategy development report. The full results of our ERASE objectives are outlined in Appendix 1.

Of the 15 objectives

**73% were
achieved
or partly
achieved**



Objectives that were not achieved included:

- Achieving 80% engagement in SU-led activity; Achieving 60% engagement in SU-led extra-curricular activity; Exceeding 80% satisfaction annually; and Exceeding 90% (NSS Q26) by 2023
- Engagement targets were ambitious, and adversely impacted by COVID-19. However the SU is very happy with the results of this engagement and this is high compared to the sector.
- Satisfaction targets were also ambitious, and slightly underachieved; however, the SU has been ranked #1 in the country for 4 of the last 5 years and sets the benchmark for student satisfaction across the Students' Union sector.
- Overall, the results of the previous strategy lend to positive outcomes and viewing, a reflection of a highly engaged staff team that delivered effectively on their areas of work.



UWLSU Strategy 2018–2023 results

UWLSU Strategy Results	KPI		Achieved?	Result
Engage	E1	Exceed 80% student engagement in SU activity	No	70%
	E2	Achieve representative student demographic group engagement	Yes	99%
	E3	Impact – Students report that UWLSU helps students engage in all aspects of university life	Yes	
Retain	R1	Exceed UWL retention rates for students engaged in SU-led extra-curricular activity	Yes	11%
	R2	Achieve 60%+ engagement in SU-led extracurricular activity	No	55%
	R3	Impact – Students report that UWLSU helps students overcome challenges and achieve their qualifications	Yes	
Attain	A1	Exceed UWL attainment rates for students engaged in SU-led extracurricular activity	Yes	14%
	A2	Achieve 60%+ engagement in SU-led extracurricular activity	Yes	92%
	A3	Achieve 80%+ UWL staff recognition that SU activity has a positive impact on the student experience	Yes	
Satisfaction	S1	Exceed 80% satisfaction annually (NSS Q26)	No	76%
	S2	Achieve 90% satisfaction (NSS Q26) by 2023	No	83%
	S3	Impact – Students report that they are highly satisfied with their overall university experience	Yes	
Employability	Em1	Exceed 80% graduate employment for Student Staff and Sabbatical Officers	Partial	100%
	Em2	Achieve a workforce that represents our student demographic	Yes	91%
	Em3	Impact – Students report that UWLSU helps students enter a well-paying job in a field of their choice with a career pathway	Yes	

CounterCulture Research

As part of UWLSU's continued approach to draw in sector insights, the SU commissioned CounterCulture, an organisation specialising in higher education policy and insight, to write a report on the key trends and research on the challenges and opportunities for the sector.

The report asked CounterCulture to provide insights on the following:

- The current political landscape and direction of travel for funding, research and prioritisation of higher education in the country.
- An overview of current research that tells us the themes of what students are asking for in their higher education experience, and what their current challenges are – both from their university and their Students' Union.
- What specific demographics of students are telling us what they want from their university experience, most crucially BAME students; International students; mature students; students with disabilities; parents and LGBTQ+ communities.
- A summary of the key trends in London-based universities in the recruitment of students, specifically looking at what students are seeking from a London-based learning experience.



Key recommendations from the report:

- To evaluate the extent to which UWLSU will have to consider a student support package that includes significant financial support and goods in kind over a number of years.
- To evaluate the extent to which UWLSU's current offer is accessible to a student body that may be working more and away from campus more often.
- To consider how UWLSU will engage with the University on the long-term financial health of the sector.
- To map, understand and evaluate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on its campaigns, work with the university and support for students
- To develop a deeper understanding of the impact of the changing finance regime, the impact on UWL and how UWLSU can respond to it.
- To build a shared approach on how UWL and UWLSU can put in place continual reflective practice to understand the motivations and expectations of their changing cohorts.
- To work with students to understand the extent to which UWL and UWLSU is supporting the autonomy of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students within their spaces.
- To work with students to understand how UWLSU can meet the needs of a mature student cohort that is both more diverse than the general student population and over-represented within their cohort.
- To investigate, interrogate and evaluate how the changing nature of internationalisation will have a distinct impact on UWLSU.
- To work with the University in considering how the institution may adopt to a LLE model.*
- To establish means of working with the University to discuss the sensitive issue of freedom of speech in anticipation of changing government legislation.
- To work with the University in the more effective systematic recording of the experiences of LGBTQ+, mature and disabled students.

*Given recent changes in policy, this recommendation is likely to be redundant.



Student Consultation

As part of identifying student views to incorporate within the strategy, UWLSU set out to gather these views in the following methods:

- Outreach project around all UWL campuses, speaking to and engaging with students to understand what they would like from us as an SU
- Survey-based questionnaire asking what students would like from us
- The outreach project sought to gather feedback through open responses, whereas the survey method presented student with options for their answers, requiring them to pick 3 that they felt were most important to them. This distinction is necessary as the results are significantly different depending on the method used.
- The questions used for both student consultations methods are:
 - What's important to you during your studies here?
 - What support do you expect from your Students' Union?
 - What behaviours and skills would you want people in your SU to have?
 - What can we improve about your student experience currently?

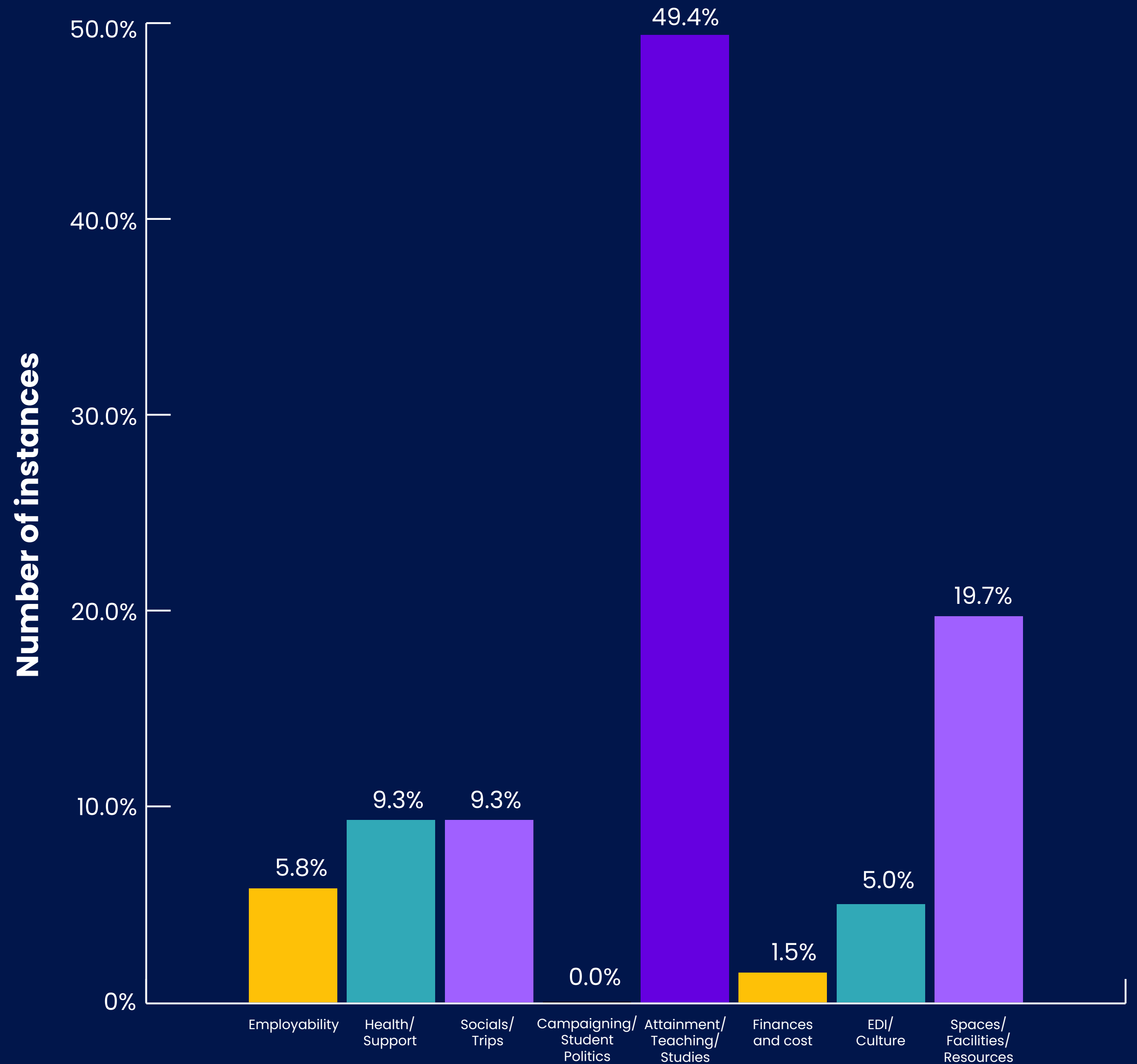
Full results can be found in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3



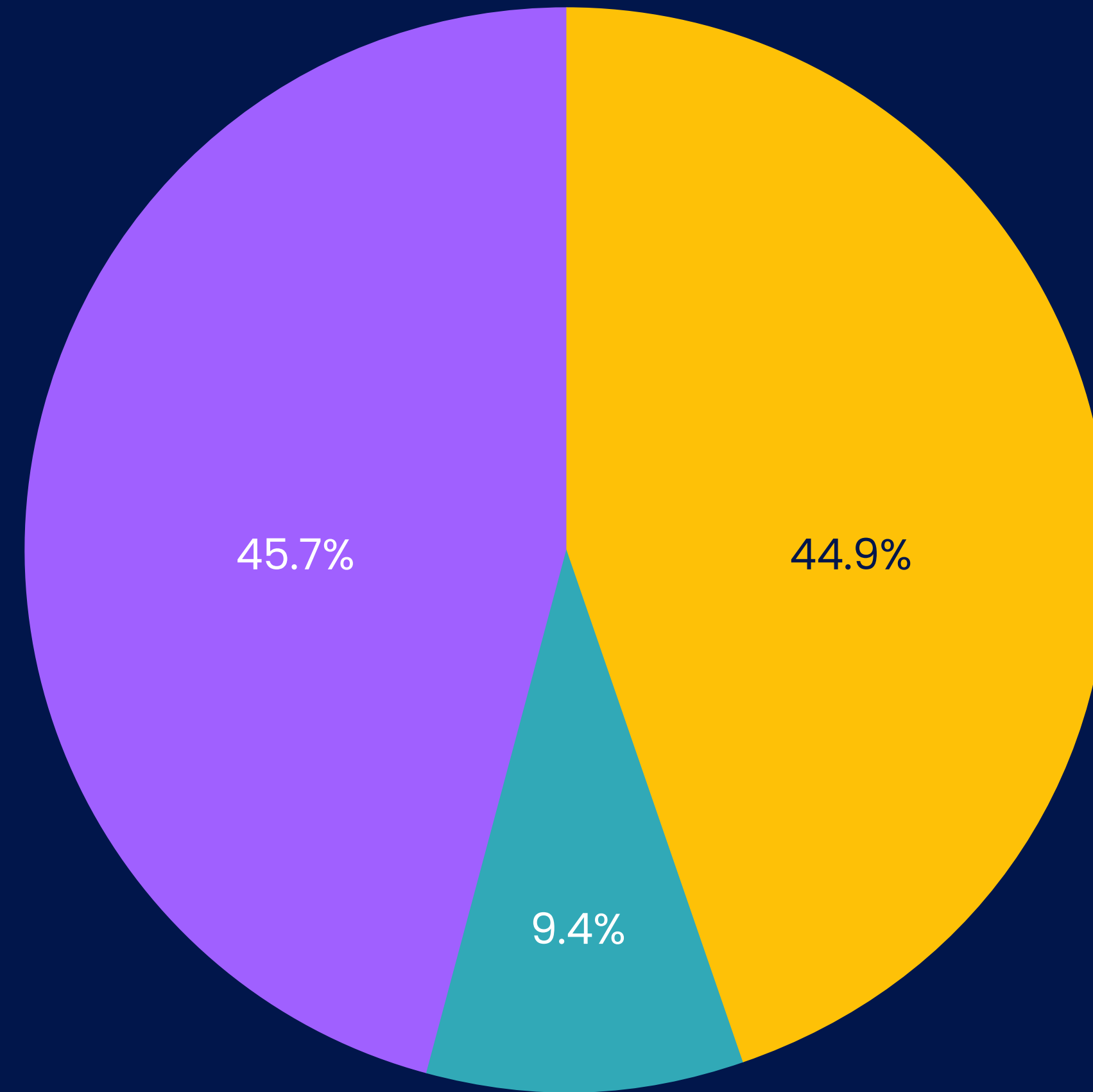
APPENDIX 2

Student Consultation Themes Outreach Method

What's important to you during your studies here?



Sub-Themes: Attainment

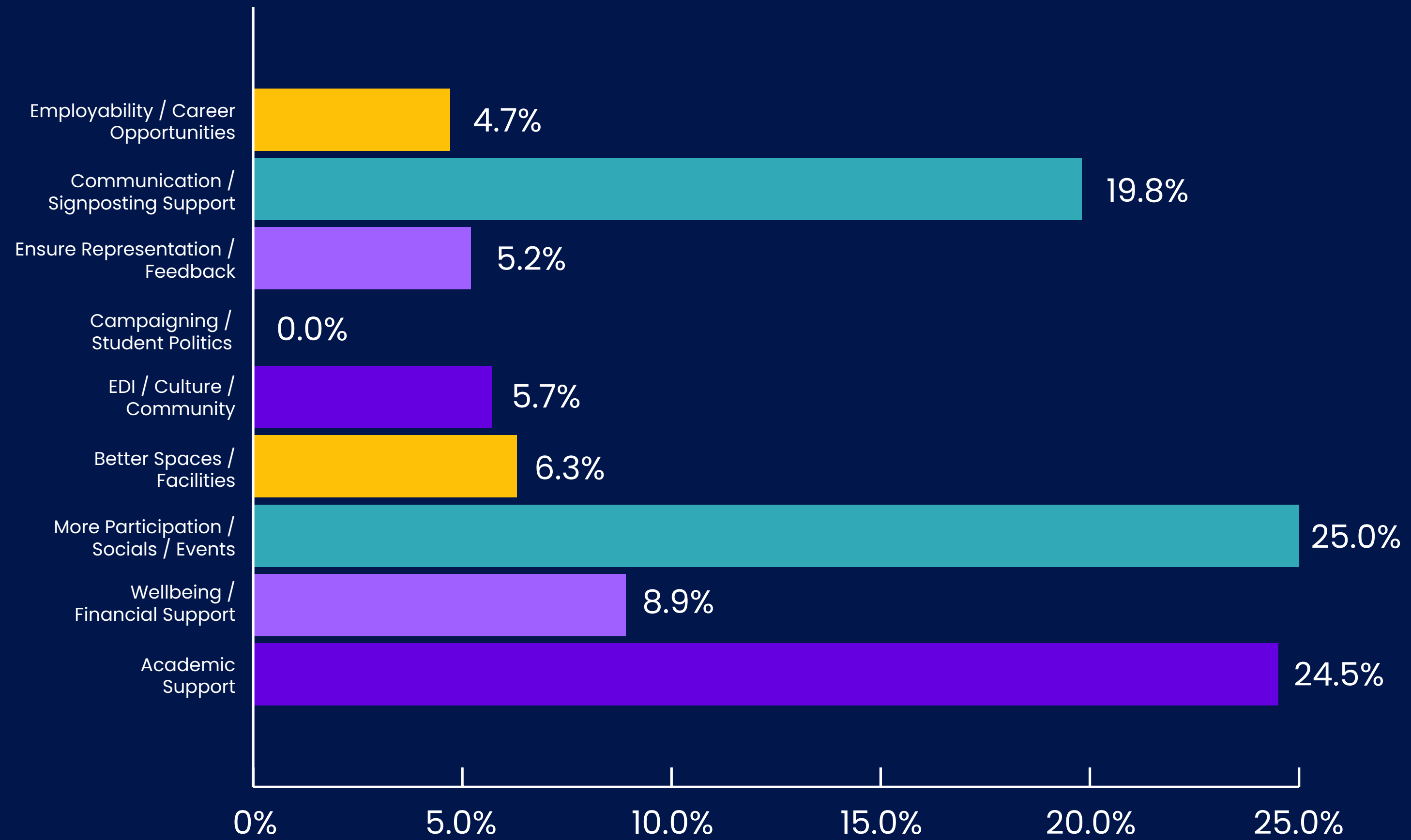


Teaching / Quality of Teaching

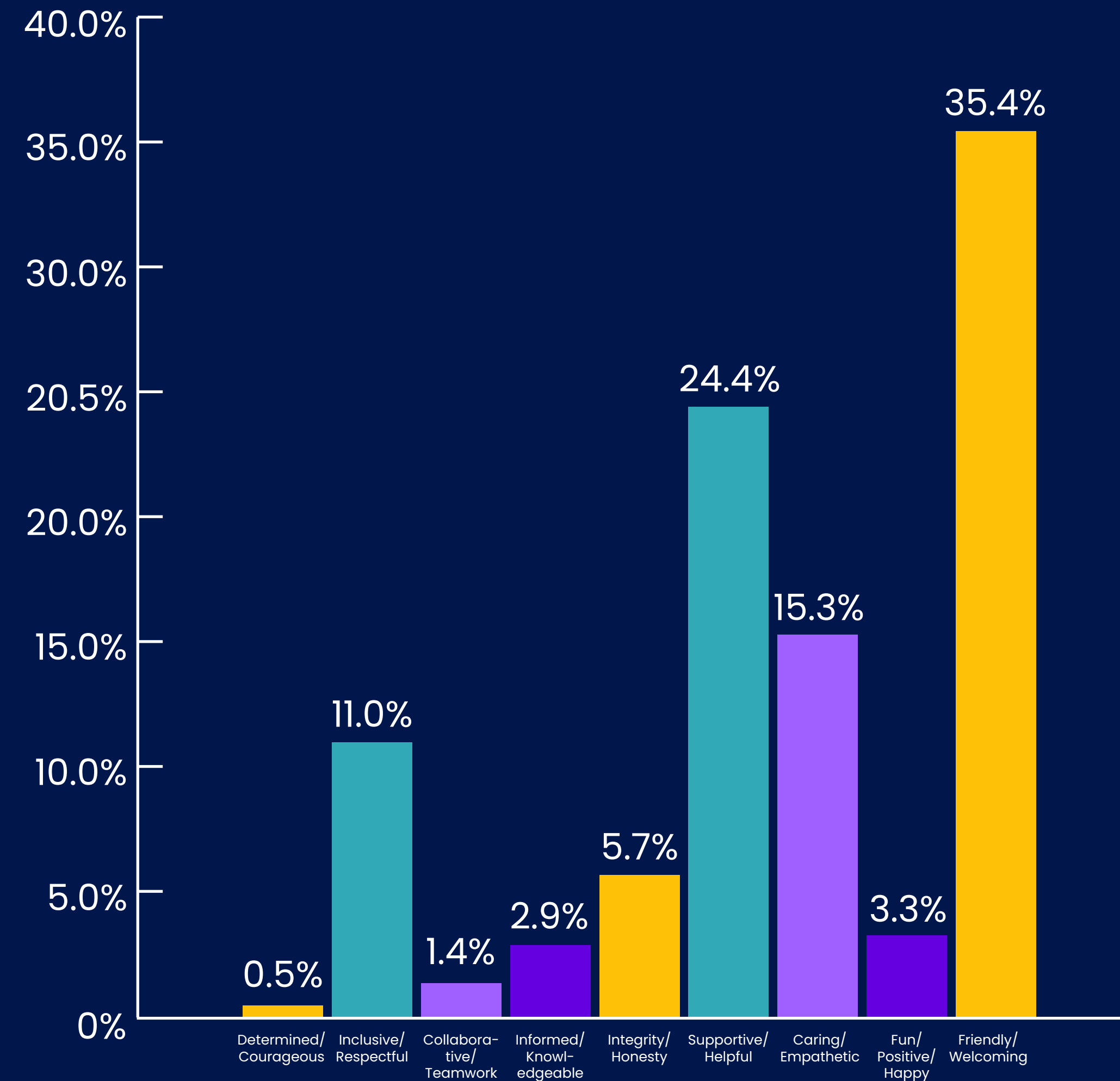
Degree / Knowledge / Learning

Logistics / Timetable

What support do you expect from your Students' Union

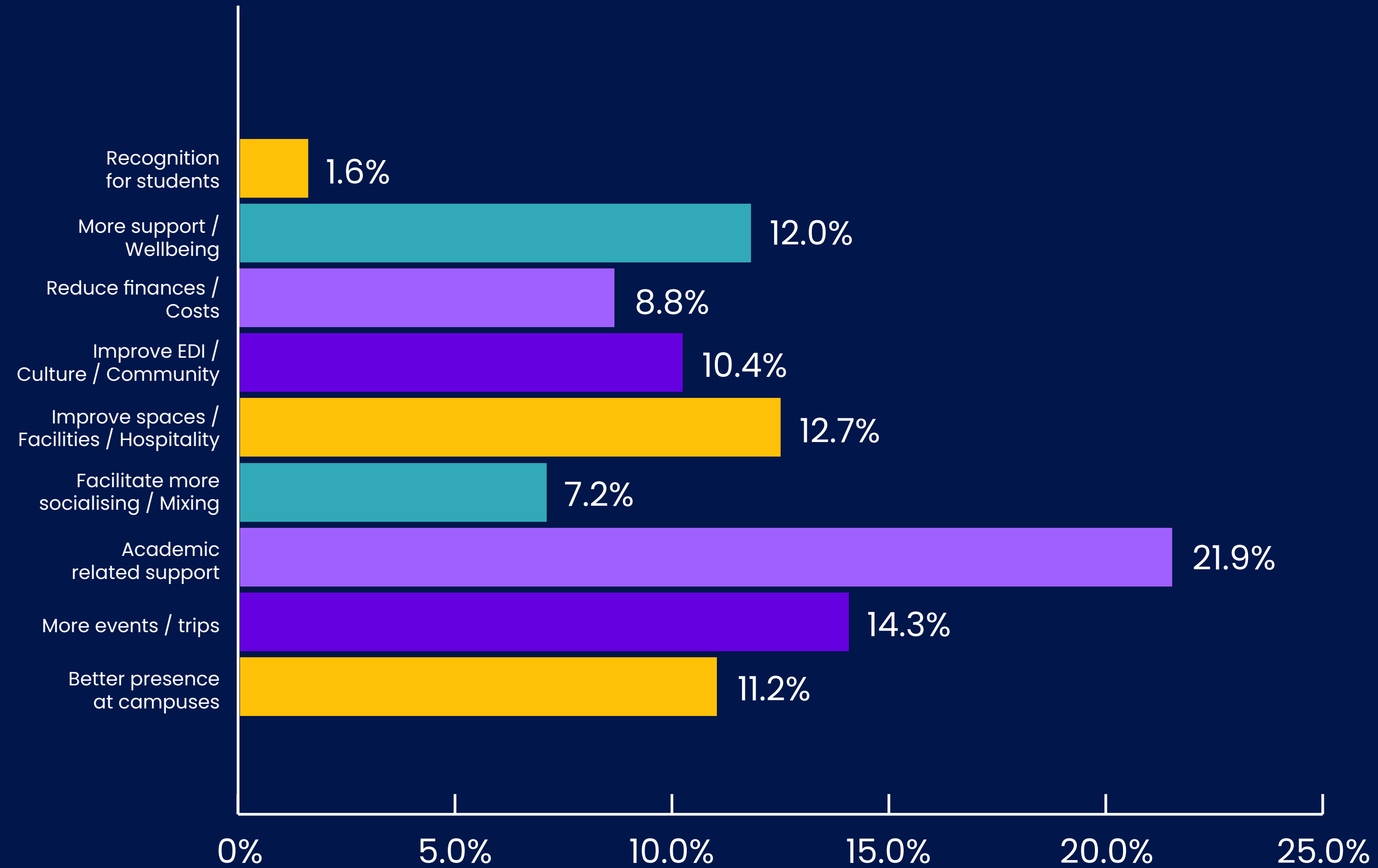


What behaviours and skills would you want people in your SU to have?



*Q4 analysed combining both methods given answers were free text or option-based

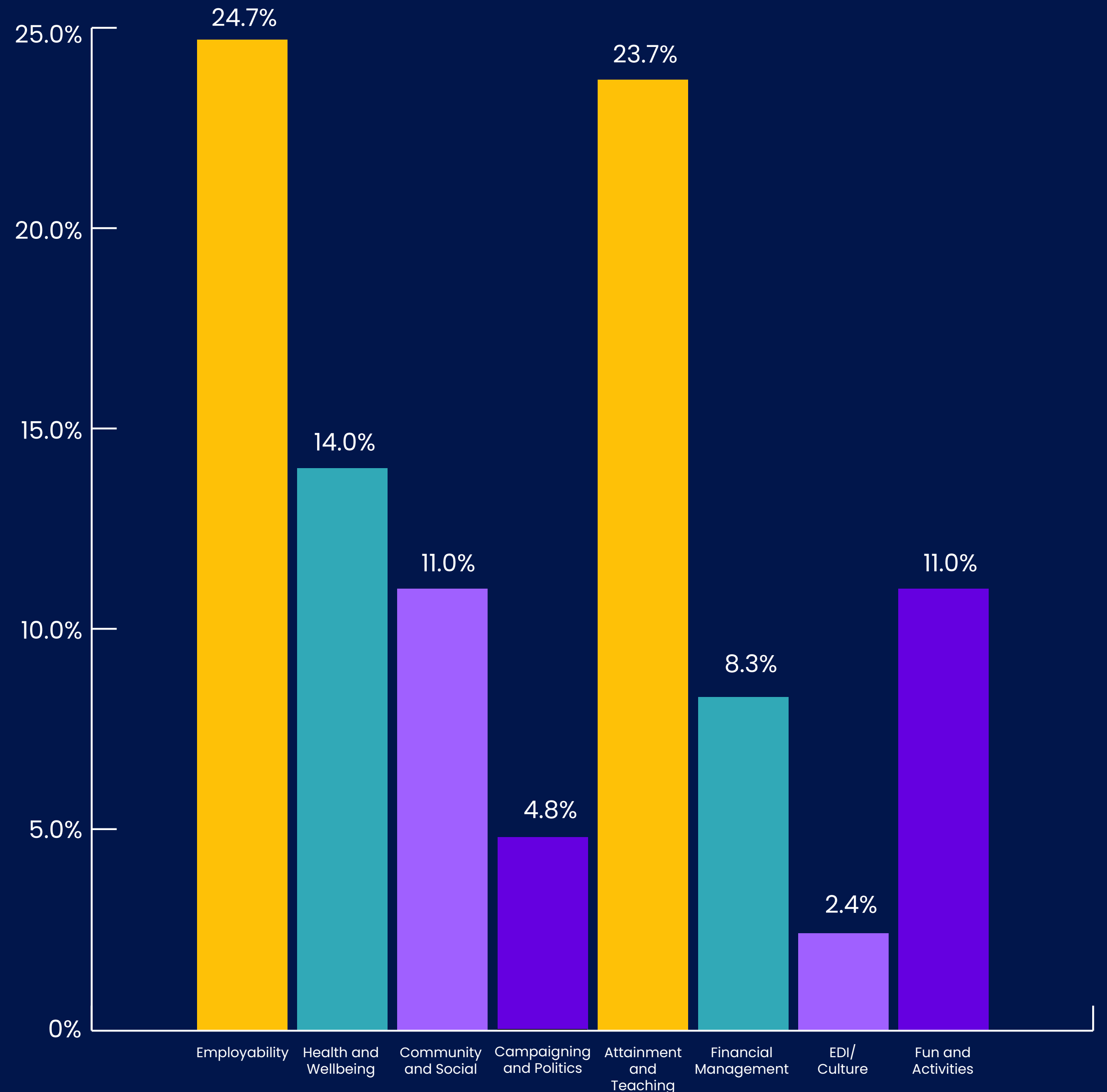
Is there anything else that you would improve about your student experience?



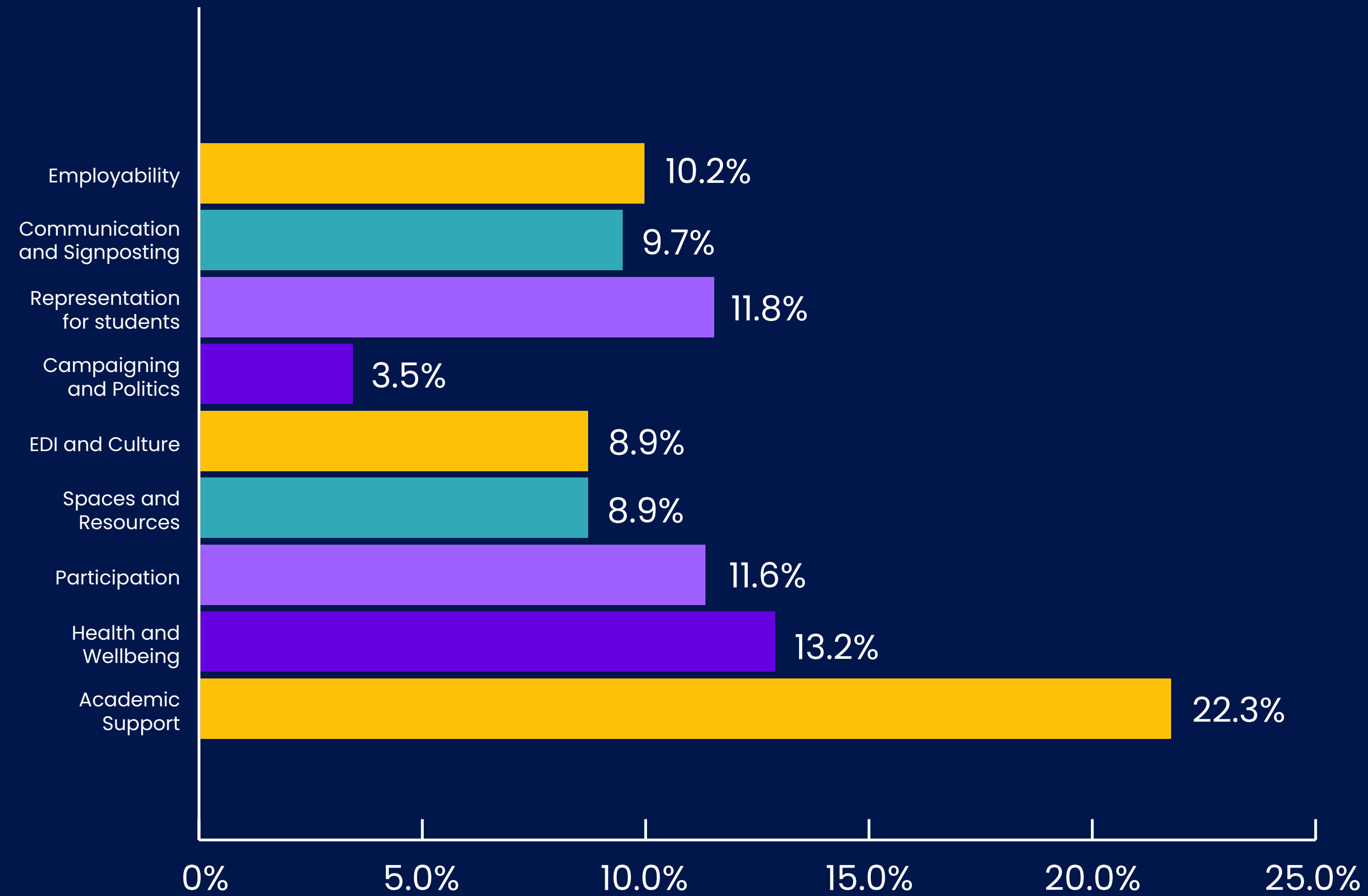
Student Consultation Themes

Option-based Method

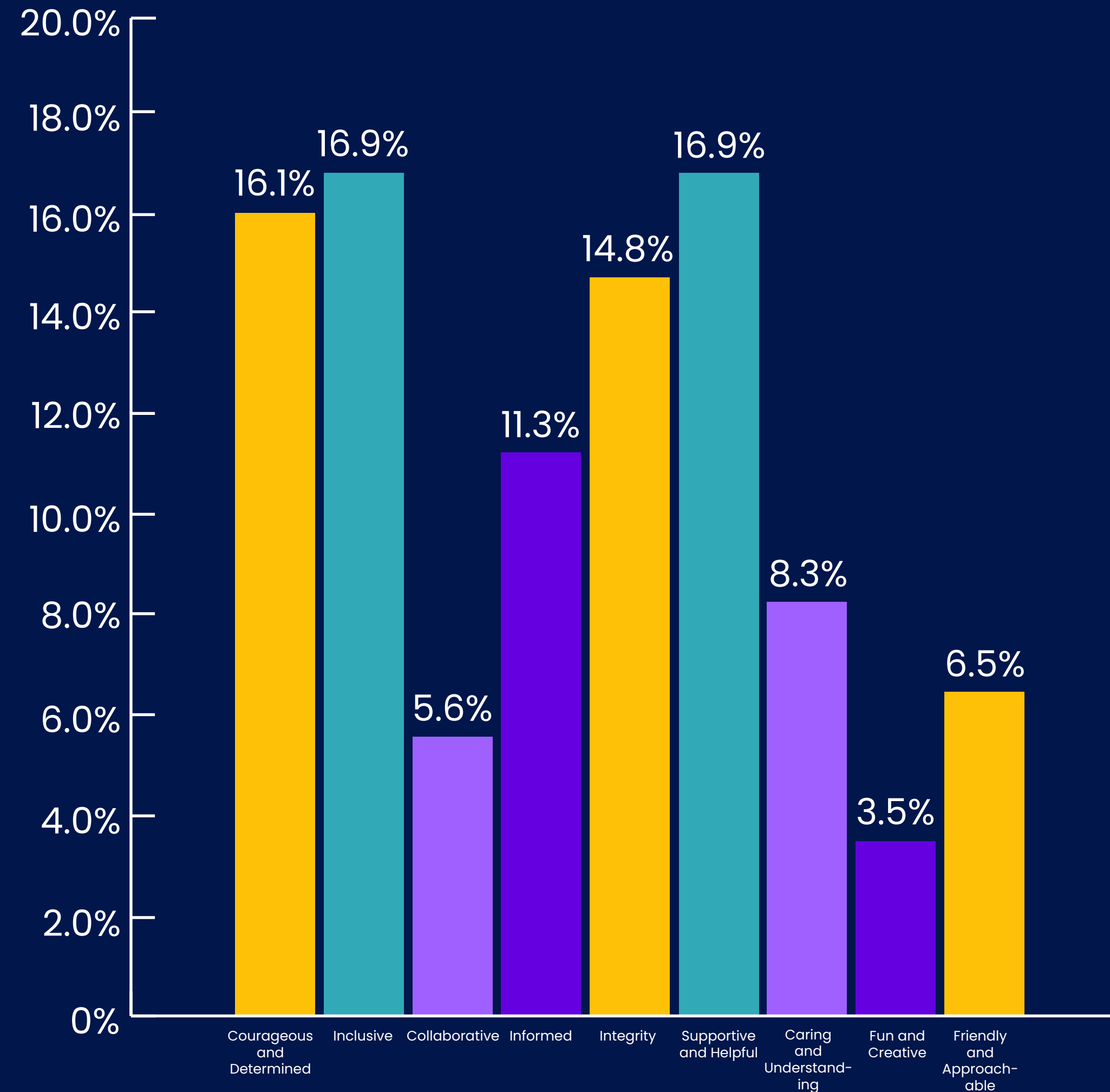
What's important to you during your studies here?



What support do you expect from your Students' Union?



What skills and behaviours would you like SU staff to have?



*Q4 analysis included in Appendix 2, combining both outreach and option-based methods

Key themes and insights

Student consultation



Attainment-related themes, as expected, stand out as students' perception of what is important to them at UWL [Question 1]. This changes fairly significantly when students are presented with options, with Employability being the most important factor for students. The Attainment theme includes quality of teaching, appropriate organisation of courses, and the actual degree content as important aspects for students.

This is followed by Health and Wellbeing; and Spaces, Facilities and Resources as the next most important themes for students.



With regards to expectations of the Students' Union, students' answers focused on Participation themes, which include trips, events and socialising opportunities. The expectations around academic support also feature strongly in the responses.

The next most important expectations, particularly with the outreach method, centre on the SU supporting students through signposting and communications, effectively giving students information about University services and more.

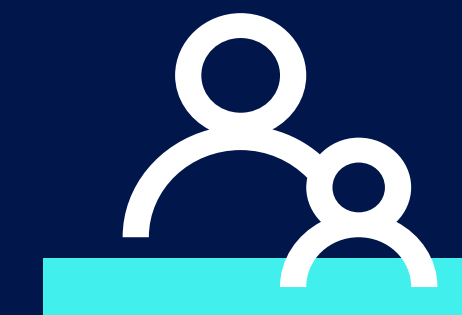
When presented with options, expectations around Representing Students, Health and Wellbeing and Employability support are much more prevalent.



The third question centres on values and behaviours of the Students' Union. When given open responses, students tended to acknowledge that friendliness, approachability and welcoming behaviours were key.

However, when presented with statements referring to differing traits, such as Inclusive, Supportive or Determined, students opted to choose these as most important. The importance of Friendliness and associated terms drastically reduced.

In both methods, Supportive is regarded as highly appreciated amongst students, demonstrating its value.



With regards to other suggestions from students to improve their experience, their answers similarly centred on further academic-related support. Many responses spoke to specific course-related support.

This was followed by requests for more trips and events; and better facilities and spaces.

Students' Union presence at campus was particularly mentioned too, with many students referencing a perceived disparity of support for Brentford and Reading-based students.

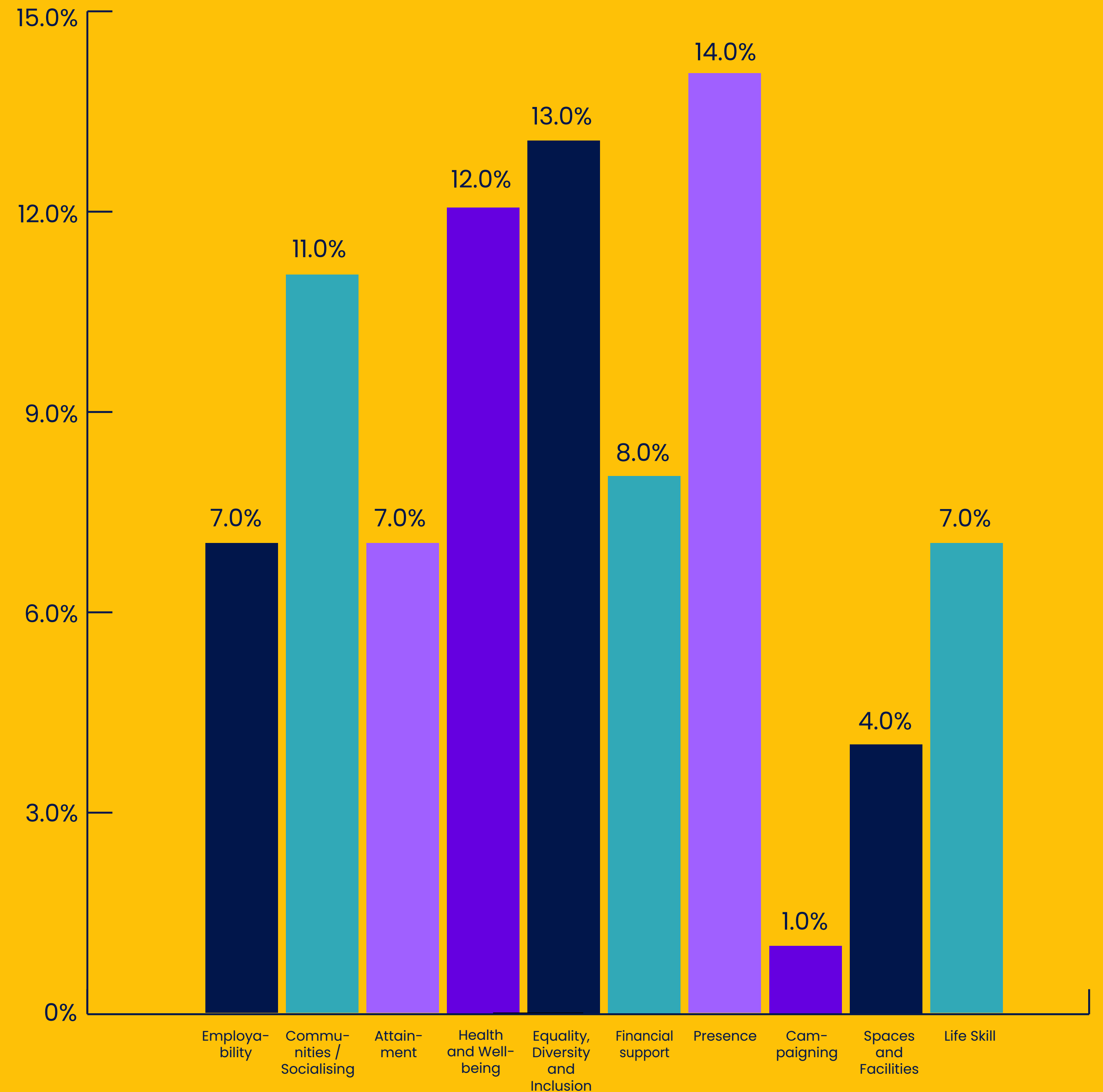
Students didn't reference further support for financial matters as highly as expected.

APPENDIX 4

Staff consultation themes

Key areas to focus on

Important themes for students in the next 5 years



Key themes and insight

Staff consultation

Staff from UWLSU were initially asked to provide thoughts on what they felt the key challenges were for UWL students over the next 5 years. Staff discussed a range of different themes relating to:



Cost-of-living challenges



Commuting challenges



Accommodation scarcity



A lack of community and belonging among students



A lack of socialisation skills post-Covid



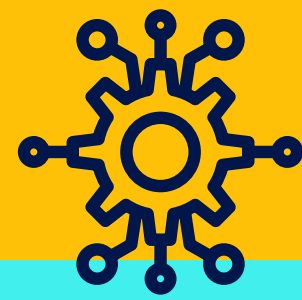
Internationalisation of University



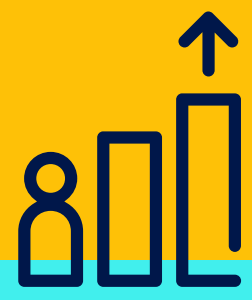
Changing student behaviours



Mental health and wellbeing



AI and academic intelligence



Changing career markets



Overload of information



Space and resource on campus

Predominantly, staff focused on financial challenges and the impacts that external environmental factors are currently having on student wellbeing and satisfaction. However more intricate discussions took place regarding person-centric challenges such as community, socialisation, student behaviours, which many theorised that the SU has much more control to mitigate than it actually has.

In order to draw out what the SU can do to support such challenges, staff were given options of areas they felt the organisation should focus on to support students. Appendix 4 indicates the responses, where it is evident that Presence on campus; Fostering equality, diversity and inclusion; Supporting health and wellbeing; and Providing community and socialising opportunities are key.

Within the focus groups, discussions reiterated and supported:

- Inclusion initiatives
- Presence at all campuses
- Supporting job prospects
- Coaching life skills
- Ensuring affordability on campus
- Representing student views
- Communication and visibility of the SU
- Diversification of events and activities
- Mentoring and developing student leaders
- Encouraging creativity and innovation in teams

It was recognised within the focus groups that there were particular areas of UWLSU's delivery that required further work, in particular with regards to student demographics. As an organisation, we need to develop further skills to understand what was needed to help these students. The overall themes are:

Demographics of students to improve our support for:

- International students
- Mature students
- Student Parents
- Black Students
- Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences
- Religious Students
- Home Students

Support mechanisms and further development were also discussed in the following areas:

- Creating a recognisable brand and presence
- Connecting with students on a deeper level
- Amplifying student stories through marketing
- Coaching and mentoring student leaders
- Improving feedback mechanisms
- Knowledge around building communities
- Further staff training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Our Theory of change statement:

It is important to note that whilst UWLSU prides itself on being knowledgeable of what support students need to university, we use or principle of partners with UWL to ensure that our visions and ideas are feasible and additionally endorsed by key UWL departments, the UWLSU Trustee Board, and UWL Vice-Chancellors Executive

As such, we engaged with many of our UWL departments from the VCE, Library; Careers; Volunteering; Quality; Study Support; Student Experience; Wellbeing and Student Advice. The aim of this engagement was to identify opportunities for partner departments to support in the delivery of any key strategic aims. This will form part of the mapping process to analyse the progress of each area and allow for good collaboration and expertise on any particular areas that are challenging, or underperforming.

Strategically, it is also important that we engage with UWLSU's Trustee Board, who are accountable to the overall success of our organisation. This overall strategic direction will be signed off by them to confirm our approach for the next 5 years. Therefore, this Strategy Development Report proved to be a necessary document to outline the rationale and importance of what UWLSU strives to do.



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