

DECEMBER 2024

Welfare Survey Analysis

Oxford Students' Union



Introduction

General Information

The aim of the Oxford Student Welfare Survey 2024 was to collect student feedback to advocate for a more supportive, inclusive, and understanding academic environment at the University of Oxford. The survey focused on collating data on student well-being, mental health, term-time stressor factors and use of University support services. This research was conducted, managed and written into this report by Ms Rosalie Chapman, Vice-President (Welfare) of the Students' Union 2023-24, and supervised by Dr Addi Haran Diman, President of the Students' Union 2024-2025. The research received CUREC approval (Reference: R91929/RE001).

The survey was optional and available to all current Oxford University students with an SSO login and was open from April 26th to June 9th, 2024, during Trinity Term. None of the individual questions were compulsory, and students were able to skip any questions they didn't want to answer. Students were also able to edit any responses they submitted up until the survey closed. In addition, all responses were collected entirely anonymously.

A total of 2116 responses were collected.

Survey Demographics

Response Rate and Representation

- **Total Responses:** 2116
- **Survey Duration:** April 26th - June 9th, 2024
- **Survey Participation:** Open to all students at the University of Oxford
- **Response Collection Method:** Microsoft Form
- **Communication of Survey:** Two all-student emails from the VP Welfare. Instagram post on the Students' Union Instagram. Promotional posters and message templates were provided to all College Common Room and Society Presidents, as well as Student Welfare Representatives across the University. Promotional material was also shared to Welfare Staff (e.g. Junior Deans, Deans and Welfare Leads) within the collegiate community
- **Consent:** All participating students provided their consent by confirming they were 18 years or older and agreeing to have their data processed after reading the accompanying Participant Information Sheet

Welfare Considerations:

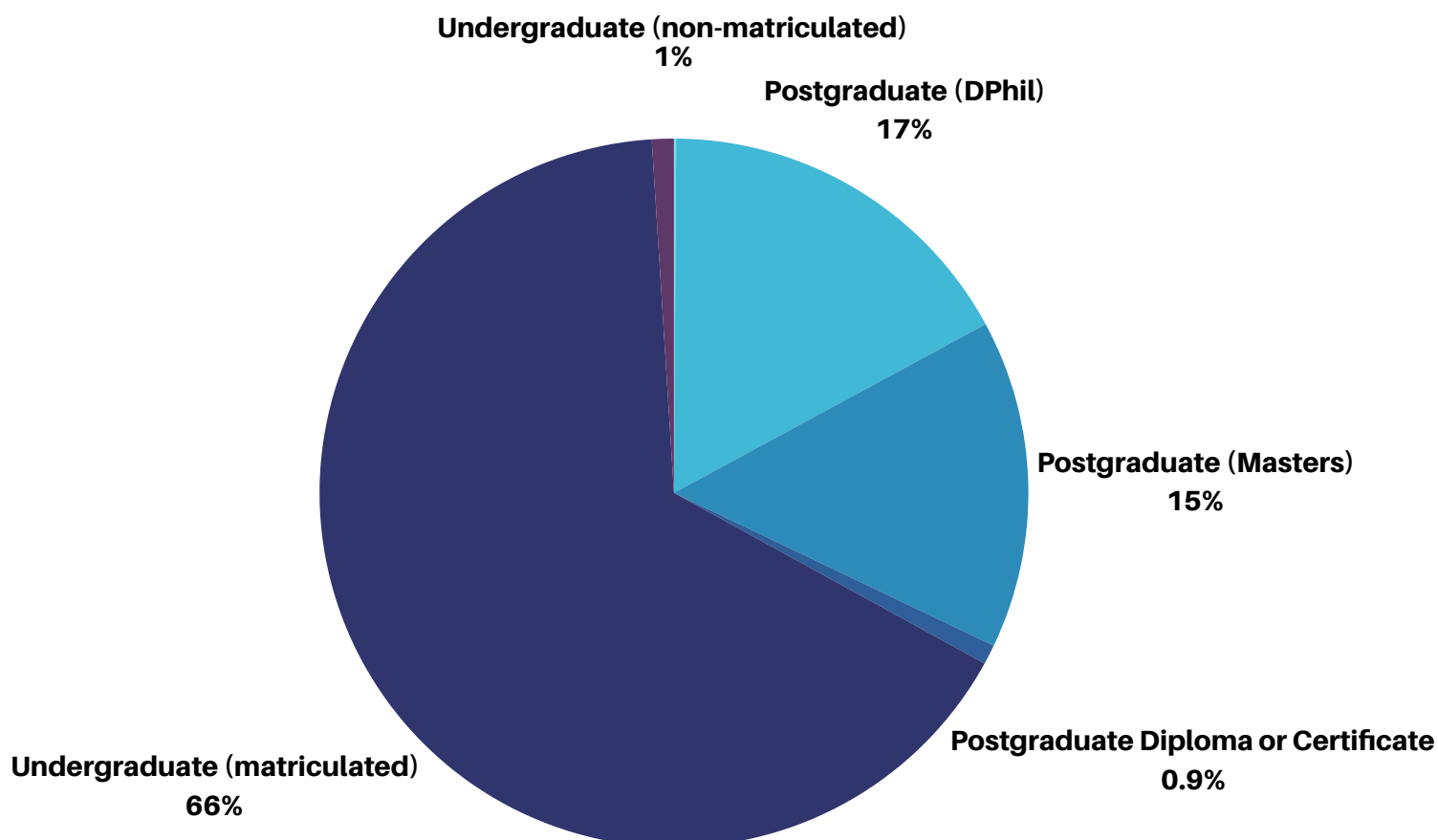
Upon submitting their responses, participants were signposted to appropriate University and external welfare support services to ensure they had access to support if needed. This included contact information for immediate assistance in case of distress: SU Advice Team, University Counselling Service, Support for Survivors of Sexual Misconduct, Samaritans and Rape Crisis 24/7 Helpline.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your level of study?

2114 responses

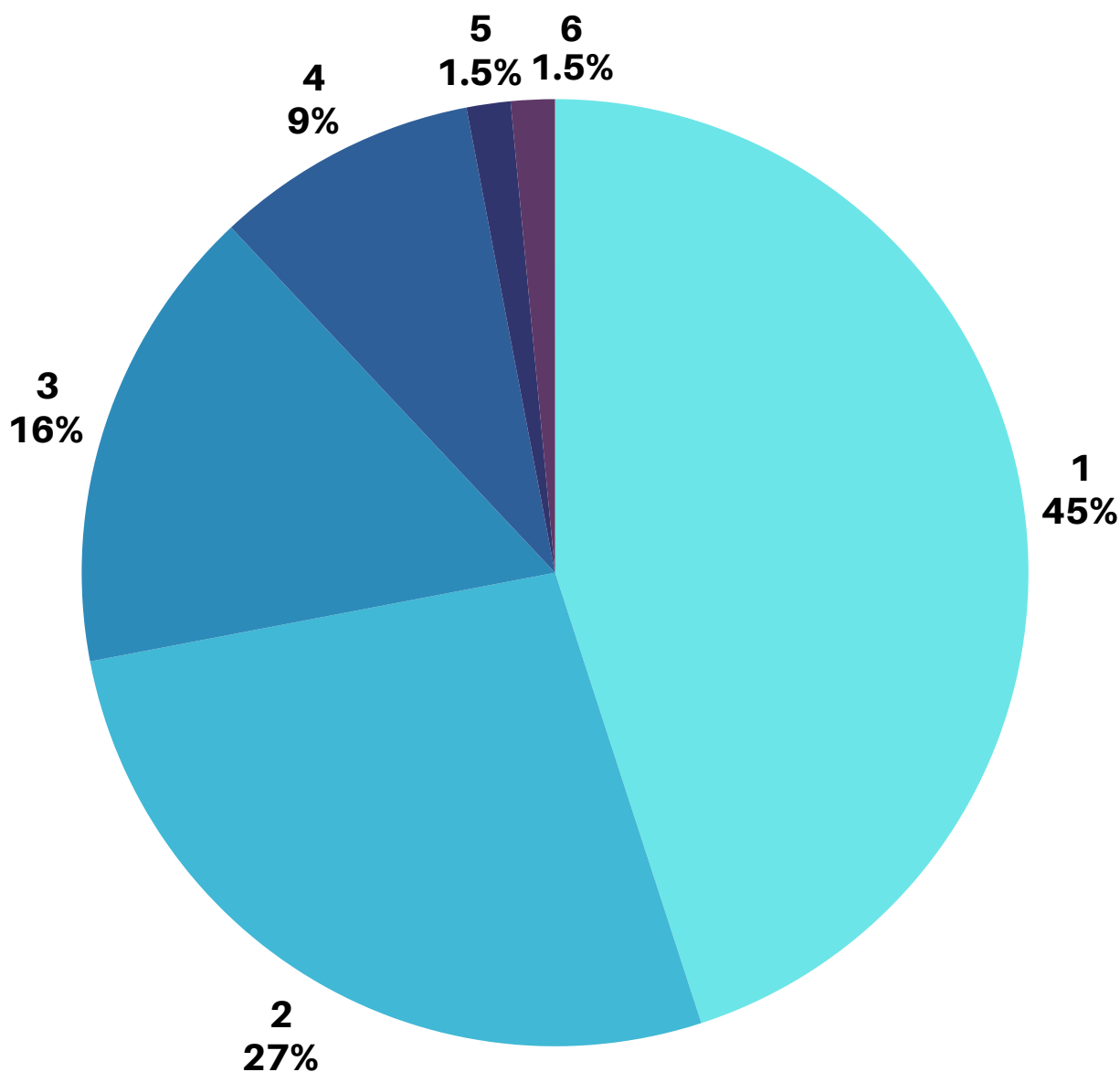
66% of respondents were Undergraduate matriculated, 17% Postgraduate DPhil, 15% Postgraduate Masters, 1% Undergraduate (non-matriculated) and the remainder Foundation Year and Postgraduate Diploma



2. What is your year of study?

2111 responses

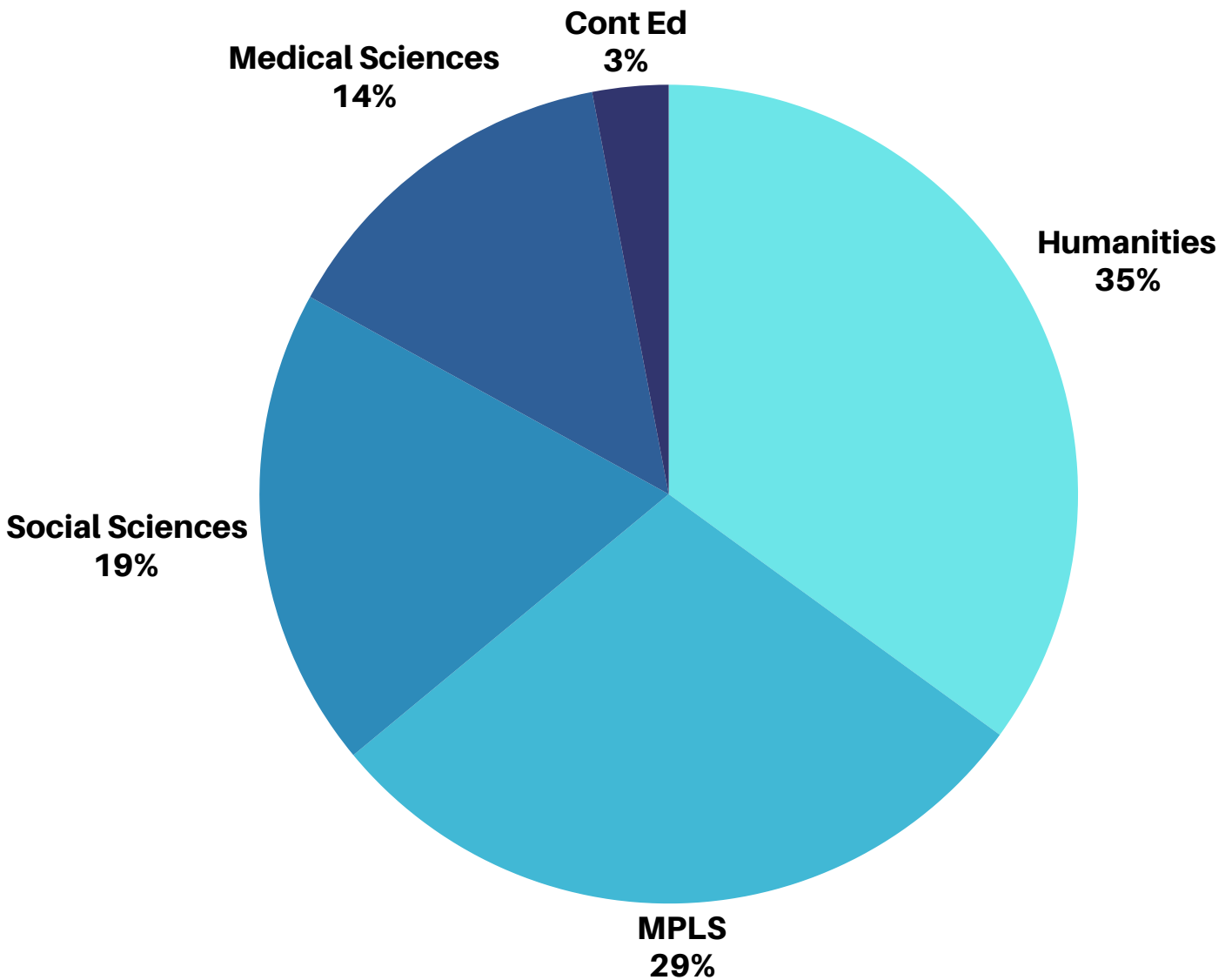
Around 45% of respondents were in their first year of study at Oxford, 27% in their second year, 16% in their third year, 9% in their fourth year, 1% in their fifth year and around 1% in their sixth year of study at Oxford



3. Which division are you a part of?

2108 responses

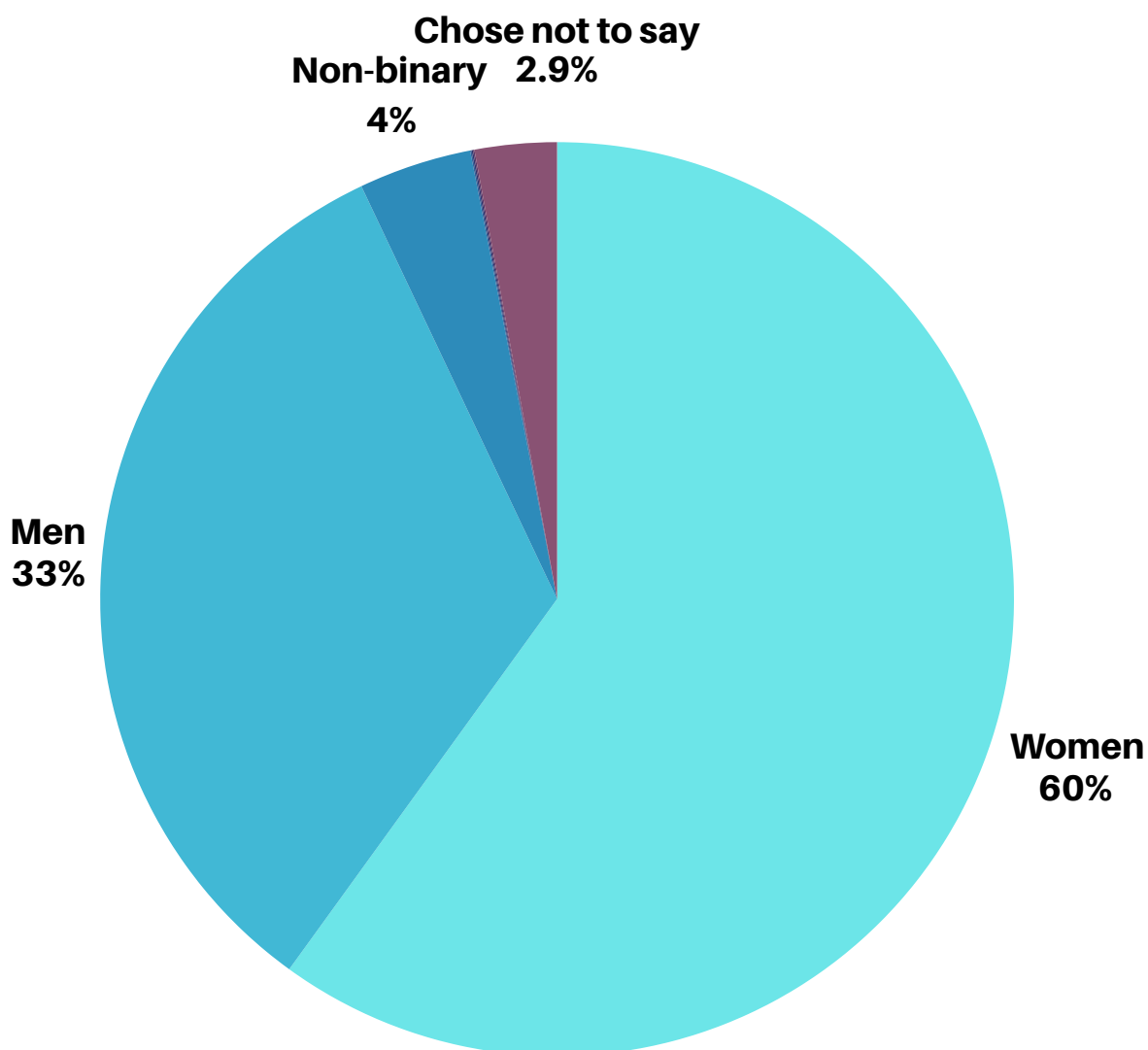
35% of respondents were part of the Humanities division, 29% part of MPLS (Mathematics, Physical and Life Sciences) division, 19% were part of the Social Sciences division, 14% part of the Medical Sciences division, and 3% part of the Department for Continuing Education



4. What is your gender identity?

2098 responses

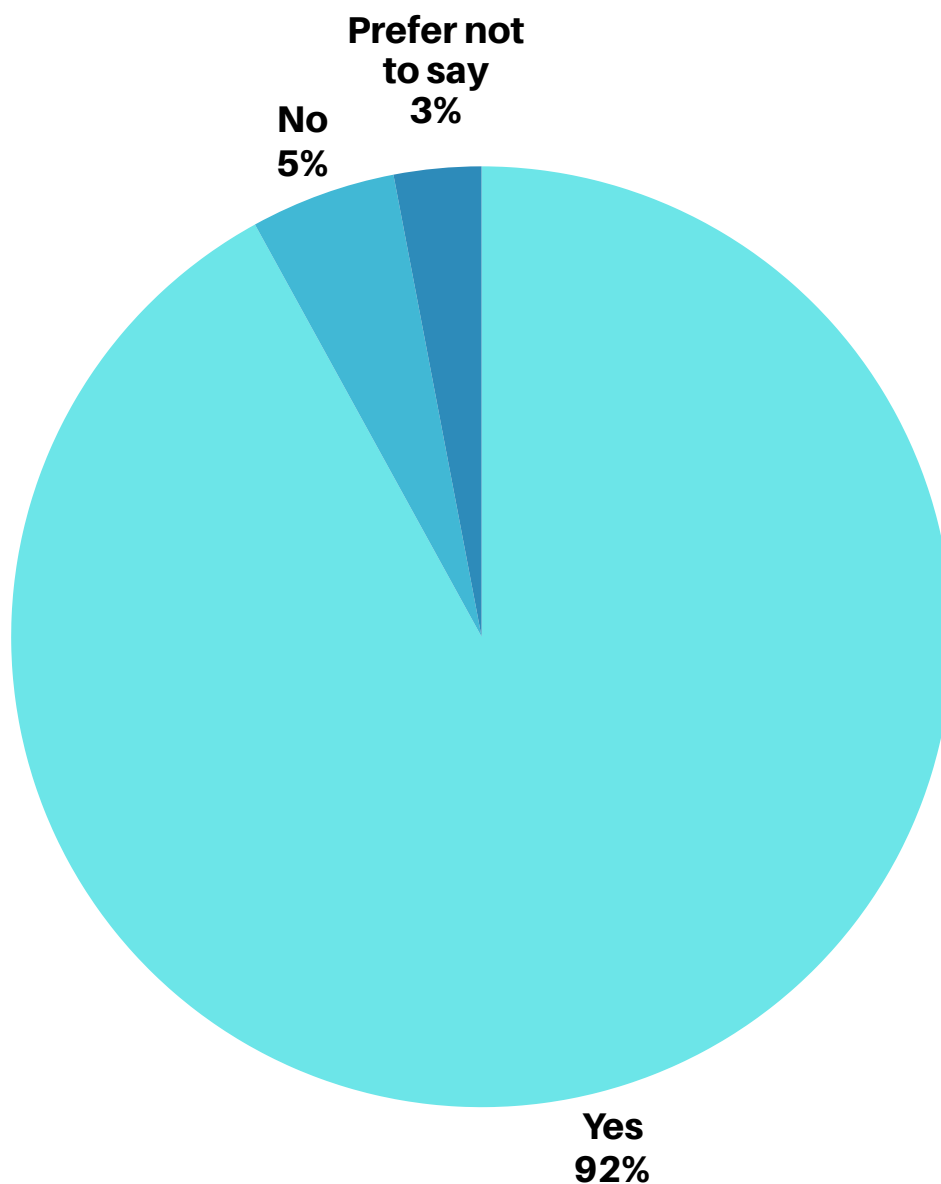
60% of respondents identified as women, 33% of respondents identified as men, 4% were non-binary and 3% of respondents preferred not to say. 1 respondent said they were a trans man, 1 respondent said they were agender and 1 respondent said they were fluid (she/her)



5. Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

2106 responses

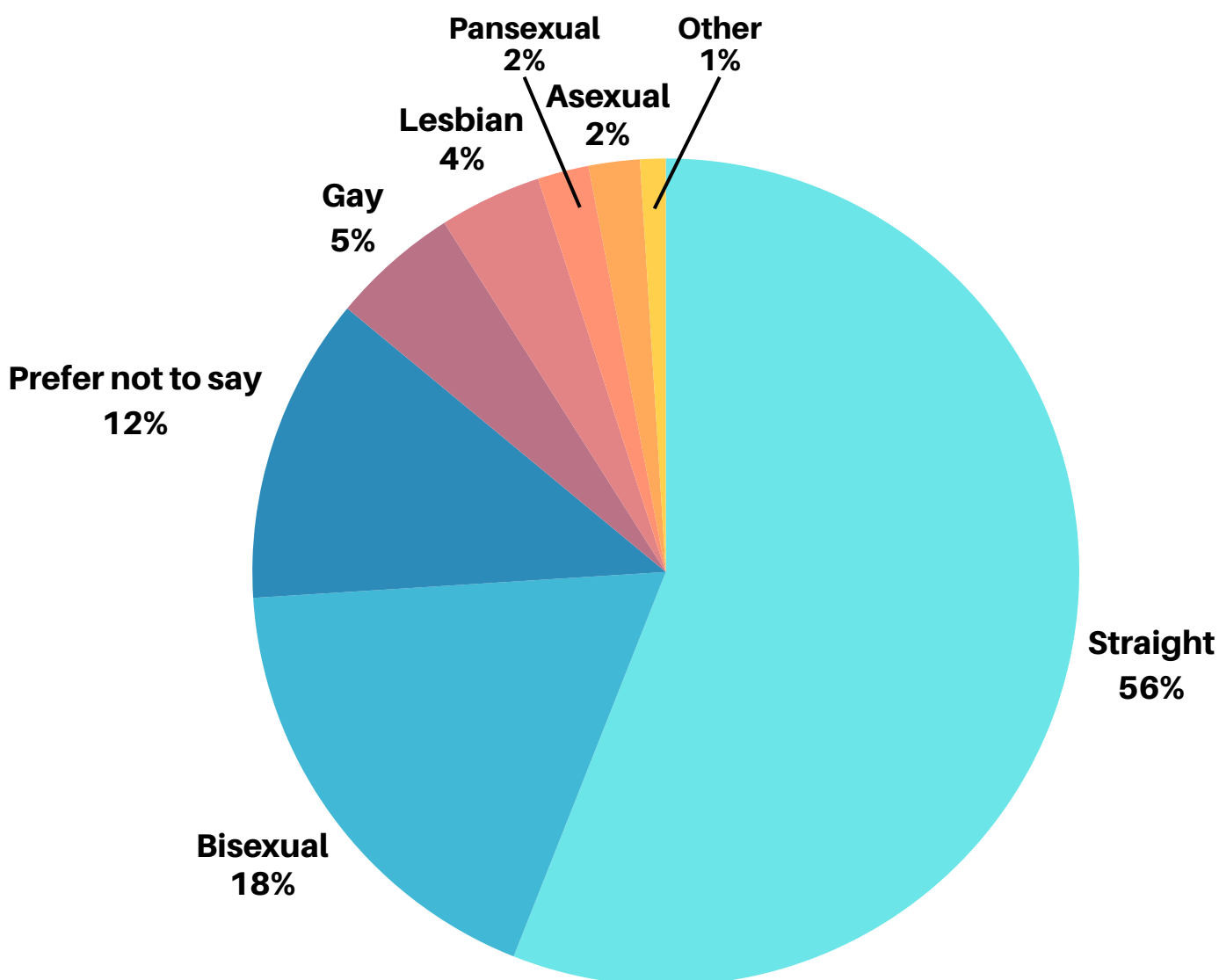
92% of respondents said their gender identity was the same as the sex they were assigned at birth, 5% said their gender identity was not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth, and 3% said they would prefer not to say



6. Which sexual orientation do you identify with?

2100 responses

56% of respondents said they were straight, 18% said they were bisexual, 12% said they would prefer not to say, 5% of respondents said they were gay, 4% said they were lesbian, 2% said they were pansexual and 2% said they were asexual. 20 respondents answered 'other' for this question.

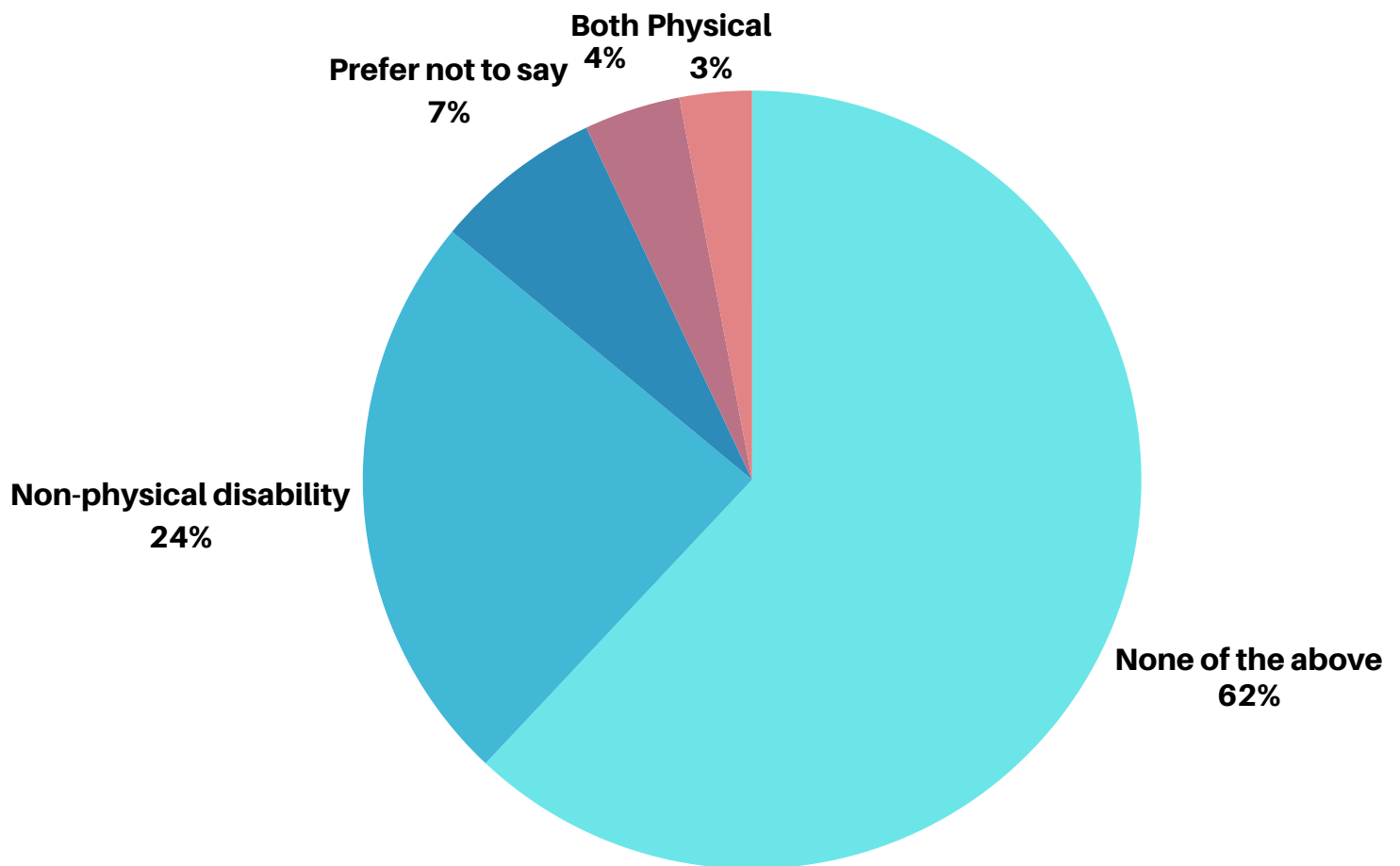


7. Do you consider yourself to have any of the following? (Disability)

2116 responses

62% of respondents said they had neither a physical nor non-physical disability, 24% said they considered themselves to have a non-physical disability, 7% said would prefer not to say, 4% said they had both a physical and non-physical disability, 3% of respondents said they had a physical disability

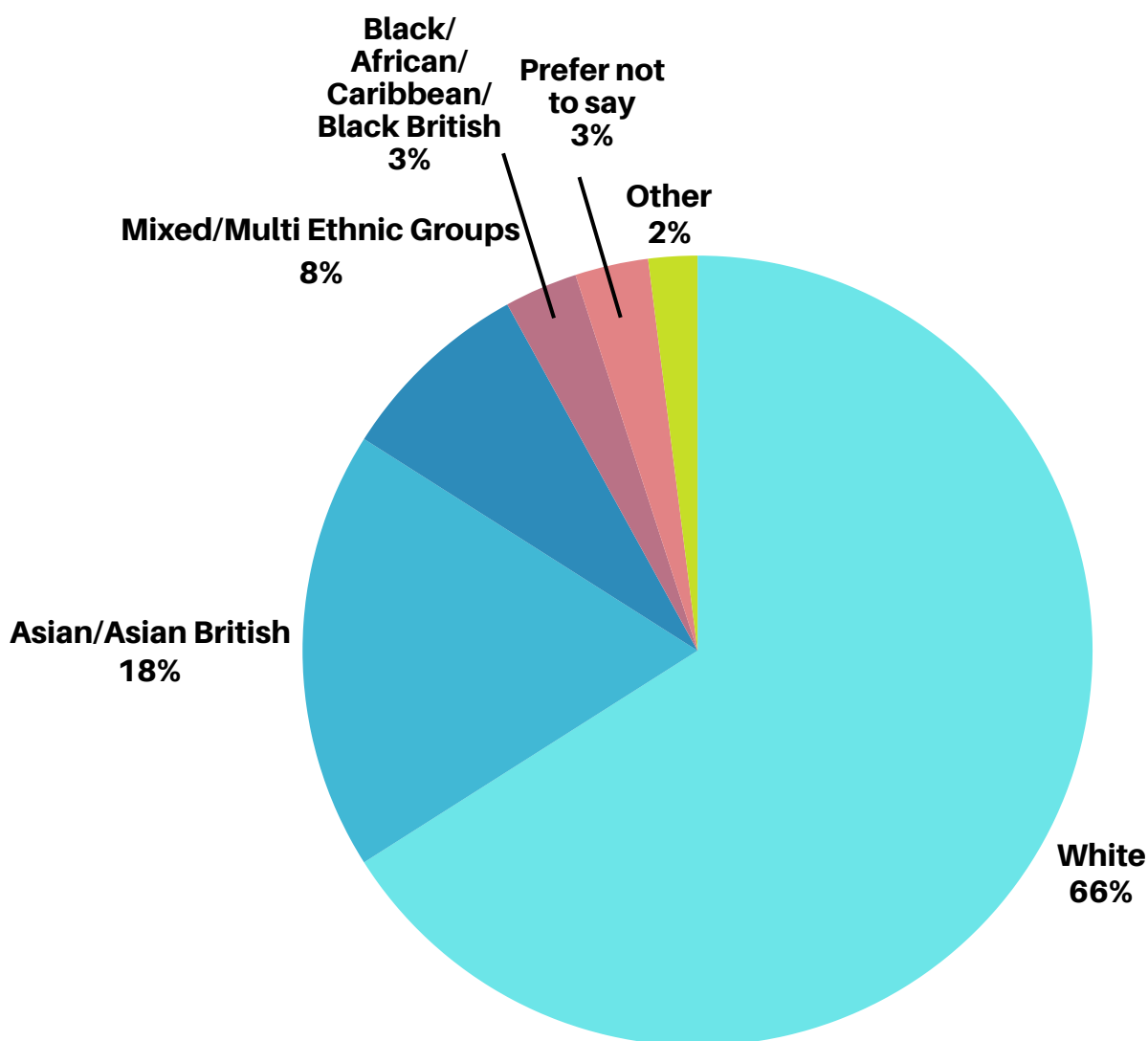
Respondents were able to select all answers which applied to them.



8. Select the ethnicity best describing you

2098 responses

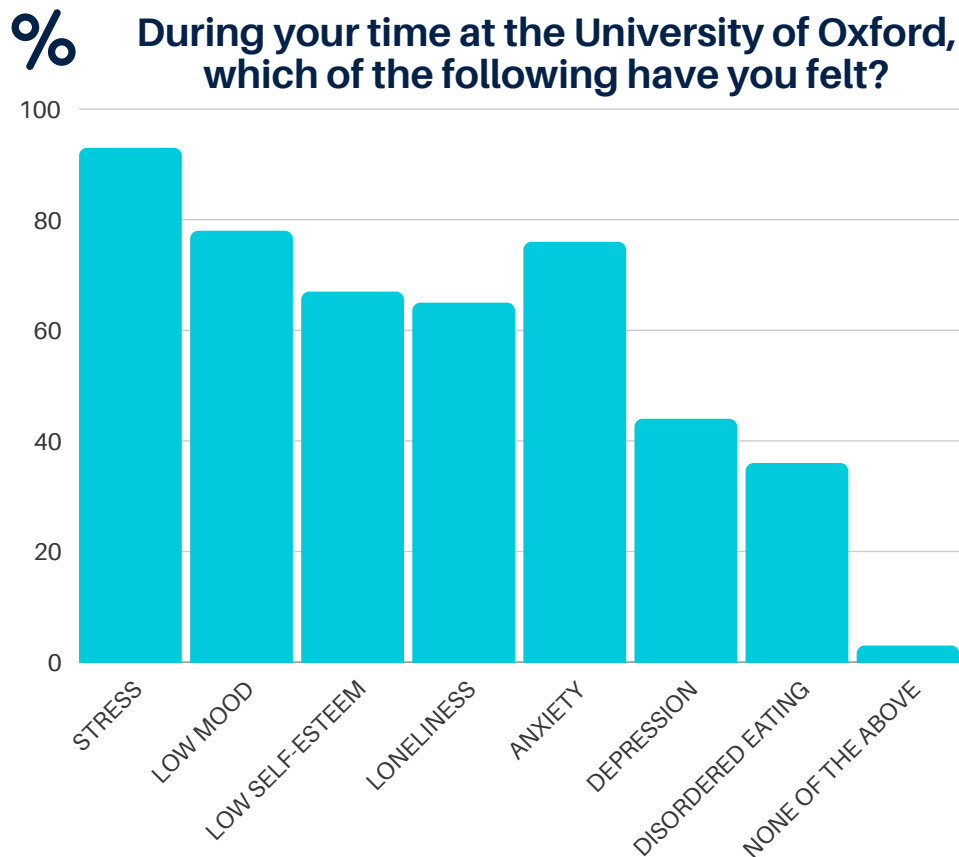
66% of respondents described themselves as White, 18% as Asian/Asian British, 8% as Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups, 3% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, 3% of respondents preferred not to say and 2% selected 'Other'



Wellbeing Questions

This section of the survey asked students how they feel about their own wellbeing.

It included a trigger warning of mental health challenges and emotional distress.



For clarity and consistency, the following terms were defined within the question, based on definitions from national charities:

Anxiety – ‘this refers to often feeling worried, tense or afraid’

Depression – this refers to persistent sadness and lack of interest in activities’

Disordered Eating – ‘this refers to unhealthy eating patterns including restrictive dieting’

9. During your time at the University of Oxford, which of the following have you felt?

2116 responses

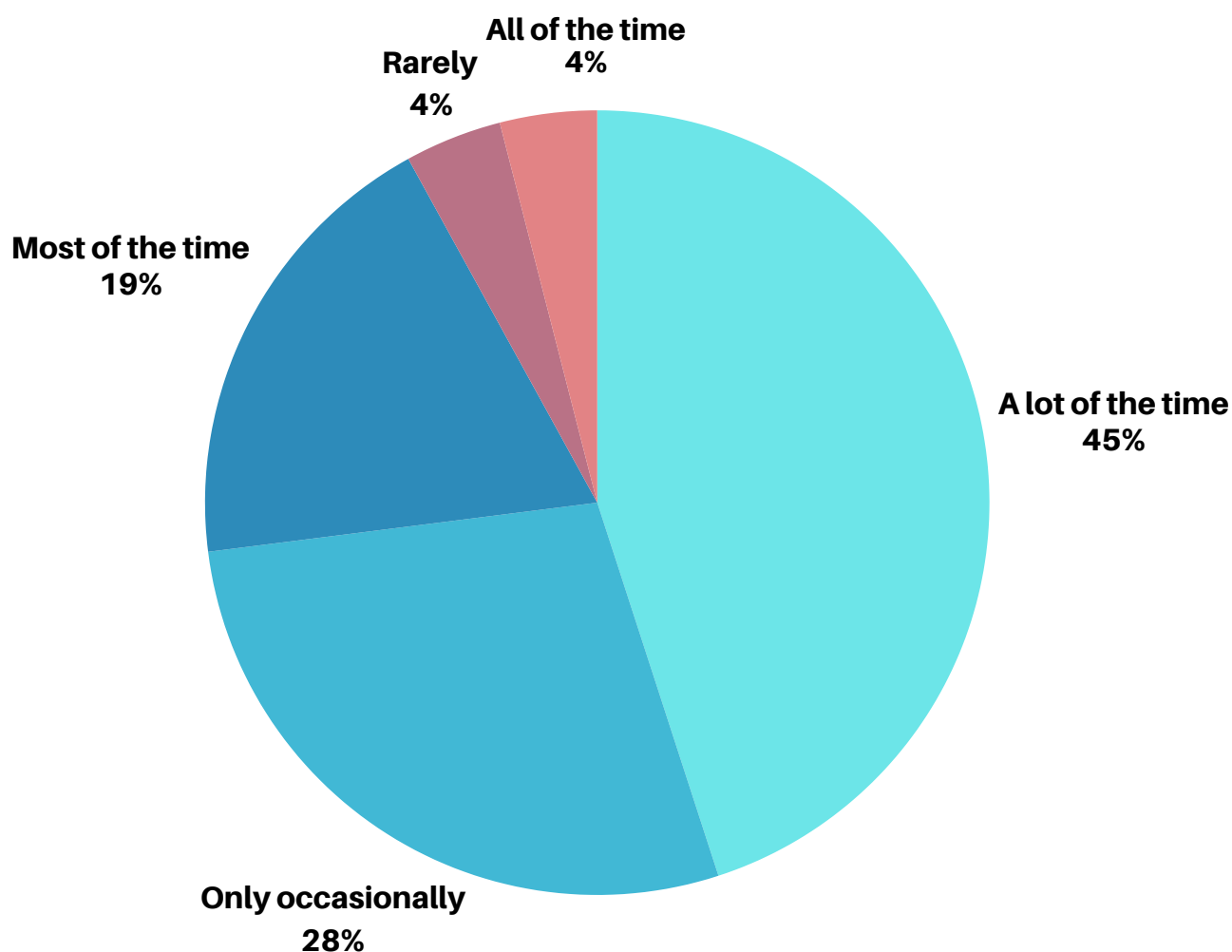
93% of respondents said they had experienced stress during their time at Oxford, 78% of respondents said they had experienced low mood, 67% of respondents said they had experienced low self-esteem, 65% of respondents said they had experienced loneliness, 76% of respondents said they had experienced anxiety, 44% of respondents said they had experienced depression, 36% of respondents said they had experienced disordered eating and 3% of respondents said they had experienced none of the above.

Respondents were able to select all answers which applied to them, so the percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who chose each option rather than totalling to 100%.

10. Throughout your time at Oxford, how often have you experienced these?

2101 responses

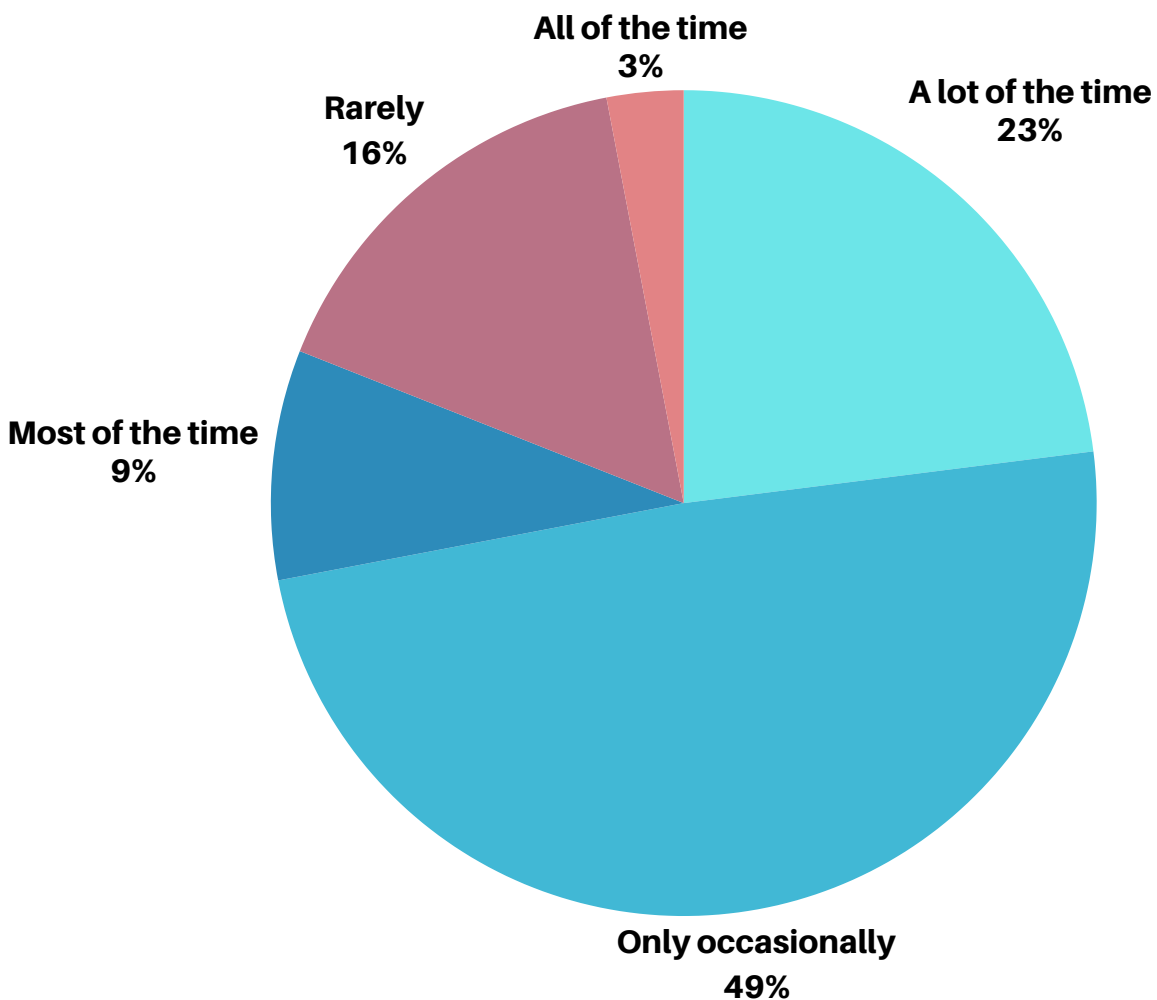
45% of respondents said they experienced the these 'A lot of the time', 28% said 'Only occasionally', 19% said 'Most of the time', 4% said 'Rarely' and 4% of respondents said 'All of the time'



11. How often do you feel isolated from others?

2109 responses

49% of respondents said they feel isolated from others 'Only occasionally', 23% of respondents said they felt isolated from others 'A lot of the time', 16% said they felt isolated 'Rarely', 9% of respondents said they felt isolated from others 'Most of the time', 3% of respondents said they felt isolated from others 'All of the time'

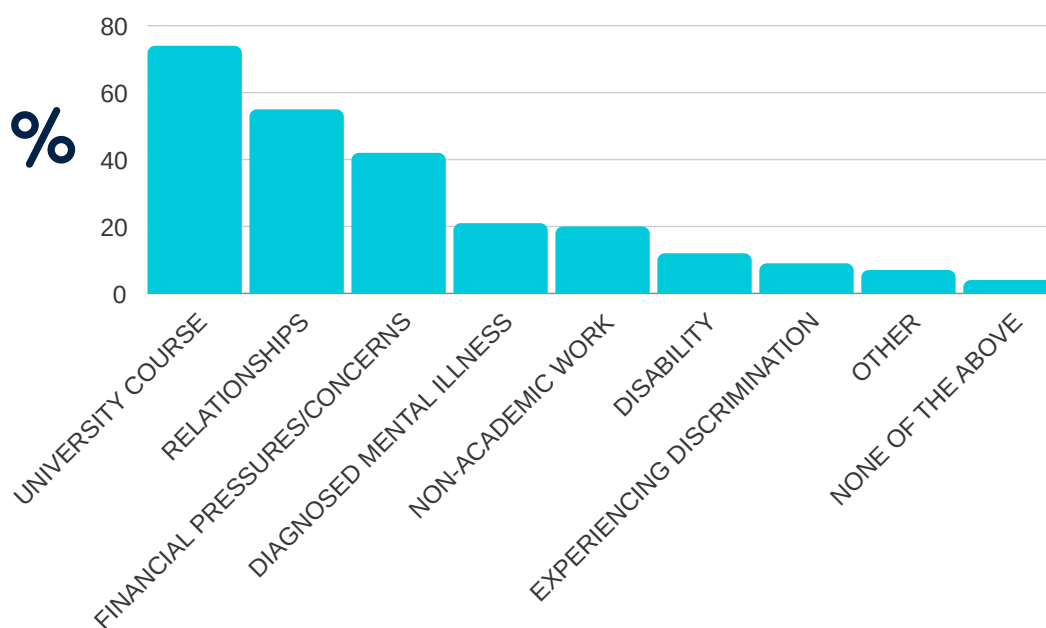


12. Which of the following factors, if any, adversely affect your mental well-being?

2116 responses

74% of respondents said their mental well-being is adversely affected by their university course, 55% said friendly/romantic/familial relationships, 42% said financial pressures and concerns, 21% said diagnosed mental illness, 20% said non-academic work, 12% said disability, 9% said experiencing discrimination, 7% answered other, and 4% answered none of the above.

Respondents were able to select all answers which applied to them, so the percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who chose each option rather than totalling to 100%.



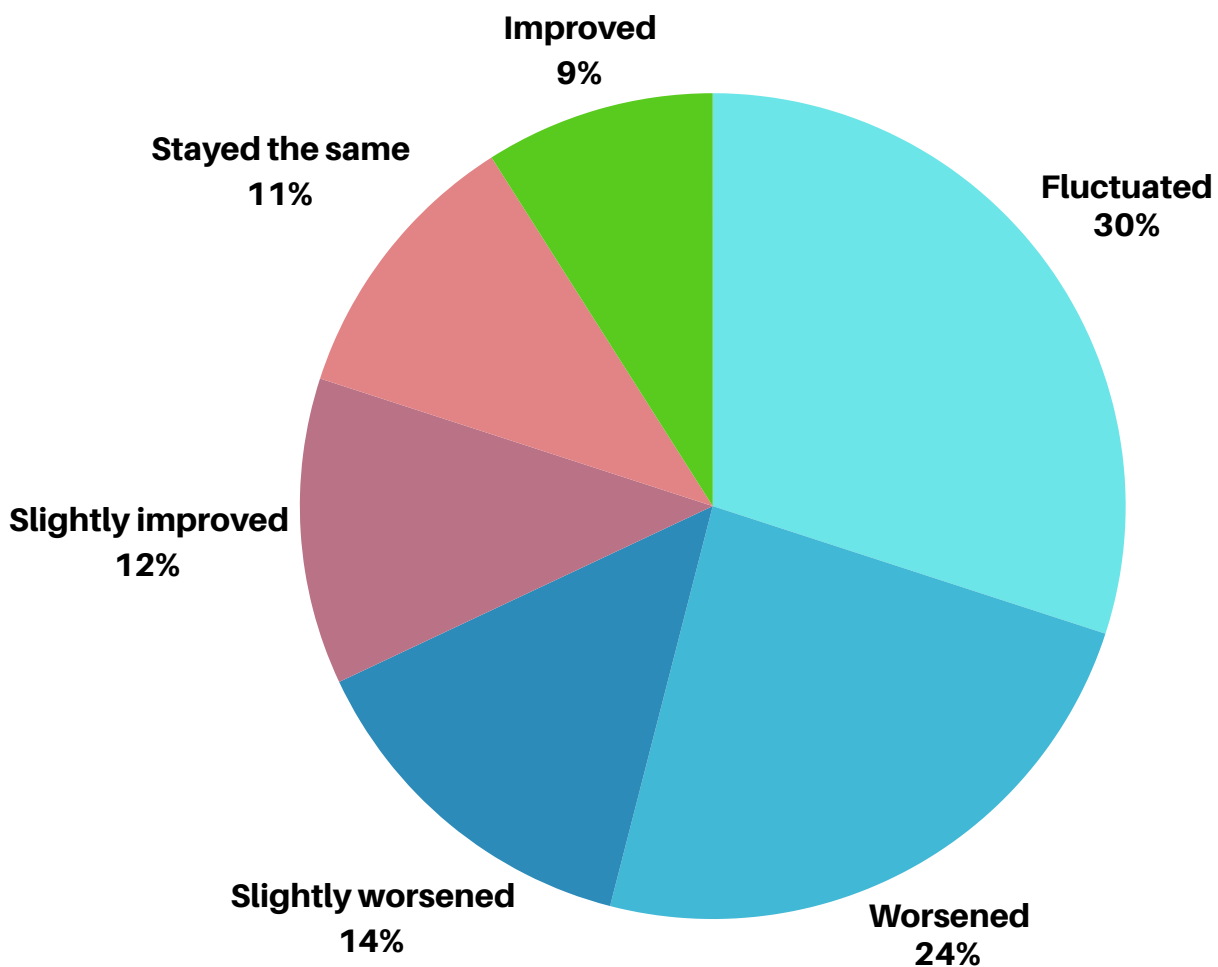
Around 143 respondents answered 'Other Factors'. These were some of the most commonly occurring 'Other' answers:

- "A fear of being inferior to others on my course"
- "Job hunt and rejections"
- "Career aspirations"
- "The war in my homeland"
- "Politics from home country"
- "Global Conflicts"
- "The climate crisis"
- "Physical sickness"
- "Not getting enough sleep"
- "Bereavement"
- "Being far away from family"

13. How has your mental health changed since joining Oxford?

2113 responses

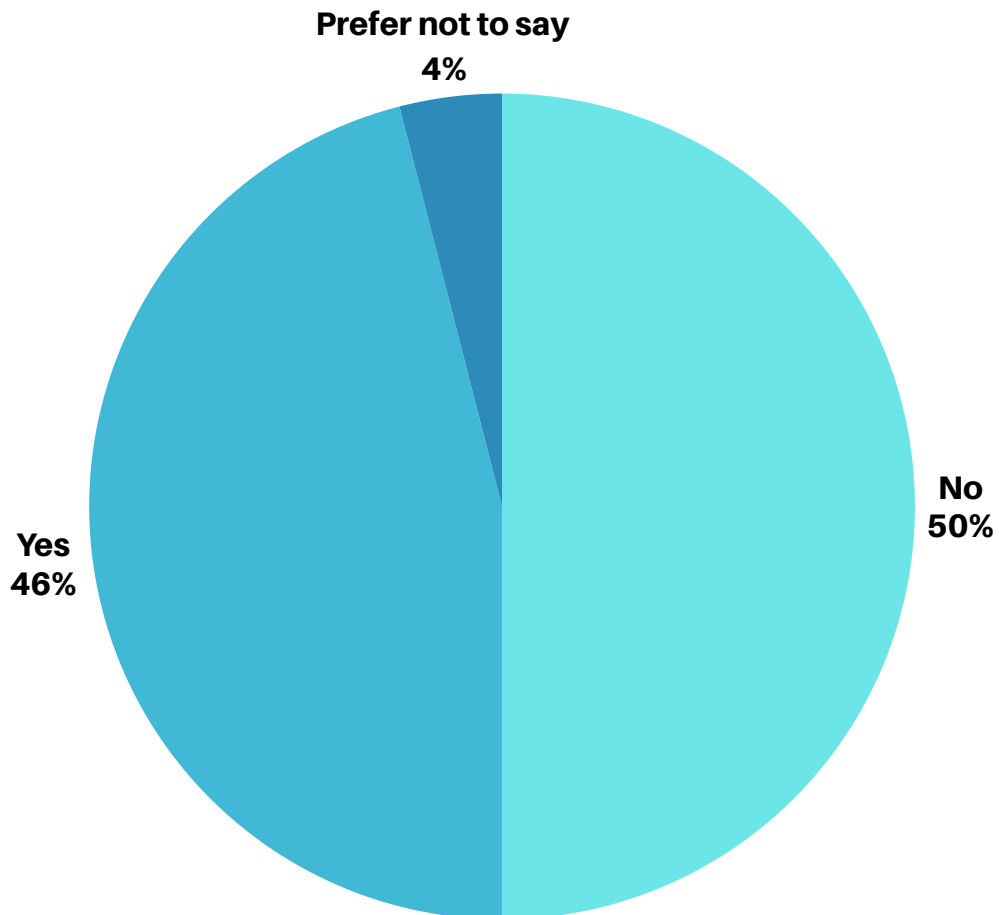
30% of respondents said their mental health had fluctuated (experienced ups and downs) since joining Oxford University, 24% said it had worsened, 14% said it had slightly worsened, 12% said it had slightly improved, 11% said it stayed the same, 9% said it had improved



14. Have you experienced a mental health crisis whilst at Oxford?

2108 responses

50% of respondents said no, 46% of respondents said yes, 4% preferred not to say.



The following term was defined within the question, based on definitions from national charities:

Mental health crisis - 'when you feel at a breaking point. This might include feeling extremely anxious, feeling unable to function, being distraught or out of control, having a panic attack, experiencing flashbacks, feeling suicidal or self-harming'

15. Could you share any aspects of your experience at Oxford that you feel significantly impact your mental well-being? (open-ended question)

838 responses

I have categorised the responses into eight key themes that reflect the most common factors affecting students' mental well-being.

Academic Pressure and Workload:

- Summary: The intense workload, short terms, and performance pressure are overwhelming for many students, leading to burnout and sleep difficulties.

Financial Strain:

- Summary: Financial pressures are significant, particularly for self-funded students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds, affecting their sense of belonging and mental health.

Mental Health and Support Services:

- Summary: While some students find the counselling service helpful, others feel there is a lack of adequate mental health support, with many witnessing severe mental health crises among peers.

Social Isolation and Alienation:

- Summary: Many students, especially those from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, feel isolated, with imposter syndrome being a constant struggle.

Discrimination and Bias:

- Summary: Experiences of racial and class-based discrimination are common, with some students also facing sexual harassment, which is compounded by complicated disciplinary procedures.

Positive Social Connections and College Community:

- Summary: Some students find their college communities, dining halls, and green spaces to be supportive, improving their well-being.

Role of Student Leadership and Public Positions:

- Summary: Leadership roles amongst student societies or groups are extremely stressful, with little mental health support and empathy from colleges for the unique pressures of these positions.

Impact of Oxford's Drinking Culture:

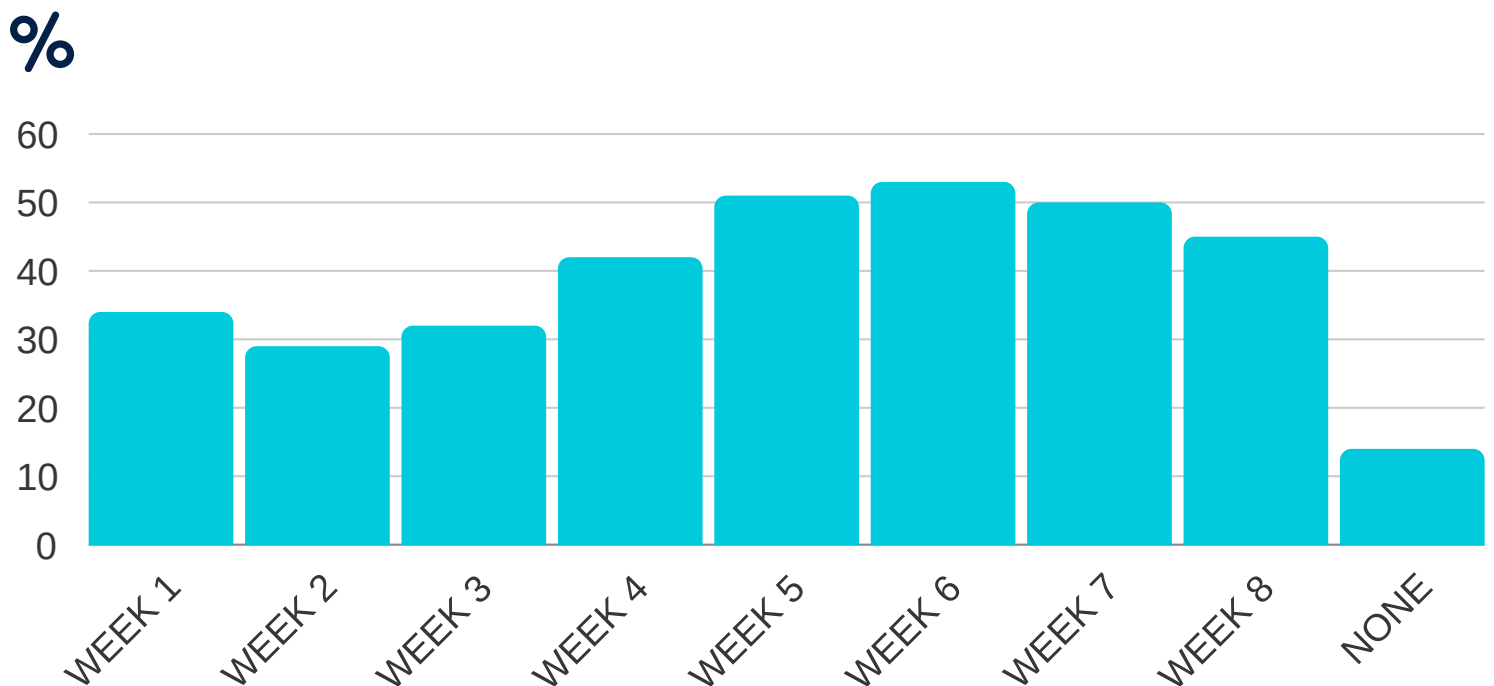
- Summary: The University's drinking culture has had negative impacts on some students' mental health and well-being.

16. During Hilary 2024, which weeks were challenging for your wellbeing?

2116 responses

34% of respondents said Week 1 was challenging for their wellbeing in Hilary 2024, 29% said Week 2 was challenging for their wellbeing, 32% answered Week 3, 42% said week 4, 51% of respondents said that Week 5 was challenging for their wellbeing in Hilary 2024, 53% said that Week 6 was challenging for their wellbeing, 50% said that Week 7 is, 45% said that Week 8 was challenging for their wellbeing, 14% of respondents said none of the weeks were challenging for their wellbeing in Hilary 2024.

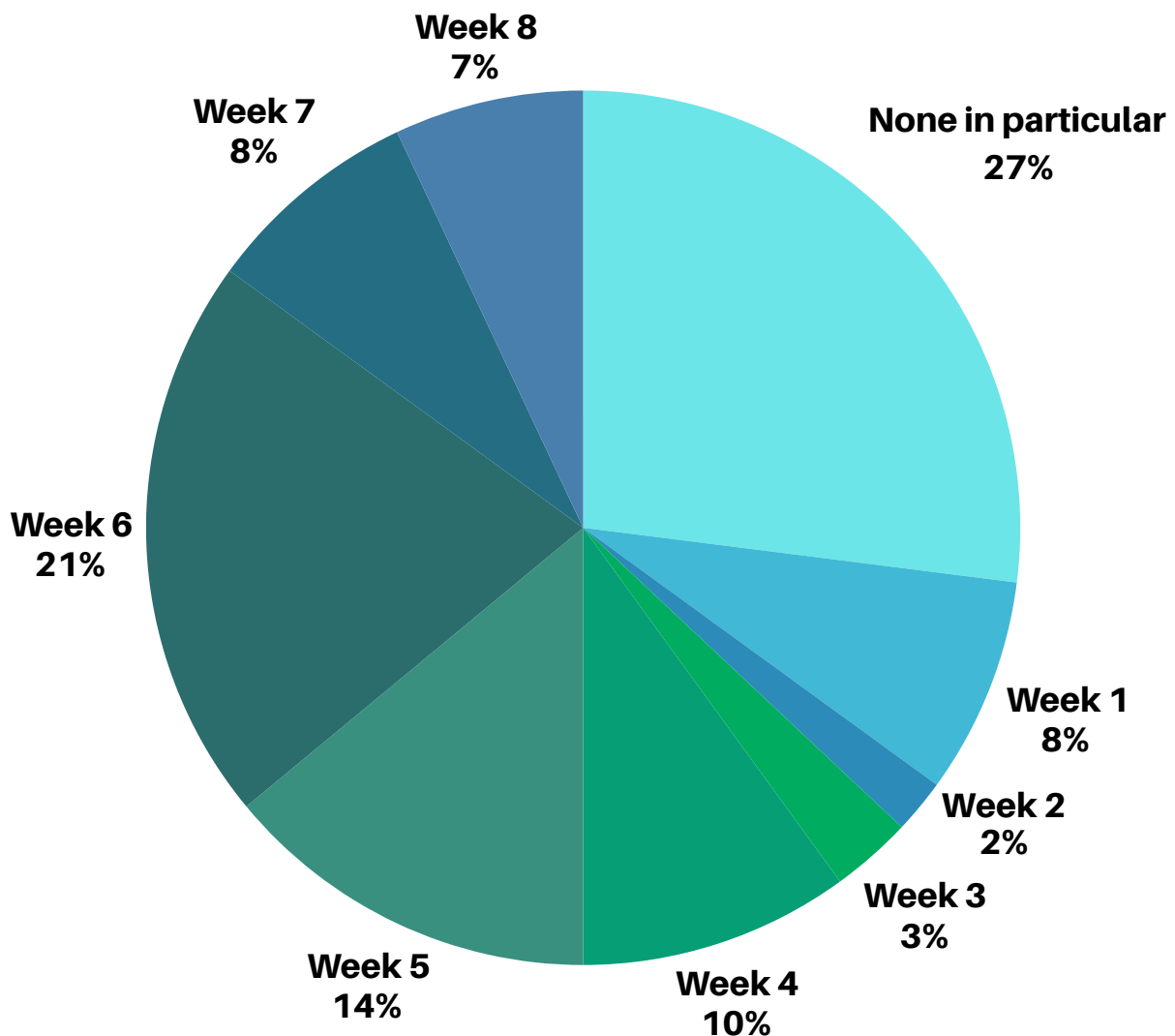
Respondents were able to select all answers which applied to them, so the percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who chose each option rather than totalling to 100%.



17. During term time at Oxford, which week in particular do you usually find the most challenging for your wellbeing?

2075 responses

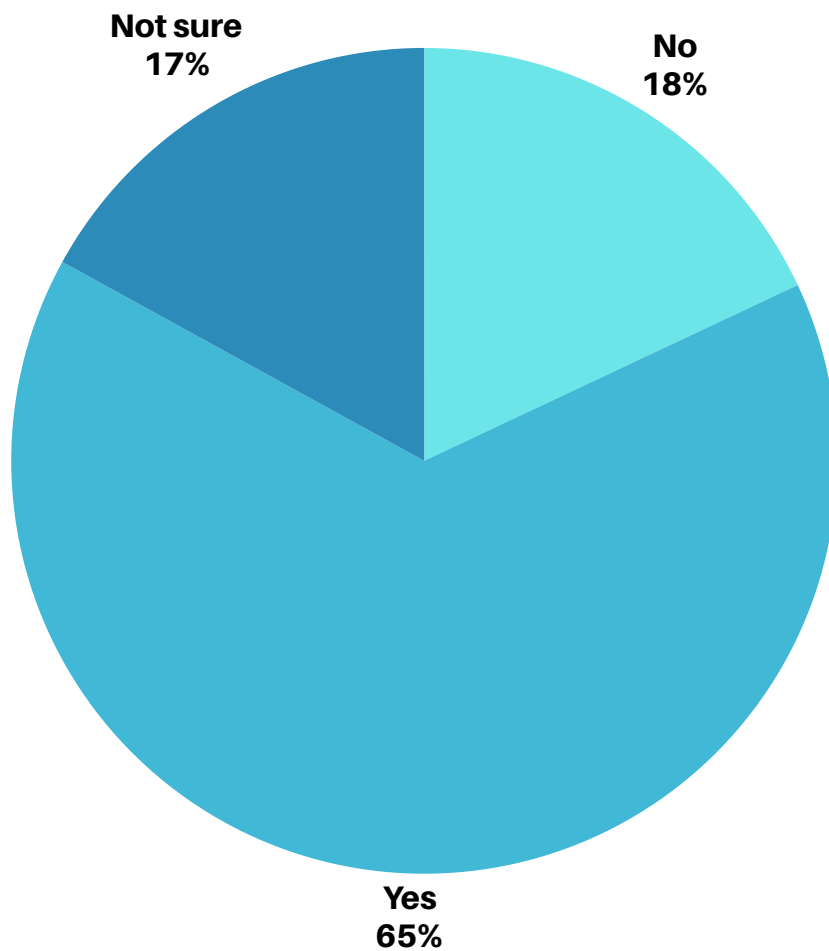
27% of respondents said that no week in particular was the most challenging for their wellbeing, 21% of respondents said they usually find Week 6 the most challenging for their wellbeing, 14% said they find Week 5 the most challenging for their wellbeing, 10% said Week 4, 8% said Week 7, 8% of respondents answered that Week 1 was the most challenging, 7% of respondents also said Week 8 was the most challenging, 3% said that Week 3 was the most challenging, and 2% of respondents said that Week 2 was the most challenging for their wellbeing.



18. Do you believe the introduction of a Reading Week would help you manage stress and/or workload in future?

2096 responses

65% of respondents answered 'Yes' that they believe the introduction of a Reading Week would help them manage stress and/or workload in future, 18% of respondents answered 'No' and 17% of respondents said they were 'Not sure'

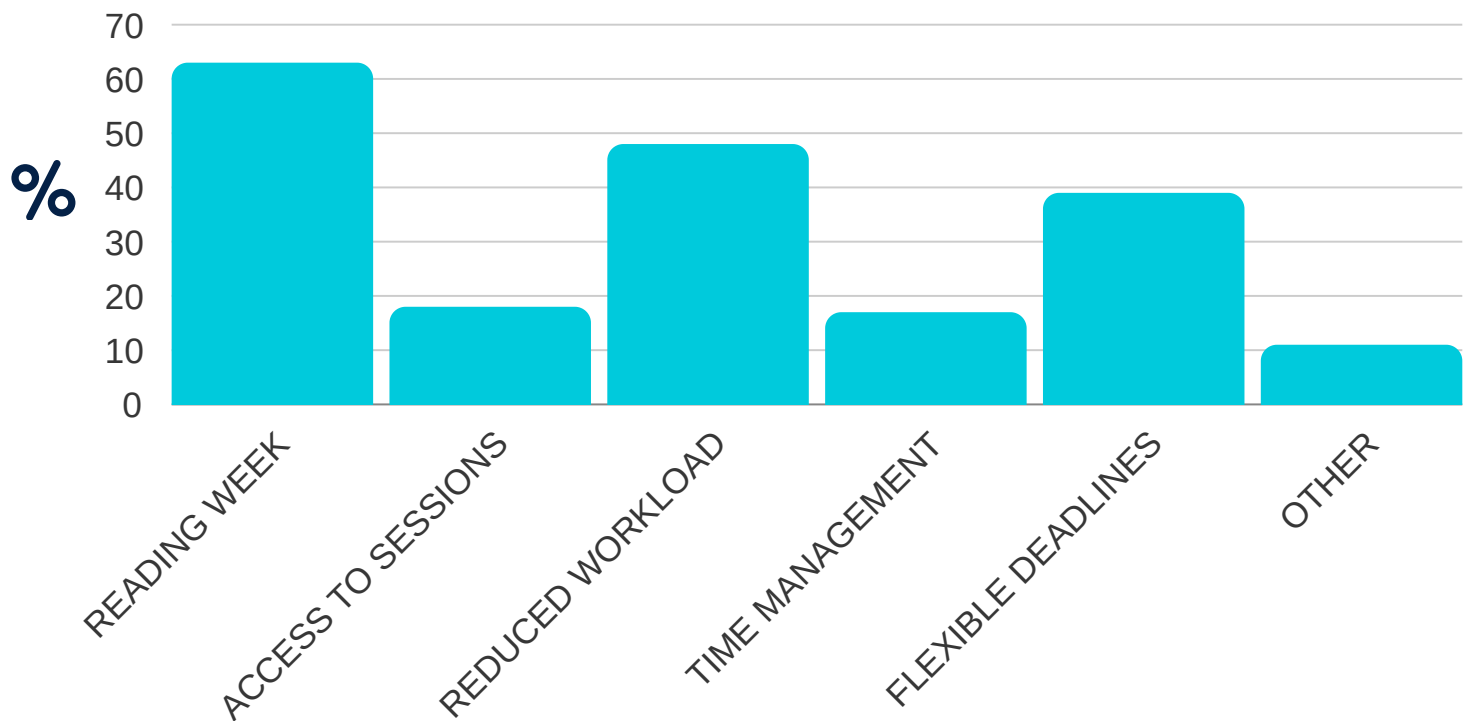


It's important to note that some students who voted 'No' to the idea of a reading week assumed this would be within the existing 8-week term framework (they commented this in Question 25). However, those same respondents noted strong support for a Reading Week if it could be incorporated within a 9-week term framework, allowing more time without condensing the workload.

19. Which of the following, if any, do you believe would have helped in managing stress and/or workload so far this academic year?

2116 responses

63% of respondents said that they believe the Introduction of a Reading Week would have helped in managing stress and/or workload this academic year, 48% of respondents said that a reduced workload would have helped, 39% said that more flexible deadline would have helped, 18% said that access to relaxation and mindfulness sessions would have helped in managing stress and/or workload so far this academic year, 17% of respondents said that time management workshops would have helped and 11% answered Other.



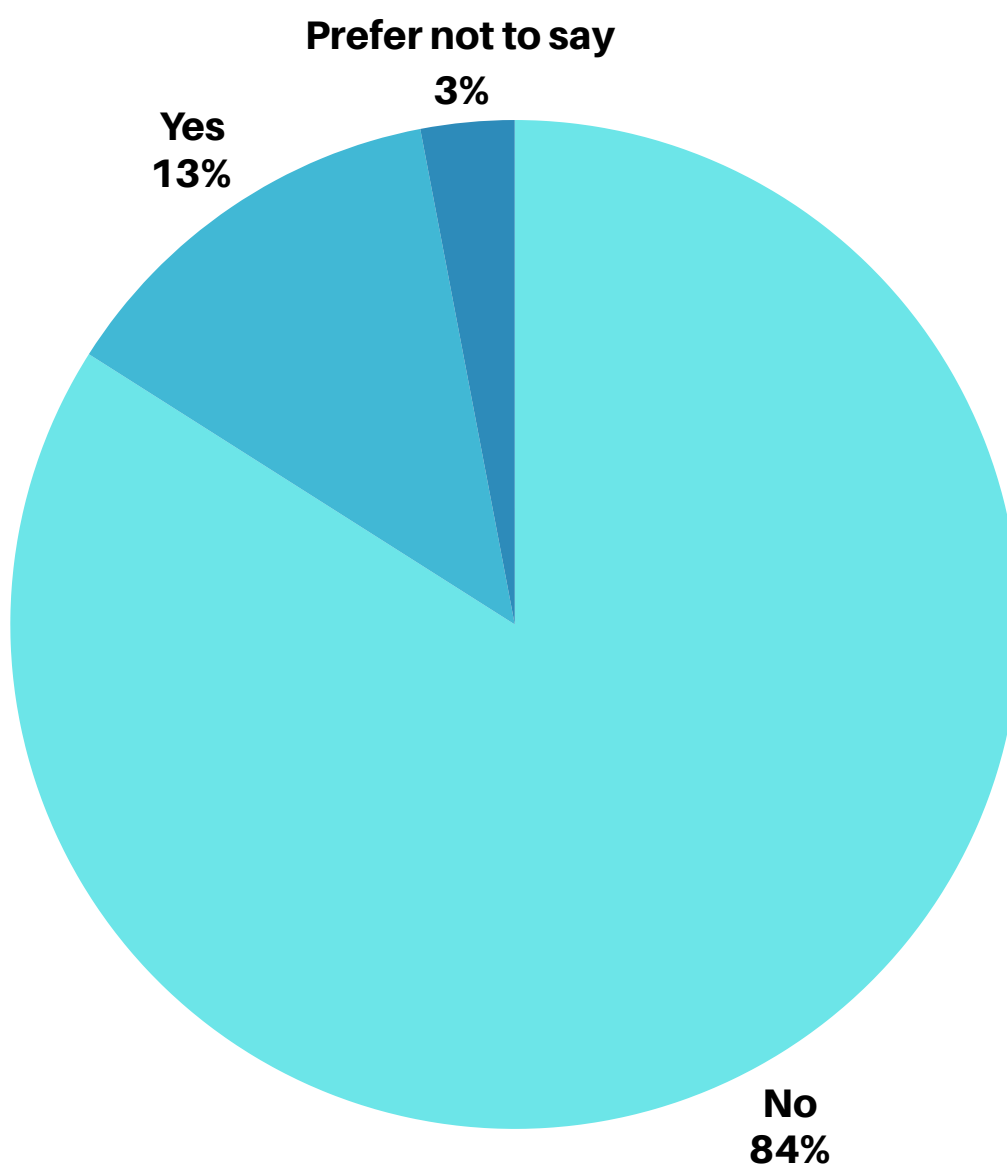
238 respondents answered 'Other'. These were some of the most commonly occurring 'Other' answers:

- "Longer terms with a reading week in the middle"
- "Longer terms with less work each week"
- "Better organised and managed degree"
- "A more course-based system"
- "Deadlines further in advance"
- "Clearer communication from department"
- "Workshops on how to conduct research efficiently and effectively"
- "More welfare puppies and animals"

20. Throughout this academic year, have you encountered any form of unwanted sexual behaviour?

2102 responses

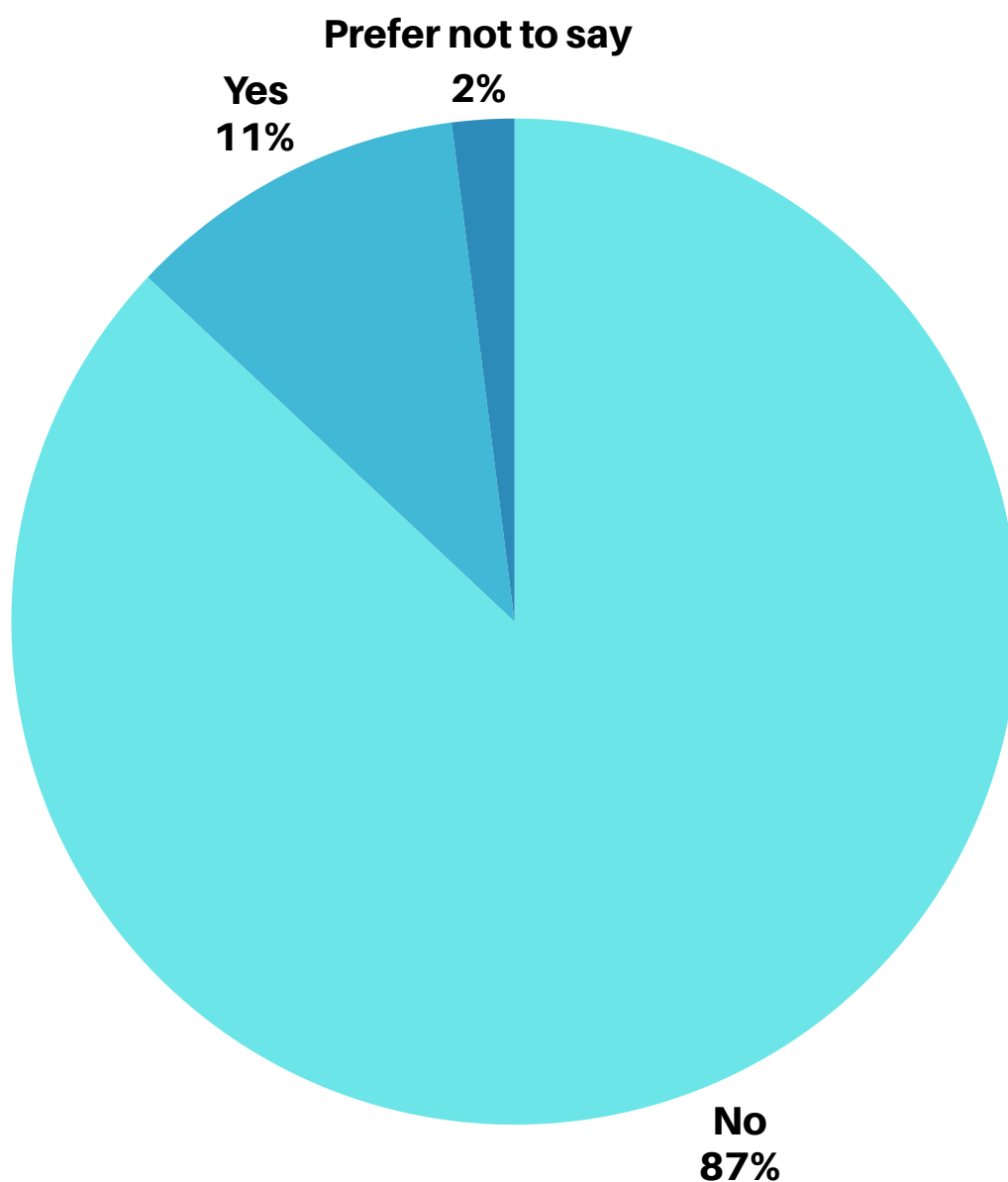
84% of respondents said that have not encountered any form of unwanted sexual behaviour, 13% of respondents said that they have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour, and 3% of respondents preferred not to say.



21. Throughout this academic year, have you encountered any form of bullying or harassment?

2099 responses

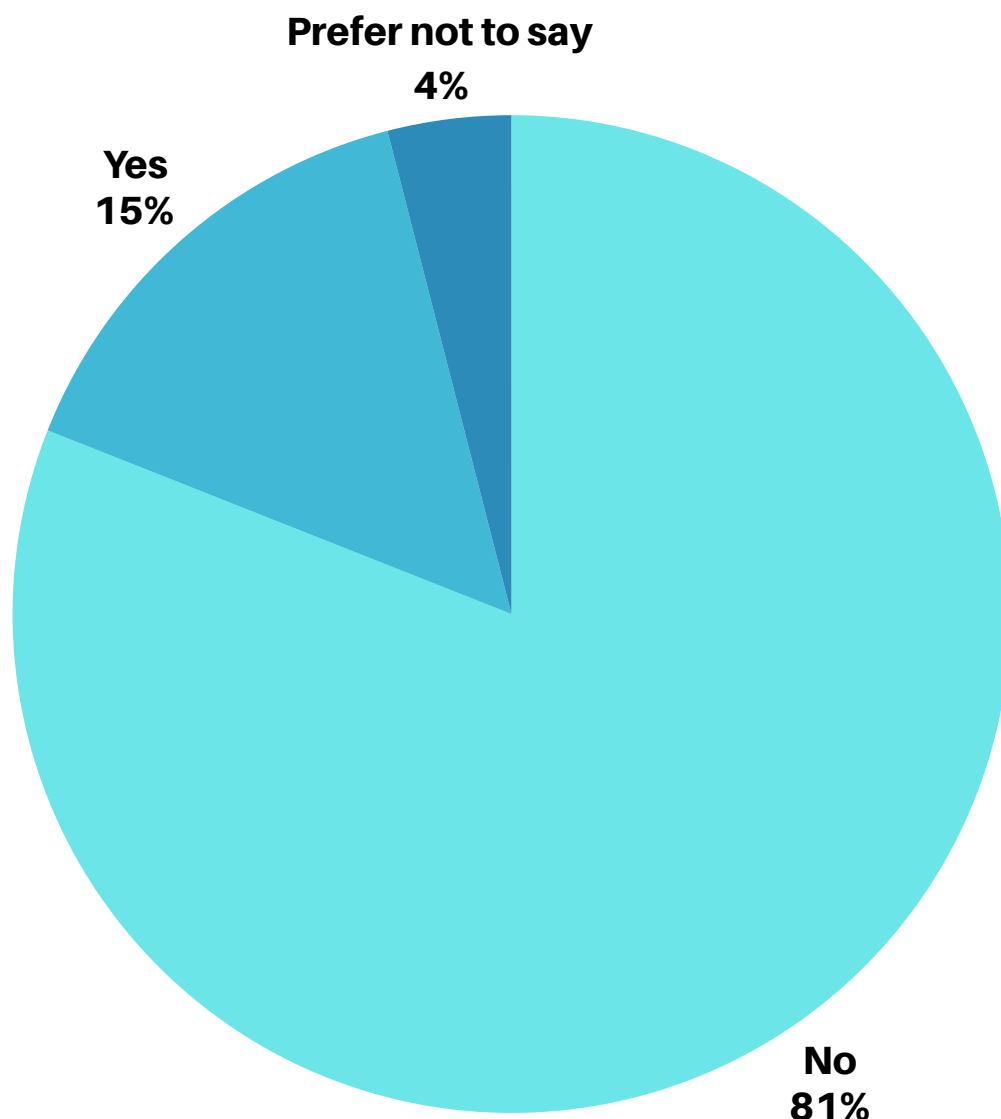
87% of respondents said they have not encountered any form of bullying or harassment, 11% of respondents said they have experienced bullying or harassment, and 2% of respondents preferred not to say.



22. Throughout this academic year, have you encountered any other form of discrimination?

2105 responses

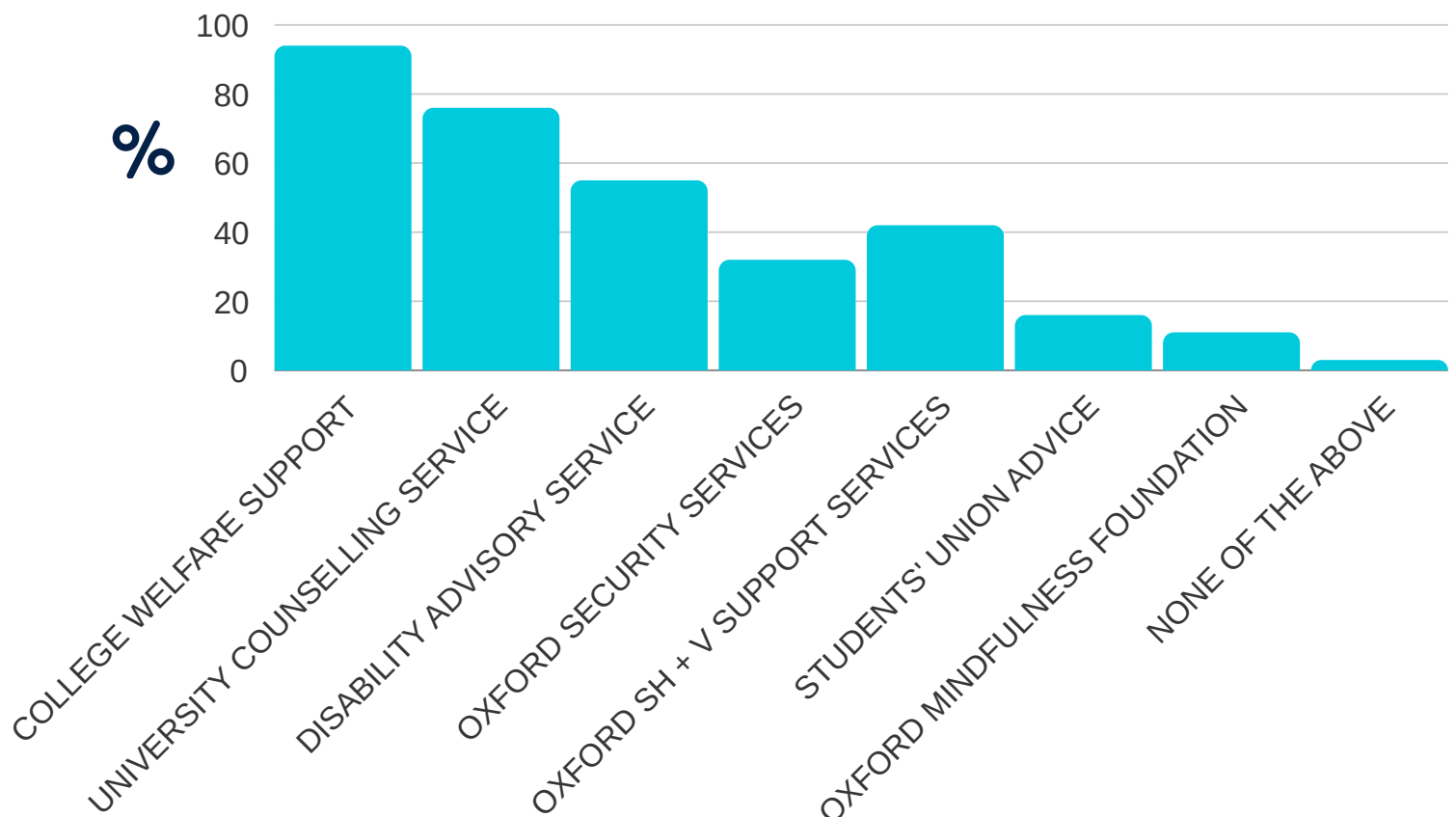
81% of respondents said that they have not encountered any other form of discrimination throughout this academic year, 15% of respondents said that they have encountered another form of discrimination this academic year, and 4% of respondents preferred not to say.



23. Which of these services are you aware of?

2116 responses

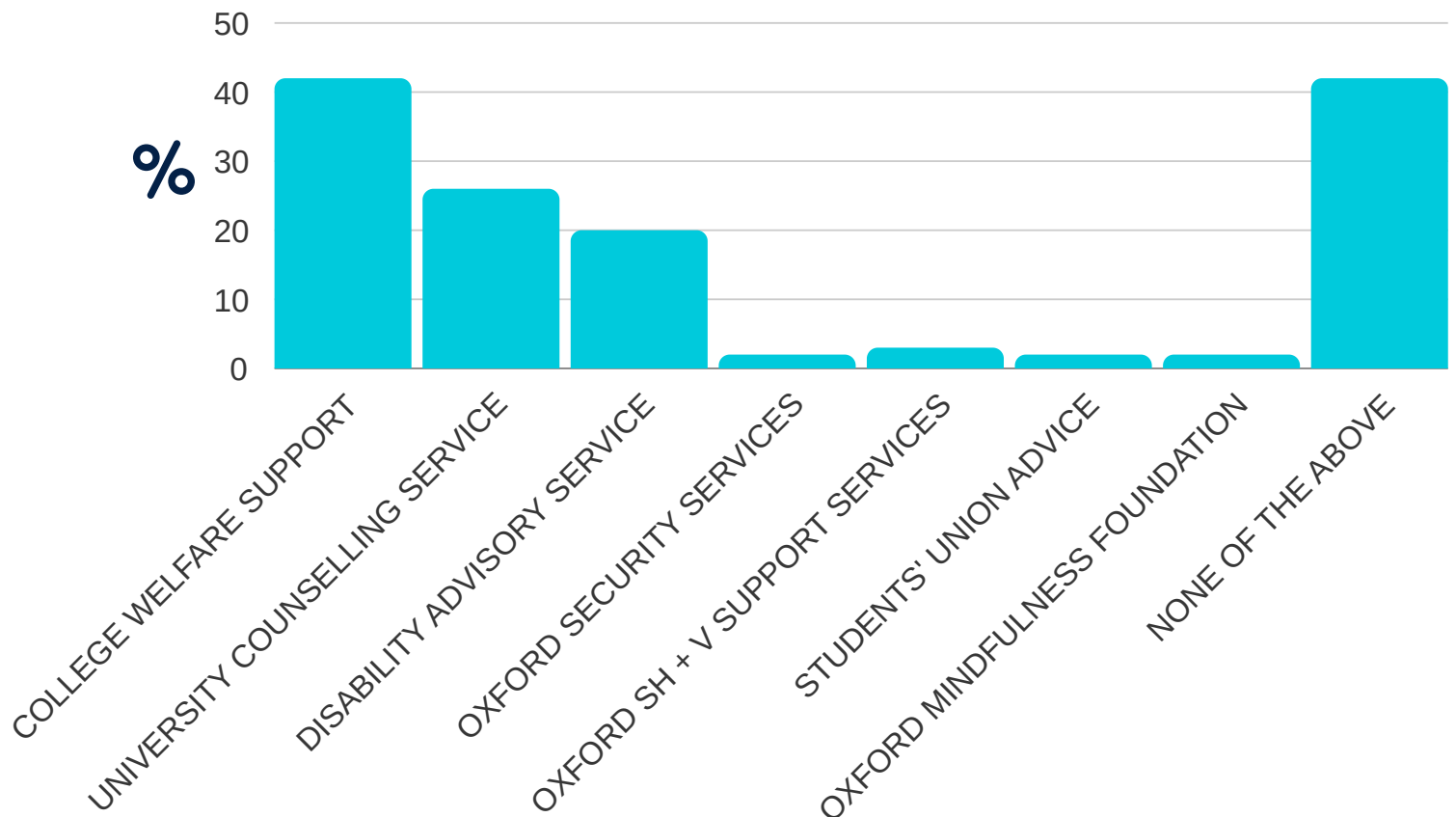
94% of respondents said that they are aware of College Welfare Support, 76% of respondents said that they are aware of University Counselling Service, 55% said they are aware of the Disability Advisory Service (DAS), 32% said they are aware of the Oxford Security Services, 42% said they are aware of Oxford Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, 16% said they were aware of the Student Union Advice Service, 11% said they are aware of Oxford Mindfulness Foundation, 3% of respondents said they were aware of none of the options above Respondents were able to select all answers which applied to them, so the percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who chose each option rather than totalling to 100%.



24. Which of these services have you used?

2116 responses

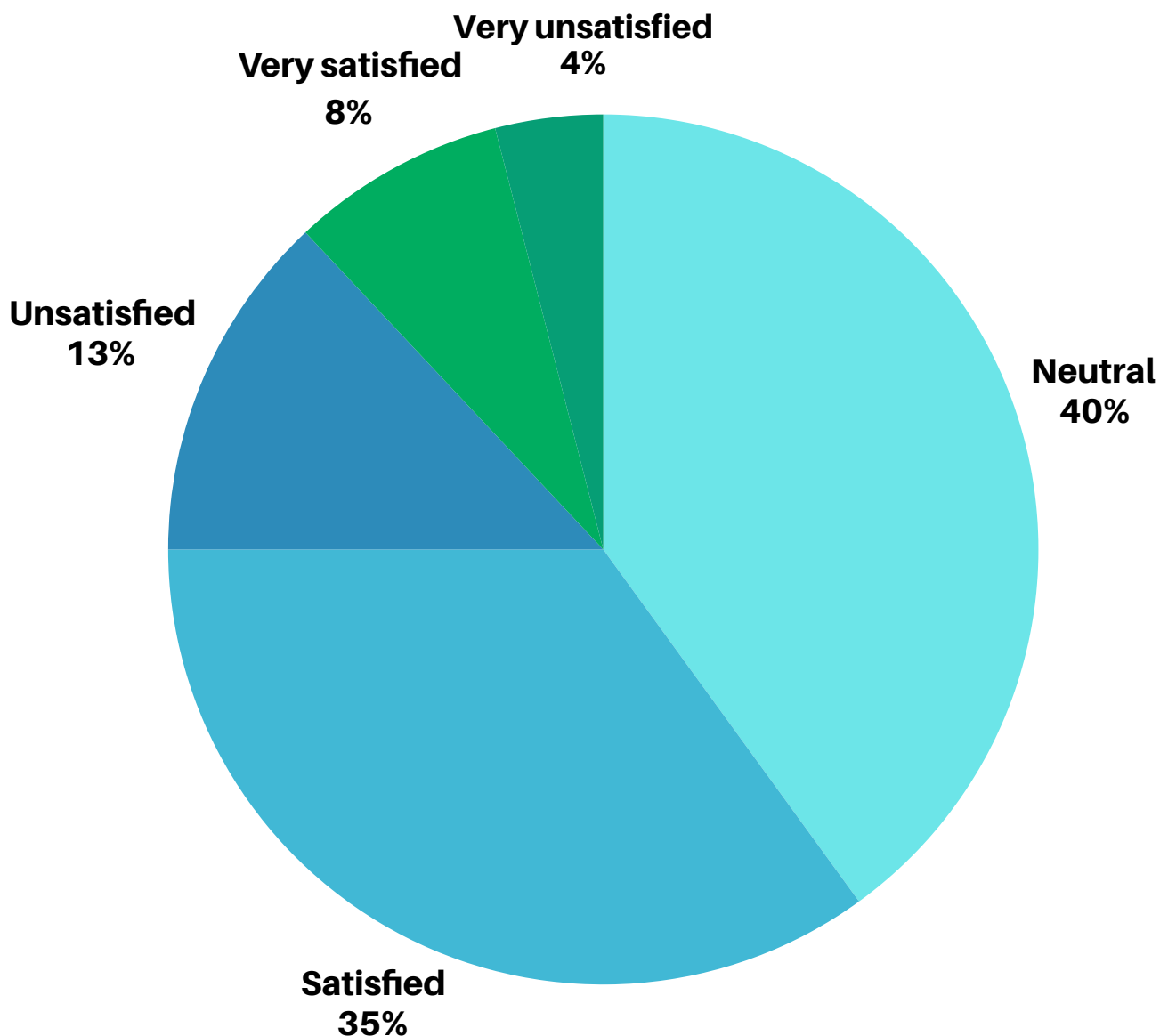
42% of respondents had accessed College Welfare Support, 42% had used none of the welfare services listed, 26% of respondents had used the University Counselling Service, 20% of respondents had used the Disability Advisory Service (DAS), 3% of respondents had used the Oxford Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, 2% had used Oxford Mindfulness Foundation, 2% of respondents had used the Students' Union Advice Service, 2% had used the Oxford Security Services. Respondents were able to select all answers which applied to them, so the percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who chose each option rather than totalling to 100%.



25. Overall, how satisfied are you with the wellbeing support at Oxford?

2101 responses

40% of respondents said they felt neutral in terms of satisfaction towards the wellbeing support at Oxford, 35% of respondents said they were satisfied, 13% of respondents said they were unsatisfied, 8% said they were very satisfied, 4% said they were very unsatisfied with the wellbeing support at Oxford



26. Any other comments, thoughts or suggestions you would like to share?

414 responses

The responses have been grouped into several key themes that reflect the most common concerns, thoughts, and suggestions students shared.

Counselling and Wellbeing Services

- Summary: Many students appreciate the availability of counselling and welfare services, though some feel these are under-resourced and inconsistent across colleges. Concerns about limited sessions and high demand are common, and several respondents suggested more personalised support options.

Academic Structure and Workload

- Summary: Many students expressed the need for systemic changes to reduce academic pressure, with widespread calls for a reading week or extended term lengths. There's a sense that existing welfare services can't fully address the negative impact of workload on mental health without structural adjustments.

Financial Concerns

- Summary: Financial strain is a prominent issue, especially for students from low-income backgrounds.

Discrimination and Diversity

- Summary: Many students shared experiences of feeling marginalised or discriminated against based on race, class, or other factors. They call for greater representation, scholarships for minority students, and proactive measures to tackle discrimination.

Sexual Harassment and Assault Support

- Summary: Some students praised the University's sexual harassment support services, while others felt let down by a lack of proactive responses around the University or by experiences of dismissal when reporting incidents. A need for better training and more consistent support was emphasised.

Need for Centralised and Proactive Support

- Summary: Many students highlighted the inconsistency in welfare support across colleges, calling for a more centralised and proactive approach from the university that extends beyond crisis management.

Reading Week Discussion

- Summary: The idea of a reading week was widely mentioned. While many feel it would help alleviate stress and manage overall workload, others worry it could add to financial burdens. Many of the critical comments caveated that it could work within a 9-week term framework to avoid condensing the workload further.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Summary: Students shared additional suggestions, including better training for staff to recognise struggling students, accessible de-stress workshops, and improved dissemination of information on available welfare services.

Correlation Analysis

Mental Health Fluctuations and Level of Study (Foundation Year) - 84% of Foundation Year students reported that their mental health "fluctuated," a significantly higher rate compared to 30% of all other respondents.

Sexual Violence/Harassment and Sexual Orientation - 21.5% of gay, lesbian or bisexual respondents said they have experienced sexual violence, compared to 8.7% of heterosexual (straight) respondents.

Disordered Eating and Gender - 40.7% of women reported experiencing disordered eating, compared to 25% of men. Among students identifying with other genders, the rate was even higher at 53.2%.

Loneliness and Gender - 66.7% of women reported experiencing loneliness at Oxford, compared to 60% of men and 75.3% of those with other gender identities, indicating higher loneliness rates among women and other gendered identities.

Low Mood by Gender - 81.5% of women reported experiencing low mood, compared to 69.8% of men and 89.6% of other gender identities, suggesting that low mood is more prevalent among women and non-binary or other gendered identities.

Self-Esteem and Gender - 73.2% of women reported low self-esteem, compared to 53.6% of men and 77.9% of those with other gender identities, showing that self-esteem challenges are notably higher among women and other gendered identities.

Anxiety and Gender - 81.3% of women reported experiencing anxiety, compared to 64.3% of men and 83.1% of other gender identities, highlighting a higher prevalence of anxiety among women and non-binary or other gendered groups.

Mental Health Changes and Gender - Women were more likely than men to report worsening mental health since joining Oxford, with 32.7% of women stating their mental health fluctuated (compared to 25.8% of men), 14.2% saying it slightly worsened (compared to 13.3% of men), and 25.5% stating it worsened (compared to 21% of men). Conversely, men reported higher rates of mental health improvements, with 10.2% of men saying their mental health improved (compared to 8.5% of women), 13.3% saying it slightly improved (compared to 10.3% of women), and 16.0% saying it stayed the same (compared to 8.4% of women).

Discrimination and Ethnicity - 20% of BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) respondents reported experiencing discrimination this academic year, compared to 12% of white respondents, indicating that BAME students are more likely to experience discrimination.

Unwanted Sexual Behaviour and Gender - 19.4% of women reported experiencing unwanted sexual behaviour, compared to 5.8% of men, underscoring a significant disparity in experiences of unwanted sexual behaviour.

Discrimination and Sexual Orientation - 20.6% of gay, bisexual, lesbian, or queer students reported experiencing discrimination this academic year, compared to 12% of heterosexual students.

Discrimination and Gender Identity - 39% of transgender students (those whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth) reported experiencing discrimination, compared to 13.4% of cisgender students. This highlights a significantly higher incidence of discrimination among transgender students.

Discrimination and Disability - 19% of respondents with a non-physical disability reported experiencing discrimination, 23.6% of respondents with a physical disability reported experiencing discrimination, 47% of respondents with both a physical and non-physical disability reported experiencing discrimination. This is compared to 11% of students with no disability reporting experiencing discrimination, highlighting a significantly higher incidence rate of discrimination among disabled students.

Collected by:

Rosalie Chapman

Vice-President of Oxford Students' Union, 2023-2024

(Welfare)