Internet trolling

December 2015

Executive Summary

Headlines

- 88% of students say that they are aware of trolling in social media
- Just under half of students (46%) have personal experience of trolling attacks.
- The most common types of attack are against personal views (31% of all students) and against personal appearance (21% of all students)
- Of students who have been trolled, 28% agree that it has affected their mental health
- 57% of students who have been trolled have not reported it, but of those who have almost half (46%) say that it was worthwhile
- Although slightly more men have experienced trolling than women, they are also significantly more likely to report that they are not bothered by it. Women are more likely to say that they are not comfortable using social networks and that they keep a low profile for fear of trolling
- Half of students (48%) agree that trolling is getting worse
- Only a third of students (30%) are aware of the university social media policy, and less than a quarter (23%) are aware of the SU policy
- 88% of students think the university should ensure reporting systems are confidential, while nine out of ten responded that it should implement procedures and sanctions for dealing with trolls
- Four in five students (82%) think the SU should campaign to raise awareness of the issue, and a similar number (78%) report that it should give practical advice to students

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction
Objective, methodology, demographics and survey details

This report presents the research findings of an online survey carried out with **students in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE)** in **November and December 2015.**

Objectives:
- how widespread problem of trolling is
- to what degree trolling or fear of being trolled deters students from running in elections
- to use research to develop toolkit for SUs to run their own anti trolling campaigns

- A final sample of **1969** was achieved.
- 52% men, 46% women
- 55% aged between 16-20
- 81% UK citizens
- 60% undergrads or equivalent
- 10% local elected student officers

In this report, a number of questions have been broken down and compared with each other. Where there are any statistical significant differences between answers, they are reported where applicable and to large enough base size (n>30) and they are valid at confidence level of 95% - 99%. They will be highlighted in an orange box throughout the report.

Prize draw of **£250** to encourage response.
The survey was advertised via the NUS extra student database.
The survey **took approximately 10 minutes** to complete.

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Experience of internet trolling

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Nearly **nine in ten students** (88%) say that they are **aware of trolling** in social media. Men are significantly more likely to report that they are aware then women

Aware of trolling in social media

Significantly more likely amongst:
- men
- undergrads than postgrads, foundation and GCSE level students
- those who identify as bisexual compared to heterosexual

4%

8%

88%

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
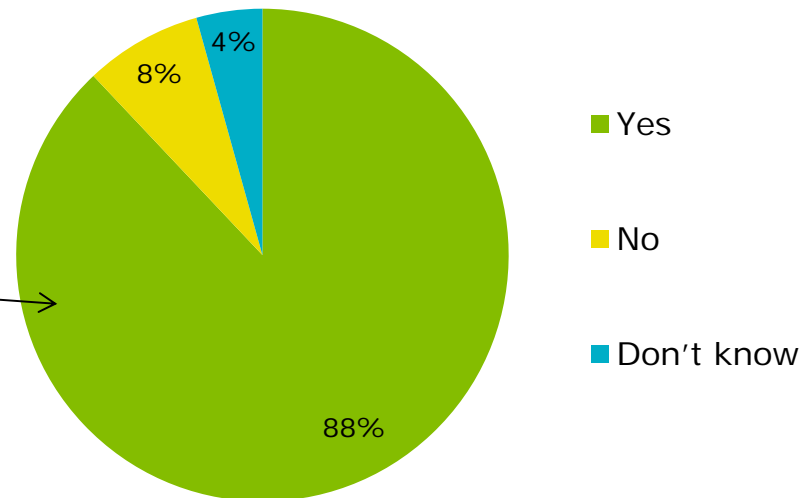
Base: 1969 respondents.

B1   Are you aware of trolling on social media forums?

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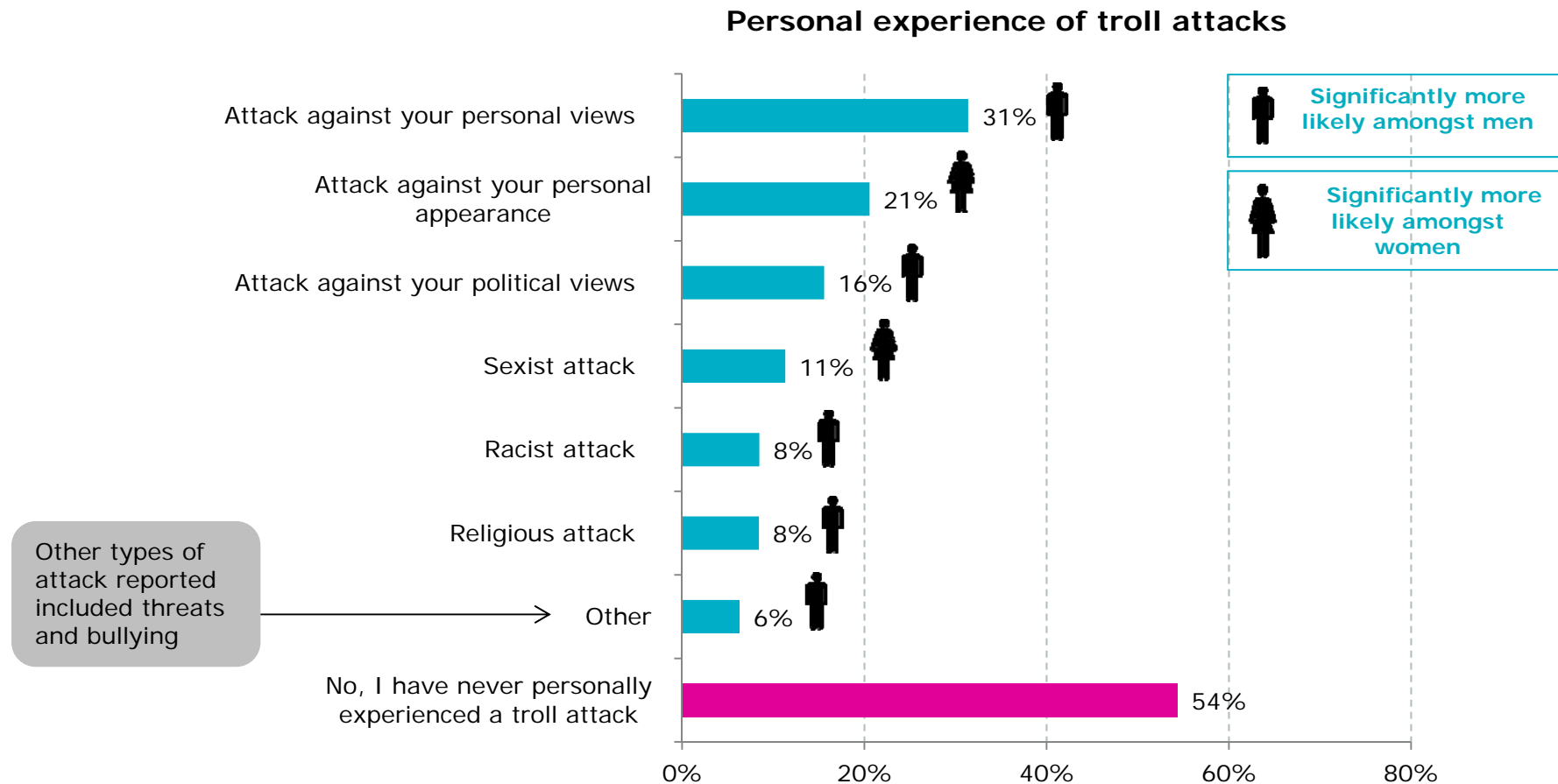**Just under half** of students (46%) have **experienced troll attacks**, and of these 43% identify as women, 54% as men. Women account for 46% of survey respondents and men for 52%, so this could be seen to **reflect the gender balance** of all students completing the survey

Personal experience of troll attacks

Category	Value
Attack against your personal views	31%
Attack against your personal appearance	21%
Attack against your political views	16%
Sexist attack	11%
Racist attack	8%
Religious attack	8%
Other	6%
No, I have never personally experienced a troll attack	54%

Significantly more likely amongst men

Significantly more likely amongst women

Other types of attack reported included threats and bullying

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Base: 1969 respondents.

B2   Looking at the list below, please indicate if you have ever personally experienced any of these kinds of internet troll attacks

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Men students are significantly more likely to experience attacks against their **personal and political views**, **race and religion**, while **women** students are significantly more likely to be attacked on **personal appearance or sexist** grounds

Type of attack	Significantly more likely among…
Attack against your **personal appearance**	• those at **A level** than postgrads • **women** students • **bisexuals** than heterosexuals
Attack against your **personal views**	• **men** students • people who identify as **bisexual** than those who identify as heterosexual, lesbian or gay
Attack against your **political views**	• **men** students • people who identify as **bisexual** than those who identify as heterosexual
Racist attack	• **men** students
Sexist attack	• **women** students • people who identify as **bisexual** than those who identify as heterosexual, lesbian or gay
Religious attack	• **men** students
I have **never** personally experienced a troll attack	• people who identify as **heterosexual** than those who identify as bisexual

B2   Looking at the list below, please indicate if you have ever personally experienced any of these kinds of internet troll attacks

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Over three quarters (77%) of students who **have experienced internet trolling** say that they have **rarely been a target**

Frequency of online trolling

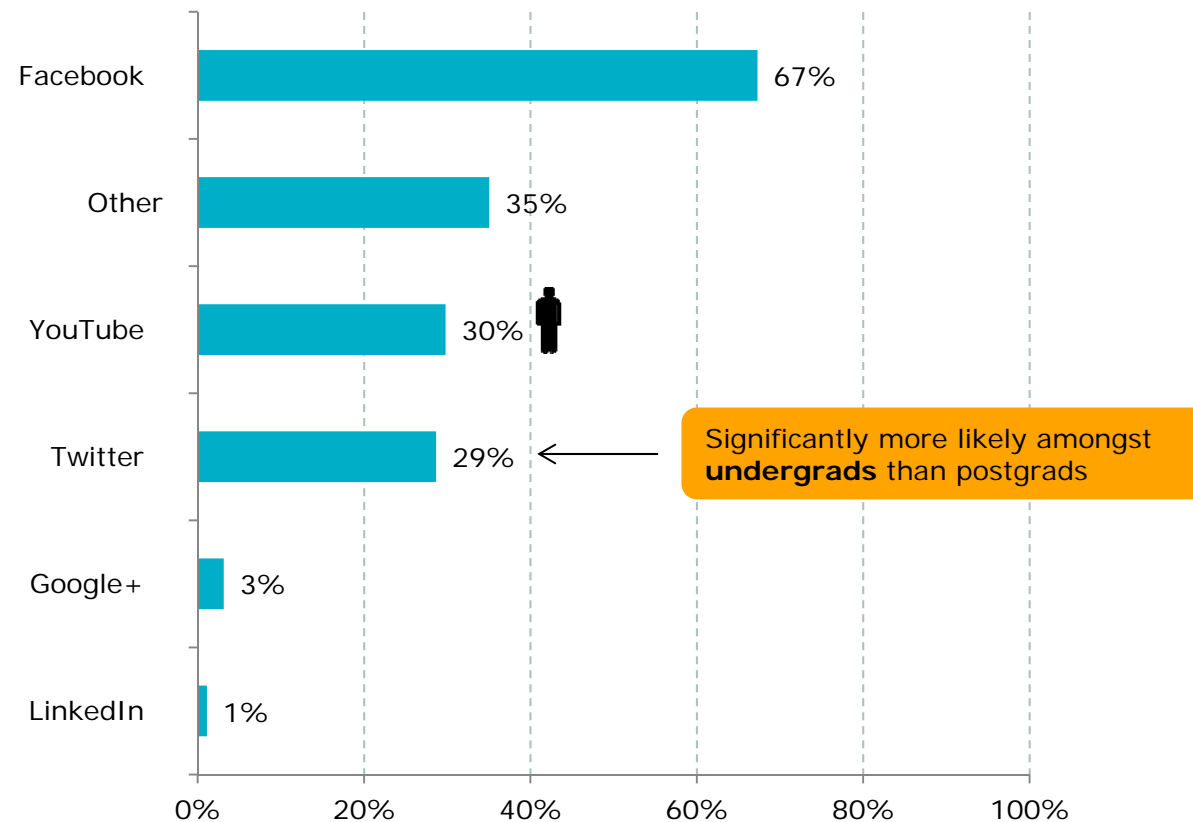| Category	Percentage
Daily	4%
Weekly	5%
Monthly	11%
Rarely	77%
Never	3%
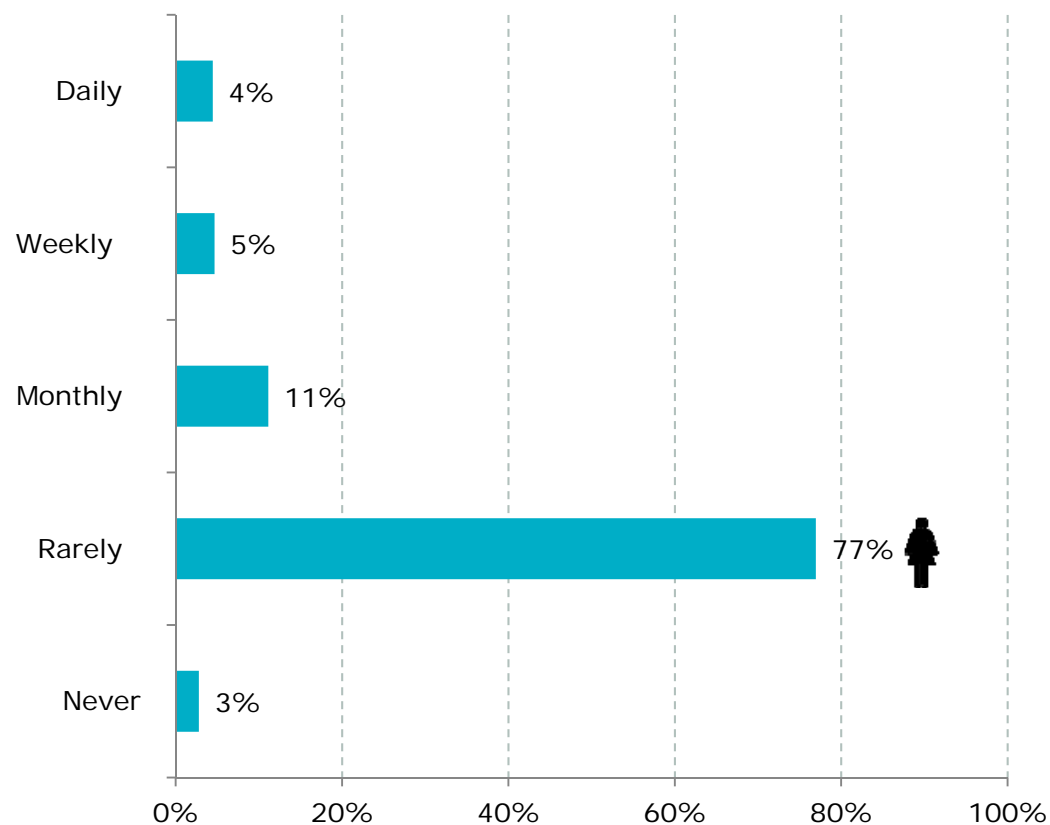
Significantly more likely amongst women

Base: 898 respondents. Balance: Have not experienced trolling / no response

B4   How often have you been the target of online trolling?

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Facebook is the site where the **largest proportion of students** have experienced **trolling attacks** – with over two thirds (67%) of those who have been trolled naming it

Social media sites where trolling experienced

Facebook — 67%

Other — 35%

YouTube — 30%

Twitter — 29%

Significantly more likely amongst **undergrads** than postgrads

Google+ — 3%

LinkedIn — 1%

Significantly more likely amongst men

Base: 893 respondents. Balance: Have not experienced trolling / no response

B3   Where have you personally experienced online trolling?

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When asked to name **other specific sites** where trolling has occurred, students most frequently report **Tumblr, Reddit and Instagram**
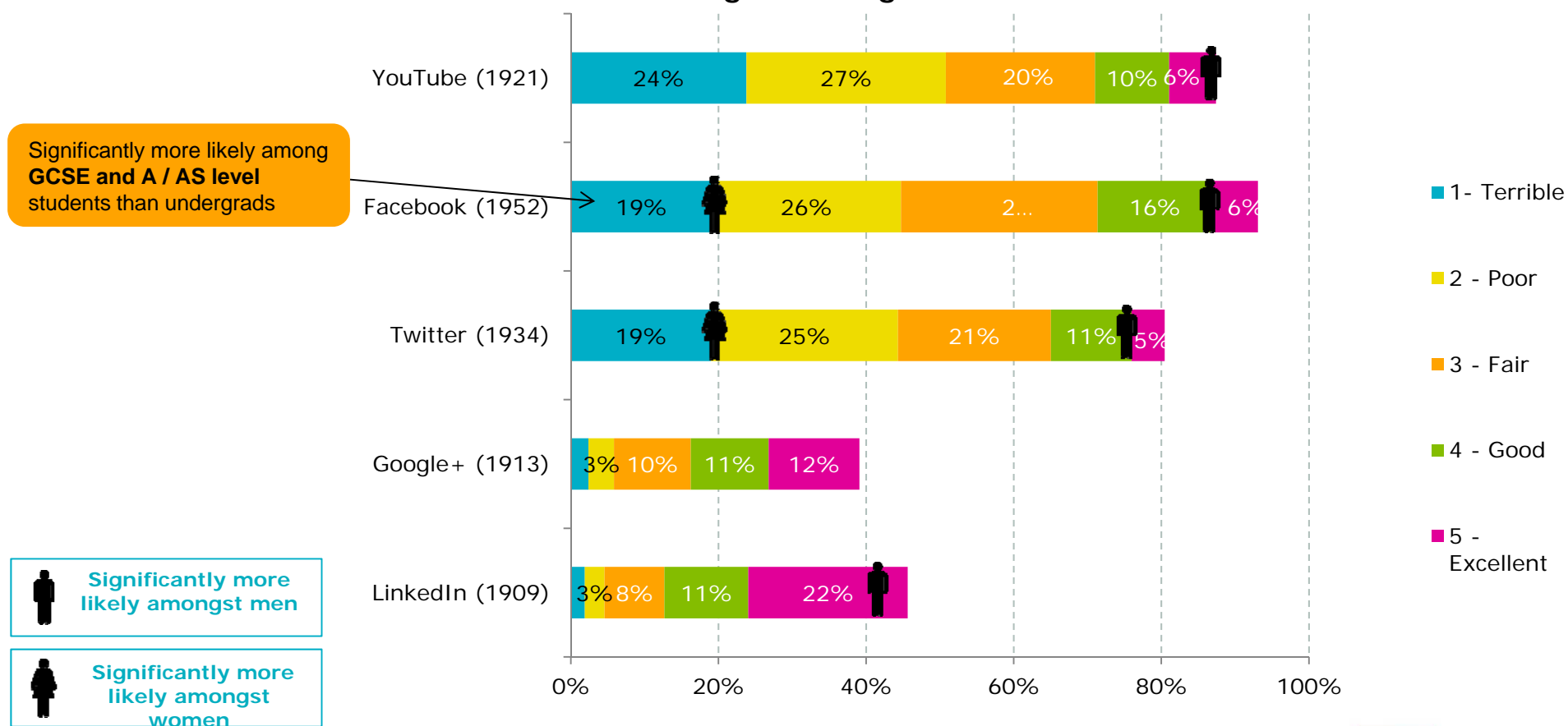
Other social media sites where trolling experienced

B3   Where have you personally experienced online trolling?

Overall **YouTube** is given the **worst rating** for trolling, with half of students (51%) saying that it is terrible or poor when it comes to internet trolling

Rating of trolling on social media sites

Significantly more likely among **GCSE and A / AS level** students than undergrads

Site	1- Terrible	2 - Poor	3 - Fair	4 - Good	5 - Excellent
YouTube (1921)	24%	27%	20%	10%	6%
Facebook (1952)	19%	26%	2...	16%	6%
Twitter (1934)	19%	25%	21%	11%	5%
Google+ (1913)	3%	10%	11%		12%
LinkedIn (1909)	3%	8%		11%	22%

- 1- Terrible
- 2 - Poor
- 3 - Fair
- 4 - Good
- 5 - Excellent

Significantly more likely amongst men

Significantly more likely amongst women

Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response (Don't know not shown on chart.)

B14 **In your experience, on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is terrible (with a large amount of trolling) and 5 is excellent (with low levels or no trolling), please rate how bad you feel trolling is on these social media sites**

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Other specific sites most frequently mentioned as places students think are **bad for trolling** are **Instagram, Tumbr** and **Reddit**

Other social media sites which students perceive as bad for trolling
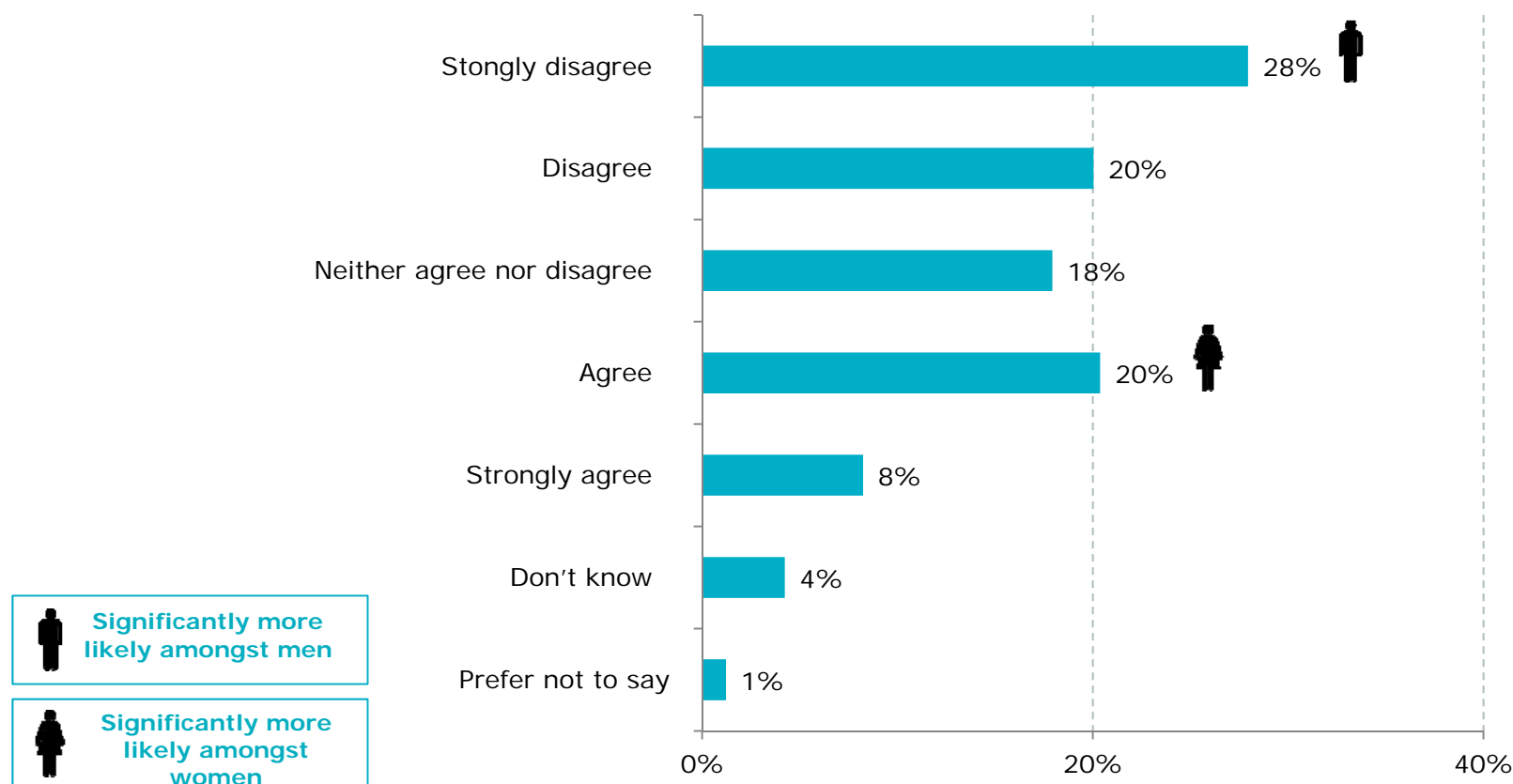

*Only sites with 4 mentions or more are shown
Base: 470 respondents. Balance: No response

B14f **Are there any other social media forums that you think are bad for trolling? Please enter in the box below**

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Of the **students who have been trolled**, over a **quarter** (28%) agree that this has **affected their mental health**. This is significantly more likely among **women**

Trolling affected mental health

Response	Percentage
Stongly disagree	28%
Disagree	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%
Agree	20%
Strongly agree	8%
Don't know	4%
Prefer not to say	1%

Significantly more likely amongst men

Significantly more likely amongst women

0%   20%   40%

Base: 898 respondents. Balance: Have not experienced trolling / no response

**B5   How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
'Being the target of internet trolling has affected my mental health?'**

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Over **half of students** (57%) who have been trolled have **not reported** the attacks.
A third (34%) have reported attacks to the social network

Reporting trolling attacks

Category	Percentage
To the social network	34%
To the internet site owner	10%
To the police	3%
To your university	2%
Other	4%
No, I have never reported trolling	57%

Reporting trolling to school teachers is most frequently mentioned here
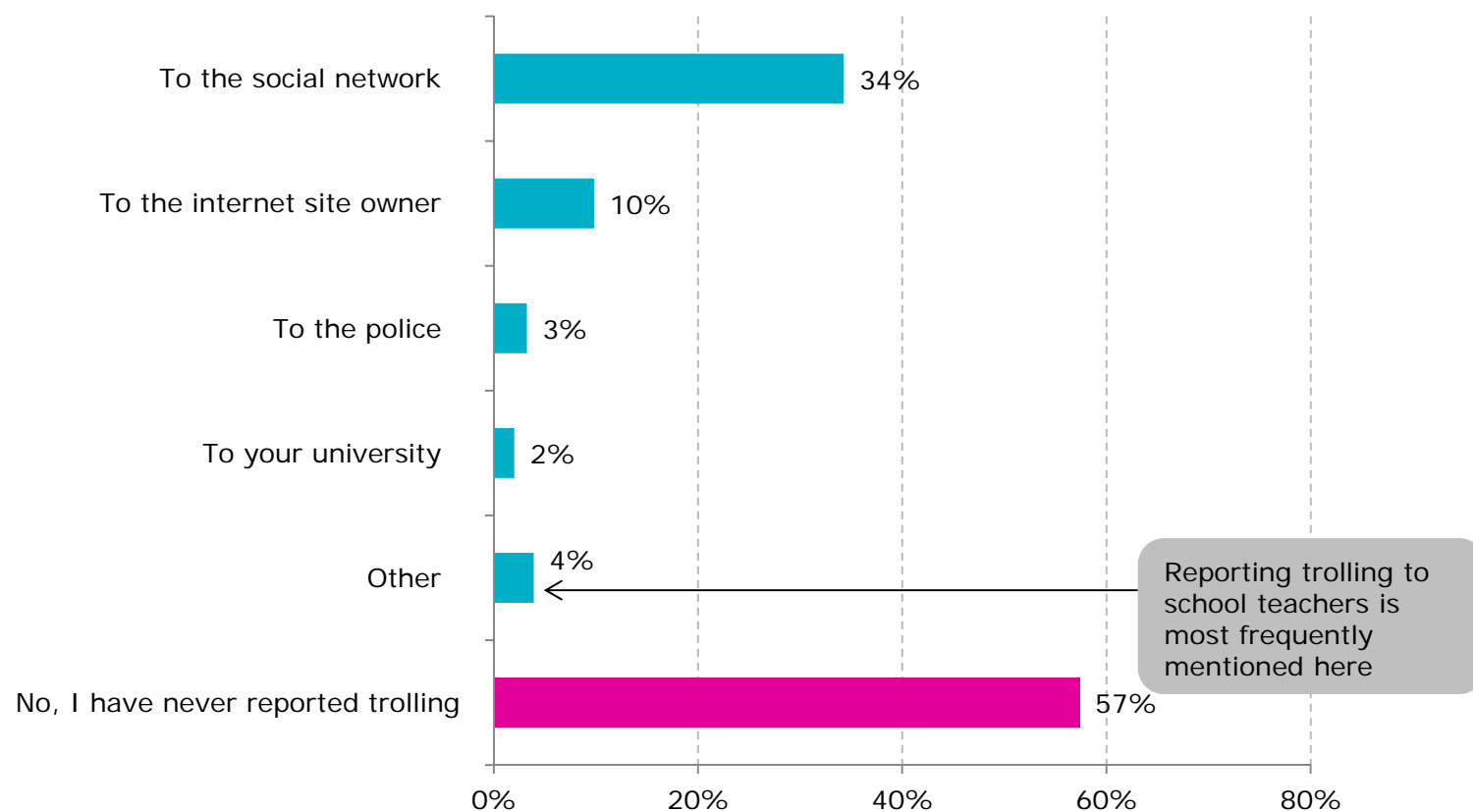
Base: 896 respondents. Balance: Have not experienced trolling / no response

B6   Have you ever reported the online trolling attacks you have experienced to any of the following?

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Two thirds of students **who give a reason** for not reporting attacks say that it was because it was **not serious** or there was **no need**

Reasons for not reporting trolling attacks

Main themes

- **Not serious / no need**

- **Would make no difference**

- **Sorted it out for myself**

- **Did not know who to complain to**

"*I **wasn't hurt** by the trolling. It's the **way the Internet is**." (Woman aged 16-17)*

"*It only happened once, once I got over it, it **seemed silly to make a big deal of it**." (Woman aged 21 - 25)*

"*I **dismissed** the persons as challenging personalities and **made comments in reply**. If they continue I **block them**." (Man aged 30+)*

"***Who** is the right person to inform? **What can they actually do**?" (Woman aged 18-20)*
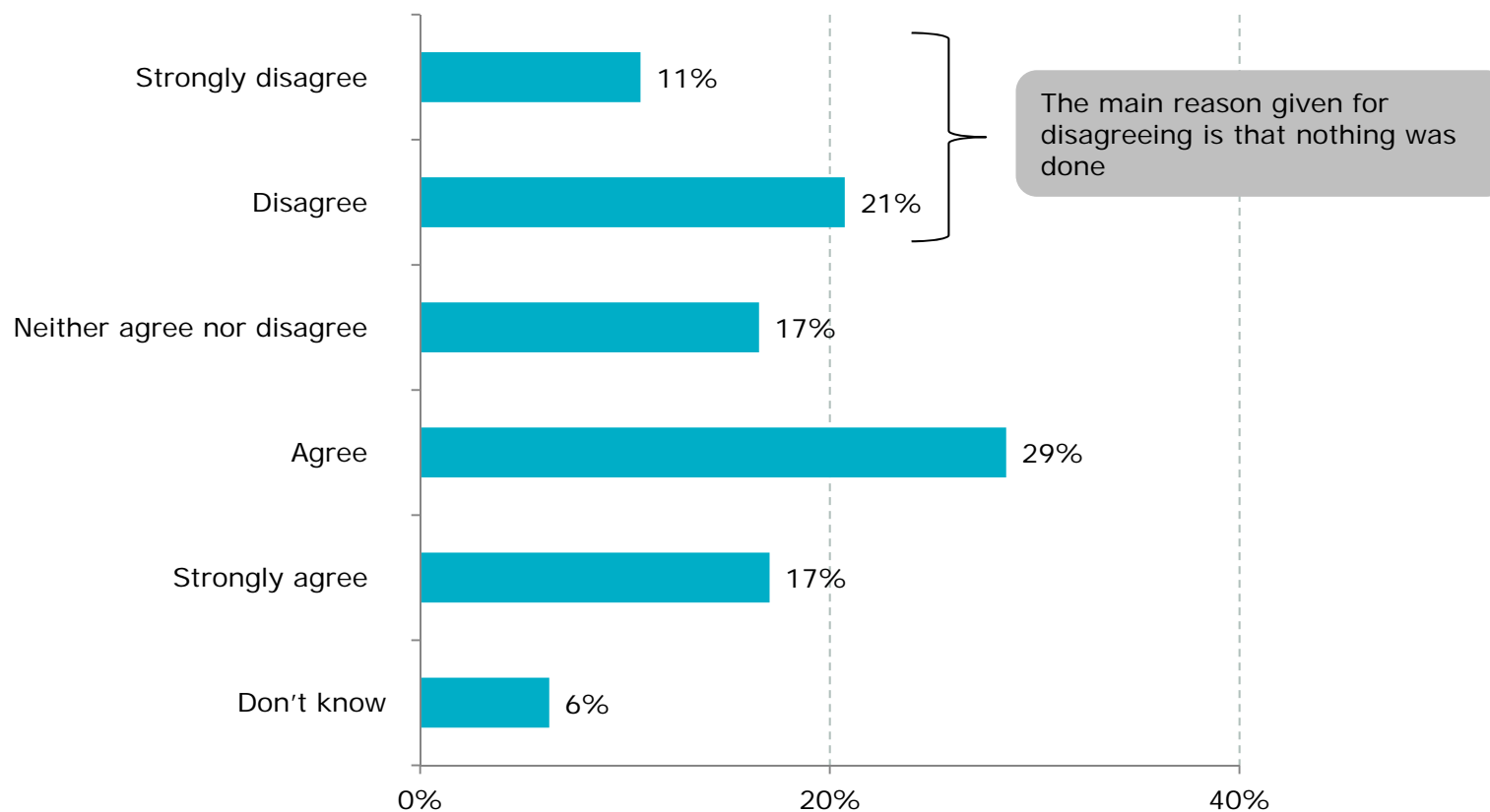
"*I did not see that it was worth it, seeing as there is **very little** in the way of **reporting tolls** that would **actually do anything**" (Man aged 16-17)*

Base: 443 respondents. Balance: No response / reported trolling / have not been trolled

B6b. Please can you tell us why you did not report trolling?

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Of the students who state that they **have reported** trolling, **nearly half** (46%) say that it was **worthwhile doing so**

Agree it was worthwhile reporting trolling

Response	Percentage
Strongly disagree	11%
Disagree	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%
Agree	29%
Strongly agree	17%
Don't know	6%

The main reason given for disagreeing is that nothing was done

Base: 381 respondents. Balance: Have not reported trolling / no response

B7   How far do you agree or disagree that it was worthwhile reporting the trolling?

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The **main reason** for agreeing that it was **worthwhile** reporting internet trolling is that it can **stop trolling** and **resolve the issue**

Main themes

- ✓ Can stop trolling / resolve the issue
- ✓ Troll can be banned
- ✓ Posts get removed
- ✓ It is abuse / can have serious effects
- ✓ Raising awareness to stop it happening to others

*"They **back off** when they get a warning."* (Man aged 16-17)

*"Because I think that these sites **need to ban** people who break rules or **make others feel bad** about themselves."* (Woman aged 18-20)

*"The incident was dealt with and **offensive comments removed**."* (Man aged 21-25)

*"If someone's account gets **barred** they might be **less likely to do it again**."* (Man aged 26-29)
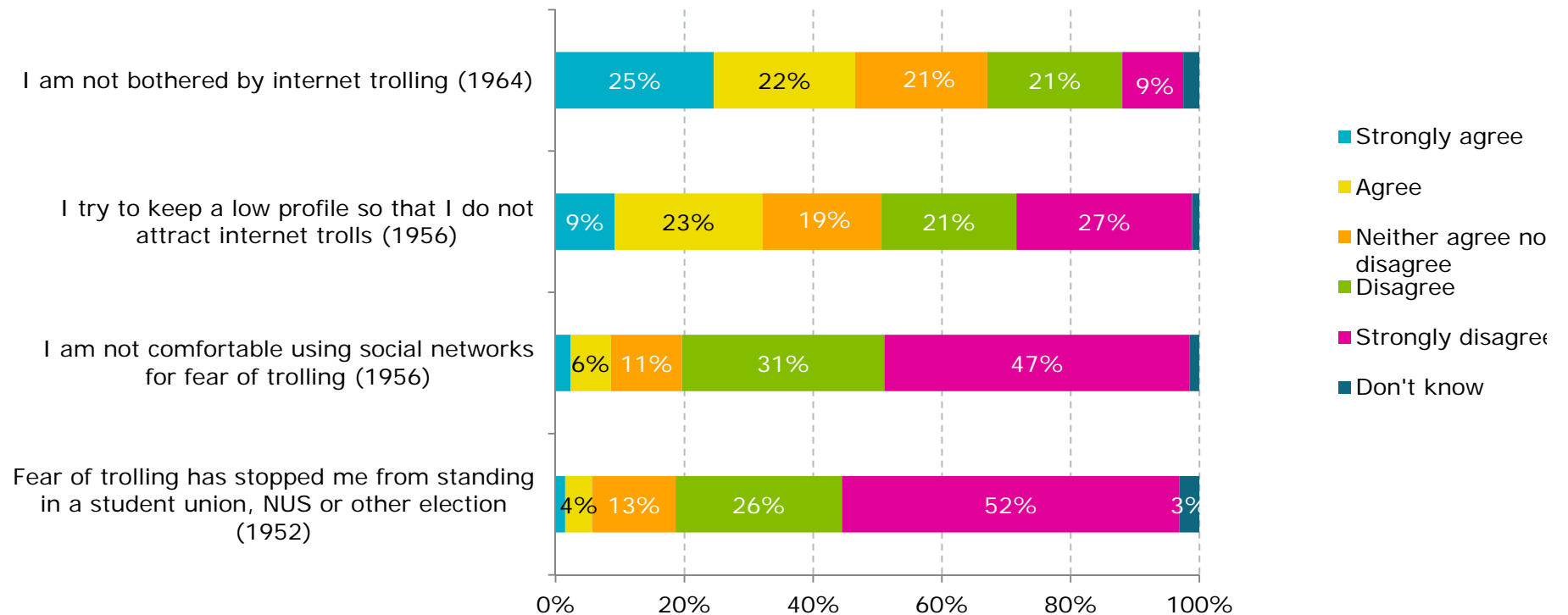
*"So then **they cannot go on** to make others feel bad about themselves and upset even more people."* (Woman aged 16-17)

Base: 127 respondents agreeing that it was worthwhile reporting trolling

B7a. Please can you tell us why you feel that?

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Although slightly **more men** have **experienced trolling** than women, they are also **significantly more likely** to report that they are **not bothered** by it. **One third** of students (32%) **keep a low profile** so that they do not attract trolls

Agreement with statements about trolling

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I am not bothered by internet trolling (1964)	25%	22%	21%	21%	9%	
I try to keep a low profile so that I do not attract internet trolls (1956)	9%	23%	19%	21%	27%	
I am not comfortable using social networks for fear of trolling (1956)	6%		11%	31%	47%	
Fear of trolling has stopped me from standing in a student union, NUS or other election (1952)	4%	13%	26%		52%	3%

Base: (in brackets) Balance: No response

B8   Looking at the statements below, please indicate how far you agree or disagree with each one

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Men students are **more likely** to report that they are **not bothered** by internet trolling, while **postgrads** are significantly **less likely to be comfortable using social networks** because of **fear of trolling** than undergrads

Statement	Significantly more likely to agree among…
I am not comfortable using social networks for fear of trolling	• postgrads than undergrads • women students
I try to keep a low profile so that I do not attract internet trolls	• women students
I am not bothered by internet trolling	• undergrads than GCSE students • men students

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B8   Looking at the statements below, please indicate how far you agree or disagree with each   one

Only a **third of students** (30%) are **aware of the university social media policy**, and this was significantly more likely if they were elected SU officers

Awareness of university social media policy

Yes — 30%

Significantly more likely amongst elected SU officers

No — 57%

Don't know — 13%
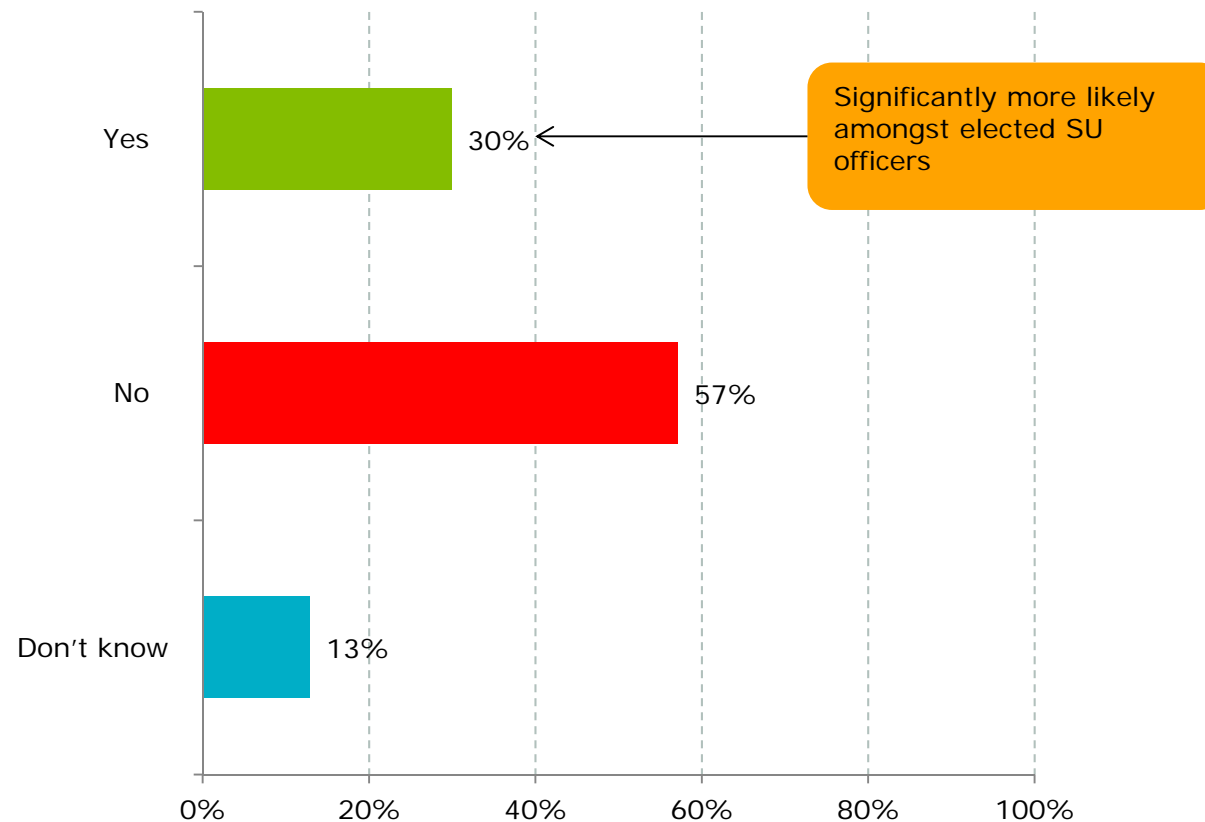
Base: 1965 respondents. Balance: No response

B9   Are you aware of your university's social media policy?

Less than **a quarter** of students (23%) have **heard of** their **union's social media policy**

Awareness of students' union's social media policy

35% of elected full-time SU officers gave this answer

Yes — 23%

No — 65%

Significantly more likely among **undergrad, postgrad and PhD students** than Foundation, GCSE students and apprentices

Don't know — 13%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
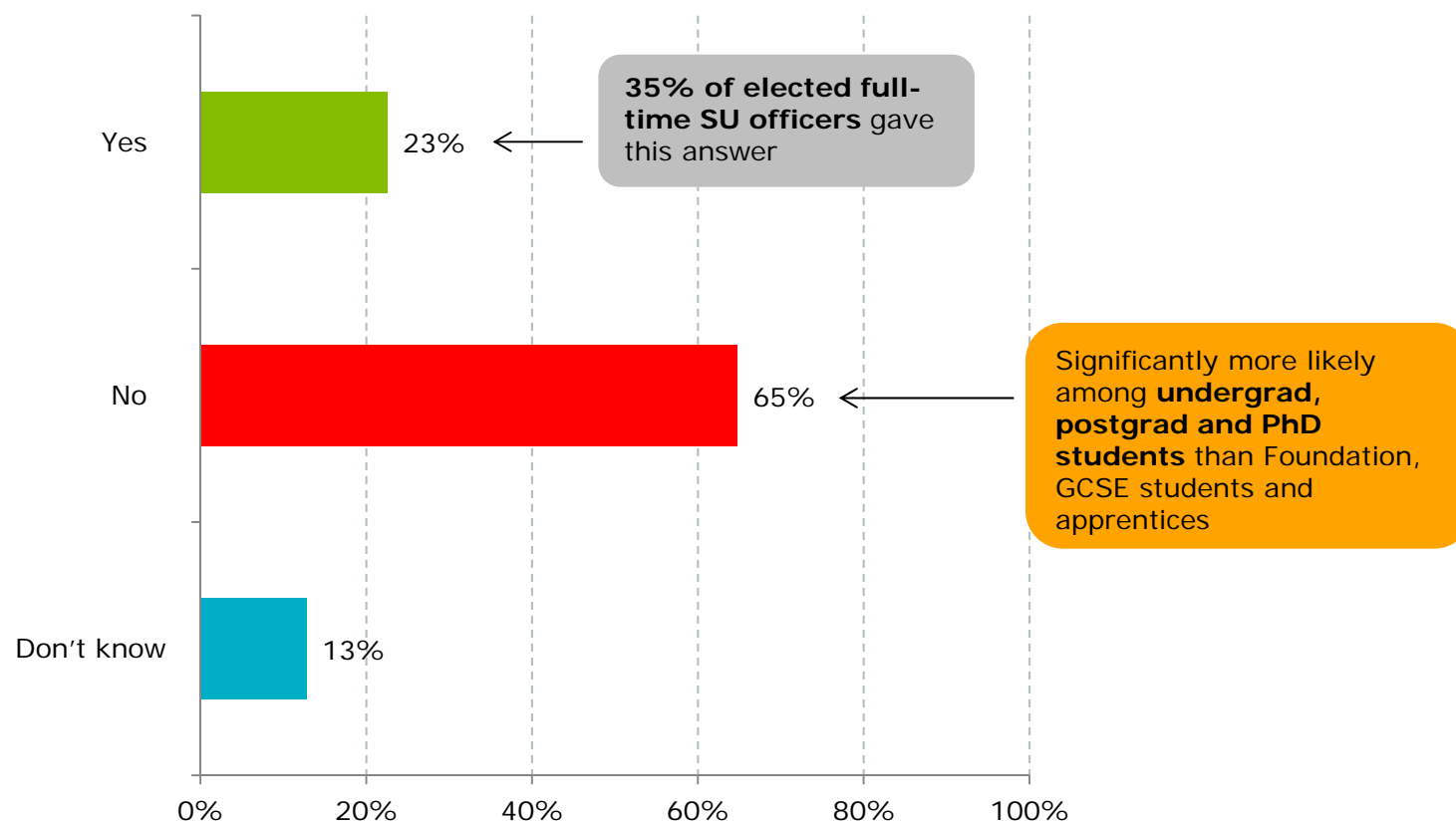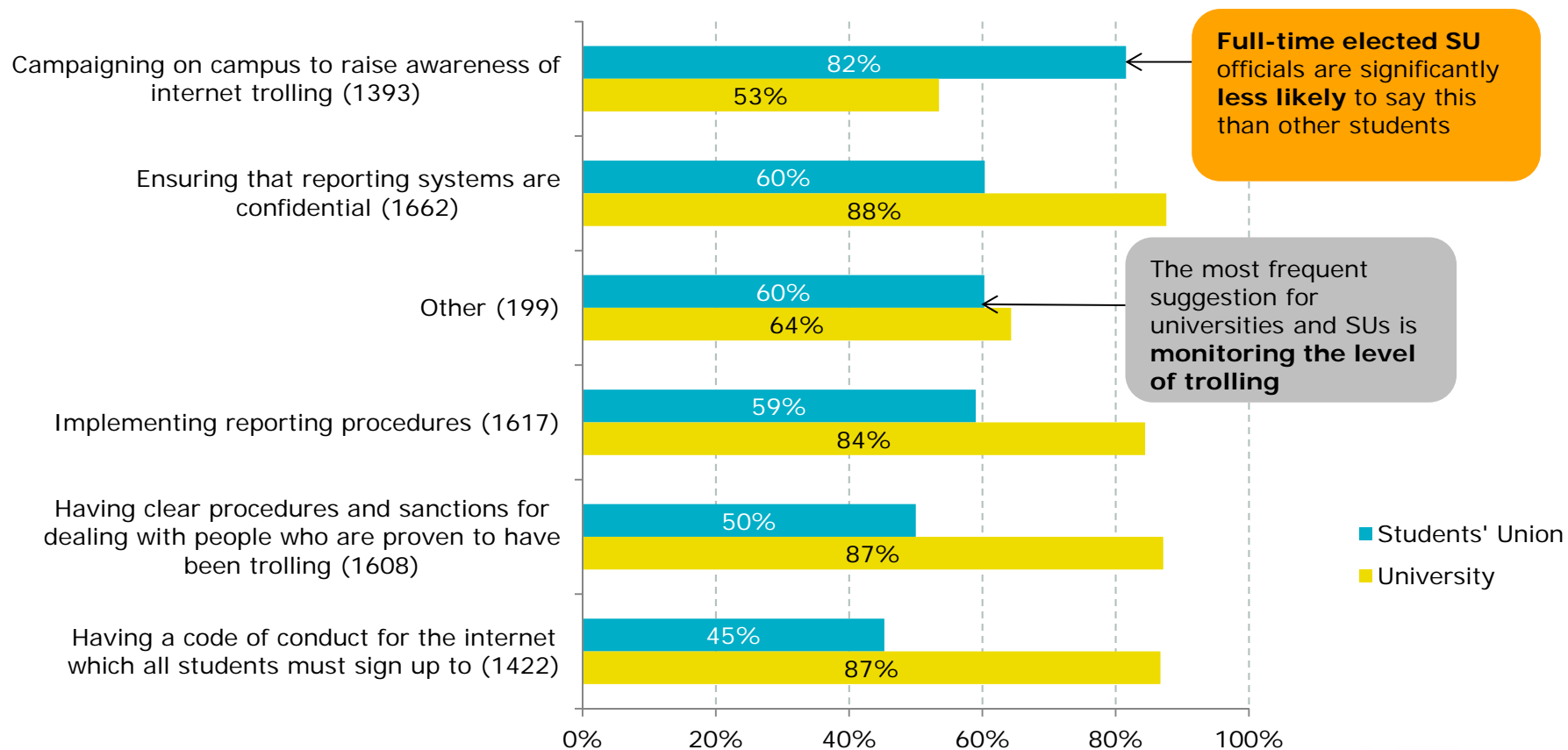
Base: 1959 respondents. Balance: No response

B10   Are you aware of your students' union's social media policy?

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The **most popular action** that students think **universities** should take is to **ensure reporting systems are confidential**, with almost nine out of ten students (88%) choosing this option. **Four in five students** (82%) feel that the **students' union** should **campaign** to raise awareness

Actions to tackle online trolling

Campaigning on campus to raise awareness of internet trolling (1393)
- Students' Union: 82%
- University: 53%

> **Full-time elected SU** officials are significantly **less likely** to say this than other students

Ensuring that reporting systems are confidential (1662)
- Students' Union: 60%
- University: 88%

Other (199)
- Students' Union: 60%
- University: 64%

> The most frequent suggestion for universities and SUs is **monitoring the level of trolling**

Implementing reporting procedures (1617)
- Students' Union: 59%
- University: 84%

Having clear procedures and sanctions for dealing with people who are proven to have been trolling (1608)
- Students' Union: 50%
- University: 87%

Having a code of conduct for the internet which all students must sign up to (1422)
- Students' Union: 45%
- University: 87%

Legend:
- ■ Students' Union
- ■ University

x-axis: 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Base: (in brackets). Balance: No response

B11 **Looking at the list below, which if any do you think that your university and students' union should do to tackle online trolling at your institution?**
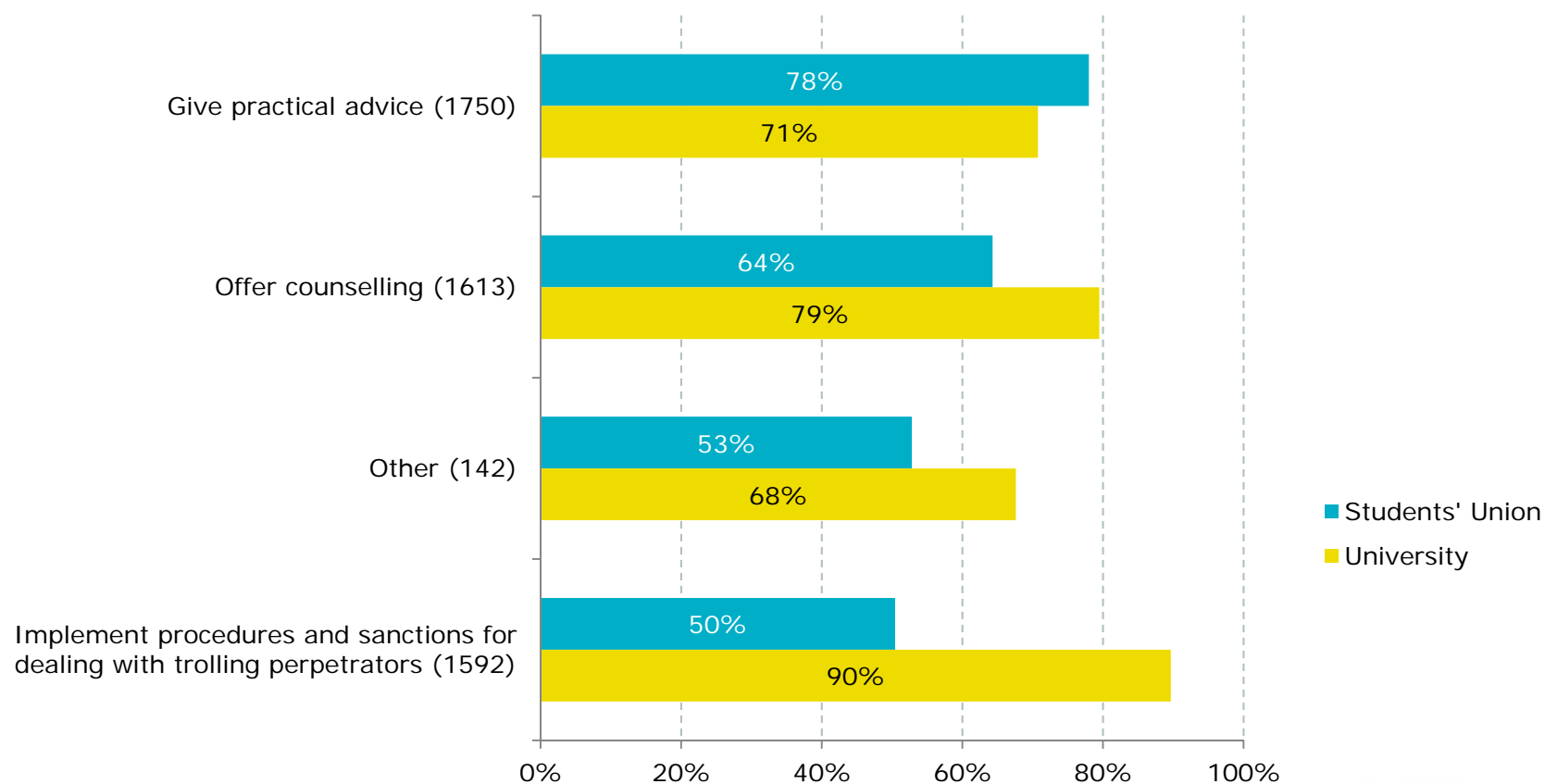
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Most significant differences occur between non-university students (apprentices, foundation, GCSE and A / AS level students) and undergrads, postgrads and PhD students, reflecting **different attitudes to the role of university and SUs**

	Significantly more likely to agree uni should do this among…	Significantly more likely to agree SU should do this among…
Campaigning on campus to raise awareness of internet trolling	• **A/ AS level students** than undergrads	• **Ordinary students** than elected SU officials
Having a **code of conduct** for the internet which all students must sign up to	• **Undergrads** than apprentices, GCSE and A / AS Level students	• **GCSE and A / AS level students** than undergrads, postgrads and PhD students
Having **clear procedures** and **sanctions** for dealing with people who are proven to have been trolling	• **BA, MA and PhD students** than apprentices, GCSE and A / AS Level students • **Ordinary students** than full-time elected SU officers	• **Apprentices, foundation level, GCSE and A / AS Level students** than undergrads
Implementing **reporting procedures**	• **Undergrad and postgrad students** than apprentices, GCSE and A / AS Level students • **Ordinary students** than full-time elected SU officers	• **Foundation level, GCSE and A / AS Level students** than undergrads and PhD students
Ensuring that **reporting systems** are **confidential**	• **BA, MA and PhD students** than GCSE and A / AS Level students	• **Foundation and A / AS Level students** than undergrads, postgrads and PhD students

B11 **Looking at the list below, which if any do you think that your university and students' union should do to tackle online trolling at your institution?**

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Over **three quarters** of respondents (78%) say that **SUs should give practical advice** to support trolling victims, while **nine out of ten** students (90%) say that **universities** should **implement sanctions** for trolls

Actions to support victims of online trolling

Give practical advice (1750)
- Students' Union: 78%
- University: 71%

Offer counselling (1613)
- Students' Union: 64%
- University: 79%

Other (142)
- Students' Union: 53%
- University: 68%

Implement procedures and sanctions for dealing with trolling perpetrators (1592)
- Students' Union: 50%
- University: 90%

■ Students' Union
■ University

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Base: (in brackets). Balance: No response

B12   How do you think your university and students' union should support victims of trolling?

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Most significant differences are again around how GCSE and A / AS Level students feel the university and students' union should support students

	Significantly more likely to agree **uni** should do this among…	Significantly more likely to agree **SU** should do this among…
Offer counselling		• **A / AS Level students** than undergrads
Give practical advice (e.g. how to report abuse to a website administrator, asking a moderator to intervene, using the ignore command)	• **Men**	• **Women**
Implement procedures and sanctions for dealing with trolling perpetrators	• **Undergrad and postgrad** than GCSE and A / AS Level students	• **GCSE and A / AS Level students** than undergrads, postgrads and PhD students

B12   How do you think your university and students' union should support victims of trolling?

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Just under **half of students** (48%) **agree or strongly agree** that **trolling is getting worse**. Women are significantly more likely to agree with this statement

Agreement with statement that trolling is getting worse

Category	Value
Strongly disagree	4%
Disagree	8%
Neither agree nor disagree	31%
Agree	33%
Strongly agree	15%
Don't know	10%

Men are **significantly more likely** than women to **disagree or strongly disagree** with this statement

Women are significantly **more likely** than men to **agree or strongly agree** with this statement
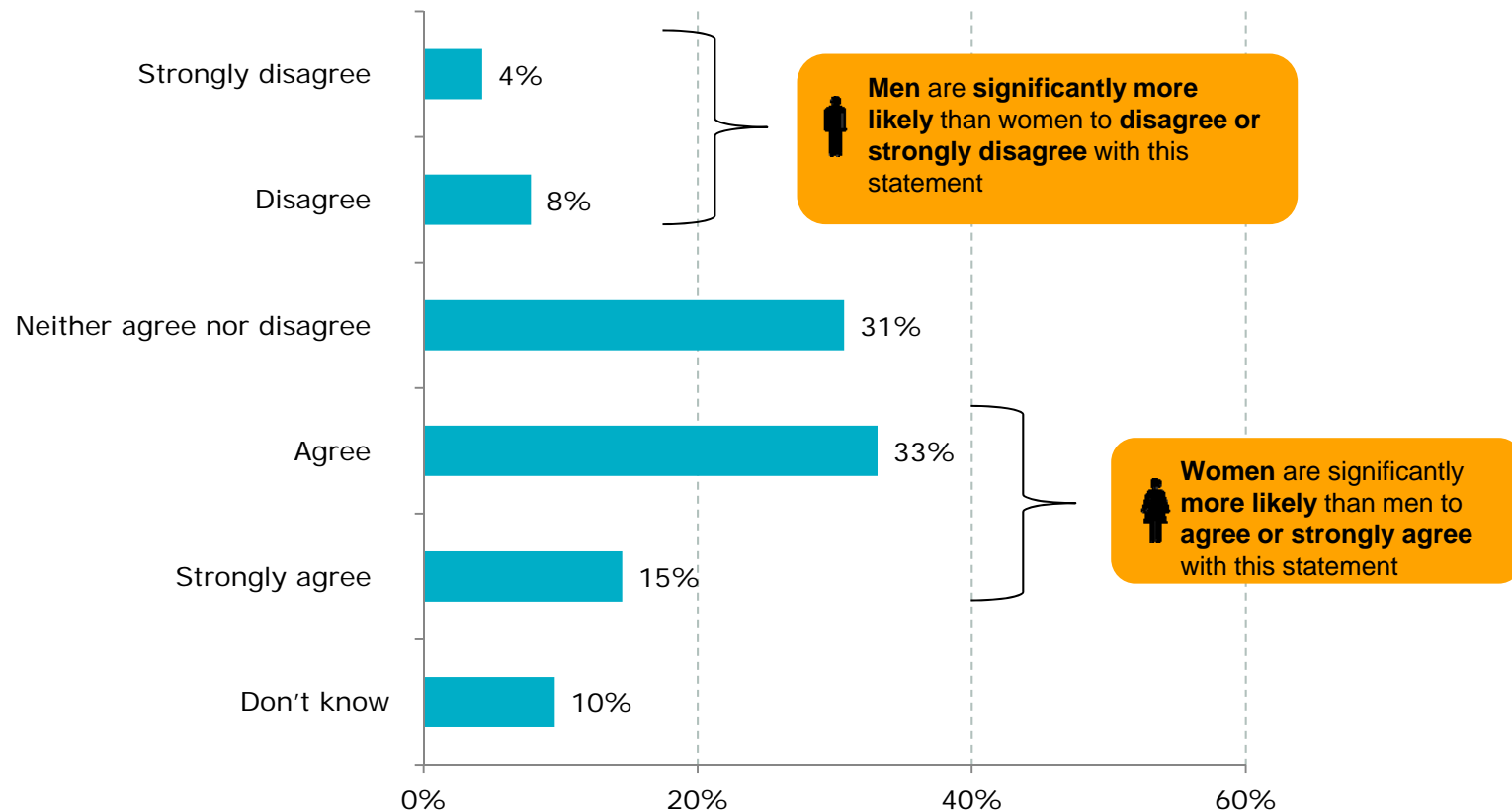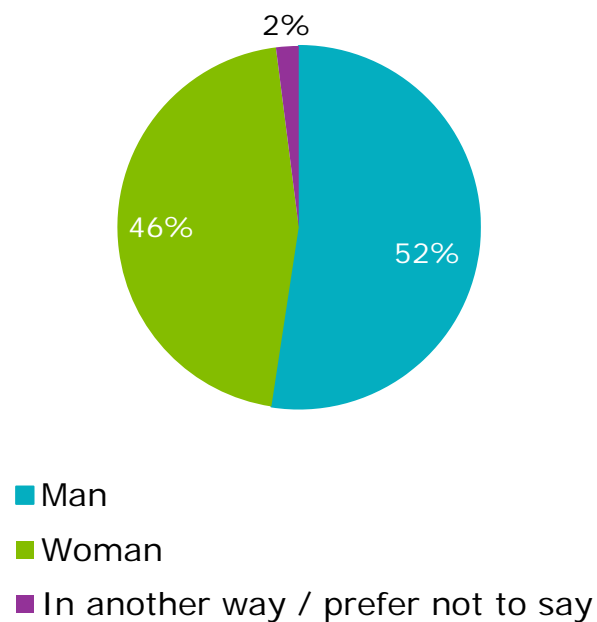
Base: 1965 respondents. Balance: No response

B13 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Internet trolling is getting worse'

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Demographics

18 – 20 year olds account for just under half of the sample (44%), while one fifth (19%) are aged **26 or older.** Just over half the sample are **men** (52%)

Age

Pie chart:
- 2% — In another way / prefer not to say
- 46% — Woman
- 52% — Man

■ Man
■ Woman
■ In another way / prefer not to say

Bar chart:
- 16-17: 11%
- 18-20: 44%
- 21-25: 26%
- 26-29: 6%
- 30+: 12%
- I would prefer not to say: 1%

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Four fifths of respondents (81%) are **UK citizens**. Over **four in five** (84%) class themselves as **heterosexual**

Sexual orientation

1%
4%
1%
5%
6%
84%

- Heterosexual / Straight
- Bisexual / Bi
- Gay / Lesbian
- In another way
- Queer
- Prefer not to say

Citizenship

I am a UK citizen studying in the UK	81%
I am an international student from outside the EU studying in the UK	9%
I am an international student from within the EU studying in the UK	8%
I would prefer not to say	1%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
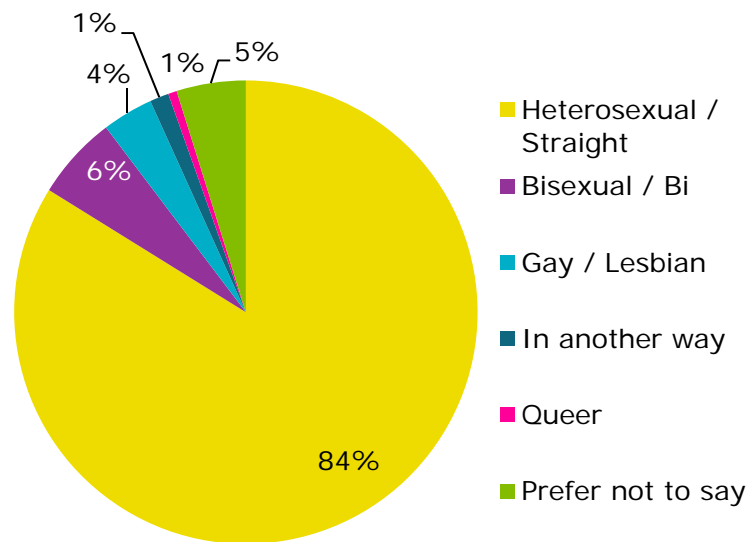
Base: 1967 respondents. Balance: No response

A5.   Which of the following options best describes your sexual orientation / preference?

Base: 1969 respondents.

A2.   Which of the following statements best describes you?

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Three in five respondents (60%) are **undergraduates** or an equivalent level. **One in five** (21%) are **GCSE and A level** students or equivalent

Level of study

Level	%
Entry-level (e.g. Skills for Life or ESOL)	1%
Foundation / Level 1	2%
GCSEs / NVQ 2 / other equivalent Level 2 qualification	4%
A / AS-levels / NVQ 3 / BTEC National / Access course / equivalent Level 3 qualification	17%
Apprenticeship (Intermediate / Advanced / Higher)	3%
BA / BSc / BEd / Foundation Degree / HNC / HND / other equivalent Level 4 qualification	60%
MA / MRes / MSc / MEd / MPhil / MBA / PGCE / other postgraduate qualification	10%
PHD / D.Phil / professional doctorate other doctoral degree	3%

Base: 1969 respondents.

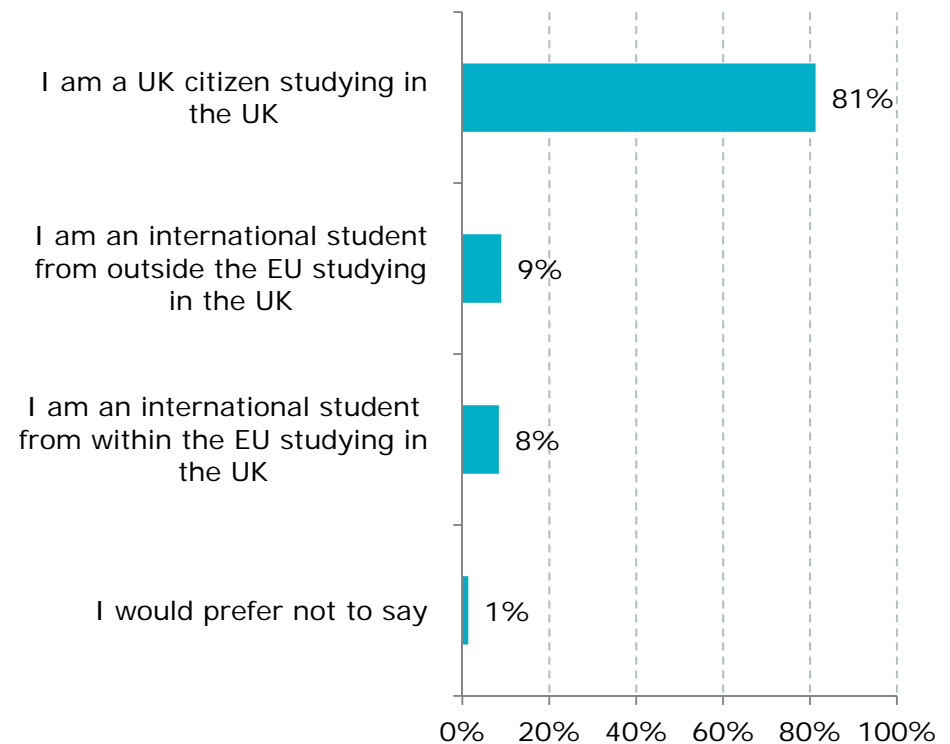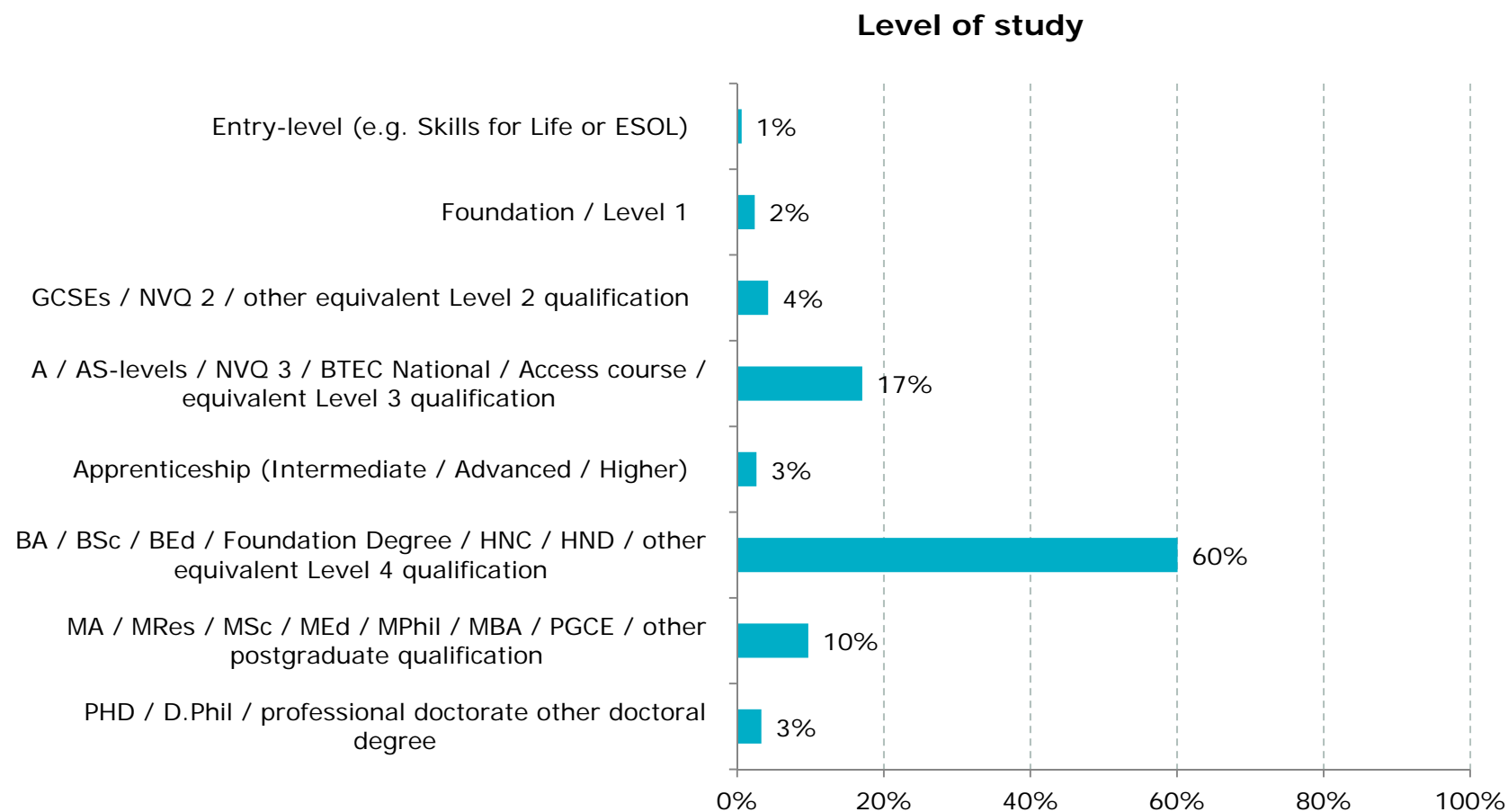**A3.   Which of the following best describes your current level of study?**

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Nearly **seven in ten** students report that they are of a **British background**

Ethnicity

Ethnic group	Percentage
English / Scottish / Welsh / Northern Irish / British	68%
Irish	0.5%
Gypsy / Traveller	0.2%
Any other White background	10%
White and Black Caribbean	1%
White and Black African	0.5%
White and Asian	2%
Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	1%
Indian	3%
Pakistani	1%
Bangladeshi	1%
Chinese	3%
Any other Asian background	2%
African	1%
Caribbean	1%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean / Black British background	1%
Arab	0.5%
Any other ethnic group	0.9%
Prefer not to say	2%

Base: 1968 respondents. Balance: No response. Please note – descriptors for each ethnic grouping e.g. 'white', 'mixed / multiple', 'Asian/Asian British', 'Black / African / Caribbean / Black British', and 'Other ethnic group' were not included in the question.

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A6.   What is your ethnic group?

Students who **do not consider themselves to have any religion** account for just under **one third** of the total respondents (30%), while 29% report that they are Christian
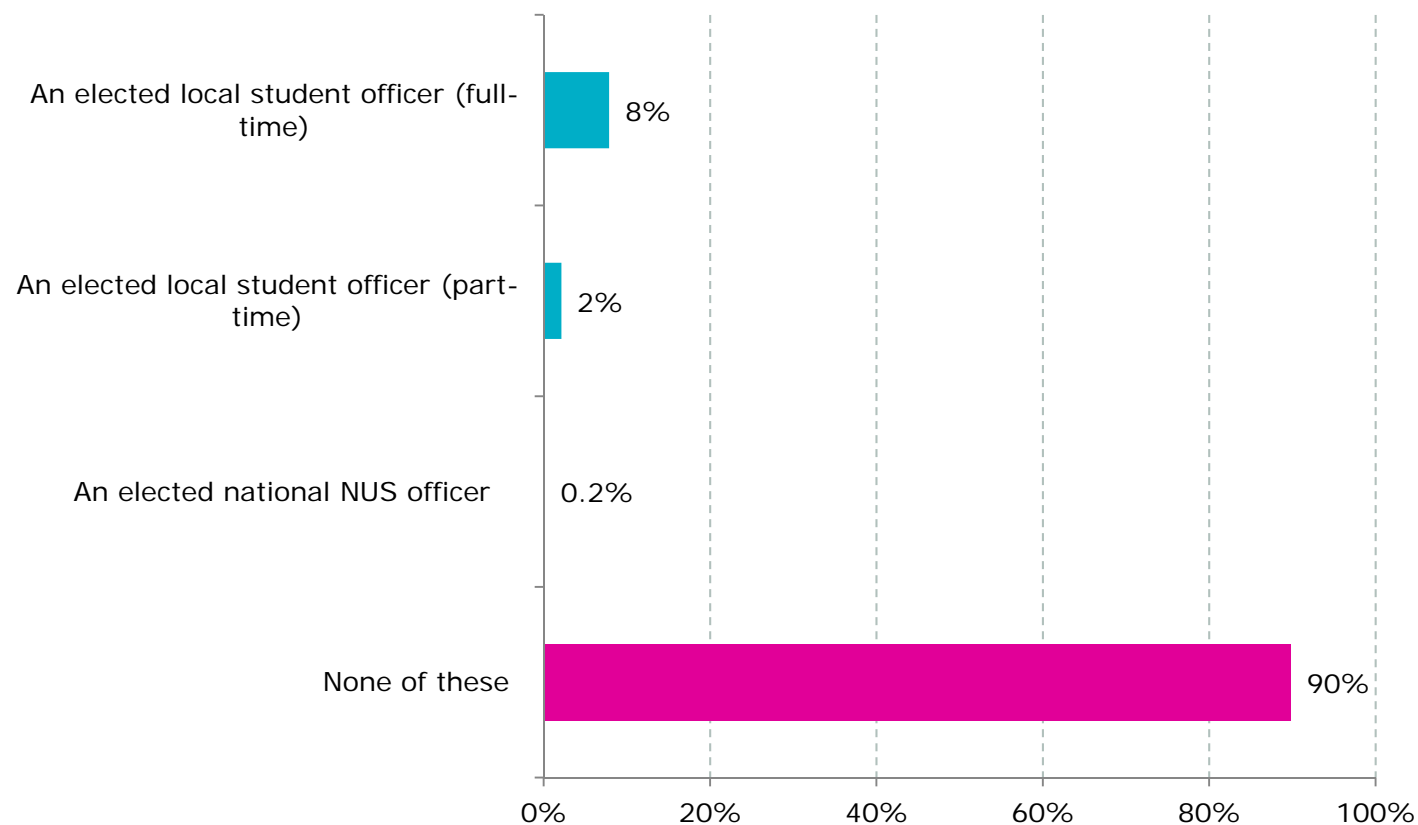
Religion

Religion	Percentage
Christian	29%
Atheist	17%
Agnostic	9%
Muslim	4%
Buddhist	2%
Spiritual	2%
Any other religion or belief	2%
Hindu	1%
Sikh	1%
Jewish	0%
None	30%
Prefer not to say	5%
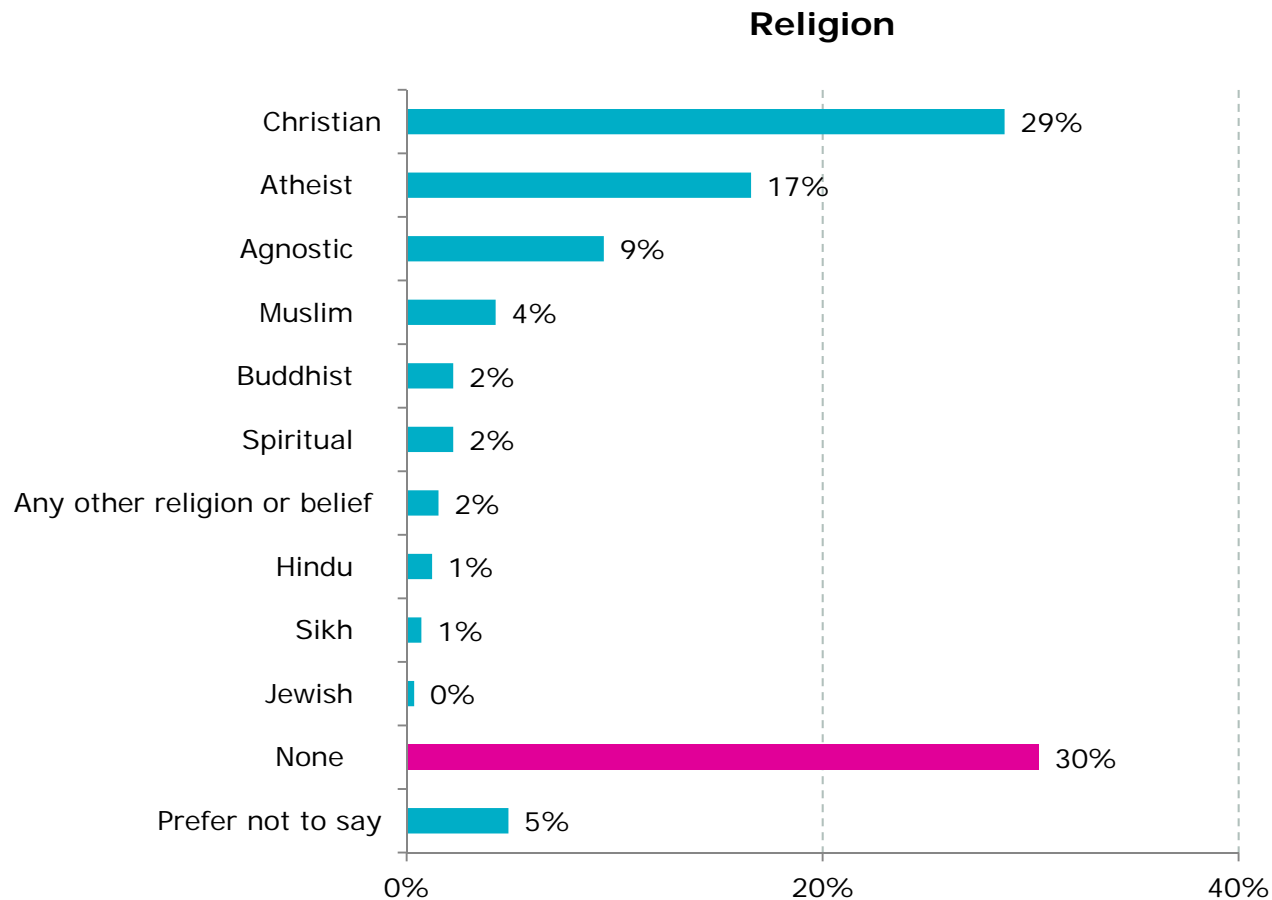
Base: 1962 respondents. Balance: No response

A7.   What is your religion, faith or belief?

nus
national union of **students**

One in ten students in the sample (10%) are local elected officers

Elected officers

Category	Percentage
An elected local student officer (full-time)	8%
An elected local student officer (part-time)	2%
An elected national NUS officer	0.2%
None of these	90%

Base: 1969 respondents.

A8.   And are you?

nus
national union of students

Internet trolling

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