

NUS DIVEST-INVEST

Research into attitudes towards investments, research and pensions across further and higher education in the UK

January 2016

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1. Summary

Research was conducted in November and December 2015, collecting views from students, student officers and staff in further and higher education on a range of issues related to investments and research...

University investments

When making investments, universities should consider...

63% say the views of students

59% say the views of staff

55% say potential for public benefit

Thinking about their university's approach to making decisions about investments, most respondents are uncertain of the factors considered, but...

26% say their university is good at considering views of students

22% say their university is good at considering public benefit of investments

21% say their university is good at considering views of staff

? 61% are unaware of a process to raise concerns about investment decisions

? 47% don't know how willing their institution would be to respond to any concerns about investments.

✓ 44% believe their institutions investments are currently contributing to public benefit.

University research

When seeking or accepting research funding, universities should consider...

48% say the views of students

47% say academic freedom

46% say the views of staff

? 67% are unaware of a process to raise concerns about research funding decisions

? 48% don't know how willing their institution would be to respond to any concerns about research funding decisions

✓ 29% believe most of the research carried out at their institution is contributing to public benefit.

Base: c.3700 [HE staff and students only completed these questions]

Respondents (staff only) were also asked for their views on pension schemes along with the extent to which their institution should be involved with energy industries...

Staff pensions

When making investments, pension schemes should consider...

58% say maximising financial return

55% say the ethical credentials of companies / industries

55% say the views of pension scheme members

? 73% are unaware of ethical investment options within their pension scheme

? 77% don't know if there are fossil free investment options within their pension scheme

✓ 5% have opted for ethical investment options within their pension scheme.

✓ 50% would consider opting for ethical investment options within their pension scheme.

✓ 47% would consider opting for fossil free investment options within their pension scheme.

University investment and divestment

44% agree that their university should remove investments from fossil fuel companies and industries

46% agree that their university should phase out research that contributes to continued use of fossil fuels

42% agree that their university should stop partnering with fossil fuel companies

50% of students say that they would be more likely to donate to their university, later in their career, if they knew the institution had stopped investing in fossil fuels

87% agree that their university should invest in renewable energy

86% agree that their university should conduct research into renewable energy

85% agree that their university should partner with renewable energy companies

Base: c.3700 [HE staff and students only completed these questions]

Finally, respondents were also asked for their views on climate change, including the UK's approach to the issue, and what role renewable energy can play...

University re-investment



85% say their university should buy or generate more renewable energy



74% say their university should offer opportunities for staff and students to invest in community-owned renewables



74% say their university should invest in community-owned renewables

Base: c.3700 [HE staff and students only completed these questions]
Icon: Nicholas Menghini

Climate change and renewable energy

Students, student officers and staff say...

86% are concerned about climate change

80% are concerned that climate change will affect them

64% say we're already feeling the effects of climate change

72% say we can't wait a few more years before we tackle climate change



44% the UK Government is not taking a lead in addressing climate change



46% the UK Government is not setting a positive example that encourages me to take action on climate change



62% say the government is not doing enough to support the use of renewable energy

61% say their university should use 100% renewable energy.

Base: c.4900 [All respondents]

2. About the research

About the research

Objective, methodology and survey details

This report presents the findings of research designed to assess the views of a range audiences across further and higher education on the relationship between institutions, fossil fuels and renewable energy.

A total of 4998 responses were gathered through an online survey run during November and December 2015. The survey was advertised through NUS' student database and promoted locally at universities and colleges across the UK amongst staff and students. A prize draw was available to incentivise responses, and the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

All differences between groups of respondents reported as significant have been statistically tested for significance to at least 95% confidence level with 5% margin of error.

About the research

Objective, methodology and survey details

The 4998 respondents identified as follows:

- 4419 students
- 58 student officers in a college
- 54 student officers in a university
- 44 members of staff in a students' union
- 58 members of staff in a further education institution
- 17 members of staff in a further higher education institution
- 313 members of staff in a higher education institution

This report presents the findings in the following areas, with the corresponding respondents identified in each case:

Investments: This section of the survey was completed by students studying at, and staff working at, higher education institutions only. Respondents were asked for their views on the factors that affect investment decisions along with perceptions of their institution's current performance.

Research: This section of the survey was completed by students studying at, and staff working at, higher education institutions only. Respondents were asked for their views on the factors that affect decisions related to research / research funding along with perceptions of their institution's current performance.

Pensions: University, college and students' union staff, along with students' union officers in further and higher education institutions were also asked for their views and experiences of pension investments.

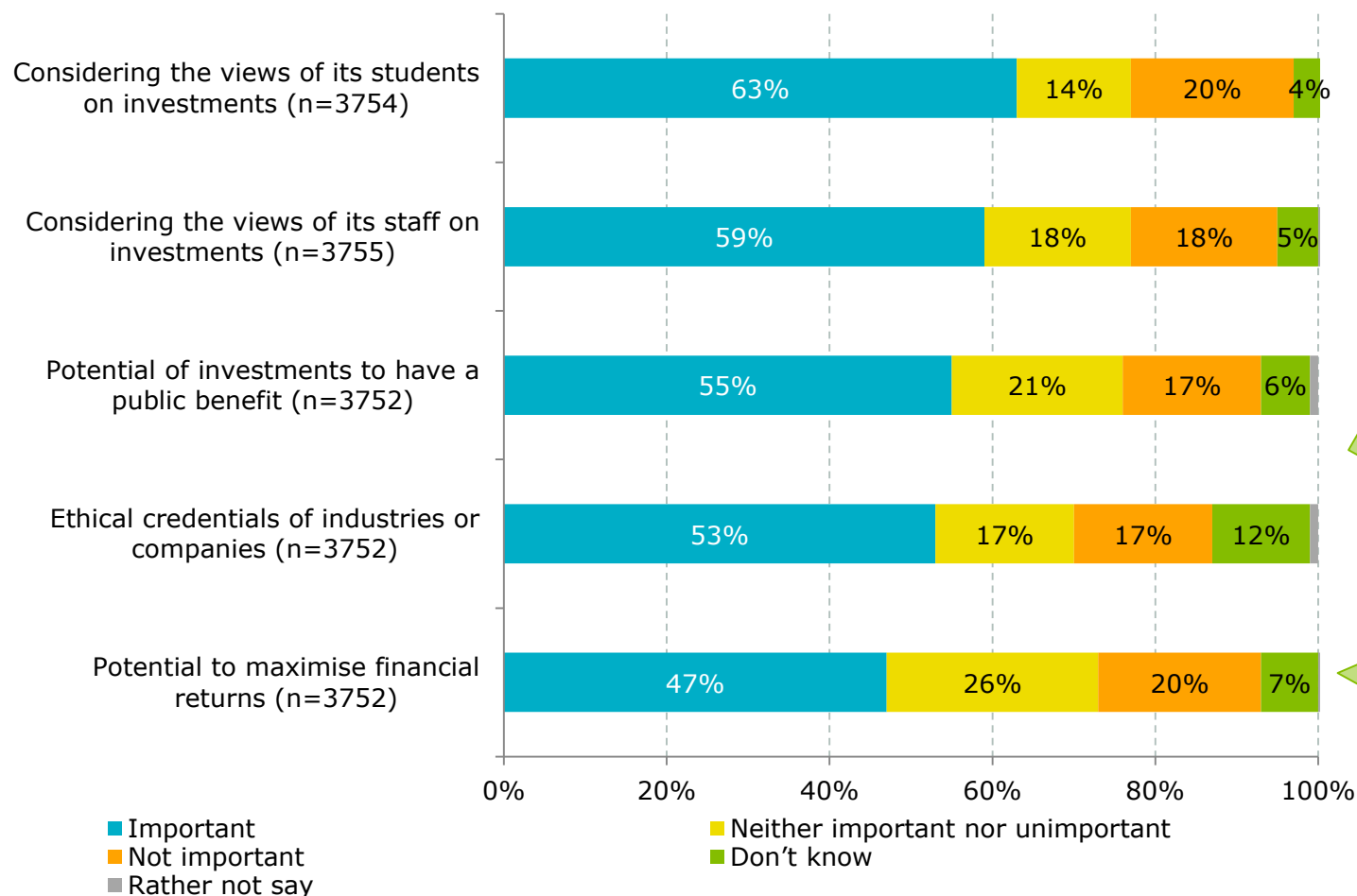
University divestment from fossil fuels and investment in renewables: University staff, students' union staff, students and student officers in higher education were also asked for their views on their institution's relationship with the energy industry. Questions included attitudes towards divesting from fossil fuels and opportunities for investing in renewable energy.

Attitudes towards climate change and renewable energy: All respondents were asked for their views on climate change and renewable energy across the UK as a whole.

3. Findings: Investments

This section of the survey was completed by students studying at, and staff working at, higher education institutions only. Respondents were asked for their views on the factors that affect investment decisions along with perceptions of their institution's current performance.

In terms of the factors that should influence investment decisions made by universities, consideration of the views of students and staff received the highest ratings of importance (63% and 59% respectively). Over half also rated the potential to have a public benefit (55%) and ethical credentials (53%) as important factors in the decision making process.



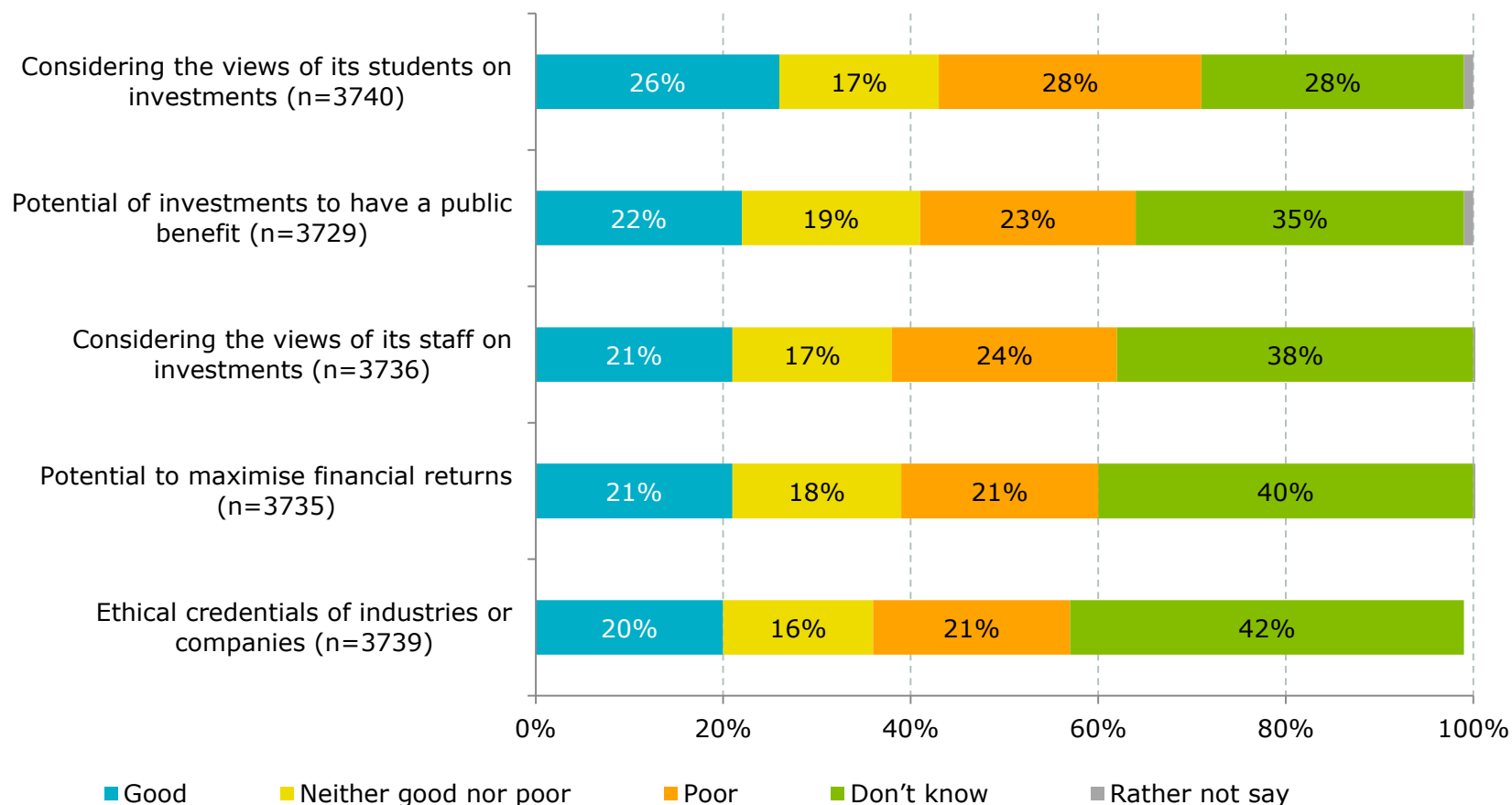
University staff are significantly more likely to say the potential to have a public benefit and the ethical credentials of industries / companies is important than student respondents. Student respondents are significantly more likely to say they 'don't know' for these options.

University staff are significantly more likely to say the potential to maximise financial returns is important than student respondents.

Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. How important should the following factors be to your university when making decisions on where to make financial investments?

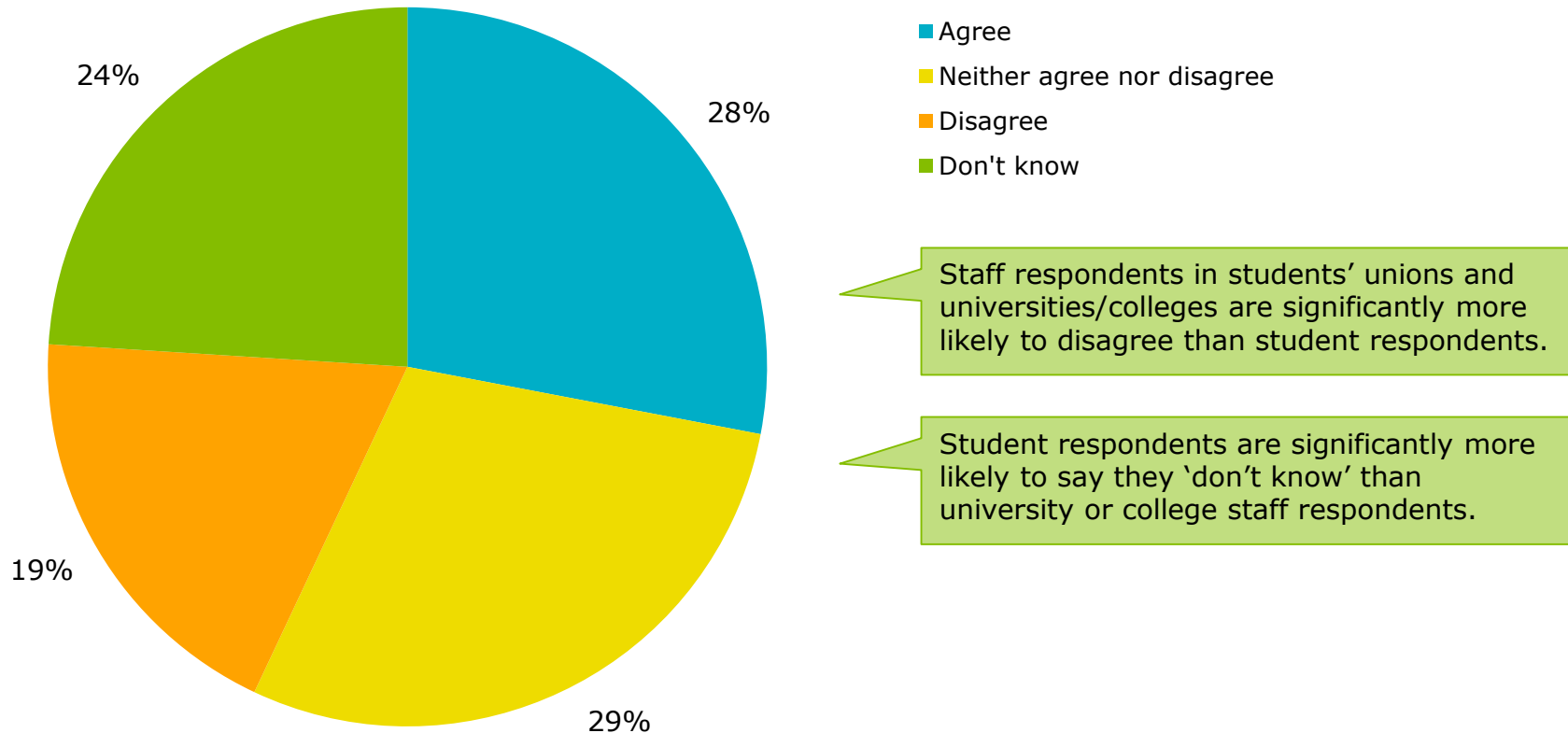
Respondents reported a high level of uncertainty over how their institution is performing against the factors presented that could influence investment decisions, for example 42% did not know the extent to which their university consider the ethical credentials of industries and companies. A quarter felt their institution was performing well on considering the views of students on investments.



Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. How would you rate your institution's current approach to investment based on the following factors?

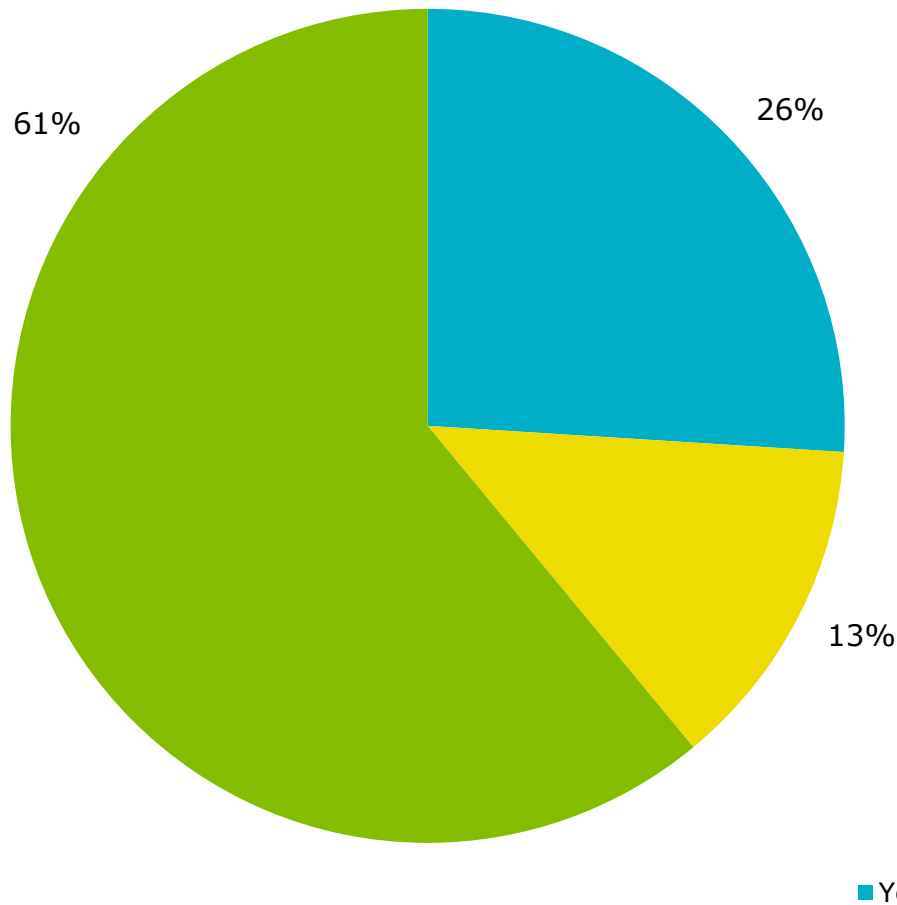
Opinion is split over the transparency of the investments made by institutions however the responses overall reflect uncertainty with 24% saying they don't know, and 29% opting for neither agree nor disagree.



Base: 3752 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? "My university / college is transparent about where they are making investments."

Three fifths of respondents are not aware of any process within their university that allows them to raise concerns about the investments being made, however one quarter of respondents are aware of such a process.



Student officers and staff respondents are significantly more likely to say 'no' than student respondents.

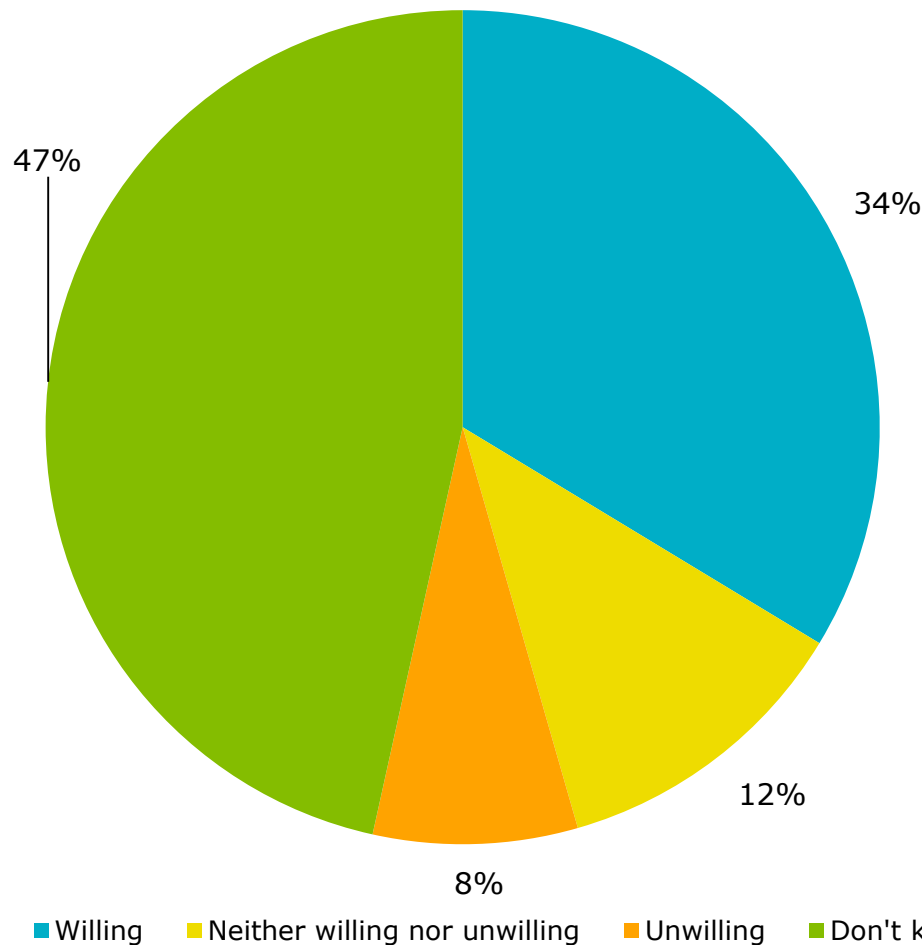
Student officers and students' union staff respondents are significantly less likely to say 'don't know' than student and university / college staff respondents.

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

Base: 3750 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Is there a process that allows you to raise any concerns about the investments made by your university?

Just under half of respondents don't know how willing their institution would be to take action based on concerns raised about their investments. One third report a perception that their institution would be willing to respond to concerns over investments.



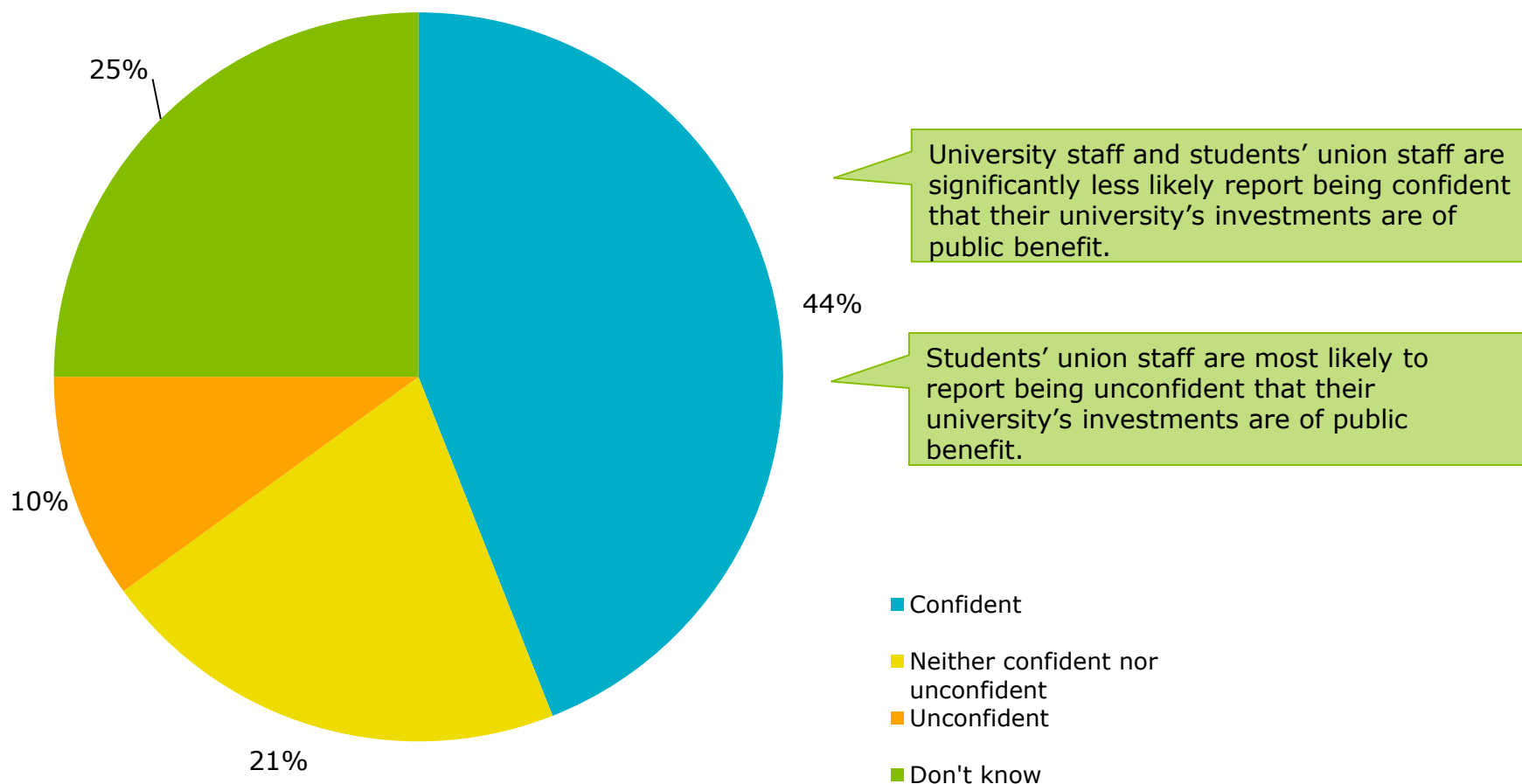
Student officer respondents are significantly more likely to view their institution as being willing to act on concerns raised about its investments.

■ Willing ■ Neither willing nor unwilling ■ Unwilling ■ Don't know

Base: 3752 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. In your opinions, to what extent is your university willing to act on any concerns raised about its investments?

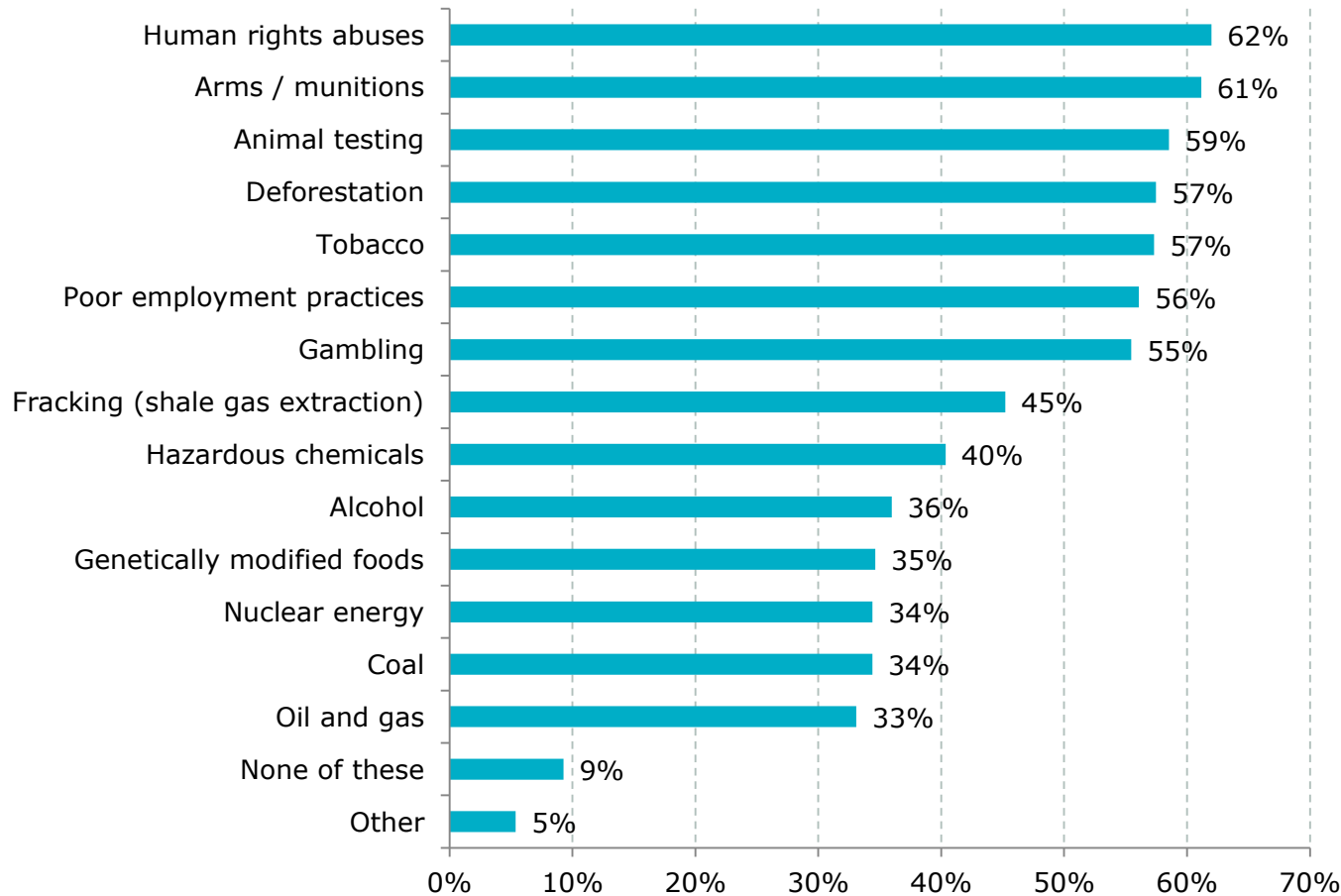
Just under half of respondents report being confident that the investments made by their university can be classified as being of public benefit. Of this 44%, only 25% of university staff respondents are confident that investments are of public benefit, compared with 46% of student respondents.



Base: 3752 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Most UK universities are registered charities, and include charitable aims of existing to benefit the public. How confident are you that the investments made by your university are in industries or companies that contribute to public benefit?

Just under two thirds of respondents say investments associated with human rights abuses and arms / munitions should be avoided (62% and 61% respectively). A third say investments in fossil fuel industries should be avoided and just under half (45%) say investments associated with fracking should be avoided.



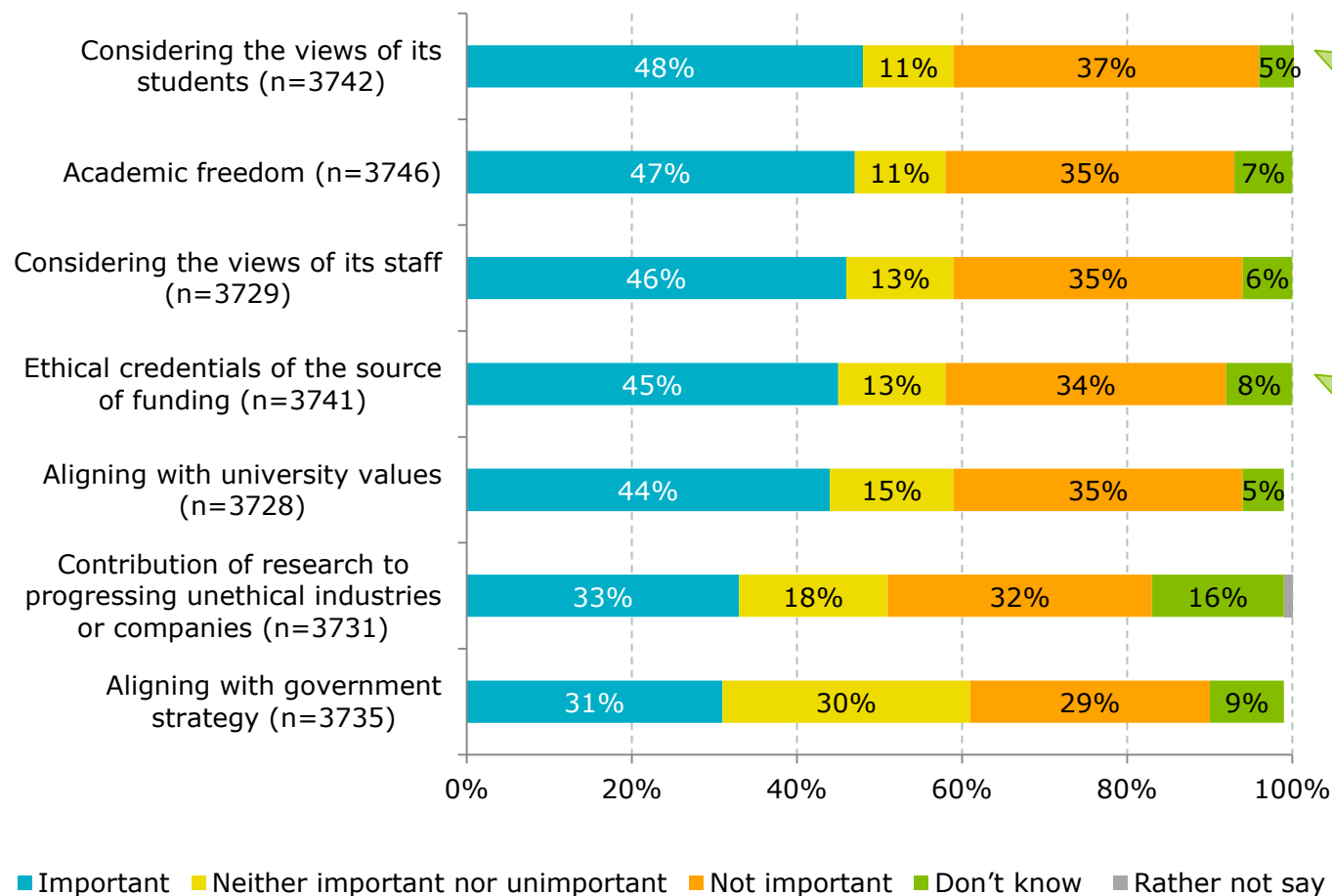
Base: (3723 - 3623). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Which of the following issues or activities should be avoided?

4. Findings: Research

This section of the survey was completed by students studying at, and staff working at, higher education institutions only. Respondents were asked for their views on the factors that affect decisions related to research / research funding along with perceptions of their institution's current performance.

The views of staff and students along with academic freedom were seen as important factors to consider when universities are making decisions to accept or seek research funding by just under half of respondents. 45% agreed that the ethical credentials of the source of funding is important, however only a third agreed that considering the contribution of research to unethical industries is important.



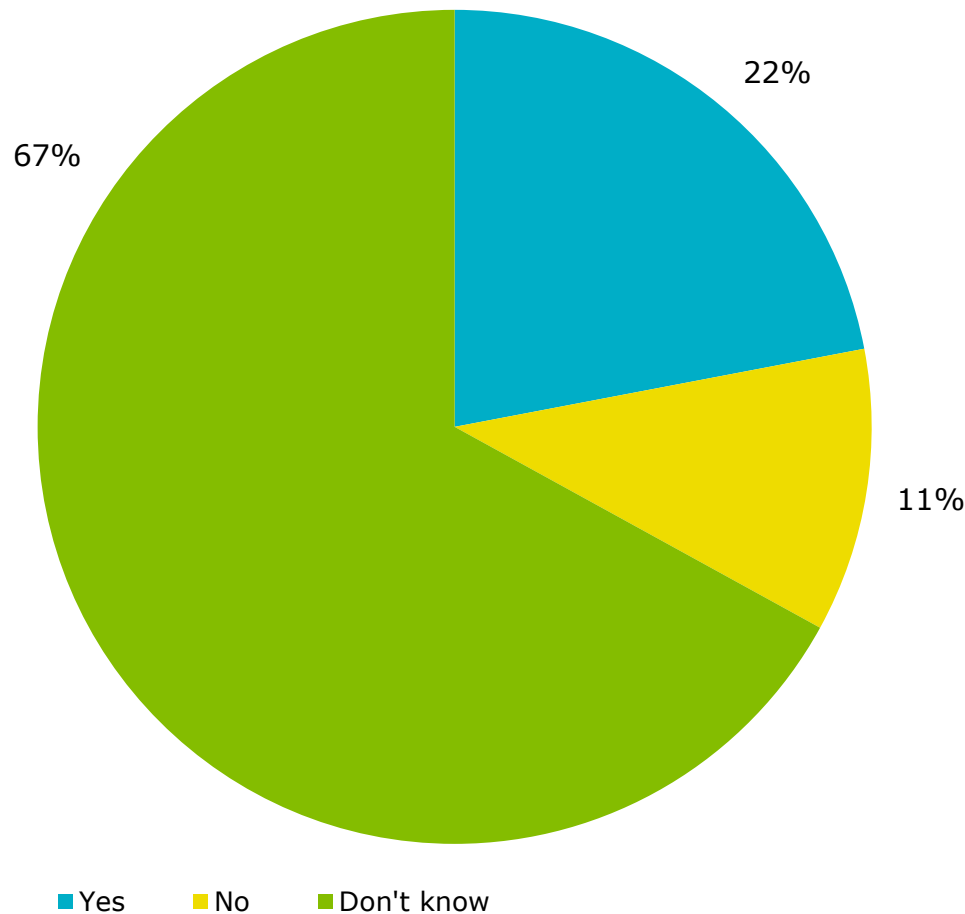
Students, understandably, are significantly more likely to report their views as 'important' than university staff respondents.

University staff are significantly more likely to say considering the ethical credentials of the source of funding is important than student respondents.

Base: (in brackets) Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. How important should the following factors be to your university when deciding to accept or seek funding for research?

Two thirds of respondents are not aware of a process at their institution through which any concerns about the research delivered or funding accepted can be raised.



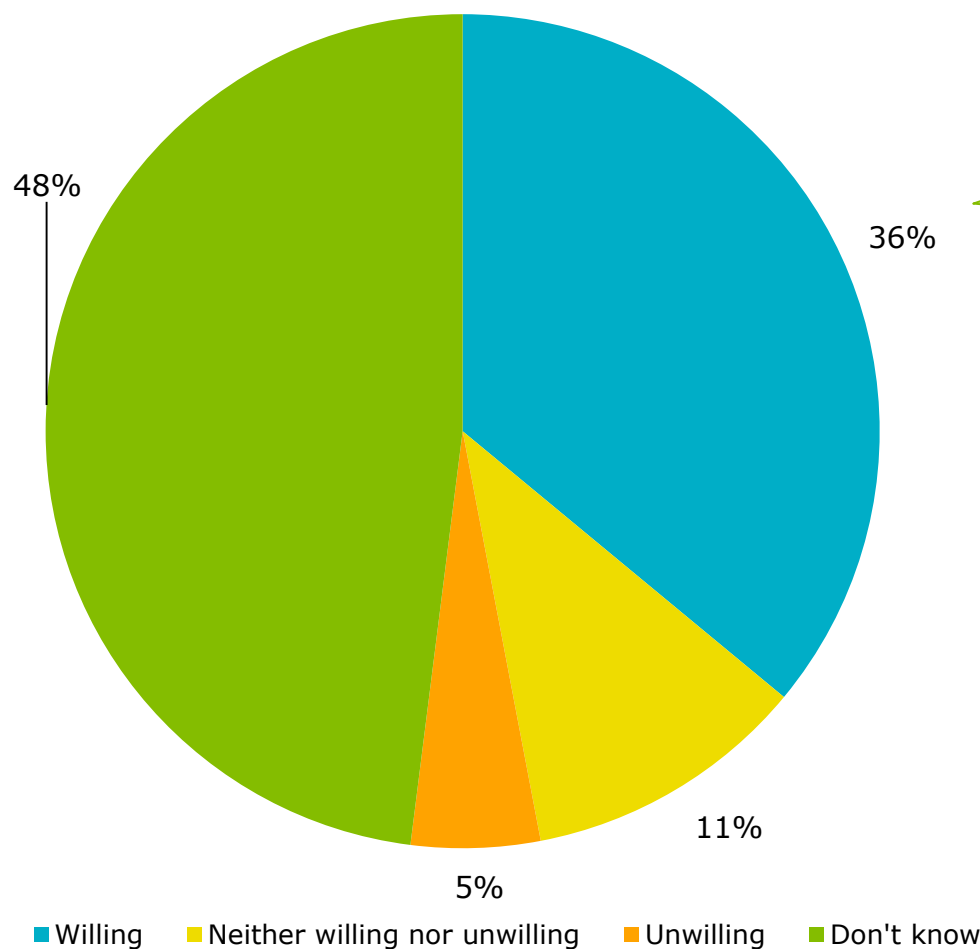
University staff respondents are significantly less likely to say 'yes' than student officers and student respondents.

Student officers and students' union staff respondents are significantly less likely to say 'don't know' than student and university / college staff respondents.

Base: 3742 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

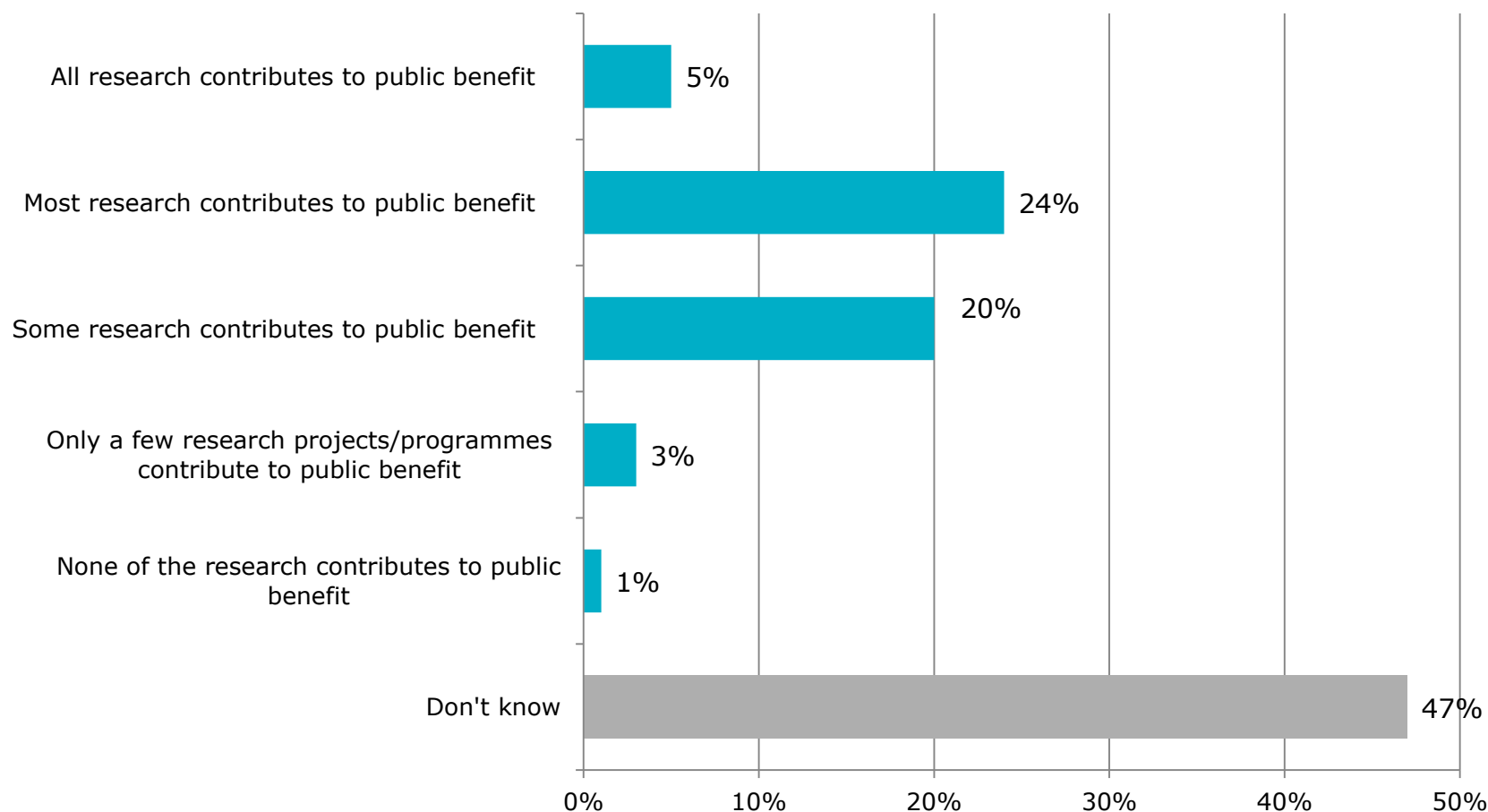
Q. Is there a process that allows you to raise any concerns about the research delivered or funding accepted your university?

Just under half of respondents don't know how willing their university would be to act on concerns raised about research activity, whilst a third report believing that their institution would be willing to take action according to concerns raised.



Student respondents are significantly more likely to view their institution as being willing to act on concerns raised than staff in students' unions and the university.

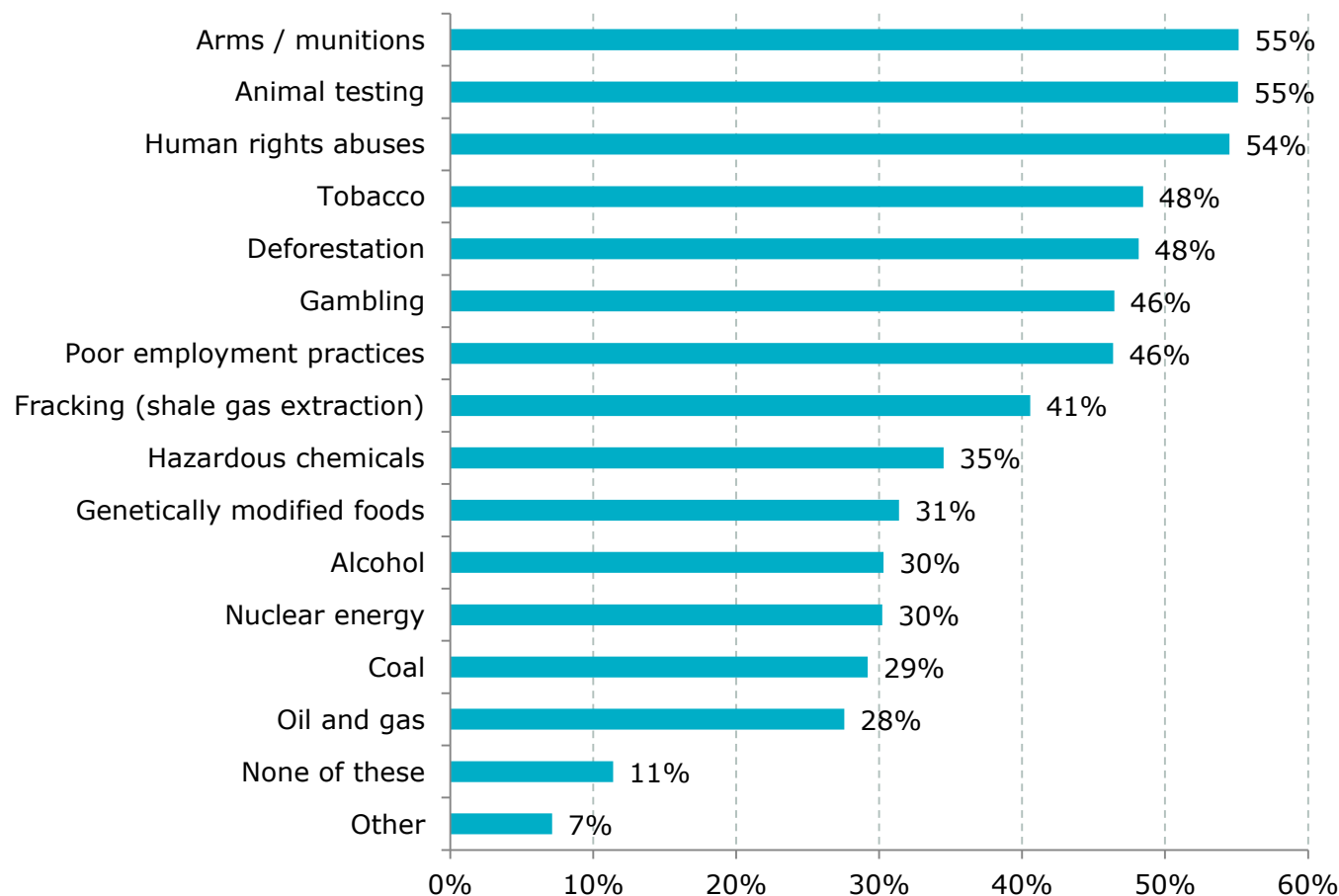
Respondents also report uncertainty over the extent to which the research carried out at their university contributes to public benefit, with 47% indicating that they don't know. Around a quarter of respondents believe that most research at their university contributes to public benefit.



Base: 3746 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Most UK universities are registered charities, and include charitable aims of existing to benefit the public. As far as you know, what proportion of the research carried out by your university contributes to public benefit?

Just over half of respondents say research into arms / munitions and animal testing should be avoided. Over half also say research linked to human rights abuses should be avoided. Between a quarter and a third of respondents (28% to 30%) say that research linked to oil, coal, gas and nuclear industries should be avoided.



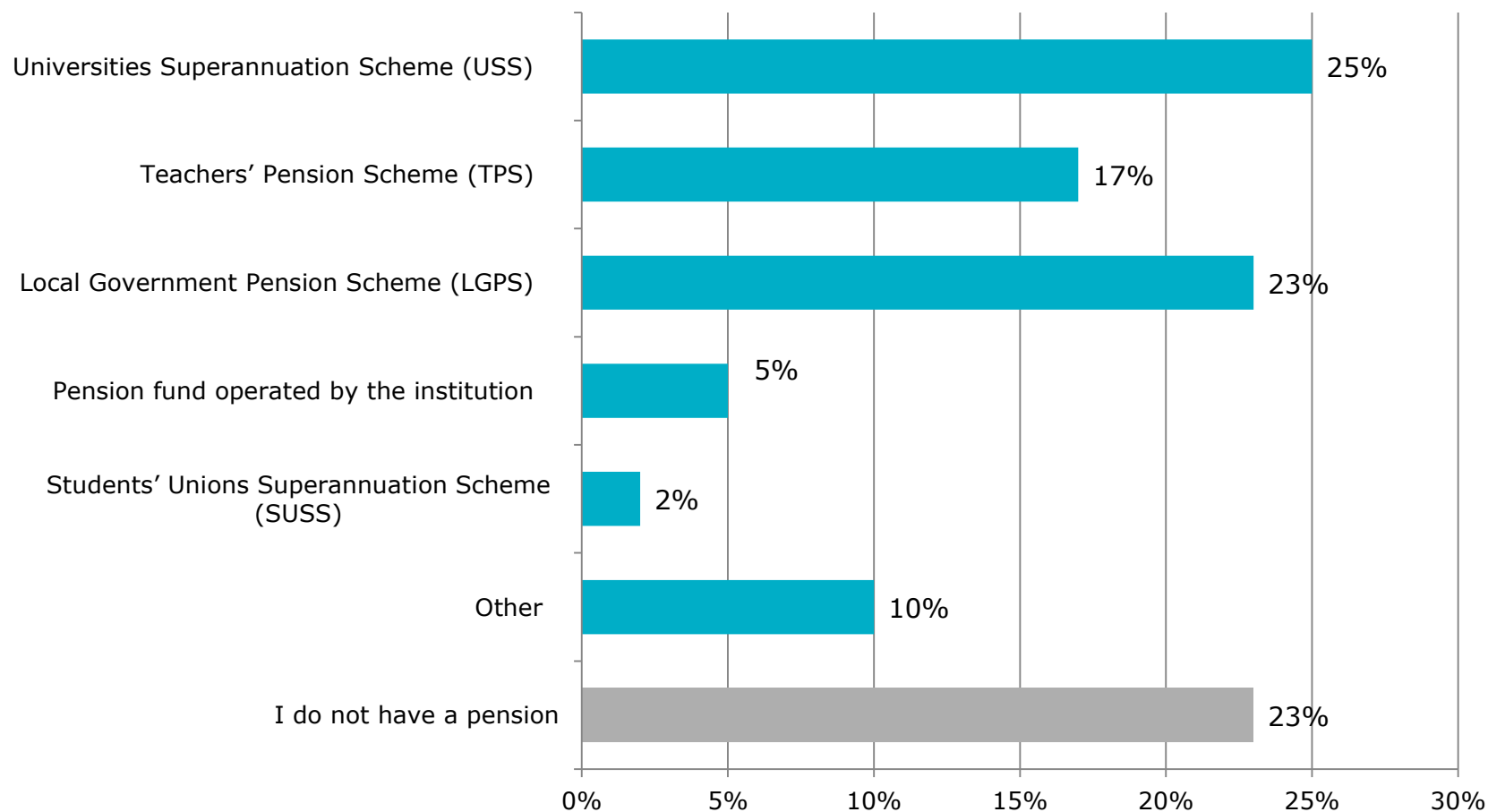
Base: (2720 - 3691). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Which of the following issues or activities should be avoided?

5. Findings: Pensions

University, college and students' union staff, along with students' union officers in Further and higher education institutions, were also asked for their views and experiences of pension investments. This is relevant because both employer and employee contributions are being invested by pension schemes on their behalf.

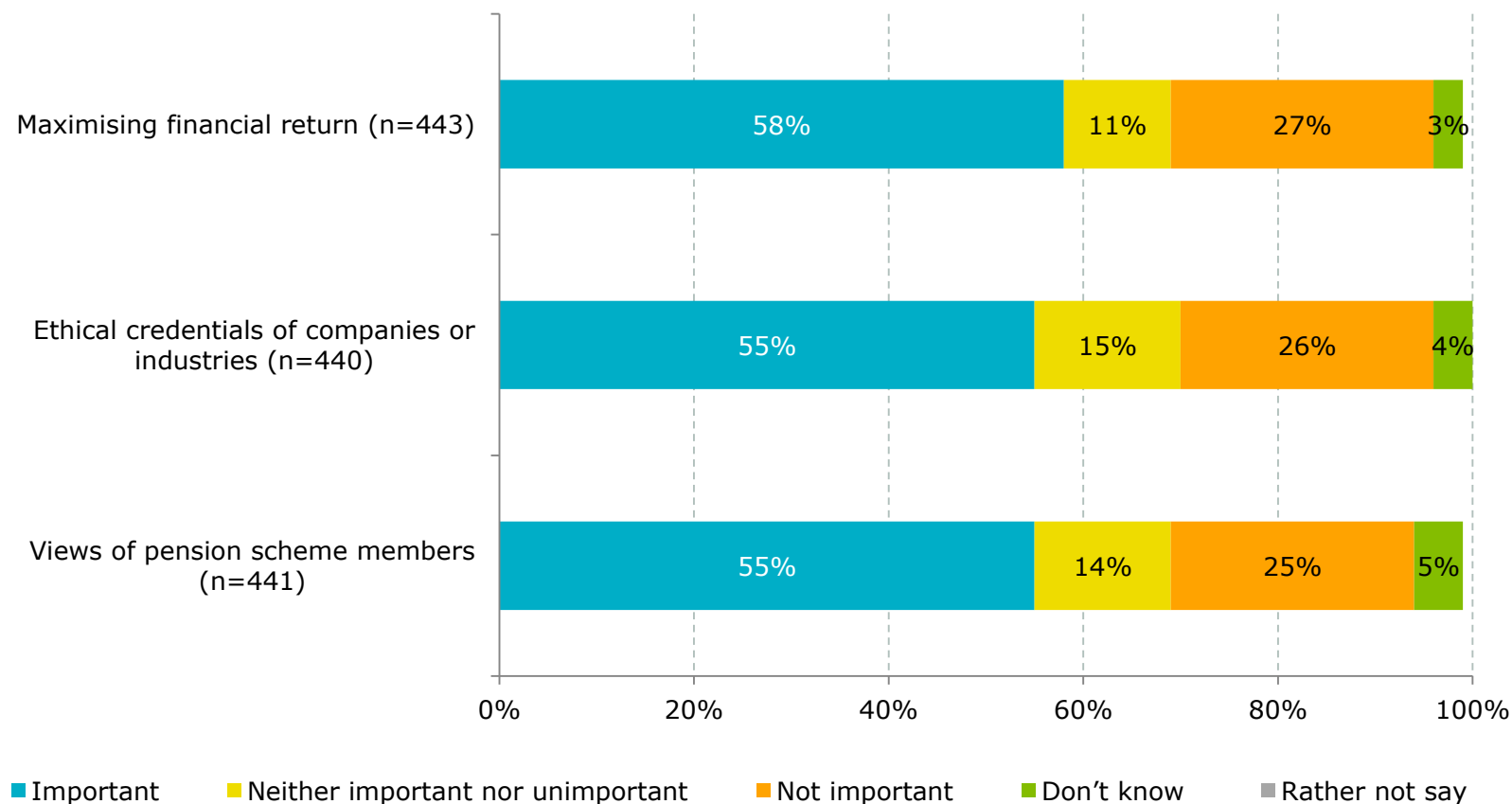
A quarter of respondents are members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), and a similar proportion are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). 23% do not currently pay into a pension scheme.



Base: 574 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [Not asked to student respondents]

Q. Are you a member of any of the following pension schemes?

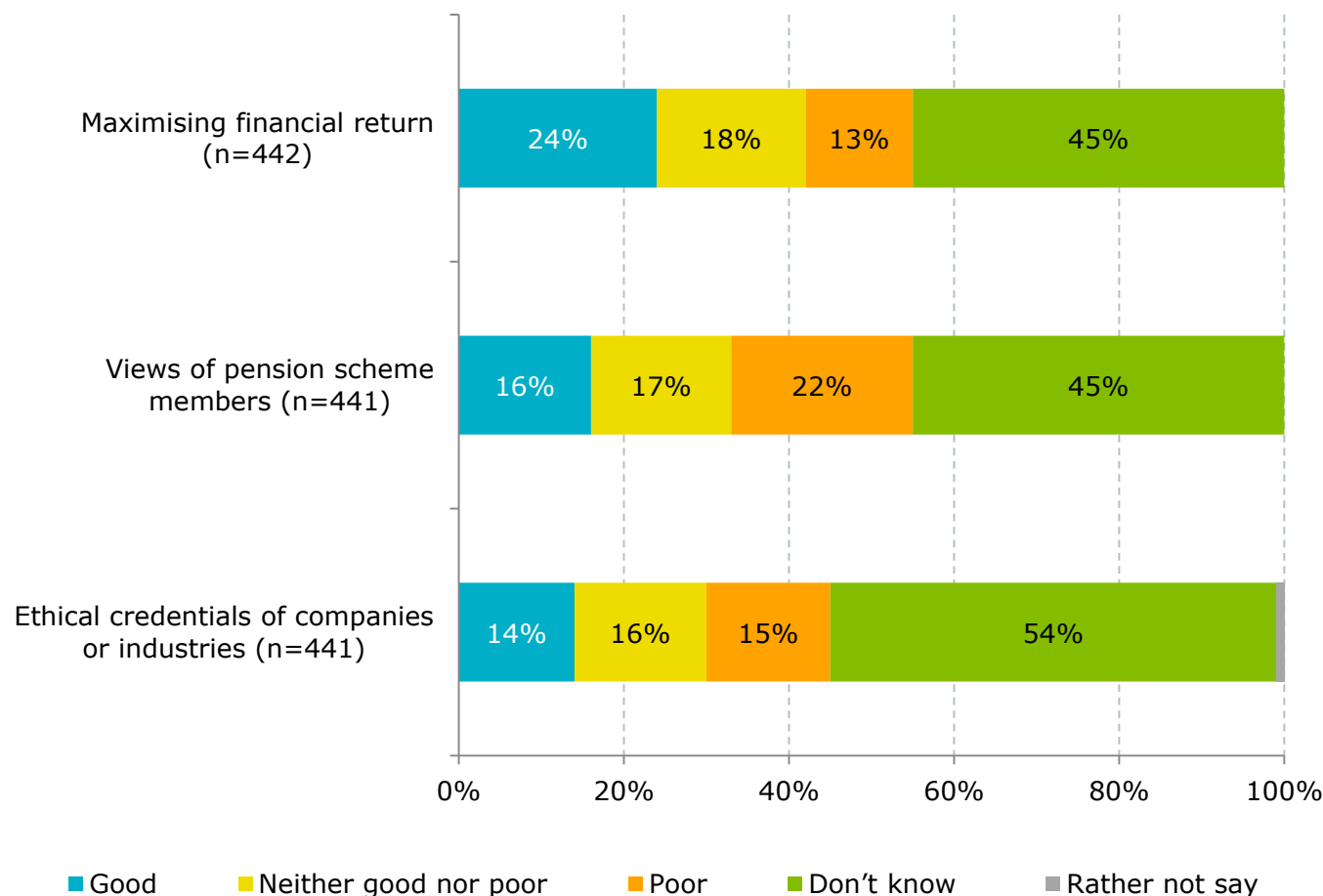
Maximising financial return was seen as important by 58% of respondents currently members of a pension scheme, with over half (55%) also recognising that the ethical credentials of companies or industries and the views of pension scheme members are important factors that should be taken into consideration.



Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [Not asked to student respondents or respondents who are not members of a pension scheme]

Q. How important should the following factors be to your pension fund(s) when deciding where to invest your money?

Respondents report a high level of uncertainty over the current approach of their pension scheme with over half (54%) saying they don't know how it performs against considering the ethical credentials of companies or industries. A quarter report that their pension scheme is 'good' in terms of maximising financial return but over two fifths don't know how it performs in this area.

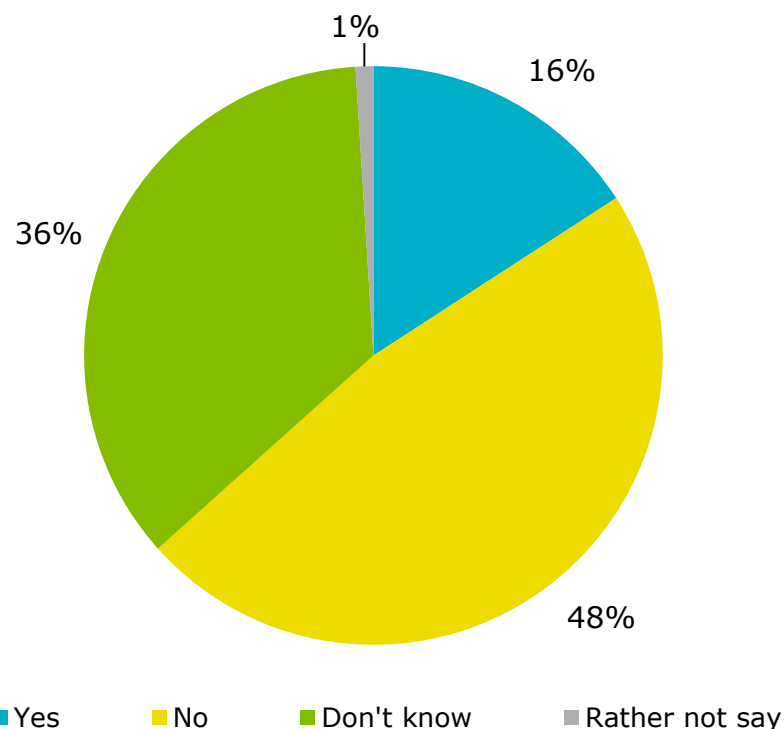


Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [Not asked to student respondents or respondents who are not members of a pension scheme]

Q. How would you describe your pension fund(s) approach to investments based on the following factors?

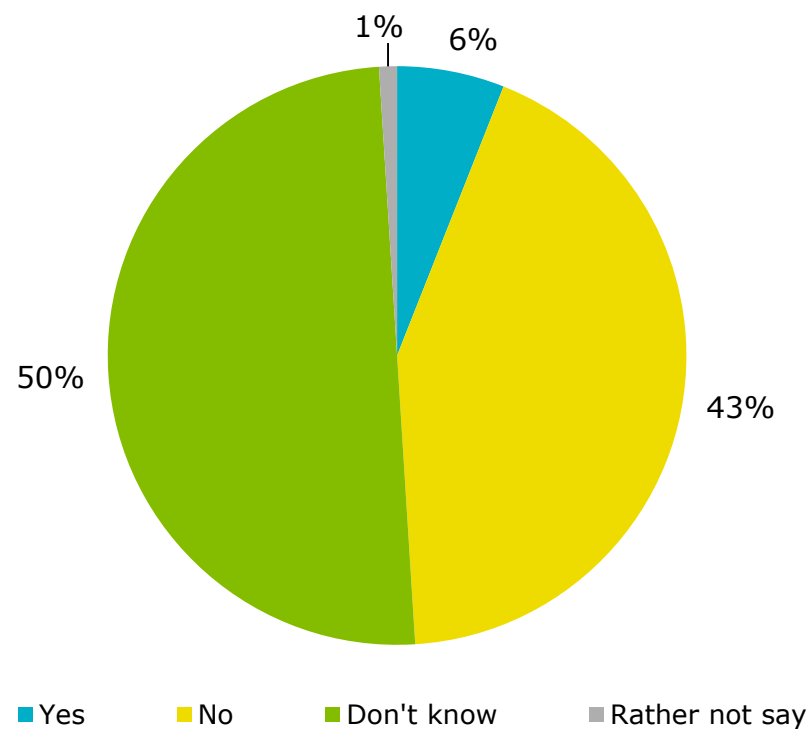
Just under half (48%) of respondents are not aware of the companies, shares, bonds and infrastructure their pension scheme invests in. A similar proportion (43%) report that they do not have the option of choosing the companies or funds their money is invested in. Half of respondents don't know whether this option is available to them.

"I'm aware of the companies, shares, bonds and infrastructure my pension scheme invests in."



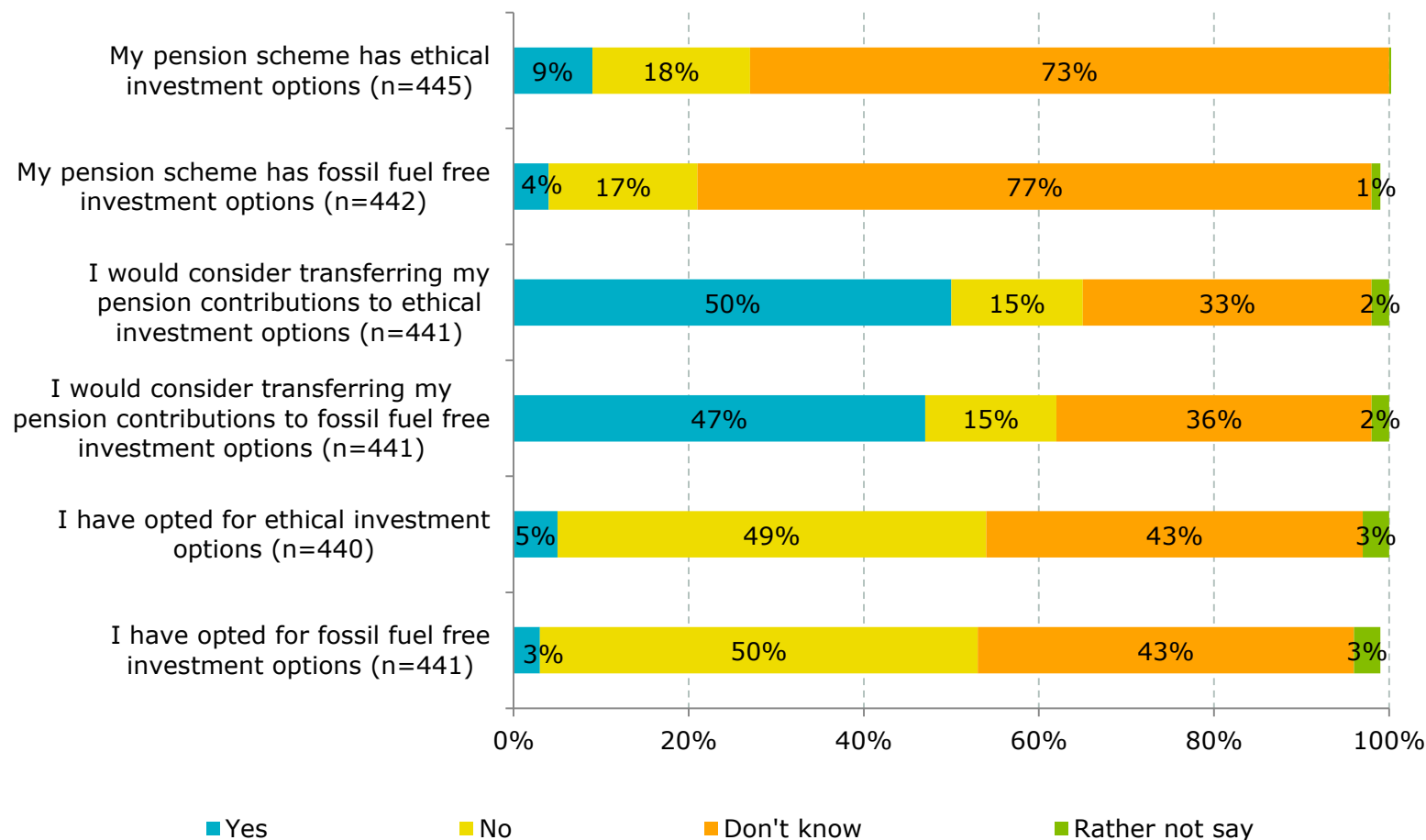
Base: 445 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response.

"My pension scheme allows me to choose the companies or funds my money is invested in."



Base: 440 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response.

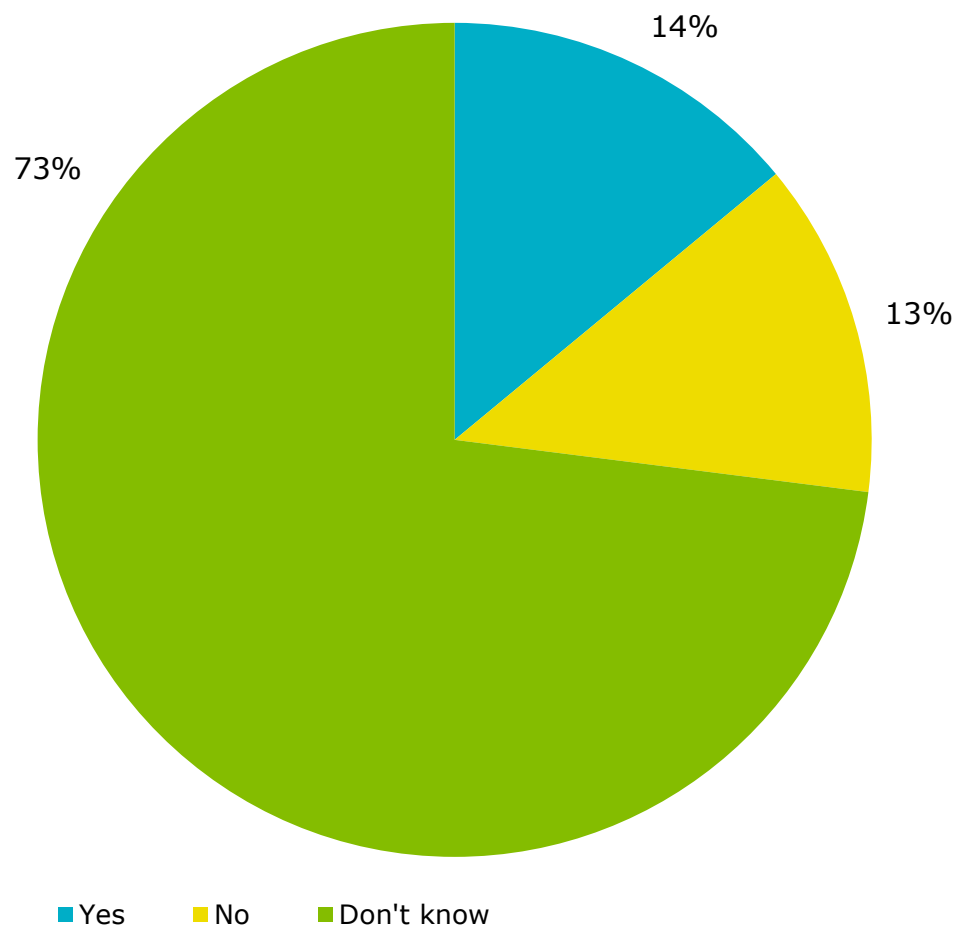
Approximately three quarters don't know if there are ethical (73%) or fossil free (77%) investment options available. As a result, only 5% of respondents report opting for ethical investment options and 3% report opting for fossil free options. However, approximately half of respondents would consider transferring their pension contributions to such investment options.



Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [Not asked to student respondents or respondents who are not members of a pension scheme]

Q. Which of the following options are you are aware of / have you chosen within your pension scheme?

Approximately three quarters of respondents are unaware of a process that would allow them to raise concerns about the investments made by their pension scheme.

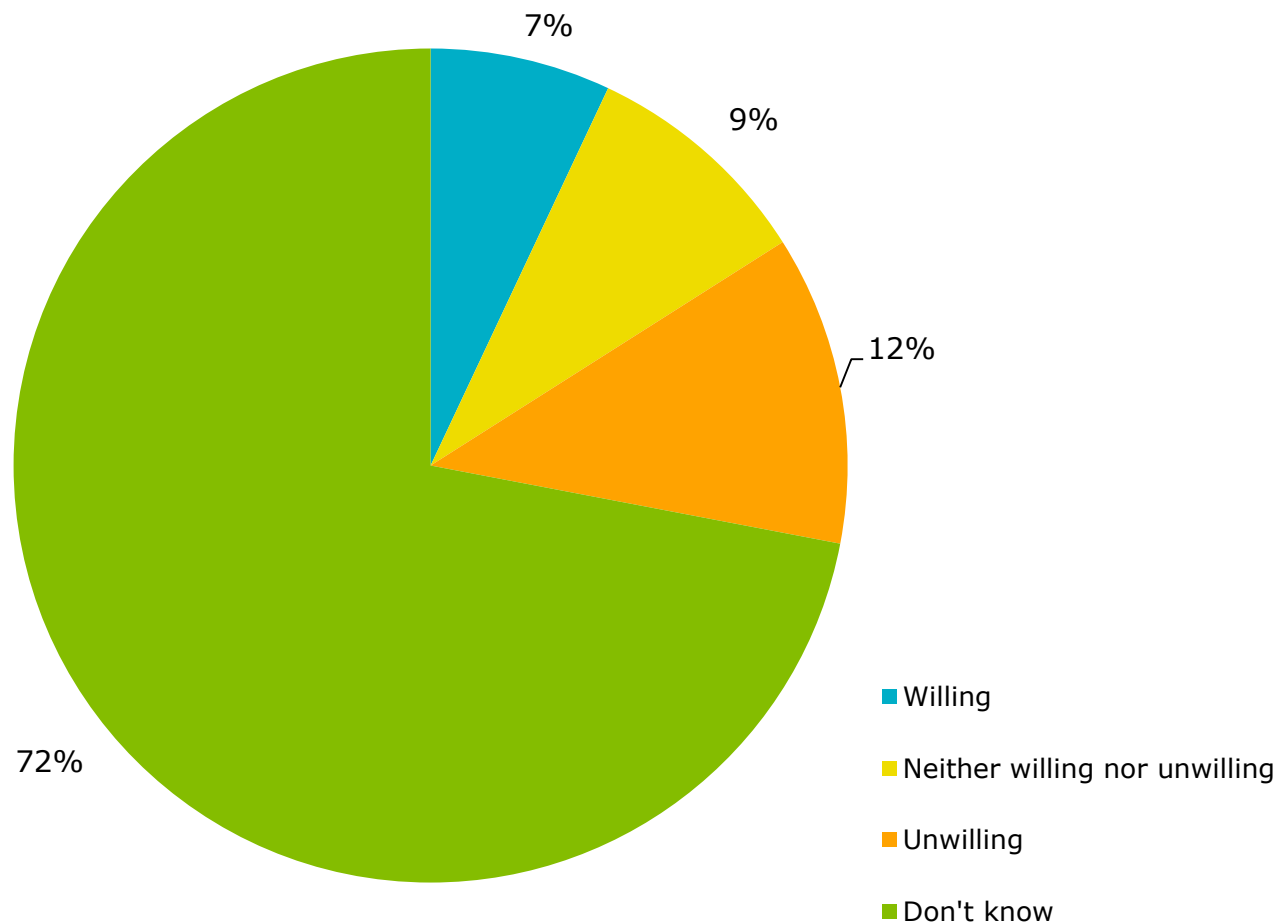


University staff respondents are significantly less likely to say 'yes' than students' union staff respondents.

Base: 445 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [Not asked to student respondents or respondents who are not members of a pension scheme]

Q. Is there a process that allows you to raise any concerns about the investments made by your pension scheme?

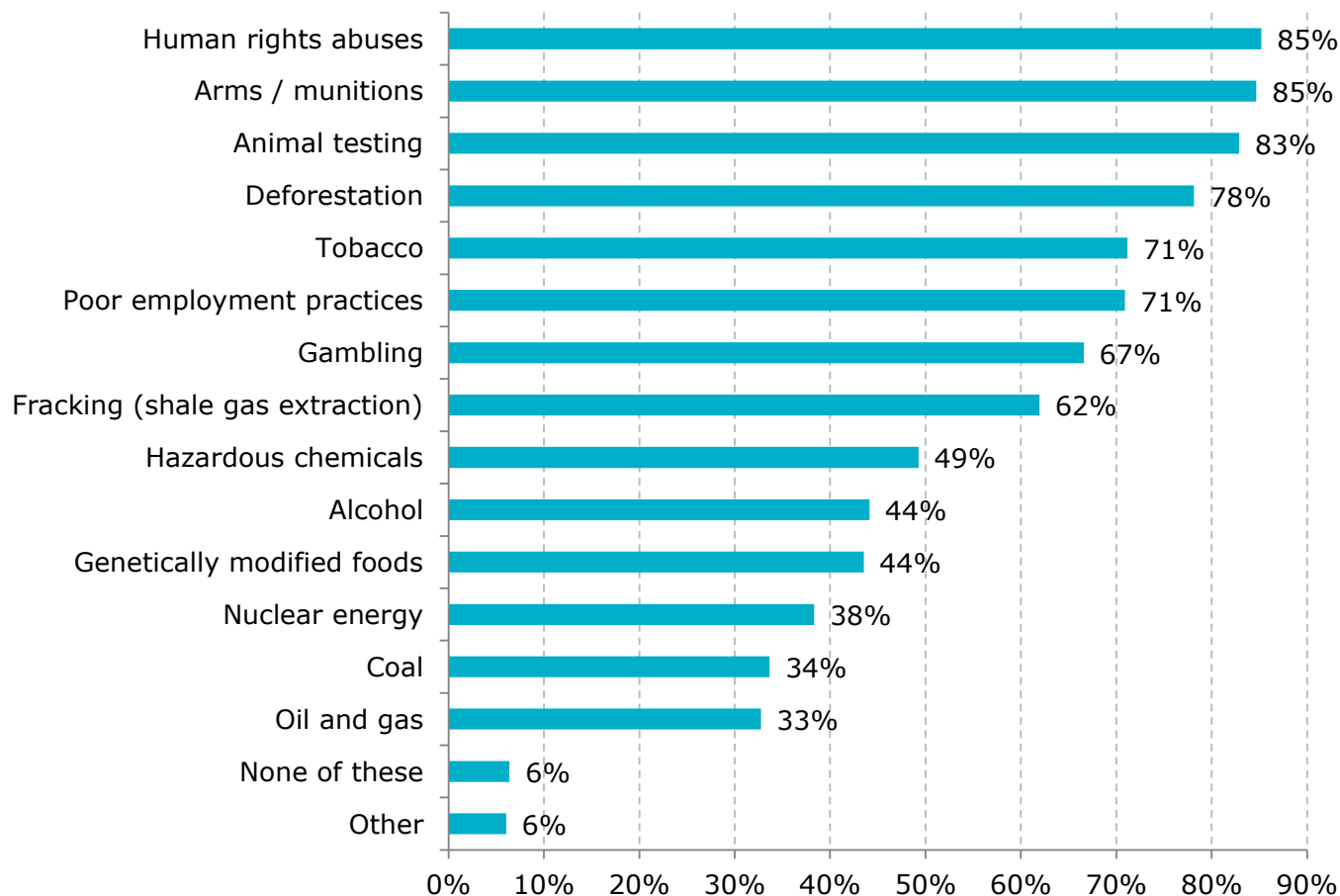
Three quarters of respondents don't know how willing their pension scheme would be to take action following concerns raised about the investments it makes.



Base: 443 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [Not asked to student respondents or respondents who are not members of a pension scheme]

Q. In your opinion, to what extent is your pension scheme willing to act on any concerns raised about the investments it makes?

85% of respondents say investments in industries associated with human rights abuses and arms / munitions should be avoided by their pension scheme. Almost two thirds also say their pension scheme should avoid investing in fracking. A third say fossil fuel investments should be avoided (e.g. 34% say coal investments should be avoided).

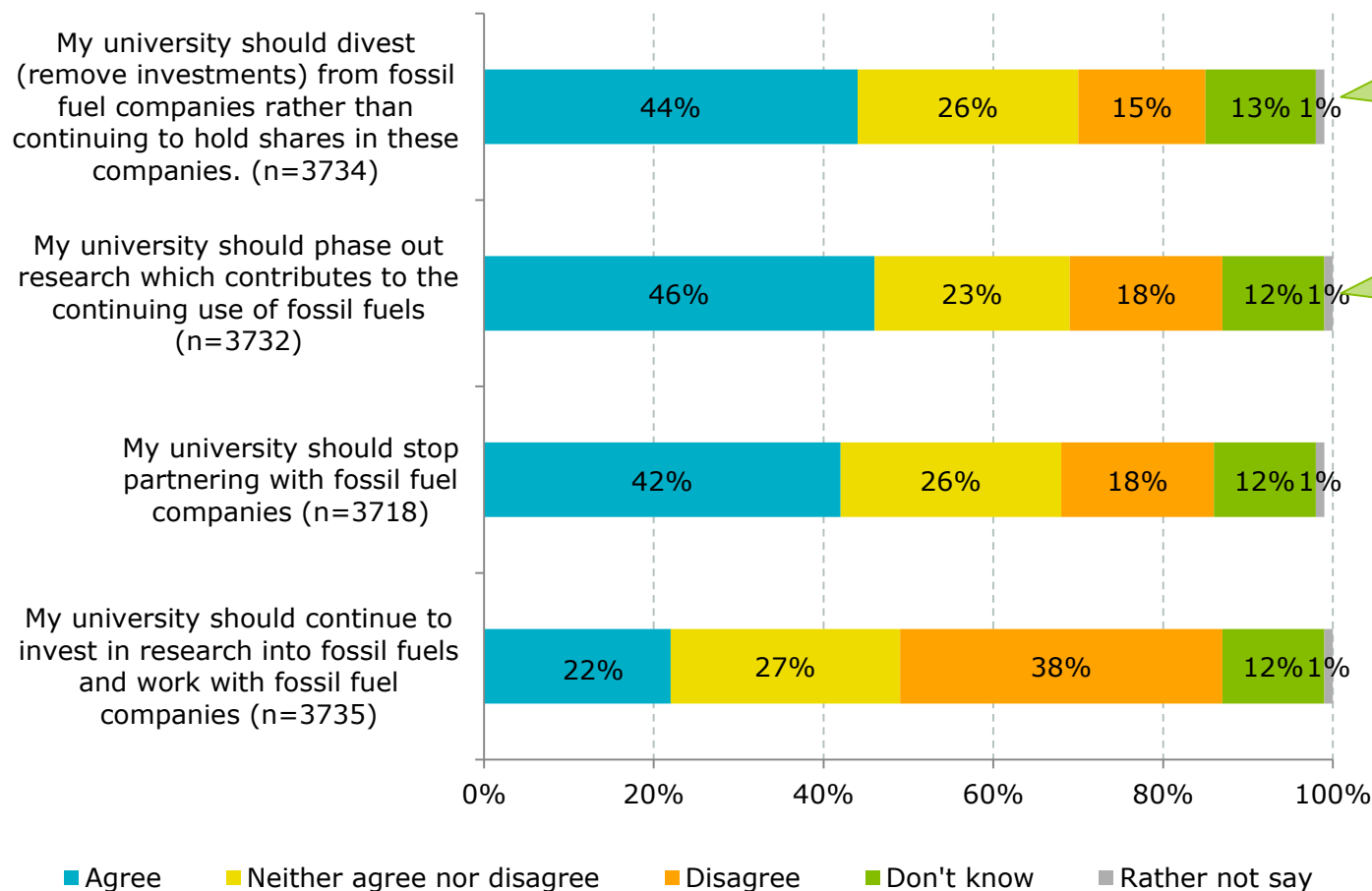


Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response.

6. Findings: University divestment from fossil fuels and investment in renewables

University staff, students' union staff, students and student officers in higher education were also asked for their views on their institution's relationship with the energy industry. Questions included attitudes towards divesting from fossil fuels and opportunities for investing in renewable energy.

Respondents are more likely to agree than disagree that their university should divest, with just under half of respondents agreeing that their university should divest from fossil fuel companies (44%) and should also phase out research which contributes to the continuing use of fossil fuels (46%). However approximately a third of respondents are uncertain of their views on the subject.



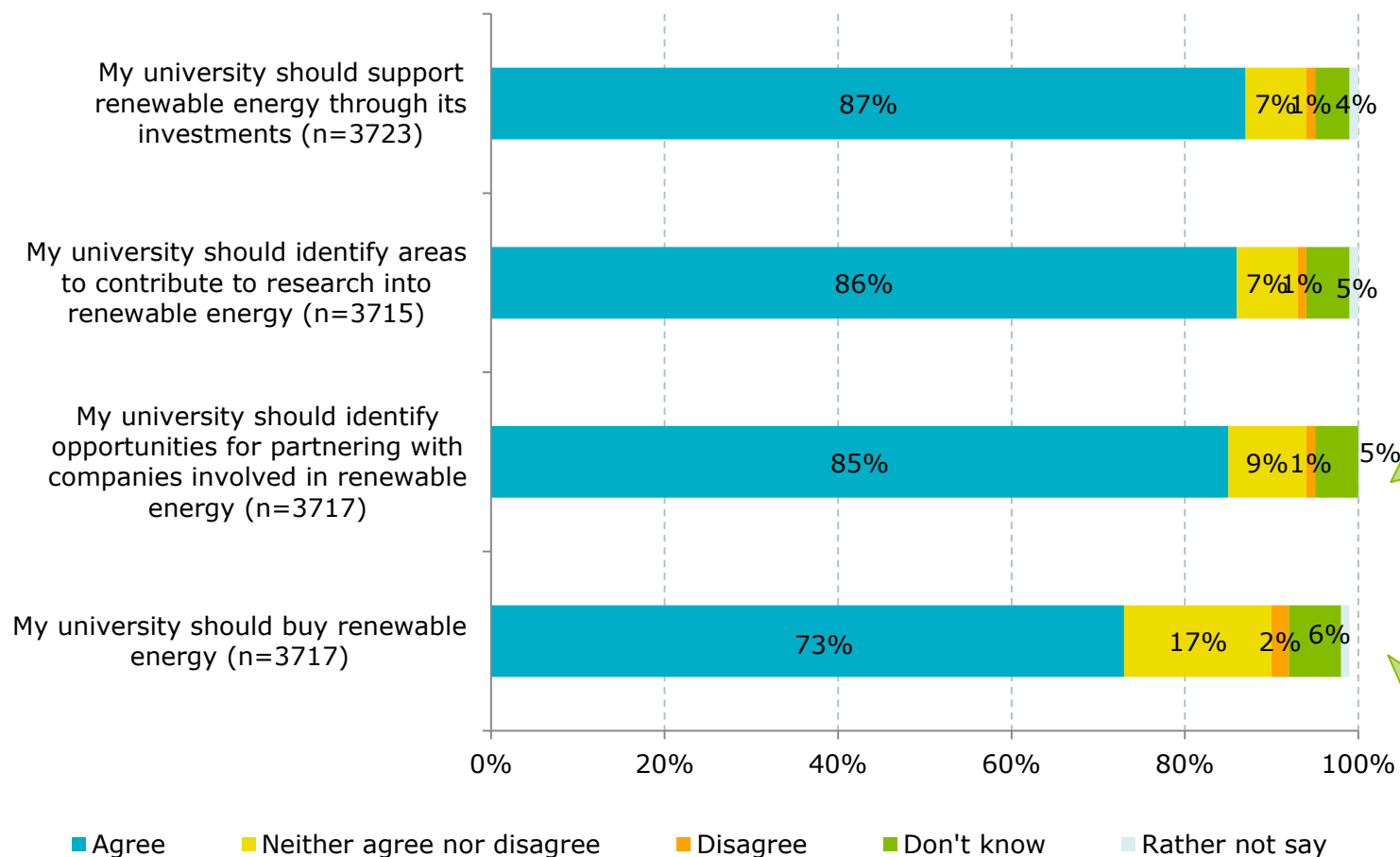
University staff respondents are significantly more likely to 'agree' than student respondents.

Students' union staff respondents are significantly more likely to 'agree' than all other respondents.

Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The majority of respondents agree that their university should support renewable energy through investment (87%), research (86%) and partnership (85%). Around three quarters (73%) agree that this support should be through the purchasing of renewable energy.



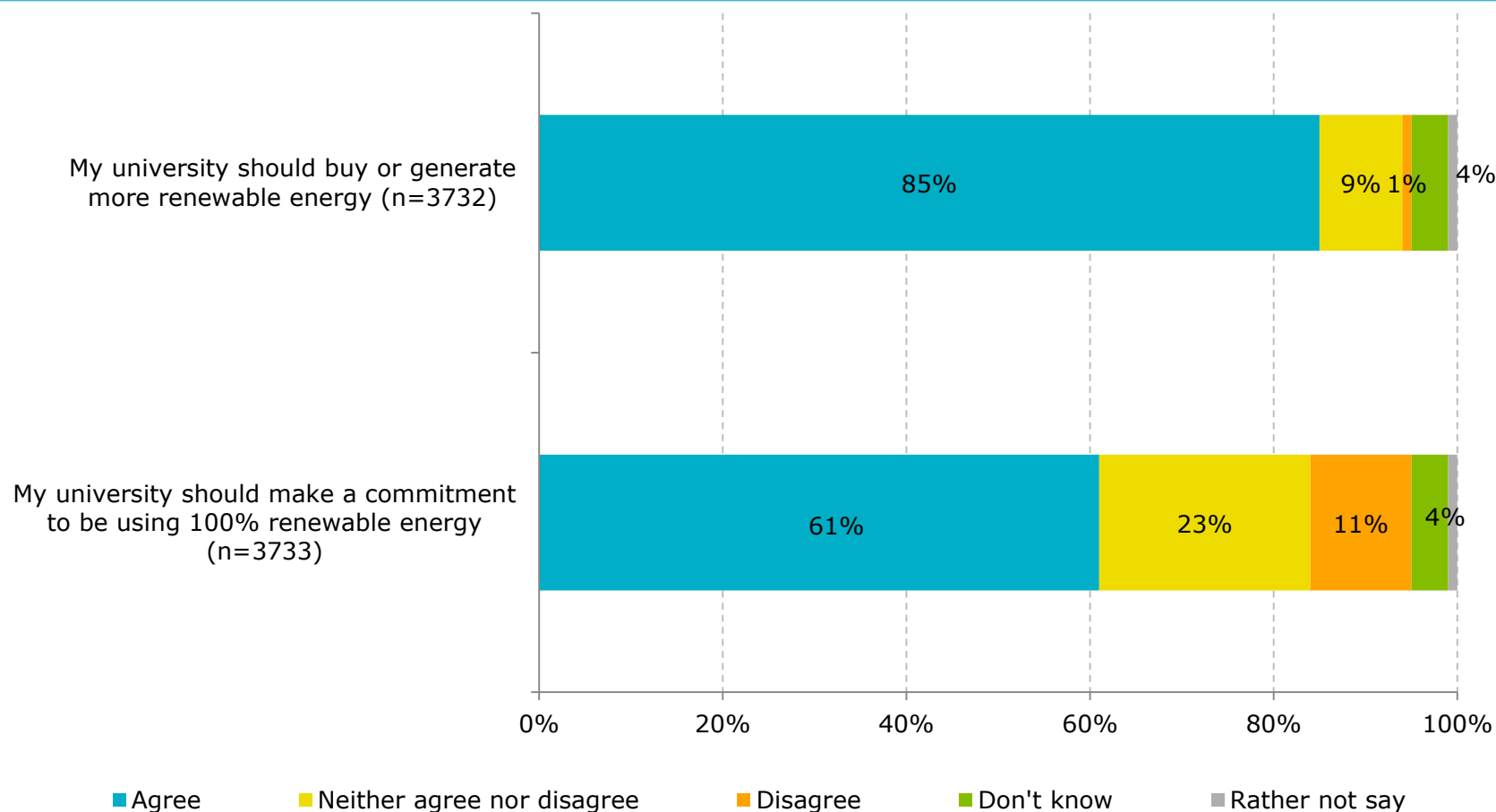
University staff respondents are significantly more likely to agree than student respondents.

University staff respondents are significantly more likely to agree than student respondents.

Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Renewable energy covers a number of different forms of energy that are quick to replenish themselves and can be used again and again, such as wind power and solar energy. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

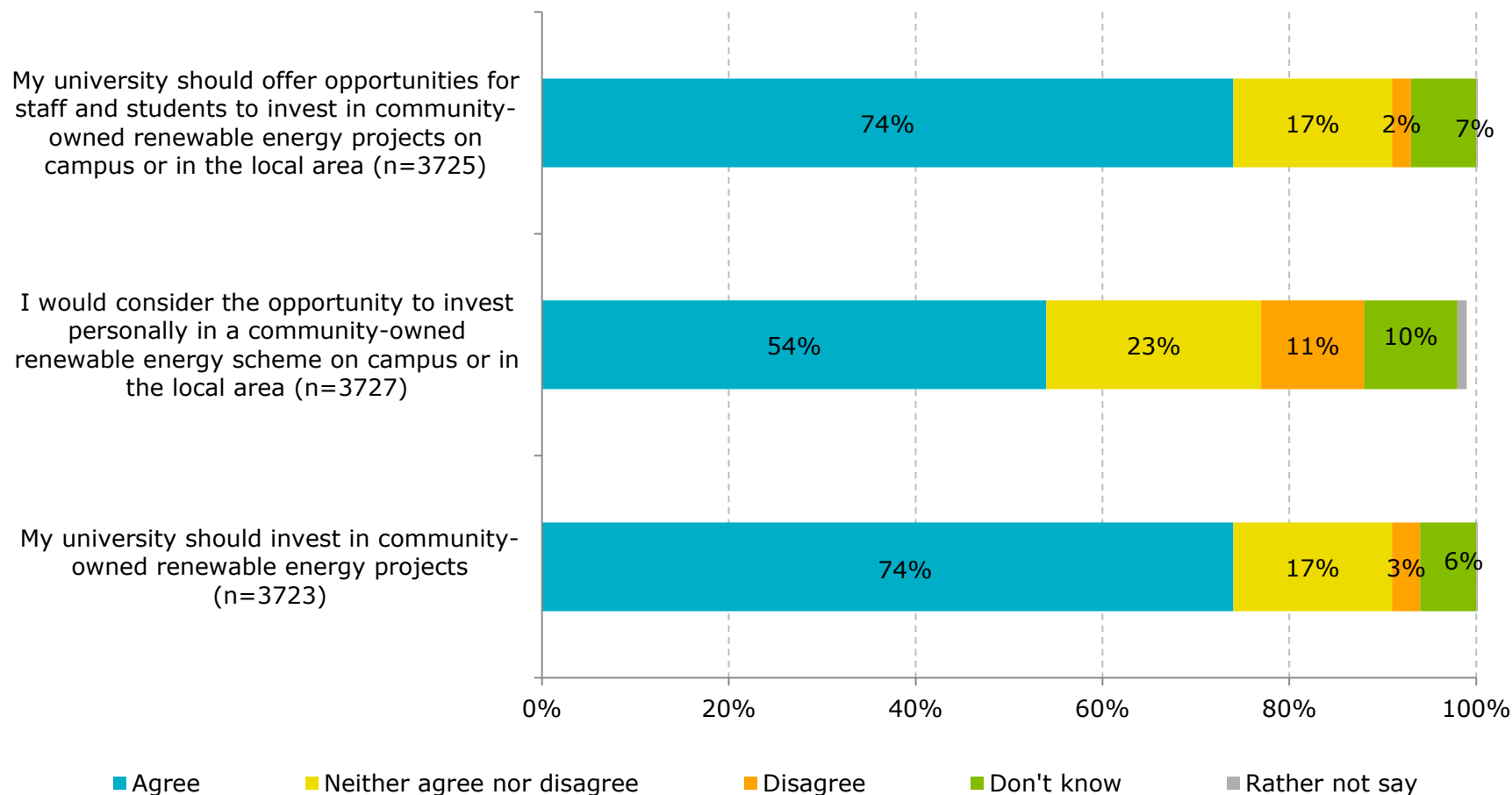
The majority (85%) of respondents agree that their university should buy or generate more renewable energy. Just under two thirds (61%) of respondents agree that their university should make a commitment to be using 100% renewable energy.



Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. In 2013-14, 39% of the energy purchased by the average university in the UK came from renewable sources. 1.2% of energy used by universities was generated on campuses. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

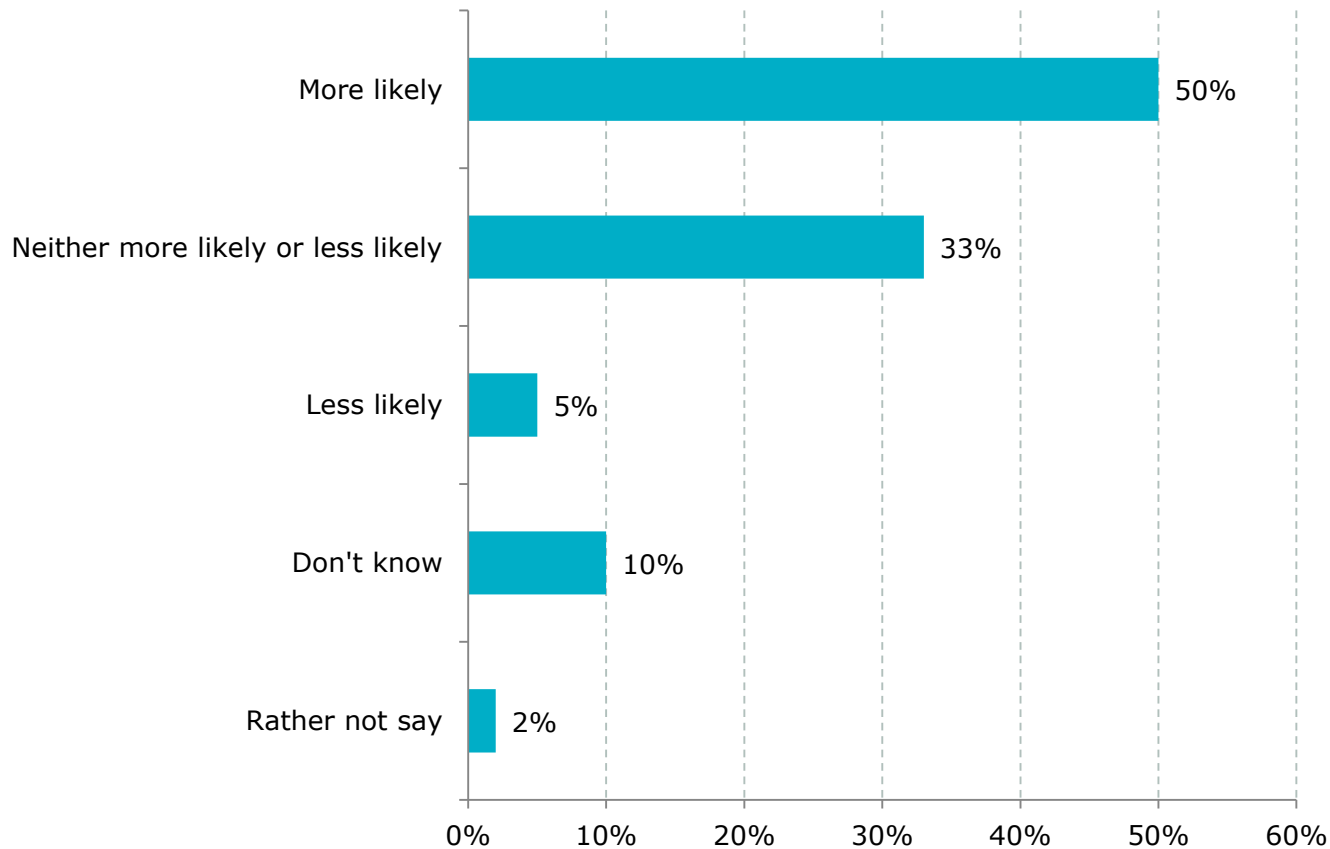
Three quarters of respondents agree that their university should offer opportunities for staff and students to invest in community-owned renewables either on-campus or in the local area. Just over half would consider the opportunity to make personal investments in community-owned renewable schemes, and three quarters agree that their university should make investments of this kind.



Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response. [HE staff and students only completed this question]

Q. Community-owned renewable energy projects offer individuals the opportunity to invest in renewable energy for example through creating co-operatives and through share offers. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Half of higher education student respondents say that they would be more likely to donate to their university, later in their career, if they knew the institution had stopped investing in fossil fuels.



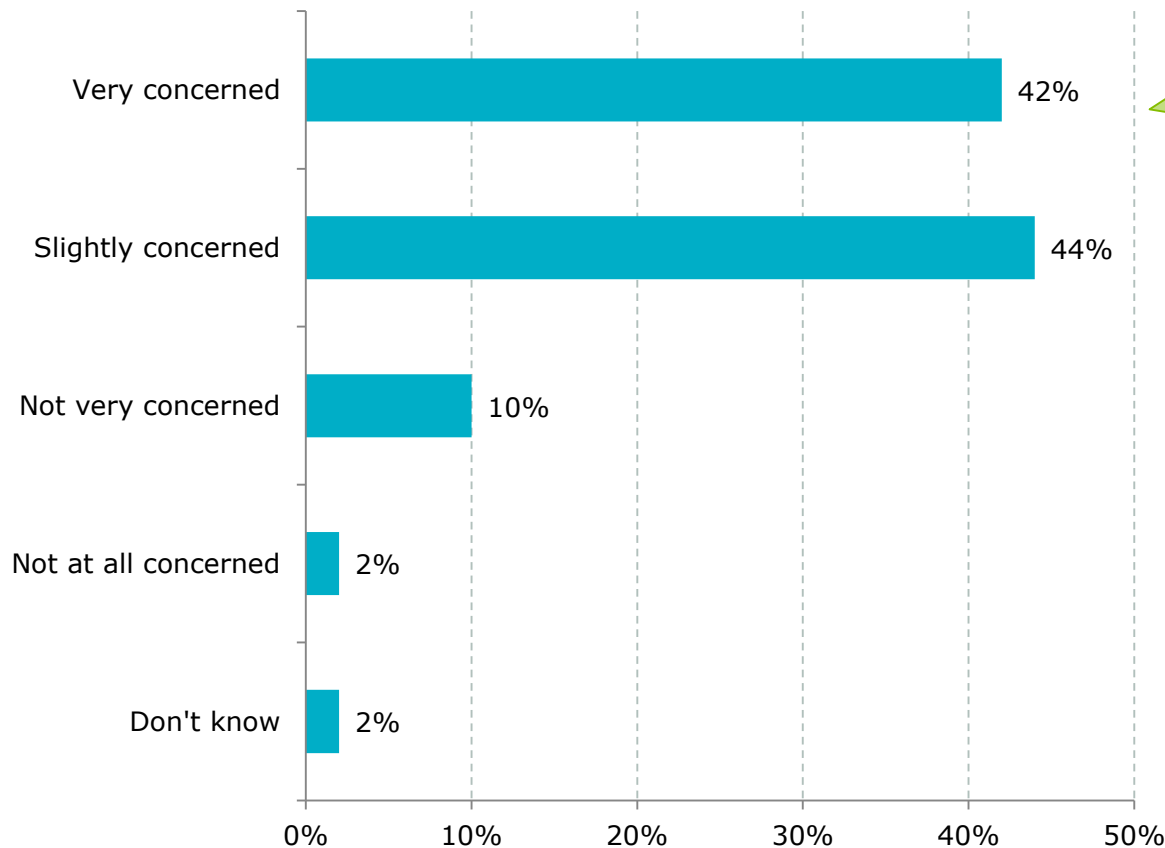
Base: 3337 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response. [Asked to HE students only]

Q. Universities often ask for donations from their students later in their careers. Would you be more or less likely to donate to your university, now or in the future, if you knew they had stopped investing in fossil fuels?

7. Findings: Attitudes towards climate change and renewable energy

All respondents for asked for their views on climate change and renewable energy across the UK as a whole. These questions featured at the end of the survey to reduce bias throughout the previous sections. The survey took place both before and during the Paris Climate Conference 2015 (COP 21).

Respondents indicate high levels of concern about climate change, with 86% reporting to be either very or slightly concerned.

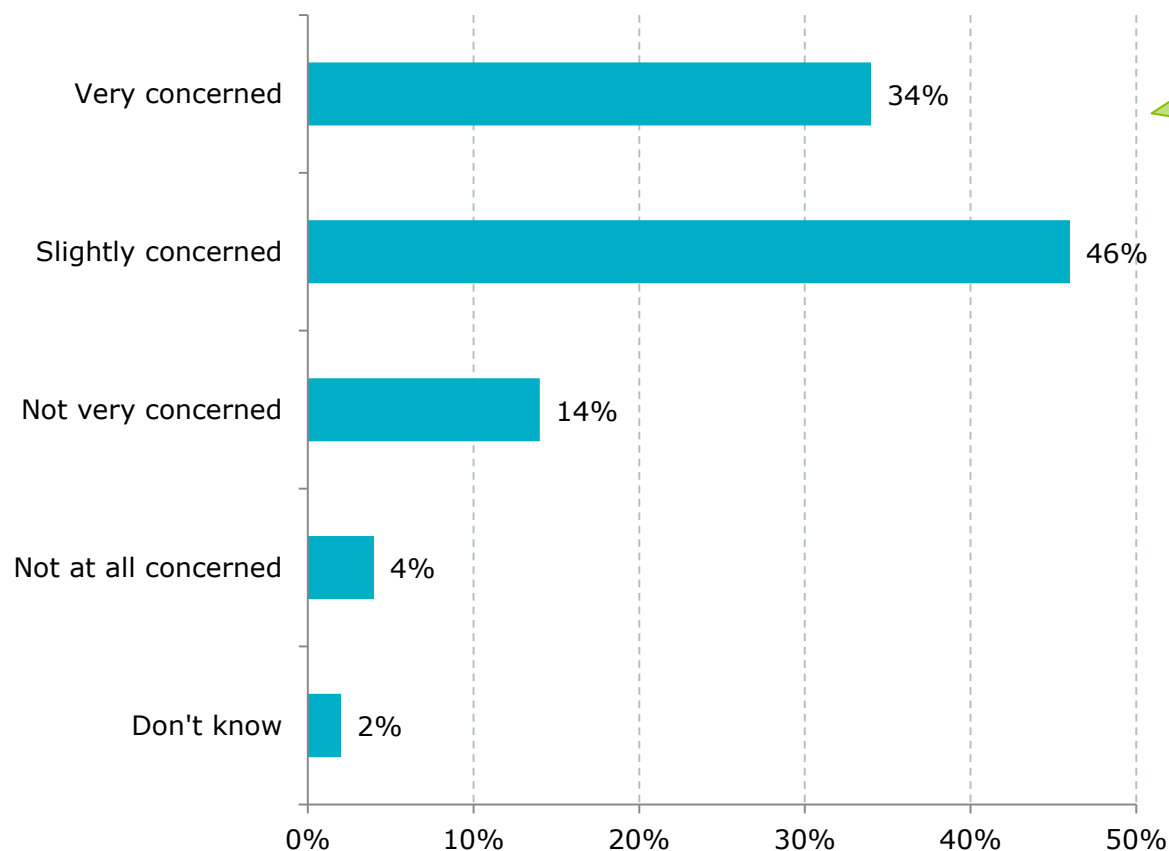


Students' union staff and university or college staff respondents are significantly more likely to say they are very concerned than student officers and student respondents.

Base: 4985 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response.

Q. How concerned are you about climate change?

80% are also concerned (either very or slightly) that climate change will affect them personally.

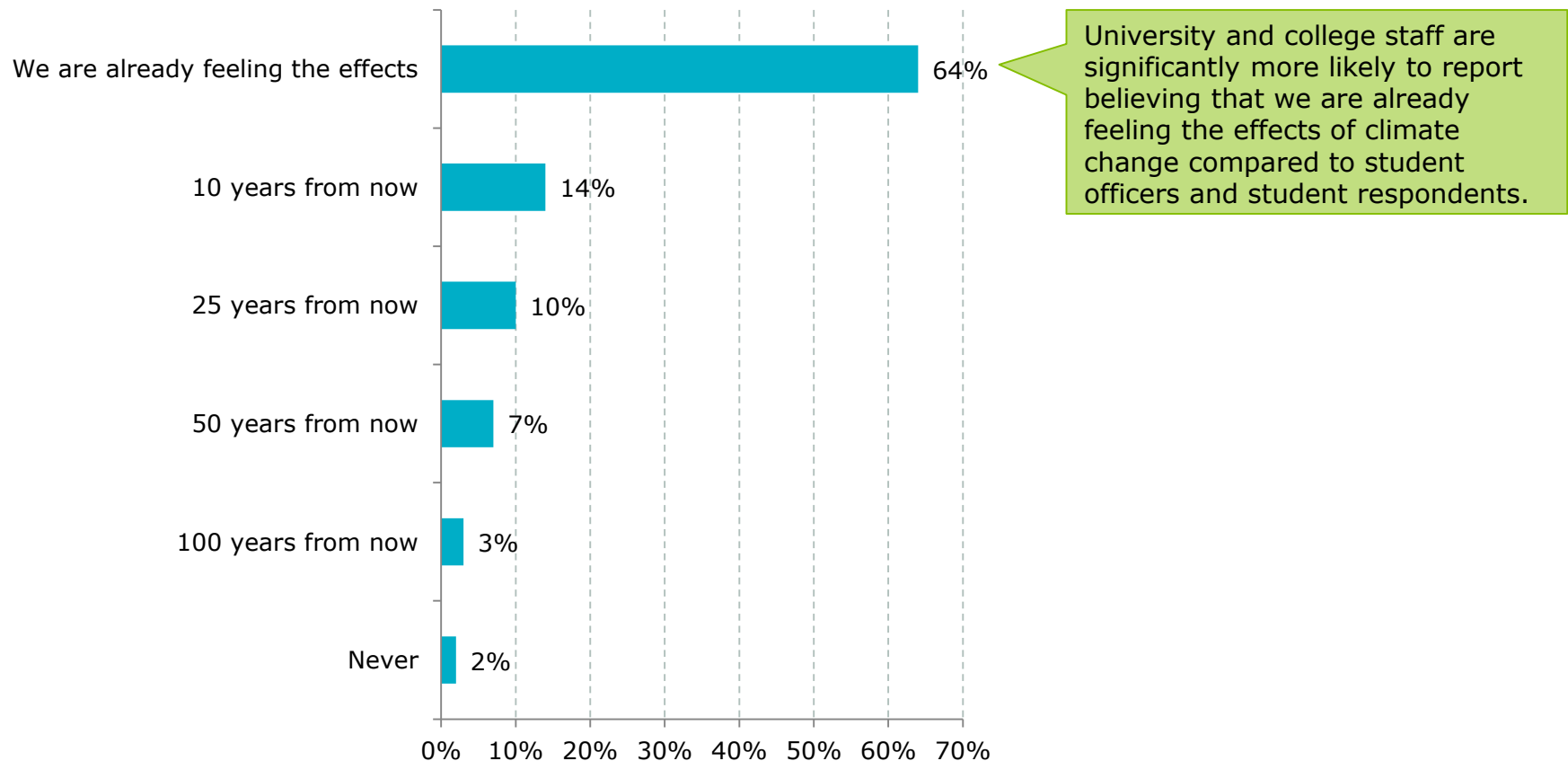


Students' union staff respondents are significantly more likely to say they are very concerned than university / college staff, student officers and student respondents.

Base: 4957 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response.

Q. How concerned, if at all, are you that climate change will affect you?

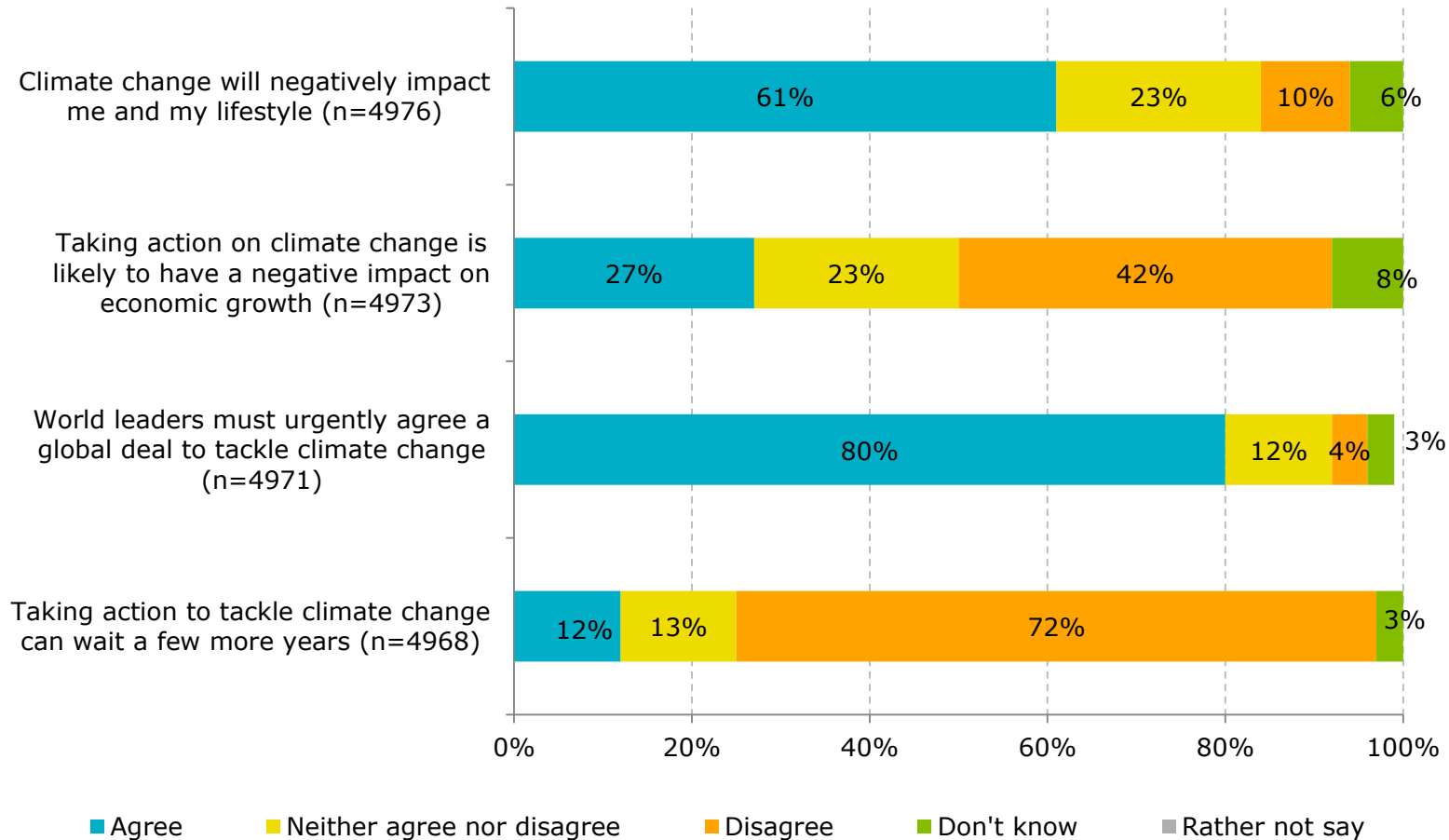
Almost two thirds of respondents already believe that the UK is already feeling the effects of climate change. Only 2% of respondents believe that the UK will never see any effects of climate change.



Base: 4980 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response.

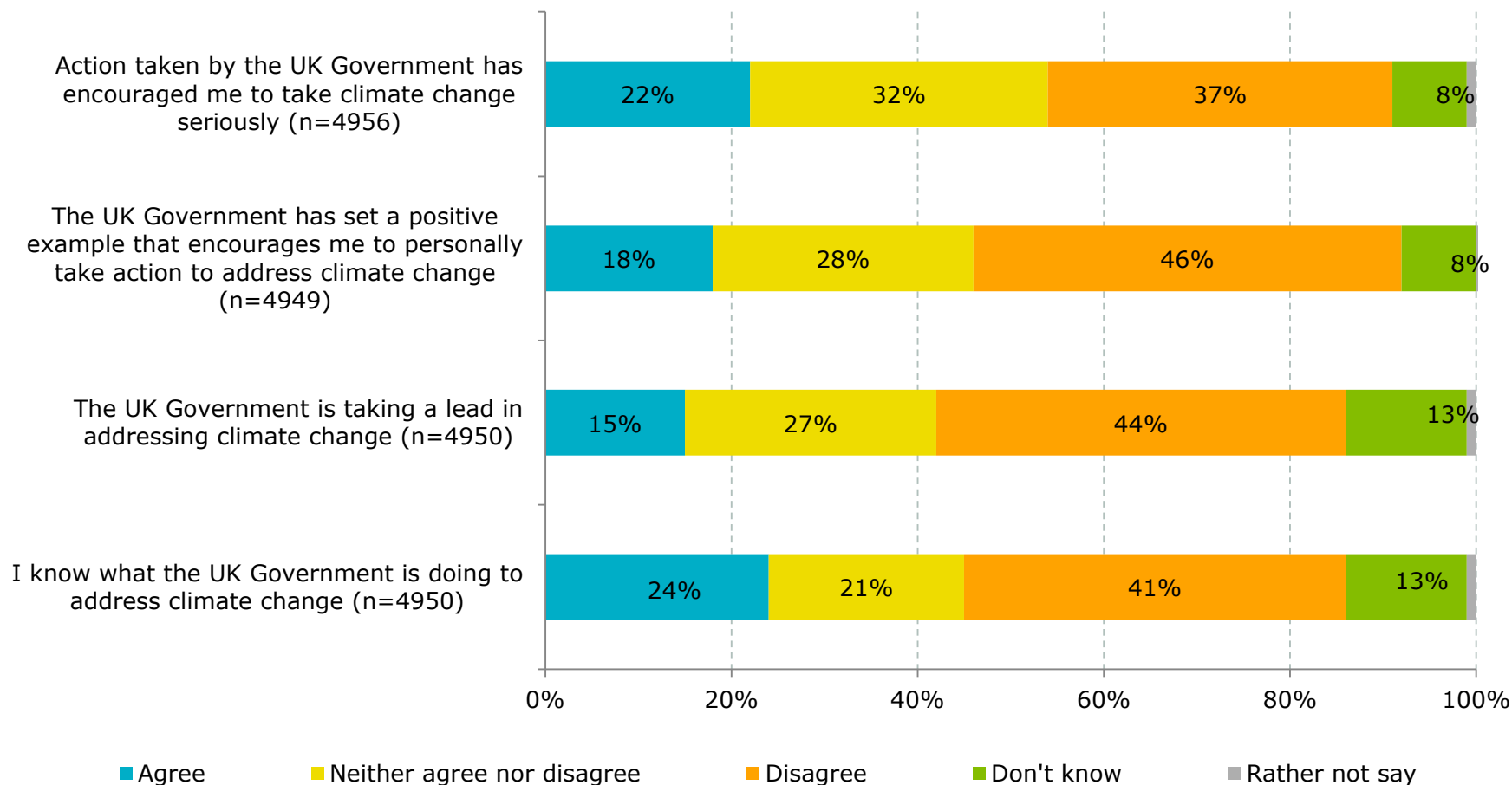
Q. When, if at all, do you think the UK will start feeling the effects of climate change?

80% agree that world leaders must urgently agree a global deal to tackle climate change, with 72% disagreeing that taking action on climate change can wait a few years. Two fifths disagree that there will be negative impacts on economic growth as a result of tackling climate change, but two thirds (61%) think that climate change will have negative impacts for them personally.



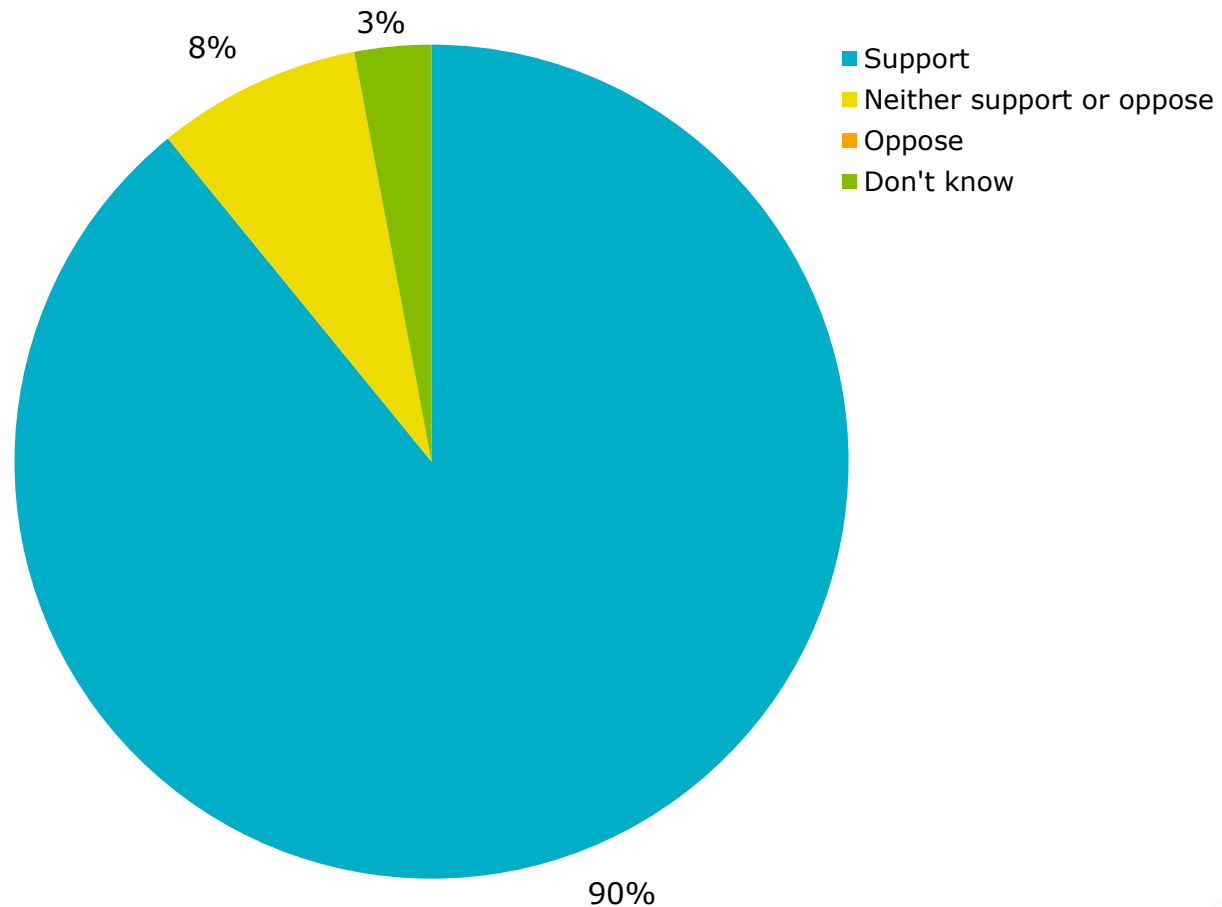
Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response.

Over two fifths of respondents disagree that the UK Government is taking a lead in addressing climate change, and that it is setting a positive example which encourages individuals to take action personally.



Base: (in brackets). Balance: Not asked and no response.

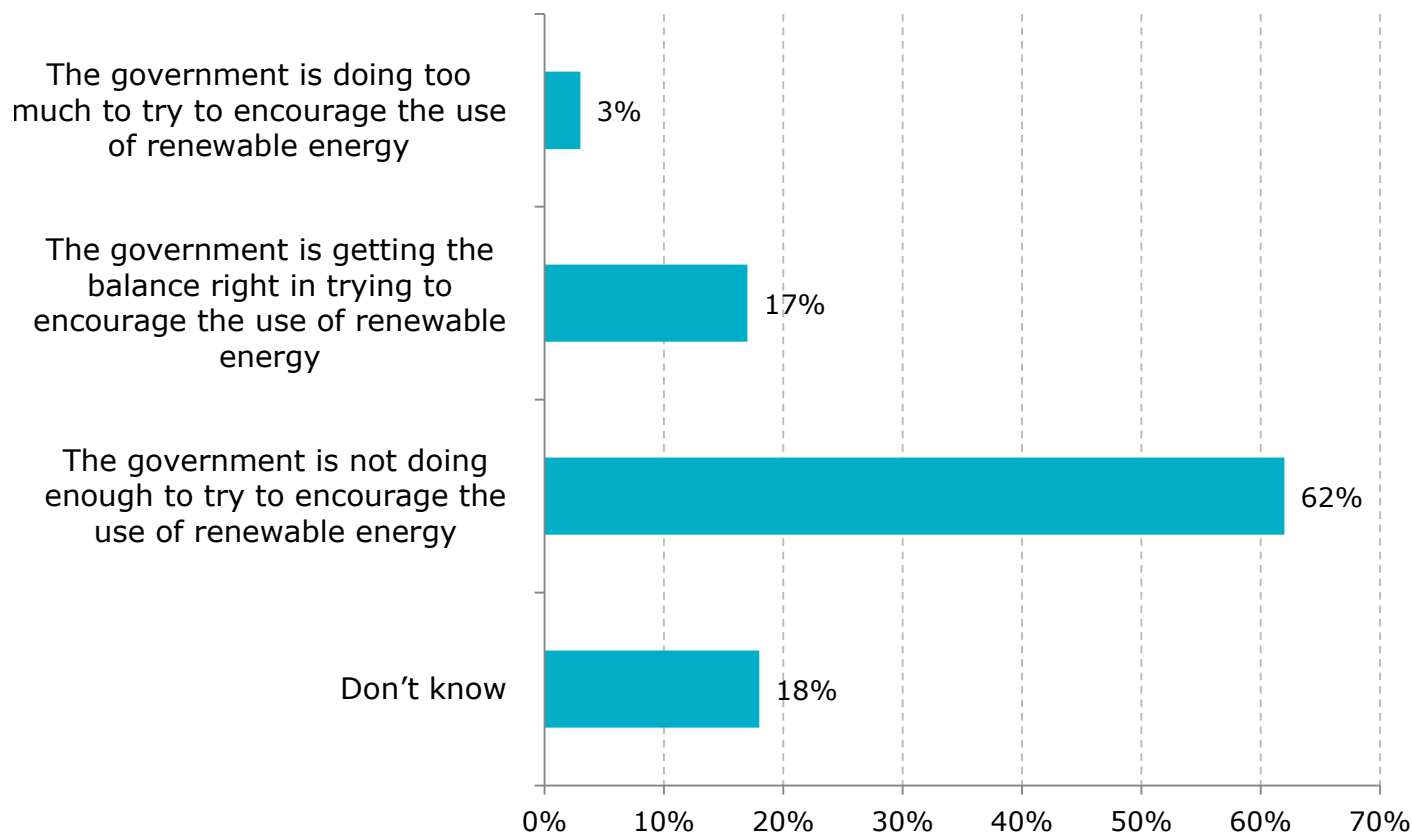
Respondents show overwhelming support for renewable energy, with 90% indicating their support for renewable energy for electricity, fuel and heating purposes.



Base: 4932 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response

Q. Renewable energy covers a number of different forms of energy that are quick to replenish themselves and can be used again and again, such as wind power and solar energy. Do you support or oppose the use of renewable energy for providing our electricity, fuel and heating?

Two thirds of respondents agree that the government is not doing enough to try to encourage the use of renewable energy with under a fifth agreeing that the government has got the balance right in its approach to encouraging the use of renewable energy.



Base: 4973 respondents. Balance: Not asked and no response.

Q. Do you think the current government is doing too much to try to encourage the use of renewable energy source, not enough, or are they getting the balance about right?

Appendix | Demographics

Demographics

Students

- 17% are in further education
- 42% are first year university students
- 11% are postgraduate Masters students
- 80% are UK citizens studying in the UK
- 88% are full time students
- 63% are female
- 46% are aged 17-20
- 68% are white British

Student officers

- 50% are student officers in a college
- 50% are student officers in a university
- 51% are female
- 81% of college student officers are white British
- 56% of university student officers are white British

Students' union staff

- 73% are permanent full time staff members
- 84% work in students' unions in higher education
- 45% work in student support roles
- 11% are managers of departments
- 57% are female
- 75% are white British

University / college staff

- 67% are permanent full time staff members
- 81% work in higher education
- 15% work in further education
- 29% are teaching members of staff
- 14% work in support roles
- 51% are female
- 74% are white British

For further information about this research, please contact:
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