



national union of **students**

# Students, ethical purchasing and Fairtrade

Research into attitudes and behaviours amongst further and higher education students in the UK

**January 2018**



# Key Findings

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**An online survey with students in further and higher education, carried out in December 2017, received 2111 responses revealing that...**

## Ethical concerns and action

- Respondents say war and terrorism is a world issue they are most concerned about (54% very concerned, 36% fairly concerned). Human rights and climate change are of next most importance.
- 2 in 3 respondents say they already sign online petitions to address issues that concern them. Half share pages or links on social media and 45% claim to buy products with ethical credentials to address issues of concern.
- Almost half (48%) say they are very or fairly confident that the actions they personally take could make a difference in addressing issues of concern.

## Ethical purchasing

- Half of respondents (51%) had made a buying decision in the last month which was influenced by ethical standards, 27% had done so in the last week.
- 1 in 5 said that ethical standards of products they buy, and the companies that sell them, matter to them a great deal. A further 45% said this mattered to them a fair amount.
- Good quality products that are produced by workers who are treated well and are environmentally friendly are what respondents look for when buying goods that are produced in an ethical way.
- Cost is the main reason why respondents are less likely to buy ethical products (60%). A lack of awareness and availability of information about ethical credentials also deters them from buying such products (40%).
- Over half of respondents strongly agree that they want to buy more products that don't harm people who produce them (54%) and agree companies need to be more responsible and ethical than they are at present (52%).
- Half (52%) say they most trust accreditation marks to provide ethical credentials of products. 1 in 4 (27%) say that information from charities and campaign organisations is their most trusted source of information about the ethical credentials of products.

# Key findings

## Fairtrade awareness and purchasing

- 94% said they had seen the Fairtrade logo. For many, Fairtrade means workers/farmers are paid a fair price for the goods they produce.
- Bananas are the most frequently purchased Fairtrade item with 39% saying they always buy Fairtrade bananas over those without the Fairtrade label. Fairtrade tea/coffee is always chosen by a fifth (19%), over non Fairtrade products.
- 2 in 3 respondents say they care a lot about knowing the products they buy have been grown without child labour (68%) and that farmers in developing countries get a fair deal for the products they grow (64%).

## Fairtrade on campus

- University/college and students' union cafes and restaurants are the main places Fairtrade products are recalled being available (mentioned by 36% and 30% respectively).
- 6 in 10 (59%) of respondents say that, other than on products themselves, they recall seeing the Fairtrade logo on displays in shops/cafes. A further 4 in 10 (38%) have seen the logo on posters around campus.
- 1 in 10 recalled seeing activity during Fairtrade Fortnight. There was mixed reaction to their colleges performance in relation to buying products with positive ethical credentials and Fairtrade products.
- Secondary education was where respondents were most likely to learn about issues linked to Fairtrade such as consumerism, global and ethical trade (39%), social justice (33%), human rights (42%) and environmental issues (48%).
- Respondents feel their university or college could do more to support Fairtrade by promoting and selling more products and making students more aware of what it is.
- 6 in 10 respondents had not seen or heard about Fairtrade type activities in their local community. Of the remainder 1 in 10 were aware of Fairtrade campaign groups or Fairtrade Fortnight events.

# Research method and respondents

# Research summary

## **Objectives:**

To gather feedback from students on :

- their ethical actions and concerns
- their ethical purchasing behaviours
- awareness of Fairtrade and how it impacts on their purchasing behaviour
- awareness of Fairtrade on campus and in their local community.

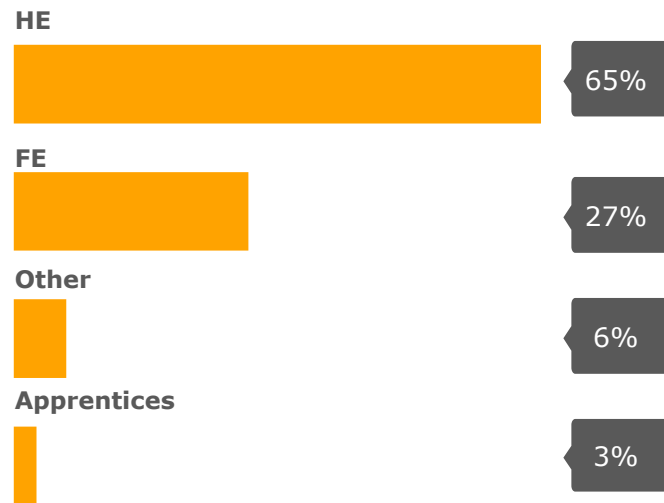
## **Method:**

The survey was promoted online via the NUS Extra cardholder student database, as a survey about a range of issues rather than mentioning Fairtrade to ensure a wide range of views were captured. Prize draw of a share of £150 to encourage response.

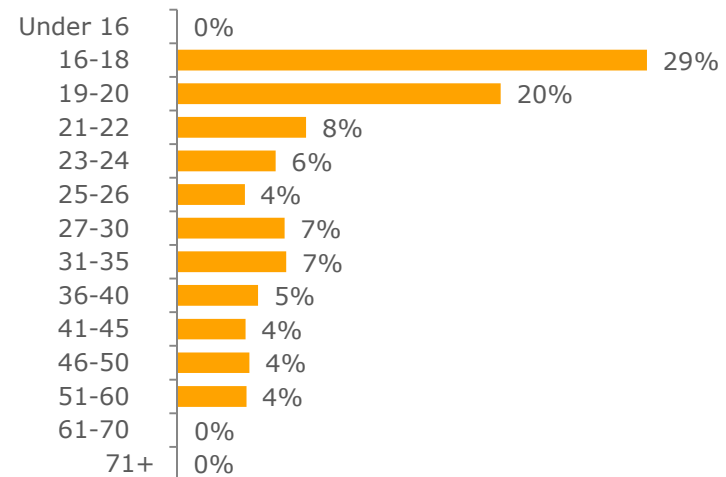
The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. 2111 further and higher education students completed the survey.

# The respondents

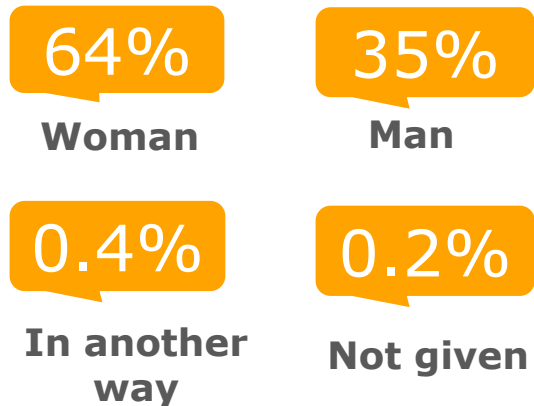
## LEVEL OF STUDY



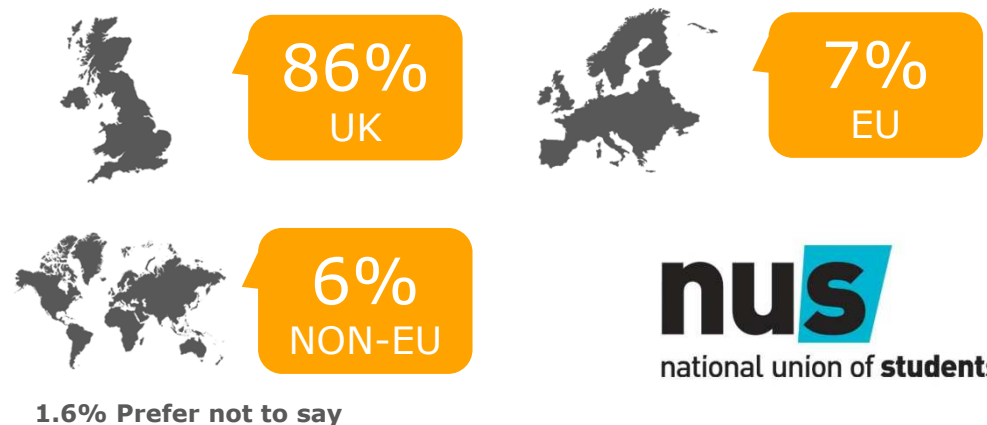
## AGE



## GENDER IDENTITY



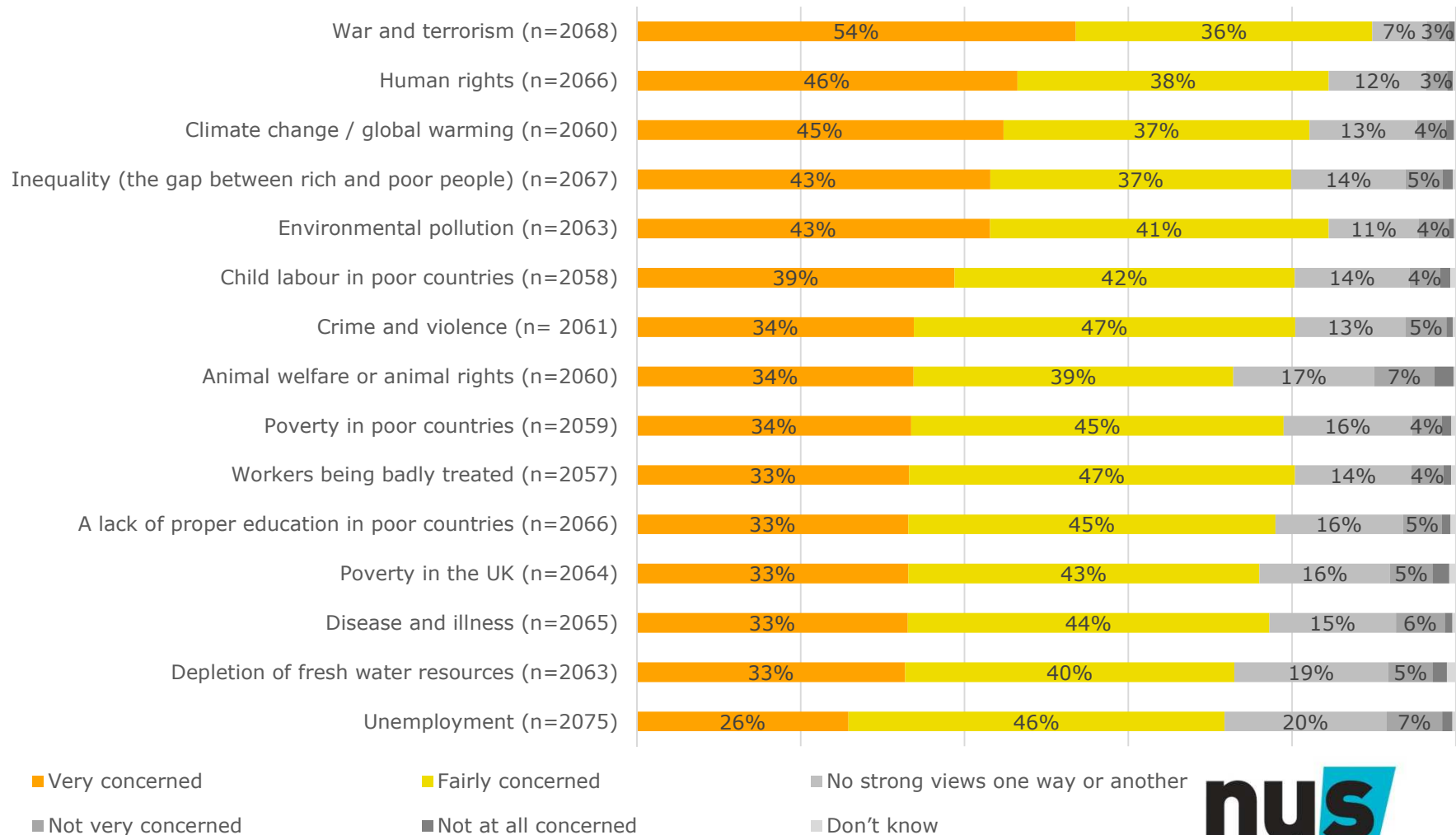
## NATIONALITY



# Ethical concerns and actions

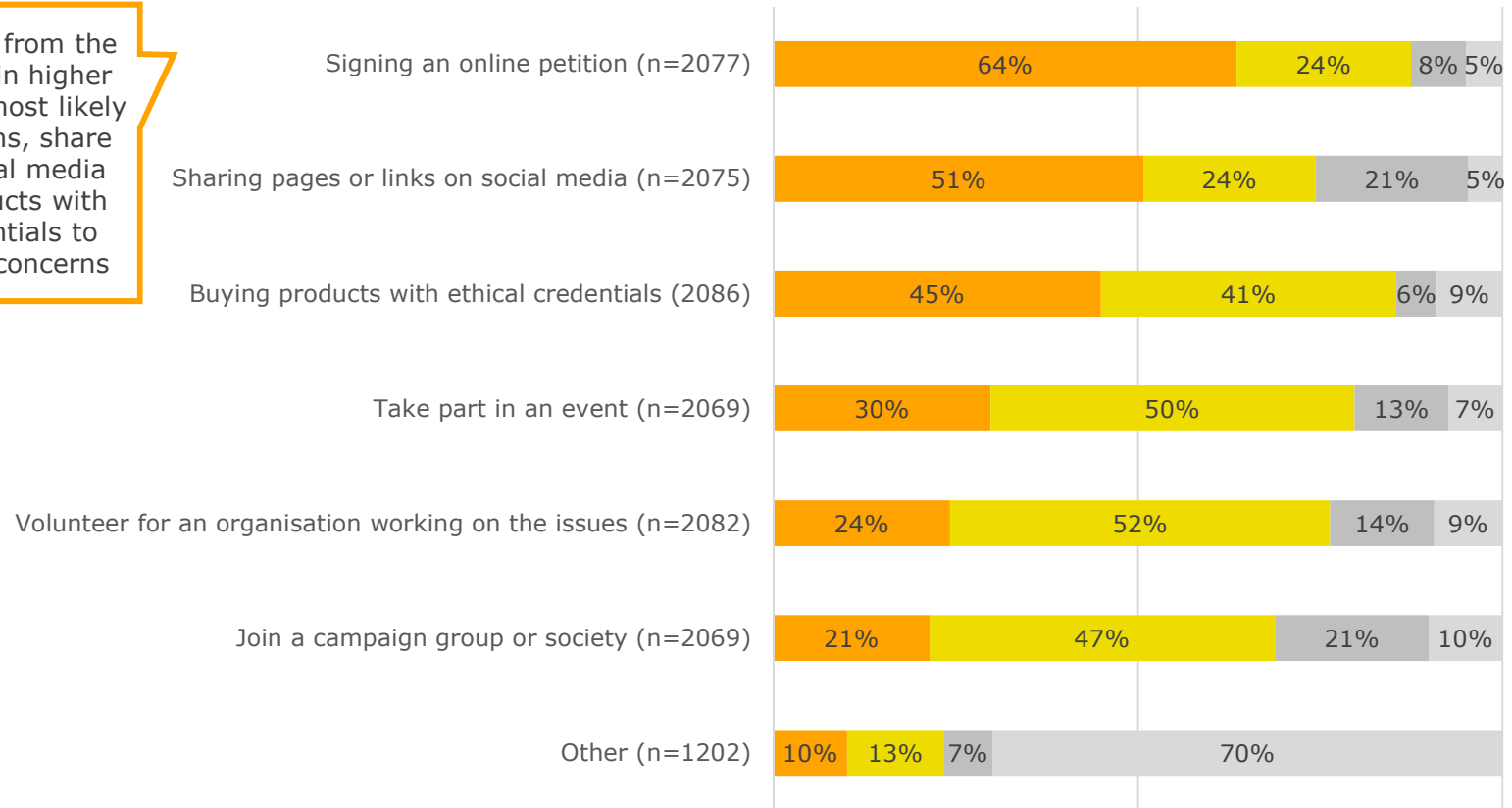


Respondents say war and terrorism is the world issue they are most concerned about (54% very concerned, 36% fairly concerned). Human rights and climate change are also seen as deeply concerning. World unemployment is of least concern of the issues researched (26% say they are very concerned about this and 46% are fairly concerned).



2 in 3 respondents say they already sign online petitions to address issues that concern them. Half share pages or links on social media and 45% claim to buy products with ethical credentials to address issues of concern.

Women, those from the UK and those in higher education are most likely to sign petitions, share pages on social media and buy products with ethical credentials to address their concerns



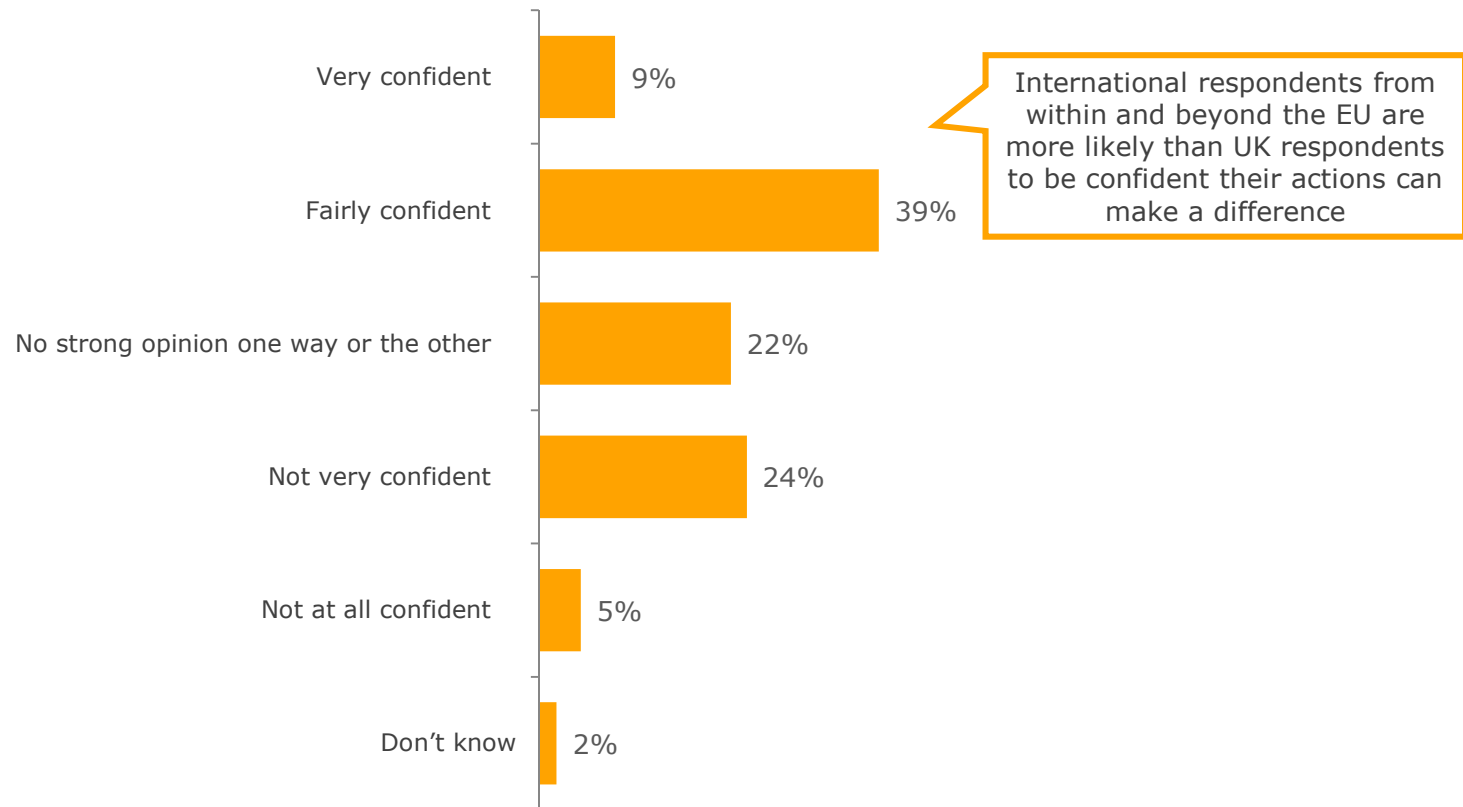
■ I already do this

■ I don't currently do this, but would be willing to

■ I don't currently do this, and would not be willing to

■ Don't know

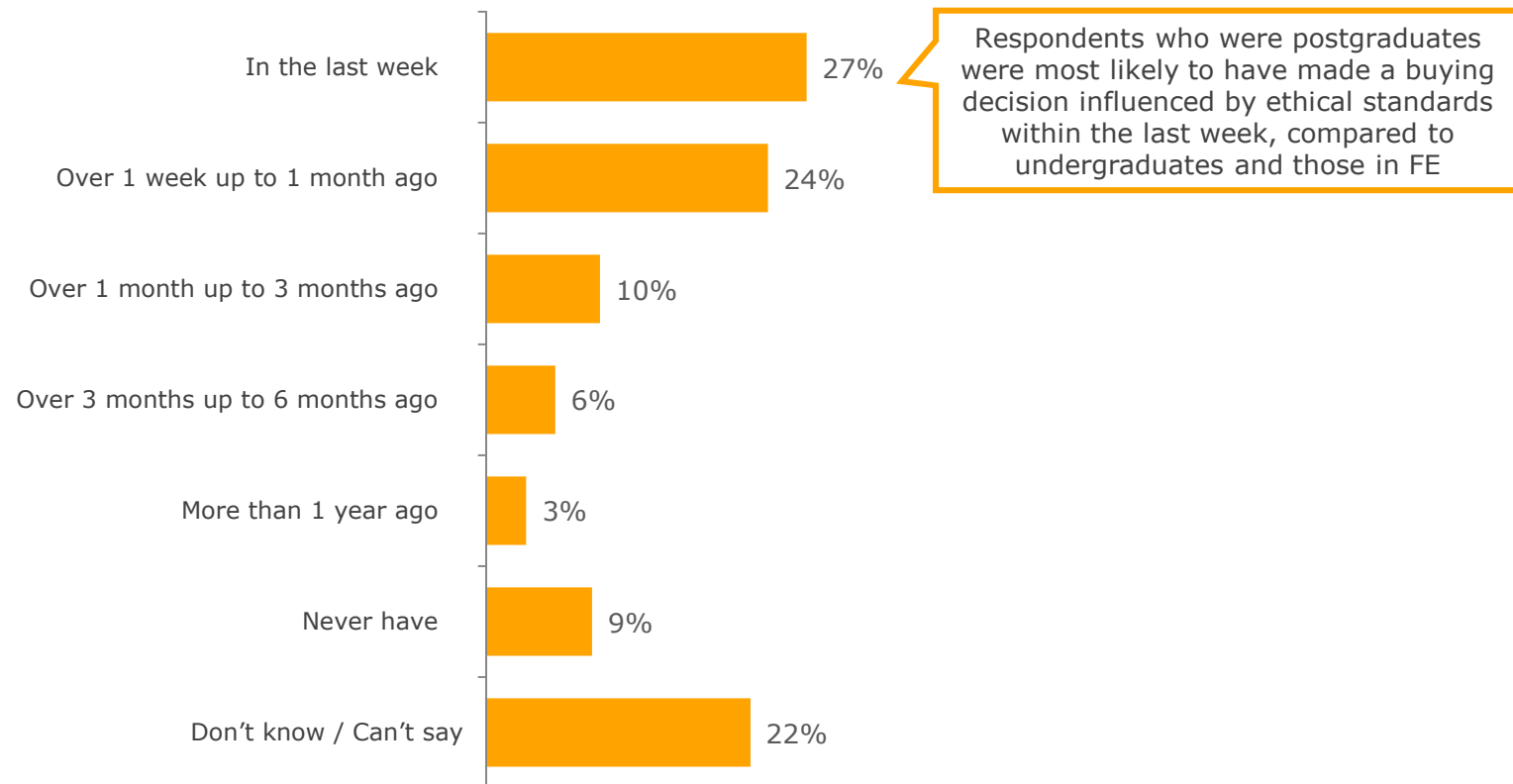
Almost half (48%) say they are very or fairly confident that the actions they personally take could make a difference in addressing issues of concern.



**B3. How confident are you that the actions you personally can take will make a difference to addressing the issues that concern you?**  
[Base: 2101 Balance: No response]

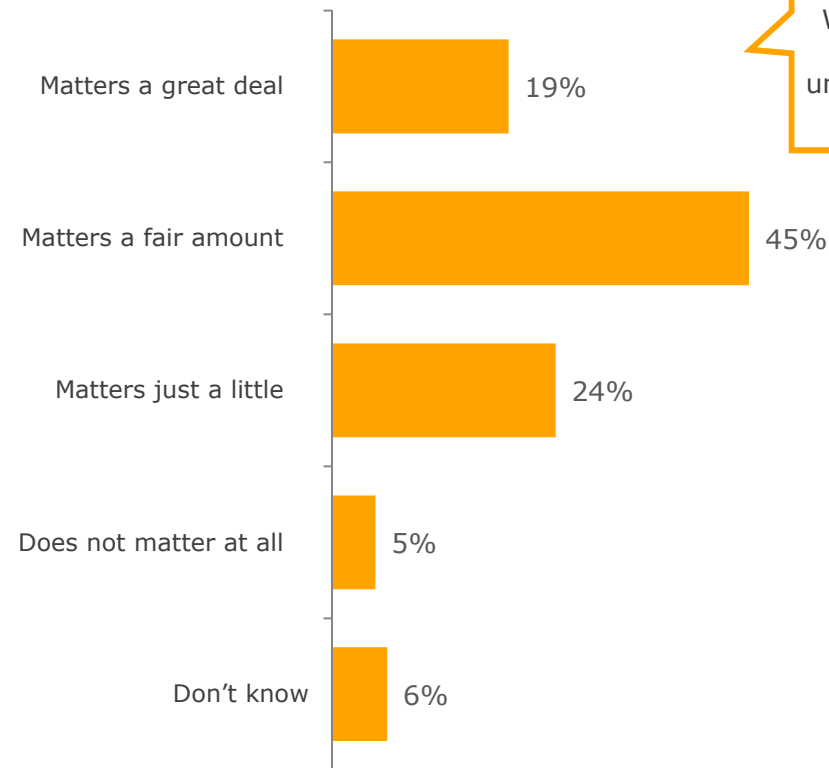
# Ethical purchasing

Half of respondents (51%) had made a buying decision in the last month which was influenced by ethical standards, 27% had done so in the last week.



C1. When, if at all, did you last make a buying decision that was specifically influenced by the ethical standards of a retailer or producer?  
[Base: 2106 Balance: No response]

1 in 5 said that ethical standards of products they buy, and the companies that sell them, matter to them a great deal. A further 45% said this mattered to them a fair amount.



Women and post graduates were more likely than men and undergraduates to say these issues mattered a great deal to them.

Good quality products that are produced by workers who are treated well and are environmentally friendly are what respondents look for when buying goods that are produced in an ethical way.

*"I want to know that the producers of the products and materials that I buy are treated well and are paid properly."*

*"Fair treatment of employees in all countries."*

*"Equality and fair treatment of animals/humans involved in creating the products."*

*"Sustainability. Fair treatment of foreign workers producing goods. Quality of product."*

*"Better quality, both of the product and quality of life for the people that make them."*

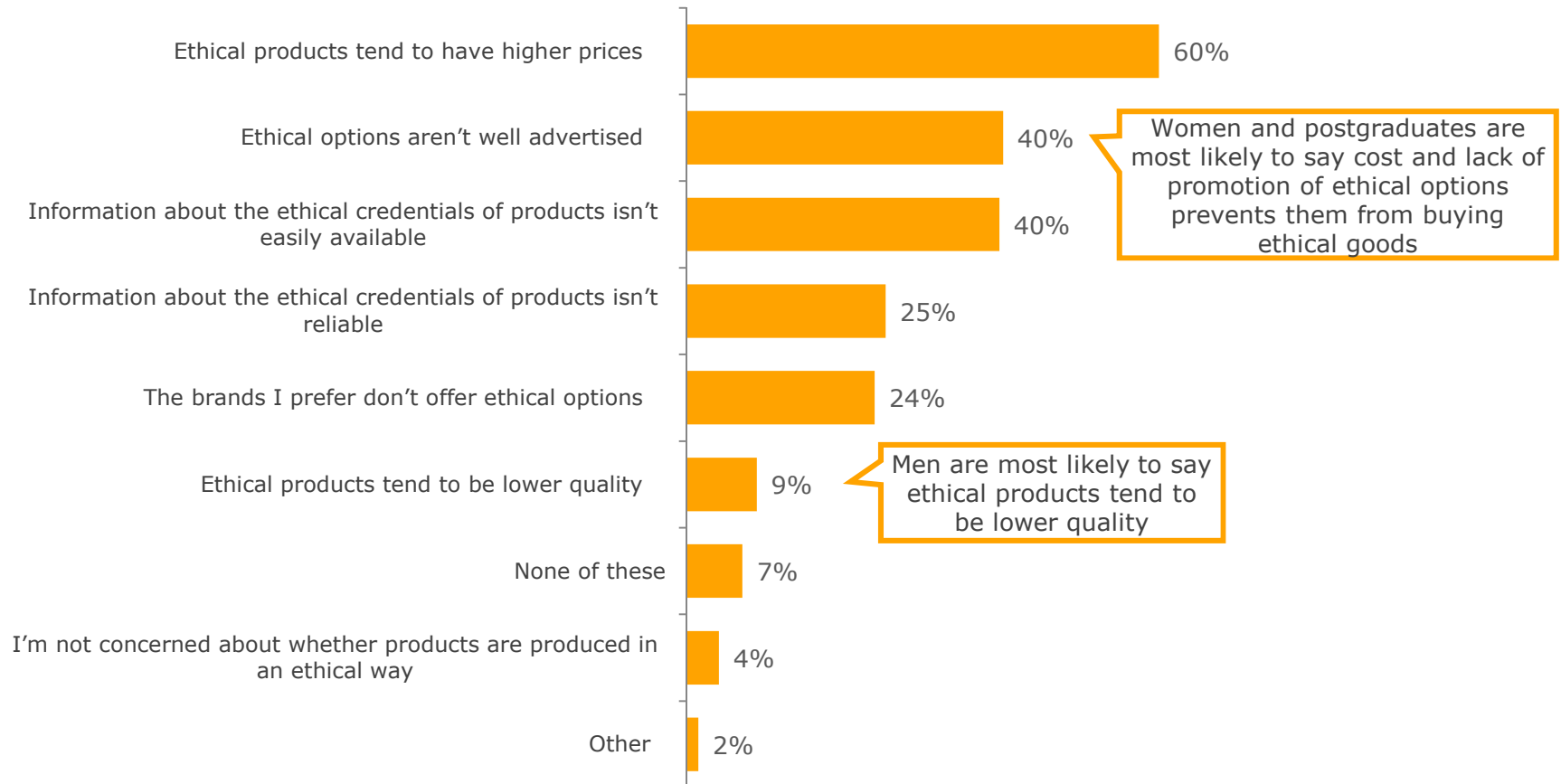
*"Their overall quality and how they are manufactured."*

*"It's the best option, both environmentally, socially and morally."*

*"It's motivating when I know if something is environmentally friendly or fair trade e. g. Coffee. My biggest concern is buying clothing as I know they are made so cheaply in horrid working conditions, so that would demotivate me."*

*"They are more environmentally and labour friendly."*

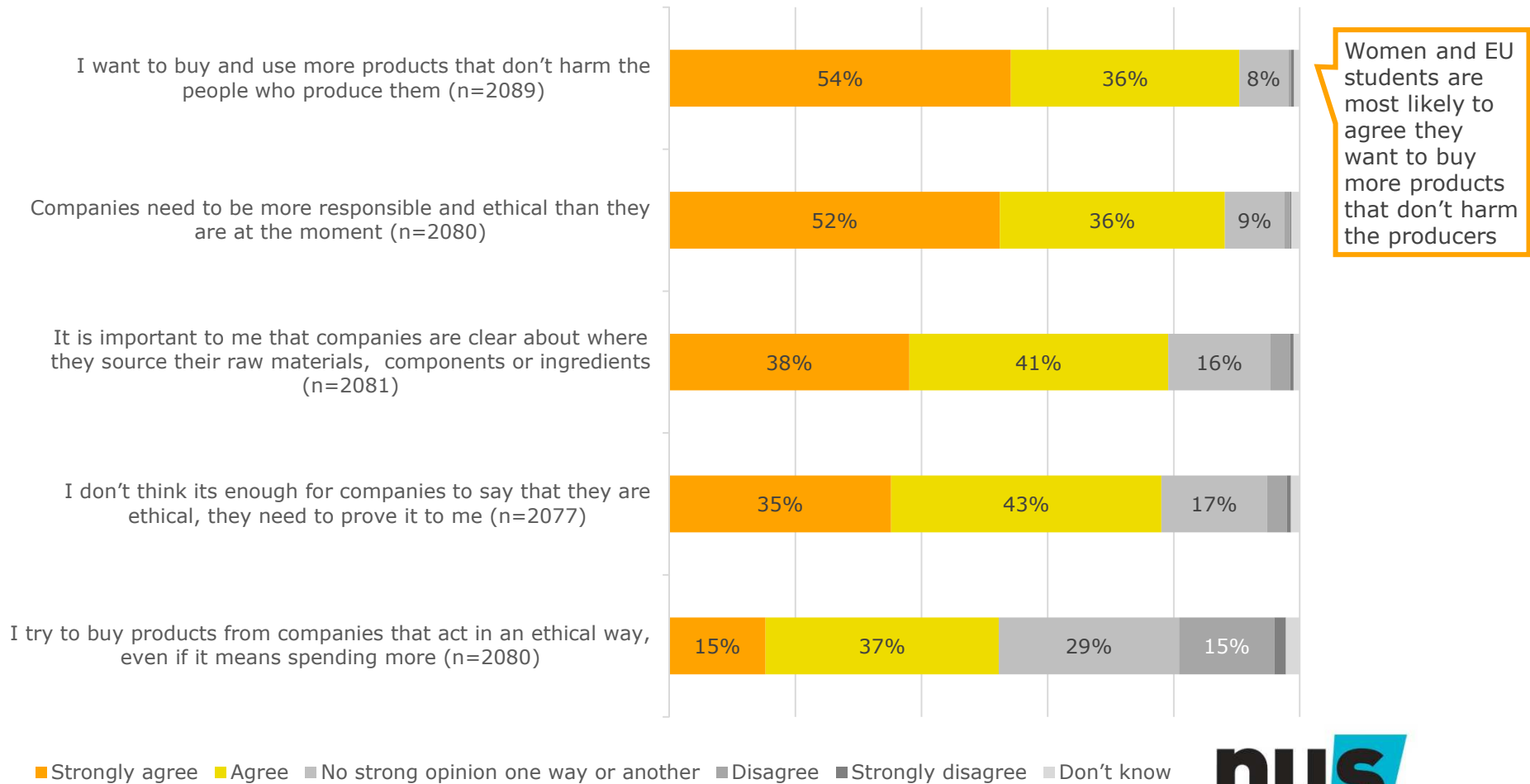
Cost is the main reason why respondents are less likely to buy ethical products – 6 in 10 say this deters them. 4 in 10 say that lack of awareness and availability of information about ethical credentials deters them from buying such products.



C4. Which of the following reasons, if any, makes you less likely to buy products that are produced in an ethical way?

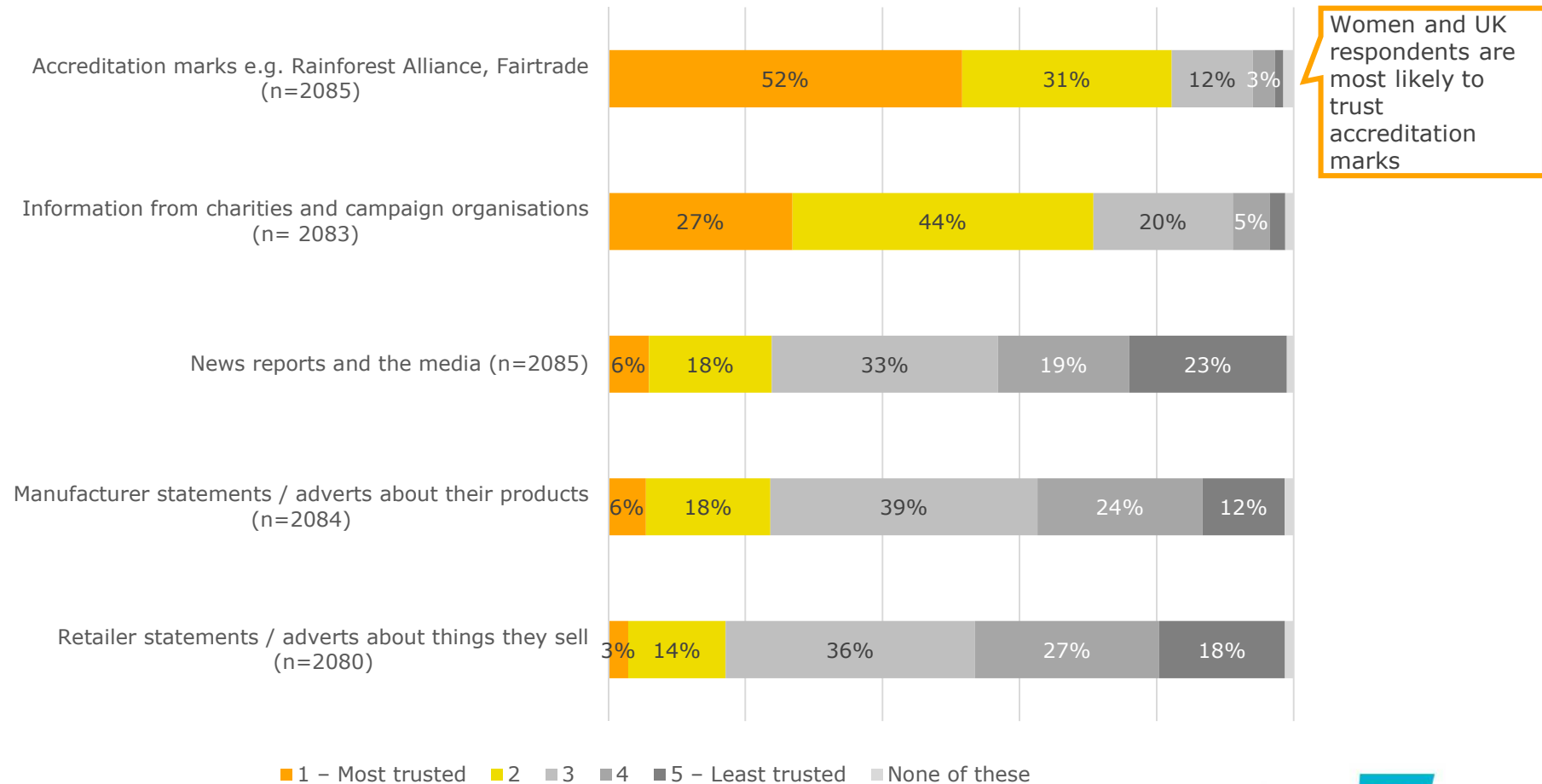


90% of respondents agree that they want to buy more products that don't harm people who produce them and 88% agree companies need to be more responsible and ethical than they are at present.



C5. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements?  
 [Base: In brackets Balance: No response]

Half (52%) say they most trust accreditation marks to provide ethical credentials of products. 1 in 4 (27%) say that information from charities and campaign organisations is their most trusted source of information about the ethical credentials of products.

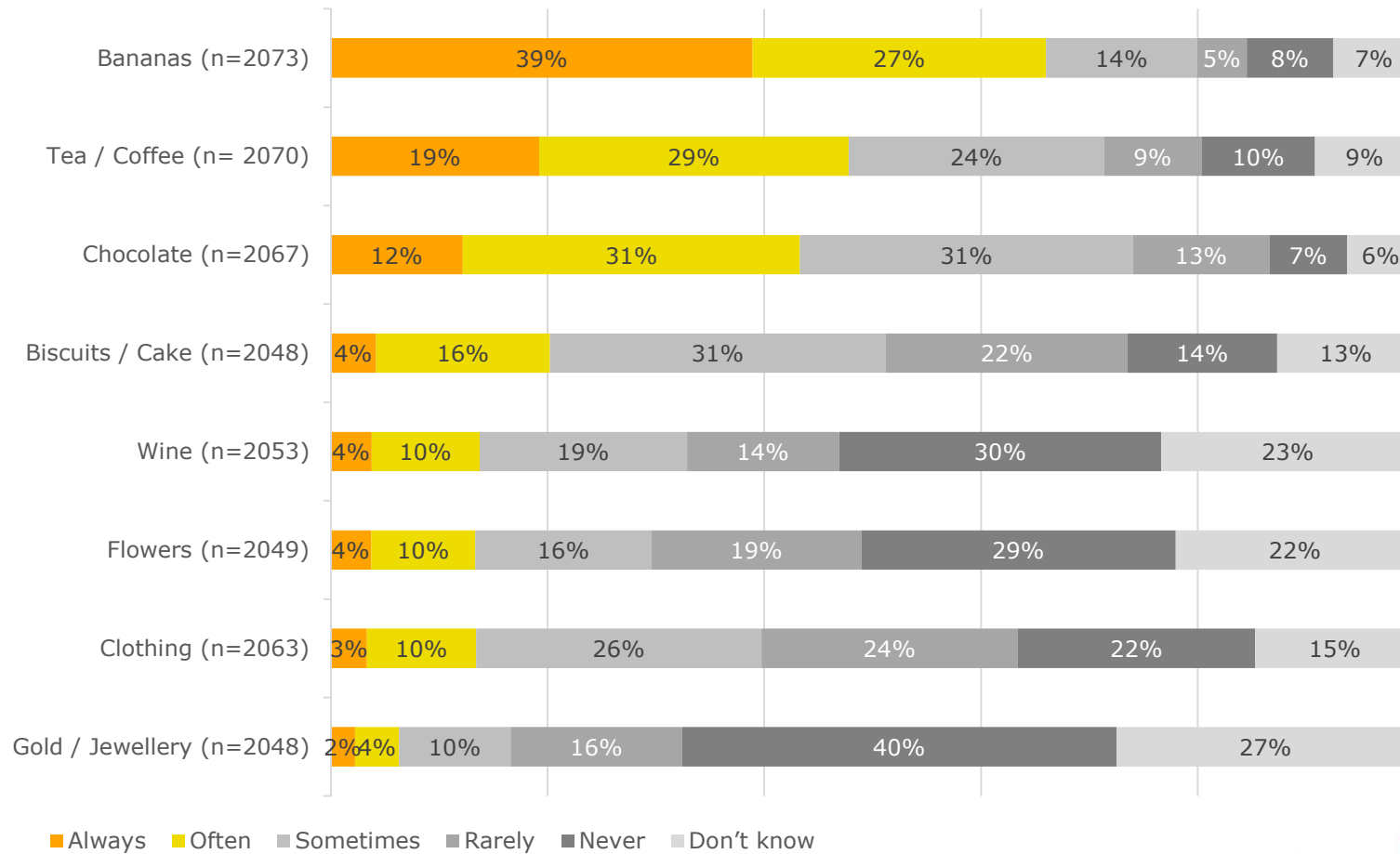


**C6. Thinking about the information that is available on the ethical credentials of products. Please rank the following sources of information according to how much you trust them.**  
 [Base: In brackets Balance: No response]

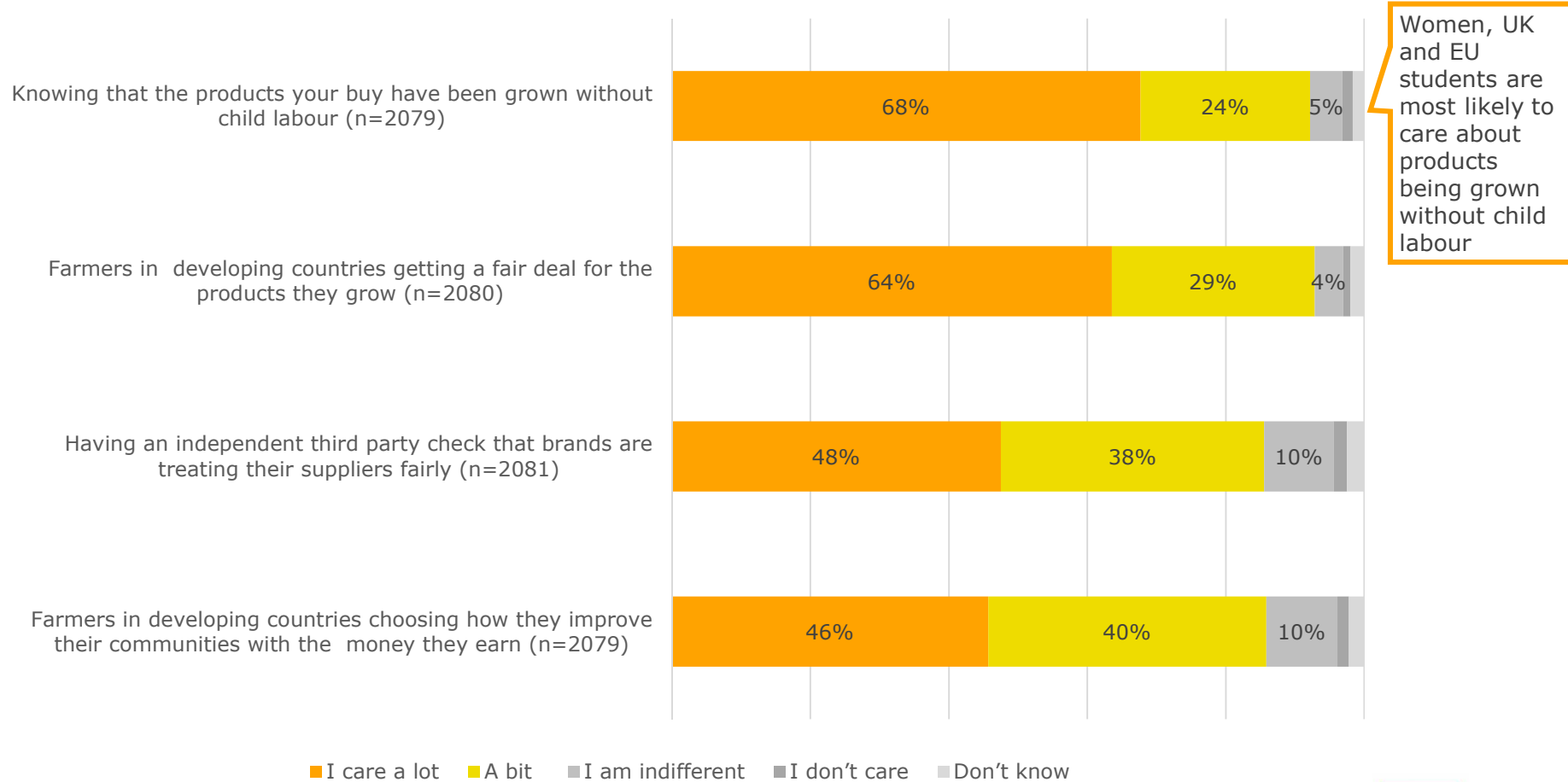
# Fairtrade awareness and purchasing



Bananas are the most frequently purchased Fairtrade item 39% saying they always buy Fairtrade bananas over those without the Fairtrade label. Fairtrade tea/coffee is always chosen by a fifth (19%), over non Fairtrade products.



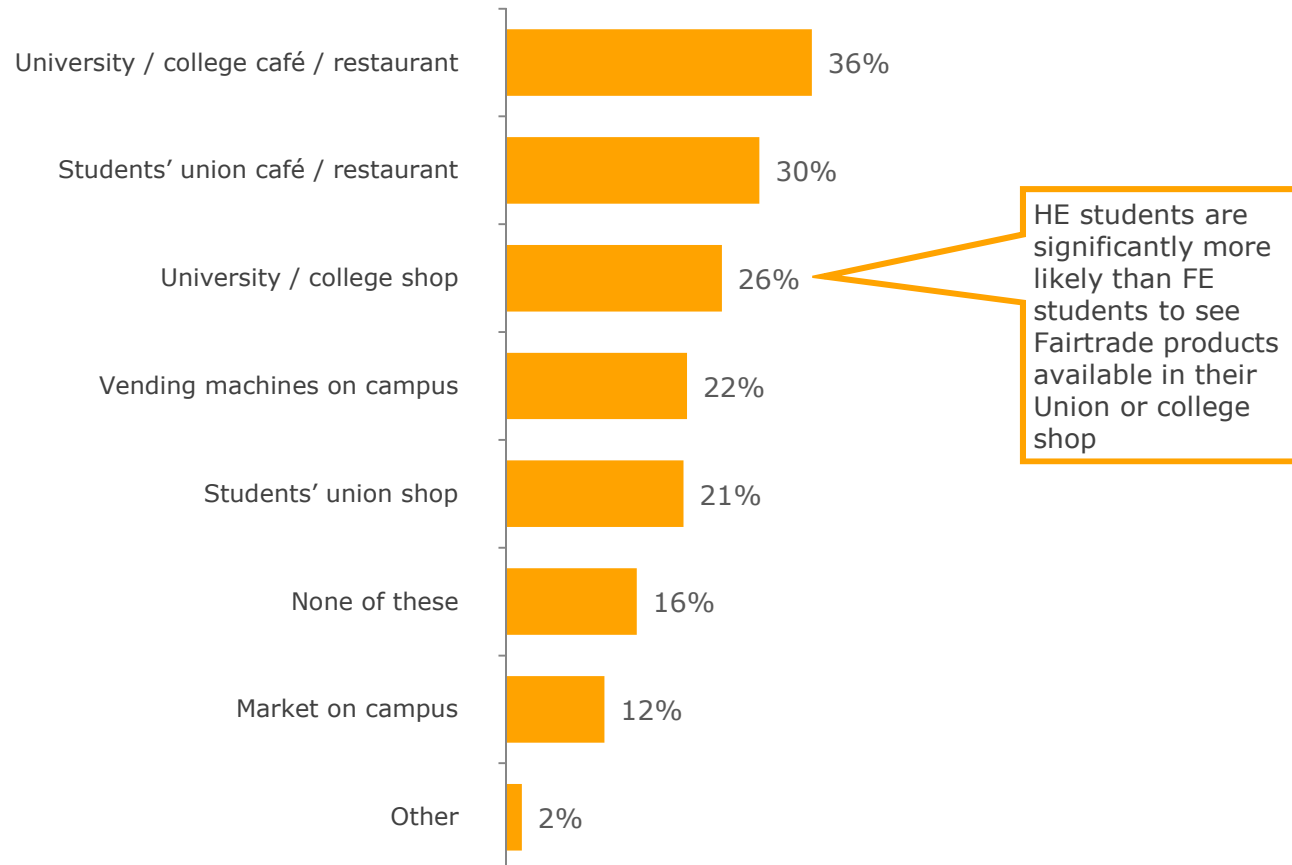
2 in 3 respondents say they care a lot about knowing the products they buy have been grown without child labour (68%) and that farmers in developing countries get a fair deal for the products they grow (64%).



D4. How much do you care about the following issues?  
 [Base: In brackets Balance: No response]

# Fairtrade on campus

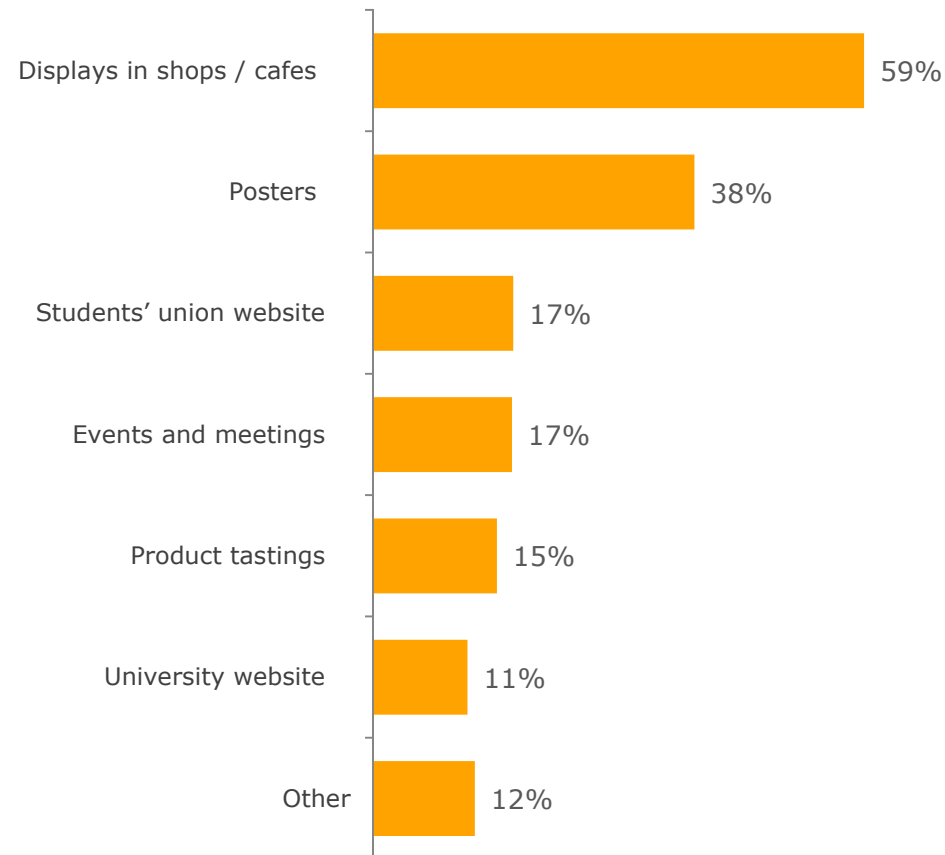
University/college and students' union cafes and restaurants are the main places Fairtrade products are recalled as being available (mentioned by 36% and 30% respectively).



E1. Thinking about your university or college, which of the following places do you recall seeing Fairtrade products available?  
[Base: 2098 Balance: No response]



6 in 10 (59%) of respondents say that, other than on products themselves, they recall seeing the Fairtrade logo on displays in shops/cafes. A further 4 in 10 (38%) have seen the logo on posters around campus.



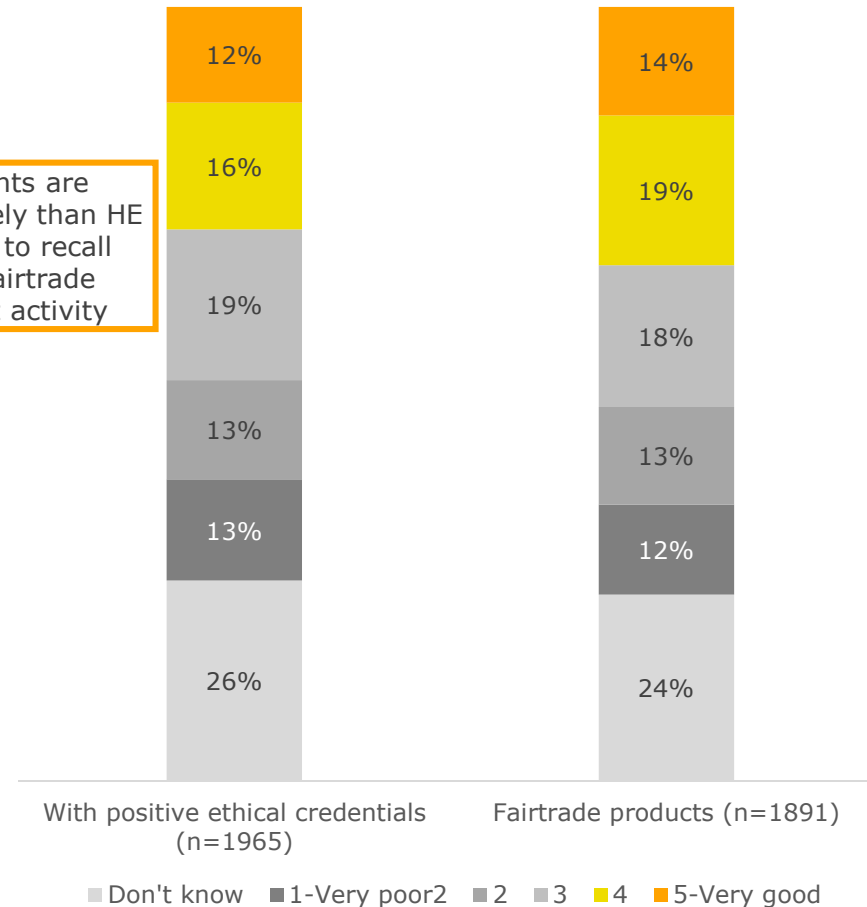
E2. Other than on the products themselves, where else have you seen the Fairtrade logo at your university of college?  
[Base: 1600 Balance: No response]

1 in 10 recalled seeing activity during Fairtrade Fortnight. There was mixed reaction to their university / colleges performance in relation to buying products with positive ethical credentials and Fairtrade products.

**11%** recalled seeing any activities, campaigns or events taking place during Fairtrade Fortnight in 2016-2017



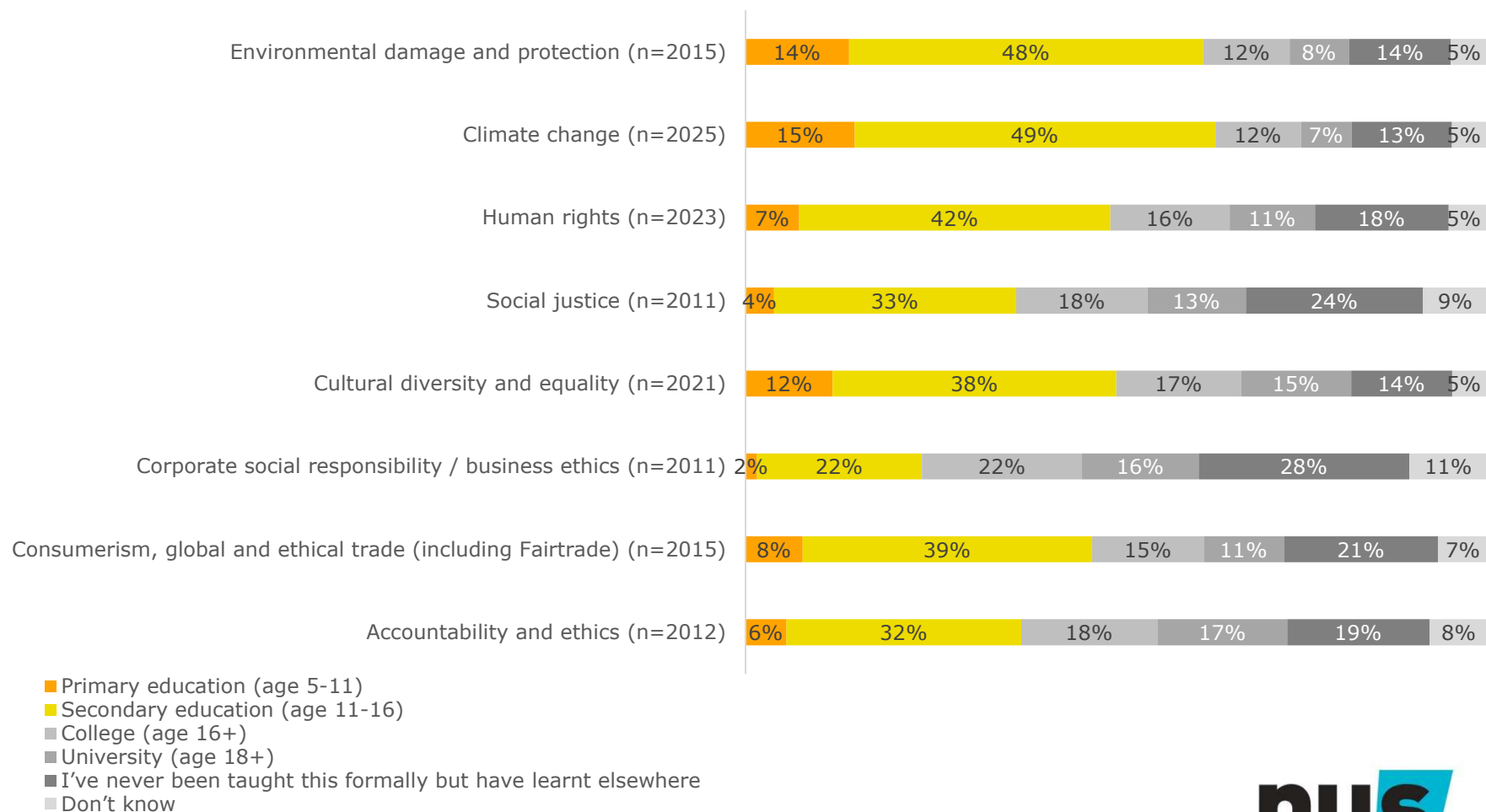
FE students are more likely than HE students to recall seeing Fairtrade Fortnight activity



E3: During 2016-2017 academic year, do you remember seeing any activities, campaigns or events taking place during Fairtrade Fortnight?  
[Base: 2089 Balance: No response]

E4: How would you rate your university/college's performance in relation to purchasing products...  
[Base: In brackets Balance: No response]

Secondary education is where respondents were most likely to learn about accountability and ethics (32%), Consumerism, global and ethical trade (39%) and cultural diversity and equality (38%).



Respondents feel their university or college could do more to support Fairtrade by promoting and selling more products and making students more aware of what it is.

*"Use more fair trade products in the restaurant/shop and promote it more."*

*"Make it more well known if the products sold are ethically sourced as it is not widely known."*

*"Work with their suppliers to offer fair trade products."*

*"Stock fair trade goods in vending machine."*

*"They currently do nothing to support it, so should use it with products they make and should advertise the importance of it."*

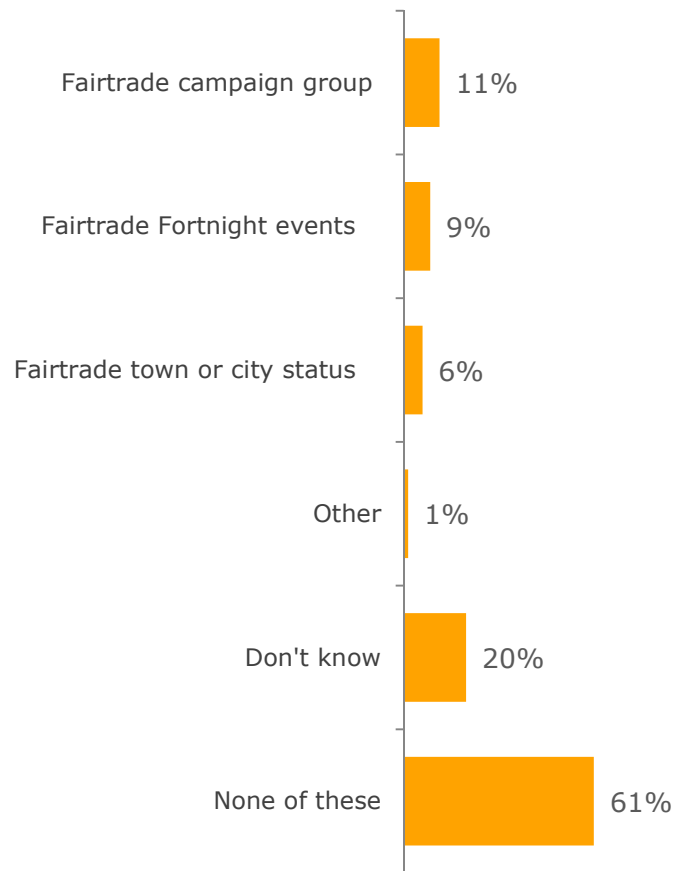
*"Spreading awareness through posters, providing fair trade food options which aren't too expensive."*

*"More Fairtrade products available and clearly labelled as such (e.g. a stand with only Fairtrade products on)."*

*"Holding Fairtrade events, campaigns and becoming a Fairtrade environment."*

# Local Fairtrade

6 in 10 respondents had not seen or heard about Fairtrade type activities in their local community. Of the remainder 1 in 10 were aware of Fairtrade campaign groups or Fairtrade Fortnight events.



**How can universities and colleges support local action on Fairtrade?**

*"Have local growers supply the SU shop"*

*"Hold events for Fairtrade Fortnight, raise awareness, put up adverts/posters"*

*"Hold community events to raise awareness of fair trade within the wider community"*

*"Stop using suppliers who don't use Fairtrade (or better schemes) products."*

*"By educating individuals more about the impact of poor trade standards."*

*"Invite local traders onto campus for an event."*

To find out more about NUS' research on sustainability issues, please visit:  
[sustainability.nus.org.uk/](https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/)

