



national union of **students**

# Research into waste practices in tertiary education | Disposable cups on campus

**October 2018**

# Research objectives and method

# Research objective and method

NUS, in partnership with Costa Coffee and the Southern Coast Affinity Group (SCAG) of universities and colleges and their students' unions, are currently working on a pilot project designed to improve recycling of disposable cups in higher and further education campuses. A survey was delivered to capture relevant information on current practices and experiences related to recycling disposable cups.

The survey was promoted through the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) Members Jiscmail, and respondents were offered an incentive of £100 donation to the charity of their choice and a supply of reusable cups for their team.

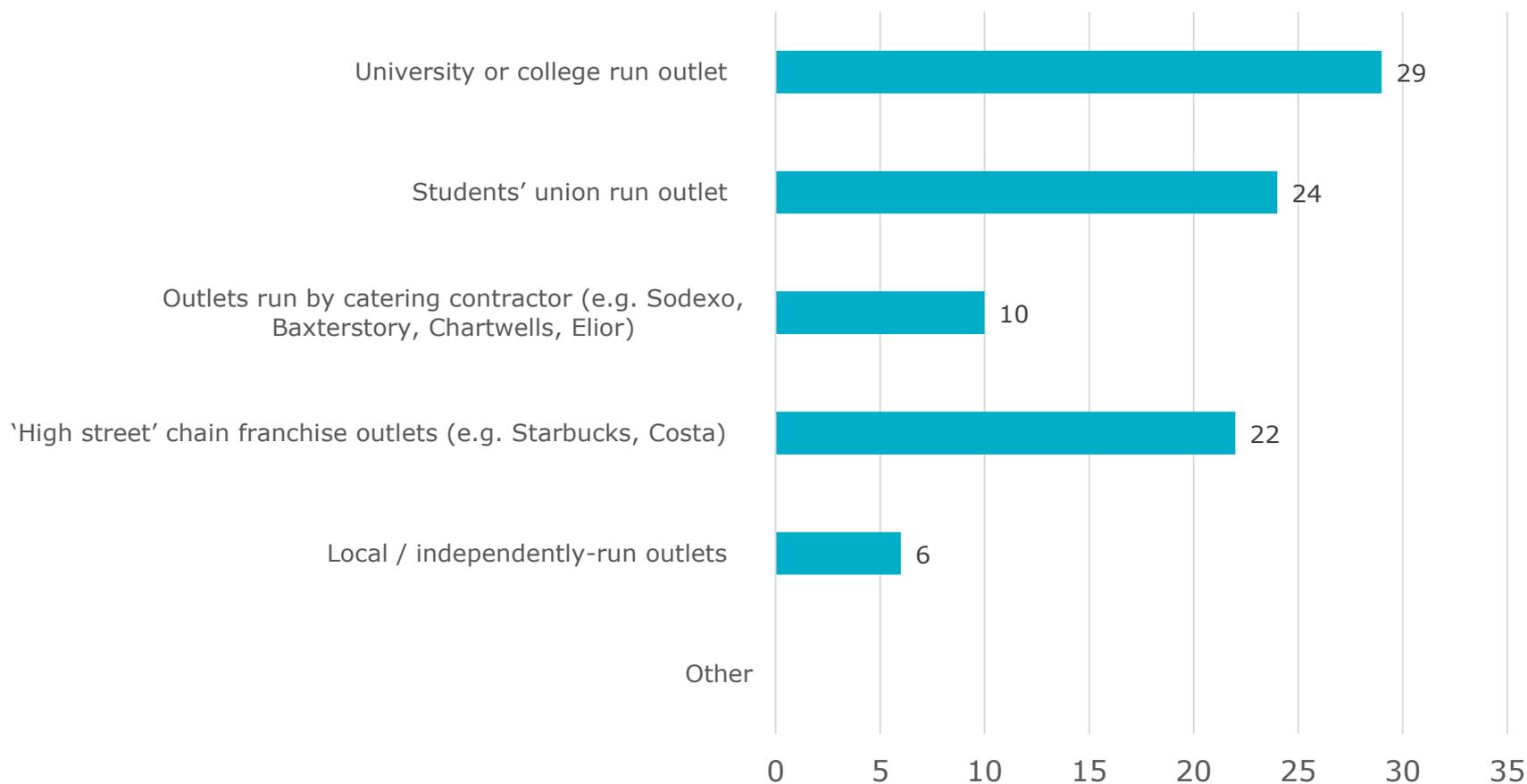
37 respondents working in higher and further education institutions completed the survey. Of the 37 respondents, 33 work in a university, 2 work in a college and 2 work in a students' union.

This report presents the findings of the research, which included the following areas:

- Coffee outlets and disposable cups on campus
- Approaches to tackling disposable cup waste
- Waste data and contracts

# Coffee outlets and disposable cups on campus

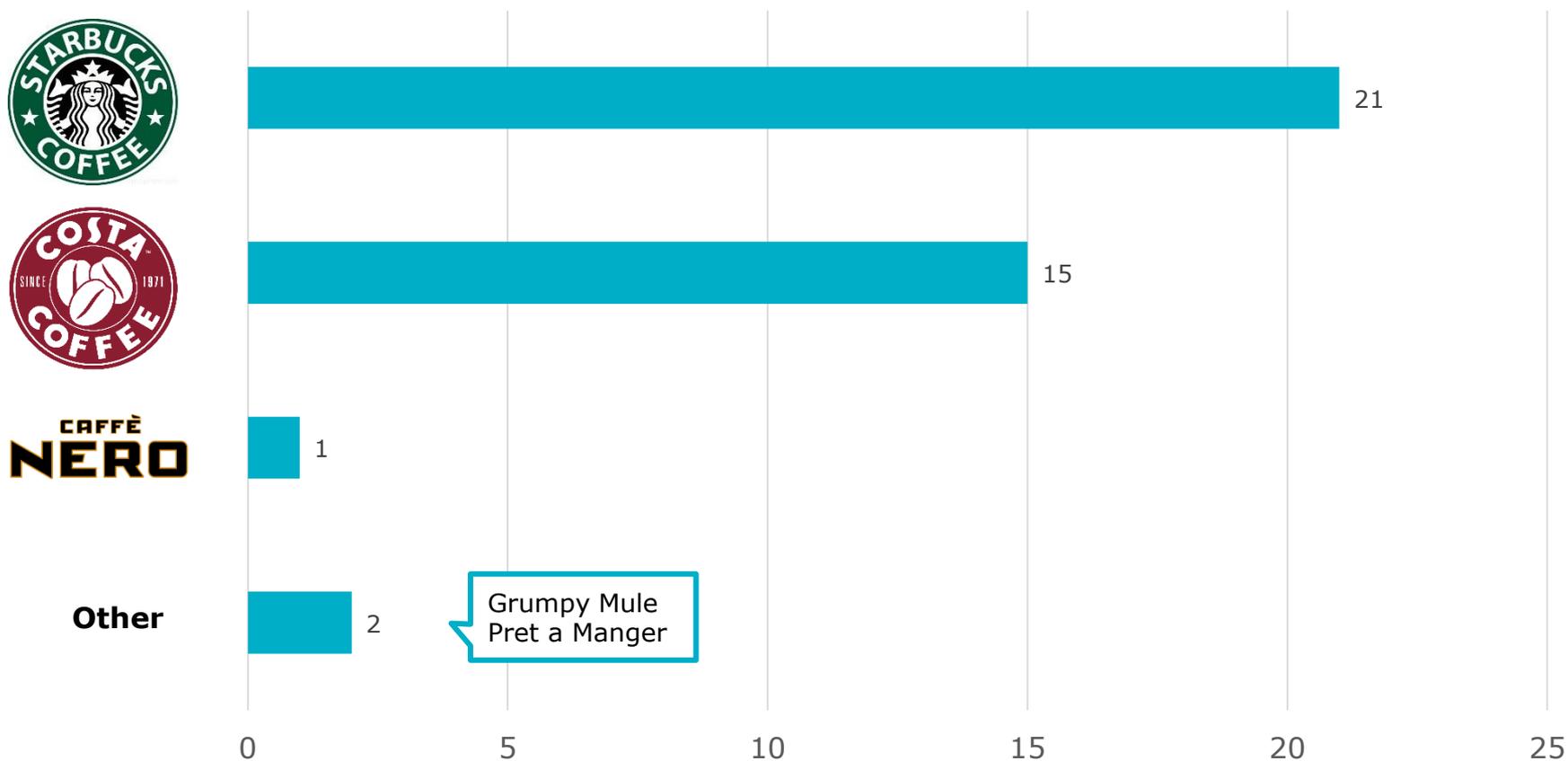
Outlets on campus selling drinks in disposable cups are most frequently run by universities or colleges. Outlets are also commonly run by students' unions or as 'high street' chain franchise outlets.



Base: 36 respondents. Balance:

**B2. Which of the following types of outlet do you currently have on campus that sell drinks in takeaway disposable cups?**

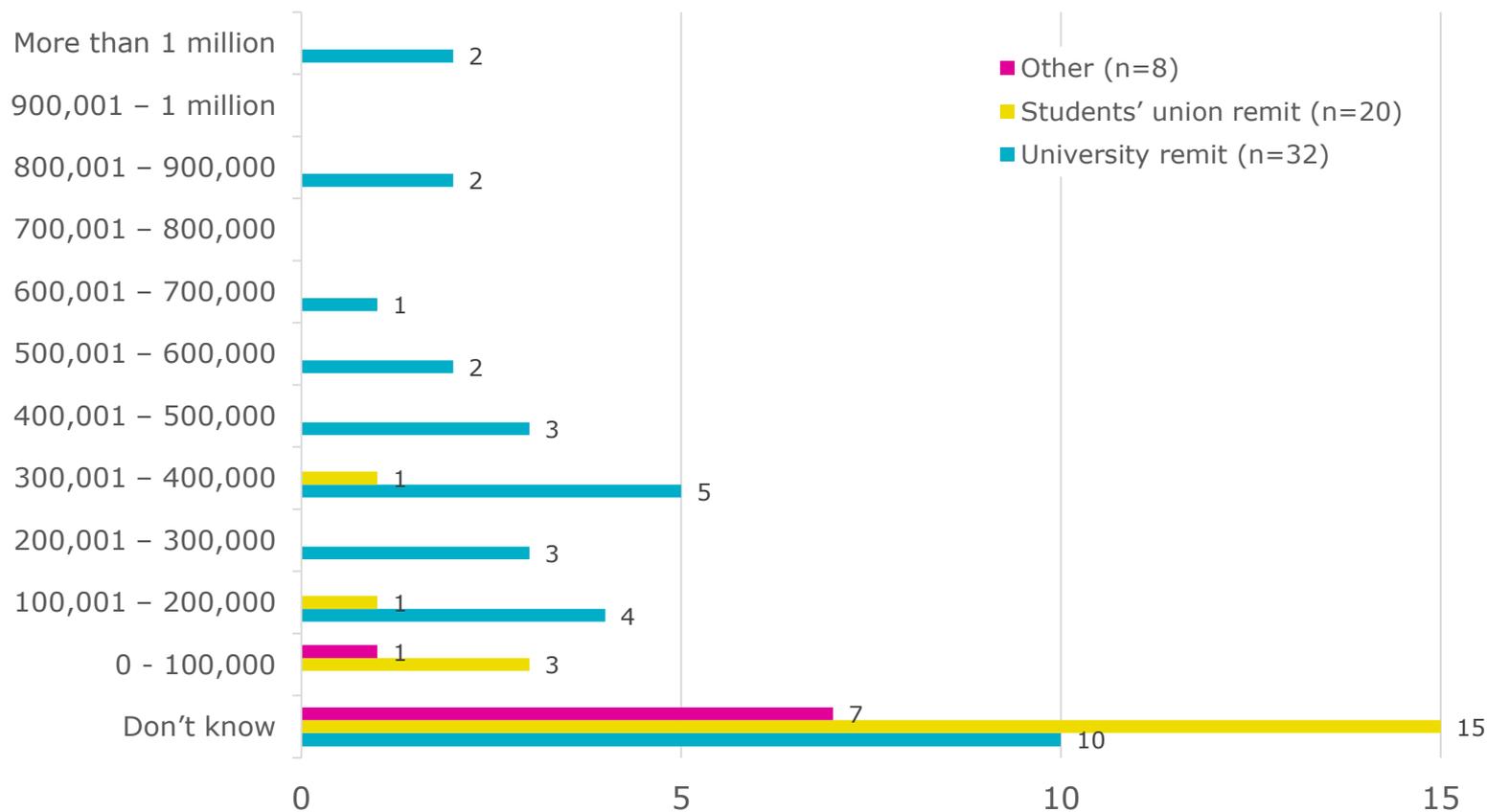
Starbucks is the most prevalent 'high street' coffee chain franchise that operates on university and college campuses.



Base: 29 respondents. Balance: No response.

**B3. Which of the following 'high street' franchises currently operate on your campus?**

Two respondents report that over a million disposable cups are used across university-run coffee outlets on campus. Most frequently, respondents reported between 300,001 and 400,000 disposable cups are used within university run coffee outlets. The majority of respondents did not know how many cups were used.



Base: (see legend). Balance: No response.

# Approaches to tackling disposable cup waste

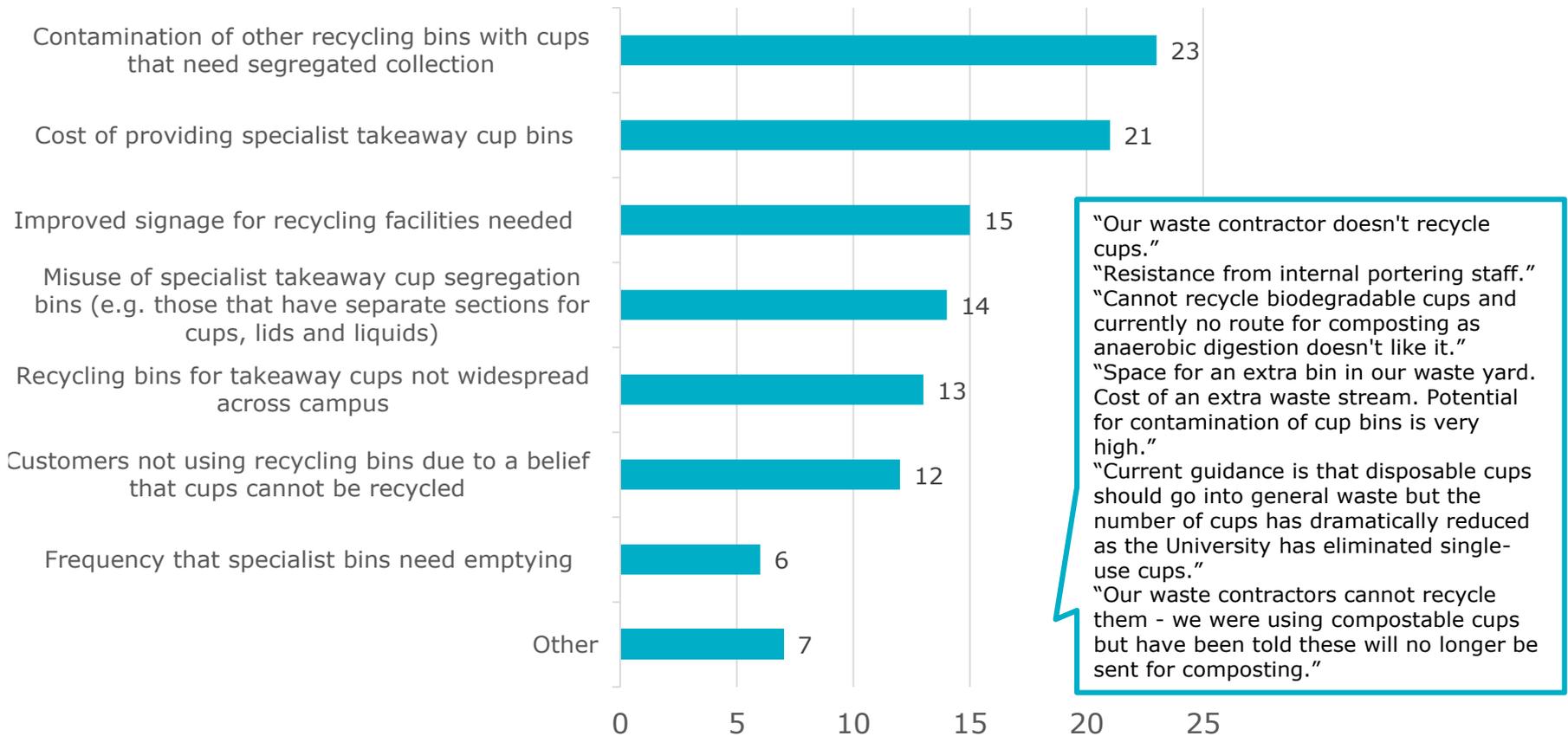
Offering money off the regular price for using a reusable cup is the most commonly reported method of tackling disposable cup waste, followed by adding an extra charge on top of the regular price for using a disposable cup.



Base: 37 respondents. Balance: No response.

**C1. Which of the following approaches to tackling waste associated with disposable cups are currently running at any takeaway drinks outlets on your campus?**

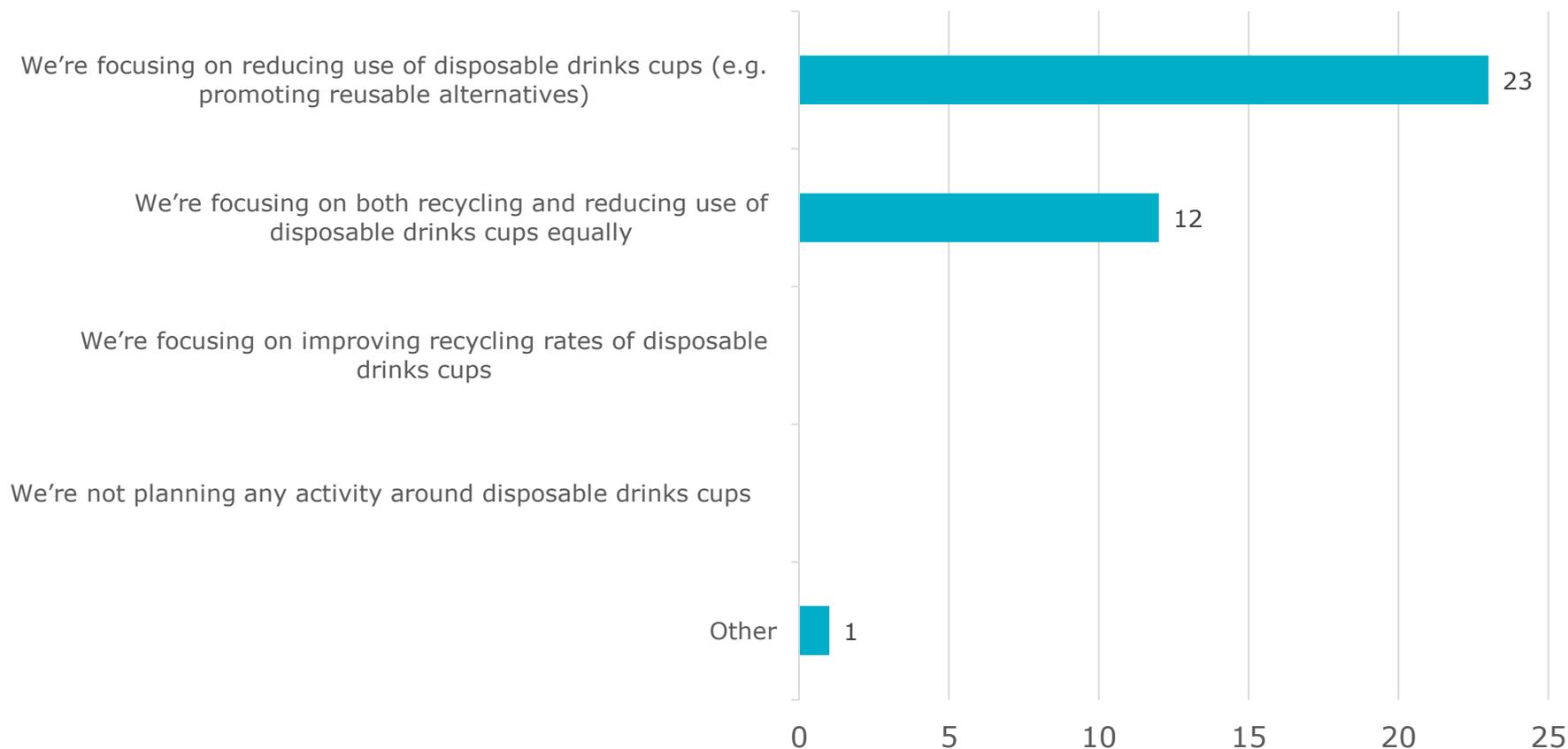
The most commonly reported barriers experienced when tackling disposable cup waste through recycling include contamination of segregated collections and the costs associated with providing specialist bins for the recycling of disposable cups.



Base: 34 respondents. Balance: No response.

**D1. What, if any, issues have you faced in implementing recycling for takeaway disposable cups?**

Two thirds of respondents are focused on tackling disposable cup waste through promoting reusable alternatives. A third of respondents say they are tackling waste through reuse and recycling.



Base: 36 respondents. Balance: No response.

**D3. Which of the following, if any, best describes your strategy going forward for dealing with disposable drinks cup waste on your campus?**

Advice from respondents on implementing recycling of disposable cups included lessons on providing and managing segregated bins for collection of disposables, and highlighted the importance of communication and working with waste contractors on the issue.

### Providing and managing segregated bins

"Segregated bins in cafés."

"Providing dedicated bins with clear signage in the outlets."

"We have found that separate bins for cup recycling do not work well because of logistics and misuse. We have found that a better solution is to attach a liquid waste container and a cup holder on either side of our existing mixed recycling bins in order to allow students and staff to dispose of "normal" mixed recycling items and cups at the same bin location."

"Liquids bin to the side for liquid removal to keep mixed recycling dry (its considered contaminated if wet)."

"Segregation using a cup recycling bin helps to reduce contamination in Dry Mixed Recycling bins."

### Working with waste contractors

"Engagement with Waste contractor to ensure that cups can be recycled."

### Bin communication and labelling

"Clear labelling on bins in café outlets."

**C3. Please tell us about anything you've found to work well when implementing recycling of disposable drinks cups?**

Respondents also provided information more generally on their experiences of tackling disposable cup waste on campus.

### Barriers to using compostable cups

"We use compostable cups but our food waste contractor will not accept these as in the process they would be identified as packaging and screened out and sent as RDF. All compostable cups have to, at present, enter the general waste stream until when or if an industrial composting facility is set up in the north west."

### Range of disposable cups on campus

"One of the largest problems is that, even if we purchase Vegware, our recycling streams contain lots of different coffee cups, some of which are brought onto site from external outlets."

### Incentives / discounts for reusable cups

"Having an incentive scheme backed up with a specific time limited incentive related campaign has been very successful."

"We have introduced keep cups for a number of years now whereby we give a free drink on purchase of the cup and 10p off each drink afterwards (in our food outlets)."

"Having reusable cups displayed while customers are waiting to order their drink."

"A double stamp on the loyalty card when using a branded cup has been a popular motivator for people using their reusable cups (more so than the 10p discount)."

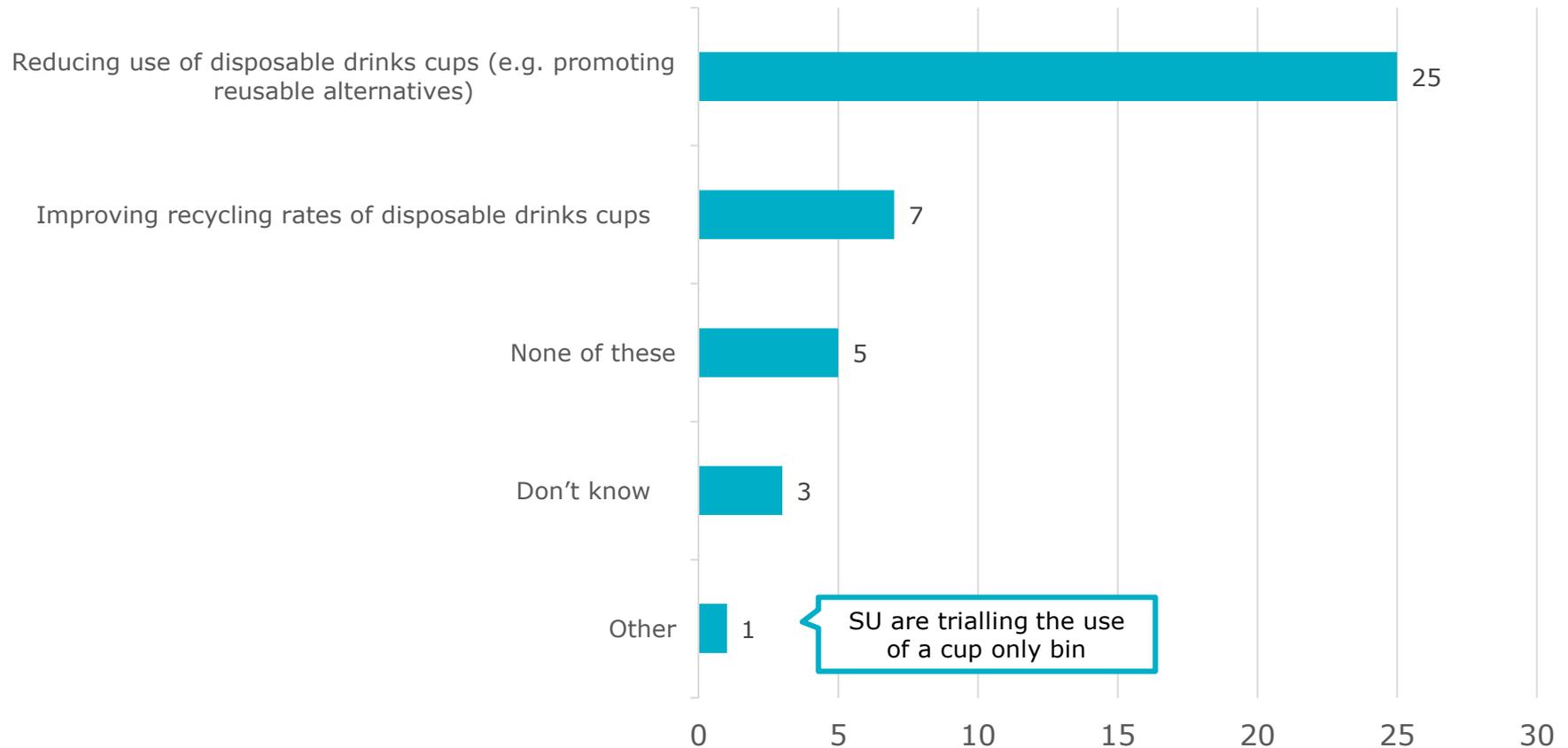
### Levy for using disposable cups

"Reducing the use of disposable cups through cup levy and providing free reusable cups."

"We have recently stopped discounting for the use of reusable cups (20p) and now charge for the use of disposable cups (25p) - we are expecting this to reduce the number of takeaway cups used on campus."

**C3. Please tell us about anything you've found to work well when implementing recycling of disposable drinks cups?**

Almost three quarters say that students or the students' union have suggested reducing the use of disposable cups through reusable alternatives. A fifth have suggested recycling of disposable cups.

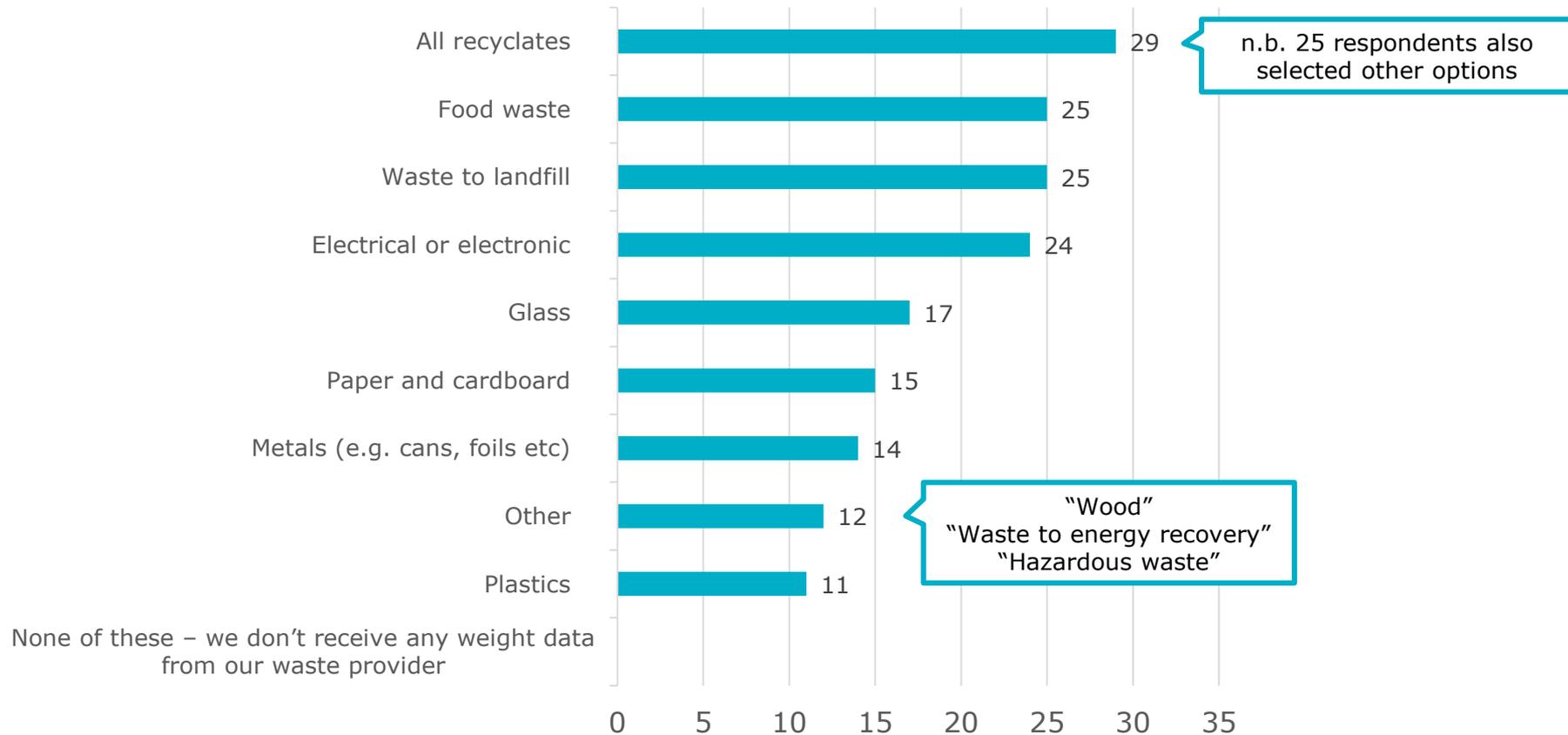


Base: 35 respondents. Balance: No response.

**D4. Which of the following, if any, have been suggested by students or the students' union at your institution as a priority for tackling disposable drinking cups?**

# Waste data and contracts

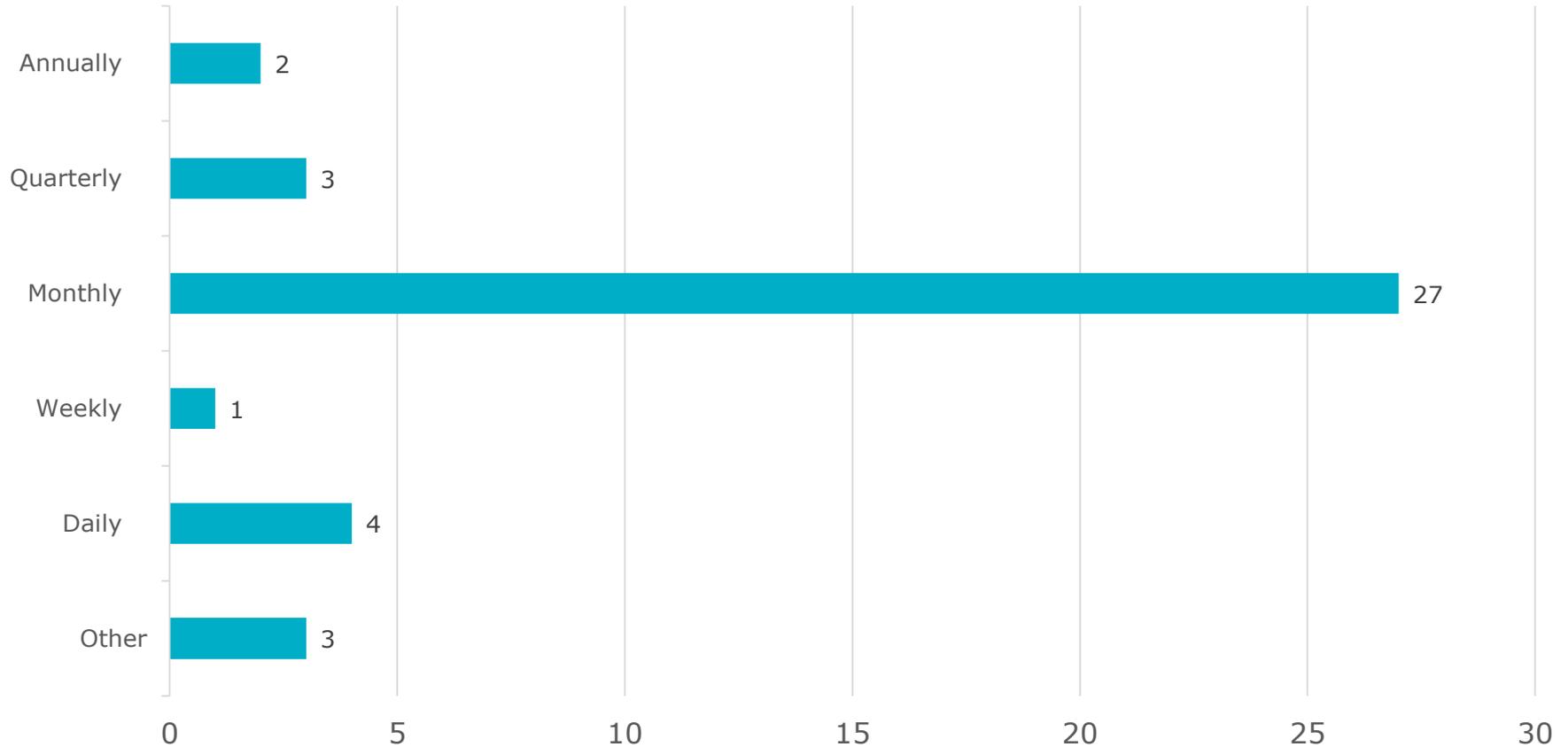
Respondents report receiving a range of weight data from their waste and recycling service providers, and most commonly report receiving data for all recyclates, and waste to landfill.



Base: 35 respondents. Balance: No response.

**E2. Which of the following weight data do you receive from your waste and recycling service provider?**

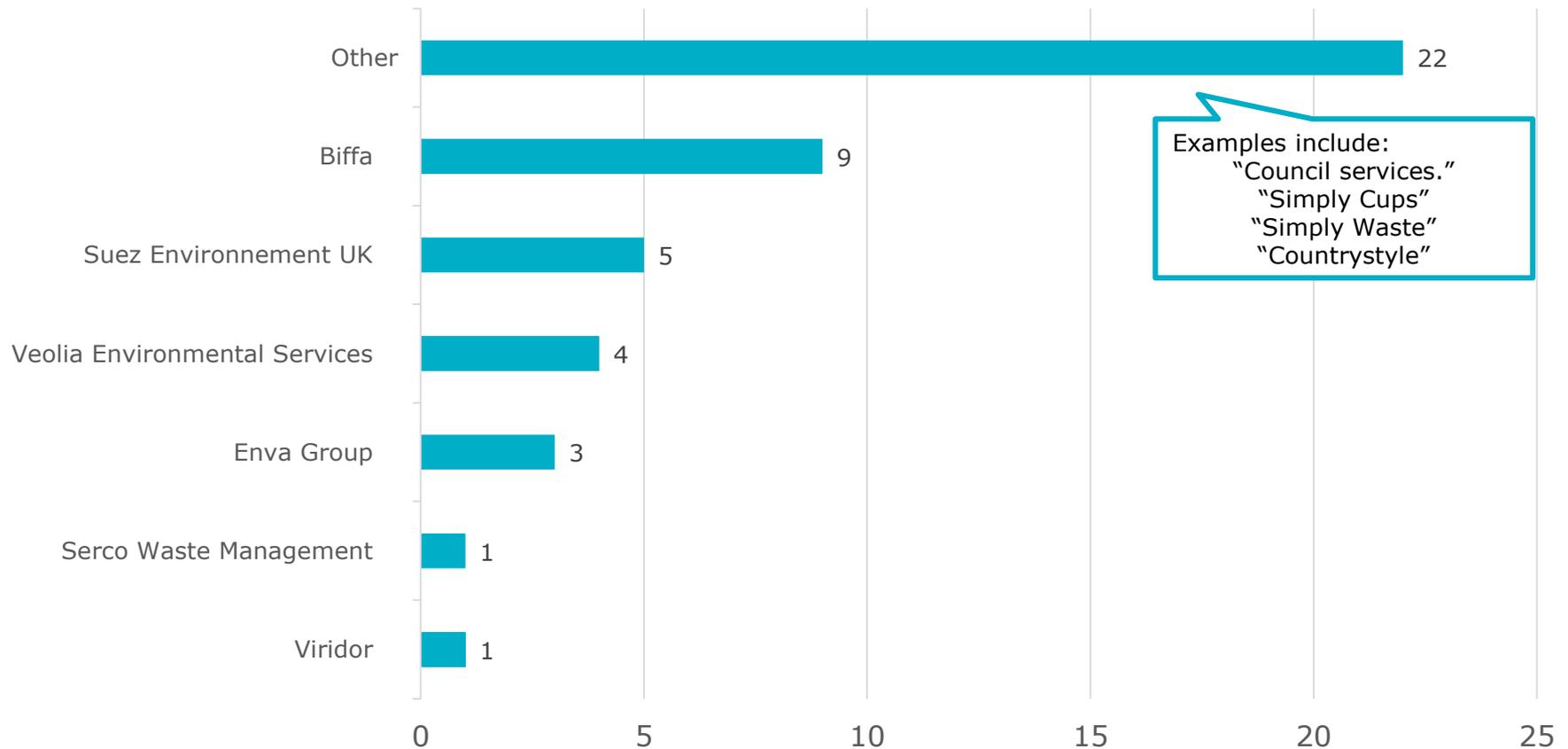
Most respondents receive weight data on a monthly basis.



Base: 33 respondents. Balance: No response.

**E3. How often do you receive weight data from your waste and recycling service provider?**

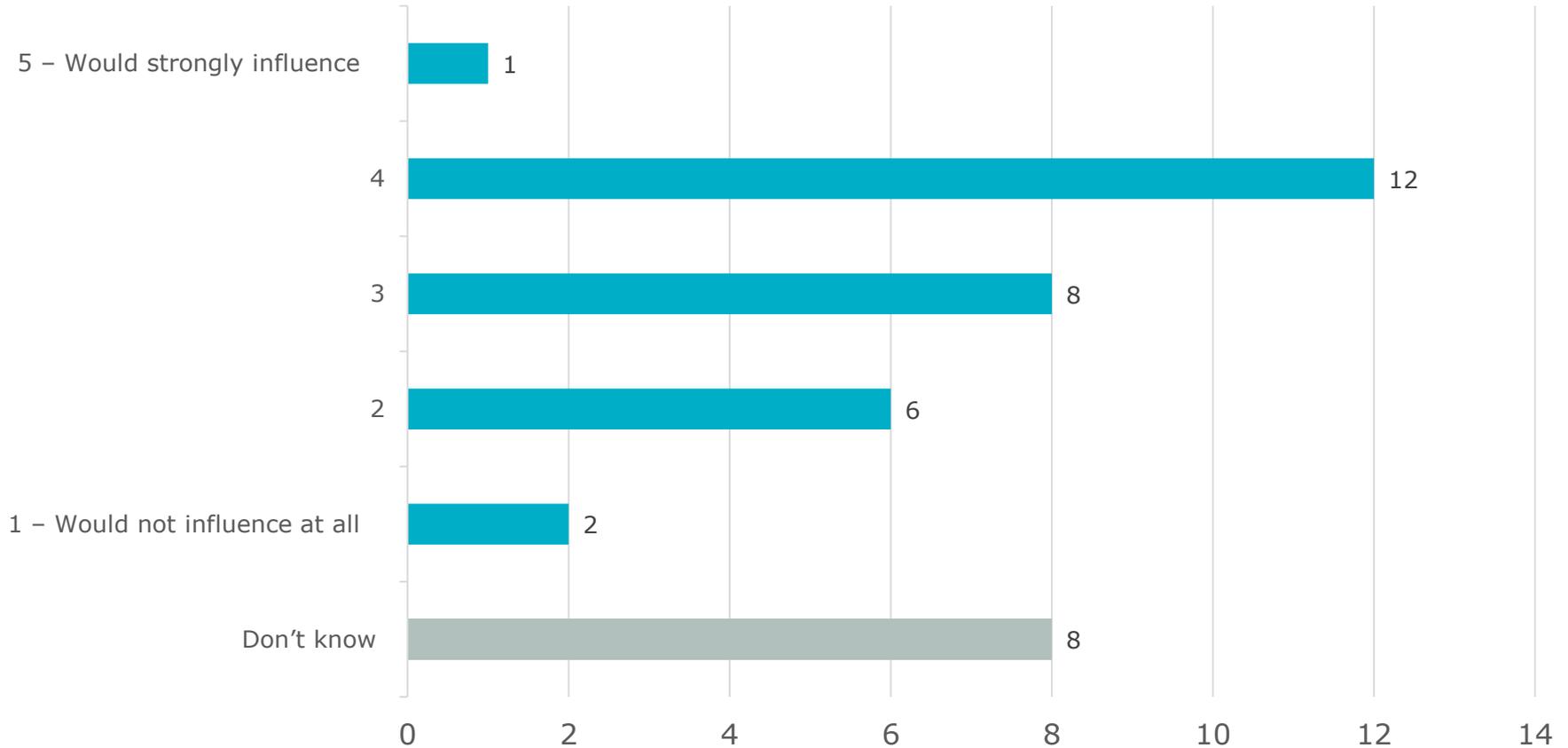
A range of waste and recycling services are operating on university and college campuses. The most commonly reported provider is Biffa.



Base: 36 respondents. Balance: No response.

**E4. Which waste and recycling service do you currently use?**

Around a third of respondents reported that provision of a disposable cup recycling service by waste providers would influence their decision on which provider to select.



Base: 37 respondents. Balance: No response.

**E7. To what extent, if at all, would the provision of disposable cup recycling by waste service providers influence your decision on which provider to select?**



national union of **students**

# Research into waste practices in tertiary education | Disposable cups on campus

For more information about this research please contact:  
Rachel Drayson – Insight manager (Sustainability) - [rachel.drayson@nus.org.uk](mailto:rachel.drayson@nus.org.uk)