

# Sustainability Skills Survey | 2018-19

Research into students' experiences of teaching and learning on sustainable development

**October 2019**

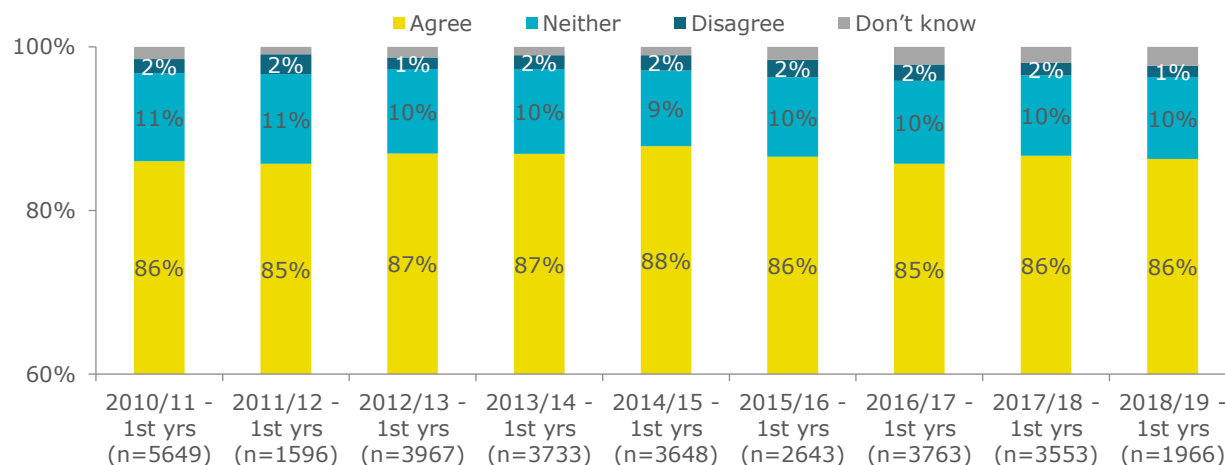
# Sustainability Skills | 2018-19

A national online survey was completed by over 6,000 students in October 2018 to build on the data gathered through eight years of previous research<sup>1</sup>, funded by the Higher Education Academy. The research continues to track student experiences and expectations around teaching and learning for sustainability. The research includes areas of questioning on student experiences of learning about key topics encompassed by sustainability as well as understanding in better detail their experiences of accumulating skills that can contribute to sustainability. Students in further education are also included in the research. This summary highlights the longitudinal trends from the historic research before considering new insight for both higher and further education respondents.

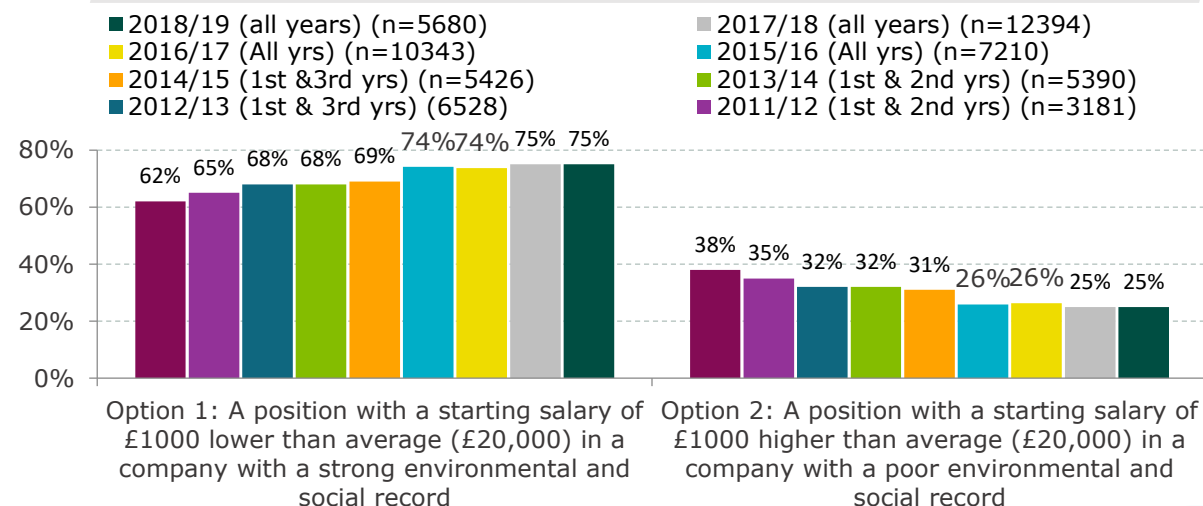
## Tracking longitudinal trends in higher education – 2010-11 to 2018-19

- As with the previous eight years of research completed with HE students, there is **overwhelming agreement amongst 2018/19 respondents in HE that sustainable development is something that universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote** with almost 9 out of 10 1<sup>st</sup> year respondents (86%, n=1691) saying they agree with this statement.
- In 2018/19, **57% agree that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about** (n=2708). This broadly matches the historic data gathered since 2010, though is significantly lower than other years of research, peaking in 2010/11 and 2014/15 at 63%.
- This year, respondents remain **more likely to say they would accept a salary sacrifice of £1000 to work for a company with a strong environmental and social record** than respondents to the research from 2010/11 to 2014/15 (e.g. 75%, n=4270 respondents in 2018/19 compared with 69% (n=3728) respondents in 2014/15). It is however worth noting the difference in years of study included in the research at each round which may have influenced findings, with respondents at a later stage of their studies more likely to accept a salary sacrifice.
- A range of sustainability skills continue to be seen as important when entering employment. Whilst the skills researched since 2015/16 have been updated, **an understanding of the relationships between humans and nature continues to reflect both a lack of coverage in teaching and receive low assessment of importance amongst HE respondents in comparison with other sustainability skills**. For example, 87% (n=4952) rank "communicating complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people" as important, whereas 57% (n=3228) rank "understanding how human activity is affecting nature" as important to their future employers.

### Sustainable development is something which universities should actively incorporate and promote... [1<sup>st</sup> year respondents only]



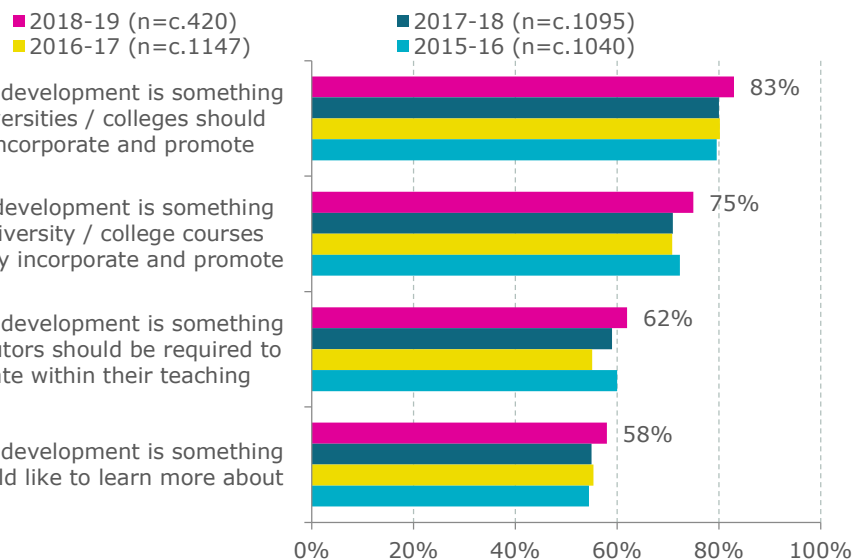
### Assuming all other factors are equal, which option would you choose?



<sup>1</sup> Details of the previous research can be found at: <https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/our-research/our-research/skills-and-sustainable-development>

# Sustainability Skills | 2018-19

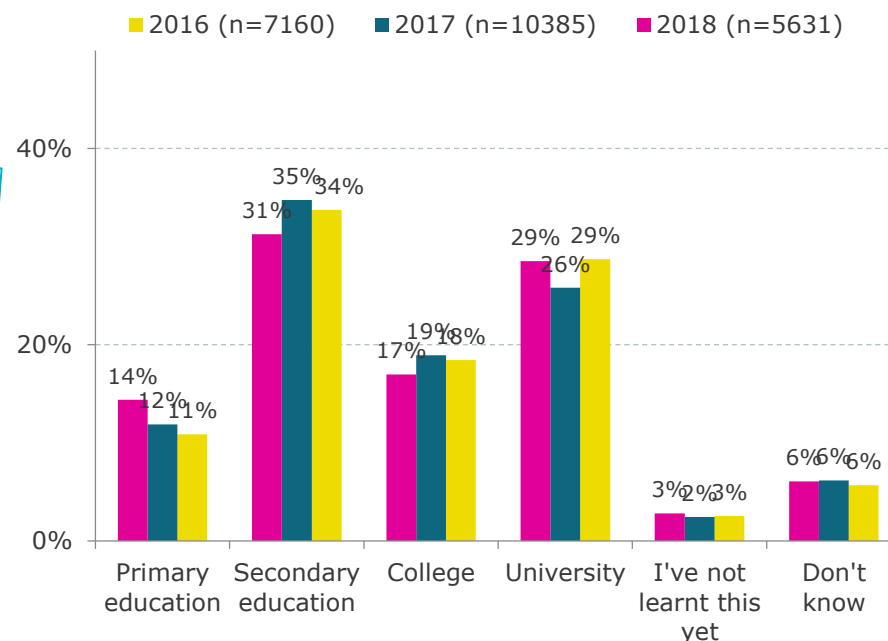
## FE Respondents: To what extent do you agree that...



- Similar to students studying in HE, the majority of FE respondents also agree that sustainable development is something their college should actively incorporate and promote and this has slightly increased over the previous three years of research (83%, n=355).
- Three quarters of FE respondents (75%, n=316) also agree that all courses should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development and six in ten say sustainable development is something they want to learn more about (58%, n=244).
- Just under three quarters of FE respondents say they would be willing to sacrifice £1000 from a starting salary to work for a company with a positive environmental and social record (74%, n=312) and six in ten say they would sacrifice £3000 from their starting salary to work in a company with these credentials (60%, n=251).
- Exposure to teaching on the the most overtly sustainability-focused skills is reported as lowest by FE respondents, for example 27% (n=110) say they have experienced teaching on 'understanding how human activity is affecting nature' and 28% (n=113) say they have experienced teaching on 'looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world'. There are no significant changes across the two years of research.

## New insight further and higher education – 2015/16 to 2018/19

- Respondents were asked to identify which place of study has had the greatest influence on them. **Both HE and FE respondents most frequently identify secondary education as the place of study which encouraged them to think and act the most to help the environment and other people in both years of the research** (31%, n=134 FE respondents and 31%, n=1760 HE respondents). University is reported as being the strongest influence for around a quarter of HE respondents (29%, n=1607).
- Respondents were also asked to **identify the place of study they perceive as taking the most action to reduce its negative impact on the environment and society**. For HE respondents, this is their current place of study (31%, n=1802). For FE respondents, secondary education is seen as the place of study which has acted to reduce its negative impact on the environment and society the most (35%, n=148).
- **HE and FE respondents attribute most of their learning on sustainability related issues to their time in secondary school**, when considering their time in formal education as a whole. For example, 60% (n=251) FE respondents say climate change was covered during their time in secondary school (this is significantly down from 72% (n=711) from the previous year). 72% (n=4034) of HE respondents say the topic was covered at this point.
- The most commonly reported impact of learning about sustainable development by respondents in HE and FE was a belief that they think and do things differently as a result. Respondents also felt that learning about these issues improved them as individuals, and were generally important life skills to have.



## HE Respondents: Which place where you have studied encouraged you to think and act to help the environment, and other people the most?

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# 1. Introduction | Objective, methodology and survey details

This report presents research completed by NUS to investigate students experiences of teaching and learning on sustainable development. The research aimed to assess:


- student attitudes to sustainable development issues;
- student definitions of sustainable development;
- student aspirations towards learning about sustainability and expectations of their place of study;
- student aspirations for sustainability in employment after their time in education.

The data presented in this report builds on the data gathered through six years of previous research and continues to track changes in demand amongst students across the UK. In 2015-16 (year 6) the research was updated to include new areas of questioning on student experiences of learning about key topics encompassed by sustainability, as well as understanding in better detail their experiences of accumulating skills that can contribute to sustainability. This updated survey was repeated in 2016-17 (Yr7), 2017-18 (Yr8) and now in 2018-19 (Yr9). This report shows the results across the 4 surveys.

The 2018-19 online survey was completed in October 2018 by students across the UK. Whilst in previous years the research has been focused on students in higher education, in recent years (6-8), this latest survey was also distributed to students studying at further education institutions. Over 6000 respondents completed the survey in Yr9, which was promoted on a national basis through NUS' Extra cardholders database and also through local promotions by universities, colleges and students' unions.

The survey was incentivised with a £1000 prize draw and was promoted as a 'skills survey', making no mention of sustainability, to avoid attracting only respondents with a prior interest in the subject. Additionally, the terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' were not used until the final section of the survey to avoid influencing respondent understanding.

The survey results have been weighted according to gender to reflect available statistics for students in Higher Education available through the Higher Education Statistics Agency. This weighting has been applied to both Higher Education and Further Education respondents in the absence of available data for Further Education at a national level, to the level of detail required. A full breakdown of respondent characteristics can be found in section 2.

Throughout the report, where analysis has revealed statistically significant differences between groups of respondents, these have been outlined as per the example below. Where significant differences exist between the latest two years of data, these are shown with the following symbol: 

Significant differences are reported at 99% confidence level unless specified otherwise.

#### Example of differences by respondent characteristics

- Within HE, there were no significant differences in terms of preferences for learning about sustainability according to year of study.
- HE women respondents are more likely to report that offering placements or work experience, and running extra-curricular activities either by the students' union or within departments is relevant compared to HE respondents who are men (e.g. 73%, n=2297 HE women say extra-curricular activities within their department is a relevant way to learn about sustainability compared to 67%, n=1553 men respondents).

#### This report

This report presents the findings in the following areas:

- Expectations for teaching and learning for sustainability
- Experiences of teaching and learning for sustainability
- Sustainability skills beyond education

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks to the universities, colleges and students' unions across the UK for their efforts in publicising the survey to their students.

And thanks also to the students who took part in the research, which helps to develop and improve the work of NUS in this area.

## Sustainability skills

To help assess respondent experiences of teaching and learning, the survey includes questions linked to a number of skills that can be associated with achievement of sustainable development. The skills include:

Using resources efficiently to limit the impact on the environment and other people

Looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world

Planning for the long term, as well as the short term

The causes of inequality in the world

Understanding how to create change

Understanding how human activity is affecting nature

Considering ethical issues linked to your subject

Solving problems by thinking about whole systems – including different connections and interactions

Communicating complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people

Looking at a problem using information from different subjects or disciplines

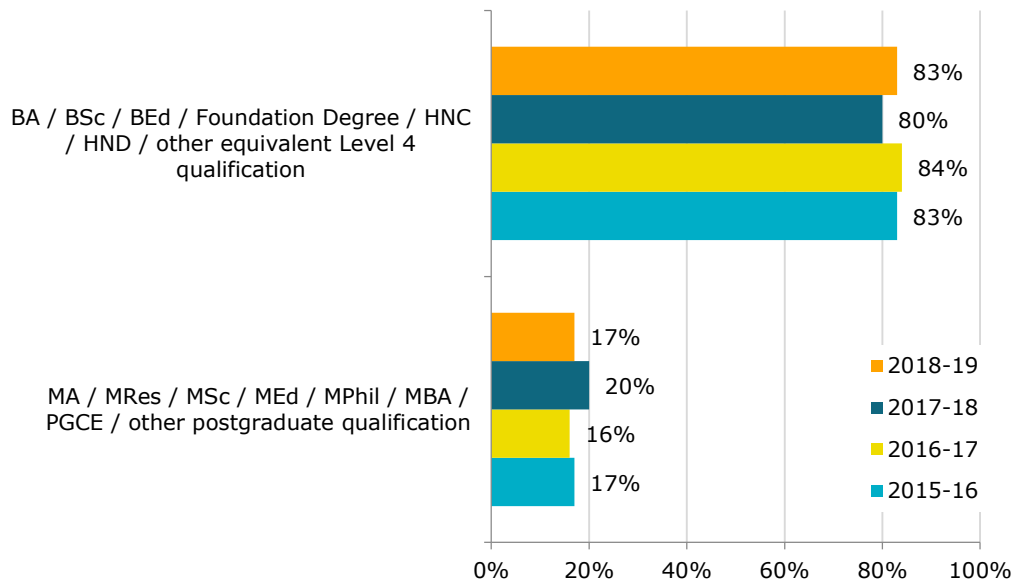
Challenging the way we do things now (like business, politics, education)

## 2. The respondents

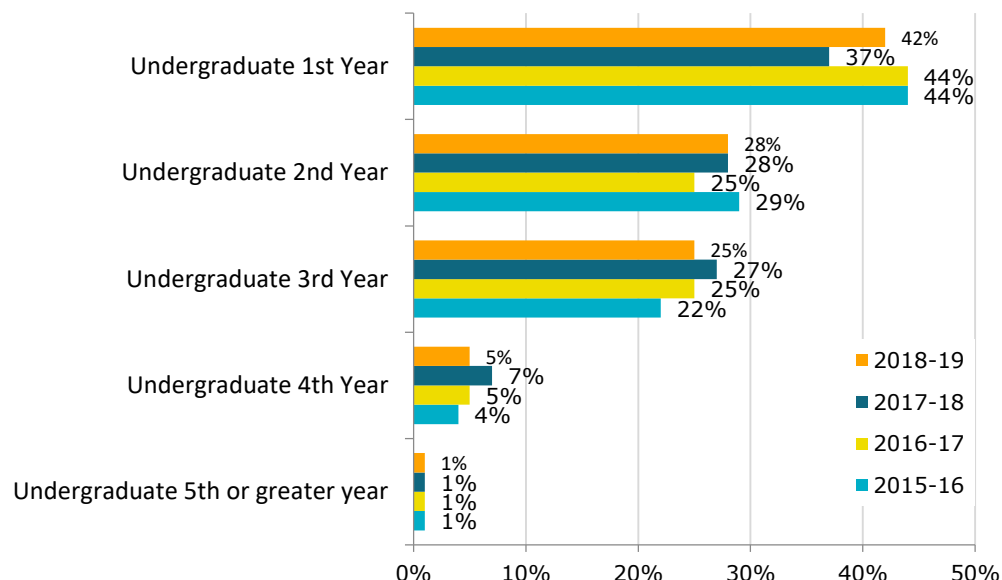


# Respondent demographics

## Level of study

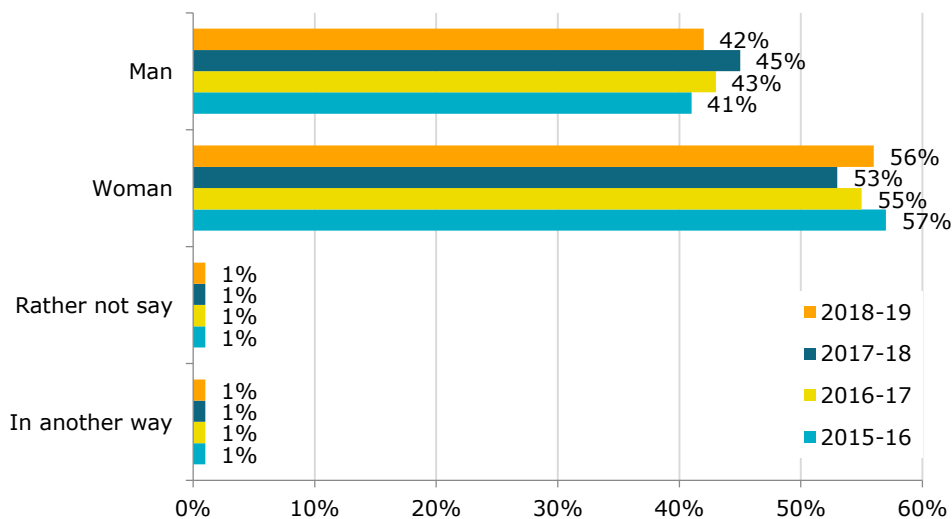


## Year of study (Undergraduates)

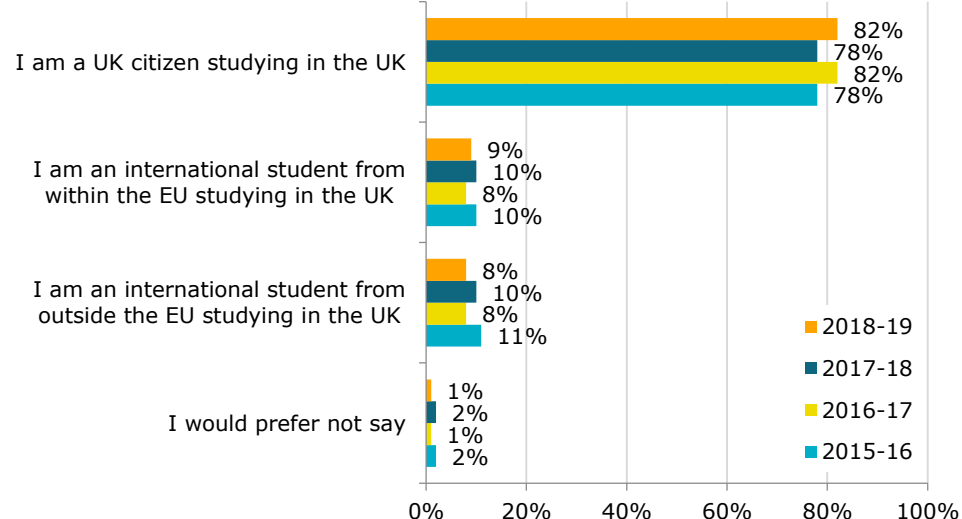


Higher education

## Gender

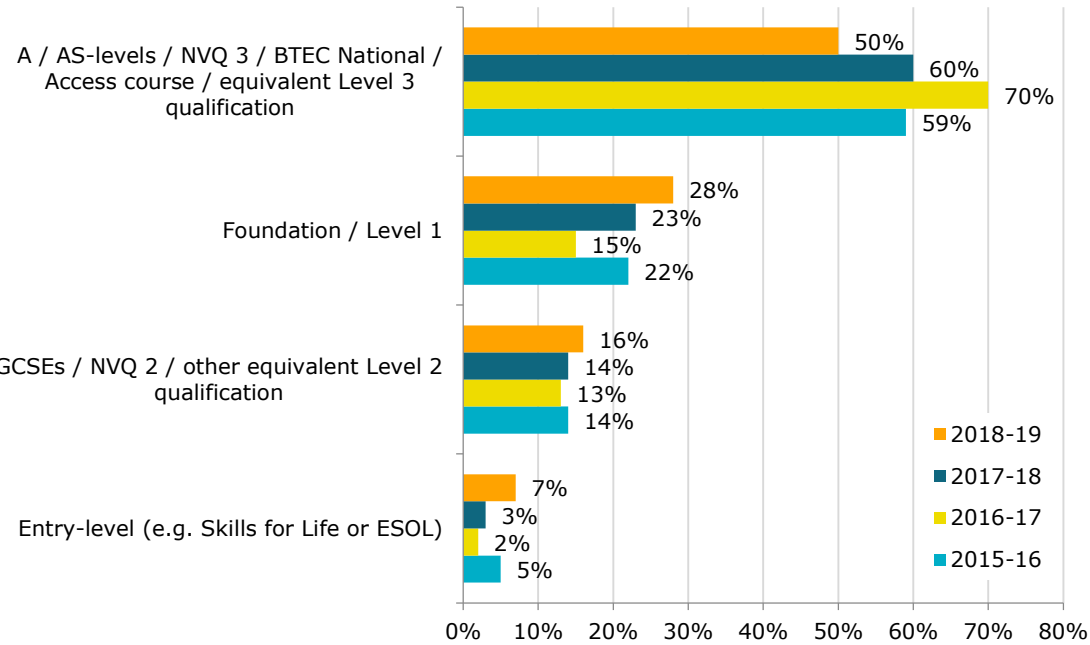


## Nationality

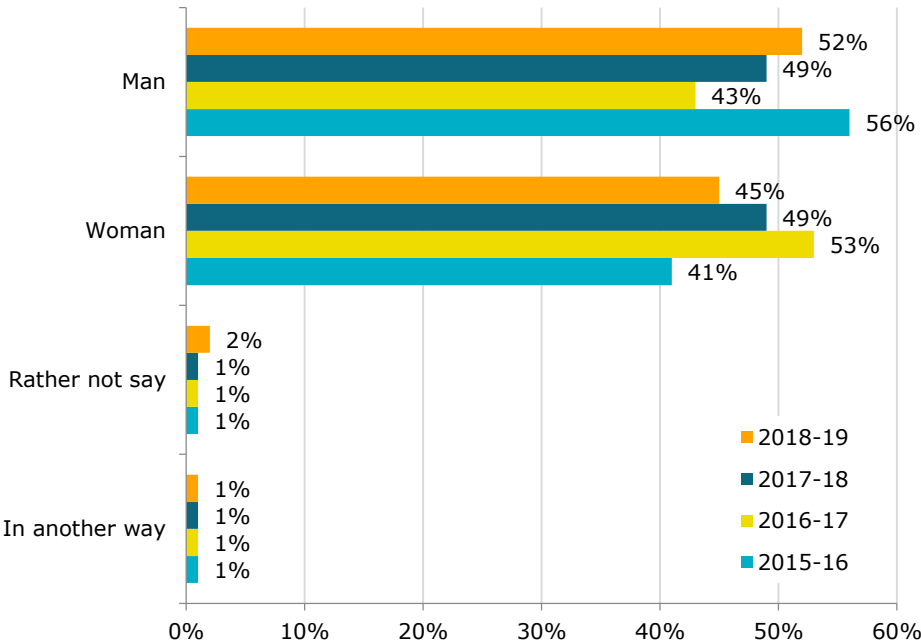


# Respondent demographics

## Level of study

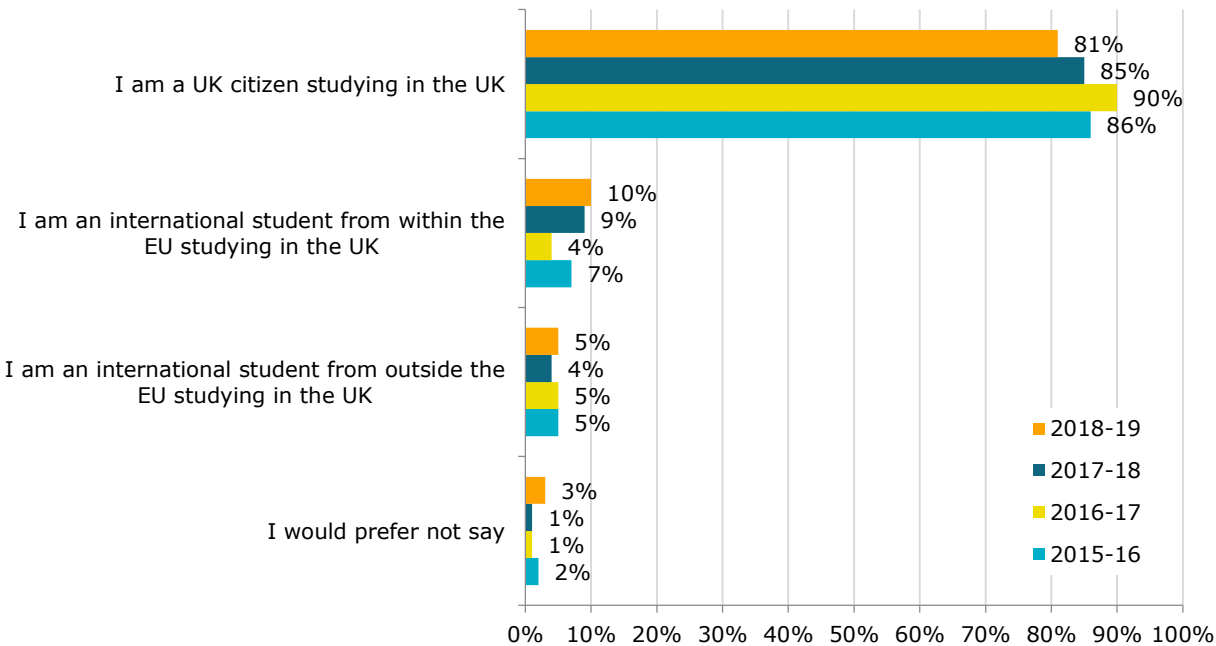


## Gender



## Further education

## Nationality

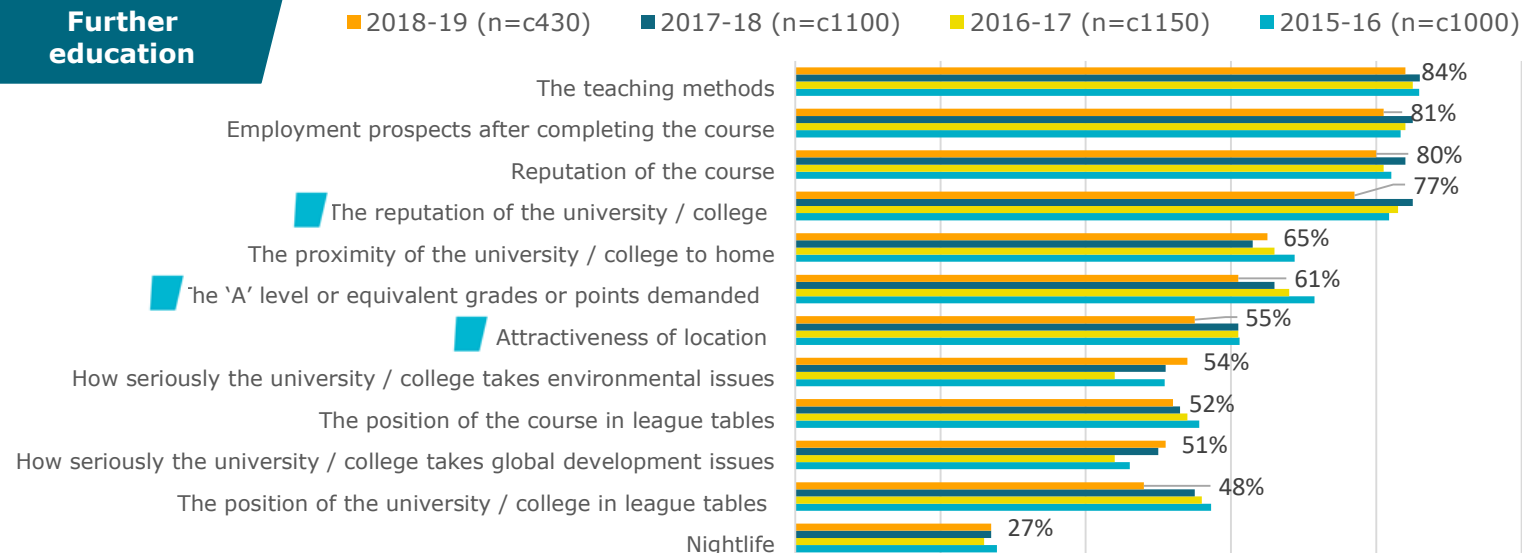


### 3. Expectations for teaching and learning for sustainability

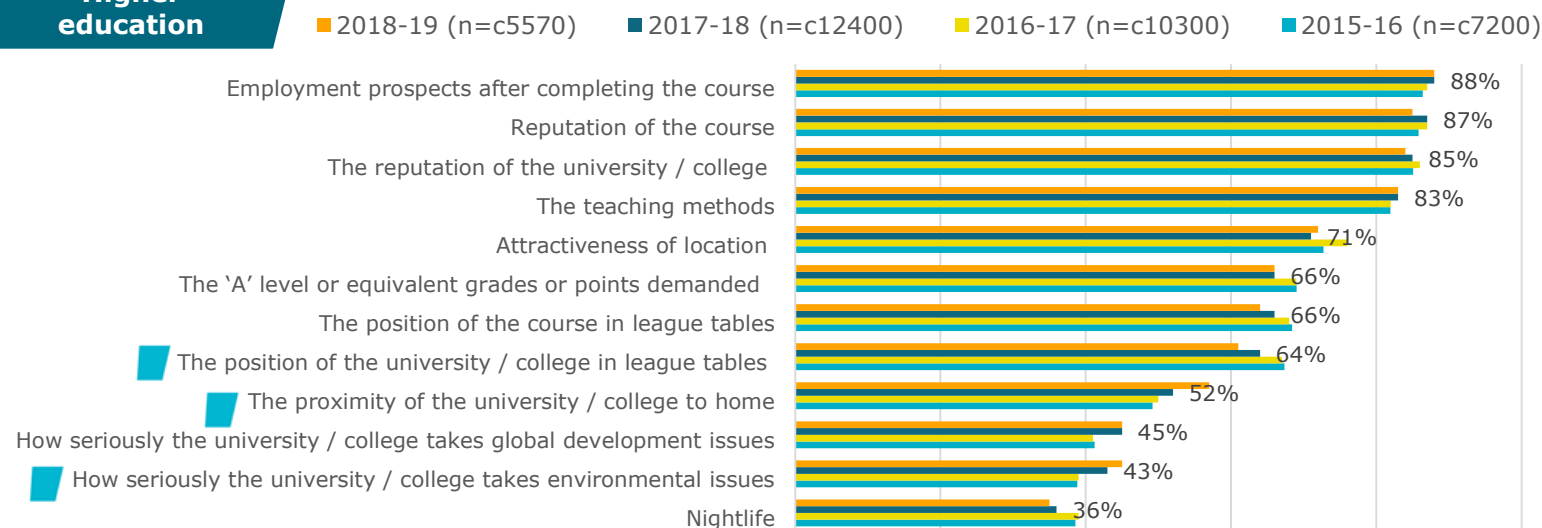
# Important factors influencing choice over place of study?

Respondents were asked to identify how important a range of factors were to their decision on where to apply to study. Primary motivations for both FE and HE respondents include reputation of their course and institution, employment prospects on completion of their course and the teaching methods used. However, almost half (45%, n=2564) of HE respondents and 54% of FE (n=234) respondents were influenced by the action their place of study takes on environmental issues. Around half of respondents report they are motivated by how seriously their university or college takes global development issues, (45%, n=2531) HE students and 51% (n=219) FE respondents) said this.

## Further education



## Higher education



## Differences by respondent characteristics

- 54% of FE respondents (n=234) are more likely to report being motivated by how seriously their place of study takes environmental issues compared to HE respondents (43%, n=2531) ranking as important.
- HE respondents are slightly more likely to report employment prospects as an important influence on their choice over where to study (88%, n=4982) than FE respondents (81%, n=338).
- Women in HE are more likely to say they were influenced by future employment prospects (90%, n=2875) compared with men (85%, n=2022).
- FE respondents who are women are more likely to say the reputation of the course was an important influence on their choice than FE respondents who are men (84%, n=162 compared with 71%, n=170).
- HE respondents who are women are more likely to say they are influenced by teaching methods than male HE respondents (86%, n=2733 compared with 78%, n=1868).
- International HE respondents are more likely to say they were influenced by how seriously the institution takes environmental issues than UK respondents (62%, n=288 compared with 43%, n=1984).
- International HE respondents are most likely to say they chose their place of study based on the position of the institution in league tables (e.g. 65%, n=336 compared with 59%, n=2753 UK HE respondents).

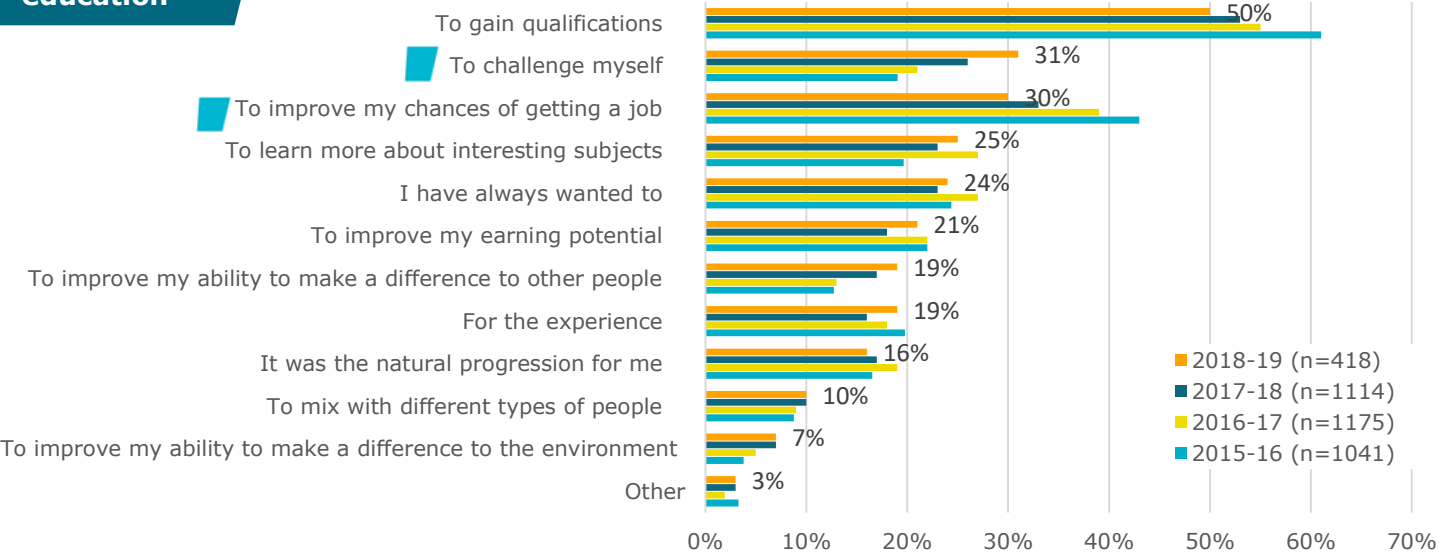
Q. How important were the following when choosing which college or university to apply to?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

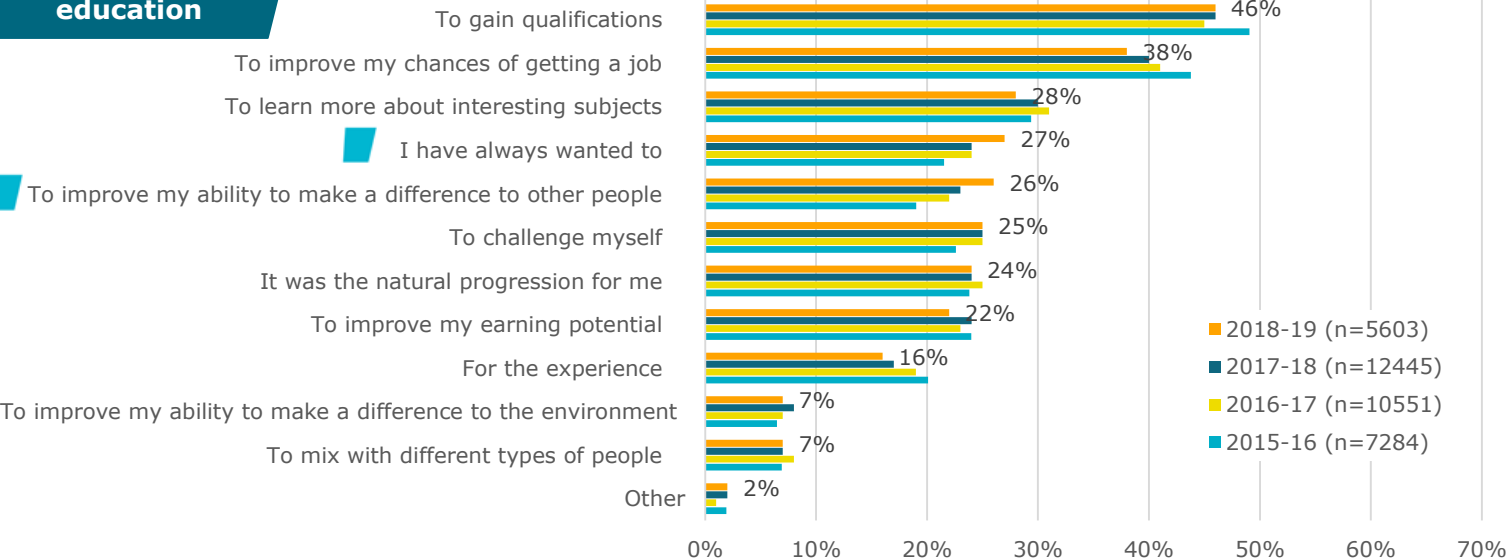
# What influences choice of subject or course?

Respondents were asked the main reasons they chose the course they are currently studying. For both higher and further education respondents, the primary motivations are to gain qualifications (e.g. 50% FE respondents (n=209) and 46% HE (n=2623)) and to improve their chances of getting a job (e.g. 30% FE respondents (n=131) and 38% HE (n=2173)). A relatively lower number of respondents cite improving their ability to make a difference to other people or the environment as a main reason why they chose their course (e.g. 26% HE respondents (n=1469) say the main reason they chose their course was to improve their ability to make a difference to other people).

## Further education



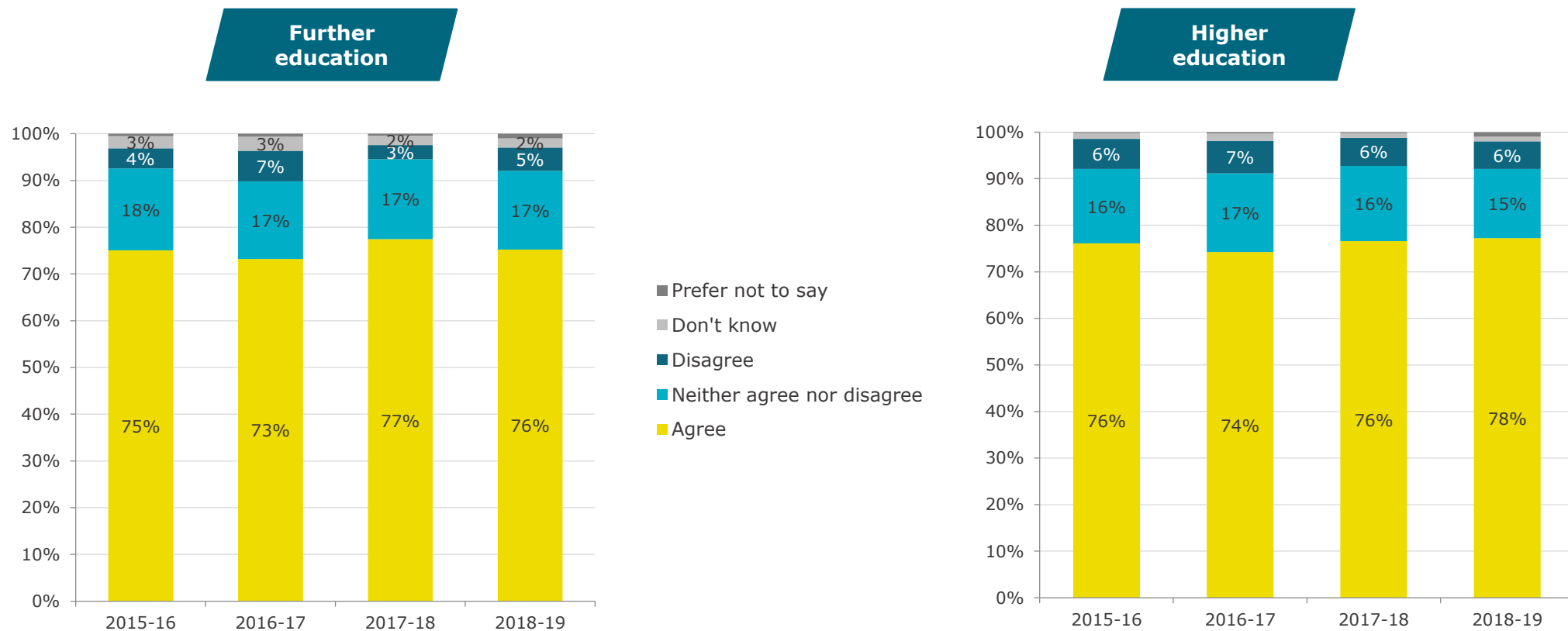
## Higher education



## Differences by respondent characteristics

- FE respondents are slightly more likely to report being motivated by the opportunity to gain qualifications than HE respondents (50%, n=209) compared with 46% (n=2623).
- HE respondents are more likely to report being motivated by the opportunity to improve their ability to make a difference to other people than FE respondents (26%, n=1469 compared with 19% (n=78)).
- HE respondents are as likely to report being motivated by the opportunity to improve their ability to make a difference to the environment (7%, n=396) as FE respondents (7%, n=33)).
- HE respondents who are men are more likely to be taking their course to improve their earnings potential (26%, n=622), compared to women (20%, n=631).
- HE UK students are more likely than International students to say they are taking their course as it is a natural progression for them (26%, n=1205) compared to 17% (n=164).

## Do students expect universities / colleges to develop students' sustainability skills as part of courses?

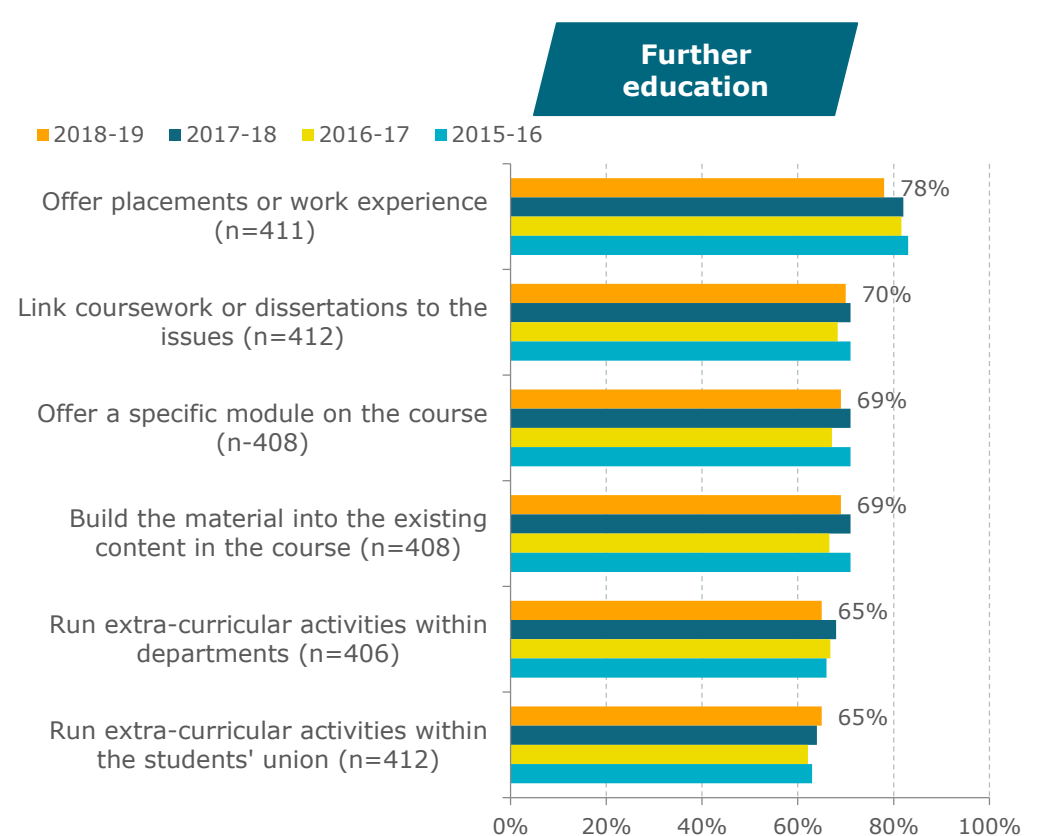
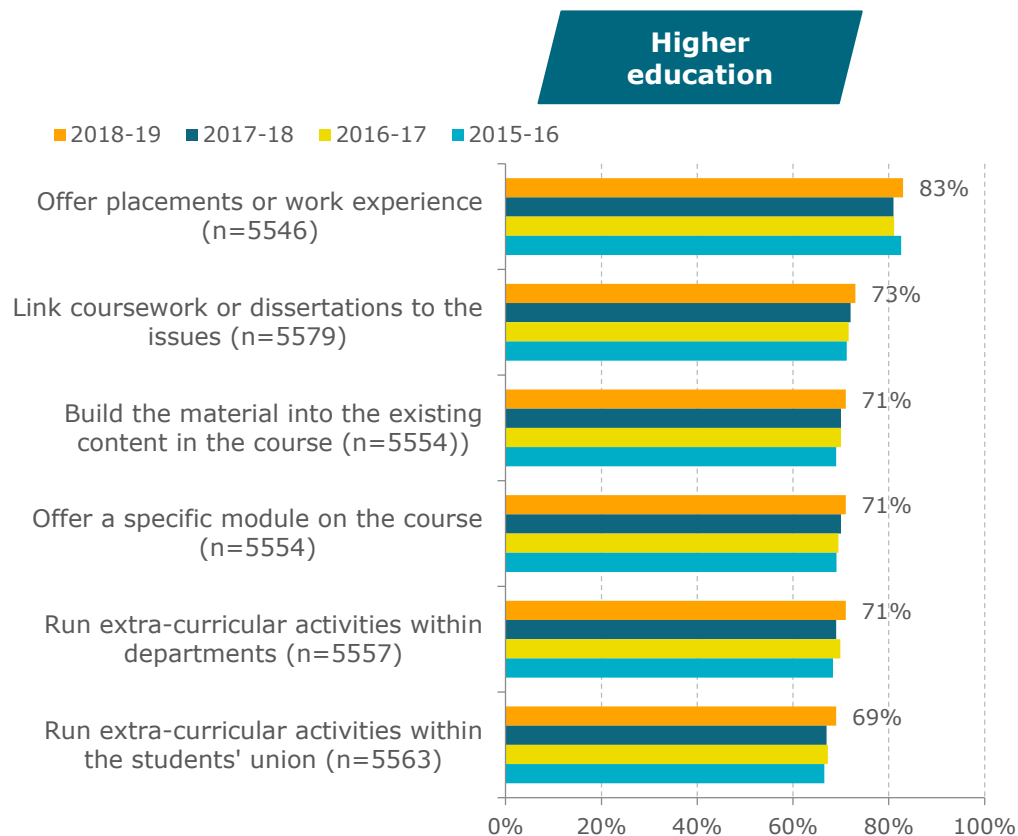


Overall, respondents in FE and HE agree that universities and colleges should be obliged to develop students' social and environmental skills as part of the courses they offer. In both FE and HE, three quarters agree (e.g. 76% FE respondents (n=311) and 78% HE respondents (n=4394)).

### Differences by respondent characteristics

- Within HE, international respondents who are from outside the EU are more likely to agree that universities and colleges should be obliged to develop student's social and environmental skills (86%, n=404) than those from within the EU (81%, n=417) and from the UK (77%, n=3528).
- Amongst HE students women were more likely to agree with this statement than men (80%, n=2558) compared to 74% (n=1767)).

# How should sustainability skills be developed and included in courses?



When asked to consider the relevance of different ways of including the skills and knowledge to help other people and the environment within their courses, respondents in FE and HE showed a preference for learning through placements or work experience (e.g. 83% of HE and 78% of FE respondents (n=4582 and n=321) respectively).

Building material into existing course content (71% HE, n=3919) and (69%, n=282) FE saw this method as relevant) and linking to coursework and dissertations (73% HE, n=4089) and 70% (n=287) FE)) were also seen as relevant methods of including skills and knowledge for sustainability.

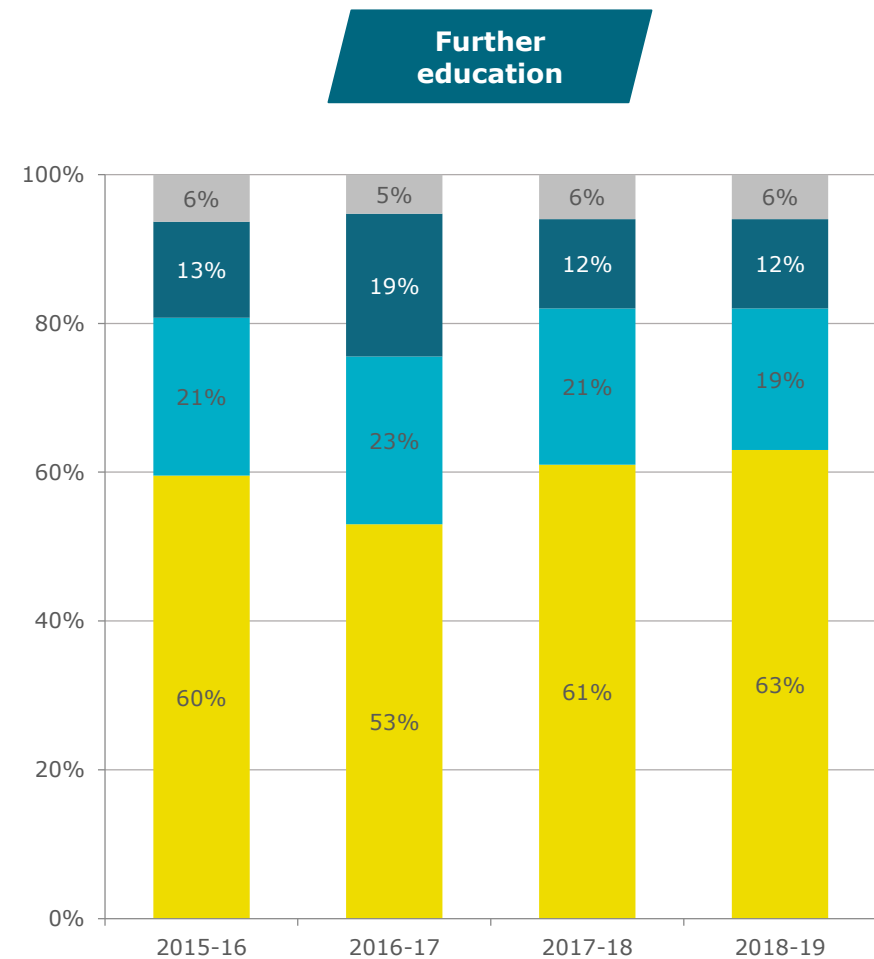
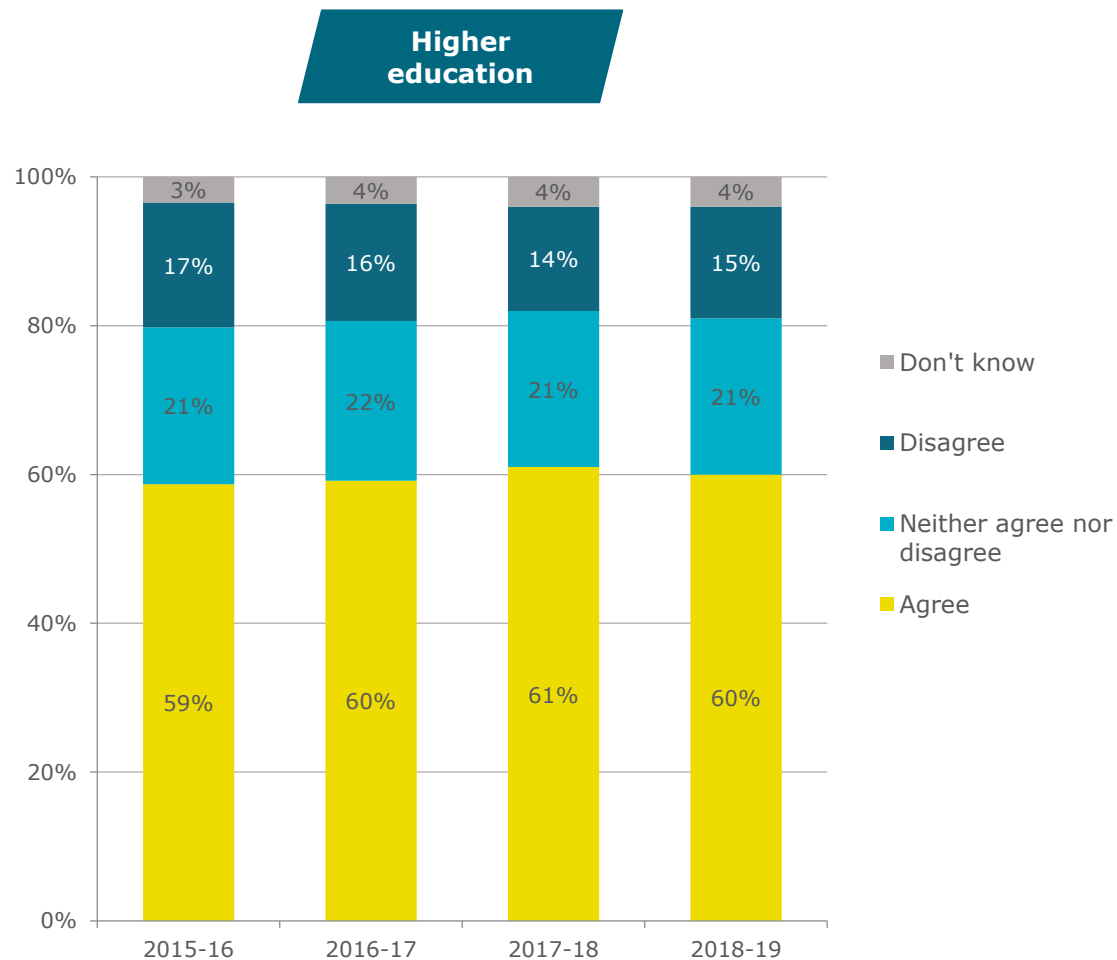
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Within HE, Non EU International students had significantly stronger preferences for offering placements (89% (n=457) than UK students (81%, n=3746). EU students were more likely to say that running extra-curricular activities within departments was more relevant (77%, n=368) than UK students (69%, n=3142).
- HE women respondents (85%, n=2709) are more likely to report that offering placements or work experience is relevant compared to HE respondents who are men (79%, n=1868). 73% of HE women (n=2297) say extra-curricular activities within their department is a relevant way to learn about sustainability compared to 67% (n=1553) men respondents.
- Amongst FE respondents women were more likely than men to say placements being offered is relevant (81% (n=156)) compared to 76% (n=170).

**Q: Imagine all university/college courses are required to include the) skills and knowledge needed to help other people and the environment. What do you think the most relevant way of including the skills and knowledge needed to help other people and the environment within your own course would be?**

Weighted base: 2018-19 figures in brackets Balance: No response

## To what extent do students feel able to influence their curriculum?



Slightly more FE respondents than HE respondents felt they were able to contribute to the development of the curriculum for their course (63%, n=260) compared to HE respondents (60%, n=3361).

### Differences by respondent characteristics

- FE EU students were more likely than UK students to feel they could influence the development of the curriculum for their course (77%, n=35), compared to 61% (n=213) UK students.
- Similarly in HE non UK students said they felt more able to influence the development of the curriculum than UK students (69%, n=676, compared to 59%, n=2726).

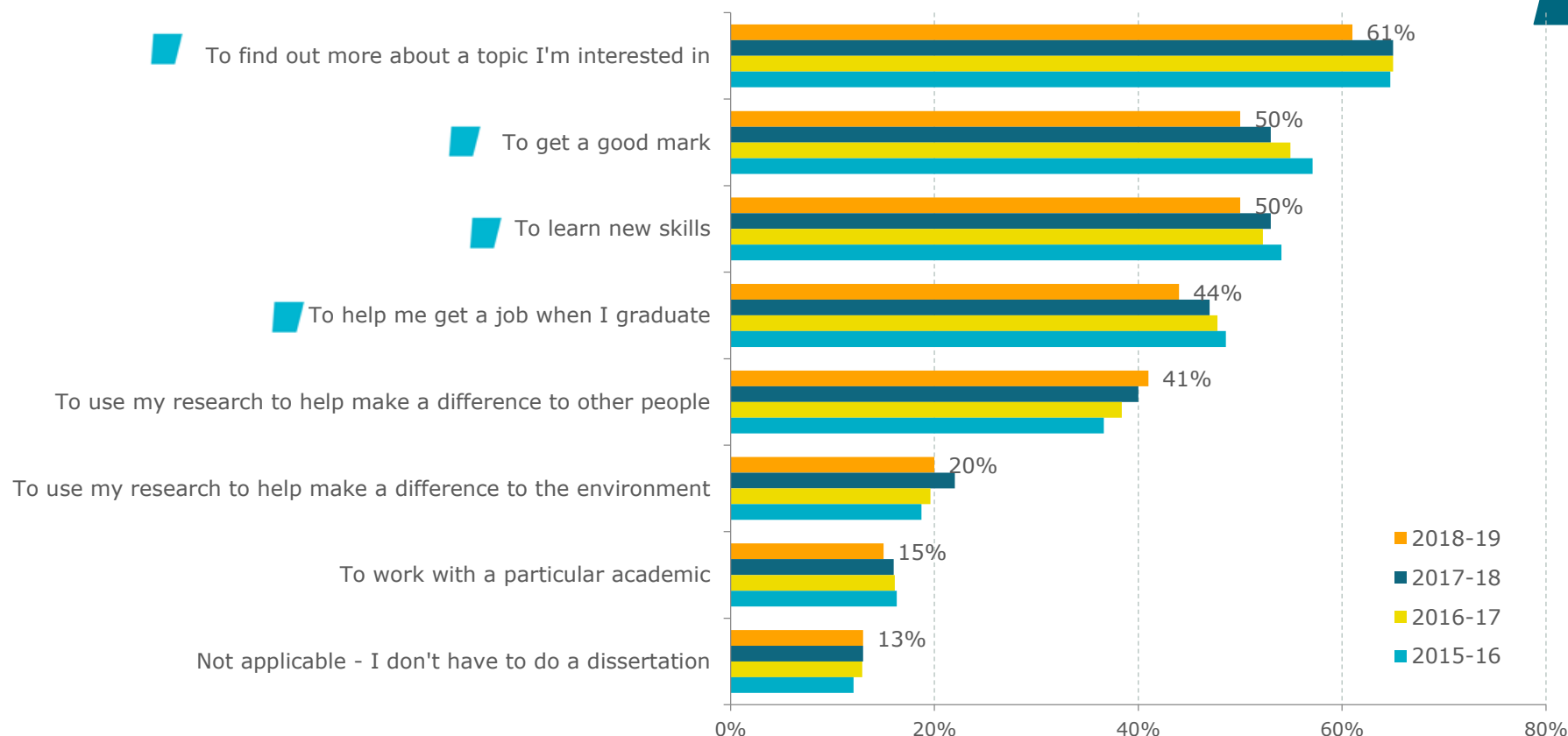
**Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I am able to contribute to the development of the curriculum for my course"?**

Weighted base: 2018-19: 5566 HE respondents, 414 FE respondents. Balance: No response



# How are dissertations linked to sustainability?

Higher education



HE respondents were asked to consider what they hoped to get out of the opportunity to complete a dissertation. In some cases there had been a significant decline in importance of how doing a dissertation would benefit them.

For around two thirds of respondents (61%, n=3405) completing a dissertation is an opportunity to find out more about a topic they are interested in. Half see their dissertation as an opportunity to get a good mark (50%, n=2788) and to learn new skills (50%, n=2771), which will in turn help them to get a job when they graduate (44%, n=2472).

Two in five respondents see their dissertation as an opportunity to carry out research that will make a difference to other people (41%, n=2270). 20% reported that their dissertation is an opportunity to complete research that helps make a difference to the environment (n=1124).

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- 4th year undergraduates are significantly less likely to see completing a dissertation as a way of helping them get a job when they graduate, compared to other undergraduates (e.g. 37%, n=88) 4<sup>th</sup> years compared with 46% (n=913) 1<sup>st</sup> years and 48% (n=628) 2<sup>nd</sup> years.
- Compared to 1<sup>st</sup> year students 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates are more focused on their dissertation being a means to securing a good mark, 57% (n=678) and 54% (n=696) respectively, compared to 47% of 1<sup>st</sup> years selecting this option (n=926).
- 2<sup>nd</sup> yr students are more likely than 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> yrs to report seeing their dissertation as a means of helping other people (e.g. 42%, n=542 2<sup>nd</sup> years want to use their research to help other people compared with 28% (n=66) 4<sup>th</sup> years and 35% (n=421) 3<sup>rd</sup> years).

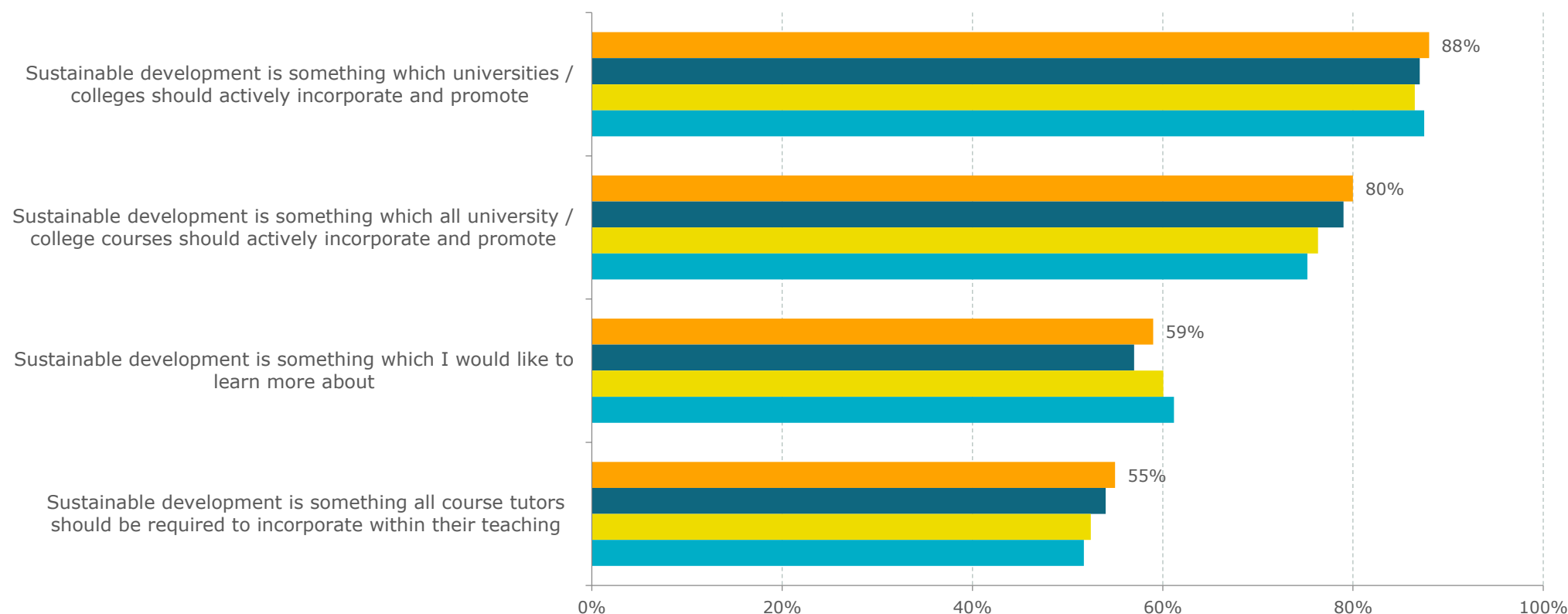
**Q. If your course includes completing a dissertation, what do you hope to get out of completing a dissertation?**

Weighted base: 2018-19 5580 HE respondents. Balance: No response and those not in HE

# Do students expect universities / colleges to take action on sustainability?

Higher education

2018-19 (n=5565) 2017-18 (n=c.12335) 2016-17 (n=c.10315) 2015-16 (n=c.7200)



As with previous rounds of research completed with HE students, there is overwhelming agreement that sustainable development is something that universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote with 88% (n=4906) saying they agree with this statement.

8 in 10 (80%, n=4435) also agree that sustainability is something all courses should actively incorporate and promote, however just over half agree that course tutors should be required to incorporate sustainable development within their teaching (55%, n=3074).

Just under two thirds agree that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about (59%, n=3261).

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- International respondents from outside of the EU are more likely to agree with all statements compared to UK respondents and international respondents from within the EU. EU international respondents are also more likely to agree with all statements compared to UK respondents.
- For example, international respondents from outside the EU are more likely to agree that sustainable development is something universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote (e.g. 94%, n=442) than UK respondents (87%, n=4031) and 90% (n=463) non-EU international respondents.
- UK respondents are less likely to agree that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about, compared with international respondents both from within and beyond the EU (e.g. 56%, n=2578) UK respondents agree compared with 67% (n=348) EU respondents and 76% (n=351) non-EU respondents.
- Women respondents are more likely than men to agree that sustainable development is something all courses should incorporate and promote (at a 95% confidence level) with 83% (n=2628) agreeing compared with 76% (n=1805) men.

**Q: Taking a definition of sustainable development as: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". To what extent, if at all, would you say that you personally agree with the following statements?**

Weighted base: (in brackets). Balance: No response and those not in HE

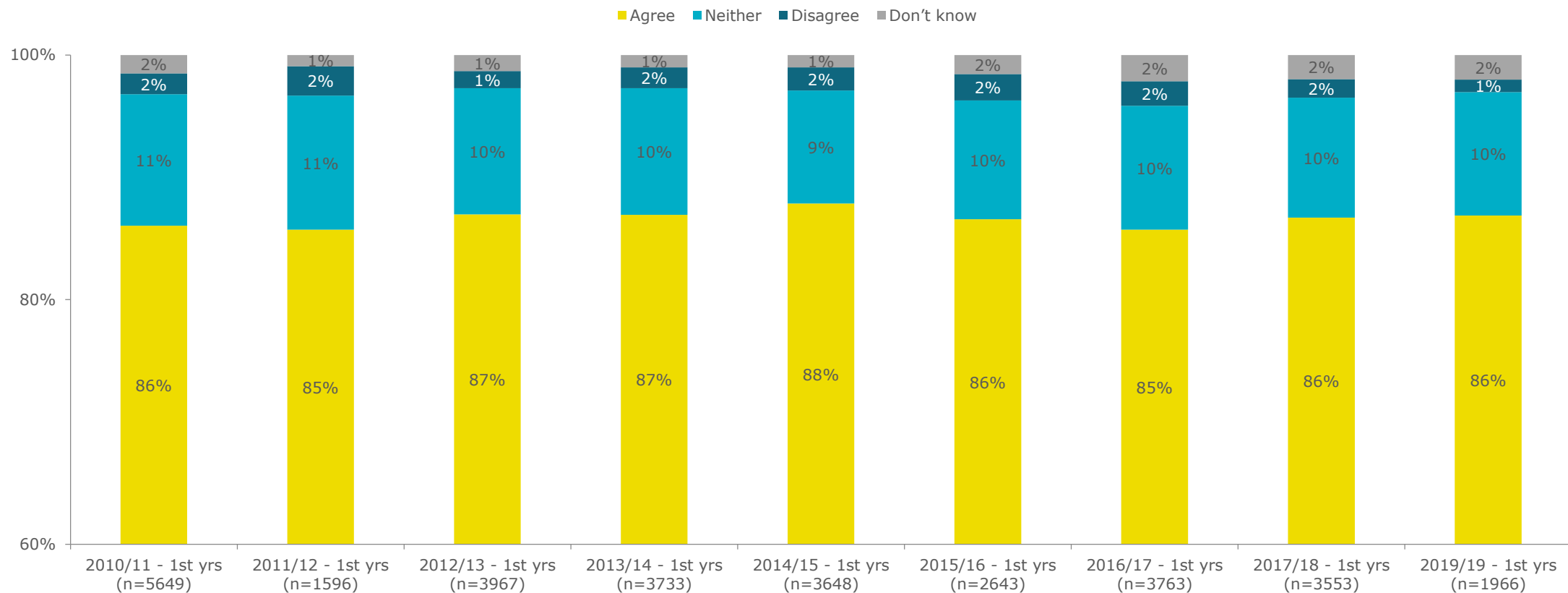
# What expectations do students have for their university?

As mentioned previously, almost 9 in 10 agree that sustainable development is something they think their university or college should actively incorporate and promote.

The chart below focuses specifically on 1<sup>st</sup> year student responses and shows a continuing demand for action on sustainable development by their institution throughout the seven years of research. However, there are small but significant variations in agreement, as identified for each research year below in the chart.

Higher  
education

1<sup>st</sup> year  
respondents



Respondent agreement that sustainable development is something that universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote...



**Q: Taking a definition of sustainable development as: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". To what extent, if at all, would you say that you personally agree with the following statements?**

Weighted base: In brackets. Balance: No response

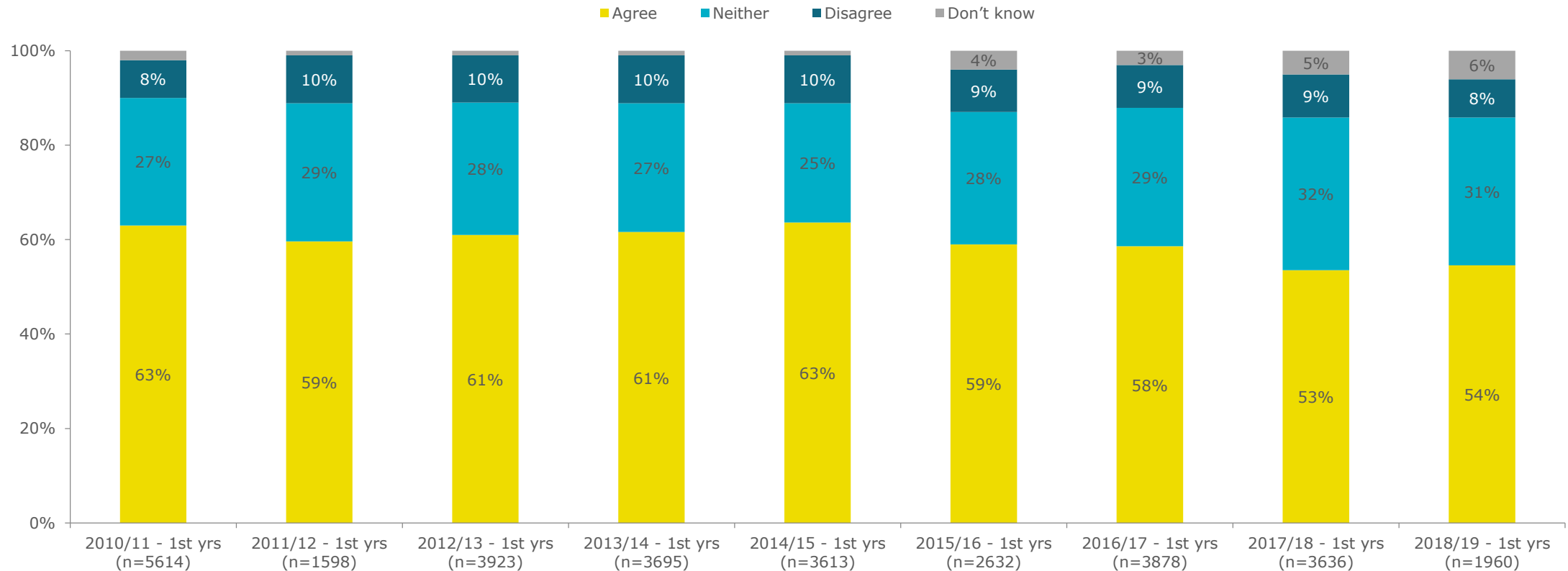
# Do students want to learn more about sustainability?

Amongst 1<sup>st</sup> year HE students there is less demand for learning about sustainable development compared to previous rounds of research, with just over half of respondents saying they would like to learn more (54%, n=1057).

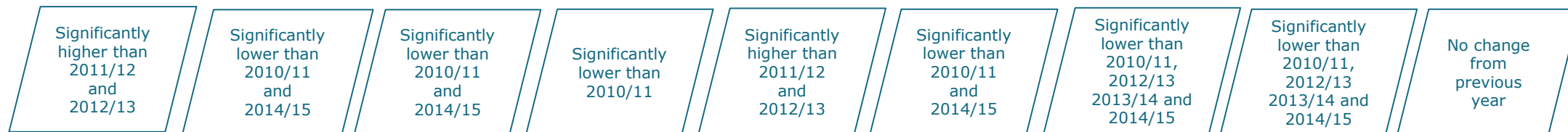
The chart below focuses specifically on 1<sup>st</sup> year student responses and shows a relatively consistent demand for learning about sustainable development throughout the seven years of research. However, there are small but significant variations in agreement that sustainable development is something that 1<sup>st</sup> year respondents want to learn more about, as identified for each research year below in the chart.

Higher  
education

1<sup>st</sup> year  
respondents



Respondent agreement that they would like to learn more about sustainable development is...

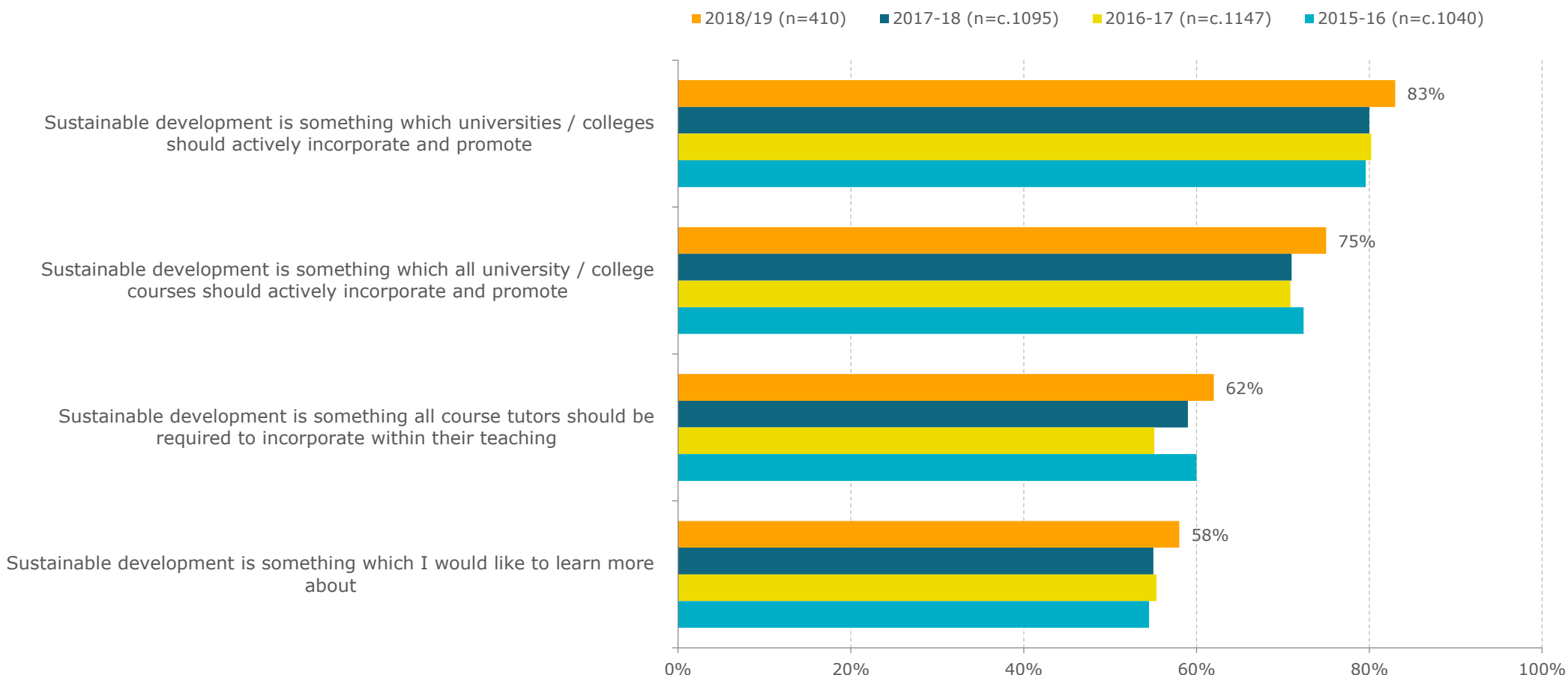


**Q: Taking a definition of sustainable development as: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". To what extent, if at all, would you say that you personally agree with the following statements?**

Weighted base: In brackets. Balance: No response

# Do students expect universities / colleges to take action on sustainability?

Further  
education



Similar to students studying in HE, FE respondents also agree that sustainable development is something their college should actively incorporate and promote (83%, n=343).

Three quarters of FE respondents (75%, n=307) also agree that all courses should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development. Almost two thirds agree that course tutors should be required to incorporate sustainability within their teaching (62%, n=254).

Over half of respondents say that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about (58%, n=236).

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Women FE respondents are significantly more likely (at 95% confidence level) to say college courses should incorporate and promote sustainable development than FE respondents who are men (83%, n=156 compared with 71%, n=156).

**Q: Taking a definition of sustainable development as: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". To what extent, if at all, would you say that you personally agree with the following statements**

Weighted base: In brackets. Balance: No response

## Why do students want to learn more about sustainable development?

Respondents were also asked to reflect on why they wanted to learn more about sustainable development. The first 250 completed responses from both HE and FE respondents were coded and show that the most common reason respondents reported was that they believe that having an understanding of sustainability was because they wanted to be able to take action and make a difference. Comments about it being important for their own and their families future were also mentioned by a significant number of respondents. There was also a view that it was important to know about and that they wanted to understand the issues better.

### Further education

### Higher education

So I can take action in this area/make a difference	60	79
It's useful / important for future	52	53
It's important to know about	50	60
To understand issues better	33	33
I don't know what it means/know enough about it	23	24
It's useful / interesting in general	13	14

"It's going to have an impact on my future at some point if it isn't already. Learning more about it would enhance my ability to contribute and be aware of it."

*UK student, Woman, Other qualification, HE*

"If we're to move forward as a society and with our environment we have to learn how to change. we cant be selfish, the world still has to be here for future generations."

*UK student, Man, Undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year Social sciences, HE*

"It is becoming increasingly important to integrate fresh ideas and ambition to reduce the impact of human actions on the environment into how to next generation of professionals."

*UK student, Woman, Apprenticeship Engineering and technology, FE*

"I would like to learn more because through sustainable development we get the best future we can have"

*International student (within EU), Woman, Level 3 course, FE*

"I think that as a primary school teacher I should be able to teach the children in my class ways to contribute to sustainable living/development. It would make the children more responsible and ecologically aware."

*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate 2<sup>nd</sup> year Education, HE*

"Because it's an issue that covers absolutely everything we experience, without sustainable development now there is no future to prosper."

*Woman, UK, Undergraduate 3<sup>rd</sup> year, HE*

"I want to help and make a change to the way things are now, in any possible way."

*UK student, Woman, Level 3 course, FE*

"I believe that the way to work towards sustainable development in our future careers aren't discussed as much as they should be. Considering the state of our planet and the short time we have left it's vital that bigger corporations and organisations work toward minimising their carbon footprint."

*International student (within EU), Woman, Undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year Creative arts and design, HE*

"I'd like to learn more about sustainable development because, our world is slowly falling apart. I think it's important for us (the younger generation) to think about the future. In order to make a better future we have to work today, which is why I'd like to learn more about sustainable development."

*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate 3<sup>rd</sup> year, Business and administrative studies, HE*

## What actions would students like to see their place of study take for sustainable development?

Respondents were also asked to consider more broadly what actions they would like to see their university or college take to improve its performance on sustainable development. The first 250 responses from FE and HE responses were coded and revealed that on the whole, respondents indicate they wanted to see more activities and interventions which would encourage people to be more environmentally friendly and take action. By incorporating sustainable development into existing courses, making students more aware of what sustainability is and how the college/university is performing in this area would also be useful.

	Further education	Higher education
More activities and interventions which encourage people to be more environmentally friendly / take action	64	135
Incorporate it into the course/student life	47	43
More awareness / information generally on sustainability and what the college / university is doing	45	51
Not sure / Don't know	31	18

"More in the medical curriculum about the consequences of the NHS on the environment and what we can do to help protect the environment."

*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate, Medicine, dentistry and related subjects, HE*

"More information should be available on it and tutors should include it in key messages during tutorials. Additionally, the institution itself could use fewer fossil fuels and could invest in electric mini busses. However, I don't think they could do any real good without better funding from the government."

*UK student, In another way, A levels or equivalent, Social Sciences, FE*

"Greater integration into existing courses; a lot of students will not bother with extra curriculum activities and sustainable development is too important to be neglected by the majority of students."

*UK student, Man, Foundation course, Mass communications and documentation, HE*

"World days of different issues around development, help to disseminate information, raise awareness and create interest among people."

*International (non-EU), Woman, Masters, Social sciences, HE*

"The University could promote sustainable development more at a course level showing the impact the subject you're studying may have on future generations and also showing how the University is dealing with sustainable development from a business viewpoint."

*International student (EU), Man, Undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year, Computer Sciences, HE*

"Give or offer talks and events on how to be a student who contributes to the sustainable development of the city and then ways to do so for the country. So start with a more personal approach then build from there, these talks can happen during academic development weeks and freshers week."

*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Historical and Philosophical studies, HE*

"Educating tutors and making it imperative to show the reality of climate change, pollution and socially toxic business practice."

*UK student, Woman, Foundation course, Biological Sciences*

"Perhaps an attempt to increase awareness generally through public engagement, events, the student union etc. but also to incorporate this in existing modules. Although an extra module on sustainable development would be appealing, I am unsure about how popular and sustainable this would be. It should be incorporated in all teaching though, not just as optional knowledge."

"It has recycling, but maybe more literature and schemes for cycling to college and things like that."

*UK student, Man, A levels or equivalent, FE*

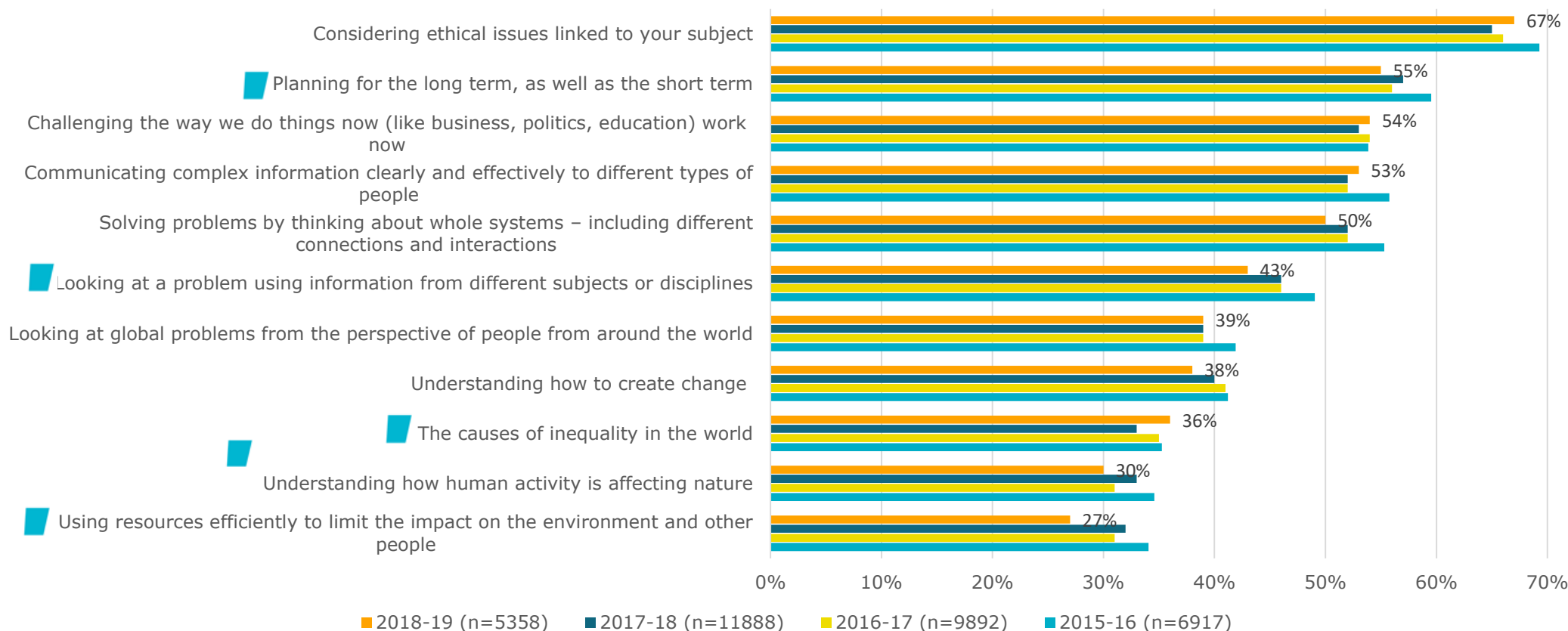
## 4. Experiences of sustainability in education





# To what extent are students experiencing teaching and learning on sustainability skills and knowledge in further and higher education?

Higher education



## Differences by respondent characteristics

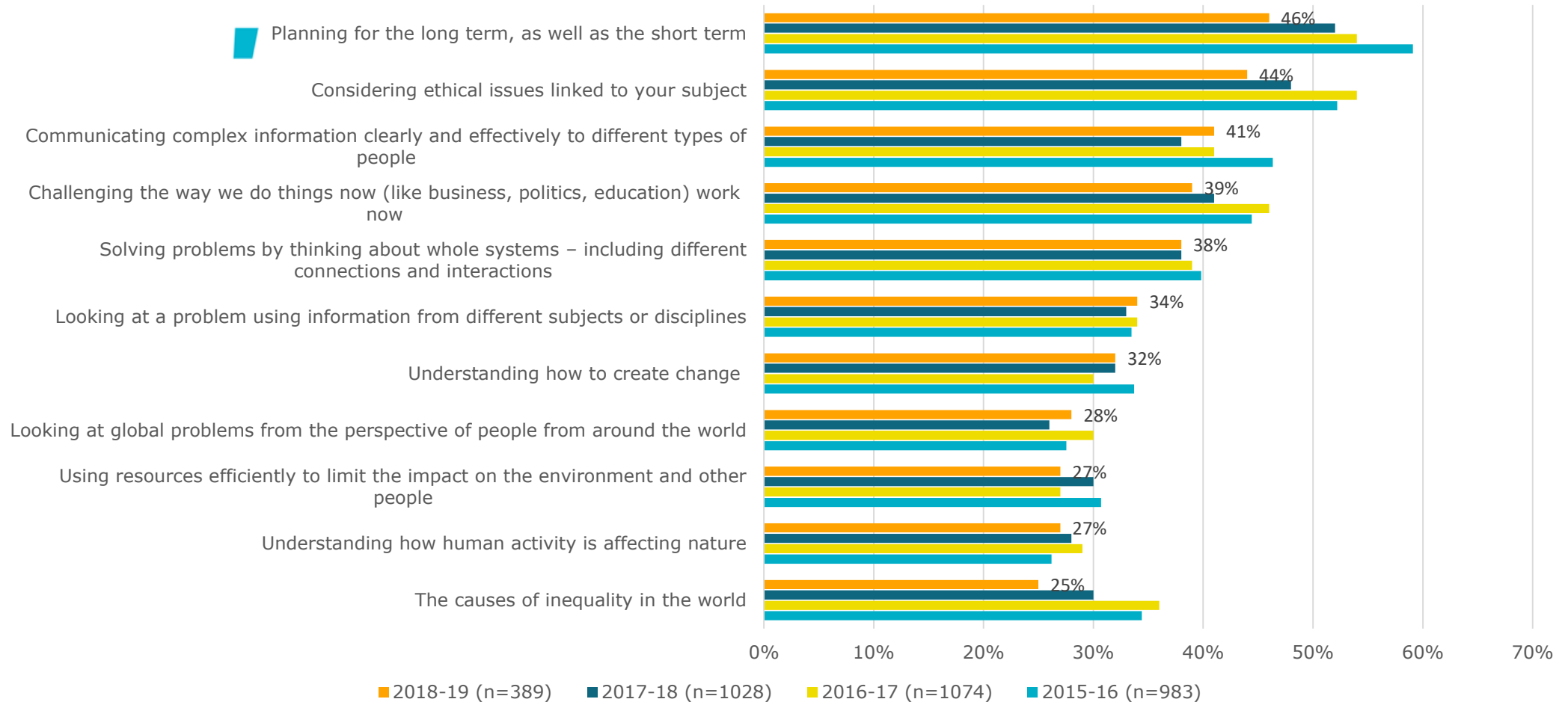
- Across the range of skills, HE undergraduate 1st years are significantly less likely to report coverage of the skills and knowledge for sustainability in their teaching and learning than all other HE undergraduates.
- UK HE respondents are more likely than international respondents from within and beyond the EU to say their teaching 'considers ethical issues linked to their course' (e.g. 69%, n=3046 compared with 62%, n=312 EU respondents and 53%, n=248 non-EU respondents).
- Within HE, women respondents are more likely to say their teaching has covered 'considering ethical issues linked to their subject' than men (71%, n=2205 compared to 61%, n=1380). They are also more likely to say 'the causes of inequality in the world' has been covered (40%, n=1251 compared with 29%, n=652) of men.
- HE respondents who are men, are more likely to say their teaching has looked at 'understanding how human activity is affecting nature' than women HE respondents (33%, n=739 compared with 28%, n=859).

Overall respondents say their teaching covers a wide range of skills and knowledge associated with sustainability

Most commonly, HE and FE respondents report coverage of 'considering the ethical issues linked to their subject' (67%, (n=3600) HE respondents and 44% (n=172) FE respondents and being 'able to plan for the long term as well as the short term' (55% (n=2925) HE respondents and 46% (n= 178) FE respondents).

# To what extent are students experiencing teaching and learning on sustainability skills and knowledge in further and higher education?

Further education



Overall respondents say their teaching covers a wide range of skills and knowledge associated with sustainability

Most commonly, HE and FE respondents report coverage of 'considering the ethical issues linked to their subject' (67%, (n=3600) HE respondents and 44% (n=172) FE respondents and being 'able to plan for the long term as well as the short term' (55% (n=2925) HE respondents and 46% (n= 178) FE respondents). There has been a significant decline in the 2018-19 results in the proportion of FE respondents saying their learning covers 'planning for the long term as well as the short term'.

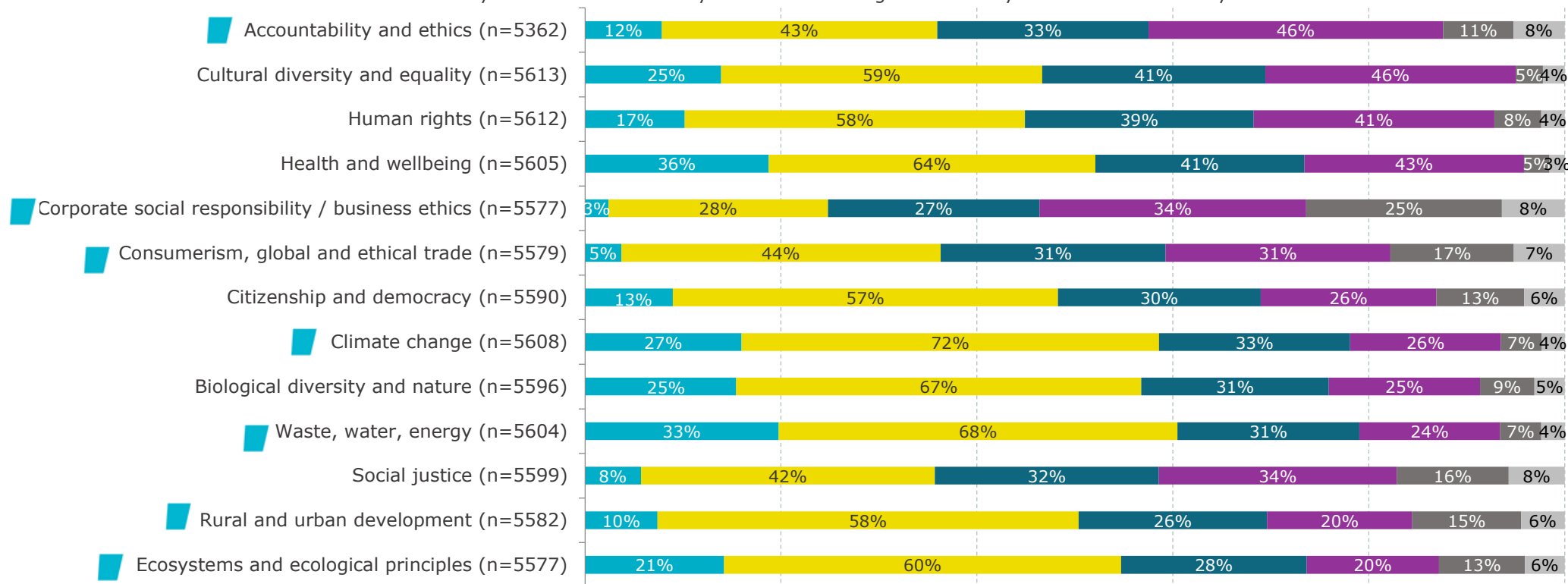
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Male FE respondents are more likely than women to say their teaching has covered 'solving problems by thinking about whole systems' (44%, n=92 compared to 31%, n=56).

# What teaching and learning on sustainability have students experienced through their time in education so far?

Higher education – 2018-19

Primary education Secondary education College University I've not learnt this yet Don't know



Respondents were also asked to reflect on their journey through education so far, and identify at which stage issues relating to sustainability have been covered by the teaching.

Higher education respondents report that most of the teaching they have received on sustainability issues occurred during secondary education, for example 72% (n=4034) of respondents say climate change was covered at this point. However, it is worth bearing in mind that two fifths of respondents are 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduates and therefore will have been exposed to limited teaching at the time of research.

Issues which are reported as having the highest level of coverage during their time at university include accountability and ethics (46%, n=2446) and cultural diversity and equality (46%, n=2605).

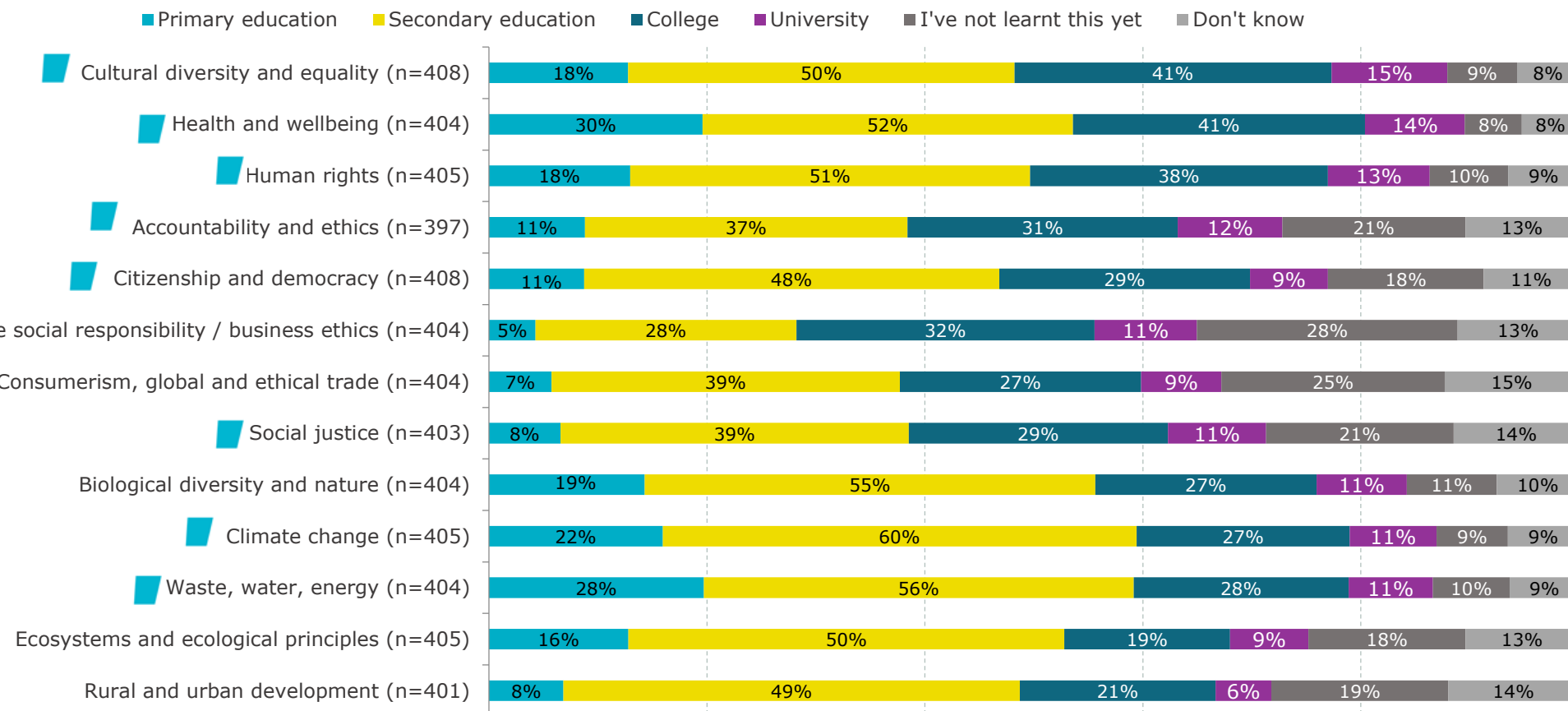
Issues highlighted with a blue symbol show a significant reduction in respondents perceptions of coverage whilst they have been at university between 2017-18 and 2018-19.

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- There are significant differences according to year of study within the responses provided by HE respondents. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> year respondents are more likely to state that they experienced teaching on a number of sustainability issues at secondary level, compared with 3<sup>rd</sup> year respondents who are more likely to indicate coverage during university. For example, 48% (n=903) 1<sup>st</sup> years say accountability and ethics was covered during secondary education compared with 38% (n=432) 3<sup>rd</sup> years, whilst 28% (n=530) 1<sup>st</sup> years say this issue has been covered during university compared with 60% (n=680) 3<sup>rd</sup> years. Given the short time at university for 1<sup>st</sup> year respondents at the time of research this can be expected.
- International respondents from outside the EU are less likely to report coverage of these issue prior to university education compared to UK respondents (e.g. 60%, (n=274) non-EU respondents say climate change was covered during secondary education compared with 74% (n=3391) UK respondents).

# What teaching and learning on sustainability have students experienced through their time in education so far?

Further education – 2018-19



Respondents who were identified as studying at further education level attributed most of their learning on sustainability related issues to their time in secondary school, when considering their educational career as a whole. For example, 60% (n=251) say climate change was covered during their time in secondary school, and 56% (n=235) said issues related to waste, water and energy were also covered at this level of education.

In general, between a fifth and 4 in 10 respondents say sustainability related issues have been covered by the teaching during their time in college. For example, 41% (n=174) say cultural diversity and equality has been covered, and the same proportion (41%, n=170) say health and wellbeing have been covered at this place of education.

Issues highlighted with a blue symbol show a significant reduction in respondents perceptions of coverage whilst they have been in secondary education between 2017-18 and 2018-19.

## Differences by respondent characteristics

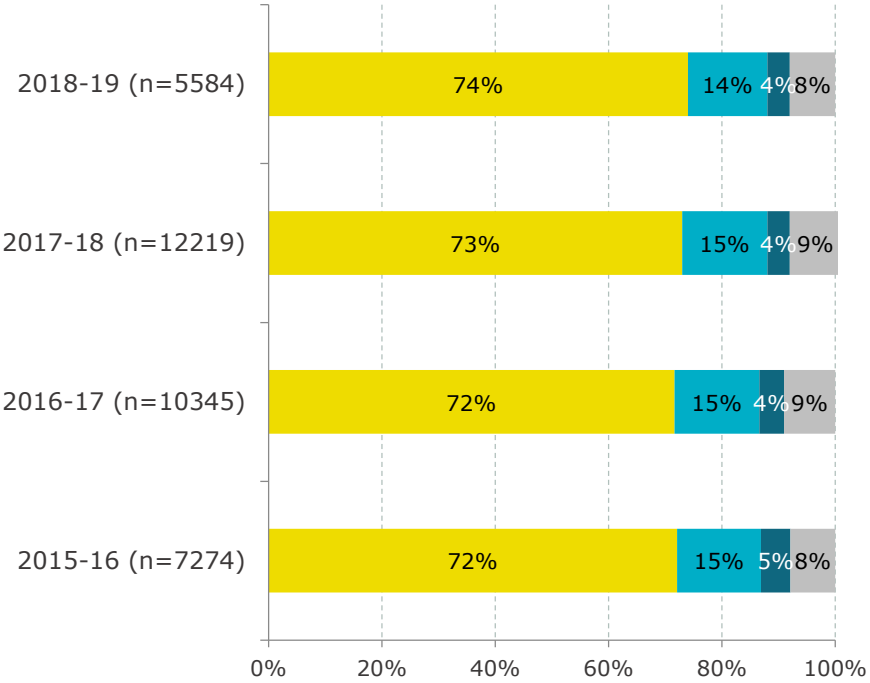
- Male FE respondents are more likely than female respondents to say they had learned about these issues at secondary school. For example 35% (n=75) male respondents said corporate social responsibility was covered at secondary school compared to 22% women (n=42).

# What impression do students have of their place of study in terms of action for sustainability?

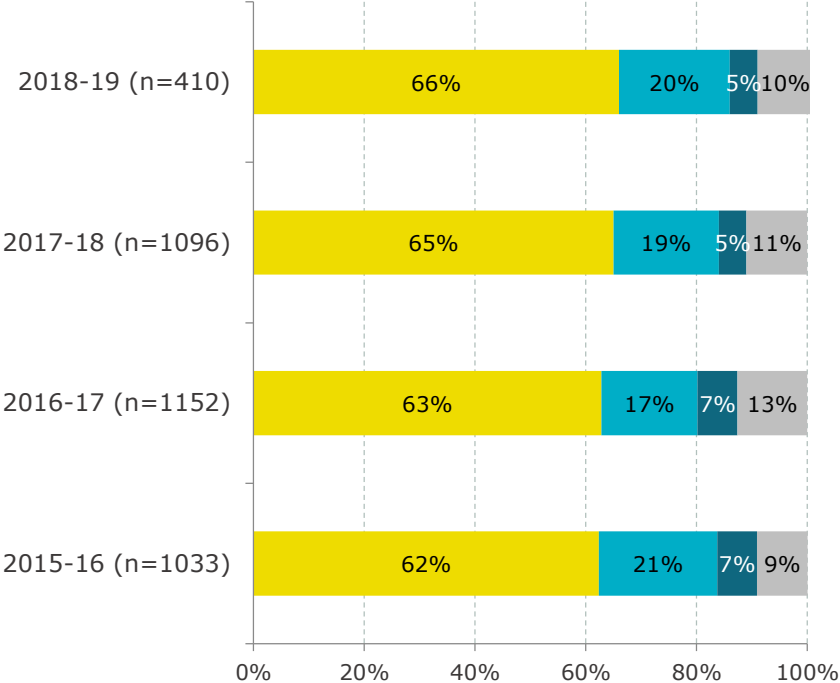
“My university/college takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society”

Higher education

Further education



Agree  
Neither  
Disagree  
Don't know



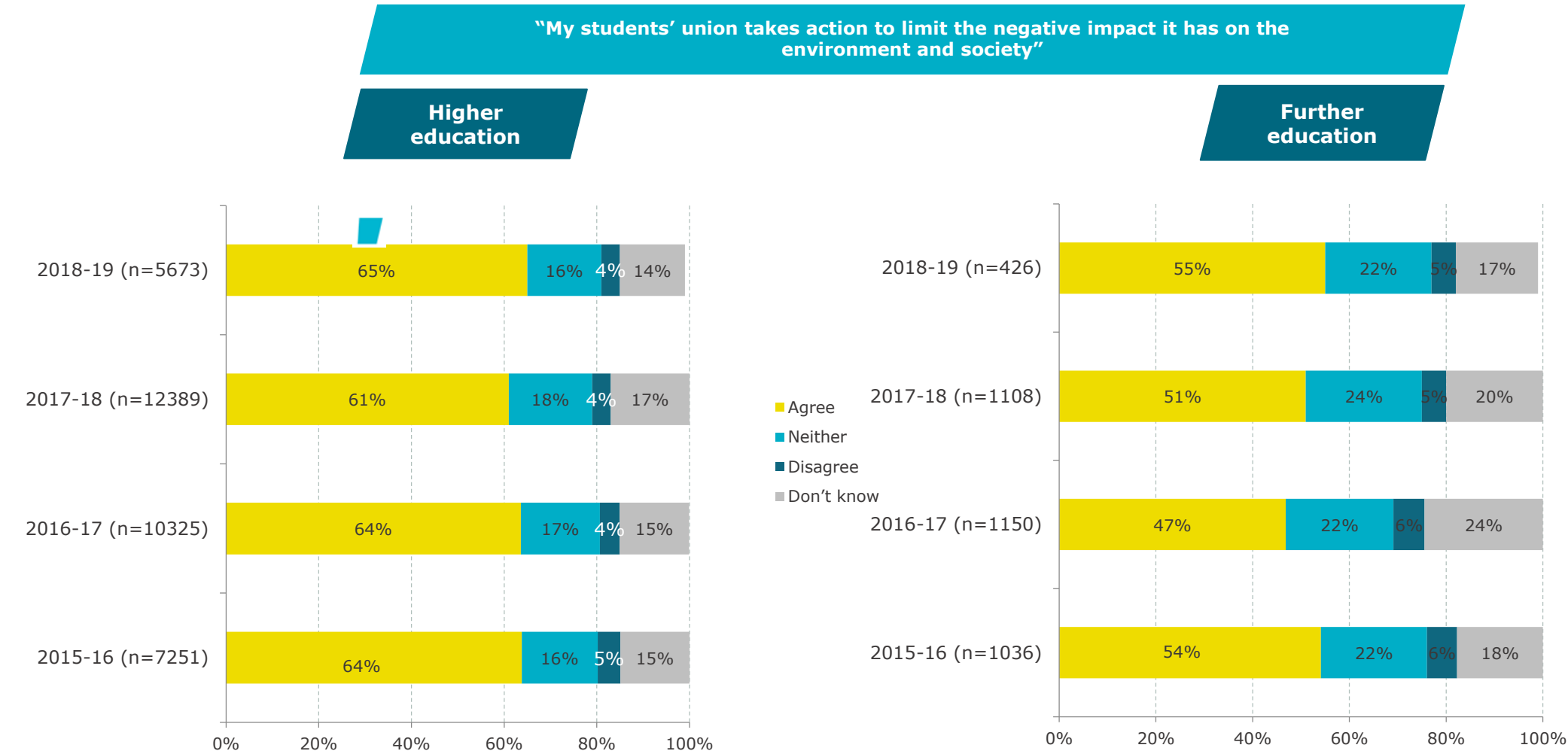
Overall, respondents have a positive view of their institutions and students’ unions in terms of the action they take to reduce negative impacts on the environment and society.

Almost three quarters of HE respondents (74%, n=4219) agree that their university is taking action in this area, however around 2 in 3 FE respondents share this belief (66%, n=281).

### Differences by respondent characteristics

- Amongst HE respondents non-EU students are more likely to agree that their institution takes action to limit the negative impacts on the environment and society (84% agree, n=391) compared to EU students (74% (n=381) and UK students (73%, n=3407).

# What impression do students have of their place of study in terms of action for sustainability?



Overall, respondents have a positive view of their students' unions in terms of the action it takes to reduce negative impacts on the environment and society.

2 in 3 HE respondents see their students' union taking action to address its negative impact on the environment and society (65%, n= 3690). This is a significant increase since the Yr8 survey, reversing the decline seen over the previous year.

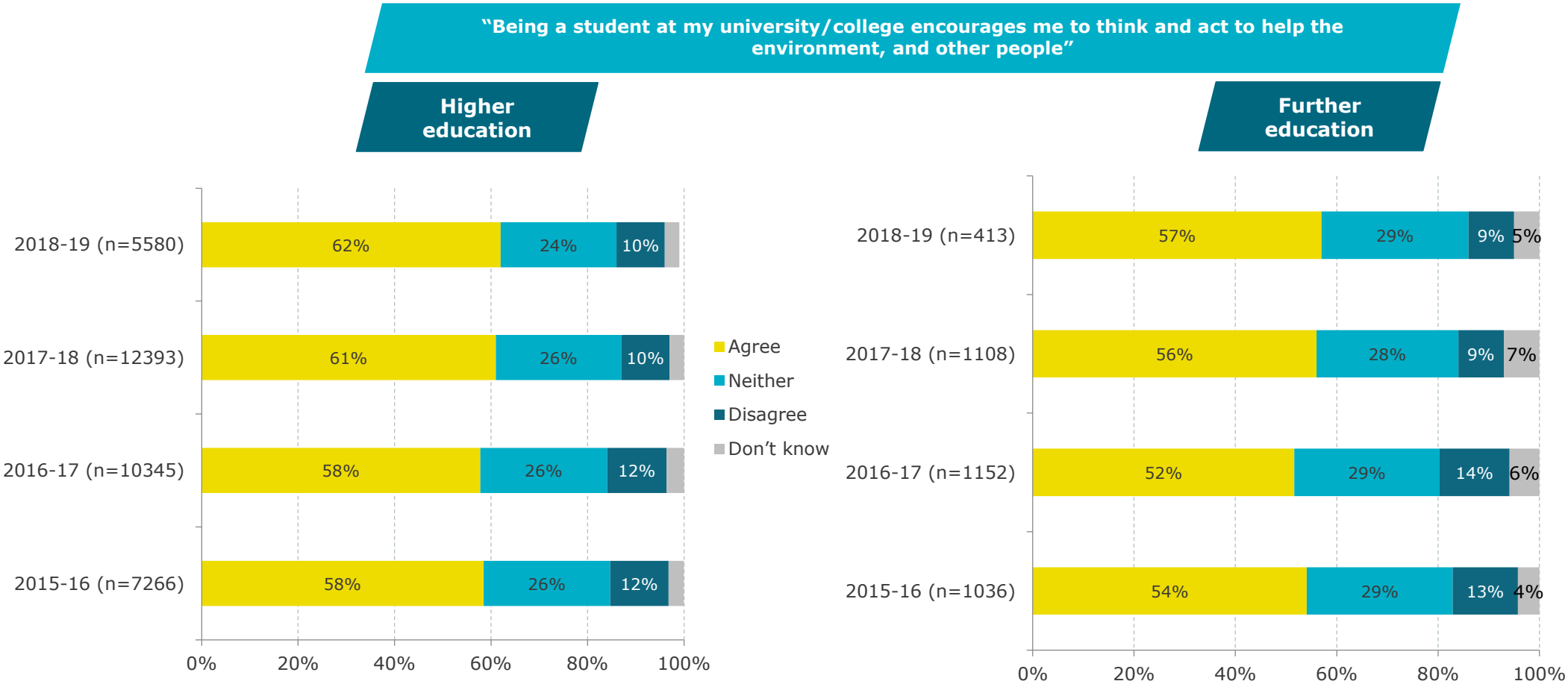
Half (55%) of FE respondents believe this to be the case (n=227), this has significantly improved since the previous survey.

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Non-EU students are more likely to agree with this statement (77% agree, n=360) compared to EU students (66% (n=339) and UK students (64%, n=2954).



# What impact is students' current place of study having on their attitudes and behaviours for sustainability?



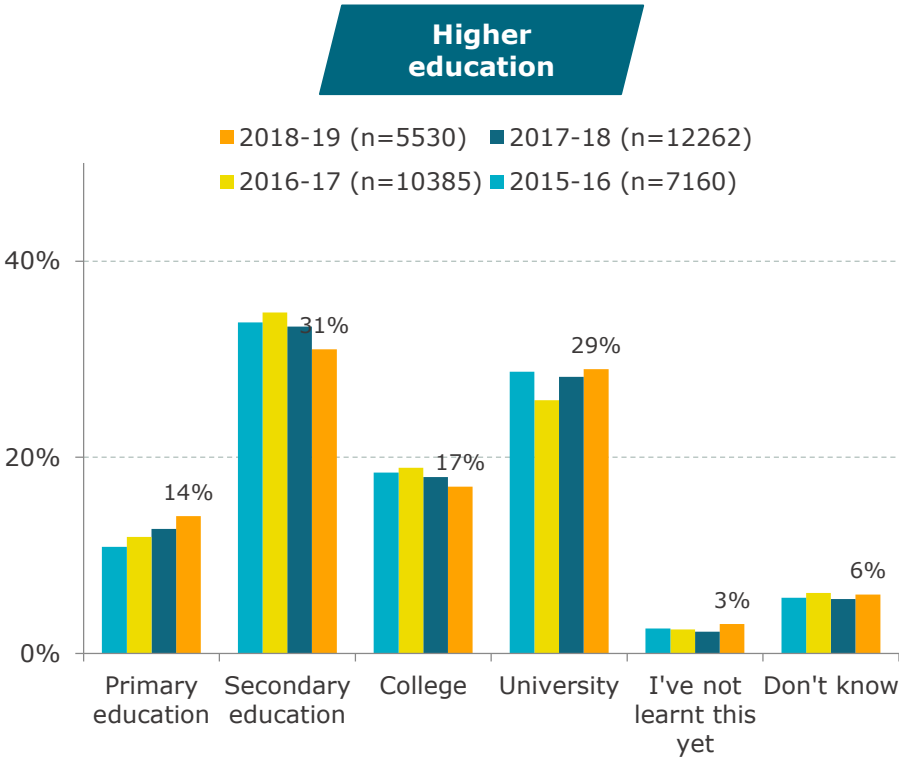
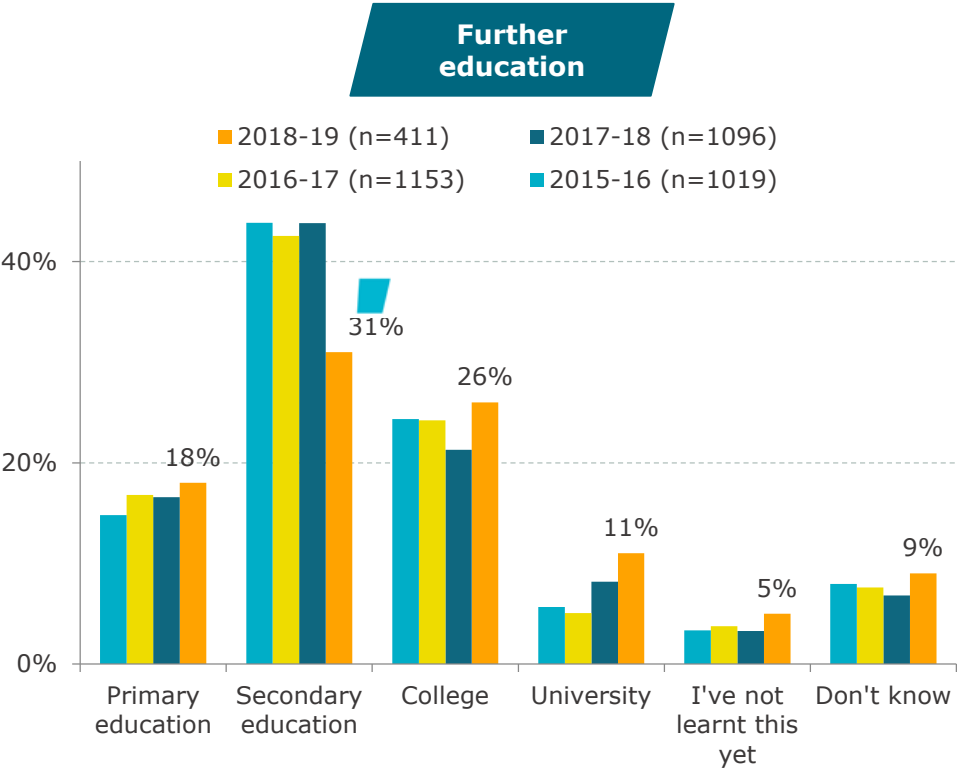
Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact their current place of study has had on their personal attitudes and actions to help the environment and other people. Over half of respondents in FE (57%, n=235) and almost two thirds in HE (62%, n=3471) agree that being a student at their university or college encourages them to think and act to help the environment and other people.

**Differences by respondent characteristics**

- HE international respondents from within and beyond the EU are significantly more likely to report being encouraged to think and act to help the environment and other people as a result of being a student at their university (e.g. 78% (n=364) non-EU international respondents agree compared with 67% (n=348) respondents from the EU and 60% (n=2780) UK respondents. A similar trend was seen for FE respondents.



# Which place of study is perceived as having the greatest influence on students to take action to help the environment and other people?



Respondents were also asked to reflect on their experiences in education so far and identify which place of study has had the greatest influence on them in terms of encouraging them to act to help the environment and other people.

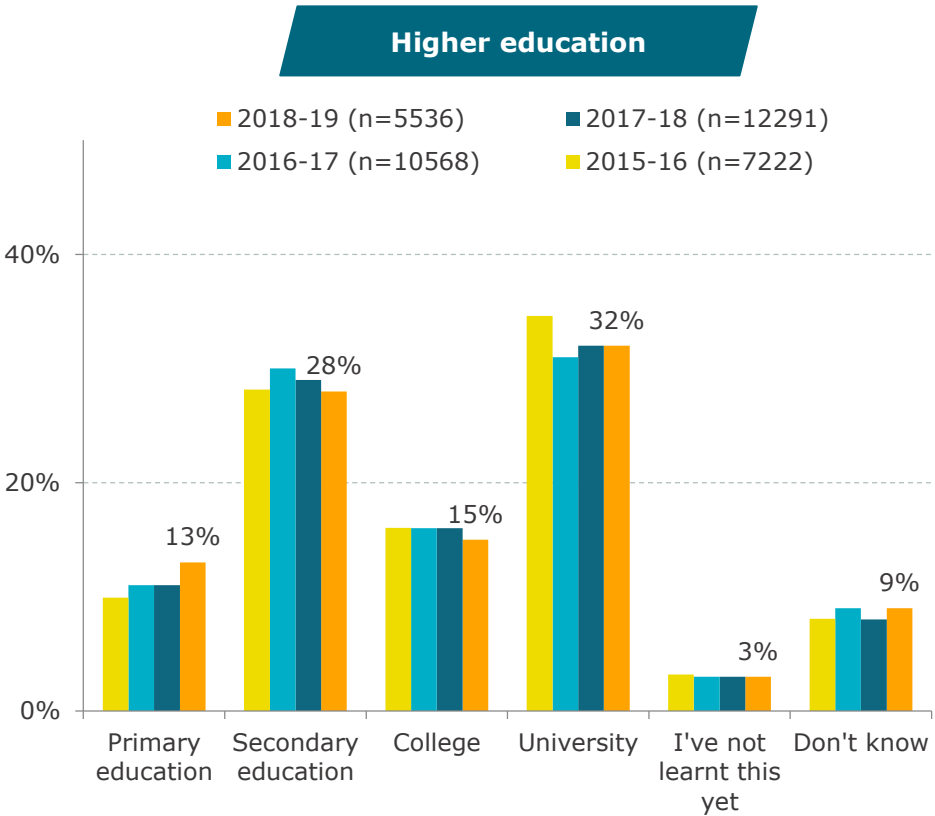
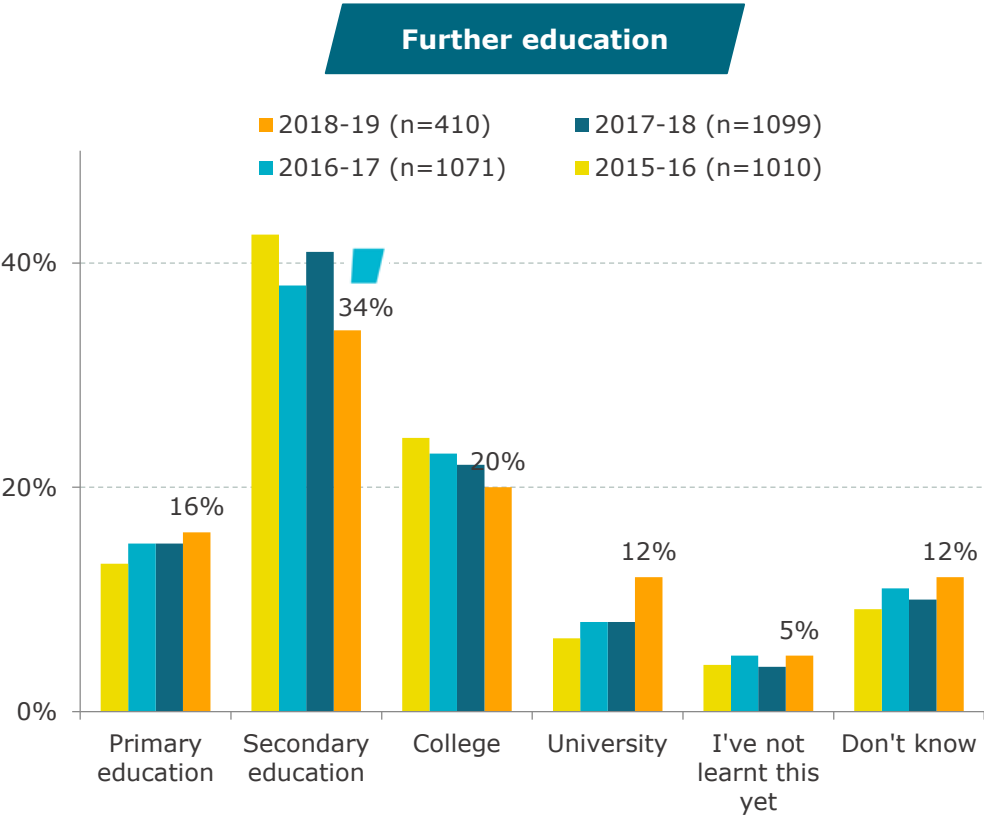
Both HE and FE respondents most frequently identify secondary education as the place of study which encouraged them to act the most (31%, n=129 FE respondents and 31%, n=1733 HE respondents). FE students are significantly less likely to say secondary education has had an influence compared to the previous survey.

University is reported as being the strongest influence for a third of HE respondents (29%, n=1580).

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Within HE, there are significant differences in assessment of which place of study has encouraged them the most to think and act to help the environment and other people, with 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates most likely to report that their university encouraged them the most compared to respondents in earlier years of study (e.g. 34% (n=401) 3<sup>rd</sup> years compared with 19% (n=367) 1<sup>st</sup> years).
- 1st year undergraduates are more likely to select both secondary and college education compared to 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates (e.g. 21% (n=409) 1<sup>st</sup> years selected college education as taking most action whereas 14% (n=164) of 3<sup>rd</sup> years selected this option)

# Which place of study is perceived as taking the greatest action on sustainability?



Respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences in education so far and identify which place of study took the most action to reduce its negative impact on the environment and society.

HE respondents are most likely to state that their current place of study, university, is taking the most action in comparison to previous places of study (32%, n=1772).

FE respondents identify secondary education as the place of study which has acted to reduce its negative impact on the environment and society the most (34%, n=141).

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Within HE, there are significant differences in assessment of the action taken by places they have studied according to year of study, with 4th year undergraduates most likely to report that their university has acted most to address negative impacts on the environment and society (e.g. 38% (n=90) 4th years compared with 24% (n=463) 1<sup>st</sup> years).
- 1st year undergraduates are more likely to select college education (18%, n=344) than other year undergraduates.

# What impact has learning about sustainability issues had?

Respondents were also asked to reflect on how learning about sustainability issues has impacted them personally, in terms of their day to day lifestyle, but also considering their values and aims for future careers. The first 350 responses were coded and revealed that for both FE and HE respondents, learning about sustainability issues has encouraged them to think about things or do things differently and has improved them as people. Respondents also noted that learning about these issues has helped improve their knowledge and understanding, which has the potential to improve their career opportunities in the future. A number of respondents didn't feel that learning had impacted them at all, however others identified that most of their learning on the issues covered by the survey had come through general life experience rather than through formal education.

	Further education	Higher education
Think about things/do things differently now	95	140
Helped develop my career/improve my knowledge/understanding	129	101
Improved me/life skills generally	97	83
None/No impact	59	49
Not sure/Don't know	10	18

"It made my eyes more open and made me more educated about the world and about people. It made me more understanding and accepting of everyone."  
*UK student, Woman, Foundation Business and administrative studies, HE*

"It brought me to be who I was today, understanding everything form ethics to global economic change has thoroughly pushed me to a career I want to pursue."  
*UK student, Man, Undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year Biological Sciences, HE*

"The more I know about the world and its people, the more I want to help preserve it. As a result of learning about biodiversity and nature, I put in a lot more effort to protect it and teach others how to help out, as well. I have started volunteering at a nature reserve because of this, as well. After finding out more about inequalities and diversity between people, I have started studying sociology in the hopes of understand people better and someday going into politics or teaching so as to better educate people and help the world become a fairer, more diverse and equal place for people, animals, and life in general."  
*UK student, Identifies in another way, A levels, FE*

"Having studied some of those issues generated in me some type of awareness and changed the way I think and see things. Thus, planted that seed in me that make me want to impact the world and change things for a better world as much as I can."  
*International student (outside EU), Man, Undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year Law, HE*

"It has been able to help me understand the world in a different way that I use to see if when I was in primary or secondary. As I didn't really understand in depth what I was being taught whereas I now know issues more in depth and can have my own opinion on them instead of depending on someone else opinion, which we are taught it is the right opinion."  
*UK student, Woman, Foundation - Other, HE*

"I'm more aware of the world around me and how myself as an individual can impact and change the future."  
*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate 1<sup>st</sup> year Creative arts and design, HE*

"it's influenced me to think differently about the values in society and how we live our lives. its influenced me to think critically and not just accept everything we are told. I understand that each individual can contribute on a global level and daily decisions about what we buy and how we live impacts the world we live in."  
*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate 2<sup>nd</sup> year Education, HE*

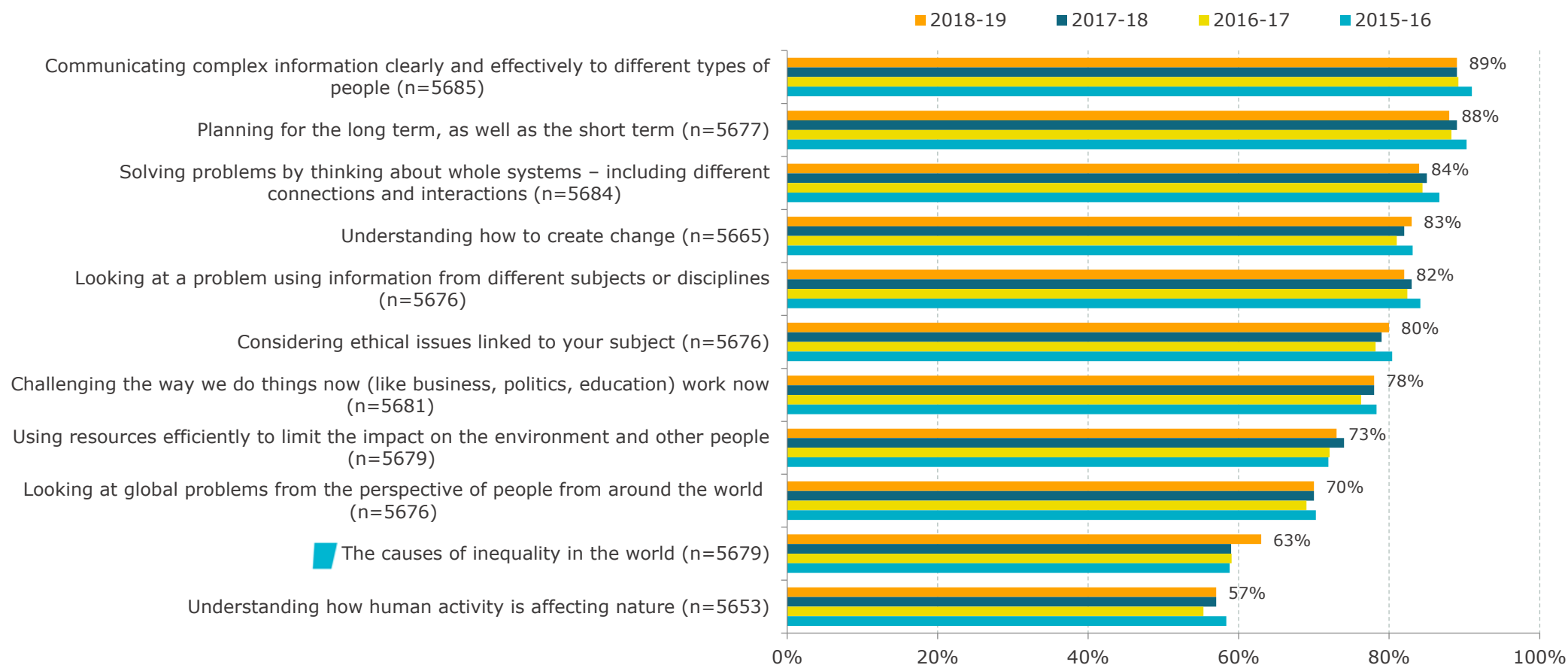
"I think learning about these issues, especially diversity, helped develop me majorly as a person as being able to learn about this it helps develop your skills and understanding making you more aware which will benefit you interacting with colleagues and people you meet in the future."  
*UK student, Woman, Undergraduate 3<sup>rd</sup> year Business and administrative studies, HE*

## 5. Sustainability skills beyond education

# How important are sustainability skills to future employers?

Higher  
education

HE respondents were asked to consider how important sustainability related skills and knowledge are to their future employers. The most important skills are perceived as being the ability to communicate complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people (89%, n=5069) and planning for the long term, as well as the short term (88%, n=5006). Having an understanding of how human activity is affecting nature is least likely to be seen as being important for future employers (57%, n=3228).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

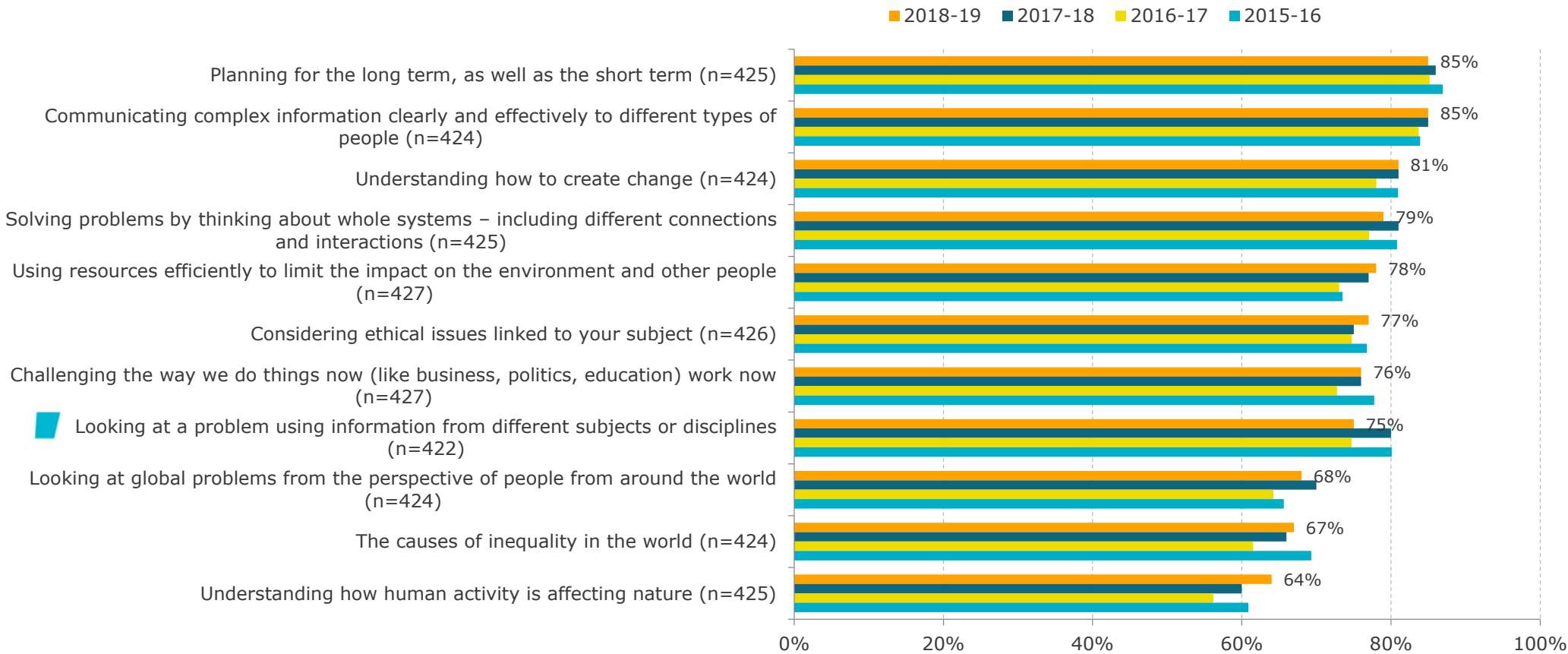
- International HE respondents from beyond the EU are more likely to think looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world will be important to their future employers than EU and UK respondents (80% (n=372)) compared with 71% (n=369) Non EU and 69% (n=3200) UK students respectively.
- Women HE respondents are more likely than men to think all these issues will be important to their future employers but especially knowing about the causes of inequalities in the world (71%, n=2259), compared to 53% for men (n=1258). They are also more likely to say considering ethical issues linked to your subject would be important to future employers (85%, n=2737) compared to 72% for men (n=1725).

**Q: How important do you think the following skills and knowledge are to your future employers?**

Weighted base: 2018-19 in brackets Balance: No response

# How important are sustainability skills to future employers?

FE respondents were also asked to consider how important sustainability related skills and knowledge are to their future employers. The most important skills are perceived as being able to plan for the long term, as well as the short term (85% (n=361) and the ability to communicate complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people (85% FE respondents, n=363). FE respondents are least likely to rate having an understanding of how human activity is affecting nature as being important for future employers (64% FE respondents (n=271) rate this as important).



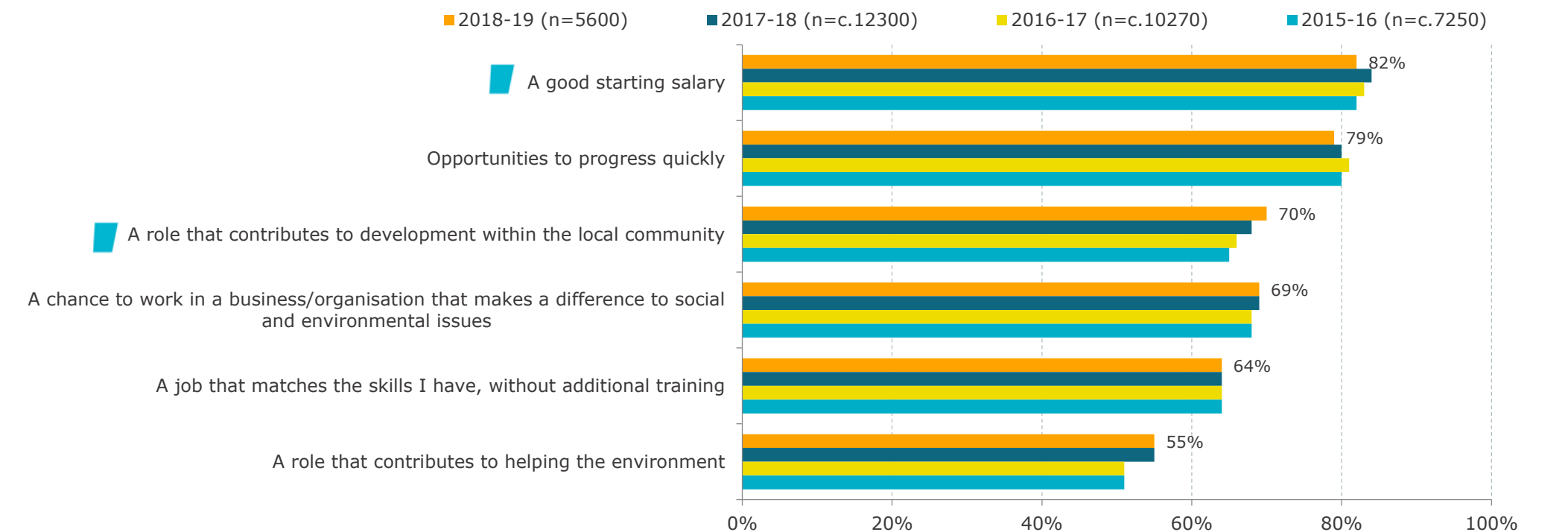
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- FE women respondents are more likely to see understanding the causes of inequality in the world as important to their future employers than FE respondents who are men (74% (n=141) compared with 63% (n=138)).
- Similarly, FE women respondents are more likely to see challenging the way we do things now as important to their future employers than FE respondents who are men (83% (n=158) compared with 71% (n=159)).
- Finally, FE women respondents are more likely to see understanding how to create change as important to their future employers than FE respondents who are men (87% (n=165) compared with 79% (n=175)).

# What factors are important when considering what jobs to apply for?

Respondents to the survey reported that a good starting salary (82% HE respondents (n=4644)) and opportunities to progress quickly (79% HE respondents (n=5600)) are important factors when considering what jobs to apply for.

Two thirds of respondents in HE reported that the chance to work in a role that contributes to development in the local community would be an important consideration (70%, n=3120)). A similar proportion said the chance to work in business or organisation that makes a difference to social and environmental issues would be an important factor to consider when applying for jobs (69% (n=3821)).



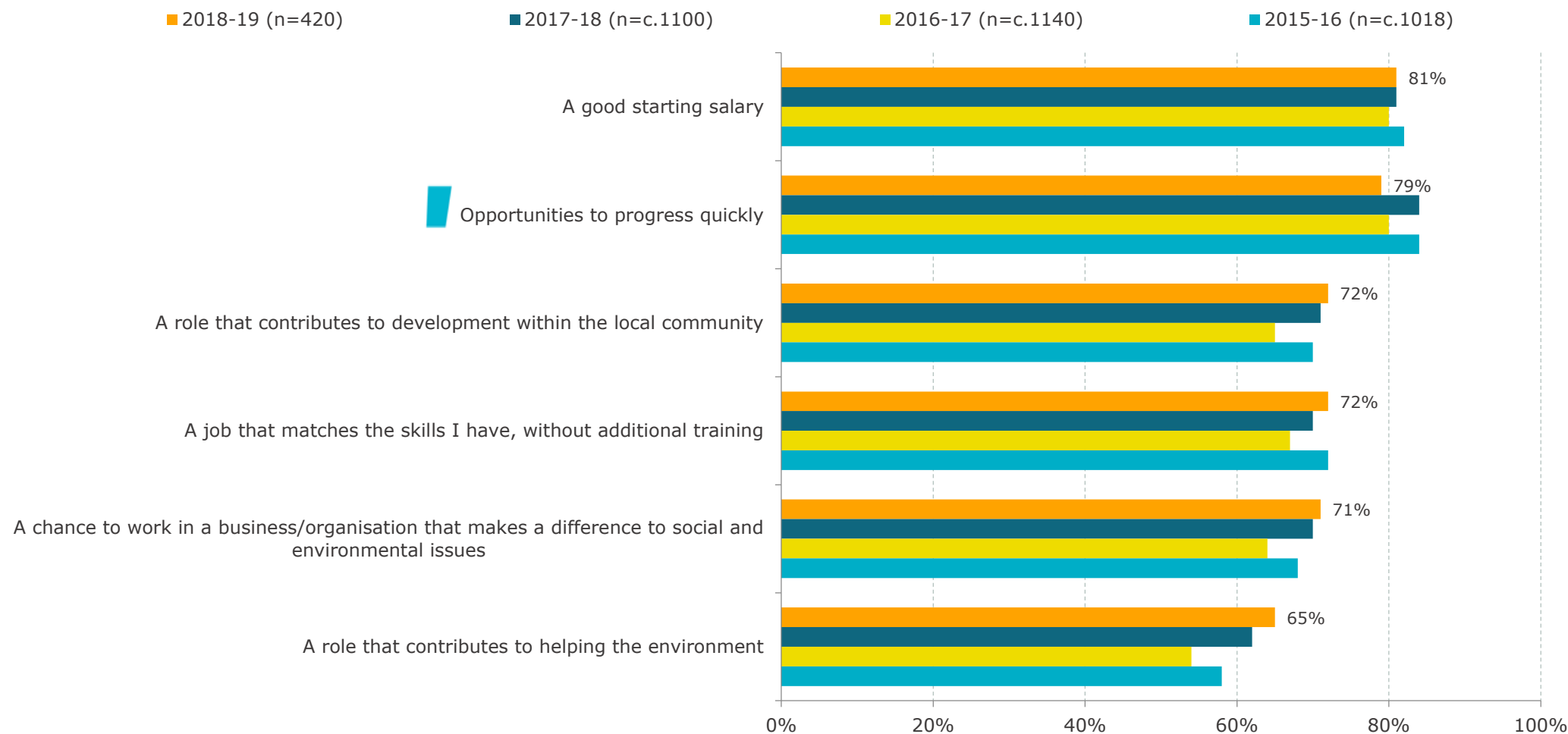
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Women HE respondents are significantly more likely to say that working in a role that contributes to development within the local community is important when considering which jobs to apply for than HE respondents who are men (75% (n=2401) compared with 62% (n=1466)).
- International respondents from outside the EU are also more likely to say a job that contributes to development within the local community is important compared to UK and EU respondents (77% (n=355) compared with 69% (n=3189) and 66% (n=336) respectively).
- International non-EU respondents are most likely to report a chance to work in a business/organisation that makes a difference to social and environmental issues was an important factor compared with UK and EU respondents (77% (n=349) compared with 67% (n=3052) and 73% (n=370) respectively).

# What factors are important when considering what jobs to apply for?

FE respondents to the survey reported that a good starting salary (81%, n=341)) and opportunities to progress quickly (79% (n=335)) are important factors when considering what jobs to apply for.

Over two thirds of respondents in FE also reported that a role that contributes to the development within the local community (72%, n=305) would be an important factor to consider when applying for jobs, as well as a job that matches the skills that they have (72%, n=303)). More respondents in this latest survey reported that having a role that contributes to helping the environment would be an important consideration (65%, n=274).



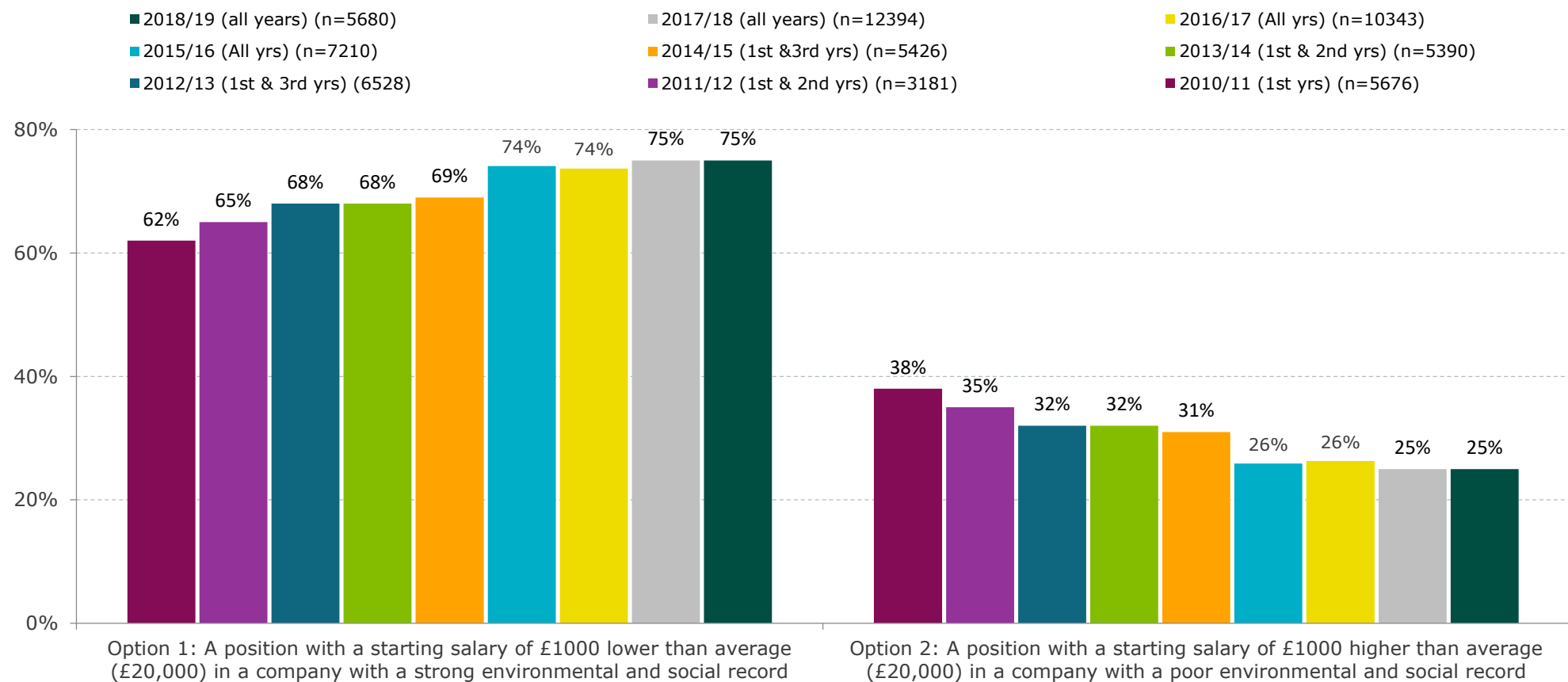
Q: Thinking about your future employer, how important, if at all, do you think the following factors will be when considering which jobs to apply for?

Weighted base: In brackets Balance: No response



# What desire do students have to work for employers with positive social and environmental credentials?

Three quarters of HE respondents completing the survey in 2018-19 say they would opt for a reduction in starting salary of £1000 in order to work for a company with a strong social and environmental record (75%, n=4270), mirroring the results reported by respondents historically throughout the research that show a preference for working for this kind of organisation.



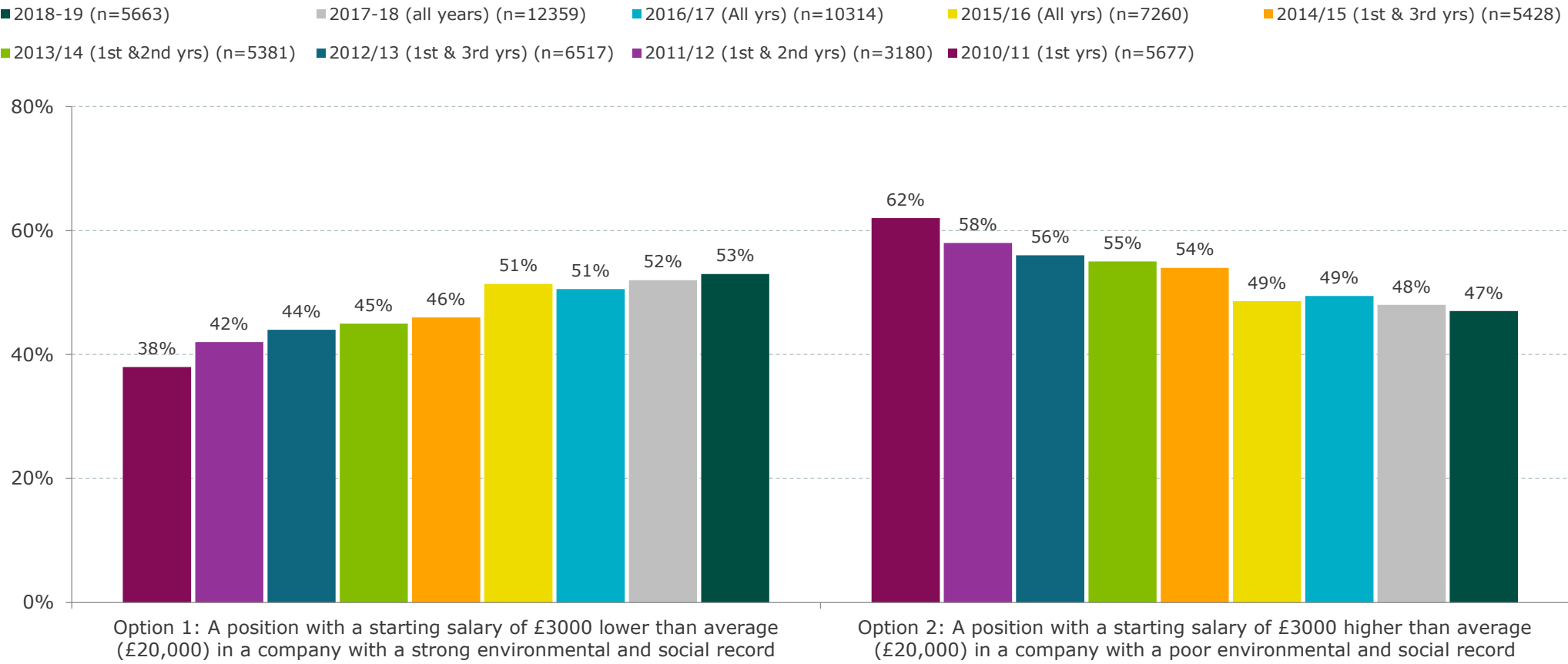
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Women respondents are more likely to say they would be willing to accept a salary sacrifice of £1000 to work for a company with a strong environmental and social record compared to respondents who are men (79% (n=2530) compared with 70% (n=1668)).

# What desire do students have to work for employers with positive social and environmental credentials?

Higher education

When asked to consider a salary sacrifice of £3000 from an average starting salary, half of HE respondents (53%, n= 2974) in 2018-19 indicated they would be willing to make this sacrifice for a position in a company with a strong environmental and social record. Again this mirrors the results seen in previous surveys, with an increasing proportion willing to make this sacrifice.



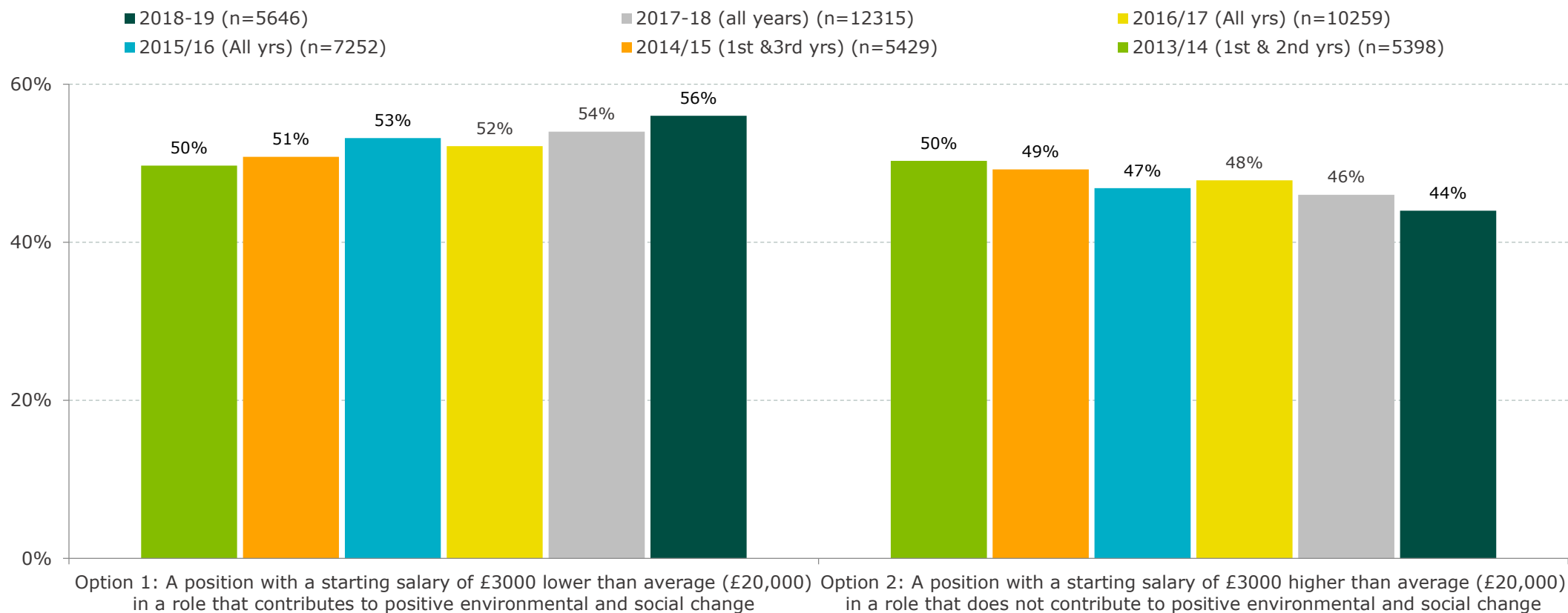
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- As seen at the £1000 salary sacrifice level, women respondents are more likely to say they would make a sacrifice of £3000 from their starting salary to work for a company with a strong environmental and social record (56% (n=1801)) compared with 47% of men (n=1116).
- International respondents beyond the EU, are more likely to say they would make the salary sacrifice of £3000 for such a role (67% (n=314) compared to EU respondents (58% (n=301) and UK respondents (50% (n=2327).

# What desire do students have to work for employers with positive social and environmental credentials?

Higher education

Just over half of HE respondents report that they would be willing to make a sacrifice of £3000 from their starting salary for a specific role that contributes to positive environmental and social change (56%, n=3190).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

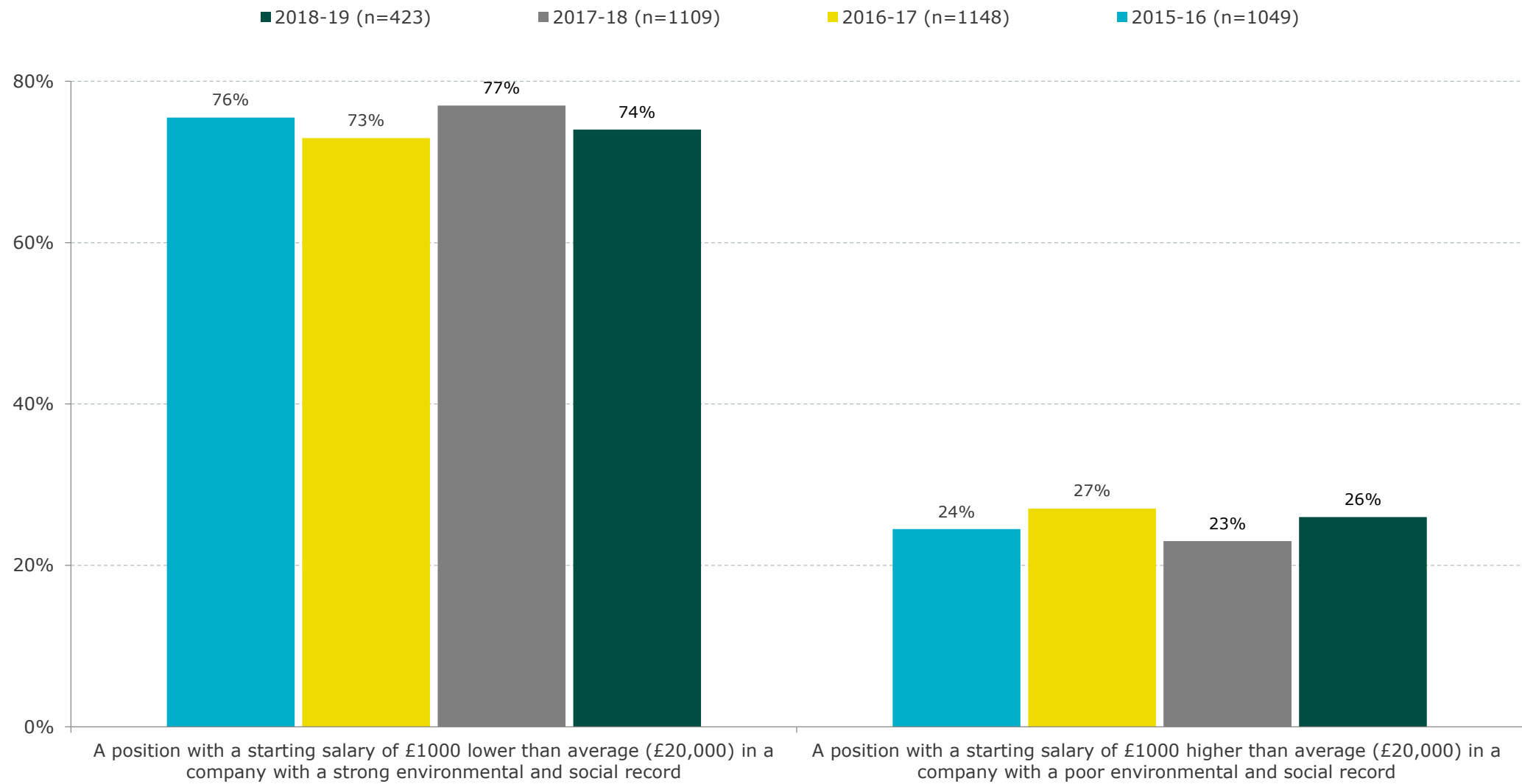
- HE respondents who are men are less likely than women respondents to say they would be willing to make a salary sacrifice of £3000 to work in a specific role that contributes to positive environmental and social change (48%, (n=1129)) compared with 63% (n=2006).
- International respondents from beyond the EU are more likely than UK respondents to accept this sacrifice (63% (n=311) compared with 55% (n=2537)).

**Q: Assuming all other factors are equal, please select which option you think that you would choose.**

Weighted base: In brackets next to each question. Balance: No response

# What desire do students have to work for employers with positive social and environmental credentials?

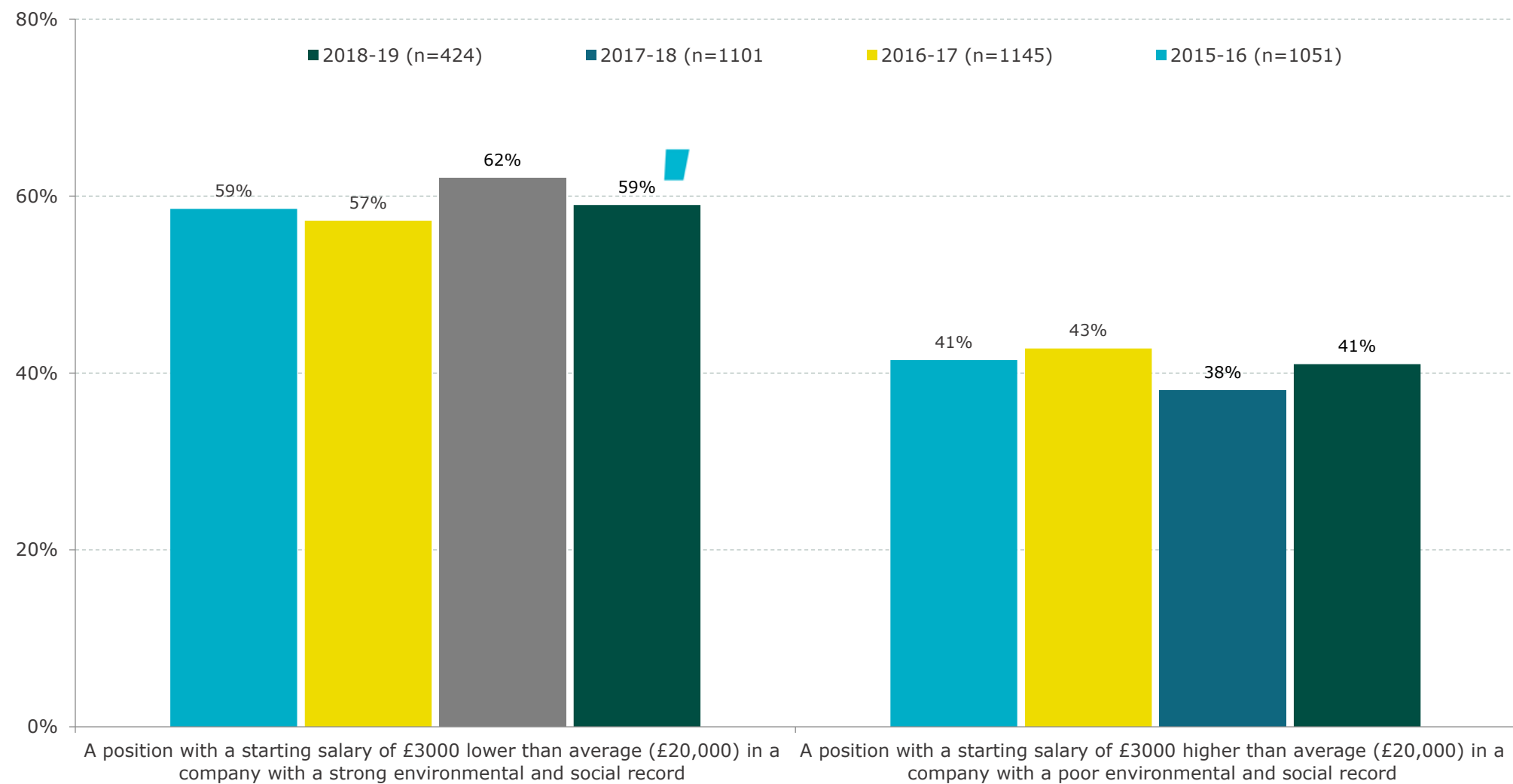
Three quarters of FE respondents say they would be willing to sacrifice £1000 from a starting salary to work for a company with a positive environmental and social record (74%, n=312).



Q: Assuming all other factors are equal, please select which option you think that you would choose.  
Weighted base: In brackets Balance: No response

# What desire do students have to work for employers with positive social and environmental credentials?

6 in 10 FE respondents say they would be willing to sacrifice £3000 from a starting salary to work for a company with a strong environmental and social record (59%, n=251). This is significantly lower than responses in 2017-18, at a 95% confidence level.

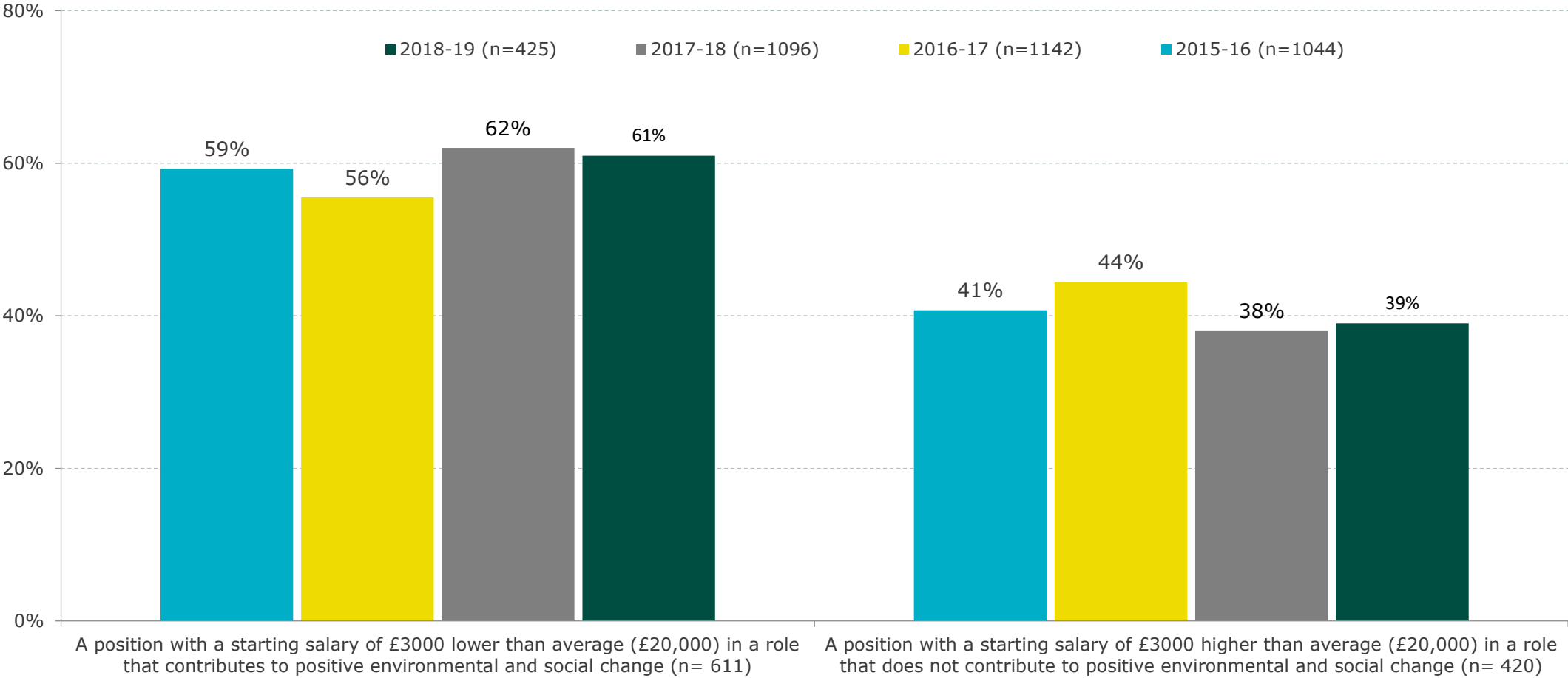


# What desire do students have to work for employers with positive social and environmental credentials?

Further education

6 in 10 FE respondents say they would be willing to sacrifice £3000 from a starting salary to work for a company that contributes to positive environmental and social change (61%, n=256).

- Differences by respondent characteristics
- Women FE respondents are more likely than men to accept a salary sacrifice (69%, n=132) compared to 51% men (n=113).



Q: Assuming all other factors are equal, please select which option you think that you would choose.  
Weighted base: In brackets Balance: No response

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