

# Sustainability Skills Survey | 2017-18

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

**August 2018**

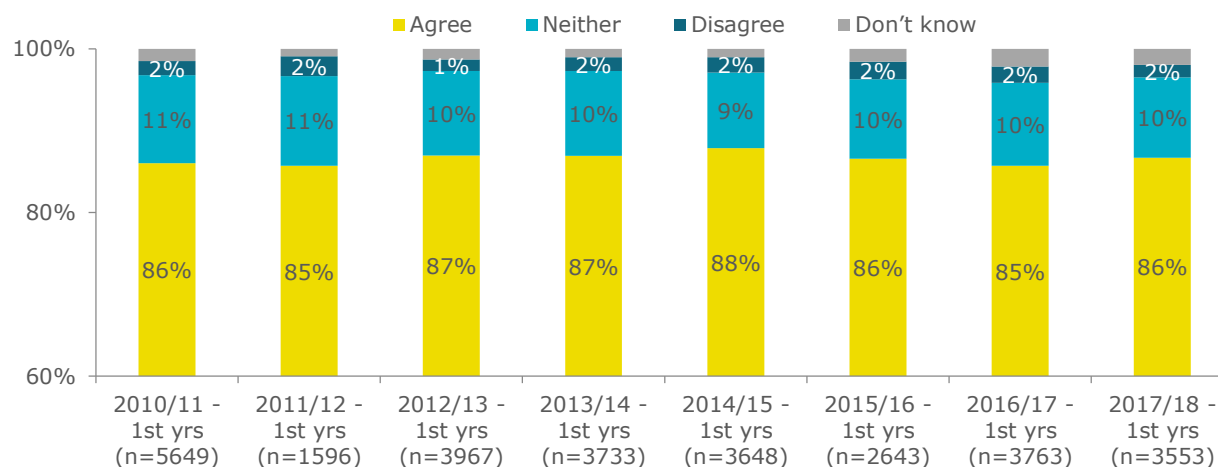
# Sustainability Skills | 2017-18

A national online survey was completed by over 12,000 students in October 2017 to build on the data gathered through six 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. This year, the research has been 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. Students in further education are included in the research for the first time. This summary highlights the longitudinal trends from the historic research before considering new insight for both higher and further education respondents.

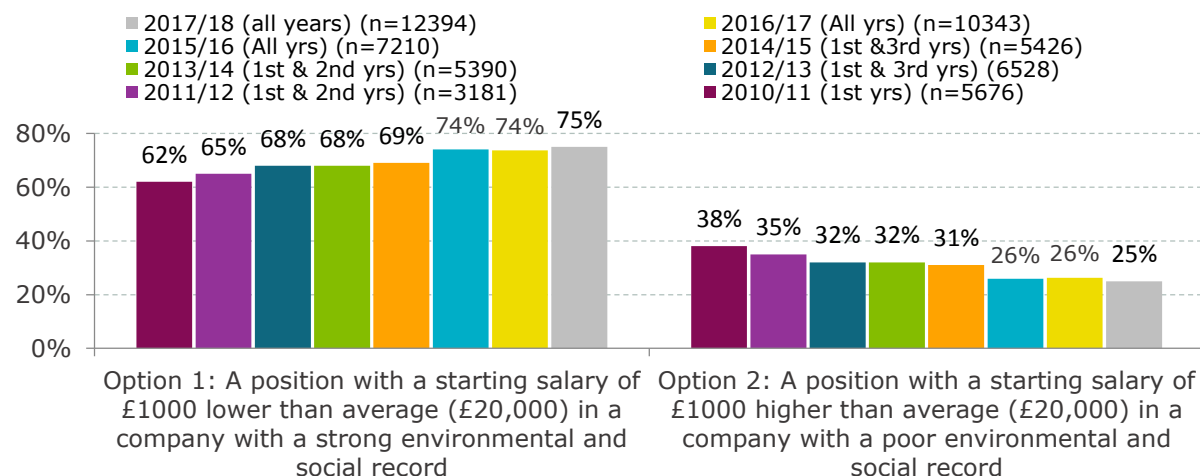
## Tracking longitudinal trends in higher education – 2010-11 to 2017-18

- As with the seven previous years of research completed with HE students, there is **overwhelming agreement amongst 2017/18 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=3114) saying they agree with this statement.
- In 2017/18, **57% agree that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about** (n=7085). 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 **significantly 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=9338 respondents in 2017/18 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 coverage in teaching and receive low assessment of importance amongst HE respondents in comparison with other sustainability skills**. For example, 89% (n=11010) rank "communicating complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people" as important, whereas 57% (n=6949) 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]



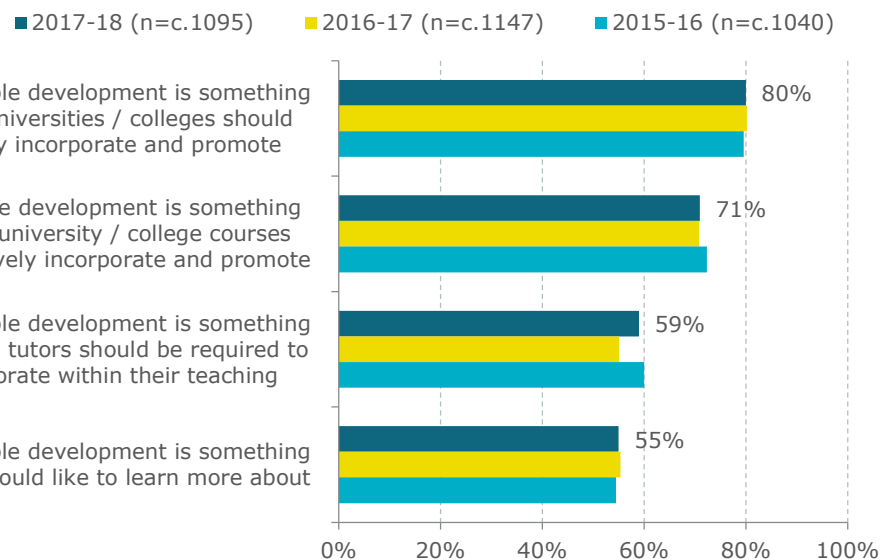
### Assuming all other factors are equal, which option would you choose?



<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 | 2017-18

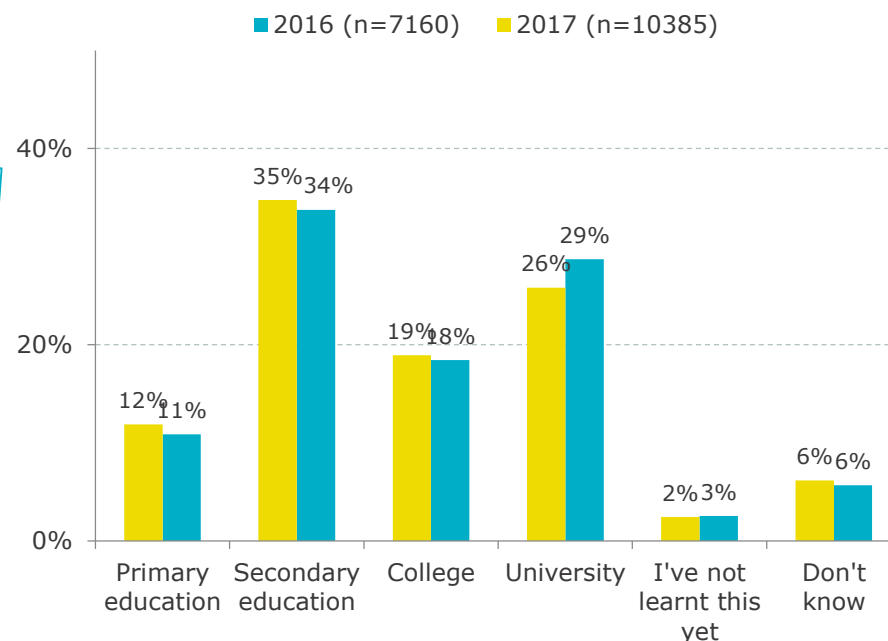
## FE Respondents: To what extent do you agree that...



- 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 remains constant across the two years of research** (80%, n=875).
- Almost three quarters of FE respondents (71%, n=782) also agree that **all courses should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development** and **just over half say sustainable development is something they want to learn more about** (55%, n=595).
- **Just over 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** (77%, n=852) and **almost two thirds say they would sacrifice £3000 from their starting salary to work in a company with these credentials** (62%, n=681).
- **Exposure to teaching on the the most overtly sustainability-focused skills is reported as lowest by FE respondents**, for example 29% (n=310) say they have experienced teaching on 'understanding how human activity is affecting nature' and 30% (n=322) 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 and 2016/17

- 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** (43%, n=484 FE respondents and 35%, n=3565 HE respondents). University is reported as being the strongest influence for around a quarter of HE respondents (26%, n=2646).
- 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=3179) however this is a significant decrease compared to 2015/16 responses (35%, n=2480). 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 however again this is a decrease compared to 2015/16 responses (38%, n=446 2016/17 and 43%, n=429 2015/16).
- **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, 72% (n=817) FE respondents say climate change was covered during their time in secondary school and 73% (n=7449) of HE respondents 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 has been repeated in 2016-17 and now in 2017-18 and this report shows the results across the 3 surveys.

The 2017-18 online survey was completed in October 2017 by students across the UK. Whilst in previous years the research has been focused on students in higher education, as in year 6 and 7 of the research, this latest survey was also distributed to students studying at further education institutions. Over 14000 respondents completed the survey in Yr8, 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. 71%, n=2894 HE women say extra-curricular activities within their department is a relevant way to learn about sustainability compared to 66%, n=1961 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

1. Previous research can be accessed at: <https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/our-research/our-research/skills-and-sustainable-development>

#### 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

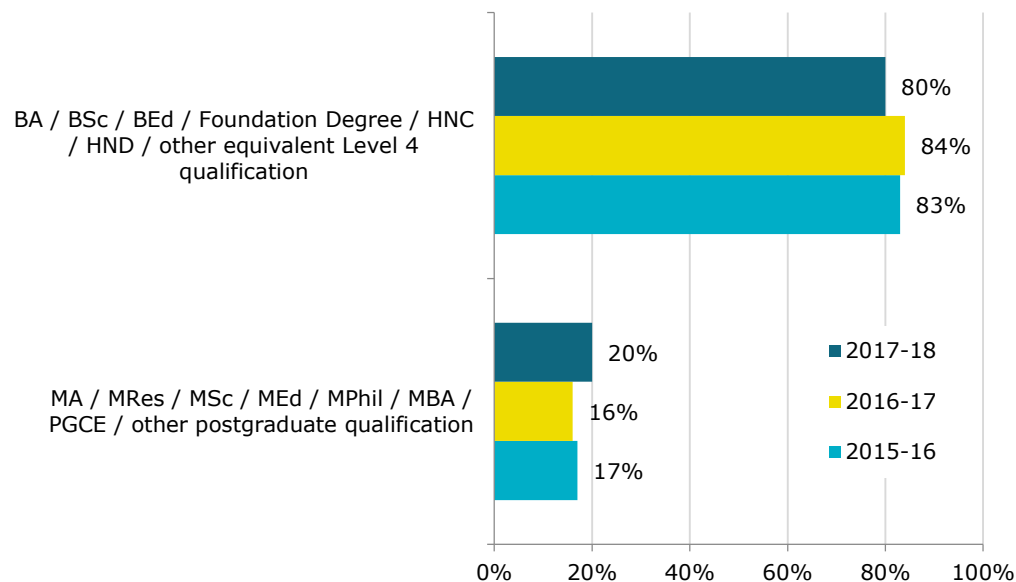
Challenging the way we do things now (like business, politics, education)

## 2. The respondents

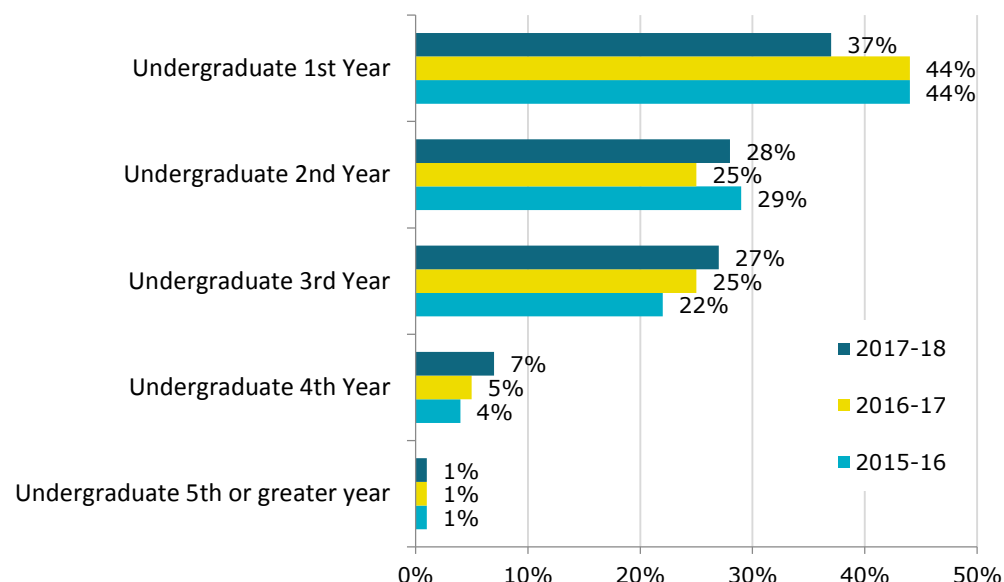


# Respondent demographics

## Level of study

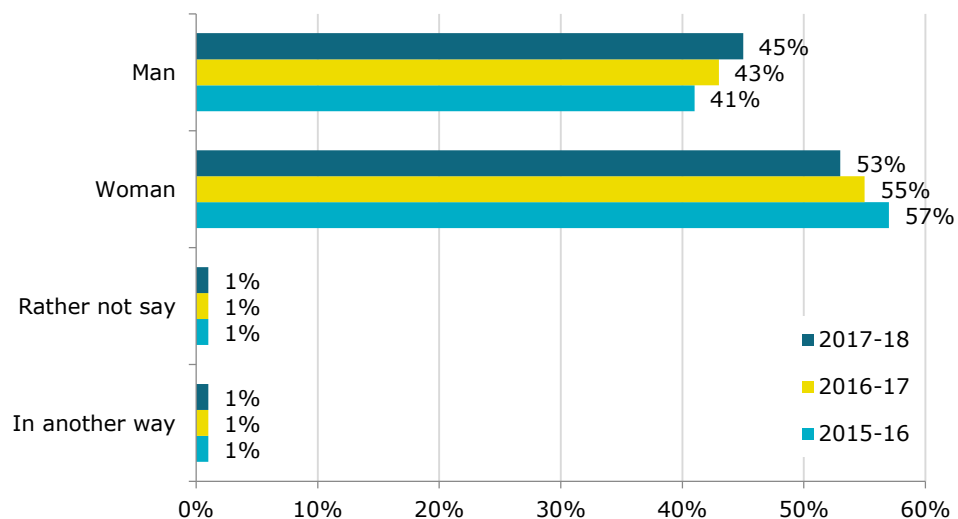


## Year of study (Undergraduates)

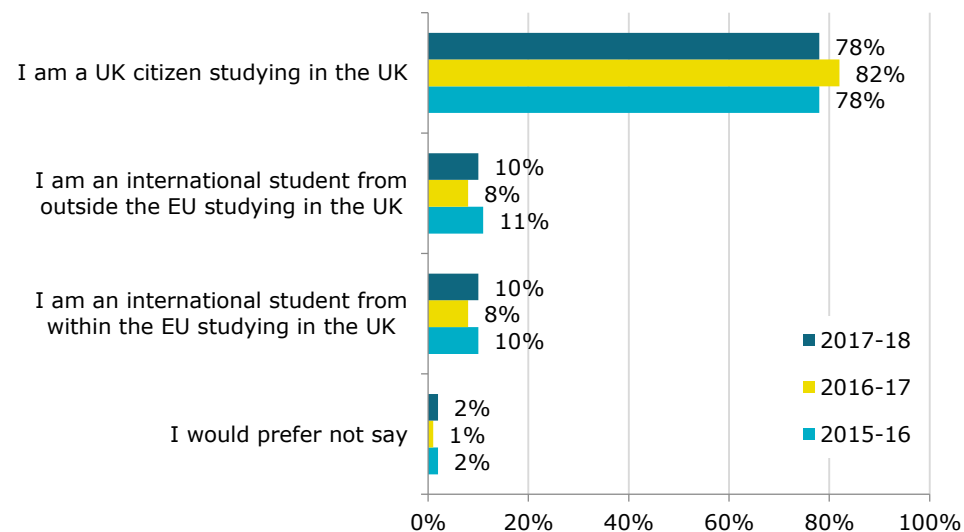


Higher education

## Gender

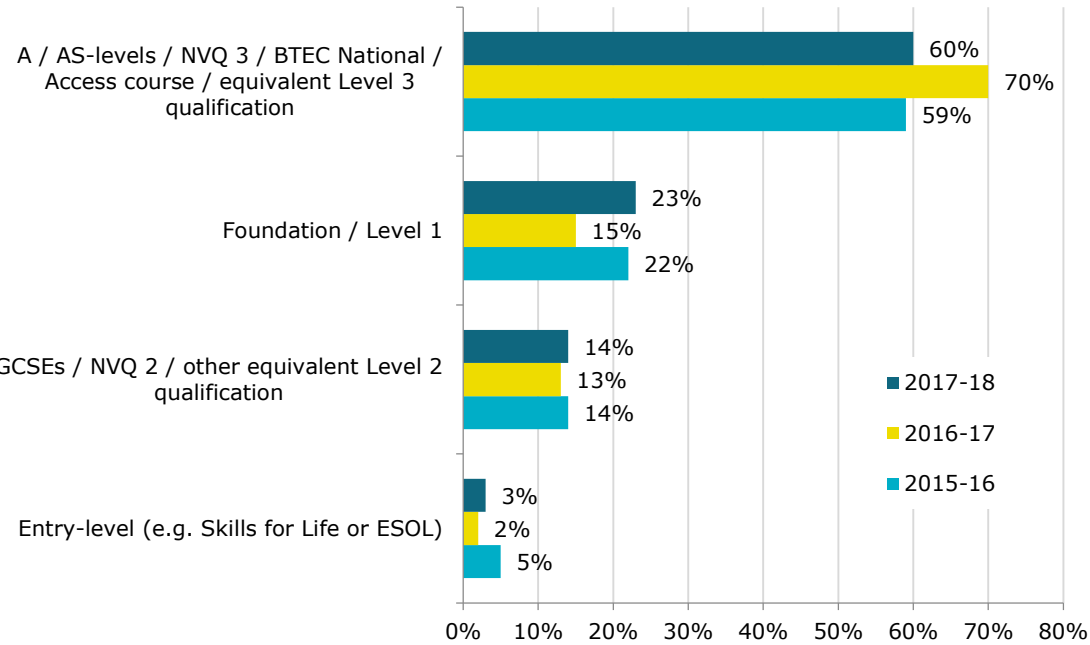


## Nationality

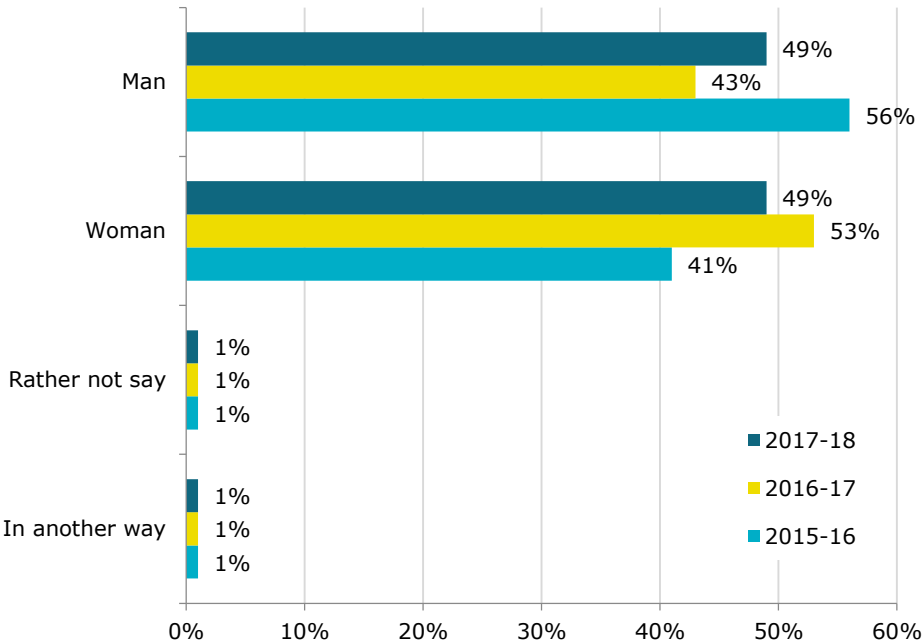


# Respondent demographics

## Level of study

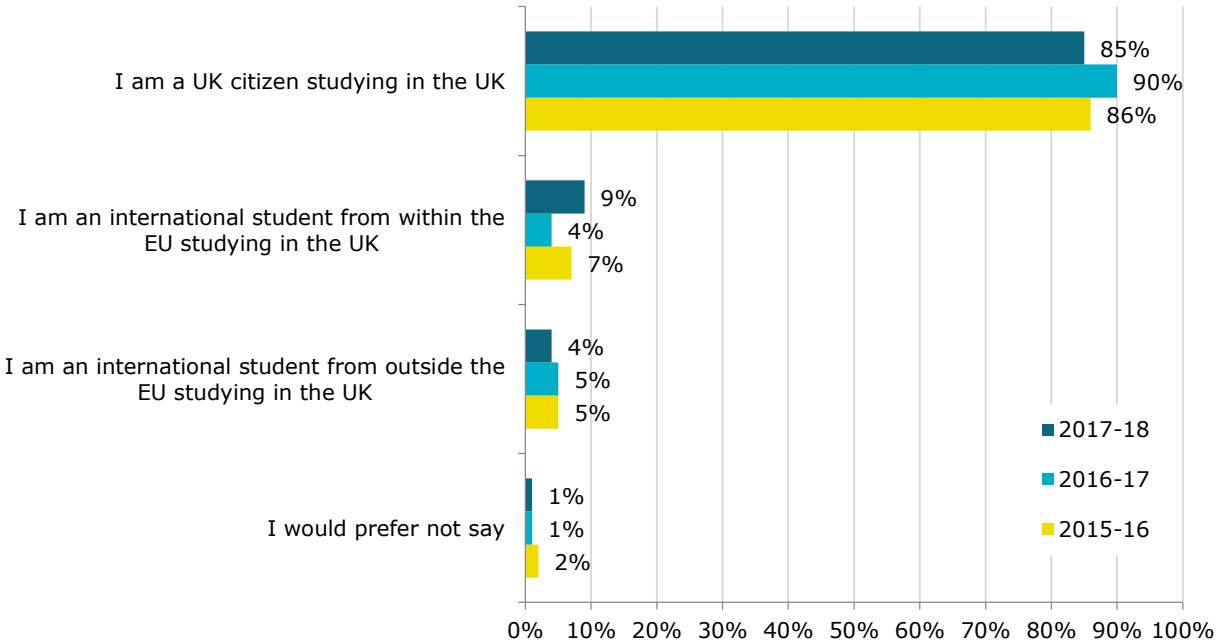


## Gender



## Further education

## Nationality

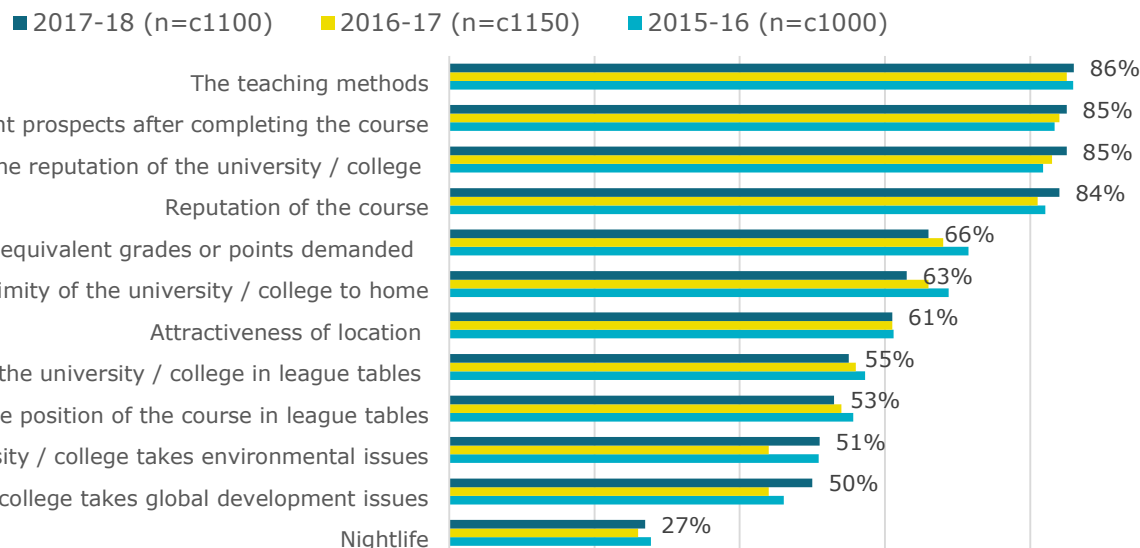


### 3. Expectations for teaching and learning for sustainability

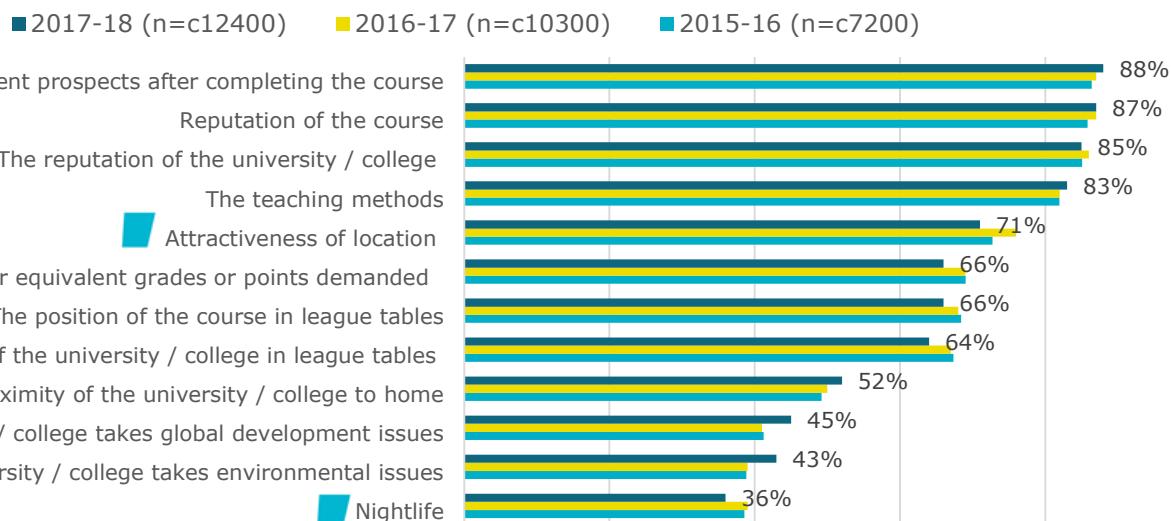
# Important factors influencing choice over place of study?

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, 4 in 10 (43%, n=5309) of HE respondents and 51% of FE (n=560) 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=5623) HE students and 50% (n=554) FE respondents) said this.

## Further education



## Higher education



## Differences by respondent characteristics

- 51% of FE respondents (n=560) are more likely to report being motivated by how seriously their place of study takes environmental issues compared to HE respondents (43%, n=5309) 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=10982) than FE respondents (85%, n=939).
- Women in HE are more likely to say they were influenced by future employment prospects (90%, n=5965) compared with men (87%, n=4799).
- 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 (89%, n=478 compared with 80%, n=432).
- HE respondents who are women are more likely to say they are influenced by teaching methods than male HE respondents (86%, n=5671 compared with 79%, n=4339).
- International HE respondents are more likely to say they were influenced by how seriously the institution takes environmental issues than UK respondents (50%, n=1260 compared with 41%, n=3944).
- 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. 71%, n=1777 compared with 63%, n=6063 UK HE respondents).

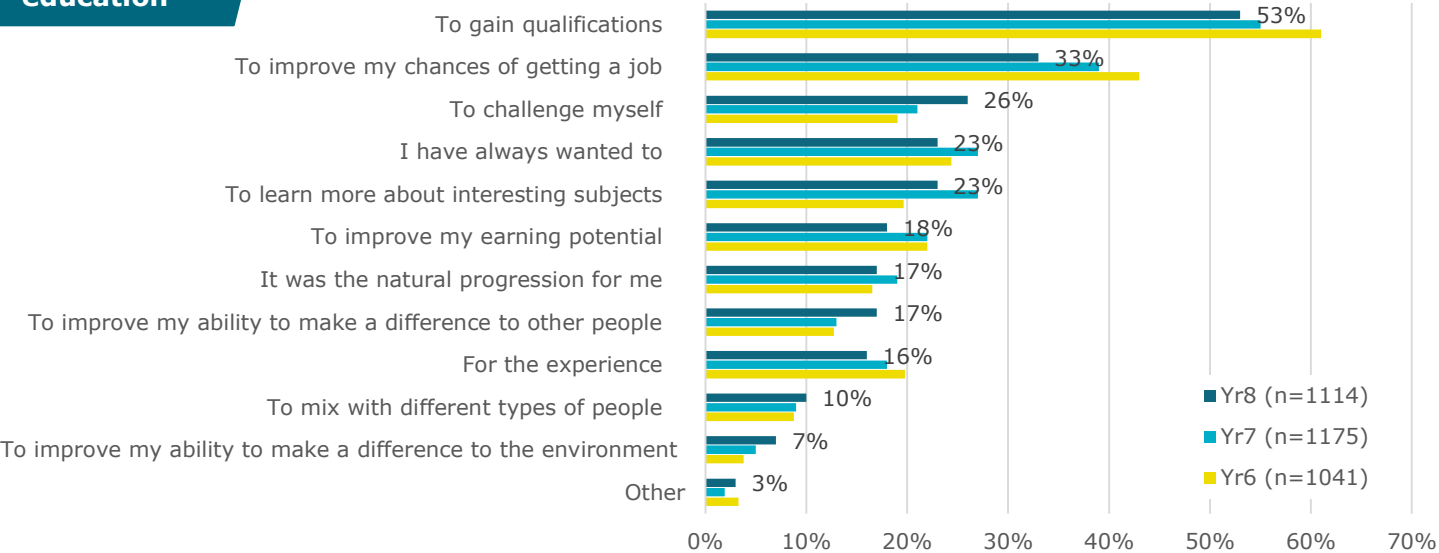
Q. How important were the following when choosing which college or university to apply to?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

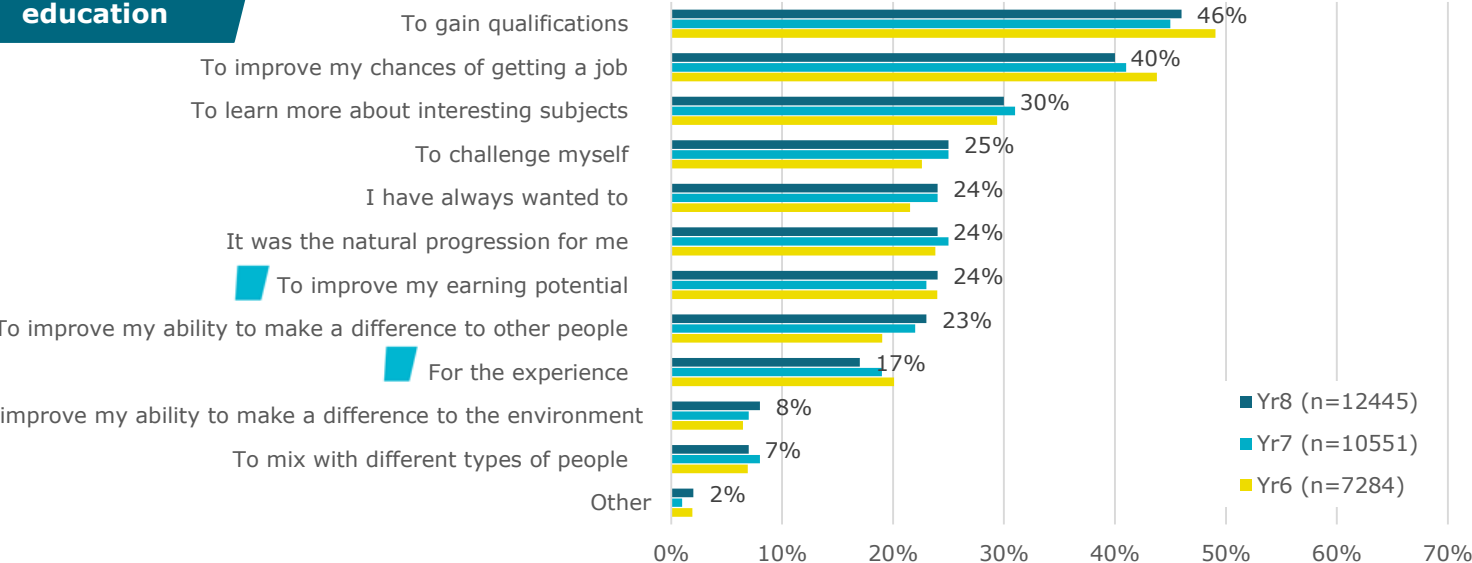
# What influences choice of subject or course?

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. 53% FE respondents (n=594) and 46% HE (n=5683)) and to improve their chances of getting a job (e.g. 33% FE respondents (n=369) and 40% HE (n=4944)). 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. 23% HE respondents (n=2829) say the main reason they chose their course was to improve their ability to make a difference to other people).

## Further education



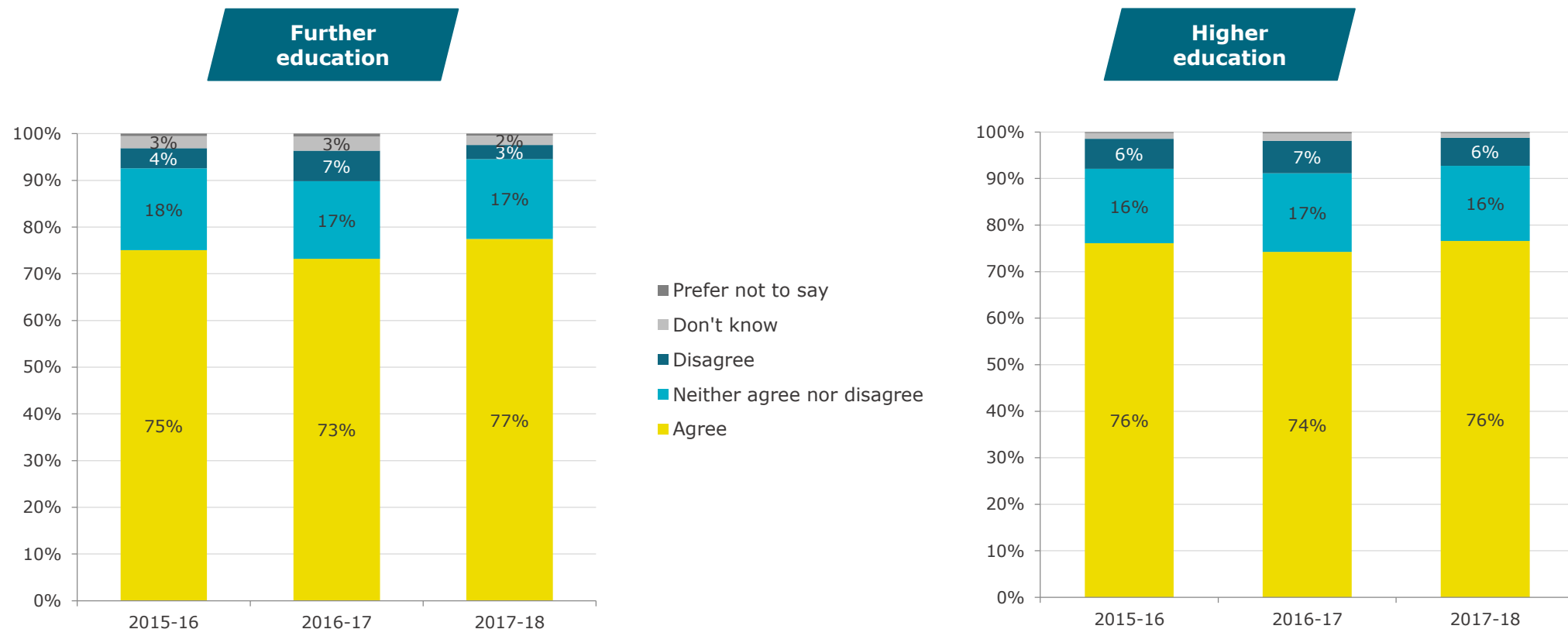
## Higher education



## Differences by respondent characteristics

- FE respondents are slightly more likely to report being motivated by the opportunity to gain qualifications than HE respondents (53%, n=594) compared with 46% (n=5683).
- 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 (23%, n=2829 compared with 17% (n=183)).
- HE respondents are also slightly more likely to report being motivated by the opportunity to improve their ability to make a difference to the environment (8%, n=1020) compared with 7% of FE respondents (n=77)).
- HE respondents who are men are more likely to be taking their course to improve their earnings potential (29%, n=1593), compared to women (21%, n=1379).
- HE UK students are more likely than International students to say they are taking their course to improve their chances of getting a job (41%, n=4031) compared to 33% (n=846).

## 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. 77% FE respondents (n=855) and 76% HE respondents (n=9401)).

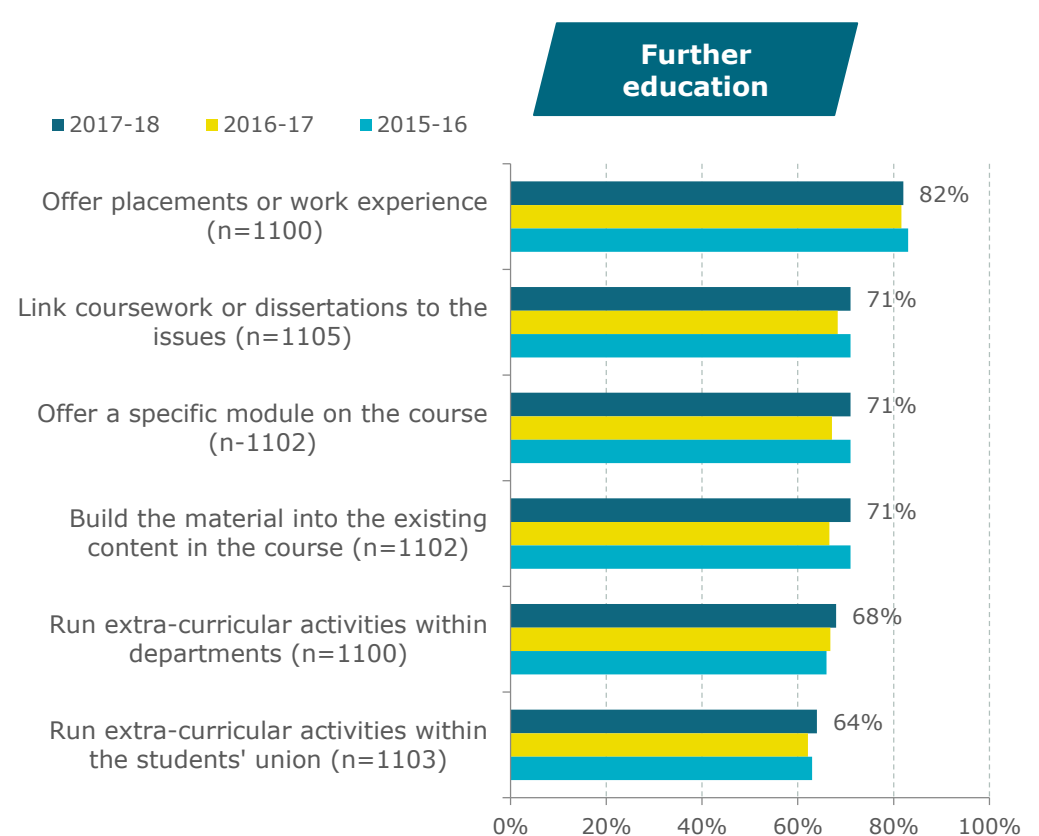
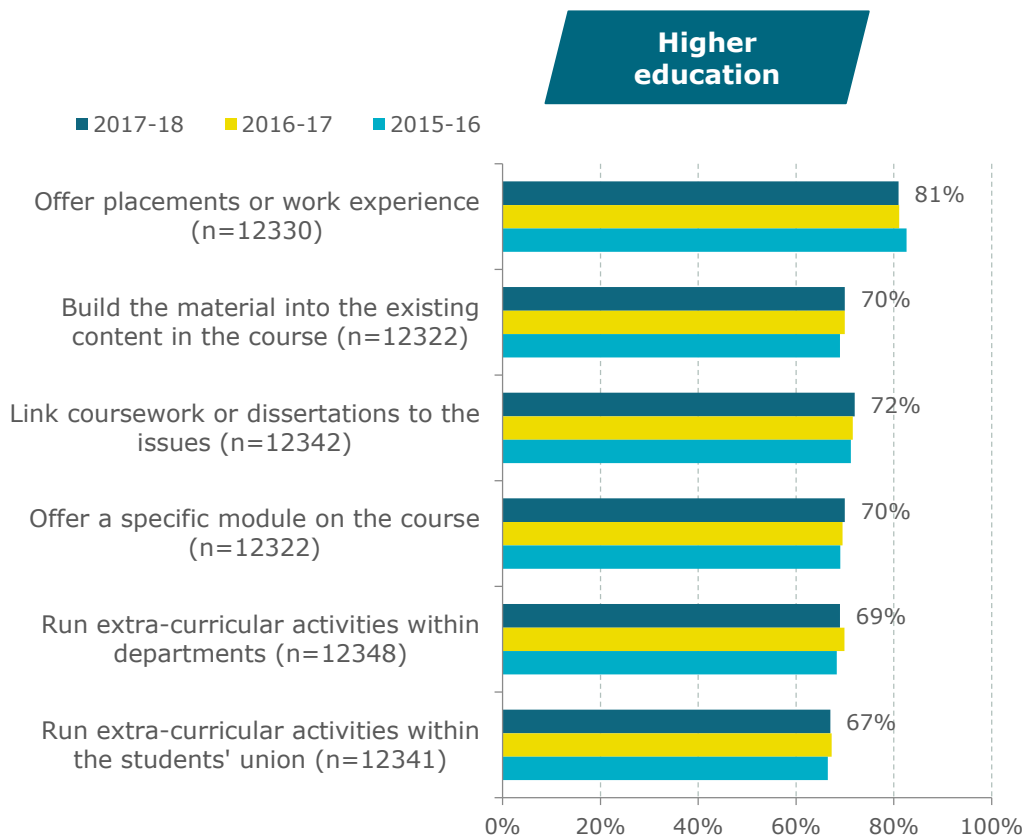
### Differences by respondent characteristics

- 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 than those from within the EU and from the UK (e.g. 83%, n=1057) non-EU respondents agreed compared to 75% (n=7247) UK respondents).
- Amongst HE students women were more likely to agree with this statement than men (79%, n=5192) compared to 74% (n=4045)).

**Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree that universities / colleges should be obliged to develop student's social and environmental skills as part of their courses?**

Weighted Base: Yr8 12360 HE respondents, 1105 FE respondents. Balance: No response

# Relevance of sustainability being 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. 81% of HE and 82% of FE respondents (n=1002 and n=902) respectively).

Building material into existing course content (70% HE, n=9052) and (71%, n=779) FE saw this method as relevant) and linking to coursework and dissertations (72% HE, n=8913) and 71% (n=781) FE)) were also seen as relevant methods of including skills and knowledge for sustainability.

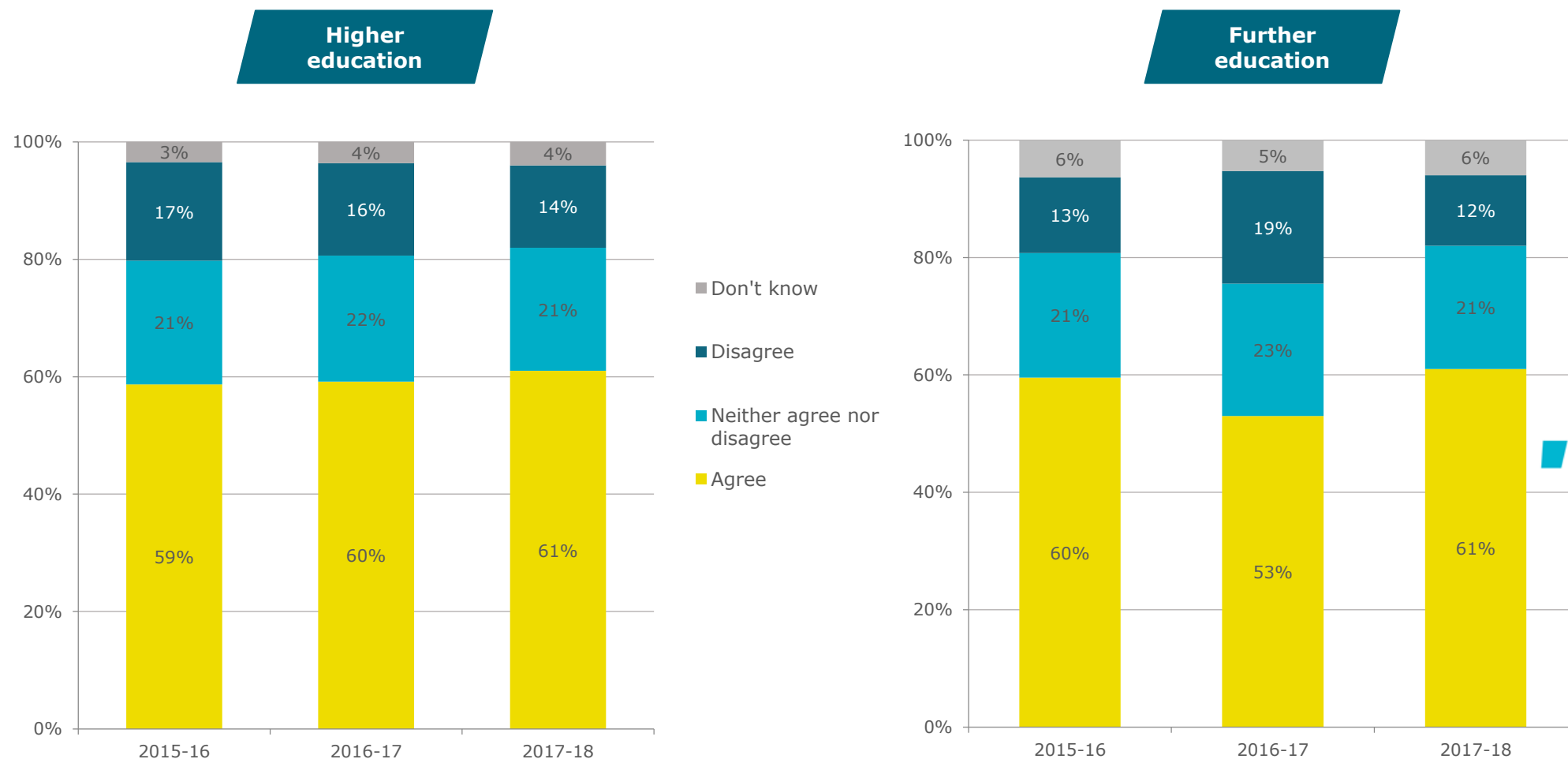
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Within HE, Non EU International students had stronger preferences for offering placements (87% (n=1095) than UK students (81%, n=7767). EU students were more likely to say that building material into coursework was more relevant (73%, n=1817) than UK students (69%, n=6616).
- HE women respondents (84%, n=5561) are more likely to report that offering placements or work experience is relevant compared to HE respondents who are men (78%, n=4282). 73% of HE women (n=4779) say extra-curricular activities within their department is a relevant way to learn about sustainability compared to 65% (n=3571) men respondents.
- Amongst FE respondents women were more likely than men to say placements being offered were relevant (87% (n=468)) compared to 79% (n=422) and linking coursework (76%, n=413) compared to 66% of men (n=358).

**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: 2017-18 figures in brackets Balance: No response

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



The same proportion of FE respondents as HE respondents felt they were able to contribute to the development of the curriculum for their course (61%, n=670) compared to HE respondents (61%, n=7504).

### Differences by respondent characteristics

- No significant differences according to respondent characteristics were seen across FE or HE respondents.

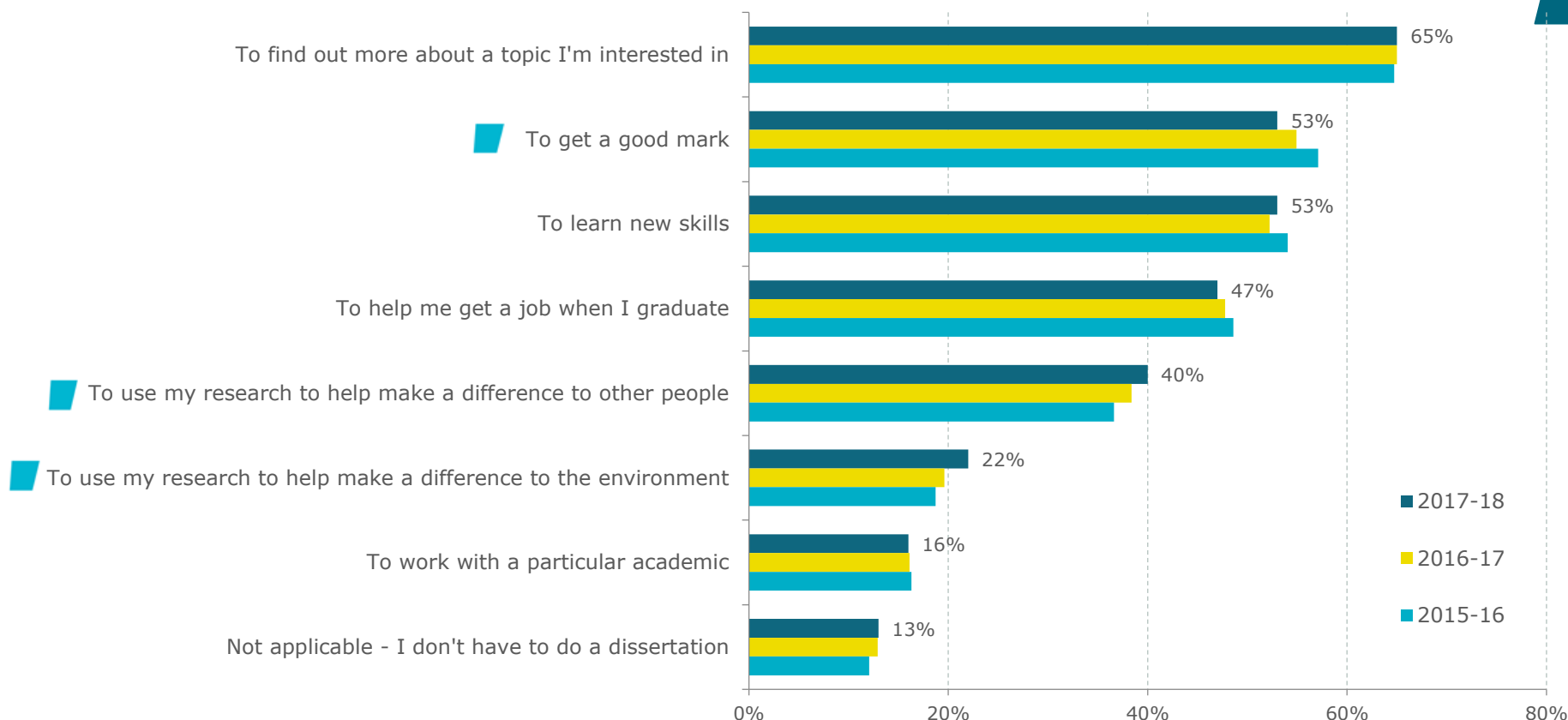
**Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement "I am able to contribute to the development of the curriculum for my course"?**

Weighted base: 2017-18: 12105 HE respondents, 1054 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.

For around two thirds of respondents (65%, n=7783) completing a dissertation is an opportunity to find out more about a topic they are interested in. Just over half see their dissertation as an opportunity to get a good mark (53%, n=6390) and to learn new skills (53%, n=6380), which will in turn help them to get a job when they graduate (47%, n=5618).

Two in five respondents see their dissertation as an opportunity to carry out research that will make a difference to other people (40%, n=4871). 22% reported that their dissertation is an opportunity to complete research that helps make a difference to the environment (n=2671).

## Differences by respondent characteristics

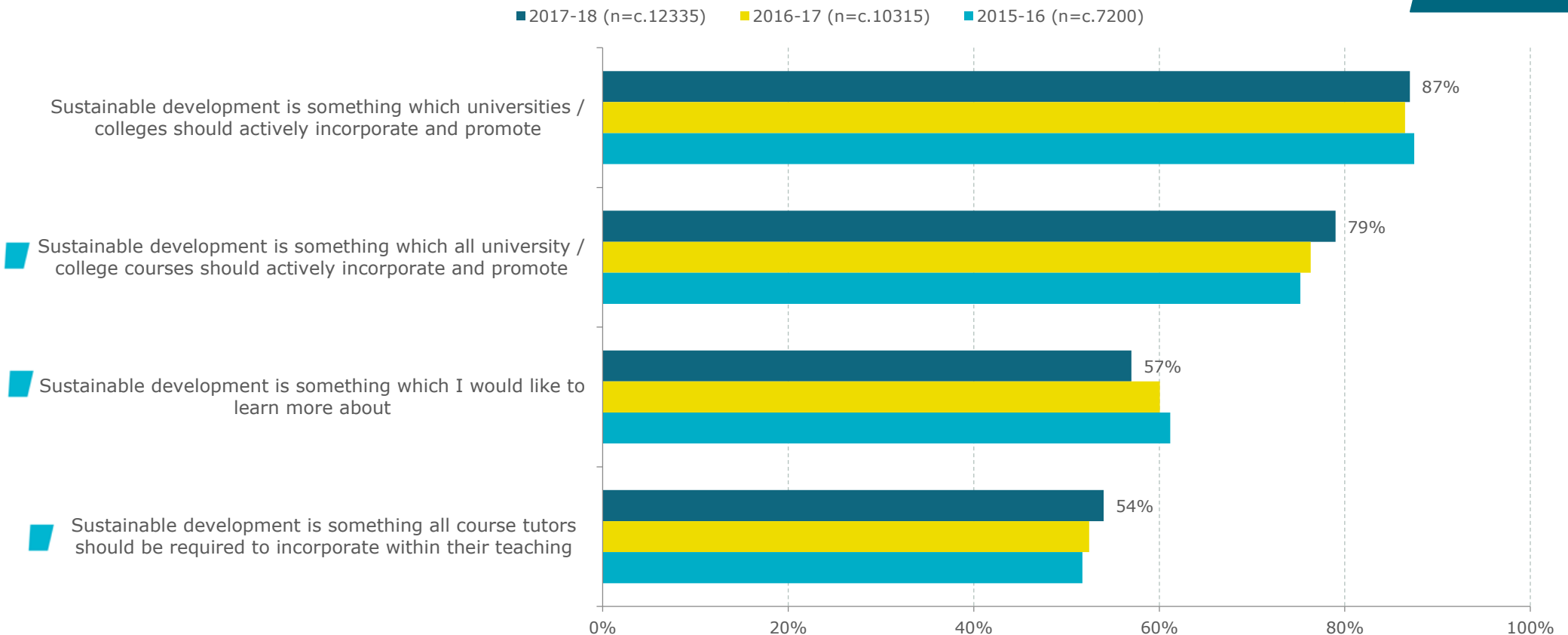
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates are significantly less likely to see completing a dissertation as a way of helping them get a job when they graduate, compared to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduates (e.g. 43%, n=1140) 3<sup>rd</sup> years compared with 52% (n=1414) 2<sup>nd</sup> years and 50% (n=1743) 1<sup>st</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=1573) and 58% (n=1535) respectively, compared to 49% of 1<sup>st</sup> years selecting this option (n=1698).
- 1<sup>st</sup> yr students are more likely than 4th yrs to report seeing their dissertation as a means of helping other people (e.g. 41%, n=1412 1<sup>st</sup> years want to use their research to help other people compared with 31% (n=216) 4th years and 37% (n=968) 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: Yr8 12037 HE respondents. Balance: No response and those not in HE

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

Higher education



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 87% (n=10784) saying they agree with this statement.

8 in 10 (79%, n=9769) 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 (54%, n=6727).

Just under two thirds agree that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about (57%, n=7085).

## 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. 92%, n=1161) than UK respondents (87%, n=8374) and 88% (n=1078) 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. 54%, n=5246) UK respondents agree compared with 65% (n=795) EU respondents and 73% (n=920) 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 82% (n=5364) agreeing compared with 77% (n=4222) 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

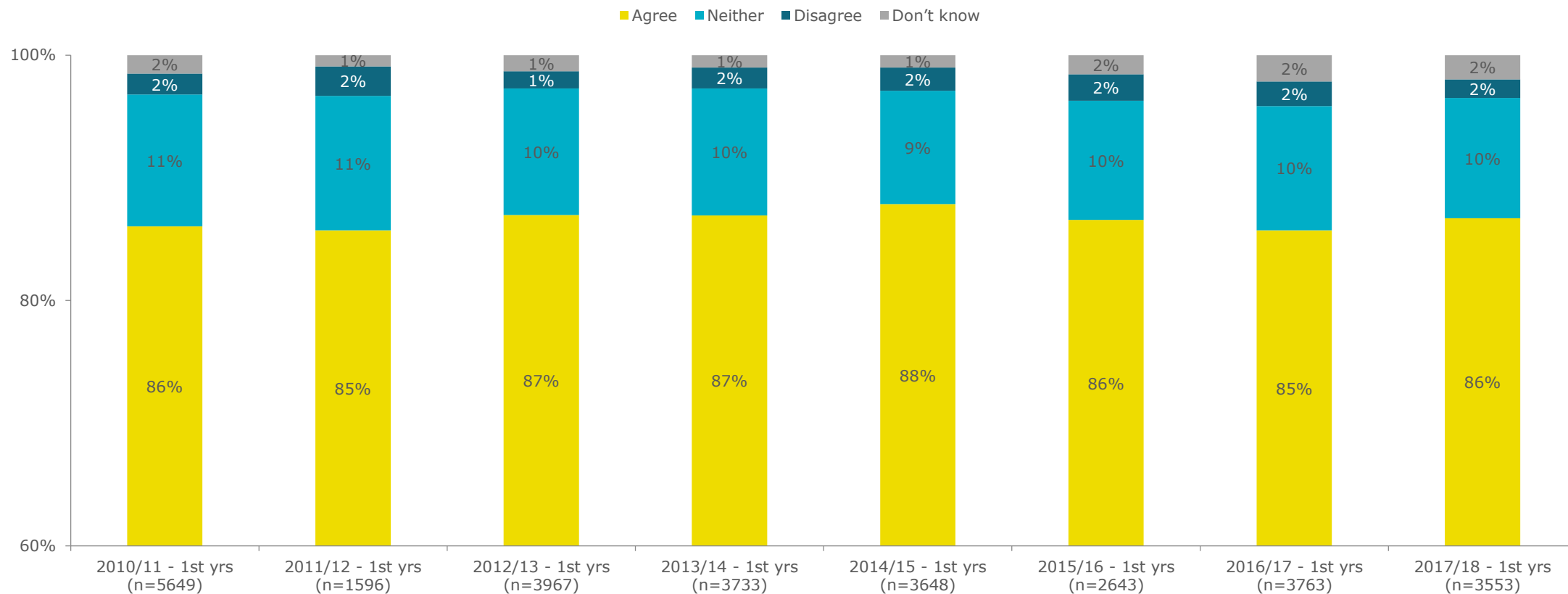
# What expectations do students have for their university?

As mentioned previously, almost 90% 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

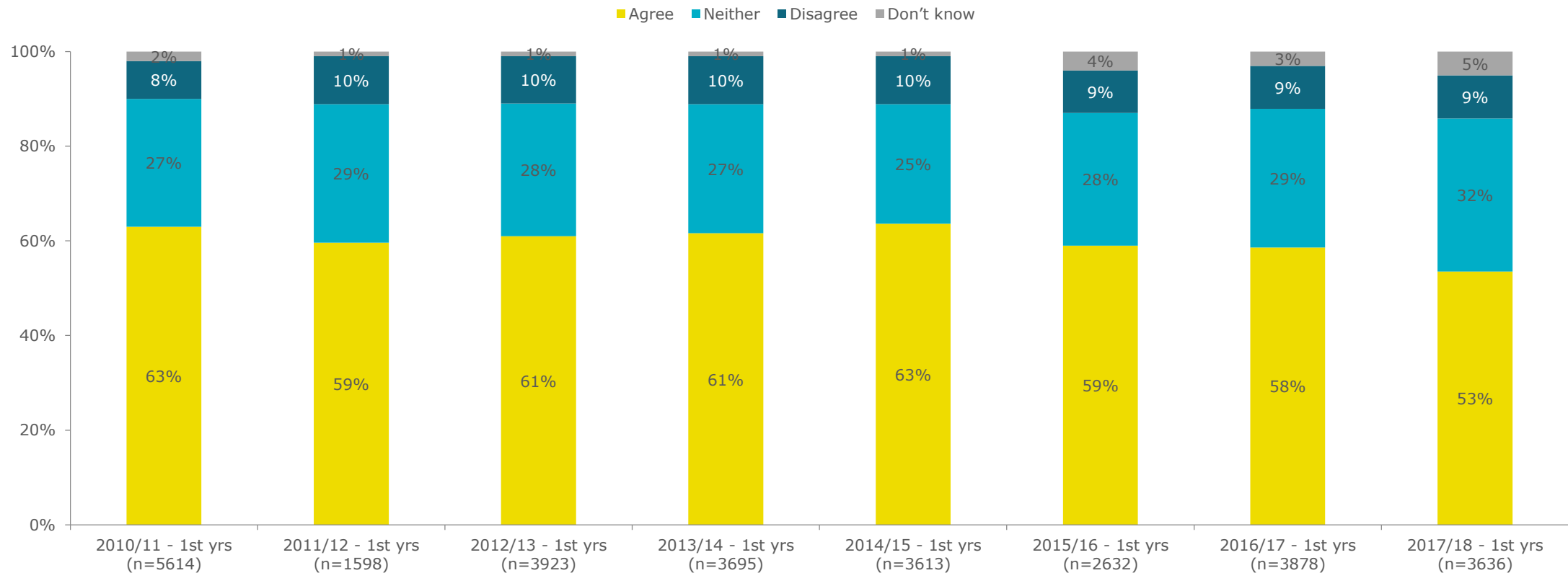
## Do students want to learn more about sustainability?

Amongst 1<sup>st</sup> year HE students there is less demand for learning about sustainable development compared to the previous 2 rounds of research, with just over half of respondents saying they would like to learn more (53%, n=1925).

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...

Significantly  
higher than  
2011/12 and  
2012/13

Significantly  
lower than  
2010/11  
and  
2014/15

Significantly  
lower than  
2010/11 and  
2014/15

Significantly  
lower than  
2010/11

Significantly  
higher than  
2011/12 and  
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Significantly  
lower than  
2010/11,  
2012/13  
2013/14 and  
2014/15

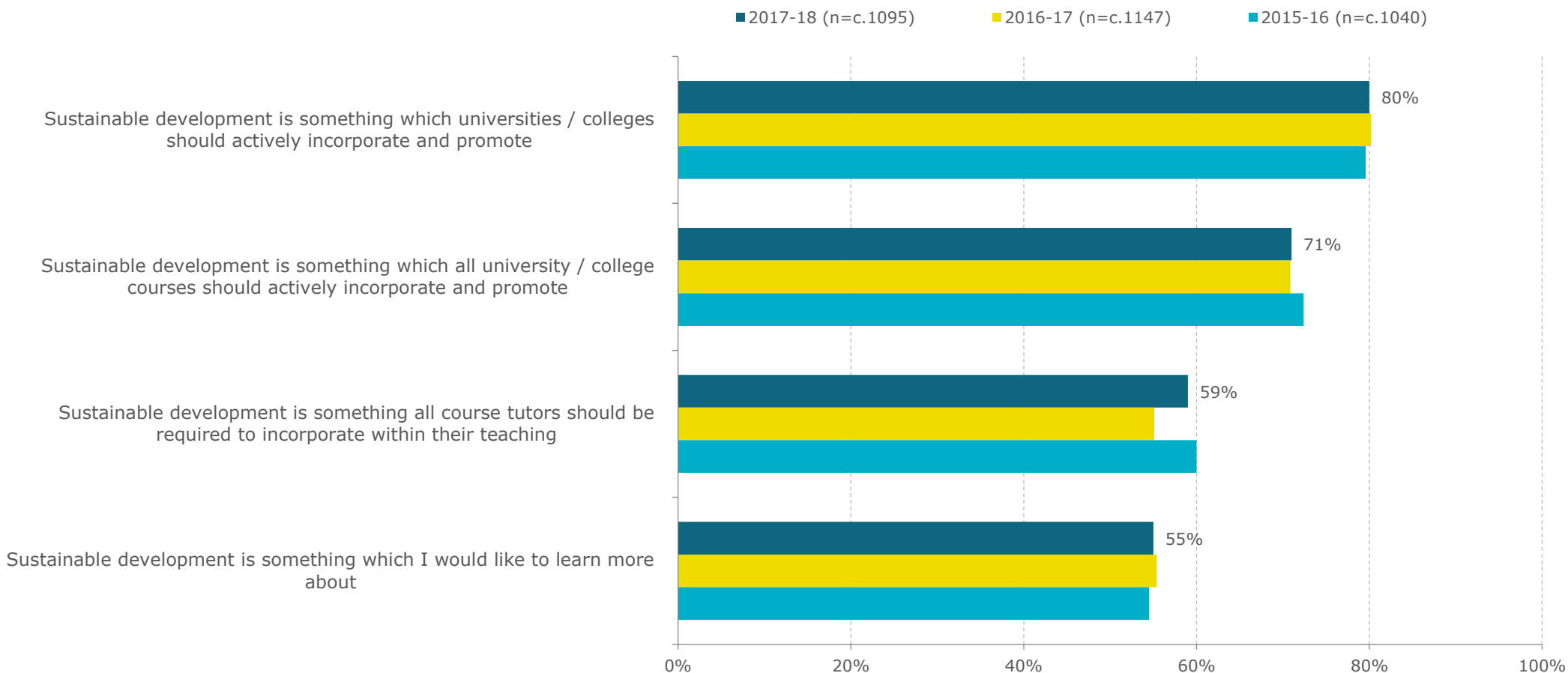
Significantly  
lower than  
2010/11,  
2012/13  
2013/14 and  
2014/15

**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 (80%, n=875).

Almost three quarters of FE respondents (71%, n=782) also agree that all courses should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development. Just over half agree that course tutors should be required to incorporate sustainability within their teaching (59%, n=648).

Just over half of respondents say that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about (55%, n=595).

## 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 (76%, n=403 compared with 68%, n=365).
- International respondents (71%, n=35) were more likely to say they would like to learn more about sustainable development than EU (67%, n=65) and UK respondents (52%, n=487).

**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 350 completed responses from both HE and FE respondents were coded and show that the most common reason respondents reported was that they believe having an understanding of sustainability will be important for their own and their families future. In most cases, respondents expressed a general concern about the future of the planet, whereas some directly related it to their future careers. There was also a desire to take action/make a difference and a view that it was important to know about and understand.

### Further education

### Higher education

It's useful / important for future	105	123
So I can take action in this area/make a difference	79	79
It's important to know about	75	110
To understand issues better	71	75
I don't know what it means	37	17
It's useful / interesting in general	18	17

"It's important that we do not impact the environment negatively during our lifetime. People need education in all aspects of sustainable development to ensure that we all think about our actions before it's too late."  
*Woman FE respondent, UK*

"Because I think that it is the most important topic for the future and for the next generations good."  
*Woman HE respondent, Non EU, 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate*

"I believe that without sustainable development that we won't be able to keep the world running to the best it can, and we will end up damaging it for the future."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate*

"Resources are not unlimited, therefore we need to understand it and create new ways to do things we do now assuming resources will never be gone."  
*Man Masters respondent, Non EU*

"To encourage sustainable development, it's necessary to understand it completely. I'm always looking for information about sustainability and I would be happy to learn directly from the experts."  
*Man Masters respondent, Non EU*

"Because it's important for the future of the world, and if I know more about it then I can be more equipped to help make a difference."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 2<sup>nd</sup> yr undergraduate*

"Because I believe that before you can make a difference to the world and the universe, that you should learn more about the problem and how to fix it."  
*Woman FE respondent UK*

"To see how I can make a difference on a personal level."  
*Woman HE respondent, Non EU*

"I think it will open my mind to new and current things that I should consider. This would be interesting to learn about."  
*Woman Masters respondent, UK*

## 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 350 responses from FE and HE responses were coded and revealed that on the whole, respondents indicate uncertainty over specific actions they want to see their institutions take. In some cases this was attributed to a lack of knowledge on what is currently going on, asking for further communications in this area. Respondents in HE and FE in particular reported being keen to see sustainability incorporated further into both courses and wider life at college or university. HE respondents were clear that they wanted to see more activities and interventions which encourage people to take action. Respondents also highlighted a desire for institutions to provide information on how their institution was performing.

	Further education	Higher education
Not sure / Don't know	155	118
Incorporate it into the course/student life	117	106
More activities and interventions which encourage people to be more environmentally friendly / take action	84	143
More awareness / information generally on sustainability and what the college / university is doing	47	51

"Students having to participate in sustainability initiatives as a compulsory part of their course."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK 4th year undergraduate*

"Incorporate it into every course they teach, not as an add-on but as an integral part."  
*Woman Masters respondent, UK*

"Attempt to be even more environmentally friendly and get students involved, also have employability courses which address sustainability as well as how to be a good employee or applicant."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 3rd year undergraduate*

"Provide food waste bins in accommodations! It should definitely include some sort of very short intro lecture to people on how to recycle as many people simply throw anything into the recycling bins."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 1<sup>st</sup> yr undergraduate*

"Open day events, especially at freshers week. Meet ups and groups to go for walks in local parks to educate them about the wildlife and land we need to protect. Open day for growing your own food on allotments. More things online as there is a huge paper waste especially when you are printing off many journals for a dissertation or your coursework. Ensuring all plastics and paper can be recycled. There is also a terrible amount of food waste from food not bought in the canteen and packaging on things can often be excessive."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 4th year undergraduate*

"For it to be talked about more. Whether this be events to promote sustainability, talks, or for it to be included in an assignment, anything which raises awareness and makes people realise it is a current issue."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 2nd year undergraduate*

"Putting more funding into the 'green team'."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate*

"To promote throughout, extra curricular activities more learning opportunities."  
*Woman FE respondent, UK, 4<sup>th</sup> yr undergraduate*

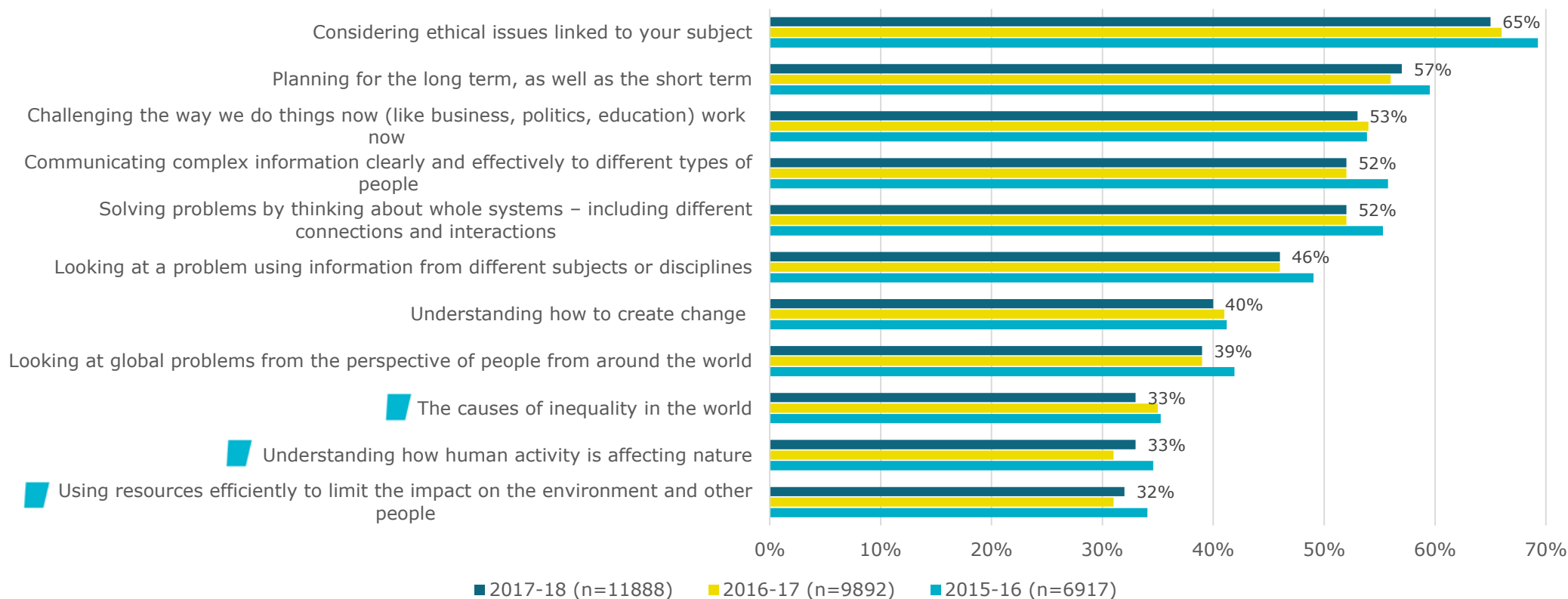
## 4. Experiences of sustainability in education





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

Higher education



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

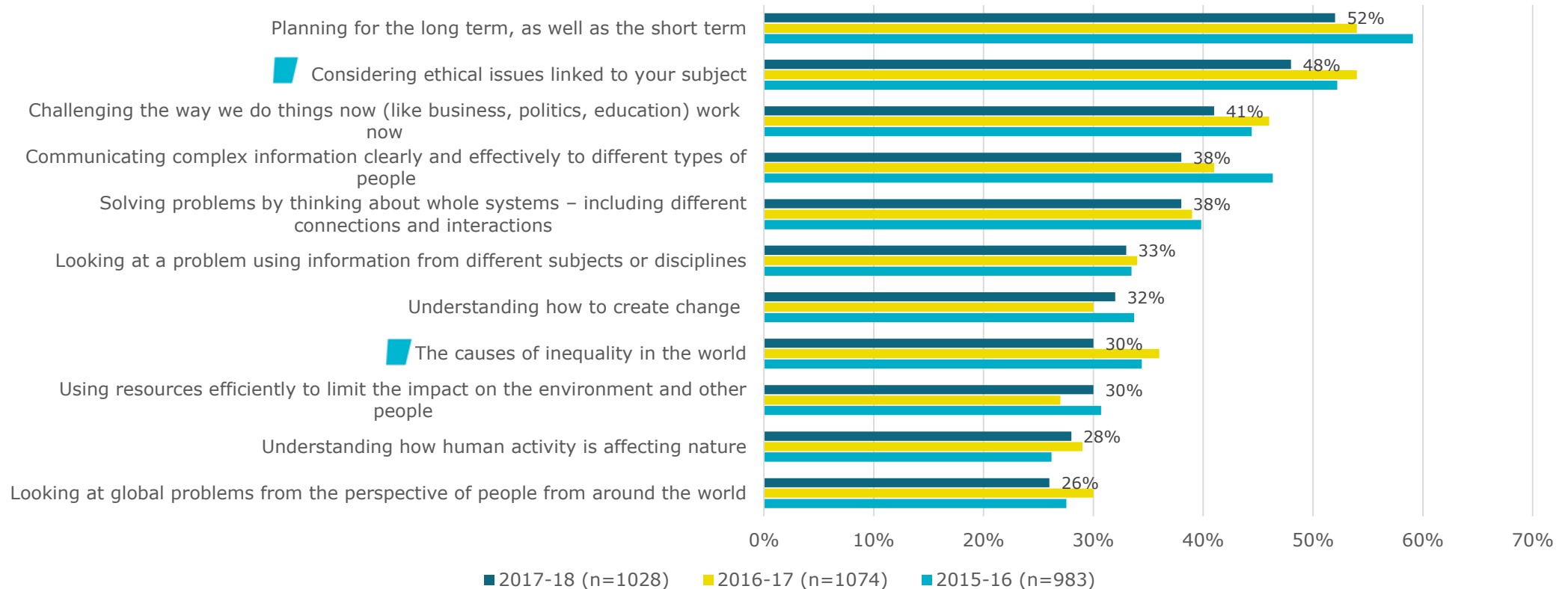
Most commonly, HE and FE respondents report coverage of 'considering the ethical issues linked to their subject' (65%, (n=7776) HE respondents and 48% (n=492) FE respondents and being 'able to plan for the long term as well as the short term' (57% (n=6789) HE respondents and 52% (n= 533) FE respondents).

## 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. 67%, n=6234 compared with 60%, n=721 EU respondents and 57%, n=710 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=4534 compared to 59%, n=3079). They are also more likely to say 'the causes of inequality in the world' has been covered (37%, n=2387 compared with 28%, n=1441) of men.
- HE respondents who are men, are more likely to say their teaching has 'used resources efficiently to limit the impact on the environment and other people' than women HE respondents (35%, n=1841 compared with 30%, n=1947).

# 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

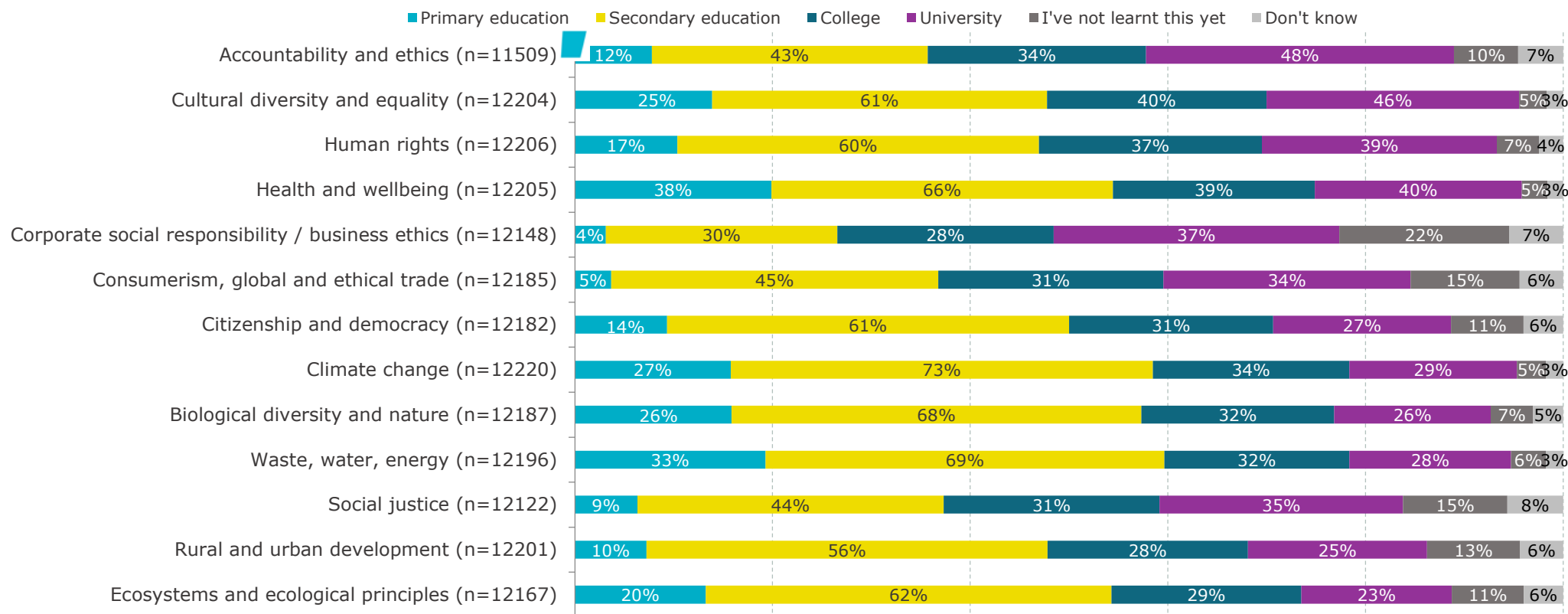
Most commonly, HE and FE respondents report coverage of 'considering the ethical issues linked to their subject' (65%, (n=7776) HE respondents and 48% (n=492) FE respondents and being 'able to plan for the long term as well as the short term' (57% (n=6789) HE respondents and 52% (n= 533) FE respondents). There has been a significant decline in the 2017-18 results in the proportion of FE respondents saying their learning covers 'ethical issues linked to their subject'.

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Within FE, women respondents are more likely to say their teaching has covered 'considering ethical issues linked to their subject' than men (55%, n=278 compared to 41%, n=208).
- Male FE respondents are more likely than women to say their teaching has covered 'understanding how human activity is affecting nature' (32%, n=160 compared to 24%, n=122).
- UK FE respondents are more likely to say their teaching has covered 'considering ethical issues' than non UK students (50%, n=440 compared with 33%, n=31 students from within the EU and 32% n= 15 students from outside the EU).

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

Higher education – 2017-18



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 73% (n=8941) of respondents say climate change was covered at this point. However, it is worth bearing in mind that almost a third 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 (48%, n=5552) and cultural diversity and equality (46%, n=5553).

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 2016-17.

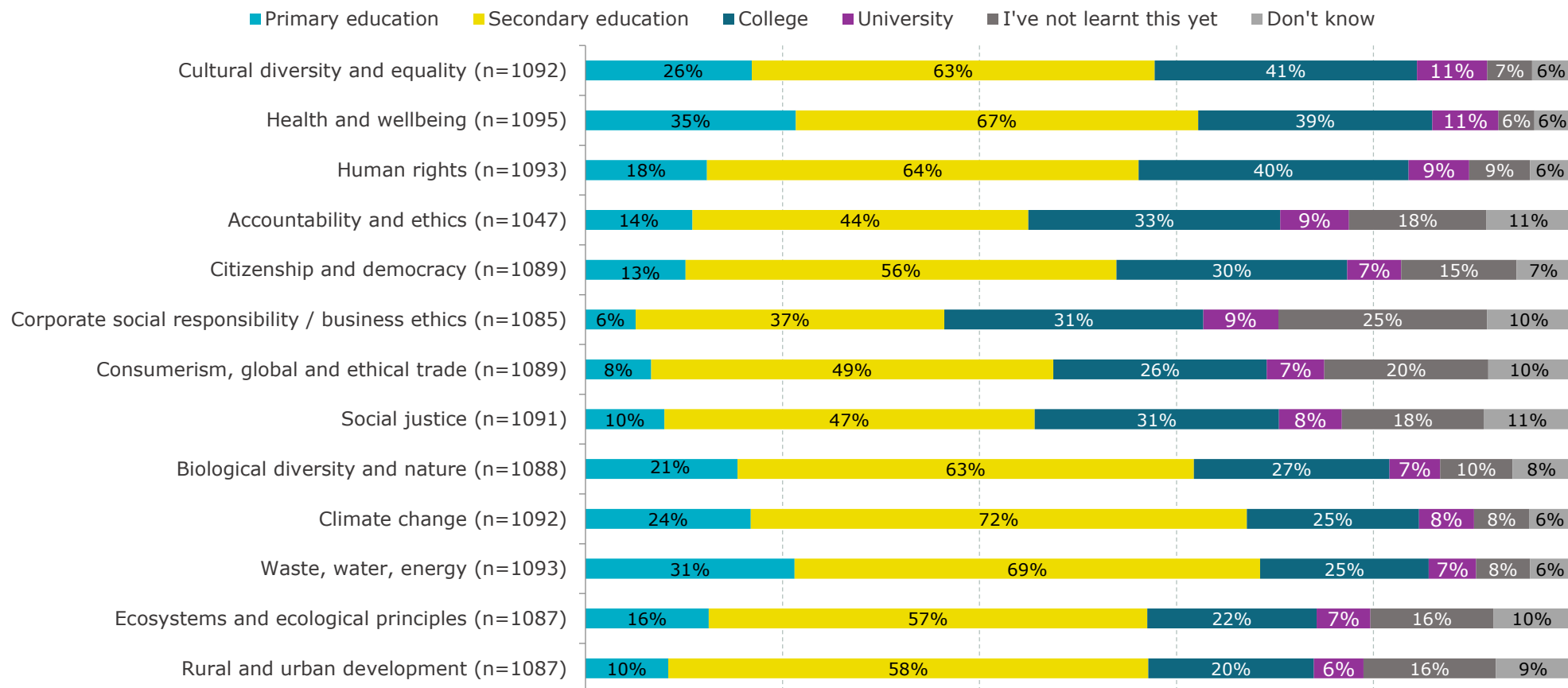
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- 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, 53% (n=1809) 1<sup>st</sup> years say accountability and ethics was covered during secondary education compared with 40% (n=983) 3<sup>rd</sup> years, whilst 29% (n=985) 1<sup>st</sup> years say this issue has been covered during university compared with 57% (n=1414) 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. 22%, (n=279) non-EU respondents say corporate social responsibility/business ethics was covered during secondary education compared with 32% (n=2994) UK respondents).



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

Further education – 2017-18



Respondents who were identified as studying at further education level also 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, 72% (n=784) say climate change was covered during their time in secondary school, and 69% (n=753) 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=445) say cultural diversity and equality has been covered, and 22% (n=243) say ecosystems and ecological principles have been covered at this place of education.

## Differences by respondent characteristics

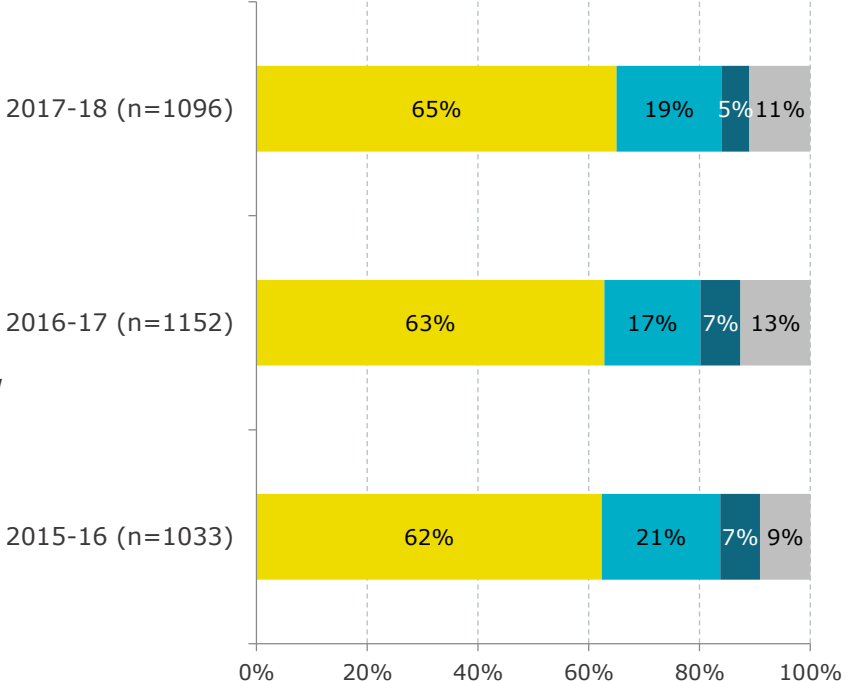
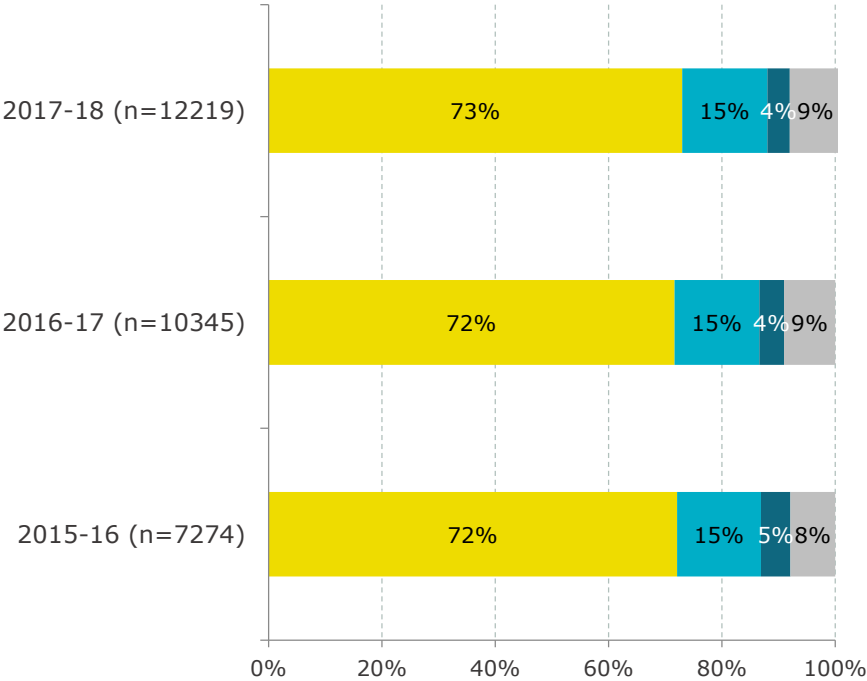
- UK FE respondents are more likely than EU and non-EU respondents to say they had learned about these issues at secondary school. For example 74% (n=689) UK respondents said climate change was covered at secondary school compared to 59% EU respondents (n=58) and 64% non-EU respondents (n=30).

# 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

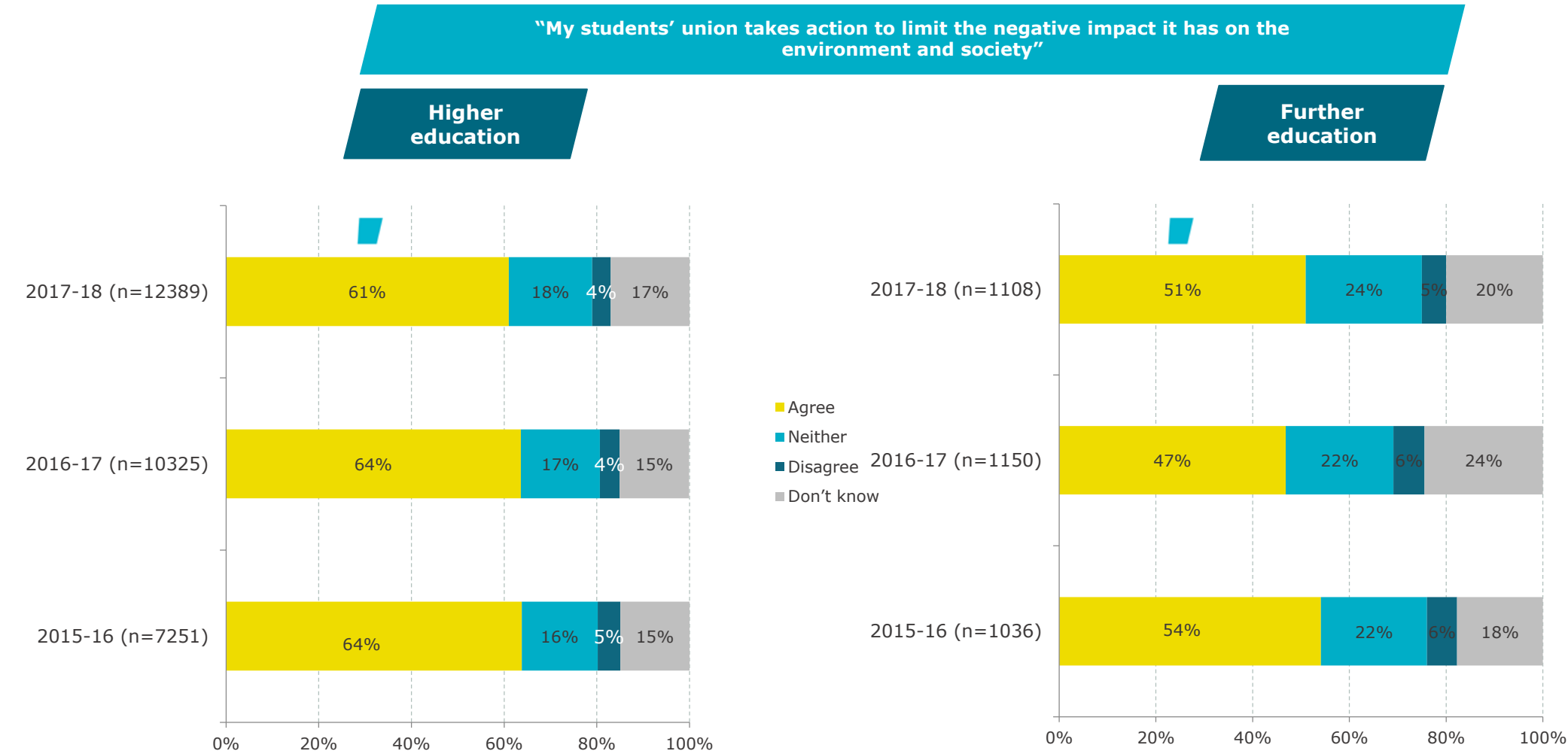
Overall, respondents have a positive view of their institutions and students’ unions in terms of the action they take to reduce negative impacts on the environment and society.

Almost three quarters of HE respondents (73%, n=8878) agree that their university is taking action in this area, however around 2 in 3 FE respondents share this belief (65%, n=716).

### 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 (78% agree, n=980) compared to EU students (73% (n=879) and UK students (72%, n=6889).

# 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.

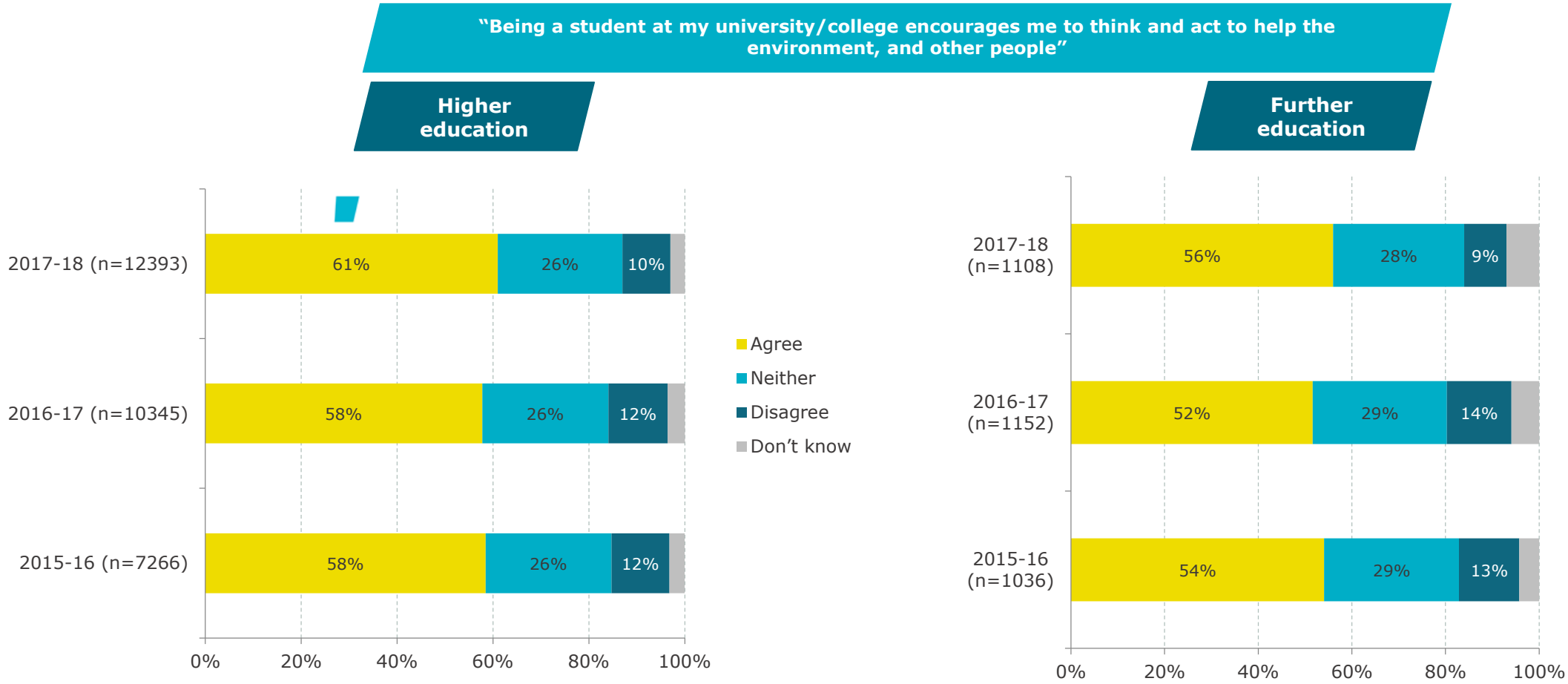
6 in 10 HE respondents see their students' union taking action to address its negative impact on the environment and society (61%, n= 7533). This is a significant decline since the Yr7 survey.

Half (51%) of FE respondents believe this to be the case (n=566), this has significantly improved since the previous survey.

## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Amongst HE respondents women are more likely than men to agree their SU takes action to limit the impact it has on the environment and society (62% agree, n=4124) compared to 59% men (n=3256).
- Non-EU students are more likely to agree with this statement (67% agree, n=849) compared to EU students (61% (n=743) and UK students (60%, n=5830).

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



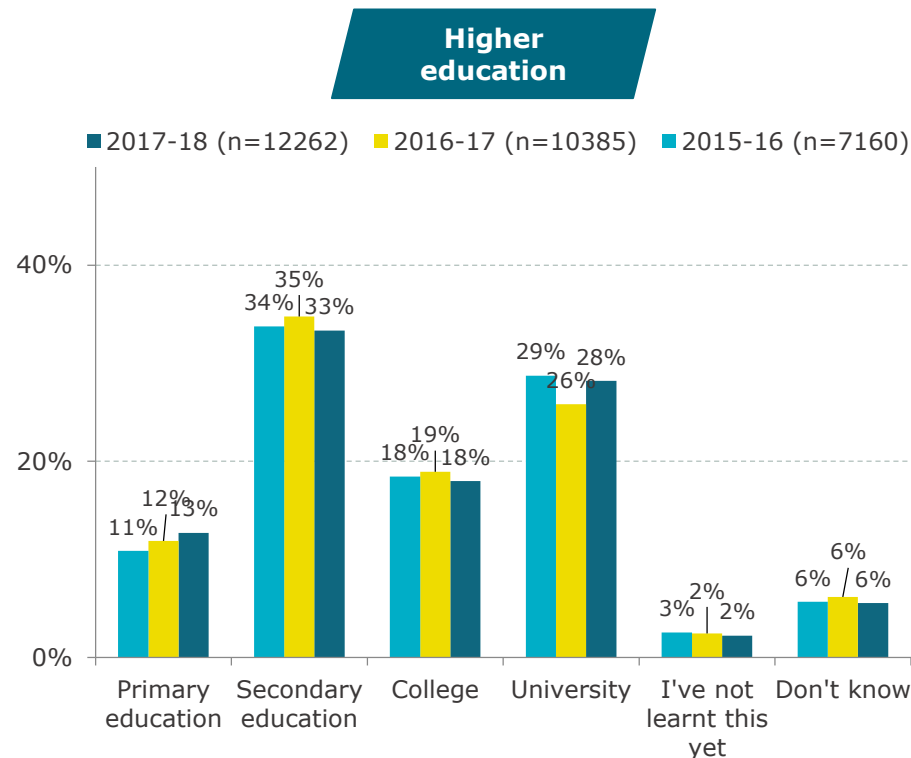
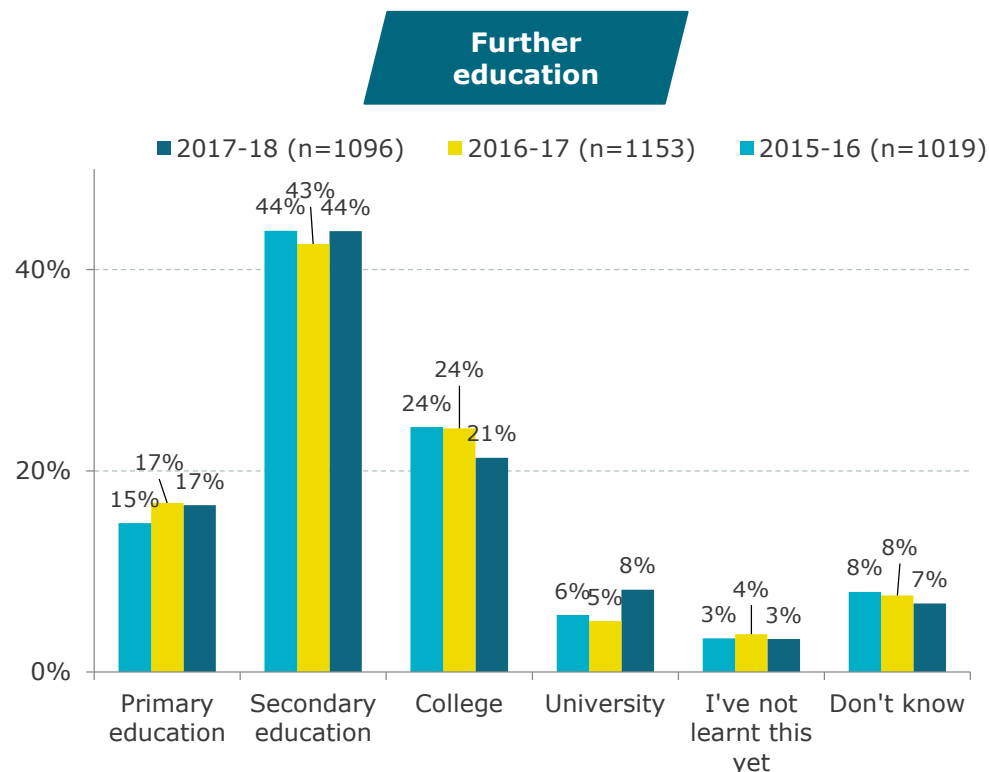
Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact their current place of study has had on their personal attitudes and actions to help the environment and other people. Over half of respondents in FE (56%, n=626) and HE (61%, n=7534) agree that being a student at their university or college encourages 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. 72% (n=917) non-EU international respondents agree compared with 68% (n=833) respondents from the EU and 59% (n=5666) 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 (44%, n=481 FE respondents and 35%, n=3565 HE respondents).

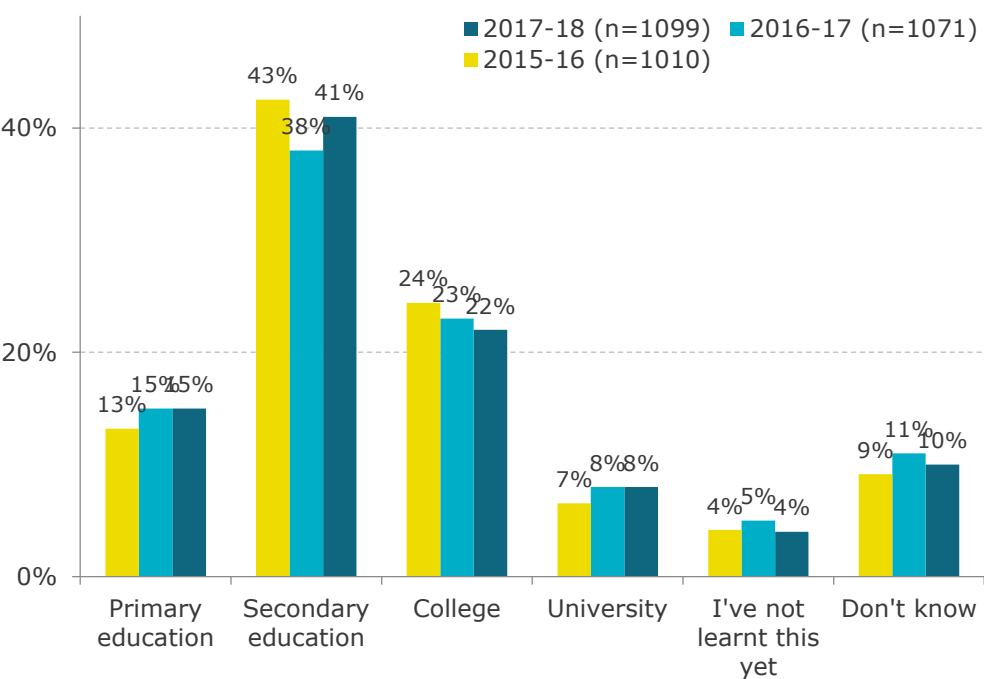
University is reported as being the strongest influence for a quarter of HE respondents (26%, n=2646).

## Differences by respondent characteristics (2016/17)

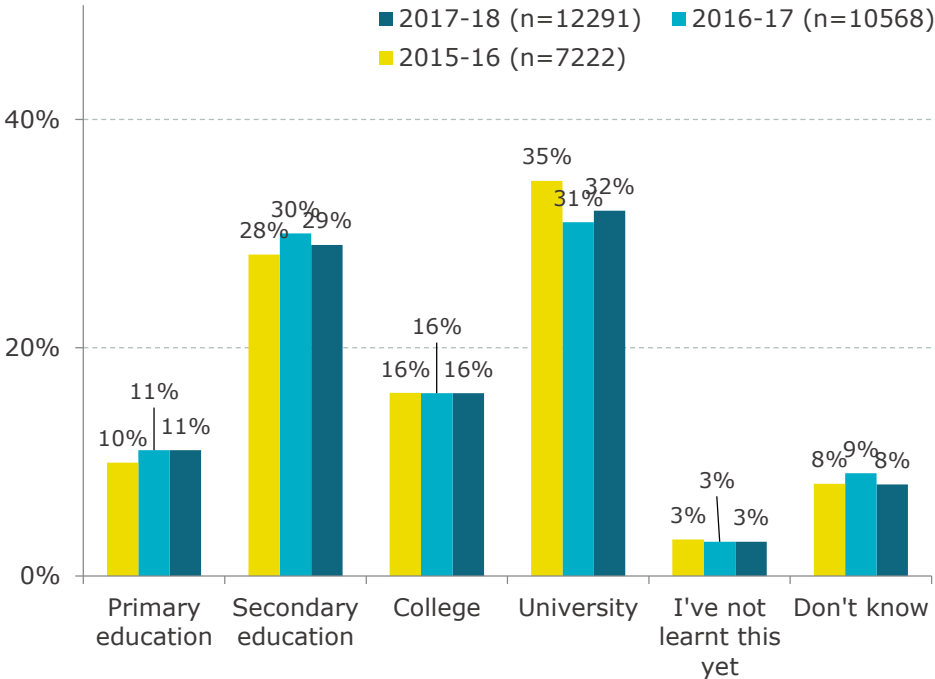
- Within HE, there are significant differences in assessment of which place of study has encouraged them the most to think and act to help the environment and other people, with 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates most likely to report that their university encouraged them the most compared to respondents in earlier years of study (e.g. 31% (n=691) 3<sup>rd</sup> years compared with 18% (n=653) 1<sup>st</sup> years).
- 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduates are more likely to select both secondary and college education compared to 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduates (e.g. 23% (n=817) 1<sup>st</sup> years selected college education as taking most action whereas 14% (n=347) of 3<sup>rd</sup> years selected this option)

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

Further education



Higher education



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.

Despite a significant decline between 2015-16 and 2016-17 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=3989).

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 (41%, n=449).

## 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. 42% (n=292) 4th years compared with 21% (n=761) 1<sup>st</sup> years).
- 1st year undergraduates are more likely to select secondary (34%, n=1248) and college education (20%, n=735) than other year undergraduates.
- International respondents are more likely to report their college took the most action compared with UK respondents, and UK respondents are more likely to report their secondary school as taking the most action however this is potentially a result of the varying terminology used to describe stages of education in different countries.
- Within FE, there are no significant differences in assessment of the action taken by places they have studied according to gender or nationality of student.

# 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

"Making me more accepting of everything in the world around me. Made me want to look into sustainable design. Thinking about where my clothes were coming from and how I shop."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate*

"I made sure that I thought about others before myself and more about the environment to reduce my carbon foot print."  
*Woman FE respondent, UK*

"A big impact, it encouraged me to set up a social action project to take care of the environment. It has also taught me to be more open minded. But I am convinced that schools could do much more."  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate*

"It has effected my social skills and my out look on learning"  
*Woman FE respondent, UK*

"All of that gives us awareness of these issues which directly affect my daily life."  
*Man HE respondent, EU, 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate*

"my career goals have changed to wanting to be part of the charity and environmental sector"  
*Woman HE respondent, UK, 3<sup>rd</sup> year undergraduate*

"I feel more empowered and informed to help towards tackling these issues."  
*Man FE respondent, UK*

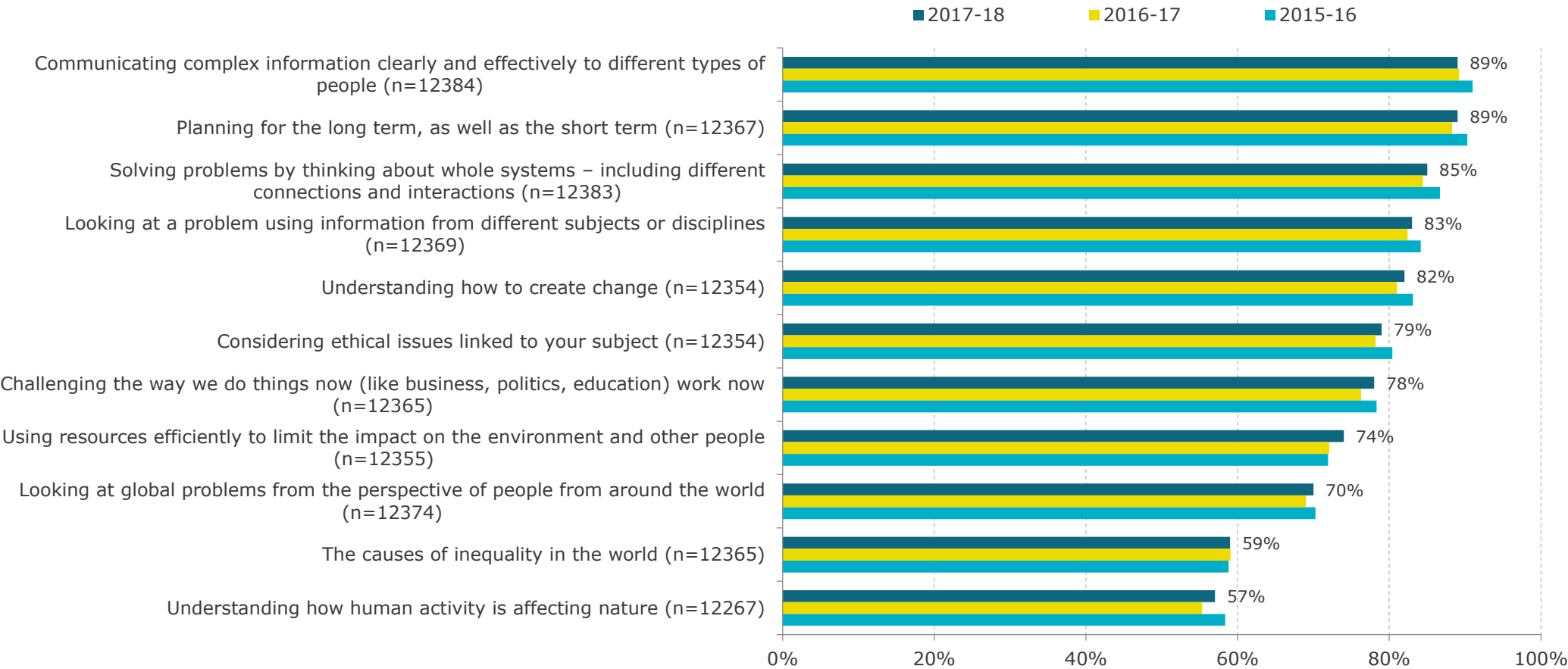
"I consider myself to be a thoughtful and caring person , to understand if not agree with many different opinions. I care about the environment and realise that there an entire planet we need to care for not just on our own doorstep . I strive for conservation daily , to leave our planet in a better condition than it so now."  
*Woman FE respondent, UK*

"More mindful of recycling, not wasting energy however no big changes"  
*Woman HE respondent, EU, 2<sup>nd</sup> year Undergraduate*

## 5. Sustainability skills beyond education

# How important are sustainability skills to future employers?

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=11048) and planning for the long term, as well as the short term (89%, n=11010). Those in HE are least likely to rate having an understanding of how human activity is affecting nature as being important for future employers (57%, n=6949).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

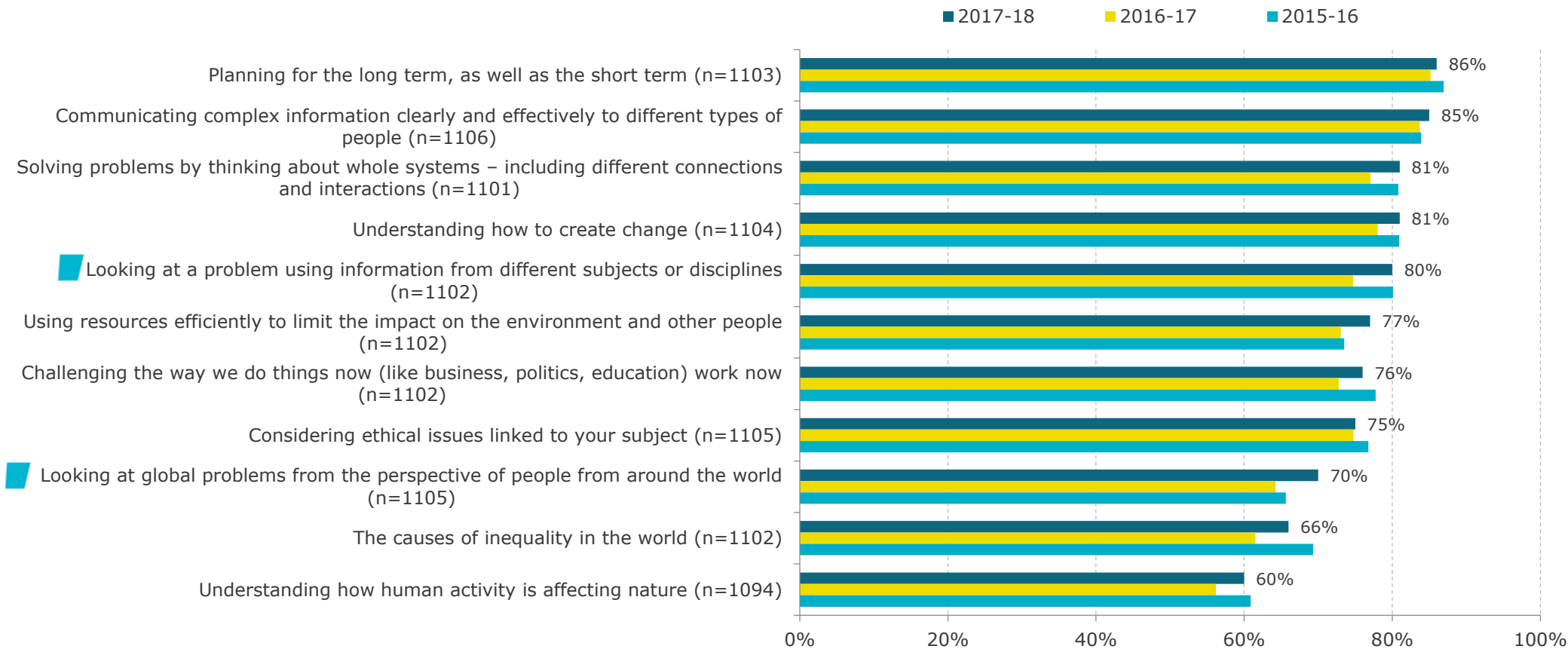
- International HE respondents from beyond the EU are more likely to think looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world will be important to their future employers than EU and UK respondents (80% (n=1004) compared with 69% (n=848) Non EU and 69% (n=6663) UK students 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 (67%, n=4395), compared to 51% for men (n=2823).

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

Weighted base: 2017-18 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 (86% (n=949) and the ability to communicate complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people (85% FE respondents, n=943). FE respondents are least likely to rate having an understanding of how human activity is affecting nature as being important for future employers (60% FE respondents (n=658) rate this as important).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

- FE women respondents are significantly more likely to see understanding the causes of inequality in the world as important to their future employers than FE respondents who are men (73% (n=396) compared with 60% (n=323)).
- Similarly, FE women respondents are more likely to see considering ethical issues associated with their subject as important to their future employers than FE respondents who are men (82% (n=444) compared with 69% (n=372)).
- 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 (86% (n=466) compared with 78% (n=419)).

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

Weighted base: 2017-18 in brackets Balance: No response

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

Respondents to the survey reported that a good starting salary (84% HE respondents (n=10327)) and opportunities to progress quickly (80% HE respondents (n=9839)) are important factors when considering what jobs to apply for.

Two thirds of respondents in HE reported that the chance to work in a 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=8347)). A similar proportion also reported that whether the role contributes to development in the local community would be an important consideration (68% HE respondents (n=8342)).

## Higher education



## 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 (74% (n=4838) compared with 61% (n=3354)).
- 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 (75% (n=950) compared with 67% (n=6494) and 63% (n=765) respectively).
- International non-EU respondents are most likely to report whether the role contributes to helping the environment as an important factor compared with UK and EU respondents (69% (n=867) compared with 53% (n=5085) and 58% (n=704) respectively).

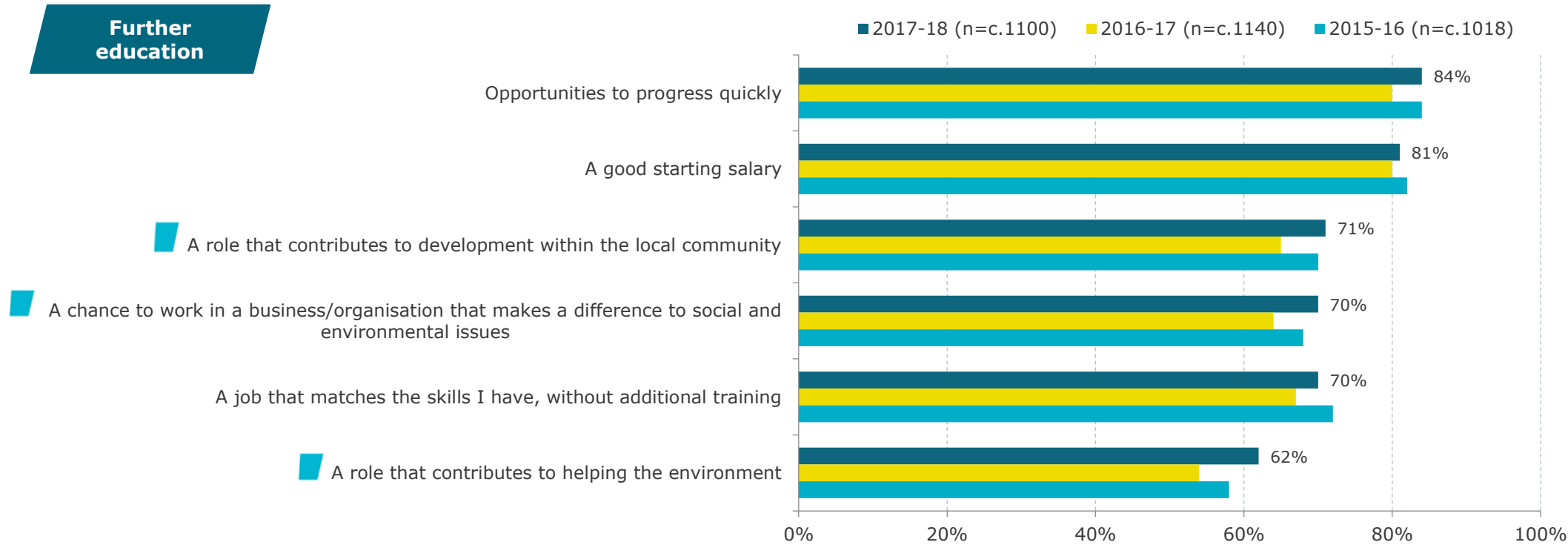
**Q: Thinking about your future employer, how important, if at all, do you think the following factors will be when considering which jobs to apply for?**

Weighted base: In brackets Balance: No response

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

FE respondents to the survey reported that opportunities to progress quickly (84% (n=920)) and a good starting salary (81% (n=894)) 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 (71%, n=786) would be an important factor to consider when applying for jobs. More respondents in this latest survey reported that having a role that contributes to helping the environment would be an important consideration (62%, n=683).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

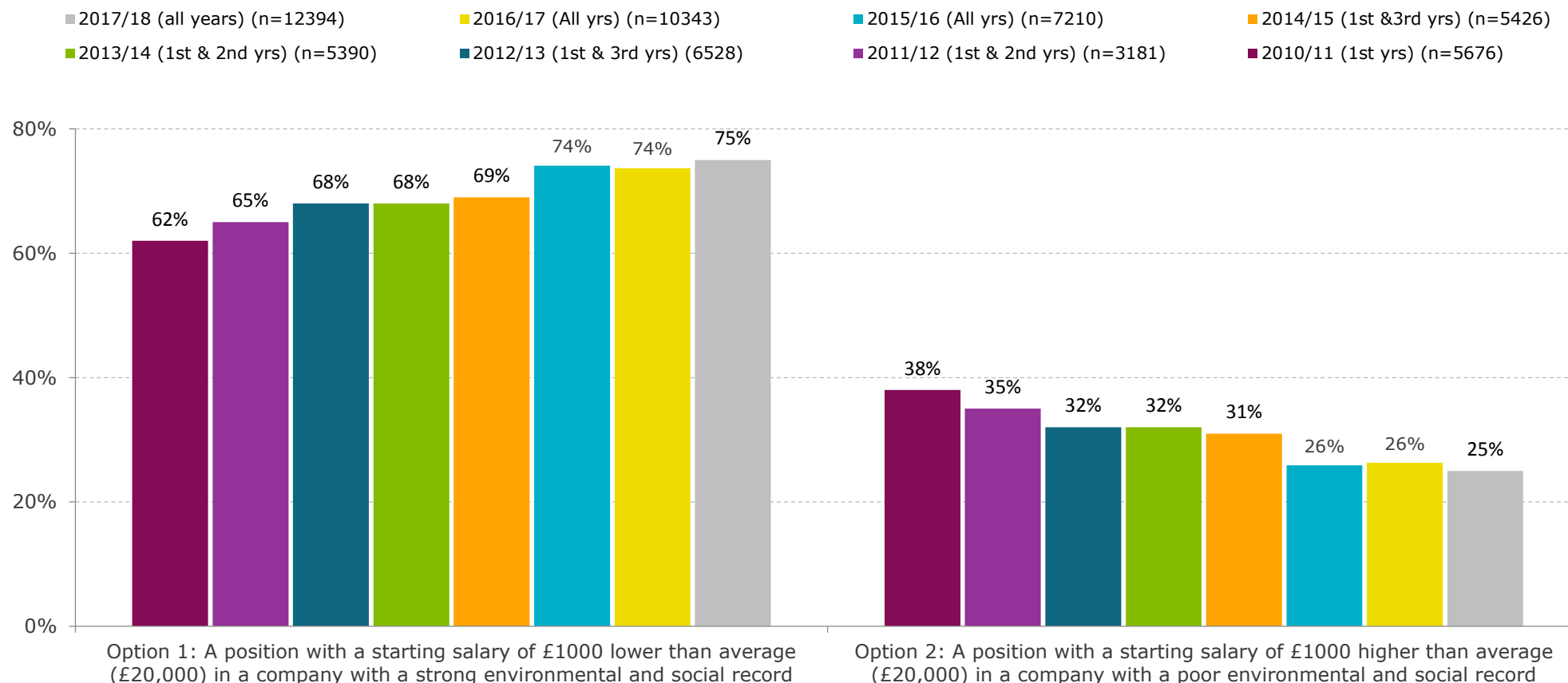
- Women FE respondents are significantly more likely to say the chance of working in an organisation that makes a difference to social and environmental issues is important when considering which jobs to apply for than FE respondents who are men (76% (n=406) compared with 65% (n=343)).
- EU respondents are more likely to say a job that matches their current skills without additional training is important compared to UK and non EU respondents (76% (n=74) compared with 70% (n=662) and 73% (n=36) respectively).
- International non-EU respondents are most likely to report whether the role contributes to development within the local community as an important factor compared with UK and EU respondents (87% (n=42) compared with 71% (n=670) and 69% (n=68) respectively).



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

Higher education

Three quarters of HE respondents completing the survey in 2017-18 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=9338), mirroring the results reported by respondents historically throughout the research.



## 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 (80% (n=5279) compared with 70% (n=3863)).
- International respondents from outside the EU are more likely than UK respondents to accept the salary sacrifice (80% (n=1019) compared with 75% (n=7230)).

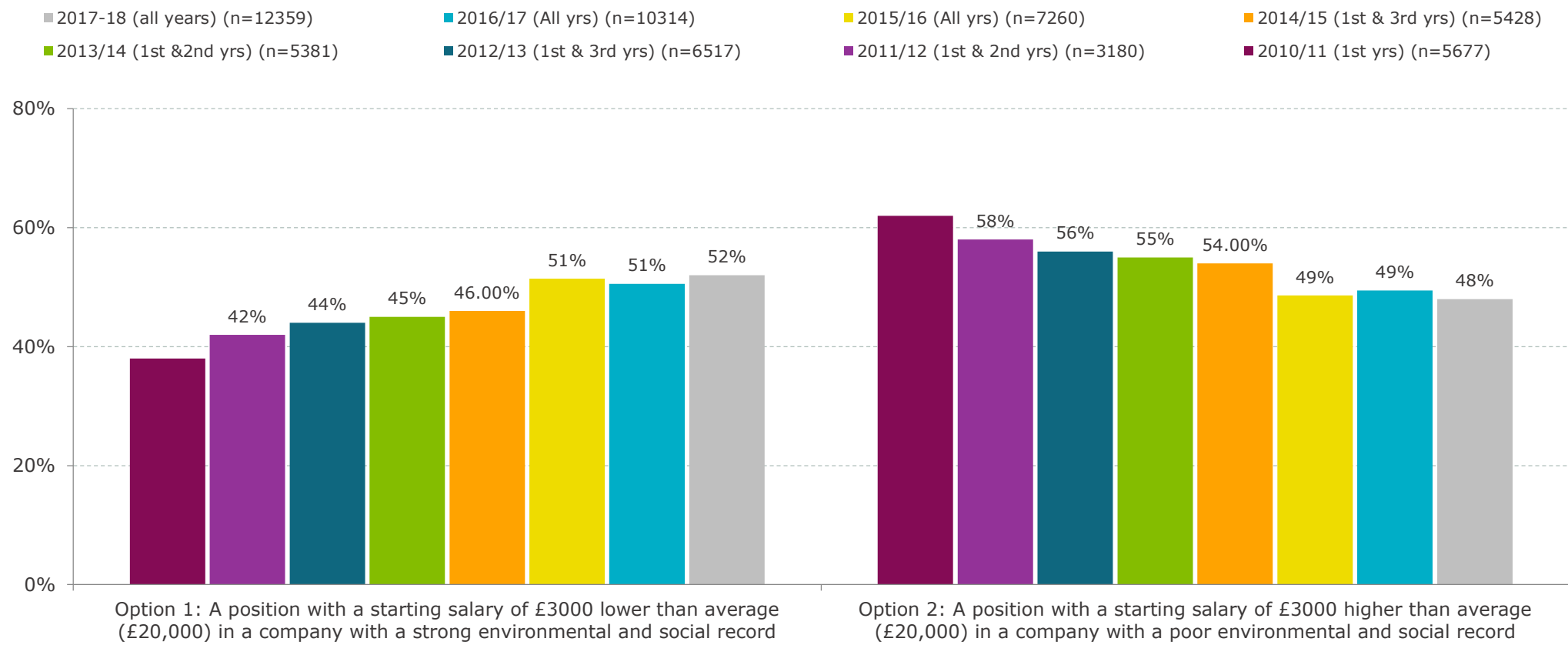
**Q: Assuming all other factors are equal, please select which option you think that you would choose.**

Weighted base: In brackets. Balance: No response

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

Higher education

When asked to consider a salary sacrifice of £3000 from an average starting salary, half of HE respondents (52%, n= 6409) in 2017-18 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.

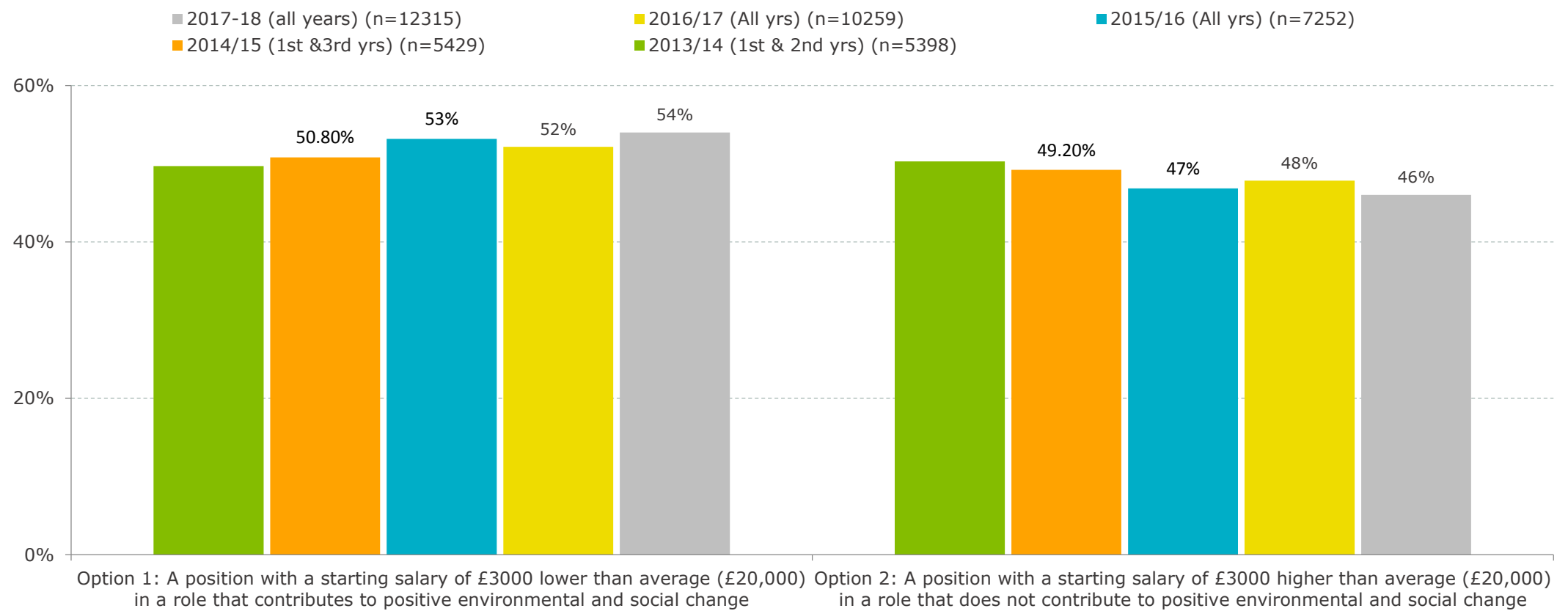


## Differences by respondent characteristics

- 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 (57% (n=3734) compared with 46% of men (n=2514)).
- International respondents beyond the EU, are more likely to say they would make the salary sacrifice of £3000 for such a role (64% (n=816)) compared to EU respondents (57% (n=696)) and UK respondents (50% (n=4786)).

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

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 (54%, n=6705).



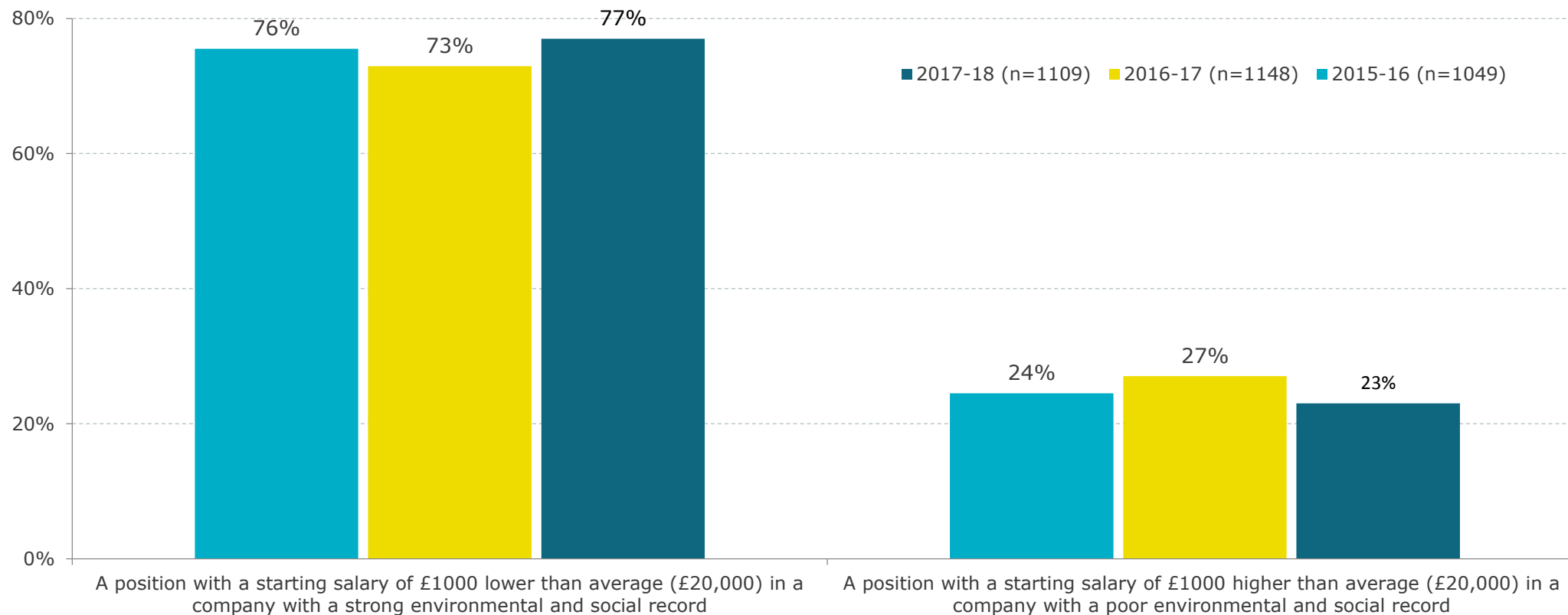
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- 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 (47%, (n=2579) compared with 61% (n=3979)).
- International respondents from beyond the EU are more likely than UK respondents to accept this sacrifice (65% (n=821) compared with 53% (n=5074)).

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

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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 (77%, n=852).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

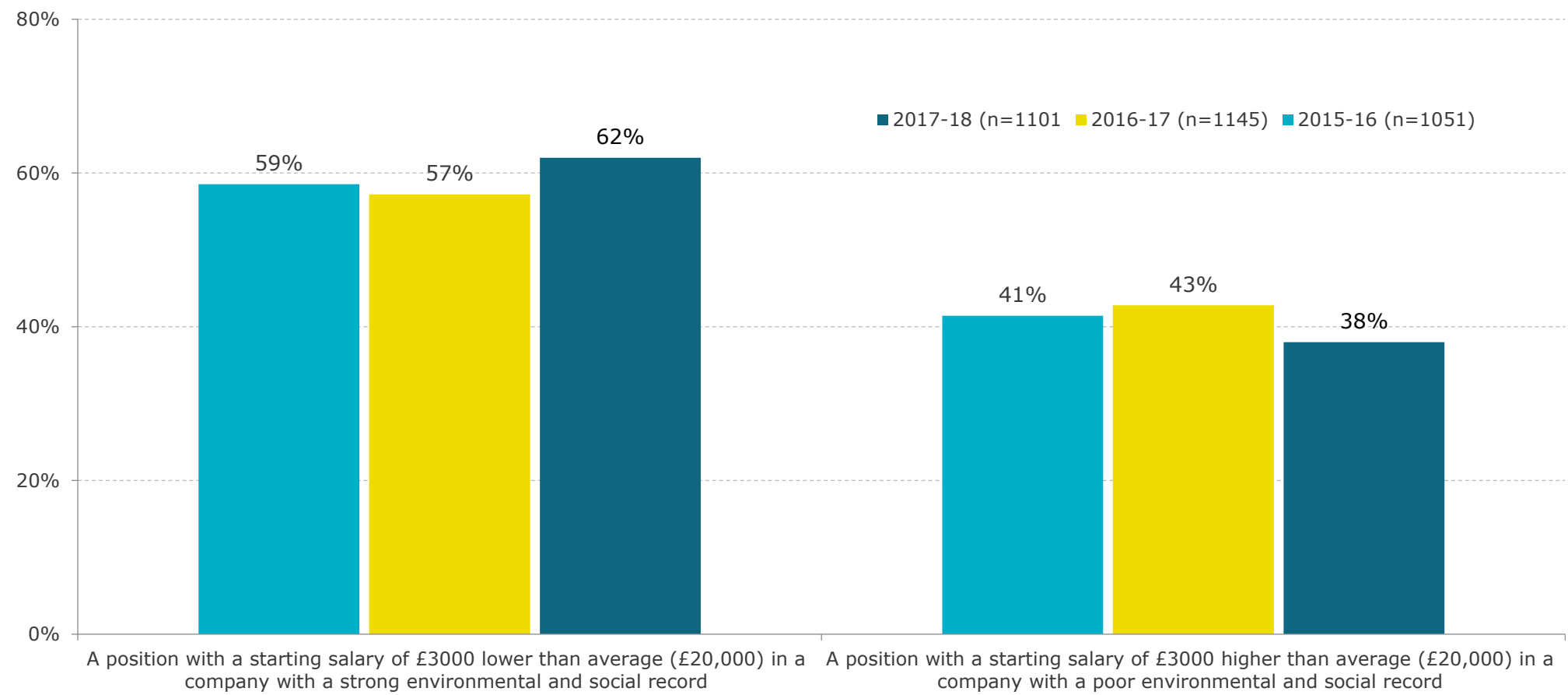
- FE women respondents are more likely than men to accept a salary sacrifice (83%, n=447) compared to men (71%, n=386).
- There are no differences by nationality of FE student.

**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?

Almost 2 in 3 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 (62%, n=681). This is significantly higher than responses in 2016-17, at a 95% confidence level.



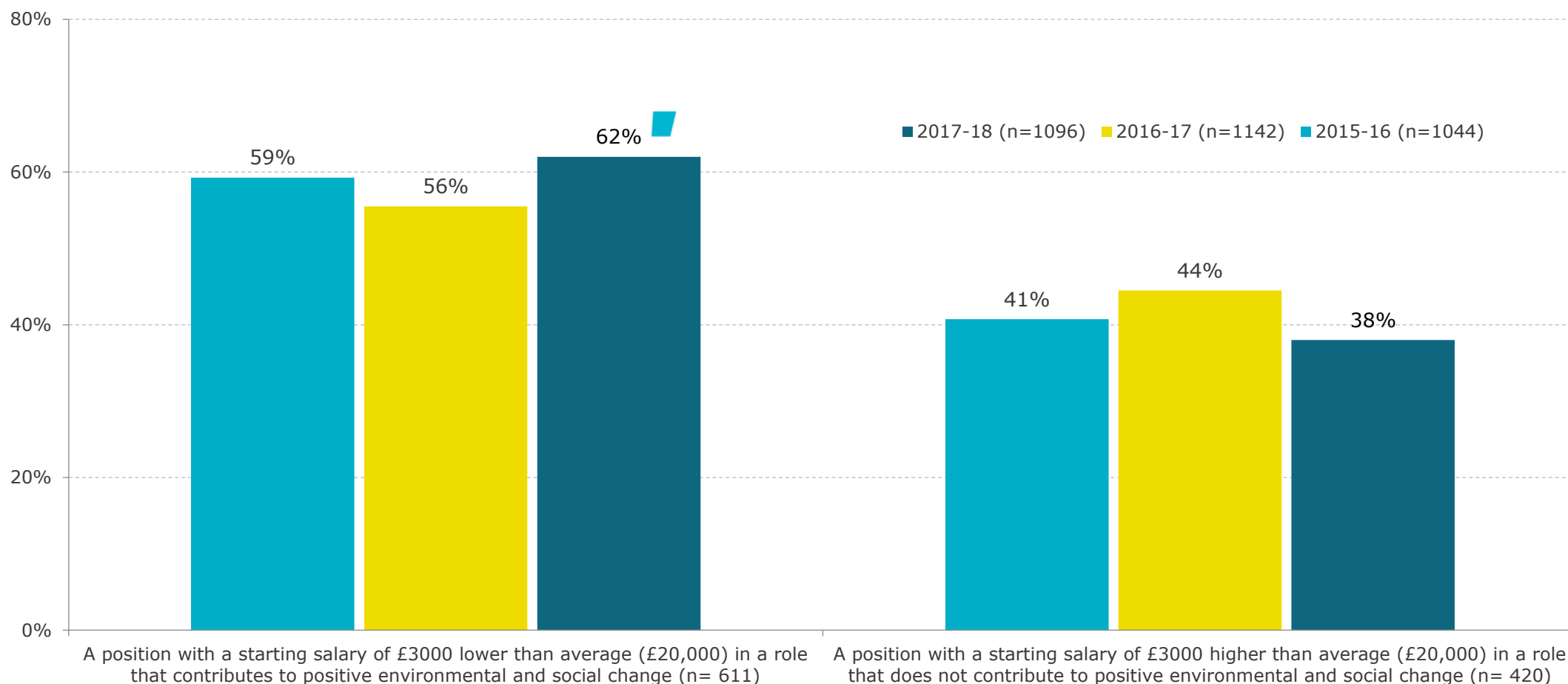
## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Again, women FE respondents are more likely than men to accept a salary sacrifice (70%, n=379) compared to 53% men (n=285).

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

Further  
education

Significantly more FE respondents this survey 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 (62%, n=683) compared to 56% in Yr7 (n=634).



## Differences by respondent characteristics

- Once again, women FE respondents are more likely than men to accept a salary sacrifice (71%, n=382) compared to 53% men (n=285).

**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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