



## Conference 2020 Evaluation Report

### 1. Introduction and Key Findings

**1.1** The Open University Students Association Conference is held every two years to offer delegates the opportunity to engage with fellow Open University (OU) students, participate in a variety of activities and events, and learn more about how their Association supports their student experience and represents their interests.

**1.2** Conference 2020 was held during 26-28 June, organised by the Association's staff team and advised by the student-led Conference Steering Committee. This report presents an evaluation of the Conference 2020 weekend against the key objectives set for the event; each of these objectives was further aligned to the *Inform and Support*, *Engage and Involve*, and *Influence and Transform* strands of the Association's Strategy.

- Ensure all conference attendees gain a good understanding of what we do and our relevance to their student journey and all of the opportunities to take part
- Ensure all conference attendees have an opportunity to provide feedback and input
- Ensure all conference attendees have a positive and uplifting experience that inspires them to get further involved

**1.3** Due to the restrictions on large-scale gatherings in 2020, the Association had to explore alternative options to the earlier format of the Conference weekend, which was a face-to-face event on the OU's Milton Keynes campus. It was decided to host Conference 2020 as an online-only event; this was also the first time that the Conference weekend would be hosted entirely online.

**1.4** A total of 411 delegates and guests attended Conference 2020. This evaluation is based on a survey sent to delegates (175 responses), as well as other engagement metrics for the Conference weekend. Overall, delegates found Conference 2020 an engaging event, with some key feedback as below:

- In response to the question, 'would you recommend Conference to a fellow student?', 82% selected 'definitely'.

- The feedback on whether Conference 2020 met delegates' expectations gives an overall satisfaction figure of 85% (50% selected 'very well, it met all my expectations' and 35% selected 'moderately well, it met most of my expectations').
- 83% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I felt that the Conference weekend reflected the Association's commitment to inclusivity and diversity' (53% selected 'strongly agree' and 30% selected 'agree').
- 77% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel that attending Conference has increased my sense of belonging to the OU student community' (46% selected 'strongly agree' and 31% selected 'agree')
- 83% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel that attending Conference 2020 has made a positive contribution to my student experience' (49% selected 'strongly agree' and 34% selected 'agree').

**1.5** As these highlights demonstrate, the Association hosted a successful event, delivering on its Conference 2020 objectives as well as progressing its broader strategic objectives. Delegates' positive experience of attending Conference 2020 is also reflected in the comments below:

*“Overall, it was a positive and varied experience (in spite of technical hiccups), I learned much more about OUSA than I had previously known, was able to hear some excellent speakers and learn more about FE/HE issues, participated in some online social sessions which were lovely and inclusive and picked up some great careers advice! Well worth attending!”*

*“It was an amazing experience and I felt very included in everything that went on while there. It has made me feel more confident as a student and in myself in general.”*

*“It can be difficult to feel part of a community when undertaking distance learning. Having an opportunity to attend the conference helped to foster a sense of community. Interesting to 'meet' others. The speakers were excellent and clearly a lot of thought, time and effort had gone into organising the conference.”*

## **2. Conference Communications**

**2.1** To raise awareness of Conference 2020, the Association communicated with students through a variety of platforms. The official notice of Conference 2020 was given on 17 April, advising students that the event would be held online. The most popular channels through which delegates heard about Conference was 'emails from the Students Association' (79%) and 'the Students

Association website' (45%) [Figure 1]. The hashtag [#oustudents20](#) was used for Conference this year.

- 2.2 Similar to 2018, a dedicated Conference microsite hosted detailed sections about the Conference Programme, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and information about Conference Business. The 'Help and guidance' section of the microsite hosted Tech FAQs for attending sessions on Microsoft Teams and Adobe Connect. There were also dedicated pages for Guidebook, Microsoft Teams and Adobe Connect, with download links and guidance for how to attend online sessions using these platforms.
- 2.3 The month leading up to Conference (1-25 June) saw 10,390 new visitors to the Association's website, with a further 1,318 new visitors during the Conference weekend (26-28 June). The Conference microsite received 2,763 page views over the Conference weekend (26-28 June), with the Conference programme (515 unique views) and Guidebook (330 unique views) pages being some of the more popular.
- 2.4 Regular Conference Update Issues were sent to registered delegates via email, as well as hosted on the Association's website. These Conference updates included news about external speakers, together with the opportunities that delegates would have to network with fellow OU students and participate in discussions. Each Conference update ended with a 'note on Business' stating that a delegate place was conditional on the student having voted on Conference Business.
- 2.5 Students' engagement with the Conference update newsletter increased as the weekend drew closer, with the 'open rate' increasing from 45% for the first newsletter sent on 29 May to 85.8% for the one sent on 25 June. The dedicated Conference weekend newsletter was sent to between 478-479 delegates over 26-28 June, with an open rate ranging between 61.9%-82.5%.
- 2.6 Feedback from the Delegate Survey suggests high satisfaction with the communications around Conference [Figure 2].
  - **Frequency of communications:** Satisfaction with the Association's regular updates on Conference was high, with 89% of survey respondents agreeing with the statement 'I was happy with the frequency of communications to me in the run-up to Conference' (57% selected 'strongly agree' and 32% selected 'agree').
  - **Daily email over the Conference weekend:** Satisfaction with the dedicated email updates offering information of upcoming Conference sessions was also high, with 83% of survey respondents agreeing with the statement 'I found it helpful to receive the daily email over the Conference weekend' (57% selected 'strongly agree' and 26% selected 'agree').

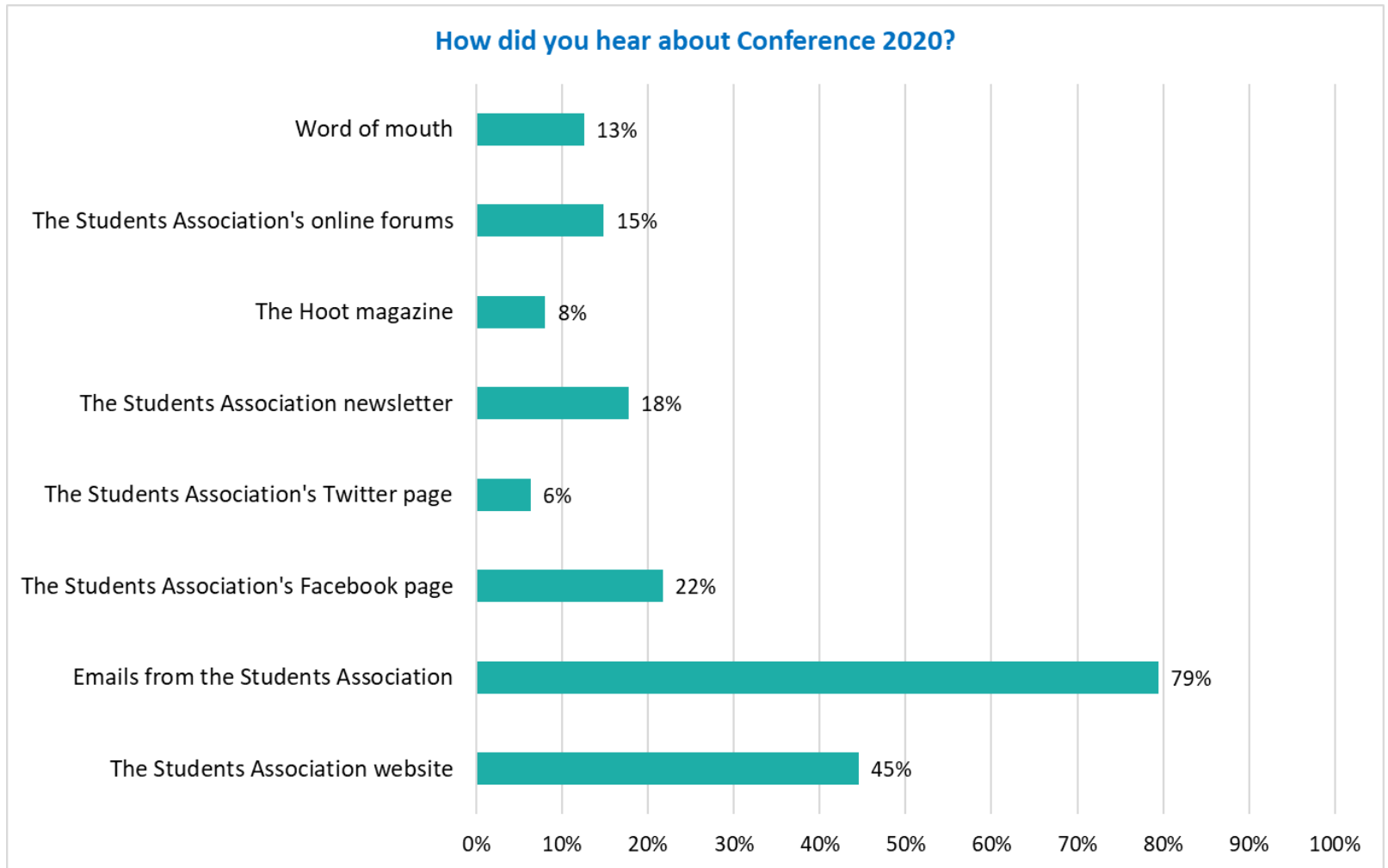


Figure 1. Delegate feedback on the communication channels through which they heard about Conference.

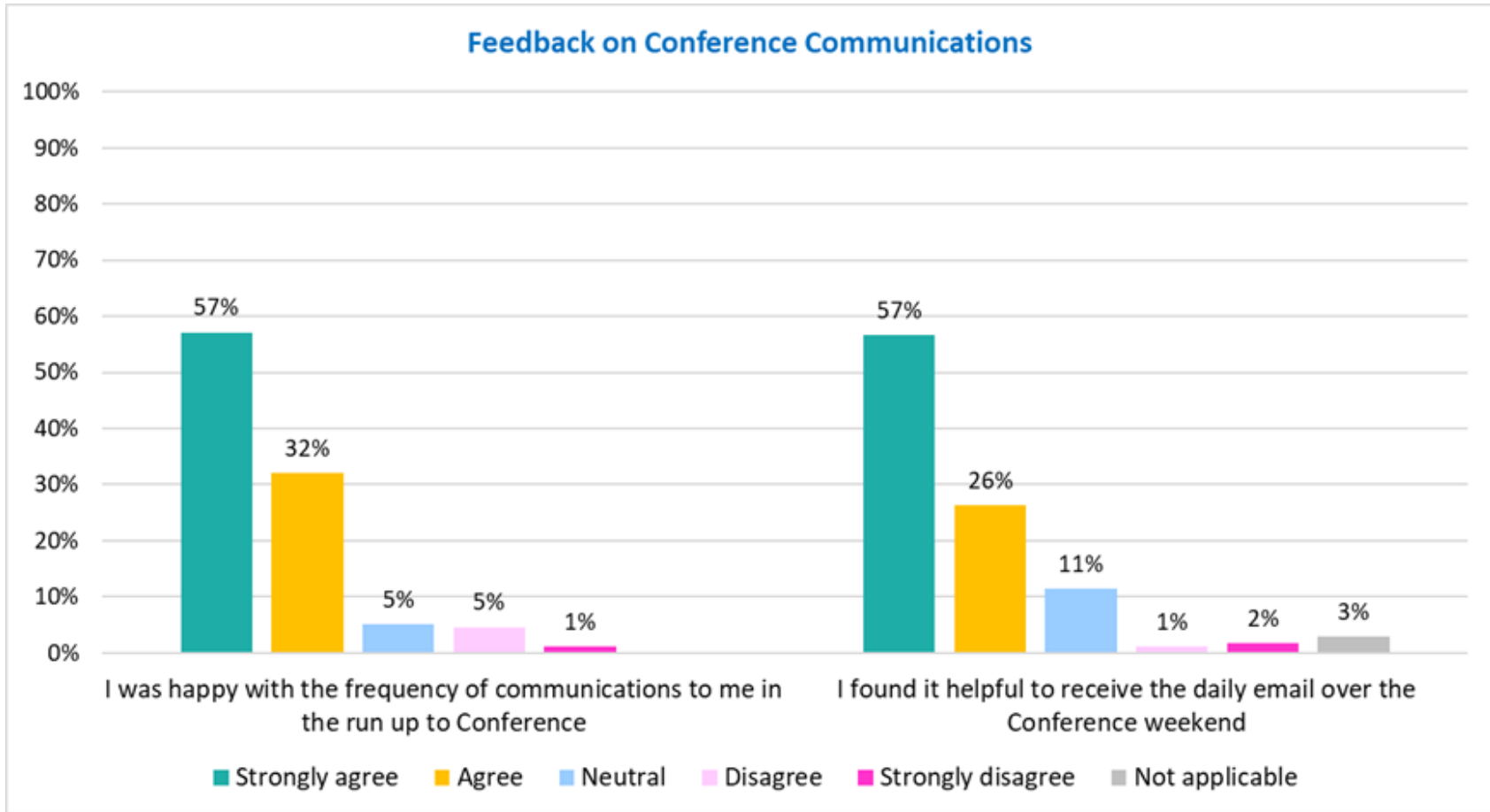


Figure 2. Delegate feedback on the frequency of Conference communications and the dedicated daily email over the Conference weekend.

### 3. Registration

3.1 In 2020, students were invited to enter a ballot for Conference, on the condition that their delegate status would only be confirmed once they had voted. Delegate feedback on the registration process and communications around registration was very positive [Figure 3]:

- **Applying for a delegate place:** 93% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'there was clear information about how to apply for a place at Conference' (67% selected 'strongly agree' and 26% selected 'agree').
- **The registration process:** 94% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I found the registration process quick and easy' (66% selected 'strongly agree' and 28% selected 'agree').
- **Condition for confirmation of delegate places:** 95% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'There was clear information on the need to participate in Conference Business to be eligible to attend the Conference weekend' (65% selected 'strongly agree' and 30% selected 'agree').
- **Ease of registering with Eventbrite:** Satisfaction with using the Eventbrite platform to register for Conference was also high with 58% selecting 'very satisfied' and 29% selecting 'satisfied'.

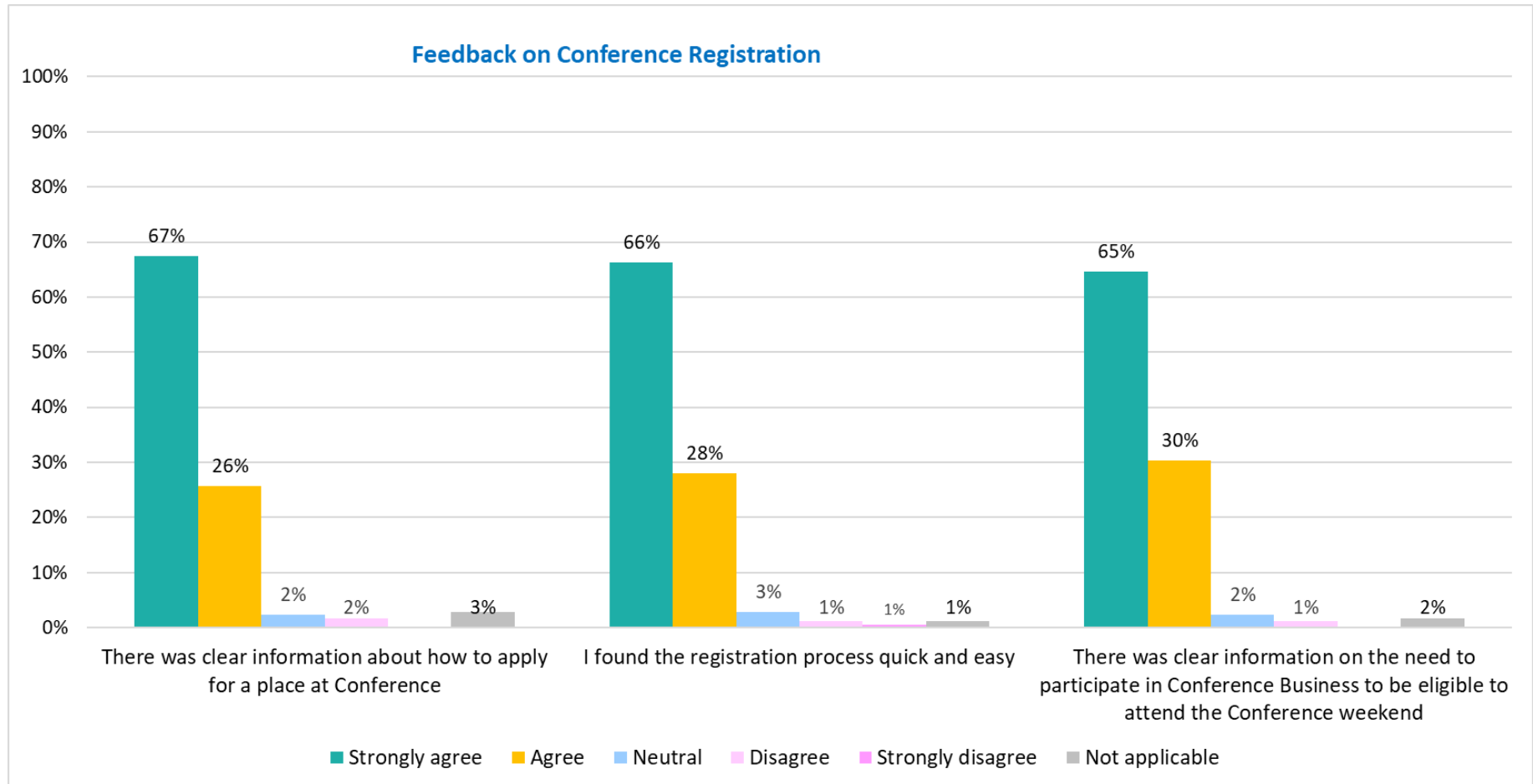


Figure 3. Delegate feedback on Conference registration.

#### **4. Delegate profile**

- 4.1** The demographic breakdown of attendees is key to our understanding of our membership engagement and gauging the reach of event such as Conference.
- 4.2** Conference 2020 engaged a lot of new student members, with 65% attending Conference for the first time. For 75% of the students who had attended Conference for the first time (or 49% of all delegates), this was also the first event hosted by the Association that they had attended. Some delegates had experience of having previously attended online events hosted by the Association, such as Community Drop-in sessions (21%), Online Meet-ups (17%) and Facebook Live chats (13%), but for the majority (63%) it was their first online event [Figure 4].
- 4.3** Figures 5-7 present profiles of those students who applied and entered the ballot, and those who voted in Business and were offered delegate places for the Conference weekend. Comparisons with 2018 figures are provided where relevant.
- 4.4** The delegate profile for 2020 changed considerably in terms of disability, with the number of delegates with a declared disability dropping from 42% in 2018 to 28% in 2020 [Figure 5]. This is a worrying drop and raises concerns about accessibility; the Recommendations section at the end of this report takes this up again. The proportion of attendees along other demographic variables did not register significant changes.
- 4.5** Delegate numbers for FASS (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) continues to be high, followed by STEM (Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) [Figure 7]. More work needs to be done to encourage participation from students in other subject areas, as well as students studying Access modules.



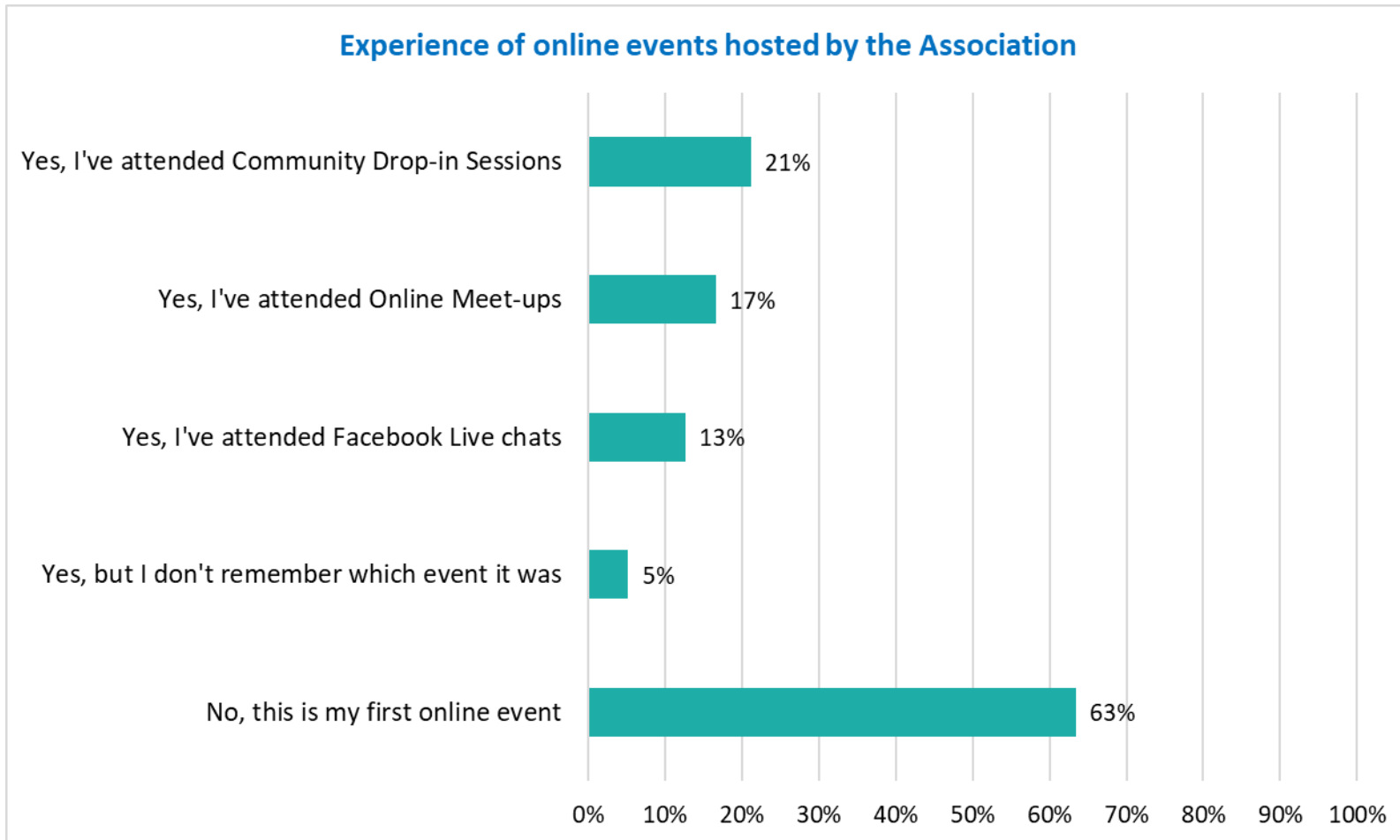


Figure 4. Delegates' experience of attending online events hosted by the Students Association.

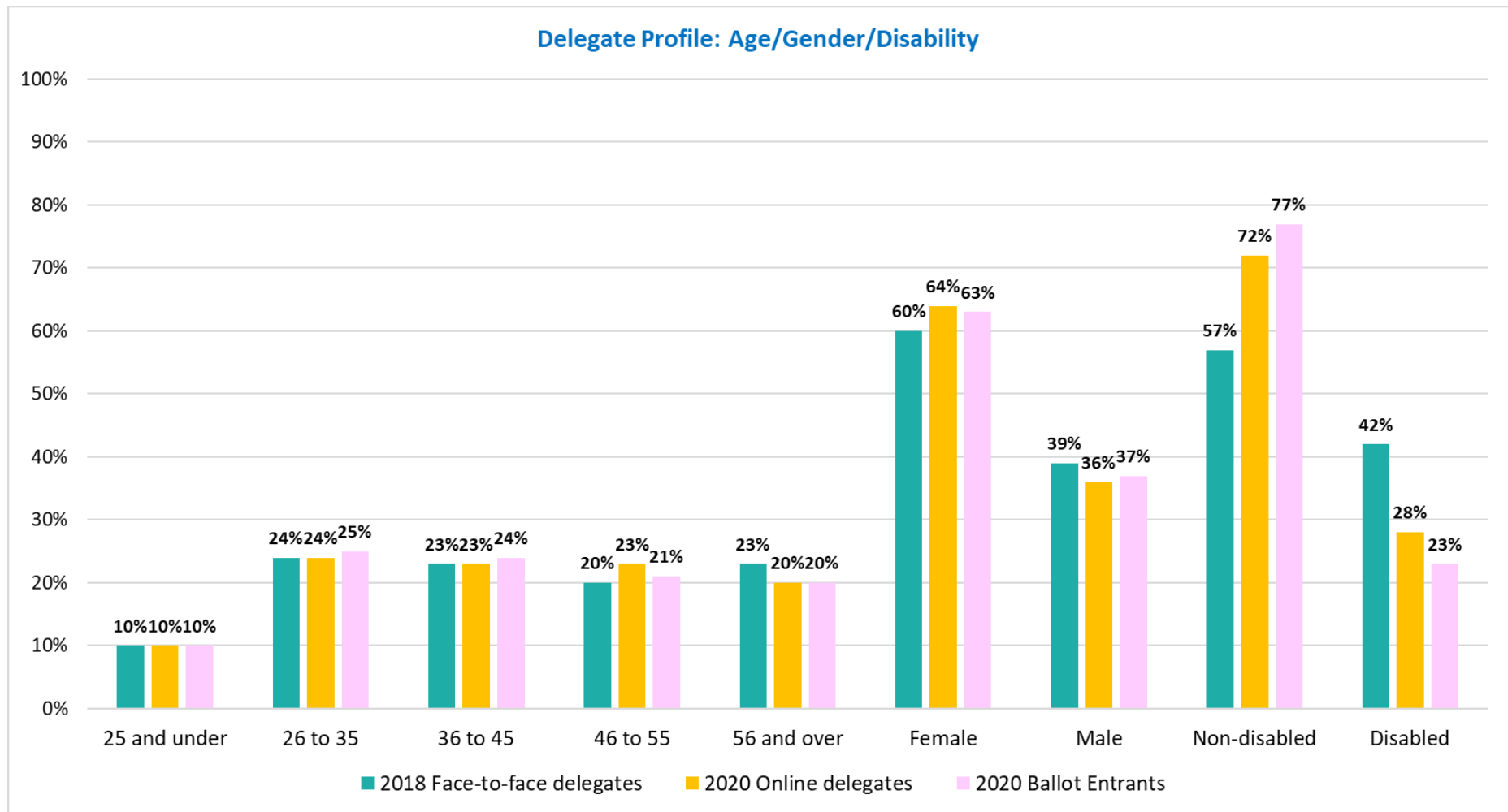


Figure 5. Delegate profile by age, gender and disability.

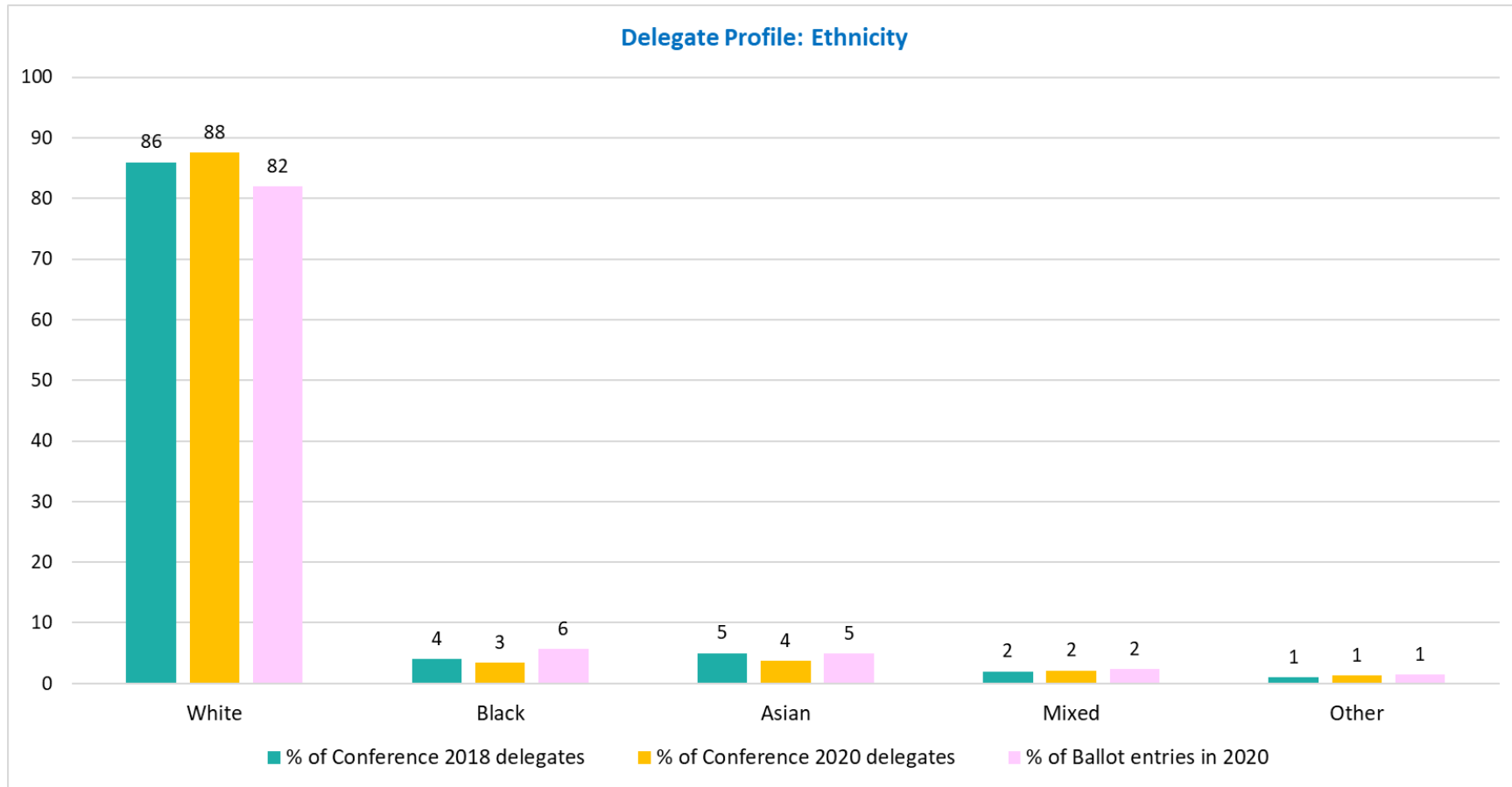


Figure 6. Delegate profile by ethnicity.

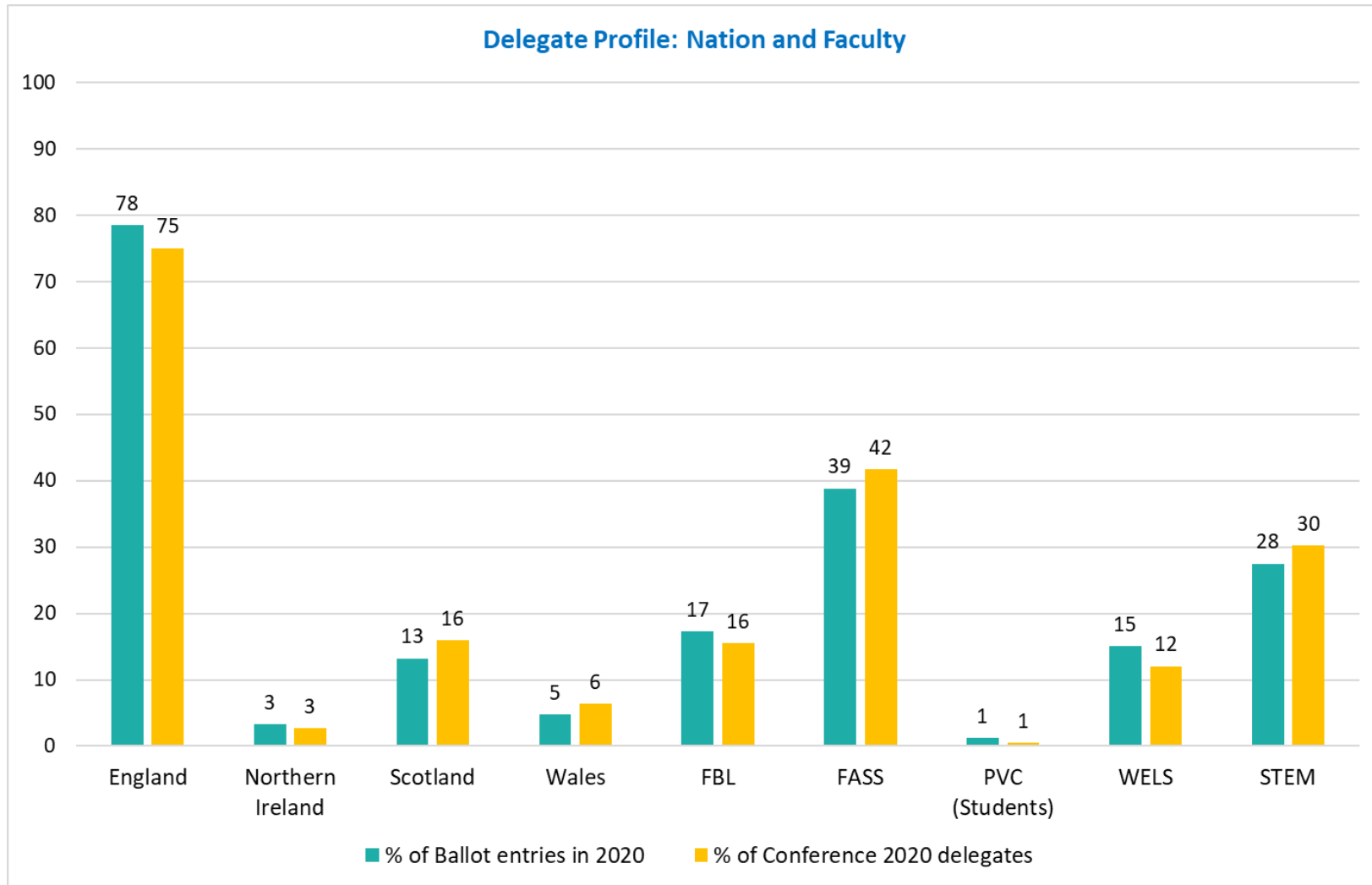


Figure 7. Delegate profile by location and faculty.

## 5. Motivations for Attending Conference

- 5.1** The Delegate Survey invited respondents to indicate what motivated them to attend Conference 2020 [Figure 9]. Respondents chose 'to meet with fellow OU students online' (65%) and 'to learn more about the OU Students Association' (63%) as their two key motivations. Other motivations for attending the event, in order of the number of survey respondents choosing each option, were: 'to learn more about the Open University' (47%), 'to explore ways to get involved with the Students Association' (45%), 'to vote on the Business resolutions' (39%), 'to try something new' (33%), and 'to get to know the new elected student leadership team' (26%).
- 5.2** In response to the question, 'how well did Conference 2020 meet your expectations?', 50% of the delegates selected 'very well, it met all my expectations' and 35% selected 'moderately well, it met most of my expectations', giving an overall satisfaction figure of 85% [Figure 8]. However, 10% of the delegates selected 'not very well, it only met a few of my expectations' and 3% selected 'not at all, it did not meet my expectations', while 2% were not sure.

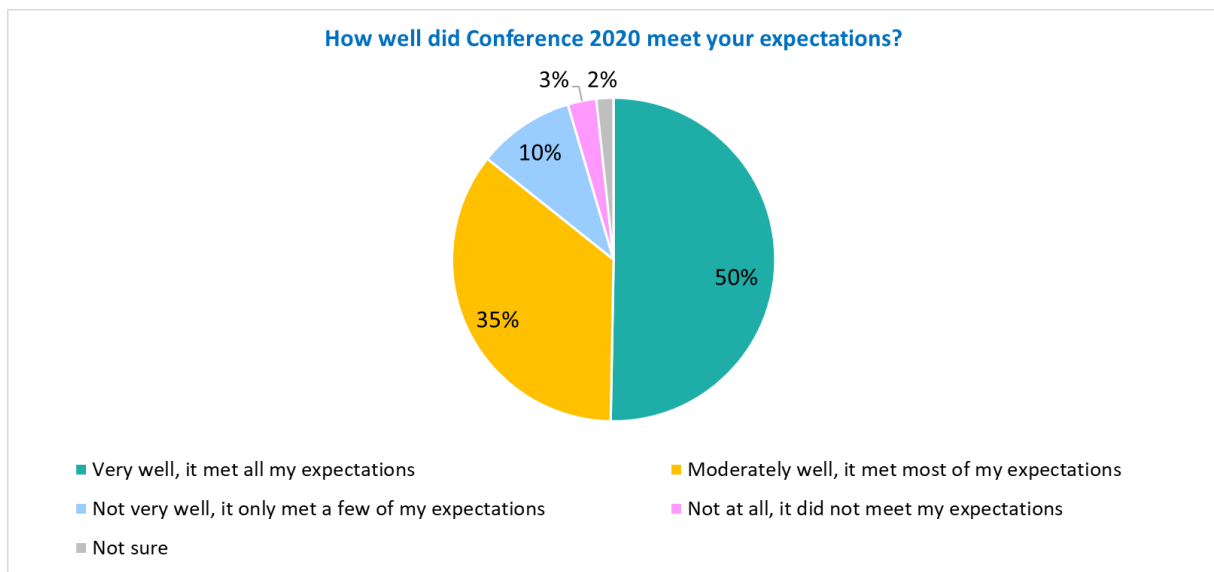


Figure 8. Delegate feedback on how well Conference 2020 met their expectations.

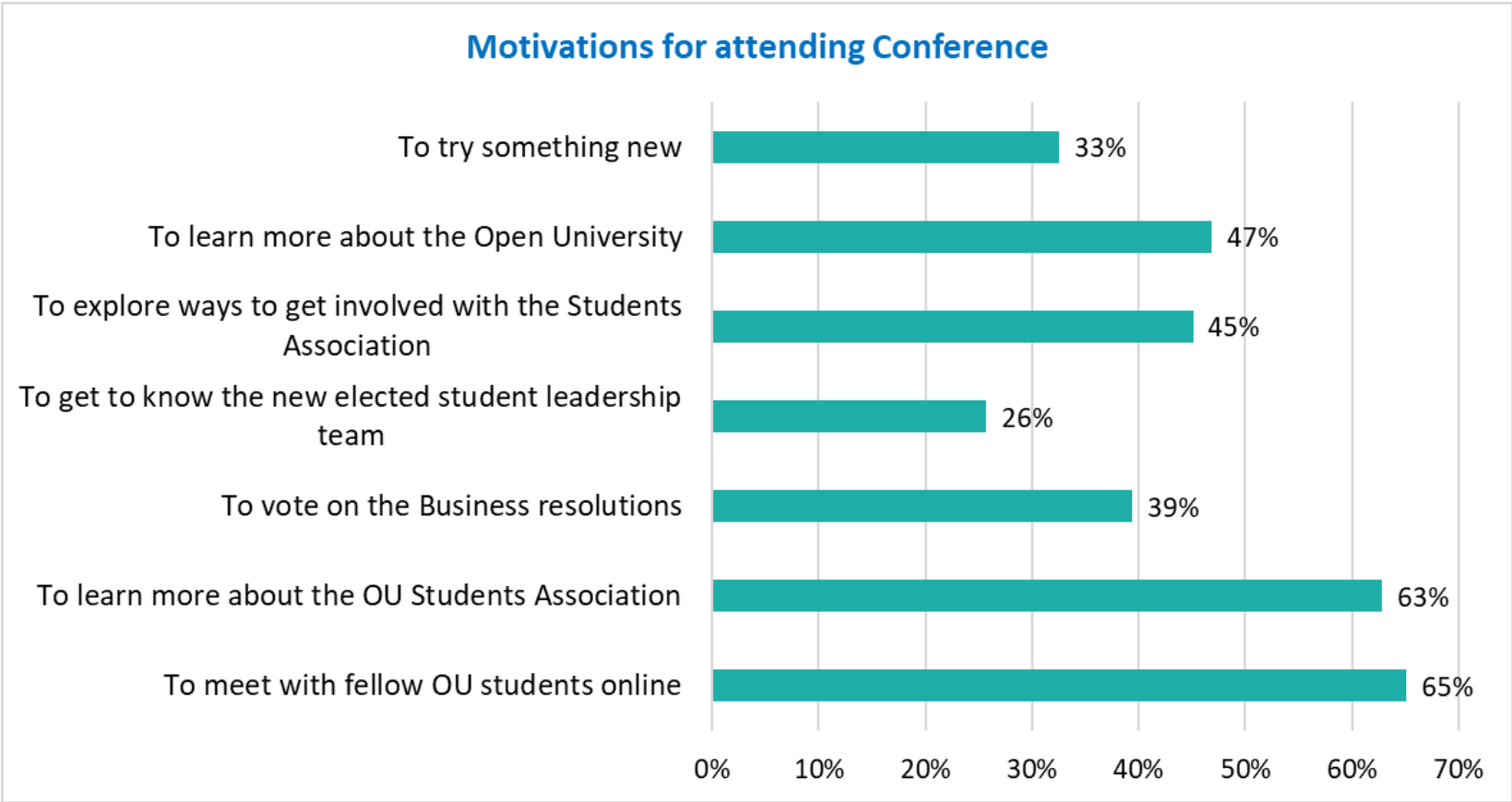


Figure 9. Delegates' motivations for attending Conference.

## 6. Conference Business

6.1 Conference Business is a key element of all Association Conferences, and offers delegates the opportunity to have a say in important decisions about the running of the Association. This year, these included the ratification of changes to the Association's Byelaws, the re-appointment of the Association's auditors, and approving the Association's list of affiliations.

6.2 The online voting for Conference Business opened on 12 June and closed on 24 June. This year 347 votes were cast, representing an 80.89% voter turnout (the highest voting percentage that the Association has had for the Business element). Each of the resolutions was passed, and 252 voters also used the quick vote option. The full Business Results can be viewed [here](#).

6.3 Similar to previous years, a key focus of Conference communications was to encourage delegates to participate in Conference Business. Content explaining the Business element and how delegates could participate was hosted on the Conference microsite, together with regular updates included as part of the Conference Updates newsletter. As mentioned previously in the Conference Communications section, the importance of voting in Business to secure a delegate place was highlighted in each Conference update newsletter.

6.4 Delegate feedback around different aspects of participating in the Conference Business, while very positive for the voting process and communications, presents a mixed picture when considering the usefulness of the Business Forums [Figure 10].

- **Voting on Conference Business items:** Satisfaction was highest for this measure with 88% of survey respondents agreeing with the statement 'I found it easy to vote on Conference Business items' (60% selected 'strongly agree' and 28% selected 'agree').
- **Communications around Conference Business:** Satisfaction was high with the communications sent out to delegates with details of the Business items and the voting process. 84% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'the communications and instructions I received about Conference Business were easy to follow' (51% selected 'strongly agree' and 33% selected 'agree').
- **Engagement with the Business documents:** The majority of survey respondents had engaged with the Conference Business documents, with 82% agreeing with the statement 'I had read the Business documents before voting' (49% selected 'strongly agree' and 33% selected 'agree').
- **Content of the Business documents:** Delegates also found the Business documents approachable, with 81% agreeing with the statement 'the Business documents were written in a clear and easy to

understand language' (46% selected 'strongly agree' and 35% selected 'agree').

- **Ease of finding the Business documents:** Delegates were satisfied with the ease of locating the Business document online, with 45% selecting 'strongly agree' and 35% selecting 'agree'.
- **Awareness of the Association:** While 71% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'participating in Conference Business has made me more aware of how the Association is run' (31% selected 'strongly agree' and 40% selected 'agree'), the 13% who were neutral and the 6% who disagreed suggest a need for improving communications about how the decisions made during Conference Business inform the Association's work.
- **Business forums:** Satisfaction with the Conference Business forums was very low with only 22% selecting 'strongly agree' and 25% selecting 'agree'. 27% were neutral, while 5% selected 'disagree' and 3% selected 'strongly disagree'; many delegates did not engage with the Business forums, with 18% selecting 'not applicable'.



### Feedback on Conference Business

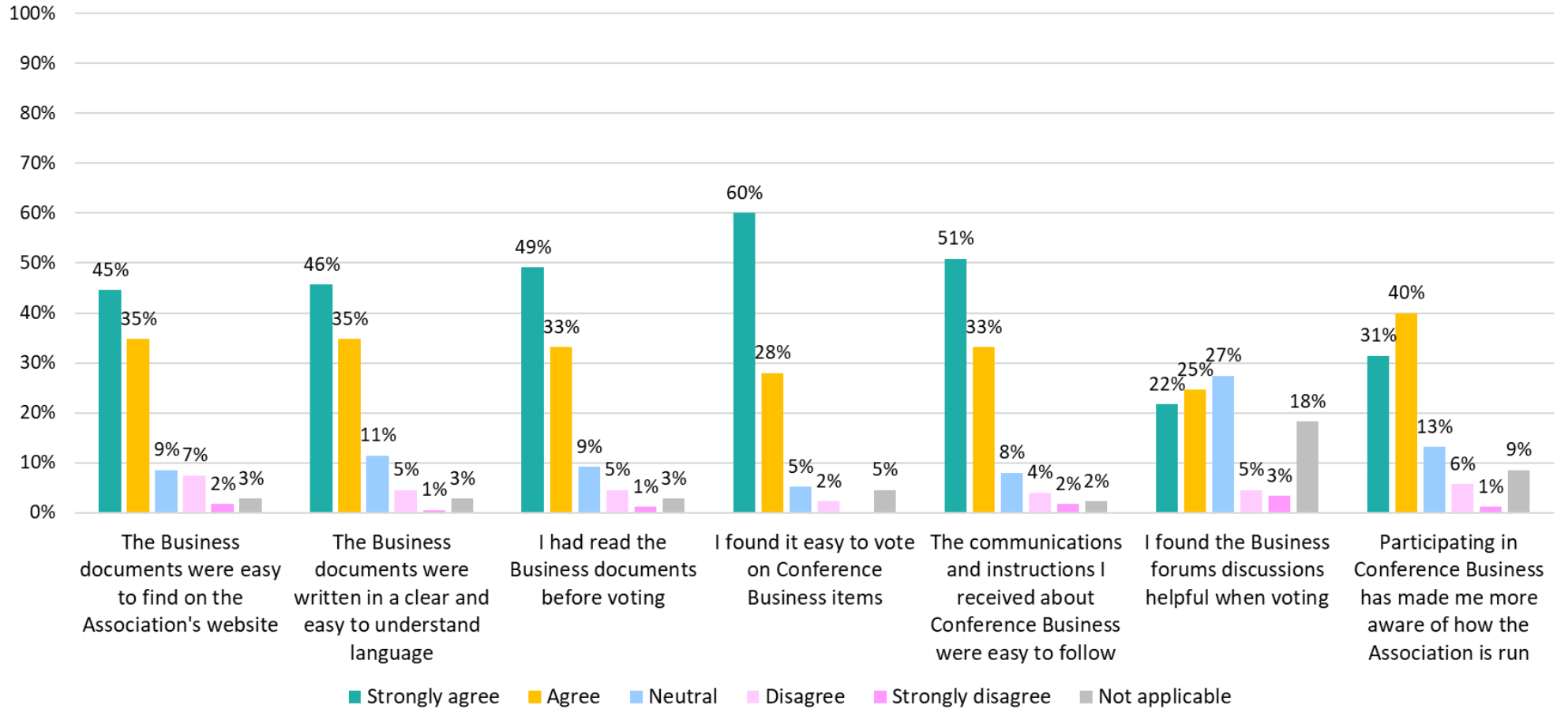


Figure 10. Delegate feedback on different aspects of the Conference Business, such as ease of voting, the Business documents, and communications around conference Business.

## 7. Conference Programme

7.1 The Conference 2020 programme was designed in line with three key themes - *Education, Inspiration* and *Wellbeing* - with a range of events and activities offered under each theme. These three themes helped the Association offer a programme that would bring the most value to students, as well as progress the key Conference objectives of raising awareness about the Association's work, providing opportunities for delegates to give their feedback, and ensuring that delegates had a positive and uplifting experience.

7.2 The Conference programme featured both formal and self-paced sessions. These sessions were either offered by the student volunteers and staff team at the Students Association, led by Open University staff, or featured external speakers. The format of these sessions was varied to offer delegates different levels of participation, from listening to speakers, interacting with session facilitators, and actively engaging in discussion with fellow students.

### 7.3 Education

7.3.1 **Sessions offered by the Students Association:** During Conference, the Association held formal *Coffee and Consultation* sessions with delegates on three topics: *Flexible study* (83 participants), *Online experience* (45 participants), and *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* (49 participants). Informal events such as the faculty-based networking sessions offered delegates a space to chat with students from the same subject area.

7.3.2 **Sessions in partnership with the OU:** The Open University's Vice Chancellor Professor Tim Blackman offered a *VC Question Time* session, while the *University Challenge* was a light-hearted event with student and OU staff teams.

7.3.3 **Speakers:** Speakers under the Education theme included Emma Hardy (the Shadow Minister for Further Education and Universities), Kirsty Williams (the Welsh Minister for Education), Clare Adamson (Member of the Scottish Parliament), and Dr Stephen Aiken OBE (Ulster Unionist Party leader). These sessions discussed current issues in Higher Education with a focus on part-time and lifelong learning, at the same time offering students a broad perspective on these issues from across the four Nations of the UK.

7.3.4 **Delegates' enjoyment of sessions under the Education theme:** Satisfaction with formal educational sessions (such as the *Coffee and Consultation* sessions and *VC Question Time*) was high with 38% of survey respondents selecting 'very enjoyable' and 38% selecting 'enjoyable' [Figure 11]. Satisfaction with informal educational sessions (such as the faculty and area networking session and *University Challenge*) was also good with 33% selecting 'very enjoyable' and 41% selecting 'enjoyable'. These educational sessions registered the highest overall satisfaction of all the themes (Education, Inspiration and Wellbeing), and the lowest proportion of survey

respondents selecting 'did not attend' for the formal educational sessions. Overall attendee satisfaction (the proportion of those selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable' from among those who actually attended the sessions) was high at 91% for formal educational sessions and 92% for informal educational sessions.

## 7.4 Inspiration

- 7.4.1 Sessions offered by the Students Association:** These sessions were led by student volunteers as well as members of the Association's staff team. Student-led sessions such as *Audience with Existing CEC* offered a space for delegates to hear from the student leadership team about the past term. The *Meet Societies* session offered information about different subject-based and interest-based Societies affiliated with the Association and how students could get involved. The *Volunteering Zone* session focused on the range of volunteering opportunities offered by the Association and how students could choose a role that suited them best.
- 7.4.2 Sessions in partnership with the OU:** The *OU Expo* focused on study skills and included the OU's Student Hub Live team, and the Library and Careers chats offered information about the resources and support students could access through the OU Library and Careers teams.
- 7.4.3 Speakers:** Inspirational speakers included Michael Irwin (contributor to the *Degrees of Freedom* book), Sabrina Cohen-Hatton (Chief Fire Officer of the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service), and the highlight of the weekend for many students, Professor Brian Cox. The programme also included a *Literature Panel* where authors Carole Matthews and Jack Sheffield spoke about the writing process and getting published.
- 7.4.4 Delegates' enjoyment of sessions under the Inspiration theme:** For the inspirational sessions led by student representatives (such as the *Audience with Existing CEC* and *Meet Societies* sessions), 36% of survey respondents selected 'very enjoyable' and 36% selected 'enjoyable' [Figure 11]. Inspirational sessions led by Open University Staff (such as the *OU Expo*) were also well-received, with 26% of survey respondents selecting 'very enjoyable' and 31% selecting 'enjoyable'. When considering these metrics it is important to note the proportion of respondents who did not attend, which ranges between 20%-35%. Overall attendee satisfaction (the proportion of those selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable' from among those who actually attended the sessions) remains high at 90% for inspirational sessions led by student representatives and at 89% for sessions led by OU staff.

*"There was a great mix of activities to choose from and Professor Brian Cox was a great guest speaker!"*

## 7.5 Wellbeing

- 7.5.1 Sessions offered by the Students Association:** The Wellbeing theme encouraged delegates to participate in a variety of self-paced sessions, and offered leisure sessions such as the *Friday Film Night* (delegates had the option of using either BBC iPlayer or Netflix), *Virtual Pub* and *Fancy Dress*. Also part of the Wellbeing theme were *A Q&A with Student Reps* where current student volunteers explored the role that volunteering plays in wellbeing, and the opportunity to learn more about the Students Association's Groups (the Disabled Students Group, PLEXUS, and the BAME Group).
- 7.5.2 Speakers/facilitators:** Several Wellbeing sessions were offered as pre-recorded videos for *Yoga*, *Meditation* and *Zumba* hosted on YouTube. A *Cook Along* session and an *Art Session* were also on offer, as well as the opportunity to hear from the inspirational speaker Hayley Mulenda.
- 7.5.3 Delegates' enjoyment of sessions under the Wellbeing theme:** For the Interactive Wellbeing sessions (such as *A Q&A with Student Reps*), 30% of survey respondents chose 'very enjoyable' and 29% chose 'enjoyable' [Figure 11]. For the Self-paced Well-being sessions (such as *Yoga* and *Zumba*), 15% selected 'very enjoyable' and 14% selected 'enjoyable'. With the Wellbeing sessions, however, a higher proportion of survey respondents chose 'did not attend' (the highest at 62% for the self-paced wellbeing sessions). Overall attendee satisfaction (the proportion of those selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable' from among those who actually attended the sessions) was at 90% for the Interactive Wellbeing sessions and at 76% for the Self-paced wellbeing sessions.
- 7.5.4** Throughout the weekend, the daily Conference newsletter signposted delegates to upcoming events. Delegates could also take part in the *Photography Competition*, where readers of the Association's *The Hoot* magazine were able to vote on their favourite photographs.
- 7.5.5** For every keynote speaker, overall attendee satisfaction (calculated as the proportion of those selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable' from among those who actually attended the sessions) ranged between 81% and 96%. The highest attendee satisfaction was for sessions with Professor Brian Cox (96%), Michael Irwin (94%), Professor Monica Grady (93%), and Dr Stephen Aiken (92%). YouTube views for speakers discussing Higher Education were high both before and after the Conference weekend: for the session with Kirsty Williams this was 95 views during the Conference weekend and 162 views after Conference until the end of August, for the session with Clare Adamson these numbers were 69 views during the Conference weekend and 95 after, and for Dr Stephen Aiken they were 54 views during the Conference weekend and 100 after.

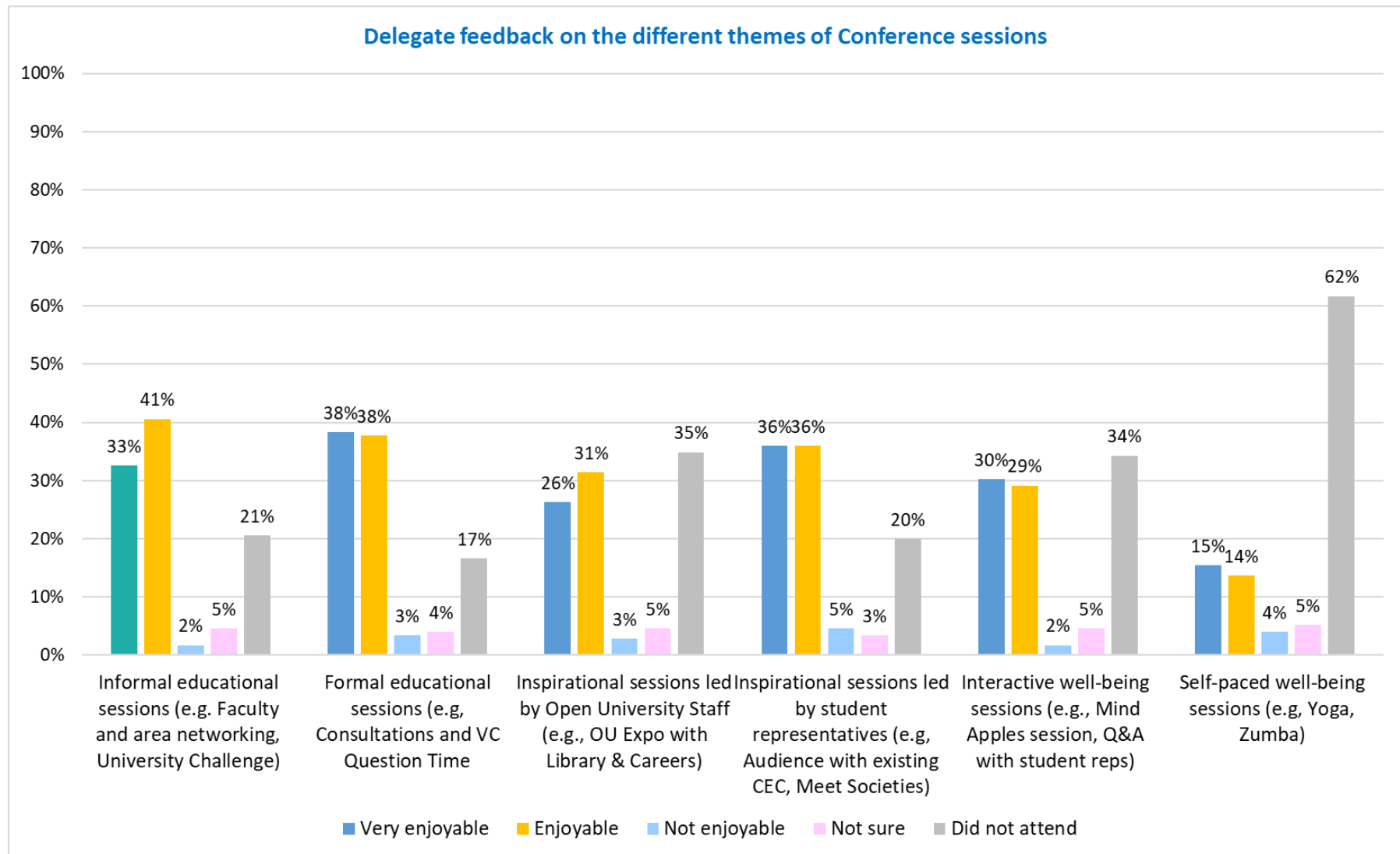


Figure 11. Delegate feedback on the different themes of Conference sessions.

## 8. Online Conference: A new format

- 8.1 Conference 2020 saw the Association deliver the event in an entirely online format for the first time. While the Conference programme was designed to offer sessions that would lend themselves to an online-only format, the new format also meant exploring platforms that were best suited for delivering these sessions in a way that would be engaging and accessible to delegates. Two platforms - Microsoft Teams and Adobe Connect - were chosen, and throughout the Conference weekend two online Adobe Connect rooms offered Tech and Helpdesk support. Details of the Tech Support were hosted both on the Conference microsite and the Guidebook Conference 2020 landing page.
- 8.2 The Guidebook app was used to host the Conference Programme, and offered delegates features such as building a customized schedule and receiving notifications. The Guidebook App was available for download on the Conference microsite, with 346 downloads and 280 unique guide users. Overall delegate satisfaction with using Guidebook was at 74%, with 41% selecting 'very satisfied' and 33% selecting 'satisfied' for 'ease of using Guidebook to build your own schedule [Figure 14].

*"Just like studying with The Open University, having the conference online really fitted in well with my other activities. The morning meditation was a lovely way to get your day started. The guidebook was really useful. Arranging your own schedule and setting reminders."*

*"Guidebook's scheduling was really useful for me as my memory isn't so good - I would enjoy that option at face to face conference too."*

- 8.3 To better understand delegates' experience of the event, the delegate survey also invited feedback on how students prefer to engage with online events:
- The majority of survey respondents preferred speakers/facilitators to use both audio and video (85%), with only 22% opting for audio only [Figure 13]. Thinking about their own participation in online sessions, the majority would have liked to use the chat function (67%) over speaking (38%) or sharing their video (16%).
  - Laptops were the most common device used for attending Conference 2020 sessions (71%), followed by smartphone (27%), tablet (21%) and desktop PC (18%).
- 8.4 While delegates were mostly positive about recommending the Association Conference to fellow students (82%), opinion was split in terms of the format that Conference should take in the future. When asked how they would like to attend Conference in the future, the delegate feedback was split between attending Conference 'as a face-to-face event' (39%), 'as a mix of face-to-face and online activities' (37%), and 'as an online event' (19%) [Figure 12]. Most delegates seemed to have a definite preference regarding the format, with

only 5% selecting 'not sure'.

*“I found the online event much less daunting than going to a face-to-face conference and it meant I could dip in and out and take breaks in a way that would be more difficult at a face-to-face conference. If an online event is repeated, the software could run a bit more smoothly but I thought it was great for a first-time event.”*

*““This was an interesting experience, and much better than not being able to participate at all. But I would much rather have been able to go to a physical conference because I'm sure I would have been able to participate more.”*

**8.5** Overall satisfaction with attending sessions on Adobe Connect was at 74% (40% selected 'very satisfied' and 34% selected 'satisfied'), but this was much lower for Microsoft Teams (30% selected 'very satisfied' and 35% selected 'satisfied') [Figure 14]. This could be explained in part by most delegates already being familiar with Adobe Connect as part of their OU studies, but further support for using Teams is required.

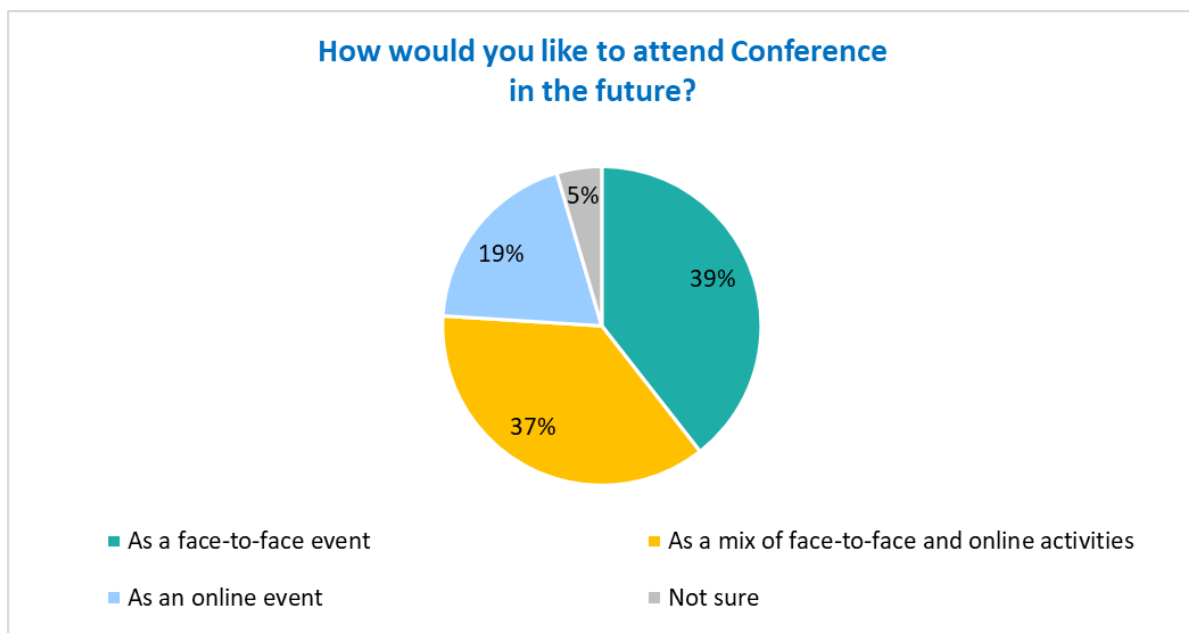


Figure 12. Delegate feedback in response to the question: 'How would you like to attend Conference in the future?'

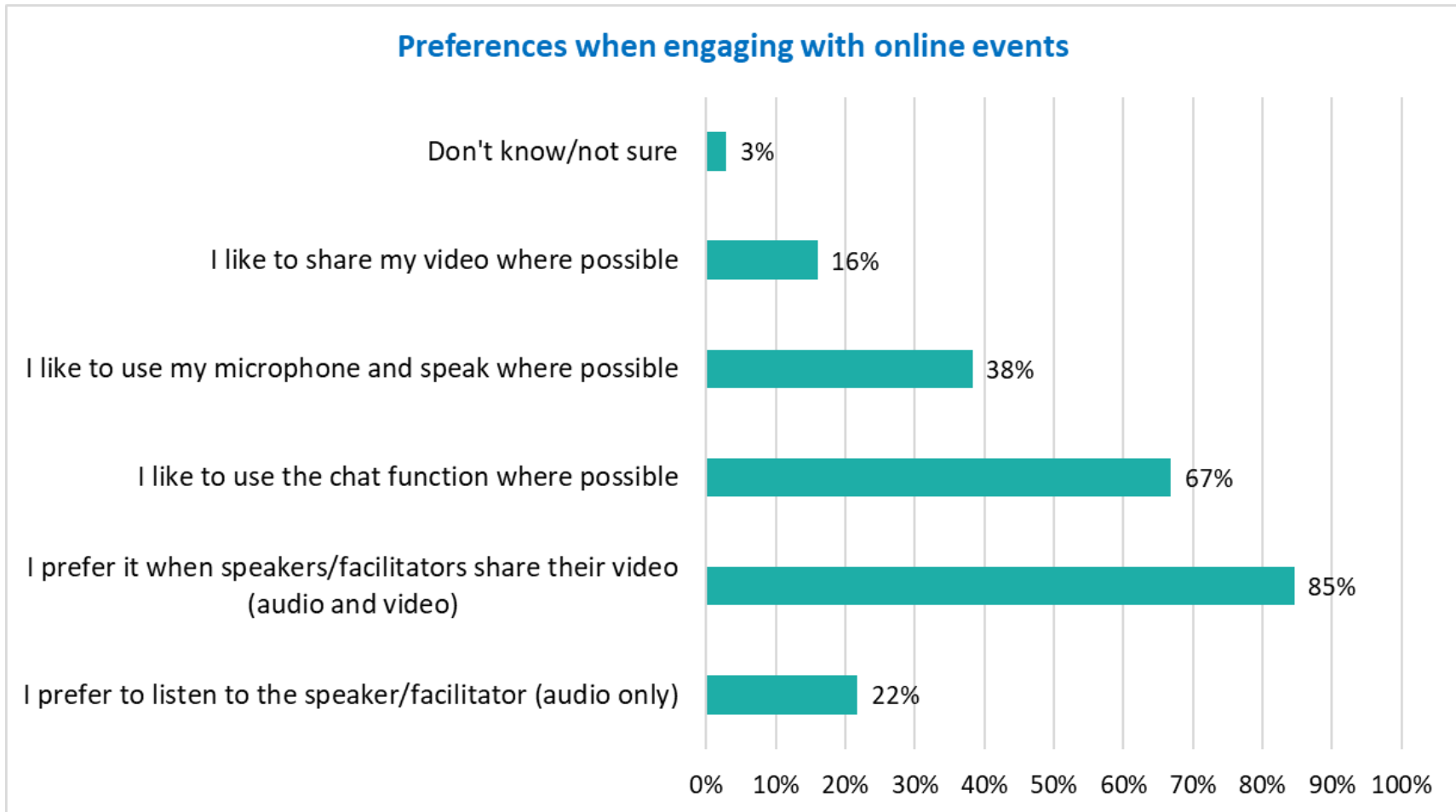


Figure 13. Delegate preferences when engaging with online events.



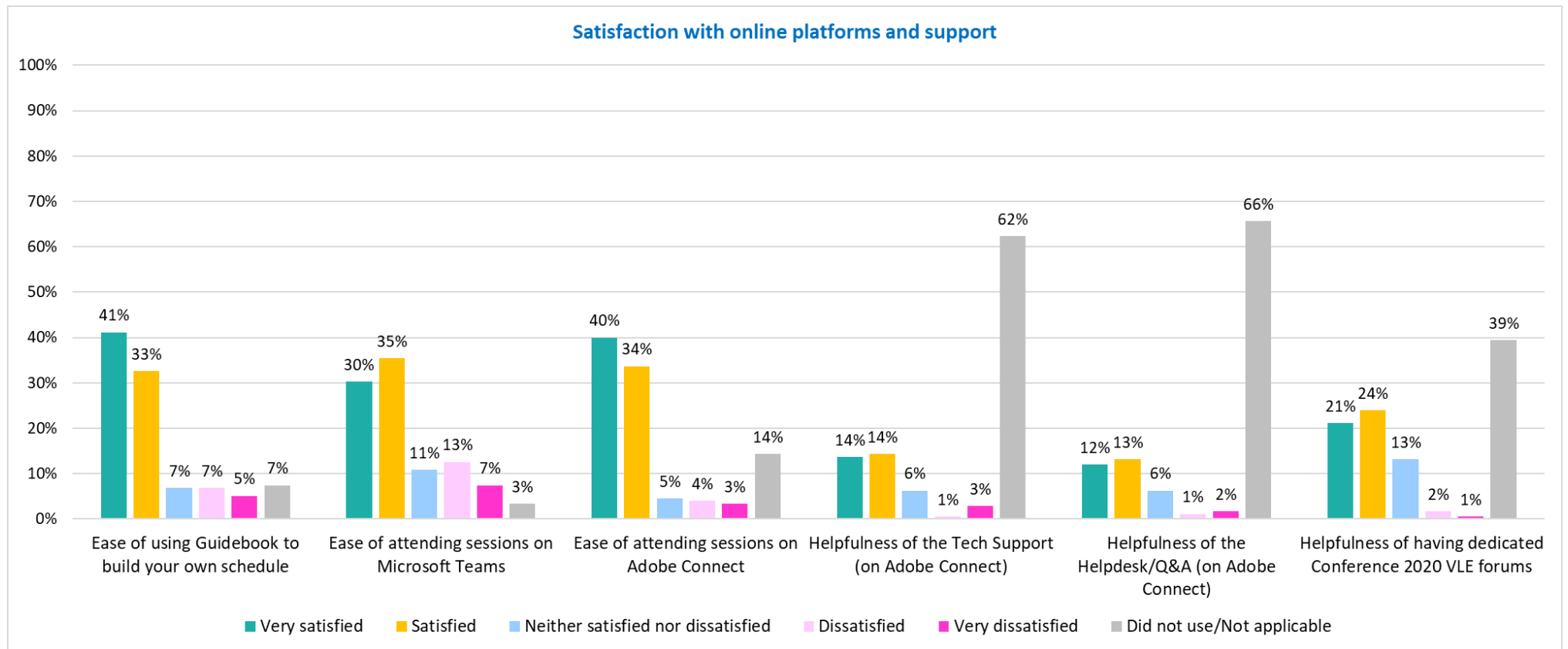


Figure 14. Delegate satisfaction with online platforms and support.

## **9. Impact: Beyond the Conference Weekend**

- 9.1** The data presented in the preceding sections demonstrates how the Students Association approached the planning and design of Conference 2020 to ensure that its key Conference objectives were met. These objectives were: raising awareness of the Association's work, offering delegates the opportunity to get their voice heard, and ensuring that all attendees had a positive and uplifting experience. This section considers key pieces of delegate feedback which act as indicators of how well these objectives were met.
- 9.2** A key consideration for this event was to design sessions in a way that their positive outcomes for delegates would carry over beyond the Conference 2020 weekend and enable students to better engage with the Association and access the support and services available to them. While one question in the delegate survey invited feedback on whether delegates felt that attending Conference had increased their awareness of different aspects of the Association's work, another asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the Association's culture (hereafter referred to as the 'Culture statements').
- 9.3 Delegate Awareness and Engagement:** The Delegate Survey feedback suggests an increase in awareness of different areas of the Association's work. As shown in Figure 15, for each of these measures the overall awareness ranges between 89% and 93%. For each of measures below, over 55% of the respondents selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and over 33% selected 'I already knew about this'.

**The services we offer to students and how you can access them:** 58% selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and 35% selected 'I already knew about this'. 7% selected 'not sure' and 1% selected 'I'm not interested in this at present'.

**The range of events and activities we organise for the student community:** 56% selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and 35% selected 'I already knew about this'. 7% selected 'not sure' and 1% selected 'I'm not interested in this at present'.

**Our democratic structure and how we make decisions within the Association:** 56% selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and 33% selected 'I already knew about this'. 8% selected 'not sure' and 3% selected 'I'm not interested in this at present'.

**Ways in which we represent your voice:** 57% selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and 34% selected 'I already knew about this'. 10% selected 'not sure'.

**The way in which we support the student community:** 55% selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and 37% selected 'I already knew about this'. 7% selected 'not sure' and 1% selected 'I'm not interested in this at present'.

**Ways to get involved with us as a volunteer:** 56% selected 'Yes, I'm more aware after attending Conference' and 35% selected 'I already knew about this'. 5% selected 'not sure' and 3% selected 'I'm not interested in this at present'.

*"I think all students should be made aware of OUSA. Maybe the OU could put a welcome letter into every student's acceptance letter. This way all students will be made aware of them being part of the community. OUSA do so much good but many students are not aware they exist."*

**9.4 Culture statements:** The Conference 2020 Delegate Survey dedicated a question to Culture statements aligned with the Conference objectives as well as the Association's key strategic objectives [Figure 16].

**9.5 I feel that attending Conference 2020 has made a positive contribution to my student experience:** Satisfaction was high with 49% selecting 'strongly agree' and 34% selecting 'agree'. With 83% of respondents agreeing with this statement, Objective 1 (*'ensure all conference attendees gain a good understanding of what we do and our relevance to their student journey and all of the opportunities to take part'*) was met. This also progresses the *Inform and Support* and *Engage and Involve* strands of the Association's strategy: delegates gained more information about the services and support available to them during their student journey, while also learning about the different ways that they could get involved with the wider OU student community.

*"Such an enjoyable weekend. High quality and variety of sessions. Something for everyone. It has made me want to continue my MSc with OU to remain part of the family!"*

*"It has completely opened my eyes to the opportunities available through the ousa and how easy it is to get involved. I came as a student feeling isolated and feeling a bit defeated but left with a new lease of life."*

**9.6 I felt that the Conference weekend reflected the Association's commitment to inclusivity and diversity:** Satisfaction was high with 53% selecting 'strongly agree' and 30% selecting 'agree'. With 83% of respondents agreeing with this statement, the Association has made progress on Objective 2 (*'ensure all conference attendees have an opportunity to provide feedback and input'*). This also progresses the *Inform and Support* strand of the

Association's Strategy: sessions such as *Coffee and Consultation*, one of which focused on *Inclusivity and Diversity*, offered delegates an opportunity to give feedback on important issues and identify what was important to them so that the Association could support them better.

- 9.7 I felt encouraged to participate in the consultation sessions:** Satisfaction was good with 46% selecting 'strongly agree' and 30% selecting 'agree'. With 76% of respondents agreeing with this statement, Objective 2 (*'ensure all conference attendees have an opportunity to provide feedback and input'*) was met. The consultation session also progressed the *Influence and Transform* strand of the Association's Strategy, so that the rich feedback gathered through the consultations will contribute to policy discussions and help the Association gather evidence about the areas that students are most concerned about.

*"I especially liked that I was able to attend consultation session with breakout rooms. It was interesting to hear other student opinions and ideas. It makes you feel heard and respected."*

*"I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet with other students, hear from student and course representatives and listen to key speakers. Additionally feeling like I was able to give back by participating in discussion sessions to hopefully improve the student experience going forward."*

- 9.8 I felt there were plenty of opportunities for my voice to be heard:** 37% of respondents selected 'strongly agree' and 37% selected 'agree' for this statement, but compared to the other culture statements the overall satisfaction of 74% could be further improved. While progressing Objective 2 (*'ensure all conference attendees have an opportunity to provide feedback and input'*), delegate feedback suggests that opportunities to join in discussions could be both better signposted and made more welcoming for new students (see Recommendations section).

- 9.9 I found the hosts and facilitators friendly and welcoming:** Satisfaction was highest with the facilitation of sessions, with 62% selecting 'strongly agree' and 30% selecting 'agree'. With 92% of respondents agreeing with this statement, Objective 3 (*'ensuring that all Conference attendees had a positive and uplifting experience'*) was met. This also progresses the *Inform and Support* strand of the Association's Strategy, in that delegates were reassured by the support available to them through the Association.

*"As a very new student to OU I had been feeling a little anxious about my ability to "be a student" I was met by such a kind friendly and supportive group of delegates, speakers, facilitators and incoming and outgoing Committee members, that I learnt a lot and definitely was made to feel "part of the gang" So not only do I know a lot more, I now feel much more confident as a direct*

*result of attending. Thank you very much.”*

- 9.10 I feel that attending Conference has increased my sense of belonging to the OU student community:** Satisfaction was good with 46% selecting ‘strongly agree’ and 31% selecting ‘agree’. With 77% of respondents selecting this statement, Objective 3 (*‘ensure all conference attendees have a positive and uplifting experience that inspires them to get further involved’*) was met. Progress was also made on the *Engage and Involve* strand of the Association’s Strategy, in that delegates felt their sense of belonging to the wider student community had increased and that they were better able to identify ways to get involved.

*“Conference was fantastic, as someone who knew little about OUSA it really helped me to find out what OUSA do and how I can become involved. I felt inspired and felt a real sense of belonging by the end of the conference!”*

*“The survey only let me select up to “met my expectations”, but the reality is that it exceeded my expectations! It was amazing to see what's happening in the Student Association, but I think the big thing for me was meeting other people who are studying with the OU. I sometimes feel disconnected, but after Conference I understand that there are so many ways to connect with fellow students!”*

- 9.11** In addition to the increase in awareness of the Association’s work and feedback on the Culture statements, other positive outcomes are already visible in the way that students are identifying opportunities to engage with the Association as participants and volunteers. For instance, 50 new sign-ups to the Association’s monthly newsletter were registered between 26 June (the first day of Conference) and 15 July (the close of the Delegate Survey where the newsletter had been advertised). It is also heartening that the Association website continued to receive 5,349 new visitors two weeks after the Conference weekend (29 June – 12 July).
- 9.12** Similarly, applications for volunteering roles such as Peer Support and Central Committee Representative also registered an increase – while it is difficult to identify whether these new applicants were also Conference 2020 delegates, it would not be unreasonable to attribute this increase in part to the interest created by the *Volunteering Zone* session during Conference. In the following months, the Association will also explore the feedback gained through the consultations and use it to inform policy discussions.

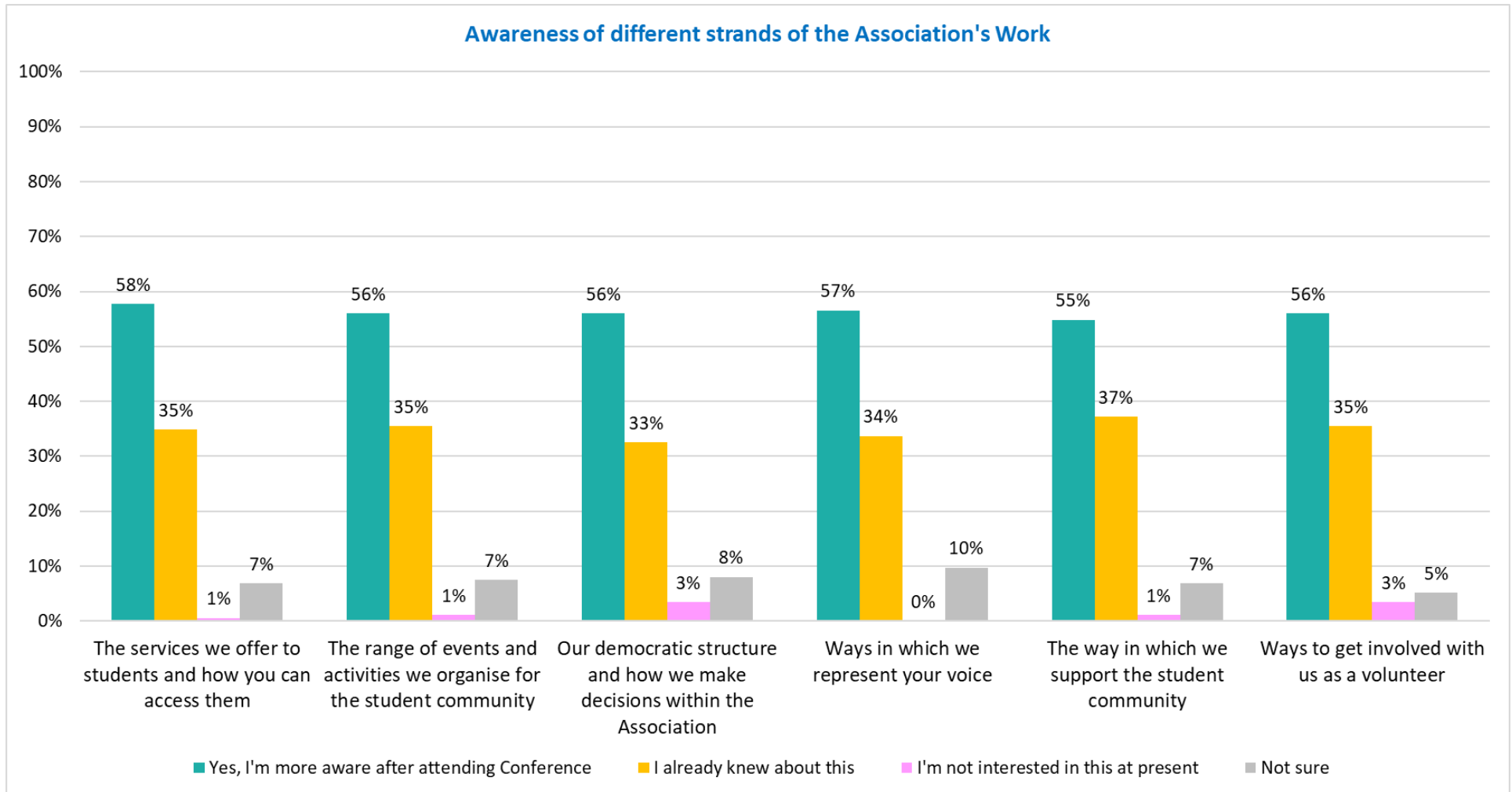


Figure 15. Delegate feedback on awareness of different areas of the Association's work as a result of having attended Conference 2020.

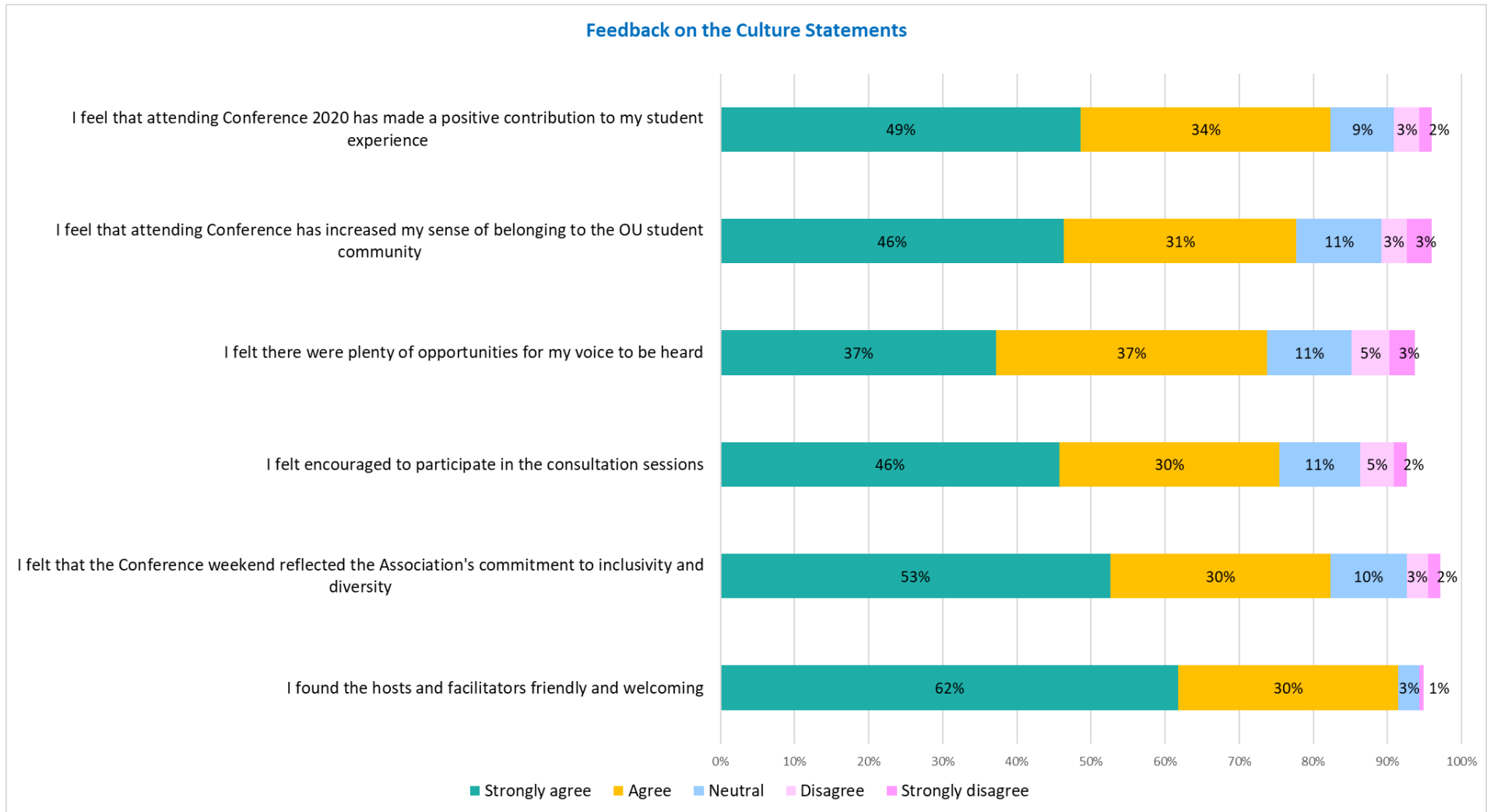


Figure 16. Delegate feedback on the Culture statements regarding Conference 2020.

## 10. Recommendations

- 10.1** These recommendations follow from delegate feedback about areas that did not work well for them, and where improvements could be made for future online events. While the first three are around technical glitches, the last recommendation focuses on how online events could be improved to make new students feel confident in participating and/or speaking in the sessions.
- 10.2 Accessibility requirements:** Improve the provision of transcripts and live captioning for the hard of hearing.

*“Please reassure your hearing-impaired attendees that they will be able to participate. Or, if you don’t have accessibility options, make that clear so someone like me can give their space to someone else.”*

*“The sound was intermittent, and perhaps subtitles or a transcript would be good for those hard of hearing.”*

- 10.3 Chat function:** We know that 67% of the survey respondents would have preferred to use the chat function, and this led to disappointment in cases where they could not access it. Having the provision of the chat function as a key consideration when choosing online platforms, and early identification of any technical glitches that delegates might face, is recommended.
- 10.4 Support with Guidebook and Microsoft Teams:** Delegates would have found it helpful to have details of Guidebook emailed further in advance. Due to delegate places being conditional on students having voted in Conference Business, the timing of when certain information could be emailed to delegates was dependent upon when the Business voting closed. For instance, the pass phrase for Guidebook was emailed on 25 June once confirmation was received that delegates had voted. For future events perhaps the Tech Helpdesk could be offered earlier to give delegates time to check whether all the applications are working for them.

*“It would have been nice to have earlier access to guidebook and/or finalised schedule to understand what platforms were being used would have been helpful, though I understand it might not have been possible. I did find it quite stressful downloading Teams the evening before starting and not having a clue how it worked or having the time to get to grips with it before the weekend started.”*

- 10.5 Ensure new students feel they are actively invited to interact:** A few students, in particular those who were new to the Association, felt left out of the conversation. As the two comments below suggest, more could be done to involve new students and present discussion topics in a way that encourages



participation from those who are engaging with it for the first time.

*“In the consultations I had a more experienced OU student make a remark that I was ‘preaching to the choir’ - I felt quite uncomfortable talking about feedback after that. I appreciate that they may not have felt listened to in the past but in voicing this here they made me not feel listened to.”*

*“Not knowing anybody as a first-time participant in OUSA events. While the details might need working out, an idea to consider would be something along the lines of a buddy system, where a more experienced participant (a faculty rep?) would be personally aware of/ get to know individuals from their faculty attending and specifically look out for them and help them to participate.”*

- 10.6** With these recommendations in mind, returning to the overall delegate feedback for Conference 2020 presents a very positive and encouraging picture. Thinking about whether they would recommend Conference to a fellow student, 82% of survey respondents selected ‘definitely’:

*“I learned lots on how to get involved with the OU, and connected with other students. I also found the key speakers events inspiring, and the conference overall helped lift my spirits during lockdown.”*

*“It was an absolute blast! A wonderful mix of events that allowed me to engage with fellow students, learn more about the association and feel less alone as a distance learner. It was also incredible to hear from so many keynote speakers and lecturers, it was especially great to hear and learn about topics that I'm not studying and wish I could do it more often! I cannot thank you all enough for organising such a wonderful event! :)”*

**Pooja Sinha**  
**Research and Information Officer**