



Student
Lifestyle
and
Learning
Report 2025



Contents

Welcome	1
Who we surveyed	2
Five-year trends	3
What's new	5
Affordability and the election	6
Advice to Year 12s of 2025	10
Insights for educators	12
What motivates students	18
Tech and AI	23



Welcome

We are proud to introduce the fifth and largest edition of UAC's annual Student Lifestyle and Learning Report.

Since the inception of this report in 2021, we've heard from almost 70,000 school leavers about their interests and passions, their concerns and dreams.

In response to one of the largest annual surveys of its kind in Australia, these young adults have generously shared their perspectives with us – through the ups and downs of the COVID pandemic, changes in government and worldwide uncertainty.

With each unique student cohort over the years, we've continued to build our understanding and awareness of what they want and need as they prepare to take their next steps after high school.

Kicking off this milestone edition, we've highlighted some significant five-year trends that show how students' views have evolved on issues such as climate, graduate employment outcomes and mental health.

Further on, this year's respondents – almost 18,000 teenagers from across the country – tell us what they really think about HECS, housing affordability and the issues that will influence their vote as Australia heads into a federal election in 2025.

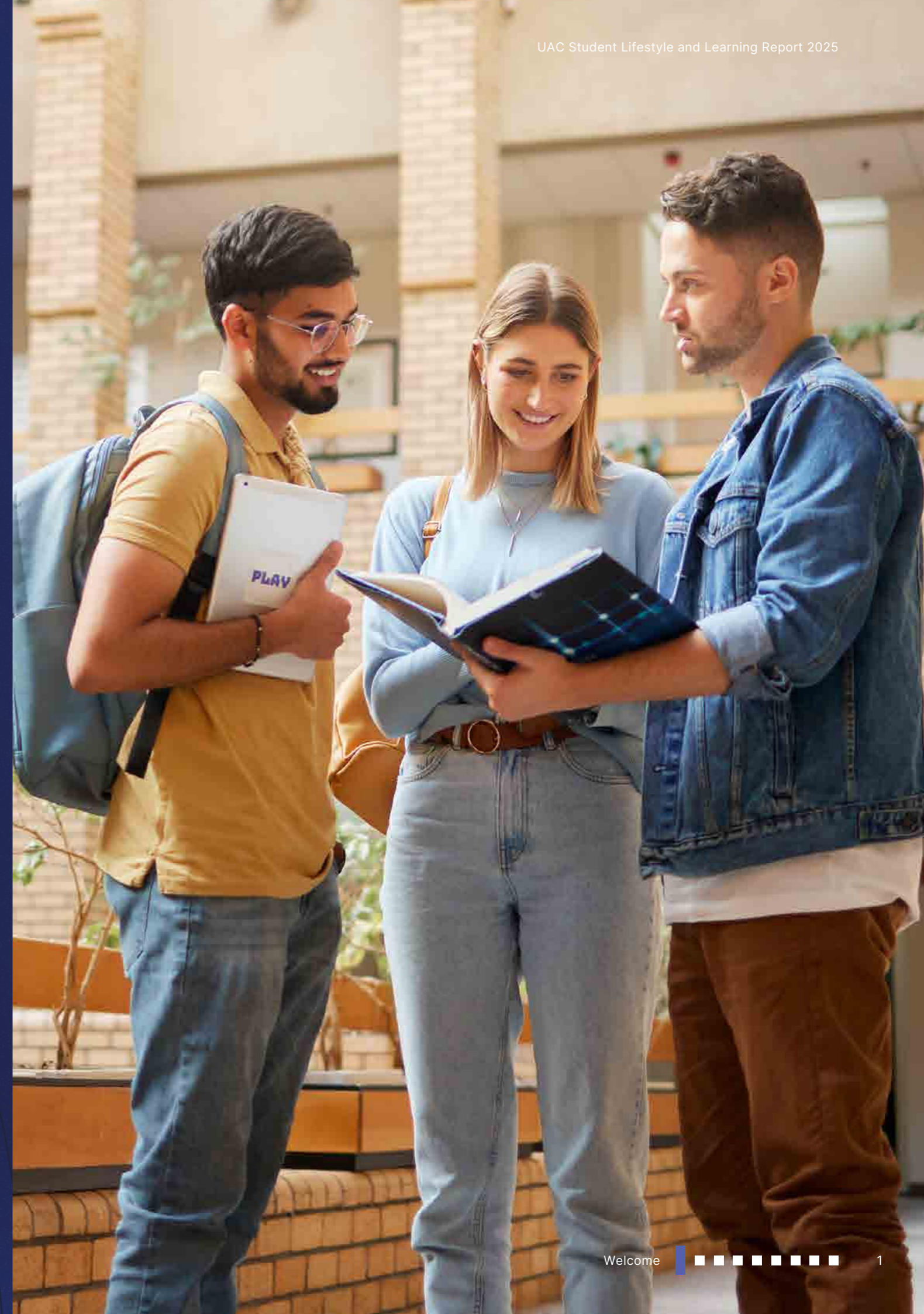
Cost of living has once again emerged as a key concern. This time, we've dug deeper to understand how financial pressures are affecting school leavers' higher education choices and when they'll move out of home.

If there's one thing that has remained unchanged in the past five years, it's students' optimism and excitement for the future. They want to develop new skills, study in an area they're passionate about and make a difference in the world.

It is this passion, determination and drive that we must continue to nurture. Now as ever it's important for us at UAC – and for decision makers, educators and the wider community – to understand the obstacles students are facing and learn how we can best support them in the years to come.

We hope you enjoy learning about these fascinating young adults as much as we did.

James Kevin
UAC Chief Customer & Commercial Officer

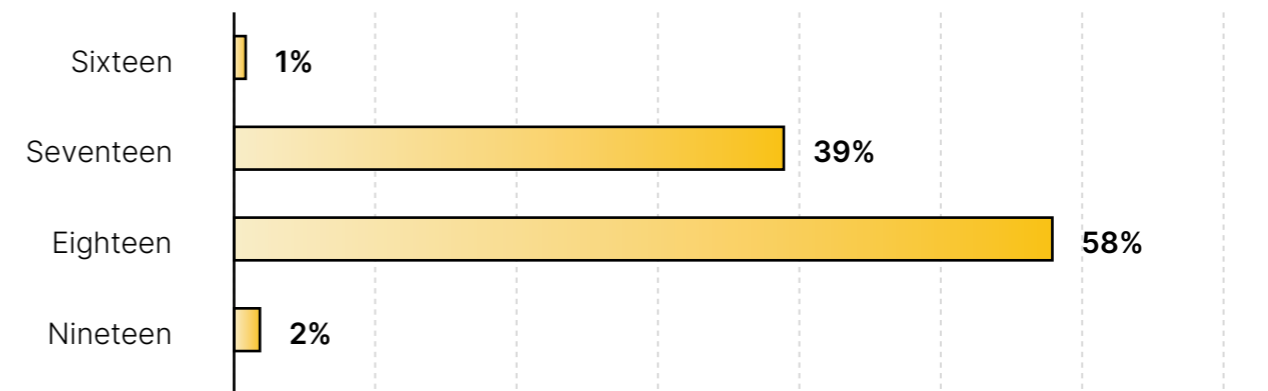




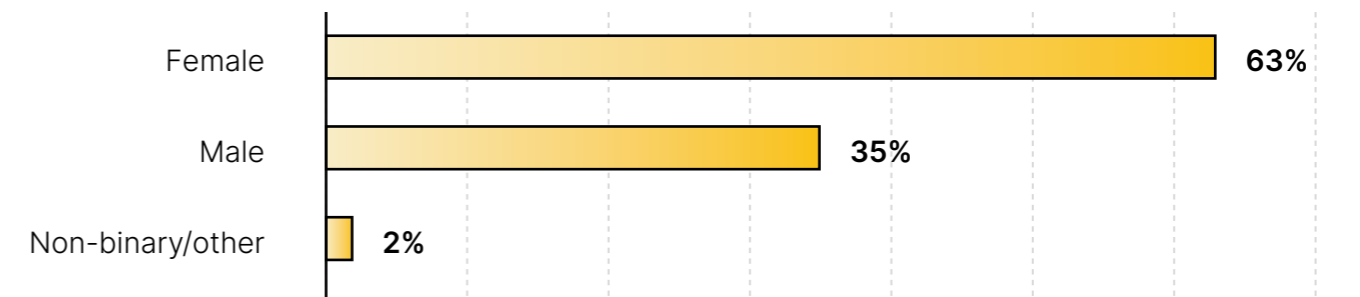
Who we surveyed

Between November 2024 and January 2025, we surveyed 17,794 Year 12 students completing their secondary schooling in every state and territory in Australia.

Age



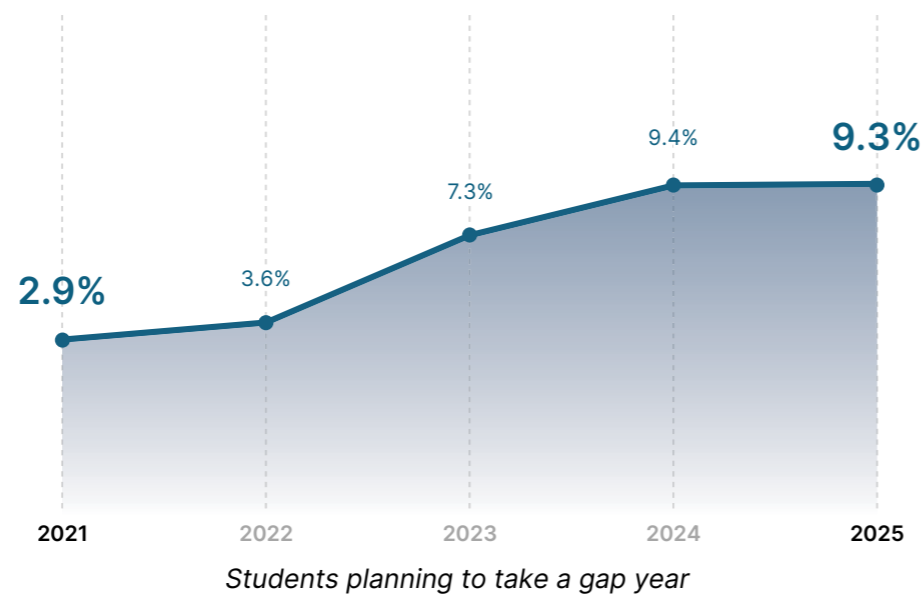
Gender



Five-year trends: on the move

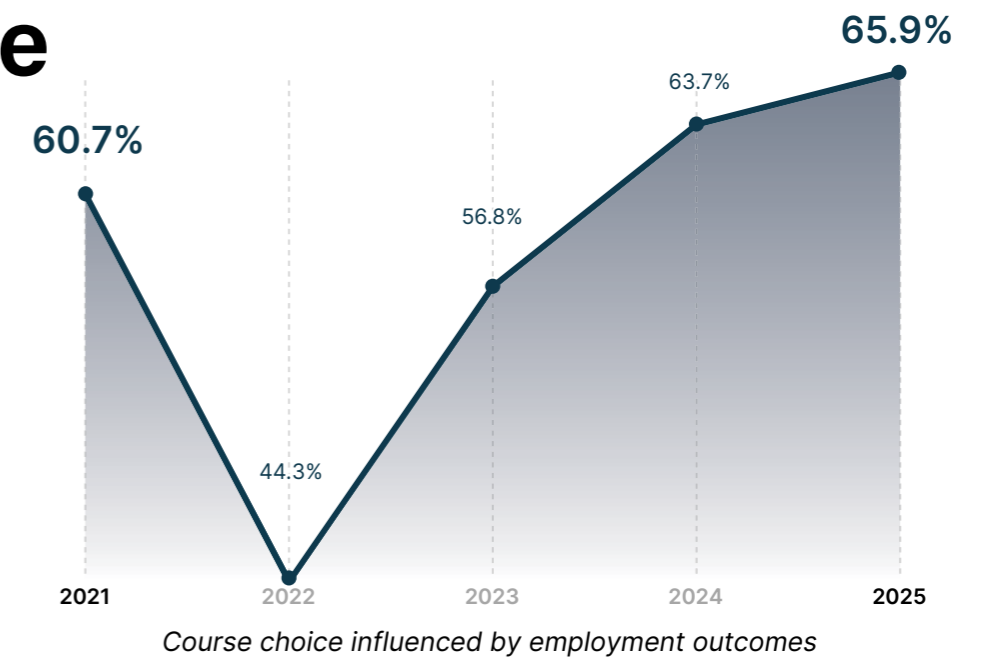
Gap years bounce back

One in eleven students take a gap year after Year 12. This trend has stabilised in 2025 to match last year's numbers. Back in 2021, only one in thirty-four students planned to take a gap year as COVID took hold and passports gathered dust.



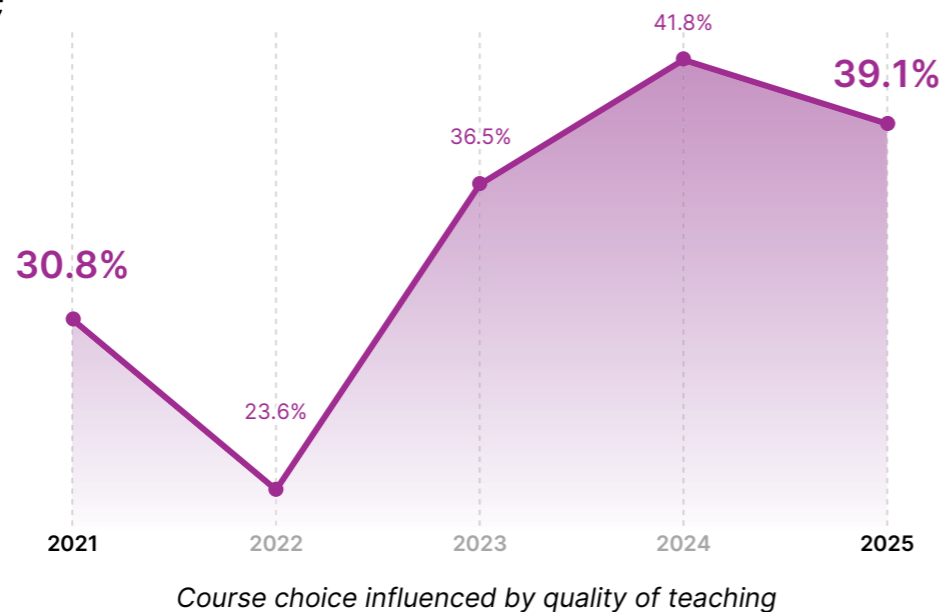
Employment outcomes surge in importance

Graduate employment matters to 65.9% of school leavers when choosing a course, rising by 21.6% since its 2022 low.



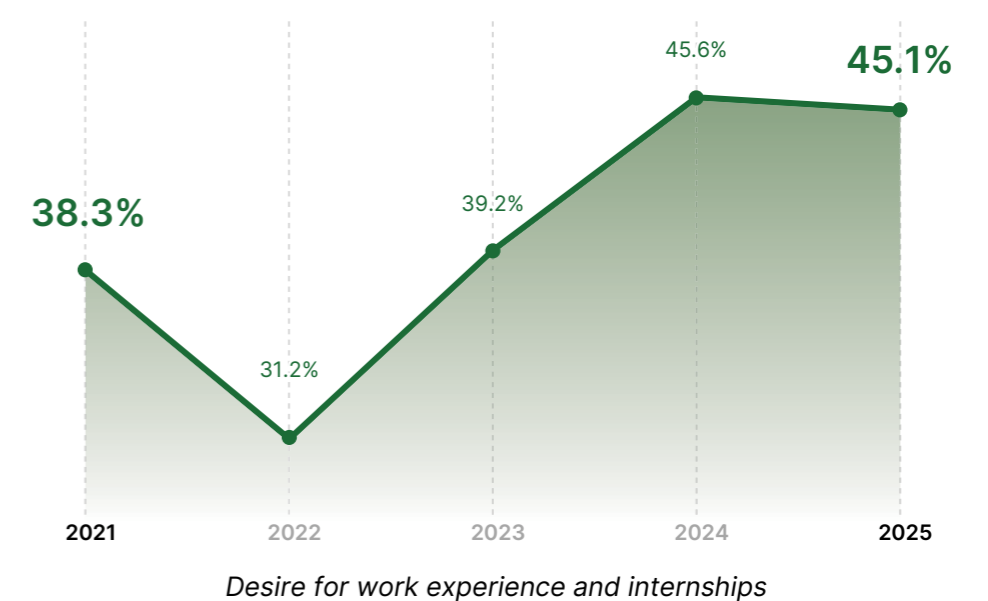
Expectations for teaching quality rise

Quality of teaching is growing in importance for students choosing a course, rising 8.3% since 2021.



Counting on experience

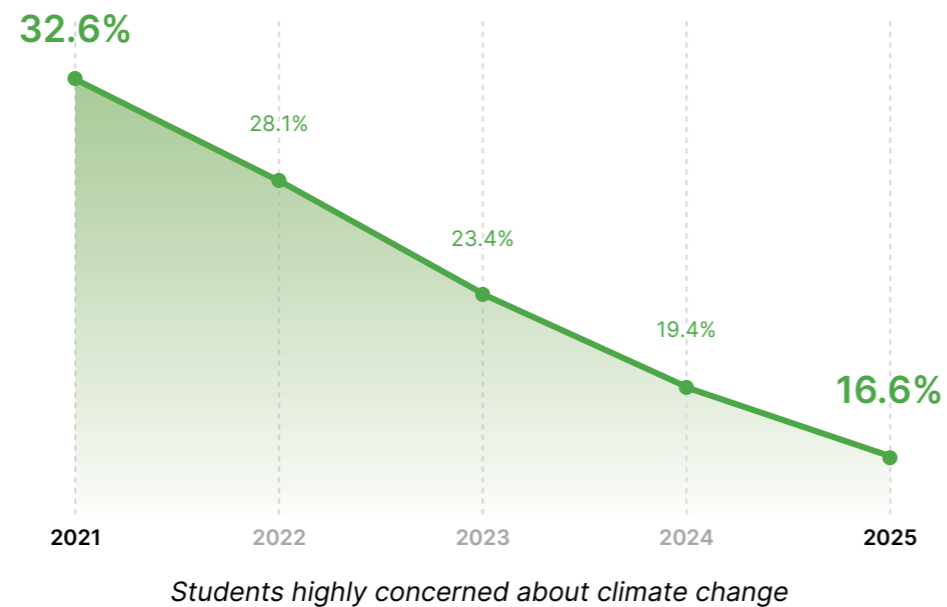
Half of students want to equip themselves for the workforce through work experience and internship opportunities during their studies. Interest in these opportunities has grown by 6.8% over the five years to 2025.



Five-year trends: steady or sliding

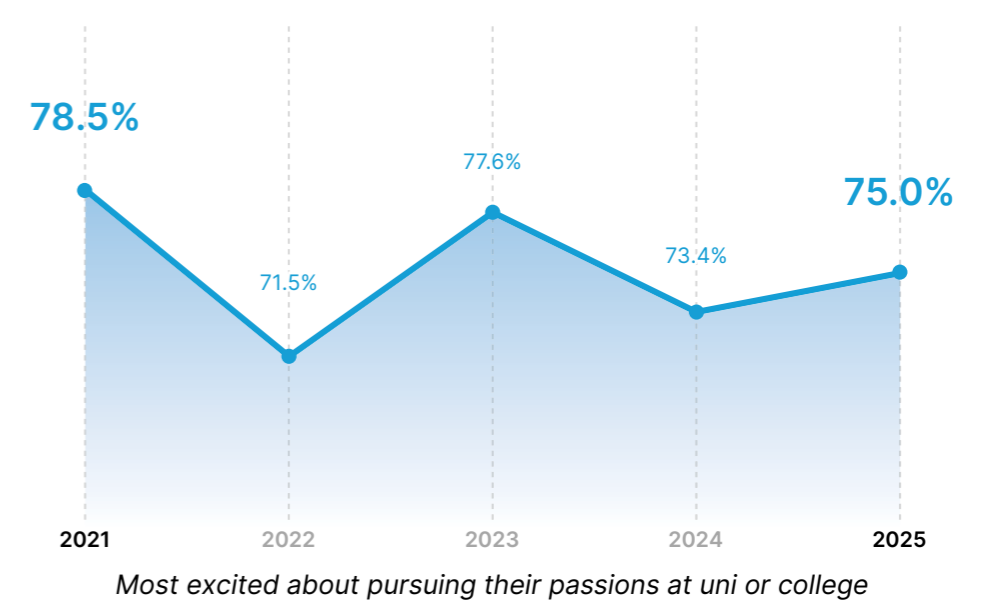
Climate concern loses focus

Concern for climate change has become less of a priority since 2021, despite global temperatures rising to record highs in 2024.



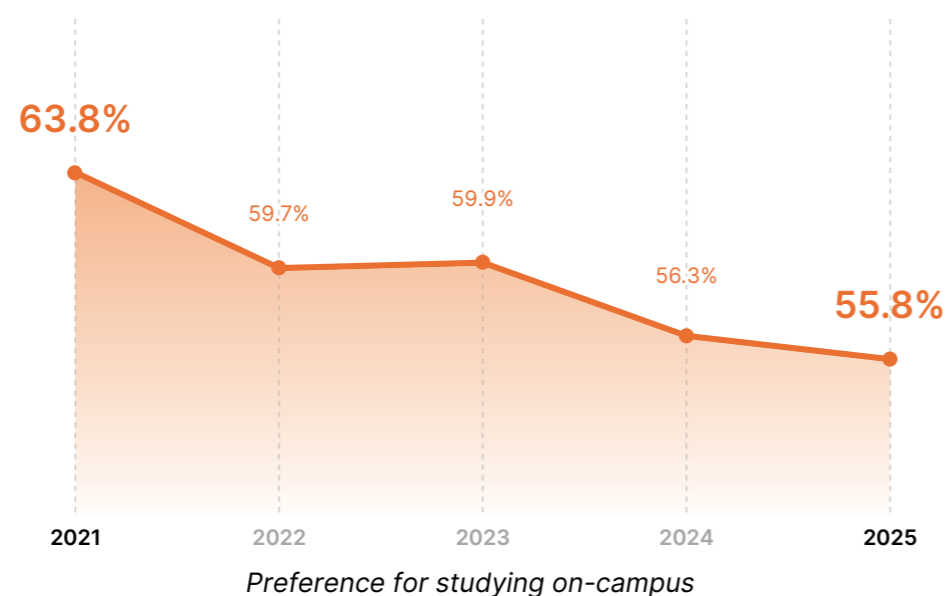
In pursuit of passion

For five years running, nothing has excited students more than the chance to pursue their passions at university or college.



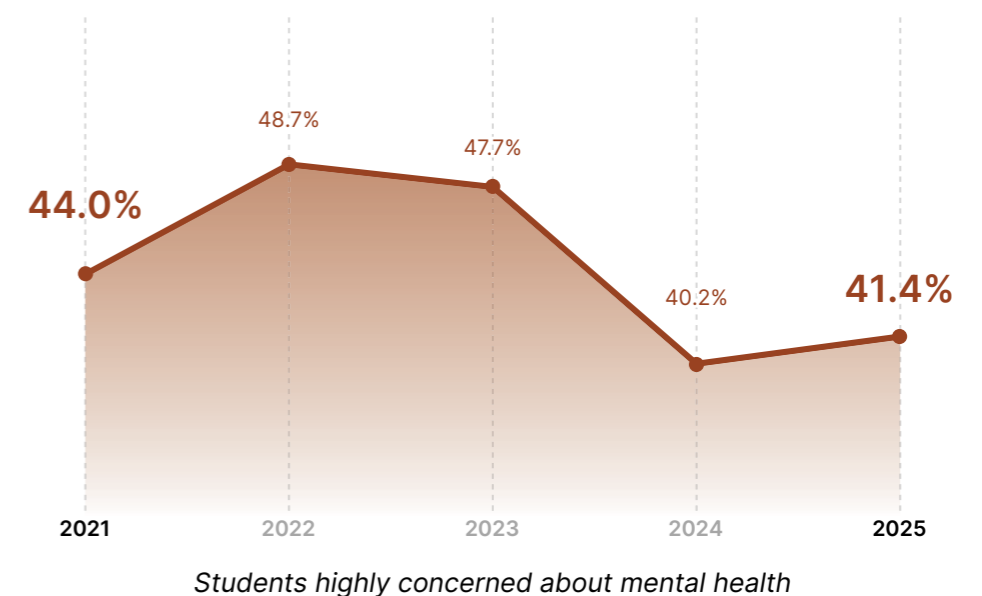
Campus down but not out

As students pivot from Year 12 to university, they want a mix of online learning components to support their on-campus learning.



Mental health still a concern

Mental health worries fell to an encouraging low last year of 40.2%. Unfortunately, this improvement has stalled in 2025, with mental health concerns rising 1.2%.



What's new



In this edition of UAC's Student Lifestyle and Learning Report, we take a pulse check on students' biggest voting concerns and whether HECS is affecting their university plans, among other new issues.

Our coverage begins with a cost of living and election feature. It provides a snapshot of the financial pressures these school leavers are facing as they head into a federal election year. They share what their biggest concerns are and where they plan to live when they start uni.

Further in the report, we've added six new questions that draw out new insights on education and student motivation. We want to know what students aspire to, what obstacles stand in their way and the support they need to achieve their higher education dreams.

Affordability and the election

What are the top voting issues?	7
How much does cost influence study decisions?	8
Where will they live?	8

Education and student motivation

What advice do they have to share with new Year 12 students?	10
What will they study later on?	15
At what age did they make a career decision?	19
How do they want to grow as people?	21
What are their skill goals?	22
What are their uni study worries?	22

The hip-pocket election

The cost of living looms largest for this group of first-time voters by a 19% margin. Eighty-six per cent reported that it will influence their voting decision in the impending federal election.

Housing affordability (69%) and jobs (61%) are the next two biggest voting issues, with HECS following as the fourth major issue (55%). This group of voters has one eye on their current finances and one eye on their future finances.



'My main voting issues are the economy and cost of living, which are really the most important issues that need to be addressed in order to live. Honestly, it costs money to even breathe nowadays!'
Solveig, 17

'Most politicians don't understand how hard it is coming from a rural area. Seeing politicians who grew up in similar areas to me immediately pushes them up on my list. As an Arabic woman, I also want someone who can embrace all cultures.'

Kirilee, 18

'If politicians have basic human empathy and I see clear evidence through their actions, I'll vote for them.'

Addison, 18

'My finances are gonna be stuffed up no matter who I choose. It'll take more than a new prime minister to make a difference.'
Jordan, 18

'It's very difficult to be a young student in this economy, so someone who cares about that and makes a difference would have my support.'
Gina, 18

'It's a coin flip for me. I'm not interested in politics.'
Dylan, 18

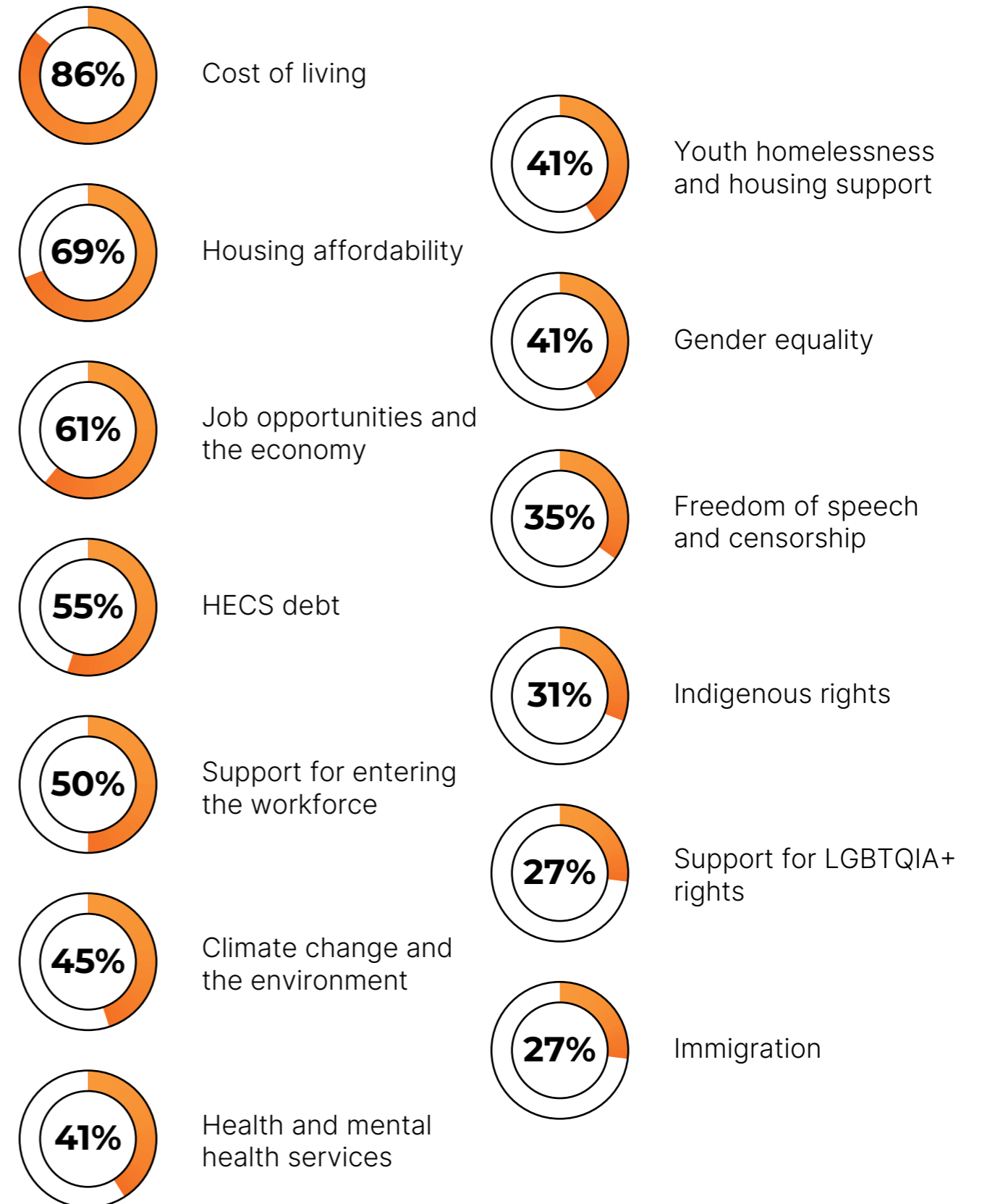
'My vote is influenced based on a candidate's character and what they have done to prove their worth. I want to know that my local MP will take the actions needed to fix problems in the community.'
Harry, 18

'I'll vote for anyone willing to say that immigration is good, actually.'
Brad, 18

'If a party claims that they'll lower the cost of living, I won't believe it until I see it'
Maximus, 18

The cost of my vote

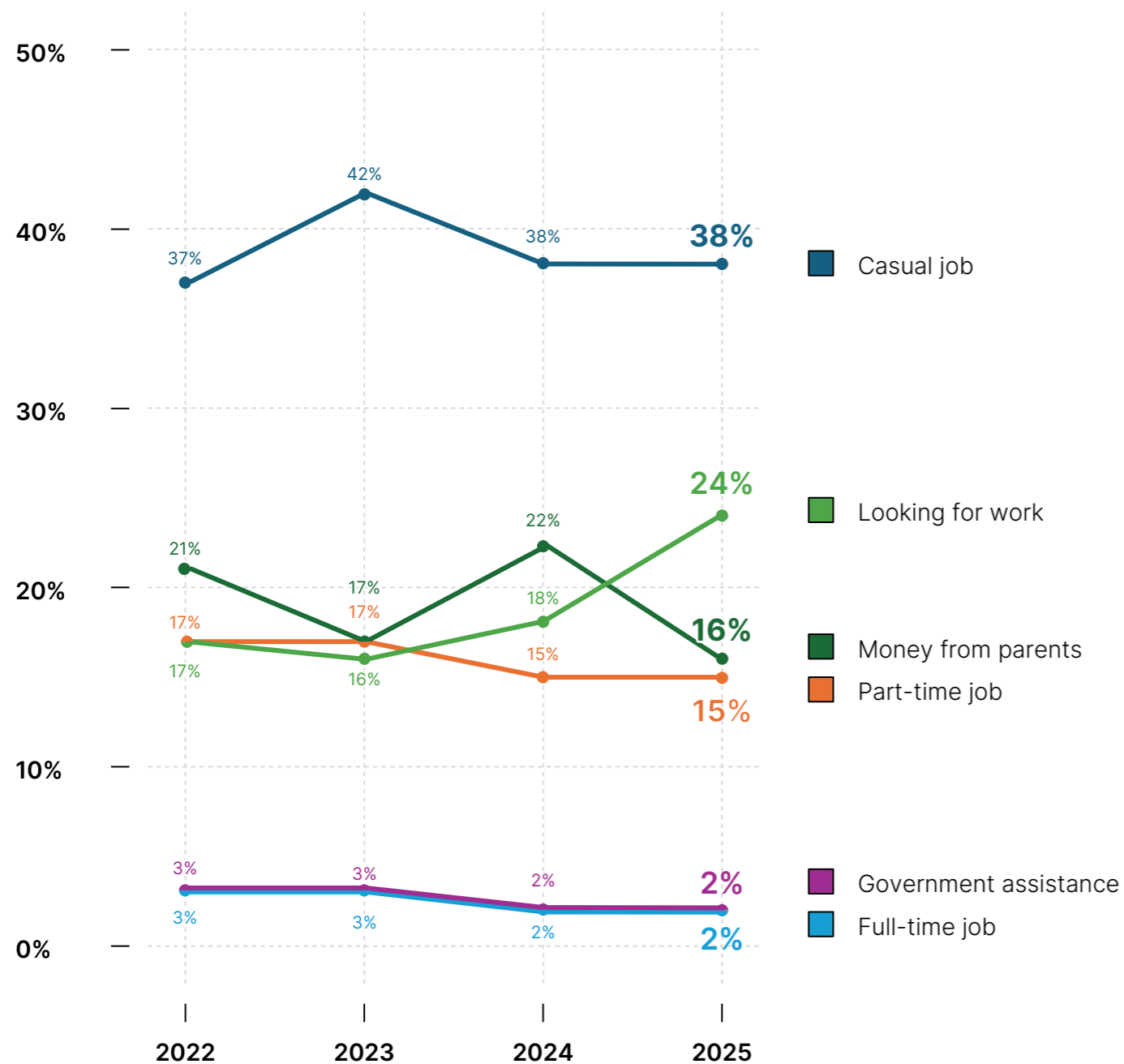
Which of these issues will influence your voting decision in the upcoming federal election?



Student debt, work and housing

Bank of Mum and Dad running dry

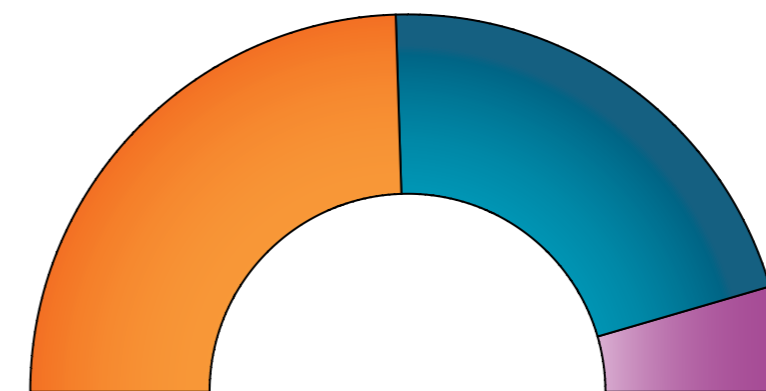
What is your main source of income?



Tough times have hit home. The percentage of parents funding their kids has decreased by 6%. In response, there has been a 6% lift in students looking for work. It raises important questions for both parents and students under financial pressure. In particular, are there enough well-paying casual jobs on the market to support the one in four students looking for work?

Who gives a HECS?

Does the cost of university influence your decision to attend?

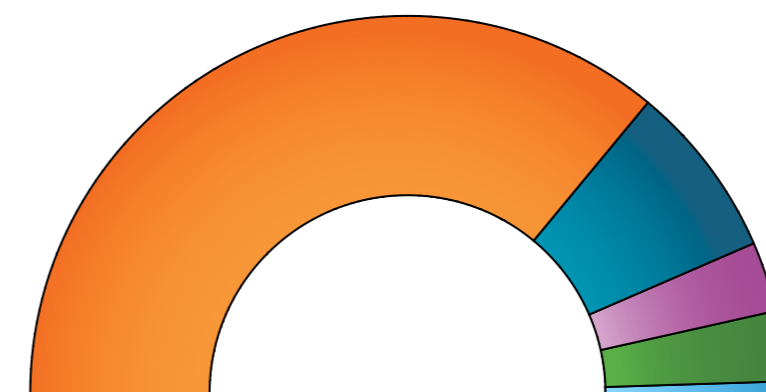


Half of students (49%) won't let a HECS debt influence their decision to attend university, while a further 9% won't have to worry at all with their families picking up the tab. Nevertheless, 42% say that HECS is a significant factor in their decision.

- 49% No, I'll worry about HECS later
- 42% Yes, it's a significant factor
- 9% No, my family will cover the cost

Trapped in the nest

What type of living arrangement do you expect to have when you start studying?



Long gone are first-year-uni renters. Almost three in four (72%) will stay in the family nest with their parents. As a sign of the times, only 6% are heading into the pricey private rental market.

- 72% Continue living with my family
- 15% Move into student housing/residential college
- 6% Rent my own place
- 5% Not sure yet
- 1% Consider living with extended family

Advice to the class of 2025



Boost your study skills

'Use past papers as soon as possible – it's the best way to prepare for how questions are asked in the real exams.'

Ishita, 18

'The syllabus is your best friend – make sure you understand each of the dot points and structure your study around them.'

Tergel, 17

'Find the study method that works best for you – whether it's mind maps, flashcards, or teaching the content to someone else.'

Mahela, 18

'Practise writing out answers under timed conditions, so you're used to working under pressure before the real exams.'

Riti, 18

Master the early research and plan phase

25% of Year 12s have already applied to UAC by May each year.



'Start developing your university pathway early. Understanding UAC and different university pathways takes the pressure off needing a high ATAR and makes Year 12 less about assessments and more about preparing for the future.'

Emily, 17

'Look into universities as soon as you can so you can adjust your UAC application.'

Tara, 18

'Have a concept of the "big picture" from the beginning of the year – have a 12-month overview calendar with important dates (last UAC early bird fee date, first round offer date etc) so that nothing gets forgotten. This will 100% lessen the stress you feel long-term!'

Hayden, 18

Settle the nerves with early offers

27,000 students applied for early offers through the Schools Recommendation Scheme in 2024. That's a 19% increase on the previous year and the largest group ever.

'Set aside time each week to work on early offer applications, so you can apply to a lot of courses without stress and therefore not have as much pressure on yourself for the HSC.'

Alice, 18

'Use the Schools Recommendation Scheme for early uni offers.'

Sam, 18

'If you're planning to go to uni, apply for early offers when you get the chance, regardless of whether you're struggling with school or doing well. It's a strategy that you should make use of.'

Joa, 18

'One hundred per cent use early offer schemes and the Schools Recommendation Scheme (if they offer it), it's a game changer.'

Jasmine, 18

'Make sure you apply to as many early offer programs as you can, so at least you have a plan B.'
Amelie, 18

You're not alone with your mental health

64% of students say that they are stressed at least half the time.

'Year 12 will be the most stressful and difficult year of your life, but if you seize the good moments too, it will be the fondest of your high school memories.'

Matthias, 17

'Although it may be stressful, it will pass. Genuinely just try your best and that's all you can do – stressing will only make you feel worse.'
Julia, 18

'Forget all your marks until now and just try your best in Year 12. Don't let the stress and anxiety of a bad mark hold you down from performing better in the next one.'

Natalie, 18

'If you feel alone and constantly stressed and burned out, talk to someone you trust – a teacher, counsellor, peer, work buddy, or parent. It will be worth it. I promise.'

Manayer, 18

How to kick your goals

55% of students want to become more proactive and organised.

'Always understand content on the day it's covered by the teacher so that information you don't know doesn't accumulate. Use NESA's resources and quizzes: they helped me so much in Year 12! Make studying fun and you will achieve high results. Do this by bringing a drink to your desk, listening to something and using colours to decorate your notes. Always love yourself and be strong!'

Leena, 17

'Stay on top of your work. Be consistent on your drafts and constantly ask for feedback from peers and teachers in order to better develop your skills for the HSC. After trials, keep grinding until the HSC is over.'

Henrietta, 18

'Have a set schedule for studying. This is truly important in allowing you to decrease stress and increase studying outcomes.'

Sulaym, 18

Balance benefits

58% of students want to learn how to better balance different areas of life.

'Balance is key. Obviously studying is an important part of Year 12, but it is important to learn to keep a good study/life balance. Go out with friends or pick up a hobby to occasionally take your mind off study. Those few hours a week will go a long way in keeping a positive mental headspace and possibly even assist in academics and study.'

Elijah, 17

'It's all about balance – pace yourself. Work, study, play hard. Make time for yourself – you can't give your 100% when you're at 50%.'
Rose, 18

'Prioritise balance and maintain consistency in your efforts. Make a study plan that divides your workload into digestible portions, then follow it. To prevent burnout, schedule time for friends, hobbies and exercise on an equal basis. Keep in mind that taking care of oneself is just as important for Year 12 success as studying.'

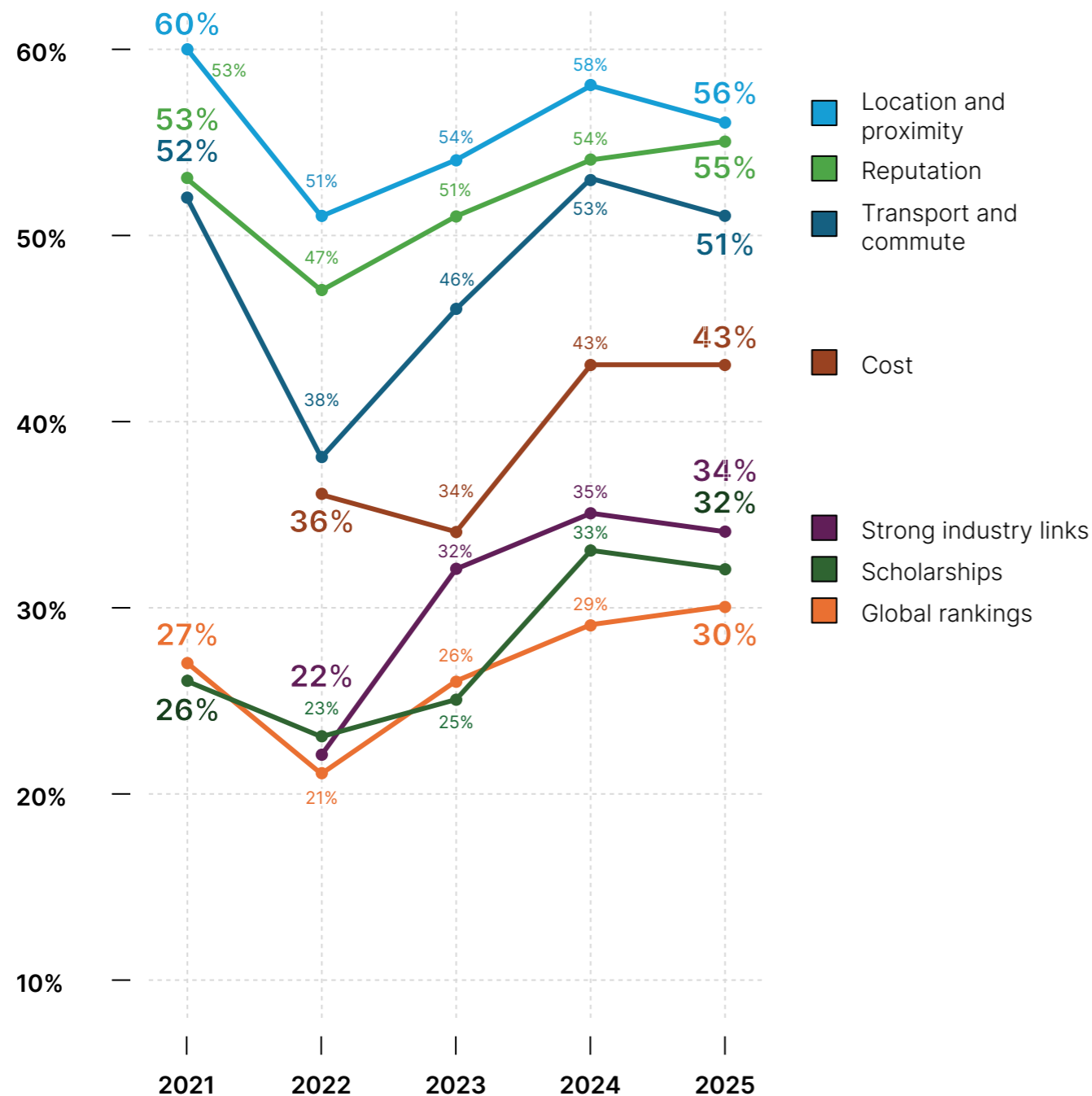
Daniel, 18



Institution matchmaking

Institution considerations

What factors are most important when choosing where you will study?

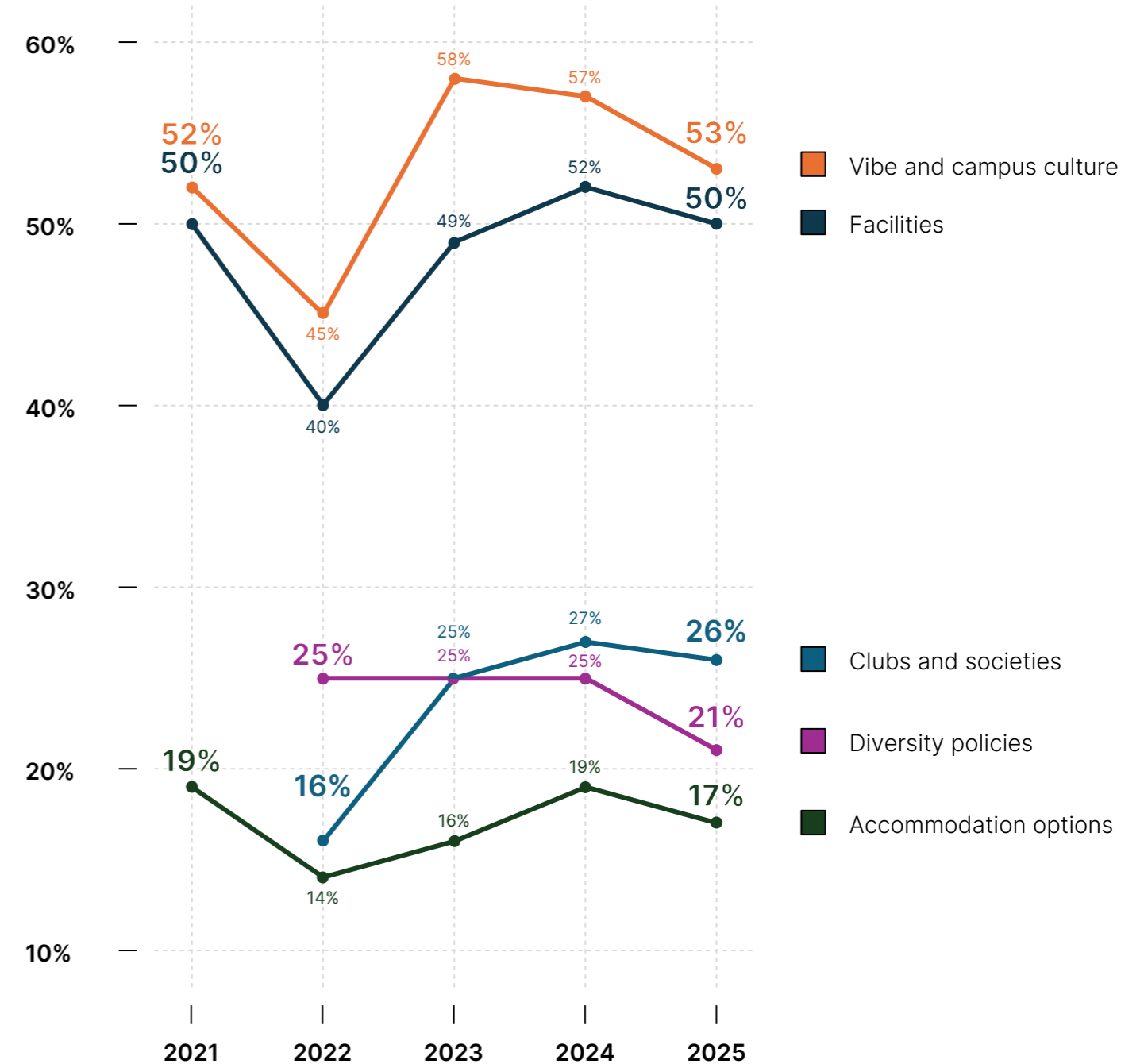


Students balk at course costs

Cost is on the radar of more students, rising 7% since 2022 as a factor when choosing between universities and colleges. As administrators compete for domestic students, course fees could be an increasing choice driver.

On-campus life

What factors are most important when choosing where you will study?



Vibe and facilities create the dream campus

Students are attracted to campuses that excel in vibe and culture (53%) and facilities (50%) when selecting where to study.

I'm excited to...

'Create healthier study habits and a more balanced lifestyle.'

Hana, 18

'Live a fun life, creating moments with new friends and old ones, having to focus on new goals and having to live with people. What I find exciting is living as a normal person.'

Aman, 17

'Start a new chapter in my life which hopefully leads to my lifelong dream career.'

Olivia, 17

'Dedicate my time to my direct passion and start my career pursuits, and hopefully find a new sense of independence.'

Tiffany, 18

'Dive into a new chapter of learning and personal growth. I'm excited to meet new people, explore different perspectives, and immerse myself in subjects I'm passionate about. I'm also looking forward to more independence, balancing study with hobbies, and taking steps toward my career goals.'

Mason, 17

'Grasp a bit more freedom whilst studying and focusing on one subject that interests me.'

Andrew, 17

'Collaborate with peers and professors on research projects, learn to apply theories in real-world settings, and contribute to a field that directly improves lives. I'm inspired by my calling!'

Luke, 18

'Achieve these great goals of mine.'

Jessica, 18

'Seize the opportunity for growth and new experiences. University life offers the chance to dive deeper into subjects I'm passionate about, meet people from diverse backgrounds, and explore opportunities that shape my future. I'm looking forward to the independence and challenges that come with this next chapter, whether it's navigating campus life, participating in clubs or events, or pushing myself academically and socially.'

Aditya, 17

'Gain a new sense of independence and pursue the areas of study I enjoy most. I also will be able to meet others who share the same passions and interests and hopefully will make new friends.'

Elizabeth, 18

'Learning about something I've chosen to study should mean that I can remain motivated.'

Alex, 18

'Work towards the degree I want, pursue my passions, relish my independence and embrace my freedom.'

Rose, 17

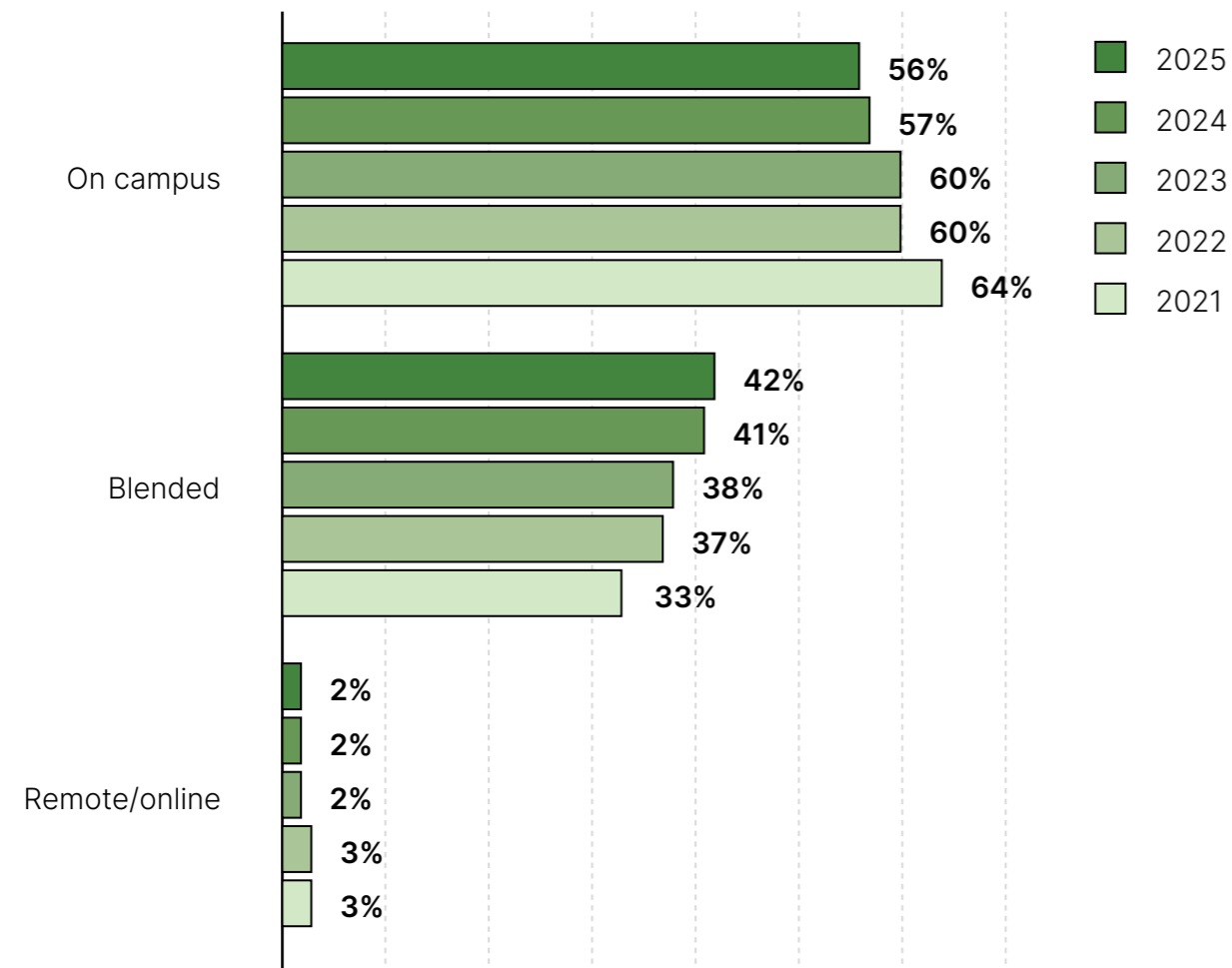
'Figure out what I'm passionate about in the "real world". Find something that will continue to inspire me as I move into the next stages of life.'

Charlotte, 18



Fewer feet on campus

What's your preferred way to study?



Students are slipping away from campus. Their preference to study solely on campus has fallen 8% since 2021 to 56%. Meanwhile, students' desire for learning that blends face-to-face and online delivery has risen 9% since 2021 to 42% of respondents.

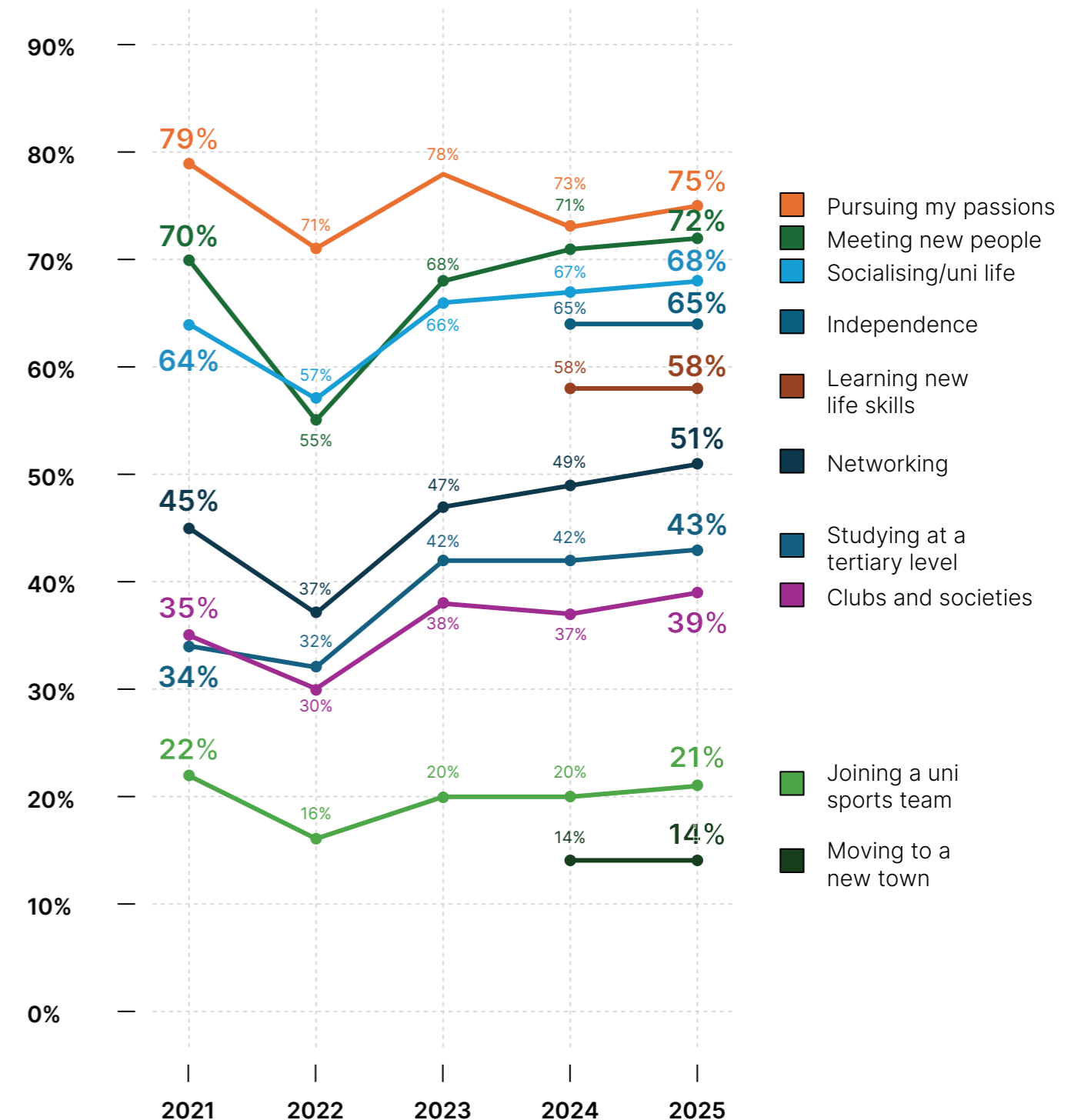
Learning and earning

Do you see yourself seeking another qualification later on?



In pursuit of passion

When you think about starting uni or college, what are you most excited about?

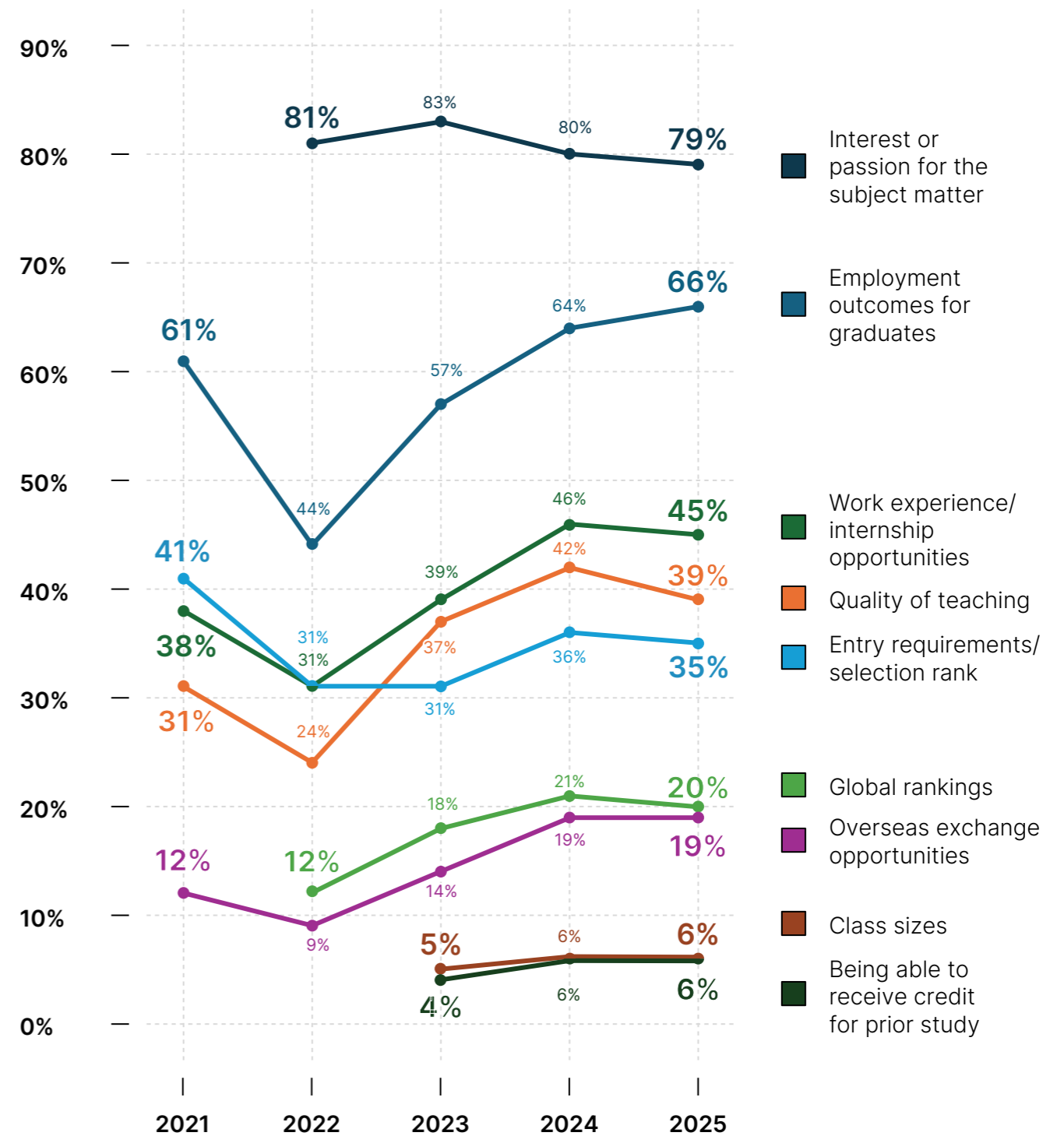


Social life central

School leavers have many causes for excitement in the next chapter of their lives. Of those, meeting new people (72%) and socialising (68%) rate as two of the top three.

Courses shaped for careers

Which factors are most important to you when choosing a course?



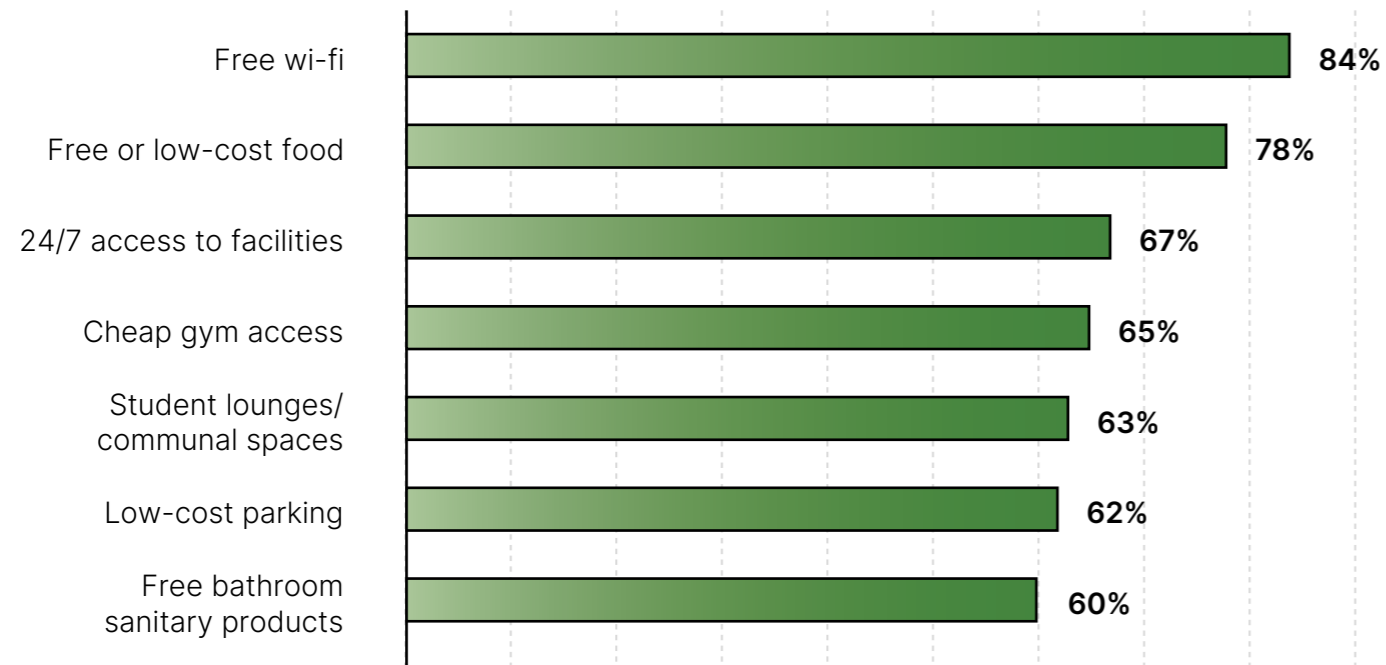
Passion powers higher education

Over the past four years, passion for subject matter has remained the number one influence on course choice for school leavers.



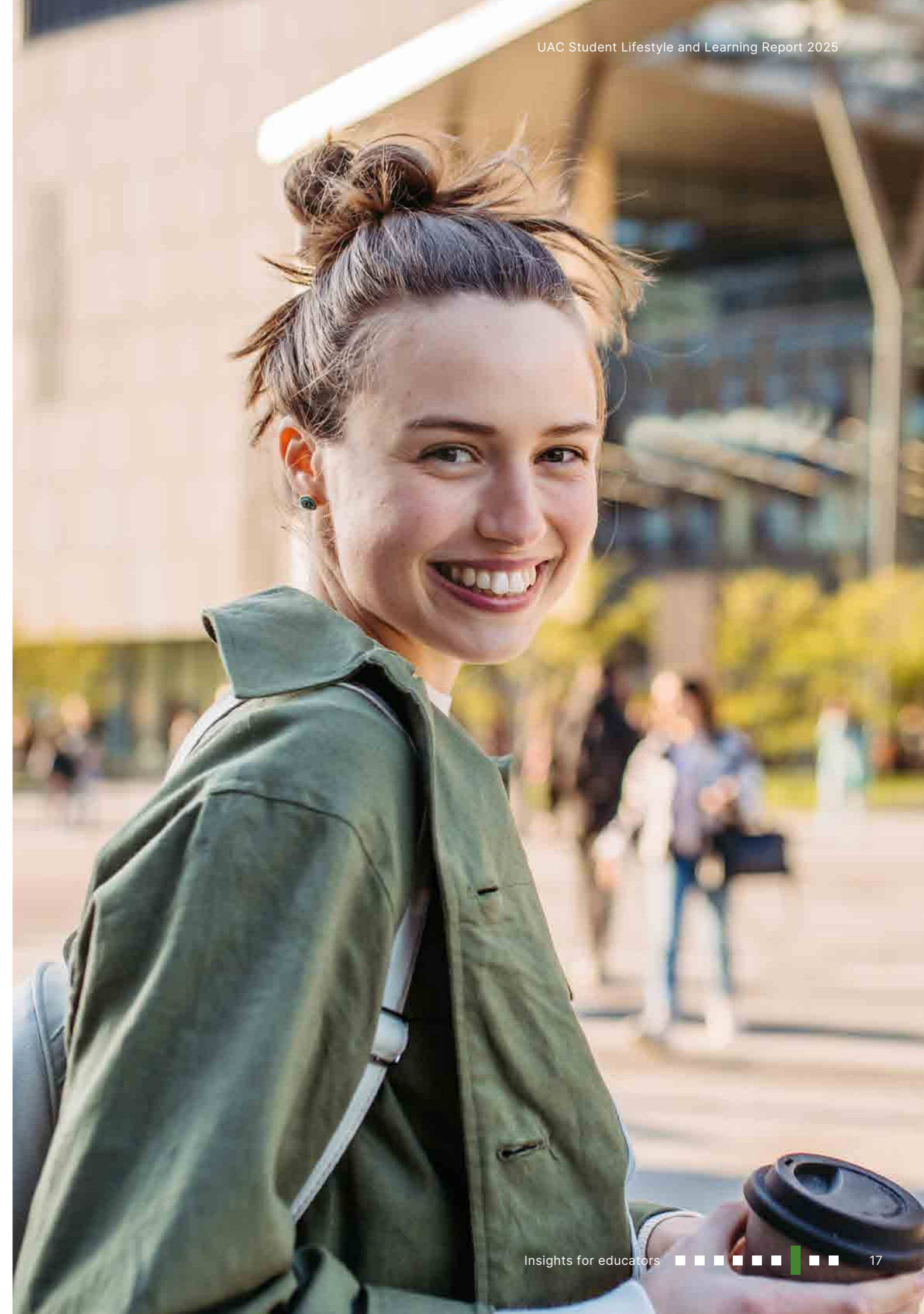
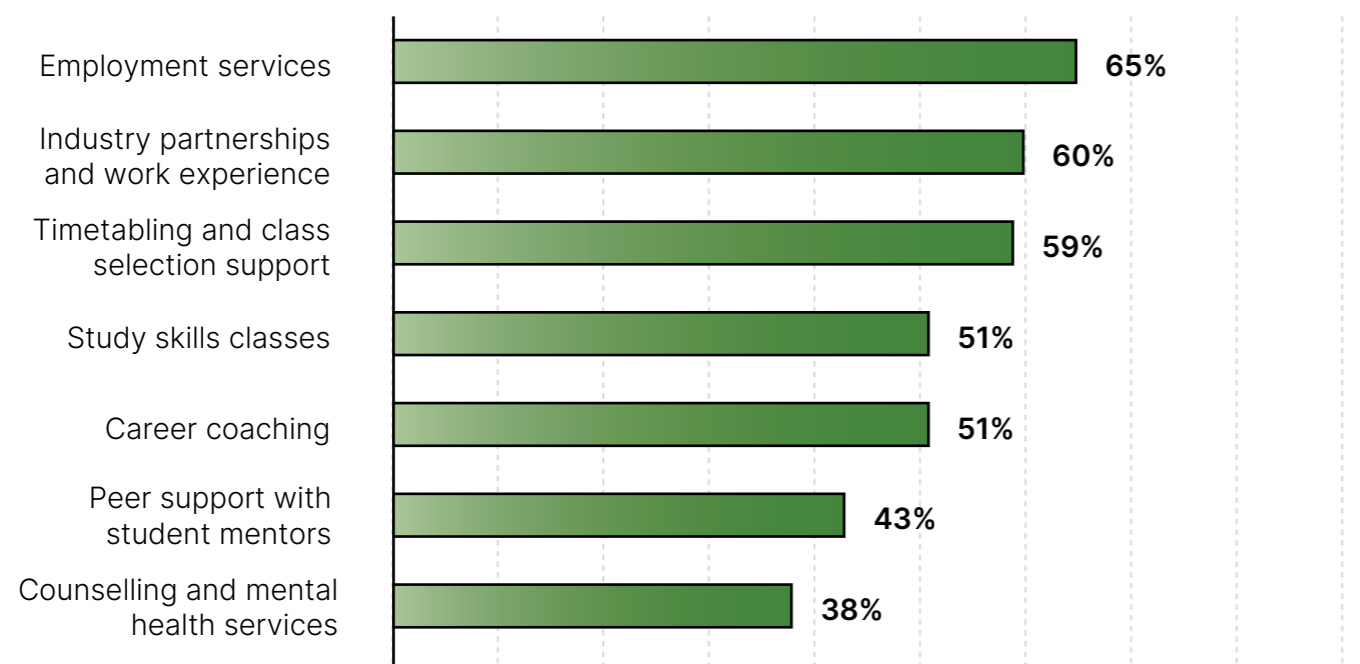
Freedom to connect

What types of facilities would you like at your campus? (top 7 responses)



Lead me to a job

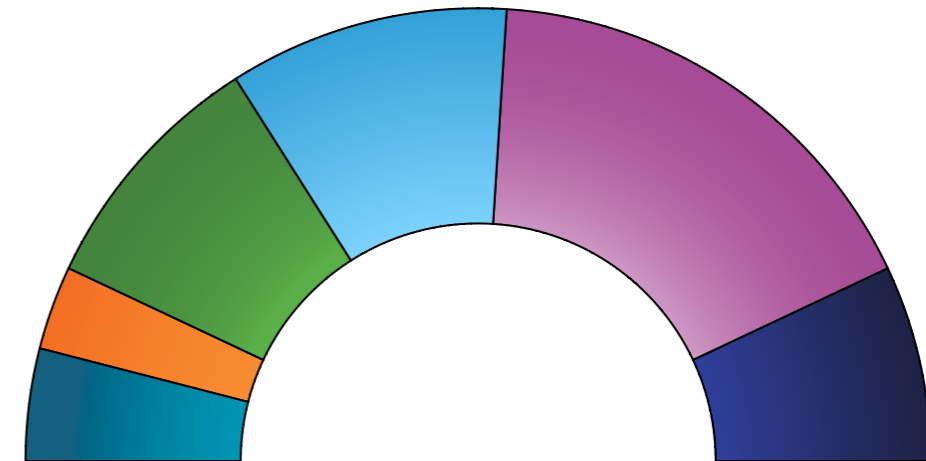
What types of services would you like to be available at your campus? (top 7 responses)





When it clicked

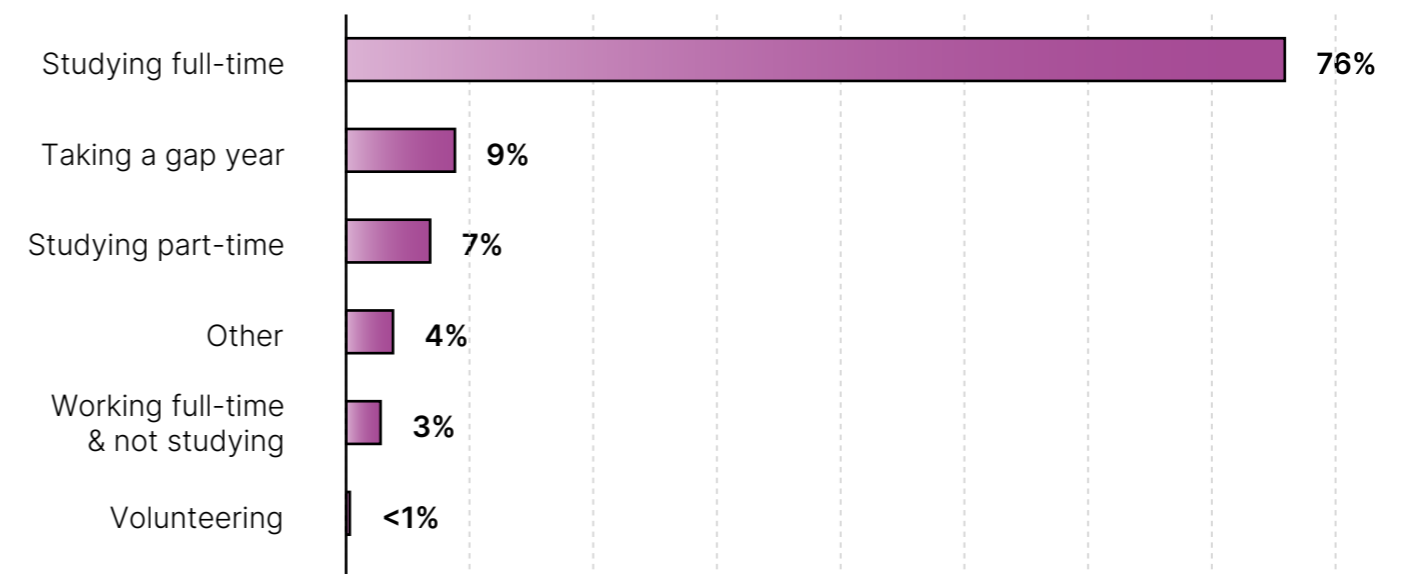
When did you decide on the course, job, career or trade you wanted to pursue?



- 7% Primary school (Years K-6)
- 6% Early high school (Years 7-8)
- 18% Middle high school (Years 9-10)
- 20% Start of senior school (Year 11)
- 35% Final year of high school (Year 12)
- 14% I'm still undecided

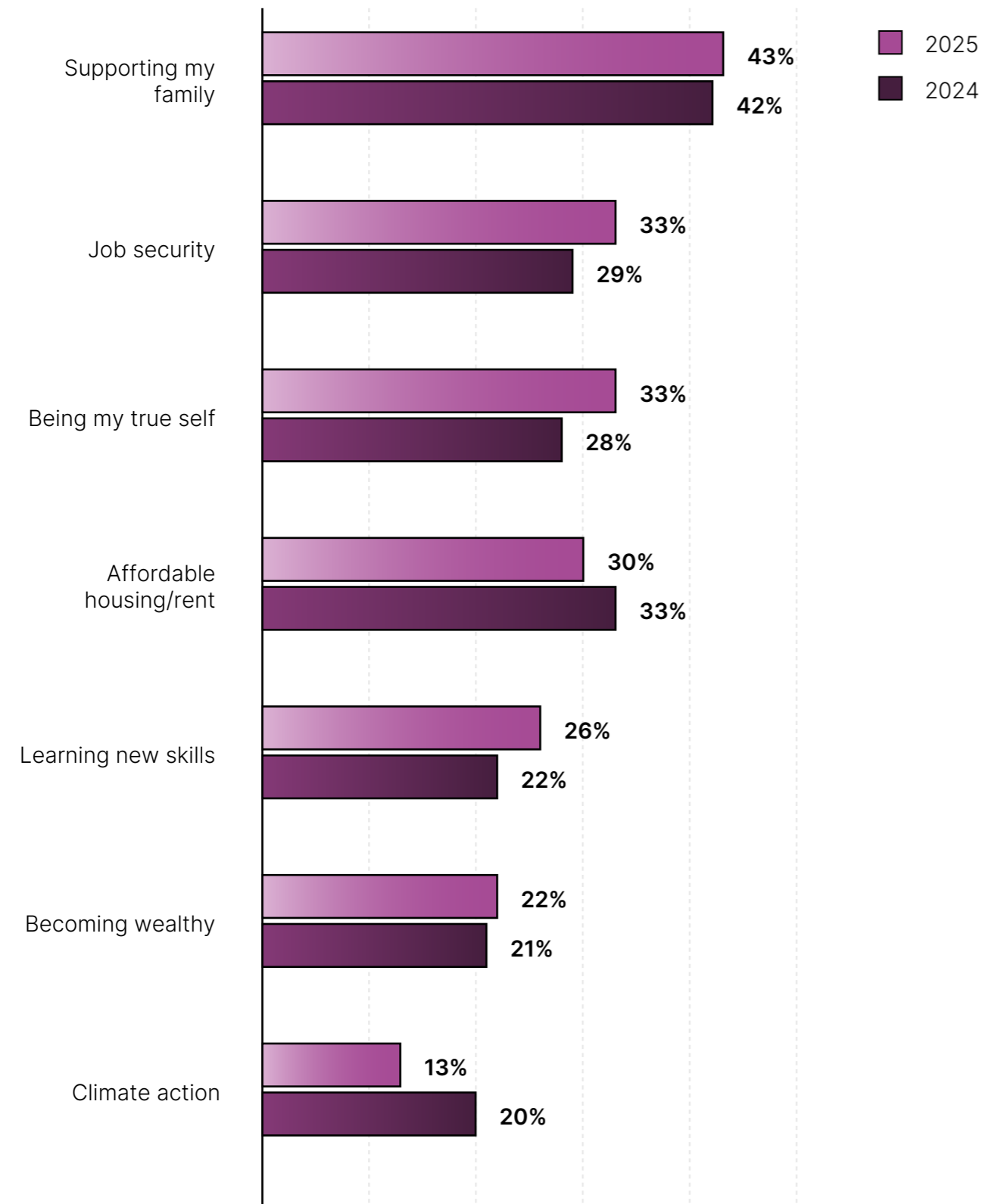
Big plans in 2025

What are your plans for 2025?



Putting family first

Which of the following are your top three priorities? (selected data)



Goals to kick in 2025

'This year I'm looking forward to gaining the skills and knowledge that will help me achieve my career goals, overcoming my challenges, being more open and confident around different people, and learning new things that will push me out of my comfort zone.'

Tyra, 17

'Life in 2025 is about embracing challenges, chasing big dreams, and creating unforgettable experiences. I can't wait to make it all happen!'

Tazmeen, 18

'Learning to manage and balance my studies, social and work life independently and meet new people.'

Risa, 18

'I'm excited about immersing myself in the university experience, which involves meeting new people, making long-lasting connections, and maturing intellectually and emotionally as a person.'

Alvin, 17

'What excites me the most is the freshness of it all after my high school experience. A new campus with a new learning style and a degree that focuses on my favourite interests. I'm excited to be around new people and make new connections.'

Manon, 18

'University offers me an ideal opportunity to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, helping me expand my knowledge and grow as an individual.'

Aminah, 18

'A fresh start, studying and learning specific skills of my choosing?'

Emily, 18

'A change in environment and being able to study more independently. School is quite restrictive, and uni will allow me to pursue a more flexible lifestyle.'

Ruby, 18

'What excites me most is immersing myself in a vibrant community and connecting with individuals from diverse backgrounds. I plan on joining different societies and taking part in a variety of extracurricular activities. It's a chance to explore new interests, take on challenges, and grow both personally and socially. I can't wait to enrich my life through these exciting opportunities.'

Monark, 18

'Being able to discover more about myself as well as broadening my worldview through living in a new place and meeting new people.'

Nina, 18

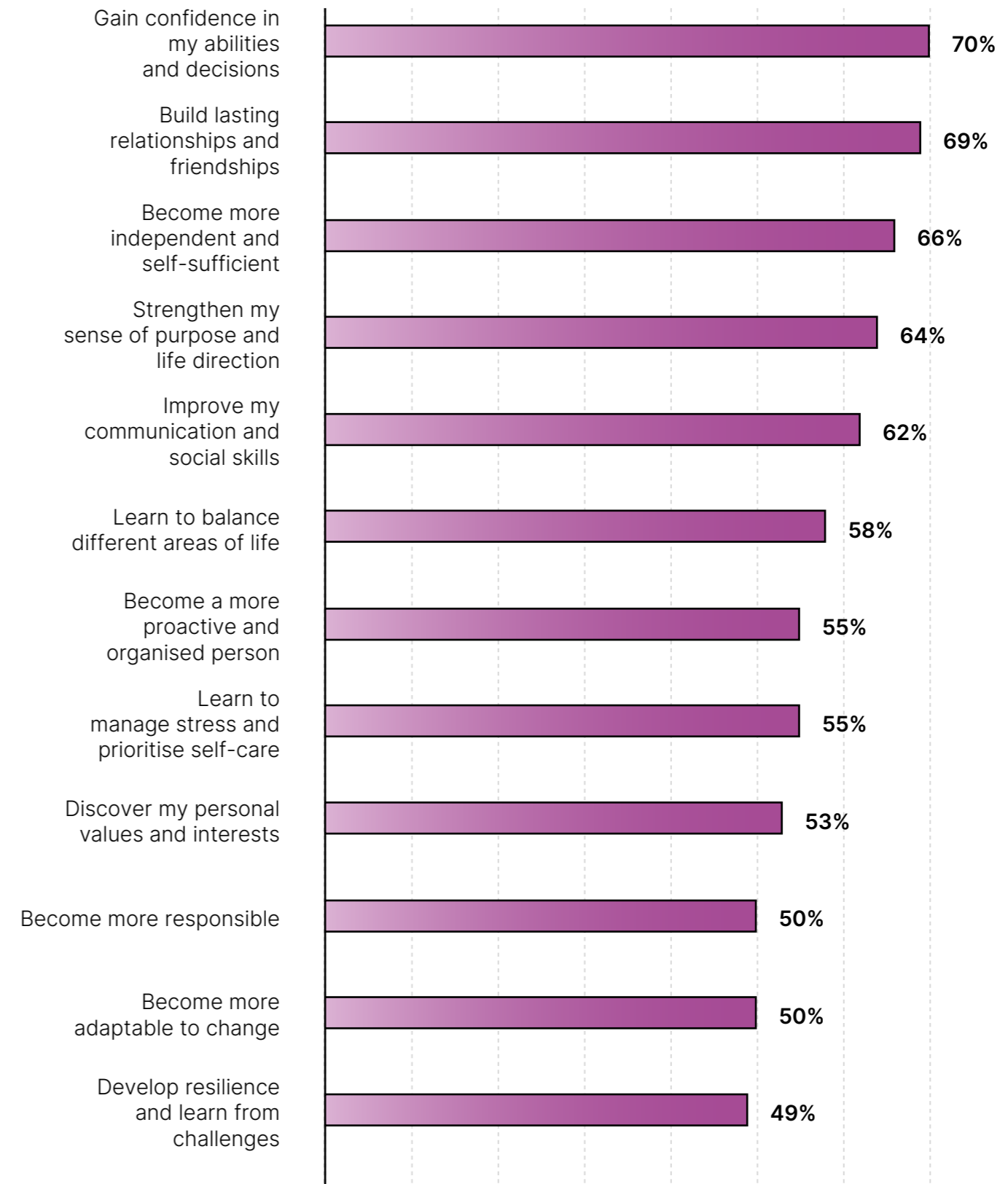
'I'm going to take the opportunity to study something I enjoy with good company around me.'

Grace, 17



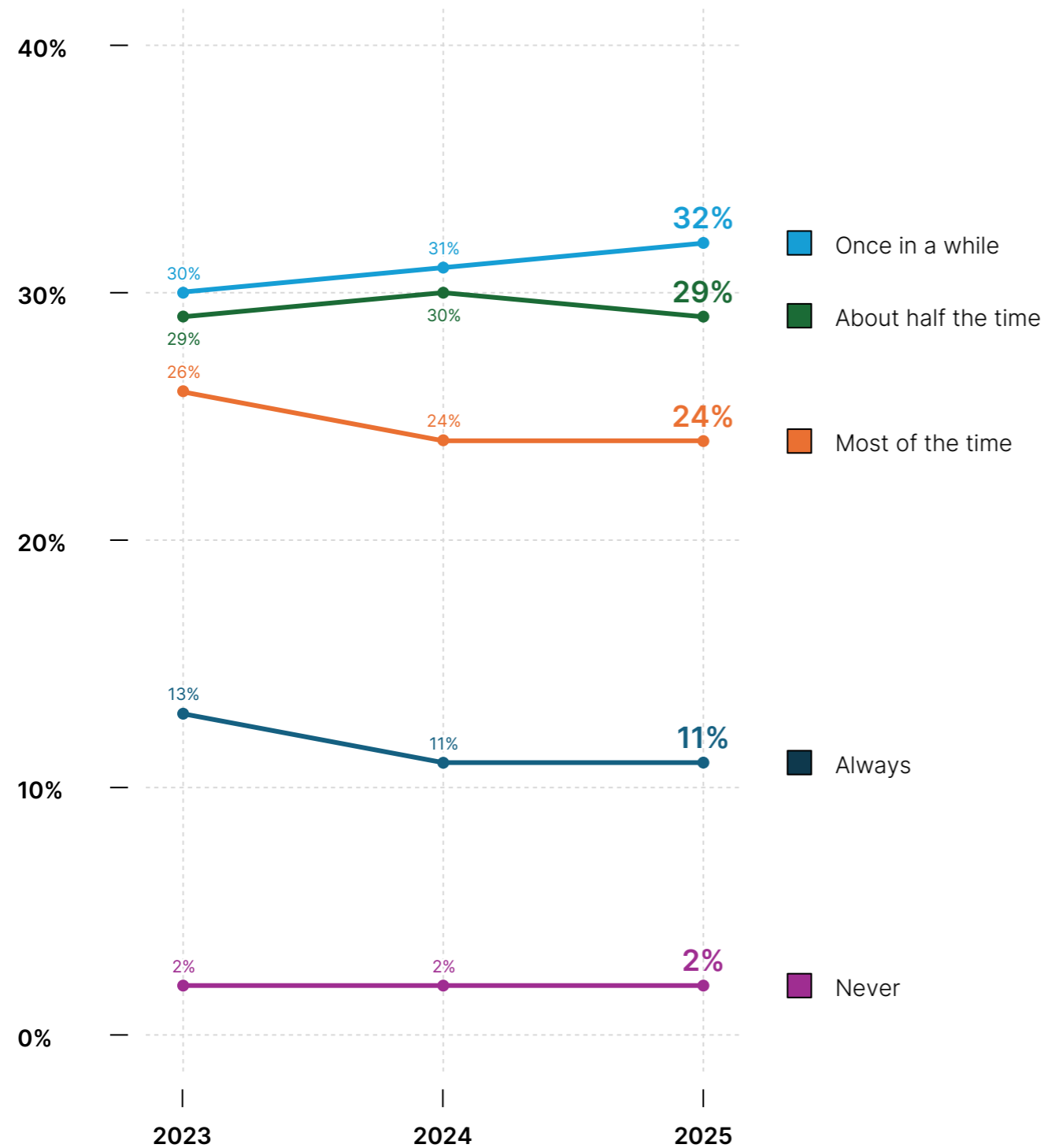
My best self

How do you hope to grow as a person during your university years?



Year 12 pressure cooker

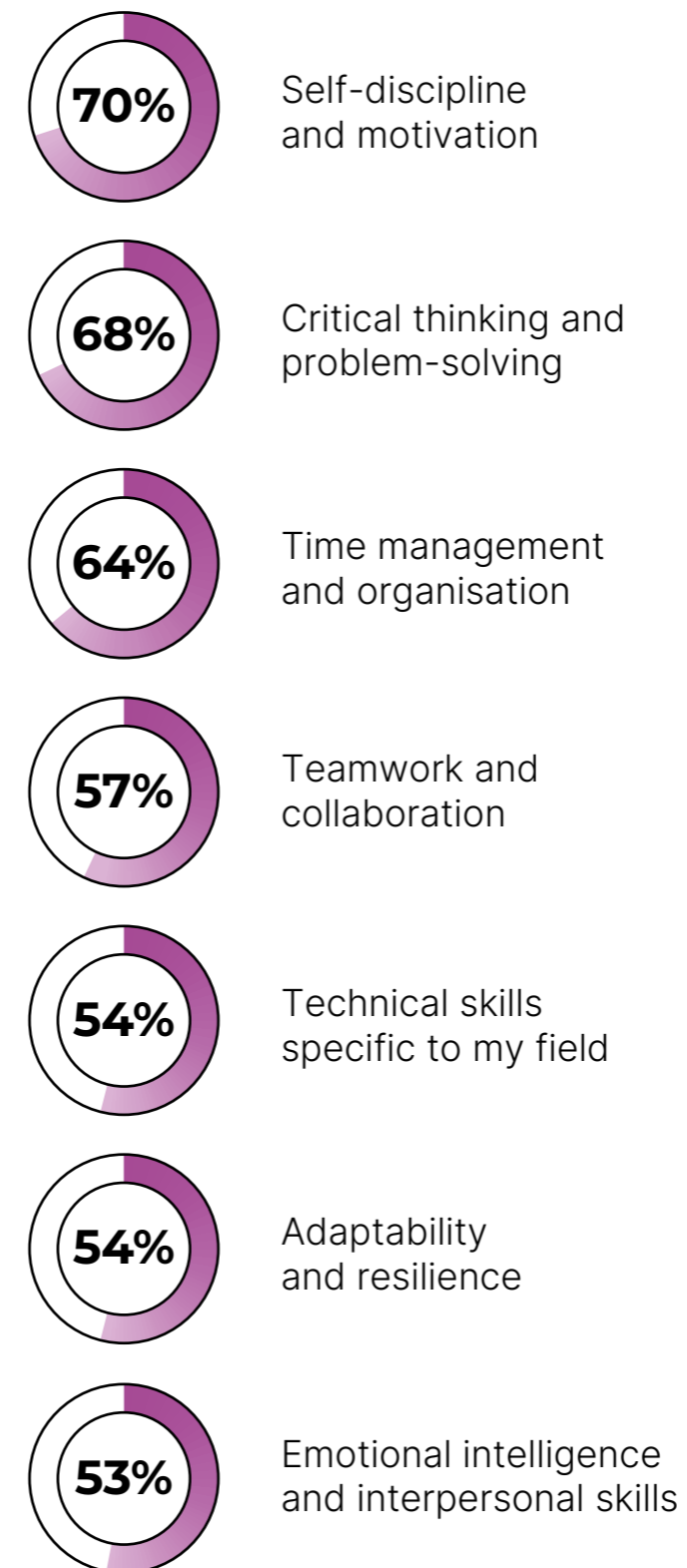
In a typical month, how often do you feel stressed or anxious?



That's a lot of stress for young people to deal with. A clear majority (64%) report that they are stressed at least half the time. Of those, one in ten (11%) feels stressed all the time.

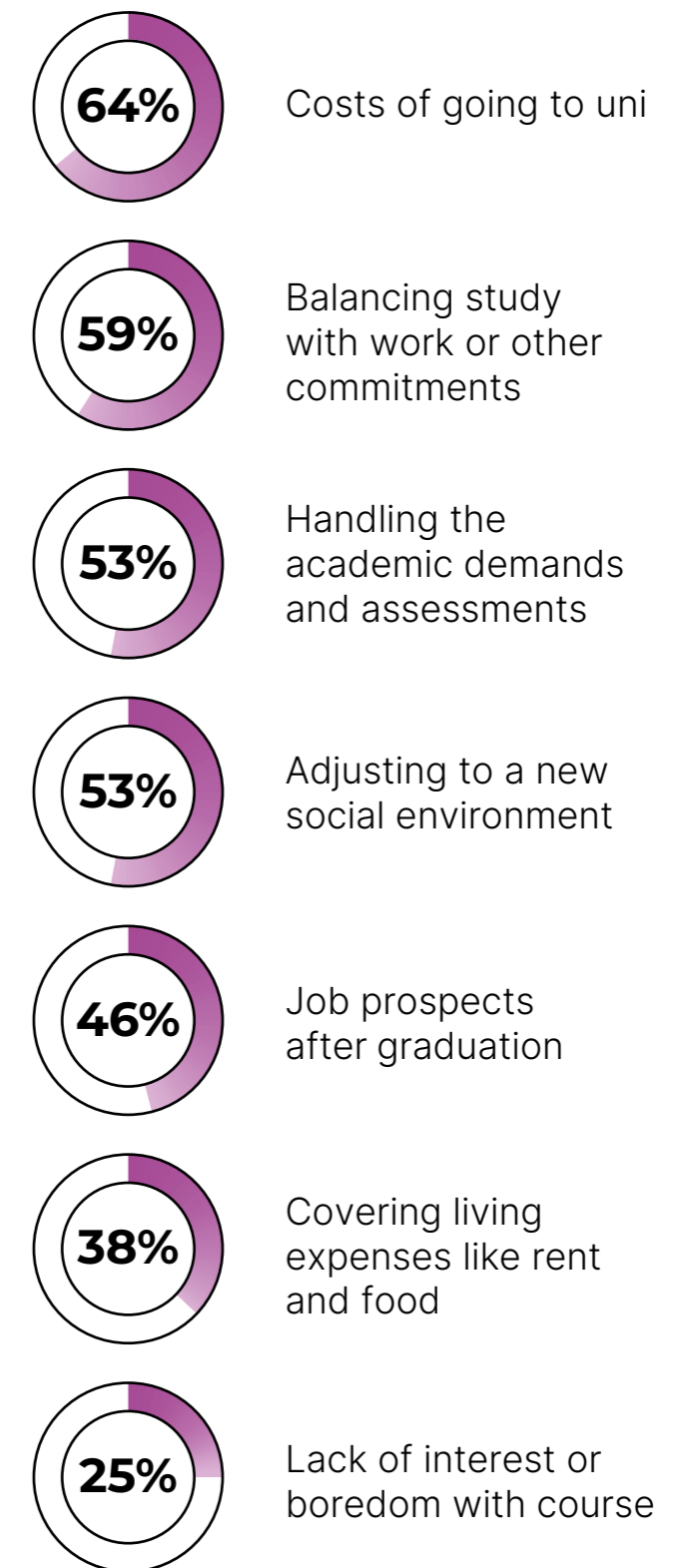
From student to master

What skills are you excited to develop through your university studies?



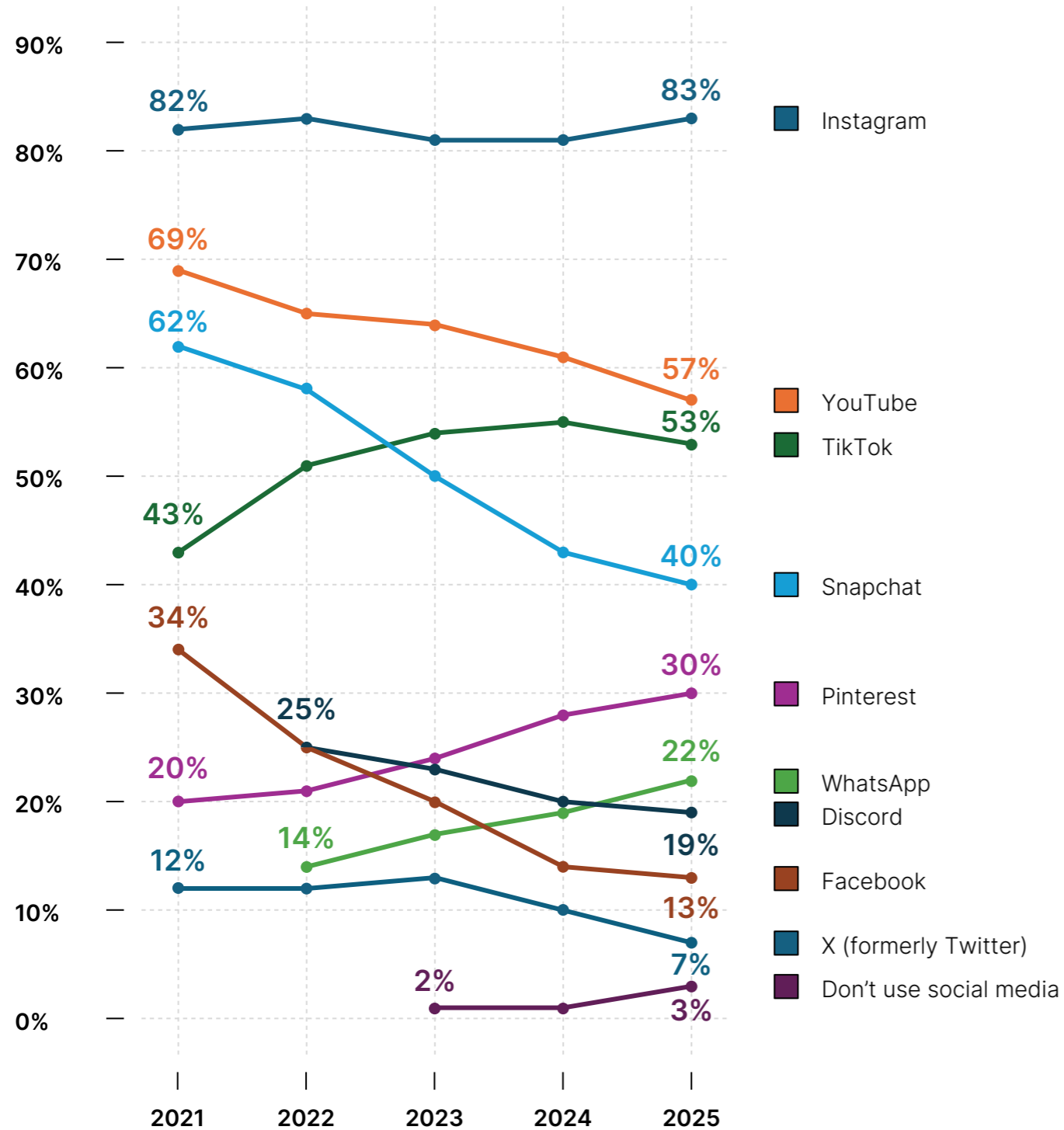
Study worries

Which of the following aspects of going to uni are a concern for you?



Filtering where they are

What are your favourite social platforms? (selected data)

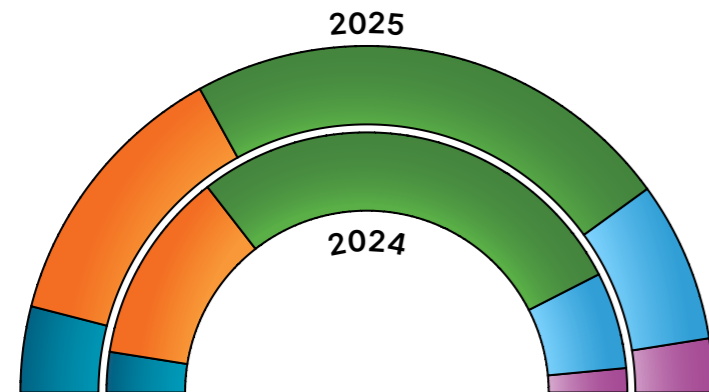


Instagram dominates student social media usage. Used by 83% of respondents, it leads its nearest and declining rival, YouTube (57%), by 26%. TikTok's growth, on the other hand, flattened in 2023, retaining 53% of the student audience to date. Facebook is in freefall, down 21% to 13%. Pinterest (30%) and WhatsApp (22%) recorded the only significant rises over five years of 10% and 8% respectively.



AI sentiment rise

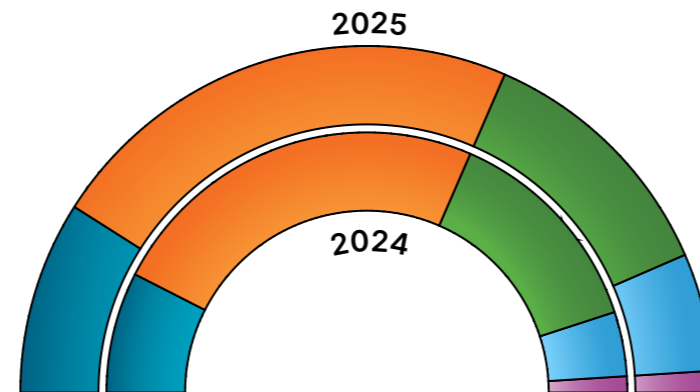
How do you feel about AI tech in general?



	2024	2025	
Very positive	5%	8%	↑
Positive	24%	26%	↑
Neutral	53%	49%	↓
Negative	15%	12%	↓
Very negative	3%	5%	↑

Gaining AI confidence

How confident are you in your ability to understand and use AI-related technologies?



	2024	2025	
Very confident	15%	18%	↑
Confident	45%	48%	↑
Neutral	27%	24%	↓
Not very confident	11%	8%	↓
Not confident at all	2%	1%	↓

AI concerns settle

Are you concerned about any of the following potential risks of AI?

	2024	2025	Change
AI automation leading to fewer jobs	70%	67%	↓3%
Loss of privacy	67%	69%	↑2%
Ehtical bias	52%	50%	↓2%
AI surpassing human intelligence	42%	36%	↓6%
AI decision-making being unexplainable	35%	31%	↓4%
Advanced skill to remain competitive	29%	28%	↓1%
I have no concerns about AI	5%	5%	0%

'I find conversational AI tools a little overhyped. However, I can see how other uses of AI have far wider reaching applications. Mitigating AI risk is one of the world's most pressing problems.'

Hurley, 18

'I would struggle without ChatGPT.'

Vickie, 18

'It's a mixed bag for me. AI is positive in some areas like science and medicine, but I'm concerned about others like music and art.'

Ryan, 18

'AI can be extremely positive for people living with a disability.'

Jasmine, 18

'AI is cool. People are scared for no reason. It's the same fear as 100 years ago with the industrial revolution. Life moves on.'
Kip, 18

'AI is revolutionary. It's actively letting society run smoother and easier, due to automated systems that don't require human assistance. But that comes with its pitfalls. It's the human exploitation and the things we can't anticipate that I fear the most.'

Jess, 18

'I believe that when AI is used correctly and ethically it is an amazing tool for productivity. It should serve as a study buddy and a guide more than just a copy and paste robot. AI can explain a concept and create quizzes to aid learning.'

Jeremy, 18

'I'm rabidly angry and extremely otherworldly negative about intellectual property violations.'

Aotea, 18

Continue the discussion

If you would like to discuss any of the findings or information presented in this report, please contact:

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Images: Good Thanks Media
Envato Elements

What we do and why we do it

UAC is a not-for-profit organisation that processes university applications for students seeking admission to most undergraduate and many postgraduate courses at participating higher education institutions in NSW and the ACT.

In the application process, UAC assesses eligibility, facilitates offers from universities and calculates the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) for NSW Higher School Certificate students.

Our centralised platform simplifies the admissions process for students, schools and participating institutions, ensuring a more efficient and accessible experience.

We care about learning and we're passionate about helping people access their potential through education. It's why we exist and it's why we'll continue to deliver platforms and services that meet the needs of all communities.

