



THE CARNEGIE TRUST
FOR THE UNIVERSITIES OF SCOTLAND

Public Perceptions of Higher Education Funding

Survey 2024/25

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In 1901 when the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland was established, there was minimal state investment in higher education. Scotland had only four universities which less than 0.2% of the population attended. For those who could afford it, the benefits were certain and plenty.

Determined that 'qualified and deserving' individuals shouldn't be excluded from the rewards of higher education, Carnegie set up the Trust to help those facing financial barriers with the costs of university tuition. Over the years it has supported generations of students—over 70,000 individuals—to fulfil their potential.

Today, in a much-altered landscape, the Trust continues to invest in the transformative potential of higher education, providing tuition fees each year for around 300 individuals from low-income households, who find themselves unable to access government support to start or complete their undergraduate studies.

Since 2020, the Trust has also offered funding for second degrees in priority areas to support retraining and address skills shortages, recognising the importance of higher qualifications as a potential route out of poverty and in supporting the development of a productive economy.

Ensuring equitable access and outcomes remains at the heart of the Trust's purpose. As well as financial hardship, 94% of the individuals we have supported over the last four years have been from groups that are underrepresented in higher education such as lone and young parents, disabled students, estranged students, carers and care-experienced students.

This support is necessary because, despite a policy of free tuition, inequalities remain in Scottish higher education. The Student Finance and Wellbeing Study, published in December 2024, found that students from underrepresented groups were most likely to have experienced financial difficulties whilst studying and to report consequential impacts on their mental health and achievements.

At the same time, it has been widely acknowledged that the sector faces its own financial difficulties with concerns about institutional sustainability raising questions about the affordability of current policies and funding models. The decisions that are taken about how to address these current challenges could have significant consequences for the future shape of the post-school education and skills system and, critically, who benefits from it.

In this context, and as the Trust embarks on a strategic review of its own priorities, we commissioned Ipsos UK to carry out this survey into Public Perceptions of Higher Education Funding. Ipsos' report highlights that, while public knowledge of the complexity of Scotland's funding system is relatively low, people hold varied views on the value and accessibility of universities and the priorities for government support.

It demonstrates the importance of opening the debate on this complex and sensitive topic to ensure that policy positions and funding models take account of the views of those they seek to serve. Clearly, this is not an issue for university chiefs and government to solve alone, but one which the public has an important stake, and should also have a voice.

It is hoped that this research provides a starting point for enabling that more open, informed and meaningful discussion.

Hannah Garrow - Chief Executive of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland

Executive Summary

The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland commissioned Ipsos UK to carry out survey research to measure public knowledge and views on higher education funding and access in Scotland.

The survey was administered through the Ipsos KnowledgePanel, a random probability online survey panel. Fieldwork took place between 5 and 11 December 2024. In total 1,057 interviews were achieved with adults aged 18+ living in Scotland.

The research aims to provide a baseline understanding of public awareness of higher education funding in Scotland. It also explores views on the value of university, access to university, and how higher education is funded.

KEY FINDINGS

The perceived value of higher education is strongly linked to employability and skills; while a majority of Scots consider university to be worthwhile, a degree is not necessarily considered essential for success.

- A majority of the Scottish public (63%) viewed attending university as worthwhile nowadays. Key reasons for this were to gain essential skills and training for a specific career (67%) and to improve the chances of getting a higher paid or better job (66%). Among those who did not consider university to be worthwhile (15%), the most common reason given was that apprenticeships were a better route (49%).
- In regard to the value of higher education, around two thirds (64%) agreed that an undergraduate degree is an impressive achievement. However, a university degree was largely not viewed as essential for future success. A majority (79%) agreed that a university degree is not essential for getting a good job in the future, while almost half (49%) felt that studying courses with no clear career path would be a waste of time.

Views on access to university are mixed, with the cost of living broadly seen as a barrier facing students from low-income households and disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular.

- A majority (54%) agreed that Scottish universities are inclusive and diverse, while just 11% disagreed. Views were more mixed on how accessible universities in Scotland are. While 44% agreed that anyone in Scotland who wants to attend university can do so, almost as many (43%) agreed that too many people in Scotland face barriers to going to university.
- The cost of living was cited as the main barrier to applying for or attending university in Scotland (72%). Reflecting this, students from low-income households (65%) and from disadvantaged backgrounds (55%) were considered the most likely groups to face barriers when applying to or attending university in Scotland

Key Findings

Knowledge of how university education is funded in Scotland is relatively low, but support for some form of Scottish Government support is widespread.

- Knowledge of how university education is funded in Scotland was fairly low. Overall, two thirds (65%) felt they knew just a little or nothing about it, while just over a third (35%) knew a great deal or fair amount.
- There was widespread support for some form of Scottish Government support to cover the cost of tuition. However, the public were divided as to whether the Scottish Government should cover costs for all first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland (44%) or should cover costs for first-time undergraduate students on low incomes, while those whose households can afford it pay at least some of the cost of tuition (43%).
- Just under half of participants (48%) supported the idea of charging university tuition fees based on ability to pay, with students from lower-income households paying less or not paying at all, and students from higher-income households paying more

Nevertheless, there is openness to alternative funding approaches, particularly those that prioritise disadvantaged groups or that address skills shortages.

- Among those who supported some form of Scottish Government support, students from low-income households (65%), students studying courses in areas where there are skills shortages (59%), and students from disadvantaged backgrounds (52%) were identified as groups who should be prioritised for funding. There was also majority support for any Scottish Government support to include both full-time and part-time students.

The Scottish public's priorities for funding post-school education reflect the importance placed on employability, equitable access and skills development.

- Participants' top priorities for Scottish Government funding in post-school education generally were apprenticeship places in key areas such as trades or accountancy (61%), grants/bursaries for those from low income or disadvantaged households (50%), and opportunities for working-age adults on low incomes to upskill and retrain for higher-paid jobs (43%).
- Just over a quarter (26%) identified university tuition fees for all first-time undergraduates as a priority for Scottish Government funding.

The survey was administered through the Ipsos KnowledgePanel, an online survey panel recruited via a random probability unclustered address-based sampling method. This means that every household in the UK has a known chance of being selected to join the panel. Letters are sent to selected addresses in the UK (using the Postcode Address File) inviting them to become members of the panel.

Invited members can sign up to the panel by completing a short online questionnaire or by returning a paper form. Members of the public who are digitally excluded are able to register to the KnowledgePanel either by post or by telephone, and are given a tablet, an email address, and basic internet access which allows them to complete surveys online.

The survey was designed using a ‘mobile-first’ approach, which took into consideration the look, feel and usability of a questionnaire on a mobile device. This included: a thorough review of the questionnaire length to ensure it would not over burden respondents from focusing on a small screen for a lengthy period, avoiding the use of grid style questions (instead using question loops which are more mobile friendly) and making questions ‘finger-friendly’ so they’re easy to respond to. The questionnaire was also compatible with screen reader software to help those requiring further accessibility.

The KnowledgePanel is a random probability survey panel. Therefore, the KnowledgePanel does not use a quota approach when conducting surveys. Instead invited samples are stratified when conducting waves to account for any profile skews within the panel. The sample was stratified by education.

Fieldwork took place between 5 and 11 December 2024. All panellists eligible for the research (aged 18+ and living in Scotland) were invited to take part. Of 1,949 panellists invited, a total of 1,057 participants completed the survey, giving a response rate of 54%.

Data were weighted to ensure the results were as representative of the population of Scotland as possible. As up to three people per household were allowed to complete this survey, a design weight was employed to correct for unequal probabilities of selection of household members.

Calibration weights were also applied using population statistics for Scotland. Two sets of calibration weights were applied:

- Calibration weighting was applied using the following variables: age, gender and region as separate variables. All three use ONS 2022 mid-year population estimates as the weighting targets.

- Demographic weights were then applied to correct for imbalances in the achieved sample. The data was weighted by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (quintiles), education, ethnicity and number of adults in the household. Estimates from ONS mid-year estimates 2019, highest level of qualification achieved by people living in UK regions 2018, Annual Population Survey October 2022 – September 2023, and mid-year estimates 2021 were used as the weighted targets.

Any differences between sub-groups referred to in this report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Where differences by sub-group are not mentioned (for example, by ethnic background), these differences are either not significant, or the sample is too small to reliably test for statistical significance. Where responses do not sum to 100%, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of ‘don’t know’ categories.



Most participants had some connection with post-school education. Over a third of survey participants had been to a further education college (33%). Over a quarter had graduated from a full-time university course (28%), while 7% had graduated from a part-time or distance learning university course.

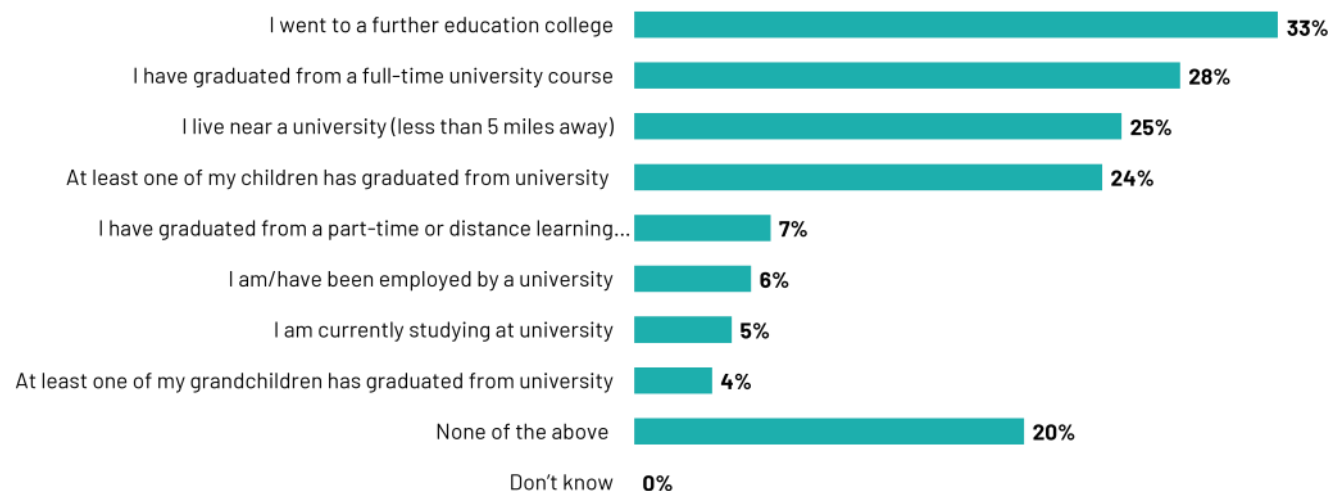
A quarter of participants said they live near a university (25%) and 24% said they had children who had graduated from university. One in five (20%) had not attended any further education college or university and reported no connection with universities through family or location.

Among those who were attending or had attended university, over half (54%) said they were the first generation in their family to attend, while 45% said that previous generations of their family had attended university (1% said they did not know if they were the first or not). Those over the age of 55 were more likely to have been the first in their generation to attend university (70%) compared to younger age groups (55% of 35–54 year olds and 41% of 18–34 year olds).

The majority of participants who were attending or had attended university felt that it had been worthwhile for them personally (88%).

Figure 3.1: Experience of post-school education

Which of the following statements apply to you?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

An overwhelming majority of those aged over 55 felt that it had been worthwhile (95%), higher than for their younger counterparts. However, younger age groups were also highly likely to feel that university had been worthwhile for them personally - 87% of 35–54 year-olds felt this way, as did 85% of those aged 18-34.

Fewer than one in ten (8%) felt that it had not been worthwhile. Those aged under 55 were more likely to feel this way (10%) than those

aged over 55 were (2%). Those who were the first generation in their family to attend university were also more likely to feel that it had not been worthwhile (11%) compared to those who said that previous generations of their family had attended university (4%).

Figure 4.1: Views on whether it is worth it or not for people to attend university nowadays

To what extent do you think it is worth it or not worth it for people to go to university nowadays?

■ Definitely worth it ■ Probably worth it ■ Neither worth it nor not worth it ■ Probably not worth it ■ Definitely not worth it ■ Don't know



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

A majority of participants (63%) considered attending university to be worthwhile for people nowadays, with 21% saying it was definitely worth it and 42% saying it was probably worth it. Fifteen per cent did not view university as worthwhile overall (14% said probably not and 2% said definitely not), while 1% were not sure.

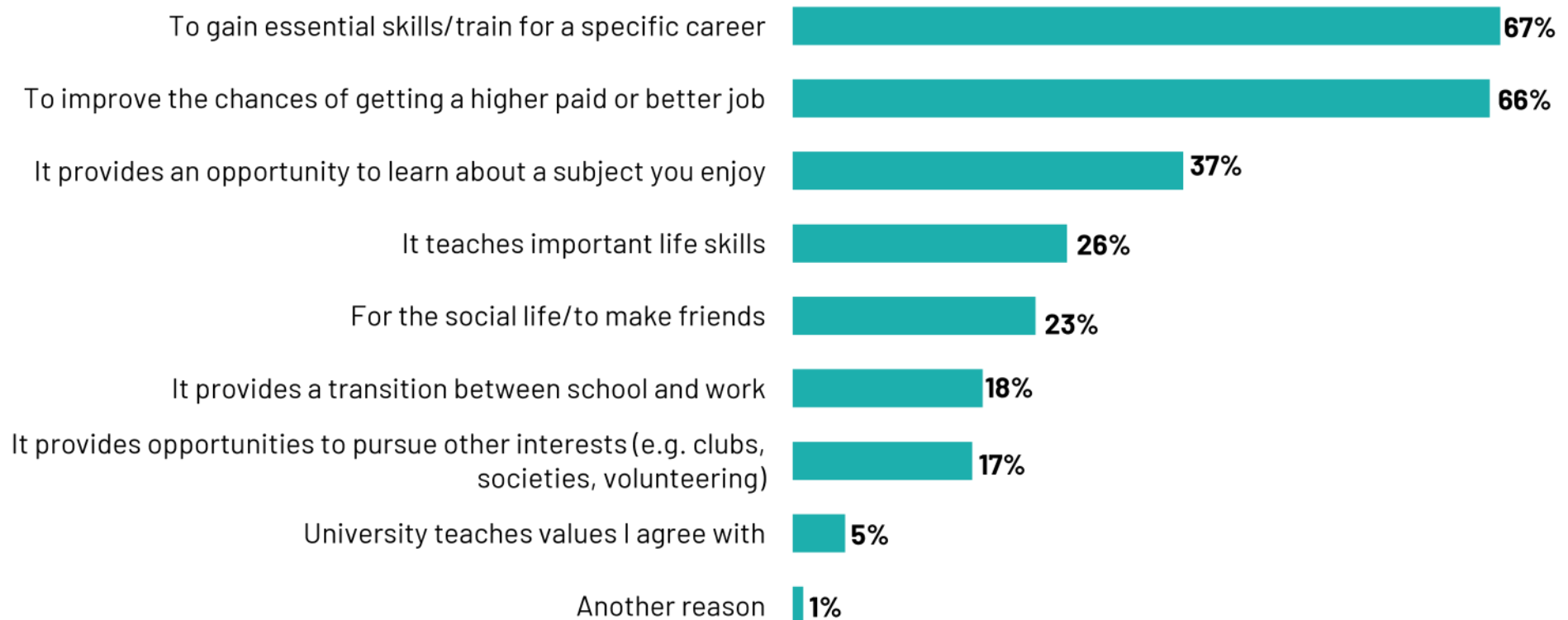
Older people aged 55 and over were more likely to consider university to be worthwhile than their younger counterparts were (70%, compared to 60% of 35-54 year-olds and 54% of 18-34 year-olds).

Those who had attended university were also more likely to consider it worthwhile (67%, compared to 61% of those who had not attended university). Participants with no children in the household were more likely to consider university not to be worthwhile (17%) than those who did have children in the household (9%).

Among those who thought that going to university was worth it nowadays, the main reasons were to gain essential skills or to train for a specific career (67%) and to improve the chances of a higher paid or better job (66%).

Figure 4.2: Reasons why going to university was considered worthwhile

Why do you feel it is worth it for people to go to university?



Base: All saying university is worth it: 696

Among those who did not consider going to university to be worthwhile, the main reasons were that it is better to do an apprenticeship instead (49%), that there is too much debt to repay from student loans (34%) and that universities don't teach people the right skills they need for life (32%).

While seen as an impressive achievement, participants generally did not feel that a university degree was fundamental to future prospects. A majority (79%) agreed with the statement that 'it is not necessary to go to university to get a good job'. Just over one in ten (11%) disagreed with this, while 10% neither agreed nor disagreed that a university degree was not necessary to get a good job (1% said they were not sure).

Those with a household income between £52,000 and £99,999 were more likely to agree with this (86%, compared with 79% of the Scottish public overall). Those living in the least deprived areas in Scotland were also more likely to agree that it is not necessary to go to university to get a good job, with 86% of those living in SIMD 5 areas agreeing, eight percentage points higher than for those living in the most deprived areas (76% among SIMD 1).

Views were more mixed on the importance of a university degree in getting a higher paid job, although on balance participants tended not

to see it as a necessity either. Forty-seven per cent disagreed with the statement that 'a university degree is necessary to get a higher paid job', while just under a third (32%) agreed (20% neither agreed nor disagreed and 1% were not sure).

Just under half of participants (49%) agreed that it was a waste of time to study courses that don't lead to a clear profession, while 35% disagreed (16% neither agreed nor disagreed and 1% were not sure). Those who had not attended university were more likely to agree with this (57%), as were those aged 55+ (54%) and those with no children in the household (51%).

Nevertheless, a clear majority of participants (64%) felt that an undergraduate university degree was an impressive achievement. Just under one in ten (9%) disagreed with this, while 24% neither agreed nor disagreed and 3% were not sure.

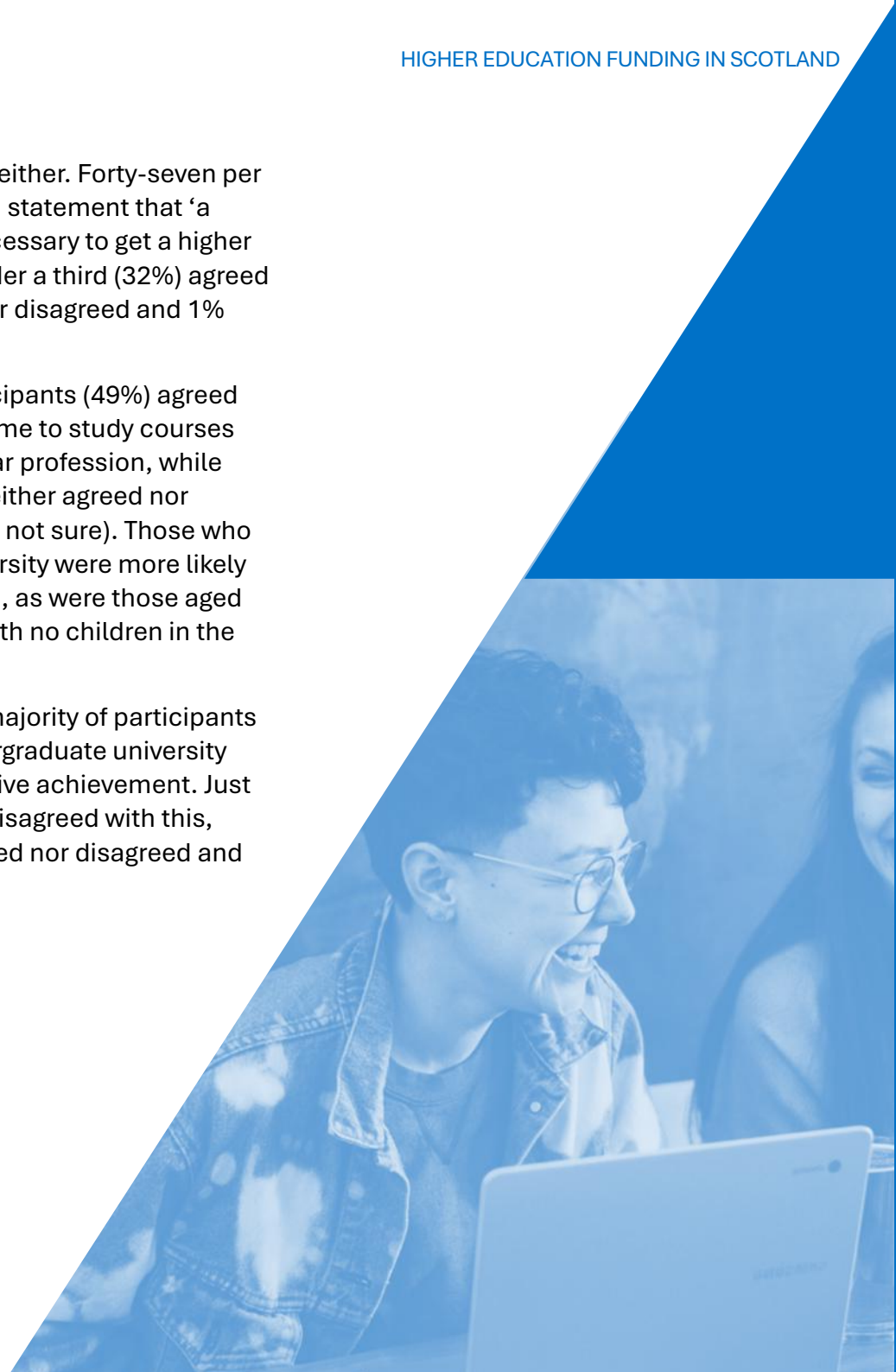
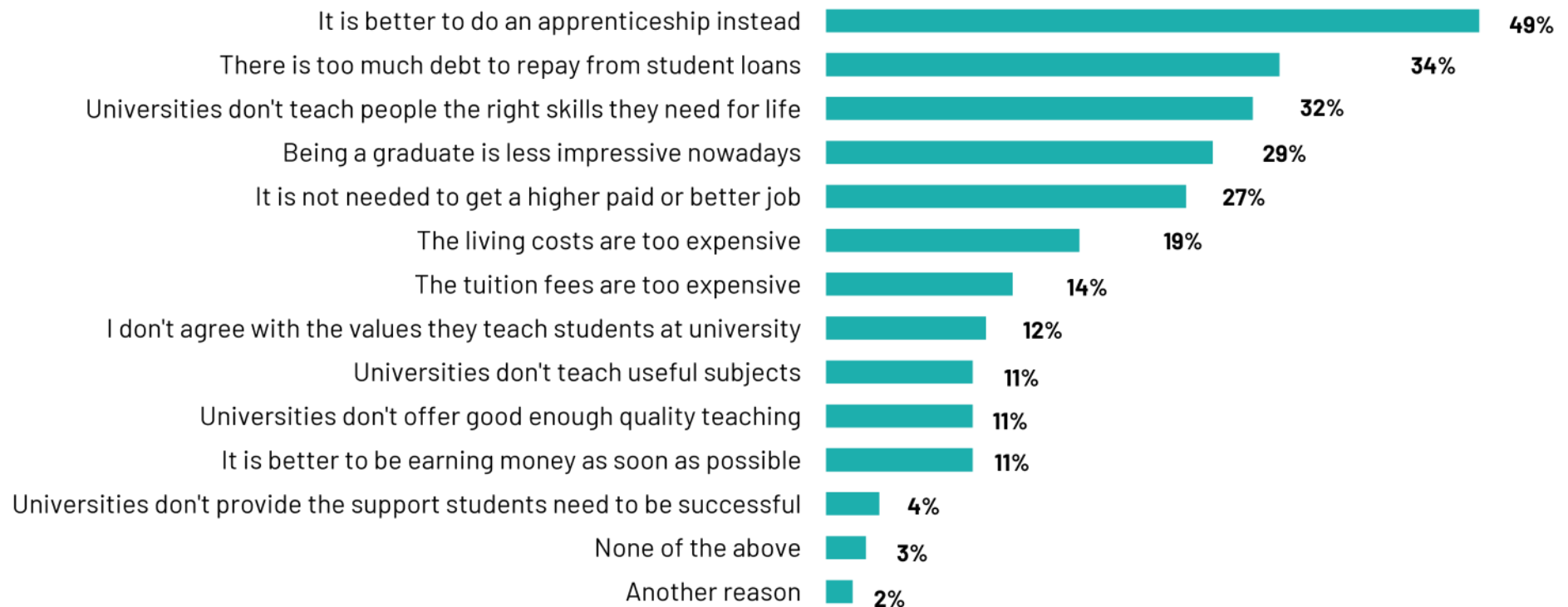


Figure 4.3: Reasons why going to university was not considered worthwhile

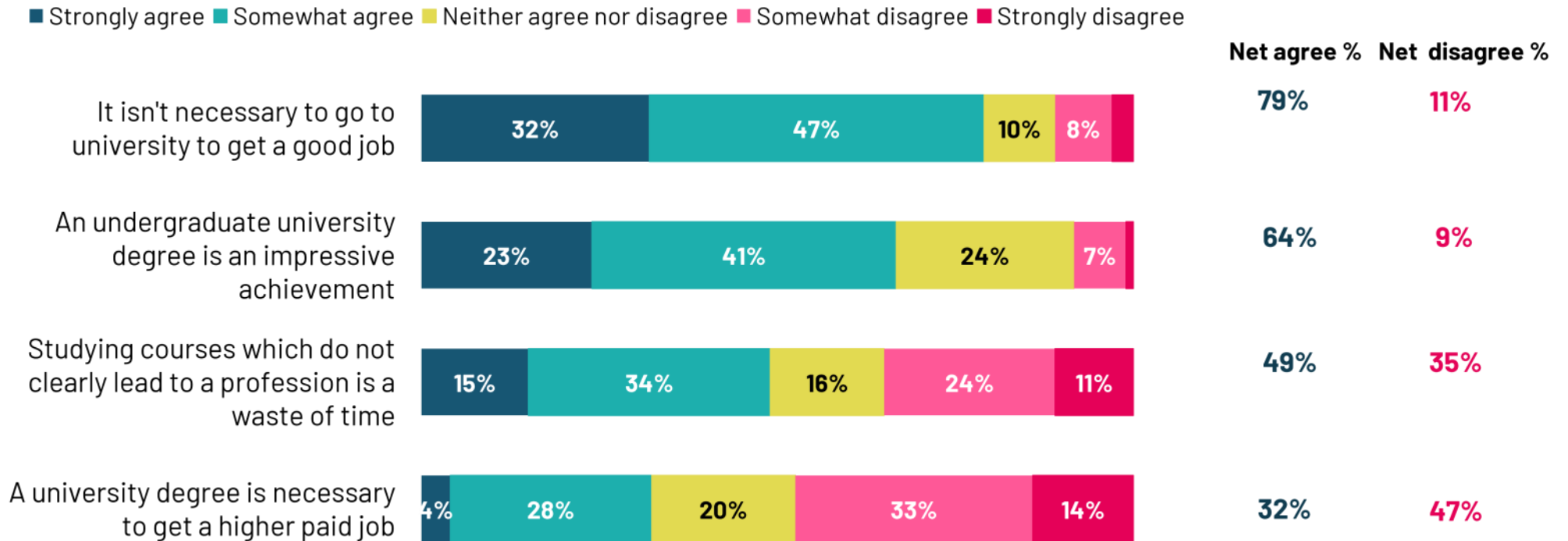
Why do you feel it is not worth it for people to go to university?



Base: All saying university is not worth it: 153

Figure 4.4: Statements on the value of a university degree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about universities in general?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

There was general positivity about Scottish universities' inclusion and diversity. Over half of participants (54%) agreed with the statement that 'universities in Scotland are inclusive and diverse places'. Just over one in ten (11%) disagreed, while 27% neither agreed nor disagreed and 8% were not sure.

Agreement was higher among those who are attending or have attended university (60%) than among those who have not (50%), as well as higher among men (58%) compared to women (49%).

Related to this, over a third (34%) disagreed with the statement that 'universities in Scotland are elitist'. However, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed and a similar proportion (29%) felt that universities in Scotland are elitist. Seven per cent were not sure.

Views were more split on how accessible Scottish universities are to people living in Scotland. While over four in ten (44%) agreed with the statement that 'anybody who wants to go to university in Scotland can go', 38% disagreed with this (14% neither agreed nor disagreed and 3% were not sure). Men were more likely to agree with this than women (49% and 40% respectively). Younger and middle age groups were also more likely to agree (49% among both 18-34 year olds and 35-54 year olds) compared with older people over the age of 55 (38%).

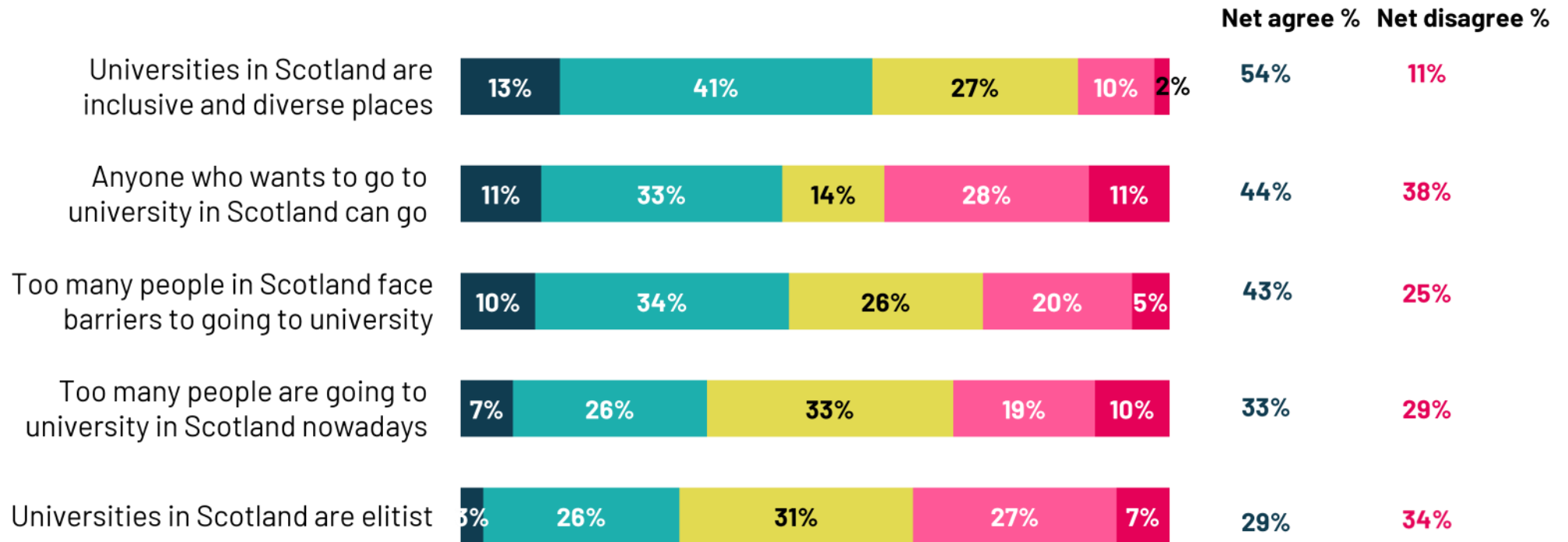
At the same time, 43% of participants agreed with the statement that 'too many people in Scotland face barriers to going to university'. A quarter (25%) disagreed with this, while a further quarter (26%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Agreement was higher among those with a health condition (50%) than among those without (39%), and among those living in the most deprived areas (53% in SIMD 1 areas) compared to those living in less deprived areas (39% on average across SIMD 3-5 areas). Women were also more likely to agree than men (49% and 37% respectively).

There were also mixed views on the numbers attending university, with a third (33%) agreeing with the statement that 'too many people are going to university in Scotland nowadays' and 29% disagreeing. A third (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% were not sure. Those living in the least deprived areas were more likely to agree (46% in SIMD 5 areas) than those in the least deprived areas were (19% in SIMD 1 areas). Men were also more likely to agree with this than women (38% and 28% respectively).

Figure 5.1: Views on access to Scottish universities

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Scottish universities?

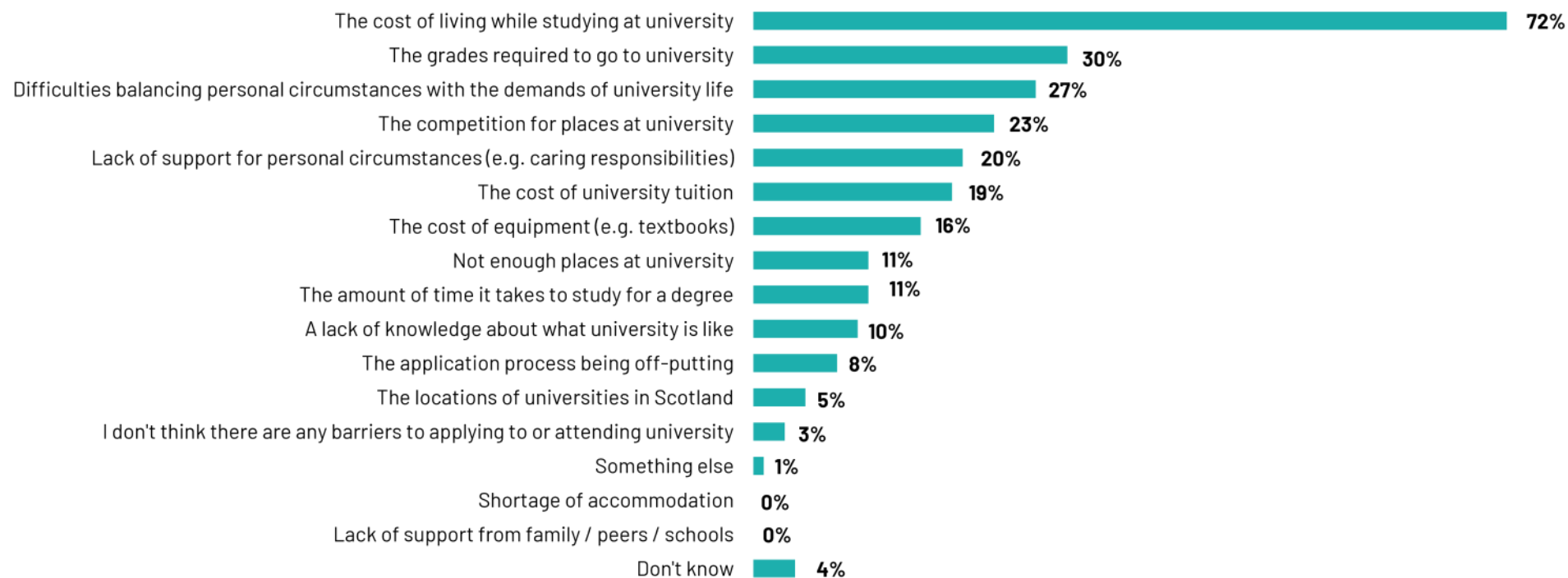
■ Strongly agree
 ■ Somewhat agree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Somewhat disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

Figure 5.2: Barriers to applying to or attending university

Which of these, if any, do you think are the main barriers that people might face when applying to or attending university in Scotland?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

Access to university

Barriers to applying to or attending university

When asked about potential barriers that people might face when applying to or attending university in Scotland, the most commonly cited barrier was the cost of living while studying at university (72%). Those living in the Highlands and Islands were more likely to mention the cost of living (85%) than those living in other regions were.

The grades required to go to university (30%), difficulties balancing personal circumstances with the demands of university life (27%), the competition for places at university (23%) and a lack of support for personal circumstances (20%) were also commonly mentioned barriers. Just under one in five (19%) cited the cost of university tuition as a potential barrier, while 3% did not think there were any barriers to applying to or attending university.

Reflecting the cost of living being perceived as the main barrier, the group most commonly identified as likely to face these barriers was people from low-income households (65%).

People from disadvantaged backgrounds were also commonly mentioned as more likely to face these barriers (55%). There was some variation by region, with those living in

the Lothian region (75%) more likely than average to identify people from disadvantaged backgrounds as likely to face barriers to university application and attendance.

Those living in Mid Scotland and Fife (64%) were also more likely to mention this group than those living in North East Scotland (50%), Highlands and Islands (49%), Glasgow (48%), or South Scotland (47%) were. Those living in urban areas (58%) were also more likely to mention people from disadvantaged backgrounds as facing these barriers than those living in rural areas were (49%).

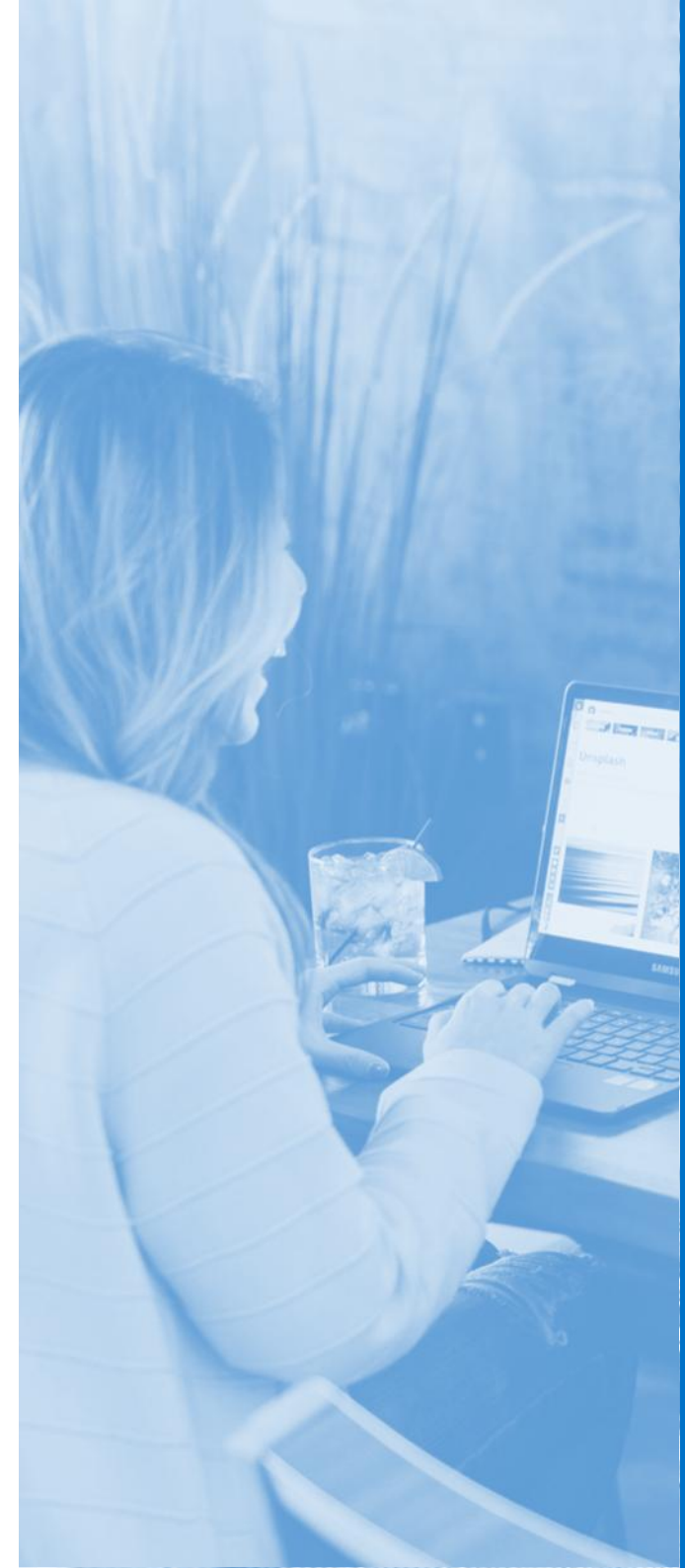
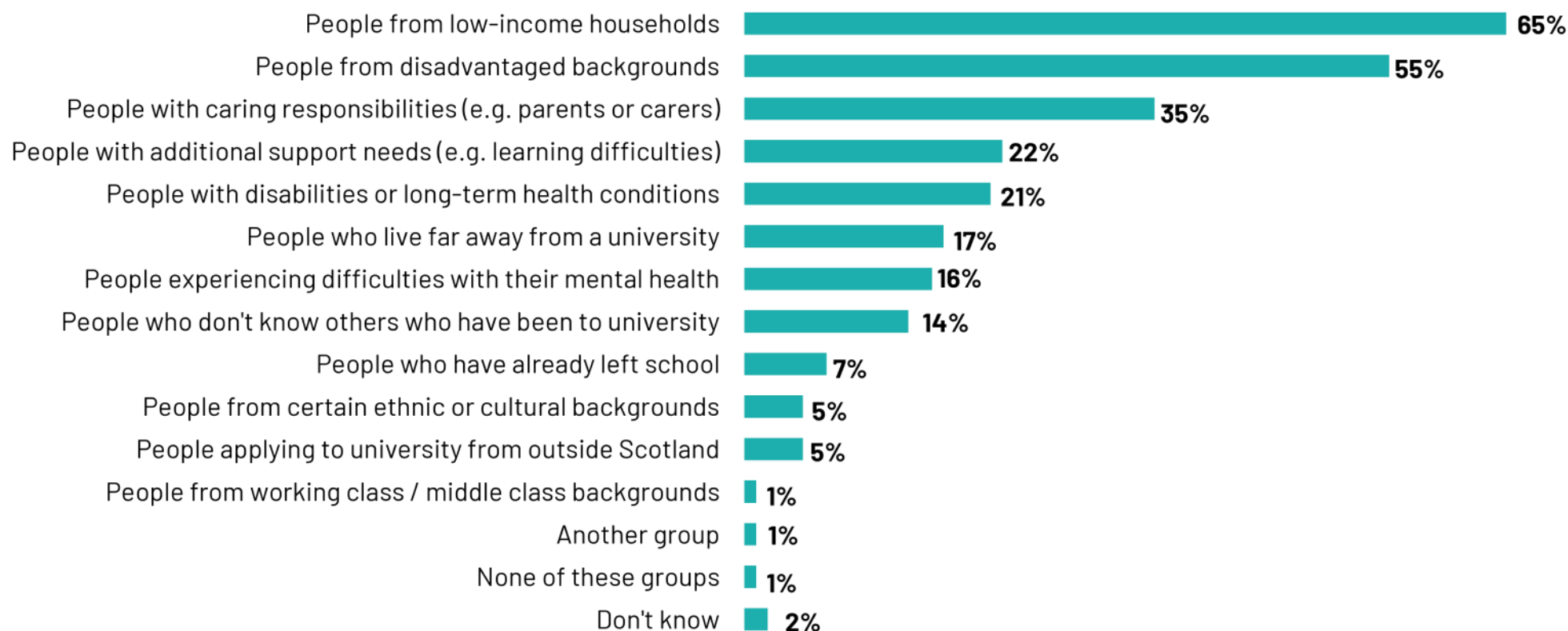


Figure 5.3: Groups most likely to face barriers

Which of the following groups of people, if any, do you think are most likely to face these barriers?



Base: All mentioning a barrier that people may face when applying to or attending university in Scotland: 986

Funding higher education

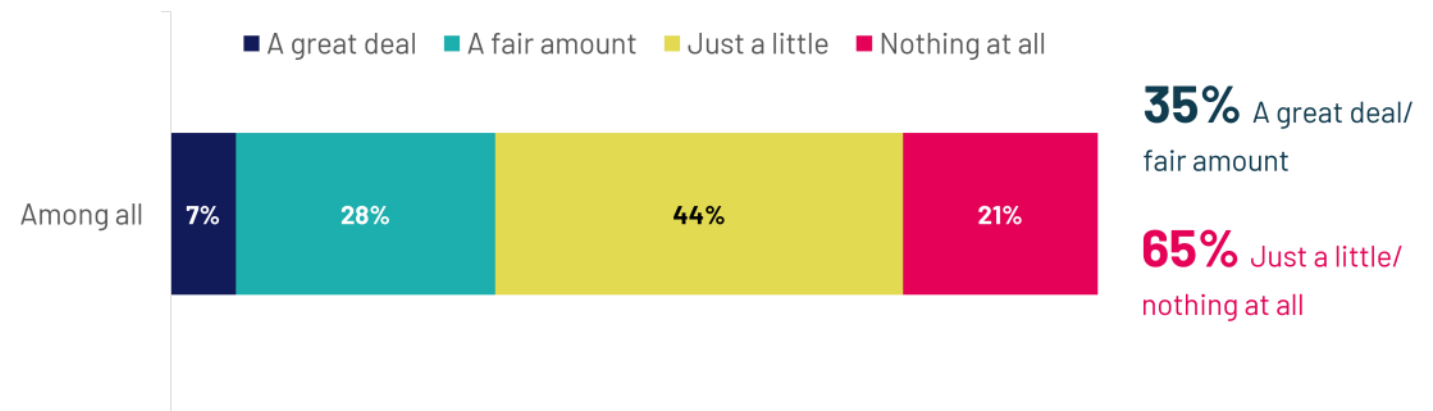
Knowledge of university education

Knowledge of how university education is funded in Scotland was relatively low, with 44% of participants saying they knew just a little about it and one in five (21%) that they knew nothing at all. Over a quarter of participants (28%) said they knew a fair amount about how Scottish university education is funded, while just 7% said they knew a great deal about this.

As would be expected, knowledge was higher among those who had attended university (52%) than among those who had not (25%). Knowledge was also higher among those who had attended university and were the first in their family to do so (58%) than those who were not the first in their family to attend (44%).

Figure 6.1: Knowledge of how university education is funded in Scotland

How much, if anything, would you say you know about how university education is funded in Scotland?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

Funding higher education

Before being asked to share their views on how university education should be funded in Scotland, participants were presented with the following information about the current funding approach:

While there was majority support for the Scottish Government providing some form of support with the cost of tuition fees, there were mixed views on the extent of this support.

“As you may know or have heard, all Scottish universities charge tuition fees for their undergraduate degree courses with limits set by the Scottish and UK Governments. The amount a student will pay, if anything, depends on where they live, whether or not they have already been to university, whether they are studying full-time or part-time, and the university they choose to attend.

Full-time students living in Scotland who attend a Scottish university for their first undergraduate degree do not need to pay tuition fees, as these are covered by the Scottish Government. Part-time students living in Scotland pay tuition fees unless their household income is less than £25,000, in which case the Scottish Government covers the cost of tuition.

Students living outside of Scotland are charged tuition fees to attend a Scottish university for their first undergraduate degree. The tuition fees will vary depending on where they live, their citizenship status, and their choice of course or university. Students can apply for loans to cover the upfront costs.”

Following this information, participants were presented with three broad approaches for sharing the cost of tuition fees for first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland. Participants were also asked whether their preferred approach should apply to only full-time students, part-time students, or both.

Overall, 44% felt that the Scottish Government should cover the cost of tuition for all first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland. A similar proportion – 43% - preferred a more limited approach to covering the costs, with the Scottish Government covering the cost of tuition for first-time undergraduate students living in

households on low incomes in Scotland, but those whose households can afford it paying at least some of their tuition.

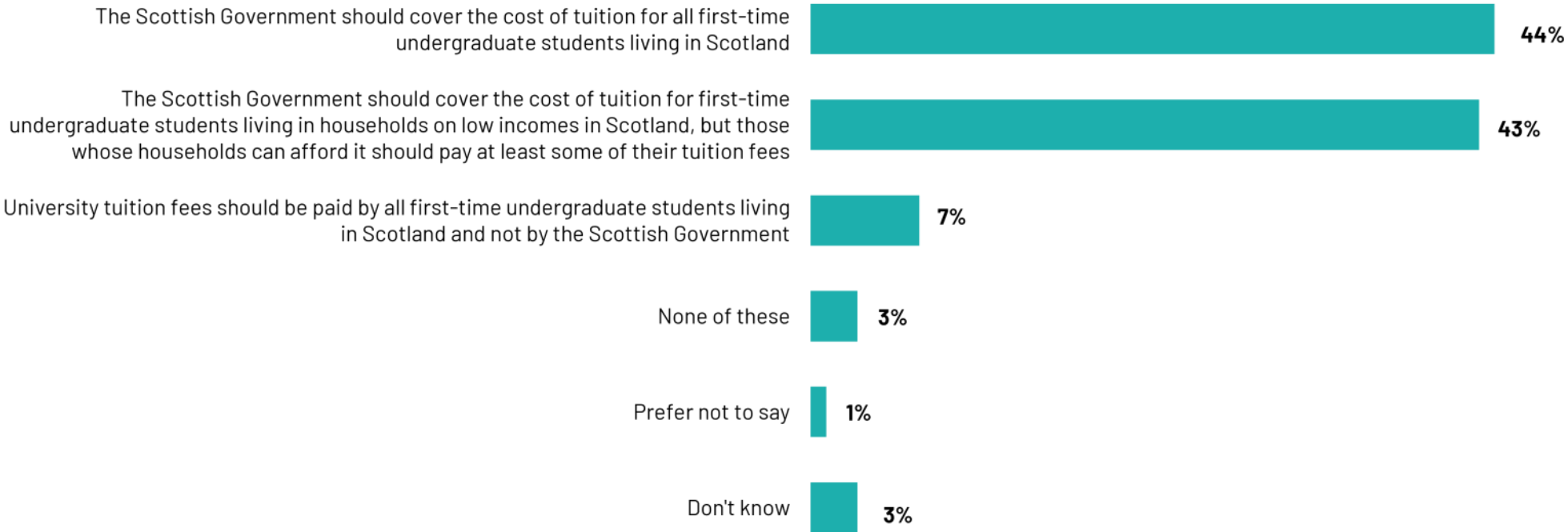
Fewer than one in ten (7%) felt that university tuition fees should be paid by all first-time undergraduate students, with no costs being covered by the Scottish Government.

Among those in favour of the Scottish Government covering tuition costs for all first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland irrespective of household income, the majority (81%) felt that the Scottish Government should cover the cost of tuition for both full-time and part-time undergraduate students undertaking their first degree. Less than one in five (18%) felt that it should apply to full-time students only, while 1% felt that it should apply to part-time students only.

There was a similar pattern among those in favour of the Scottish Government covering tuition costs for those from low-income households while those whose households can better afford it pay at least some of these costs. Again, a majority (79%) felt that this should apply to both full-time and part-time undergraduate students undertaking their first degree. Less than one in five (18%) felt that it should apply to full-time students only, while 2% felt that it should apply to part-time students only.

Figure 6.2: Views on covering the cost of tuition fees

Which of the following statements, if any, comes closest to your view about how the cost of tuition fees for first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland should be covered?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

Funding higher education

There was some variation in views across demographic groups. The view that the Scottish Government should cover the cost of tuition for all first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland was more popular among:

- Those living in higher income households; 61% of those in households with an annual income of £100,000 or more preferred this approach, compared with 29% of those in households with an income of up to £25,999.
- Those with children at home (60%) compared to those without children at home (40%).
- Younger age groups; 57% of those aged 18-34 and 46% of those aged 35-54 preferred this approach, compared with 35% of the over 55s.
- Those who attended university (58%) compared to those who did not attend university (36%).

The view that Scottish Government should cover the cost of tuition for first-time undergraduate students living in households on low incomes was more popular among:

- Those living in lower income households; 55% of those living in lower-income households with an annual income up to £25,999 preferred this approach, compared to 24% of those in the highest income bracket (£100,000 and above).
- Older people aged 55+ (53%) compared to younger age groups (39% among 35-54 year olds and 32% among 18-34 year olds).
- Those who did not attend university (49%) compared to those who did attend university (33%).
- Those without children at home (47%) compared to those with children at home (27%).

The view that university tuition fees should be paid by all first-time undergraduate students living in Scotland and not by the Scottish Government, while not a popular option overall, was more popular among men (9%) than among women (4%).

Approaches to funding university education

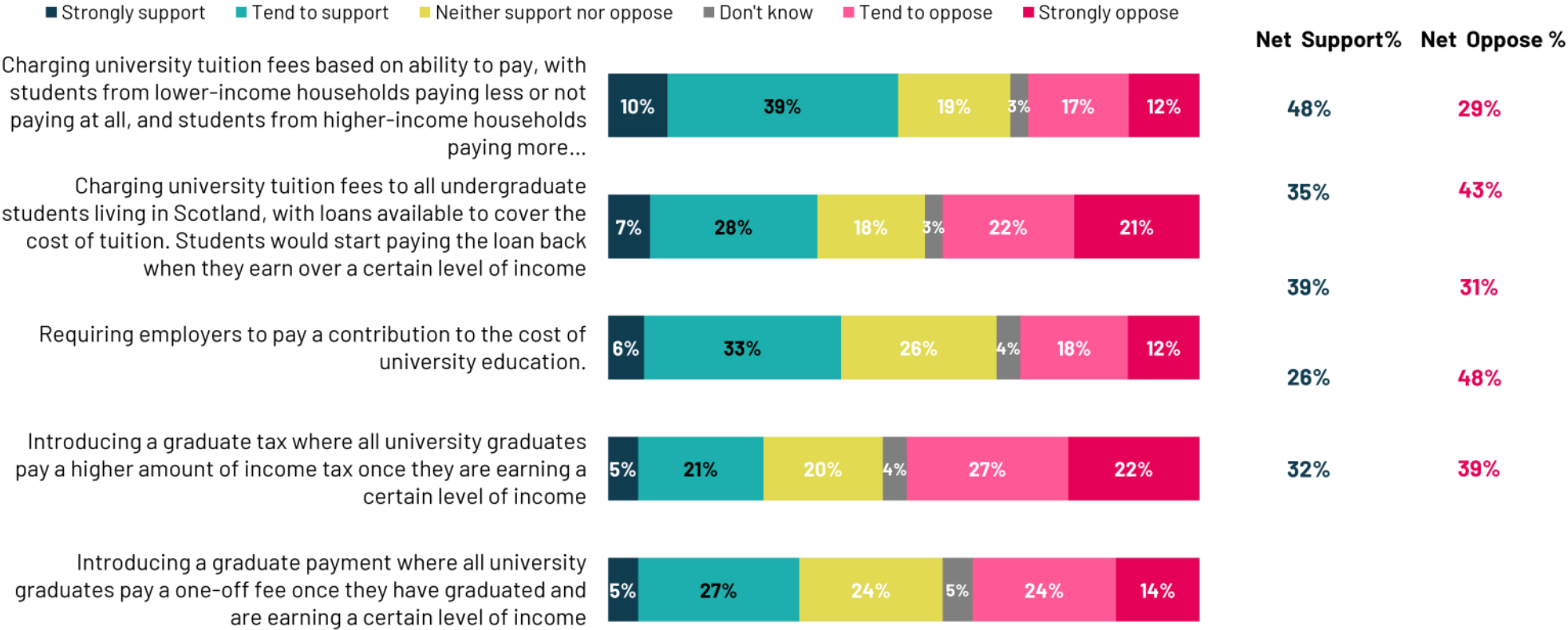
Participants were then presented with a range of possible alternative approaches to funding undergraduate degrees in Scotland in the future.

Overall, and of the two options presented that involved charging tuition fees, an alternative funding approach based on ability to pay was the most popular. Just under half of participants (48%) supported the idea of charging university tuition fees based on ability to pay, with students from lower-income households paying less or not paying at all, and students from higher-income households paying more with access to loans that are repayable once earning a certain level of income. Just under three in ten (29%) opposed this approach, while 19% neither supported nor opposed it (3% said they were not sure).

Views on the other approach to tuition fees based on a universal charge were more mixed, and less supported overall. Just under a third (35%) supported the idea of charging tuition fees to all undergraduate students living in Scotland, with loans available to cover the cost of tuition to be repaid once earning a certain level of income. More than four in ten (43%) opposed this, while 18% neither supported nor opposed it and 3% were not sure.

Figure 6.3: Views on funding approaches

To what extent would you support or oppose the following possible approaches to funding undergraduate degrees in Scotland in the future?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

Funding higher education

After charging tuition fees based on ability to pay, the idea of requiring employers to pay a contribution to the cost of university education was the next most popular approach. Just under four in ten (39%) supported this, while 31% opposed it and 26% neither supported nor opposed it (4% were not sure).

There were more mixed views on the idea of a graduate payment, which would involve all university graduates paying a one-off fee once they have graduated and are earning a certain level of income. Just under four in ten (39%) opposed this, while 32% supported it (24% neither supported nor opposed and 5% were not sure).

The idea of a graduate tax was the least popular overall. Almost half of participants (48%) opposed introducing a graduate tax where all university graduates pay a higher amount of income tax once they are earning over a certain level of income. Just over a quarter (26%) supported this, while one in five (20%) neither supported nor opposed and 4% were not sure.

Support for charging tuition fees based on ability to pay was higher among those without children at home (52%) than among those with children at home (33%). Households with an annual income of less than £100,000 were also more supportive of this approach than those with an income over £100,000 (52% among households with an annual income of up to £25,999, 53% among those in the £26,000-£51,999 bracket, and 49% among those in the £52,000-£99,999 bracket, compared with 32% of those with an annual income of £100,000 and above).

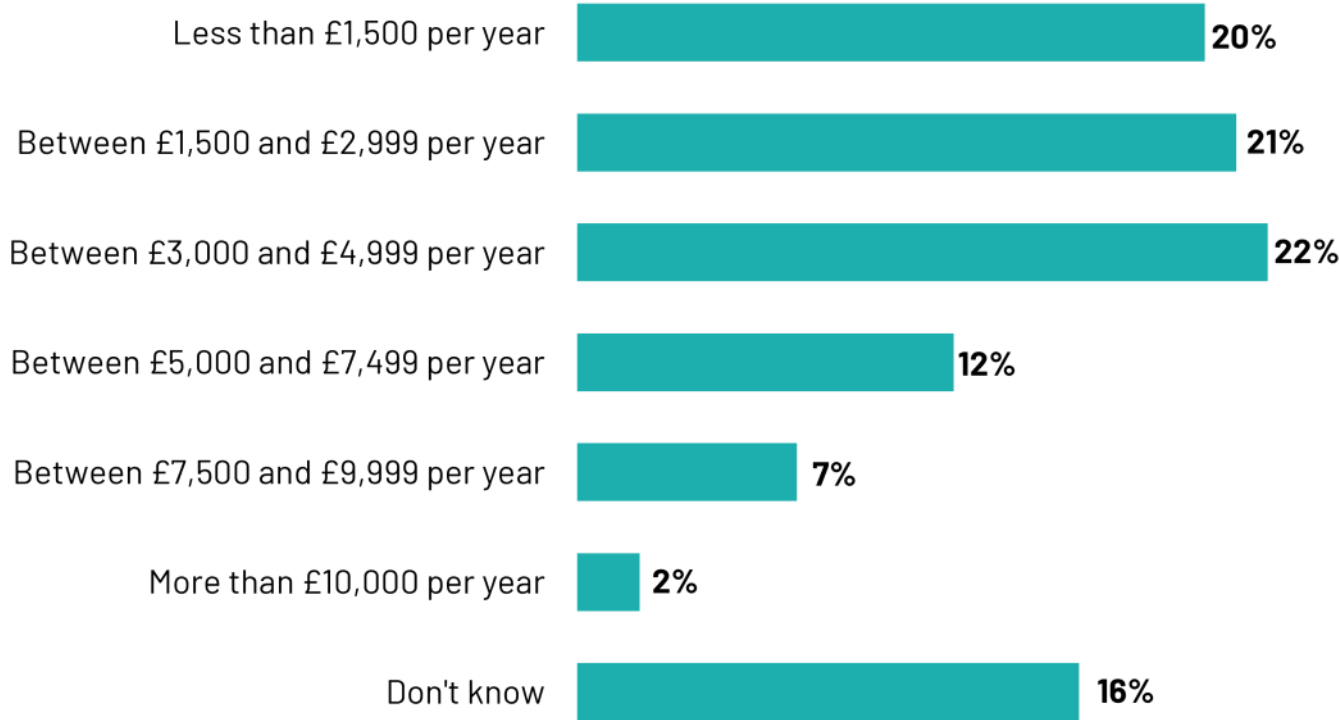
Support for charging tuition fees to all undergraduate students living in Scotland, with loans available to cover the cost of tuition, was higher among older and middle age groups (41% of those over the age of 55 and 36% of 35-54 year olds supported this) than among young people (24% of those aged under 35). Those who didn't attend university were also more likely to support this (40%) than those who did (24%), as were those with no children at home (37%) compared to those with children at home (26%).

Tuition fee amounts

Among those in support of some form of tuition fees, views on a reasonable charge were mixed. Around one in five (20%) considered up to £1,500 per year to be a reasonable charge, while similar proportions considered between £1,000 and £2,999 to be reasonable (21%) or between £3,000 and £4,999 to be reasonable (22%). Support for charges above £4,999 dropped down, with 12% considering between £5,000 and £7,499 to be reasonable, 7% considering £7,500-£9,999 to be reasonable, and 2% considering more than £10,000 to be reasonable. Sixteen per cent were not sure what a reasonable charge per year would be.

Figure 6.4: Views on tuition fee charges per year

What level of tuition fee do you think it is reasonable to charge undergraduate students per year (for a four-year course)?



Base: All who support some form of tuition fee charges (for all undergraduate students and/or based on ability to pay): 652

Funding higher education

Priority groups for funding

If the Scottish Government were to cover the cost of tuition fees for some groups of people living in Scotland, there was broadest support among participants for prioritising groups based on income, background and course choice. Around two thirds of participants (65%) identified students from low-income households as a priority group, followed by students studying courses in areas where there are skills shortages such as nursing or engineering (59%), and students from disadvantaged backgrounds (52%). The view that students from low-income households and from disadvantaged backgrounds should be prioritised for funding reflects findings elsewhere in the survey which highlighted that these groups were identified by participants as most likely to face barriers in applying to or attending university.

Scottish Government priorities

Thinking more generally about post-school education (such as universities, further education colleges, training or apprenticeships), apprenticeships and support for low-income and disadvantaged households were most commonly identified by participants as priorities for Scottish Government funding.

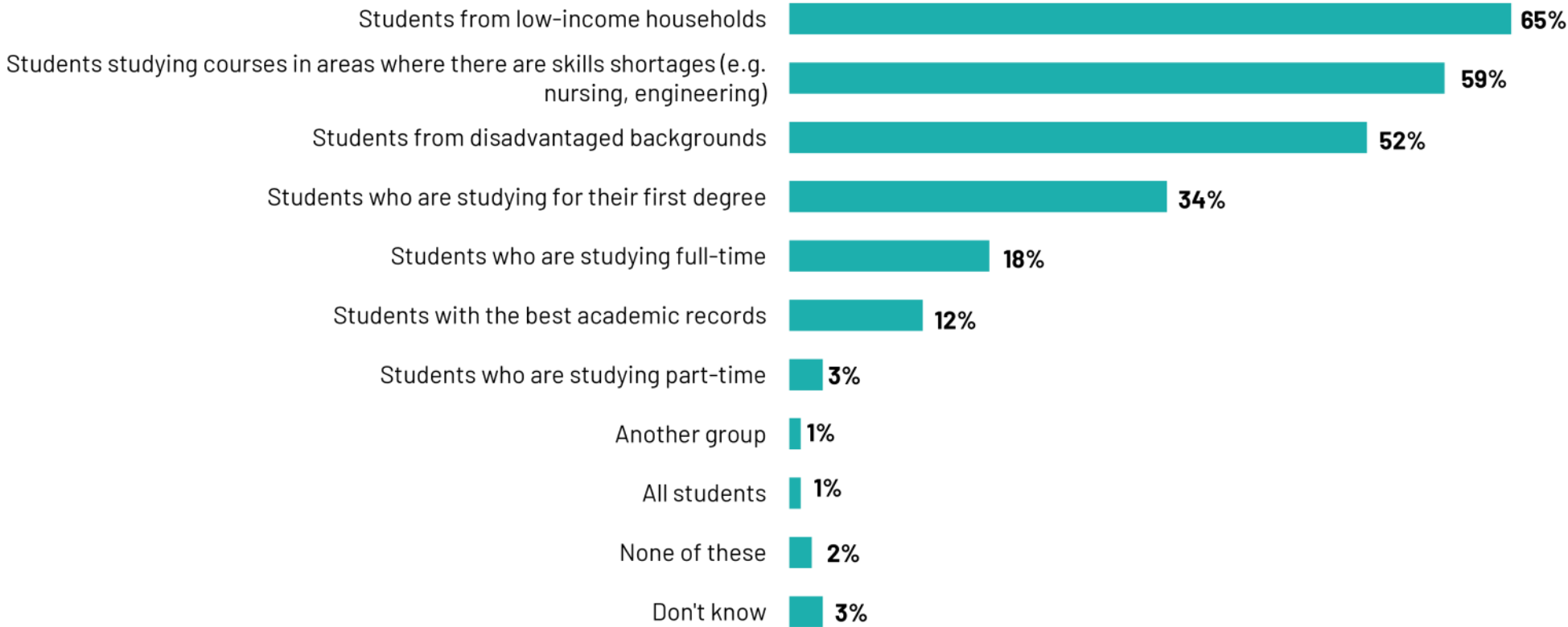
A majority of participants (61%) felt that the Scottish Government should prioritise funding for apprenticeship places so people can 'earn as they learn' in key areas. Support for this was higher among older people (71% of those aged 55+ prioritised this, compared with 61% of 35-54 year olds and 45 % of 18-34 year-olds) and those living in rural areas (68%, compared with 59% of those in urban areas). It was lower among those living in Scotland's most deprived areas (49% in SIMD 1 areas).

Half of participants (50%) felt that funding should be prioritised for grants or bursaries for low-income and disadvantaged students to cover the cost of living while studying.



Figure 6.5: Views on priority groups for funding

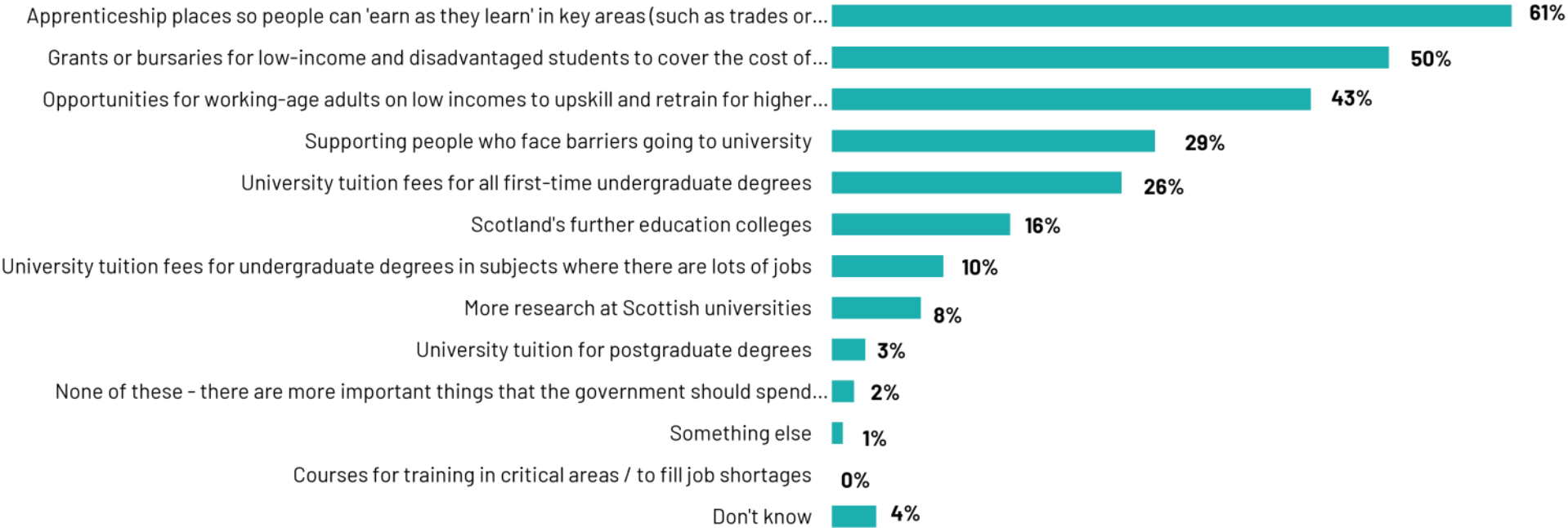
If the Scottish Government was to cover the cost of tuition fees for some groups of people living in Scotland, which of the following groups, if any, do you think should be prioritised?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

Figure 6.6: Views on Scottish Government priorities

Which of the following, if any, do you think the Scottish Government should prioritise funding for?



Base: All adults 18+ living in Scotland: 1057

The findings highlight a range of perspectives on the role of higher education and how it should be funded in Scotland.

A majority of the Scottish public (63%) viewed university as worthwhile. Key reasons for this were to gain essential skills and training for a specific career (67%) and to improve the chances of getting a higher paid or better job (66%). Among those who did not consider university to be worthwhile (15%), the most common reason given was that apprenticeships were a better route (49%). Views were also relatively positive when it comes to Scottish universities' inclusion and diversity; over half (54%) agreed that universities in Scotland are inclusive and diverse, while just 11% disagreed.

Views were more mixed on how accessible universities in Scotland are, however. While 44% agreed that anyone in Scotland who wants to attend university can do so, a similar proportion (43%) agreed that too many people in Scotland face barriers to going to university.

The cost of living was by far the most frequently cited barrier (72% mentioned this), followed by the grades required (30%) and difficulties balancing personal circumstances with the demands of university life (27%). Reflecting concerns about the cost of living while attending university, students from low-income households (65%) and from disadvantaged backgrounds (55%) were considered the most likely groups to face barriers when applying to or attending university in Scotland.

This was reflected in the widespread support for Scottish Government funding to prioritise low-income students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, if not everyone. Nevertheless, there was some openness to alternative funding models that balanced individual responsibility and equitable access, with 48% supportive of tuition fees based on ability to pay, 39% supportive of employer contributions to the cost of university education, and 35% supportive of universal

tuition fees, with loans available to cover the cost of tuition (35%). Around one in three supported a graduate payment (32%) while one in four supported a graduate tax (26%).

Despite acknowledging the benefits of higher education, there were nuanced views on the value of a university degree. While the majority (64%) considered an undergraduate degree to be an impressive achievement, it was not broadly considered to be essential for getting a good job in the future. Nearly half of participants (49%) felt that studying courses that did not lead to a clear profession were a waste of time. As such, there were other ways in which participants felt the Scottish Government should prioritise funding for post-school education, such as apprenticeships (61%), as well as grants and bursaries for low-income students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds (50%).

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About The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland

The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland is an independent foundation that supports individuals to access higher education through grants and drives improvement of the higher education system in Scotland through strategic projects and partnerships.

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