



# Annual Membership Survey 2023

**Strategy and Insights Team**



## AMS 2023

The Annual Membership Survey is a key business activity for the OU Students Association. Each year, all students who are current members of the Association are invited to participate in the survey. Their feedback on key areas of our services plays a crucial role in helping us better understand what our members need from us, and enables informed decision-making across the organisation.

## About the survey

In 2023, 4,108 students took part in the AMS, or 2.4% of the 166,047 students who were invited to take the survey.

The survey was incentivised, with students winning a laptop, two tablets, five £150 shopping vouchers and ten £50 shopping vouchers.

## Areas that we invite feedback on

The AMS invites feedback on key areas of the Association's work, including:

- Awareness of the Association and how students prefer engaging with us
- Awareness of our activities and services
- Interest in volunteering opportunities and student elections
- Student representation and student voice
- Interest in our work around EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and Sustainability

# Awareness

- Overall awareness
- Awareness of the SLT/BoT
- Awareness of our activities
- Awareness of our services



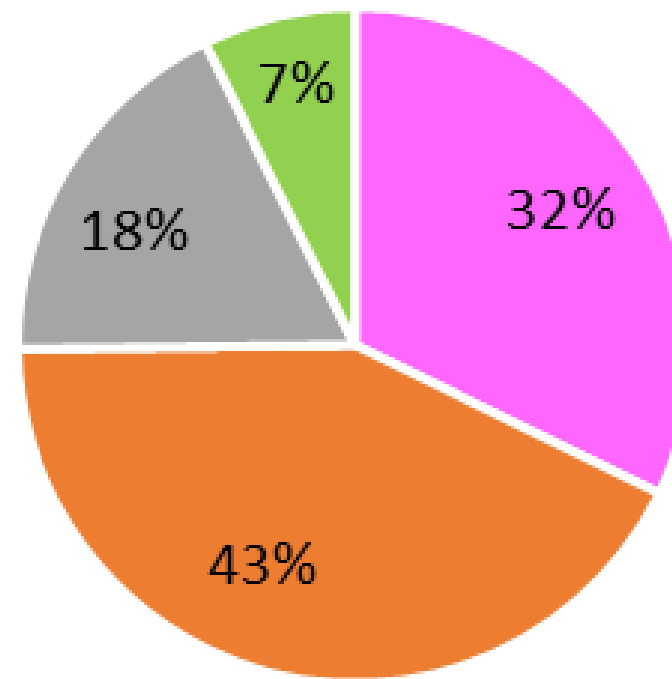
## Awareness

Overall, 75% of respondents were aware of the Association. 2023 saw a 7% increase in the number of students who selected the option ‘Yes, and I know what is available to me as a member’. This increase is also important because it measures not just awareness but also understanding of what the Association offers to students.

## Student Leadership Team (SLT) and Board of Trustees (BoT)

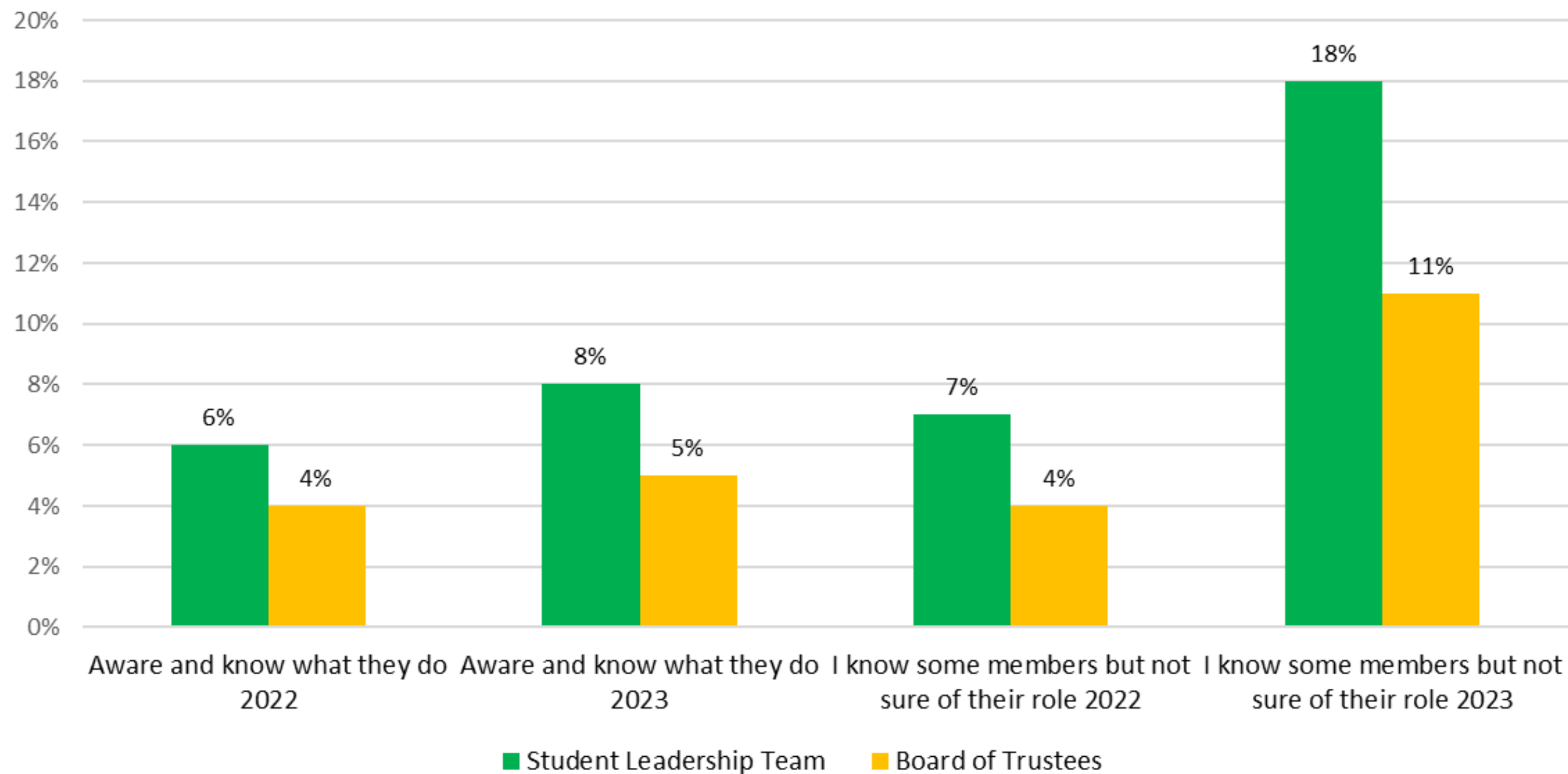
Awareness levels increased in 2023 for both the SLT and the BoT. In particular, the feedback suggests that there is more awareness for individual members of both the SLT and the BoT: the percentage of survey respondents selecting ‘I know some members but not sure of their role’ increased by 11% for the SLT and by 7% for the BoT.

## Awareness of the Students Association



- Yes and I know what is available to me as a member
- Yes but I don't know what is available to me as a member
- No but I have heard of the OU Students Association
- I had not heard of the OU Students Association until today

### Awareness of SLT and BoT Feedback from 2022 and 2023



## Our Activities

**Student-led support groups:** Those selecting ‘not aware but interested’ dropped from 43% in 2022 to 36% in 2023. At the same time, those selecting the ‘it’s not for me’ option increased from 20% in 2022 to 25% in 2023.

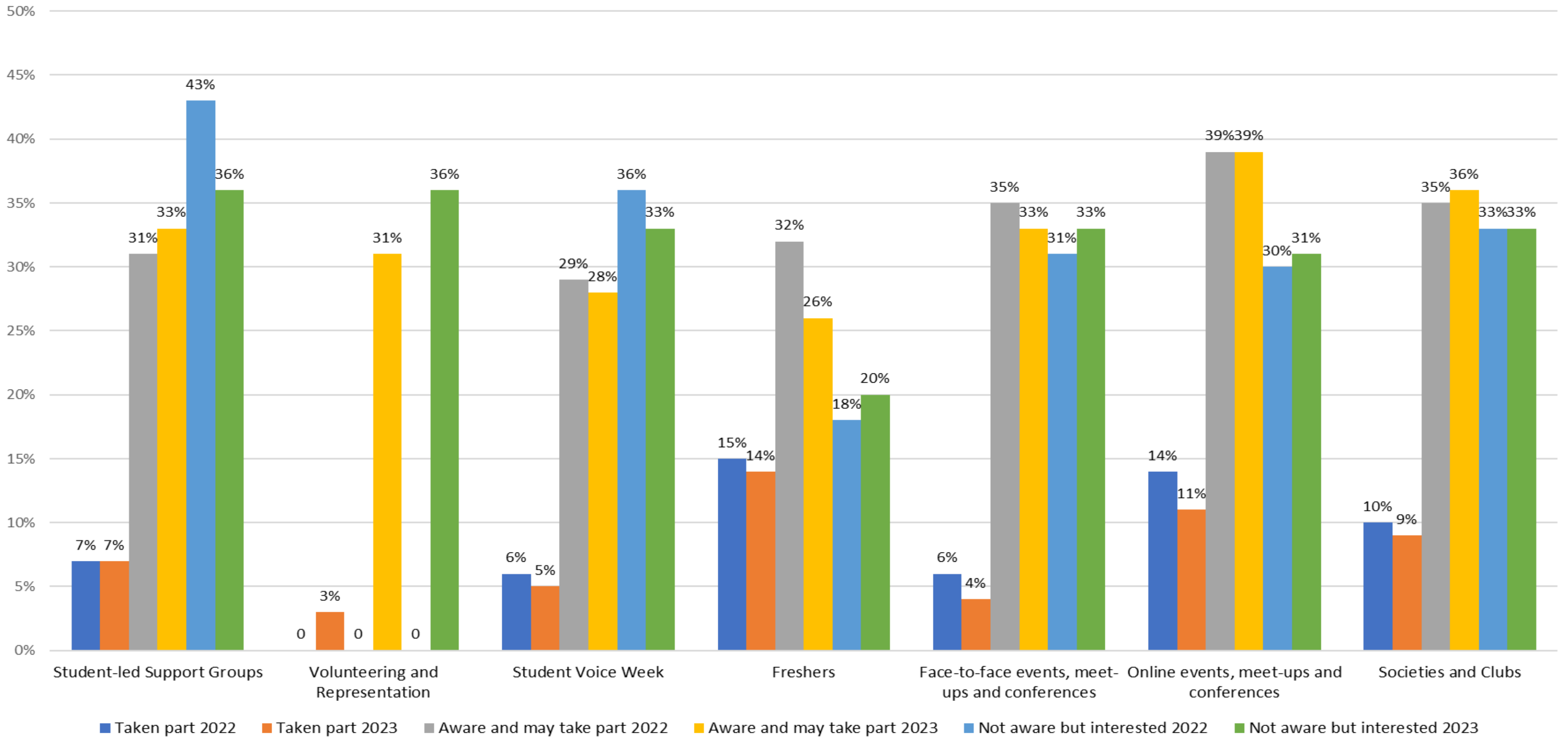
**Freshers:** Those selecting ‘aware and may take part in the future’ dropped from 32% in 2022 to 26% in 2023. At the same time, those selecting the ‘it’s not for me’ option increased from 36% in 2022 to 40% in 2023.

## Awareness of the activities offered by the Association

We have compared the feedback from 2022/2023 along three scales – those who have already taken part in an activity, those who are aware of the activity on offer and might take part in the future, and those who were not aware of the activity but would be interested in taking part in the future. Most of the 2023 percentages are similar to those from 2022, except for student-led support groups and Freshers.



## Activities offered by the Association Feedback from 2022 and 2023



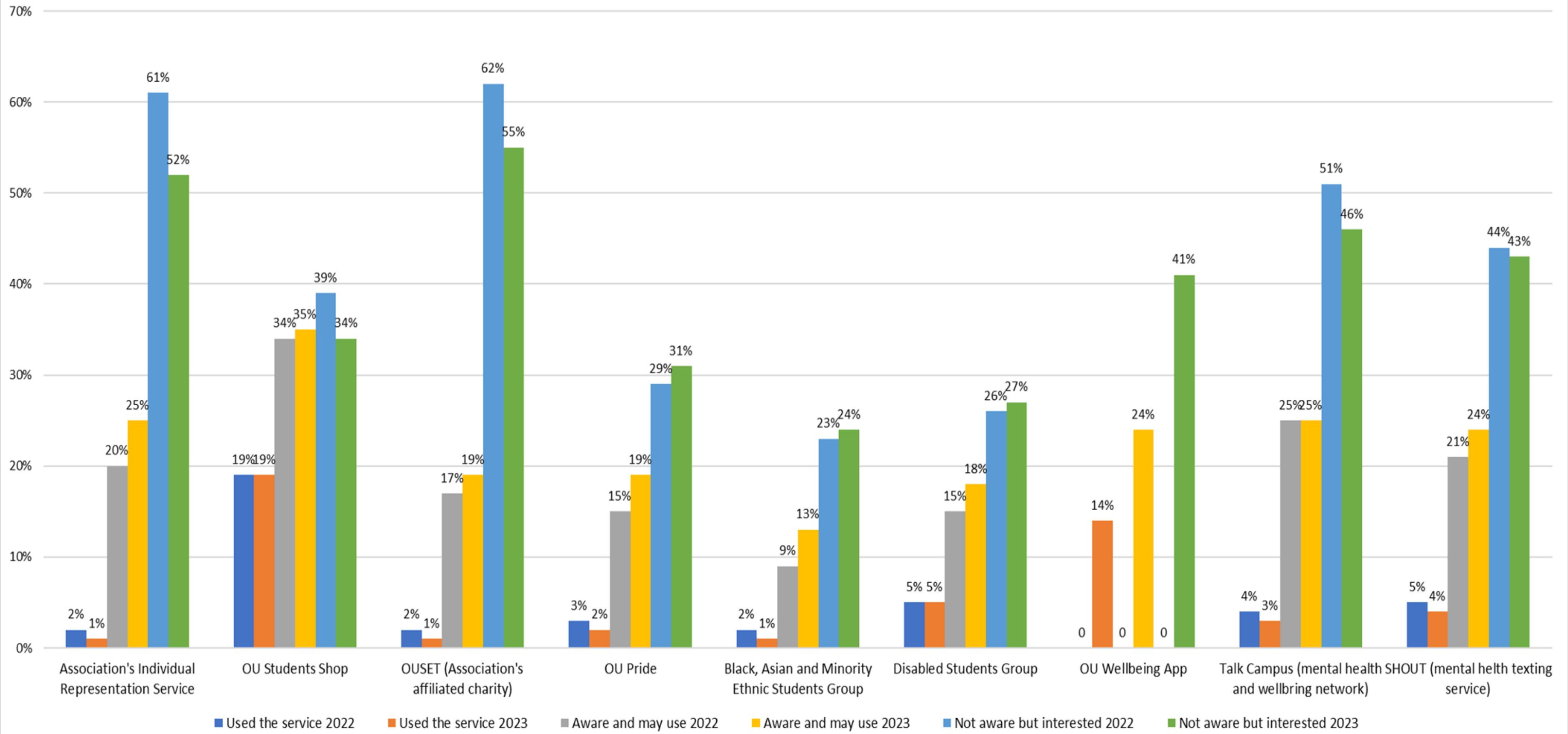
# Our Services

*“I have found the student association really supportive in the first few weeks of study, they have provided the support needed that goes beyond academic support. As a single parent returning to higher level academic study for the first time in 12 years they have offered the support and advice I have needed when feeling completely overwhelmed with everything.”*

*“Everything I have read or come in contact with organized and created by the Association is truly amazing, there is a lot of effort put in by students to make others feel accepted appreciated cherished, and celebrated!”*

We have compared the feedback from 2022/2023 along three scales – those who have already used a service, those who are aware of the service on offer and might use it in the future, and those who were not aware of the service but would be interested in using it in the future. While most of the 2023 percentages are similar to those from 2022, for the Individual Representation Service and OUSET, the number of students selecting the ‘not aware but interested in using this service in the future’ option dropped by 7%-9% between 2022 and 2023. For both, there was a positive shift in the number of students choosing the ‘aware and may use’ option.

## Services offered by the Association Feedback from 2022 and 2023



# Communication channels

- Key channels for raising awareness
- Social media channels

## Communication channels

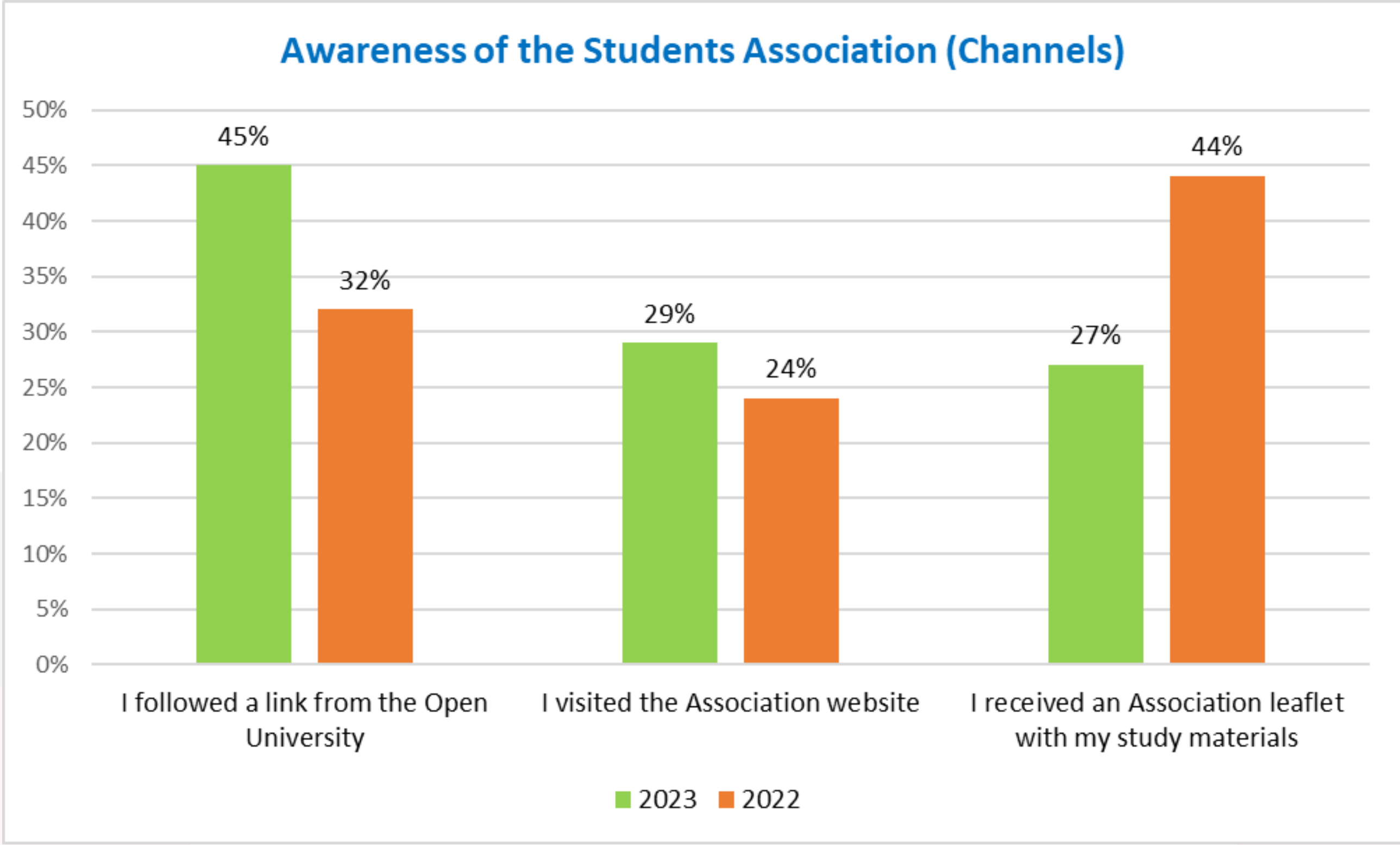
Facebook, Instagram and the Students Association forums Continue to be the most popular social media channels

## Key channels for raising awareness

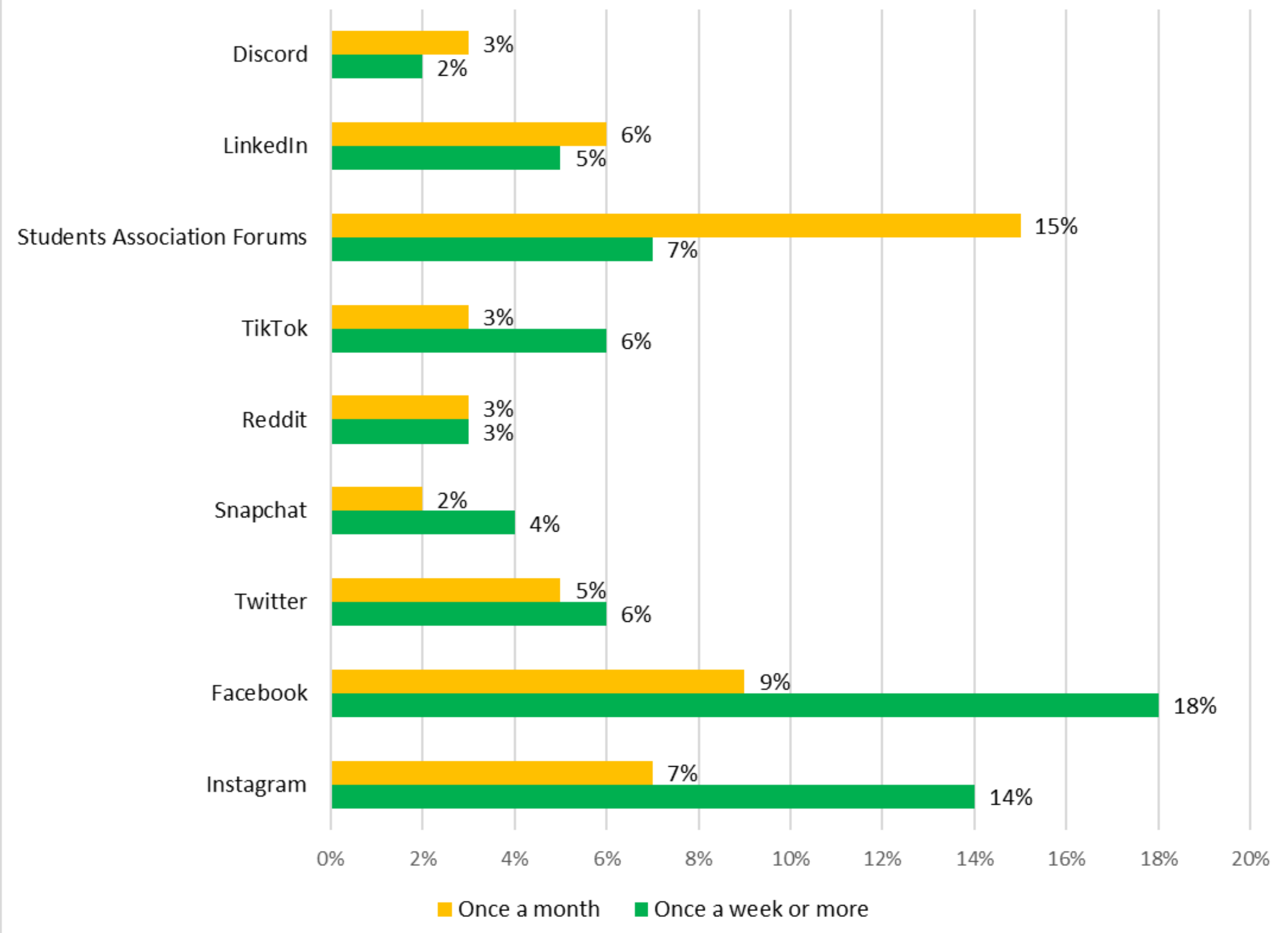
In 2023, when asked how they became aware of the Association, the option 'I followed a link from the Open University' (45%) was the most popular one selected by students. This was followed by 'I visited the Association website' (29%) and 'I received an Association leaflet with my study materials' (27%). Compared to 2022, there is an increase of 13% in students who became aware of the Association through the Open University, with a drop of 17% in those who became aware of the Association after receiving a leaflet with their course materials.



### Awareness of the Students Association (Channels)



### Use of social media channels



Some students fed back that answering the Annual Membership Survey had been their first introduction to the Students Association and all that it could offer, and that they would have liked to have received similar information at the start of their studies. Given that students often receive printed materials after the start of their modules, with a risk of it getting buried under other reading material, perhaps an online version of the Association leaflet - which could be mailed out to students when they first register for a module – might help raise awareness levels.

Students also mentioned the role that tutors could play in raising awareness of what is available to students through the Association.

*“I was unaware of \*any\* of the Association's Services until this survey, I feel that an email to all students setting out what the association does, how to get involved, and the first point of contact would be massively improving on the lack of information currently.”*

*“There just needs to be more information about what's available to OU students. Maybe tutors discuss it at the start of modules or send out information booklets alongside ou material?”*

*“It would be good if there was better integration between the OU and Student Association websites. More OUSA news on the Student Home page will remind people that the association is there, and promote activities and campaigns.”*

# **Volunteering and Representation**

- Student representation
- Interest in volunteer roles
- Interest in student elections

## Student Representation

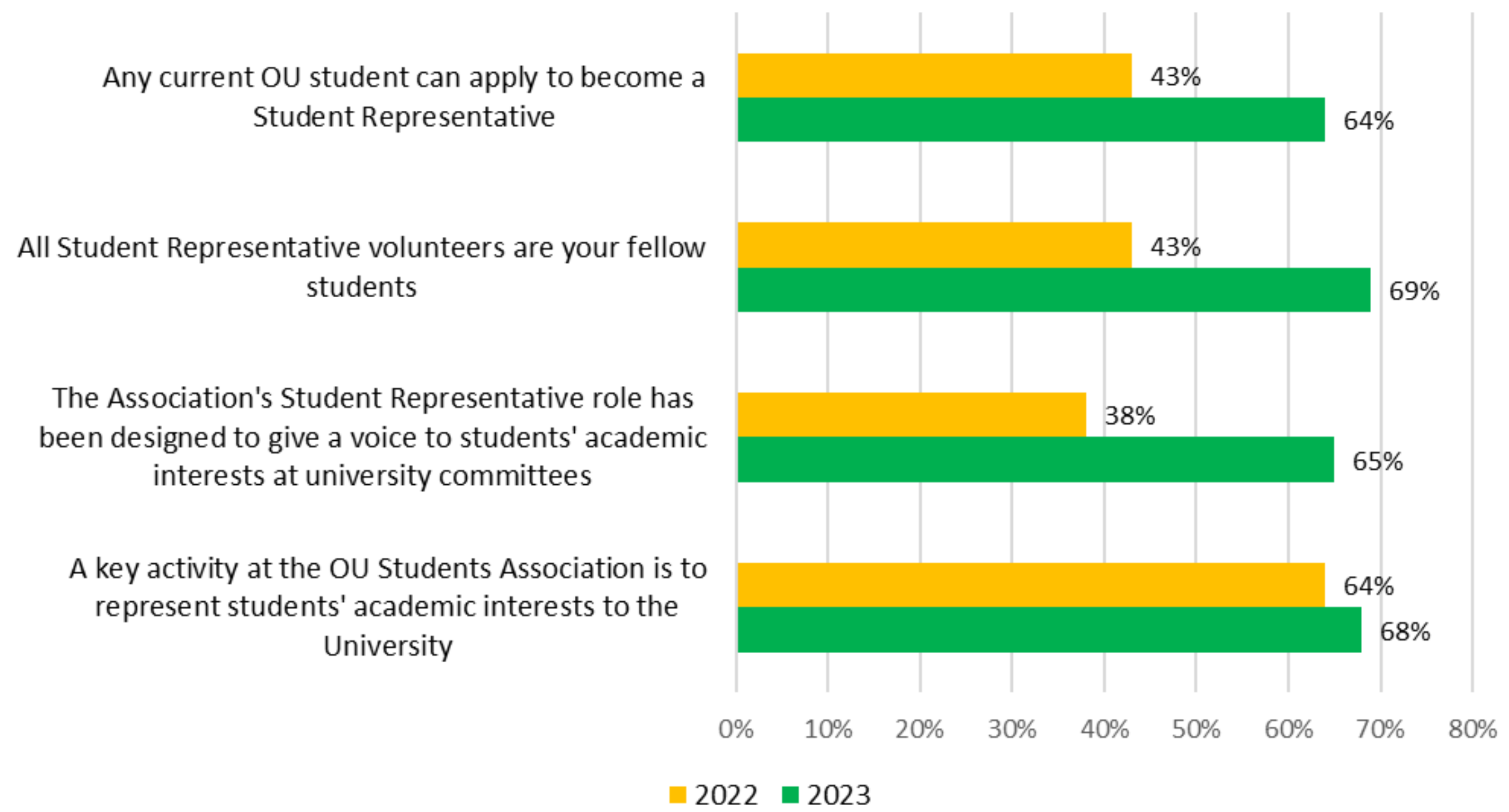
24% of the respondents in 2023 were interested in volunteering roles that sit under Academic Representation. 40% were interested but felt they did not have the time to volunteer.

## Awareness of Student Representation

The feedback from 2023 indicates a substantial increase in awareness levels of our student representation work. Compared to 2022, this year we had a 27% increase in students who were aware of the Student Representative role, a 26% increase in students who were aware that all Student Representatives were their fellow OU students, and a 21% increase in students who were aware that any current OU student can apply to become a Student Representative.



## Awareness of Student Representation



## Volunteering roles

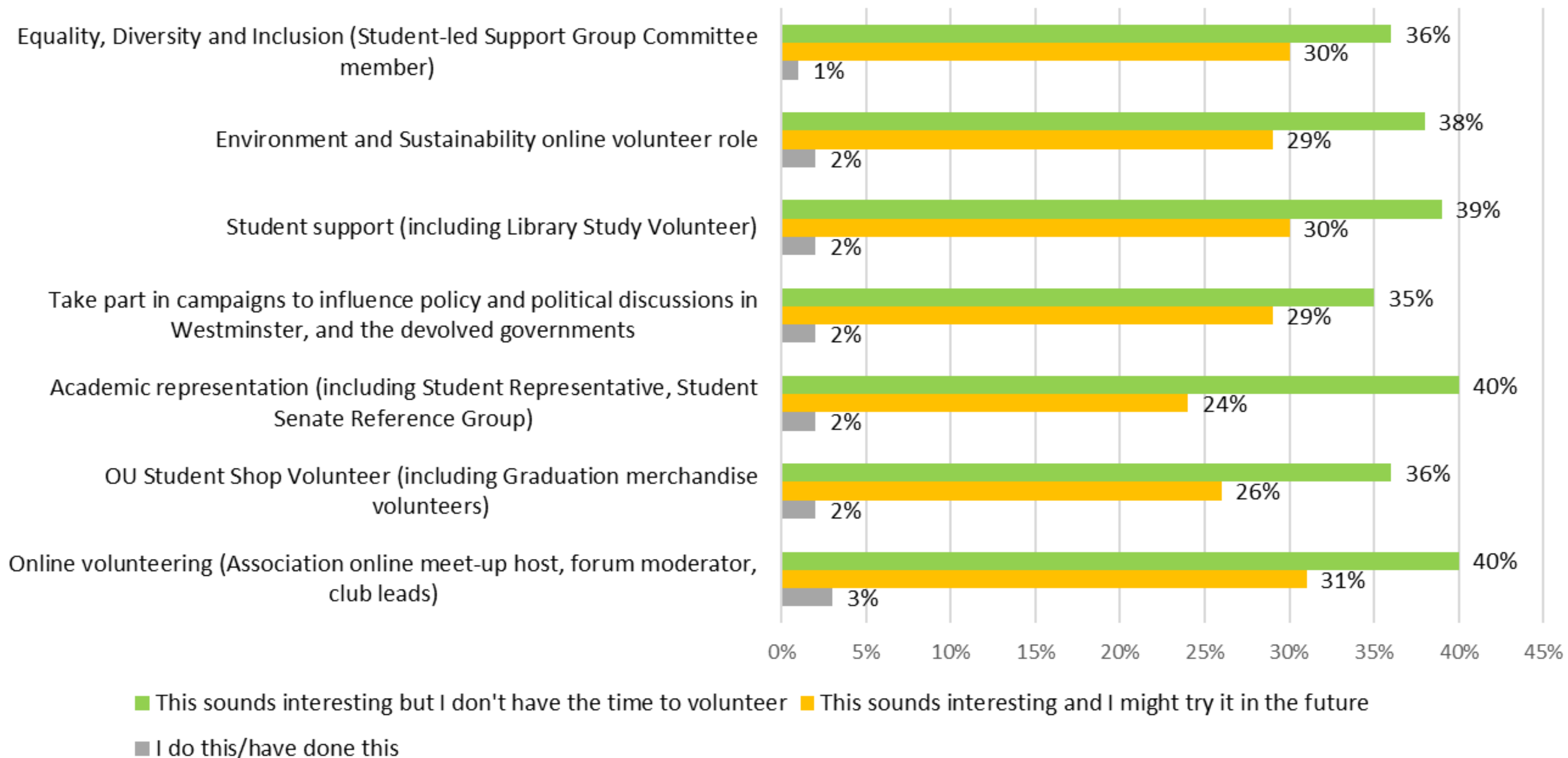
For every type of volunteering category, the interest is high (over 35%), but students feel that they cannot take up a volunteering role due to time constraints. This would indicate a need for better visibility of the flexibility within volunteering roles and the availability of bite-size volunteering opportunities.

## Interest in volunteering

The volunteering categories that elicited the most interest from students (i.e., those who chose the ‘this sounds interesting and I might try it in the future’ option) were:

- Online volunteering (31%)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (30%)
- Student Support (30%)
- Environment and Sustainability (29%)
- Influencing policy and political discussions through campaigns (29%)

## Interest in Volunteering Opportunities



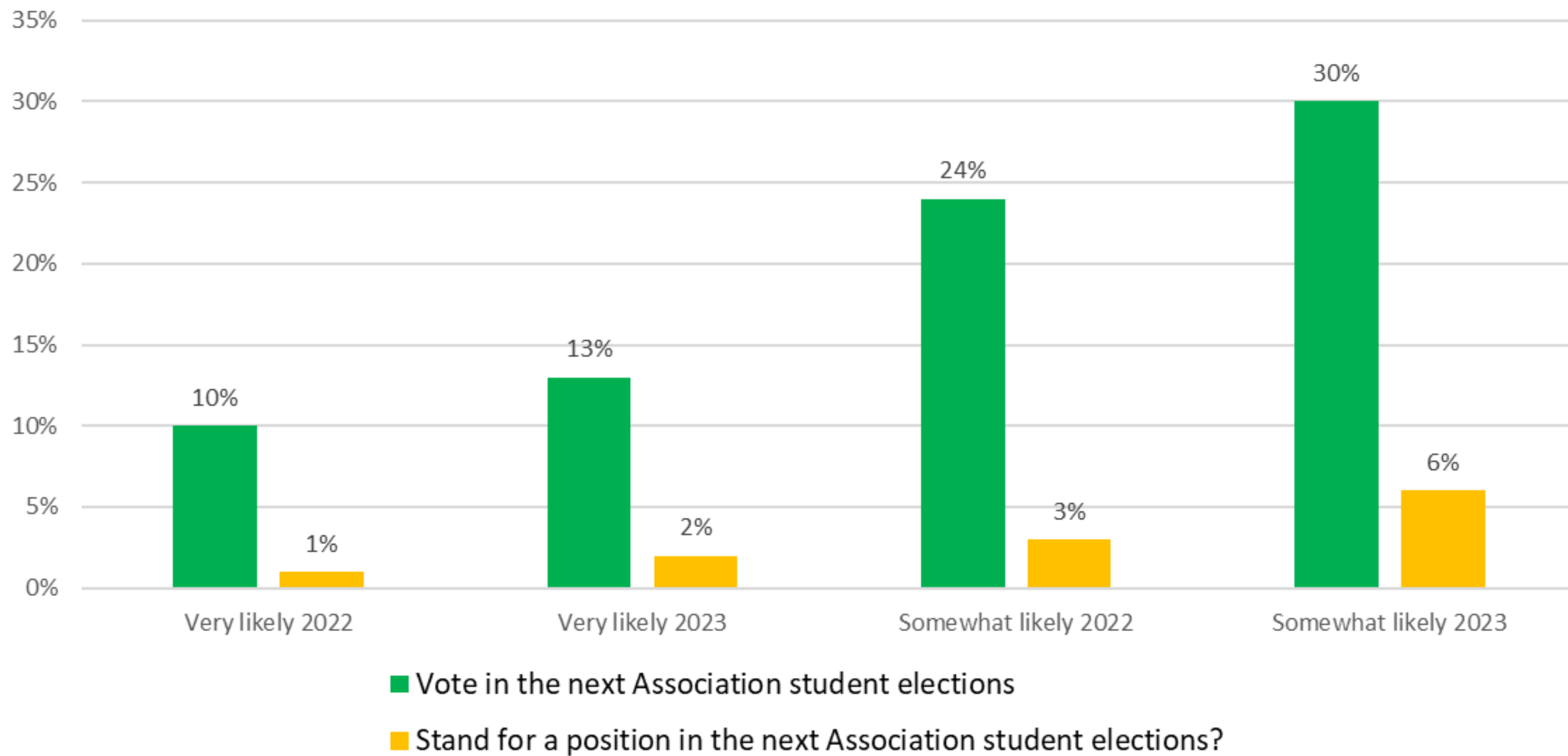
## Student Elections

7% of Asian and 6% of Black students were among those who would be interested in standing for a role; looking at these numbers more closely reveals that this interest was expressed by 17% of all Asian students and 21% of all Black students who took the survey.

## Likelihood of participating in elections

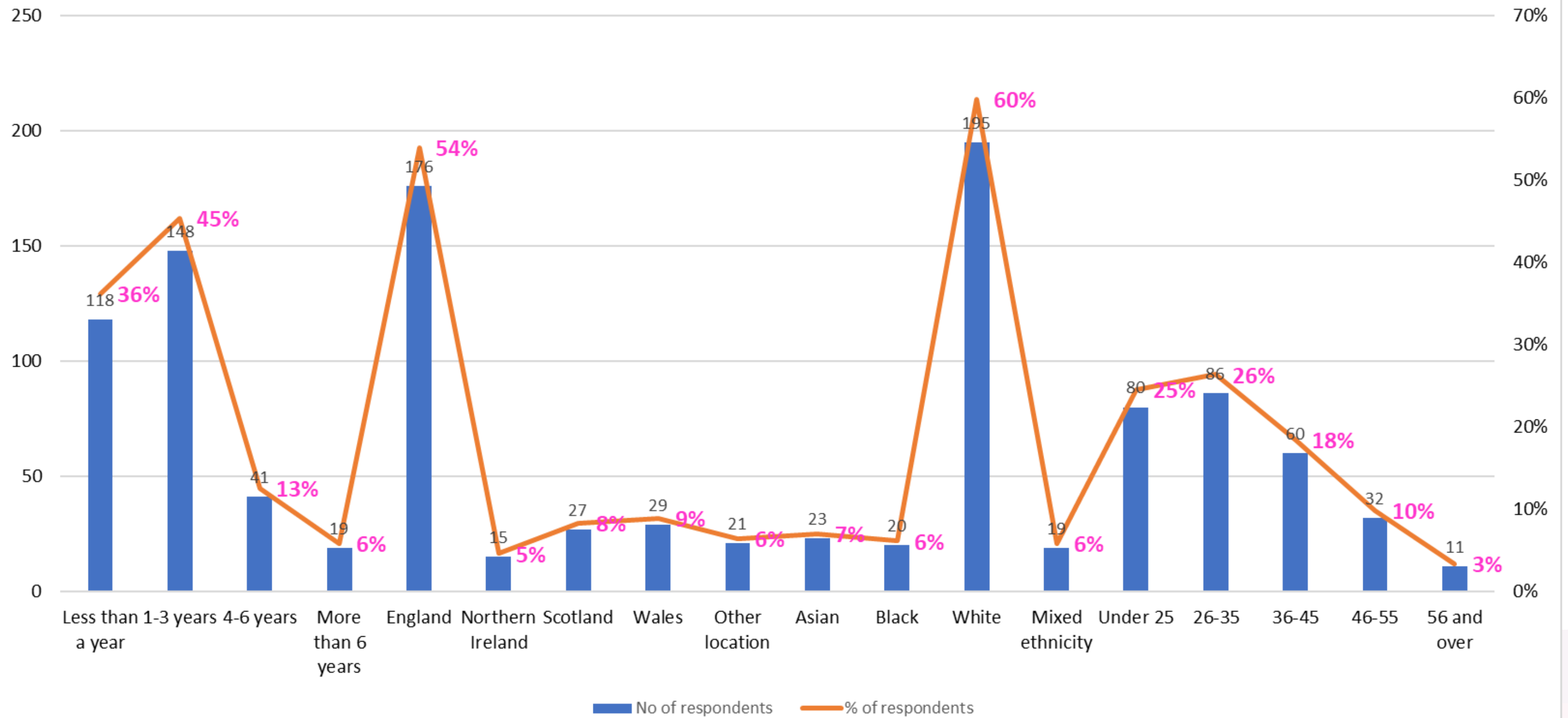
2023 saw an increase in the number of both those who would consider voting in the Association's student elections and standing for a role. A demographic breakdown of those who selected 'very like' or 'likely' when asked about their interest in standing for election (326 respondents in total) shows that these are students who are younger, and students who have recently started at the OU.

## Likelihood of participating in student elections





### Demographic breakdown of those interested in standing for elections



# Student Voice

Student comments in response to being asked about the key areas that they would like elected student representatives to work on highlighted the following:

- Better visibility of elected student representatives
- Availability of face-to-face tutorials
- Availability of tutorial recordings across clusters
- Better consistency in TMA advice from tutors
- The Association's response to issues such as strike action
- Support for overseas students
- Support of Postgraduate Research students
- Cost of living
- Student wellbeing and mental health
- Diversity and representation

## Tutorials and tutor support

*“Protecting the provision of face-to-face/day schools - these were cancelled this year for my module and a lot of disappointment was expressed in our common room forum about it, but I wasn't really sure how to get that message across to the faculty.”*

*“I would like to see a return to some face to face study events such as tutorials and study days. I previously got so much out of these and I know students who have never had chance to experience them.”*

*“Requesting equality of provision of tutorial materials- e.g. share recordings between everyone on the course, not just within clusters.”*

*“I have felt there is a disparity with what tutors are telling students in their various clusters. Tutors also seem to be telling their clusters different things when questions are asked, the same question to multiple tutors they give different, contradicting answers.”*

# Cost of living and issues affecting students

*“Acknowledging the impact of the cost of living on working students.”*

*“Support in the current financial crisis - perhaps more discussion of grants etc that could alleviate financial pressures.”*

*“Cost of living lobbying.”*

*“Standing up for student rights during any future strike action.”*

*“Better action on issues that affect the student body, for example the OU are imposing major changes to courses with the withdrawal of opportunity and funding for module face-to-face tutorials, the student association does not appear to be doing anything about this to fight for students.”*

# Support for PGR students

*“I don't think the association represents international postgraduate students.”*

*“I really think there should be more focus on postgraduate students, particularly those on campus and maybe events aimed specifically at us. We have our own events through the grad school but funding is limited and we have to plan and organise all events ourselves. Finding a way to connect the PGRs with undergrads in their fields by organising lectures done by the PGRs would be great.”*

*“I also think PGRs need more support with moving to Milton Keynes. This is supported by the graduate school, but I think some further visibility of support through the Students Association on wider matters like well-being and cost of living could be helpful.”*

*“As a part time postgrad research student, I feel very left out of university activities. It would be nice to have more online events that we could join (social and otherwise).”*



## Better visibility of student representatives

*“Don't even know them. They need to make themselves more visible in the subject and module forums.”*

*“I'd like for them to be more present, so I know who they are and what they are doing on behalf of students. More at the beginning of the student experience.”*

*“Better feedback and interaction with the student body, they're very remote and not well linked to the average student (we tend not to see most reps except at elections, no matter what good work they do behind the scenes, we never hear it, or get to interact with them)”*

*“They feel remote once elected unless sought out. I would like more information on what they are doing, especially subject area representatives. A regular specific newsletter would be wonderful.”*

# Student Engagement

- Interest in events
- Preferred time for engaging
- Key considerations when engaging with the Association

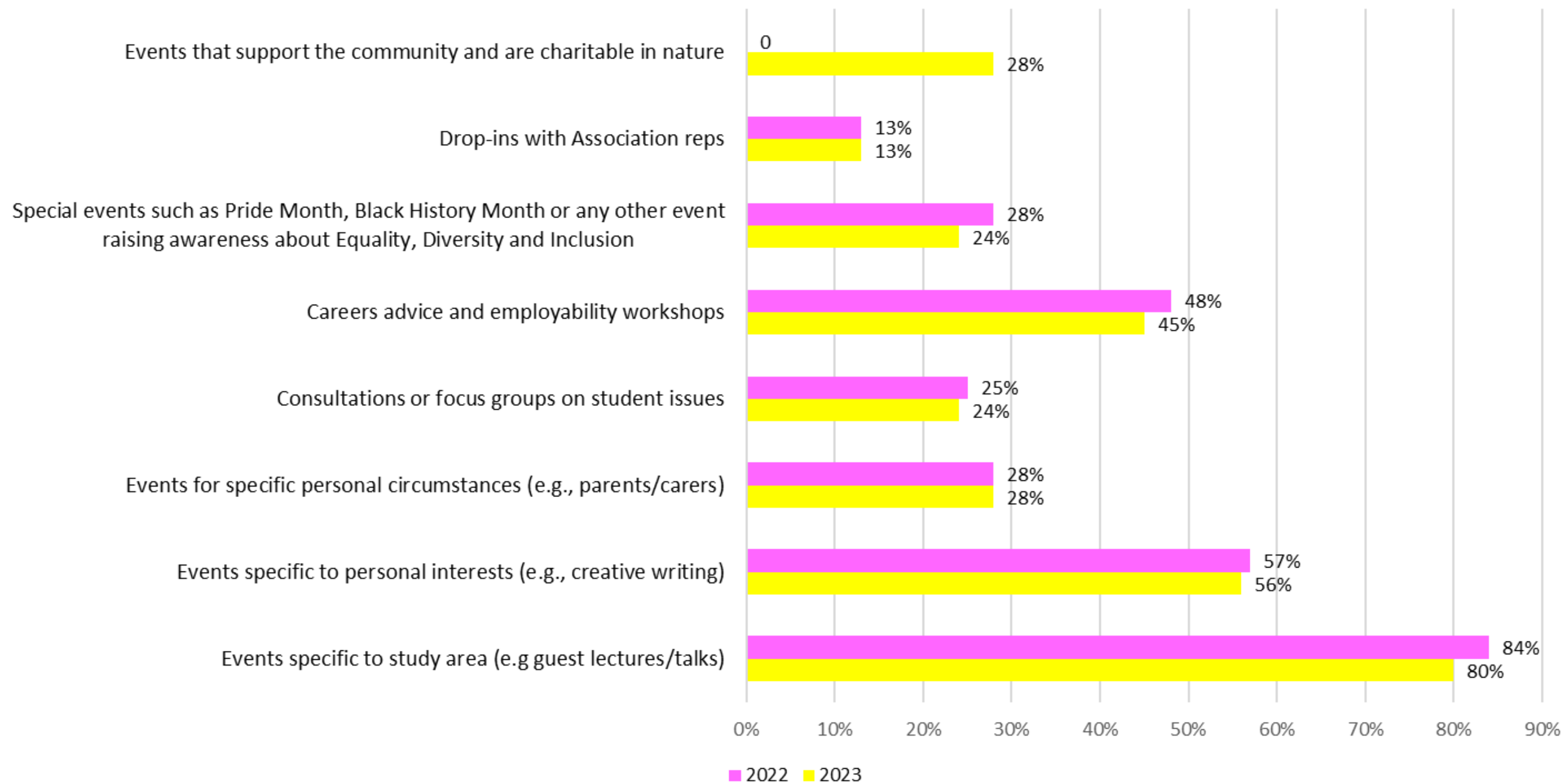
# Student Engagement

The preference for attending online and face-to-face events was similar for the daytime slots (between 11 am and 5 pm), but most students preferred evening slots for online events (between 5 pm and 10 pm).

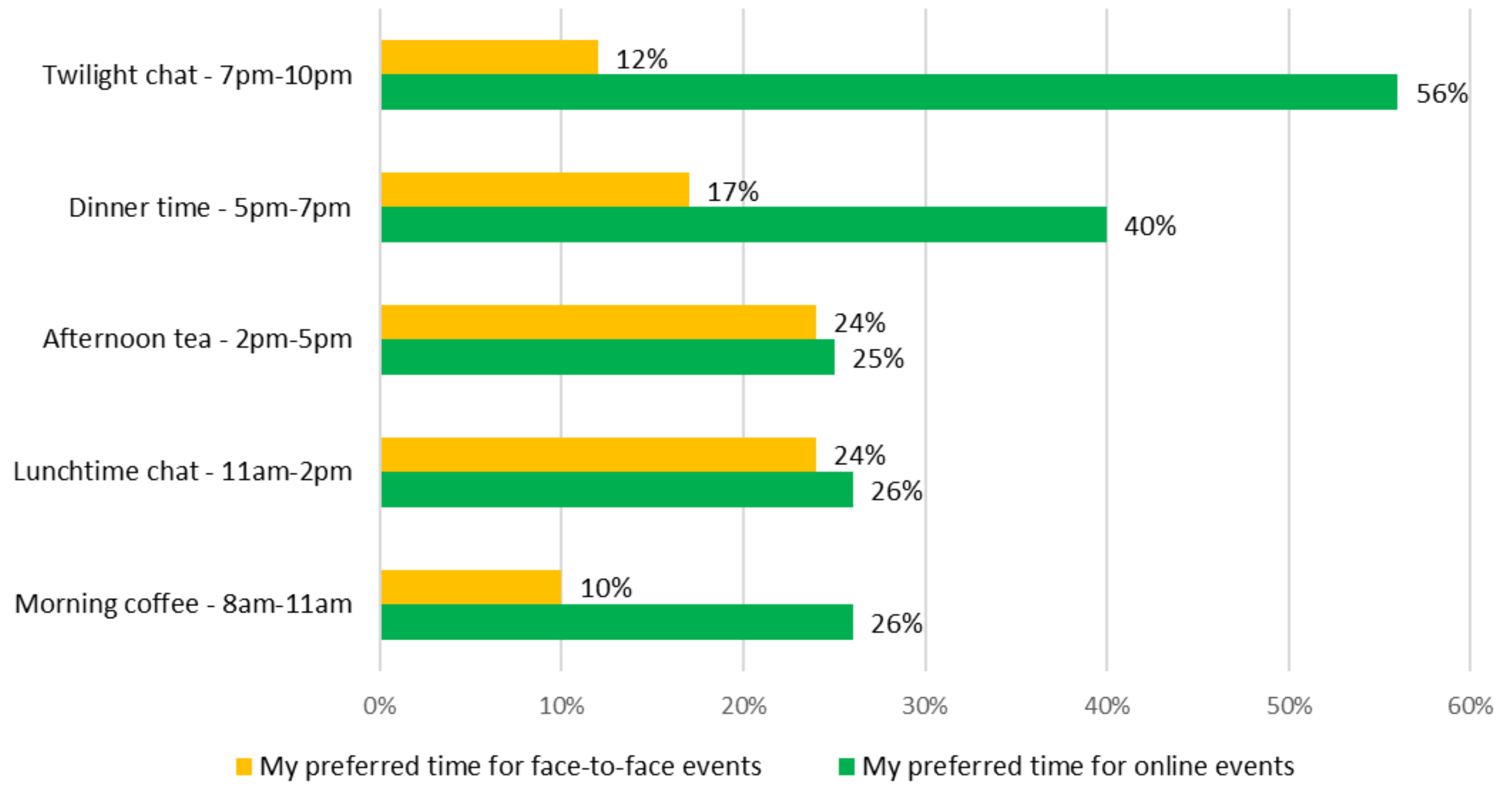
## Interest in attending events

Feedback from both 2022 and 2023 shows that most respondents were interested in attending events that were specific to their study area (80% in 2023 and 84% in 2022), such as guest lectures and talks. This is followed by events that cater to personal interests (56% in 2023 and 57% in 2022), and careers advice and employability workshops (45% in 2023 and 48% in 2022).

### Interest in events



### Preferred time for engaging in Association events and activities



# Student Engagement

Student comments around how they would like to engage with the Association focused on:

- the availability of more local events
- events relevant to their study area
- events that would help them meet fellow students with similar life experiences (such as parents, carers, veterans)

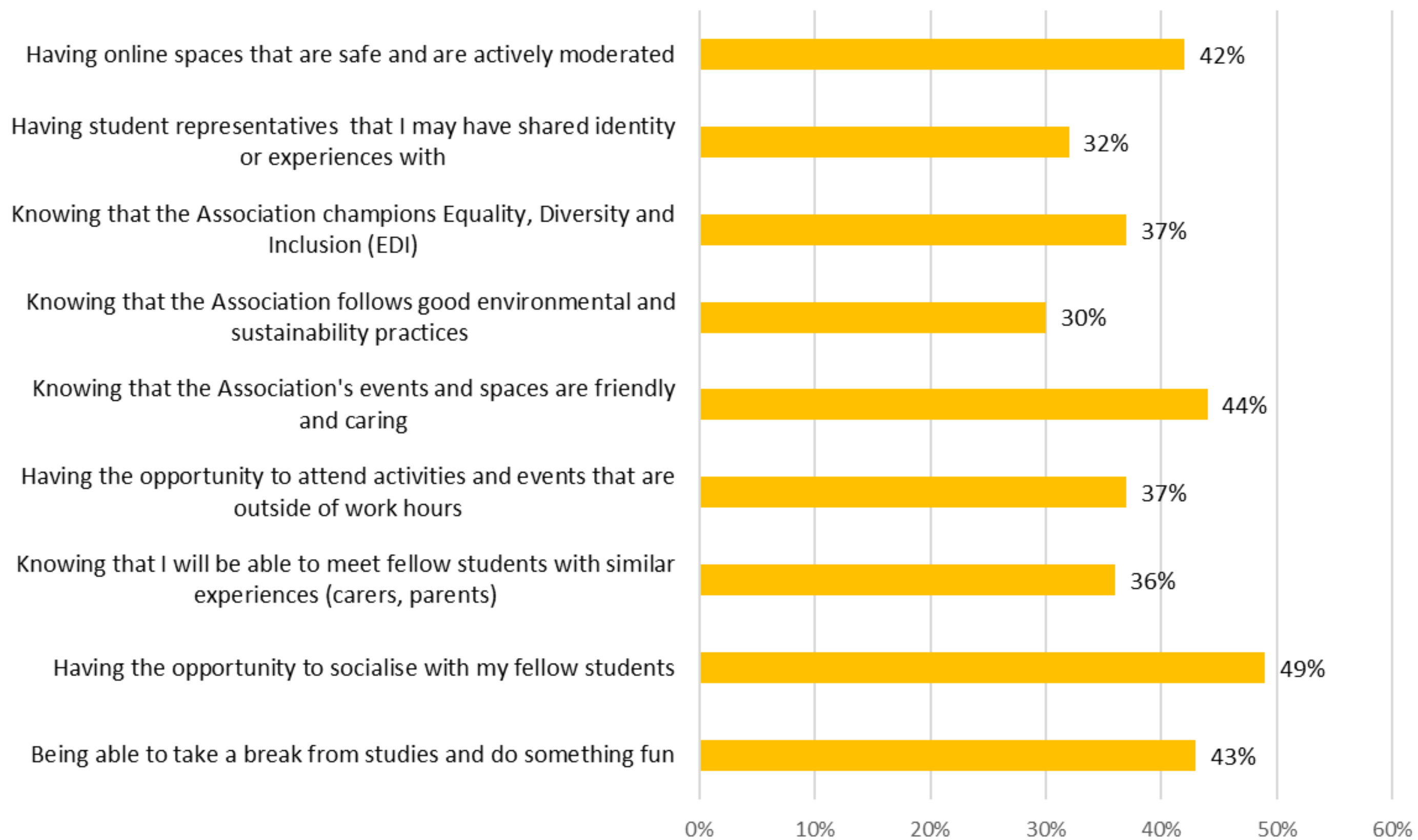
## Considerations when engaging with the Association

This was a new question added to the AMS in 2023, and includes statements around values and ways of working relevant to all areas of the Association's work. The priority areas for students were:

- having the opportunity to socialise with fellow students (49%)
- Having friendly and caring events and spaces (44%)
- Being able to take a break from studies and do something fun (43%)
- Having online spaces that are safe and actively moderated (42%)



## Considerations when engaging with the Association



*“The reason I am doing my degree with the Open University is that I am a parent and need to work at the same time. I am sure there are lots of people in the same situation and it is very challenging so it would be nice to see some focus on us.”*

*“Having Military/Veteran OU Student Association Rep- this would help ease many military students into Uni life as we tend to struggle with adapting.”*

*“Have a bit more focus on serving military students and veterans, even military spouses and families who are studying with OU.”*

*“It would have been nice to feel more included at nearby events. So many events are nowhere near me, and being a carer I couldn't travel too far.”*

*“I would like to see events (online or otherwise) around significant moments in life that are related to our study - such as scientific breakthroughs, important moments (shuttle launch or something) or moments of cultural importance (elections, olympics, international conflict etc.)”*

*“There's a lot of online events although I would benefit from face-to-face events. A lot of the societies I have joined barely post anything on social media or hold any events so I don't find them useful.”*

# Culture and Values

- Sustainability work
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work

# Sustainability

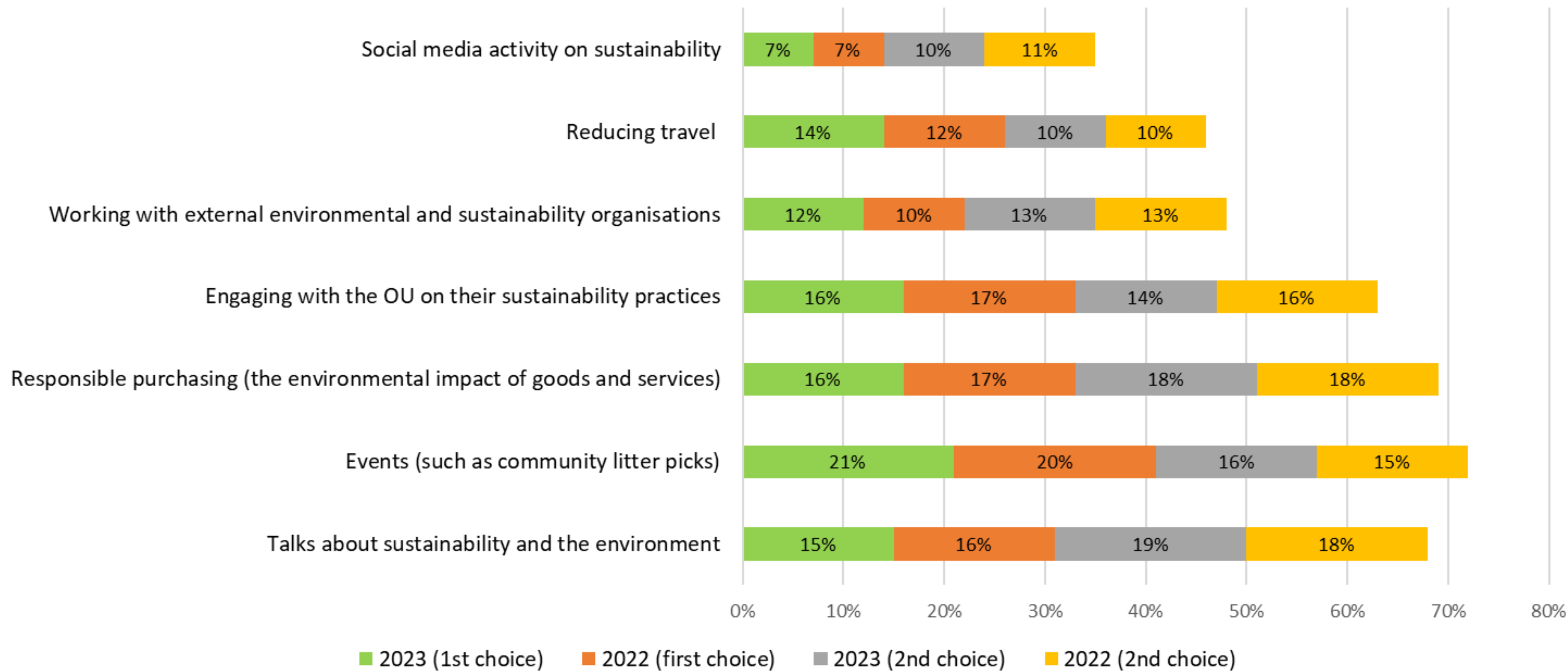
## Importance of sustainability for students

When asked about the key considerations that influenced their engagement with the Students Association, 30% of respondents chose the statement: 'knowing that the Association follows good environmental and sustainability practices'.

## Activities and events

Students were asked to rank different activities and events relating to sustainability, and a comparison between 2022 and 2023 indicate that these rankings have remained similar year on year. Feedback indicates that the top priority for students is the availability of events such as community litter picks, which was ranked as the first choice by 21% of our survey respondents in 2023 and 20% in 2022. This was followed by activities such as 'engaging with the OU on their sustainability practices' and 'responsible purchasing'.

### Interest in activities and events related to Sustainability





## EDI work

Student feedback suggests a gap between students supporting our values (such as EDI) and being interested in actively participating in such events. While 37% of the respondents selected the Association championing EDI as a key consideration when engaging with us, just 21% were interested in participating in EDI-focused activities and events.

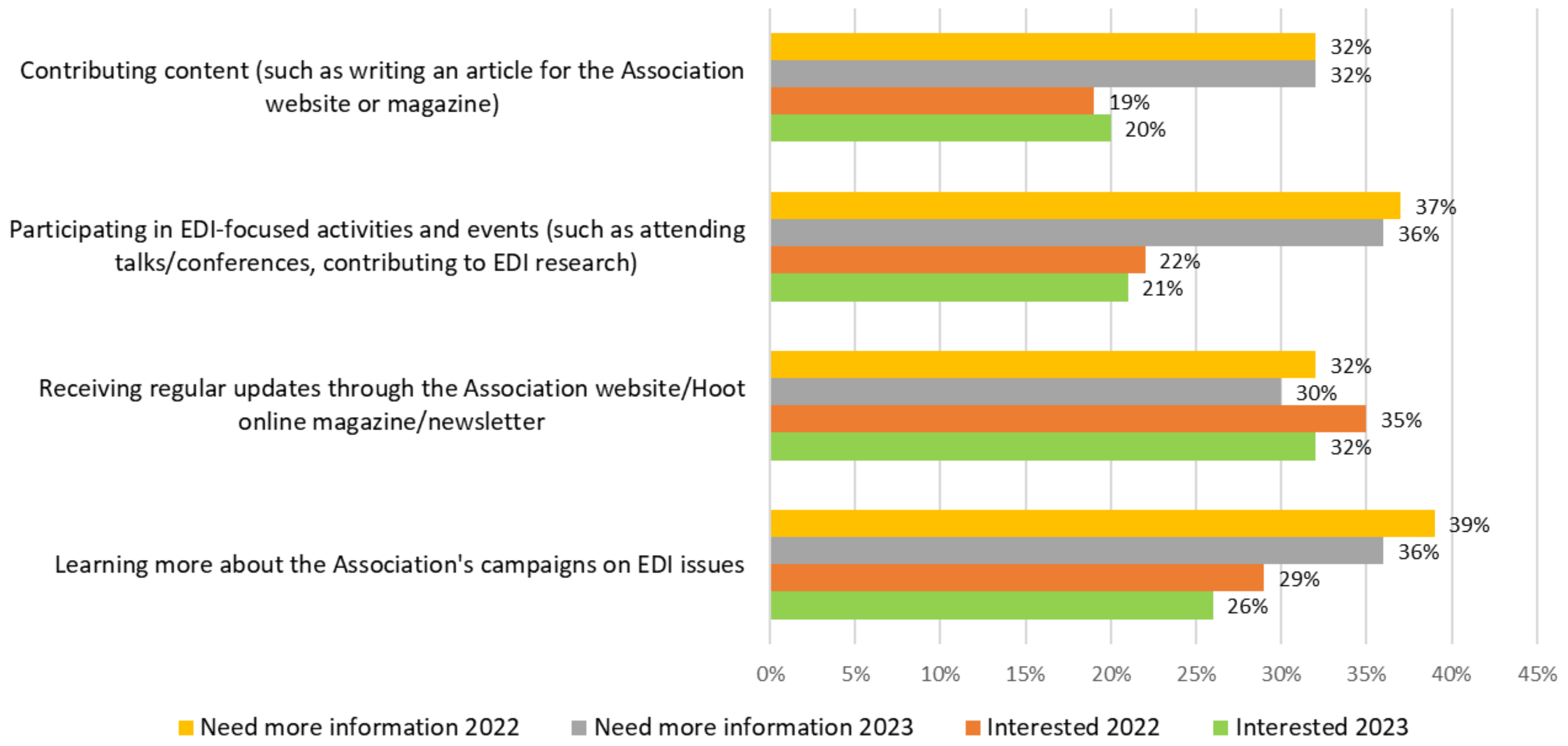
## Interest in EDI activities and events

The feedback from 2022 and 2023 indicates a gap between those who are interested in our EDI work and those who need more information about it. This gap is at its largest when it comes to actively participating in our EDI work:

- Contributing content
- Participating in EDI-focused activities and events
- Learning more about the Association's campaigns on EDI issues.



### Interest in EDI activities



**Thank you!**