Social Information and Awareness Report

January 2026

Contents

Privacy Statement

Exeter Students' Guild is committed to the protection of the personal data of students. All data in this report has been given with full understanding of its usage and consent for publication.

All data has been handled, stored, and shared in line with GDPR guidance. For further information, please see our the Guild's privacy policy.

For any further information, please contact insights@exeterguild.com.

Referencing

If you wish to reference this report, please use 'Exeter Students' Guild' as the author/organisation.

Key Dates

Survey Window: 05/01/2026 – 18/01/2026
Focus Group date: 04/02/2026
Report Completed: 13/02/2026
Report Published: 16/02/2026

Introduction

Survey Superheroes gathers monthly feedback from 1000 student volunteers regarding their opinions on a variety of pre-planned and developing issues in exchange for financial compensation.

The Student's Guild Insight Team uses this feedback to influence decisions by the University, inform our projects and empower students to create change for their community.

One of our key topics for January was Social Information and Awareness. We wanted to find out:

1. What topics do our students keep up to date with and why?
2. How socially aware do students feel?
3. How aware are students about what's going on at the University of Exeter?
4. What do students think of the social atmosphere at the University of Exeter?

This report will analyse the feedback given in relation to the above questions and provide recommendations for both the Student's Guild and the University of Exeter to action in order to improve Social Information and Awareness.

A focus group was also held to empower students to shape the recommendations in this report which had 12 participants.

All text in quotations marks are comments provided by students showing their individual thoughts and opinions; they have been included as they largely reflect the quotes within the same topic.

Summary

Students are most often keeping updated on international conflict, social inequalities, artificial intelligence, discrimination and education and student rights (Fig. 1). They choose to keep up with these topics largely because they feel that these topics are relevant to them or affect them directly (Fig. 2). Students who don't engage with the news or social awareness say that they are restrained by time, that they aren't looking for information, or that they find these topics to be sad, depressing and/or stressful (Fig. 4).

32% of students are actively searching for information on social issues a few times a week and 15% look only when something significant has occurred (Fig. 5). Most students are finding news topics without having to actively search for it (Fig. 6).

75% of students get information on social issues through Instagram, 64% use online news apps and 44% use TikTok (Fig. 7). Many students reported ways in

which they decide if a news outlet is reliable including looking and the source and further fact checking (Fig. 8).

Most students feel that being socially aware is a priority for them and most students feel already somewhat socially aware (Fig. 9, Fig. 10). 55% of students report feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information on social information that they experience (Fig. 12). Those students who feel more socially aware appear to be more overwhelmed by the amount of social information they receive compared to those who are less socially aware (Fig. 13). 21% of students want to know more about social issues but have too much going on and 18% want to know more but are worried about the impact it may have on their mental health (Fig. 14).

Most students are staying updated on what's happening at university through emails and social media (both University and Guild) (Fig. 15). Students also report finding information easy to miss or hard to find or follow (Fig. 17)

Prior to starting university 34% of students expected student politics to lean right-wing and 26% expected it to lean left-wing (Fig. 18). Since starting university the top response shifted to a mixture of all, with only 24% finding it to lean right-wing and 18% left-wing. (Fig. 18, Fig. 20).

67% of students feel that politics at university have not impacted their experience, but 16% of students feel that politics have affected their sense of belonging and community, where they can fit in and where feel comfortable at university. 9% mentioned discussions and debates regarding politics, with most feeling that this has benefited them in terms of learning more (Fig. 25).

62% of students agreed that they feel safe to express their political views whilst 11% disagreed. Students who reported the political environment to be extremely left or right wing, felt less safe to express their views (Fig. 26 and Fig. 27). When asked what influenced feeling safe (or not) to express views, students cited peer groups, others having differing views and the open environment that they feel exists (Fig. 28).

31% of students discussed how meeting new people at university from different backgrounds has helped them to be more socially aware. Following this, 17% of students mentioned how hearing new perspectives at university has developed their social awareness (Fig. 31). 57% of students think that both the University and the Guild should help students become more socially aware (Fig. 32).

Analysis

1. **What topics do our students keep up to date with and why?**

Which topics do you keep the most up-to-date with?
Please select your top five

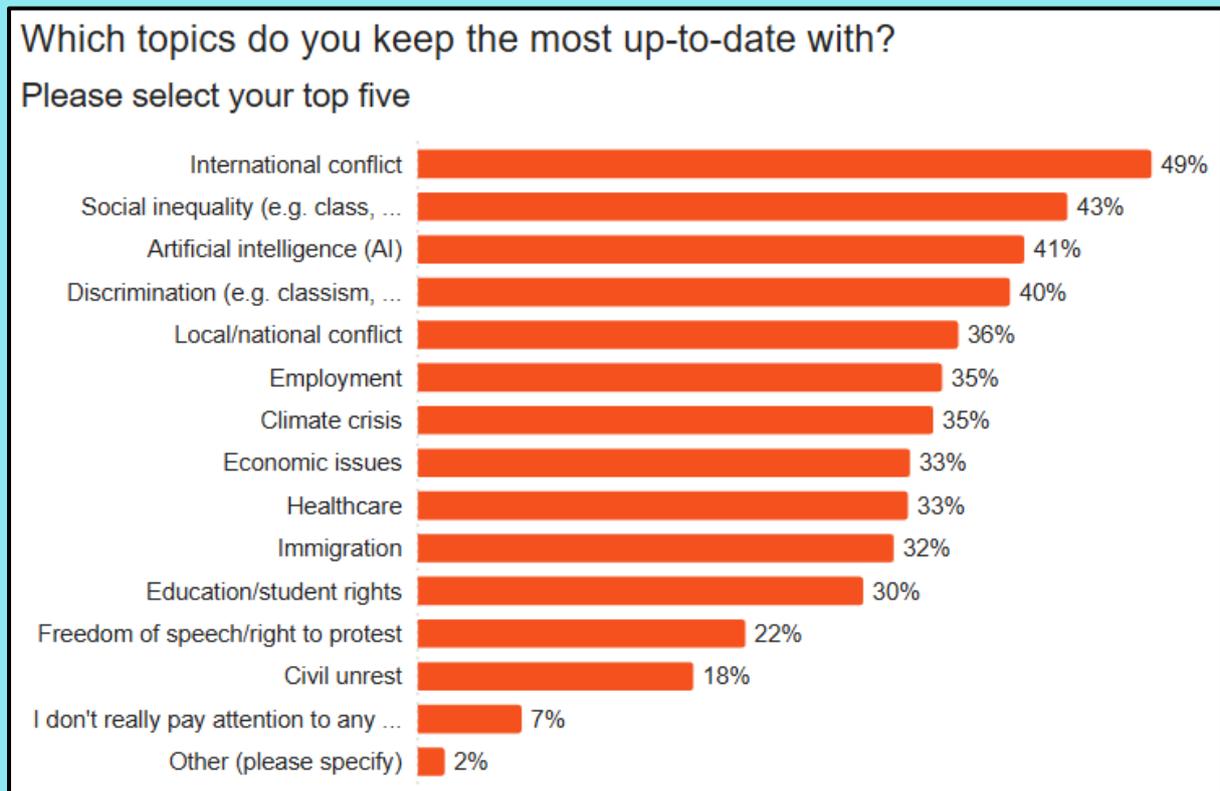| Topic	Percentage
International conflict	49%
Social inequality (e.g. class, ...)	43%
Artificial intelligence (AI)	41%
Discrimination (e.g. classism, ...)	40%
Local/national conflict	36%
Employment	35%
Climate crisis	35%
Economic issues	33%
Healthcare	33%
Immigration	32%
Education/student rights	30%
Freedom of speech/right to protest	22%
Civil unrest	18%
I don't really pay attention to any ...	7%
Other (please specify)	2%

Figure 1- Which topics do you keep most up-to-date with? (Top 5)

International conflict is the topic that students keep most up-to-date with, 49% of students responded this way. Following this, 43% of students keep up-to-date on social inequalities, 41% artificial intelligence and 40% discrimination (Fig. 1).

30% of students are staying informed on education and student rights. Only 7% of students responded that they don't pay attention to any of these topics (Fig. 1).
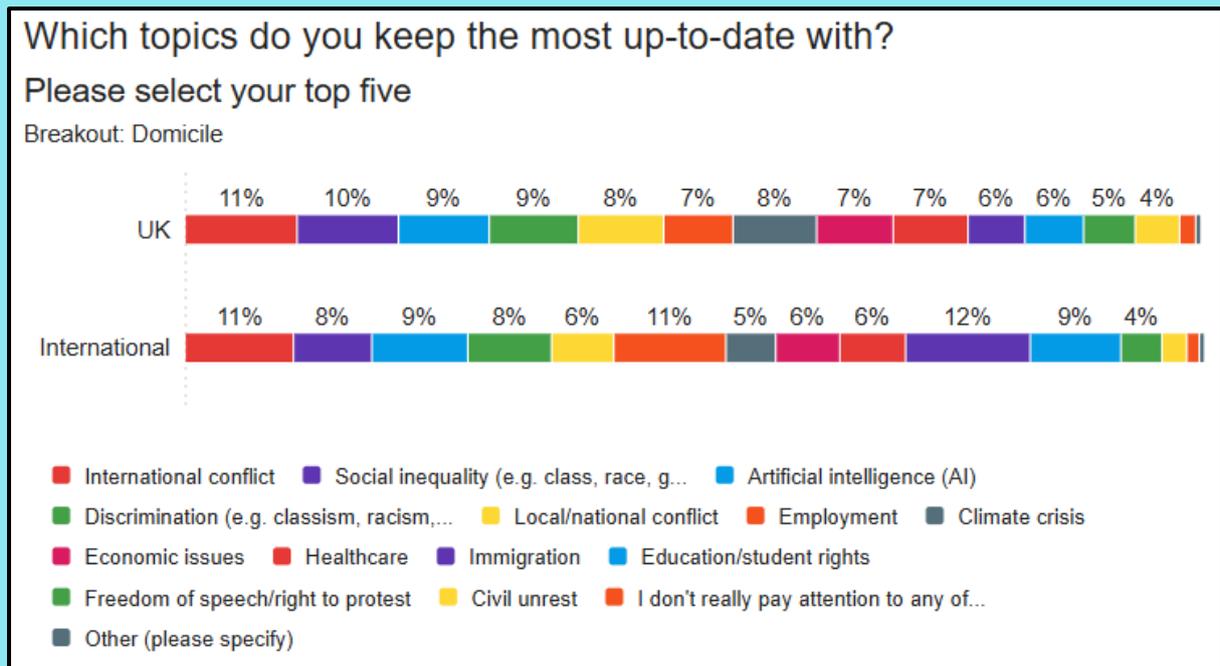
Figure 2- Which topics do you keep the most up-to date with? Breakout - domicile

If we look at topics that students stay up to date with by domicile, we generally see a similar pattern. However, we see slightly more interest in employment from international students at 11% compared to UK students at 7%. We also see that twice as many international students are informed on immigration compared to UK students (12% vs 6% respectively). (Fig. 2)

Why are these the topics you keep up-to-date with the most?

Open text response themes

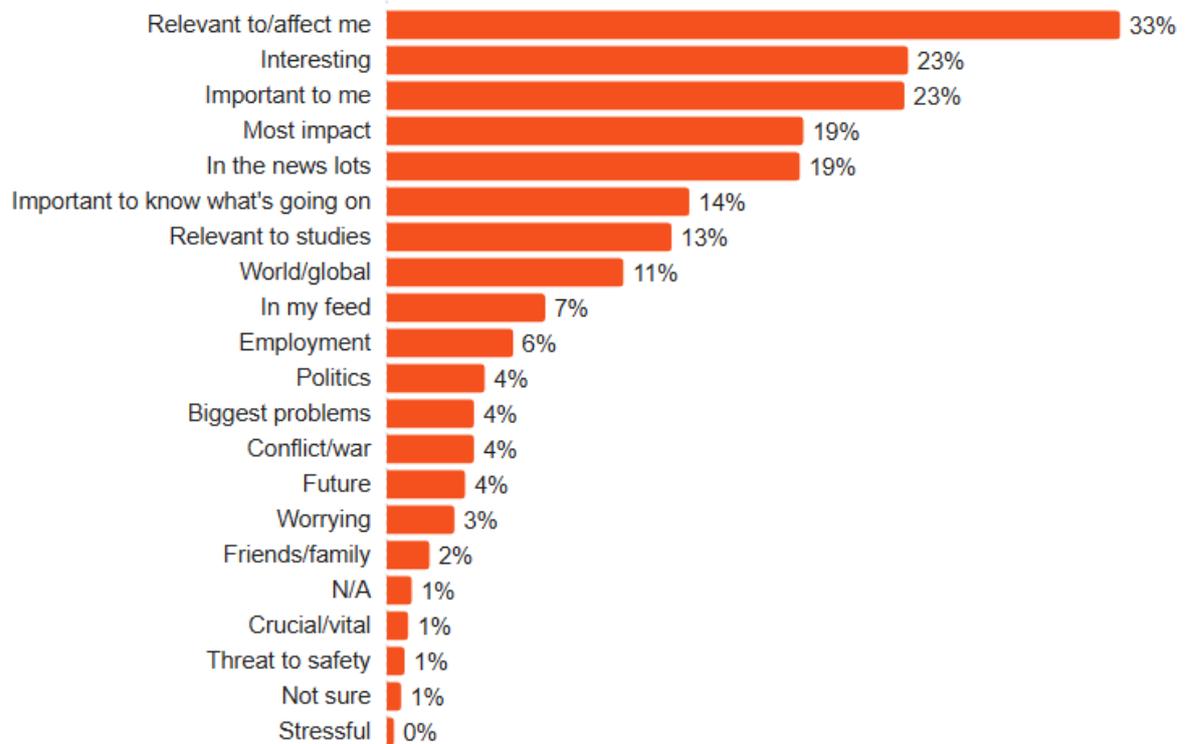| Theme	Percentage
Relevant to/affect me	33%
Interesting	23%
Important to me	23%
Most impact	19%
In the news lots	19%
Important to know what's going on	14%
Relevant to studies	13%
World/global	11%
In my feed	7%
Employment	6%
Politics	4%
Biggest problems	4%
Conflict/war	4%
Future	4%
Worrying	3%
Friends/family	2%
N/A	1%
Crucial/vital	1%
Threat to safety	1%
Not sure	1%
Stressful	0%

Figure 3 - Why are these the topics you keep up-to-date with the most? open text response themes

When asked what it was that motivated them to keep up with these topics, 33% of students said that they feel that these topics are relevant to them or affect them directly.

"Relevant to my future and climate change is relevant to my biology degree" ~ Year 3, ESE student

"Healthcare, education and student rights, and employment are especially important to me because they affect wellbeing, financial security, and long-term career prospects. Staying informed helps me better understand current debates, make informed decisions, and engage more thoughtfully with discussions in academic and social contexts." ~ Masters, HLS student

"They affect me the most individually and they seem to have the most potential for disaster" ~ Year 2, HASS student

23% of students said the topics they selected are interesting with another 23% say they are important to them (Fig. 1).

> "I'm very interested in international relations so I like to keep updated on global conflicts and the global economy." ~ Year 2, HASS student
>
> "I find nutrition and health interesting to read about and implement into my daily life" ~ Year 4, HASS student
>
> "It is important to me to be educated on these topics" ~ Masters, HASS student
>
> "Because these are some of the most important to me and I find they underlay a lot of other issues e.g. international conflict is related and affects oil and therefore the climate crisis, without right to protest we wouldn't have rights for students/ educational staff etc" ~ Year 2, HLS student

19% of responses mentioned both that these topics had the most impact either in their lives or in the wider world and that these topics were in the news a lot (Fig. 1).

> "They feel like the ones that impact my life more directly" ~ Other, HASS student
>
> "I keep up to date with these topics because they have a direct impact on people's everyday lives and my own future as a student." ~ Masters, HLS student
>
> "I feel the BBC seems to be talking about these topics a lot. It's almost impossible to not be informed to some level" ~ Year 3, HASS student
>
> "I try not to watch the news but based on my interests and social media activity these are the topics that I see the most and am therefore most aware of" ~ Year 3, HLS student

What prevents you from staying up-to-date with any of these topics?

Open text response themes

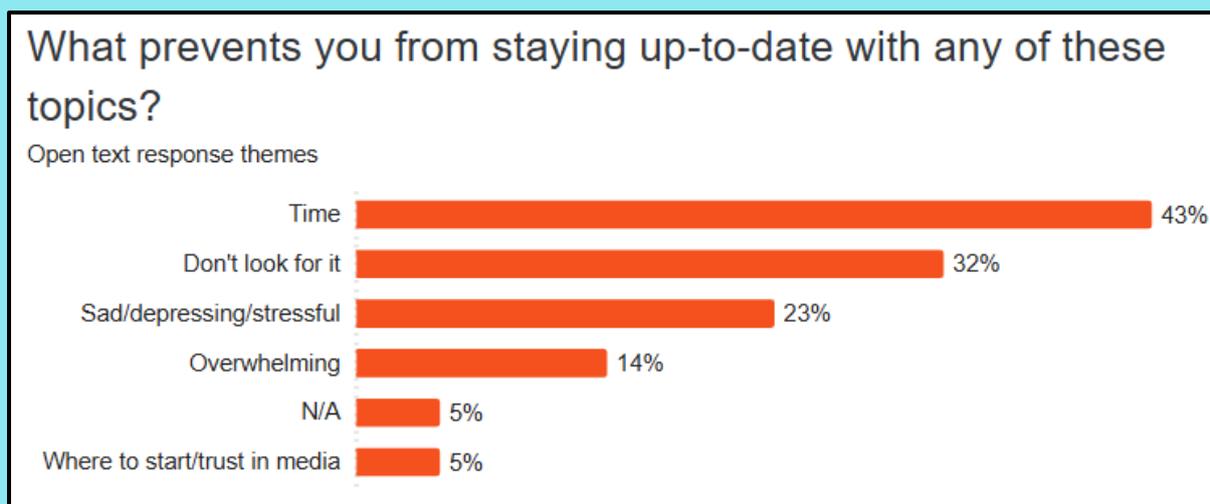| Theme	Percentage
Time	43%
Don't look for it	32%
Sad/depressing/stressful	23%
Overwhelming	14%
N/A	5%
Where to start/trust in media	5%

Figure 4 - What prevents you from staying up-to-date with any of these topics? Open text response themes

For the 7% of students in Figure 1 who reported not really paying attention to the listed topics, we wanted to follow up and find out what it was that was preventing them from staying up-to-date. The primary reason was being restrained by time, with 43% of responses mentioning this (Fig. 4).

"University overworks me massively and I don't have the free time to keep up." ~ Year 1, HASS student

"I am quite busy and it generally just upsets me." ~ Year 2, ESE student

"Too much bloody uni work I barely have time to breathe and dont have any spare brain power to care" ~ Year 2, ESE student

23% of these students find the topics to be sad, depressing and/or stressful (Fig. 4).

"If I did, it would give me anxiety" ~ Year 4, ESE student

"They are inherently negative and will just get me down to know about them so if it's important enough someone will eventually tell me, otherwise i don't seek to know" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"Too overwhelming, makes me sad, don't know where to go for reliable information" ~ Masters HASS student

32% of these students said they don't actively look for information (Fig. 4).

"It just isn't something I'm exposed to much and I don't go out of my way to research about it." ~ Year 1, ESE student

"there's already enough going on locally without going online and searching for stuff to be miserable about" ~ Year 1, HLS student

How frequently are you actively searching for information on social issues? (e.g. looking up a topic or event on Google)

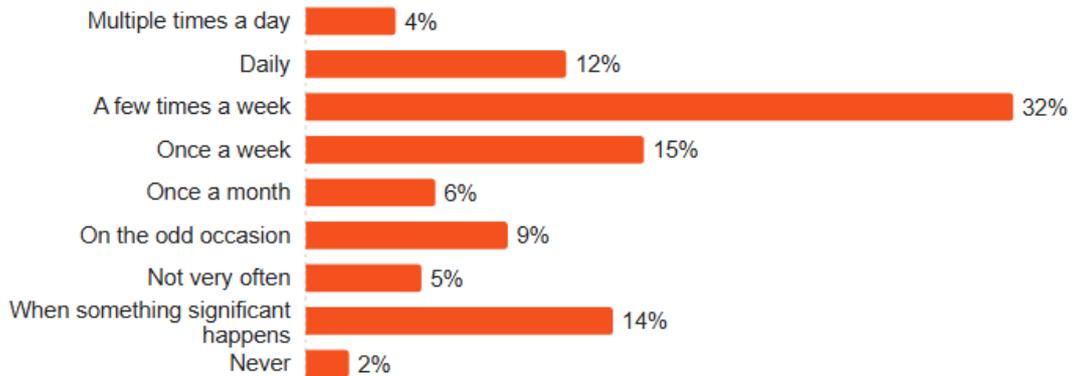|	
Multiple times a day	4%
Daily	12%
A few times a week	32%
Once a week	15%
Once a month	6%
On the odd occasion	9%
Not very often	5%
When something significant happens	14%
Never	2%

Figure 5 – How frequently are you actively searching for information on social issues? (e.g. looking up a topic or event on Google)

We asked students how often they are actively searching for information on a social issue. Whilst we saw a mix of different responses, most students, 32%, are searching a few times a week. 12% are looking daily and only 4% are looking multiple times a day. 15% are actively searching once a week. 14% of students are only actively searching for information when something significant has happened. (Fig. 5)

How frequently is information on social issues presented to you without prompting? (e.g. appears on your media feed)
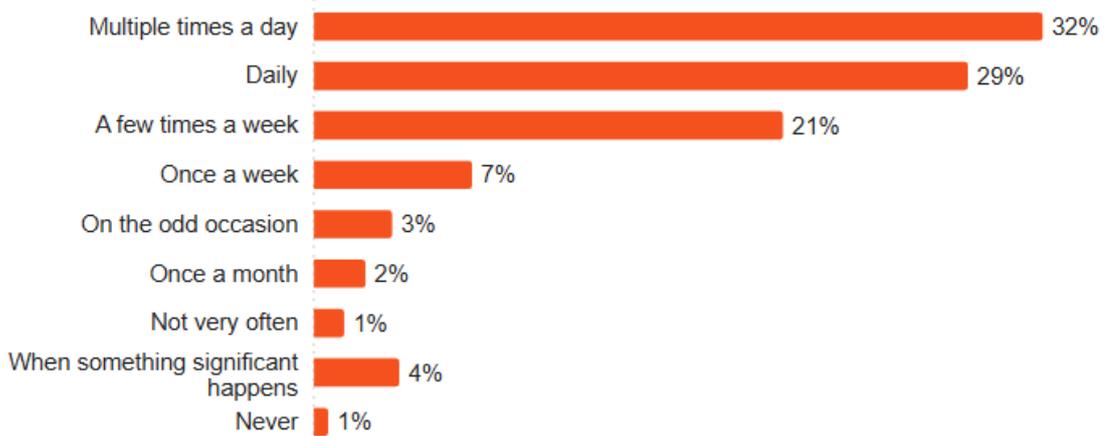
Multiple times a day	32%
Daily	29%
A few times a week	21%
Once a week	7%
On the odd occasion	3%
Once a month	2%
Not very often	1%
When something significant happens	4%
Never	1%

Figure 6 – How frequently is information on social issues presented to you without prompting? (e.g. appears on your media feed)

We see a less mixed response in the frequency that students have information presented to them without prompting. 32% see this information multiple times a day, 29% have this occur daily and 21% responded a few times a week. This shows that whilst students may not be frequently actively searching out information on

social issues, this does not mean they are not seeing it as most students see this information on their feeds without prompting at least weekly. (Fig. 6)

Where do you get most of your information about social issues from? Please choose all that apply

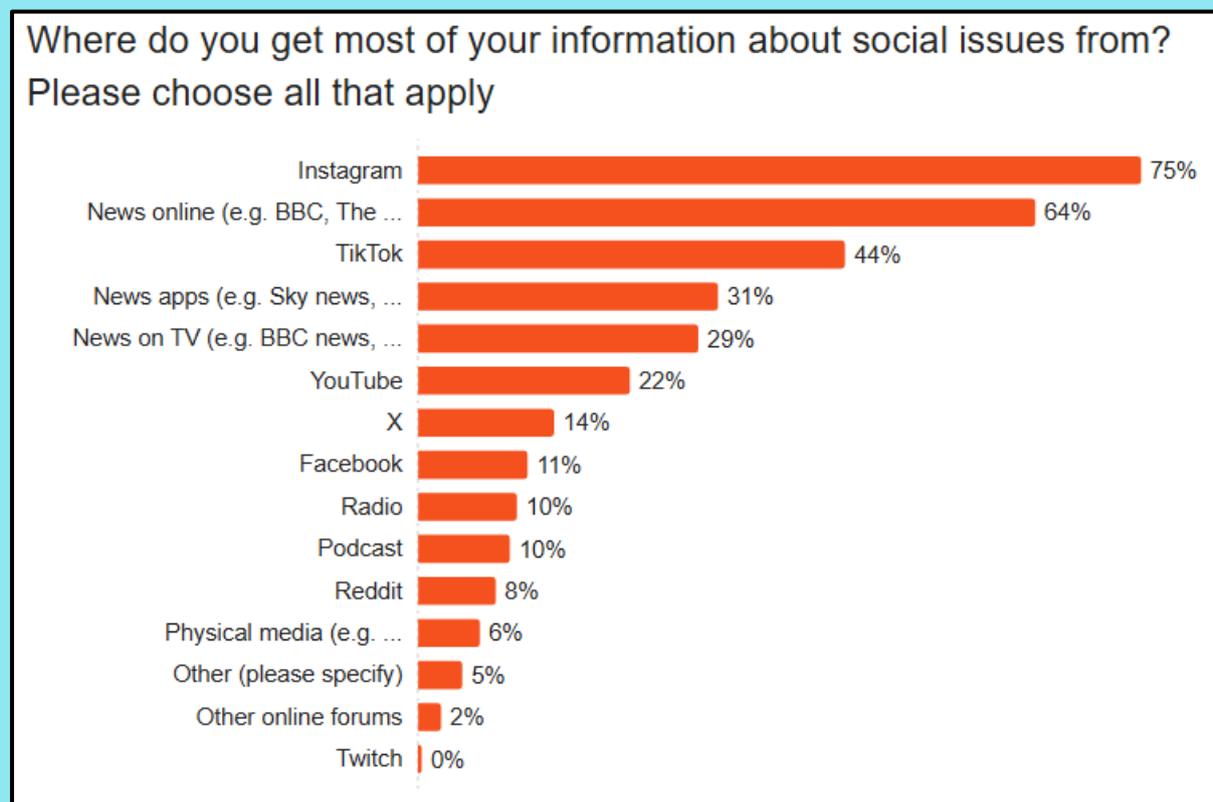| Source	Percentage
Instagram	75%
News online (e.g. BBC, The ...)	64%
TikTok	44%
News apps (e.g. Sky news, ...)	31%
News on TV (e.g. BBC news, ...)	29%
YouTube	22%
X	14%
Facebook	11%
Radio	10%
Podcast	10%
Reddit	8%
Physical media (e.g. ...)	6%
Other (please specify)	5%
Other online forums	2%
Twitch	0%

Figure 7 - Where do you get most of your information about social issues from? Choose all that apply

75% of students are getting their information on social issues from Instagram. 64% use online news outlets. 44% use TikTok. 31% are using news specific apps. 29% are watching the news on TV and 22% are using YouTube. Following YouTube, we see smaller percentages of students using other sources like radio, podcasts and Reddit. (Fig. 7).

As part of the focus group, students were asked how they keep up with current events and social issues. The most common answer was social media, reflecting what the survey found, followed by various online news sources, such as the Economist, the Financial times and the Guardian. Students also mentioned YouTube and X, again following survey results, as well as LinkedIn.

Three students said they actively search up this information on social media, but the majority of students said that social issues are often presented to them through social media unprompted, which also aligns with the survey results.

How do you decide if the information you're getting is reliable/from a reliable source?

Open text response themes

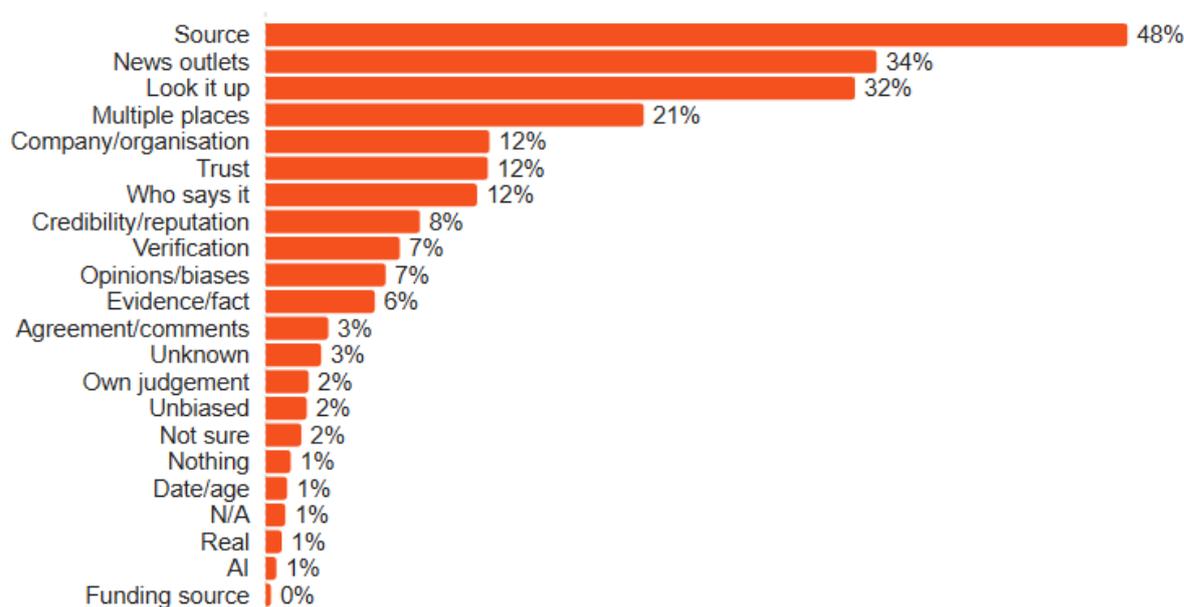| Theme	Percentage
Source	48%
News outlets	34%
Look it up	32%
Multiple places	21%
Company/organisation	12%
Trust	12%
Who says it	12%
Credibility/reputation	8%
Verification	7%
Opinions/biases	7%
Evidence/fact	6%
Agreement/comments	3%
Unknown	3%
Own judgement	2%
Unbiased	2%
Not sure	2%
Nothing	1%
Date/age	1%
N/A	1%
Real	1%
AI	1%
Funding source	0%

Figure 8 - How do you decide if the information you're getting is reliable/from a reliable source? Open text response themes

When students are deciding if their information is coming from a reliable source 48% mention the source itself. These responses included checking information against other sources, getting information from a source they trust or using multiple sources.

"I follow sources that I trust and believe to be reliable. But also with social media you get offered a few different perspectives on the same issue, so you can kind of sift through and work out which perspective is the most reliable." ~ Masters, HASS student

"Checking several sources about this specific topic then reading people's responses and reactions and discussing current events and issues on blogs" ~ Masters, ESE student

"Whether it is a known source and is a trusted provider of information. Also, if the information seems credible. Looking for multiple sources" ~ Year 2, ESE student

34% of students feel their information is reliable if it is coming from a news outlet.

"Make sure it comes from a proper news outlets page" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"Look for national news agencies which have historically held little political bias." ~ Year 2, HASS student

"If it is given by a reliable and well known news channel, I know its reliable, like the BBC." ~ Year 1, HLS student

32% of students are fact checking their information by further looking it up.

"if I see something from TikTok that I want to find out more about i will look it up online to see the details" ~ Year 3, HLS student

"Most of the information I get is initially from social media but I almost always double check this online from a reputable source, such as the BBC, Sky etc., particularly if it's a topic I care about" ~ Year 4, HLS student

"I first of all check if the story is repeated elsewhere to check whether it is misinformation or not and check the other source to see whether anything has been exaggerated or the wording twisted. Additionally, I research the author to check for their biases, whether they are funded by a political party, how many prior articles they've written etc." ~ Masters, ESE student

2. How socially aware do students feel?

Prior to asking any questions about social awareness, we gave students the definition below to ensure a consistent level of knowledge amongst respondents.

> Social awareness is defined as the ability to understand and empathize with the feelings, thoughts, and perspectives of others in various social contexts.
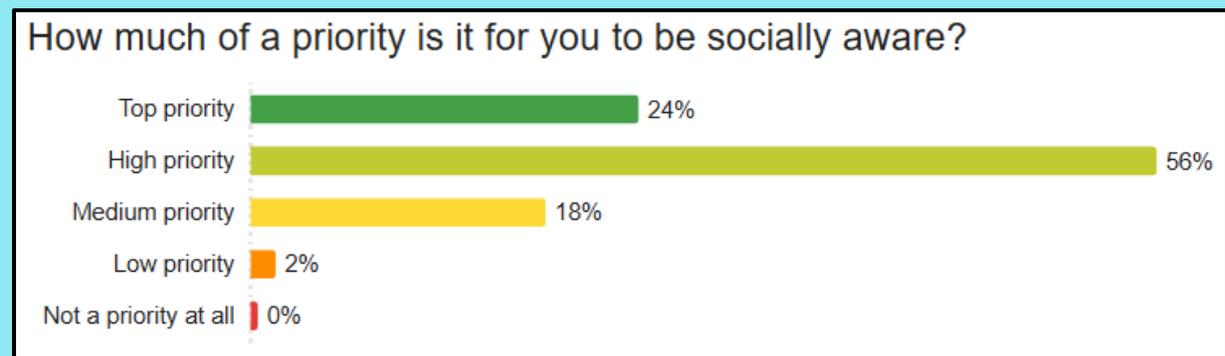

How much of a priority is it for you to be socially aware?

Top priority	24%
High priority	56%
Medium priority	18%
Low priority	2%
Not a priority at all	0%

Figure 9 – How much of a priority is it for you to be socially aware?

56% of students feel that being socially aware is a high priority for them; 24% feel that it is a top priority and 18% feel that it is a medium priority (Fig. 9).

Students in the focus group felt that it was very important for them to be socially aware, with no students responding with anything other than high or top priority.
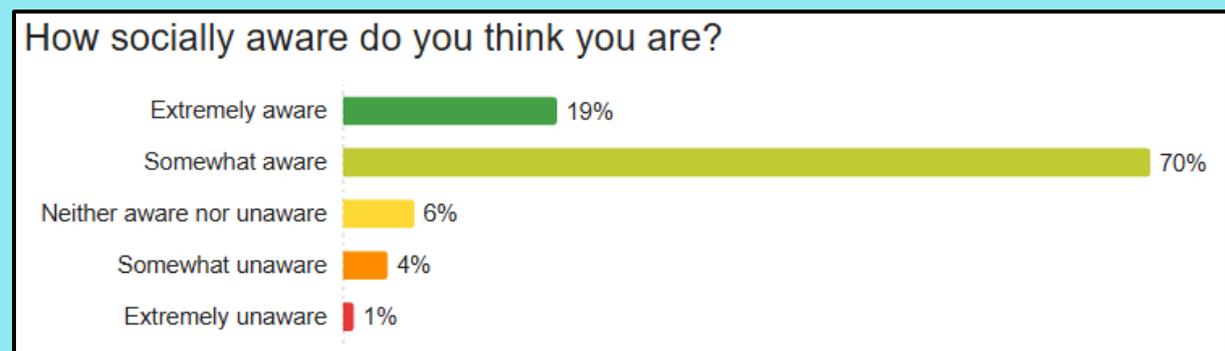

How socially aware do you think you are?

Extremely aware	19%
Somewhat aware	70%
Neither aware nor unaware	6%
Somewhat unaware	4%
Extremely unaware	1%

Figure 10 – How socially aware do you think you are?

70% of students think that they are somewhat socially aware. 19% feel extremely social aware, 6% feel neutral and only 5% feel unaware. (Fig. 10).

We then looked at the extent to which students feel being socially aware is a priority by how socially aware they currently feel.
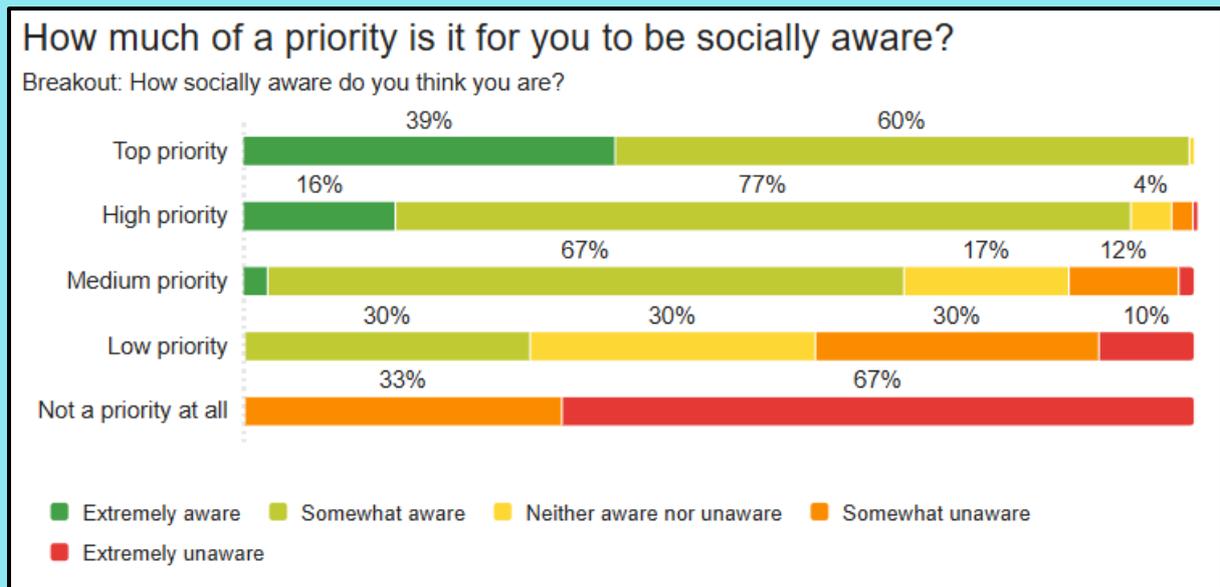
Figure 11 – How much of a priority is it for you to be socially aware? Breakout – how socially aware do you think you are.

39% of students who feel that being socially aware is a top priority felt they were extremely socially aware and 60% rated themselves as somewhat aware. For students who feel it is a high priority, 77% felt somewhat socially aware and 16% felt extremely aware (Fig. 11).

For students who feel that being socially aware is a low priority we see a more even split of current social awareness, 30% feel somewhat aware, 30% felt neutral and 30% felt somewhat unaware. 10% of this group feel extremely unaware (Fig. 11).

For students who feel that being socially aware is not a priority at all, none felt currently socially aware, 33% felt somewhat unaware and 67% felt extremely unaware. (Fig. 11).

There is a clear trend, then, that shows students who prioritise social awareness find themselves feeling more confident in their levels of social awareness compared to those who don't (Fig. 11).

Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information on social issues that you experience?

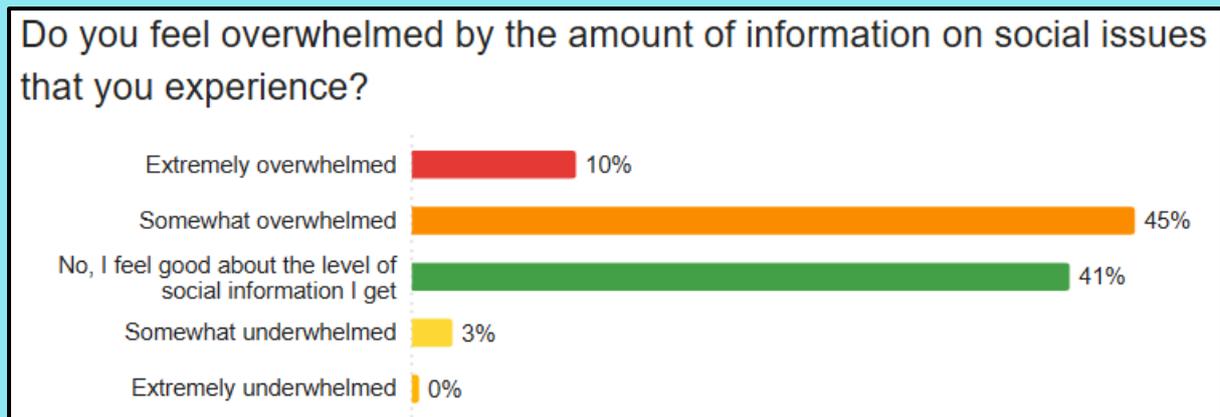|	
Extremely overwhelmed	10%
Somewhat overwhelmed	45%
No, I feel good about the level of social information I get	41%
Somewhat underwhelmed	3%
Extremely underwhelmed	0%

Figure 12 - Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information on social issues that you experience?

45% of students report feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of information on social issues that they experience. 10% feel extremely overwhelmed. 41% feel good about the level of social information that they experience. Only 3% of students feel underwhelmed by the information they are experiencing. (Fig. 12).

50% of students in the focus group expressed that they feel extremely overwhelmed by the news/amount of news they get and 25% somewhat overwhelmed, with the other 25% feeling fine, and none feeling at all underwhelmed. It is possible that these numbers are slightly higher due to the smaller number of students in the focus group compared to the survey, but the trend of students feeling more overwhelmed that anything else remains

When students in the focus group were asked how they cope with feeling overwhelmed with social issues, there respones feel into two catergories: actions to take more control of politics surrounding them, and methods of self-care and regulating personal wellbeing. Recommedned actions to lessen stress by taking control consisted of joining protests, reaching out to local leaders and asking for help or expressing your opinion, and reading literature around the issue to better educate themselves.

Many of the responses from the focus group reflected on self-care practises in order to manage stress caused by social issues and politics. This includes playing calming games, reading, hobbies, drinking water or tea or eating, taking a bath, sports, going outside for nature walks and reconnecting with reality and your surroundings. They also discussed ways in which to regulate anxiety, such as grounding techniques, stimulating all five senses, talking to other people or wellbeing services, and taking time to sit and process the emotions. Students mentioned the importance of taking social media breaks to stop doom scrolling and spiralling, whilst also accepting that you still need to be up-to-date with the news, instead taking breaks so it is more manageable.
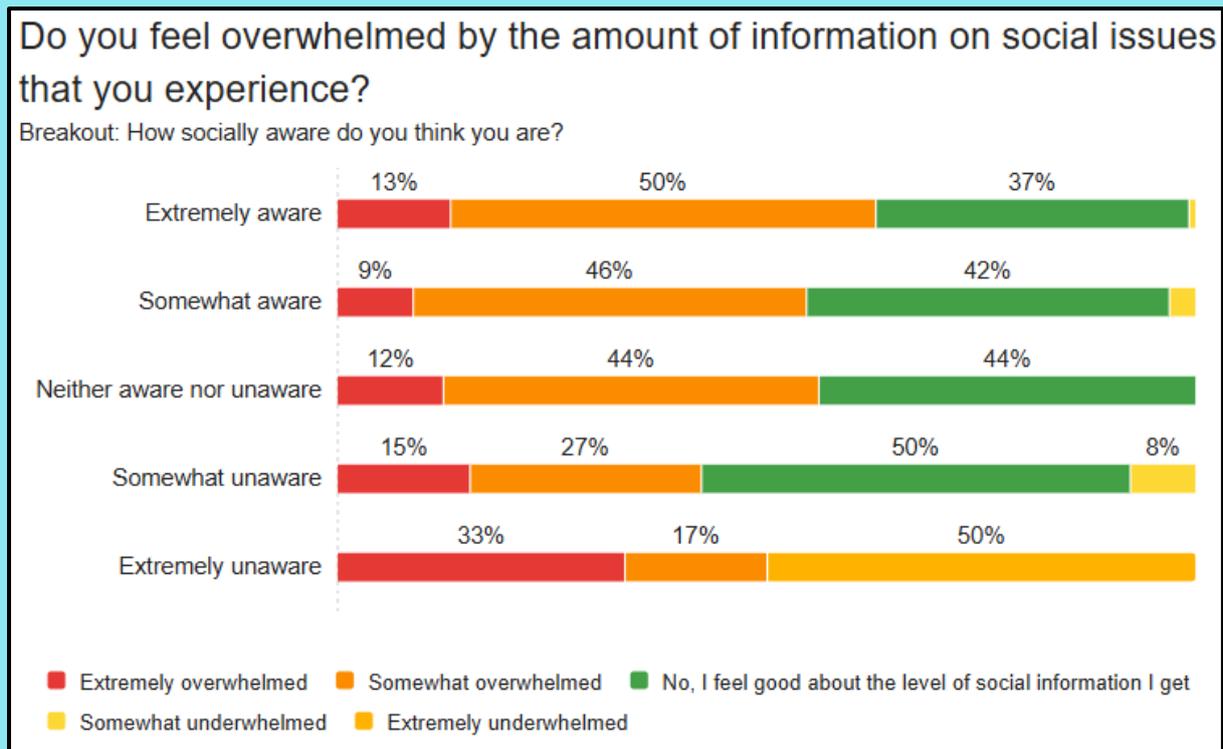
Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information on social issues that you experience?

Breakout: How socially aware do you think you are?

	13%	50%	37%
Extremely aware			

	9%	46%	42%
Somewhat aware			

	12%	44%	44%
Neither aware nor unaware			

	15%	27%	50%	8%
Somewhat unaware				

	33%	17%	50%
Extremely unaware			

■ Extremely overwhelmed   ■ Somewhat overwhelmed   ■ No, I feel good about the level of social information I get
■ Somewhat underwhelmed   ■ Extremely underwhelmed

Figure 13 – Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information on social issues that you experience? Breakout – level of social awareness

If we look at feelings of overwhelm by feelings of social awareness, we can see some differences emerge. For students who feel extremely aware of social issues, 63% feel overwhelmed to some extent and 37% feel good about the level of social information that they receive. For students who are somewhat aware, we see less overwhelm at 55% and 42% feel good with the level of information they experience.

For those students who feel somewhat unaware, 42% feel overwhelmed, 50% feel good and 8% feel underwhelmed. For students who rate themselves as extremely unaware of social issues, 50% feel overwhelmed, none felt good about the information and 50% felt extremely underwhelmed with the level of information that they experience.

Generally, we see more feelings of overwhelm in the socially aware students and more feelings of underwhelm in the socially unaware students. (Fig. 13).

Which of these statements do you feel most apply to you? Please choose up to three statements
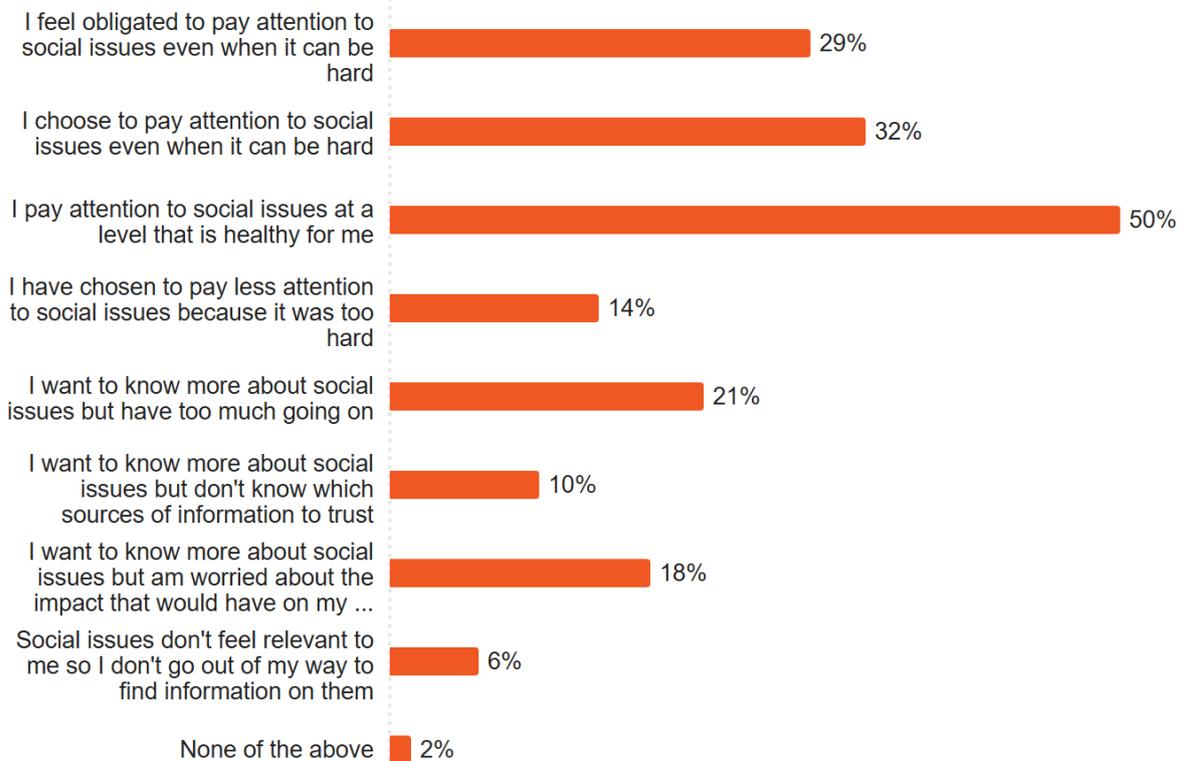
Statement	Percentage
I feel obligated to pay attention to social issues even when it can be hard	29%
I choose to pay attention to social issues even when it can be hard	32%
I pay attention to social issues at a level that is healthy for me	50%
I have chosen to pay less attention to social issues because it was too hard	14%
I want to know more about social issues but have too much going on	21%
I want to know more about social issues but don't know which sources of information to trust	10%
I want to know more about social issues but am worried about the impact that would have on my ...	18%
Social issues don't feel relevant to me so I don't go out of my way to find information on them	6%
None of the above	2%

Figure 14 - Which of these statements do you feel most apply to you? Choose up to three statements

50% of students say that they are paying attention to social issues in the level that feels comfortable for them. This generally aligns with results we saw earlier, with 41% of students feeling good with the level of social information they experience (Fig. 14 and Fig. 12).

29% of students feel obligated to pay attention to social issues even when it can be hard. 32% of students choose to pay attention to social issues even when it can be hard. 14% of students have chosen to pay less attention to social issues because it was hard. 21% of students want to know more about social issues but have too much going on. 18% of students want to know more about social issues but are worried about the impact on their mental health. Is there a way to help engage these students in social issues without impacting their mental health negatively? (Fig. 14).

88% of students in the focus group feel obligated to keep up with news even when its stressful, with the rest feeling somewhat obligated. This is higher than the survey responses, possibly due to students in the survey group all feeling it is a priority for them to be socially aware and feeling overwhelmed by the news/amount of news they receive.

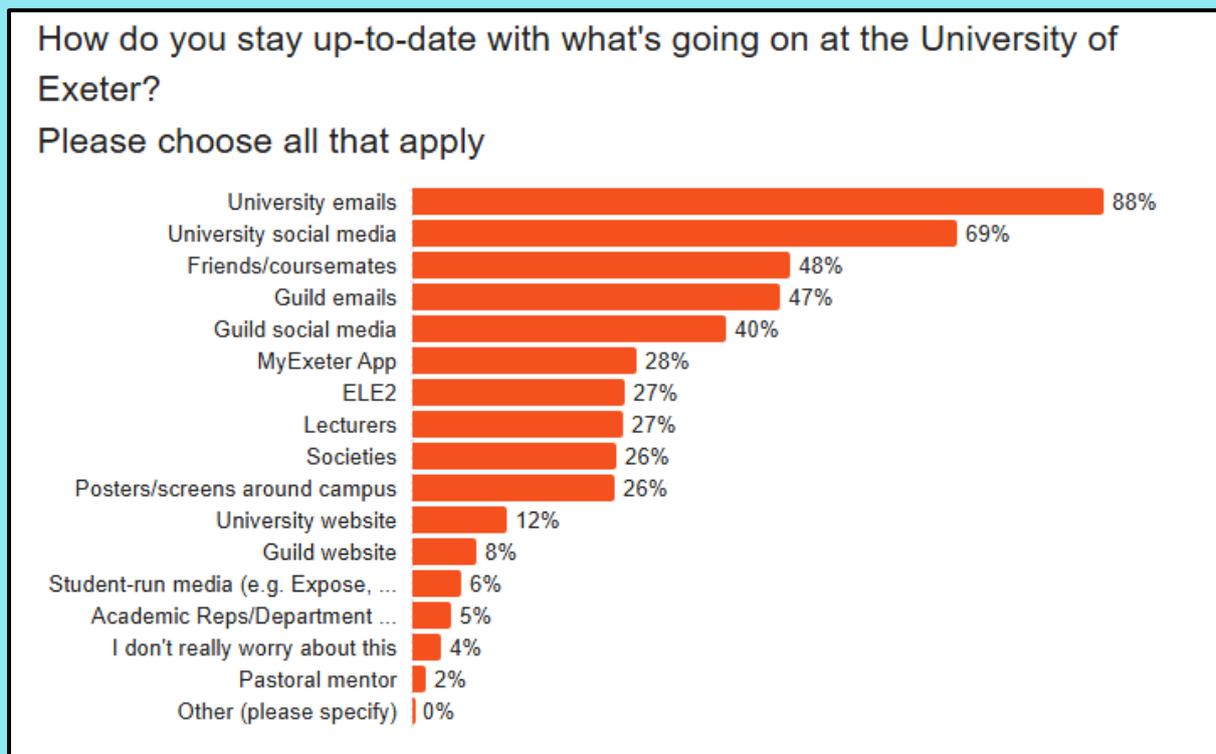### 3. How aware are students about what's going on at the University of Exeter?

How do you stay up-to-date with what's going on at the University of Exeter?
Please choose all that apply

Source	%
University emails	88%
University social media	69%
Friends/coursemates	48%
Guild emails	47%
Guild social media	40%
MyExeter App	28%
ELE2	27%
Lecturers	27%
Societies	26%
Posters/screens around campus	26%
University website	12%
Guild website	8%
Student-run media (e.g. Expose, ...)	6%
Academic Reps/Department ...	5%
I don't really worry about this	4%
Pastoral mentor	2%
Other (please specify)	0%

Figure 15- Question 10: How do students stay up-to-date with what's going on at the University of Exeter?

88% of students keep updated with what's happening at the University through University emails, with a further 69% using the University social media. Guild emails, 47%, and the Guild social media, 40%, are the next most common ways, after friends/course mates, 48%. 28% of students use the MyExeter App to stay updated, and 27% use ELE2. 27% of students are informed about current events through lecturers, and 26% through societies or posters/screens around campus. The University and Guild websites are used by 12% and 8% of students respectively, with only 6% using students run media (such as the Expose), 5% being informed by Academic/Department Reps and only 2% through pastoral mentors. 4% of students do not really worry about staying up-to-date with what's happening at the University. By far, the most common and effective ways that students are kept up to date is through emails and social media from the University and the Guild. (Fig. 15)
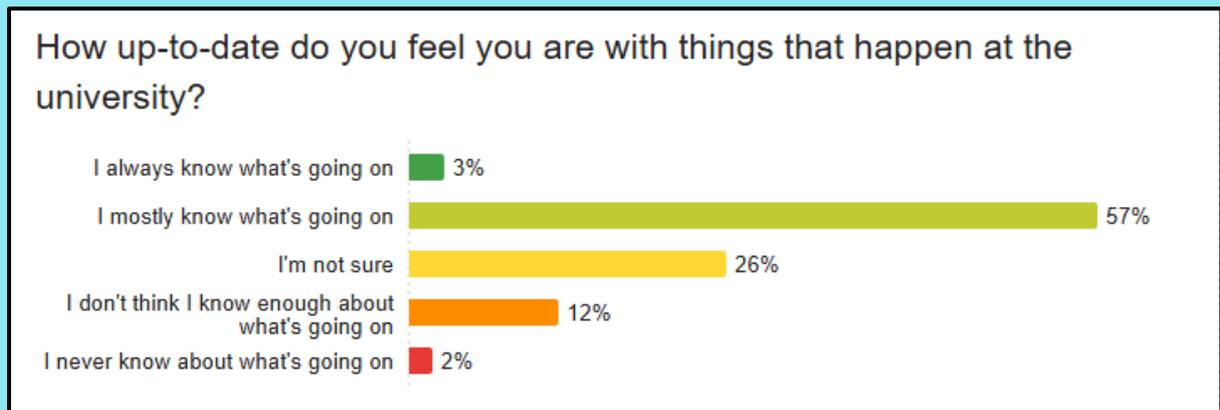
Figure 16- Question 11: How up-to-date do students feel they are with things that happen at the University?

60% of students feel that they know what's going on at the University, including 3% who feel that they always know what's going on, and 57% that mostly know what's going on. 12% of students do not think that they know enough about what's going on, with a further 2% feeling that they never know about what's going on. 26% of students feel unsure about how up-to-date they are with what happens at the University. (Fig. 16)

Why do you feel this way?

Open text response themes

Theme	Percentage
Barriers	49%
Communication Tools	45%
Measures of Success	38%
Knowledgeable	34%
Emails	24%
Information Shortage	23%
Busyness	16%
Consequences	16%
Social Media	16%
Missing Events	10%
Scale	10%
WOM	10%
Isolation	9%
General Platforms	6%
Information Overload	5%
Selectively Knowledgeable	5%
Not Sure	4%
Societies	3%
Poor Communication	3%
News	3%
N/A	3%
Feeling Successful	2%
Effort	2%
St Luke's	2%
Don't Care	2%
In-Person	2%
Placement	1%
Unaware	1%
Commuter	1%
Good Communication	1%
Feeling Involved	1%
Postgraduate	1%
Accessible	0%
Feeling Satisfied	0%
Degree Apprentice	0%
Low Priority	0%
Priority	0%
1st Year	0%
Course cuts	0%
Demand for Upskilling	0%
Exchange Student	0%
General Vibes	0%
Part-Time	0%
Signposting	0%
Stress	0%

Figure 17- Question 11a: Why do you feel this way? Open text response themes

When students where asked why they felt the way they do about how up-to-date they are about what's happening at the University, 49% of students felt that there are barriers that prevent them from accessing useful information to keep them updated, feeling that things are easy to miss, or information is hard to find or follow.

"There is always a lot going on at University so it is difficult to know everything/always identify the most relevant opportunities at the right time (e.g. I sometimes find out about useful resources after I needed them as there is so much information)" ~ Year 2, ESE student

"I feel like I am fairly aware of what is happening at university as I read all my emails and check associated social media, however, some things are not noted and so I miss out on what's happening like society events and what's going on in the Forum. I feel there should be a calendar on the Guild website that has all of the Society events on there that can have a filter function based on event type (drinking/non-drinking), theme and society. This way it would be easier to know what is going on rather than having to spend a lot of time searching through Fixr and social media pages." ~ Masters, ESE student

"As a part-time student, I sometimes feel very out of the loop as I'm not always on campus" ~ Other, HASS student

45% of students mentioned that communication tools affect how up-to-date they feel, with 24% mentioning emails and 16% mentioning social media specifically.

"I feel like the emails keep me up to date with the most relevant and recent happenings around the uni. The Instagram as well is normally first to report." ~ Year 2, HASS student

"I'm always connected via Instagram to the University news" ~ Masters, HASS student

"I feel like I see a lot of information on the Guild Instagram page, that has a lot of information about day to day things happening at the university" ~ Year 3, ESE student

38% talked about measures of success, discussing ways that they keep somewhat up to date if not completely. 34% mention feeling generally knowledgeable about what's going on at the University to varying degrees. (Fig. 17)

"I make an effort to keep aware of things going on at the uni" ~ Year 4, ESE student

"I am on campus every day and usually for long periods of time so I generally have a good idea on what's going on." ~ Year 4, ESE student

"I feel like I am quite up to date with most of the latest news" ~ Year 3, HLS student

16% feel that there is a shortage of information, conversely 5% discuss information overload and feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information they are given. 16% discuss being too busy to keep up to date, with 10% missing events and 16% discussing consequences of being too busy or missing updates. (Fig. 17)

"sometimes there are too many sources but reporting the same information so it can get hard to follow or to know where to get the information" ~ Masters, ESE student

"Not enough easily noticeable sources of info" ~ Masters, HASS student

"Sometimes there are so many things so you might miss some things" ~ Year 2, HASS student

The general reasons for why students feel how they do can be categorised into barriers that prevent them from being up-to-date, various communication tools that they use to keep updated, consequences that they face as a result of how up-to-date they are, measures of success as to how updated they are and how much of a priority being up-to-date is for them, where each category can be further broken down into more specific reasons that can be seen in figure 17.

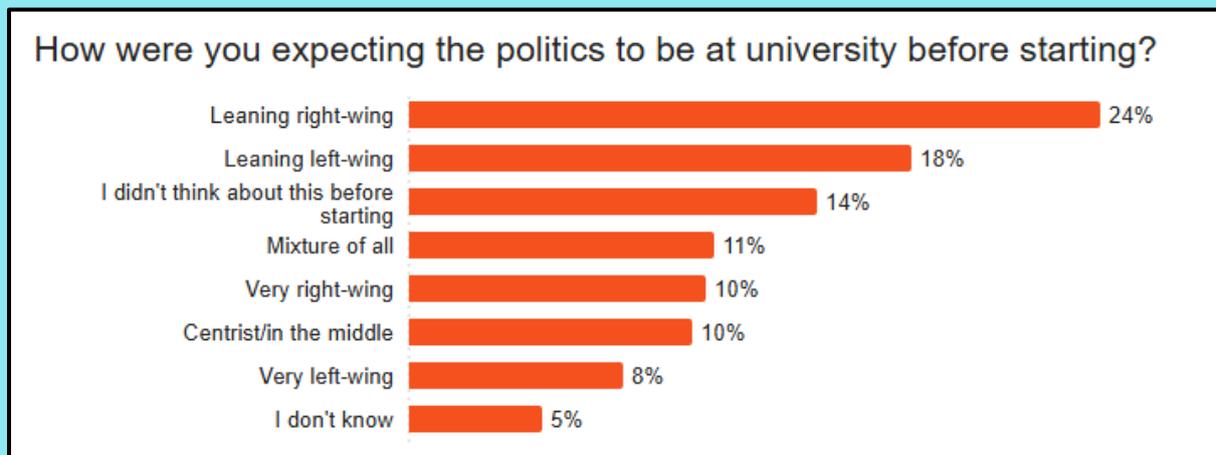## 4. What do students think of the social atmosphere at the University of Exeter?

How were you expecting the politics to be at university before starting?

Leaning right-wing	24%
Leaning left-wing	18%
I didn't think about this before starting	14%
Mixture of all	11%
Very right-wing	10%
Centrist/in the middle	10%
Very left-wing	8%
I don't know	5%

Figure 18– Question 12: How were students expecting the politics to be at university before starting?

Before starting University, 24% of students expected the politics to be right-wing leaning, compared to 18% that expected it to be left-wing leaning. 10% expected it to be very right-wing, and 8% very left-wing. 11% expected a mixture of all, and 10% expected it to be centrist/in the middle. 14% stated that they did not think about the politics at university before starting, with a further 5% saying that they do not know. (Fig. 18)

44% of students in the focus group expected the university to be a mixture of all before starting, this was the most common response which differs from the survey result where it was instead leaning right-wing. 22% of students expected it to be right-wing, with none expecting it to be left leaning or centrist. This follows the results from the survey, in that most students expected it to be right leaning, but more students in the survey also expected it to be left leaning. 33% of students in the focus expressed that they had not thought about this before starting university, which aligns with the survey results since many students also expressed this sentiment.
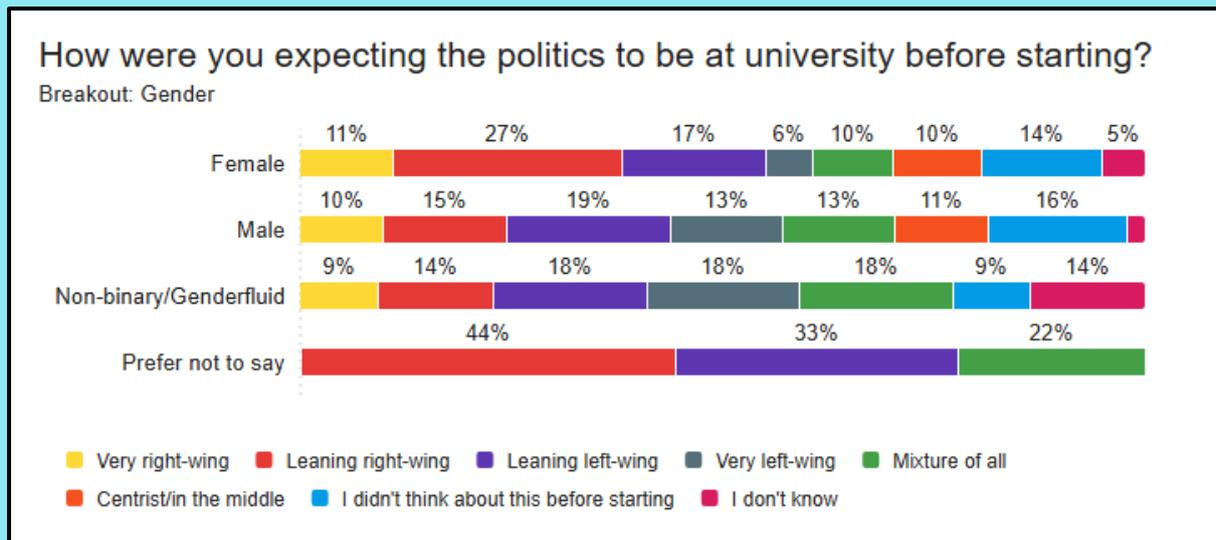
Figure 19- Question 12: How were students expecting the politics to be at university before starting? (Breakout: Gender)

When we look at this by gender identity, the percentages of students who expected very right-wing politics is very similar across all genders, with 11% of women, 10% of men and 9% of non-binary/genderfluid people expecting this. 27% of those identifying as female expected it to be leaning right-wing, compared to 15% of men and 14% of non-binary/genderfluid people. 44% of those who prefer not to say also thought it would be right-wing leaning. Overall, women were the largest gender demographic, other than those who prefer not to say, that expected the politics to be more right-wing leaning. (Fig. 19)

Whereas, the most common answer for male and non-binary/genderfluid people was left-wing leaning, with 19% for men and 18% for non-binary/genderfluid, however this is closely followed by 17% of women; suggesting there is a greater split between women who expected it to be left/right-wing leaning than for other gender demographics. 18% of non-binary/genderfluid people expected it to be very left-wing leaning, making it the demographic with the highest percentage of students who expected the politics to be more left leaning, followed by those who prefer not to say and men. 13% of men expected the politics to be very left leaning, compared to only 6% of women. (Fig. 19)

33% of those who prefer not to say expected the politics to be left leaning, with the rest expecting it to be a mixture of all. 18% of non-binary/genderfluid people expected it to be a mixture of all, which is slightly higher than the 13% of men and 10% of women.   Male and female had very similar percentages of students who expected more centrist/in the middle politics, with 10% female and 11% male, however, no non-binary/genderfluid people expressed expecting this. (Fig. 19)

Men had the highest percentage of students who had not thought about this before starting, with 16% compared to 14% of women, and 9% of non-binary/genderfluid people. However, this was the highest gender demographic with students who felt they didn't know, with 14% compared to 5% of women and 3% of men. Overall, it can be seen that women and those who prefer not to say

expected the university politics to be more right leaning, compared to men and non-binary/genderfluid people who expected it to more left leaning. (Fig. 19)
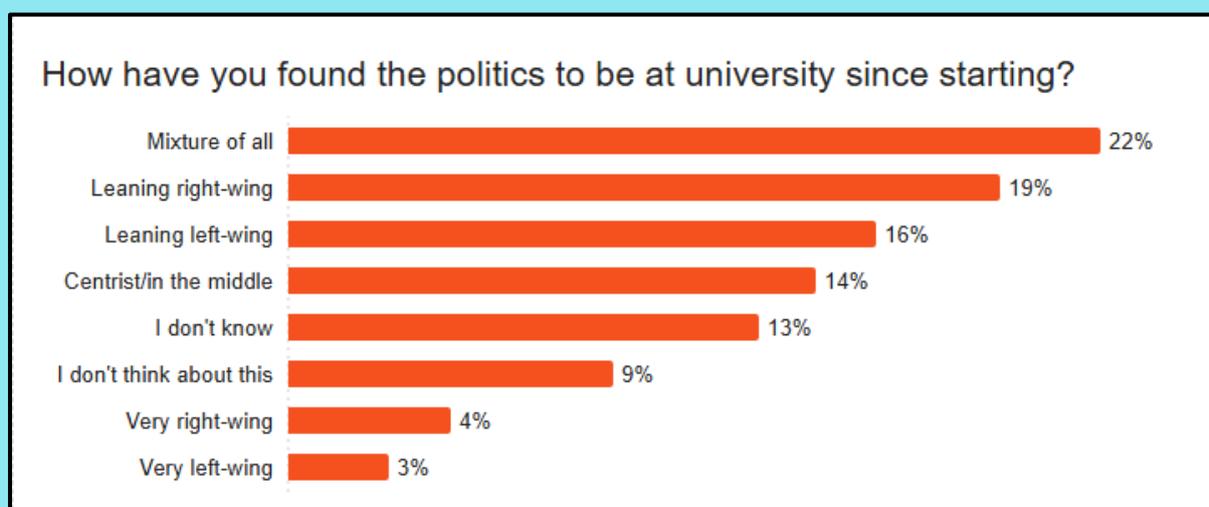

How have you found the politics to be at university since starting?

Mixture of all	22%
Leaning right-wing	19%
Leaning left-wing	16%
Centrist/in the middle	14%
I don't know	13%
I don't think about this	9%
Very right-wing	4%
Very left-wing	3%

Figure 20- Question 13: How have students found the politics to be at university since starting?

Students were then asked how they have found the politics since starting at university, and the top response shifted from right-wing leaning to a mixture of all with 22%. Right-wing leaning was, however, the next most common answer with 19% once gain followed by left-wing leaning at 16%. 14% of students have found the university politics to be centrist/in the middle, with few students finding it to be extreme either way. 4% of students found it to be very right-wing, and 3% very left-wing. 13% of students feel that they do not know, with a further 9% stating that they do not think about this. (Fig. 20)

The percentage of students who found student politics to be a mixture of all since started is double the percentage of students that expected it to be before starting. Less students found student politics to be leaning more right-wing than expected to by 5%, but this still remains higher than those expecting it and finding it more left-wing leaning which dropped by 2%. Fewer students found student politics to be one of the extremes than expected, especially those who expected it to be very right-wing compared to how many found it to actually be. More students found it to be more centrist or a mixture than expected it to be, which dropped 6%, whilst very left leaning dropped by 5%. The percentage of students that found it to be centrist/in the middle is 4% more than those who expected it to be. Students who feel they don't know increased by 8% since starting university. The number of students who don't think about this is 5% less than students who didn't think about it before starting. The biggest difference is that students seem to have found more of a mixture of opinions and more centrist views than they expected to. (Fig. 18) (Fig. 20)

The focus group also echoed this, with 67% finding it a mixture of all, this being the most common answer, followed by 22% who found it more right leaning. No students reported finding it left leaning, however there was a rise to 11% who found

it centrist, similar to how more students in the survey found it centrist than expected to.

How have you found the politics to be at university since starting?
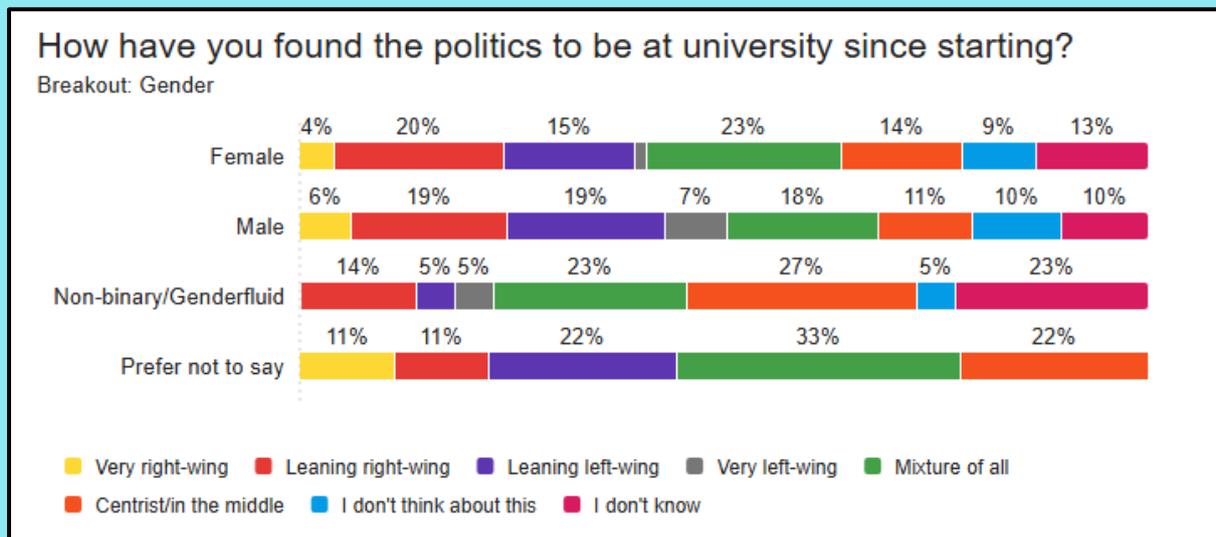Breakout: Gender

Figure 21- Question 13: How have students found the politics to be at university since starting? (Breakout: Gender)

When we look at this by gender, 24% of women have found the politics to be more right-wing leaning, including 4% who have found it very right-wing, which interestingly is very slightly lower than the 25% of men who have found it more right leaning, including 6% finding it very right-wing. The same percentage of men have found it to be more right-wing than expected it to, however the percentage of women has decreased by 14%. Instead, 23% of women have found it to be a mixture of all, which has increased by 13pp. The percentage of men, non-binary/genderfluid people and those who prefer not to say who have found it to be a mixture of all are all greater than those who expected to, with a 5pp increase for men and non-binary/genderfluid people, and an 11pp increase for those who prefer not to say. (Fig. 19) (Fig. 21)

Non-binary/genderfluid people who found the politics to be more right leaning is 9% less than those who expected to, with none finding it very right leaning. There is also a decrease of 22pp of those who prefer not to say finding it more right wing, instead finding it more centrist/in the middle, which is also the case for non-binary/genderfluid people with an increase of 27pp, becoming the most common answer for this demographic. This also increased by 4pp for women but stayed the same for men. (Fig. 19) (Fig. 21)

Both male and female students found student politics to be less left-wing they expected, with 23% of female students expecting it to be very or lean left-wing but only 17% actually finding it this way and 32% of male students expecting it to be this way but only 26% actually finding it to be so. Students who preferred not to disclose their gender also followed this pattern, with 33% expecting the politics to lean left-wing but only 22% finding it this way. We see the most dramatic drop

in expectation compared to reality amongst non-binary/genderfluid students, 36% of whom were expecting the politics to either be very or lean left-wing but only 10% of whom actually found it to be this way showcasing a 26pp disparity between expectation and experience (Fig. 19) (Fig. 21)

Less students across all gender demographics (except for those who prefer not to say) stated that they didn't think about this since starting compared to those before starting, however there was an increase across all demographics (except for those who prefer not to say) of students who felt they didn't know. Overall, women have found the politics to be more right leaning or a mixture of all, whilst men have a more even split between left and right leaning. Non-binary/genderfluid students have found it to be more centrist or more of a mixture of all, similar to those who prefer not to say. (Fig. 19) (Fig. 21)
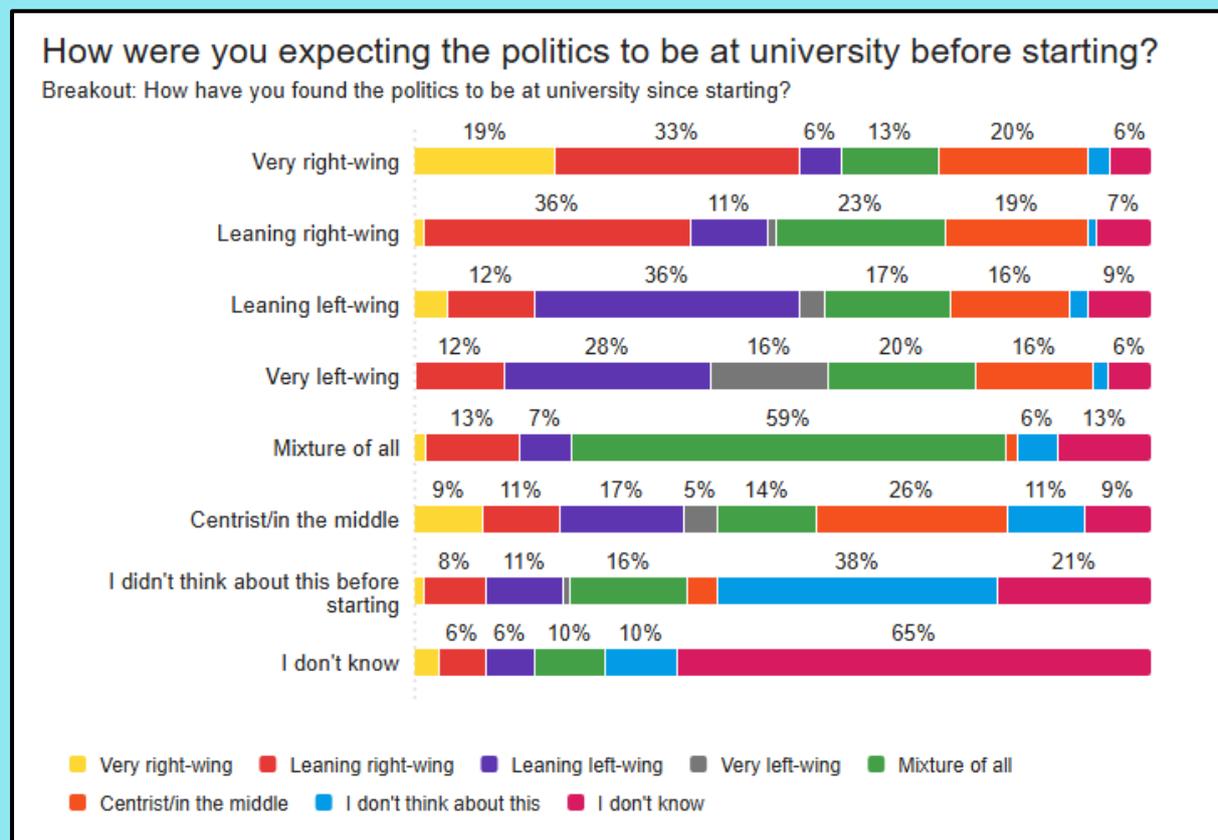
Figure 22- Question 12: How were students expecting the politics to be at university before starting (Breakout: Question 13: How have students found the politics to be at university since starting?)

19% of students who expected student politics to be very right-wing have found that it to be so, with 33% instead finding it to only lean right-wing; 20% have instead found it to be more centrist. Only 6% of these students have found the politics lean left-wing with another 6% reporting that they don't think about this now. (Fig. 22)

38% of students who expected student politics to be more right-wing leaning have found this to be accurate to their experience, with 23% finding it a mixture of

all instead. 19% have found it to instead be more centrist/in the middle, with 11% finding it to actually be left leaning. Overall, 18% of students who were expecting the politics to be more right-wing (whether leaning or very) have instead found it to be left wing (either leaning or very). (Fig. 22)

16% of students who expected student politics to be very left-wing have found it to be so, with 28% of students finding it to be left leaning. This is followed by 20% who found it to be a mixture of all, and 16% who found it to be centrist/in the middle. 12% found it to be more right leaning instead (Fig. 22)

36% of students who expected the politics to be left leaning have found that it does lean left wing, as expected, followed by 17% who have found it to be a mixture of all, and 16% who have found it to be more centrist/in the middle. Interestingly, over 12% found that it instead is more right leaning. In total, 30% of students who expected the politics to be more left-wing (either leaning or very) instead found it to be right-wing (either leaning or very). (Fig. 22)

59% of students who expected university politics to be a mixture of all have found it to be so, with 13% finding it right leaning and 7% finding it left leaning. 26% of students who expected it to be centrist/in the middle have found it to be so, with 22% finding it to be more left wing (either leaning or very), and 20% finding it to be more right-wing (either leaning or very). (Fig. 22)

On average, 37% of students found that their original predictions were correct and that their initial expectations reflect what they have found since starting university. More students who were expecting an extreme, either very left or right-wing, found it to be so compared to any other group, with 16% and 19% respectively; perhaps because these students may be seeking these spaces more or be more politically active than others. (Fig. 22)

How socially aware do you think you are?
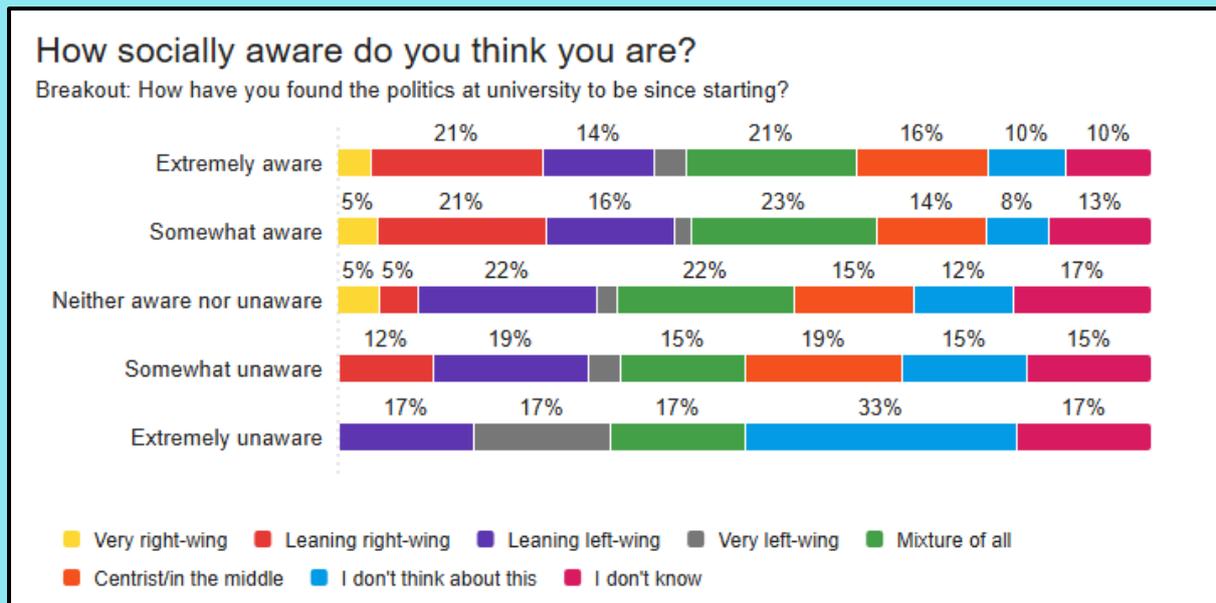Breakout: How have you found the politics at university to be since starting?

Figure 23- Question 3: How socially aware do students feel they are? (Breakout: Question 13: How have students found the politics to be at university since starting?)

When we look at how socially aware students are compared with how they have found the politics at university to be since starting, it can be seen more students who consider themselves to be socially aware perceive student politics to be more right-wing than left-wing. Whereas more students who consider themselves to be socially unaware perceive the university to be more left-wing than right-wing. In fact, no students who consider themselves to be extremely socially unaware find the university to be at all right leaning. Only 12% who are somewhat unaware find it to be right leaning, compared to 26% of those who are either extremely aware or somewhat aware finding it right-wing (either leaning or very). (Fig. 23)

Students who consider themselves to be more socially aware also found the politics to be more of a mixture of all than those who are unaware. For students who are more socially aware, the percentage who find the politics to be left leaning and those who find it centrist are very similar (14% left leaning compared to 16% centrist for very aware, and the reverse for somewhat aware), whereas this those who are more unaware have a higher percentage who find it left leaning. Students who consider themselves to be less socially aware also had a higher percentage of students who say they either don't know, or do not think about it. (Fig. 23)
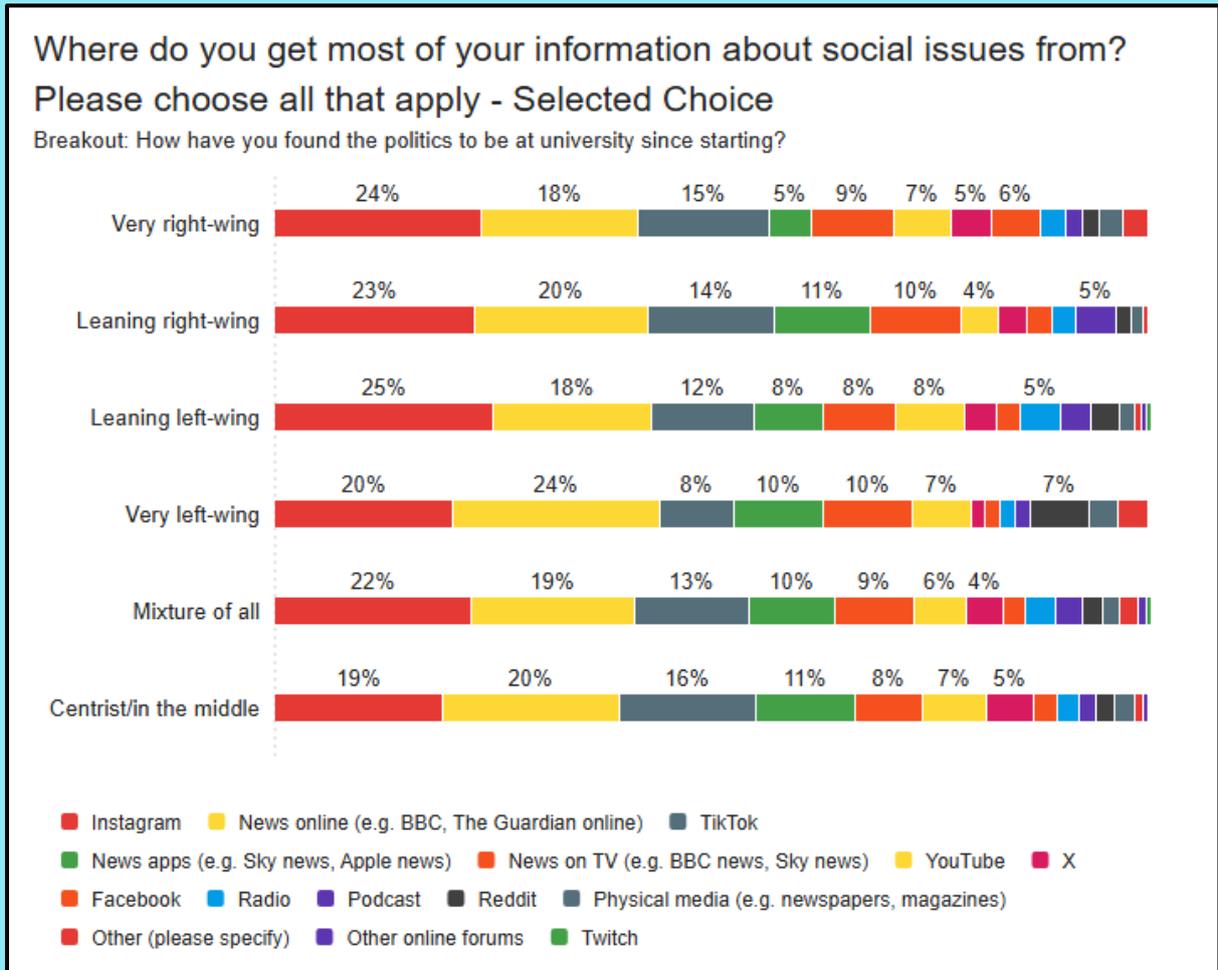
Where do you get most of your information about social issues from? Please choose all that apply - Selected Choice

Breakout: How have you found the politics to be at university since starting?

Figure 24– Question 6: Where do students get most of their information about social issues from? (selected choice) (Breakout: Question 13: How have students found the politics to be university since starting?)

When we compare how students get most of their information regarding social issues with how they have found the politics at university since starting, the results are generally quite similar. Slightly less students who have found it to be very left-wing get their information from Instagram and TikTok, compared, instead using news online more. (Fig. 24)
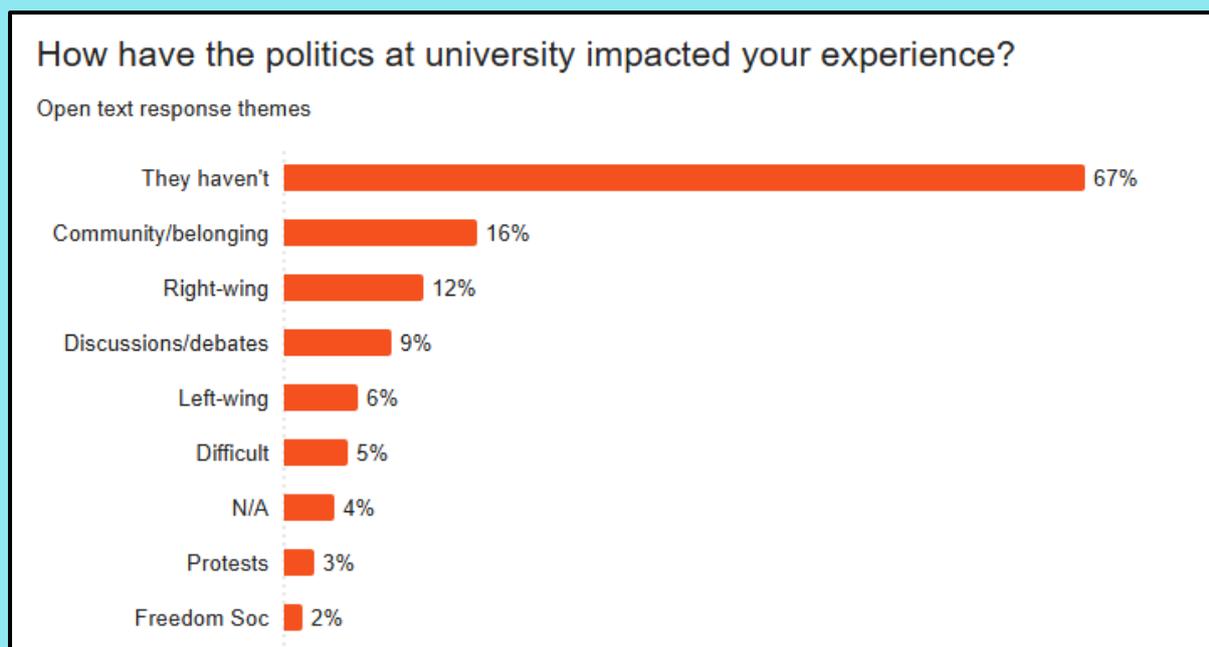
How have the politics at university impacted your experience?

Open text response themes

Theme	Percentage
They haven't	67%
Community/belonging	16%
Right-wing	12%
Discussions/debates	9%
Left-wing	6%
Difficult	5%
N/A	4%
Protests	3%
Freedom Soc	2%

Figure 25– Question 13a: How have the politics at university impacted students' experiences? Open text response themes

67% of students feel that politics at university have not impacted their experience. (Fig. 25)

"Hasn't directly impacted my experience, University means you meet a range of people." ~ Year 3, HASS student

"Not much I try to not get involved" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"I haven't noticed any significant impact of university politics on my experience, as I mainly focus on my academic work." ~ Other, ESE student

16% of students feel that politics have affected their sense of belonging and community and where they can fit in and feel comfortable at university. (Fig. 25)

> "I feel the uni has been very welcoming and created a safe space for students from different backgrounds and coming from different countries. I think equal opportunity has been provided to everyone, which is fair" ~ Masters, ESE student
>
> "It's been nice to be in an environment that generally believes in equality" ~ Year 4, ESE student
>
> "Exeter is quite a conversative city, I feel outcasted" ~ Year 3, ESE student
>
> "I'm more apprehensive towards others in case they turn out to be very discriminatory or hateful in their views. It makes me sad as well seeing how protesters at our university get dismissed" ~ Year 3, HASS student

9% mentioned discussions and debates regarding politics, with most feeling that this has benefited them in terms of learning more, broadening their perspectives and developing their communication and debate skills, finding the discourse interesting. (Fig. 25)

> "University politics have impacted my experience by influencing policies, campus culture, and decision-making, sometimes creating tension or debate but also encouraging awareness, discussion, and student involvement." ~ Other, ESE student
>
> "Gives me a well-rounded view of all aspects of the political spectrum. I like the mix - I think it is representative of the real world, which is what uni should be" ~ Year 4, HASS student

12% of students mentioned right-wing politics have impacted their experience in some way, with some mentioning feeling uncomfortable and others speaking about opportunities for discussion and constructive interactions.

"I have managed to click more with left-leaning people, however I have met some people with right wing politics who then used that to be racist/sexist/homophobic which was uncomfortable, as well as hearing this (especially homophobic) rhetoric around campus which makes the environment feel less safe" ~ Year 2, HLS student

"I tend to be with people that are generally left leaning, however, sometimes, I will come across people who are very right or left wing, and we have discussions. These tend to be constructive, and don't devolve into arguments." ~ Other, ESE student

"I have felt a degree of classism related to politics (with right-wing/leaning students) who tend to come from more privileged backgrounds and don't seem to understand the experiences of others who haven't had the same opportunities growing up" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"I met more leaning right wing people than I thought I would and I come from somewhere that is mainly leaning left wing and so it was interesting to adjust to people with openly different ideas discussion, and student involvement." ~ Year 1, ESE student

6% mentioned left wing politics having an impact as they are able to create connections with like-minded people, whilst some others feel that left-wing ideals contradict their personal beliefs. (Fig. 25)

"I've found very left wing people who have helped me to feel safe and included in my sexuality and gender identity." ~ Year 1, ESE student

"I am in the Exeter Evangelical Christian Union, so some of the left-wing ideologies the university encourages do not agree with my beliefs and the beliefs of the society." ~ Year 3, ESE student

5% discussed their difficulty in navigating politics at university, whether forming their opinion, discussing it with others, or observing other's behaviours. 3% mentioned protests having an impact on their experience, either participating in them, seeing them on campus, or feeling weary because of them. 2% mentioned the Freedom Society having an impact on their experience at university, with some discussing discomfort due to their presence, actions and ideologies and the lack of consequences for harmful behaviour. (Fig. 25)

"Feelings of anxiety around certain people/groups of people/societies. Anxiety about meeting people and expressing myself." ~ Year 2, HASS student

"The freedom society seems to be allowed to get away with being unkind to other students. This hasn't directly impacted my experience but I do worry that it has impacted the experience of other people. I think that regardless of 'politics' the Guild has an obligation to ensure that all societies are kind to different groups on campus." ~ Year 2, HASS student

"Just stop oil protests, protests in the forum right next to the library" ~ Year 3, HLS student

"Not very much at all. The far right protests in town are sometimes scary." ~ Other, HLS student

How much do you agree with the following statement: I feel safe to express my political views at university

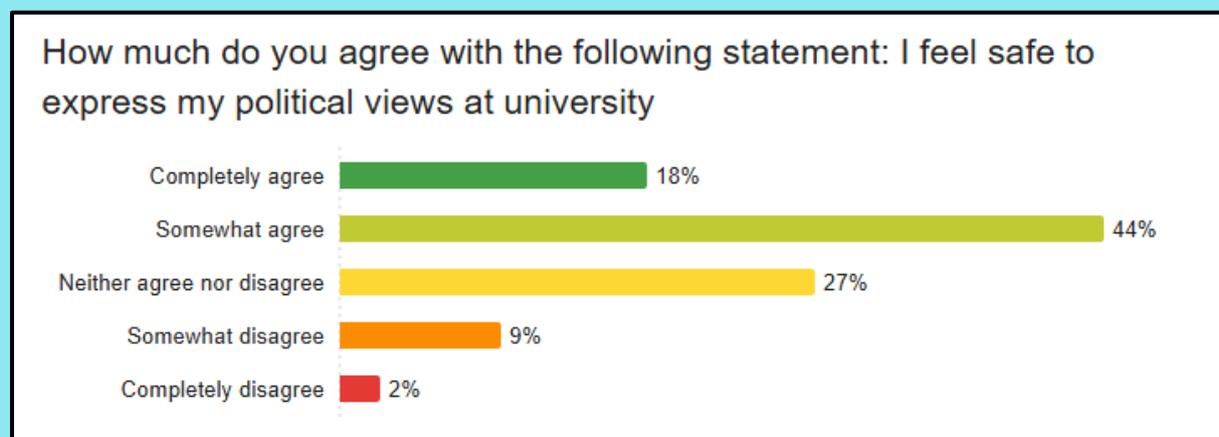|	
Completely agree	18%
Somewhat agree	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	27%
Somewhat disagree	9%
Completely disagree	2%

Figure 26- Question 14: How much do students agree that they are safe to express their political views at university?

66% of students agree that they can safely express their political views at university, including 18% who completely agree and 44% who somewhat agree. 27% of students neither agree nor disagree. Only 11% of students disagree, including 2% of students who completely disagree that they can safely express their political opinions at university, and 9% who somewhat disagree. (Fig. 26)
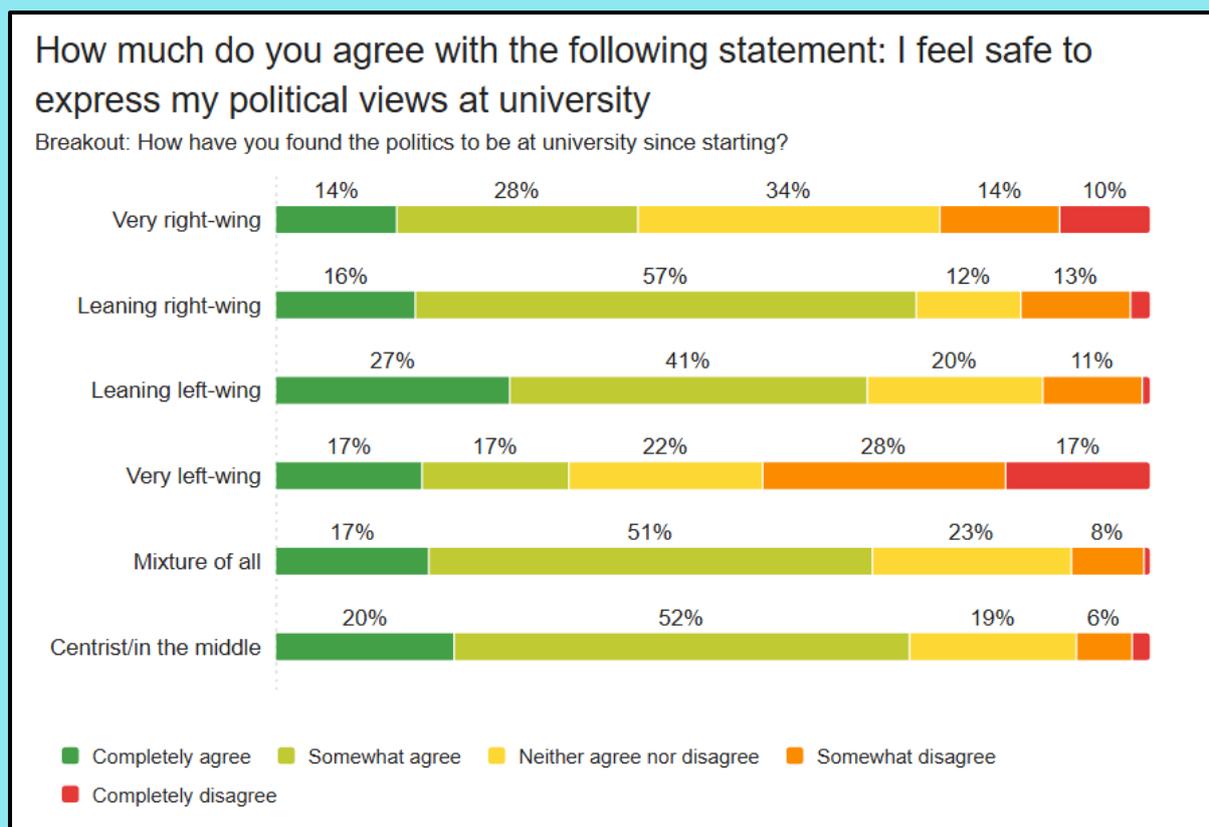
Figure 27- Question 14: How much do students agree that they are safe to express their political views at university? (Breakout: Question 13: How have students found the politics to be university since starting?)

When we look at how much students agree that they're safe to express their political views at university in the context of how they view the political environment at the university, it is clear that those who have found it to be one of the extremes, either very left or right-wing, feel less safe to express their views. 73% of students who find the politics to be leaning right-wing agree, at least somewhat, that they are safe to express their views. This is similar for those who find it to be centrist/in the middle, with 72%. 68% of students who find the politics to be either a mixture of all, or leaning left-wing agree, at least somewhat, that they are safe to express their political views at university, which is only slightly lower than right leaning and centrist. (Fig. 27)

However, this drops to 42% for those who find it very right-wing, and 34% for those who find it very left leaning. Of the 58% who find it very right-wing that do not agree, 34% of them neither agree nor disagree, but this is only 22% for those who find it very left wing (out of 66% who do not agree). Instead, 45% of those who find the politics to be very left-wing disagree with the statement, including 17% who completely disagree. This is by far the largest of all the demographics, followed by 24% that at least somewhat disagree for those who find it very right-wing. (Fig. 27)

More students who find student politics to be leaning right-wing disagree, at least somewhat, with the statement than those who find it leaning left (15% compared to 12%) who instead have more that neither agree nor disagree (20% compared to 12%). Students who find the university to be a mixture of all had the second

highest percentage of students that neither agree nor disagree, after very right-wing, with 23%, and along with those who find it centrist, has the lowest percentage of students who disagree, at least somewhat, with 9% for both. (Fig. 27)
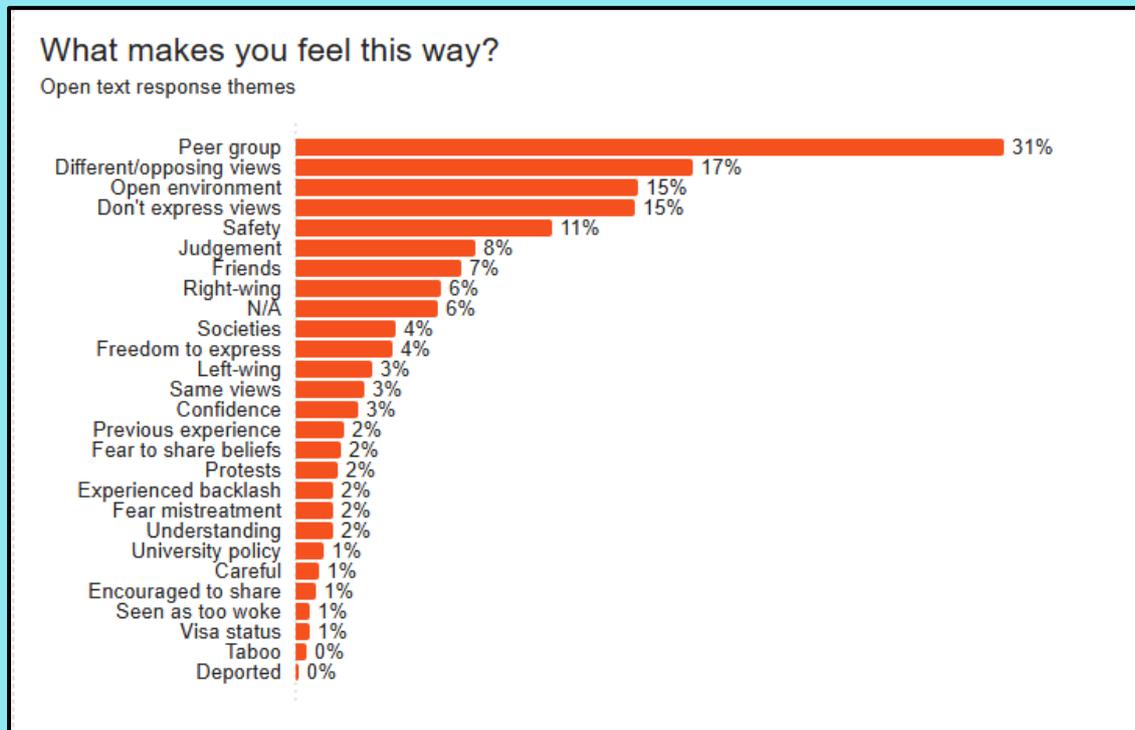

What makes you feel this way?
Open text response themes

Theme	Percentage
Peer group	31%
Different/opposing views	17%
Open environment	15%
Don't express views	15%
Safety	11%
Judgement	8%
Friends	7%
Right-wing	6%
N/A	6%
Societies	4%
Freedom to express	4%
Left-wing	3%
Same views	3%
Confidence	3%
Previous experience	2%
Fear to share beliefs	2%
Protests	2%
Experienced backlash	2%
Fear mistreatment	2%
Understanding	2%
University policy	1%
Careful	1%
Encouraged to share	1%
Seen as too woke	1%
Visa status	1%
Taboo	0%
Deported	0%

Figure 28– Question 14a: What makes students feel this way? (Open text response themes)

When students were asked what makes them feel that they can or cannot safely express their political views at university, 31% of students discussed their peer group, ranging from being encouraged to share their opinion through others expressing the same, to some not feeling comfortable due to observing people with extreme views that are not accepting, and some simply feeling uncomfortable about discussing their views with people they are not close to. Following from this, 17% also discussed that people with different/opposing views affect how safe they feel to express their view, with some discussing nervousness in discussing their opinions with someone that might not accept them, aggressively disagree with them or hold beliefs that they find offensive. (Fig. 28)

> "Lots of people voice their opinions, even if conflicting, which makes me feel as though I can also join in when I have different views" ~ Year 2, ESE student
>
> "The protests and arguments I've seen and how aggressive some people represent their opinions that is doesn't feel safe to object" ~ Masters, HASS student
>
> "Most of the time it feels safe to do so, but have encountered problems with people with opposing political views taking this as an opportunity to attack my personal identity feel less safe" ~ Year 4, ESE student

15% of students however, discussed the open environment on campus emboldening them to voice their views. 15% of student feel more neutral due to not discussing their political views or feeling a need to express them. 11% of students discussed safety, both in the context of feeling safe on campus to share their opinion and not feeling in danger, whilst others observe protests and aggressive arguments and feel unsafe to do so. 8% discuss judgement, with some feeling there is little judgement in the university, whilst many others fear judgement for expressing their views , but 7% express feeling more comfortable discussing with friends where they fear judgement less. (Fig. 28)

> "University gives us freedom and provide platform for us to share different perspectives" ~ Year 2, ESE student
>
> "The uni makes its inclusion and equality policies clear so I know if I faced any sort of harassment for expressing political views about things like lgbtq+ rights I could get support." ~ Year 2, ESE student
>
> "The protests and arguments I've seen and how aggressive some people represent their opinions that is doesn't feel safe to object." ~ Masters, HASS student
>
> "I feel comfortable discussing with my friends at university, but I don't know if I'd be comfortable expressing my views in a room full of people who I know may have differing views." ~ Year 4, ESE student
>
> "It depends on the context. In some settings, such as structured academic discussions, I feel comfortable expressing my views, but in more informal or social spaces I'm more cautious due to fear of misunderstanding or conflict." ~ Masters, HLS student

Students in the focus group were then asked if they spend more time with people whose political views are similar or different to theirs, as this may influence how they view politics at the university, and affect how comfortable they are in discussing politics with their friends. 44% of students in the focus group said mostly the same, with 44% instead saying that they don't think about this. Interestingly, 11% said that they spend more time with people with very different opinions.

When students in the focus group were asked whether they find it difficult to discuss politics with their friends 44% felt it is not difficult at all, with a further 11% finding it is somewhat difficult. The rest, 44%, said that it depends on the topic, with some harder to discuss than others.

We asked students in the focus group to expand on what makes them feel this way. For those who said it was not at all difficult, students said it was easy to discuss the following topics with their friend: current affairs, injustices (e.g. genocides or immigration controversy), equality and equity, the Green party, Syria and Kurdistan, the Epstein files, Trump and US politics, religion and gender, classism at university, protests taking place (e.g. alt-right, Palestine, Israel, Iran, America). Some students discussed being able to have engaging conversations surrounding these topics no matter what political affiliation as long as the conversation is respectful. Students seem to feel more comfortable discussing things with their friends as they trust them to be more respectful, and perhaps because the friends they surround themselves with are of similar political views so there is less likely to be disagreements or offense taken.

Some students said that they do not usually talk about politics with their friends, only doing so if something very interesting happens, such as changes in USA politics. Some topics that students said they find difficult to discuss with friends include: political parties, class, the cost of living, religion, sexual orientation, freedom of expression, and protests across the country. Students said they feel this way since these topics can be more controversial and more likely to offend friends with different opinions or backgrounds. One student expressed that they find it hard because they don't want to offend anyone or come off as ignorant, so they only comment on topics that they feel more informed about, such as what's going on in America, but not on topics that they feel less informed on.

Students in the focus group were then asked whether they find it hard to discuss politics with people they don't know at university, to which everyone said they find it difficult. 67% find it somewhat difficult, with the rest, 33%, finding it extremely difficult. When asked why they feel this way, the most common theme was not wanting to offend people, start disagreements or incur judgement since they do not know their political stance. Students mentioned not wanting to get off on the wrong foot, not being aware of everything so not wanting to seem rude or offend anyone, wanting to be respectful of others.

They also discussed how the diversity of views held by students can make it difficult to know if they're speaking to someone who shares their opinion or holds others, making it difficult to bring up politics with people they don't know as it could create an uncomfortable situation. However, students also expressed that they think students who hold more extreme political views differ from this and appear to be more comfortable sharing their opinions with students who they don't know which some said can be uncomfortable at times.

Students mentioned overhearing people say things they found to be "offensive" or "ignorant", with classism being very prevalent. One mentioned that the university seems to avoid discussing politics, as do students who do not seem to be interested in politics.

Students in the focus group were asked to discuss more generally what has made dialogue about politics with students easier and what has made it more difficult, within small groups. Things that students in the focus group agreed made it easier to discuss politics with students where when the students that they are discussing with are open-minded, willing to listen, understanding, and calm. When there is a sense of trust or agreement, and the discussion feels conversational, students feel more comfortable when discussing politics. Students mentioned that environments such as classrooms or protests feel more appropriate to discuss politics in. Students find the diversity of backgrounds at Exeter make it easier to learn more about politics and different perspectives.

Conversely, students in the focus group agreed that discussing politics with students felt more difficult when people are insensitive, highly opinionated, unwilling to change, defensive or disinterested in politics. When people are more ignorant or judgmental students find it harder to discuss politics. They mentioned the private/state school divide, as well as the divide between domestic and international politics, feeling that generally domestic students tend to be less interested in international politics.

They discussed how protests are not talked about enough, and that they feel that politics is not addressed by both the institution and students, finding that people have depersonalised views where if it doesn't affect them then they do not care. Students find that they don't want to talk about politics out of fear of clashing views and ideas as well as worrying about hurting anyone who might be more sensitive to specific topics. Environments that students mentioned feeling uncomfortable discussing politics in were at societies and gathering of friends, feeling that it is more inappropriate to bring it up there.

How much do you agree with the following statement: Since coming to the University of Exeter, I've become more socially aware

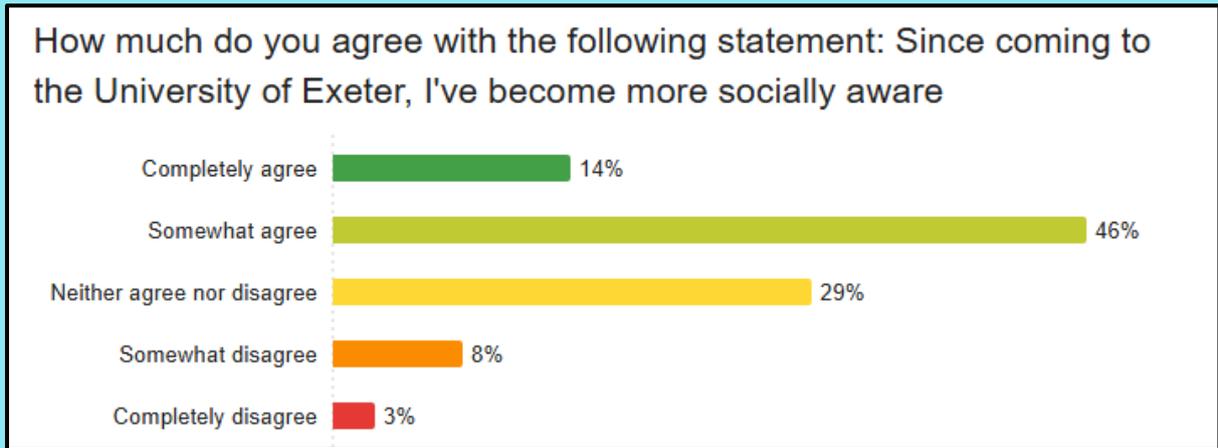|	
Completely agree	14%
Somewhat agree	46%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%
Somewhat disagree	8%
Completely disagree	3%

Figure 29- Question 15: How much do students agree with the following statement: Since coming to the University of Exeter, I've become more socially aware.

60% of students agree that since coming to the University of Exeter they have become more socially aware, including 14% who completely agree and 4% who somewhat agree. Only 11% of students disagree, with 8% somewhat disagreeing and 3% completely disagreeing. 29% of students neither agree nor disagree. (Fig. 29)

How much do you agree with the following statement: Since coming to the University of Exeter, I've become more socially aware

Breakout: How have you found the politics to be at university since starting?

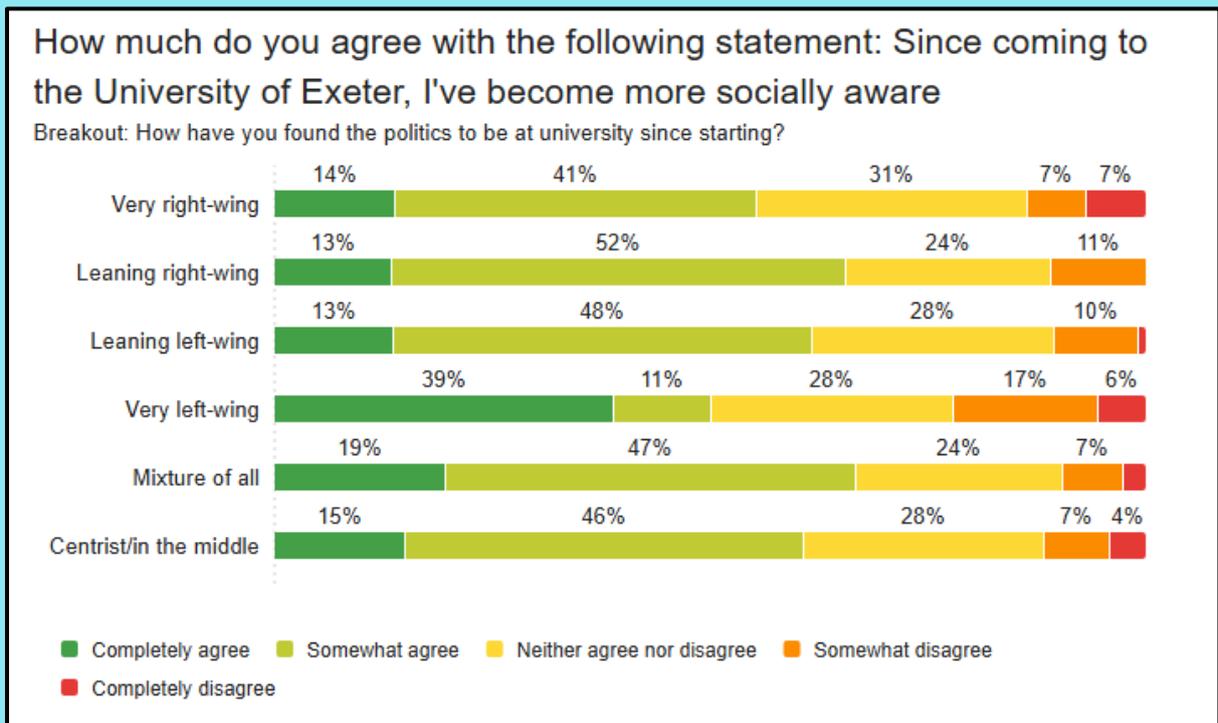|	Completely agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Completely disagree
Very right-wing	14%	41%	31%	7%	7%
Leaning right-wing	13%	52%	24%	11%	
Leaning left-wing	13%	48%	28%	10%	
Very left-wing	39%	11%	28%	17%	6%
Mixture of all	19%	47%	24%	7%	
Centrist/in the middle	15%	46%	28%	7%	4%

Figure 30- Question 15: How much do students agree with the following statement: Since coming to the University of Exeter, I've become more socially aware. (Breakout: Question 13: How have students found the politics to be university since starting?)

Most students follow a similar trend of agreement about whether they have become more socially aware since being at the University of Exeter when we look

at this across how students have found the politics at Exeter since starting, with the exception of the those who find it either very left or right-wing. 31% of students who find the politics at university to be very right-wing neither agree nor disagree that they are more socially aware since being at university, which is the highest across all groups, and 14% at least somewhat disagree which is the second highest across all groups. Those who find the university to be very left-wing had the highest percentage of students who disagreed with the statement with 23% disagreeing at least somewhat and only 50% agreeing at least somewhat, which is lower than all other groups. This is perhaps because those that perceive the university as more extreme feel that they were already very socially aware, and that this has not changed much since being at university. (Fig. 30)

What makes you feel this way?
Open text response themes

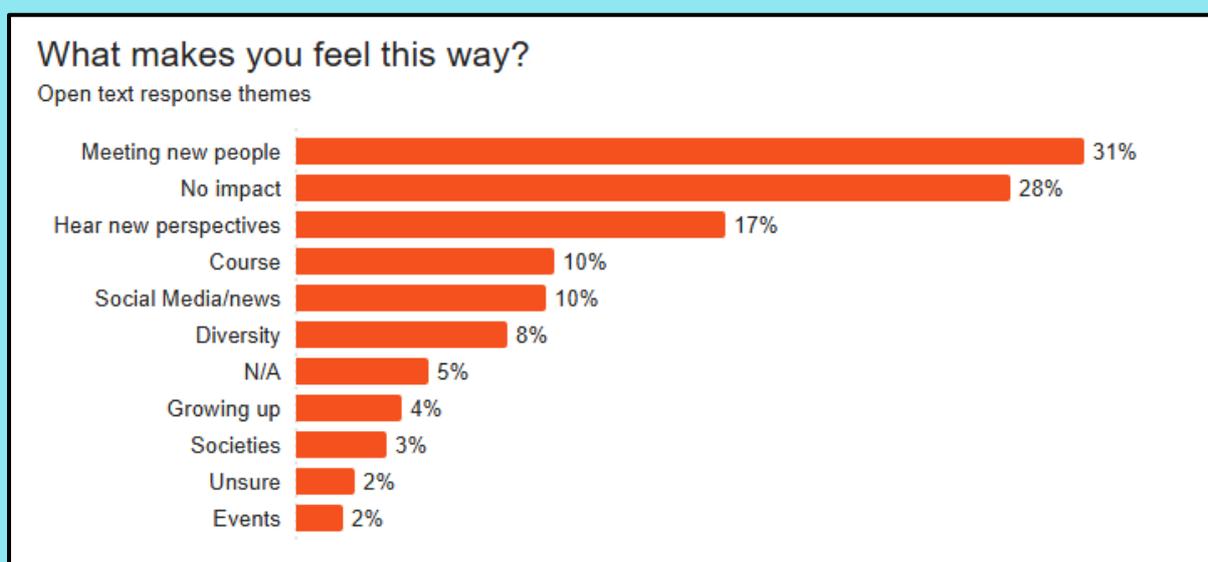| Theme	%
Meeting new people	31%
No impact	28%
Hear new perspectives	17%
Course	10%
Social Media/news	10%
Diversity	8%
N/A	5%
Growing up	4%
Societies	3%
Unsure	2%
Events	2%

Figure 31- Question 15a: What makes you feel this way? (Open text responses)

When students were asked what makes them think they are or are not more socially aware since coming to the University of Exeter, 31% of students discussed how meeting new people at university, from different backgrounds has helped them to be more socially aware by introducing them to issues they may not have encountered before. Following this, 17% of students mentioned how hearing new perspectives at university has developed their social awareness by enlightening them with new ideas and viewpoints, encouraging them to challenge their own and others. 8% also discussed the diversity at university having an impact on their social awareness. (Fig. 31)

"Being at university has exposed me to a wider range of people, perspectives, and social issues through my course, discussions, and campus life, which has increased my awareness even if I'm still learning and developing my views." ~ Masters, HLS student

"Being in an environment which allows us to interact with people from varying backgrounds and walks of life" ~ Masters, HLS student

"I have met and heard the views of people that I never would have seen in my hometown. Also, becoming educated helps you understand the world around you in much more depth, found myself to be far more tolerant and understanding." ~ Masters, HASS student

"University opens you up to a huge variety of people from all different backgrounds, cultures, faiths, beliefs, socio-economic situations, etc so you learn a lot" ~ Year 4, ESE student

28% of students said that the university had no impact on their social awareness, with some claiming this is due to lack of action/involvement. However most said it is because there were already very socially aware before starting university and it has not changed significantly since being at university, since they are still socially aware. 4% discussed that the university itself had less of an impact, and more growing up and living independent has increased their social awareness as they have become more mature and interested. (Fig. 31)

"Before coming to university, I would still carry out the same sort of research/ news reading to gain a wider understanding of what is happening in the world and country." ~ Year 2, HASS student

"I was quite socially aware before starting uni and don't believe my uni experience had impacted that in any way" ~ Year 3, HLS student

"I was already quite socially aware but I think as an adult who can vote and say things i've felt more personally involved and therefore put more effort into it." ~ Year 4, ESE student

"I feel like I've definitely become more socially aware, however probably more through the experience of growing up and living independently rather than as a direct result of the university" ~ Year 4, ESE student

10% feel that their course has impacted their social awareness by exposing them to new content, or deeper research. 10% also said that social media and the news

have impacted their social awareness, often making them more informed. 3% feel that societies have impacted their social awareness, either through being a part of one that focuses on social issues or encountering/observing societies. A further 2% mentioned events, including Guild organised events, environmental efforts from the university and protests that happen on campus or in the city. (Fig. 31)

"Within my history course we cover a lot of modern political events and their impacts overall, as well as just generally growing up and becoming more aware of what is happening around me" ~ Year 2, HASS student

"My course as well as the guild had built my social awareness" ~ Year 1, HASS student

"I feel the university has a lot of programmes and initiatives on helping climate change" ~ Other, ESE student

Do you think that the University or the Guild should help students become more socially aware?

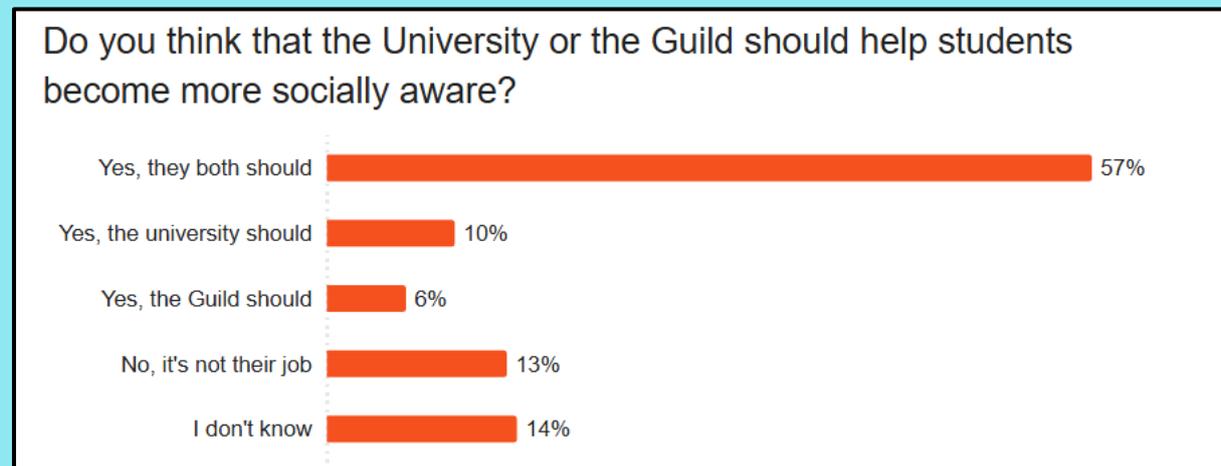|	
Yes, they both should	57%
Yes, the university should	10%
Yes, the Guild should	6%
No, it's not their job	13%
I don't know	14%

Figure 32- Question 16: Do you think that the University or the Guild should help students become more socially aware?

57% of students think that both the University and the Guild should help students become more socially aware, with a further 10% thinking that the University should, and 6% thinking that the Guild should. Only 13% feel that it is not their job, and so no, they should not. 14% of students do not know or are unsure. (Fig. 32)
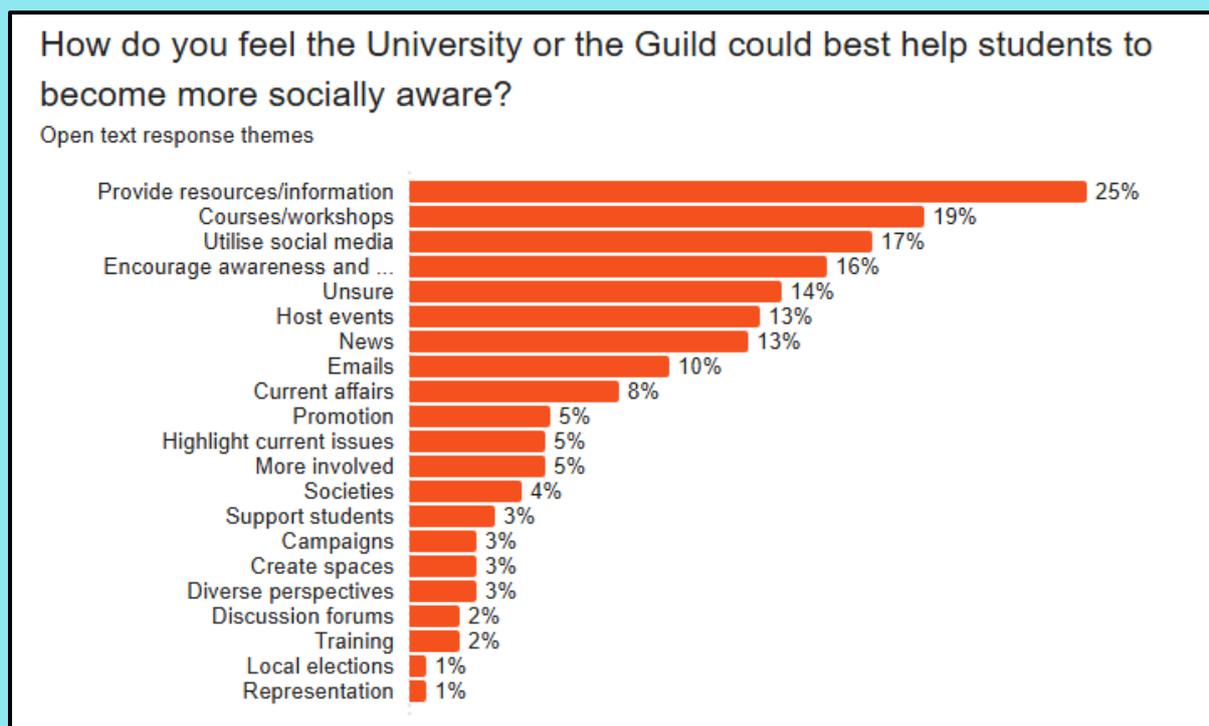
How do you feel the University or the Guild could best help students to become more socially aware?

Open text response themes

Theme	Percentage
Provide resources/information	25%
Courses/workshops	19%
Utilise social media	17%
Encourage awareness and ...	16%
Unsure	14%
Host events	13%
News	13%
Emails	10%
Current affairs	8%
Promotion	5%
Highlight current issues	5%
More involved	5%
Societies	4%
Support students	3%
Campaigns	3%
Create spaces	3%
Diverse perspectives	3%
Discussion forums	2%
Training	2%
Local elections	1%
Representation	1%

Figure 33- Question 16a: How do you feel the University or the Guild could best help students to become more socially aware? (Open text response themes)

When students who thought that either the University, the Guild or both should help students to become more socially aware were asked how the University or the Guild should help: 25% of students suggested that they could provide resources or information. 19% proposed that this could be done through courses or workshops, hosting events (13%) or through utilising social media (17%), since many students stay informed through different forms of social media (Fig. 7), with a further 10% also suggesting emails. 16% of students think the Guild and the University should encourage awareness and engagement, with students also mentioning promoting events and issues, highlighting current issues and local elections. Other students suggested discussion forums to experience more diverse perspectives and creating spaces for discussion and learning. (Fig. 33)

"I think recommending different news sources and highlighting what biases they might have would be a good place to start by helping people navigate the information out there. I know the student newspaper does its part to help spread awareness of social issues so maybe invest in this more. I also find it hard to stay up to date with things going on in the news, as it changes so quickly so offering timelines for major social issues and events to help students track the progress might be nice. So much info is already out there, its just about making this accessible and approachable to people who don't study politics or know where to start on the issue." ~ Masters, ESE student

"The University or the Guild could help by providing more accessible information, workshops, and discussions on social issues, and by promoting inclusive events that encourage students to engage and learn at their own pace." ~ Other, ESE student

"Emails, newsletters. provide the resources, but it is up to individuals if they choose to follow them! People tend to be less tolerant if views or ideas are thrust upon them, provide resources that entice curiosity without forcing a viewpoint on them." ~ Masters, HASS student

Students in the focus group were asked how they feel the Guild can better support them and how it should be involved in helping students become more socially aware. Students discussed having a platform for students to express their views, with some thinking this would be better if it was anonymous, and others suggesting open mic nights for students in different groups to share their lived experiences. Students also feel that the Guild should promote more sensitivity amongst both students and professors, and some suggest taking societies off of social media. They mentioned wanting statements of support from the Guild as well as regularly organised (weekly or monthly) support groups that students can attended to help manage stress.

Some students in the focus group feel that the Guild news outlets should speak more about politics to make sure that important things get the necessary exposure, including both domestic and international issues. They suggested that another way that this could be done is through awareness booths in the forum where students can learn and discuss different issues, and where the Guld can help students with becoming more socially aware.

Students were concerned about bias from the Guild of they are reporting on social issues and politics, feeling that this is unavoidable and that the Guild should stay neutral. Students feel that the best way to navigate this is by showing students ways to get involved in politics instead by neutrally giving information about how to be politically aware. They feel that the Guild should recommend and trusted

news sources and outlets. They feel that this should have priority over general political information since a general overview might be biased, it is better for students to read the information themselves and form their own opinions however they want verified sources from the Guild so that they can trust the information that they are getting.

The focus group was then asked about whether they would be interested specifically in a monthly Guild newsletter about current social issues and events, and there was a mix of responses. Half of the students expressed that they would be interested, feeling that it would help to keep them up-to-date every month and that they could trust it is verified information, and would be happy to receive this through social media and the newsletter. They also suggested that it might be better if it is twice a month due to the amount of changes than can occur in a short time. This was also a reason given for a student that felt they would probably not be interested, feeling that it wouldn't be frequent enough or go into enough depth. Another student also mentioned feeling unsure, thinking it is unnecessary for the Guild to do this since social media already does. A couple of students stated that they were uninterested in a Guild newsletter since they use news sources and only that. They expressed that this should only be the responsibility of the Guild if the issue has a direct impact on the students in order to avoid bias. Generally, students feel it would be better for the Guild to direct them to verified sources of information to avoid bias whilst still helping to keep them up-to-date.

Conclusions

1. What topics do our students keep up to date with and why?

International conflict is the topic that students keep most up-to-date (49%), followed by social inequalities (43%), artificial intelligence (41%), discrimination (40%) and education and student rights (30%). Only 7% of students responded that they don't pay attention to any of these topics (Fig. 1). We see slightly more interest in employment from international students, 11%, compared to UK

students, 7%. We also see that twice as many international students are informed on immigration compared to UK students (12% vs 6% respectively). (Fig. 2)

33% feel that these topics were relevant to them or affect them directly. 23% of students said the topics they selected were interesting, and 23% say these topics were important to them. 19% mentioned that these topics had the most impact and that these topics were in the news a lot. (Fig. 3) The primary reason for students not paying attention was being restrained by time (43%), followed by 32% of students who don't look for information, and 23% who find the topics to be sad, depressing and/or stressful. (Fig. 4)

32%, are actively searching for information on social issues a few times a week. 12% are looking daily and only 4% are looking multiple times a day. 15% are actively searching once a week. 14% of students are only actively searching for information when something significant has happened. (Fig. 5) 32% see this information without prompting multiple times a day, 29% have this occur daily and 21% responded a few times a week. (Fig. 6)

Most students are getting their information on social issues from Instagram (75%): followed by online news outlets (64%), TikTok (44%), news specific apps (31%), news on TV (29%) and YouTube (22%). (Fig. 7). When students are deciding if their information is coming from a reliable source 48% mention the source itself. 34% of students feel their information is reliable if it is coming from a news outlet. 32% of students are fact checking their information by further looking it up. (Fig. 8)

2. How socially aware do students feel?

56% of students feel that being socially aware is a high priority for them. 24% feel that it is a top priority and 18% feel that it is a medium priority, and 2% feel it is low priority. (Fig. 9) 70% of students think that they are somewhat socially aware. 19% feel extremely social aware, 6% feel neutral and only 5% feel unaware. (Fig. 10). 39% of students who feel that being socially aware is a top priority rated themselves as extremely socially aware, with 60% rating themselves as somewhat aware. For students who said it is a high priority, 16% said extremely, and 77% said somewhat. Students who prioritise being socially aware more rate themselves as more socially aware. For those that chose low priority there is an even split of 30% for each that rate themselves as somewhat aware, neutral, and somewhat unaware with 10% feeling extremely unaware. (Fig. 11)

45% of students report feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of information on social issues that they experience. 10% feel extremely overwhelmed. 41% feel good about the level of social information that they experience. Only 3% of students feel underwhelmed by the information they are experiencing. (Fig. 12). For students who feel extremely aware of social issues, 63% feel overwhelmed to some extent and 37% feel good about the level of social information that they receive. This is slightly less for students who are somewhat

aware, (55% overwhelmed, 42% good), and students who are somewhat and extremely unaware (42% and 50% overwhelmed, 50% and 0% good, 8% and 50% underwhelmed, respectively). Generally, we see more feelings of overwhelm in the socially aware students and more feelings of underwhelm in the socially unaware students. (Fig. 13).

50% of students say that they are paying attention to social issues in the level that feels comfortable for them. 29% of students feel obligated to pay attention to social issues even when it can be hard, and 32% choose to. 14% of students have chosen to pay less attention to social issues because it was hard. 21% of students want to know more about social issues but have too much going on. 18% of students want to know more about social issues but are worried about the impact on their mental health. (Fig. 14).

3. How aware are students about what's going on at the University of Exeter?

The most common ways that students keep updated with what's happening at the University are: University emails (88%), University social media (69%), friends/course mates (48%), Guild emails (47%), Guild social media (40%), the MyExeter App (28%), ELE2 (27%), lecturers (27%) and societies or posters/screens around campus (26%). (Fig. 15)

3% of students who feel that they always know what's going on feel that they know what's going on at the University, with 57% that mostly know what's going on. 12% of students do not think that they know enough about what's going on, with a further 2% feeling that they never know about what's going on and 26% of students feel unsure. (Fig. 16)

When students where asked why they felt the way they do about how up-to-date they are about what's happening at the University, the most common themes were: 49% of students feeling that there are barriers that prevent them from accessing useful information to keep them updated, feeling that things are easy to miss, or information is hard to find or follow (49%), communication tools (45%) such as emails or social media, measures of success (38%) in staying up to date or attending events and 34% feeling generally knowledgeable. (Fig. 17)

4. What do students think of the social atmosphere at the University of Exeter?

Before starting University, 24% of students expected the politics to be right-wing leaning, compared to 18% that expected it to be left-wing leaning. 10% expected it to be very right-wing, and 8% very left-wing. 11% expected a mixture of all, and 10% expected it to be centrist/in the middle. 14% stated that they did not think

about the politics at university before starting, with a further 5% saying that they do not know. (Fig. 18) Women and those who prefer not to say expected the politics to be more right leaning, compared to men and non-binary/genderfluid people who expected it to more left leaning. (Fig. 19)

Since starting at university, the top response shifted from right-wing leaning to a mixture of all with 22%, which is double the percentage of students who expected it to be before starting. Less students found university politics to be leaning more right-wing than expected, but this still remains higher than those expecting it and finding it more left-wing. Fewer students found politics to be one of the extremes than expected. Students have found more of a mixture of opinions and more centrist views than they expected to. (Fig. 18) (Fig. 20) Overall, women have found the politics to be more right leaning or a mixture of all, whilst men have a more even split between left and right leaning. Non-binary/genderfluid students have found it to be more centrist or more of a mixture of all, similar to those who prefer not to say. (Fig. 19) (Fig. 21)

On average, 37% of students found that their original predictions were correct and that their initial expectations reflect what they have found since starting university. More students who were expecting an extreme, either very left or right-wing, found it to be so compared to any other group; perhaps because these students may be seeking these spaces more or be more politically active than others. (Fig. 22)

More students who consider themselves to be socially aware perceive university politics to be more right-wing than left-wing, whilst more students who consider themselves to be socially unaware perceive the university to be more left-wing. Students who consider themselves to be more socially aware also found the politics to be more of a mixture of all than those who are unaware. (Fig. 23)

67% of students feel that politics at university have not impacted their experience. 16% of students feel that politics have affected their sense of belonging and community and where they can fit in and feel comfortable at university. 9% mentioned discussions and debates regarding politics, with most feeling that this has benefited them in terms of learning more. (Fig. 25)

18% of students completely agree that they can safely express their political views at university and 44% somewhat agree. 27% of students neither agree nor disagree. Only 11% of students at least somewhat disagree. (Fig. 26) Those who have found it to be one of the extremes, either vey left or right-wing, feel less safe to express their views. (Fig. 27)

When students were asked what makes them feel that they can or cannot safely express their political views at university, 31% of students discussed their peer group, ranging from being encouraged to share their opinion through others expressing the same, to some not feeling comfortable due to observing people with extreme views that are not accepting, and some simply feeling uncomfortable about discussing their views with people they are not close to.

Following from this, 17% also discussed that people with different/opposing views affect how safe they feel to express their view. (Fig. 28)

15% of students discussed the open environment on campus emboldening them to voice their views. 15% do not feel a need to express them. 6% of students discussed people holding more right-wing views, including reform and freedom supporters. This was mostly in the context of feeling weary or uncomfortable and 3% of students mentioned left-wing views. (Fig. 28)

14% of students completely agree that since coming to the University of Exeter they have become more socially aware and 4% somewhat agree. Only 8% somewhat disagree and 3% completely disagree. 29% of students neither agree nor disagree. (Fig. 29) Those who perceive student politics as leaning very strongly to one side of the spectrum disagreed more, perhaps because they feel that they were already very socially aware, and that this has not changed much since being at university. (Fig. 30)

31% of students discussed how meeting new people at university, from different backgrounds has helped them to be more socially aware. Following this, 17% of students mentioned how hearing new perspectives at university has developed their social awareness. (Fig. 31) 28% of students said that the university had no impact on their social awareness, most said it is because there were already very socially aware before starting university. (Fig. 31)

57% of students think that both the University and the Guild should help students become more socially aware, with a further 10% thinking that the University should, and 6% thinking that the Guild should. Only 13% feel that it is not their job, and so no, they should not. 14% of students do not know or are unsure. (Fig. 32) Students generally feel that they should help by providing easy access to reliable information or running workshops or events where students can become more educated surrounding social issues. (Fig. 33)

Recommendations

- The University and/or Guild could work on developing support strategies and resources specifically to help students mitigate the impact social issues are having on their mental health
- The University and/or the Guild could provide resources to help students learn how to identify reliable sources of information
- The University and/or Guild could explore ways to streamline their communications so that students don't miss out on important information and aren't overwhelmed with having to find it amongst the other information they receive
- The University and/or the Guild could continue to support an open environment that encourages students to share political views and engage in conversation
    - Continue to advertise policies related to inclusion and equality
    - Continue to advertise support services for students who are struggling and/or have experienced harassment or discrimination
    - Could explore running workshops or providing resources that help upskill students on communicating with each other
- The University and/or Guild could consider running events or workshops related to social issues that impact student life

Focus Group Recommendations:

- Provide verified sources of information to help students stay socially aware whilst the Guild remains neutral.
- Help students develop the skills and spaces to safety discuss their experiences and views
- Open mic nights for students to share lived experiences and a safe designated environment to discuss politics
- Support groups for students to discuss and manage their stress
- Promote more sensitivity around politics and how to have constructive discussions
- Student news-outlets could discuss more domestic and international issues that the student body are interested in
- Organise awareness booths in the forum

External Resources

If you want to read some more around this topic, you could start with the following articles:

- [Public Opinions and Social Trends](#), Office for National Statistics
- [Politics and Social Media](#), National Centre for Social Research
- [Understanding the New Generation of Voters](#), National Centre for Social Research
- [Where will Students Hold the Power in the 2024 Elections?](#), Higher Education Policy Institute
- [Supporting Free Speech on Campus](#), WONKHE
- [The post-matrix university–trust, relevance, and the politics of plugging back in](#), WONKE

If you are a current University of Exeter student, please find some resources below:

- [University of Exeter Wellbeing Services](#), University of Exeter
- [Guild Wellbeing Hub](#), Exeter Students' Guild
- [University of Exeter Freedom of Speech Policy](#), University of Exeter
- [Campaigns](#), Exeter Students' Guild

Demographics

Our panel of 1000 students is demographically representative of the University of Exeter's student population but, due to varying response rate on a month-to-month basis, the demographics of this data change survey-to-survey.

The demographics of this report's respondents are illustrated below.

*PNS = Prefer not to Say

Category	Panel Total	Response Total	Category	Panel Total	Response Total
Faculty			Gender		
ESE	363	241 (66%)	Female	721	506 (70%)
HAS	379	260 (69%)	Male	236	139 (59%)
HLS	248	172 (69%)	Non-Binary/ Genderfluid	31	22 (71%)
INTO	10	3 (30%)	PNS*	12	9 (75%)
Campus			PNS*	12	
Streatham	831	558 (67%)	Identification with Gender Assigned at Birth		
St Luke's	142	102 (72%)	Yes	946	638 (67%)
Distance	27	16 (59%)	Sometimes	22	13 (59%)
			No	23	18 (78%)
Domicile			PNS*	9	7 (78%)
UK	739	531 (72%)	Ethnicity		
International (EU)	47	23 (49%)	White	625	445 (71%)
			Latin	13	9 (69%)
International (Rest of World)	214	122 (57%)	Black	36	20 (56%)
Mode of Study			Asian	240	142 (59%)
Full-Time	951	645 (68%)	Arab	12	8 (67%)
Part-Time	49	31 (63%)	Mixed	51	35 (69%)

Study Level			Other	11	9 (82%)
1st Year	250	149 (60%)	PNS*	12	8 (67%)
2nd Year	228	172 (75%)	Sexual Orientation		
3rd Year	172	132 (77%)	Gay	18	11 (61%)
4th Year	54	42 (78%)	Lesbian	24	19 (80%)
5th Year	13	11 (85%)	Bisexual	142	100 (70%)
Masters	220	128 (58%)	Pansexual	18	13 (72%)
Other	63	42 (67%)	Asexual	19	17 (89%)
			Queer	30	20 (67%)
Age Bracket			Heterosexual	636	422 (66%)
Under 20	553	384 (69%)	Other	2	
21-30	396	260 (66%)	Unsure	23	16 (70%)
31-40	35	22 (63%)	PNS*	88	57 (65%)
41-50	15	10 (67%)	Disability Status		
51+	1	0 (0%)	No known disability	647	432 (67%)
Widening Participation			Learning disability	110	32 (29%)
Parent	17	8 (47%)	Physical disability	45	13 (29%)
Carer	21	17 (81%)	Mental health condition	190	95 (50%)
Care experienced or care leaver	4	4 (100%)	Other	23	17 (74%)
Estranged from family	12	9 (75%)	PNS*	56	40 (71%)
Refugee or asylum seeker	1	1 (100%)			
None of the above	945	637 (67%)			