Students, sustainability and employability

NUS and HEA research into student attitudes and behaviours around sustainable development
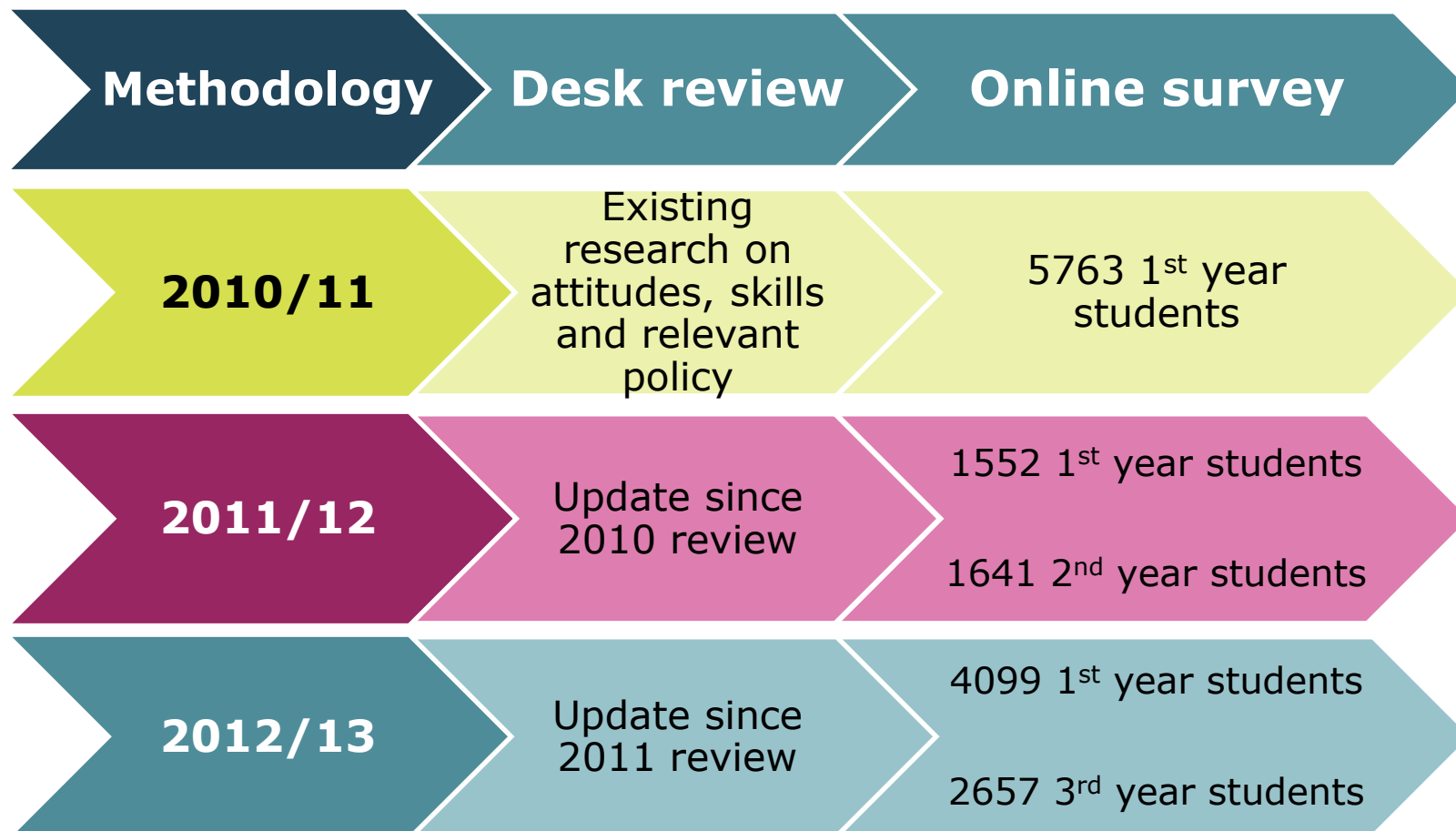
- Background to NUS' research
- Methodology
- Key findings

Background to the research

This research has been carried out over three years (2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13) against a backdrop of...

- Approximately 1 million unemployed young people (16-24 year olds)

- Falling graduate employment levels and working in non-graduate jobs (Higher Education Statistics Agency)

- Within higher education, Education for Sustainable Development received increasing policy relevance through climate change and the 'green economy'

- An increasing focus on the idea of 'graduate attributes' upon leaving higher education

- Changing funding landscape within higher education including increase in maximum fees to £9000 in 2012

Methodology

Methodology	Desk review	Online survey
2010/11	Existing research on attitudes, skills and relevant policy	5763 1st year students
2011/12	Update since 2010 review	1552 1st year students 1641 2nd year students
2012/13	Update since 2011 review	4099 1st year students 2657 3rd year students

Year 3 (2012/13) London results

- 429 First year respondents
- 225 Third year respondents

Filtered by all London HEIs, and responses received from the following institutions:

Birkbeck
Brunel
Goldsmiths
Guildhall School of Music and Drama
Imperial
Institute of Education
King's College
Kingston
London Met
LSE
LSBU
Middlesex
Queen Mary
Roehampton
Royal Holloway
St George's

St Mary's
West London
City
Royal Veterinary
East London
Westminster
Trinity Laban
UCL
UL
University of the Arts

Skills for sustainability

Understand people's relationship to nature

Act as a responsible citizen locally & globally

Analyse using many subjects
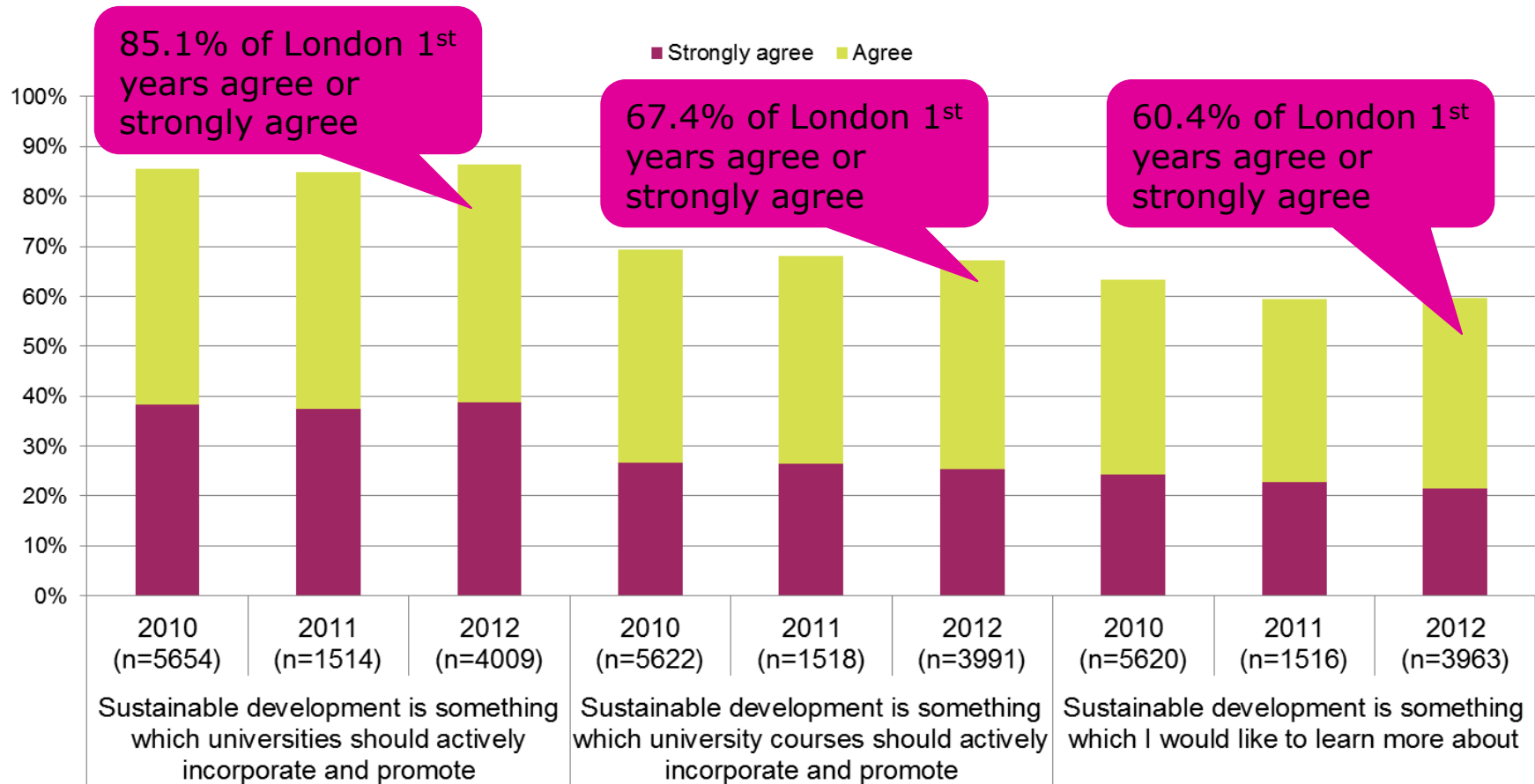
Use resources efficiently

Plan for the long term as well as the short term

Consider the ethical issues of your subject

Adapt to new situations

Think of the whole system and the links when considering new ideas

ESD is in demand and continues to be seen as a core agenda for universities

85.1% of London 1st years agree or strongly agree

67.4% of London 1st years agree or strongly agree

60.4% of London 1st years agree or strongly agree

■ Strongly agree   ■ Agree

| 2010 (n=5654) | 2011 (n=1514) | 2012 (n=4009) | 2010 (n=5622) | 2011 (n=1518) | 2012 (n=3991) | 2010 (n=5620) | 2011 (n=1516) | 2012 (n=3963) |

Sustainable development is something which universities should actively incorporate and promote

Sustainable development is something which university courses should actively incorporate and promote

Sustainable development is something which I would like to learn more about

First years 2010 - 2012

Q.46: To what extent, if at all, would you say that you personally agree with the following statements? (Balance: no response).
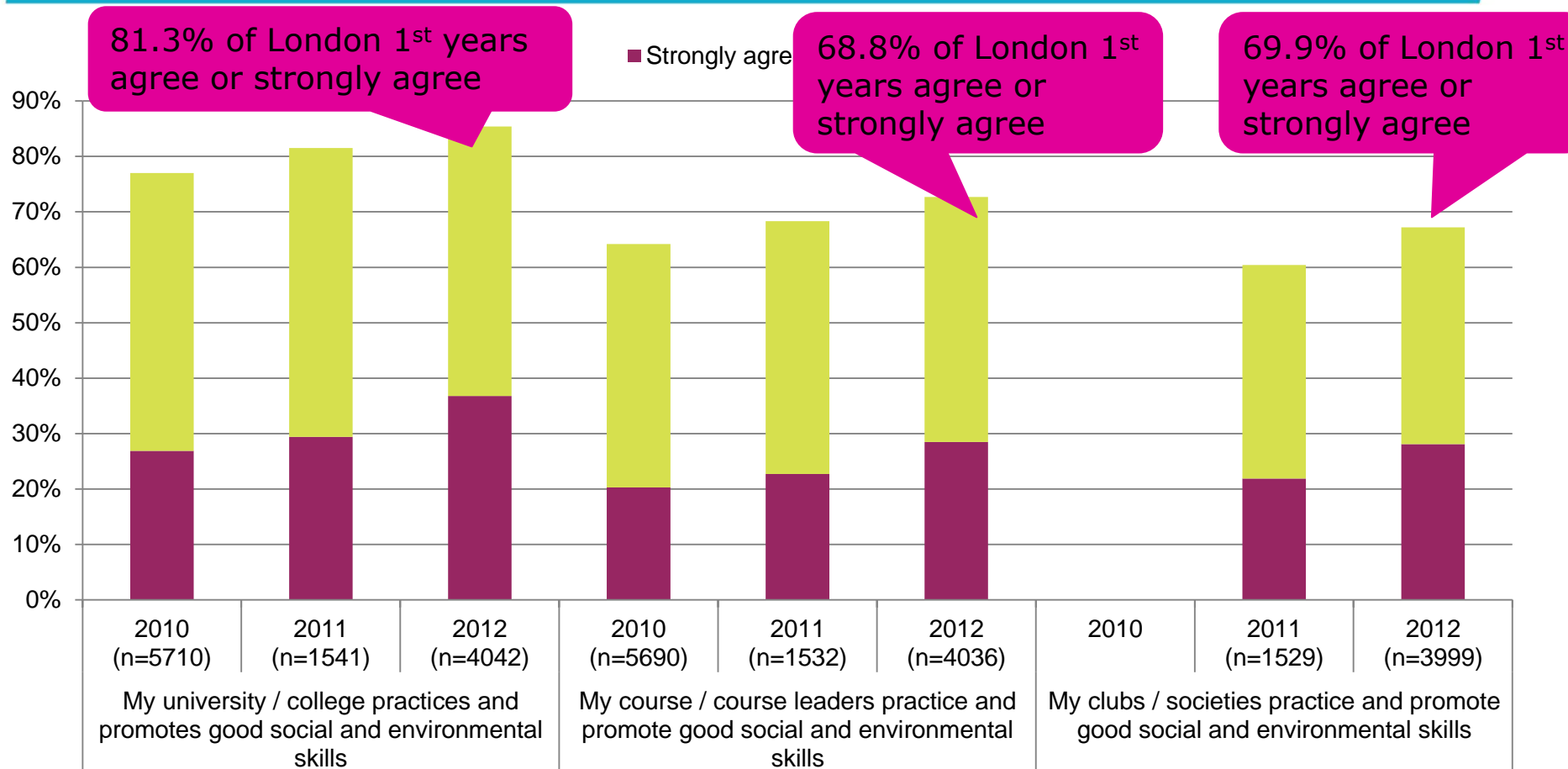
nus
national union of students

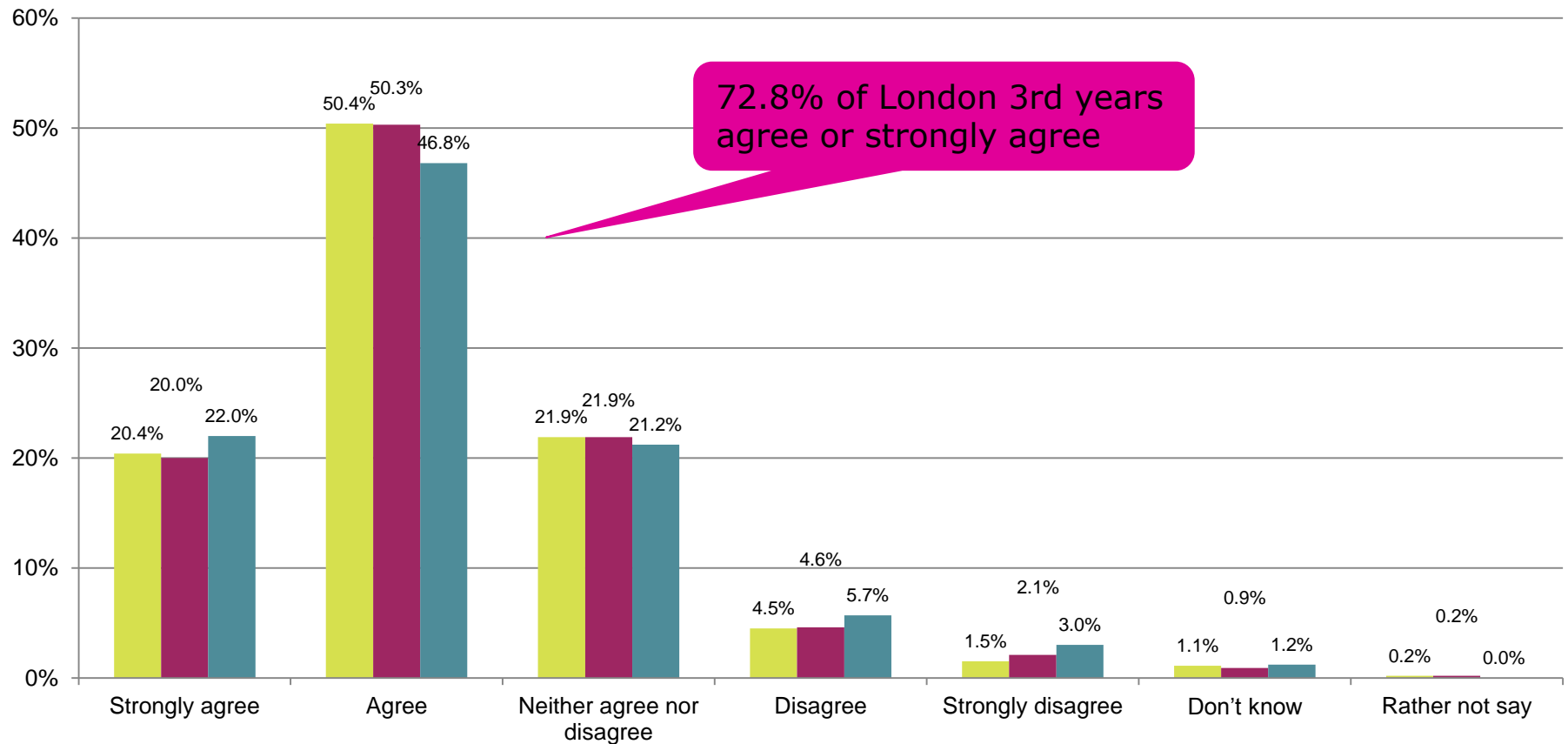London 1st year students

London 3rd year students

national union of students

Evidence of strong, and increasing, inclusion of environmental and social skills across the board by institutions

81.3% of London 1st years agree or strongly agree

68.8% of London 1st years agree or strongly agree

69.9% of London 1st years agree or strongly agree

■ Strongly agree

	2010 (n=5710)	2011 (n=1541)	2012 (n=4042)	2010 (n=5690)	2011 (n=1532)	2012 (n=4036)	2010	2011 (n=1529)	2012 (n=3999)

My university / college practices and promotes good social and environmental skills

My course / course leaders practice and promote good social and environmental skills

My clubs / societies practice and promote good social and environmental skills

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First years tracker

Q.19 To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements?

Skills for SD are seen as increasingly relevant to the majority of students as they progress through their university careers

86.8% of London1st years in 2012 think **using resources efficiently** is relevant

79.8% of London 3rd years in 2012 think being **think of the whole system and the links when considering new ideas** is relevant

79.3% of London 1st years think **considering the ethical issues of their subject** is relevant

62.8% of London 3rd years in 2012 think **understanding people's relationship to nature** is important

Q.26 Thinking only of your own personal view, how relevant is it to you that the following skills are developed through your university / college education? [Extremely relevant &Somewhat relevant]

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Skills around adaptability, planning and problem solving ranked as more important to future employers than explicitly environmental or social skills when looking across the suite of sustainability skills

89.2% of London 1st years in 2012 think **planning for the long term as well as the short term** is important

90.9% of London 3rd years in 2012 think being **able to adapt to new situations** is important

83.7% of London 1st years think **acting as a responsible citizen, globally and locally,** is important

65.2% of London 3rd years in 2012 think **understanding people's relationship to nature** is important

Q.27: How important do you think the following skills are to your future employers? Responses shown for 'very important' or 'somewhat important'. (Base clockwise from top left: n=3985, n=2523, n=3993, n=2525. Balance: No response)

Students exhibit support for a range of opportunities to include SD, though ... into ... eferred

58.3% of London 3rd years selected extremely / somewhat relevant

66% of London 3rd years selected extremely / somewhat relevant

68.4% of London 3rd years selected extremely / somewhat relevant
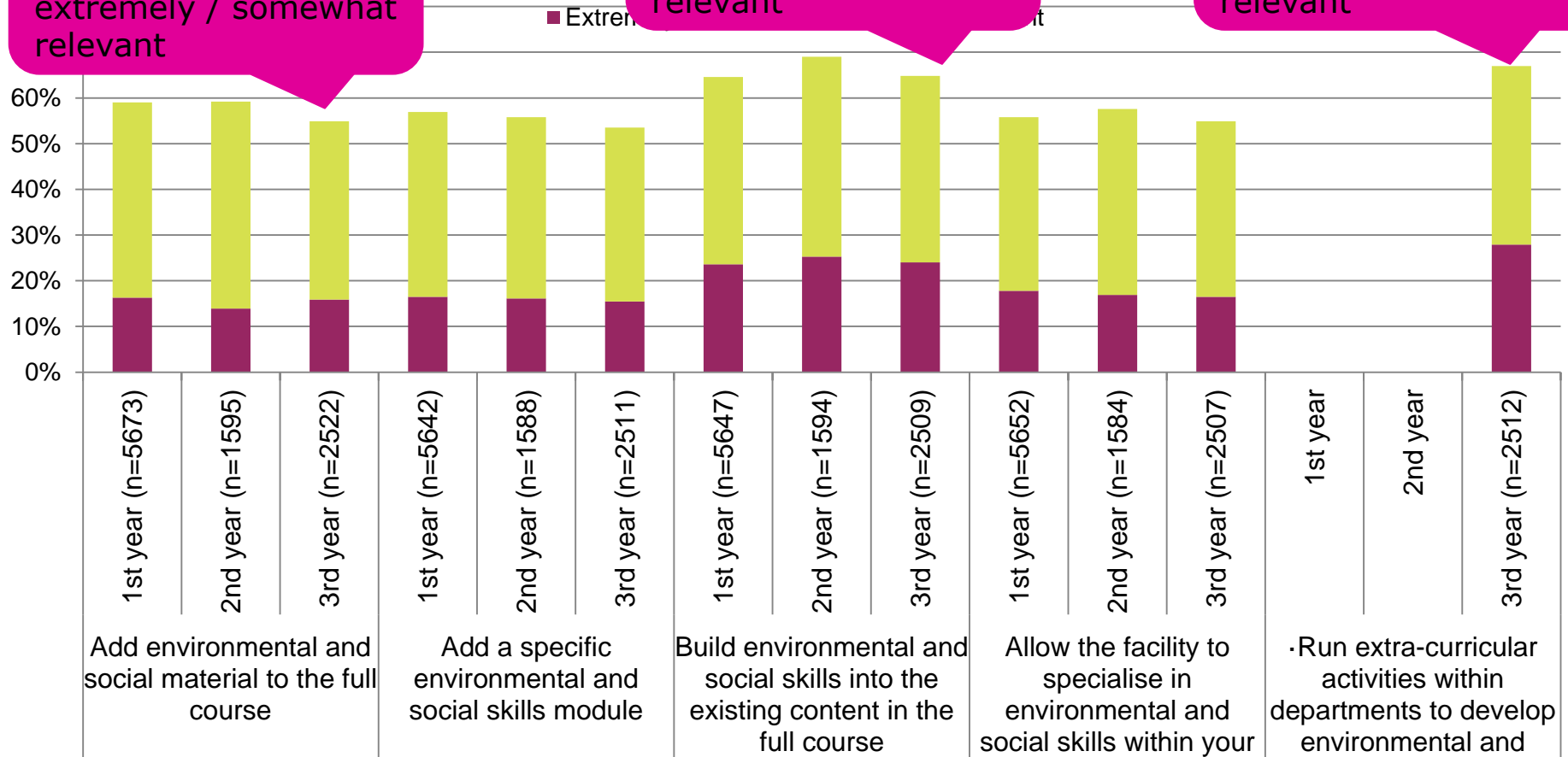
Q.43 Thinking of your course only, if a policy were passed to include social and environmental skills within all university / college courses, what do you think the most relevant way of including social and environmental skills within your own course would be?
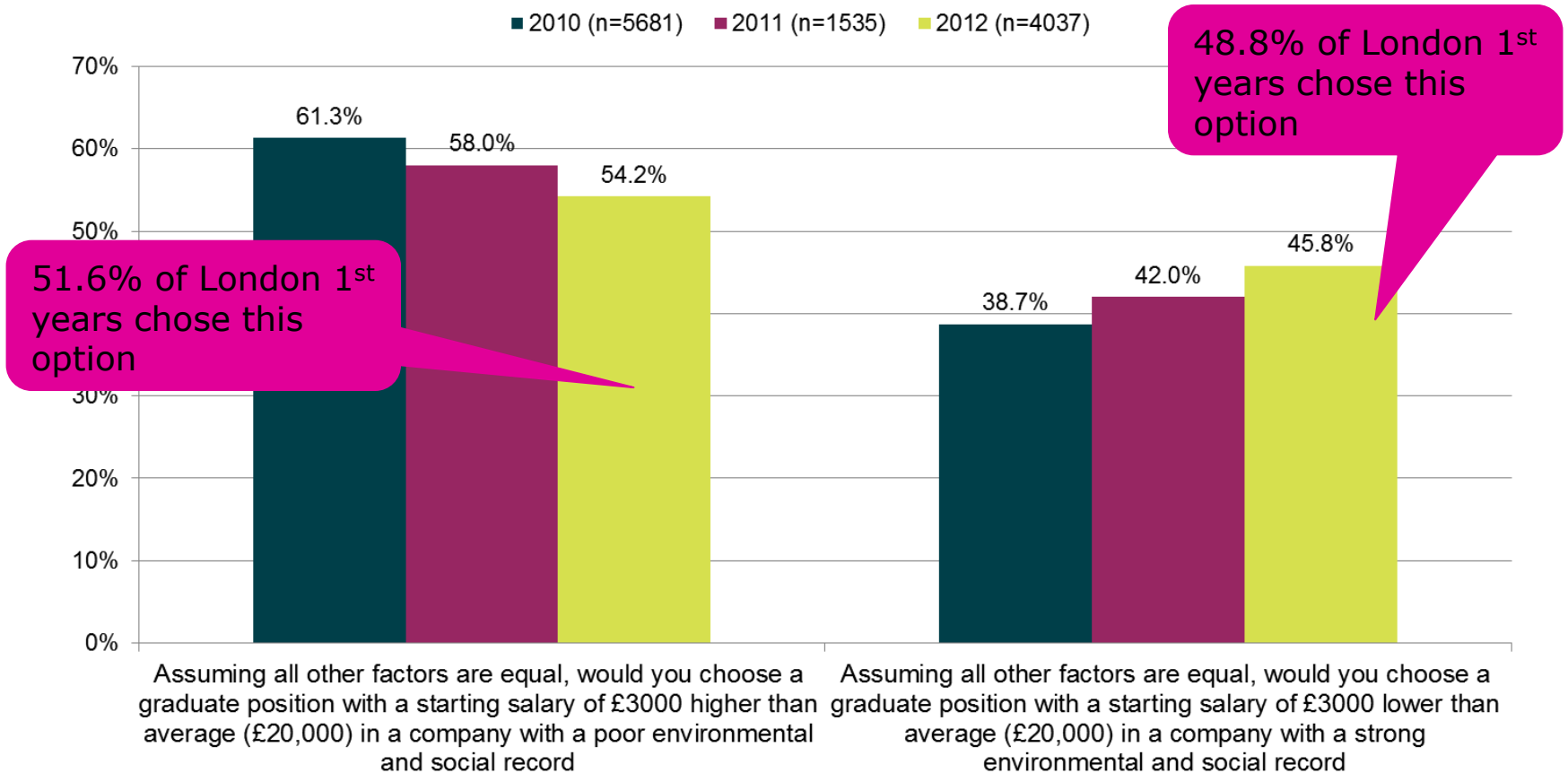
2010 cohort tracker

Willingness to sacrifice £1000 from salary for an employer with a strong SD record increases throughout university career

Legend: ■ 1st year (n=5682) ■ 2nd year (n=1607) ■ 3rd year (n=2538)

Chart data (left group): 37.4%, 33.9%, 32.6%

Chart data (right group): 62.6%, 66.1%, 67.4%

Callout: 32.3% of London 3rd years chose this option

Callout: 67.7% of London 3rd years chose this option

Left category: Assuming all other factors are equal, would you choose a graduate position with a starting salary of £1000 higher than average (£20,000) in a company with a poor environmental and social record

Right category: Assuming all other factors are equal, would you choose a graduate position with a starting salary of £1000 lower than average (£20,000) in a company with a strong environmental and social record

Q.40: We are interested in your prioritisation of social and environmental aspects into the future. For the following pairings, please select which option you think that you would choose in the future. (Balance: no response).

2010 cohort

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Sacrificing £3000 from salary despite a strong SD record is less attractive, however first years are increasing in their willingness to make the sacrifice

Legend: 2010 (n=5681) · 2011 (n=1535) · 2012 (n=4037)

51.6% of London 1st years chose this option

48.8% of London 1st years chose this option

Assuming all other factors are equal, would you choose a graduate position with a starting salary of £3000 higher than average (£20,000) in a company with a poor environmental and social record
- 61.3%
- 58.0%
- 54.2%

Assuming all other factors are equal, would you choose a graduate position with a starting salary of £3000 lower than average (£20,000) in a company with a strong environmental and social record
- 38.7%
- 42.0%
- 45.8%

First years 2010 - 2012

Q. 41 We are interested in your prioritisation of social and environmental aspects into the future. For the following pairings, please select which option you think that you would choose in the future. (Balance: no response).

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Recommendations for HEIs include...

- Encourage academic staff to develop formal and extra-curricular opportunities and resources for sustainability and employability skills relevant to their discipline;

- Work with employers and professional bodies to identify the skills and knowledge needed for business opportunities to 'green' the economy;

- Consider the effect of increased tuition fees and the health of the economy on student choices and preferences, along with research on the different definitions of sustainable development being used by students, academics, and policy makers.

Full report available at…

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/sustainability/ESD_student_attitudes_2013_v4.pdf

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