

Green Gauge: Insights into sustainable attitudes and behaviours at the University of Liverpool

**A report by NUS for Liverpool
Guild of Students**

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Introduction

Introduction

Background

Liverpool Guild of Students (LGoS) is currently embarking on a journey towards positioning the Guild as a hub for student-led sustainability projects with the aim of supporting students in their role as change agents in higher education and beyond. The 'Green Guild' project is receiving funding under the HEFCE/NUS Students' Green Fund and will see an array of activity taking place across the university via three main themes:

- Education for sustainable development;
- Engagement; and
- Community outreach.

Looking more widely, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under legislative instruction by HEFCE to reduce carbon emissions by 43% by 2020 as part of their funding conditions, with Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions already forming the outcomes of the carbon reduction implementation plans. Guidance has been issued on measuring scope 3 emissions alongside this.

Historically, university estates have been at the forefront of activity; however research with students has shown that opportunities exist to communicate the efforts made by estates and improve engagement and performance across all the activities of institutions.

Research objectives

Bearing these elements in mind, the following objectives were set for the research.

- To gain a baseline understanding of attitudes, awareness and behaviours (& motivators and barriers)
- To build understanding of demand for action, services and skills
- To understand impact of existing schemes amongst students and develop insight for development
- To provide statistics for impact monitoring

Methodology

An online quantitative survey was run at UCL, with fieldwork collected November 2013. The surveys were promoted through local electronic promotion via the students' union, and a respondent prize draw incentive was put in place for the student survey with national and local prizes as follows:

- £500 first prize and 10 x £50 second prizes offered nationally
- local prizes of 1 x £50 voucher and 5 x £10 vouchers

The survey was promoted neutrally with no reference to sustainability or the environment, in order to prevent bias towards those with particularly strong positive or negative attitudes in this area.

Sample

A total of 498 survey responses were collected over the fieldwork period where 378 were needed to achieve statistical representation¹. The sample was spread across year groups, however there was a slight over-representation of full time students (98%, n=482) compared to 83%²).

Figure 1 | Sample overview

27.4% (n=136) are 1 st year students
98% (n=482) are full time students
53.6% (n=266) live in rented accommodation

¹ At 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5%.

² Figures provided by HESA for 2011/12 academic year.

Results

Values and attitudes

Segmentation

Student respondents were asked to state their similarity to a series of characteristics in an attempt to segment the population by their values and attitudes. This segmentation is often used to target communications appropriately to ensure they appeal to their desired audience and improve engagement.

Figure 2 | Defra's segmentation model

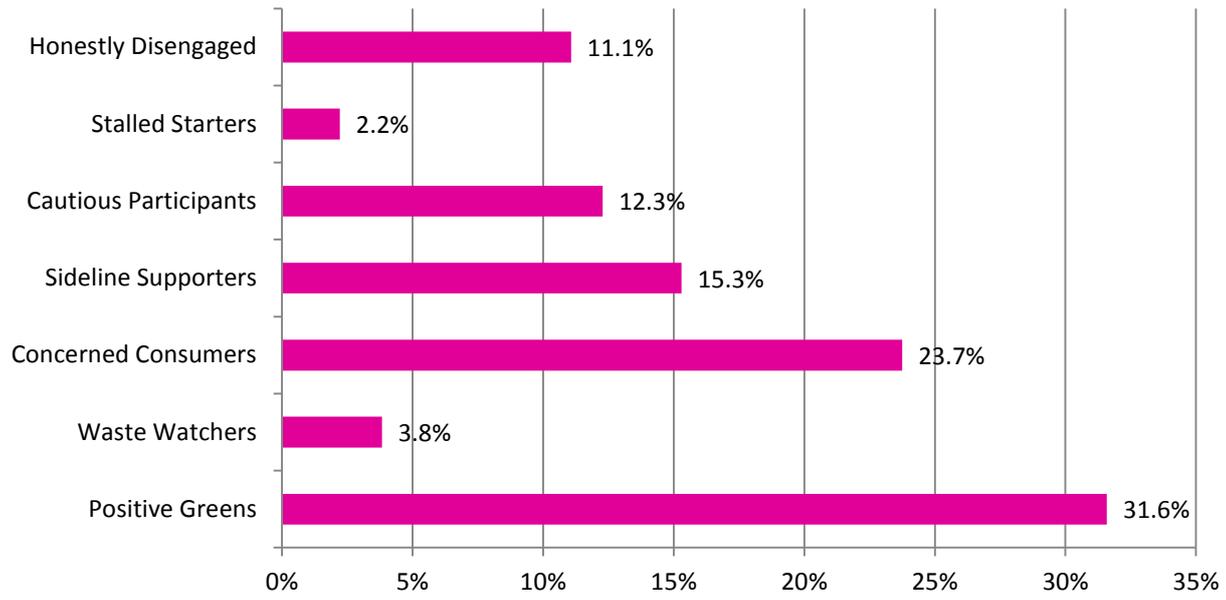
Segment	Characteristics
Positive greens	"I think we need to do some things differently to tackle climate change. I do what I can and I feel bad about the rest"
Waste watchers	"Waste not, want not' that's important, you should live life thinking about what you're doing and using"
Concerned consumers	"I think I do more than a lot of people. Still, going away is important, I'd find that hard to give up, well I wouldn't, so carbon offsetting would make me feel better"
Sideline supporters	"I think climate change is a big problem for us. I suppose I don't think much about how much water or electricity I use, and I forget to turn things off. I'd like to do a bit more"
Cautious participants	"I do a couple of things to help the environment. I'd really like to do more, well as long as I saw others were"
Stalled starters	"I don't know much about climate change. I can't afford a car so I use public transport, I'd like a car though"
Honestly disengaged	"Maybe there'll be an environmental disaster, maybe not. Makes no difference to me, I'm just living my life the way I want to"

Based on their responses, just under a third of student respondents fall can be classified under the 'Positive Green' segment (31.6%, n=157). This segment can be described in more detail as:

- Positive environmental attitudes and beliefs
- Least embarrassed about being seen to have an environmentally friendly lifestyle
- Least motivated by saving money
- Most willing to change their lifestyle to help the environment
- Majority are willing to sacrifice home comforts to save energy

The next largest segment is the 'Concerned Consumers' at 23.7% (n=118) followed by 'Sideline Supporters' (15.3%, n=76). These segments are engaged in environmental issues but not to the extent of the 'Positive Greens' and therefore represent a key opportunity to shift from awareness to action.

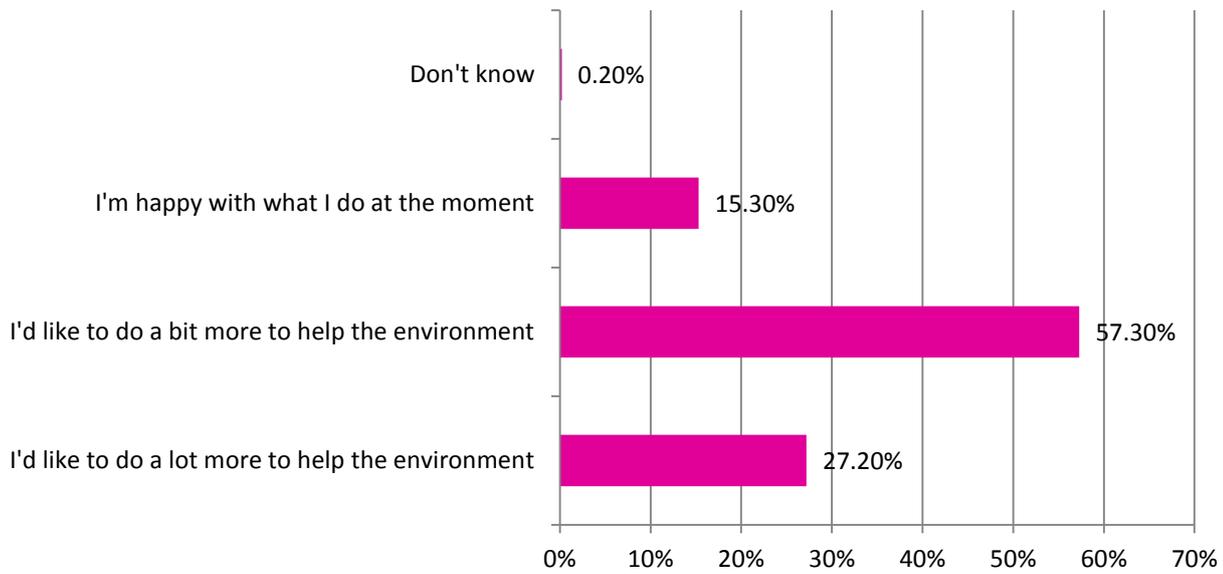
Figure 3 | Defra's segmentation model



Lifestyles and behaviour

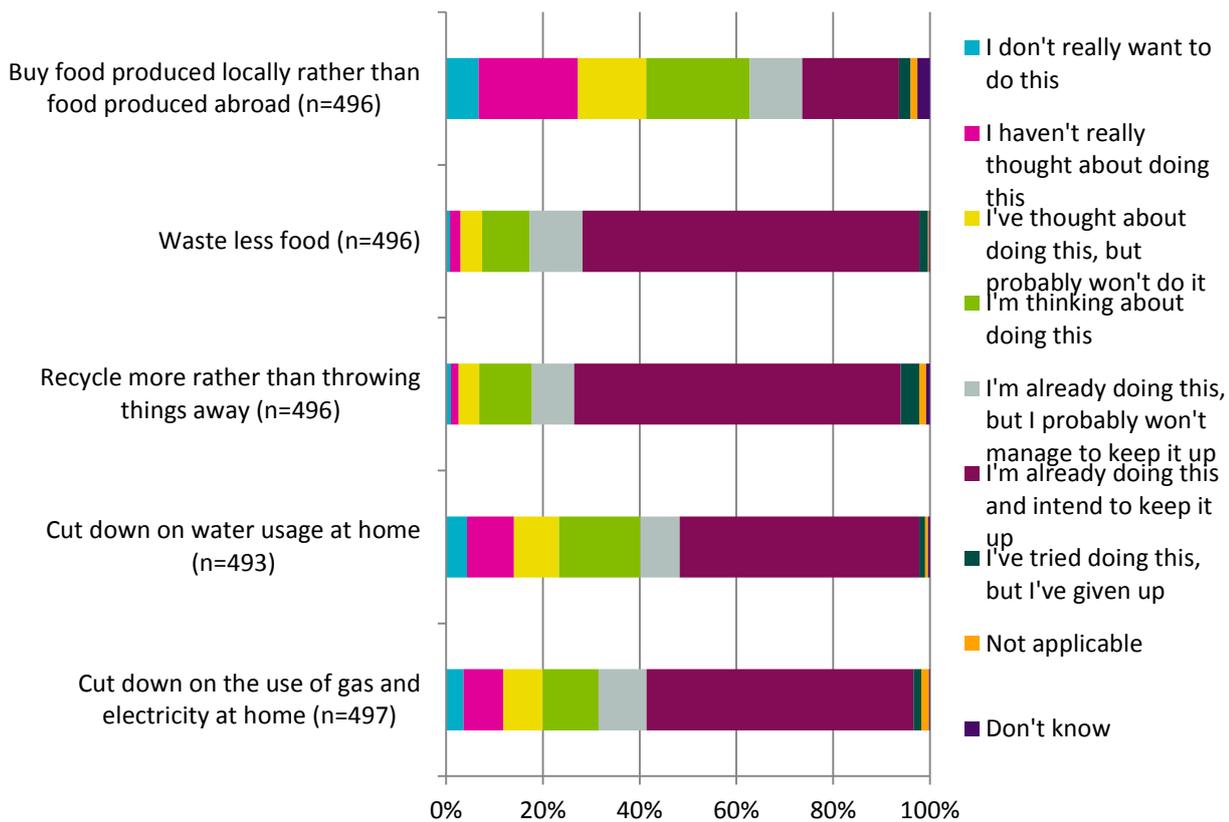
Figure 4 below demonstrates the latent potential for action on environmental issues amongst the student population at the University of Liverpool. Only 15.3% (n=76) report being happy with their current levels of action in this area, with the remaining 84.5% (n=420) expressing a desire to do (a bit or a lot) more. Harnessing this desire will be key to the success of the Green Guild projects.

Figure 4 | Which of these best describes how you feel about your current lifestyle and the environment? (n=497)



Students were also asked to assess their current behaviour, and attitude towards that behaviour across a range of pro-environmental actions. Figure 5 below shows that positive behaviours already exist in these areas, for example with 69.9% (n=345) reporting that they are already wasting less food, and intend to keep doing so. Buying locally produced food rather than that produced abroad presents an opportunity increasing action in this area with 21.4% (n=106) of respondents reporting that they are thinking about taking action in this area.

Figure 5 | Here are some changes that people might make to their lifestyles. For each one, please tell us which answer applies to you personally at the moment. There are no right or wrong answers - we're just interested in what you do at the moment, not what you think you should or shouldn't be doing.



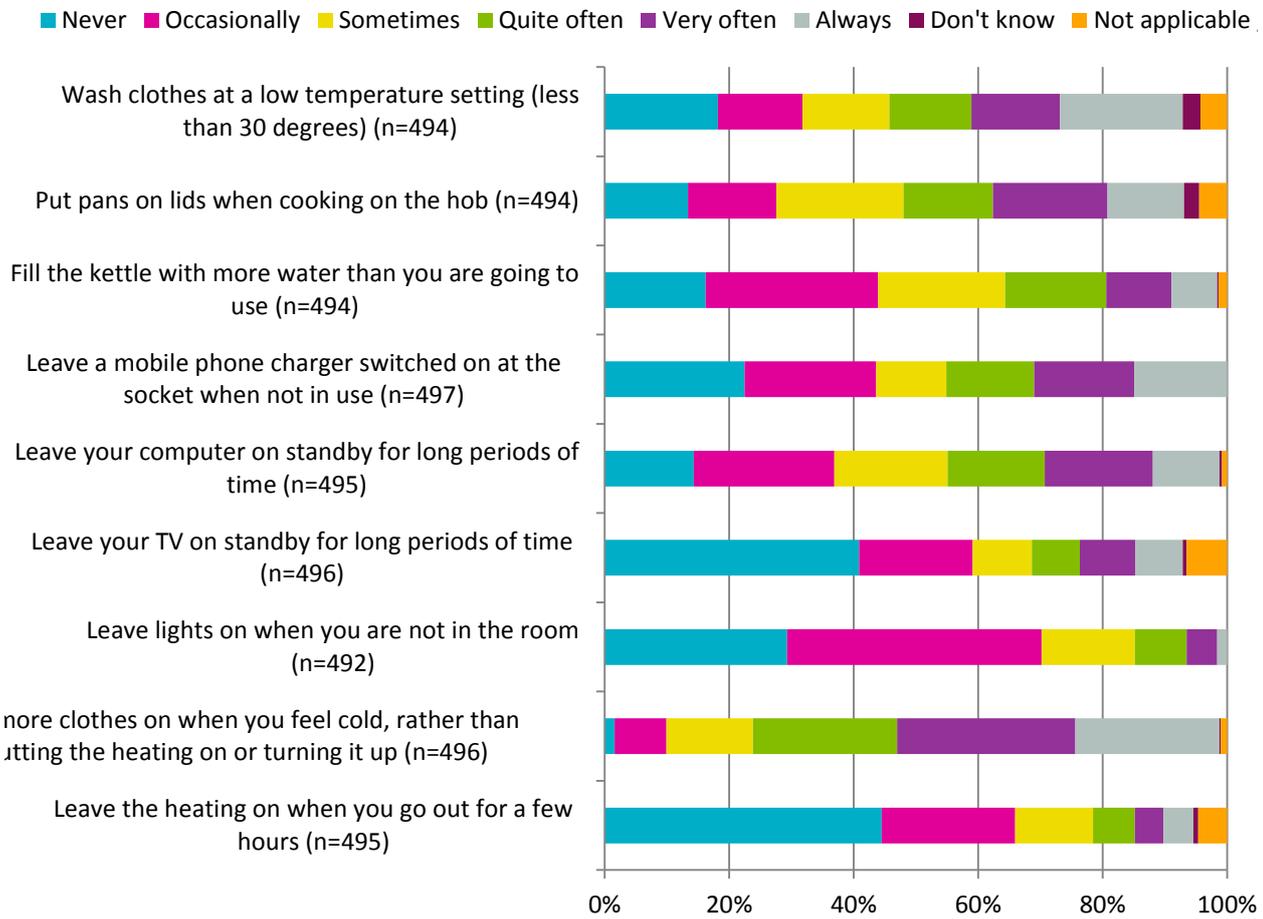
Energy saving behaviour at the University of Liverpool

The survey design also included questioning around specific areas of pro-environmental action, such as energy conservation and efficiency. Figure 6 below shows how respondents report taking action in this area. The results show that some energy-saving actions are becoming the norm amongst respondents with 40.9% (n=203) stating that they never leave the TV on standby for long periods of time. Similarly, 44.4% (n=220) respondents report never leaving the heating on when they go out for a few hours. Despite positive performance in these areas, there is considerable scope for improvement with only 12.3% (n=61) of respondents reporting always putting lids on pans when cooking on the hob.

There are differences in behaviour according to accommodation type, for example respondents who live in rented accommodation are significantly more likely to say they never leave the heating on when they go out for a few hours compared to those living in university halls (50.2%, n=133 compared to 30.3%, n=37). On the other hand, those in university halls are significantly less likely

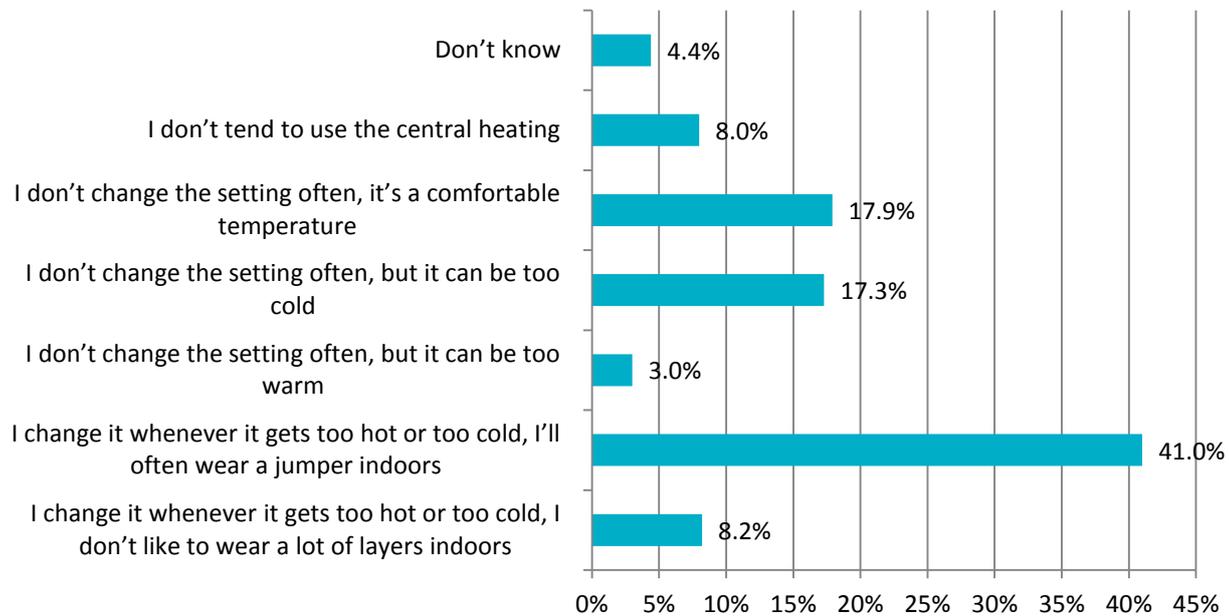
to report never putting lids on pans when cooking on the hob than those in rented accommodation (9.2%, n=11 compared to 12.5%, n=33).

Figure 6 | How frequently, if at all do you conduct the following behaviours?



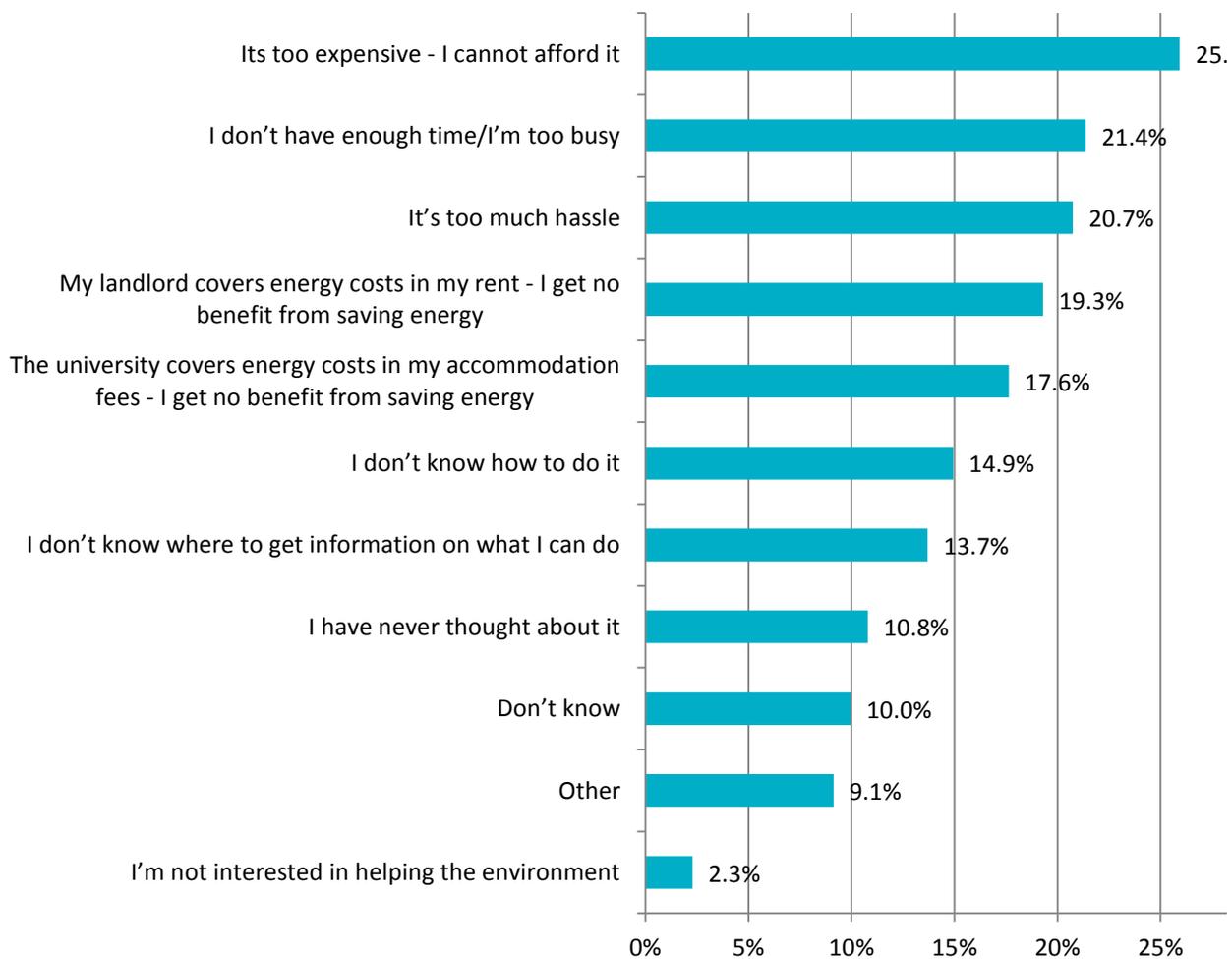
In terms of heating use, there is also positive practice reported amongst University of Liverpool students. Figure 7 below shows that respondents are changing the settings according to the temperature, and also making sure they are wearing appropriate clothing (41%, n=204).

Figure 7 | Thinking about your heating system at home, which of these statements best describes how you set the temperature during the winter? (n=497)



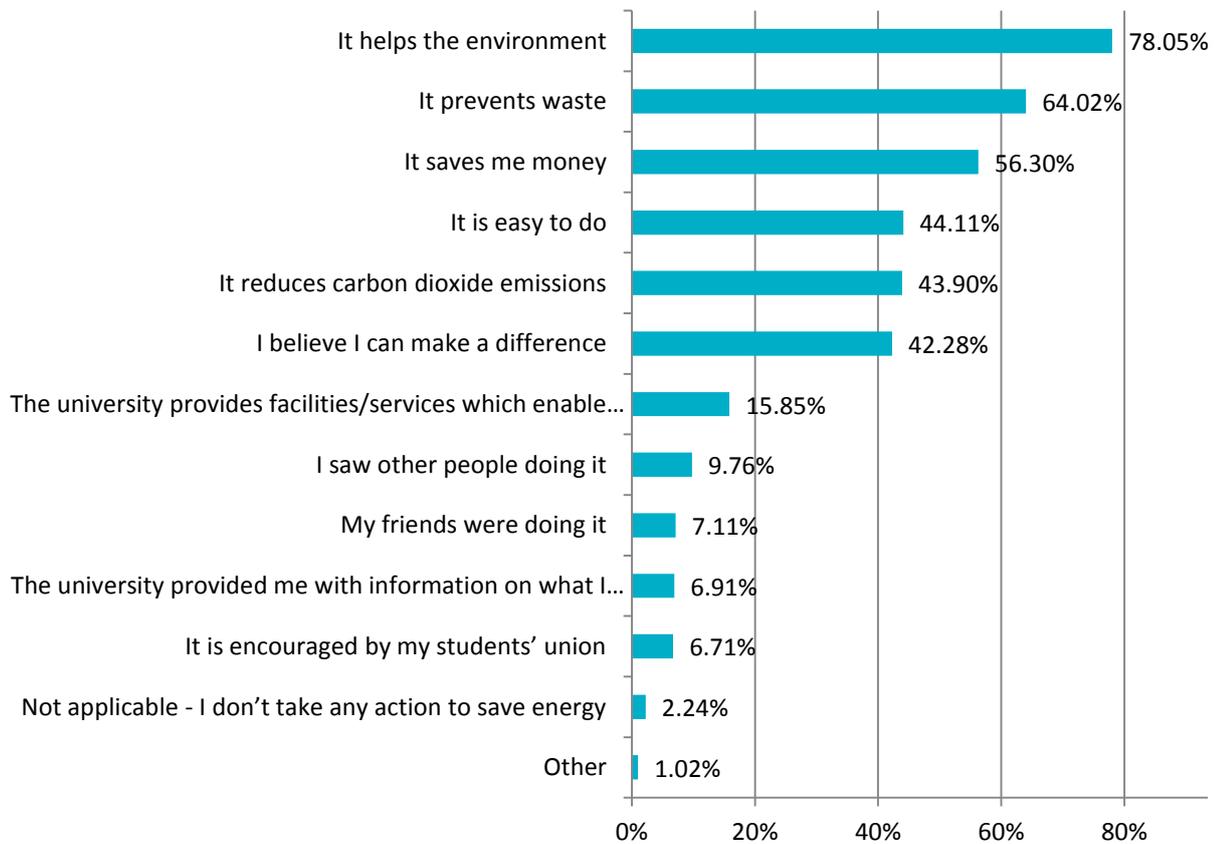
The survey also looked at motivations and barriers to saving energy amongst the student population. In terms of barriers (see figure 8), respondents identified a perception of saving energy as being something that involved expense beyond their financial capability (25.9%, n=125) along with perceived hassle and time commitment (20.7%, n=100 and 21.4%, n=103 respectively). Projects and campaigns run by LGoS should therefore focus on communicating and developing ways to engage students that do not involve spending money and that can fit in around the commitments of student life. Respondents in both private-rented accommodation and halls of residences identified that energy bills were included in their rent payments, and therefore they had no financial incentive to save energy (19.3%, n=93 and 17.6%, n=85 respectively). Emphasising non-direct financial incentives, along with other motivations will be key for this proportion of the student population.

Figure 8 | What would you say are the main reasons you do not take action to save energy? (n=482)



In terms of motivations, helping the environment and preventing waste are reported as being key motivators for respondents to the survey (78%, n=384 and 64%, n=315). Just as (perceived) expense of taking action was cited as a barrier to action, the financial savings that result from taking action are also a key motivator (56.3%, n=277). Ease of taking action was also emphasised (44.1%, n=217) along with feeling that their actions to save energy will make a difference (42.28%, n=208).

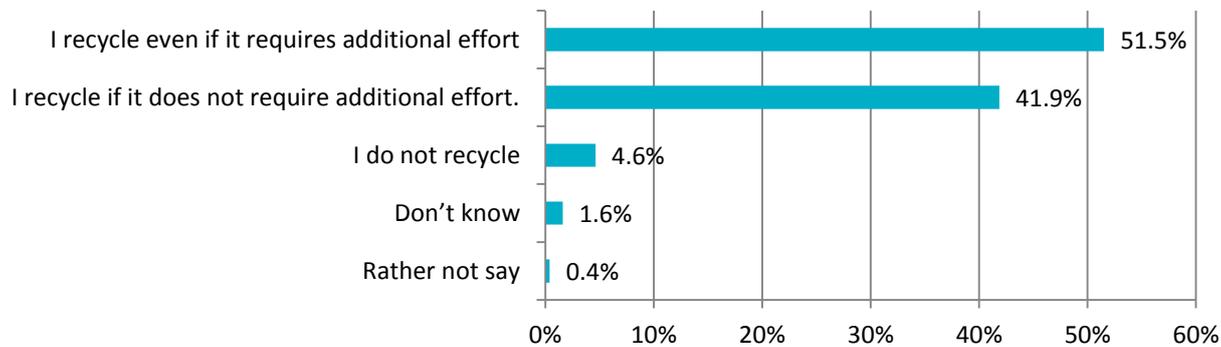
**Figure 9 | What would you say are the main reasons you take action to save energy?
(n=482)**



Recycling and waste

Levels of recycling are reported to be high amongst respondents, with only 4.6% (n=23) stating that they do not recycle. This is significantly lower than the 7.8% (n=199) that reported that they don't engage in recycling behaviour in a nationwide survey using the same question conducted by NUS in spring 2013³.

Figure 10 | Which of these statements best describes your attitude to recycling? (n=497)

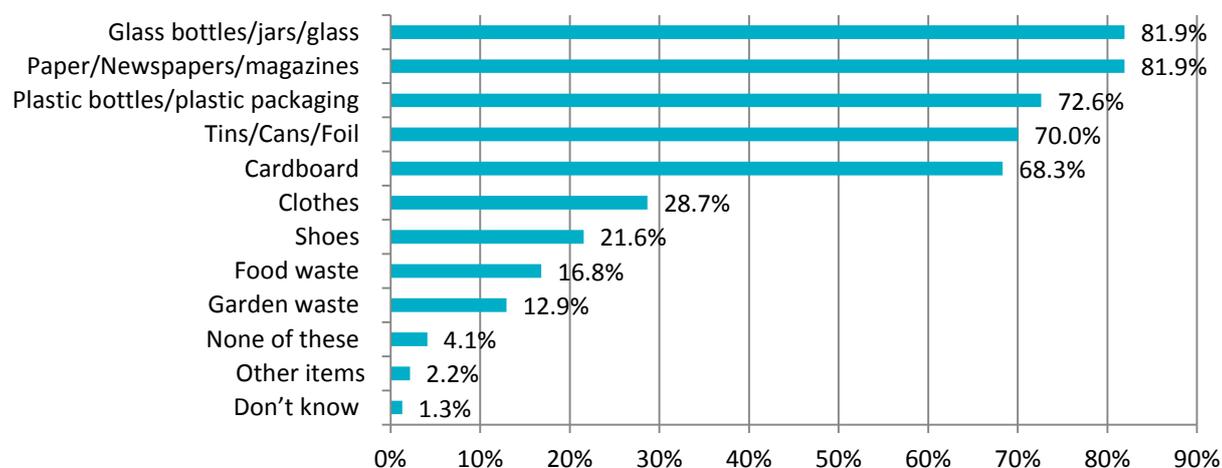


There is scope for improvement also by shifting those who currently recycle if it does not require additional effort (41.9%, n=208) towards those respondents who report recycling even if additional effort is required (51.5%, n=256). There is also scope for targeting action according to accommodation type as those in private halls are significantly less likely to report recycling even if it requires additional effort than those in either university halls or in rented accommodation (31.1%, n=14, compared to 51.6%, n=63 or 53.8%, n=143).

Respondents to the survey reported recycling a range of materials, but reflecting the provision of recycling services within the city. Figure 11 shows that materials such as glass, paper, plastic, tins/cans and cardboard are commonly recycled.

³ <http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/43221/SITA%20UK%20NUS%20Report.pdf>

Figure 11 | Which of these do you normally recycle or compost during term time? (n=464)

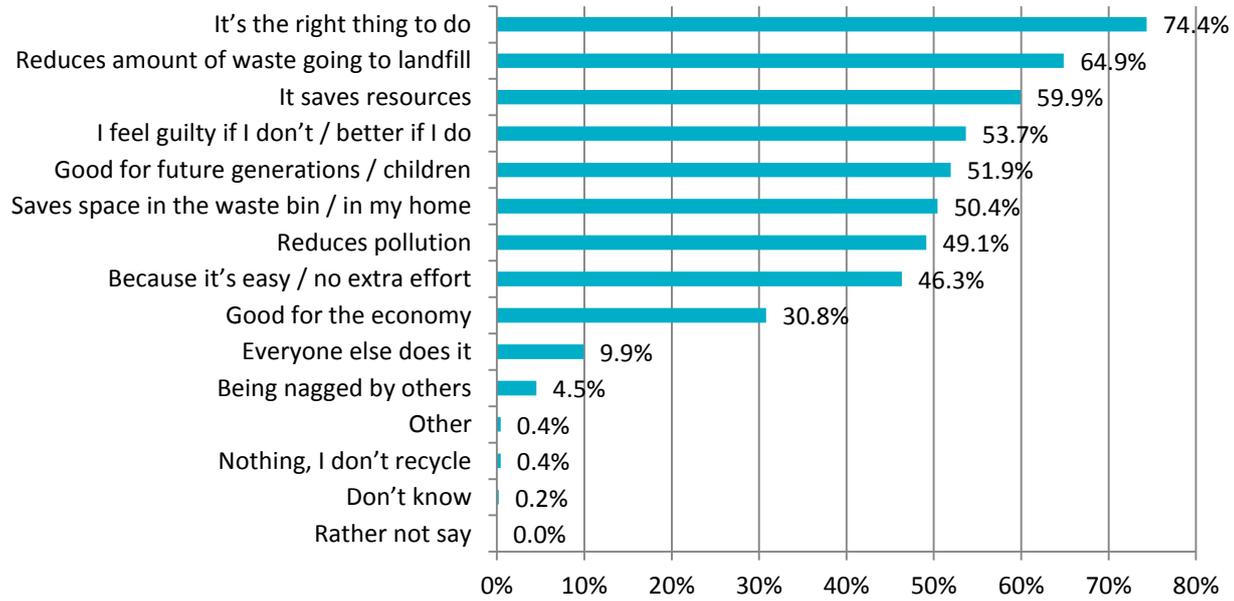


Reports of recycling items such as clothes, shoes and food and garden waste are lower, in part a likely reflection of frequency of disposal but also a reflection of recycling services as food waste collections are not offered by the local authority or in halls of residence. Further research would be required to assess the potential savings from this waste stream amongst students in Liverpool, however nationwide research has found that UK households are throwing away 4.2 million tonnes of household food and drink annually. Whilst reducing waste would be the preferred option, collecting food waste separately allows it to be used to create energy or compost⁴.

Motivations for recycling amongst respondents (see figure 12) are similar to those for saving energy, however recycling appears to be linked more strongly to morals and values with the top reason for recycling given as being 'the right thing to do' (74.4%, n=345). This is significantly higher than the motivations expressed in the national survey (67.8%, n=1577). Over half of respondents also stated that they 'feel guilty if they don't' recycle (53.7%, n=249). Environmental motivations are also high with almost two thirds stating that they recycle to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill (64.9%, n=301). Again there are differences between accommodation types, with those in university halls reporting to be significantly less motivated by reducing the amount of waste going to landfill (54.5%, n=65) compared to those in rented accommodation (70.2%, n=177).

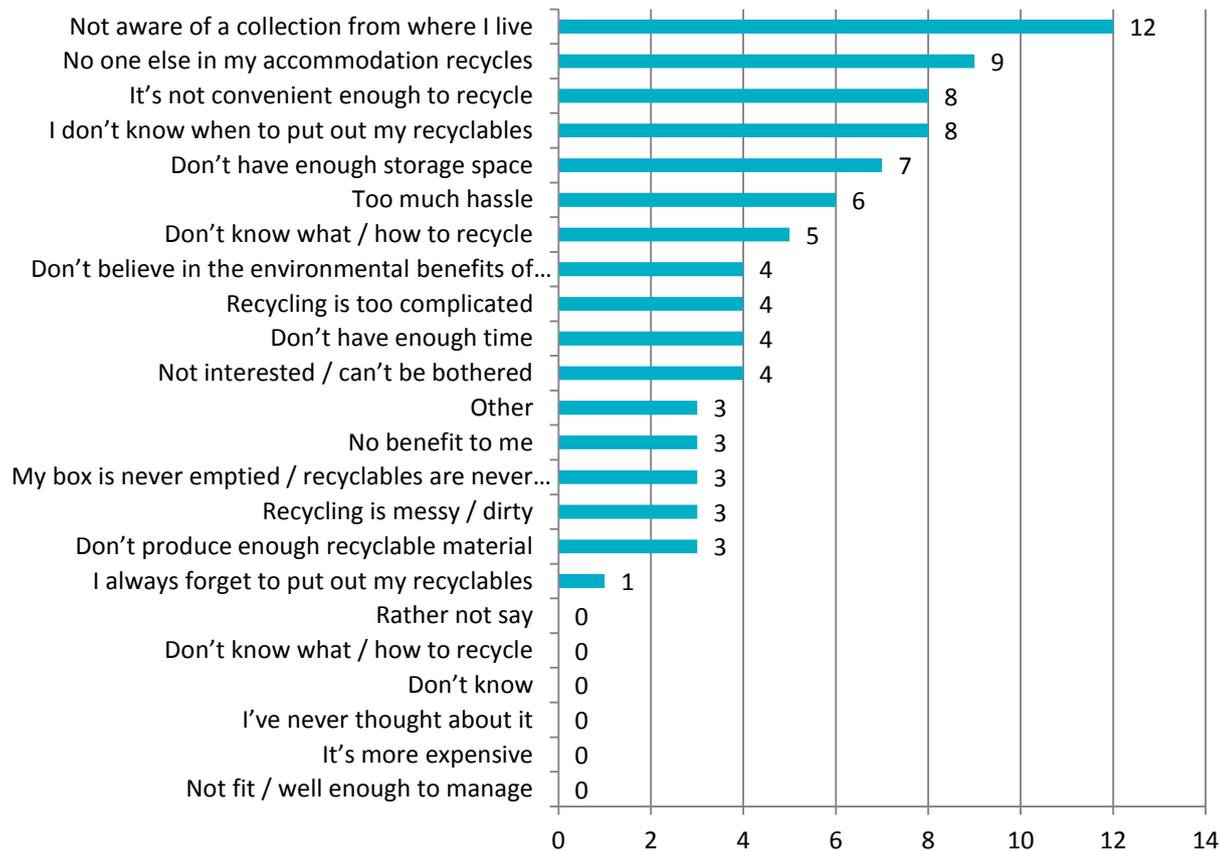
⁴ <http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/hhfdw-2012-summary.pdf>

Figure 12 | Which of the following, if any, motivates you to recycle? (n=464)



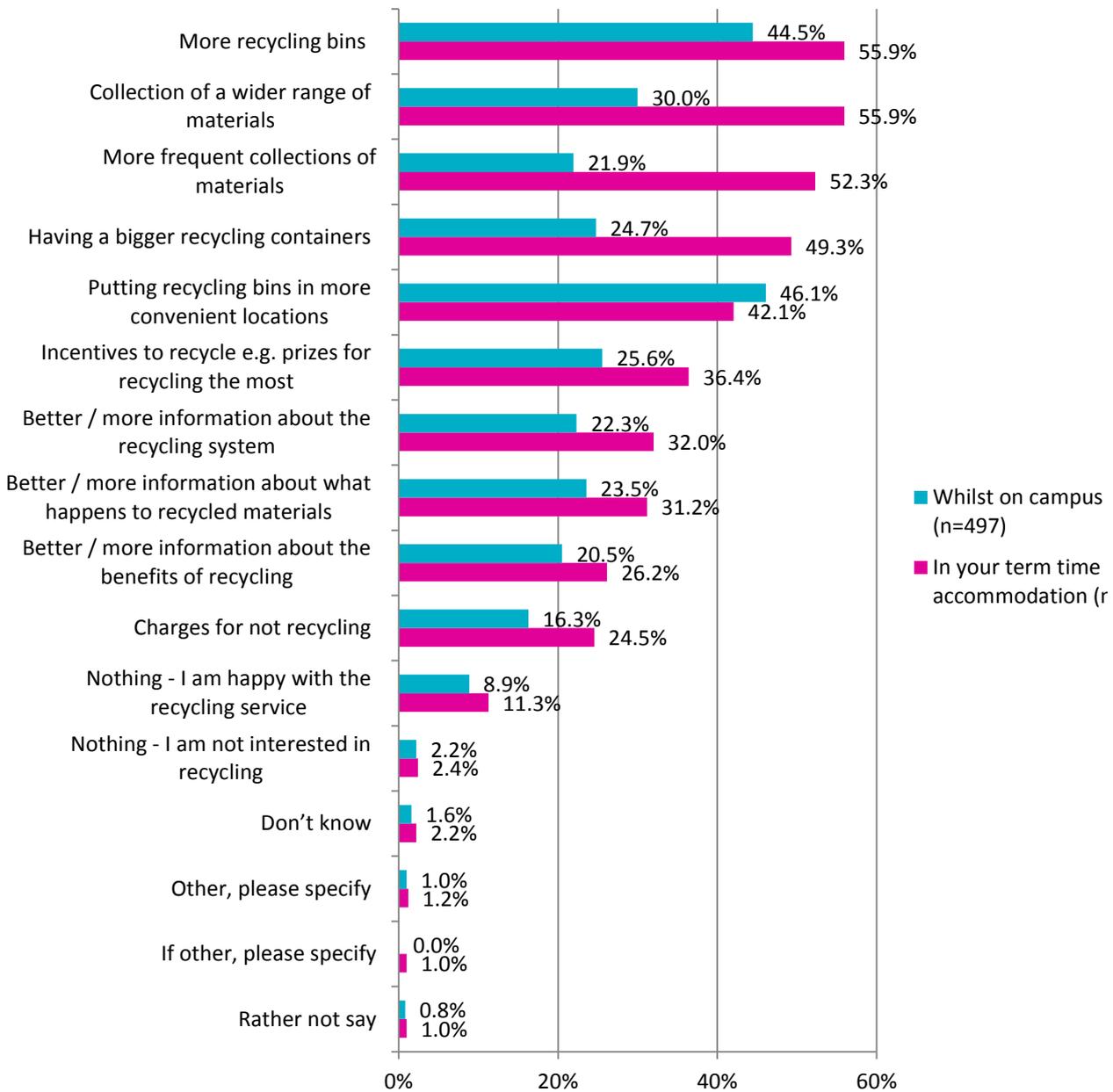
For those who don't currently recycle (31 respondents), see figure 13, a lack of awareness of recycling collections or facilities is the key barrier, with just under half of respondents report this as a barrier (n=12). Social norms can also be seen as a barrier with 9 respondents reporting that they do not currently recycle as nobody else in their accommodation does so. Initiatives aimed at improving recycling amongst students should aim to remove the barriers identified here.

Figure 13 | You said that you don't recycle...why don't you recycle, or why have you stopped recycling? (n=31)



All respondents were also asked to identify improvements that could be made to the recycling services, both where they live during term time and also 'on campus' (figure 14). In term time accommodation, respondents felt that providing more bins would be the main way to improve recycling and collecting a wider range of materials (55.9%, n=278 respectively). To improve recycling on campus, respondents felt that recycling bins should be placed in more convenient locations (46.1%, n=229) along with providing more recycling bins (44.5%, n=221).

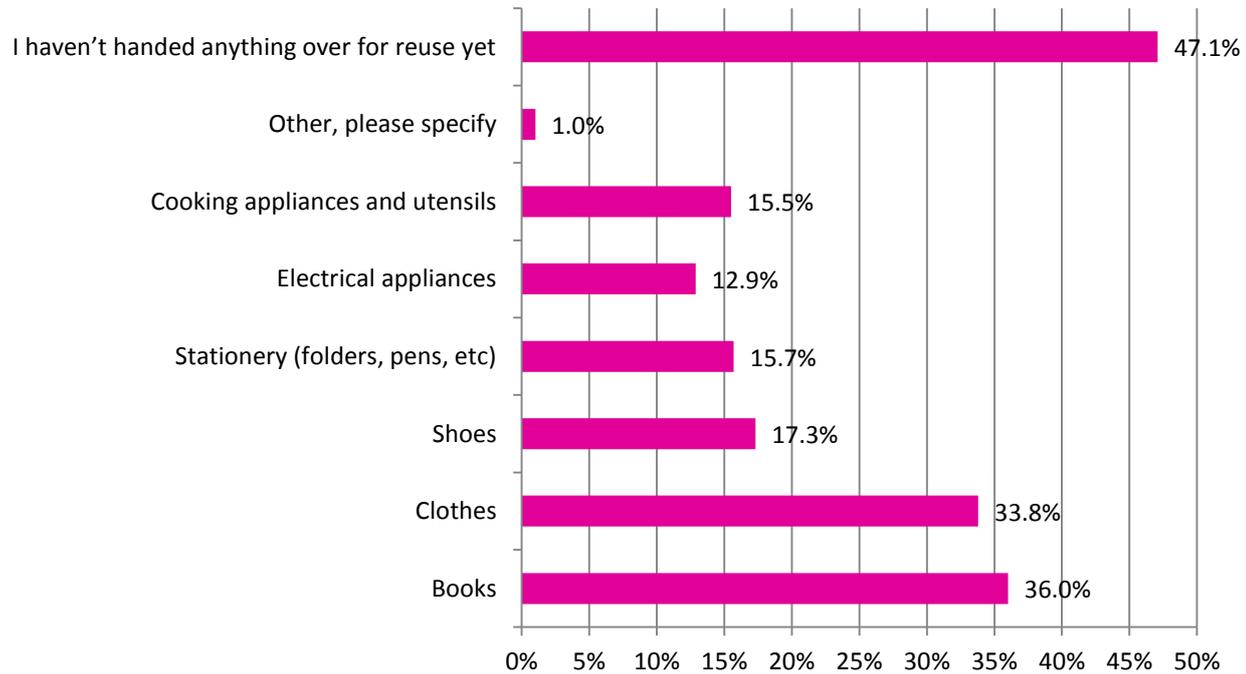
Figure 14 | What, if anything, would persuade you to start recycling or to recycle more?



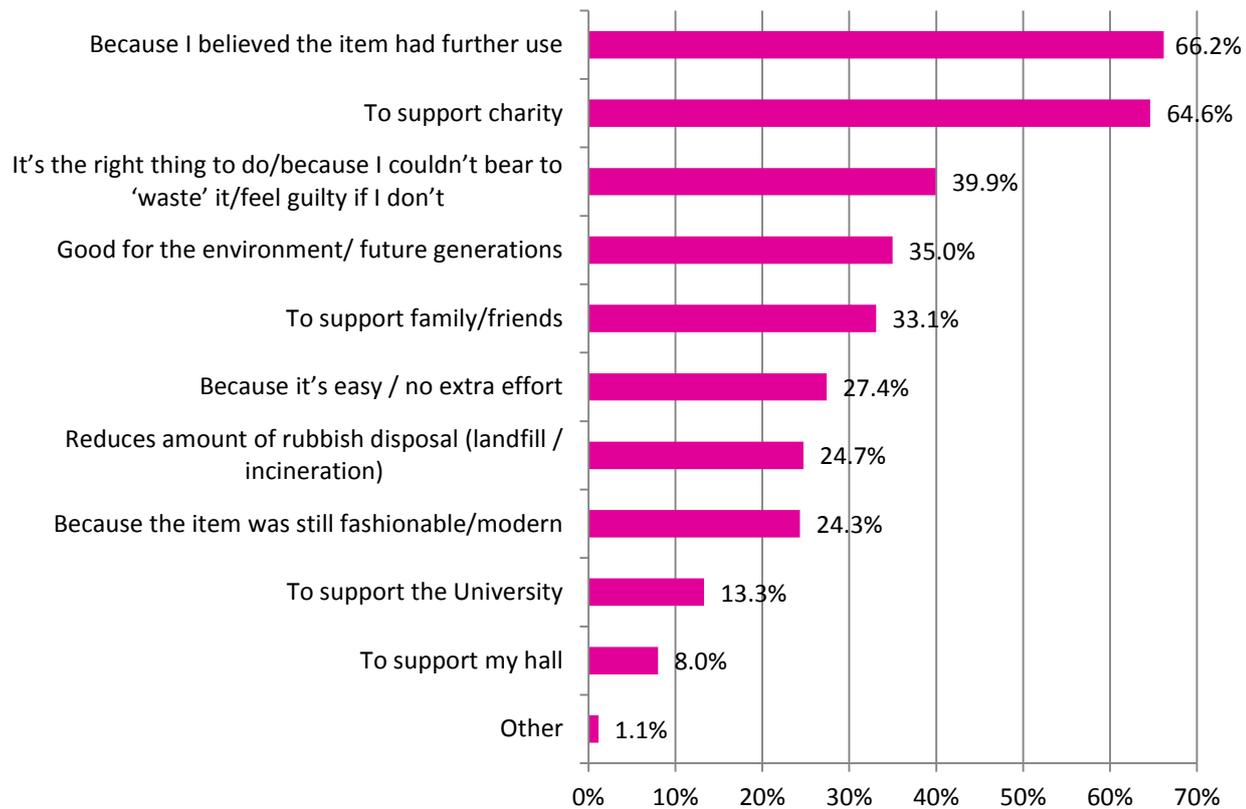
Looking further up the waste hierarchy, respondents were also asked about their reuse behaviour. Most respondents hadn't yet had anything to hand over for reuse, however further research would be necessary to ascertain whether this is due to a lack of suitable items, or a lack of awareness of the range of items that can be reused.

Figure 15 shows that of those who have handed over items for reuse, books and clothes are the most frequently donated items (36%, n=179 and 33.8%, n=168 respectively).

Figure 15 | What, if any, items have you handed over for reuse during your time at university so far? (n=497)

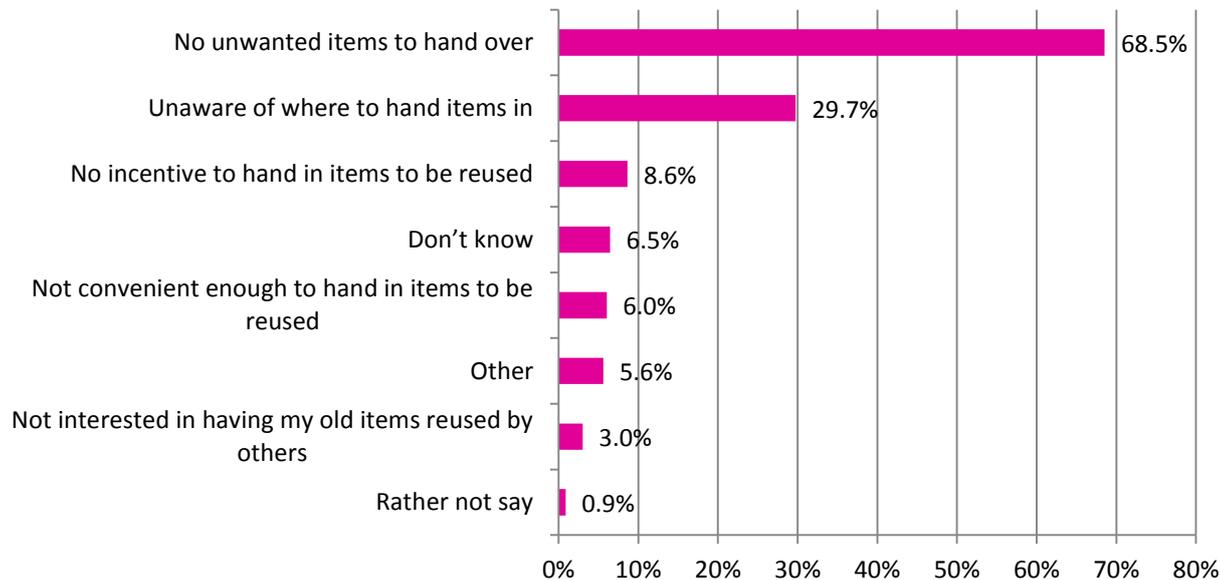


Motivations for reuse, see figure 16, are linked to beliefs that the items still had further use (66.2%, n=174) along with a desire to support charity (64.6%, n=170). Emphasising links with charitable organisations could therefore be an important way of driving participation in reuse projects.

Figure 16 | Why did you choose to hand over items to be reused? (n=263)

Those respondents who reported that they hadn't yet handing over any items for reuse largely attributed this to a lack of unwanted items (68.5%, n=232) however there is scope to increase donations through improving awareness and accessibility of where to hand items in (29.7%, n=69).

Figure 17 | What, if any, items have you handed over for reuse during your time at university so far? (n=497)

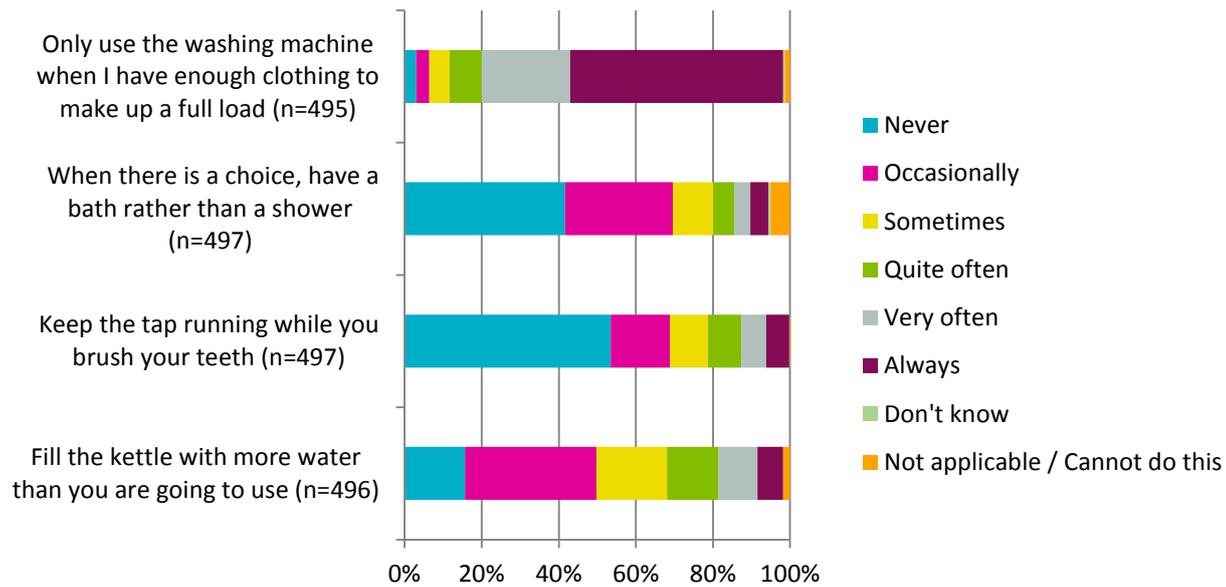


Water use

Survey questioning was also included to assess water efficiency behaviour amongst the student population at the University of Liverpool. As with energy efficiency behaviours, there is some evidence of good practice, with certain behaviours becoming a norm; however there is also scope for improvement where behaviours are largely reported to be carried out only occasionally or sometimes.

Figure 18 shows that over half of respondents report that they never keep the tap running while they are brushing their teeth (53.5%, n=266). Similarly, 41.7% (n=207) say they choose a shower rather than a bath when they have the option. Use of kettles is a behaviour where there is scope for improvement with only 15.7% (n=78) reporting that they never fill their kettle with more water than they are going to use. As well as reducing water wastage, targeting this behaviour will have an impact on energy use as research has estimated kettle use to account for a third of all cooking related electricity use, which in turn accounts for approximately 15% of the household total⁵.

⁵ www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Publications2/Corporate/Research-and-insights/The-elephant-in-the-living-room

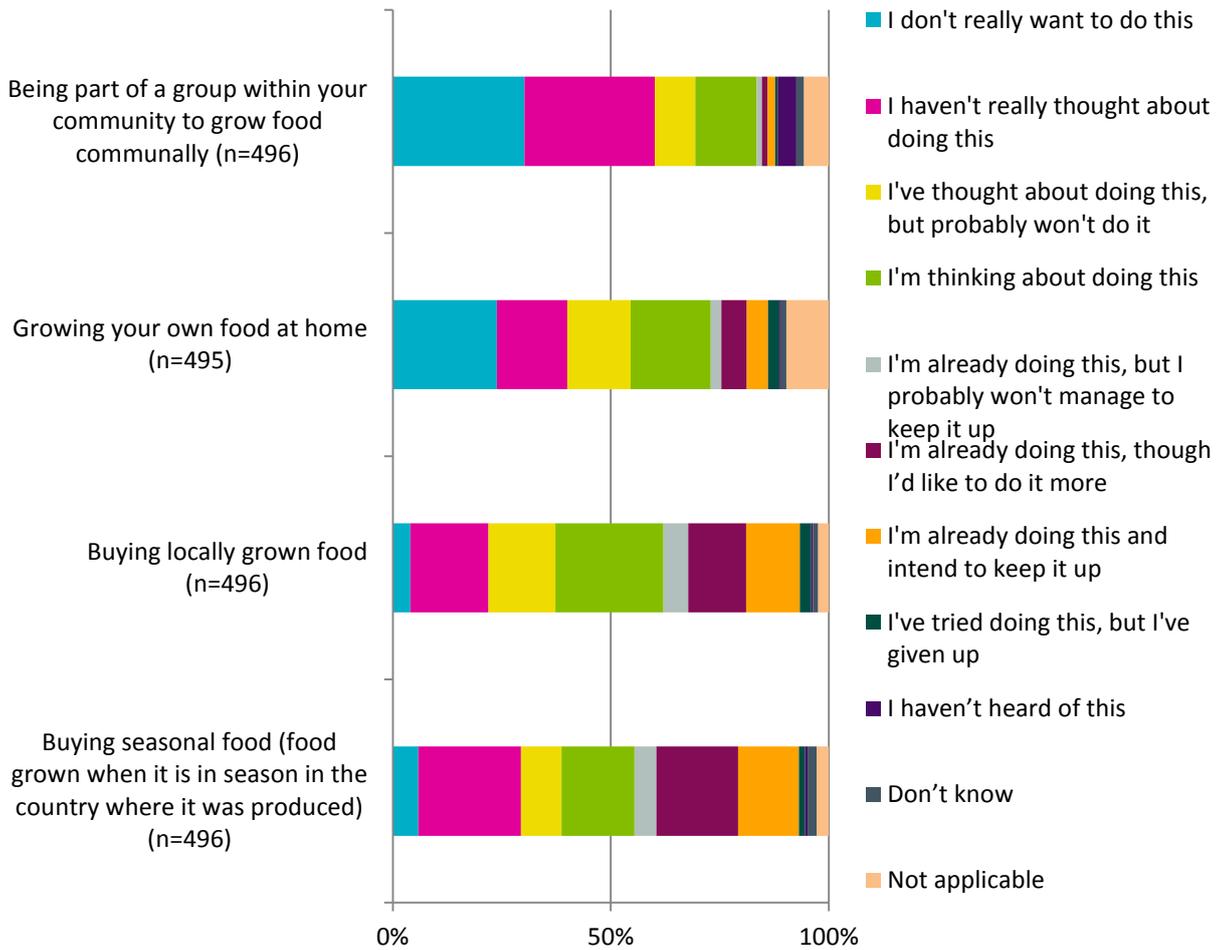
Figure 18 | Please could you tell me how often you personally do each of the following?

Food

Students' attitudes and behaviours surrounding food purchasing and growing were also assessed through the research.

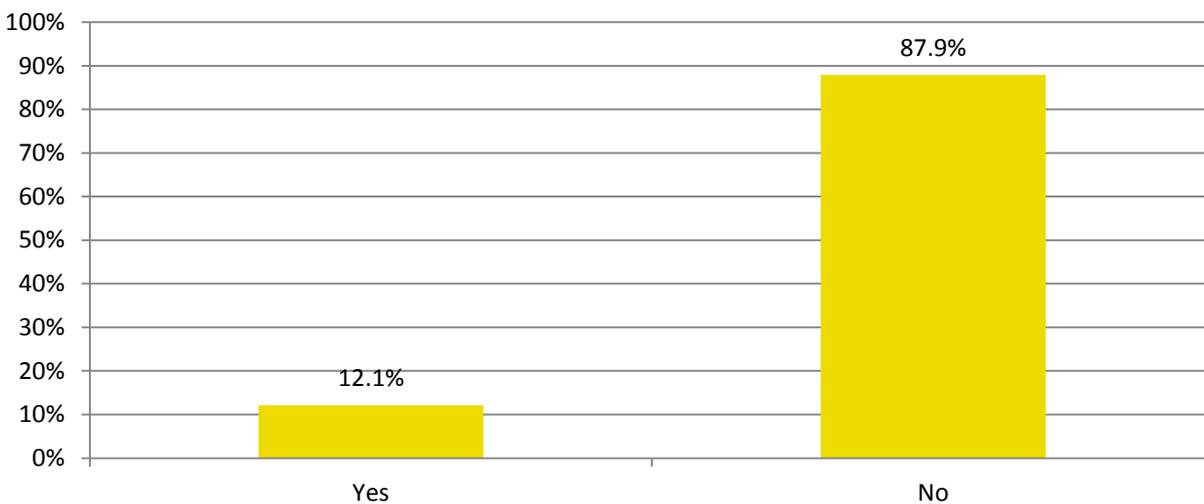
On the whole, respondents showed a greater affinity with reducing the impact of food through changing their purchasing habits rather than growing the food themselves with 13.9% (n=69) saying that they are already, and intend to keep up, buying seasonal food (food grown when it is in season in the country where it was produced) compared to 4.85% (n=24) saying that they are already, and intend to keep up, growing their own food at home. There is however scope for considerable improvement in this area with approximately a quarter of respondents saying that they had not thought about buying seasonal food (23.5%, n=117) and 29.8% (n=148) saying they had not thought about being part of a group within the community to grow food communally (see figure 19).

Figure 19 | Which of these best describes how you currently feel about:



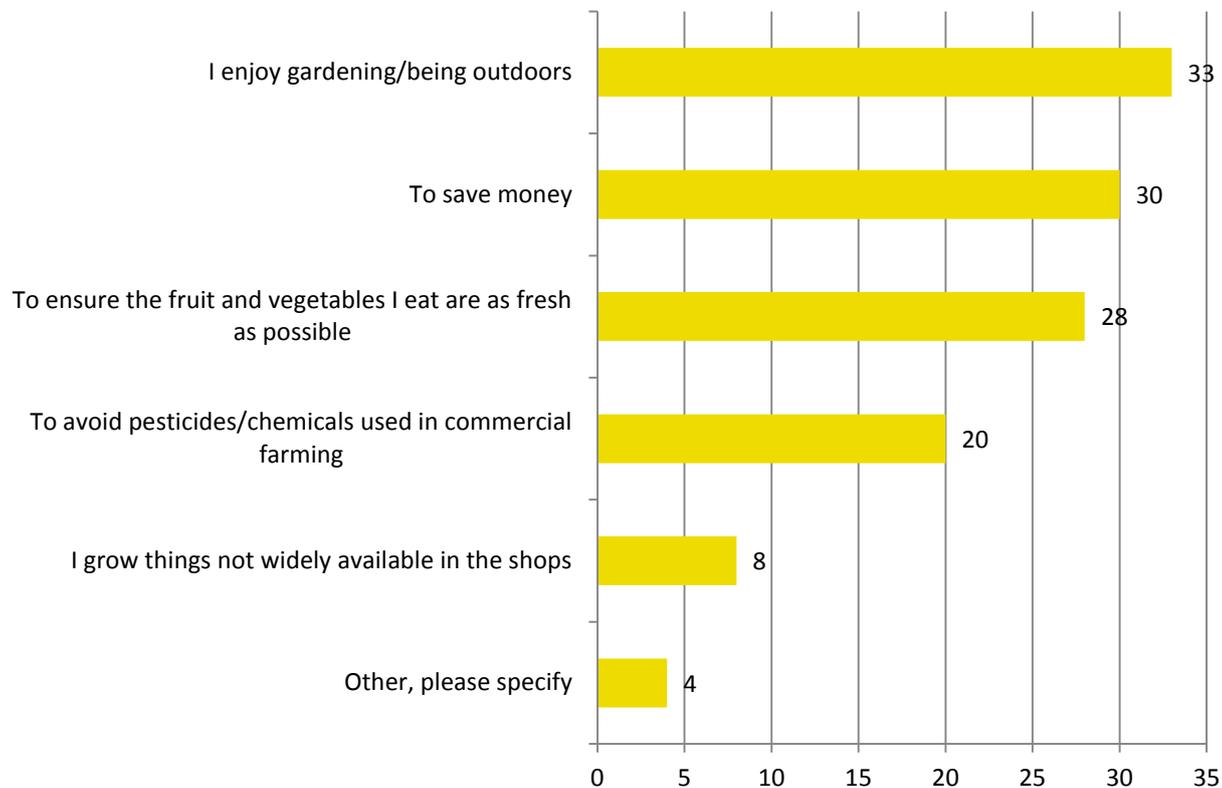
In total, just over ten percent of respondents (12.1%, n=60) reported growing their own food (see figure 20).

Figure 20 | Do you currently grow any of your own food? (n=497)



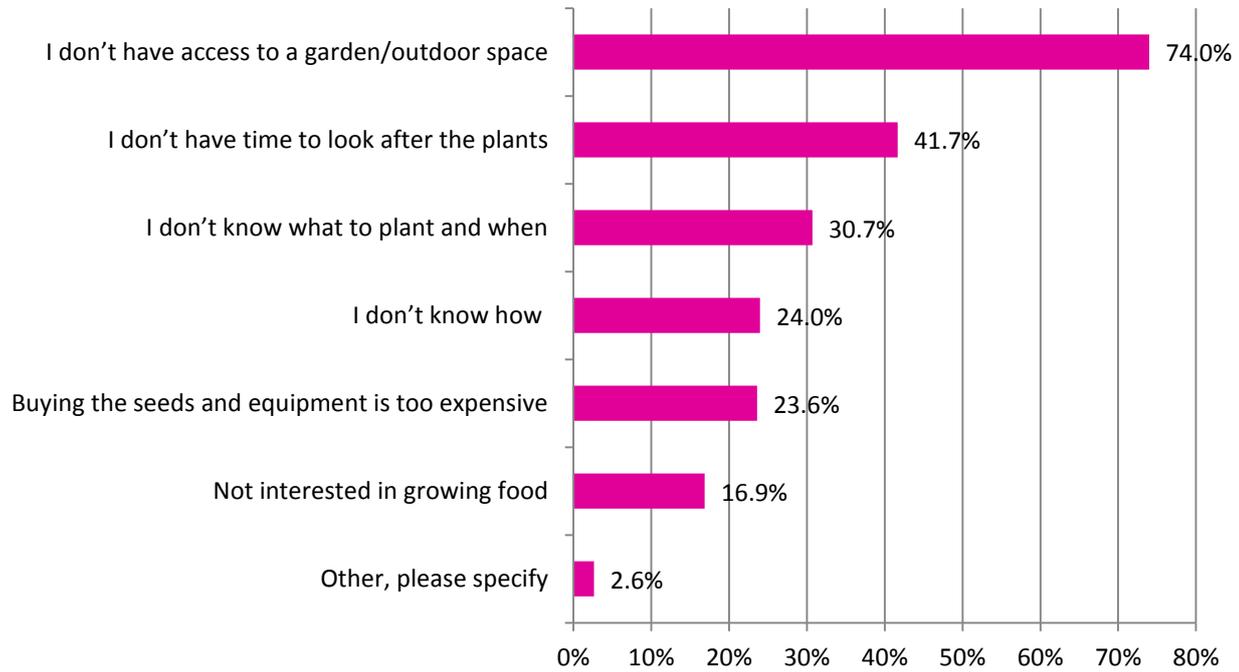
These respondents are choosing to grow their own food in the main because they enjoy being outdoors or gardening (n=33) however saving money is also a motivator for half of respondents (n=30). Figure 21 below outlines the reasons behind growing their own food for those that are currently doing so.

Figure 21 | Why do you choose to grow your own food? (n=60)



The most common barrier facing those that don't currently grow their own food is a lack of access to a garden or outdoor space (74%, n=364). A lack of time to tend to plants is also a barrier (41.7%, n=205) along with the knowledge of how to grow food (30.7%, n=151 don't know what to plant and when, 24%, n=118 don't know how). Very few respondents indicated that they simply weren't interested in growing food (16.9%, n=83) therefore emphasising the ability of communal growing schemes to address these barriers will be key when recruiting participants.

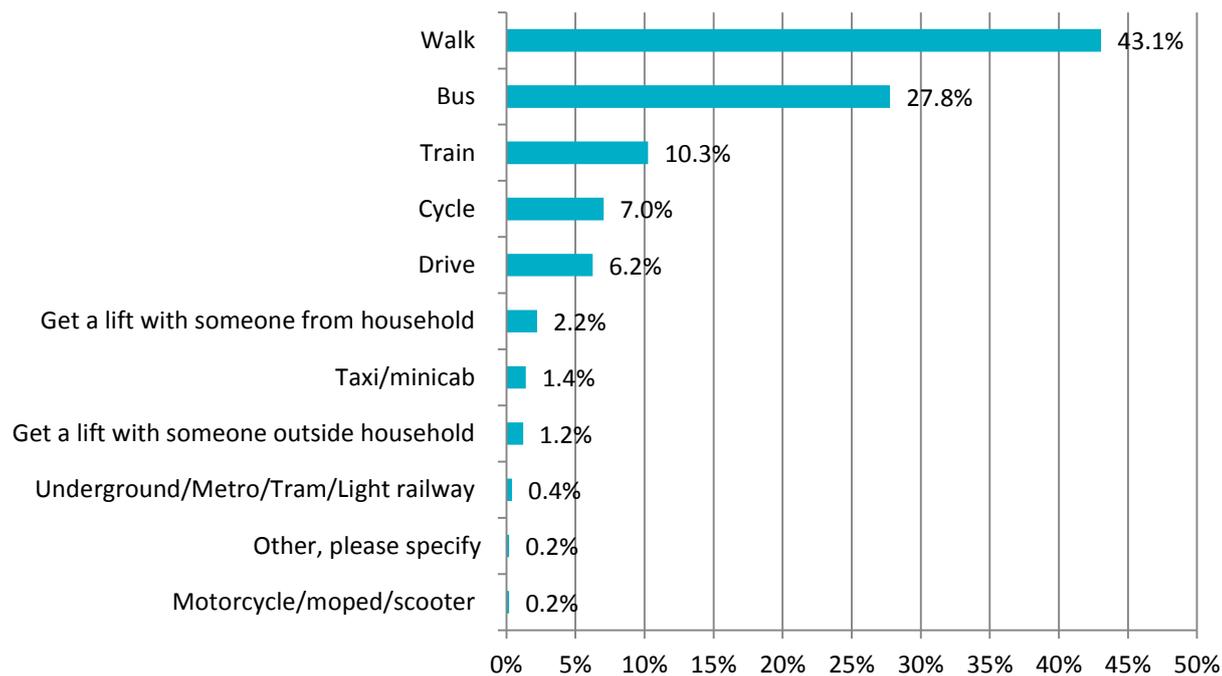
Figure 22 | Why do you choose to grow your own food? (n=60)



Travel and transport

On the whole, respondents report using sustainable methods of transport to travel between their term time accommodation and the place where they study. The most frequently used method by respondents to the survey is walking (43%, n=214) followed by using the bus (27.8%, n=138). A total of 11.1% (n=55) travel by car, either driving themselves or getting a lift. Whilst this may seem like a small figure, when scaled up across the entire student population the figure could be as high as over 2000 students travelling by car⁶ and therefore represents an opportunity to reduce carbon emissions from student travel.

Figure 23 | How do you usually travel from your home during term time to the place where you study? (n=497)

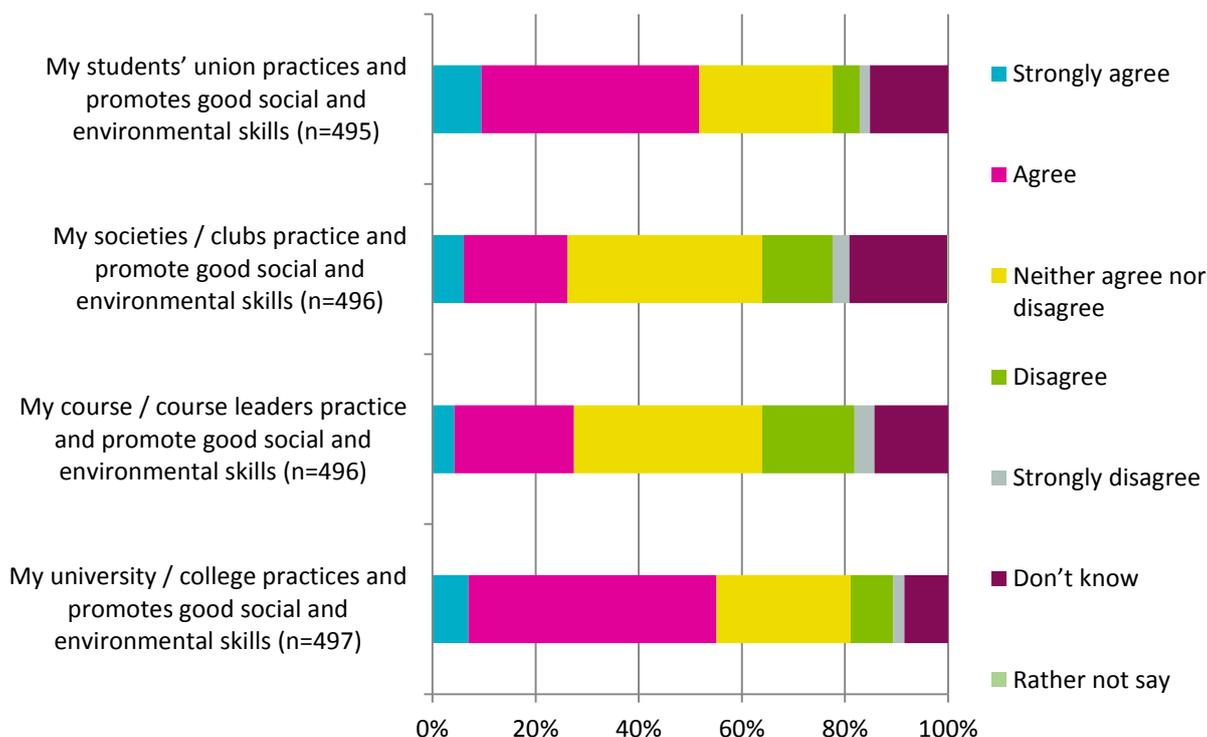


⁶ Based on HESA student numbers for 2011/12

University and sustainability

The research also aimed to assess respondents' experiences of teaching and learning on sustainable development at the University of Liverpool. Initially, respondents were asked to consider the performance of different elements of the university on promoting and practicing social and environmental skills. Figure 24 below shows that respondents' overarching perceptions of their university or students' union are fairly positive however on a more 'local' level experiences are more mixed. For example, 55% (n=274) of respondents agree to some extent that their university practices and promotes good environmental and social skills and 51.7% (n=256) agree to some extent that their students' union practices and promotes good social and environmental skills. On the other hand, just 26.2% (n=130) agree to some extent that their societies and clubs practice and promote good environmental and social skills and 27.4% (n=136) agree to some extent that their course or course leaders practice and promote good social and environmental skills (see Figure 24).

Figure 24 | To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements:



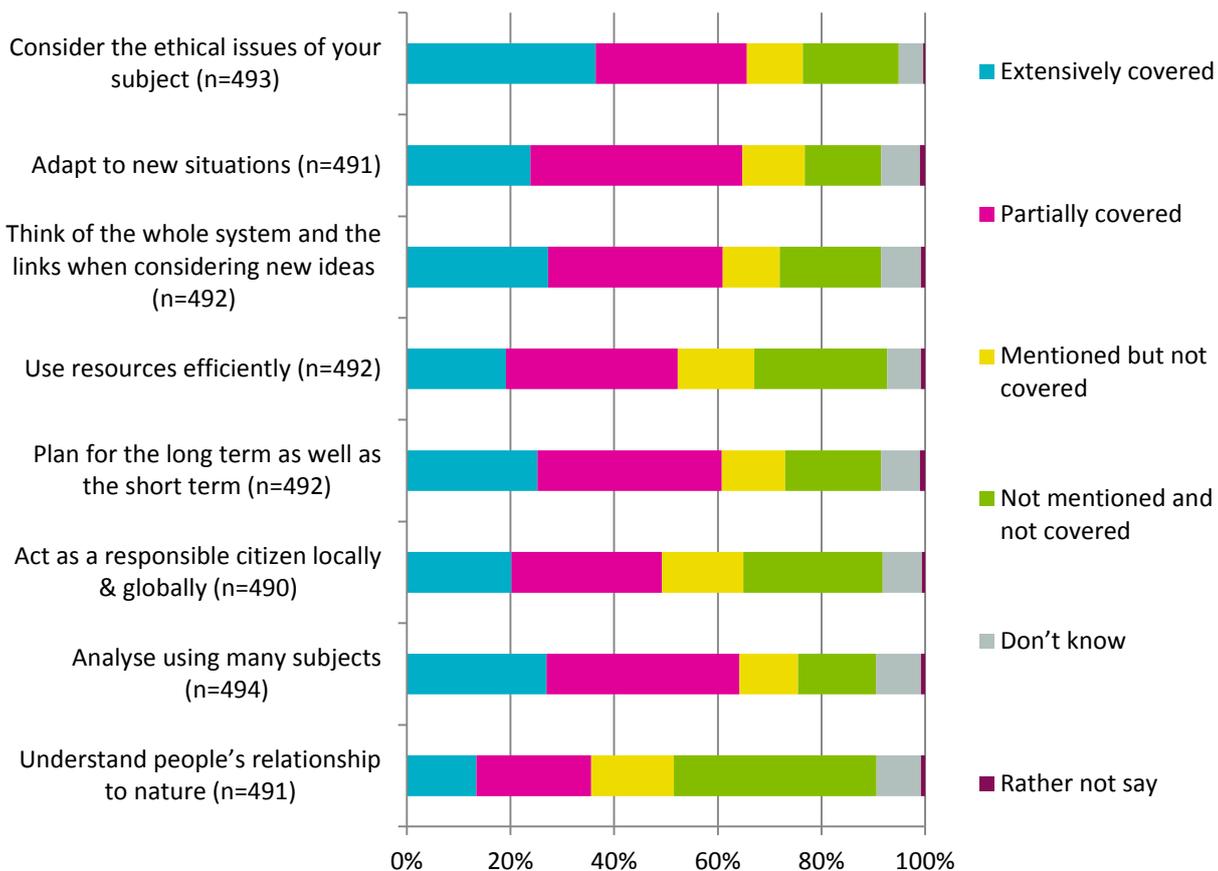
Respondents were also asked to assess the coverage of a series of skills for sustainable development by their courses. The skills used, whilst not comprehensive or definitive, were developed through the NUS' longitudinal research on behalf of the Higher Education Academy into student attitudes towards and skills for sustainable development to represent those that contribute to ways of thinking and acting to promote sustainable development. The skills are as follows:

- Consider the ethical implications of your subject
- Adapt to new situations
- Think of the whole system and the links when considering new ideas
- Use resources efficiently

- Plan for the long term as well as the short term
- Act as a responsible citizen locally and globally
- Analyse using many subjects
- Understand people’s relationship to nature

Figure 25 shows the perceptions of coverage from respondents at the University of Liverpool. Overall, over half of respondents believe that most skills have been covered to some extent for example, 65.7% (n=324) believe that the skill of considering the ethical issues of their subject has been covered. Similarly, 64.1% (n=317) believe that they skill of analysing using many subjects has been covered by their course. There is scope for improving these perceptions across the board however this is particularly the case for skills such as understanding people’s relationship to nature (35.6%, n=175) and acting as a responsible citizen locally and globally (49.2%, n=241). There are however some differences between year groups, for example third year students are significantly more likely to believe that ‘considering the ethical issues of their subject’ has been extensively covered than first year students (40.5%, n=47 compared to 28.1%, n=38).

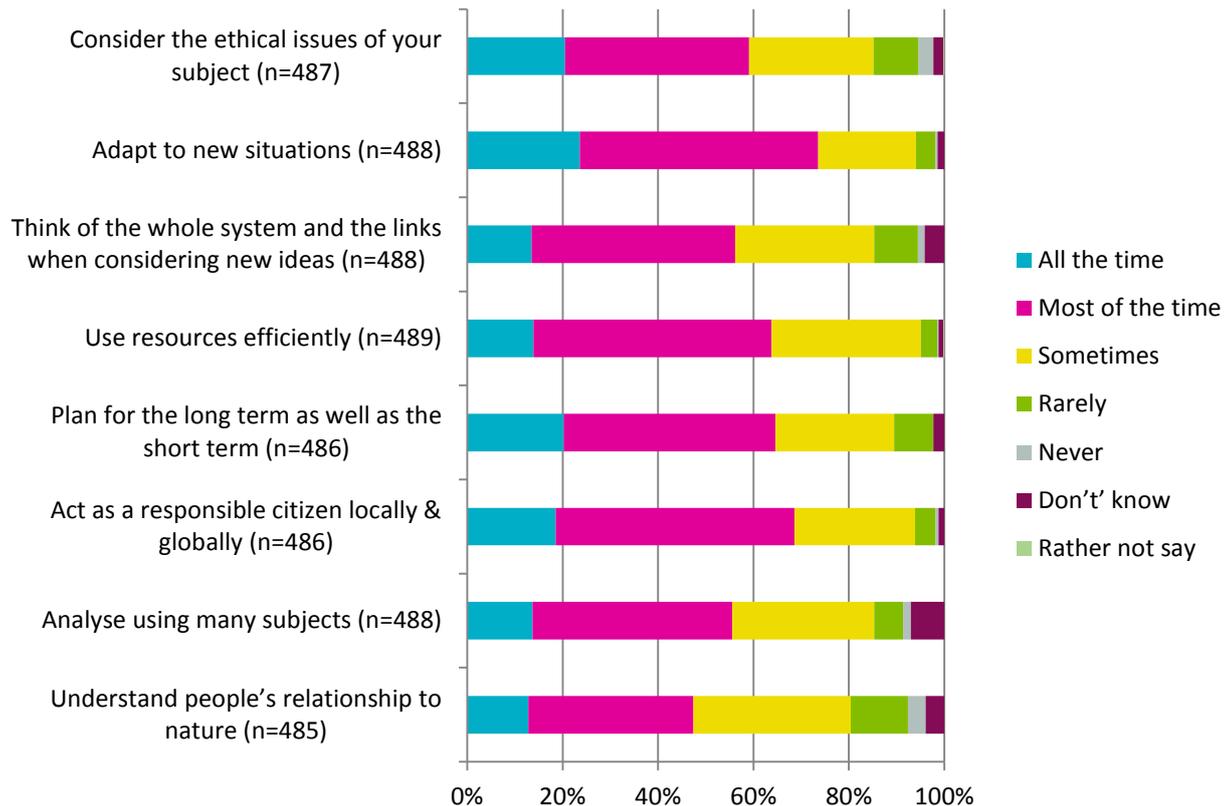
Figure 25 | Thinking about the teaching and learning you have experienced so far at university, please tell us to what extent, if at all, you believe these skills below have been covered in your course so far:



Respondents were also asked to reflect on the extent to which they put these skills into practice (figure 26). The extent to which respondents report using these skills broadly matches the

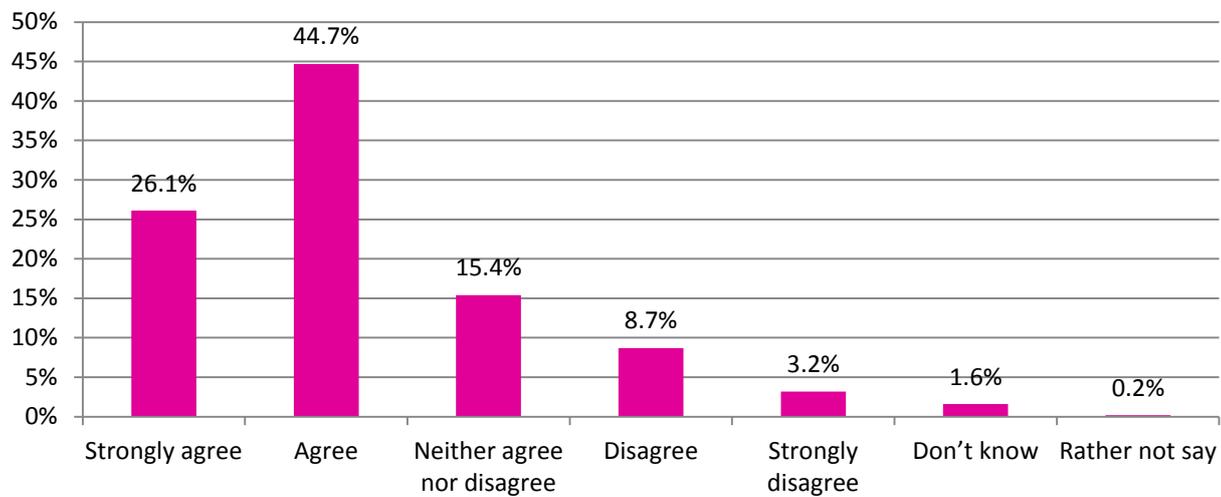
perceptions of coverage of these skills during their time at university, for example 56.1% (n=488) of respondents report thinking of the whole system and the links when considering new ideas but only 47.4% (n=485) say they practice an understanding of people’s relationship to nature. Again there are differences according to year group, for example third year undergraduates are significantly more likely to say they practice ‘thinking of the whole system and the links when considering new ideas’ than second year undergraduates (16.2%, n=19 compared to 5.9%, n=6).

Figure 26 | To what extent, if at all, do you think that you personally carry out the following skills?



Overall there is strong agreement that universities and colleges should be obliged to develop students’ environmental and social skills as part of their courses, providing an impetus for action at the University of Liverpool. In total, 70.8% (n=350) agree or strongly agree as show in figure 27 below.

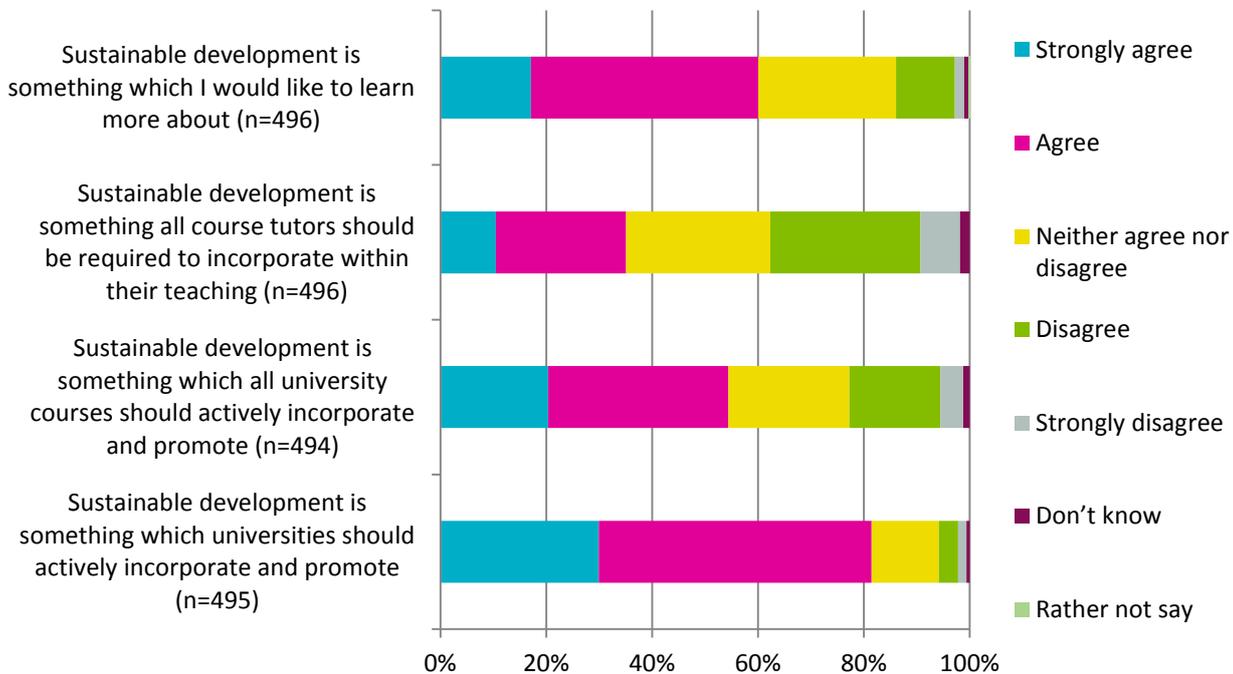
Figure 26 | To what extent, if at all, do you agree that universities / colleges should be obliged to develop student's social and environmental skills as part of their courses? (n=494)



This latent demand for increased education for sustainable development is emphasised again by respondents with 60% (n=298) reporting sustainable development to be something they would like to learn more about. Similarly, 81.4% (n=403) believe sustainable development to be something which universities should actively incorporate and promote. These figures are broadly in line with the picture reported nationally in research conducted by NUS on behalf of the Higher Education Academy⁷.

⁷ http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/sustainability/2013_student_skills_final_report

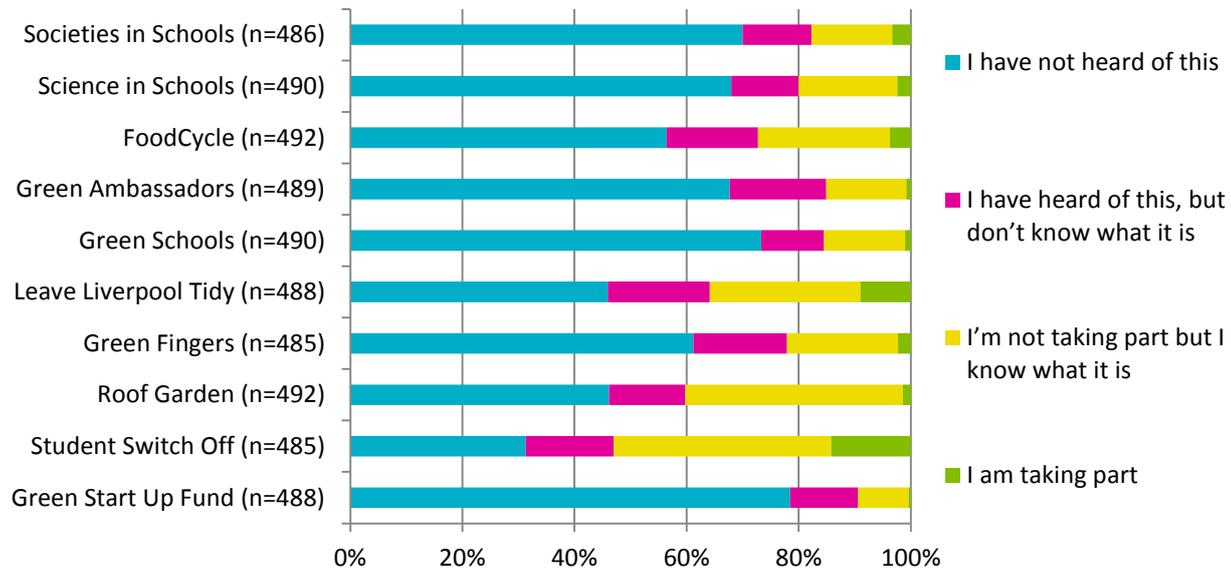
Figure 27 | Taking the definition of sustainable development to mean: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” To what extent, if at all, would you say that you personally agree with the following statements:



Given that 54.4% (n=269) agree that courses are the means through which sustainable development should be incorporated and promoted, consideration of other vehicles of learning is also important. One possibility is the informal curriculum and as such an assessment of participation in current extra-curricular activities related to sustainability was included in the research.

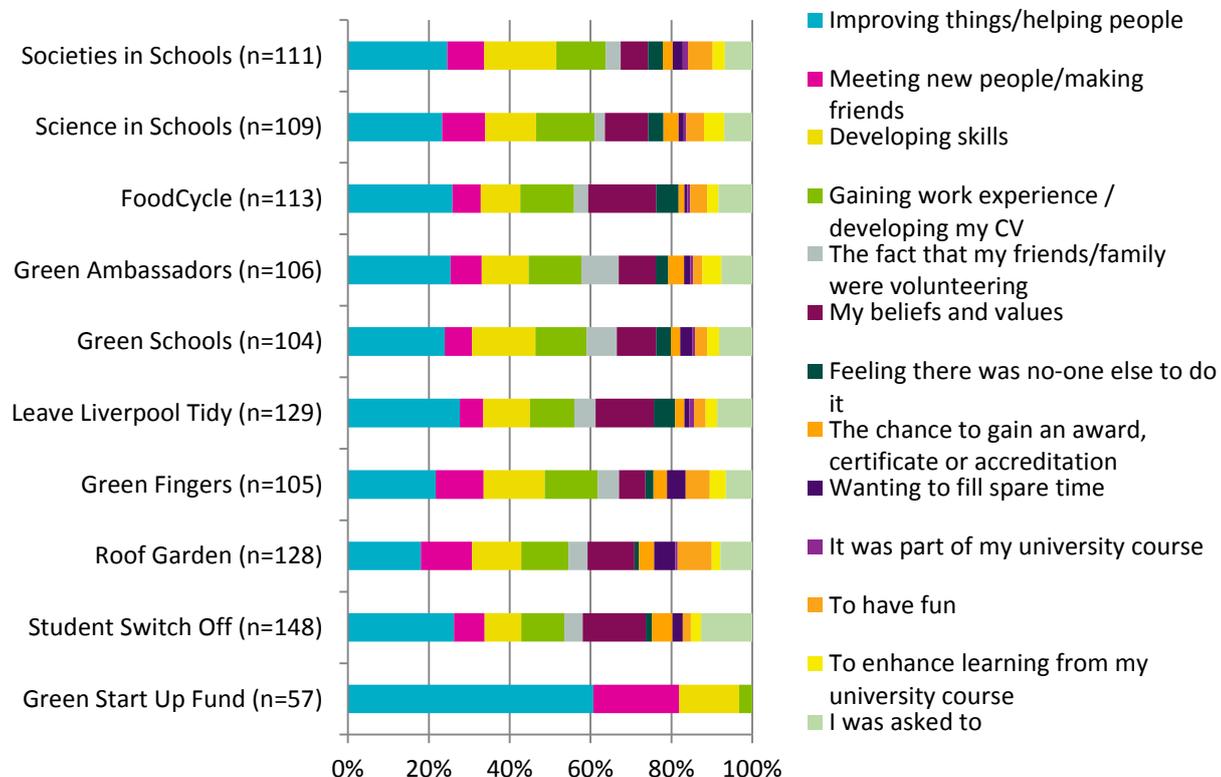
Respondents were asked to indicate their level of awareness and participation for a range of activities and opportunities currently run at the university. On the whole, levels of awareness and participation are low, for example 70% (n=340) have not heard of the Societies in Schools project. Similarly, only 9% (n=44) report taking part in the Leave Liverpool Tidy project despite higher levels of awareness. This of course may be reflective of the time of year the research was conducted – in the first term many respondents may not yet have had an opportunity to participate – however active promotion of the activities and opportunities will be essential to drive engagement in sustainable development outside of the lecture theatre.

Figure 28 | Please tell us which of the following initiatives at the University of Liverpool you are aware of or take part in?



Drivers of engagement include the opportunity to improve things or help people, to gain work experience and develop CVs and also a coincidence of respondents' beliefs and values and the objectives of the project/initiative.

Figure 29 | Why have/would you choose to take part in this/these initiatives?



Conclusions and suggestions

Conclusions and suggestions

Research at the University of Liverpool paints a positive baseline picture of attitudes and behaviours for sustainable development amongst the student population however it also identifies a number of opportunities for improvement.

Values and attitudes

Just under a third of respondents fall into the most engaged in the Defra segmentation model of environmental attitudes and behaviours – the 'Positive Greens'. There is scope to move those currently in the remaining segments closer to this group, in particular those which are already engaged, but to lower levels.

Lifestyles and behaviour

Respondents' assessment of their current lifestyle and the environment emphasises the opportunity to increase engagement and action with 84.5% (n=420) expressing a desire to (a bit or a lot) more to help the environment. Harnessing this desire will be key to the success of sustainability projects run by the Guild of Students and the university.

Looking more closely at current behaviour, a mixed picture is painted in terms of behaviours which impact the environment. Respondents are generally positive in their behaviours relating to resource consumption, however opportunities remain to address frequently conducted poor environmental practices, particularly around food, through existing or novel schemes.

Motivations for environmental action (saving energy and recycling) are largely altruistic and include helping the environment and preventing waste along with feeling that they are doing the right thing, and making a difference by taking action. The invisible nature of energy costs to many students however presents a barrier, along with a lack of awareness of how to take action and perceptions of a hassle-factor and expense. Suggestions for removal of barriers, particularly around recycling behaviour, are linked to ensuring systems are widely available and easy and convenient to use.

Whilst the barriers facing respondents taking action to grow their own food are may appear easily solved by the development of a community growing scheme (thereby providing access to growing space, reducing time commitment and providing expertise), over half of respondents haven't thought about taking action in this area, or don't want to do this so engaging a range of students may require careful consideration on how the opportunities for are developed and communicated.

On the whole, respondents exhibit positive transport behaviour in terms of environmental impact of the methods used to travel between their home during term time and their place of study. There is however scope to investigate further the reasoning behind the reliance on cars for approximately ten percent of respondents.

University and sustainability

Respondents report positive overarching perceptions of the promotion of good social and environmental skills by their university and students' unions. However when considered at a more 'local' level, for example at course or club and society level, agreement on positive performance is weaker highlighting an opportunity to work more holistically across the university.

Coverage of skills for sustainable development is high with over half of respondents believing that most skills identified in the research have been extensively or partially covered. Some skills however were felt to have been covered to a lesser extent, for example understanding people's relationship to nature, and acting as a responsible citizen locally and globally. The same applies when considering the extent to which respondents put these skills into action.

Overall, there is strong agreement that universities should be obliged to develop environmental and social skills through their courses coupled with a desire to learn more about sustainable development. Currently, awareness of and participation in initiatives related to sustainable development does not match expressions of desire for action therefore communication around these initiatives, and the associated opportunities, will be key.

Suggestions

- University/guild led schemes may benefit from discussion of target audiences, for example the ~80% of respondents who state the intention to conduct more pro-environmental behaviours in future, or those segments who already exhibit some engagement with environmental issues.
- Linking new and existing schemes to specific behaviours, and specific student types, in order to further engage, for example those behaviours identified as being carried out 'occasionally' or 'quite often' in this research.
- A role for increased communication and promotion of the existing initiatives at Liverpool to students, in order raise awareness and participation to support a "social norms" agenda within the university and further engage and enable students to create visible change.
- Further polls to indicate awareness of, participation in and impact of schemes may be advantageous, if conducted at appropriate times throughout the year, to act as a metric of success.
- Strong desire for action on sustainable development across the university should be matched by holistic action both in terms of skills development and opportunities for teaching, learning and engagement.

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