



# Belong Survey Student Experience Research

Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union  
2023/24





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# Belong survey

## Falmouth and Exeter Findings



14% of students find it hard to access subject specific resources



59% of students feel lonely at least once a week



Students lack awareness of how the SU represents them



25% of students do not feel part of a community of students and staff



25% of students don't think that information on university mental wellbeing support services is communicated well



25% of students don't know about or lack an awareness of activities and opportunities provided by the SU & our student communities



35% of students don't know or feel that support services are sufficient for their needs



## Demographics

This report serves two main purposes. The first is to understand the key themes and issues that students are facing using data from the Belong Survey and secondly, to identify areas that we as Students' Union can work on to improve student experience and our own offerings.

The Belong Survey provides us with a detailed understanding of both our sample (across Falmouth & Exeter, Falmouth, and Exeter in Cornwall) and the total sample from the UK. The following section of this report breaks down the demographics of our sample, comparing this to the total sample of the national Belong Survey dataset.

We achieved a total response of 365 (231 from Falmouth and 58 from Exeter in Cornwall) with the total sample achieving 4,757 responses. Our response rate is relatively low (particularly from Exeter in Cornwall students) and therefore, is not representative of the whole student population across the two universities that we represent.

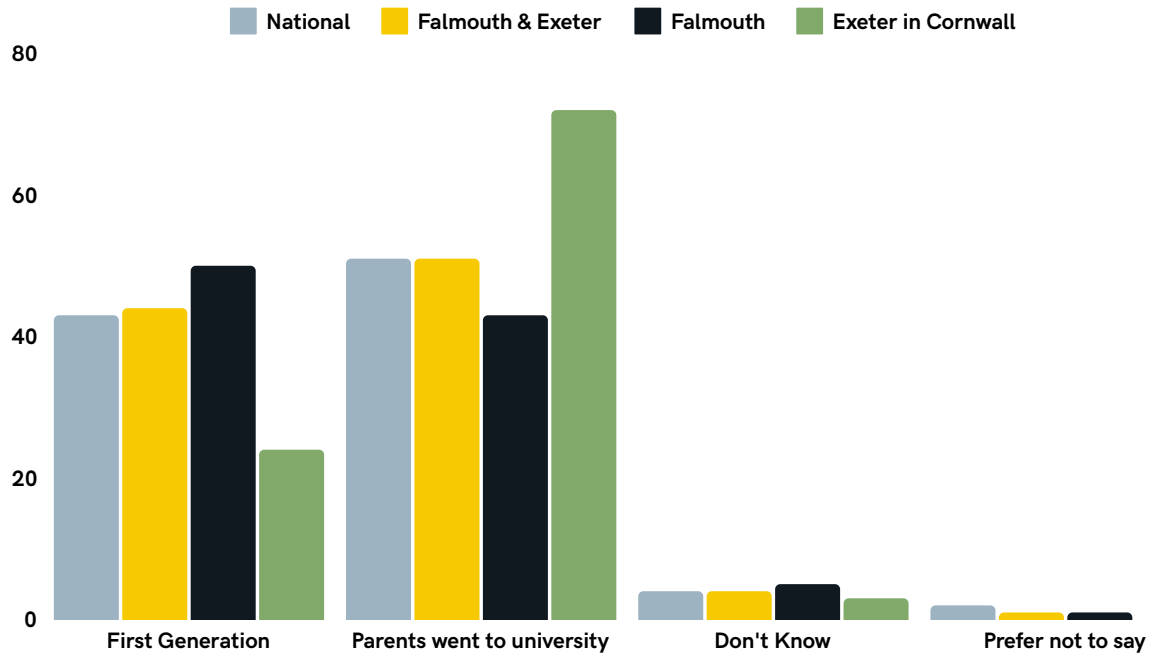
The survey was sent out in waves with the breakdown of responses shown in the tables below:

Wave	Total	Falmouth and Exeter	Falmouth	Exeter in Cornwall
1 - 16/10 to 5/11	981	39	30	0
2 - 27/11 to 17/12	1621	65	44	0
3 - 8/1 to 28/1	362	77	49	0
4 - 19/2 to 10/3	286	75	47	21
5 - 1/4 to 21/4	846	88	45	33
6 - 13/5 to 2/6	660	21	16	4

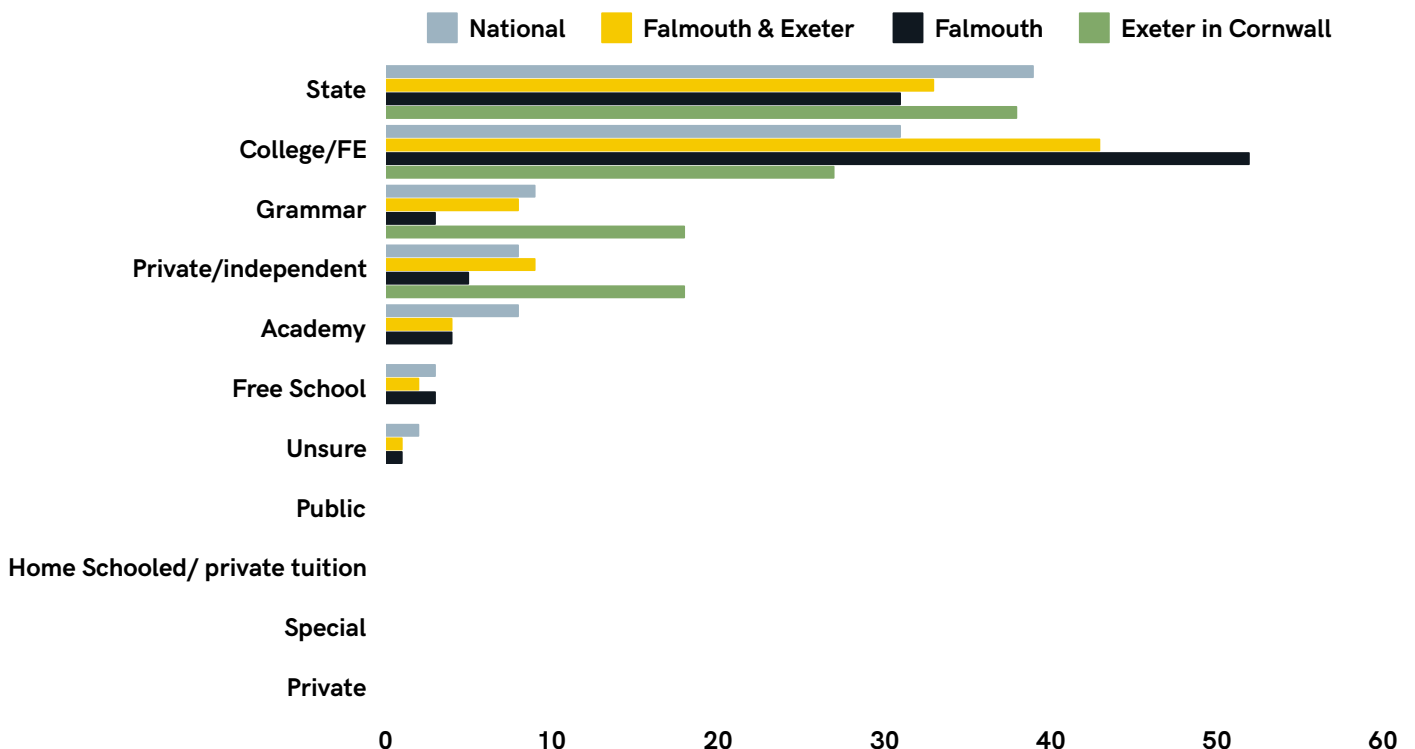
## Academic Landscape

Participants of the survey were asked a series of questions that link to their university demographics and students' previous education, which allows us to understand the academic landscape of who we engaged with during this survey.

The below graph identifies the proportion of participants who are first generation students. This clearly illustrates that a higher percentage of Falmouth students are first generation whilst Exeter in Cornwall respondents have a significantly higher percentage of second-generation university students.

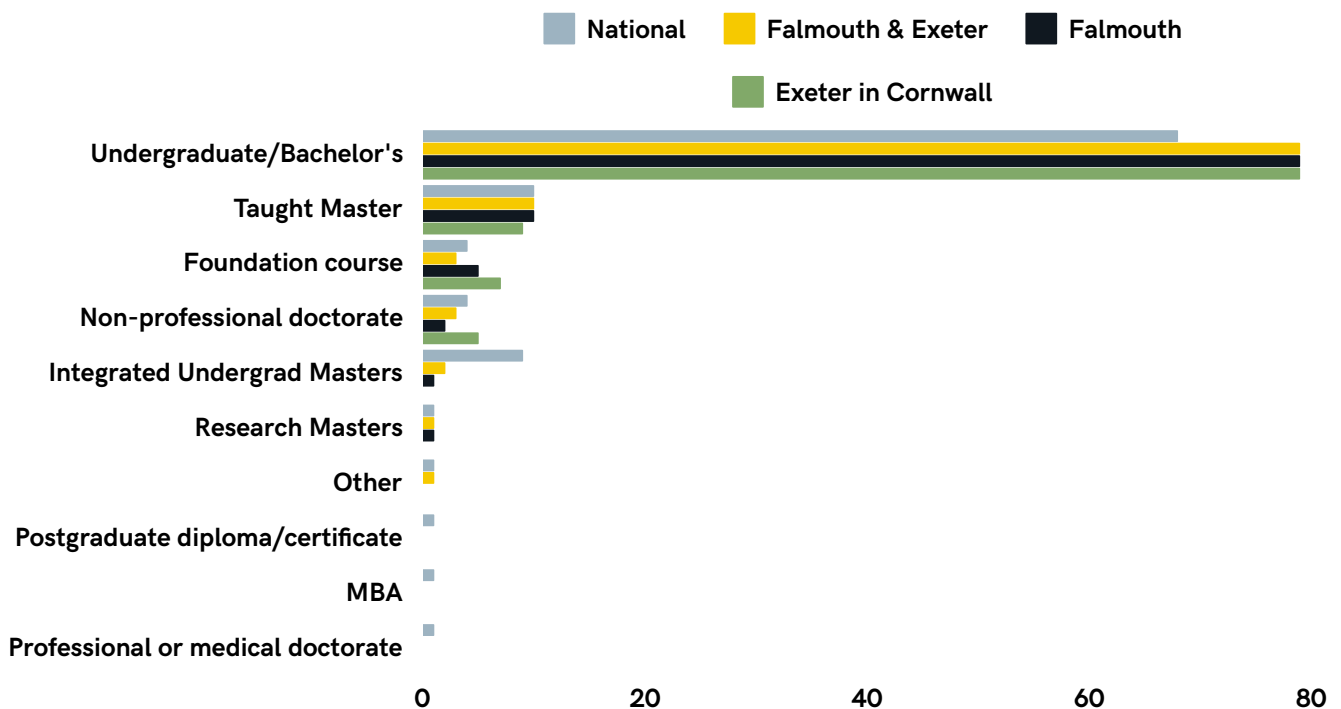


Participants were also asked what type of school/college they went to prior to attending university. Our sample follows a similar pattern to the total average. Most notably the percentage of respondents who went to college or pursued further education, is much higher with Falmouth students. Similarly, whilst it is a low percentage overall, a larger number of respondents from Exeter in Cornwall have attended either grammar or private/independent schools.

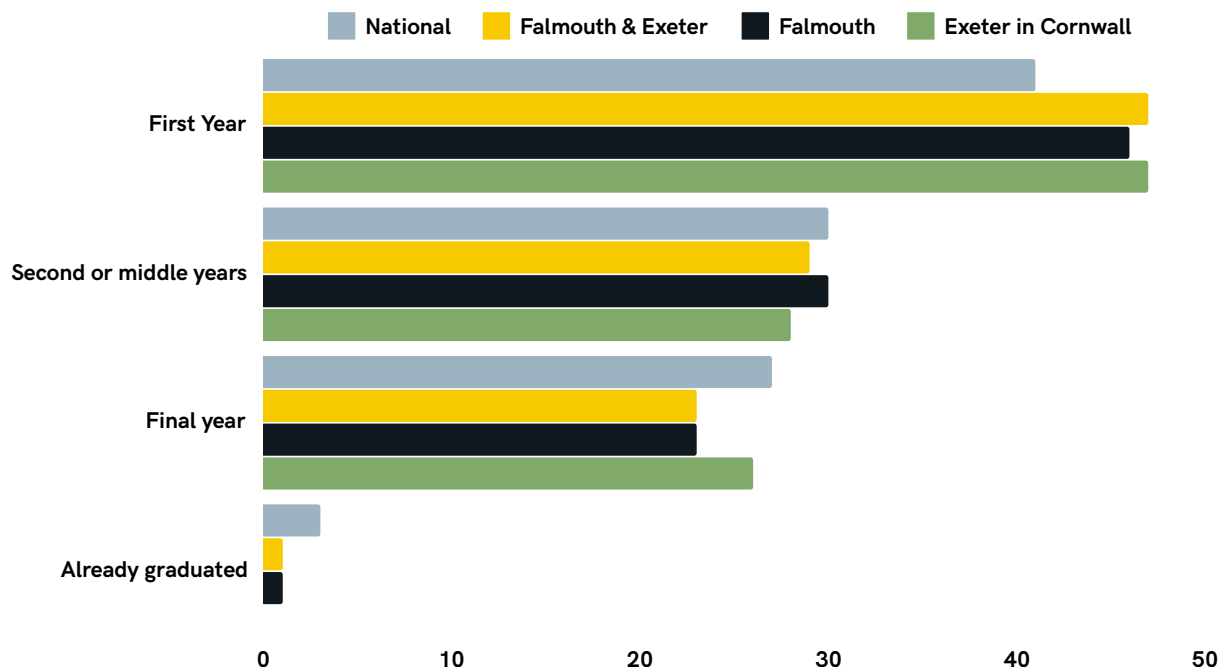




Important for us to understand, participants were also asked a series of questions related to their current study. The below graph identifies the level of study of the sample, highlighting that 79% of participants from our survey were undergraduates – with only 10% of responses accounting for those on a taught master's degree. This highlights the need to focus on postgraduate students in future research, as much of the insights from this survey will not be generalisable to this cohort of students.

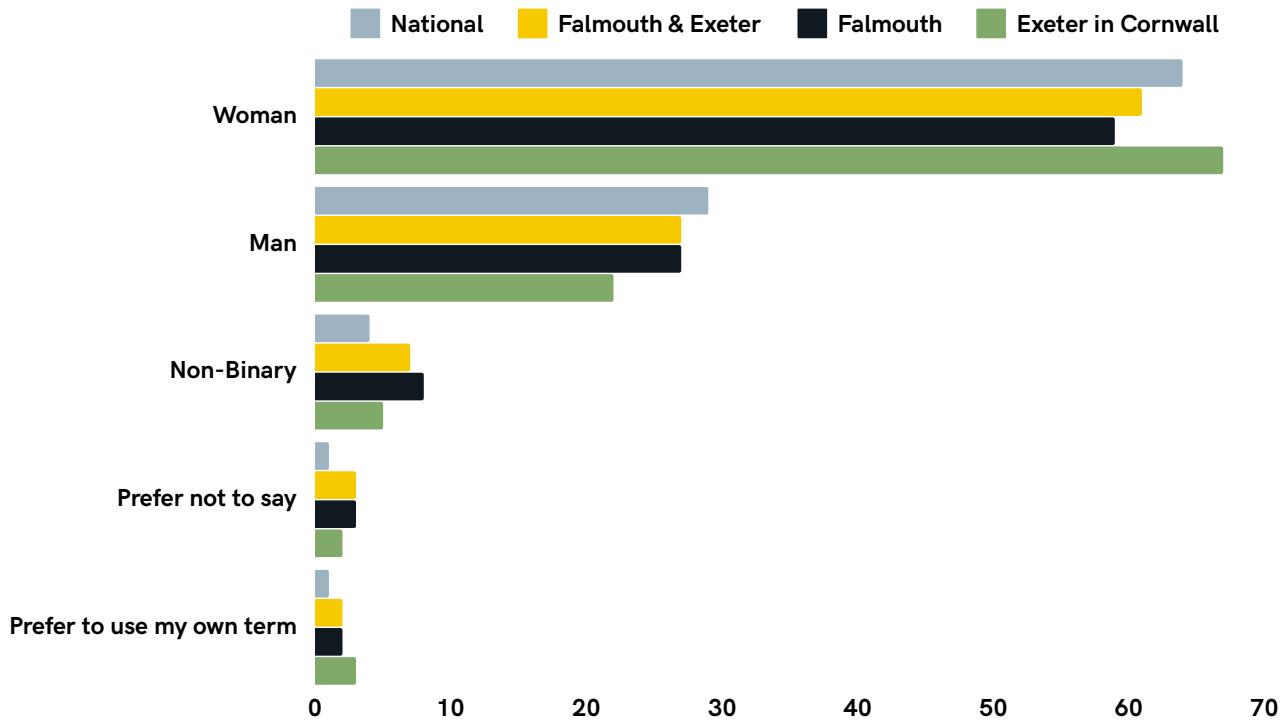


Participants were also asked to select the year of study. As shown in the graph below, most of our responses came from first year students with the percentage of respondents declining as their year of study progressed. Therefore, for future research we need to explore how we can engage students across their academic journeys rather than at limited points.



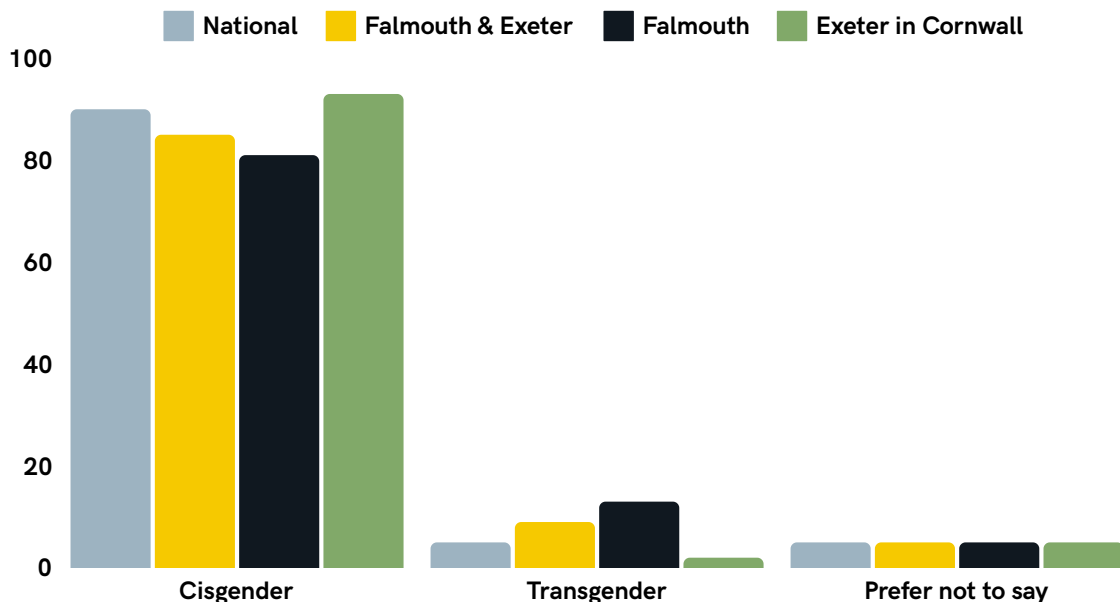


## Gender Identity and Sexuality



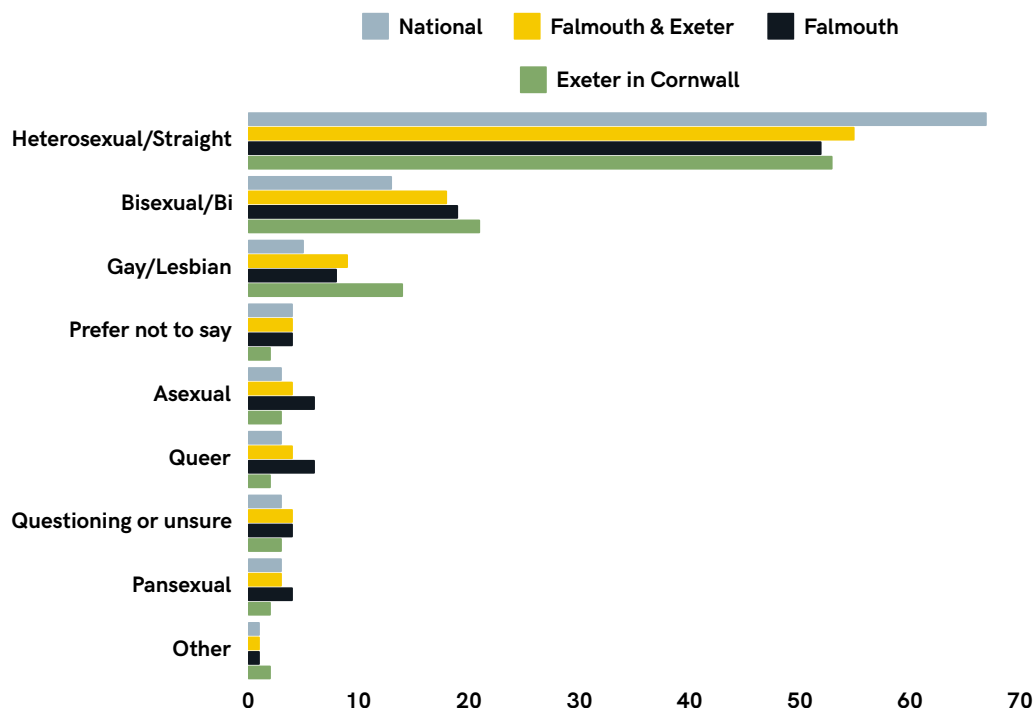
The above graph outlines the gender in which participants identify with, which highlights that we had a larger uptake with women compared to other genders. This follows the same pattern as the total sample results however, we had a larger proportion of non-binary participants across Falmouth & Exeter and Falmouth. The main limitations with this data (which is a repeated issue across all demographic factors) is that we have reached a limited sample and therefore, we do not have enough data across each gender to accurately generalise the findings within their segments.

Below further explores the gender identity of respondents, which highlights that most responses have come from cisgender students. Whilst, we have a higher percentage of participants identifying as transgender (this comes from Falmouth students) compared to the national results, this is still only 9% when combined as Falmouth & Exeter and 13% when Falmouth is analysed in isolation.





Participants were also asked to select their sexual orientation. Our sample follows a similar pattern to that of the total sample, we received the highest number of responses from students who identified themselves as heterosexual/straight. However, we received higher responses from students who identified themselves as LGBTQ+ compared to the total sample but this is still a low percentage of our respondents.



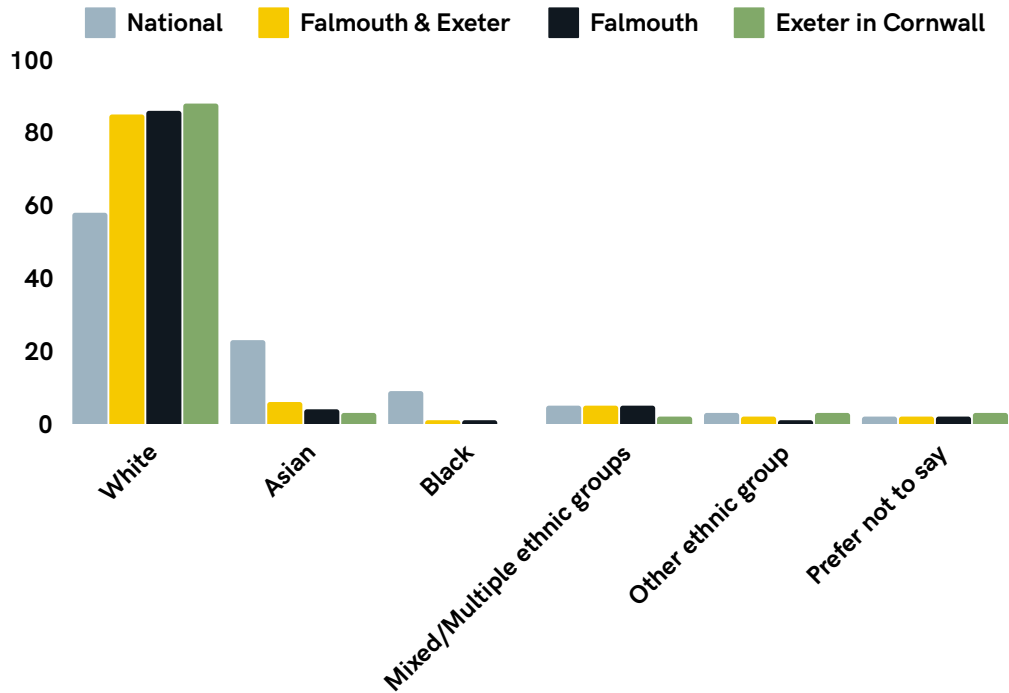
The key insight from the Gender Identity and Sexuality data, highlights that minority groups are not engaging with the survey. Therefore, we need to explore how we engage with the wider student population to ensure that all student groups are accurately represented in our research. Thus, allowing us to better understand our members and improve our service offering to them.

## Ethnicity and Domicile

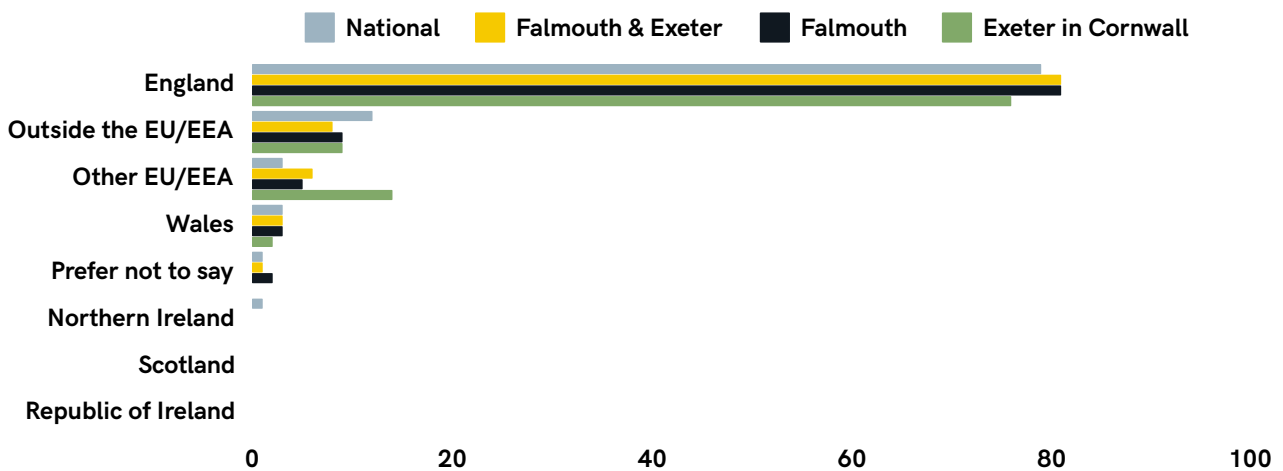
Students were also asked to select their ethnicity and domicile; domicile referring to the country that a person treats as their permanent home.

The below graph highlights that our percentage of white participants is much higher than the overall average and we have a much lower response rate from BAME students. This proves there is a need to widen the participation of our research, as we are currently achieving insights that are biased.





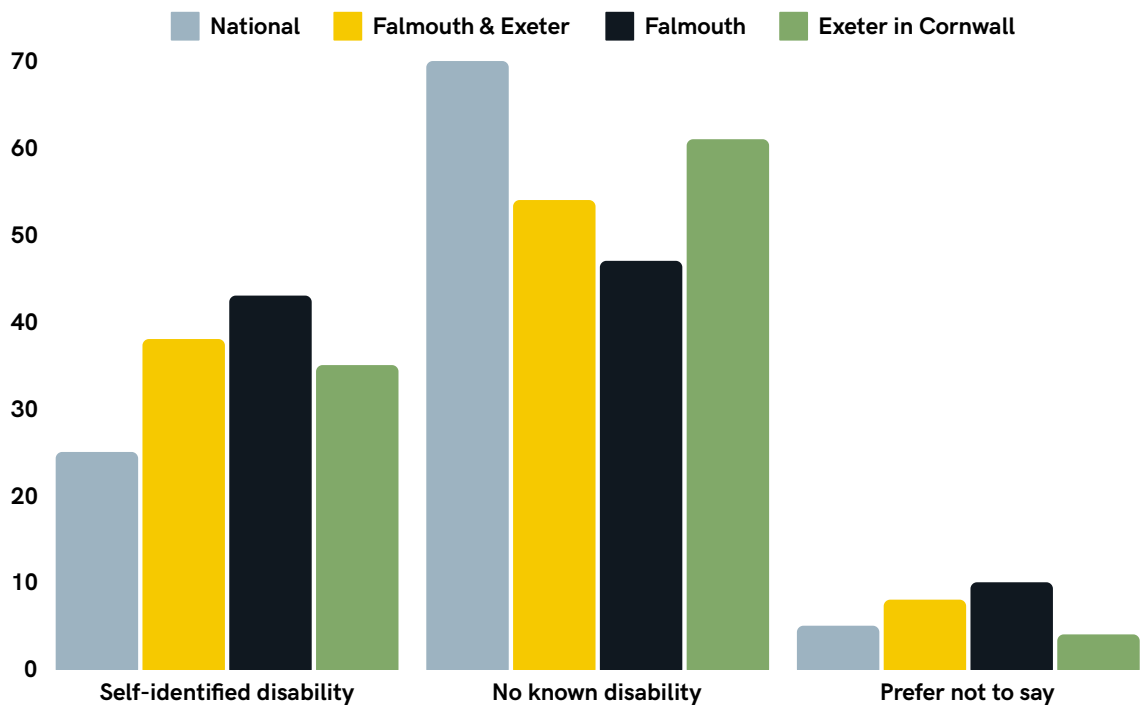
Below further iterates this as the graph shows that 81% of our responses came from students who consider England to be their domicile. Thus, showing that we are not achieving a larger response rate from international students. It should also be noted that some international students may permanently live in England which would account for the lack of responses from other areas.



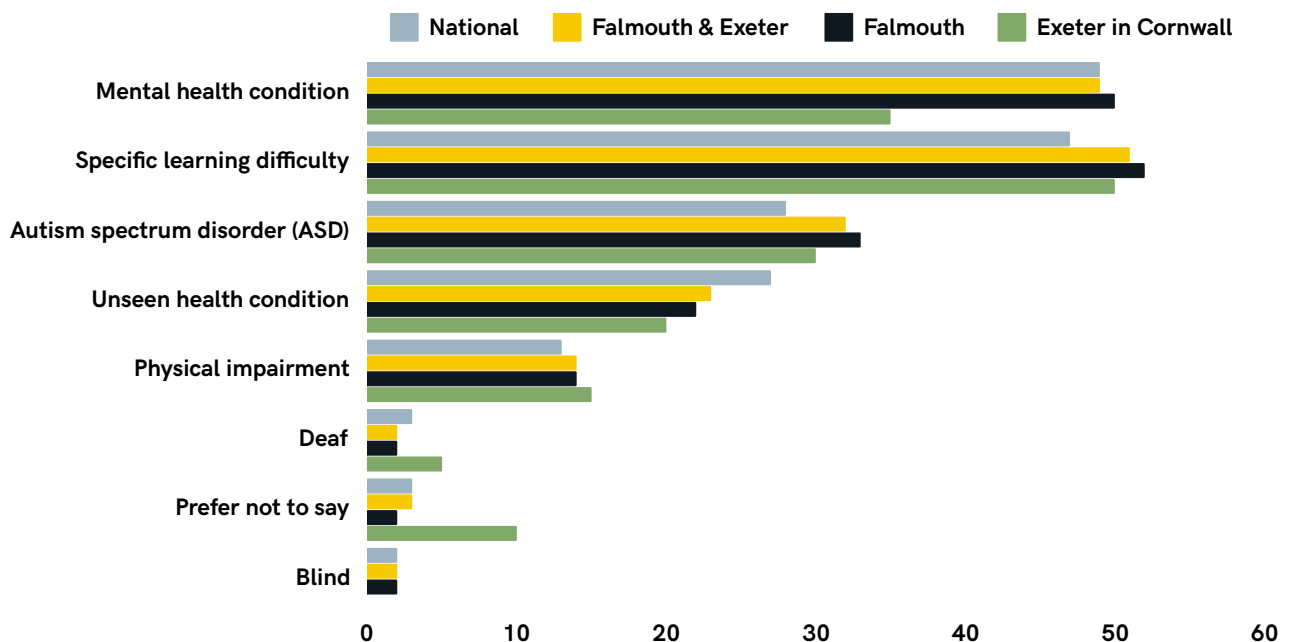


## Disabilities

The graph below shows that 38% of our respondents have a self-identified disability, which is a figure that is higher than the total sample.



To further understand this, respondents were also asked to describe their disability, impairment, or long-term health condition. As shown in the graph below, almost half of our participants identified that they have a mental health condition which is in line with the results from the wider sample. This highlights that University students are struggling with their mental health and therefore, this must be considered within our work as a Union.





The graph also highlights that our respondents have a range of disabilities, impairments or long-term health conditions that encompasses both physical impairments and hidden disabilities. However, whilst we have received a varied response and engaged with students who identified that they had a disability, this is still a small number of the wider student population. Thus, further research would be needed to understand the student experience for those with disabilities.

Overall, the key issue that has been identified whilst analysing the demographics is that a small pool of students engages with our research. Thus, meaning that our insights are not representative of the wider student community particularly when minority & underrepresented groups are concerned. Therefore, as a Union our clear next step here is to identify how we can engage with students and encourage increased response rate to surveys.

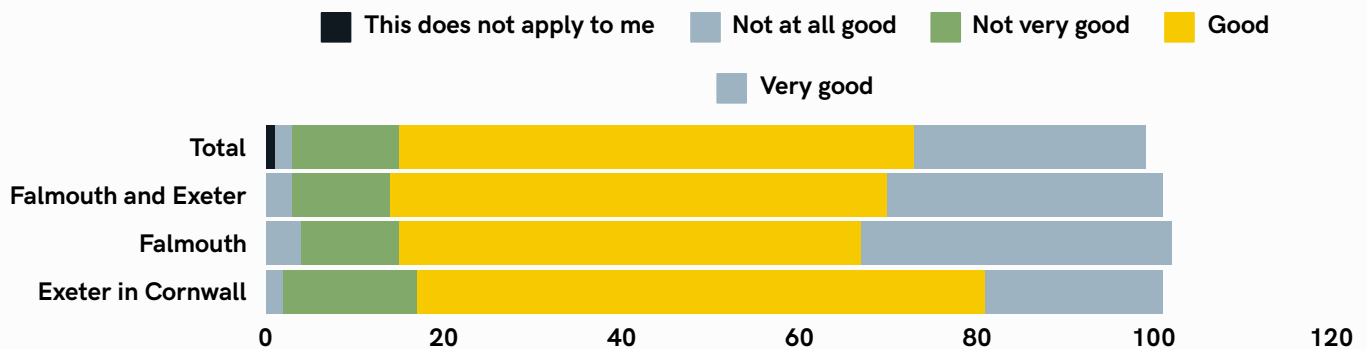


## Academic Experience

The following section of this report explores the academic experience of respondents. This will provide an overview of students' experiences related to their learning, assessment, and feedback, learning resources and the academic support available to them.

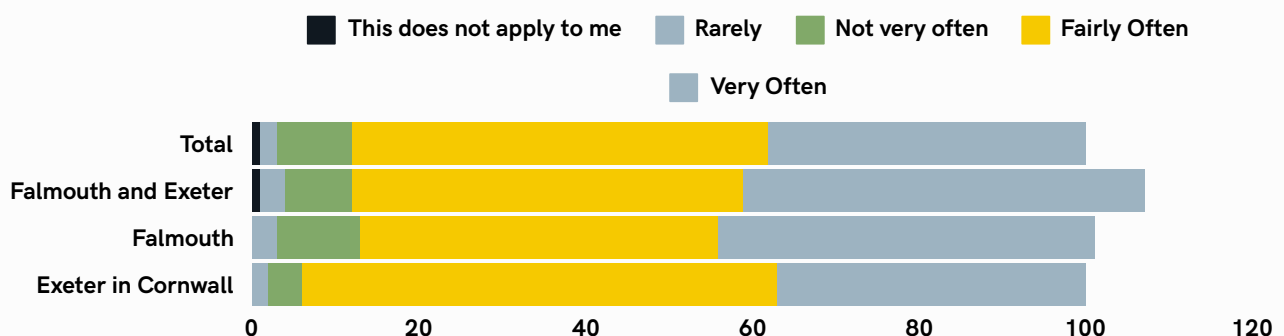
### Learning Experiences

**How good are staff at explaining things and making the subject engaging?**



The graph above demonstrates how students view academic staff in terms of being engaging and explaining things well. Overall, this highlights that students are happy with the quality of teaching and staff across both universities are good at explaining content & making their subjects engaging. This is highest with Falmouth students with 87% of respondents rating staff as good or very good at explaining things.

**How often in the course intellectually stimulating, challenging you to do your best work?**



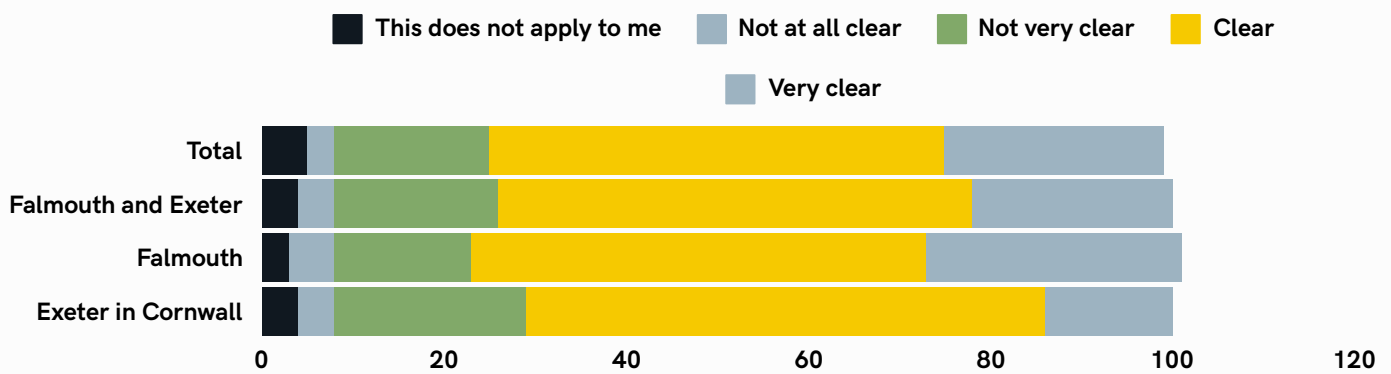
Participants were also asked to rate how often they found their course to be intellectually stimulating and challenge them to do their best work. For both universities, this has positive feedback with 94% of Exeter in Cornwall respondents and 88% of Falmouth students stating that their course is stimulating either fairly or very often.

Overall, the survey suggests that students from both universities are happy with their learning experiences with participants the results from both questions being highly positive. However, this is from a limited sample size and therefore further research needs to be done in this area to assess the overall student population's experiences with their learning. Similarly, the survey itself asks set questions (most of which are closed) meaning there is limited follow-up that help us explore this further.



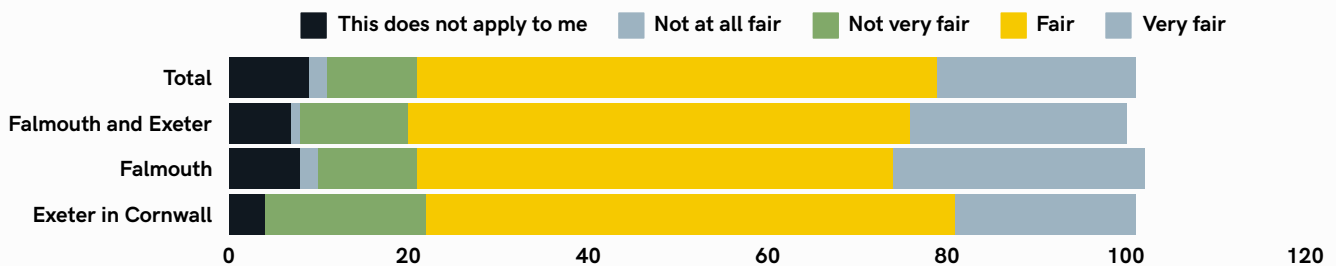
## Assessment and Feedback

### How clear are the criteria used for marking your work?



Participants were asked to select how clear the criteria used for marking their work was, this received positive feedback across students from both universities. The clear difference between the experiences of students is that those from Falmouth had a higher percentage of students (28%) who ranked the marking criteria to be very clear compared to those at Exeter in Cornwall (14%).

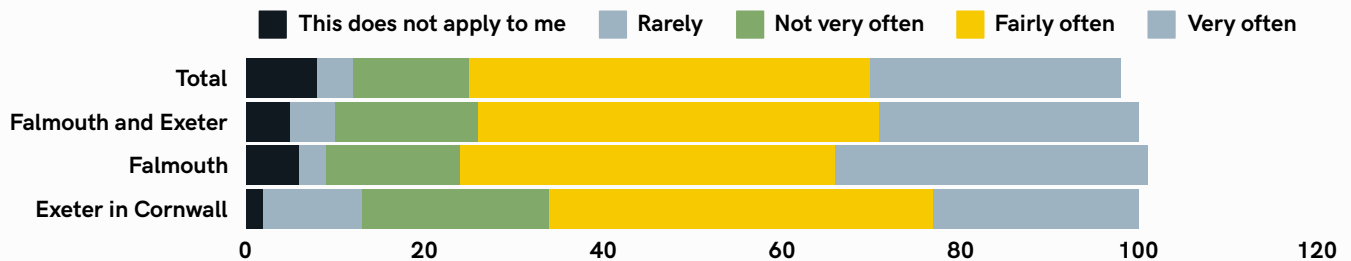
### How fair is marking and assessment on your course?



Participants were also asked how fair the marking and assessment on their course is; overall, this is positive when looking at both Falmouth & Exeter with 80% ranking marking and assessment as either fair or very fair. However, Exeter in Cornwall participants have a higher percentage of students who found this to be not very fair (18%) compared to the total sample average (10%). Whilst this is a larger percentage, responses from Exeter in Cornwall students were much lower than Falmouth students so this only accounts for 10 participants. Therefore, there needs to be further research into assessment and feedback for Exeter in Cornwall students.

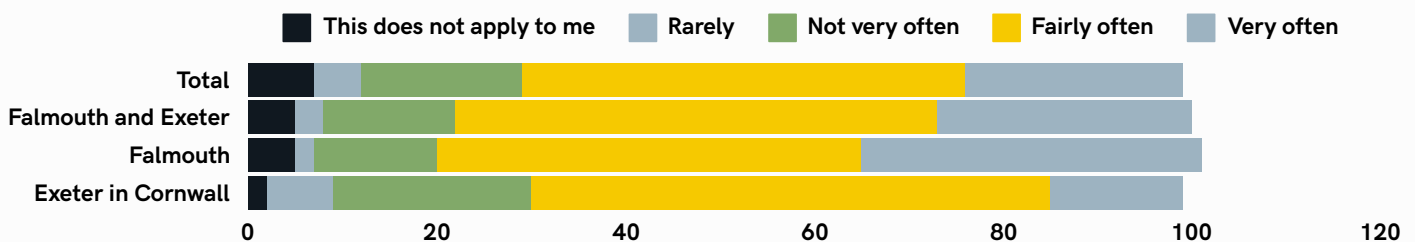


### How often do you receive assessment feedback on time?



Participants were asked how often they received feedback on time from assessments; when combined as Falmouth & Exeter, the results are in line with the total sample. Falmouth had a higher percentage of respondents who received assessment feedback on time very often (35%) which, when combined with the insights from the previous questions, shows a positive experience with assessment marking and feedback overall. However, Exeter in Cornwall students have a more negative experience with receiving feedback on time with 32% of participants stating that they receive feedback on time rarely or not very often. As previously stated, there is not enough data from Exeter in Cornwall students to make generalisations from this survey, but it does provide us with a basis of what topics we need to research further within their academic experience.

### How often has feedback helped you to improve your work?



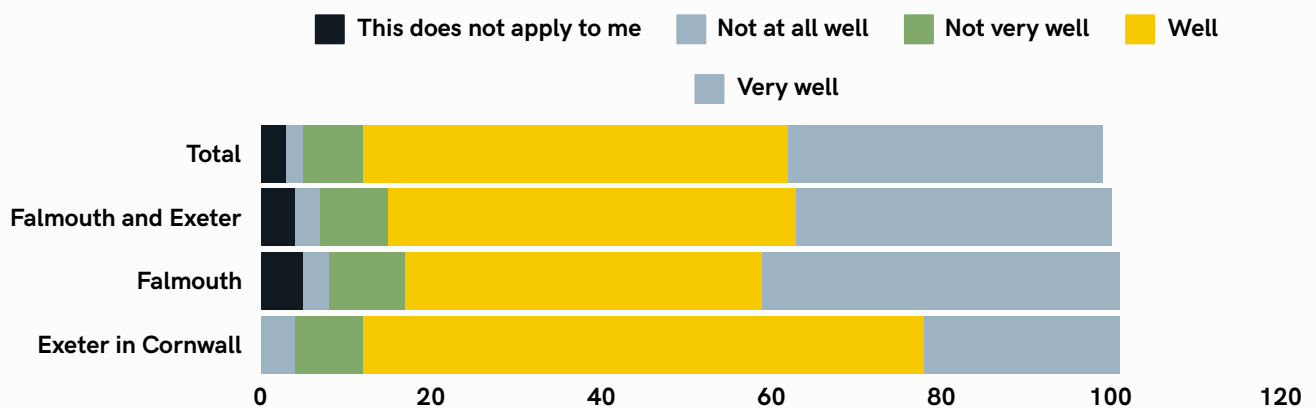
The final question given to participants related to assessment and feedback asked how often feedback has helped improved their work. This shows a positive experience across students from both universities with 78% of participants agreeing that the feedback given helped improve their work either very or fairly often. This is higher with Falmouth students (81%) and 36% of participants found that feedback helped improve their work very often. However, 28% of Exeter in Cornwall participants found that feedback only improved their work rarely or not very often. Therefore, further work needs to be completed to understand this further.

Overall, the survey suggests that whilst students from both universities are having overall positive experiences in relation to assessments and feedback – this is more consistent with Falmouth students. Whilst the data is limited, the patterns identified suggests that Exeter in Cornwall students are more likely to have negative experiences with their assessment and feedback. This is a clear area that as Union we need to work towards understanding further and supporting students.



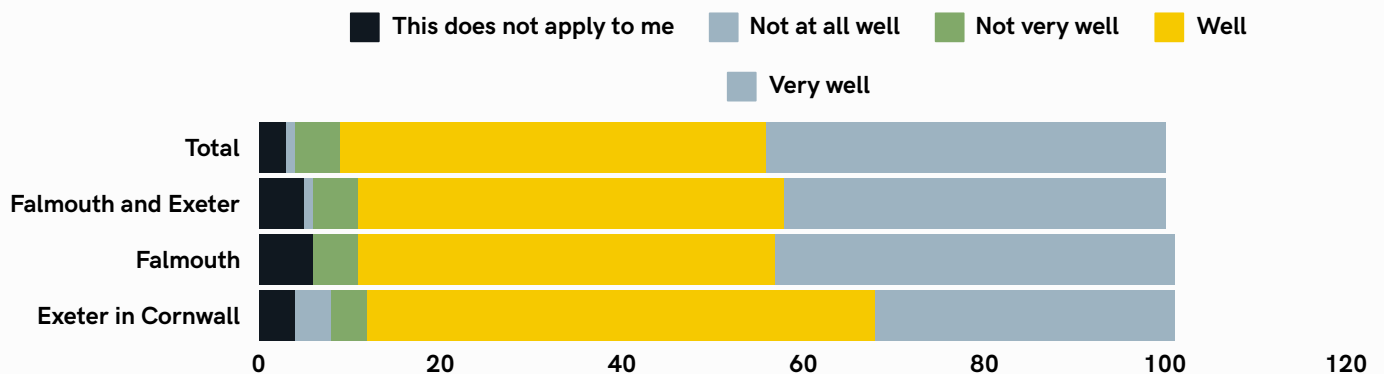
## Learning Resources

How well are the IT resources and facilities supporting your learning?



Participants were asked how well the IT resources and facilities supported their learning; this had a positive response students across both universities with 85% agreeing that IT supports their learning either well or very well.

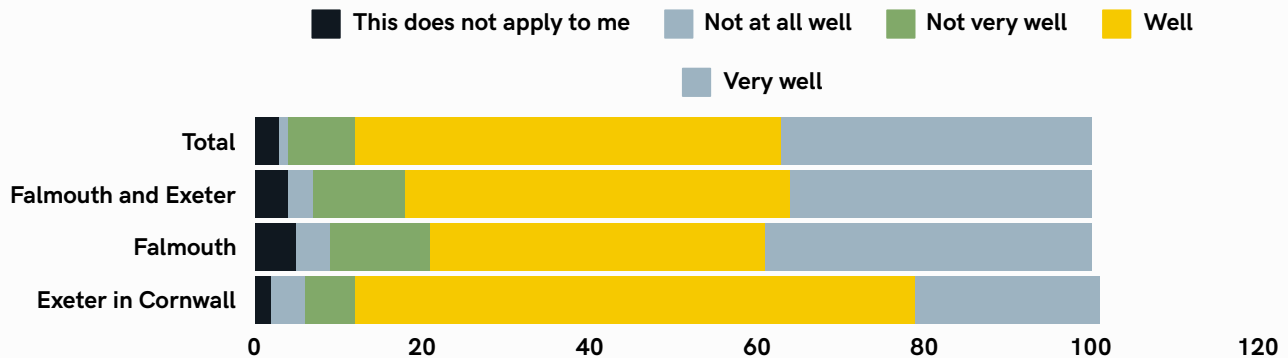
How well are the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supporting your learning?



Participants were asked the same for library resources which identified a positive experience across the universities, in line with the total sample/national dataset. 89% of our participants agreed that the library resources supported their learning either well or very well which is a similar figure when each university is looked at in isolation (90% for Falmouth and 89% for Exeter in Cornwall).



### How easy is it to access subject specific resources when you need them?



To further understand students' experiences with learning resources, participants were asked how easy it is for them to access subject specific resources when needed; whilst there were small margins with this, overall, our students find it harder to access resources when needed compared to the total survey results. This figure is 14% when combined and 16% when Falmouth is looked at in isolation. Therefore, an assumption can be made that this impacts the academic experience of students (Falmouth in particular). Thus, we need to explore this further to understand the barriers students are facing and how we can support them with this.

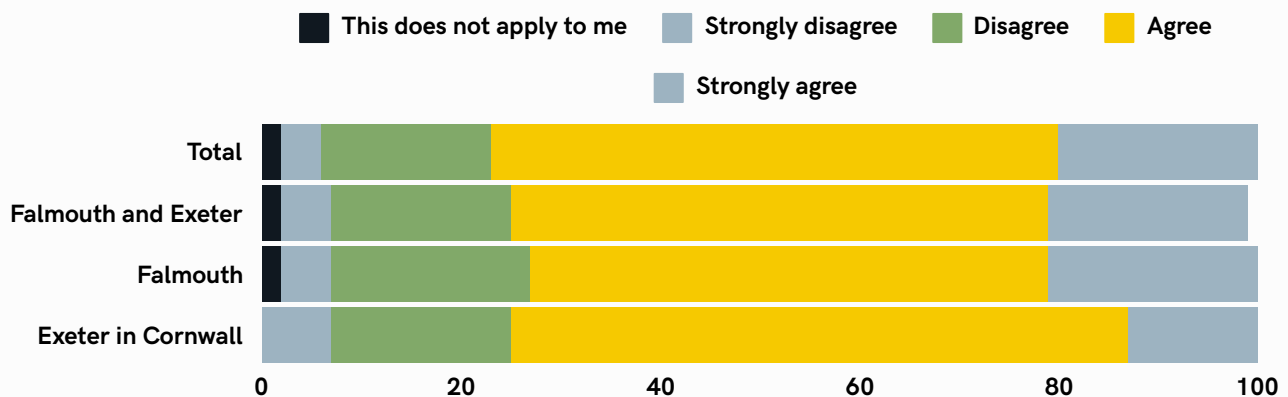




## Community

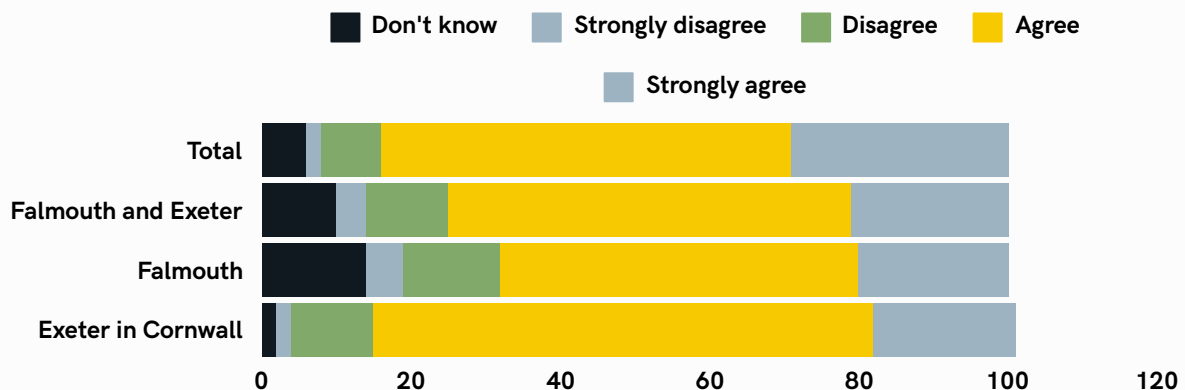
The following section of this report explores the sense of community amongst respondents. This explores their sense of community among staff and students, awareness & satisfaction of opportunities provided by us and our student communities, as well as students ability to express themselves.

### 'I feel part of a community of students and staff'



Participants were given the statement 'I feel part of a community of students and staff.' This identified that 74% of our students, overall, felt part of a community. However, when looked at in isolation, 25% of Falmouth participants and Exeter in Cornwall participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt part of a community of students and staff. Therefore, we need to further research this aspect to understand whether students feel isolated by a particular aspect within this and how we can use our tools to bridge this gap - such as student communities and our democratic collectives.

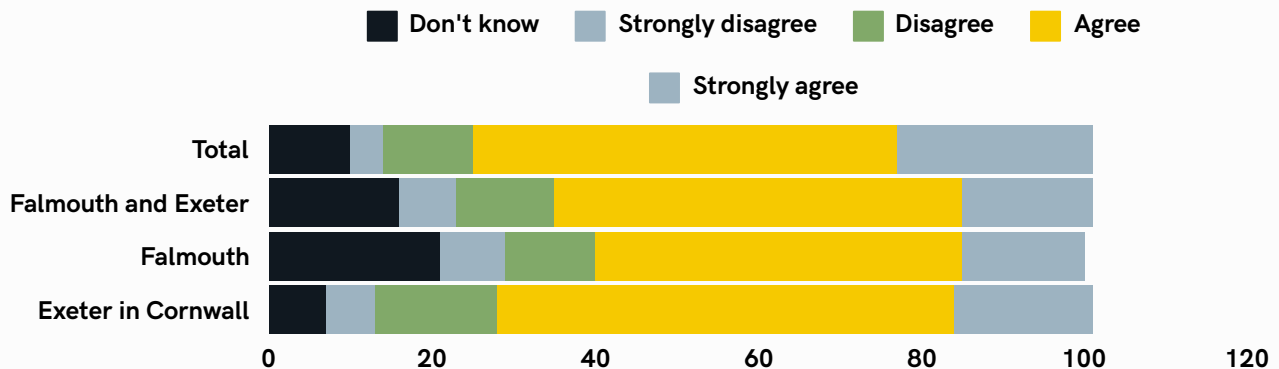
### 'I am aware of the activities and opportunities offered through the SU and student societies'



Relevant to us as the SU, participants were given a statement in relation to their awareness of the activities and opportunities offered through the SU and student societies. Whilst 75% of participants were agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 25% of participants either didn't know, disagreed, or strongly disagreed; this is a higher figure than the total sample. Therefore, a key aspect for us to consider moving forward is how we can increase the awareness of student communities and our own activities & opportunities - particularly with Falmouth students where the figure rises to 32%.

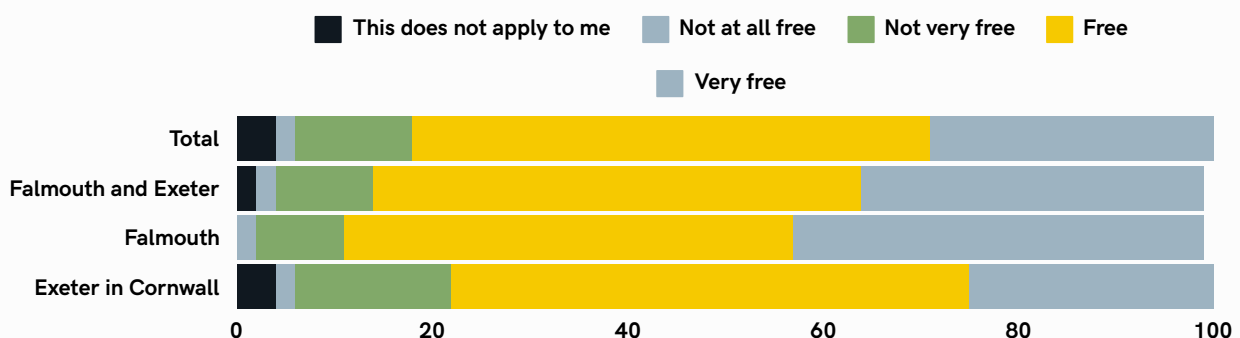


### 'I am satisfied with activities and opportunities offered through the SU and student societies'



Participants were then given a statement regarding how satisfied they were with the activities and opportunities offered through us and our student communities. Overall, 35% of our respondents stated that they didn't know, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement – a figure higher than that of the total sample. In line with the results of the previous statement given to participants, this rises to 40% with Falmouth students. It can be assumed that the higher dissatisfaction from Falmouth is that students were unaware of the opportunities available to them. However, there is still a high percentage of overall students who didn't know or were dissatisfied with the opportunities. Therefore, we need further insight into what students would like to see from us and our student communities to help bridge this gap.

### 'During your studies, how free have you felt to express your ideas, opinions and beliefs'



The final question given to participants in relation to community referred to their ability to freely express their ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Whilst overall, 85% of our participants felt free or very free to freely express themselves during their studies, 18% of Exeter in Cornwall students felt that they were either not at all or not very free to express themselves during their studies. This is a higher percentage compared to the total sample and Falmouth students. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted in this area to understand if this generalisable to a wider sample and the underlining causes of this. Thus, allowing us to identify how we can improve our offering and support students with this further.

Overall, there are clear gaps of where students don't feel part of a community and are unaware of what is available to them from us and our student communities. This provides a clear opportunity to develop our offering and utilise tools such as our collectives and student community groups to increase the sense of community amongst students. There will need to be further research and insight behind this to understand what students need & want to achieve this.

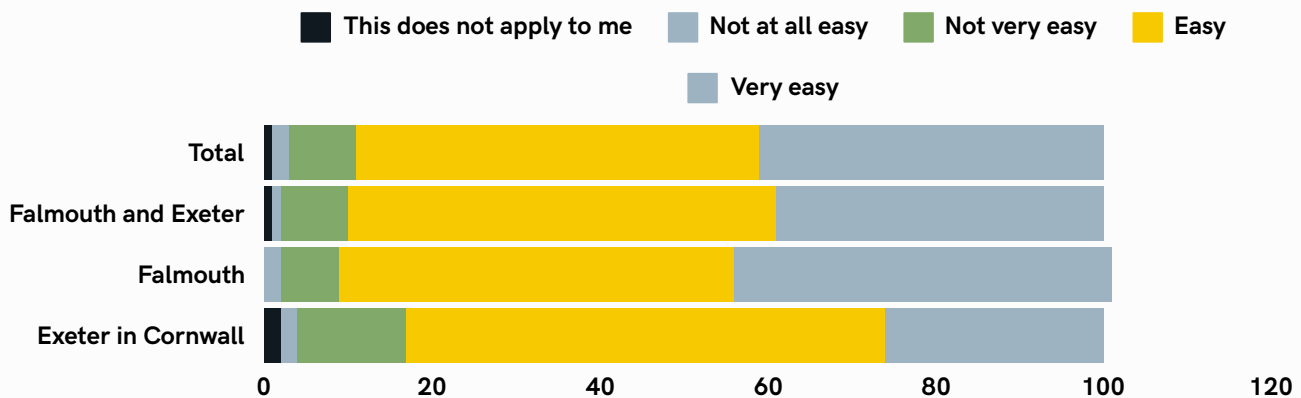


## Wellbeing and Support

This section explores the student experience related to the support available to them and their wellbeing.

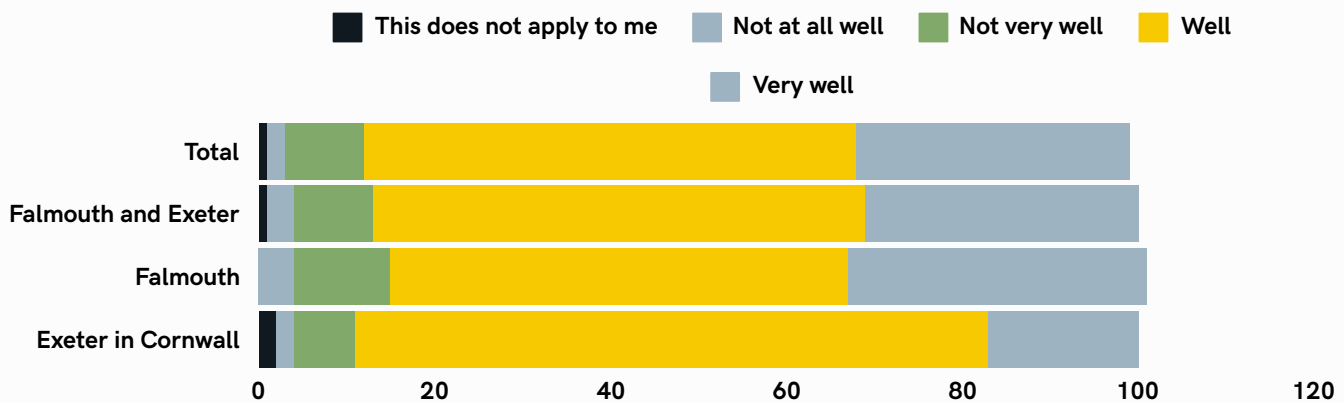
### Academic Support

How easy is it to contact teaching staff when you need to?



Participants were asked how easy they found it to contact teaching staff, 90% of our respondents said that they found it easy or very easy to do so. This figure is higher than the total sample which shows a positive experience for students in relation to contacting teaching staff. For Exeter in Cornwall students, 15% said that it was not at all easy or not very easy to contact teaching staff which is higher than the overall averages. However, as previously mentioned, there was a very small sample from this category and therefore further research is required to validate this finding.

How well are teaching staff supporting your learning?

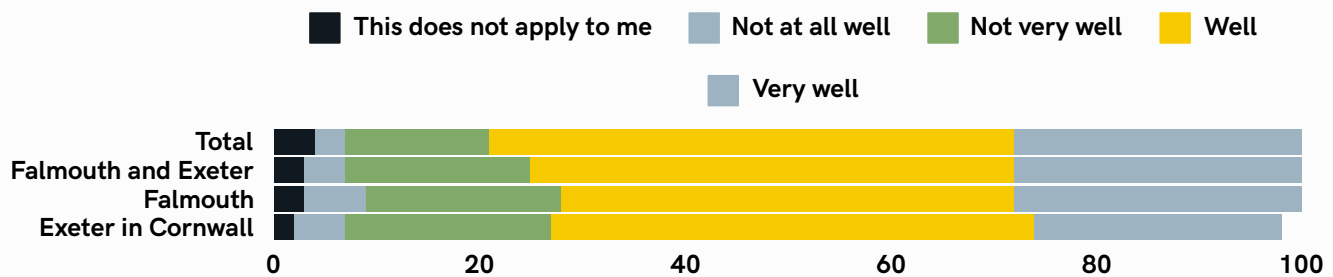


Participants were then asked how well teaching staff were at supporting their learning, our data is in line with the total sample with 87% agreeing that teaching staff supported their learning well or very well – which is the same figure as the total sample. The standout here is that 15% of the Falmouth students who participated in this survey did not find teaching staff to support their learning. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted to understand this and identify areas of development for us as an SU and the University to ensure students have a positive experience whilst studying here.



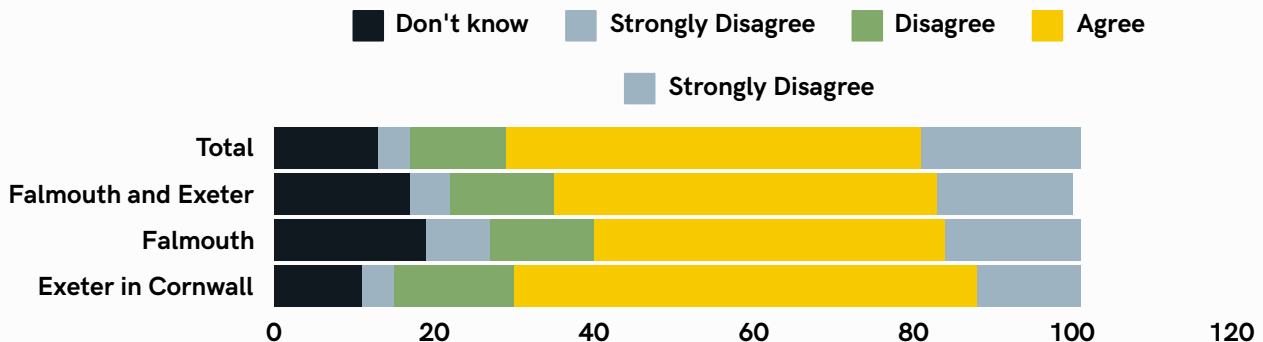
## Support Services

### How well communicated is information about your university's mental wellbeing support services?



Participants were asked how well communicated information about mental wellbeing support services were, this identified that, whilst 75% of students agreed that it was communicated well or very well, a larger percentage of students across both universities (22%) felt like it was communicated not very well or not at all well compared to the total sample (17%). This figure rises to 25% when each university is looked at in isolation. Therefore, we need to further understand how services are being communicated and what can be done to improve this – from an SU and university perspective.

### To what extent do you agree that the support services are appropriate and sufficient to your students' needs?



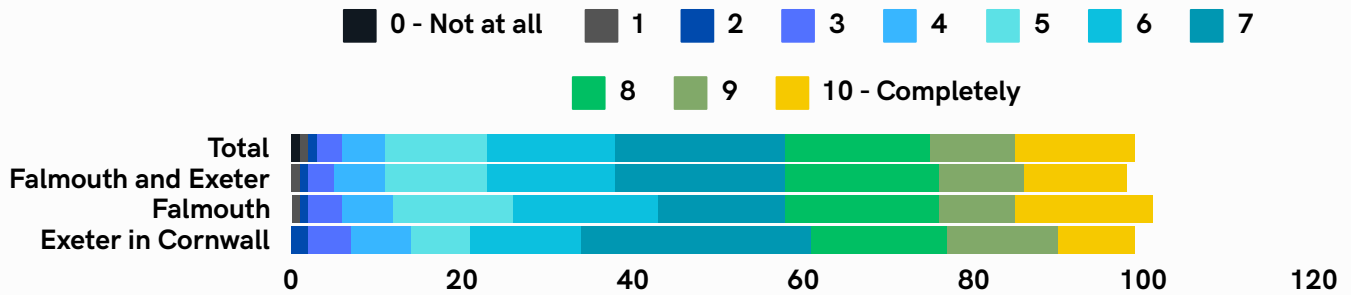
Participants were also asked to what extent did they agree that the support services were appropriate and sufficient to their needs as students. This identified that 35% of our respondents did not know, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement, rising to 40% when Falmouth is looked at in isolation. It can be assumed that some of our participants have not accessed support services which would account for those who responded 'don't know' but it is clear there is a need for further understanding of student experience with support services offered to them.

## Future

Participants were given a statement in relation to how well they think their activities at university are preparing them for their future careers. Overall, students rated this positively with overall 60% selecting a 7 or above. This question is restrictive and does not allow us to fully understand what activities students are undertaking at university and therefore, we need further insight into this.

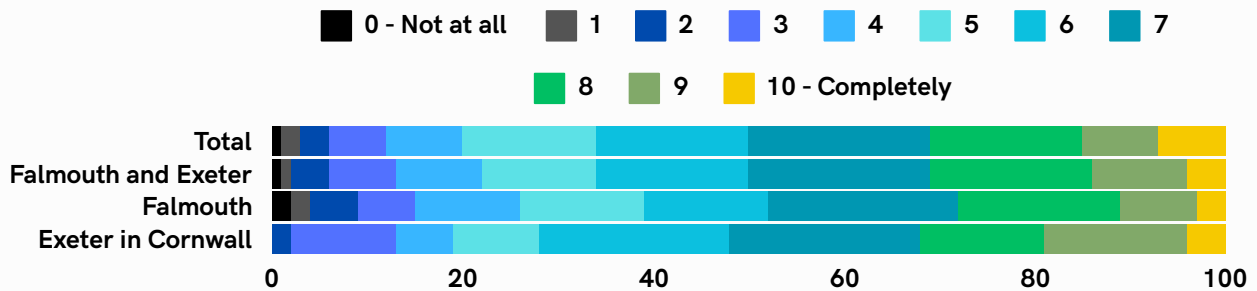


### 'My current activities at university are preparing me for my future career'



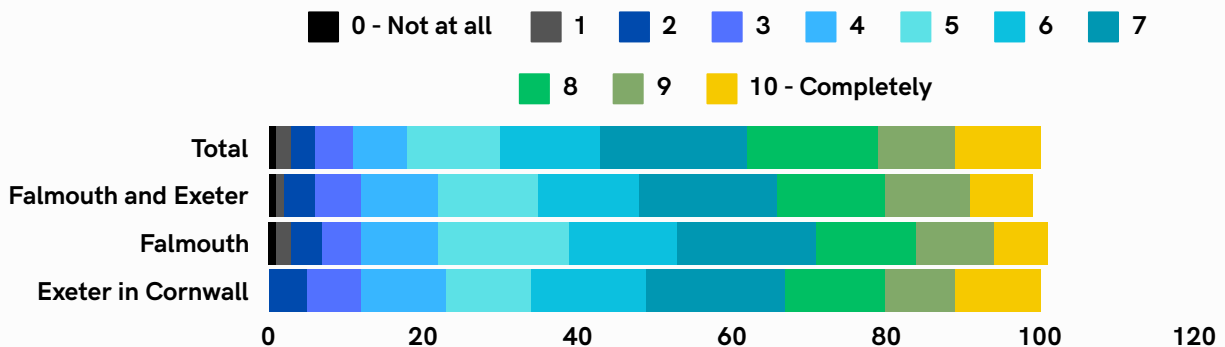
### Mental Health

#### Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



Participants were asked to rate how satisfied they were with their life overall. This identified that most of our students (52%) sat between 6-8 on the scale. However, our percentage of participants who selected between 0-4 (22% and rising to 26% when Falmouth is looked at in isolation) is slightly higher than the total sample. Our participants highest levels of satisfaction with their lives were during the final wave of the survey (May/June) with 67% selecting either 7 or 8 on the scale.

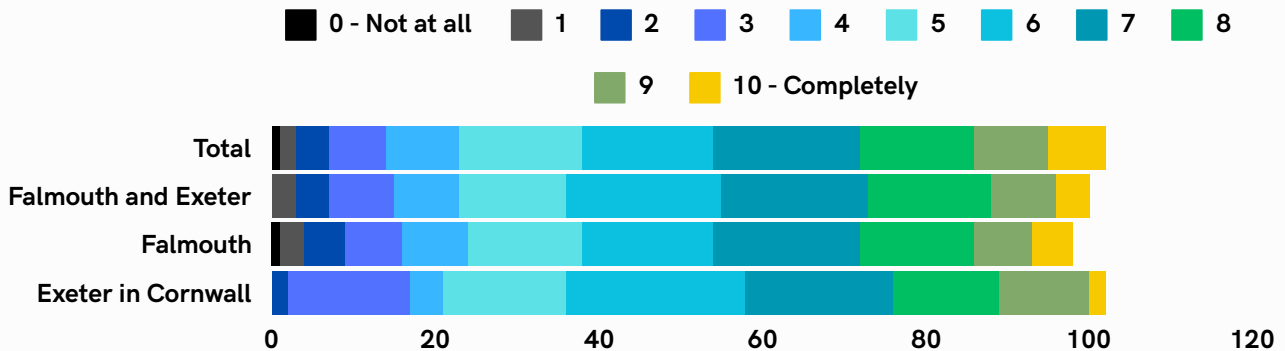
#### Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



Participants were also asked to rate how worthwhile they felt the things they do in their life were. This identified that most students fall between 5 and 8 on the scale (58%). This is fairly in line with the total sample size but, as with other questions, this is restrictive, and it does not allow us to see the bigger picture. With the data, we are unable to understand what 'things' students do or don't do in their lives which may affect their perspective on this.

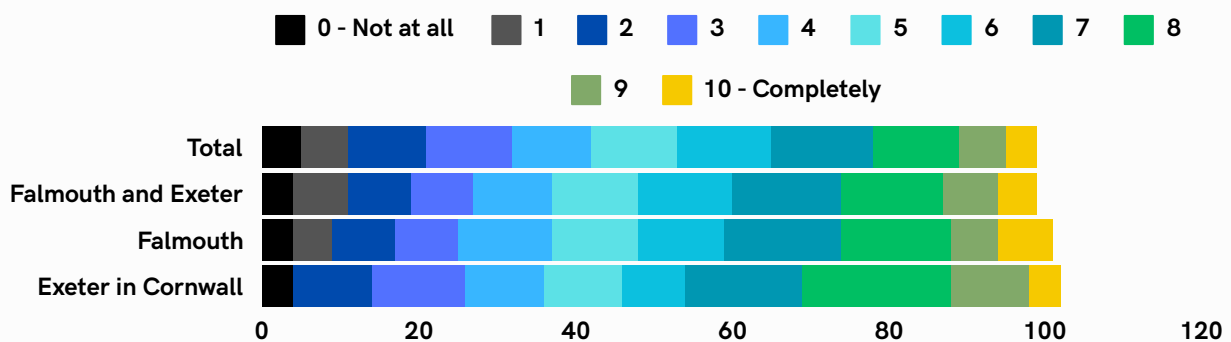


### Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?



At the time of the survey, participants were asked how happy they felt the day before. Our participants followed a similar pattern to the total sample with most rating their happiness levels between 6 and 8 on the scale. This data is particularly useful when broken down into the waves as it would provide us with a clear understanding of the emotion students feel throughout the year. Therefore, we could use this to support a student journey map. However, our sample size is not large enough to draw reliable conclusions from the different time periods.

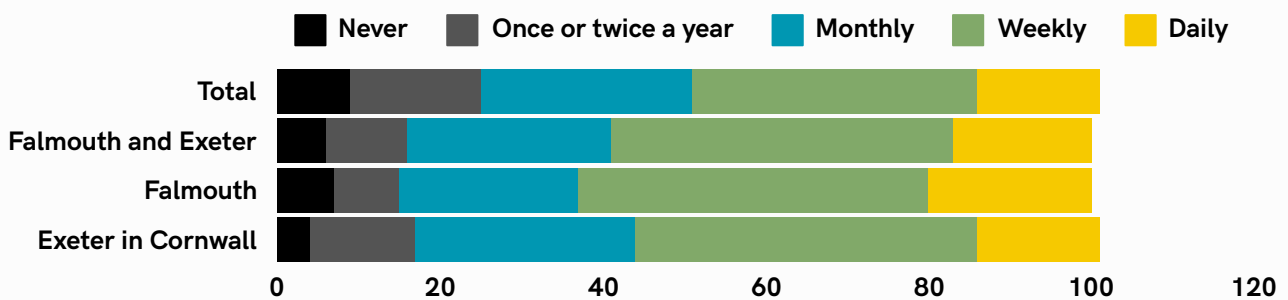
### Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?



Participants were also asked how anxious they felt the day before. Like the happiness question, our participants followed a similar pattern to the total sample with most students rating their anxiety levels between 4 and 8. This demonstrates a broad experience of students related to anxiety. However, this question doesn't account for participants who may suffer with a mental health condition that could account for higher levels of anxiety. As mentioned previously, this data would help us to map our student's journey, but our sample size is not big enough to make accurate maps at present.



Over the last month, how often have you felt lonely?



Participants were then asked how often they had felt lonely over the last month (at time of completion), this identified that 59% of our students felt lonely at least once a week. This figure rises to 63% when Falmouth is looked at in isolation. Therefore, we need to assess what we can do to decrease this number. However, to do this, we will need further insight into the factors affecting loneliness in students.

Overall, the data for the support section has identified that loneliness is a key issue affecting students and therefore we need to further research this to action this problem.

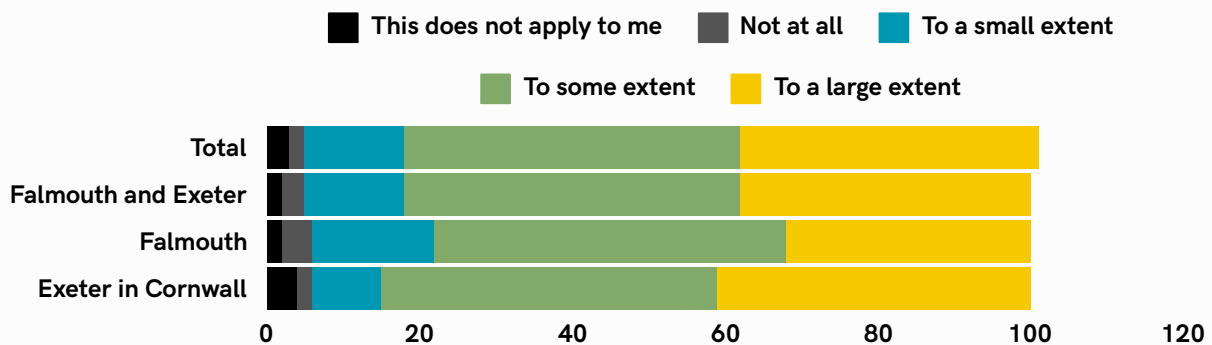


# Student Voice and Representation

The following section looks at students' perspectives and opinions on the representation & attitude to student voice.

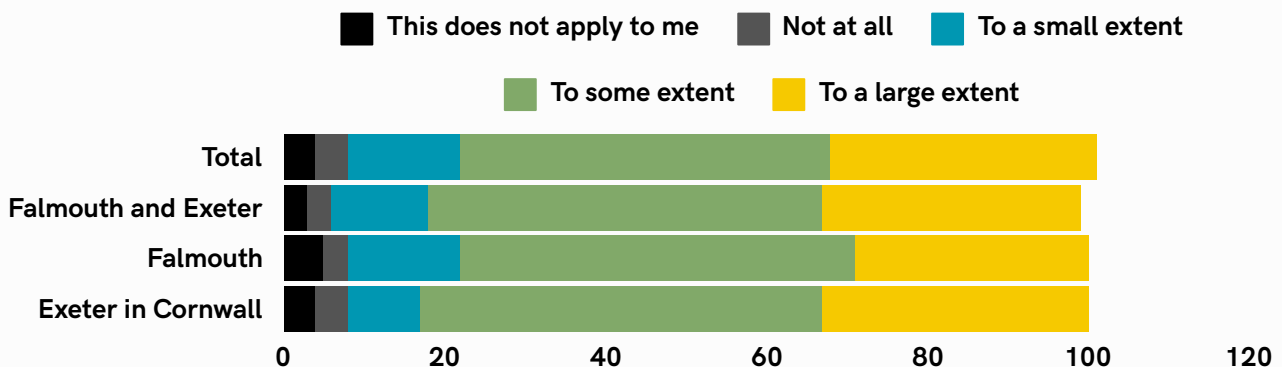
## Student Feedback

To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?



Participants were asked whether they got the right opportunities to give feedback on their course, 82% agreed to some or a large extent. However, this question is poorly worded with the phrase 'right opportunities' as this can be seen as subjective.

To what extent are students' opinion valued by staff?

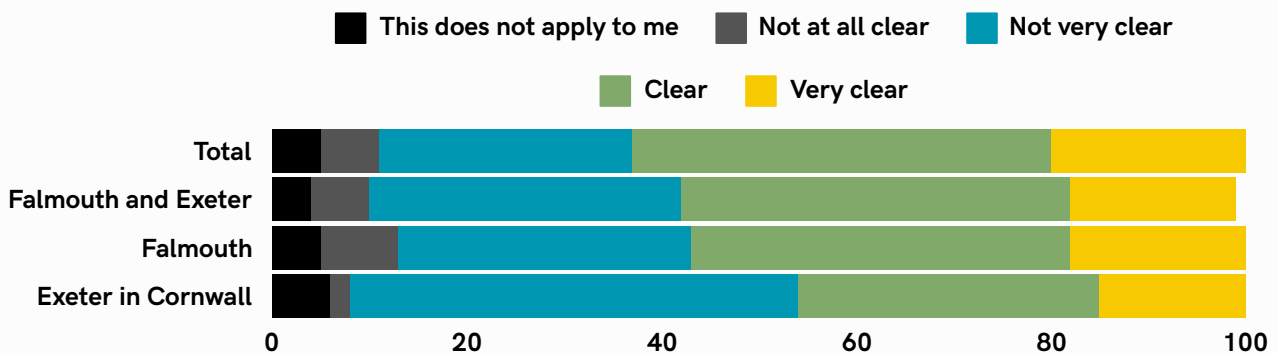


Participants were also asked if they felt that student opinion is valued by staff. 81% of our participants agreed that opinions were valued to some or a large extent. This is in line with the overall total sample.





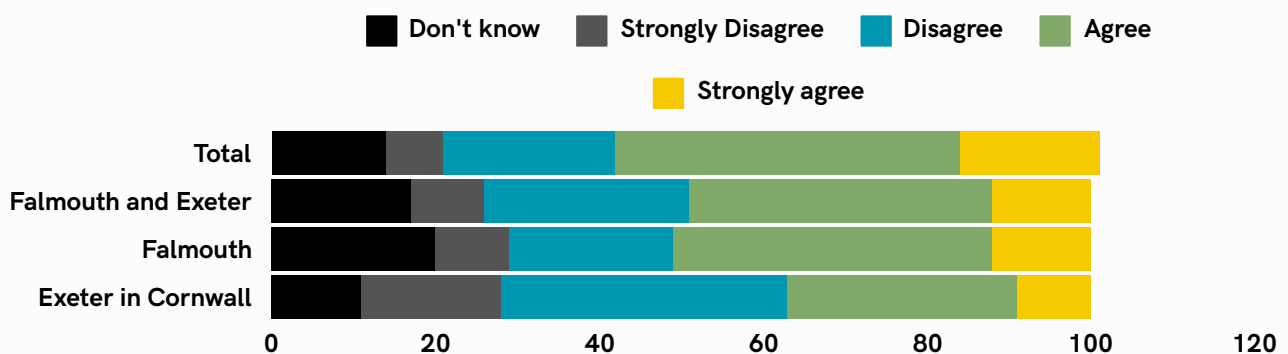
### How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?



Participants were then asked to identify how clear it is that feedback is acted on. Overall, 57% of our participants agreed that it is clear or very clear that feedback is acted on. However, 32% overall felt that it is not very clear – this figure rises to 46% when Exeter in Cornwall is looked at in isolation. Therefore, further work needs to be done surrounding this.

### Students' Union

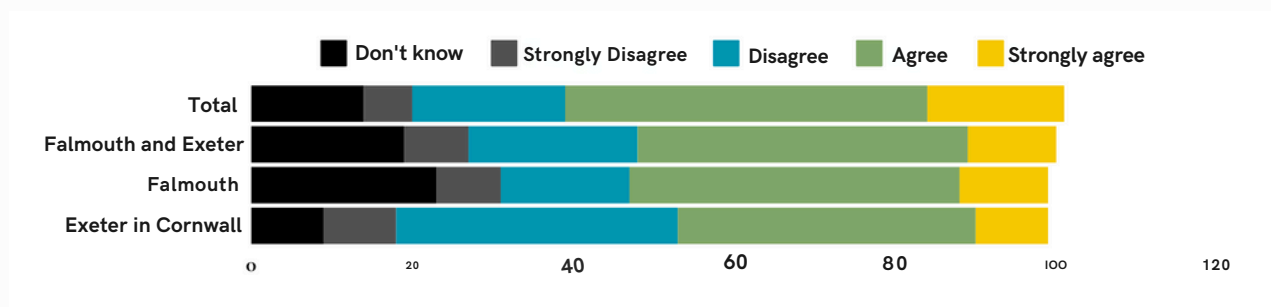
#### 'I am aware of the things that the SU says on behalf of students'



Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement: 'I am aware of the things that the SU says on behalf of students.' This identified that 51% of our participants either didn't know, disagreed, or strongly disagreed (rising to 63% when Exeter in Cornwall is looked at in isolation), which shows a clear lack of awareness with what the SU is saying on behalf of students. Therefore, we need to identify how we can improve this to clearly communicate to students.

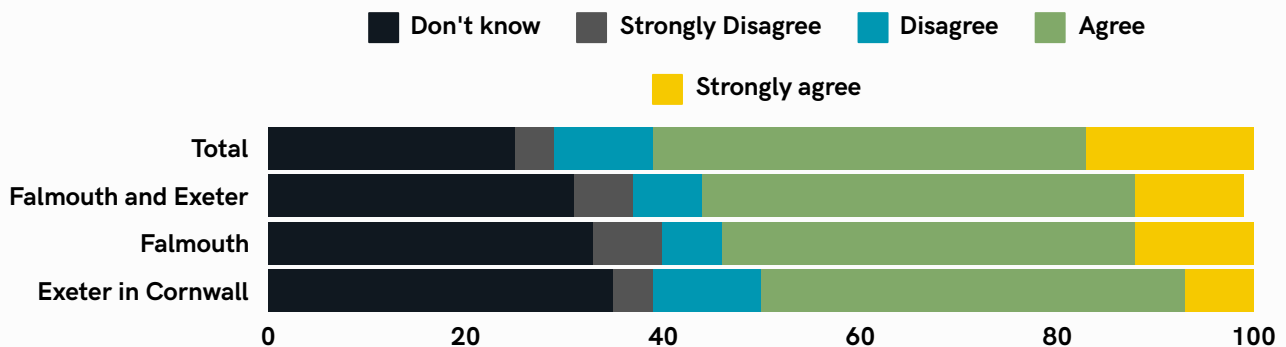


### 'I am aware of the mechanisms that the SU uses to represent students'



Participants were also asked to what extent they agreed with the statement: 'I am aware of the mechanisms that the SU uses to represent students.' This found that 48% of participants didn't know, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that they were aware of how we represent them as students. This is clear area of improvement for us to assess how we communicate this information in a meaningful and engaging way to students.

### 'I am satisfied with what the SU says on student behalf to the University'



Participants were then asked to what extent they agreed with the statement: 'I am satisfied with what the SU says on student behalf to the university.' This identified that 31% of students (rising to 35% for Exeter in Cornwall and 33% for Falmouth, when looked at in isolation) didn't know, meaning that they are unlikely to be aware of what we and our officers are doing to enact change or represent them at a university level. Therefore, we need to do further work to understand how we can improve how we communicate this to our members.

Overall, the key issue that has been identified throughout the student voice and representation analysis is the lack of awareness surrounding structures, feedback and work that is being undertaken. Therefore, we need to assess how can improve this to ensure all students are aware of how they are represented at university.



## Summary (TL; DR)

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The Belong Survey was sent out to students across six different waves from October 2023 to June 2024, receiving 365 responses overall. Our sample size was small and not representative of the whole student community, resulting in our insights being skewed, with a lack of representation of voices from minority groups. Therefore, a clear next step for us is to understand how we can incentivise and encourage participation in surveys.

The Belong Survey was distributed by us but the survey and 'data dashboards' are not created in house; there were clear limitations with the restrictiveness of the questions resulting in a surface level insight to the overall student experience. Which resulted in us having a solid foundation to build our insight offering around but not a comprehensive understanding of the student experience. However, The Belong Survey would be a useful tool to support a student journey mapping research study as it would enable us to identify key time periods for when students experience certain emotions and issues.

One of the most crucial insights found that 59% of our participants felt lonely at least once a week (over a month-long period). This is a clear issue that we need to further understand and work towards reducing the percentage; particularly when looked at with 25% of participants not feeling part of a community of student and staff.



## Key Insights and Recommendations

**The survey only achieved 365 responses, and this did not encompass a diverse range of students. So, our insights are not representative of the wider student body.**

A clear issue that was identified in the demographics of this analysis was that we were not receiving responses from a diverse range of students and therefore, we are not creating representative data of the whole student population. Therefore, the engagement team need to explore how we can engage with students and encourage an increased response rate to surveys. A large part of this exploration is looking at how we incentivise students to participate and the mailing lists that we utilise.

**18% Exeter in Cornwall students found marking and assessment on their course to be not very fair, compared to the total sample average of 10%**

There is an issue with the validity of this insight given the small sample from Exeter in Cornwall students. However, this is an area that needs to be explored further to identify if a similar result is achieved when a wider sample is asked. It would also be useful to understand in more depth why students find it to be unfair and how we can support with communicating this feedback to Exeter University.

**Exeter in Cornwall Students have a worse academic experience than Falmouth students**

As previously mentioned, there is not enough data from Exeter in Cornwall students to make reliable generalisations however the data suggests that these students are more likely to have unfair marking and delays to receiving feedback. Therefore, further research is needed into their academic experience to identify areas of concern and how we can support students with communicating this to the relevant people.

**14% of students (16% when Falmouth is looked at in isolation) find it hard to access subject specific resources when they need them**

Our participants had a higher percentage that did not find it easy to access subject resources and therefore, further research in to understanding the barriers students are facing is needed.

**25% of students do not feel part of a community of students and staff**

A quarter of participants do not feel part of a community and therefore we need to assess the factors driving this. With further insight into the influences on the lack of community, we need to assess how we can bridge this gap using tools available to us – such as the communities and collectives.

**25% of students lack an awareness of the activities and opportunities offered by us and our student communities**

A key aspect for us to consider is how we can increase awareness of our activities to students. This will involve both the engagement and communities' teams working together to understand how we can better communicate this to students. It is also needed to understand what opportunities and activities students would like to see from us, this will help with their overall experience as members of the SU.



**25% of students do not think that information about the university's mental wellbeing support services is communicated well**

This insight shows that we need to explore ways of how as an SU we can help signpost students effectively and communicate with them what support is available to them. Further research onto student wellbeing is needed but with this we can then communicate directly with service providers at the university to understand how it can be communicated better to students.

**35% of students (40% for Falmouth) did not know or felt that support services were not appropriate or sufficient for their needs as students**

This insight shows a clear need to further understand the student experience related to support service. It is particularly important to ensure the experience of minority groups are considered within this, which are not captured in this survey.

**59% of students felt lonely at least once a week over a month-long period**

Loneliness is a clear issue impacting our students and therefore we need to further research this to understand the factors driving loneliness and how we can support students with this.

**Students lack awareness of the structures in place and what we say on behalf of them**

Students are unaware of what is said on their behalf by us and to the university, as well as not understanding what mechanisms are in place for us to represent them as students. With the officers, we need to understand how we can better communicate the work that is being undertaken to ensure that students are aware of how we represent them.

Overall, we need further insight to the student experience which means a more comprehensive insight calendar that benefits the whole organisation.