



Student Engagement on Campus



2022 Research Findings - Dr Lisa Gowthorp - PRME Grant recipient

Background Information

This research project examines the role of extra curricula activity and engagement on university students' experience, academic performance, health and wellbeing.

With increased online learning and more social isolation than ever before, it is important to understanding how young adults are coping during this time and determine what role universities can play to ensure the happiness, health and well-being of its students.

Advocacy research for sport at University (UniSport Australia).

Why?

- Various studies suggest this [COVID lockdowns] isolation may be having a detrimental impact on students' health and wellbeing (Galle, et al 2020).
- Murphy et al (2018) suggest there is a “paucity of data examining the relationship between happiness and health-related behaviours in college students” (pg. 744).
- “There is a need to ensure that the value of engagement in sport and engagement in sport leadership activities is communicated and promoted in universities” (Griffiths, Bullough, Shilbi & Wilson, 2017, p.448).
- As such the research findings can assist university policy makers determine the most appropriate activities to engage students outside of the classroom.

Wellbeing & Physical Activity

- Participation in physical activities and sports during adolescence is associated with numerous wellbeing domains (Richards, Hamilton, McEwen, 2022).
- Calls for tertiary institutions to take active roles in addressing wellness needs of students (Eisenberg et al, 2012; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).
- Sport can be a means of developing psychological resilience (Eime, 2013).
- Sport participation is known to positively influence self-efficacy, self-worth, social behaviour, motivation, goal orientation, friendships, team building etc (Eime, 2013; Donaldson & Ronan, 2006).

Engagement and Belonging

- Studies indicate that a positive relationship exists between a students' sense of belonging and their retention in higher education (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018).
- Belonging represents perceptions of acceptance and connection, and is associated with student wellbeing, academic attainment and retention.
- Belonging consists of four domains: academic, social, surroundings and personal space (Ahn and Davis, 2019).
- Stronger feelings of belonging are reported by students who invest a greater number of hours per week in extra-curricular activities (Knifsend, 2018).

Engagement and Belonging

- Engagement in extra-curricular activities also has the potential to foster both physical and psychological wellbeing among students (e.g. Bowman, 2010; Kilgo et al., 2016; Shiah et al., 2013).
- Participation in campus activities also may be linked to psychosocial wellbeing (Knifsend, 2018).
- In fact, students often report that they use extra-curricular activities as a means through which to manage their levels of stress (Bland et al., 2012)

Employability

Which of the following strategies undertaken by students does your organisation value when recruiting graduates?

Strategies	Students	Higher Education	Employers
Capstone	9%	35%	13%
Careers advice	59%	47%	28%
Extra-curricular	48%	47%	60%
Internat exchange	16%	30%	23%
Mentoring	28%	48%	34%
Networking	49%	51%	40%
P-T work	53%	36%	38%
Portfolios	40%	41%	25%
Prof. Assoc'ns	29%	54%	34%
Social media	33%	40%	15%
Volunteering	47%	48%	53%
Work Experience	74%	40%	87%

(Adapted from Kinash & Crane, 2015, p. 15)

The University Mental Health Charter

- Outlines principles of good practice to operationalise a whole university approach to improve mental health outcomes for the whole university community.
- The Charter contains five dimensions and 18 themes in total.
- The six principles of good practice relate to: community; **social integration**; social isolation; loneliness; discrimination; and social cohesion.
 - Social integration, connection and sense of belonging are all significantly positively associated with mental health and wellbeing outcomes

Social Integration

- While individual characteristics such as personality and propensity to connect may have some impact on social integration, it is also acknowledged that institutional factors play an important role (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).
- Elements such as the culture of the university or curriculum design may affect the student's experience within the educational interface, including their sense of belonging and connection to students, staff and the institution (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Social Capital

- **Social Capital comprises both a network and the resources available from the network, entailing ‘investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns in instrumental or expressive actions’ (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001, p. 17).**
- **Social capital requires the cooperation of other participants and can take time to develop through interaction and exchanges (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).**

Social Capital

- Social capital can have many benefits such as facilitating the flow of information and ideas, enabling successful transition during change, providing access to social credentials and social support, as well as fostering a **sense of belonging** (Rienties, Johan, & Jindal-Snape, 2015).
- It has also been linked to **improved mental health** outcomes (De Silva, McKenzie, Harpham, & Huttly, 2005) and life satisfaction (Theurer & Wister, 2010).

Research Questions

- If engagement in extra-curricular activities stands to benefit students in terms of belonging and wellbeing, should universities be promoting students' participation in order to maximise these benefits?
- What are the reasons why some students are more likely to engage in extra-curricular activities than others?
- How can students develop social capital?
- What role can (should?) Universities play in fostering social integration within campus life?

Methodology

Survey (qualtrics)

- Email survey through the registrar office
- **774** completed surveys
 - **Students prize 3 x \$100 gift vouchers**

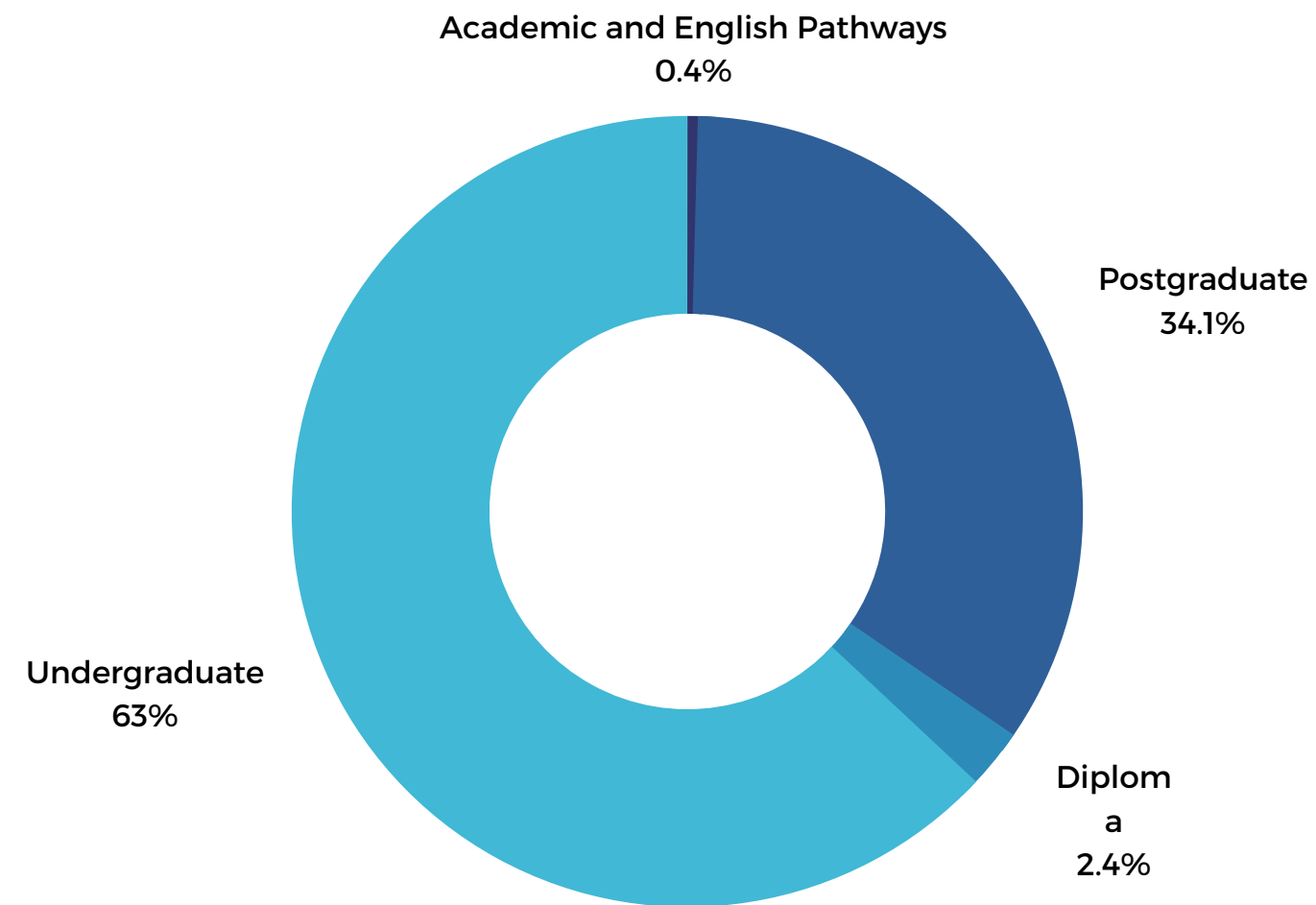
Focus Groups

- 7 Focus Groups (3 - 6 students per group)
- 37 students in total
- Focus groups ran for approximately 50mins.
 - **Students prize 1 x \$250 gift vouchers**

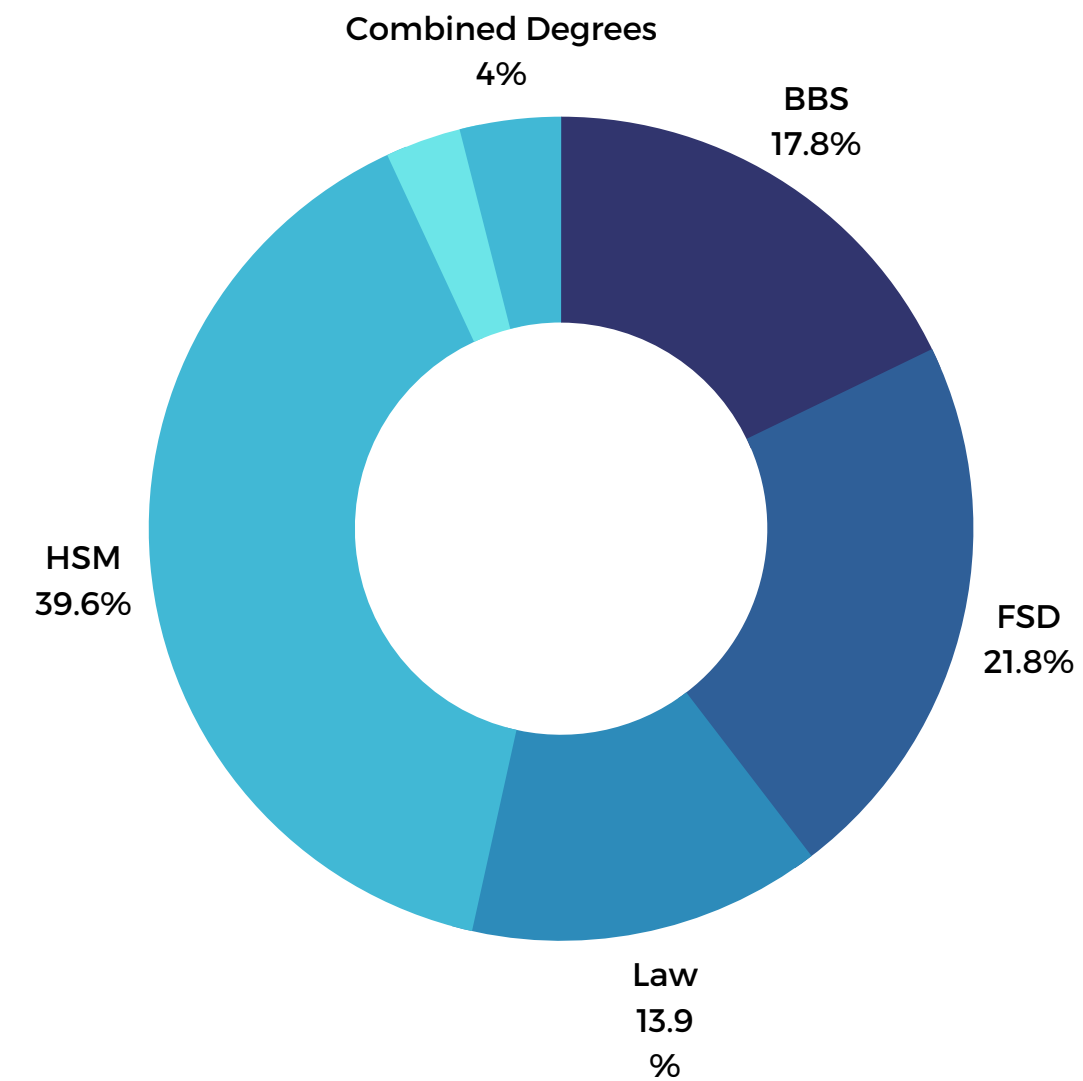
Participation

- **774** students participated in the survey

Type of degree



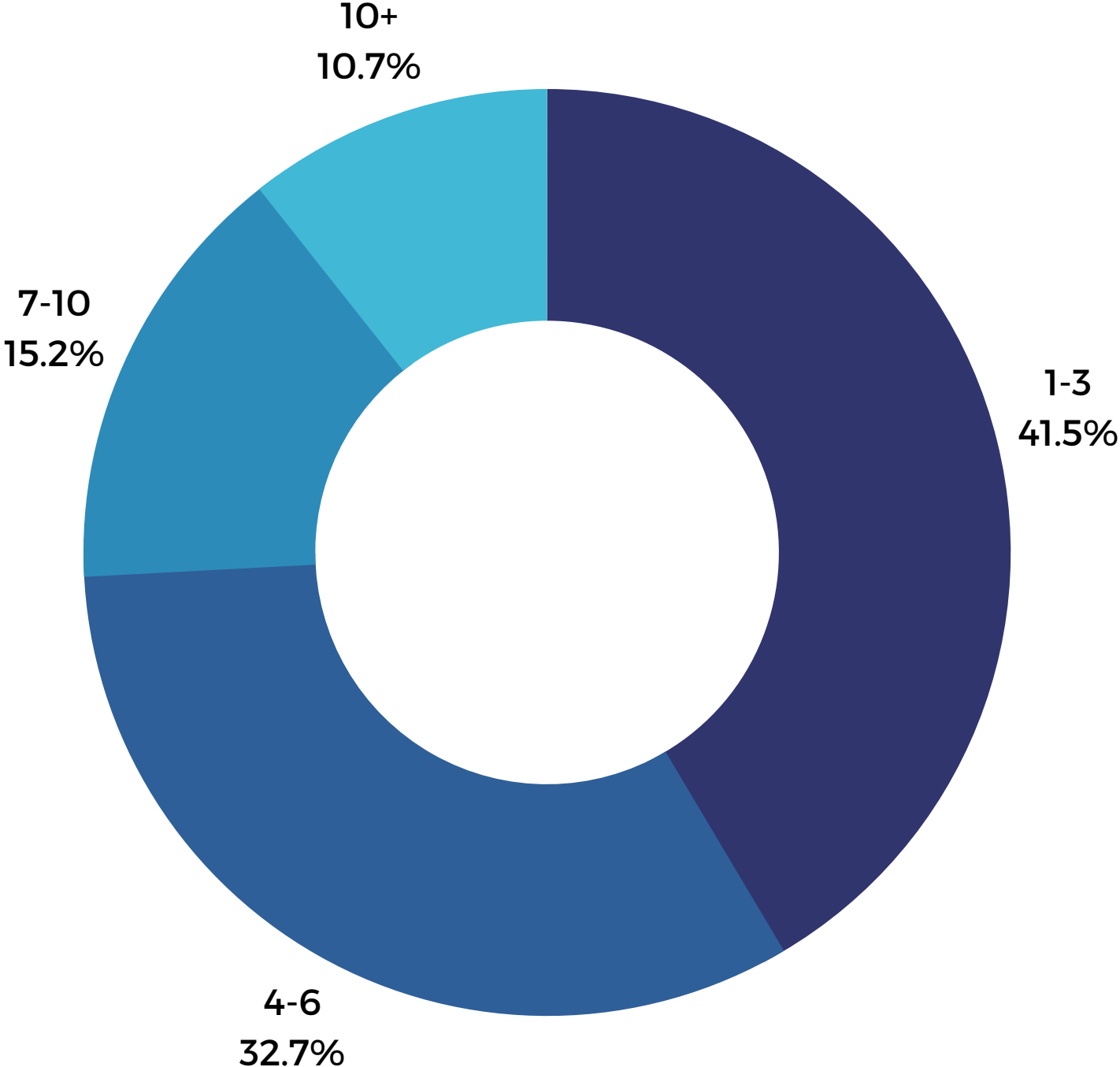
Faculty



- **7 Focus Groups (37 students)**

General Information

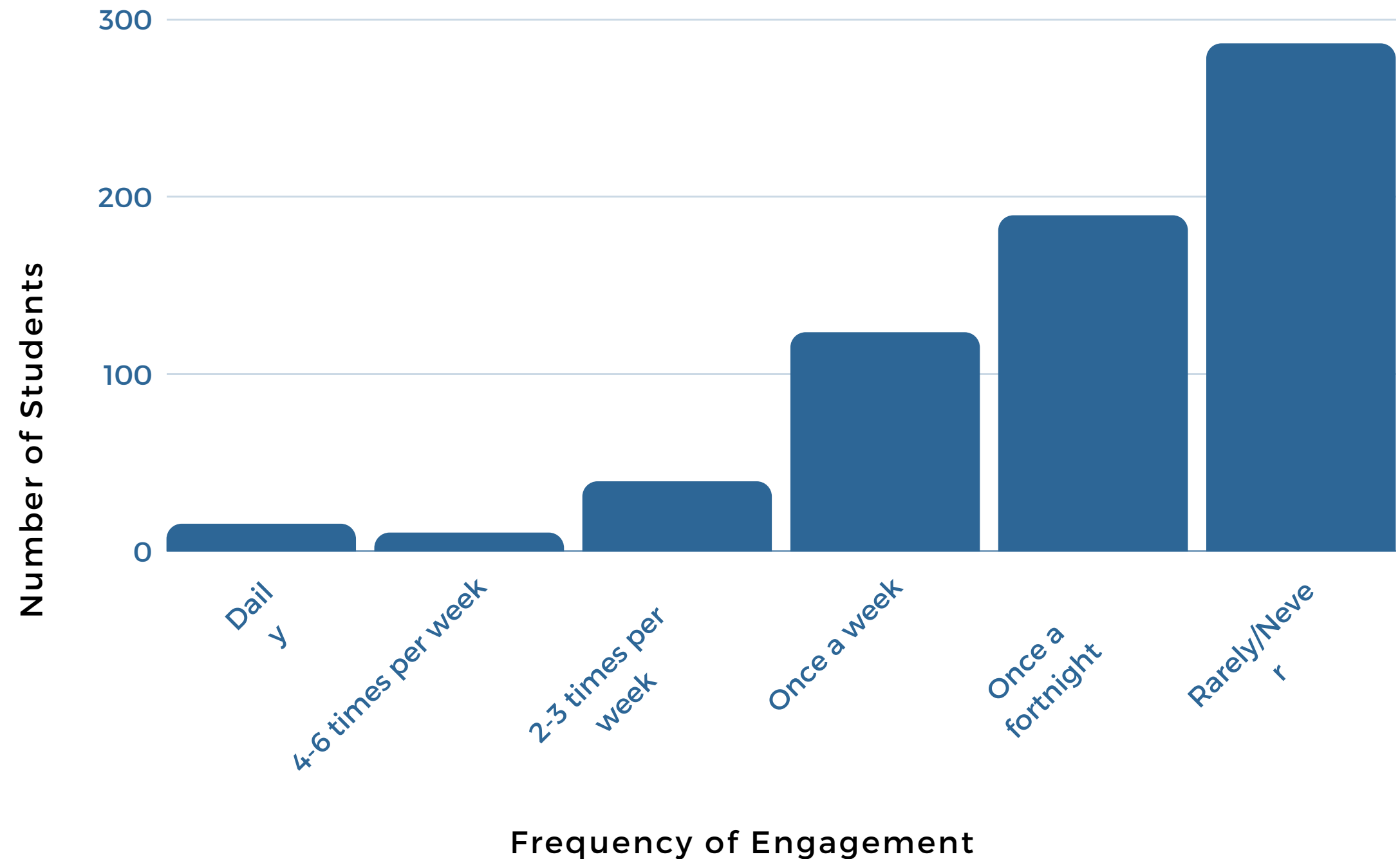
Number of semesters enrolled at Bond



Engagement with BUSA

- **96%** of respondents are aware of BUSA
- **87%** believe BUSA provide adequate support to students
- **43%** of students rarely/never engage in BUSA activities

How often do students participate in BUSA-related activities?



Student Feedback on BUSA

We need BUSA to show more recognition to events that support a strong cause or charity rather than only focusing on a Dons night out.

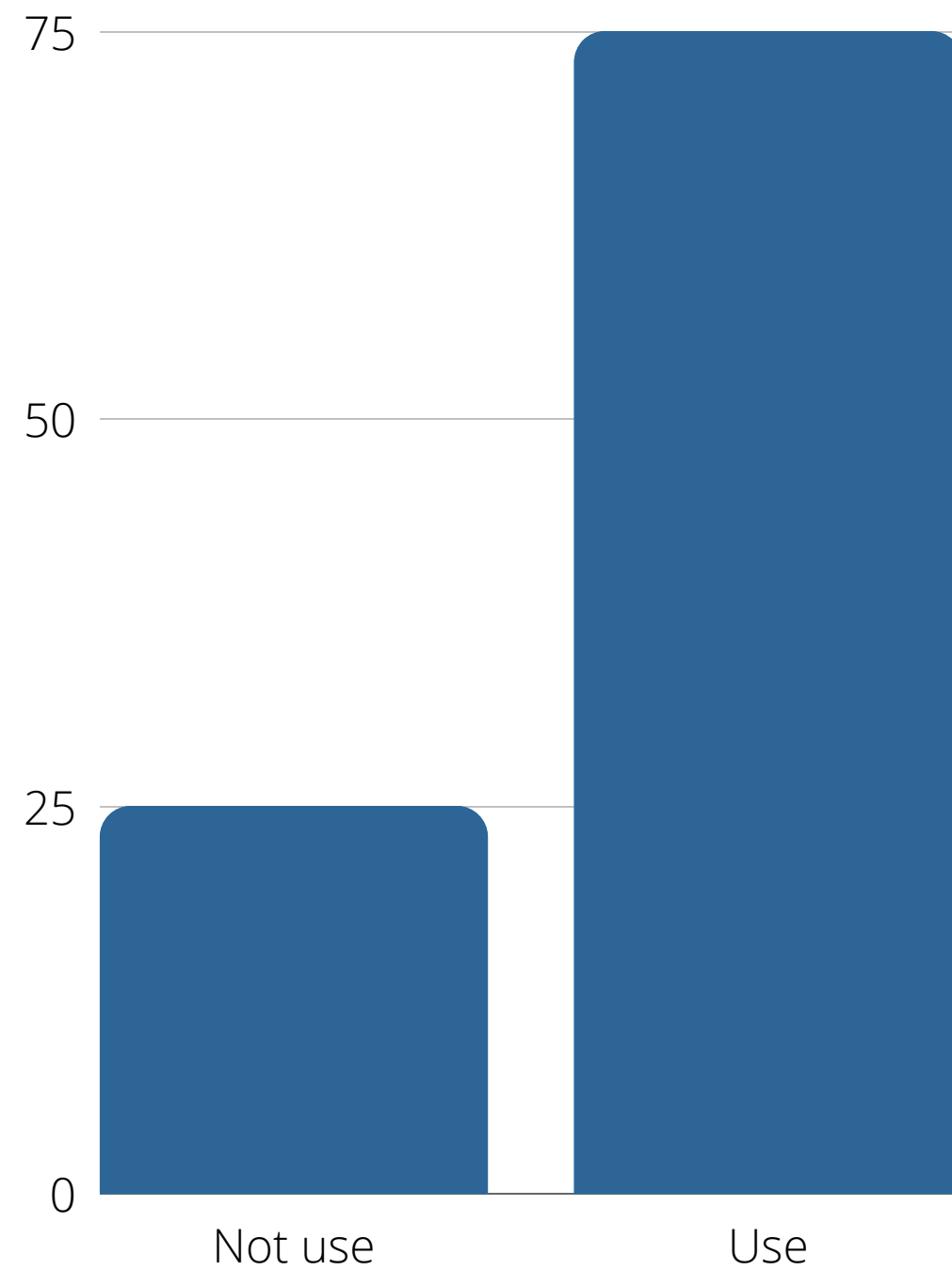
We have some fabulous clubs such as the society of indigenous and Torres Strait Islander club, and the environmental club that recognise key issues. However, advertisement of such initiatives are not driven as much as a Dons party.

Same goes with educational events, such as a TEDx talk, careers breakfasts, LSA forum nights - all are not pushed enough through BUSA and are often, as a result, over-looked by students.

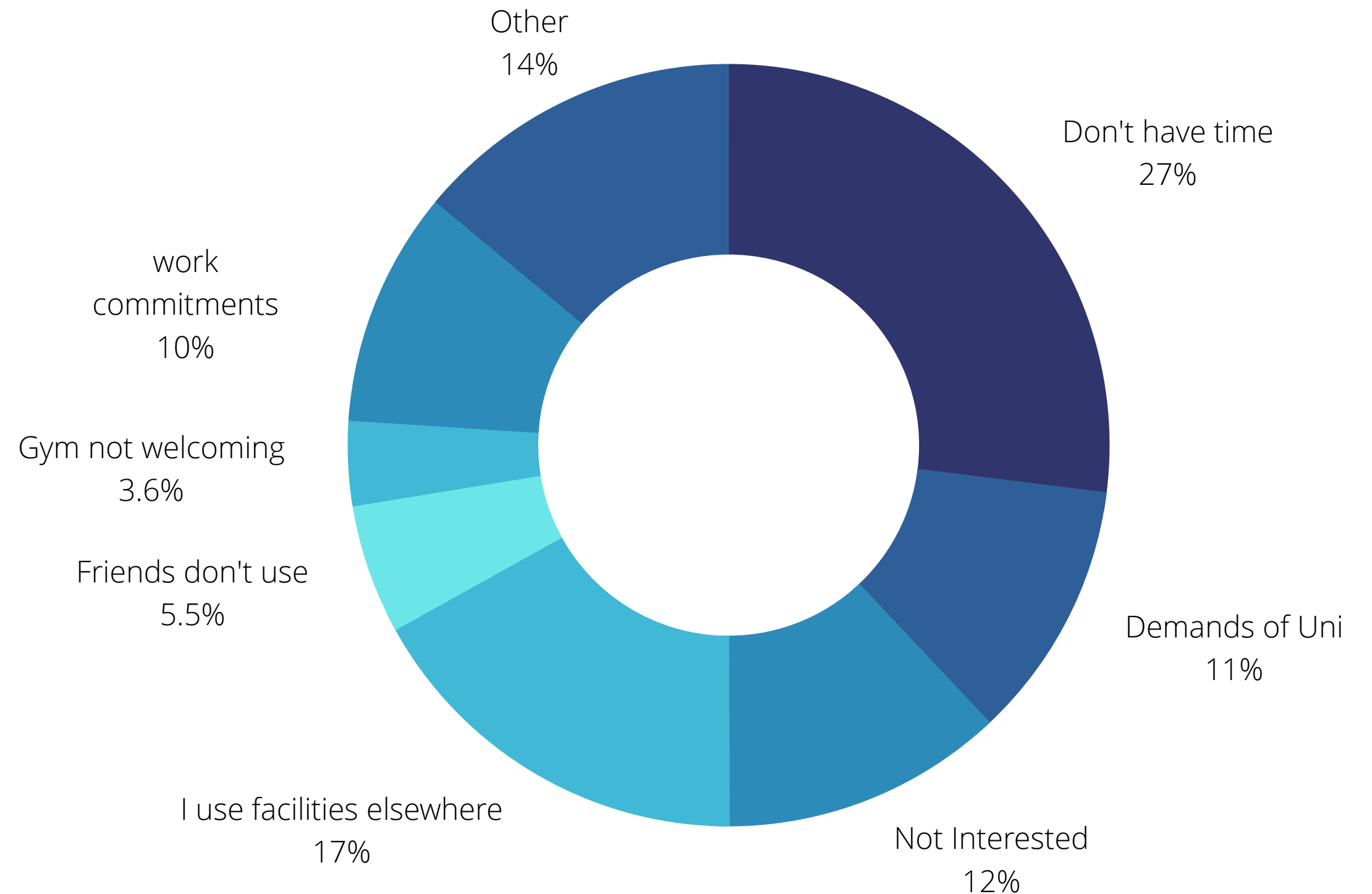
I think further accountability of what BUSA promotes to students will allow students who don't want to go to a dons night, the ability to know about other events. In such, would increase engagement on campus!"

Use of the Bond Sport Centre

- **75%** of respondents use the sport facilities on campus



Reasons why students don't use the sport centre



"Other" reasons why students don't use the sport centre

Rude staff member at orientation

Self-Conscious

Not aware i can

Guys go there to stare at girls so its off putting!

Never was shown around, too much anxiety

Overwhelming!

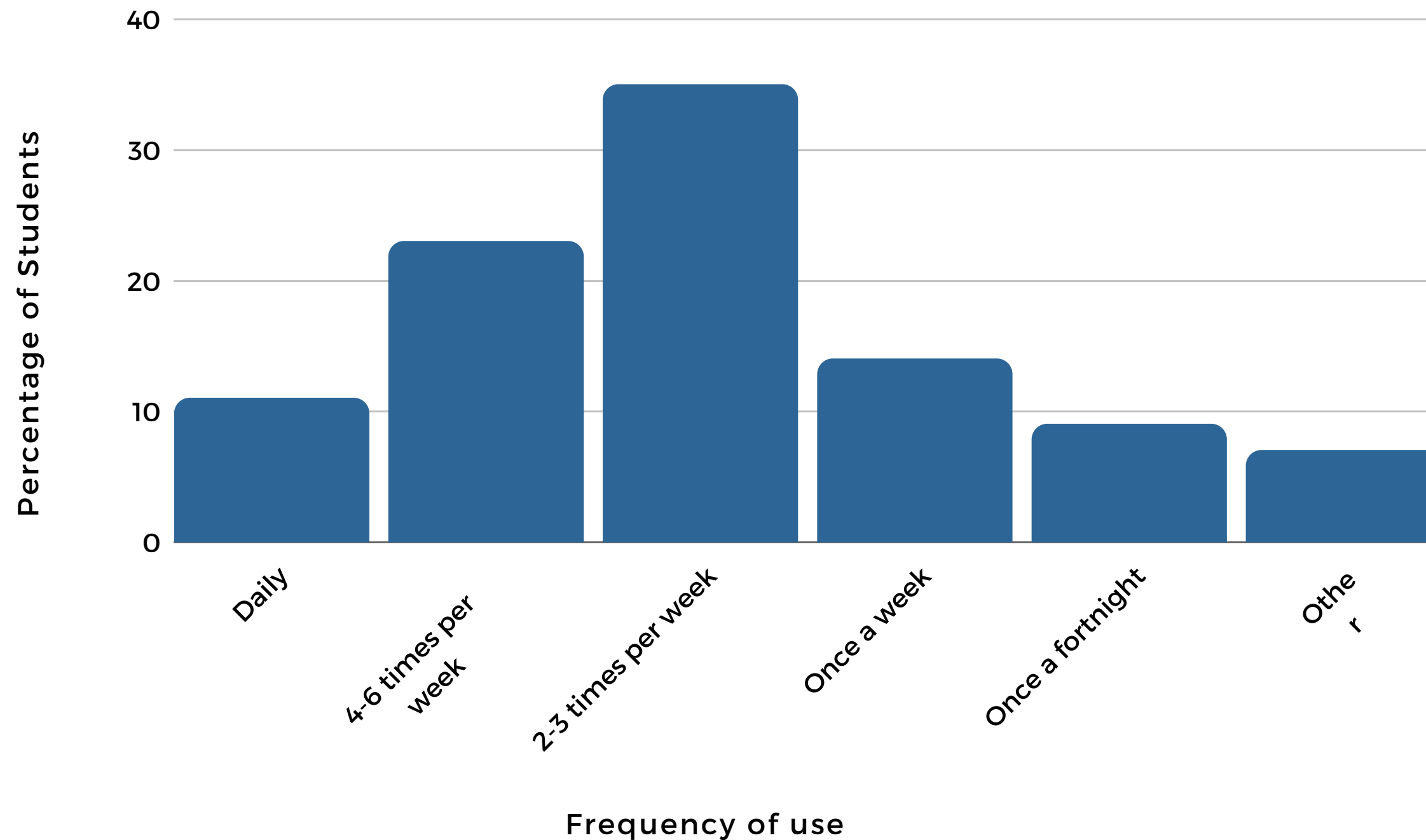
I used the gym but found it too intimidating

Scared to go and check it out

I haven't been given any information about it

Frequency of use

- 70% of users visit the sport centre at least twice a week



The role of friends on engagement

Do your friends use the sports centre?



93.3%

YES

Do your friends engage with Sport Clubs?

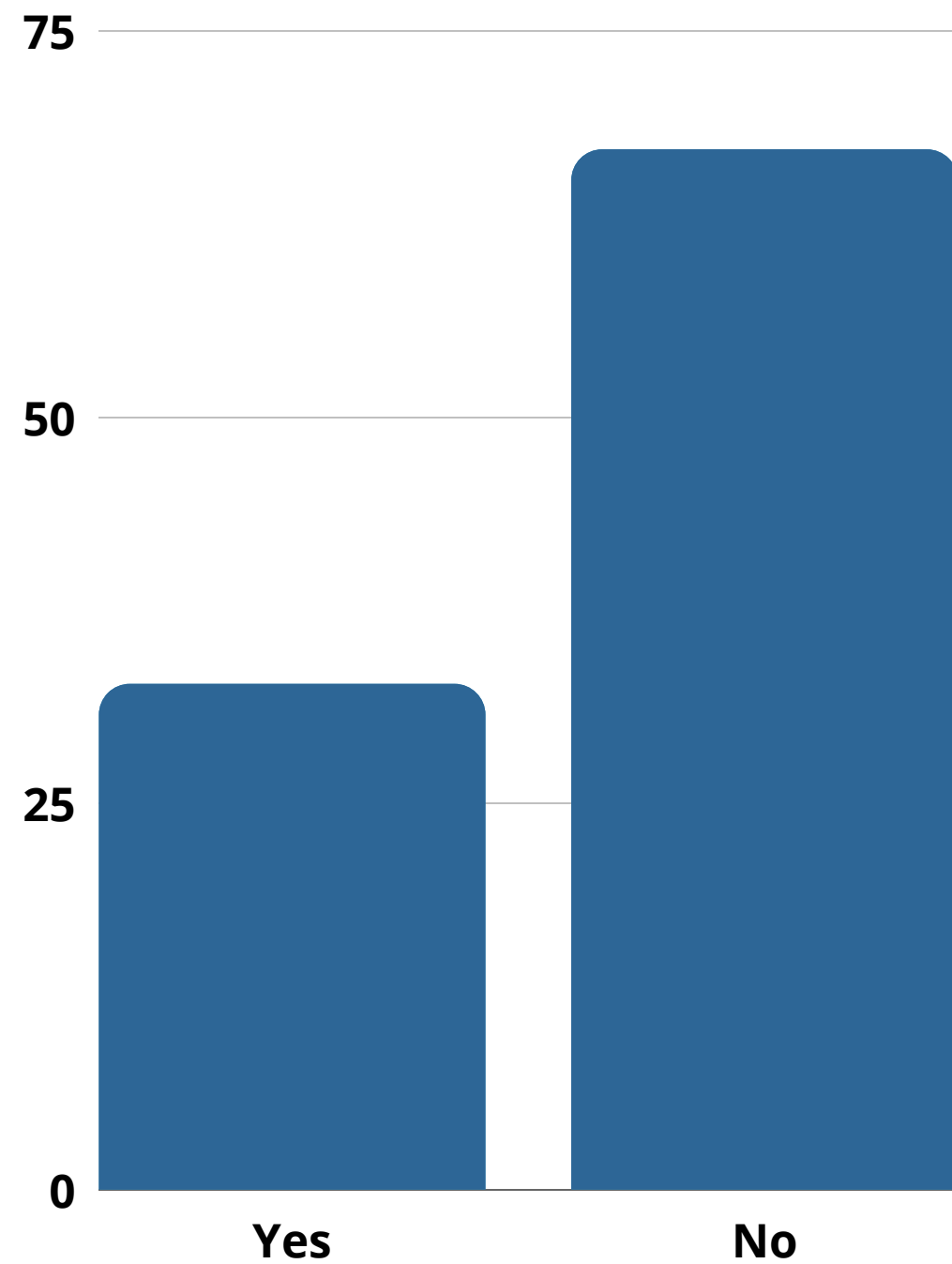


86.5%

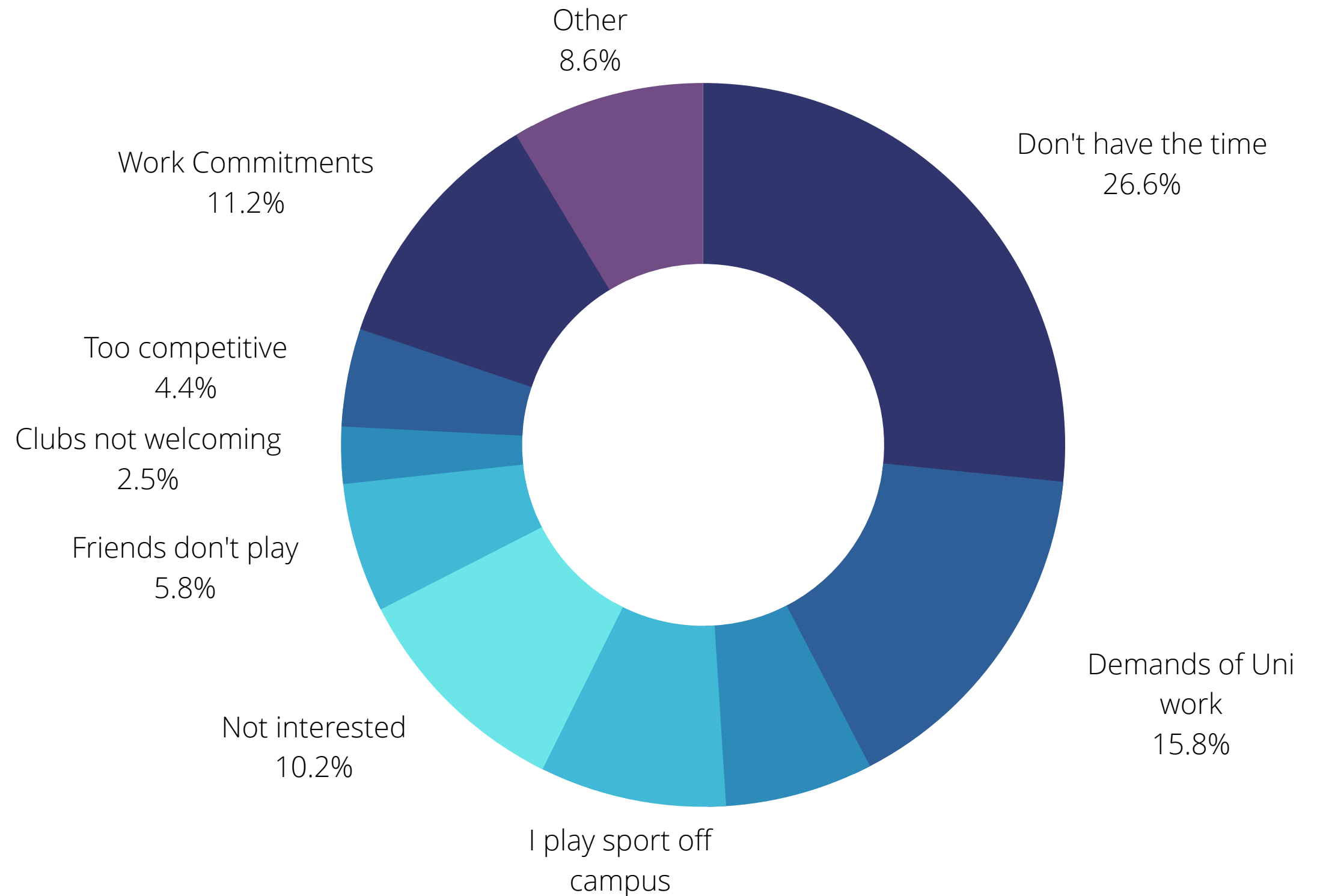
YES

Engagement with Sports Clubs

Are you involved with any sport clubs at Bond?



What are the main reasons why you don't participate?



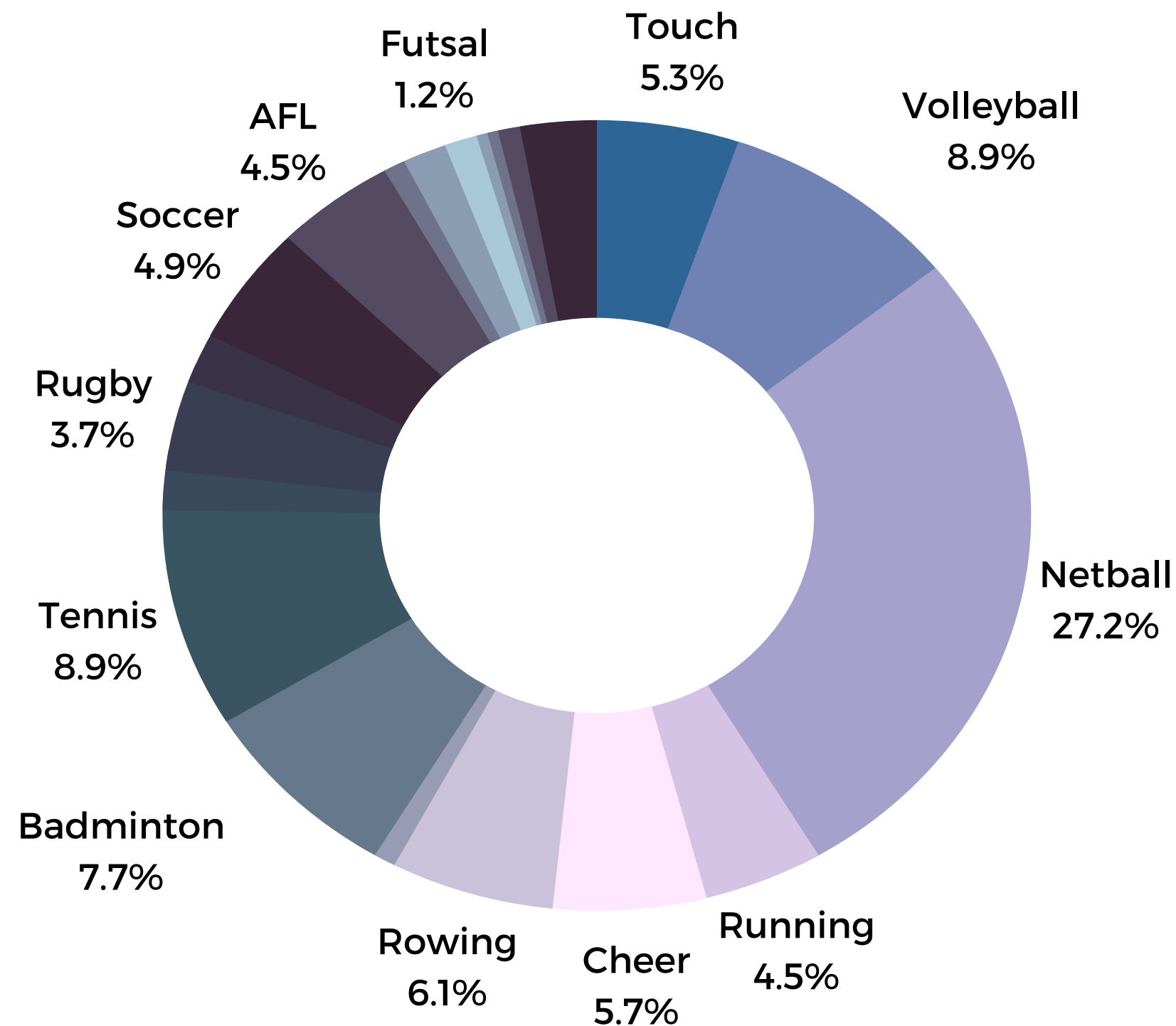
"Other" reasons why students don't engage with sport clubs

- *Don't know how to join/get involved*
- *Work and family commitments*
- *Doesn't fit with class schedule*
- *Injured/fear of injury*
- *Negative experiences in the past with team atmosphere/coaches*
- *Don't live close to campus*
- *Attended club sign-on day but have not been provided further information*
- *Joining/ongoing fees*
- *Not much of a team atmosphere in clubs I joined in the past*
- *Poor English, feel uncomfortable*
- *I don't know how to join them*
- *No connection for mature-aged students*
- *I'm not sure what is available*
- *I'm a beginner and just want to play socially*
- *Thought I wasn't good enough*

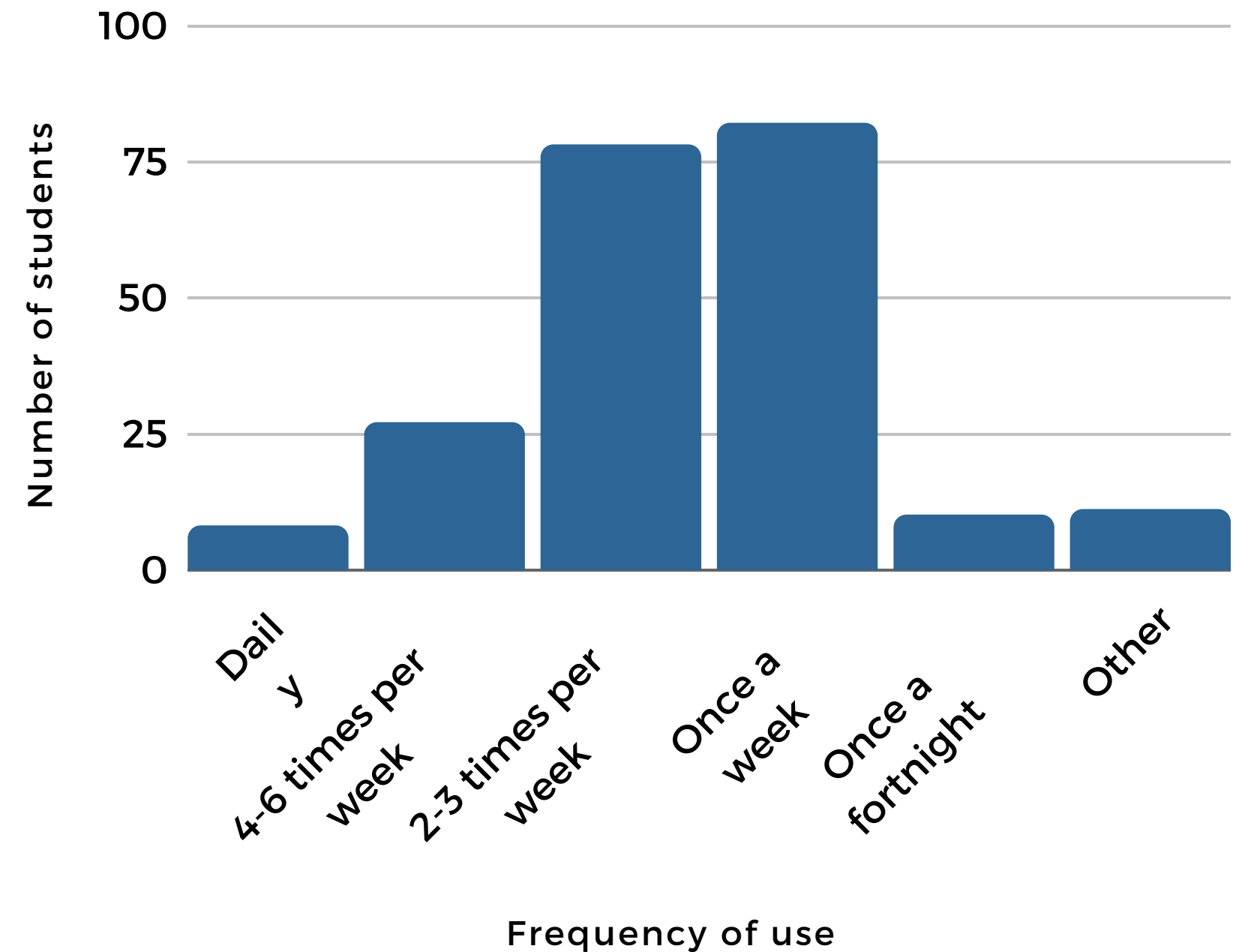
Engagement with Sport Clubs

- 33% of students are involved with a Bond sports club
- Students participate in sports club-related activities at least once a week

What sports clubs are students involved in?



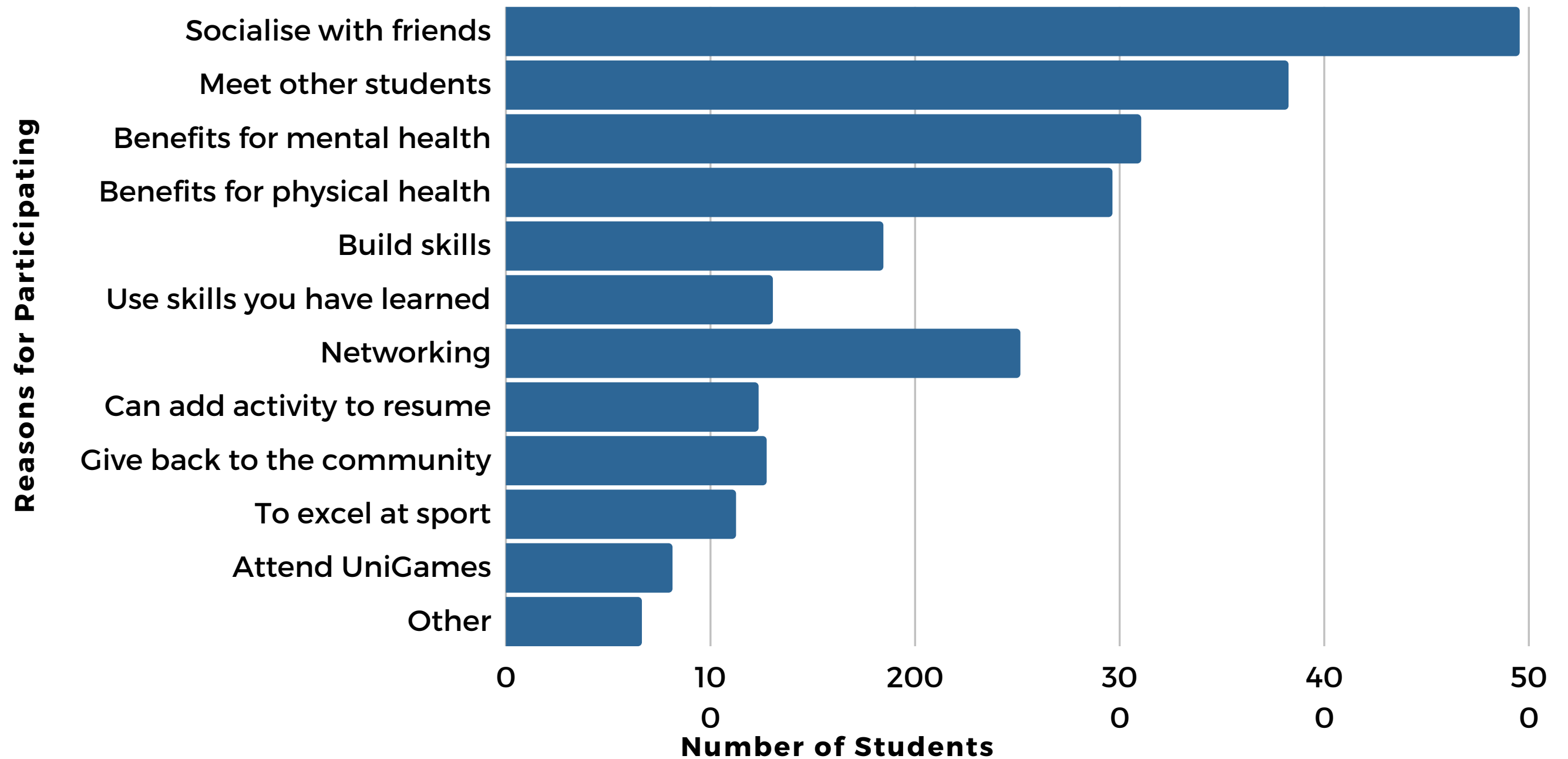
How often do students participate in sports-club related activities?



Why do students use sports facilities and/or are involved in sports/social clubs?

Why do students participate in their selected activities on campus?

- **35%** participate in these activities for the social aspect
- **24%** participate for the physical and mental health benefits



What other sport clubs & activities would you like on campus?

- *More social, casual sports*
- *Surfing, Surfing lessons*
- *Table Tennis*
- *Dance and dance workshops*
- *Fitness & Gym lessons, activities for newbies*
- *Female-only gym spaces and classes*
- *Fishing*
- *Indoor Cricket*
- *A powerlifting/bodybuilding club*
- *Learn to swim and swim squads*
- *Pickleball*
- *Female sport clubs*
- *Indoor volleyball / Badminton*
- *Yoga / Pilates / Meditation Club*
- *Sailing*
- *Self defence*
- *Inclusive clubs run by neurodivergent and LGBTQIA+ friendly*
- *Lacrosse*



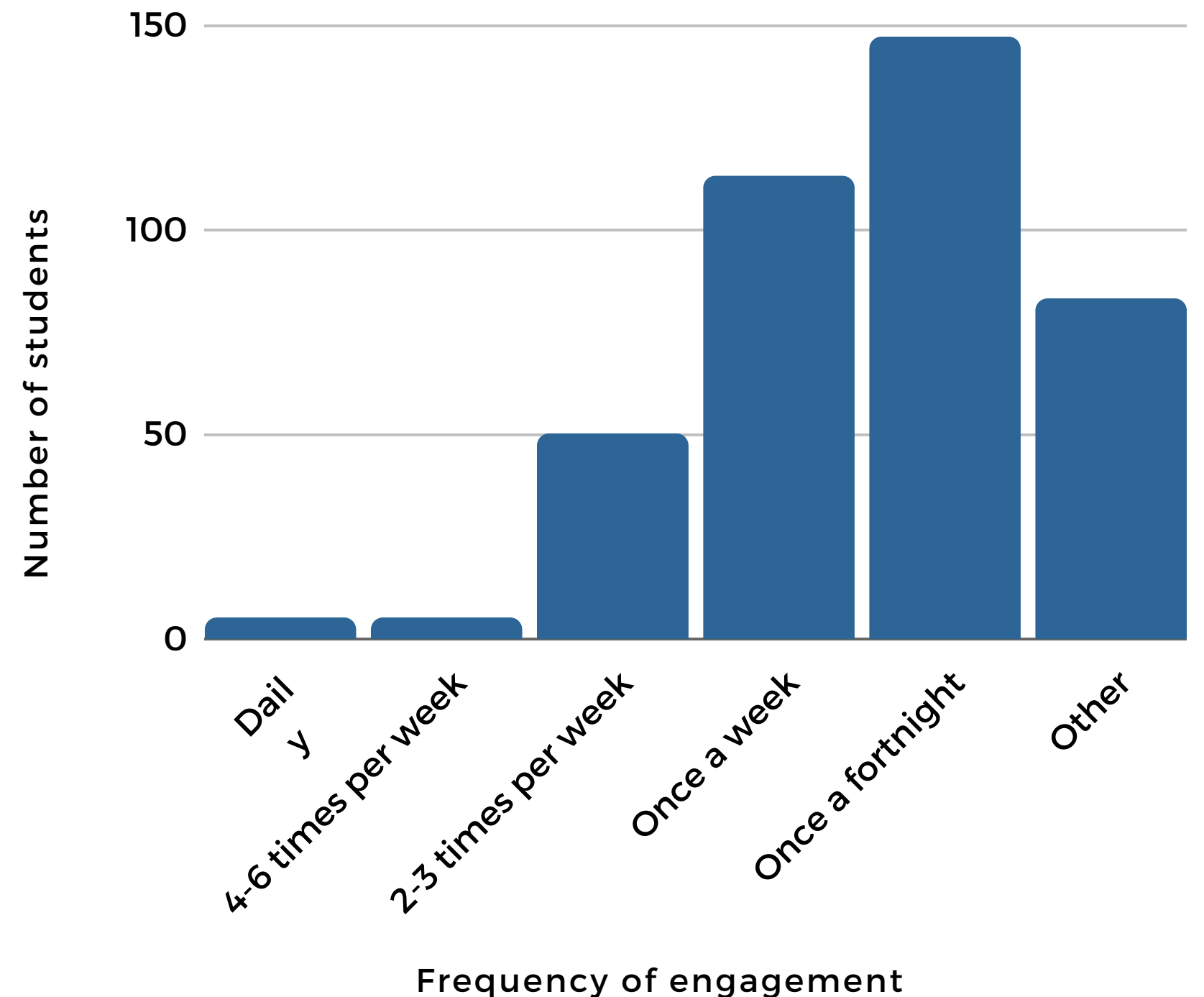
Engagement with Student Clubs and Social Events

- **60%** of students participate in these types of activities (e.g., Bondstock, Parties at Dons, Global Food Fest, Wednesday by the Water)

Do your friends engage with Social Events?



How often do students participate in student club and society events?

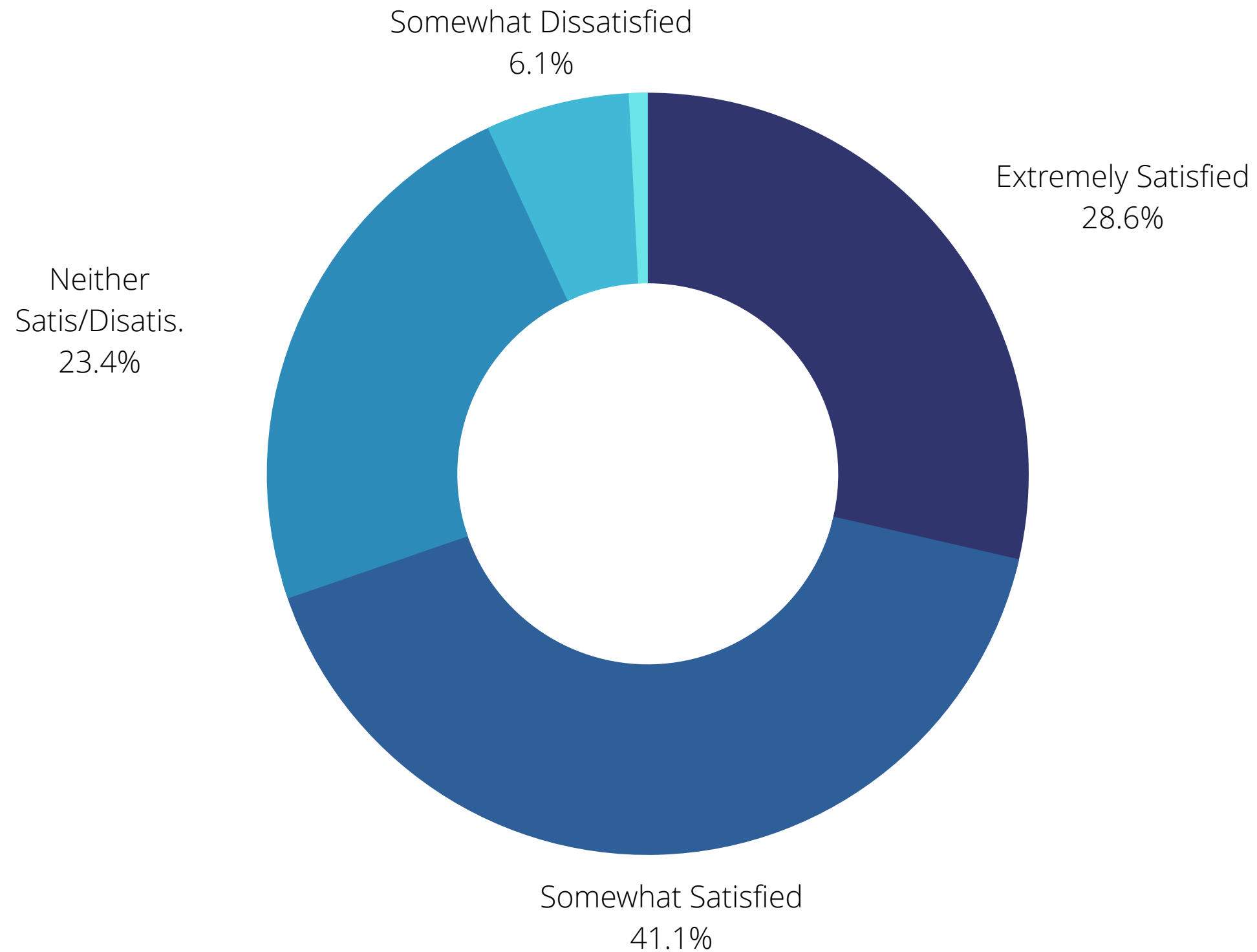


Why other clubs/activities do students want to see?

- *More cultural events/clubs*
- *More fun-filled clubs/small get-togethers (coffee)*
- *Language Clubs*
- *International clubs (e.g., pacific island community)*
- *Non-party events at Dons (e.g., trivia nights & book clubs)*
- *General activities (e.g., reading, writing, movie clubs, cooking, photography, wine, music, crafts/art, pottery making, paint and sip)*
- *Christian/religious based activities, catholic club,*
- *Debating society*
- *Bigger music society/arts presence overall*
- *LGBTQ+ club and neurodivergent club*
- *More food based events like wednesday by the water*
- *Music/big band*
- *More events accommodating to non-drinkers*
- *Something specifically for first years/new students*
- *Cooking lessons*
- *Environmental and climate change activities*
- *Networking events*



Student satisfaction with activities and clubs on campus



70% of students are satisfied with the activities and social clubs on campus

Suggestions for improving student engagement on campus

- *More staff involvement in clubs, some staff hard to work with, too much pressure on students running clubs*
- *More Clubs, more interactive spaces, more outdoor seating not limited to cafes*
- *Offer more activities that don't revolve around alcohol*
- *Have the university promote activities so we can get more engagement and not just use club sharing posts*
- *More social sporting events*
- *More engagement activities for postgrad students*
- *Make sure list of clubs and contact details are up to date*
- *Make the events more easily accessible online*
- *More notification that things are happening, not just on a Clubs preferred social media platform*
- *Provide incentives for students to organise, join and participate in clubs and their events*
- *More support for people with poor English in clubs and sports*
- *Include BOTH campuses - BISH so separate and not included*
- *More expos or club days to promote sports/clubs*
- *Extend the gym hours - especially on the weekend for those who live on campus*
- *Sporting clubs are too competitive - young players find it very hard to get into the team despite months of hard work*
- *More student events run by staff*
- *Diversifying associate/club personnel to better understand the multifaceted needs of the wider campus demographic. Not just the straight from high school to uni stream*

Feedback

"It presents as modelled on the USA fraternity model, which to an Australian presents as unwelcoming and divisive; a clicky group of beautiful people. Perhaps this is appropriate as on the Gold Coast."

"Another big issue regarding Bond clubs is that many students with good club ideas are unsure as to how to start these clubs. I would suggest more information in how to start a club."

"An active Bond University Sports page with all upcoming sports events, sports club openings, etc."

"I seem to find out about events when it's too late to rearrange my schedule or purchase tickets... I check my Bond email multiple times a day but it seems as though most updates/information about events is on social media. I am personally not a huge social media presence and I would like to learn about upcoming events more than just a day before the event. I unfortunately had to miss out on many things I would have liked to attend simply because I didn't know about them until it was too late. A solution to this problem could be an upcoming activities calendar posted for the following week or even the following month. This would help me to make sure I can rearrange my schedule in a timely manner and be prepared to attend the events."

"More postgrad friendly events that are not geared towards 'pub' crawls etc. More informal wellbeing, health focused and support style engagement on campus would be great."

"People on Busa are also in the faculty club and are also the res fellows they get all the ideas from 1 exclusive group of people who don't do their job well they aren't inclusive. The clubs barely run anymore other than sport teams and if your not into sport there's nothing to do."

Social Capital?

"I think just general engagement in a sport or club is that you build that network and that's a network of people who are going to lookout for you. I think that's like good thing to have as well. By engaging, you now have more friends or even just people that you know and if they notice that you haven't been too lakeside in a while for dinner, it's a good thing to have those people to then check in on you and make sure you're okay."

Focus Groups

- **Friendships/networking**

- “I’ve met so many friends through doing those clubs. Probably a 1/3 of my friends are through my degree the rest are from clubs and stuff.” (FG1)
- “When I'm sitting at home bored it's good to know that you can just come to the campus and there will be people that you know. I can sit at the MLC and have a conversation and so that's always good to know that I'm not alone.” (FG2)
- “It’s made me feel part of the community, that's a very big thing. Even connecting with people and networking with them - like through that bondies connect program I could connect with people from other disciplines like law students or business students.” (FG5)

Focus Groups

- **Mental Health**

- "It's a good way to destress, especially playing some of the sports where you get to just throw a ball or go swim and going to vent out your frustration." (FG1)
- "It gives you a break and a distraction and time to switch off." (FG4)

Focus Groups

- **Academic Performance**

- “It's nice to have that opportunity to take a step back, have a break and come back to your studies because you have a fresh mind.” (FG5)
- “The more engaged I am in sport, the better I am in general. If I'm kind of pulling back from that then I'm usually pulling back from study.” (FG6)

Focus Groups

- **Barriers to sport club engagement**

- I think the lack of awareness is probably the biggest thing that's inhibiting students from engaging in that." (FG1)
- That's my expectation - that all of the teams have high level athletes because that's how Bond advertised it." (FG3)
- "Because I'm a beginner, there's that hesitation that I might fail or like it might not cater to beginners." (FG5)
- "I feel like there needs to be more recreation level sport clubs. I know a lot of people have dropped out of because it's very competitive and there's a high commitment level." (FG7)

Focus Groups

- **Implications of student run clubs**

- “When we come into associations we don’t realise there is politics within university. As students we come in blind and we have to try to figure out who to talk to, when to talk to them. By the time we figure out all that, our term is done and the next person in my role has to redo it as you can't really tell someone ‘do this and this.’ (FG1)
- "On the sport club side, a lot of it's just extremely disorganised and for the whole semester I tried to join the soccer team but I think 85% of their games were cancelled and there was so much disorganisation with it. Because it’s run by students that's where there’s sort of some issues.” (FG3)

Focus Groups

- **Moving Forward**

- “I think a lot of people think that if you miss that club sign on day you can't join a team.” (FG1)
- “I like the idea of having a dedicated landing page or website, that would make things a lot easier.” (FG4)
- “Maybe if it’s just a page with the sport clubs and who to contact, when these teams train and all that kind of stuff. So, if someone is interested they don't have to ask three or four people just to get the contact number.” (FG7)

Discussion

- Students understood the importance of friendships, engagement and socialisation.
- Making the time to engage and interact was a priority for many respondents. However, research suggests that students find it challenging to balance extra-curricular activities and their studies (Winstone, et al, 2022).
- Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) suggest the development of social capital is significantly affected by those factors upon which social relationships depend; these include time and interaction. Therefore, even a small change over just a few weeks is an important outcome.

Discussion

- Developing social capital requires an environment conducive to social integration and social interactions.
- While research linking wellbeing and social capital is complex, De Neve, Diener, Tay, and Xuereb (2013) report that higher levels of wellbeing and a positive mood can increase interest in, and therefore improve the quality of, social interactions, helping people to be more inclusive and sympathetic in their dealings with others, exhibit greater social skills and confidence, be more talkative and engage in deeper conversations
- Therefore, strategies to improve a student's social connections and their wellbeing are important considerations for Universities.

Discussion

- In a global context of increasingly diverse student cohorts and competition for enrolments, universities can maximise student success and satisfaction through strategic interventions that facilitate the development and maintenance of social capital.
- Trust in the university, bridging social capital and peer social support predicted university life satisfaction, which can play an important part in student retention (Bye, Muller, Opreescu, 2020).

Implications

- Further analysis and more research are required to fully understand student social capital development in a university setting.
- The relationship between Wellbeing and Social Capital requires further exploration.
- Need to examine more closely a breadth of psychological, social and cultural reasons why some students cannot or do not engage.
- There is a need for universities to offer a greater diversity of extra-curricular activities, including opportunities for quieter, introverted students and students from diverse cultural backgrounds to participate (Winstone, et al, 2022).

Practical Recommendations

- Reassess BUSA, its purpose, operations, funding etc. Diversify committee. Provide support to BUSA to succeed.
- Employ a staff member to assist BUSA meet its obligations to students.
- Reassess the clubs currently on offer - are there too many? Are they all active? How many students engage with the club? Is there variety?
- Establish standardised operating templates, platforms. eg strategy, operations and communication platforms (dedicated landing page?).
- Provide more opportunity to join clubs - not just sign on day - making sure enquiries are responded to, new students welcomed and supported.
- More support and encouragement for introverted students to join in - student event 'friends', or ice-breaker events.
- Consider allocating 'Beyond Bond' points to include participating and engaging in campus activities.
- Sport - more 'sport-for-all', recreation and fun. Try out activities/events.

Future Research

- Australia-wide university study.
- Longitudinal (3-4 years) to examine social capital growth, measure wellness and mental/physical health.
- Track retention, academic performance and employability outcomes.
- Quantitative statistical component....
- Linkage Grant Opportunity

THANKS!
QUESTIONS?
FEEDBACK?