



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS

JANUARY 2026



Marissa Mueller (2023) sustainability photographer collection



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

- Initiated to support the engagement strategy
- Measures change following implementation of:
 - Grassroot schemes
 - Campaigns
 - Direct engagement with professional communities
 - Flagship projects

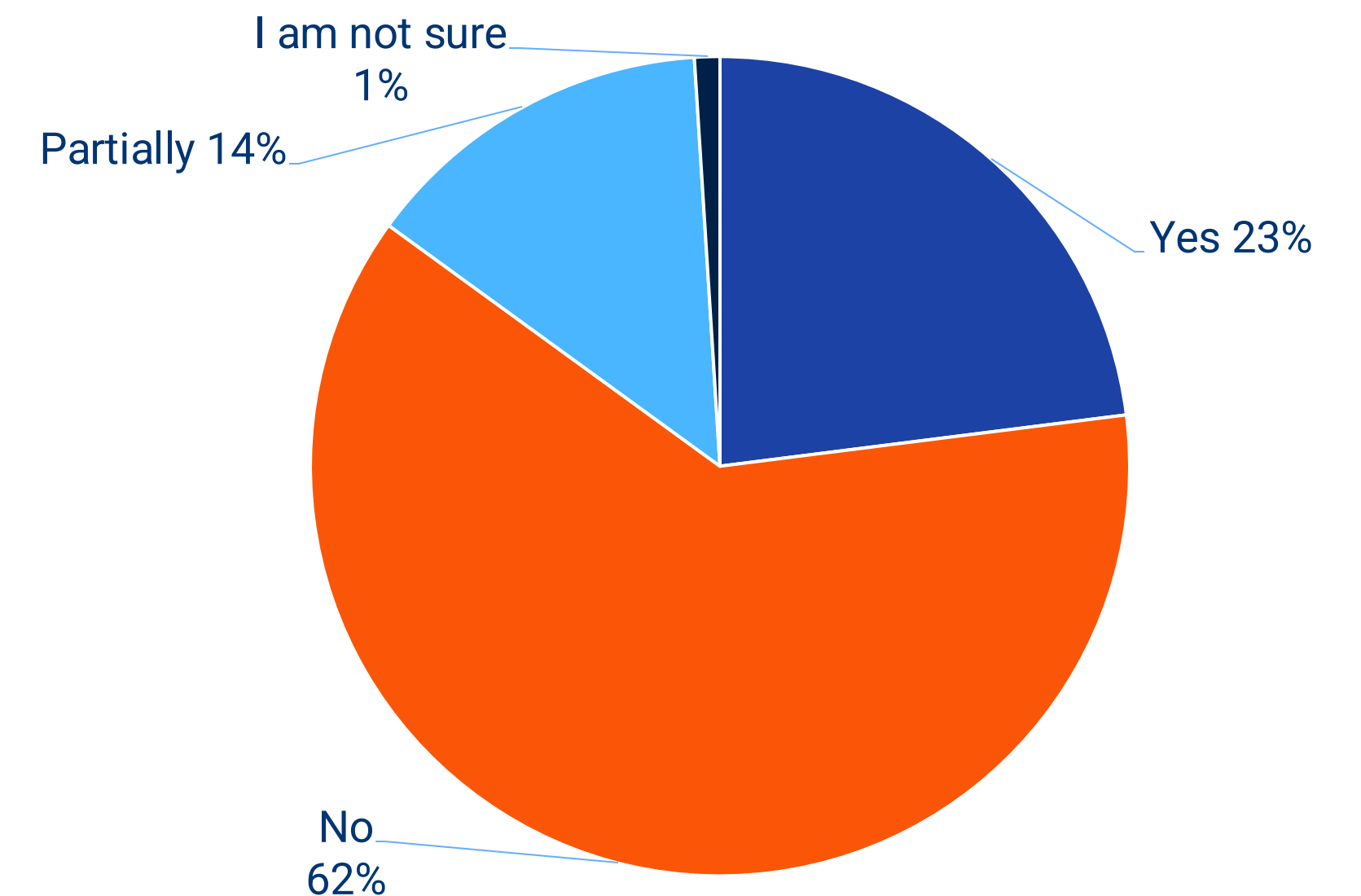
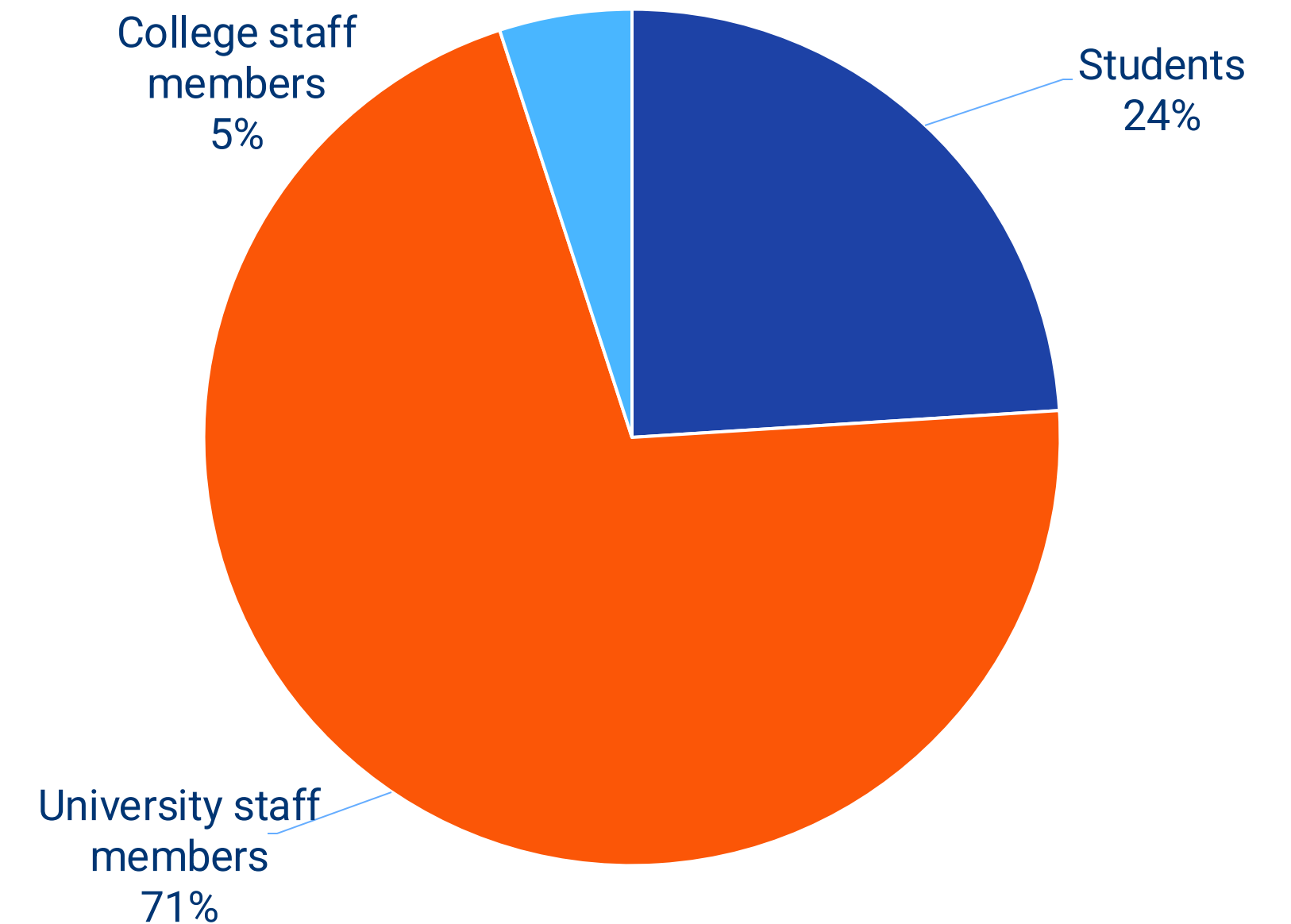


Participants in the survey

GENERAL

- Delivered in November 2025 following a lengthy process to secure approval and a time slot in the University survey schedule.
- Total of 412 responses from students, and University and college staff.
- The survey was designed as part of the engagement strategy to measure impact of engagement work.
- Survey was shared in various University channels.
- Participation was rewarded with a chance to win one of ten a £30 gift cards.

Is your course linked to environmental studies, such as geography or biology?



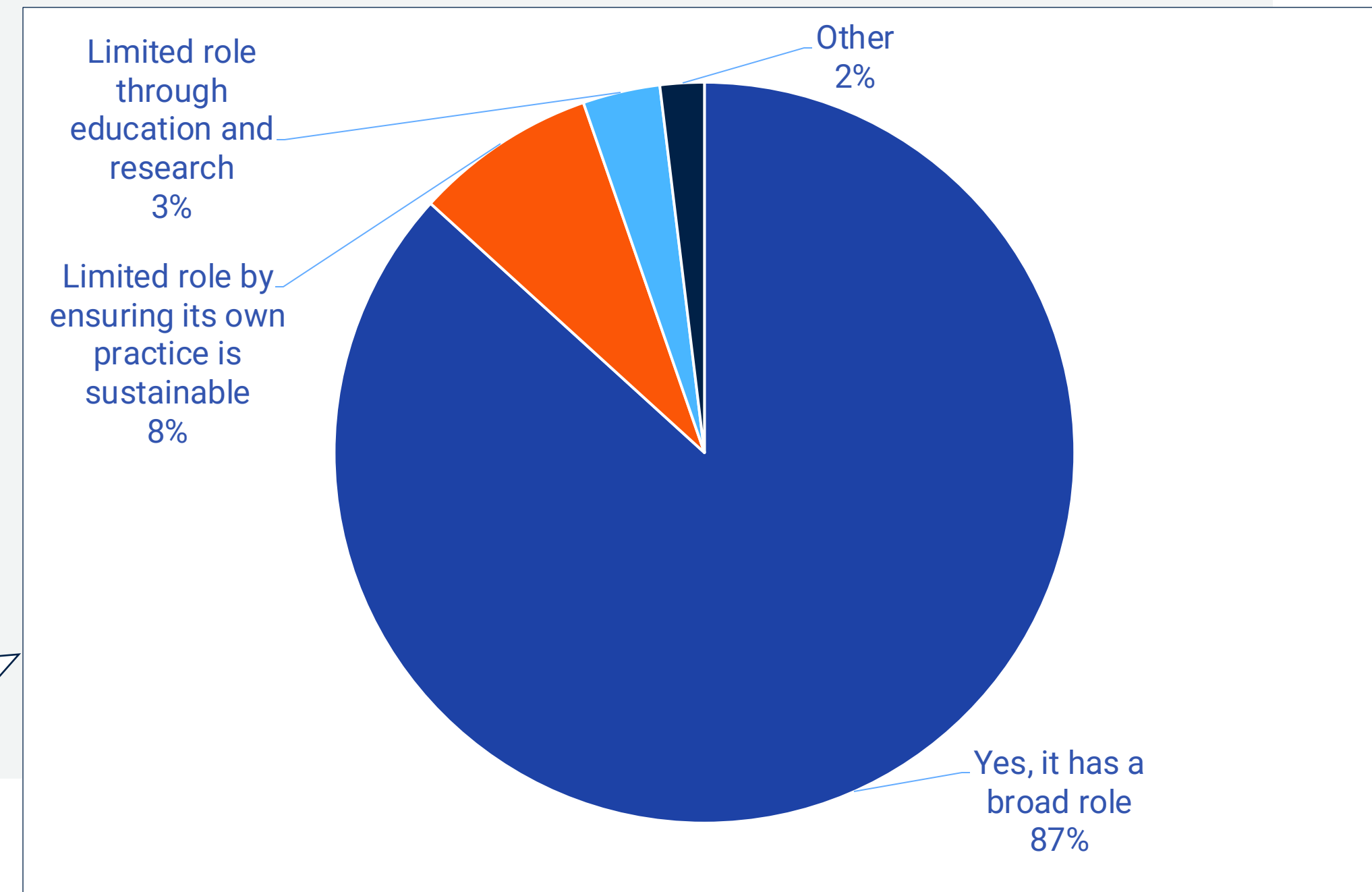
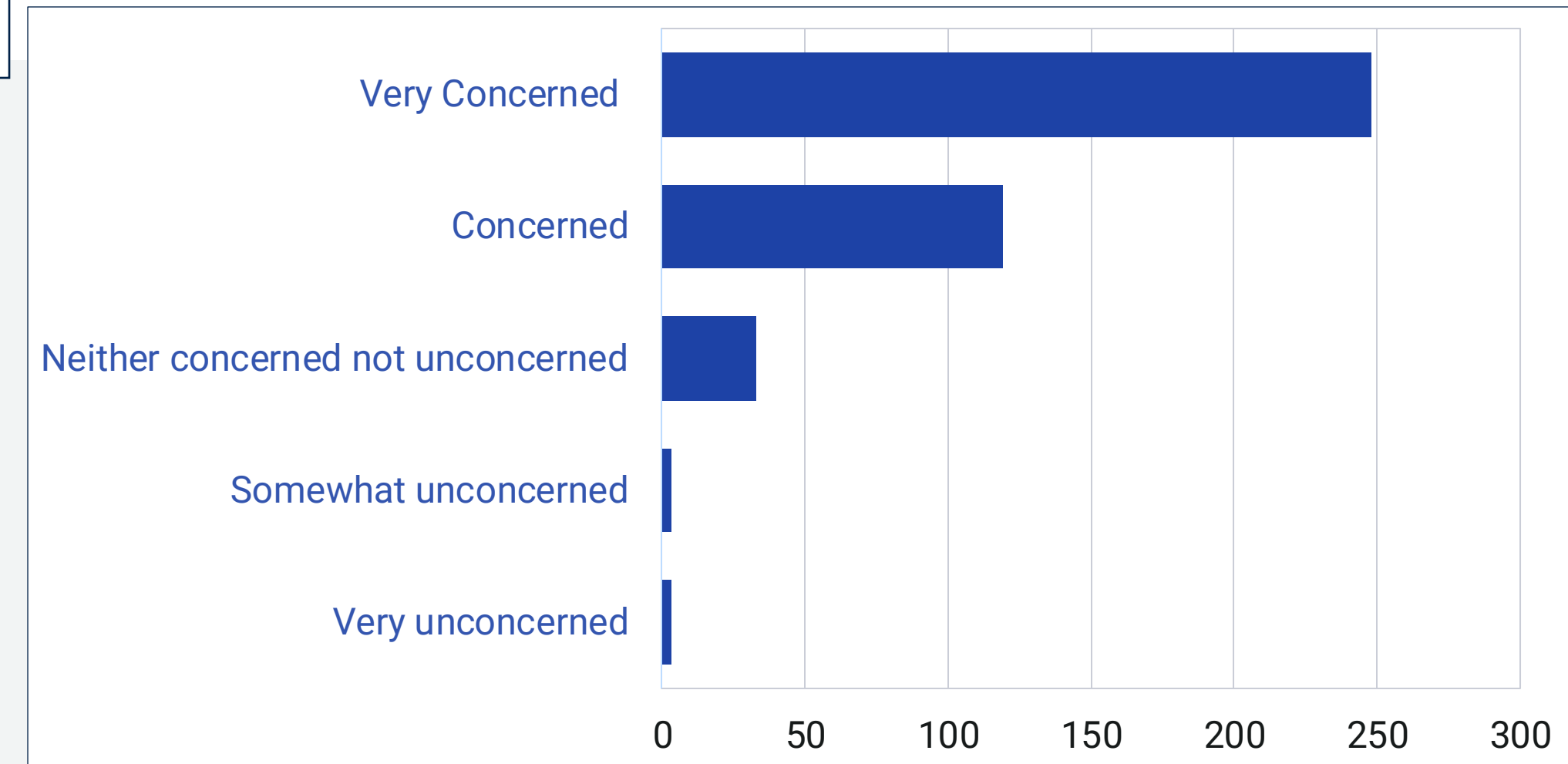


How **concerned** are you about environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, etc.?

STRONG CONCERN AND EXPECTATIONS FOR ACTION

- 92% of respondents are concerned or very concerned about environmental issues.
- 87% believe the University has a broad role in addressing environmental challenges.
- Concern levels are high across all groups, including those not studying or working in environmental disciplines.

Do you think the University has a role in addressing environmental challenges?



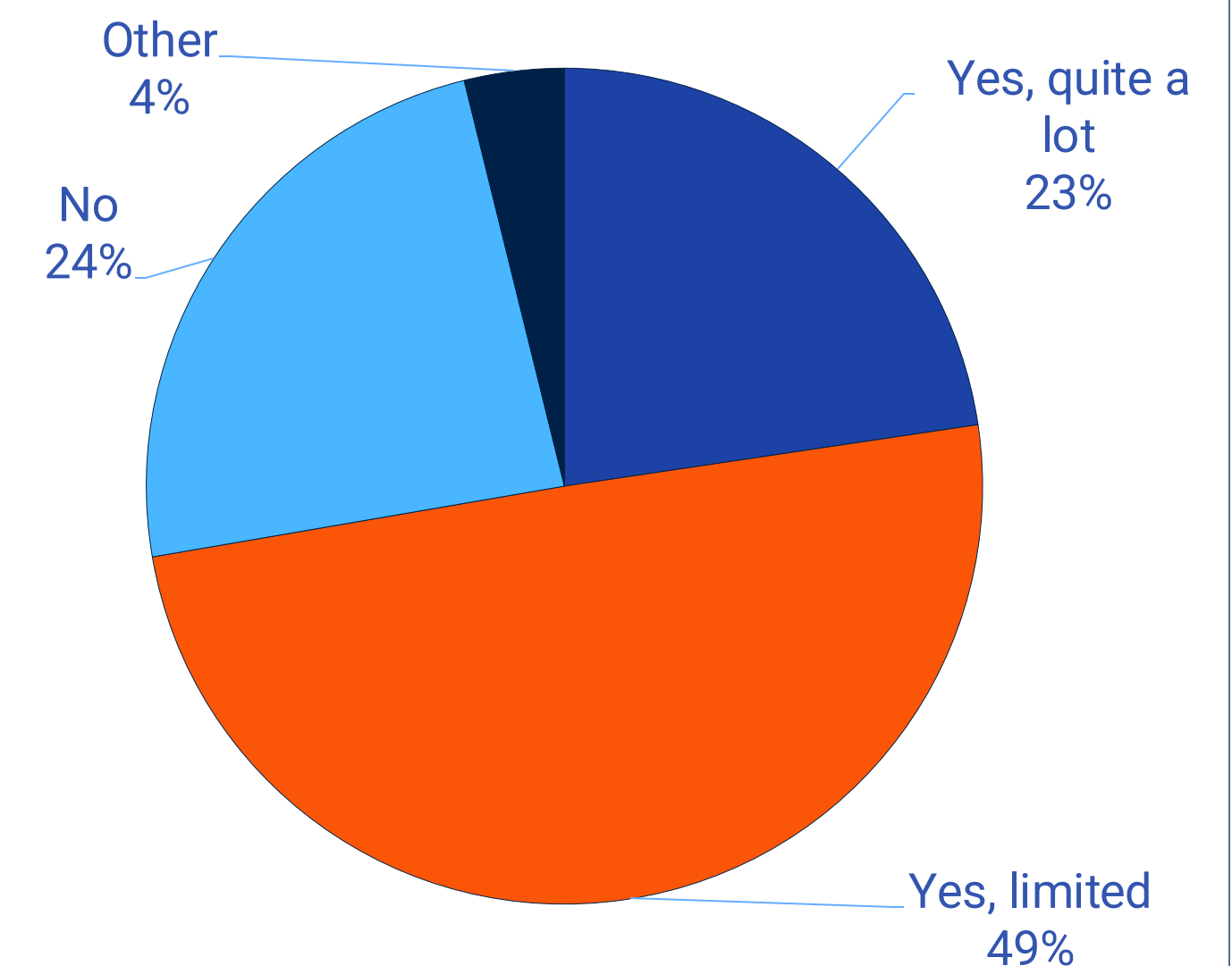
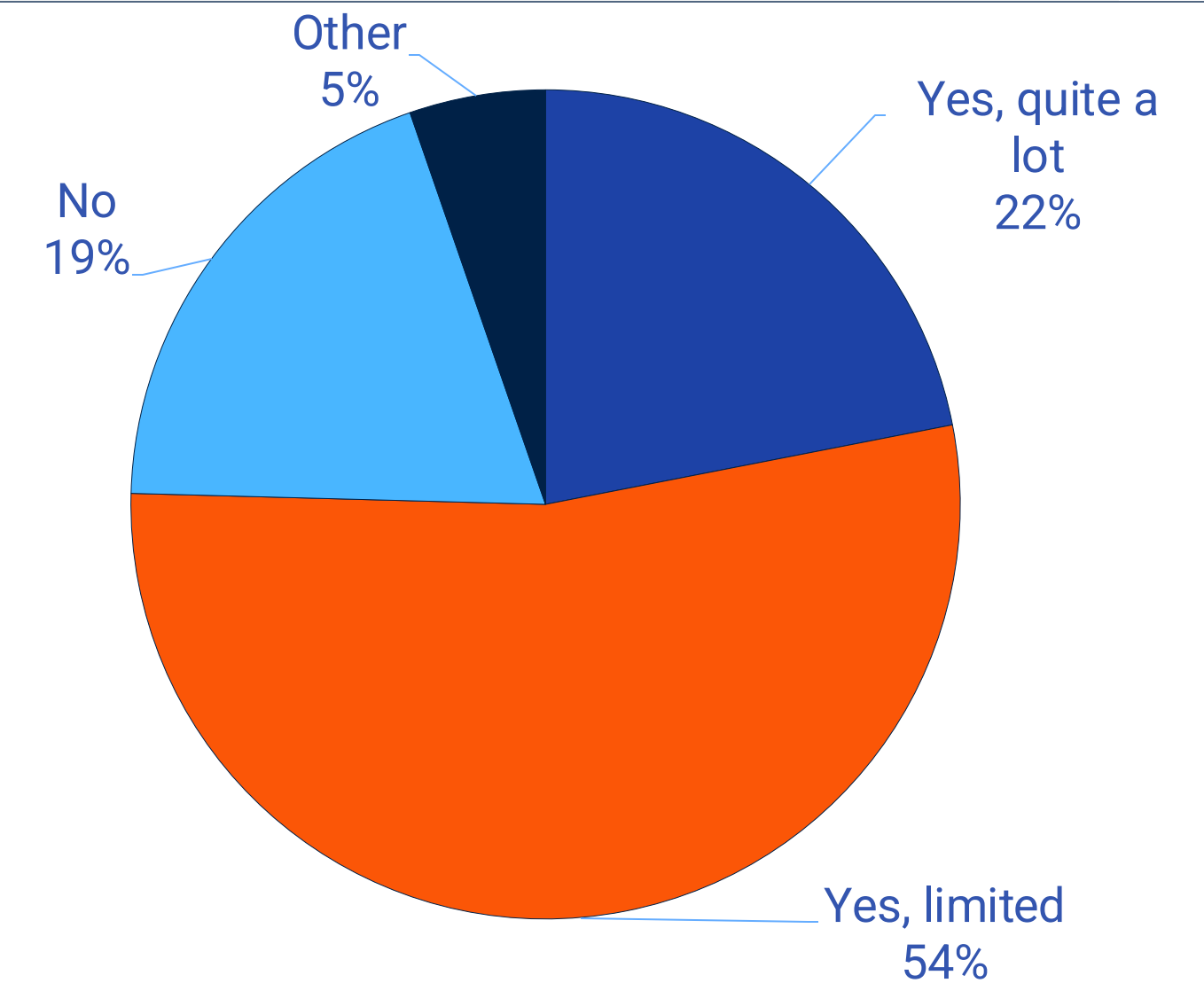


In the past two years, have you **noticed** any changes in practice in your work/study context towards more sustainable choices

CHANGE IS HAPPENING

- 76% have noticed changes toward sustainability in their work or study context.
- 72% report making changes themselves.
- However, 77% of those who provided examples of actions, reported action that were individual or personal in nature.
- Only 5% of examples of actions reflect strategic or structural change.
- Staff responses show more team-level change (linked to initiatives such as Green Impact) but limited departmental and strategic change.

In the past two years, have you **implemented** any changes in practice



Category of change	Number of actions or observations	% from total
Personal behaviour (i.e., I travel by bike, I eat less meat, I bring food from home to avoid packaging)	168	25%
Food & catering sustainability (incl. purchasing)	91	14%
Waste infrastructure & bin systems ¹	85	13%
Buildings, energy and infrastructure (excluding waste)	57	9%
Laboratory sustainability	52	8%
Local travel and commuting (excl. flights/international)	45	7%
Advocacy and influencing others (e.g., talk with colleagues, join Green Impact)	43	6%
Leadership & structured engagement	31	5%
Reducing paper use and digital behaviour	25	4%
General sustainability (e.g., being more aware)	23	3%
Flights-related actions	18	3%
Procurement	16	2%
Organisational change and operations	8	1%
Total	662	



IS IT THE *'RIGHT'* TYPE OF CHANGE?

Estimated impact of the change*	% of responders	% of staff members
Individual/personal change	77%	54%
Change at a team level	3%	25%
Change at a departmental level	15%	15%
Strategic or structural change	5%	6%

*Individual actions - i.e., personal daily choices.
Team level changes - actions a small unit, team or lab group can collectively adopt.
Departmental changes - changes affecting one department, building, college or service unit.
Strategic or structural interventions – larger-scale, policy, infrastructure or institutional changes with widespread impact.

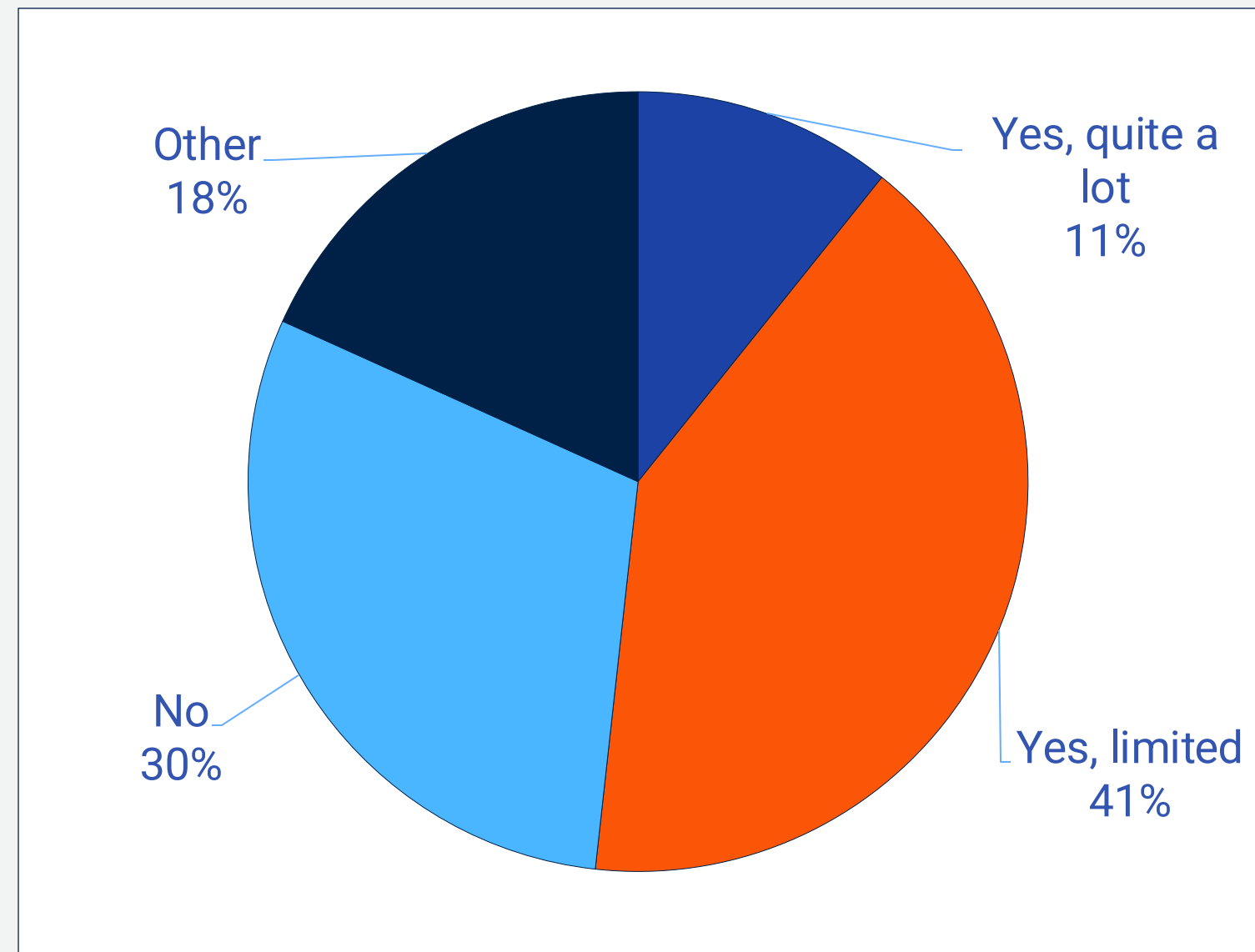


LIMITED RECOGNISED IMPACT FROM THE STRATEGY

- Only 52% recognise any change in the University’s approach following the 2021 Environmental Sustainability Strategy.
- Just 13% feel the Strategy led to “quite a lot” of change.
- Strategic change is less visible than local or organic initiatives, contributing to perceptions of fragmentation.

	Yes, quite a lot	Yes, limited	No	Other
Do you recognise any changes in the University’s approach following the strategy	11%	41%	30%	18%
	13%	51%	36%	

The Environmental Sustainability Strategy was approved by the University in 2021. Do you recognise any changes in the University’s approach to sustainability since the strategy was launched?





BARRIERS TO CHANGE ARE SYSTEMIC

Among those identifying barriers (62% of respondents), the most cited barriers were:

- Cost and funding constraints (~55%)
- Time, workload, and capacity pressures (~32%)
- Cultural resistance and apathy (~30%)
- Lack of leadership, priority, and accountability (~24%)
- Infrastructure and estate limitations (~21%)

There is a strong perception that sustainability efforts rely too heavily on voluntary individual behaviour, rather than systemic, enforced and well-resourced action.



AWARENESS

- 64% of the responders **are aware** of sustainability initiatives

Which of the following sustainability practices are you aware of at the University or your college? (Select all that apply)	
Waste management programmes, including recycling	334
Cycling and public transport support and advice	294
Energy-efficient building design	172
Energy friendly behaviour campaign	158
Sustainable food options at events and in dining halls	152
Travel policy (including the Flight Levy)	130
Sustainable purchasing (such as recycled paper, reusable lab supplies, etc)	122
Paperless office/classroom initiatives	107
Biodiversity enhancement	92
Decarbonisation (eliminating fossil fuel use eg replacing gas boilers with electric systems)	76
Solar panels	53
Other	19



ENGAGEMENT

- 39% are aware and try to engage
- Local, department or college-led initiatives are the most popular, followed by Green Impact and centrally led campaigns (Green Action Week, The Good Gardener).
- A significant minority (31%) are not aware of any sustainability initiatives.

Statement	% of responders
I am aware and try to engage	39%
I am aware but I don't engage	25%
I am not aware of any environmental initiatives	31%
Other	5%



ARE WE DOING ENOUGH?

- In response to the question, a repeating narrative underlined the point that actions seem to be on a small scale and rely on individuals rather than addressing the really difficult decisions.
- Lack of policy, systemic change, coherence and enforcement is mentioned repeatedly with a call for stronger governance, standardisation and “choice architecture.”
- In addition, University’s approach to implementing AI raised concerns about the environmental consequences of this approach.

Do you think the University / your college is doing enough to address its environmental impacts?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Is the University doing enough? (379 responders)	15%	41%	44%
Is your college doing enough (135 responders)	32%	35%	33%



GOING FORWARD

Top improvements respondents want to see (from a suggested list):

- Increased use of renewable energy (19%)
- Reducing single-use items (13%)
- Better sustainable travel options (12%)
- More sustainable food options (11%)

Lower prioritisation of sustainable research practices (7%) and procurement (6%) suggests a gap in awareness of their environmental impact.



CONCLUSIONS

- The survey received a substantial number of responses, suggesting strong interest across the University.
- Most respondents reported noticing positive change over the past two years and said they have also made changes themselves.
- The examples for change provided were largely small scale and dependent on individual actions rather than systematic or strategic initiatives.
- The reported changes align with past campaigns and grassroots activities, which indicate successful engagement with the University community.
- The survey identified a recognised gap in action led by leadership or others who are in the position to implement systematic and strategic change.
- The most noted barriers to significant progress were cost and time/capacity constraints, followed by resistance to change and a perceived lack of leadership.
- Several respondents also noted that some University actions, particularly the large-scale rollout of AI tools, may conflict with the Strategy's goals.

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