

Student Voices:

Building a campus that reflects student priorities



The Student Voices survey, commissioned by the University Design Forum (UDF) used OnePulse to gather insights from 175 students who represent a diverse range of institutions across the UK in January 2025. This research aimed to understand how students engage with campus spaces, what facilities they prioritise and how universities can better align their estate strategies with evolving student expectations.



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Foreword from the Chair of the University Design Forum

Trevor Wills, University of Plymouth

Students' experiences and interactions with their university environment are widely believed to influence their academic success, wellbeing and sense of belonging. As universities plan for the campuses of the future, it is essential to take students' views into account. This survey represents a snapshot of their current priorities, offering university estates evidence-based guidance to support learning, promote inclusivity and gain a better understanding of students' perspectives on sustainability.

Building on previous [University Design Forum](#)¹ research, this OnePulse survey examines which campus facilities students value most and how universities can create environments that support their success. Aligning estate strategies with student needs can improve satisfaction and help campuses remain relevant for future generations.

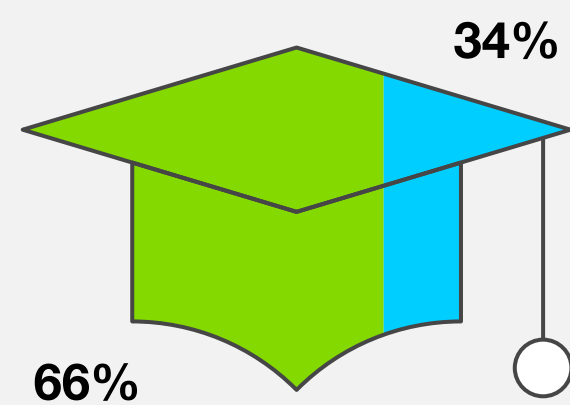
This OnePulse survey aims to inform ongoing discussions and practical measures to support the development of higher education estates.



¹ 2022 Campus spaces and places: Impact on student outcomes and 2021 Student Life (<https://www.universitydesignforum.org/research/>)

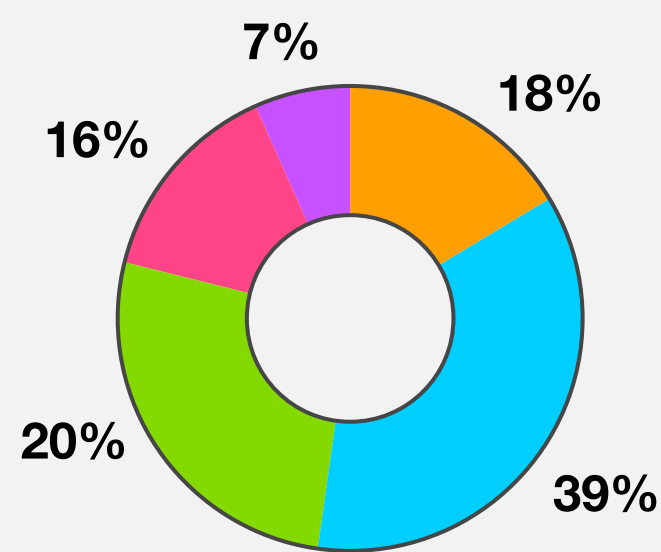
Student Voices at a glance

175 respondents (26% response rate)



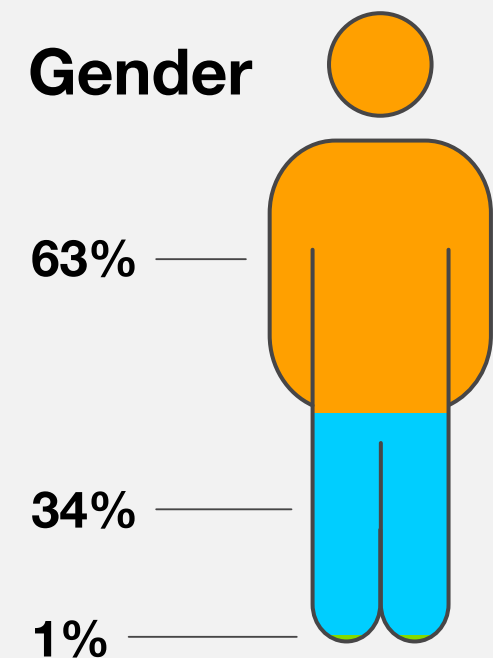
undergraduates
postgraduates

Age range: 57% of respondents aged 18-23



18-19 years of age
20-23 years of age
24-29 years of age
30-39 years of age
> 40 years of age

Gender



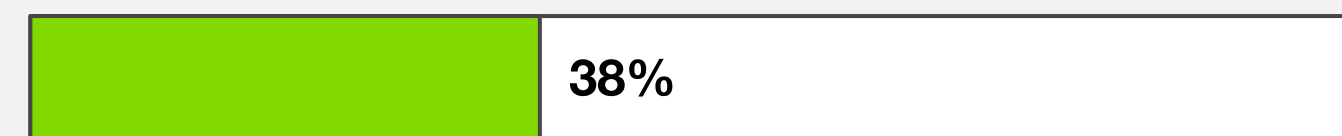
female
male
preferred not to answer

Sustainability priorities

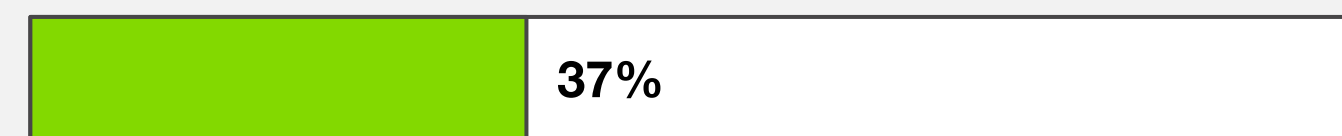
When choosing a university, students valued:

69% of students say sustainability initiatives influence their choice of university

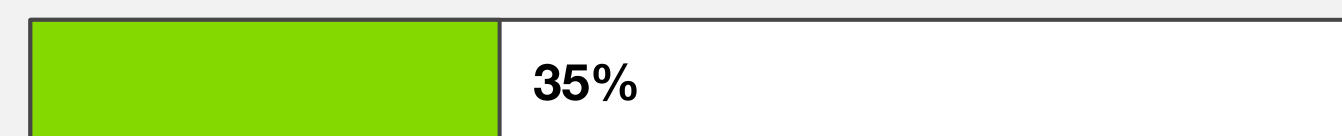
Promoting biodiversity



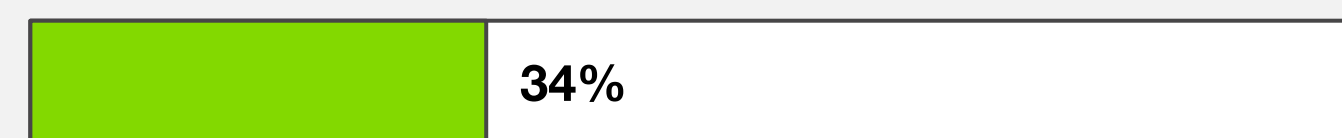
Recycling and waste management



Renewable energy usage



Sustainable buildings



Key campus spaces

Students prioritised these campus spaces in rank order*:



*examples given as context in OnePulse questions

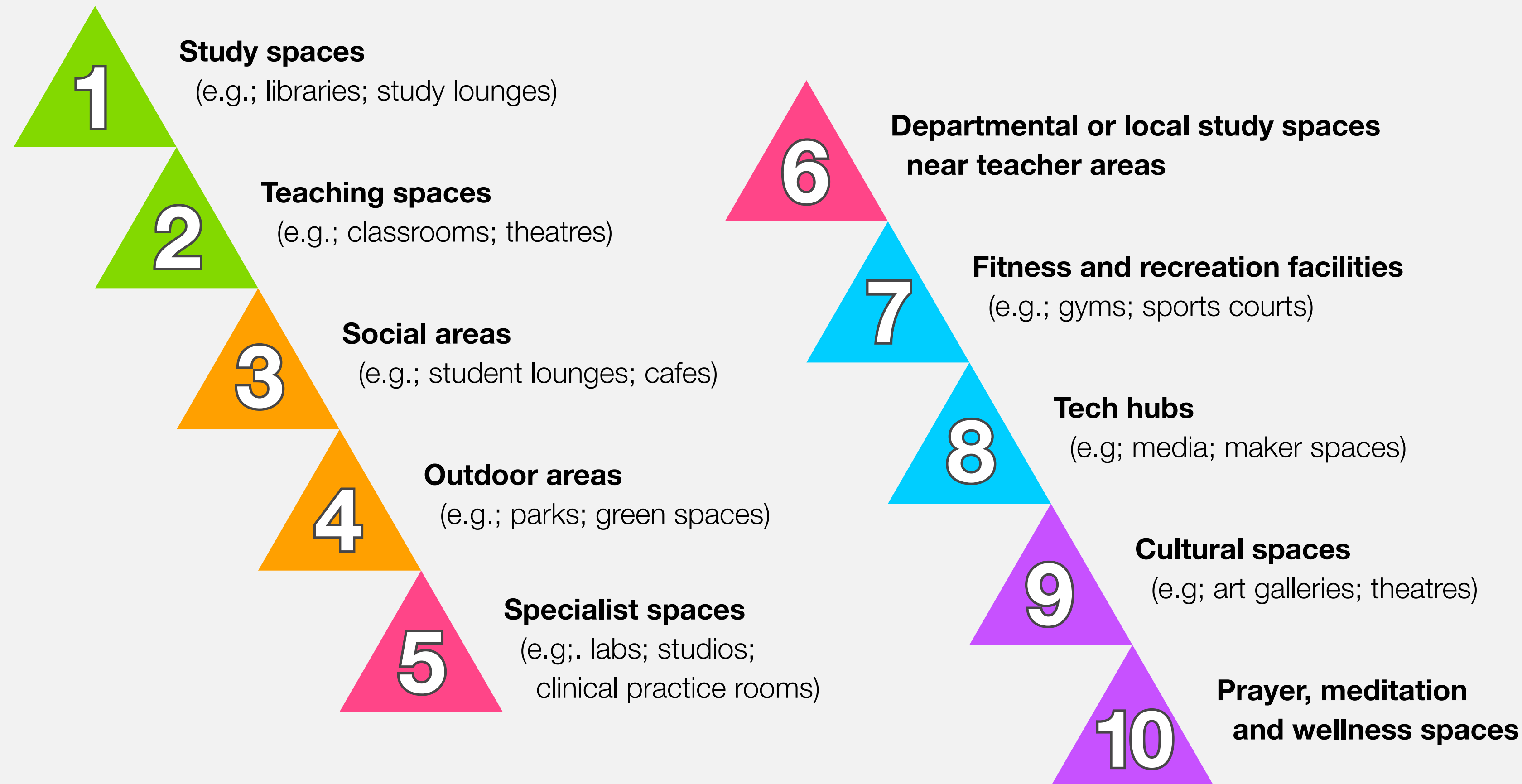
Creating campus spaces where students thrive

A well designed campus is central to fostering student engagement, academic success and overall wellbeing. The OnePulse survey confirms the importance of study and teaching space spaces, while also highlighting the critical role of social and outdoor environments in creating a holistic student experience.

The findings illustrate that successful campus design should strike a balance between structured academic settings, dynamic social environments and wellness supporting spaces. By incorporating diverse, flexible and student-centred spaces, universities can create an inclusive and stimulating atmosphere that enriches the overall student experience.



Pulse Question 1: Rank the aspects of campus spaces are most important to your experience at university? 1 being most important and 10 being the least important.



Spaces that shape campus life

- **Study spaces** emerged as the most valued campus feature. This was slightly higher among undergraduates.
- **Teaching spaces** ranked second, emphasising the need for high quality lecture theatres and adaptable classroom settings that facilitate active learning.
- **Social spaces** and **outdoor areas** are valued, but they support rather than replace academic environments.
- **Specialist spaces** and **tech hubs** are very relevant, particularly for postgraduates.
- **Prayer, meditation and wellness spaces** should not be dismissed in last place. Other UDF research suggests these spaces are emerging and their value is increasing in line with societies wider appreciation of diversity, equality, inclusivity and wellness.

Despite the diversity of responses, common themes emerge around what social learning means:

1 Collaborative learning spaces

- “Working with other students in group projects.”
- “Means learning with others, bouncing ideas off each other.”
- “Social learning to me means working with others, taking advice from peers, engaging in group work and learning to work in a team environment.”
- “Learning happens best in discussion groups amongst people who have study interests in common.”

2 Flexible study environments

- “Open areas we can study in groups. They should include quiet sections, areas for group work and more relaxing areas.”
- “Social learning is studying or learning with friends around so would probably be in sociable spaces or dedicated group rooms.”
- “Social learning is about studying in a group and I think it can happen best in the library (not in the quiet zones) or in seminars or even at home.”

3 Community-focused spaces

- “Outside the university. Lectures with local elements such as local charities etc. Learning in the field.”
- “Learnt in clubs and societies through experiences with other people.”
- Social learning means being connected to my peers, the university as a whole and in the greater community to learn collaboratively for the greater good of all.”
- “Where people learn together in social situations through working together and helping each other.”

4 Diverse learning environments

- “Learning in small groups with a diverse set of people and diversity welcomed.”
- “Social learning should happen outside in a physical setting.”
- “Social learning means looking at your learning in the context of the world – it can be done in many ways, for example, talking to people from other backgrounds or by applying teachings from lessons into real-world scenarios.”

Several responses indicate uncertainty or confusion about what the term “social learning” means. Some quotes that illustrate this:

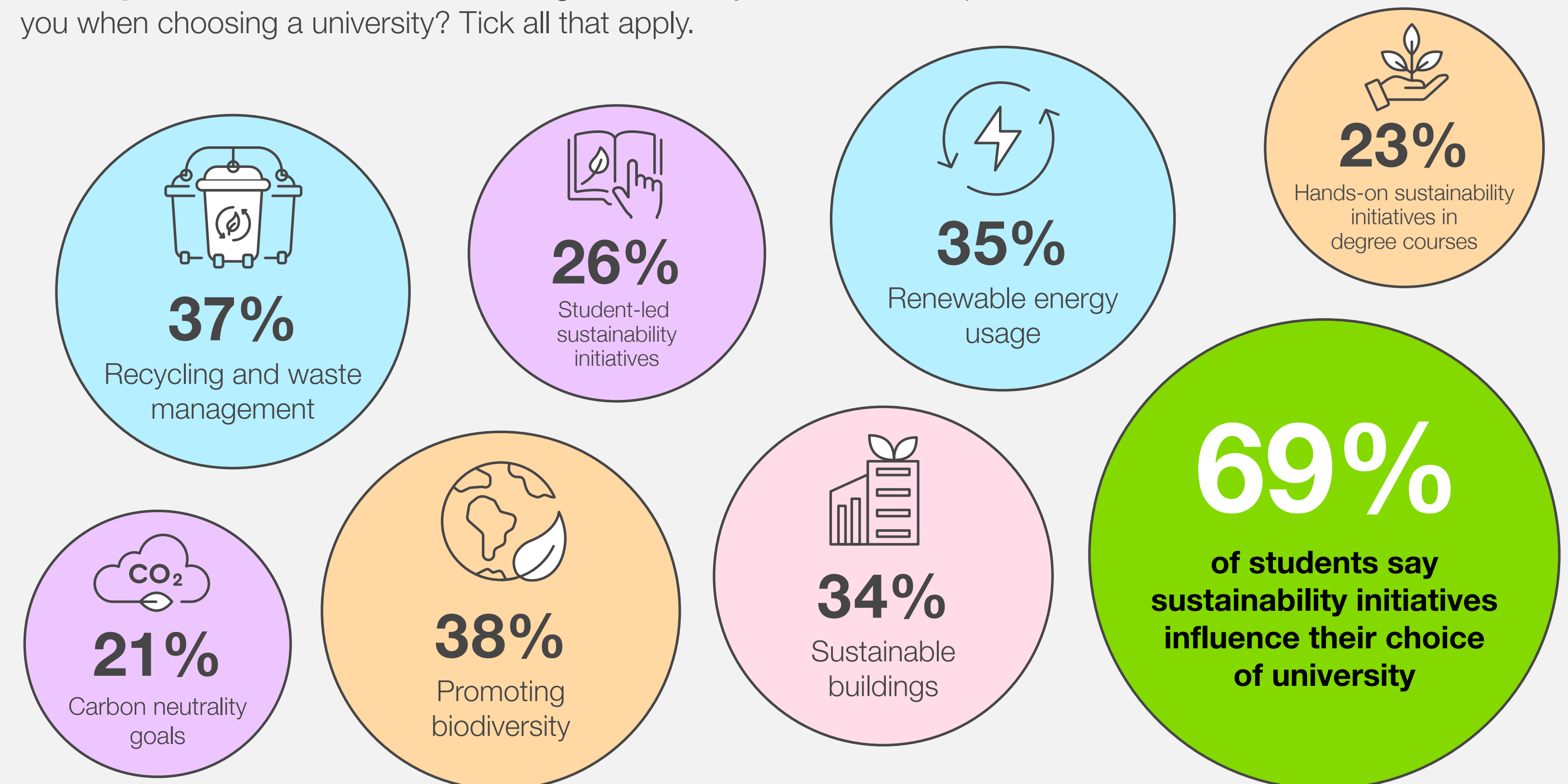
- “I have never heard of this term before.”
- “I am not too sure about what social learning means to me to be fair.”
- “I have no idea.”
- “It doesn’t mean anything to me.”

The sustainability stake

Sustainability presents both a challenge and an opportunity for universities. A clear majority—69% of students—indicated that environmental initiatives influence their decision-making when choosing a university, reflecting a growing expectation for visible and credible action. In contrast, 31% of students appear disengaged, suggesting that sustainability does not currently influence their priorities when considering the overall student experience.

The OnePulse research highlights two key insights. First, universities and students' unions have an opportunity to increase student engagement by making sustainability a visible and practical part of daily campus life. Second, students value direct involvement in sustainability initiatives rather than passive participation. There is a clear appetite for hands-on experiences and student-led projects, suggesting that integrating sustainability into learning and campus activities could enhance both engagement and awareness.

Pulse question 3: Which of the following sustainability initiatives are important to you when choosing a university? Tick all that apply.



Summary

The findings from this survey provides a snapshot on the elements of university estates that most significantly impact students' academic experience, wellbeing and engagement. Academic spaces remain the core of student life, with study spaces, teaching environments and social space ranking as the most valued features.

Social learning is increasingly recognised by University facilities professionals as an essential aspect of student development. Responses indicate a strong preference for collaborative and flexible learning spaces that facilitate peer interaction and cross-disciplinary engagement.

Informal learning environments, both physical and digital, further contribute to an enriched student experience.

Sustainability is a priority for many students, with initiatives such as biodiversity promotion, recycling and renewable energy receiving strong support. However, a substantial proportion of students remain disengaged from sustainability efforts and do not value it in their choice of university. A previous UDF research paper 'Sustainable Campus Study' indicated that 61% of students primarily look towards government to take the lead on sustainable initiatives.



Acknowledgements

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