How do students define and relate to the curriculum? Findings from a recent study at the University of Edinburgh

MEET THE TEAM

One Pusumane

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Outline of session

11:00 Welcome and introductions
11:05 Presentation
11:25 Questions
11:30 Breakout groups
11:50 Share back in larger group
12:00 Finish

NB: We will record the presentation only, not the chat or breakout groups . The engage network is open to staff and students – You are ALL welcome

What is the curriculum?

Fraser & Bosanquet (2006)

a) Structure and content of a unit of study

b) Structure and content of a programme of study

c) The students' experience of learning

d) A dynamic and interactive process of teaching and learning

About the research

- Short questionnaire - 10 questions
- Distributed May-July 2021 - via student newsletters, EUSA, L&T Conference
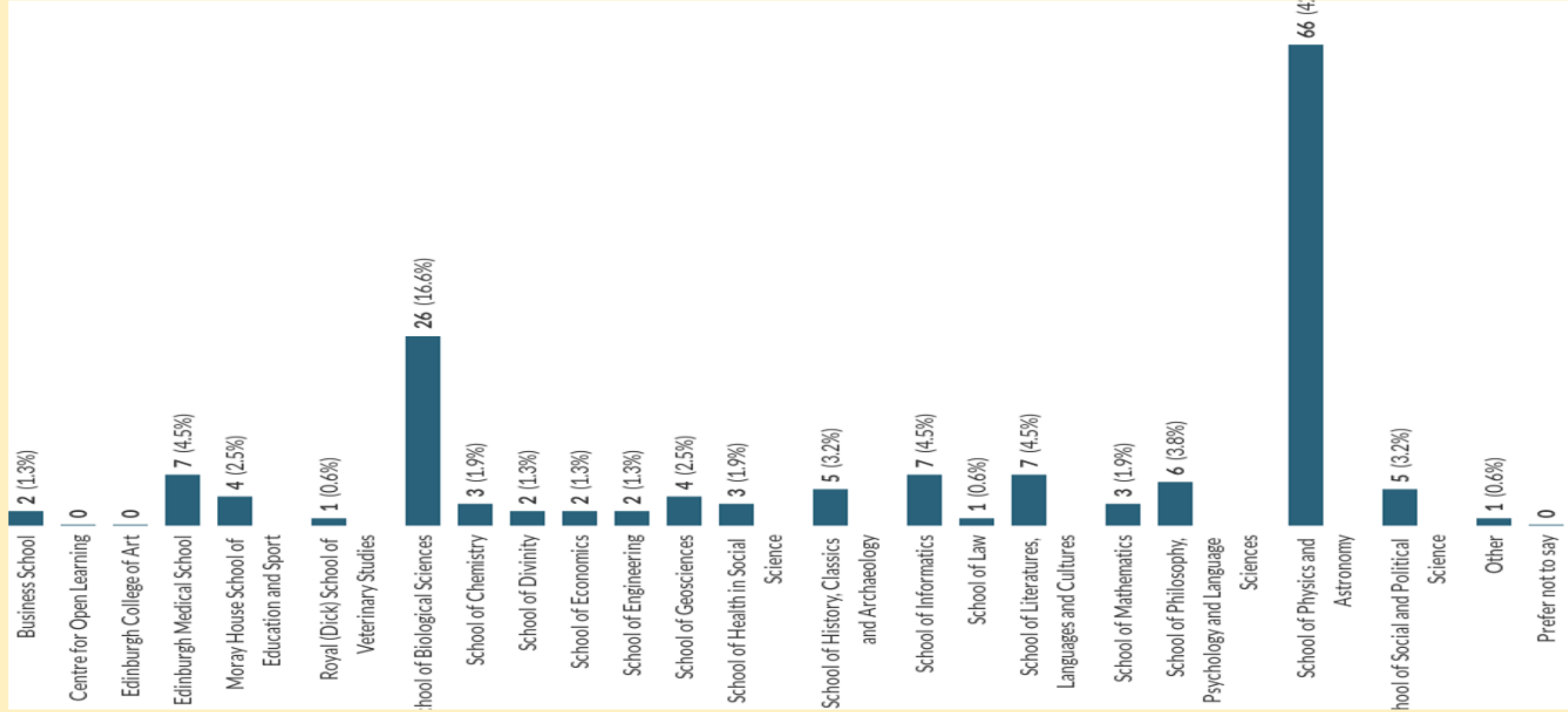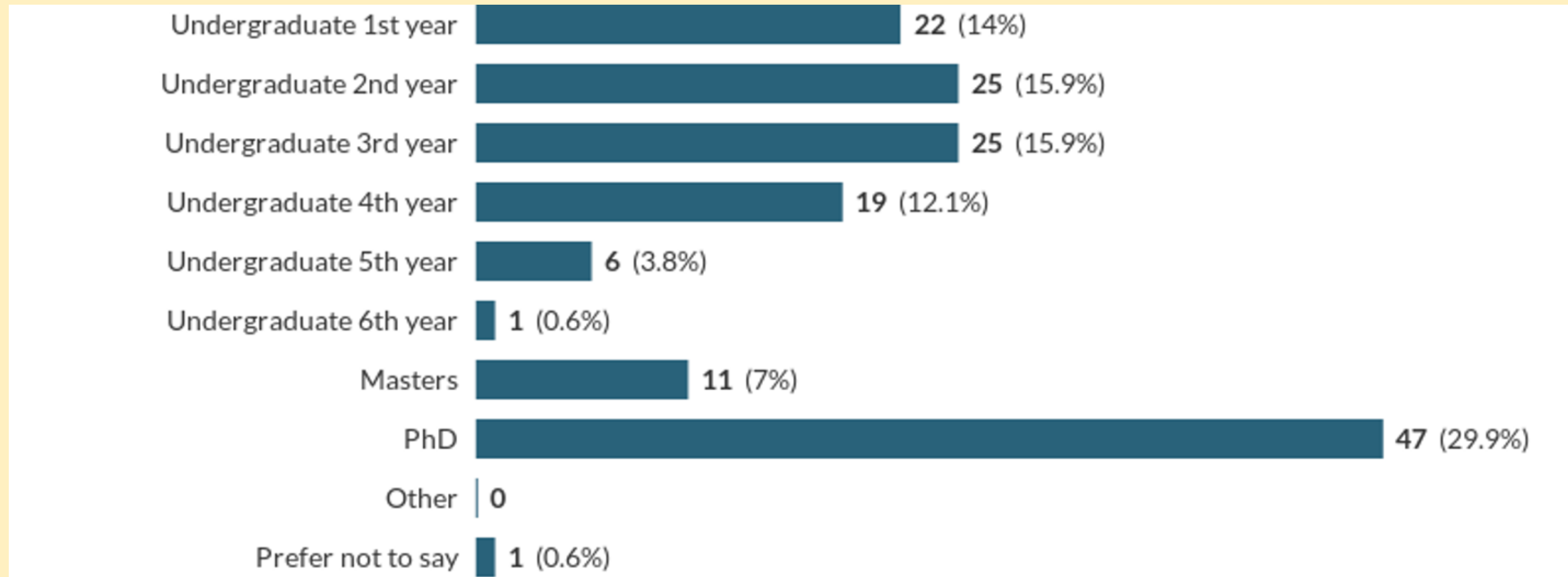- 157 responses

Gender (n=157)

- 83 Female
- 68 male
- 3 or please define your gender as you prefer
  - 1 non binary man
  - 1 non binary
  - 1 no gender, just female sex
- 3 prefer not to say
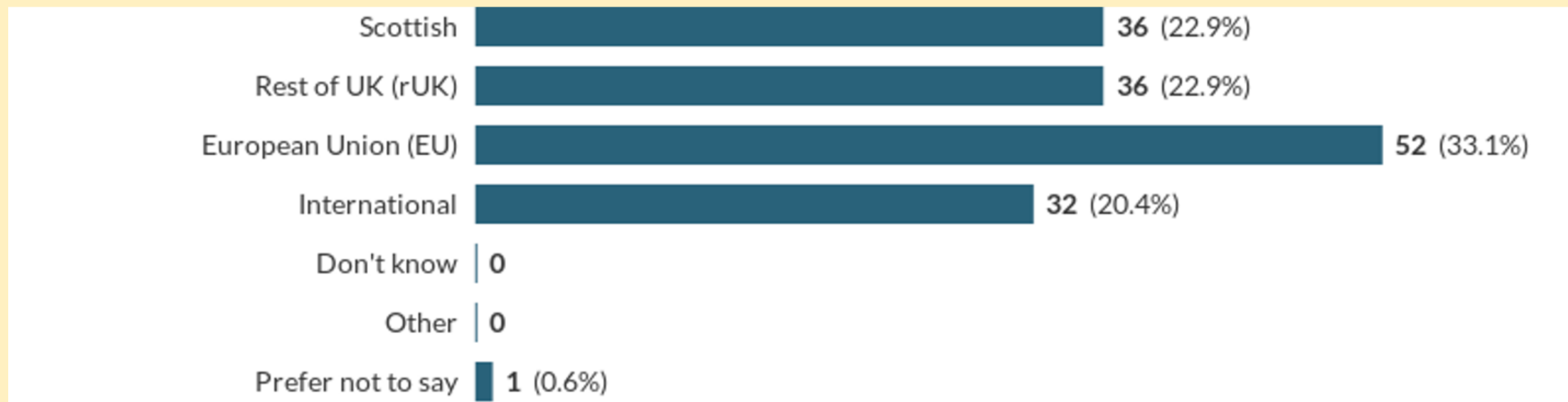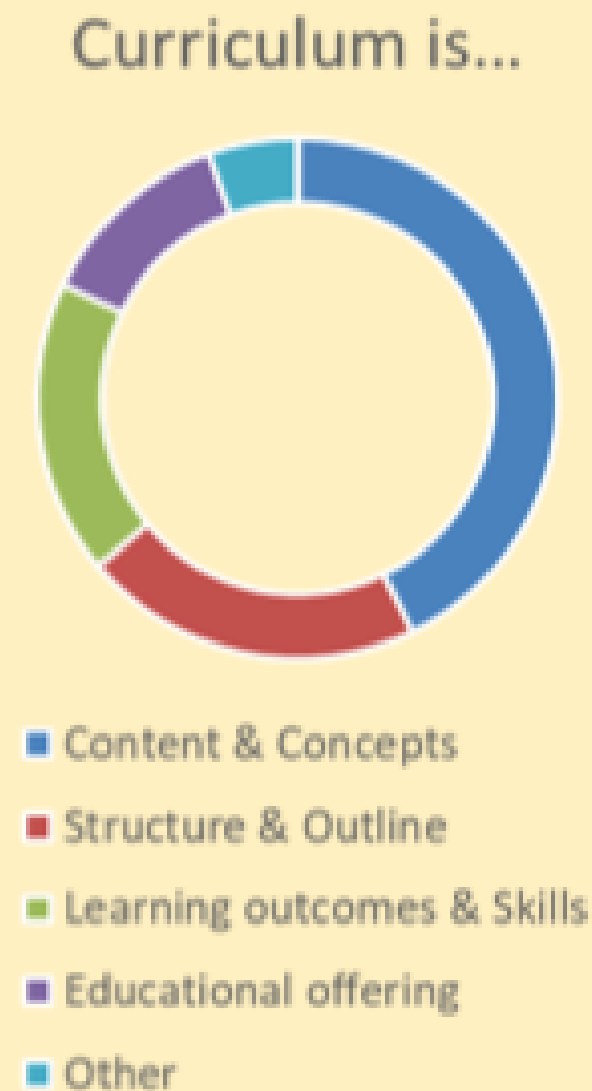
Which School are you from?

School	Count (%)
Business School	2 (1.3%)
Centre for Open Learning	0
Edinburgh College of Art	0
Edinburgh Medical School	7 (4.5%)
Moray House School of Education and Sport	4 (2.5%)
Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies	1 (0.6%)
School of Biological Sciences	26 (16.6%)
School of Chemistry	3 (1.9%)
School of Divinity	2 (1.3%)
School of Economics	2 (1.3%)
School of Engineering	2 (1.3%)
School of Geosciences	4 (2.5%)
School of Health in Social Science	3 (1.9%)
School of History, Classics and Archaeology	5 (3.2%)
School of Informatics	7 (4.5%)
School of Law	1 (0.6%)
School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures	7 (4.5%)
School of Mathematics	3 (1.9%)
School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences	6 (3.8%)
School of Physics and Astronomy	66 (4:)
School of Social and Political Science	5 (3.2%)
Other	1 (0.6%)
Prefer not to say	0

At what level of study are you?

What type of student are you classified as?

Category	Count
Scottish	36 (22.9%)
Rest of UK (rUK)	36 (22.9%)
European Union (EU)	52 (33.1%)
International	32 (20.4%)
Don't know	0
Other	0
Prefer not to say	1 (0.6%)

What does the word curriculum mean to you? Please don't look it up on Google (we are interested in what it means to you currently even if you are not sure)

Curriculum is…

- Content & Concepts
- Structure & Outline
- Learning outcomes & Skills
- Educational offering
- Other

L&T in Curriculum:

36 learning

29 teaching

12 both

69 no mention

- 24 students used first person to talk about curriculum
- Small number who don't know what it is, e.g. CV

Can you think of any other similar words that mean the same thing to you as curriculum? Please list as many as you wish.

classes, courses modules, degree	74
Syllabus, canon, list, handbook, mapping	69
Content, knowledge, subject	50
Learning, study	48
Aims, objectives, goals	18
Plan, overview, scope, strategy, summary	17
Learning outcomes, competences, skills	16
Path, approach, outline, sketch	9
Compulsory, core, directive, requirements, regulations	7
Schools, schooling, formal, standardised	6
Sandbox, space, ideas	2

How would you describe your role in relation to the curriculum?

Active role	60
Passive/active	27
Tutor perspective	26
Passive	20
blank	8
Proactive	5
Unsure	5
no role	4
Negative emotion	1
Irrelevant	1

Active: To choose, to feedback, as learner, as participant, to suggest, to be aware, to acquire knowledge, to explore, to engage, to be assessed

'…to learn & understand the material in the curriculum'

To take responsibility for engaging and then exploring around the subjects both for my own interest and to be able to deeper understand them

Passive/active: *'I think I'm supposed to engage with it'*

Passive: *'I'm just taught it'*

'I feel unimportant in the establishment of the curriculum. I am expected to complete what is expected of me'
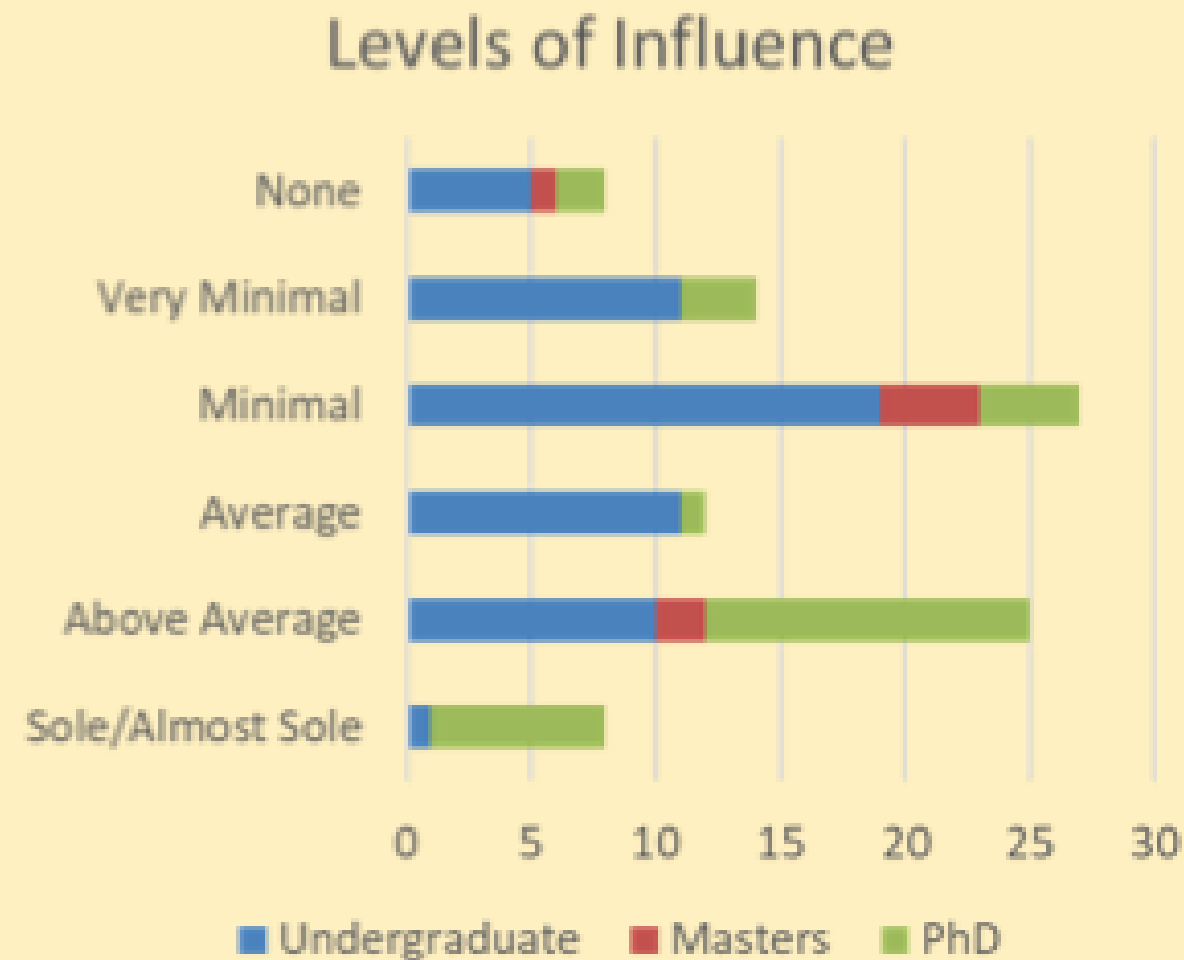
'Something students have to accept and live with'

Recipient, consumer, attender

How would you describe the influence you currently have on your learning experience at University?

Levels of Influence

4 areas of influence:
•Direction of study
•Choice of institution/courses
•Course content/delivery
•Personal engagement/effort

"...So I'd say that in most of the cases unfortunately, if I'm not happy with a course - I can definitely share my feedback (the class reps are also amazing for this!), but usually nothing changes."

Reflections on the analysis so far: Ian

- **definitions:** are diverse, often surprising and raises questions for the Programme about assumptions we are making.
- **difference:** staff view is much more open, enhancement-based and presents opportunities. Students' viewing it more as a set of rules/parameters which they have to hit and be measured against.
- **habitus:** perceived permanency of teaching to the test and the habitus which so many of our UG students seem to inhabit that education is about passing as opposing to learning, challenge and development.

Reflections on the analysis so far: Emma

"I have no influence on my learning experience...I can go beyond the bounds of my curriculum and then all I have is unemployable information. My learning experience is fixed by the results I must get from it."

vs.

"In a broad sense, I am aware that my behaviour has a large impact on my learning experience....I can actually alter my own **personal curriculum** in the sense that I can broaden out the scope that is usually given to me..."

Reflections on the analysis so far: One

The idea of curriculum transformation is more abstract. There are limited discussions across the university. Describe your role in the curriculum-

"I don't know what you mean by this"
"My role is to read the curriculum and identify the learning objectives."

Reflections on the analysis so far: Cathy

I think that as a student you have the opportunity to shape the curriculum"

"I don't think I have a role in that. I just study what I'm told to"

"Fraught", "bumpy road", "a massive cycle of depression"

"...teachers may need to come to see their own plans for classroom work as simply proposals...which learners have the right to reformulate, elaborate upon or even reject."
(Breen and Littlejohn, 2000: 277)
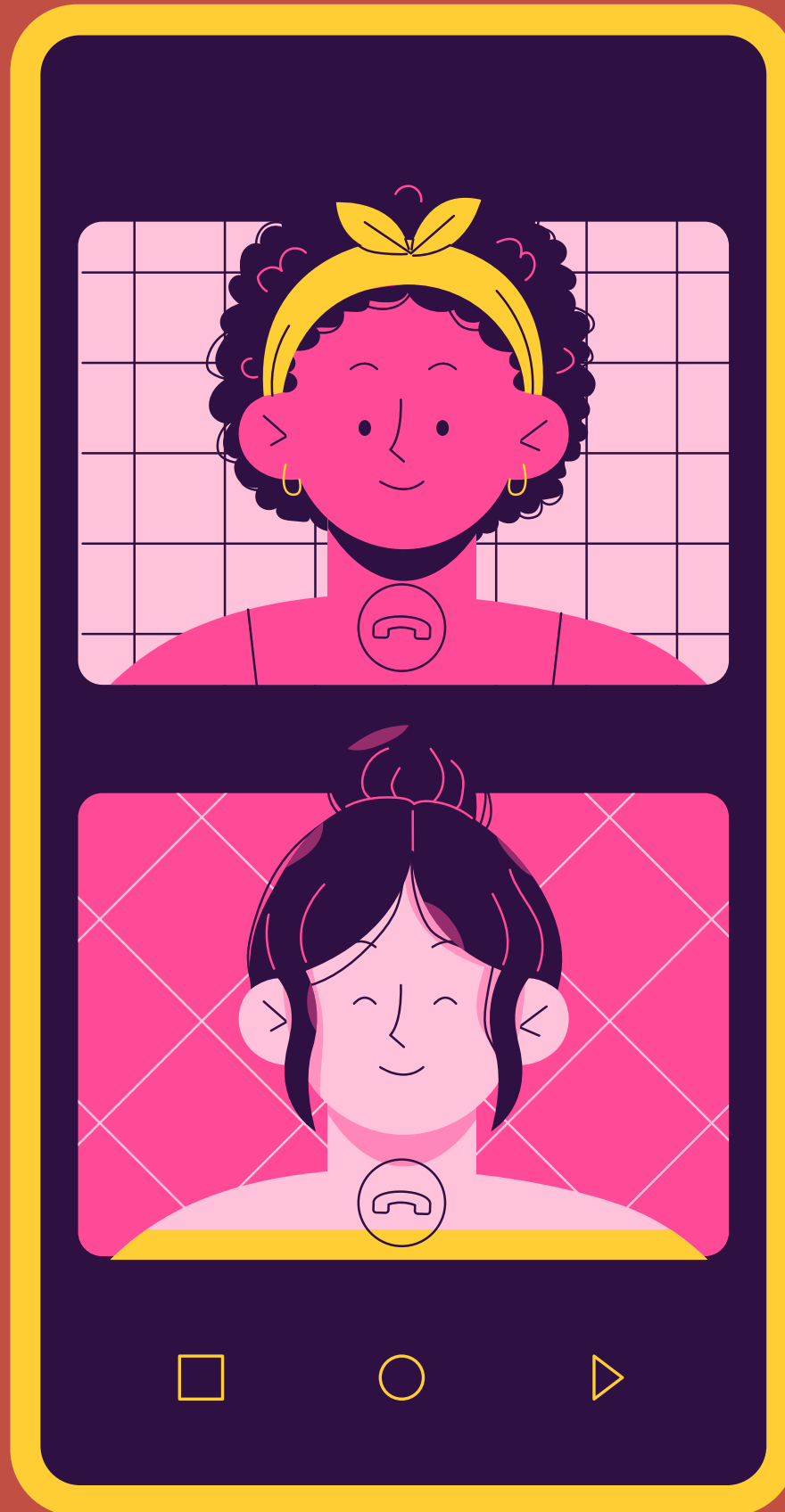
Breakout groups

1. What interested you most from the study findings?

2. What is relevant to you in your setting?

3. Which findings are most relevant for the University?

Do you want to be on our mailing list?

Would you like to be on the **engage mailing list**? Send an email to Christy MacLeod: Christy.macleod@ed.ac.uk

Recording

We will post the **recording, slides/other resources** from this session to the engage webpage
https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/connect/engage
Scroll down to 'Previous engage events and resources'

Future event

Tuesday 7th December 2021 16:00-17:00 Online
Is 'mattering' a more helpful way to think about belonging at university?
Peter Felten, Assistant Provost for Teaching and Learning, Director of the
Center for Engaged Learning, and Professor of History, Elon University, USA
Heidi Weston, Undergraduate Researcher, Elon class of 2023 (History and
Education), Elon University, USA
https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-
teaching/connect/engage