

Improving Support Pathways for University Students

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Why are we doing this research?

- One-third of university students in England report poor wellbeing, and 30% of students reported a decline in their mental health after starting university (Student Minds, 2023).
- At The University of Manchester, almost a quarter of students are registered with the Disability Advice and Support Service (DASS).
- This indicates a significant need to enhance academic and wellbeing support across the university.
- Students have highlighted the need for university-wide structural and cultural changes to support pathways (Doyle et al., 2024; Priestly et al., 2021; Scott & Sedgewick, 2021; Sedgwick-Müller et al., 2022).

Study Aims

To improve support pathways for university students

- Mental health support pathways
- Academic support pathways
 - e.g., academic advising, programme-level support, reasonable adjustments

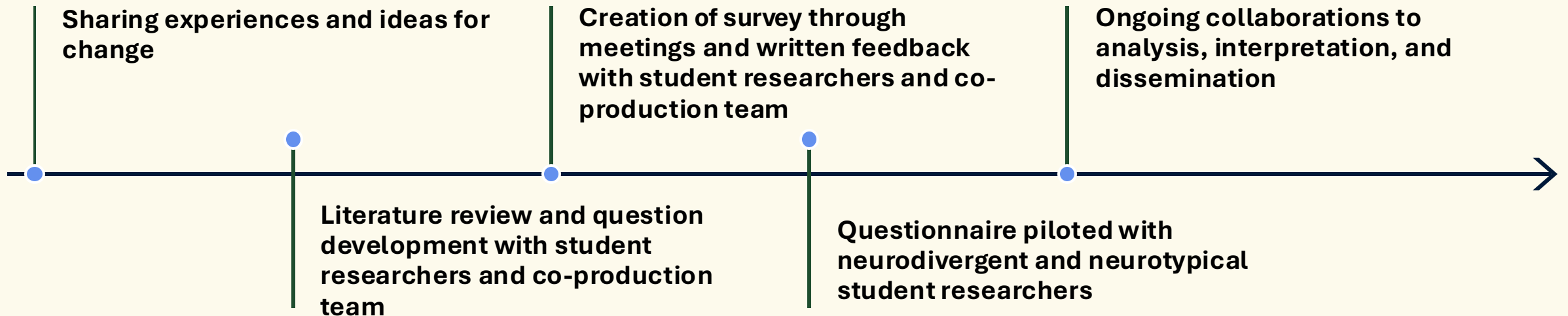
We would like to explore:

- Student needs
- Service accessibility
- Experiences of current services
- Reasonable adjustments

Deliberate recruitment of neurodivergent and neurotypical students to be able to explore group differences

Co-production

- The research team consisted of :
 - Two project leads with lived and occupational experience
 - Nine student researchers including neurodivergent and neurotypical students with and without mental health difficulties
 - Three neurodivergent lived experience co-production team



Methods

- Eligibility criteria:
 - BSc Psychology (1st and 2nd years) and BSc Cognitive Neuroscience & Psychology (1st year) students participating in the Student Experiment Participation Scheme. Students received credits for participating in the survey
- Preliminary sample:
 - 109 neurotypical participants
 - 95 neurodivergent participants

Demographics

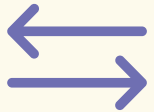
Table 1: Sample demographics

	Neurotypical with Mental Health Difficulties	Neurodivergent with Mental Health Difficulties
Year Group	Year 1: 74 / Year 2: 35	Year 1: 52 / Year 2: 43
Age <i>M</i> (sd)	19.47 (1.25)	19.53 (1.28)
Gender	Women (99); Men (9); Trans man (1)	Women (76); Men (13); Gender fluid (3); Non-binary (2); Trans man (1)
Ethnicity	White (58); Asian (38); Mixed (8); Other/Arab (2); Black (2)	White (50); Asian (28); Mixed (10); Other/Arab (5); Black (2)
Other	International (34); Commuter (18); Free School Meals (10)	International (24); Commuter (16); Free School Meals (12)
Common MH	Anxiety (92); Depression (49)	Anxiety (49); Depression (36)
Common ND	-	ADHD (60); Autism (27); Dyslexia (19)

Preliminary Focus



Disability or strength?



Transition to University

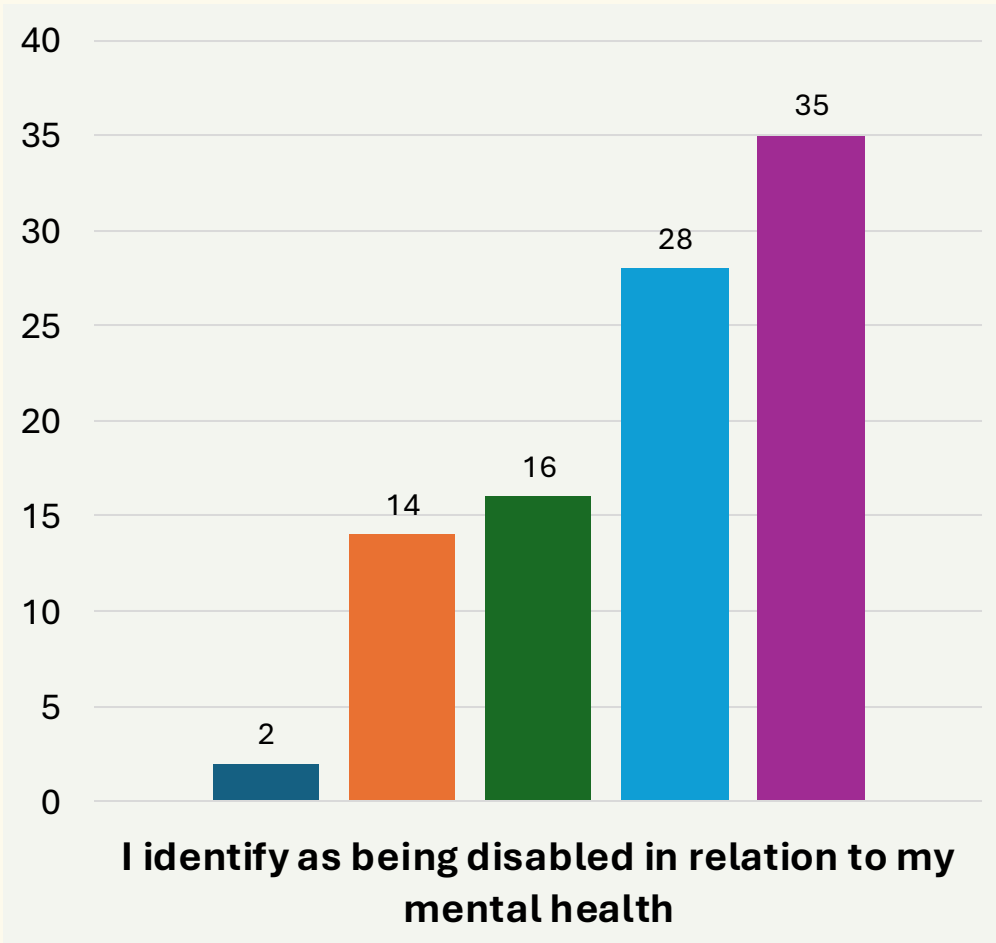


Impact on academic engagement and attendance

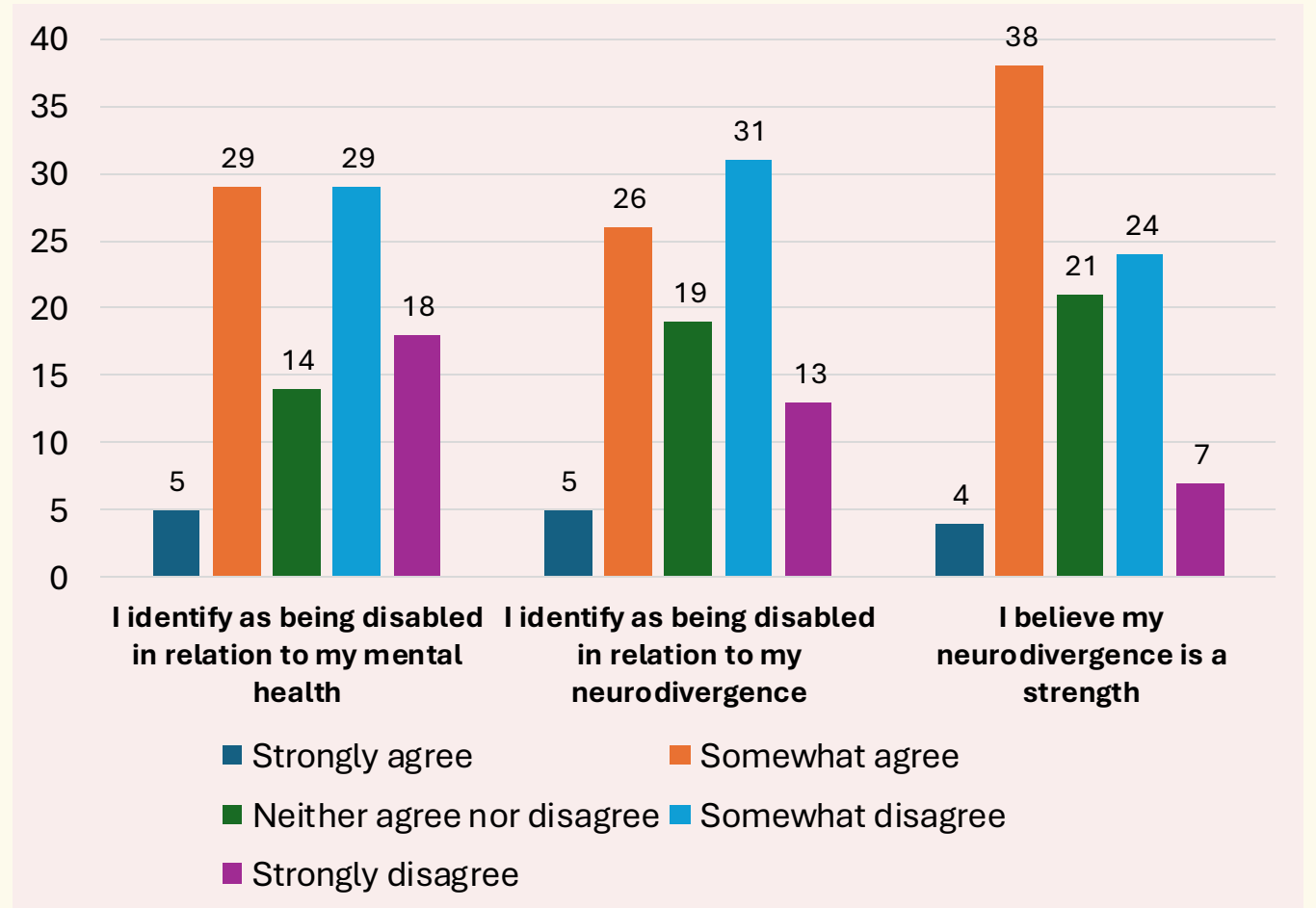


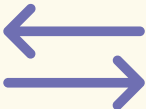
Disability or strength?

Neurotypical Students



Neurodivergent Students

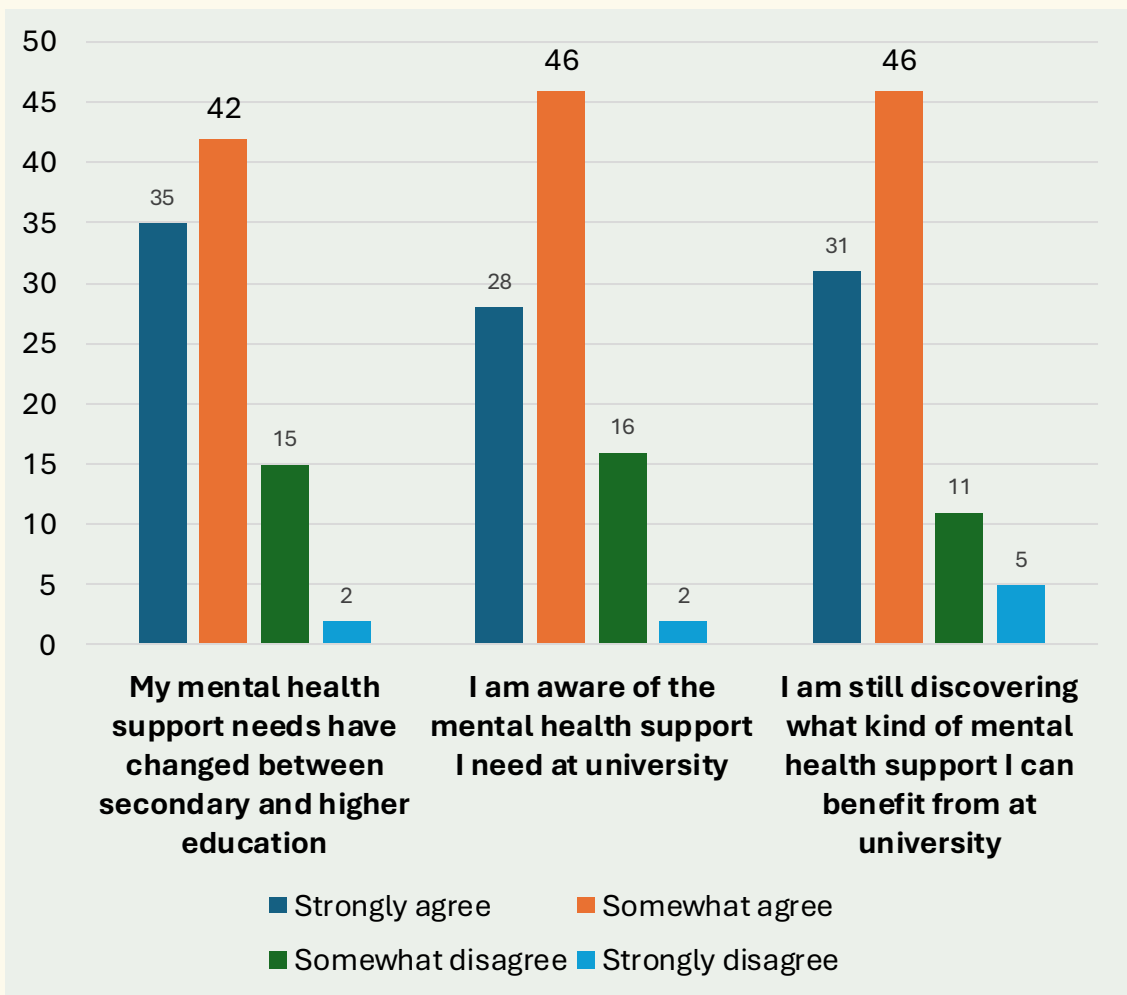




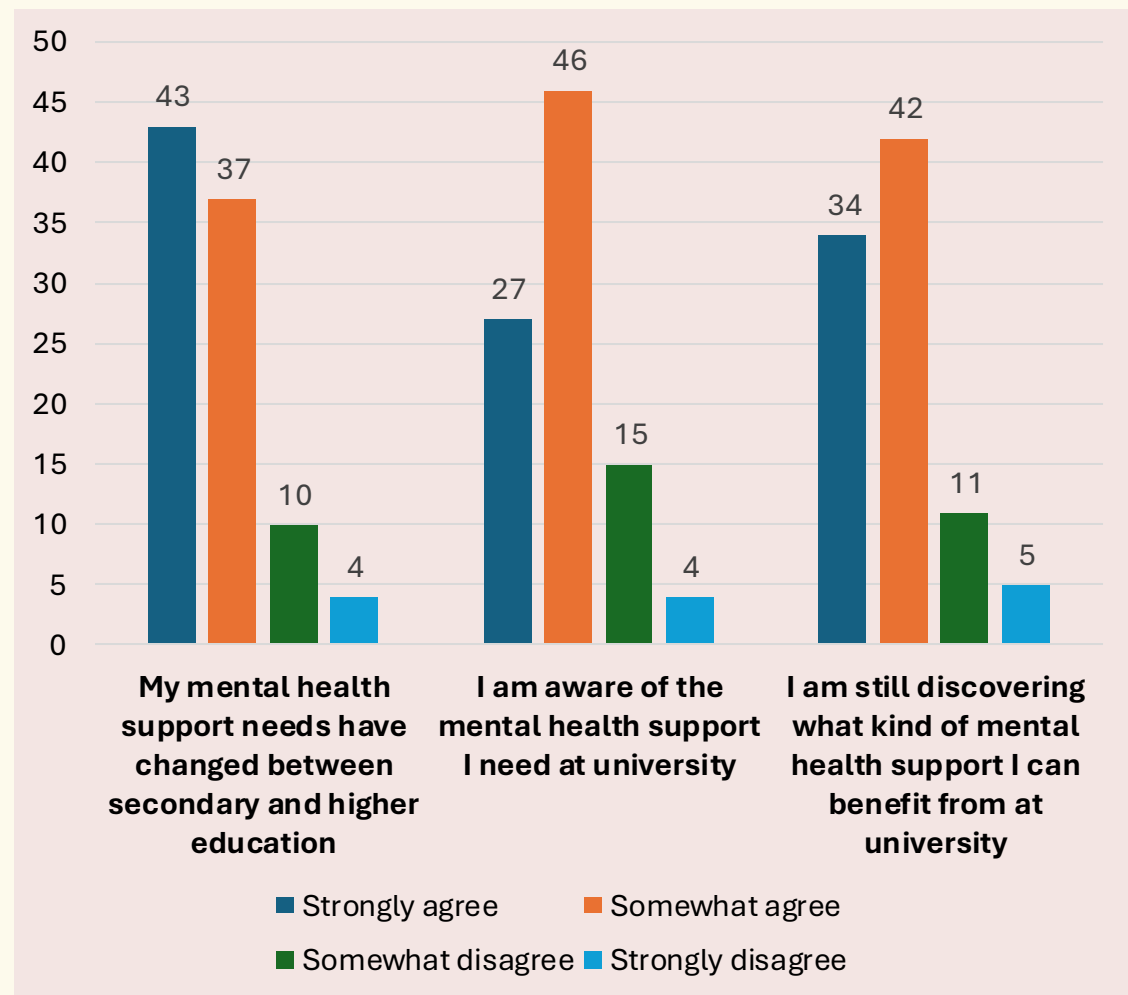
Transition to University

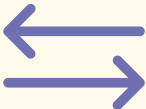
Changes in support needs – Mental Health

Neurotypical Students



Neurodivergent Students

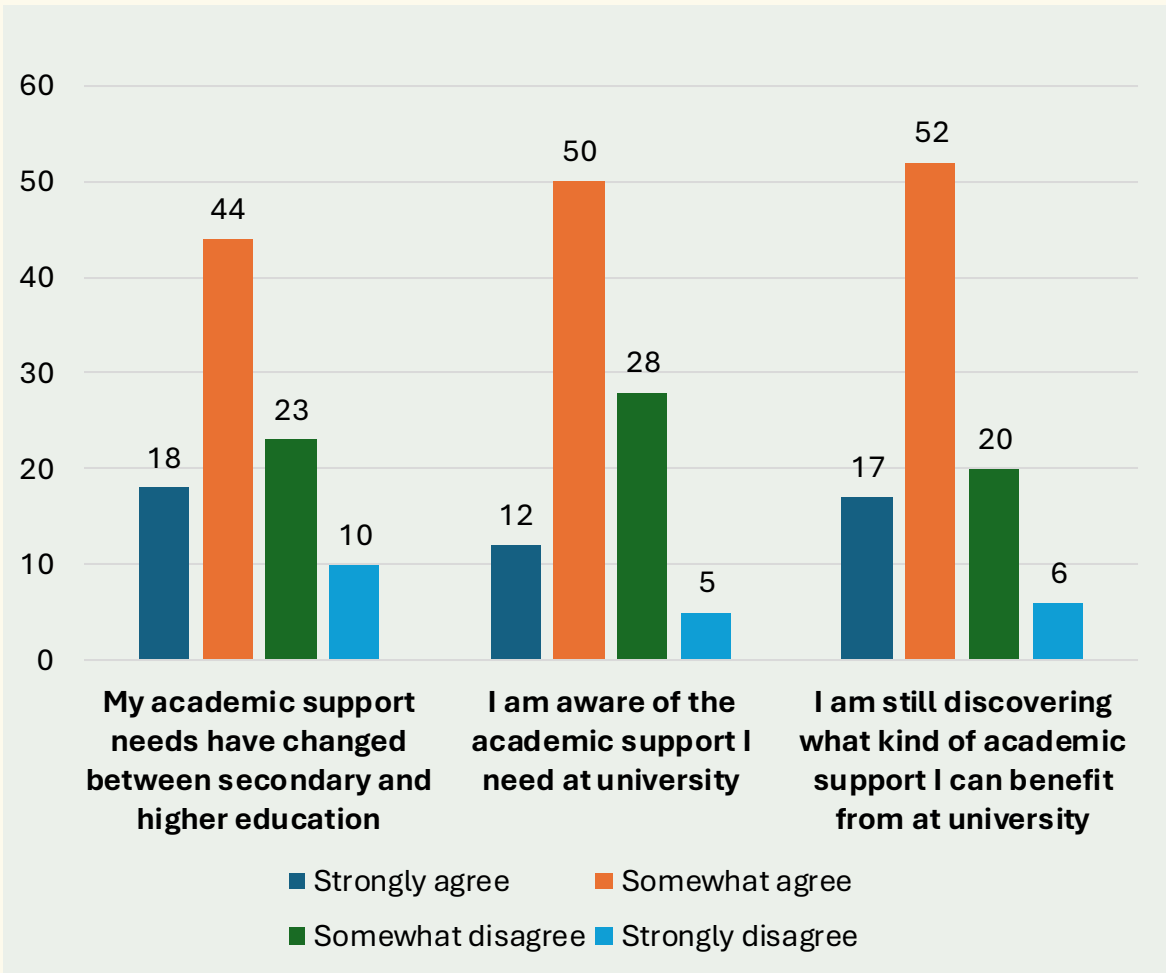




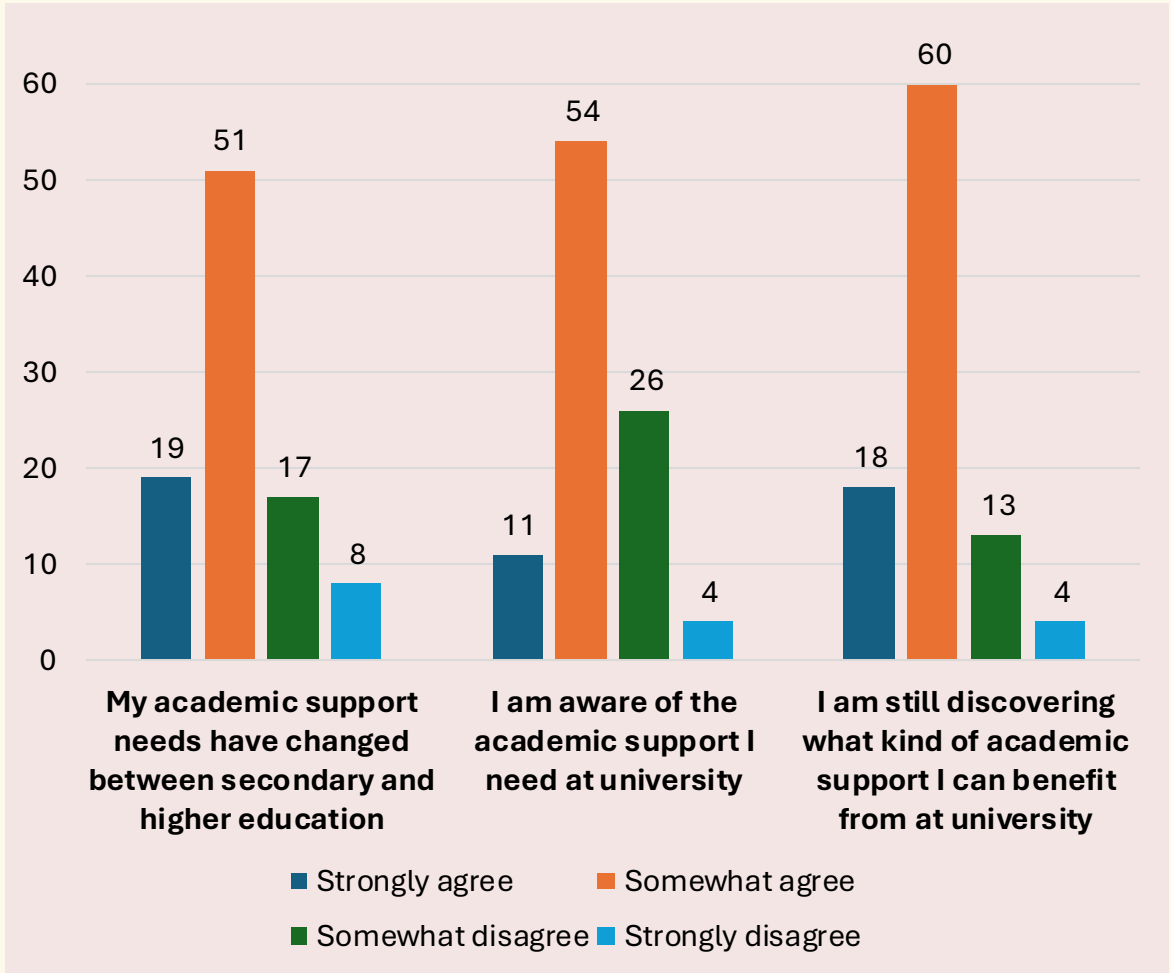
Transition to University

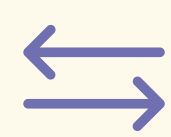
Changes in support needs – Academic

Neurotypical Students



Neurodivergent Students

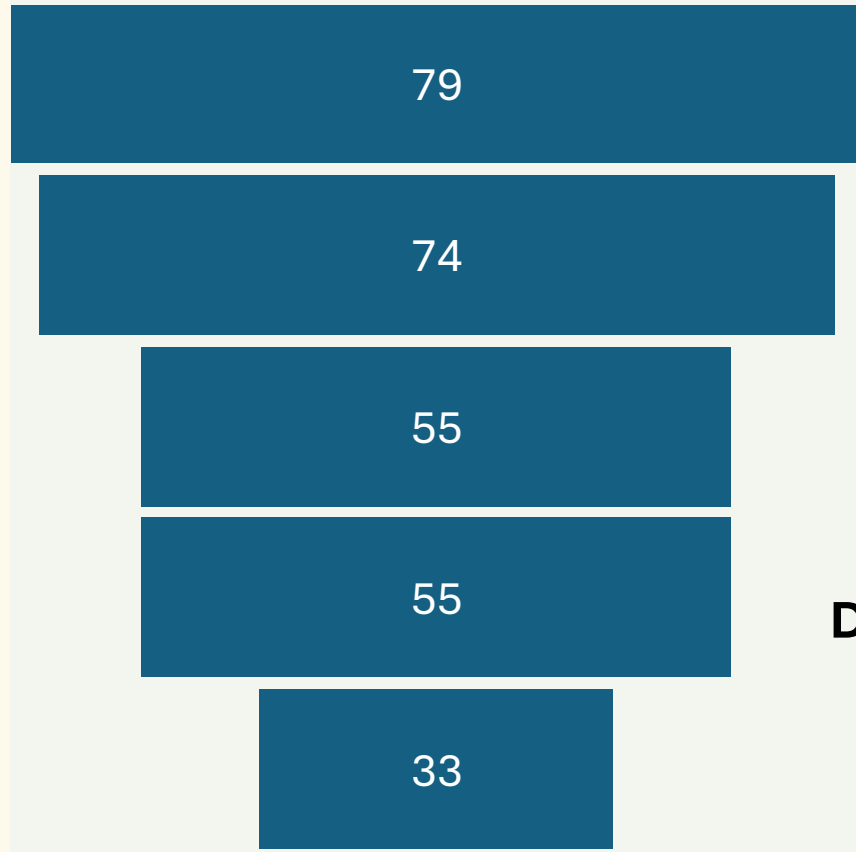




Transition to University

Have you heard of any the following services at The University of Manchester?

Neurotypical Students



School Hub

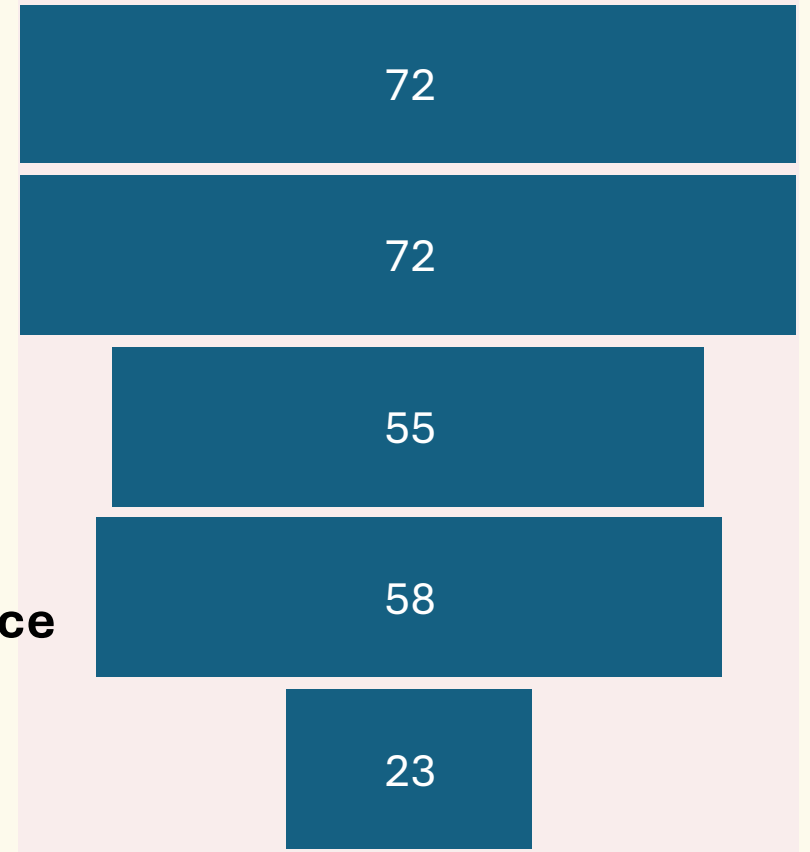
School Wellbeing Team

Mental Health Support Team

Disability Advisory Support Service

University Library Support

Neurodivergent Students



72

72

55

58

23



Impact on engagement and attendance

On average, across a typical semester, how many days would you estimate you were completely unable to engage in university related course work or attendance?

Neurotypical Students

Average: 12.13 (11.18)

Range: 0-50 days

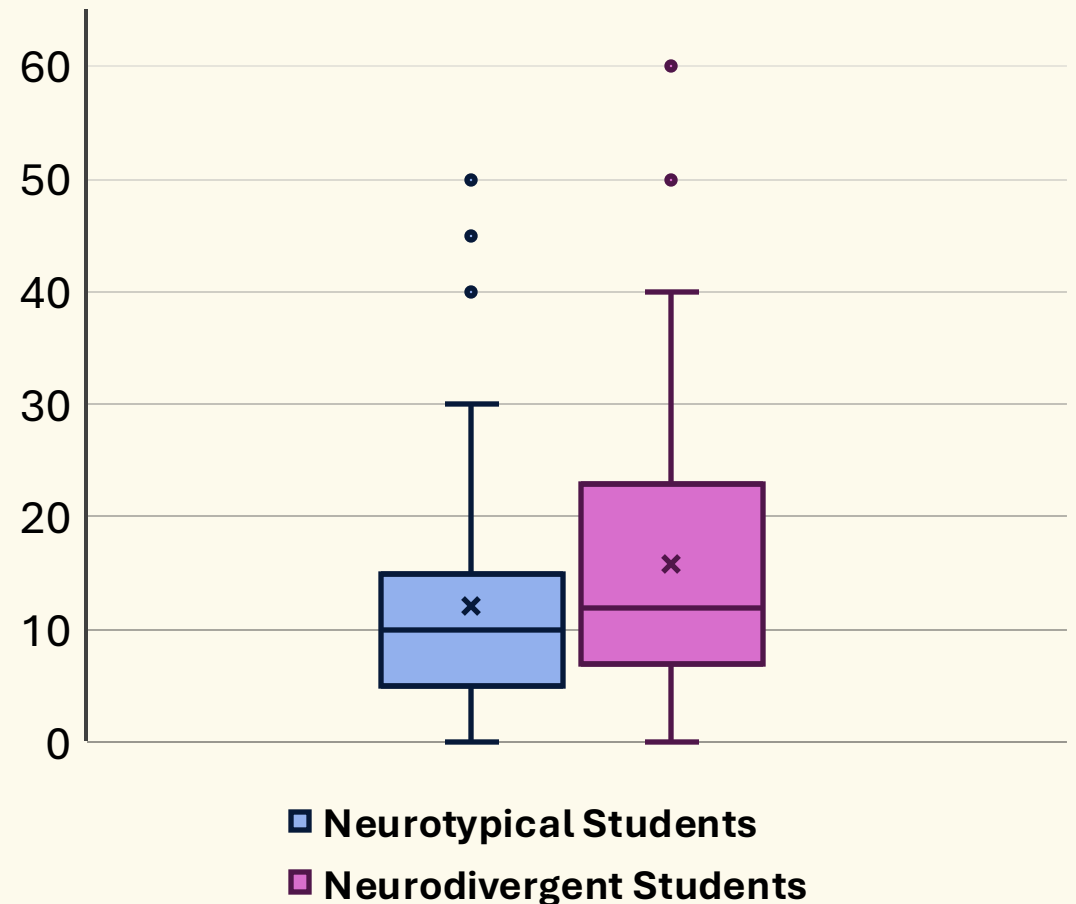
Median: 10 days

Neurodivergent Students

Average: 15.89 (12.61)

Range: 0-60 days

Median: 12 days

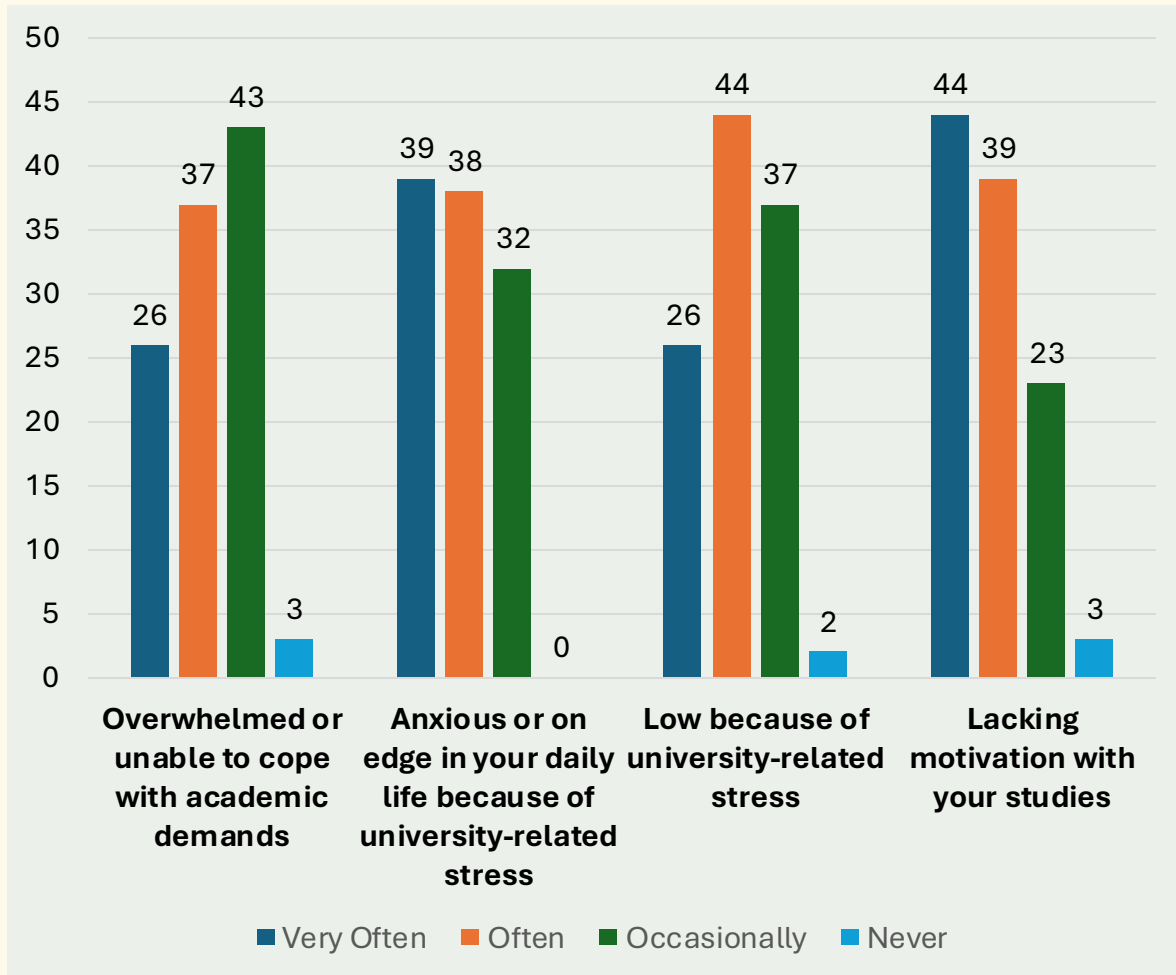




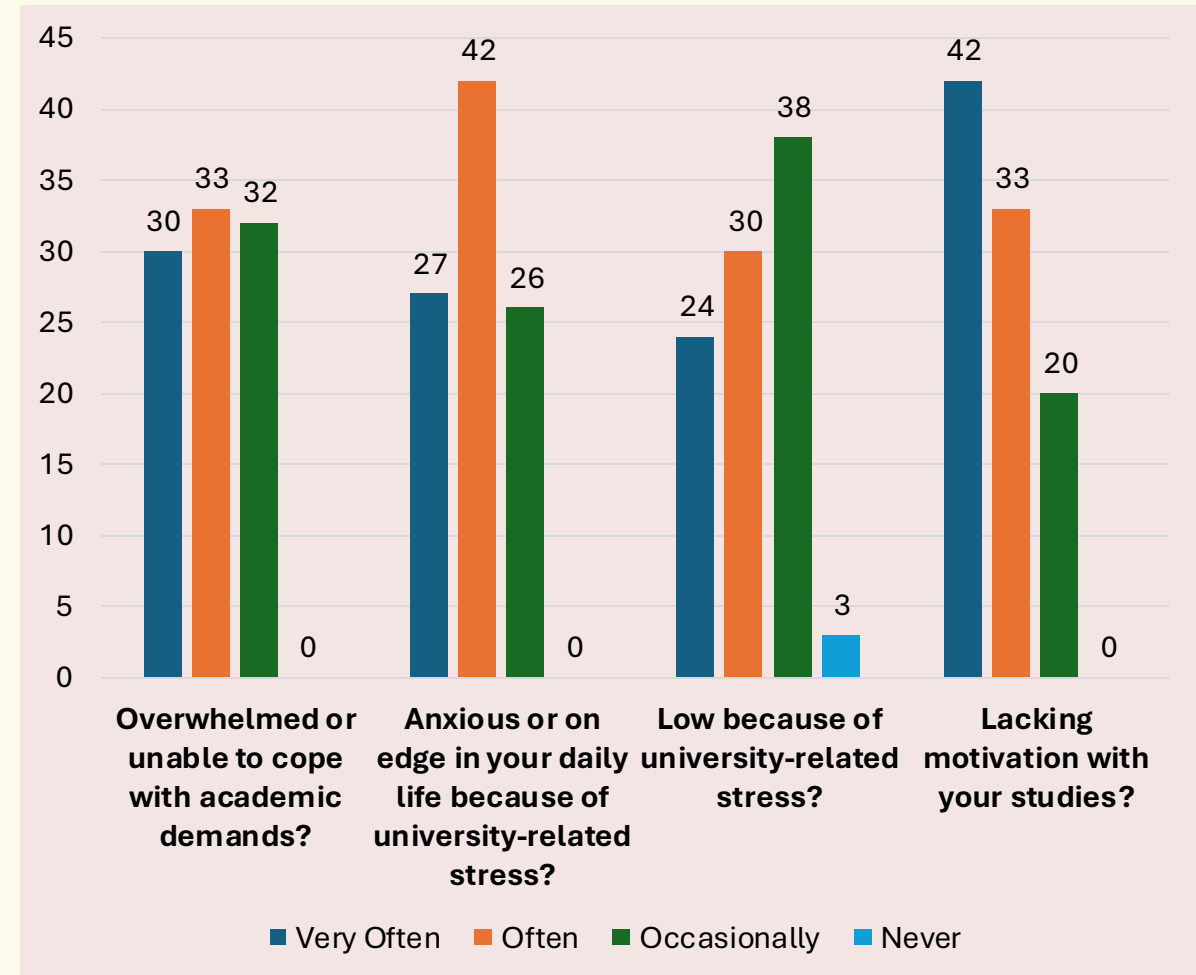
Impact on engagement, attendance, and stress

How often have you felt...

Neurotypical Students



Neurodivergent Students

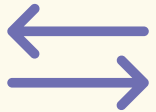


Preliminary Focus



Disability or strength?

- Not all students with mental health difficulties identify as disabled
- Not all neurodivergent students identify as disabled, and some see their neurodivergence as their strength



Transition to University

- Both mental health and academic support needs change during the transition into university



Impact on academic engagement and attendance

- Mental health significantly impacts student's academic engagement and attendance.

References

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Would you like to help us recruit or stay in touch?



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