

Belonging in Biological Sciences: What students tell us

Maria Canal and Adella Lumbantobing
School of Biological Sciences (SBS) @ The University of Manchester

In today's talk...

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Introduction

Understanding
importance of sense
of belonging

02

Methods

How our research
was designed &
conducted

03

Results

Summary of key
responses & next
steps

Background Information

- Belonging influences student motivation, confidence and academic success
- Low belonging linked to **lower retention rates**
- Belonging improves engagement and performance for students from marginalised groups

Project aim: to explore students' belonging, academic confidence and perceptions of inclusion in the School of Biological Sciences

Methods

- This study was approved by the UoM Ethics Committee
- Online survey shared with all undergraduate students in SBS via email
- Survey questions on demographics, university experience and feelings of belonging
- Focus group held with undergraduate SBS students

Methods – Feelings of belonging

Belonging

- Settled
- Belonging
- Happy
- ❖ Lonely

Course

- Confident
- Connections
- Valued
- Community
- Supported
- Welcoming
- ❖ Imposter

Personal

- Respected
- Speak freely
- Be myself
- Empowered
- Safe

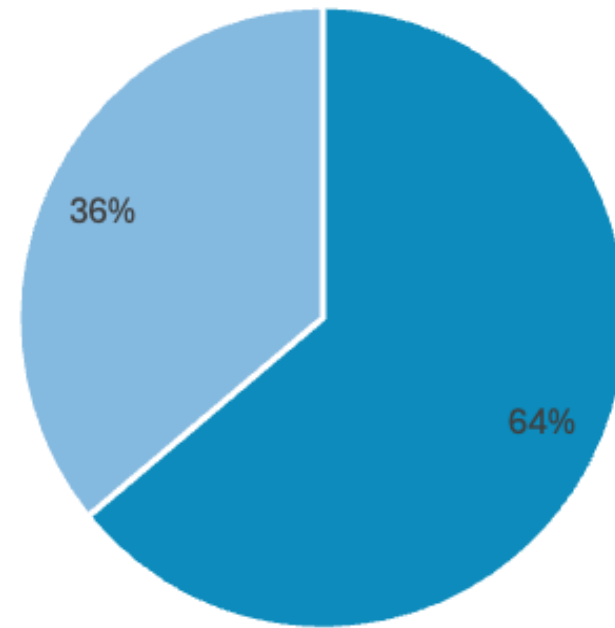
Methods – Inclusivity

- ✓ Is the teaching on your course delivered in an inclusive style?
- ✓ Would you know how to raise an EDI issue?
- ✓ Barriers to teaching and learning

Key findings – Demographics

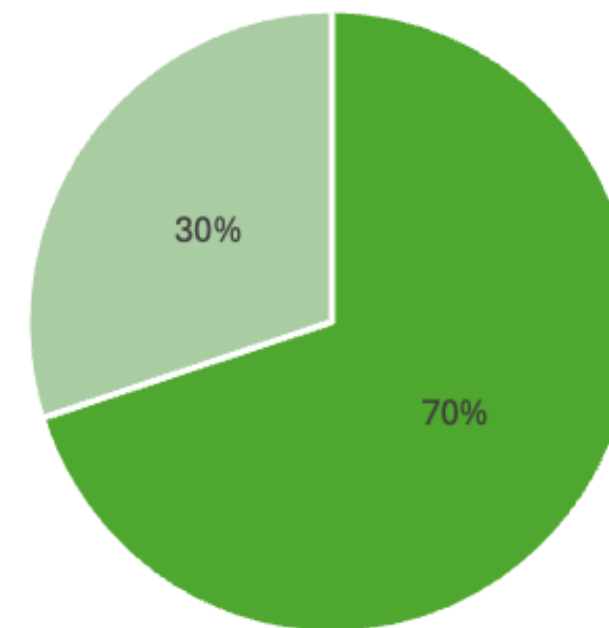
N = 185

Year of study



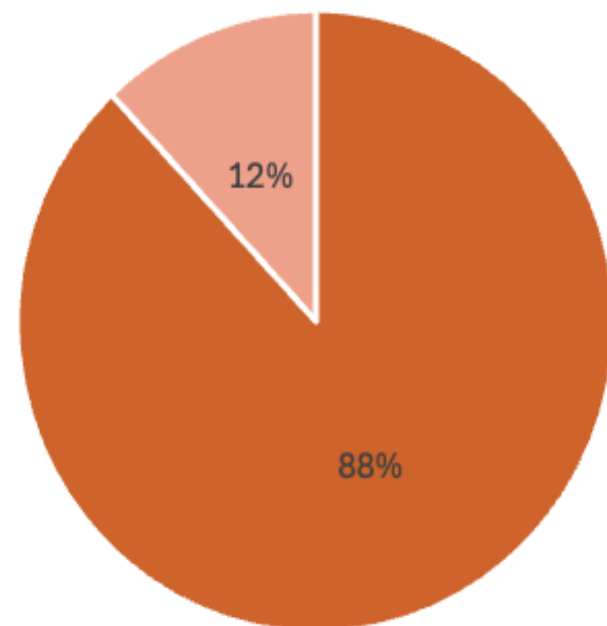
■ Foundation/First ■ Second/Final

Fee Status



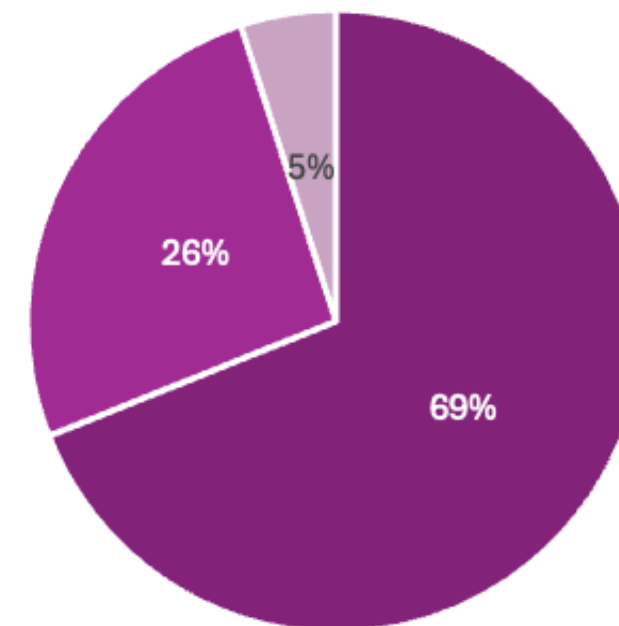
■ Home Students ■ International Students

WP Flag



■ No/NA ■ Yes

Gender

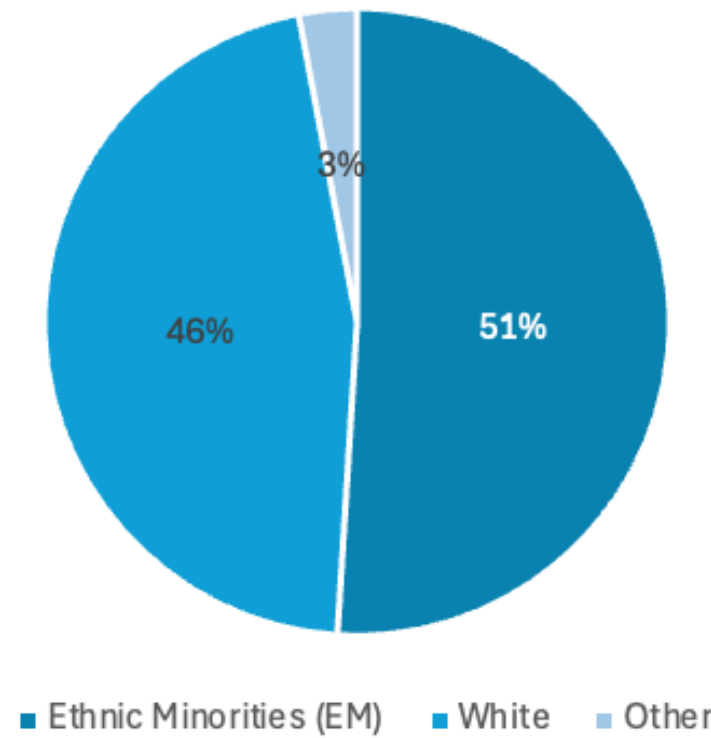


■ Female ■ Male ■ Other

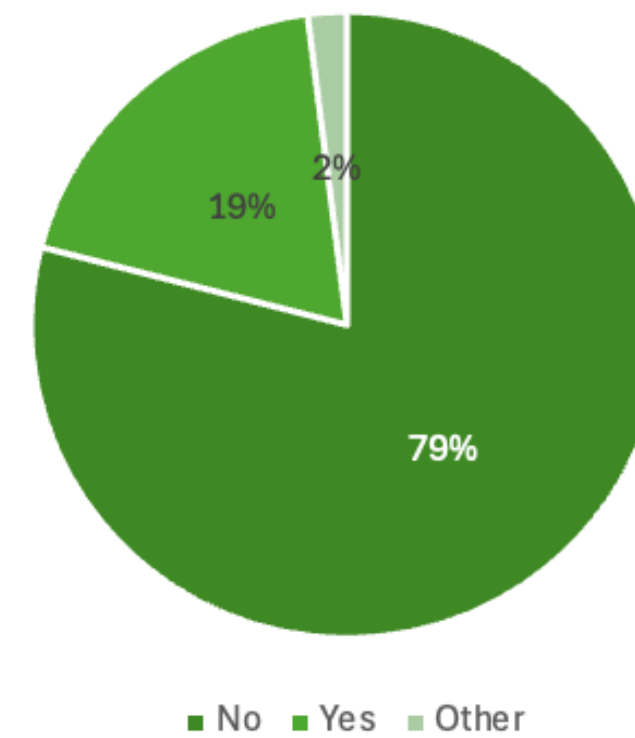
Key findings – Demographics

N = 185

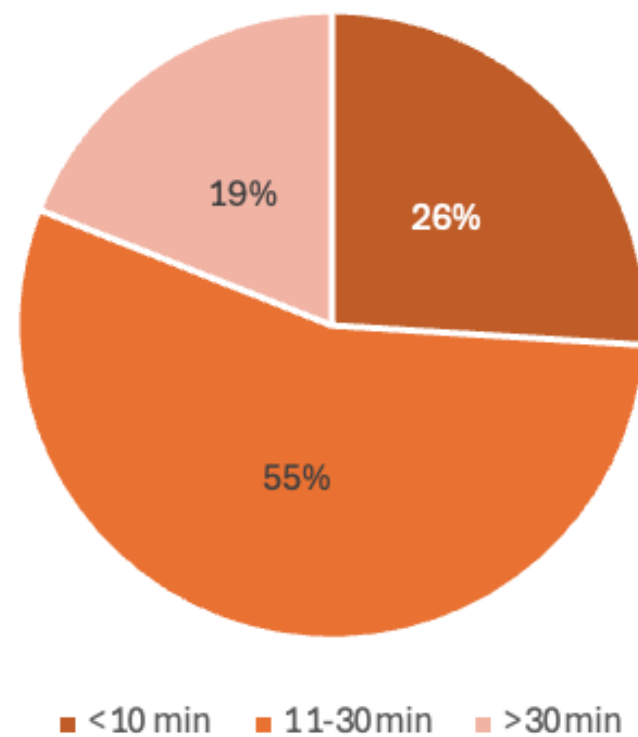
Ethnicity



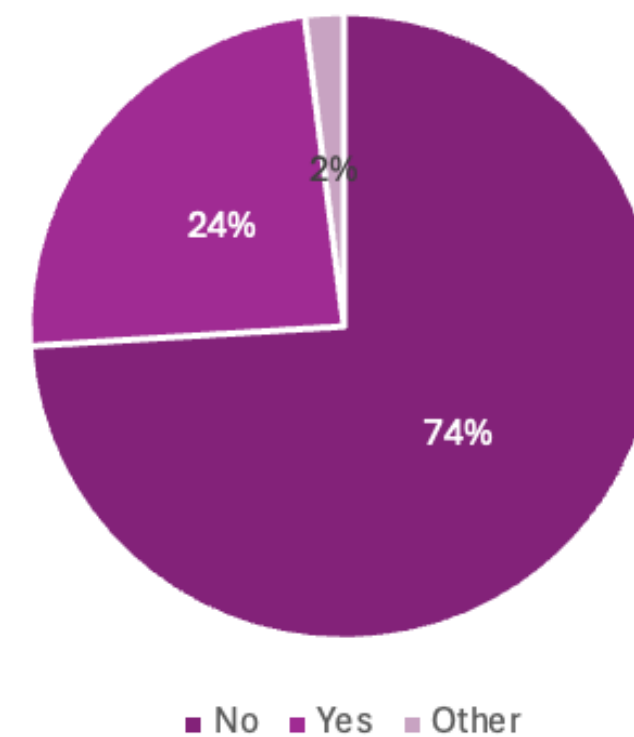
First in Family to go to University



Commuting Distance



DASS Registered



Key findings (% agree)

Belonging

- Settled (64%)
- Belonging (61%)
- Happy (67%)
- ❖ Lonely (27%)

- ✓ Most students feel happy, settled and that they belong
- ✓ A quarter of students feel lonely

From the Focus Group:

"I've got more settled (...) as time's gone on (...) first year's quite scary with, like, everyone being put in the same place. Like, it's a big lecture hall, whereas, like, now that there's, like, smaller lecture halls, I feel like it's a more calm"

Key findings (% agree)

Course

- Welcoming (61%)
- Connections (65%)
- Valued (57%)
- Confident (48%)
- Community (45%)
- Supported (45%)
- ❖ Imposter (46%)

- ✓ Most students feel welcome, valued and that they've made connections with other students in their course
- ✓ Half of students don't feel a sense of community or supported in their course
- ✓ Half of students experience imposter syndrome

From the Focus Group:

"Like, I'm a very extroverted person, like, I need the community (...) it's so nice to, like, be in the community and help"

Key findings (% agree)

- ✓ The vast majority of students felt respected, safe, empowered and that they could be themselves and speak freely

From the Focus Group:

"on campus, super safe. Like, absolutely super safe (...) even at night. Yeah, so even if I'm coming back from, like, city center, I'll walk through campus and will still feel safe, like, alone"

Personal

- Respected (82%)
- Speak freely (76%)
- Be myself (80%)
- Empowered (65%)
- Safe (80%)

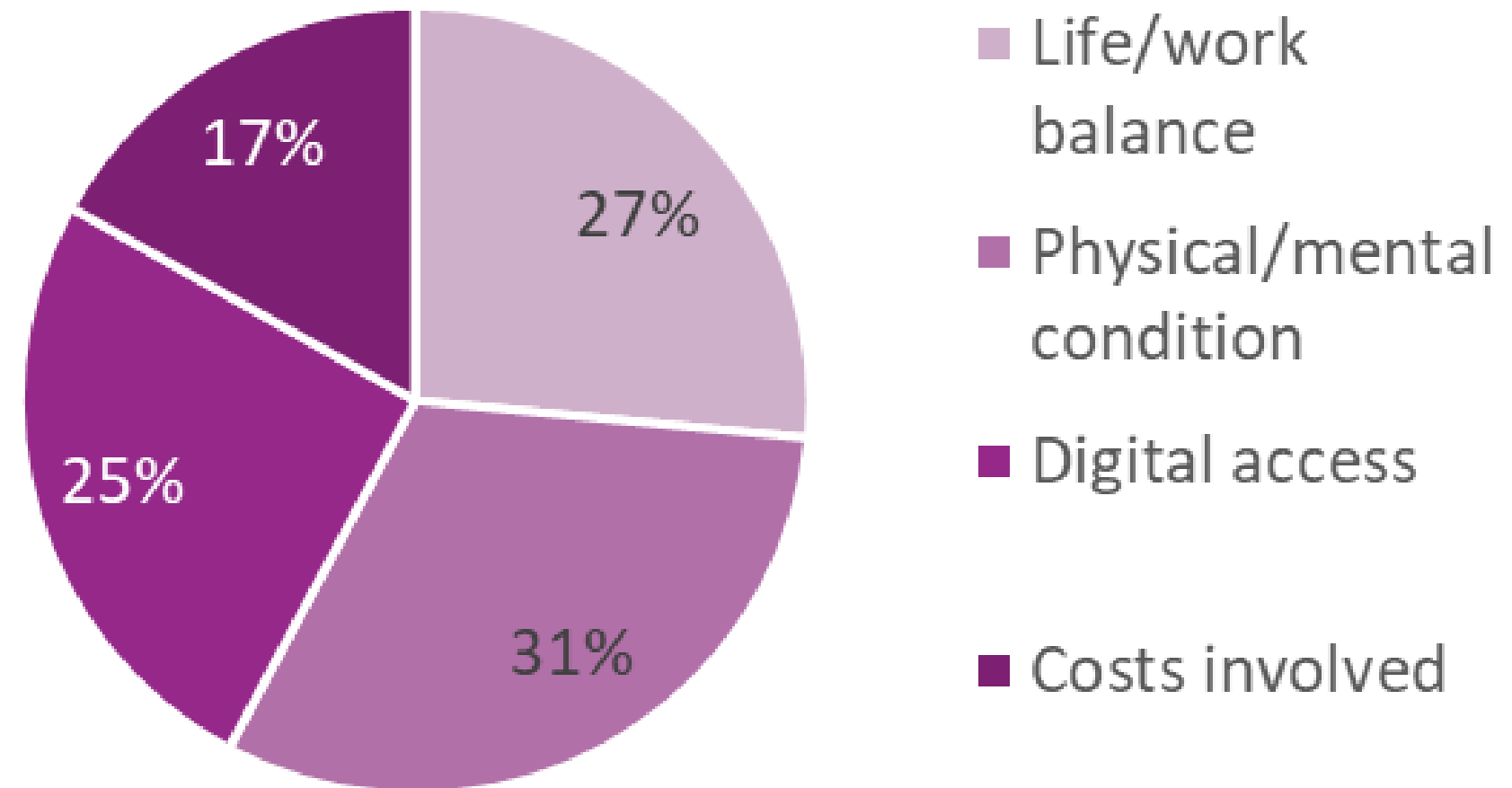
Key findings – Barriers

- ✓ Half of students (49%) said that they had experienced one or more barriers accessing teaching and learning

From the Focus Group:

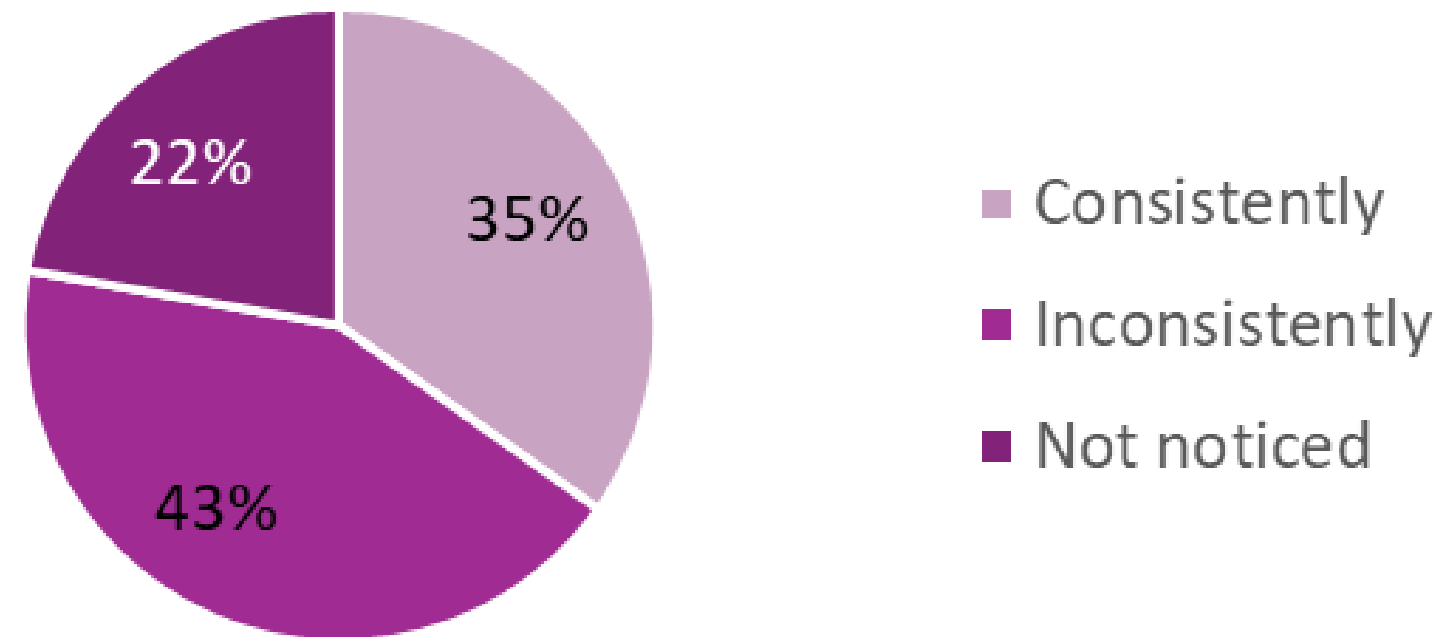
"I get migraines (...) if I'm in the period where I'm gonna get a migraine, and I know when I'm gonna get a migraine, and so they try to put things in place for me (...) like, transcripts of, like, lectures if I went in person (...) But you can't ask any lecturers to turn the brightness down on any screen, because if someone can't see very well, they need the screen to be brighter."

Types of barriers experienced

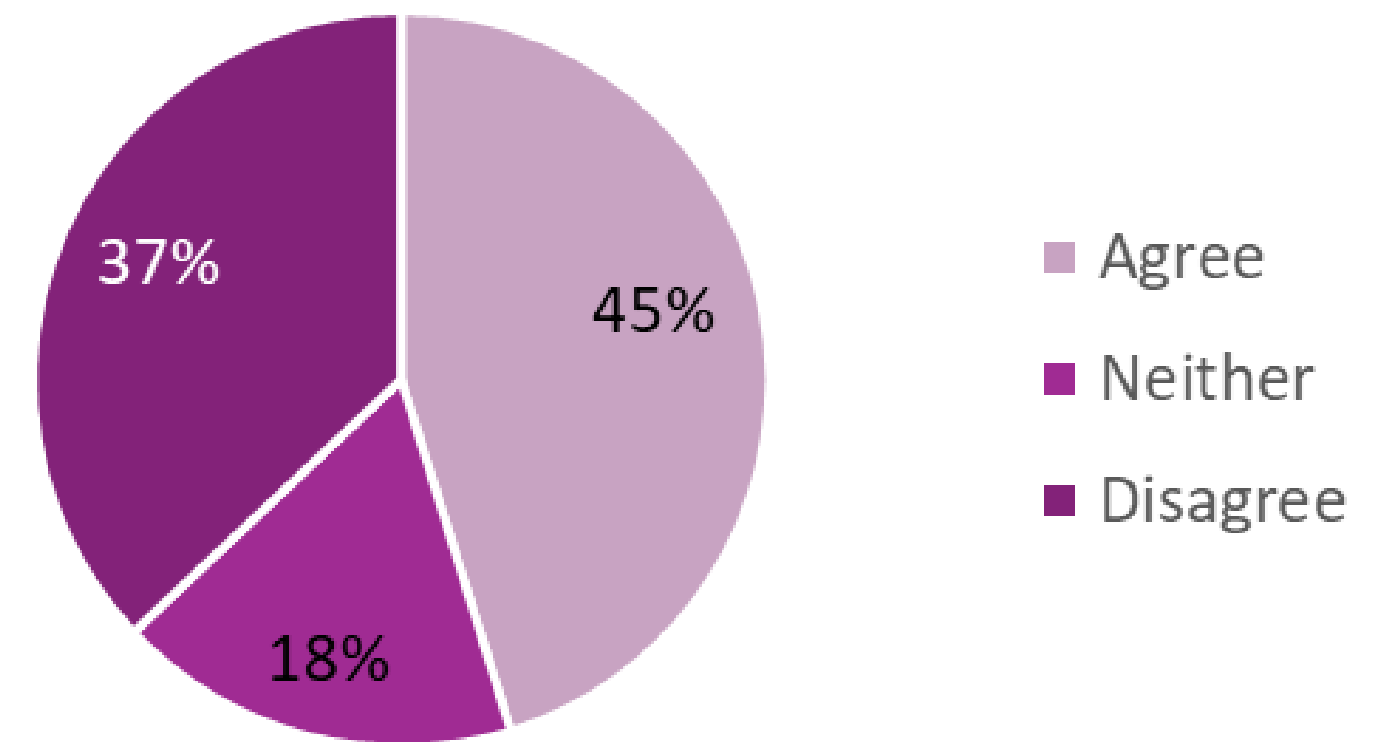


Key findings – Inclusivity

Inclusivity is embedded consistently throughout all course modules



I would know how to raise an EDI issue



Main take-home messages

What is working well

- SBS is welcoming
- Most students feel settled and that they belong
- Students feel respected, safe and that they can be themselves

What needs improving

- Consistent inclusive teaching across modules
- Clear pathways to raise inclusion concerns
- Enhanced community and support in large programmes





What can we do?

- ✓ Review of inclusivity within modules
- ✓ Clear signposting for raising inclusion concerns
- ✓ Foster peer connection within courses
- ✓ Tackle loneliness and imposter syndrome
- ✓ Continuous monitoring

Thank you

maria.canal@manchester.ac.uk



Dr Maria Canal

Deputy Director for Inclusive
Education for the School of Biological
Sciences (SBS)



Adella Tobing

Inclusive Education Student
Partner for the School of Biological
Sciences (SBS)



Maria Mercè Canal
Senior Lecturer at The University
of Manchester



Adella Tobing
3rd Year BSc Biomedical Sciences | Student
Inclusion Partner for the School of Biologica...

