

SMF ~~UN~~HEARD VOICES

A-LEVEL RESULTS DAY

AUGUST 2025

SOCIAL
MOBILITY
FOUNDATION 

x



METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork was conducted between June 5th – July 3rd 2025.

- › 2,012 x 15-minute online surveys with young people aged 16-21 years old
- › Sample from an online panel sample provider partner (Researchbods, n=1494) and Social Mobility Foundation contacts (n=518)
- › Target quotas plus a modest amount of weighting were used to achieve a robust and representative sample of 16–21-year-olds living in the UK
- › This report splits the data between professional or higher (PSEB–779*), intermediate (ISEB – 398*), and those from lower or working-class socioeconomic backgrounds (LSEB – 724*) **
- › Survey design included consultation with SMF Youth Advisory Panel

*Unweighted bases, remainder unclassified

** a small number selected 'Other such as retired, this question does not apply to me' so don't appear in these groups

Throughout the report the following symbols are used:

↑↓ = Significantly higher or lower at 95% confidence limit

* = Caution – low base size

SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Socioeconomic background (SEB) is defined using the occupation of the main household earner when aged about 14, according to the [National Statistics Socio-economic Classification \(NS-SEC\)](#).

This is the methodology [recommended by the Social Mobility Commission](#), an independent statutory body whose purpose is to research, promote and advise government on social mobility.

We also asked respondents whether they received free school meals (FSM) during their secondary education, which is a measure of low income.

PROFESSIONAL OR HIGHER SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND (PSEB)

Includes:

- ✓ Modern professional and traditional professional occupations
- ✓ Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators

INTERMEDIATE SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND (ISEB)

Includes:

- ✓ Clerical and intermediate occupations
- ✓ Small business owners who employed fewer than 20 people

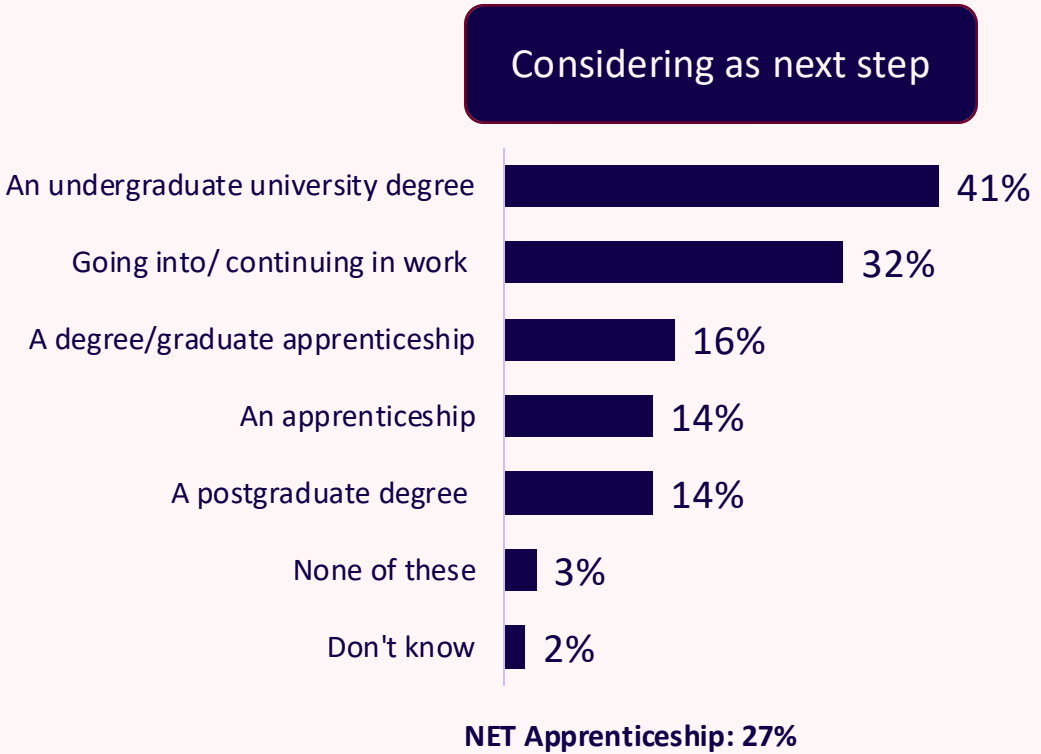
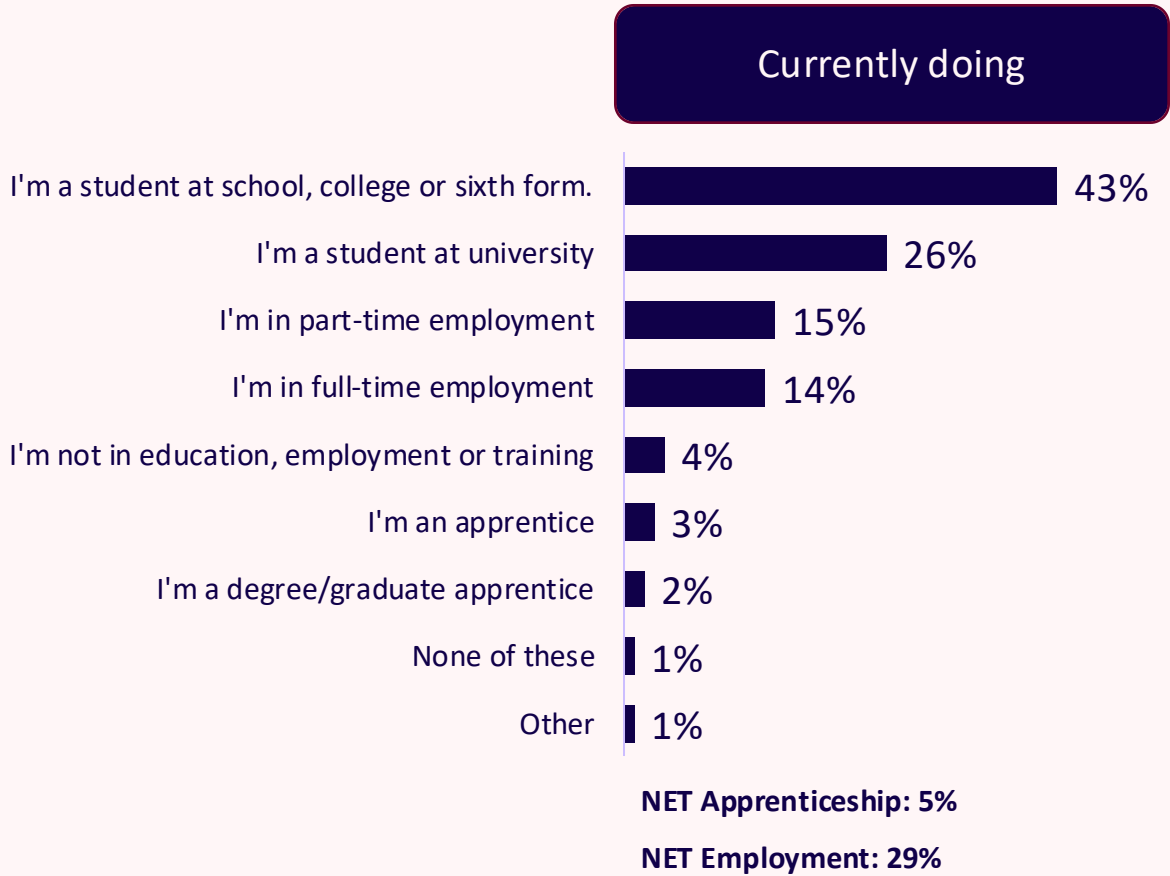
LOWER OR WORKING-CLASS SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND (LSEB)

Includes:

- ✓ Technical and craft occupations
- ✓ Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations
- ✓ Long-term unemployed

CURRENT & NEXT STEPS

- The sample covers the full range of current circumstances of respondents and next-step ambitions and is virtually the same regardless of background.



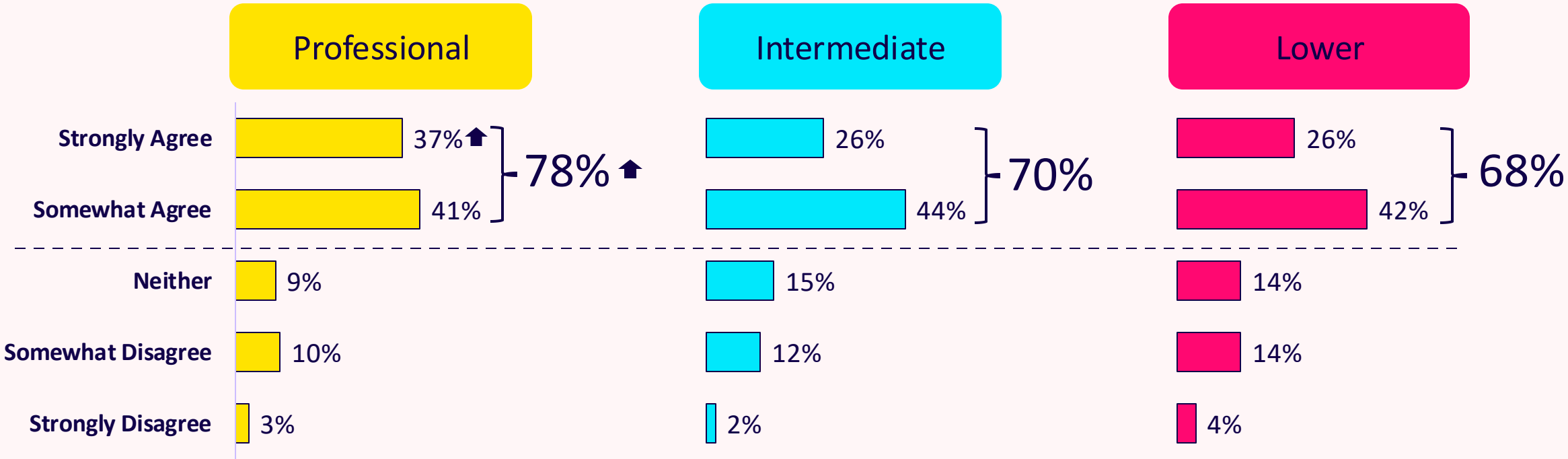
NOTES: At 16/17 years-old, females are significantly more likely than males to aspire to an undergraduate degree (76% vs 58%), particularly amongst those from a LSEB (85% vs 56%).

RESULTS DAY



THOSE FROM PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO FEEL THEY HAVE HAD THE RESOURCES TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL IN EDUCATION

72% Agree:
‘I have had the resources I need to reach my potential in education’
Total sample



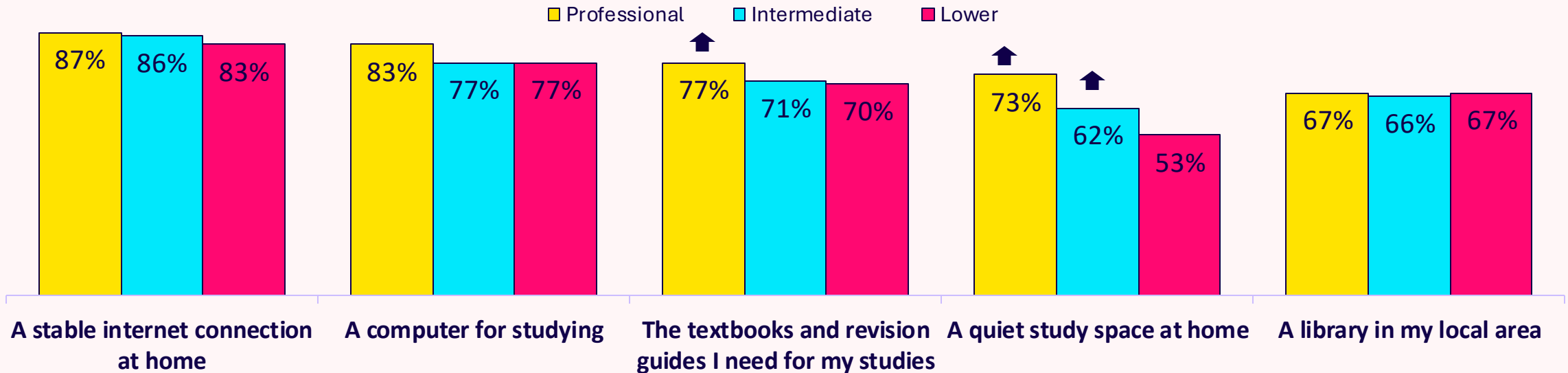
NOTE: females are significantly LESS likely than males to agree, including amongst those from LSEBs (64% vs 72%).

ONLY HALF OF SCHOOL/COLLEGE/6TH FORM STUDENTS AGED 16YRS+ FROM LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS HAVE A QUIET PLACE AT HOME TO STUDY

- Those from an intermediate and from a professional SEB are significantly more likely to have access to a quiet place to study.
- LSEB students are significantly less likely than PSEB students to have access the textbooks and revisions guides they need.

Which do you have access to?

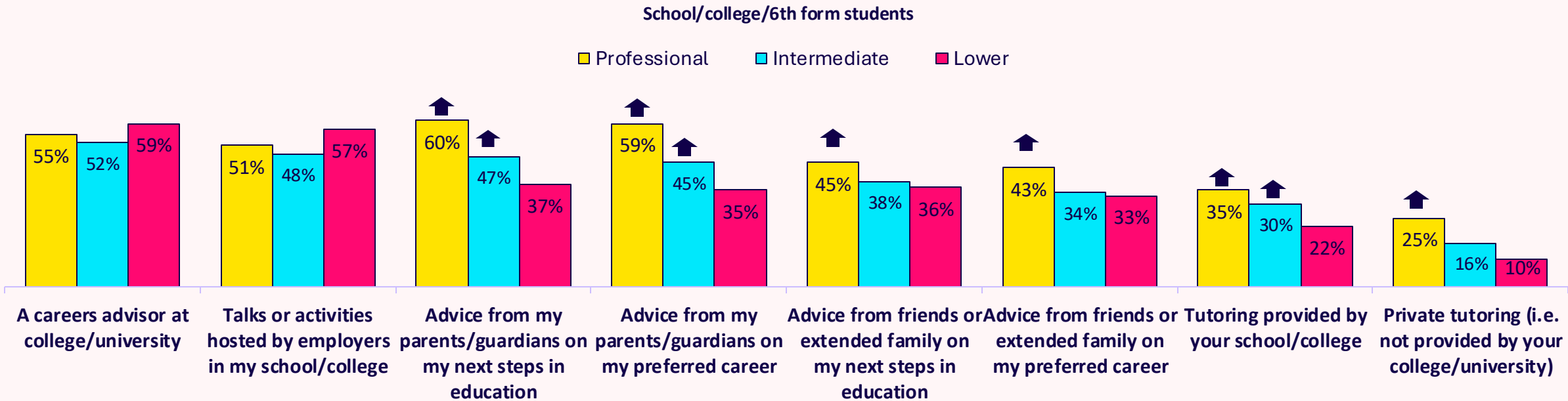
School/college/6th form students



SCHOOL/COLLEGE/6TH FORM STUDENTS AGED 16YRS+ FROM PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS HAVE MORE ACCESS TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUPPORT

- This includes advice from extended family/friends as well as parents.
- And tutoring provided either through school or privately (50% vs 42% Intermediate vs 29% Lower).

Which have you had access to?

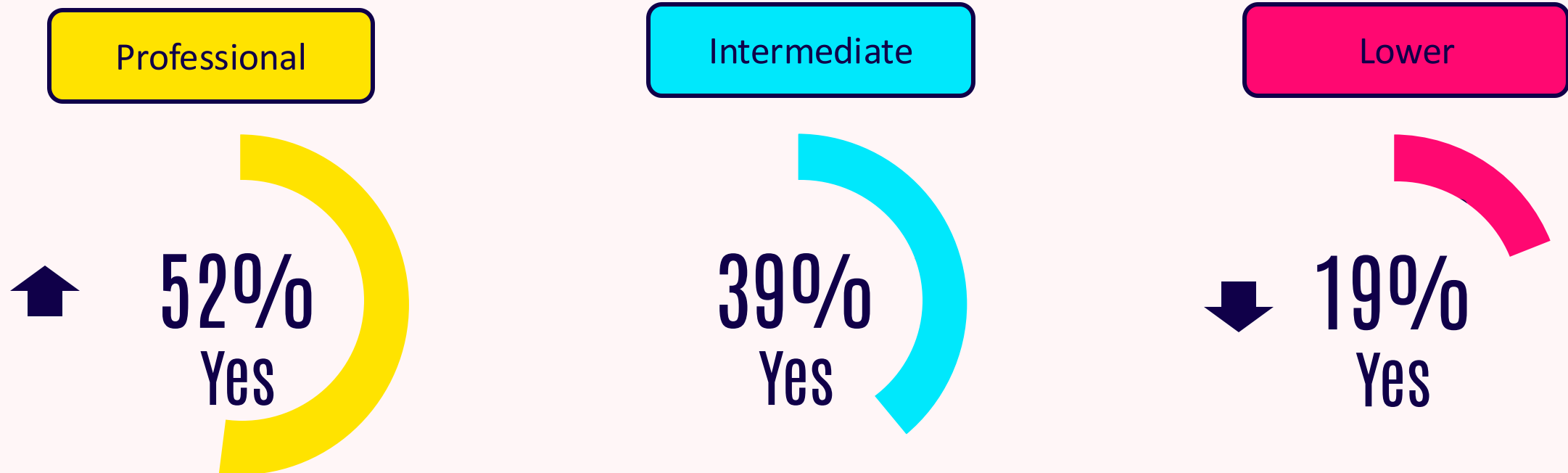


MOST LSEB STUDENTS BELIEVE THEY WILL ONLY GET ONE CHANCE AT GETTING THE GRADES THEY NEED WITH RESITS TOO COSTLY

- Just 1 in 5 say they could afford the cost of resits compared to more than half of those from PSEBs.

35% Agree: “If I don’t get the grades I need, I can afford the cost of taking resits”

Secondary school/6th form college students



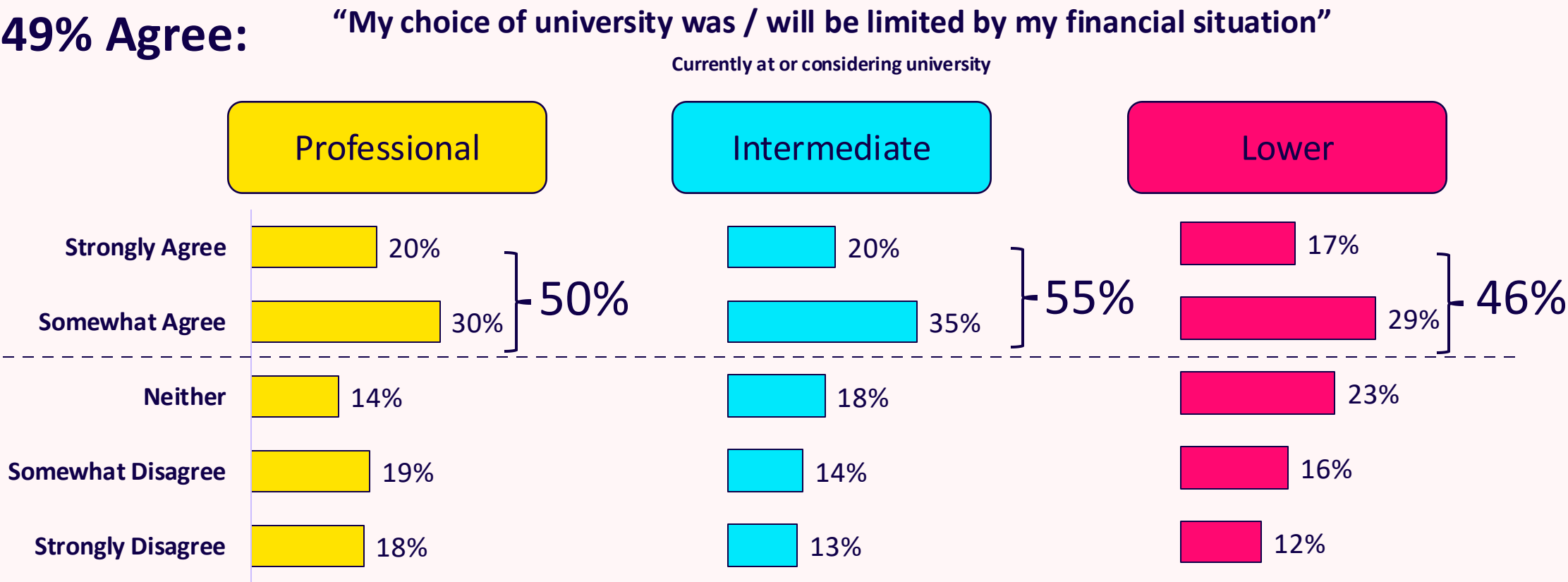
NOTE: females are significantly less likely to feel that they can afford to resit (28% vs 44% males) – females from LSEBs even less likely at just 16%.

UNIVERSITY

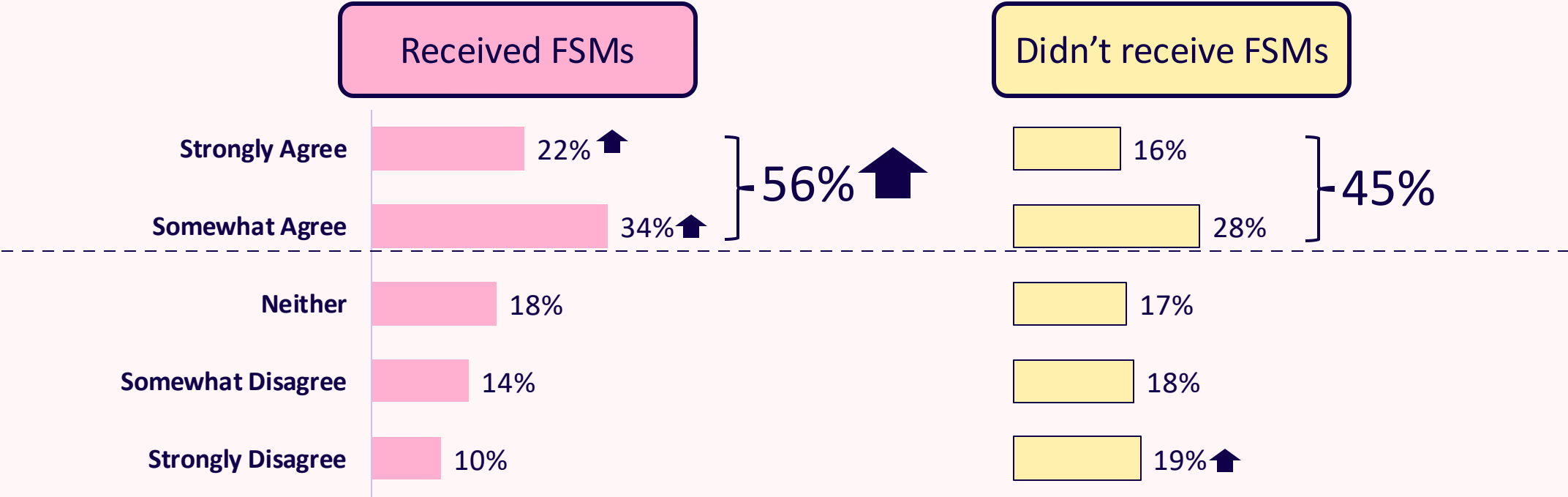


HALF OF ALL THOSE SURVEYED AGREE THAT THEIR CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY IS / WAS LIMITED BY THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION

- 51% of those considering a university degree / 47% of those already students at university



THOSE IN RECEIPT OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS DURING THEIR SECONDARY EDUCATION ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO SAY THAT THEIR CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY IS, OR WOULD BE, LIMITED BY THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION



ONLY HALF OF ALL CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CAN AFFORD THE ESSENTIALS ON STUDENT FINANCE ALONE

- No significant differences by SEB.
- N.B. This figure is **higher** for those living away from home (61% vs 48% for all university students).

48% Agree:

“I can afford the essentials at university from student finances alone”

Current university students

Professional

47%
Agree

Intermediate

54%
Agree

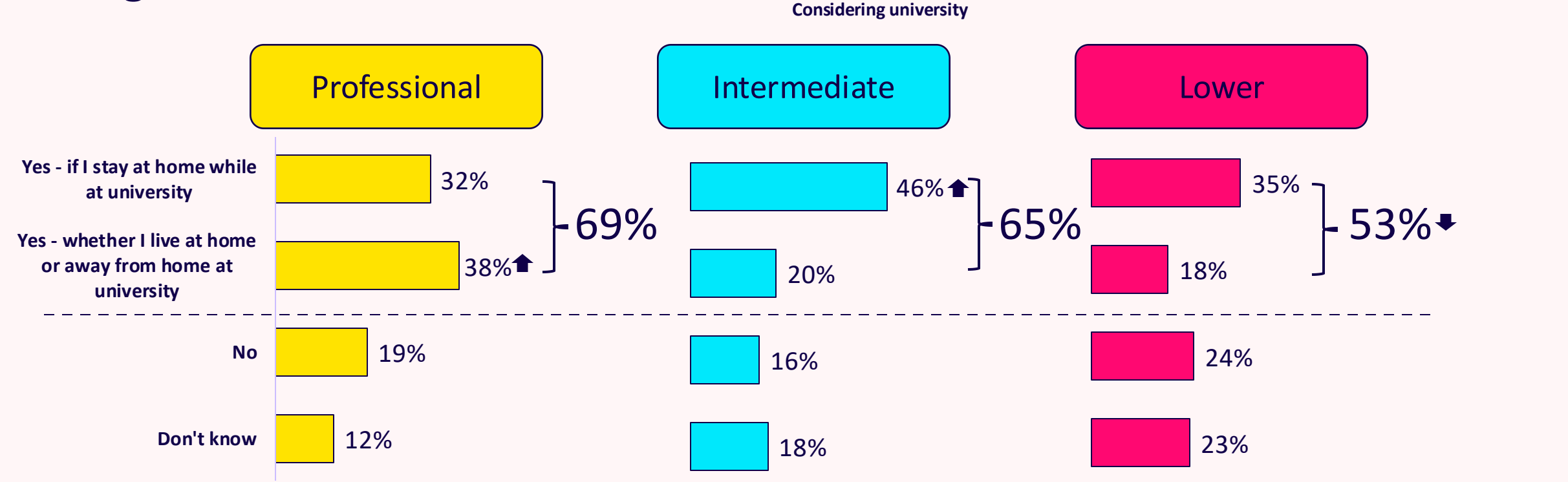
Lower

45%
Agree

LSEB STUDENTS CONSIDERING UNIVERSITY ARE CONSIDERABLY LESS LIKELY TO BELIEVE THEY COULD AFFORD THE ESSENTIALS

- Whilst those from professional socioeconomic backgrounds are most likely to say they could, regardless of whether they stay at home or move away, maximising their potential options.

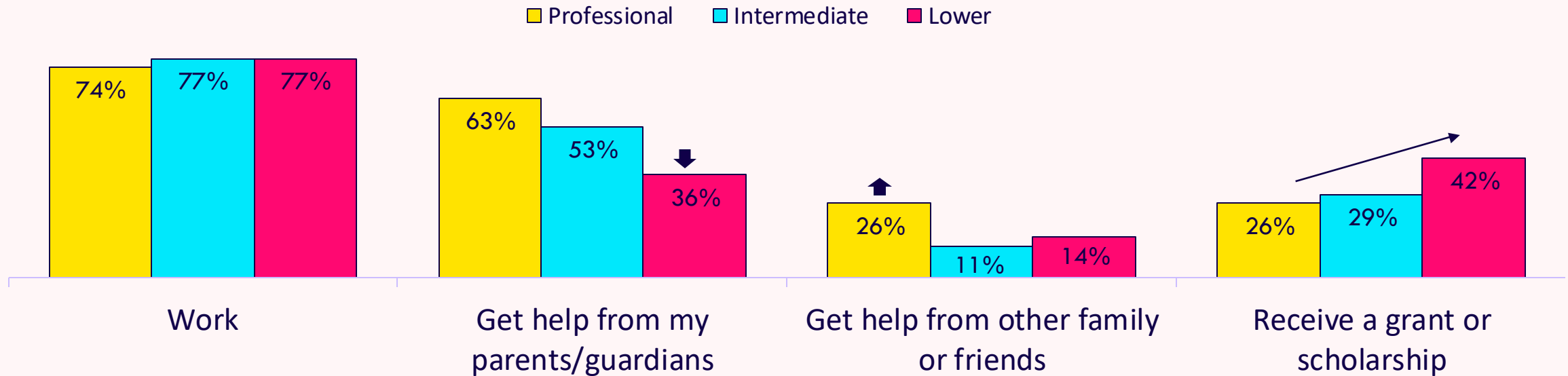
62% Agree: “I would be able to afford the essentials whilst at university from student finance alone”



LSEB STUDENTS ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO BANK ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS & FAMILY

What they do / would do to make up the difference

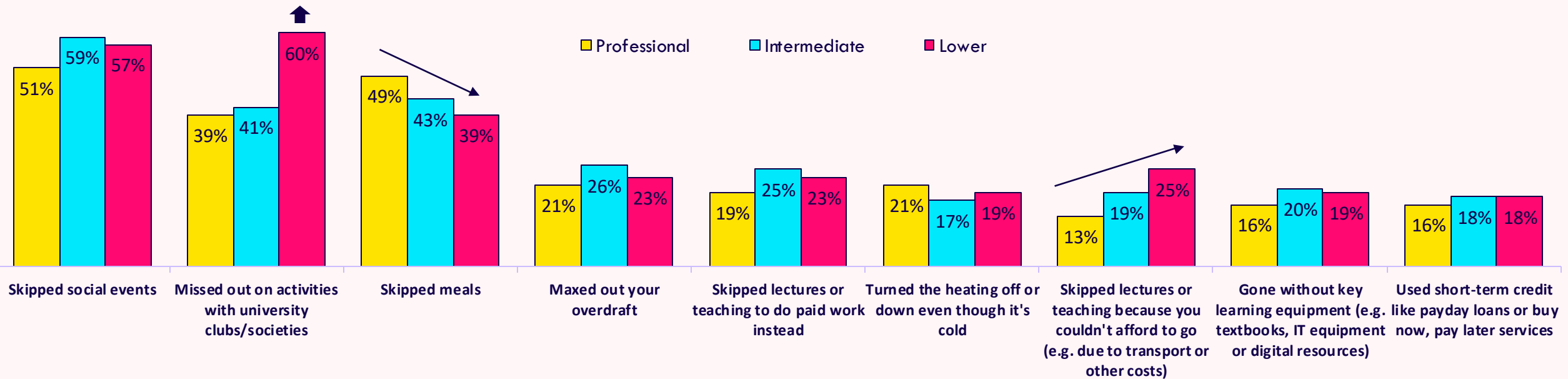
Those who cannot / would not be able to afford the essentials from student finance alone



1 IN 6 (17%) UNIVERSITY STUDENTS HAS USED SHORT TERM CREDIT SUCH AS PAYDAY LOANS OR BUY-NOW-PAY LATER

Have you done any of the following whilst at university because of a lack of money?

Current university students



45%
have skipped meals because of a lack of money

“

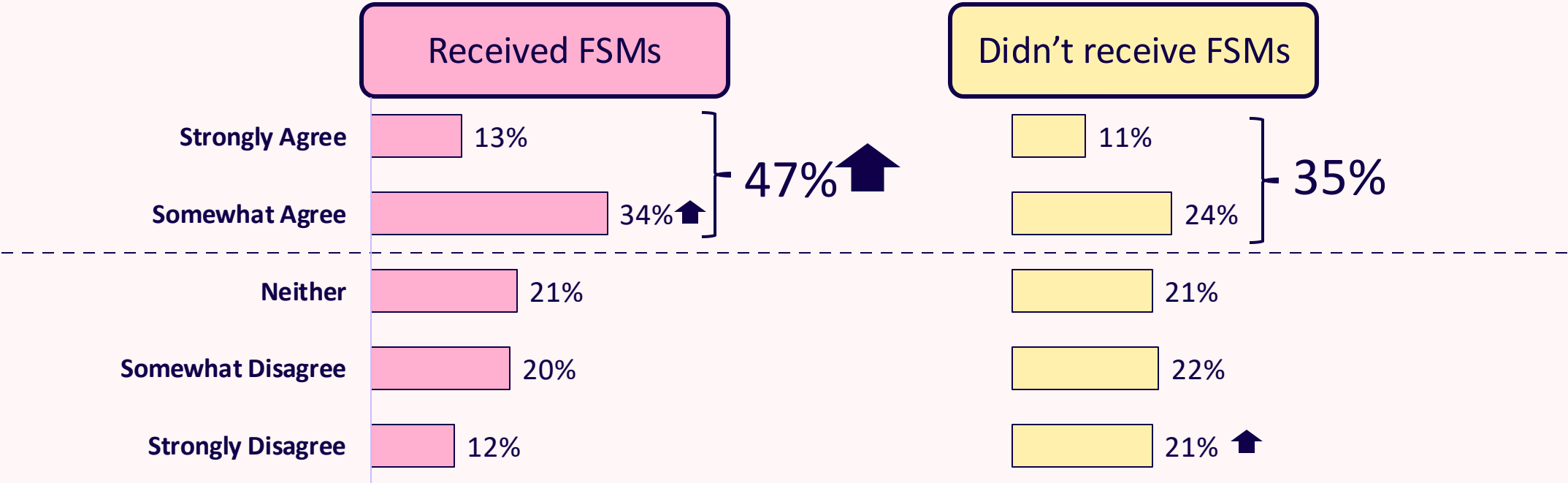
I DON'T GET THE FULL STUDENT LOAN BECAUSE MY MUM HAS A JOB, BUT I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO SURVIVE COMFORTABLY. I EAT ONE MEAL A DAY BECAUSE I CAN'T AFFORD MORE FOOD. I USUALLY END THE WEEK WITH £1 IN MY BANK ACCOUNT BARELY ENOUGH TO NOT GO UNDER.

SOME PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE THE RESOURCES TO BE GOING TO THEIR DREAM UNIVERSITY AWAY FROM HOME. ALTHOUGH STUDENT FINANCE PAYS FOR BASIC NECESSITIES, WHEN I FIRST CAME TO UNIVERSITY I COULD NOT PAY FOR ALL OF THE STUFF I NEEDED TO MOVE AWAY AND RELIED HEAVILY ON MY GRANDPARENTS WHICH A LOT OF PEOPLE MAY NOT HAVE.

”

THOSE IN RECEIPT OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS DURING THEIR SECONDARY EDUCATION ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THAT THEIR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION HAS BEEN NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION

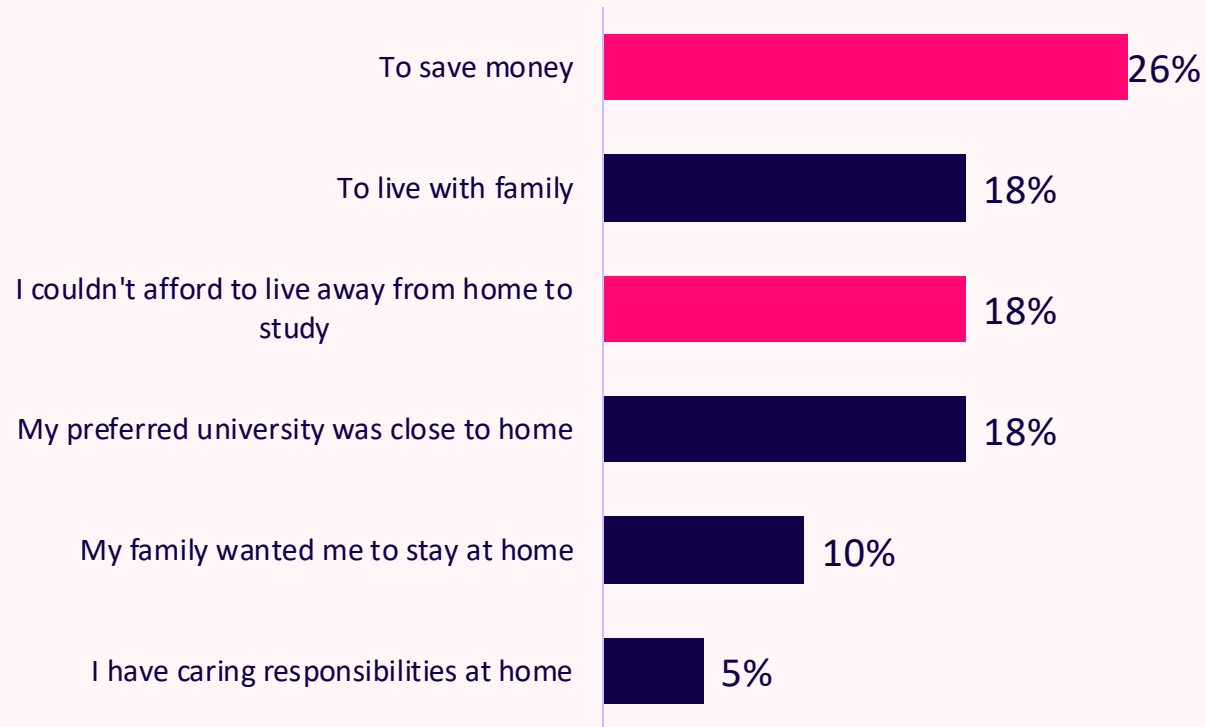
39% Agree: “My learning at university has been negatively impacted by my financial situation”
All current university students



ALMOST HALF SAY THEIR MAIN MOTIVATION FOR LIVING AT HOME WHILST AT UNIVERSITY IS FINANCIAL

MAIN reason for living at home whilst at university

Current university students living at home /
prospective university students who anticipate living at home



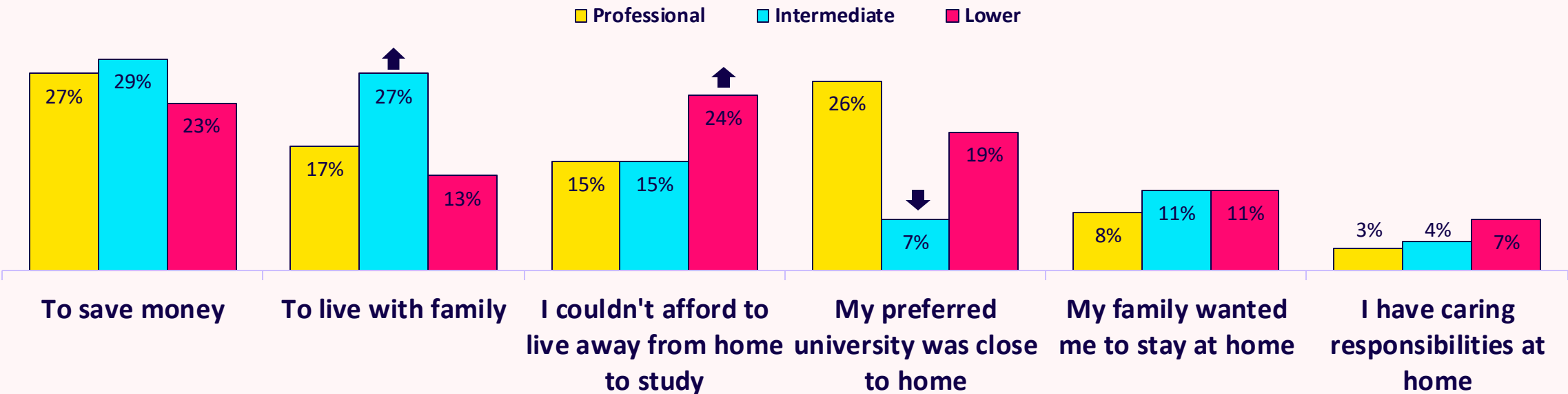
44%

FINANCIAL

FOR PSEB/ISEB STUDENTS, THIS IS MOST OFTEN EXPRESSED AS WANTING TO SAVE MONEY, WHILST FOR LSEB IT IS JUST AS LIKELY TO BE NOT BEING ABLE TO AFFORD TO MOVE AWAY

MAIN reason decided to live at home to study

Living at home / would be living at home



- NOTES:
- Females significantly more likely to select external pressures, including financial (49% vs 39%), whilst males more often talked about positive choices e.g. their preferred university being close to home (23% vs 12%).
 - Those living in the South out of term-time were significantly less likely to say that financial pressures were the main reason they chose / would choose to live at home (34% vs 52% of those living elsewhere).

↕ Indicates a statistically significantly different result @95% confidence vs both the other two groups

Q29: What was the MAIN reason you decided to live at home to study?
BASE: All those who are living at home or would be living at home:
Professional 212/ Intermediate 111/ Lower SEB 184
N.B A handful of respondents said 'Prefer not to say'

For further details about this research, please contact the Social Mobility Foundation press team:

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