



# The Heart of the Campus: How Academic Libraries in Ireland are supporting student well-being

A review of well-being and mental health provisions for students in academic libraries across the island of Ireland



**by Claire Mason**

# Student Mental Health - in numbers

21.7%

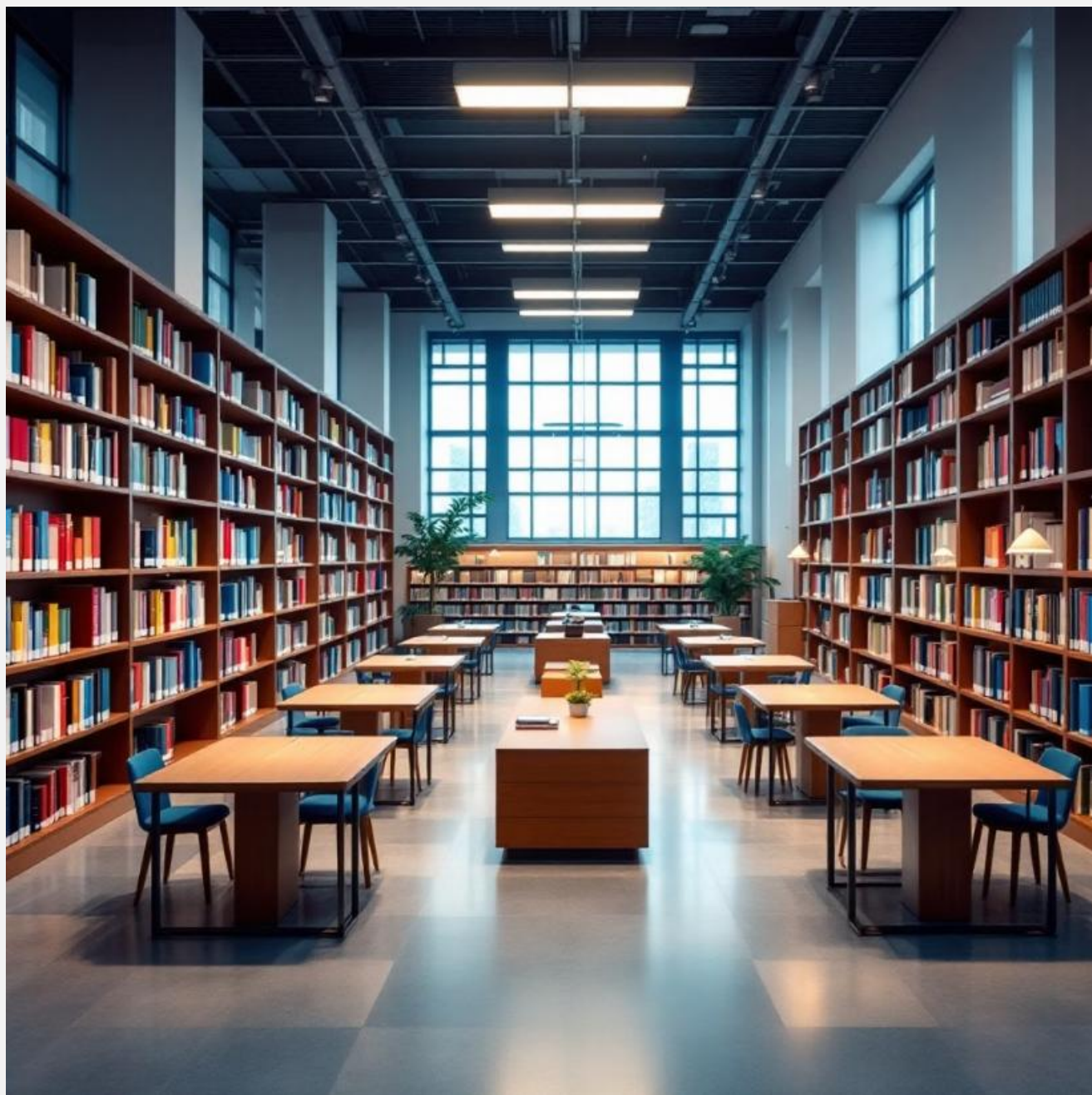
*Disclosed a mental health condition*  
(AHEAD, 2024)

59%

*Negatively impacted due to the  
pandemic*  
(AONTAS, 2021)

92%

*Stated that loneliness was a contributory  
factor*  
(Student Minds, 2022)



# Why the Library?

- **"Heart of the Campus"**
- **Safe and neutral space**
- **Long opening hours**

(Bladek, 2021 ; Green, 2020 ; Ramsey & Aagard, 2018)

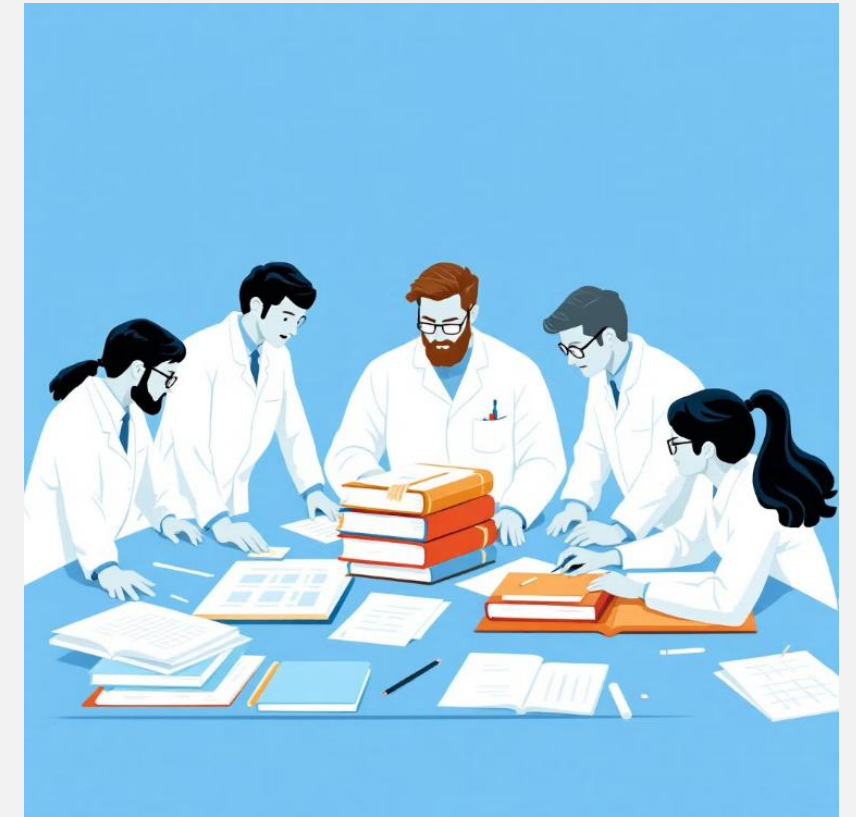


# Literature Review & Methodology

- *Library support for student mental health and well-being in the UK (Cox & Brewster, 2020)*
- *Aligned but not integrated: UK academic library support to mental health and well-being during COVID-19 (Cox & Brewster, 2022)*



- Survey adapted from Cox & Brewster's 2022 study
- Sent to all academic libraries on the Island of Ireland
- Response rate 62%
- 87% Republic of Ireland



# Research Questions



What role do academic libraries in Ireland play in supporting student mental health and well-being?



Has COVID-19 changed the way libraries are providing support?

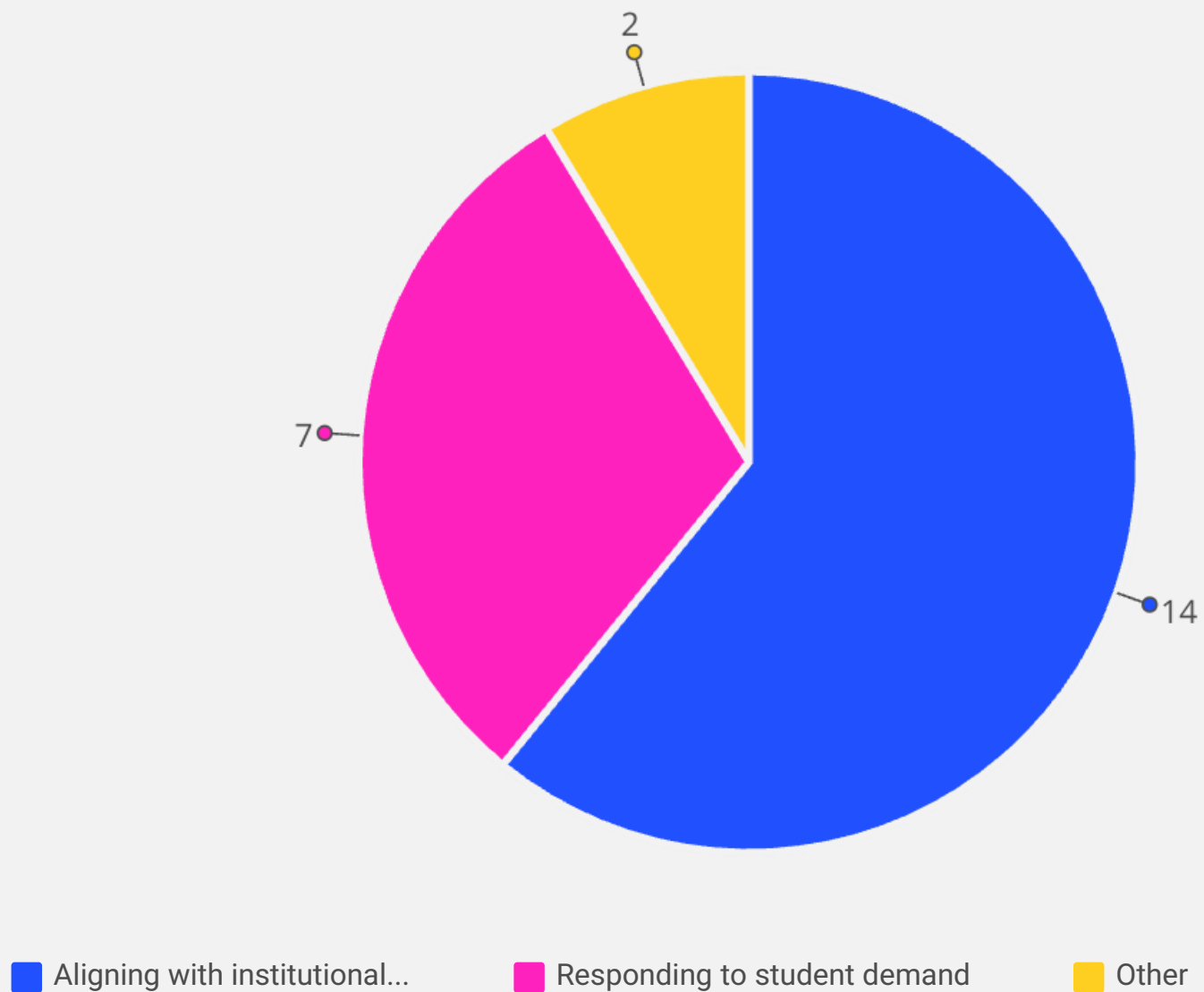
# Findings

- **Library Space**
- **Library Collections**
- **Library Staff**
- **Library Activities**



# Key Drivers

- **61% - Aligning with Institutional Strategy**
- **30% - Responding to Student Demands/Concerns**
- **9% - Other e.g. observing other institutions**



# What are we doing?



91%

**Providing and efficient and friendly service**



83%

**Referring students to support services**



78%

**Designated physical spaces for well-being**



74%

**Improving the library space environment**



61%

**Designated digital spaces for well-being**



57%

**Providing a bibliotherapy collection (print/online)**



48%

**Providing a fiction/leisure reading collection**



26%

**Other activities e.g. animal therapy, arts & crafts, yoga**



# Library Staff

1

## Service

Providing an efficient & friendly service which is conducive to promote learning

2

## Time Management Strategies

Teaching students how to prioritise tasks e.g. providing assignment management tools

3

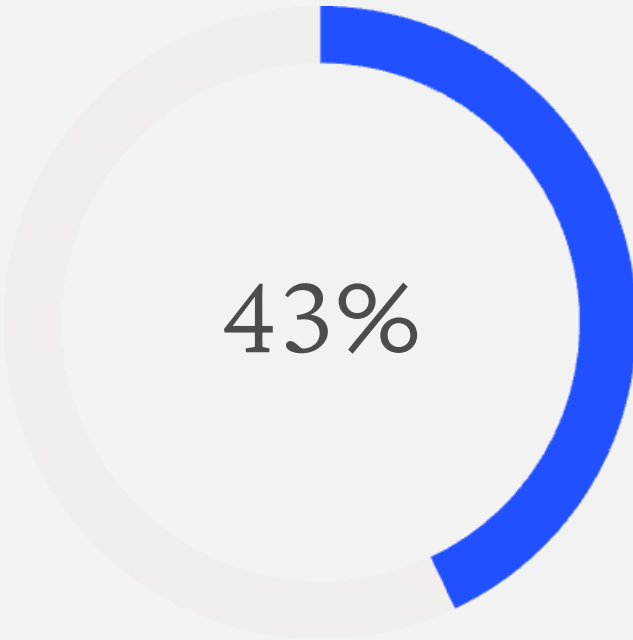
## Stress Reduction Strategies

Sharing tips and tools for coping with academic stress and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

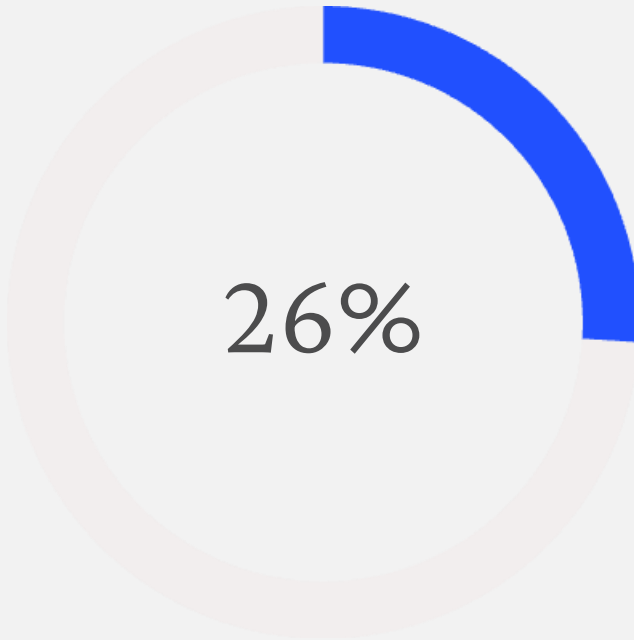
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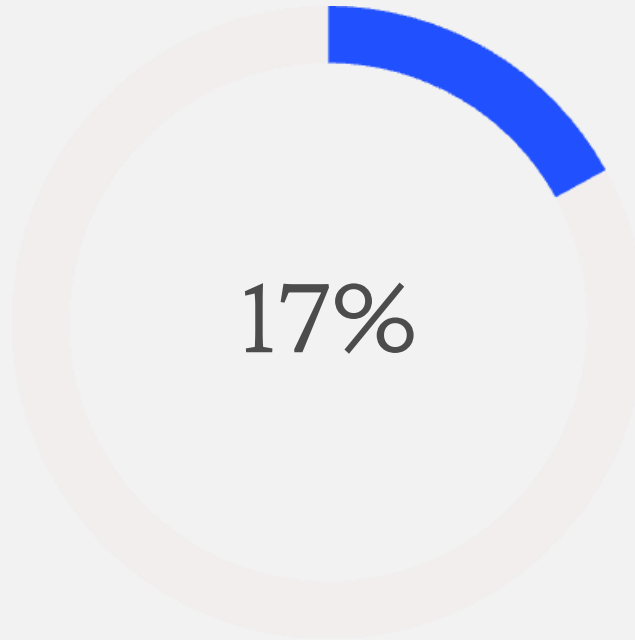
# Who provides the services?



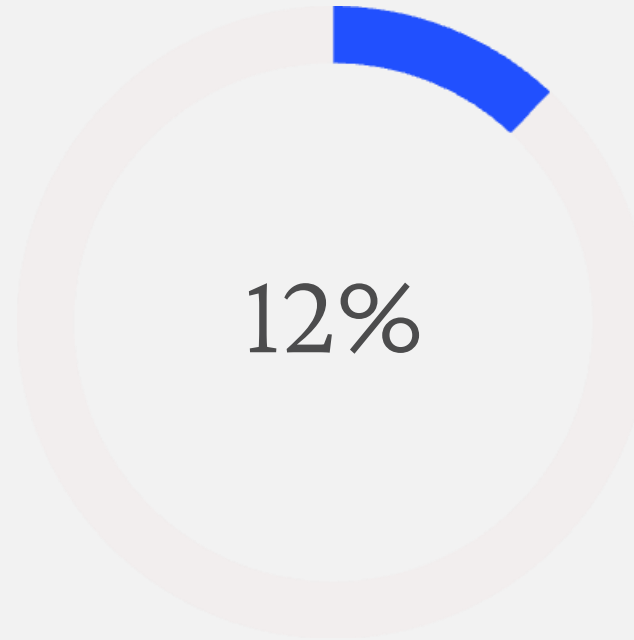
One team primarily



Everyone



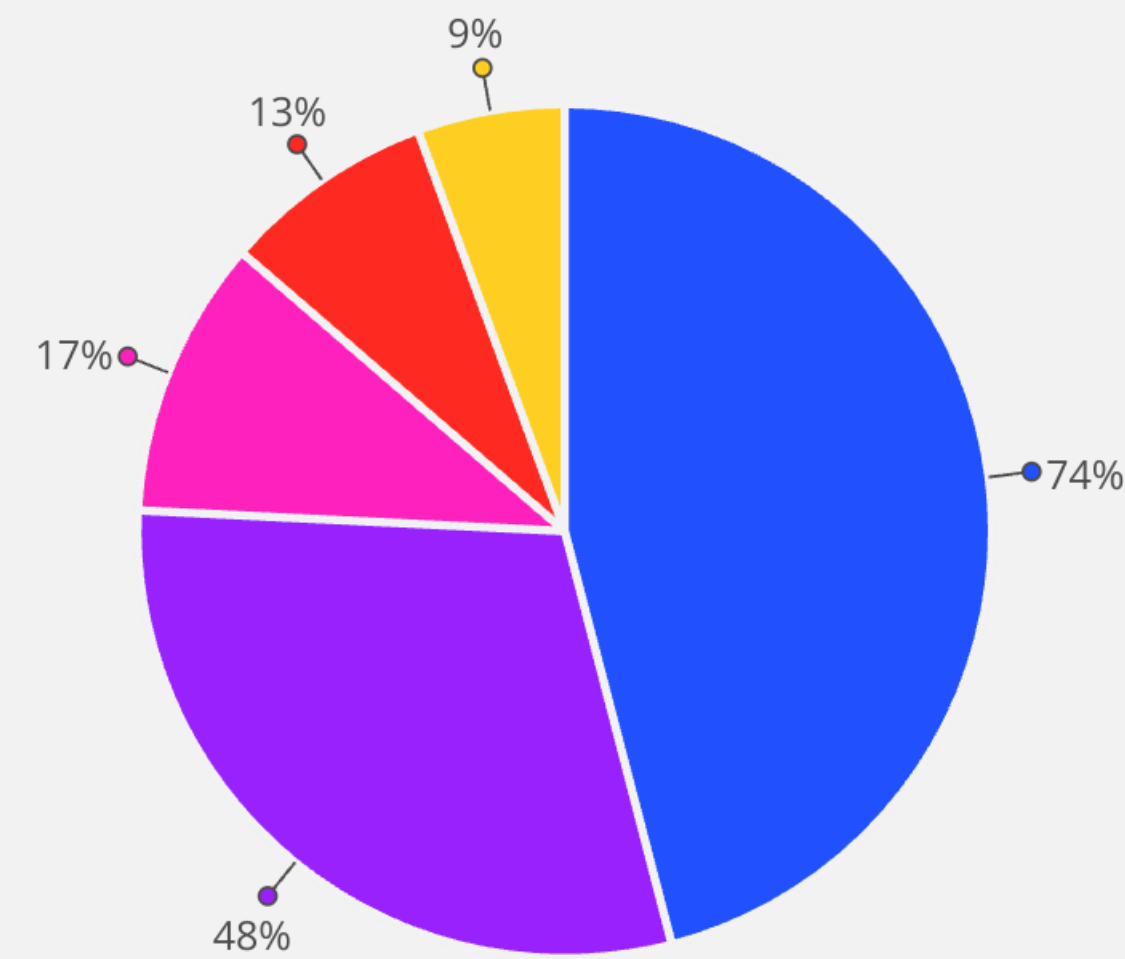
Multiple teams



Other

(Working group, one person,  
no-one)

# Training for Library Staff



■ In house specific short cou... ■ General customer service tr... ■ Formally credited mental he... ■ No training ■ Observations to inform best...

- 77% - Institutional courses
- 48% - General customer service courses
- 17% - Formally credited course
- 13% - No training at all
- 9% - Observations to inform best practice

# Library Spaces

## General Environment

Designed with natural light,  
green spaces and calming décor

## Sensory Spaces

Created with UDL principles,  
incorporating study areas and  
workspaces

## Well-Being Zones

Designated areas for relaxation from study







# Library Collections

1

## Bibliotherapy

Curated collections of books, journals and other material on mental health and well-being

2

## Reading for Leisure

Fiction and non-fiction collections for non-academic use

3

## Online Resources

Digital resources on topics such as stress management during study and exams and other topics



# Library Activities



## Hosting Well-Being Events

Stress reduction activities at exam time, “Human Library” events etc.



## Arts and Crafts

Mindfulness colouring, jigsaw puzzles etc.



## Animal Therapy

“Dog therapy” sessions, mobile petting zoos etc.



# Evaluating Success



Staff Observation  
**87%**



General Library  
Survey  
**65%**



Measuring Service Use  
**30%**



Specific Survey after  
activities  
**13%**



National Student Survey  
**9%**



Other – E.g. Informal  
**17%**



No Evaluation  
**13%**

# "Whole Campus" Approach - Formal Partnerships with other support services (Brewster & Cox, 2023)

52%

Formally involved

39%

Informally involved

9%

Not involved

# Types of "whole campus" activities



86%

Campus Wide Activities



64%

Library Led Initiatives

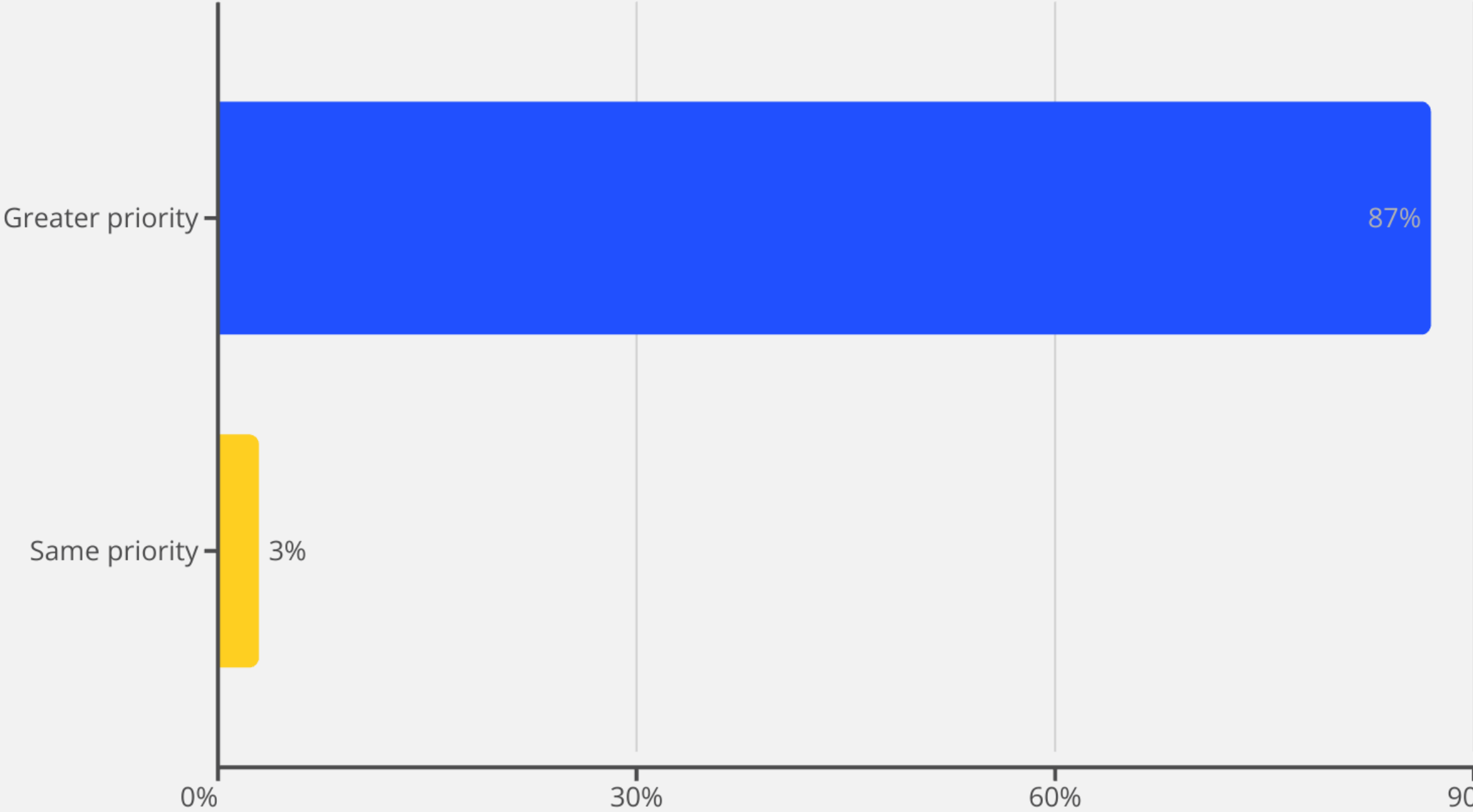


64%

Staff Training Events



# Response Post COVID-19





# New Initiatives Since Covid 19

*"We have acquired a CUBBIE (sensory space). We are looking at the physical space to see if we can make it more accessible"*

*"Focused on the library as being a place of quiet reflection...library courtyard with trees...connecting with nature.."*

*"Introduced well-being e-book collection, incorporated biophilic principles...launched a dedicated listening space"*

*"Made more resources online...introduced sensory furniture and rooms...pop up promotions on mental health and well-being in line with the Institution's mental health drives...noise cancelling headphones"*

*"Stress relief stations around exam time...mindful colouring pages...Update to the Live Wise Book Therapy collection ""*

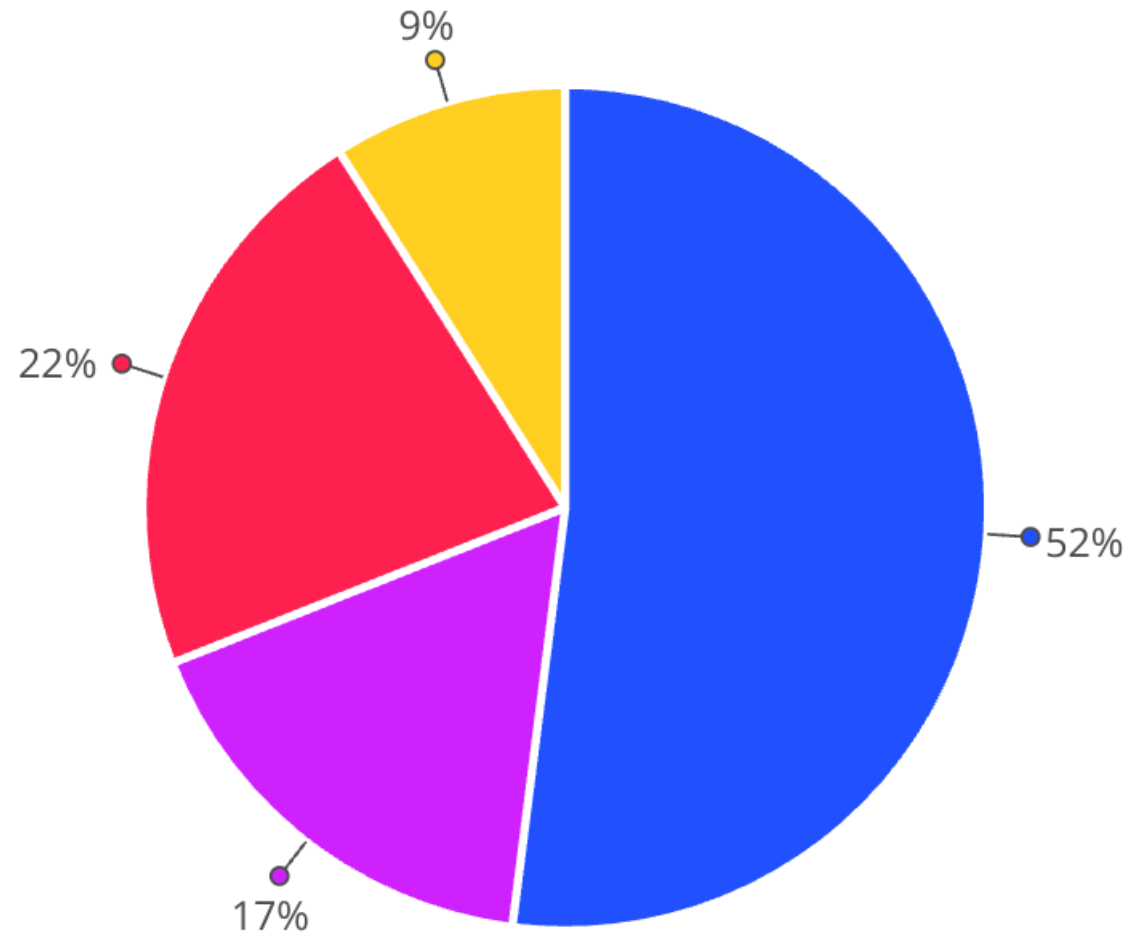
*"New wellness/sensory space, dedicated LGBTQ+ liaison librarian"*

*"Removed fines as a direct response to student cost of living implications...book swap carousels that promote reading for pleasure"*

*"Implemented a digital wayfinding system to reduce the stress of navigating physical spaces"*

*"The Library held a Human Library event with a range of speakers...[pertaining] to well-being and mental health"*

# Change of Library Space?



- 52% - Yes
- 22% - We are planning to make changes
- 17% - No
- 9% - We made changes before COVID 19

■ Yes

■ No

■ We are planning to make  
cha...

■ We made changes before the  
...

## Let's hear from you...



# Responses to open text questions

*"This is an area getting increasing attention during policy discussions and space reviews - we are focused on adapting our student spaces to be as welcoming and user friendly as possible"*

*"An increasingly important area and one that can have a transformative impact on the student experience"*

*"I think our Library places quite an emphasis on its role in supporting student mental health and well-being"*

*"As libraries are front-facing...[they] are well placed to support students, but there isn't always joined up thinking from the university on this...we rely on like minded individuals...which is very personality dependent"*

*"The library would benefit from a formalised approach to promoting well-being in a library context"*

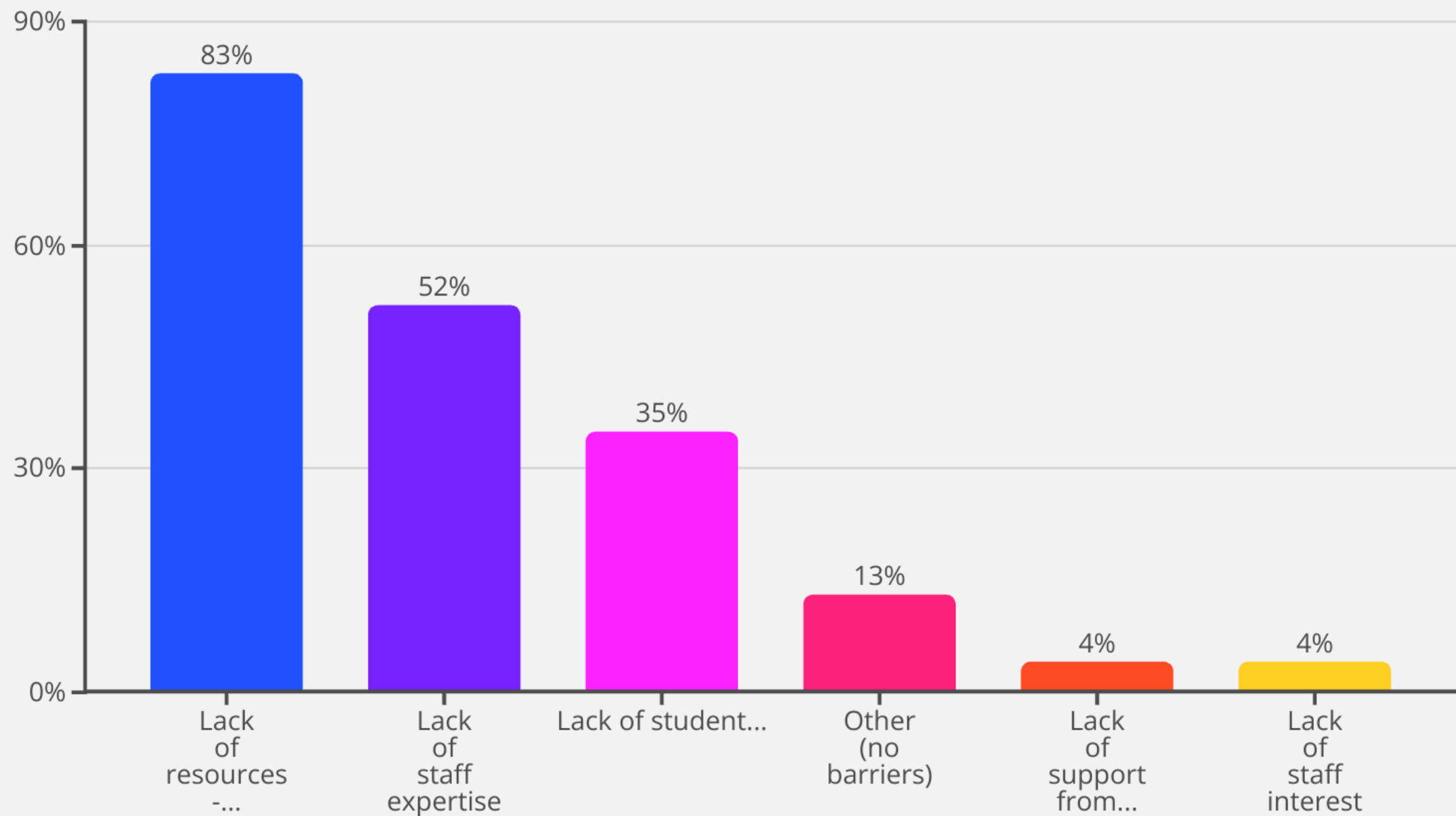
*"We have a student experience team under which mental health services exist. We are not trained to deal with student's mental health"*

*"I am not qualified and I have enough to deal with, with my own mental health and can't take on other peoples"*

*"It can be difficult to provide the service we want to due to staffing restrictions...we are also struggling with lack of space"*

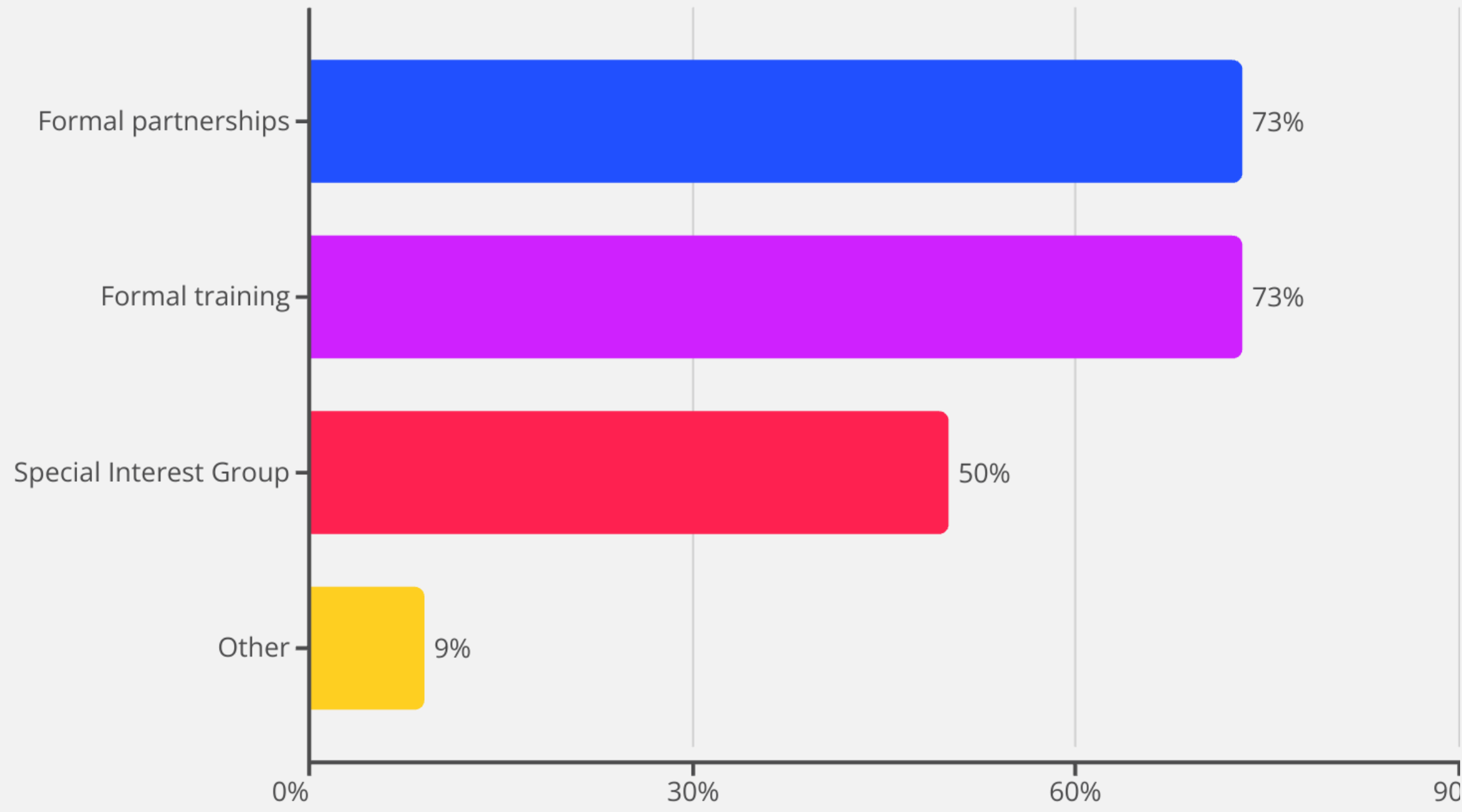
*"This survey has given much food for thought in terms of the range of well-being initiatives a library could provide"*

# Challenges to service provision





# Future Planning



# Recommendations

- **Library Policy - Strategic Plan**
- **Designated Coordinator**
- **Formal Training for Library Staff**
- **Community of Practice/Special Interest Group**



# Conclusion

- Academic Libraries in Ireland are enthusiastically providing multiple support services for student well-being
- A key driver is to align with institutional strategy
- The majority of libraries are involved either formally or informally with “whole campus” initiatives
- The COVID-19 pandemic led to a number of new initiatives for libraries, particularly the change of space
- Barriers to service provision include lack of time and resources
- Recommendations for future planning could include creating a Community of Practice Group and formal library training



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**Thank you for listening!**