Students' voices on access to and use of learning materials: South African experience
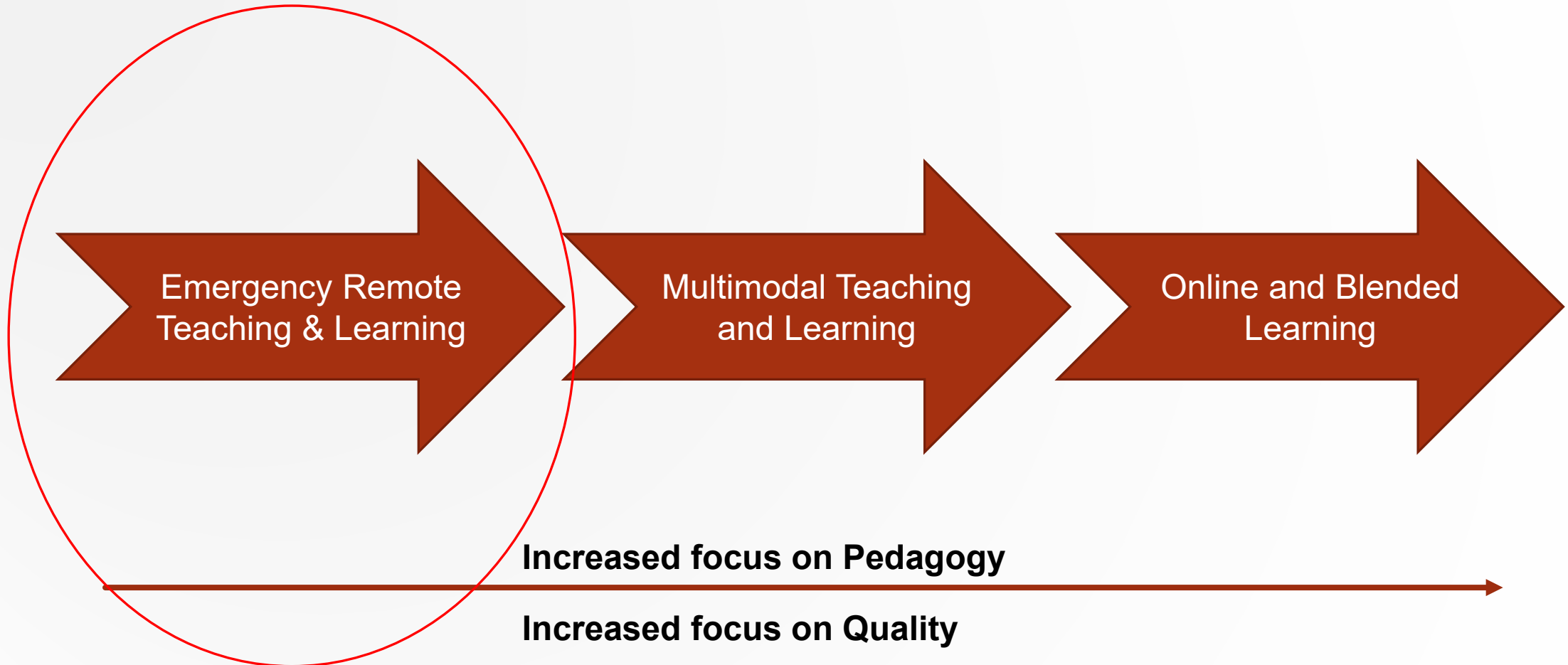
SAQAN/INQAAHE Webinar
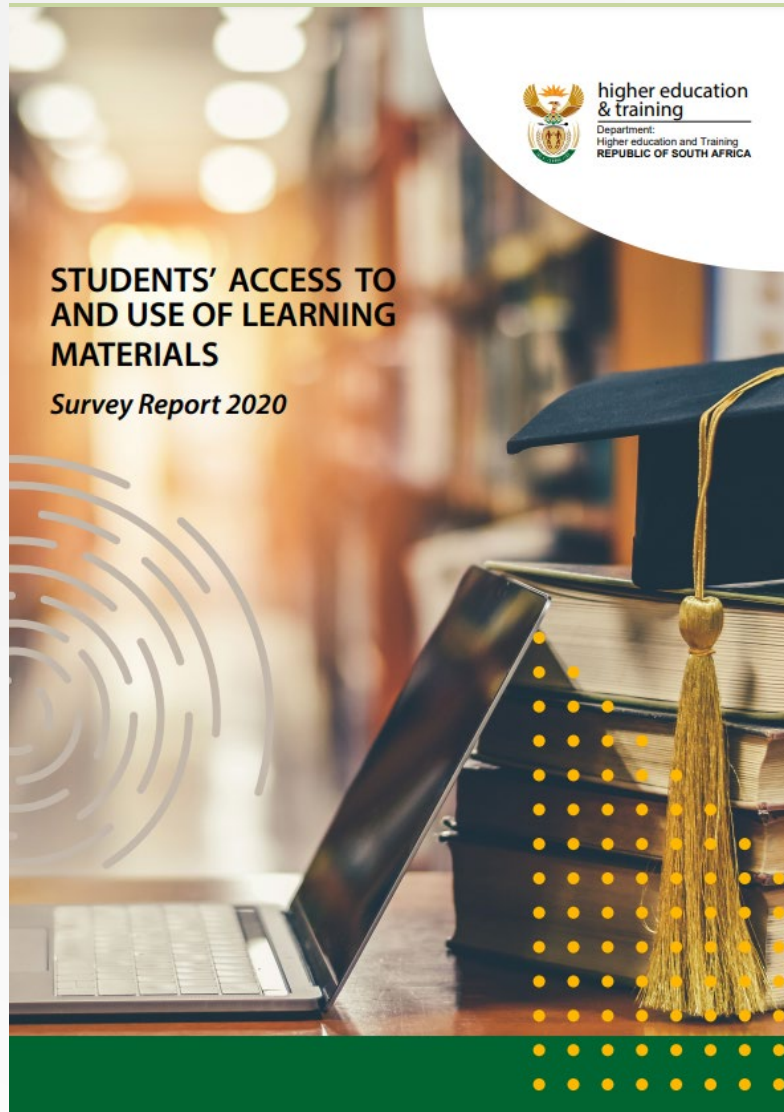
16 November 2022

COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Evolving towards online and blended learning on a greater scale

Emergency Remote Teaching & Learning → Multimodal Teaching and Learning → Online and Blended Learning

Increased focus on Pedagogy

Increased focus on Quality

The Students' Access To And Use Of Learning Materials (SAULM) Survey

STUDENTS' ACCESS TO AND USE OF LEARNING MATERIALS

Survey Report 2020

higher education & training

Department:
Higher education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

- ✓ **24** participating institutions

- ✓ **48,981** respondents (5% of sector;

- ✓ 69% NSFAS students – 6% of sector);

- ✓ **3,672** pages of qualitative data

https://www.usaf.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DHET_SAULM-Report-2020.pdf

Access to devices

Please indicate which devices you own and use to engage with your studies when you are off-campus.

Device	NSFAS	Not NSFAS
Desktop computer	2%	6%
Laptop	51%	69%
Tablet	5%	10%
Smartphone	90%	89%
Other	1%	1%
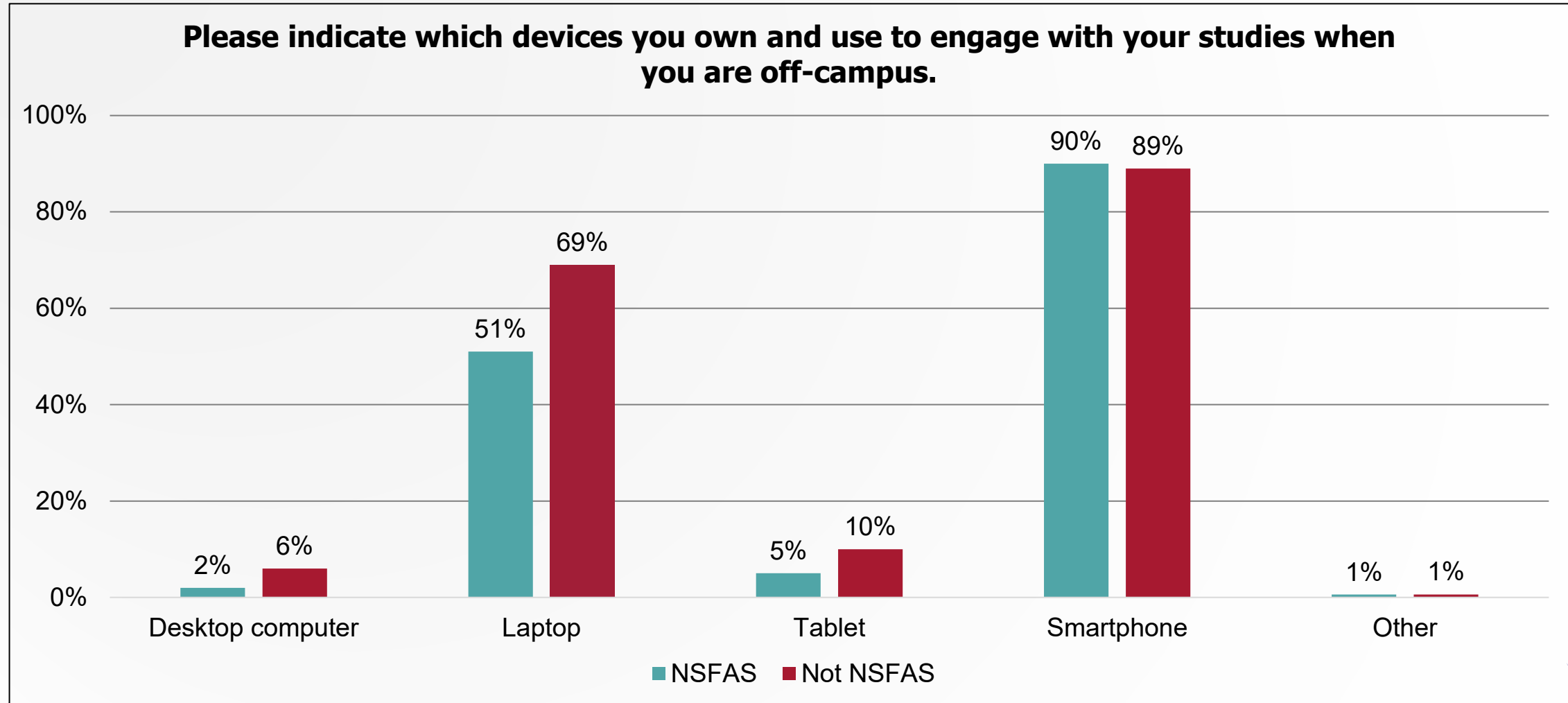
Access to devices: Student voices

My smartphone is too old. It sometimes works slowly

*Using a very old device, it is a disadvantage as it struggles with updated versions of programmes.*

My laptop froze when I was busy with tests and assignment. I had two test and an assignment due in one day.

It is very too difficult to juggle four modules using one device (smartphone). Most of the times, I have to write two tests on the same day and it gets quite nerve wracking as I need to make sure that my device is fully functioning and that it won't disappoint.

Access to data

How did you access the data you used for the online activities?
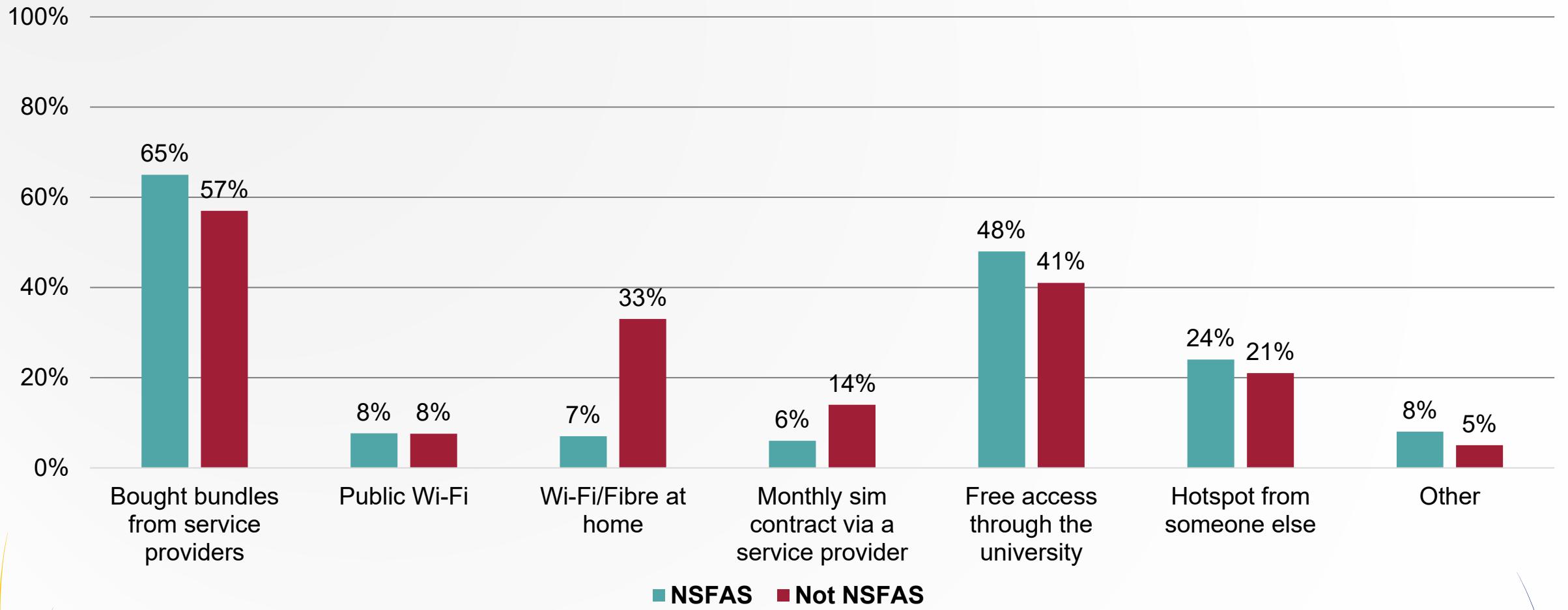
Students' voices on data access

It takes up A LOT of data - which I simply can't afford - resulting that I fall behind with work.
Mobile data provided by university being more at night than day when most learning activities take place during the day.

The daily data it's depleted so quickly, it's not enough to use it to participate in daily activities such as lectures on teams etc.

The data we are provided with does help to a certain extent, but it doesn't last over two weeks and we end up having to stay up all day and all nightconsecutively to try and catch-up using night data.

The 10 GB doesn't last me for a month. I end up buying expensive data to submit, stay connected and updated.

CHE
COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Access to infrastructure and conducive learning environment
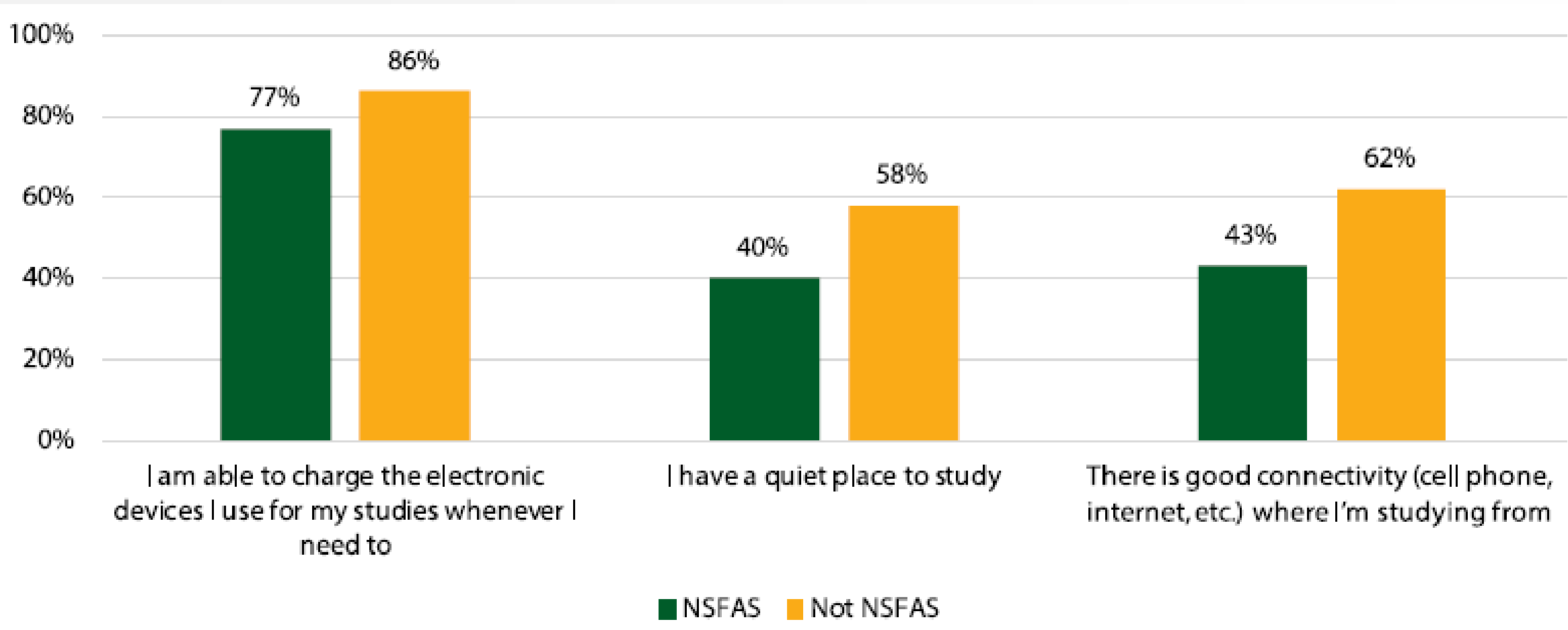
Student voices on access to infrastructure and conducive learning spaces

The area where I'm residing network connectivity is so bad that the data given by NSFAS becomes virtually useless. If the network provider can strengthen network coverage.

There is no internet so we can't access technology.

Sometimes I could not get into a lesson because my device was giving me problems with the network. It would load forever until the class is done and past that.

70% of the time we don't have electricity around my village

When I have a class and my mom wants me to do something else. I'm the first person to go to varsity at home so they don't understand somethings.

I'm from a township and during the day there is more activities taking place. I also share a room with family members. To work effectively I should wait for them to sleep or go to the nearest hall.
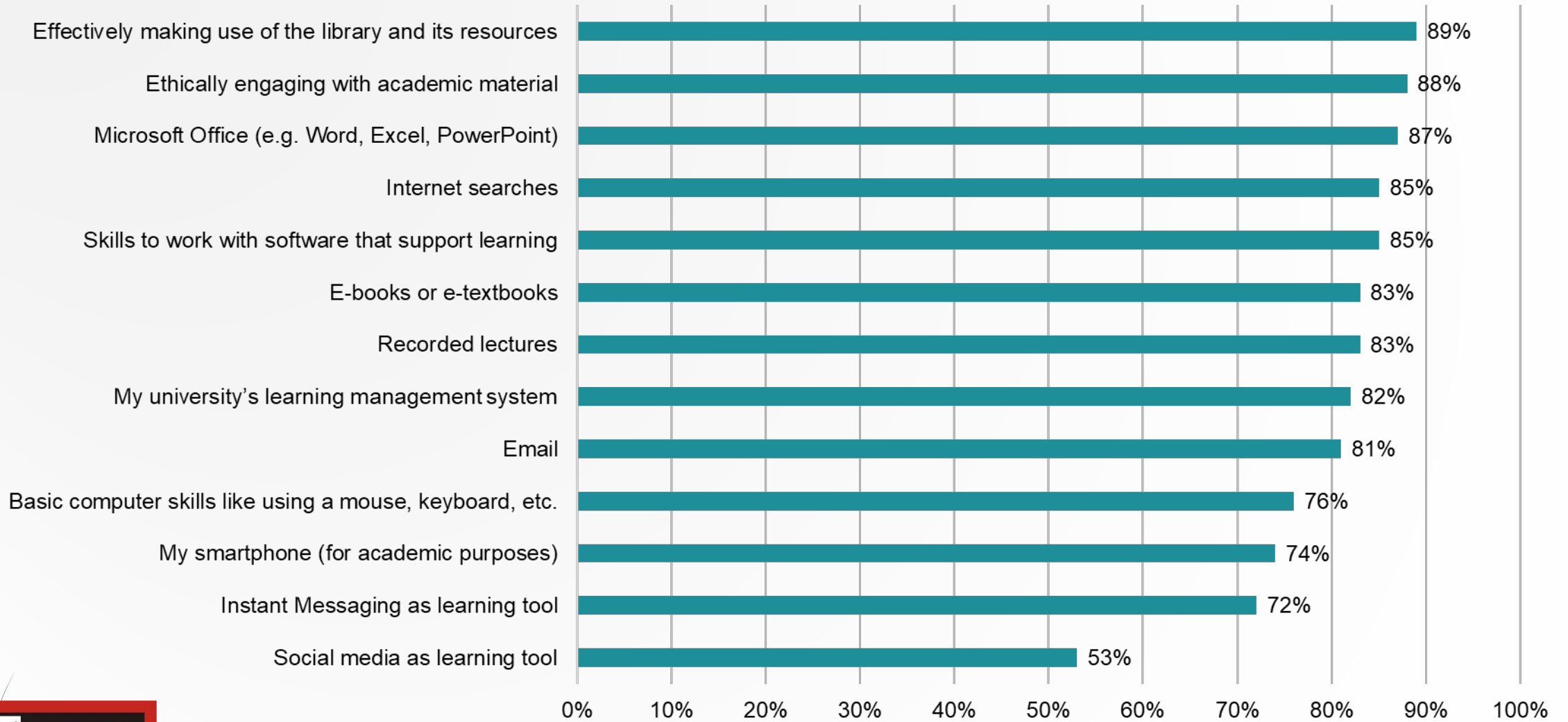
CHE
COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Ability to use technology

When I started University, I was well prepared to use technology needed in my modules/courses.
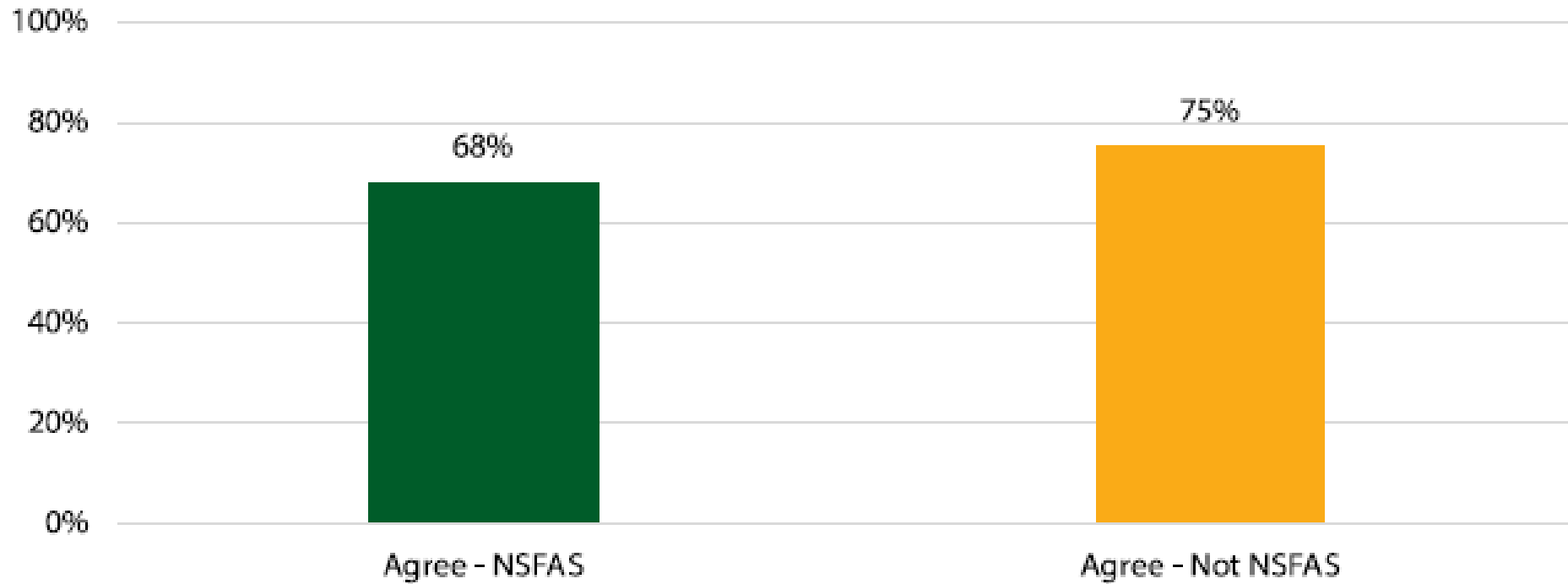
Digital Skills Capacity Development Needs

I would be a more successful student if I were better trained in:

Category	Percentage
Effectively making use of the library and its resources	89%
Ethically engaging with academic material	88%
Microsoft Office (e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint)	87%
Internet searches	85%
Skills to work with software that support learning	85%
E-books or e-textbooks	83%
Recorded lectures	83%
My university's learning management system	82%
Email	81%
Basic computer skills like using a mouse, keyboard, etc.	76%
My smartphone (for academic purposes)	74%
Instant Messaging as learning tool	72%
Social media as learning tool	53%

11

Students' reflections on digital skills

It's very challenging and frustrating at times when you don't know how to use technology.

Lack of knowledge when it comes to using online resources.

I don't always complete my tests on time because of my typing speed. I was a slow typer and it was my first time using a laptop.
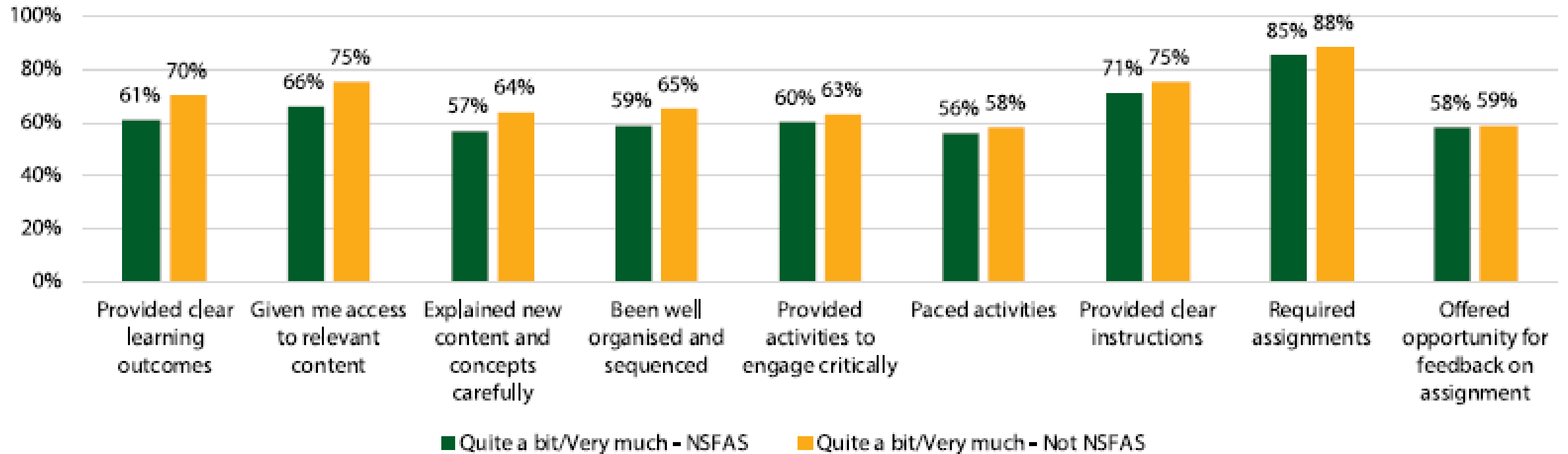
Accessing resources through the library was not easy because it redirected a lot and there was just a lot of processes involved. Sometimes it did not just take you directly to where you wanted to go..

Lack of technical support from university administration staff.

CHE
COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Quality of remote learning and teaching

In general, to what extent have the remote learning materials:

Legend: Quite a bit/Very much – NSFAS (green); Quite a bit/Very much – Not NSFAS (orange)

Category	Quite a bit/Very much – NSFAS	Quite a bit/Very much – Not NSFAS
Provided clear learning outcomes	61%	70%
Given me access to relevant content	66%	75%
Explained new content and concepts carefully	57%	64%
Been well organised and sequenced	59%	65%
Provided activities to engage critically	60%	63%
Paced activities	56%	58%
Provided clear instructions	71%	75%
Required assignments	85%	88%
Offered opportunity for feedback on assignment	58%	59%

COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Students' voices on quality learning

There is no standard for performance from lecturers. No two lecturers have adapted in the same way, and some have done so extremely poorly. It is rather difficult to keep up with all the different ways classes are handled.

Learning new skills, new stuff. For example; Zoom meetings, Microsoft Teams. Wow we learnt a lot.

I'm now able to access information on different platforms, and sharing big files with my mates through different platforms and online videos has played a role for us to understand, it's unlike a physical contact classroom.

Sometimes there has been a lack of explanation or very vague explanation whereas when you are in a lecture you can ask your lecturer as you go through the work instead of now having to put your work on hold and wait to hear back from your lecturers.

The communication barrier between the students and the lecturers; the lag time creates problems when students seek urgent answers and some lecturers are so busy that they never even respond to students' questions.

CHE
COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Summary of main findings

- Basic learning infrastructure and equipmemt is crucial (this includes access to a stable network and internet, data and devices)

- Flexible content delivery platform(s) should be considered. This includes the use of textbooks, institutionally developed materials, as well as Open Education Resources (OERs) across a range of devices and aligned with universal design for learning principles.

- Use the crises to reimagine learning and teaching. Students and institutions have learned valuable lessons about the benefits a more technology-infused learning and teaching environment can bring.

- Reconceptualising quality assurance. Student responses point to an opportunity to improve the quality of university education by creating enriching learning and teaching environments.

- Enable digital skills for students and the ethical use of digital resources.

- Enhanced financial aid. Existing support for students needs to continue, and innovative solutions for the "missing middle" will be vital to ensuring that all students can participate in a new learning and teaching environment.

THANK YOU