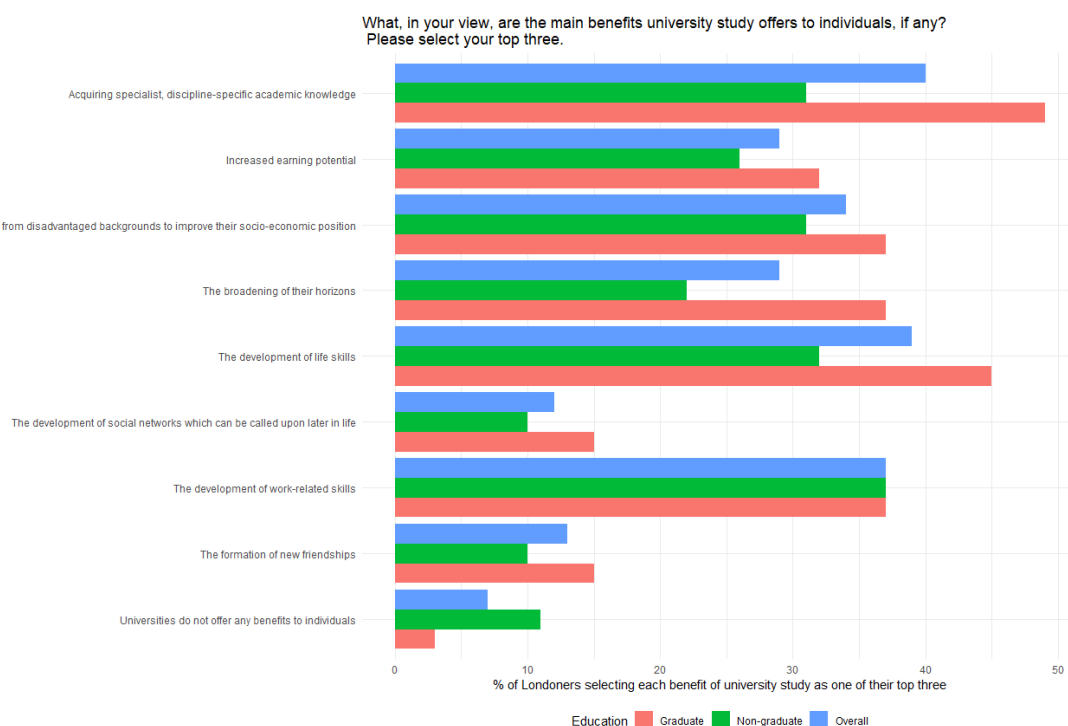


Londoners believe universities benefit both students and society

A new poll conducted by the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary University of London shows that there is a clear consensus among the vast majority of Londoners – regardless of whether they themselves have attended university – that universities offer important benefits both to the individuals that attend these institutions and to society more generally. Just 7 per cent of Londoners think that studying at university offers no benefits to individuals and only 9 per cent believe universities offer no benefits to society.

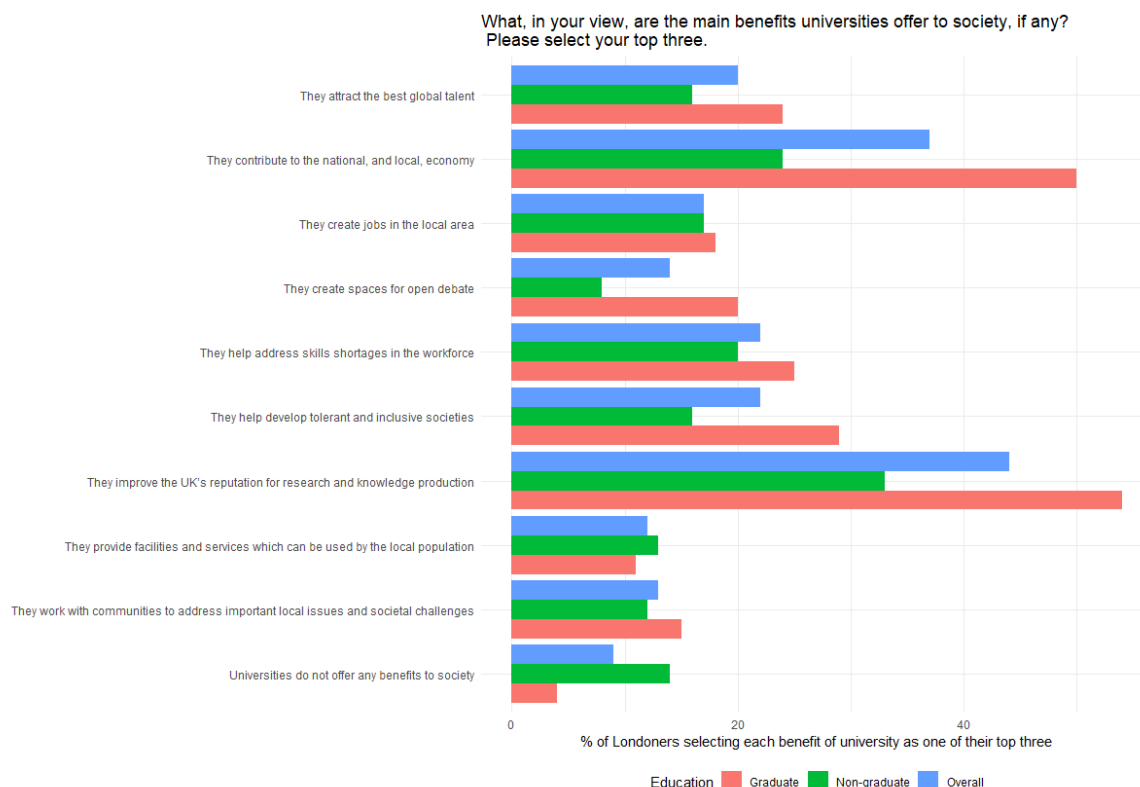
It remains the case, however, that university graduates are somewhat more optimistic about the role of universities than their non-graduate counterparts (see the figures below). While 11 per cent of Londoners who do not possess university degrees believe that studying at university offers no benefits to individuals, this figure drops to just 3 per cent among university graduates. Similarly, while 14 per cent of Londoners who have not studied at university say universities offer no benefits to society, just 4 per cent of those who have attended university say the same.



The top three benefits university study offers to individuals, according to Londoners, are that it helps them to acquire specialist, discipline-specific academic knowledge (40 per cent said this), that it helps them to develop life skills (39 per cent) and it helps them to develop work-related skills (37 per cent). It is also striking that Londoners clearly believe universities can act as vehicles for social mobility with 34 per cent of Londoners believing that one of the main benefits of university study is that it can help people from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their socio-economic position.

Our polling reveals a strong focus on the economic benefits brought about by universities. Three of the top four main benefits universities offer to society, according to Londoners,

can be defined in economic terms; with 44 per cent of Londoners saying that universities improve the UK’s reputation for research and knowledge production; 37 per cent saying that universities contribute to the national and local economy; and 22 per cent saying that universities help to address skills shortages in the workforce. 22 per cent of Londoners also believe that universities play a role in helping to develop more tolerant and inclusive societies.



We do observe some important differences in opinions according to Londoners’ educational backgrounds. Londoners with university degrees are much more likely to say that one of the main benefits university study offers to individuals is the acquisition of specialist, discipline-specific, academic knowledge than are those without such qualifications. On the other hand, Londoners who have not studied at university are somewhat more likely than those who have to claim that one of the main benefits universities offer to society is that they can provide facilities and services for use by their local populations.

Considering the effects of studying at university on individuals more broadly, our latest poll also finds that 67 per cent of Londoners think that the experience of university study generally changes individuals’ attitudes and values. Of those Londoners who think this is the case:

- 43 per cent believe the experience of studying at university makes individuals more socially liberal;
- 24 per cent believe the experience of studying at university makes individuals more economically left-leaning;

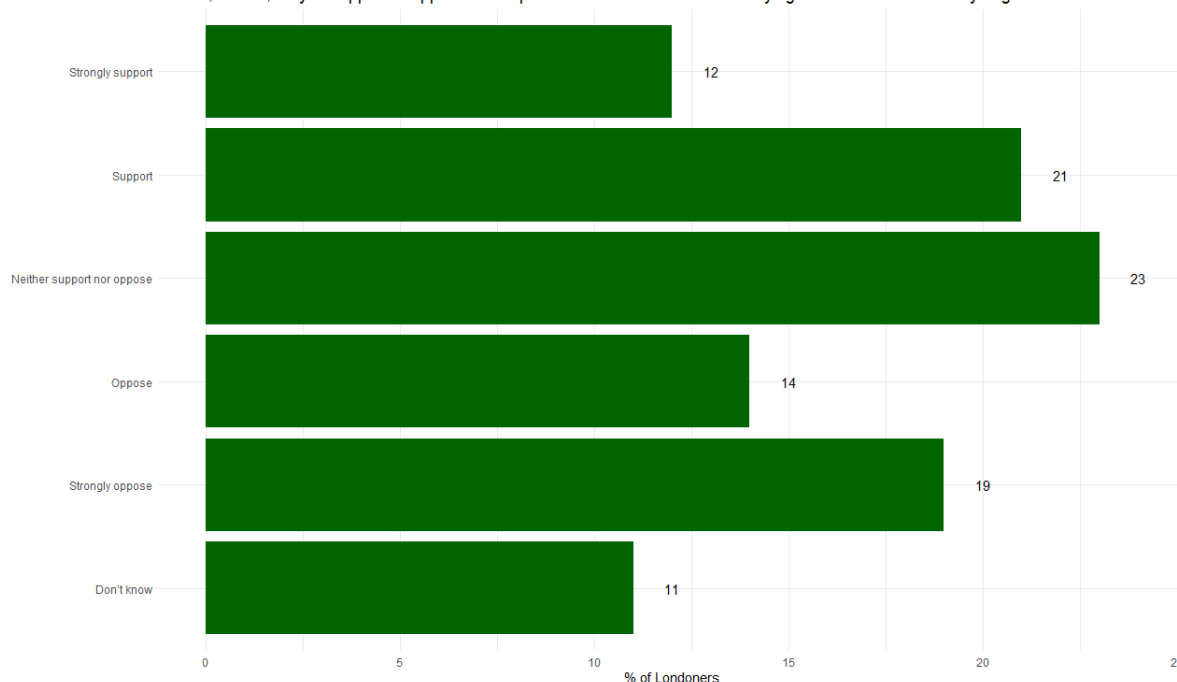
- 24 per cent believe the experience of studying at university makes individuals more pro-EU;
- 7 per cent believe the experience of studying at university makes individuals more socially conservative;
- 7 per cent believe the experience of studying at university makes individuals more economically right-leaning;
- 1 per cent believe the experience of studying at university makes individuals more anti-EU;
- and 57 per cent believe the experience of studying at university changes individuals' attitudes and values in other ways

Our findings on the effect of university study on economic attitudes are particularly striking. While most academic evidence suggests that the experience of studying at university, on average, moves individuals' economic attitudes toward the right (see [Scott, 2022](#) and [Simon, 2022](#) for evidence of this in the British context), we see that a considerably larger proportion of Londoners think that the experience of studying at university shifts economic attitudes to the left (24 per cent) rather than to the right (7 per cent). It appears there is a considerable degree of public misunderstanding around the effects of studying at university on our economic attitudes.

Finally, our recent polling also sheds interesting light on Rishi Sunak's plans to cap the number of students studying for 'low value' university degrees, which is set to come into effect in the 2024/2025 academic year. This policy proposed that limits should be imposed on courses where a low proportion of graduates get a 'professional' job, study a postgraduate qualification, or start a business after leaving university. The results suggest this promises to be a divisive policy.

The figure below shows that although 33 per cent of Londoners support Sunak's proposal (12 per cent strongly support and 21 per cent support), 33 per cent oppose it (14 per cent oppose and 19 per cent strongly oppose) while a further 34 per cent either don't know how they feel about this policy, or neither support nor oppose it.

Rishi Sunak has recently announced plans to cap the number of students studying for 'low-value' university degrees, which will come into effect in the 2024/2025 academic year. Limits will be imposed on courses where a low proportion of graduates get a 'professional' job, study a postgraduate qualification or start a business after leaving university. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose this cap on the number of students studying for 'low-value' university degrees?



Support for capping the number of students studying for 'low value' degrees is highest among older Londoners, and those who voted Conservative in the 2019 general election. While 54 per cent of Londoners who voted Conservative in 2019 support this policy, just 25 per cent and 34 per cent of 2019 Labour and Liberal Democrat voters, respectively, report doing so.

The age gap in support for this policy is also pronounced: just 28 per cent of the youngest Londoners (those aged 18-24) supporting the policy compared to 51 per cent of the oldest Londoners (those aged 65+).

Data tables are available here: [QMUL London Tabs Oct23 Part2.xls \(live.com\)](#)

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from fieldwork conducted by YouGov Plc for the Mile End Institute (which should be credited as the commissioner and designer of the survey). Fieldwork was conducted online between 12th – 17th October 2023. Total sample size was 1,066 adults living in inner and outer London. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults living in London (aged 18+). YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council and abide by their rules.