Supporting Digital Reading

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Education Lead
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Overview

- Introduction to the project
- Approach/methodology
- Findings from staff/student survey
- Recommendations
- Additional outcomes
- Next steps in the project
- Further reading

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Definitions

- **Online Learning:** learning that is conducted and/or materials that are delivered via online spaces
- **Digital Reading:** Reading in an electronic text whether online or offline; similarly, it is distinct from *Digital Literacy*
- **Active Reading**: the practice of deep engagement with a text using techniques of annotating, responding, questioning, summarising, and sharing.
- **Critical Reading**, reading beyond the surface of the content, applying deep focus beyond the words on the page

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Some questions for you throughout this talk...

1. How much support does the university provide to students to develop their reading practice?

2. What content does institutional reading support cover? e.g. deep reading, skim reading, note taking, critical reading

3. What from your perspective are the core reading skills we as a sector should prioritise with our students?

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Project Overview

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Active Online Reading

- Collaboratively funded project between QAA and Talis
- Project led by UCL, Nottingham, University of Lincoln
- Exploring the practices, structures and methodologies used to enhance digital reading
- Year long project, concluding May 2022
- Presenting interim survey findings today

*"Students' reading practices have transformed over the past 20 years, with the increasing digitisation of resources, the emergence and then ubiquity of virtual learning environments, and the widespread use of mobile devices. **The pandemic has accelerated such developments**, with the rapid roll-out of online and blended learning. Yet **we know strikingly little about how students read online, how this relates to their overall learning, and which pedagogic strategies are effective**.*

Professor Jamie Wood. Project Lead, University of Lincoln

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Methodology

- **Academic/student survey (mixed methods)**
- Collaborative workshops with SEDA
- Longitudinal study; thematic/sentiment analysis of annotation activity
- Autoethnographic reflections from student researchers
- Comprehensive literature review
- Focus groups with staff/students
- Case Studies; digital reading practice

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Outputs

- Case studies and workable activities
- Reading list
- Blog posts from student researchers
- Project findings, report
- Workshop/framework for local adoption

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Student researchers

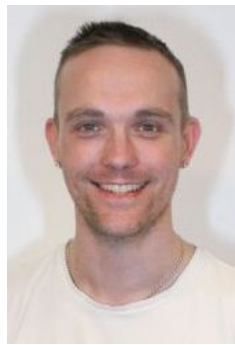Rachel: UCL
Catherine: Lincoln
Lee: Salford
Linh: Sheffield Hallam
Annabelle: Lincoln
Hannah: Sheffield Hallam
Samantha: Lincoln
Stefan: Nottingham
Anna: Nottingham

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Staff/Student Survey

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Academic Responses

- 69 Responses
- 38 institutions, international responses
- Academic/Library/Curriculum Development/Researcher roles
- 75% Humanities courses
- 60% Responses not Talis customers
- 28% respondent institutions using Talis Elevate

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In general, how would you describe the effectiveness of students' academic reading practices (online and offline)?

Positive (8-10)
11.6%
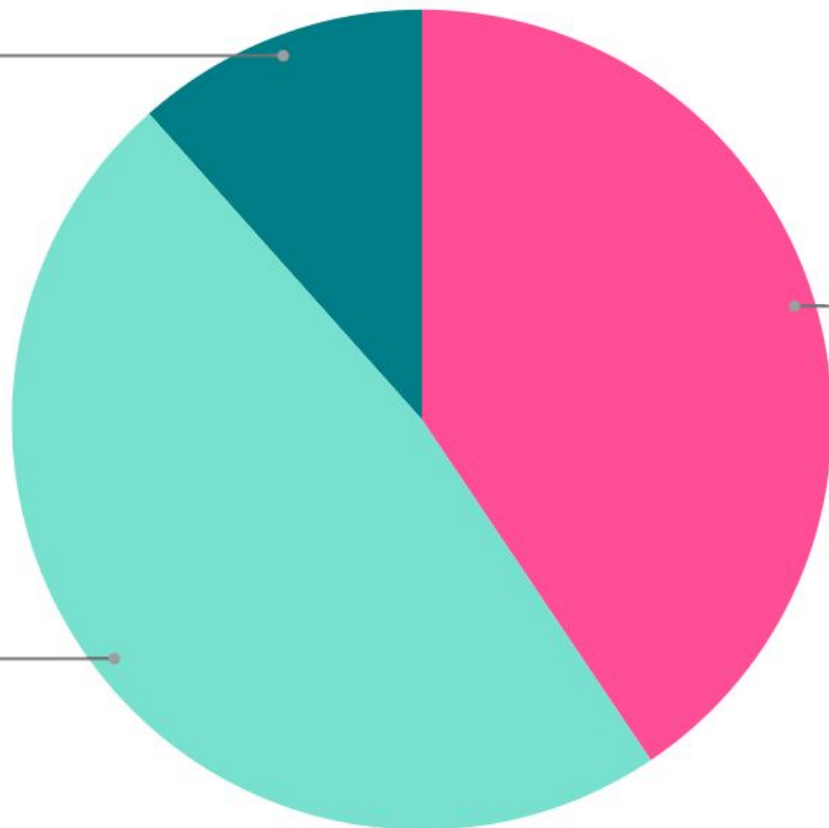
Negative (1-3)
40.6%

Neutral (4-7)
47.8%

In general, how would you describe the effectiveness of students' academic reading practices (online and offline)?

- Academic language a barrier for many
- Mixed perception on improvement through digital reading
- Support lacking on key reading skills within institutions
- Priority reading practice (Skim over deep)

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"

Students often struggle with academic reading

in particular, unfamiliar vocabulary or theories can be a big barrier for less confident students, who do not have the skill or confidence to get the gist of a work (or read around unfamiliar material) and then go back and tackle questions or issues with the reading."

Librarian, UK

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In general, how would you describe the effectiveness of students' academic reading practices (online and offline)?

- Intrinsic motivation seen as the most important factor
- Transition to HE seen as critical point: Recognition from many this improves over time
- Social media perceived to impact approach to reading negatively

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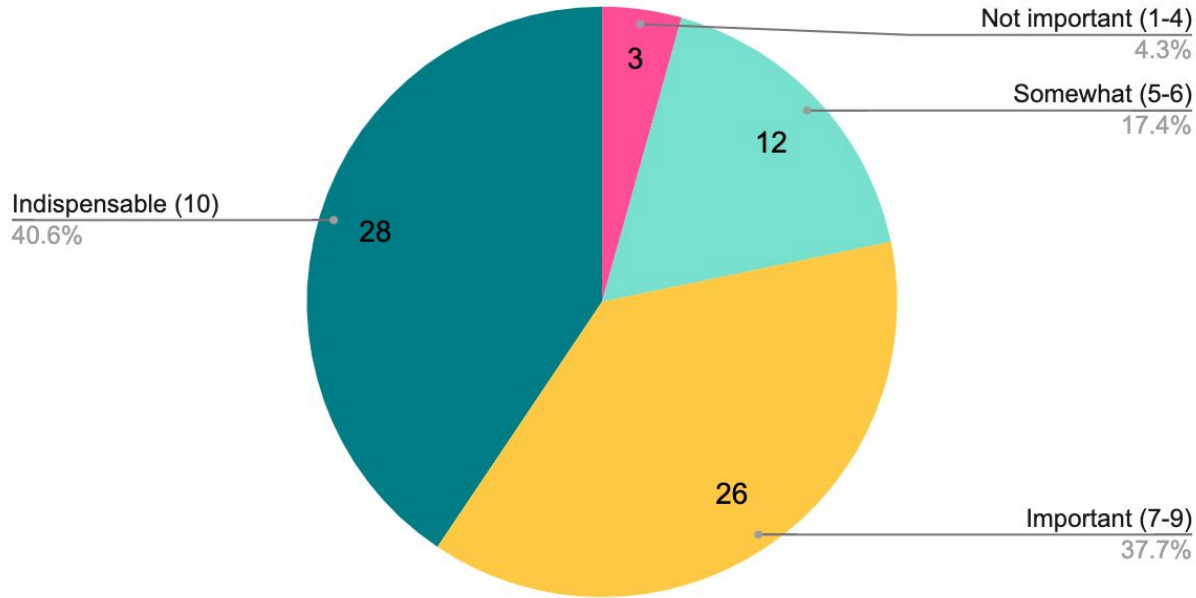# "Once students know what they are supposed to read, for when,

and have been given some grounding of the different reading skills required at University, I've generally found a good rate of engagement for most, with the usual candidates not engaging. The biggest problems I encounter are that there seems to be very little tenacity or resourcefulness: if PDFs aren't emailed to them or precisely where they expect them to be, that is often used as an excuse for not having read it."

Associate Professor, Arts/Creative Industries, UK

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What content does institutional reading support cover?
e.g. deep reading, skim reading, note taking, critical reading

How important is online reading to students' learning in your discipline?

- Not important (1-4) 4.3% — 3
- Somewhat (5-6) 17.4% — 12
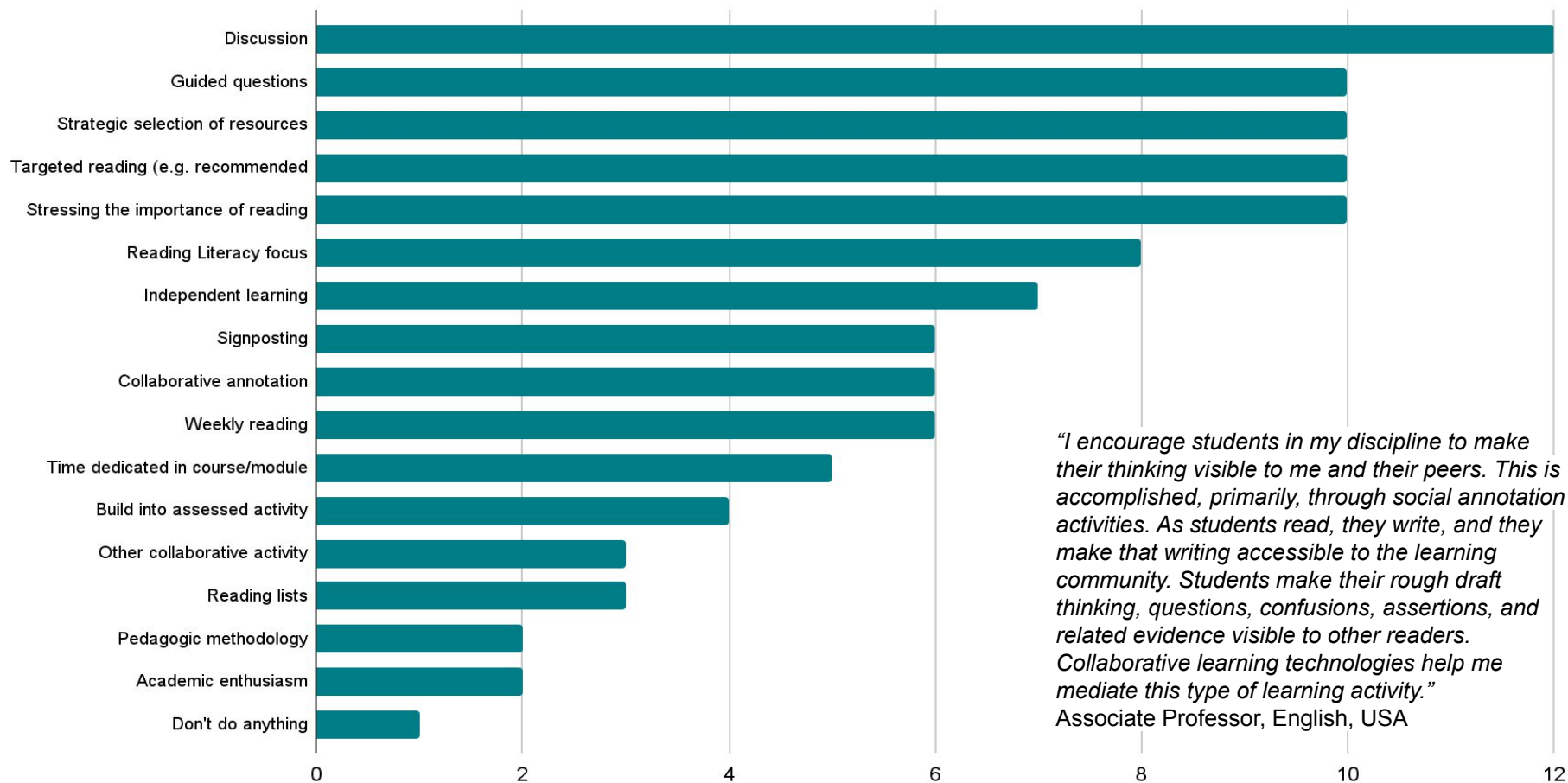- Indispensable (10) 40.6% — 28
- Important (7-9) 37.7% — 26

History is about in the creation of historical arguments by reading primary sources and past historical arguments about these sources and events in the past. Reading is at the core of the discipline.
Associate Professor, History, University of Nottingham

"Campus Based reading is increasingly done online (esp since 2020). All readings are available electronically, and I suspect that only a minority of students download readings or print them out. The library collection still gets used though, especially for assignments (which is when much of the reading gets done)"
Associate Professor, History, Leicester

How do you encourage reading?

Chart showing responses to "How do you encourage reading?":

- Discussion: 12
- Guided questions: 10
- Strategic selection of resources: 10
- Targeted reading (e.g. recommended: 10
- Stressing the importance of reading: 10
- Reading Literacy focus: 8
- Independent learning: 7
- Signposting: 6
- Collaborative annotation: 6
- Weekly reading: 6
- Time dedicated in course/module: 5
- Build into assessed activity: 4
- Other collaborative activity: 3
- Reading lists: 3
- Pedagogic methodology: 2
- Academic enthusiasm: 2
- Don't do anything: 1

"I encourage students in my discipline to make their thinking visible to me and their peers. This is accomplished, primarily, through social annotation activities. As students read, they write, and they make that writing accessible to the learning community. Students make their rough draft thinking, questions, confusions, assertions, and related evidence visible to other readers. Collaborative learning technologies help me mediate this type of learning activity."
Associate Professor, English, USA

Perceived challenges around digital reading

1. Lack of core skills (information/digital/critical)
2. Distraction/Concentration
3. Lack of support/guidance
4. General reading challenges
5. Screen fatigue
6. Impact of social media
7. Device ownership and Digital poverty
8. Lack of time management
9. Access/availability of resources
10. Preference over print
11. Learning disabilities
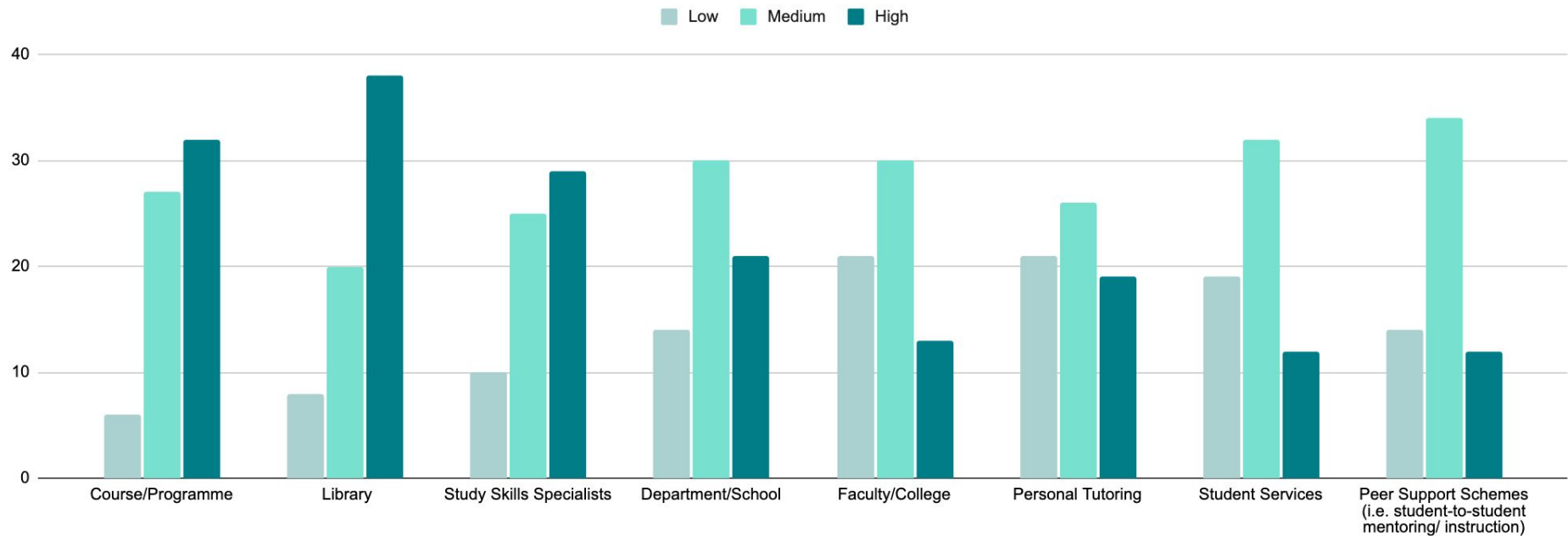
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Perceived challenges around digital reading

"Top three:
1. Reading to then synthesize among diverse academic sources and perspectives
2. Reading to correctly attribute sources, identify misinformation, substantiate claims
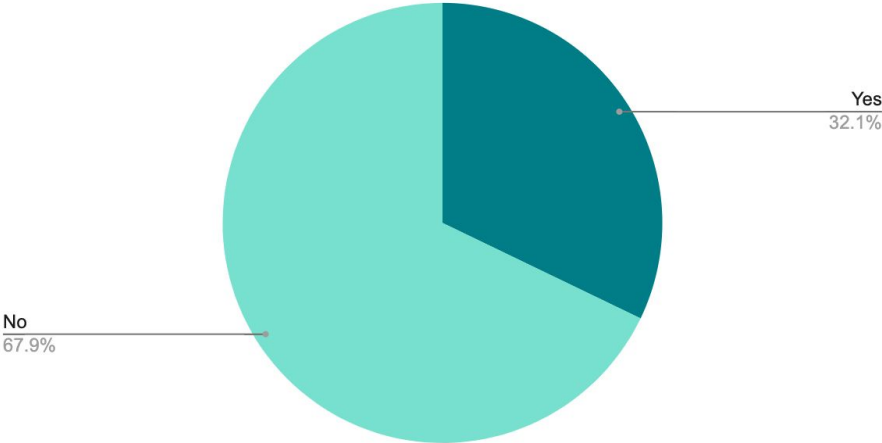3. Reading to accurately represent contrary evidence to a claim"
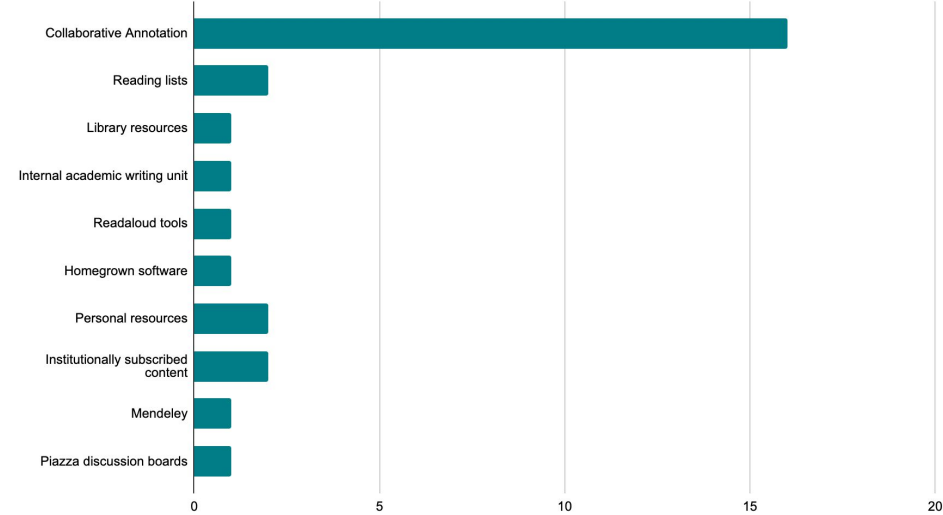
Associate Professor, English, USA

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"How important are the following parts of your institution in developing your students' skills in academic reading (grouped)

Legend: Low, Medium, High

Have you found any resources, platforms or tools particularly effective in helping to develop students' online reading?

Yes
32.1%

No
67.9%

If yes, what do you use?

Collaborative Annotation	
Reading lists	
Library resources	
Internal academic writing unit	
Readaloud tools	
Homegrown software	
Personal resources	
Institutionally subscribed content	
Mendeley	
Piazza discussion boards	

0   5   10   15   20

60% Responses not Talis users
72% institutions not using Talis Elevate

If you use Collaborative Annotation tools, what do you use?

Hypothesis
6.7%

Perusall
20.0%
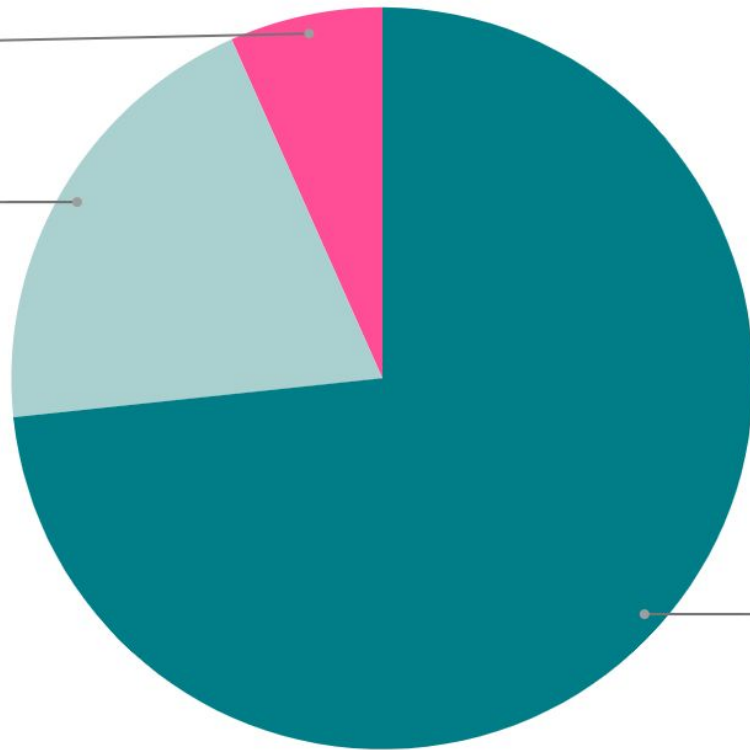
Talis Elevate
73.3%

"I use Talis elevate to help students take notes and reflect on what they read. In class, I run exercises where we draw mind maps to define unfamiliar terminology. I have recently been experimenting with asking students to play 'academic pictionary'--to define a scholarly word or phrase by drawing a textless picture or cartoon that shows what it means. Everyone seems to get a laugh out of it and it seems like it helps normalise the process of working out what something means."

Librarian, UK University

How much time do you think students typically spend reading for their modules a week (in hours)?

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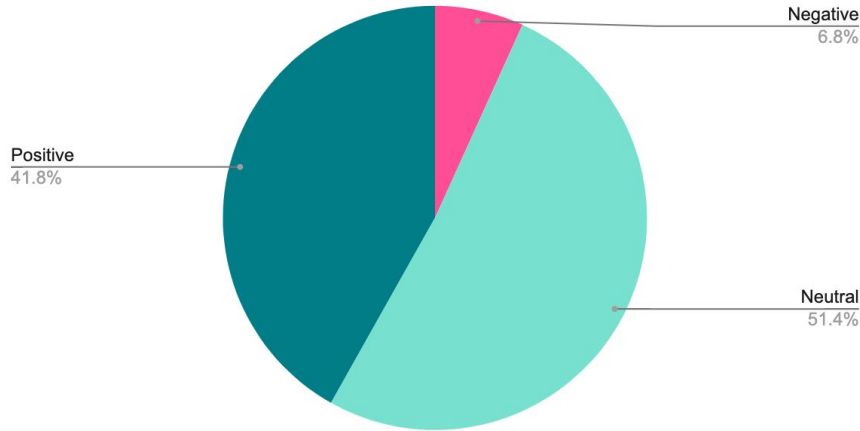
Demographic information

- 362 respondents
- 56% UK Universities
- 15.8% (53) self-identified as having a disability

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Student confidence with reading

How would you describe your confidence with reading for studies (online or offline)?
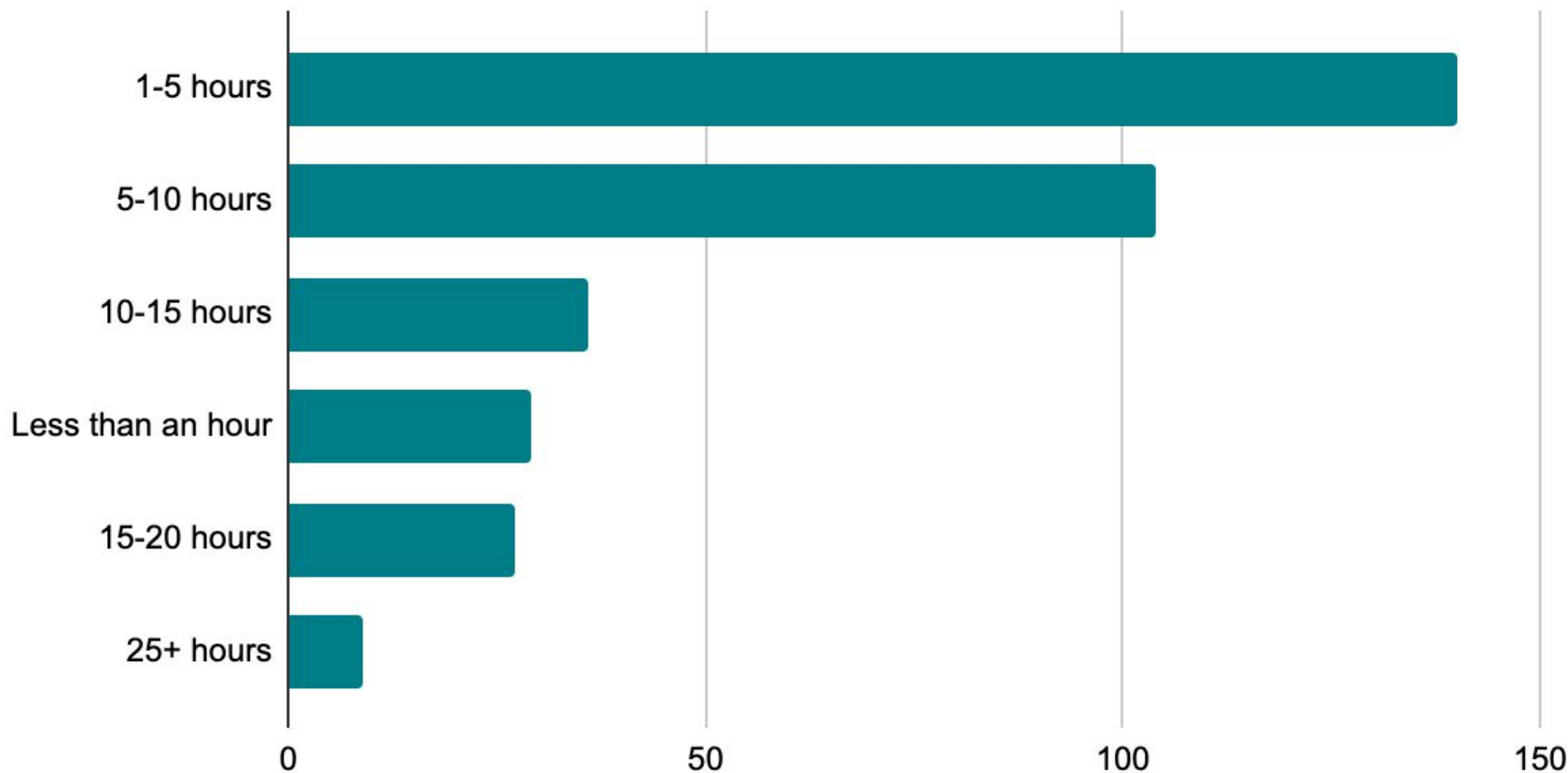

Negative
6.8%

Positive
41.8%

Neutral
51.4%

Staff perceptions of capability

In general, how would you describe the effectiveness of students' academic reading practices (online and offline)?

Positive (8-10)
11.6%

Negative (1-3)
40.6%

Neutral (4-7)
47.8%
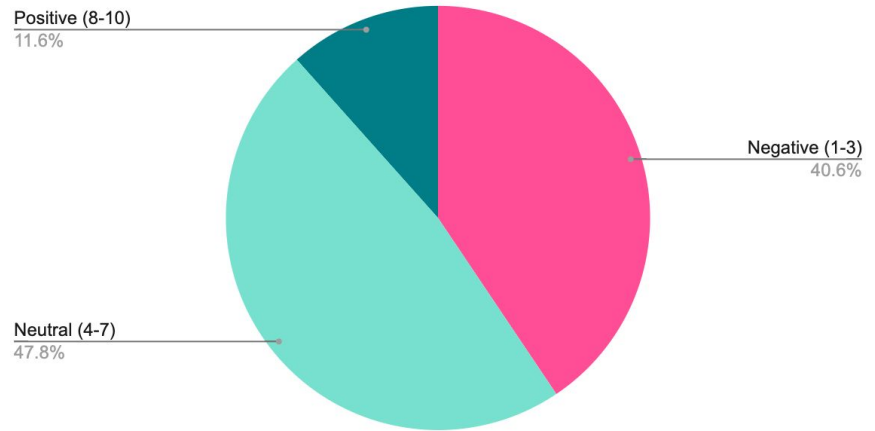
How much time do you spend reading (online and offline) in preparation for all of your classes each week during term time?
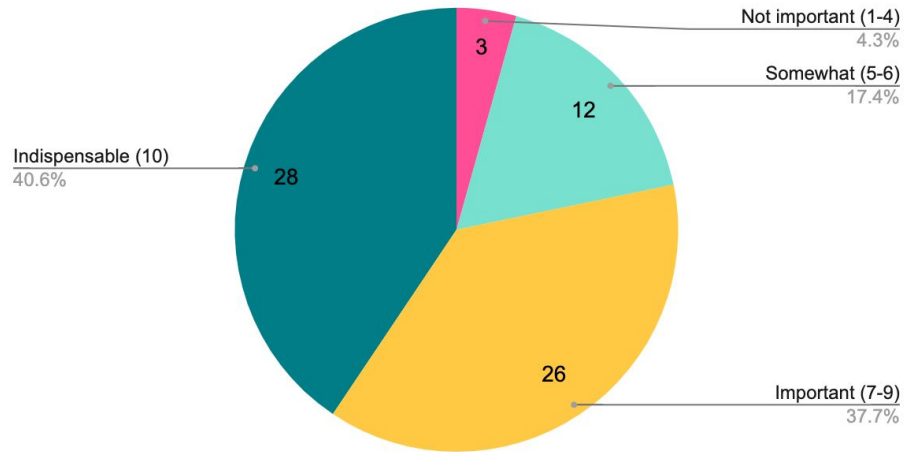
What from your perspective are the core reading skills we as a sector should prioritise with our students?

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# To what extent has your programme of study improved your ability to read online for your studies?

A small amount
18.5%

60

A lot
31.1%

101

164

Somewhat
50.5%
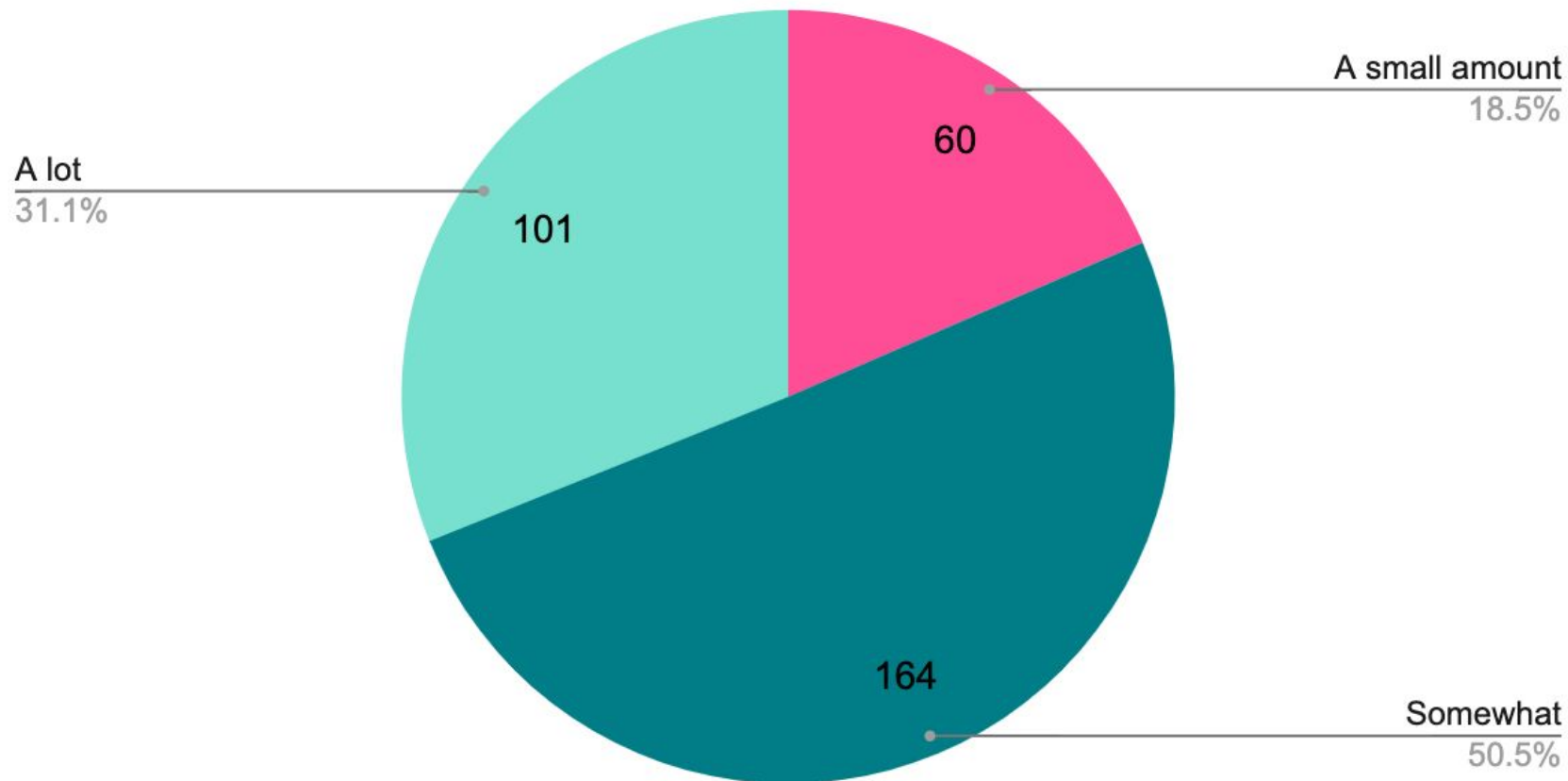
Academic importance

Student perception of focus

How important is online reading to students' learning in your discipline?

Not important (1-4)
4.3%

Somewhat (5-6)
17.4%

3

12

Indispensable (10)
40.6%

28

26

Important (7-9)
37.7%

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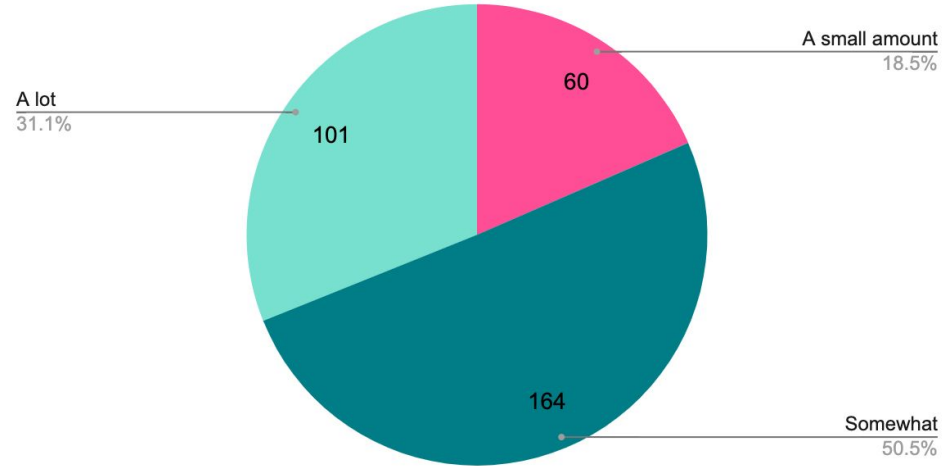
What sort of training, support or guidance have you received to develop your reading skills (online and offline) at university? (select all that apply)
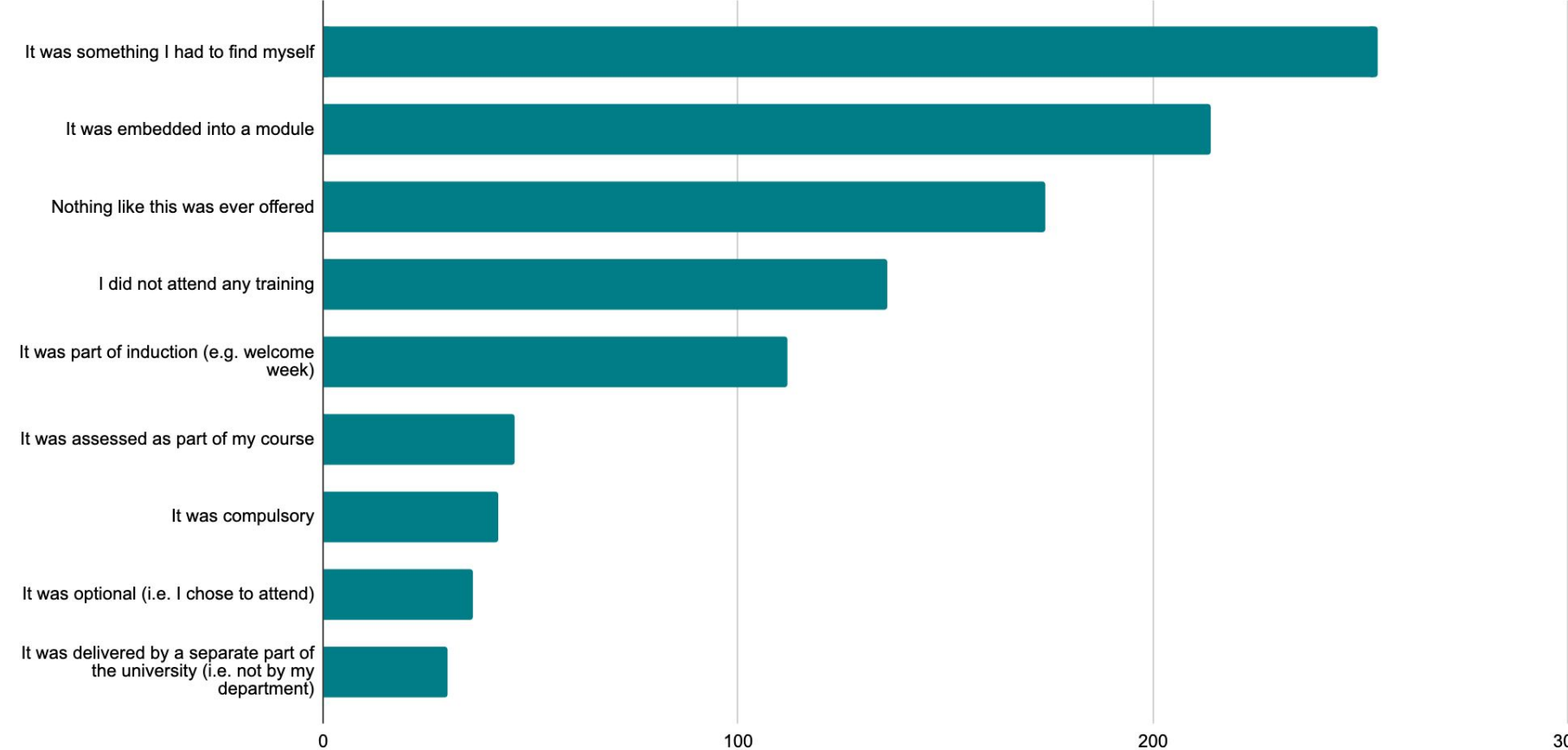
What did any additional support focus on?

1. Basic reading skills
2. Information literacy
3. None offered
4. Critical reading/thinking
5. Signposting to library
6. Student led (e.g journal clubs)
7. Note taking skills

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> "*Some of my first year modules dedicated time to developing our reading skills - namely, how to be more selective in our approaches, as well as how best to take notes and summarise what we had read. **This was actually really beneficial in the long term**, helping me to transition from pre-university expectations and alleviating the stress that typically comes with this.*"

> "*It was one session on reading. it was a bit much for the first years and everyone I know didn't enjoy it. The lecturer was well-meaning but I think they could've taken a different angle, one focusing on extracting key points and summarising rather than using reading to find more reading. **It was probably more overwhelming than useful.***"

> "*In certain modules we focused on the critical reading of primary and secondary sources. The weekly assignment of various texts essentially forces the student to develop better reading skills. **The platform that we viewed these sources in (Talis Elevate) even allowed for us to make annotations while we read. I found this to be helpful as I liked to annotate texts that we examined in class.***"

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Value of sharing thoughts/ seeing others thoughts on resources

Legend: ■ Sharing thoughts ■ Seeing others thoughts

X-axis: Value (1–10)
Y-axis: 0 to 60

> *"If you don't understand something then you can see what someone else thinks and sometimes that's really helpful to you figuring it out. It's also nice when you get a discussion going in the comments as you can take that forward into the seminar"*

> *"It's useful to see what points my peers have picked up on whilst reading the same stuff, as it might raise points I haven't anticipated. It is sometimes useful to share my own thoughts as people sometimes respond with questions that change my perspective on matters. However, it is not integral to my understanding of my reading, and sometimes it is more of a hindrance than help."*

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If you could go back, what would you do differently?
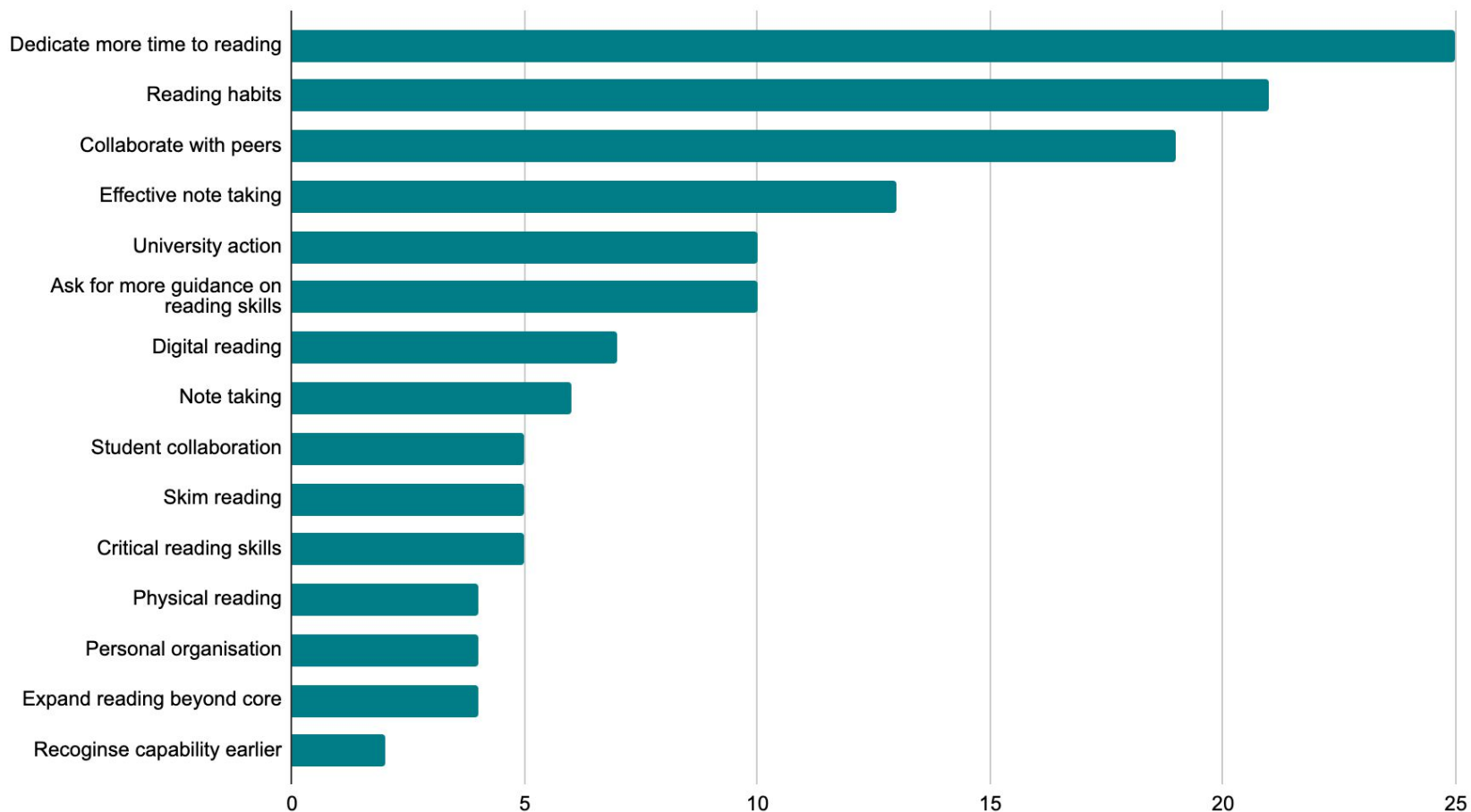
Student suggestions to their universities

- Embedding into course
  - Core reading skills should be mandatory. The skills needed in HE are different
  - Further note taking support
- Support student led reading groups
- Digitisation of resources
- Open access
- Audiobooks
- Tips on avoiding distractions
- Timetabled reading groups

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Student suggestions to their universities

"I would change the academic reading culture generally to include audiobooks - Like if scientific journals were somehow also available as audiobooks and print,so as to allow or be able to reduce the amount of time I spend looking at a screen. That's what I would change"

"I think it would have been very helpful if there was a programme or module designed to help us with our own reading practices in the first year, because without that help, we often develop bad and unhealthy reading habits that lead to frustration and dissatisfaction with the practice of learning"

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The COVID Effect

- Deficit theme throughout qualitative
- Longing for F2F activity
- ^Perception F2F is more impactful on learning
- Pandemic fatigue
- Preference for passive engagement
- Signposting in a time of crisis

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Findings and Conclusions

Synthesis

- Reading expectations vs reading reality
- Required skills vs taught skills
- Impact of collaborative reading/annotation
- 'Readiness' for academic reading in HE
- Student understanding of what 'good' reading looks like
- Library is central to general/critical reading but...
- Dedicated focus in discipline areas needed
- Distraction in general is a big problem

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How can we better support students reading practice?

- Transitional support / reading readiness
- Self assessment: benchmarking reading skills
- Critical Reading/critical thinking reading list
- Digital reading best practices
- Alternative formats for core 'reading'
- Clear signposting on 'literacies' within courses
- Academic reading skills 'champion' in Departments
- Timetabled collaborative reading sessions
- 'Guided reading' allocation
- Student testimonials/ reflections

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Further investigation/actions

- Further segmentation; year of study / discipline
- Sector analysis on 'reading skills support'
- Categorisation of essential/desirable skills around reading practice
- Identification of 'critical discrepancies' in reading skills at discipline level
- Informing product development
- 'What does good look like on lists' investigation

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Digital reading working group?

Contact matt.east@talis.com

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Any questions?

Further reading / watching

https://makingdigitalhistory.co.uk/read/active-online-reading/

https://talis.com/2021/10/04/in-conversation-with-the-active-online-reading-project-southampton-solent-university/

https://talis.com/2021/08/17/the-launch-of-the-active-online-reading-project/

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