



# Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities

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**ncee**  
Entrepreneurship in Education

## *Driving Entrepreneurship in Education*

University Enterprise Report 2023



**UK**

# Foreword

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**With all the challenges we face globally and here in the UK, we need to be enterprising and entrepreneurial to find solutions and improve our futures.**

Our students in higher education will be among the world leaders, researchers, policy makers, and business leaders that will create our future. Ensuring they have enterprise and entrepreneurial skills has never been more important.

Our survey has been running for over 10 years, and it has helped us to see the trends and development of enterprise activity over that time.

We are pleased to see that despite the pandemic and other challenges there has been a growth in enterprise activity within higher education, with social enterprise continuing to increase. Support for students continues to be a strong area, with the proportion of universities providing summer schools for enterprise, for example, doubling since 2020. And nearly all enterprise leaders expect the growth of enterprise to continue.

For the first time our survey shows that all universities have enterprise and entrepreneurship embedded within some of their degree programmes. We believe exposing all students to enterprise and entrepreneurship makes them more agile, creative and innovative – essential skills for the future. However, there is still some way to go in STEM and medicine, healthcare and veterinary courses, all of which are key areas and demand enterprising and entrepreneurial skills.

The biggest challenge identified was funding. This sits alongside an increased reliance on university core funds as European funding diminishes. There have also been huge drops in the support for enterprise in local schools (from 57% a decade ago to 17% today), and community enterprise engagement is considerably below levels seen in 2012.

Constrained budgets and uncertain funding may be limiting partnerships, but higher education is part of a broader ecosystem. We encourage universities, Government and local partners to work together to build more collaborative relationships.

Given the financial situation in UK higher education and indeed more widely around the globe, we actively encourage higher education institutions to explore their own entrepreneurial behaviours, and to seek new models that support outstanding higher education and research.

Government can support by using its networking and mobilisation power to support university enterprise, it can fund activity through local development programmes, and align the enterprise and levelling up policy agendas. Sector bodies including the Office for Students and UKRI can incentivise enterprise activity through policies, metrics and funding (including grants for students), adjust the HEIF funding formula to promote enterprise and help smaller institutions, and support enterprise champions and business support staff. And across the education system we can encourage the embedding of enterprise at earlier stages, in schools and colleges.

The power to make change comes through our collective voice. This survey shows what universities across the sector are doing to support enterprise. Join our new Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities to build a greater collective voice for enterprise and entrepreneurship – learn more at [ncee.org.uk](https://www.ncee.org.uk).



**Professor Ian Dunn**  
Chair, NCEE  
Provost, Coventry University

## *Executive summary*

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NCEE's 2023 University Enterprise Report, *Driving Entrepreneurship in Education*, provides valuable insights into the state of enterprise and entrepreneurship activity within UK universities. It reveals how this activity has changed over the past decade, and provides a snapshot of the landscape which has emerged from the pandemic.

Taking stock of this landscape is essential as we plot a course towards a fairer, more prosperous and sustainable society – one in which the enterprise activity of universities, students and staff should play a key role.

The survey, capturing the views of 50 Heads of Enterprise, finds that enterprise activity at UK universities has grown over the past three years despite the pandemic.

Key findings include:

- Over 80% of respondents report an increase in enterprise activity over the past three years, with continued growth in social enterprise. Nearly 90% of universities plan to expand activity in the next year.
- Support for students continues to be a strong area, with the proportion of institutions supporting enterprise summer schools, for example, more than doubling from pre-COVID levels. 73% think student interest in enterprise on arriving at university has grown.
- For the first time, all universities have embedded entrepreneurship within some degree programmes. However, coverage is inconsistent across subjects: there is still some way to go in STEM and medicine, healthcare and veterinary courses.
- Support for enterprise in local schools has fallen significantly in the past decade, from 57% to 17%. Support for enterprise in community engagement is also well below levels seen in 2012. Constrained budgets and uncertainty around funding may be limiting partnerships, but these are vital to rebuild outreach.
- Funding remains the biggest challenge, with increased reliance on core university funds as European funding declines. At some institutions, philanthropic and private donor funds have helped to fill gaps.
- 77% want government to do more to support entrepreneurial activity in universities. Suggested actions are provided in the recommendations.

# Recommendations

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## University leaders should:

- Prioritise funding for enterprise activities, as lack of funding is seen as the biggest challenge. This will often mean utilising core university funds.
- Support partnerships with schools and communities to provide enterprise outreach, which has declined significantly over the past decade.
- Incentivise faculties and departments to collaborate with enterprise teams to ensure consistent and tailored support across the institution.

## Heads of Enterprise should:

- Work closely with careers services to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Collaborate on workshops, events, and messaging to students.
- Develop relationships with external partners such as incubators, accelerators, investors, and local entrepreneurs to provide quality mentoring, funding opportunities, and role models for students.
- Look to diversify funding sources where possible. Potential sources may include philanthropic donations, income generation from services, and government programmes.
- Offer more targeted programs for underrepresented groups to increase participation in enterprise activities.

## Sector bodies such as UKRI and the Office for Students should:

- Incentivise enterprise activity through policies, metrics and funding programs, including, for example, grants for students.
- Support enterprise champions and business support staff through training, networking and knowledge exchange programs.
- Ensure data, metrics and evidence on enterprise activity feeds into the Higher Education Business and Community Interactions (HE-BCI) survey and the HEIF funding formula, reflecting in particular activity at smaller institutions.

## Government should:

- Use its convening power to support university enterprise through partnerships and initiatives.
- Fund enterprise activities through local economic development programs, and align this activity with other policies such as levelling up and the formation of innovation zones.
- Support embedding of enterprise earlier in schools and colleges to help develop entrepreneurial mindsets.

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# *Methodology*

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We surveyed 50 Heads of Enterprise (or the equivalent position) from UK universities through an online questionnaire from August 2022 to February 2023. This report builds on the 2018 and 2020 NCEE Heads of Enterprise surveys, and previous biennial surveys that NCEE ran until 2012. We have kept questions about the provision of enterprise and entrepreneurship support within universities from these earlier surveys, allowing us to track how enterprise and entrepreneurship activity has changed and responded over the past 11 years.

83% of respondents were from English institutions, 9% from Wales, 6% from Scotland, and 2% from Northern Ireland. Most (62%) of the responding institutions were not members of a university mission group; the remainder were split equally between MillionPlus, the Russell Group and University Alliance (13% each). Mission group categorisation is based on membership in March 2023.

## A: Growth in enterprise activity

Entrepreneurship activity provided by universities has increased over the past three years

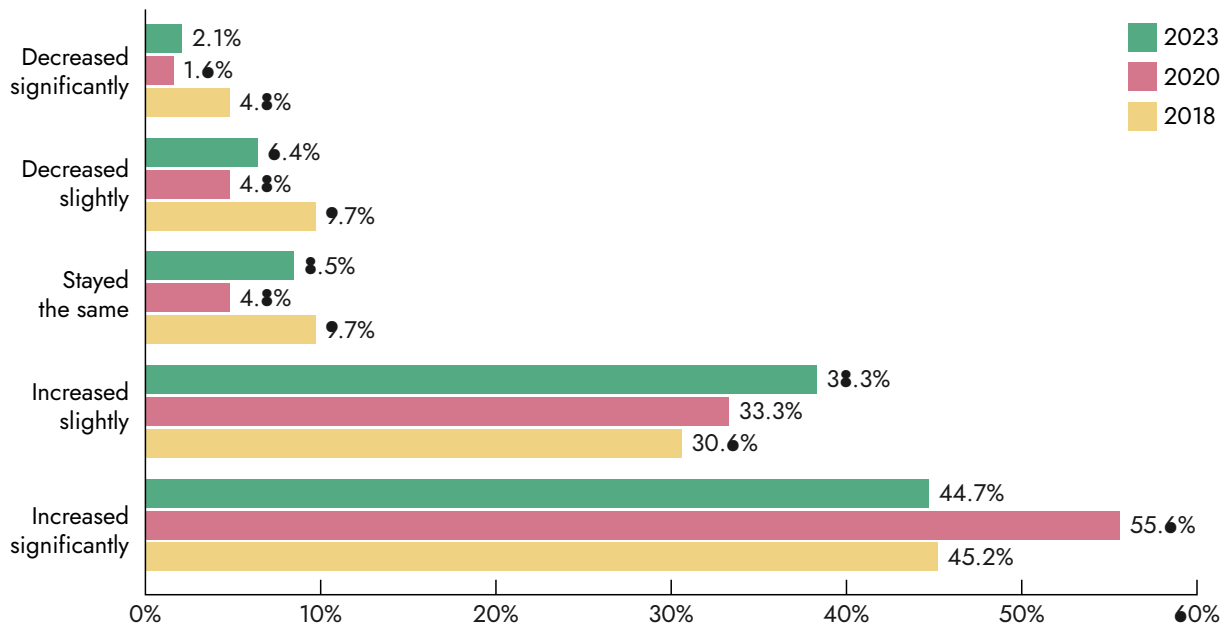


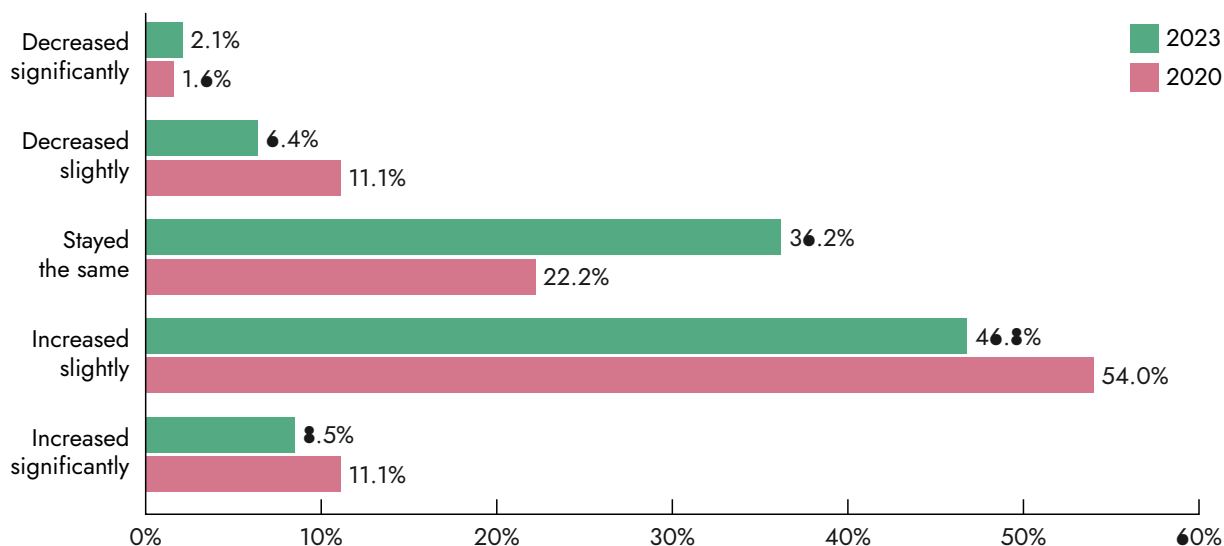
Figure 1. Do you think enterprise/entrepreneurship activity provided by your university has increased or decreased over the last three years?

Growth in enterprise activity has been sustained through the pandemic. 83% of respondents think that entrepreneurship activity provided by their university has increased over the past three years, down slightly from 90% in 2020 and up from three quarters in 2018 (figure 1). The proportion of respondents who feel activity has significantly decreased remains broadly similar to the previous survey, and has fallen since 2018.

**83%** think that their entrepreneurship activity has increased over the past three years



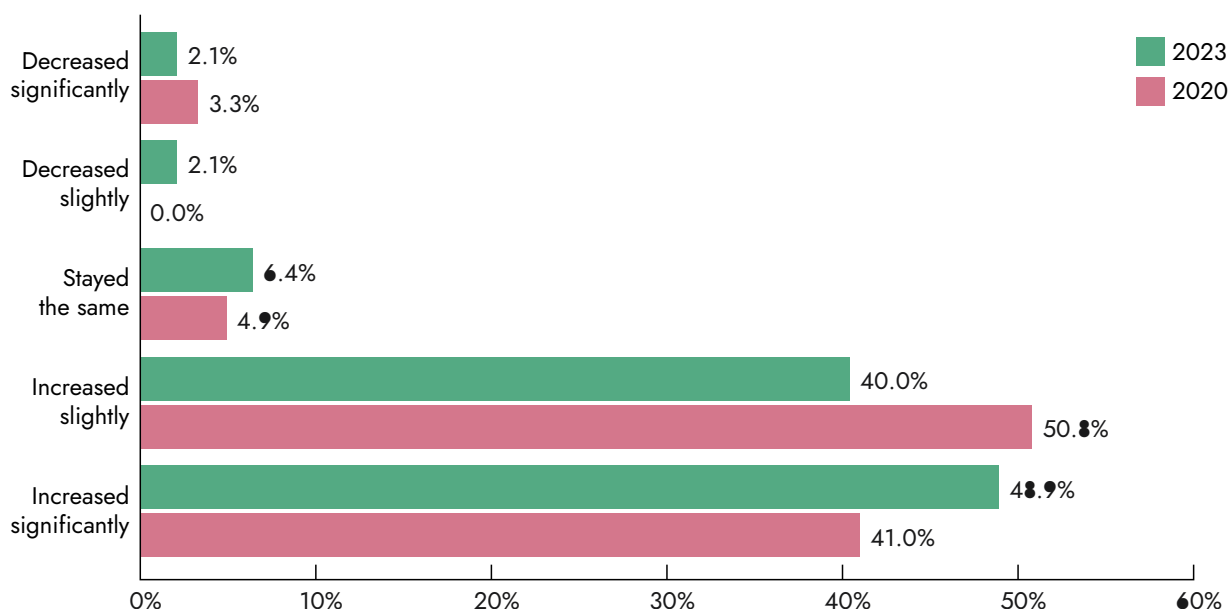
## Social enterprise activity has also grown



**Figure 2: More specifically, do you think social enterprise activity provided by your university has increased or decreased over the last three years?**

Social enterprise activity has increased slightly or significantly for 55% of respondents (figure 2) – a slight fall compared to 2020. However, in common with trends for overall enterprise activity (figure 1), very few respondents report a significant decrease in activity, and this vital but fragile stream of activity appears to also have weathered the pandemic and its aftermath.

## There are widespread plans to increase enterprise activity within universities

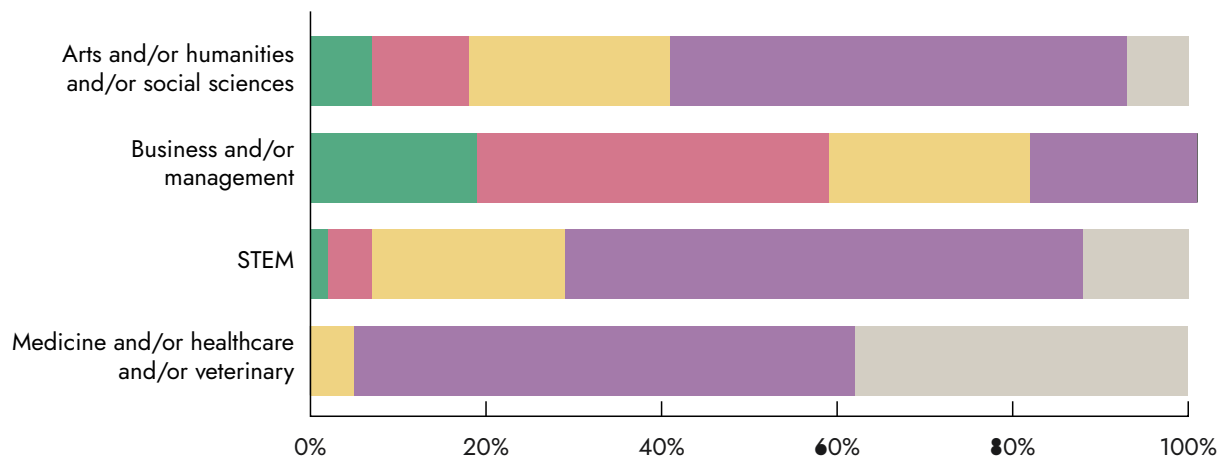


**Figure 3: Do you plan to increase your enterprise/entrepreneurship activity within the next year?**

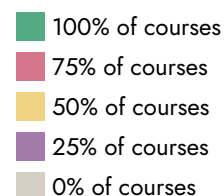
In a strong sign of commitment to enterprise provision, nearly 90% of respondents plan to increase their entrepreneurship activity over the next 12 months (figure 3). Nearly half plan to significantly increase their activity – a small but notable jump from the previous survey, which captured views just before the pandemic struck.

## B. Delivery of enterprise activity

All universities embed entrepreneurship within at least some degree programmes



**Figure 4: Please indicate, to the closest percentage, the proportion of degree programmes in which your institution embeds entrepreneurship and enterprise activity.**



All institutions have credit-bearing entrepreneurship and enterprise courses within at least some degree programmes (figure 4). This figure represents a climb from previous surveys, which hovered around 90% for the past decade. However, the extent of embedding varies in subject areas. As shown by the green shading, a far greater proportion of business and management courses embed enterprise education than medicine, healthcare and veterinary courses.

**Table 1: Does your institution offer additional or elective modules in enterprise or entrepreneurship?**

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>
Yes – elective modules	44.7%	35.5%
Yes – additional modules	14.9%	17.7%
Both elective and additional modules	23.4%	22.6%
No	17.0%	24.2%

83% of respondents offer additional and/or elective modules in enterprise or entrepreneurship (table 1). This is an increase from three quarters in 2020 – which itself was broadly similar to 2018.

**Table 2: What proportion of your enterprise activity do you deliver online?**

All activity is delivered online	6%
About three quarters is delivered online	4%
About half is delivered online	26%
About a quarter is delivered online	49%
None is delivered online	15%

For the first time, we asked universities this year how much of their enterprise and entrepreneurship activity (including education and training, events and networking) is provided online (table 2). For most, between a quarter and a half is delivered online. Many noted a shift back towards face-to-face delivery following feedback from students; others plan to run hybrid events in the future to meet student demand. Most online events and activity are also offered in-person, although online international engagement (with overseas campuses, summer schools, or to train professionals) has grown and proved to be a viable means of expanding enterprise activity.

## C. Student interest in enterprise

Heads of Enterprise think student interest in entrepreneurship activity on arriving at university is increasing

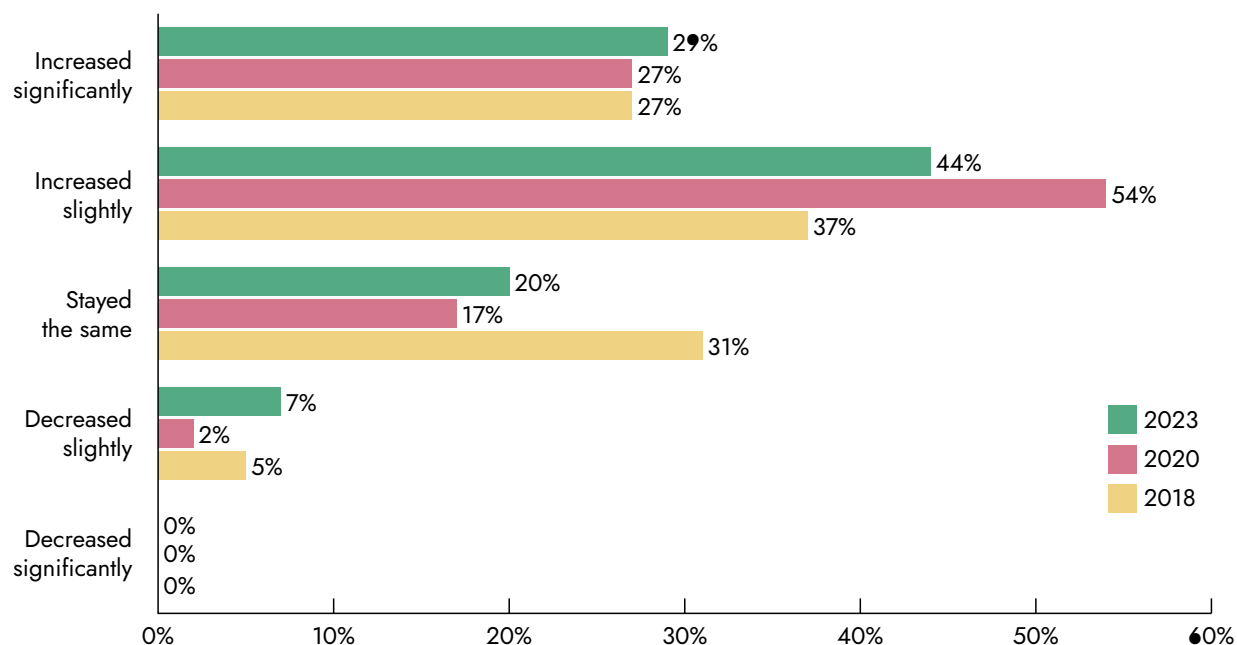


Figure 5: Do you think students' interest in enterprise/entrepreneurship activity on arriving at university has increased or decreased over the last three years?

The perceived interest in enterprise activity of students arriving at university has increased over the last three years, with nearly three quarters of respondents reporting a slight or significant increase (figure 5). These finds are broadly consistent with our previous surveys: no respondents report a significant decline, and around a fifth say interest remains the same.

## *D: Enterprise provision over time*

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We have tracked more than 40 measures of enterprise provision over time, including policies, activities and facilities (table 3). In 2020 we asked new questions about social enterprise, and found that 8% of universities have a centre for social enterprise – this figure has now risen to 19%. Many of the figures for 2023 are broadly consistent with previous surveys, although some show marked changes since 2012 (deeper red colours are lower levels of provision; darker greens are higher levels).

Support for enterprise in local schools continues to fall. Fewer than a fifth of respondents provide this support, down from 57% in 2012. Support for enterprise in local communities remains similar to 2020 and 2018 at 51%, but below the high of 73% seen in 2012. Constrained budgets and uncertainty about successor funding to European structural funds may limit the extent of financial support for new partnerships, meaning university leaders need to think creatively to ensure vital enterprise outreach activity with schools and communities is not neglected.

Workshops or events aimed at widening participation and minority ethnic students have increased since 2020 (to 38% and 30% respectively), but there is still plenty of room for improvement. Workshops for female students continue to rise – from 29% in 2018, 40% in 2020, and 45% in 2023. In our previous surveys we have recommended that staff with responsibility for enterprise activity look to promote the work of diverse and local entrepreneurs; the need for representative role models is greater than ever, and more targeted programmes are needed to ensure participation in university enterprise activity by under-represented groups.

In many areas, particularly around support for staff, provision has fallen since 2012. This is striking given the growth in university enterprise activity over the past three years reported in section A. The contrast is perhaps due to distributed governance and the decentralisation of some enterprise activity to faculties and departments. This can result in more personalised and tailored activity within some subject areas – and hence for some staff and some students – but patchy and inconsistent activity across an institution as a whole.

Finally, support for students continues to be a strong area, and support for venture creation is uniformly higher than in our earlier (2018 and 2012) surveys – with the exception of enterprise internships and fellowships, which are perhaps a victim of the pandemic; summer schools, conversely, have seen more than a doubling since 2020.

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**Support for enterprise  
in local schools has fallen**  
**from 57% in 2012 to 17% today**

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**Table 3: Which of these policies, activities and facilities are provided at your university?**

<b>Institutional policy</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
An explicit institutional enterprise or entrepreneurship policy	49%	54%	44%	49%
A PVC responsible for enterprise / entrepreneurship	49%	46%	45%	61%
Tracking of individuals after graduation	74%	62%	68%	78%
Support for enterprise in local schools	17%	22%	32%	57%
Support for enterprise in local communities	51%	46%	44%	73%
A central office for technology transfer	57%	65%	66%	84%
A centre for social enterprise	19%	8%		
A dedicated web page for access to enterprise support	81%	75%	68%	80%

<b>Support for staff in enterprise</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Staff training in enterprise	62%	52%	39%	60%
Staff funds for CPD	43%	49%	40%	79%
Staff curricula development funds	23%	22%	26%	51%
Institutional awards for excellence or good practice	36%	32%	42%	59%
Development sabbaticals for staff	11%	10%	15%	40%
Staff support for commercialisation of IP	66%	67%	55%	88%
Incentives to attract / encourage educators to entrepreneurship	28%	22%	21%	35%

<b>Ideas and Planning for students</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Business plan competitions	64%	68%	68%	81%
Ideas competitions	87%	84%	77%	79%
Enterprise / Entrepreneurship summer schools	53%	54%	47%	47%
Entrepreneur-led events	81%	79%	81%	86%
General enterprise / entrepreneurship workshops	96%	95%	85%	96%

<b>Venture Creation</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Student incubator facilities	68%	73%	60%	53%
Student hot-desk / drop in facilities	74%	75%	66%	64%
Start-up funds for students / graduates	79%	71%	65%	65%
Student enterprise interns / fellowships	38%	59%	53%	53%

<b>Start up support programmes</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Enterprise awareness events / festivals	83%	83%	85%	80%
Student enterprise conferences	26%	32%	39%	33%
Summer schools	91%	40%	39%	
Access to funding workshops	70%	68%	61%	54%
Investor events	45%	48%	45%	35%
Mentoring for start-ups	94%	83%	82%	86%
Technical / professional / funding / specialist advice	83%	75%	76%	78%

<b>Enterprise Skills Development</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Enterprise / entrepreneurship skills training programmes	83%	87%	77%	80%
Careers service events / workshops	83%	81%	79%	88%
Student enterprise placement workshops	47%	40%	44%	51%
Placement or internships with entrepreneurs and small businesses	74%	65%	68%	77%
Personal skills coaching	57%	59%	48%	60%
Enterprise champions	49%	32%	47%	75%

<b>Networking Events</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Network introduction events	70%	71%	66%	84%
Student enterprise club or society	60%	63%	66%	81%

<b>Workshops / Events specifically targeting:</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2012</b>
Social enterprise / entrepreneurship	64%	75%	77%	77%
Minority ethnic students	30%	19%	18%	12%
Widening participation students	38%	22%	34%	
Female students	45%	40%	29%	23%

## E: Funding for enterprise

### Core university funds are critical for underpinning enterprise and entrepreneurship activity within universities

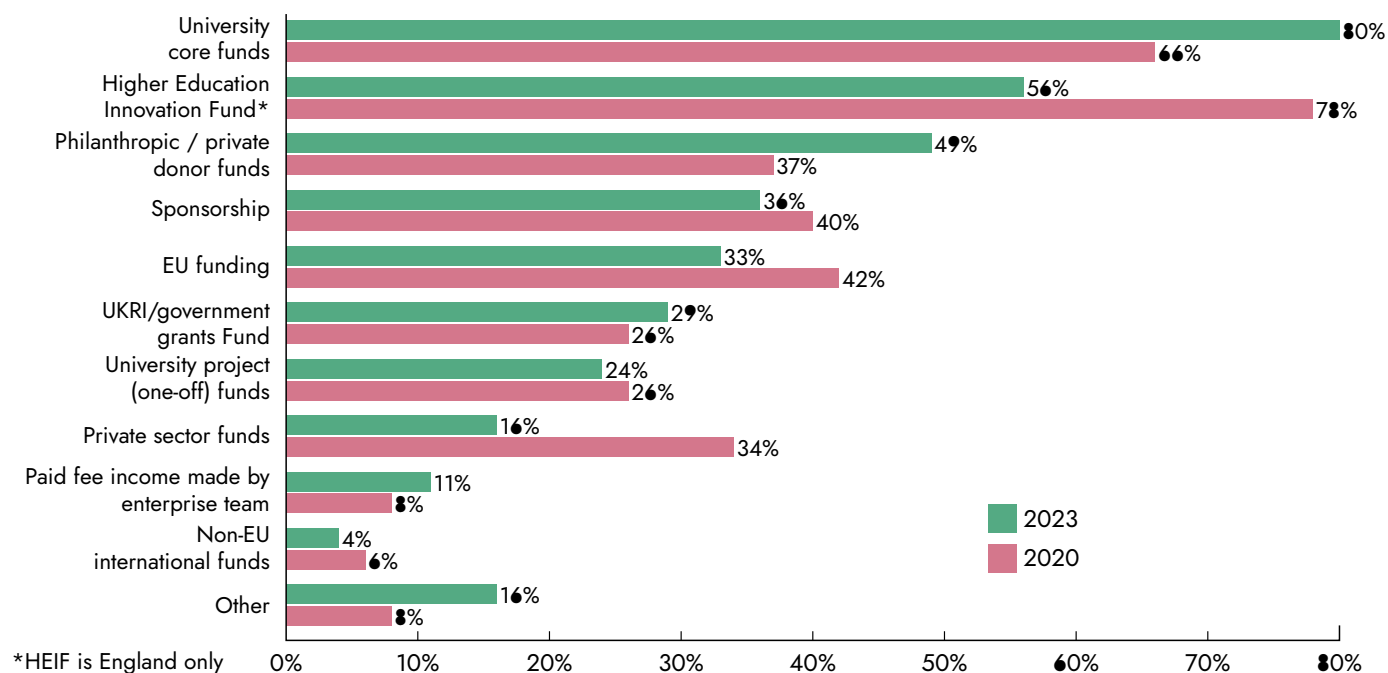


Figure 6: How do you fund enterprise and entrepreneurship activity within the university?

Several headlines emerge from our analysis of funding for enterprise in UK universities (figure 6). First is the decline in EU funding, supporting a third of respondents in 2023, down from 40% in 2020 and 51% in 2012. However, for those universities receiving EU funds, these usually sustain a significant proportion of their enterprise activity – up to 80%. It is essential that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – and other programmes that are intended to replace the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund – supports enterprise activity in higher education institutions. There is uncertainty amongst universities about what will happen to existing enterprise support following the end of European funding in mid-2023.

Second is the reliance on core university funds – up to 80% from 66% previously. This may be compensating for the decline in EU funding, and a fall in funding from private sector initiatives.

Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) supports enterprise activity at 56% of the English institutions surveyed, underscoring the importance of this modestly sized fund, and equivalent support programmes in the devolved nations (and programmes such as Welsh Government Youth Entrepreneurship Funding), although this is a significant fall from 78% in 2020.

Third, philanthropic and private donor funds have increased in importance. A few universities have funded the majority of activity using generous grants from wealthy donors, and a few others generate income from rent and other activities to fund enterprise support.



## F: Challenges and enablers

### Funding is the biggest challenge facing a third of Heads of Enterprise

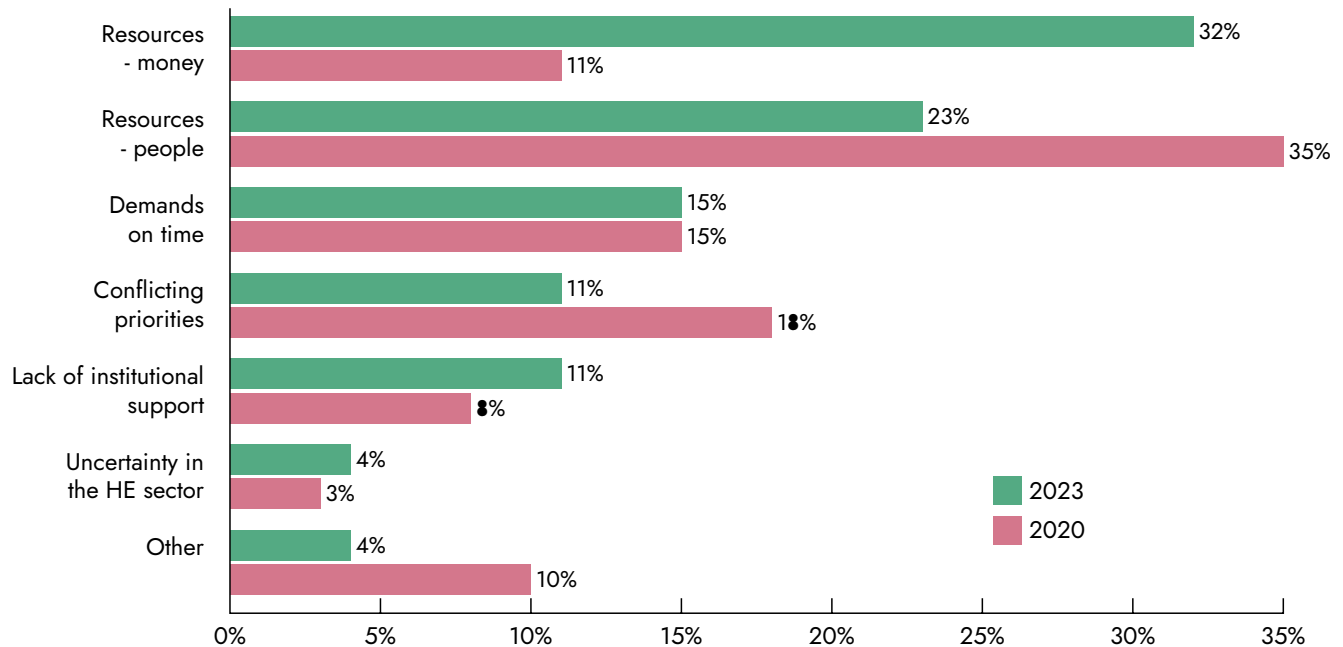


Figure 7: What is the biggest challenge you currently face in providing enterprise/entrepreneurship activity?

A third of respondents identify funding as the biggest challenge in providing enterprise activity (figure 7). This is a reversal of 2020, when the biggest challenge was seen as a shortage of staff – now 23%. 15% identify demands on time, and 11% conflicting priorities or a lack of institutional support. Respondents also mentioned challenges in securing student engagement, especially amongst those looking for a ‘safer’ career path post-pandemic.

***For 32%***  
**funding is the biggest challenge**  
**in providing enterprise activity**

## Internal university staff are the biggest enabler in delivering enterprise activity

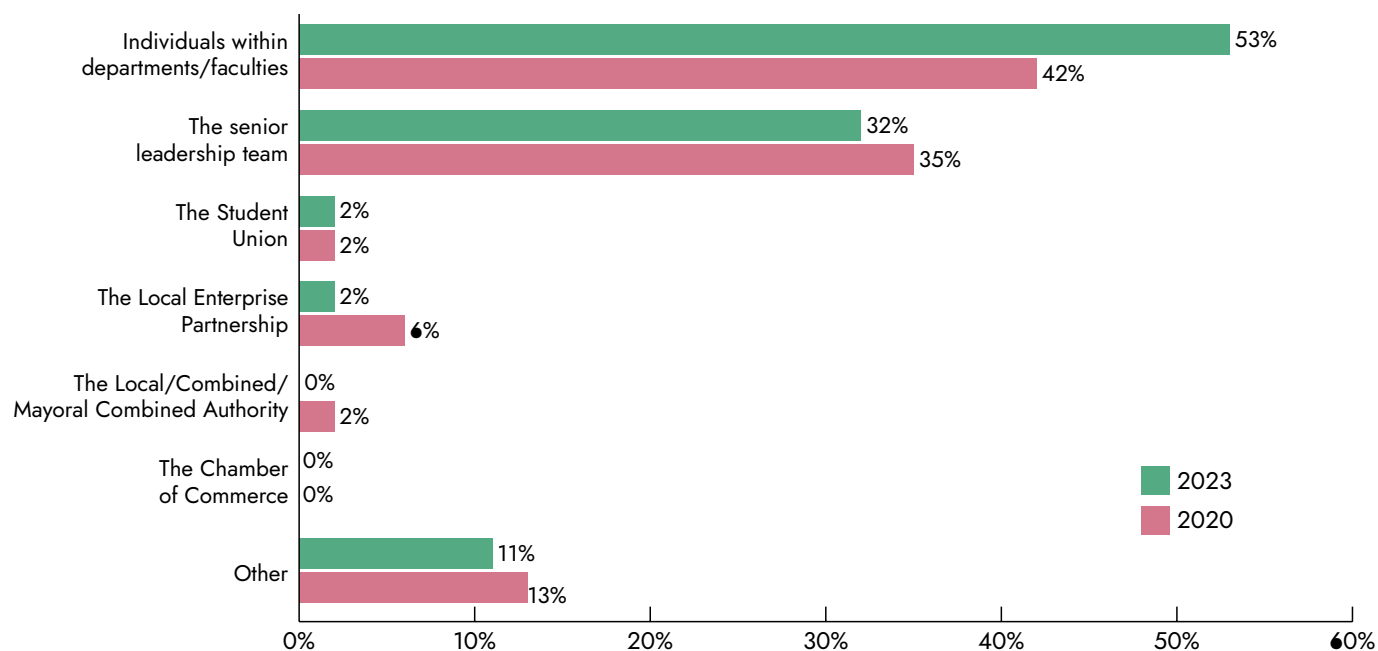


Figure 8: Who is the biggest enabler in helping you deliver enterprise/entrepreneurship activity?

In common with 2020, but with an even greater share, individuals within departments or faculties are seen as the biggest enabler in helping to deliver enterprise activity, with over half of the total (figure 8). Several highlighted the importance of strong links between the enterprise team and academic staff. A third picked the senior leadership team. Several Welsh institutions recognised the important work of the Welsh Government in supporting activity, and others mentioned the important role played by student unions.

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**53%** identify individuals within departments as the biggest enabler in delivering enterprise activity

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## G: Government and higher education policy

Three quarters of Heads of Enterprise want the government to do more to support entrepreneurial activity

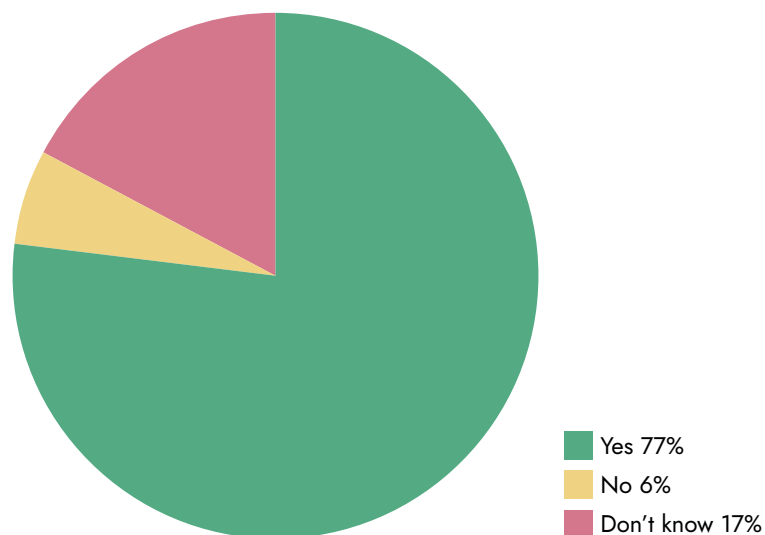
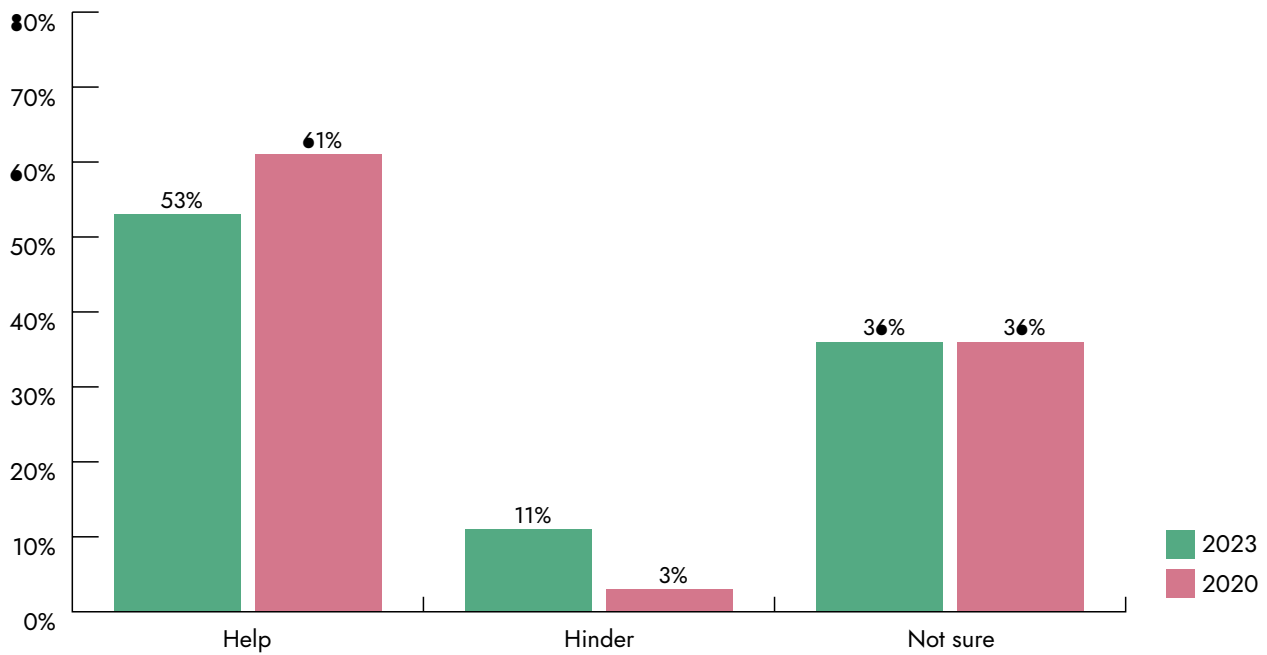


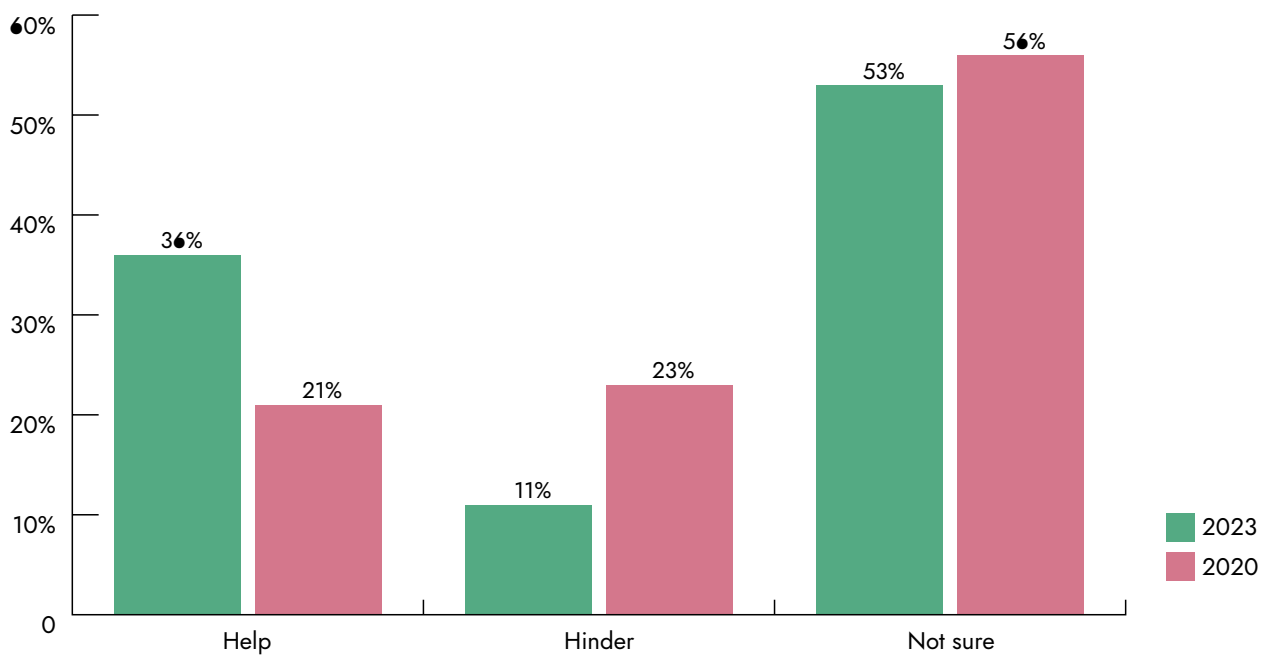
Figure 9: Do you think the government needs to do more to support enterprise activity within higher education institutions?

77% of respondents call for the government to do more to support entrepreneurial activity in universities, with 17% uncertain (figure 9). These figures are remarkably consistent with our 2020 survey. Potential actions proposed for government include using its networking and mobilisation power to support university enterprise, funding activity through regional development programmes and aligning the enterprise and levelling up agendas, strengthening incentives for enterprise activity through policies and metrics (as covered below) and funding (including grants for students), adjusting the HEIF funding formula to promote enterprise and help smaller institutions, supporting enterprise champions and business support staff, and embedding enterprise in earlier stages of the education system.

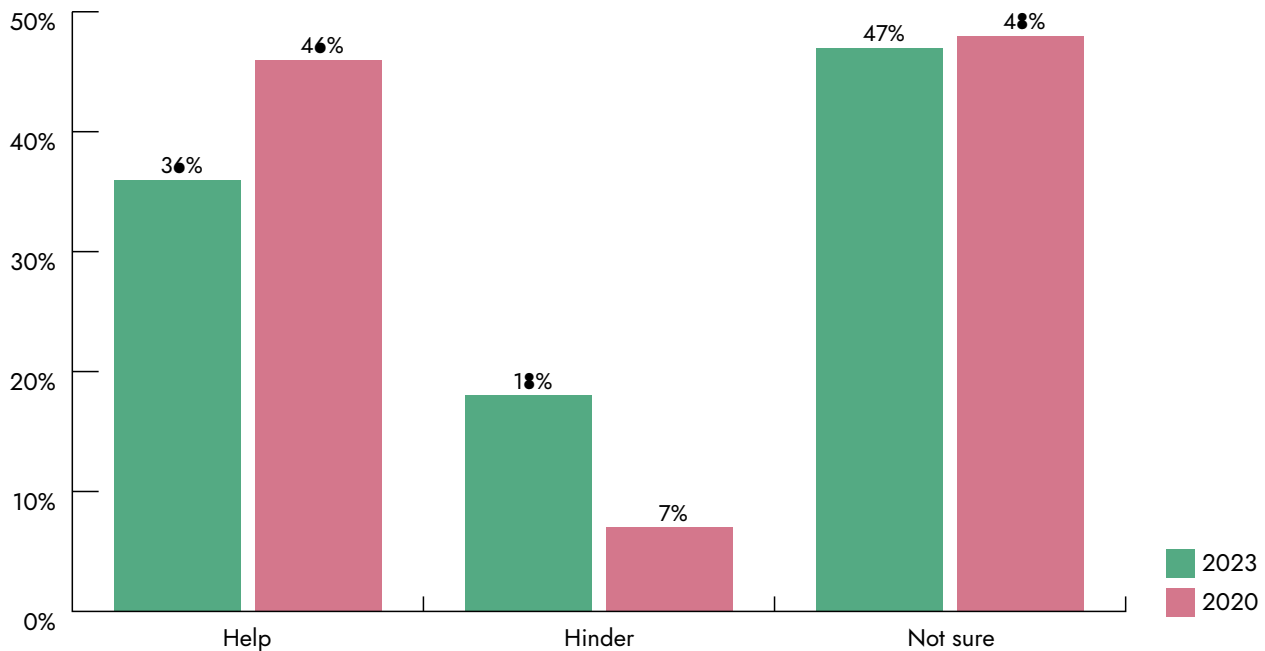
## The KEF is broadly welcomed by Heads of Enterprise, but the impact of the TEF and LEO data is uncertain



**Figure 10: Do you think the following policies, as they currently stand, will help or hinder your enterprise work? The KEF (Knowledge Exchange Framework)**



**Figure 11: Do you think the following policies, as they currently stand, will help or hinder your enterprise work? Publication of LEO (Longitudinal Education Outcomes) data**



**Figure 12: Do you think the following policies, as they currently stand, will help or hinder your enterprise work?  
The TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework)**

Approximately 53% of respondents feel the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) will help their enterprise work, compared to 36% for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) – both witnessing a slight dip since 2020 – and 36% for the publication of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data on graduate earnings; an increase since 2020 (figures 10-12). For all three measures uncertainty is high suggesting greater clarity is needed over the direction of policies and how universities should respond.

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**53%** feel the KEF  
will help their enterprise work

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## *About NCEE and report credits*

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The National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE) is an international organisation that focuses on promoting and developing entrepreneurial universities. We are a platform and collaborative network for sharing best practice, research and insights related to enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation.

NCEE brings together academia, higher education professionals and policy leaders to exchange knowledge and expertise to drive societal impact. We facilitate dialogue, organise events and training programmes, and provide resources to help universities foster innovation and entrepreneurship. As a collective voice, we champion entrepreneurial universities.

NCEE is a trusted partner with governments across the globe. Established in 2004, we have a base in the UK and China and are engaged in programmes worldwide.

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To speak to us about how NCEE can help your institution please contact Ceri Nursaw ([ceri.nursaw@ncee.org.uk](mailto:ceri.nursaw@ncee.org.uk)).



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