

The background features a repeating pattern of stylized, semi-transparent illustrations of students sitting at desks with computer monitors. The students are depicted in various colors (brown, black, blue) and are shown from the back, looking at their screens. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a muted color palette.

MEd Dissertation findings

# *What can MOOC completers tell us about learning design?*

Layla Croll

**Would we design online  
degrees in similar ways to  
our MOOCs?**

**Is MOOC design  
successful?**

**Who for?**

**What do they want to do  
next?**

**How can we take forward  
what we have learned from  
MOOCs?**

# Existing research

MOOCs

NEW  
SUCCESSES

LEARNERS

Online distance learning  
students.  
MOOC learners.  
Many are same  
demographic.

Online distance learning

SUCCESSES

CHALLENGES

# Existing research: Online distance learning

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2008–2010: 'Fastest growing sector of Higher Education', 33% of US institutions had online as strategic directive, 30% of US students taken an online course, 10% of UK students online distance learners (1).

Persistence is a challenge (2).

2012–2019: Online student numbers still increasing 5% per year. Persistence still a challenge due to isolation and frustration with courses (3).

1. (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Christensen et al, 2011; Garrett, 2015; Means et al, 2010)

2. (Carr, 2000; Moody, 2004; Angelino et al, 2007; Hart, 2012; Bowden 2008; Kreideweis, 2005; Simpson, 2013)

3. (Gregori et al, 2018; Chiyaka et al, 2016; Yang et al, 2017; Walmsley-Smitha et al, 2019; Angelino et al, 2007; Zaborova and Markova, 2016; Ni, 2013; Markova et al, 2017)

# Existing research: Online distance learning

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'Learning design' emerged to meet the challenge with some success:  
Active learning, collaborative design, frequent tasks to check understanding, practice questions, encouragement, strengths approach, putting learning into context of students working lives, socialisation (4).

# Existing research: MOOCs

2012–2017: MOOC platforms emerged and grew numbers, based their approach upon core pedagogical principles successful in online distance learning.

MOOCs reaching the same learners as ODL: international, graduate professionals (5), career-related aspirations for online study (6).

MOOCs also reaching high school graduates, undergraduates and lifelong learners (7).

5. (Despujol et al, 2014; Ding et al, 2014; Christensen et al, 2013; Heywood, 2015; Cusamano, 2015; Formaneka et al, 2017)

6. (Liu et al, 2015; Christensen et al, 2013; University of Edinburgh, 2013; Davis et al, 2014; Ho et al, 2014; Park et al, 2015; Liu et al, 2015; Bahaa, 2017; Macleod et al, 2014; Dillahunt et al, 2014; Radford et al, 2015; Bayeck, 2016; Heywood, 2015; Cusamano, 2015)

7. (Bahaa, 2017; Belanger & Thornton, 2013; Dillahunt et al, 2014, Stokes et al, 2015)

# Existing research: MOOCs

Learning design evolution proved successful for learners: Quality of materials, active learning, tasks relating to working lives, real-life examples, mentor encouragement, checking progress, socialisation, built-in feedback, reflective discussions (8).

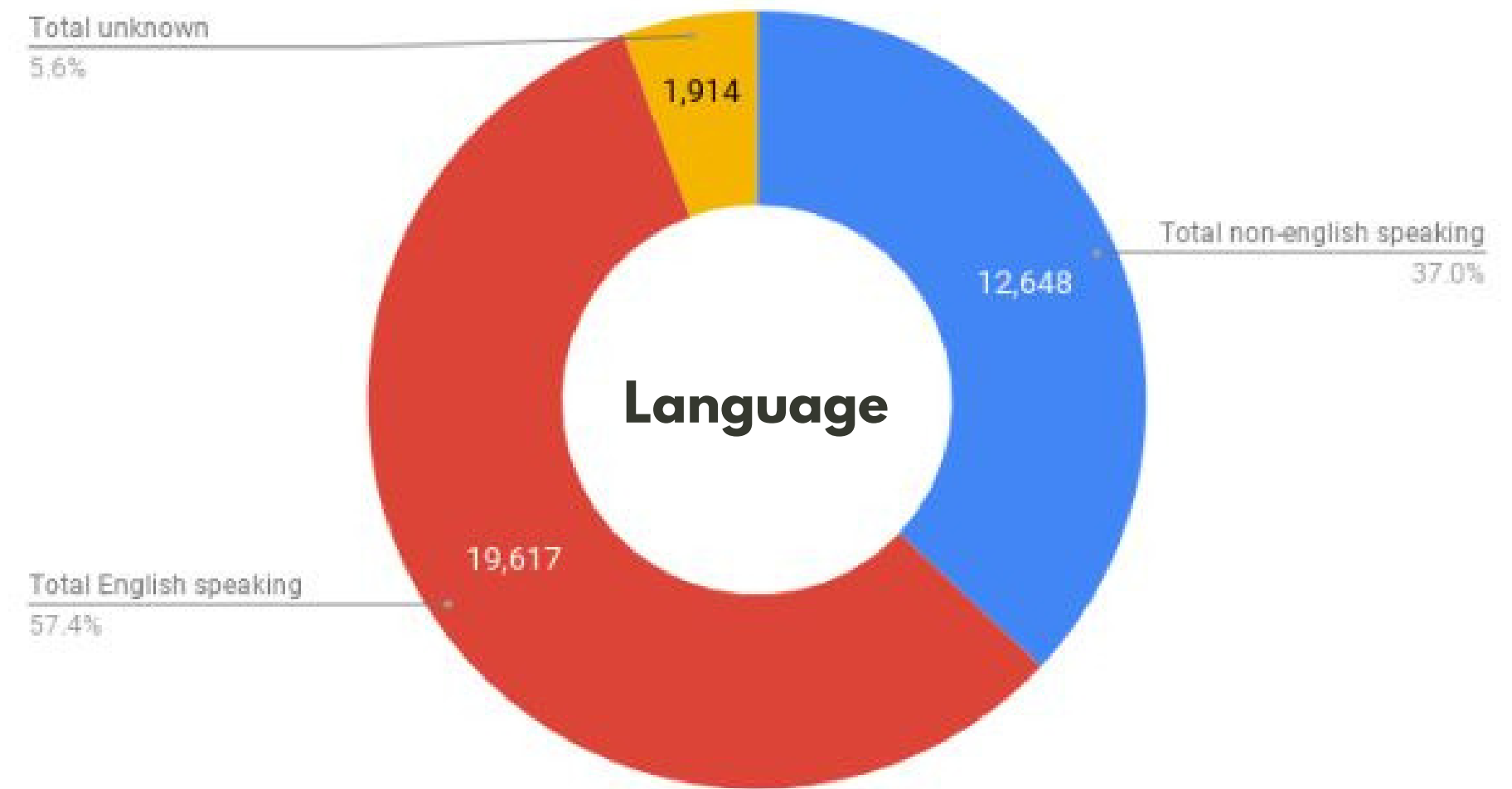
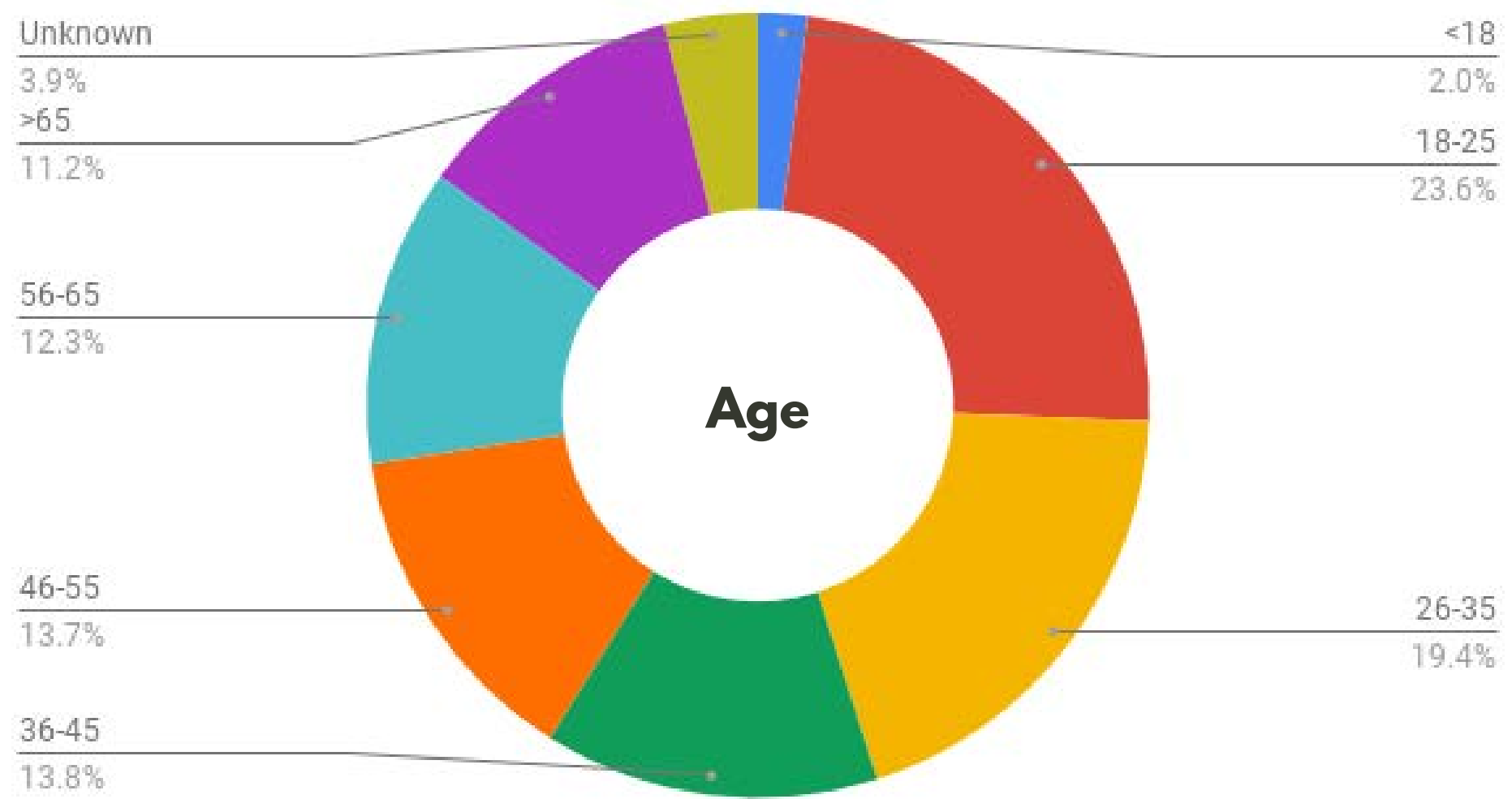
Could this have implications for designing other learning experiences?

# *MOOC 'completers'*

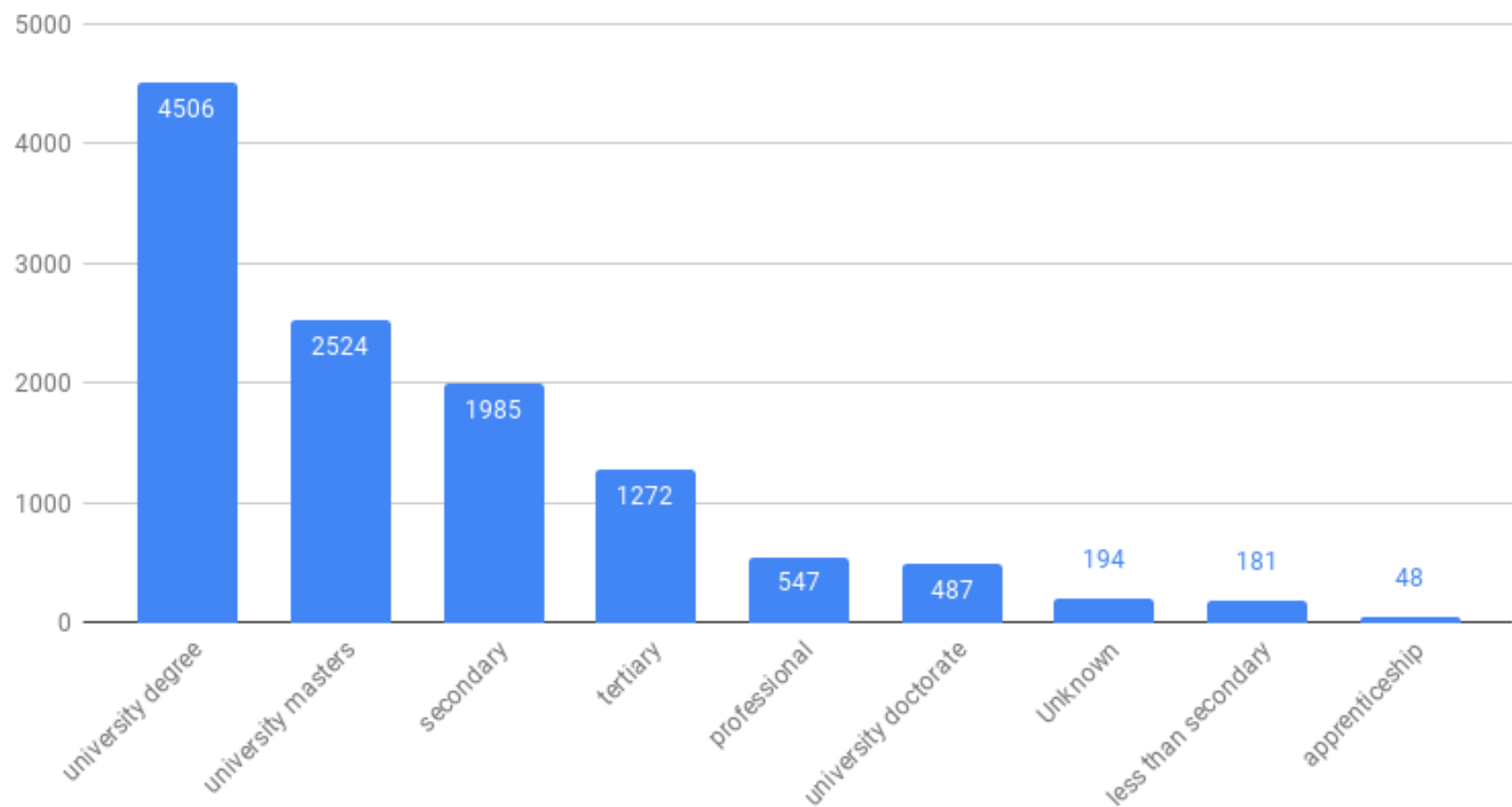
## LEARNER PERSPECTIVE

What do those who have completed our MOOCs find helpful from MOOC design and would they find it helpful in ODL?





Highest education level 'completers'



## POTENTIAL POSTGRADUATES

47% between 26 and 55.

Largest group are educated to graduate level.

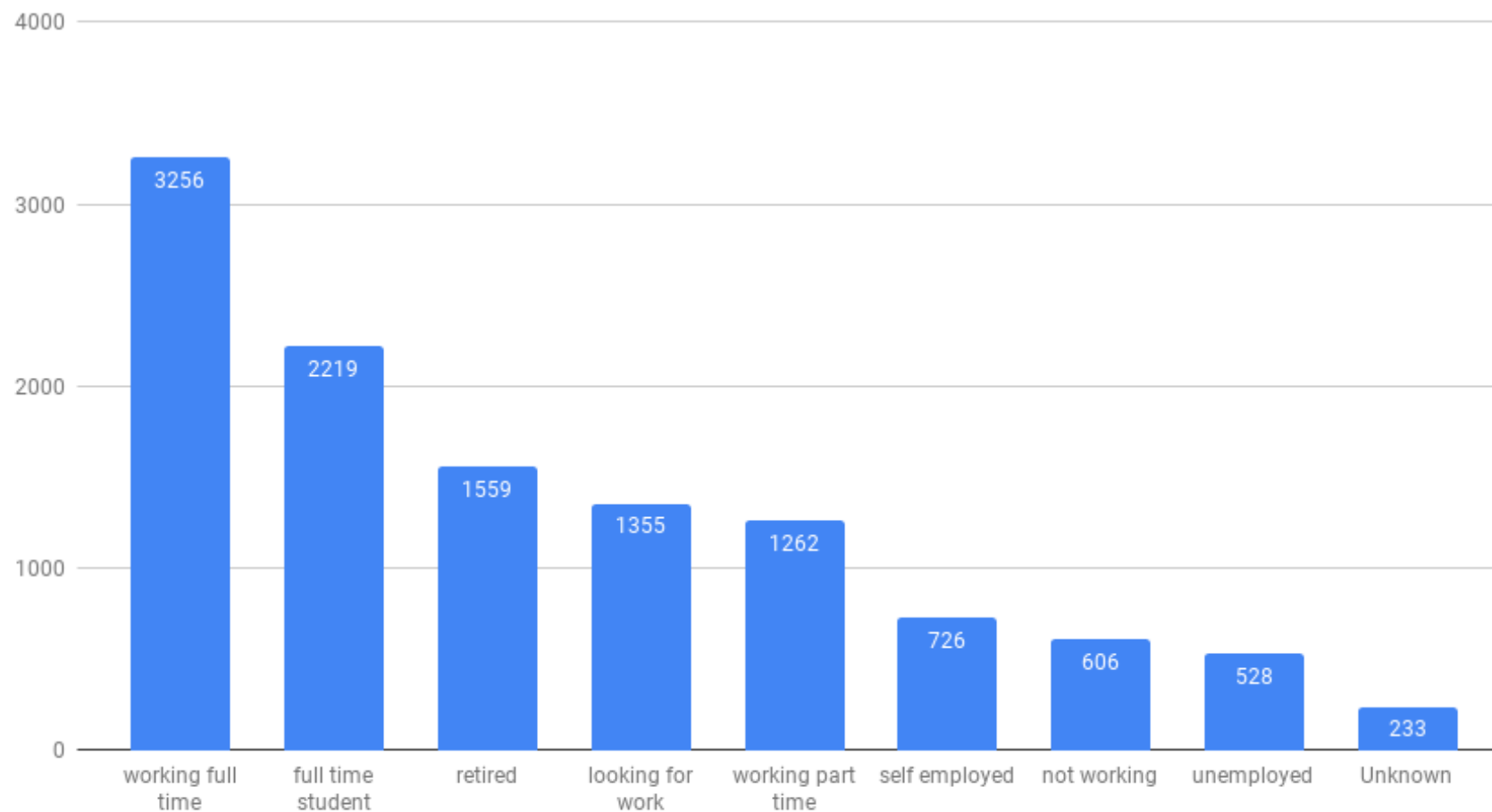
Largest group are working full time.

## UNDERGRADUATES

24% between 18-25.

2nd largest group are full time students.

Employment status 'completers'



## LIFELONG LEARNERS

13% retired.

26% had postgraduate degrees or doctorates.

## POTENTIAL UNDERGRADUATES

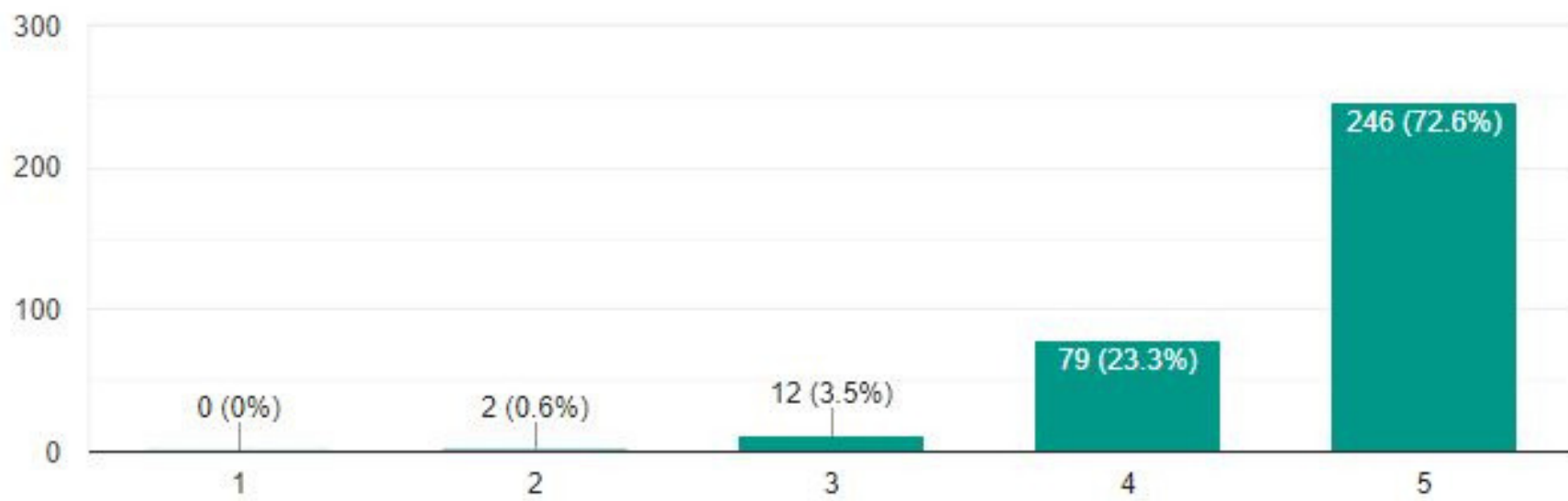
19% had 'less than secondary school', 'secondary school', 'apprenticeship' and 'professional' as highest educational attainment.

## **What elements of the MOOC helped you to learn?**

- **Themes to follow, such as a question posed (e.g. Who killed Mr. X?)**
- **Bite-sized chapters**
- **Marking and tracking progress**
- **Discussion on every step**
- **Explanation of tasks**
- **Frequent tasks to check understanding**
- **Instant feedback on quiz attempts**
- **Video demonstrations**
- **Insights from real-life experts working in the field (e.g. Interviews)**
- **Main content in one place**

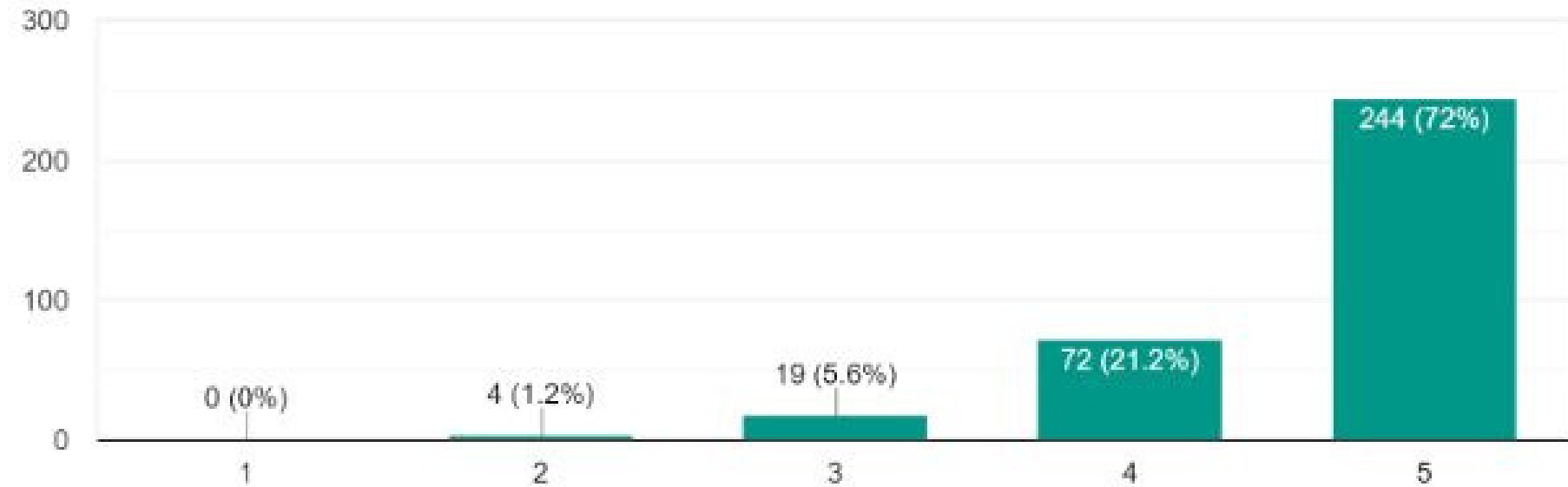
### Instant, automatic feedback on quiz and test answer attempts (e.g. hints if you answer incorrectly)

339 responses



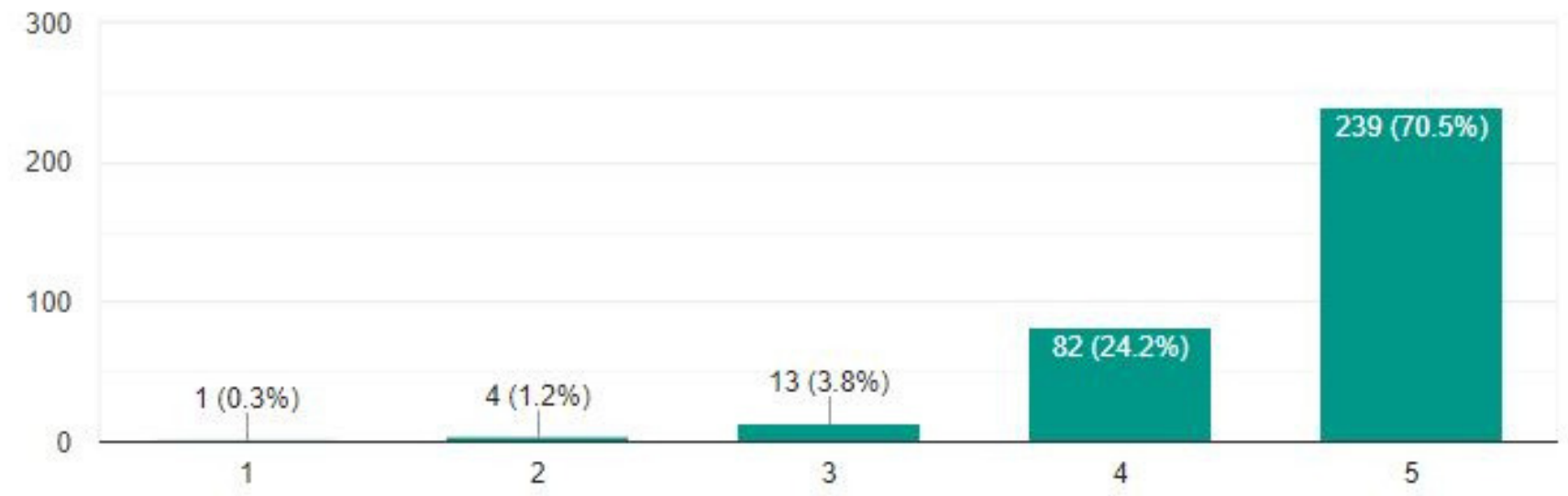
### Insights from real-life experts, working in the field (e.g. interviews with professionals and experts, real-life examples)

339 responses



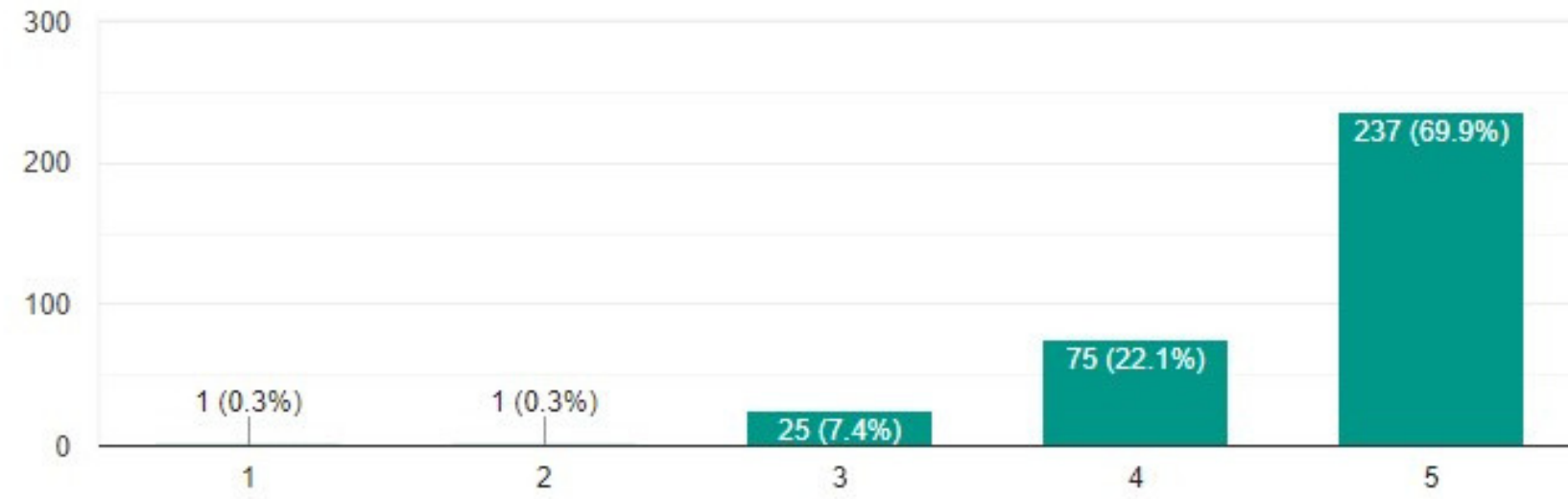
### Video demonstrations (e.g. which showed you a concept in action or in the field)

339 responses



### Opportunities to mark and track your progress and celebrate success (e.g. being able to find your place easily when you return, marking where you are up to and which of the content you have read and understood)

339 responses

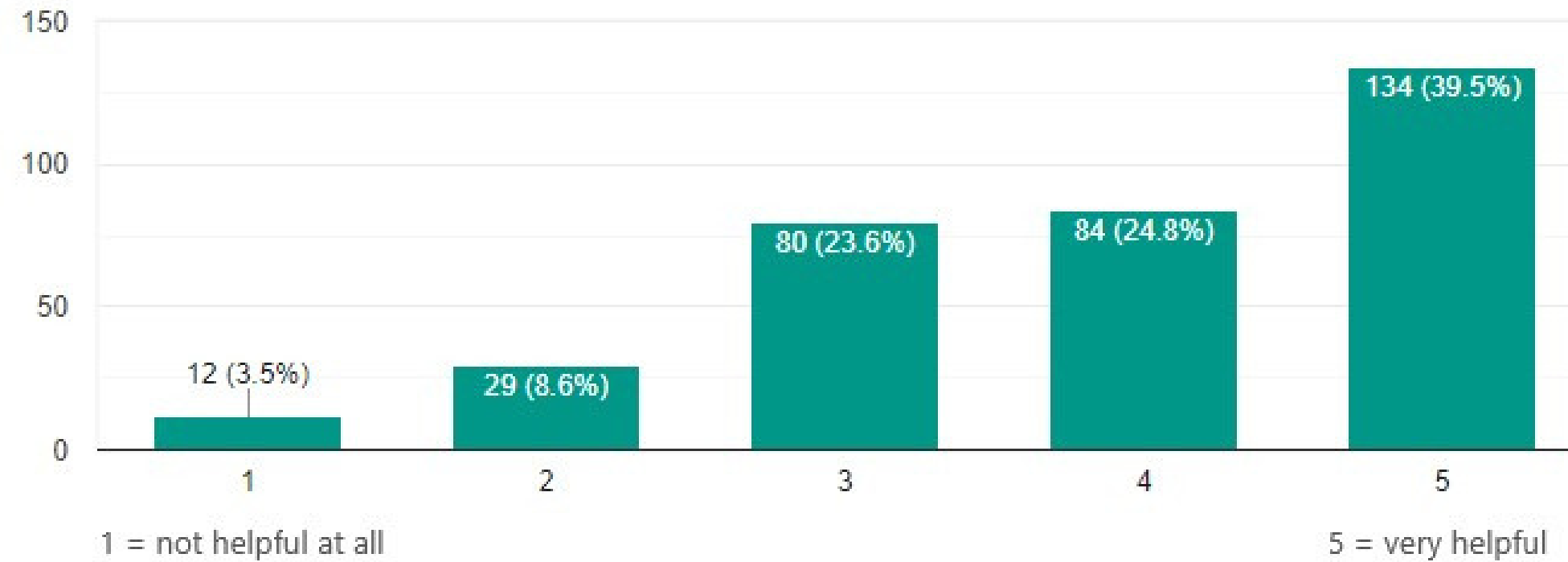


**'...demonstrating the material covered in a different medium, like a video or annotated images, really helps cement what you've read about. It also gives you something more memorable than a sentence you read among many, so it helps when it comes to tests to have something easier and more specific to recall...'**

**'The course was extremely well designed for distance learning. The fact it could be left at short notice (I have a busy life with lots of interruptions!) and picked up where I left off was helpful.'**

The possibility on all steps and at any moment during the course to discuss the content with other learners (e.g. commenting function on each step of content)

339 responses

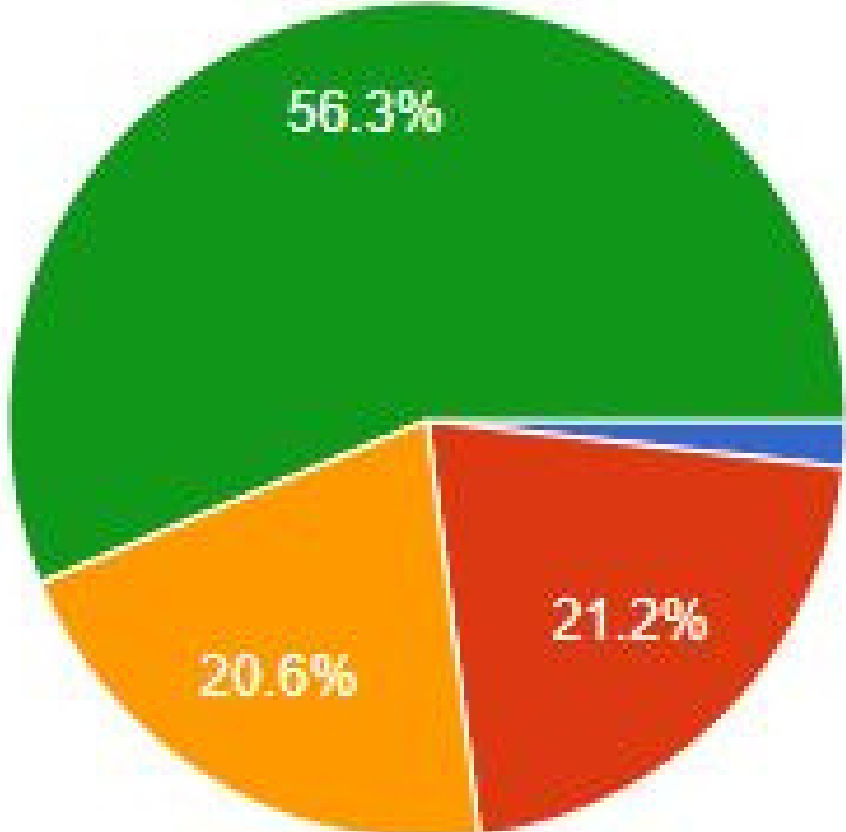


**'Sharing comments was good and can stimulate thinking, but it needs feedback from the 'tutors' to round off discussions sometimes. If not, the discussions can feel very open-ended, incomplete and unsatisfactory, not discussions at all.'**

**'The way the course was set out gave opportunity to get feedback from other learners and tutors. Which helped me to feel more confident working through the course.'**

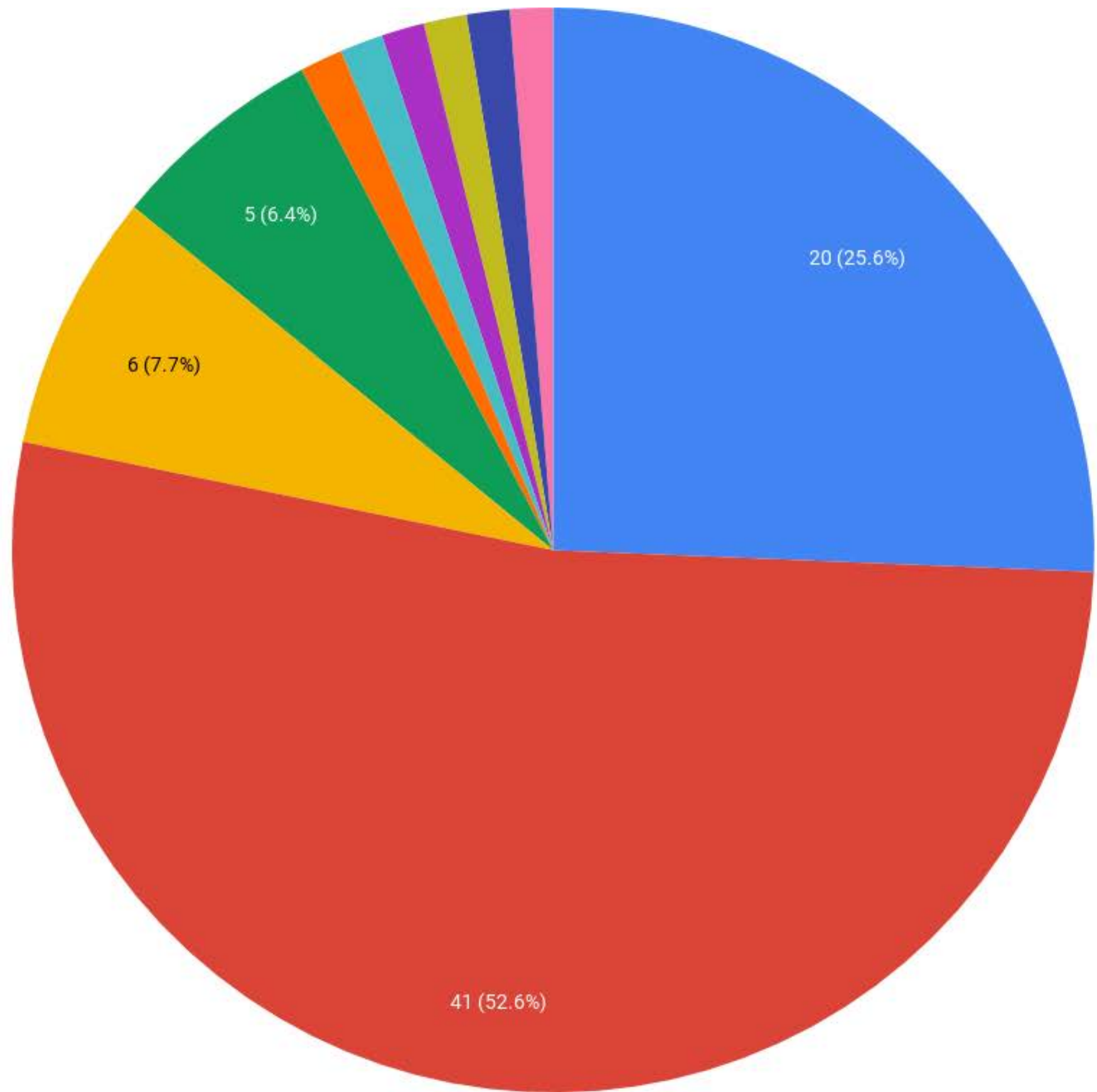
Have you also taken or are currently taking an online course for university credit (such as an online degree or module)?

339 responses



- Yes, with Sheffield
- Yes, with another university
- No, but I am considering taking an online degree
- No

# What platform was your course delivered on?

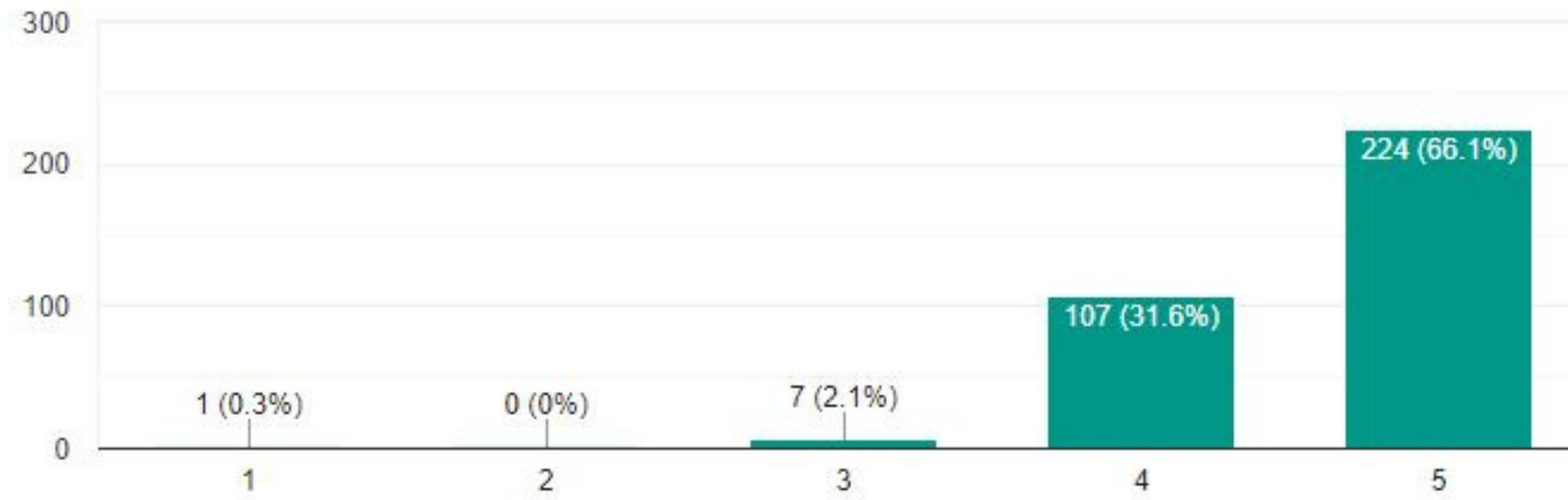


- FutureLearn
- University's own platform
- University of Sheffield
- EdX
- FutureLearn and Coursera
- MOOCs + university site
- I dont remember
- not sure
- Moodle
- Vision2learn



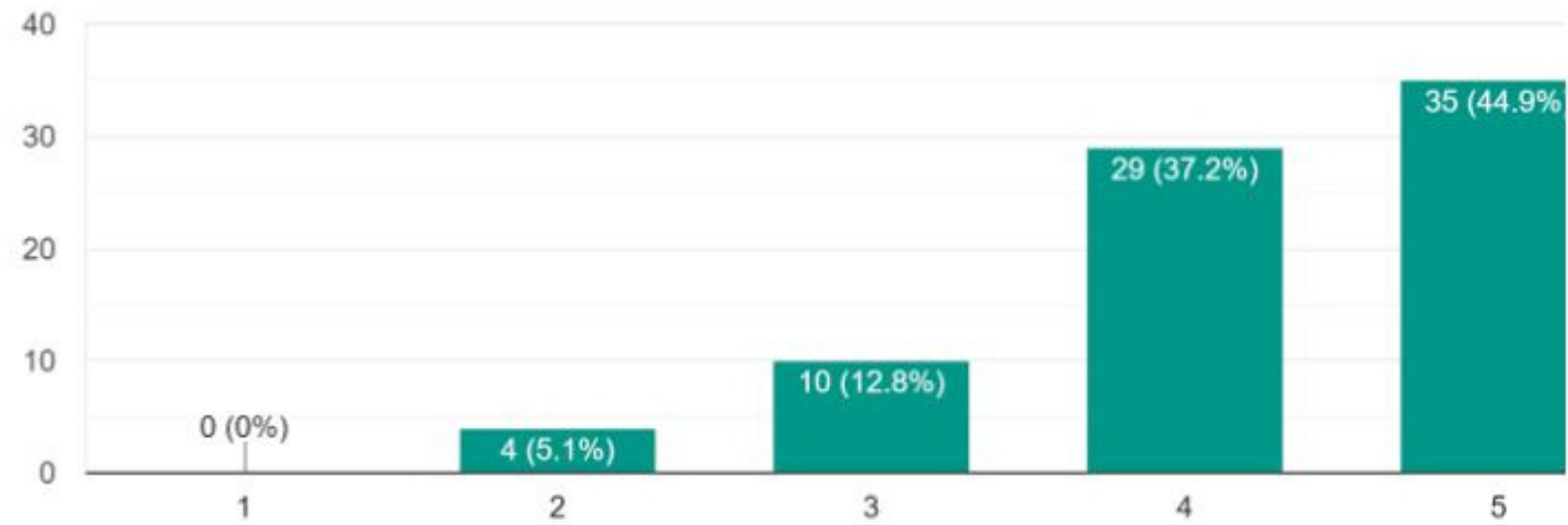
## Was the MOOC content easy to follow?

339 responses

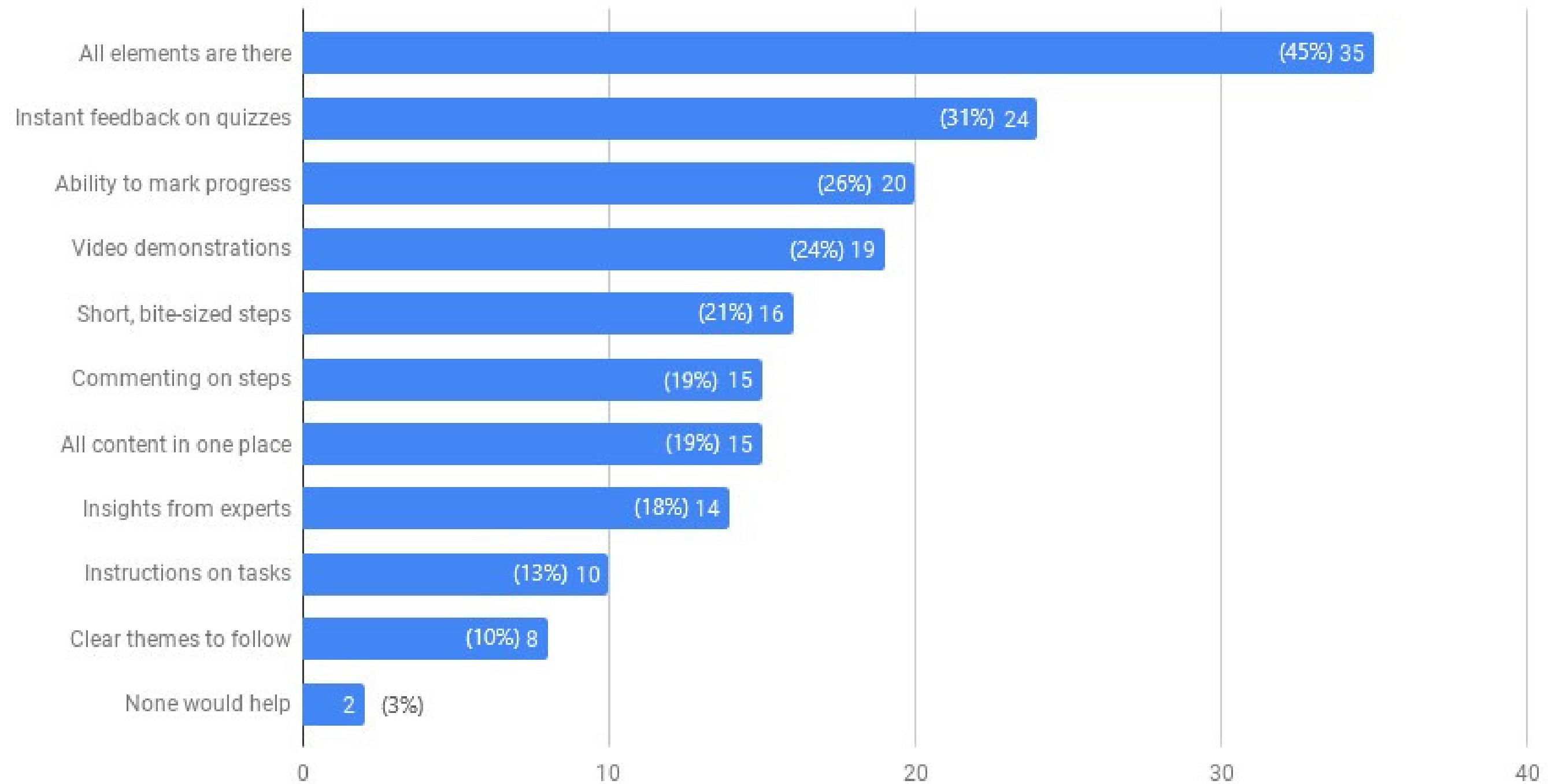


## Is/was the online degree content easy to follow?

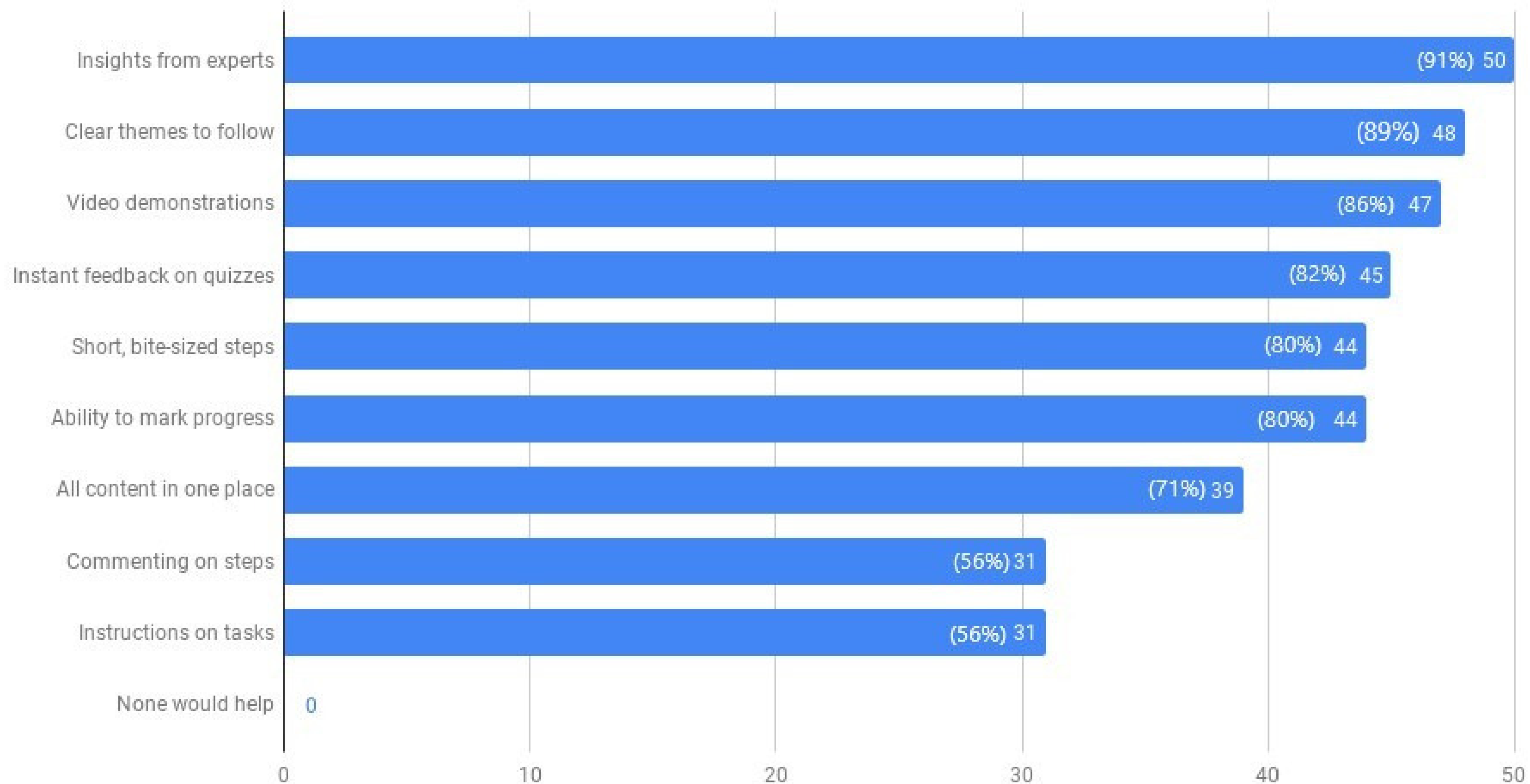
78 responses



Which of the following elements are NOT used on your degree course and you feel would help your learning if they were (tick all that apply)



Which if the following elements do you feel would help your learning if they were included in an online degree? (Tick all that apply)



**'... I passed but found it a disorienting and extremely challenging experience and would welcome any improvements that may emerge from the online experience of participants in Future Learn MOOCs...'**

**'I started an online course years ago, but did not complete it because the pace was too overwhelming. The "bite-sized steps" of this course make it a much more appealing, and doable format. I would consider doing more courses of this kind.'**

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# *Implications for other learning design*

## ONLINE DEGREE LEARNERS

Evidence to suggest that MOOCs attract similar cohorts to ODL. Graduate professionals who need flexibility to study around work. Career-related motivation. Appreciate bite-sized learning, insights from other professionals, ability to track progress easily when returning to course and plain-English as many have English as 2nd language. Argument for FutureLearn as an effective degree platform for institutions?

## UG AND POTENTIAL UG STUDENTS

Plain English as not familiar with academic language. Big questions and themes help them engage with academic research. Social learning builds their confidence and interactivity helps practice new concepts and check understanding. Implications for preparatory online material for UG? For UG learning content presentation on VLEs?

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## *Further research*

### SOCIAL LEARNING

Learners connect social element to lack of feedback from tutors. Need to consider where formal learning can build more feedback and moderation into the social element and what may not be appropriate for smaller student cohorts. More specific research into levels of facilitation and feedback (both MOOCs and ODL).

### LEARNING DESIGN FOR DIFFERENT COHORTS

Research to record the responses from the graduate professional group and the UG student group separately- did they find different elements useful due to their level of understanding?