

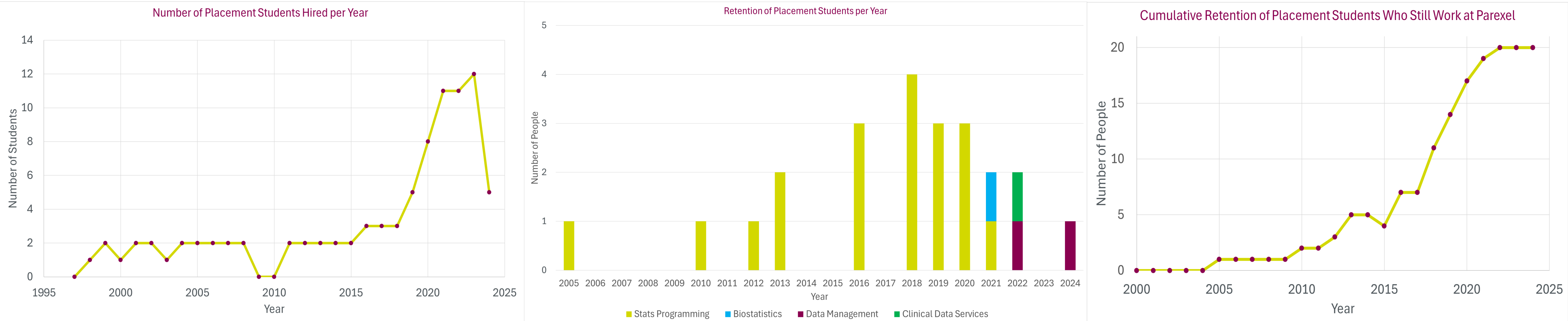
Attracting Young Talented Programmers to the Pharmaceutical Industry in a Post-COVID World: Adapting to the Evolving Working Landscape

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Background

Despite reaching record numbers of placement students in the Parexel Sheffield UK office (across several departments), retention of students Post-COVID has significantly declined following years of success Pre-COVID. Is this purely coincidental? Or is it an unexpected domino effect from COVID that has come to fruition?



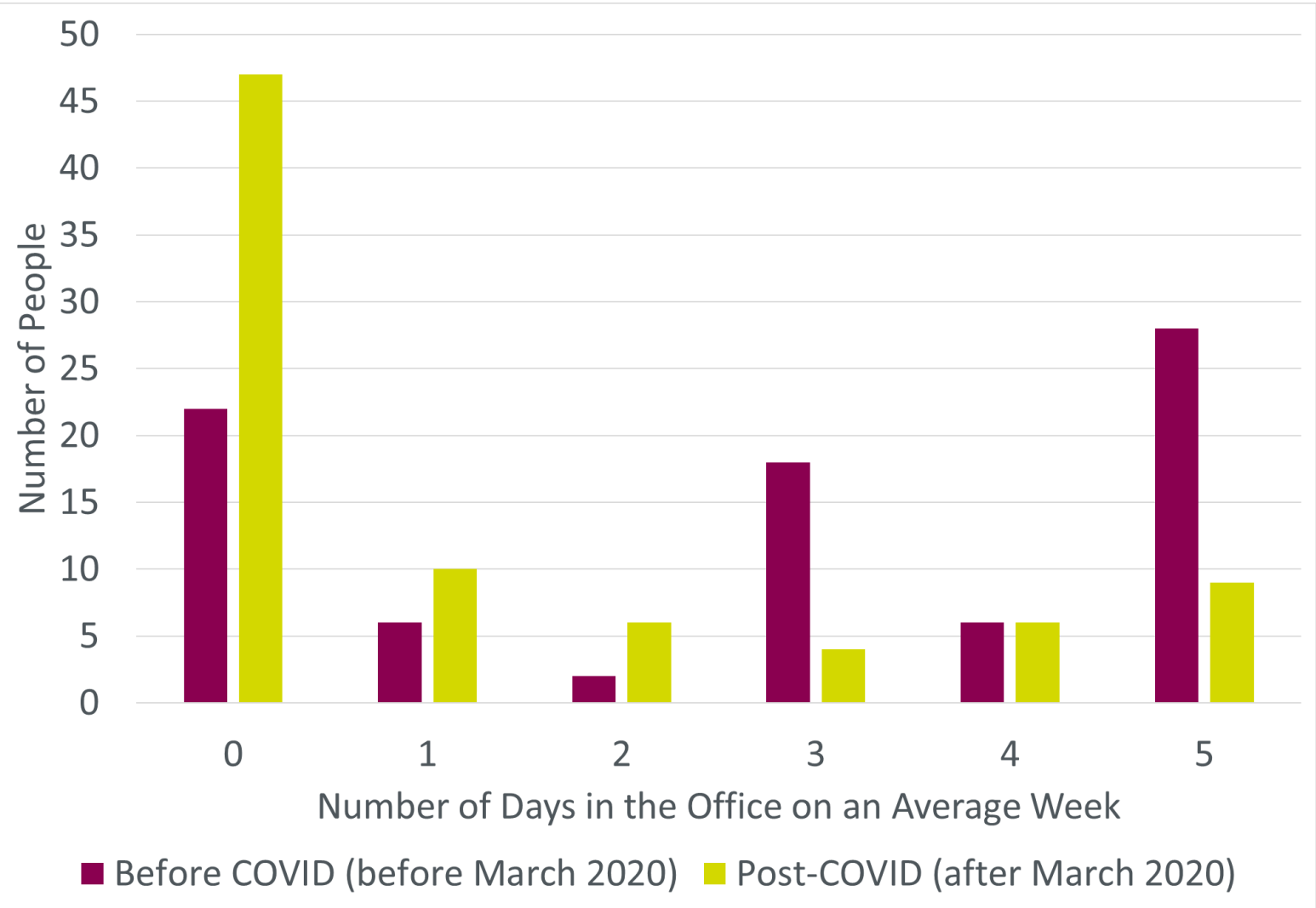
Investigation

Two questionnaires were created and distributed with two different target audiences in mind. One for Parexel staff members (82 respondents), and another for ex-placement students (23 respondents). The purpose behind this was to collate the sentiments and experiences of all respondents with respect to the impact of COVID in the workplace

and identify any common trends in respondents' attitude and behaviours. The information gathered was to be analysed as to how the changes forced by COVID has negatively affected students specifically and possibly caused the decline in retention. Conclusions would be drawn on what preventative or proactive actions could be implemented to address the issues observed, to the benefit of both the company, and the talented individuals.

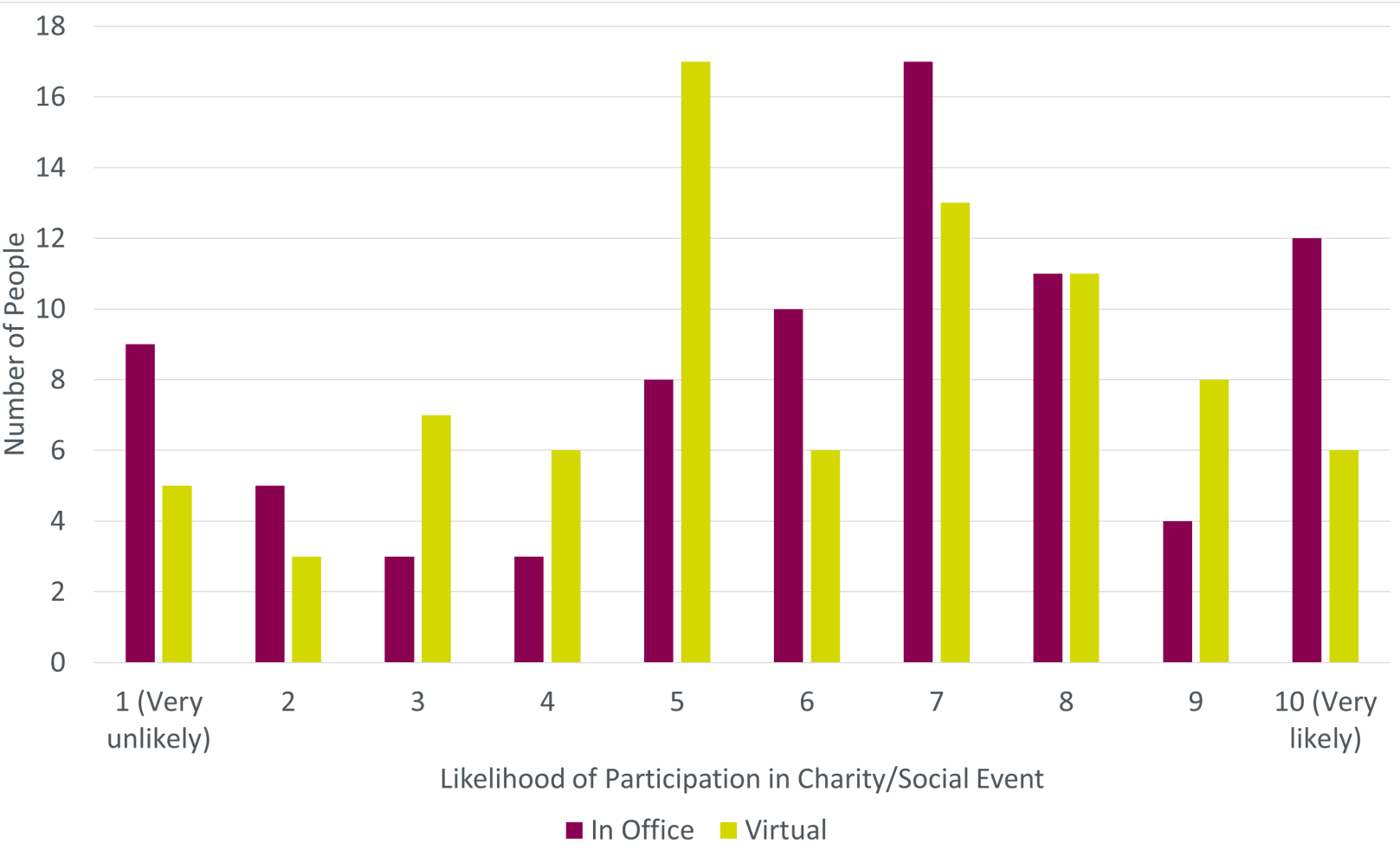
Results & Discussion Points

The Benefits of a Social Office Environment

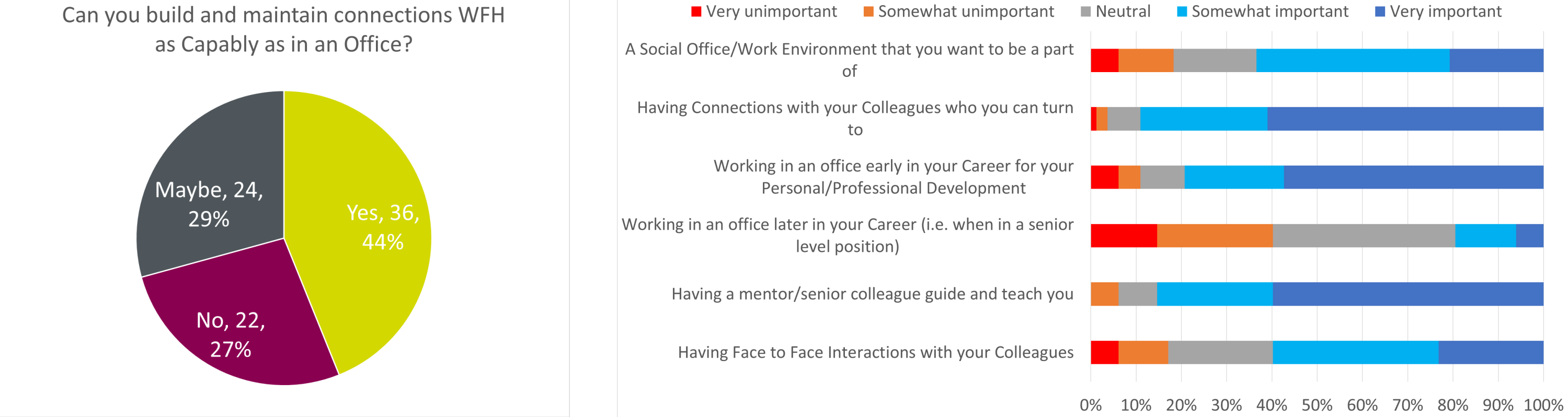


Even in a virtually inclusive environment, in person interactions are more desirable. 63% of respondents would be more likely (6-10) to partake in an event if it were in the office, in contrast to only 51% (also 6-10) that would be likely to partake if the event had a virtual element to it instead.

Unsurprisingly, COVID brought about a big shift in the dynamics of the office. From a bustling hive of social activity to a flexible but quiet atmosphere. The world adapted to home working, but many feel they can't replace the intricacies of human interaction and the boosts in morale that occur by having simple impromptu conversations with your colleagues.

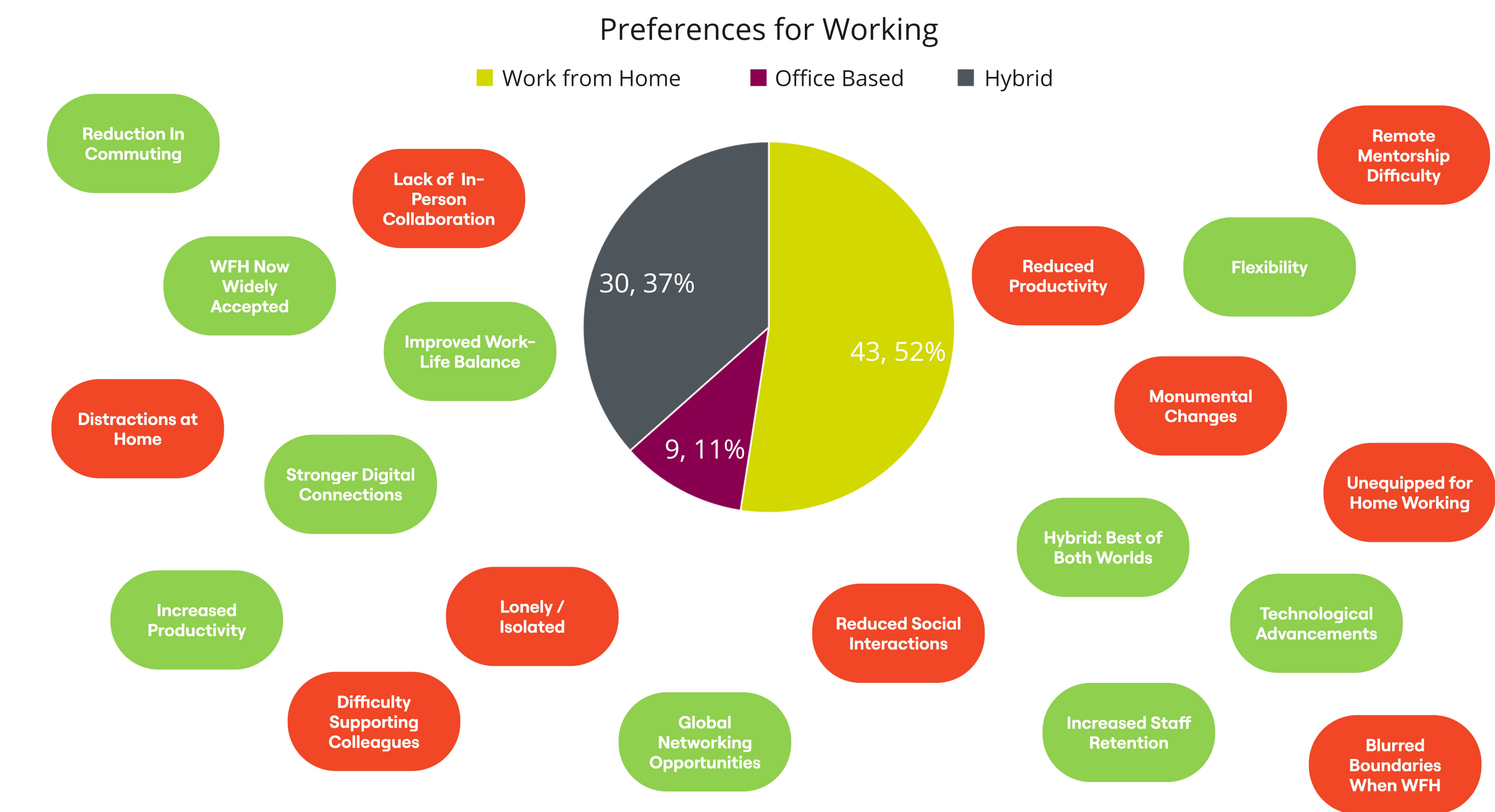


A Disconnect between Idea and Reality – Building Connections



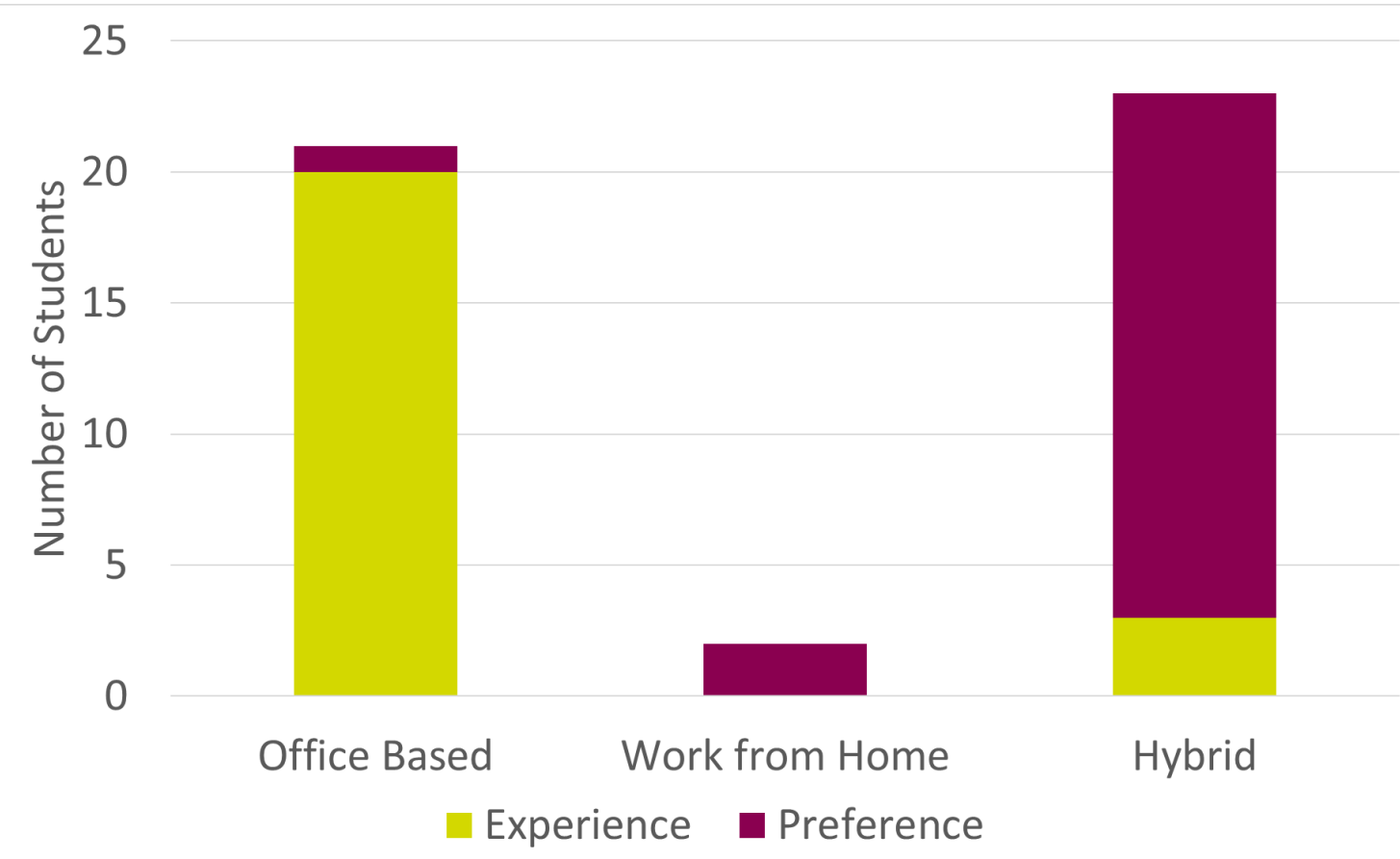
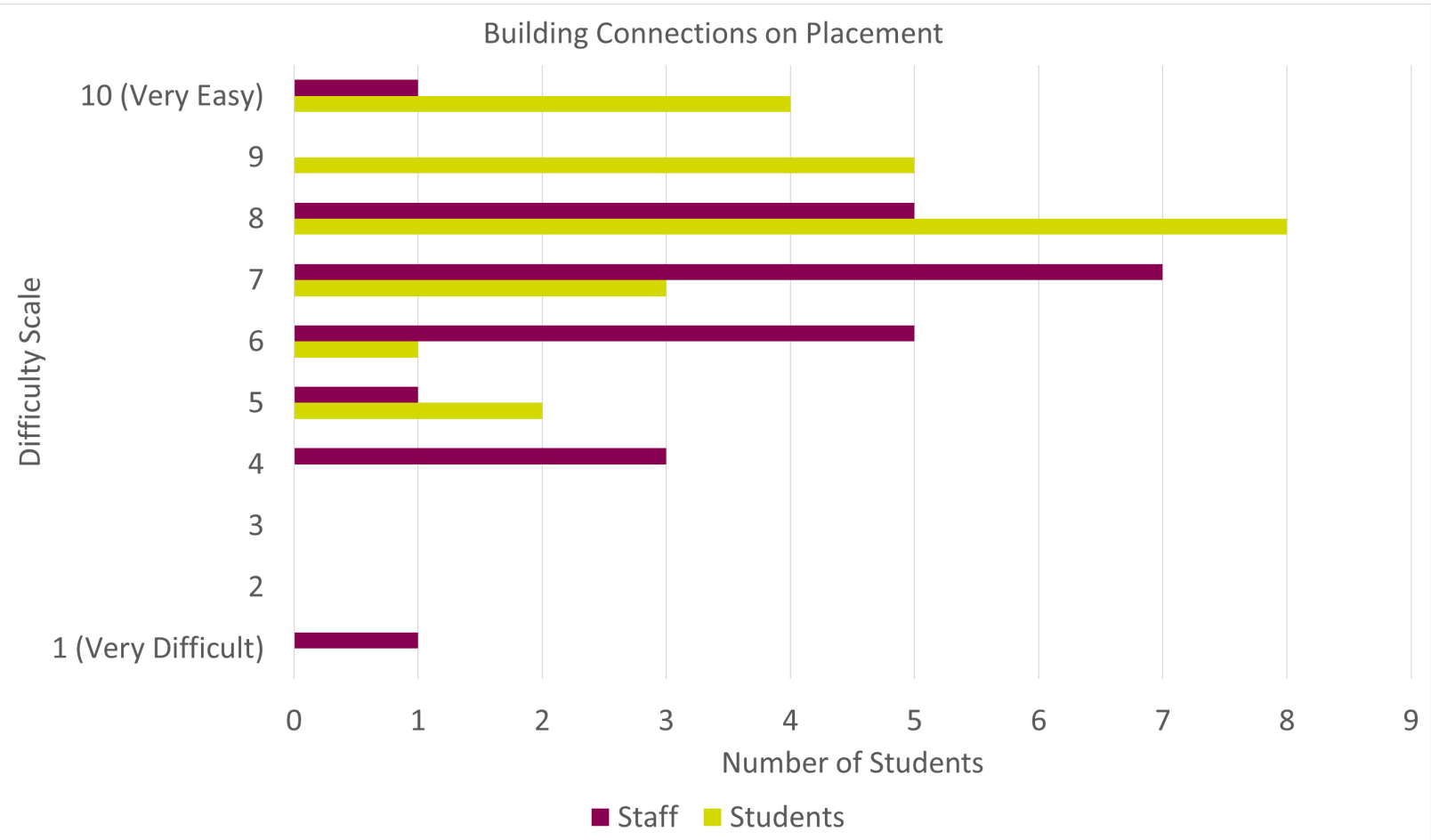
Given the office vacuum that COVID created and the shift to remote working, it doesn't seem to have altered the opinion that being office based early in your career, is more beneficial to you (57.3% v. important), as well as having a mentor guide you (59.8% v. important). However, the question arises as to what benefits do we speak of, when almost all senior members of staff are remote working? Where is the passive knowledge sharing? Who leads by example with respect to discipline and professional behavior? How can we expect junior staff to build lasting connections the same way past generations did when everything has changed? What is most interesting is that 61% of respondents believe it to be very important (28% important), to have connections with your colleagues who you can turn to for support, yet only 44% feel confident enough to say they can maintain those connections WFH at present.

What are the Implications of Working from Home?



The Student Perspective – A New Generation Emerges

Placement students simply do not want to be in an office 5 days a week. Has their experience Post-COVID been the catalyst for this? In any case, students still recognized the benefits of office working such as for building relationships, but they also see the value of flexible remote work. Are we making enough of a concerted effort to provide them with a hybrid model that works?



Placement students found it easier to build and maintain connections with each other (avg. 8.09/10) than they did with permanent staff (avg. 6.39/10). They cited that unlike themselves, permanent staff members either weren't around in the office or rotated too often. Remote working limited their interactions which in turn affected their ability to get support. Social events were key to trying to bridge the gap.

Conclusions

The results from the questionnaire were conclusive, remote work is here to stay. However, there is a strong sense that it cannot replace everything that COVID risked destroying. Remote working can largely satisfy an individual's own working needs, but what it doesn't bring is face-to-face interaction and collaboration that unites and motivates people. When comparing student experiences to the opinions of permanent staff, there is a clear disconnect. It could be argued that a work environment is no longer being cultivated in which students desire to return to. This could firstly be addressed by giving junior members of staff the same autonomy that has been granted to senior members of staff, the right to choose their own working pattern as best suits them. Nevertheless, it would not be as straightforward as simply letting them work from home more, even with advancements in technology for virtual collaboration. That is because all ages and experiences collectively understood and agreed on the benefits of a social office environment, when such an office exists. The problem is identifying what's lacking and looking to address it so that everyone reaps the rewards, whilst not forcibly denying anyone's right to remote work. This needs to be consciously done and not happen coincidentally. COVID restrictions have long dissipated, but the damage they did have arguably not been adequately addressed due to the increase in popularity with remote working. A hybrid model seems to be the ideal solution, but that model is currently only benefitting those who have been in the industry since before COVID and already have the connections and technical knowledge. Work is needed to develop a hybrid model that works for all ages and levels of experience. This should then fully enable people to work as one team, strengthen job satisfaction and incentivize students to want to come back.