

The 2025

Higher Education Transformation Priorities Report



Insights into institutional demand for advisory services, digital ecosystems, and learning experiences to strengthen enrollment and retention.

Survey Methodology

Conducted in April 2025, this survey gathered insights from 180 higher education leaders with decision-making authority across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Ireland. It explored perceptions of what education management partners (EMP) — institutions that offer a range of education delivery models with flexible engagement options — bring to the table.



PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The goal: To identify the most pressing institutional needs — from enrollment and student support to teaching innovation and operational sustainability — and understand how institutions are prioritizing partnerships and investments.

PARTICIPANTS

Respondents were key decision-makers or influencers in selecting learning management and education technology solutions. All currently use, have used, or plan to use an education management partner (EMP), and all represent a mix of public and private institutions, including medium-sized institutions (2,000–9,999 students) and large institutions (10,000–30,000 students).

DEFINING THE EMP CATEGORY

An education management partner goes beyond the traditional definition of an online program manager (OPM). While OPMs typically focus on launching and managing online degree programs under long-term revenue-share agreements, EMPs serve as broader strategic partners. They help institutions scale programs, improve quality, and optimize operations through flexible engagement models that leverage technology, data insights, and specialized expertise. The term was intentionally used in this survey to capture the broader scope of services institutions now expect and to move beyond the narrow connotations often associated with the OPM model.

Key Insights

Higher education is ready for digital transformation, but institutions aren't chasing novelty. They want partners who integrate seamlessly, demonstrate ROI, and align with institutional culture.

The institutions leading the way are moving beyond fragmented solutions — and toward integrated ecosystems. They're partnering with education solutions providers that help reduce friction across departments, enhance the learner's experience, empower faculty, and unlock actionable insights through connected data.

The next phase of digital evolution in higher education isn't about which new tool to buy or which service to outsource. It's about ensuring integrated systems and partnerships are in place to empower the institutions to respond, adapt, and serve learners better.



Institutions are ready to move — with the right fit

More than 95% of institutions find education management partners' products and services appealing, with most expecting to adopt new platforms within the next one to two years. Medium-sized institutions, in particular, show strong early-adopter intent, signaling where near-term momentum is likely to build.



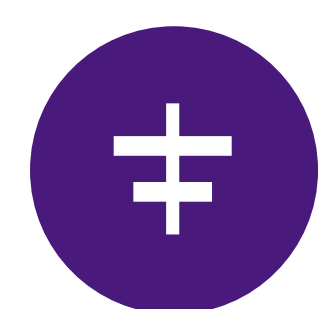
Innovation, ROI, and flexibility are must-haves

Decision-makers prioritize tools that integrate, streamline, and deliver measurable value. Concerns over ROI, cost, capacity, and cultural fit continue to shape adoption decisions.



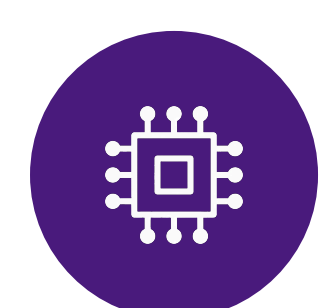
Fee-for-service models are taking over

Institutions increasingly favor fixed-cost pricing over revenue sharing, particularly for strategic advisory, data, and training-related services.



Flexibility and customization drive adoption

Institutions want modular, scalable solutions that fit their internal capacity and existing systems.



AI and data integration are emerging priorities

Institutions see connected data and responsible AI use as the next enablers of institutional efficiency and learner success, but most are still developing strategies to get there.

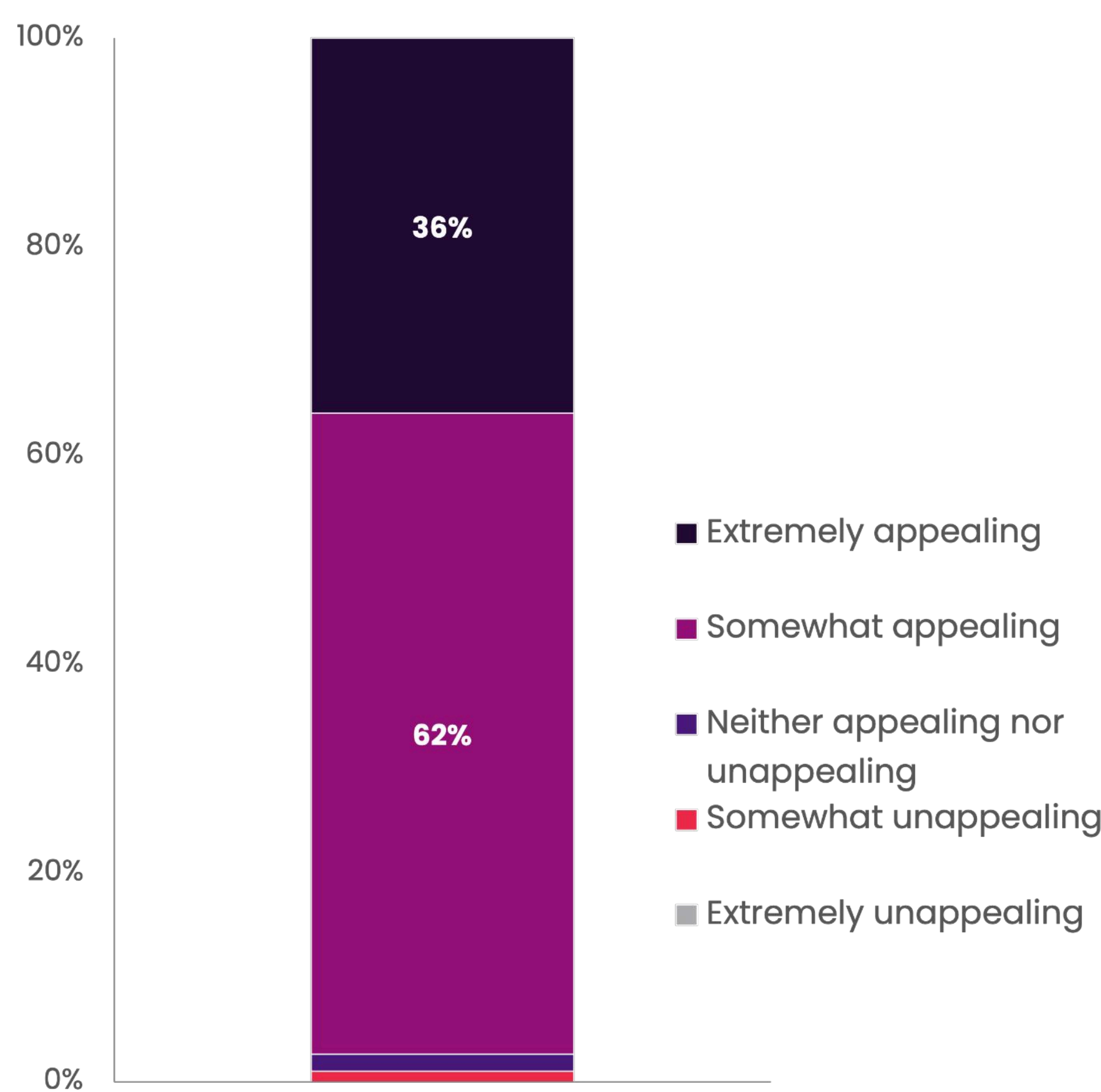


Widespread appeal signals strong market demand

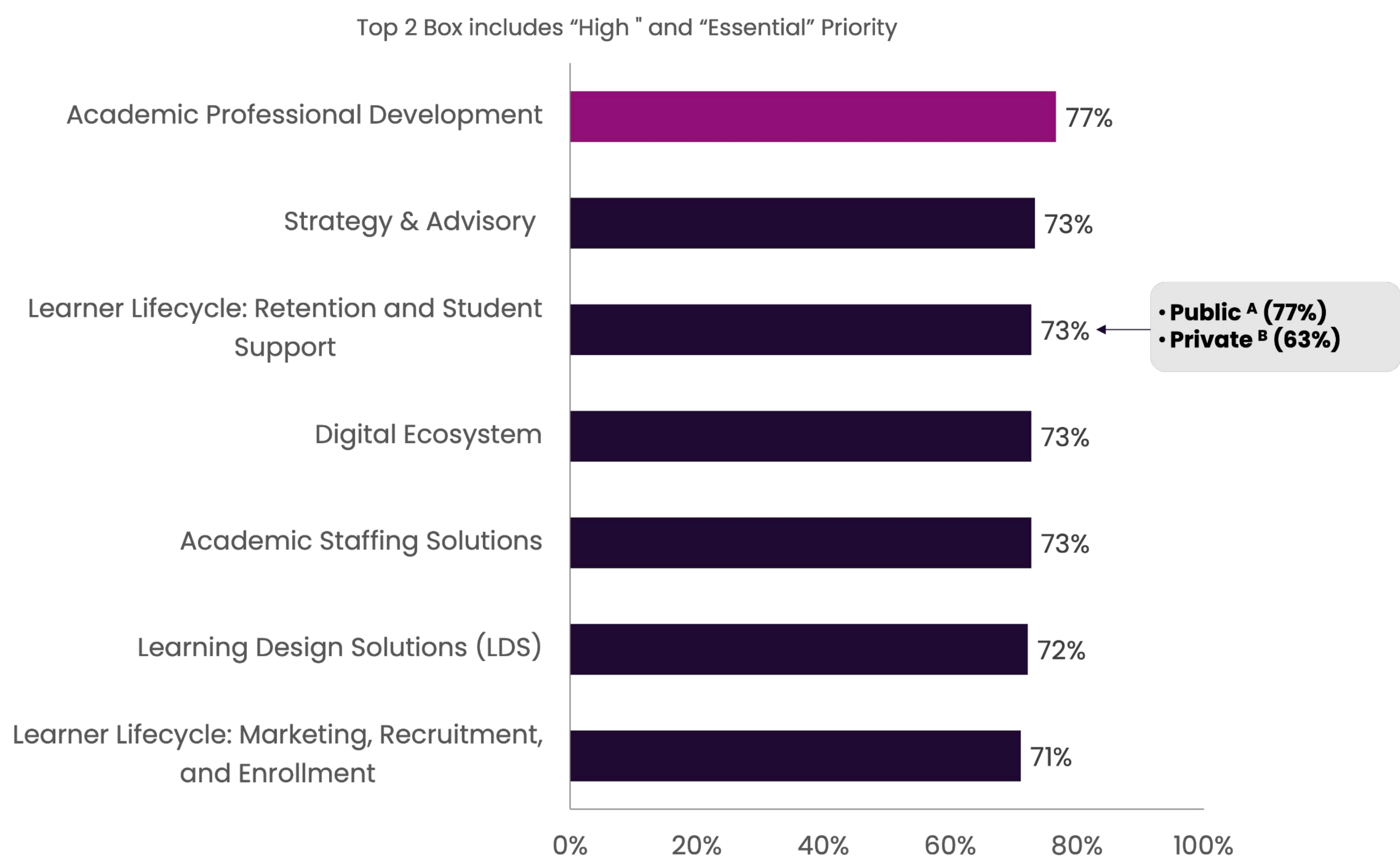
The vast majority of colleges find education management partners’ products and services appealing, with one-third rating them “extremely appealing.” This enthusiasm reflects strong institutional demand for external support in high-need areas such as academic professional development, strategy and advisory services, and student success.

Public institutions, in particular, rate student support services as higher priorities, highlighting where the market is most ready to act.

SERVICE SUITE APPEAL



EXTERNAL SUPPORT NEEDS



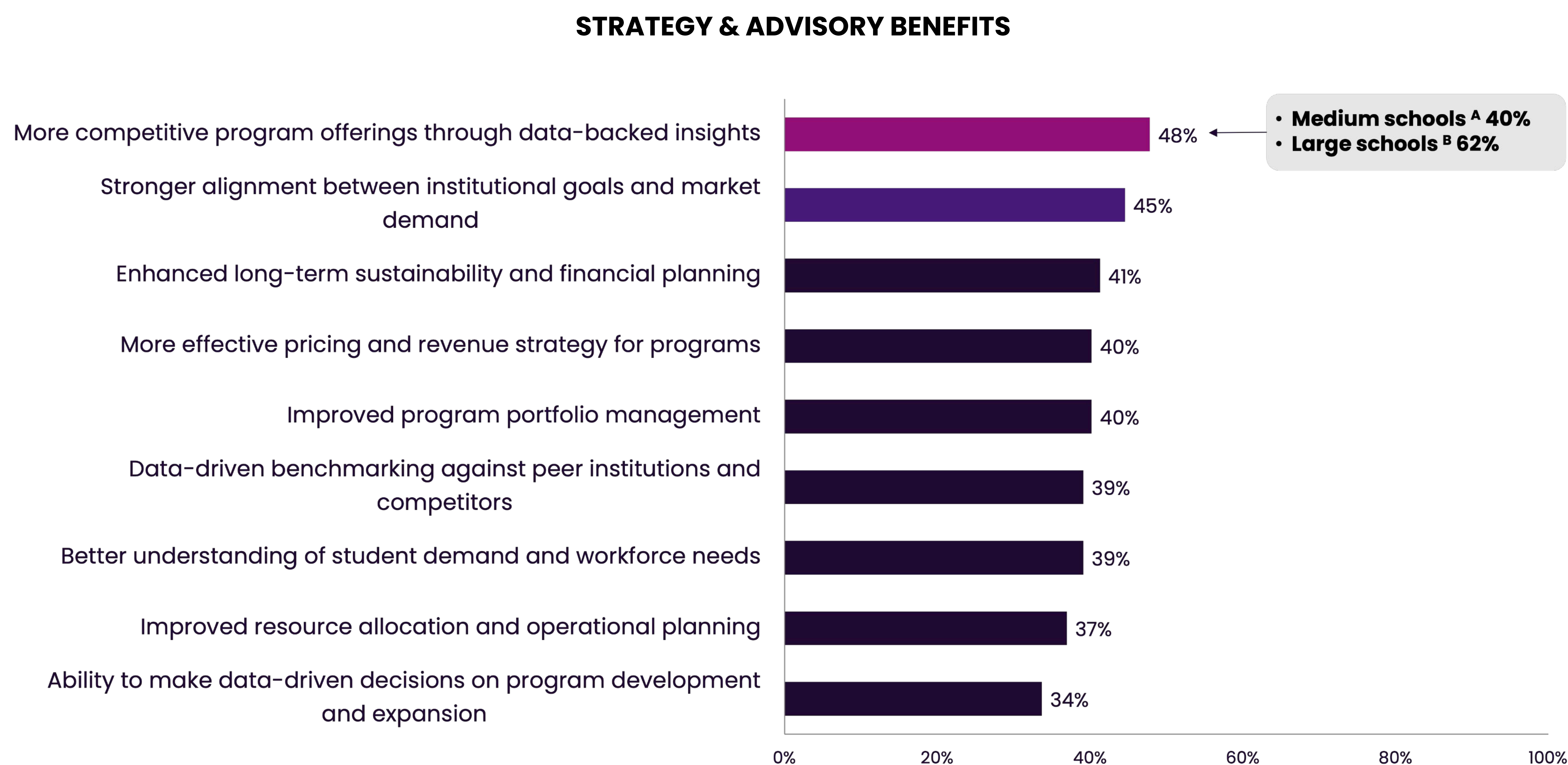
Q: Overall, how appealing would you find such a suite of services? (n=180)
Q: How would you rate your institution's level of need for external support in each of the following service areas? (n=180)



Colleges turn to strategy and advisory services to stay competitive

Nearly half of institutions value data-backed insights to align offerings with market demand. Top priorities include competitive program portfolios (48%), market alignment (45%), and sustainability planning (40%). Yet adoption often stalls on leadership resistance or skepticism of external research. Institutions aren't just buying insights — they're buying trust.

Short, targeted projects can build confidence and open the door to broader partnerships.



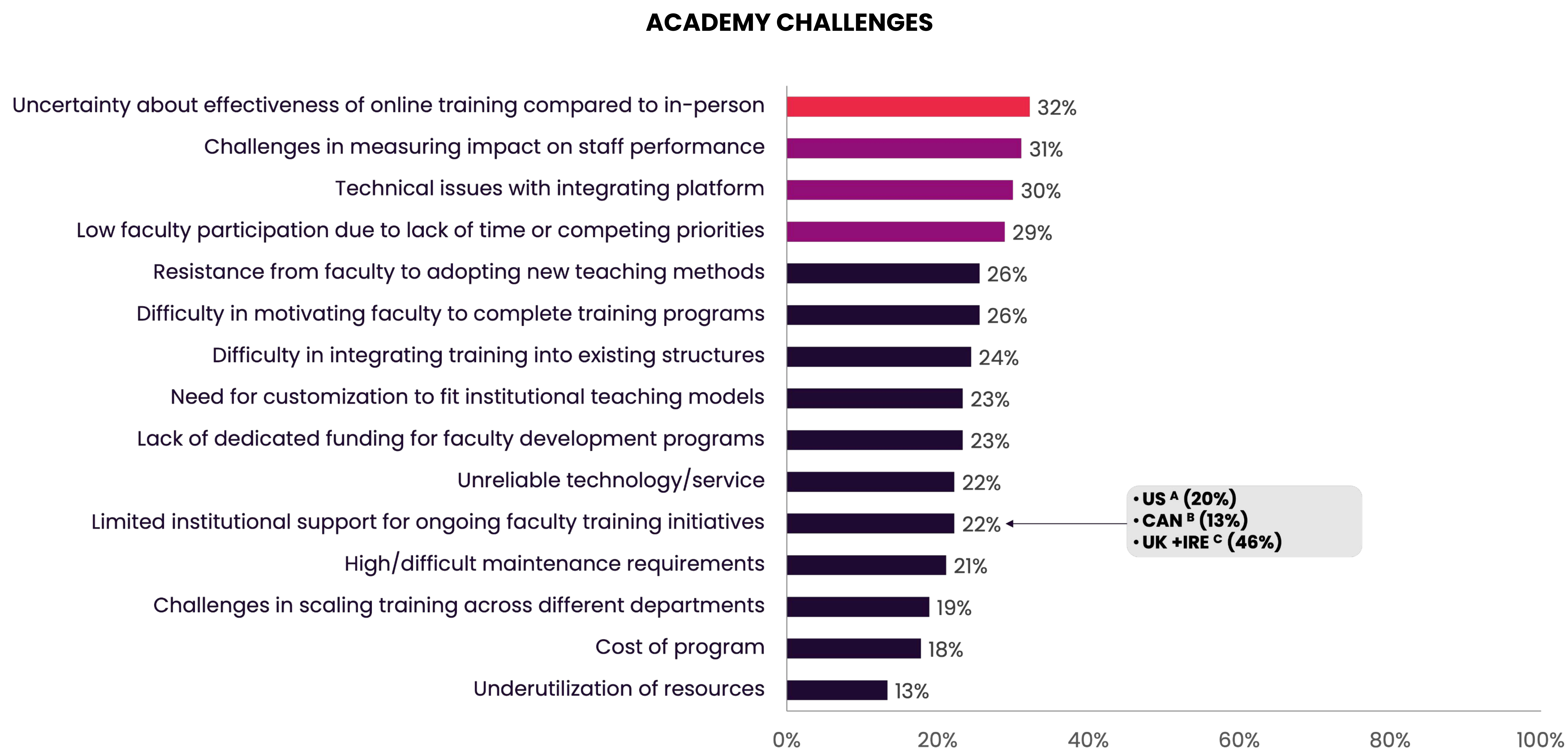
Q: Which of the following benefits would your institution expect from implementing a research-driven advisory service? Select all that apply. (n=92)



Proving the value of online training solutions

Institutions want faculty professional development that delivers higher-quality course design, stronger collaboration, and better outcomes for students. To overcome skepticism, providers must show measurable effectiveness, make onboarding easy for faculty, and demonstrate visible institutional impact.

Regional nuance matters: Institutions in the U.K. and Ireland expressed greater concern about limited institutional support for ongoing training, while U.S.-based and Canadian institutions showed more varied expectations and are generally more resourced for faculty development. Across all markets, institutions want professional development that translates directly into improved teaching and stronger student success — not just access to training modules.



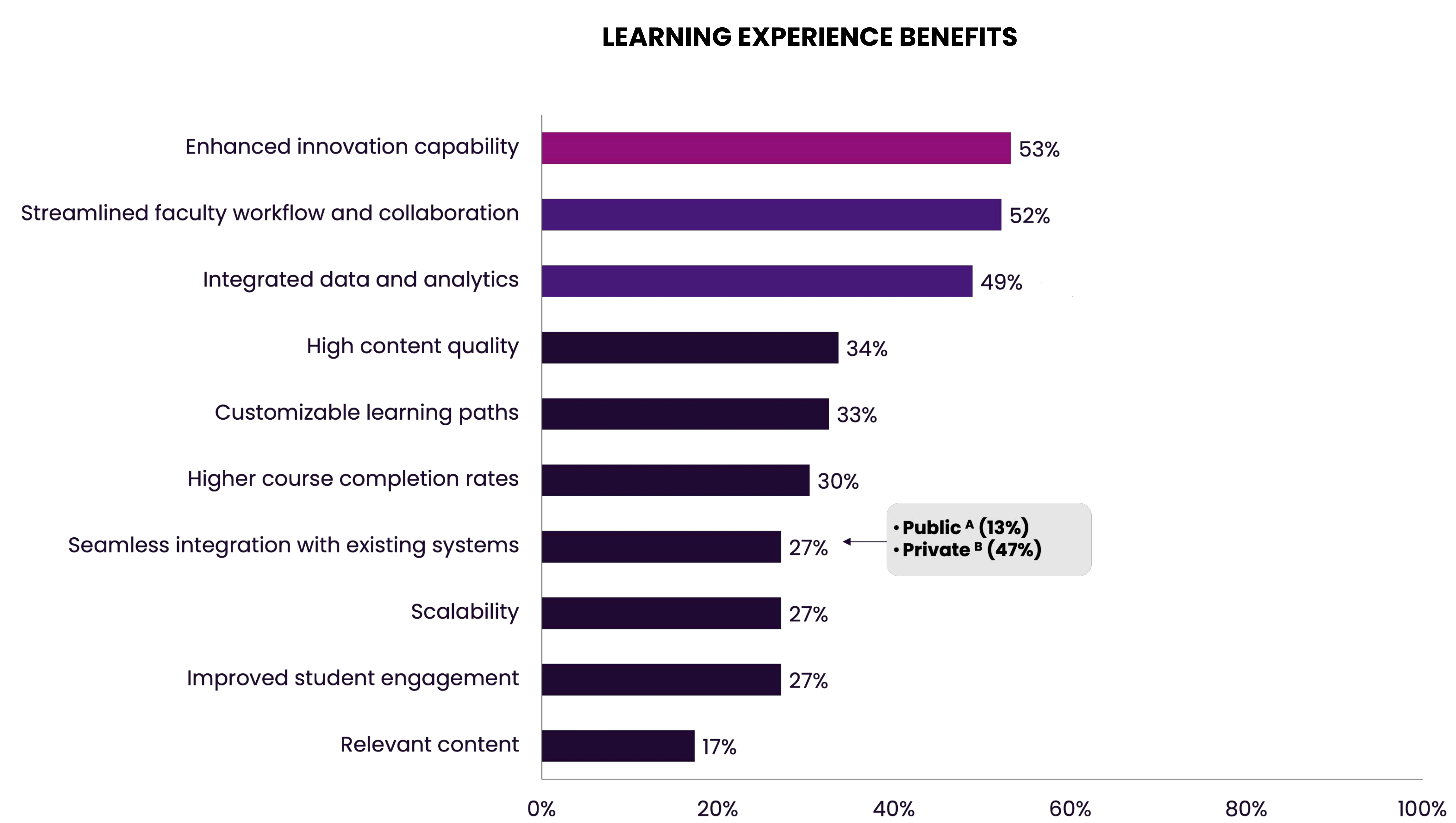
Q: What challenges or concerns might your institution face when implementing a faculty and staff training solution like Educate? Select all that apply. (n=90)



Digital ecosystems must deliver more than connectivity

When institutions talk about their digital ecosystem, their top priorities are clear: Innovation, streamlined faculty workflows, and integrated analytics. These aren’t “nice-to-haves” — they’re expectations. Institutions are looking for solutions that strengthen faculty workflows, enhance collaboration between faculty and administration/staff, simplify operations, and provide data they can act on. For providers, the message is simple: Ecosystems must not just connect platforms; they need to deliver measurable value across the institution.

Concerns about compliance and procurement standards are especially pronounced in U.K.-based and Irish institutions, underscoring the need for providers to couple strong features with equally strong assurances of security and integration.



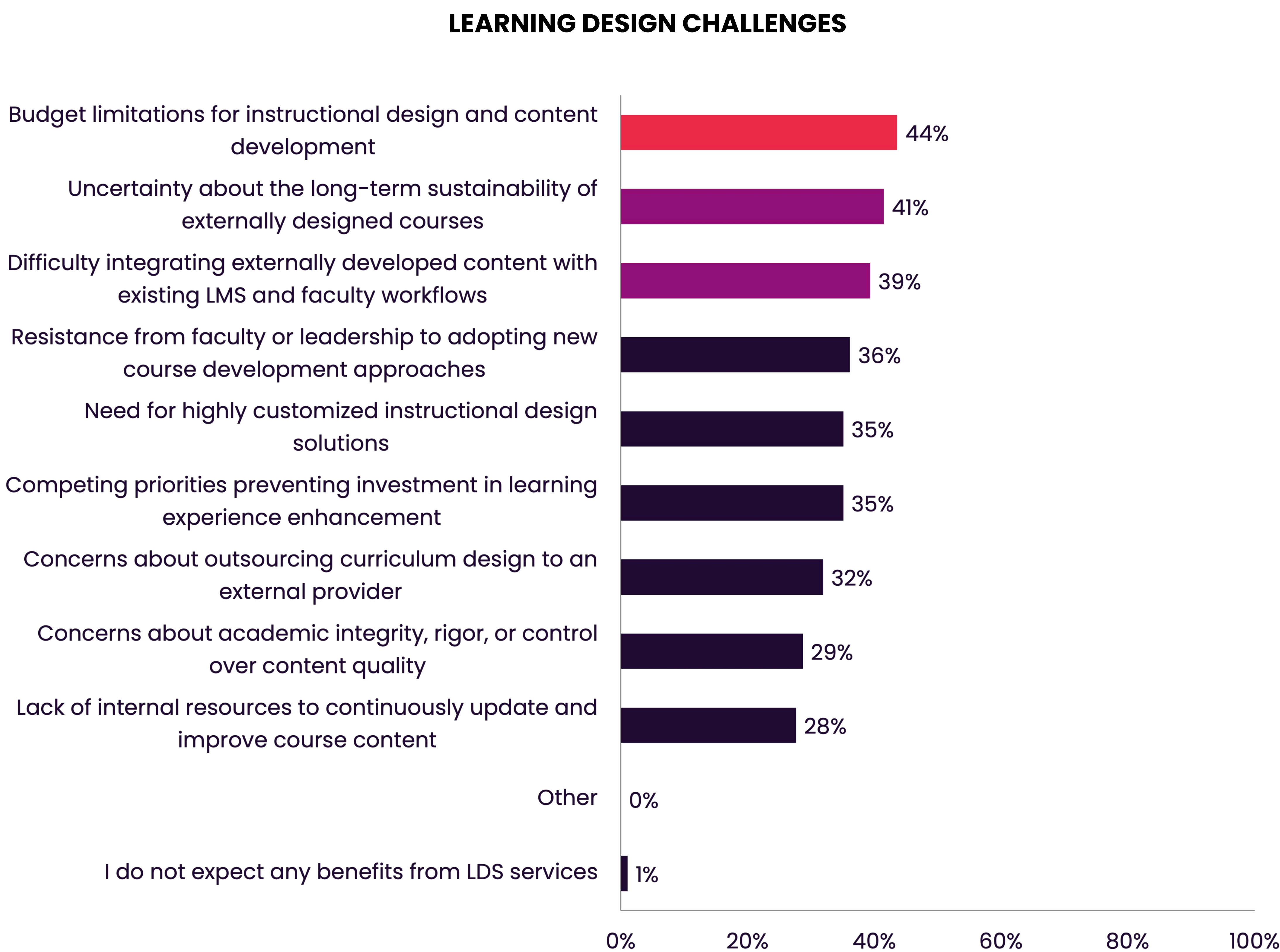
Q: Which of the following benefits do you expect from implementing such a platform at your institution? Select all that apply. (n=92)



Learning Design Barriers

Institutions are eager to adopt learning design, but they face familiar challenges. The top barriers are budget limitations (44%), uncertainty about the longevity of externally designed courses (41%), and integration difficulties with existing LMS and faculty workflows (39%). Resistance from faculty or leadership, along with competing priorities, also slows momentum.

These concerns point to a clear opportunity. To gain adoption, providers need to de-risk learning design engagements through transparent pricing, regularly updating content, and integration support. Faculty co-design, documentation, and refresh cycles can address worries about long-term viability. Positioning learning design as a partnership that extends institutional capacity rather than replacing it helps build trust and overcome resistance.



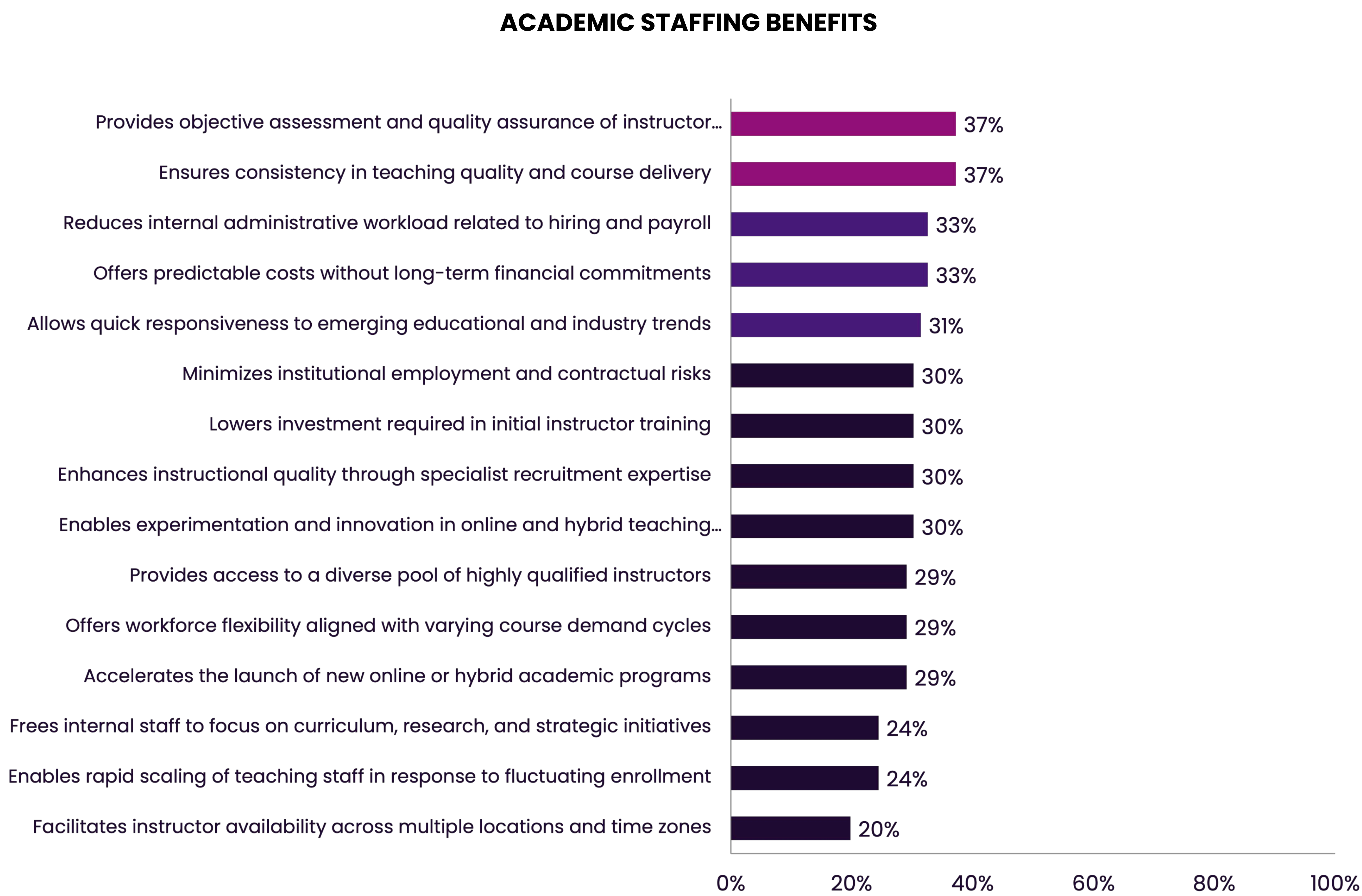
Q: What challenges or concerns might your institution face when implementing these services? Select all that apply. (n=94)



Staffing solutions that scale

Institutions turn to staffing for three main reasons: Quality assurance, consistency in teaching, and reduced admin workload. Public institutions lead demand, but interest is about raising standards as much as filling gaps.

Adoption depends on overcoming cultural concerns: Will instructors feel connected, and will faculty see them as partners? Providers that emphasize vetting, oversight, and cultural alignment can position staffing as structured, high-quality support rather than stopgap coverage.



Q: Which of the following benefits would your institution expect from implementing and using such a service? Select all that apply. (n=86)

What's Next?

As you consider how these insights align with your institutional priorities, the following thought-starters may help you identify opportunities for progress.

1. Where could external support help you move faster?

You probably have identified areas in strategy, student success, and faculty development where you are not moving as fast as you'd like. What goals could an external provider help you accelerate?

2. Is your digital ecosystem making things easier or more complicated?

Institutions need integrated, streamlined systems, but many are still dealing with fragmented platforms. Where do students and staff still encounter friction that better integrations could solve?

3. Are your faculty training programs producing measurable improvements in retention?

Engagement and measurable outcomes are common challenges. Are you able to track and improve the impact of teaching quality on student retention?

4. How prepared are you to scale high-quality programs with the staff and resources you have today?

Staffing, quality assurance, and consistency are challenges when growing online programs. Where do you currently face staffing gaps or inconsistent learner experiences?





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To explore our innovative solutions, visit **boundlesslearning.com**.

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