



SUBMISSION TO THE NCCA PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON ENHANCING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROGRAMMES

REFORMING THE SENIOR CYCLE



NPC

SUPPORTING PARENTS
SUPPORTING CHILDREN

NPC Vision

The National Parents Council want to see an Ireland where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential

NPC Mission

The National Parents Council exists to ensure that all parents are supported and empowered to become effective partners in their children’s education. NPC will work to increase the capacity and capability of the education sector, to achieve true partnership and deliver better outcomes for all children and young people.

Values

NPC knows that when parents and schools work together, children do better. Therefore, NPC believes that in order to achieve this parents must feel:

Engaged: Parents must be actively engaged in the education of their children.

Supported: Parents’ involvement in children’s education must be supported by the attitudes, beliefs and practices of all members of the school and broader education community.

Partners: Parents must be viewed as partners in facilitating children’s learning and be supported in this role by the school and broader education community.

Valued: Parents should be viewed as full partners in the decisions that affect their children and their family.

Welcomed: Parents should be welcome in the school, and their support and assistance sought as a valuable resource to support children’s education in the school.

Connected: All communication and dialogue with parents must be regular, open, two-way and meaningful.

National Parents Council

Key Activities

SERVICE DELIVERY

NPC's services are developed to empower parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.

HELPLINE

The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen and give information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level.

WEBSITE

The NPC's website www.npc.ie aims to provide parents with information regarding education at early years, primary and post primary levels.

ADVOCACY

NPC engages in awareness-raising activities and campaigning and lobbying at a national level on the objectives of its Strategic Plan.

REPRESENTING PARENTS

NPC represents the voice of parents through representation on external bodies and other mediums. NPC consults with parents and brings parents' views to bear on education policy.

BUILDING PARTICIPATION

NPC builds participation strategies and activities to ensure parents and children are an integral part of the work of NPC.



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Introduction

The National Parents Council (NPC) is delighted to share parents' views on the proposed new modules at L1 and L2 with the NCCA. This report looks at important areas, such as parents' awareness of the changes in subject content, their understanding of the new skills being introduced, and how these updates will affect students' learning, social life, and overall education. The feedback comes from a survey and online focus group sessions with parents as part of the consultation process for improving the Senior Cycle special education curriculum.

The findings presented here are based on the results of surveys and online focus groups conducted by the NPC during January 2026. The surveys were sent to all parents on the NPC mailing list who had consented to receiving such invitations, and an invitation to the online focus groups was sent to those who answered the surveys. The surveys were open from the 5th till the 14th of January, 2026. During this time, a total of 214 parents completed the surveys. The online focus groups were held on the 13th of January 2026. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey and the online focus groups will be shared in this report.



Surveys

Ten different surveys were sent to parents to collect feedback, one for each specific module. The survey asked a number of questions to find out how well the modules meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

The surveys included a mix of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. This gave parents the chance to choose answers that suited their views and also share extra thoughts. Parents were also asked to think about how well the proposed subjects match their child's learning needs. The main results of the surveys, including key points and parents' opinions, will be shared in this report.

Focus Group

On 13th January 2026, a small online focus group with 2 parents was held to gather some in-depth insight on the redevelopment of the post-primary special educational needs programmes.

NPC opened the session by outlining the purpose of the focus group and surveys, emphasising their role in improving the effectiveness of special educational needs programmes.

During the discussion, parents in the focus group were asked a series of questions to provide deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives on their children's special educational needs in schools. The questions focused on:

- Which elective modules would benefit their children the most, and why?
- What challenges might their children face in these modules?
- What other skills or topics should be included to support their children's learning?



Survey Findings

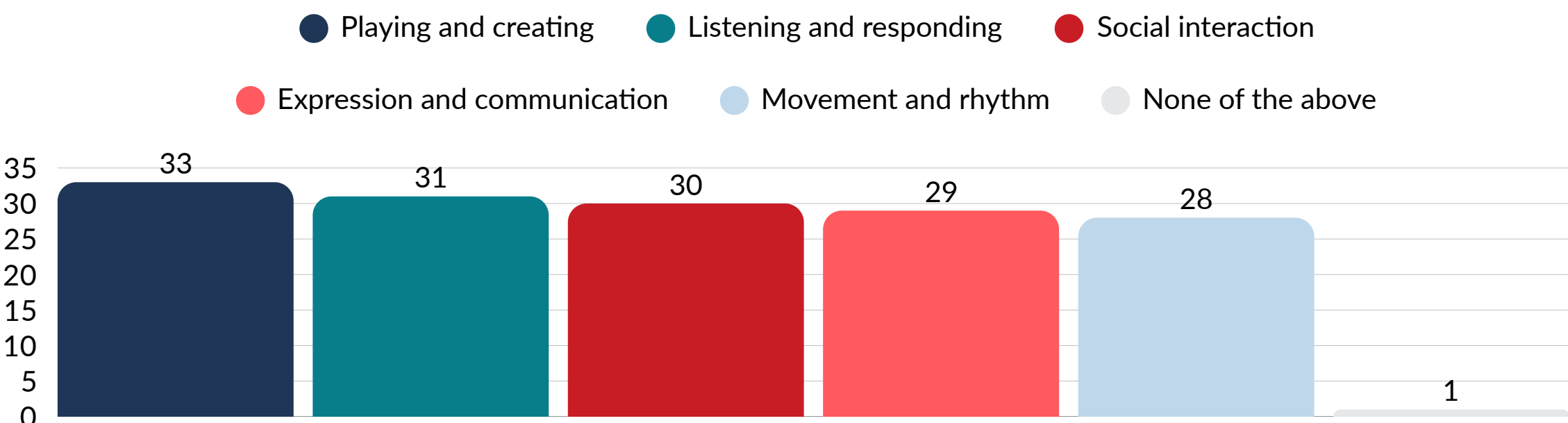


Level (1): Music

A total of 42 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

Q 1 When parents were asked which of the NCCA’s summarised learning outcome categories would be most relevant for their child’s learning needs, the largest number selected playing and creating, followed by listening and responding and social interaction. Slightly fewer parents highlighted expression and communication or movement and rhythm.

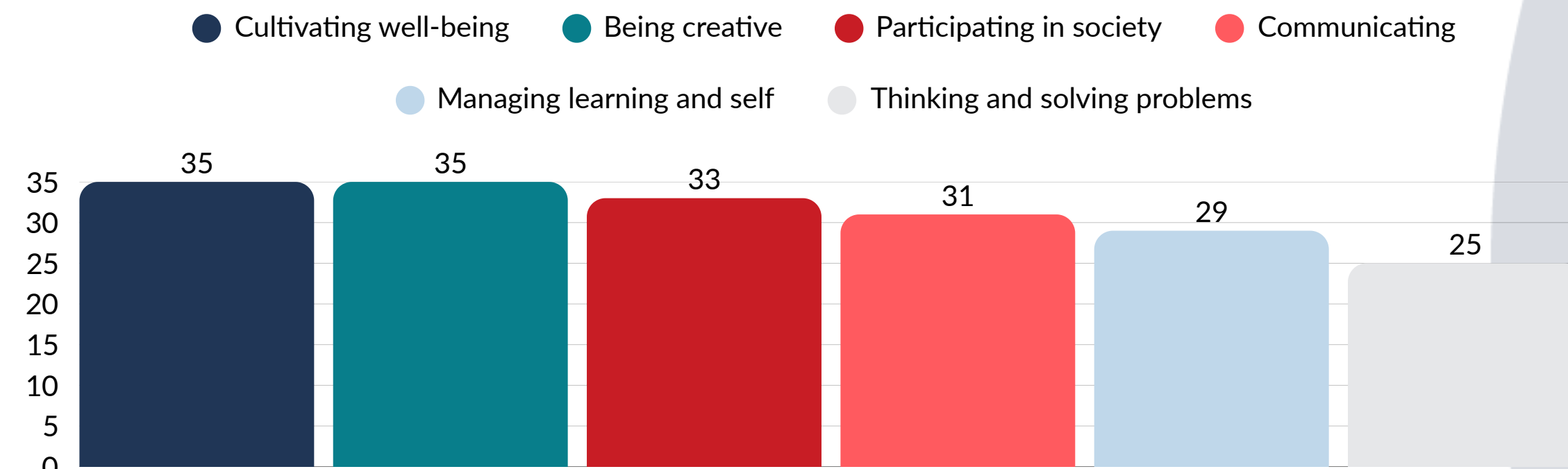
One parent indicated that none of the categories were relevant for her child, explaining that he is not interested in this module (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the music module, the highest number identified cultivating well-being and being creative. These were followed by participating in society and communicating. Slightly fewer parents mentioned managing learning and self, while the smallest group highlighted thinking and solving problems (see Figure 2).

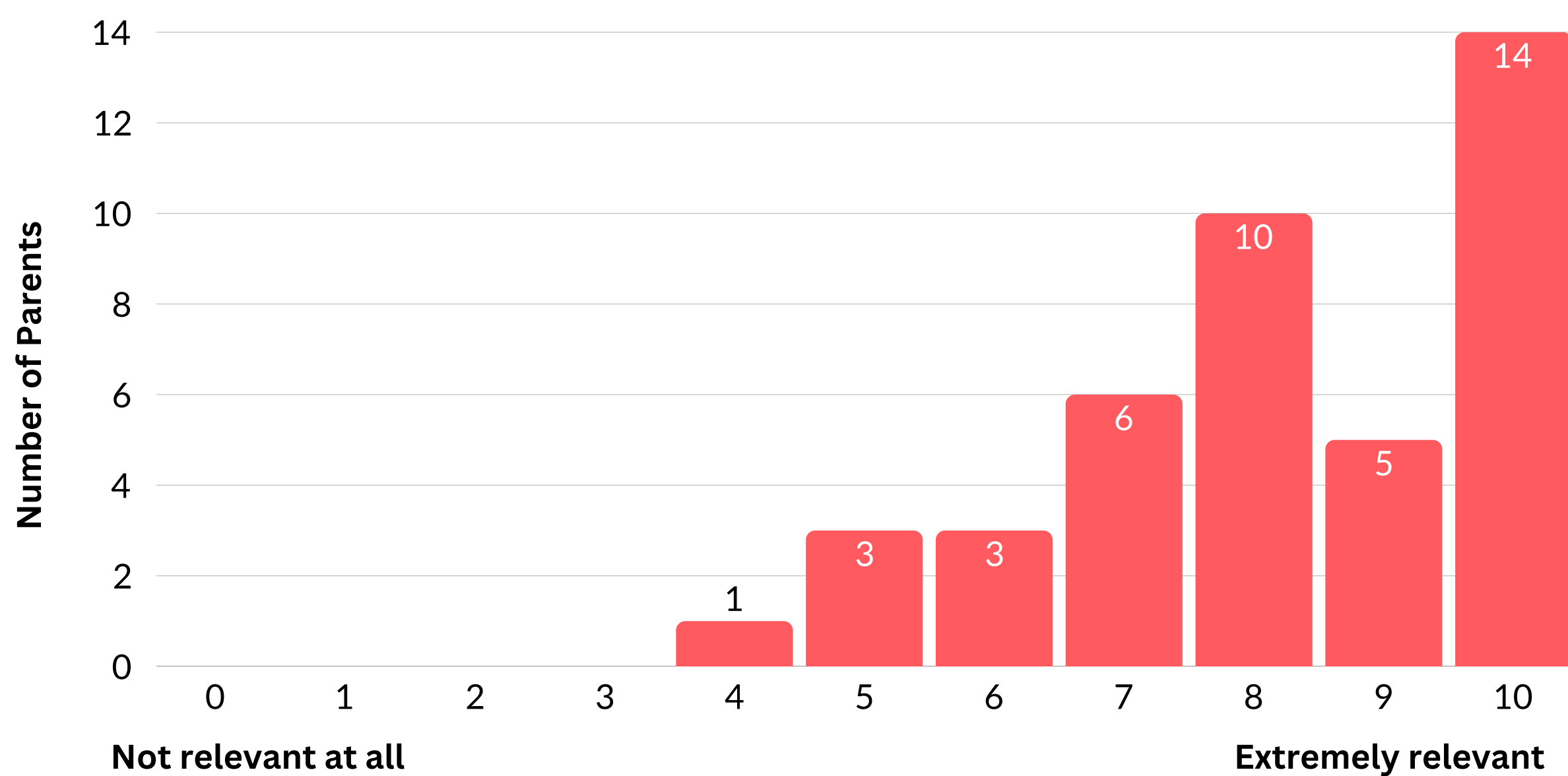


(Figure 2)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (1): Music?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the music module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 42 responses, the strong majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 8 and 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings of 4, 5 or 6, suggesting that the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 3 (see Figure 3).



(Figure 3)

To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

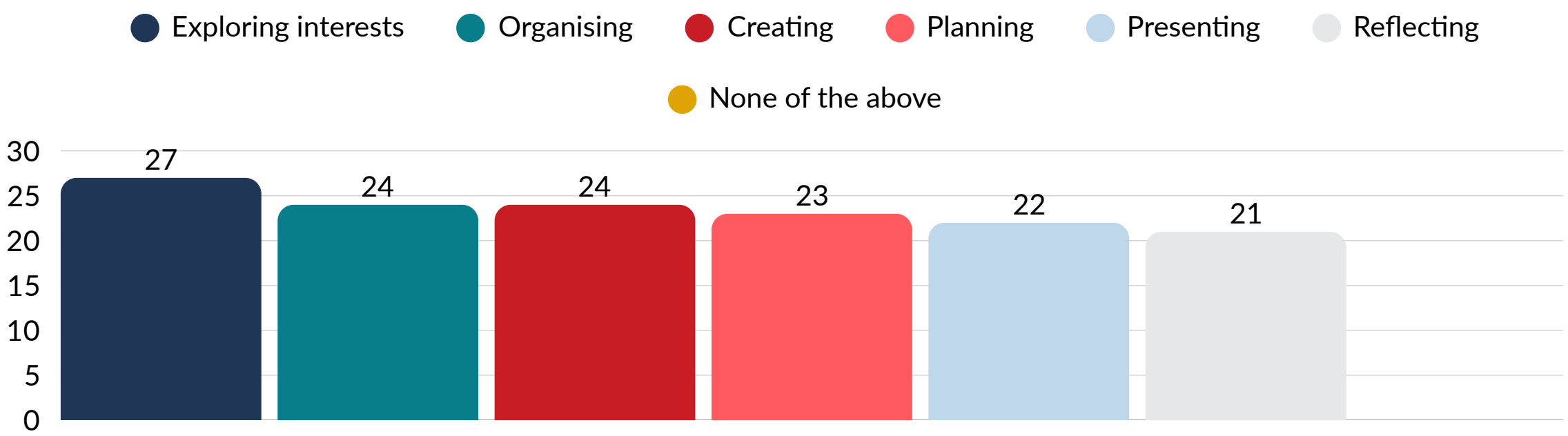




Level (1): Area of Special Interest

A total of 28 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

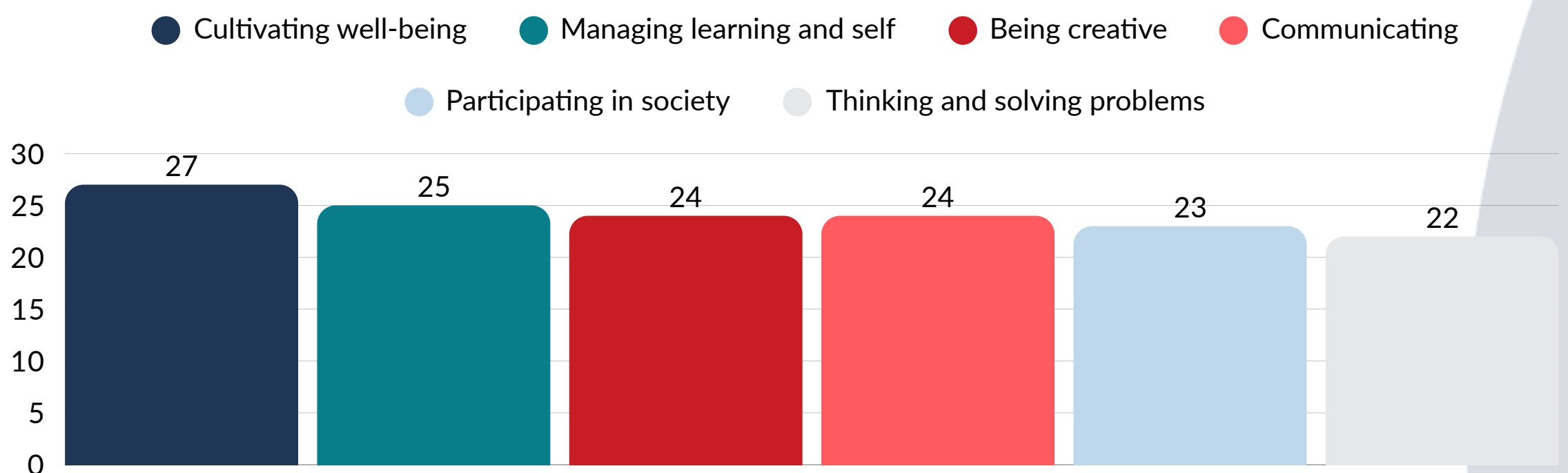
Q 1 When parents were asked which of the NCCA’s summarised learning outcome categories would be most relevant for their child’s learning needs, the largest number selected exploring interests, followed closely by organising and creating. Slightly fewer parents highlighted planning, presenting, or reflecting. No parents selected none of the above (see Figure 4).



(Figure 4)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the area of special interest module, the highest number identified cultivating well-being. This was followed closely by managing learning and self, as well as being creative and communicating. Slightly fewer parents selected participating in society, while the smallest group highlighted thinking and solving problems (see Figure 5).

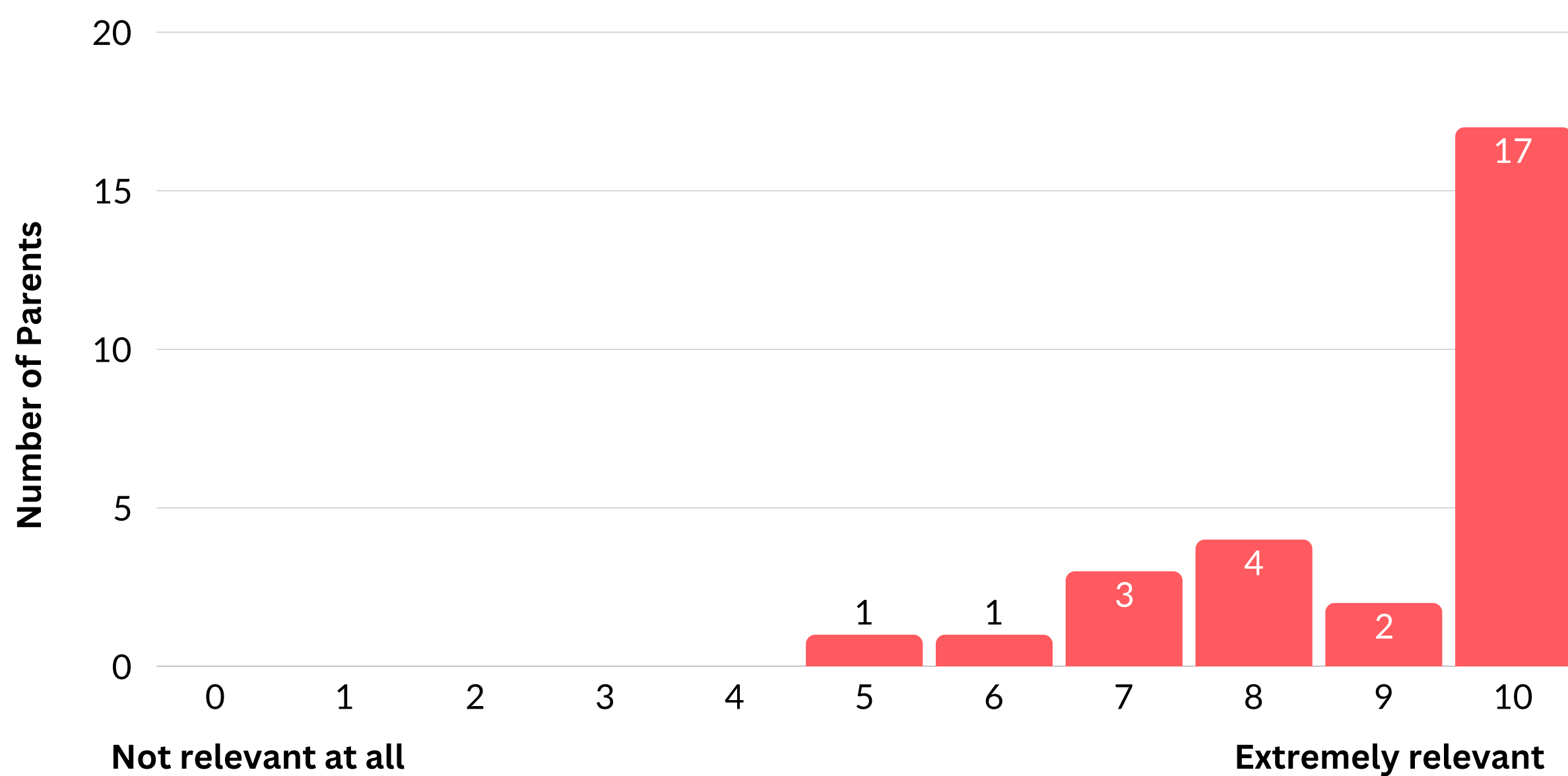


(Figure 5)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (1): Area of Special Interest?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the area of special interest module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 28 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 8 and 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings of 5, 6 or 7, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 4 (see Figure 6).



(Figure 6)

To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

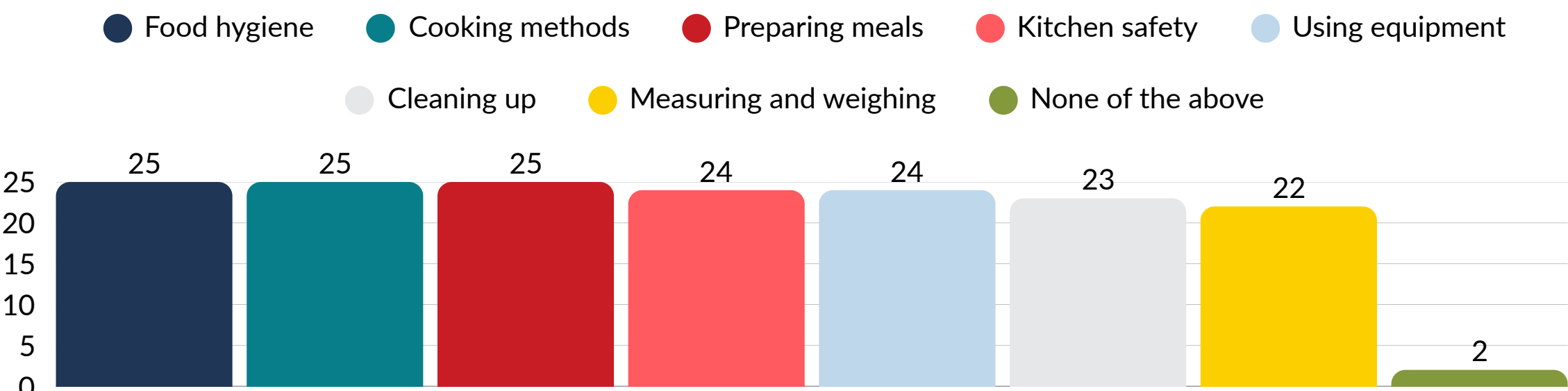




Level (1): Cookery

A total of 26 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

Q 1 When parents were asked which of the NCCA’s summarised learning outcome categories would be most relevant for their child’s learning needs, the largest number selected food hygiene, cooking methods, and preparing meals. These were followed closely by kitchen safety and using equipment. Slightly fewer parents highlighted cleaning up or measuring and weighing. Only two parents selected none of the above (see Figure 7).

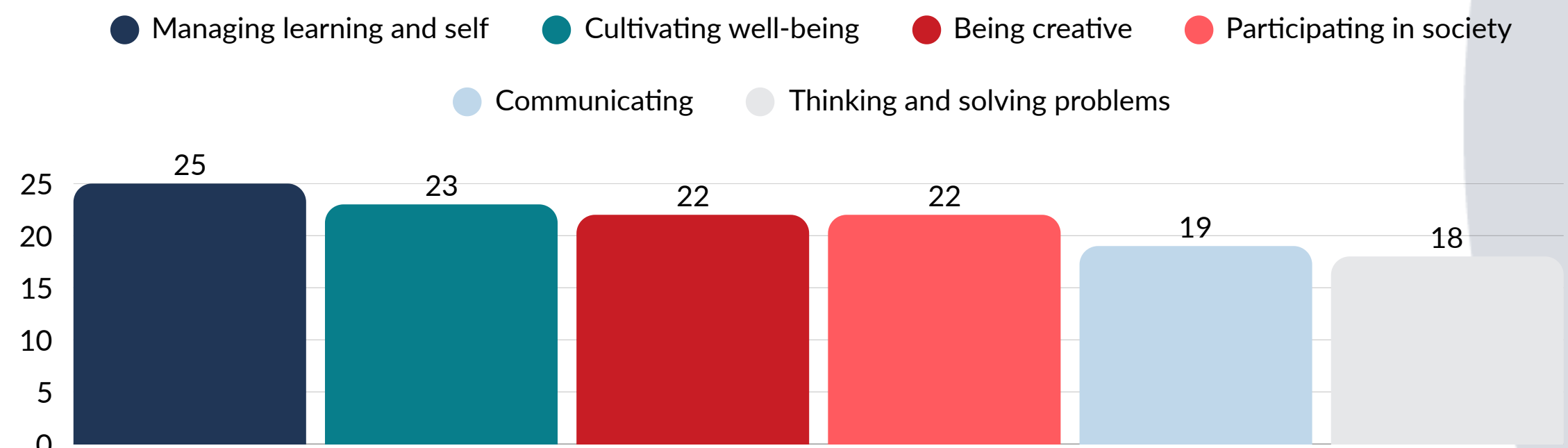


(Figure 7)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Parents who selected none of the above explained their choices by noting that one would like additional learning included, such as using ingredients from different cuisines and understanding food processing, while the other felt their child already cooks at home and does not need to learn these skills in school.

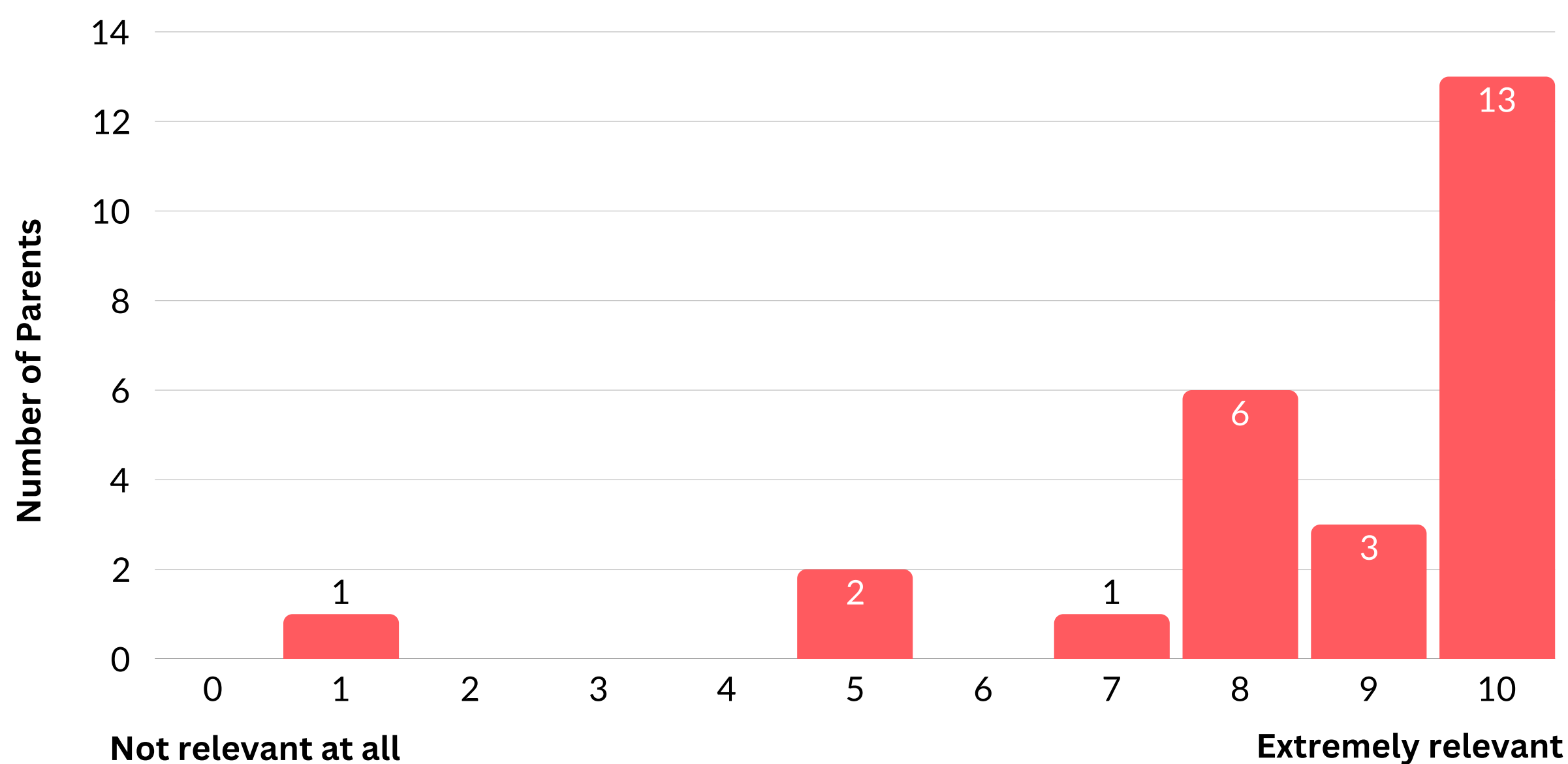
Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the cookery module, the largest number selected managing learning and self. This was followed by cultivating well-being, as well as being creative and participating in society. Slightly fewer parents highlighted communicating, while the smallest group selected thinking and solving problems (see Figure 8).



(Figure 8)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (1): Cookery?

Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the cookery module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 26 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 8 and 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings of 5 or 7, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. Only one parent selected a low rating of 1 (see Figure 9).



(Figure 9)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

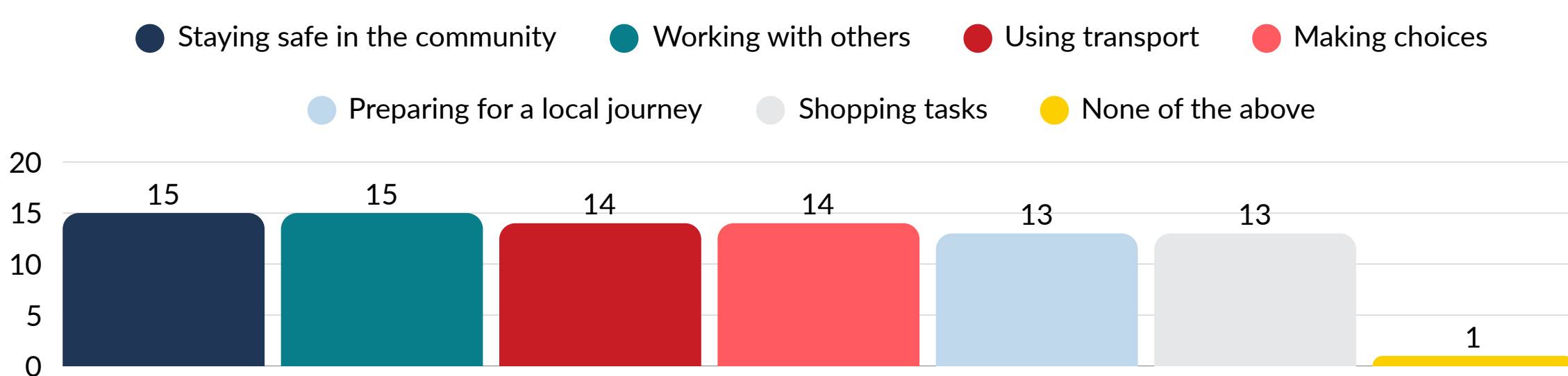




Level (1): Being Part of the Community

A total of 17 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

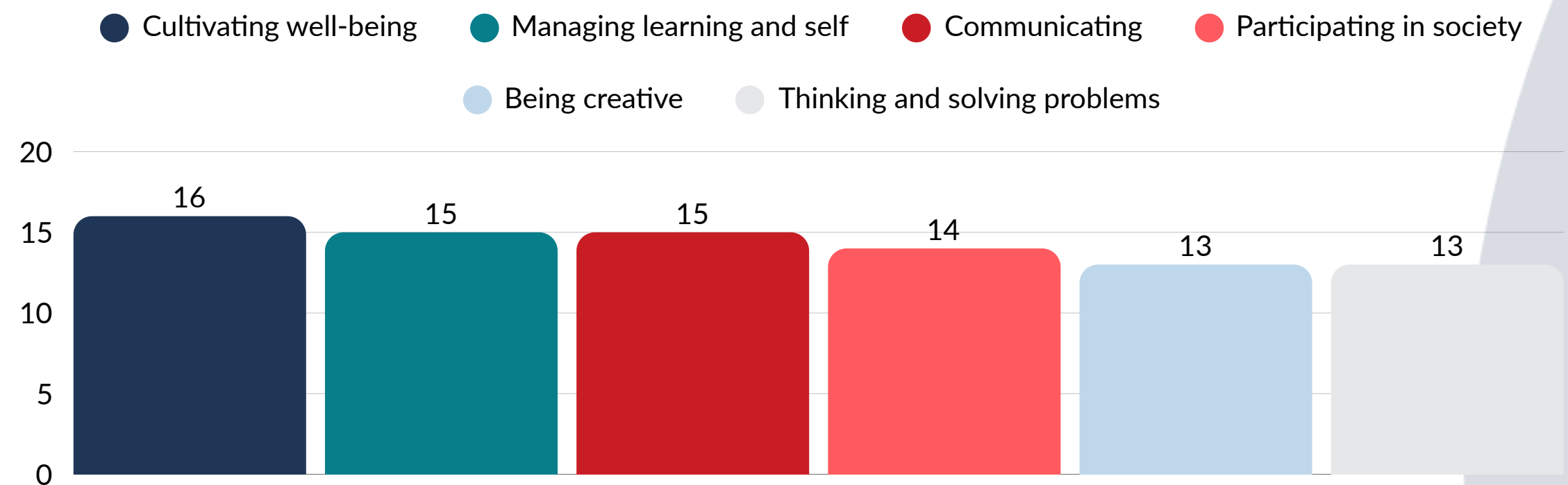
Q 1 When parents were asked which of the NCCA’s summarised learning outcome categories would be most relevant for their child’s learning needs, the largest number selected staying safe in the community and working with others. These were followed closely by using transport and making choices. Slightly fewer parents highlighted preparing for a local journey or shopping tasks. Only one parent selected none of the above and explained that these topics can be taught by parents as well as in school (see Figure 10).



(Figure 10)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

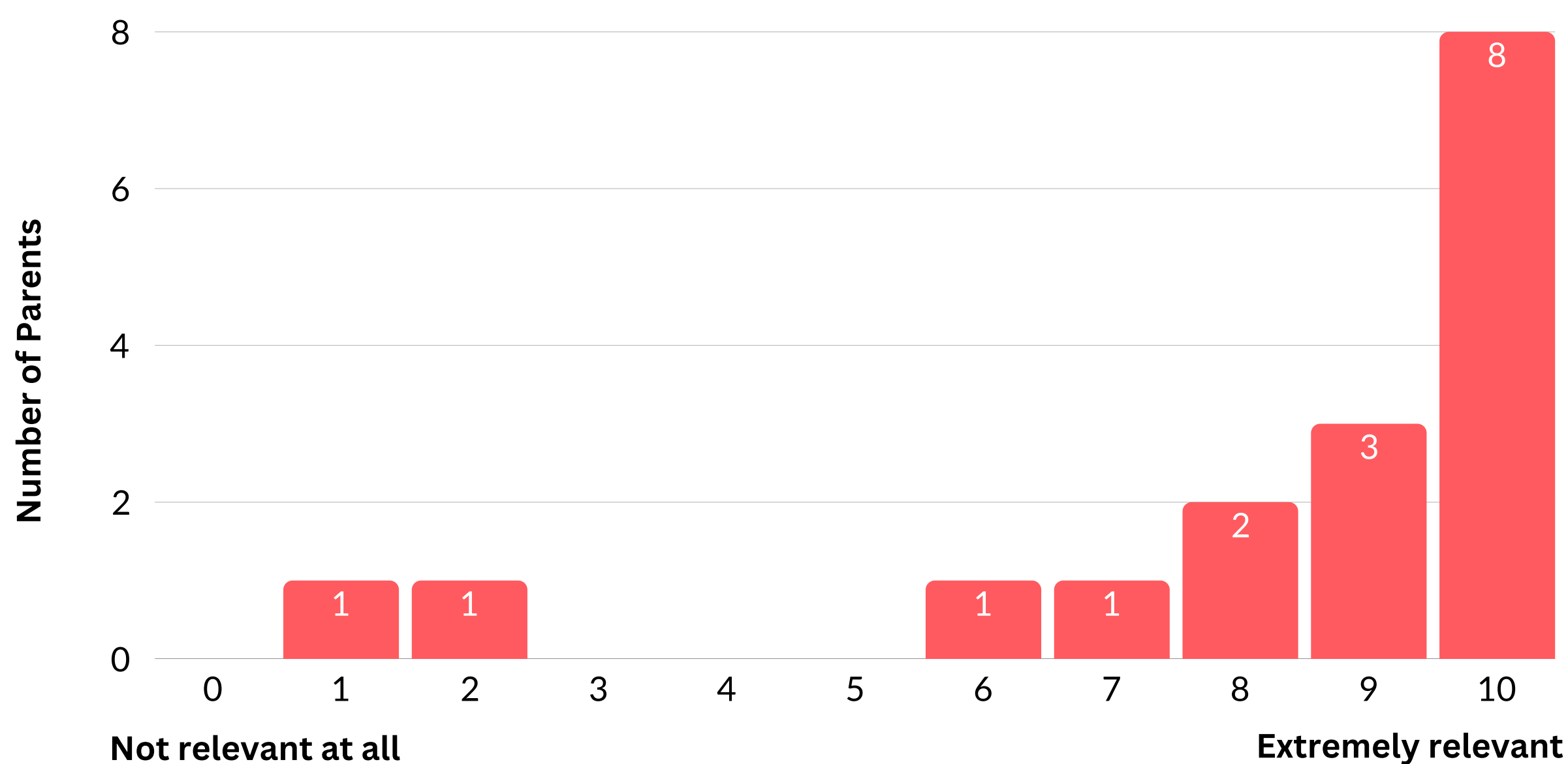
Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the being part of the community module, the largest number selected cultivating well-being. This was followed closely by managing learning and self and communicating. Slightly fewer parents selected participating in society, while being creative and thinking and solving problems were the least frequently chosen (see Figure 11).



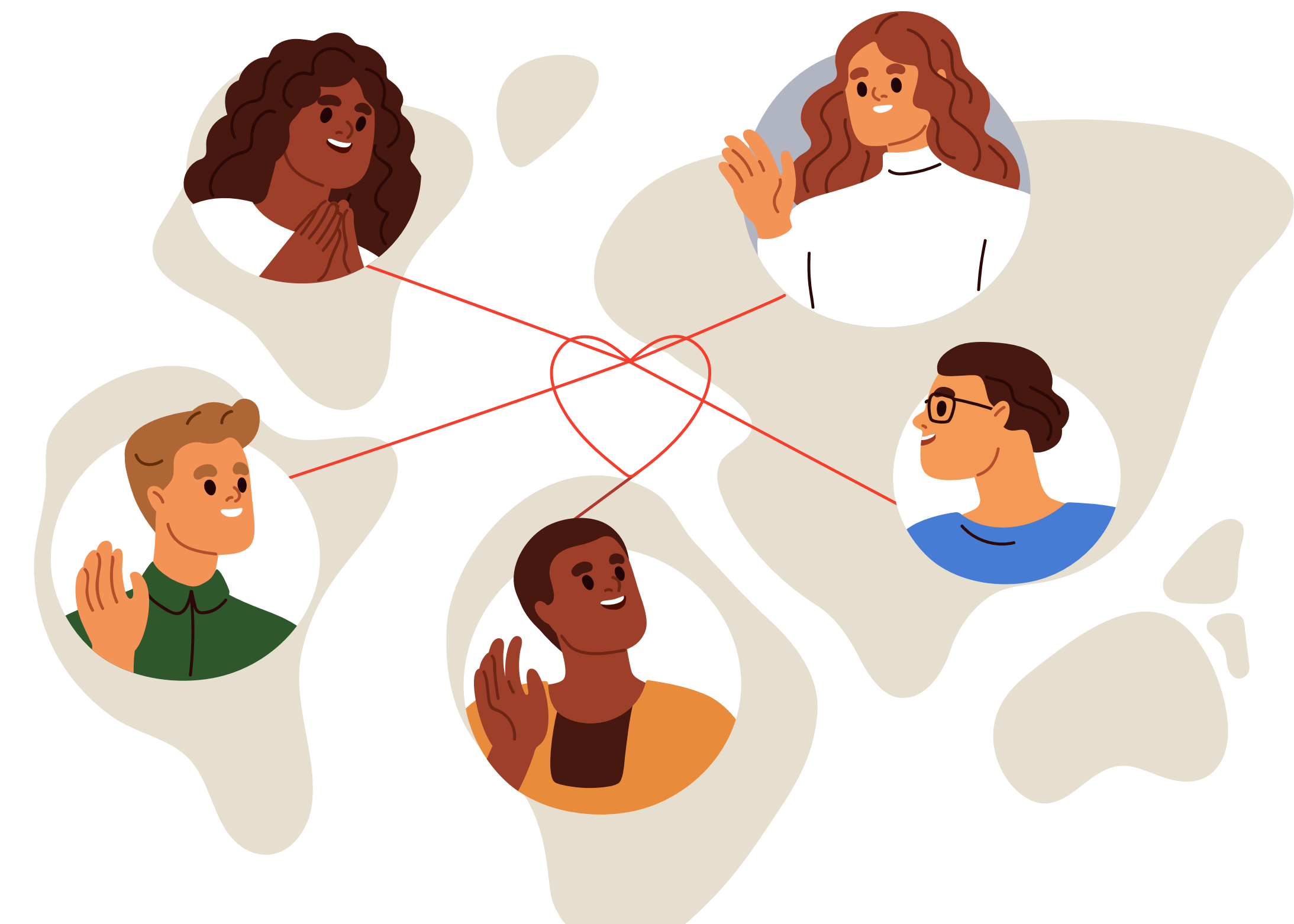
(Figure 11)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (1): Being Part of the Community?

Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant being part of the community module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 17 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 8 and 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings of 6 or 7, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. Two parents selected low ratings of 1 or 2 (see Figure 12).



(Figure 12)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

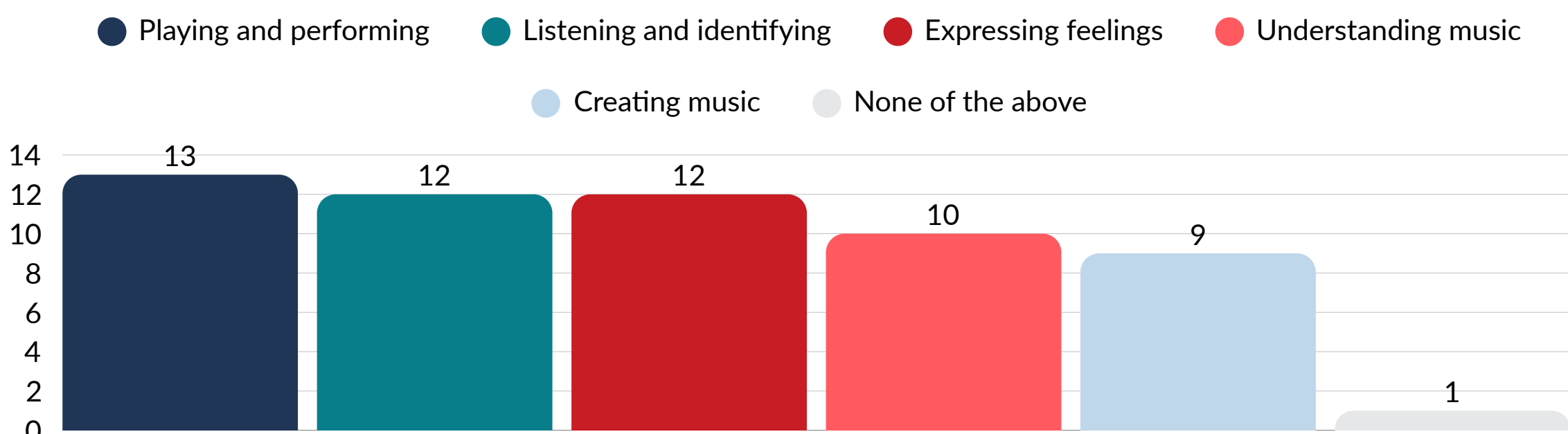




Level (2): Music

A total of 14 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

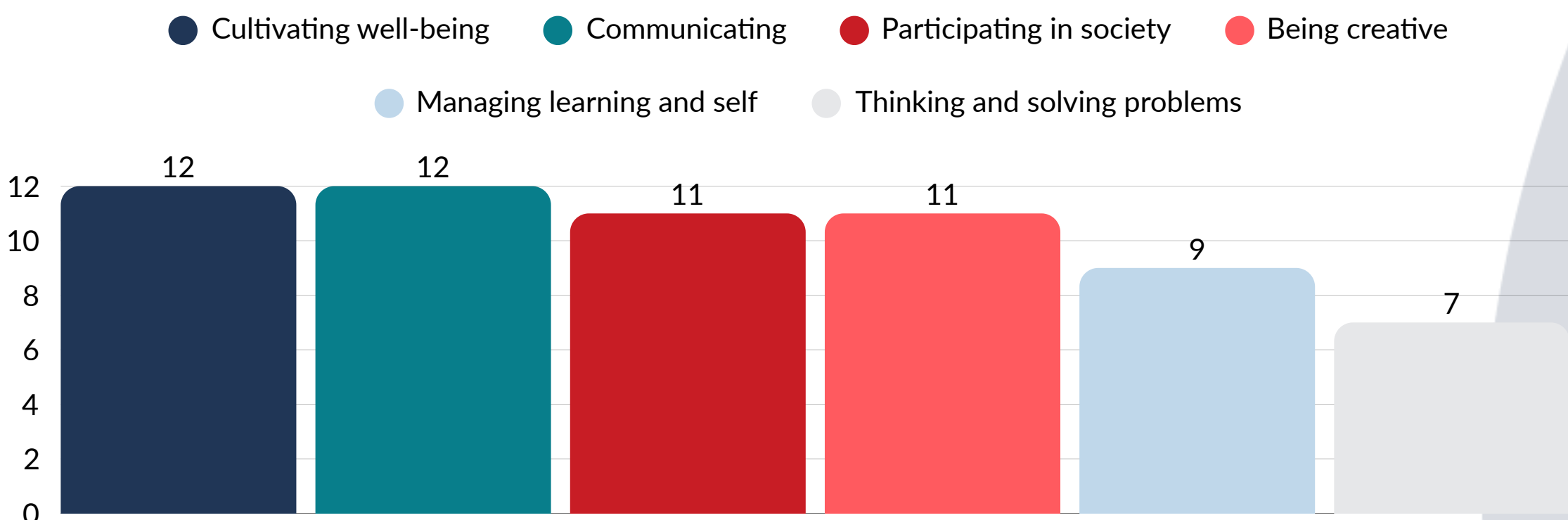
Q 1 When parents were asked which of the NCCA’s summarised learning outcome categories would be most relevant for their child’s learning needs, the largest number selected playing and performing. These were followed closely by listening and identifying and expressing feelings. Slightly fewer parents highlighted understanding music or creating music. Only one parent selected none of the above (see Figure 13).



(Figure 13)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the music module, the largest number selected cultivating well-being and communicating. These were followed closely by participating in society and being creative. Slightly fewer parents selected managing learning and self, while the smallest group highlighted thinking and solving problems (see Figure 14).

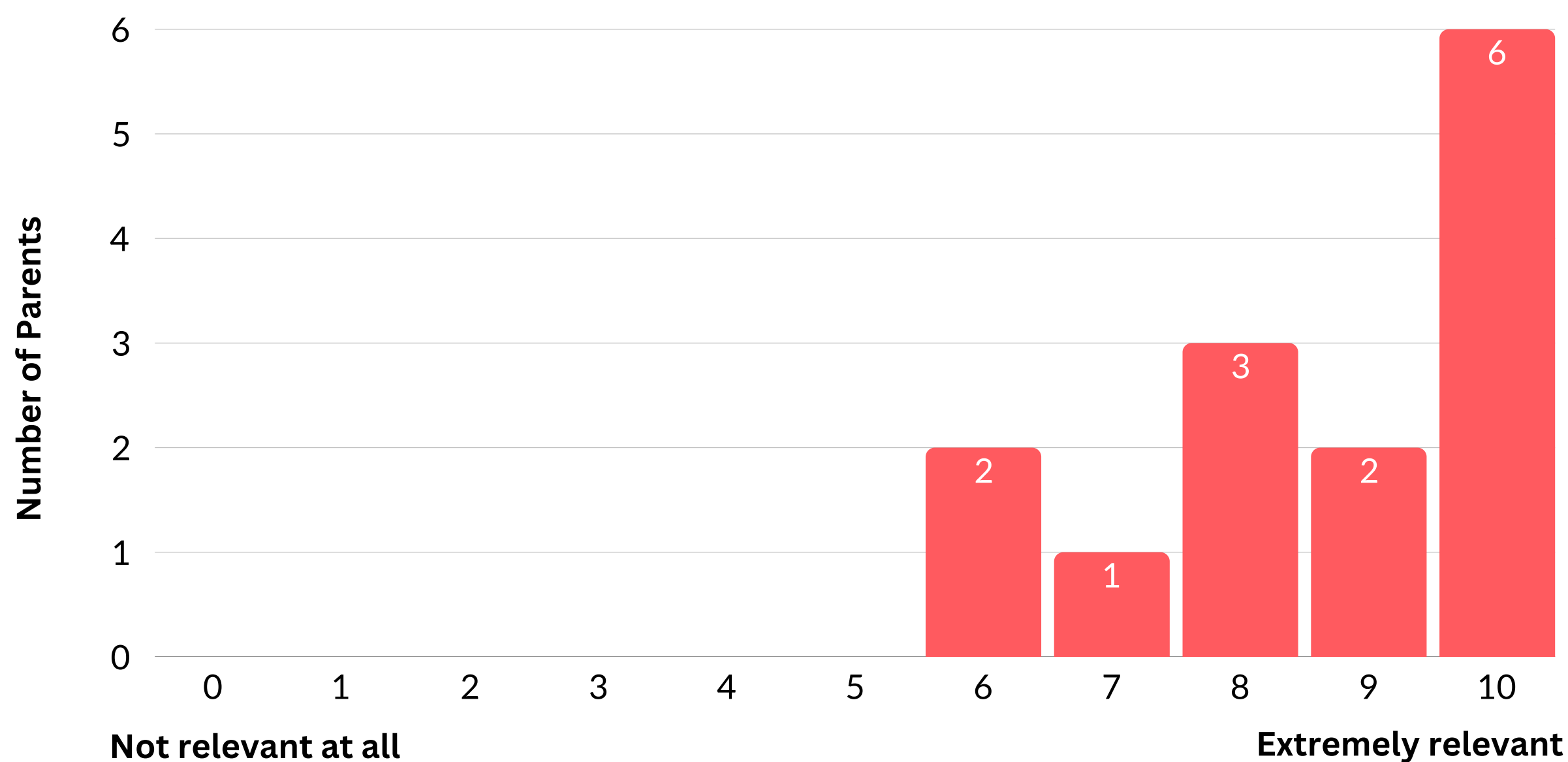


(Figure 14)

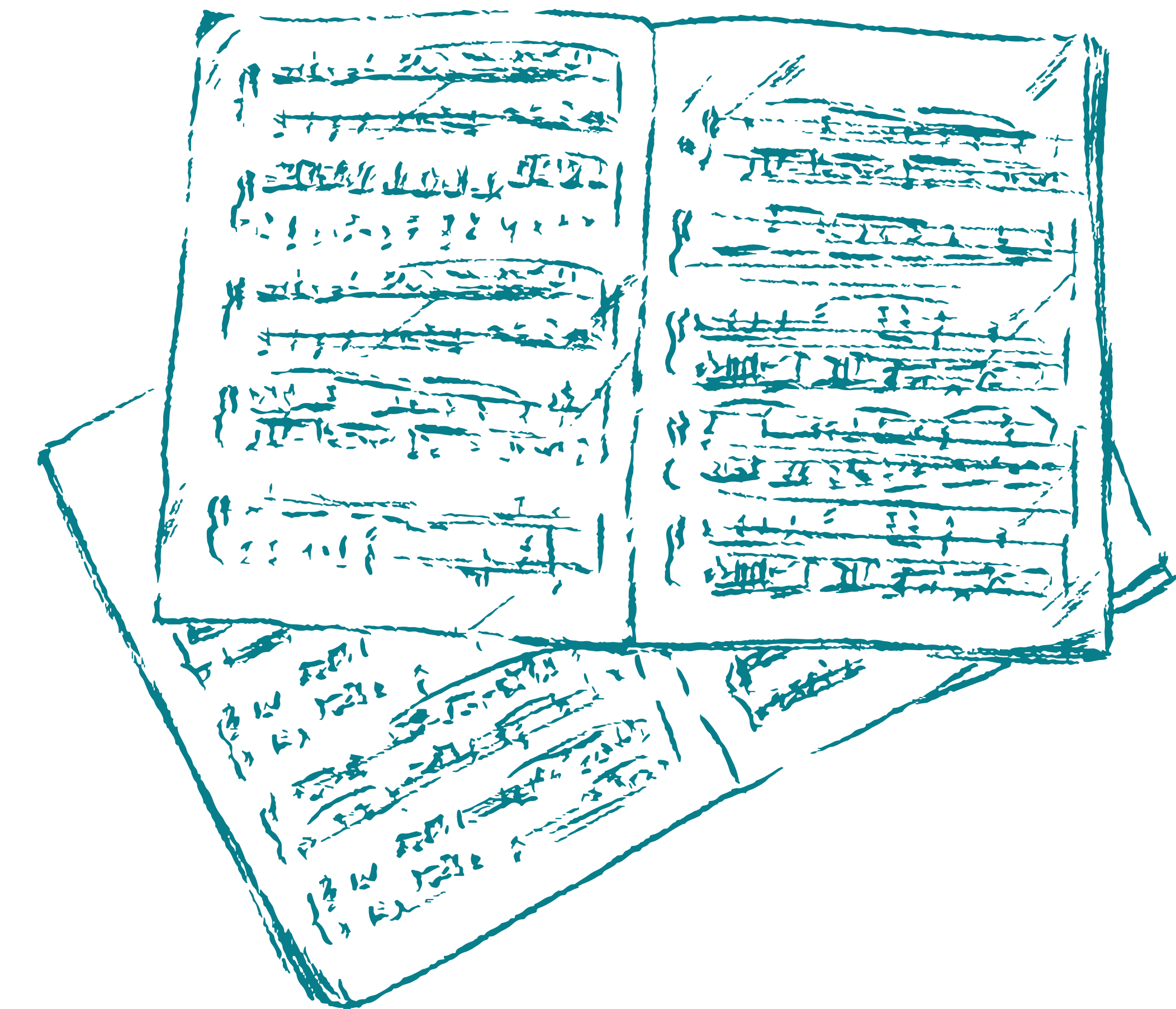
In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (2): Music?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the music module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 17 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 8 and 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings of 6 or 7, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 5, and no parents selected low ratings of 1 or 2 (see Figure 15).



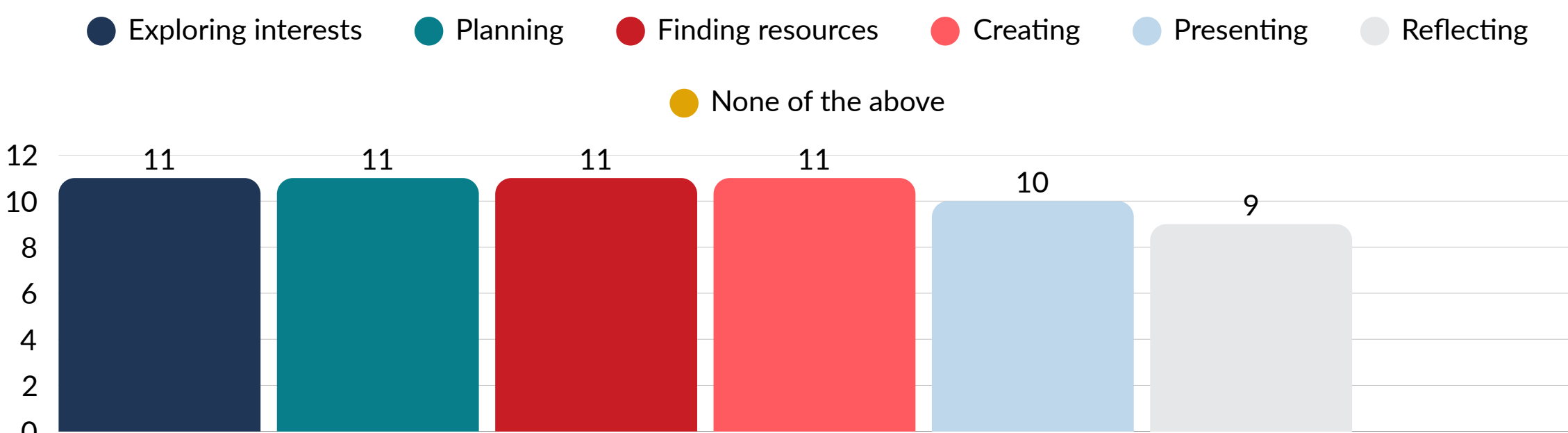
(Figure 15)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?



Level (2): Area of Special Interest

A total of 11 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

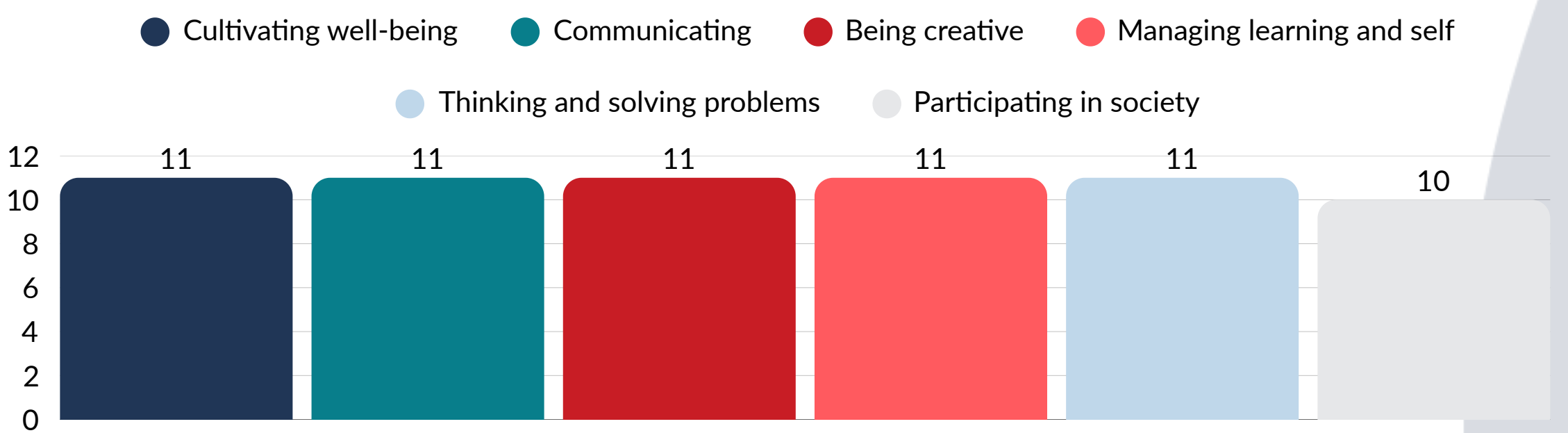
Q 1 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the area of special interest module, the largest number selected exploring interests, planning, finding resources, and creating, all chosen equally. These were followed closely by presenting and, slightly fewer again, reflecting. No parents selected none of the above (see Figure 16).



(Figure 16)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the area of special interest module, the parents selected equally cultivating well-being, communicating, being creative, managing learning and self, and thinking and solving problems. Slightly fewer parents selected participating in society (see Figure 17).

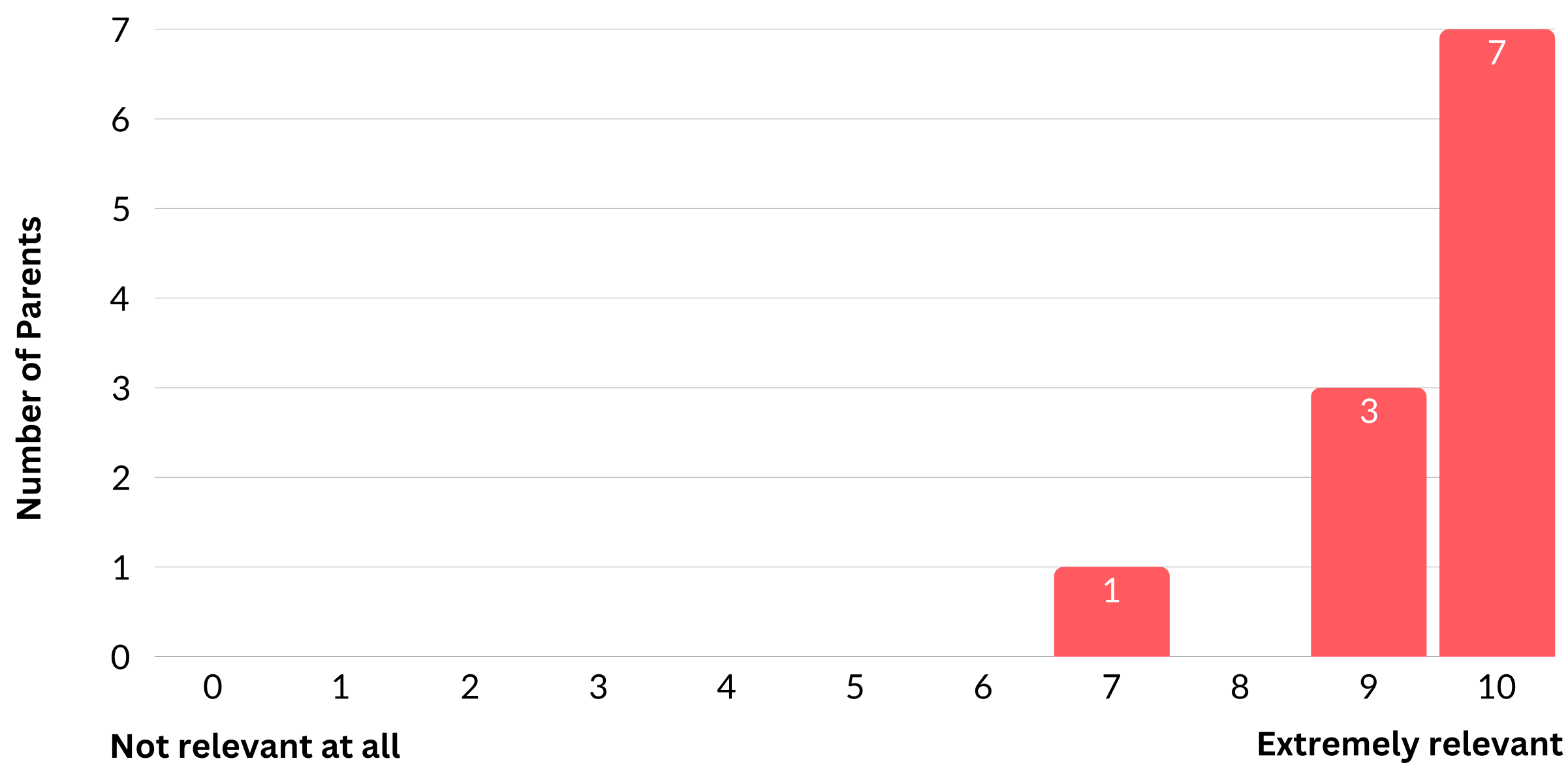


(Figure 17)

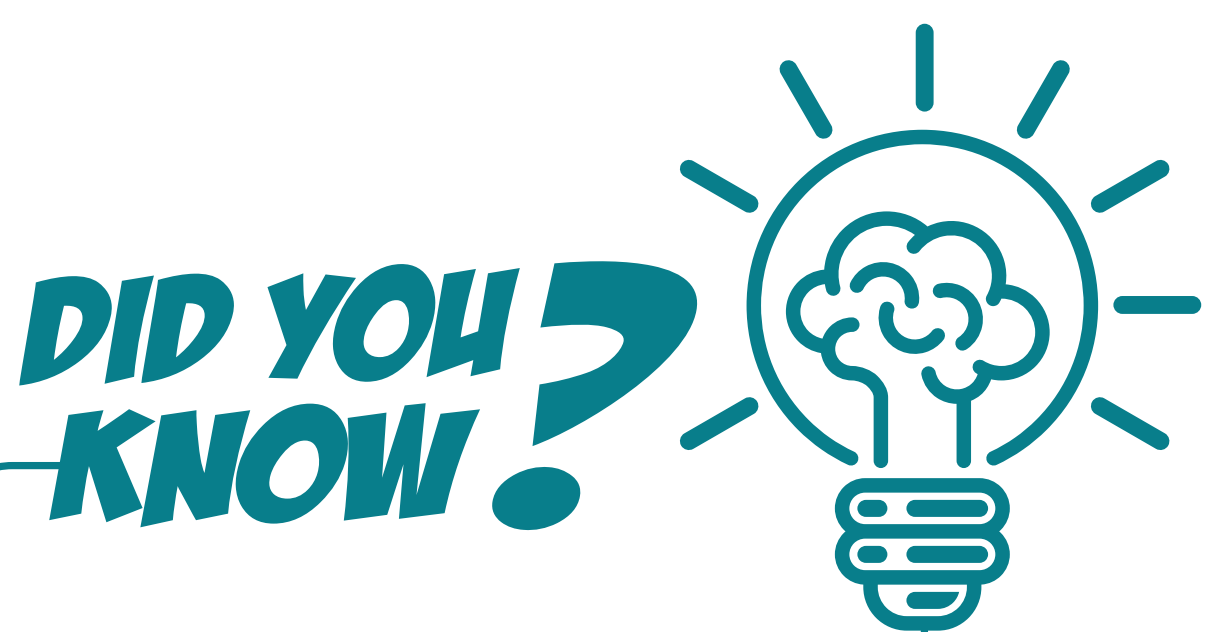
In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (2): Area of Special Interest?

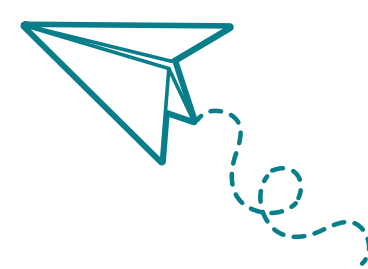


Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the area of special interest module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 11 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 9 and 10. Only one parent provided a moderate rating of 7, and no parents selected ratings between 0 and 6 (see Figure 18).



(Figure 18)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

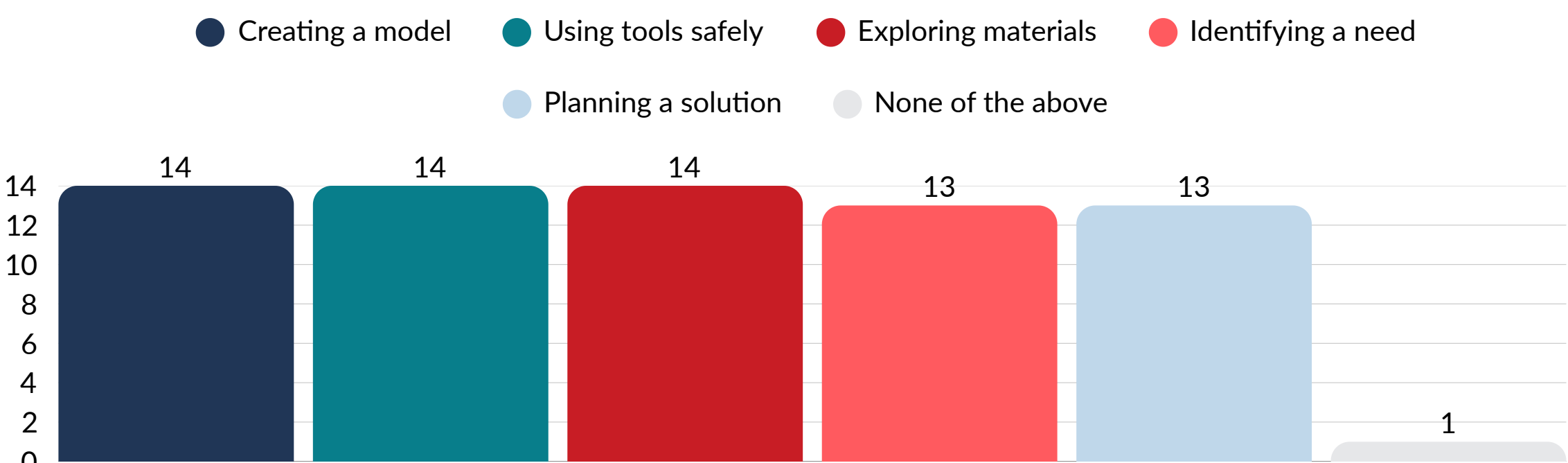




Level (2): Design and Do

A total of 14 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

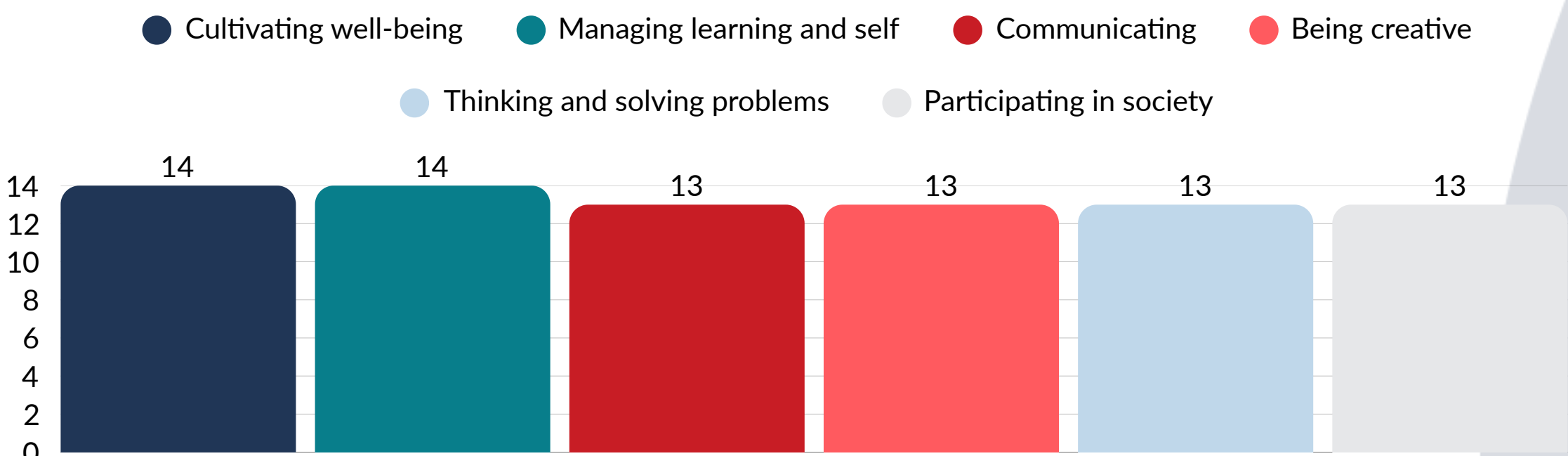
Q 1 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the design and do module, the largest number selected creating a model, using tools safely, and exploring materials, all chosen equally. These were followed closely by identifying a need and planning a solution. Only one parent selected none of the above (see Figure 19).



(Figure 19)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the design and do module, the largest number selected cultivating well-being and managing learning and self. These were followed closely by communicating, being creative, and thinking and solving problems, all chosen in similar numbers. Slightly fewer parents selected participating in society (see Figure 20).

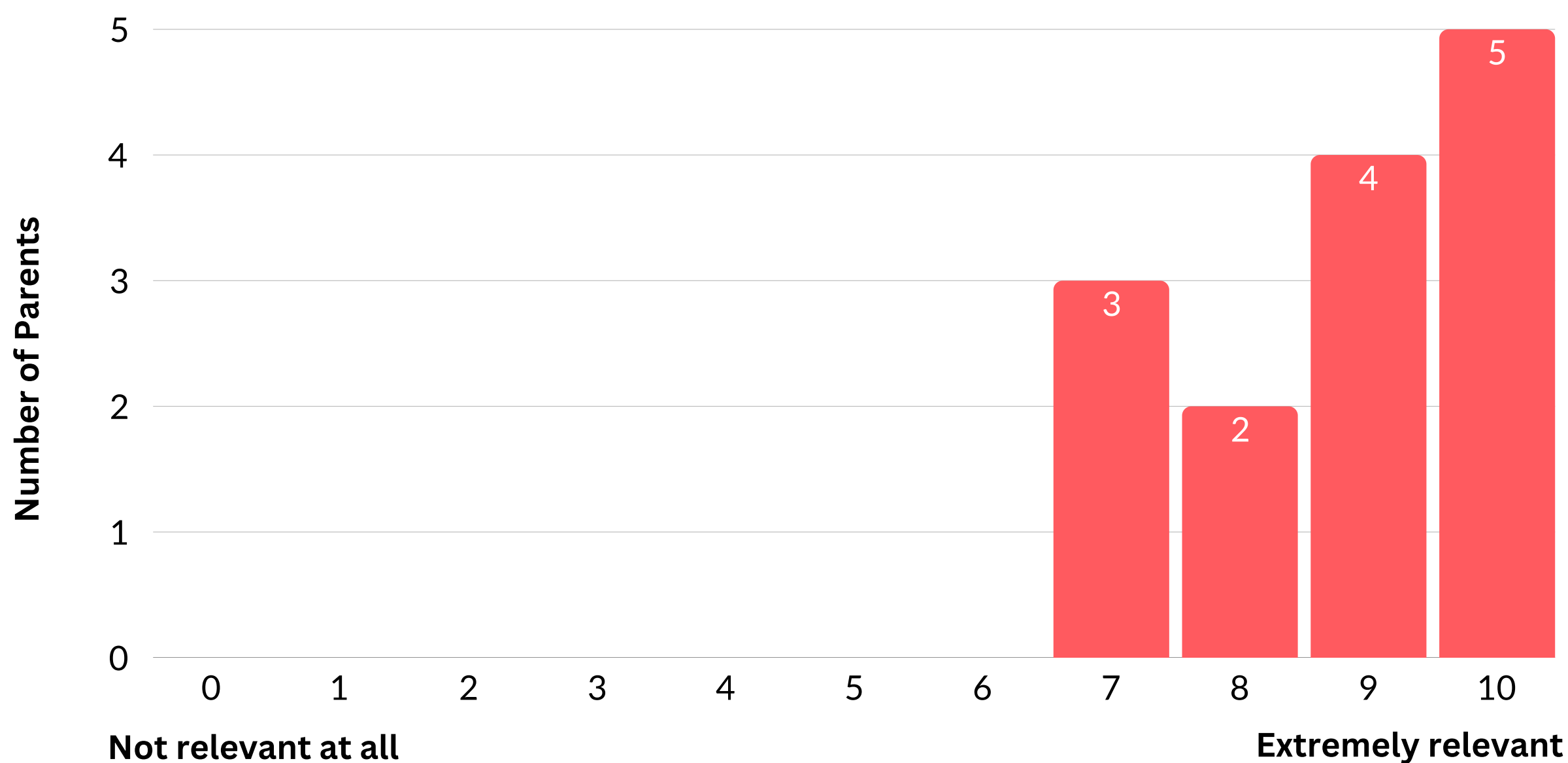


(Figure 20)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (2): Design and Do?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the design and do module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 14 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores between 9 and 10. A smaller group selected moderate ratings of 7 or 8, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 6 (see Figure 21).



(Figure 21)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?



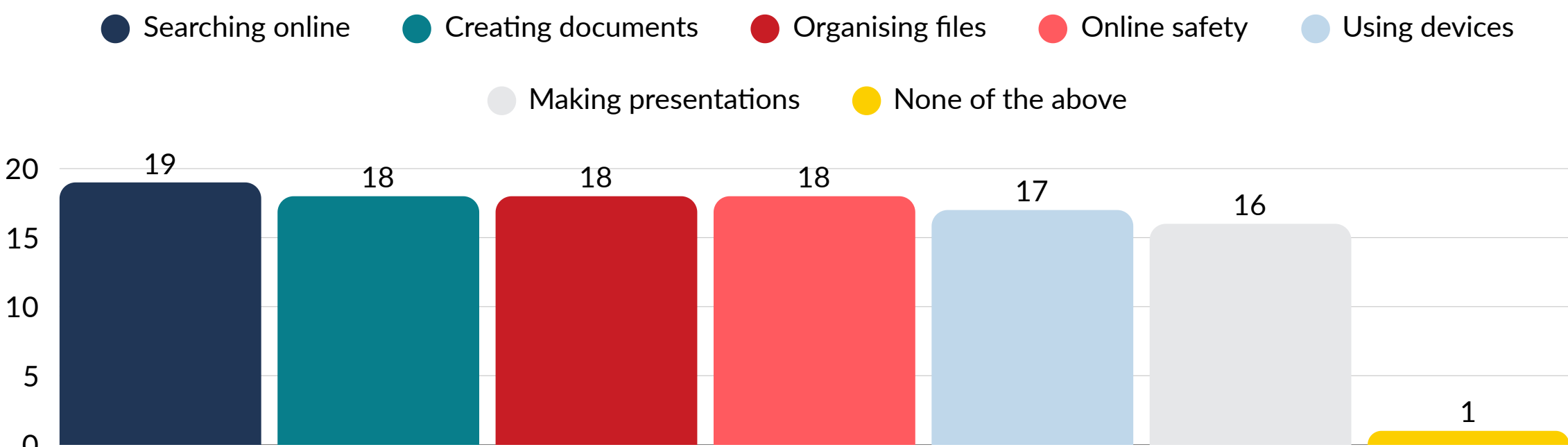


Level (2): IT Skills

A total of 20 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

Q 1 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the IT skills module, the largest number selected searching online. This was followed closely by creating documents, organising files, and online safety. Slightly fewer parents highlighted using devices, while making presentations was selected by the smallest group.

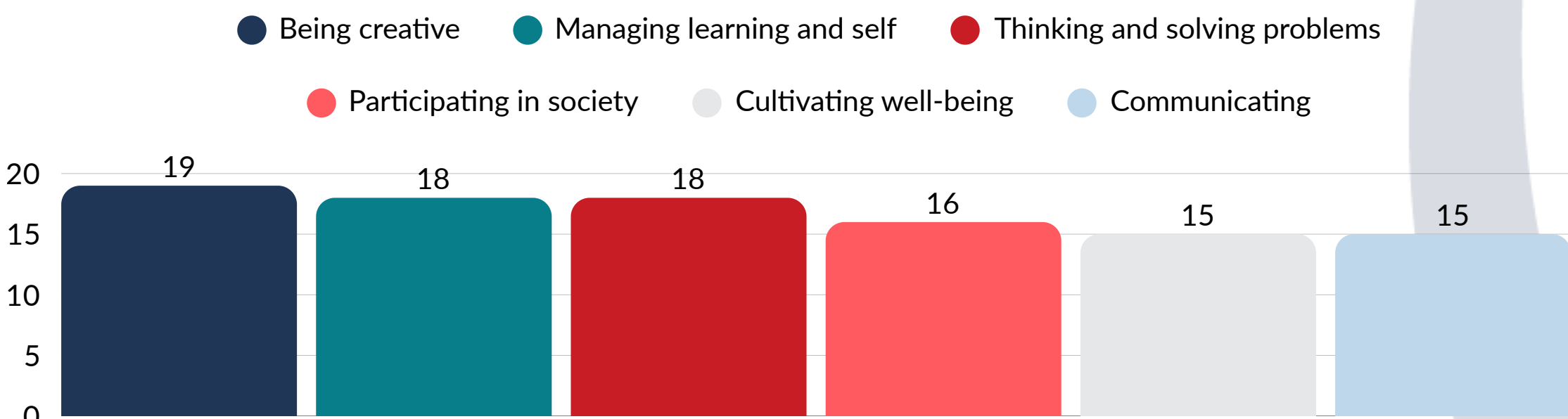
Only one parent chose none of the above and mentioned that children already use a lot of technology from a young age, and that the children can already make slides in primary school using Google Classroom. The parent felt that learning basic coding and how to tell if online information is good or trustworthy would be more useful skills for students (see Figure 22).



(Figure 22)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the IT skills module, the largest number selected being creative. This was followed closely by managing learning and self and thinking and solving problems. Slightly fewer parents chose participating in society, while cultivating well-being and communicating were selected by the smallest number of parents (see Figure 23).

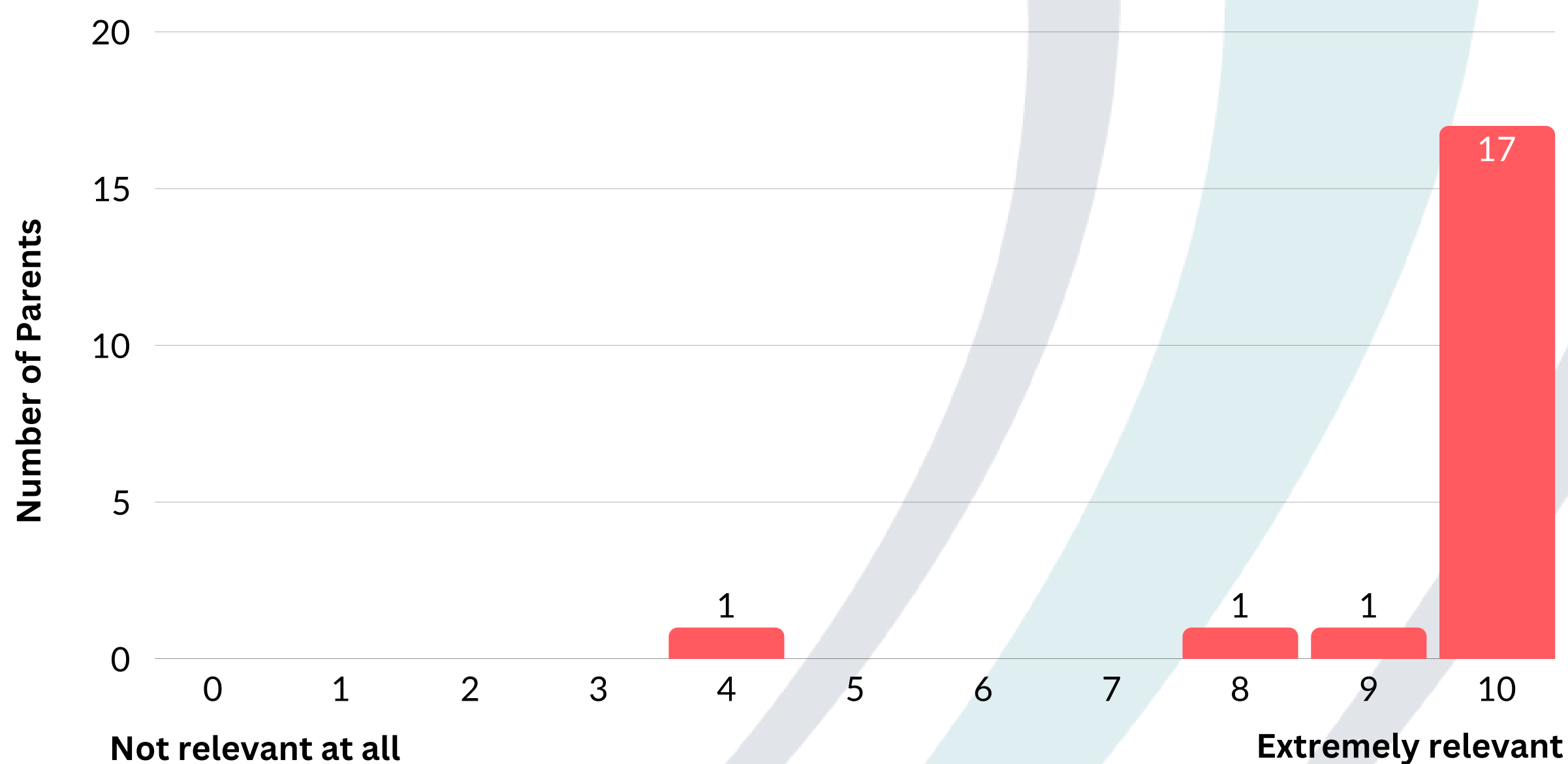


(Figure 23)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (2): IT Skills?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the IT skills module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 20 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores of 9 or 10. A very small group provided moderate ratings of 4 or 8, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 3, 5 and 7, or 1 and 6 (see Figure 24).



(Figure 24)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

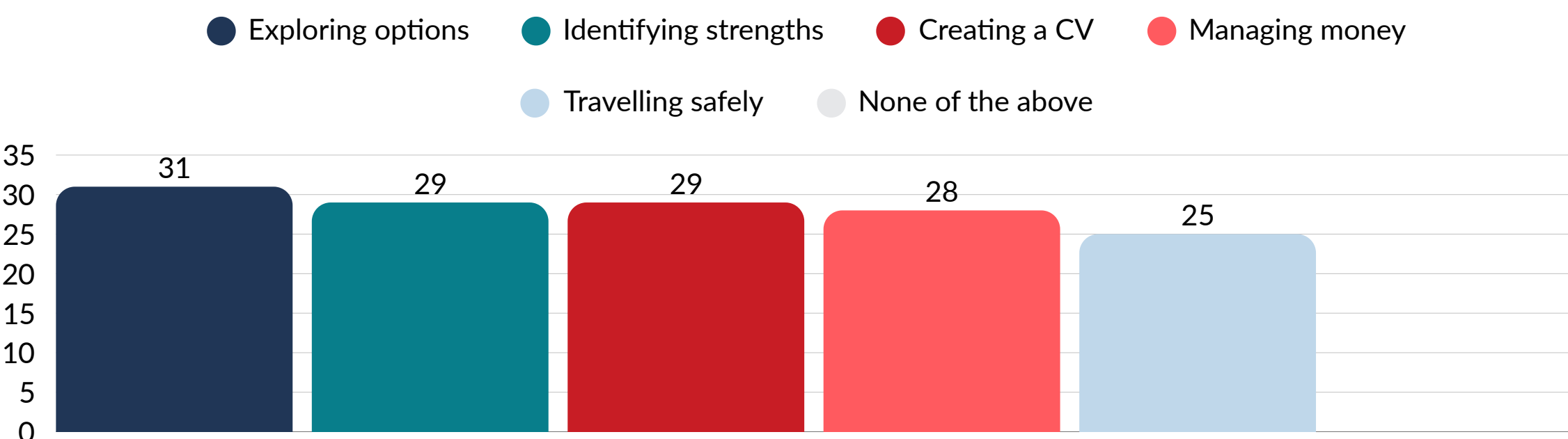




Level (2): Preparation for Life after School

A total of 32 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

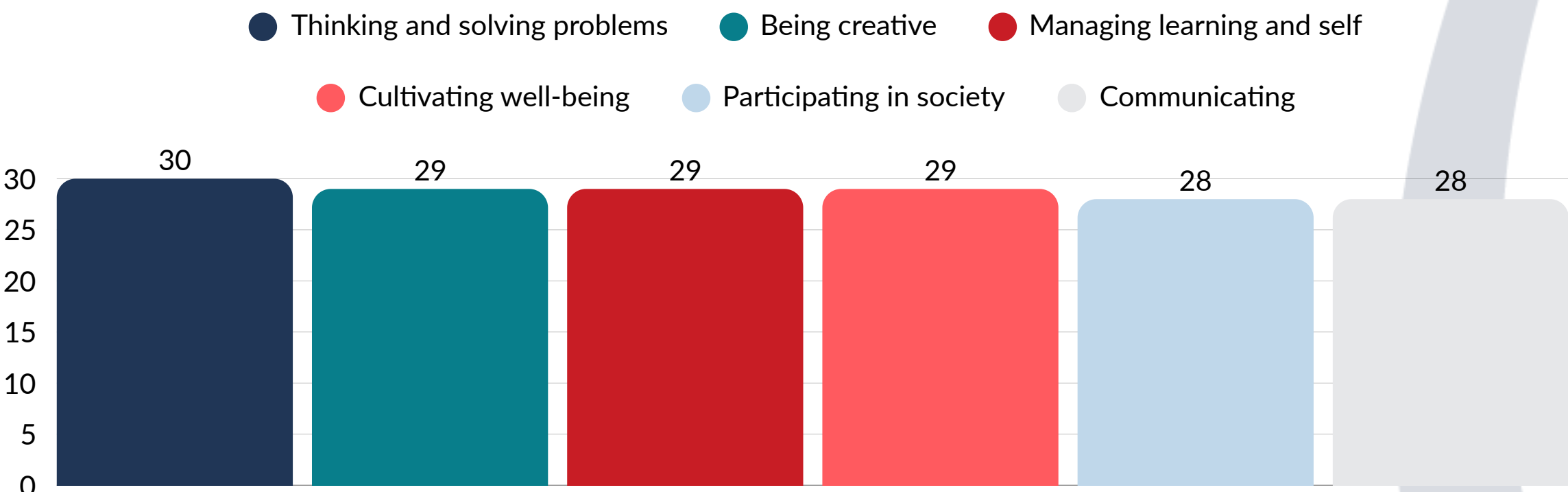
Q 1 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the preparation for life after school module, the largest number selected exploring options. This was followed closely by identifying strengths and creating a CV. Slightly fewer parents highlighted managing money, while travelling safely was chosen by the smallest group. No parents selected none of the above (see Figure 25).



(Figure 25)

The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the preparation for life after school module, the largest number selected thinking and solving problems. This was followed closely by being creative, managing learning and self, and cultivating well-being, all chosen equally. Slightly fewer parents selected participating in society, while communicating was chosen by the smallest group (see Figure 26).

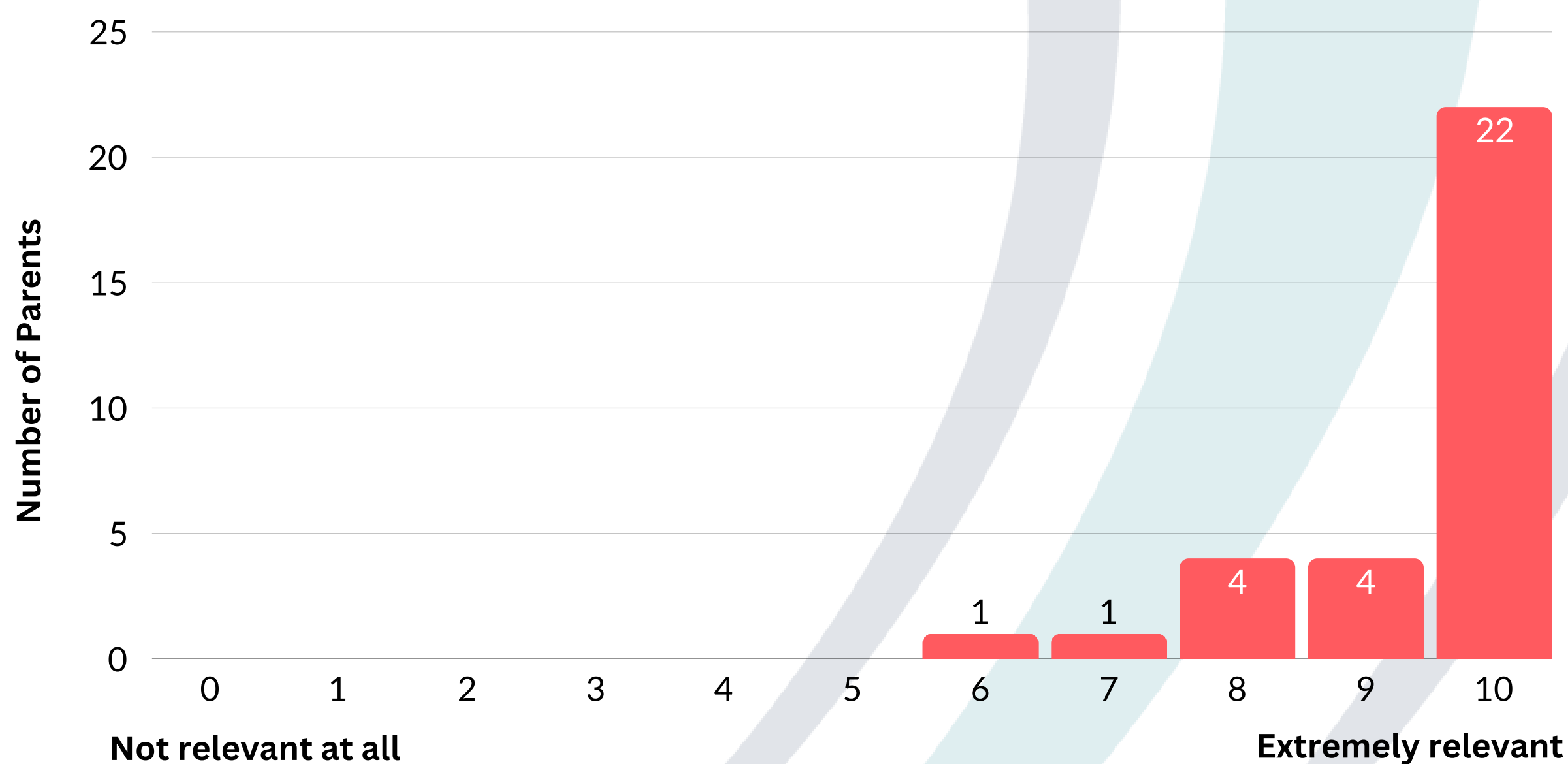


(Figure 26)

In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (2): Preparation for Life after School ?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the preparation for life after school module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 32 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores of 9 or 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings of 6, 7, or 8, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 5 (see Figure 27).



(Figure 27)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?

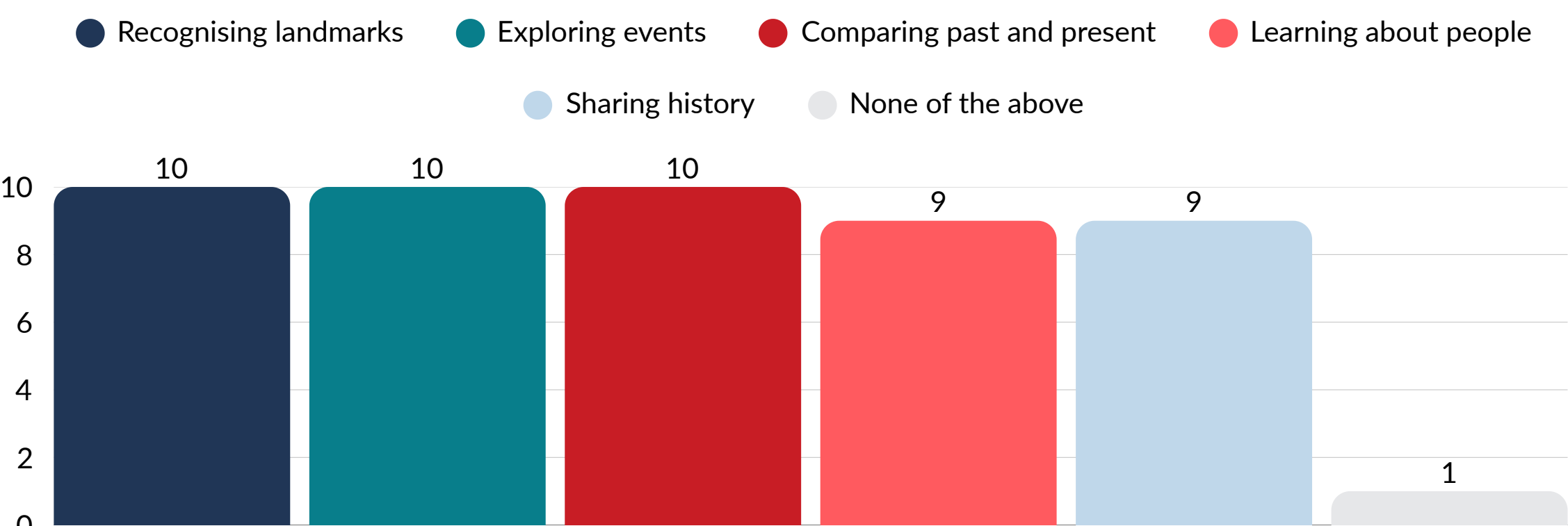




Level (2): The Past in my Place

A total of 10 responses were recorded, and parents were given the option to choose multiple answers for this question.

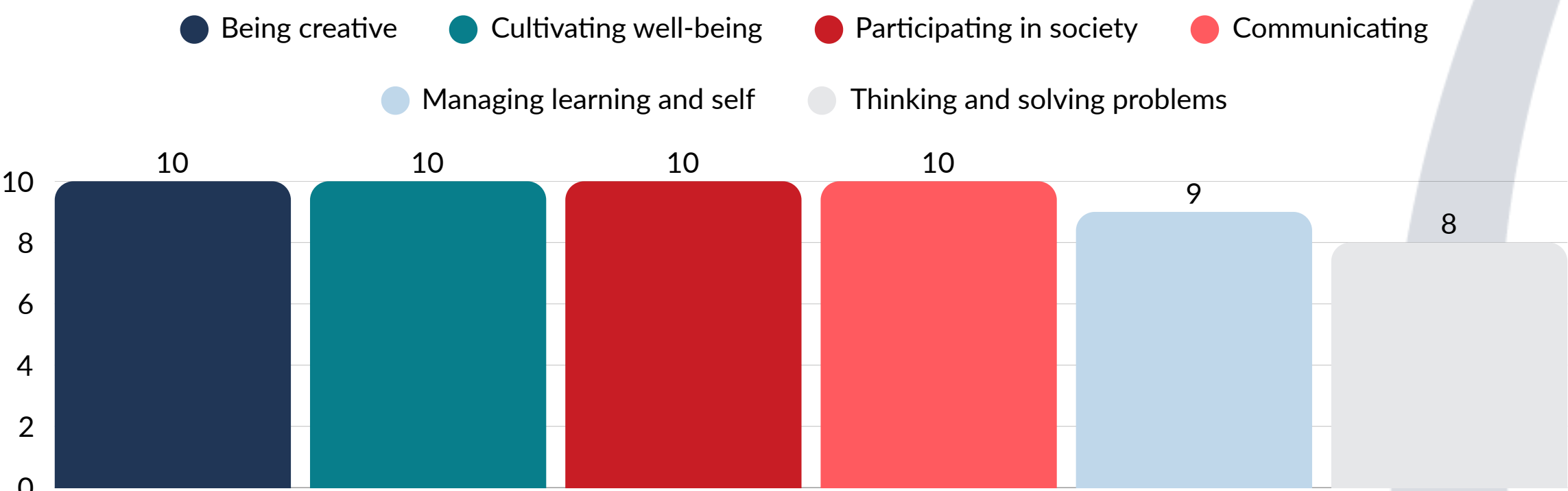
Q 1 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the past in my place module, the largest number selected recognising landmarks, exploring events, and comparing past and present, all chosen equally. These were followed closely by learning about people and sharing history. Only one parent selected none of the above (see Figure 28).



(Figure 28)

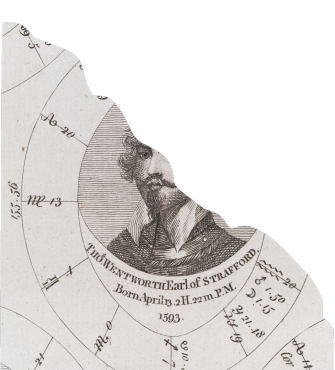
The NCCA has developed learning outcomes for this elective. We have summarised them into the following categories. Which of these would be relevant for your child's learning needs?

Q 2 When parents were asked which abilities and skills they felt would best align with their child’s needs through participation in the past in my place module, the largest number selected being creative, cultivating well-being, participating in society, and communicating, all chosen equally. Slightly fewer parents selected managing learning and self, while the smallest group highlighted thinking and solving problems (see Figure 29).

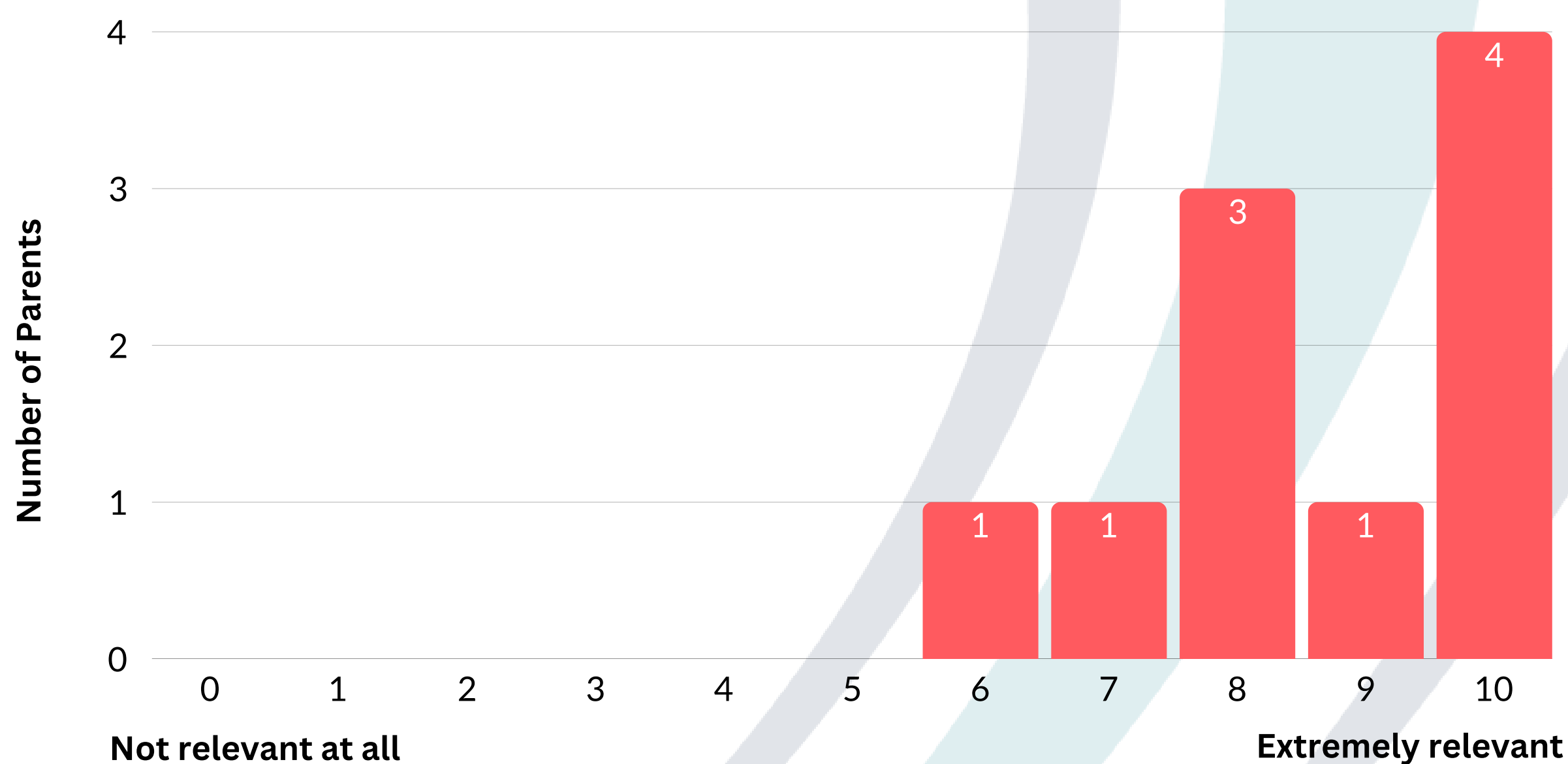


(Figure 29)

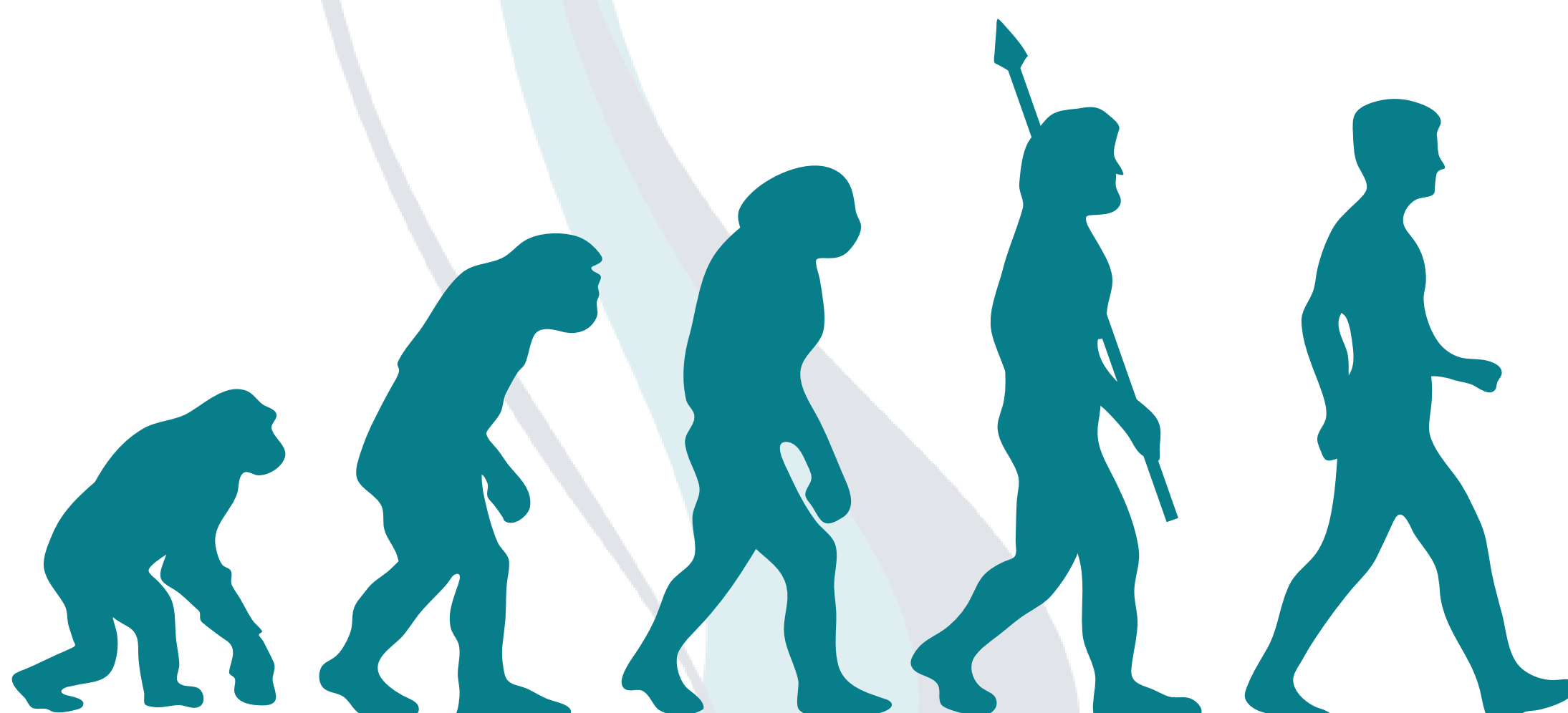
In your opinion, which abilities and skills would be aligned with your child's needs through participation in the Level (2): The Past in my Place?



Q 3 Parents were asked how relevant the past in my place module would be for their child’s needs. Out of 10 responses, the majority rated the module highly, with most parents selecting scores of 9 or 10. A smaller group provided moderate ratings between 6-8, suggesting the module was somewhat relevant for their child. No parents selected ratings between 0 and 5 (see Figure 30).



(Figure 30)
To what extent will this elective be relevant for your child's individual needs?



Suggestions for New Elective Modules and Ideas

In this section, we gathered all the open-text questions from all surveys and organised them into L1 and L2 groups. You will find below a summary of the responses, and you can refer to the appendix for the full set of answers.

L1 Modules answers summary:

Parents expressed a wide range of ideas about what should be included in the curriculum, with a strong emphasis on practical life skills that help children become more independent. They highlighted the importance of teaching everyday abilities such as cooking, healthy eating, cleaning, shopping, using money, managing bank tasks, planning, and self-care routines. Many also felt that emotional wellbeing needs more attention, including support with expressing feelings, building confidence, managing stress, and developing mindfulness. Music and creative expression appeared frequently, with parents suggesting more opportunities to explore different genres, learn composition, use AI music tools, attend musical events, and engage in hands-on creative activities like pottery and art therapy.

Digital literacy was another clear priority, with parents calling for basic computer skills, typing, using Word and Excel, understanding online communication, and learning how to recognise misinformation and use AI safely. Several respondents felt that structured one-to-one academic support would help children who struggle with reading, writing, phonics, spelling, maths, and comprehension. Community engagement and social interaction were described as essential to inclusion—parents want their children to be out in real-world environments, talking to others, practising conversations, and increasing visibility within their communities.

Physical activity and outdoor learning were also emphasised, including gymnastics, running, cycling skills, and horticulture, although there were concerns about unequal access to facilities. Nutrition education was frequently mentioned, with parents wanting children to learn about food seasonality, label reading, food safety, and the difference between homemade and ultra-processed foods, along with simple food science. Safety and practical preparedness—such as first aid, road safety, and what to do if lost—were highlighted as important and potentially life-saving skills



Some parents raised the need for a specialised relationship and sexuality education programme adapted for young people with intellectual disabilities and taught by trained professionals to ensure understanding and protection. Others suggested adding culturally rich and globally relevant content, including early language learning, globalisation and immigration, mythology, and diverse cultural perspectives. A smaller number of parents mentioned expanding access to psychology, interpersonal communication, basic, employment skills, and other practical numeracy tasks linked to everyday activities. Overall, parents want a curriculum that is more practical, inclusive, emotionally supportive, community-based, and aligned with the everyday realities and future needs of their children.

L2 Modules answers summary:

Parents expressed a strong preference for practical, hands-on learning that supports independence, creativity, and readiness for adult life. They suggested expanding expressive subjects such as drama, dance, and music, including opportunities to learn instruments for relaxation and to become familiar with well-known composers and important musical works. Many parents recommended nature-based and craft-based activities such as gardening, growing food, woodwork, household maintenance, sewing, knitting, jewellery making, and other creative crafts.

Digital skills were repeatedly highlighted as essential, including using computers, tablets, and mobile phones; sending emails; joining video calls; creating presentations; exploring basic programming; and learning how artificial intelligence and assistive technology can be used in everyday life. Parents felt students should also learn how to complete forms online and on paper, compare prices for services, book travel or accommodation, and understand the community services they may need to use as adults, such as legal, medical, financial, and social supports.

Preparation for the workplace was another area that parents felt strongly about. They particularly mentioned workplace behaviour, understanding employment rights, reading a payslip, budgeting, managing money, interview skills, and gaining meaningful work experience. Everyday safety and decision-making were also seen as valuable, including understanding healthy eating, cooking on a budget, knowing road rules for walking and cycling, deciding when to seek medical help, and practising recycling and repair skills.



Several parents stressed the importance of communication skills, such as greeting people appropriately, holding conversations, answering phone calls, and passing on messages clearly. Some also emphasised the need for relationships and sexuality education that is adapted for students with intellectual disabilities and taught by specialists.

Parents also valued learning that strengthens cultural awareness and a sense of belonging, including exploring local heritage, talking with grandparents about family history, and engaging with the community. They mentioned animal care and nature activities as positive ways to encourage responsibility and curiosity. Overall, parents saw this type of curriculum as essential for helping students develop confidence, independence, and practical life skills for life after school.



Focus Group Findings

Two focus groups were held to gather parents' perspectives on the proposed Level 1 and 2 elective modules for students with additional educational needs. While only one parent attended each session, both conversations were highly insightful, detailed, and informed by rich personal experience.

Parents were invited to share their views on the proposed elective modules through a structured set of questions designed to collect meaningful feedback and support the NPC in representing parents' voices effectively.

This section of the report summarises the insights and suggestions provided. A total of 3 questions guided the discussions, as outlined below:

1. Which elective modules would benefit your children the most, and why?

Both parents identified optional modules they believed would benefit their children. The most popular was Areas of Special Interest, as it allows students to learn through topics they genuinely enjoy. One parent explained that her child thrives when working on Lego, coding, robotics, and structured problem-solving, and felt that focusing on his interests would increase engagement and confidence. The other parent shared that her child has a strong interest in animals and believed a personal-interest module could help her explore future options, including work.

Both parents also viewed IT skills as essential. They described it as a basic life skill that supports independence and future employment. Skills such as typing, online safety, using digital tools, creating documents, and giving presentations were seen as important for confidence and everyday functioning.

Another highly valued module was Preparation for Life After School. Parents explained that young people with additional needs often do not pick up skills like workplace behaviour, money management, interview skills, or independent travel unless these are taught directly. These skills were seen as key to future independence.

Finally, one parent strongly supported The Past of My Place, describing a history project that helped her child feel more confident, included, and proud of her work. This showed that well-supported project work can help students feel a sense of belonging while also developing academic skills.



2. What other skills or topics should be included to support your child's learning?

Both parents suggested extra skills that should be taught across the whole programme to better support students with additional learning needs. A key focus was the clear, direct teaching of communication and social skills, which they felt are essential but often missed. These include making eye contact, greeting people properly, saying thank you, holding a conversation, and introducing yourself in new settings such as workplaces. Parents explained that these skills do not come naturally to their children and need to be taught step by step.

Both parents also stressed the importance of everyday maths skills, such as reading timetables, measuring ingredients when cooking, using a calculator, estimating amounts, and handling money. They saw these as essential for real independence. They also felt that independent travel needs its own clear focus, including reading public transport information, staying safe, dealing with changes to plans, and knowing how to ask for help.

Finally, they highlighted the need for well-prepared staff and clear planning in schools, pointing out that even a strong curriculum will not work if it is not delivered consistently or if teachers are not confident in what they are teaching.

3. What challenges might your child face in these modules?

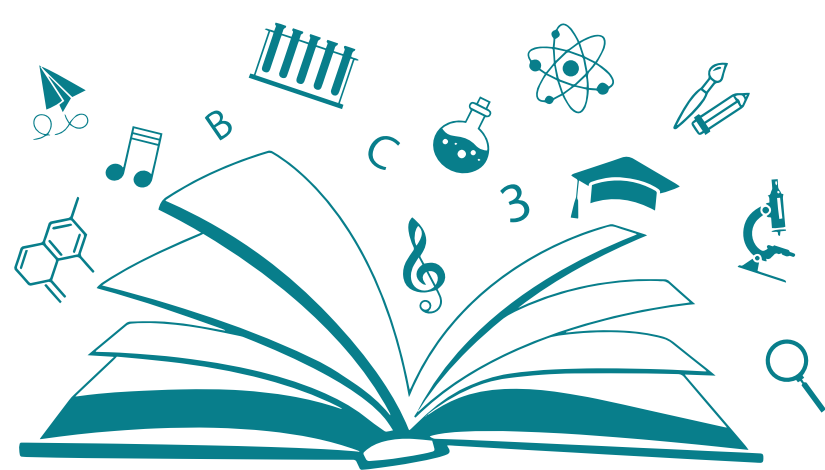
Both parents identified practical challenges their children may face when taking part in these elective modules. Most of the issues relate to how schools run and deliver the learning, not the modules themselves. A major concern is the lack of consistent support in mainstream schools. Children often move between different teachers with different approaches, uneven routines, and poor coordination, which makes it hard for them to settle or make steady progress.



Another concern is the strong focus on exam subjects in mainstream schools, which could result in Level 2 modules in particular being pushed into low-priority timetable slots. This risks lowering their quality and making students feel less valued.

Both parents also explained that their children struggle with starting new activities. One child often resists unfamiliar tasks unless given strong support, while the other becomes uncertain or disengaged if instructions are not very clear. Social situations can also be challenging, as group work, moving between activities, or presenting work may cause stress without proper support.

Overall, parents felt that the main difficulties would come from how consistently and seriously the school organises and supports the modules, rather than from the content of the modules themselves.



Conclusion

This report shares what parents think about the updates to the Senior Cycle special education programmes. The feedback shows that while many of the proposed modules are seen as valuable and relevant, parents also highlighted important areas that need further improvement to ensure the curriculum truly meets the needs of all students.

Parents consistently expressed a desire for a school system that supports the development of confidence, independence, and practical life skills. They want subjects that are meaningful, easy to understand, and clearly connected to students' everyday lives—covering areas like communication, emotional wellbeing, digital literacy, social skills, money management, independent travel, and workplace readiness. Parents also emphasised the importance of learning through personal interests, hands-on experiences, and real-world environments.

Across all modules, parents stressed that successful delivery depends on schools providing consistent support, well-prepared staff, and structured teaching approaches. They want better communication from schools, clearer pathways for life after school, and learning environments where students feel included, valued, and understood.

By expanding practical learning opportunities, ensuring high-quality and consistent teaching, strengthening communication with families, and continuing to listen to parents and students, schools can build a more inclusive and supportive Senior Cycle experience. Working together, we can ensure every student has the skills, confidence, and opportunities they need to grow, succeed, and participate fully in their community.

Appendix

Level (1): Music

If none of the above, please tell us why?

1. he is not much interested in that

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

1. Music, drama, religious education, wellbeing and mindfulness

2. "All about time, routines that happen around time eg morning breakfast, afternoon dinner prep, evening bath etc.. time management

Typing and basic computer skills and also using electronic devices and media.. communication through eg email, WhatsApp etc.. shopping online eg food"

3. "AI-powered music tools, DJ skills, and subjects exploring music and mental health—such as relaxation through music, how music affects mood, and how it supports studying and focus—should all be part of the curriculum.

There is definitely a need for more music classes. However, I find it baffling that every such addition must be consulted with parents, which only delays the implementation of these modules. You are professionals—use your expertise to adapt the curriculum and introduce modules that create real opportunities for our children, the next generation. Education should not be stalled by seeking opinions on every minor decision from people who either do not care or are simply too busy to engage meaningfully."

4. "Music:

School trips to the opera or other musical events,

Classical music in primary schools/ Secondary schools

Watching some live music events on screens ie. orchestral shows

DJ's skills

AI tools and software for music "

5. Group work, employment skill, horticulture,

6. Pottery clay , horse riding

7. More assistance with expressing feelings

8. I think having the chance to explore lots of different types and forms of music. Having the opportunity to explore music composition and reflecting on the differing ways it could then sound if used in a different style of music such as Jazz, Blues etc.

9. Music and sound for films, how it's made, sound effects etc

10. I feel the use of music as a means to explore feelings is fantastic

11. "Art & play therapy....through creative exploration

Nature

Cooking, healthy eating exploration of different food and taste "

12. 0

13. Not sure

14. Everyday one child I'm the class must have one to one with the teacher with maths or reading or history geography..spelling.phonocs anything that child may need help with. During lessons one child a day.. with the teacher that teaches that sub just.. or anyone. Just a thought as I feel one to one on stuff my kids can't grasp.. helps them in confidence. I will still do yjst with my kid's anyway..

15. Reading and writing is one of the most important needed throughout life and my child needs additional support which currently isn't enough. Maybe if we introduce reading music and writing music along with the words of songs would be hugely and highly beneficial to students of all age categories.

16. I have nothing to add, but I would like to say I would love my child learnt music in school

Level (1): Area of Special Interest

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

1. Practical topics would be good like learning, architecture, finance and money matters, life skills

2. "Food and Nutrition – In Ireland, approximately one in five primary school children is living with overweight or obesity, highlighting the urgent need for stronger education around healthy eating and nutrition.

Internet and AI Fact-Checking – Teaching children how to verify information online and use AI tools responsibly to recognise misinformation and fake news.

Sports and Physical Activity – Activities such as gymnastics, stretching, and running should be core components of school life. Currently, provision depends heavily on the school's resources. In disadvantaged areas, including DEIS schools, basic facilities such as running tracks are often missing. EU funding should be prioritised to ensure all Irish schools—especially DEIS schools—have access to proper sports infrastructure.

Mindfulness – Practical techniques to help children cope with everyday challenges, manage stress, and build emotional resilience.

Cycling Skills and Road Safety – Mandatory training for all children on safe cycling and scooter use, including how to navigate roads and streets responsibly.

First Aid – Age-appropriate first aid training, equipping children with simple, essential life-saving skills."

3.I believe independent living skills should be part of areas of interest, and list of some important skills like basic cooking, self grooming, food shopping and using money etc. I know it's person led & they get to learn about something they love, which is usually music for my son, looking up people online and listening to music, which is fine, but he does that at home. I think there should be a constructive list to choose from, so their time at school is productive, and has maximum learning potential.

4.Emotional control

5."Sustainable Cities,
Mythology & Folktales,
The Science of 'Why',
The Science of FOOD (ultra processed foods)
Extreme Weather & Natural Disasters
Hand Hygiene

Self-Reliance- walking to school on their own rather than being dropped oin the car by their parents

Road Safety skills- Bike and scooters"

6.Managing money and everyday banking skills.

7.Social skills and obligations, life skills

8.Organisational skills and planning for independent living

9."Work skills

Horticulture

Communication & social skills (ideally with speech and language therapist input in order to incorporate individual goals within this).

Urgent need to create an RSE module adapted for teens with intellectual disabilities who may be non verbal/have difficulties with language comprehension. This cohort is very vulnerable to abuse and need more education than mainstream students to help protect them. I feel we need specialist educators to carry out this programme. In my experience teachers do not have sufficient education and there is a level of discomfort in addressing RSE to the extent it needs to be for people with ID to fully absorb. There is a sense that this area is the remit of parents. "

10. Not sure

11. Art

12. "Learning how to use Word, Excel, foreign language alphabets etc for current mode of state exams.

Psychology and interpersonal communication. Different personality types.
"

13. I have nothing to add

Level (1): Cookery

If none of the above, please tell us why?

1. Along with all of above knowledge of usage ingredients in different cuisines, and processing should also be included
2. We cook at home I don't need him to do that in school

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

1. House cleaning alongside daily classroom cleaning
2. All age groups boys and girls would benefit
3. There could be a focus on cooking and numbers, incorporating numbers more into cooking, having fun with numbers. Eg cost and measurement of ingredients, and how long to cook for, at what temperature. Develop a chart to note these numbers, to make it easy to go back and find this information, for when they do it at home. And to be able to bring this information home, so it could be presented in a folder, labelled, easy access.
4. "The nutrition component should be expanded within this module to include information on the seasonality of fruit and vegetables in Ireland and globally, as well as basic methods of food preservation. Children should also learn about the importance of temperature control when cooking and storing food safely.
In addition, it is essential to address ultra-processed foods and teach children how to read and understand food labels. A practical activity could involve cooking a homemade lasagne, writing down the ingredients, and then comparing it with a shop-bought version. This could be extended by introducing basic food chemistry—for example, explaining how food colourings are used, or how high-protein yogurts are thickened.
While specialist input would be recommended, the educational opportunities are significant. A well-designed programme could help children understand key risks within the food industry—topics that are often challenging even for adults, let alone young learners."
5. Ask the children?
6. Healthy choices and why
7. An absolute brilliant idea to include a child to be able to be understood and independent
8. Managing money, banking and shopping skills.
9. More focus on self awareness and building confidence
10. Not sure
11. To integrate the current modules into the schools. My children don't currently learn these at school although I try to teach at home it's very difficult with a lot of children in a busy home.
12. Nutrition
13. I have nothing to add
14. Learning how to be self sufficient

Level (1): Being Part of the Community

If none of the above, please tell us why?

1.This tipis can be covered by parents, not necessary to be school involved

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

1.Social integration is essential for inclusion and acceptance. People with needs must be present in their communities. Its essential that this program includes community activities that bring people together, like visiting old people's homes and talking with the elderly, going into shops and having conversations, going to cafe and ordering drink and have conversations with others, visiting other schools and having conversations with typical kids. Its important to have exposure and spread positive attitudes about disability- they could talk about their disability eg my name is X and I have down syndrome. Overall I believe it's essential to be out in the community and not in hiding where your community don't know you exist.

2."A dedicated module on globalisation and immigration should be introduced, covering migration from early periods—such as the Vikings—to the modern-day reasons people migrate. This module should highlight the value of cultural diversity and its importance in Irish society and local communities.

Language education should be treated as a priority. Children should be exposed to multiple languages from an early age, with a focus on the most widely spoken languages in the world, alongside the Irish language. For example, in the area where I currently live, schools do not offer Spanish, Chinese, Indian languages, Arabic, or Portuguese. Instead, French is taught, despite being spoken in far fewer countries compared to many global languages.

Waiting until secondary school to introduce additional languages is simply too late. Early language learning supports cognitive development, cultural understanding, and future opportunities, and should be embedded at primary level."

3.What to do if lost etc

4.Life skilld

5.Fantastic module

6.Not sure

7.I nothing to add

8.Going out more to shops and understanding money

9.Special needs students are inhibited socially because their peers just don't know how to relate to them. Modules with more interaction with their peers would be immensely productive for all of society.

Level (2): Music

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

- 1."Drama, Dance - expressive performing arts
Caring profession skills - link to other parts of society...SNA, nursing home
AI - and AT.... how can it benefit society as a whole
Languages... utilising some children's amazing memory skills.
Horticulture - again being very practical, link to local social farms"
- 2.knowledge of composers and famous works is simply necessary for general development
- 3.Woodwork or basic household maintenance
- 4.I wish my son could know the music better and use a instrument for relaxation.

Level (2): Area of Special Interest

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

- 1."Nature/gardening growing own food plants flowers etc
Science based subject an easier version of chemistry, physics, biology
Crafts eg needlework knitting crocheting jewelery making, pottery, lino printing etc
DIY skills around home incorporating perhaps woodwork and engineering skills as well as basic jobs around home or how to identify when something needs to be repaired or checked"
- 2.Great way of developing skills without it being seen as "work".

Level (2): Design and Do

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

- 1.Practicing tangible subjects is important as not all students will excel academic
- 2.Independent living skills
- 3.Workplace skills, navigating working environment, rights and entitlements, employment law, how to be a good worker
- 4.My son would love this
- 5.Creative ideas

Level (2): IT Skills

If none of the above, please tell us why?

1.Children today are immersed in tech since primary school. My children already present slides in 6th class using Google classroom. I think basic coding and an understanding of source quality of data would be more appropriate for SC.

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

1.IT is essential for everyday living and should start in primary school

2.Using all electronic devices & apps

3.IT skills are so important for all abilities to be able to express themselves and yet be creative

4."It skills also needs to include sending emails, zoom calls, teams meetings etc, maybe some basic programming with option for advancement if child has an interest, using excel and word and maybe some exposure to some databases or accounting or payroll packages

Also a course on personal finance including understanding the calculations on their pay slips, social welfare calculations etc

Practicing completing forms on paper and online esp government departments forms.

Also exposure to websites for basic utilities insurance etc eg how to do quotes or use comparison websites and also things like how to buy products online or book hotels, holidays or flights etc

Also providing information on the different services available in community and when you should or may need to use them eg when to use solicitor, physio, podiatry, social welfare office, banks, accountant etc"

5.Robotic

6.So needed in terms of promoting independence in a safe way

7.see previous comment

8.Using AI for creating presentations

Level (2): Preparation for Life after School

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

1. Real life skills are essential. Budgeting, looking for work, driving skills, interview techniques

2. "Eating healthily - question is this covered in SPHE? I know it is in Home Economics but this is not available in all schools. And linked to this is cooking on a budget / managing money.

In the transport one cover rules of the road as a pedestrian or cyclist in particular and issues with drivers/cars/speed.

Looking at up and recycling and circular economy ... could show/promote such skills as sewing, fixing, changing a plug and so on. "

3. To help make decisions that are needed for example, when to go to the GP, when to buy cough medicine etc

4. Hugely important for whatever they do in life

5. General PC skills, use of MS Office overall, debating and presenting and interview skills would be extremely beneficial to all students preparing them for life after secondary school

6. Getting my child ready for the outside working world.

7. This area is critical to ensure that our children are not left behind after school ends

8. Think this module preparing for life after school should also include driving test theory, interview practice, work experience in a variety of placements with meaningful experience gained (schools should monitor these placements through spot checks and asking students to document work undertaking, training provided)

9. Life skills re personal care and also healthy eating and how it benefits the body and mind

10. This module for all students across the board a great initiative.

11. Communication skills- from the basics of how to greet people, answering phone calls, taking a message from the phone and relaying it to others, turn taking in conversation etc.

12. "Work skills/ supervised work experience

RSE adapted for students with ID, Speech/language difficulties ideally delivered by a specialist educator in this area."

13. N/a

14. "Basic money management and costing.

How to read a payslip and basic finances "

15. Nothing to add

Level (2): The Past in my Place

What new elective modules or ideas do you think could be added to help meet your child's needs? Please share any ideas you believe would be beneficial.

- 1.Excellent idea. Learning culture and keeping community alive
- 2.Talking to grandparents. Taking an interest in family trees etc
- 3.I don't think there should be a huge focus on this subject. Its a good idea in theory, once it's kept basic, most children in special needs schools are from other towns, so I wouldn't really want my own child spending alot of time on the history of a town he doesn't live in, but I understand the outcomes, team work, doing research, finding out information, sharing ideas etc..
- 4.Animal education, caring for animals
- 5.Need to be mindful of learning resources
- 6.Fantastic to examine their world and enhance a sense of belonging.