

## **Graduate Volunteer Feedback Highlights Gaps in Interview Technique and Academic Performance between Access and Non-Access Groups during Interviews**

Our graduate volunteer base at OxFizz are a motivated and diverse group, providing excellent interview skills workshops in conjunction with practice admissions interviews to our young people. In these 1:1 sessions, students are provided with an opportunity to gain vital practice in an 'OxBridge' style interview session, followed by feedback from our volunteers that have been through the system themselves and are well equipped to give advice on the interview process.



Feedback is discussed in person for each young person and a written copy forwarded on to them, highlighting key strengths, areas for improvement and next steps. This has provided us with an extensive database of feedback through which we have been able to compare the key differences between young people from an access background and those that are paying clients (non-access). This data highlights key differences between young people, namely disparities between interview technique and academic performance, both of which can be targeted at a variety of levels to bridge the gap between groups.

### **AIMS OF STUDY**

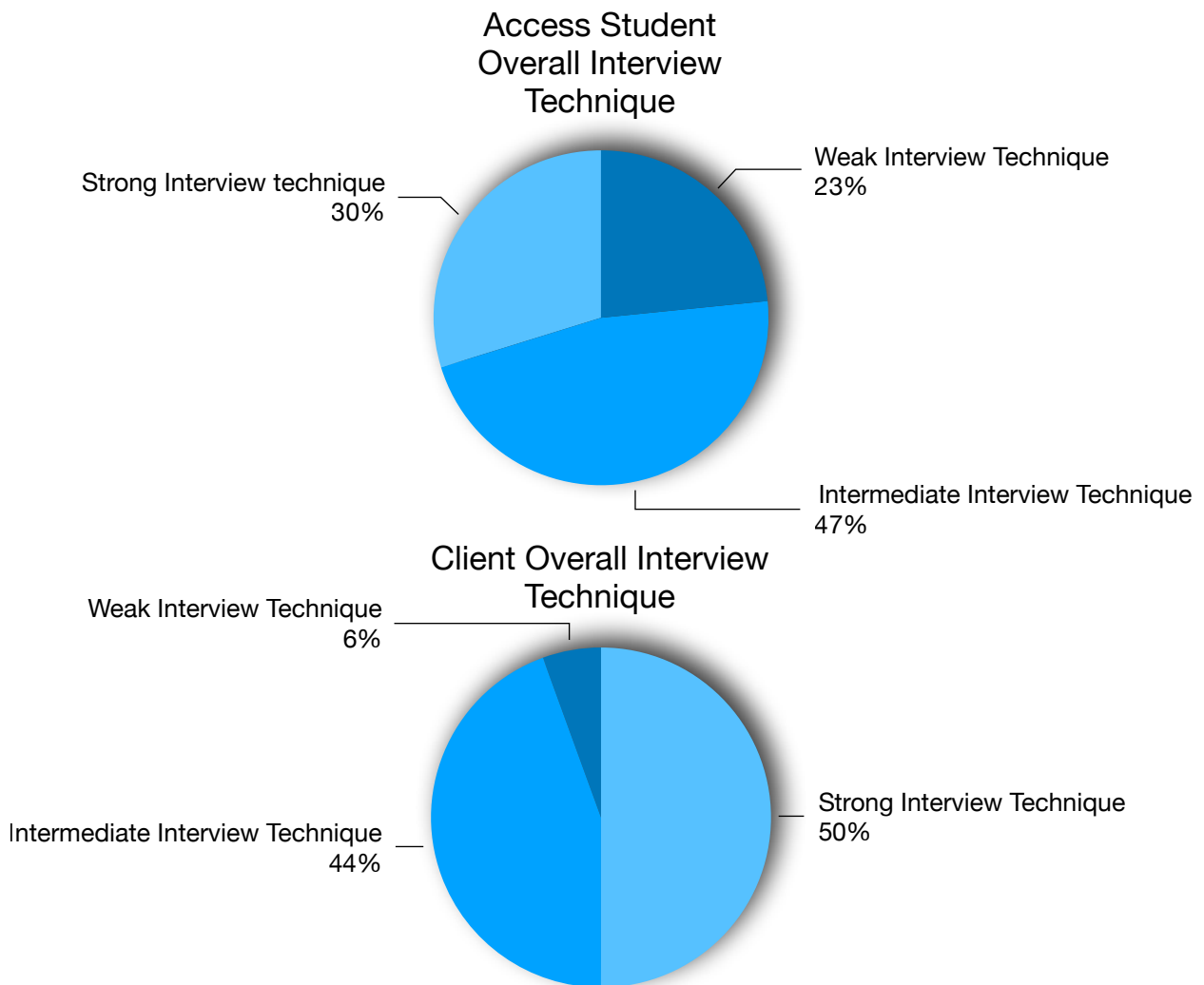
- 1- Establish the key differences between paid client and Access Student feedback**
- 2- Evaluate the differences in Interview Technique and Academic Performance between groups**
- 3- Highlight the key interview skills to be improved for young people from a variety of backgrounds**

Analysis by Benjamin Wood

Overall, a large proportion of students display strong interview technique, combining the ability to talk out loud their thought processes, engage with interviewers and demonstrate an enthusiasm for their subject. Only a small proportion of students, according to volunteer interviewer feedback, did not display any strong qualities in terms of interview technique.

Strong Interview Technique was used to describe students in which volunteer interview feedback mentioned only positive aspects of a students interview skills, whereas weak Interview Technique was used to describe students in which volunteer interview feedback mentioned only negative aspects of a students interview skills. Intermediate Interview Technique was used to describe those students with a combination of positive and negative interview skills.

There is, however, a significant difference between students from access and client groups, namely a significant increase in the proportion of students displaying strong interview technique with a concurrent decrease in those students displaying weak technique.



**Figure 1:** Pie charts showing overall Interview Technique performance between access groups (top) and client groups (bottom). Total number of Access Students analysed was 160 and total number of Paying Clients analysed was 62 using feedback data from 2020.

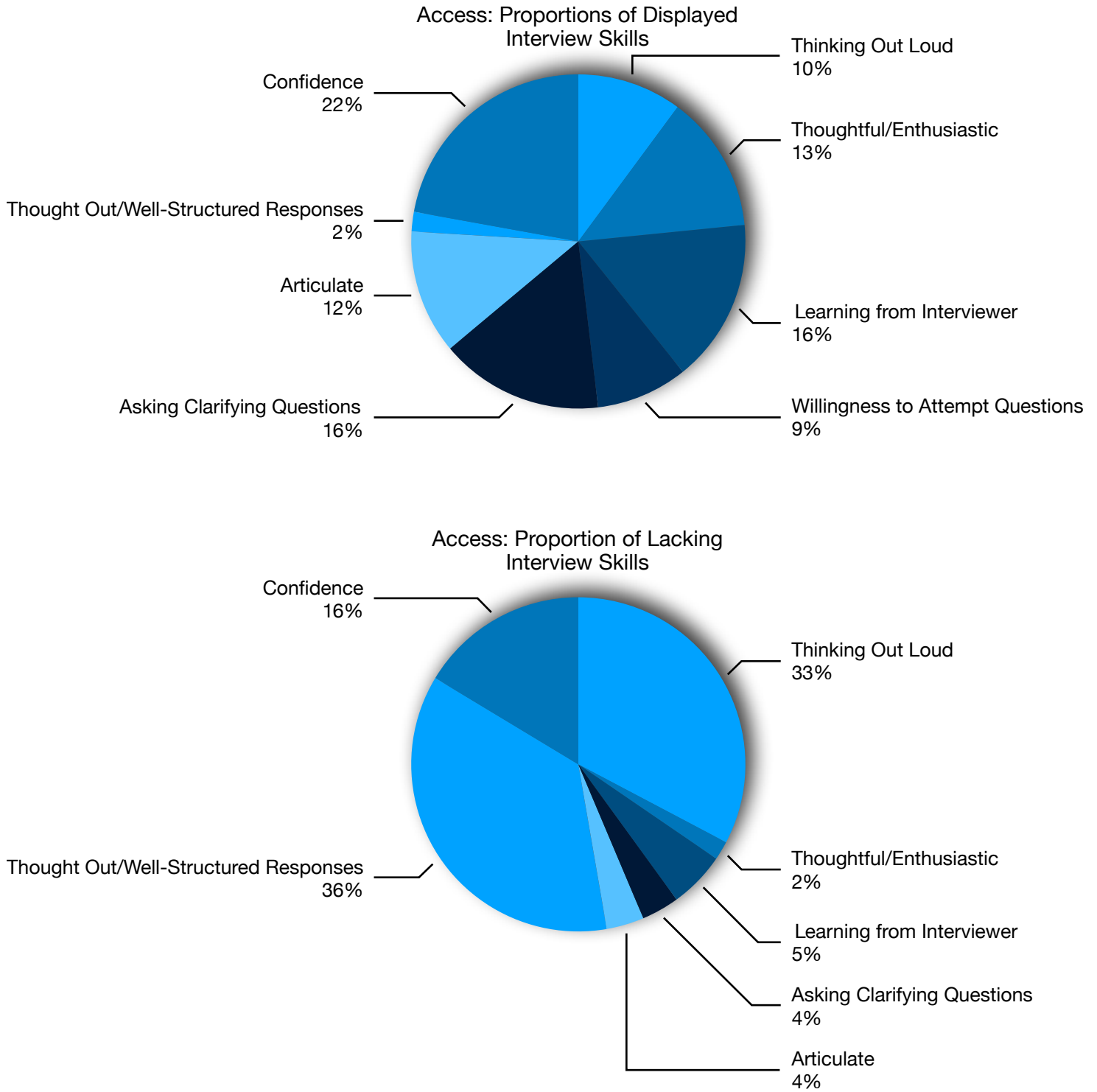
Our volunteer feedback provided a great depth of information highlighting a number of important factors in presenting good Interview Technique:

- **Thinking Out Loud:** The ability to talk through a problem as you go enables the interviewer a better understanding of your thought processes, problem solving skills and knowledge
- **Learning from the Interviewer:** Being able to change opinion or track when presented with new information
- **Willingness to Attempt Questions:** Remaining calm when presented with unknown material and being willing to attempt to use what you already know to respond
- **Thought Out/Well-Structured Responses:** Taking time before answering to structure your argument/response
- **Asking Clarifying Questions:** Asking for further information or rephrasing of the question, especially in a way that probes further into the topic rather than just repeating the question
- **Articulate:** Avoiding colloquialisms and the ability to deliver a clear and thoughtful response
- **Confidence:** Remaining calm under stress, good form and eye contact and emphasising your abilities as an academic
- **Thoughtful/Enthusiastic:** Engaging with the subject and showing a deep interest

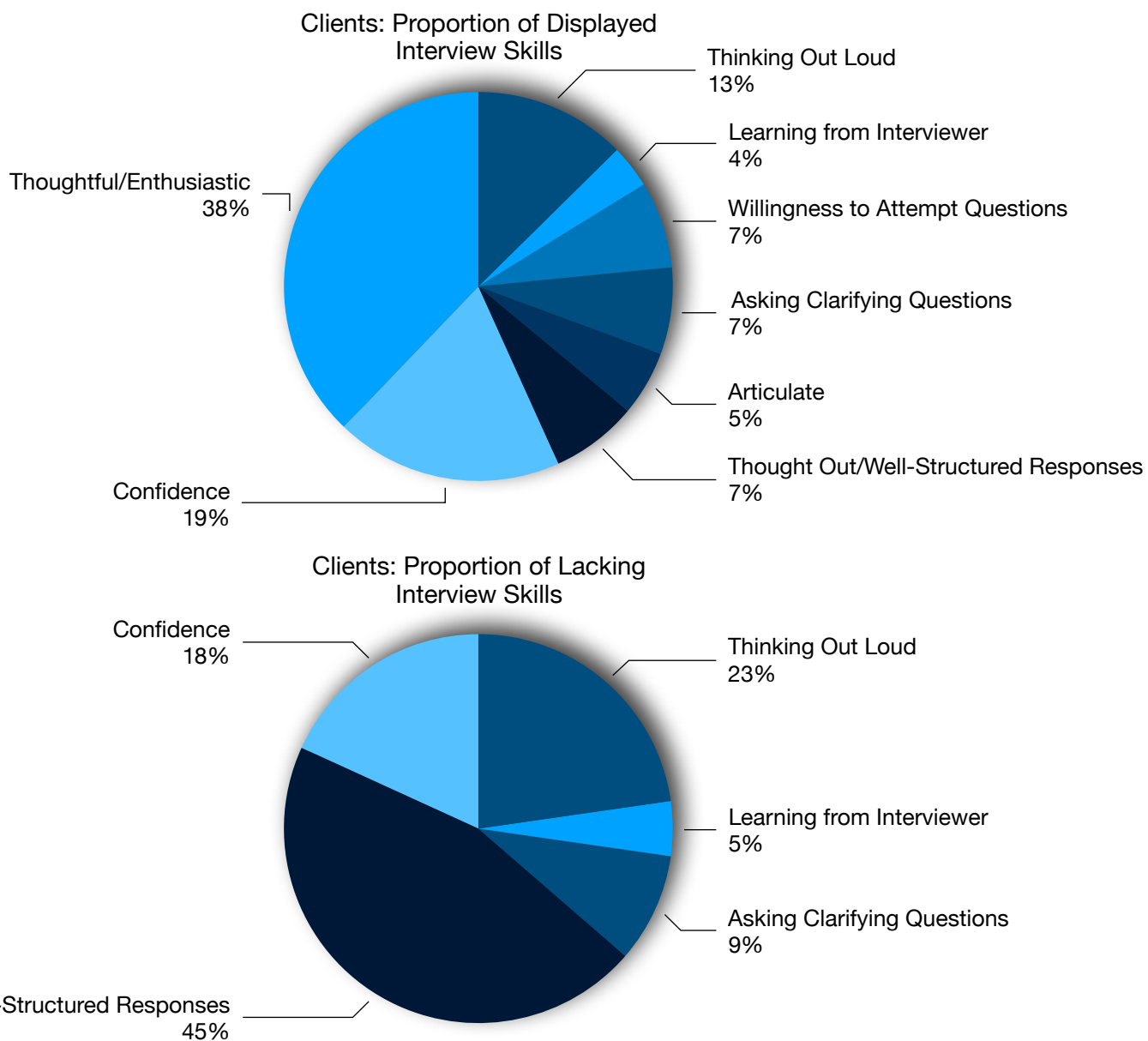
Looking in more detail at the proportion of interview skills associated with a good interview performance and those associated with a bad interview performance, we see some key areas for improvement with students from an access background. Three over-represented areas are: 1) Thinking out loud; 2) Providing thought out and well-structured responses; 3) Confidence. Interestingly, assessing the skills that are demonstrated during strong and intermediate interviews does not appear to identify a clear subset of interview techniques. It is likely that in stronger interviews there is a much greater degree of interaction between variables; ie. increased confidence during interviews would impact a students ability to demonstrate their enthusiasm, provide time for themselves to stop and think before answering and promote engagement with interviewers.

Assessing the proportion of interview techniques displayed in the strong and intermediate interviews from a client background shows a different proportion to that of the access group however. One clear difference is the over-representation of volunteer interviewers picking up on student enthusiasm and engagement with the interview.

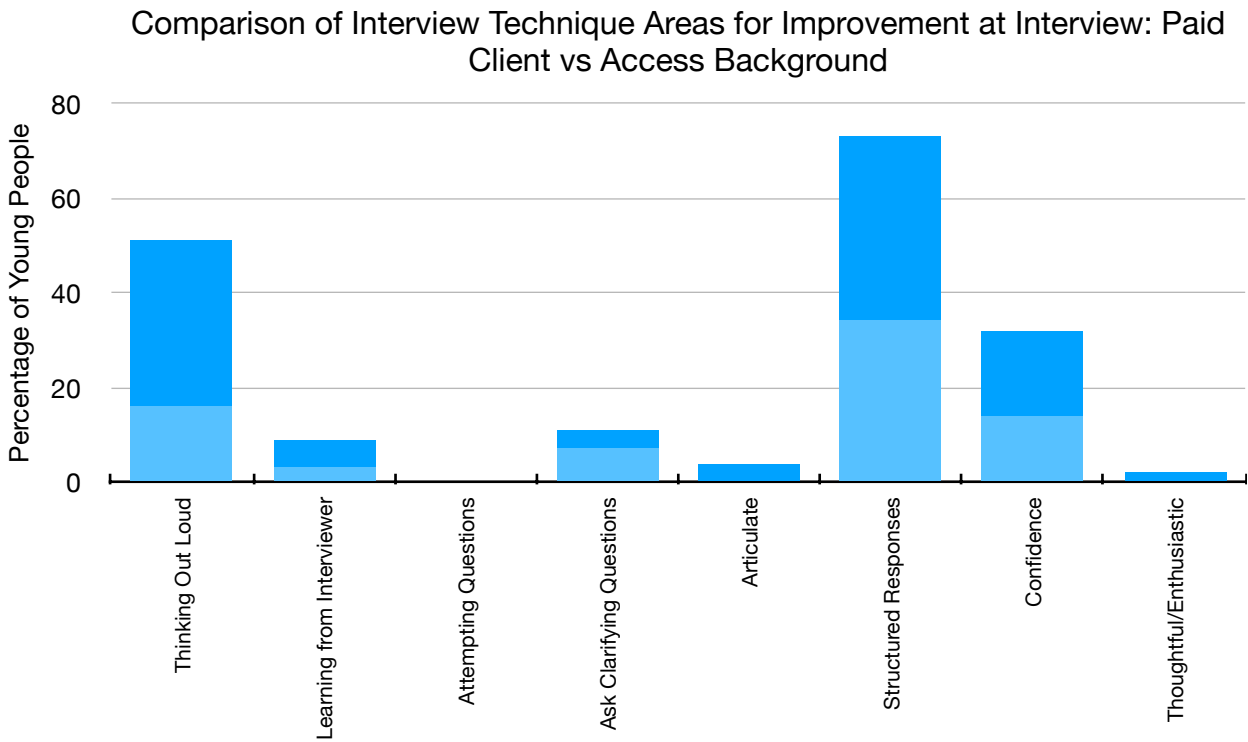
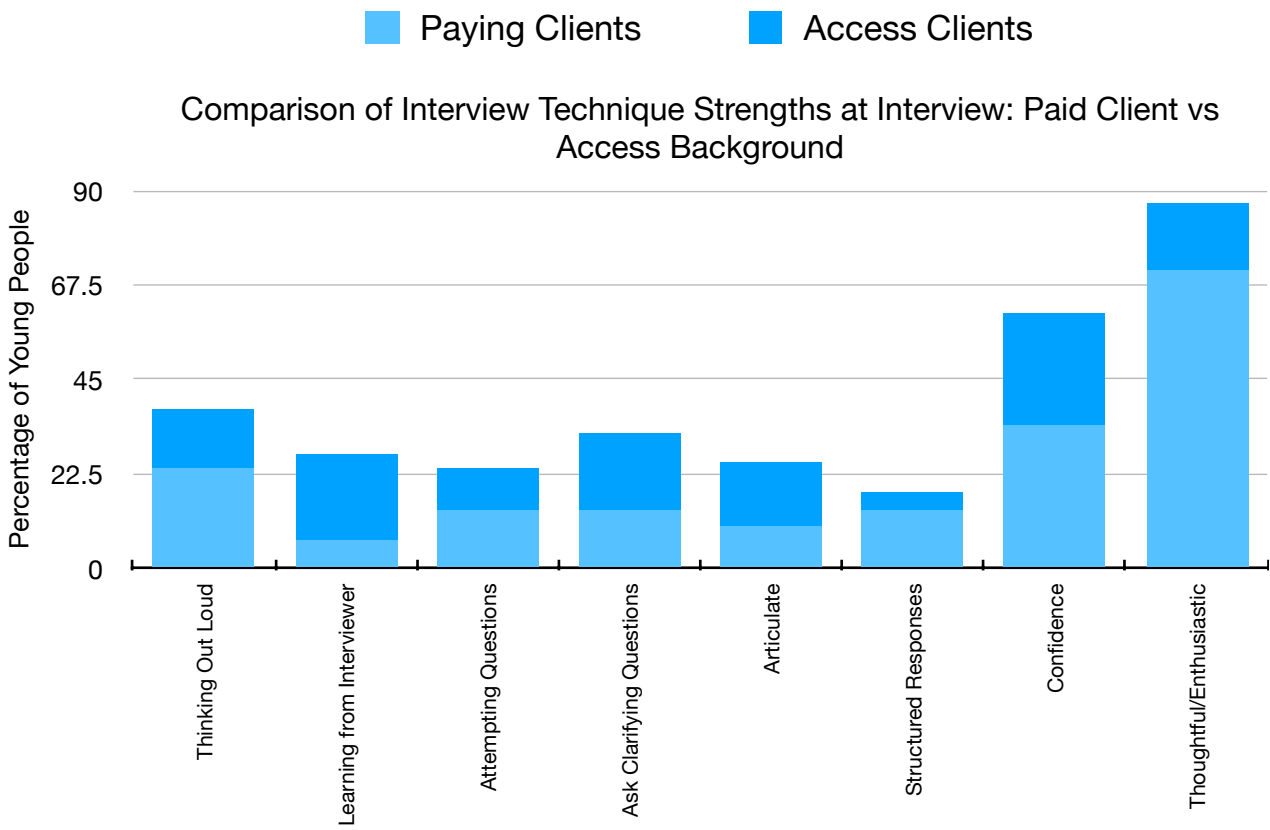
A similar subset of interview skills require improvement in the client group, including the ability to think out loud, taking time to structure a response and general confidence; this does, however, represent a smaller proportion of students from the client group.



**Figure 2:** Pie charts showing distribution of interview skills displayed in strong interviews (top) and lacking in weaker interviews (bottom) from access groups. Percentages represent how many times each factor was mentioned out of all factors considered per group strength or weakness. Eg. Of all the factors that need improvement in an access background, Thinking Out Loud was mentioned 33% of times.



**Figure 3:** Pie charts showing distribution of interview skills displayed in strong interviews (top) and lacking in weaker interviews (bottom) from paying client groups. Percentages represent how many times each factor was mentioned out of all factors considered per group strength or weakness. Eg. Of all the factors that need improvement in a client background, Thought Out/Well Structure Response was mentioned 45% of times.



**Figure 4:** Compound bar charts directly comparing proportions of interview skills between client and access groups. Percentages directly represent number of students given feedback indicating the above factors as strength or weakness. Eg. 71% of Paying Clients demonstrated strong Thoughtfulness/Enthusiasm compared to 16% of Access Students.

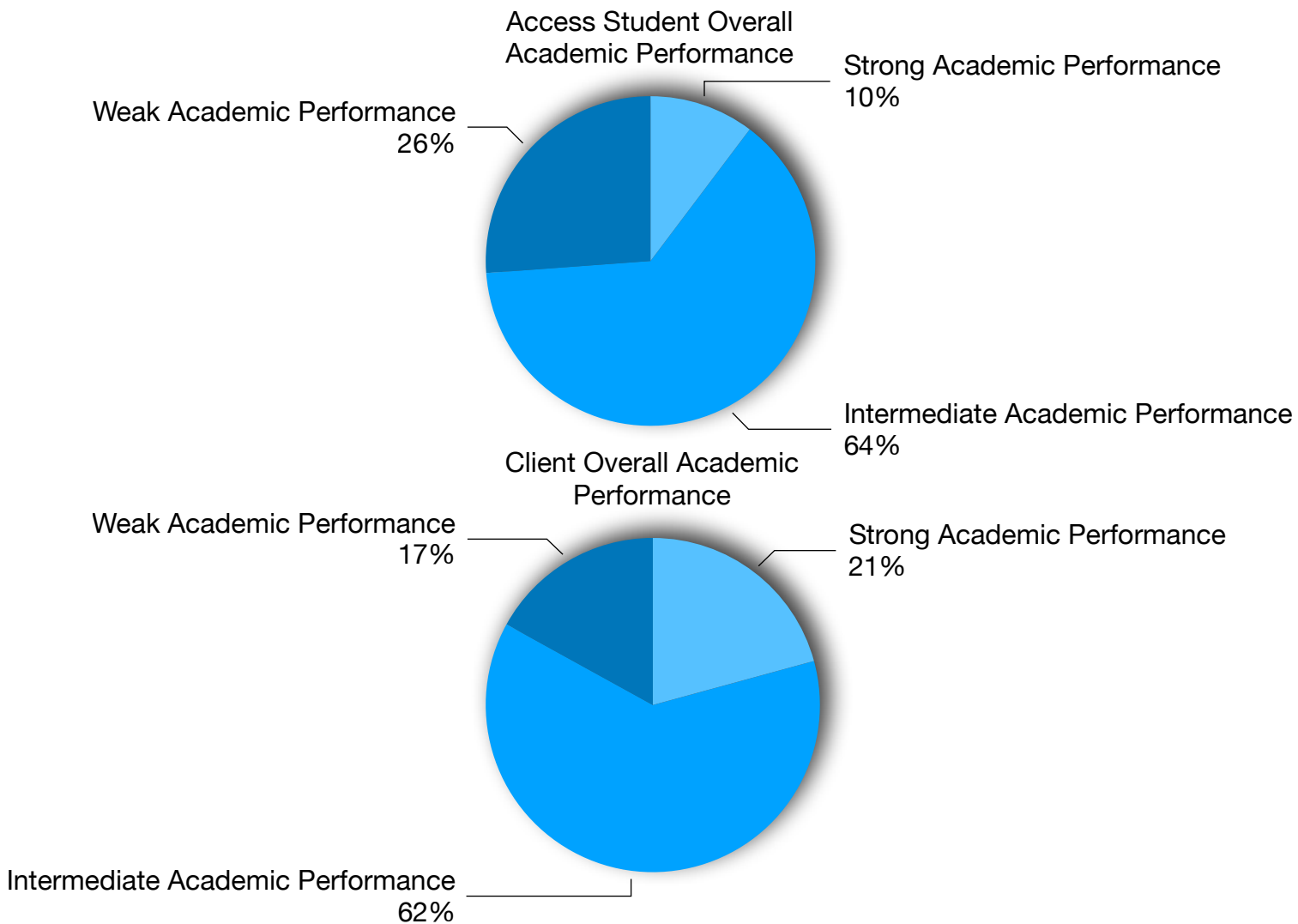


Assessing Academic Performance during an interview provides more of a mixed bag of feedback, with both access and client groups displaying a much larger proportion of students in the intermediate range. This is the most fundamental aspect of the interview process, assessing the students' ability to apply knowledge they have learned during their studies to new scenarios and unseen material; it is no surprise then that in many cases improvements can be made to a students' Academic Performance.

Academic Performance, as with interview skills, was assessed considering multiple factors, using volunteer feedback to categorise students into three groups:

- i) Students demonstrating a strong Academic Performance (No areas to improve)
- ii) Students demonstrating an intermediate Academic Performance (Some areas to improve)
- iii) Students demonstrating a weak Academic Performance (Most or all areas require improvement)

It is clear from this analysis that small differences appear between access and paying client groups, namely the larger proportion of students from a paying background with a strong Academic Performance with a concomitant decrease in the proportion of students with a weak Academic Performance.



**Figure 5:** Pie charts showing overall Academic Performance between access groups (top) and client groups (bottom). Total number of Access Students analysed was 160 and total number of Paying Clients analysed was 62, using feedback data from 2020.



Once more, thanks to our dedicated volunteer base, we have a wealth of feedback providing a great depth of information highlighting a number of important factors in presenting a strong Academic Performance:

- **Foundation/Application of A-Level Knowledge:** Demonstrating a solid understanding of A-level (or equivalent) knowledge and being able to apply this to new situations
- **Super-Curricular Knowledge:** Demonstrating a wider knowledge of the subject to bolster academic discussion and indicate further interest in the subject
- **Contemporary Relevance/Current Affairs:** Demonstrating a knowledge of current affairs such as the political climate and relating this to subject area when appropriate
- **Versatility of Examples/Perspectives:** Including a range of examples and perspectives to improve an argument and demonstrate deeper thinking in answers
- **Use of Terminology:** The ability to use appropriate terminology during academic discussions
- **Problem Solving Skills:** The ability to tackle unknown scenarios through application of logic and doing this under pressure
- **Engagement with Interview Materials:** The ability to analyse materials given in detail, such as detailed source analysis and critical reading of texts
- **Ability to Form an Argument:** Giving opinions where appropriate, defending viewpoints and forming a balanced argument

The similar distribution of what students do well and what students need to improve on during interviews likely represents those factors that are most visible (and likely the most impactful on an interviewer assessing a student). For example, in young people from an access background, the most represented factor contributing to a strong Academic Performance appears to be having a foundation of A-level (or equivalent) knowledge and being able to apply this within the interview. This factor is also the one most commented on by volunteer interviewers that needs improving. As this is one of the key interview tactics at Oxbridge (ie. assessing foundation knowledge and ability to apply that to unseen circumstances), it is no surprise that we see this as the most represented factor in both strengths and weaknesses of interviewees.

Comparison of access groups and paying client groups highlights a few key differences:

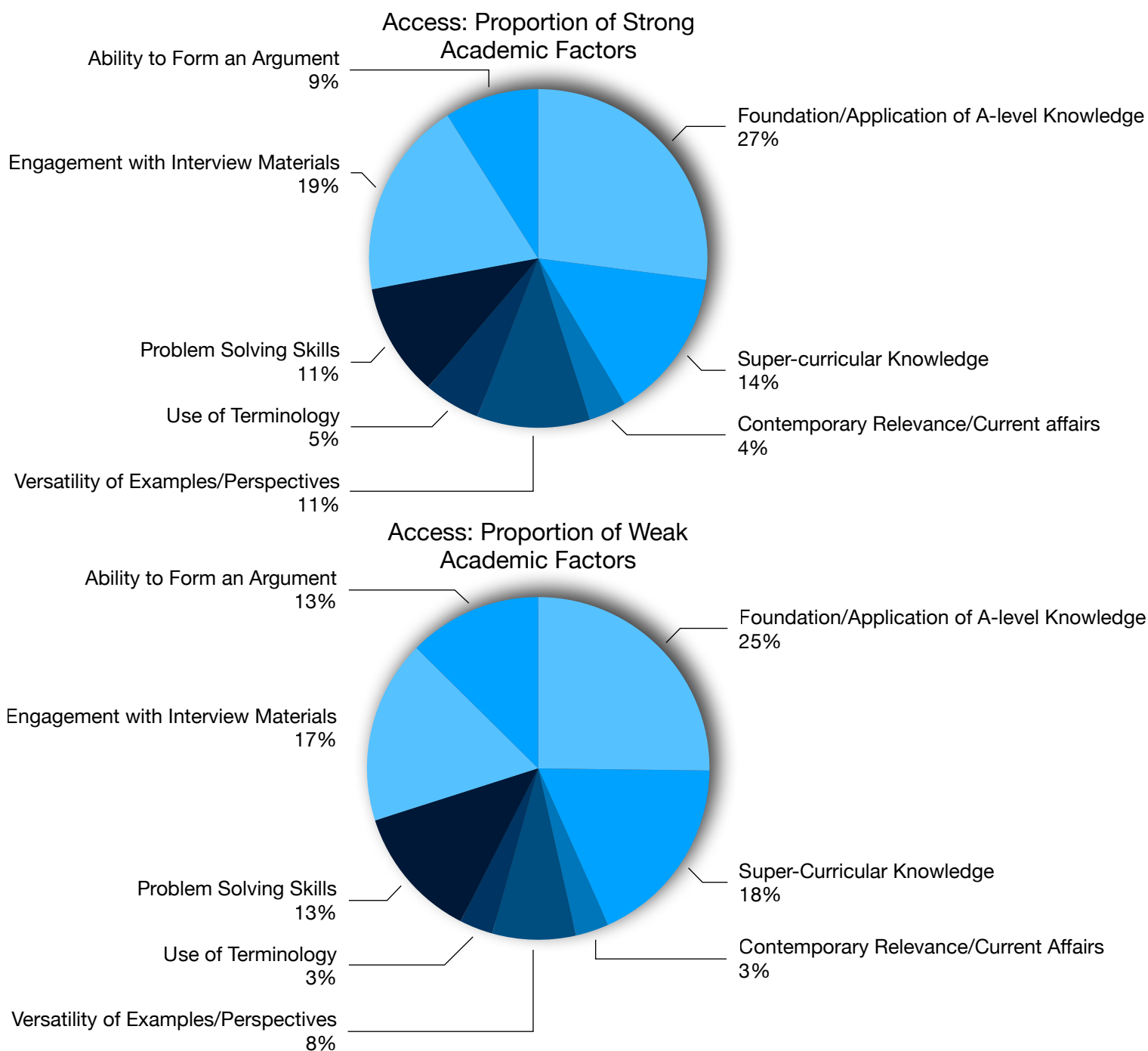
1- Access backgrounds appear to rely on and apply their A-level (or equivalent knowledge) in a larger proportion of students in comparison to client groups.

2- Students from a client background demonstrate a stronger incorporation of super-curricular knowledge and versatility of provided examples and perspectives. These two factors are likely to be intimately linked as students are able to draw on a diverse range of examples from wider reading.

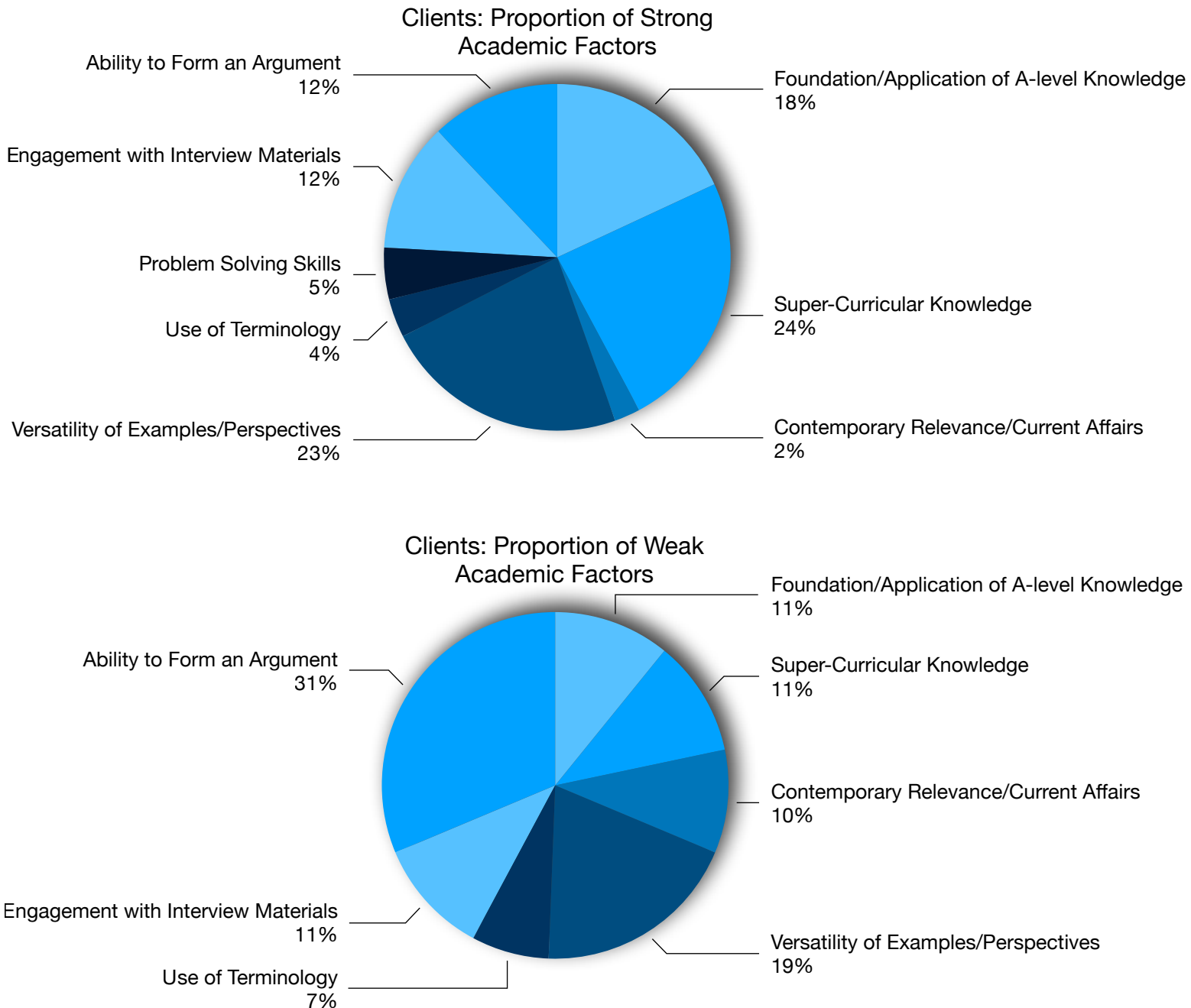
3- The major points of improvement for students from an access background appear to be: 1) Application of A-level knowledge; 2) Improving super-curricular knowledge; 3) Engagement with interviews (eg. Practising source analysis, critical reading of texts etc.)

4- The major points of improvement for students from a client background appear to be: 1) Ability to form an argument; 2) Drawing on a versatile range of examples and perspectives.



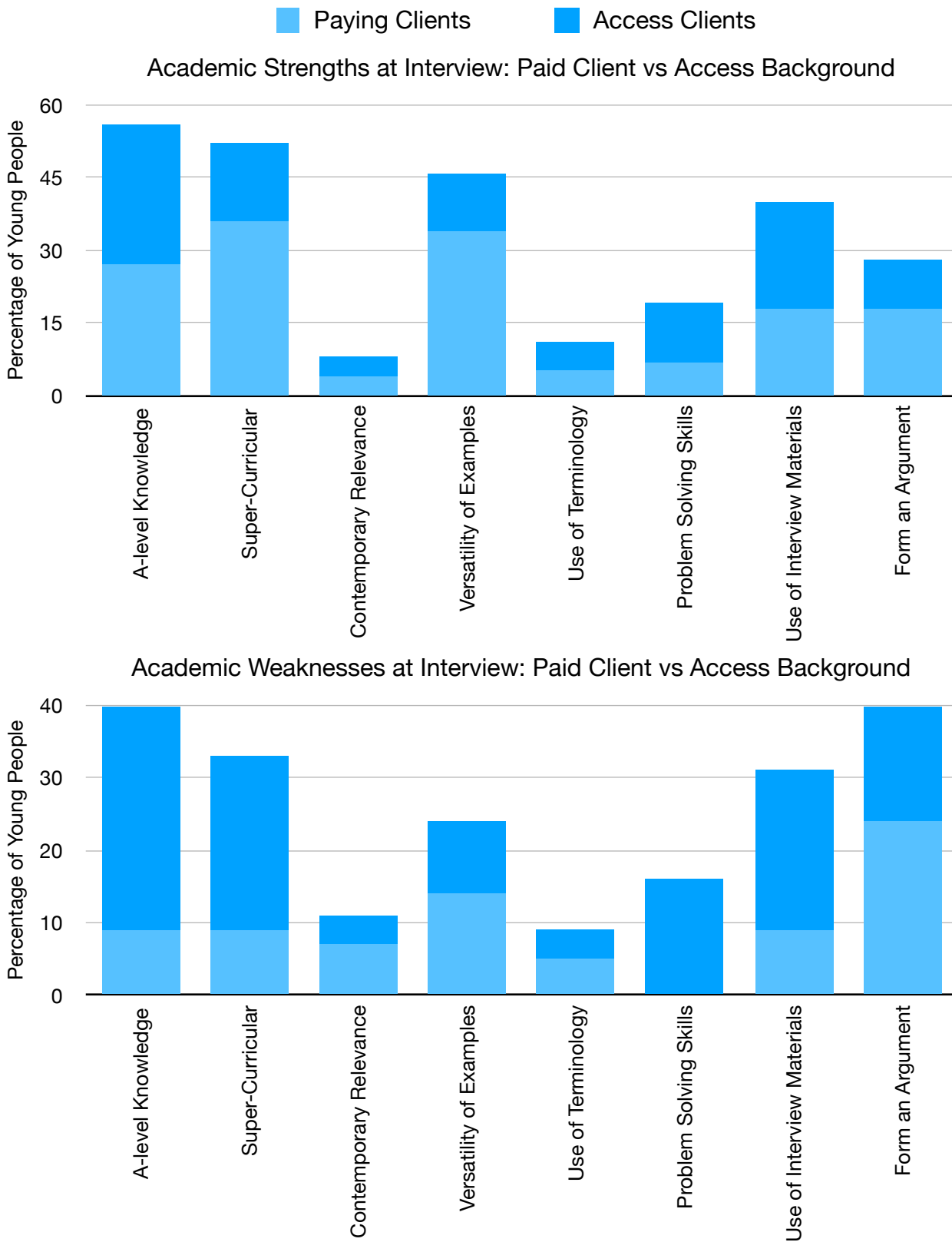


**Figure 6:** Pie charts showing distribution of factors contributing to a good Academic Performance in strong interviews (top) and in weaker interviews (bottom) from access groups. Percentages represent how many times each factor was mentioned out of all factors considered per group strength or weakness. Eg. Of all the factors that need improvement in an access background, Foundation/Application of A-level Knowledge was mentioned 25% of times.



**Figure 7:** Pie charts showing distribution of factors contributing to a good Academic Performance in strong interviews (top) and in weaker interviews (bottom) from paying client groups. Percentages represent how many times each factor was mentioned out of all factors considered per group strength or weakness. Eg. Of all the factors that need improvement in a client background, the Ability to Form an Argument was mentioned 30% of times.





**Figure 8:** Compound bar charts directly comparing proportions academic strengths and weaknesses between client and access groups. Eg. 9% of Paying Clients demonstrated the need to improve/weak A-Level knowledge compared to 31% of Access Students.

### KEY TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- 1- Students from an access background demonstrate weaker Interview Technique than those from non-access background, likely reflecting a gap in access to admissions knowledge, resources and training
- 2- Key areas that should be targeted to bridge the gap between these groups regarding Interview Technique should be: 1) Thinking out loud; 2) Thought out and well structured responses; 3) General confidence
- 3- Students from access and non-access backgrounds demonstrate differences in Academic Performance at interview.
- 4- Key areas that should be targeted to bridge the gap between these groups regarding Academic Performance are: 1) Foundation and Application of A-level knowledge; 2) Access to super-curricular materials and resources; 3) Problem solving skills
- 5- Highlights the need for increased access to facilitated spaces for young people to engage with and discuss super-curricular content, providing opportunities for them to practice talking out loud, structuring their thinking and responding to challenging questions.