

# Exploring international application to the UK

June 24<sup>th</sup> 2021



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# Partnering to bring value to the sector

**Brian Pepin**



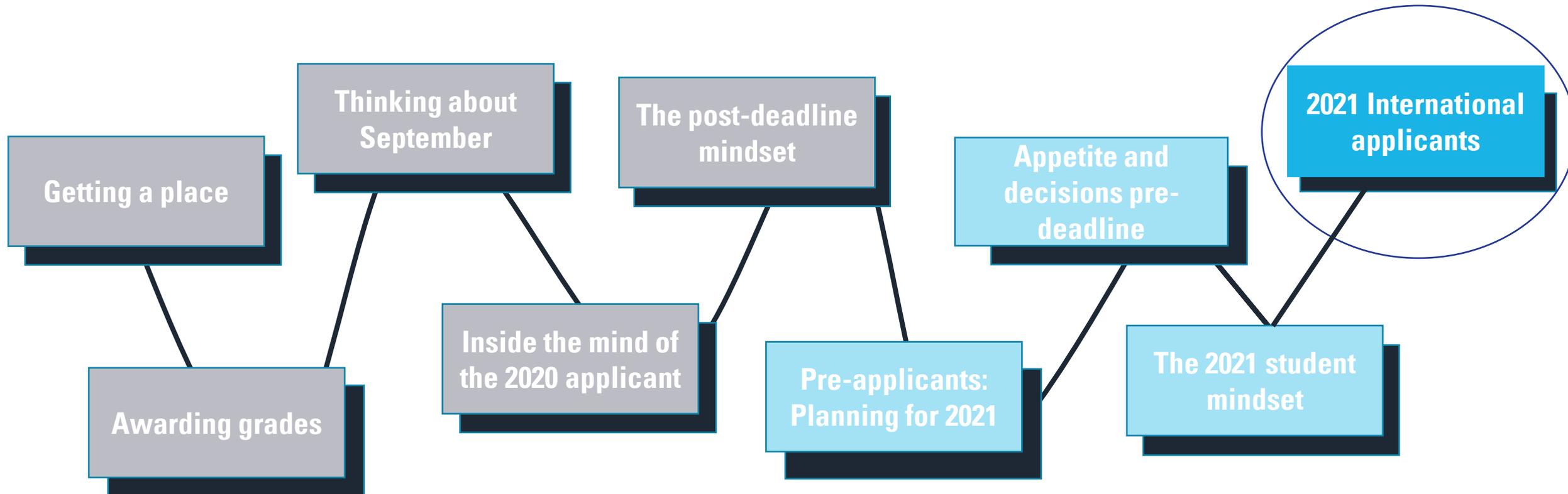
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**Managing Director**  
**YouthSight Research**

# UCAS x YouthSight webinar series



# A reminder of our methodology

Online survey

**533**

International applicants applying for Autumn 2021 or 2022 entry

'International applicants' are those applying to universities outside the country/countries where they have legal citizenship

All sample from UCAS's database

Fieldwork 24<sup>th</sup> May – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021

**The view of  
international applicants**

June 24<sup>th</sup> 2021

**The state of play  
for international  
applicants**



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The UK remains a hub for international application, and UK universities are in a good position to attract applicants

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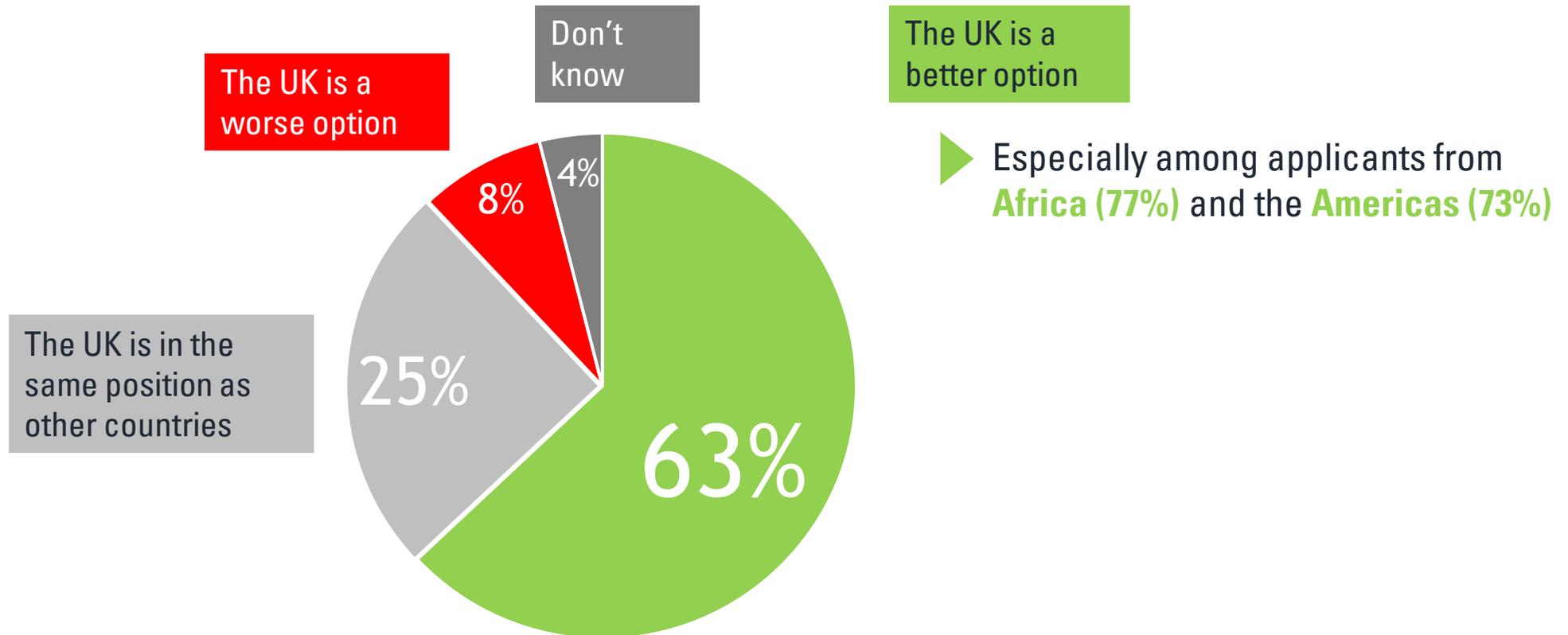
# 88%

Of international applicants see the UK as a **positive (48%)** or **very positive (40%)** place to study

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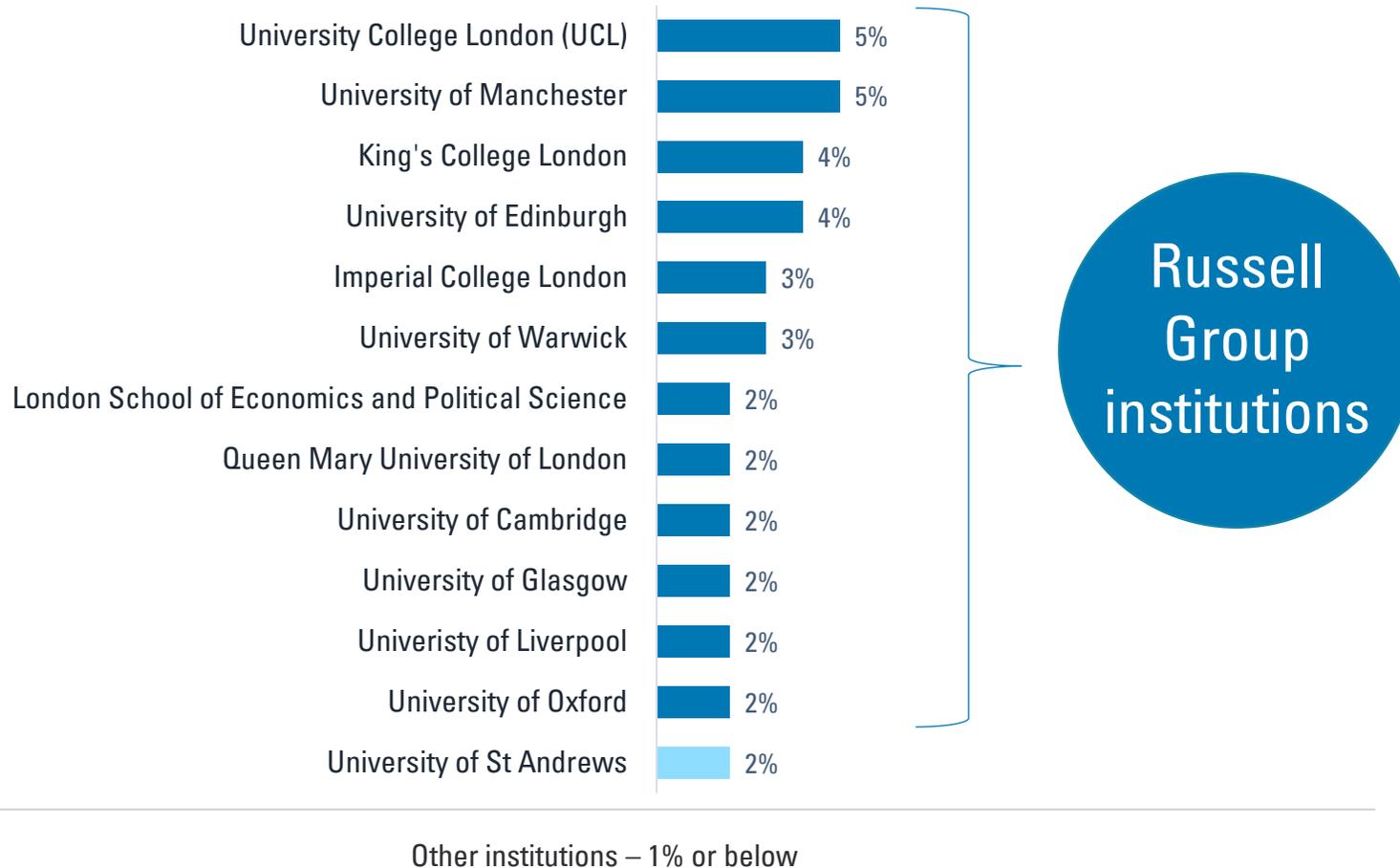
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# 63% believe the UK is a better option compared to other countries they're considering applying to



# The UK's strong reputation for academic excellence continues to drive application

% applied to each university (universities drawing 2% and above shown)



The UK is clearly an attractive prospect for international applicants – but choosing a UK university is not a foregone conclusion

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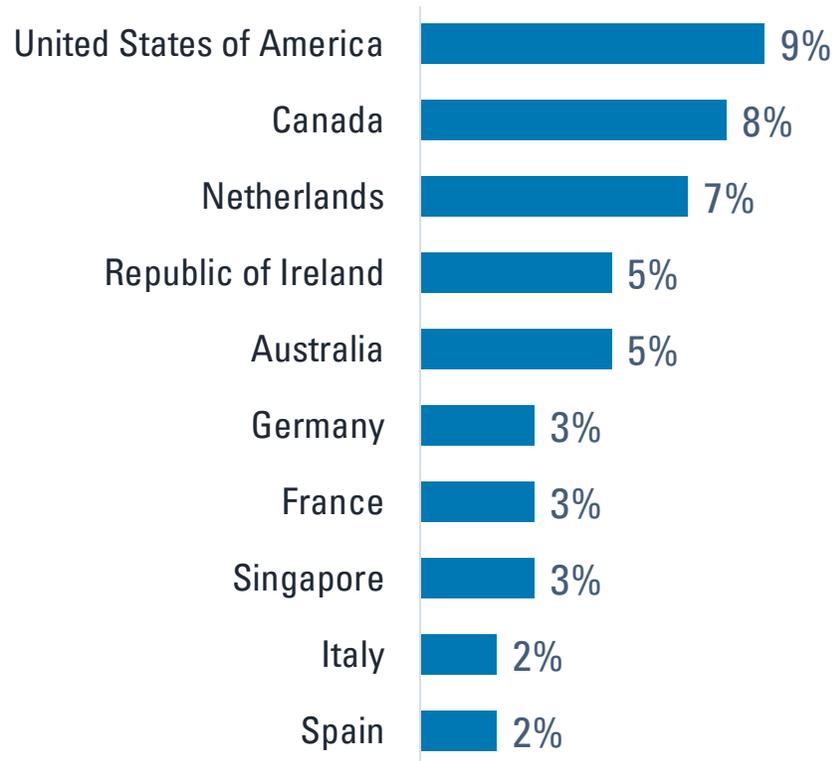
Just  
5%  
have applied  
only  
to the UK

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# The UK is competing with other nations for applicants

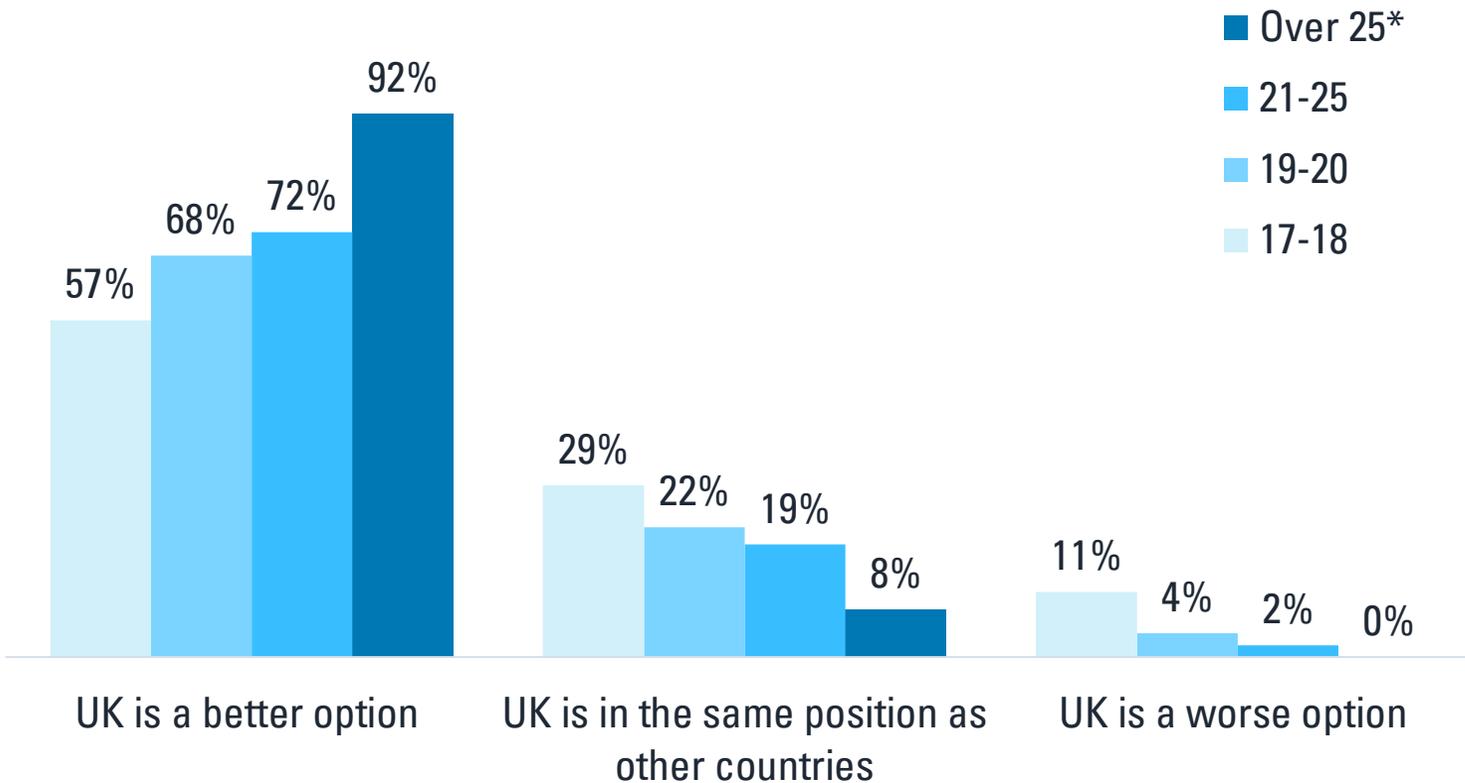
## % applied to each country outside of the UK – top 10 competitors



Other countries – 1% or below

# There are signs that younger age groups and those in Europe are feeling less positive about the UK

Perception of UK by age (% selecting)



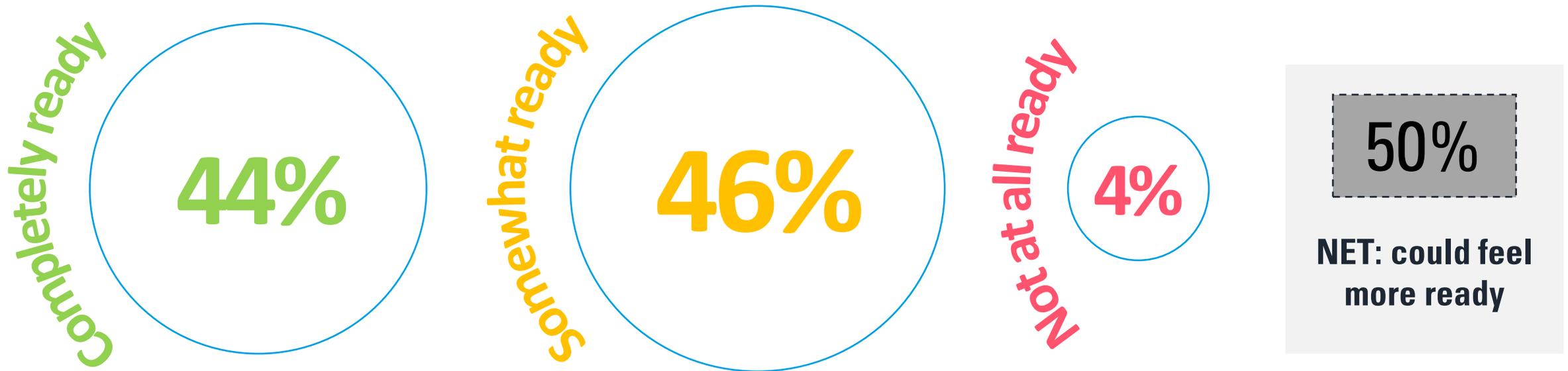
'The UK is a better option'

- ▶ **Africa (77%)**
- Americas (73%)**

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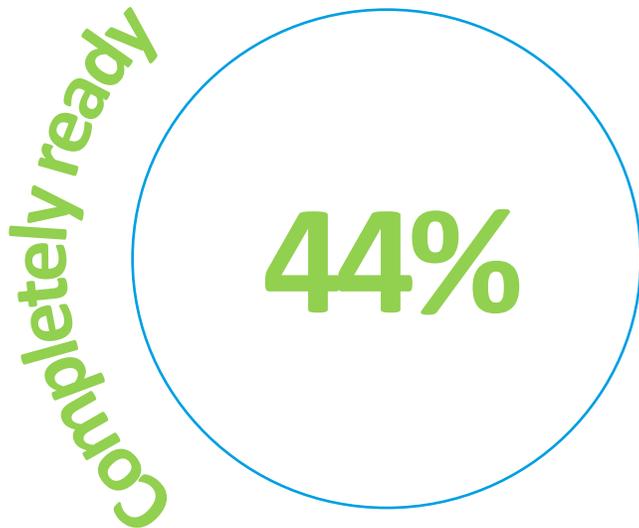
- ▶ **Central and Eastern Europe (52%)**
- Western Europe (53%)**

# More could be done to make international applicants feel ready to study abroad



# Those feeling completely ready are excited to move abroad and start their new lives

Reasons for feeling completely ready:



**Excited for opportunities**

*"I have my plans and my goals and I know this is what's best for me"*

**Pre-existing experience living abroad**

*"I have moved around many times in my past and I am looking forward to the new city and country I'm going to be a part of"*

**University communications**

*"Open days have helped prepare me for what to expect and I also have the full support of my friends and family"*

# For those feeling less prepared, universities should step in to provide information, support, and reassurance

Reasons for feeling somewhat ready/not at all ready:

50%

**NET: could feel more ready**

**Hesitant to leave family/friends**

*"The stress of this new life, of being on my own and far from my family and friends makes me sometimes feel like I am not ready"*

**Brexit/ costs**

*"The financial impact is somewhat worrisome, because there is almost no financial support for EU students since the Brexit"*

**The pandemic**

*"I also have to imagine what restrictions would be like living in cities or away from cities, and in general, what covid in the UK is like"*

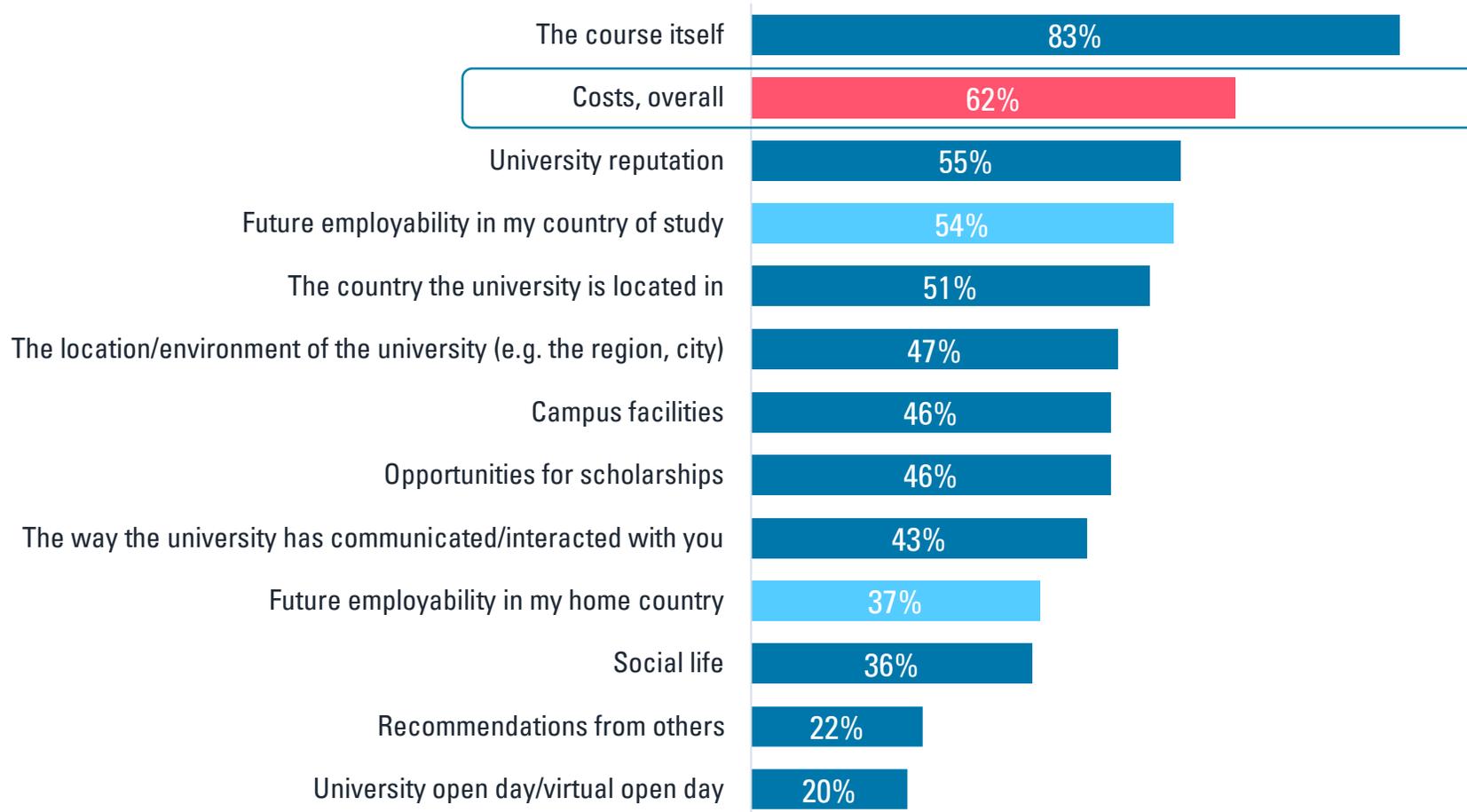
**Waiting for university confirmation**

*"I am still waiting for decisions from certain universities before I decide and start preparing for my departure"*

Decision-making is complex – international applicants are influenced by a range of factors when it comes to university choice

# The key difference in priority between UK-domestic and international applicants is their view on costs

% selecting each factor as 'very important'



International applicants have the future in mind - **many will want to stay and access job opportunities** which their degree opens for them



Future employability in my country of study  
(% very important)



Future employability in my home country  
(% very important)

► Higher in Africa (64%) and Asia (57%)

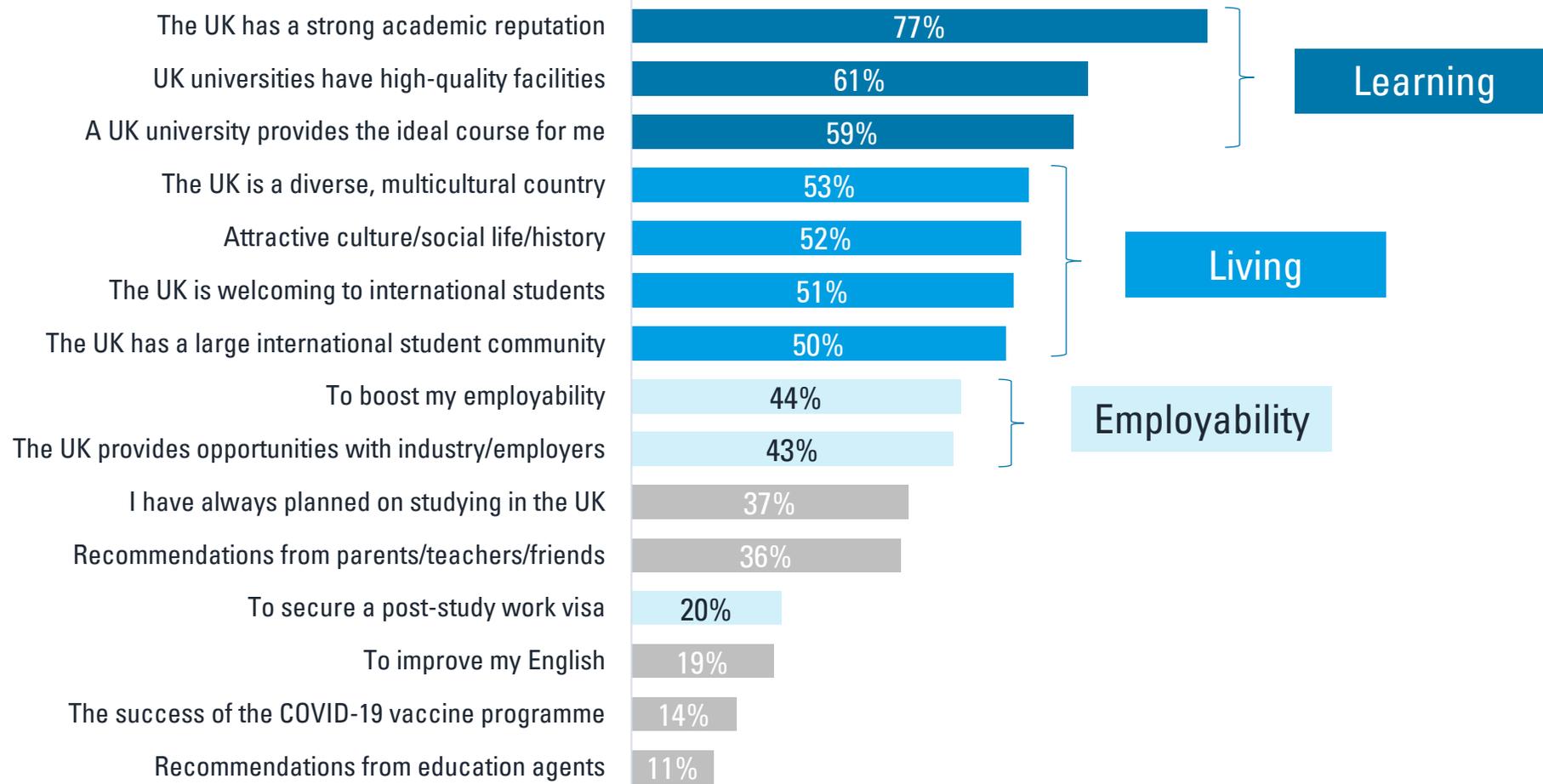


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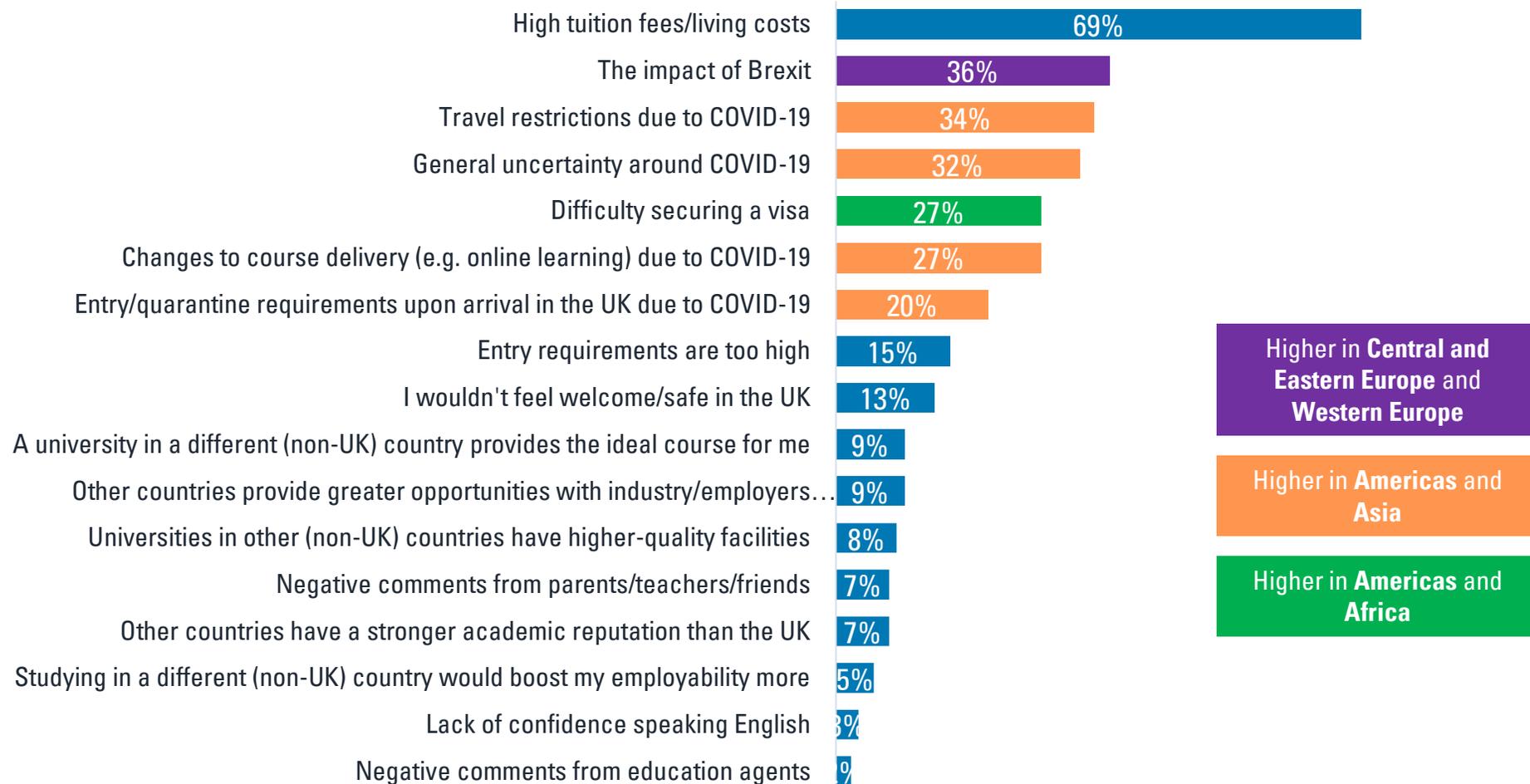
# As a destination, the UK fulfils a set hierarchy of needs

## Reasons to apply - % selecting each factor



# High costs, Brexit, and the impact of the pandemic put international applicants off UK study

## Barriers - % selecting each factor



# What does this tell us about international applicants?

The UK is highly attractive but there is evidence of a shift in perceptions among the younger age group and certain markets

Applicants are applying to other countries too – choosing a UK university is not a foregone conclusion

The future is in mind: many want to stay after graduating and seek to boost their employability in the UK

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

Universities should provide clarity and reassurance over issues they have control of to better support international applicants

Deliver on what international applicants find important to engage with them - they need to be convinced they are getting 'bang for their buck'

International applicants will be looking for support in finding a job – there is an opportunity for universities to step in and provide this

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The view of  
international applicants

Information needs  
and communications



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With the pandemic causing uncertainty around what the academic year ahead will look like, international applicants need more information from universities

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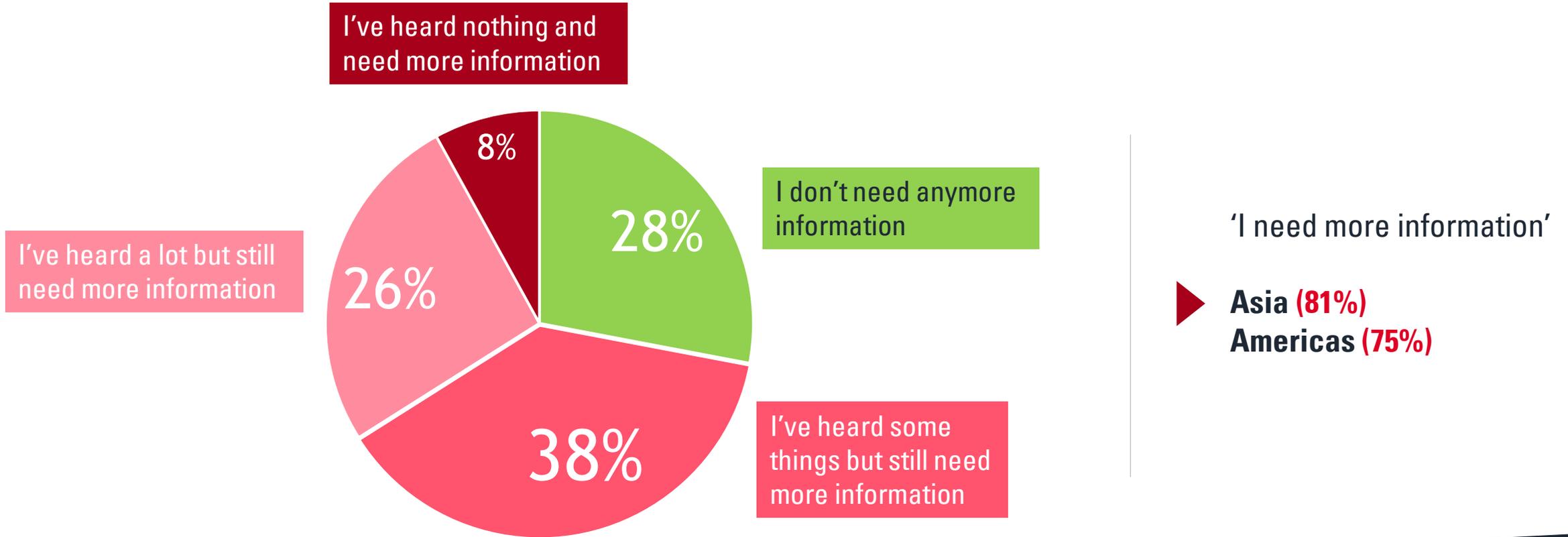
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**72%**  
**need more information  
about how the  
pandemic will impact  
the academic year**

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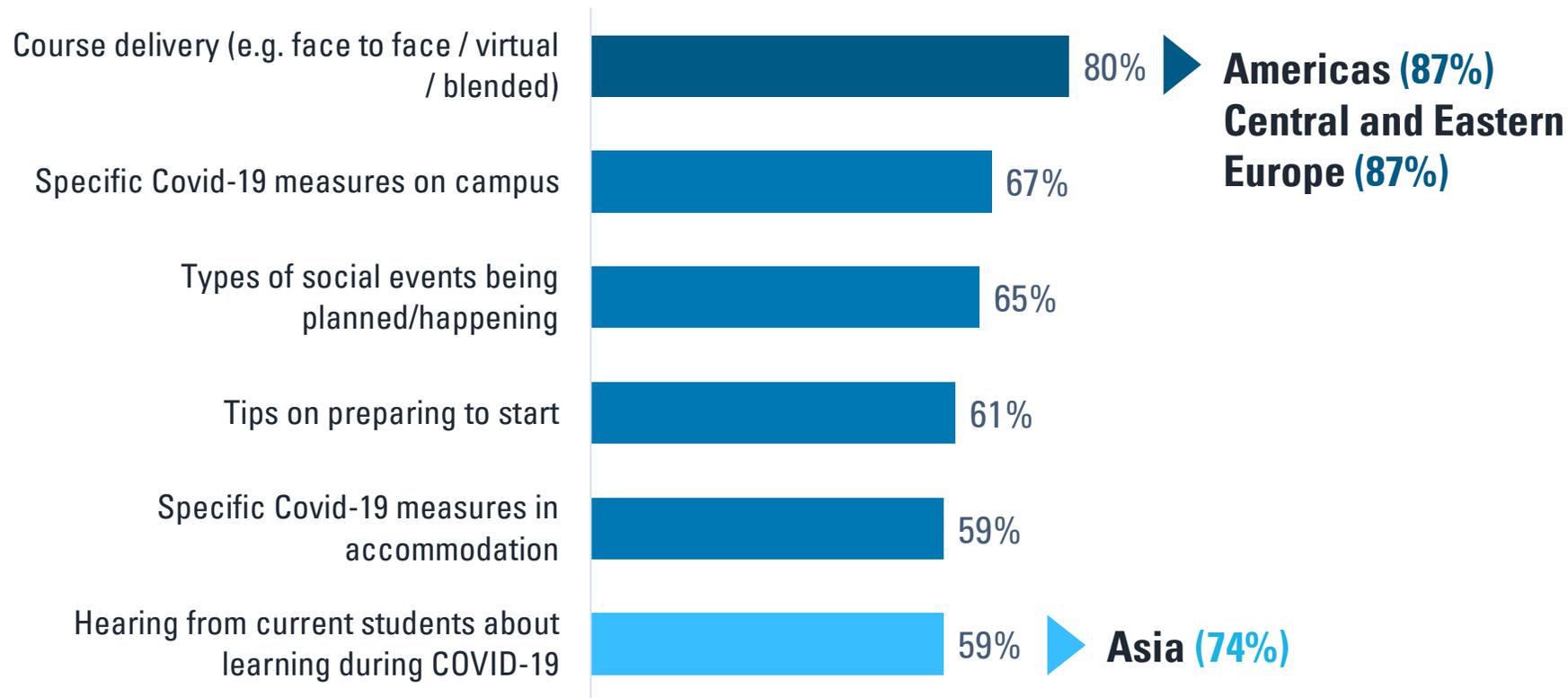
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# International applicants are likely to want more information even if they've received some or a lot



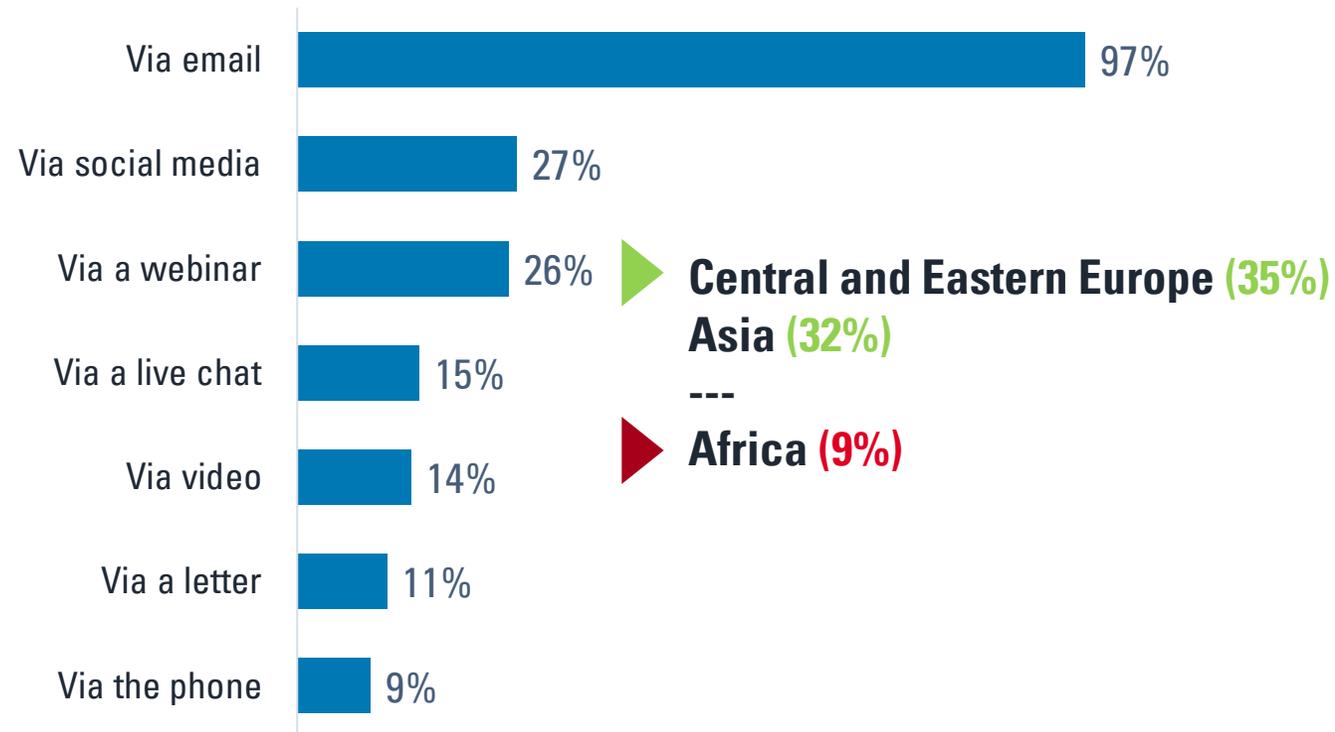
# Course delivery details are the priority, but international applicants also want to hear lived experiences from current students

% selecting each type of information



# Email should be the first port of call for universities when contacting international applicants

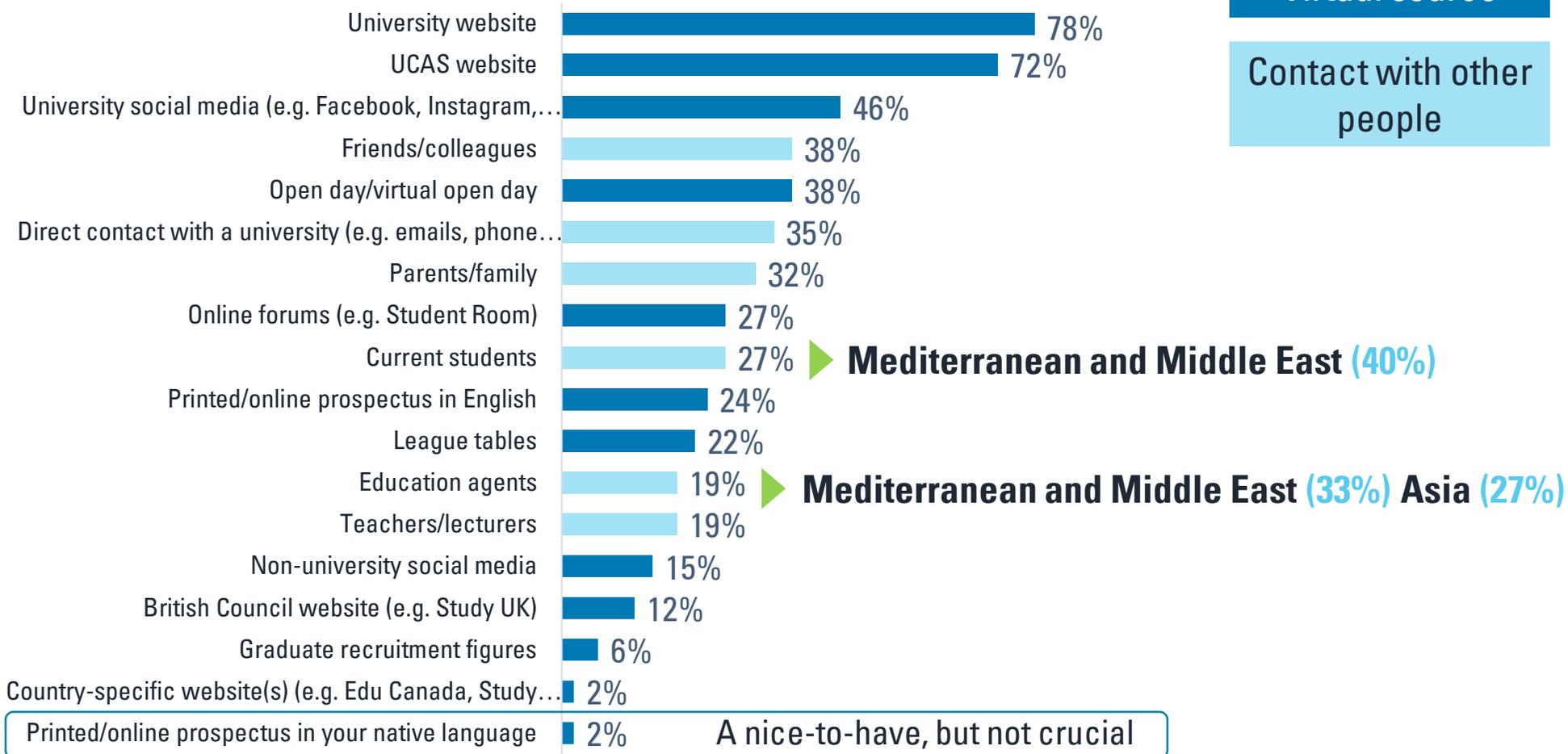
## Contact preferences (% selecting each channel)



Virtual sources are proving instrumental during this cycle – but other sources play an important role in decision-making

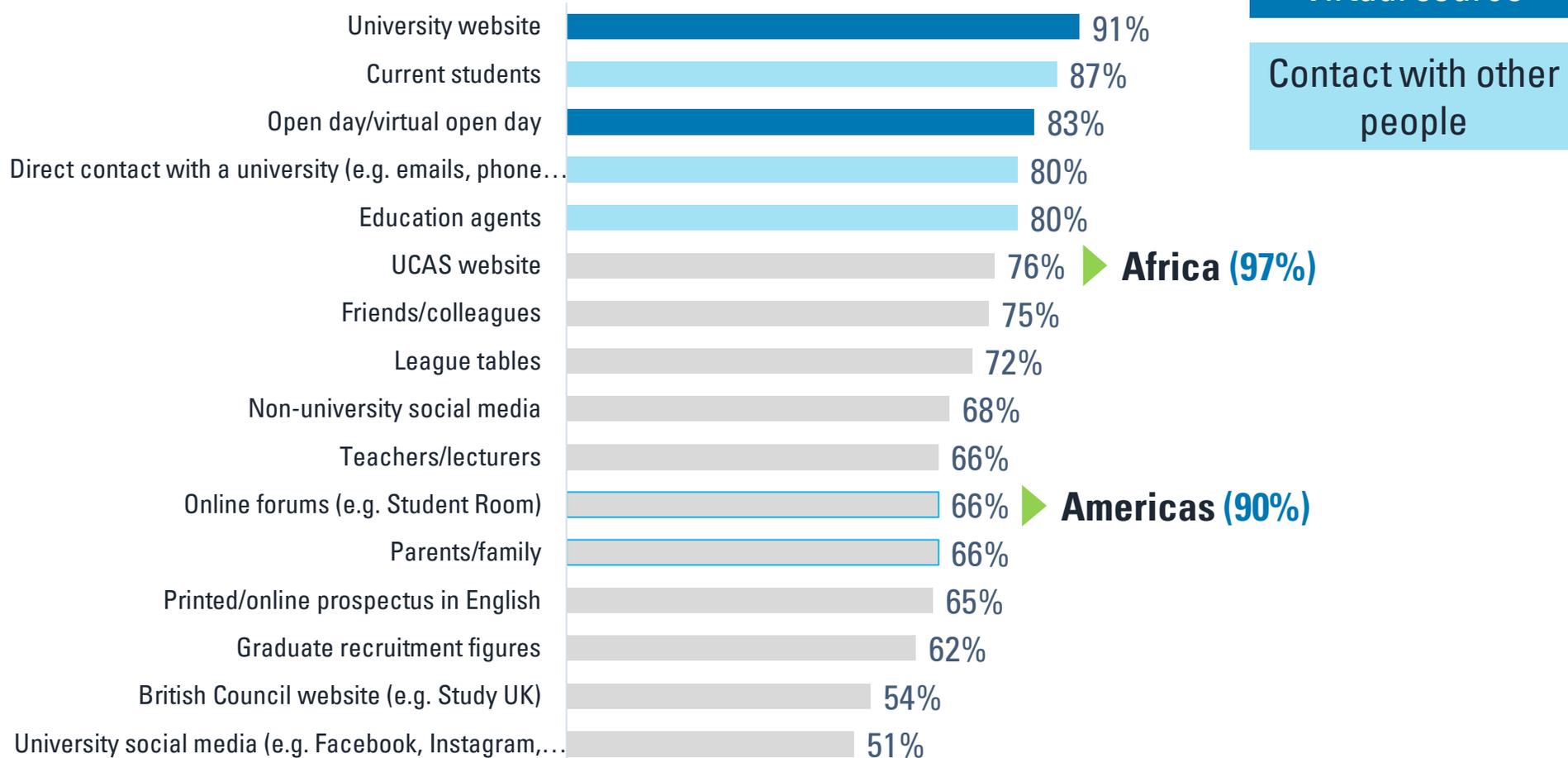
# Friends/colleagues, parents/family, and current students play important roles in giving information

## % using each source



# The views of other people are just as useful as university websites and other virtual sources

## Source usefulness (aggregated %)



# What does this tell us about international applicants?

Applicants engage with institutions virtually, but also find the views of others highly useful in weighing-up decisions

As a result of the pandemic applicants want more information about what university will look like

Email is preferred, but applicants also value the word of current students

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

Universities should take action with confidence: additional information is required and this provides an opportunity to leave a good impression on applicants

Digital sources such as the website must be continually optimised to meet information needs and provide great user-experience

Universities should facilitate contact between current students and international applicants

# The view of international applicants

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## Key takeouts



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It's a good-news story for the UK – 88% of international applicants see it as a positive place to study

International applicants continue to be attracted by the strong reputation and prestige of UK universities

The UK is competing on a global level, and attending a UK university is not a foregone conclusion

It's crucial that universities communicate regularly with international applicants to offer support and information

The views of others (especially current students) are valued – these connections should be facilitated

# Thank you for attending

A recording of this webinar will be available on the UCAS Media website. We again welcome any suggestions for future topics for the webinars in this series. Please send us your suggestions.

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