

NOVEMBER 2021

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# UCAS MEDIA INSIGHT NEWSLETTER



## Welcome to the UCAS Media Insight Newsletter – November 2021.

This month, we're all about finding out how students made their decisions about which university or college to attend. In a world still reeling from the impact and implications of the pandemic, it's no mean feat to plan the next few years of your life.

Plus, we'll walk you through the changes in course popularity, demand from countries, interest in cities, and what students are searching for.

**Let's get stuck in.**

# What are students doing?

On [ucas.com](https://ucas.com)

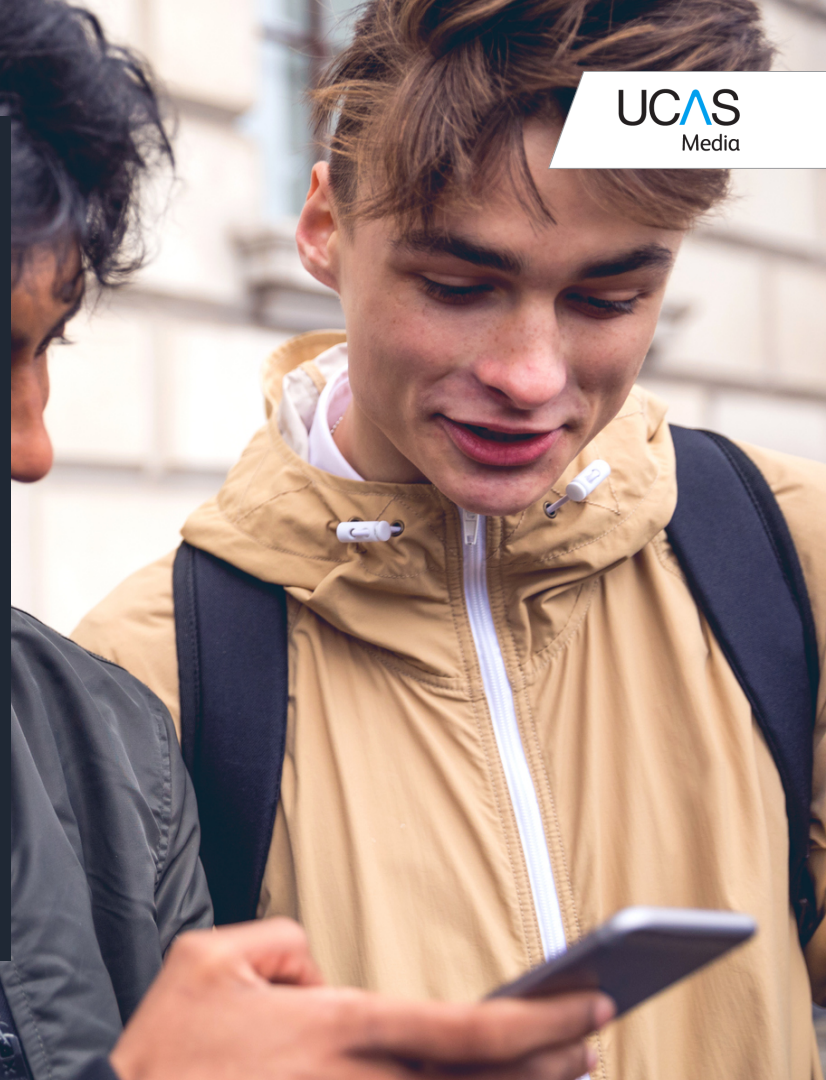
# WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

TOP SEARCHED FOR SUBJECTS ON UCAS SEARCH IN OCTOBER 2021

Position for  
October 2021

=	1	Medicine	▲ <sup>5</sup>	6	Criminology
=	2	Psychology	▼ <sub>2</sub>	7	Midwifery
=	3	Law	=	8	Physiotherapy
=	4	Nursing	▲ <sup>1</sup>	9	Computer science
▼ <sub>1</sub>	5	Business	▼ <sub>1</sub>	10	Pharmacy

▲  
Change in  
position since  
October 2020





## WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

UCAS.COM USERS: TOP 10 NON-UK COUNTRIES IN OCTOBER 2021



Position for  
October 2021

▲ <sup>3</sup>	1	China
▼ <sup>1</sup>	2	United States
▼ <sup>1</sup>	3	India
▼ <sup>1</sup>	4	Ireland
▲ <sup>6</sup>	5	Nigeria
▼ <sup>1</sup>	6	Hong Kong
▼ <sup>1</sup>	7	Pakistan
▲ <sup>1</sup>	8	France
▲ <sup>1</sup>	9	United Arab Emirates
▼ <sup>2</sup>	10	Spain

▲  
Change in  
position since  
October 2020

# WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

UCAS.COM USERS: TOP 10 UK CITIES IN OCTOBER 2021



Position for  
October 2021

=	1	London
=	2	Birmingham
=	3	Manchester
▲ <sup>2</sup>	4	Glasgow
▼ <sup>1</sup>	5	Bristol
▲ <sup>1</sup>	6	Leeds
▲ <sup>6</sup>	7	Belfast
▲ <sup>2</sup>	8	Liverpool
=	9	Nottingham
▼ <sup>5</sup>	10	Newcastle

▲  
Change in position  
since October 2020

POSTCODE DISTRICT MAP



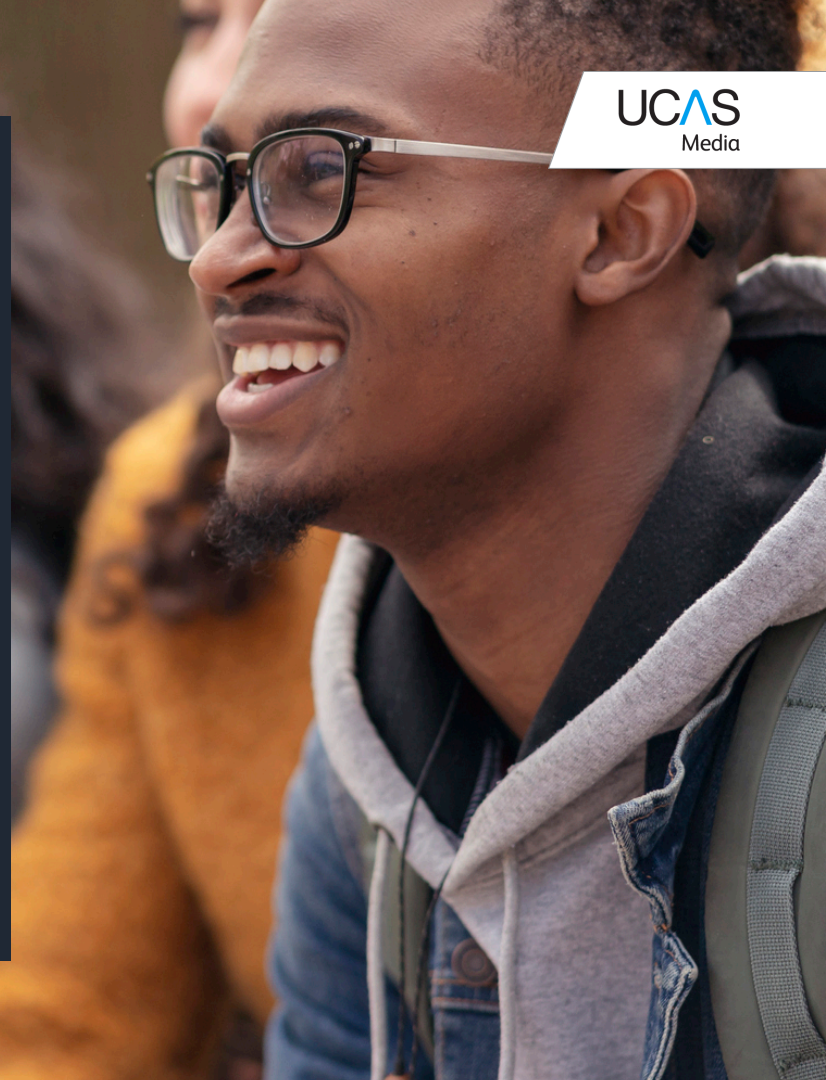
# WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

## TOP UG PAGES ON UCAS.COM IN OCTOBER 2021

Position for  
October 2021

=	1	How to write a UCAS Undergraduate personal statement
▲ <sup>3</sup>	2	Applying to university
▼ <sup>1</sup>	3	Filling in your UCAS undergraduate application
▼ <sup>1</sup>	4	UCAS undergraduate: When to apply
▲ <sup>3</sup>	5	Tracking your UCAS application

▲  
Change in  
position since  
October 2020

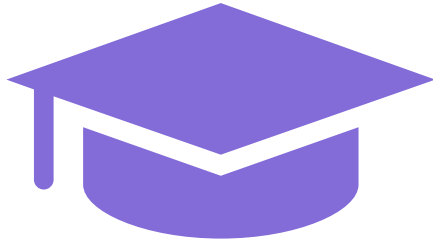


# End of Cycle Placed Applicant Survey 2021

Key findings about students' decisions when finding a place



# Placed Applicant Survey 2021



Sent to 2021 placed applicants

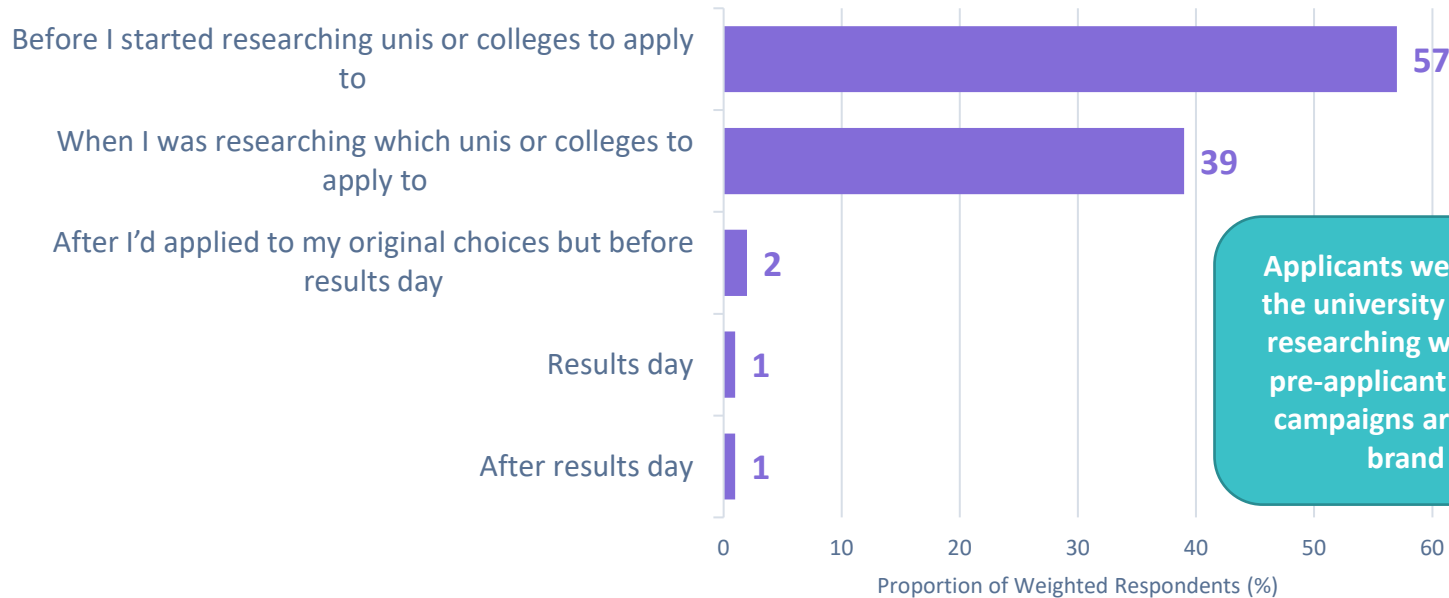


Covering decisions made when finding a place



Received over 13,500 responses (combined)

## Q: When do you first remember hearing or learning about the university or college you are placed at?



Applicants were likely to know of the university before they started researching where to study. Your pre-applicant (January deadline) campaigns are key to increasing brand awareness.

Q: Which of the following factors, if any, influenced your decision to study at your chosen university or college? Please select all that apply.

**65%**

The location of the university or college

**35%**

League table position

**51%**

The range of modules offered on the course

**31%**

Social life or activities available

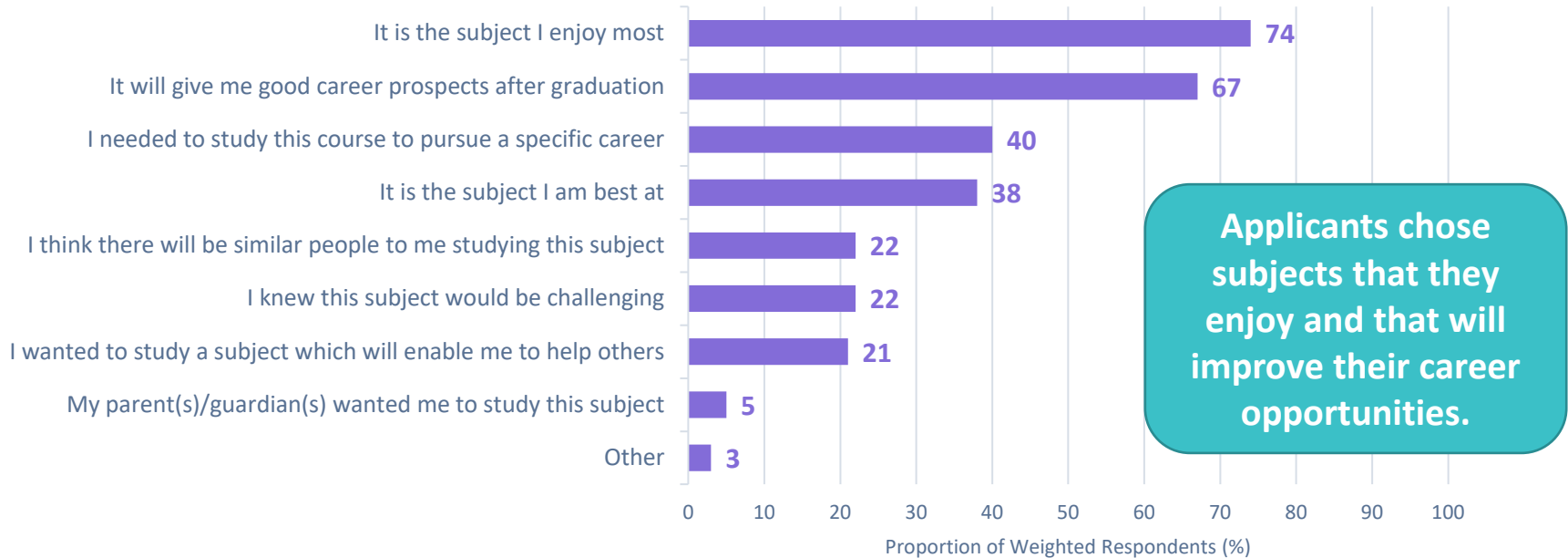
**36%**

Entry requirements for the course

**28%**

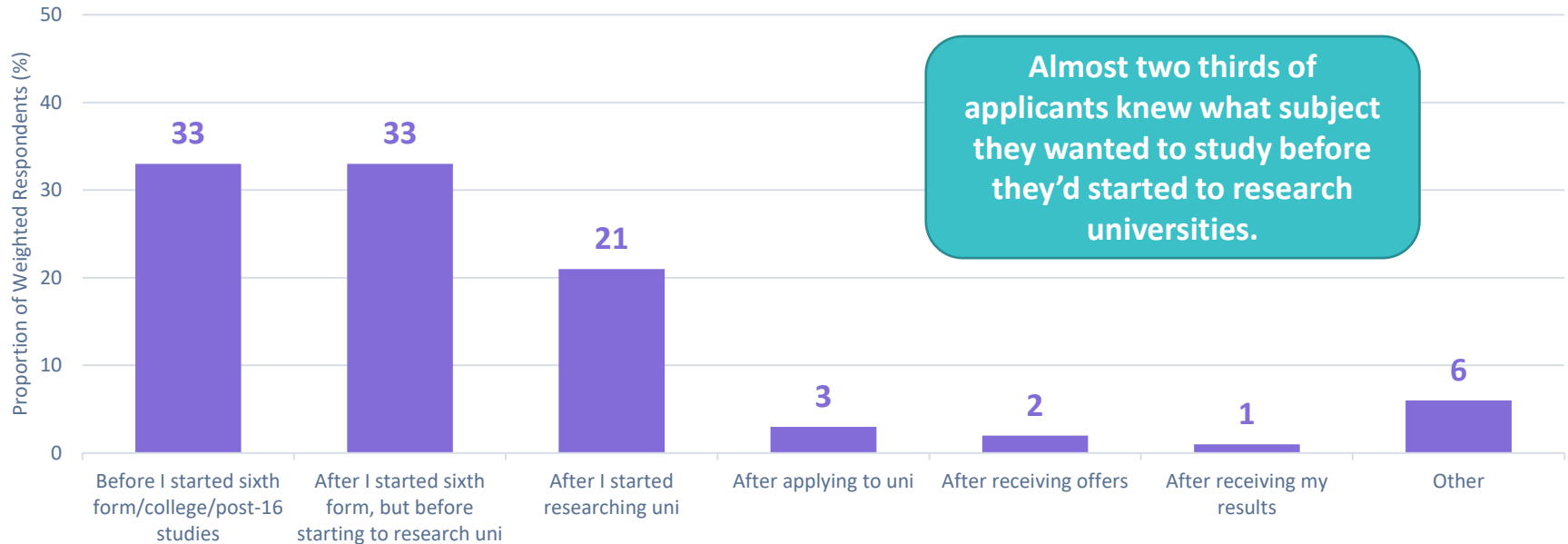
Teaching style on offer

Q: Which of the following are reasons for you choosing the subject you are going to be studying? Please select all that apply.





Q: When did you decide this was the subject you wanted to study?



## Precision beats power, timing beats speed.

Last month we did some myth busting. The main misconception – that students who find their places through Clearing are students settling for second place – was cracked wide open by research which showed that many of them win places at a provider they actually applied to – and most of the rest find themselves at one they'd at least researched. Only one in twenty joined a university or college that they were unfamiliar with.

The same is true, as we now see from the End of Cycle Placed Applicant Survey, with all students. 57% knew of their eventual choice before they'd started researching, and another 39% found theirs before application. That only leaves 4% whose provider was unfamiliar to them when they applied.

We can also see this trend in subject selection. A third of students decided on their degree before they turned 16, whilst another third decided before they started researching uni. That's 66% who know their subject before they know their university.

Course content and location continue to win out as being the most influential factors in the decision making process. But while many universities and colleges think league tables are their golden ticket, only 35% of students rated these as influential. Social life and activities are in the top five as expected, as students actively look for their 'tribe' at university.

### What does this mean?

Understanding when students are in listening mode and what they're listening for is important in deciding how to communicate with them.

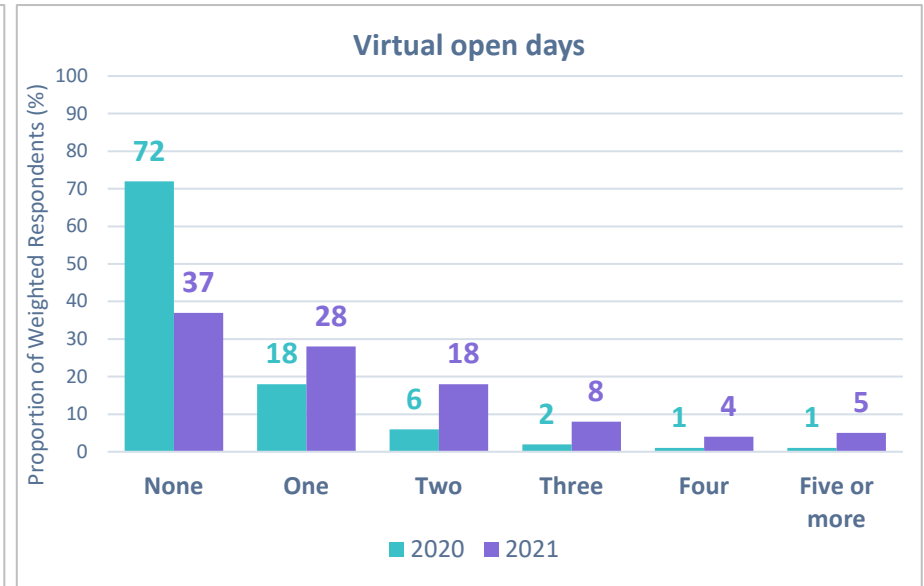
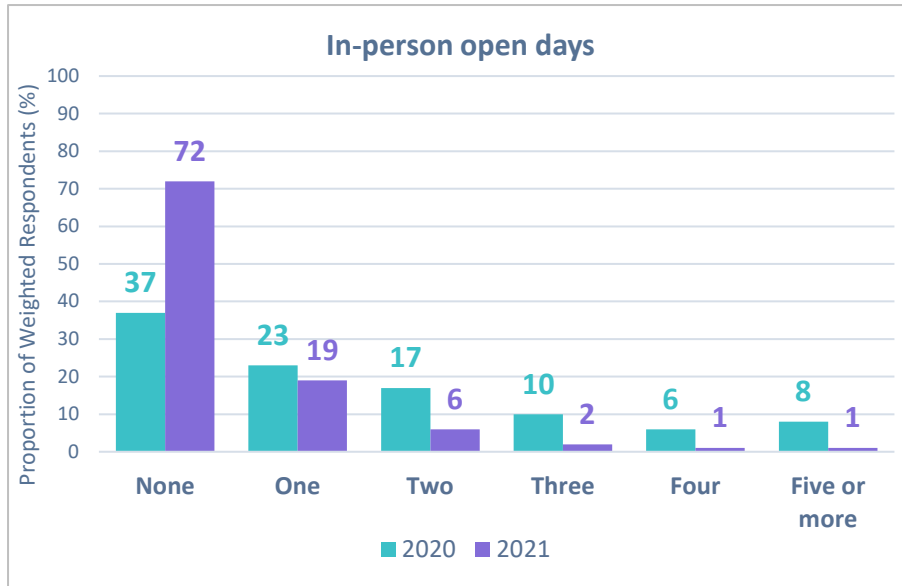
Even in this small subset of findings, we know that a strategy targeting students early to promote subjects, and then retargeting them to promote the modules of a course in that subject, would be likely to have an impact.

It's less important to spend big or react quickly, it's more important to research and plan.

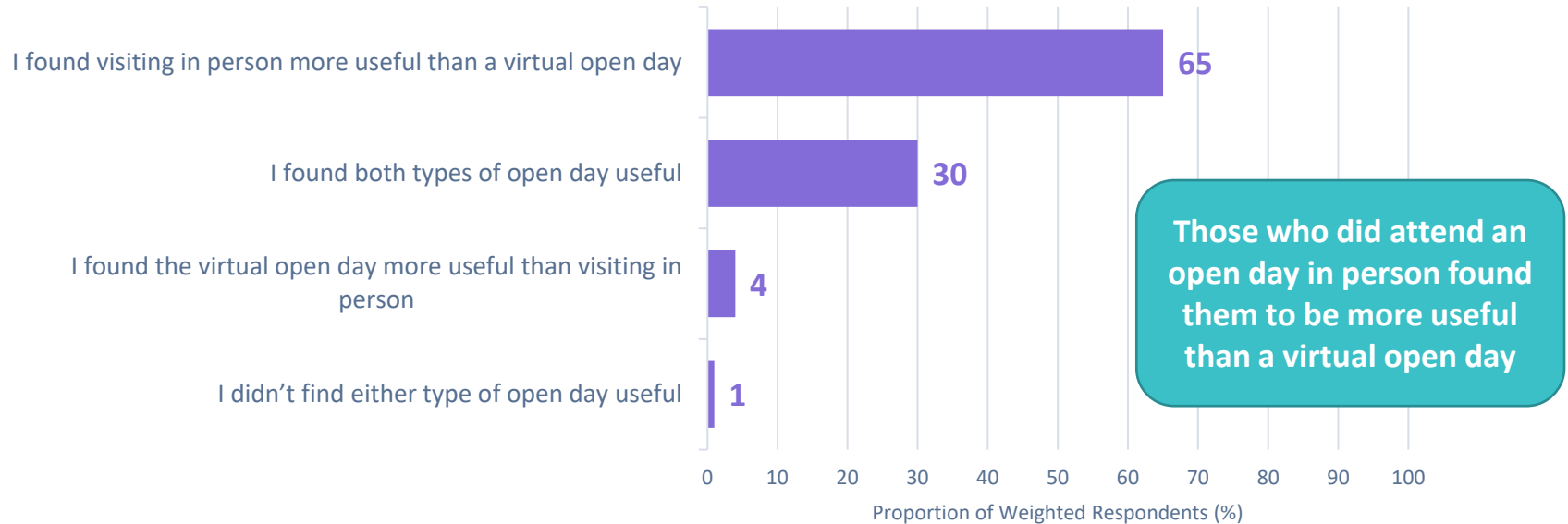


Q: How many open days did you attend either before or after making your application? (2020 vs 2021 cycle)

28% attended at least one open day in person, and 63% attended at least one virtual open day.

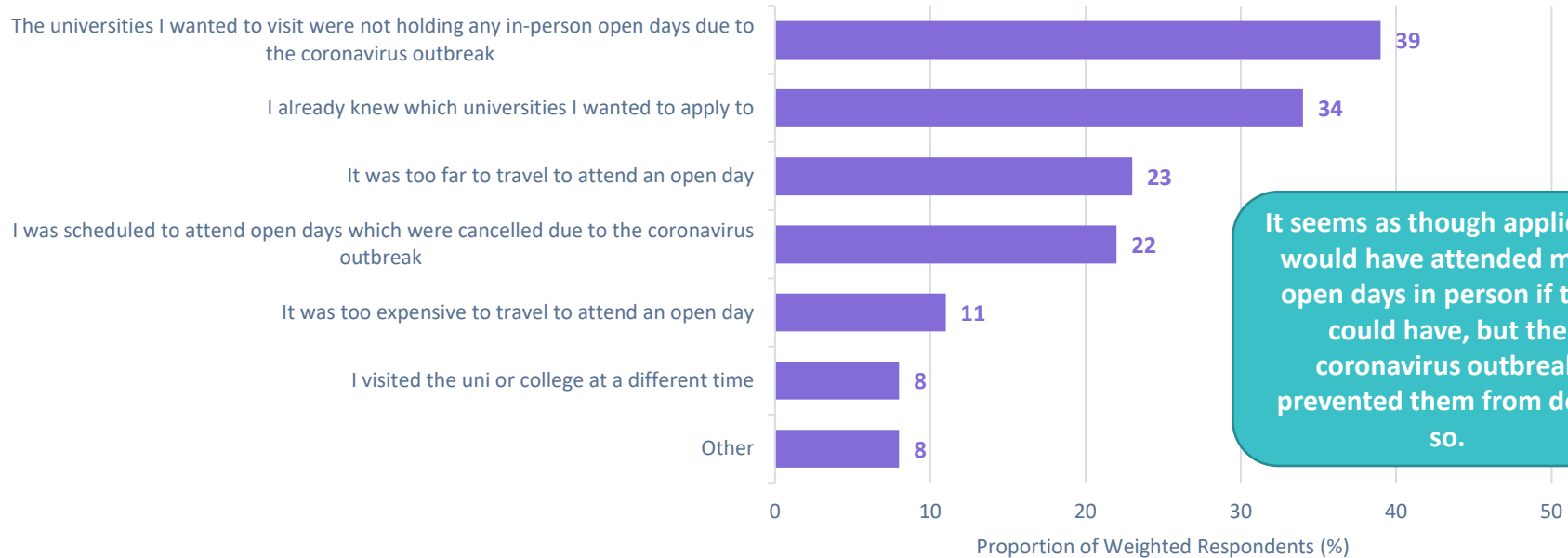


Q: Which of the following best describes your experience of attending open days virtually and in person?

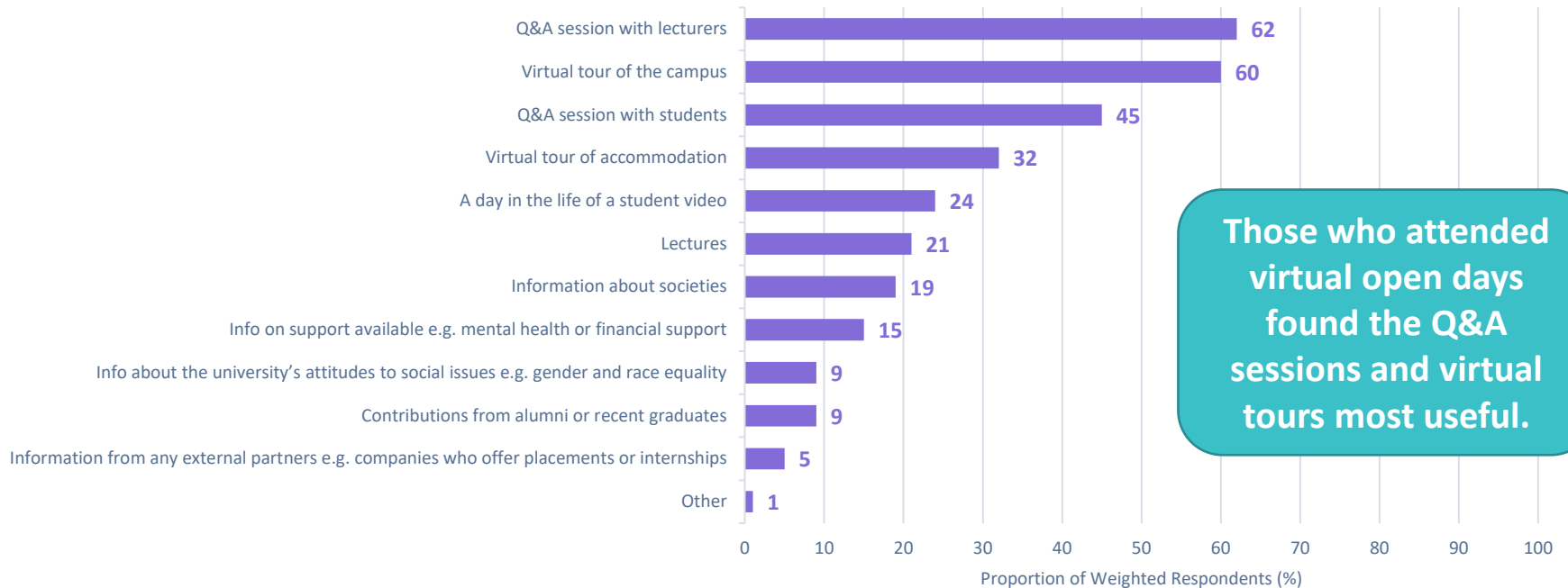




Q: Which of the following, if any, were reasons why you didn't attend any open days in person? Please select all that apply.



Q: Which, if any, of the following features of virtual open days did you find useful? Please select all that apply.



## Making a difficult choice.

We are in the third consecutive year of academic cycles characterised by COVID-19. But even now, it's easy to forget the stark differences between 2020 and 2021.

This year, the number of students attending physical open days fell by almost half, whilst the number of virtual open day attendances more than doubled.

Regardless of this shift to virtual, students aren't giving up on the importance of open days, with 92% of them attending at least one (in whatever format it was offered).

More than two thirds of students rated physical over virtual experiences, which comes as no surprise – what better way to get a 'feel' for where you'll spend the next 3 or 4 years. But – virtual events are not to be ignored as we come out of the pandemic.

With the growth of augmented and virtual reality technology across the education and business world, plus the cost-cutting potential of holding open days online, there is a significant feeling that virtual events are here to stay. Not to mention their accessibility to the all important overseas student market.

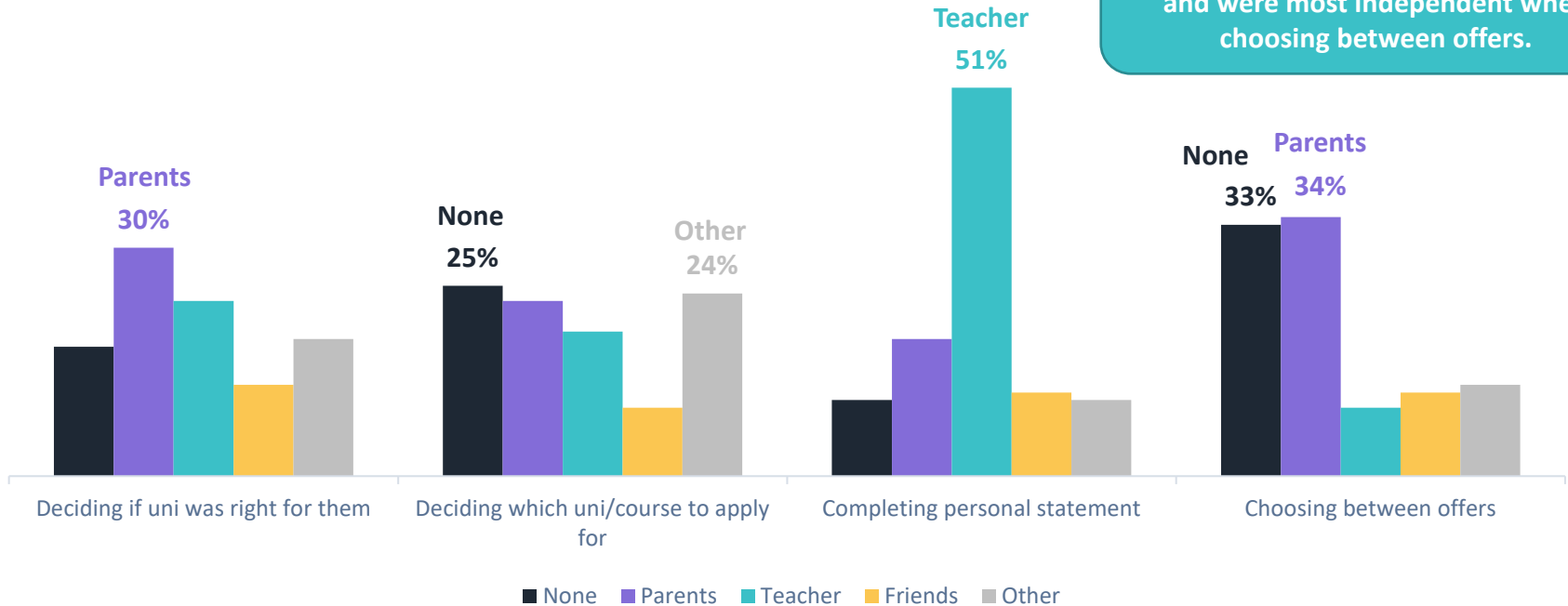
### What does this mean?

The research paints a very clear picture. Open days are one of the most important recruitment tools a college or university has to offer and, whilst prospective students will attend whether they're online or in-person, they **vastly** prefer seeing it with their own eyes.



Q: Who was the biggest help during each of the following stages of the application process?

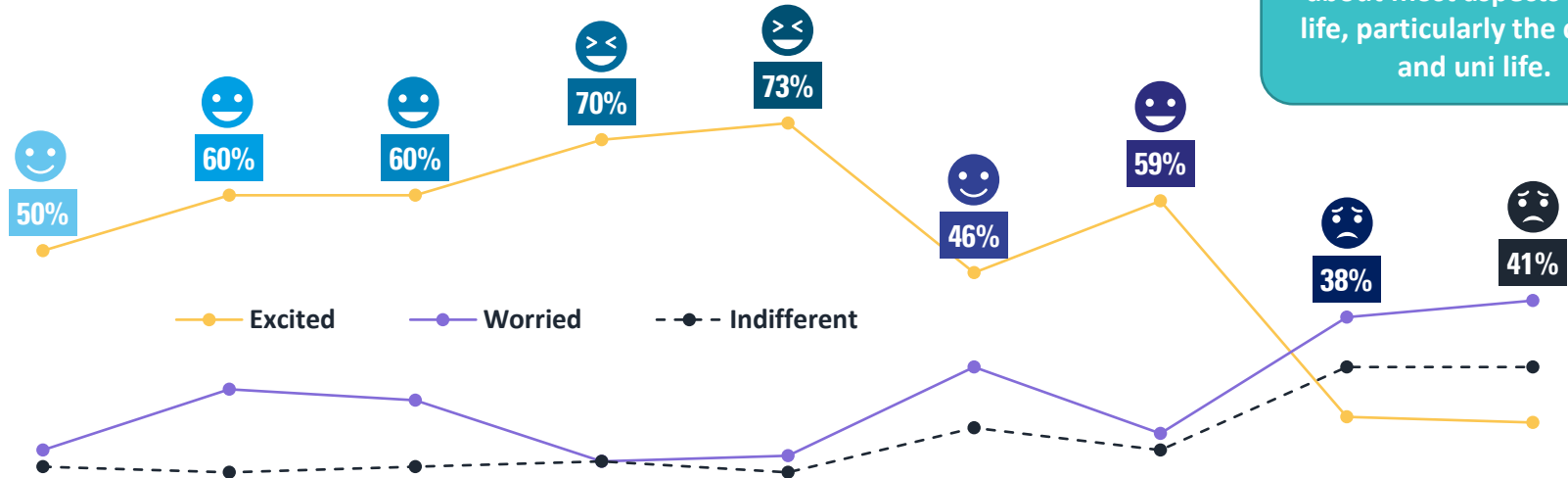
Applicants sought the most guidance when completing personal statements, and were most independent when choosing between offers.





Q: Now that you have your place confirmed, how do you feel about the following aspects of going to university?

Applicants were excited about most aspects of uni life, particularly the course and uni life.



Leaving home

First day of uni

Making new friends

Finding uni life enjoyable

Finding the course enjoyable

Stepping up to uni level

Job prospects as a graduate

Managing money at uni

Workload at uni

## Where and how to focus your emotive campaigns.

Hindsight is good, but foresight is better. And with the findings from our End of Cycle Placed Applicant Survey, we can look both ways.

In a world still navigating and recovering from COVID-19, there are mixed feelings about starting university. At one end of the spectrum, we see that most (70%) students are excited about the prospect of experiencing enjoyment in their new lives and courses. It must feel like a fresh start, given the restrictions of the pandemic.

But at the other end, more than a third of students are carrying worries about their finances and workloads. Less than half are looking forward to stepping up to university level.

This fresh start doesn't come without its caveats.

Fortunately, most students are not without their support network. The right advice at the right time can make a

world of difference. And we saw in the survey results that, on average, teachers and parents were consulted in around half of all decisions – ranging from deciding whether uni is the right path, all the way to choosing between offers.

### What does this mean?

For providers looking to get their incoming students into a positive frame of mind, now is the time for emotive campaigns which accelerate excitement and slow down anxieties. Answers must be made available without questions being asked - many students will be too shy to act, but will be grateful for proactive reassurances. Particularly if they come from existing students, Gen Z trust their peers above organisations.

(And don't forget their faith in parents and teachers too.)



## So what next?

The End of Cycle Placed Applicant Survey has given us key insight into how students made their choices this year, so that we can better serve their decision-making next year.

But it's also given us a glimpse into what excites and worries them on a day-to-day basis, which is information we can use to build better student experiences, right here, right now.

If that's something you'd like our help with, or you need access to more data like this, [get in touch](#).

We'll be back next month, with more insight, from November 2021.

# Get in touch

For further information and insights, get in touch with your Customer Success Director

To discuss campaigns, contact your UCAS Media Account Manager

Or email us at [ucasmediaeducationteam@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:ucasmediaeducationteam@ucas.ac.uk) for anything!