JULY 2021

UCAS MEDIA INSIGHT NEWSLETTER

Welcome to July's newsletter

As the curtain is drawn back and the UK finally starts to come alive once more, we're looking ahead to what that means for you as a university or college.

We've been conducting research on your behalf on the state of affairs in international recruitment, what domestic demand is like, and how you can most effectively target unplaced applicants through Clearing. And it all comes straight from the horse's mouth.

Let's get stuck in.

What are students doing?

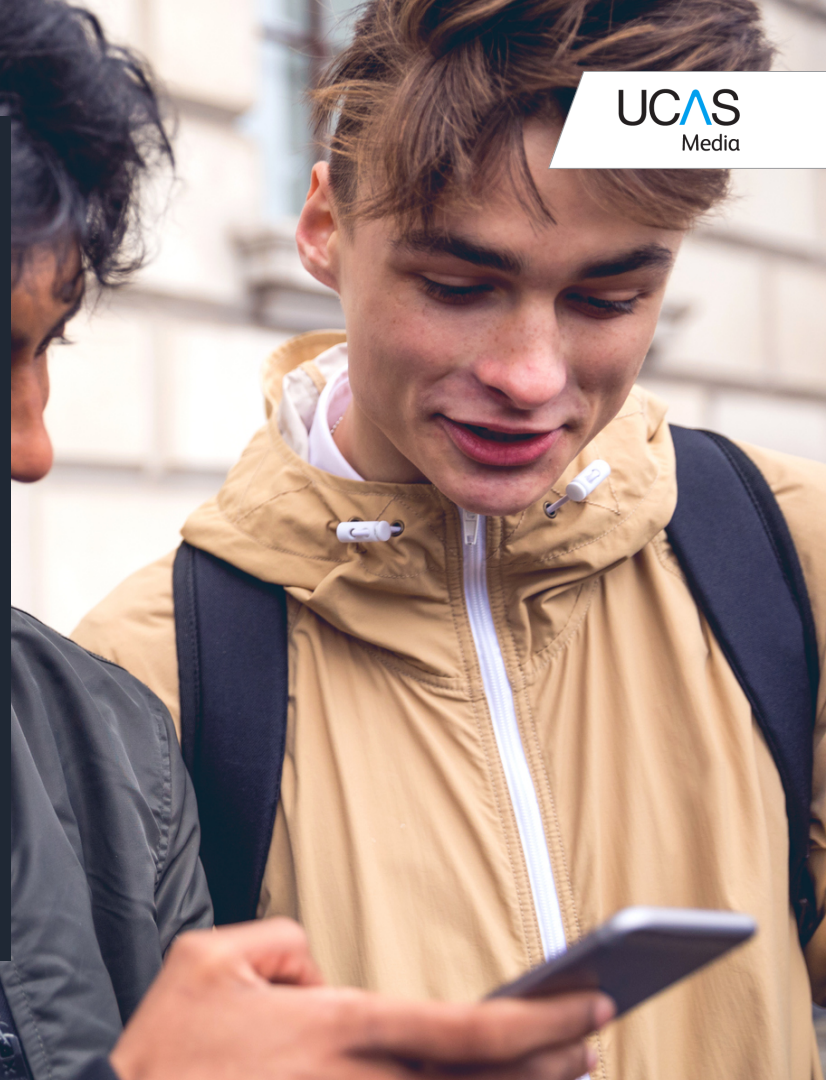## ON UCAS.COM

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?
TOP SEARCHED FOR SUBJECTS ON UCAS SEARCH IN JUNE 2021

Position for
June 2021

=	1	Medicine
=	2	Psychology
=	3	Law
=	4	Nursing
▲1	5	Business

▼1	6	Midwifery
=	7	Computer science
▲5	8	Criminology
▼1	9	Economics
▼1	10	Physiotherapy

Change in
position since
June 2020

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

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

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Position for June 2021

Change	Position	Country
▲ 1	1	India
1 ▼	2	United States
=	3	China
▲ 3	4	Nigeria
=	5	Pakistan
▲ 4	6	Malaysia
1 ▼	7	South Africa
4 ▼	8	Hong Kong
1 ▼	9	Ireland
1 ▼	10	United Arab Emirates

Change in position since June 2020

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

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

	Position for June 2021	
=	1	London
=	2	Birmingham
▲1	3	Manchester
▲2	4	Glasgow
2▼	5	Newcastle
▲1	6	Leeds
2▼	7	Bristol
▲1	8	Nottingham
▲2	9	Cardiff
2▼	10	Liverpool

Change in position since June 2020

POSTCODE DISTRICT MAP

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

TOP UG PAGES ON UCAS.COM IN JUNE 2021

Position for
June 2021
▼

▲ 1	**1**	**Track your UCAS application**
1 ▼	**2**	**How to write a UCAS Undergraduate personal statement**
▲ 5	**3**	**Applying to university**
▲ 2	**4**	**What is Clearing?**
1 ▼	**5**	**When to apply**

▲
Change in
position since
June 2020

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International student mindset

Key findings from our June webinar

The UK remains in a good position but there's still competition

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88% of international students see the UK as a positive or very positive place to study

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

But just **5%** applied **only** to the UK

Half of students said they could feel more ready

- Hesitant to leave family/friends
- Brexit/costs
- Waiting for university confirmation
- The pandemic

72% said they need more information about how the pandemic will impact the academic year)

59% want to hear lived experiences from current students who've studied during it

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

"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"

They have their future in mind

54% want to secure a job in the country where they studied

37% want to secure a job in their home country

Missed the live webinar?

Watch the playback **or** **view the presentation**

Access the full series of webinars with YouthSight online

June deadline 2021 analysis
More students ready to take next step despite pandemic

30 JUNE DEADLINE 2021

KEY FINDINGS

Record numbers of students are set to take their next step this summer, with data from the 30 June deadline showing **applications** and university **offer-making increasing**, plus searches for **apprenticeships** continuing to rise.

UCAS is predicting that increases in applications and offer making will see a record number of students starting university or college in the autumn.

30 JUNE DEADLINE 2021

KEY FINDINGS

All applicants

682,010 applicants +4% on 2020 made **2,955,990 applications** +6% resulting in **1,998,690 offers** +3% made by universities and colleges.

UK 18 year olds

311,010 applicants +10% made **1,474,900 applications** +12% resulting in **1,147,460 offers** +10% from universities and colleges.

Applications and offers are up in each of the four nations of the UK.

Applications to the most selective universities have increased and offer-making from these institutions is also up from last year's high - including a 20% rise since 2019 in offers to students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

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30 JUNE DEADLINE 2021
KEY FINDINGS

UCAS's **CareerFinder**, which helps students find jobs and degree/higher apprenticeships, saw a record **1.35 million searches** in the last 12 months, **up 37%** from 986,000 in 2020.

These searches have resulted in **225,000 job applications**, an increase from 181,000 last year **(+24%)**.

View full data release

Though not every student will find themselves in the position they had initially hoped for, they still have a wide range of options, including undergraduate courses and apprenticeships. Clearing and our apprenticeship service is now open and UCAS is supporting students throughout the summer online, including on TikTok, Facebook and Instagram.

JUNE DBD DEADLINE 2021

KEY FINDINGS

Unplaced applicants have increased – up 33% compared to 2020

This is partly applicants who've received no offers, but **more applicants declined their offers in 2021 compared to 2020**.

These mind-changers are likely to be open to new opportunities.

Clearing campaigns

Optimising your creatives for maximum impact

FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

WHAT DID WE ASK THEM?

We showcased a variety of Clearing email creative designs to potential applicants earlier this year to gather their feedback on what resonated well, what stood out, what they liked/disliked and why.

Please click through to the next slide to discover what their feedback.

1. Personalise your subject line & emails

On A level results day 2020, subject lines that were personalised to a recipient's first name achieved open rates that were **4 percentage points higher** than those not personalised **(37%** vs 33%).

In a recent focus group, we also asked some potential applicants what they thought of personalisation within the email itself e.g. those that start with 'Dear FIRSTNAME,…'. Here are some of their responses:

> 'I like when it has my name as it gives a personal touch'

> 'Saying the name in the email is more likely to get me to read on'

> 'The first name is better, as I am more likely to read it if it feels personal'

> 'I'm more likely to open the email and maybe even read on if it has my first name'

2. Use an email preheader

On SQA results day, only 14% of the HE Clearing emails used a preheader, and these emails achieved an average open rate of 38% vs 31% for those who didn't.
On A level results day, 19% used a preheader, and these emails achieved an average open rate of 33% vs 37%.

Preheaders are generally known to boost open rates, **if they make sense and are relevant**.

What is a preheader?
An email preheader is a snippet of text that follows the subject line.

By default, this line of text is taken from the first text found in the email campaign, but you can set a custom email preheader which would make more sense and help to elaborate on your subject line.

Preheader

No preheader, so defaults to the first line of text from the email, of which includes a logo.
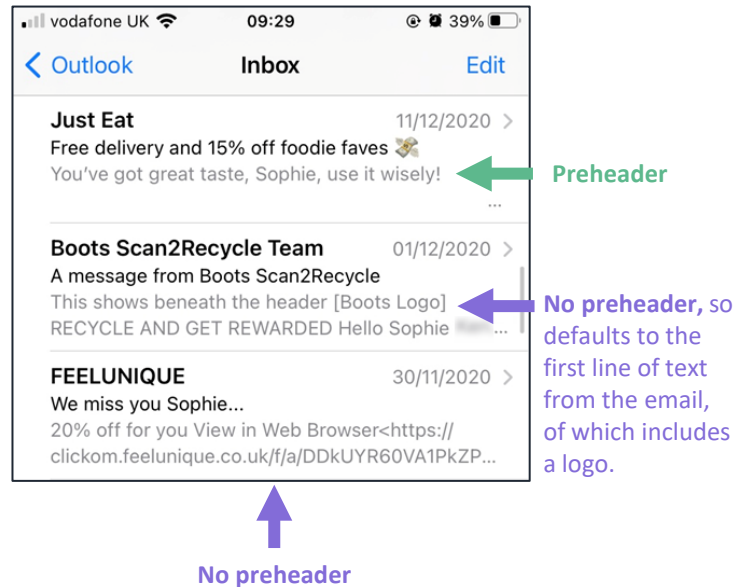
No preheader

Tips for using a preheader:

- **Don't repeat the subject line**

- **Consider the character limit:**

The character limit will depend on which email service provider recipients use - most recommend using 50-100 characters. However, some mobile devices have a smaller limit; when viewing emails on the iPhone mail app, the preheader is cut off at around 80-90 characters including spaces.
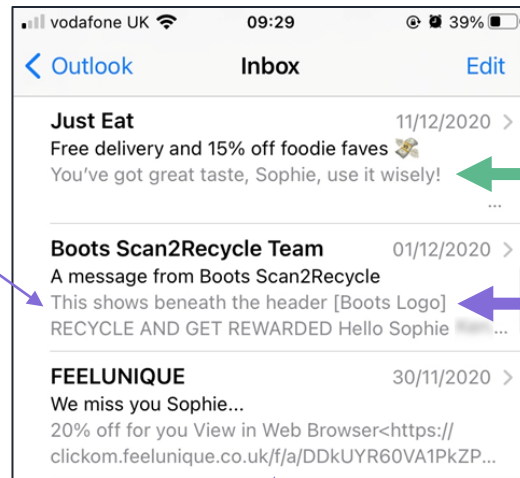
High performing examples used in Clearing

→ **You're still in the race**

(Subject line: Clearing places available at [HEP])

→ **Choose the [HEP name]**

(Subject line: %%FIRSTNAME%%, we have clearing spaces)

Both examples used short and snappy preheaders and subject lines, meaning that both were likely to be visible on a mobile phone preview, and complimented each other.
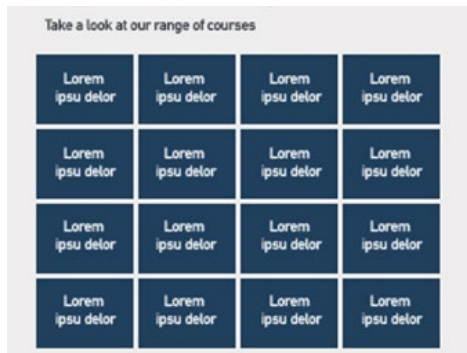
Preheader:
Cuts off at 46 characters including spaces.

No preheader:
Cuts off at 84 characters including spaces.

No preheader:
Cuts off at 87 characters including spaces.

3. Include individual course buttons or a list of linked courses

On A level results day 2020, engagement increased when email creatives included a list of linked courses, or individual course buttons. Creatives that included this feature achieved an average CTR of **2.4%** (vs 1.6% for those that didn't).

Take a look at our range of courses

Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor
Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor
Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor
Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor	Lorem ipsu delor

We know that many factors will affect engagement with an email on the day, but individual course buttons or links, listed alphabetically, enable recipients to **quickly** find the content most **relevant** to them, as they will most likely know what subjects they want to study.

3. Include individual course buttons or a list of linked courses

Prospective applicants in our focus group also told us that they like this feature within email creatives;

‘Clear list of the courses’

‘everything is easily accessible’

[I like it because it's] ‘organised’

[I like it because it's] ‘not just clumped up paragraphs’

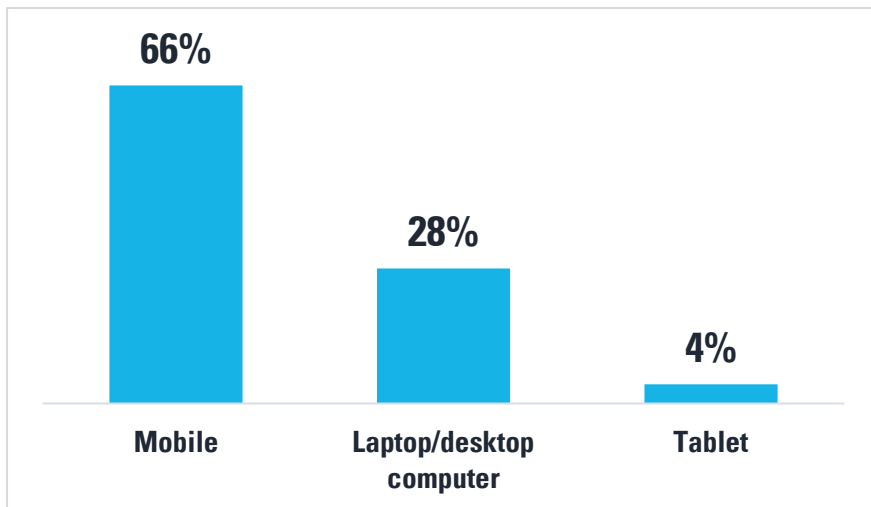‘The different boxes make it easy to pick apart different bits’

4. Optimise your creatives for all devices

During August 2020, around 60% our emails were viewed on a desktop, however just over 70% of clicks took place on a mobile. We also asked applicants in a survey how they normally view emails from UCAS Media:

66% Mobile

28% Laptop/desktop computer

4% Tablet

> 'I look at the emails on my mobile but when using links, the formatting on my mobile can be unclear'

> 'I usually see that I got an email on my phone, sometimes I skim it or look at the first part on my phone too, then I look at it and actually read it on my laptop at a later time.'

When considering the mobile view of an email, ensure your creatives include **clear call to actions** and buttons to easily display where a user can interact with the content. If you cannot provide html, our email templates are mobile responsive.

It's also important to ensure your emails are inclusive and accessible to **screen readers** and other assisted devices, so that they're **accessible to all**.

5. Use colour and images

We asked our focus group attendees what they thought of the use of bright colours and images in email creatives. Here are some of their thoughts:

‘it's nice an eye catching, looks very appealing’

[I like the] ‘mixture of images and information’

‘I like the photos, it splits up the text really well’

‘the pictures make it stand out from the average boring email’

‘I like that there are pictures along with the text so it's spaced out’

Students told us that email design and colour could affect how they feel about not having a place

When we showed the group some examples of brightly coloured emails, the feedback was generally positive:

'Simplistic, more personal, colourful, less saddening than the others '

'[I like the] bright colours which makes us feel more optimistic about getting a place at university'

But the choice of colours is important;
- Use a high contrast when including text on a block colour background.
- Use colours that complement each other.

'White text on green boxes are bit hard to read'

'The colours are a bit aggressive - reds and yellows looks more like a sale not something personalised to you'

What students told us they like about emails:

COURSE BUTTONS

STREAMLINED

EYE CATCHING

EASY TO READ

COLOURFUL

IMAGES

CLEAN, SHORT AND SWEET

PERSONALISED

Well, that was a welcome positive read wasn't it?

We are overwhelmed to finally see our screens filled with green numbers and upward trend arrows once again. It's about time higher education caught a break.

But even within all this growth are lessons to build into your strategy. There are reservations to be addressed in the international community, there are more unplaced applicants to communicate with, and there are changes to be made to your Clearing campaigns.

But forewarned is forearmed.

And now you can get to work.

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

If you want to combine this snapshot, the full insight of UCAS, and the reach of UCAS Media, we're only a click away.

Get in touch

For further information and insights contact your UCAS Media account manager or email us at ucasmediaeducationteam@ucas.ac.uk.