

A young man and woman are shown in a close-up, profile view, looking towards the right. They are in a bright, sunlit environment, possibly outdoors, with a soft, warm glow from the sun. The man is in the foreground, wearing a dark jacket, and the woman is slightly behind him, her hair catching the light.

UCAS

2024 END OF CYCLE CLEARING REPORT

UNDERSTANDING CLEARING STUDENTS
MOTIVATIONS AND MINDSETS



**IN 2024, WE SENT A SURVEY
TO EVERY SINGLE STUDENT
WHO GOT PLACED IN CLEARING**

A photograph of two young women sitting at a desk in what appears to be a library or study area. The woman on the left is a Black woman with glasses and a wide smile, looking towards the right. The woman on the right is a white woman with long blonde hair, resting her chin on her hand and smiling at the camera. A laptop is partially visible in the foreground. The background shows bookshelves and a staircase.

**THEY RECEIVED THIS
SURVEY **WITHIN 24 HOURS**
OF GETTING THEIR OFFER**



**THIS REPORT IS THE RESULT
OF ALMOST 6000 RESPONDENTS**

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WHAT'S NEW IN 2024

DECLINE MY PLACE USAGE IS AT 33%

That's **+4%pts on last year**, marking the **second highest** on record. More students are switching to a new university or course, voluntarily reshaping their paths.

TRADITIONAL CLEARING IS AT ITS LOWEST SHARE YET

24% of Clearing students missed their grades this year (**-5%pts vs. 2023**). Fewer are in Clearing because of underachievement; more are actively choosing it.

MIND CHANGERS ON THE RISE

14,940 students changed course or university this year (**+9% vs. 2023**). They're using Clearing to pivot into courses that better match their interests or circumstances.

DIRECT TO CLEARING GROWS

21,970 applicants skipped the main cycle altogether (**+13% vs. 2023**). More older or non-traditional students are making late but confident decisions.

FEWER 'NO OFFERS' ENTRANTS

11,345 applicants arrived with zero offers in the main scheme (**-8% vs. 2023**). Even so, they remain selective, prioritising teaching quality and course fit.

EARLIER RESEARCH, FEWER CONTACTS

67% started researching the university they ended up at **before August** and **45%** contacted **only one** university (up from 38% in 2019), showing more targeted, purposeful choices.

Overall, 2024 continues the trend of Clearing as a **proactive, strategic route** rather than a last-minute fallback. Students using Decline My Place is increasing, preparing earlier, and contacting fewer universities—showing just how **empowered and deliberate** they've become.



EMERGING THEMES

CLEARING IS NO LONGER A LAST-MINUTE BACK UP

- Those who use Clearing as a second chance after missing their grades are now the minority.
- Many students are entering Clearing voluntarily and using it actively and strategically.



ONLY 24%

OF CLEARING USERS WERE
THERE BECAUSE THEY
MISSED THEIR GRADES

A woman with black-rimmed glasses is looking down at a desk. She is wearing a dark blazer over a white top. On the desk, there are papers, a calculator, and a glass of water. The background is slightly blurred.

67%

OF CLEARING USERS START
THEIR RESEARCH BEFORE
RESULTS DAY

STUDENTS HAVE STRONG GAME PLANS & CLEAR INTENTIONS

- Choices made in Clearing are considered in advance, made with purpose, and well-researched.
- More students are now only contacting one university during Clearing.
- Knee-jerk reactions are becoming less common.

DECLINE MY PLACE IS BEING USED MORE THAN EVER AND IN DIFFERENT WAYS

- When missing their Firm Choice, many forego their Insurance Choice and apply elsewhere.
- These students consider their Clearing university to be better than their Insurance Choice.



33%

USED DECLINE MY PLACE
(+4%PTS ON LAST YEAR)

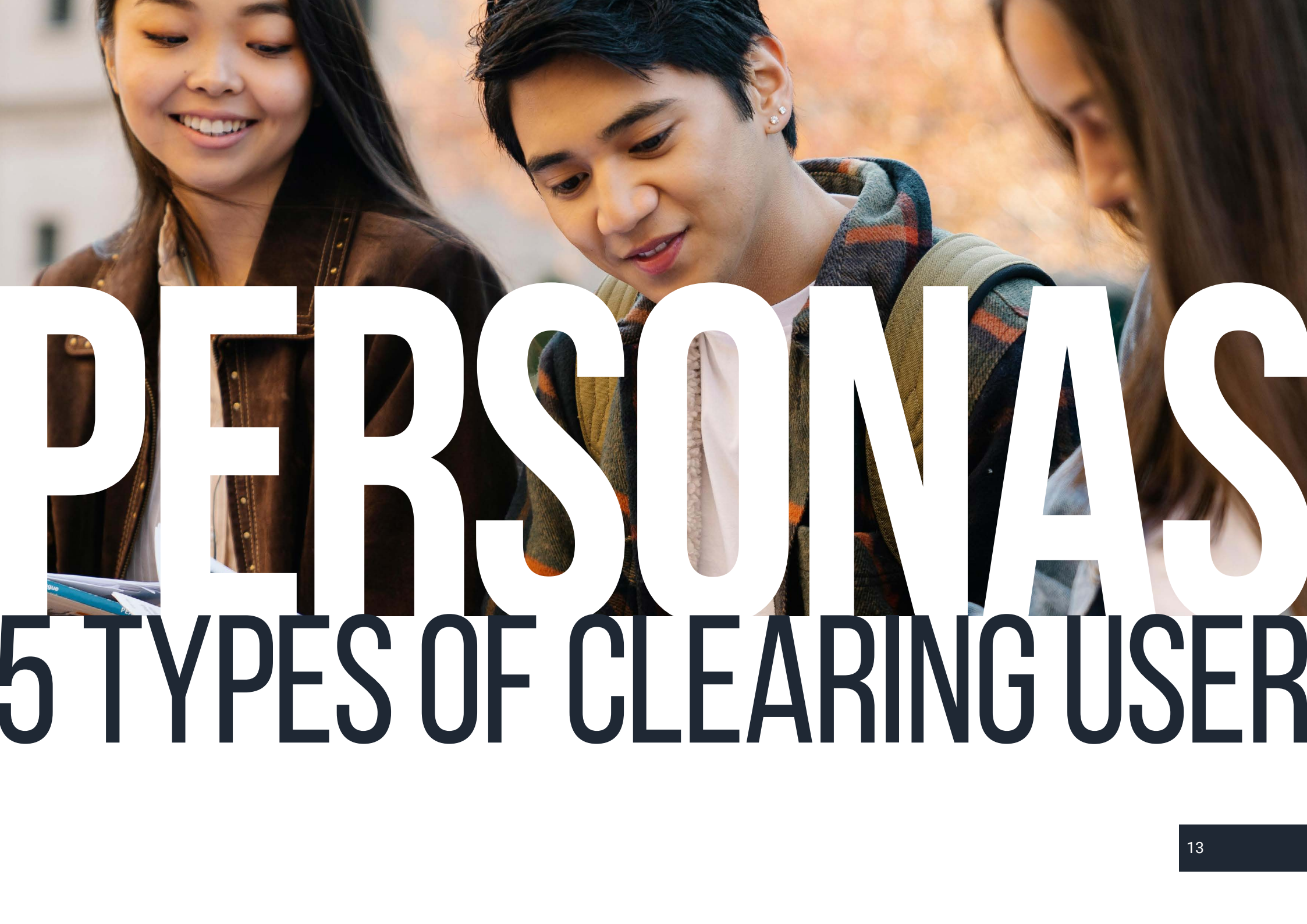


45%

OF CLEARING USERS
CONTACTED ONLY
ONE UNIVERSITY

MANY ARE WELL-INFORMED ABOUT THEIR UNIVERSITY PRE-RESULTS DAY

They are using Clearing to target a specific course at a specific university.



PERSONAS

5 TYPES OF CLEARING USER

PERSONAS

5 TYPES OF CLEARING USERS

For most of its history, Clearing was primarily used as a second chance for students who did not meet the entry criteria for offers.

It also catered for those who had received no offers, and those who decided to apply to university once the original application deadline had passed.

But in recent years, new groups have emerged.



PERSONAS

EXISTING

Traditional

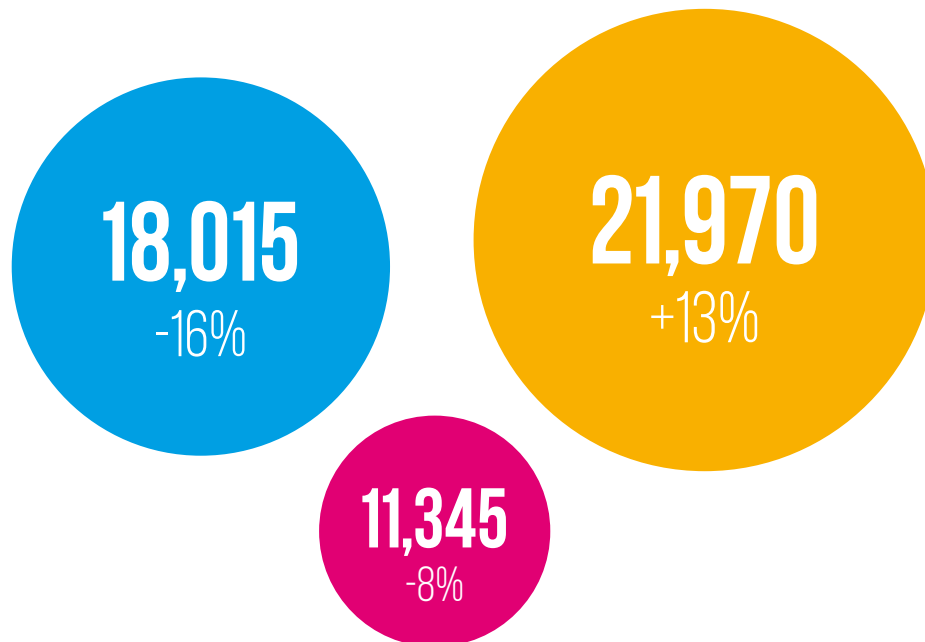
Those who didn't get their grades to meet their offer conditions.

No Offers

Those who had received no offers in the application cycle.

Direct

Those who didn't apply before the application deadline.



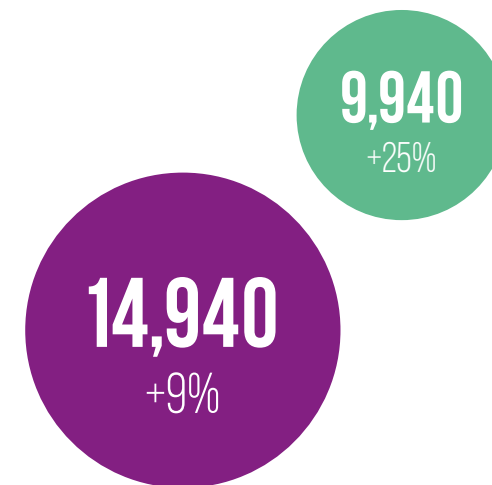
NEW

Mind Changers

Those with offers who have since decided they would rather study something else, or somewhere else. They use 'Decline My Place' and apply elsewhere during Clearing.

Trade Ups

Those with offers who get better grades than they were expected, and use 'Decline My Place' to seek a better university or course than they originally applied to.



PERSONA (% OF 2024 CLEARING)	KEY STATS	WHEN THEY RESEARCH	WHAT THEY WANT	PREFERRED CHANNELS	ACTION POINTS
Traditional (24% of total, -5%pts vs. 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didn't meet firm/insurance • Often stressed; rely on quick clarity • Lower confidence in next steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many wait until Results Day morning • Some do research pre-August 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on the process • Facts about the course, teaching, accommodation availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University & UCAS websites • Phone (hotlines) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide step-by-step guides • Host dedicated post-Results Q&As
No Offers (15% of total, -1%pts vs. 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had zero offers going in • 24% think of Clearing before May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most prepared for Clearing • 65% have a target university in mind early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching quality, quality of facilities • Transparent cost-of-living details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University websites • UCAS search 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise course structure & teaching quality • Offer straight-talking financial info
Direct to Clearing (29% of total, +3%pts vs. 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skipped main cycle • Often older or returning students • Highest confidence in final choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45% start researching Feb–July • Less dependent on results day blitz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility (timing, location, finances) • Straightforward, no-frills approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local ads • University/UCAS pages • Email/phone contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear last-minute application guides • Highlight part-time or local options & financial support
Mind Changers (20% of total, +2%pts vs. 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed course/location • Half changed their mind before getting their results • They look for a better "fit" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% consider switching before May • 60% decide from August onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal alignment (course modules, campus vibe) • Real stories of students who changed their minds mid-cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University websites • Friends/family (personal advice) • The Student Room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise course benefits, campus culture and transport links • Share case studies of successful switches
Trade Ups (13% of total, +2%pts vs. 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceeded expected grades • Highest confidence, aim for universities with better reputations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many plan "just in case" early • Half decide from August onward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prestige, career outcomes • They want bigger challenges & better prospects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media (TikTok, Insta) • League tables, ranking sites • The Student Room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand awareness on top-tier courses • Plan targeted messages for those that do better than expected on results day



MARKETING WRAP

STRENGTHEN YOUR 2025 CLEARING STRATEGY

MARKETING WRAP

STRENGTHEN YOUR 2025 CLEARING STRATEGY

Clearing isn't a last-minute rescue anymore - it's a purposeful, well-researched path that starts earlier, involves fewer university contacts, and sees students from multiple routes making empowered decisions.





HIGHLIGHT PERSONAL RELEVANCE

Traditional: Provide reassurance and quick phone support around Results Day.

No Offers: Show off teaching quality, cost-of-living transparency, and entry support.

Direct: Feature flexible study modes and finance clarity, especially from Feb–July.

Mind Changers: Promote course diversity, campus culture, and success stories.

Trade Ups: Emphasise ranking, career outcomes, and celebratory messaging for overachievers.

MATCH THEIR TIMELINE

- **Direct** and **No Offers** audiences often look before the standard cycle heats up.
- **Mind Changers** and **Trade Ups** pivot heavily around Results Day.
- Keep lines open and staff ready for those big shifts in August.





CHOOSE CHANNELS WISELY

Traditional: Web + phone lines.

No Offers: Clear website details, strong UCAS presence, targeted email.

Direct: Local channels, personal outreach.

Mind Changers: Use social media storytelling to highlight course variety and culture.

Trade Ups: Social media, ambassadors, league table references.

SUSTAIN POST-RESULTS ENGAGEMENT

Students don't all accept instantly. Many are still weighing up finances, location, and accommodation after Results Day, so maintaining a presence beyond the initial rush is key.

Keep your Clearing pages fresh and accessible

Students continue researching options after the first wave of placements.

Provide clear, structured follow-up communication

Let students know when they will hear back after expressing interest or submitting an application. Clarity and reassurance about next steps help prevent unnecessary stress and improve conversion rates.

Stay active across multiple channels

Some students will still prefer to call, while others will look for email confirmations, chat support, or social media updates.



**CLEARING ISN'T JUST ABOUT GETTING
NOTICED ON RESULTS DAY - IT'S ABOUT
SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT TO SECURE THE
RIGHT STUDENTS FOR YOUR UNIVERSITY**



MINDSET

THE PUSHES & THE PULLS

MINDSET

THE PUSHES & THE PULLS

In the past, many students would have been disappointed to find themselves in Clearing. Most would have entered the process having underachieved on their grades, failed with their applications, or missed the original deadline.

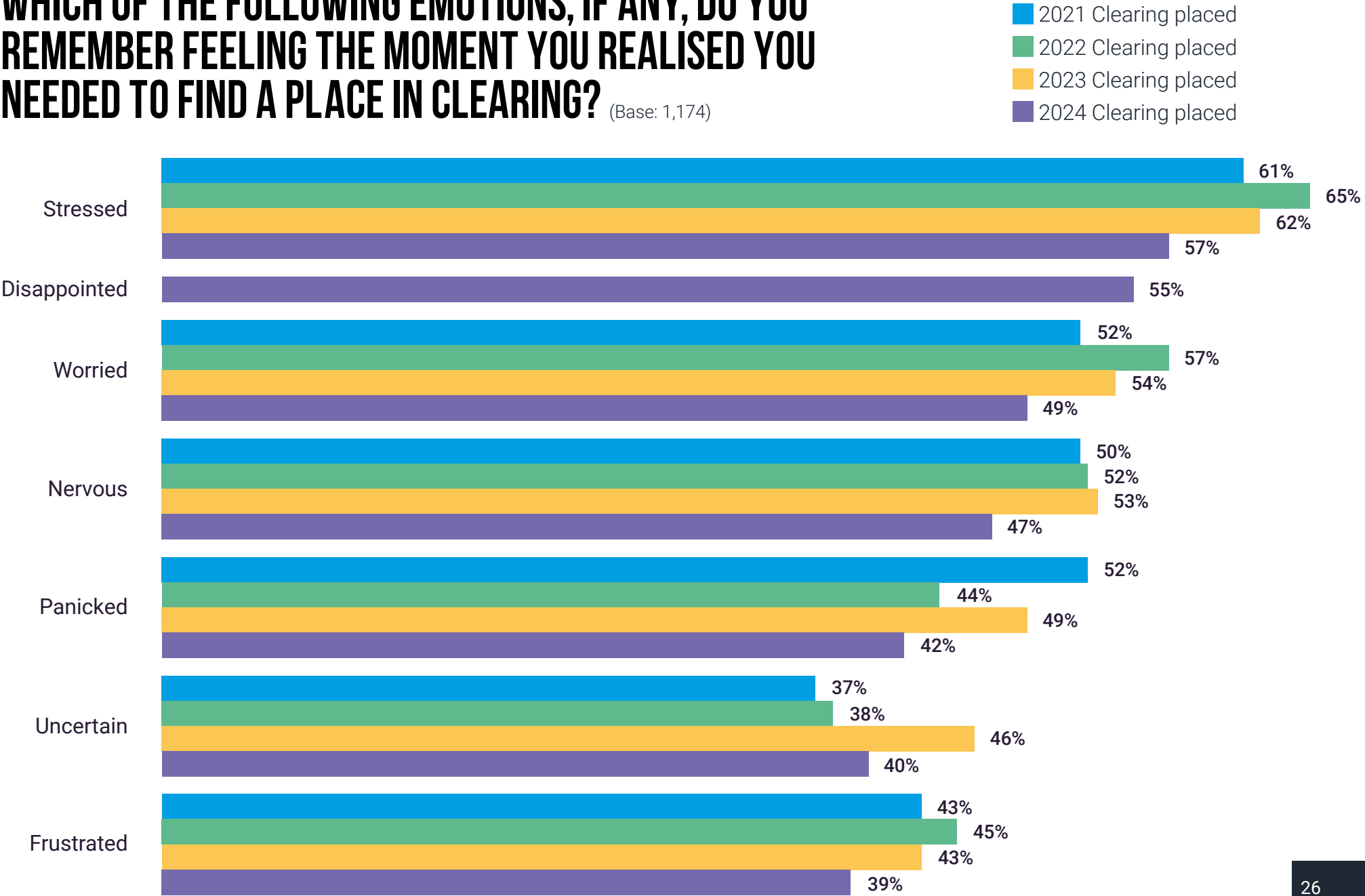
But the emotional experience of Clearing is rapidly and significantly changing for the better. As more students use it to make empowered and strategic decisions, the overall perception of Clearing is changing – even for those who are there unwillingly.

Clearing is no longer a last-minute fallback but a strategic choice for many students. While motivations vary by group, the process is becoming more positive and accepted.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING EMOTIONS, IF ANY, DO YOU REMEMBER FEELING THE MOMENT YOU REALISED YOU NEEDED TO FIND A PLACE IN CLEARING?

(Base: 1,174)





STUDENTS ARE WELL- PREPARED FOR UNI BUT ALSO KEEPING THEIR OPTIONS OPEN

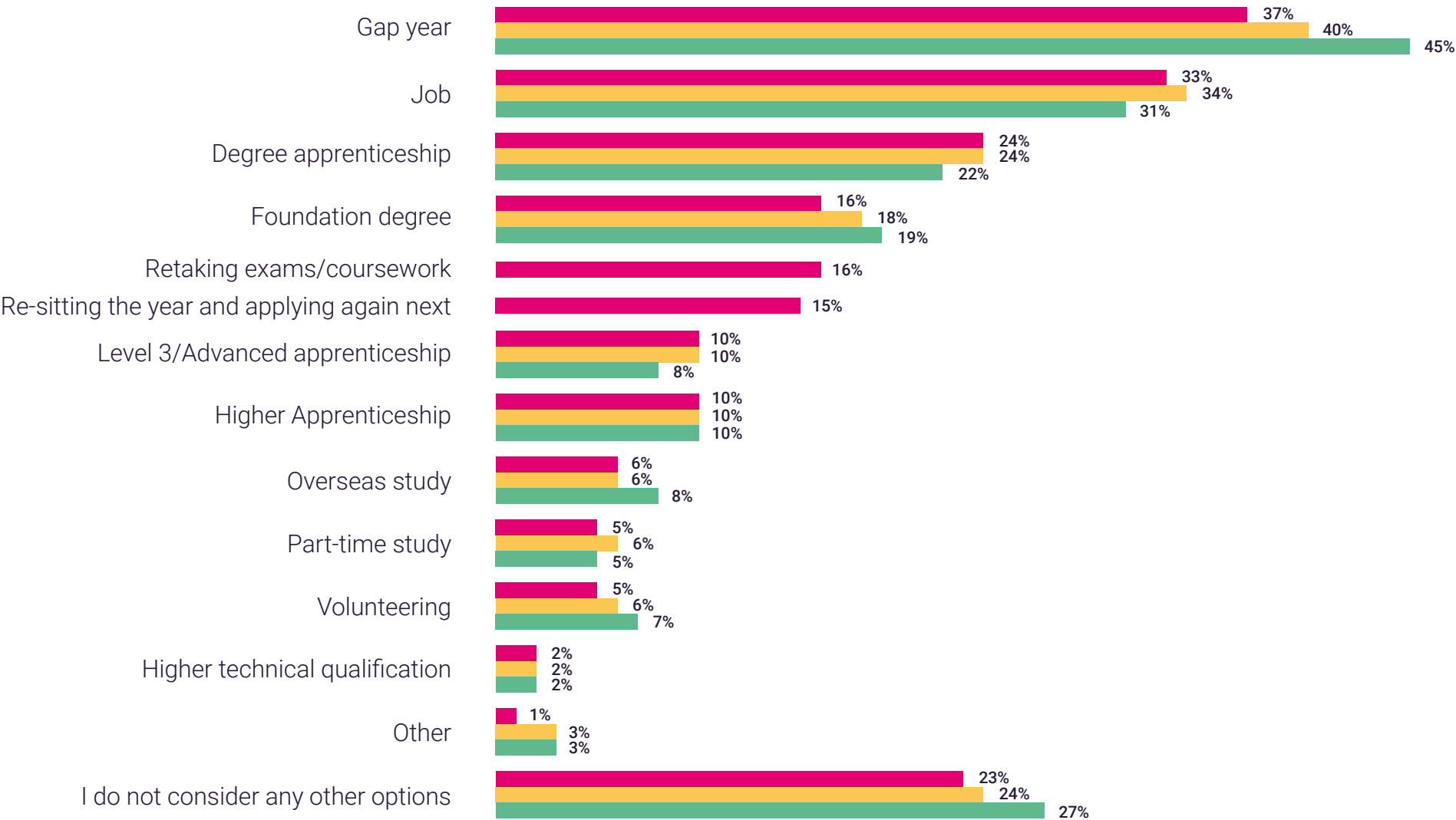
67% started researching their Clearing university pre-August, but once in Clearing even more **(77%)** were considering other options.

However, as the perception of Clearing improves, many of the alternatives are becoming less popular. Gap years, employment, foundation degrees, overseas study, part-time study, and volunteering **all fell year-on-year.**

WHILE YOU WERE SEARCHING FOR A PLACE IN CLEARING, DID YOU AT ANY POINT CONSIDER ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS INSTEAD OF GOING TO UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE?

(Base: 5,925)

2024 Clearing placed
2023 Clearing placed
2022 Clearing placed



THEY NEED LESS SUPPORT, BUT MORE INFO

70% WANTED UNIVERSITIES TO TALK THEM
THROUGH THE PROCESS STEP-BY-STEP

60% WANTED TO BE GIVEN ALL THE FACTS

ONLY **30%** NEEDED
REASSURANCE

ONLY **22%** NEEDED TO BE
CALMED DOWN

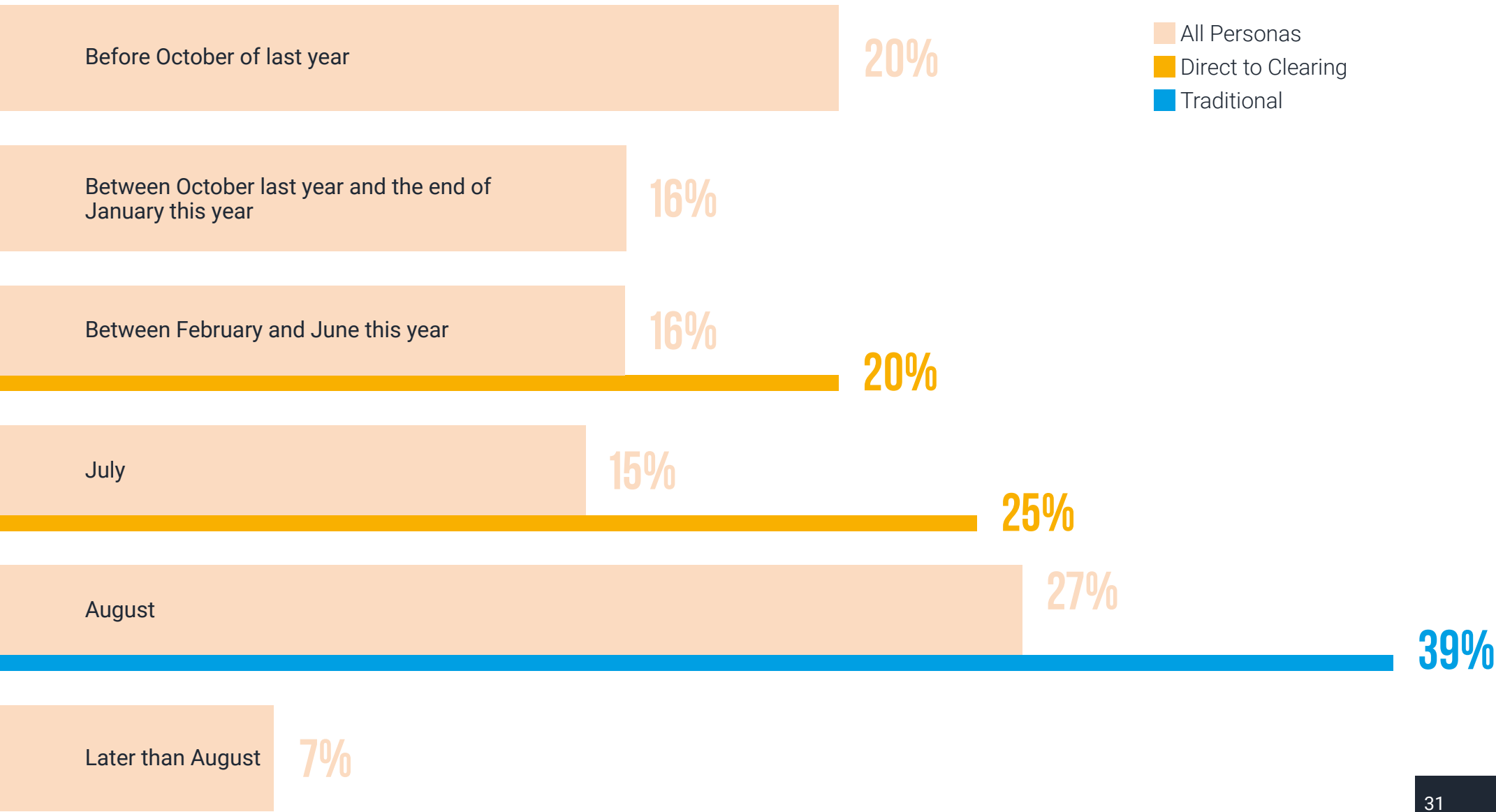


RESEARCH STARTS EARLY AND CHANGES BASED ON THE ROUTE INTO CLEARING

27% start researching their Clearing university in August, making it the busiest month for searches, but the majority (**67%**) happens much earlier – with **36%** even happening before the January deadline.

WHEN DID YOU START RESEARCHING THE UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE YOU WERE PLACED AT THROUGH CLEARING?

(Base 5,972)



MORE STUDENTS PLANNED TO USE 'DECLINE MY PLACE' BEFORE THEY GOT THEIR RESULTS

52% (+4%pts vs. 2023) now decide to decline before they get their grades, plus an additional **20%** who were considering it based on how they did in their exams.



**MOTIVATIONS FOR USING
'DECLINE MY PLACE'
VARIED WIDELY**



17%

WANTED TO LIVE
SOMEWHERE CHEAPER



23%

EXPERIENCED A CHANGE IN
PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES



31%

SWITCHED THEIR
SUBJECTS

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"I realised over time that I wanted to stay closer to home, and the Clearing process helped me find a university nearby that still offered the course I wanted."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"I changed my mind after visiting my firm choice on an open day. The experience didn't meet my expectations, so I started looking at other options through Clearing."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"The closer it got to starting, I decided I didn't want to dread going to university for a course that I picked. I found a new course through Clearing that made me excited about studying again."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"The accommodations available were too expensive, and my maintenance loan wouldn't cover the total costs, so I opted for a different university."

**THESE STUDENTS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY
TO BE PULLED TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE
UNIVERSITY THAN TO BE PUSHED AWAY
FROM THEIR ORIGINAL CHOICE**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"I received better grades than I expected, so I decided to apply through Clearing for a higher-ranking university that I hadn't initially considered."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"It offers better future opportunities and aligns closely with my career aspirations compared to the other choice."

A photograph of two young adults, a man and a woman, looking at a book together. The man, on the left, has dark hair and wears glasses, a white hoodie, and a red jacket. The woman, on the right, has long dark hair and is wearing a blue sweatshirt and jeans. They are both smiling and looking down at the book the man is holding. The background is a warm, out-of-focus indoor setting.

**KEY PULL FACTORS IN 2024 INCLUDED
LOCATION, COURSE, AND REPUTATION**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

*"Much more diverse group of
extracurriculars offered
by the university."*

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

*"The lecturer came highly
recommended, enhancing the
academic appeal."*

**MOTIVATIONS FOR
DECLINING A FIRM CHOICE
ARE DIFFERENT TO
DECLINING AN INSURANCE**

50%

of those who declined their Insurance Choice started thinking about it in August, suggesting that when they didn't get the grades for their Firm Choice – they realised their Insurance Choice wasn't an attractive back-up plan.

For more than a quarter, the Insurance Choice was never really a serious option for them anyway.



DECLINING FIRM CHOICE

These students were more likely to do so from changing subjects, or because they exceeded the offer conditions.

Proximity to home mattered more to this group.

DECLINING INSURANCE CHOICE

These students were more likely (than those declining their Firm Choice) to do so because they changed their minds after a visit.

Graduate prospects and reputation were more important to this group.



**EVEN WITH A PLACE AT THEIR INSURANCE
CHOICE, IT WAS COMMON FOR STUDENTS TO
THINK THEY COULD FIND SOMETHING ELSE
MORE SUITED TO THEM**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"When my original firm contacted me with an offer, it changed my plans, and I decided not to pursue my insurance choice."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"My insurance offered me a place with a change of course that I did not want."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"When I decide that studying physics might be too stressful, I started exploring other options and chose not to go to my insurance university."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"It was a 'just in case' university but it stayed that way until results day and so only then I realised what it would be like for me to go to my insurance and I did not like that idea at all."

ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - MINDSET

Clearing students are much **more likely to be pulled towards a new university than they are to be pushed away** from one. So, focus on your pull factors. Showcase the **strengths of your location, campus culture, & course reputation**.

Share examples of how Clearing has **helped students realign their goals and overcome unexpected changes but** prioritise the dissemination of **useful and practical information** over emotional messages of support and reassurance.

Engage with potential applicants **whilst they are in Y12** and ensure your Clearing information is accessible year-round. Groups research at different times, it's an evergreen process.



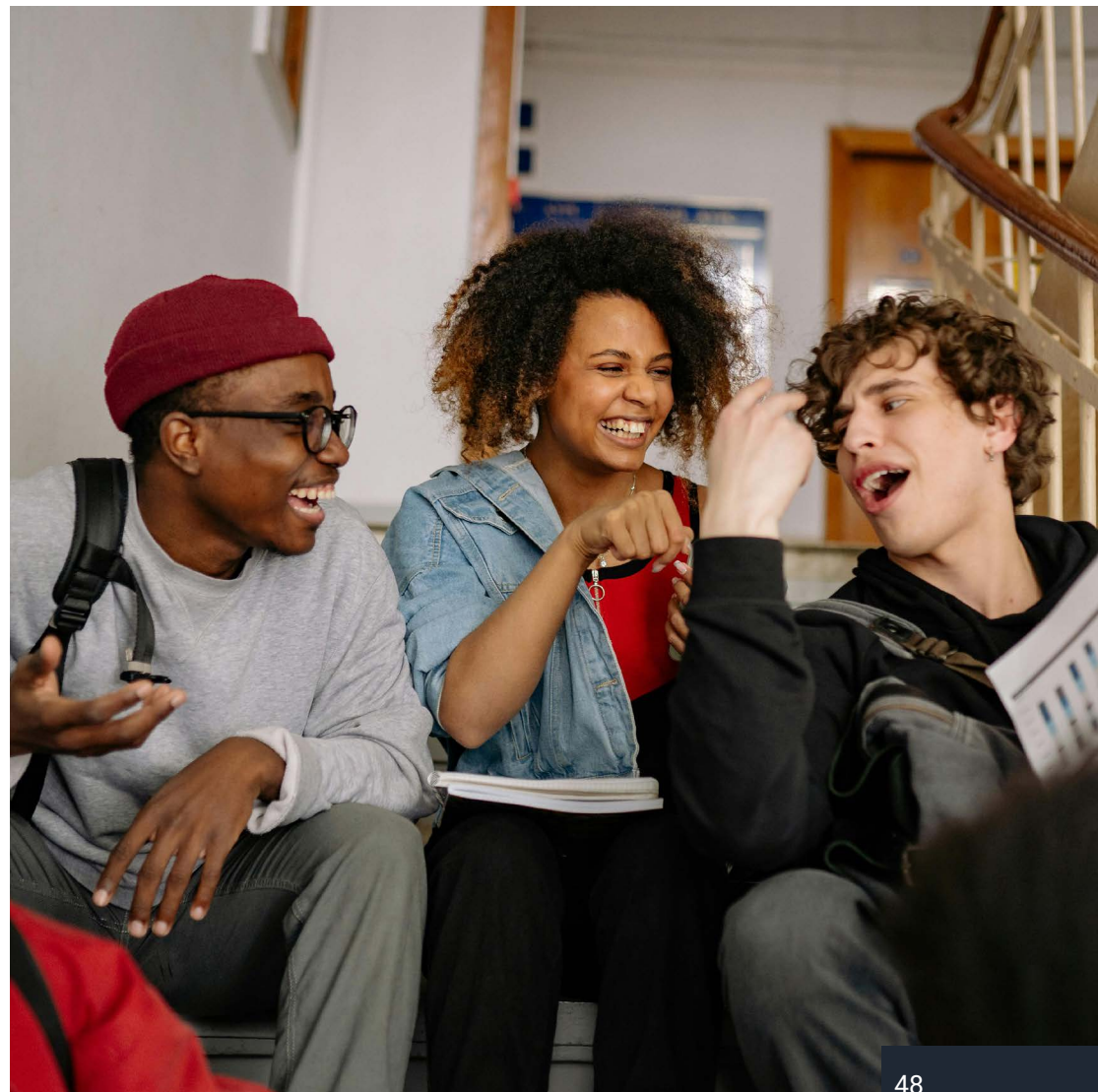
ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - MINDSET

Most students want detailed information about the Clearing process, so invest in **creating explainer content and guides**.

Stagger your segment-specific campaigns for **different times** based on their activity levels.

Prepare for earlier consideration of 'Decline My Place' and **get your messaging ready keep hold of your applicants, before Results Day** – using webinars, campus tours, and Q&A sessions to engage students who are in two minds.

Reassess conversion rates and forecast models that consider Insurance Choice applicants – they are **increasingly declining their insurance place** if they miss out on their Firm Choices.





DEEP DIVE INTO THE PERSONAS



STUDENTS WHO DIDN'T GET THEIR GRADES TO MEET THEIR FIRM OR INSURANCE CHOICE OFFER CONDITIONS

AHMED

Is determined and aiming high, his eyes set on a place in mechanical engineering. But it's a tough, competitive subject and he narrowly missed the grades he needed. His conditional place was no longer an option.

To Clearing he went, looking for a second chance and finding a supportive university nearby offering a similar engineering course that aligned with his career aspirations and, crucially, the grades he achieved. Speaking to the admissions team, he got the guidance he needed and could confidently navigate his Clearing options.

Motivation

Students in this group seek universities offering practical and straightforward support. These students value reassurance and clear pathways to their chosen fields.


TRADITIONAL

18,015 -16% VS. 2023

**CLEARING IS BECOMING
MORE POSITIVE FOR
TRADITIONAL USERS**

**WHILST MORE THAN HALF
OF TRADITIONAL CLEARING
STUDENTS STILL FELT
STRESSED (57%) OR
DISAPPOINTED (55%)**



A photograph of two young women sitting outdoors, smiling and laughing. The woman on the left is wearing a blue shirt, and the woman on the right is wearing a light green shirt. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

THERE WAS A REDUCTION IN MOST
NEGATIVE REACTIONS

-6%
NERVES

-7%
PANIC

-5%
WORRY

-6%
UNCERTAINTY

**FEELINGS OF CALMNESS
AND RELIEF ALSO
BOTH INCREASED**



PARENTS ARE BEING RELIED ON LESS BY STUDENTS WHO MISS THEIR GRADES

Fewer students from this group are going to their parents for immediate support (**43%** in 2024 vs **55%** in 2022), showcasing the normalisation of Clearing as a valid route into Higher Education.

Compared to last cycle, this year's students were **more likely** to first head to sources of support where practical advice is available: like universities & colleges (**13%**), and UCAS (**6%**). The increased preparedness of students in this cycle is reducing reliance on parents and equipping them to go straight to direct sources when the time comes.



**STUDENTS AREN'T
CHASING UP THEIR
NEAR MISS OFFERS**

37%

**ALMOST MADE THEIR FIRM
CHOICE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**

A group of young people are sitting together, looking at a smartphone held by one of them. The person in the foreground is a woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue sweater, who is holding the phone. Behind her, a woman with dark hair in a bun and a green shirt is smiling. To the left, a woman with red hair is looking at the phone. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a casual setting.

BUT ONLY
14%

CONTACT THEM TO CHECK
IF THEY COULD BE ACCEPTED

ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - TRADITIONAL

Prioritise the **more direct sources for practical information** – like university and UCAS websites. Ensure that information about courses and the Clearing process are clear, concise, and readily available online.

Implement **automated follow ups** with students who narrowly miss their offer grades, to show them their options.

Position Clearing as a **valid and strategic pathway into Higher Education**, reducing stress and disappointment for students who miss their grades. For example, sharing stories of students who entered through Clearing.

Host **dedicated post-Results Day webinars** to guide Traditional Clearing students through the process.





STUDENTS WHO COME TO CLEARING WITHOUT ANY OFFERS IN THE MAIN SCHEME

HANNAH

Passionate about environmental sciences but facing intense competition during the main cycle, Hannah didn't get any offers from universities. Through Clearing, she discovered a degree in environmental sustainability at a university known for its supportive community and flexible entry requirements. She was drawn to the course's focus on real-world impact and practical fieldwork opportunities.

Motivation

This group has had longer to plan their Clearing journey, and they want reassurance that they will get quality teaching and support – which will lead to their desired career outcomes.

NO OFFERS

11,345 +8% VS. 2023

THEY MIGHT BE SHORT ON OPTIONS, BUT THEY'RE NOT COMPROMISING ON WHAT THEY WANT

55%

ARE MOST LIKELY TO SAY THAT THE QUALITY OF STAFF/TEACHING IS VERY IMPORTANT TO THEM

52%

SAY TEACHING FACILITIES ARE VERY IMPORTANT

44%

SAY GRADUATE PROSPECTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT

49%

SAY EARNING POTENTIAL IS VERY IMPORTANT



THEY'RE THE EARLIEST OF ALL TO CONSIDER CLEARING

Having entered Clearing without any offers in the main scheme, they were the most likely **(28%)** to have first thought Clearing would be an option for them before May.

ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - NO OFFERS

Prioritise the practical, traditional pull factors when targeting this group
– highlighting the quality of teaching and graduate potential.





STUDENTS WHO DIDN'T APPLY IN THE REGULAR CYCLE BUT APPLIED DIRECTLY DURING CLEARING

PRIYA

During a gap year, Priya spent some time working in care homes. After discovering her passion, she decided to pursue it and apply for a nursing degree – but her decision came after the deadlines had passed. She found exactly what she was looking for in Clearing, a local university with a strong reputation for the kind of nursing placements she wanted. The course's emphasis on practical learning and the welcoming communication from the admissions team made her decision an easy one.

Motivation

Direct to Clearing applicants value clear, practical course information and personalised communication that makes it easy for them to understand their options and the support available to them.

DIRECT

21,970 +13% VS. 2023

**MORE DIRECT STUDENTS
ARE EXPLORING
ALTERNATIVES
TO UNIVERSITY**

A young man with dark, curly hair is in the foreground on the left, looking towards the right. He is wearing a dark jacket with a grey collar. In the background on the right, a young woman with long, wavy red hair is smiling and looking towards the left. She is wearing a brown jacket over a light-colored top. They are both looking out over a body of water under a cloudy sky.

OF THOSE WHO APPLIED DIRECTLY

37%

DID SO BECAUSE THEY
WEREN'T ORIGINALLY
INTENDING TO APPLY

24%

WERE WAITING TO SEE
WHAT THEIR PERSONAL
CIRCUMSTANCES WERE

24%

MISSED THE DEADLINE



MOST RESEARCH HAPPENS FEB - JULY

These students are researching their Clearing universities after the Equal Consideration Deadline but before Results Day (with **45%** starting during or before summer, compared to **31%** on average.) As Direct applicants tend to be older, they're not as beholden to the usual school or exam cycles as most applicants.

ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - DIRECT

Focus resources on targeted outreach to low-engagement students, who may not have interacted with your university yet. Many will engage for the first time during Clearing, so **build early awareness through consistent, multichannel campaigns** to ensure your university is top of mind when they start exploring options.

Tailor your messaging to an older audience, who may be less aware of the application cycle and process. **Reference support for those returning to learning and prioritise career-focused content.** Direct applicants are also likely to be local, so **outdoor media and local radio ads** are particularly important channels.



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - DIRECT

Create campaigns **which address common concerns early in the cycle**, such as uncertainty about applying to university, changing personal circumstances, or missing deadlines.

Create **'last-minute application' guides** tailored to Direct to Clearing students, addressing their unique concerns and timelines.

Invest in **paid media campaigns during peak Direct to Clearing application periods**, such as July and August.





MIND CHANGERS

14,940 +9% VS. 2023

STUDENTS WHO USED 'DECLINE MY PLACE' TO LOOK FOR A DIFFERENT COURSE BASED ON A CHANGE OF PREFERENCE OR PRIORITY

SOPHIE

Was all set on business studies at her firm choice, but as Results Day drew closer she started to think it wasn't the right fit for her. She decided to Decline Her Place and utilise Clearing to pursue her true passion, creative media. She found a university closer to home that aligned with her goals and interests.

The university's focus on hands-on projects and industry partnerships made the course stand out, and the admissions team's responsiveness reinforced her decision.

Motivation

This group needs adaptable messaging that highlights how universities can meet changing priorities, with a focus on aligning courses to new career aspirations.

**HALF OF ALL
MIND CHANGERS MAKE
THEIR DECISION ON
OR AFTER RESULTS DAY**

WHY HALF OF ALL MIND CHANGERS DECIDE ON OR AFTER RESULTS DAY

Despite their decision being a change of heart rather than getting better than expected grades, this group were more likely to make their decisions on or after Results Day than Trade Ups.

Most activity happens for this group in August. It's when **40%** start thinking about applying elsewhere and when **56%** make the decision.



DID YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT STUDYING AT YOUR ORIGINAL CHOICE BEFORE RESULTS DAY?

(Base 1,104)

MIND CHANGERS

Yes

50%

Considered declining my place, depending on my results

18%

No

26%

Not Sure

6%



BUT THEY'RE NOT 100% SOLD - MIND CHANGERS BALANCE THE POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES

Among Mind Changers, most feel that their Clearing university offers a more enjoyable experience, a better location, and improved degree outcomes compared to their original firm choice. However, fewer are convinced it outperforms on academic rigour, social integration, or overall reputation. This balanced perspective highlights a thoughtful decision-making process - students are taking control and carefully considering both the benefits and the drawbacks of their new choice.

THEIR MOTIVATIONS ARE MORE THAN JUST 'MIND CHANGING'

As well as simply deciding to switch courses, this group is also more likely (compared to Trade Ups) to have experienced a change in personal circumstances, to want to live somewhere cheaper or closer to home, or to be influenced by their parents.



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - MIND CHANGERS

Reach out to students **immediately post Results Day** with clear guidance on how to explore options through Clearing and **communicate the advantages of the new course or university**, focusing on personalised benefits like graduate links, unique extracurricular opportunities, and campus life.

Incorporate both **soft and hard pull factors** in your campaigns to engage students using Decline My Place – some are changing for ambition, while others are looking for the right fit.



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - MIND CHANGERS

Highlight **success stories from other students who have transitioned to new courses or universities** through Clearing, offering reassurance and motivating others to explore their options.

Universities who want to retain their applicants and **stop them becoming Mind Changers** may also want to run pre-Results Day campaigns that build and promote their sense of place and community. To keep your confirmations, make sure to also drip feed messaging around cost-of-living support and course specific information to **build excitement and momentum**.





TRADE UPS

9,940 +25% VS. 2023

STUDENTS WHO GOT BETTER GRADES THAN EXPECTED & USED CLEARING TO LOOK FOR BETTER COURSES AND UNIVERSITIES


DANIEL

With better grades than he expected, Daniel saw Clearing as an opportunity to pursue a more ambitious academic goal. Declining his Firm and Insurance places, he targeted a top-rank university with strong industry links in aeronautical engineering. This was a big step up from his original plans, but his grades were good enough. He got it. The combination of academic prestige, career-focused learning, and campus resources convinced him to make the switch.

Motivation

High-achieving students are drawn to universities that highlight their reputation, graduate outcomes, and unique opportunities. They need to know about the accommodation available to them, where the university is in the city, and what existing students are saying in reviews.

**TRADE UPS ARE
MORE LIKELY TO
CHANGE THEIR MINDS
BEFORE RESULTS DAY**



55%

OF THOSE WHO DID BETTER THAN
EXPECTED HAD CHANGED THEIR MIND
ABOUT THEIR ORIGINAL UNIVERSITY
BEFORE THEY KNEW THEIR GRADES

DID YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT STUDYING AT YOUR ORIGINAL CHOICE BEFORE RESULTS DAY?

(Base 862)

TRADE UPS

Yes

55%

Considered declining my place, depending on my results

22%

No

21%

Not Sure

3%

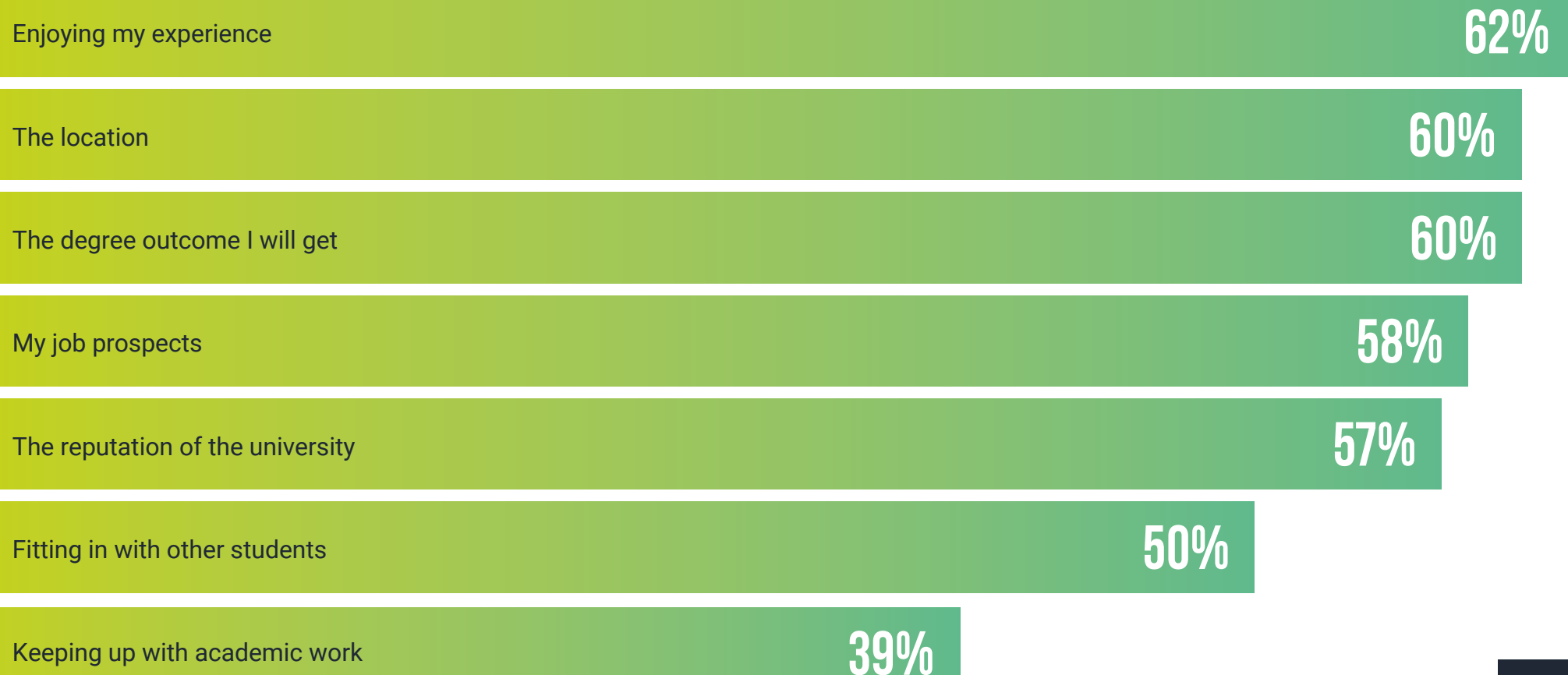


THEY ARE AMBITIOUS AND BELIEVE IN THEIR NEW CHOICE BEING A BETTER OPTION

Compared to their Firm or Insurance Choices, this group thought their Clearing university had a better location, degree outcomes and job prospects. They thought they would enjoy their experience more at their Clearing university.

CONSIDERING BOTH THE UNIVERSITY YOU HAD AS YOUR FIRM CHOICE, AND THE ONE YOU FOUND A PLACE WITH IN CLEARING, WHICH DO YOU THINK IS BETTER FOR YOU ON THE FOLLOWING FACTORS? (Base 826)

TRADE UPS



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - TRADE UPS

Continue with brand awareness campaigns focusing on messages of positive outcomes and opportunities, **even in the later stages of the cycle – so that your university is top of mind on Results Day** for those who may do better than expected.

Appeal to their ambition with messages of **improved opportunities and outcomes**.

Partner with student and graduate ambassadors to highlight benefits of making the switch and choosing your university, **sharing authentic experiences that resonate with prospective students**.



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - TRADE UPS

To retain your applicants and reduce the likelihood of them switching, run pre-Results Day campaigns that reinforce your university's strengths. Focus on academic excellence, graduate outcomes, and unique opportunities while **building a sense of community and belonging**.

On Results Day itself, send targeted messages to those who achieved much higher grades than expected – to **recognise their achievement and reassure them that they remain a good fit for your university**.





DECISIONS

WHAT, WHEN, HOW, WHY?

DECISIONS

WHAT, WHEN, HOW, WHY?

As students move through the decision-making cycle – from preliminary research which can take place years earlier, through the emotions of exams and results, to their final choice in Clearing – they also move through an information cycle.

What matters to students at the start of their journey can change as they approach Results Day. Early priorities like course options and university reputation may give way to practical considerations, such as location, financial support, and accommodation availability, which often emerge as decisive factors when making their final choice.



MOST STUDENTS WHO ENTERED CLEARING WERE CONSIDERING AND PREPARING EARLY

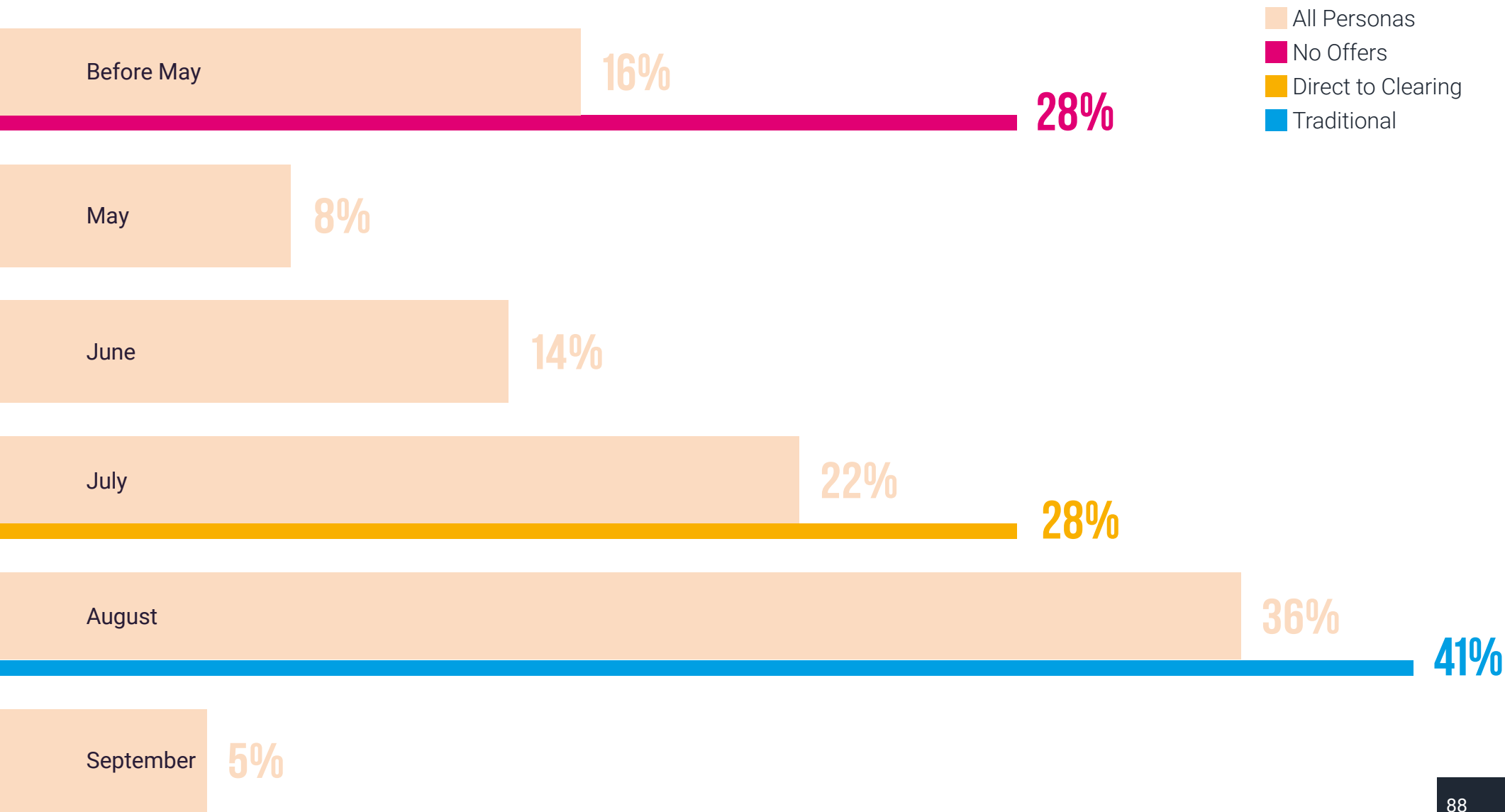
60% THOUGHT CLEARING MAY BE AN
OPTION FOR THEM BEFORE AUGUST

63% ALREADY RESEARCHED AVAILABLE PLACES
& KNEW WHO THEY WANTED TO CONTACT
(+5%PTS FROM 2021)

92% LOOKED FOR INFORMATION ABOUT CLEARING BEFORE THEY ENTERED IT

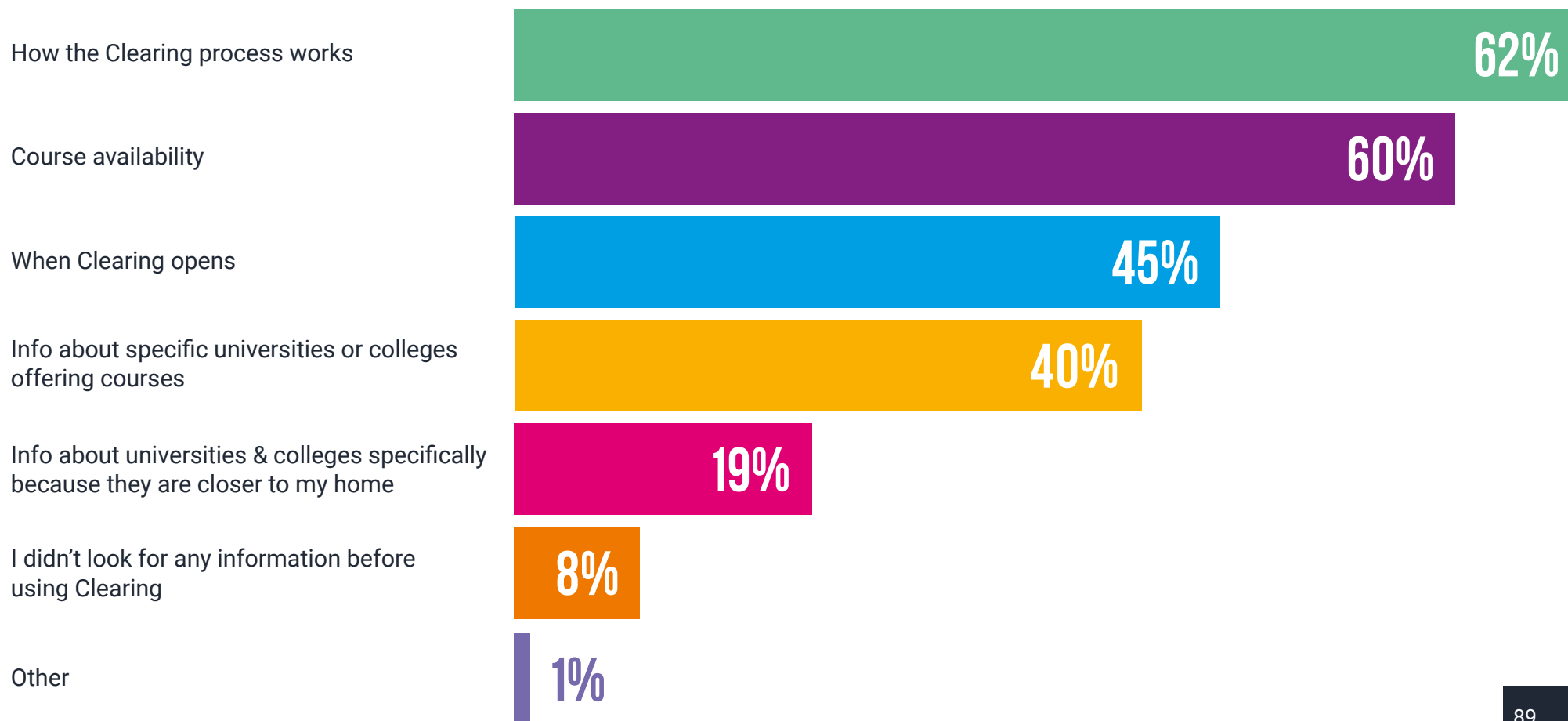
WHEN DID YOU FIRST THINK CLEARING MIGHT BE AN OPTION FOR YOUR ROUTE TO UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE?

(Base: 5,972)



WHAT INFORMATION DID YOU LOOK FOR ABOUT CLEARING BEFORE YOU USED THE CLEARING SERVICE?

(Base: 5,965)





DECISION-MAKING IS BECOMING MORE DELIBERATE AND MORE TARGETED

45% of students in 2024 Clearing contacted only one university.

And compared to 2019, **fewer students** contacted three or more universities – and more chose to just get in touch with one.

ACTIVITY STARTS EARLY ON RESULTS DAY

By 10am, **almost a quarter** of all Clearing respondents have started to look for a place – and **more than a third** have contacted their first university.

This is at its highest for those entering Clearing via the Traditional route – **more than a third** are searching pre-10am, with **42%** also contacting their first university early.



46%

STARTED TO LOOK FOR
A PLACE IN CLEARING
BEFORE RESULTS DAY

ACTIVITY ON THE DAY IS AT ITS LOWEST FOR
THOSE WHO APPLY DIRECT TO CLEARING.
THESE APPLICANTS TEND TO BE OLDER,
AND LEAST RELIANT ON RESULTS DAY

33%

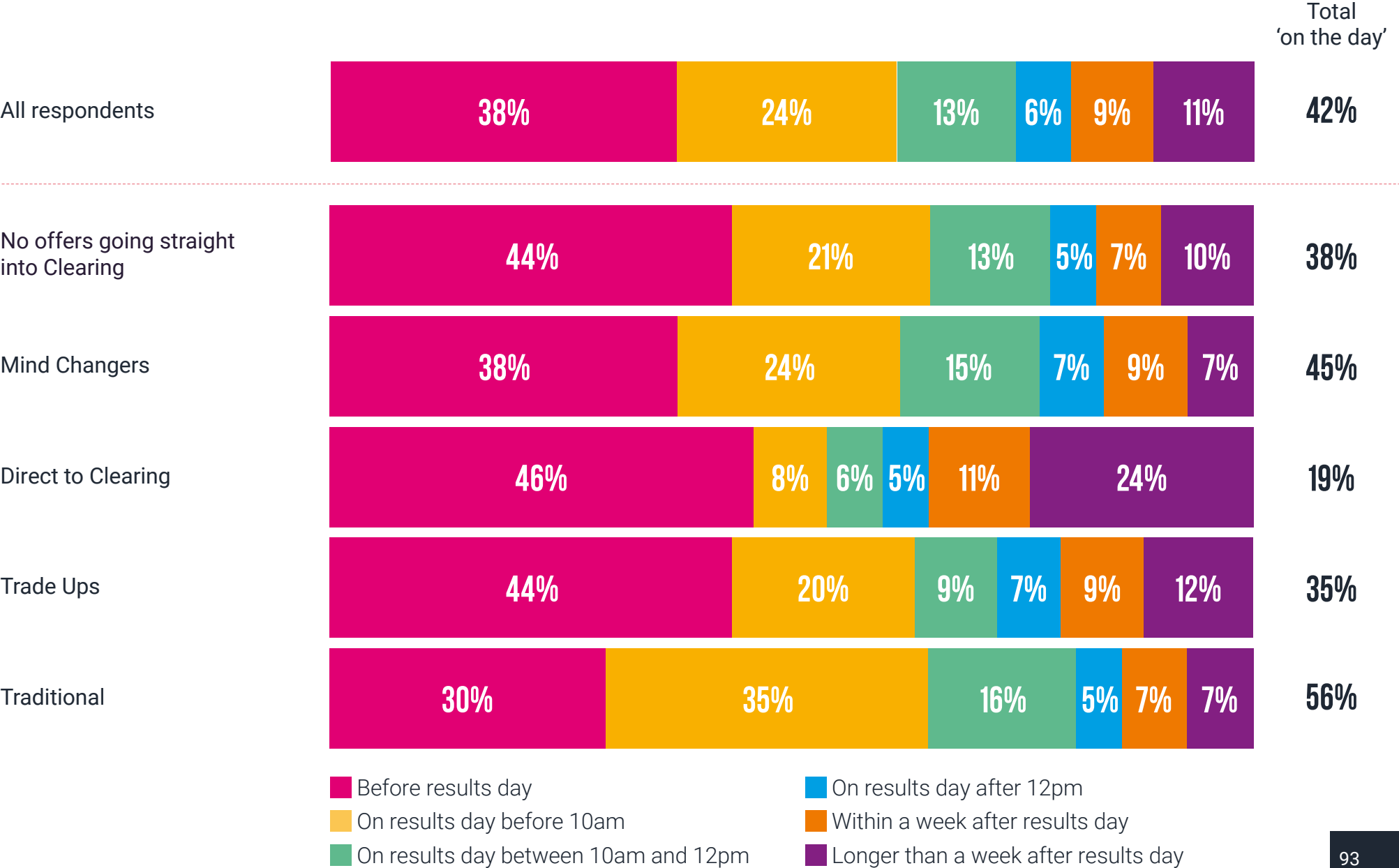
CONTACTED THEIR
FIRST UNIVERSITY
BEFORE RESULTS DAY

24%

STARTED TO LOOK
MORE THAN A WEEK
AFTER RESULTS DAY

WHEN DID YOU START LOOKING FOR A CLEARING PLACE?

(Base: 4,655)



DECISION-MAKING PEAKS ON RESULTS DAY

42%

ACCEPT THEIR
CLEARING OFFER ON
RESULTS DAY

**MOST LIKELY TO ACCEPT
ON-THE-DAY**

TRADITIONAL

**MIND
CHANGERS**

**LEAST LIKELY TO ACCEPT
ON-THE-DAY**

DIRECT

CLEARING STUDENTS DON'T COMPROMISE

The same factors apply for Clearing as they do for the rest of the cycle. It's not just a mad scramble for what courses are left.

At least 8 in 10 students consider the quality of teaching, facilities, student reviews, course content, and academic support.

Money, too, with the cost of living, financial support, and cost of travel all within the **top five most important** lifestyle factors. Compared to 2023, factors including cost of living, cost of travel, financial support, distance from home, and location in the town/city were all more important.



HOW IMPORTANT WERE THE FOLLOWING LIFESTYLE FACTORS WHEN CHOOSING YOUR PLACE IN CLEARING?



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - DECISIONS

Clearing starts on 5 July. **Don't wait until Results Day to showcase your Clearing opportunities.** Highlight your courses and make Clearing content highly visible across your website, email campaigns, and social media well in advance to capture early researchers.

Be ready the moment Results Day begins.

Optimise all communications channels and ensure you have the staff to cover you on hotlines, live chat, and social media.

Keep the **momentum going post-Results Day.**

Maintain prominent Clearing information on your website and continue targeted outreach for those still researching.



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - DECISIONS

Pay attention to those who engage with you in Clearing, they are increasingly likely to have only targeted you.

Use the marketing that worked well for you during the cycle, because what matters to students doesn't change during Clearing.

Prioritise financial information and provide both practical and reassuring resources about the cost of living at your university and town/city.

Highlight your unique strengths. **Use data-driven insights to emphasise what makes your university stand out**, such as career prospects, student satisfaction, or facilities.





ENGAGEMENT

WHICH CHANNELS TO USE & WHEN

ENGAGEMENT

WHICH CHANNELS TO USE & WHEN

Students in Clearing need different information at different stages in their decision-making but disseminated on the wrong platforms will result in even the best-designed advice and guidance falling by the wayside.

Inbound channels will make all the difference too, especially in the rush of Results Day when students need direct answers and real-life engagement.



**WORD-OF-MOUTH
MATTERS MOST**



**WORD OF MOUTH
WAS THE **MOST COMMON**
ROUTE THIS YEAR
(AND IT'S ON THE RISE)**

**UCAS COURSE
SEARCH WAS THE
MOST INFLUENTIAL
MARKETING/
ADVERTISING SOURCE**

**UCAS.COM WAS ALSO
THE **MAIN SOURCE** USED
TO FIND INFORMATION
ABOUT CLEARING IN THE
RUN-UP TO RESULTS DAY**

**RESPONDENTS ARE HAPPY
WITH THE INFORMATION
SOURCE THEY USE**

**MORE THAN
4/5**

**RATED THEM EXTREMELY
OR MOSTLY USEFUL**

**ESPECIALLY
UCAS.COM WHERE**

92%

**OF USERS RATED IT
EXTREMELY USEFUL
OR MOSTLY USEFUL**

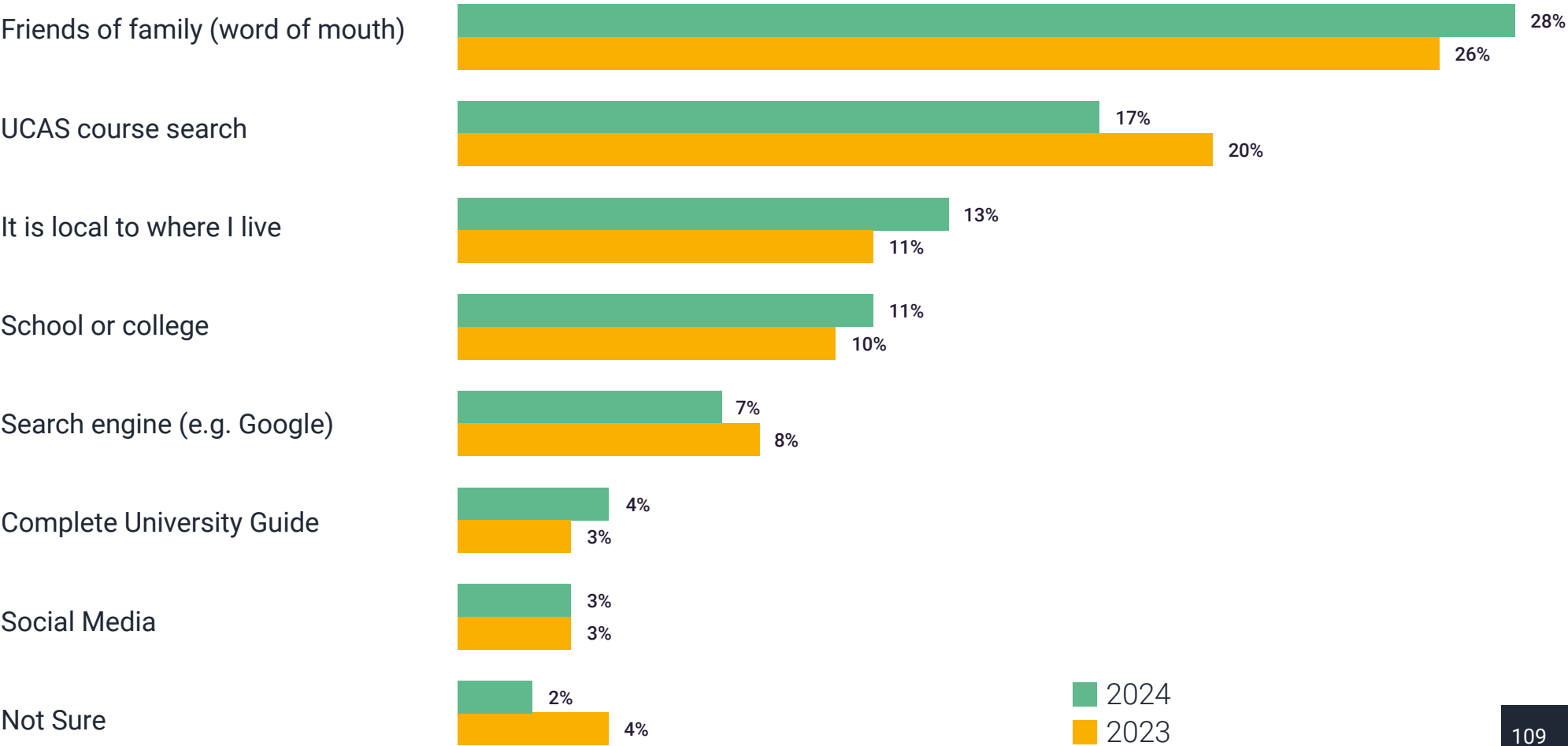
**UNIVERSITY WEBSITES
AND SPEAKING TO
ADMISSIONS STAFF
WERE ALSO RATED HIGHLY**

AND IN LINE WITH
PREVIOUS YEARS,
UNIVERSITY WEBSITES
AND **UCAS.COM** TOPPED
THE CHARTS FOR
SEARCHING FOR PLACES



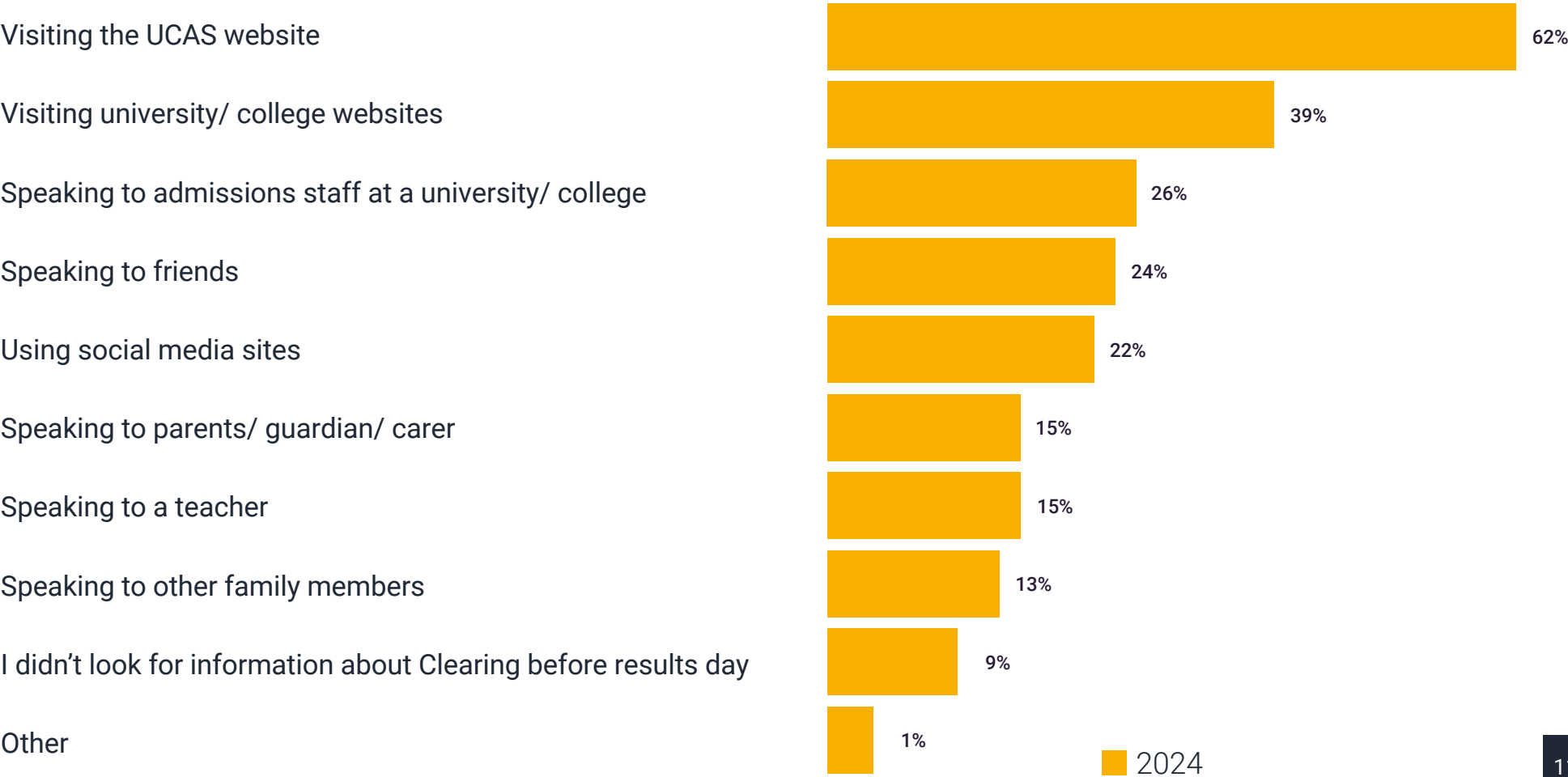
WHERE DID YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE YOU FOUND A PLACE AT IN CLEARING?

(Base 5,973)



WHERE DID YOU LOOK FOR INFORMATION ABOUT CLEARING IN THE RUN UP TO RESULTS DAY?

(Base 5,963)



**UNIVERSITY WEBSITES
AND UCAS.COM ARE
THE MOST USED
RESEARCH CHANNELS**

MOST USED RESEARCH CHANNELS BY **TRADITIONAL** USERS

Uni/college website

46%

UCAS.com Search

43%

Google

27%

Clearing Plus

21%

Complete University Guide

19%

MOST USED RESEARCH CHANNELS BY **NO OFFERS**

Uni/college website

47%

UCAS.com Search

44%

Google

32%

Social Media

18%

Clearing Plus

17%

MOST USED RESEARCH CHANNELS BY **DIRECT** USERS

Uni/college website

47%

UCAS.com Search

37%

Google

33%

Social Media

12%

None

11%

Clearing Plus

10%

MOST USED RESEARCH CHANNELS BY MIND CHANGERS

Uni/college website

49%

UCAS.com Search

39%

Google

30%

Complete University Guide

17%

The Student Room

14%

MOST USED RESEARCH CHANNELS BY **TRADE UPS**

Uni/college website

48%

UCAS.com Search

41%

Google

28%

Complete University Guide

16%

The Student Room

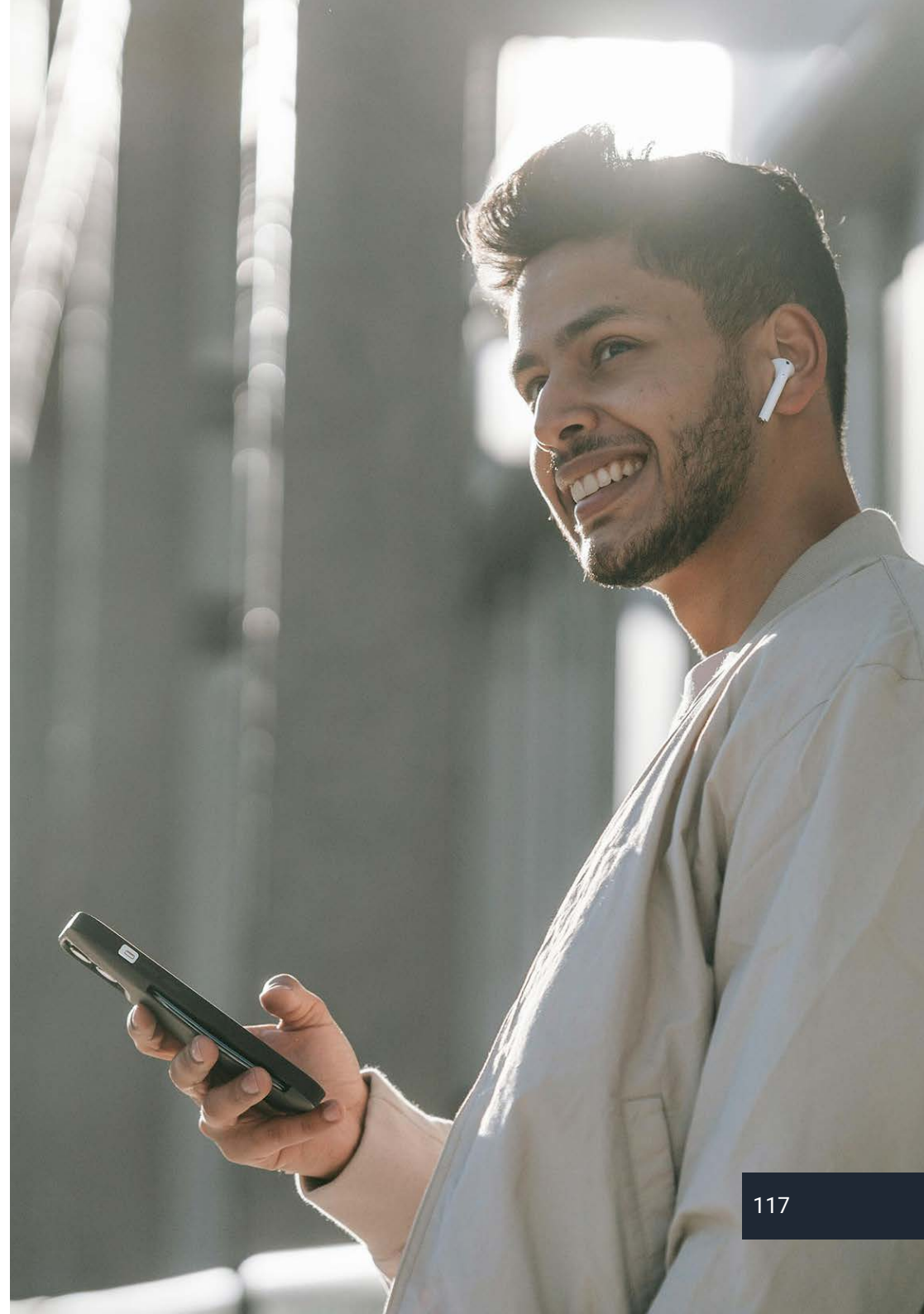
13%

Social Media

13%

BUT SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS MORE PRE-CLEARING

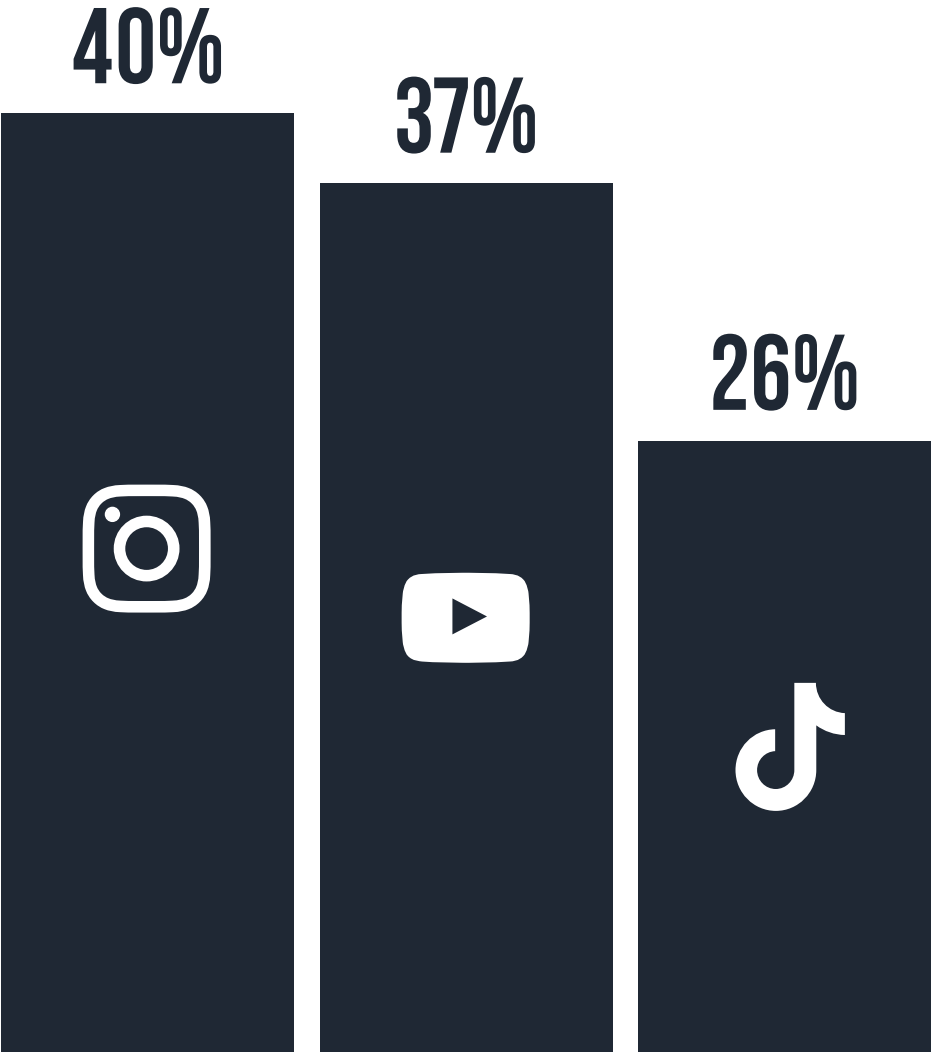
Whilst the use of social media during Clearing grew year-on-year compared to 2023, it still remains underutilised during Clearing itself.



APPLICANT DECISIONS SURVEY

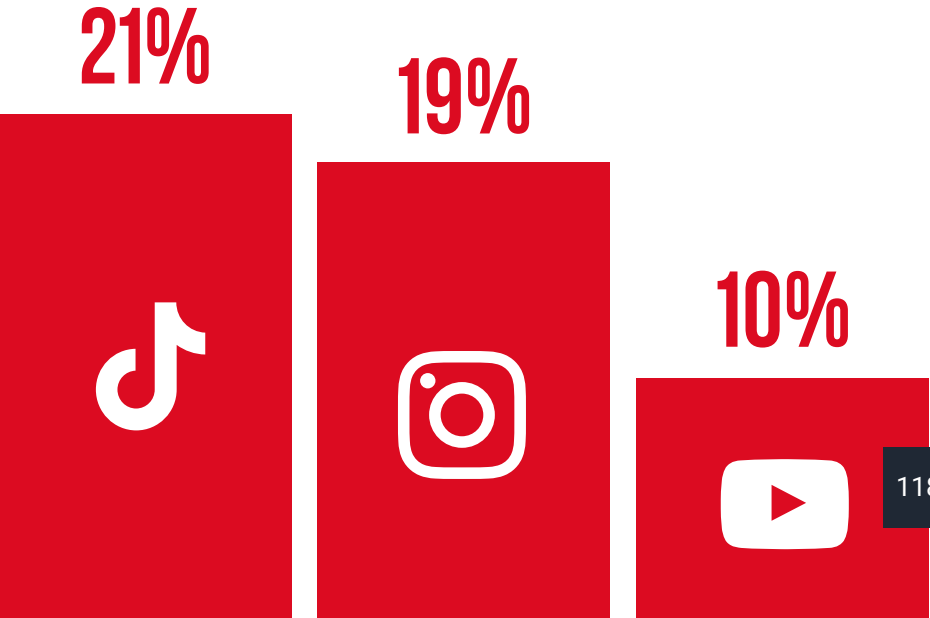
(Sent when students submit their application)

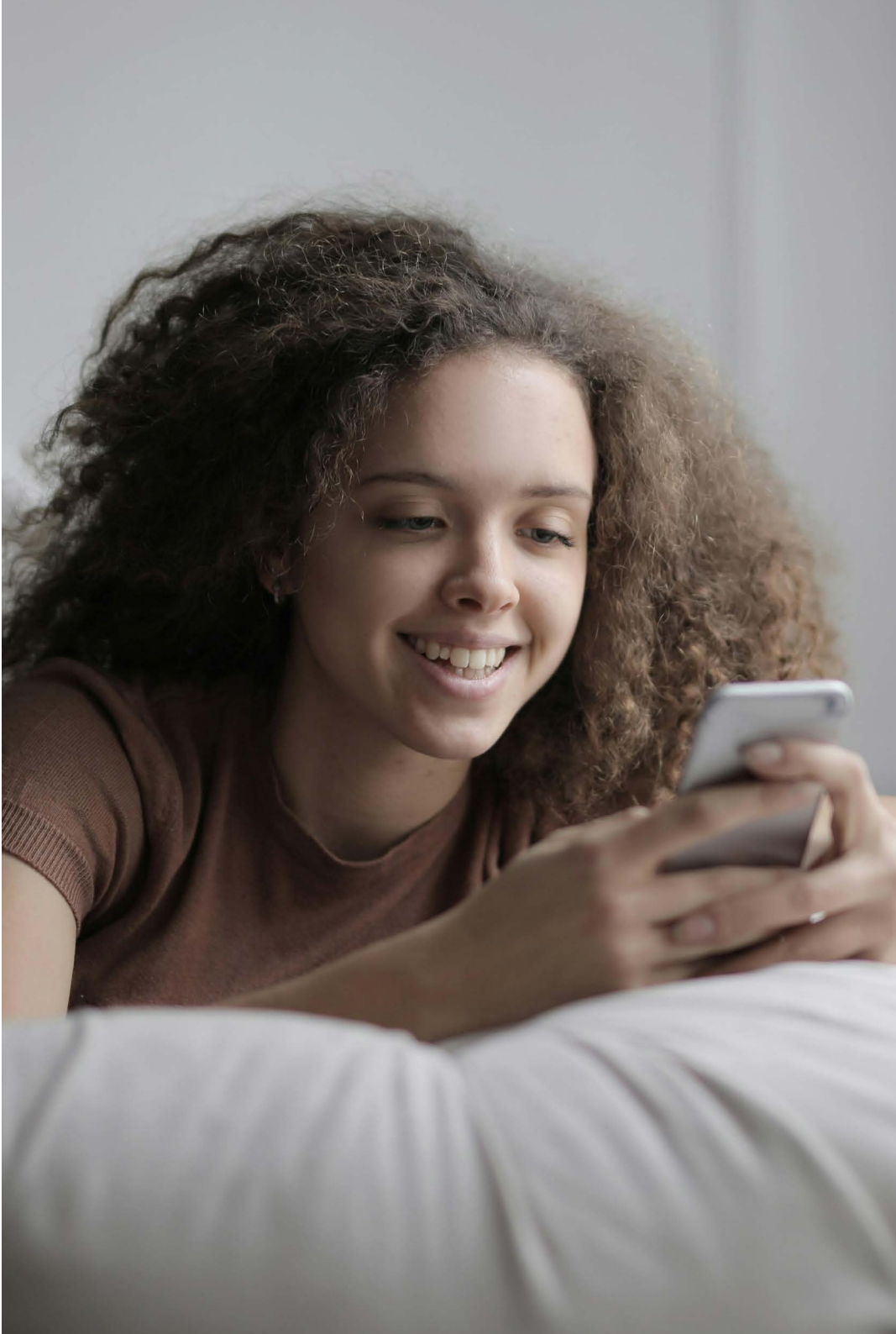
The higher popularity of Instagram and YouTube earlier in the cycle may be because of longer form content.



END OF CYCLE CLEARING SURVEY

TikTok became proportionally more prominent, whereas YouTube fell considerably – which may suggest a preference for quicker media consumption in the rush of Results Day.

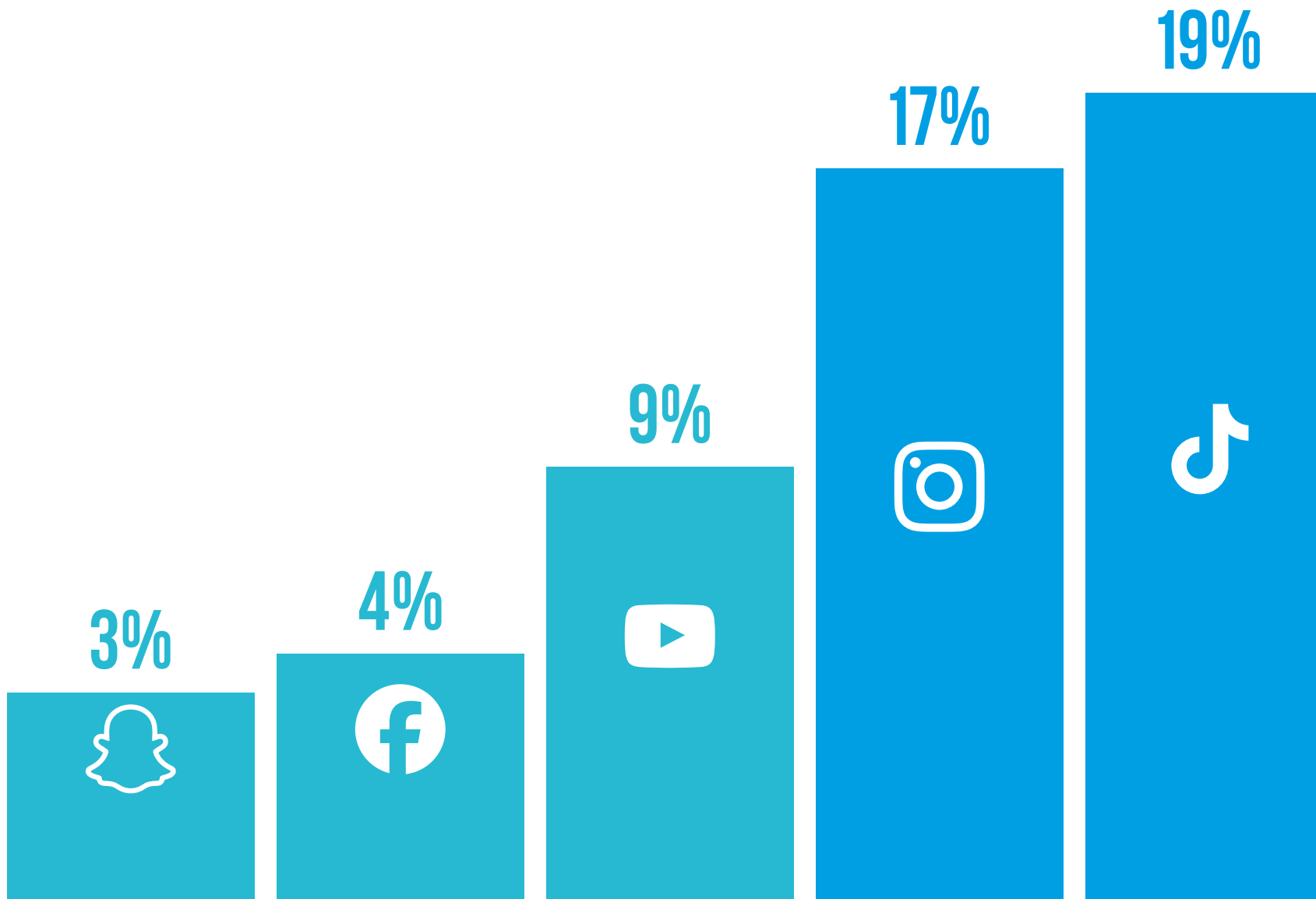




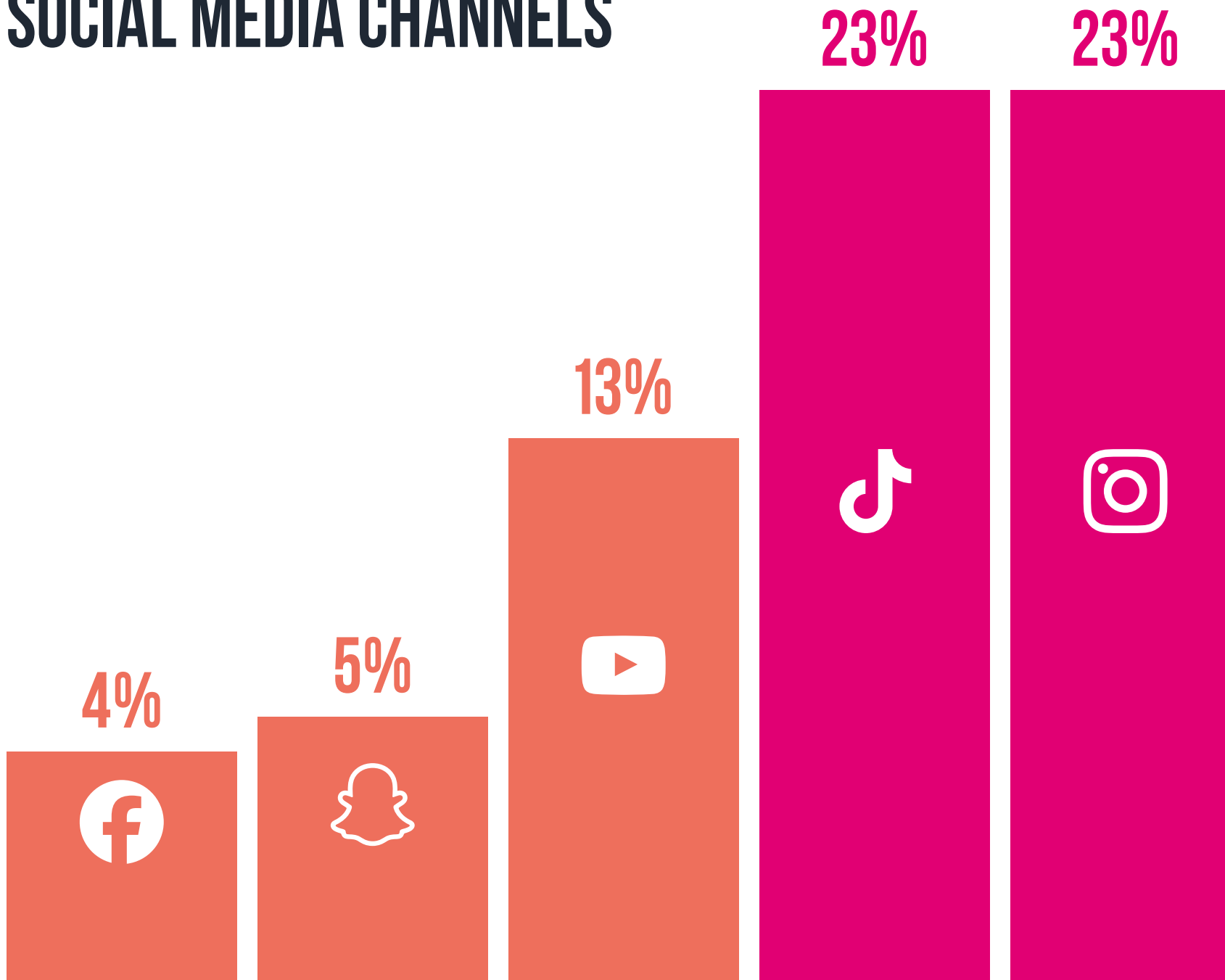
AND OF THOSE, TIKTOK AND INSTAGRAM ARE MOST USED

TikTok is **significantly more popular** for those using Decline My Place – Mind Changers and Trade-Ups. Traditional respondents were **least likely** to use social media to search for a place.

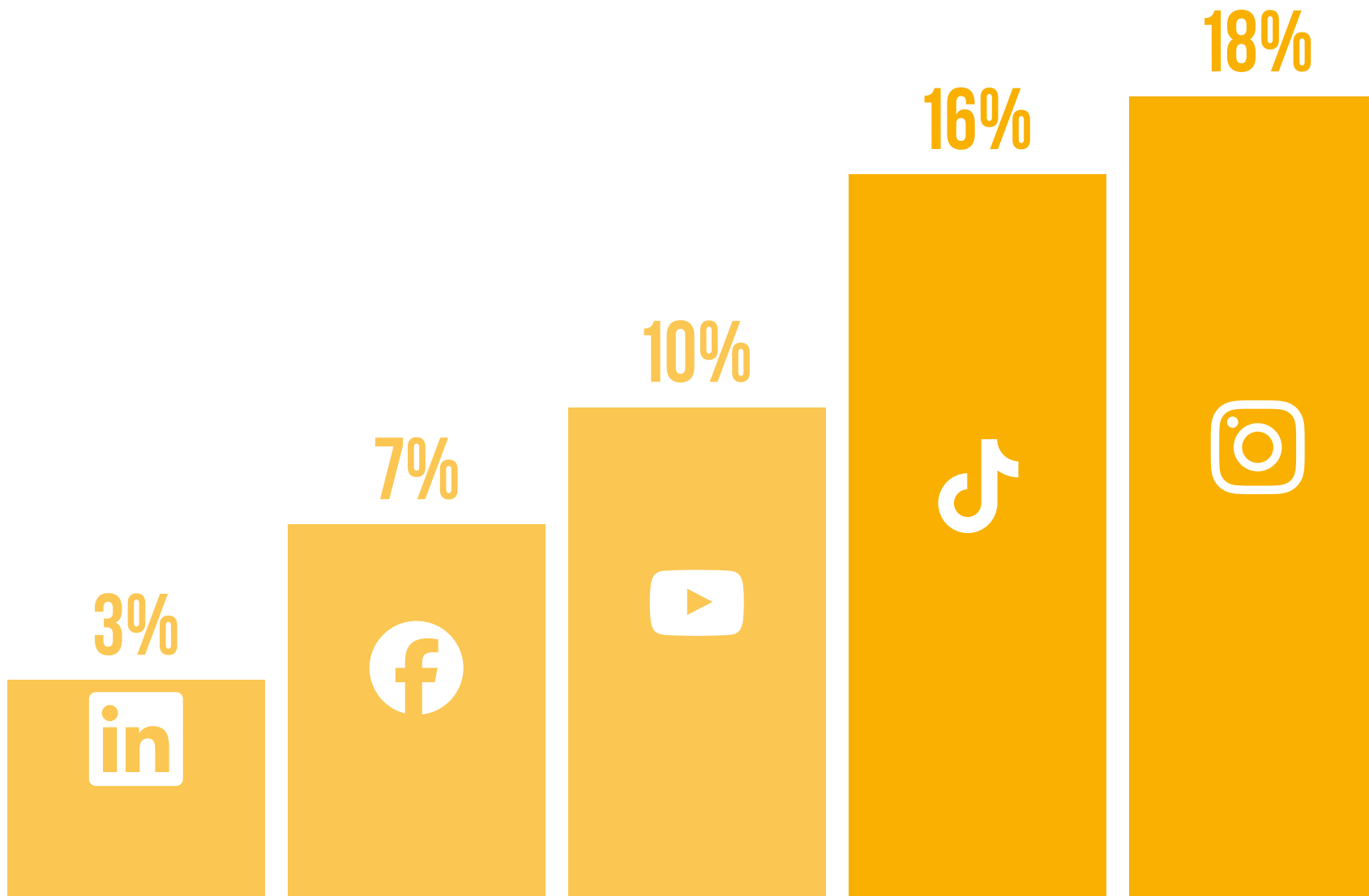
TRADITIONAL USERS MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



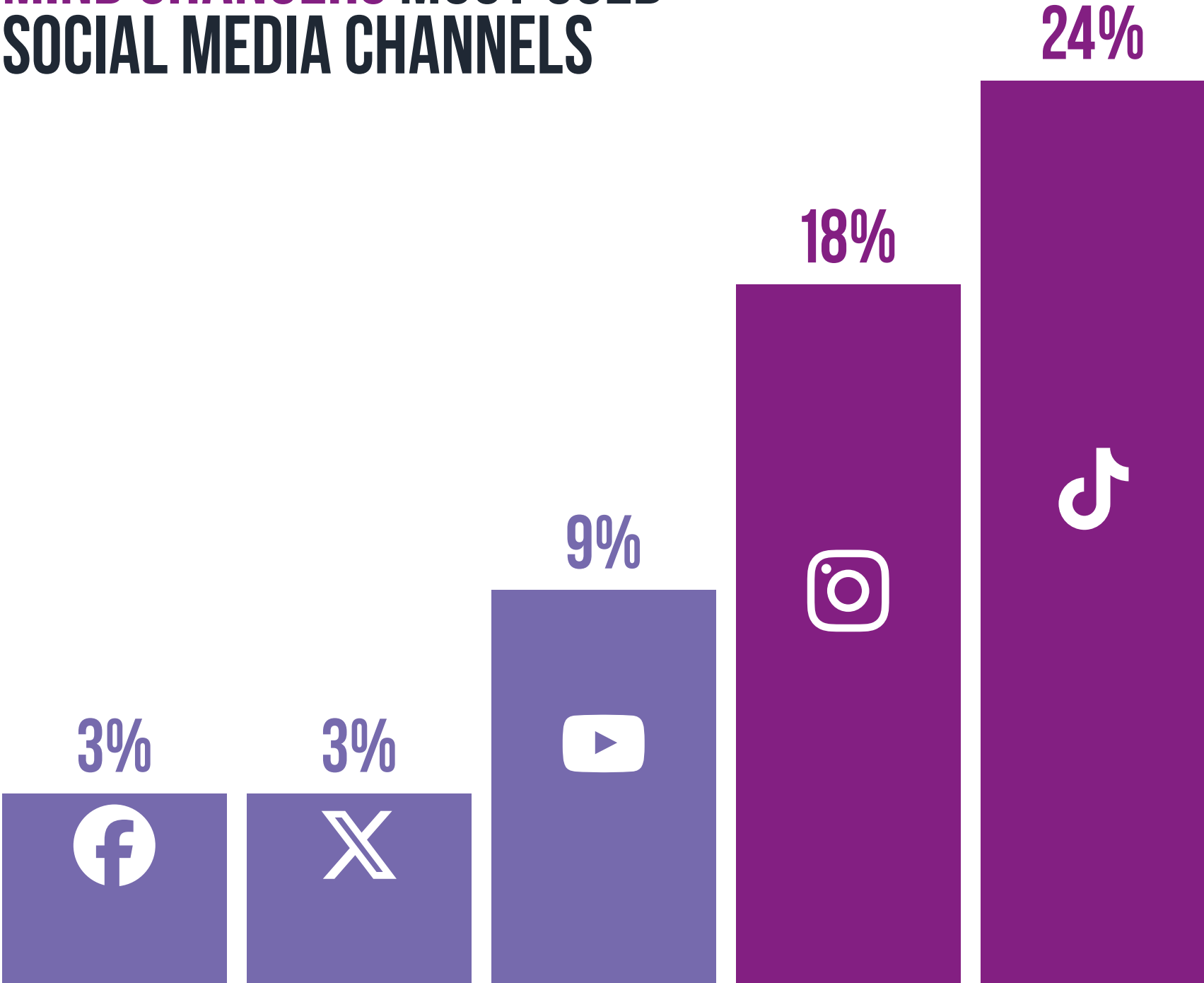
NO OFFERS MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



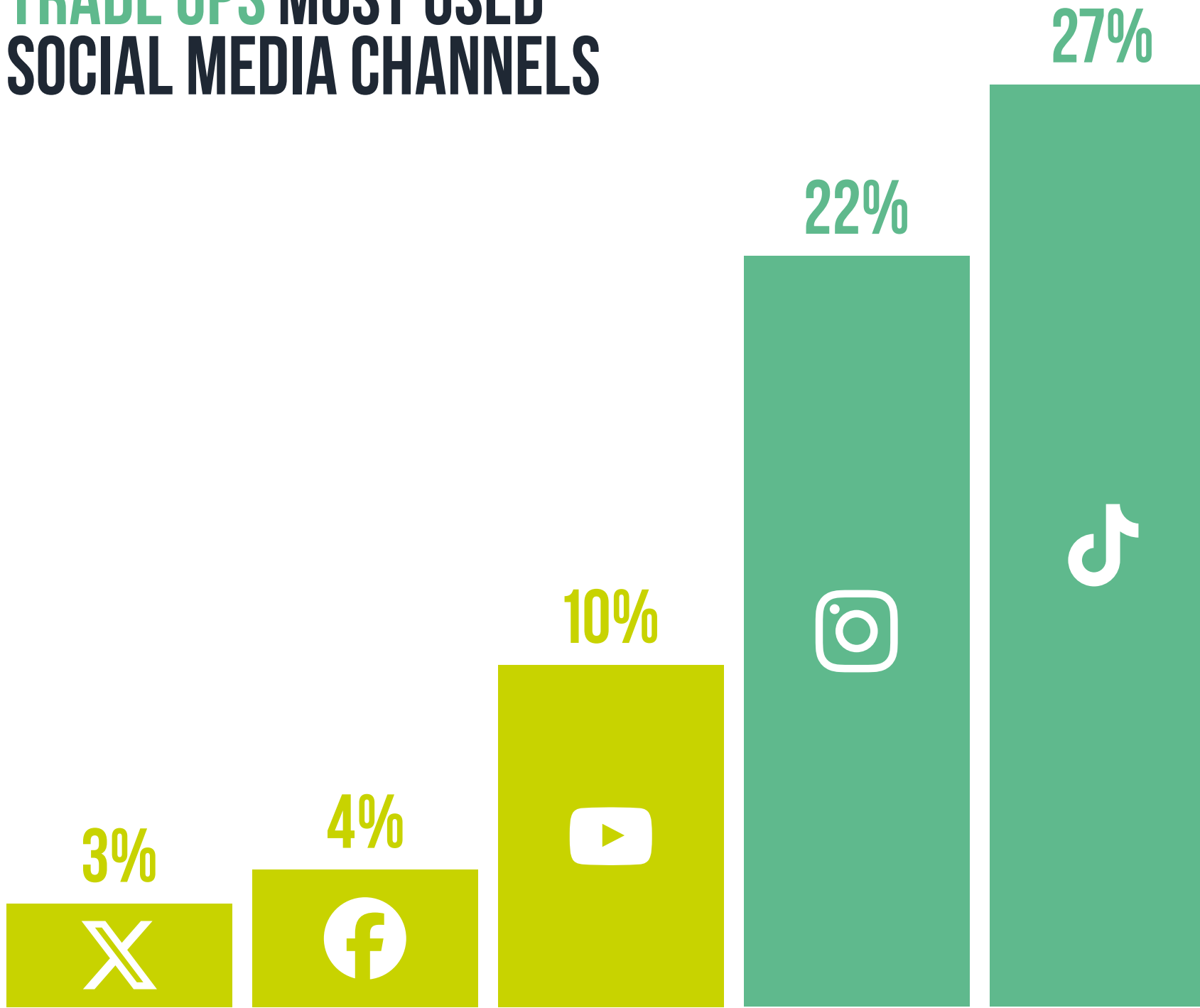
DIRECT USERS MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



MIND CHANGERS MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



TRADE UPS MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

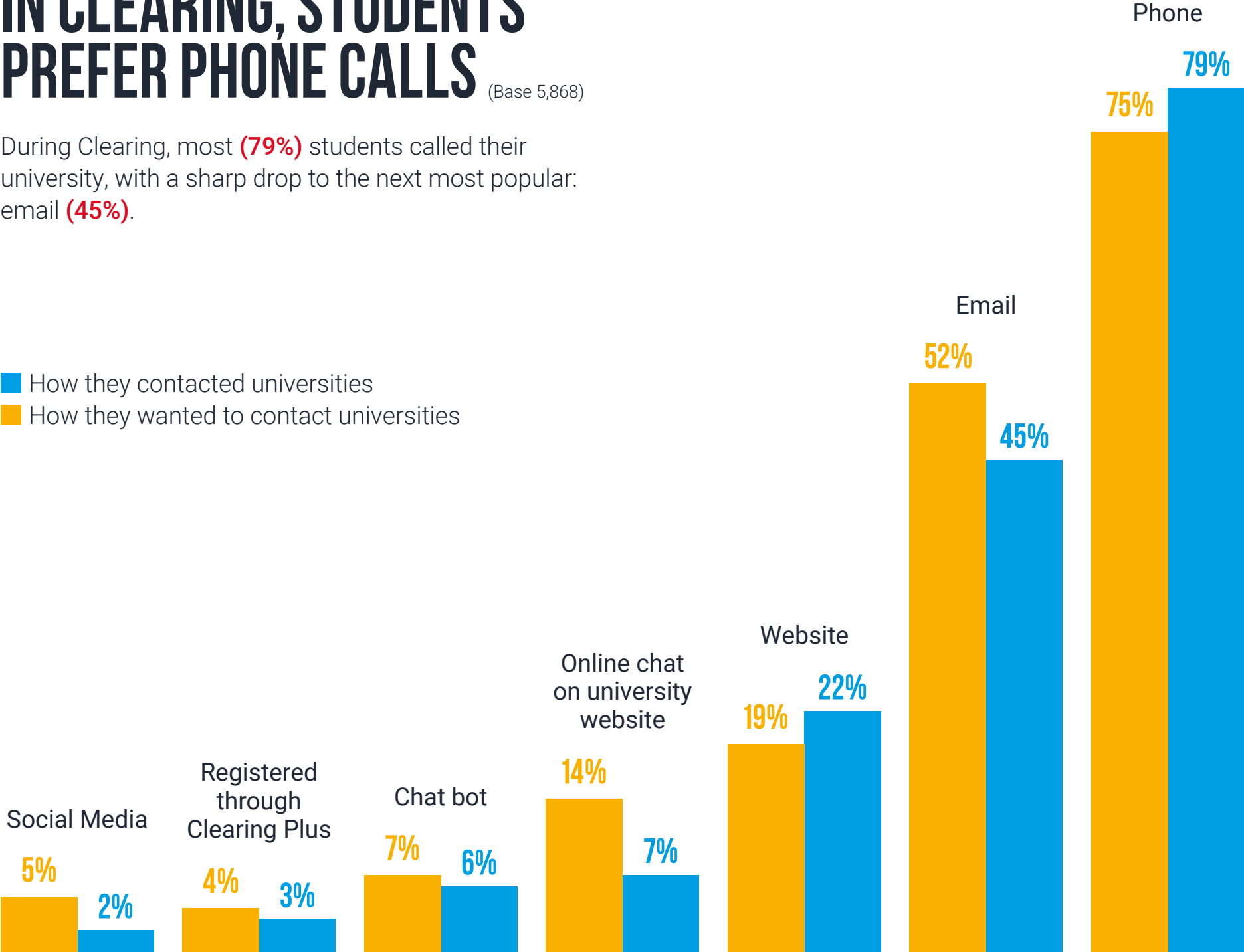


IN CLEARING, STUDENTS PREFER PHONE CALLS

(Base 5,868)

During Clearing, most (79%) students called their university, with a sharp drop to the next most popular: email (45%).

- How they contacted universities
- How they wanted to contact universities



A photograph of a group of diverse students. In the foreground, a young woman with curly hair is looking down at a tablet. Behind her, a young man with a beard is also looking at the tablet. To the left, another student is partially visible. They are all wearing casual clothing.

**MOST HAVE
NEVER VISITED
CAMPUS**

57%

**HADN'T ATTENDED AN
OPEN DAY AT THE UNIVERSITY
THEY WERE PLACED AT**

ONLY
33%

**ATTENDED ANY IN-PERSON
EVENT AT ALL AT THEIR
CLEARING UNIVERSITY**





CLEARING ADS NEED TO BE PRACTICAL

When asked whether they could recall any Clearing advertisements that stood out this year, **many respondents said they couldn't.**

Lower advertising budgets and spending freezes were common in 2024, so this is perhaps simply a response to fewer ads being placed.



**REGARDLESS, THE BEST PERFORMING
CHANNELS HELD THE TOP SPOTS
FROM 2023 INTO 2024**

SOCIAL MEDIA

UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

UCAS WEBSITE

**AND WHEN ASKED ABOUT WHAT KIND
OF MESSAGING THEY'D SEEN, STUDENTS
RECALLED THE CONTENT BEING ABOUT**

CLEARING PLACES BEING AVAILABLE

REASSURANCE: E.G. FROM EX-CLEARING STUDENTS

THE PROCESS AND WHAT TO DO

THAT IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO APPLY

COURSE SPECIFIC MESSAGES

ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - ENGAGEMENT

- | **Prioritise peer-to-peer marketing campaigns** to take advantage of the superiority of word-of-mouth.
- | **Audit your content on your own website and UCAS.com**, as these will be primary research sources.
- | Front-load your **social media campaigns earlier in the cycle**, as they are less influential during Clearing.
- | Prioritise **TikTok and Instagram**.
- | Leverage **chatbots to handle common queries**, freeing up phone lines for more complex conversations. Offer **live chat options with students or graduates**, as well as live Q&A sessions to provide personalised advice and build trust.
- | Provide **remote resources** to address the missed opportunity of a campus visit, like **virtual tours**.





SATISFACTION

WHAT WORKS & WHAT DOESN'T

SATISFACTION

WHAT WORKS & WHAT DOESN'T

There will always be an element of disappointment for some students who find themselves in Clearing, especially those who don't expect to.

The best thing universities can do to soothe these feelings is to provide clear and consistent information which is easy to find and appropriate for the individual.

Fortunately for marketing departments, the feedback is that this is already happening. But there's always room for improvement.





**CLEARING HAS BECOME A MORE
POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE
EXPERIENCE FOR MANY**

72%

**SAID IT WAS EASY
TO FIND A COURSE
THEY WANTED**

88%

**HAD A POSITIVE
EXPERIENCE OF
FINDING A COURSE
IN CLEARING**

91%

**WERE CONFIDENT
THEY HAD MADE
THE RIGHT CHOICE
IN CLEARING**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"It was extremely easy as I could filter the universities that were in Clearing to only show the ones that were offering the course I wanted to apply for."

"I searched up the course that I wanted to see if there was space, filled out an enquiry form and the next day I had an offer."

"I was able to search up my course apply online and put through UCAS and they accepted me and gave me an offer very quickly."*

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"It was easy because all you had to do is follow the UCAS step by step guide and call your chosen universities."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"I was in shock at how easy the Clearing process was. I entered a Clearing live chat and before I knew it had a verbal offer for a course."



ONLY
10%

**HAD TROUBLE FINDING A
COURSE THEY WANTED
TO STUDY**

**THIS GROUP COMMENTED THAT THE
PROCESS HAD BEEN TIME CONSUMING
- WITH LONG PHONE QUEUES AND
OCCASIONAL DISCONNECTIONS**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"It was hard to understand the process as my course didn't appear on Clearing but was accepted directly from the university."

"It took me 3 phone calls to the university to speak to someone who could start an application with me."

"Being on hold for hours, some courses still appeared to be in Clearing but were full."

**SOME STRUGGLED TO FIND COURSES THAT
MATCHED THEIR INTERESTS (PARTICULARLY
IN MEDICINE AND VETERINARY SUBJECTS),
AND OTHERS SAID THAT THE GRADE
REQUIREMENTS WERE TOO HIGH**

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"Not a lot of universities would have taken me through Clearing due to my grades so I felt very uncertain, as I kept getting no's from most universities I had rang."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"Struggled to understand how to actually choose the course as a choice."



SOME STUDENTS NEEDED MORE INFORMATION FROM UNIVERSITIES REGARDING:

- Accommodation (availability and how to book).
- Course information, modules, timetables.
- Information for disabled students (accessibility, support).
- Logistics on the Clearing process – specific to their route into Clearing, plus step-by-step guides and timelines of when decisions would be finalised.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"The accommodation process was unclear, and some universities didn't inform me until it was too late that there would be no accommodation left for Clearing students."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"A lack of information about how long processes would take caused anxiety, especially around whether I was 100% confirmed a place."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"As I am trying to move to part time at my current job, it is extremely difficult..., without knowing rough finish times."

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

"I wanted more information about bursaries or financial support specific to Clearing applicants, as this was a big factor in my decision-making."

ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - SATISFACTION

Run a 'Roadmap to Results Day' campaign.

Provide students with a clear overview of the Clearing process, including key deadlines and resources for accommodation and financial aid. Use your communication channels to **guide them through every step**.

Support students with disabilities and specific needs.

Dedicate a team or point of contact to offer tailored advice and assistance for applicants with disabilities. Ensure all communications and platforms, including live chats and digital content, are **accessible**. Highlight disability support services in your Clearing listings and provide **clear guidance on accessing accommodation, teaching facilities and resources**.



ACTION FOR UNIVERSITIES - SATISFACTION

Prioritise accommodation and financial transparency. Share detailed accommodation options and availability alongside your Clearing course listings, including **costs and deadlines**. Promote **financial aid and bursary options** tailored for Clearing students, with clear guidance on loans and scholarships. Offer dedicated channels, such as live chat or WhatsApp, to address **financial and housing queries** during the Clearing period.

Provide detailed course information on Clearing listings. Ensure your Clearing listings include **comprehensive details about course modules, career pathways, and campus culture**. This helps students make informed decisions during the process.

Continue providing **post-Results Day support, online and via phone**, there are plenty of late researchers.







From its genesis as a second chance for students, to a strategic tool used by choice to improve their opportunities – Clearing has been through a dramatic evolution these past five years.

Shaped by the proactive behaviours, shifting priorities, and new perspectives of students, the onus is now on universities to respond accordingly. As you adapt to these changes, the key to success lies in understanding and responding to the motivations of diverse applicant groups – and staying on top of the continual evolution.

From engaging earlier in the cycle to delivering personalised outreach, you have a unique opportunity to shape the Clearing experience and drive meaningful connections with prospective students of all tariffs, subjects, and backgrounds.

Apply the insights from this report, build a new Clearing strategy for a new type of Clearing, and you can enhance your recruitment strategies for the next generation of learners.

**CLEARING ISN'T
JUST A MOMENT**

A photograph of two young men sitting at a wooden desk, focused on their work. The man on the left is wearing a beige jacket over a dark shirt and has large black headphones around his neck. He is smiling and looking down at a small spiral notebook, holding a pink highlighter. The man on the right is wearing a grey hoodie and is also smiling, looking at a larger open notebook. He is holding a light blue pen. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a library or study area with bookshelves. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text 'IT'S A JOURNEY' in a large, bold, white sans-serif font.

IT'S A JOURNEY

LET'S MAKE THE
THE MOST OF IT