

UCAS

PROJECT NEXT GENERATION

EARLY DRIVERS AND
STUDY PATHWAYS
ADVISER REPORT

(UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)





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| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2024-25 academic year, by January's equal consideration deadline, the number of applicants from the USA to UK undergraduate courses increased by 12% on the previous year, marking the highest number of US applicants on record.

This report, the second of a country-by-country series, provides insights into the decision-making process of USA students, aged 13-16, as they consider higher education and career options.

It aims to help advisers support students mindfully and effectively at key points in their journey. The research is based on a 2024 summer survey involving 2,035 young people, with 400 USA participants, examining their motivations, information requirements, and sources of influence.

Compared to other international markets, there are fewer cultural obstacles to overcome between the UK and the USA, but there remain some key differences to consider. The key findings of this report comprise:

- ▶ American students are optimistic about their current and future lives, trusting that things will fall into place if they focus on their passions and strengths. Just 21% are actively mapping out their future.
- ▶ The UK is their preferred study location, with almost half (49%) of students considering it. The nearest European competitor, France, would be considered by 38% of students.
- ▶ Despite being the world centre of social media, and this being the most digital generation yet, young people in the USA still rely heavily on analogue advice from family (65%) and school (61%).
- ▶ The prestige of the UK education system is important to USA students, but life experience is the most powerful attractor for those hoping to study abroad (58%).
- ▶ Cost is a significant barrier to moving overseas, with 45% of respondents concerned about it, and over a third (35%) saying that their choices are restricted by lack of funds/funding options.



| FOREWORD

The UK's international student enrolment landscape has changed significantly over the last decade, with more and more overseas learners attracted by the prestige, quality of education, and career opportunities that British degrees can offer.

The United States of America has always been a big part of this picture, but recently there has been a boom in demand. As student mobility increases globally, UK universities continue to be attractive to students in the USA – with factors like fees and living costs, shorter degrees and safety being key pulls. We expect this to be a rising trend.

But, whilst the cultural and linguistic barriers between the UK and US are much lower than for students from countries like India or China, there are still plenty of differences for advisers to consider when providing guidance on UK university admissions, and not only during the application stage. Whilst many reports investigate sentiment of current applicants to higher education, we hope this one is useful to you, in the crucial work you do in providing expert information, advice and guidance on a world full of opportunities. UCAS is proud of its community of advisers and counsellors, and as you read through this report, please do reach out to us with your thoughts and ideas as to how we can play our part in continuing to provide support for you and your students into the future.

Des Cutchey
Head of International



How to make the most of this report:

1. Pay close attention to **the nuances in regional preferences, changing behaviours by age, differences between study vs career advice, and each chapter's focus on specific support needs.** As teachers, counsellors, and advisers – you can use these insights to tailor your conversations very specifically and plan your study abroad guidance sessions on an individual level.
2. Look closely at **who students consider influencers, with teachers and counsellors coming a close second to parents and families.** Analogue guidance plays a huge role in helping students navigate a world of opportunities to find their 'best fit', but some advice is more valuable from counsellors and some more so from parents.
3. At the end of each chapter, you will find a **summary of UCAS Tools and Resources that will help you and your students navigate the UK higher education system and process.** This covers the whole student journey, from discovery tools when a student is assessing all options, through to enrolment and integration. **UCAS is much more than just an application portal, it's your local ally with all the information you need.**

Methodology

WE CONDUCTED A BESPOKE RESEARCH PROJECT WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AGED 13-16

Engaging with 2,035 young people (400 from the USA) we set out to answer two big questions:

1. What are they planning for the future, and what drives/helps them to make these choices?

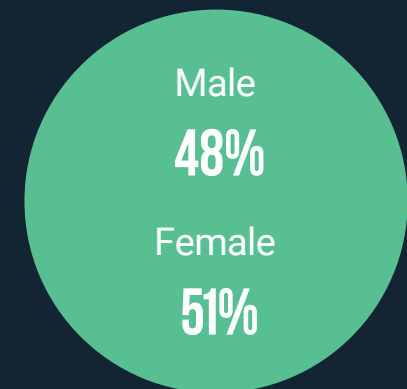
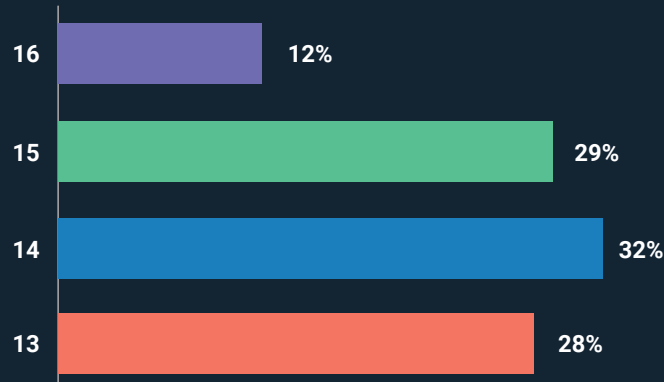
2. How do they choose particular pathways, subjects, careers, or professions?

United States of America (USA)



California 11%	Ohio 5%
Florida 7%	Pennsylvania 5%
Texas 7%	Arizona 4%
N. Carolina 6%	Georgia 4%
New York 5%	Illinois 4%

Age



CHAPTER 1- FEELINGS & CONFIDENCE

Perfectly embodying the American spirit of positive idealism, this is a group who are optimistic about both their life today and what tomorrow may bring.

Bridging the gap between older Gen Z teens and some of the first Gen Alpha intakes – this cohort is likely to host some of the most progressive, flexible, and alternative-thinkers on campus. They are far less focused on the traditional values of university, favouring personal empowerment and mental wellness over chasing high salaries.

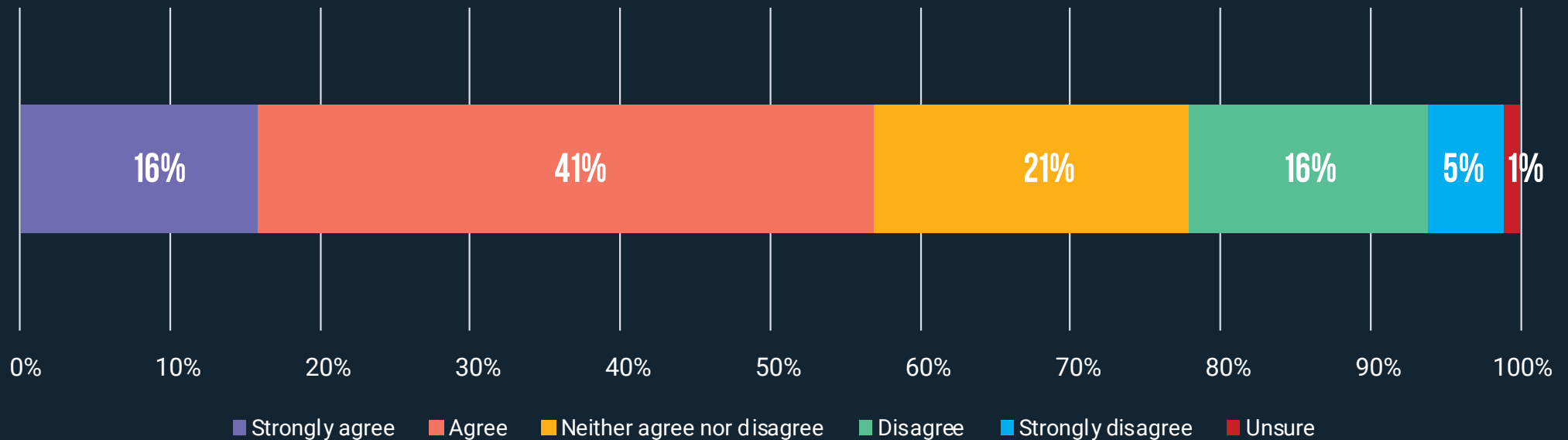
And it's this relaxed, blue-sky thinking that explains why the vast majority (84%) told us that they're happy with where they are right now, and even more (89%) are looking at their futures with positivity and excitement.

Putting their faith in passions and interests, most (57%) aren't trying to chart a fixed course but are trusting that everything will fall into place if they focus on what they enjoy and what they're good at.





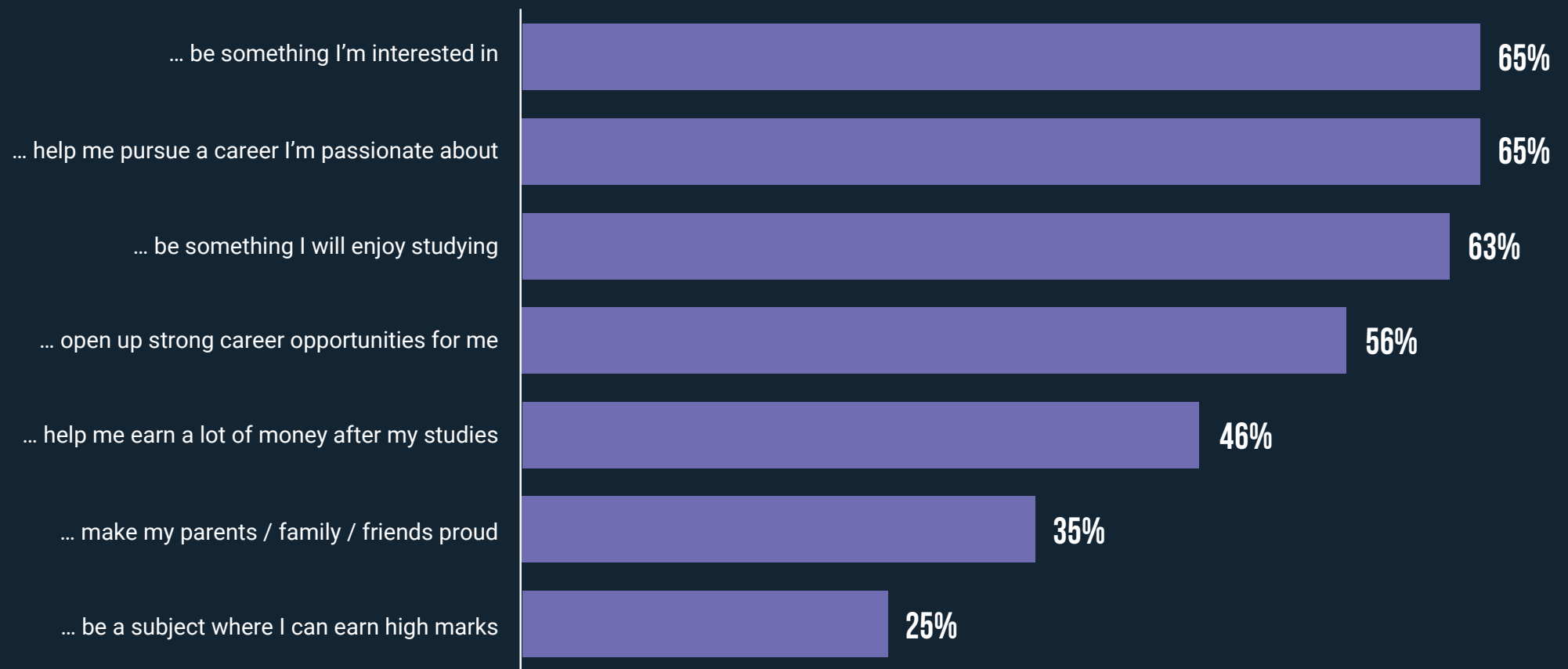
I'm not trying to map out my future – I'm sticking to what I enjoy / what I am good at and the rest will take care of itself



I'm not trying to map out my future – I'm sticking to what I enjoy / what I am good at and the rest will take care of itself P55. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (400)

As an adviser, you can encourage this approach by not overwhelming them with rigid plans. Help them to connect their interests and their strengths to potential academic and career pathways, translating their passions into practical steps, without diminishing their sense of autonomy or enthusiasm.

The subject I study at university should...



Whilst this open-minded optimism is characterised en masse by respondents, some things do change by age:

- ▶ At 13, they are the most likely to embody the idea that the future will take care of itself.
- ▶ At 14, they're looking to study a subject that will open up strong career opportunities (62%) and help them earn a lot of money after their studies (54%).
- ▶ At 15, interests are the most important factor – citing that the subject they study at university should be something they're interested in (77%) and that it should help them pursue a career they are passionate about (69%).
- ▶ At 16, they feel more parental pressure to make some firm decisions about direction, as well as being more careful to consider financial constraints. But the passion-driven outlook remains, with 67% still focused on finding a subject they'll enjoy.

But following their instincts doesn't mean they're not planning their paths, with 62% having considered their future study plans and 72% having started researching. Over half intend to apply to university immediately after school and 82% expect to apply at some point in the future.

Your job is to respect their wish to follow their hearts, whilst providing them with guidance that equips them to pursue secure careers. Because having perhaps seen Millennial parents in stressful corporate jobs, they might see a dichotomy between passions and payslips – so you must prompt them to understand and self-select what is realistic and achievable:

- ▶ Do their passions align with secure job markets?
- ▶ Can the skills learned from their hobbies be applied to potential careers?
- ▶ What future professions match current hobbies and what are the best routes to follow?

"DO SOMETHING THAT YOU ENJOY & MAKES YOU HAPPY BECAUSE THEN IT WON'T FEEL LIKE WORK AT ALL."

Female, 15

"JUST GIVE IT TIME & DON'T OVERTHINK AT 13 YEARS OLD WHAT YOU WANT TO BE."

Female, 13

"MY MOM KEEPS TELLING ME THAT I CAN DO ANYTHING I PUT MY MIND TO AS LONG AS MY MIND IS LOCKED IN WITH A CAN-DO ATTITUDE."

Male, 16

"FOLLOW YOUR PASSION & YOU HAVE TIME TO CHANGE YOUR MIND."

Male, 14

Whether by chance or design, the link between study intentions and future career plans already shows a trajectory leading to strong industries. Whilst they may not be making long-term decisions based on more traditional career considerations, there is a clear path towards the UK's growth sectors:

TOP SUBJECTS CONSIDERED AFTER THE AGE OF 16



Computing / computer science
(22%)

TOP SUBJECTS CONSIDERED FOR UNIVERSITY



Computing / computer science
(21%)

TOP SECTORS FOR FUTURE CAREERS



Information Technology / IT
(19%)



Computer gaming and design
(18%)



Computer gaming and design
(17%)



Engineering
(14%)



Business & Management
(18%)



Engineering
(17%)



Healthcare
(13%)

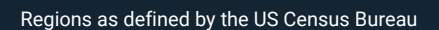
P10b What subject(s) would you consider studying after school after the age of 16 (e.g. when you do A-levels, Baccalaureate, etc)? Base: Those who have an idea of what they want to study (373) S50 What subject(s) would you consider studying at university? Base: Those who are likely to apply to university (327)

P20b Which of the following best describes the sector(s) in which you'd like to work in the future? Base: Those who have thought about their career plans (373)

By underscoring these links, you can help keep students on paths that will meet both their current personal and future professional needs, especially by highlighting how broad subject areas can branch into specialised fields. This may inspire curiosity to uncover career options they might not have considered.

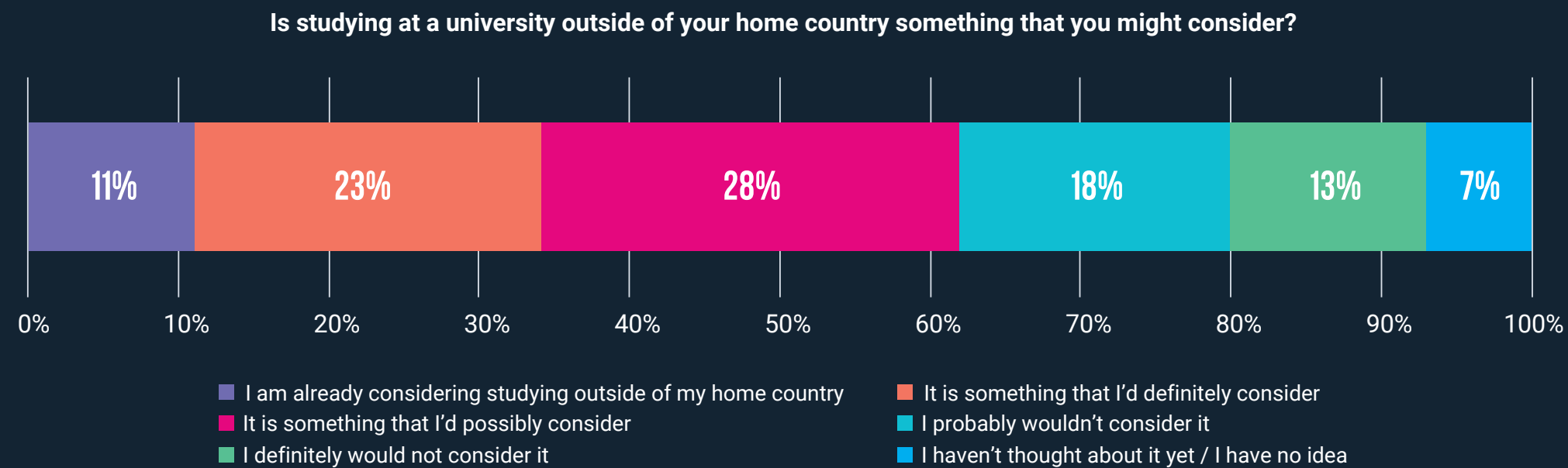
It's an important factor to emphasise - USA students are more used to the concept of learning broadly at the beginning of a degree and specialising later, whereas UK education emphasises subject depth and specialism from the beginning. It's also more common in the USA to be able to switch majors, whereas changing courses mid-degree in the UK is difficult. By focusing on how subject areas can lead to diverse careers, you can offset feelings of constriction.

- ▶ USA students from the West (e.g. California, Arizona) are significantly more likely to consider studying Computer Gaming & Design (25%), and also select the highest number of subjects overall at 3.28.
- ▶ Meanwhile, fewer students from the South (e.g. Florida, Texas) say they'd like to study Law (9%).
- ▶ Knowing how your region favours specific subjects will help when having course-specific conversations.



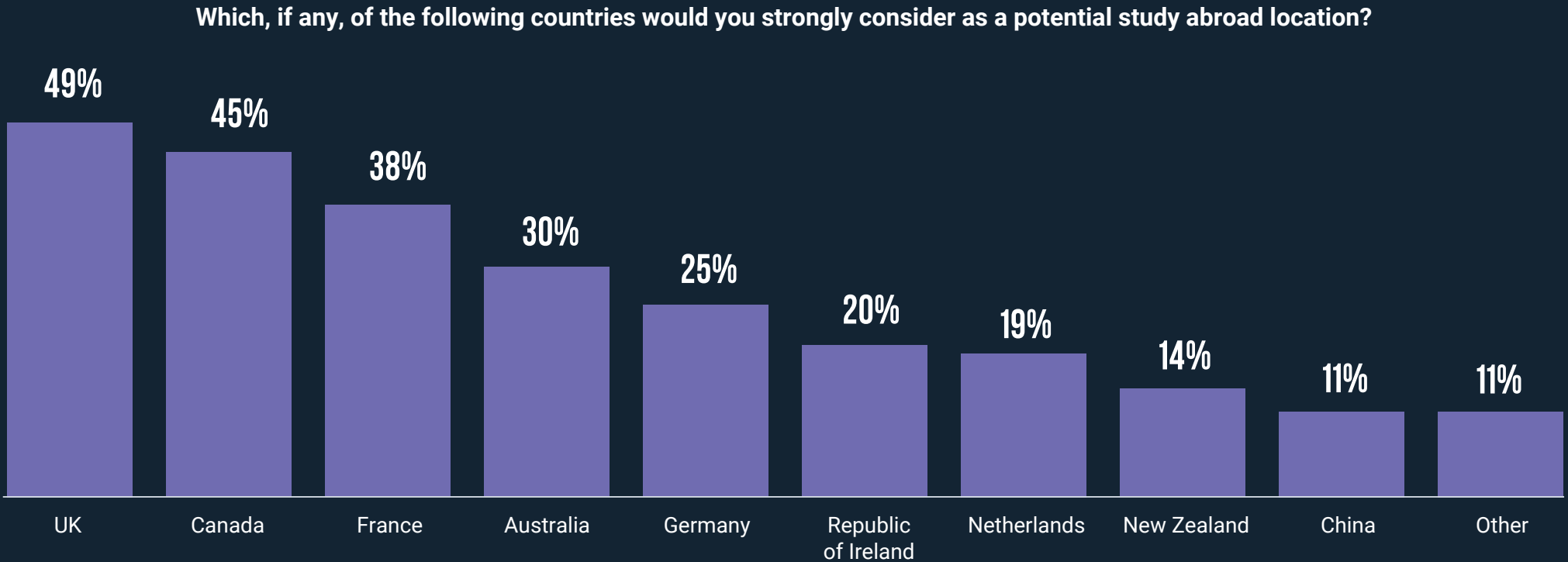


But despite the size and breadth of opportunity in their home country, the prospect of studying abroad is something that almost two-thirds (62%) of USA students are open to, rising significantly as they get older.



S90 Is studying at a university outside of your home country something that you might consider? (327)

And of all the destinations being considered, the UK is the most compelling, appealing to almost half (49%) of all respondents. Canada comes in second, at 45%, but the nearest European contender, France, is attractive to 38% of respondents.



S120a. Which, if any, of the following countries would you strongly consider as a potential study abroad location? (Where applicable, respondent not shown their home country 201)

For USA students, it's not only the UK's global reputation of academic prestige, but also the added compatibility of language and culture. **Yet whilst there are fewer barriers than studying in a non-English speaking country, early and proactive advice is still key to help students understand their choices and options.**



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

1. **Subject Guides** - Detailed guides provide insights into what it's like to study specific subjects, how to access these fields, and the potential career opportunities they offer. These guides help students make informed decisions about their future.
2. **The Hub** - A tailored experience that adapts to each student's interests and goals, offering personalised advice, relevant tools, and guidance to ensure they feel supported at every stage of their journey.
3. **International Podcast** - Experts and students discuss what it's like to study in the UK, budgeting, visas, post-graduate options and more.
4. **Subject spotlights** - Free, on-demand virtual experiences designed to help explore various subjects before applying, enhance personal statements, and make informed decisions.

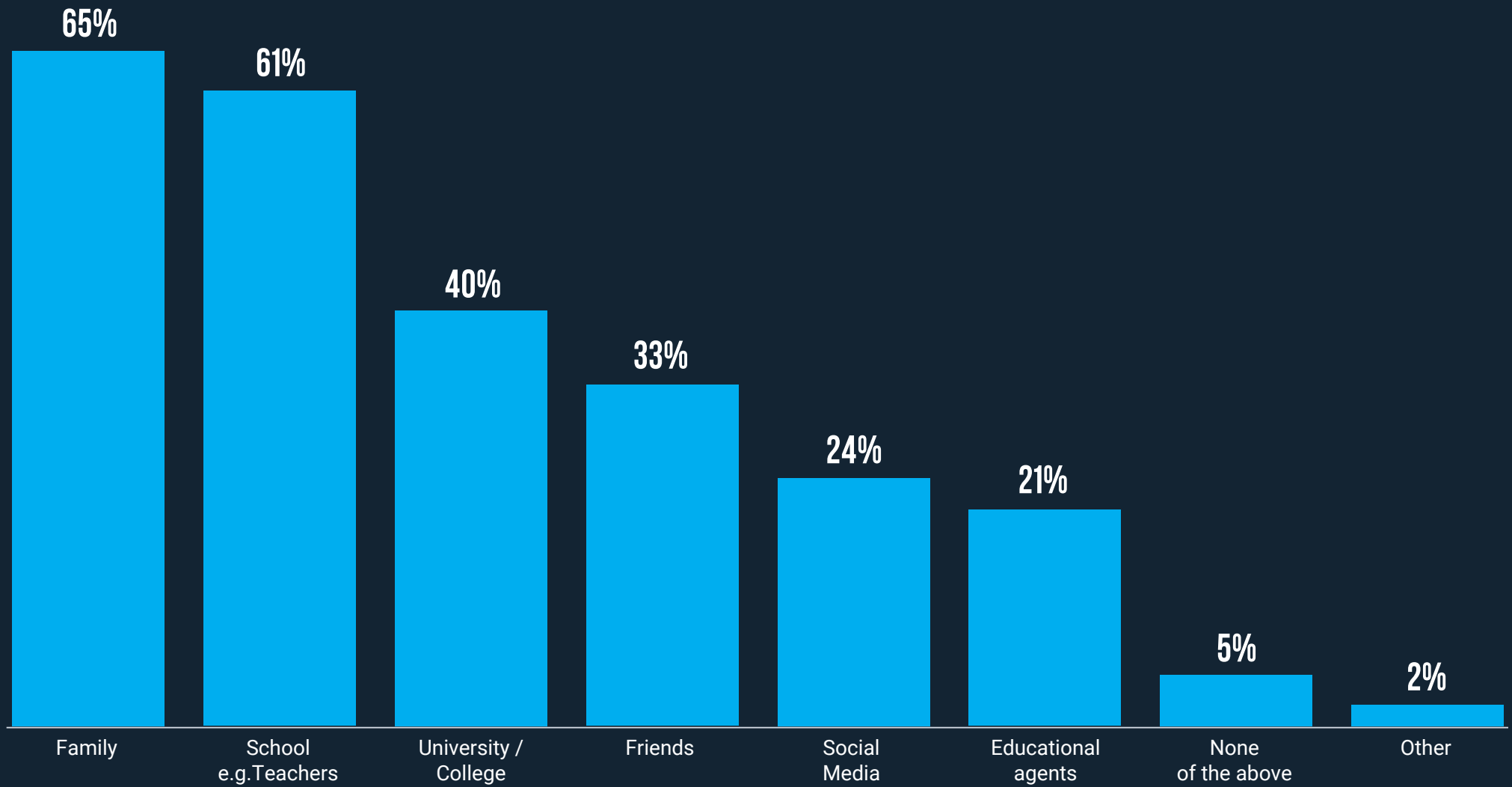
CHAPTER 2 - INSPIRATION & INFLUENCERS

For a cohort who were all born in the 21st century, inspiration and influence are more diverse than ever, reflecting the widest variety of opportunities to date.

But despite being the most digital generation yet, these prospective students in the USA remain reliant on in-person influences, both at home and at school.

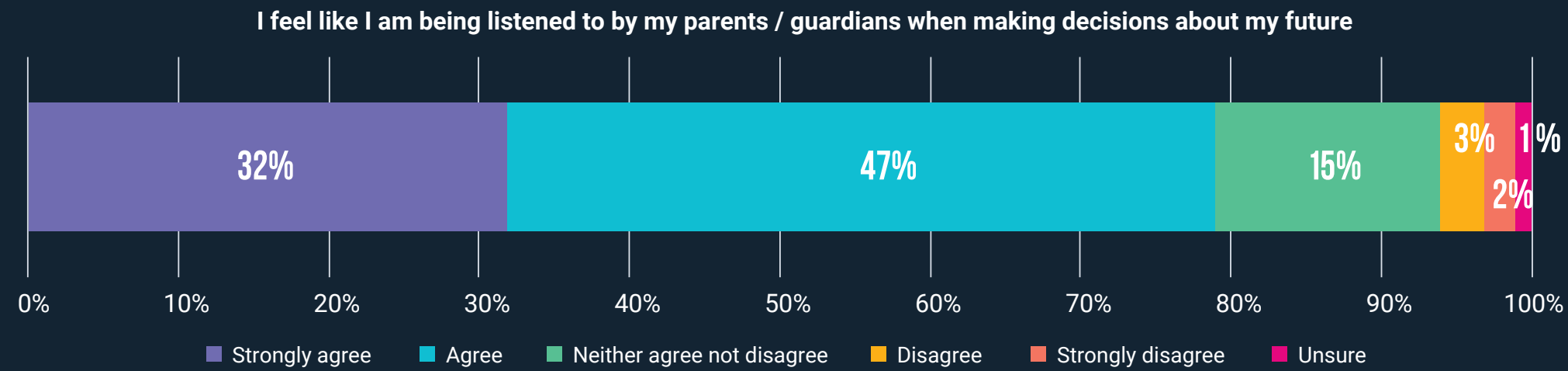


Where do you look for advice on university study?



S70b. Where do you look for advice on university study? (313)

Whilst family remains key throughout, they are particularly influential for younger students. Parents and guardians often play a decisive role in shaping their aspirations, with 79% of respondents saying that they listen to them when making decisions about the future. However, 47% admit this can come in the form of parental pressure (rising to 55% at 16 years old.)



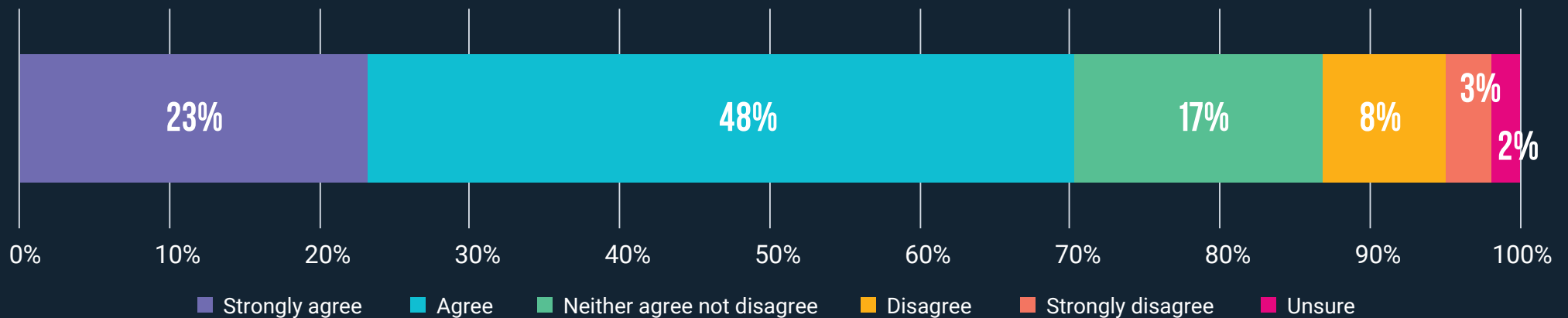
I feel like I am being listened to by my parents / guardians when making decisions about my future:P55 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (400)





Perhaps for this reason, teachers play a bigger role as young people age (along with institutions like universities and colleges). But across all age groups, 71% say that their teachers help them to make meaningful connections between classroom learning and future careers.

My teachers help me understand how the things we are learning about might help us in life / future careers

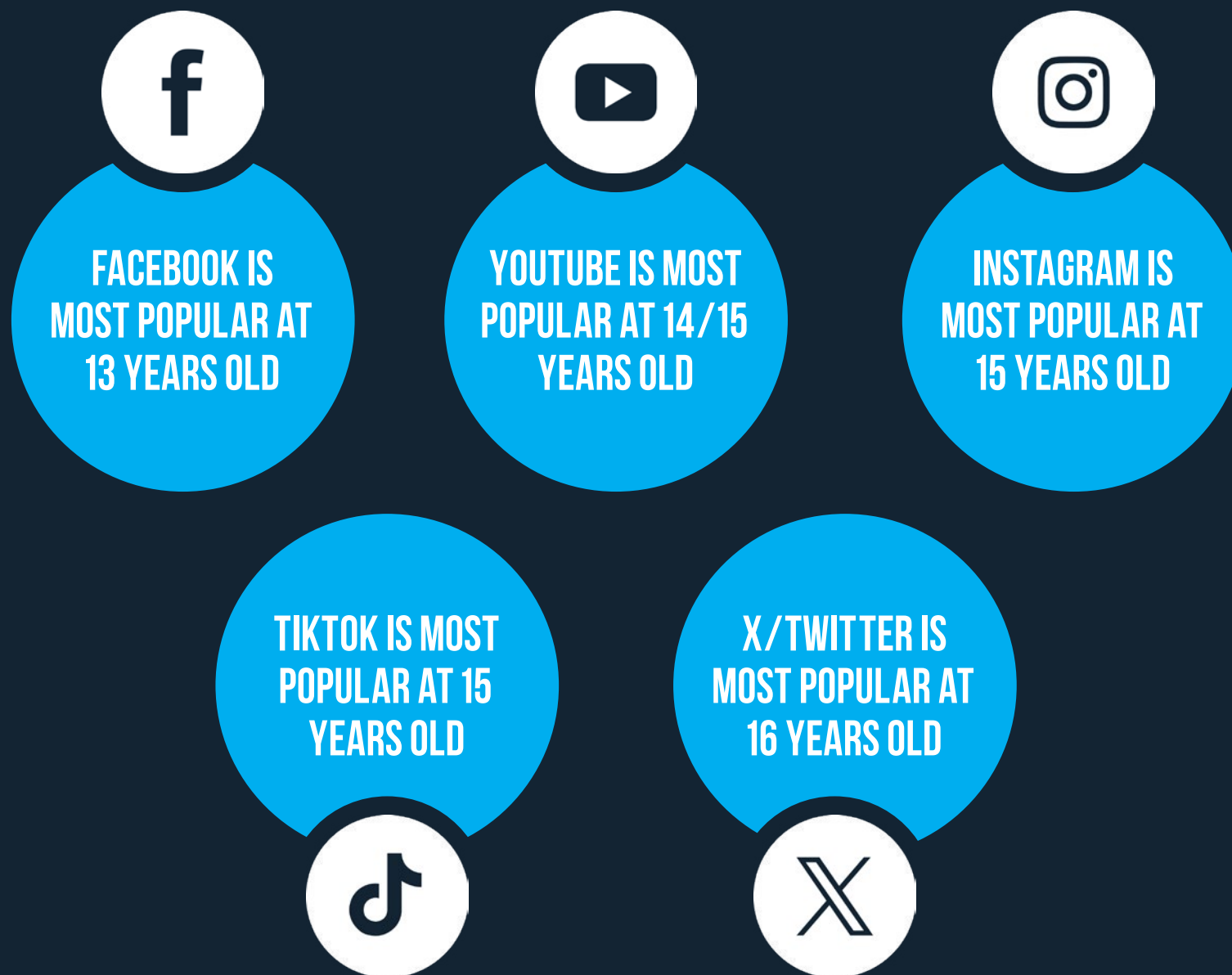


My teachers help me understand how the things we are learning about might help us in life / in future careers:P55 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (400)

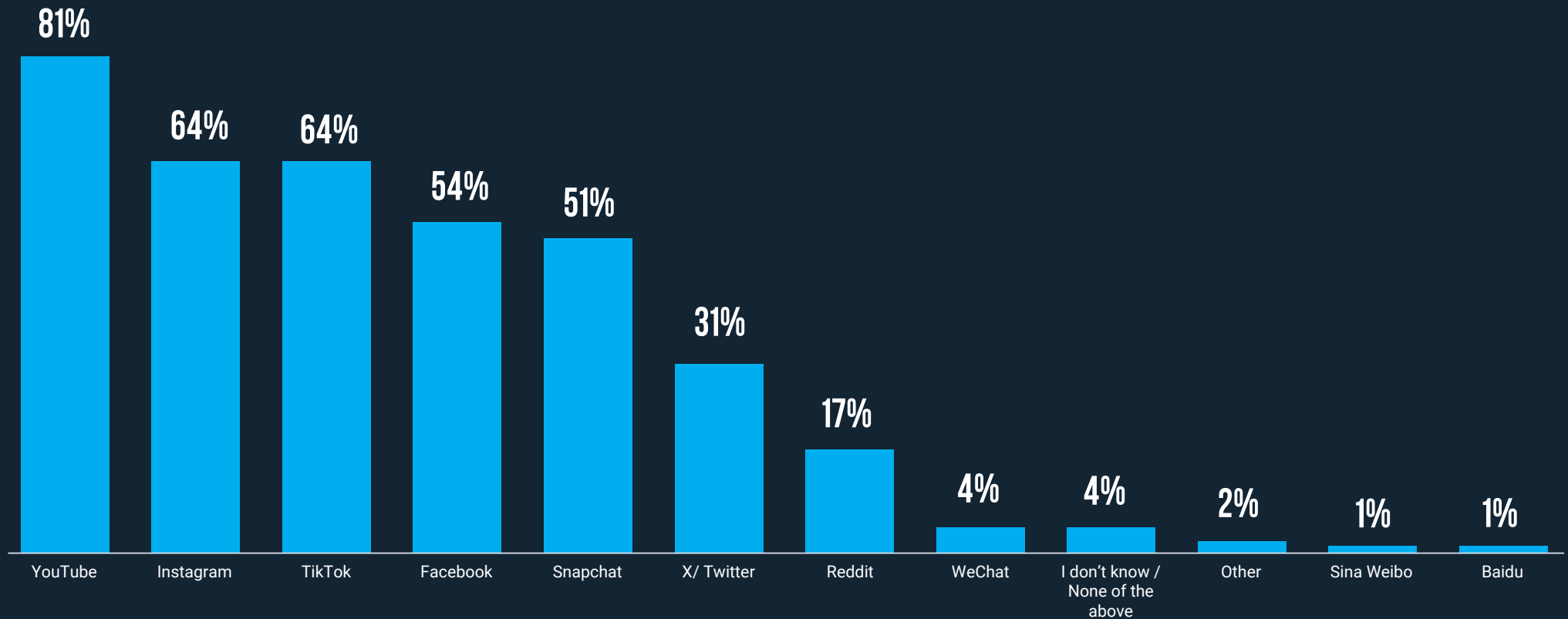
As advisers, you can support the guidance of family and friends by providing objective, practical advice and informed insights. You are in a position to reinforce the links between learning and their future in one-on-one conversations and provide real-world examples that relate subject learning to diverse career paths, especially as students consider opportunities like studying abroad.

Friends and social media also contribute to shaping perceptions and aspirations, particularly among students who are in the early stages of decision-making. At 13, they're more likely to turn to their friends (39%), and at 14, 29% will use social media for information.

And whilst it may not be instrumental in final decision making, social media plays a huge role in discovering opportunities and forming opinions. USA students are heavily influenced by social media, with the majority being active on YouTube (81%), Instagram (64%), and TikTok (64%) – platforms where storytelling, peer experiences, and influencer content thrive.



Which of the following social media channels do you use?



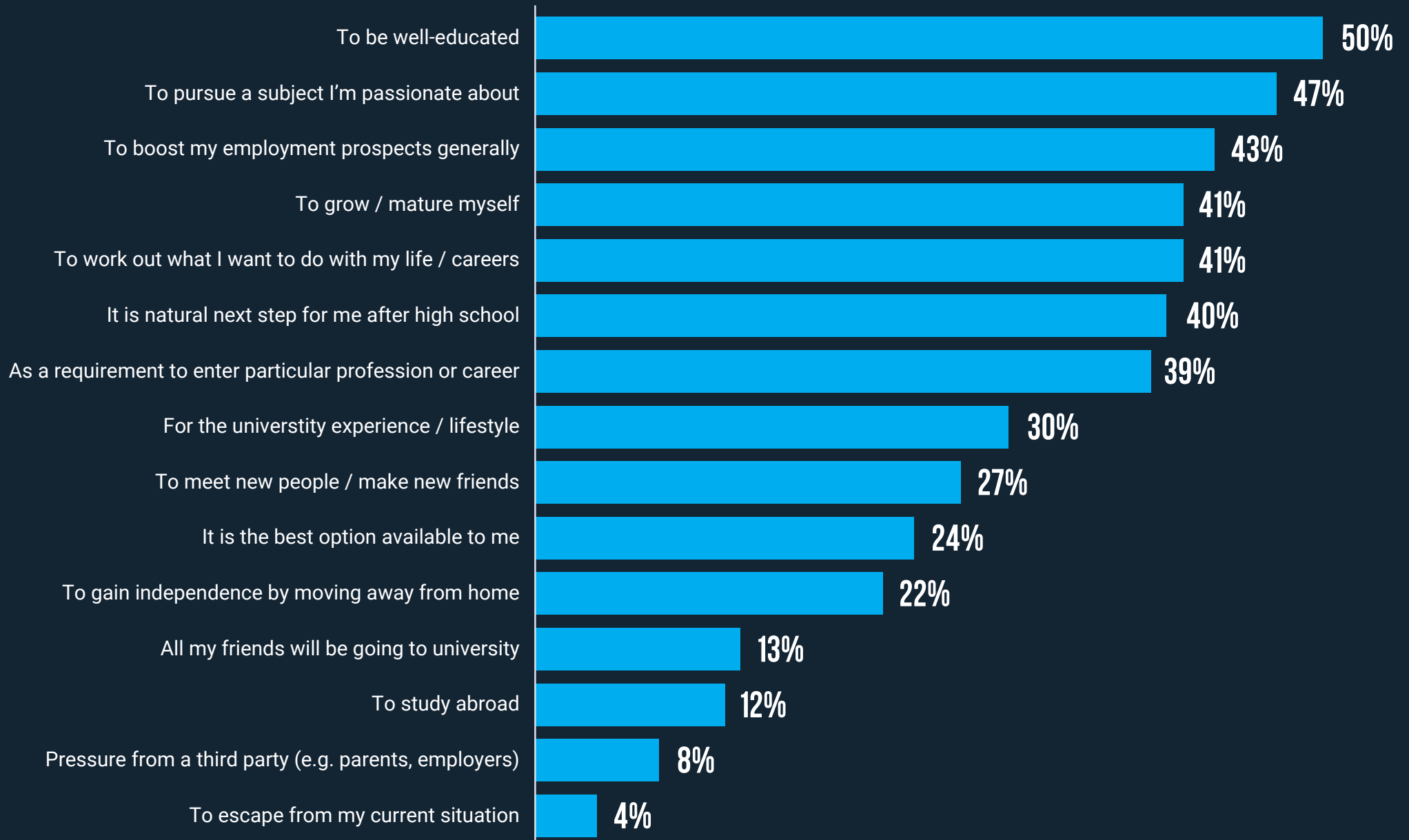
M10. Which of the following social media channels do you use? (400)

Similar to the regional preferences of subject and sector, there are geographical differences in social media usage, another element to consider when advising and reaching prospective students.

For example, the average number of social media channels used is higher in the Northeast region (4.1), particularly in comparison to the Midwest (3.4), where significantly fewer use Instagram. Meanwhile, YouTube is used by close to 9 in 10 respondents from the South, considerably more than any other area.

It's clear that influence comes from a remarkably wide range of sources for USA students. The same is true of inspiration, with a vast range of motivations cited for going to university. They view it as more than just an academic step, it's a crucial stage in their personal development.

What are your main reasons for wanting to go to university?



S30. What are your main reasons for wanting to go to university? (327)

Alongside the traditional reasons, 41% want to use university as a time to mature and figure out their path in life, which is particularly important to 13 year olds (48%). Once they get to 14, half see university as a chance to pursue their passion (51%) and boost their employment prospects (50%). Whereas, 16 year olds are most likely to be attracted by the independence of moving away from home.

These year-by-year nuances in motivation are important to factor in when advising young prospective students. Acknowledge the emotional and personal dimensions and when they are at their strongest. By encouraging self-reflection and guiding students through conversations that consider both academic interests and life goals you can empower them to make choices with greater independence and long-term purpose.



S100a. What do you hope to get out of studying abroad? (201

For most USA students (58%), the primary attraction of studying abroad is expanding their horizons and gaining life experience. Fortunately for UK universities seeking USA students, high quality of education is also extremely important to many respondents (44%) – alongside increasing their career opportunities (39%).

Living in another country, making international friends, and improving language skills were also important to a broad number of students. These students see study abroad not just as an academic choice, but as a formative life event that shapes their worldview, deepens their independence, and strengthens their personal and professional future.

**LIFE
EXPERIENCE IS
MOST IMPORTANT
AT 13 & 16 YEARS
OLD**

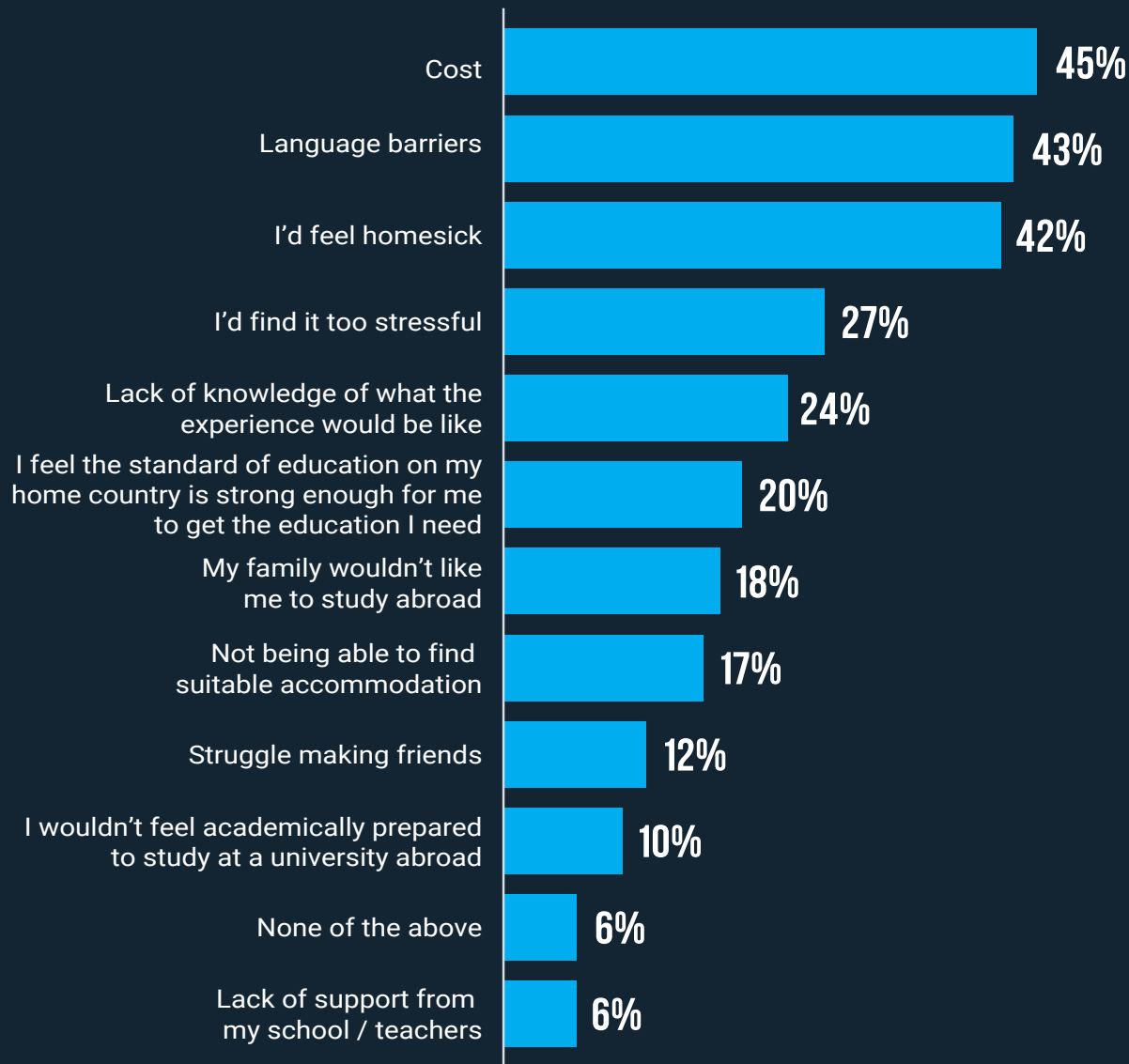
**QUALITY
EDUCATION IS
MOST IMPORTANT
AT 14 YEARS
OLD**

**LIVING
IN ANOTHER
COUNTRY IS MOST
IMPORTANT AT 15
YEARS OLD**



But alongside all the excitement, there is a level of anxiety to be expected at the prospect of leaving friends and family behind to assimilate in a new culture across the Atlantic. Both emotional and practical barriers, like cost (45%), language barriers (43%), homesickness (42%), and stress (27%), are significant deterrents.

What, if anything, do you think would prevent you from studying abroad?



Nearly a quarter also say that they don't know what the experience would be like, while others worry, they aren't academically prepared or fear that making friends will be difficult.

These findings highlight that emotional readiness and confidence are just as critical as academic or financial preparedness when it comes to making major education decisions.



Students need more proactive encouragement and informed advice from parents, educators, and institutions to help them pursue international education with confidence.

S110. What, if anything, do you think would prevent you from studying abroad? (327)

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

1. **UCAS YouTube** - A collection of easily digestible videos that provide guidance on everything from choosing courses to navigating the application process, making complex information more accessible.
2. **Provider Profiles** - An easy place for prospective students to find and compare universities and colleges, filtered by region, study mode, qualifications, and more.
3. **UCAS Social Media** -
 - X/Twitter: Latest updates, deadlines, and advice.
 - Instagram and TikTok: Tips, student stories, and interactive content.
 - Facebook: Live Q&A sessions.



CHAPTER 3 - INDEPENDENCE & IMPORTANCE

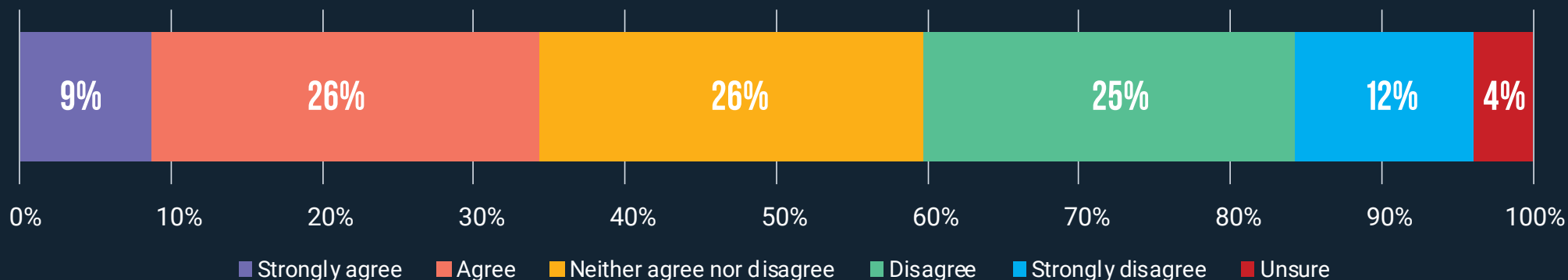
University has long been a beacon of independence, but studying overseas is an even bigger opportunity for those who yearn for even more freedom and liberty.

But with greater rewards come greater challenges, especially financially.

While many students are eager to take charge of their future, financial barriers can restrict their sense of independence. Over a third (35%) feel that a lack of money limits their choices, rising even higher in certain regions like the Northeast, where fully half of all respondents view it as a preventative factor.



My choices about my future are restricted by not having enough money

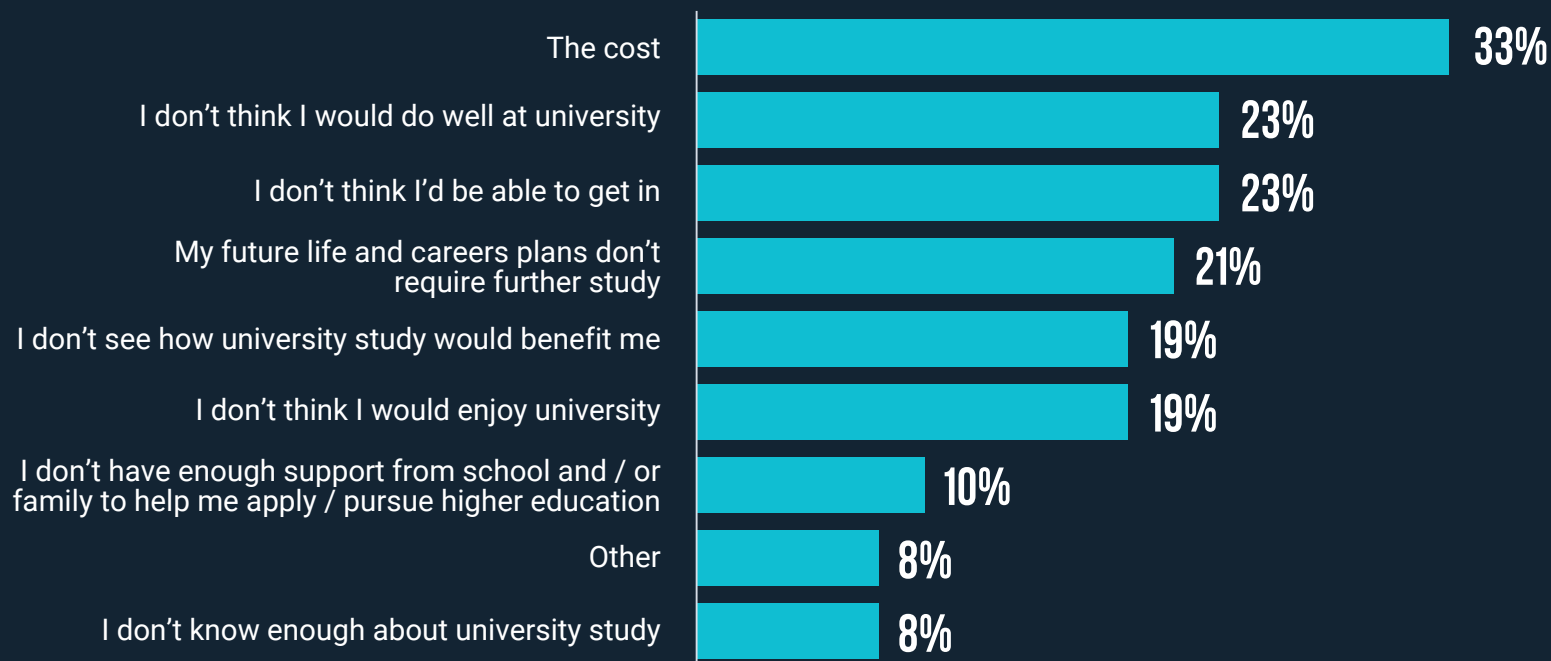


My choices about my future are restricted by not having enough money:P55 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (400)

This tension between aspiration and affordability highlights the need for clear guidance and support. Helping them to feel empowered, rather than constrained, as they navigate their big decisions can help them to follow their dreams of studying abroad.

There are other factors at play too, besides finances, with confidence and understanding representing major barriers. Almost a quarter believe they wouldn't do well or be able to get into university, with a fifth believing that their plans don't require degrees or that they don't see how it would benefit them. And another 10% believe they don't have the right support network to succeed.

What are the main reasons you don't think you will apply to university?



S40. What are the main reasons you don't think you will apply to university? (52)

These insights highlight how a student's sense of agency is influenced by more than just aspiration, and specifically by whether they feel equipped or encouraged to pursue them.

When doubts are high and confidence is low, advisers can play an integral role. You can directly address gaps in academic confidence, awareness of financial support, and their understanding of

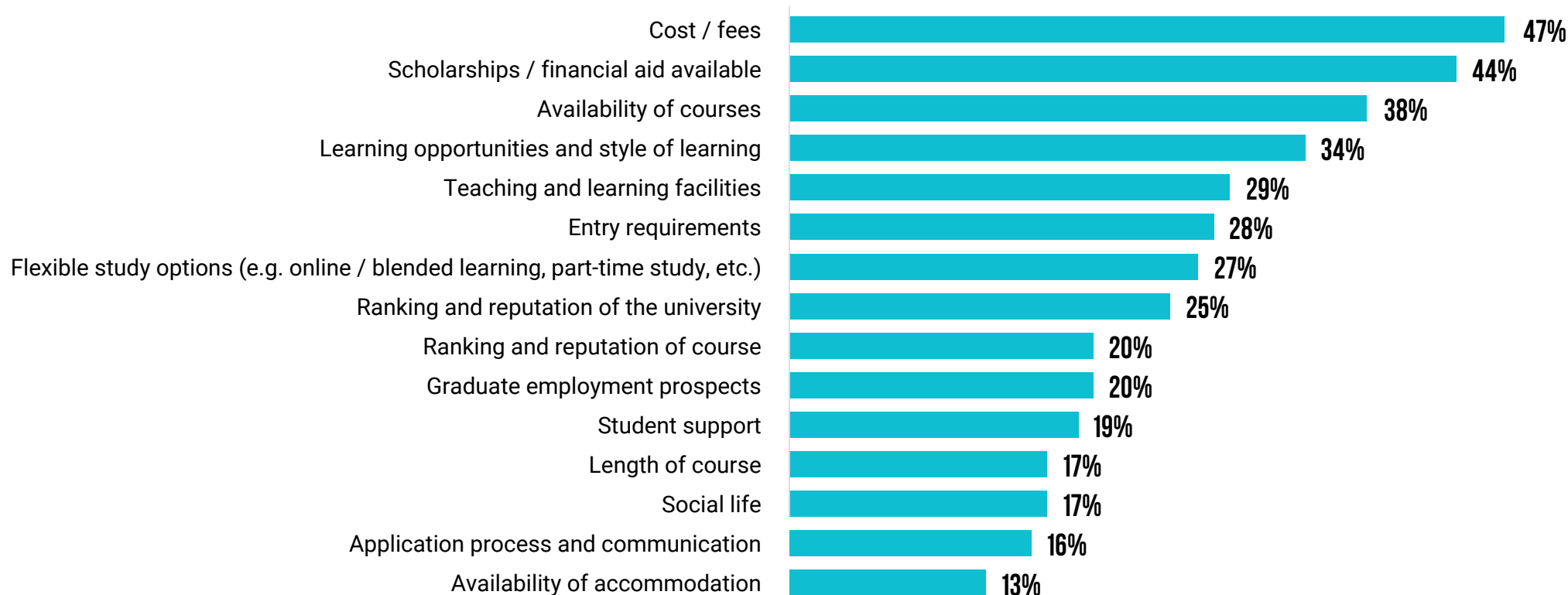
university study by providing clear information, reassurance, and resources to help them overcome obstacles, both perceived and real.

You can also help them build practical skills that will help them to feel more confident to live independently abroad, like financial literacy, time management, and social adaptability. By equipping them with both knowledge and skills, many of the

perceived barriers could become less of a concern.

For USA students, practicality takes precedence over prestige when choosing a university. What matters most is money, with costs/fees chosen by 47% of respondents and scholarships/financial aid by 44%. These considerations are more than twice as important as traditional markers like course rankings/reputation (20%) and social life (17%).

What is important to you when choosing university?



S85. What is important to you when choosing a university? (Select up to 5) (327)



**ENTRY
REQUIREMENTS
ARE MOST
IMPORTANT AT 13
YEARS OLD**

**FINANCIAL
SUPPORT IS MOST
IMPORTANT AT 14
YEARS OLD**

**COSTS AND
FEES ARE MOST
IMPORTANT AT 15
YEARS OLD**

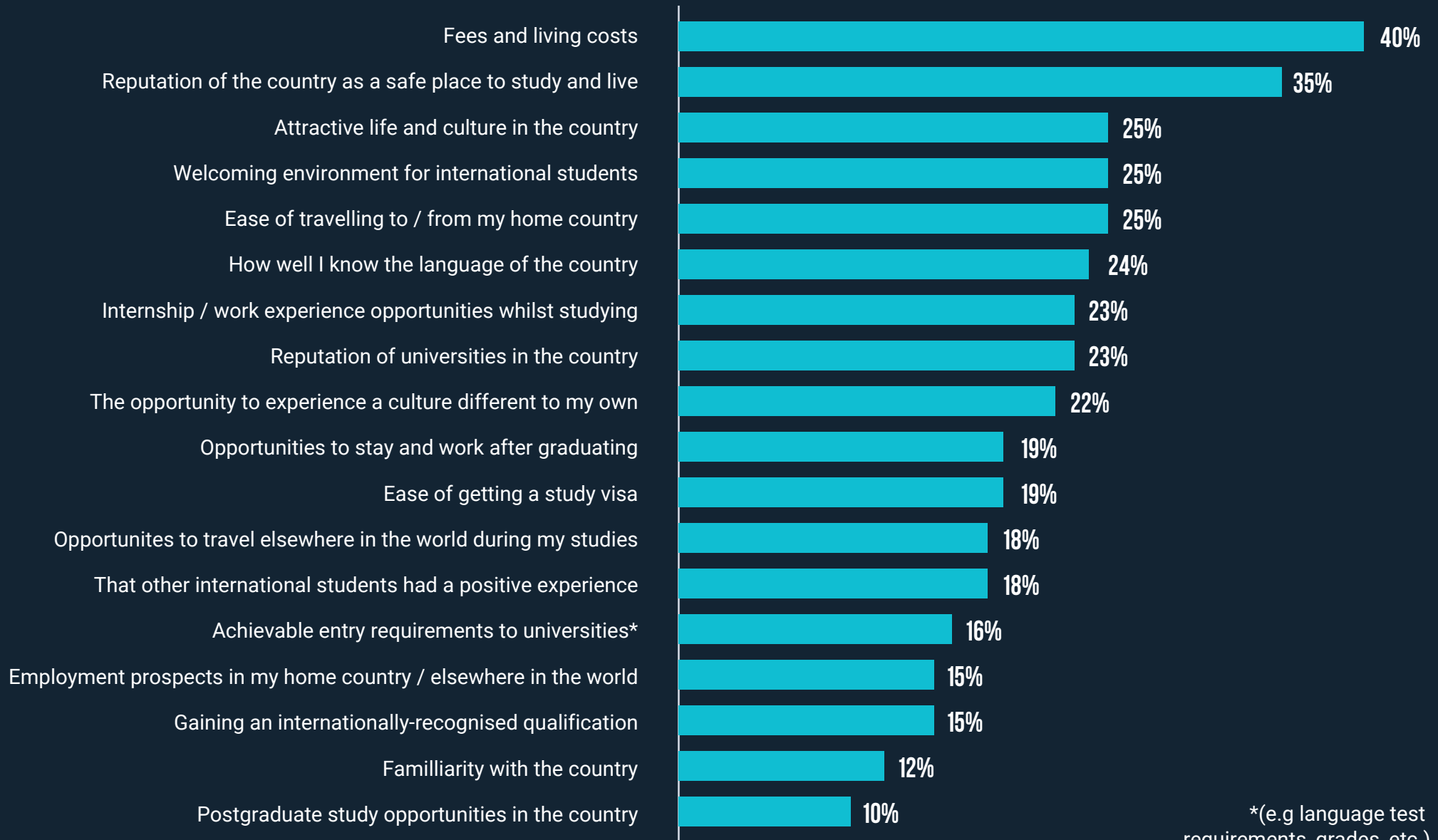
**TEACHING
AND LEARNING
FACILITIES ARE
MOST IMPORTANT
AT 16 YEARS OLD**

With cost being such a strong consideration, demonstrate to young people the long-term value (like graduate employment prospects and student support) to help them understand their investment in a UK education. You can also promote lesser-known institutions which offer strong programmes, good value, and course availability/teaching quality, many of which won't be on the radar for USA students.

By zooming out and looking at the considerations for choosing a country to study in, there are more diverse factors at play. Whilst fees and living costs remain top of the tree, selected by 40% of respondents, other emotional and cultural factors hold more weight, like safety (35%), ease of travel, attractive lifestyle, and welcoming environment (all 25%).

More traditional markers are cited too, underscoring a strong desire for return on investment.

What is most important to you in picking the country where you may study abroad?



S125. What is most important to you in picking the country where you may study abroad? (Select up to 5) (201)

**ATTRACTIVE LIFE
AND CULTURE IS MOST
IMPORTANT AT 13
YEARS OLD**

**FEES AND LIVING
COSTS ARE MOST
IMPORTANT AT 14
YEARS OLD**

**SAFETY IS MOST
IMPORTANT AT 15
YEARS OLD**

**POSTGRADUATE
STUDY
OPPORTUNITIES ARE
MOST IMPORTANT AT
16 YEARS OLD**

When advising USA students who wish to study abroad on choosing a country, help them to compare cost-of-living and scholarship availability – as well as providing insight into student visa processes, work options after graduation, and the availability of internships.

Both FAFSA (Federal Student Aid) and Sallie Mae student loans can be used internationally.

Cultural briefings, or connecting students with international alumni, can help to bring country-specific lifestyles into focus and assist in visualising the social and emotional experiences of studying abroad.



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

1. **Budget Tools** - Financial concerns can be overwhelming for students considering higher education. These tools provide practical support and guidance, helping students manage costs, plan budgets, and explore funding options, making money matters less stressful.
2. **Location Guides** - UCAS Location Guides offer city, region, and country overviews, highlighting universities, lifestyles, and unique educational landscapes across the UK.
3. **Parent Podcasts** - Recommend UCAS Parent Podcasts to keep parents in the loop about changes to application processes, deadlines, and support systems. This ensures parents are well-equipped to support their children through the decision-making process.



CHAPTER 4 - EXPERIENCE

The UK university experience is a powerful magnet for USA students, but to fully embrace it with confidence, they're looking for advice that spans personal values, emotional readiness, and long-term career goals.

Culture and lifestyle play a vital role in their decision. They're excited about experiencing new environments, but seek reassurance that they will feel comfortable, supported, and able to maintain personal routines. Introducing students to resources that highlight cultural differences, such as pre-departure orientations, intercultural workshops, or connections with international student communities can provide clarity and comfort.



**"I'D DEFINITELY WANT TO VISIT
AHEAD OF TIME AND MAKE SURE
IT WOULD BE A GOOD FIT FOR ME."**

Male, 13

**"I WOULD NEED TO KNOW THE TYPE
OF LIFESTYLE THAT I WOULD
HAVE TO LIVE IN THAT COUNTRY."**

Male, 16

**"I'D NEED TO KNOW THE
COURSES OFFERED AND
HOW SAFE IT IS FOR ME."**

Female, 16

Affordability is also a central concern. Students and their families are mindful of tuition fees, living expenses, and access to scholarships, and they appreciate practical advice that helps them prepare financially. Advisers can offer critical support by helping students fully understand the scope of costs involved and guiding them in creating a realistic budget.

In the UK, there isn't an exact equivalent to the 'financial packages' or 'financial aid packages' that students from the USA are used to, so advice around similar support would be welcomed.

**"WHAT WOULD THE OVERALL COST
BE, WHAT IS THE HARDEST PART
ABOUT IT ALL?"**

Male, 14

**"PRICE/COST WOULD BE A HUGE
BARRIER FOR ME STUDYING
ABROAD."**

Female, 16

**"CAN I AFFORD IT? CAN I GET
STUDENT LOANS?"**

Female, 14

Academically, students are aware that entry requirements abroad may differ significantly from those at home, and they value clear, early guidance about applications, credits, and course expectations. Many students are also unsure how international degrees translate back into their local job markets, making career alignment a key concern.

**"WHAT I WOULD GET
OUT OF IT IN THE LONG
TERM AND HOW MUCH
WOULD IT COST"**

Student, 15

**"I WOULD NEED TO KNOW WHERE I WOULD LIVE, HOW THE
EDUCATION SYSTEM WORKS, IF MY DEGREE WOULD BE
COMPARABLE TO MY HOME COUNTRY SCHOOL, AND HOW I
WOULD LIVE. WOULD I NEED A JOB OR FIND A PLACE TO LIVE?"**

Female, 13

**"I WOULD NEED
TO KNOW
HOW LONG A
PROGRAM IS."**

Male, 15

For most, hearing others' experiences, both the challenges and successes, plays a powerful role in shaping their expectations and confidence.

**"I WOULD NEED TO KNOW
OTHERS' EXPERIENCES
WITH IT AND WHAT IT
WAS LIKE FOR THEM."**

Female, 16

**"I WOULD FIRST TALK TO YOUNG PEOPLE
LIKE ME WHO ACTUALLY DID GO TO SCHOOL
OVERSEAS AND ASK THEM WHAT IT WAS LIKE
APPLYING, WHY THEY DID, AND HOW IT WENT."**

Female, 14

**"SOME EXPERIENCE
STORIES, SUCCESS STORIES,
DIFFERENT SCENARIOS,
MORE INFORMATION."**

Male, 15

More than half of USA students (56%) want to know how to get started in a specific career and are seeking advice on the education required (51%). Almost as important are knowing what's available in certain subject areas (44%) and the associated potential earnings (43%).



**HOW TO GET
STARTED IN A
SPECIFIC CAREER IS
VERY IMPORTANT AT
14 YEARS OLD**

**THE LEVEL OR
TYPE OF EDUCATION
REQUIRED IS VERY
IMPORTANT AT 15
YEARS OLD**

**WHAT CAREERS
ARE AVAILABLE IS
VERY IMPORTANT AT
16 YEARS OLD**

So whilst we know that this is a generation of students who primarily trust in their instincts, there is also a clear, pragmatic approach in finding structured pathways to achieve their goals.

Whether through one-on-one sessions, workshops, or access to online resources, early and consistent exposure to career pathways, especially emerging or lesser-known fields, can empower students to make confident, informed choices. Encouraging curiosity and demystifying the steps from school to career can transform inspiration into action.

The advice they find most valuable often comes from parents and teachers, usually the kind that encourages them to pursue something that brings them happiness and fulfilment. But they also appreciate guidance that motivates them to work hard, stay focused, and believe in themselves.

And it's not just information that they're looking for from advisers, but also reassurance, inspiration, and help with navigating the complexity of long-term decision making.

Passion vs. Practicality

Explore various fields with real-world applications to help students feel confident in choosing paths that resonate with who they are, while also ensuring they understand how to turn those passions into viable career options. This can help them make well-rounded, informed decisions.

**"DO SOMETHING YOU LOVE AND HAVE
WORK LIFE BALANCE. ALSO HAVE A
BACKUP JUST IN CASE."**

Male, 13

**"DO WHAT I LOVE. WHEN YOU DO WHAT
YOU LOVE THE REST WILL COME
NATURALLY."**

Female, 14



Hard work & Perseverance

Provide a clear picture of the effort, skills, and time commitment required for various careers. Nurture a growth mindset to help students remain committed to their goals. Recommend extracurricular activities, internships, or online courses to develop resilience and discipline.

**"DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS
AND ALWAYS GO ABOVE AND
BEYOND TOWARDS YOUR
DREAMS."**

Female, 15

**"TO KEEP WORKING HARD AND
STICK TO YOUR GOALS."**

Male, 14



Self-determination & Confidence

Encourage students to think for themselves and not to let peer or societal pressure dictate their paths, and to trust their own instincts. Support their autonomy and decision-making through confidence-building activities like public speaking, leadership roles, and mock interviews.

"BELIEVE IN MYSELF, TO NEVER GIVE UP AND FOCUS ON WHAT I WANT IN LIFE. THAT I CAN DO ANYTHING I WANT TO AS LONG AS I KEEP TRYING."

Male, 15

"FOLLOW MY GUT AND DON'T MAKE MYSELF SMALL."

Female, 16





One of the many advantages the UK has in attracting USA students is the longstanding connection between both countries, grounded in the similarity of culture and historic prestige. Students from the USA feel optimistic about life at a UK university, valuing the famed education system, career opportunities, multicultural environment, and the potential for personal and academic growth.

Many see it as an exciting and enriching opportunity, often describing it as fun, adventurous, and even a dream come true. The shared English language and perceived cultural similarities make the UK feel like an accessible international option, lowering the barrier to entry compared to non-English-speaking countries.

At the same time, some express concerns about cultural adjustment and homesickness, and many admit uncertainty due to limited exposure or knowledge.

Advisers can support these students by providing accurate, detailed information about UK universities, guiding them through application processes, discussing academic expectations, and addressing emotional readiness for studying abroad.



"IT WOULD BE GREAT TO LEARN ABOUT A DIFFERENT CULTURE WHILE STILL SPEAKING ENGLISH."

Female, 13

"I THINK IT WOULD BE A HIGH QUALITY OF LEARNING. I DON'T THINK IT WOULD HAVE SUCH A PARTY ATMOSPHERE LIKE IN THE UNITED STATES."

Male, 14

"A VERY DEVELOPED COUNTRY IN TERMS OF EDUCATION AND CONTAINS UNIVERSITIES WITH HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION."

Male, 15

"THEY SPEAK ENGLISH LIKE AMERICANS DO BUT THEY ARE AN OLD COUNTRY, AND I COULD UNDERSTAND IN SCHOOL, PLUS FROM THE UK IT'S EASY TO GET TO ALL THE OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO EXPLORE AND LEARN FROM."

Female, 14

"I THINK IT WOULD BE FUN BECAUSE OF THE MULTICULTURAL THING THERE. THE UK HAS FREE MUSEUMS TO GO TO. IT WOULD BE SO COOL TO WALK IN THE PLACE WHERE SIR ISAAC NEWTON WAS."

Female, 14

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

1. **Careers Quiz** - Start with the careers quiz to help students identify possible career paths based on their interests and skills.
2. **Events Tool** - Encourage participation in open days, online tasters, and virtual tours to help students learn more about their options before making decisions.
3. **Unibuddy Chat** - Use the Unibuddy chat to connect students with current students. This can provide valuable insights into the day-to-day experience of university life, helping students gain a realistic understanding of the course, campus culture, and support systems.
4. **2026 Adviser Guide** - A deep dive into how to apply to UK universities and colleges, how UCAS processes applications, how to manage your students' applications, and the support we provide.



Age Profiles

13

14

15

16

DECISION-MAKING

Optimistic about their future, driven by their passions and interests, whilst also thinking about the practicality of their choices

Pressure from parents and money influences decision-making

Interest in university study at all ages, research increases over time

Choice of which subject to study starts - driven by career opportunities

Choice of which subject to study firms up - driven by passion and interests

Most interest in studying abroad

Interest in building a career across all ages

MOTIVATORS AND INFLUENCERS

Being well-educated and increasing future career opportunities

University is the next stage in their personal development and boosting employment prospects

Gaining independence and experiencing the university lifestyle in another country

Family and school/teachers are key influencers on both study options and future careers

Cost is cited as an influencer across all ages

RESOURCES

Online search engines and university websites are the main research channels across all ages

Speaking to people they know and current students, social media

University Websites

YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are the most commonly used social media channels at all ages

Facebook

YouTube, Instagram, TikTok

Twitter/X

| WHAT NEXT?

The Hub is a tailored digital experience that adapts to each student's interests and goals – with personalised advice, relevant resources, and guidance.

Many of the tools mentioned and recommended in this report can be found in The Hub:

PROVIDER PROFILES

An easy place for prospective students to find and compare universities and colleges, filtered by region, study mode, qualifications, and more.

SUBJECT GUIDES

Insights into what it's like to study specific subjects, how to access these fields, and the potential career opportunities they offer.

UCAS YOUTUBE

Guidance on everything from choosing courses to navigating the application process, making complex information more accessible.

INTERNATIONAL PODCAST

Experts and students discuss what it's like to study in the UK, budgeting, visas, post-graduate options and more

PARENT PODCASTS

Keeping parents in the loop about changes to application processes, deadlines, and support systems.

BUDGET TOOLS

Practical support and guidance to help students manage costs, plan budgets, and explore funding options.

CAREERS QUIZ

Help students to identify possible career paths based on their interests and skills.

EVENTS TOOL

Open days, online tasters, and virtual tours to help students learn more about their options before making decisions.

UNIBUDDY CHAT

Connect future students with current students who can share valuable insights into the day-to-day experience of UK uni life.

SUBJECT SPOTLIGHTS

Free, on-demand virtual experiences designed to help explore various subjects before applying, enhance personal statements, and make informed decisions.

UCAS SOCIAL MEDIA

Get the latest updates, deadlines, advice, student stories, interactive content, and live Q&A sessions.

LOCATION GUIDES

UCAS location guides offer city, region, and country overviews, highlighting universities, lifestyles, and unique educational landscapes across the UK.

To receive future reports and insight direct to your inbox,
sign up ucas.com/forms/sign-adviser-updates

Or if you've got questions about any of these resources or
want to know how else we can support you:

international@ucas.ac.uk



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