



UCAS

STUDENT MINDSET CONFERENCE



2025

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UCAS

THE BIG TRENDS SHAPING **STUDENT** **MINDSET** IN 2025



Confidential

METHODOLOGY- 3 RESEARCH PROJECTS



“Finding Their Place”: 2 student surveys: pre- and post-arrival, an online student community, a parent survey and a parent focus group, over 4,000 students and 1,200 parents, Summer 2024.



“Careers and Employability in University Choice survey”: 1,500 pre-applicants for 2026 entry, Spring 2025.



“Decline my Place”: survey and focus groups, 1,400 students who found a place through clearing, through declining their place, Autumn 2025.

KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED:

1. Uni preparation starts earlier
2. Placements=employability
3. Increased parent and student dissonance
4. Money worries are the new norm
5. Community dents everything
6. “Decline my place” is a no mercy mindset



TURNING INSIGHT INTO ACTION

- **Differentiate** with comms that resonate with students and families.
- **Build earlier, stronger connections** to boost belonging and retention.
- **Close the gaps** between expectations and preparedness with timely support.
- **Position your institution** as one that understands the real student experience.
- **Showcase employability up front** - placements, industry links, and career pathways.



A LOOK AT THE KEY FINDINGS

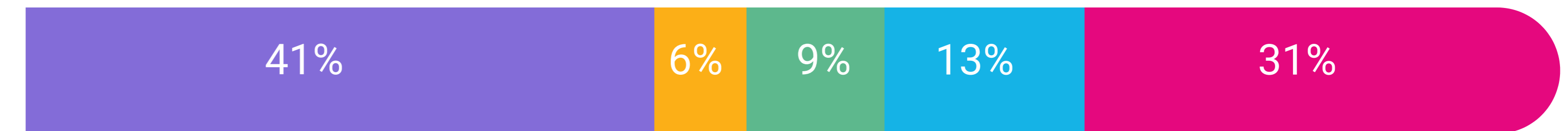


PREP STARTS BEFORE MAY — SUMMER IS THE RAMP, NOT THE START

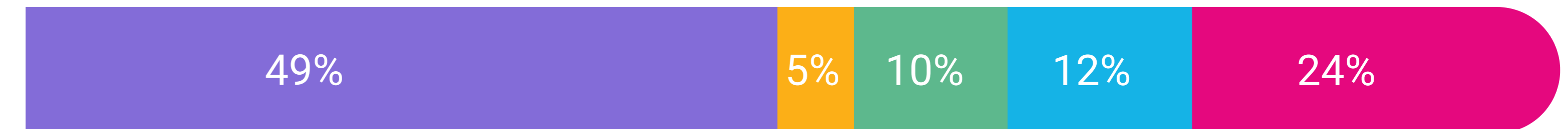
- Preparation starts earlier than we assume - and happens in iterations, not one big moment.
- This shows headspace opens in spring – before most providers start talking.
- Support is back-weighted; large information lands at arrival and overwhelm.

WHEN DID YOU START THINKING ABOUT MAKING THOSE PURCHASES?

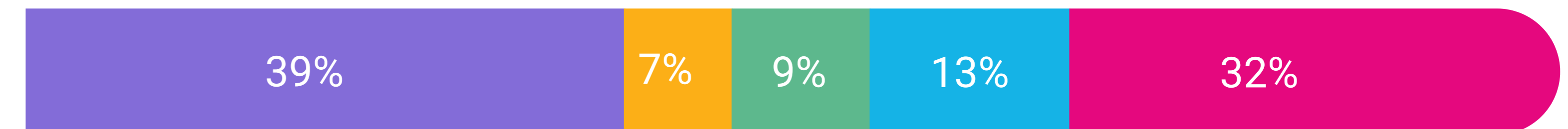
Laptop



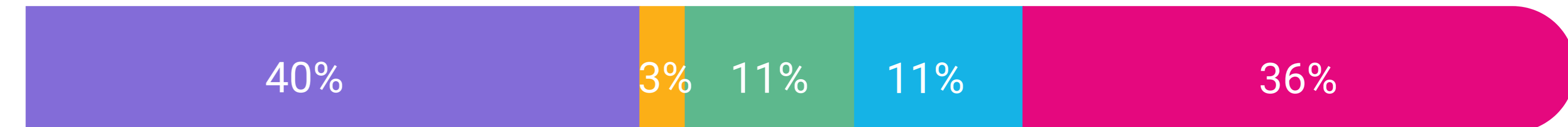
Computer



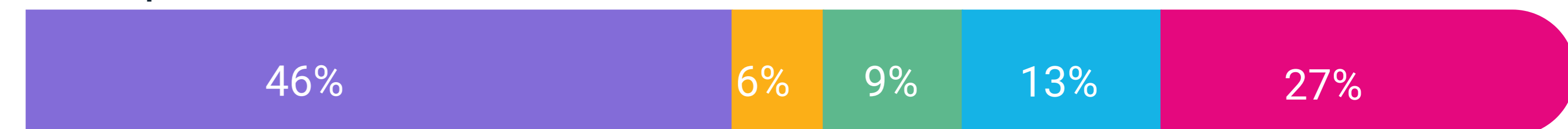
Tablet



TV



Headphones



KEY



Before May 2024



May 2024



June 2024



July 2024

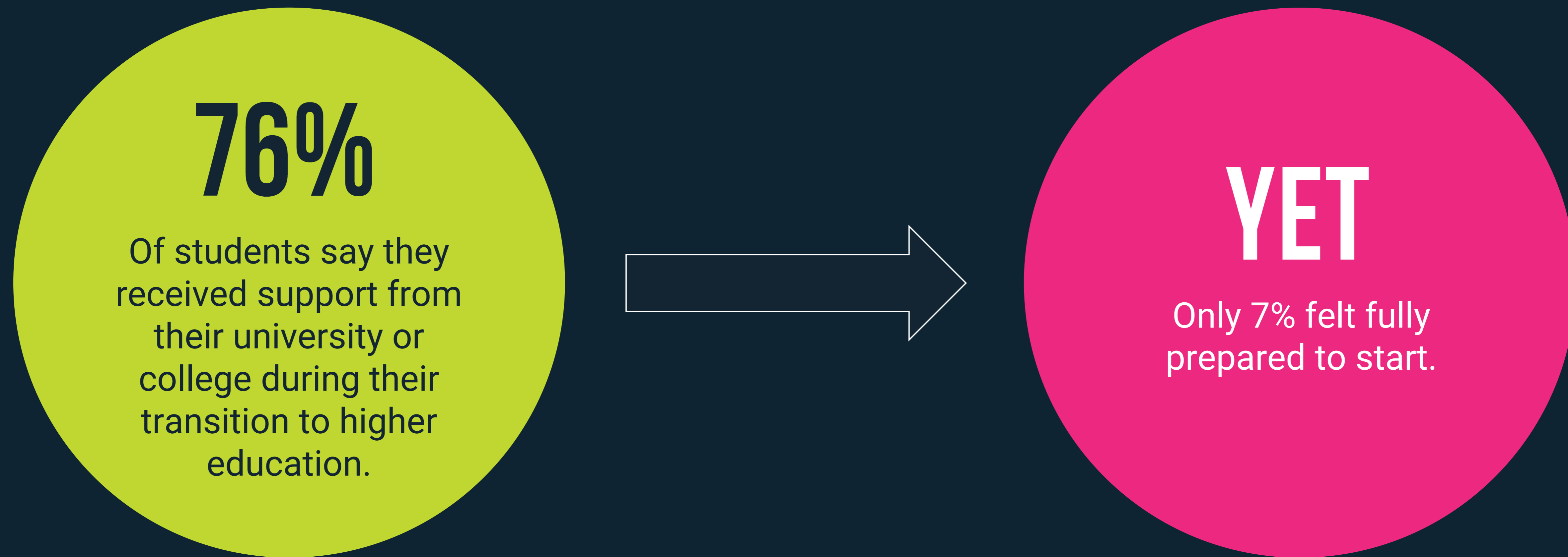


August 2024

Respondent numbers: 3,385

SUPPORT IS BROAD — DELIVERY IS NARROW

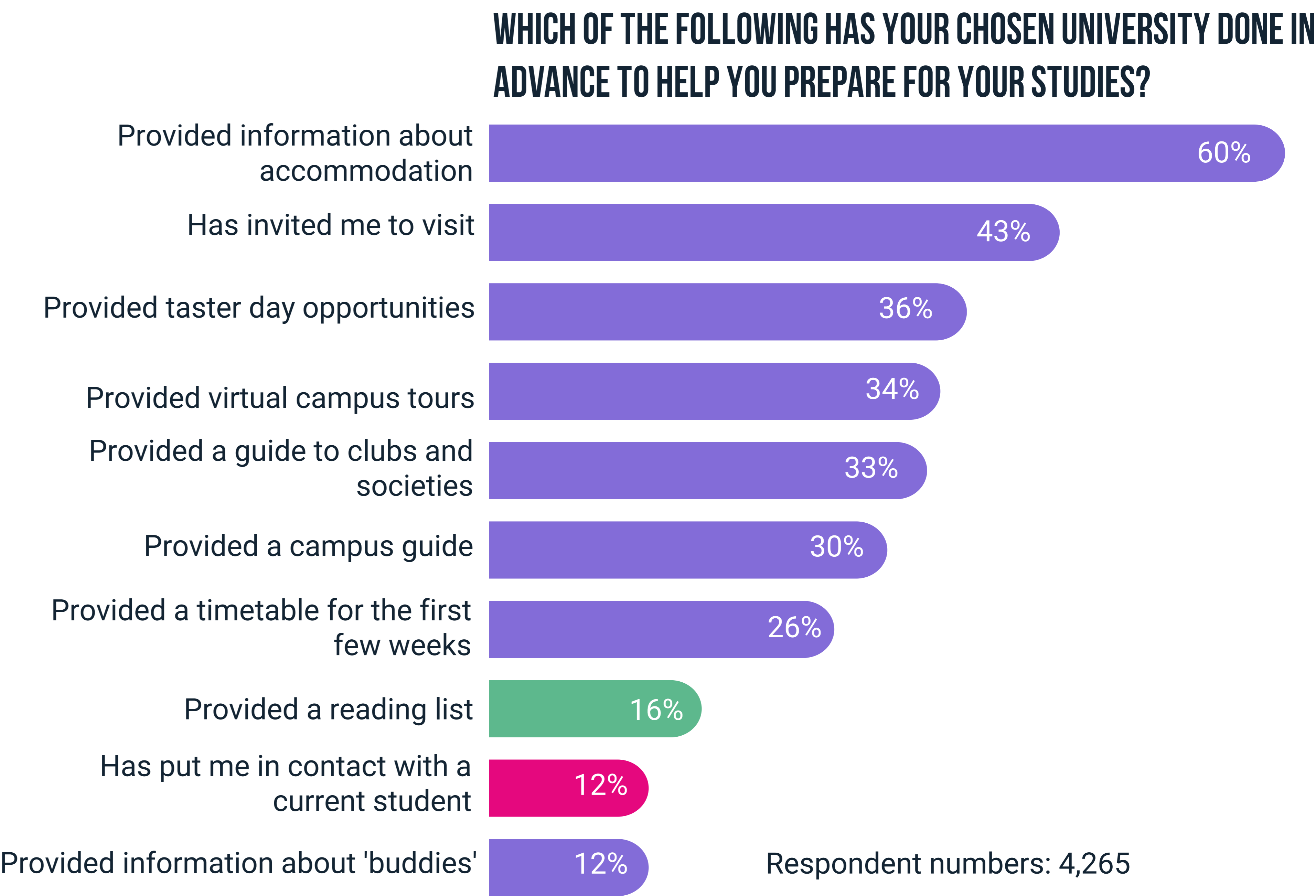
The support paradox: lots given, little stands



The gap is scope and timing – not effort

WHAT STUDENTS GET FROM UNIVERSITIES

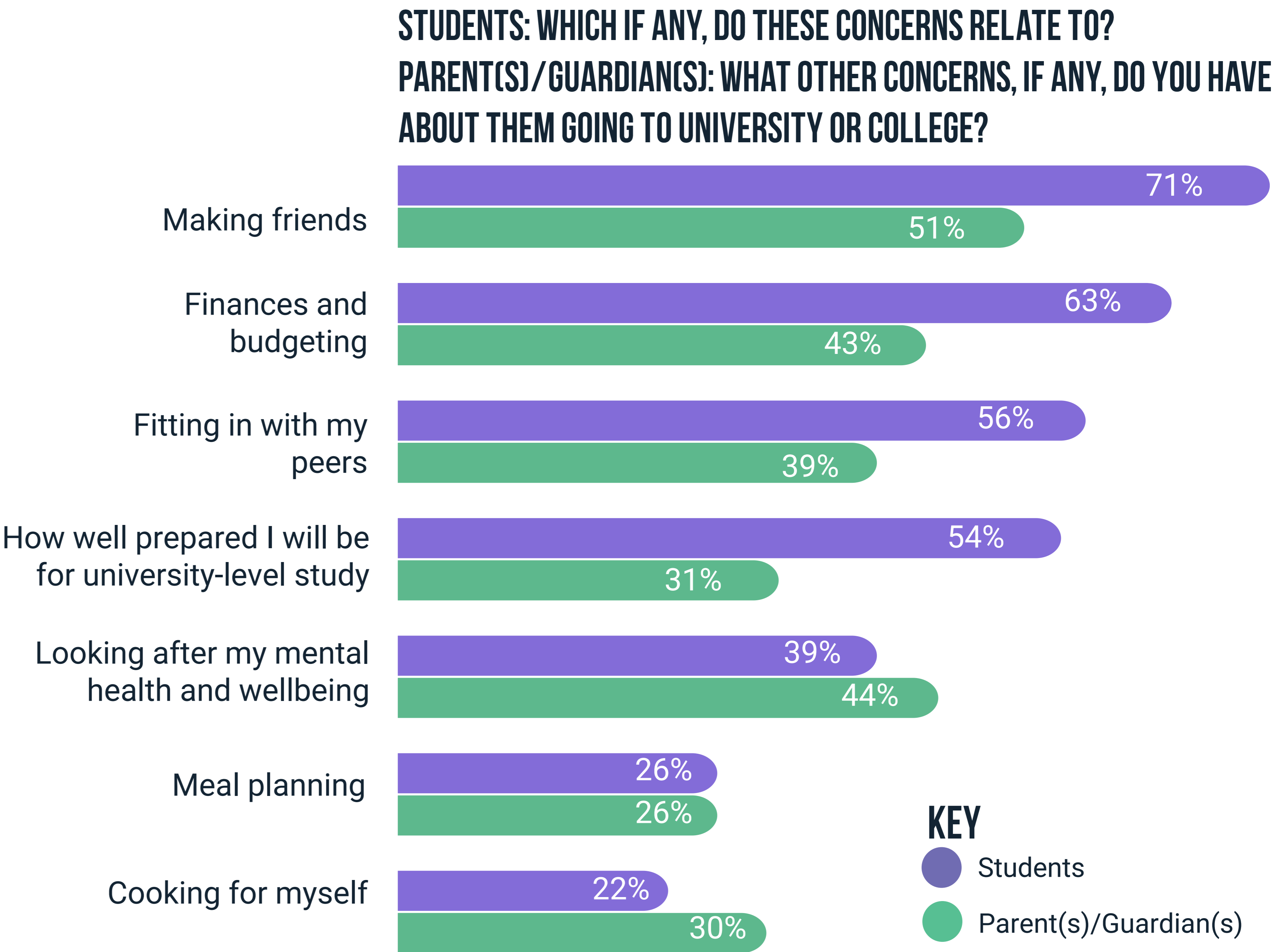
- 60% get clear, early support on accommodation - timely and useful for those moving away.
- Far fewer receive academic prep or peer-connection opportunities.



WHAT PARENTS AND STUDENTS VALUE

- **The big three:** friends, finances, fitting in. Parents share these worries.
- **Next in line:** confidence about uni-level study.
- **Parents lean harder:** mental health, wellbeing, life skills.

“
‘She struggles with making friends...it’s really overwhelming for her. And that was what I was most nervous about’
-
Parent / Guardian Respondent”



Student respondent numbers: 3,275
 Parent/guardian respondent numbers: 880

MONEY IS A CONSTANT MENTAL LOAD (BEYOND THE OBVIOUS)

- In term, **58%** still worry about money; **40%** struggle with budgeting after moving.
- **68%** plan part-time work, but few use uni support: **7%** job centre; **2%** careers.
- Working students report a ~**£40/week** gap: **£99 earned** vs **£139 needed**.

Amount needed to earn per week

£139

Amount earned per week

£99

'I have a student loan and a part-time job, but I'm still worried about how to make it last the whole term'

-
Student Respondent

How Much Do You Earn: Respondent Numbers: 279

How Much Do You Think You Need to Earn: Respondent Numbers: 256

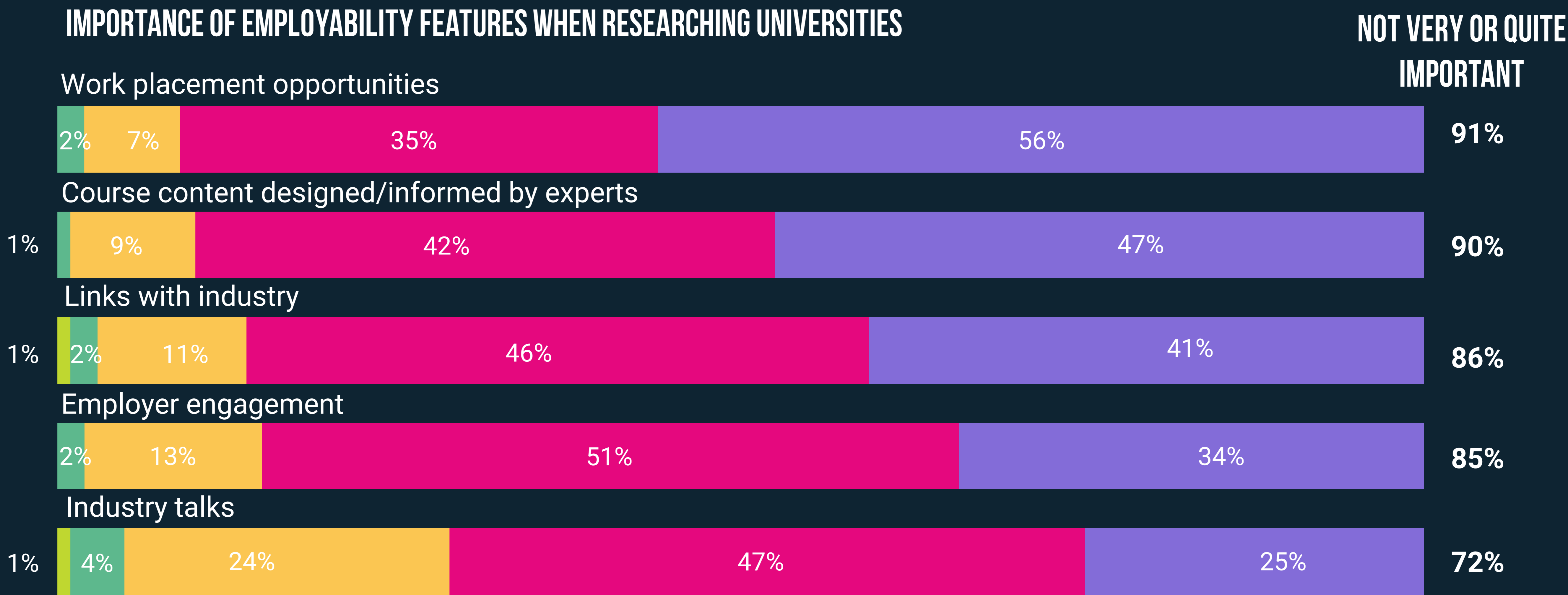
BEYOND PART-TIME JOBS: STUDENTS CHOOSE ON CAREERS

- Money pressures drive students to part-time work.
- But career outcomes shape university choice itself.
- Employability must be visible in marketing.



PLACEMENTS ARE THE PROOF STUDENTS LOOK FOR

- 91% judge employability by placement opportunities



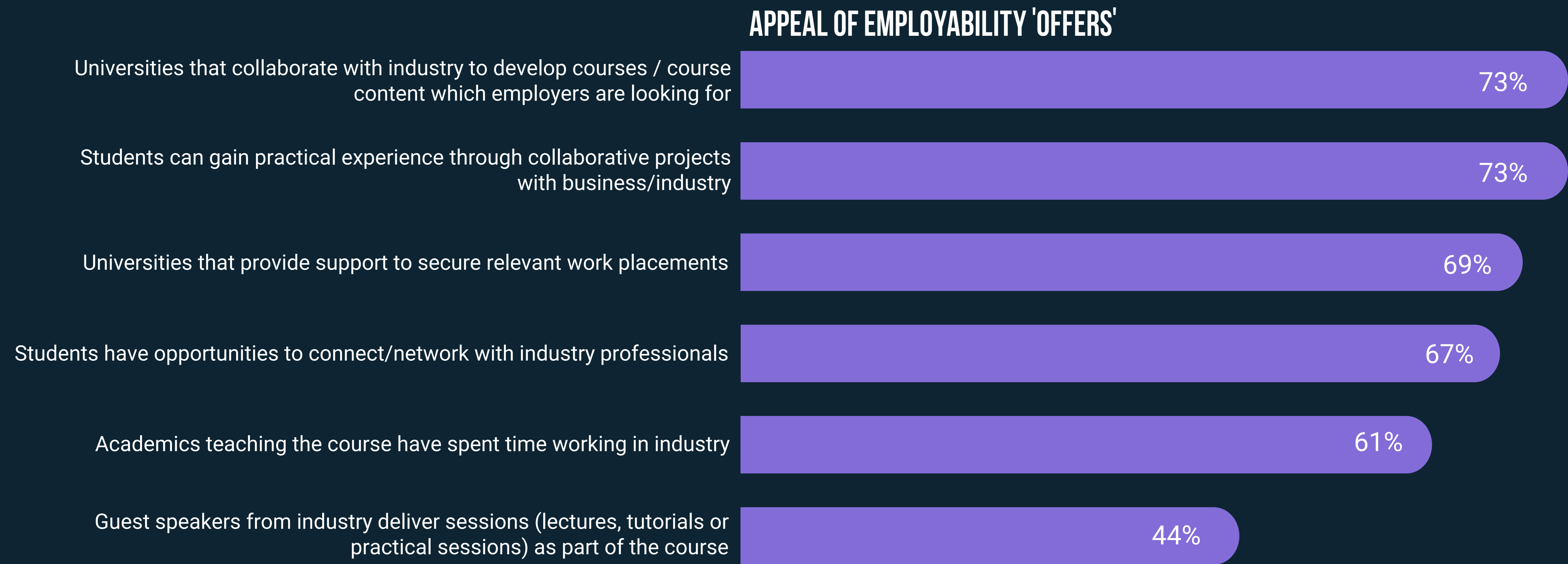
KEY

● Not at all important
 ● Not very important
 ● Neither / nor
 ● Quite important
 ● Very important

Respondent numbers: 1,660

EMPLOYABILITY WORKS WHEN IT'S BAKED IN

- Almost all (99%) said at least one of the employability ‘offers’ was appealing to them.



Q: Which, if any, of the following are appealing to you? Please select all that apply.
Respondent numbers: 1,674

STUDENTS WANT CLEAR PATHWAYS TO SECTORS

1	Healthcare, social care	31%
2	Science and pharmaceuticals	24%
3	Law	19%
4	Teacher, education, childcare	18%
5	Business, consulting and management	18%
6	Accountancy, banking and finance	17%
7	Creative arts and design	16%
8	Engineering and manufacturing	16%
9	Media and internet, journalism	14%
=10	Digital	11%
=10	Charity and voluntary work	11%

TOP TEN SECTORS CONSIDERED/OPEN TO WORKING IN

- Top interest areas: Health, Science, Law, Education, Business.
- International lean towards Business/Tech; UK towards Teaching/Media.
- Clarity on where courses lead drives choice.

Q: Which if any of the following sectors are you considering/open to working in in the future? Please select all that apply?
 Respondent numbers: 1,683

FUTURE ROLES SHAPE TODAY'S CHOICES

Future company

- Supportive environment (70%)
- Positive workforce culture (67%)
- Pay rises based on performance (59%)
- Flexible working hours (55%)

Future role

- Fair pay (70%)
- Job security (65%)
- A role where I can help people (62%)
- Progression (56%)

Ideal working day

- Collaboration with colleagues (64%)
- Making decisions as a group (46%)
- Variety – working on multiple projects (45%)
- Time alone to think/reflect (45%)

Q: Thinking about the type of company you'd like to work for in the future, which, if any, of the following are important? Please select all that apply Respondent numbers: 1668

Q: Thinking about a future role, which, if any, of the following are important to you? Please select all that apply Respondent numbers: 1693

Q: What does an ideal working day look like to you? Select all that apply Respondent numbers: 1682

THE FORGOTTEN COMMUTERS

- Only **54%** of living-at-home students felt prepared vs **60%** in halls.
- **45%** researched travel before term - commuting is a real mental load.
- Commuting dents attendance, belonging, and day-to-day energy.



*'I can't just stay late on campus like others
– the train is expensive, and it takes too
long. I feel like I miss out'*

Student Respondent



HOW PREPARED DO YOU FEEL TO START UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE?

Student accommodation



Living at home



KEY

- I am feeling fully prepared
- I am feeling quite prepared
- I am neither feeling prepared nor unprepared
- I am feeling quite unprepared
- I am feeling very unprepared

Respondent numbers – Student Accommodation: 3,050

Respondent numbers – Living at Home: 1,080

LIVING AT HOME: THE HIDDEN BELONGING GAP

- Only **54%** feel prepared vs **60%** in halls.
- Just **50%** connect with peers before arrival vs **62%** in halls.
- **27%** don't connect at all vs **22%** in halls.
- This can leave them starting university with weaker social networks and a reduced sense of belonging.

HAVE YOU CONNECTED WITH OTHERS WHO WILL BE GOING TO THE SAME UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE AS YOU?

Student accommodation



Living at home



KEY

● Yes ● No ● Not yet, but I intend to

Respondent Numbers – Student Accommodation: 3,025

Respondent Numbers – Living At Home: 1,065

STUDENTS WANT A FRIENDLY FACE ON DAY ONE

- **Routes exist; scaffolding doesn't**
 - **58%** connect digitally pre-HE; only **12%** were offered a buddy/linked to a current student.
- **36%** say their university gives **limited** chances to bring students together before, during & after first term.
- Only **15%** found pre-uni workshops/orientation or online groups useful once they'd started.

71%

Reported making friends as their top concern when starting university – more than any other priority.

38%

of students experience homesickness and loneliness.

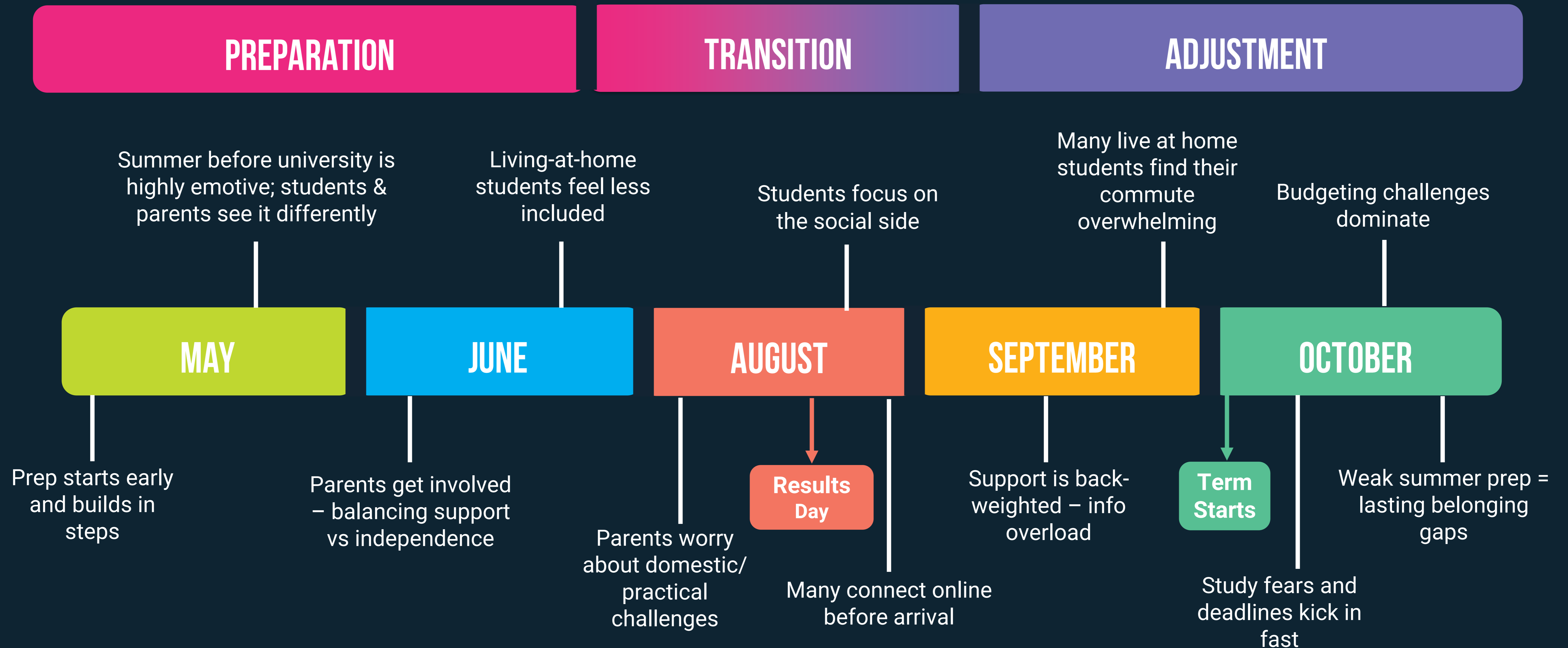
"It has been a bit lonely getting used to not having my family around. For a while I hadn't met all of my flat-mates and it felt awkward to speak with them."

-
Student Accommodation

"It's quite overwhelming and isolating, particularly as my flat isn't very social."

-
Student Accommodation

THE JOURNEY TO HIGHER EDUCATION



FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

DIFFERENTIATE WITH EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT COMMS

Reflect two
audiences:
students &
parents

Speak to
belonging,
independence,
and practical
worries

BUILD EARLIER, STRONGER CONNECTIONS

Start in
May/June

Create visible
routes for
commuters and
pre-arrival peer
groups

CLOSE GAPS BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS & PREPAREDNESS

Be transparent
on study
realities

Provide practical
scaffolding:
budgeting,
academic
readiness, peer
support

PUT EMPLOYABILITY FRONT-OF-HOUSE

Showcase
placements,
embedded
industry links,
and employer
pathways

Market careers
outcomes and
value-based
futures as
central to
course choice

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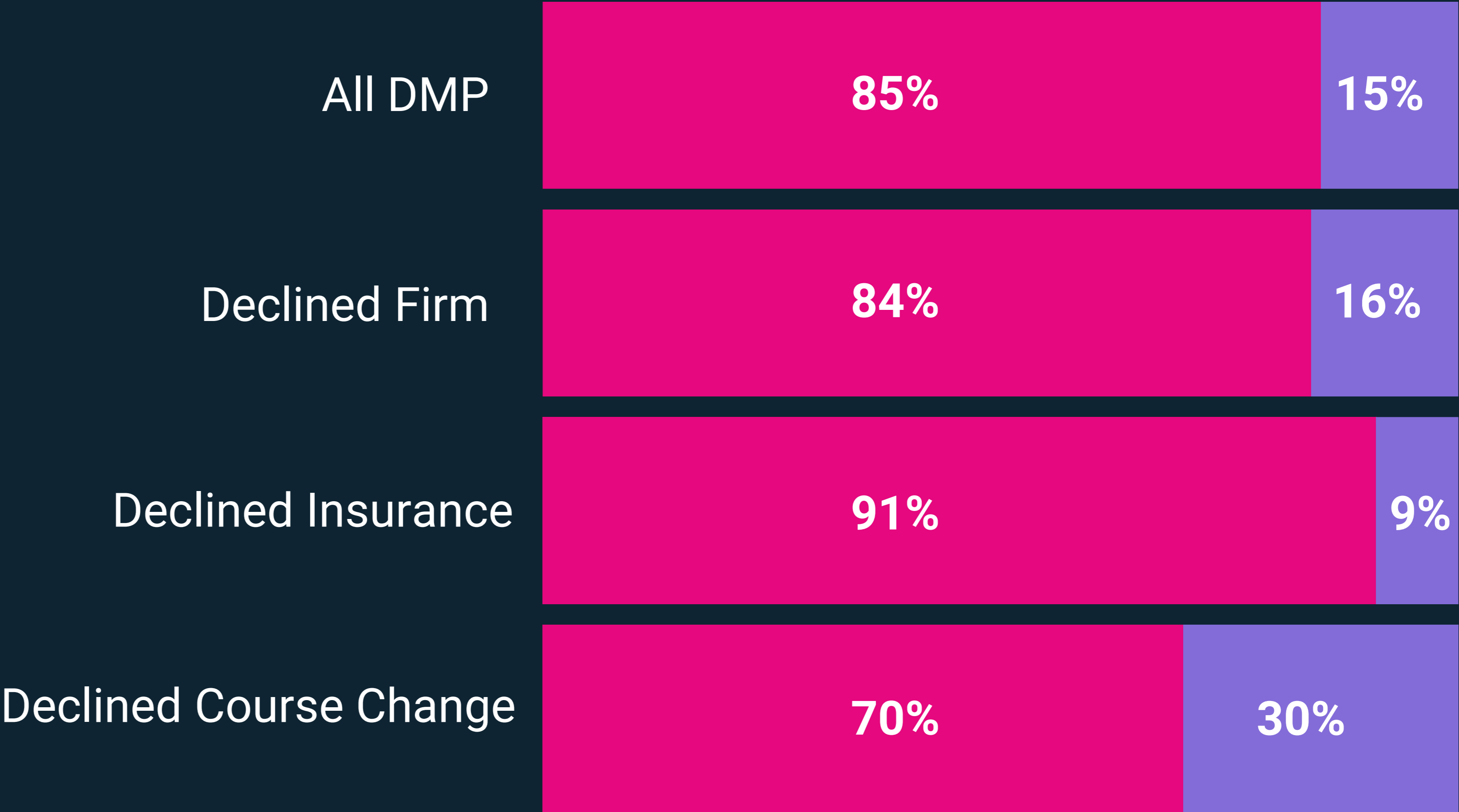
**DECLINE MY PLACE:
WHAT REALLY
DRIVES DECISION
REVERSALS**



ONCE THEY'VE GONE, THEY'VE GONE

- 85% say nothing could have stopped them declining.
- Some mention finance, communications, or accommodation.

WAS THERE ANYTHING YOUR PREVIOUS UNIVERSITY
COULD HAVE DONE TO ENCOURAGE YOU NOT TO DECLINE
YOUR PLACE?



KEY

● No ● Yes

Respondent numbers : All 1458, Firm 855, Insurance 438, Course change 142

NOT EVERYONE IS READY TO COMMIT

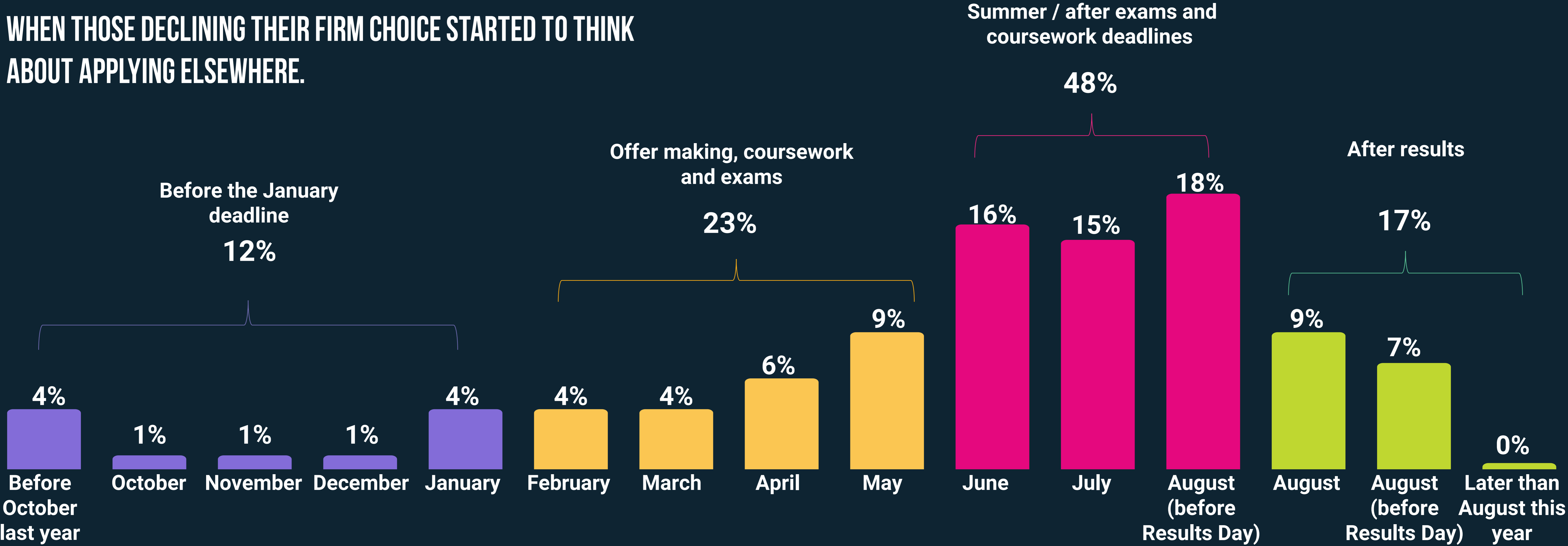
- Many apply before they're ready to decide.
- Process isn't linear.
- Firm/insurance offers don't always feel 'final'.

I applied for all the same course at 5 different unis that I'd never been to and hadn't actually read the modules of what I would be studying... I rushed the entire year making impulsive decisions and not actually researching that this would be 3 years of my future. So I then took the time over the summer.

I chose sociology and I chose that just cause the exams officer at my school was just really rushing me to make a decision. Cause I've done all of the Application stuff last minute because I had no idea what I wanted to do at university and I just thought that I picked a random university and I thought sociology would be sort of a subject that I couldn't go wrong with but, when I look more into it, I really didn't like it, so I've changed to something that I think I like a lot more.

WOBBLES PEAK IN SUMMER

WHEN THOSE DECLINING THEIR FIRM CHOICE STARTED TO THINK ABOUT APPLYING ELSEWHERE.



Q: When did you start thinking about applying somewhere else?
Respondent numbers declined firm choice 852

Note: Not all respondents were school leavers, approx. school timetable provided for context

THANK YOU & QUESTIONS

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