

UCAS

CLEARING 2025: DECLINE MY PLACE RESEARCH

Autumn 2025

Report Author
Barbara Bradshaw, Student Insight Lead



OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Understand decision making and the role of Decline My Place

Objectives - to understand

- the different uses of Decline My Place
- the segments using it
- when decisions are made
- what providers could have done differently to respond to leaving triggers

Audience

2025 entry students

Methodology

- UCAS 2025 Clearing survey (Day 28 data cut)
- UCAS 2025 Placed Student survey
- 3 x focus groups with UK students who considered or used Decline My Place

KEY INSIGHTS

Decline My Place is a choice, but for a large proportion it's a decision prompted by the circumstances they find themselves in on results day. Students placed at their insurance or offered a course change were often driven by a desire to more closely replicate their original plan. Their timeline was more focused around results day.

Firm choice decliners often decided to switch prior to results day, with the summer months being key. Qualitatively the timing was often prompted by having more time to think about or research options. The decision was often gradual, without any key trigger point. Outside termtime, parents, family, and friends are key influencers and supporters

For most survey respondents there was nothing their previous university could do to alter the decision. A minority suggested financial incentives, improved communications or affordable/subsidised accommodation.

While not the key motivator, many focus group participants switched to an option closer to home. Most knew or had previously applied to the university they switched to. They still undertook research, using feedback from family, friends and current students in their decisions to decline or accept.

Those motivated by changing their course/subject were not loyal to their original university and took a 'course first' approach to their research. Some were drawn to an alternative course, often one they had considered previously.

Some no longer wanted to study the course they initially applied to but without another course in mind. These students are perhaps most at risk of leaving the application process, if they don't find an alternative course which catches their interest.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN...

Summer is a key time in decision making but also a point where students may not have access to support from teachers or careers advisors. Students become more reliant on their networks (parents, family, friends etc.) for guidance about decisions and, careers etc.

The most disadvantaged students, in particular, may have limited access to a range of informed support when making Decline My Place decisions.

- Comms over the summer speaking to students who are uncertain, signposting career advice e.g., the careers courses lead to, may be helpful at this stage.
- Recognising the increased role of parents and carers in university decision making and careers advice over the summer may also be valuable e.g., providing content for parents/carers/guardians whose young person is 'wobbling'.

- **Firm choice decisions may not be final - continue to build excitement for the course after application and over the summer.**
- **Responses to applicant enquiries could be make or break.** Ensure enquiries are handled quickly and in the best interests of the applicant.
- **Accommodation allocation and the reality of funding it may be a breaking point for some student.** Consider using accommodation allocation coms to reassure students, signpost financial support, or offer a helpline for students who may be 'wobbling' at this stage. This could be tailored to WP students in the first instance.
- Consider signposting to support for your potential wobblers, e.g., to reassure about the course they have applied to, or explore alternative options at your institution.

DECLINE MY PLACE PATHWAYS

Decline My Place

(41% of Clearing survey respondents)

Decline Firm Choice

(59% of Decline My Place respondents)

Focus group findings

Want to change university only
i.e., will study the same course at
a different university

Likely driver: choosing an
option closer to home

Want to change course/subject
Previous university is 'collateral
damage' in the bid to find a new course,
likely to look at local alternatives or
those considered/applied to previously

New course pull:
Have an alternative
course they want to
change to, potentially
this was always a
consideration

Old course push:
Don't want to study the
course they applied to
or follow that career
path so looking for an
alternative course.

Decline Insurance
Choice
(30% of Decline
My Place
respondents)

Main motivation:
Don't want to go to
insurance choice
(57% who declined
insurance choice)

Potential secondary
driver: changed their
mind about the
subject (21% who
declined insurance
choice)

Decline Change of
Course
(10% of Decline
My Place
respondents)

Main motivation:
Offered a course
they don't want to
study (40% who
declined course
change)

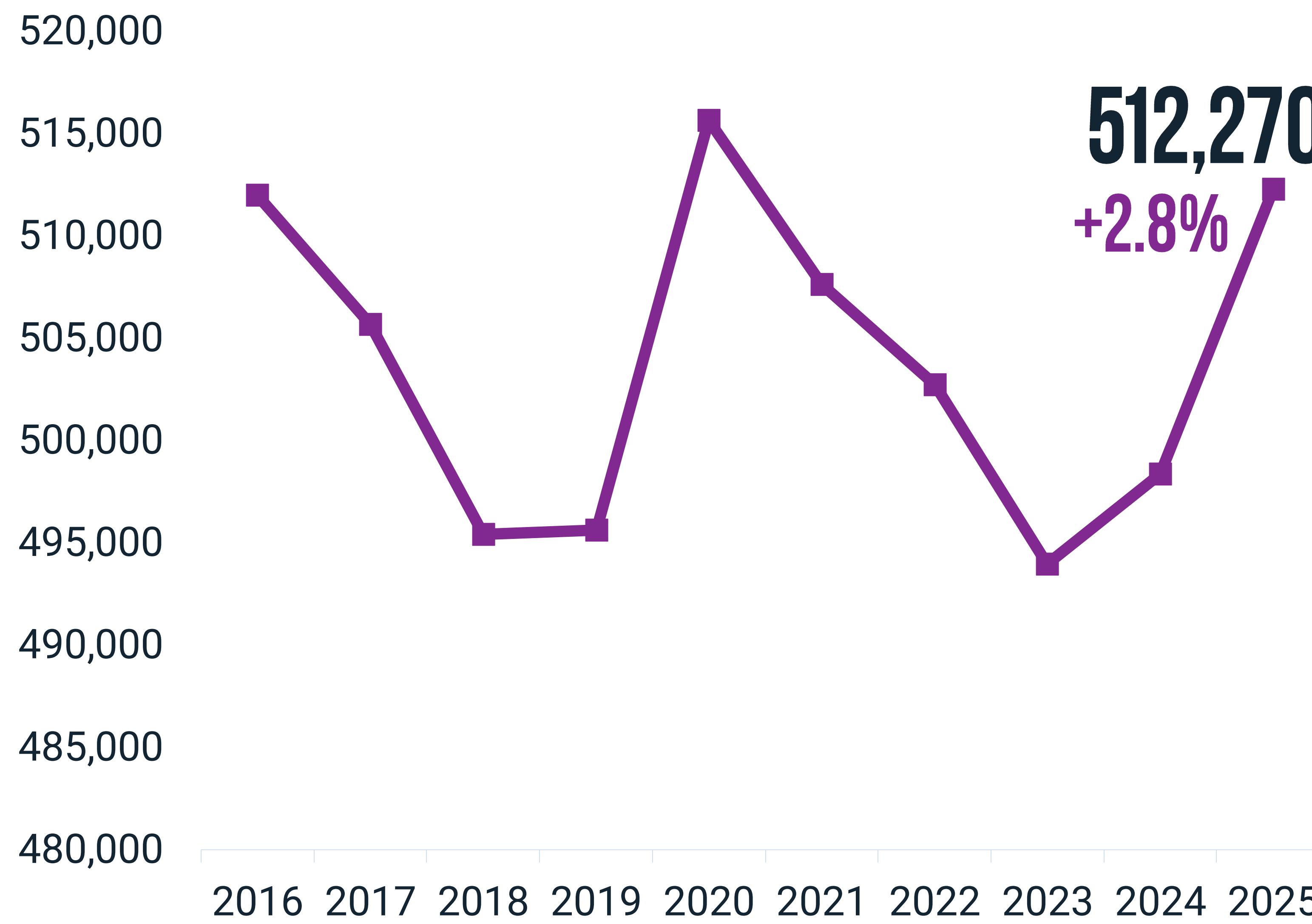
Potential secondary
driver: changed their
mind about the
subject (36%)

CLEARING PATTERNS



28 days after Level 3 results day

HIGHEST NUMBER PLACED SINCE 2020



CLEARING +1.7%

FIRM +2.3%

INSURANCE +6.4%

DECLINE MY PLACE



6.3%

USED DMP

6.3% of all applicants
used Decline My
Place

42,920

(+1.4% since 2024)



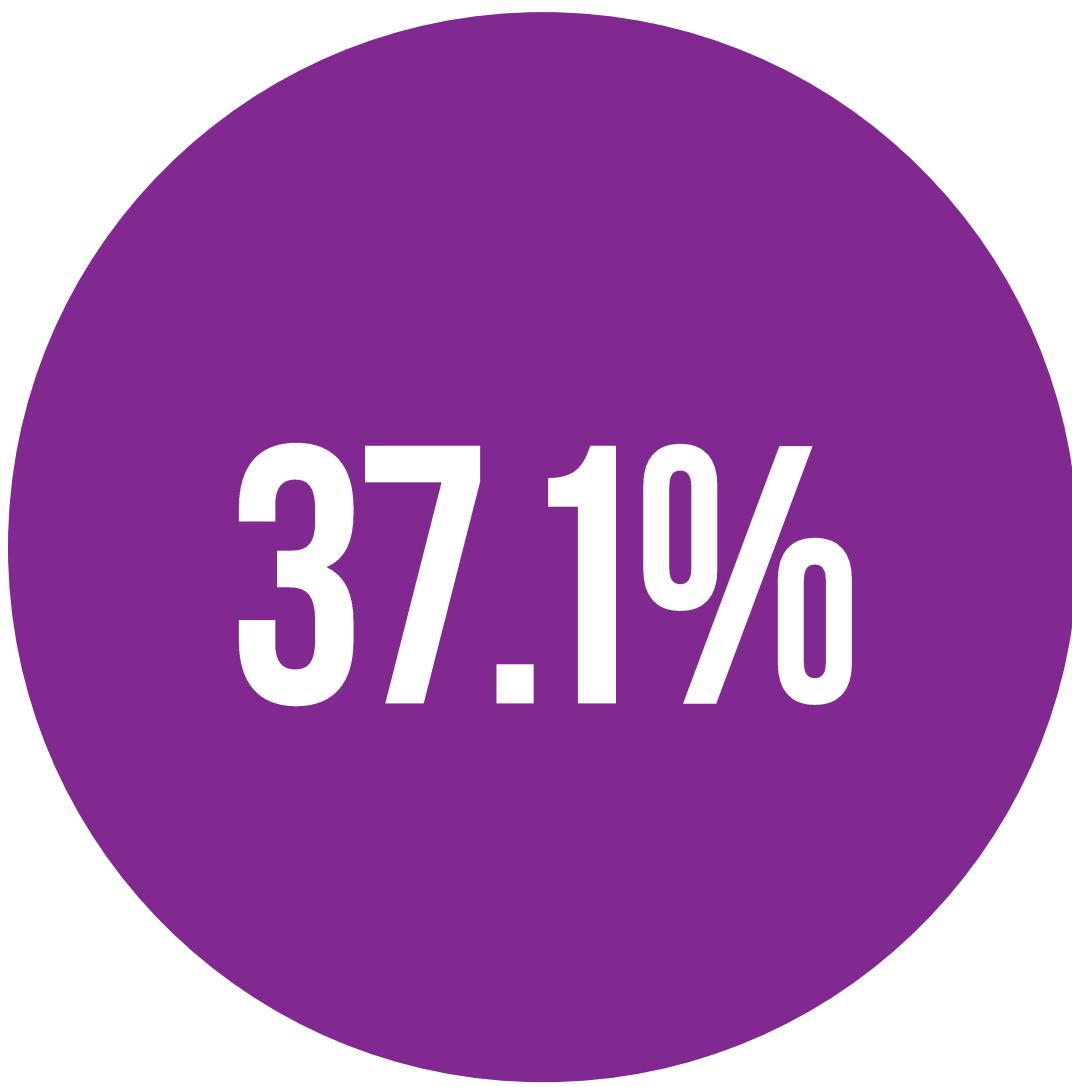
60.5%

DMP USERS PLACED

60.5% of those using
Decline My Place are
now placed

25,960

(+2.8% since 2024)



37.1%

CLEARING USED DMP

37.1% of people
placed in Clearing
used Decline My
Place before finding
their place

DECLINE MY PLACE – UK 18-YEAR-OLDS



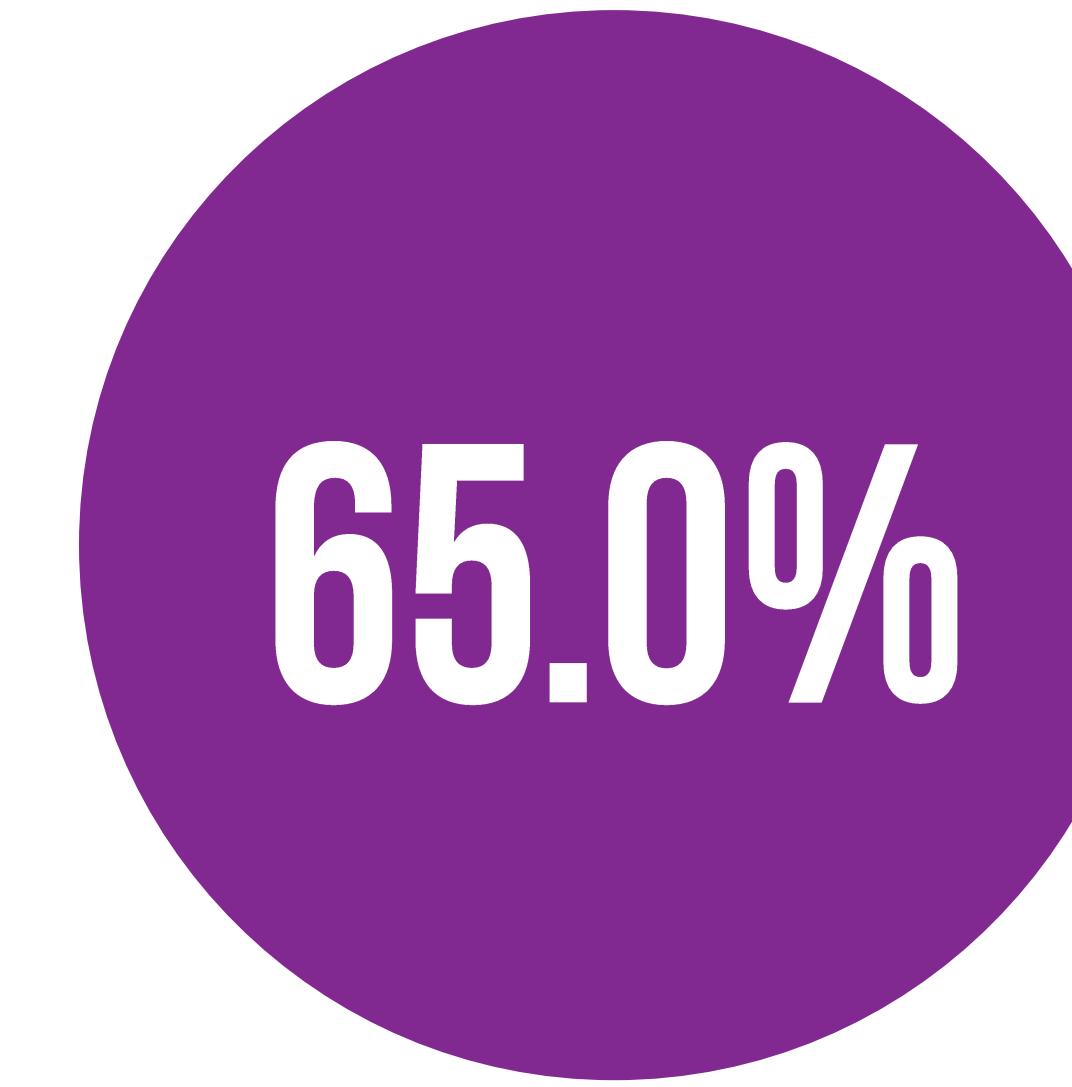
8.9%

USED DMP

8.9% of UK 18-year-old applicants used Decline My Place

29,230

(+0.3% since 2024)



65.0%

DMP USERS PLACED

65.0% of UK 18-year-olds using Decline My Place are now placed

18,990

(+2.6% since 2024)



50.7%

CLEARING USED DMP

50.7% of UK 18-year-olds placed in Clearing used Decline My Place before finding their place

CLEARING SURVEY DATA



Decline My Place respondents

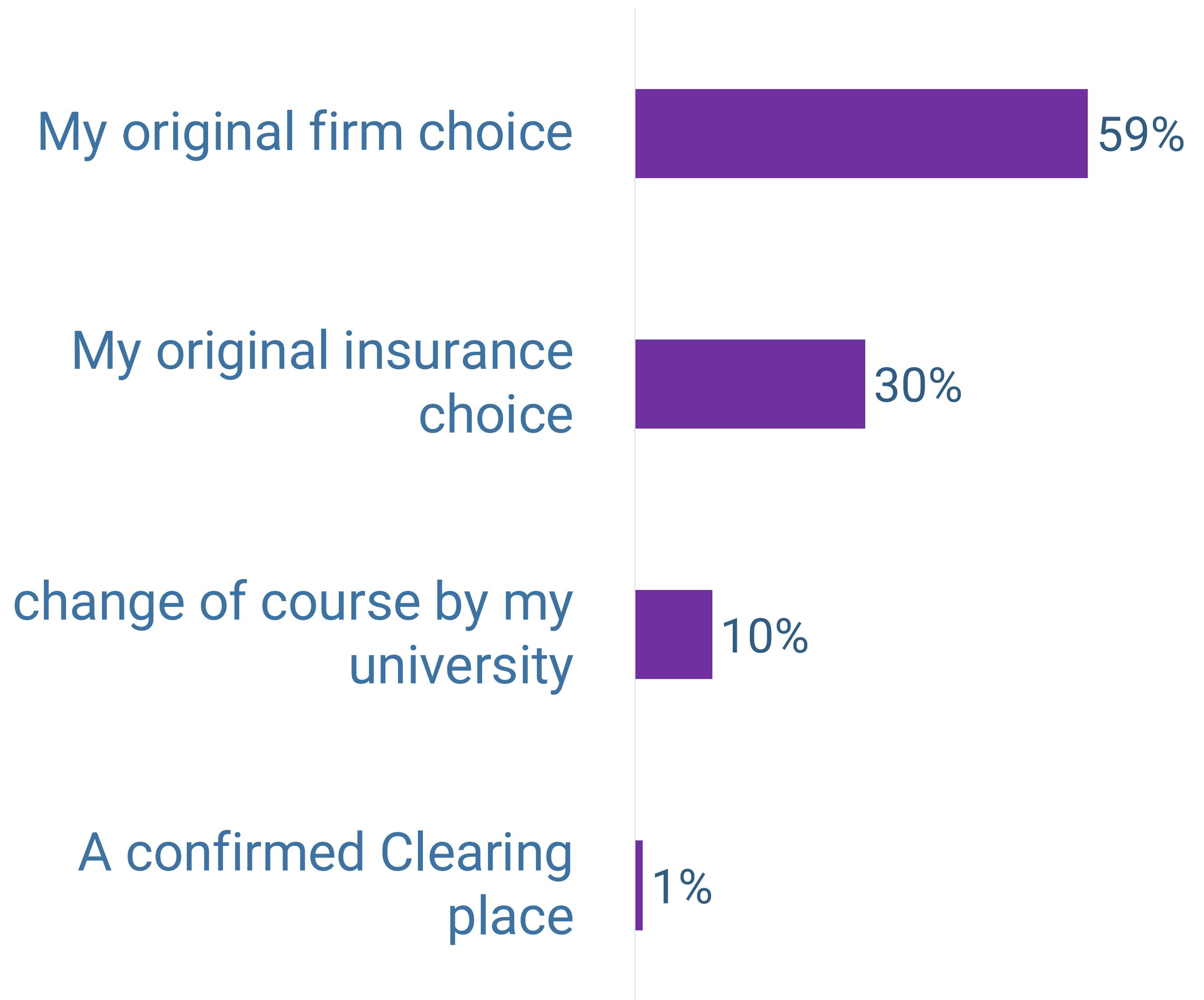
While the option to decline their place is a choice, for a large proportion the decision was made because of the circumstances they found themselves in.

For 40% it was prompted by a change to their original plans, either because they were placed at their insurance choice and chose to decline that (30%), or because they had declined a change of course by their university (10%).

Around three in five (59%) declined their original firm choice university.

60% of DMP respondents found the option to decline their place *extremely useful*.

Which did you decline?



Q: Which of the following did you decline? Base 1462 DMP respondents

Q: How useful did you find the option to decline your place? Base 1457 DMP respondents

When did you decide not to go to your insurance university?

For 43% of insurance choice decliners the decision was a direct response to not getting a place at their firm choice.

Some told us they had subsequently secured a place at their original firm choice through DMP/Clearing. Others said delays by their insurance in confirming their place prompted them to look elsewhere. Some had turned to Clearing as accommodation / affordable accommodation wasn't available at their insurance university.

Almost a quarter (22%) had decided to decline their insurance prior to results day. As with firm choice decliners, some insurance choice decliners had a change of heart about their course and looked to Clearing for other options.

When I discovered I hadn't got a place at my firm choice university

Before I got my results

It was never really a serious choice

Other

43%

22%

22%

13%

Q: You said you declined your insurance choice, at what point did you decide you were not going to go to your insurance choice university?

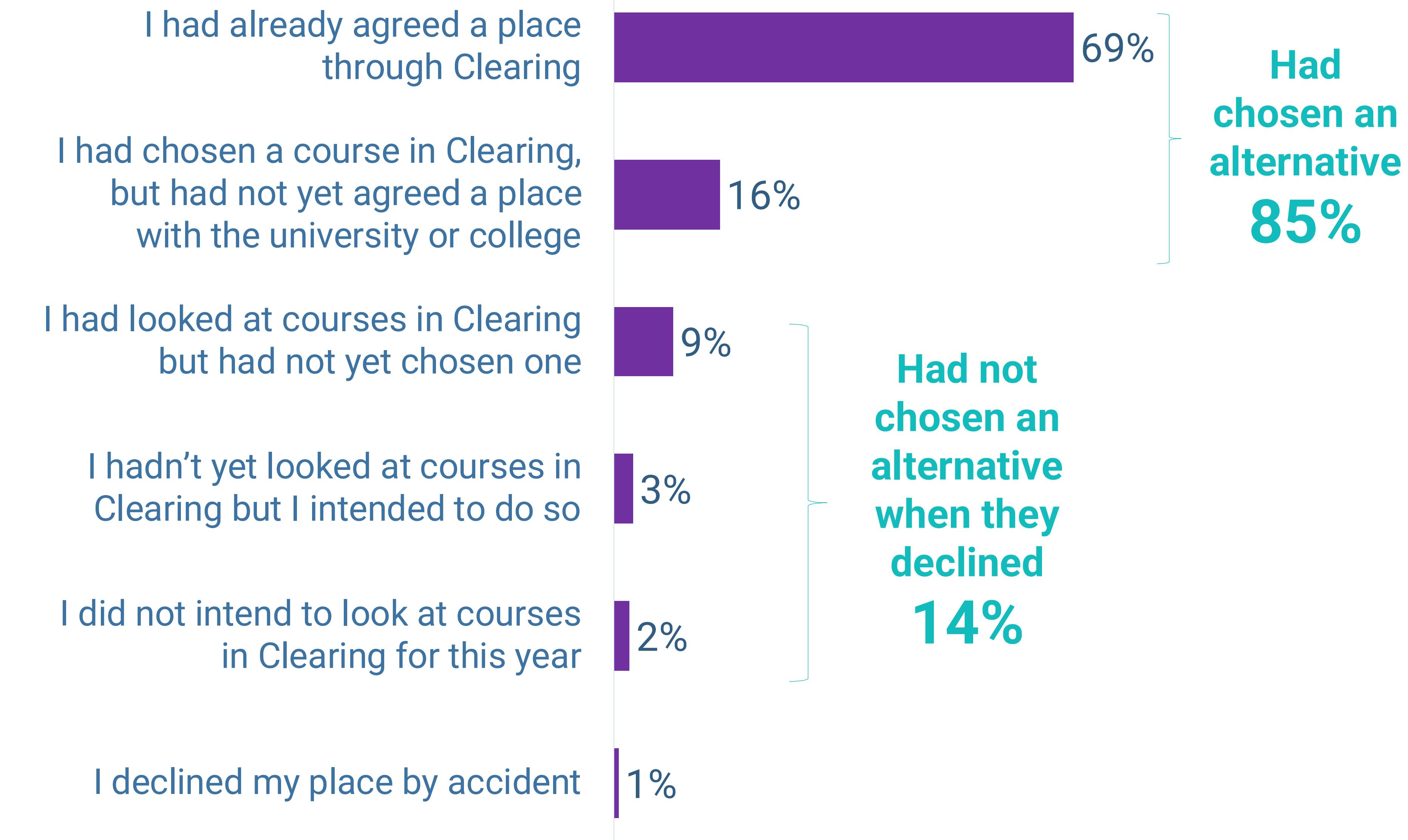
Base 439 declined insurance choice respondents

When the decision to decline was made, most had a plan in place.

The majority (85%) had either chosen an alternative course or already agreed a place through Clearing, when they declined.

However, around one in seven (14%) had declined their place without having an alternative, suggesting that for these respondents the 'push' from their previous choice was stronger than any 'pull' to an alternative university. Among those who **declined a course change** by their previous university the proportion was higher still, with more than one in five (22%) declining this course change without an alternative in mind.

When you declined your place, what were your plans?



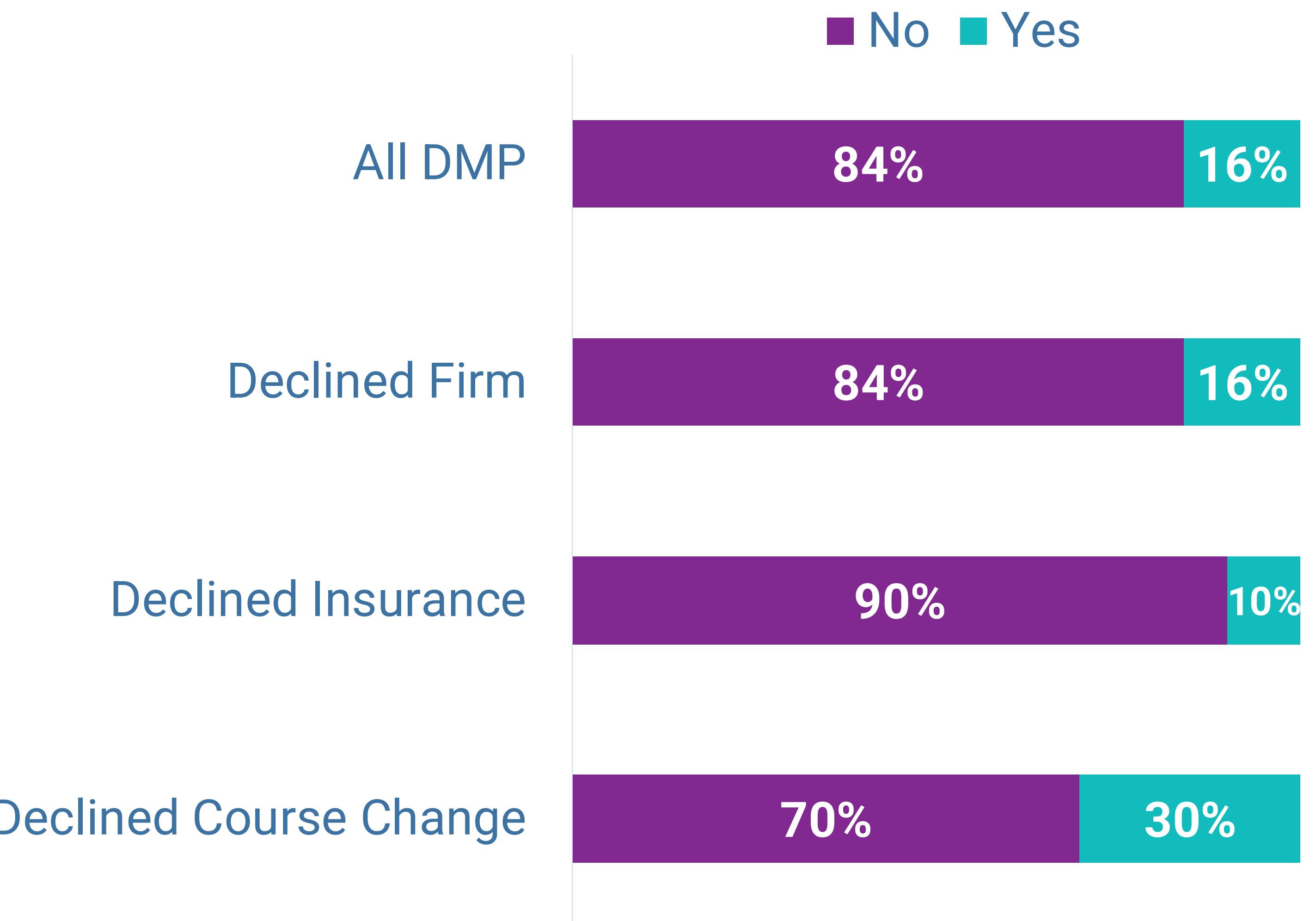
Q: When you declined the university or college you were originally placed at and released yourself into Clearing, what were your plans? Base 1,458 DMP respondents

Once the decision to decline had been made, the majority of respondents (84%) were set on their plans and felt there was nothing their original university could do to change their minds.

Those who **declined their insurance choice** in particular were unlikely to waiver from their decision to decline.

That said, almost a third (30%) of those who **declined a change of course** by their original university indicated that the university could have taken steps to encourage them not to decline, understandably these respondents often wanted the option to revert to the course they had originally applied to.

Was there anything your previous university could have done to encourage you not to decline your place?



Q: Is there anything your previous university could have done to encourage you not to decline your place with them? Base: All 1458, Firm 855, Insurance 438, Course change 142

FOR THOSE WHO MAY BE SWAYED, WHAT COULD THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSITY HAVE DONE TO ENCOURAGE THEM NOT TO DECLINE?

Declined firm choice (16%)

- Offer financial incentives e.g., reduced fees, scholarships or travel bursaries
- Improve communications e.g.,
 - General course details both for info and or to build enthusiasm,
 - interactions with the university e.g., responses to enquiries, open day experience
- Offer affordable or subsidised accommodation
- Course related e.g., not changing their course or campus
- Allow them to change to a different/preferred course

"Tell students what life would look like, how many times I would be in a week etc. Very stressful not knowing as a student who lives over an hour away"

Declined Insurance (10%)

- Offer an alternative course more suited to their preferences
- Accommodation related e.g., ensuring accommodation availability for insurance students, lower cost options
- Better communications e.g., course info to build enthusiasm for their 'revised' situation
- Financial incentives

"More detailed information on what the course content covered despite a lower global reputation"

"I wrote to them with few questions about the course curriculum and prospects few times. They rudely refused to answer any."

"They could have had better communication about the lack of accommodation"

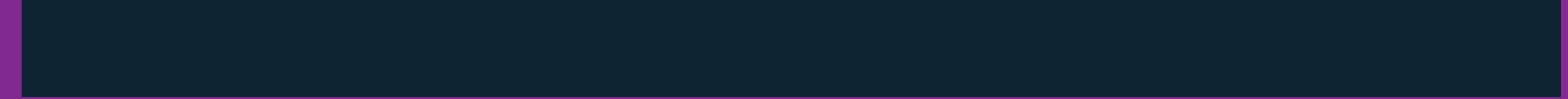
Declined Course Change (30%)

- For almost all who commented the change of course had prompted their decision.
- For some this had been because they had not met the grades for their original offer, for others the course had been withdrawn or moved to alternative campus which was unsuitable for them.
- Several mentioned that better communications around the decisions would have helped them

"They could have not cancelled the course without warning"

"When rejecting me for my original course they offered me a completely different one, if they offered me one similar to the original I wouldn't have rejected it"

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS



What influences the decision to decline one university place and choose another

In 2024 we reported that Decline My Place respondents selected more reasons for choosing their new university (pull factors) than for declining their previous choice (push factors). This remains the case in 2025.

However, different factors influenced decisions depending on which offer was being declined.

Those declining a firm choice were most likely to have changed their mind about the subject they wanted to study (34%). For those declining insurance choices (21%) or a course change (36%) this was the second most frequently cited push factor.

Those declining an insurance choice or change of course **primarily declined** because they didn't want to accept the new position they were in.

Push factors: What influenced your decision to decline your original university? Top reason

DECLINED FIRM CHOICE	DECLINED INSURANCE CHOICE	DECLINED COURSE CHANGE
34% I changed my mind about the subject I wanted to study	57% I didn't want to go to my insurance choice university	40% I was offered a different course which I didn't want to study

Q: Which of the following factors, if any, influenced your decision to decline the university or college you were originally placed at? Please select all that apply
Base: All 1452, Firm 849, Insurance 440, Course change 142

WHILE THE TOP PUSH FACTORS DIFFERED DEPENDING ON WHICH OFFER WAS BEING DECLINED SOME PUSH FACTORS WERE COMMON TO ALL ROUTES

Changing their mind about their subject of study, a change in personal circumstances and wanting to live in a cheaper location were key push factors.

Not wanting to study at their insurance choice university, was the third most mentioned among those who declined a change of course.

What influenced your decision to decline your original university?

	All Decline My Place	Declined Firm	Declined Insurance	Declined Course Change
I changed my mind about the subject I wanted to study	30%	34%	21%	36%
I didn't want to go to my insurance choice university	23%	7%	57%	19%
Change in personal circumstances	17%	19%	15%	7%
I wanted to live somewhere cheaper e.g. living at home or a cheaper city, due to the increase in cost of living	14%	15%	14%	9%
I exceeded the offer conditions, so had a rethink about my options	12%	16%	6%	2%
I was influenced by my parent(s)/guardian(s)	9%	10%	9%	8%
After visiting the uni, I decided I no longer wanted to study there	9%	10%	8%	3%
I wanted to go to my insurance choice university	6%	9%	3%	2%
I was offered a different course which I didn't want to study	6%	3%	0%	40%
I was offered an incentive to apply elsewhere	6%	6%	6%	3%
I was unhappy with the communications I received from the university after selecting the offer from them	5%	5%	5%	6%
I exceeded the offer conditions, so I thought the course would be too easy	4%	5%	3%	4%
I couldn't get the accommodation I wanted at the uni	3%	4%	2%	1%
I didn't meet the offer conditions, so I thought the course would be too difficult	3%	2%	2%	5%

THE TOP PULL FACTORS INFLUENCING NEW UNIVERSITY CHOICES WERE THE COURSE, THE LOCATION, AND PERCEIVED BETTER REPUTATION OR GRADUATE PROSPECTS

The top five **pull factors** were the same regardless of whether respondents were declining their firm, insurance or a course change.

Reputation was particularly important for insurance choice decliners. Among those who declined a course change, preferring the course at the university they had chosen was paramount with almost double selecting this compared to the next most frequently mentioned pull factor.

Which factors influenced your decision to choose the university you're going to?

Declined Firm choice	Declined Insurance choice	Declined Course change
46% I preferred the course 42% I preferred the location of the university/college 33% Better reputation 30% Closer to home 27% Better graduate prospects	48% I preferred the location of the university/college 43% Better reputation 42% I preferred the course 32% Better graduate prospects 24% Closer to home	53% I preferred the course 27% I preferred the location of the university/college 18% Better reputation 16% Closer to home 15% Better graduate prospects

Q: Which factors influenced your decision to choose the university you are going to, over the university you were originally placed at? Please select all that apply Base: All 1449, Firm 852, Insurance 437, Course change 139

UNLIKE PUSH FACTORS, PULL FACTORS WERE LARGELY SIMILAR REGARDLESS OF WHICH OFFER RESPONDENTS WERE DECLINING

Prestige was important to insurance choice respondents

They were more likely than others to have chosen their Clearing university as they believed it to have a better reputation.

Those declining a change of course were less likely than others to say reputation, graduate prospects, or location were influential in their decision.

What influenced your decision to choose the university you're going to?

	All DMP	Declined Firm	Declined Insurance	Declined Course Change
I preferred the course	45%	46%	42%	53%
I preferred the location of the university/college	43%	42%	48%	27%
They have a better reputation	35%	33%	43%	18%
There are better graduate prospects	27%	27%	32%	15%
This university was closer to home	27%	30%	24%	16%
They had better student reviews	20%	20%	23%	11%
The cost of living is lower	15%	16%	13%	9%
I thought the course would be more challenging	12%	13%	12%	9%
I was influenced by my parent(s)/guardian(s)	10%	11%	9%	8%
I prefer the accommodation on offer	10%	10%	12%	4%
They offered me an incentive	4%	4%	4%	3%
The tuition fees are lower	3%	4%	3%	3%
I thought the course at this university would be easier	3%	3%	3%	2%

Q: Which factors influenced your decision to choose the university you are going to, over the university you were originally placed at? Please select all that apply Base: All 1449, Firm 852, Insurance 437, Course change 139

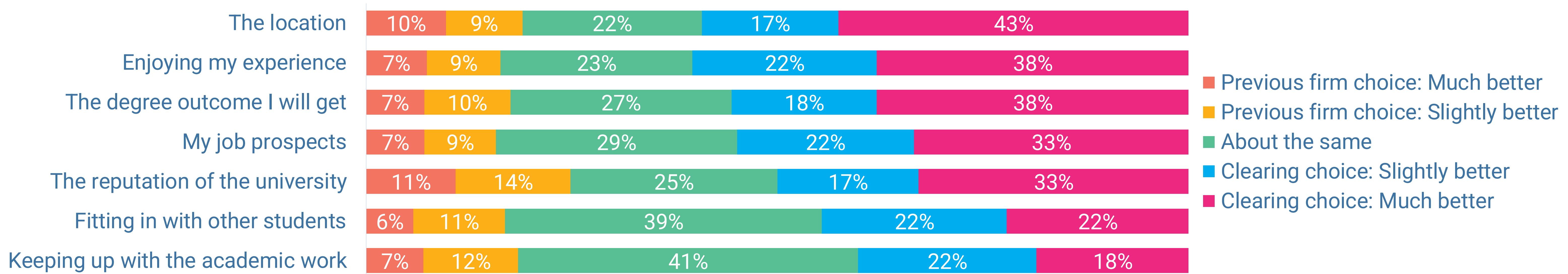
WHICH IS BETTER - THEIR CLEARING CHOICE OR THEIR ORIGINAL CHOICE? PERHAPS SURPRISINGLY FOR FIRM CHOICE DECLINERS THE ANSWER WASN'T ALWAYS THE CLEARING CHOICE

Decision making involves weighing up which university will suit best, particularly for those declining a firm choice. In line with pull factors for their new university centring on changing subject preferences and location factors, respondents who declined their firm choice believed they would enjoy the experience more at their Clearing university (60% felt it would be much or slightly better) and feel the location was better (59%).

For each factor a higher proportion felt their Clearing choice would be better for them than their original firm, although perhaps more surprising were the proportions (more than one in five for each measure) who felt the two universities were about the same, particularly for keeping up with the work (41%) and fitting in (39%).

Reputation is perhaps the stand out factor with a quarter (25%) believing their original firm university was better reputationally than their Clearing choice, perhaps suggesting this is an area where some firm choice decliners are willing to compromise.

Which is better your firm choice or the place you found in Clearing? Firm choice decliners



Q: 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: Firm 845

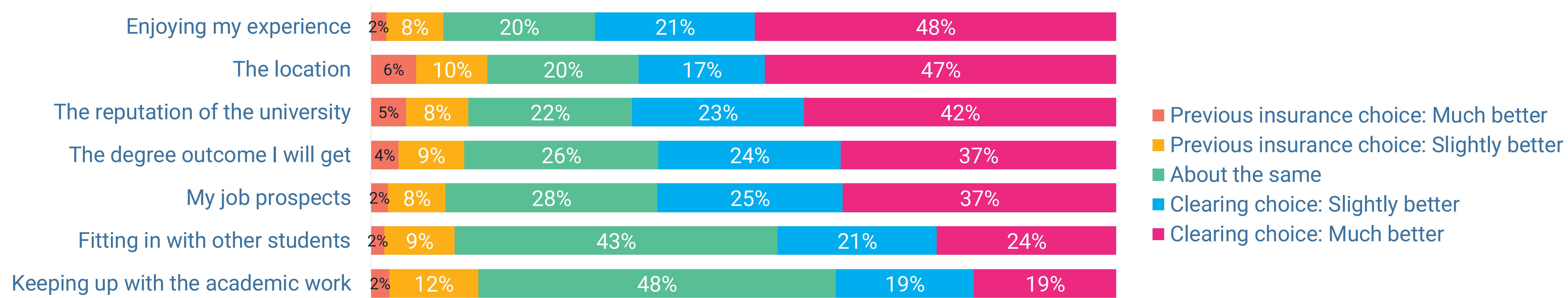
WHICH IS BETTER THE CLEARING CHOICE OR THE INSURANCE CHOICE THEY ARE DECLINING? IN ALMOST EVERY MEASURE AT LEAST DOUBLE FELT THEIR CLEARING CHOICE WAS MUCH BETTER

Like firm choice decliners, insurance choice decliners were most likely to say they would enjoy the experience better at their Clearing university (70% felt their Clearing choice was much or slightly better). While 64% said the location was better for them.

Prestige and employability are important to this audience. 65% felt their Clearing university had a better reputation than the insurance choice they had been placed at. The degree outcome (61%) and job prospects (62%) were also considered better at the Clearing choice.

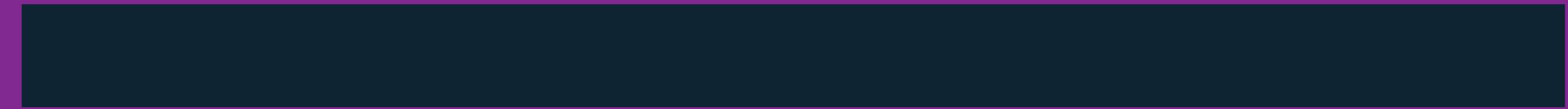
Fitting in with other students was an area where high proportions felt their Clearing university and previous insurance choice were about the same (43%).

Which is better your insurance choice or the course you found in Clearing? Insurance choice decliners



Q: Considering both the university you had as your insurance choice, and the one you found a place with in Clearing, which do you think is better for you on the following factors? Base: Insurance 438

TIMING

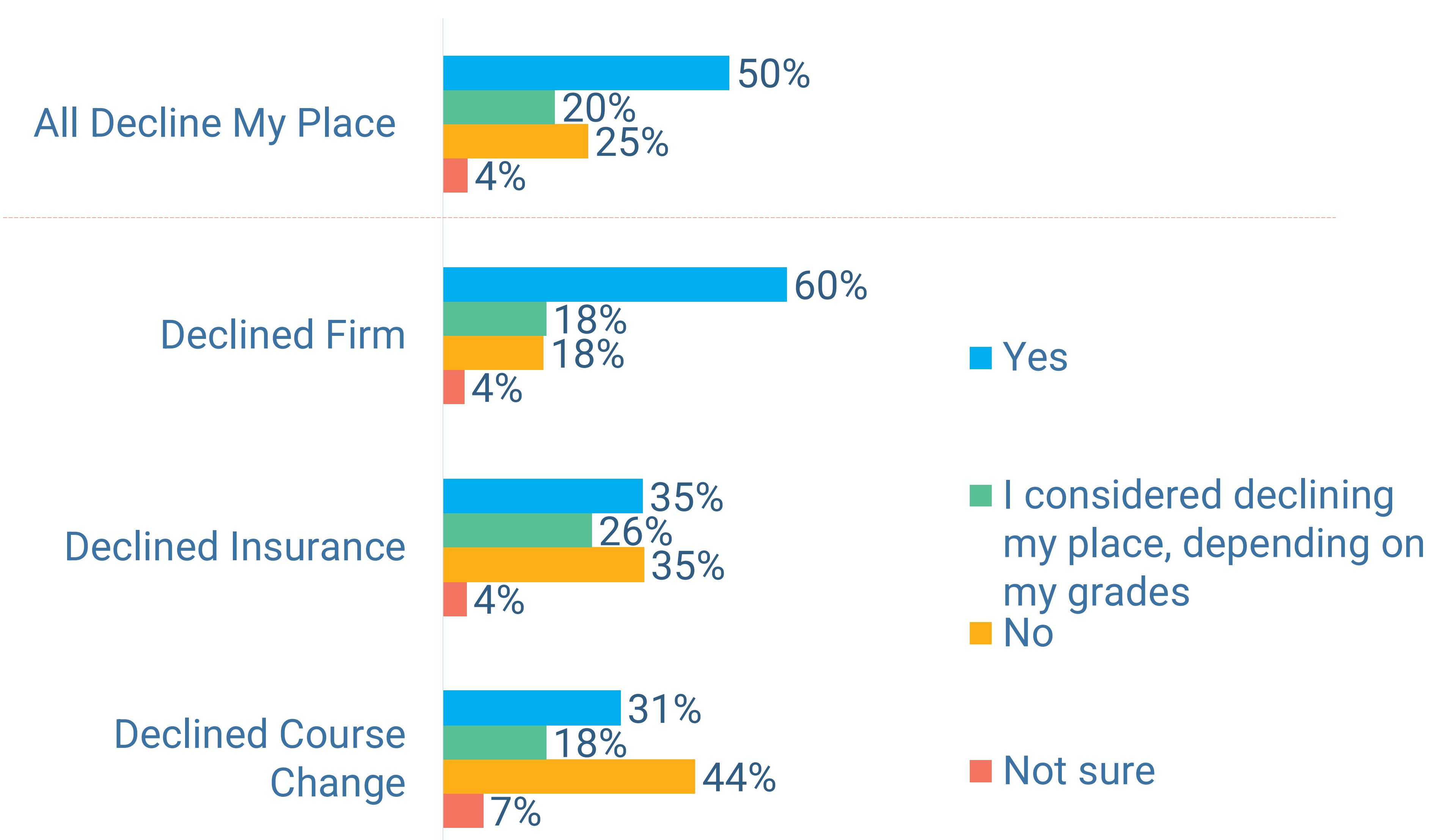


For most, results day itself wasn't the catalyst for the change. Half of all respondents had changed their minds about their original choice before results day while a further 20% were considering it depending in their grades.

Only a quarter changed their minds on or after results day. Higher proportions of those prompted to change an insurance choice (35%) or course change (44%) made the switch on or after results day - only around a third of these audiences had considered changing from their original course before their circumstances changed.

For firm choice decliners the decision appears to have been the most considered, 60% had changed their minds before results day.

Did you change your mind before results day?



Q: Did you change your mind about studying at your original choice before results day?
 Base: All 1458, Firm 854, Insurance 439, Course change 143

DECLINING A FIRM CHOICE UNIVERSITY

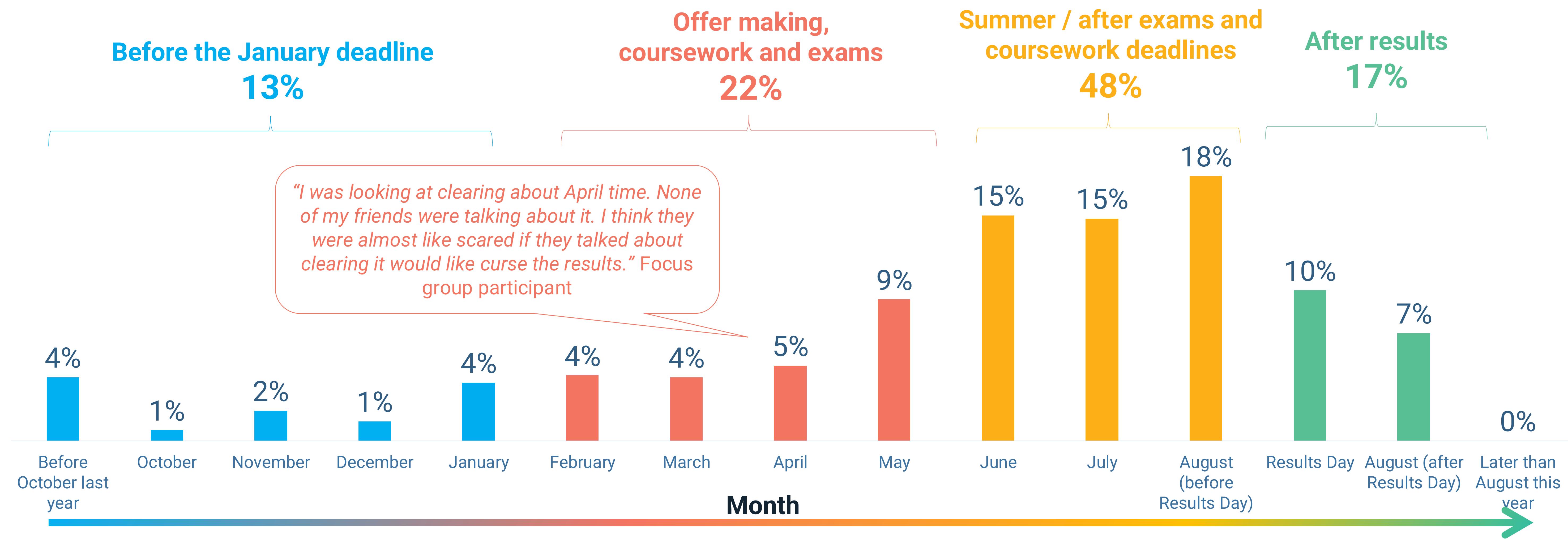
RECOMMENDED

THE SUMMER MONTHS APPEAR PIVOTAL IN FIRM CHOICE 'WOBLING'

Around half of those who declined their firm choice **started to think about applying elsewhere over the Summer months**.

For almost a quarter (22%) doubts about their original choice appeared to creep in earlier in the year, in the period where applicants would typically be receiving and accepting offers (Feb-May).

When those declining their firm choice started to think about applying elsewhere



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

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

Focus group participants outlined a similar timeline. For some, doubts crept in after they submitted their UCAS form or after exams and coursework deadlines, either as a result of their perceived poor performance or because they had more time to focus on their decisions.

A couple of participants had delayed their entry to university from the previous cycle or were resitting and realised they didn't want to study the course or at the university they had applied to. Even among this audience the decision to decline was generally still only made weeks or months before Clearing.

I really changed my mind like 2 weeks before results day. I didn't do any research beforehand. I just kind of like chose universities that, I feel like I would like, but without any research, and then I did some research.

I was looking for like months beforehand, like which other courses I can do and which other unis I can do and I just happened to find the geography one about two weeks before results day, and then that was when I decided to do that instead.

I would say for me it was gradual. I guess I did some research like after the exams were over and I just wasn't really satisfied with how narrow the career path was, so I decided I wanted to try something else.

Most participants said the decision to decline was gradual rather than identifying any specific trigger prompting their decision.

For the few who had a 'trigger' putting them off their original choice, these tended to involve a realisation that they didn't want a career in the field they had initially planned, often this was a result of experiences working in that field.

One participant identified a trigger related to the university itself

"I logged on to the website and I saw that the average [accommodation] was 10 grand for a shared room. I was like, no, it's not for me, this isn't my place. I'm not risking it, it's too expensive and I like mentally clocked out from that moment."

I don't think for me it was a particular moment. It was just the fact that I'd had the gap year obviously and I was just sat there thinking, is this really what I want to do? Do I want to go this far out and study this degree? So then I think it was just lots of little moments like that that built up towards it. Just thinking to myself, I don't think this is what I want to do or where I want to go. And then it culminated. And then I decided to just pull out.

I don't want to go into a career where it's more of the same really, and the pay isn't amazing right now.... I thought I don't want to do this basically, and then made the jump

In order to be qualified for that course you have to do 2 weeks work experience. So I did my two weeks and I found that I really didn't enjoy it. So it kind of put me off the course.

I had two very specific moments, so my final deadline for my foundation. I crammed it all in three days, having put it all off because I didn't want to start and I was dreading it and that was like I don't want to do this as a degree and so that was kind of June. And then working with an occupational therapist and talking to her about it really kind of solidified in my head that actually that seems like a much better route and I should just go for it and apply for it.

The extent of initial research into their five UCAS choices had varied with some admitting they had carried out very little research before applying.

Others had focused on researching the universities themselves e.g., through visits, feel, and fitting in, but changed their minds after comparing course and module details or looking at metrics such as ranking. Some felt rushed by teachers or were under pressure to submit by the deadline and made hasty decisions.

After undertaking more thorough research into the universities and courses they had applied to, doubts crept in and alternative options were considered.

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 ... So I then took the time over the summer

I decided to explore my options a bit because I also wasn't very sure about psychology. It was more of a choice that I just made in college because I felt stuck into making a choice.

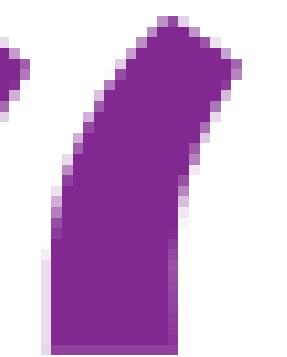
The exams officer at my school was just really rushing me to make a decision. I've done all of the Application stuff last minute because I had no idea what I wanted to do at university and I just thought that I picked a random university and I thought sociology would be sort of a subject that I couldn't 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.

JAKE'S STORY

Jake lives in West London, he plans to study Marketing and live at home for university.

He received three offers including the university he's now placed at but chose an alternative university as his firm. After further research he began to question his choice.

He made the final decision to switch universities 2 weeks before results day. On results day he called the new university and received an offer.



I decided to cancel my firm because I kind of found it like as an impulse. I researched it. I mean, I went to the open days and applicant days. I enjoyed the uni. But I didn't really check its rankings or the quality of teaching or anything...and then afterwards, once I did my research, I realised that [the new uni choice] had better teaching, had better facilities and everything.

[The new choice] is a lot closer to me. It's a 20 ish minute drive compared to, you know, [the previous uni] where I'd have to get a train every day and it'd be a lot more like financially, a lot more money and just harder to do every single day.

No one I knew was going to [the previous choice] and it was kind of nerve-wracking, like I wouldn't know anyone. And a lot more people I know are going to [the new choice]. Not that that that's a deciding factor, but it's a nice bonus.

I can be more a part of it because I live closer. I can be more a part of the of the community. I can stay longer, stay later because I live closer.



UNIVERSITY AND COURSE CHANGE MOTIVATIONS

Change of course

- Career alignment / long term goals
 - Wanting something with perceived better employment options on graduation
 - Realising they did not want a career in the field they initially chose
- Course mis-match
 - A desire to study a long-term interest takes priority over the course initially applied to (new course pull)
 - A loss of interest in the previous course prompts the search for a new course (old course push)

Change of uni

- Prompted by change of course
- Location based
- Cheaper accommodation
- Better metrics e.g., ranking, reputation etc
- Recommendations and positive feedback and in a minority of cases vs. negative student feedback about the previous choice
- For two participants the financial status/industrial action at the university had contributed to their decision to decline

So like the general consensus online when I looked was that the admin's really bad...and then my friends I knew who went last year said that it's really disorganised... Their students aren't very happy, the staff aren't very happy, so they've got bigger issues than me to figure out.

Indicative decision path: Changing university location

Focus group participants were either changing

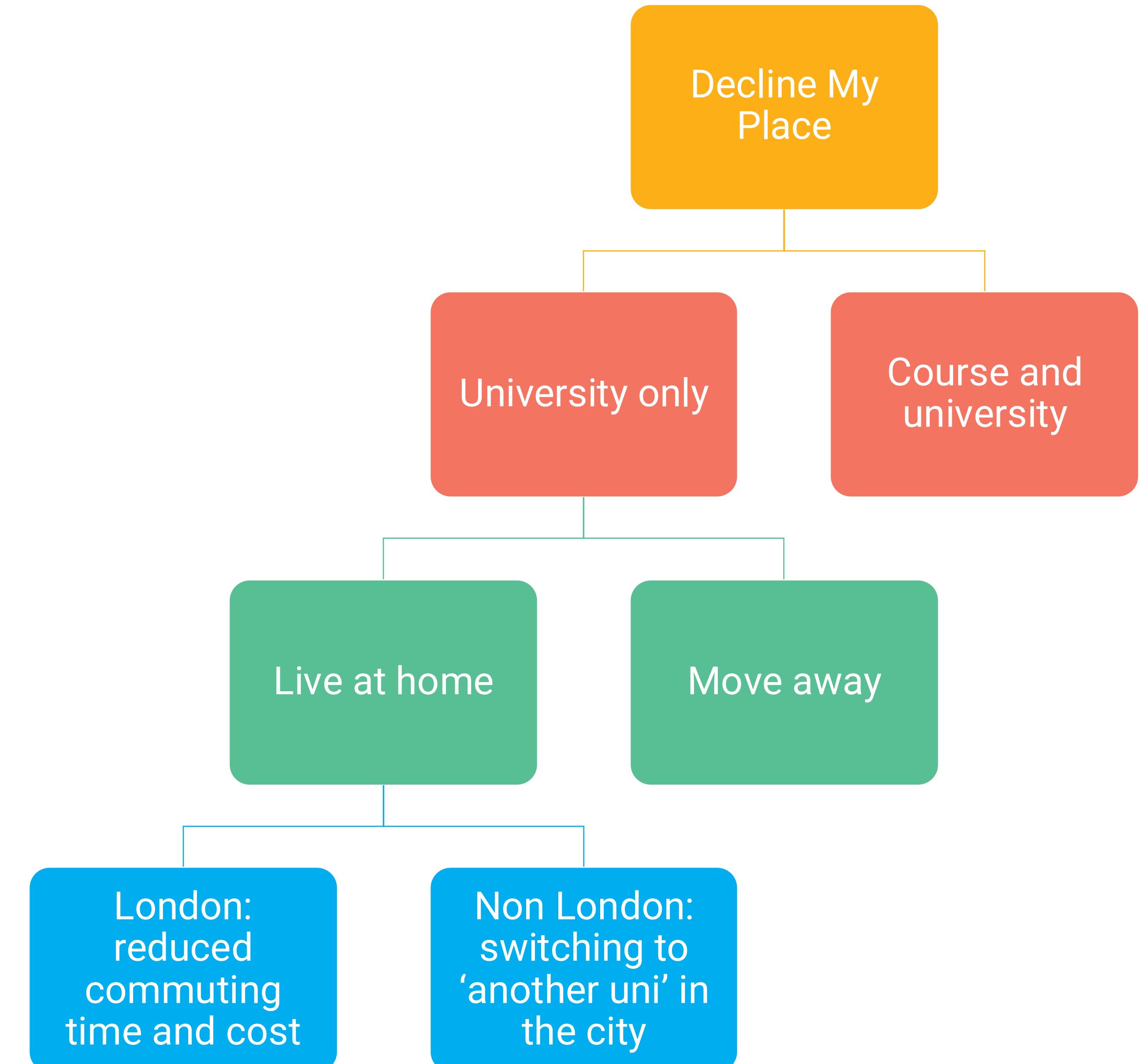
- both course and university or
- just their university.

For almost all respondents, regardless of whether they were changing course or not, their new university was closer to home, and for some this was the primary reason for their change.

For respondents **planning to live at home**, staying at home was almost an unspoken 'hygiene factor'.

- Greater London based respondents wanted to reduce commuting time and cost.
- Among those outside London, their alternative university was another institution in their home city.

For those **moving away for university** choosing somewhere closer to home was not necessarily the key factor in choice but among the benefits they cited of their new university choice.



For those changing both course and university the course change was generally the key motivator for declining their place. Course changers were not loyal to their original university, taking a 'course-first' approach to their research.

New course 'pull'

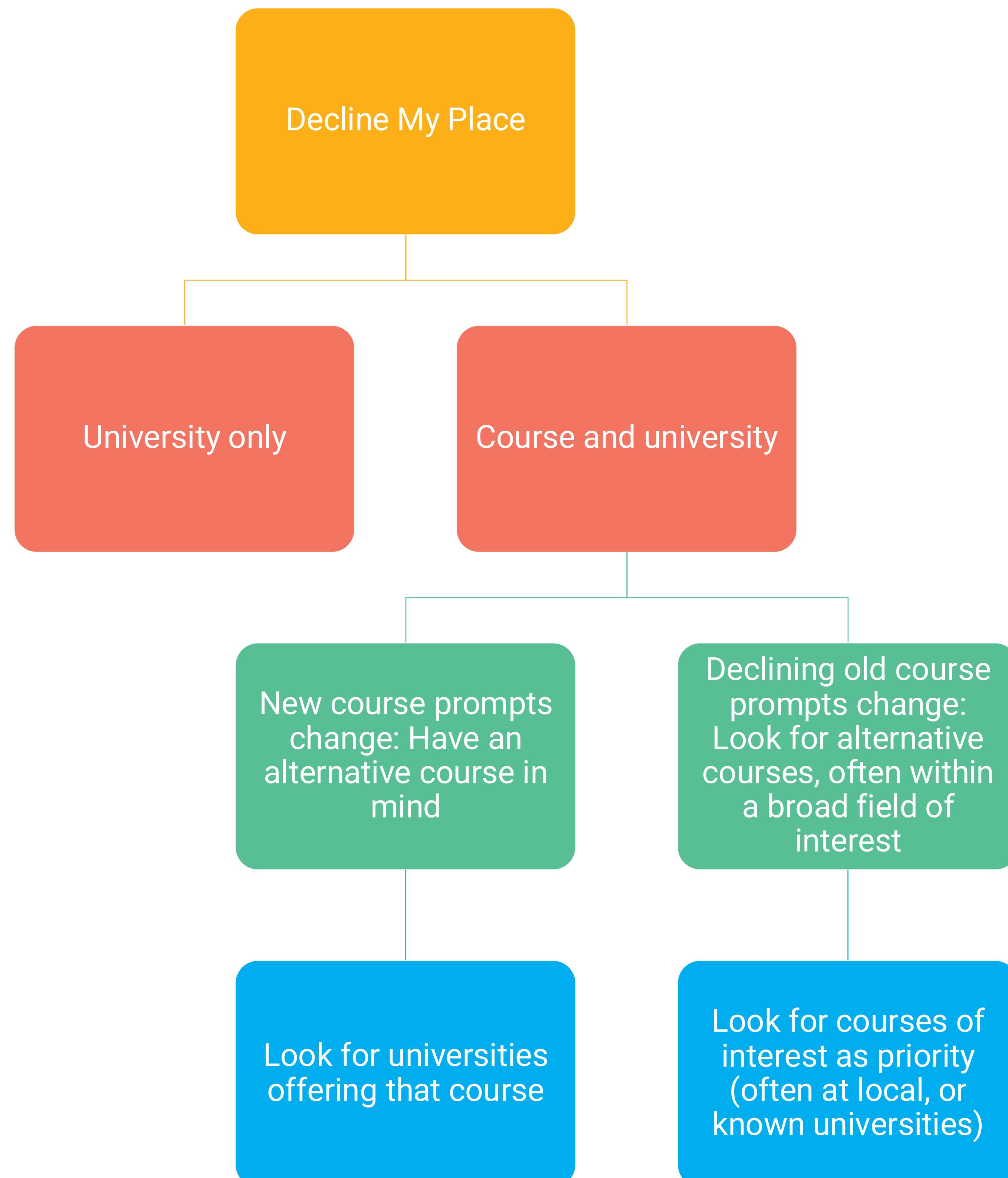
For some, wanting to study their **new course** prompted the change. These were often courses/career paths they had considered or studied previously. Having decided on the alternative course they then set about finding universities that offered it.

Old course 'push'

For others, a change of heart about their **previous course** prompted the decision, often without an alternative in mind when they decided not to study the original course. They researched a range of options in a new field of interest, or potentially taking a gap year / not going to university. They sought advice from family or teachers before arriving at a course they were excited to study. The universities considered were often local or those they had considered or applied to previously.

Once the new course has been decided upon, participants felt there was nothing their original university could have done to sway the decision as it was course related rather than anything the university had done.

Indicative decision path: Changing course and university



When looking for an alternative university students generally weren't starting from scratch, most firm choice decliners surveyed (84%) had some knowledge of the university before applying. 37% had previously applied to the university they were now placed at in Clearing.

Even given the short window between deciding to decline and results day, focus group participants described extensive research into their new choice including reviewing course content and modules, employment prospects, speaking to current students and alumni, referring to student reviews and exploring university reputation and rankings.

Word of mouth also played a key part in decision making both in confirming the decision to decline and in choosing an alternative option, with participants getting first hand feedback from friends or family who had studied at the universities involved.

Q:Thinking about the university or college you were placed at through Clearing, how much do you feel you knew about them before applying to them through Clearing? Base declined firm choice 857

The research I did was mostly into the course and the facilities rather than the rest of it, because I already kind of know how the [city] life works and that kind of stuff

I looked at all of the unis I may have wanted to go through clearing with, just in case I'd done like way worse than I thought I had or like way better

My cousin had already finished the same degree there [at the previous uni] and I had friends that were also at that uni and the same course and they didn't particularly recommend it.

Parents or other family members were key supporters in the decision to decline.

A couple of course changers mentioned discussing their options with professionals already working in their chosen field, these were people already in their networks e.g., friends or family.

Perhaps because key decisions were often made outside termtime, support from teachers, schools or colleges were mentioned less often.

A couple mentioned supportive conversations with the university they planned to join, both in terms of the course and the Clearing process.

I spoke a lot to my brothers, because they've gone through the system. I asked my parents their opinion on it. They're all very supportive. They told me to do what I think I would enjoy most and what I could do the most with. So then through that, I just felt more empowered sort of to go and do what I wanted to do instead.

I would say my family also had a bit of an influence on my decision making. Prior to the course change, my physics teacher who taught me physics at A level, he also recommended the course because of how broad the pathway is. So that also like stuck in the back of my mind, and then I decided to explore it after the exams finished. I would say both their words and advice like helped influence my decision.

So my boyfriend actually is doing paramedic science there and so he's giving me kind of insights into what kind of facilities and things they have available to healthcare students and it just made sense.

EMILY'S STORY

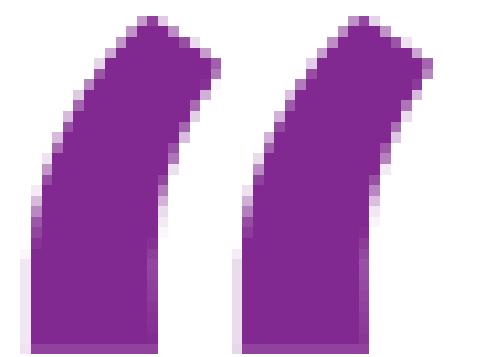
Emily's original firm choice was English Language and Literature at the Russell Group university in her home city.

After her exams she wasn't confident she'd get the grades and started to look around.

She spent time over the summer researching alternatives and decided to apply to another university in her home city to study Geography.

Although she didn't make the grades for her firm choice she was still accepted.

On results day she declined her place as her heart was set on her alternative choice.



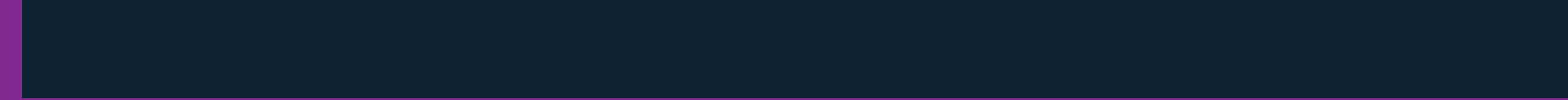
I didn't think I was going to get into uni from about April, so I'd already started like having a look at clearing, but for other English courses at that point. And then I think about two weeks before results day, basically, I was like, 'why on earth am I doing an English degree?' There's not many jobs you can get with an English degree. There's a lot more with a geography degree.

I rung them [the new university] up, then they were very, very useful on my phone. At first, I found the like the clearing department... they were really useful in terms of like what to actually do on results day. And then I got put through to one of the one of the lecturers I think, and I had a really good phone call with her about the actual course and what that'd look like. And I think that made the biggest difference, probably.

But I spoke to my parents a lot through it and then on results day, they drove me to college so I could get my results. And then I phoned [the new uni] in the back of the car at about 8:15. But yeah, they [my parents] were very, very helpful about it. Mostly in terms of like moral support, and they helped me research jobs I can do on the on the back of it.

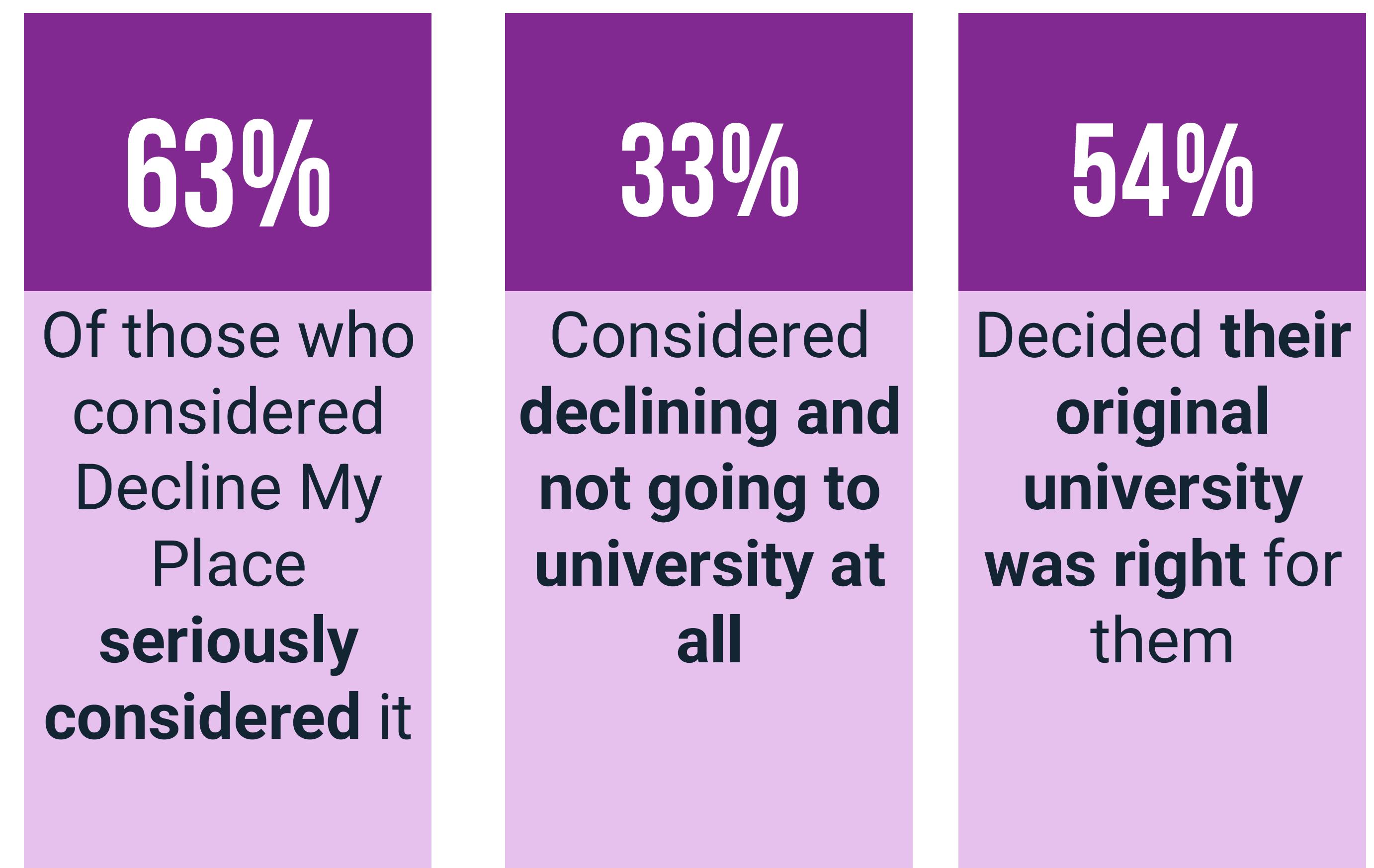


NOT DECLINING



Those who considered declining their place but decided not to

16%
OF OUR END OF CYCLE PLACED
STUDENT SURVEY
RESPONDENTS HAD
CONSIDERED DECLINING
THEIR CONFIRMED
UNIVERSITY PLACE BUT
DECIDED AGAINST



UCAS End of Cycle Placed Student Survey 2025
Q: Did you at any point consider declining your confirmed place at university? Base 3,927

Q: How seriously did you consider declining your place? Base Considered DMP but didn't use 617
Which of the following, if any, were reasons why you ultimately decided not to change your course? Base Considered but DMP but didn't use 611

While those who considered declining ultimately decided to stick with their original choice this wasn't always because they were totally committed to it.

12% had looked for alternatives but didn't find any courses they preferred in Clearing. 7% were concerned they would not get accommodation if they switched.

For more than a quarter the process itself was a deterrent, either because they didn't want to risk not finding an alternative (23%) or because they didn't understand how to release themselves (4%).

These students could perhaps have swayed from their original choice if they had found an alternative option that met their needs, or had more knowledge and confidence in the process.

Why did you decide not to use DMP?



Among focus group respondents who considered declining but decided not to, **the decision-making process was not linear**, these participants mentioned various points in their journey where they struggled with their choices.

For some, their insurance choice was the alternative university they were considering, others were considering a complete change in direction.

Most had looked into the Decline My Place process to some extent, but there was concern they could end up without a place or a misconception/ misunderstanding around whether they could secure a place at their insurance using Decline My Place.

So I think I first heard about it [DMP] on social and then I just looked into a little bit online and I was just thinking that if I do decline my place, does that like automatically send me through to seeing if I got into my insurance or do I have to redo your whole process, go through clearing. Knowing that like I can either contact my insurance or switch it around, but it was just too much for me to like think of doing in fear of losing all my options completely. So I decided against it.

I did research it quite a bit and like about on results day what I could do if I still got into my firm and I think they said like you could ring up your insurance and say 'do you have a place for me?' I got into my firm, but I'd rather go here and it seemed like I was fairly confident about being able to do that, I think.

While all had ultimately decided not to change course, some gave the impression **they were still not completely sure of their decision.**

One respondent was planning a 5 hour daily commute, another STEM student mentioned that the thing she was most looking forward to about university was joining a society that would allow her to pursue the alternative course she had considered.

Several mentioned that it was only on Results day, when they secured their firm choice that they 'settled' on the decision. Suggesting perhaps that these students may be at a greater risk of attrition in the future.

I was unsure of what I wanted to do all throughout year 13. So I was between Biological sciences or doing backstage theatre production all throughout the year and I ended up applying to biology, obviously, but even after I submitted all my options, I was still unsure of what I wanted to do. So like, especially when it came up to results day, I was so convinced I failed maths that I really thought I'd take a gap year and like try and go through the theatre route that way, but I passed, so I ended up giving up on that.

So when it was leading up to results day, I really wasn't sure if I preferred [my firm choice] or [my insurance choice] and because they're quite different as well in terms of the student experience. And also the teaching and the course. But I did eventually settle with [my firm choice] because I also didn't know what grades I was going to get.

And even to be fair, up to results day, I was still unsure whether I'd made the right decision. But then I think once I got like the confirmation of, oh, you've got a place. I was like, oh, OK, no, that is the right place for me to go.

ALEENA'S STORY

Aleena is from East London. She plans to live at home to study Pharmacy.

During the main scheme she discovered the course at her favourite university was on a campus 2.5 hours away, prompting her to consider another option closer to home.

She visited both universities taking friends along to help make her firm choice decision. She discussed her options extensively with her mum and subject teacher, eventually choosing the first option due to the course content.

She was still questioning her decision until Results Day when she ultimately decided to stick with her firm choice.

So, I was considering my second option. It wasn't even a second option situation. It was like they were both on the same level for me and it was a bit hard for me to decide to go which one to.

So, I did look, I did like research a little bit about the decline my place and also about changing my mind. But it was more worry about getting in, more fear of declining like, because we apply with hope of getting an offer, and then declining it, it just felt like such a scary move for me. Because imagine I decline it and then just everything goes wrong, and I can't be complaining because I was the one that made the move. So, it's like if they're going to give it to me and I'm happy with that, I'm just going to stick with that. I'm not going to take my chances.

And also, just getting that e-mail from UCAS that says you got your place, it feels so official, and it was just like, yes, like I want it, and I didn't want to change.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

2025 Clearing survey

41%

OF CLEARING SURVEY
RESPONDENTS HAD A
CONFIRMED PLACE AND CHOSE
TO DECLINE THEIR PLACE
AND FIND AN ALTERNATIVE IN
CLEARING

Q: Which of the following statements best describes how you obtained your current place at university or college? Base 3,645 respondents (Day 28)

CLEARING SURVEY: DECLINE MY PLACE RESPONDENT PROFILE

Decline My Place survey respondents were likely to be young/ school leaver age with almost three quarters (72%) aged 18. The age profile was similar to that of 'traditional' disappointed on results day Clearing students (versus Direct to Clearing students who tended to be older).

Gender and widening participation (WP) characteristics were in line with the broader Clearing survey population



Men
30%

Women
67%

Age	
16 to 17	3%
18	72%
19	16%
20-24	7%
25-39	1%
40 or over	1%

- 25% Would be the first generation in their family to enter higher education
- 20% Currently receiving free school meals, or received free school meals between the ages of 11 to 18
- 15% Have a physical and/or mental health condition, long-term illness or learning difference
- 3% Have unpaid caring responsibilities (not including parenting)
- 46% Had **none** of UCAS' standard Widening Participation characteristics