PART OF UNITE STUDENTS' INSIGHT SERIES 2017

REALITY CHECK

A report on university applicants' attitudes and perceptions

CONTENTS

hepi
Higher Education Policy Institute

UNITE STUDENTS

CONTENTS

	FOREWORDS	3
	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
	INTRODUCTION	6
1	TEACHING, LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY	8
2	MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING	14
3	ACCOMMODATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION	21
4	READINESS FOR STUDENT LIFE	28
	CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS	32
	APPENDICES	34

Acknowledgements

Thank you to our steering group for all of their help and advice:

Liz Wilkinson, AGCAS
Lynne Condell, NASMA
Ant Bagshaw, Wonkhe
Catherine Boyd, Wonkhe
Emily McIntosh, University of Bolton
John Bloomfield, AMOSSHE
Gillian Almond, CUBO.

FOREWORD

BY RICHARD SMITH

As the UK's largest provider of student accommodation, Unite Students has accumulated deep insight into the experiences and views of students across the UK. In particular, we have learnt that good social integration is a critical factor in helping young people to settle and thrive in their new environment.

With this report, we wanted to tell another story. We wanted to understand more about how young people applying to university for the first time think about the upcoming transition to life as a student. The results show that it is a time of both excitement and apprehension. Having the right information, the right skills and the right support when things get tough can make the adjustment easier.

Reality Check is the first major survey of its kind to look exclusively at applicants' expectations and state of mind. I hope it will focus attention on applicants' needs at this critical moment in their lives. I also hope that, when read alongside our annual Student Insight Survey and other research, it provides useful food for thought for universities, schools, colleges, applicants, parents, and advisers so that the needs of applicants are better understood and met.

> "I HOPE REALITY CHECK WILL FOCUS ATTENTION ON APPLICANTS' NEEDS AT THIS CRITICAL MOMENT IN THEIR LIVES... AND ENSURE THAT THEIR NEEDS ARE BETTER UNDERSTOOD AND MET."

Richard Smith

Richard Smith
CEO, Unite Students

FOREWORD

BY NICK HILLMAN

Since 2006, the Higher Education Policy Institute has run the Student Academic Experience Survey, generally in conjunction with the Higher Education Academy. This has revealed a substantial gap between students' prior expectations and their time in higher education.

For example, in the 2017 results, fewer than one in ten students (9%) say their higher education experience closely matches their prior expectations. One quarter (25%) say it is better, one in eight (13%) say it is worse and around half (51%) say it is better in some ways and worse in others.

The degree to which prior expectations are met goes a long way to explaining students' perceptions of value for money, how much they think they are learning and their satisfaction with their course. Yet we know surprisingly little about those prior expectations – just that they are often not being met.

That is why HEPI and Unite Students have jointly set out to ask higher education applicants what it is they are hoping for and expecting. The results are illuminating and will be of interest to applicants, all those who advise people about higher education, higher education institutions, policymakers and the media.

> "THE DEGREE TO WHICH PRIOR EXPECTATIONS ARE MET GOES A LONG WAY TO EXPLAINING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS."

Nick Hillman
Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reality Check looks at the expectations of university life from the perspective of the applicant. To what extent will their hopes be met by the realities of this new and exciting phase in their lives?

Unite Students has conducted an annual survey of university students and applicants since 2012. In the process, we have built up a granular picture of their time in higher education, highlighting the issues and challenges that this generation of undergraduates face.

This year, we decided to conduct some bespoke research into the views of applicants in the period before they arrive at university so that we can better understand their aspirations and ambitions.

This is important because Unite Student's annual Student Insight Survey, and other research, including that of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), has recognised the deep connection between applicants' expectations of higher education and students' overall satisfaction. It also shows, that the first few months at university can play a disproportionate role in shaping their overall experience of higher education.

The report shows applicants are excited by what lies ahead: moving away from home, gaining more independence and taking on the academic challenge of studying for their degree. They are career-minded, with high expectations about securing a fulfilling job once they graduate, and they are confident about managing their money.

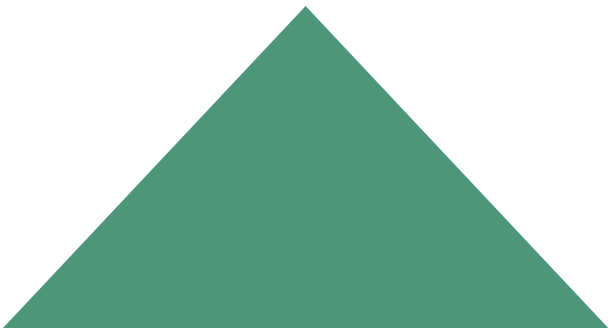
In short, being on the cusp of higher education is a time full of anticipation and excitement. Dig a little deeper, and the results show that – despite their confidence and excitement – not all applicants are well prepared. There are some significant disparities between what they assume life is like at university, and what it is actually like for most students.

For example, applicants perceive they will receive more one-to-one time and undertake more group work than at school or college, particularly among those applying to Arts courses. Given that independent directed learning is a key characteristic of higher education, it is unlikely such expectations will be met in full.

While most applicants approach university with optimism, it is clear that for some it can be a challenging time. Many have high expectations of the level of careers advice, financial guidance and mental health support that will be available.

Alongside the findings in Reality Check, we include some thoughts on ways that the transition from school and college to university might be made easier. We hope that these will stimulate a debate about how higher education institutions, student unions, schools, policymakers, and accommodation providers can work together to ensure people are better prepared and get the most from this challenging and exciting time in their lives.

WHILE MOST APPLICANTS APPROACH UNIVERSITY WITH OPTIMISM, IT IS CLEAR THAT FOR SOME IT CAN BE A CHALLENGING TIME.



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT REALITY CHECK

Early in 2017, Unite Students and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) jointly commissioned YouthSight to conduct a large-scale bespoke survey of attitudes and opinions among university applicants. Reality Check provides a summary of the key findings and themes to emerge from the research.

Record numbers of people are going to university: in 2015/16 there were almost 530,000 first year full-time undergraduate students.[1] Our research surveyed over 2,000 young people applying for higher education and intending to take up a place in the next two years.

The applicant survey is designed to enable us to identify areas where prior expectation and the reality of higher education are out of step with one another. It is hoped this will help applicants preparing for higher education and outline some areas where more could be done to ensure a smooth transition to student life.

In addition, the Student Academic Experience survey from HEPI and the Higher Education Academy has identified a connection between expectations prior to university and student satisfaction rates, as well as students' perceptions of value for money.

This report looks at the expectations of university applicants across four key thematic areas:

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY
2. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING
3. ACCOMMODATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION
4. READINESS FOR STUDENT LIFE

Consideration has been given to what the findings mean for all those who are communicating with, and supporting, applicants and new students.

REALITY CHECK SHOWS THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN APPLICANTS' AMBITIONS AND HOPES FOR LIFE AT UNIVERSITY AND THE REALITY OF STUDENT LIFE. IT ALSO INCLUDES THOUGHTS ON HOW ALL PARTIES CAN WORK TOGETHER TO SUPPORT THEM BETTER.

[1] HESA 2015/16, accessed 6 June 2017 https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students

READY OR NOT?

81%

OF APPLICANTS ARE EXCITED ABOUT GOING TO UNIVERSITY

61%

OF APPLICANTS FEEL ANXIOUS ABOUT GOING TO UNIVERSITY

Methodology overview

The research methodology comprised an online survey that took participants, on average, 20 minutes to complete. In total 2,021 applicants to UK universities participated in the survey. An applicant is defined in this research as someone who has registered with UCAS and has started the application process.

The questionnaire was reviewed by a steering group within the higher education sector. Some questions were duplicated from the Unite Students' Student Insight Survey to allow direct comparisons between applicants and students.

More detail on methodology can be found in Appendix 2.

Unite Students' Student Insight Survey 2017

The Student Insight Survey was conducted among 6,500 participants in parallel with the applicant survey. All respondents were undergraduates studying at UK universities. The survey has been running since 2012. We have referenced relevant unpublished data from the 2017 findings to help highlight areas where applicants' expectations and views match, or fall short of, the actual student experience. The full 2017 student findings will be published later this year.

1

REALITY CHECK:

TEACHING, LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY

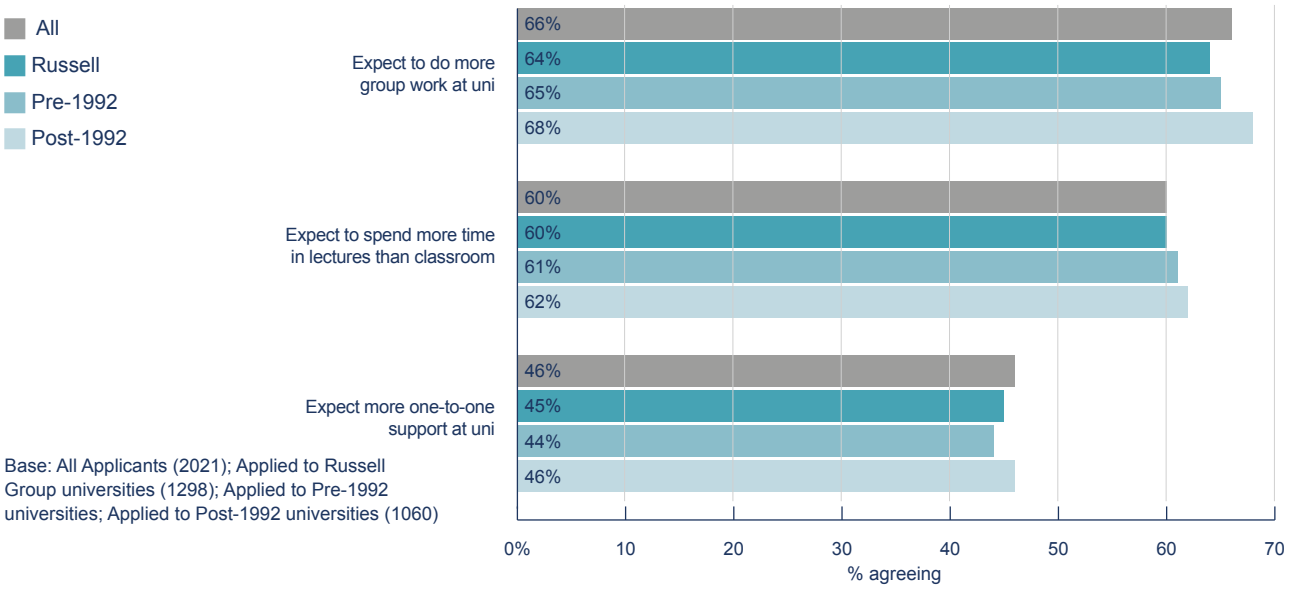
UNIVERSITY APPLICANTS ARE PREPARED TO WORK HARD AT UNIVERSITY. BUT THEY DO NOT ALWAYS RECEIVE THE CONTACT TIME AND CAREER SUPPORT THEY EXPECT.

Applicants are ready for a demanding workload at university. Nearly all (95%) assume that they will do more independent work at university than at school. Yet their expectations regarding the amount of contact time and career support that they will receive at university are often unlikely to be met.

In comparison to their school experience, two thirds (66%) of applicants expect more group work and more than half (60%) expect to spend more time in lectures than in their school classroom.

Figure 1 Applicant expectations of contact time at university

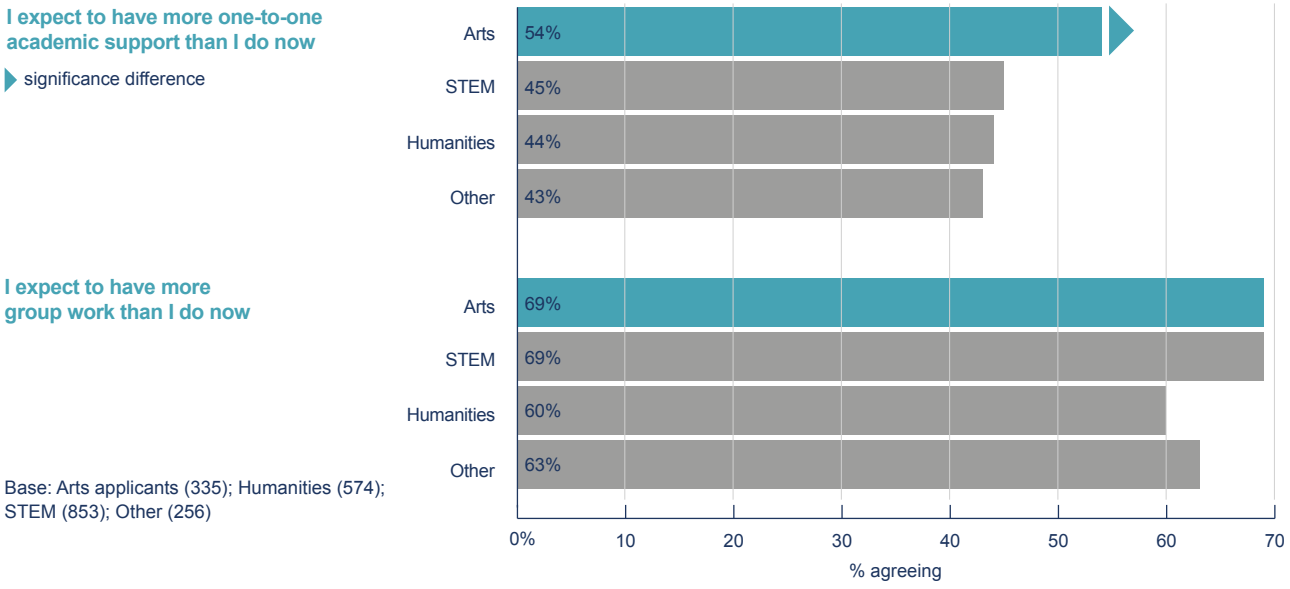
Almost half of those surveyed (46%) believe that there will be more one-to-one academic support available at university, compared to their experience at school.



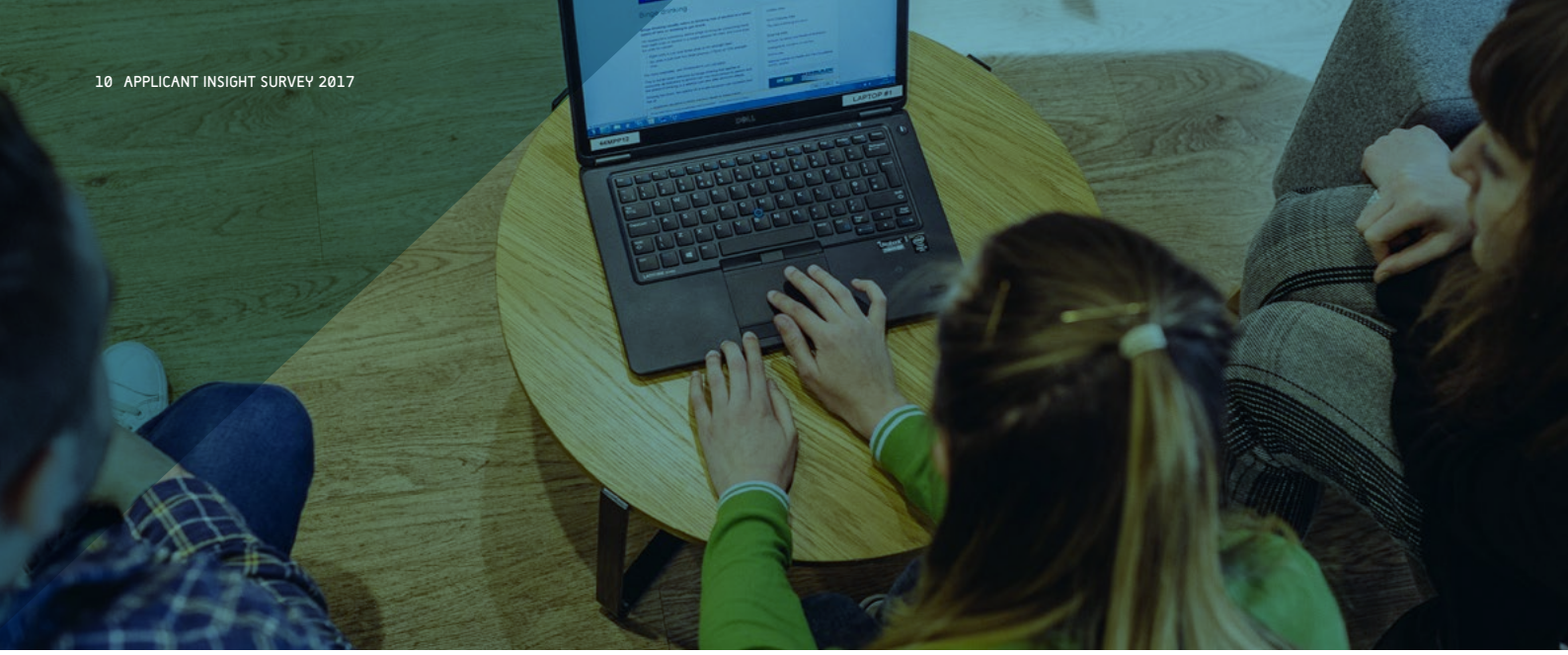
Base: All Applicants (2021); Applied to Russell Group universities (1298); Applied to Pre-1992 universities; Applied to Post-1992 universities (1060)

In terms of one-to-one contact time, the expectation gap is most pronounced among applicants for Arts courses, with over half (54%) anticipating that there will be more one-to-one academic support than at school and over two thirds (69%) expecting more group work.

Figure 2 Arts student expectations of contact time as compared with other disciplines



Base: Arts applicants (335); Humanities (574); STEM (853); Other (256)



The reported experience of students does not match applicants' expectations of contact time.

The data from the Student Insight Survey 2017 suggests a gap between what applicants expect in terms of academic support from their university and what they will actually receive.

Students have a lower experience of group work than applicants are expecting, with half (52%) of students agreeing that there is more group work than at school.

Similarly, the percentage of students who agree that they spend more time in lectures than they did in the school classroom is much lower than applicants expect. While six in ten (60%) applicants expect to spend more time in lectures than they do in school lessons, fewer than two in ten (19%) students find that this actually happens.

The level of one-to-one support available to students also falls some way short of applicants' expectations; almost half (46%) of applicants anticipate more one-to-one support than at school, but just one-third (36%) of students find this to actually be the case.

EXPECTATION:

66% OF APPLICANTS EXPECT MORE GROUP WORK THAN AT SCHOOL

REALITY:

52% OF STUDENTS DO MORE GROUP WORK THAN THEY DID AT SCHOOL

EXPECTATION:

60% OF APPLICANTS EXPECT TO SPEND MORE TIME IN LECTURES THAN IN THE CLASSROOM

REALITY:

19% OF STUDENTS SAY THAT THEY SPEND MORE TIME IN LECTURES THAN THEY DID IN THE CLASSROOM

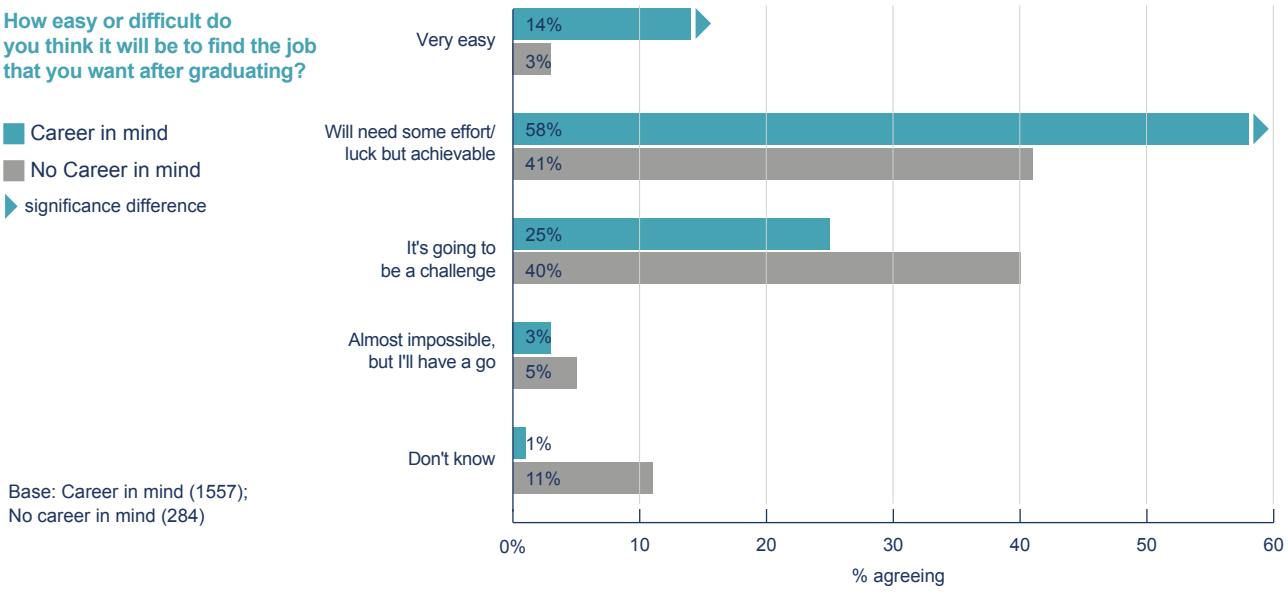
Employability is top of mind for applicants.

While intrinsic motivations, such as interest in the subject, are still the strongest reasons for attending university, the third strongest is to get a better job. Over three-quarters (77%) of those surveyed have a specific career planned. Those who have identified their future work are more optimistic about getting a job after university than those who haven't. A similar proportion of those with a career in mind (72%) believe that, with some effort, they can secure the job of their choice after graduating.

Including those without a career in mind, two thirds (66%) of all applicants believe that with some effort they can secure the job they want after graduation. According to the Student Insight Survey 2017, just over half (54%) of all students believe that the job they want is within reach post-graduation.

Applicants have a high expectation of their university helping them to plan and achieve their career ambitions. Four out of five applicants (78%) expect more career-planning support at university than at school. In fact, just three fifths (61%) of students taking part in the Student Insight Survey 2017 reported that this is the case.

Figure 3 Applicant expectations on getting a job after university



Base: Career in mind (1557); No career in mind (284)

66% OF ALL APPLICANTS ARE CONFIDENT ABOUT SECURING THE JOB THEY WANT AFTER GRADUATING

54% OF STUDENTS FEEL CONFIDENT, WITH LOWEST CONFIDENCE EXPERIENCED BY SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS

The proportion of applicants believing that they will find it very easy to find a job after graduating has risen from 8% in 2016 to 11% in 2017.

Those applying to STEM courses are more optimistic about their job prospects than those applying to other courses. Over two thirds (71%) of STEM applicants are confident about securing the job they want after graduating, compared to three-fifths (63%) of both Arts applicants and Humanities applicants (62%).

A 'CONTACT CONTRACT'

Many universities publish student charters, outlining in general terms what students may expect from their universities, as well as what each university expects of its students.

For example, the University of Newcastle's Student Charter for 2016/17 states: 'a full-time stage one undergraduate student will receive at least 9 hours of academic staff contact time per week as an average across 24 teaching and learning weeks'.

More detailed information tends to be provided in programme handbooks. The University of Manchester's Programme Handbook for History tells students to: 'Treat your studies like a full-time job, devoting 40 hours per week to them for each of the 30 weeks of the academic sessions'.

An honest 'contract' between students and universities may help to manage expectations on both sides, and prepares applicants for the reality of academic life.

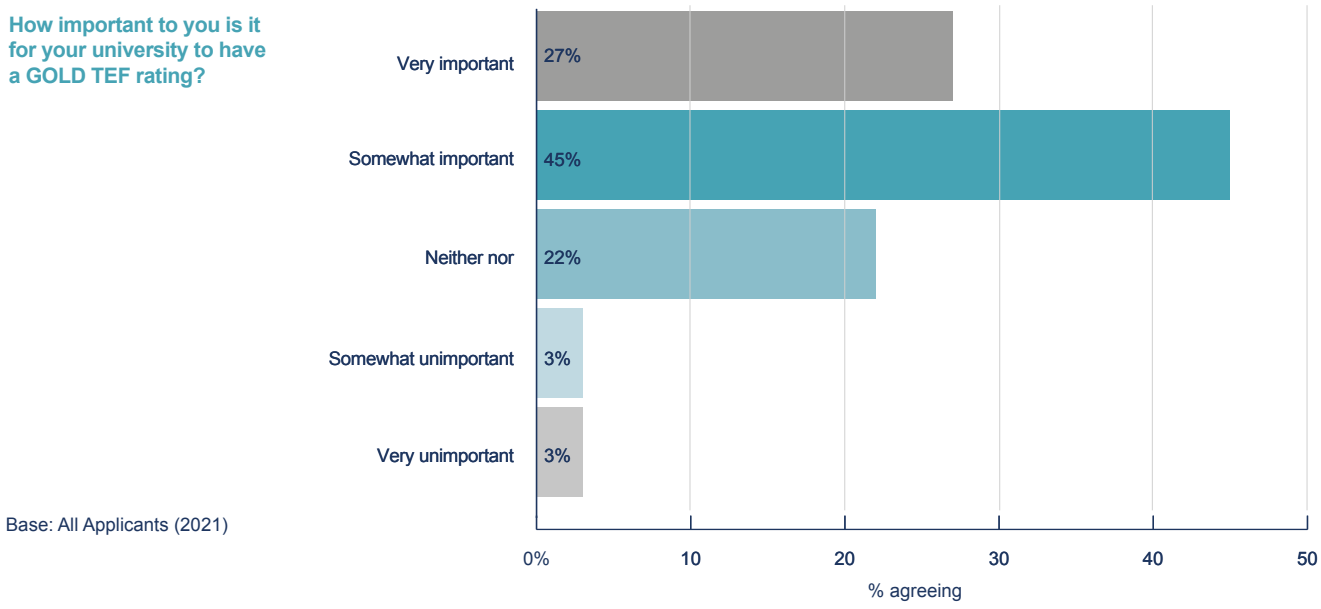
THE TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK COULD BECOME A DECISION-MAKING FACTOR FOR APPLICANTS.

We asked applicants for their response to the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) using the following wording:

"The TEF is a scheme being introduced by the government to measure the quality of teaching at Higher Education Institutions in England. Universities will be given a Gold, Silver or Bronze rating to indicate the level of teaching they provide. How important to you is it for your university to have a GOLD TEF rating?"

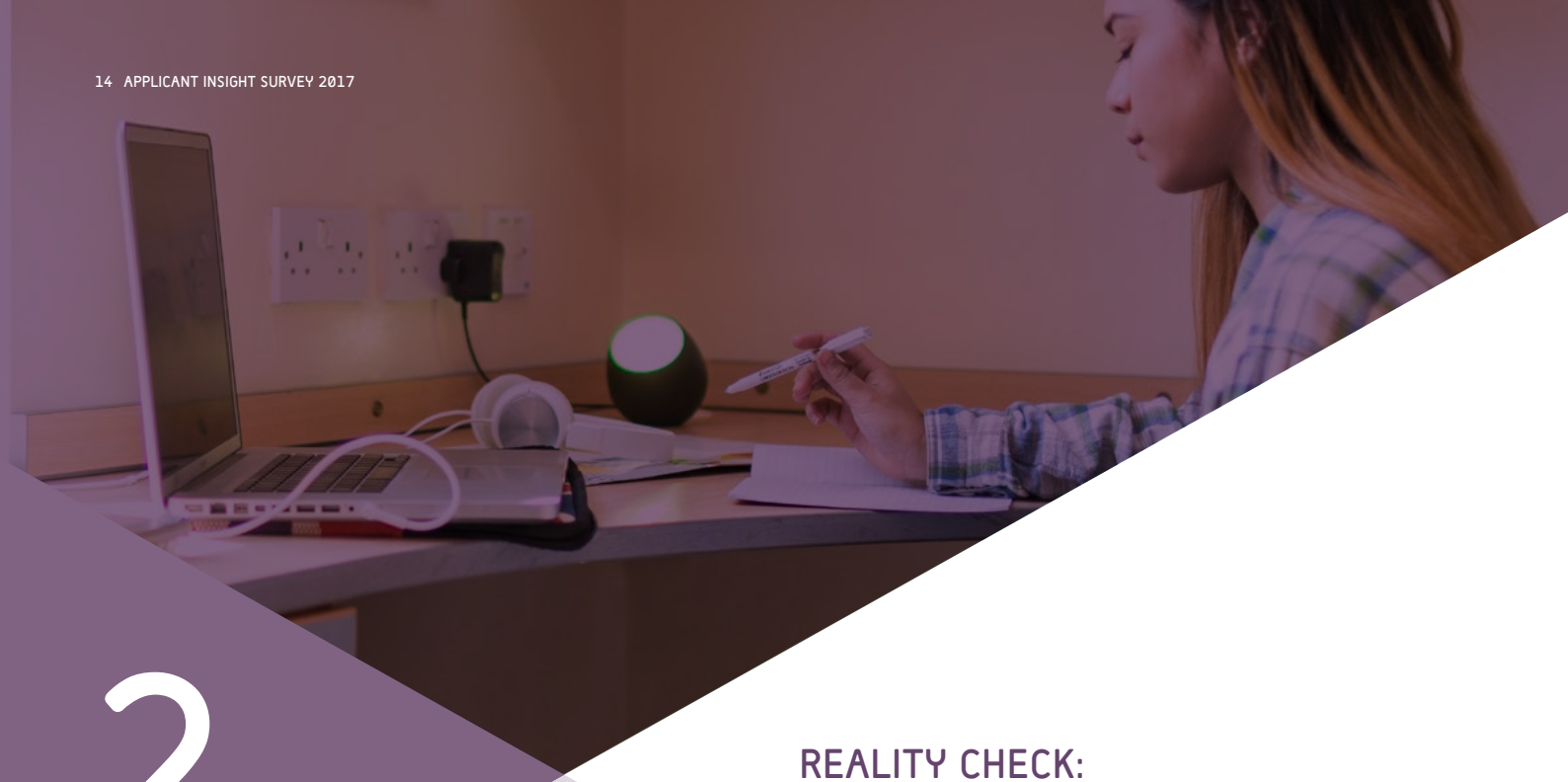
Almost three quarters (72%) rated it as important, with just over a quarter (27%) of all applicants rating it as very important. Applicants from outside the UK were more likely to rate it as important compared to UK applicants.

Figure 5 Applicant rating for the importance of a university having a GOLD TEF rating



Base: All Applicants (2021)

The Teaching Excellence Framework is a relatively new system for recognising universities' excellence in learning and teaching. It has the potential to alter applicants' decision-making and therefore have an impact on the appeal of individual universities, and these findings seem to support this potential impact. However, the introduction of student fees in England in 2012 did not change applicant behaviour in the ways that had been predicted, so it remains to be seen how much influence the TEF will have over applicant decision making in practice.



2

REALITY CHECK:

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ON THE WHOLE, APPLICANTS ARE HAPPY AND SATISFIED WITH THEIR LIVES, ALTHOUGH THEY ALSO EXHIBIT HIGH LEVELS OF NEGATIVE FEELINGS. AROUND ONE IN EIGHT HAVE A PRE-EXISTING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION BUT MANY CHOOSE NOT TO DISCLOSE IT TO THEIR UNIVERSITY.

When it comes to applicants' mental health and wellbeing, the survey paints a mixed and ambiguous picture.

The majority of applicants (71%) feel satisfied with their lives. On the whole, they feel well supported and optimistic about the future.

However, they often report some common symptoms of anxiety and stress, such as lack of sleep, panic attacks and trouble concentrating. They expect support for their mental health at university but are more likely to turn to friends than to more formal sources of support, such as those provided by their university or the NHS.

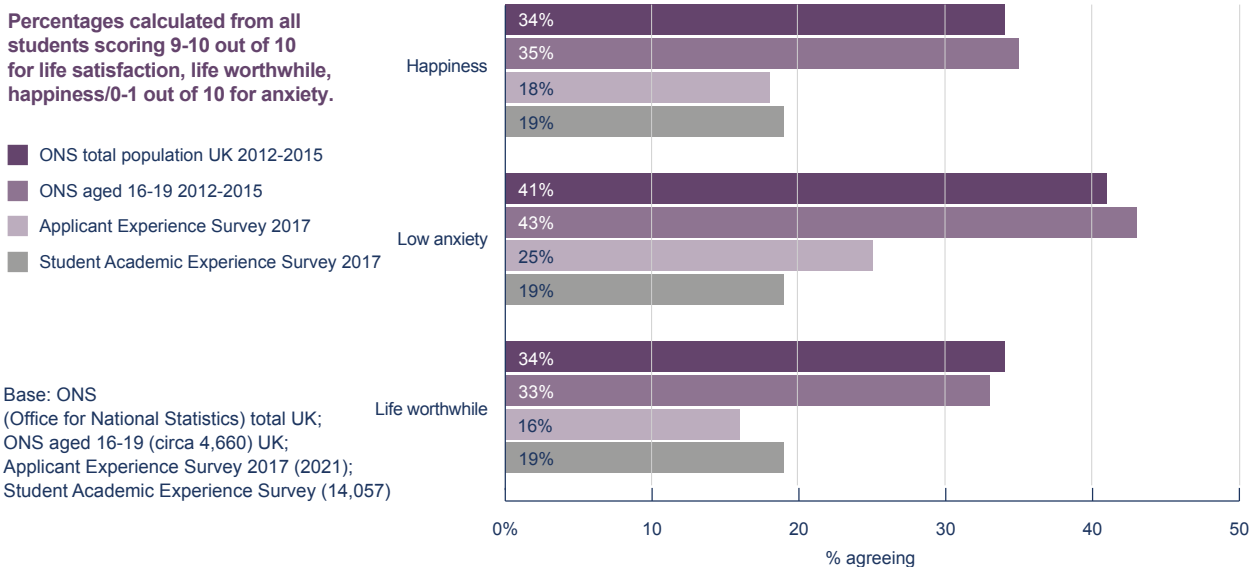
Applicant Wellbeing

On the whole, applicants approach university feeling positively about their lives.

In terms of feeling happy and that life is worthwhile, applicants scores are in line with those of the student population as measured by the HEPI/HEA Student Experience survey. They are slightly less anxious than current students. Yet, as with students, they score more poorly than the general population across all of these measures.

Figure 6 Feelings of happiness, anxiety and worthwhileness amongst the UK adult, UK 16-19 year old, applicant and student populations

Percentages calculated from all students scoring 9-10 out of 10 for life satisfaction, life worthwhile, happiness/0-1 out of 10 for anxiety.



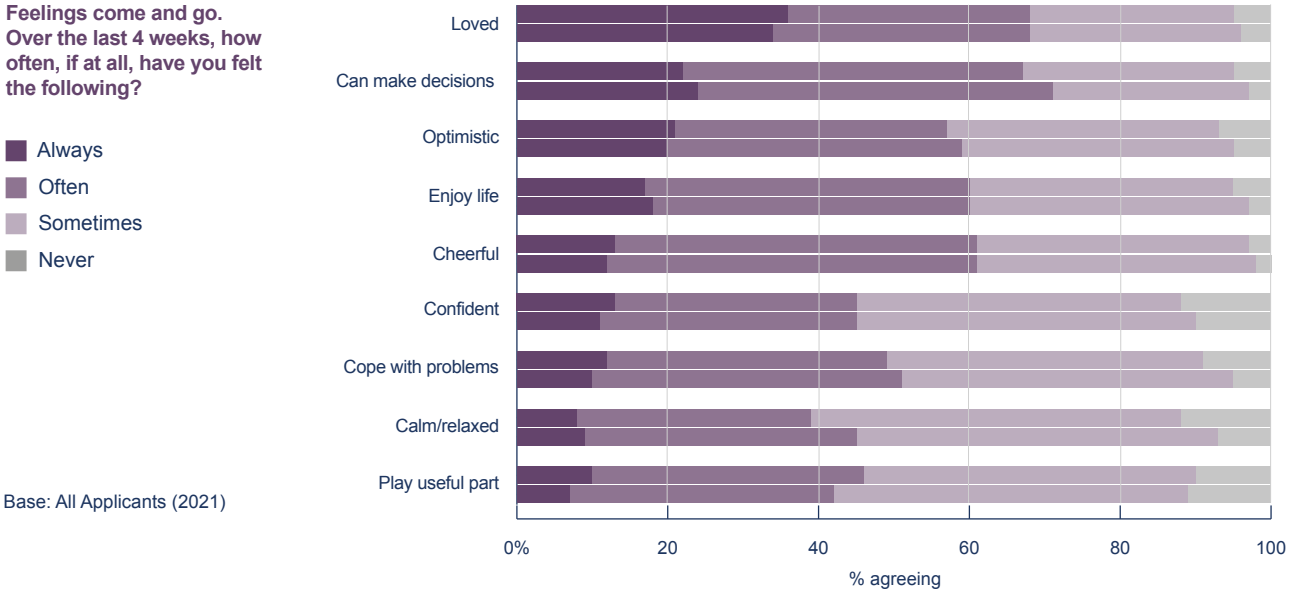
Base: ONS (Office for National Statistics) total UK; ONS aged 16-19 (circa 4,660) UK; Applicant Experience Survey 2017 (2021); Student Academic Experience Survey (14,057)

Most applicants feel cheerful, loved, optimistic and able to make decisions, although many also experience negative feelings.

More than two-thirds (69%) of applicants always or often feel loved, and three-fifths (61%) always or often feel cheerful. However, almost three-quarters (72%) reported feeling tired or lacking in energy during the previous four weeks, almost two-thirds (63%) have often or always felt stressed. Well over half (59%) have often or always felt under strain.

Figure 7 Applicant experience of positive feelings in last four weeks

Feelings come and go. Over the last 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you felt the following?

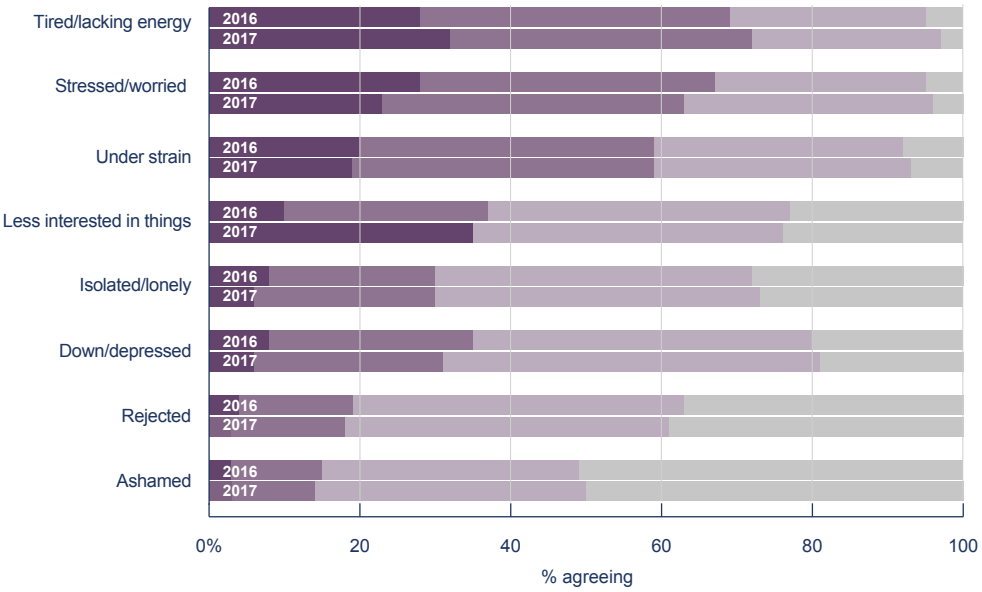


Base: All Applicants (2021)

Figure 8 Applicant experience of negative feelings in last four weeks

Feelings come and go. Over the last 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you felt the following?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

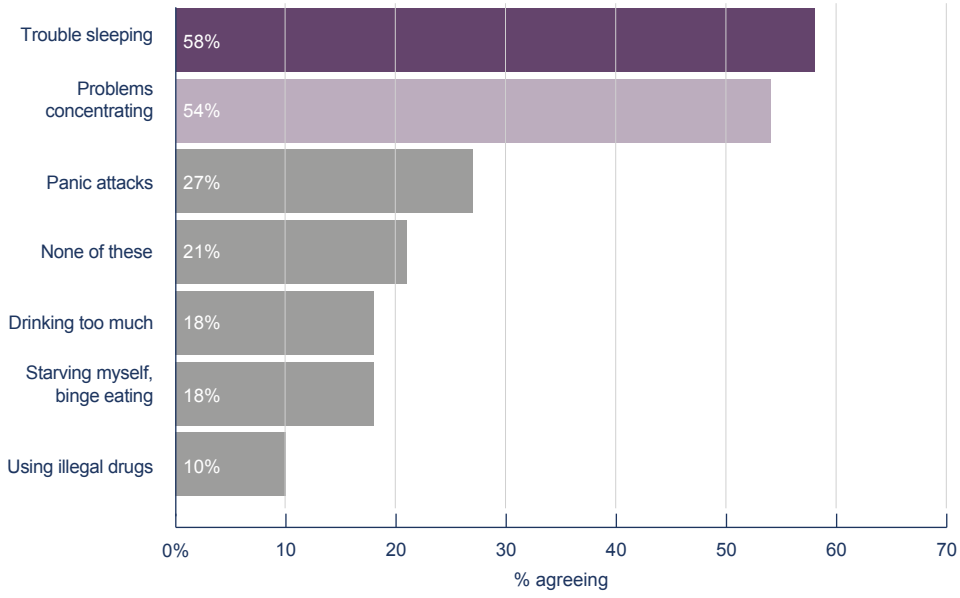


Base: All Applicants (2021)

Many applicants have had negative experiences over the past year. Over half (58%) have had trouble sleeping and just over a quarter (27%) reported that they had panic attacks.

Figure 9 Applicant experiences in last year

Which of the following if any, have you ever experienced during the last year?



Base: All Applicants (2021)

Applicants who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' sexuality, those with an existing mental health condition and applicants from socio-economic groups D and E report feeling less satisfied with their lives than their peers. Moreover, applicants with a mental health condition, care leavers and applicants who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' sexuality, applicants report a higher level of anxiety.

Mental health and support at university

More than half of applicants (53%) expect that there will be more support for mental health issues at university than is available at school, rising to almost two-thirds (62%) of applicants with an existing mental health condition.

This matches up to reality, with 56% of students saying that they receive more support at university and 67% of students with a mental health condition say they receive more support at university.

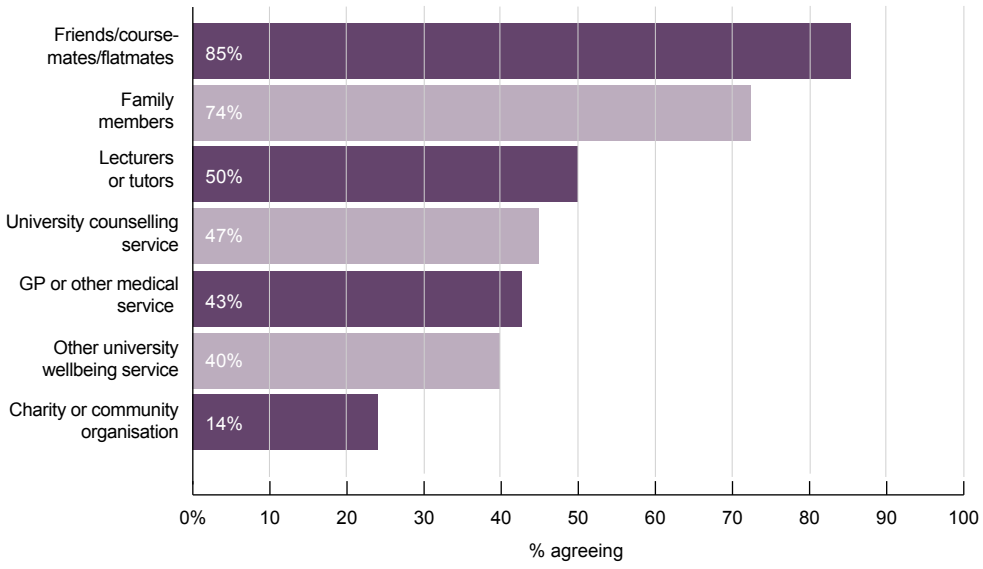
About one in eight (13%) of applicants have a mental health condition. This is broadly in line with the overall student population (15%) as measured by this year's the Student Insight Survey 2017.

The question was asked in the context of a question about disability. Applicants were asked within the survey whether they considered themselves to have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition. Those respondents who declared a mental health condition were asked which, if any, mental health issues they had experienced within the last two years from a standard list of conditions. By far the most common issues declared were anxiety (82%) and depression (73%).

Applicants were asked where they would turn if they were struggling while at university. Friends emerged as the first line of support for the majority (85%) with family second (74%). In terms of support from their university, lecturers or tutors were the most popular (50%) ahead of university counselling services (47%) or GP (43%).

Figure 10 Applicant sources of help if struggling whilst at university

Thinking ahead to when you are at university, if you felt as though you were struggling, how likely would you be to try to speak to each of the following?



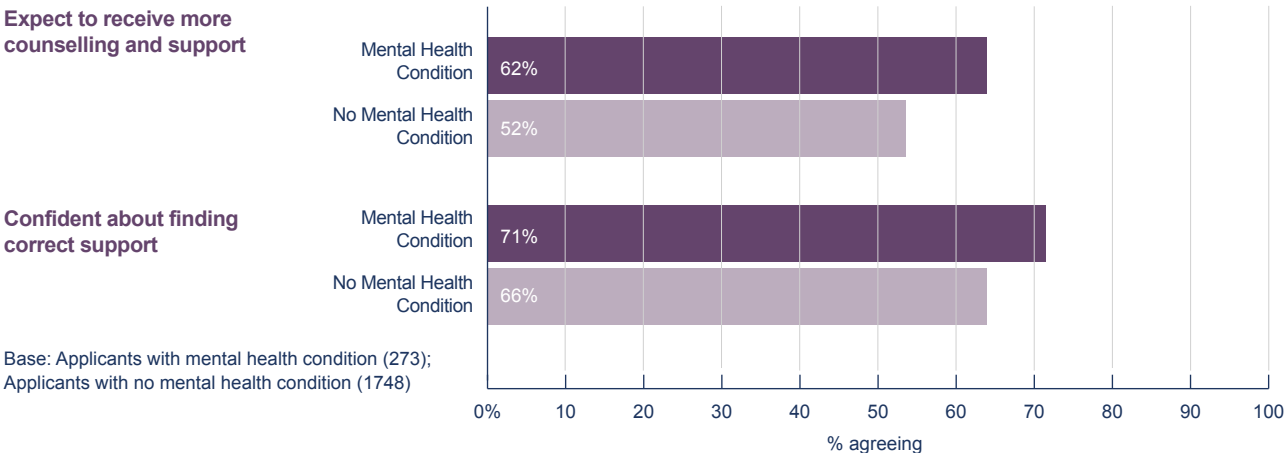
Base: All Applicants (2021)

Applicants who have an existing mental health condition are more likely than other applicants to expect to turn to counselling services or a GP, perhaps reflecting their prior experience with these services. However, friends still remain the first port of call for these applicants.

Peer support is the most important first line of support anticipated by applicants. Among university staff, it is lecturers and tutors that are most likely to be approached.

Two-thirds (67%) of all applicants are confident that they will be able to find the right support for a mental health condition at university. While this is slightly higher for applicants with an existing mental health condition, it still suggests that many applicants may find it challenging to access appropriate services.

Figure 11 Applicants expectation for receiving counselling support and confidence in getting the right support



Most applicants would be willing for their university to discuss their mental health with their parents, but this figure is slightly lower for those with an existing mental health condition.

Although higher education institutions have very clear and strict protocols around confidentiality, almost three-quarters (72%) of applicants would be willing for their university to contact a parent or guardian about their mental health, 23% would be willing in any circumstances and almost half (49%) in extreme circumstances.

However, this drops to two-thirds (66%) of applicants with a mental health condition who are willing for their parent or guardian to be contacted about their condition. Almost half (48%) of applicants with a mental health condition are willing for disclosure to take place only under extreme circumstances.

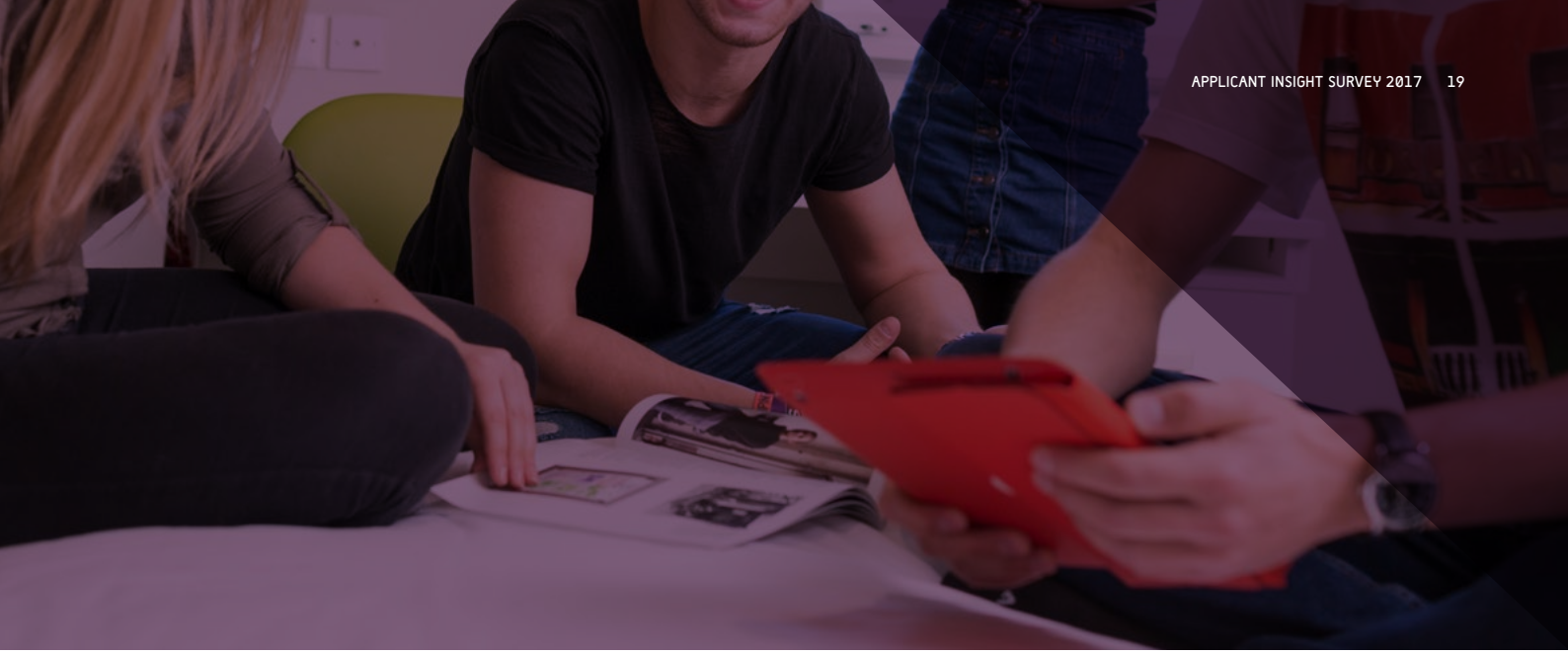
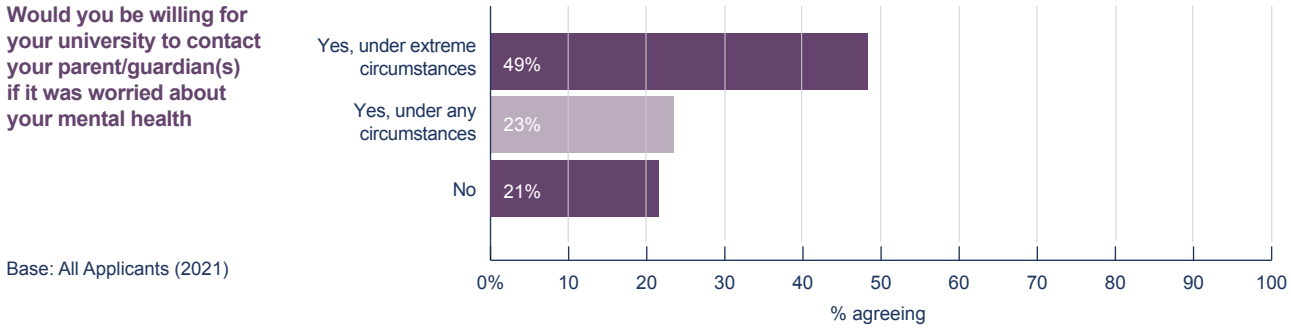


Figure 12 Applicant willingness for their university to contact their parent or guardian if it was worried about their mental health



Base: All Applicants (2021)

Only just over a third (37%) of applicants with a mental health condition have disclosed, or intend to disclose, their mental health condition to universities.

This relatively low rate of disclosure has implications for the ability of universities, and indeed the accommodation providers whose buildings in which students spend much of their time, in terms of offering appropriate support and adjustment for students with mental health conditions.

Applicants may need more assurances in order to feel comfortable disclosing their condition. This may include information about how this disclosure will be used, including clarity about the university's policies on confidentiality and data protection.

SUPPORTIVE OUTREACH

The University of Bath has developed a process of outreach and support for new students to encourage disclosure and help-seeking before arriving on campus.

Any applicant disclosing a disability (mental or physical) on their UCAS form is contacted by a Disability Advisor to discuss funding and benefits. A telephone or face-to-face meeting takes place to discuss how to provide support for a smooth transition from school. A member of the Counselling and Mental Health team also makes contact to ensure support is in place.

The Disability Advisor keeps in contact with academic departments to ensure that all staff are aware of a student's condition and the support that they require. To increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of staff, mental health first aid training is provided by Student Services and to date 600 members of staff have been trained.

The university is also piloting a workshop for students, as well as outreach to parents, to encourage disclosure on the UCAS form. Reassuring applicants and their families that they can do so in a stigma-free environment means that the right support can be in place in advance of their first days as a student.

3

REALITY CHECK:

ACCOMMODATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

APPLICANTS ANTICIPATE THAT WHERE THEY LIVE AS A STUDENT WILL PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN THEIR SOCIAL INTEGRATION.

Applicants are thinking about where they will live, who they will live with and how they will get along. While confident about making friends in a new situation, they are less sure about living with people they have never met before. This is particularly important for applicants who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' sexuality and those from socio-economic groups D and E.

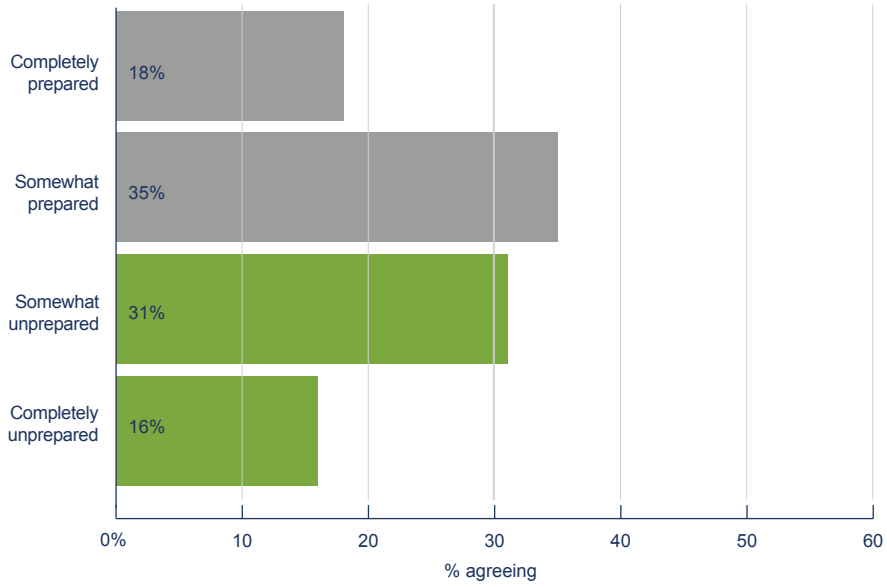
In general, applicants feel confident about making friends at university, with almost three-quarters (71%) feeling prepared for meeting new people. They also feel secure about navigating their social life with minimal support and input from their university. Just one-sixth (16%) would expect more support resolving problems and disputes than at school.

While some applicants may have experienced a high level of pastoral care around social issues such as bullying and peer conflicts in a school setting, most believe that they will not receive this level of support in a university environment.

However, almost half (47%) have a degree of anxiety about living with people they have never met before.

Figure 13 Applicant preparedness to live with people they have not met before

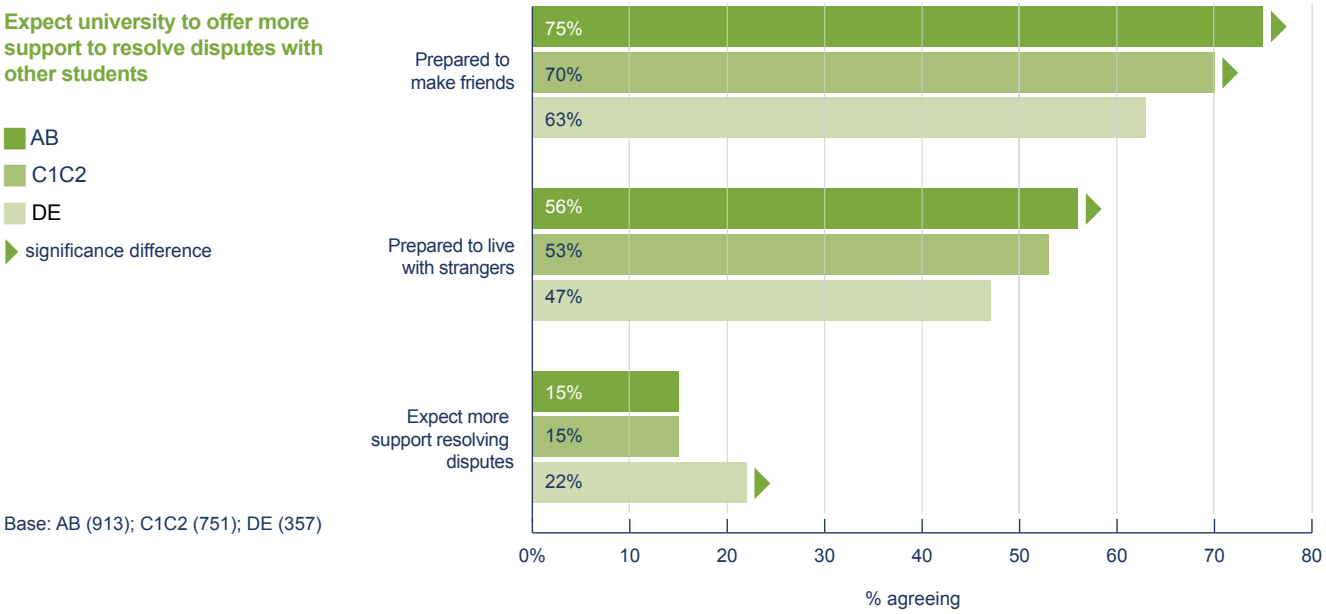
How prepared do you feel to live with people you've not met before



Base: All Applicants (2021)

In particular, those from socio-economic groups D and E feel less prepared both to make friends and to manage living with strangers. In addition, 22% of these applicants also expect more support resolving disputes, compared to 16% of all applicants.

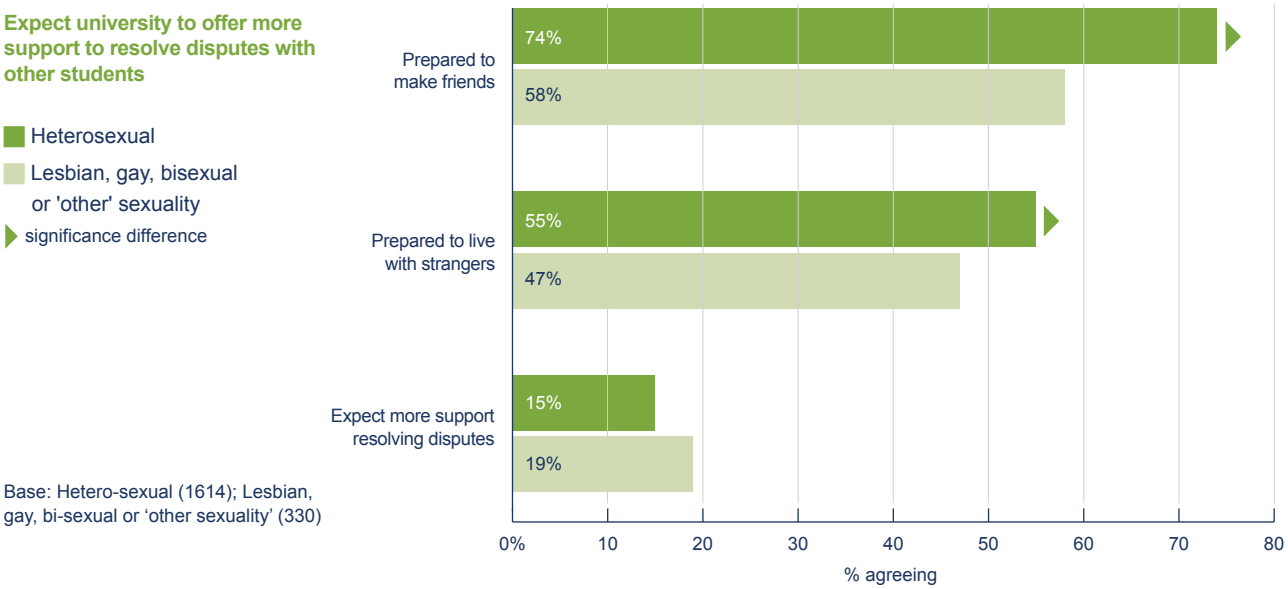
Figure 14 Applicant preparedness to make friends at university, to live with people they have not met and expectations of support from university, by socio-economic group



Base: AB (913); C1C2 (751); DE (357)

Of all respondents, 16% identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' sexuality. As a group, they feel less confident about making friends, with 58% feeling prepared to do so, compared to nearly three-quarters (74%) of those identifying as heterosexual. This group is also likely to feel slightly more anxious about living with strangers, with fewer than half (47%) compared to 55% of all applicants feeling prepared for living with people who they have never met before. However, there is little difference in the expectation of support in helping to resolve disputes with other students between both groups.

Figure 15 Applicant preparedness to make friends at university, to live with people they have not met and expectations of support from university, by sexuality

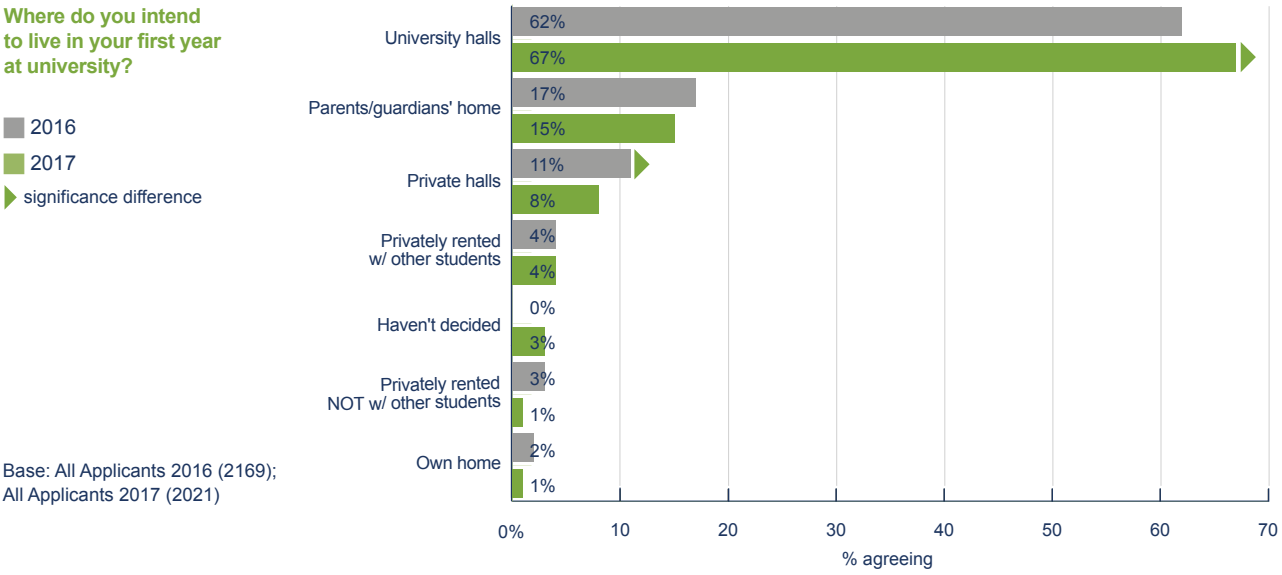


Base: Hetero-sexual (1614); Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or 'other sexuality' (330)

Accommodation is an important place for making friends

Living in shared halls of residence continues to be the top choice for first-year accommodation for applicants. The percentage of those planning to live in halls, both university and private, has grown slightly over the past year, from 73% in 2016 to 75% in 2017.

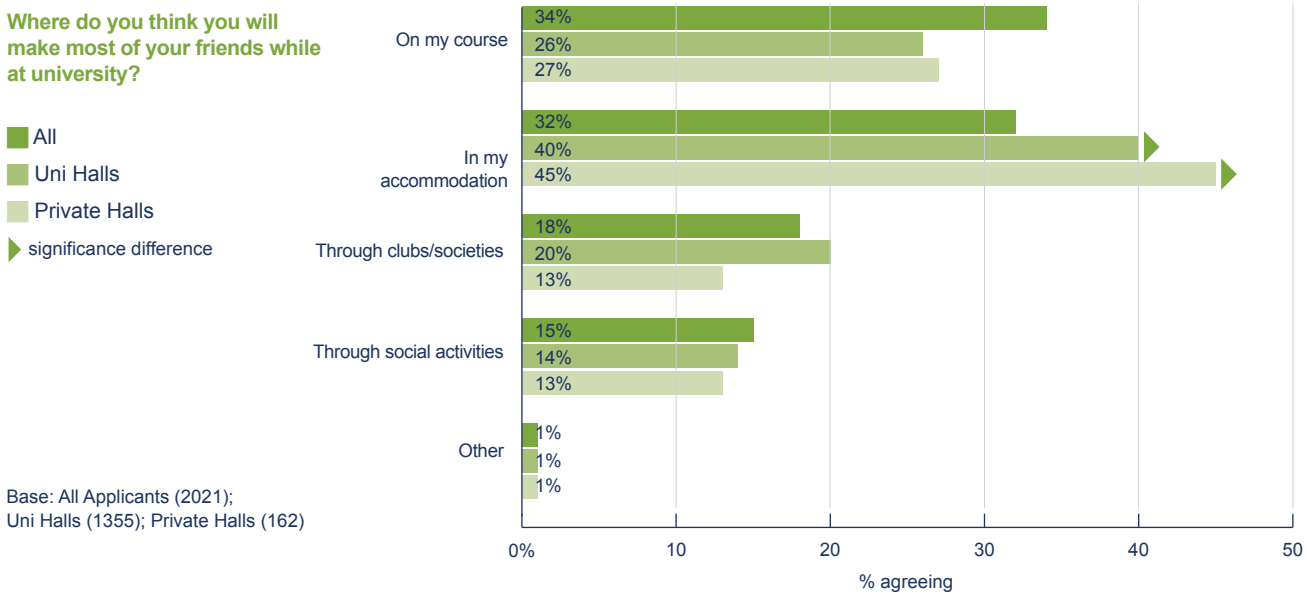
Figure 16 Applicant intentions for where they will live



Base: All Applicants 2016 (2169); All Applicants 2017 (2021)

The role of accommodation in social integration and making friends is important to applicants. While one-third (34%) expect to make friends on their course, a similar number (32%) expect to make friends with the people they live with. When looking at those who plan to live in halls, this number rises to 40% for those planning to live in university halls, and 45% for those planning to live in private halls.

Figure 17 Applicant expectations where they will make most of their friends while at university



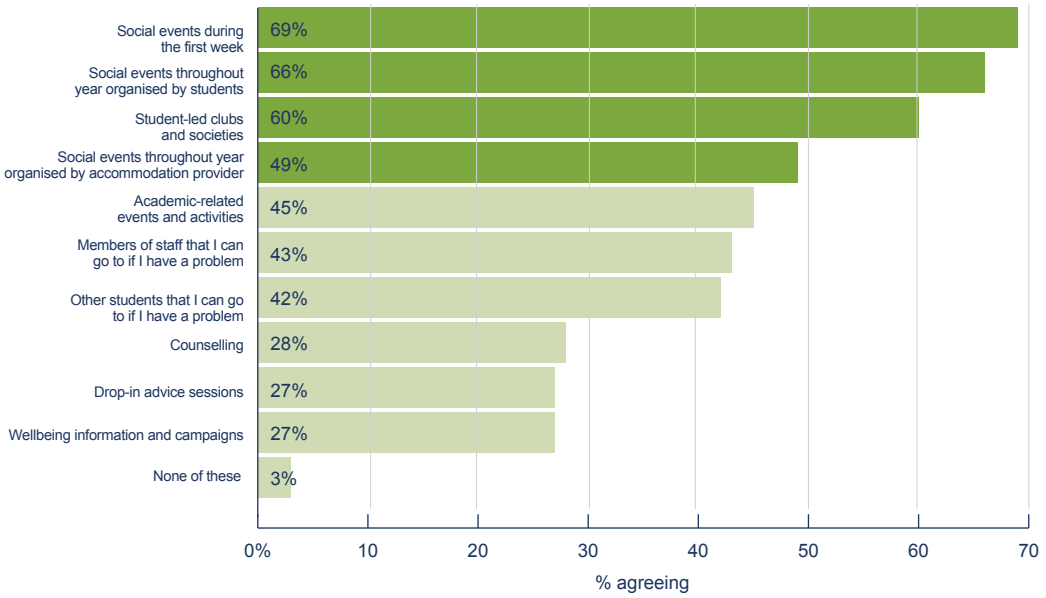
Base: All Applicants (2021);
Uni Halls (1355); Private Halls (162)

Living with like-minded students with whom they can become friends or, at the very least, get along with, is very important to applicants. In fact, 88% of applicants who are expecting to live away from home indicated that living with people they like was more important to them than the specification of their accommodation.

Applicants hope to be able to integrate with others in their halls at social events held in their accommodation, particularly during their first weeks (69%). Two-thirds (66%) would also like to see student-led social events held throughout the year in their accommodation, and 60% would like clubs and societies to use university accommodation for events.

Figure 18 Applicant expectations for what they would like to see provided in their accommodation

Which of the following would you like to see provided by your student accommodation?



Base: All Applicants (2021)

PLANNING TO LIVE AT HOME

THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS PLANNING TO LIVE AT HOME WITH THEIR PARENTS OR GUARDIANS IS SIMILAR TO 2016, WITH 15% IN THIS YEAR'S SURVEY.

THOSE FROM SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS D AND E ARE MORE LIKELY TO LIVE AT HOME, WITH 25% INTENDING TO REMAIN AT HOME.

THE MAIN REASON FOR THIS REMAINS FINANCIAL (72% OF APPLICANTS), WITH CONVENIENCE (52%) AND PROXIMITY TO UNIVERSITY (48%) THE OTHER STATED REASONS.

THE 'STICKY CAMPUS'

Evidence shows that students who choose to live at home or have no choice but to live at home (known as commuting students) find life unexpectedly 'tiring, expensive and stressful'.[2] Issues affecting their quality of life include travel, security and the lack of a 'place' where they feel they belong.

Commuter students typically prioritise academic engagement, yet the non-academic aspects of student life are also important in unlocking success after graduation.

By creating a sticky campus, a university can make itself more attractive for academic work and social events, with a particular benefit for the outcomes of commuter students.

UK universities implementing the sticky campus concept include Abertay University, the University of Manchester and Staffordshire University.

2. Liz Thomas and Robert Jones, Student engagement in the context of commuter students, 2017 http://tsep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Com.Eng-Summary_A4-lowres.pdf

4

REALITY CHECK:

READINESS FOR STUDENT LIFE

THE UNIVERSITY OPEN DAY IS A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE FOR THE MAJORITY OF APPLICANTS. BUT GAPS IN SOME APPLICANTS' FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE AND READINESS FOR AN EMERGENCY SUGGEST THERE MAY BE A CASE FOR A GREATER FOCUS ON SOME PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF UNIVERSITY LIFE.

Open days can play a major role in applicant decision-making.

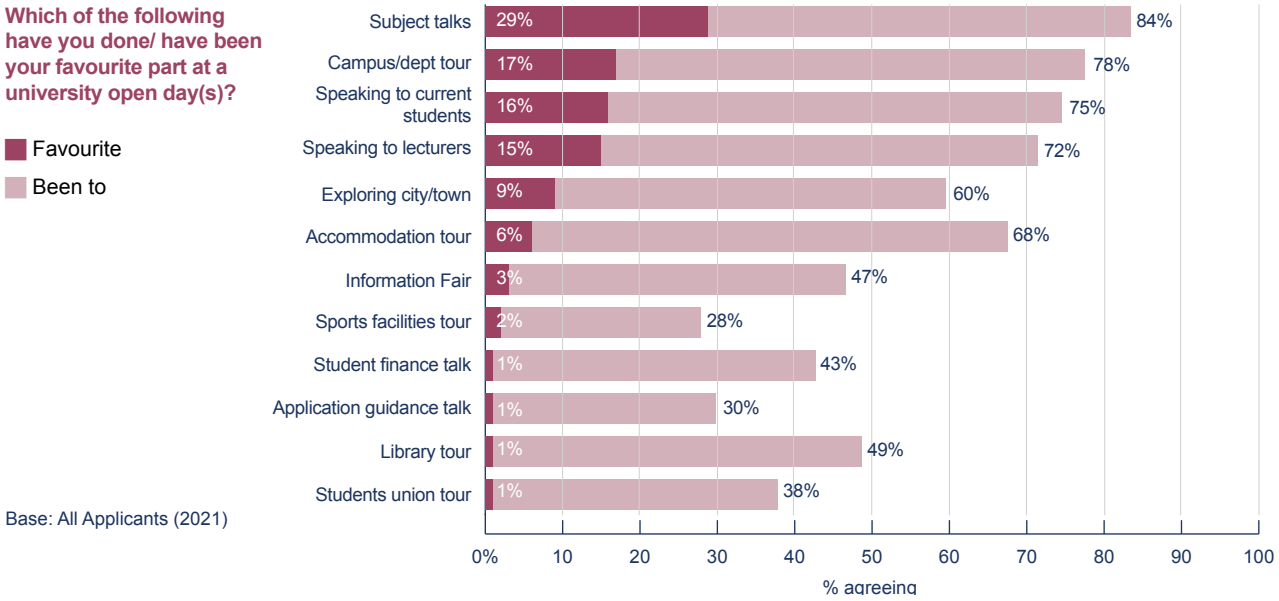
The majority of applicants regard their chosen course as the most important reason for choosing a particular higher education institution, followed by its academic reputation and the prospect of a job in their chosen career following graduation.

For over one-third of applicants (36%), the university open day is one of the main reasons for choosing a particular institution. One in ten applicants cite the open day as the most important factor in their choice.

A large majority of applicants (81%) report attending an open day and almost all (96%) were satisfied with their experience.

Applicants want to learn more about their course and to get a general feel for the university and accommodation on an open day visit. They like to visit the local area and are more interested in the university experience than learning more about the practicalities.

Figure 19 Applicant participation in activities at university open day(s)



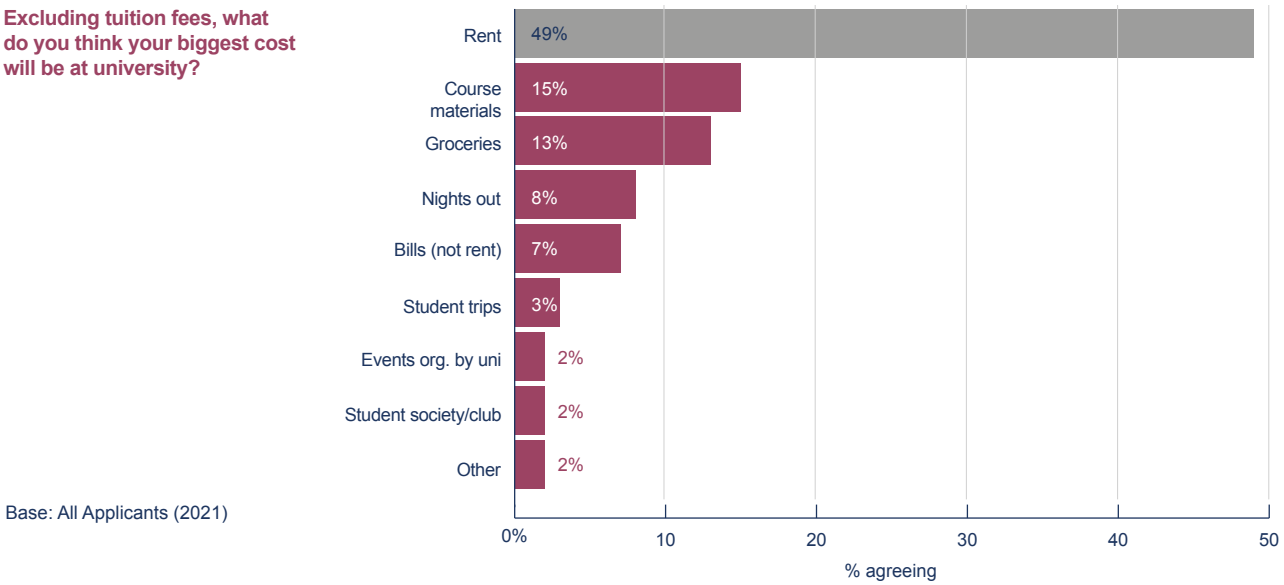
Tours of accommodation facilities are well attended, with two-thirds (68%) of those attending open days having a look around where they might live. However, only a very small proportion (6%) counted the accommodation tour as the most enjoyable part of the day.

Budgeting and finances

Most applicants believe that they have a good grip on how to budget and manage their money once they get to university. Three-quarters (75%) feel confident about creating a budget for the next month and 62% feel prepared to manage their finances at university.

But under half (43%) are confident about paying a bill and only two-fifths (41%) agree that they understand student finances well. Applicants also appear to underestimate essential costs such as rent, with under half (49%) thinking rent will be their biggest non-tuition expense.

Figure 20 Applicant expectation regarding their biggest cost at university



Applicants expect that universities will advise and guide them through the management of their finances.

EXPECTATION:

78% OF APPLICANTS EXPECT MORE FINANCIAL ADVICE FROM UNIVERSITY THAN THEY RECEIVED AT SCHOOL

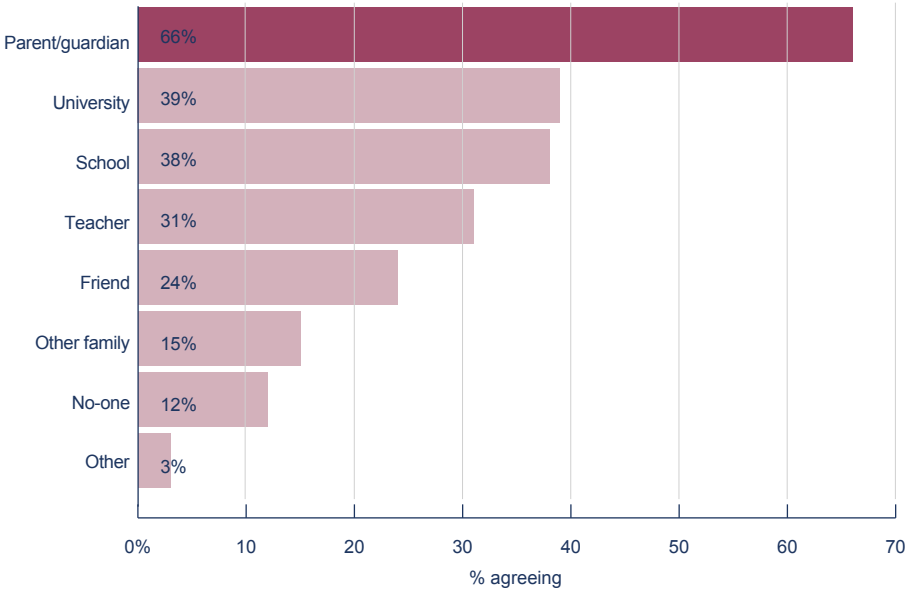
REALITY:

60% OF STUDENTS SURVEYED AGREE THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED MORE FINANCIAL SUPPORT AT UNIVERSITY

Parents are key sources of support on financial matters but applicants also expect universities to step in too, if and when advice is needed.

Figure 21 Applicant experience of sources of advice about how to manage their money at university

Which of the following have given you advice about how to manage your money at university?



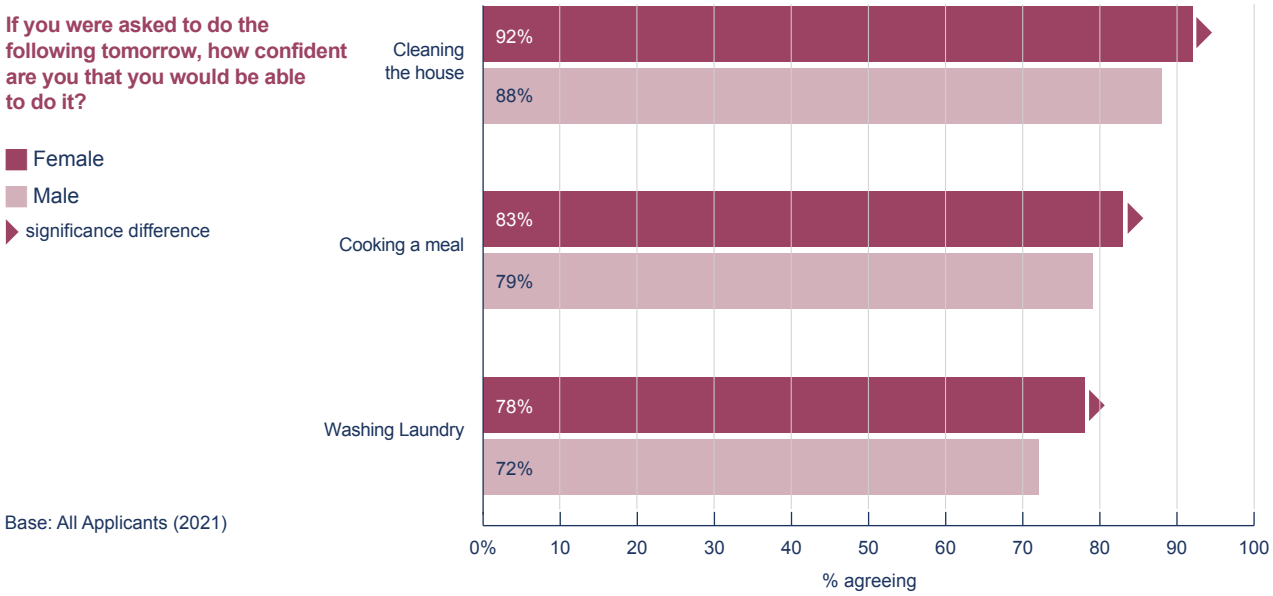
Base: All Applicants (2021)

Preparedness for day-to-day life

Most applicants feel prepared for living independently, with 81% reporting that they feel prepared to do common household chores such as cooking, cleaning and laundry. Female applicants are more likely to feel prepared for these tasks than male applicants.

However, only a third (34%) feel prepared to deal with a DIY issue such as plumbing or heating. While the majority of students will not have to deal with these issues directly, those living in the private rented sector will need enough knowledge to know when and how to communicate such issues to a landlord or agent.

Figure 22 Applicant confidence in undertaking routine household tasks, by gender



Base: All Applicants (2021)

Breaking new ground

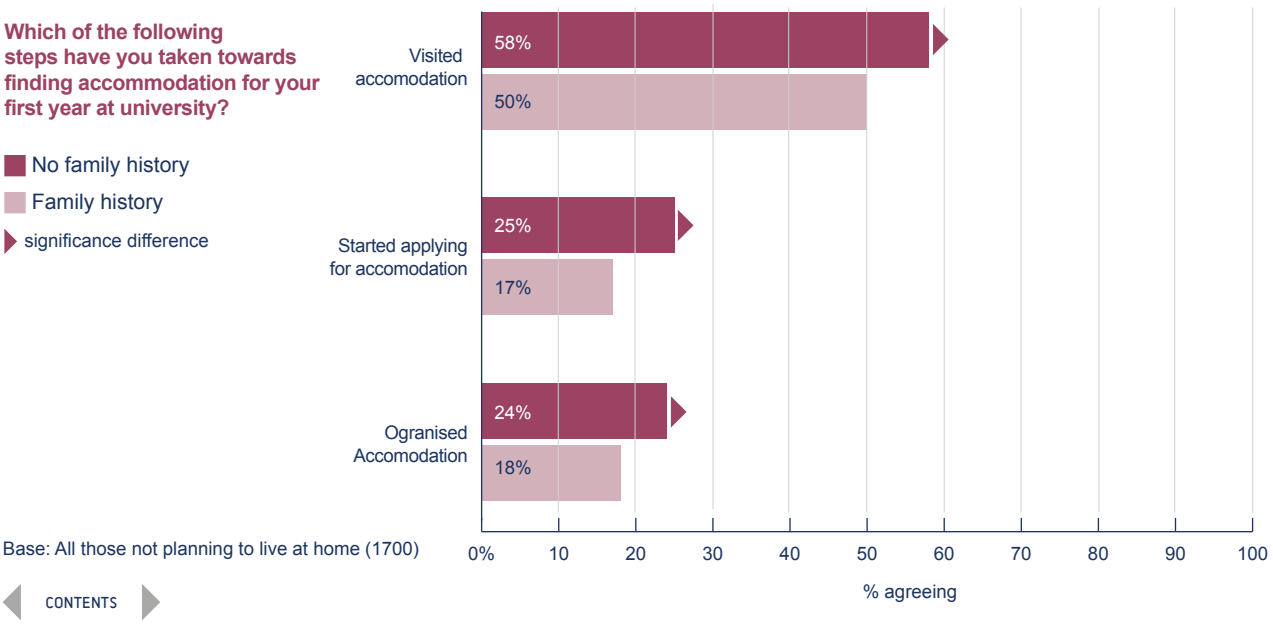
Those applicants who are first in their family to apply for university are using a wide range of information sources to get advice on accommodation, finances and student life.

The first-in-family applicants are more likely to turn to teachers and universities for information on decisions about where to live, or how to get help managing their money.

They are also more likely to seek and secure their accommodation earlier in the application process, with a quarter (25%) stating they have started applying for accommodation, compared to 17% of those who have a family history of attending higher education.

At the time of the survey, 24% of those without a family history of attending university had already secured accommodation, compared to 18% of those who were not first in their family to attend.

Figure 23 Applicant steps taken towards finding accommodation in their first year at university



Base: All those not planning to live at home (1700)

CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The overall picture this survey paints is well-recognised: a cohort of young people approaching university in an emotionally heightened state, juggling a range of different feelings – excitement, apprehension, optimism and vulnerability.

The experience of plotting a course through these emotions is an important part of the UK's university tradition.

We welcome the fact that more people from a wider range of backgrounds are going to university and it is right that students have an increasing focus on value-for-money. It is in this context that we are asking what can be done to ensure that we are preparing young people as best we can for the experience. Quite simply, they need to get the best from their time at university.

There are few simple answers to this. Policymakers, schools and colleges, universities, parents, student unions and accommodation providers all have a role to play in supporting students through the transition.

In broad terms, our survey suggests there are a number of areas where better pre-arrival communication, interaction and engagement could help align applicants' expectations with reality:

- More specific information about the amount of face-to-face teaching time students are likely to receive;
- Better information about student welfare and the mental health services that are available, and how these services operate;
- More encouragement for applicants to disclose mental health issues before or on arrival; and
- Integration into open days and pre-arrival information about the practicalities of university living and full campus and city orientation.

There are other areas where we could do a better job of instilling in applicants important new skills that will stand them in good stead, including:

- Independent directed learning;
- Financial literacy and budgeting;
- Dealing with emergency household situations;
- Resilience skills.[3]

[3] A recent report by Unite Students looks more closely at the issue of emotional resilience and why some students are better equipped than others to bounce back from setbacks. A copy of the report can be found at www.unite-group.co.uk/studentresilience

Finally, there are some improvements that could usefully be made in the pre- and post-arrival experience:

- Greater consideration should be given to the needs of particular groups who are more likely to find the transition challenging, such as first-in-family applicants, applicants who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' sexuality, and applicants from particular socio-economic backgrounds;
- Bespoke activities and support to help applicants who intend or need to commute from home to integrate fully and quickly into university life;
- Consideration of the role that peer support plays in student wellbeing, and how this can be supported;
- Review of the training and information needs of lecturers and tutors who may be the first port of call for students in distress;
- An opportunity for applicants to get to know the people they will live with; and
- A differentiated teaching model for students in the early stages of university which allows them to adapt more gradually to more independent learning.

WE HOPE THAT THIS REPORT PROVIDES SOME USEFUL INSIGHT AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT. APPLICANTS ARE LOOKING AHEAD POSITIVELY BUT COULD OFTEN DO WITH MORE SUPPORT ON UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE NATURE OF LIFE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Yet it is important to remember that no two applicants' experiences will be the same and that in isolation none of these ideas provides a panacea. We do, however passionately believe that the time is right for more debate on how, working together, we can better prepare applicants for university.

APPENDICES

1. Questionnaire

HEPI-Unite Students Applicant Survey 2017
BU2174

Sample definition
2,000 applicants to UK undergraduate courses (6,500 UK undergraduate students in separate questionnaire)

Read-in variables
These panel variables to be read-in for analysis and screening purposes:

Gender

Ethnicity

Nationality (UK - UK-Overseas - EU - Non-EU)

Home Region

Intro screen
Welcome to this survey about your lifestyle and your experience of choosing to study at university. Your responses will go on to inform a report which will be used to provide a national perspective on the experiences of those who are applying for university and those who are already at university.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete and is worth £2 in Amazon vouchers.

Our research is confidential and in line with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct. We are an MRS Company Partner. We only do market research. That means no selling, no marketing and we never disclose any of your personally identifiable details.

Please click 'Next' to begin.

Demographics

Ask all
A1a. How old are you?
Please give one answer only

Under 16 – *Screen Out*
List out 16-51
51+

Ask all
A1b. What is your current gender identity?
(Please select one option)

Male
Female
Trans male/Trans man
Trans female/Trans woman
Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
Different identity

Ask all
A2. Which of the following best describes your current level of study? Please give one answer only

Basic Skills, ESOL, foundation diploma, NVQ 1 or similar – *Screen Out*
Standard Grades, GCSEs, NVQ2, Apprenticeship or similar
Highers, Advanced Highers, A-Levels, Advanced apprenticeships or similar
HND, HNC or similar
Undergraduate degree – *Screen Out*
Postgraduate degree, PHD, or similar – *Screen Out*

Ask all
A3. And have you already applied to study at university in the UK in the next 1-2 years?
Please give one answer only

Yes
No – Screen Out

Ask all
A8. Please can you give us your postcode?
Please enter your term-time postcode in the box below

[single line open text]

Ask all

A9. Which one of the following best describes the subject that you would like to study at university? Please give one answer only

Architecture, building and planning
Biological sciences
Business and administrative studies
Creative arts and design
Education
Engineering
Language, literature, linguistics, classics and related subjects
Historical and philosophical studies
Law
Mass communications and documentation
Mathematical and computer sciences
Medicine and dentistry
Physical sciences
Social studies
Subjects allied to medicine
Technologies
Veterinary science, agriculture and related subjects
Combination of subjects
Other
I don't know yet

Ask all

A10. Which one of the following qualifications are you studying? (please select one option)

A Level
NVQ Level 3
Advance GNVQ Level
International Baccalaureate
Scottish Advanced Highers
Other
None – screen out

Ask all

A11. Which of the following best describes the place you are currently studying at? (please select one option)

At school in 6th form
6th form college
Further education college (including technical and art/design colleges)
A fee-paying school/college

Ask all

A13. Which of the following best describes your living arrangements? Please select one option

I live on my own
I live in a shared house/flat
I live with my partner/spouse
I live with both of my parents
I live with one of my parents
I live with one of my parents and their partner
I live with family (not your parents)
I live in a foster home/in care
Other

Student Decision Making

[new screen]

We'd now like to find out a little more about how you make decisions about applying for university.

Ask all

Ea1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please select one answer per row *[Randomise]*

I expect to work harder at university than I do now
I expect to have more one-to-one academic support at university than I do now
I expect to do more group work at university than I do now
I expect to do more independent learning at university than I do now
I expect to spend more time socialising at university than I do now
I expect to spend more time in lectures than I do being taught in the classroom
Strongly agree

Somewhat agree
Neither nor
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree

Ask all

E1. What are your motivations for going to university? Please select up to three from the following list of reasons. *[Randomise]*

Moving away from home
The location of the university
Interest in my chosen subject
To get a better job
To gain a higher level of education
To have a good time
My family expects it
My school/teacher expected it
Seems like the thing to do
I can't get / don't want to get a job
Most of my friends are going
To become more independent
To study in the UK
Other (specify)

Ask all who selected 2 or 3 options at E1

E1a. And what is your most important motivation for going to university
Please select one option

Show all options selected in E1. Show "specify" text.

Ask all

E2. Which of the following, if any, best describe what you think will be your main reasons for choosing a university? Please select up to five from the following list of reasons. *[Randomise]*

Good impression from the prospectus
Its academic reputation
It offers the course I want
It offers the clubs and societies I want to join
I like the accommodation
It offers the level of academic or student support I need
I like the city/area
Affordable cost of living
The nightlife is great
It is a university that shares my values
It is close enough to home
It is far enough away from home
I have friends going to the same university
Future job prospects
Good impression from open day
Recommendations
Campus facilities
None of these - fix, exclusive

Ask all who selected between 2 and 5 options at E2

E2a. And what will be the most important reason for choosing a university? Please select one option

Show all options selected in E2.

[Randomise]

Ask all

E4. Have you been to any university open days? Please select one option

Yes
No

Ask all who answered yes at E4

E5. How satisfied are you with your open day experience(s) so far? Please select one option

Very satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
Neither nor
Somewhat unsatisfied
Very unsatisfied

Ask all who answered yes at E4

E6. Which of the following have you done at a university open day(s)? Please select all t hat apply

[Randomise]

Spoken to current students
Spoken to lecturers/course leaders
Attended subject talks
Attended an open day information fair
Attended a student finance talk
Attended an application guidance talk
Been on a tour of campus/department facilities
Been on a tour of accommodation

Been on a tour of sports facilities
Been on a tour of the Students Union
Been on a tour of the Student Library(s)
Explored the city/town
Other- fix
None of these- fix, exclusive

Ask all who answered yes at E4 – show options selected at E6. Do not ask those who selected other or none of these at E6. Do not ask those who answered one option at E6.

E7. What has been the best part about the open day(s) you have been to so far? Please select one option

[Randomise]

Speaking to current students
Speaking to lecturers/course leaders
Subject talks
Open day information fairs
Student finance talks
Application guidance talks
Tour of campus/department facilities
Tour of accommodation
Tour of sports facilities
Tour of the Students Union
Tour of the Student Library(s)
Exploring the city/town

Ask all

E9. Are you aware that there is an option to complete an undergraduate degree in a two year programme (an accelerated degree)? Please select one option

Yes
No

Ask all

E10. Do you think an accelerated degree is a good option for you? Please select all that apply

Yes
No

Ask those who answered yes at E10

E11. Why do you think an accelerated degree is a good option for you? Please select all that apply

[Randomise]

It would allow me to get a job more quickly
I would save on the living costs of the third year
I would not have to live away from home for so long
Other (please specify):

Ask those who answered no at E10

E12. Why do you think an accelerated degree is not a good option for you? Please select all that apply

[Randomise]

I don't think I would get the same quality of learning
I think the pace of work would be too fast
I use my holidays for work/leisure and like it like that
Other

Student Social Life

We'd now like to ask you a few things about your social life at school and outside school.

Ask all

I1. On the scale below, please indicate how happy or unhappy you feel about each of the following relationships at the moment Please select one option in each row

[Rows - Randomise]

Relationships with my family
Relationships with my friends at school
Relationships with my friends outside of school
Relationships with other students at my school/ college (not friends)

[Columns]

Very happy
Fairly happy
Neither happy nor unhappy
Fairly unhappy
Very unhappy
Don't know

Ask all

I2. Compared to other people you know, to what extent do you have each of the following? Please select one option in each row.

[Rows]

Have friends and acquaintances

Belong to groups/cliques of friends or acquaintances

Belong to clubs or organisations

[Columns]

Far less than others

Less than others

About the same as others

More than others

Far more than others

Ask all

I3. Which of the following statements, if any, on your friends do you feel apply to you? Please select all that apply.

[Randomise]

My best friend goes to my school

I have friends who I meet to socialise with (outside of school) at least twice a week

I have friends who I speak to for dating or relationship advice

I have friends that I trust with deeply personal secrets

I have spoken to a friend about my financial concerns related to university

I have spoken to a friend about my health concerns

None of these - fix

Ask all

I4. Where do you think you will make most of your friends while at university? Please select one option

[Randomise]

In my accommodation

Through clubs/societies

On my course

Through social activities (not organised by a club/society)

Other

Ask all

I5. How often do you think you will go out socialising with your friends while at university? Please select one option

Every day

2-3 times a week

Once a week

Less often

Ask all

I6. If you were asked to do the following tomorrow, how confident are you that you would be able to do it? Please select one option per row

[Randomise]

Cooking a meal

Washing your laundry

Paying a utility bill (e.g. electricity/gas/water)

Dealing with a plumbing/heating/electricity/DIY issue

Cleaning the house

Having a difficult conversation with a friend

Creating a budget for the next month

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Neither nor

Somewhat unconfident

Very unconfident

Ask all

I7. How prepared do you feel to do the following things while at university? Please select one option per row

Make friends

Cope with the academic work

Manage my finances

Live with people I've not met before

Find my way around a new city

Do household chores such as cooking, cleaning and laundry

Cope on my own

Completely prepared

Quite prepared

A little prepared

Not at all prepared

Ask all

18 Which of the following describes how you

currently feel about going to university? tick as many as apply

[Randomise]

Anxious

Excited

Ready

Worried

Impatient

Supported

Well-informed

Relaxed

Unprepared

None of these - fix

Ask all

O7. The TEF is a scheme being introduced by the government to measure the quality of teaching at Higher Education Institutions in England. Universities will be given a Gold, Silver or Bronze rating to indicate the level of teaching they provide.

How important to you is it for your university to have a GOLD TEF rating? Please select one answer only

Very important

Somewhat important

Neither nor

Somewhat unimportant

Very unimportant

Resilience

Ask all

R1. How satisfied are you with your life at the moment?

Please select one answer only.

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

Ask all

0b. Overall, (on a scale of 0 to 10, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Please select one answer only

SCALE: 0 to 10 where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'

Ask all

0c. Overall, (on a scale of 0 to 10), how happy did you feel yesterday?

Please select one answer only

SCALE: 0 to 10 where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'

Ask all

Q0.d Please note that for the next question, the scoring scale is reversed so that 0 is the most positive answer and 10 is the most negative answer.

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Please select one answer only

DP INSTRUCTION: Insert red text under question saying: 'Scale reversed, 0 is the most positive and 10 is the most negative'

SCALE: 0 to 10 where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'

Ask all

Q0.d.i You selected [Q0.d score] for how anxious you felt yesterday on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all anxious and 10 is completely anxious. Is that correct?

Please select one answer only

Yes

No

DP INSTRUCTION: If no re-route back to Q0.d then ask Q0.d.i again.

Ask all

R2. Feelings come and go. Over the last 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you felt the following?

Rows - randomise

Optimistic about the future

Able to enjoy life

Tired or lacking in energy

Stressed or worried
Under strain
Less interested in things you used to enjoy
Calm and relaxed
Down or depressed
Coping well with problems
Capable of making decisions about things
Playing a useful part in things
Confident in yourself
Loved
Ashamed
Rejected by others
Isolated or lonely
Cheerful

Columns

Always
Often
Sometimes
Never

Ask all

R3. Which of the following if any, have you ever experienced during the last year? Please select all that apply

Rows - randomise

Trouble sleeping
Problems concentrating that have affected study
Drinking too much
Using illegal drugs
Starving myself, binge eating or otherwise experiencing an eating disorder
Panic attacks
None of these - fix

Ask all

R4. To what extent, if at all, have you considered dropping out of school? Please select one answer only.

[Randomise]

I have strongly considered dropping out
I sometimes consider dropping out
I have never considered dropping out

Ask all

R5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please select one answer in each row.

Rows - randomise

If something is worth starting, I'm going to finish it
I tend to panic under pressure
I can become upset when things do not work out as planned
I am quick to get help from others when I encounter problems
I depend on myself to find a way through anything
I consider the impact of my actions on others
I tend to take on short term discomfort for long term gain
I have clear idea of goals I would like to achieve in the year ahead
Disappointment doesn't stop me from trying again
I tend not to complain if I can help it
I am able to plan my way out of negative situations

Columns

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree

Ask all

R6. Everyone experiences setbacks in life. Which of the following have you experienced in the last year after a setback? Please try to think of specific circumstances when answering. Please select all that apply.

[Randomise]

I have dwelt on negative experiences for longer than I should have
A setback negatively impacted on my confidence for some time
I overreacted to a setback, damaging relationships with friends or family
My reaction to a situation made things worse
I have not faced up to my failure and blamed others instead

I have relied too much on others to make decisions for me

I have avoided doing something from fear of failure

I don't think that I have experienced a setback – exclusive

None of these – exclusive

Ask all

R7. Thinking of the same setbacks, did you turn to anyone in order to help resolve it? Who did you turn to and who could you have turned to but didn't? Please select one answer in each row.

[Rows – Randomise]

School support staff

Teachers

Designated student mentors/buddies

Friends at school

Friends outside of school

Family

[Columns]

Would not be able to turn to

Could turn to

Could turn to and have turned to in the past

Ask all

R9. Looking at the list of issues below, do you expect to receive more, less or the same amount of support from your university as you currently receive at school? Please select one option per row

[Randomise - rows]

Helping you to resolve disputes with other students

Helping you with your academic studies

Helping you to resolve financial problems

Counselling and support for mental health issues

Helping you to plan your future career

Columns

Much less support at university than at school

A bit less support at university than at school

The same level of support

A bit more support at university than at school

Much more support at university than at school

Ask all

R11. Thinking ahead to when you are at university, if you felt as though you were struggling, how likely would you be to try to speak to each of the following? Please select one option per row

[Randomise]

Family members

Friends/course-mates/flatmates

Lecturers or tutors

University counselling service

GP or other medical service

Other university wellbeing services

Charity or community organisations

Very likely

Somewhat likely

Neither nor

Somewhat unlikely

Very unlikely

Ask all

R10. Some people might, while at university, need or want to access support for their mental health. If this ever applied to you, how confident do you feel that you would be able to find the right support? Please select one option

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Neither nor

Somewhat unconfident

Very unconfident

Accommodation

[New screen]

Thank you! We'd like to just follow these details by understanding your living arrangements.

Ask all

C1. Where do you intend to live in your first year at university? Please select one answer only *[Randomise]*

University halls

Private halls (e.g. provided by Unite Students, Nido, Victoria Halls, Derwent, UPP, Digs The Student Housing Company, etc)

Privately rented house or flat with other students

Privately rented house or flat NOT with other students

Your own home which you own

Parents' or guardians' home

I haven't decided yet- fix

I don't have a preference - fix

Other - fix

Ask those who intend to live at home (C1= 6)

C2. And why do you intend to live at home? Please select all that apply *[Randomise]*

It will be more affordable

It will be close to my place of study

It works well with other commitments in my life e.g. work, hobbies

It will be convenient

To continue living with my family / partner

I don't like the idea of living in halls of residences

I don't like the idea of sharing a house

Other - fix

Ask those who intend to live in privately rented house (C1=3,4)

C2b. Why do you intend to live in a shared house rather than halls? Please select all that apply. *[Randomise]*

It will be more affordable

I don't like the halls environment

I prefer to be more independent

I want to live with my friends

It will provide the sort of living environment I wanted

I may not be able to get a place in halls

Other, please specify - fix

Ask those that answered anything other than living at home (C1 = 1,2,3,4,7,8,9)

Ca5. Which of the following steps have you taken towards finding accommodation for your first year at university? Please select all that apply

I've looked at accommodation options online

I've looked at accommodation options in a prospectus

I've visited accommodation

I've started applying for accommodation

I've successfully completed the process of applying for accommodation

Other - fix

I haven't done anything towards finding accommodation - fix

Ask all

Ca6. Which of the following have given you advice about choosing accommodation for your first year at university? Please select all that apply *[Randomise]*

Parent/guardian(s)

Other family- fix below parents

Friend(s)

Teacher(s)

School

University(ies)

Accommodation provider(s)

Other - fix

I haven't received advice from anyone - fix

Ask those that intend to live in student accommodation (C1=1 or 2) and did not select 'I've visited accommodation' at Ca5

Ca8. You mentioned you have not visited the type of accommodation you intend to live in during your first year at university. Why have you not visited? Please select all that apply

I will visit the accommodation nearer to when I start university

The accommodation is too far away to visit

I have looked at the accommodation in a prospectus

I have looked at the accommodation online

The option to visit the accommodation has not been offered to me

I don't think it is important to visit accommodation before I start university

I'm not sure which university I will be attending yet

Other

Ask those who intend to live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

Ca9. What are the three most important things to you when choosing student accommodation? Please select three answers only *Rows - randomise*

Large bedroom

Large kitchen/dining area

Large living room

Comfortable living room

Quiet space to study (outside of bedroom)

My own bathroom

Laundry on site

Maintenance staff on site

Security staff on site

Cleaning service for communal areas

Reception staff on site

Living in a building with a large number of students

Living in a building with a small number of students

Location within walking distance to campus

Having your own kitchen area

Having a café in your building

Shared areas

Being able to choose who you live with (e.g. all female accommodation)

Ask those who intend to live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

Ca11. Ignoring price, which of the following university accommodation options would you pick? Please select one option only

Living in very high end accommodation with people you really don't like

Living in very basic accommodation with people you really like

Ask those who intend to live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

Ca12. Which of the following would you like to see provided in your student accommodation? Please select all that apply *[Randomise]*

Social events during the first week

Social events throughout the year organised by other students

Social events throughout the year organised by the accommodation provider

Student-led clubs and societies

Other students that I can go to if I have a problem

Members of staff that I can go to if I have a problem

Drop-in advice sessions

Academic-related events and activities

Counselling

Wellbeing information and campaigns

None of these - fix

Ask those who intend to live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

Ca13. Which of the following opportunities would you like to have before you arrive at your accommodation? Please select up to three options

The ability to be able to contact people I am going to live with

The ability to talk to students that already live in the accommodation I am going to live in

The ability to be able to visit the accommodation I will be living in

A 360 degree virtual tour of the building online

A virtual tour of the building with a current student (e.g. via skype)

Information about the accommodation and local area online

Online advice on skills such as cooking and budgeting

None of these

Student finances

We'd now like to hear your thoughts around your finances and funding for your time in study. Please be assured that all your answers will are anonymous and analysed in a confidential way. *[new screen]*

We'd now like to hear your thoughts around your finances and funding for your time in study.

Ask all

Fx. Excluding tuition fees, what do you think your biggest cost will be at university? Please select one answer only *[Randomise]*

Rent

Groceries

Social events organised by the university

Nights out

Student society/club membership fees

Bills (not rent)

Student trips

Course materials (e.g. books, stationery)

Other

Ask All

Fa1. On a scale of 1 to 5 how well do you feel you understand how student finances work (where 1 is not at all and 5 is very well)? Please select one option only

1 – not at all

2

3

4

5 – very well

Ask all

Fa3. Which of the following have given you advice about how to manage your money at university? Please select all that apply *[Randomise]*

Parent/guardian(s)

Other family – fix under parent/guardian

Friend(s)

Teacher(s)

School

University(ies)

Other - fix

I haven't received advice from anyone - fix

Employability and careers

We'd now like to ask you a few questions about how you feel about your future career

Ask all

G3a. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you already have a career in your mind for the future? Please one answer only

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Ask all

G2. How easy or difficult do you think it will be to find the job that you want after graduating from university? Please select one answer only

Very easy

Will need some effort and luck but should be achievable

It's going to be a challenge

Almost impossible, but I'll have a go

Don't know

Closing Demographics

You're nearly finished. We'd just like to ask you a few more questions about yourself.

Demographics

Ask all aged 19-24 (Panel Variable)

H1. Have you supported yourself financially for a total of three years or more before the start of your university course?

Yes

No

Ask all where H1=Yes or Aged 25+ (Panel Variable)

H2. Which best describes your main occupation [before you started your current degree course]? Please choose one answer

Professional / higher managerial (e.g. doctor, lawyer, chairman or managing director of medium or large firm)

Manager / senior administrator (e.g. senior manager, owner of small business, head teacher)

Supervisor / clerical / skilled non-manual (e.g. teacher, secretary, junior manager, police constable)

Skilled manual worker (e.g. fireman, plumber, electrician, hairdresser)

Semi-skilled / unskilled manual worker (e.g. assembler, postman, shop assistant)

Receiving state benefits for sickness, unemployment, old age or any other reason

Ask all aged under 19 (Panel Variable) or H1=No

H3. Which of these best describes the chief income earner in your PARENTAL household? Please choose one answer

Professional / higher managerial (e.g. doctor, lawyer, chairman or managing director of medium or large firm)

Manager / senior administrator (e.g. senior manager, owner of small business, head teacher)

Supervisor / clerical / skilled non-manual (e.g. teacher, secretary, junior manager, police constable)

Skilled manual worker (e.g. fireman, plumber, electrician, hairdresser)

Semi-skilled / unskilled manual worker (e.g. assembler, postman, shop assistant)

Receiving state benefits for sickness, unemployment, old age or any other reason

Ask all

H4. Are you the first person in your family to apply to go to university?
Please choose one answer

Yes

No

Don't Know

Protected Characteristics

[New screen]

We would now like to ask you some questions to ensure that this survey is as inclusive as possible. You do not need to answer all of these questions if you do not wish to – there are options for prefer not to say in each question.

Ask all

B1.Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition? Please pick all that apply
[Randomise]

Specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia or ADD/ADHD

Blind or serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses

Deaf or a serious hearing impairment

A physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using arms, using a wheelchair or crutches

A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder

A long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy

A social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder

Prefer not to say [exclusive, fix]

No known disability or health condition [exclusive, fix]

Ask all who select B1_5 (A mental health condition…)

B1a. Which, if any, of the following best describe the mental health issues you have experienced in the last two years?

Please select all that apply

Depression

Anxiety

Bipolar

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Personality disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Schizophrenia / psychosis

Eating disorder (including Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating Disorder)

Other (specify)

Don't know

Prefer not to answer

Ask all who select B1_5 (A mental health condition…)

B1b. Have you declared (or do you intend to declare) your mental health condition to the universities you have applied to?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Prefer not to answer

Ask all who are under 22

B1c. Would you be willing for your university to contact your parent/guardian(s) if it was worried about your mental health?

Please select one option

[Randomise - rows]

Yes, but only under extreme circumstances

Yes, under any circumstances

No

N/A

Prefer not to answer

Ask all

B2. And have you ever been in local authority care (for example children's home, foster placement, etc)?

Please select one answer only

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Ask all

B3. Which of the following options best describes how you think about yourself?

Please select one answer only

Heterosexual or Straight

Gay / Lesbian

Bisexual

Other

Prefer not to say

Ask all

B4. Are you estranged from your parents?

By this, we mean that you have no current relationship with your parents.

Please pick one option only

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

2. Methodology

YouthSight is an award-winning insight agency which helps clients grow within the youth market by better understanding Millennials and Gen Z. It delivers insight that gives clients confidence in the business decisions they need to make. YouthSight monitors and tracks the HE sector, working with over 100 universities, collecting data for the annual THE Student Experience awards, as well as working closely with HEPI on topical reports and their annual Student Academic Experience report.

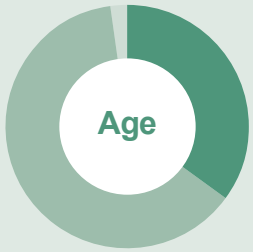
The research methodology comprised an online survey that took participants, on average, 20 minutes to complete. The study was fielded between 24th March and 24th April 2017.

The questionnaire was reviewed by a steering group of relevant bodies within the higher education sector to ensure it included areas of key interest to the sector. Some questions were duplicated from the Unite Students' Student Insight Survey 2016 to allow comparisons with this year's and former years' findings.
In total 2,021 applicants to UK universities participated in the survey. An applicant is defined in this research as someone who has registered with UCAS and has started the application process.

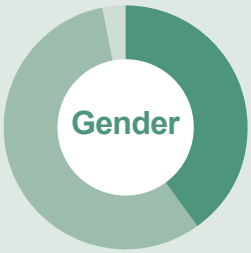
All participants were existing members of YouthSight's OpinionPanel. All participants received £2 in Amazon vouchers in return for completing the survey.

Recruitment quotas for EU and non-EU international students were set. For the remaining sample of domestic students, representative interlocking quotas were set across gender, age and school type. Targets for the quotas were set using UCAS 2015 data. During analysis, the data was weighted in line with these representative quotas.

The data was analysed paying particular attention to any statistically significant year-on-year changes in the data and to identify any significant differences between sub-groups within the applicant sample.

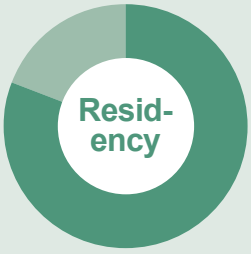


- 16 - 17 35%
- 18 - 19 63%
- 20+ 2%



- Male 40%
- Female 57%
- Other 3%

- Non-fee paying 84%
- Fee paying 16%



- UK 81%
- Non UK 19%

Unite Students

Unite Students is the leading provider of student accommodation in the UK, providing homes for 50,000 students, in more than 140 properties, across 28 cities. Since our foundation in 1991, we have housed more than half a million students and we work in partnership with more than 60 higher education institutions.

HEPI

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) was established in 2002 to shape the higher education policy debate through evidence. It is UK-wide, independent and non-partisan and funded by organisations and universities that wish to see a vibrant higher education debate as well as through our own events.