
Applicants appetite and decisions – understanding their research and their application pre Jan 15th

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Sarah Barr Miller

Head of Insight & Consulting, UCAS Media

s.barmiller@ucas.ac.uk



Courteney Sheppard

Senior Customer Experience Manager, UCAS

c.sheppard@ucas.ac.uk

Our methodology

- Large sample of Year 13 pre-applicants which have been statistically weighted.
- All sample from UCAS's registrant database, from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, plus international countries.
- Fieldwork conducted **23rd Oct to 2nd Nov 2020**

Please note, fieldwork was carried out before the start of Lockdown 2

21,615

Year 13 university applicants
planning to go to university in 2021

We explored...



Where applicants are in the application process (and a focus on EU applicants)



How they are experiencing your virtual events



What is going to influence their final decision making

School has been positive in focussing applicants, though appetite for applying to HE was already high

90%

are planning to
apply to university
in the UK for 2021

88%

of EU applicants say
the same

More than 5,000 EU applicants have already applied this year for the 15th October courses – including 1,400 for Medicine – but this is 19% down YOY.

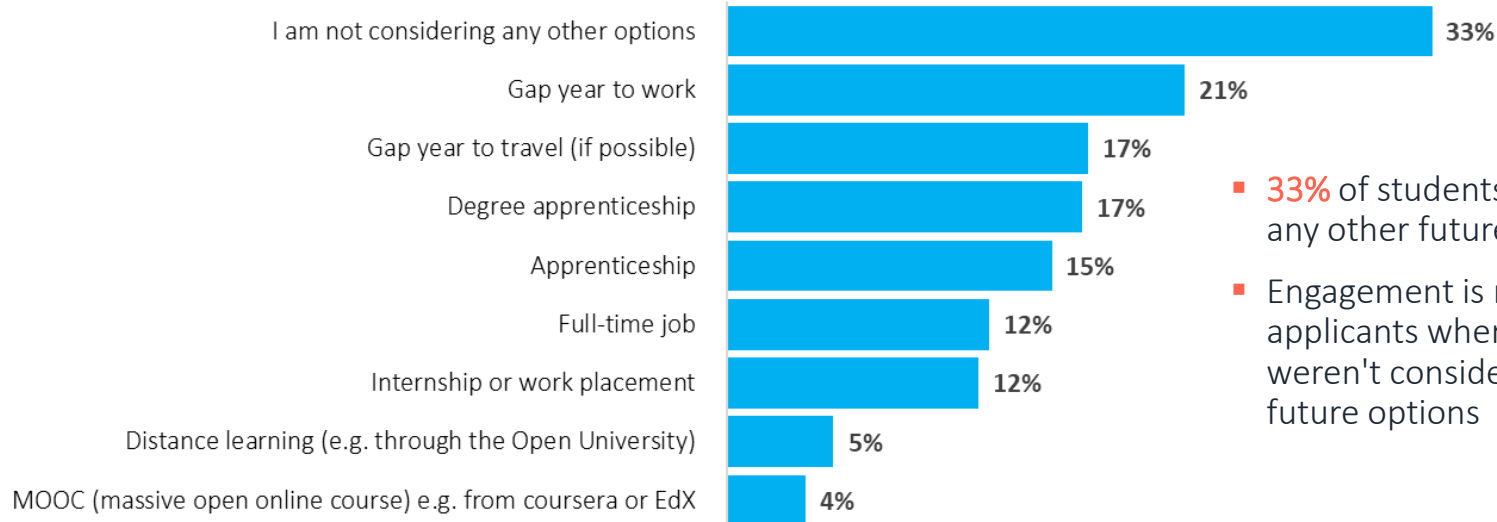
88%

of EU applicants say the same

Some 62% of 2021 EU applicants have so far said they are applying to a country other than the UK, up from around 50% at the same point last year.

2/3 of UK apps are keeping their options open

Q: Alongside thinking about applying to uni, are you also considering any other options?



- 33% of students are not considering any other future options
- Engagement is much higher for EU applicants where 42% said they weren't considering any other future options

Focus and support

Q: Which of the following best describes how your focus has changed since you went back to school?

- I feel more focussed since I went back to school.
- Going back to school has had no impact on my focus.
- I feel less focussed than before I went back to school.

And they are feeling supported
by their school

70%

are feeling more focused
since being back at school

Applicants are very engaged with the process

Q: How much progress, if any, have you made with your personal statement so far?

- Only **13%** have not started their personal statement
- **19%** of EU and **21%** of international applicants have not started their personal statement



Applicants are very engaged with the process

Q: Do you anticipate making your UCAS application in time for the January 15 deadline?

- 86% are planning on having their application completed by Jan 15th
- Only 75% of International applicants feel the same way



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**There is still much scope to engage
with prospective applicants**

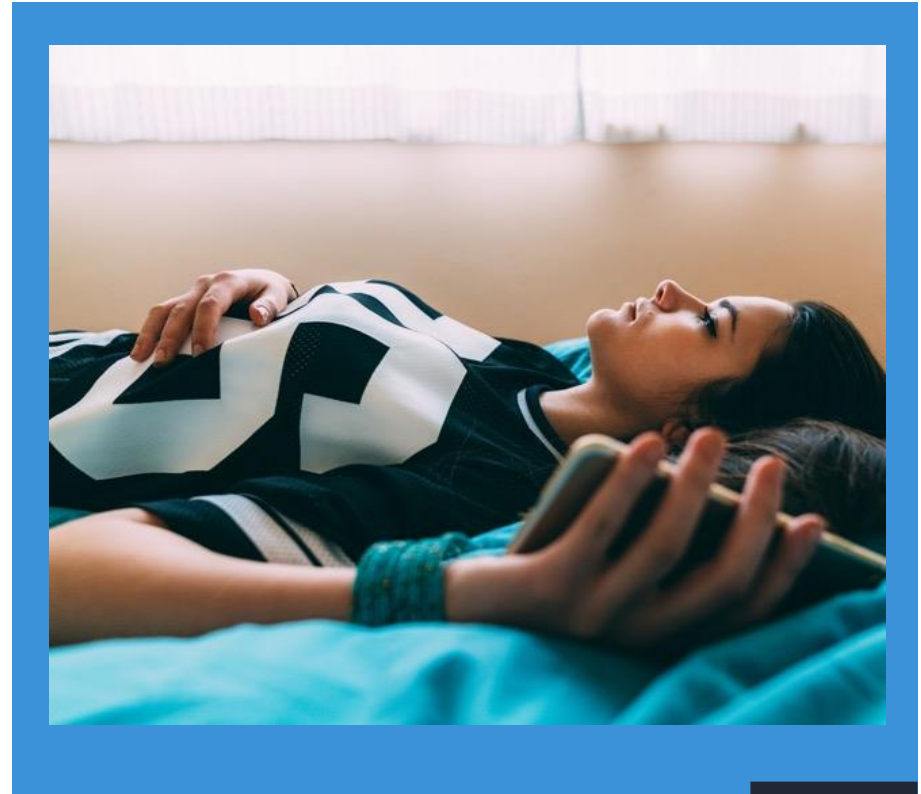
Engaging prospective applicants

Q: What stage are you at with choosing the universities and/or courses you want to apply to?

Only

40%

have decided on their final choices,
up from 27% in the last wave



Applicants are considering a range of sources, but your website remains crucial

Resources and activities

Q: When deciding which unis and colleges, and which courses, to apply to, how important have the following resources and activities been?

93%

said that **university websites** were either extremely or very important when deciding where to apply



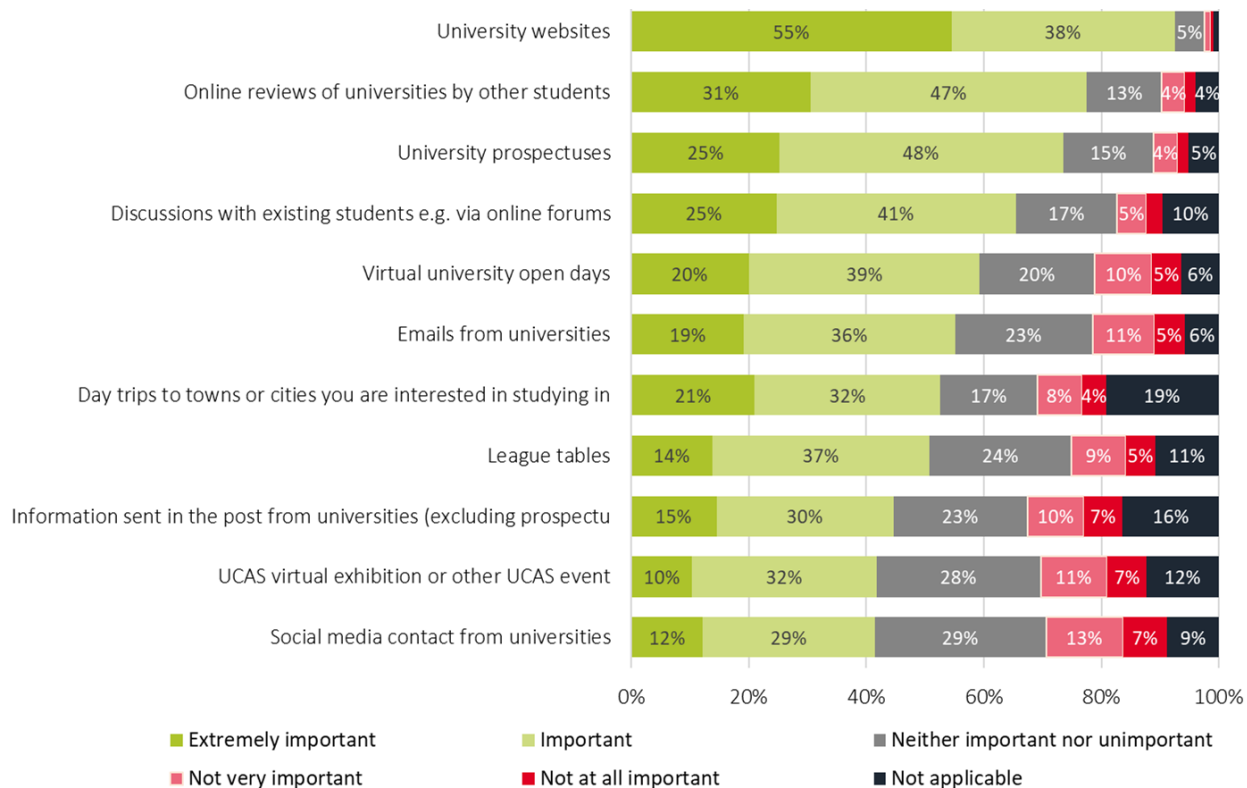
Resources and activities

Q: When deciding which unis and colleges, and which courses, to apply to, how important have the following resources and activities been?

Aside from your website and prospectus, **your students' reviews are very important**

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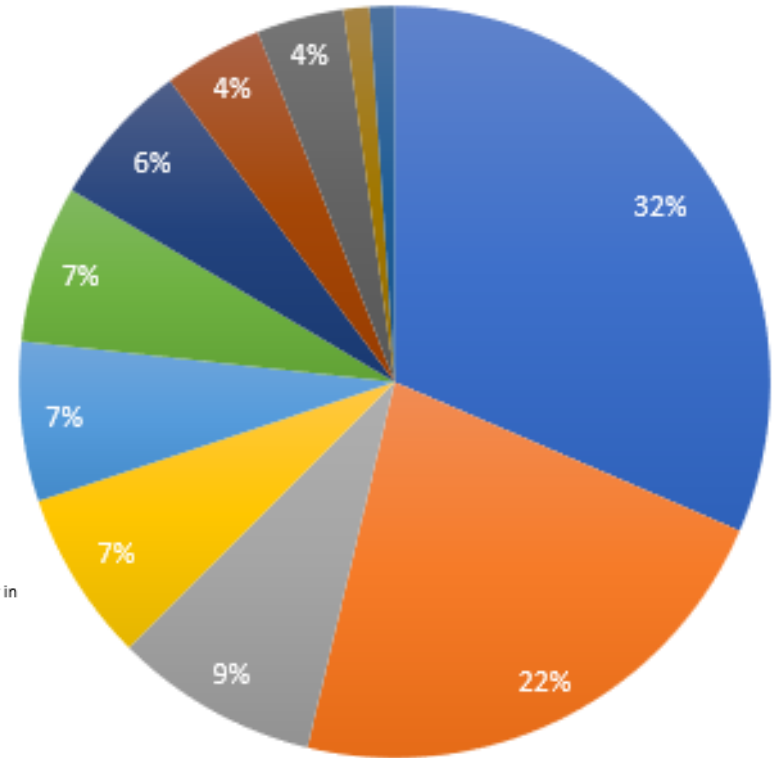
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Resources and activities

Q: When deciding which unis and colleges, which of these has been the most important?

Over 1/5 of applicants now say it's your **virtual open days** that are the most important



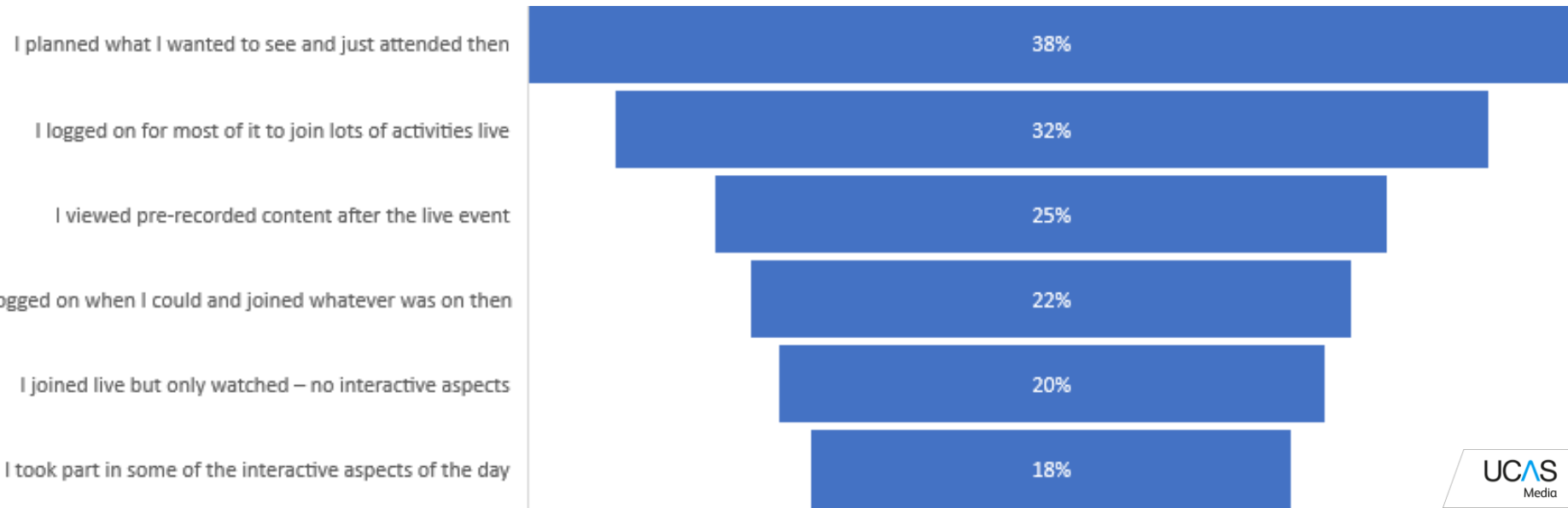
- University websites
- Virtual university open days
- University prospectuses
- Day trips to towns or cities you are interested in studying in
- League tables
- Online reviews of universities by other students
- Discussions with existing students e.g. via online forums
- Emails from universities
- UCAS virtual exhibition or other UCAS event
- Information sent by post from unis (excl. prospectuses)
- Social media contact from universities

“I think that most people choose their uni for the ‘vibe’ and the course.”

Applicant’s perspectives on virtual open days

How are they engaging with your virtual events?

Q: How have you typically interacted with the open day(s) you've attended? Please select all that apply.



Why aren't they attending?

Q: Why wouldn't you take part in any virtual open days?

- They don't think they will be representative and would prefer to have an IRL experience
- They feel they can find this info out elsewhere
- They are already set on their course and/or university so they don't feel relevant



They don't think they will be representative and would prefer to have an IRL experience

“Open days in my experience give you false expectations that always get let down”

“I don't find them as useful as actually attending the university.”

“I don't feel that you can truly get a taste of a university or its atmosphere through a virtual livestream - the person in charge of it is free to cherry-pick your sights and experiences of the university, which could result in choosing a university that was heavily romanticised.”

They feel they can find this info out elsewhere

“I don't feel that they offer anything extra that i can't already find online.”

“Pointless. Not the same as meeting in person. A telephone call is easier.”

“I do not think they are very useful, per se, I think that I can find all the relevant information through the websites of respective colleges.”

They are already set on their course and/or university so they don't feel relevant

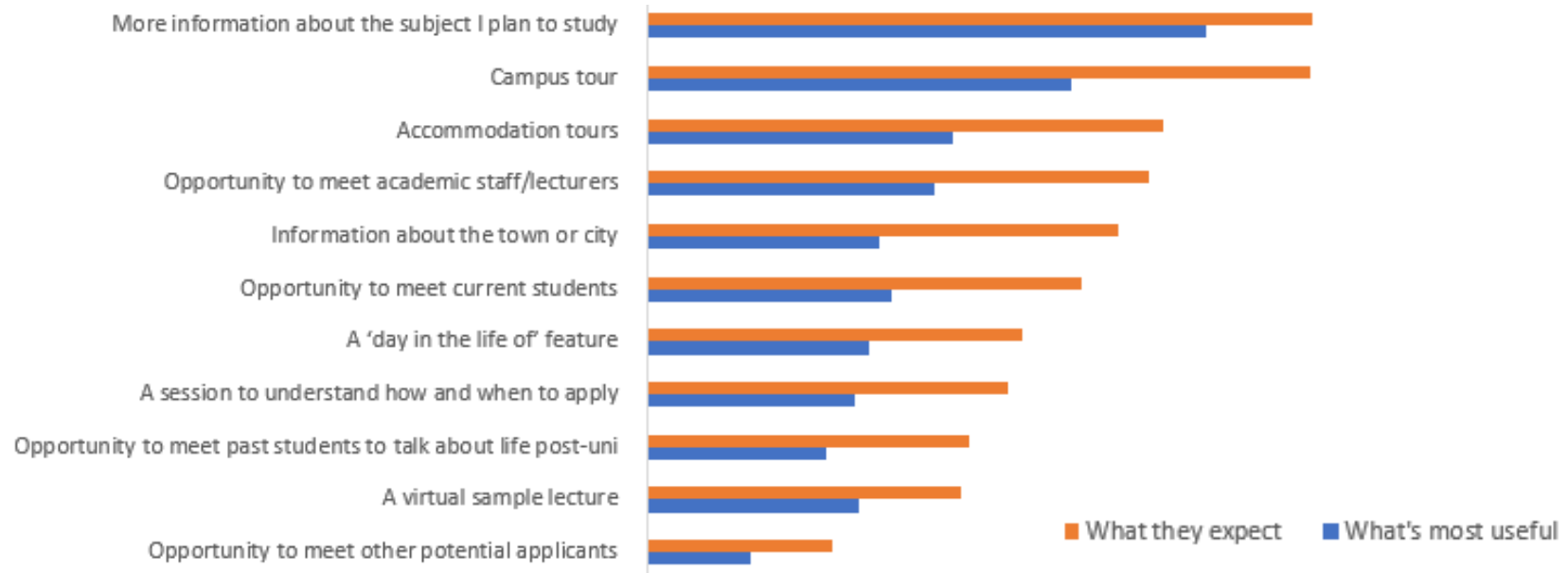
“Because I had already decided what universities I wanted to attend before virtual open days were introduced.”

“I already have a definite idea of the course and university I want to attend.”

“I don't feel like i need to know about the university, i need to know about the course”

So, what is most useful? It's the course

Q: Which of the following would you expect to be included in a virtual open day? And what would you find the most useful?



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—
***“A-day-in-the-life-features,
to gain as much of a feel for
the place as possible.”***

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What do they want?

Q: Which of the following would you expect to be included in a virtual open day? (Free text responses)

- Hearing from alumni and future applicants
- More subject-specific information
- More location information
- Information on sports, clubs and student support



Hearing from alumni and future applicants

“It would've been nice to have talked with past students about their careers and other information.”

“More talks with students at different levels as well as people that went onto have a career in their field of study”

“Being able to interact with possible students who also may be studying there next year. This gives us an opportunity to make friends and get to know people before we start. Having the ability to do this makes everything less scary for next year.”

More subject-specific information

“Short videos to watch and information on course varieties and different options, e.g. degree apprenticeships”

“The typical day of a student in that subject. What do the timetables look like.”

“Specific videos about a single course rather than the department.”

“Sample lectures for courses”

More location information

“More on the place in general. City life, favourite places the students go etc”

“Information about the towns/cities e.g club or restaurant recommendations”

“I loved with the universities gave information about their location/town, it helped me form an idea of what life as a student would be like there.”

Information on sports, clubs, and student support

“More sports-related features, especially for someone looking to participate in a sport at uni and potentially be part of a team”

“More detailed info on societies, student union etc”

“Information on student support to ensure individuals know what to do and who to go to when they are struggling.”

“Widening access and accessibility information for disabled students”

What was most memorable?

Q: Thinking about the virtual open days you've attended, was there anything any of the unis included in their events you found particularly attractive, useful, or memorable? (Free text responses)

- Detailed subject information
- Those with a good set-up
- Hearing from your students
- Accommodation information
- Advice on how to apply



Detailed subject information

“I find the way the course is presented has a big impact on my decision”

“Subject specific vertical meeting and being able to put questions in a chat to ask the presenter”

“I found that the virtual open days that provided sample lectures ended up being favoured to those that didn't, as it gave more of a university experience feel rather than just being told the structure of the course, which is all available online anyway.”

Those with a good set-up

“A welcoming video telling the students where to go, what to do and how things work.”

“Q&A sessions are extremely helpful”

“One university included a walking tour of the campus which was filmed live and then available afterwards.”

“Self guided virtual campus and facilities tours”

“The Unis that had the best open days were ones that had websites with chatrooms and meetings and videos all in one place, not just Zoom meetings at set times”

Hearing from your students

“Students’ own perspective about university life and honest opinions”

“I found that past students in the universities have helped me know what life is like at university; and have shown me insights on what the level of studying is going to be at.”

“Chat rooms with current students about specific courses, clubs, sport etc.”

“Current students speaking not just about uni but about life in general and juggling work, studying and their social life, etc.”

Accommodation information

“Tours of the accommodation and the accommodation options available to me.”

“I enjoy viewing the campus and accommodation, so I feel more prepared and welcome for wherever I choose”

“Detailed accommodation tours”

“360° tours of accommodation- very useful”

Advice on how to apply

“Giving advice on how you should approach applying to a certain course and things that are encouraged to be used in application processes.”

“One uni described the application process very clearly and it really helped to understand what to expect”

“Offering a table explaining exact steps to apply.”

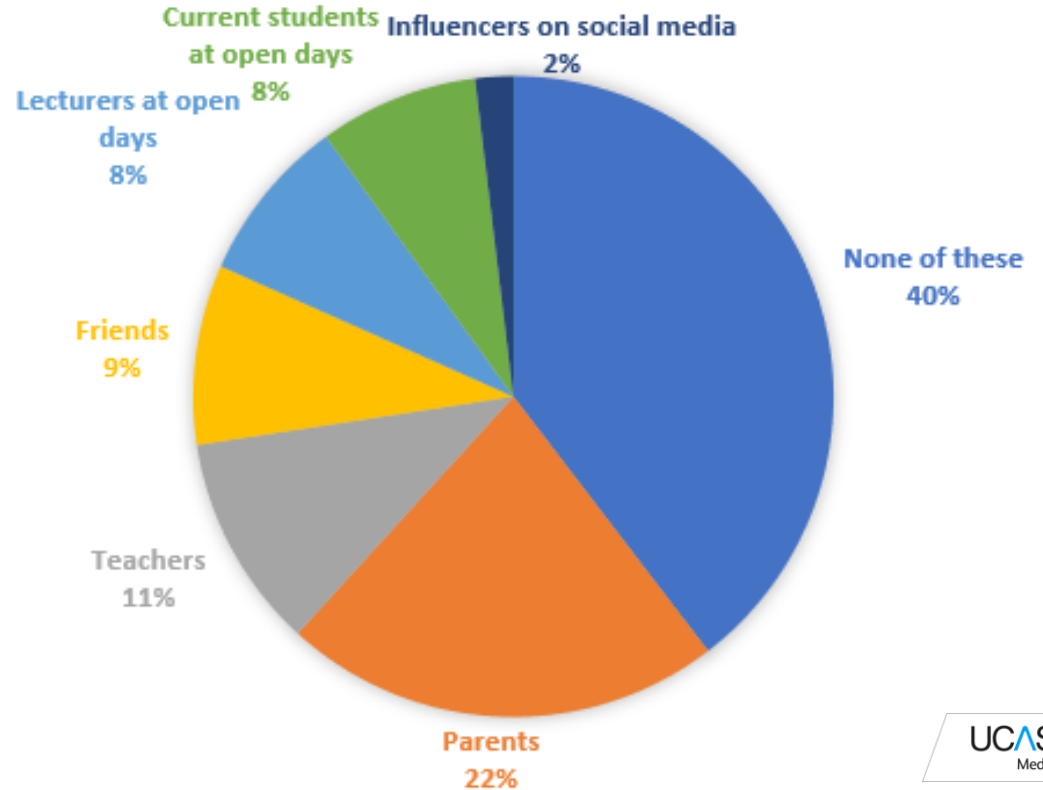
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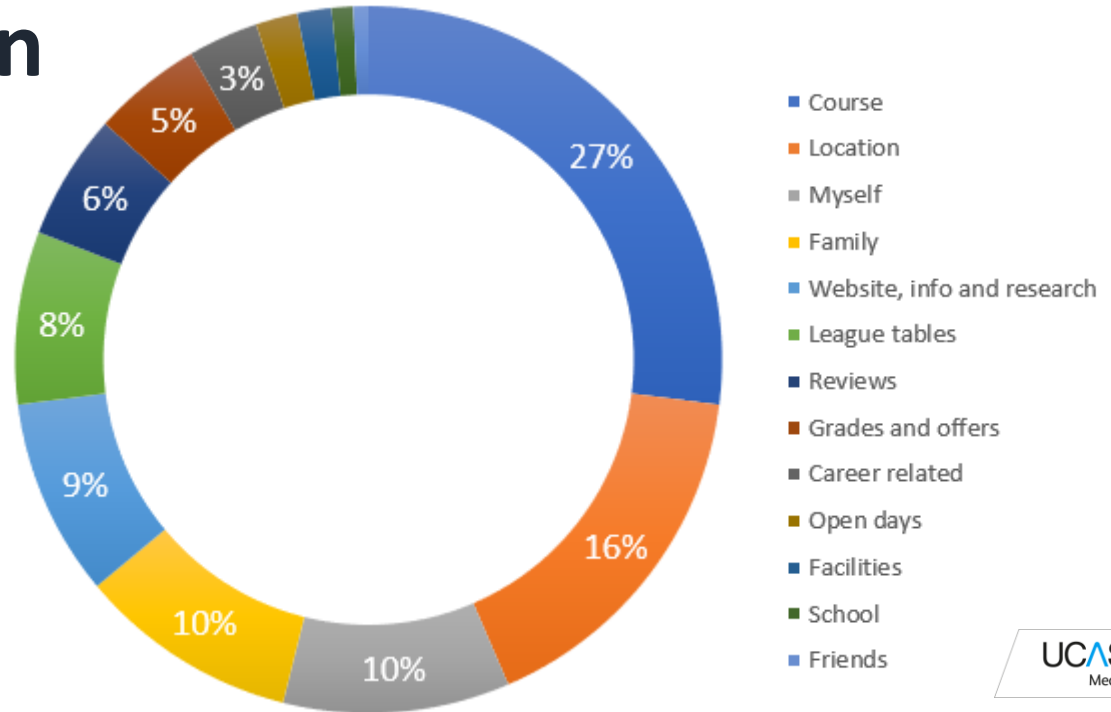
Parents, your location, and your courses are most influential to applicant decision making

Parents were the most influential, where we got the question right!

Q: Which of the following has the most influence in you deciding which universities and colleges to apply to?



43% of responses mentioned either the course or location



Q: Which of the following has the most influence in you deciding which universities and colleges to apply to? (Free text response)

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So, what about Covid?

It seemingly isn't impacting decision making

Q: Which of the following has the most influence in you deciding which universities and colleges to apply to? (Free text responses)

Only

5 people

said Covid was the main influence on their choice of university

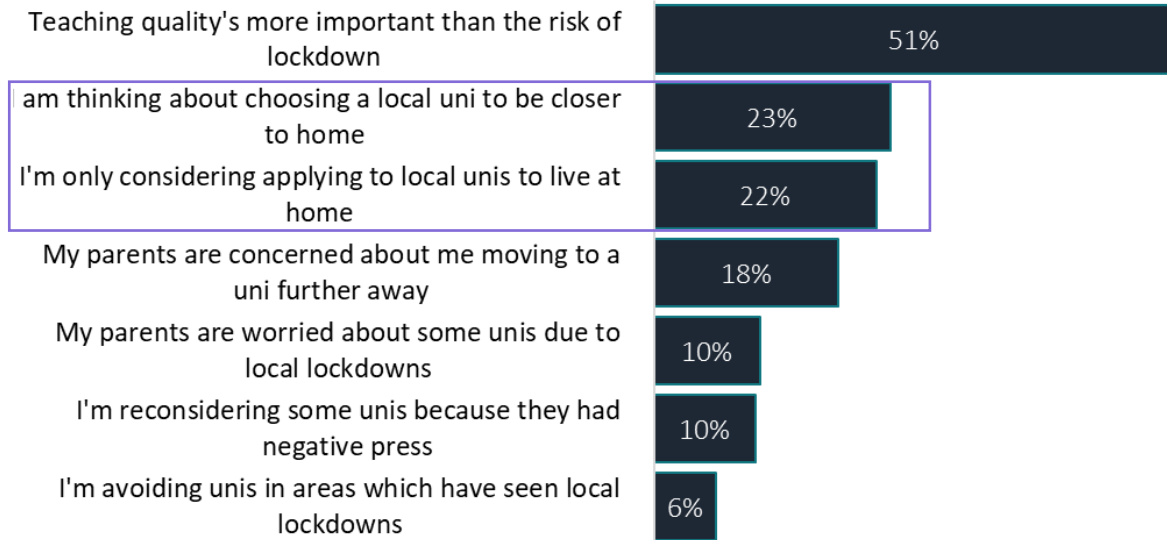


Teaching quality is more important than local lockdowns, but many do want to remain local

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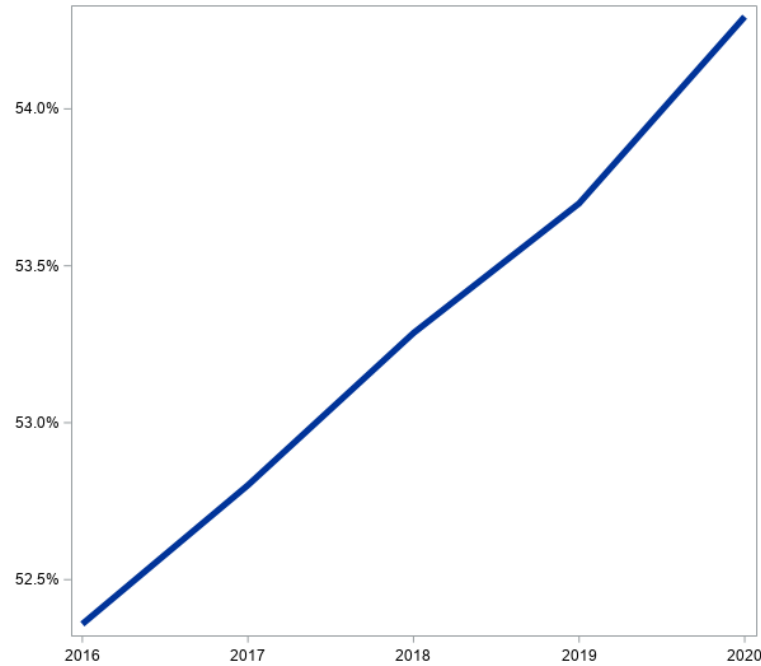
Q: Have the recent reports of students in coronavirus-related lockdowns within their student halls had any impact on your choice of unis to apply to?



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More UK domiciled applicants are choosing to stay within their home region

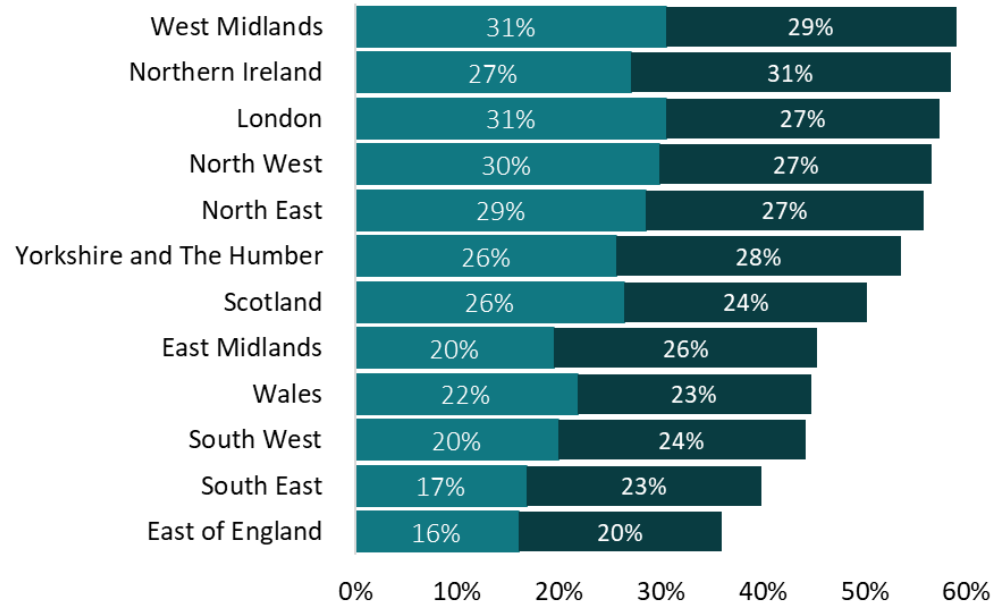
- Nearly half of 2020's placed applicants remained within their home region to study – a continuation of past trends.
- However, the rate of increase in students choosing to study closer to home has slightly accelerated this year due to COVID-19 and the increase of mature applicants



There are clear regional differences regarding the importance of location and proximity from home

Q: Have the recent reports of students in coronavirus-related lockdowns within their student halls had any impact on your choice of unis to apply to?

- I'm only considering applying to local unis to live at home
- I am thinking about choosing a local uni to be closer to home

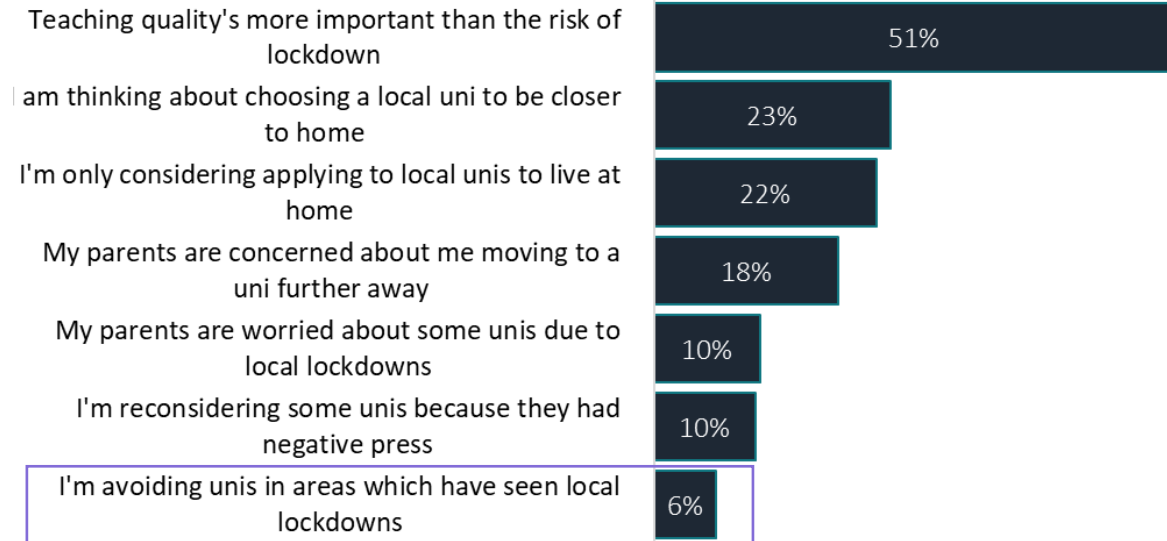


Location is a very important influence, but generally this is not covid-specific

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Q: Have the recent reports of students in coronavirus-related lockdowns within their student halls had any impact on your choice of unis to apply to?



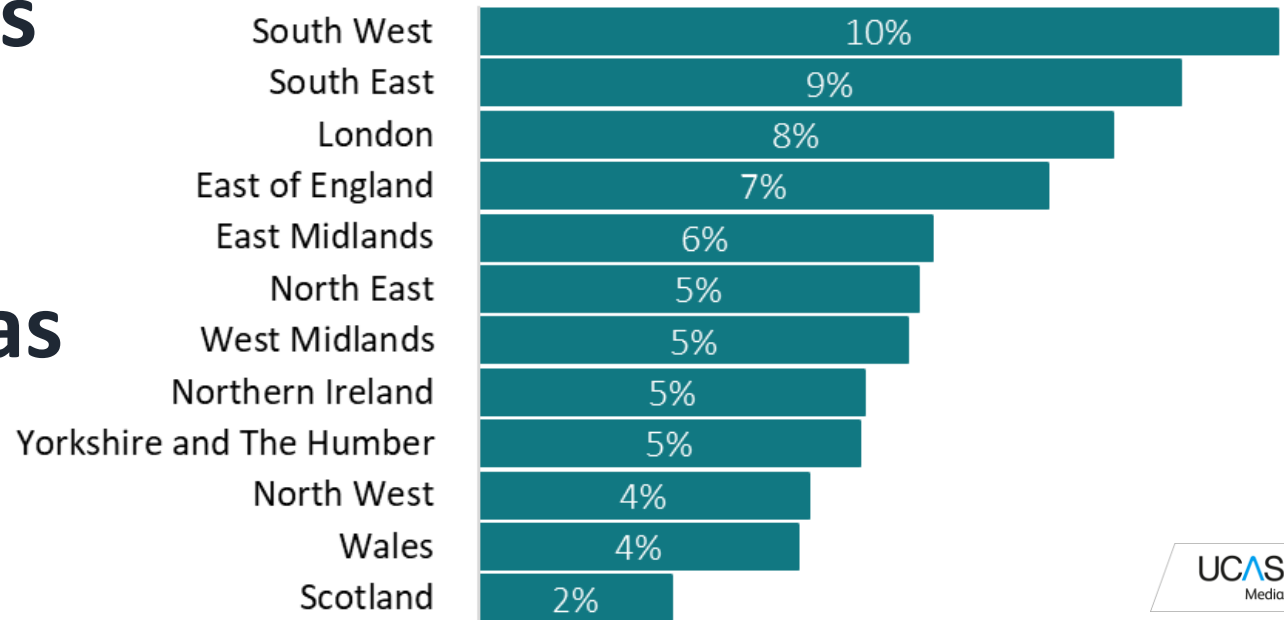
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There are big regional differences as regards appetite to consider areas with local lockdowns

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Q: Have the recent reports of students in coronavirus-related lockdowns within their student halls had any impact on your choice of unis to apply to?
I'm avoiding unis in areas which have seen local lockdowns



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Q: Thinking ahead to the start of the uni term next year, what level of social distancing measures do you anticipate being in place at the time?

61%

think there will be fewer restrictions than we have today



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70%

said they were fairly or very confident they would make the right choice even if they can't physically visit the campus/location.

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Has a potential vaccine impacted decision making?

Q: Does the prospect of the new COVID vaccine make you question your choices?

72%

said they were happy with their choices

479 responses so far





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Key take aways and recommendations

1.

Huge appetite to apply to HE by Jan 15th and the majority have started their application

2.

Only 40% of our registrants have chosen their university choices – though more females have decided

3.

Your website is crucial for research, though virtual events are also very influential

4.

Virtual events: Detailed course info is key and make it interactive where possible

5.

Covid is not a major decision-making factor

What this means for you

The majority of applicants who have started the UCAS process are still making their final decisions - the recruitment window is therefore far from closed

You need to strategically plan the content of your virtual events - ensure there's clear sign-posting; ensure you cover some basics, provide detailed course info, allow interaction and showcase your current and past students

Whilst Covid is not an overt part of decision making, location will be a big influence this year – and may continue existing trends we see already; understand your local market and what works when recruiting from further afield