

UCAS

STUDENT MINDSET CONFERENCE

2023

**Student Decision Making:
The Hidden Factors**
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Sponsored by



The hidden (psychological) influences on school leavers' future decision-making

October 2023



Agenda

01 About us

02 The hidden influence on
decision-making

03 UCAS Case study

04 Segmentation by needs

05 Summary

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01

About us



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About us

As psychologists and behavioural scientists we use insights from the human psyche and subconscious to help organisations find clarity and deliver impact in their marketing activity.



Our Clients



UNIVERSITY OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE



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02

The hidden influence on decision-making



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Behaviour needs explaining!

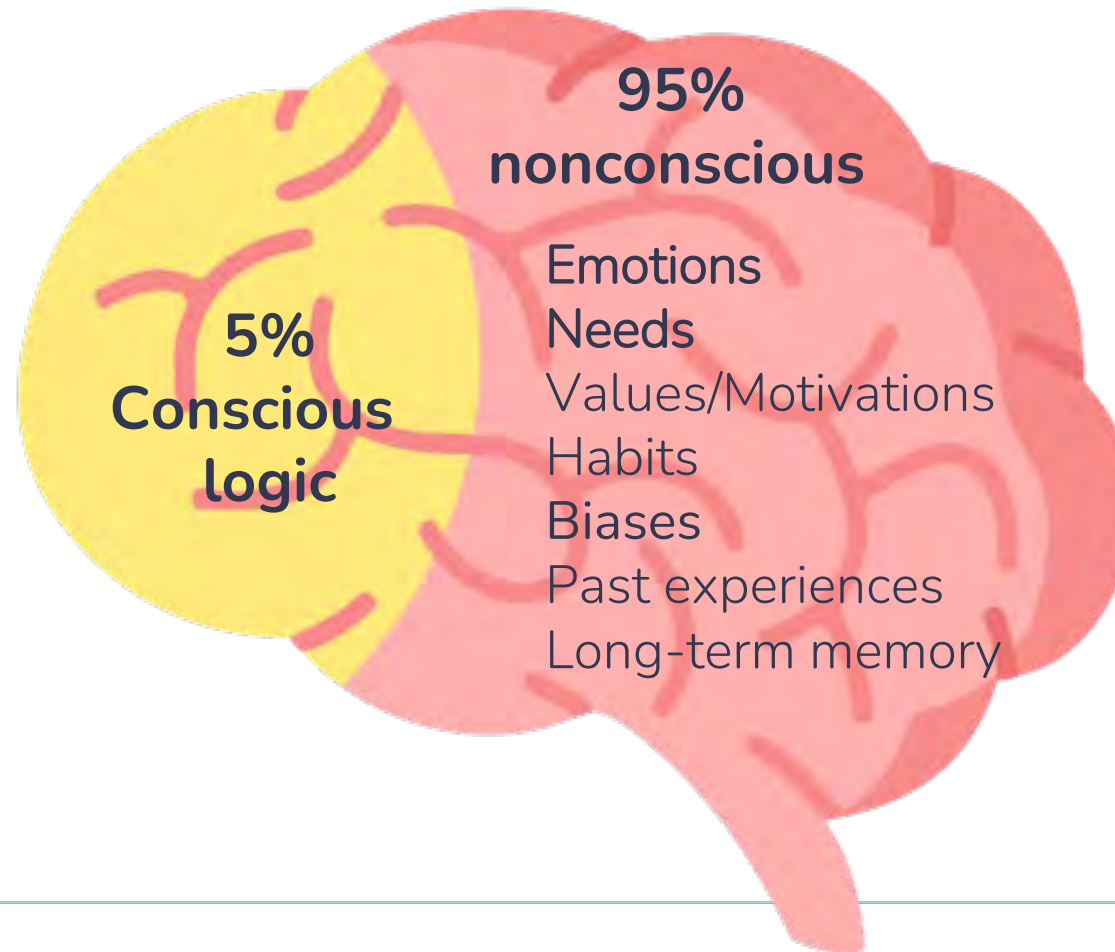


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Humans are notoriously difficult to understand



What drives the hidden/non-conscious?



Psychological Science

Can discover the conscious and nonconscious drivers of behaviour.

It can reveal the hidden factors that enable you to create content and communications that resonate, engage and motivate your audiences



03

A psychological lens on school leavers' decision-making



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The Psychological Lens

A **psychological lens** over some recent research on UK secondary school children, that looked at:

- Attitudes,
- Motivations,
- Expectations

around their future academic lives beyond school.



What the research shows..

UK secondary school students have:

Remarkable mental strength, however,
some worries



School mental health appears to be relatively good – only 17% of students viewed it as a top 5 concerns compared with UK average of 25% of ppl having a mental health issue.



School leavers feel insecure about their future

**Worry that they
are not
making the best
decision**

...and feel insecure
about their choice
of university.

**Challenge to
express needs**

..... due to the
emphasis on Russell
Group universities
by parents/others.



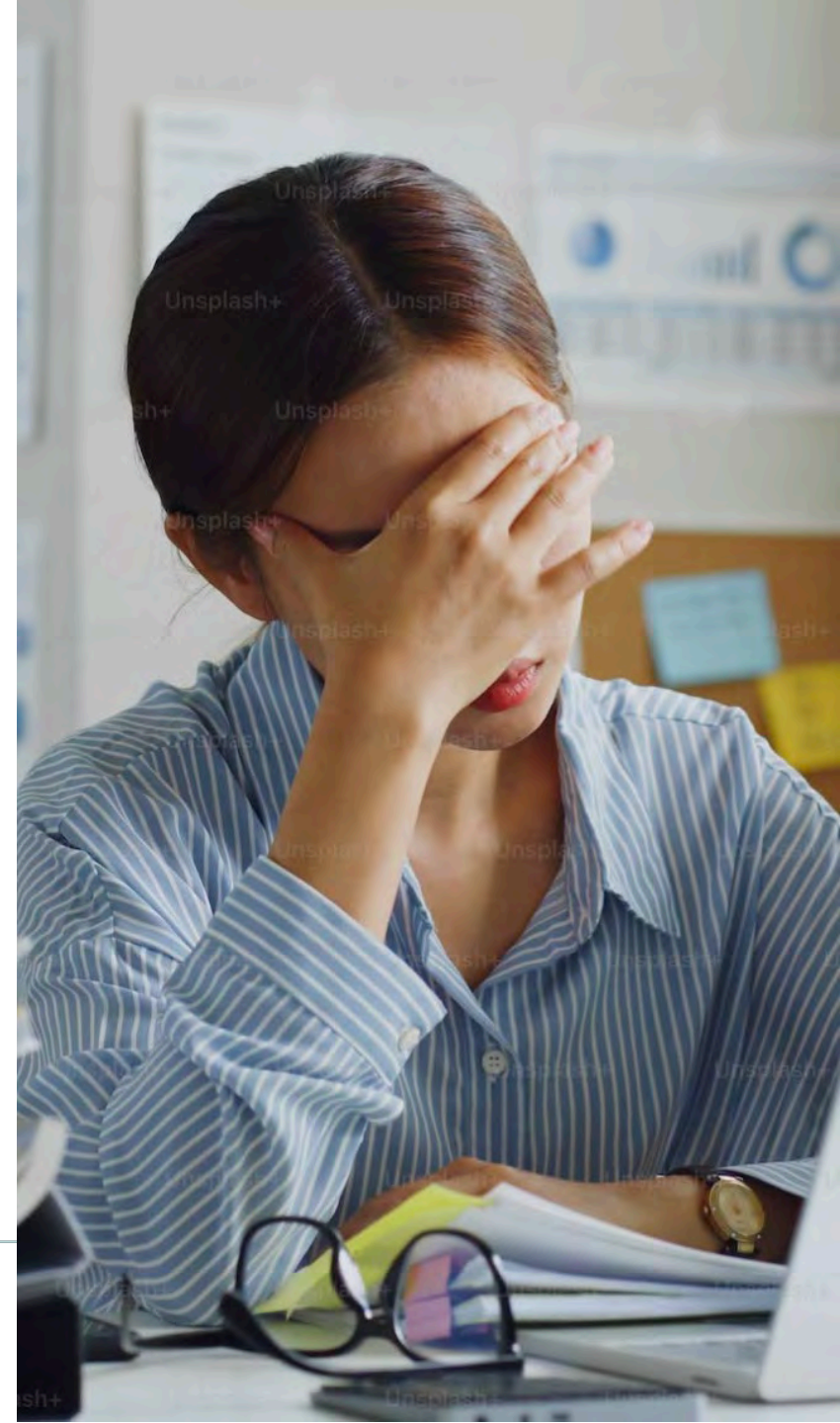
The psychology of... Anxiety from Uncertainty

We find uncertainty discomforting and aversive - especially when the consequences are seen to be highly significant.

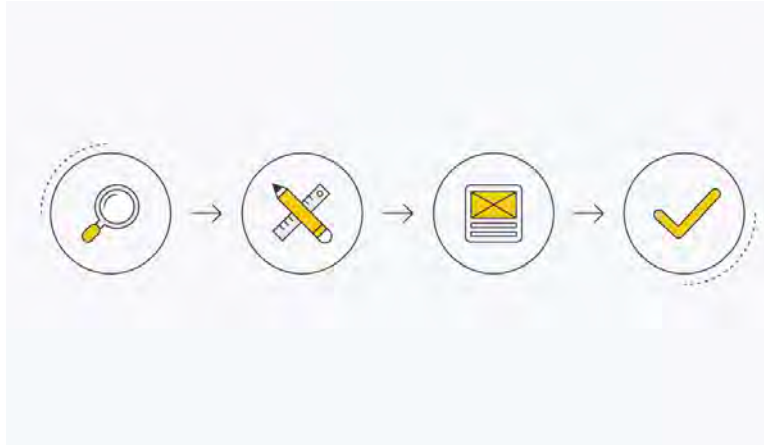
Making decisions under conditions of uncertainty is psychologically demanding. Its:

- stressful
- effortful

as we have to work to resolve ambiguity and complexity.



Strategies to address anxieties



**Create a step-by-step
assessment process
checklist that reflects
their interest, capabilities
and needs**



**Create a experiential
program where...**

existing university and
apprenticeship students take
school leavers under their
wings for a day to give them
a flavour of what's it like?



Reframing university as a stepping stone



No longer a life decision



Strategies to address anxieties



- Communicate university's support on
- identifying which jobs would be best to start testing out after uni
 - on finding a job after university



School leavers feel overwhelmed

Information Overload

They have too much information to process when making a decision.

Intimated by consequences

They feel intimidated by the enormity of the choice regarding what to do after school.



The psychology of... Cognitive Overload

Cognitive Overload occurs when our working memory receives more information than it can process..

This leads to:

- Loss of attention
- Lower comprehension
- Procrastination



Overcoming cognitive overload



Create accessible information....

(e.g. short articles and videos) that are easy to read, understand and digest. Information needs to be condensed and/or kept in one place.



Visit schools (or virtual events) ...

to engage with students will be particularly helpful to first generation university students who lack the support at home.



Make simplicity a core design principle



What do people really need to know / read for the desired behaviour to happen?



Reasons for choosing their subject

Students are primarily interested in going for degrees and careers that firstly focus on what they enjoy and then having a viable career.

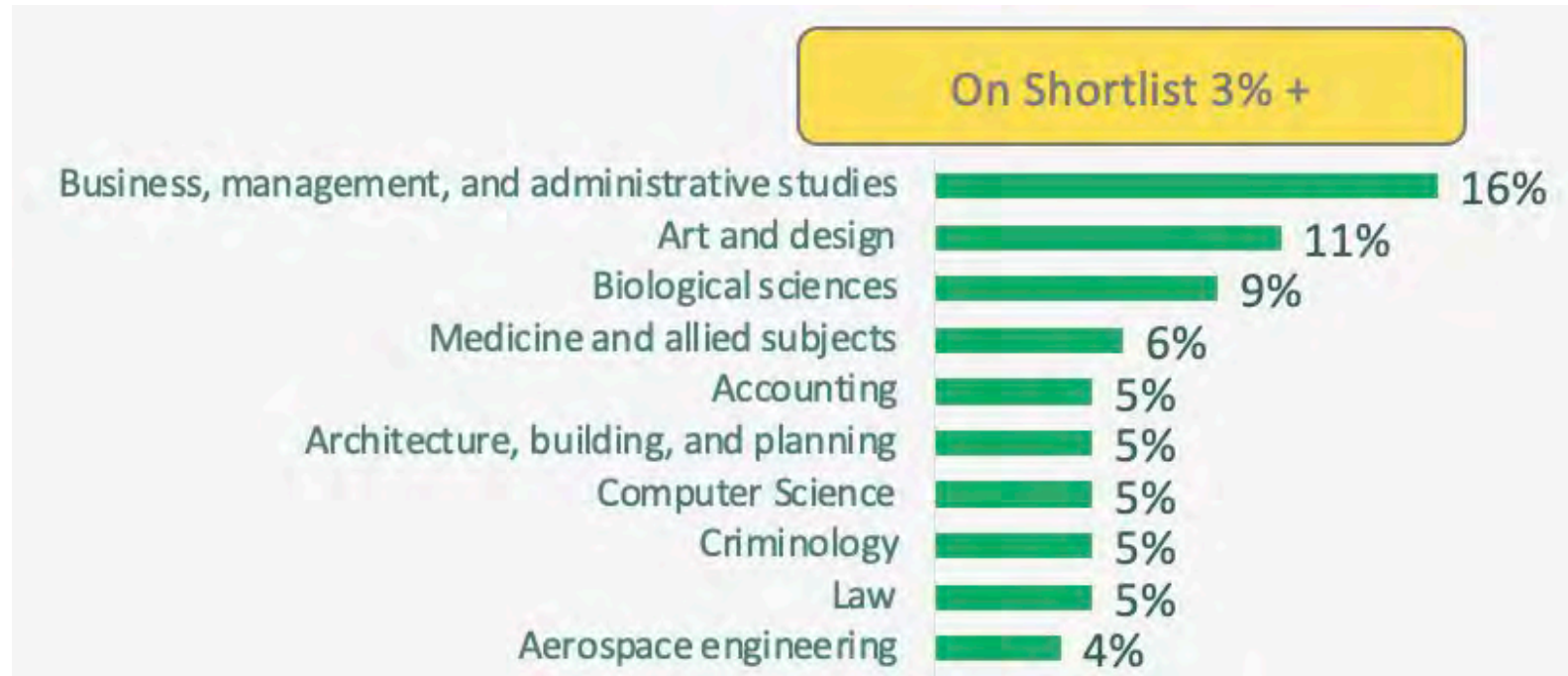


Research tells us that high self-efficacy is positively associated with the choice for academic bachelor programs.



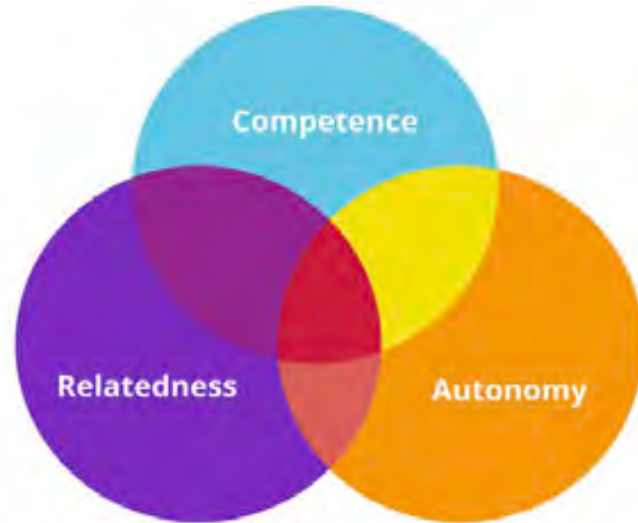
What do students want to do?

Students are largely focusing on STEM and business degrees showing a good understanding that these degrees lead to high paying jobs providing future stability.



A need for Self Determination

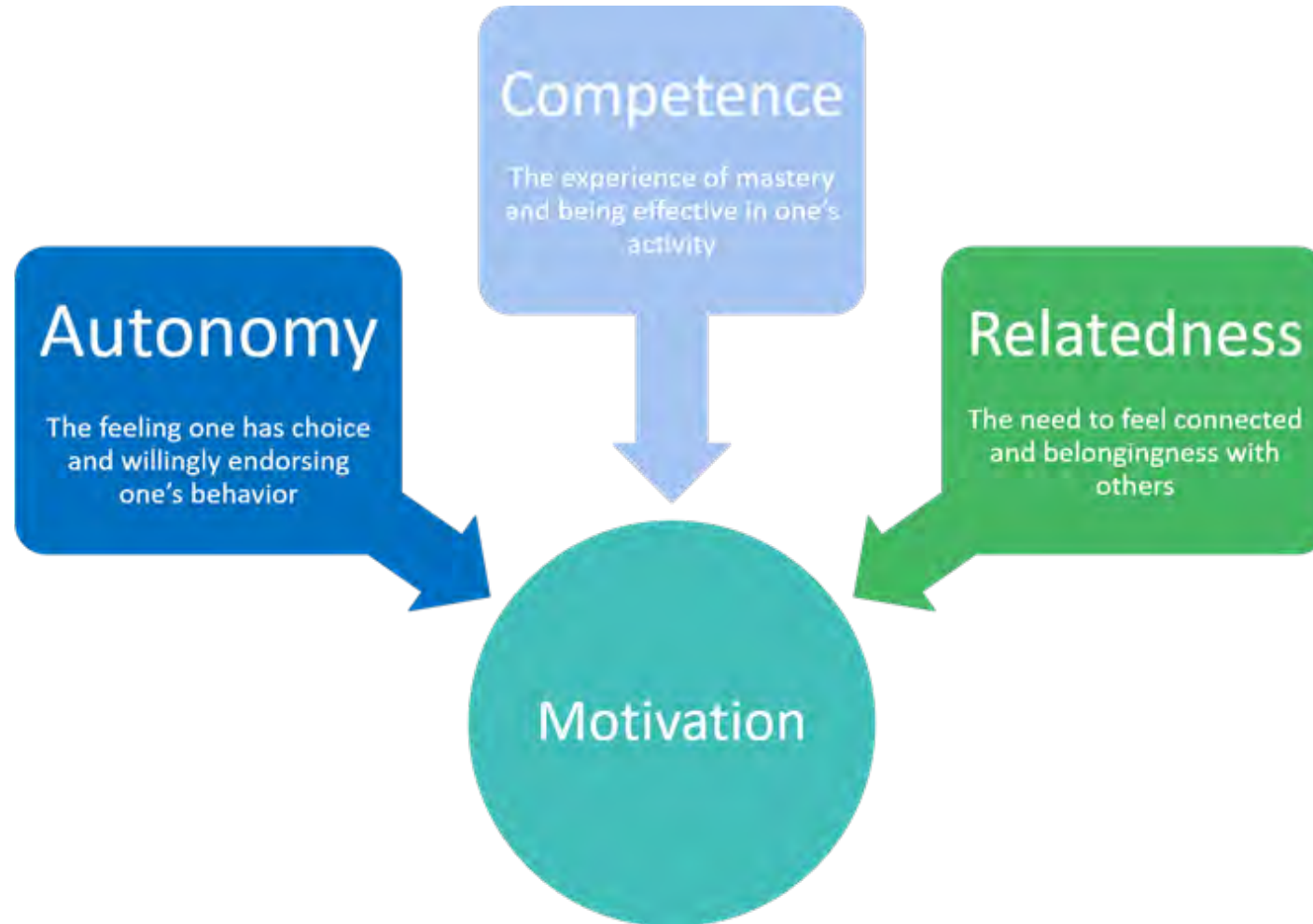
The research here, shows that future university students are primarily focused on **building a sense of autonomy, competence and belonging in university life and beyond.**



When these 3 psychological needs are met in a person, it leads to well-being and psychological growth – this framework is known as **Self Determination Theory.**



An overview of Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

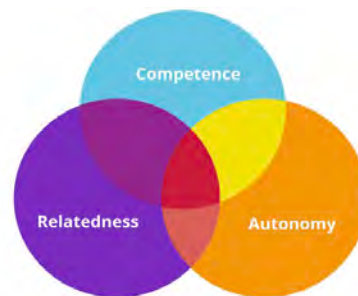


We can see these needs as differentiators in decisions

The main reason students chose to go to university was to improve their career long term – meeting the need to feel competent, while the second most common reason 'following dreams' relates to the need for autonomy and control.



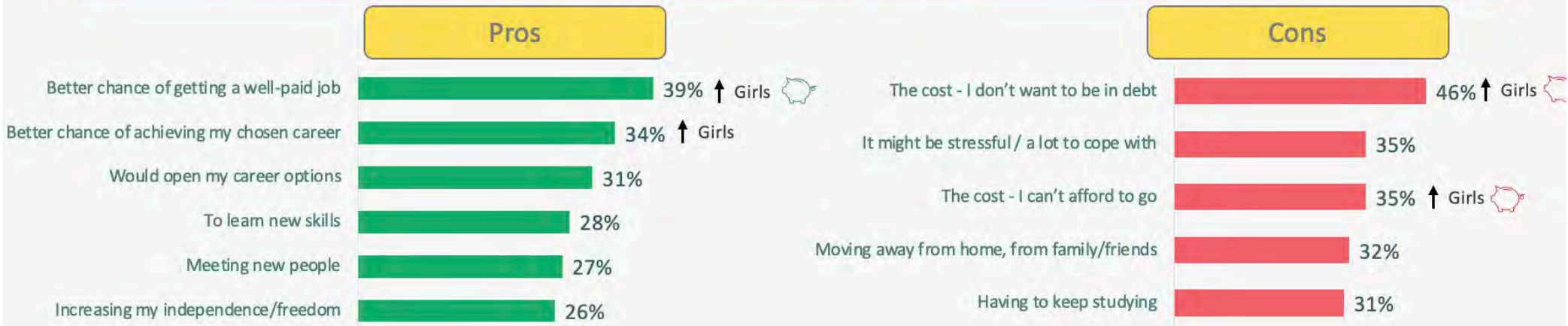
The MAIN reasons that students have decided to go to..... X....



The perceived pros of going to university also reflect the needs for largely competence and autonomy

University pros and cons: The main draw of University would seem to be as an investment in their future Careers.

Very similar regardless of Year Group



What school students want help with:

Students are worried about having:

1. Stability in the future (finding a job),
2. Making enough money,
3. Able to move out to get their own independence.

9/10 would like some help with at least one type of work-based skill



Currently, universities are focusing their marketing on..

1. Academic Excellence
2. Career Opportunities
3. Campus Life
4. Location and Facilities
5. Finances

Essex is 32nd in the UK in the Complete University Guide 2024

89% of our graduates are in employment or further study (Graduate Outcomes 2023)



Your career

Here at Hallam, you don't just learn it – you do it. Find out how our applied learning will help you get career ready



Our campuses

View our campus spaces and explore where you will be studying as a Hallam student



University marketing can be made more effective if:

It uses Self-Determination Theory as a framework to create messaging that echoes the sentiments of autonomy and competence that resonate with the younger generation.



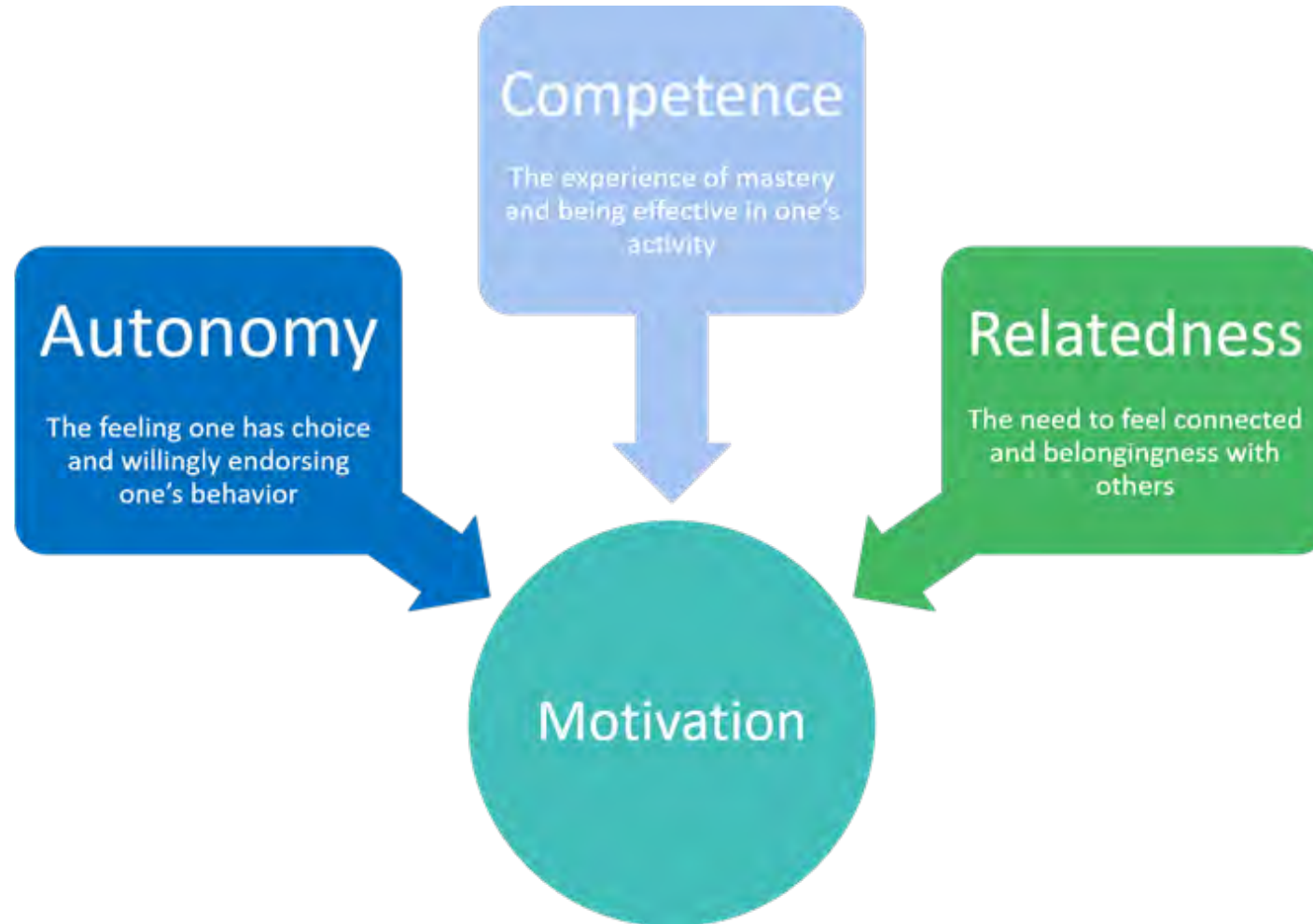
Applying SDT to marketing strategies means emphasizing how university life can fulfill these needs, particularly autonomy, showcasing university as a place where students can govern their learning, lifestyle, and future.



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Reminder: An overview of Self-Determination Theory



Using an SDT framework to look at marketing...

And based on the research... marketing and comms would focus on:

Need:	Autonomy-Centric Messaging:	Competence-Driven Narratives:	Relatedness & Community Connection:
Highlight:	Autonomy in learning and decision-making.	Opportunities to master new skills and knowledge.	The sense of belonging and connection within the university community.
Example:	“Forge your path with diverse course selections and personalised learning experiences.”	“Equip yourself with the skills and knowledge for the future, mastering disciplines that interest you.”	Join a diverse community, sharing ideas and building lasting relationships.”

SDT messaging in practice



Venture into *new territory* and
chart your own path

Autonomy

Competence



Learn, Master,
Conquer: Be
Future Ready



Self-Determination Theory - Competence

Competence is a core need for SDT. If we set goals but are not competent enough to complete them then what is the point?

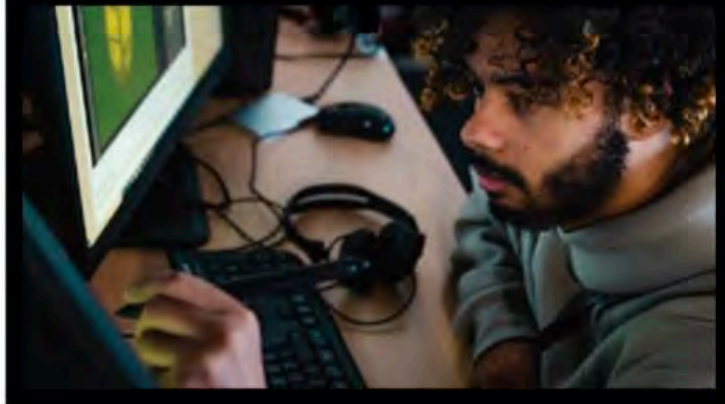
Students are **chasing a sense of power and competence** in their lives. One of their main concerns is not getting the grades for their courses.

By supporting students both pre and during university to be more competent will attract the modern student.



Speaking to the need for competence

Employability skills and development is built into all our courses.



Self-directed Skills Development



Building your future

Develop Your Employability Skills



Self-Determination Theory - Relatedness

Pre - University students are naturally part of diverse social networks but will have their social networks disrupted and reformed during fresher's. This can cause loneliness for people and using social clubs and other events can help students to maintain.

We offer suggestions in order to counter this:

1. Implicitly highlight that your university has mentors, peers, and resources for support.
2. Emphasize the role of positive relationships in personal growth that can be found at your university.



Speaking to the need for Relatedness



A Better World Together

Harvard is committed to creating an inclusive living and learning environment for every member of our community.



Creating the connections that make us stronger



Self-Determination Theory - Autonomy

Pre - University students already exhibit high levels of autonomy with the research presenting a desire to engage in careers they personally find interesting and respecting but not bowing to parental advice/pressure.

1. Encourage them to channel this autonomy towards self-development through university study.
2. Emphasize the importance of setting personal goals which can be achieved through self efficacy training.



Speaking to the need for Autonomy



Conclusion

High school and A level students are mental strong and self-aware but they have worries about their choices and the future.

Leveraging **Self-Determination Theory** can unleash their full potential and they will go to universities that promote these ideas as fitting with their values and ideals.

By incorporating elements of SDT, you will not just be promoting an educational institutions but advocating for the self-development, resilience, and fulfillment of future graduates.



Thank you and questions?

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