

**An applicant's view**

# **Keeping pace with changing applicant sentiment**

**Sarah Barr Miller**



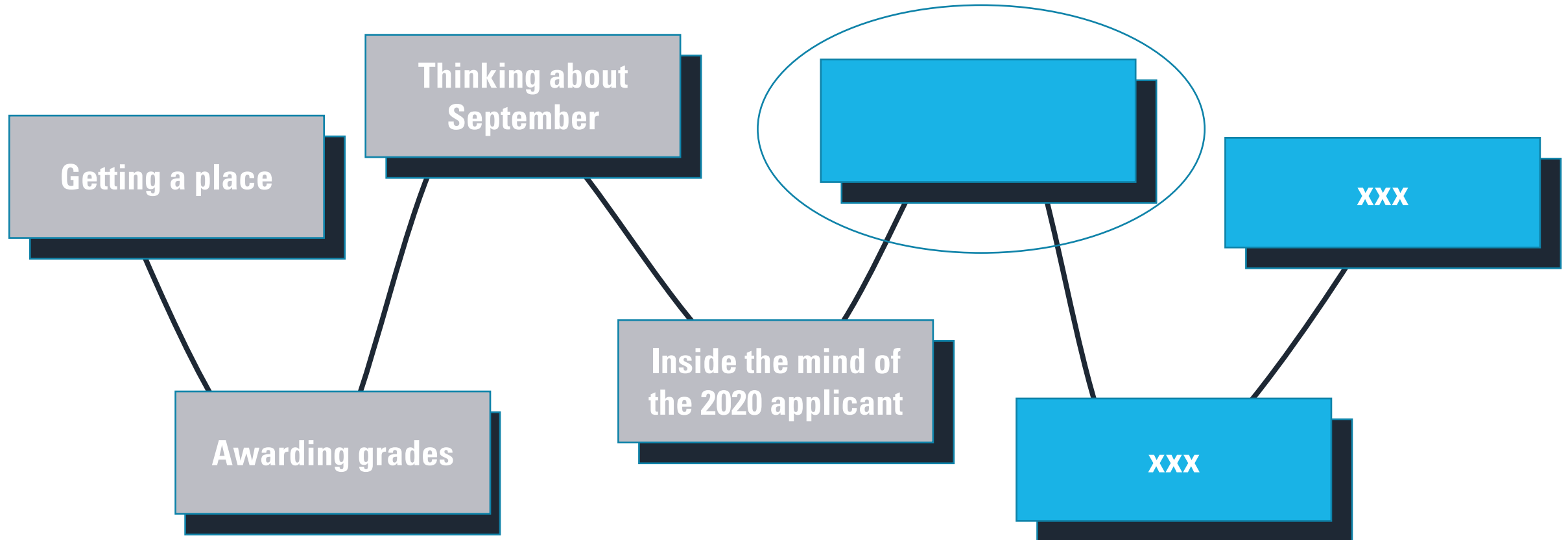
**YouthSight**

**UCAS**  
Media

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The aim is to support the sector through the provision of timely sentiment research

13<sup>th</sup> July 2020



# We have been exploring.....



How applicants' mood is tracking



How uncertainties are affecting commitment



Decision-making changes applicants are considering – and when



How applicants feel about Clearing and self-release

**An applicant's view**

# **Applicant mood tracker**



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June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

A photograph of three young adults (two men and one woman) jumping joyfully in a snowy field. They are all smiling and have their arms raised. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic and a brown jacket. The man in the middle is wearing a blue jacket and a black cap. The man on the right is wearing a black t-shirt and glasses. The background shows a snowy landscape with bare trees.

**Missing out on the real  
university experience is  
now the biggest worry for  
applicants**

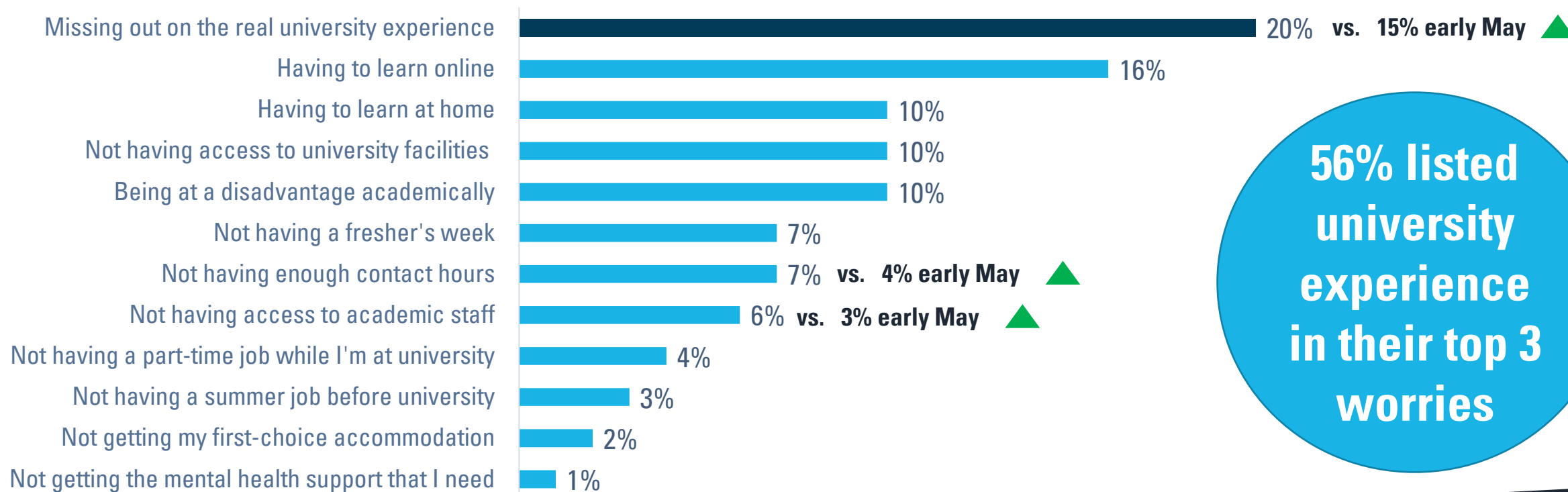
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# Missing out on experience has overtaken learning online as the number one worry for applicants

## % who ranked each 1<sup>st</sup> in their top 3 worries



**56% listed university experience in their top 3 worries**

**An applicant's view**

June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

**Uncertainty  
around university  
experience is  
affecting  
commitment**



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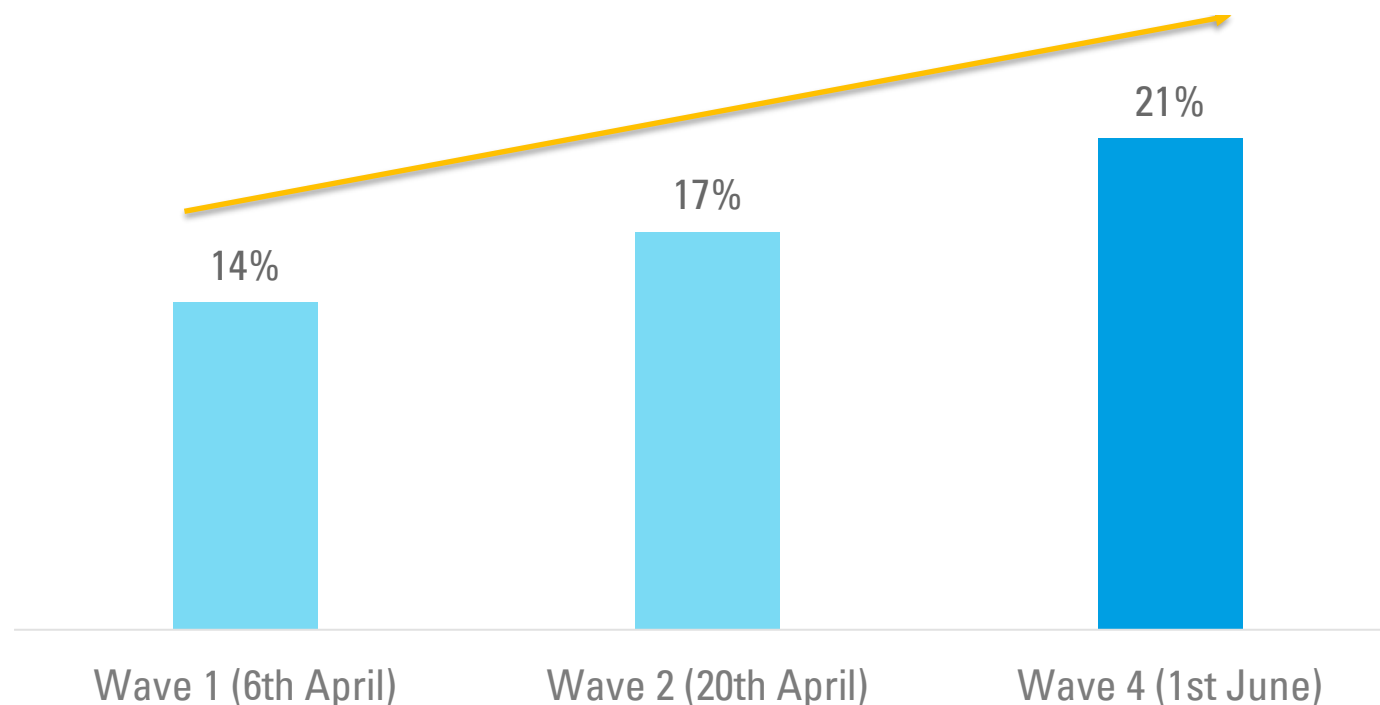
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June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

# One in five have already changed their decisions

% who have changed any of their university decisions



**Those who are most likely to have changed:**

**BAME**

**Haven't made firm/ insurance choices**

**Have done some research about changes**

**Are open to clearing and self-release**

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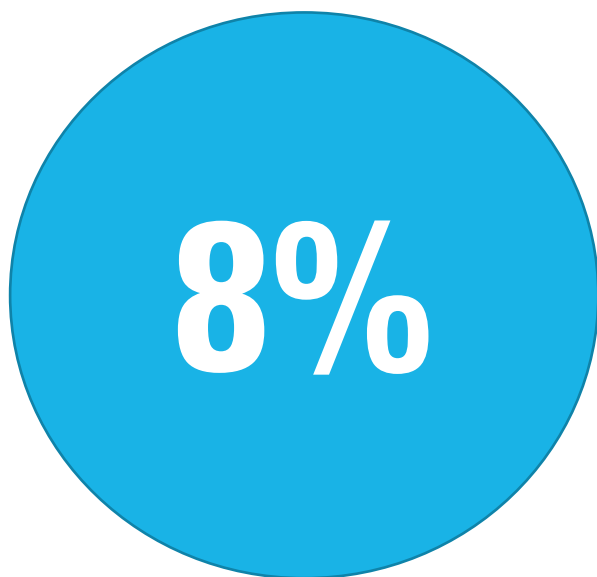
Q2. Since the start of lockdown, have you changed any of your decisions about university?

Base: All respondents (509) June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

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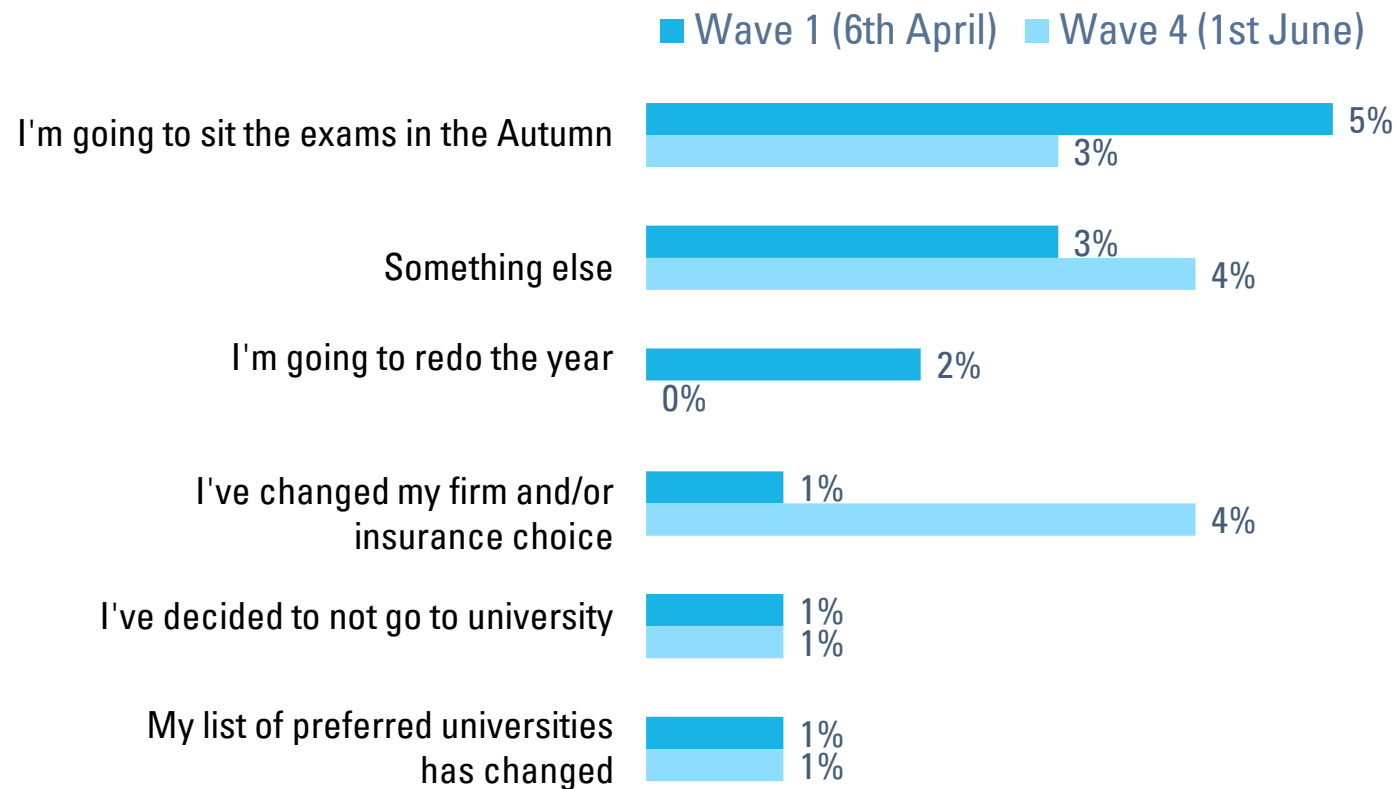


# There has been an increase in the number choosing to defer a year



**have decided to defer a year**

▲ **vs 3% early April (Wave 1)**

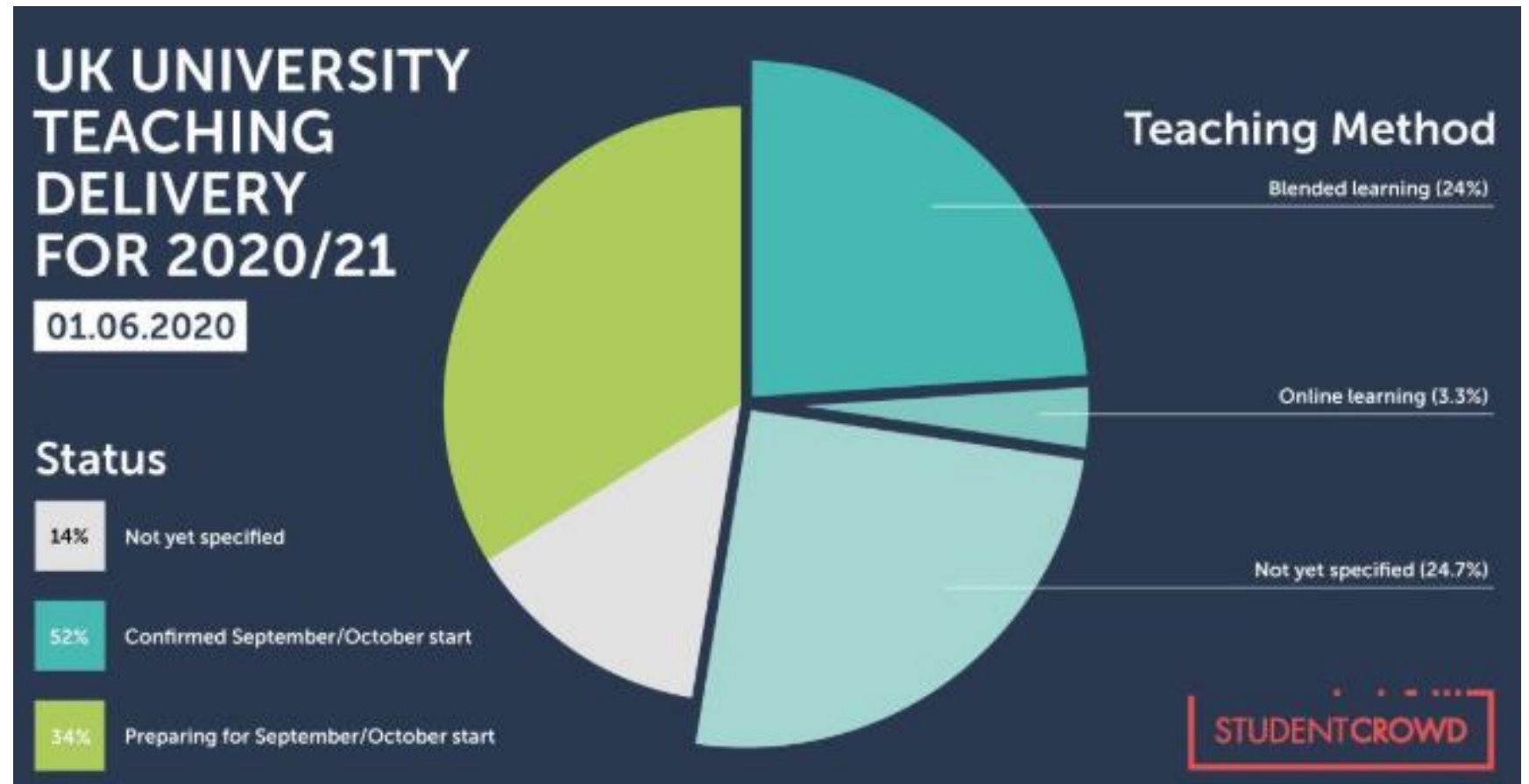


The trend for deferrals is not as alarming as the sentiment may suggest

So far this cycle  
12,660 choices have  
been deferred through  
UCAS – this compares  
to 13,020 last year

There is actually a small amount of evidence that among UK 18 applicants there is a greater tendency to **un-defer** this cycle - 4,590 choices have been un-deferred so far this cycle compared to 3,580 last cycle

Only 52% of universities have confirmed their intentions for teaching this year





**An applicants' view**

June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

**The options being  
considered - and  
when they are  
likely to make  
those choices**



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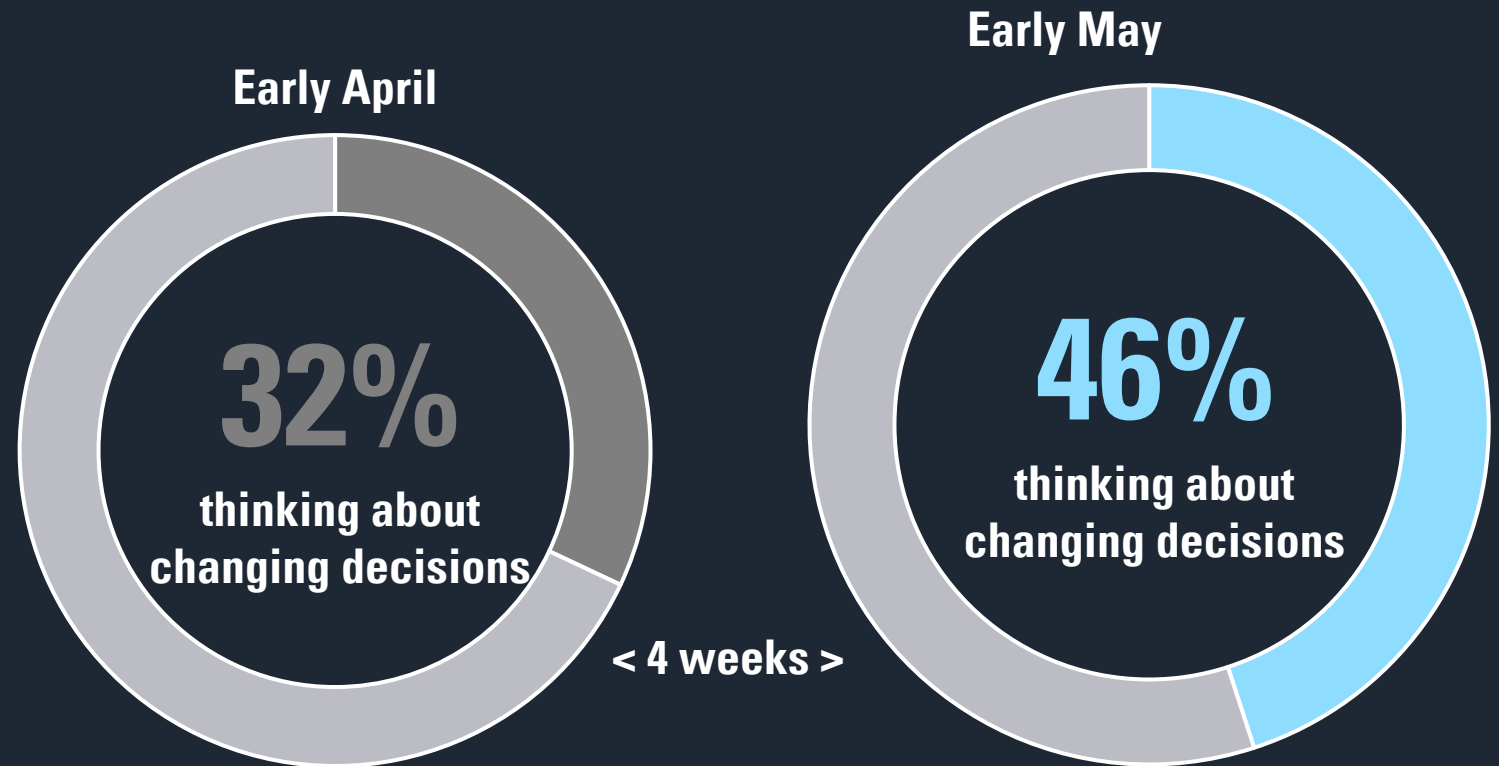
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# Nearly half of applicants are considering changing their university choices



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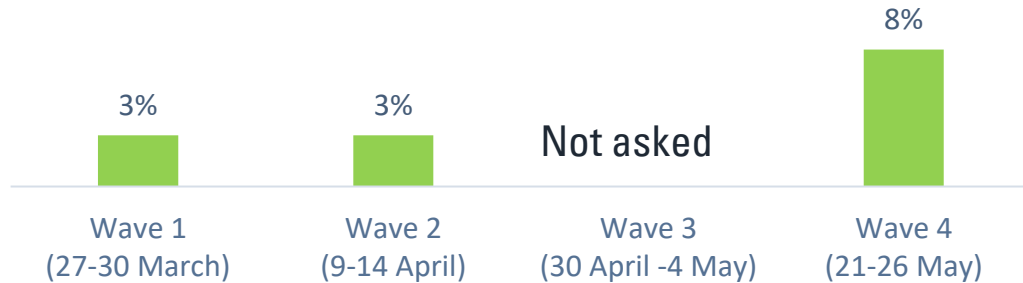
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Q3. Since the start of lockdown, are you thinking about changing any of your decisions about university?  
Base: All respondents (Wave 2 - 519), (Wave 3 - 522)

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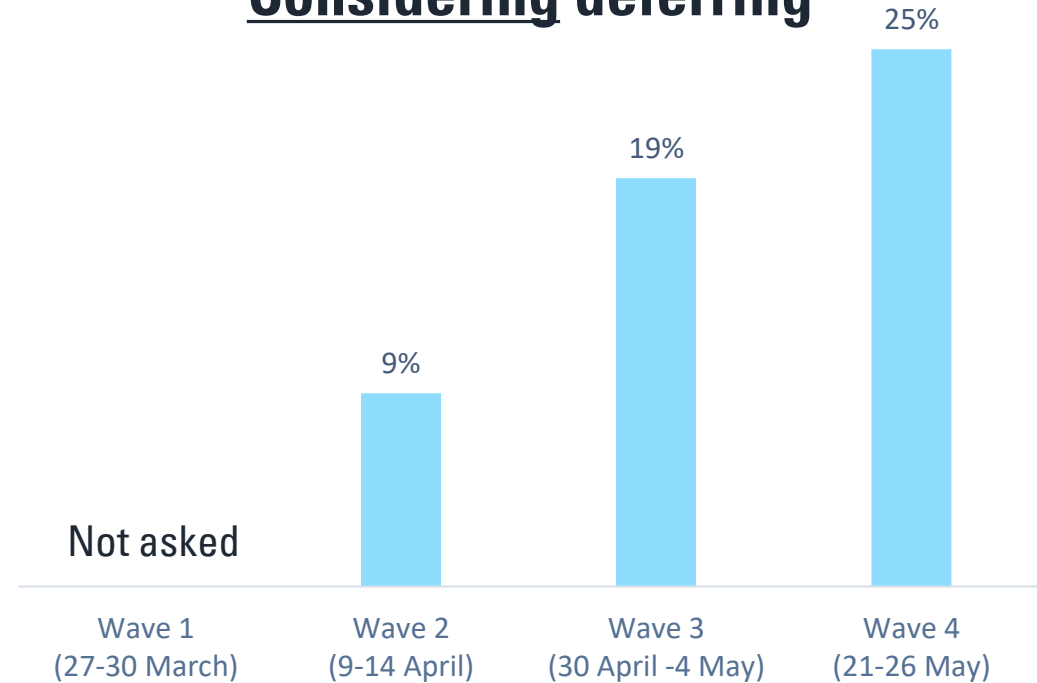
# Keeping track on deferral sentiment

## Decided to defer



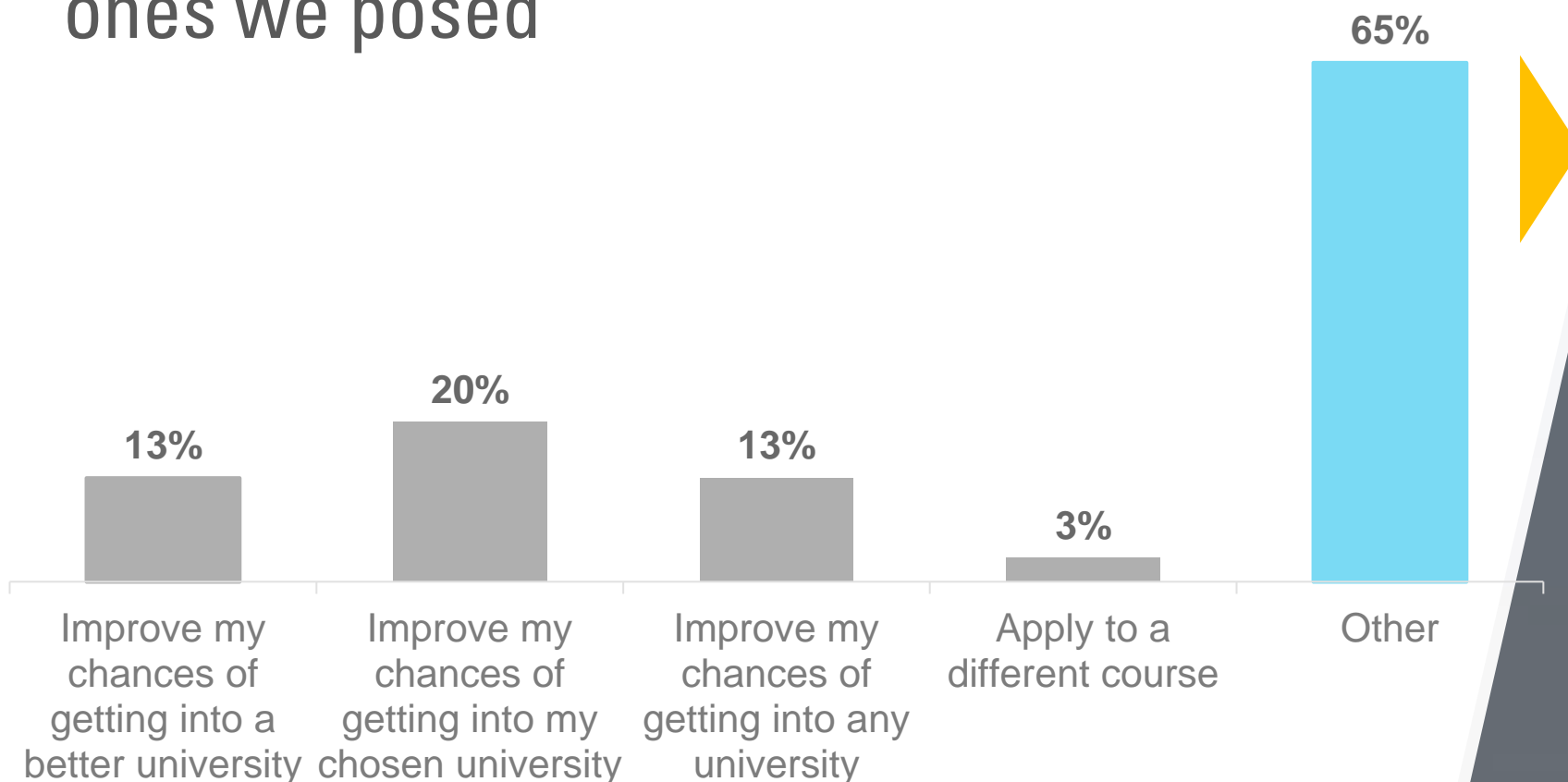
In the last week/since the start of lockdown, have you changed any of your decisions about university?  
Base: All respondents c.500 per wave

## Considering deferring



Since the start of lockdown, are you thinking about changing any of your decisions about university?  
Base: All respondents c.500 per wave

However, applicants considering deferral, are doing so for different reasons than the ones we posed



26% said they wanted a **true university experience**

38% said they did **NOT** want to be **taught online**

Q5.1. You mentioned you're thinking about deferring a year and applying to university in 2021. Please tell us what you are hoping to achieve by doing this.

Base: All thinking of deferring (131)



*"I've applied to a **practical course** so an **online course** wouldn't be very **good**"* Female applicant

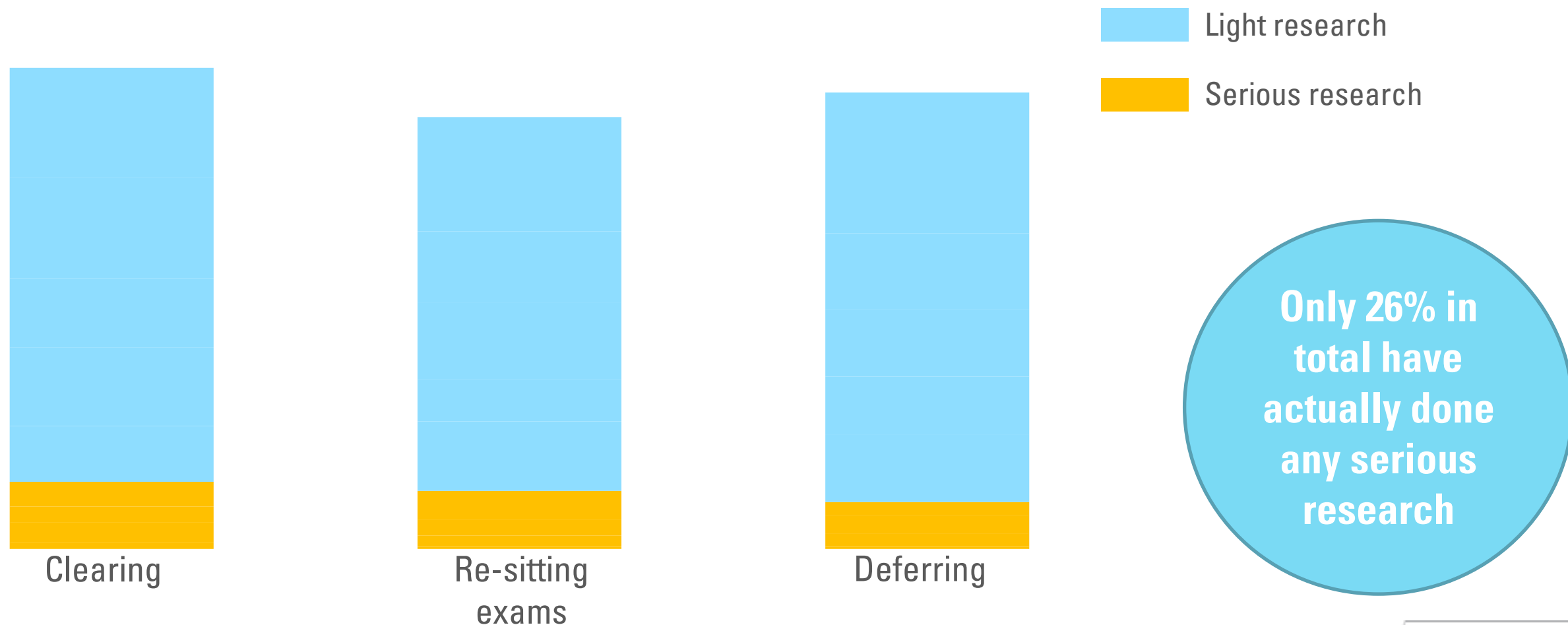
*"If Coronavirus means the lockdown will **prevent the social side** of university, I will go next year instead. I want to **experience the whole university life**"* Male applicant

*"[I want to] be able to apply when the situation is mostly back to normal, meaning **face-to-face teaching**, rather than primarily online based"* Male applicant

*"**Better quality teaching** and able to take part in **normal social activities**"* Female applicant



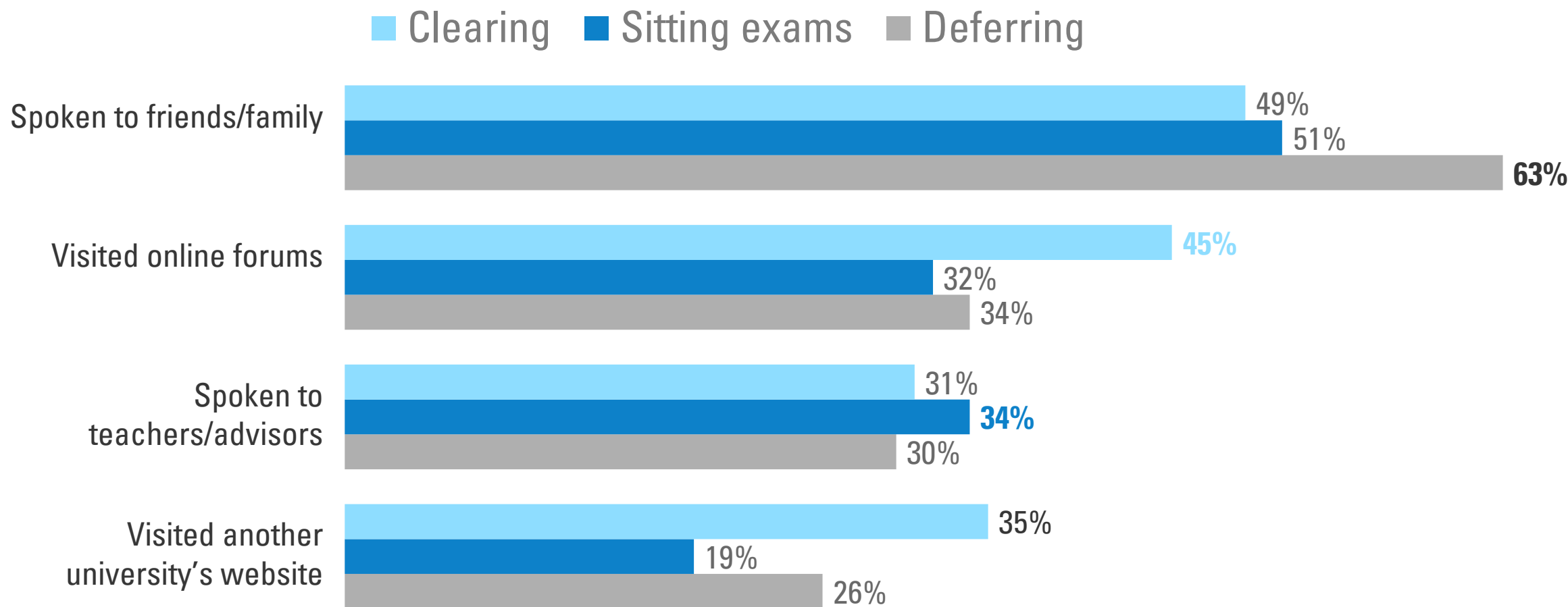
# Applicants are doing a range of research, some more serious than others



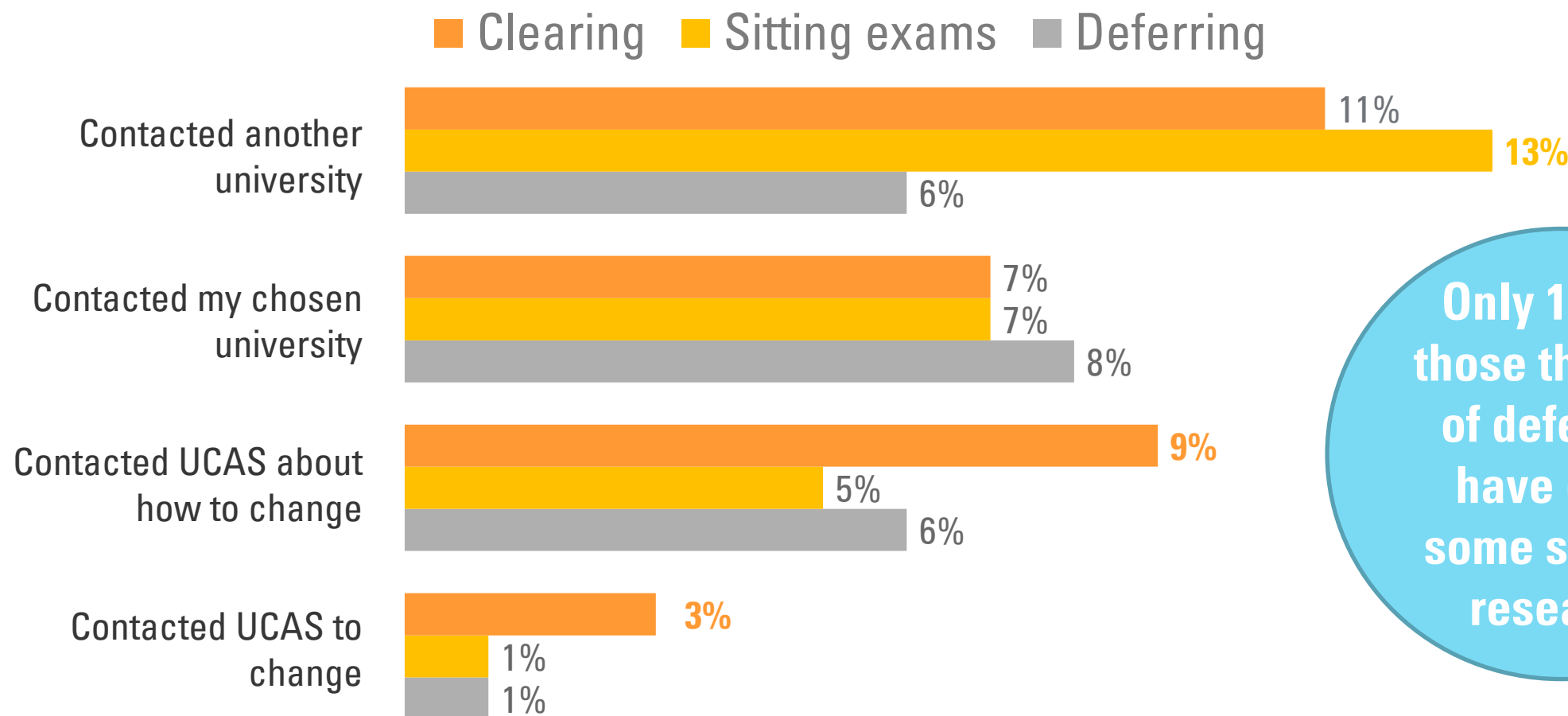
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# Light research typically involves speaking to others



# More serious research involves contacting universities or UCAS

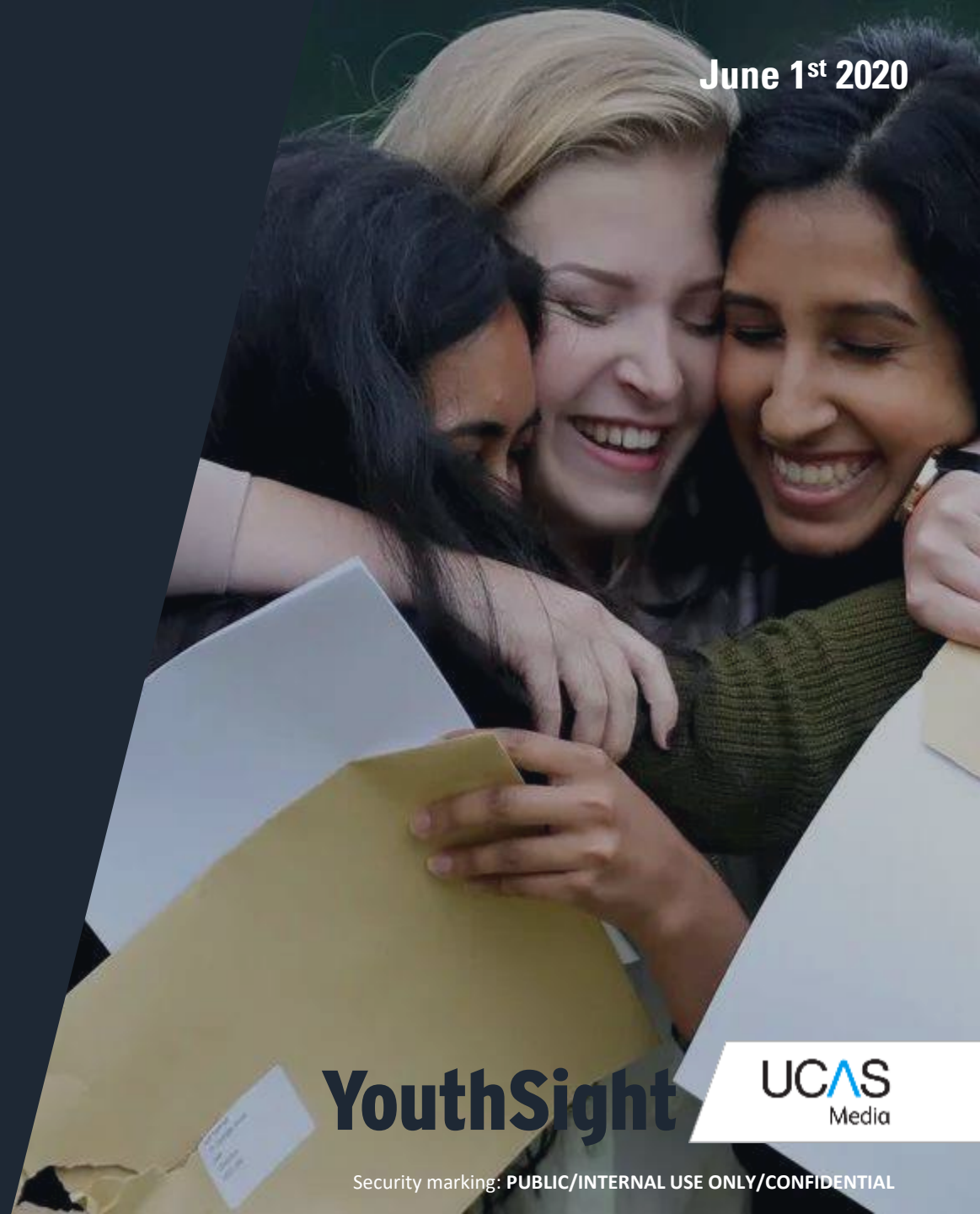


Only 16% of those thinking of deferring have done some serious research

June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

# 57%

are waiting for **Results Day**  
before changing any of  
their university decisions



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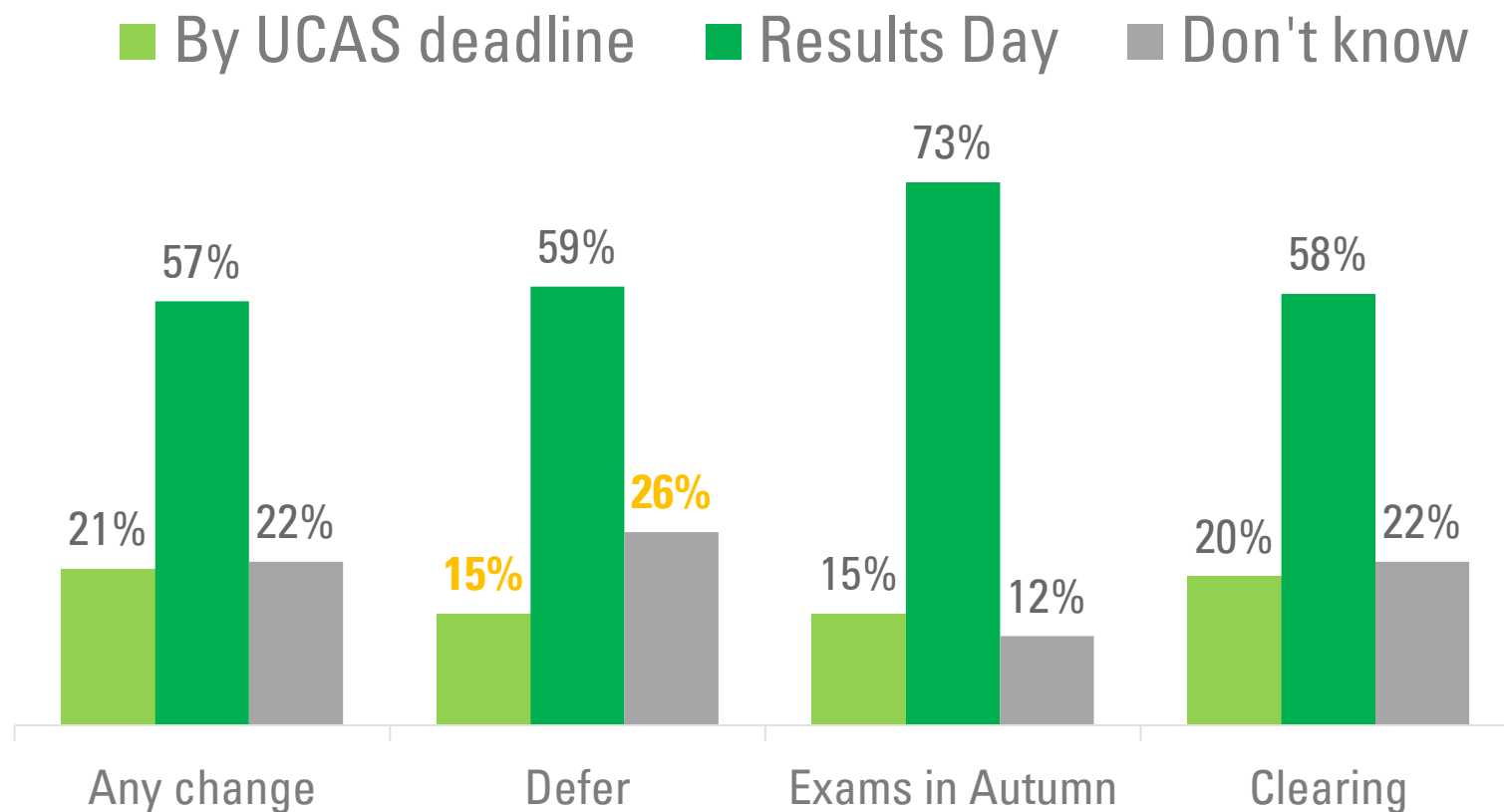
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Q7. How serious, if at all, are you about changing your university decision(s) at this ?  
Base: All thinking of changing decision (234) June 1st 2020

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# The majority of decisions will be made on Results Day



**A quarter** of those who are considering **deferral** are **unsure** when they will make this decision

**An applicant's view**

**June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020**

**How busy will  
Clearing and  
self-release be  
this year?**

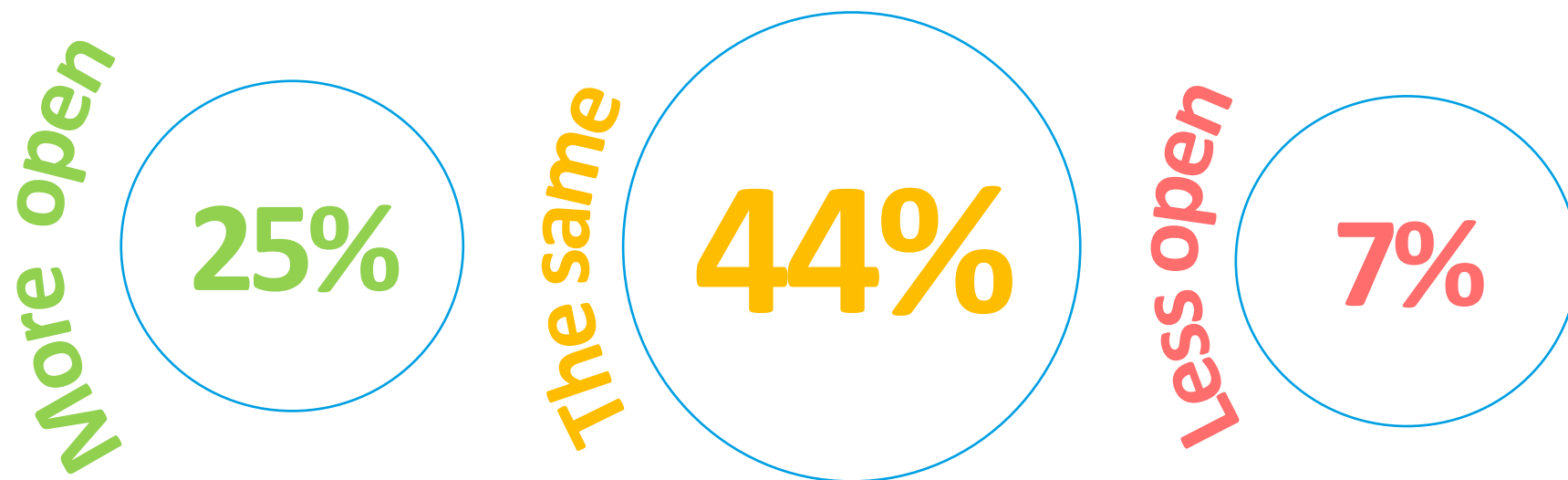


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# A quarter are more open to Clearing compared to before Coronavirus



**Those more open to Clearing:**

**BAME**

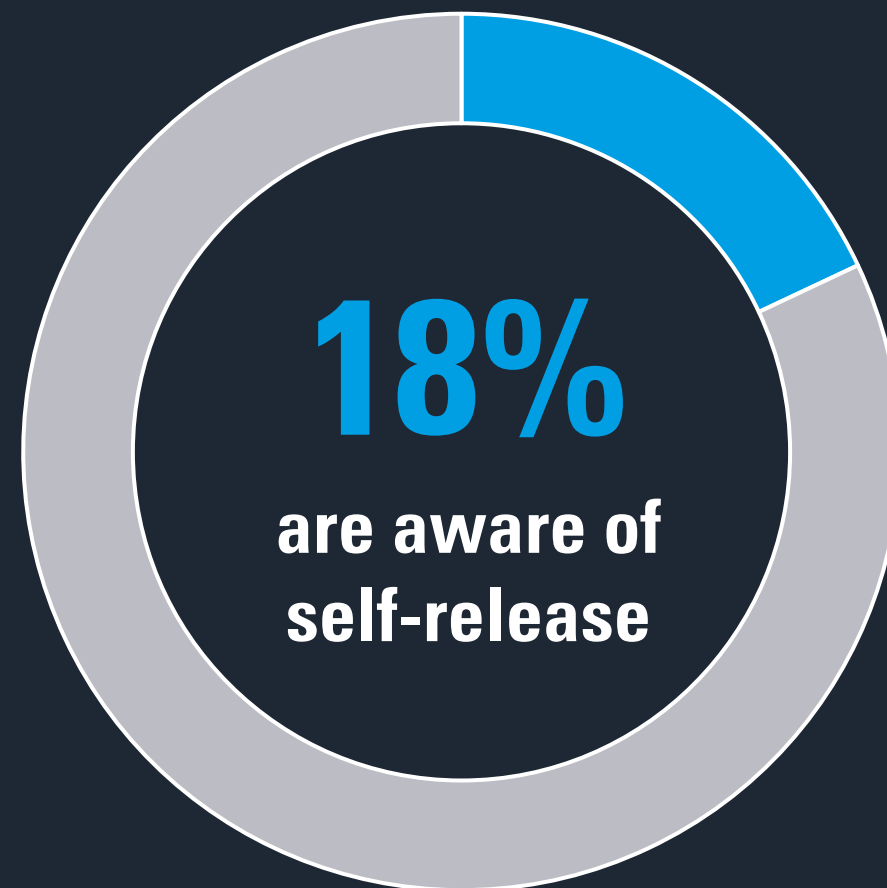
**Haven't made choices yet**

**Have already changed/  
considering changing  
decisions**

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Q9. As part of the university application process, you can self-release. Are you aware of what this is?

Base: All respondents (509) June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

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Once hearing about what self-release is, around half of applicants are somewhat open to it



**An applicant's view**

## **The 5 key takeouts from the research**

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56% of applicants are concerned with missing a real University experience and it is the most popular number 1 choice

8% have already decided to defer the year; though this isn't yet reflected in the data where un-deferring is a trend

46% are now considering changing their choices; a theme that is stable over time; 25% are now considering deferring

Only 26% have actually done any concrete research

57% are waiting till A level results day, when circumstances are likely to be very different

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# Got comments or questions, then get in touch

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<https://www.ucasmedia.com/content/were-here-support-you>

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# Support for providers over the 2020 cycle

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# The key ways we're helping the sector this cycle



Proving access to use UniBuddy



Promoting your virtual events



Our research with YouthSight



The Sentiment Tracking Report



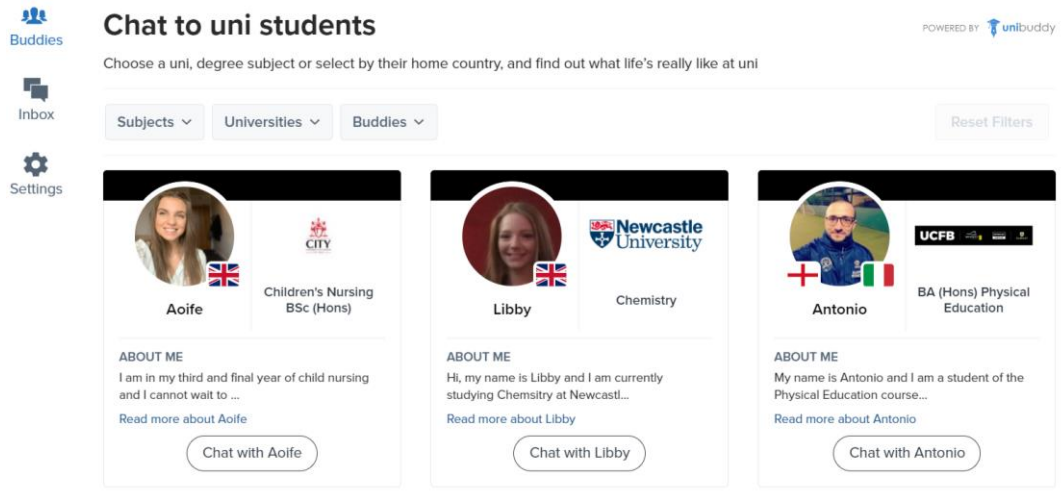
The Recruitment Variance Planner

# Unibuddy and UCAS Partnership

We know how important peer-to-peer engagement is, and this network facilitates your existing students to engage meaningfully, in a safe way, with enquiring prospective students.

We have therefore enabled Unibuddy to be free on [ucas.com](https://ucas.com) for providers until 20<sup>th</sup> September, bar a small set-up fee. Unibuddy will support your onboarding and launch – so within days you'll be up and running. So far over 70 providers have benefited from this offer.

This provides yet another way to keep connecting with potential applicants, both for this cycle and beyond.



# Highlighting your online and virtual events

Navigating the number of online and virtual events for an applicant can be difficult, so UCAS are collating and promoting these on behalf of providers, free of charge.

Simply update your event information and UCAS will promote them across a range of UCAS networks.

**SAE Creative Media Virtual Undergraduate Advice Event**  
9 May 2020  
Online • Open day • Virtual and digital • Undergraduate • 16-18 Choices

**Manchester Metropolitan University - Postgraduate Online Open Week**  
11 May 2020 to 15 May 2020  
Manchester • Open day • Virtual and digital • Postgraduate

**The University of Law - Virtual Twilight Lecture Law and Criminology**  
12 May 2020  
Online • Open day • Virtual and digital • Undergraduate

**Online event: Accommodation**  
13 May 2020  
Brighton • Open day • Virtual and digital • Undergraduate • Postgraduate

**University of Sunderland - Online Open Day**  
13 May 2020  
Sunderland • Open day • Virtual and digital • Undergraduate • Teacher Training • 16-18 Choices



**YouthSight**

# Tracking applicant sentiment

UCAS have partnered with leading youth research company YouthSight to track current applicant sentiment.

The possible impact of Covid-19 on 2020 entry students is exceptionally fluid, and this longitudinal study offers valuable insight into what students are thinking and feeling right now; from deferring to their thoughts on the new grading system.

The findings of this work are available to all, and are presented in webinars roughly every fortnight.

<https://www.ucasmedia.com/content/were-here-support-you>

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# The 2020 Sentiment Tracking report

NEW

Building on the great series of webinars we have hosted with YouthSight we wanted to explore how the sentiments we've been exploring are shared amongst a wider base of applicants (we asked nearly 4,500) enabling the understanding of how your applicants are feeling, right now, and how this may differ from the rest of the UK.

Various reports are available – from a sector-wide overview of the whole UK to reports covering the four devolved nations along with those from applicants who wish to study STEM subjects, Nursing and Lab/facilities-based courses. Prices start, for providers, at £500.

Reports available soon

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# The Recruitment Variance Planner

## NEW

Understanding what applicants are feeling and thinking at the moment is incredibly useful, but we wanted to go a step closer by helping Universities understand what impact change could have on their recruitment for this cycle.

This data product applies a range of data-driven extrapolations of sentiment and empirical data and applies them to the recruitment for this cycle.

Highlights will be shared with the sector and then providers have the opportunity to know what this is likely to mean for them.

Prices start at £1000.

Reports available soon

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# UCAS Media & Civitas Learning

Supporting student  
retention

# The power of our partnership

**Civitas Learning:** experience of working with 375 US universities and colleges supporting 8 million students with their fully operationalised service, which combines behavioural data from students, with outcome and 'persistence' rate data



**UCAS:** delivering market leading data science, modelling and analysis services to the HE sector for over 40 years (include something about strength of consultancy offering for strategic leadership)



**Millions** of data points transformed into predictive data to pinpoint where student experience and student success can be improved in the covid era



## Pre-Covid issues in HE

Student experience and retention metrics:

- Key success metric
- Show progress in widening access and participation
- Underpin financial performance, sustainability and reputation

## New Covid concerns

The metrics and regulations for universities will not change, but the stresses that drive non-continuation will.

Re-prioritisation requires rigorous analysis to focus scarce resources to handle new challenges.

Enrolment – The students who enroll in 2020/2021 will be the least known cohort to enter institutions with:

- Atypical data
- Atypical routes into the institution
- Complex and challenging journey

**The most at-risk students are all more likely to have additional obstacles.**







## What data questions should you be asking about your 2020 cohort?

Complex characteristics will be at play beyond the traditional metrics.

How can we understand what drives student non-continuation and identify those at greatest risk?

We focus on intersectionalities:

- Why do students leave their courses and the institution?
- What causes this change; what do we need to know?
- How can we identify when this might be happening and what can we do to support the student to prevent it?
- Attainment gaps

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# Partnership strengths

## UCAS Media

- Admissions data at granular level
- Ability to access other UCAS data and insight, including surveys
- Consultants who understand admissions data and target market of institutions in the UK
- Existing brand awareness and reputation for understanding data

## Civitas Learning

- Modelling capabilities
- Software and non-operationalised institution-specific data
- Functional and technical expertise in tech implementation
- Proven and tested delivery model



# Explore truly predictive power with a fully managed solution

**Insight and actions** to enhance the student experience and prevent student non-continuation

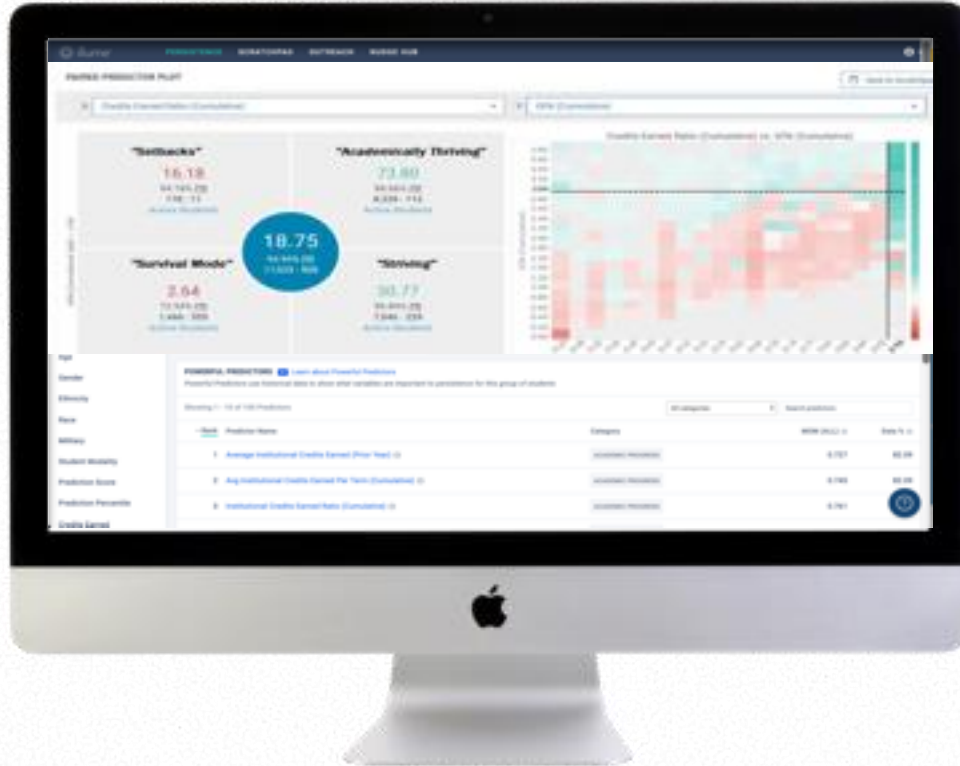
Identify and combine **relevant** applications and **contextual data**



Use the insight to design an outreach strategy to **recognise, monitor and support** appropriate interventions for those students at risk

Make the resulting insight available **easily and simply** for decision making

# Student segment level analysis to understand what matters most



## INSIGHT:

Utilising predictive data from two variables which influence continuation, “Credits Earned Ratio” to better understand how many credits a student is earning versus failing and “GPA” to understand overall academic achievement can help us better understand students who are:

- Academically Thriving (High GPA, No Failed Marks)
- Striving (High GPA, Some Failed Marks)
- Students who have experienced Setbacks (Lower GPA, No Failed Marks)
- Students in Survival Mode (Low GPA, Failed Marks).

Better understanding these dynamics and the impact on the persistence rates (Ranging from 98% to 72%) to better serve students and understand their academic needs.



# Benefits

Understand characteristics which may make student cohorts less likely to persist, allowing future interventions to be targeted towards specific groups of applicants

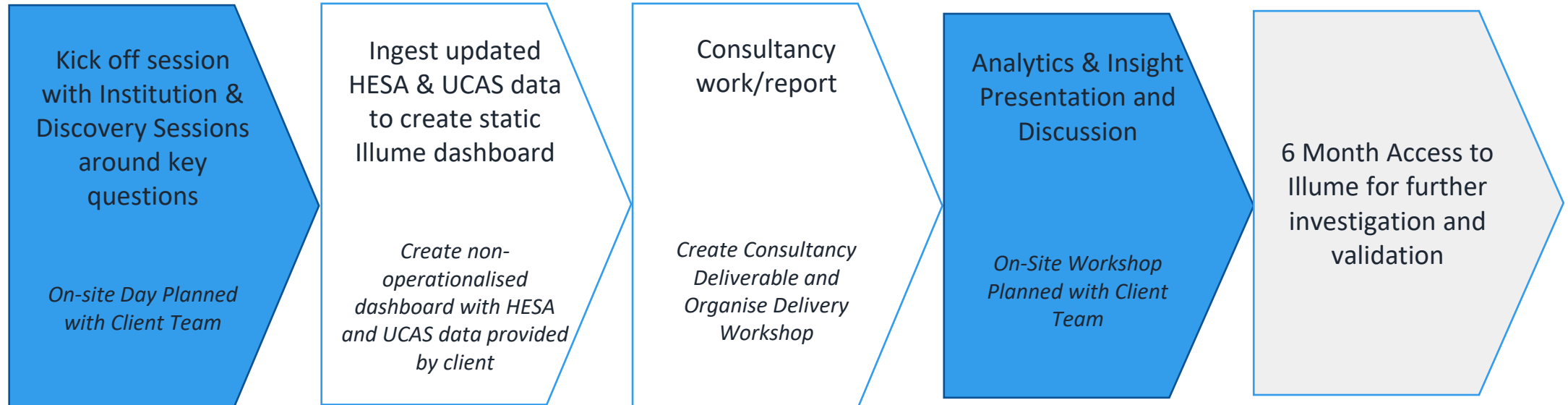
Understanding attainment gaps that may exist, or other factors that might be affecting outcomes enabling development of targeted support

Understand how attainment links to outcomes by applicant characteristics, helping to understand applicant potential, supporting and informing contextual offer making

Giving visibility to subject areas of strength allowing identification of best practice

Using insights in conjunction with additional UCAS data to drive targeted marketing strategies

# Top level engagement delivery process



# Delivery/Data Protection

