

# Pre-applicants: Planning for 2022

July 2021



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# Partnering to bring value to the sector

**Courteney Sheppard**



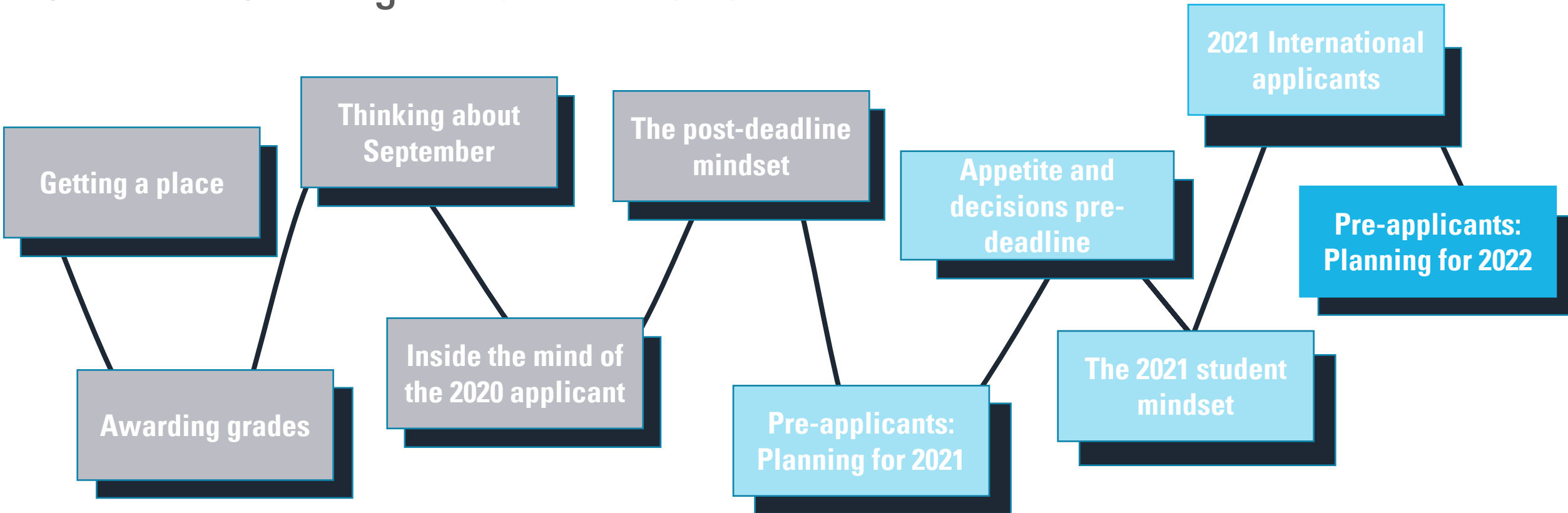
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Manager  
UCAS Media**

**Josephine Hansom**



**Managing Director  
YouthSight Research**

# UCAS x YouthSight webinar series



# We explored...



The state of play for  
pre-applicants



Information needs and  
sources used



How to impact  
decision-making



# A reminder of our methodology

**Online survey**

**577**

Year 12 university  
pre-applicants  
planning to go to  
university in 2022

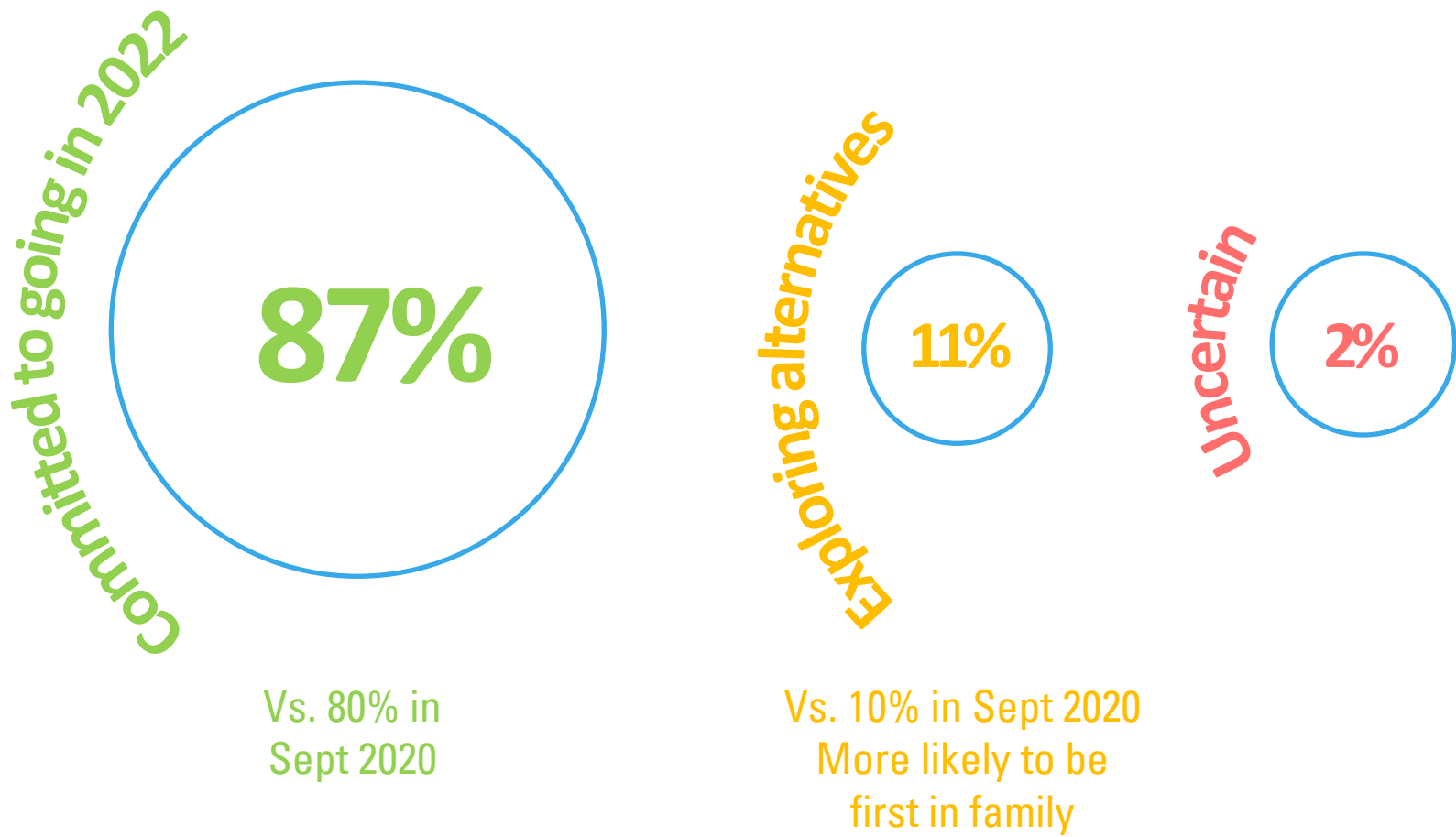
All sample from **UCAS's pre-applicant database**, from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Fieldwork **14th June – 21st June 2021.**

**Data comparisons** to previous pre-applicant webinar (September 2020) made where possible.

The vast majority of pre-applicants are keen to go to university in 2022 and are gearing-up for a summer of decision-making

Almost 9 in 10 are committed to going to university in 2022, but 11% are still exploring their options



Q3. In light of the Coronavirus pandemic and its impact on education, how do you feel about your plans to go to university in 2022?  
Base: All respondents (577)

# More practical experiences are swaying those who are exploring alternatives

Exploring alternatives

11%

Alternative options:

## Apprenticeships

*Apprenticeships, as I feel that the coronavirus pandemic has put a stunt in my education – Female Pre-applicant*

## Degree apprenticeships

*They allow you to gain full on experience while studying and gaining a qualification. It is also a great head start into the work environment and you get to meet lots of people within the industry – Female Pre-applicant*

## Gap year

*A gap year, mainly so that I can gain experience and strengthen my application through work experience because there has not been many opportunities for that this year – Female Pre-Applicant*

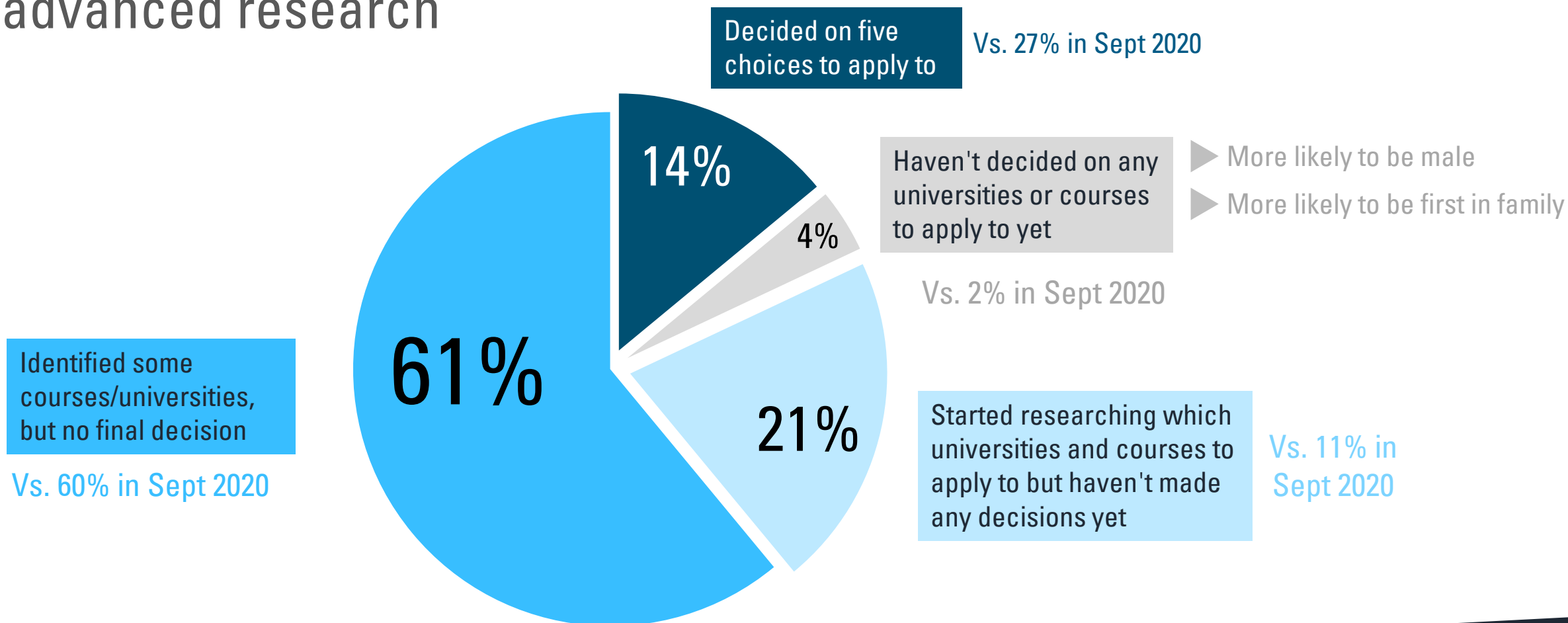
Those exploring alternative options last year were mainly considering deferring study as a result of the pandemic

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# 96% of pre-applicants have already done some advanced research



# 73%

Have already chosen  
their subject...



...But most are yet to  
choose their university

# 74%



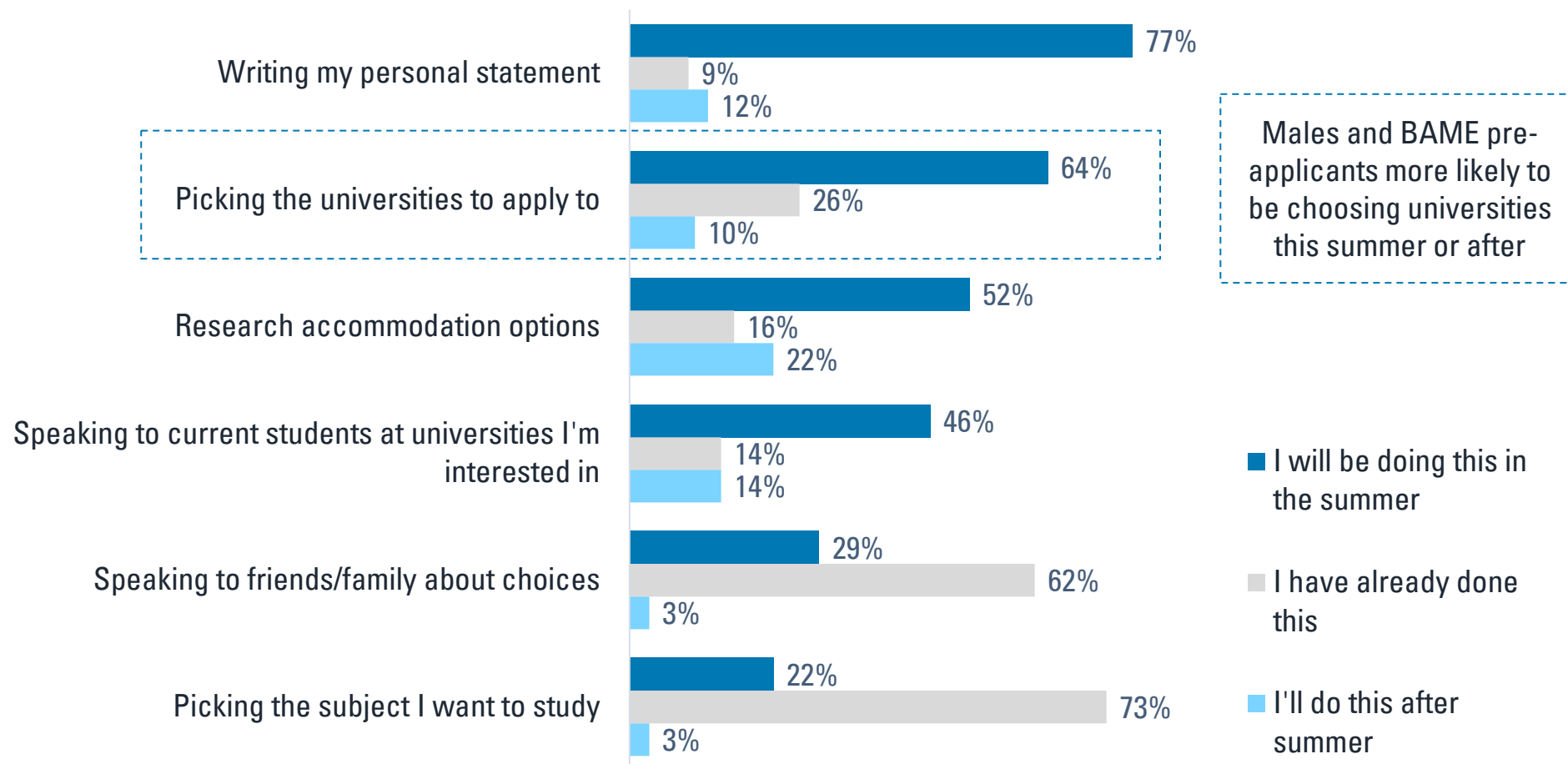
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# The months ahead are a critical juncture in decision-making

## Planning for university - % selecting each option



With daunting decisions ahead, pre-applicants  
are worried about applying to, and attending,  
university



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# Only 4%

of pre-applicants don't have any worries about **applying to university**

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Q12. Young people like yourself may have some worries about applying to university in 2022, given your time out of school.

What worries do you have, if any, about applying to university?

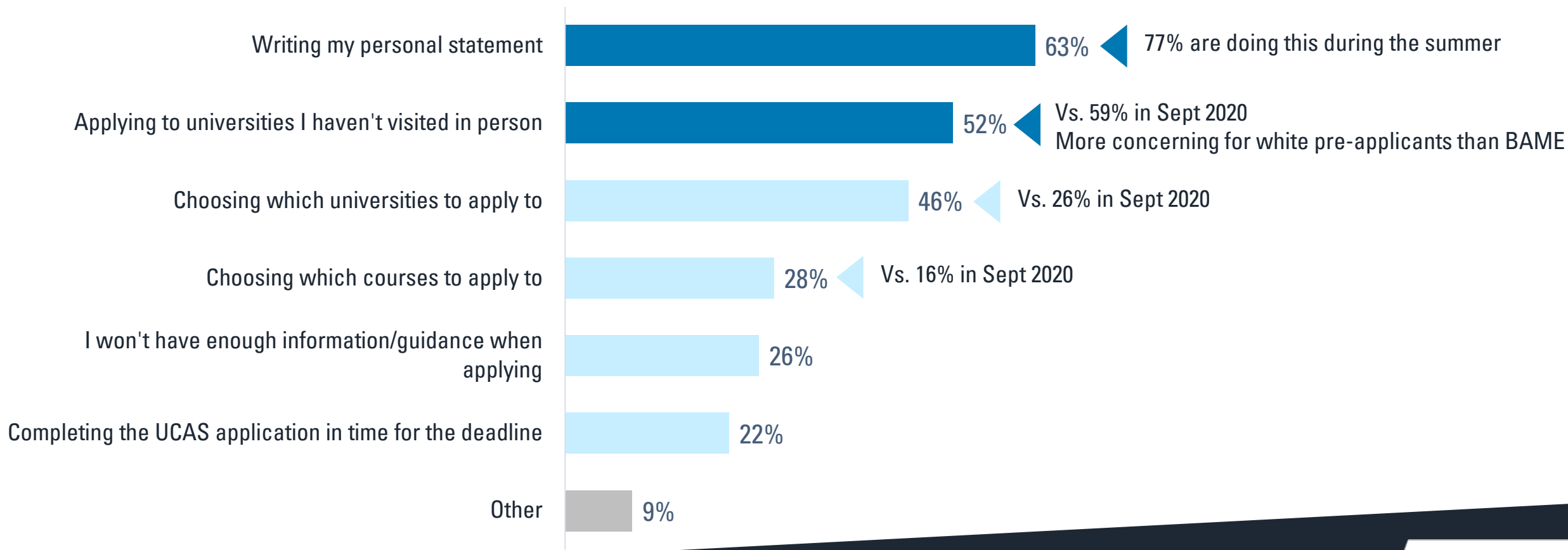
Base: All respondents (577)



# The pandemic continues to have an impact – not visiting the universities before applying is a continued concern

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% worried about these when applying to university



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Q4a. Young people like yourself may have some worries about applying to university in 2022, given your time out of school. What worries do you have, if any, about applying to university? Base: All respondents (577)

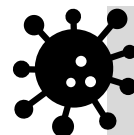


# Around 1 in 10 have other concerns...

Alternative concerns:



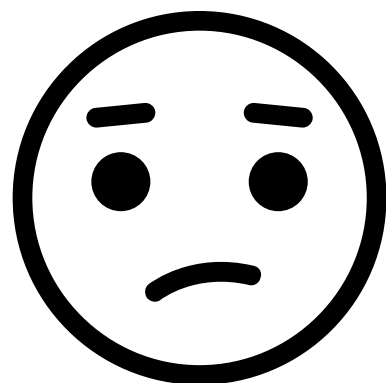
**Knowledge gaps**



**Impact of COVID-19 on university experience**



**Support available**



*Lack of experience and also the gap in my learning due to online school, this may affect my grades – Female Pre-applicant*

*Whether or not covid will still impact me during my time in university and whether or not to wait a year for things to settle down – Female Pre-applicant*

*It just feels all so straightforward but when my sister went through it, it seemed a lot more stressful so I think just making sure that I'm doing the right things – Female Pre-applicant*

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# Only 5%

Of pre-applicants don't have any worries about attending university

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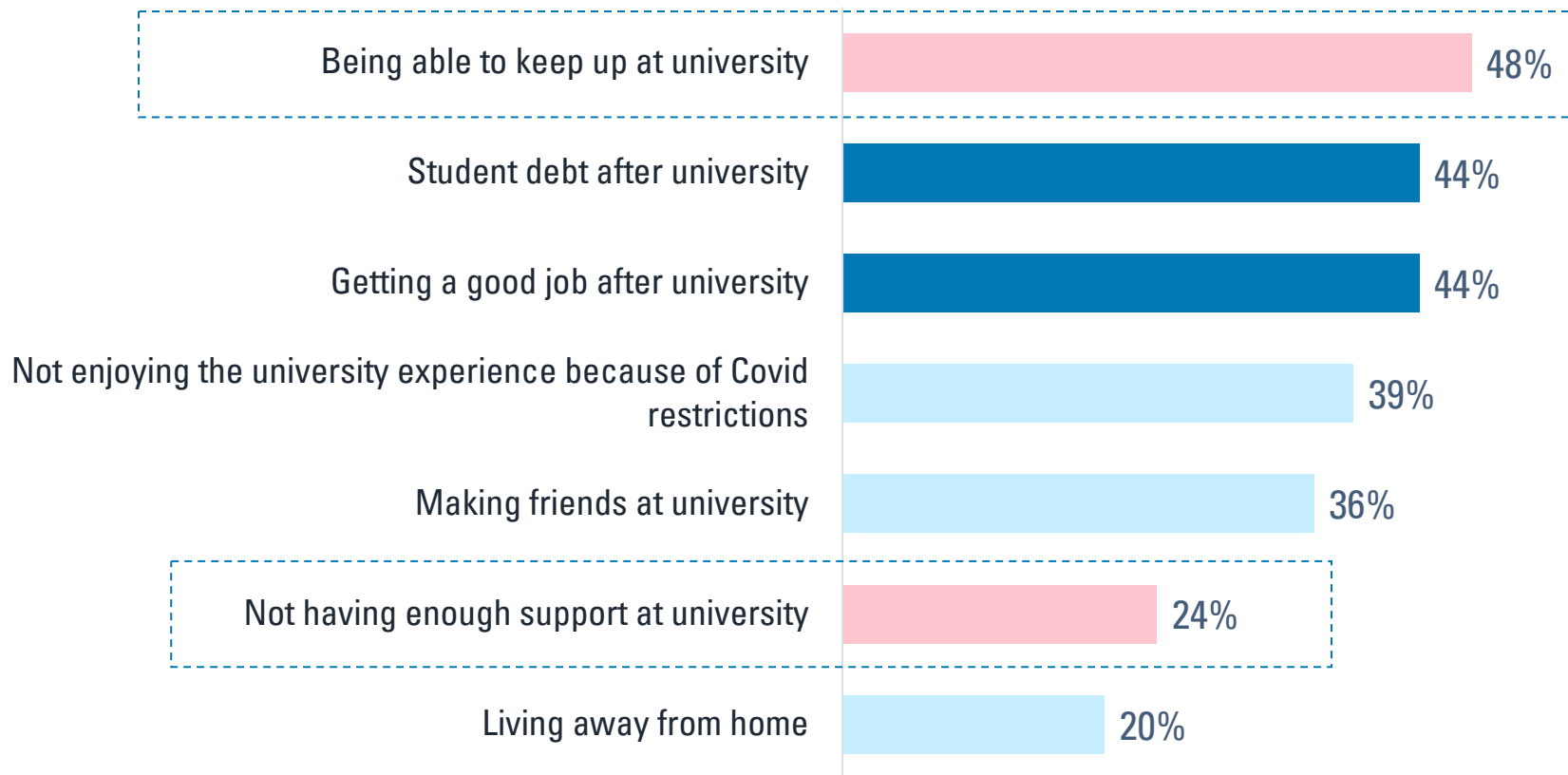
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Q4b. Young people like yourself may have some worries about attending university in 2022, given your time out of school. What worries do you have, if any, about attending university??  
Base: All respondents (577)

# Pre-applicants are worried about issues *during* university, but also *beyond* university

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% worried about these when attending university



*I feel worried about getting the right grades to go into the university and the course I want to do because of missing a chunk of learning because of lockdown – Male Pre-applicant*

Those who have the right amount of information/guidance are significantly less likely to worry about being able to keep up and not having enough support

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# As the fallout from the pandemic continues, support is clearly high on the pre-applicant agenda

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## Concerns and worries...

Mental health support

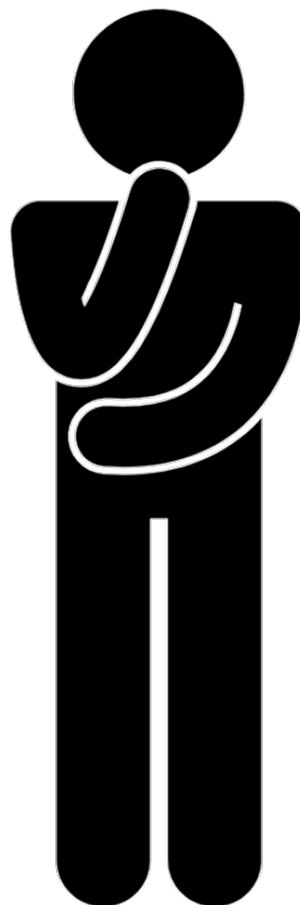
*Whether mental health support at university is sufficient... Female pre-applicant*

Return on investment

*Not being certain the course I'm taking is what I want to do, the stress of paying for a degree without knowing I want to pursue a career in that field... Male pre-applicant*

Accommodation

*Accommodation and finance... Female pre-applicant*



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Q4a. Young people like yourself may have some worries about applying to university in 2022, given your time out of school. What worries do you have, if any, about applying to university? Base: All respondents (15)

# What does this tell us about pre-applicants?



Many pre-applicants are committed to university, but some are exploring alternative options

Pre-applicants have had a tough time: the vast majority are worried about both applying for and attending university

Pre-applicants need support and reassurance across a range of aspects to reinforce their confidence

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

The pandemic continues to impact decision-making – institutions should acknowledge this openly when communicating with pre-applicants

Institution support provisions must be communicated early, clearly, and authentically to maximise impact

The next few months are a critical juncture in decision-making and a key time to make a positive impression on those considering alternative options



**A pre-applicant's view**

**July 29<sup>th</sup> 2021**

# **Information sources**



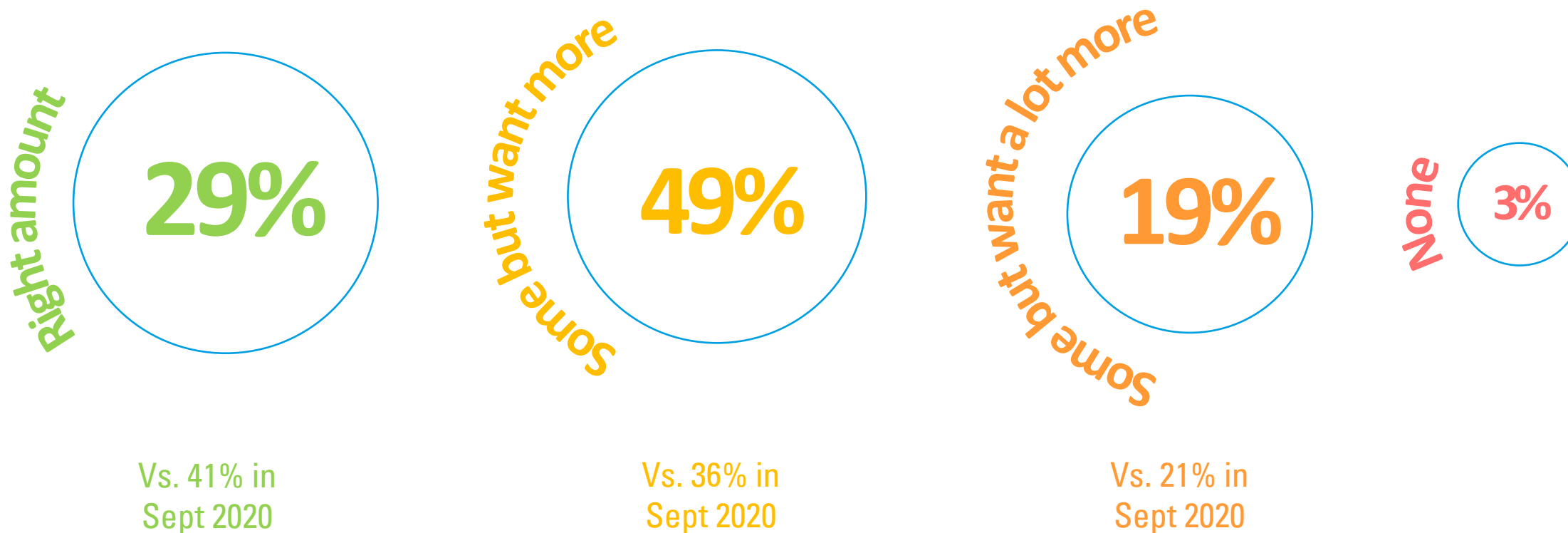
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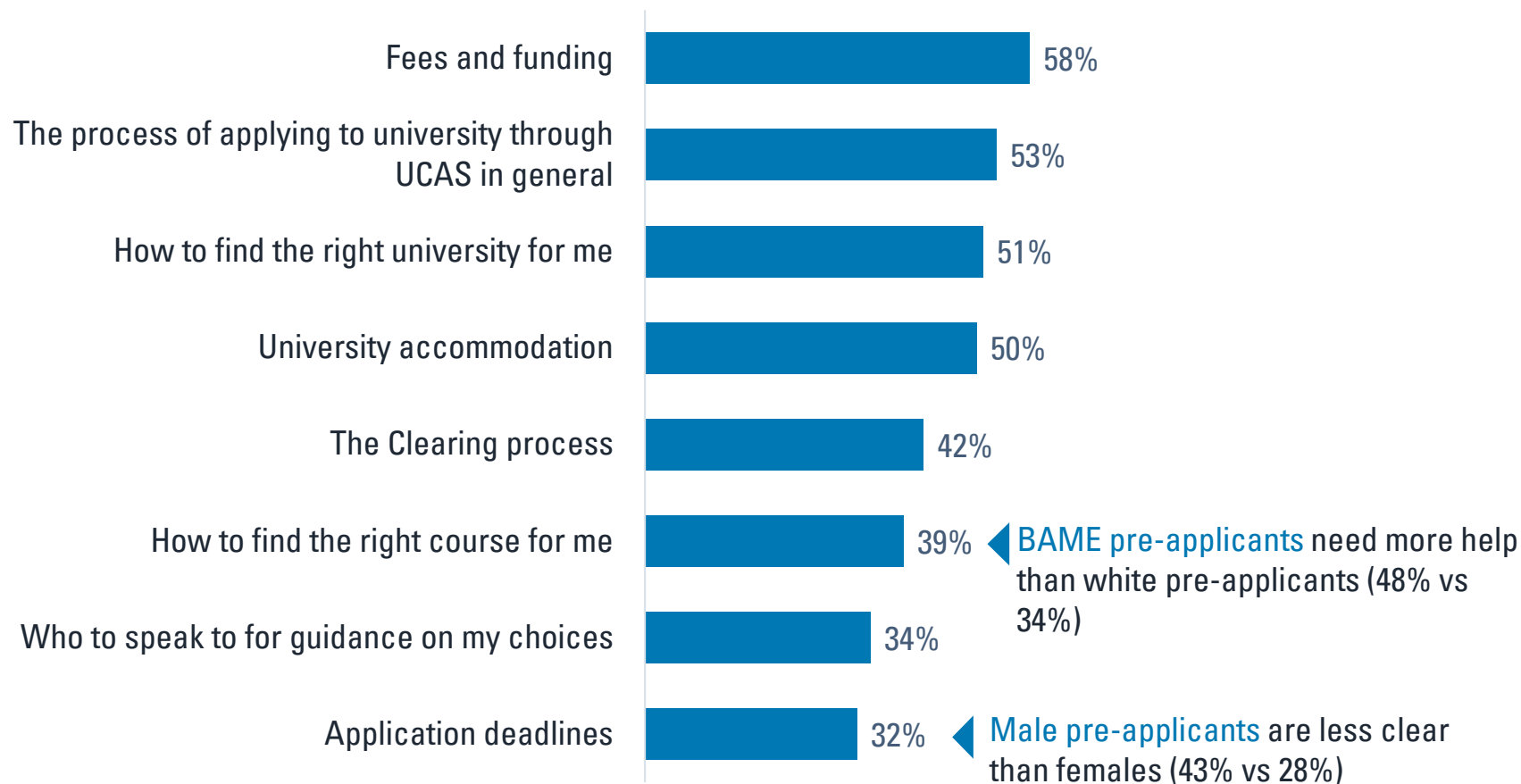
Pre-applicants are doing their research, but 71%  
need more information and guidance

# Half need some more information, while 1 in 5 want a lot more



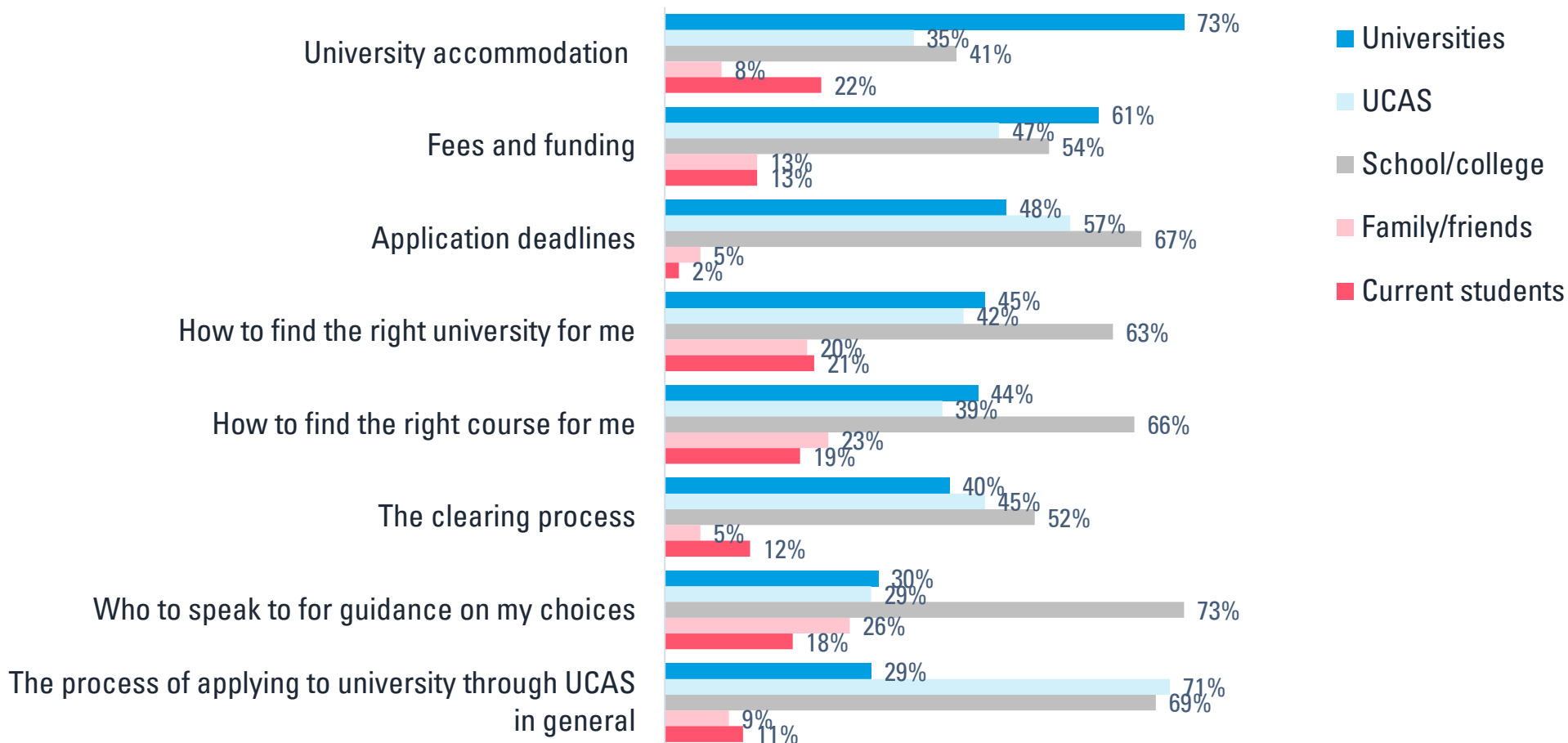
# Most pre-applicants want more information about fees, the application process, and choosing universities

Where pre-applicants need more information - % selecting each option



# Pre-applicants are turning to universities for crucial information about accommodation and fees/funding

## Expected source of information per need - % selecting each option



### Looking to universities for:

- Accommodation
- Fees and funding

### Looking to UCAS for:

- Application process
- Application deadlines

### Looking to school/college for:

- Guidance on choices
- Application process
- Application deadlines

With the fallout of the pandemic continuing,  
pre-applicants remain heavily reliant on virtual  
sources



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**98%** used a **university website**

**95%** used the **UCAS website**

**90%** used a **virtual open day**

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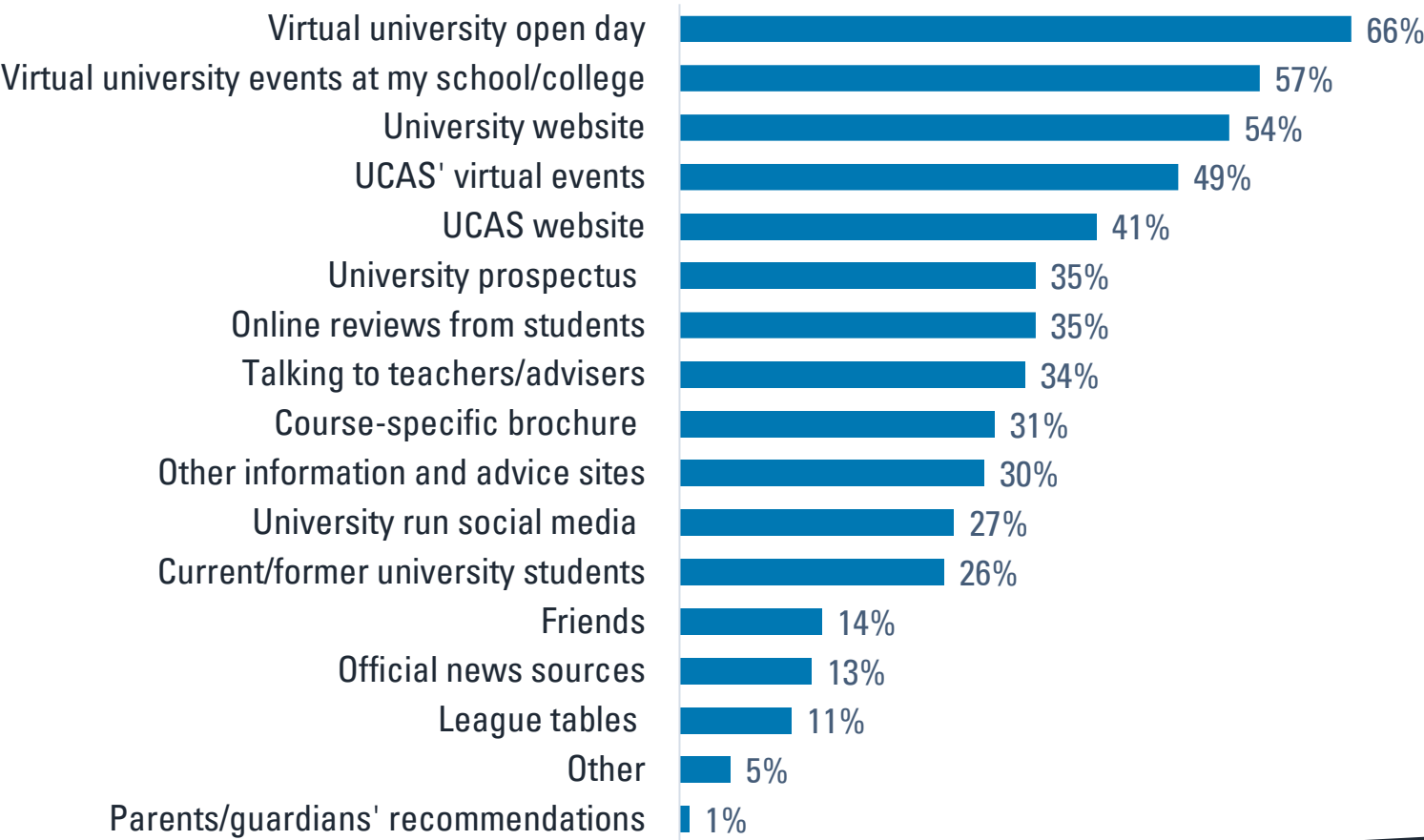
Q7. Thinking about the information sources you've been using to help decide which universities to apply to, have any become more or less important to you since the start of the pandemic?

Base: All respondents (577)

# As with the previous cohort, all sources of information have increased in importance compared to pre-pandemic

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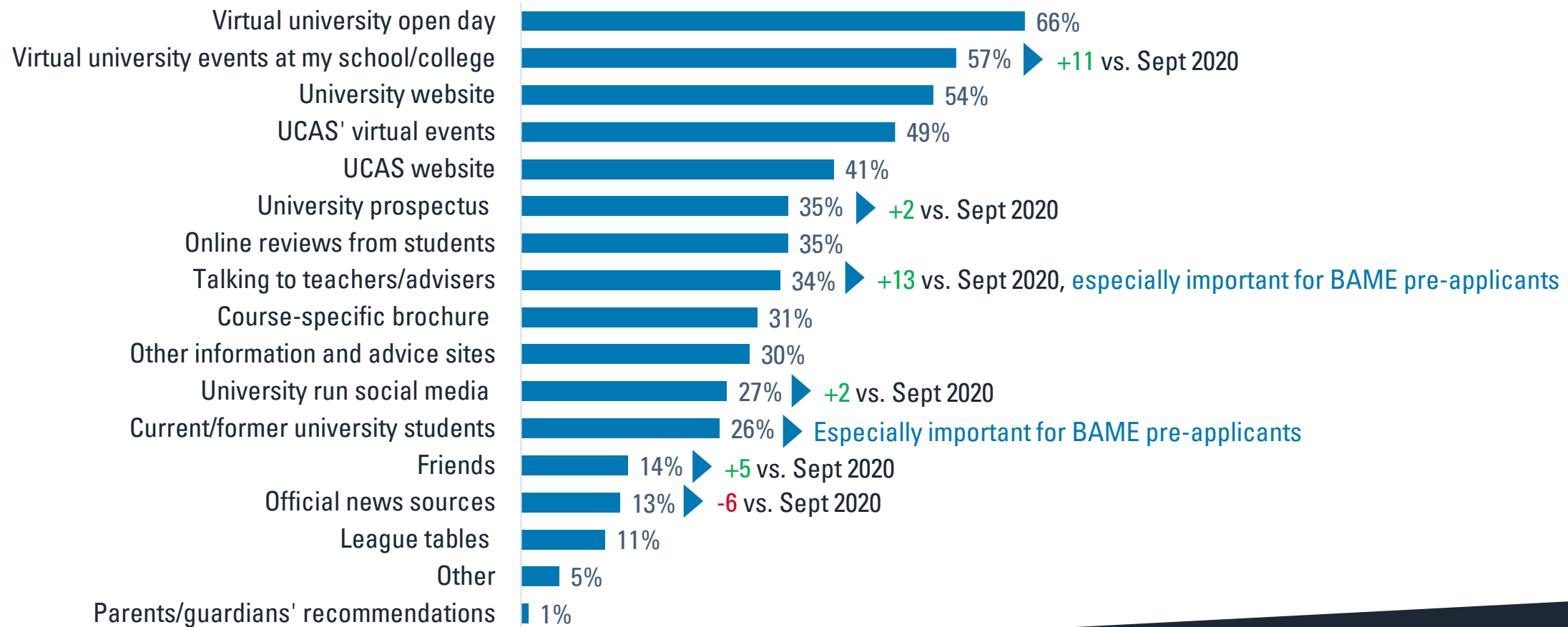
% NET increase in importance (taking 'less' important away from 'more' important)



# Information sources compared year-on-year

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% NET increase in importance (taking 'less' important away from 'more' important)



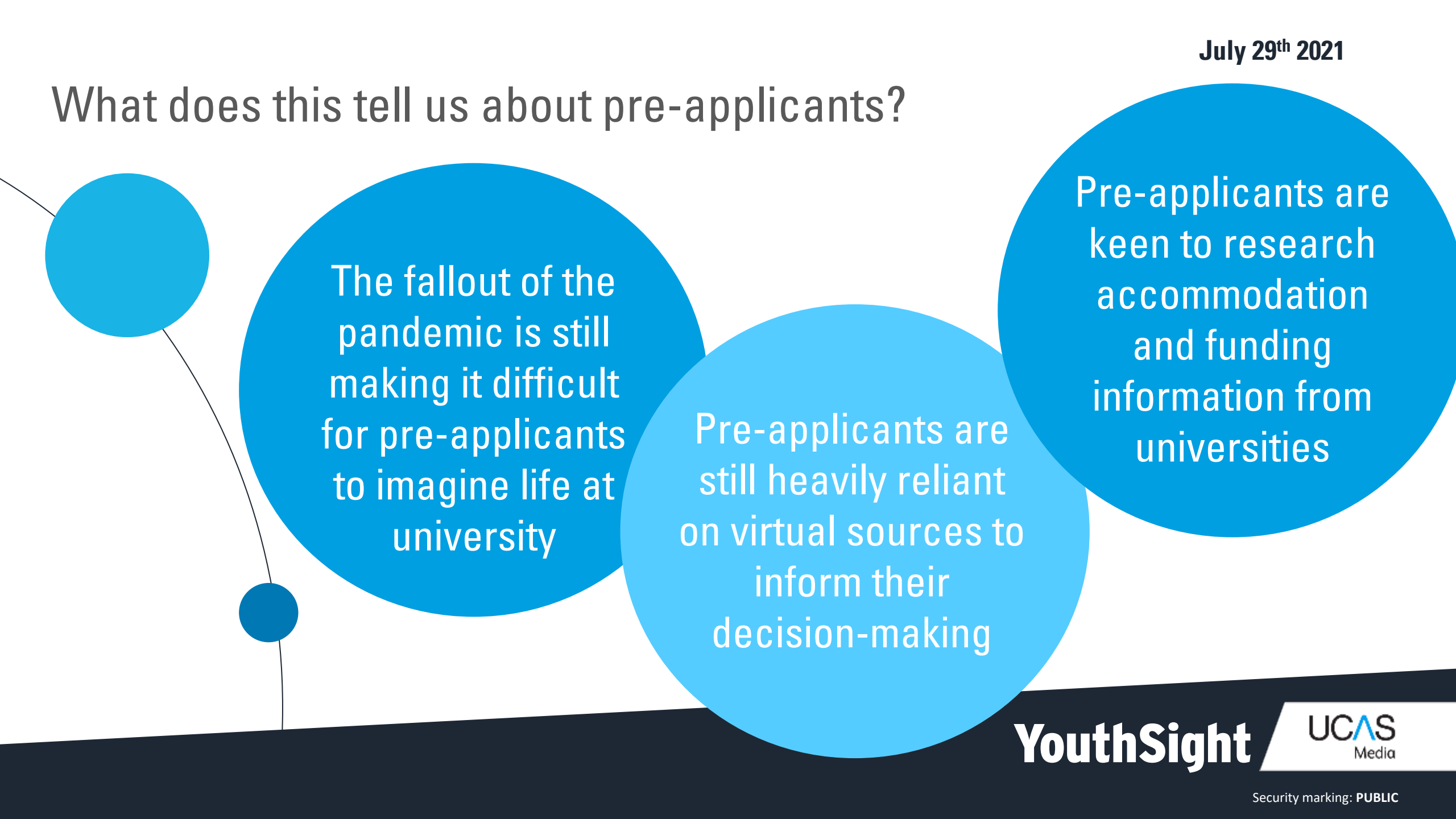
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Q7. Thinking about the information sources you've been using to help decide which universities to apply to, have any become more or less important to you since the start of the pandemic?

Base: All respondents (577)

# What does this tell us about pre-applicants?



The fallout of the pandemic is still making it difficult for pre-applicants to imagine life at university

Pre-applicants are still heavily reliant on virtual sources to inform their decision-making

Pre-applicants are keen to research accommodation and funding information from universities

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

Fees and funding and accommodation are high on the agenda for many – ensure this information easily available to fulfil information needs

Virtual sources remain a vital means of communication – these need to provide an engaging, two-way communication experience to have the greatest impact

Provide additional, authentic reassurance for BAME pre-applicants who are seeking advice from other people



**A pre-applicant's view**

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# **Factors in decision-making**

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While the pandemic is making decision-making more difficult, pre-applicants are looking past it to weigh-up options



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# 73%

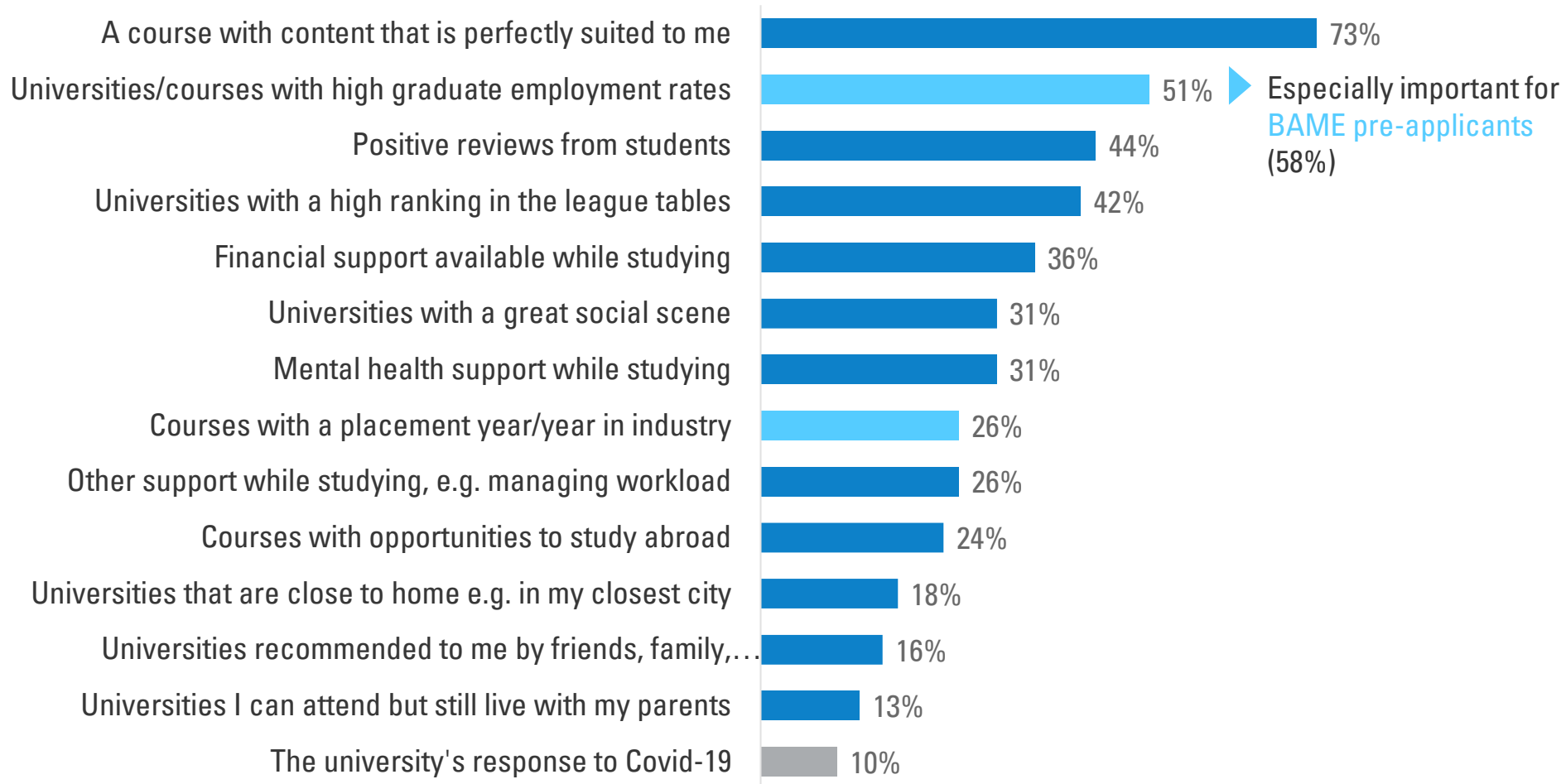
cite **the course** as the key  
driver of decision-making

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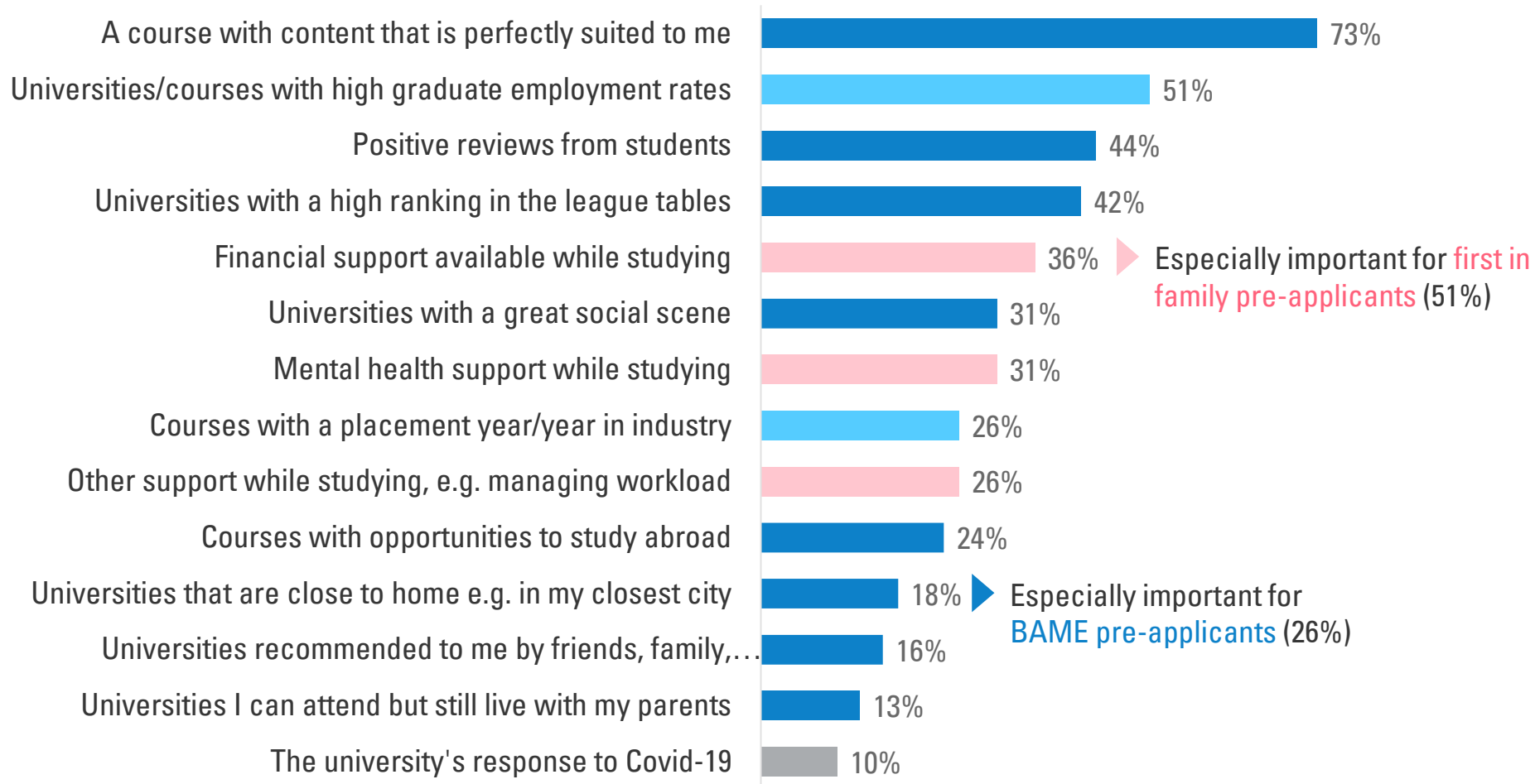
# Many cite employability (high employment rates and placement opportunities) as highly important

% selecting each factor within their top 5 most important




# Support is also high on the agenda, e.g financial, emotional, and academic

% selecting each factor within their top 5 most important



# What does this tell us about pre-applicants?



The pandemic makes decision-making more challenging for pre-applicants but does not strongly impact choice

Pre-applicants are focused on the future and want to reinforce their employability

Pre-applicants need wide-ranging support (financial, emotional, and academic) to reinforce their confidence

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

The impetus on employability is not going away – ensure communications give tangible and relatable examples of how studying at your institution boosts employability

Support provisions must be made clear to pre-applicants – provide details on how they can get help financially, emotionally, and academically

Course remains the pivotal factor of choice, so optimise courses and course information in-line with pre-applicant needs



**A pre-applicant's view**

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## **Key takeouts**

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87% of UCAS pre-applicants are committed to attending university in 2022

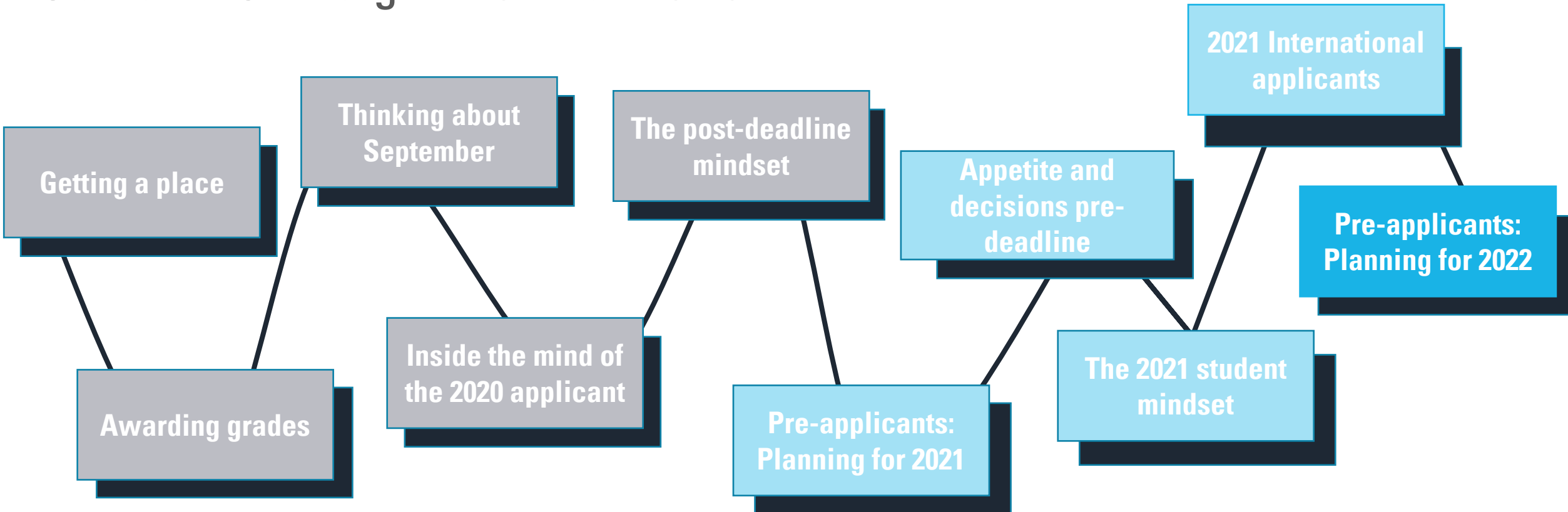
74% are yet to choose their university – everything is to play for

It will be a summer of decision-making for many pre-applicants – finalizing personal statements, choosing universities, etc.

Pre-applicants require information about accommodation, fees and funding, and support

Pre-applicants are keen to understand what their university experience will look like (esp. BAME)

# UCAS x YouthSight webinar series



We're planning the next webinar series – what would you like to know?

# Thank you for attending

A recording of this webinar will be available on the UCAS Media website. We again welcome any suggestions for future topics for the webinars in this series. Please send us your suggestions.

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