

# The 2021 student mindset

9<sup>th</sup> March 2021



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# Partnering to bring value to the sector

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**YouthSight Research**

March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021

# The Registrant Mindset

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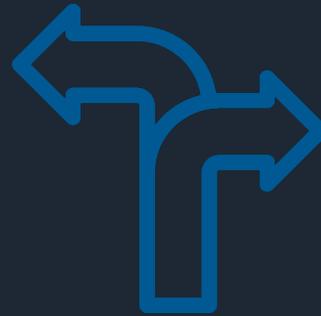
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# We explored...



Likelihood to go to university this year



Registrant decision-making



What would encourage registrants to go to university this year

# A reminder of our methodology

Online survey

**958**

Registrants (those who are on the UCAS database but haven't submitted an application)

All to be registrants **aged 21 and under** and non-rejectors of university.

All sample from **UCAS's registrant database**, from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and both international and UK students.

Fieldwork **1<sup>st</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

Please note: Fieldwork was carried out before government's roadmap for lifting Covid restrictions was announced

# Who registered with UCAS but didn't apply by the 29<sup>th</sup> January deadline?

## c350k registrants

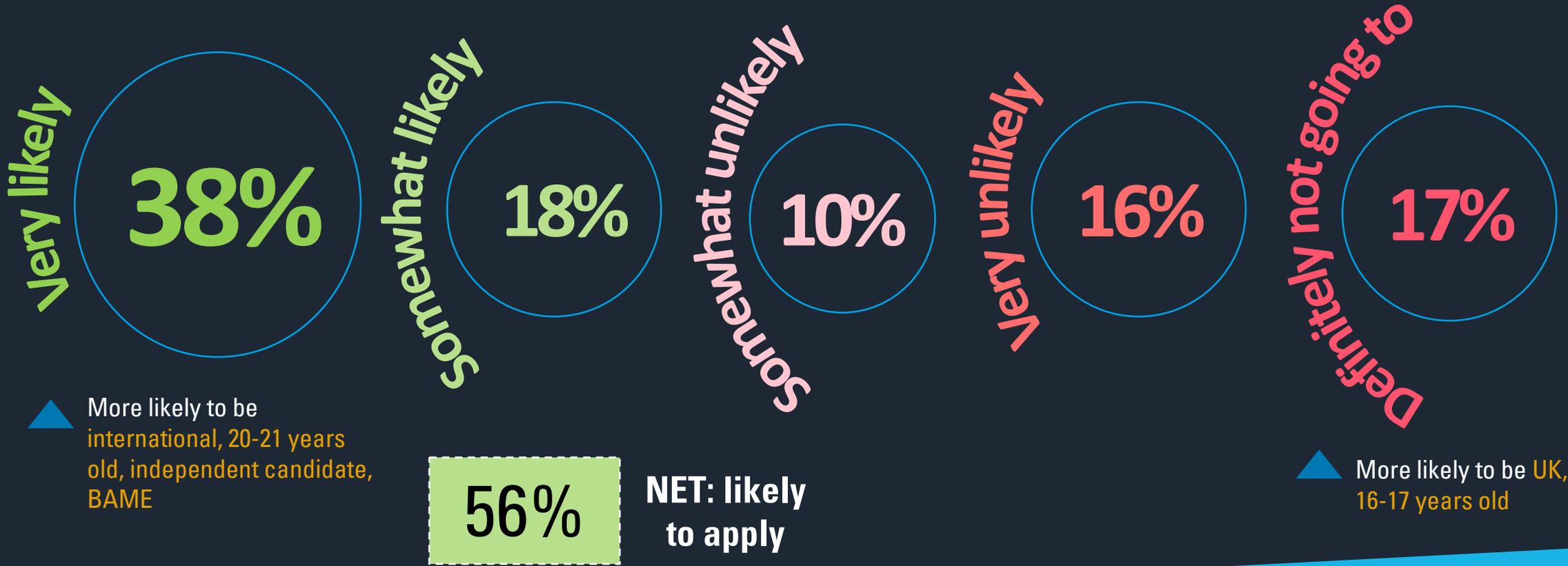
### Age

- 49% – <18
- 22% – 19-21
- 28% – >22

### Location

- 65% – UK
- 6% – EU
- 30% – outside the EU

# Over half who haven't yet submitted their application are still likely to apply to university in 2021



**41%**  
of those who haven't yet  
submitted their application  
are still deciding on the  
universities/courses they want  
to apply to



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# 2 in 5 haven't made firm decisions yet – a key opportunity for Higher Education institutions

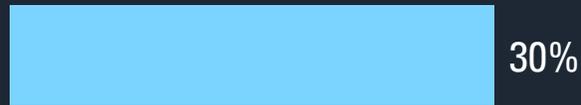
## Commitment to universities/courses, % selected

I've firmly decided on the universities/courses I want to apply to and I will make this choice soon

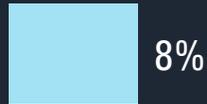


More likely to be 20-21 year olds and internationals

I've identified some universities/courses I'm interested but haven't made my final decisions yet



I've started researching which universities and courses to apply to but haven't made any decisions yet

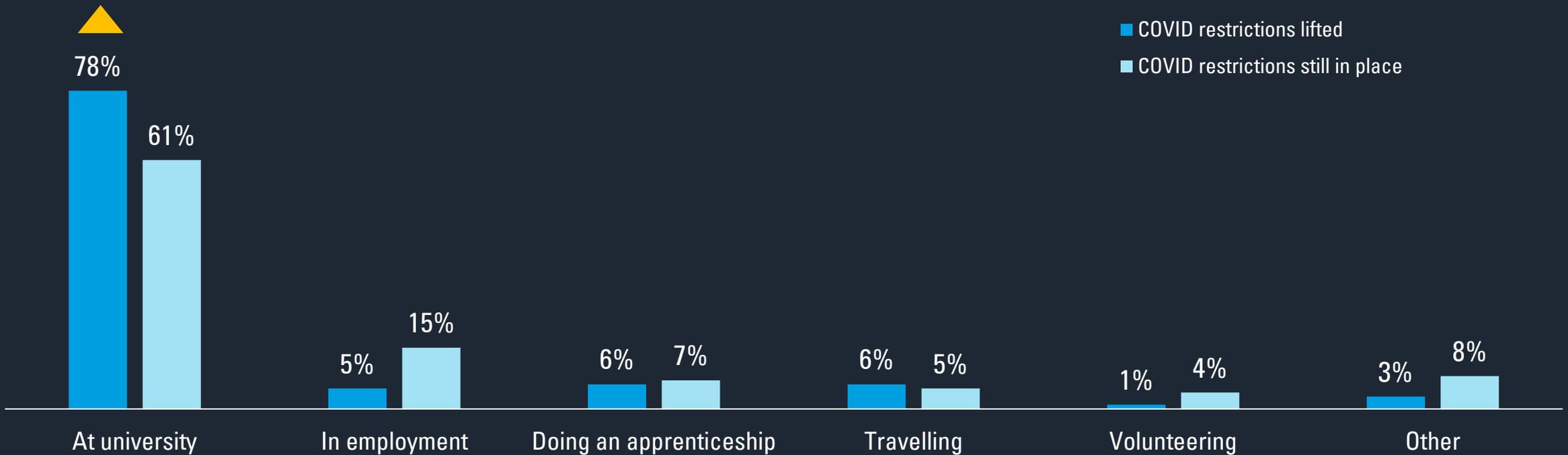


I haven't decided on any universities or courses to apply to yet



More likely to be first in family, UK

# Commitment to university further increases as Covid restrictions are lifted, which we now know is a strong possibility



▲ Indicates significant different @95% CI

# But right now, the future is still uncertain and that has put a third off applying to university this year

17%

I'm definitely not going to apply to start university in 2021

16%

I'm very unlikely to apply to start university in 2021

*Due to the Covid pandemic I believe that it would be inefficient to go to university this year or the year after so things can get back to normal by the time I do wish to apply to university*

*I'm not sure how the covid situation will be, and after seeing how students were treated this year, it's not something I want to risk. I also feel I could benefit from taking a year out to save more money before going to uni, so I am planning to apply for 2022 instead.*

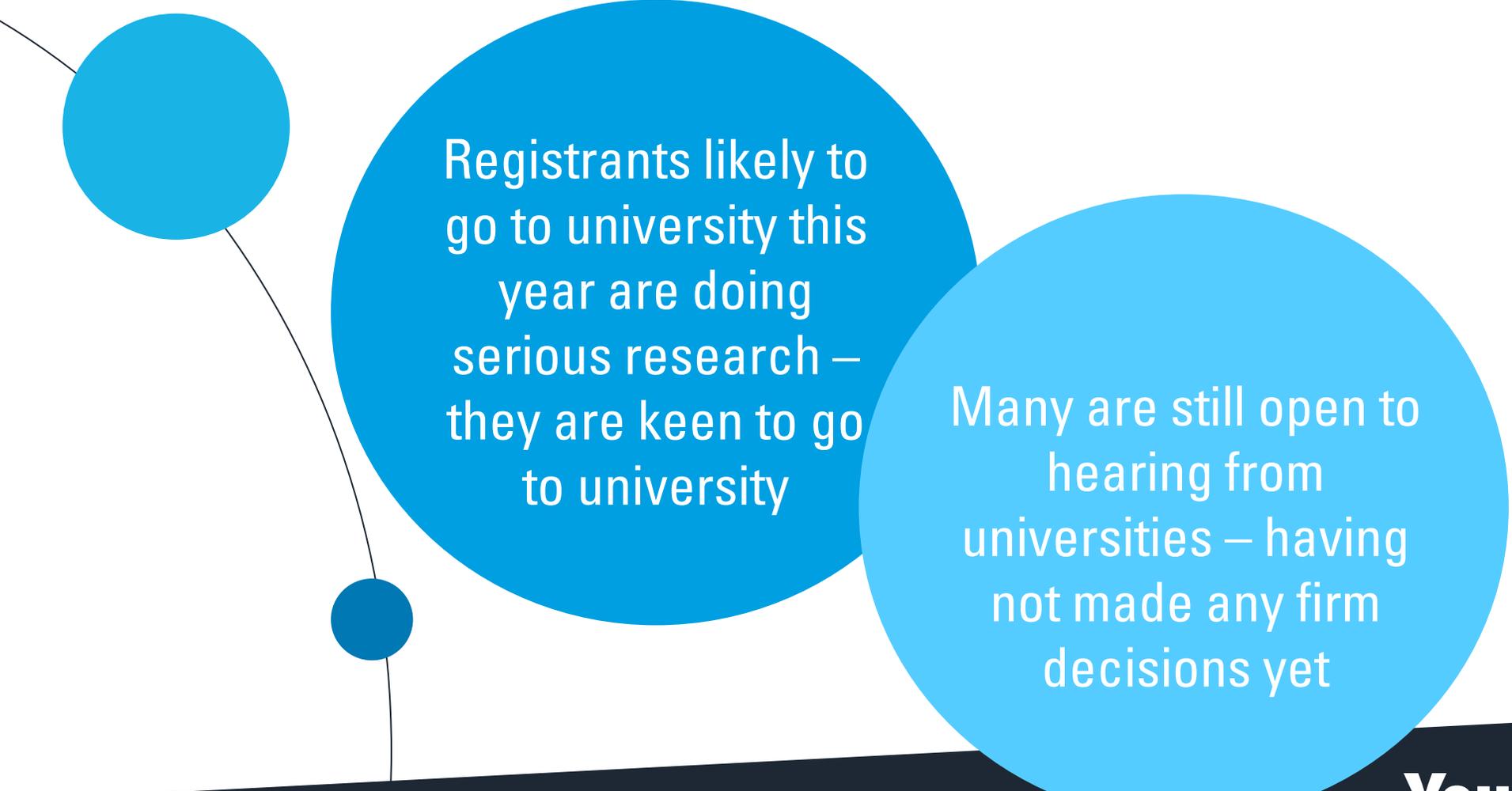
*Because it's stupid to pay the same amount of money, receive less education and effort then be expected to obtain the same results. I would love to go but not if its going to cost me the same amount to just stay at home.*

# What does this tell us about registrants?



Registrants likely to go to university this year are doing serious research – they are keen to go to university

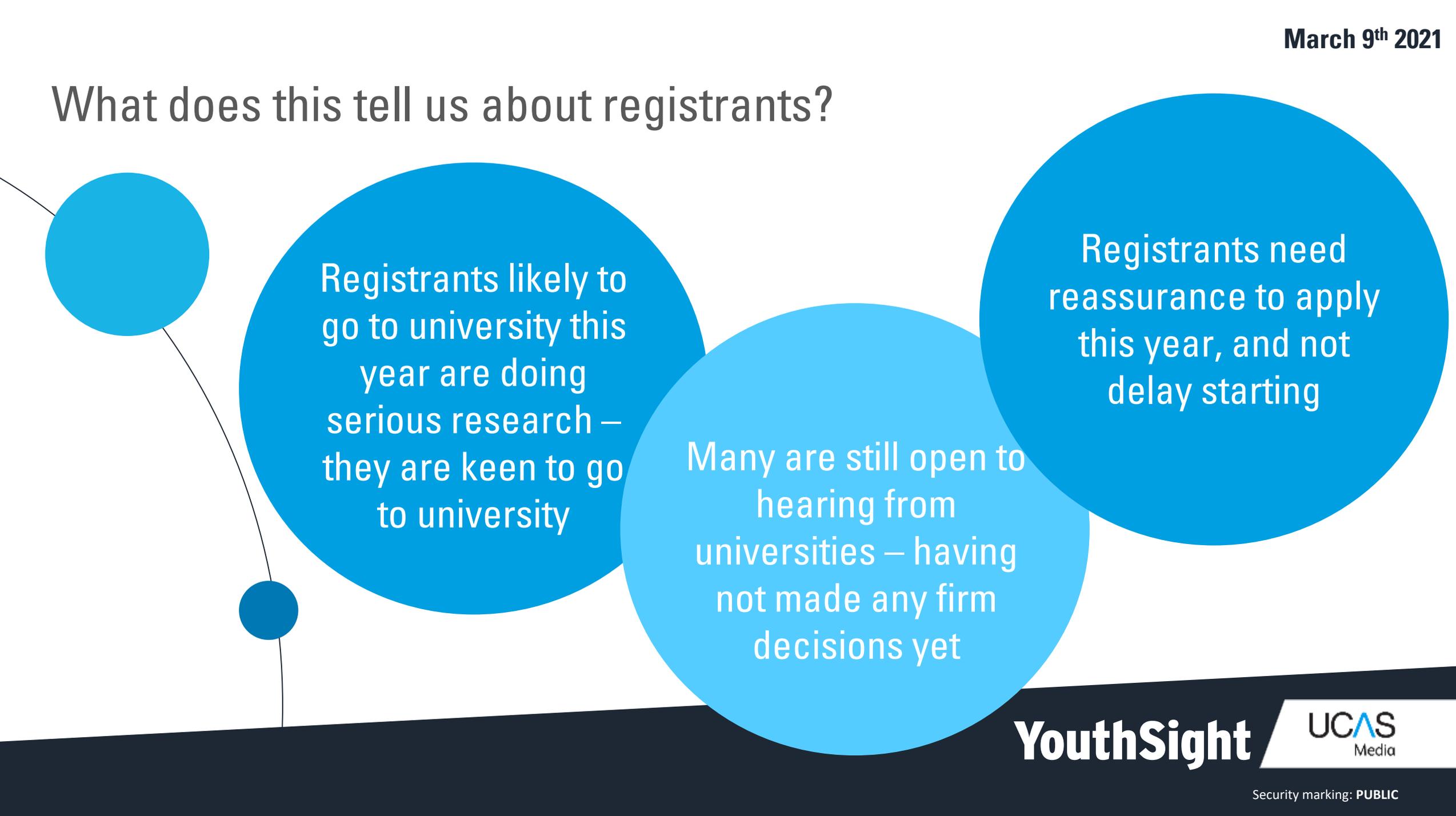
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Many are still open to hearing from universities – having not made any firm decisions yet

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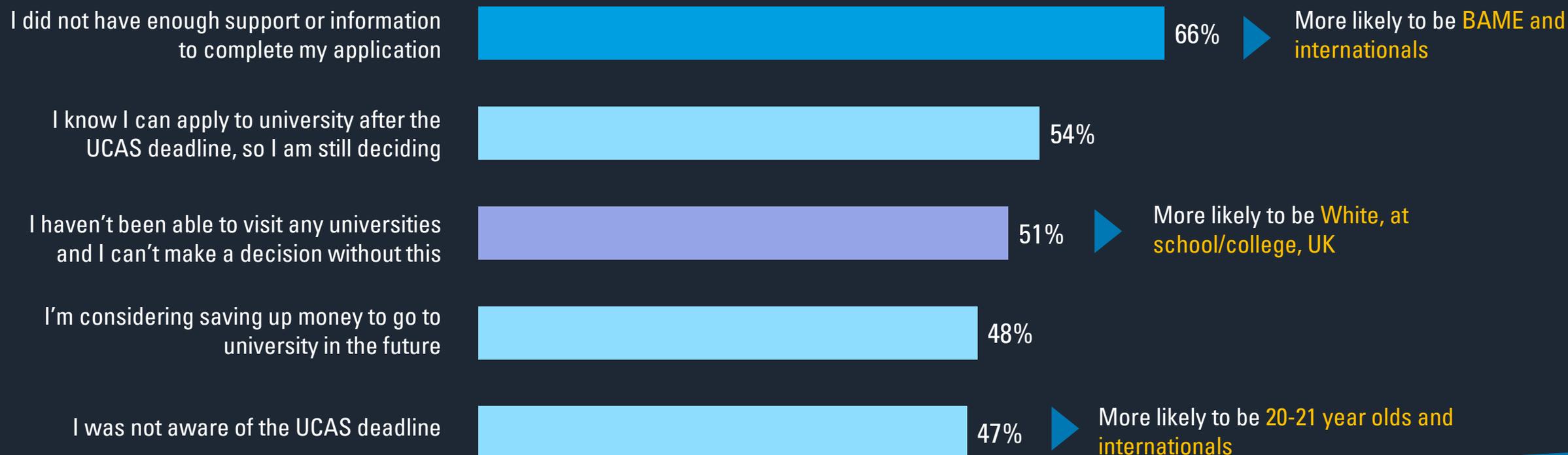
Many are still open to hearing from universities – having not made any firm decisions yet

Registrants need reassurance to apply this year, and not delay starting

**How to get registrants over the line?**  
Registrants need more information and  
guidance with their applications

# Reasons for not making the 29<sup>th</sup> January deadline mainly centre around not having enough information and support

## Reasons for not meeting the deadline, % selected slightly contributed or significant reason (top 5)



# Similarly, we see factors around information and guidance being the ones that will encourage applications

## Factors encouraging them to apply to university, % selected (top 6)

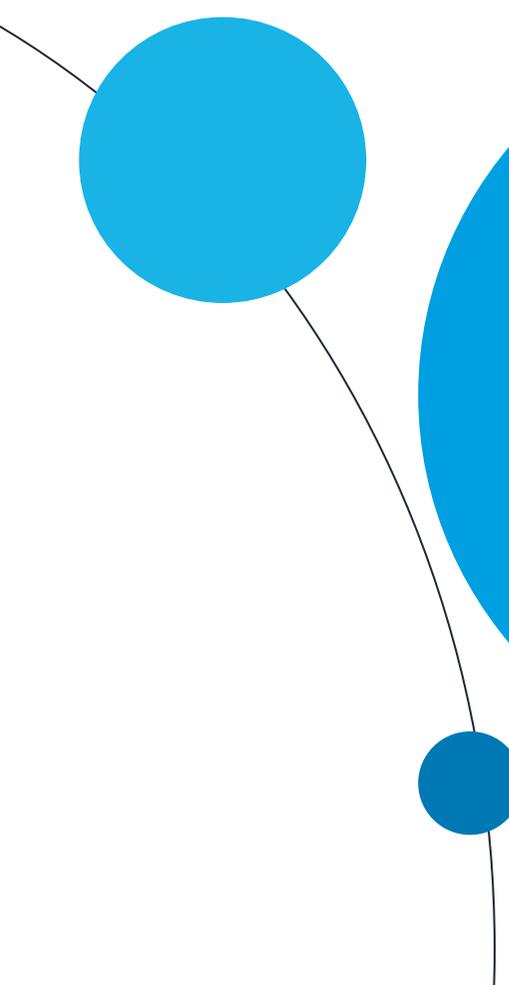


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Registrants need more support to complete their applications, especially as they have not been at school

Visiting universities is important to this group who are perhaps more nervous and unsupported, more so than applicants

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

Don't ignore this group  
– 350k and over half  
could apply,  
presenting new  
opportunities to attract

Many registrants are  
still researching their  
options and could still  
be swayed – you  
should be  
communicating and  
reassuring them

Create a framework to  
help registrants with  
decision-making now  
that the deadline has  
passed

An applicant's view

March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021

# The Applicant Mindset



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# We explored...



The applicant mindset



What would change applicants' decisions



What applicants think September 2021 will be like

# A reminder of our methodology

Online survey

**1,159**

Applicants (those who are on the UCAS database and have submitted an application)

All to be **planning to go to university this year** (Sept 2021)

All sample from **UCAS's applicant database**, from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and both international and UK students.

Fieldwork **1<sup>st</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

Please note: Fieldwork was carried out before government's roadmap for lifting Covid restrictions was announced

The vast majority of applicants are confident,  
to some extent, about getting a place at  
university this year

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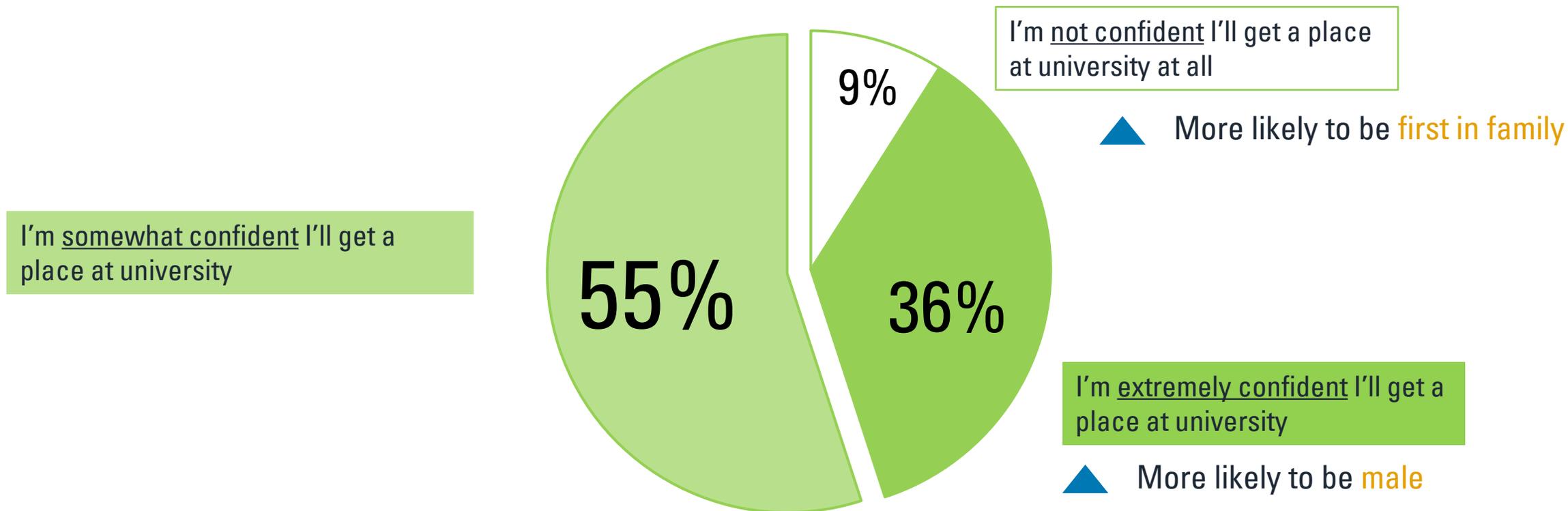
91%

are confident they will  
get their place

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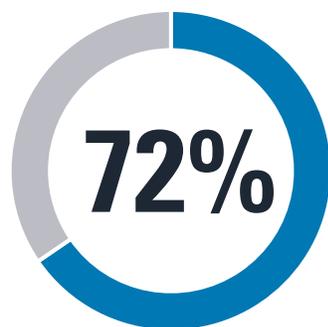
91% are confident to some degree they will get their place, but high confidence is understandably modest



Most applicants already have a preferred university in mind and are committed to their choice despite not visiting it in person

Nearly three quarters already have a preferred university in mind, but equally as many have not managed to visit

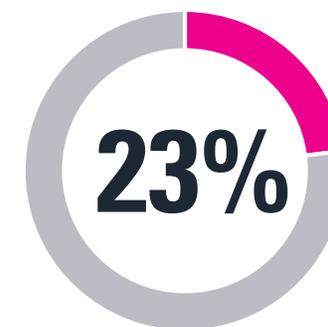
% already decided



**Have a preferred university in mind**



% yes

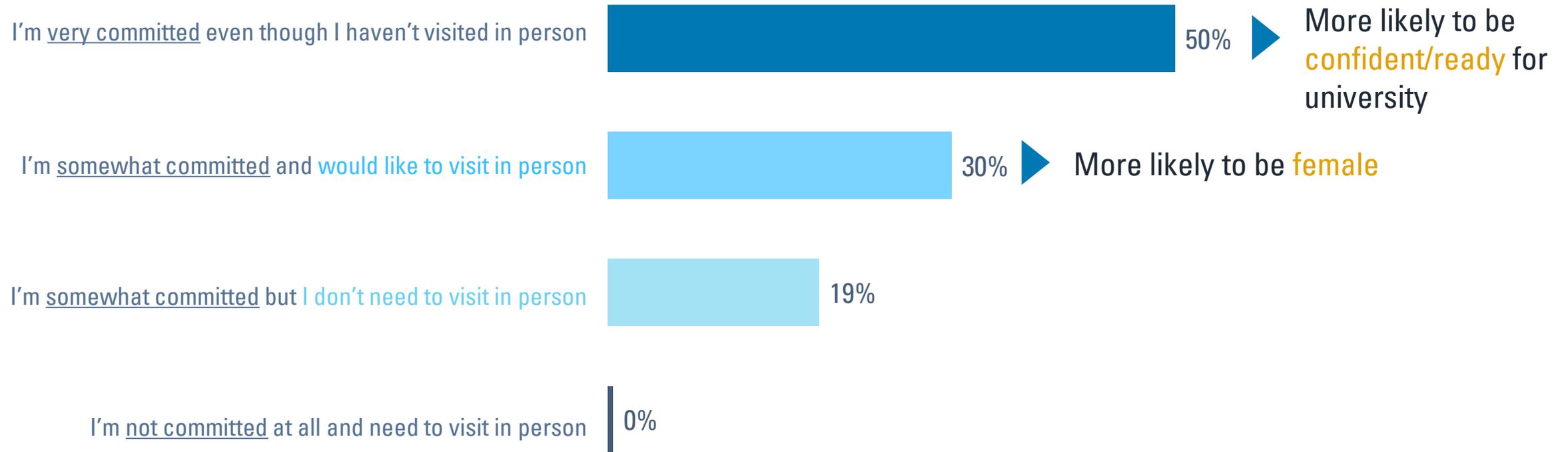


**Have visited the university in person**

# Yet half are still very committed to their chosen university

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## Commitment to preferred university, % selected



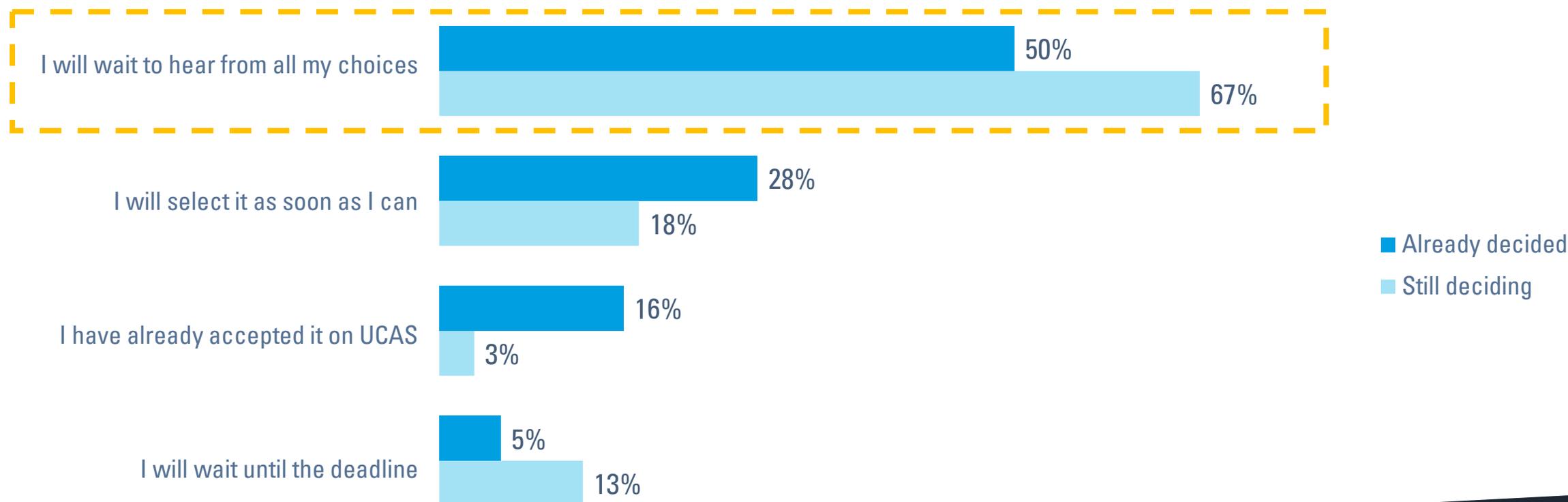
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Those who are still deciding on their preferred university want to wait until they hear from all their choices before making their decision

# Those who are yet to decide are being pragmatic and weighing up their options thoroughly before deciding

## Timing of selection of firm choice, % selected



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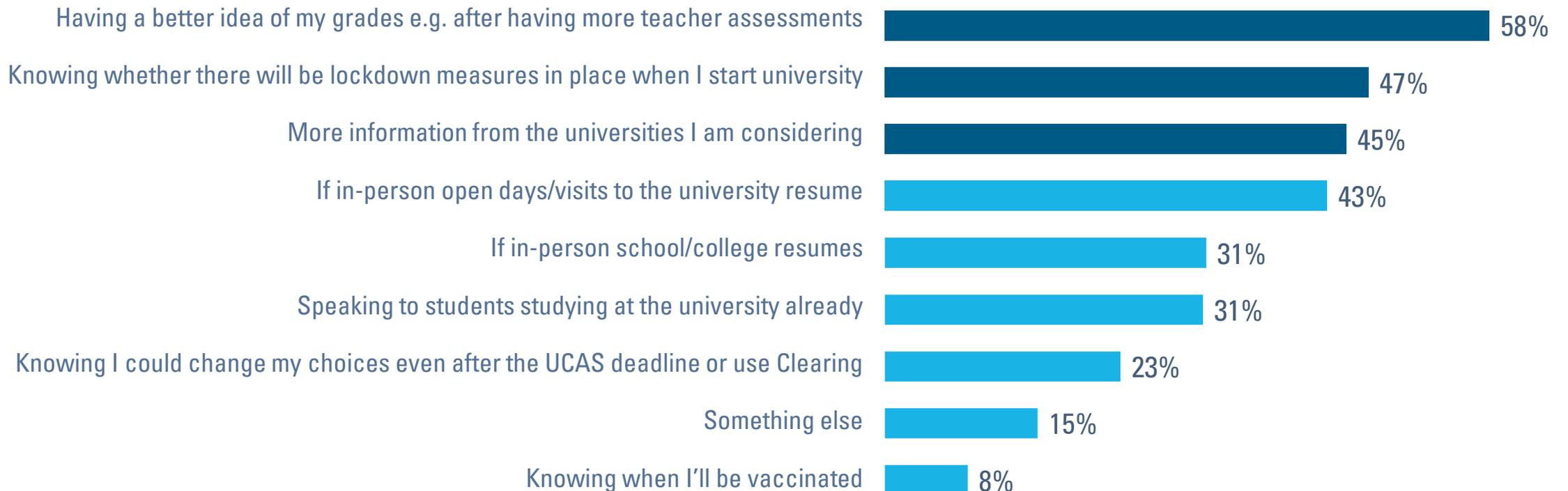
Only **7%**  
of all applicants **will**  
**wait for the UCAS**  
**deadline** to make their  
choice...

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# For those yet to make their decision, having a better idea of their grades would most help, but more info is also needed

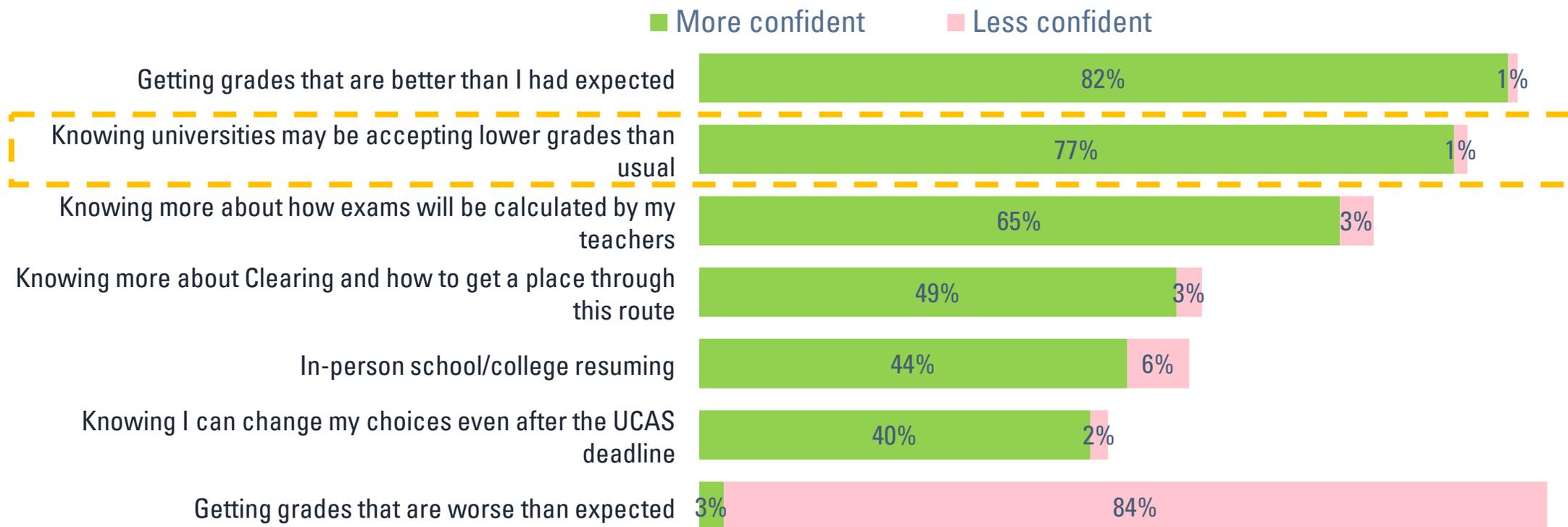
## Factors which would aid decision-making, % ranked in Top 3



Applicants' confidence is being knocked by the fact that they still have no clarity on how grades will be awarded

# Universities' willingness to be lenient will help instil applicant confidence

## Scenarios affecting confidence, % selected

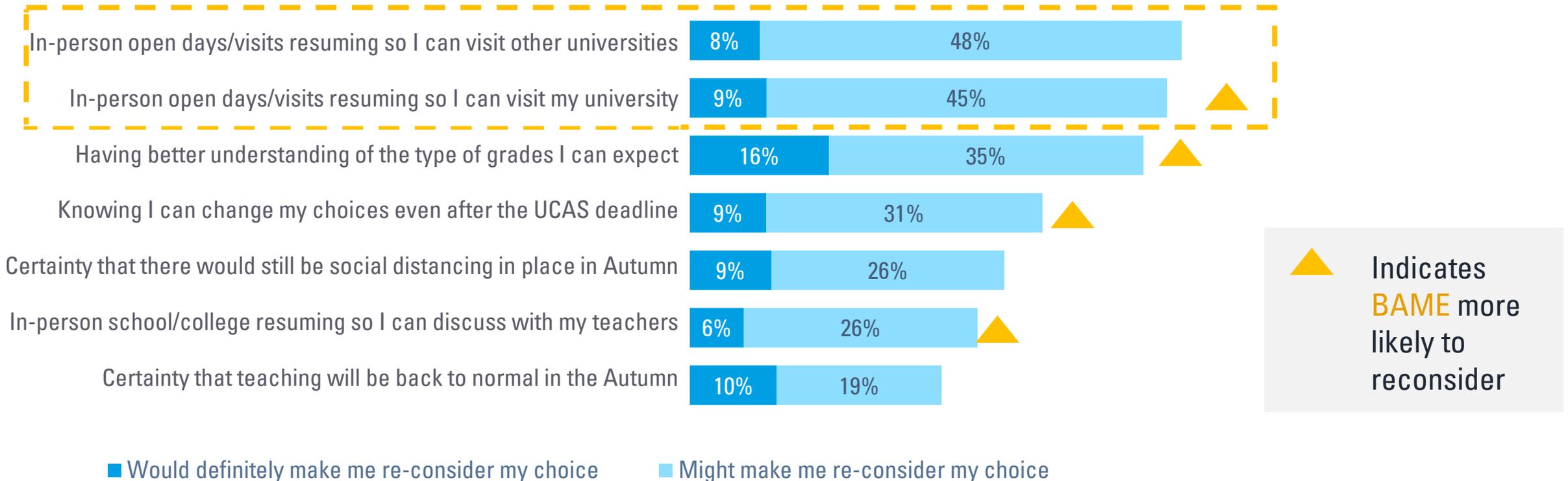


Q4: How, if at all, would any of the following scenarios affect your confidence in getting a place at university this year?  
 Base: All respondents (1,159)

Applicants want the reassurance that they're making the right decisions when it comes to their preferred choices - in-person open days/visits could give them this reassurance

# Applicants are keen to get a ‘feel’ for their chosen university – it’s hard to get a sense of belonging without it

## Scenarios affecting decision to select firm choice uni, % selected





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# What does this tell us about applicants?



Most applicants are feeling confident and have made a decision, but some still need more information from universities first

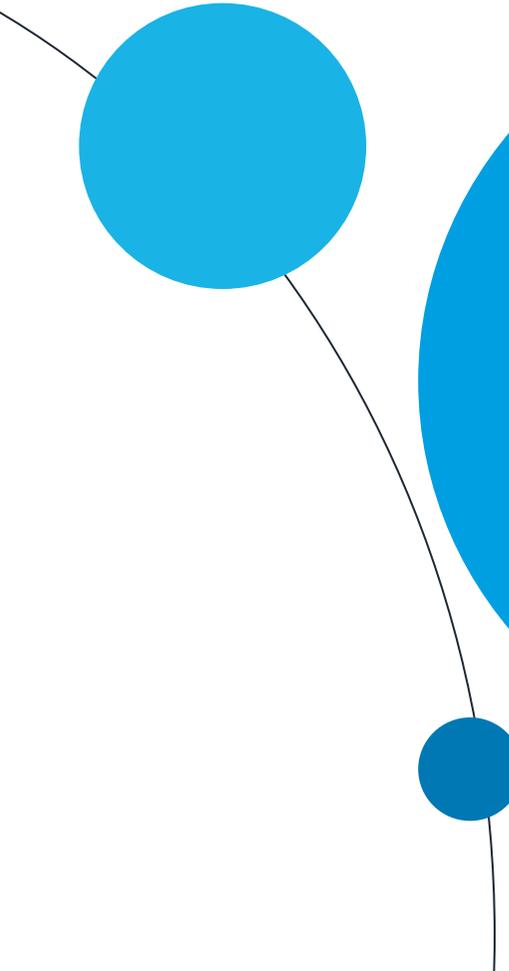
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Confidence is riding on grade and exam uncertainty; as well as universities' willingness to be lenient in such tough times

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Confidence is riding on grade and exam uncertainty; as well as universities' willingness to be lenient in such tough times

Applicants are keen to visit universities in person – this can help to reassure them that they're making the right decision

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

Decision-making is very much ongoing – there are still opportunities for you to influence applicant decision-making

Universities' willingness to show empathy to situation will fare better in the minds of applicants

Now the government has announced its roadmap, your undecided applicants are likely to try to visit off their own backs

An applicant's view

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# Future Focus



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Applicants have a realistic and pragmatic view about what social distancing would look like in September



**98%**  
of all applicants think there will  
**still be some sort of social  
distancing in place** in September...

# 2 in 3 applicants are feeling okay about social distancing in September – preparedness drives positivity

## Expectations for the start of university experience, % selected

There will be less restrictions than we have in place today but not complete normality, and I'm okay with this



More likely to feel **ready or confident** about university, **White**

There will be strict social distancing, but I'm okay with this



More likely to feel **ready** for university, **BAME**

There will be less restrictions than we have in place today but not complete normality, and I'm not looking forward to it



There will be strict social distancing and I'm not looking forward to it



It will be the same as it was before Covid-19



# A third, however, aren't looking forward to social distancing particularly if they aren't ready for university

## Expectations for the start of university experience, % selected

There will be less restrictions than we have in place today but not complete normality, and I'm okay with this 40%

There will be strict social distancing, but I'm okay with this 24%

There will be less restrictions than we have in place today but not complete normality, and I'm not looking forward to it 20% ▶ More likely to not feel ready for university, female

There will be strict social distancing and I'm not looking forward to it 14% ▶ More likely to not feel ready, not be confident in their place, still deciding on their preferred choice, BAME

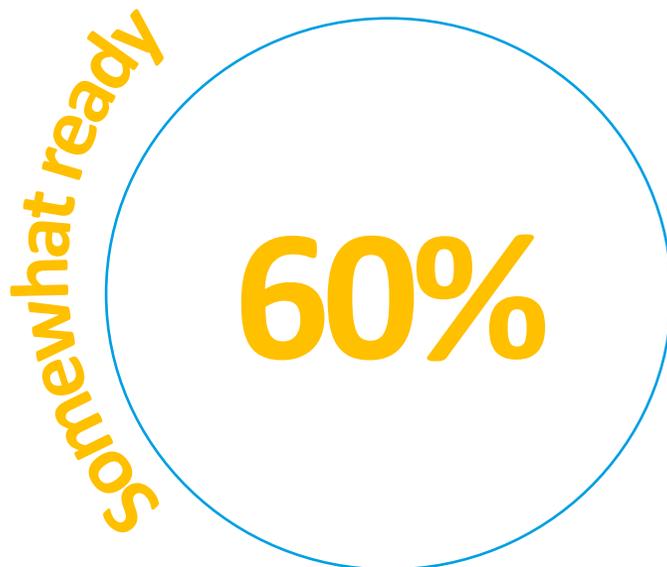
It will be the same as it was before Covid-19 2%

Some applicants don't feel ready for university in September, and will need further support and encouragement from universities

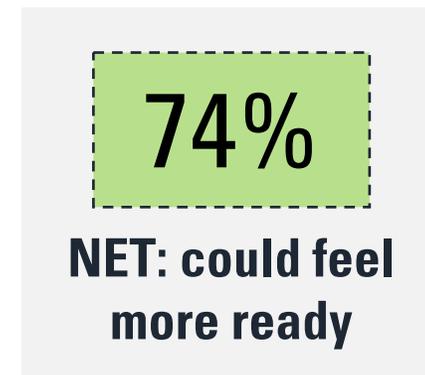
With only a quarter feeling completely ready for university, there is scope for universities to help applicants feel more prepared



▲ More likely to be male, feel confident about their place, have a preferred university in mind



▲ More likely to feel somewhat confident about their place



For those feeling ready for university, they are excited, confident and keen to move forward with life



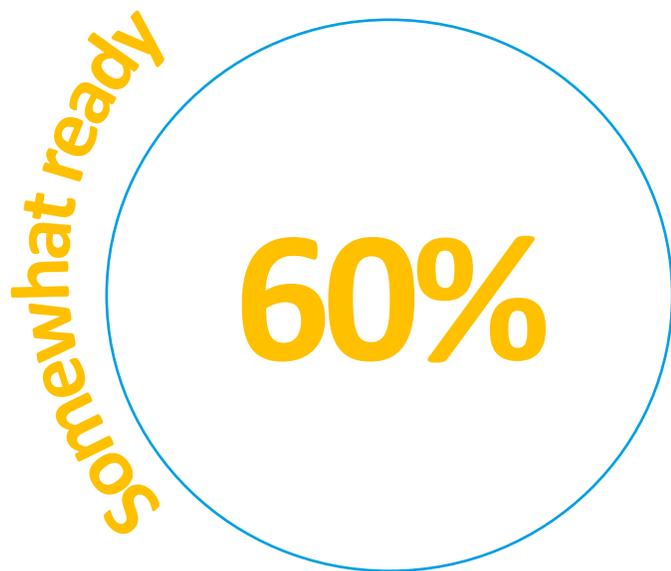
*"I'm looking forward to the **change** and the **opportunities** and **experiences** university will bring"*

*"I have wished for this and heard about the university life through my friends and family members - I am very **excited** about meeting new people and making new friends"*

*"I've spoken to a lot of past students and I feel confident that I know what to do"*

*"I'm happy to be beginning the **next chapter** in my life and I'm really excited to work towards a degree and to be able to be proud of myself"*

Although excited, the level of uncertainty around what university life will look like holds many back from feeling completely prepared



*"I love being independent however, I am not looking forward for uni if covid is still the way it is. It would be a waste of money"*

*"I'm confident I can meet the entry grades but would have preferred in person teaching on the content covered in lockdown"*

*"I don't know how my end grades will look as of yet"*

# Those who don't feel ready at all are lacking support and guidance, particularly from school/college

Not at all ready  
14%

*"Not having been in college to properly discuss with teachers and not being able to see the university in person"*

*"Doing online lessons for A-levels has been extremely tough and I feel like at university it would be even harder."*

*"Because I'm unsure on my grades. I don't know when I will be accepted or declined"*

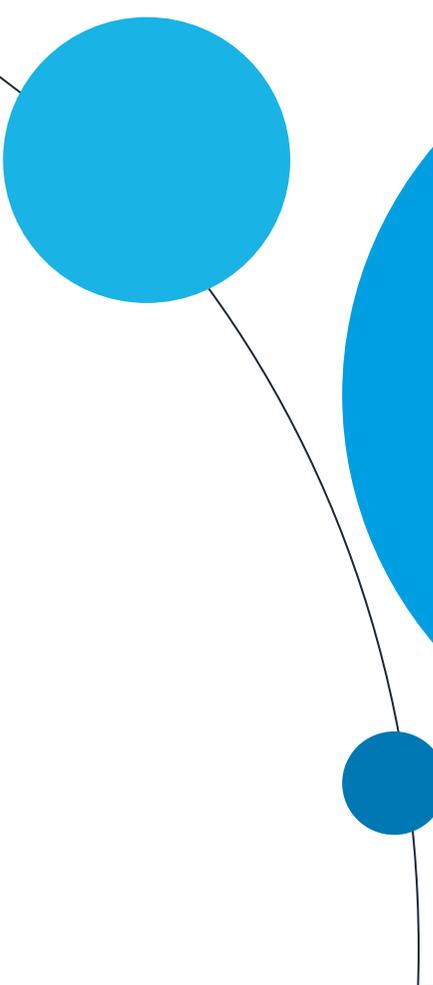
*"Not had a chance to develop socially and emotionally and gain independence over the last year"*

# What does this tell us about applicants?



Applicants are aware there will likely be some form of restrictions in place when they start university – they are pragmatic in their outlook

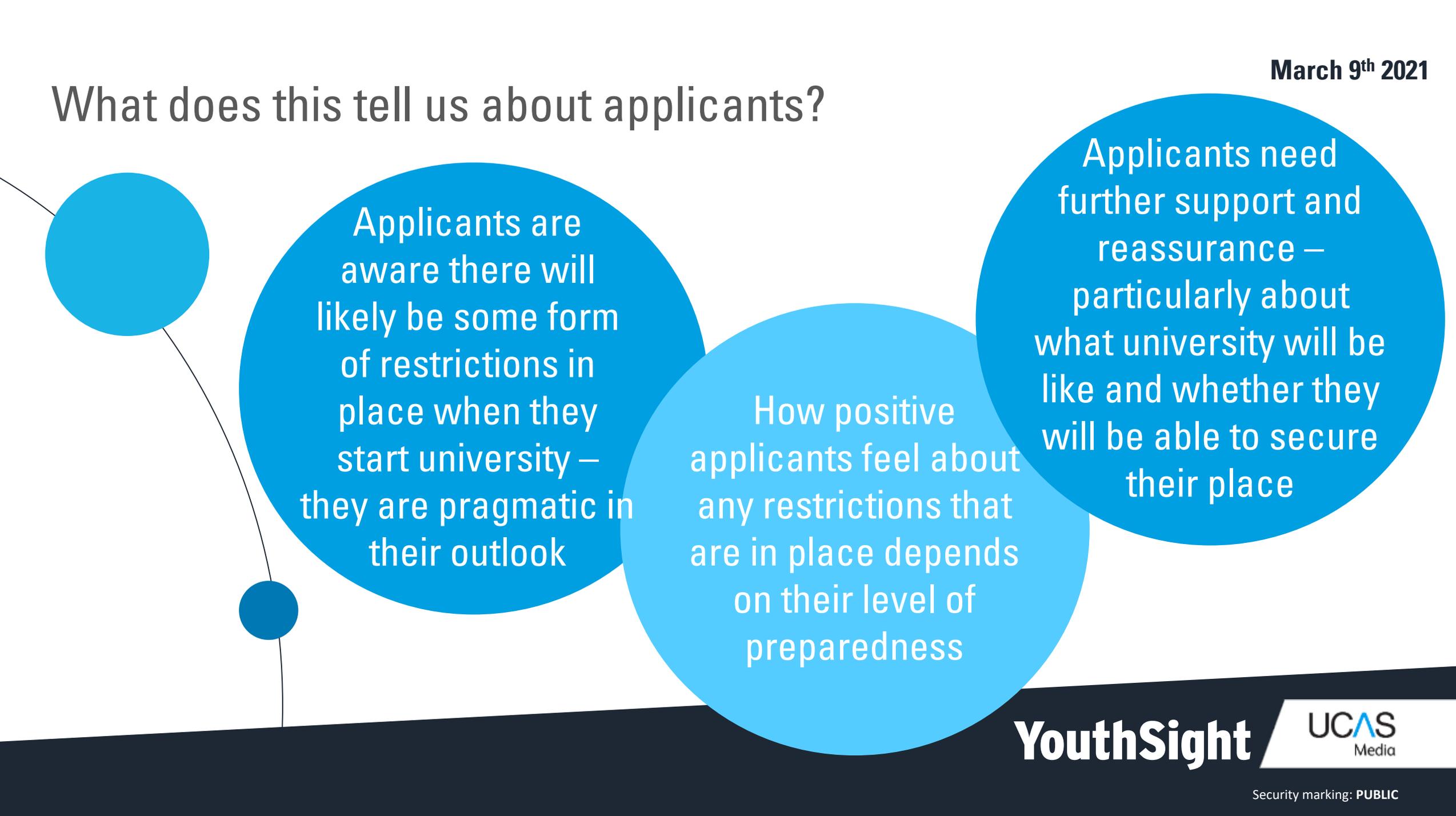
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How positive applicants feel about any restrictions that are in place depends on their level of preparedness

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Applicants are aware there will likely be some form of restrictions in place when they start university – they are pragmatic in their outlook

How positive applicants feel about any restrictions that are in place depends on their level of preparedness

Applicants need further support and reassurance – particularly about what university will be like and whether they will be able to secure their place

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PROVIDERS

Universities should be up-front in communications surrounding restrictions, reflecting the pragmatic views of applicants

Be as clear as possible in outlining what life at university will look like to help tackle uncertainty – it won't turn applicants off

It is incumbent on universities to step in and instill confidence in applicants, making them feel ready

**Key takeouts**



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41% of registrants are still deciding on the universities/courses they want to apply to

92% of registrants want more information from unis – and 90% want to know more about what it'll be like

While 50% of applicants are very committed to their firm choice, despite not visiting in person, visits will be key for others

77% will feel more confident if they know universities may be accepting lower grades than usual

98% think there will be social distancing in place in September – and two thirds are ok with it

# 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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