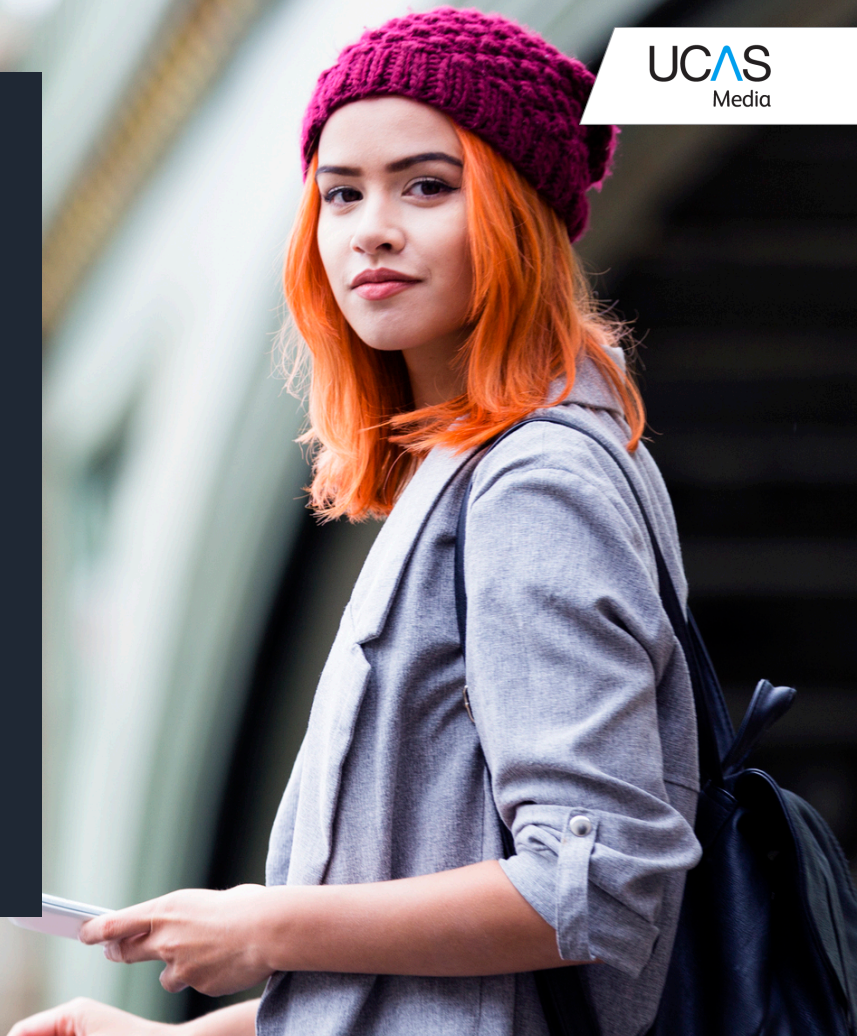


DECEMBER 2021

UCAS MEDIA INSIGHT NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the UCAS Media Insight Newsletter – December 2021.

It's a strange old feeling, the end of the year. Current students are heading home, when it only feels like yesterday that they moved away to start their next chapter. Next year's students are enjoying what might be the last festive season before their new life starts – all the while deciding what that new life will be.

In this newsletter, you'll find insight into the mindsets of both parties. Things are a little different this time around though so, apologies in advance, if you continue reading you may be giving yourself a bigger to-do list...

Let's get stuck in.

What are students doing?

On ucas.com

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

TOP SEARCHED FOR SUBJECTS ON UCAS SEARCH IN NOVEMBER 2021

Position for
November 2021

=	1	Psychology
=	2	Law
=	3	Nursing
=	4	Business
=	5	Medicine

▲ ¹	6	Physiotherapy
▲ ¹	7	Criminology
▲ ²	8	Computer science
▼ ₃	9	Midwifery
▼ ₁	10	Economics

▲
Change in
position since
November 2020

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

UCAS.COM USERS: TOP 10 NON-UK COUNTRIES IN NOVEMBER 2021



Position for
November 2021

▲ ²	1	China
▼ ¹	2	United States
▼ ¹	3	India
=	4	Ireland
▲ ¹	5	Nigeria
▼ ¹	6	Hong Kong
▲ ²	7	France
▼ ¹	8	Pakistan
▲ ¹	9	United Arab Emirates
▲ ⁴	10	Spain

▲
Change in
position since
November 2020

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

UCAS.COM USERS: TOP 10 UK CITIES IN NOVEMBER 2021



POSTCODE DISTRICT MAP

Position for
November 2021

=	1	London
=	2	Birmingham
▲ ¹	3	Manchester
▲ ¹	4	Glasgow
▲ ²	5	Leeds
▲ ²	6	Belfast
▲ ⁹	7	Croydon
▲ ⁴	8	Liverpool
▼ ³	9	Bristol
=	10	Edinburgh

Change in position
since November 2020



WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

TOP UG PAGES ON UCAS.COM IN NOVEMBER 2021

Position for
November 2021



=	1	How to write a UCAS Undergraduate personal statement
▲ ⁵	2	Applying to university
=	3	Filling in your UCAS undergraduate application
▲ ¹	4	UCAS undergraduate: When to apply
▼ ³	5	Tracking your UCAS application

▲
Change in
position since
November 2020

End of Cycle data 2021

Key headlines from the end of the 2021 application cycle

END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

KEY FINDINGS

562,060

total accepts

Down by -1% from
2020

492,005

UK accepted
applicants

Up 1% from 2020

38.3%

of UK 18 year old
confirmed a place

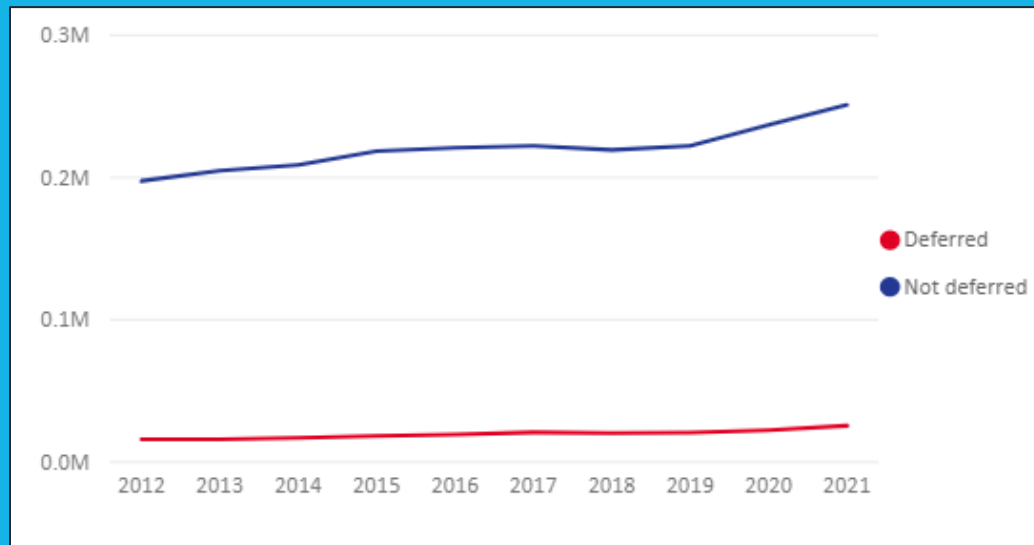
Up from 37.0% in
2020

223,315 UK 18 year olds secured their **first choice** of course (81% of all those placed), up from 194,035 (75%) in 2020 and 177,680 (74%) in 2019.



END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

ACCEPTED APPLICANTS BY DEFERRED STATUS

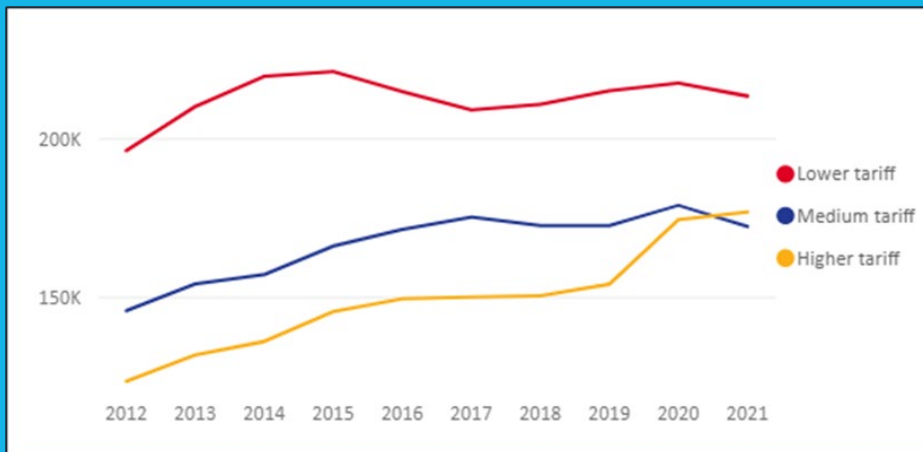


The number of UK 18 year olds choosing to defer starting their course for a year rose by 3,185 to 24,855, a **15% increase**.



END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

ACCEPTED APPLICANTS BY TARIFF GROUP OF PROVIDER



103,010 18 year olds across the UK were accepted at **higher tariff providers** by the end of the 2021 admissions cycle, up 11% from 92,650 in 2020 (and up 28% from 80,380 before the pandemic in 2019). This 11% rise comes despite just a 3% increase in the UK's overall 18 year old population during the 2021 cycle.

The number of applicants achieving A level grades equivalent to three A*'s nearly quadrupled from pre-pandemic levels to 19,595 (5,655 in 2019), and close to doubled compared to 2020 (12,735).

Not all these high achieving, deferring students have decided to keep the place they have though. Instead, they have used their higher grades to completely reapply for some of the most competitive courses in the UK. As seen with the publication of the recent 2022 cycle 15 October deadline data, covering courses at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, plus medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine/science courses, there has been a notable increase in students from the 2021 cycle reapplying. These applicants are pairing their excellent results for 2021 with soaring aspirations for 2022, adding another dimension to the current cycle.

The newly empowered 18 year old

There are few cohorts of young people more affected by COVID-19 than the UK 18 year old. Having dreamt of campus life and lecture halls, they found themselves at the mercy of lockdowns and restrictions, repeatedly needing to manage their own expectations.

Last cycle saw more students confirming their first choice. In 2021 38.3% of 18 year olds confirmed a place at university or college, up from 37% the previous year. 81% secured their first choice, compared to 75%. And 11% more were accepted at higher tariff providers, thanks to 4x as many top mark achievers.

But the empowerment doesn't necessarily come from greater numbers, rather from a new strategic and competitive approach. 15% more 18 year olds have deferred their course this year.

Armed with better grades and more time, plus a greater appreciation of freedom and health, these young people are reconsidering their next steps, with some setting their sights on higher tariff institutions.

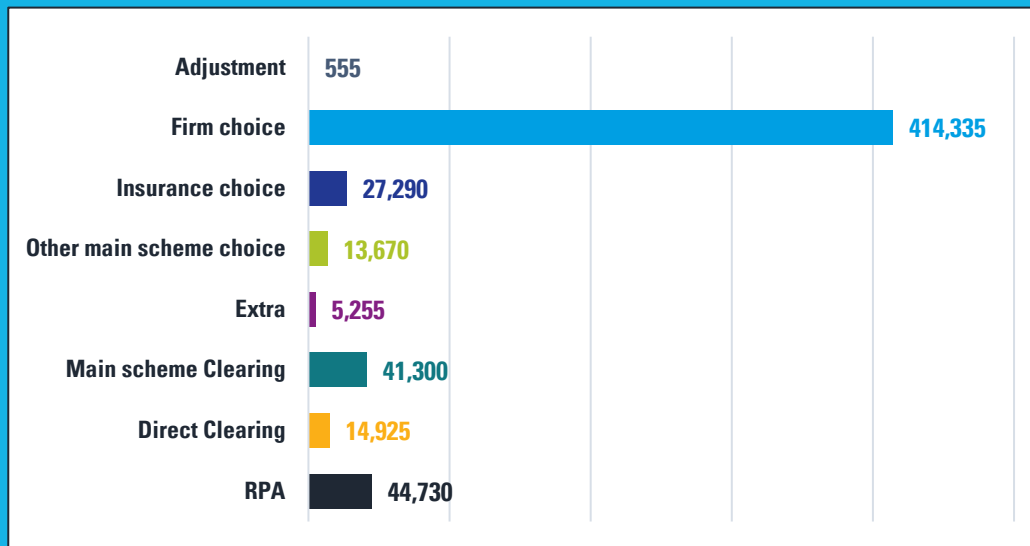
What does this mean?

Admissions will face a new challenge in next year's cycle. Higher tariff providers will process even more applications than usual, and have to choose between a higher calibre of applicant. But their limits exist for a reason, which could mean an overspill of high-achieving applicants who may need to consider other options. This push-pull effect will mean a less predictable cycle for most of the market, as providers watch this swelling cohort plot their next move. For those that aren't successful will they defer again, or set their sights elsewhere? Communication at the right times will be key to influencing this decision.



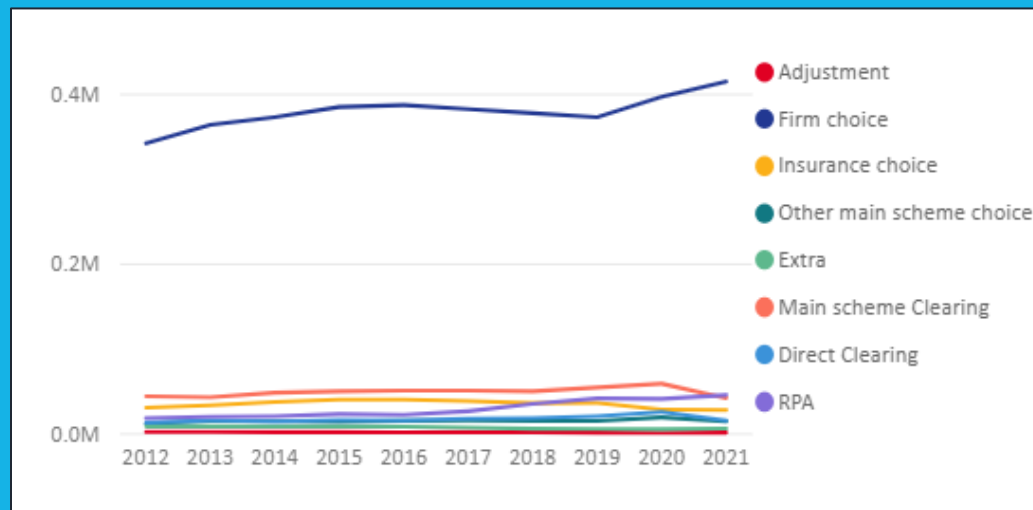
END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

ACCEPTED APPLICANTS BY ACCEPTANCE ROUTE



END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

ACCEPTED APPLICANTS BY ACCEPTANCE ROUTE



END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

RESULTS BY DOMICILE

492,005

accepted
students from
the UK

+1% from 2020

54,030

accepted
students from
outside the EU

+2% from 2020

16,025

accepted
students from
the EU

-50% from 2020

Accepts by top 5 non-EU countries

16,310	China
4,600	India
4,095	Hong Kong
2,825	Malaysia
2,710	United States of America

Accepts by top 5 EU countries

2,730	Portugal
2,385	Ireland
1,515	France
1,495	Spain
1,135	Italy

END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

RESULTS BY SUBJECT

Top five JACS3 subject groups with the highest number of accepted applicants

79,645	Group N Business & Admin studies
71,725	Group B Subjects allied to Medicine
59,390	Group C Biological Sciences
49,630	Group L Social Studies
48,220	Group W Creative Arts & Design

Top five HECoS subject groups with the highest number of accepted applicants

83,645	CAH17 business and management
75,435	CAH02 subjects allied to medicine
63,890	CAH15 social sciences
51,895	CAH21 creative arts and design
34,455	CAH03 biological and sport sciences

END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

EXPLORE THE DATA FURTHER

Our detailed sector-level data resources for the end of the 2021 application cycle can be explored further in our **interactive dashboard**.



END OF CYCLE DATA 2021

A COMPETITIVE YEAR LIES AHEAD

The journey to a million total applicants of all ages and domiciles is well under way – there is now only a gap of 250,000 between the final 2021 total and 1,000,000. However, the gap between the number of places and the number of applicants, especially for courses that were already very competitive, such as medicine and dentistry, looks set to grow in the immediate future.

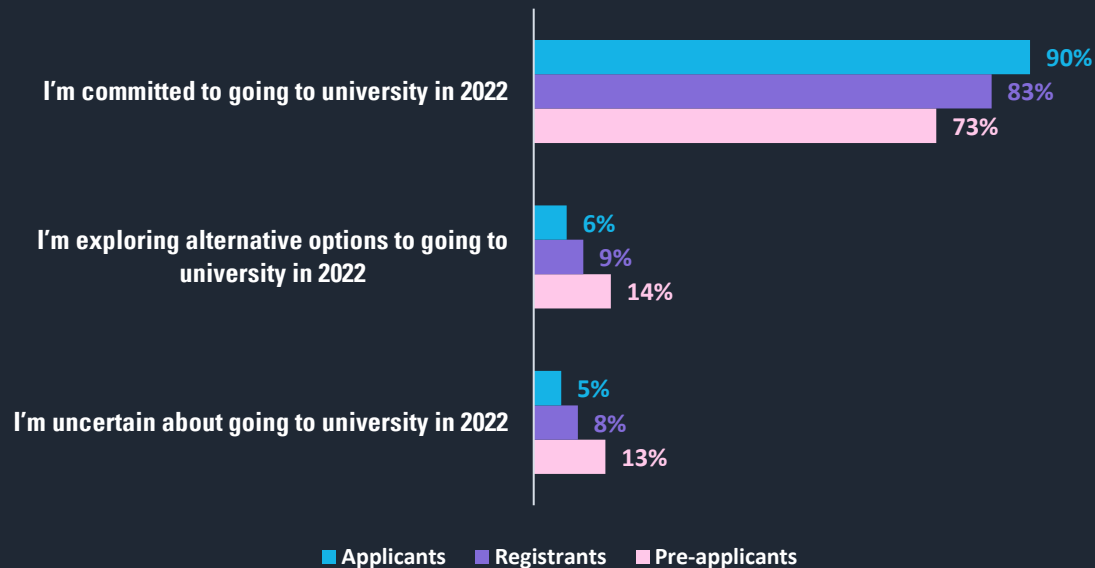
The rise in apprenticeship interest also needs to be considered – searches in UCAS' Career Finder are up 45 per cent in the last 12 months. 2022 will undoubtedly be a different landscape again; although there are the early signals for providers to use as they put plans in place to manage the cycle fairly and, as everything currently stands, expect hopefully less disruption than we've all experienced over the last two admissions years.



Open days survey

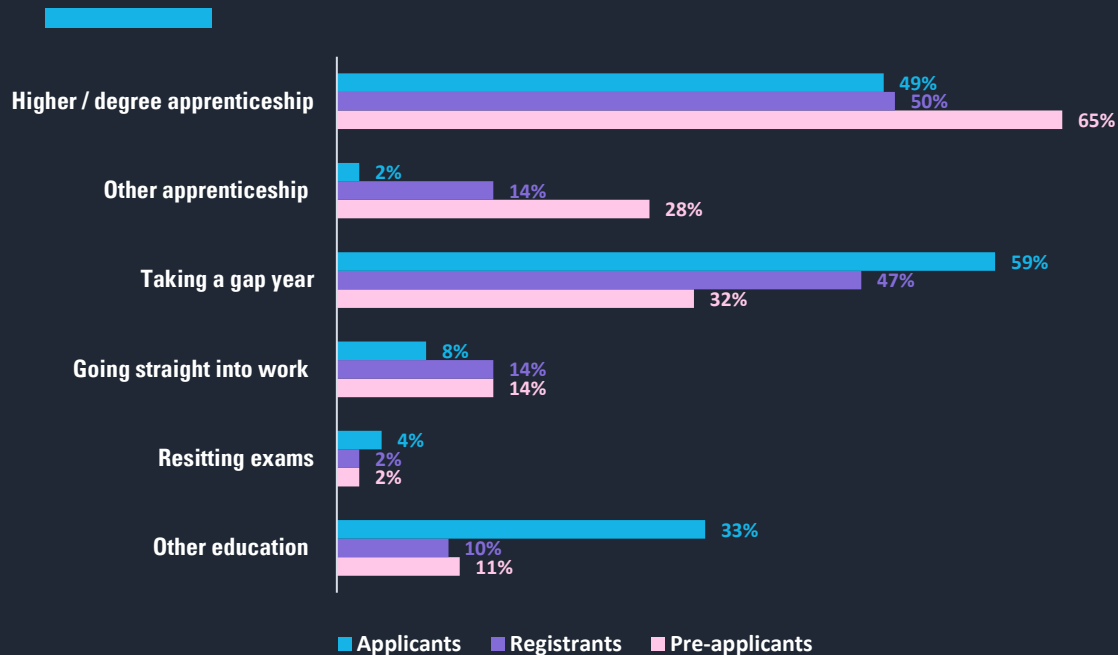
Key findings from our November open days survey

Q: PLEASE TELL US WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS THE CLOSEST TO HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR:



WHAT ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS ARE RESPONDENTS EXPLORING?

(Asked only to those who selected 'I'm exploring alternative options...' to previous question).



What's the alternative to university?

This is the question that almost 30% of next year's potential students are asking themselves.

(And you can add another 26% if you count those who are unsure about going to university but haven't yet started exploring their other options.)

Whichever way you look, that's a lot of indecision.

Pre-applicants are leaning towards apprenticeships, whilst for applicants – it's gap years. And for those who have only registered, they're torn between the two.

An interesting subset is that a third of these undecided applicants are exploring 'Other education' – which bolsters the case of next year being a mass reapplication phase, especially for higher tariff providers.

Most of us had hoped that, by now, higher education would be in a more concrete position and young people would be able to make their choices with confidence.

But the reality is that COVID-19 isn't going away quickly, and the Omicron variant has already led to more restrictions that may impact another academic year.

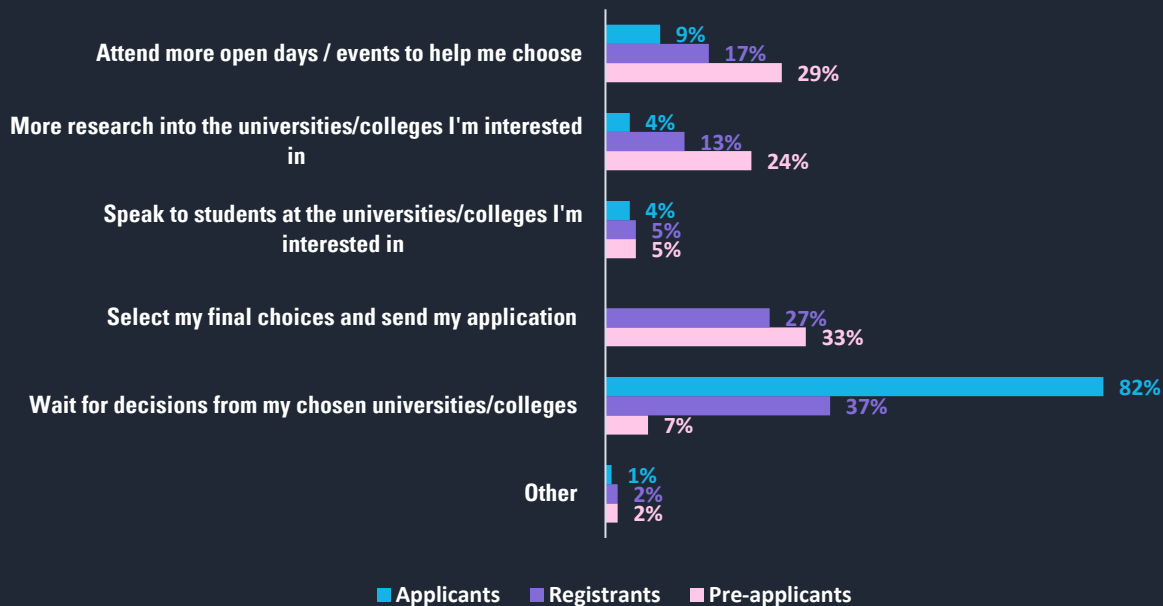
What does this mean?

For universities, it means doubling down on their communication with every segment. Applicants need reassurance and consistent engagement to help them make informed and empowered decisions.

For degree apprenticeship providers, there is an opportunity to tap into this secondary market of young people who are on the fence about their future. Targeting your communications with the right messaging and timing may open up another avenue of applications.



NEXT STEPS ACROSS OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS:



Greater variety, greater opportunity.

It's all change. Again. But this new insight means that there's more nuance for recruitment departments to wrestle with this year. Young people are reassessing their priorities, changing their minds, and designing their own futures. With so much fluctuation, even among those who have been offered places, it feels like we're turning the clock back and putting everything back up for grabs.

Targeting these cohorts (with tailored messaging) is the new challenge.

If that's something you'd like our help with, or you need access to more data like this, [get in touch](#).

We'll be back next month, with more insight, from December.

Until then, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Get in touch

For further information and insights contact your UCAS Media account manager or email us at ucasmediaeducationteam@ucas.ac.uk.