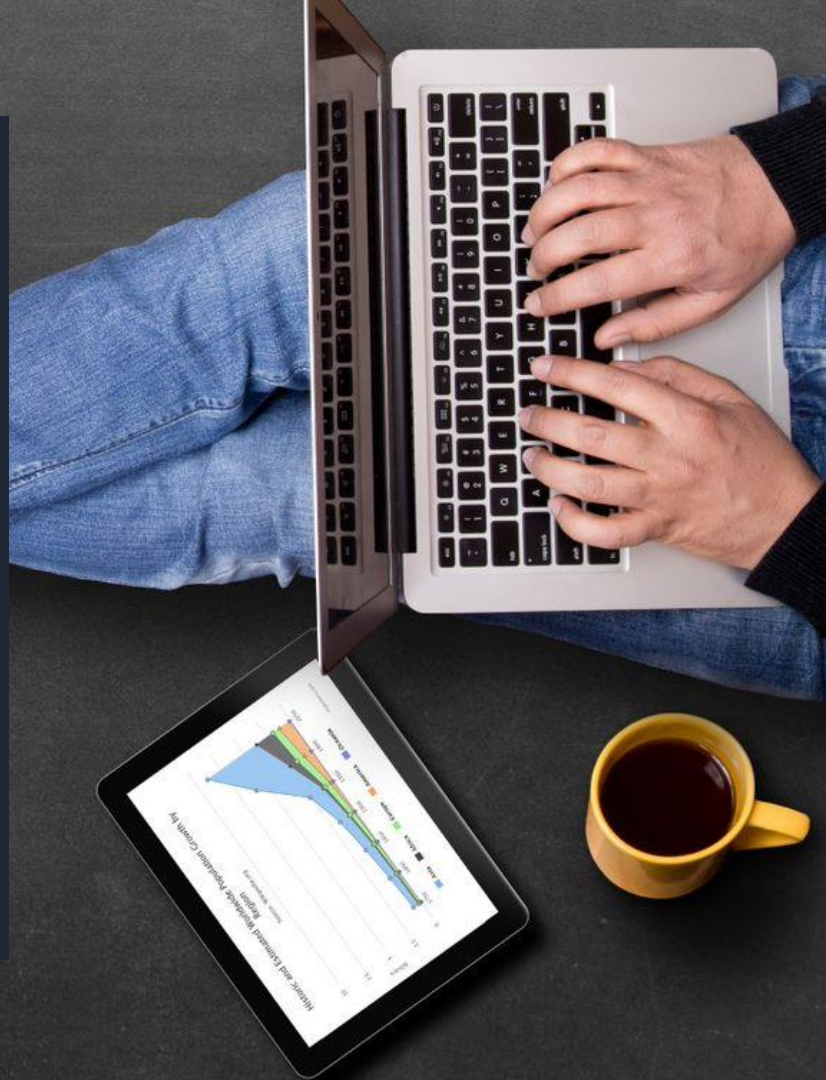


Insight Newsletter

March 2023

UCAS



Welcome to the UCAS Insight Newsletter – March 2022

Offer holder and discovery events season is here. Campuses and exhibitions are about to fill up with the bright eyes and bushy tails of the 23/24 hopefuls. It's a crucial moment in the higher education calendar and, with the cost of living being such a big focus for students, an unmissable chance to instil some confidence and showcase how you're supporting your new crop of learners.

Especially because now is when **applicants** start thinking about and booking their accommodation, which they may have more questions about this time around, and because **pre-applicants** might be meeting you for the very first time. For **undergraduates**, things are a little quieter as they get ready to head home for their final break before term time exams.

At UCAS HQ, this month has all been about mindset research. We've been doubling down on understanding the way that students are thinking, acting, and making decisions – as the world moves on from COVID-19 and into the new challenge of an increased cost of living.

Let's dive into the findings.

What are students doing?

Across ucas.com

WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

Top ten searched for subjects on UCAS Search in February 2023

Position for
February 2023

=	1	Medicine	▼ ₁	6	Business
=	2	Psychology	▲ ₁	7	Physiotherapy
=	3	Law	▲ ₄	8	Economics
=	4	Nursing	▲ ₁	9	Architecture
▲ ₁	5	Computer science	▲ ₅	10	Pharmacy

▲
Change in position
since February 2022



WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

Top ten visited Subject Guides on ucas.com in February 2023

Position for
February 2023

▲ ²	1	Medicine and allied subjects	=	6	Business, management and administrative studies
▼ ¹	2	Psychology	▲ ¹	7	Veterinary science
▼ ¹	3	Law	▼ ⁴	8	Computer science
▲ ¹⁴	4	Criminology	▲ ⁴	9	Paramedic science
▲ ⁴	5	Nursing	▼ ⁵	10	Architecture, building and planning

▲
Change in position
since February 2022



WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

Top ten visited City Guides on ucas.com in February 2023



POSTCODE DISTRICT MAP

Position for
February 2023

=	1	London
▲ ¹	2	Manchester
▲ ⁵	3	Liverpool
▼ ₂	4	Edinburgh
▲ ²	5	Leeds
▼ ₂	6	Bristol
▼ ₁	7	Birmingham
▲ ²	8	Nottingham
▼ ₄	9	Bath
▲ ⁴⁰	10	Stoke-On-Trent and Newcastle-Under-Lyme

Change in position
since February 2022



WHO'S ENGAGING WITH UCAS?

Top five undergraduate pages on ucas.com in February 2023

Position for
February 2023

▲ ¹	1	Applying to university
▲ ⁴	2	Replying to your Undergraduate offers
▼ ₂	3	Tracking your UCAS application
▲ ¹	4	When to apply
▼ ₁	5	How to write a UCAS Undergraduate personal statement

Change in position
since February 2022



The 2023 Student Mindset

A look into the mindset of current applicants and potential applicants through 2023 entry surveys hosted by UCAS at various points in this cycle.

**93% of UK applicants
are confident they will
get into university**

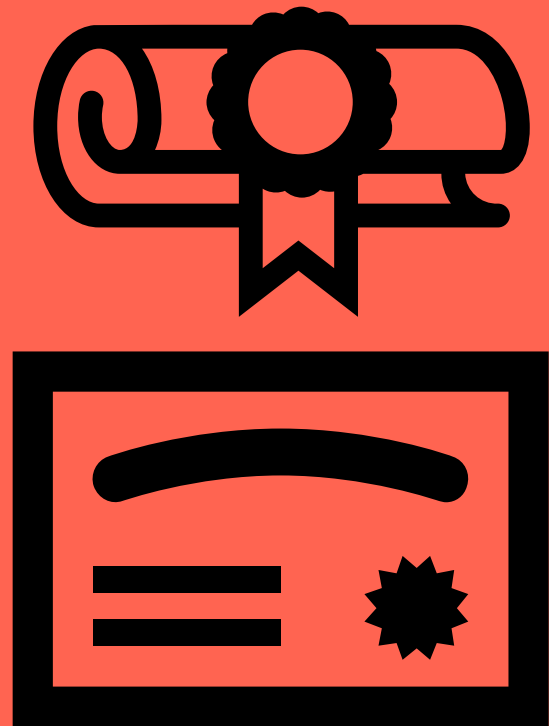
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+2 vs 2022 (91%)



Research is from Applicant pulse survey
2,185 respondents
2023 Applicants filtered to UK only



**86% of applicants said
it is likely they will get
the grades they need
to get onto their first
choice course**

Confidence

We asked:

What could make you feel more confident or ready for University?

- **79%** said visiting (the uni/college)
- **54%** said speaking to current students (of the uni/college)
- **51%** said more information (from the uni/college)

Influences

We asked:

Which of the following are, or will be, most important to you when deciding on your firm and insurance choices?

- **58%** said a course with content that is perfectly suited to me
- **40%** said universities/colleges with high graduate employment rates
- **39%** said positive reviews from students

Which of the following, if any, will you do in future to help you decide which universities to choose as your firm or insurance choices?



76% of applicants said they would visit the university / college.
↑ +11 (65% in Feb 22)



63% of applicants said they would do more research into the course or university/college.

What does this mean for providers?



Invite applicants to come back

Open days are becoming more important, not just for potential applicants. Get them through the door so that they make that personal connection to you.



Provide lots of detail

Make sure your website is up to date about your courses, module content and other detail that helps them to really get a sense of what you are offering including practical information about the university and local area.

Online resources are the most important to applicants.

The UCAS Hub, Online reviews of universities by other students and the UCAS Search Tool are among the most important resources to applicants when deciding where to apply to as well as University open days and virtual events.

Both reasons were also the top two reasons given in 2022.

Q: When deciding which universities and colleges to apply to, how important were the following resources?
UCAS New Applicant Survey 2023 - based on factors rated either 'extremely important' or 'important'

What should universities or colleges do next to encourage you to choose them as your firm choice?

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"Be supportive and welcoming. Understanding the pressure students are under"

"Offer information via emails about accommodation, student unions, benefits of the uni, more open days, information on financial support, more information on accommodation"

"Definitely post-offer holder events and having good communication (for example, lots of emails which may answer basic questions, offers, accommodation information etc"

"Clearly outline financial, mental and academic support available. A typical day of a student on the same course, whilst at the Uni, to provide a more realistic view of what it is like at the Uni such as how to get there, what lectures look like etc."

"Engage with applicants, provide lots of information about the program and about the selection process"

"Provide a lot of detail about their course so I know it suits my interests, ensure their current students are happy with the service they are being provided and have affordable accommodation options."

"I would say quick response times, and reach out and show future students why it would be a benefit to choose their university via emails."

"Give more clear and straightforward information on the strong points and what makes them different from other universities. What I can specialise in and what skills will I develop best by studying with them."

"Highlight how they will support students with additional needs"

Quick wins checklist:

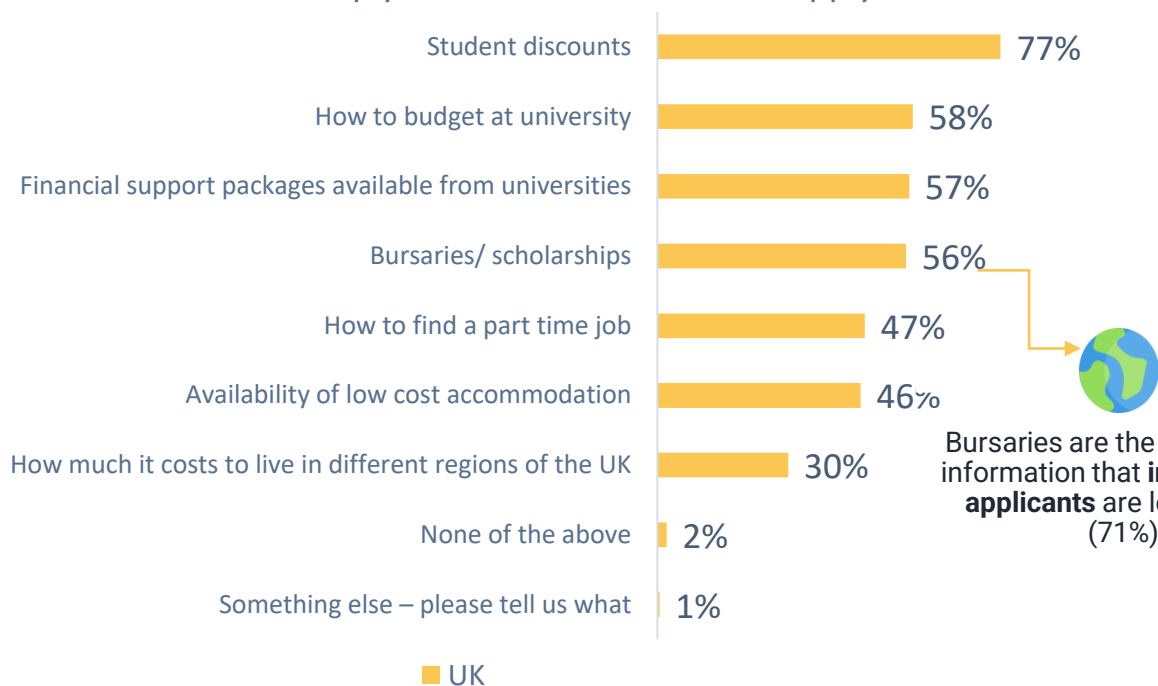
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- Use your social media platforms or website to display **student reviews** and make it easy to **speak to your current students**. Put your Student Ambassadors to work.
- Invite applicants back to you if you can. An **open day** may really influence decision making.
- Give lots of **detail of your course content and modules**. Personalise comms to applicants about module content. This has been consistently important for applicants this cycle – make sure your website gives enough detail for existing and potential applicants.



Applicants are looking for practical tips on how to live day to day at university

Q29: Thinking about the cost of living increase, what information would help you? Please select all that apply



"I wish all unis gave us separate information on exactly what help we can get"

"how do current students cope with the increase of living crisis?"

"how can students living at home budget their travel expense?"



Quick wins checklist:

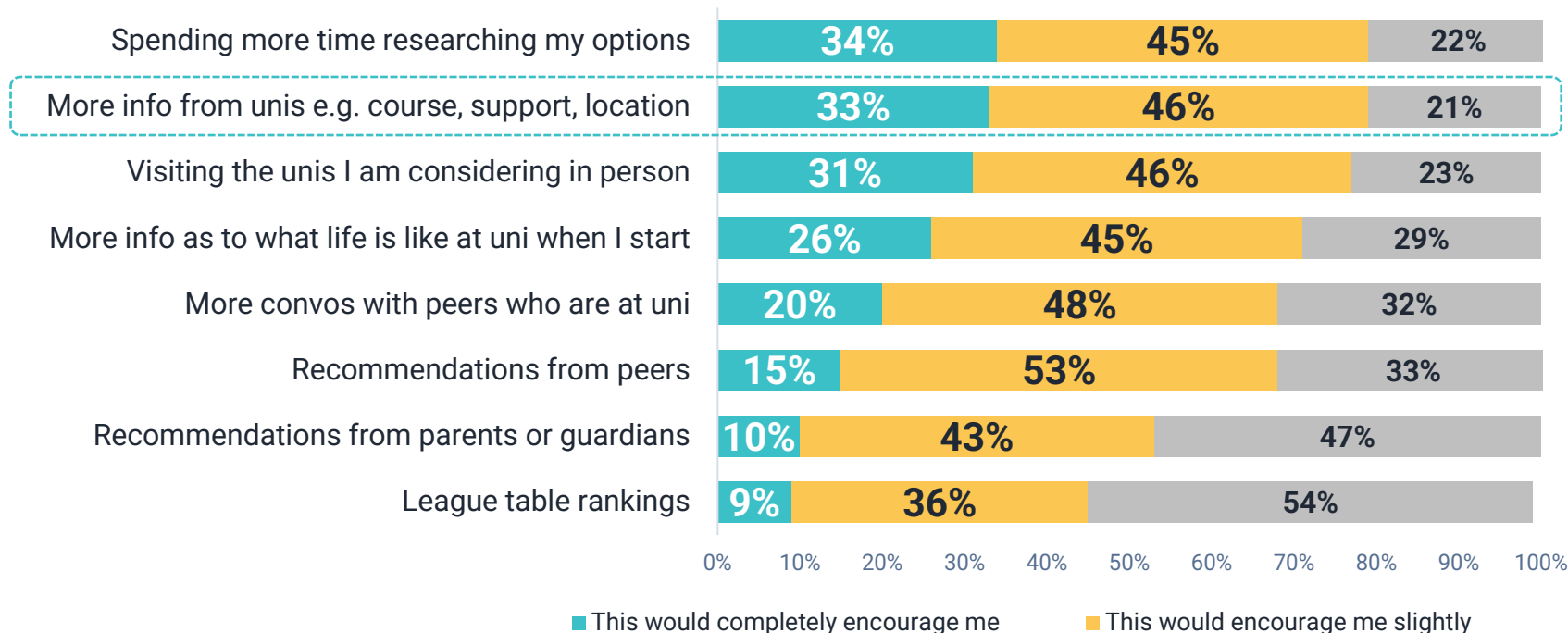
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- **Host open days** to address any concerns or nervousness for applicants and offer holders.
- Get your **student ambassadors** talking.
- Highlight your **support offer**- financial, pastoral, academic as these are key to some students.
- Contact your applicants and offer holders with **supportive messages** and encourage an open dialogue.



Receiving more info from unis would encourage people to submit their application

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Quick wins checklist:

UCAS

There's still an opportunity to convert late applicants:

- **Keep prospective applicants informed** about the courses and support you have available - specifically financial supports.
- Consider sharing any information you have about **open days/virtual open** days to help prospective applicants make an informed choice, for those who felt they needed more time.
- Speak to your UCAS Customer Manager about options for supporting late conversion activity, through **UCAS' media channels**.



If you would like to hear more about the 2023 Student Mindset

You can view this [short video](#) and the [whole presentation](#) giving an overview of the data as well as insight about where applicants are at in their decision-making process and what could change those decisions.

Journey to a Million

UCAS projects that by the end of the decade, we could see up to a million students apply for higher education (HE) across the full range of Level 4 and above opportunities. This is a result of a growing population looking to progress through education and training.

'Journey to a Million'

2030 1,000,000 | +40,000

2029 960,000 | +40,000

2028 920,000 | +30,000

2027 890,000 | +30,000

2026 860,000 | +35,000

50 key thinkers have contributed to the debate, and over the next three months will tackle key themes such as:

- How do we continue to widen participation?
- What are the answers to the imbalance of supply and demand?
- How do we support students in a more competitive environment?
- How do we promote the full range of choices to students?
- What is the future student experience?

Join the conversation: ucas.com/j2am



3 Big Lessons from February 2023

UCAS

(If you only read one slide, make it this one.)

Confidence is sky-high.

But grounded info will help convert.

Academically, the next couple of years are looking bright, positive, and confident.

With **93%** of applicants expecting to get into university and **86%** expecting to achieve their first-choice grades; it might seem like half the job is already done.

But getting them to pick **you** isn't a sure thing.

- **79%** still want to visit campus
- **54%** still want to speak to current students
- **51%** still want more information from you

Getting your applicants back for a follow-up Open Day could address all of these. Invite them to return and give your Student Ambassadors the microphone.

The old student support isn't good enough.

This time it's personal.

More support! is the call of the 23/24 student.

Or perhaps there's plenty of support, but they want more specifics. What's available? How much do I get?

They want your **financial, mental health, accommodation**, and **academic** resources clearly explained. They want to be welcomed and have their pressures understood.

They want **quick responses** to questions, **regular** dialogue, and **crystal-clear** instructions.

Make it easy for them to acknowledge what makes you different and show that you (truly) care about their wellbeing. It's still a big, scary, life-defining decision to choose a university. You can make it a little easier.

Cost of Living is the chief concern.

See them, soothe them, support them.

Finance is now front of mind for most students.

- **77%** want to know about student discounts
- **58%** want budgeting advice tailored to uni
- **57%** want to know about financial packages
- **56%** want to hear about bursaries & scholarships

And this year we're going to see more students in part-time employment than ever, so make sure you've got the resources to support this (both in helping them find those jobs and in supporting this extra responsibility around their studies.)

(Chapter 1 of our new Student Lifestyle Report is all about how the Cost of Living is affecting students. Sign up to receive a copy [here](#).)

01.

02.

03.

More information, more often, more clearly.

As ever, knowledge is power when it comes to decision making.

But this year it's less about the academic and employment prospects (although these are still key differentiators) and more about the everyday challenges. Students want to know how they're going to be supported – across every aspect of their experience – and they want you to be active and forthcoming with that information.

They've never had more choice, but they've also never had more questions. Being able to answer any objections before they arise (and showing that your support services reflect the times) is going to be what makes you a contender for 23/24 applicants.

We'll see you again next month.

Get in touch

For further information and insights contact your UCAS Customer Manager or email us at: educationservices@ucas.ac.uk