



Upper Sixths and Higher Education 2019 Survey

SEPTEMBER 2019

HMC/GSA Universities Committee

Authored by **Emma Mitchell & Chris Ramsey**

Foreword by **Nick Hillman**



Published in September 2019 by Emma Mitchell, EdD student at the Institute of Education, University College London.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-5272-4802-1

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Foreword	2
The readiness is all.....	4
Executive summary.....	8
Introduction.....	10
Methodology	16
1 Demographics	18
2 Intentions.....	22
3 Expectations and attitudes.....	27
4 Sources of information.....	33
Conclusions and observations.....	38
Recommendations.....	40
References.....	43

Acknowledgements

Mike Buchanan, HMC

Vivienne Durham, GSA

Nick Hillman, HEPI

Will McAdam, QMUL

Nicola Pensiero, UCL

Michael Reiss, UCL

Upper sixth students and tutors, Whitgift School

All participating students and schools

Foreword

By Nick Hillman

Life is a gradual journey. Education should be too. Yet as the former HMC headteacher and current vice-chancellor Anthony Seldon regularly points out, we erroneously assume something magical happens to young people in the brief period between leaving school and starting university.

We treat school pupils more like children than adults – as does the law – but we tend to assume brand new undergraduates are fully-fledged adults. The shift is reminiscent of how birds are said to teach their young to fly by pushing them out of their nests. In fact, this is quite rare for birds know there are more effective routes to independence.

Similarly, entering university should not resemble a cliff edge, where your only options are to take flight or fall off. At its best, higher education should provide a ‘managed transition to adulthood’, in the words of the former Minister for Universities David Willetts. We need to help people rather than leave them to flail. This report helps explain how to do that better.

It focuses on independent school pupils, who generally receive an excellent all-round education. This does not guarantee a smooth transition to university. Challenges arise when prior expectations are out of sync with the student experience and the survey results suggest university teaching, in particular, may be different to expected.

Yet sometimes the transition may be easier for HMC and GSA pupils than others, as universities and independent schools have much in common. For example, the breadth of extra-curricular activities at independent schools can be a good match for the options at university and the UK’s residential model of higher education means any new student who has previously been a boarder may face a smaller shift in lifestyle than others.

As a teacher in an HMC school back in the mid-1990s, I ran a pre-university course for sixth-formers. The biggest difficulty was getting hold of useful information. That is not

the problem now. If I were running the course today, my challenge would be deciding which information to share. This report suggests managing finances could be a good starting point.

Academics often say higher education is a higher calling, delivering more than just skills for the labour market. I agree, but this report rightly recognises most students who pass through university do it primarily because they want a secure and rewarding job. At the least, it helps explain policymakers' obsession with employment outcome data.

So, I welcome this report on how we can better support people on track for university. Its goal of ensuring the best fit between applicants and places is especially important at the moment, when a drop in the number of school leavers means universities are competing more and seeking to disrupt applicants' choices through more unconditional offers and other incentives.

Finally, given the recent labelling of students as 'snowflakes', it is worth noting that providing additional support for people on the cusp of higher education is not mollycoddling. The transition from the final year of school to the first year of university is one of life's major turning points. There is nothing weak about new students using any support on offer to help light their way.

Nick Hillman



Nick Hillman is Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI).

The readiness is all

By Chris Ramsey

Transition to university has rightly become a much more important subject for discussion in recent years. A number of factors during the last decade have, I think, made this a more complex experience. Hugely increased numbers at university mean more students feel more anonymous – though of course it's also true that students have always felt anonymous, sometimes tragically so, when starting this new life; social pressures have risen (technology for example both facilitates and encourages solitary pursuits, as well as feeding the feeling of urgency in a challenging world); and finally the rise in public exam accountability in schools, which has meant school learning has been more structured, more a matter of unlocking the codes to exams, and codes which candidates have the right to demand are provided. These factors all make transition to university learning environments harder. To all of that we can add the generation gaps which education inevitably produces – staff who expect attitudes they themselves had.

The wonder is that the dropout rate (6.2% in latest figures) isn't higher, though we should all worry that HEPI research continues to tell us that something like a third of students say they would choose another course or university if they had their time again¹.

So, it was excellent that Unite Students and HEPI produced an authoritative study of applicant expectations in 2017. In 2016, HMC and GSA had also contributed in a more modest way to the debate with our 2016 survey of school leavers. We found then that:

- Most students (83%) felt well or very well prepared, though only 15% felt 'very well' prepared.
- They were looking forward to their work and didn't hugely care about facilities... with the exception of Wi-Fi!

¹ Jonathan Neves and Nick Hillman, '2018 Student Academic Experience Survey' (HEPI & Advance HE, 7 June 2018), <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/06/07/2018-student-academic-experience-survey/>.

-
- They had concerns about finance, and felt least well informed about the first few days.
 - As many feared Freshers Week as were excited by it.
 - They looked forward to independent work, but also feared lack of guidance. My conclusion was that too often they didn't actually know what independent work is. This is a crucial area in which we can all provide better advice to young people.

Putting that together with undergraduates' views, we concluded that:

- Teaching at school continued to be rated more highly than teaching at university for all school types and all undergraduate years².
- Pastoral support was also rated much more highly at school, except at post 1992 universities, and general support and wellbeing were much more highly praised at small, specialist institutions³.

This report is a more in-depth study, carried out under professional guidance and as part of the EdD programme at UCL. We are hugely grateful to all those who advised on the survey, and above all to those students who took the time to participate.

We have found some interesting – and perhaps to some unexpected – aspects to this cohort of young students. Nearly a quarter (22.5%) are in some way disabled. Nearly 10% are from POLAR quintiles 1 or 2. In other words, this is not a middle-class elite. 5% – one in twenty – are not confident they have chosen well, yet more (something like 6.2%) will drop out: will those 'extra' students have been disillusioned by not having expectations met... or by having had false expectations?

Alongside this research, the ISC carries out professional and authoritative research into applications and destinations. UCAS, too, through its annual report⁴, gives sector-wide

² HMC, 'Independent Schools Provide Best Teaching & Learning Experience, Say Students', *HMC* (blog), 5 October 2011, <https://www.hmc.org.uk/blog/independent-schools-provide-best-teaching-learning-experience-say-students/>.

³ HMC.

⁴ UCAS, *2018 End of Cycle Report* (England and Wales: UCAS, 2018), <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2018-end-cycle-report>.

data as to where these students go. The independent sector provides a (perhaps disappointingly) traditionally-minded cohort, overwhelmingly destined for ‘traditional’ courses at ‘top’ universities. But our conclusions are valid for all students. Their expectations need to be understood not just by the high-profile part of the higher education sector to which many independently-educated young people progress, but by the whole sector and for all entrants.

This report shows that they are, as we found in 2016, both excited and nervous. The social aspect of university is a key concern for them, and personal activities, such as Open Days, are crucial to them to unlocking the ‘human face’ of their new home. Lurking behind some of these points is the importance for universities of finding ways of being human and approachable, not monolithic and bureaucratic.

We hope that our recommendations are helpful, and we end with a plea to both schools and universities to engage more. We know that this is happening increasingly, and if we can encourage activities which get both secondary and tertiary sectors working together, that must be for the good of all.

Then there are some easy wins.

We think it’s crucial first of all that schools make clear what independent learning actually is, and help students get used to it. It’s not just doing your homework! Schools should do more investigation work and unexamined work, and universities could help them. We should make sure they know that spoon-feeding and model answers are out, but that support and teamwork are in. There are some fine examples of best practice here, with universities such as Goldsmith’s helping Colfe’s School with Year 12 curriculum and assessment⁵, and we believe more universities could help mentor Extended Projects or provide even more opportunities for independent study. Others could team up to help all students prepare for university, as Norwich School and the University of East Anglia do, in the Norfolk Summer School⁶.

⁵ UCAS, ‘Goldsmiths Colfe’s Interim Examination (GCiE)’, UCAS Qualification Information Profiles, 14 June 2018, <https://qips.ucas.com/eip/goldsmiths-colfes-interim-examination-gcie>.

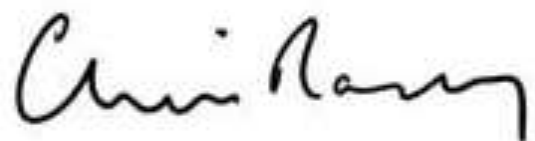
⁶ Norfolk Summer School, ‘Norfolk Summer School’, 2019, <https://www.norfolksummerschool.co.uk>.

Second, we must make sure students know where to go for help even if they don't think they'll need it. We in schools should encourage active membership of Student Unions and teach Mental Health First Aid. It is important for them not just how to cope individually, but what to do if sharing a house with a friend who struggles with mental health issues – what will help and when to ask for professional guidance, as well as where to find the latter.

And finally, we all need to be up-front about what university is for. Our belief is that recent stress on university as a qualification for employment has done significant harm to transition, because it has depicted Higher Education as a transaction, and imposed A-Level-like rules – learning for the test, asking how to answer the question, finding the formula for success - which university staff in the most high-tariff universities do not believe in, and which indeed fail to recognise the gear-change students should be navigating.

Instead, we should try to agree on some philosophical imperatives. University at its best gives students a chance to think about and develop values and your attitudes, to test and refine their world view in studies, conversations, journalism, societies and debate.

If we can help students to recognise more clearly what will be different, and how we will help them, and make it clear we want them to be different learners and people, we will continue to improve transition. As Hamlet said, the readiness is all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Roney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Executive summary

Upper Sixths and Higher Education is the latest contribution by the HMC/GSA Universities Committee to solving the university transition quandary: how to close the gap between student expectations and experience.

Amidst a growing collection of research into the expectations of school leavers, this survey (conducted when university offers had been received in 2019) takes a closer look at the independent sector. What are our students' intentions? What do they expect from the university experience? And where do these expectations come from? Armed with the answers, we may have the key to reducing dropout rates and future regret over university and course choices.

This report shows that upper sixths at HMC and GSA schools are diverse, both in characteristics and need. School leavers apply to universities all over the UK (and beyond) and for courses in all sorts of subjects, and generally feel upbeat about the process so far. No wonder – schools are providing a rich higher education curriculum and universities are in regular contact. Most choose the university route for the 'right' reasons – subject interest and career progression – and make their final decisions based on rankings, advice from parents, location and facilities (rather than nightlife!).

But there is more we could be doing. Our students may be so occupied with exam preparation that they are oblivious to the wealth of educational and cultural opportunities surrounding them, both in and outside school. Half either fail to attend or recall careers talks and events and may consequently lack the aspirations or information needed to make an individual choice. While excited, some are anxious about starting university (girls more so than boys) and we would do well to bear in mind the effects of the rejection faced by one in three applicants.

Schools should consider the changes that will follow in living arrangements, peer activities, budgeting and coping emotionally as well as in academic study when planning provision. With families (and colleagues) often unfamiliar with today's processes, it is important to take household income and qualifications, first language,

and educational needs into account. This report suggests interventions against which evaluations can be performed.

Universities too have a role to play. This report recommends that communications and outreach efforts focus more on engagement to support academic preparation than to urge acceptance of offers. Having established the high rates of participation in open days and their relative importance, we urge that any portrayal of the student lifestyle reflects the day-to-day requirements of being an undergraduate. Being clearer about the transitions during university induction and between years of study could pre-empt and reduce students' misunderstanding, distress and failure in the longer term.

We conclude with a take-home plea for school leaders and higher education policymakers.

If nearby schools and universities were to collaborate on a systematic basis, we might see the beginnings of a reduction of the burden placed on school leavers as they face up to the challenges of the undergraduate reality. Rather than changing the inherent aims and nature of the secondary and higher education sectors altogether, closing the gap between expectations and experience is surely the less arduous route to promote student satisfaction and academic success in the years ahead.



Emma Mitchell conducted this survey on behalf of the HMC/GSA Universities Committee. She is Head of Higher Education at Whitgift School (HMC) and a doctoral student at the UCL Institute of Education.



Chris Ramsey conducted the 2016 *Survey of U6 Students* and co-authored this report. He is Co-Chair of the HMC/GSA Universities Committee and Headmaster of Whitgift School.

Introduction

Experience versus expectations

Research exploring the lived experience of undergraduates is commonplace. The National Student Survey (Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Office for Students) and the Student Academic Experience Survey (AdvanceHE and HEPI) present year-on-year comparisons of student opinions of higher education.

However, not all undergraduates have a uniformly positive experience. Students face challenges related to practicalities, academic pressures, lifestyle and mental health. While this phenomenon is not entirely preventable, dropout rates and the failure to complete degrees may be reduced if applicants had more accurate expectations of university. As education professionals, we have a responsibility to prepare our school leavers for the transition and years ahead, bearing in mind that today's academic and social experiences – and expectations – differ from those we ourselves faced as undergraduates. This survey reveals a contemporary snapshot of student expectations that is nationally representative across the independent sector.

The joint Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) and Girls' Schools Association (GSA) surveys match the equivalent nationally representative upper sixth expectations projects (HEPI and Unite Students) in achieving 2000+ participants. This survey also creates an opportunity for follow-up with the same individuals, a distinguishing feature of this research project. We will be able to track the same students once at university to explore their progress and outcomes. This design closes a gap in the research that is generally split between the expectations of school students and the experience of undergraduates by comparing the two like-for-like.

Looking back

Previous surveys with the specific aim of exploring school leavers' prior expectations of university have taken place in recent years, but the projects have been disparate in timings, samples, aims and methods. The findings of seven such surveys over the last 15 years are summarised here.

Table 1 Existing research of school leavers' expectations

Research organization	Data collection	Respondents (total)
Warwick Institute for Employment Research (<i>Futuretrack</i>) ⁷	2006	All UCAS applicants (130 000)
The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills ⁸	2008	Upper sixths at 18 schools (1400)
Jones et al. ⁹	2013 (and 2006)	Lower sixths (1494)
Sodexo and Times Higher Education (<i>University Lifestyle</i>) ¹⁰	2013	YouthSight panel (2000)
Callender and Mason ¹¹	2015 (and 2002)	Upper sixths (2455)
HMC/GSA Universities Committee ¹²	2016	Upper sixths at HMC and GSA schools (2132)
HEPI and Unite Students (<i>Reality Check</i>) ¹³	2017	YouthSight panel (2021)

Collectively these projects conclude that course choice and university reputation are significant factors in students' institution choices. Interest in and enjoyment of the subject are the biggest motivators in course choice. Indeed, most choose university over other post-18 routes to develop their academic specialism. While students are prepared to be more independent in their work, most expect some aspects of school-based pedagogy to continue at university, such as personal verbal feedback, classroom lessons and relationship building with tutors. These expectations may not be fulfilled. Perhaps of more concern is that expectations of one-to-one teaching and structured

⁷ Kate Purcell et al., 'Futuretrack 2006 Stage 1 Summary' (Warwick Institute for Employment Research: HECSU, 2008), <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/findings/stage1/>.

⁸ Máiréad Dunne, Russell King, and Jill Ahrens, 'Applying to Higher Education: Comparisons of Independent and State Schools', *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 9 (21 October 2014): 1649–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.801433>.

⁹ Harriet Jones et al., 'Perceptions of University Assessment and Feedback among Post-16 School Pupils', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 42, no. 8 (17 November 2017): 1233–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1259388>.

¹⁰ Sodexo and Times Higher Education, 'The Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey 2014' (London: Sodexo, 2014), <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/sodexo-times-higher-education-university-lifestyle-survey-2014-results/2011981.article>.

¹¹ Claire Callender and Geoff Mason, 'Does Student Loan Debt Deter Higher Education Participation? New Evidence from England', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science; Thousand Oaks* 671, no. 1 (May 2017): 20–48, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1177/0002716217696041>.

¹² Chris Ramsey, 'Survey of U6 Students' (HMC/GSA Universities Committee, September 2016).

¹³ HEPI and Unite Students, 'Reality Check: A Report on University Applicants' Attitudes and Perceptions' (UK: Unite Students, 2017).

group work are inaccurate for the majority and will not be representative of most teaching and learning hours.

These projects discuss students' perceptions of the worth of university. They recognise the associated costs and hope to develop personally as well as academically. However, there is a risk (particularly among middle-class and upper-class students) that some assume an improved position in the job market and a higher salary will be an automatic progression from university careers services. Students walk a tightrope between the excitement of meeting new people away from home and the anxieties associated with workload and budgeting.

In terms of university readiness and information gathering, visiting the institution is often reported as the most helpful resource, although peer recommendations can also sway decisions. The independent sector has a reputation for providing a high-quality curricular approach to higher education preparation. But some whole-cohort approaches are reliant on students possessing the traditional cultural capital to engage and understand the information provided. Making better use of diverse school alumni may counteract this risk of alienation. Universities too may be able to offer support in supporting school leavers to have a clearer understanding of the induction process.

Why independent schools?

More than one in seven (16%) school students aged 17+ attends an independent school¹⁴. Students from independent schools are more likely to go to university than those from the state sector, with over-representation in the Russell Group¹⁵. However, contrasting data¹⁶ indicates that the overall proportion of UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants from independent schools is just one in ten (10.2%). It is beyond the scope of this project to resolve this contradiction. Regardless, existing

¹⁴ ISC, 'ISC Census and Annual Report 2019' (London: Independent Schools Council, 2019), <https://www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census/>.

¹⁵ Rebecca Montacute and Carl Cullinane, 'Access to Advantage: The Influence of Schools and Place on Admissions to Top Universities' (London: The Sutton Trust, December 2018).

¹⁶ See Table A in HESA, 'Widening Participation: UK Performance Indicators 2017/18', Higher Education Statistics Agency, 7 February 2019, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-02-2019/widening-participation-summary>.

studies weighting sample data to match oft-cited¹⁷ figure of 7% in private education risk diluting the impact of participants from the independent sector.

We must be wary of some concerning differences between independent and maintained school students at university. While independent school leavers have better raw outcomes at university¹⁸, the relative picture is less clear. When background characteristics and prior attainment are controlled, students from independent schools are slightly more likely to drop out and less likely to complete their degree than those from non-selective maintained sector schools¹⁹. The relatively small number with outcomes from AAB to CCC at A Level achieve a lower rate (by 3%) of good degree classifications (albeit with no gap at AAA+)²⁰. While we can speculate that these figures indicate the success of the independent sector in helping students to maximise school attainment, no projects in the academic literature have explored further. The HMC/GSA Universities Committee surveys are unique in focusing on the independent sector.



¹⁷ e.g. The Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission, 'Elitist Britain 2019' (London, 25 June 2019), <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/elitist-britain-2019/>.

¹⁸ Alan Smithers, 'Social Disadvantage and Widening Access to Universities' (Centre for Education and Employment Research: University of Buckingham, November 2015).

¹⁹ Claire Crawford, 'The Link between Secondary School Characteristics and University Participation and Outcomes' (DfE, 6 June 2014), <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7235>.

²⁰ Higher Education Funding Council for England, 'Differences in Degree Outcomes: Key Findings' (HEFCE, March 2014), https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19811/1/HEFCE2014_03.pdf.

Why now?

The previous HMC/GSA Universities Committee survey was conducted in 2016. Since then, the 2019 upper sixth cohort will have noticed many changes in the higher education landscape: the introduction of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), an expansion of the availability of university places during a decline in the population of UK 18-year-olds, the government's commissioning of the Augar Review, ongoing debates on elite university admission and Widening Participation, and media spotlights on 'no platforming', 'initiation rites' and degree classifications. These changes are likely to affect students' expectations of university. The cohort in this study is part of the first increase in higher education applications in 3 years – a total of 561 420 with 453 840 from the UK²¹. It is 2 years since the publication of the HEPI and Unite Students *Reality Check* report, for which the next release is expected in the autumn of 2019. The timing of this HMC/GSA research publication will enable a comparison between the independent and maintained sectors.



²¹ UCAS Press Office, 'First Rise in University Applications for Three Years', UCAS, 7 February 2019, <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/first-rise-university-applications-three-years>.

Aims

To establish the characteristics of school leavers at UK independent schools

While there are some characteristics that typify our students, they are not homogenous. If we are to propose interventions to support development of expectations and preparations, we should explore the types of need before suggesting solutions.

To explore expectations of the academic experience and student life at university

What do our students already know? And have they got the right idea? This survey looks at what they expect from the academic experience and student life at university as an update for future comparisons and to support higher education curriculum decisions for future cohorts.

To update our understanding of students' sources of information

A cohort-wide curricular approach to informing students about university is oft-cited as a highlight of independent sector provision. But do we always get this right? And how engaged are our students? Do our students feel adequately prepared for the changes involved in education transition?



Methodology

Overview

The research methodology comprised an online survey that took an average of 14 minutes to complete. The survey was fielded between 25th March and 31st May 2019. The total number of respondents was 4796, representing 10.8% of the 44 560 upper sixth students in ISC schools. Of these, 2815 completed the questionnaire, giving a refined response rate of 6.3%. Following the weighting procedure described below and excluding missing data within questions, each of the analyses is based on a different response base (as stated).

Questionnaire

With *Reality Check* providing a recent nationally representative picture of higher education expectations, this was considered the best model for this equivalent study in the independent sector. Permission was granted to use these questions as the basis of the survey from Nick Hillman, Director of HEPI, and a joint commissioner of the *Reality Check* study. These were cut and edited to accommodate inclusions from the 2016 HMC/GSA survey and other timely items of interest.

The questionnaire was circulated on the *Opinio*²² website following a full ethical approval process. An information letter and link were sent in advance to headteachers via email bulletins with additional follow-up on social media and through professional contacts. Not all responses were required. It was voluntary for respondents to provide their email address as permission for future contact during the follow-up in Year 1 or 2 of university as part of the longitudinal research design; 1025 did so.

Weighting procedure

Exploratory analyses were conducted to compare the sample with the available characteristics of the independent schools upper sixth population from the

²² opinio.ucl.ac.uk

Independent Schools Council census 2019²³. These characteristics included gender, whether the school was single-sex or coeducational, school region, nationality, ethnicity and disability. Of these, gender, school type and school region deviated most from the expected population. The data was weighted accordingly.

Table 2 Sample characteristics

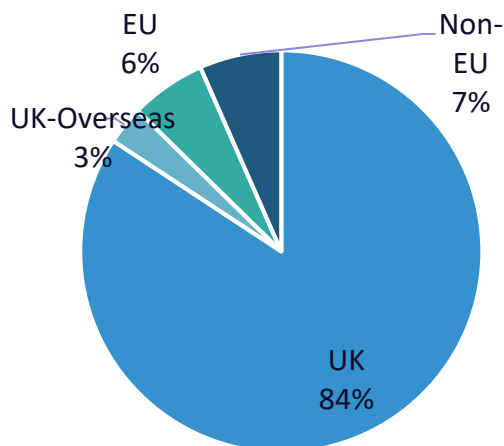
Characteristic	Respondent selection	Respondents to survey (%)	ISC population (%)	Weighted sample (%)
Gender	Male	45.7	50.9	51.8
	Female	52.8	49.1	47.4
	Other (trans male, trans female, queer or different identity)	1.5	Not reported	0.8
School type	Coeducational	65	75.3	73.6
	Single-sex	35	24.7	26.4
School region	South East	43.1	22	21.3
	London	9.3	19	15.3
	North West	3.8	7	7.4
	East of England	2.8	12	13.0
	West Midlands	11.0	7	8.0
	Scotland	3.3	5	5.9
	South West	9.1	14	15.8
	Yorkshire and the Humber	3.9	5	5.5
	East Midlands	6.6	5	5.9
	Wales	2.2	1	1.1
	North East	1.7	1	0.9
	Northern Ireland	0.0	0	0.0
	Isle of Man	0.3	0	0.0
	Channel Islands	0.9	0	0.0
Other	2.1	0	0.0	

²³ ISC, 'ISC Census and Annual Report 2019'.

1 Demographics

Age, nationality, language, ethnicity and disability

After weighting the data by gender, school type and school region, the mean age of respondents is 17.7 with a median of 18, in line with the school leaving population.



Four in five (84.3%) self-report as UK nationals, slightly below the ISC value (89.7%). One in seven (14.7%) speak English as an additional language, almost matching the national figure (17%) in secondary education²⁴. Just three in five (62.5%) state that they are eligible for UCAS fee code 02, which gives access to student finance services, but this could signal intent to access a student loan.

Figure 1 *Nationalities of the sample*
Base 2179

The ethnicities of the sample (67.3% white British) are a good overall match to the ISC population (66.2%) and more diverse than the UK population²⁵.

Table 3 *Ethnicities of the sample*

Ethnicity	Frequency	Ethnicity	Frequency
White British	1510	Asian Bangladeshi	9
White other	215	Asian Chinese	101
Mixed Caribbean	12	Asian other	29
Mixed African	18	Black African	22
Mixed Asian	56	Black Caribbean	7
Mixed other	30	Black other	0
Asian Indian	90	Arab	8
Asian Pakistani	26	Other	31

²⁴ EAL Nexus, 'EAL Learners in the UK', The Bell Foundation, 2017, <https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/school-leaders/eal-learners-in-uk>.

²⁵ Office for National Statistics, 'Population of England and Wales', GOV.UK, 1 August 2018, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest#by-ethnicity>.

Close to one in four (22.6%) respondents have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition, a higher proportion than the ISC population (15.7%) with special educational needs and disabilities. Most of the conditions reported are specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia or ADD/ADHD, or a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety disorder.

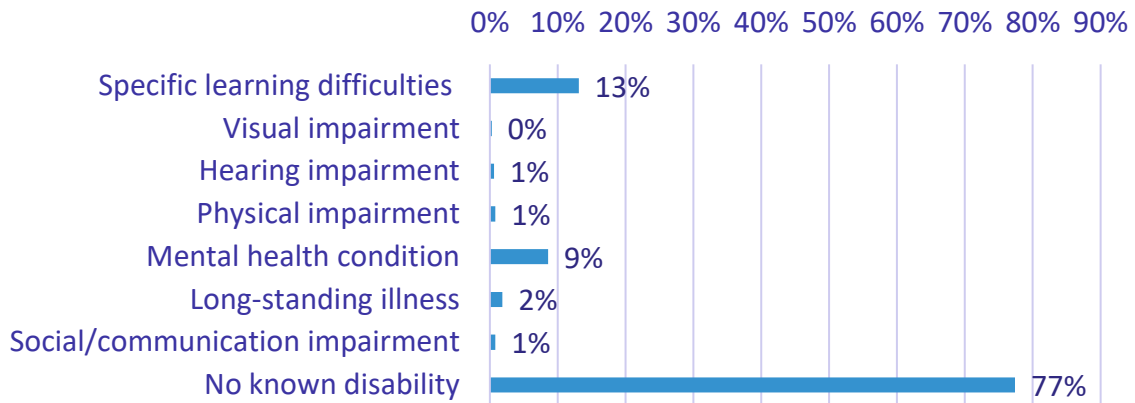


Figure 2 Disabilities, impairments and long-term health conditions of the sample
Base 2181

Curricula and qualifications

Respondents' sixth form curriculum choices are largely traditional routes in advance of higher education, with nine in ten (91.0%) studying A Levels. Almost all (92.4%) report having passed the full breadth of the English Baccalaureate at GCSE (or equivalent), which includes English language and literature, mathematics, sciences, geography and/or history and a language. One in seven (15.3%) achieved 10 or more A*/8/9 grades at GCSE, indicating the impressive academic calibre of the sample, with the median student achieving five top grades.

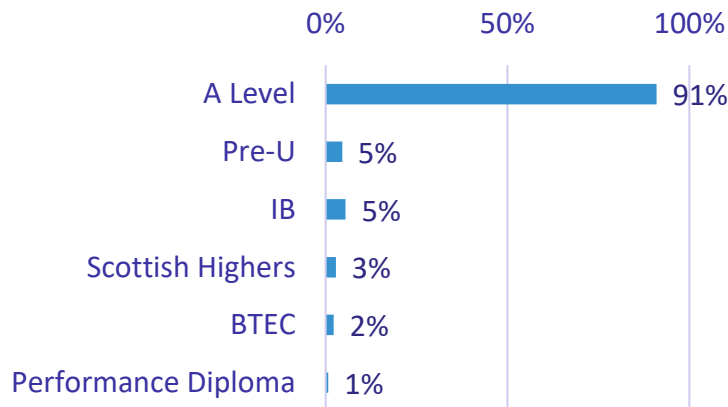
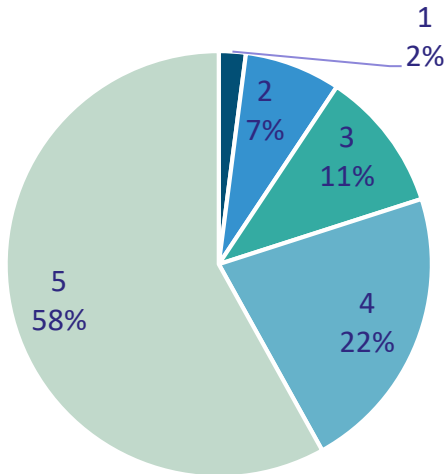


Figure 3 Curricula studied (an individual respondent may have selected more than one)
Base 2243

Socioeconomic status

Several items provided mechanisms to consider the socioeconomic status of respondents: POLAR4 quintile categorization, parental professional status, parental qualifications and cultural engagement.



The POLAR4 classification²⁶ divides household postcodes according to participation in higher education. Quintiles 1 (18.6% participation) and 2 (27.8%) are Widening Participation target areas. This cohort has a mean of 4.27 with most in the top quintile (64.4% participation). But lower quintiles are not unrepresented; almost one in ten (9.3%) of those surveyed lives in a quintile 1 or 2 community.

Figure 4 **POLAR 4 quintiles**
Base 93

Over half describe the chief income earner in their parental household as professional (49.8%) or higher managerial (32.7%), which includes the roles of doctor, lawyer, and chairman or managing director of a medium or large firm. As with household postcode, the sample is not homogenous. 5.1% have parents or guardians in semi-skilled or skilled manual positions and a further 1.5% report a household income from government benefits.

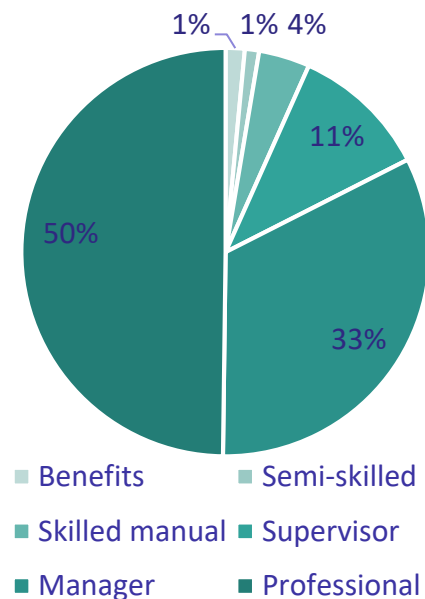
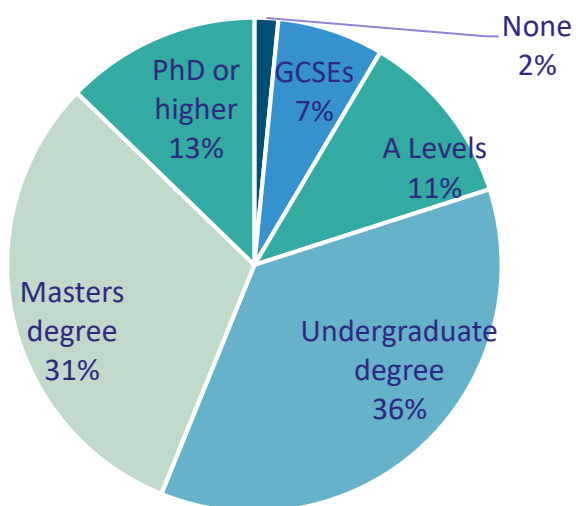


Figure 5 **Highest household employment status**
Base 2153

²⁶ HEFCE, 'POLAR4 Classification', October 2017, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/postcode-search/>.



The most common highest household qualification is an undergraduate degree (36.1%) and many exceed this. These qualifications surpass the UK labour market, in which 42% are graduates²⁷. However, one in five (20%) have no further than A Level qualifications.

Figure 6 Highest parent or guardian qualification
Base 2152

Respondents were asked about engagement with cultural capital development activities in the last 3 months. Over three in five (64%) had read a novel or book that was not required for their studies, over half (56%) had gone to the theatre or a museum, almost three-quarters (71%) had been to the cinema and half (50%) had been to an art gallery or musical performance. Less than half (44%) had played a musical instrument. With five options available, the mean total was 2.9.

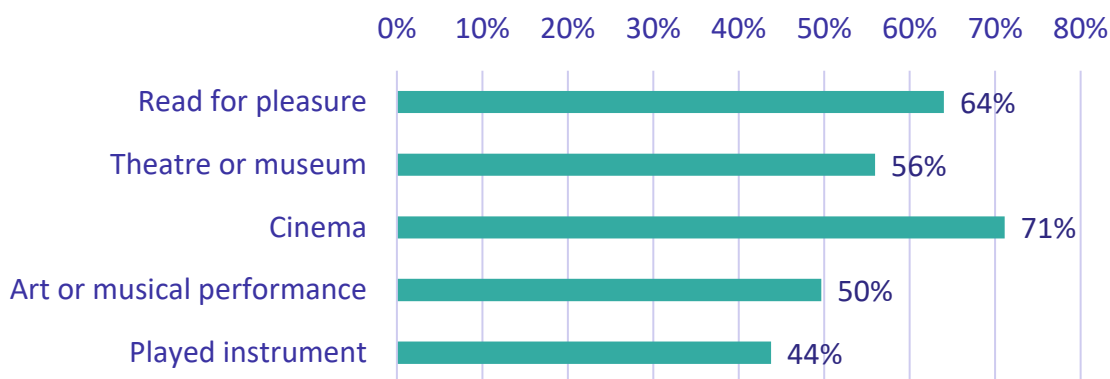


Figure 7 Recent cultural capital activity engagement
Base 2184

²⁷ Office for National Statistics, 'Graduates in the UK Labour Market' (ONS, 24 November 2017), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/graduatesintheuklabourmarket/2017>.

2 Intentions

Applications

Over four-fifths (84.4%) of respondents in the sample applied to at least one UK university, with 3.1% making only international applications. The remainder had not applied to university (12.5%), which could represent those making alternative applications for apprenticeships, employment or further education, taking gap years, or those who would prefer to apply post qualifications.



Offers

Respondents who applied to UK universities indicated which types of university they had selected as their firm choice and their insurance choice. Almost one in ten (9.2%) aspire to meet offers from Oxford or Cambridge; few relegate these offers to the insurance choice. A further 70.9% have accepted an offer from another Russell Group university. An additional 18.3% have accepted offers from other Office for Students funded universities and 1.4% have made a private university their firm choice. The ISC typically sees just over half (54%) continue to a Russell Group university and 5% study outside of the UK. The variation could indicate this sample's bias in favour of elite higher education, or that some disappointment was inevitable on results day.



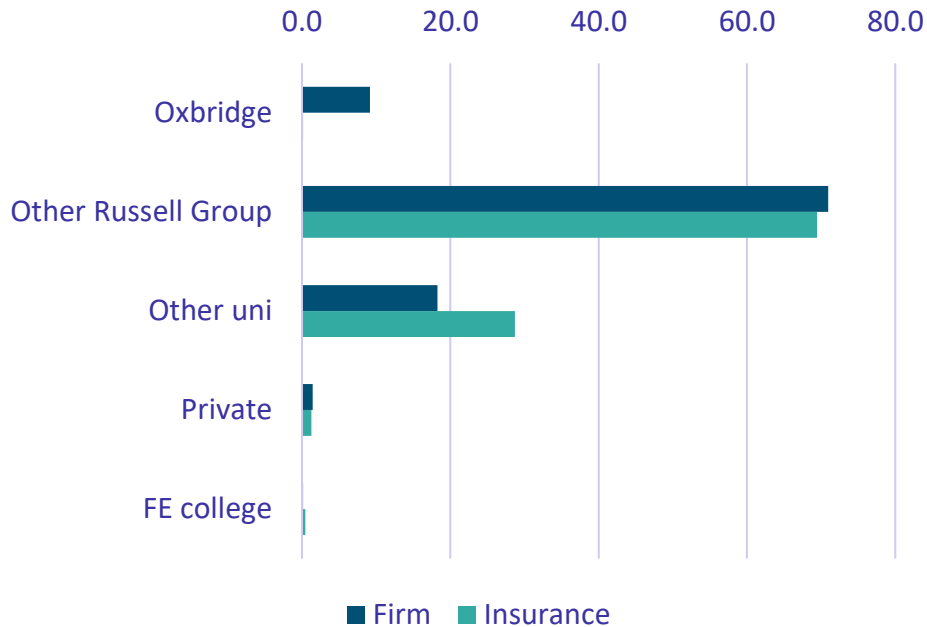


Figure 8 Firm and insurance choices for UK applications
Base: Firm (1874); Insurance (1835)

Not all receive offers from their university applications. Almost two in five (18.0%) experienced rejection from Oxford or Cambridge, one-third (29.1%) from other Russell Group universities and one in ten (10.4%) from a non-Russell Group university.

The national prevalence of unconditional (or conditional unconditional) university offers is reflected with almost one-third (30.4%) having received at least one. This is, however, lower than the UK average (38%) for the same cycle²⁸, perhaps because university choices were more competitive or due to receiving fewer contextual offers.

30%
Hold unconditional offers

²⁸ UCAS, 'Unconditional Offers - an Update for 2019', July 2019, <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/update-unconditional-offer-making-2019>.

Regions and subjects

The most popular locations for firm choice universities are London (14.1%), the South West (15.8%) and the North East (13.2%). Although applications to Northern Ireland appear to be negligible, over half of the respondents from Northern Irish schools apply to universities in the same region.

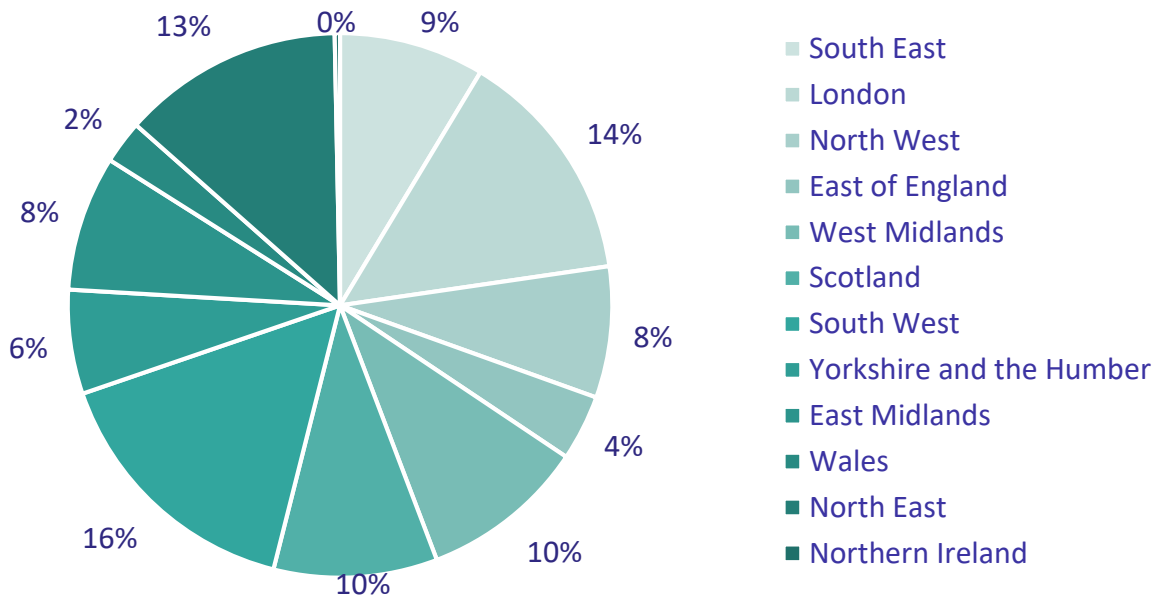


Figure 9 Firm choice UK university regions
Base 1883

There is a good spread of intentions across STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), humanities, and arts and languages subjects with similarity to all UCAS places awarded²⁹ (43% STEM, 39% humanities, and 18% arts and languages). The subject areas attracting more than one in ten of the sample are language, literature, linguistics, classics and related subjects (12.5%), history and philosophical studies (10.6%), social studies (10.6%), and business, marketing and administrative studies (10.1%). Gender imbalances are present in favour of males in engineering, and mathematical and computer sciences, and females in subjects allied to medicine, and veterinary science and agriculture, but the proportions are more balanced than the

²⁹ Calculated using the same subject groupings from UCAS Analysis and Research, 'End of Cycle 2017 Data Resources: DR3_010_01' (UCAS, 14 December 2017), <https://www.ucas.com/files/2017-acceptances-subject-group-summary-level>.

overall UK population of UCAS applicants³⁰. The imbalances were more severe than nationally in technologies (males) and social studies (females).

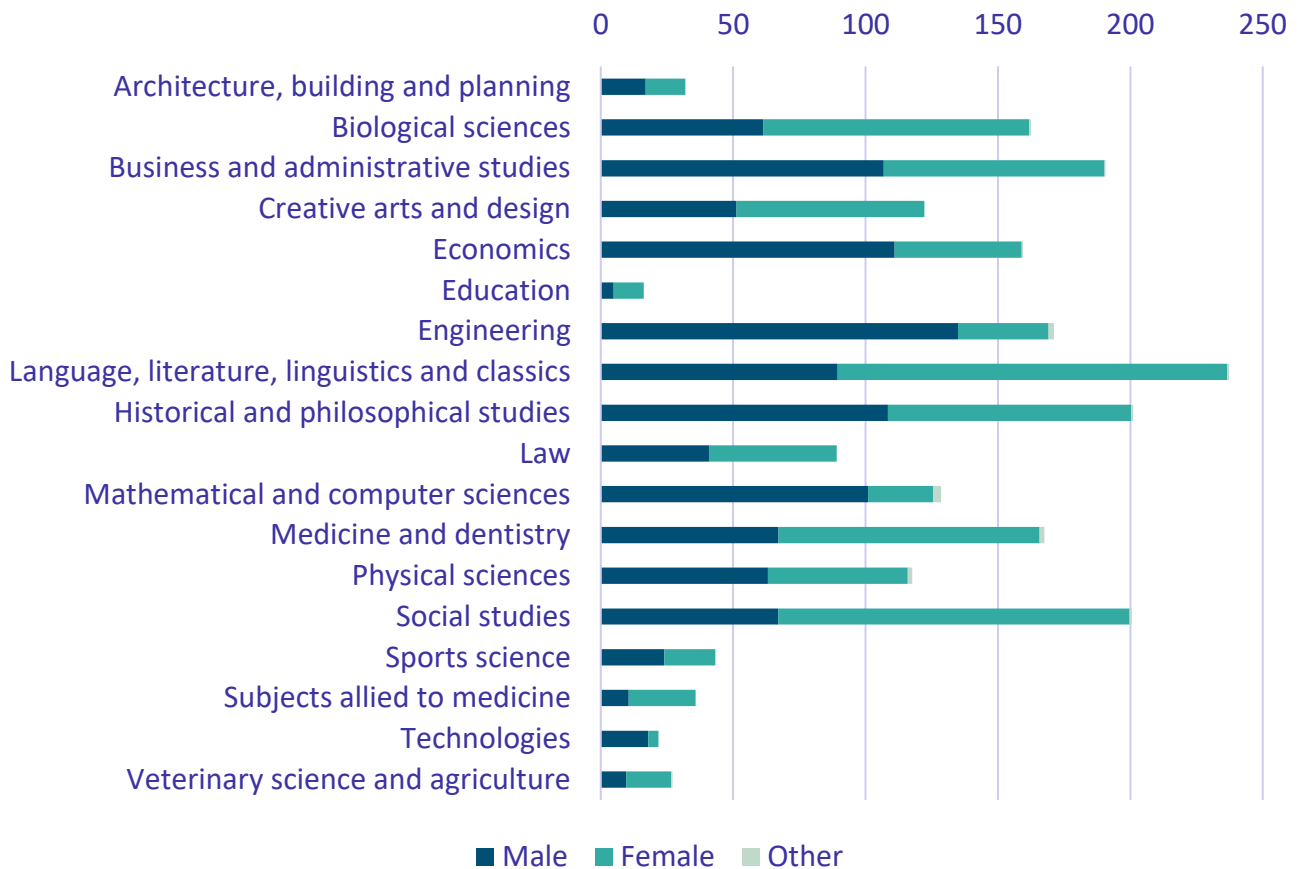


Figure 10 Subject choices and gender identity
 Base: Males (1086); Females (1024); Other (13)

Please refer to the ISC analysis for HMC and GSA schools’ university applications for complete data across all applicants at 148 schools³¹.

³⁰ Calculated from UCAS, ‘Analysis of Applicants by Subject Group and Sex’, 2019 cycle applicant figures – January deadline, 21 January 2019, <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2019-cycle/2019-cycle-applicant-figures-january-deadline>.

³¹ Independent Schools Council, ‘Analysis of GSA & HMC Schools’ University Applications 2019’, in press.

Are you sure?

Three in five are very confident or certain about their higher education choices of institutions and subjects to date. Just one in twenty are not at all confident.

However, there are some variations according to household income and gender. Children of parents in managerial roles (such as senior managers, small business owners and headteachers) are more likely to select 'somewhat confident', indicating a reduction in uncertainty, compared to those with professional parents (doctor, lawyer, chairman or managing director). With increasing confidence, the proportion of males increases.

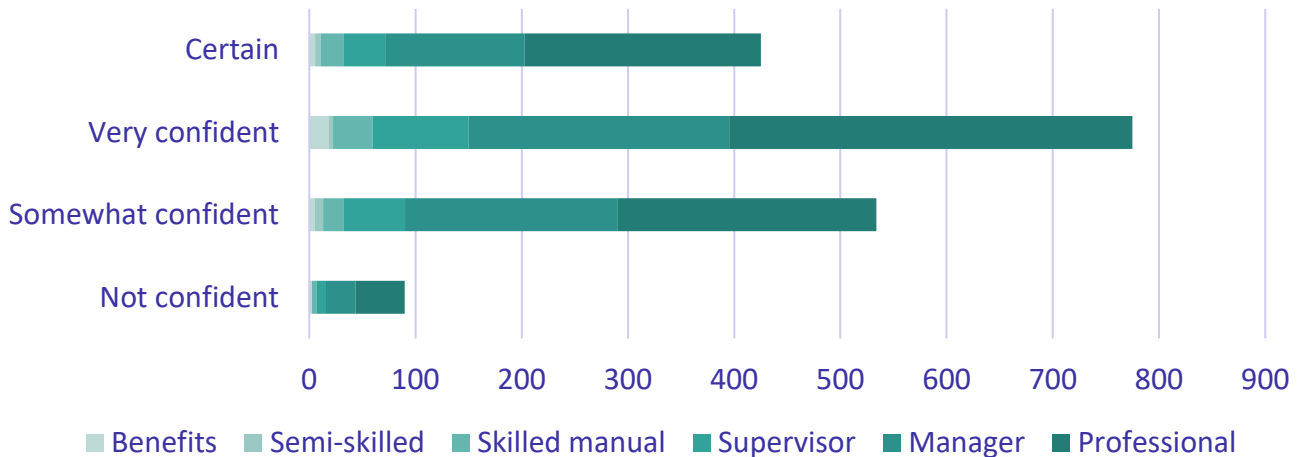


Figure 11 Overall confidence in university and course choice and household income
Base 1824

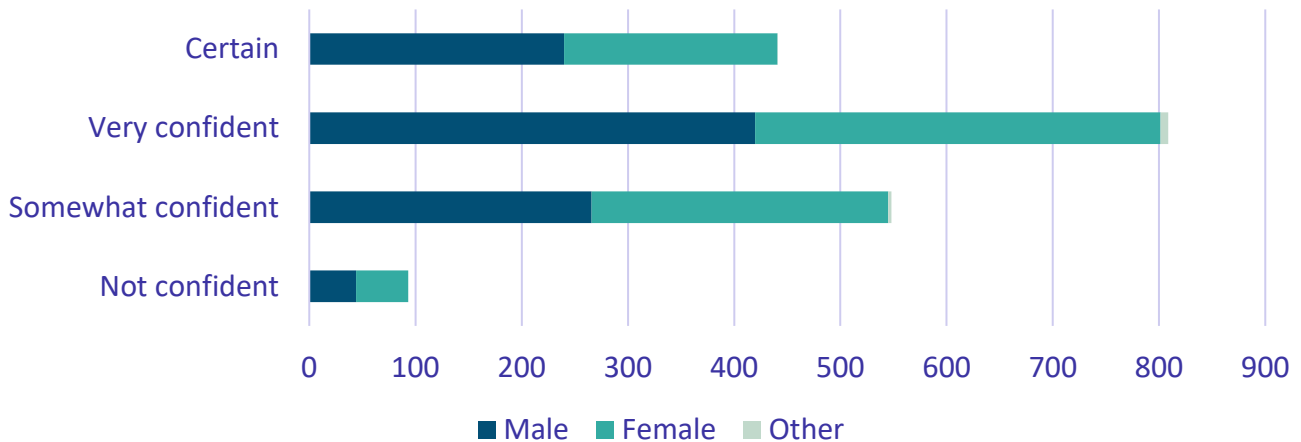


Figure 12 Overall confidence in university and course choice and gender identity
Base 1891

3 Expectations and attitudes

Why university?

Students ranked their motivations for going to university. The largest (both in total and preference) were getting a better job in the future, interest in the chosen subject and gaining a higher level of education.

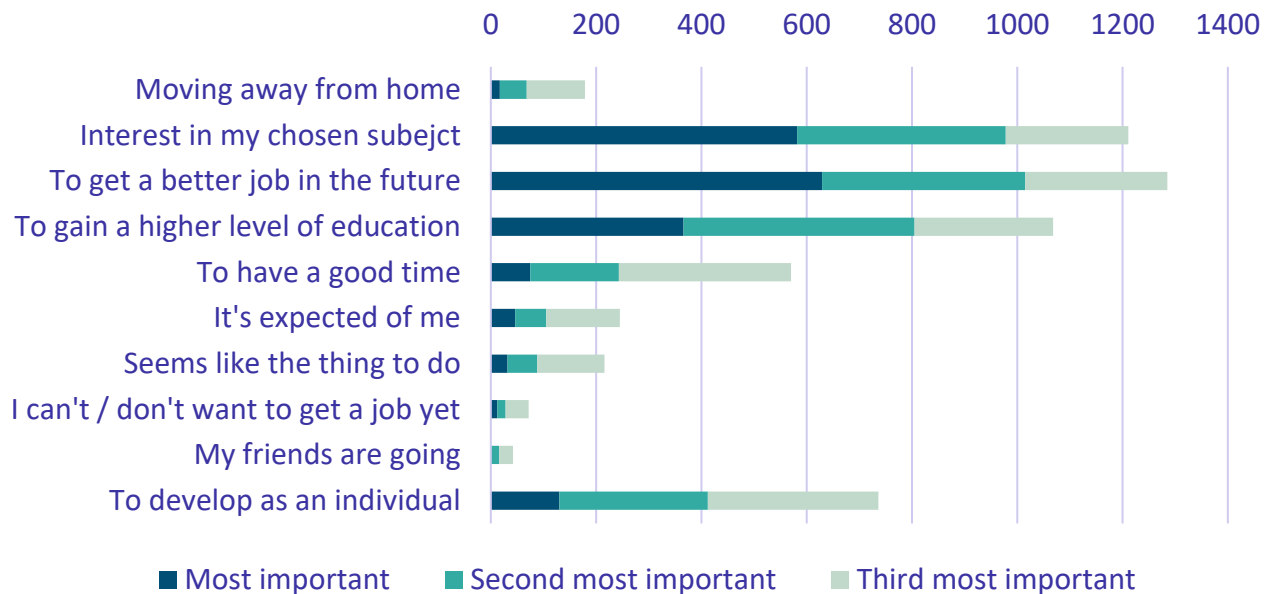


Figure 13 **Motivations for going to university**
Base 2243

Academic expectations

Students provided their expectations of the academic course. While there is variation in responses, there is a consensus of agreement with all statements. However, as reported in *Reality Check*, the two statements on having more one-to-one support and more taught time are going to be untrue for most universities and courses. It could be argued that Oxbridge, medicine and veterinary science aspirants have more chance of having their expectations met, but they could be even more disappointed if they fail to meet their offer requirements. We can, at least, take some confidence in our students' improved accuracy in comparison to the national population. In this dataset, one in three (34%) expect more one-to-one support (compared to *Reality Check's* 46%) and 28% expect more taught hours (compared to 60%).

Table 4 *Academic expectations (mean out of 5, where 5 is strong agreement)*

I expect...	Mean
Marking and assessment to be fair	4.53
To be intellectually stimulated	4.47
My course to be well-organised and to run smoothly	4.46
Opportunities to explore ideas and concepts in depth	4.44
Academic staff will be good at explaining things	4.30
To know how to succeed on the course	4.01
To receive timely personal feedback	3.89
To work harder at university than I do now	3.74
To have more one-to-one academic support at university than I do now	2.92
To spend more time in lectures than I do now being taught in the classroom	2.72

It could be suggested that a student consumer mindset is revealed here; while university students certainly deserve a well-organised course with opportunities to explore ideas, the overwhelming agreement that they should experience intellectual stimulation and receive good explanations from academic staff may not be met unless they too are prepared to engage in independent learning.

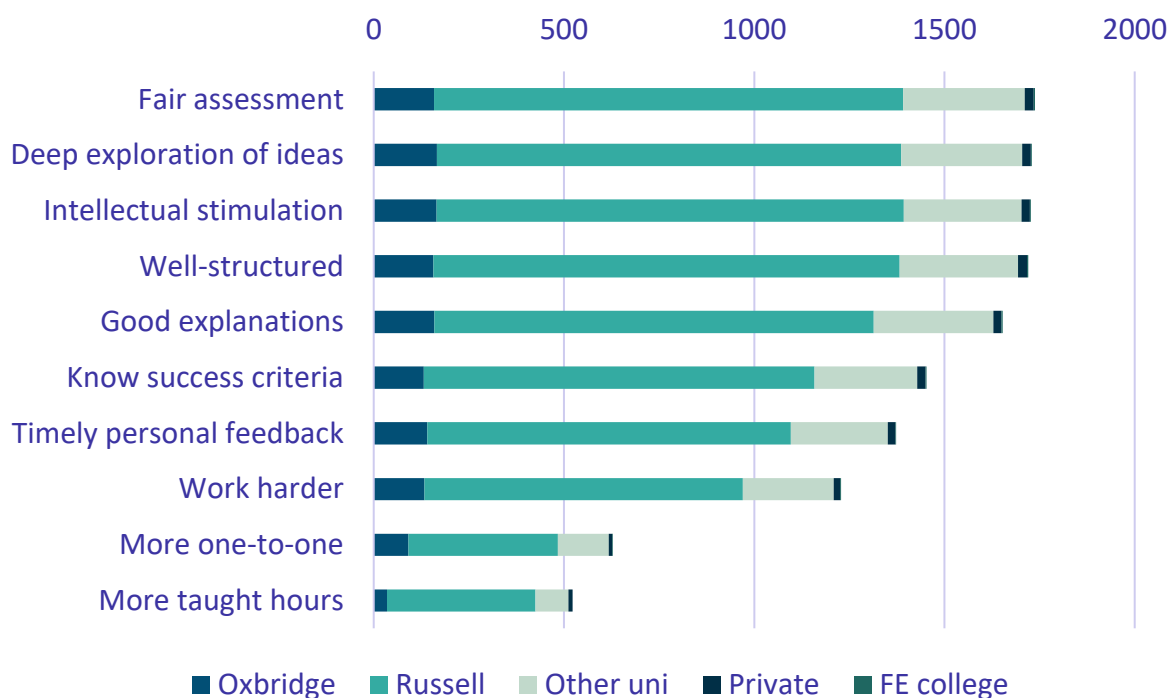


Figure 14 *Agreement with academic expectation statements and firm university type*
Base 1874

Lifestyle expectations

So, what about student lifestyle, rather than academic plans? Respondents could select up to three influences on university choice from a set list. Liking the city or area was the biggest factor, with campus facilities and enjoyment of the open day also important. Respondents appear to be less concerned about affordability or having friends going to the same university, but the numbers selecting these are not negligible. More students would prefer to travel away from home than to stay close by.

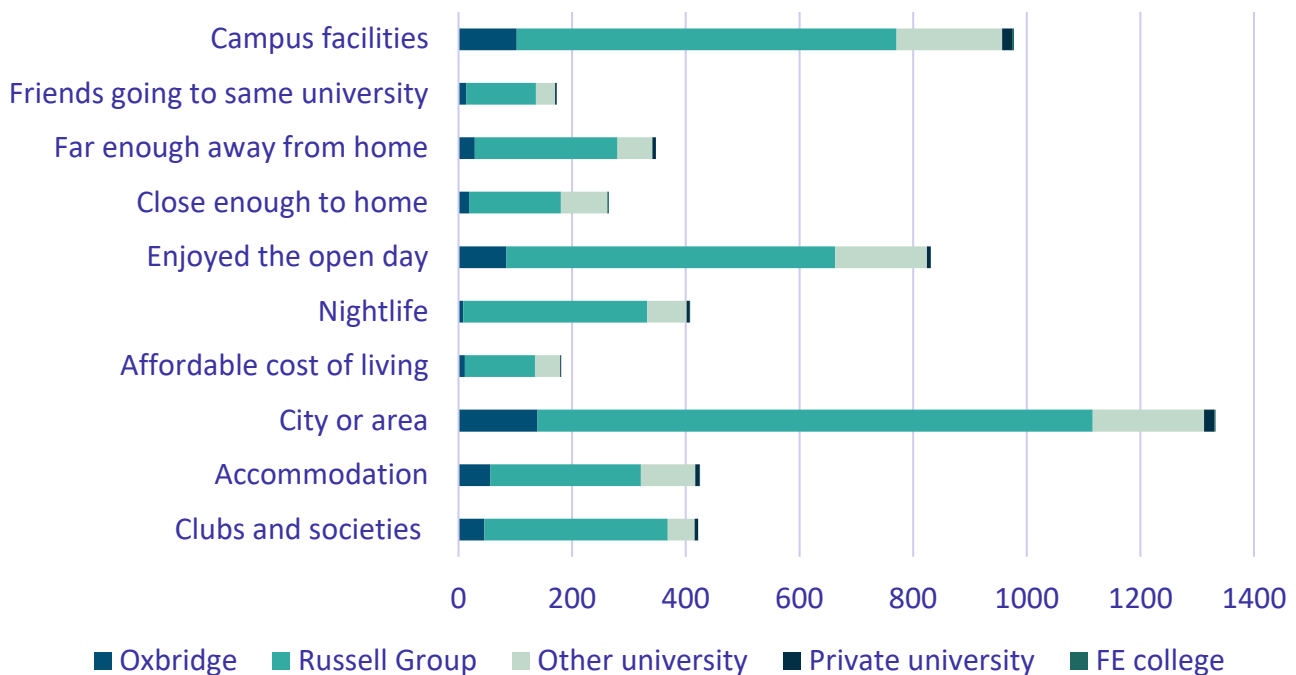


Figure 15 **Student lifestyle influences on university choice and university type**

Base: Oxbridge (172); Russell Group (1329); Other uni (343); Private uni (27); FE college (3)

Get ready!

Respondents were asked about their readiness for three aspects of the transition to university: accommodation, budgeting and finance, and preparing for academic study. Of these, respondents were most organised in terms of accommodation, with two-thirds (66%) confident about how to proceed. In terms of budgeting and preparation of academic study, however, the proportion knowing how to organise each of these fell to just over half (55%); these students risk facing a more difficult transition as a result. These are areas in which schools could do more to support their leavers and in which universities could communicate their expectations more clearly.

66%

Prepared for accommodation

55%

Prepared for budgeting and finance

55%

Prepared for academic study

Almost all (93.2%) intend to live in university halls for the first year. Equal numbers (each at 2.5%) will live in private halls or their family home. These figures mark a shift from the nationally representative *Reality Check* project, which indicated that the broader spectrum of university applicants is more inclined to live with parents or in private halls.

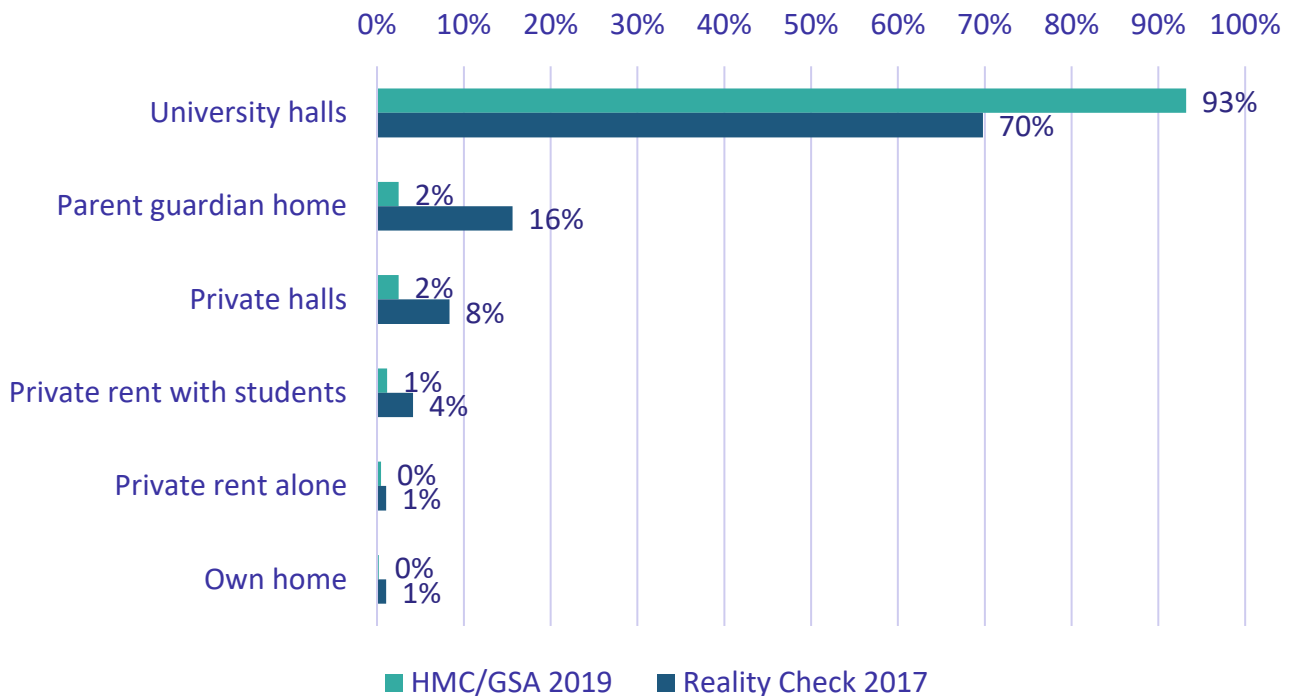


Figure 16 Accommodation plans

Base: HMC/GSA 2019 (1892); *Reality Check* 2017 (2021)

Once at university, students will have a range of new experiences to manage. Ten of these were presented for students to choose between being concerned, a little nervous, quite positive and excited about. This question also enabled a comparison between the academic and student lifestyle expectations of school leavers.

Table 5 Attitudes to aspects of university life (mean out of 4, where 4 is excitement and 1 is concern)

Attitude to...	Mean
Study of chosen subject	3.44
Facilities at university	3.33
Student societies	3.31
Social life (including Freshers Week)	3.19
Coping practically	2.90
Living with new people	2.78
Peer activities (including initiation rites)	2.78
Managing workload	2.73
Coping emotionally	2.72
Managing finances	2.58

Respondents were more positive than negative about all the aspects presented, with study of the chosen subject the most favourable of all the options available. This indicates, once again, that HMC/GSA school leavers’ motivations are largely academic, but they clearly expect to get stuck into the new facilities, societies and social life opportunities on offer as well. There is some variability in the consistency of responses. Respondents were very clear about their favourable expectations of the facilities at university. However, when considering the social life, living with new people and peer activities, far from all are positive about these changes.

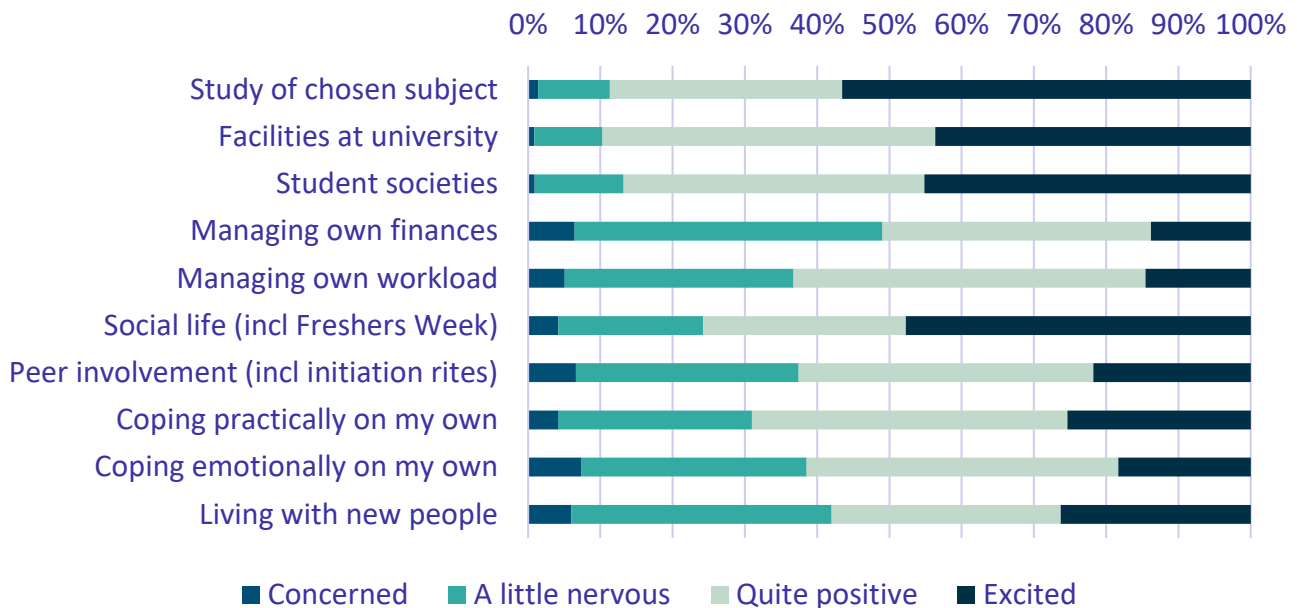


Figure 17 Academic and student life attitudes comparison
Base 1892

How are you feeling?

In summing up all overall feelings associated with going to university, the most popular response was ‘excited’ (75%). However, the second most popular response was ‘anxious’ (47%), with some overlap between the two. This indicates more conservative attitudes than the *Reality Check* cohort (81% excited and 61% anxious). More respondents feel ‘ready’, ‘supported’ and ‘well informed’ than ‘worried’, ‘impatient’ and ‘unprepared’ but the tally is far from everyone, indicating some unresolved concerns among half of the students surveyed. There are variations according to gender: males report being less anxious, worried and unprepared, despite their larger participation in the survey.

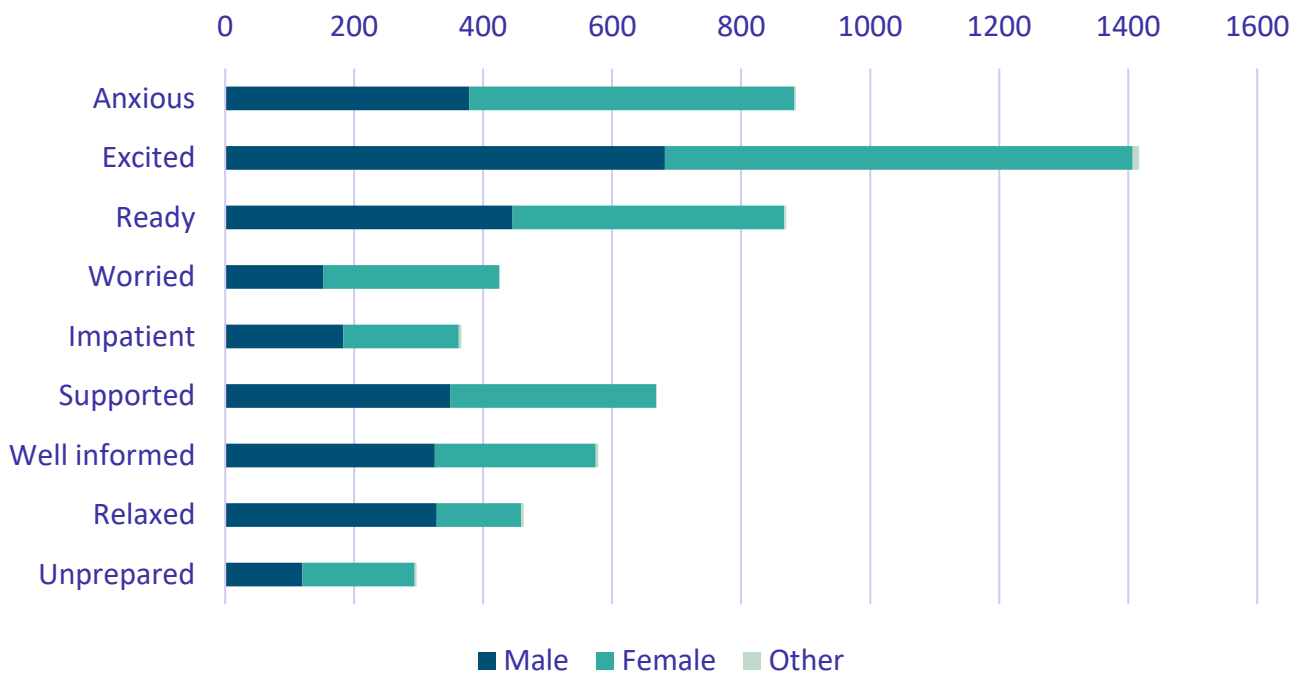


Figure 18 Overall feelings and gender identity
 Base: Male (970); Female (911); Other (12)



4 Sources of information

Influences

There are many influences on students' university choices. Linked to their academic motivations, students prioritise course choice and academic rankings. Student satisfaction rankings and a feeling of the university being a good fit are also important. In terms of recommendations and advice from others, it is interesting to note that family members have a bigger sway than teachers and peers, and that this endorsement far exceeds what students are exposed to in the media, online and as part of the wider economic and political context. Choosing a university seems to be more about aspiration than realism, with the likelihood of getting a place and prior qualifications insignificant for many, but this could reflect the academic strength of the cohort discussed in the demographic characteristics.

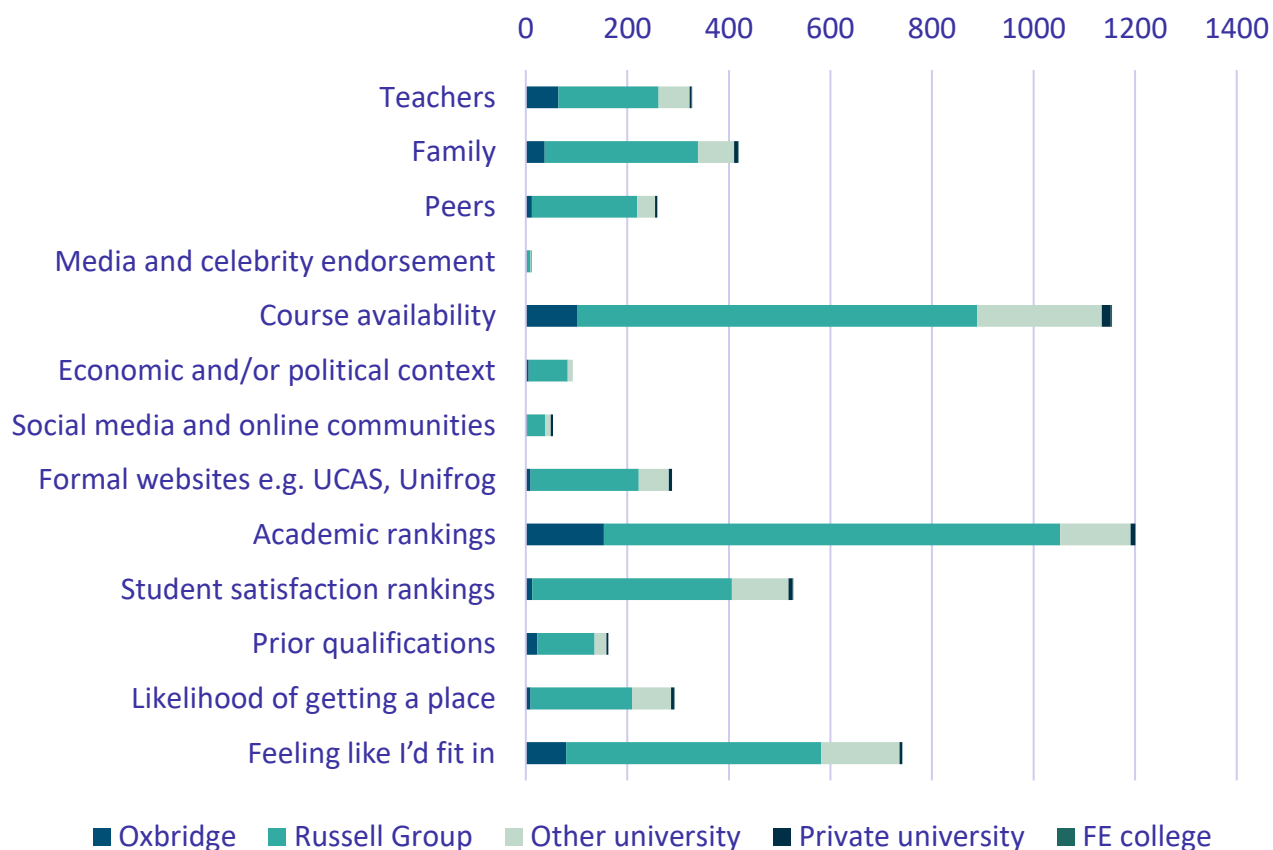


Figure 19 Influences on university choice

Base: Oxbridge (172); Russell Group (1329); Other uni (34); Private uni (27); FE college (3)

University communications – essential info or sales pitch?

Applicants receive communications from universities related to formal application administration, informal matters, university careers services, student societies, prominent alumni and academics, and emotive encouragements about starting university. Of these, emotive emails and formal administrative communications are received most often (at least termly for most respondents). Informal communications, and information about careers and student societies are received less than termly, although the average student has received at least one communication detailing prominent alumni or academics.

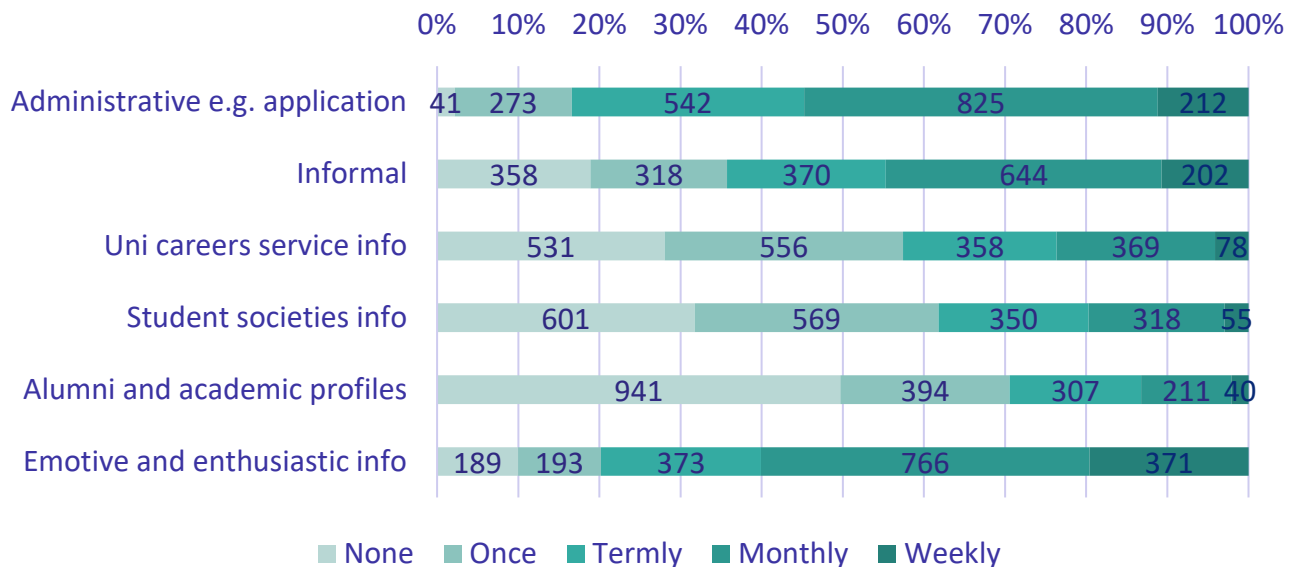


Figure 20 **University communication types and frequencies**

Base 1892

With much to manage during the transition from school to higher education, it is important that universities are effective at explaining the changes that students will face. While students consistently feel they have a good grasp of the course content that they will be studying, there is less certainty about the contact hours involved, the process for progression to subsequent years, the academic workload and the support on offer, with the average respondent not yet feeling sufficiently informed to commence their course of study. The least secure area is the induction process and how the first few days will work out, a finding repeated from the 2016 HMC/GSA survey, with respondents preparing to do further research. This survey was conducted 5 months before most university courses will commence, so it is possible that the

universities intend to provide further information in the interim. But we would argue that students ought to have had this signposted before the stressful exam period; more than 68% should have heard something on this matter.

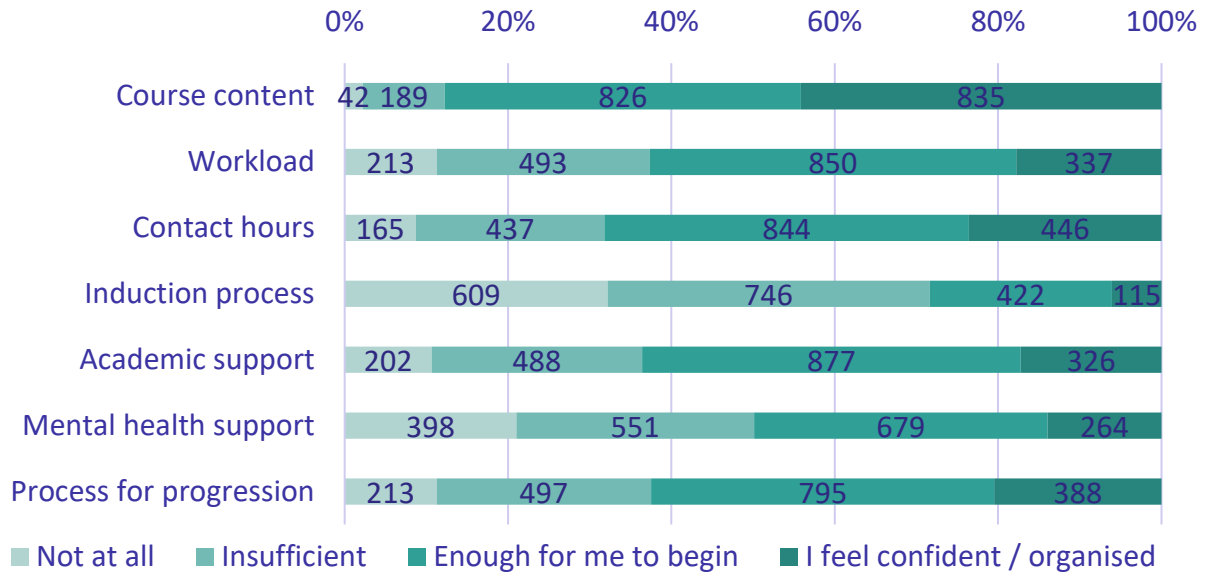


Figure 21 **University explanations quality**
Base 1892



Students' preference (78%) for receiving information is by email. Orientation days would be a good option for a quarter (24%) of respondents but the use of social media and online modules are less popular. None of the options presented was selected by all respondents, indicating that there will be variations in engagement with the process regardless of how induction requirements are communicated.



Higher education curriculum

As noted in existing research, independent schools have a reputation of providing high levels of information and advice to their students about university. A growing number do so in partnership with local maintained sector schools. The interventions most recalled (from the list below) by students are support with writing the personal statement (85%), lessons about university (77%), for example during form periods and assemblies, and having members of staff to talk to about individual requirements (72%). Around half of respondents have been informed by academic opportunities such as trips and talks (58%), software to support decision-making (58%), careers conventions (57%), alumni or parent visits (53%). Schools are also helping students see the links between higher education and future employment by enabling students to meet employers (55%), and through expecting students to participate in work experience placements (53%). The lowest response was on awareness of facilitating subjects (34%), perhaps as this is a term has been phased out of use by the Russell Group or because these students are already typically taking traditionally academic curricula that facilitate future university study.

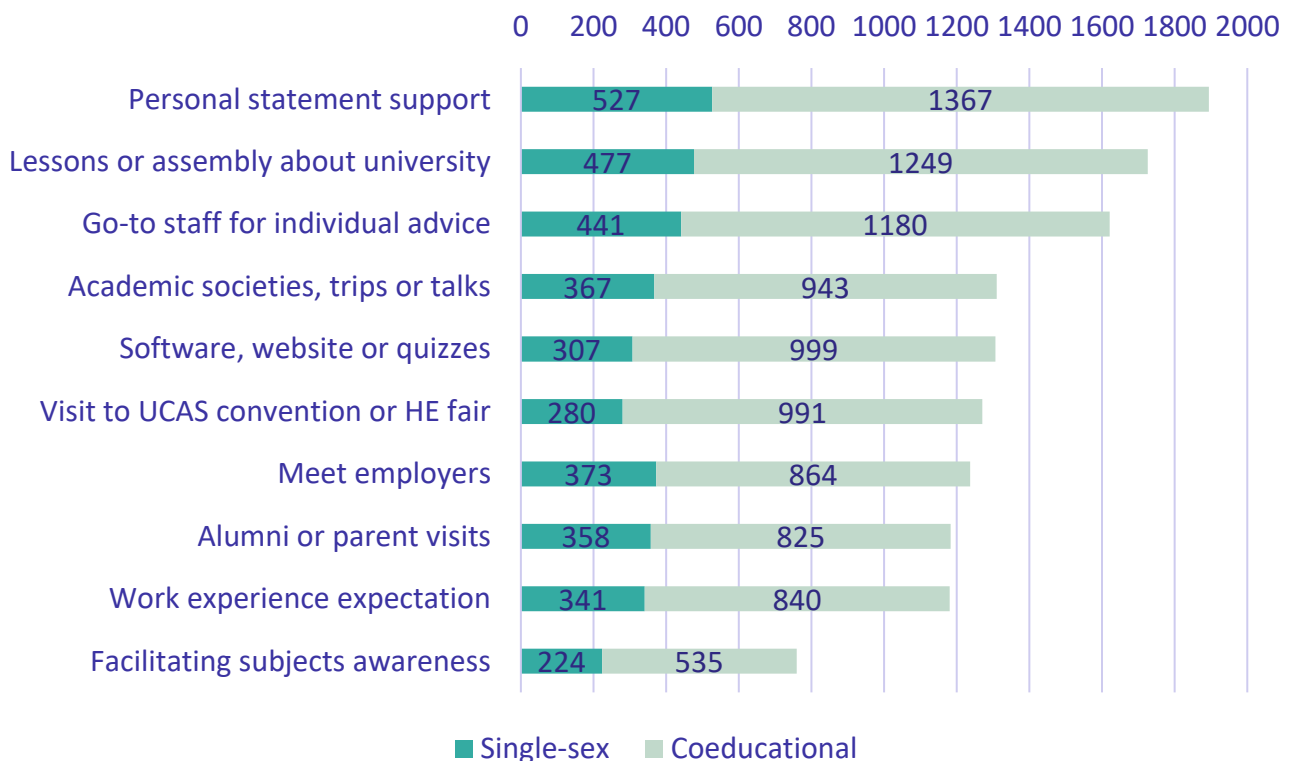


Figure 22 School interventions and school type
 Base: Single-sex (591); Coeducational (1648)

Do these school interventions work? The mean number recalled by respondents is six out of ten. This could indicate that schools are offering some but not all the recommended opportunities, or that some students do not engage with or recall their school’s provision; some report that their school provided three or fewer interventions.

There are variations in how these interventions are reported by members of different school types. Those attending single-sex schools are less likely to visit UCAS conventions or higher education fairs and to have access to software. However, they are slightly more likely to have visits from alumni or parents and to meet employers.

Over to you

Students may seek their own help in researching university life and decision-making. Almost all have used formal university materials such as the prospectus and website; these were mostly considered helpful. While fewer students attended open days (albeit more than *Reality Check’s* 81%), over half find these very helpful. Students are more likely to seek information from friends and family or school members, rather than online communities. Those who do so find these persons more helpful than social media.

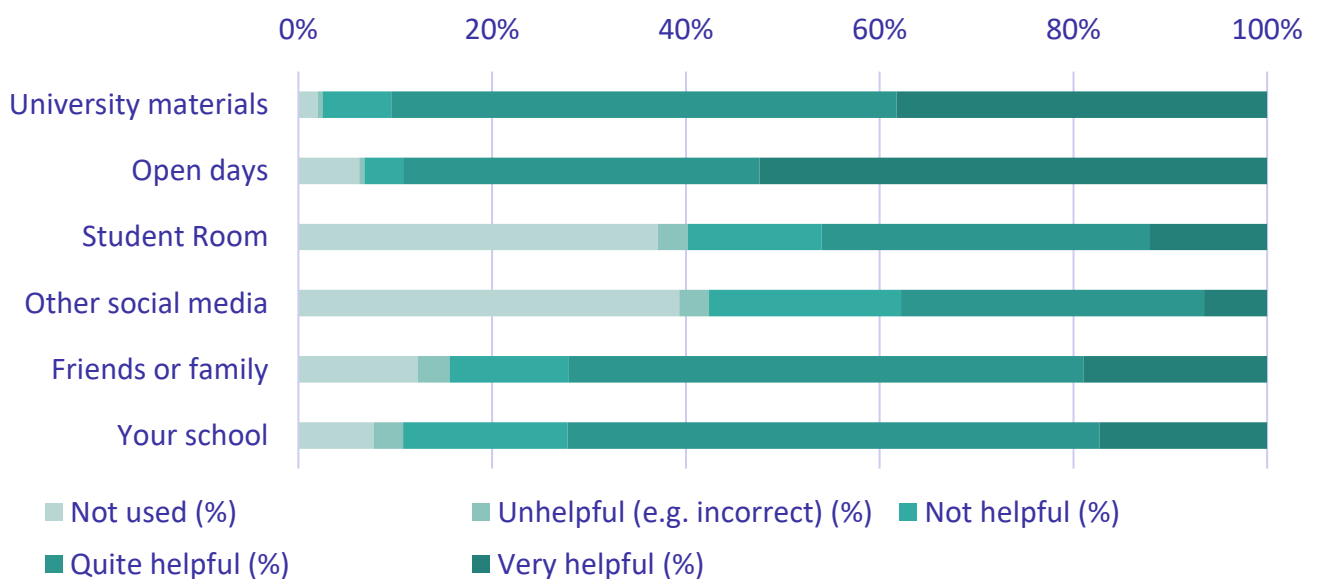


Figure 23 **Research techniques**

Base 1892

Conclusions and observations

School leavers from HMC and GSA schools are diverse in nationality, first language, ethnicity and educational need. Most, but not all, study A Levels and have a strong academic background. It may be no surprise that the majority have university educated parents and live in postcode areas with high levels of access to higher education. But some come from low-income families and half do not regularly engage with theatres, museums, art or musical practice or performance.

HMC and GSA leavers generally continue to higher education in the UK, but a sizeable number apply only overseas or for other routes. Those remaining here have made firm choices all over the UK but disproportionately in favour of London, the South West and the North East. While some gender imbalances continue in course choice, overall there is a broad spread of applications across the STEM, humanities and arts subjects. Applicants receive university offers of all kinds, including the very most academically selective on offer, but not all are so lucky. It is pleasing that many are confident that they have chosen the right course at the right university, but there are some differences between groups of students, and the data suggests that many will regret these decisions in the future.

University is the chosen path because of academic motivators – interest in the subject and career progress – improved job prospects and increasing qualifications. Students' expectations of university are largely accurate (more so than across all school types), but too many (in comparison to the university experience) are incorrect in expecting one-to-one teaching and verbal feedback. And, perhaps seeking good value for money, students expect to be intellectually stimulated and to receive clear explanations but may not be aware of their own responsibilities in the learning process.

Contrary to the portrayal of undergraduate involvement in nightlife and social opportunities, HMC and GSA leavers are more concerned with finding the right fit of university area and facilities. Some express nerves or concern about the prospect of living with new people, peer activities such as initiation rites and coping emotionally. Almost half feel unprepared for budgeting and finance and commencing academic study. More are confident about organising accommodation, perhaps a reflection of

their intention to live in university halls. These leavers express overall excitement but admit to anxiety, worry and impatience (although less so than applicants at large), with variations between males and females.

When making decisions, HMC and GSA leavers will look first at the availability of courses, rankings and fit before personal advice, but parents may hold more sway than teachers. Schools provide lessons, staff and support all geared towards university applications. But they aren't hitting the spot for everyone, with only half of respondents able to recall trips and talks, careers conventions, alumni or parent visits, meetings with employers or the provision of software. Universities strike a fair balance when contacting prospective students with application administration the most important aspect, but perhaps erring too much toward non-essential emails intended to promote acceptances of offers. Students do independent research too, more so than in the maintained sector, focusing on official university materials and open days. Many ignore online communities, but those that engage find these helpful.

A joined-up approach between secondary and higher education sectors could be to the benefit of all parties. Nearby schools and universities could forge links to provide school leavers with opportunities to visit beyond the open day, seeing more of the undergraduate experience. And university admissions teams would have direct access to a subset of their prospective applicants to learn about expectations and skills, and for testing communication strategies. Closing the gap between expectations and experience is surely the less arduous route to promote student satisfaction and academic success in the years ahead.



Recommendations

While the future looks bright for many HMC and GSA school leavers, based on this research we propose some suggestions for schools and universities in a bid to bring the expectations closer to the reality of the university experience.

Schools

- Remember that your students are not unanimously fluent in the UK higher education system. Nor are their parents. Provide opportunities for family engagement, especially those overseas or speaking English as an additional language, given the influence of parents' opinions over students.
- One in twenty students from independent schools will go to university overseas. Ensure they are included in your planning.
- Students should guard against the sole use of academic and student satisfaction rankings in choosing universities. With open days proving to be another powerful influence, allowing students to attend may give them a more human perspective when they meet undergraduates. But these too could present an unrealistic impression.
- Applications to elite universities are supported by possession of cultural capital, being able to communicate with unfamiliar academics and experts and having interests beyond the classroom. As well as encouraging further study, consider the benefits of unrelated reading, film, museums and music.
- Our schools see students making applications across STEM, humanities and arts and languages subjects, and nationwide. We should never expect proportional representation in everything, but nor should we leave considerable disparities unchallenged. Ensure that students from different income families and males and females make active choices with equal resourcing and staff encouragement. Your cohort should be aware of the availability of university provision across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Conduct an audit of your higher education 'curriculum'. Considering the additional needs of vulnerable students, is it appropriately challenging and supportive? If your provision is already thorough, ensure that it is well-signposted so that students can't help but notice the opportunities on offer.

-
- Almost all our students receive offers from universities for appropriate courses. This makes it easy for us to forget the impact of a rejection. Even one decline of a place can be disheartening, something that more than one-third of our students will experience.
 - When offers are received, there is likely to be variability in the extent those from different income families and males and females perceive their own readiness, excitement and anxiety. Consider making provision once students have their offers to help them prepare. A panel of former students could be assembled to discuss what a day in the life of an undergraduate looks like, and to advise on how to prepare for higher academic study and budgeting.
 - Engage with nearby universities in pursuit of bringing your students' expectations into closer alignment with reality.



Universities

- It is inevitable that some applicants will be rejected by your university. Consider the privilege of being selected by that young person based on myriad influencing factors and be clear but careful with the language used when presenting this information. To those you accept, avoid a sales pitch approach.
- The open day is perhaps the most important tool in motivating HMC and GSA school leavers to apply for your university. Ensure that you present a fair and

accurate impression of the undergraduate experience so that applicants are not given unrealistic expectations.

- One cause of student dropout from university and delays in completing the degree is the conflict between academic expectations and the teaching and learning provision available. Being upfront in all formal documentation about contact hours, the process for progression to subsequent years, academic workload and the support on offer would give applicants more accurate bases on which to make decisions.
- Most school leavers do not know how the first few days at university will work. Easter may be too early to explain the induction process in full, but ensure you have signposted when details will be provided. All mechanisms that may ease anxieties about transition to higher education should be employed.
- Reach out to local schools to offer talks, workshops and student experience opportunities, even to applicants for other universities. Just as the Oxford and Cambridge colleges take collaborative responsibility for making access links systematically across all UK regions, each university should do its bit to ensure that no school is without higher education curriculum support to cover the basics of decision-making, applications and what to expect. In this way, the expectations and independent learning skills of entrants nationwide could be brought into closer alignment with those required.



References

- Callender, Claire, and Geoff Mason. 'Does Student Loan Debt Deter Higher Education Participation? New Evidence from England'. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*; Thousand Oaks 671, no. 1 (May 2017): 20–48.
<http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1177/0002716217696041>.
- Crawford, Claire. 'The Link between Secondary School Characteristics and University Participation and Outcomes'. DfE, 6 June 2014. <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7235>.
- Dunne, Máiréad, Russell King, and Jill Ahrens. 'Applying to Higher Education: Comparisons of Independent and State Schools'. *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no. 9 (21 October 2014): 1649–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.801433>.
- EAL Nexus. 'EAL Learners in the UK'. The Bell Foundation, 2017. <https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/school-leaders/eal-learners-in-uk>.
- HEFCE. 'POLAR4 Classification', October 2017. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/postcode-search/>.
- HEPI, and Unite Students. 'Reality Check: A Report on University Applicants' Attitudes and Perceptions'. UK: Unite Students, 2017.
- HESA. 'Widening Participation: UK Performance Indicators 2017/18'. Higher Education Statistics Agency, 7 February 2019. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-02-2019/widening-participation-summary>.
- Higher Education Funding Council for England. 'Differences in Degree Outcomes: Key Findings'. HEFCE, March 2014. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19811/1/HEFCE2014_03.pdf.
- HMC. 'Independent Schools Provide Best Teaching & Learning Experience, Say Students'. HMC (blog), 5 October 2011. <https://www.hmc.org.uk/blog/independent-schools-provide-best-teaching-learning-experience-say-students/>.
- Independent Schools Council. 'Analysis of GSA & HMC Schools' University Applications 2019', in press.
- ISC. 'ISC Census and Annual Report 2019'. London: Independent Schools Council, 2019.
<https://www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census/>.
- Jones, Harriet, Kay Yeoman, Emma Gaskell, and John Prendergast. 'Perceptions of University Assessment and Feedback among Post-16 School Pupils'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 42, no. 8 (17 November 2017): 1233–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1259388>.
- Montacute, Rebecca, and Carl Cullinane. 'Access to Advantage: The Influence of Schools and Place on Admissions to Top Universities'. London: The Sutton Trust, December 2018.
- Neves, Jonathan, and Nick Hillman. '2018 Student Academic Experience Survey'. HEPI & Advance HE, 7 June 2018. <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/06/07/2018-student-academic-experience-survey/>.
- Norfolk Summer School. 'Norfolk Summer School', 2019. <https://www.norfolksummerschool.co.uk>.

-
- Office for National Statistics. 'Graduates in the UK Labour Market'. ONS, 24 November 2017. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/graduatesintheuklabourmarket/2017>.
- Office for National Statistics. 'Population of England and Wales'. GOV.UK, 1 August 2018. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest#by-ethnicity>.
- Purcell, Kate, Peter Elias, Ritva Ellison, Gaby Atfield, Duncan Adam, and Ilias Livanos. 'Futuretrack 2006 Stage 1 Summary'. Warwick Institute for Employment Research: HECSU, 2008. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/findings/stage1/>.
- Ramsey, Chris. 'Survey of U6 Students'. HMC/GSA Universities Committee, September 2016.
- Smithers, Alan. 'Social Disadvantage and Widening Access to Universities'. Centre for Education and Employment Research: University of Buckingham, November 2015.
- Sodexo, and Times Higher Education. 'The Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey 2014'. London: Sodexo, 2014. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/sodexo-times-higher-education-university-lifestyle-survey-2014-results/2011981.article>.
- The Sutton Trust, and Social Mobility Commission. 'Elitist Britain 2019'. London, 25 June 2019. <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/elitist-britain-2019/>.
- UCAS. 2018 End of Cycle Report. England and Wales: UCAS, 2018. <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2018-end-cycle-report>.
- UCAS. 'Analysis of Applicants by Subject Group and Sex'. 2019 cycle applicant figures – January deadline, 21 January 2019. <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2019-cycle/2019-cycle-applicant-figures-january-deadline>.
- UCAS. 'Goldsmiths Colfe's Interim Examination (GCiE)'. UCAS Qualification Information Profiles, 14 June 2018. <https://qips.ucas.com/eip/goldsmiths-colfes-interim-examination-gcie>.
- UCAS. 'Unconditional Offers - an Update for 2019', July 2019. <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/update-unconditional-offer-making-2019>.
- UCAS Analysis and Research. 'End of Cycle 2017 Data Resources: DR3_010_01'. UCAS, 14 December 2017. <https://www.ucas.com/files/2017-acceptances-subject-group-summary-level>.
- UCAS Press Office. 'First Rise in University Applications for Three Years'. UCAS, 7 February 2019. <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/first-rise-university-applications-three-years>.

HMC (the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference) is a professional association of Heads of the world's leading independent schools. HMC's schools are individual and distinctive offering parents a rich variety of options when choosing the right education for their child. At the heart of every HMC school is a commitment to the benefits of a holistic educational experience: academic excellence coupled with a strong emphasis on pastoral care and exceptional co-curricular opportunities. HMC exists to serve and support its members, to represent their views and to exemplify excellence in education.

The Girls' Schools Association represents the Heads of a diverse range of independent UK girls' schools (day and boarding) including many of the top performing schools in the UK independent sector. GSA schools encourage the highest standards of education, pastoral care and co-curricular activity, and provide a wealth of extra-curricular opportunities in art, music, drama, sport and more. GSA schools share experience, specialisms, opportunities and facilities with state sector schools in a wide range of partnerships. Many also provide means-tested bursaries for families of limited financial means.

The HMC/GSA Universities Committee works closely with universities and schools in both independent and state sectors: state schools are represented on the group and are important partners. We aim to ensure good information on applications, transition and the student experience is shared in schools, in universities and between secondary and tertiary providers. The committee is the only national group to undertake this activity at this level.

The Universities Committee is chaired by Rachel Dent (The Abbey School) and Chris Ramsey (Whitgift School) and commissioned this report as part of its work on transitions.





Upper Sixths and Higher Education: 2019 Survey

Commissioned by the HMC/GSA Universities Committee

Authored by Emma Mitchell & Chris Ramsey

Foreword by Nick Hillman

ISBN 978-1-5272-4802-1