

Thoughts on the proposed A-Level restructure, TEF ratings, university comms and money management

Student sentiment update by The Student Room

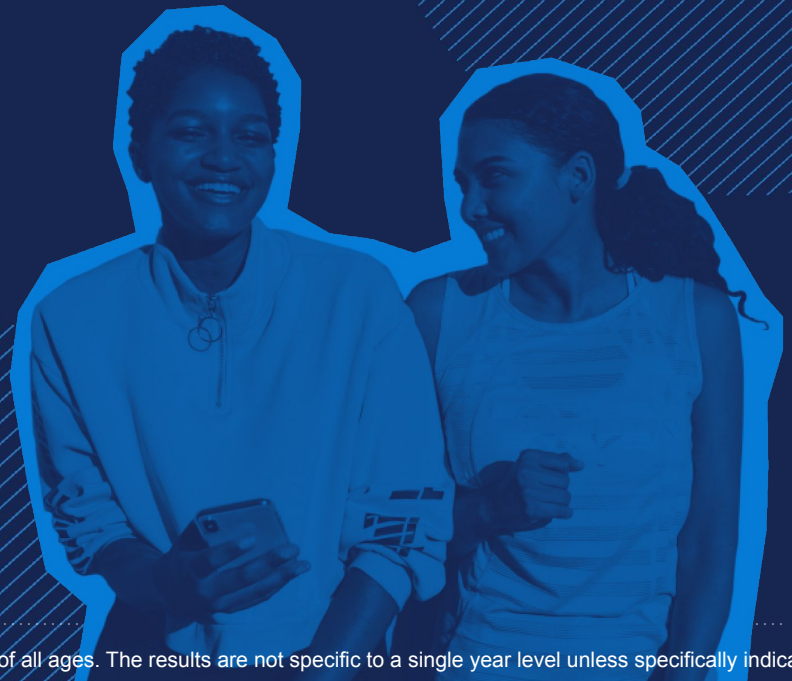
29 September - 31 October 2023



Sharing the student voice

As the UK's largest online student community, we are privileged to witness the support, reassurance and advice young people share with one another everyday. What we learn about their experiences and concerns guides us in the support we provide.

We have an incredible opportunity (and responsibility) to raise the voice of students and share it with people like you who are there to support them. It's by listening to students and working across every sector together that we can make a real difference in students' lives.



Highlights in this update

- More than half of students were not confident about managing money at university
- 25% of students feel current A-level structure should change but not as proposed
- Nearly 75% of students in our poll are unaware of what the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) rating is
- Email takes a strong lead in the most commonly preferred method of communication from universities by students

Uncertainty around managing finances at University



It is clear from the results of this poll that there are mixed feelings regarding money management amongst students on site. It's important to note that a significant portion of the respondents fall into the "Not confident at all" and "Not too confident" categories, which collectively make up **52%** of the total responses indicating a potential need for improved financial education and support in the lead up to more independent living at university.

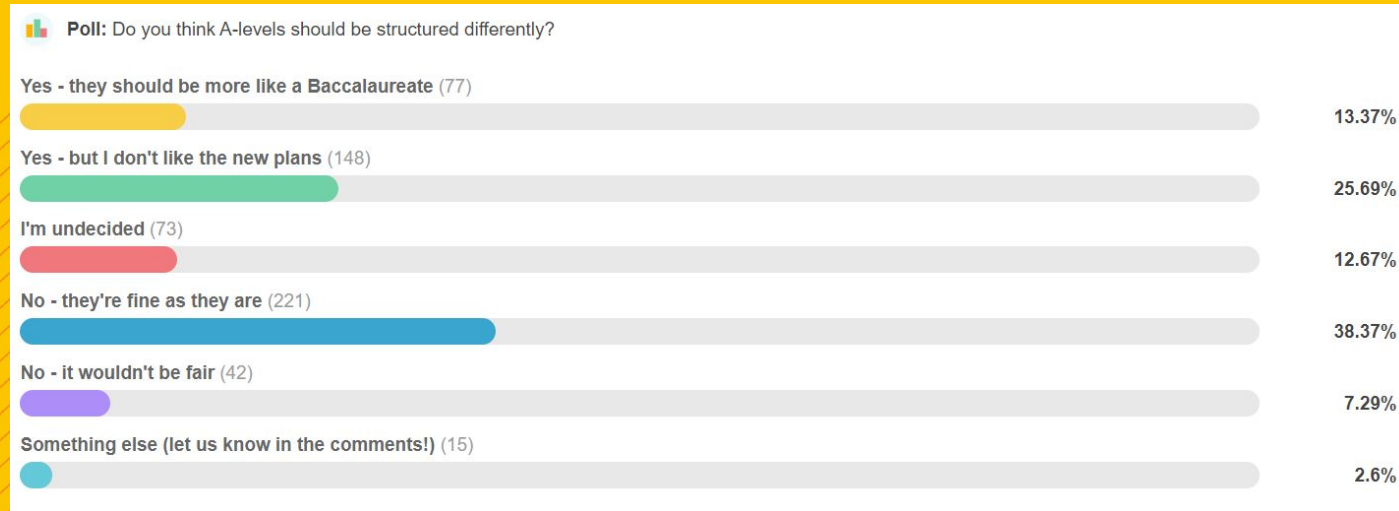
On the positive side, **33%** of the respondents stated that they are "Somewhat confident" whilst **14%** of the respondents expressed being "Very confident" in their money management abilities. While this is the smallest group, it shows that there are students who feel well-prepared to handle their finances during their university years.

A substantial number of students express a desire to know more about money management, which could be addressed through workshops, courses, or peer-to-peer support groups or guidance spaces. Additionally, understanding the needs and concerns of students who feel "Not confident at all" or "Not too confident" universities could benefit from using this to create insightful, engaging and reassuring financial education materials for prospective students.



These findings also support [our poll](#) we shared with you last month where money management was the top area from a variety of options 2023 UG entrants said they needed support on for starting uni

Do you think A-levels should be structured differently?



"imo it's great for people to be able to choose, some will do better with the IB style some with A levels, no reason to change A levels to be like IB when IB already exists, rather if government wants to support IB takers more, they should invest into more schools implementing IB as an option."

We asked students on site what they thought of the prime minister's plans to introduce an Advanced British Standard (ABS) qualification that would "take the best" of A-levels and T-levels and bring them together into a "Baccalaureate-style" qualification. Nearly two fifths (38%) thought that A-levels don't need to change at all, but 39% thought that they should be restructured differently, although two thirds of these respondents didn't like the proposed new plans. The student quote shown, says that students should be given a choice and there should be more investment into IBs in the current structure.

Continued thoughts from students on this topic...

"Yikes.

Looks like the current PM learned nothing from all the scorching criticism and hostility from secondary school teachers that similar proposals made by Ed Miliband generated.

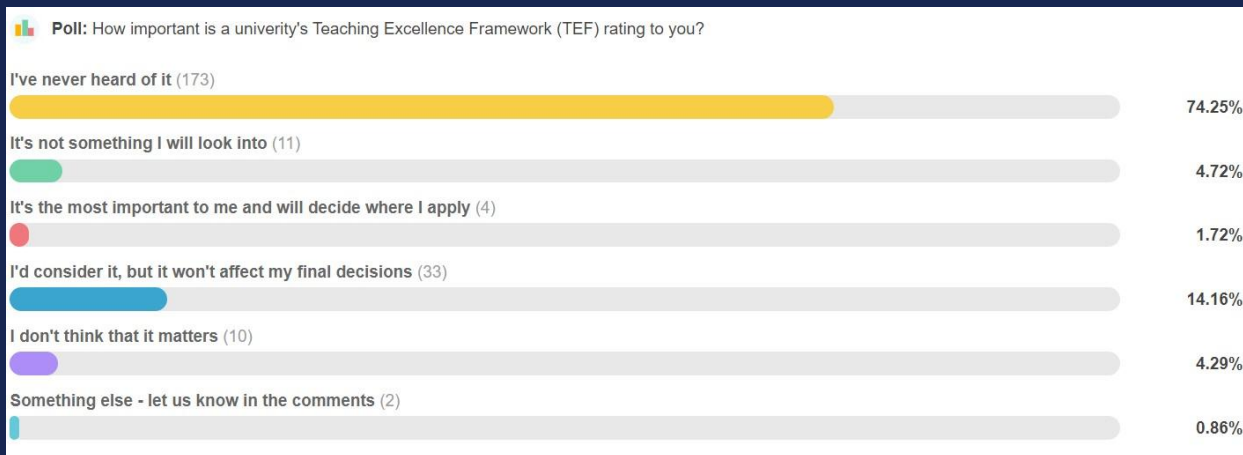
The only real changes that need to be phrased in for teenaged educational students in mainstream schools should be: qualifications in basic maths & basic english literacy, lessons in essential life skills, the basics of uk law, what is illegal in terms of selfies & social media, more focus on making students aware of their options in terms of apprenticeships and post 16 paid alternatives to academic education."

This is so mean, students will basically be taking 5 a levels which they really don't need plus the increased stress of handling 5 subjects let alone 3.

"My question is: where exactly do the ~20% of 16-18 year olds that do neither (A-levels or T-levels) fit into this?"

Isn't the whole point of taking three or four A-Levels - of your own choosing - to specialise a bit, in preparation for deciding what to do at university? Taking five seems too broad. And the whole English and maths till 18 - I can't help but feel that if you get to 16 aren't "literate and numerate", two extra years aren't going to help much!!

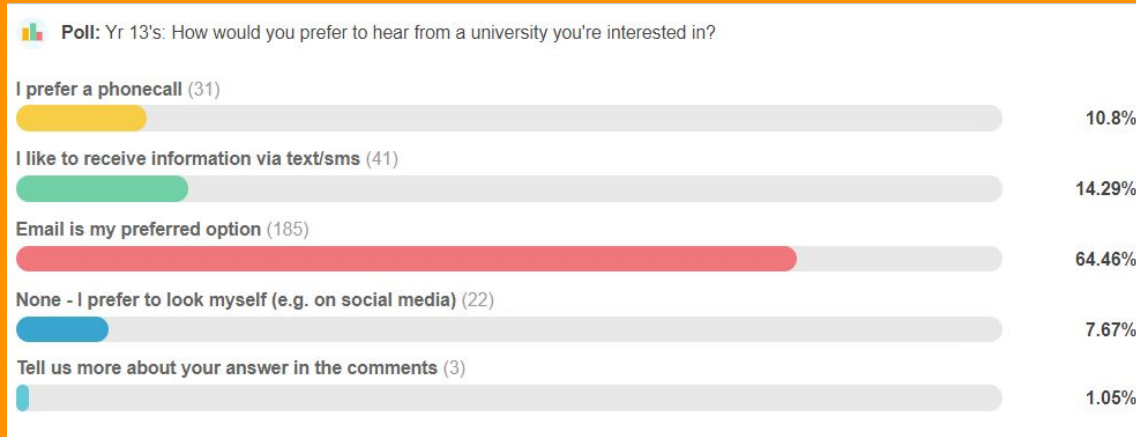
How important is a university's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating to you?



With the recent release of TEF ratings for 2023 (on 28th September), students on site were asked whether they consider the TEF rating of a university an important factor in their decision making. The perspectives highlighted in this poll further confirm the complexity of decision-making when it comes to choosing a university. With **74% of respondents** identifying that they have not heard of a TEF rating, indicating an almost overwhelming lack of awareness. This could be due to insufficient promotion or coverage of TEF by universities, other educational institutions or could even indicate that in their decision making process, students do not value ranking systems such as these as important.

A very small proportion of respondents (**2%**) voted that the TEF rating is the most important factor considered when deciding what university to apply to, with a further **14%** indicating that they will consider it but it will not sway their final decision, additionally **4%** say that they do not believe that it matters.

Year 13s: Which communication method do you prefer from a university you are interested in?



"I prefer emails since I can read them at my own pleasure. I think they should only call/text if they've got important information about your application and not for marketing."

Here the stats are clear, email dominates as the most popular method of communication with students in the context of hearing from universities.

While this remains the most preferred communication method among Year 13 students, there is a diversity of communication preferences, including phone calls, text/SMS, and self-research through social media. This suggests that in order to effectively engage with this demographic, universities should continue to adopt a multi-channel approach to their communication strategies and cater to the individual preferences of prospective students whilst being open to adapt depending on the context of the communication.



Insight from TSR Asks surveys

TSR Insight: How are schools and colleges supporting university decision making

Almost all (93%) said their school/college had organised events to support their university decision making. Most commonly schools/colleges had invited representatives from universities in to speak.

Perhaps surprisingly given the current financial climate, less than two-fifths (39%) said their school or college had provided Student Finance information at this point in the cycle (pre-application).

“Assemblies on the UCAS system and advice on how to complete the application etc.”

Q: Has your school/college done any of the following in relation to your university application / decision making? (Multiple response)



Methodology: Online survey
 Audience: 2024 entry prospective UGs
 Fieldwork: 6th - 9th October 2023
 Base: 222 responses

TSR Insight: How influential are teachers and schools on university decision making?



Almost two-thirds (63%) of prospective undergraduate respondents felt their teachers would have some influence their university choice, including 10% who thought they would have significant influence on their decisions.

Q: How much influence, if any, do you feel your teachers will have on your university choice? (Single response)



“Suggesting which universities are within my grades”

Q: Has your school/college done any of the following in relation to your university application / decision making? (Multiple response)

29%	Suggested courses you could consider
29%	Suggested universities you hadn't thought of
28%	Suggested careers you could consider
23%	Helped you narrow down university choices
12%	Discouraged you from choosing certain universities
5%	Discouraged you from choosing certain courses
3%	Something else
37%	None of these

Schools and colleges may be playing a part in students' rejecting universities; almost a quarter (23%) said their school/college had helped them narrow down their university choices while around one in eight (12%) said they had been discouraged from choosing certain universities by their school/college.

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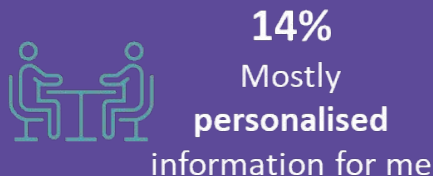


TSR Insight: How is advice delivered and where are schools advising students to search for information?



The majority of respondents (86%) said the information and support provided by their school or college was mostly general and delivered to groups of students. 14% said they received mostly personalised information or support.

Q: Which of the following best describes the information / support provided by your school or college about university? (Multiple response)



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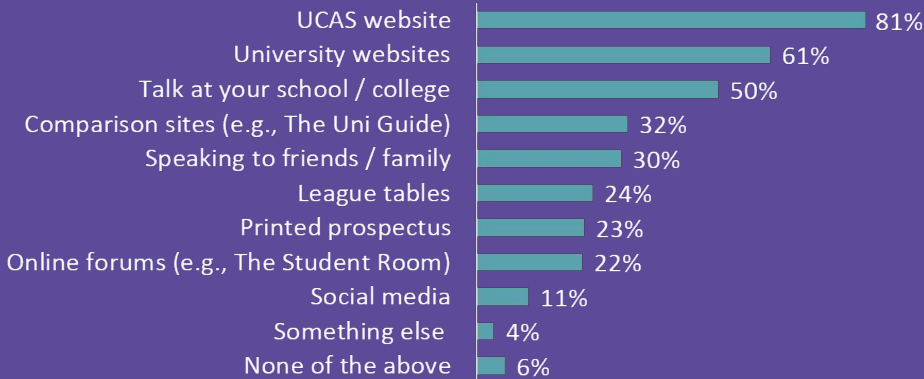
TSR Insight: How is advice delivered and where are schools advising students to search for information?



Positively almost all respondents (94%) had been given guidance on where to seek information to support their decision making. The UCAS website was the most frequently mentioned resource (81%), followed by university websites (61%).

Around one in three were being advised to seek information from comparison sites such as the Uni Guide (32%). Schools and colleges were also encouraging students to seek peer-to-peer recommendations from both friends and family (30%) or via online forums such as The Student Room (22%).

Q: Which, if any, of the following information sources have teachers advised you to use in relation to your university application / decision? (Multiple response)



Methodology: Online survey
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Product developments



New registrations on site (October)

2,936
Year 11

5,527
Year 12

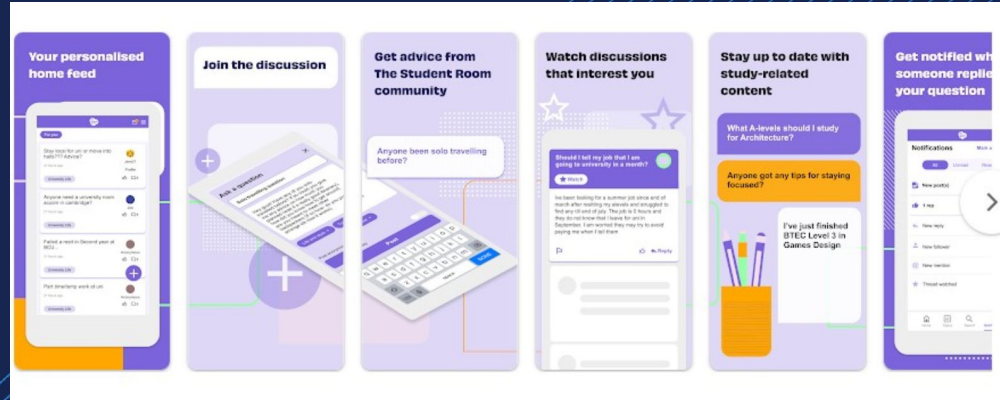
7,965
Year 13

New app launching soon

As we shared with you in October, we have been busy working on our new app for The Student Room.

We're excited to announce it is now available in app stores to download and as we start to roll the app out, we'll be continuing to gather user feedback and make refinements.




It is available to download on Apple and Android - just search for 'The Student Room'

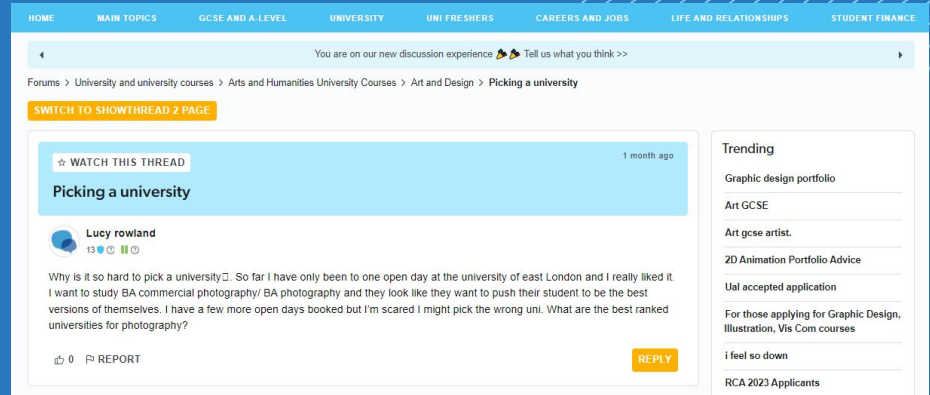


New thread experience

A lot has changed in all the years we've been around - but we've always been here to support students and connect them when it comes to making the big decisions.

And soon, we're going to be doing that better than ever. In the next few weeks, you'll see some changes to the site as we move over to a new modern design on thread pages called 'React'. Here's what we've improved:

-  Updated the discussions look and feel
-  Faster site
-  Easier to start new discussions and reply to current ones



All Official Reps at universities will be moving over to this. We have sent them a PM about this but please get your reps to check their messages for more details.

Things are changing round here

We're edging ever closer to our brand relaunch. We hope to present to you in all things violet next month!

