

Students need money management education, life skills support and more help from universities to make their decisions

Student sentiment update by The Student Room

6 February - 5 March 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 started writing these student sentiment updates back in January of 2021, when schools were closed to most students and traditional exams were cancelled. In 2022 we shared 13 of these updates, showcasing 108 community polls, with over 23,000 votes from students.

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

- Prospective students would like info on process, to speak to current students and a way to compare courses and universities to help them make their **university decisions**
- Only **15% of 2023 applicants feel fully clued up about student finance**; 45% 'have no idea' how it works
- Freshers would most benefit from **life skills and money management** support
- Over 60% of students still prefer **physical prospectuses**, and not just for their practicality
- 77% of TSR members support **UCAS' new apprenticeship application service**

The help Year 12s and 13s really need in making their university decisions

- 18%** Info about the process - what should I be doing when?
- 16%** Speaking with current students studying what I'm interested in
- 14%** A way to compare courses between unis
- 11%** Course-specific info from unis
- 11%** In-person open days run by the uni

The help Year 12s and 13s really need in making their university decisions

I would want to know the graduate prospects resulting from the degree/university and also how content is examined (for example with a Science degree how practicals/labs are used and what can I do to prepare for them (although the later I imagine I could easily research when I get round to it). What I would also like a comparison between two similar sounding degree courses (e.g Biochemistry and Chemistry, what areas of the subjects that I already do is focused on.)

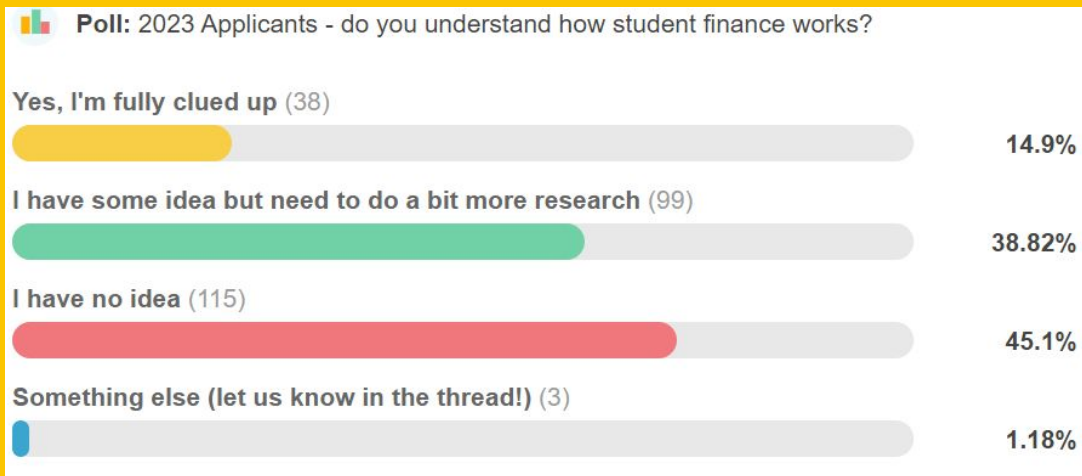
I'd love a way to compare courses between multiple unis (and yes, I know it's not that easy, but that's literally the deciding factor for me) since the modules tend to be really similar. What makes each uni stand out, subject-wise?

Uni life for unis (including the life for under 18s, which unis are most accomodating to under 18s in freedom and whatnot, and maybe for under 16s for info). Comparison between similar courses

Students are struggling with understanding student finance

Over 83% of students only had 'some idea' about student finance on the week applications opened, with 45% saying they have 'no idea'.

This is compared to 35% in the same poll we ran last year saying that they had 'no idea'. With concerns around money management and budgeting already there for 2023 applicants, ensuring students get as much support as possible is a key priority at the moment for anyone advising students.

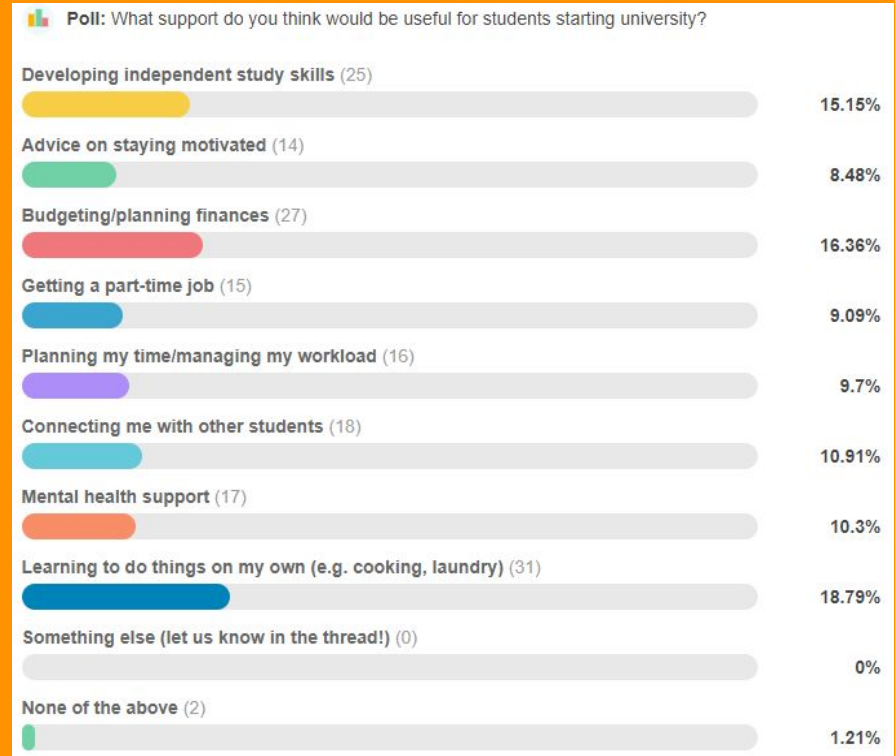


Freshers would most benefit from life skills and money management support

We asked future, current and past students what support they thought was most needed when starting university.

By far, life skills ('learning to do things on my own') was the top choice, with money management close behind.

Every year we see students seeking support in relation to life skills. Often it's closely linked with the need for a sense of confidence (especially in shared living) and overall wellbeing, not just the practicalities of 'doing life'.



Freshers would most benefit from life skills and money management support

I'm a third year, but when I started uni I could've done with a lot more help in actually how to write an essay / some kind of structure. We really were thrown into the deep end with the whole 'be analytical, there IS no structure' idea which was not very helpful. Having said that, I voted for budgeting help because it's important to understand the concept of money and how far it goes

I wanted to vote for more than one... I would have chosen mental health as well as study skills. Clearly mental health support should not solely be provided by universities, and no other agency or organisation, but it should be something they are aware of and involved in imo.

...I think that it should be the responsibility of schools and not unis to be teaching pupils how to Cook, Budget, do Laundry etc. I'd like to see the educational system changed so that learning about life skills (cooking, cleaning, doing taxes, budgeting, first aid etc) are part of the educational system (at secondary school and lower only, not university).

Freshers would most benefit from life skills and money management support

Students being keen to learn money management skills isn't surprising, especially when we consider some of the key facts from Blackbullion's newest [Student Money and Wellbeing 2023](#) report.

[These findings] show how the current cost of living crisis is causing lifetime scarring for current generations of students. What we must see as basic material rights for young people – adequate food, heating and time for study – have become privileges protected only for the wealthy.

Lee Elliot Major OBE

On average, students need

£548 extra

a month to feel confident they will be able to complete their degree

Female students² are short an

extra £120

than their male peers³ each month

The financial gap between what students have and need is

39% larger

than it was in 2022 (£395) and 67% more than in 2021 (£329)

9 in 10 students (87%)

are worried about money



say worrying about finances negatively impacts their mental health

Over a third (34%) are going hungry and

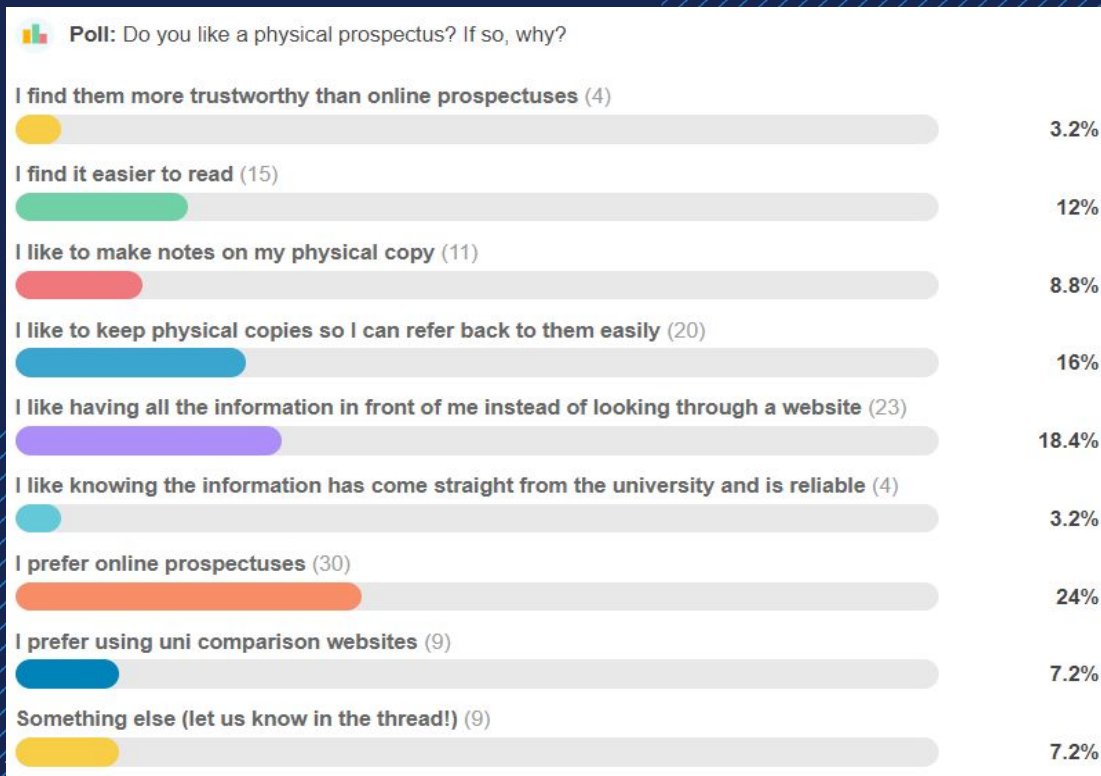
1 in 6 (16%)

are cutting back on personal hygiene

Students are still keen on physical prospectuses

While 30% of voters preferred online prospectuses or comparison websites, it was the ease of a tactile reference point that keeps the majority of other students interested in those glossy prospectus documents, according to our poll.

For hard-copy fans, there's almost a rite of passage associated with the physical document. While for others they're impractical but necessary for a greater level of detail.



Students are still keen on physical prospectuses

I love reading them at random times, and I much prefer reading something physically rather than digitally.

I love a good physical prospectus - it's a bit like a memento. You can easily pick it back up, and you're reminded of where and when you got it. Digital files just don't have that same nostalgic or keepsake air to me.

I remember way back when we went to a uni fair thing and had to pick up physical prospectuses, and while very shiny and neat looking, practically they were not any more useful than the uni website (and the material became outdated much more quickly). Also it was impractical trying to carry around too many which limited how many I could even get on the day! I prefer detailed programme information being made available on the uni webpages. Unfortunately, unis seem to be entering a trend of making their online pages much more limited with just basic information available...

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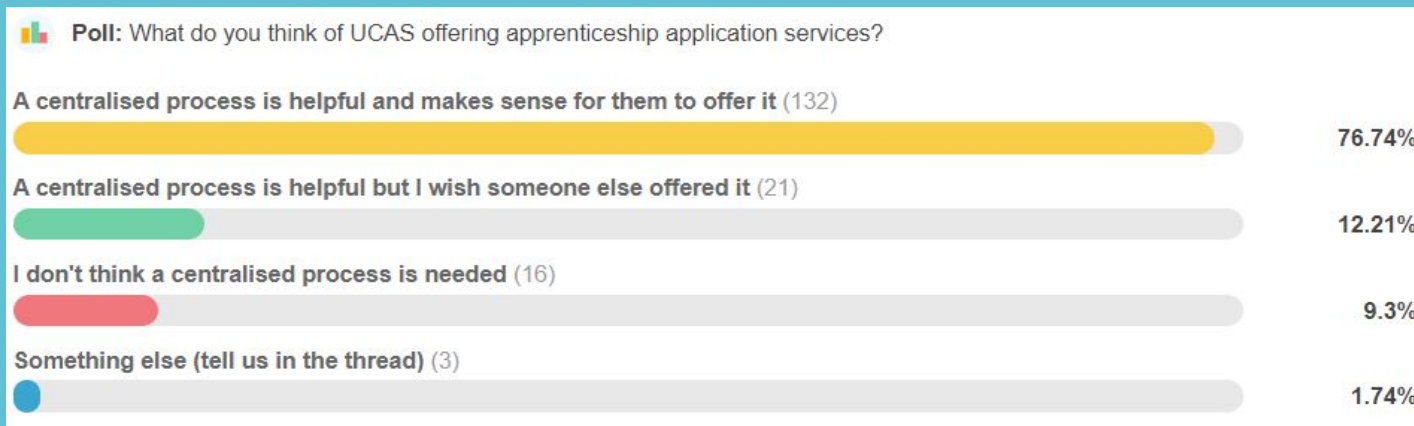
I found the physical copy was the best when I was very early in my decision making process for university (S4 in Scotland - prior to sitting exams and picking Higher subjects). It was much easier to look at the prospectuses from a couple of universities, all the different faculties and the range of different courses available. Once I had made decisions on the courses I was interested in, if I wanted to look up anything on those courses I would use online.

Seeing the manual prospectuses sitting invitingly on the table or splayed out on the floor made it feel all so real! Every morning they were the first thing I clapped eyes on and I read them like a million times. They smelt different and smelt like 'success'

I always found physical better to make notes on about the accommodation etc. Also there was usually more info than there was online, I didn't want to have to search through all the websites

77% of TSR members support UCAS' new apprenticeship application service

Following UCAS and the government's announcement of their new apprenticeship application service, more than three quarters of TSR members have shown their support for the move. Given the increasing interest we see in alternatives to traditional undergraduate degrees (including degree apprenticeships), it makes sense that students are keen for a level of centralisation around this process.



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As it is, there are different application deadlines for different universities and most (but not all) courses in medicine, veterinary medicine/science, and dentistry. Some universities and some courses interview, but candidates often don't know which. Some courses at some universities use entrance tests, but candidates often don't know which. Add apprenticeships into the mix, which will doubtless have their own deadlines, their own interview policies, their own entrance tests, etc etc. will just add an extra layer of complexity to the UCAS application process. I think the only way it would work is with very good and distinct branding. Students seem to be comfortable with the concept that UCAS Extra and UCAS Clearing are separate from (but linked to) the main scheme. So if UCAS launched a completely separate service called UCAS Apprenticeship (for example), then that might work.

I think it's great providing that they do not make the process overly confusing and complicated. This also might cause confusion for people who have completed degrees and are then applying for apprenticeships. Where do they apply?

I think it's a great idea for UCAS to expand their offerings to include apprenticeships. Many students may not have considered apprenticeships as a viable option for further education and career development, and having them easily accessible through UCAS could open up new opportunities for them. Additionally, having a centralized platform where students can search and apply for both university courses and apprenticeships makes the process more streamlined and convenient for students. The collaboration between the government and UCAS is also promising, as it could lead to greater transparency and accessibility in the apprenticeship sector