

TSR INSIGHT



The Covid Cohort

Understanding 2022 applicants

Welcome: Webinar 6th May 2021



The Covid Cohort: Understanding 2022 applicants

Presenters

- **Victoria Littler:** Senior Account Director | 6 years HE
| Supporting clients to understand their target market | Leadership role across multiple sectors - Education, Brands, Government, Recruitment and Insight.
- **Barbara Bradshaw:** Senior Market Research Consultant
| 16 years experience specializing in qualitative and quantitative research | University background | Leading TSR's NCO research



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Agenda

- What we did and why we did it
- Scene setting
- Findings
- How they're feeling in general
- University research
- The future
- Key takeaways
- Q&A



Methodology:

**Quantitative Tracking Study
Navigating Changing Options**



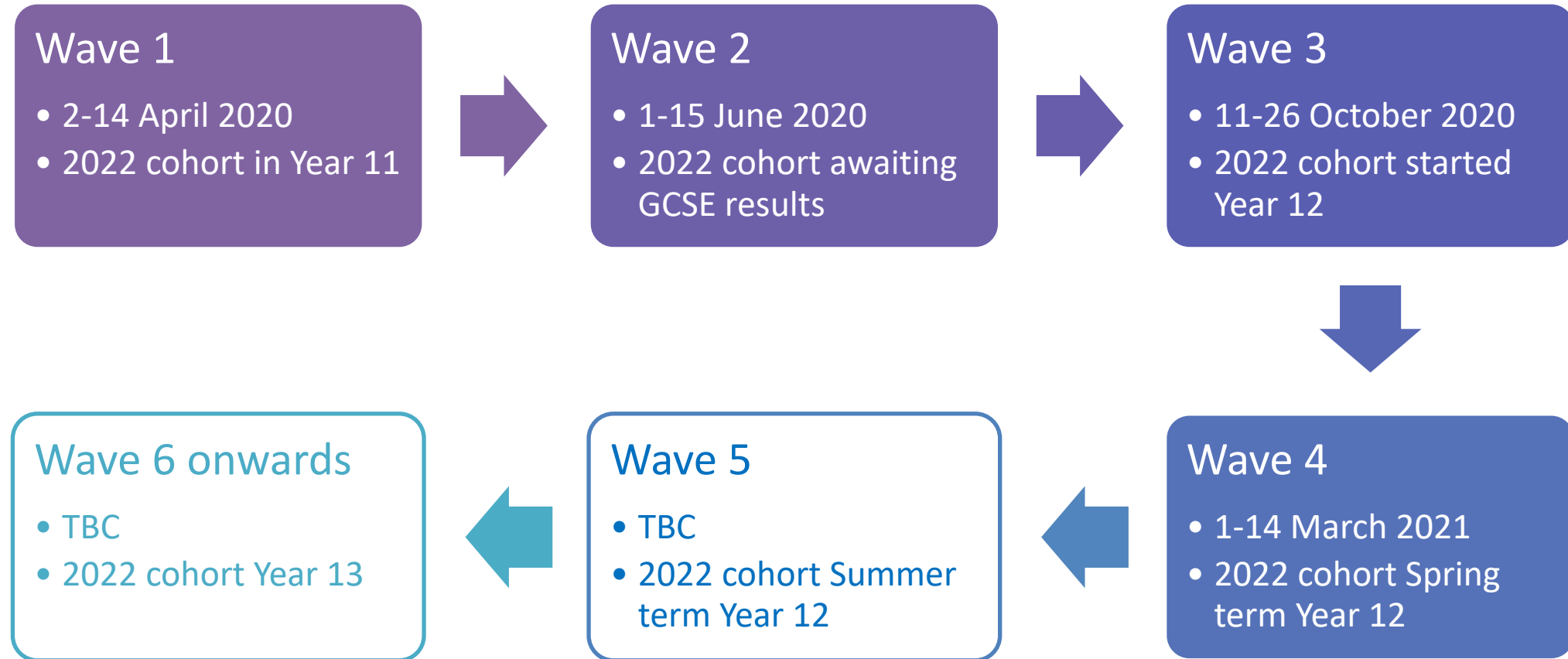
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Navigating Changing Options: Methodology

- Regular large scale online tracking surveys
- Responding to changes in the recruitment cycle
- Registered members of the TSR community and visitors to the site
- 75% of UK students visit us
- UK students and applicants aged over 16
- Year 11 through to current university students
- This presentation: Focus on 2022 cohort – from Year 11 through to now



Navigating Changing Options: Timings



Setting the Scene:

What was happening during the four fieldwork periods

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Wave 1: 2nd – 14th April 2020

2022 cohort were in Year 11, rainbows were everywhere

885 Year 11s participated in our survey

- **Main news**

- The UK had locked down
- GCSEs were cancelled
- The 2022 cohort had just 2 days notice that their high school years were over

- **While the survey was live**

- Captain Sir Tom Moore was walking laps of his garden
- Boris Johnson was admitted to intensive care and then discharged
- Families around the world were tuning in to PE with Joe
- The plan for Centre Assessed Grades for GCSE students was announced



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Wave 2: 1st – 15th June 2020

2022 cohort were awaiting their GCSE results and Lockdown 1 was easing

1,554 Year 11s participated in the survey

- **Main news**
 - Test and Trace launched
 - 10th and final clap for carers
 - Schools were in the process of submitting Centre Assessed Grades
- **While the survey was live**
 - Anti-racism demonstrations around the world
 - Support bubbles were introduced
 - Non-essential retailers were allowed to reopen



<https://www.gov.uk/>

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Wave 3: 11th – 26th October 2020

2022 cohort had started Year 12, back in the classroom, but there'd be Tiers before Xmas

617 Year 12s participated in the survey

- **Main news**

- We'd had A level results day - and the algorithm
- GCSE results determined by Centre Assessed Grades
- The country had spent the summer eating out to help out...

- **While the survey was live**

- Nationwide Tier regulations came into force
- Uncertainty regarding free school meals funding over half term holidays
- UK universities faced criticism about the cost and quality of food parcels for self isolating students



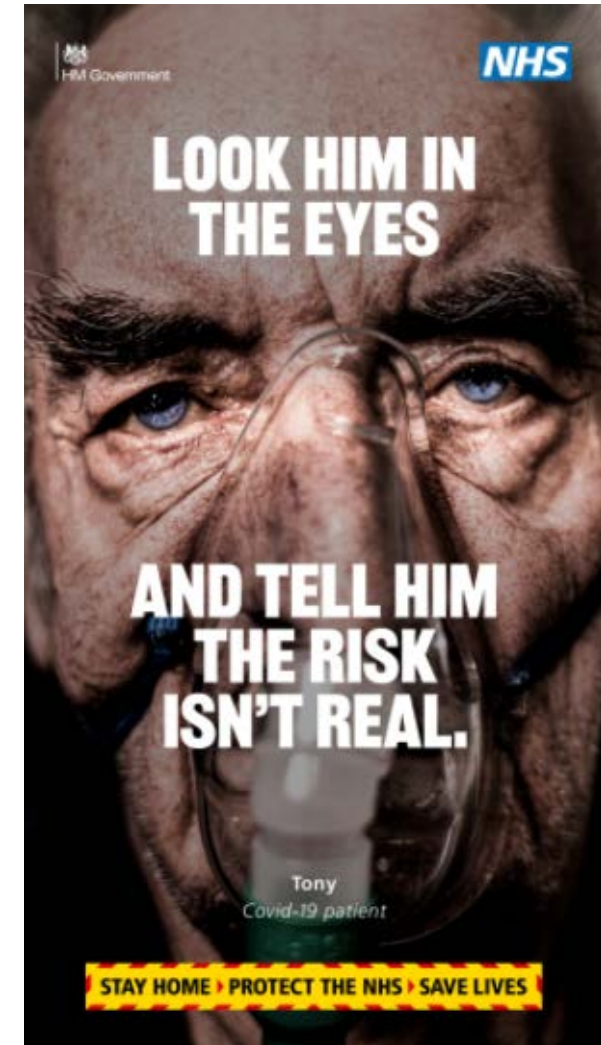
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Wave 4: 27th Feb – 14th March 2021

2022 cohort in Spring term of Year 12, remote learning for most
- no rainbows this time

766 Year 12s participated in the survey

- **Main news**
 - Vaccinations were well under way
 - New variants identified
 - Lockdown 3 in progress – plans to reopen published
- **While the survey was live**
 - Schools and colleges returned to classroom learning
 - Reclaim the Streets protests
 - 24.2 million had received their first vaccination





Findings:

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Despite initial lack of confidence the majority were happy with the GCSE grades they achieved

- **In April 2020**
 - Just 44% were confident they would get the grades they deserved
- **In June 2020**
 - Less than half (45%) said they understood how their GCSE grades would be calculated
- **In October 2020**
 - 63% reported that they had received the grades they deserved
 - 80% said overall they were **happy** with their results

Q: How confident are you that you will get the grades you deserve? 5 point scale (Wave 1 Base: 839, Wave 2 Base: 1433)

Q: Do you understand how your grades will be calculated / awarded? (Wave 2 Base: 1432)

Q: Thinking about the grades you received, please answer yes or no to the following statements? (Wave 3 Base 587)

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However missing GCSE exams led to concerns about future exam performance

“Having missed being able to sit exams for two years in a row, I feel very frightened about having to sit my A-Levels next year knowing I've never sat a real exam before.”



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And this cohort had other concerns to contend with

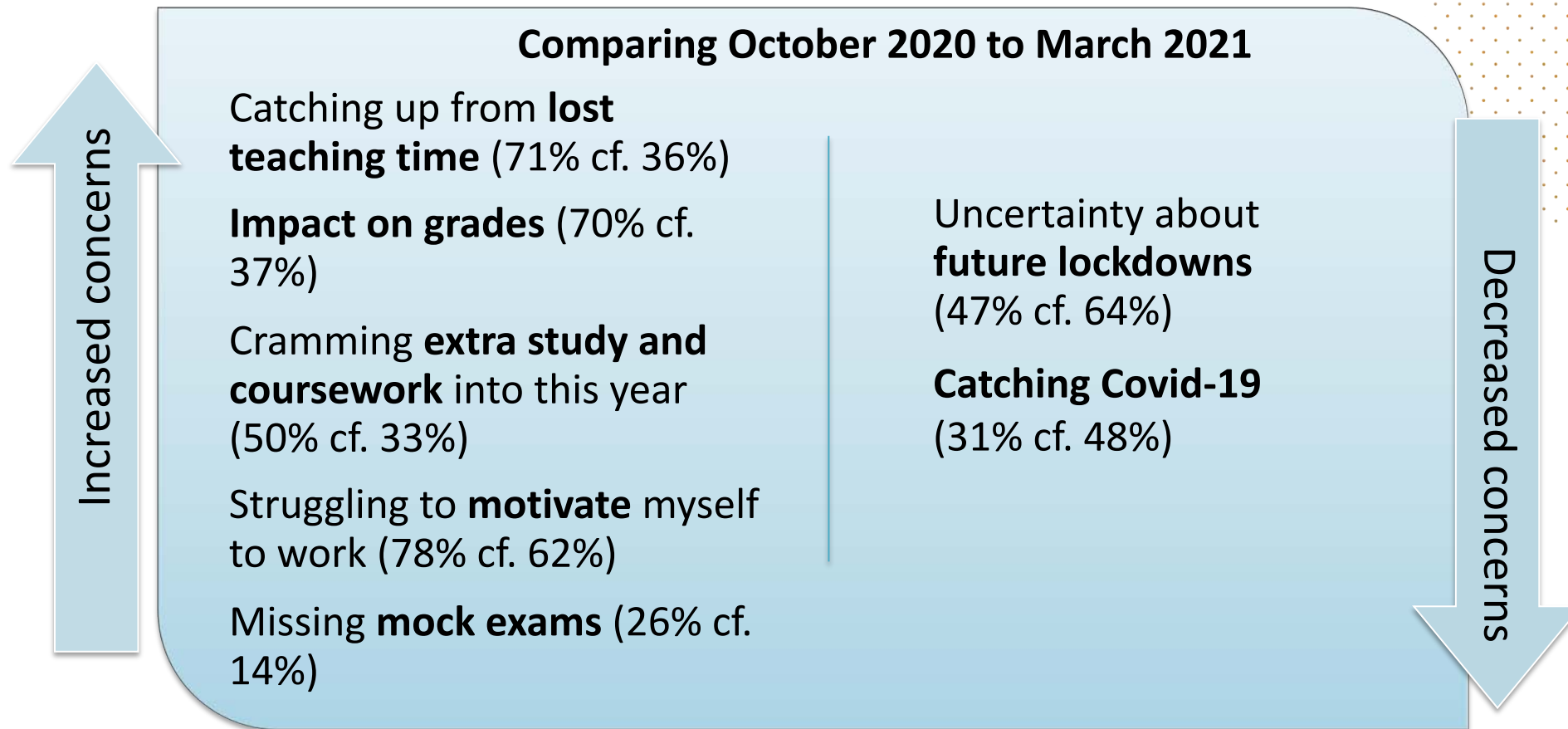
- Struggling to **motivate** themselves to work 78%
- Catching up from lost teaching time 71%
- The impact on their grades 70%

- And in relation to their university applications
 - Missing **work experience opportunities** 68%
 - Missing **face-to-face university open days** 58%
 - Missing extracurricular opportunities to put on my **personal statement** 57%
 - Missing **UCAS/HE fairs** to find out about universities 40%

Q: Which, if any, of the following are you worried about? Please select all that apply (Wave 3 Base: 604, Wave 4 Base: 731)

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Concerns had intensified as Year 12 progressed and the reality of lost teaching time and the potential impact on their grades becomes more apparent



Q: Which, if any, of the following are you worried about? Please select all that apply (Wave 3 Base: 604, Wave 4 Base: 731)

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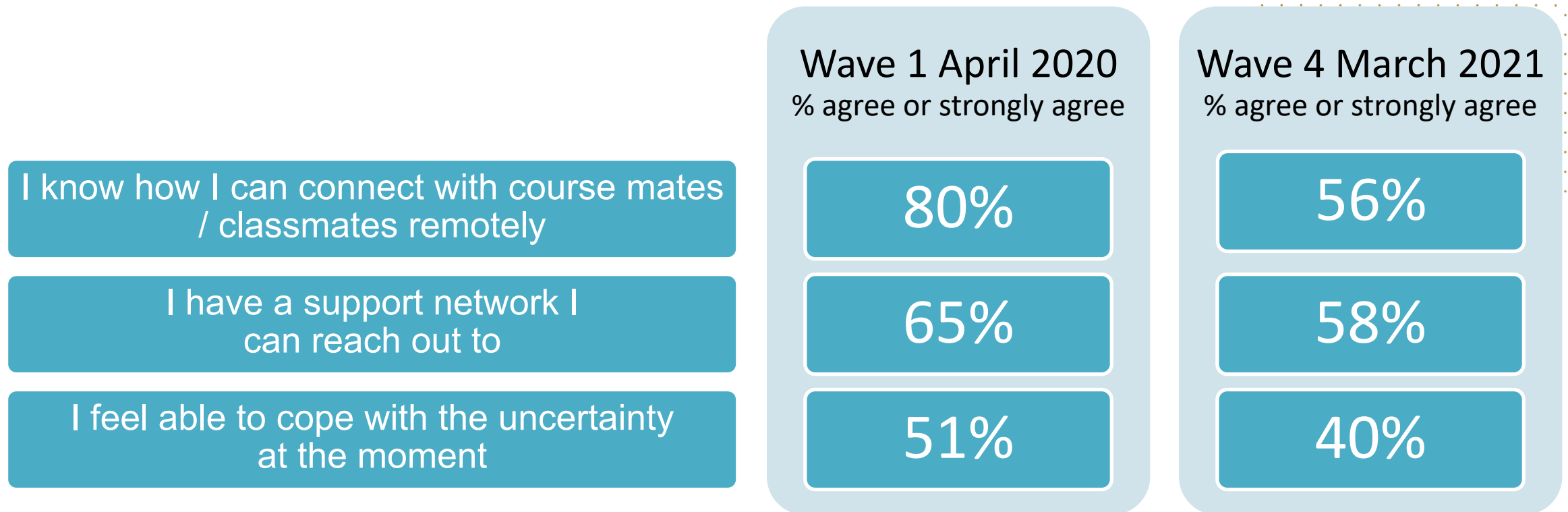
And this cohort face new and unprecedented worries

“if I stay in school any longer than necessary and attend that revision session, I am more likely to kill my grandparents’



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While communicating online for school and social interactions has increasingly become the norm, this cohort were feeling less connected now than they did in Lockdown 1. Connection with others, having a support network and the ability to cope with uncertainty had declined.



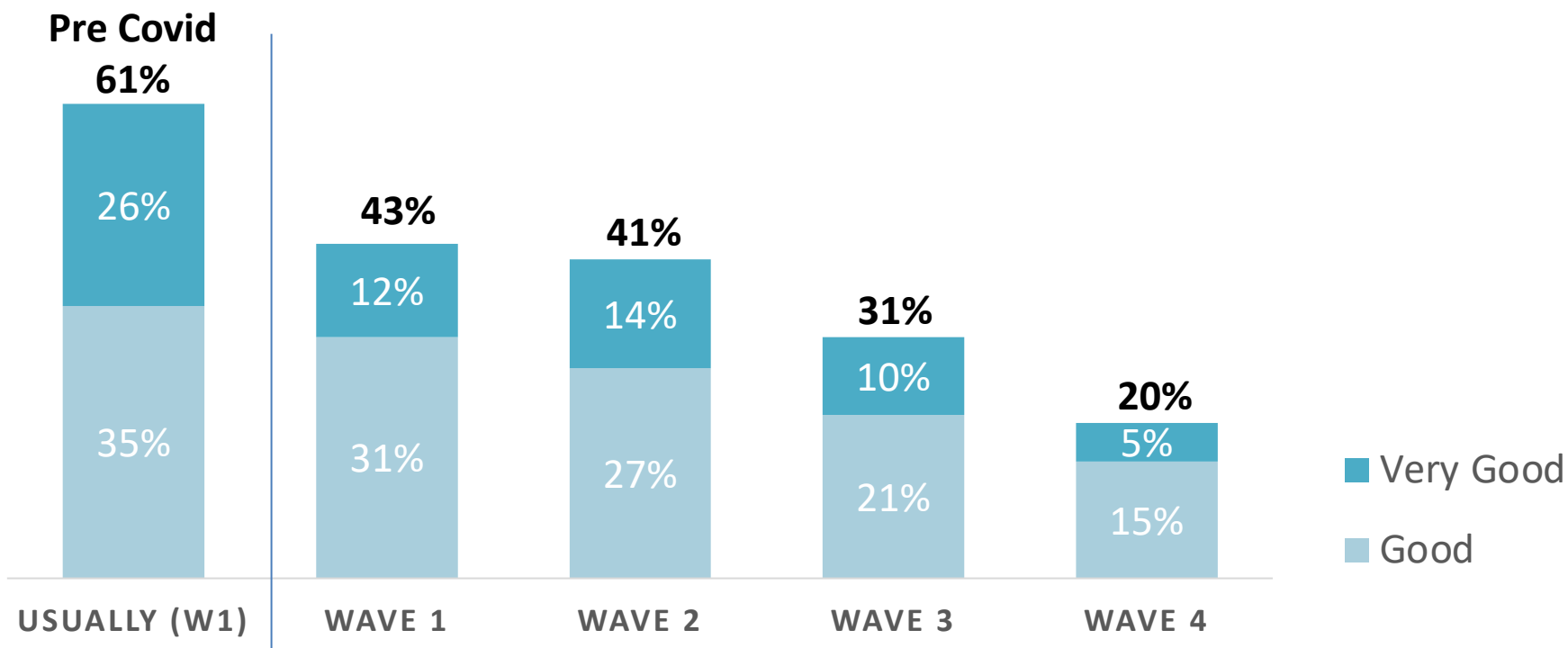
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 5 point scale (Wave 1 Base: 856, Wave 4 Base: 664)

I know how I connect with coursemates / classmates remotely / I have a support network I can reach out to / I feel able to cope with the uncertainty at the moment

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The impact on mental health has been significant – just 20% described their mental health positively

Proportion describing their mental health as 'good' or 'very good' over time



1st-14th March 2021
Across TSR we saw 4,295 posts from 2,088 unique posters mentioning 'stress', 'anxiety' or 'worry'

Q: How would you describe your mental health...Usually/At the moment 5 point scale (Wave 1 Base: 843, Wave 2 Base: 1442, Wave 3 Base: 552, Wave 4 Base: 666)

Q: Which, if any, of the following are you worried about? Multiple response (Wave 4 Base 731)

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Motivation is low...

“Motivation and mental health has gone down the drain and literally everyone I know hates school and their current subjects now... it's like watching their passion for learning just die slowly :)”

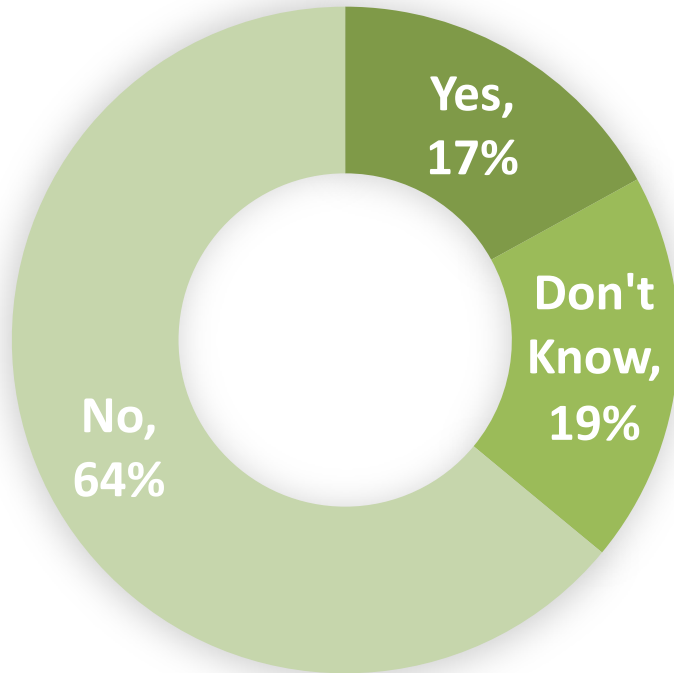




Impact on their future:

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Has Covid 19 impacted choice of subject for 2022 applicants?



For 17%, yes it had, 19% were unsure

Some groups were more likely to have been influenced

- 23% of those predicted AAB-BBB said yes (compared to 14% predicted AAA +)
- 20% of first in family respondents said their choice of subject had changed (compared to 14% whose parents had been to uni)

Why has Covid 19 impacted their choice of subject?

- Lack of relevant **work experience opportunities**
- Lack of **careers advice** and fails to explore difference options
- Lack of **confidence** they will get the grades required for the courses they originally considered
- Lack of **motivation** and confidence to pursue high pressure careers
- Choosing courses more likely to lead to **secure employment**
- Increased **time to reflect** and consider choices

Q Why has Covid-19 impacted your choice of subject? (Wave 4 Base: 93)

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Employability after they graduate was a concern and Covid had heightened this worry

- 68% were quite or very concerned about getting a job after they graduate
- Pre-covid half as many had concerns (34%)

“Covid-19 has made me feel as if all the doors are closed on us”

“We’ve just been so messed around and I think many students are at breaking point :(it’s so hard to look into future careers with this going on too and I can’t get a part time job because of COVID either.”

Q: Before Covid-19, how concerned were you about getting a job after you graduate / finish your studies? 5 point scale (Wave 4 Base: 667)

Q: Now thinking about the current situation, how concerned are you about getting a job after you graduate / finish your studies? 5 point scale (Wave 4 Base: 667)

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How has Covid 19 impacted their choice of subject?

In their own words

It has made me realise that I lack the motivation and self confidence needed to go into certain industries - and that I should try and find employment opportunities that aren't as intense

I haven't been able to meet with my careers teacher as much as I would have liked so I'm not completely sure of the career options that I would have with other subjects that I might have chosen

I want to be sure I choose a degree that gives me a high chance of employment, rather than a degree I like but doesn't lead directly into a stable career because of the economic impact COVID-19 has had..

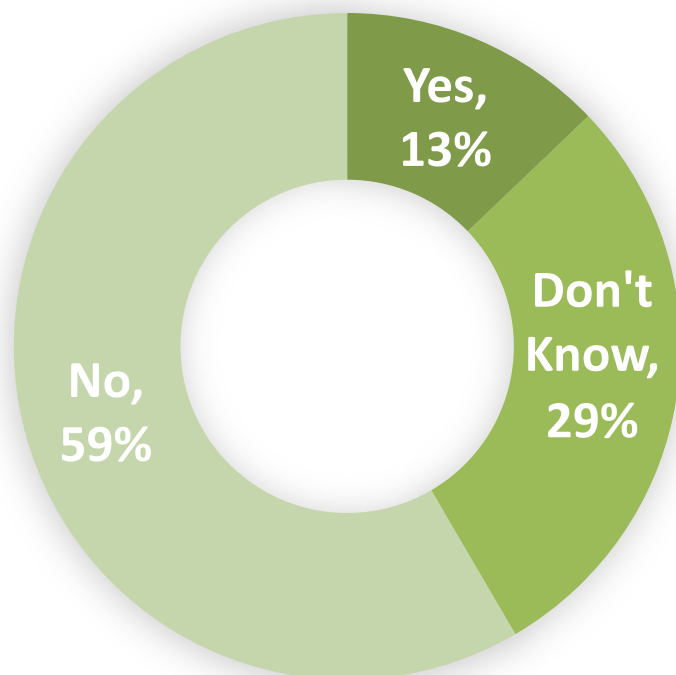
I need to go with the safer option as covid as made me realise how easy it is to be out of a job

I was considering law but without the work experience opportunities English was less risky

Has given me more time to realise what I want and what job I want

Q Why has Covid-19 impacted your choice of subject? (Wave 4 Base: 93)

Has Covid 19 impacted choice of university for 2022 applicants?



For 13%, yes it had, 29% were unsure

- Male respondents were more likely than females to say their university choice would be unaffected 71% said 'no' versus 55% of females
- Female respondents were more likely to be unsure (31% versus 21%)

Why has Covid 19 impacted their choice of university?

- Lack of **confidence** they will get the grades required for the universities they originally considered
- Lack of **motivation** to apply to universities with high entry requirements
- Desire to be **closer to home** (not necessarily at home) in case of future lockdowns
- **No opportunities to visit** and explore different options
- Response to universities' handling of the pandemic and **treatment of current students**

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How has Covid 19 impacted their choice of university?

In their own words

It has made me realise that I am not capable of achieving top grades and that I should aim for something lower

I don't think I'll travel to a uni outside of London for me. As the travel home fiasco that occurred with uni students when Covid hit was very bad.

Grades have dropped because of online learning

it made me realise how much I depend on my family, so I want somewhere close enough to visit but far enough for independence

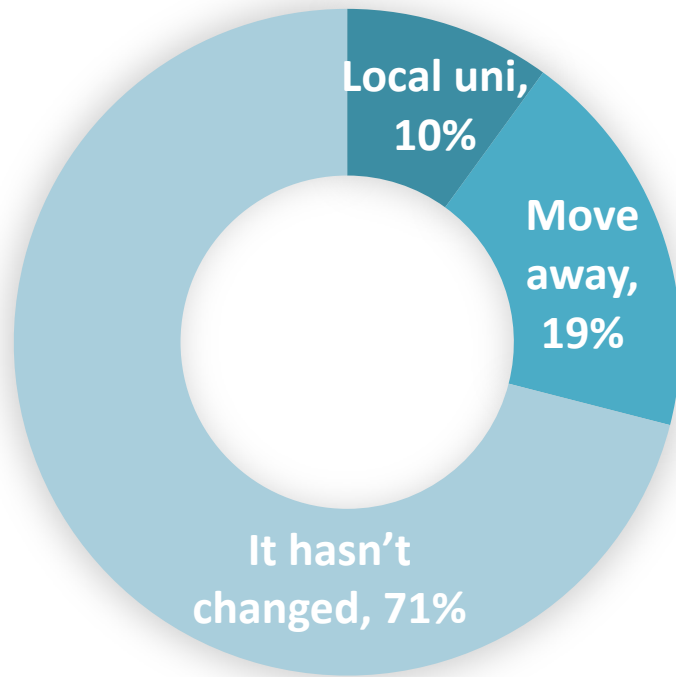
Some universities that I considered, have dealt with this pandemic in a terrible way and have treated students poorly. I have decided not to attend those universities.

i am unable to attend open days and so i am only able to get information about universities with a large online presence e.g detailed website, social media, those that hold virtual open days and attend virtual fairs

Q Why has Covid-19 impacted your choice of university? (Wave 4 Base: 71)

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Are 2022 applicants more likely to want to stay at home for university?



For most (71%) plans hadn't changed

- 10% were more interested in staying at home
- 19% were more interested in moving away
- First in family respondents were more likely to have changed their plans
 - 12% now staying local (versus 7%)
 - 24% now moving away (versus 16%)

Q: Has this changed since the Coronavirus pandemic? (Wave 4 Base: 608)

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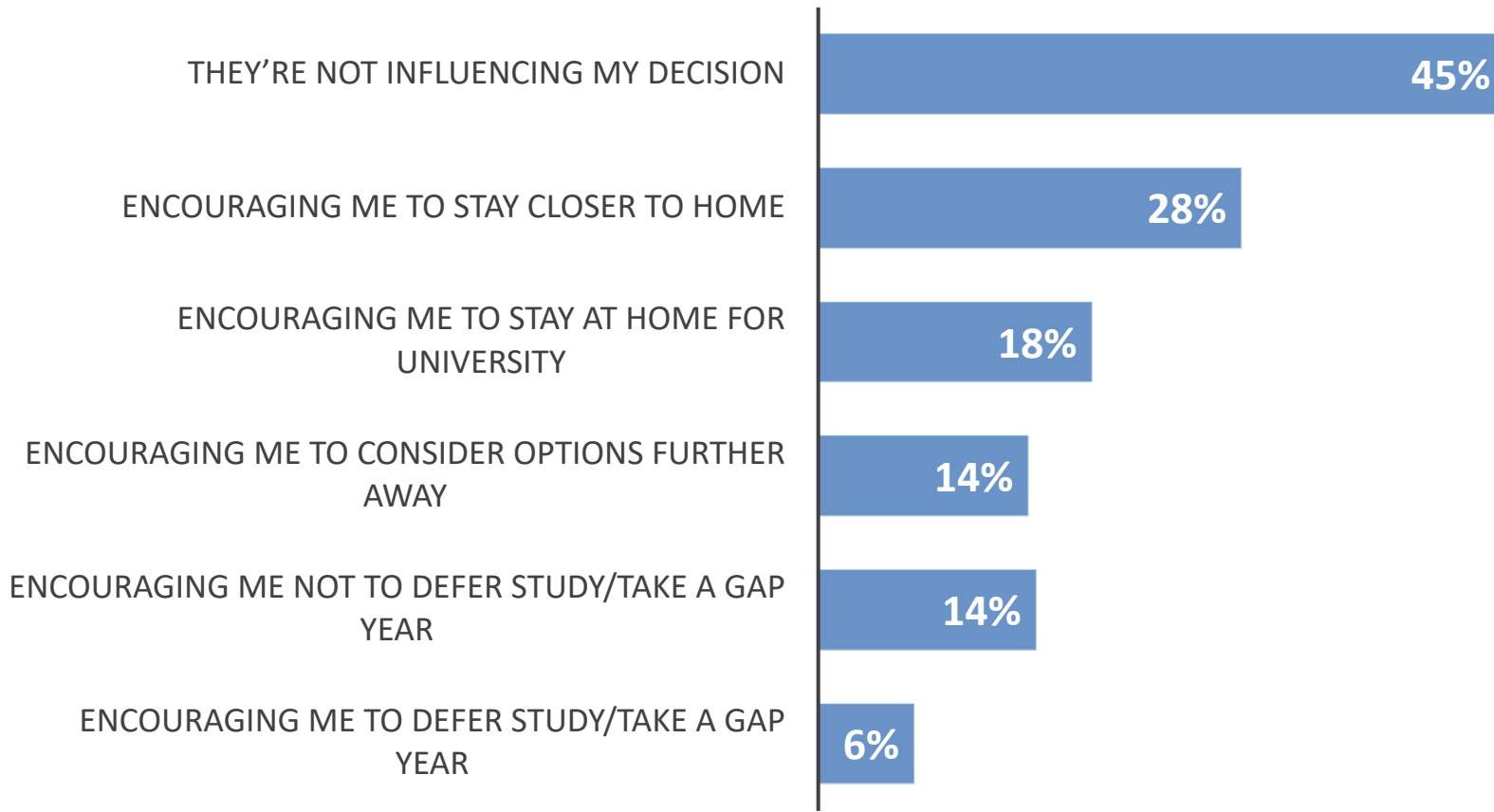
**It's not necessarily about staying at home for university,
it's about being able to get home if they need to**

*"I want to be in university away
from home so I can enjoy myself but close
to transport so I can leave last minute and
quickly if anything happens"*



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With all the additional time spent at home are parents influencing decisions?



First in family respondents and those that received **Free School Meals** were more likely to say parents were encouraging them to **stay at home for university**

Q: How, if at all, are your parents/guardians/carers currently influencing your university decision making at the moment? Multiple choice? (Wave 4 Base: 603)

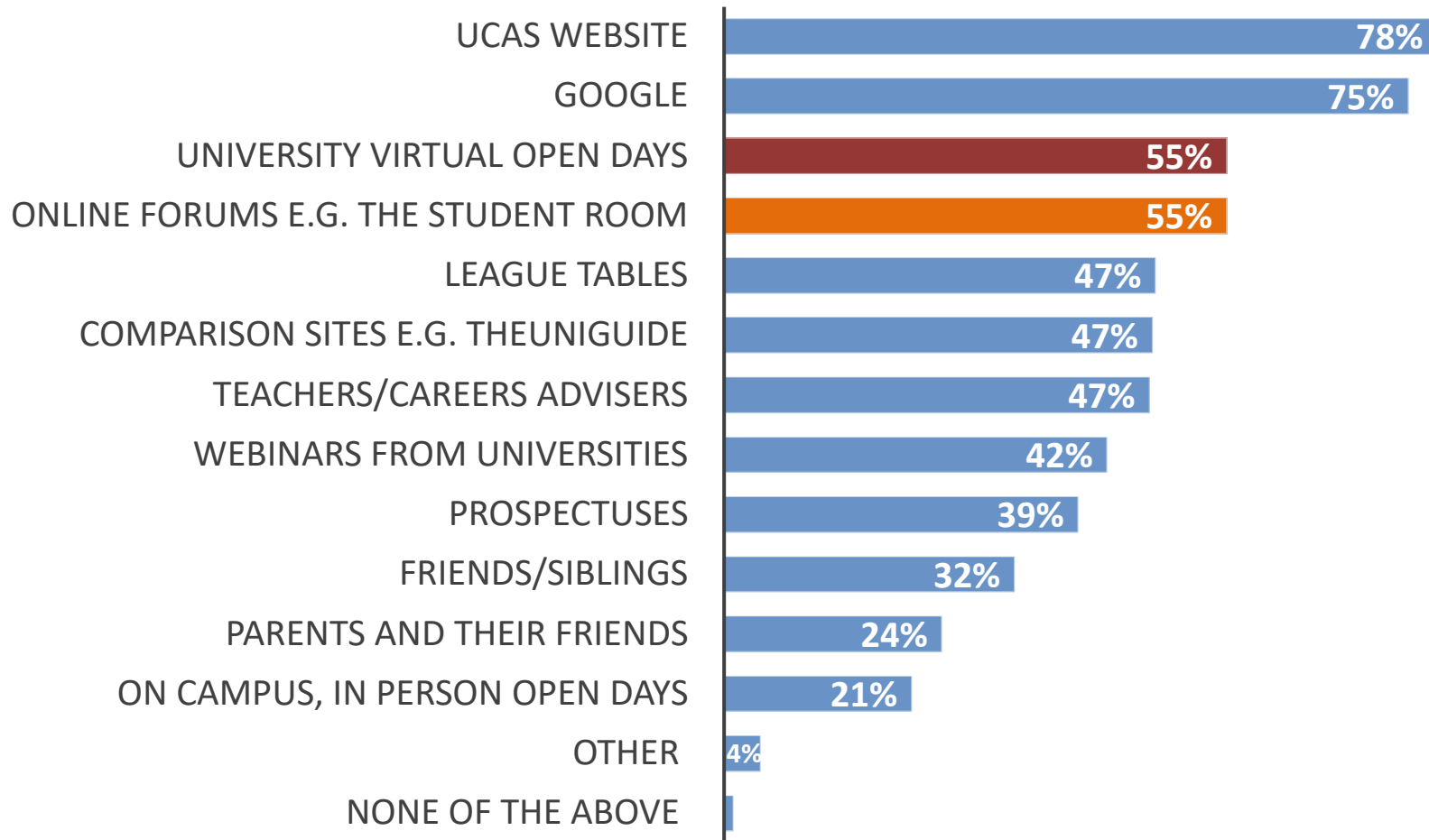


Researching universities:

Covid style

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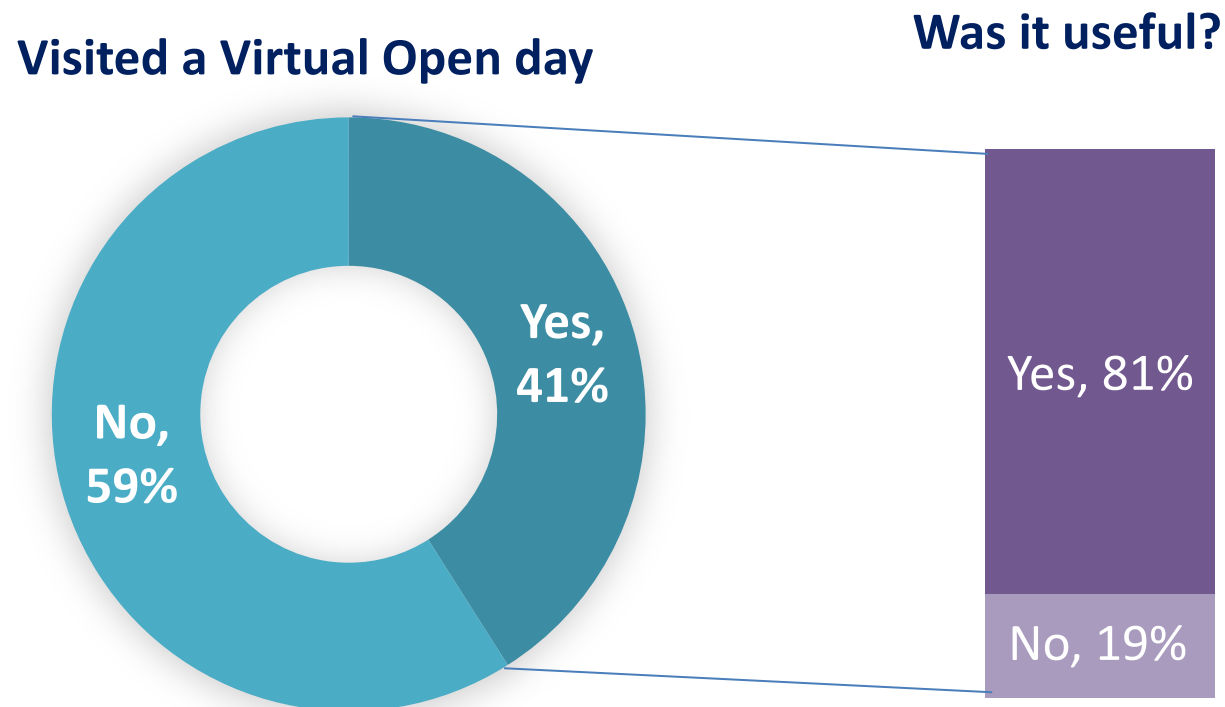
How they are researching universities?



First in family
respondents used fewer information sources in general than those whose parents had uni experience

Q: How have you / will you find out about the different universities and courses that are available to you? Multiple responses (Wave 4 Base: 604)

Virtual Open Days: Have they attended and if so, were they useful?



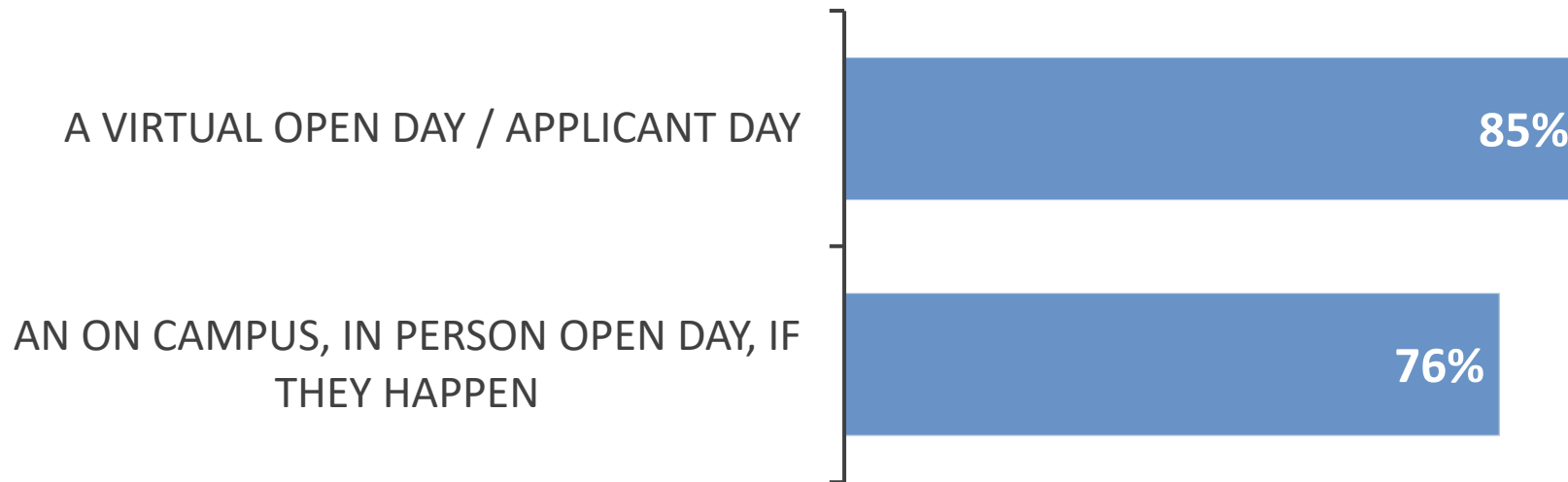
- **41% had attended** Virtual Open Day so far
- 81% of those found the virtual open day they attended **useful**

Q: Have you visited any Virtual / Online Open Days so far? (Wave 4 Base 606)

Q: Were the Virtual / Online Open Day(s) you have attended useful? (Wave 4 Base: 253)

They still plan to attend more Virtual Open Days and on campus events if they can

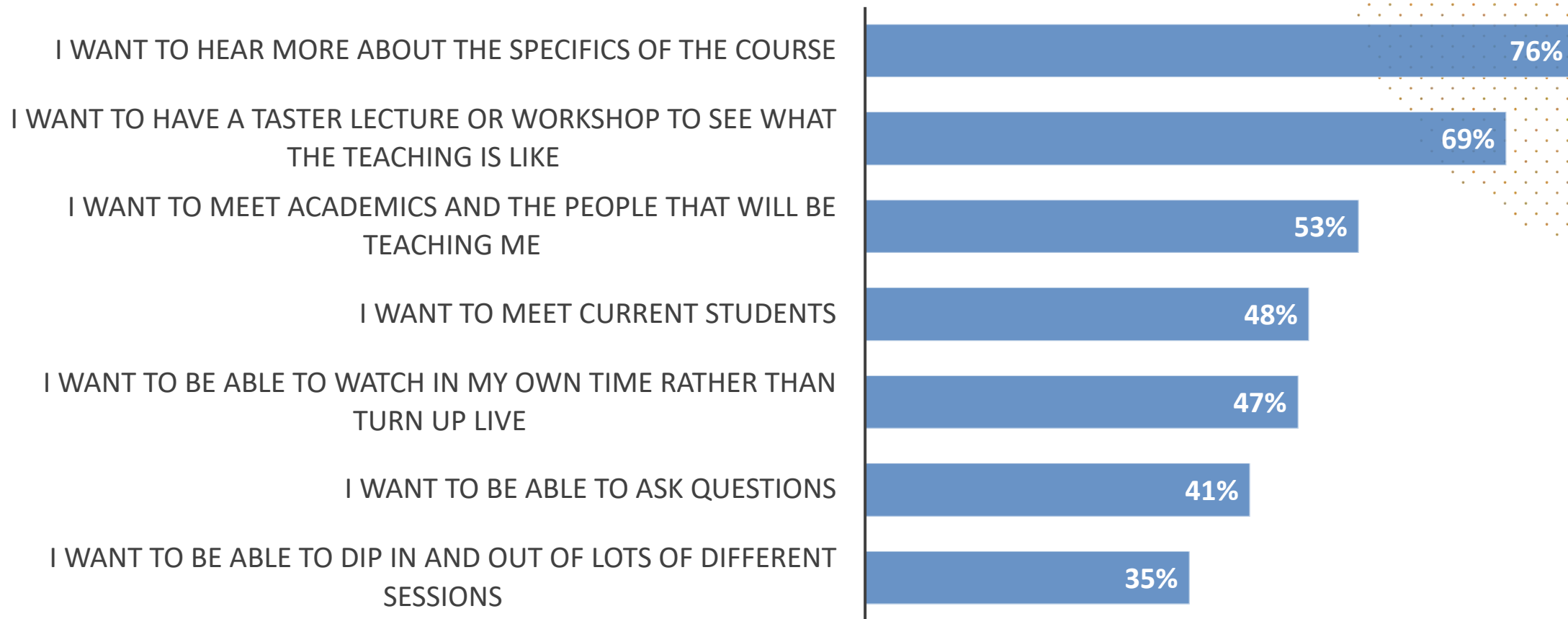
And this spring / summer, are you planning to attend...?



71% planned to visit both online and face-to-face events this summer (if restrictions allow)

Q: And this spring / summer, are you planning to attend...? (Wave 4 Base: 604)

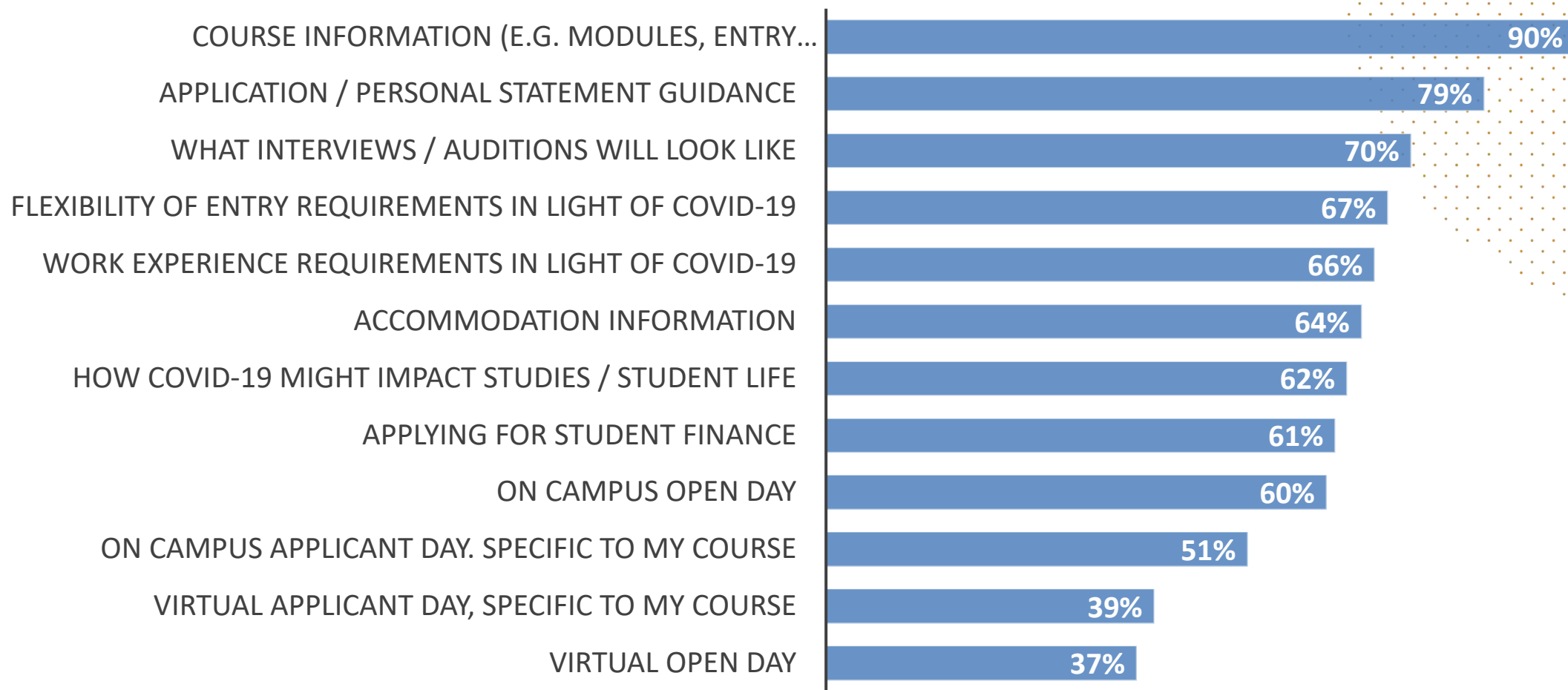
What do you want most from university virtual open days and online events?



Q: What do you want most from university virtual open days and online events? Please select up to three choices (Wave 4 Base: 599)

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What information do they want from universities now?



Q: What information do you want from universities now? Multiple responses (Wave 4 Base: 572)

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They're worried that exams and applications will return to normal for 2022 entry and no allowances will be made

“As I am in my first year of college I’m scared we will have to sit A-levels as if nothing happened. ... I hope they either cancel 2022 A-levels completely or at least significantly cut down in content to make up for the lessons we’ve missed and take into account the major decrease in motivation and mental health.”



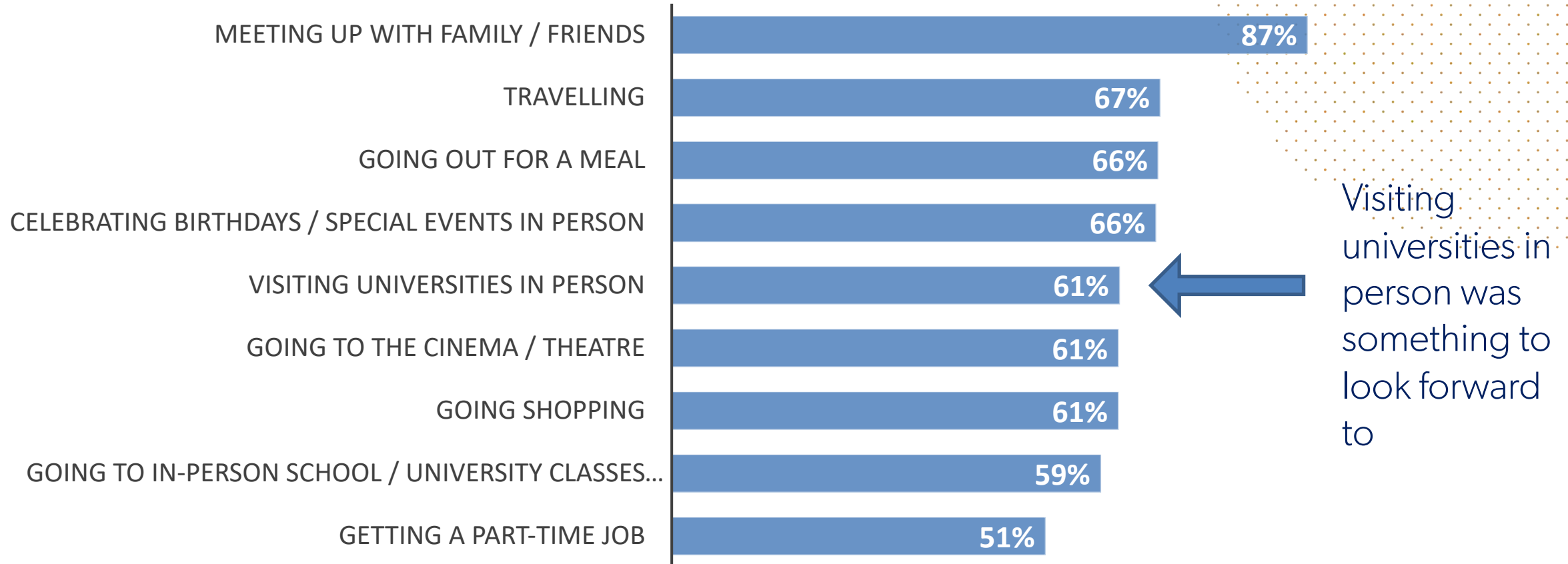


The future:

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Meet-ups, travelling, meals out and in-person celebrations topped the post lock-down to-do list



Q: What are you most looking forward to, when the vaccination roll-out is completed and it's safe to socialise again? Please select all that apply (Wave 4 Base: 662)

Chart shows aspects selected by more than 50% of respondents

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Lockdown wasn't all bad... and options to continue studying flexibly could be welcomed

- 96% wanted to maintain some elements of their lockdown lives
- On average each respondent selected 4.5 aspects of lockdown they wanted to maintain
- 57% wanted the **flexibility** to work / study at a **time that suits them**
- 50% wanted the **flexibility** to work / study **from home**
- 41% wanted to continue **studying more independently**

Q: Are there any positive aspects of lockdown that you would like to maintain once restrictions are eased? Please select all that apply (Wave 4 Base: 656)

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There have been some upsides

“Covid has given me more time to look into universities, I think my choices would of been different if covid had not happened”

“The lockdowns have provided me with more time to focus on university research.”



Key Takeaways



What this means for you

1. 2022 cohort are keen to visit universities in person
2. Consistent, clear and supportive communication
3. Offering flexibility in where/when/how they can study may be of interest
4. Communicate whether and what allowances will be made to regarding work experience and entry requirements
5. Be mindful of a general lack of confidence and motivation
6. Be aware that they're watching how universities are dealing with current students and this is impacting where they are considering



Any questions?

Contact us

Thank you so much for joining us!

**If you have suggestions for topics to include in future waves
let us know**

For access to the full reports contact Victoria Littler

hello@tsrinsight.com

