

Students thoughts on 2022 exams and apprenticeships

Plus revision tools, UCAS
submissions, and wellbeing
resolutions



Student sentiment update by The Student Room

3 - 30 January 2022

Sharing the student voice

I'm Mhairi and I'm the Head of Student Voice and Diversity at The Student Room.



I've worked with TSR for five years, having started as a Community and Volunteer Manager, then moving to Head of Community, and I'm now thrilled to continue transforming our support for students in this role. Before my TSR life I was a secondary school teacher and head of year. Through my career I've always been driven by my passion for supporting students and helping them to create a future they love, no matter their background or personal circumstance.

I started writing these student sentiment updates back in January of 2021, when schools were closed to most students and traditional exams were cancelled. At TSR, we spend our days chatting to students and hearing all about the way they experience their world and the challenges they face. In 2021 we shared 17 of these updates, showcasing 72 community polls, with over 42,000 votes from students. We have an incredible opportunity (and responsibility) as the UK's largest online student community, to raise the voice of students and share it with people like you who are there to support them. I really do believe that its by listening to students and working across the whole industry together that we can make a real difference in students' lives.

I'm always up for a chat, so do get in touch if you'd like to hear more about this work (or massively geek out about students with me over a coffee).

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Highlights in this update

- Students are divided about whether **exams** should go ahead in 2022 - and they've got strong opinions as to why
- 1 in 5 students on TSR are actively considering an **apprenticeship**
- When it comes to revision, **past papers** are the most popular tool of choice
- October was the most popular month for TSR students to submit their **UCAS applications**
- For those young people who made new year resolutions, **wellbeing** was a top focus

Students are divided about whether exams should go ahead this year

...and it's a divisive issue. In addition to nearly 1000 votes in our [poll](#), we received a huge amount of discussion from students on this topic. It's clear how front-of-mind it is for them.

The next few slides share thoughts from those who support exams, those who don't, and students who've experienced disrupted assessments in 2020 and 2021.

 **Poll:** Do you want exams to go ahead?



Students are divided about whether exams should go ahead this year

Here's what students said who DO want exams in 2022...

As a gap year student who only had 6 months of the normal a level experience and is resitting a levels this summer... yes 100% I'm paying to sit them as a private candidate and am relying on getting the grades I am capable of, in order to get into the university I dream of going to. I would hate for that money to go to waste and my future plans to jeopardise so badly. I also think there is no reason to cancel them, with a lot of people vaccinated, and the importance of exams over TAGs as a more reliable form of assessment for universities, employers, students, teachers, etc. Surely the DfE wouldn't want another year of embarrassment?

As a year 11 I want exams to go ahead because I want grades that I worked for, not just a guess. I'm not saying past years didn't work for their grades in any way, however some teachers are biased and this results in massive grade inflation, meaning your grades are seen as lower in value than they are.

I definitely want them to go ahead. As glad as I was that our gcse's got cancelled (schools closed, and then we just rocked up in August to get our results), if exams this year were to be cancelled, it would be nothing like that (not saying that what happened in 2020 was good, but I would be lying if I said I didn't benefit from it). However, last year, looking at the year 13s and what they were going through because of the cancelled exams, it seemed horrible... This year especially though I want them to go ahead. At GCSE, I wasn't particularly bothered about whether I got say a 7 or an 8 in some subject. Who cares, right? Not the end of the world. However, now I'm in year 13, and so a difference of one grade could quite literally be the difference between getting into uni or not.

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Yes we absolutely need to do exams and yes, removing content is at the end of the day a bad thing but you have to remember that these are the most important exams that GCSE and A-Level students have taken so far. I have no doubt that I will look back on my A-Levels and think it was easier when I am at university, but right now they feel very difficult and the situation with covid does make it more stressful.

I'm a yr 13 student and I hope they do, the other option would be TAGs which aren't standardised at all, and imo very unfair. I was doing online learning from a phone bc my sisters were using our laptops but with the resources available like YouTube and pmt I don't think it's that hard to catch-up, especially now schools are open and you can ask teachers to clarify things. (For context I do bio, chem and RS alevel)

I'm in Year 13 and I voted yes just cause lol there's no real reason to cancel them, cancel ours and the next year 13s will demand theirs be cancelled too and the cycle is never ending also I don't want my real grades to be based off my mocks next week. Also I didn't do SATs, GCSE, 11+ so my first important exam will NOT be in uni

I would argue that what's unfair about examinations is the inconsistency in everyone's learning. The main problem with no exams, is the inconsistency in the assessments that replace it. And inconsistency breeds this sense of injustice. So in summary - exams are unfair, yes; but when those exams are taken away the inconsistent approaches widen that unfairness, rather than solves it... the examination system isn't very fit-for-purpose in the first place. The problem is nobody in power has spent enough time being imaginative enough to remedy this.



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Here's what students said who DON'T want exams in 2022...

I go to an underperforming college and have been hugely affected by the almost year of home learning. I am a SEND student so having face to face support is a necessary factor for me and not having that has put me at a huge disadvantage. I've had some severe mental health problems especially during and following the January lockdown of last year in which I could hardly go out afterwards and felt drained. I've been able to produce some good work when we've been in college and luckily managed to convince teachers of what I'm capable of. However, this work is not reflecting my A-Levels as whole as we haven't done the full mocks and we've had guidance which likely was much better than what we get in February. Personally, I think for me TAGs would be fairer but obviously this is an individual case and I completely understand those who have issues with teachers likely not providing the grades they deserve.

i think exams should be cancelled it's unfair if not. we had remote learning in the beginning of last year and that's a lot of content that had to be learnt online, and many factors can alter how people learn from home than in class. also the cases are still going up and with schools opening it's going to be far worse...with schools opening back up not only will cases rise and more students and teachers miss days off school they want to "combine classrooms" which is actually getting pretty pathetic now.

I don't think some you actually understand the situation us students are in right now. I had a supply teacher 3/5 periods on the first day and we've been online for the last 2 days because of how hard covid has hit the staff at my school. Now I obviously don't know how long that will go on but having supply teachers for alevel bio and chem rn isn't the best. In addition the stress of having Tags aswell as the possibility of exams going ahead is too much on students. All my TAGs are on yr13 content, do I have anytime to revise and go over year 12 content ? Not really . Will my teachers have time to do over it ? Probably not. Now someone tell how standardised exams in may and June will be fair ?

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Here's what students said who DON'T want exams in 2022...

No because I think exams in general are an outdated unfair method of assessment... Students should be examined on what they know of the subject NOT how they can cope with hayfever, a cold, a stuffy exam room, anxiety or worrying about the bus not turning up or getting stuck in a traffic jam on the way to an exam all of which add stress and affect performance. Some people suffered from more stress and anxiety than others and that's why exams are unfair and should be scrapped. Covid gave a chance to change the system but the government chose to return to the old system. Only exams available should be for external self taught students who can't do coursework. Schools and colleges need to move to 100% course work.

We are literally facing a PANDEMIC which has significantly and constantly disrupted our education... nothing like this has ever happened where they had to cancel exams twice but it is really unfair for those who are still facing lots of disruption and can even fail to perform accurately on exams because of this.

I really feel underprepared for these exams. I wish governments were able to see from the students perspectives. I'm not sure what I want but if there is exams there should be some ways to making the exams easier. If we might get some hints but not all subjects offer those and realistically I think the hints we do get might not even be useful. I did. Learning Keats poems online was difficult

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Here's what students said who DON'T want exams in 2022...

I answered no, and there's a reason for that. (I'm in year 13)

Every single week across the country, there are students, classes and entire year groups self-isolating due to COVID 19. The virus isn't even bad now, but they still have to stay at home and miss school for 10 days. Forgetting the fact that they are missing learning that is vital for their exam, what do you think is going to happen when exam season is here? So what I want to know is how we expect exams to take place when its likely that a 5th, a 4th even, of students won't be at school to sit them...Now we are in the situation that not everyone will sit them at the same time, so those people are unfortunately going to have an advantage over the ones that sat them at school...for the schools that have understaffing and entire year groups off across the country, something has to change for them.

Does anyone not want them to go ahead other than certain privileged students who study at schools that persistently over-predict?

When i had covid it took me 7 weeks to recover and being at school it was very difficult for me to concentrate, let alone perform my best in exams. This is coming from an A student. In year 12 and year 13 I had to self isolate for 10 days 6 times due to others around me testing positive. This is valuable lesson time i missed and having to do online lessons where only a few people are isolating and the rest are in class no way constitutes the same learning...people have been impacted differently and this must be taking into consideration when exams take place. It's ridiculous to say exams should go ahead the same way they've always been.*



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We also saw students who've already undergone assessments which were disrupted in the past two years during covid, sharing their opinions on 2022 exams based on their experiences.

As a student who went through TAGs last year for my A-Levels, I really hope the exams go ahead

*i want this current year to take exams so they don't have to deal with the ***** we have to deal with because of TAGS and the whole prejudicing*

I was the 2020 GCSE class and I am certain that I could have done better in some of my subjects if I was given the opportunity to prove myself. Exams need to happen so there isn't another year group who struggle at A-Level because they haven't experienced the pressure of external exams.

I had my A levels cancelled last year in 2021 and received TAG, Im also resitting this summer in 2022 so I have a fair perspective of both sides...in my experience having TAG's was terrible. There was NO standardisation whatsoever...I think we should 100% have exams, and instead of people complaining and procrastinating revision in hopes of having them cancelled, we should be making the most of the time we have now. Exams are the fairest way to assess students abilities, and have actual standardisation compared to grades given out by teachers.

1 in 5 students are actively considering an apprenticeship

As we head toward [National Apprenticeship Week](#), our [poll](#) of over 580 TSR community members shows that 21% are actively considering an apprenticeship or degree apprenticeship.

Importantly, nearly half said they hadn't considered an apprenticeship yet, showing how much opportunity still remains for growth in awareness-building about this pathway. The students on the thread spoke very positively about the apprentice pathway.



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Having done a degree, I'd much rather have gone through the apprentice route in hindsight.

Money, independence, work experience are the main [aspects I like about apprenticeships more than options like uni]... I just wish apprenticeships were talked about a lot more in schools or at least there were more facilities for apprentices to discuss. Even finding youtube videos about degree apprentices is a challenge as theyre all from 5 years ago or about one kind of apprenticeship.

*Really have considered it tbh but the uni life is something I definitely want to experience so I firmly decided on uni (although the paid work experience is **really** tempting!).*

I tried to gain an apprenticeship for many years but unfortunately I wasn't able to so I reluctantly went to university. I would love to do an apprenticeship if I ever acquired one though! As someone at university the experience does not mitigate the lifetime of student debt, especially during the middle of a pandemic when the vast majority of your degree is online anyway!

They are difficult to find, applying for lots and hoping to get accepted for at least one

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Many apprenticeship employers, like the Civil Service, will often fund you for further qualifications post apprenticeship. Mine is paying for my MEng at the moment as well as my professional registration fees with the IMechE and IET.

I'm currently doing the Level 3 Assistant Accountant apprenticeship. I'm really enjoying it tbh. I've found my niche in accountancy - and being able to go to work and do something I enjoy is great!!

Funnily enough I just applied to one. I went to uni last year but dropped out so it's something I'm only just looking into really and definitely a path I think should be more looked at during your years at school.

I like the way [apprenticeships] integrate on the job learning with completion of the degree/qualification. For a discipline like software development or data analytics in particular, it helps ensure that you're getting a vocationally relevant practical aspect to the degree, plus you're getting work experience and earning while doing the course. I'd say those are the main reasons.

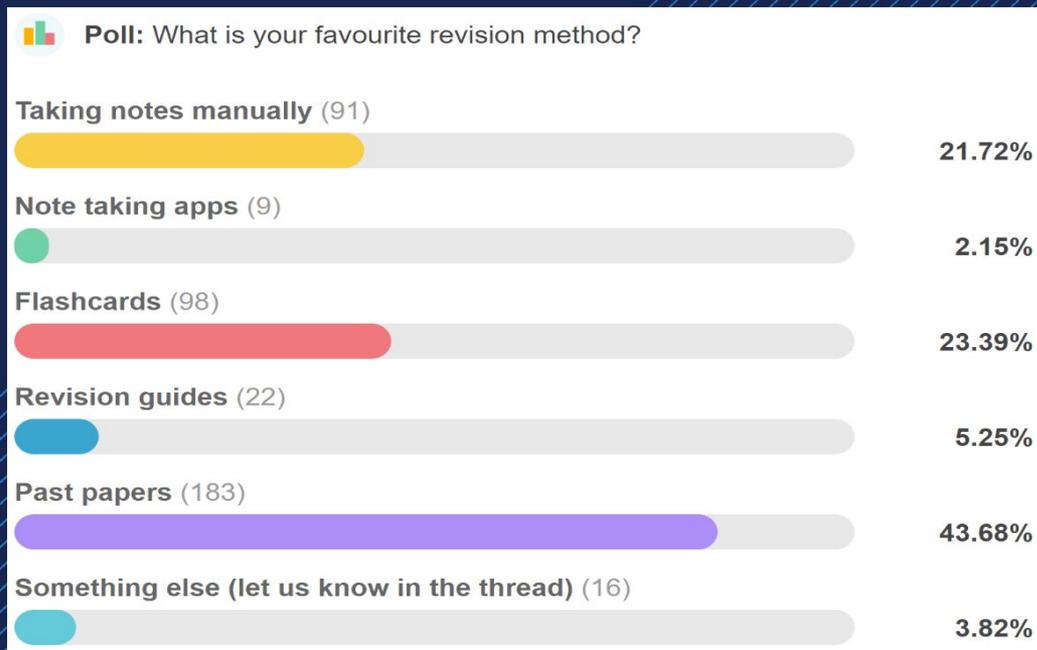
I started out in Engineering, a career I'd hoped for for a long long time, through an Apprenticeship at 30. Fantastic opportunity if you research and choose what you apply for carefully.

Past papers rule the revision world

According to our [poll](#) of over 400 students, past papers are by far their favourite revision method.

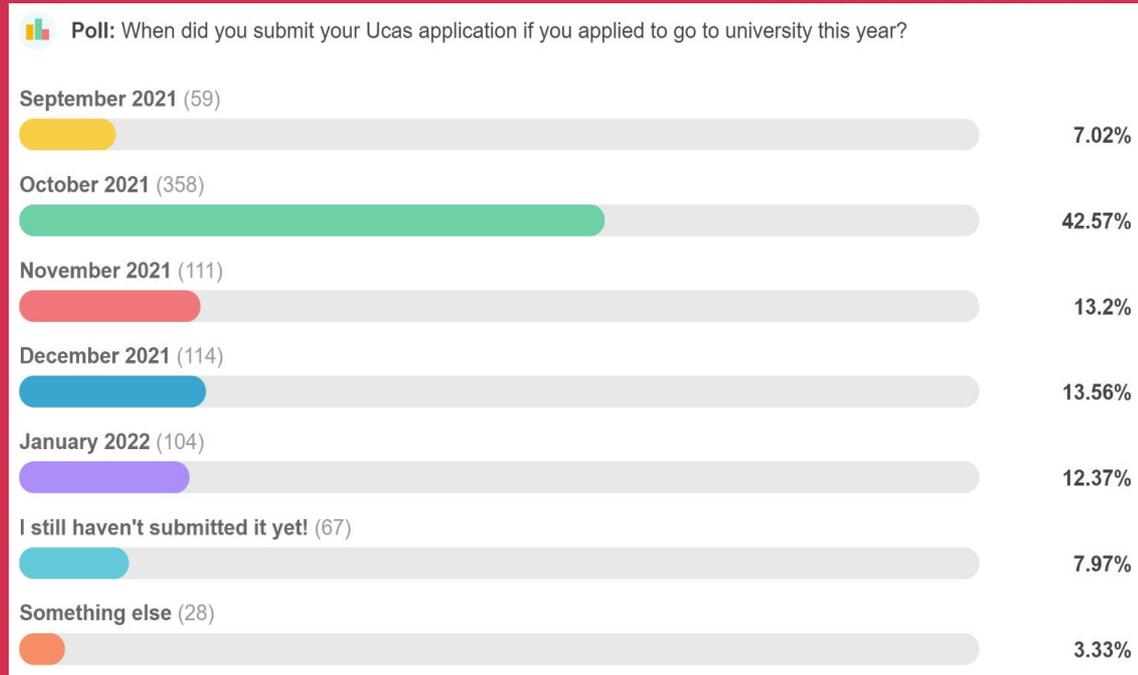
Taking their own notes and using flash cards were also go-to tools for many students.

Check out the [thread](#) to see what students are saying about their revision.



Most students submitted their UCAS applications in October

With the UCAS deadline having come and gone, we were interested to find out when most students were submitting their applications. Our [poll](#) of over 840 TSR community members showed that over 42% submitted in October. Check out the [thread](#) to read about students' experiences of applying.



Students' resolutions are often to do with wellbeing

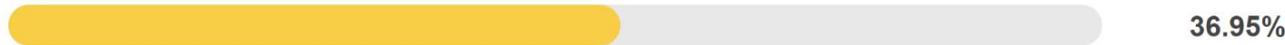
According to 200 students on TSR, most of them don't make new year resolutions. But for those who do, wellbeing is a central focus.

I've got 10 this year. One is to sort my mental health out once and for all. I've got to ring the doctors in the morning to get put in touch with the mental health team. So fingers crossed I'll be ticking one resolution off sooner rather than later.

This year I've vowed to lose weight (covid has really messed my lifestyle up), come off anti-depressants and achieve a few other things.

 **Poll:** Do you make new year resolutions?

Yes (75)



No (128)



My goal for 2022 is to never let myself get as low as I did in 2021.

Mine is to stand by friends who i know need help and i am always here for them