

# The mental health impact of exams, Applicant Days and Student Finance

Plus the secret to revising, Advance Info for 2023, loneliness at uni, support for making final uni decisions, and accommodation at university

Student sentiment update by The Student Room

7 March - 3 April 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).*

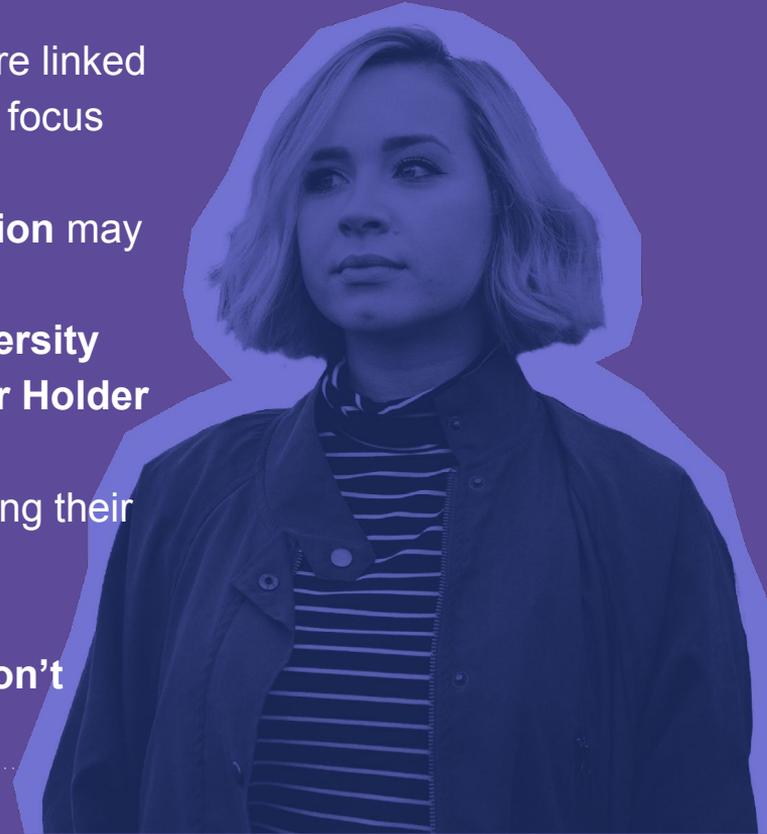
*Mhairi*

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# Highlights in this update

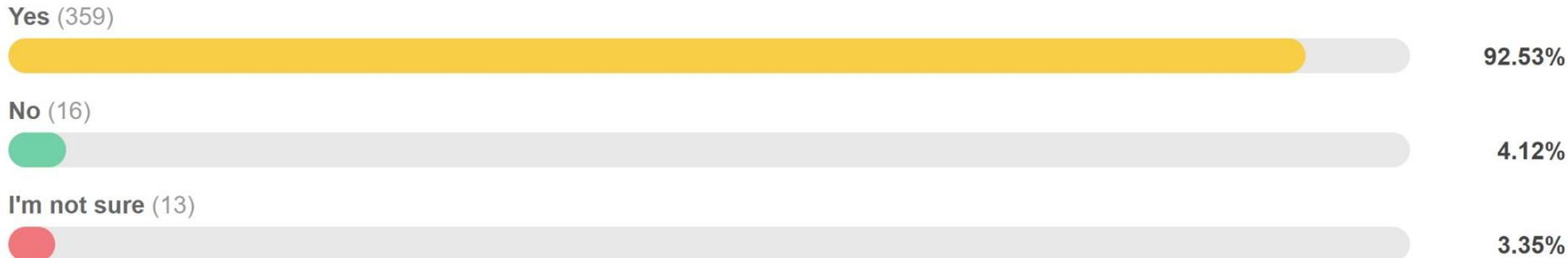
- Over 90% of students say **mental health and exams** are linked
- TSR members say listening to **music** is the best way to focus when revising
- Students are divided about whether **Advance Information** may be needed for the 2023 cohort
- Students share their experiences of **loneliness at university**
- More students are planning on going to **Applicant/Offer Holder Days** than HE/UCAS fairs this year
- Find out what students need help with right now in making their **decisions about uni** this year
- 66% of TSR members prefer **living in Halls**
- Knowledge is increasing but **a third of students still don't understand Student Finance**



# Over 90% of TSR members think exams and mental health are linked

As we move closer to exams, we asked members of the Student Room about the connection between exams and mental health. For some students, it's simply expected that this will be the toughest part of their lives so far. Others ponder the possibility of changing how assessment happens to better support student wellbeing and foster achievement. Students also pointed out that exams can exacerbate the challenging their already facing outside the classroom and vice versa.

 **Poll:** Is there a connection between exams and mental health?



# Over 90% of TSR members think exams and mental health are linked

***I don't think... the idea of making pupils to sit some form of assessment to prove their knowledge in a subject [is] the issue, it's England's attitude towards exams and their irrational stubbornness (until university level) when it comes to how students must be assessed that's the issue. We need to start assessing pupils in a more diverse manner.***

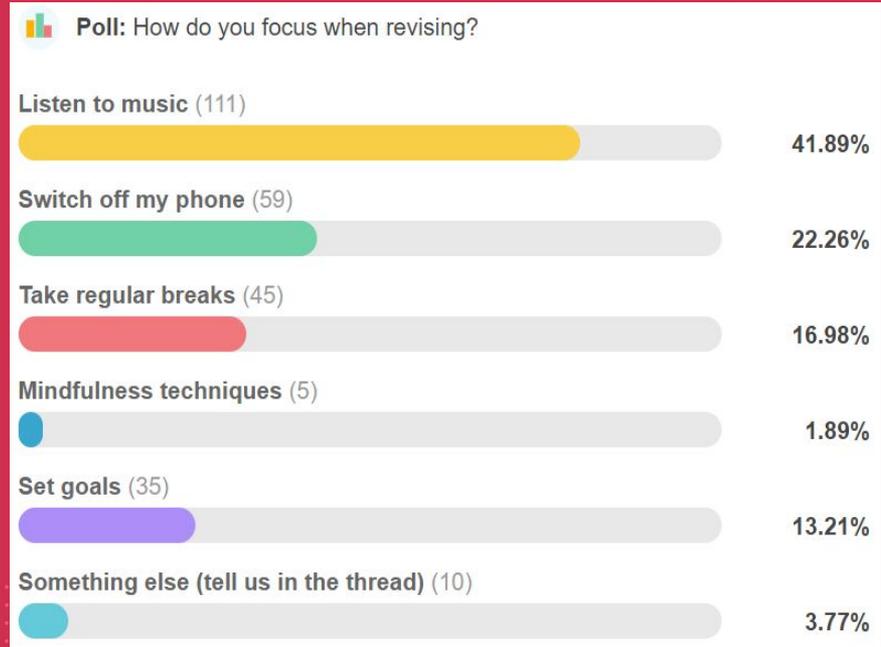
***My mental health does seem worse due to the stress piled on by exams and deadlines, particularly in subjects where there is a lot to remember. It also does not help when the teachers start to stress and put pressure on us. One of my teachers said to us the other day (and I quote this): "To be able to do well, you need to be having at least one mental breakdown a week"***

***I think exams generally fall at a difficult time in life, at 16 I was navigating relationships, at 18 I'm navigating uni applications and adulting in general, so I think a lot of factors contribute to poor mental health in exam periods, and I think a lot of people have it worse than me, e.g. learning difficulties such as dyslexia, difficult home situation etc.***

# Music is most helpful when revising

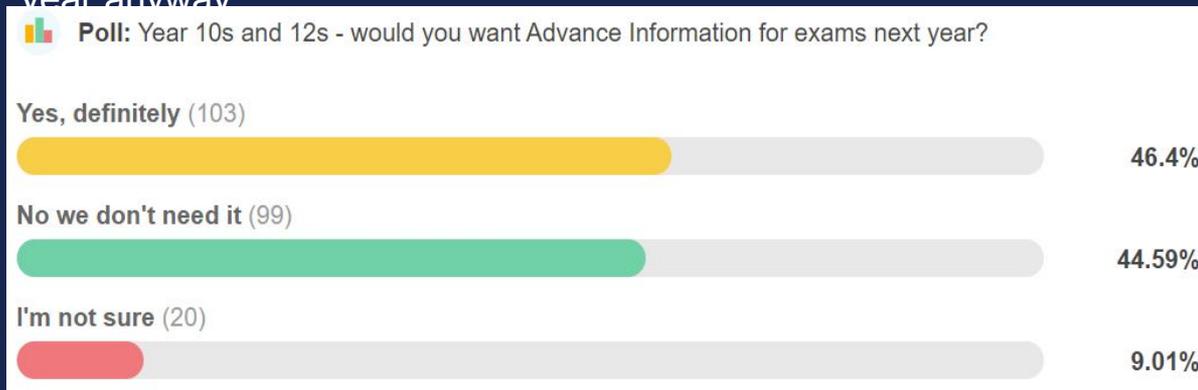
According to 265 members of The Student Room, listening to music is the most helpful way to focus when revising.

However, lots of the advice on the thread spoke about revision techniques like the Pomodoro method, using timers, having breaks, studying alongside others, minimising distractions and having allocated study areas.



# Next year's cohort are split on how best to be supported with exams

When we asked our Year 10 and 12 audience if they would want Advance Information for their own exams next year, results were surprisingly split - with just 46% saying that they would want similar support seen to this year. In the discussion we saw a number of Year 13s saying that the next cohort don't need Advance Information because they haven't been as disrupted during key years, and that AI hadn't helped them this year anyway.



We have learned over the past three cohorts affected by the pandemic that they're very concerned with fairness between cohorts and the validity/value of their grades, so we expect the conversation around this to continue evolving.

# Can uni be lonely?

In mid-March, one of our community members anonymously asked a very important question...

'Has university been lonely for you?'

The conversation clearly resonated with many members of the community, and gathered three pages of comments. This is a theme we see on TSR every year. It makes me reflect on the necessity of the emphasis on belonging spoken about in the [Student Futures Manifesto](#) and the opportunities for community-building in university settings.

*I've personally felt very lonely, I live in student accommodation but in a studio flat so I don't have flat mates. I'm a very quiet person and don't go out often so I don't have any friends.*

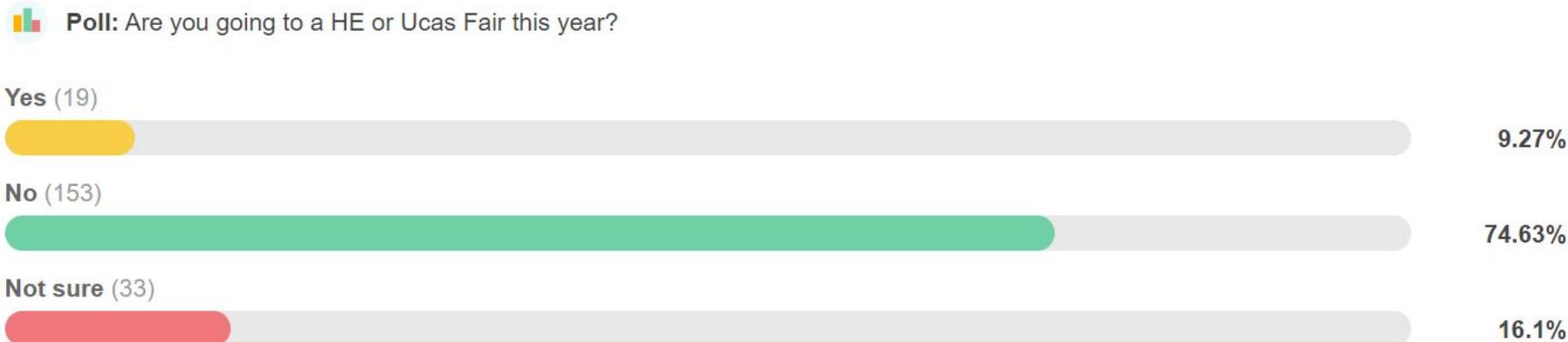
*I commute to university for religious reasons / saving money as free accommodation (no rent). I have no real course mates.*

*Yes but due to my own mental health not the uni itself, there's plenty of activities I could do to try and make friends if I had the self confidence to do so*

*Yes. During term time I only interact with people during supervisions and practicals, so I go days without speaking to people or even leaving my room. I did try to talk to my flatmates but they're not the type of people I'd be friends with. There's no separation between work and rest and no routine - online lectures means that there's no motivation to get up before 11am. I need this degree to go into research so hopefully this experience isn't a complete waste, but I am having a terrible time.*

# Are students going to UCAS or HE fairs?

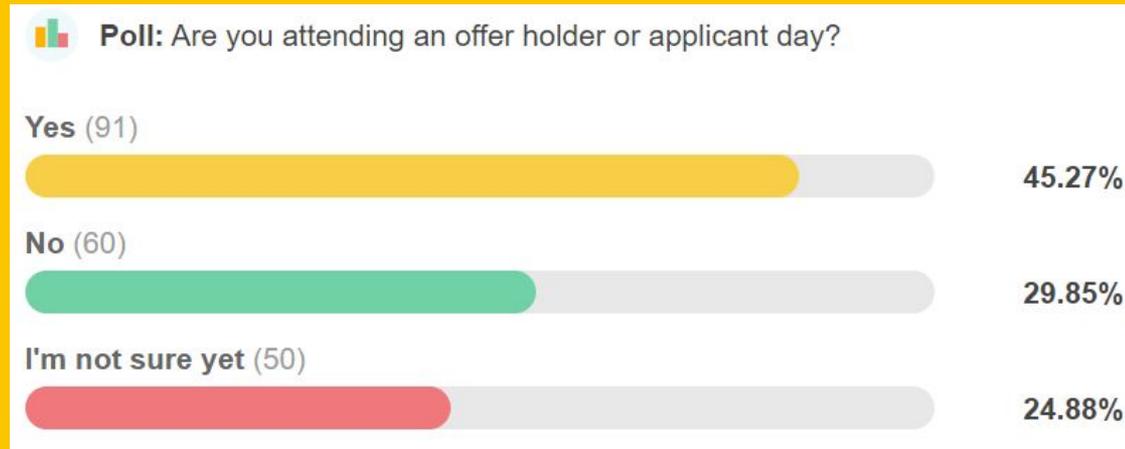
According to our poll of just over 200 members of The Student Room, three quarters of them weren't planning on going to a HE or UCAS fair...



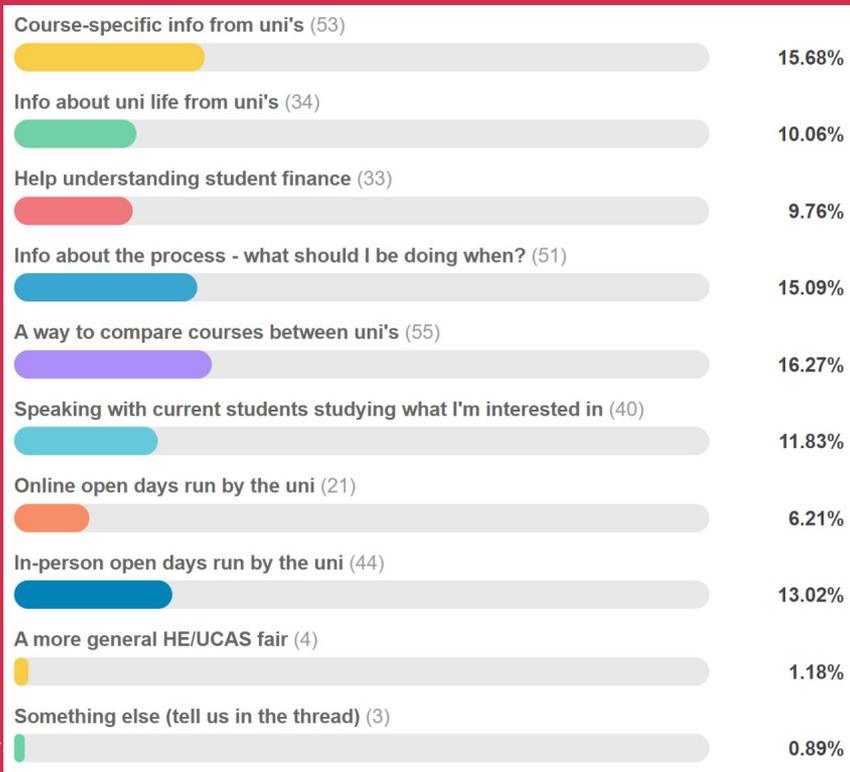
# What about applicant or offer holder days?

However, when we asked about Offer Holder or Applicant Days, we saw many more students interested in attending these.

In the discussion, we saw some great advice from our Official Reps, and students who'd attended an Offer Holder day saying that it really helped them with their final decision.



# What help students need making uni decisions right now



## Top Four

1. A way to compare courses/unis
2. Course-specific info from unis
3. Info about the process
4. In-person open days

In our poll about support for uni applicants, we saw that it's help with comparisons and really understanding the nitty gritty of their potential uni experience that students are looking for now. They need support with the details.

# 66% of students prefer living in halls

This month we learned that the vast majority of students would prefer to live in halls, according to our poll of just over 260 TSR members.

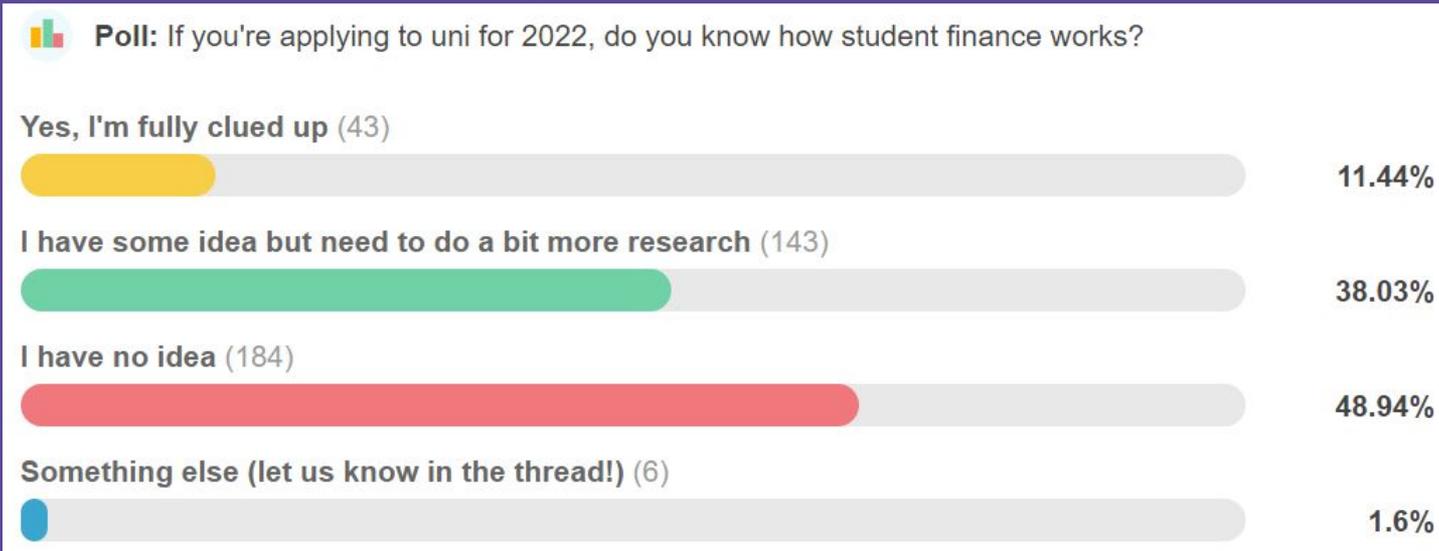
The discussions hinted that halls seemed to be central to community-building and were particularly recommended for first years.

*I'd always recommend a new starter at university to get into university-run accommodation as that's where the majority of your peers will be.*

*I'm a first year who is currently in on-campus accommodation...i'd definitely recommend choosing on-campus accommodation for at least your first year if you have the choice to do it: it helps you meet people which off-campus doesn't necessarily (plus it's a lot easier to literally roll out of bed to your lectures if you're on campus..)*



# In November 2021, 87% didn't fully understand student finance...



# In March, knowledge is growing, but support still very much needed

Asking students the same question this month, we can see more than double now feel fully clued up, and that most students have at least some understanding of student finance.

However, we still see a third of students who have no idea about student finance as we approach the application deadline for new students in May.

It's also important to consider the role of finances can play in wellbeing, and what opportunity there is here to continue building that financial literacy.

