

Post-exams round up

Grade confidence, exam difficulty and a reported paper leak

Student sentiment update by The Student Room

6 June - 3 July 2022

Plus Year 12 researching options for university, perceptions
of Year 13 challenges and thoughts on the maths curriculum



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 over 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

- Half of students feel they **haven't achieved the grades they need for their university offer**
- Most students found **exams more difficult** than they expected
- Students react to the reported AQA **exam paper leak**
- We're starting to see some early interest in **university options from Year 12s**
- Workload, exams and mental health are key **challenges during Year 13**
- Most students feel the **maths curriculum prepares them for the future** (especially for a STEM career)

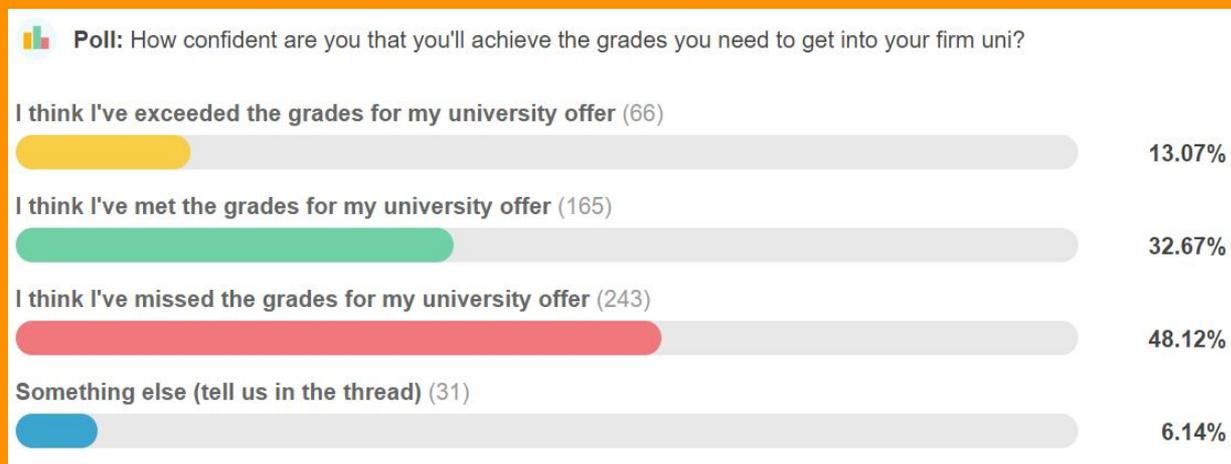


Almost half of Year 13s feel they've missed the grades for their uni offer

It's been the first full season of exams in three years; and the students who sat them may not have done formal exams since Year 6. So maybe it's not surprising that confidence in grades this year isn't high. Anecdotally, we don't remember ever seeing grade confidence this low prior to the pandemic.

Almost half of just over 500 TSR community members said they don't feel confident they've met their offer.

It will be interesting to see how the results season unfolds and whether these students' concerns are realised.



Almost half of Year 13s feel they've missed the grades for their uni offer

I've been doing so well for the past 2 years, and I feel like I ruined everything in my exams, even though I still worked hard. I don't think I'll be able to go to my firm or insurance (which I was really excited about) and I don't know how I would tell people my grades especially my family

literally how i feel , i really want to do well so my family can be smiling..thats really the only reason

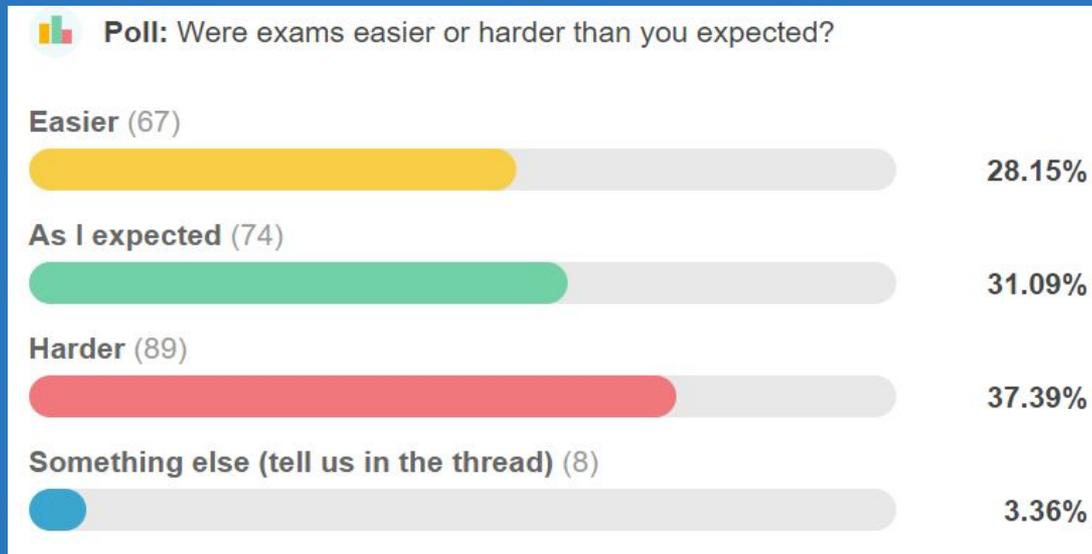
50% (at the point of writing this) feel that they have missed the grades for their university choice. Now whether this is because they are underestimating their actual performance in the exam, or are sure of it (like I am), this could be indicative of a large portion of people ending up into clearing. I wonder whether universities will be more relaxed about grades this year, considering most students haven't done exams before ,and feel that they haven't performed as well as they could?

I basically have a crisis every night before an exam about whether I can get into my firm but I'm really hoping I've done enough.

Most students found exams more difficult than expected

Perhaps unsurprisingly given students' confidence in their grades, we also found this month that almost 40% of students on The Student Room felt their exams were more difficult than they expected.

While these students did have Advance Information this year, we saw mixed feelings ([here](#) and [here](#)) about its helpfulness, and it's interesting to consider these students lack of experience with the formal exam setting.



Reports of exam paper leaks cause students concern

In the midst of a busy exam season, rumours began circulating on Twitter (and other social media) about a leak of the AQA Chemistry paper 2.

AQA released a [statement](#) on the 22nd of June explaining their investigation and reassuring students that 'no one would have an unfair advantage.'

In our [discussion](#) on The Student Room, we saw students chatting about the leak and AQA's response, with particular concern about the methods that would be used to identify those who may have received a leaked paper before the exam.

I'm a little concerned about "monitoring for any students with suspicious performance on this paper" because this paper went MUCH better than my paper 1 and I don't reckon I'm gonna have a performance that good on my paper 3 either which is going to make me look a little strange. Anyone else feeling similar?

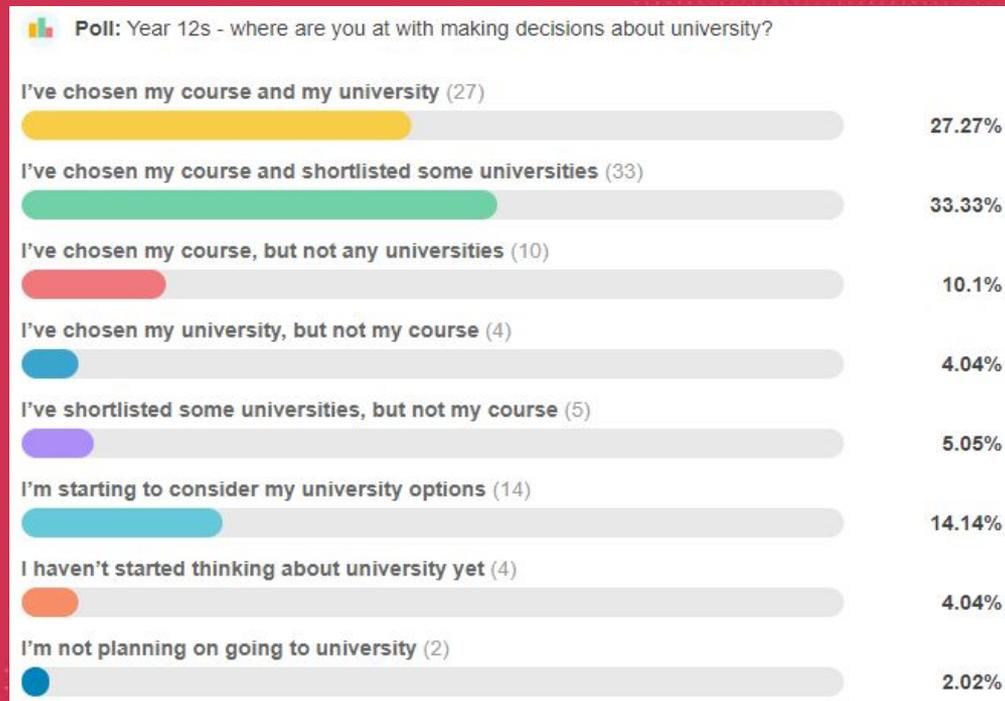
Im sorry but if thats their solution thats ridiculous, what does that even mean?! I know that would make me panic so much + kinda anxious , even to the point of making my paper 3 answers 'less like the markscheme' eg waffling more, rather than having the specific marking point ive learned from doing past papers, which is ofc silly.

I dont think checking 'suspicious performance' is gonna help cause the paper was quite a bit easier than the first one

Year 12s making a start on their uni application decisions

For Year 12s, we are starting to see some early interest from Year 12s who are starting to look at where they'd like to go to university next year.

With reasonably small numbers of voters, we'd recommend taking this poll with a pinch of salt, but there are early indications that selecting a [course](#) is first on students priority list.



Exams, workload and mental health are the biggest challenges during Year 13s

As Year 12s look toward starting their final year in college, we invited current/previous Year 13s to share what the biggest challenge was in that year.

As we ran this poll around exam time, perhaps it's unsurprising that the biggest challenges are around exams and workload. But it's also interesting to note that wellbeing featured quite highly as well.

We saw some great advice being shared with Year 12s also...



Exams, workload and mental health are the biggest challenges during Year 13s

Finished year 13 a year ago. The biggest challenge for me was learning new content and revising previously learnt content at the same time. I recommend spending two/three days per week solely focusing on previously learnt content so you don't forget anything. It will make life a lot easier when exam season comes around.

I'm currently in year 13, and I think the biggest challenge so far has been underestimating the workload. Like now in my exam period, I find the revising for the exam more stressful than actually sitting the exam. From my experience, I would advise year 12 students to get on top of Year 12 content and revision in Year 12 itself, and to make the most of the summer. It can be making notes or posters on all the topics, or doing all the question packs and AS papers, as say for myself in the beginning of Year 13 there literally no time to even look back with the uni application process and heavy year 13 content.

I finished year 13 last year, the thing I struggled with was to keep on top of content and revising effectively... But most important of all is exam practice under timed conditions, get used to what it will be like on exam day and the different types of questions that will crop up as well as how strict the marking criteria is... I also found that my friendships were on a rollercoaster which is to be expected with it being stressful for everyone, which makes people sensitive. Honestly, you've only got a few months left with them, so it's better to make the most of the time you have left with them. Motivation was another challenge. I overcame it through sharing my worries or thoughts with family and friends and focussing on not overwhelming myself.

Got 3 A-levels left, i struggled with keeping up my wellbeing the most. MY schools mental health support sucks - I told them literally everything about my worrying mental health and they said they would get on top of that right away to support me... they never contacted me again.

Most students feel school-level maths prepares them well for future, particularly for STEM

According to our poll of almost 200 TSR members, most students think school-level maths gives a reasonable foundation for the future, especially if that future involves maths/STEM.

There are various perspectives about whether it's the job of school-level maths to teach life skills (eg. tax), or whether that should be part of a separate life skills curriculum; and whether the focus on things like pythagoras theorem is right at this level.

