

The new academic year run down...

How Freshers are settling in, the help students really need with their uni applications and how school and college students are finding their new years

**Student sentiment update by The Student Room
29 August - 3 October 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 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).

Mhairi

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Highlights in this update

- 33% of Freshers finding it tough settling into uni accommodation
- A look into our work around sense of belonging with feedback from current university students
- Uni applicants most want help with personal statements and standing out from the crowd
- Students most need sample personal statements and feedback on drafts
- Students' experiences of Clearing were mixed
- A new academic year brings a patchwork of worries for school and college students

33% of Freshers finding it tough settling into uni accommodation

With Freshers taking their first steps into their new uni lives, we noticed a lot of conversation around the forum from students who weren't finding things easy.

This poll shows us that sadly, the majority are finding things tough, with only around 20% saying they're loving it.

Some reasons we see for this are homesickness, social anxieties, feeling inadequate for not making friends quickly and lack of confidence in practical life skills.



Belonging is about students being who they authentically are, not about changing to 'fit in'

In September, The Student Room team hosted a panel discussion all about a sense of belonging for university students, where I (Mhairi) shared some feedback from students about belonging, alongside some perspectives from representatives of the University of Liverpool and the University of Leicester. You can watch the discussion and check out the summary [here](#).

The following week, WonkHE and Pearson announced their '[Belong from the beginning](#)' webinar, presenting research into what facilitates (or prevents) feelings of belonging for students. They said '*Students who felt they belonged at their university reported substantial differences in their academic confidence, their course inclusivity, and their peer networks, compared to students who reported feelings of not belonging.*'

On the next page are posts from students in our [Uni Life](#) forum from within the same 24 hour period in September during welcome week. While it's not uncommon for us to see these worries upon starting university, it's clear that there's still opportunities for more support for students.

Belonging is about students being who they authentically are, not about changing to 'fit in'

I moved into uni last Sunday and I spent the whole time crying and wanting to come home so I spoke with the disability service and we decided that I should take a year out (I'm autistic and have anxiety and depression). I had constant panic attacks about sharing the kitchen and ended up not eating for the week whilst there. I'm worried that I made the wrong decision with taking a gap year.

I know it's too early to tell whether I like this uni experience already, but it's more of a gut feeling and that fact I thought about problems that might occur like being restricted by money (can't go home when I want because train tickets are high) or not enough diversity (there was no afro hair shops or afro Caribbean food shops around me) have been coming to surface.

I'm due to start uni tomorrow. I am a mature student and will be commuting 40 mins each day. Therefore I will not be staying near my uni like most others. I'm so nervous about starting and not fitting in.....

I've made a couple friends, one rily close friend but her friends from sixth form are also here so she always wants to go with them. i've only been here for a couple of days but i'm feeling disheartened bc everyone else has a proper group of friends

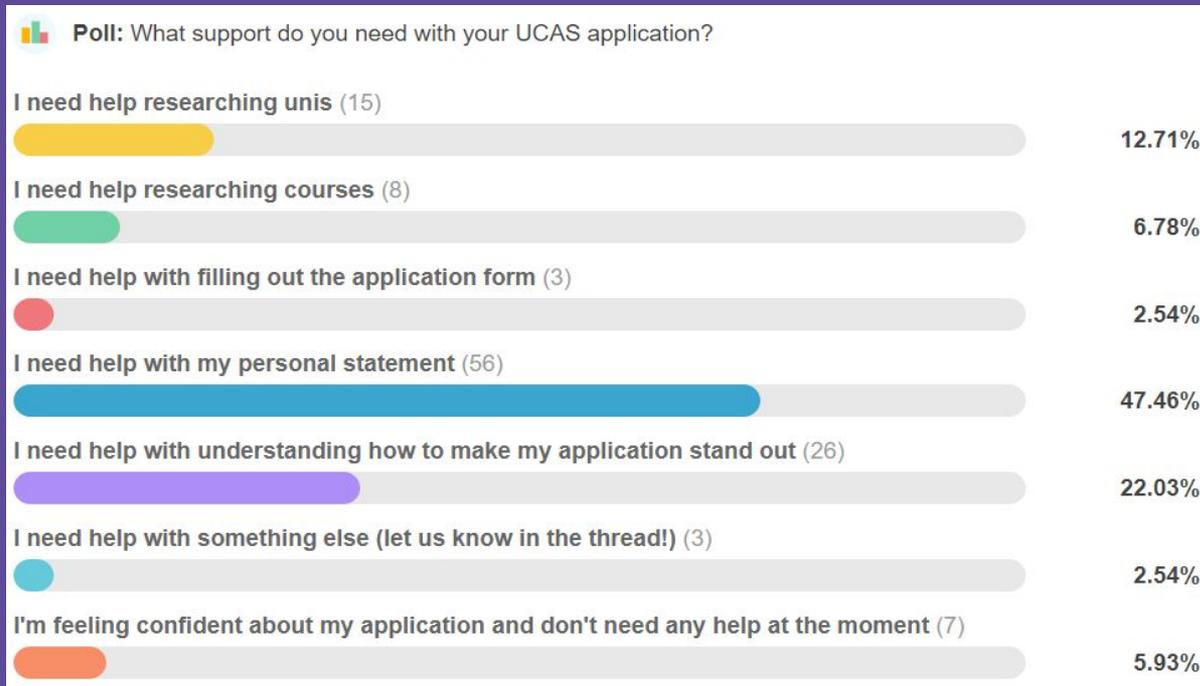
I have a worry about cooking in uni. Do your flatmates already know how to cook when you get into uni? And do other people watch you when you cook? What if they laugh at you when it goes wrong and you just embarrass yourself in front of them?

Im 20F and i have no friends. Ive tried joining societies, I've tried making friends from my own course. nothing works out. its just small talk, but it never extends to anything more or deeper. I can honestly say i have no friends at uni, since first year I've always ever eaten lunch alone. I just don't know what to do anymore. Do i try to make friends in my final year or just get by and graduate and just have no friends.

Uni applicants most want help with personal statements and standing out from the crowd

With a new cohort of Year 13s stepping foot into the world of university applications this month, in early September we asked what they most need help with ahead of applying.

We found that almost half (47%) of students need help with their personal statement, while another 22% need guidance on how to make themselves stand out from the crowd.

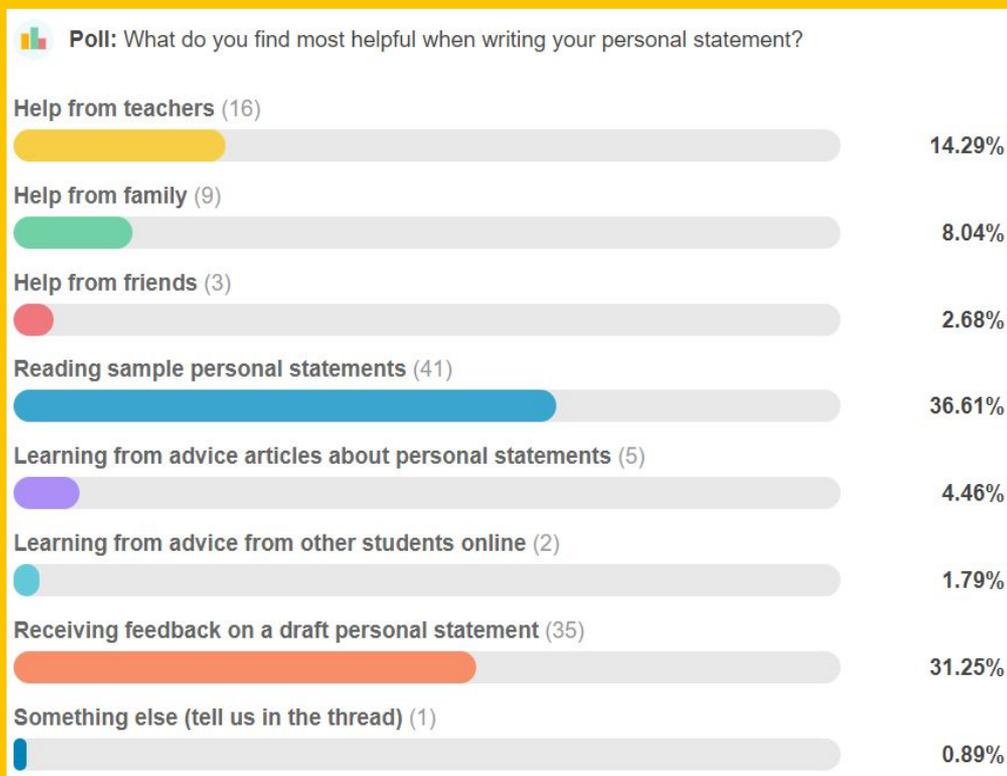


Students most need sample personal statements and feedback on drafts

Since university applicants told us they most need help with their personal statements, we needed to understand the best way to provide that support, so we asked the experts - students who've already applied!

By far, these students found reading sample personal statements and getting feedback on their own drafts the most helpful thing.

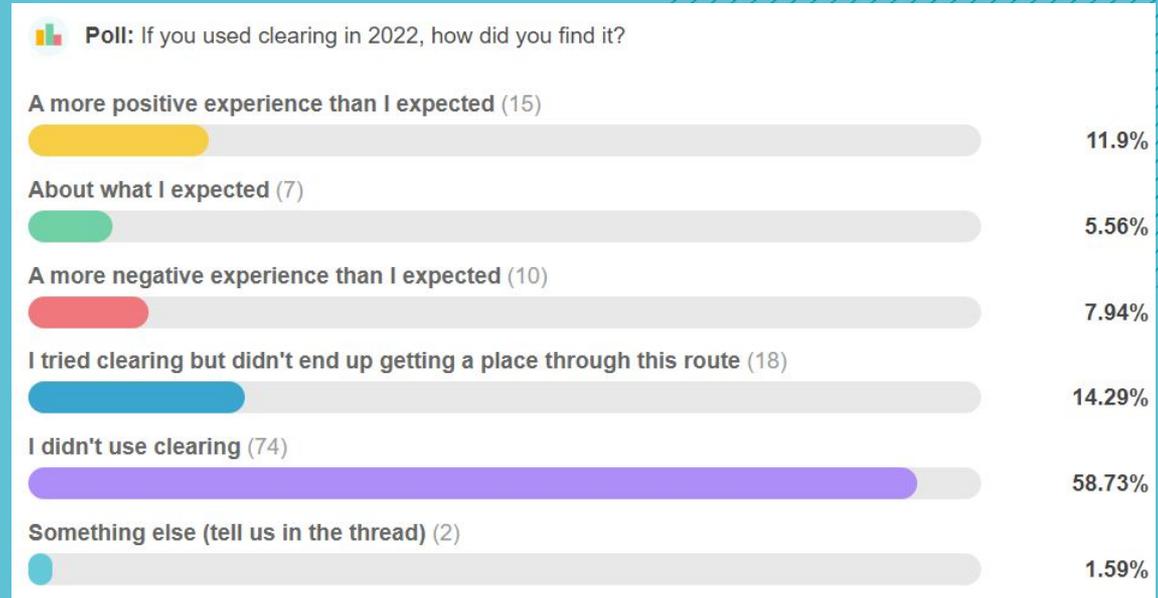
There were some great tips in the thread and we're continuing to help students with TSR's [personal statement support](#).



Students' experiences of Clearing were mixed

While the majority of TSR community members who voted in this poll didn't use clearing, we found that of the 40% who did, students had varied experiences.

While 12% found clearing more positive than they thought it'd be, 14% of voters who used clearing didn't end up getting a place.

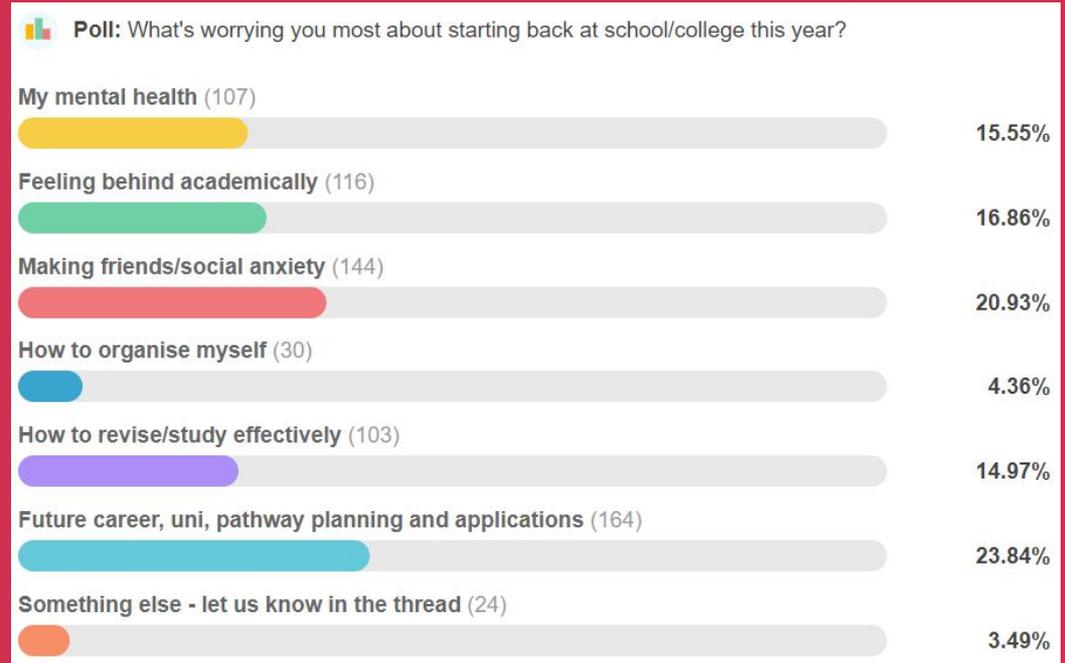


I think I was one of the only people who didn't get a place for clearing so not really answering your question, but usually there's clearing in the university I wanted to go and this year there wasn't spaces in most subjects which was weird. I wanted either pharmacy or optometry.

A new academic year brings a patchwork of worries for school and college students

When we asked school and college students what's worrying them most as they started a new academic year in September. The answer wasn't simple.

Around a quarter of the 700 students who voted said future planning was their biggest concern (24%), but this was closely followed by making friend/social anxiety (20%), feeling behind academically (17%), mental health (16%) and revising/studying effectively (15%).



A new academic year brings a patchwork of worries for school and college students

Anecdotally, we see similar themes to this most academic years on The Student Room, but it's interesting to consider the impact of the pandemic disruptions on students' confidence in relation to planning a future they can count on, their overall wellbeing and their ability to keep up with the work. This poll considers students from all year levels, but it may also be interesting to consider the difference in pressures students may experience when they're starting a new qualification, or entering an exam year for example.

Is "all of the above" an option...because I personally am having issues with every single one of those lol

Kind of expecting to feel a bit overwhelmed, keeping on top of homework and assessments will probably be hard, I feel like Year 11 will be at least 3 times the pressure as Year 10.

I've just had my results and am going into year 12 now, honestly, year 11 is a bit of a rollercoaster ride.