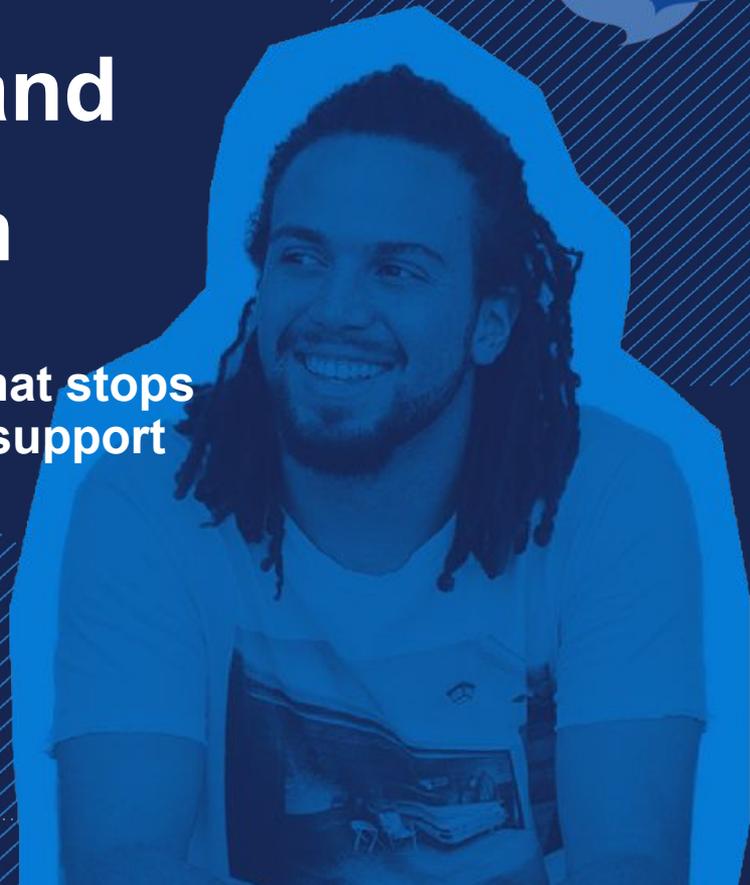


# The cost of living crisis and stepping up to sixth form

Plus... how uni applications are going and what stops young people reaching out for sexual health support

Student sentiment update by The Student Room

4 - 30 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

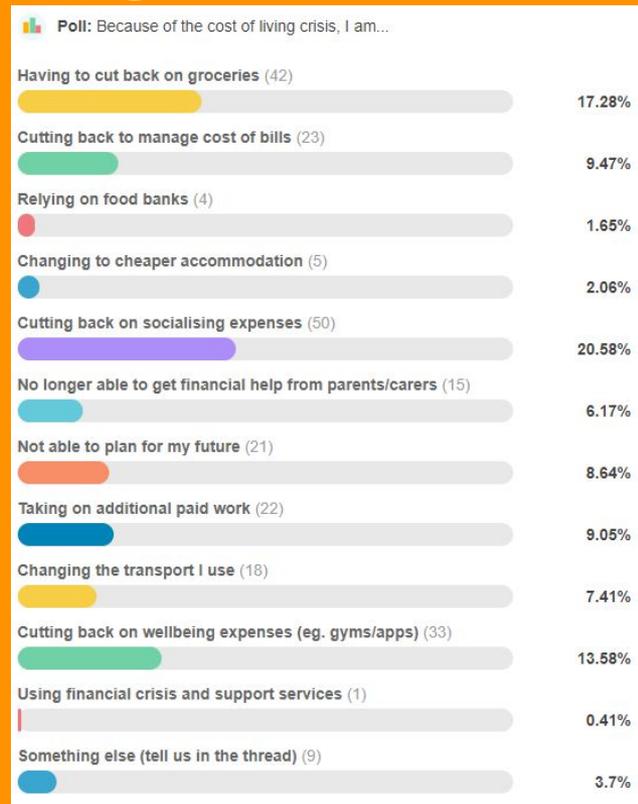
- Students making cutbacks to groceries, socialising and wellbeing expenses to manage the cost of living crisis
- The majority of Year 12s have found the move up from Year 11 more difficult than they anticipated
- Most students felt informed to make their sixth form decisions, but 31% needed better info on subjects
- January deadline students are broadly feeling on track with their application journey
- Embarrassment and fear of being 'found out' stops young people accessing sexual health services

# Students are cutting back on groceries, socialising and wellbeing to manage increases to the cost of living

Socialising, groceries and wellbeing are taking the biggest hit as students work to manage the rising cost of living. The conversation across the thread shows the very palpable concern and practical impacts rising costs are having on students. It also shows the risk that exists not just in terms of having a safe living environment, but also on the overall wellbeing of students right now.

*I'm saving up as much as I can and slashing unnecessary spending. Increasing my overtime. Maximising use of free options and exchanging favours or swapping items to reduce the need to spend cash*

*Family struggling to pay so I took a part time job while resitting A levels to help pay my exam fees/tutoring as well as help pay the bills and feed us. Cutting back as much as we can. Really not a glamorous gap year haha and tiring as hell*



# Students are cutting back on groceries, socialising and wellbeing to manage increases to the cost of living



*Even though I am on a busy vet course and have previously said I don't think there's any way for me to juggle a job alongside, it's now coming to the point I've been applying because I need to. I guess where there's a will there's a way but I'm not sure how long/much I'd be able to work without it affecting uni.*

*Managing fine on my salary from hospital and the supermarket. Think being out of the house for about 14 hours per day when doing a 12 hour shift help with not using the electric and gas has kept this down. I have even donated a few times groceries to the local community food Bank because I am able to do so*

*panicking about how long I'm going to have to live at home for when I graduate*

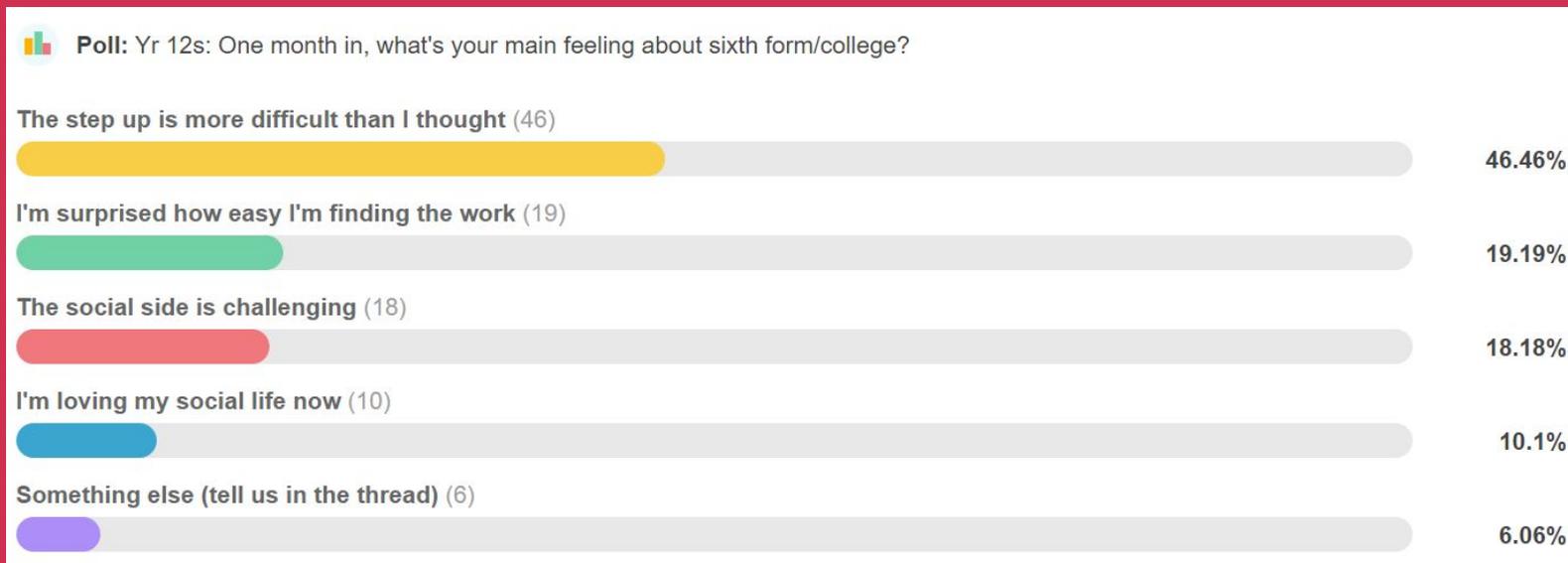
*Cheaper forms of entertainment, mostly outdoors (which I was doing already). Cutting out non-essential groceries (£30/week saving. Less alcohol, especially on nights out (which I already drank relatively little off). Less eating out (about £50-£100 less per week)*

*I actually stockpiled 20kg of porridge and other cheap non-perishables, in case supermarket prices go truly berserk. I'm not paying £2 for a loaf this year. Or the next. It's offensive. I'd rather get used to bird food.*

*Finding a decent place to live is the real issue. The price of potatoes is not what's got the world going mad. Not even the price of petrol, since not everyone has a car. It's housing. Decision makers just can't seem to put their heads on when it comes to housing. If Hollywood can build Hogwarts and Disneyland in a year then the government can build housing in half that time. Let's add in driving schools, the racket that they are. Paying to learn to how to do something that impacts your survival like driving is damn near extortion. Driving schools should be free for citizens, more frequently located than McDonald's, **and** publicly funded by the government since driving and licensure is so heavily regulated anyways. There shouldn't be "I can't afford to learn how to drive."*

# New Year 12s struggled with the step up to sixth form or college

As Year 12s neared the end of their first half term in sixth form or college, we found that almost half of them found the step up from Year 11 more difficult than they thought. They were also nearly twice as likely to be finding the social side of sixth form challenging (rather than loving it).



# New Year 12s struggled with the step up to sixth form or college

Experiences differed between students though, with some questioning their subject choices, and others finding the social side difficult. For some, it's a welcome opportunity to make new friends and get stuck into their studies.

*I have sooo many regrets, like I want to do English literature, but it is far to late for me to change. I have chosen Biology instead to show everyone ik that I am capable of so much more. Organisation..... Well, I need to improve on that...I want to do an EPQ, but I am already doing 4 a-levels. My friend have become quite distant to me- so my social life is changing.*

*Its different. Social side of things I still have my old friends, and i made a lot of new year 13 friends :-> theyre super cool. Buuuut Academic bro too much WORK and so much content. But I can do this Lets do it*

*I feel kind of overwhelmed, but maybe thats because I'm constantly stressing out over the fact that everythings happening so fast. Its already been a month and it hardly feels as if we started! Can't stop thinking about how in two months itll be 2023 and then a few months later, I'll be doing my Year 12 end of year exams and then whatever i get in those exams, my predicted grade will be based on, and then sent off to the universities i apply to....terrifying. I was wondering if its too late to start a fourth a level, and if its really worth it. im doing bio chem physics, but i really like history so i wanna do that as well but i dont wanna drop any of my current subjects. do universities even get impressed by 4 a levels? or is it better to jut focus on 3 and aim to get the best grades possible in those? Im trying to seem like a pro active student but idk how and its lowkey hard*

*i'm not feeling the step up in the way i anticipated. i thought i'd find the independence hard and struggle with self studying and wider reading but actually i'm just struggling with the workload. the social side is non existent for me, i'm so busy i'm doing my homework in almost every free moment*

# Most students felt informed to make their sixth form decisions, but 31% needed better info on subjects

As new Year 12s were settling into their new course and subjects this month, we started to see questions about whether it's too late to change subjects and worry about whether students had made the right choices. We're also seeing Year 11's reaching out for advice about what A-level subjects to pick for next year.

*I am a student who's just completed the first half term of college. I'm studying maths, physics, chemistry and computer science, and my ambition is to become some kind of scientist who reasearches and discovers stuff. However, I realise that this is a really difficult goal to achieve and so I took a 4th A-level (computer science) so that I can get into software development as a backup plan. After finishing my first half term at college, I've realised that computer science is quite boring and I don't really like it (I find the subject mildly interesting, but my heart isn't really in it). Should I ditch computer science, giving up my backup plan in exchange for biology, which synergises with chemistry a lot better and gives me more fields to go into as a scientist?*

*For context, I am in year 12, and am doing Biology Chemistry Maths and English. In year 11, I was really good at maths and english, hated biology and chemistry was dull. Come year 12, I walked into my first maths lesson and walked out wanting to cry. My class is full of really clever people and good on them ! yknow, but they knew what was going on and I just sat there wanting to cry because I didn't know what was going on. In A-Level, I hate to say this it makes me feel horrible but I feel like I'm not good at english anymore. With biology I think I know what the topic is but whenever I get a small like question back I always do badly, and I'm not naturally good at this or good at it regardless either. Chemistry I didn't like at GCSE and it's still not the best at A-Level, we got a better teacher for one topic but I am still rubbish at it. I think I feel like if I dropped maths why would I specifically drop maths because I'm bad at it if I'm bad at everything else too ? There's no point dropping it if I'm crap at everything else as well. Anyways, does anyone have any advice or anything ?*

# Most students felt informed to make their sixth form decisions, but 31% needed better info on subjects

*I want to drop economics and pick up maths this coming half term because I think it will be more beneficial for a University degree. Will I be able to catch up if my class mates are a term in? I got an 8 at GCSE but most of my friends did further maths at gcse and got 9's. I'm willing to work hard to catch up. Is it possible?*

*i am currently studying history, biology, and chemistry at a-level. i like history and chemistry is just okay, but i hate biology and feel miserable during bio lessons and revising it. i've also recently realised that i have zero interest to pursure science at university or as a career, i really dislike lab-work and doing experiments. i think i would like to study history or the history of art at university.. it is too late for me to change a-level subjects at my school. what should i do?*

*I currently take French, Art, History and Biology (I am aware it's a weird combination). We all started with 4 subjects and are now allowed to drop one. I want to study law at uni. I am either dropping biology or art- I feel that i could get a very high grade in art and a less-high grade in biology. I also enjoy art more. But I am worried that if I drop biology good unis will consider art to be a "soft subject" and I will have less of a chance at getting offers. Will art lessen my chances of getting in?*

# Most students felt informed to make their sixth form decisions, but 31% needed better info on subjects

*Alevel options from current yr11 girl: Which option is better for A-Levels: Comp Science, Biology, Maths OR Comp Science, Maths, Product Design/Design*

*I want to do History, English Literature, and also Chemistry. I have kept Chemistry in my options because I'd love to see if there are other opportunities besides those given by History and English Literature. Would there be any point in doing A Level Chemistry? Should I drop it for something else?*

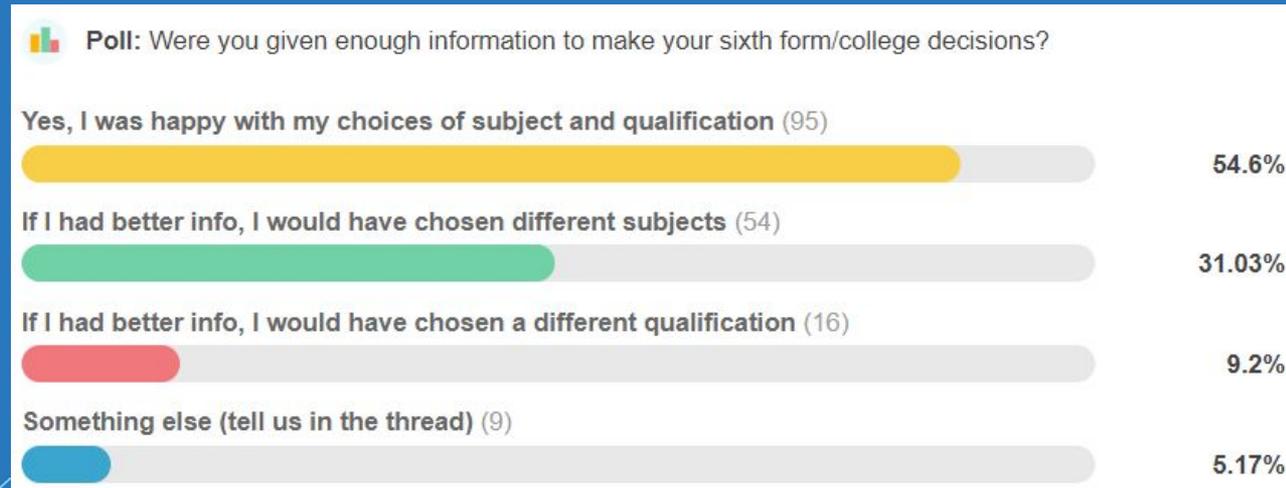
*I originally picked Math Business and Computer Science for my A levels. Now that I'm in year 13 I realise I don't need math for what I want to do. Math is my worst subject and I struggle in it and with finding motivation to study it. I really want to change it out. Is it possible to do another A level in one year? What is the best thing for me to do?*

# Most students felt informed to make their sixth form decisions, but 31% needed better info on subjects

So we asked those students who are currently studying or have finished sixth form/college how informed they had felt when they made their choices. Happily, more than half said they were happy with the choices they'd made. However, 31% said they'd have made different subject choices if they'd had access to better information.

There were also 9% of respondents who said they'd have chosen a different qualification if they'd had better information.

So while support for this important decision-making time is generally good, some students could benefit from improved information



# January deadline students are broadly feeling on track with their application journey

On the cusp of the October deadline, it was great to see so many October deadline applicants having send off their applications.

What's interesting though, is the positive space January applicants appear to be in. The majority are well on their way to making their choices about university and courses they'd like to apply for, with time for students to continue considering the right choice for them in time for submission.



# Embarrassment and fear of being ‘found out’ stops people accessing sexual health services

In October, our friends at Brook hosted Sexual Health Awareness week. In keeping with the theme ‘breaking barriers’, we wanted to find out what might stop young people from accessing support with their sexual health.

The most common responses speak to the shame and fear that can still exist around sexual wellbeing, with 27% feeling too embarrassed to access help. Privacy is also a major concern, with 22% being held back by worry their parent/carer would find out.

