

# In-person vs virtual open days, personal statement worries and student finance for 2023 applicants

Plus what support Year 13s need with their applications, Year 12s post college plans and personal statement reforms

Student sentiment update by The Student Room  
31 October - 4 December 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

[mhairi.underwood@thestudentroom.com](mailto:mhairi.underwood@thestudentroom.com)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mhairi-underwood/>

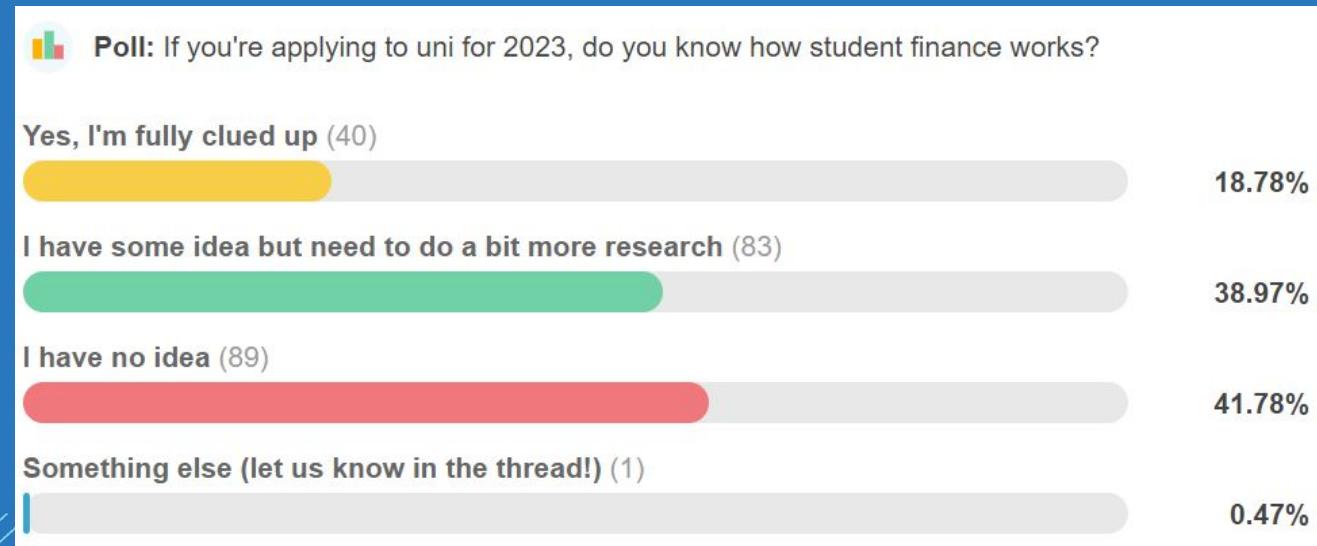
# Highlights in this update

- Less than 20% of 2023 applicants are fully clued up on **student finance**
- Year 13s love in-person open days, but 40% of students still need **virtual events**
- Year 13s most **want to talk to students studying their course** of interest ahead of making their applications
- ‘Not being convincing enough’, ‘not having enough experience’ and ‘not knowing where to start’ are the three **most common worries for students writing their personal statements**
- The majority of **Year 12s** are already actively planning their post-year 13 steps (including starting applications)
- Opinion is split following HEPI call to **reform personal statements**

# Less than 20% of 2023 applicants are fully clued up on student finance

In a year's time, these students will have already started their first year at university, but right now there's still a lot of support they'll need to get to that point.

Almost half (42%) currently have no idea about student finance. Only 19% of those who voted felt fully confident, meanwhile around 39% had 'some idea'.



# Less than 20% of 2023 applicants are fully clued up on student finance

There's still plenty of time for these students to build their understanding, but this is a strong early indication that the majority of students will be needing support to prepare and build their knowledge around this important part of attending university. With the cost of living crisis, it may be even more important this year to ensure students have the help they need to manage their financial and emotional wellbeing.

The good news is we're seeing a slight improvement on the levels of awareness compared to last year's cohort at the same time...

	2022 applicants	2023 applicants
<i>'Fully clued up'</i>	11.5%	19%
<i>'Some idea'</i>	38%	39%
<i>'No idea'</i>	50%	42%

# Year 13s love in-person open days, but virtual events are still needed

While most students prefer in-person events, virtual open days still have an important role post-pandemic.

18%

...can't afford to go to IRL events

17%

...use them to narrow down which IRL events they'll attend



*Travel is annoying and expensive but in person days are good to go especially for experiencing the environment and looking around yourself.*

# Year 13s love in-person open days, but virtual events are still needed

For 18% it's the cost of in-person events which is prohibitive for them. So for those young people where financial pressures can form a challenge, virtual open days are an important way to work toward removing barriers to access.

For another 17% of students who voted in our poll, virtual open days are a tool in their early-stage which helps them to narrow down which in-person events they'll prioritise to attend. What this shows is that virtual events can form an important first impression for students, and could be a key decision-making moment where students choose whether to pursue their research with a particular institution any further.

*'Sometimes, ones just have no choice, e.g. international students. They can't go to real ones.'*

# Year 13s need university's support ahead of making their applications

For students who are applying for university in 2023/24, there's more support they need from universities ahead of submitting their applications. In our poll with over 300 votes, we found that students most want...

Speaking to current students studying the course I'm interested in

Information about course modules

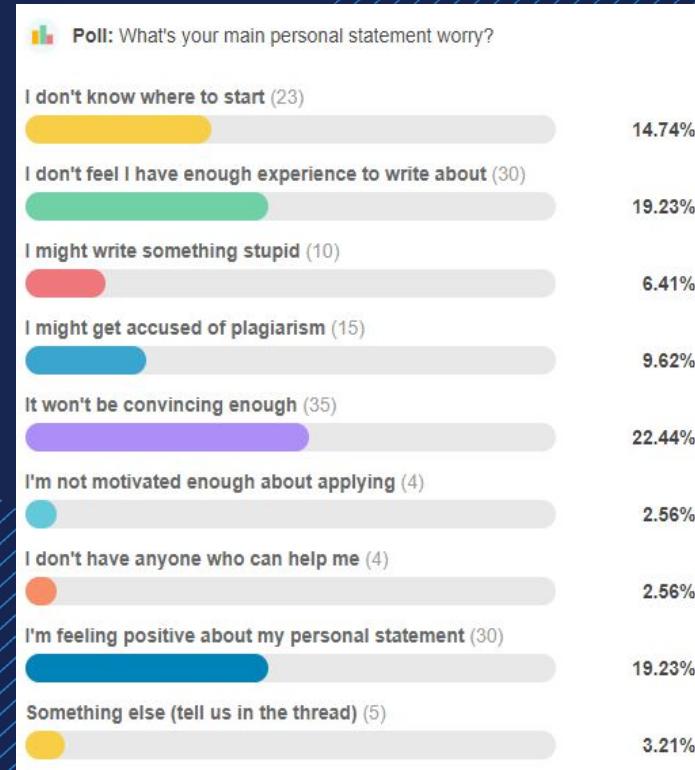
Information about the campus and student life

Support with what they're looking for in personal statements

# The biggest personal statement worries

We all know that putting together a personal statement can be tough. Happily, for 20% of those who completed our recent poll, they felt positive about their personal statement.

However for those who don't, there's some clear concerns in their minds. Not being convincing enough, not having enough experience and not knowing where to start are the three most common worries for students writing their personal statements. With renewed calls to review the structure of personal statements, it's interesting to consider how some of these concerns might be allayed.



# Year 12s are hot on their post-Yr13 plans

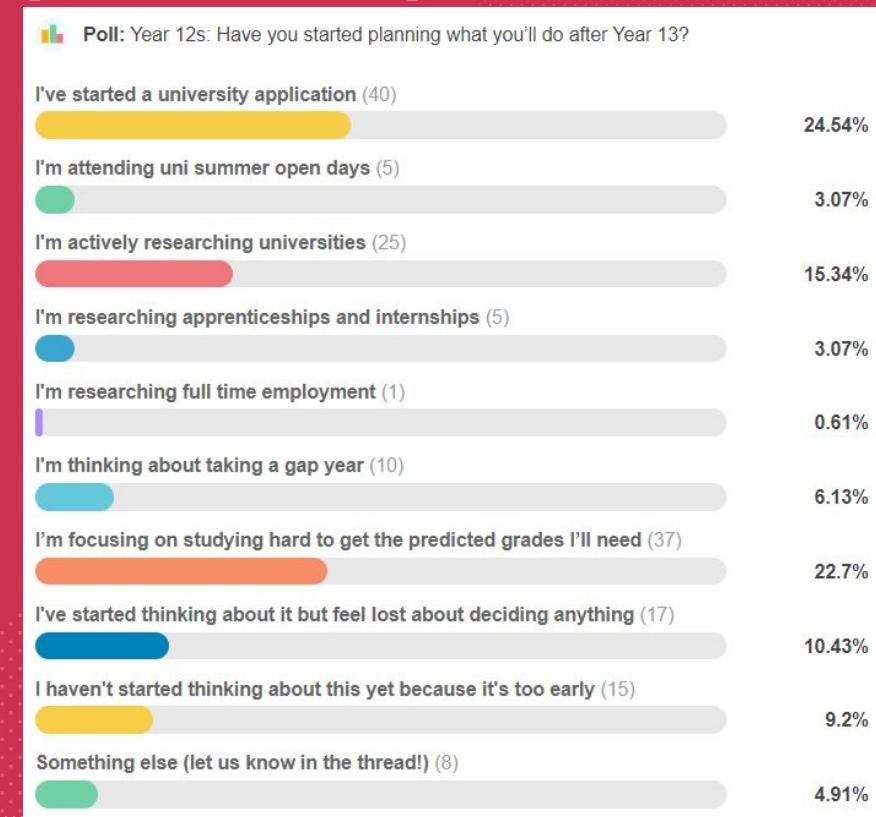
They've only just started Year 12, but Year 12s are forward planning...

**25%** ...have started a university application

**23%** ...are focusing on getting the predicted grades they'll need for their chosen path

**15%** ...are actively researching universities

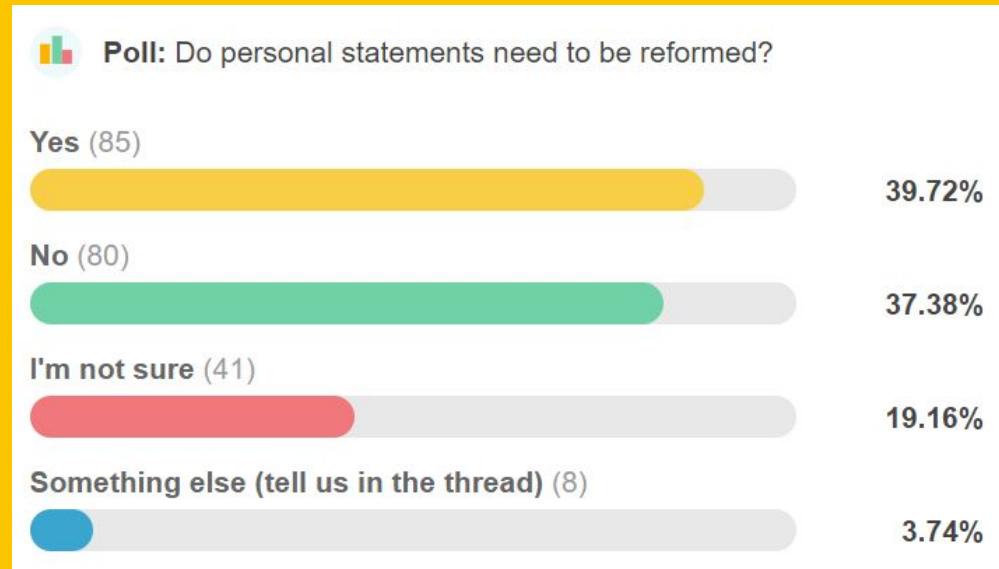
This could be a key time for students to be creating their shortlist of potential courses and universities, it's interesting to consider how important that early contact could be on in its influence on a students' final decision.



# Split opinion about potential reform of personal statements

In a [paper](#) released by HEPI in November, the case was made to reform UCAS personal statements. When we asked The Student Room community what they thought, opinion was very divided.

It's worth noting that as a place of support for students writing their personal statements, or students who are already at university, these results may be different compared to those students who aren't/haven't accessed support like ours.



# Split opinion about potential reform of personal statements

The biggest issue with personal statements and the reason why some unis no longer routinely read them (apart from for vocational courses like medicine) or don't put much weight on them is that some students get huge amounts of help drafting them from parents/schools or even pay a PS writing service, while other students get no help at all. The PS (if used in the selection process) can disadvantage young people from certain backgrounds, which is an issue those involved in Admissions are becoming more aware of.

I personally think personal statements are a good idea, but not in how they're implemented. I feel like, for universities a personal statement is really useful for seeing how passionate prospective students are about their subjects, and helps to distinguish from just high grades. But at the same time, they can be so hard to write and cause so much stress to many, that at a time that's stressful anyway is it really worth it. I also think that PS can only feel worth it for higher unis - if you know what I mean, when you go into an interview your personal statement is a talking point, but otherwise you do it and then never hear of it again. I'd say that it could be nicer to have a more CV-style application, with projects, books you've read, etcetera in a less flowing format of course, but easier to write (and also, debatably, easier to understand.) It can also be unfair if say, people who help you with it are much more experienced.

With regards to replacing them, I would be against it... if you are struggling to write about your motivation or suitability for a subject, maybe it isn't the correct one for you. IE. It's a good exercise for the applicant, even if not all their choices use it, in their selection process. That said, a lot of headline courses do score the PS closely, and I think for those they do add value, (even if they are challenging for the applicant to write).

# Split opinion about potential reform of personal statements

*I think at 18 they are a bit useless. Having done one at 45 again for a second degree it was useful to show why I wanted to do that degree and why I was committed in terms of understanding the time commitment and how I'd manage it around work etc. It took an hour, then mum (haha) gave some feedback then I submitted it. It was easy to write. So I think it should stay for non standard students, to explain why they want to do a course now etc. but not so much at 18, straight from A levels. Then it seems a bit meaningless.*

*I didn't enjoy writing my PS last year and I did feel pressure to get it right, but in hindsight I am glad it was there (even though it is likely no one read it!). I also found it hard as I went to low progression school and there was little support... I started thinking about it, just bullet pointing things I could include or do that year around springtime well before it was due in, and having it as something I had to do motivated me... I changed the engineering discipline I eventually applied for due to the PS process I went through - civil to mechanical. Once I knew what I wanted to do I wrote my PS over a weekend, sent to TSR to review and got some excellent feedback, made adjustments and submitted shortly after. If done correctly, preparing a PS at 18, could help reduce the number of students dropping out or regretting their course choice. Too many of my friends just threw together a PS, have rashly chosen courses on subjects they didn't know enough about and are regretting it now.*