

# Perceptions of apprenticeships, personal statement shakeup, teacher strikes and applications

Student sentiment update by The Student Room

2 January - 5 February 2023

# 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 six 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 2022 we shared 13 of these updates, showcasing 108 community polls, with over 23,000 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

- In National Apprenticeship Week we found Interest in **apprenticeships** rising for third year in a row
- 56% of TSR members don't think **scrapping personal statements** in favour of a question series is a good idea.
- 62% of student support **teacher strikes**, but many don't like missing out on learning time
- When it comes to **comparing universities**, applicants find location to be the most contrasting factor
- 68% of students still **waiting for offers** at the end of January
- Past papers are the top **revision** method for students

# Interest in apprenticeships rising for third year in a row

The 6th - 13th of February marks [National Apprenticeship Week](#)! Since 2021, we've asked students the same question at this time of year, and 2023 is the third year in a row where we've seen a gradual but sustained increase in interest in the apprenticeship pathway.



# Interest in apprenticeships rising for third year in a row

What I find most interesting in comparing the past three years is the trend toward more students being aware of and considering apprenticeships, and the clear increase in those considering degree apprenticeships specifically. For the third year, this shows significant potential in this area.

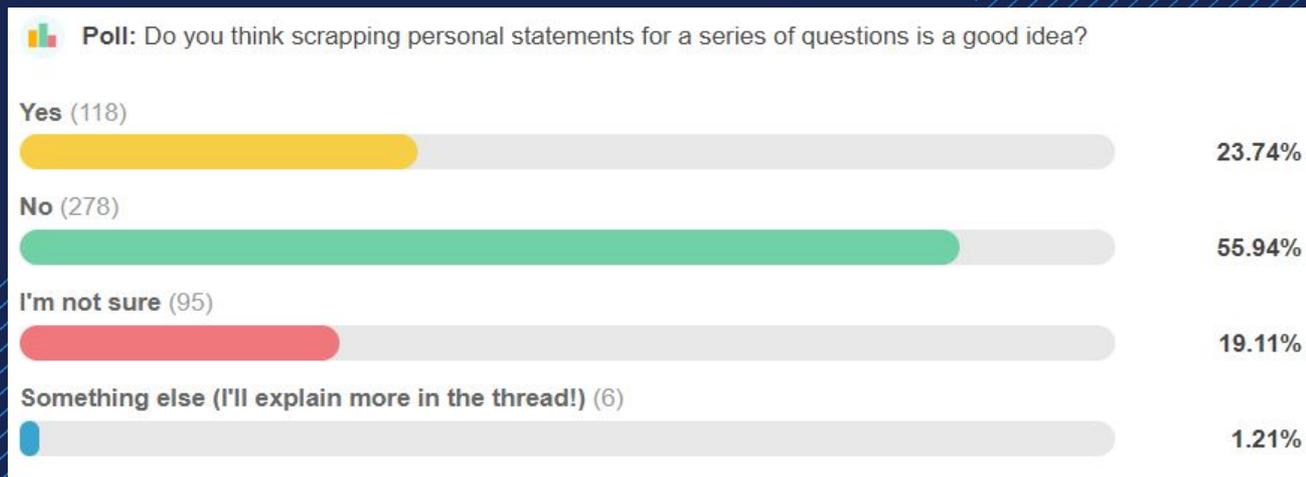
This week we're [hosting a Q&A](#) all about apprenticeships if it's helpful to the students in your life.

	2021	2022	2023	
<b>Considering an apprenticeship</b>	12.16%	13.5%	13.86%	↑
<b>Considering a degree apprenticeship</b>	8.71%	8.03%	11.45%	↑
<b>Have considered but not for me</b>	25.59%	25.3%	25.3%	=
<b>Haven't considered an apprenticeship</b>	50.27%	48.21%	45.18%	↓

# UCAS' personal statement announcement gets a mixed response from the TSR community

In January UCAS released its [Future of Undergraduate Admissions](#) report and [announced personal statements will undergo a shake up](#) in 2024 for 2025 applicants, switching the typical essay style for a series of questions students will respond to.

One of our TSR Volunteers invited the community to share their views on the announcement, with the majority saying they're not keen on the changes in a poll. It's worth bearing in mind a diverse age group responded.



# UCAS' personal statement announcement gets a mixed response from the TSR community

With feedback from current and past students, and even some admissions specialists, we're seeing varied points of view on this one...

*From an applicant's POV I think this would be an easier, less stress-inducing process. From an admissions POV it's a bad idea. With the PS being free format, it's a nice way to distinguish otherwise similar candidates. If they all answer the same 5 Q's then you're going to end up with a huge amount of identikit responses which don't add much value to anyone. We'd probably lean more towards achieved/predicted grades for decision making.*

*The suggested approach feels clinical. It's easy to make an essay unique. It's a lot harder to make each response unique. So many students will end up looking like generic job applicants.*

*I wonder if Oxbridge might still ask for the additional written personal statement? Since they have extra exams and interviews already. Or maybe other "prestigious" uni's?*

*I would much prefer them to create more options for private / external candidates since the reference process has been a absolute headache for me and many others and I've wasted so much time and money on getting a reference to show my current abilities just because my past with education was bad*

# UCAS' personal statement announcement gets a mixed response from the TSR community

*It depends on individual preferences, but some students might find answering a series of short responses to be a more manageable task, compared to writing a long personal statement. The shorter questions may make it easier for students to focus on specific aspects of their application, such as their motivation for studying the course and any extenuating circumstances that might impact their achievements. On the other hand, the personal statement allows students to showcase their writing skills, passion and creativity.*

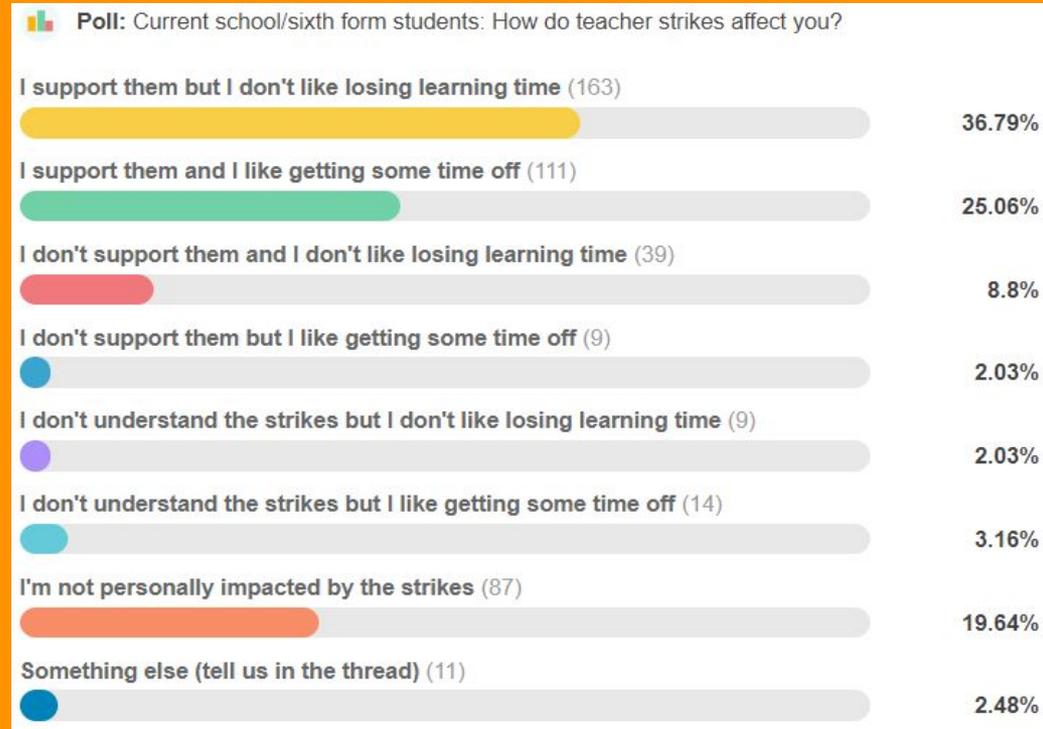
*The Medical Schools Council have advised medical schools to ignore the PS for several years now as the support available to applicants is so variable. Bristol does not read them for any subject and, given the speed with which some universities make offers, I think that others (Birmingham, Newcastle?) may not use them either. If it plays a significant part in getting an offer, there is a massive advantage for people with good support.*

*Getting rid of the personal statement is a good decision. So many students are coached through the personal statement writing process and end up writing impressive-sounding BS. Without interviews, there is no way of finding out which personal statements are genuine, and which are effectively the product of coaching. Using a set of questions instead is a slight improvement (less time wasted for everybody involved) but is associated with the same general issues as the personal statement. I don't see why they don't just get rid of it entirely - no written answers, just grades and a reference. The most competitive courses will use admissions tests and/or interview(s) and/or a course-specific personal statement. But most courses are not massively over-subscribed so there really isn't any issue with just using grades.*

# 62% of students support teacher strikes

In January when the [NEU announced](#) teachers had voted in support of strike action, much of the conversation was dominated by how adults viewed the decision and its impacts. So we decided to ask students.

Overall 62% of students support the strikes, but more than half of those don't like losing out on learning time, while 25% like the time off. A further 9% of respondents don't support the strikes and don't like losing learning time.



# 62% of students support teacher strikes

In the thread set up by a TSR member, the conversation was interesting. Made up of current and past students, and even teachers themselves.

*It's a shame how certain sectors feel the need to strike but they need to get better working conditions and higher pay.*

*No wonder with how the Tories have been hollowing out education and teacher's pay and conditions. For me it's a day off on my birthday, so that's the bright side I guess*

*Yeah, I support teachers going on strike but it does look like everyone is going on strike these days.*

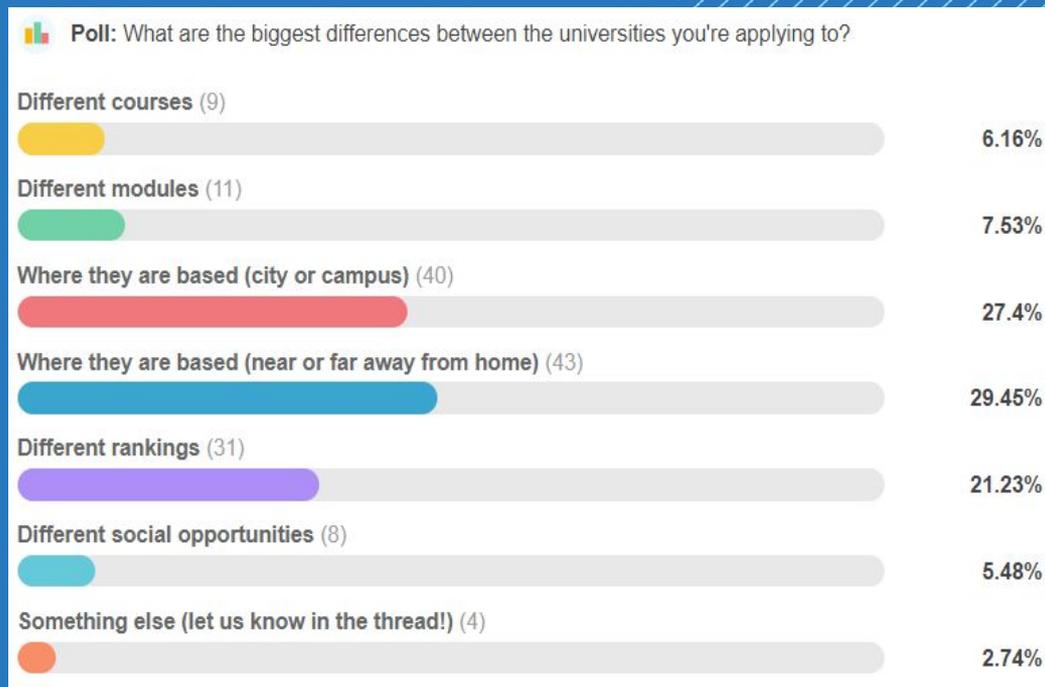
*It just seems ridiculous to me to strike when millions are on minimum wage and counting every penny. Now that teachers are striking it could even mean that some parents can't work.*

*I'm with the NEU but my job falls under the umbrella of support staff and we won't be striking as not enough people voted so we didn't pass the 50% threshold. I voted to strike mainly because of the proposals that salary increases be taken from existing School budgets rather than being government funded. I will still support my teacher colleagues who are striking in any way I can. For example, I won't be covering their work or supervising their classes. That would undermine the point they are trying to make.*

# Location and rankings are the biggest differences in university choices

Just before the UCAS deadline, we asked students what were the biggest differences between the universities they're applying to. By far, location was the biggest feature of note, including city vs campus (27%) and home vs commute (29%).

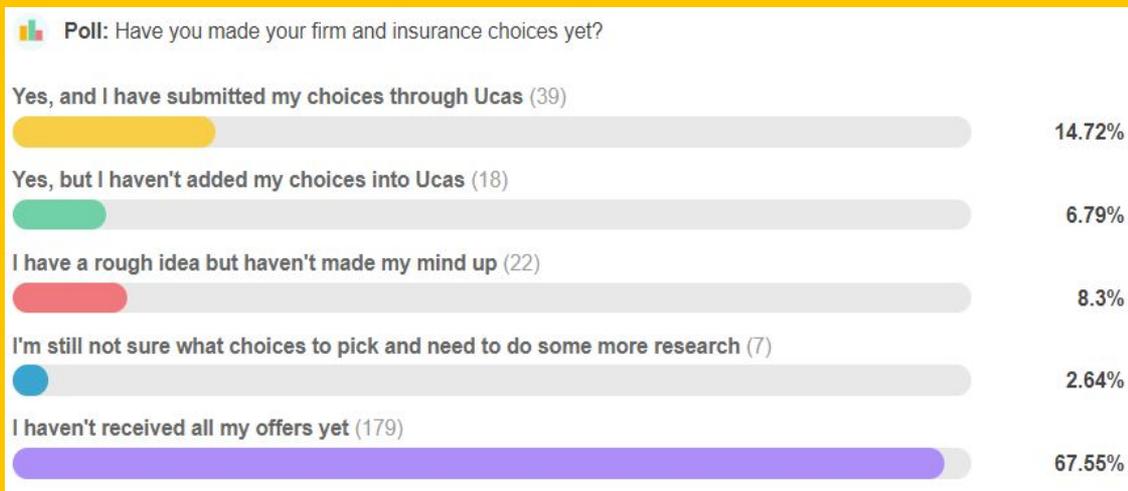
This may highlight an area of opportunity for students to be supported around the implications of location-based decisions and how their future at a particular campus may look.



# 68% of students still waiting for offers at the end of January

Although the deadline to reply to offers is still a few months away, we wanted to check in and see how students were getting on with their firm and insurance choices.

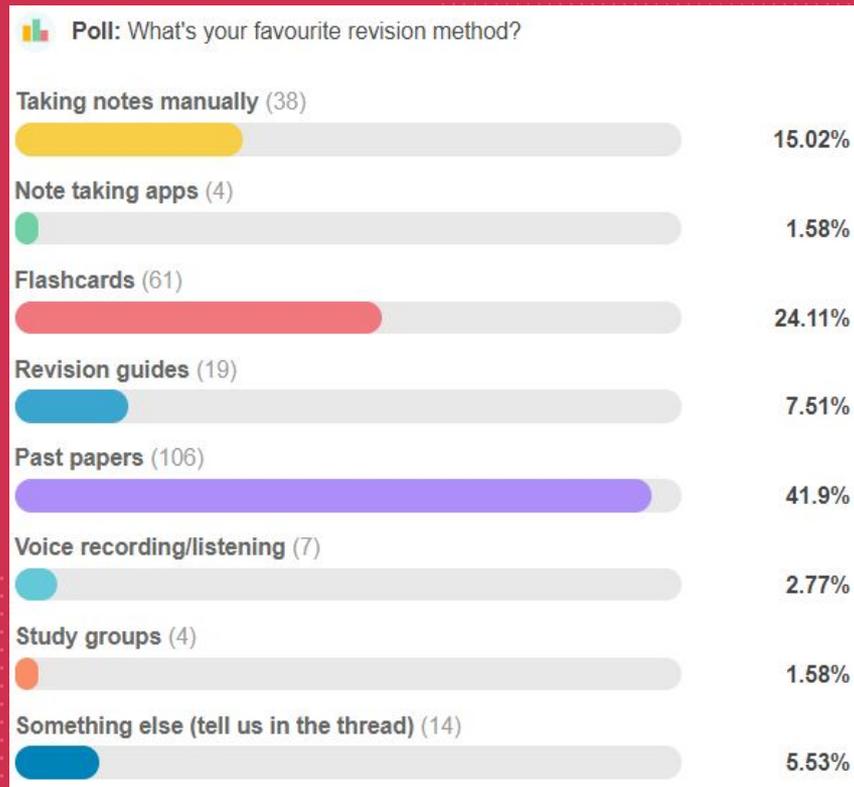
Almost 70% said they haven't received all their offers yet. This is exactly the same as this time in 2022 so it feels like things are roughly on the same track. So for now, many students on TSR continue to [wait together](#) to receive their news.



# Past papers are the top revision method for students

It's crazy to think Year 11 and 13 students will be in mega revision mode soon.

In keeping with [last year's trend](#), our poll this year showed past papers are the most popular revision tool for students, with flashcards and manual note taking next in line. However, realistically, we know most students will use a mixture of these tools.



# Past papers are the top revision method for students

*I like using flashcards and also mind maps. But I really should use practise papers as I heard they help so much.*

*favourite? reading through notes/watching videos. Most effective methods definitely aren't my favourite as they require effort!*

*I think that I prefer to use past papers for revision, but probably also taking notes manually sometime writing the steps involved for tasks and key things over and over a few times a day to try and get it memorised*

*Of course I used past papers to see what I have got by learning and how good my knowledge is. I also used flash cards for the explanation of terms (and vocabularies in foreign languages), but there is one method students hardly try, but helped a lot (me at least did): reading and explain the things in your own words in a monologue in front of a mirror. Or better: in a dialogue in front of a person you have to explain.*

*Another precious advice for the most students: when you are doing past or present papers, listen to relaxing classic music for studying. It is helpful to calm down and to prevent procrastination.*