

Home or Halls? Exploring prospective undergraduates' decisions to stay at home or move away for university

Market Research Report

Summary of Findings: Deciding whether to stay at home or move away for university

- Almost a quarter (24%) of our sample were planning to **stay at home for university**. Reasons for staying at home included wanting to save money, having support around them, and keeping existing commitments. There was also a feeling among some that they didn't need to move, as good universities were available nearby.
- 76% were planning to move away for their studies. Reasons for moving away included gaining independence and responsibility, and experiencing new things or meeting new people. There were also some practical reasons, for example universities locally not offering their chosen course, or that commuting would be logistically difficult or expensive. Some also mentioned that 'better universities' were available further away.
- Indeed, while practicalities fed into their decisions, for the majority of 2024 entry respondents there was an element of choice in their decision, with only a minority of those staying at home (18%) or moving away (27%) saying this decision was made purely out of necessity.
- The decision of whether to stay at home or move away was often made **early in the application cycle with 90% having made this choice prior to submitting their UCAS application**. For the largest proportions of respondents (40% stay at home, 51% move away), it was **always their plan**.

Summary of Findings: Drivers for the decision to stay at home or move away for university

- It also appears that the majority of those planning to move away would be **flexible on their decision** for the right course. If the perfect course was available a mile away, more than half (53%) would instead stay at home. Just one in five (19%) said they would choose a different university further away.
- And if money and personal circumstances were no object, around half (49%) of respondents planning to **stay at home** would have made the same decision.
- Cost of living concerns regarding their university plans were felt by both those
 planning to stay at home and those planning to move away, half (50%) worried if they
 could afford university, with no significant differences between those planning to move
 away and stay at home.
- For 64% of those planning to move away, and 44% of those planning to stay at home, the cost of living while at university **concerned them more than tuition fees**.

Summary of Findings: Needs of students moving away for university, including accommodation

- More than three quarters (77%) of those moving away felt that *accommodation* was important in their university choice, including 20% who felt accommodation was very important in their decision.
- Over three quarters (77%) of 2024 entry respondents were satisfied with the information they had received about accommodation. Positively, 79% of 2024 entry respondents had already secured accommodation or were confident they would be able to.
- Cost was the most likely to be considered an important factor when choosing accommodation, selected as an important feature by 84% of respondents. This was also most likely to be selected as the most important (33%), selected by more than twice as many respondents than any other factor listed. Qualitatively, when asked what word they would use to describe their ideal university accommodation, the most common words mentioned were comfortable, clean, and safe.

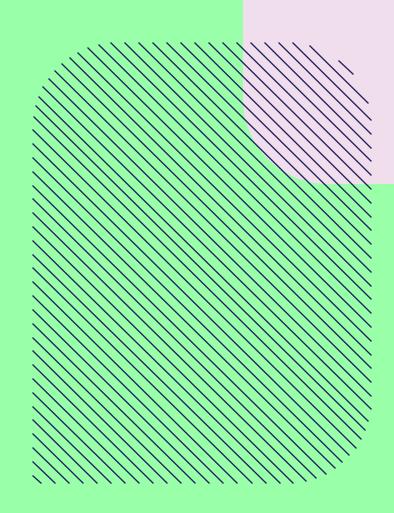
Summary of Findings: Needs of students moving away for university, including accommodation

- 54% of those planning to live away from home had seen **reports about a shortage of student accommodation in the media**. And of those aware, most (93%) had made changes to their plans as a result, most often choosing universities with first year accommodation guaranteed (57%). In total, 55% of those aware had made a change to their choice of university city as a result of accommodation shortages (choose a university city with more plentiful accommodation or ruled out universities in cities with shortages).
- Perhaps following increased advertisement due to supply issues, there appears to be relatively high awareness of accommodation guarantees. More than three quarters (78%) of 2024 entry respondents who were moving away believed their university to offer an accommodation guarantee for first year students.
- Ahead of moving away, all 2024 entry respondents wanted information from their university and/or accommodation provider, including what happens on moving day (88%), what to bring (84%), and practical information such as where the nearest supermarket is (83%).

Summary of Findings: Needs of students staying at home for university

- Most of those planning to move away felt that some information would be helpful as they transitioned to university, including the course timetable (75%), support for students staying at home (68%), and opportunities to meet and network with other commuter students (67%). In total, 69% wanted to know about the transport links available.
- Indeed, journeys were expected to be complex, with each respondent planning to commute by an average of 2.3 different transport modes, most often including **public transport** such as a bus (56%) or train (48%).
- Almost two fifths (59%) of respondents planning to stay at home, expected their commute time to be under one hour. 7% expected their commute time to be 90 minutes or more.

Background, objectives and methodology



Research outcomes and objectives

- Explore the decision to stay at home or move away for university, and the reasons for this choice
- Understand the impact of increased cost of living on planned living arrangements
- Understand the information and support that is required with the transition to university
- For those planning to move away;
 - Understand what is really valued in accommodation and the influence on university choice
- For those planning to stay at home;
 - Understand the distance that students may be willing to commute and planned commute method

Methodology and target audience

- An online survey with the Student Room Community.
- Fieldwork: 24th April to 14th May 2024
 - Prospective undergraduates
 - UK students aged 16+
 - Planning to start university in 2024, 2025, or beyond
- 993 respondents completed or partially completed the survey.



Who we spoke to

Age

37% 16 39% 17 23% 18 1% 19 <0.5% 20 or over

Year of study

25% Year 11 or equivalent 39% Year 12 or equivalent 34% Year 13 or equivalent 1% Gap year 1% Apprenticeship or vocational course Full-time employment <0.5% <0.5% Unemployed <0.5% Prefer not to say

Year of entry

33% 2024

67% 2025 or beyond

Parents went to university

58% Yes 40% No

2% Prefer not to say

Received free school meals

19% Yes79% No

2% Prefer not to say

Subject(s) of interest

29% Non-clinical STEM
20% Clinical
34% Social Sciences
27% Arts & Humanities
5% Not sure yet
15% Other
<0.5% Prefer not to say

Region

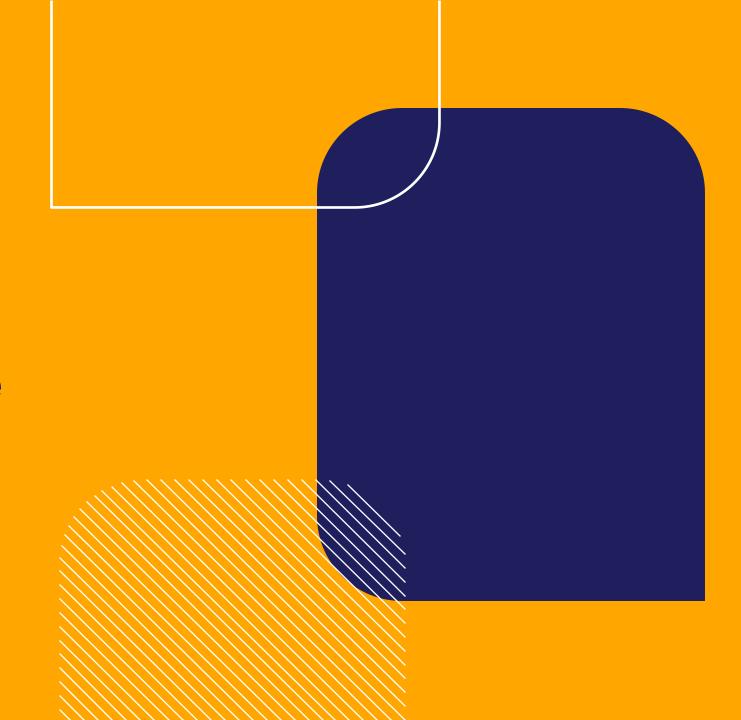
6% East Midlands 6% East of England **Greater London** 3% North East 10% North West South East 19% South West 12% 10% West Midlands 6% Yorkshire & the Humber 4% Wales Scotland 2% 1% Northern Ireland 1% Other 1% Prefer not to say

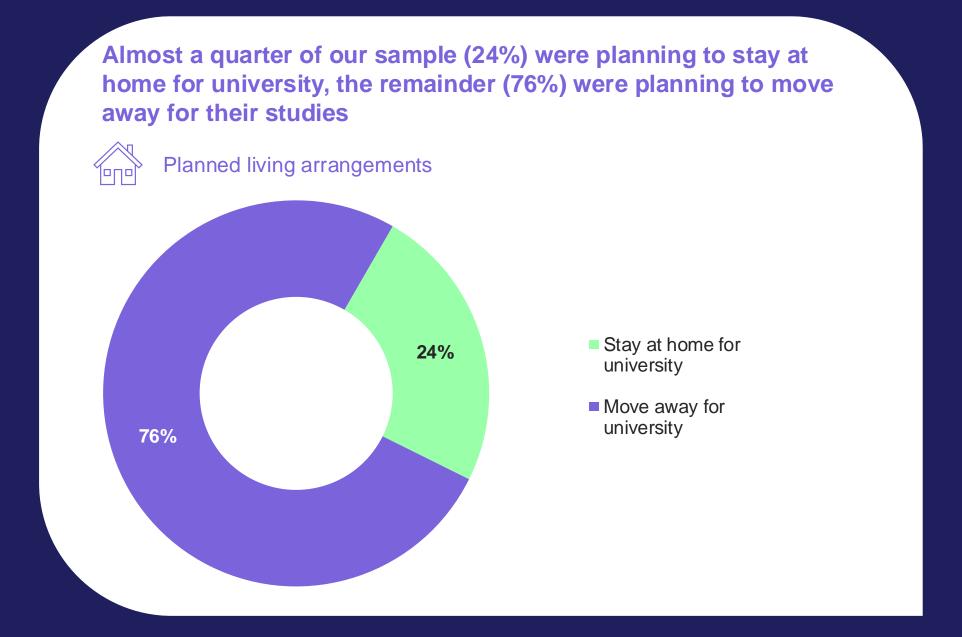
Currently live in

36% City
47% Town
17% Village / Hamlet / Rural Area
1% Prefer not to say

The big question...

Stay at home or move away for university?





Who is staying at home for University?

Those planning to stay at home were more likely than those moving away to;

- Be the **first in their family** to go to university
- Have received free school meals
- Live in London or the North East
- Live in a city
- Be interested in Clinical subjects





In their own words...

Reasons for staying at home for university

- 1) Financial considerations: Saving money on rent, bills and food.
- 2) Having support around them: Helping with the transition to university.
- 3) **There's no need to**: Good universities nearby that meet their needs.
- 4) For a smaller number of respondents, to keep their **existing commitments**.

"Closer to family and place I know best, if anything happens to me I can go straight home."

"University is already quite expensive and moving away to a new city and having to pay for accommodation along with groceries and possibly transport is a lot."

"Money is a significant factor but I also don't feel ready to move out."

"Accommodation is very expensive on top of fees. Staying at home means that I don't have as much added expense as I would staying in student accommodation. Also the universities near to me are very good for the courses I am considering so don't see a reason to move."

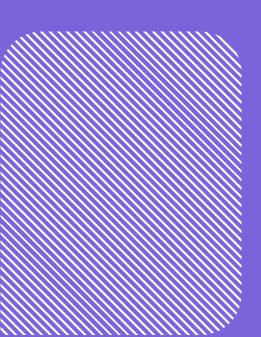
"I'm not willing to get myself into even more debt' than university will already put me in by moving out. Staying at home allows me to save more money."

"I like the city and I think the university there is very good. I wouldn't want to move."

Who is moving away for University?

Those planning to move away were more likely than those staying at home to;

- Have had parent(s)/carer(s) who attended university
- Live in the South West or South East
- Live in a **village** or **rural area**
- Be interested in Arts & Humanities subjects





Move away for university

"The course I want is not available locally. Living in halls will be an exciting experience, and hopefully help me to make friends outside my course."

"As there are not many unis around where I live and affording the train every day would add up"

"For independence and to learn necessary life skills not just rely on my parents."

"Because I think it is time to leave my home town, and both my siblings left for uni so I feel like it is my time."

In their own words...

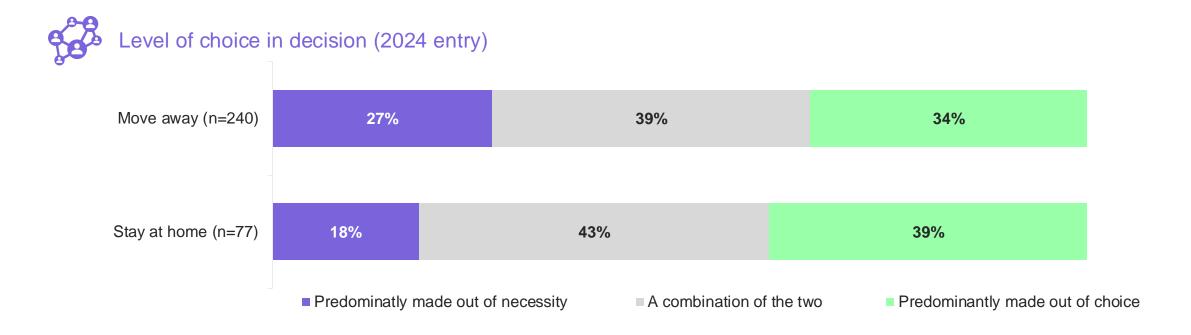
Reasons for moving away for university

- 1) Gaining independence and responsibility, doing things on their own.
- 2) Experiencing new things or meeting new people, getting the halls experience.
- 3) Course suitability: Can't do course locally / 'better' universities further away.
- 4) Not practical / would be too expensive (e.g., commute logistics).

"I feel as though a fresh start would be needed to make the most out of studies, I think that meeting new people encourages you to socialise with those that you wouldn't normally consider talking to. Thus making the university experience more memorable."

"I don't want to limit my boundaries for education to somewhere local, I would be willing to go most places for education. Plus, it's an experience to be independent and to mature.."

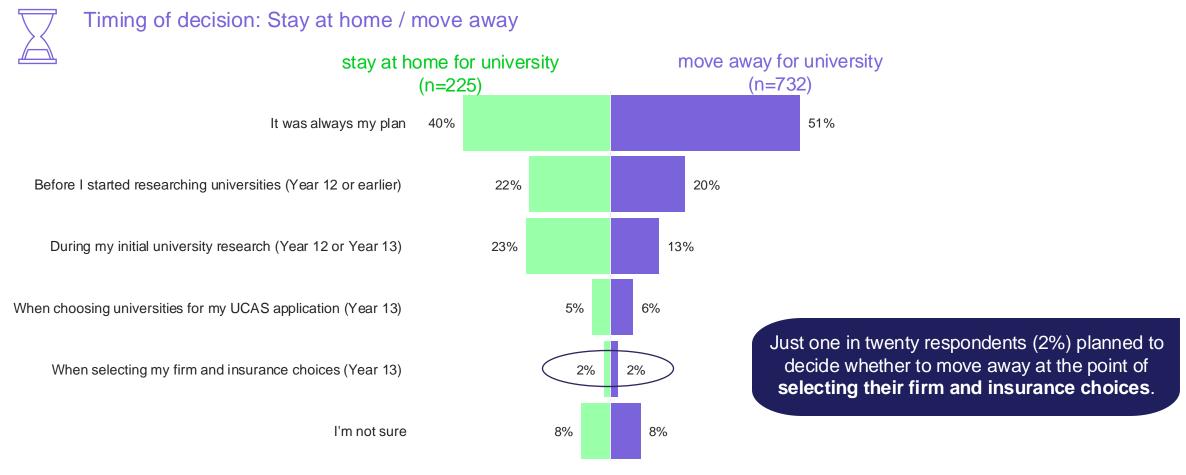
We asked 2024 entry respondents whether their decision to stay at home or move away was made out of choice or necessity. Perhaps surprisingly, those planning to move away from home were slightly more likely to say their decision was made out of necessity than those planning to stay at home. However, for the majority of those both moving away (73%) and staying at home (82%), there was an element of choice in their decision (either their decision was made out of choice or a combination of choice and necessity)



Q: Thinking about your decision to stay at home or move away for university, would you say this decision was...? Please select the option that best describes you (Single Response) (Base: 317 2024 entry respondents. Stay at home: 77, Move away: 240)

The decision to stay at home or move away was generally made early in the cycle.

For the largest proportion of respondents, it was always their plan (40% stay at home, 51% move away), most (90% of each audience) had made this decision prior to submitting their UCAS application

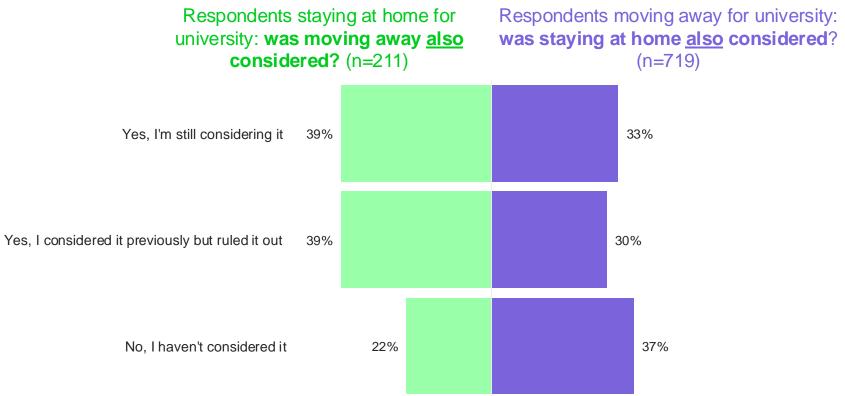


Q: At what point did you/will you decide that you want to move away or stay at home for university? (Single Response Question) (Base: 957 – Stay at home: 225, Move away: 732)

Despite decisions generally being made early, the majority of both those staying at home and moving away had also considered or were actively considering the alternative option



Consideration of alternative options



Respondents planning to stay at home appear to be more open to moving away than those planning to move away appear to be staying home.

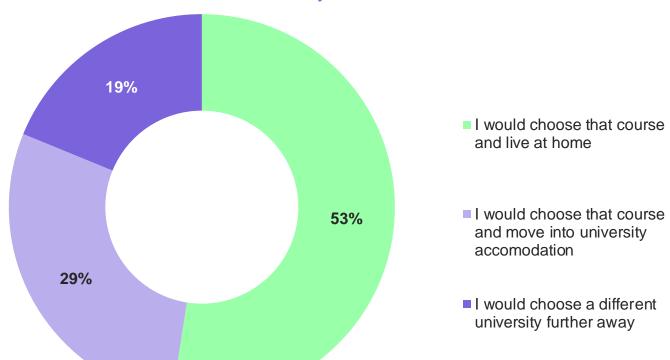
- 78% of those planning to stay at home for university were actively considering or had previously considered moving away.
- Significantly higher than the 63% of those moving away who had also considered or were considering staying at home.
- Just 22% of those planning to stay at home had only considered this option.

Q: Did you also consider / are you also considering staying at home for university? (Single Response Question) (Base: 719 move away students)

Q: Did you also consider / are you also considering moving away for university? (Single Response Question) (Base: 211 stay at home)

It also appears that the majority of those planning to move away would be flexible on their decision for the right course. If the perfect course was available a mile away, more than half (53%) of those planning to move away would instead stay at home, and almost three in ten (29%) would choose that course and move into university accommodation

Move away respondents: What if the perfect course was available a mile away?



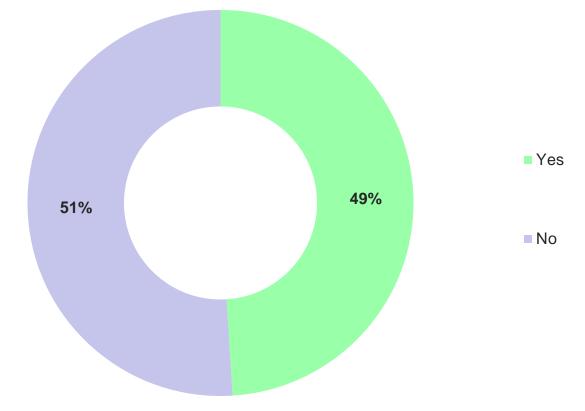
Only around one in five (19%) said they would choose a different university further away.

- Perhaps reflecting their later stage in the decision making, 2024 entry respondents were more likely to say they would choose a different university further away (23%) than those applying for 2025 entry or beyond (16%).
- First in family respondents were more likely to say they would choose that course and live at home (61%) than those whose parent(s)/carer(s) went to university (49%).

If money and personal circumstances were no object, around half of respondents planning to stay at home would have made the same decision



Stay at home respondents: What if money/circumstances were no option?



There were no significant differences by year of entry or whether their parent(s)/carer(s) went to university in terms of whether they would still live at home.

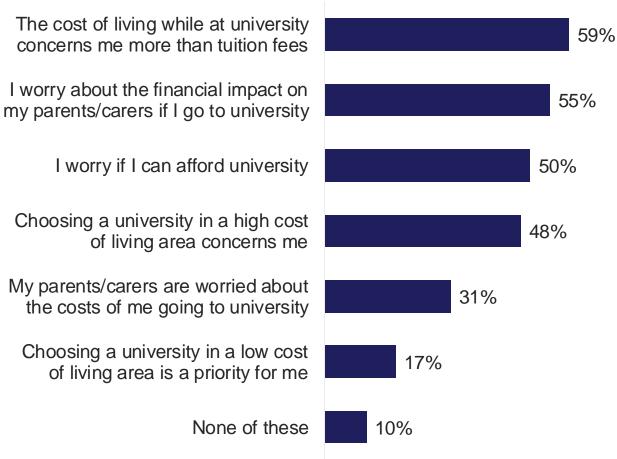
Cost of living concerns



90% agreed with at least one of the statements around cost of living. For around three fifths of respondents (59%) the cost of living was more of a concern than the tuition fees



Cost of living concerns



Respondents were not just concerned about their own needs – In total, 63% selected that they were worried about the financial impact on their parents/carers, and/or that their parents/carers were worried about the costs.

Half (50%) worried whether they **could afford university**, however less than one in five (19%) felt that **choosing a university in a low cost of living area** was a priority.

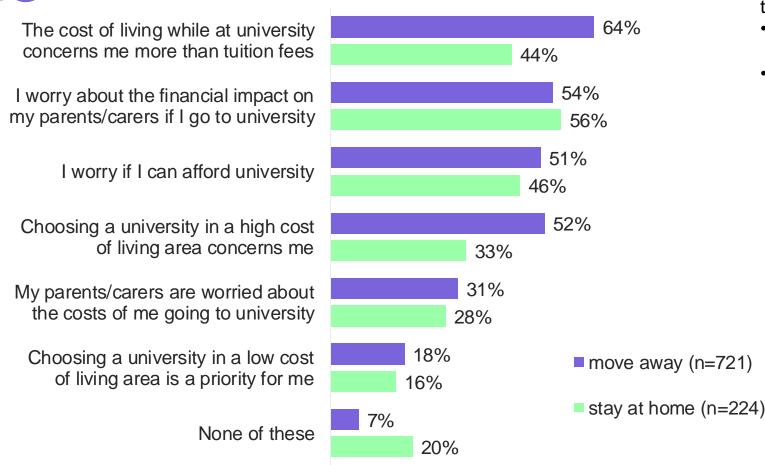
And 2024 entry respondents were more likely than those applying in 2025 or beyond to feel;

- The cost of living concerned them more than tuition fees (66% cf. 56%)
- Their parents/carers were worried about the costs of them going to university (35% cf. 29%).

Those planning to move away were more likely to have cost of living concerns than those planning to stay at home. 93% of those planning to move away felt that at least one of these areas was a concern, compared to 80% of those planning to stay at home.

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Cost of living concerns (move away / stay at home comparison)



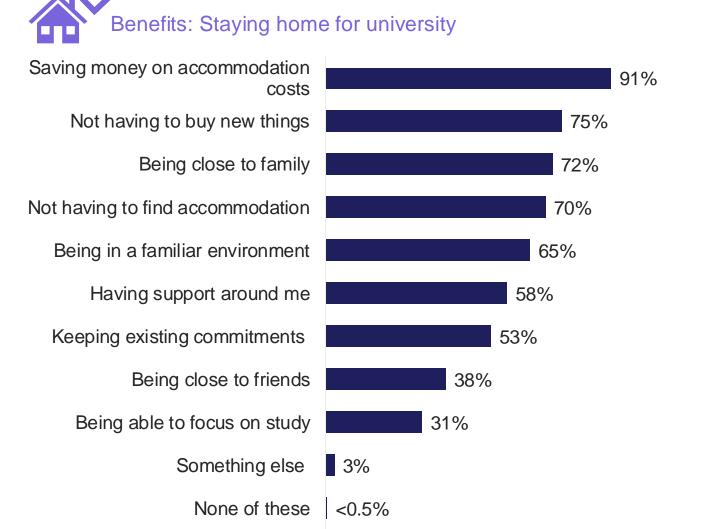
Specifically, those moving away were more likely than those staying at home to feel;

- Choosing a university in a high cost of living area concerned them (52% cf. 33%)
- The cost of living at university concerned them more than tuition fees (64% cf. 44%).

Perceived pros and cons of moving away and staying at home

In this section of the survey, we asked respondents what they considered the benefits and drawbacks of both moving away and staying at home for university to be.

Almost all respondents considered there to be benefits to staying at home for university, most frequently the financial benefits of saving on accommodation costs (91%) and not having to buy new things (75%)



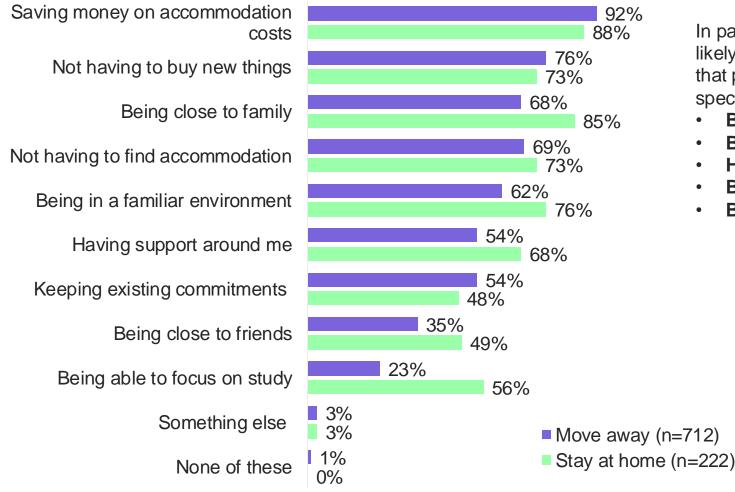
On average, each respondent selected 5.6 different benefits of staying at home for university.

Those planning to start university in 2025 or beyond were more likely to consider being **close to friends** as a benefit (41%) than 2024 applicants (33%).

First in family respondents were more likely to consider **being able to focus on study** a benefit (36%) than those whose parent(s)/carer(s) went to university (28%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those planning to stay at home for university selected a larger number of benefits of staying at home on average (6.2) than those planning to move away (5.4)

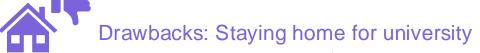
Benefits: Staying home for university (move away / stay at home comparison)

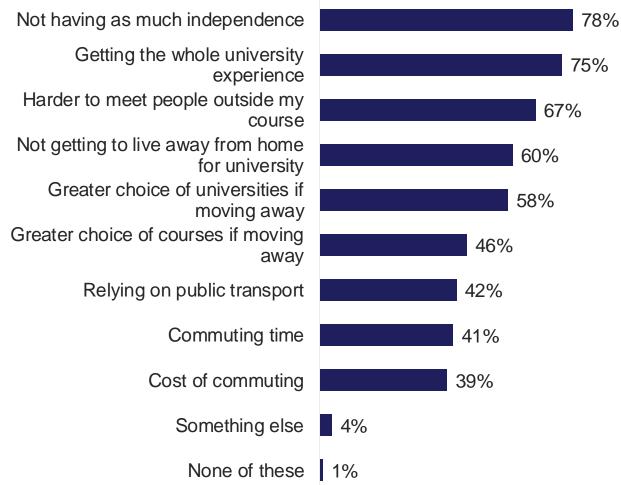


In particular, respondents planning to stay at home were more likely than those planning to move away to consider the benefits that perhaps went **beyond finances and practicalities**, specifically:

- Being close to family (85% cf. 68%)
- Being in a familiar environment (76% cf. 62%)
- Having support around me (68% cf. 54%)
- Being able to focus on studies (56% cf. 23%)
- Being close to friends (49% cf. 35%)

Almost all respondents also identified drawbacks to staying at home for university, with not having as much independence (78%) and getting the whole university experience (75%) selected most frequently





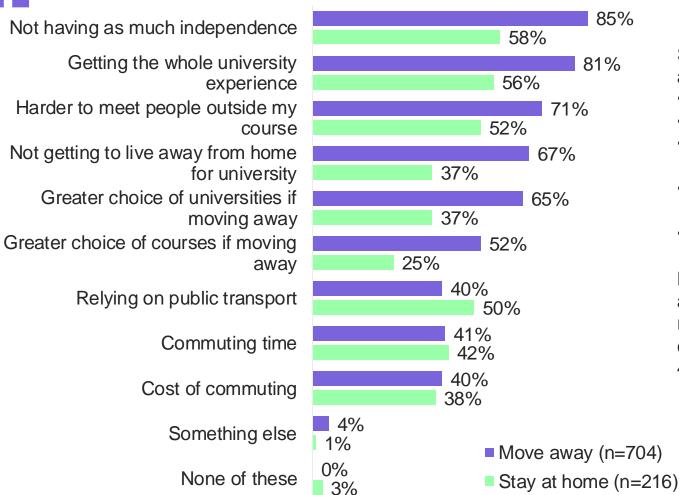
Respondents each selected an average of 5.2 drawbacks of staying at home for university.

Perhaps having conducted further research into logistics at this stage, 2024 entry respondents were more likely than those applying in 2025 and beyond to consider **commuting time** (50% cf. 37%) and **cost** (47% cf. 36%) drawbacks. Whereas those applying for 2025 and beyond were more likely than 2024 entry respondents to consider the greater choice of **universities** (61% cf. 53%) and **courses** (48% cf. 41%) if moving away a drawback of staying at home.

Those whose parent(s)/carer(s) went to university were more likely than first in family respondents to consider **not having** as much independence (81% cf. 75%), **not getting the** whole university experience (79% cf. 70%), and **not getting** to live away from home for university (64% cf. 55%) as drawbacks of staying at home for university. Whereas first in family respondents were more likely to consider **reliance on public transport** a drawback (51% cf. 37%).

Those planning to stay at home selected on average a smaller number of drawbacks (4.1) of staying at home for university than those planning to move away (5.5)

Drawbacks: Staying home for university (move away / stay at home comparison)



Stay at home respondents were less likely than those moving away to consider the following as drawbacks:

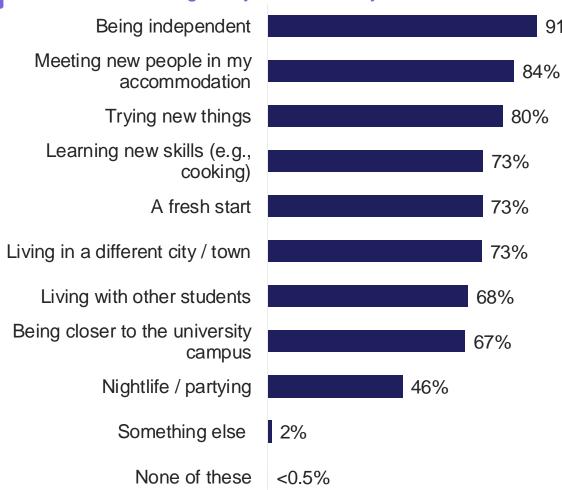
- Not having as much independence (58% cf. 85%)
- Getting the whole university experience (56% cf. 81%)
- Harder to meet people outside of my course (52% cf. 71%)
- Not getting to live away from home for university (37% cf. 67%)
- Greater choice of courses (25% cf. 52%) or universities if moving away (37% cf. 65%)

However, perhaps as they may have conducted further research about commuting and transport options, stay at home respondents were more likely than those moving away to consider **relying on public transport** as a barrier (50% cf. 40%).

Being independent (91%), meeting new people in my accommodation (84%), and trying new things (80%) were considered the key benefits of moving away for university – Again, almost all respondents saw at least one potential benefit of moving away from home

91%





On average, each respondent selected 6.6 different benefits of moving away for university.

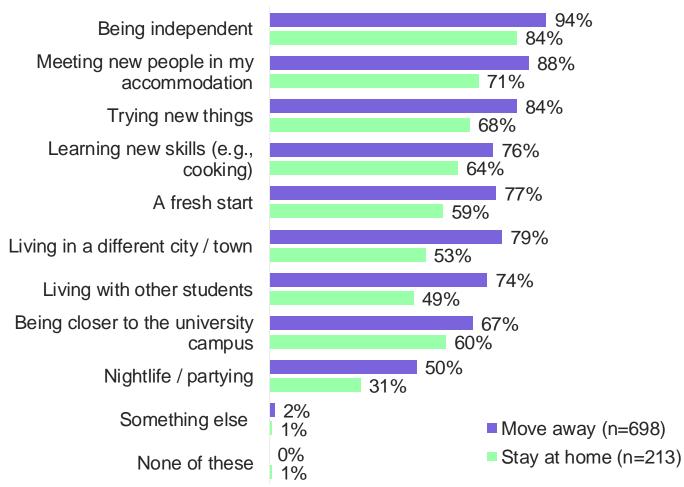
There were no significant differences between 2024 and 2025 and beyond entry respondents in terms of the perceived benefits of moving away for university.

Those whose parent(s)/carer(s) went to university were more likely than first in family respondents to consider the following as benefits of moving away for university;

- Meeting new people in my accommodation (87% cf. 79%)
- Living in a different city / town (77% cf. 68%)
- Living with other students (71% cf. 63%)
- Nightlife / partying (49% cf. 38%).

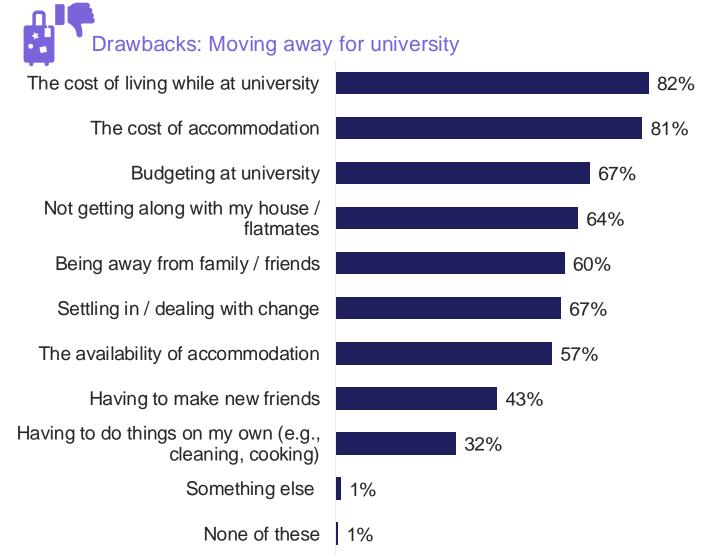
Those planning to move away selected an average of 6.9 benefits of moving away for university, compared to 5.4 benefits selected by those planning to stay at home

Benefits: Moving away for university (move away / stay at home comparison)



Those moving away for university were significantly more likely to consider **all options listed as benefits** than those planning to move away.

Again, almost all selected at least one drawback of moving away. Drawbacks selected were most commonly related to cost and finances - In total, 94% selected at least one option relating to cost of living, cost of accommodation, or budgeting.

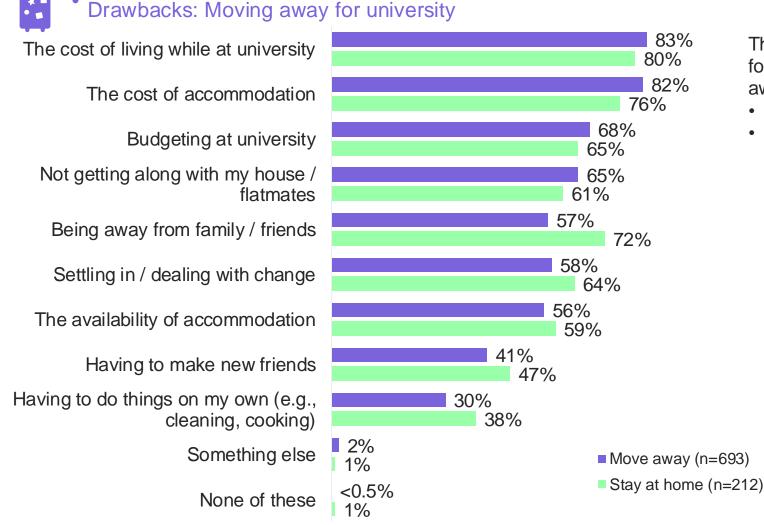


Each respondent selected an average of 5.5 different drawbacks of moving away for university.

Those applying for 2025 or beyond were more likely to consider the availability of accommodation a concern (61%) than those applying for 2024 entry (50%).

There were no significant differences in perceived drawbacks by whether their parent(s)/carer(s) attended university.

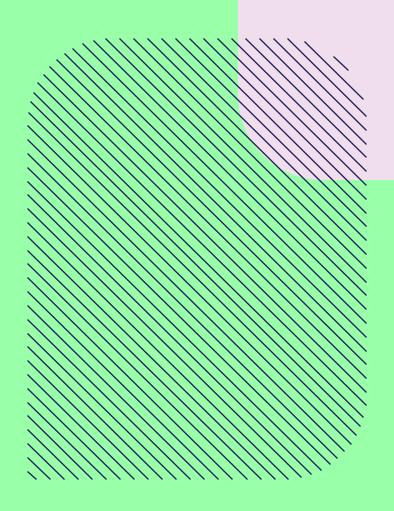
Those planning on staying at home for university selected an average of 5.7 drawbacks of moving away from the list, whereas those planning on moving away selected an average of 5.4 drawbacks each



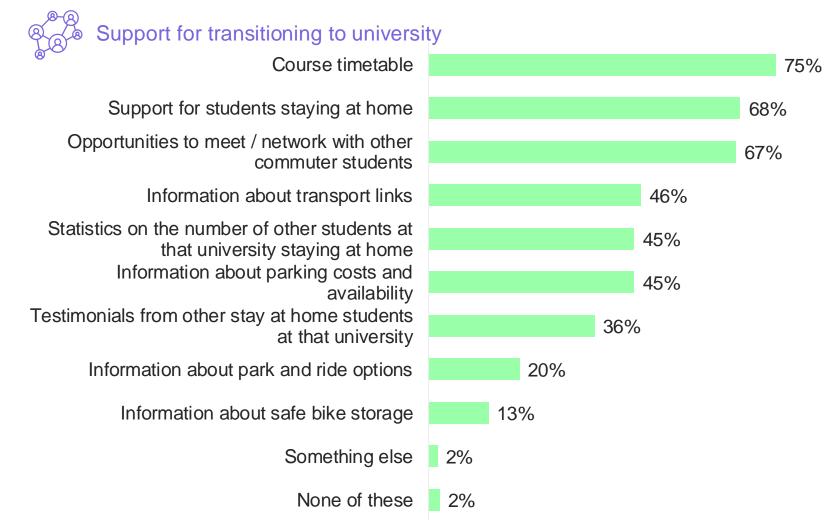
Those staying at home were more likely to consider the following as drawbacks than those planning to move away:

- Being away from family / friends (72% cf. 57%)
- Having to do things on my own (38% cf. 30%).

Needs of students staying at home for university



Most (98%) of those planning to stay at home felt that some information would be helpful as they transitioned to university, most often the course timetable (75%), support for students staying at home (68%), and opportunities to meet and network with other commuter students (67%)



In total, 69% wanted information relating to transport (information about transport links, parking, park and ride, or safe bike storage).

93% wanted specific information or opportunities for stay at home students (stats, testimonials, opportunities to meet / network with other stay to home students, or support for students staying at home).

On average, each respondent selected 4.2 different options each, again suggesting a wide range of support is required as they begin university

Respondents staying at home were most likely to plan to commute to university using a wide range of methods, 84% would be reliant on public transport for all or part of their journey. Commutes were expected to use multiple transport methods – Each respondent selected that their commute would include an average of 2.3 different modes of transport.



Expected commute



Bus: 56%



Train: 48%

On foot: 26%





Tram: 8%



Car: 40%



Bike: 6%



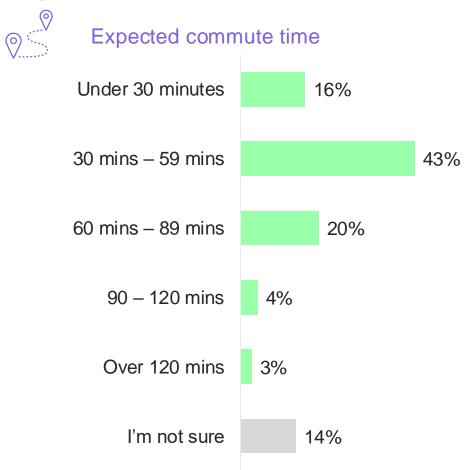
Underground: 27%

84% expected to be reliant on public transport in some way.

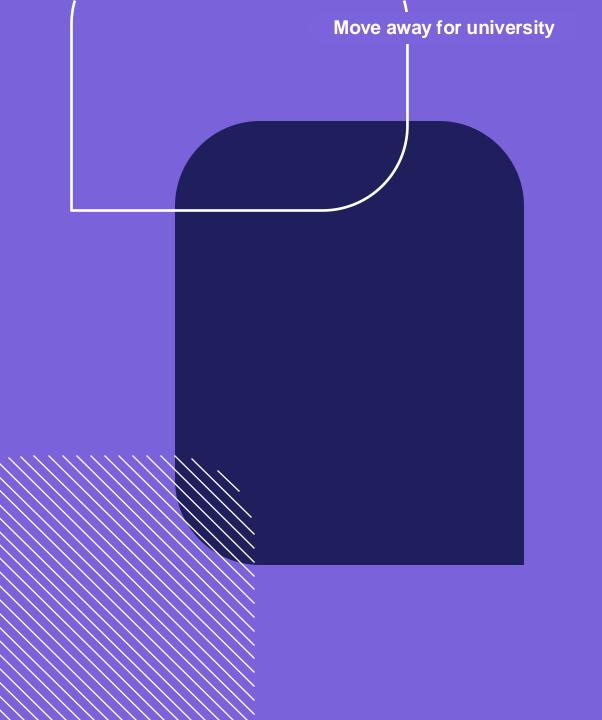
Q: How are you planning to commute to university? If your daily commute will involve multiple methods of transport, please select any that apply (Multiple response) (Base: 210 stay at home respondents)

Almost two fifths (59%) of respondents planning to stay at home expected their commute time to be under one hour.

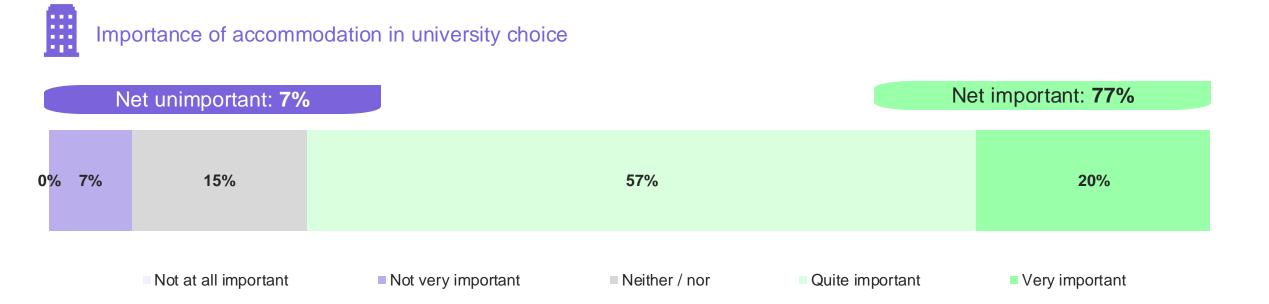
In total, 7% expected their commute time to be 90 minutes or more. 14% were still unsure at this stage how long their commute was likely to take.



Needs of students moving away for university

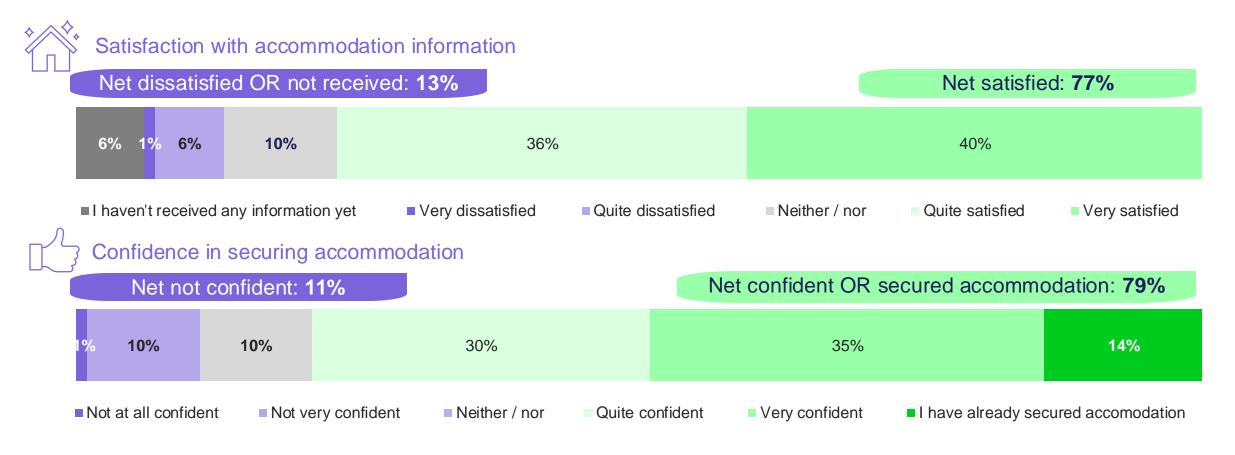


More than three quarters (77%) of those moving away felt that accommodation was important in their university choice, including 20% who felt accommodation was very important in their decision



The majority (94%) of 2024 entry respondents had received accommodation information by the time of the research, and in total, over three quarters (77%) were satisfied with the accommodation information they had received.

Positively, of 2024 entry respondents, 79% had already secured accommodation or were confident they would be able to

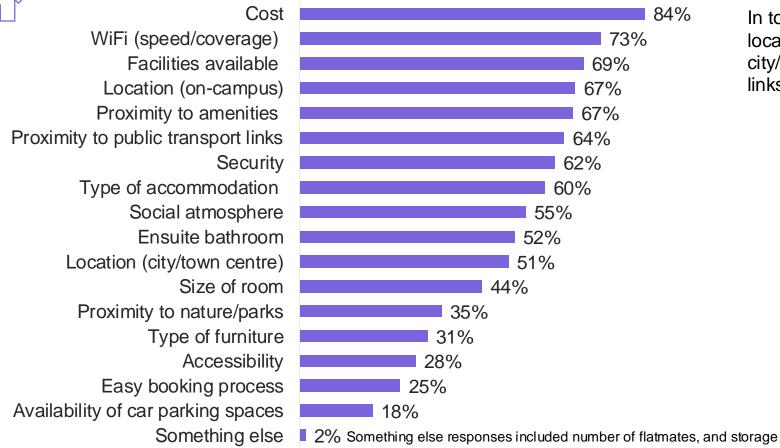


Q: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of information your Firm (first) choice university has provided about accommodation options? (Single Response) (Base: 222 move away respondents, starting university in 2024)

Q: How confident are you that you will be able to secure suitable accommodation for your first year? (Single response) (Base: Results shown for 221 move away respondents, 2024 entry)

Cost was the most likely to be considered important when choosing accommodation, selected as an important feature by 84% of respondents. WiFi speed and coverage was selected by 73%, facilities available were selected by 69%

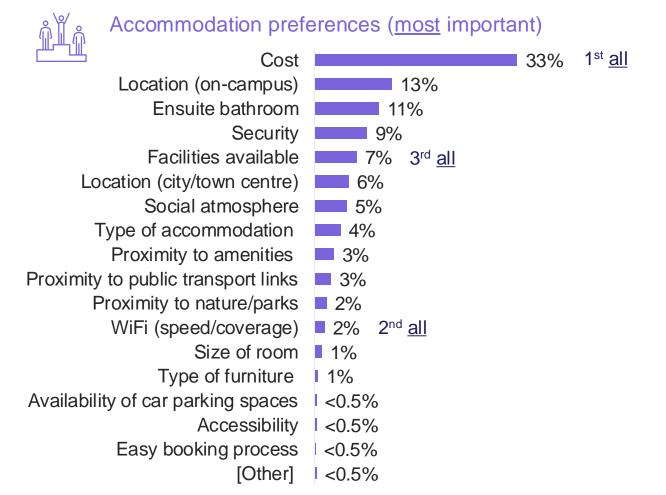




In total, 96% selected at least one factor relating to location (location – on campus, location – city/town centre, proximity to amenities, transport links, or nature/parks).

On average, each selected 8.9 from the list, suggesting respondents considered a wide range of features when choosing accommodation

When selecting the one factor <u>most</u> important in their accommodation choice, cost was the most likely to be considered important, selected by a third (33%), followed by on-campus location (13%) and ensuite bathroom (11%)



Security was 7th in the chart among <u>all</u> factors (see previous slide) but 4th in terms of <u>most</u> important, suggesting among those considering this factor in their accommodation choice, it tended to be very important. Similarly, **ensuite bathroom** was 10th in the chart for <u>all</u> important features, whereas 3rd in the chart for <u>most</u> important features. However, it should be noted that cost of accommodation was three times more likely than an ensuite likely to be considered the most important priority (33% compared to 11%), perhaps suggesting cheaper shared bathroom accommodation is likely to be preferable for some.

WiFi (speed/coverage) was 2nd among all factors, but 12th among most important, suggesting this was a lower priority, or perhaps considered a hygiene factor.

Similarly, **proximity to amenities** (9th most vs 5th all) and **public transport links** (10th most vs 6th all) were also lower in the list of most important than for all.

When asked what word they would use to describe their ideal university accommodation, the most common words mentioned were comfortable, clean, and safe

In total, more than one in ten of the open responses (12%) referenced cost or affordability of accommodation*.



Describing their ideal accommodation (open comment)





Q: What one word describes your ideal university accommodation? (Open response question) (Base: 606 open comments received from move away respondents) Only words with 10+ mentions shown

^{*}Other words related to cost or affordability were mentioned by <10 respondents and are excluded from the word cloud (e.g., good value, inexpensive, bargain)

My ideal university accommodation is...

"Close enough to home to be able to regularly visit, but far enough to be new and exciting and something to explore"

"No guarantor, ideally close enough to uni for a bike ride, cheapish but nice"

"ensuite bathroom and doesn't cost much more than my maintenance loan"

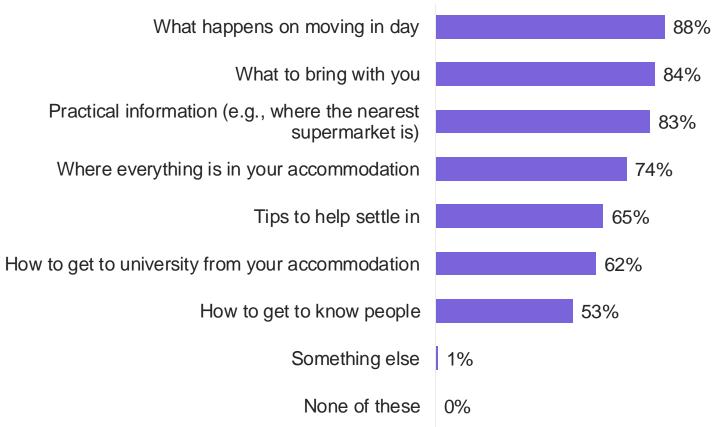
"Cheap, but not awful. A double bed enough space."

"Affordable but with basic facilities"

All 2024 entry respondents moving away for university wanted some information from their university and/or accommodation provider before moving in, including what happens on moving day (88%), what to bring (84%), and practical information (83%)



Information prior to moving in



Those whose parents went to university were more likely than first in family respondents to want information about;

- How to get to university from their accommodation (68% cf. 53%)
- How to get to know people (60% cf. 42%)

On average, each respondent selected 5.1 options each, suggesting a wide range of information needs.

Q: What information, if any, would you like to receive from your university and/or accommodation provided before you move in? (Multiple response) (Base: 212 2024 entry move away respondents)

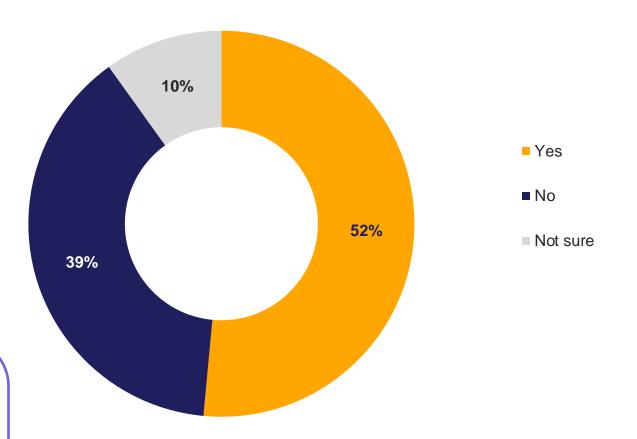
Responding to accommodation shortages

We asked respondents if they had heard about reported shortages of accommodation in the media, and for move away respondents who were aware, whether these had impacted their plans. We also explored awareness of accommodation guarantees for first year students.

More than half of respondents (52%) had seen reports about a shortage of student accommodation in the media



Seen media reports about accommodation shortages?

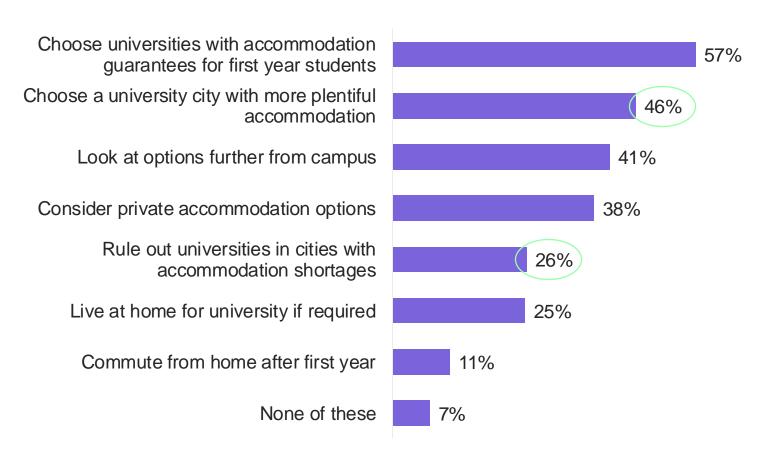


Those planning to move away for university were more likely to have seen the reports about the shortages (54%) than those planning to stay at home (45%).

The majority (93%) of move away students who aware of the shortages had made changes to their plans as a result, most often choosing universities with first year accommodation guaranteed (57%)



Actions of a result of shortages (move away students aware of shortages)

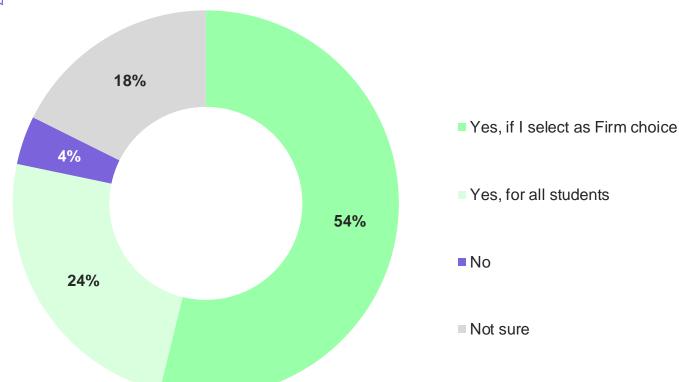


In total, 55% of move away respondents aware of the reported shortages had made a change to their choice of university city as a result of accommodation shortages (chosen a university city with more plentiful accommodation, ruled out universities in cities with shortages).

There appears to be relatively high awareness of accommodation guarantees.

More than three quarters (78%) of 2024 entry respondents who were moving away believed their Firm choice university to offer an accommodation guarantee for first year students

Does your Firm choice offer an accommodation guarantee?



More than half (54%) thought their university offered this if they selected it as Firm, whereas around a quarter (24%) felt this was offered for all first year students.

Almost one in five (18%) didn't know, suggesting further information in this area may be valued.

Of those who mentioned they would **choose universities with accommodation guarantees as a result of accommodation shortages**, 87% believed their Firm choice university to offer some kind of accommodation guarantee.

Thank you for reading this report

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