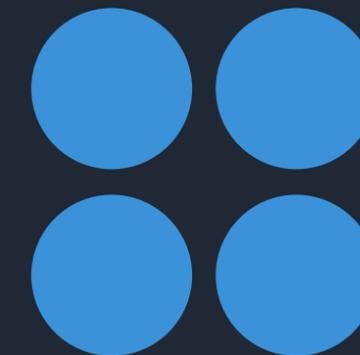


2022 CLEARING REPORT



CLEARING THE WAY

How 2022's applicants have changed
the game for good

UCAS



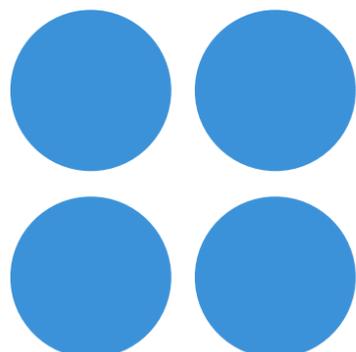
THE SAMPLE

The 2022 UCAS Clearing survey was sent out in September 2022 to a sample of 2022 cycle applicants who had obtained a place at a university or college using Clearing.

In total, around 1,300 applicants took the time to tell us about their experience of using Clearing to find a place at a university or college, as well as what factors were important to them when searching for a place in Clearing.

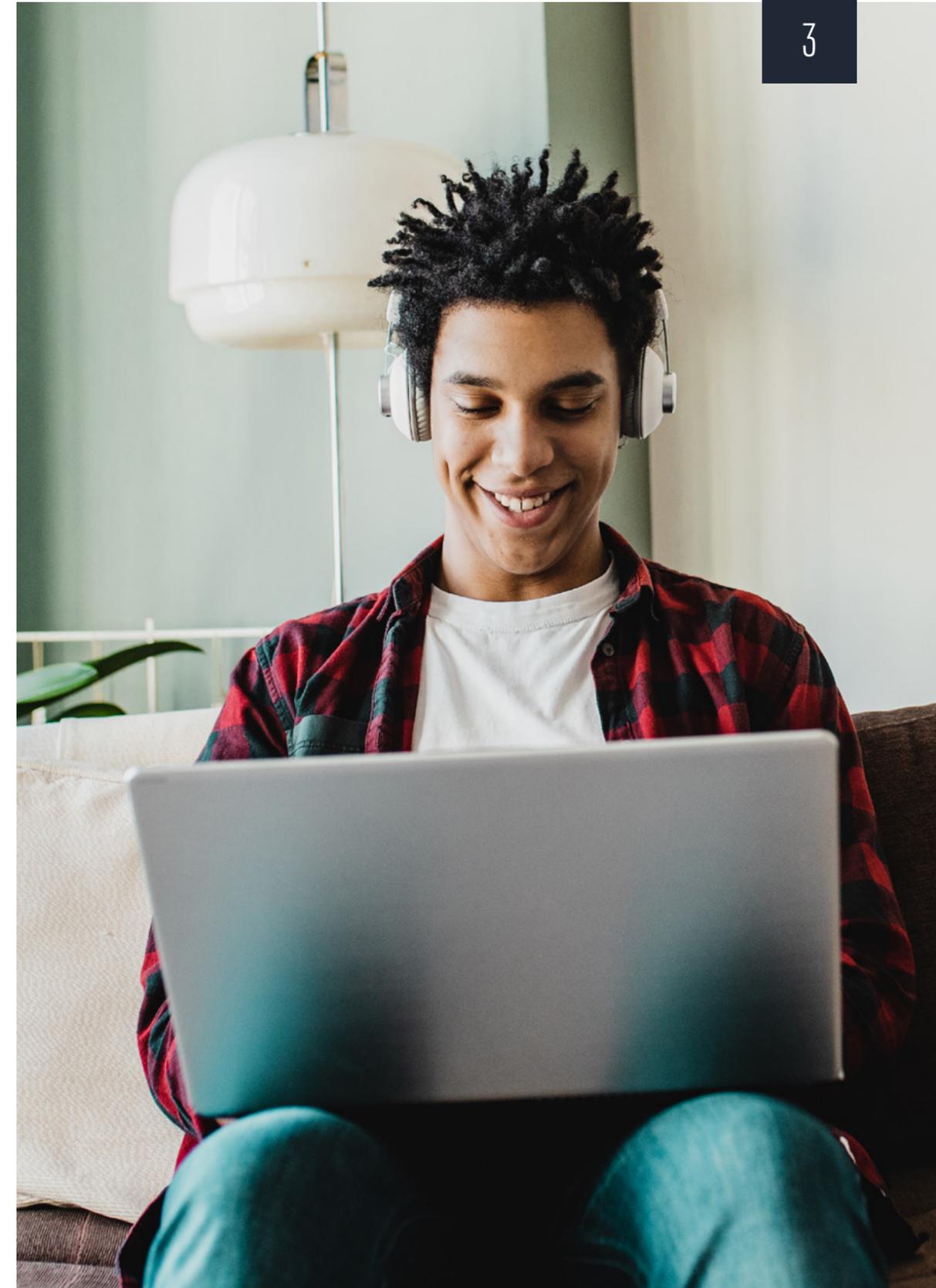
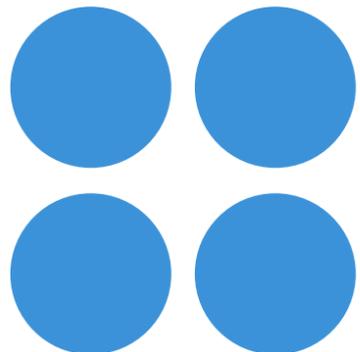
Their responses were weighted to represent the entire population of 2022 cycle applicants who had found a place at a university or college using Clearing, accounting for differences in response rates observed in different characteristic groups, such as gender, age, and ethnicity.

This year we wanted to understand how students had navigated Clearing in 2022 and investigate two key factors: the reduction in disruptions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rising costs of living.



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INTRODUCTION

Clearing is changing. For the better.

Prospective students are using it to give themselves greater choice, more flexibility, and extra security for their own futures.

We call these The Mind Changers. They decline their offers, join Clearing voluntarily, and use it to find a better outcome.

2022 also showed us two other distinct users of Clearing: The Direct Routers (who don't apply until July and do so directly through Clearing) and the The Still Searching (who aren't accepted and enter Clearing to search for a course).

Each group is distinct from the other in its needs, wants, and timeframes – but they're all united by one thing. They're researching and making decisions earlier than ever.

This year's Clearing Report has a few more surprises too. Our findings are a window into the mindset of your current crop of first years, as well as a fix-it list ahead of Clearing 2023:

- ▶ They want more information, which is more specific, and more readily available.
- ▶ They're looking for direct conversation with providers, over the phone, to get immediate answers.
- ▶ Their worries about finding accommodation and coping with the cost of living are influencing their choices.
- ▶ They rely on UCAS more than ever, to discover providers and find out about the Clearing process.

Applicants are enjoying the new face of Clearing, saying it's a positive and trustworthy experience.

Let's dive a little deeper into the rest of the changes.

THE DIRECT ROUTERS	THE STILL SEARCHING	THE MIND CHANGERS
DIRECT TO CLEARING	MAIN SCHEME CLEARING	DECLINE MY PLACE
	21,000 unplaced on JCQ results day	37,000 used Decline My Place
16,600 placed	12,000 placed	20,000 placed
SURVEY RESPONDENTS		
Answered 'I didn't apply pre June and applied direct to Clearing'	Answered 'I was not accepted at F/I choices and found a place in Clearing' OR 'I found a place in Clearing after not having a F/I choice' OR 'I found a place at my original F/I choice uni through Clearing'	Answered 'I had a place but declined it and found a place in Clearing'

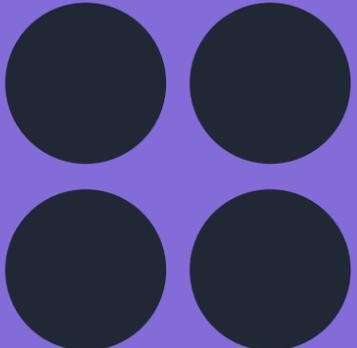
18	19	20-24	25+
15%	15%	30%	39%
Male		Female	
40%		60%	

18	19	20-24	25+
66%	10%	10%	13%
Male		Female	
28%		72%	

18	19	20-24	25+
70%	17%	7%	6%
Male		Female	
25%		75%	



UNDERSTANDING CLEARING





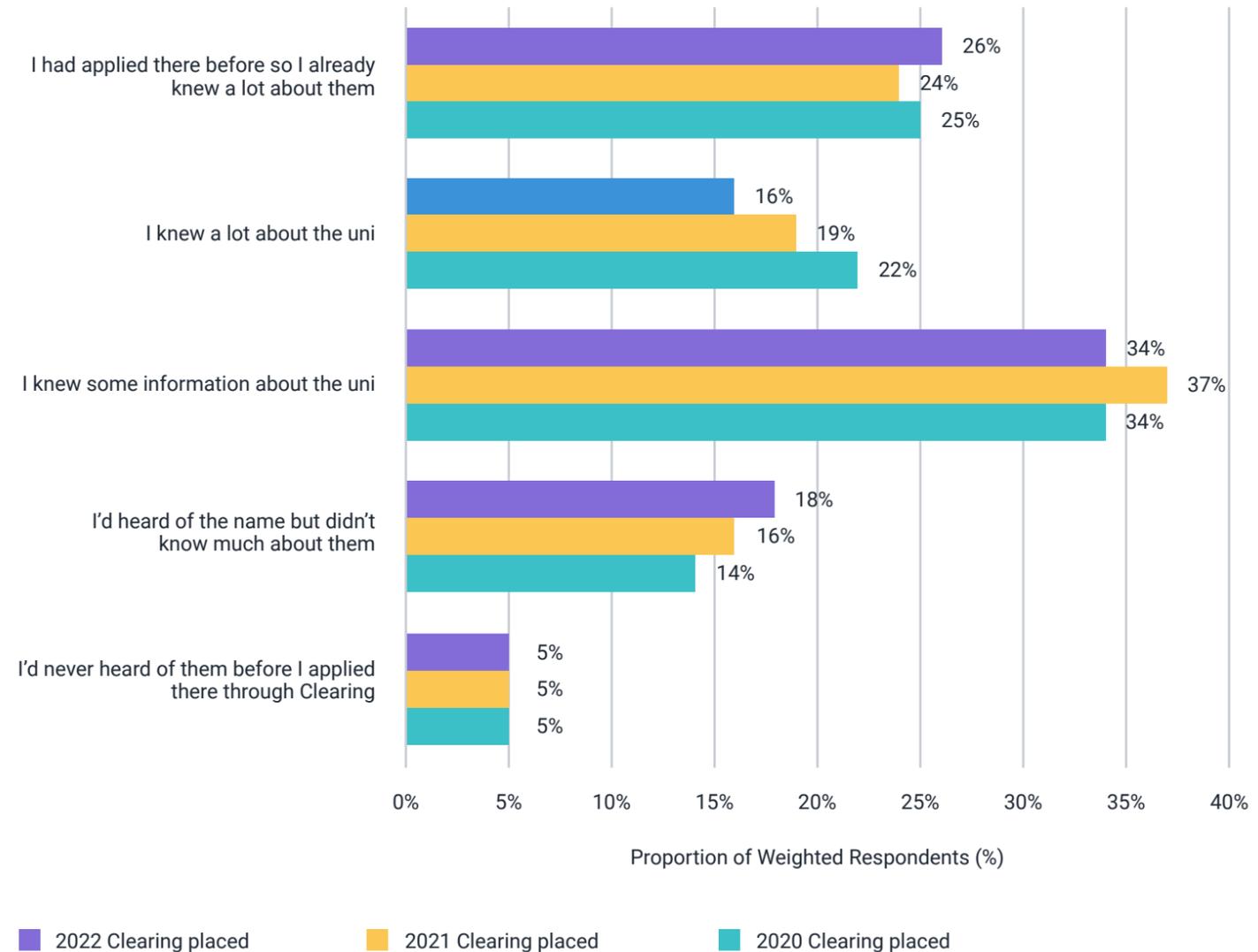
Students are often already familiar with the university they accept in Clearing

The majority of Clearing applicants know at least something about their chosen university beyond just the name

- ▶ The largest group are those who know some information about their chosen university.
- ▶ 26% had applied to their university before, so already knew a lot about it.
- ▶ But less than half know a lot about their university of choice (42%).
- ▶ Only 5% have never heard of their chosen university before they applied – this remains consistent year on year.



Thinking about the university or college you were placed at through Clearing, how much do you feel you knew about them before applying to them through Clearing?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,292

This makes sense as the majority had already done some research on which universities and colleges were available to contact

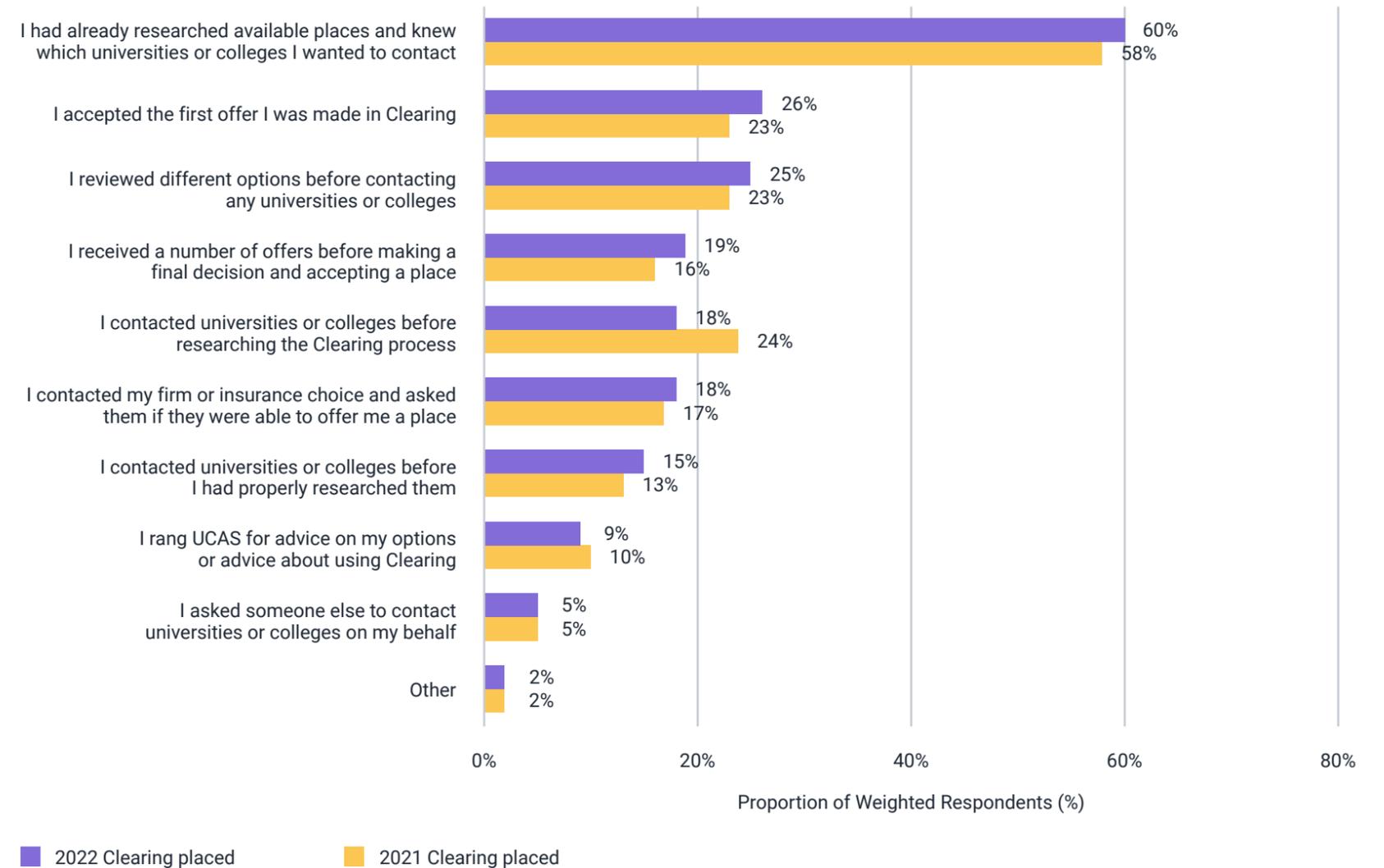
62%

of those who did not apply directly to Clearing had researched the university or college they were placed at through Clearing when they made their original five choices

54%

had researched the university or college they were placed at before they got their results

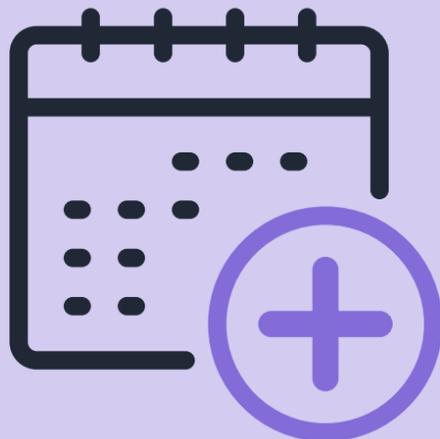
**Which of the following statements describe how you used Clearing?
Please select all that apply.**



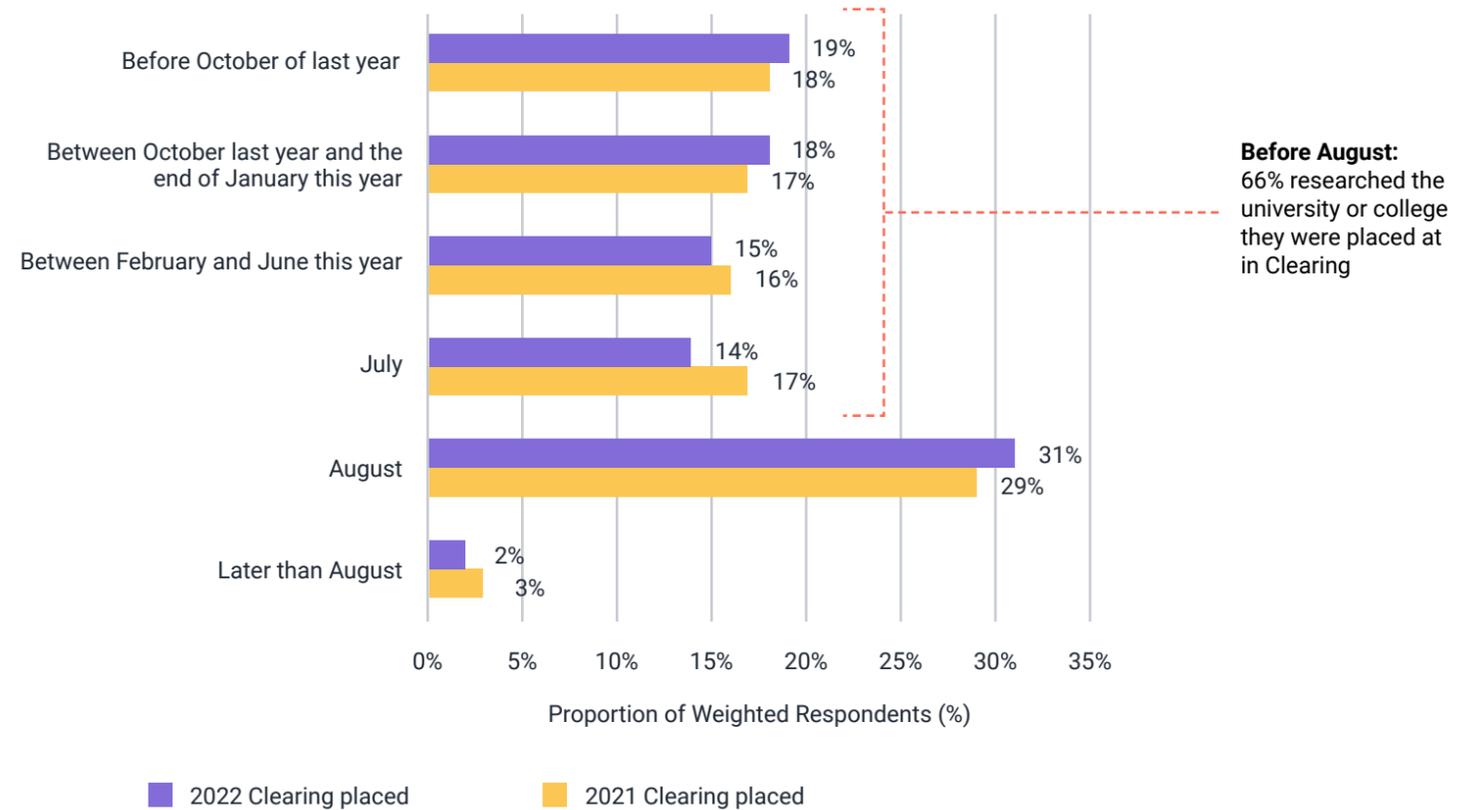
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,291

Research starts early, with only a third starting their research in August

- ▶ **August** is the largest single month for beginning to research their university, but the bulk of research begins before then.



When did you start researching the university or college you were placed at through Clearing?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
2022 survey; No. respondents: 1,292

GET AHEAD, STAY AHEAD

1 Most students know the university that they end up at. By the time Clearing starts, it isn't about discovery, it's about choosing and securing a place.

2 Research and decision-making are happening earlier and earlier in the cycle. Students are getting more inquisitive and proactive, with two thirds getting their research done pre-Clearing.

3 The results day application frenzy could be fading away. Modern Clearing is an extra string to the student bow – a tool to be used purposefully and proactively, at different points in the cycle.

Earlier brand awareness campaigns are key if you want to connect and recruit the growing number of Clearing users.

With Clearing being used in different ways, and at different times, providers need to build connections with their prospective students as early as possible. Whether it's getting the attention of The Mind Changers earlier in the cycle, or The Still Searching in July and August, you need to be front of mind throughout.

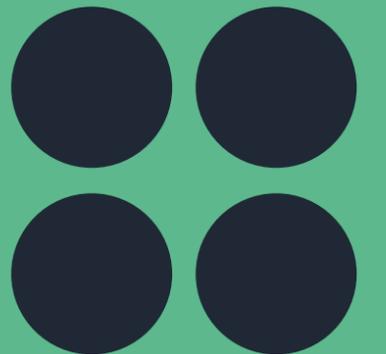
And with prospective students becoming more investigative and meticulous, you also need to be present and available for conversation. Build and maintain regular touchpoints throughout the application process, especially at the increasingly early research stage.

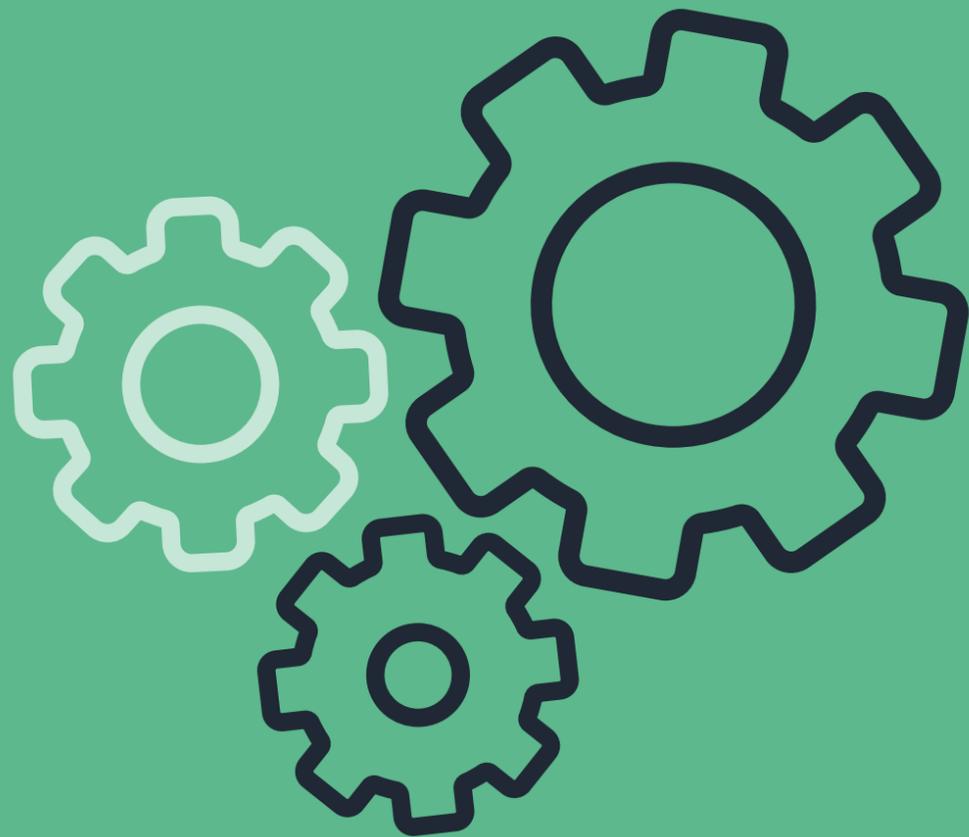
When it comes down to decision-making, it may be the provider with the quickest response or the most accessible information that wins.





THE THREE TYPES OF STUDENT





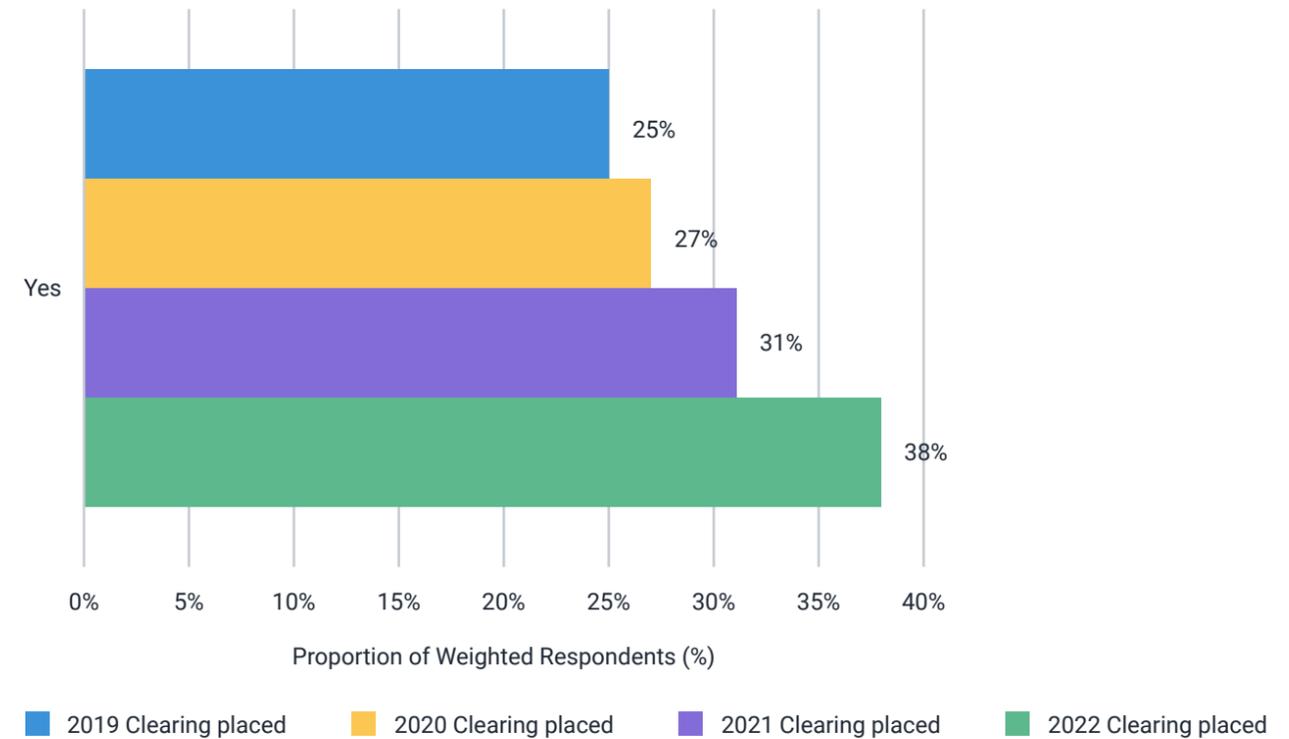
**Those who applied
direct often plan this
in advance in response
to personal situations**

Those who applied directly to Clearing are increasingly planning this in advance

- ▶ 2022 was the third year in a row where the proportion of those who applied direct to Clearing increased.
- ▶ July was the most popular month to research options (29%) although 18% started their research before October of the previous year.
- ▶ 69% of respondents who applied direct were 20 or older.



Did you always plan to apply directly to Clearing?



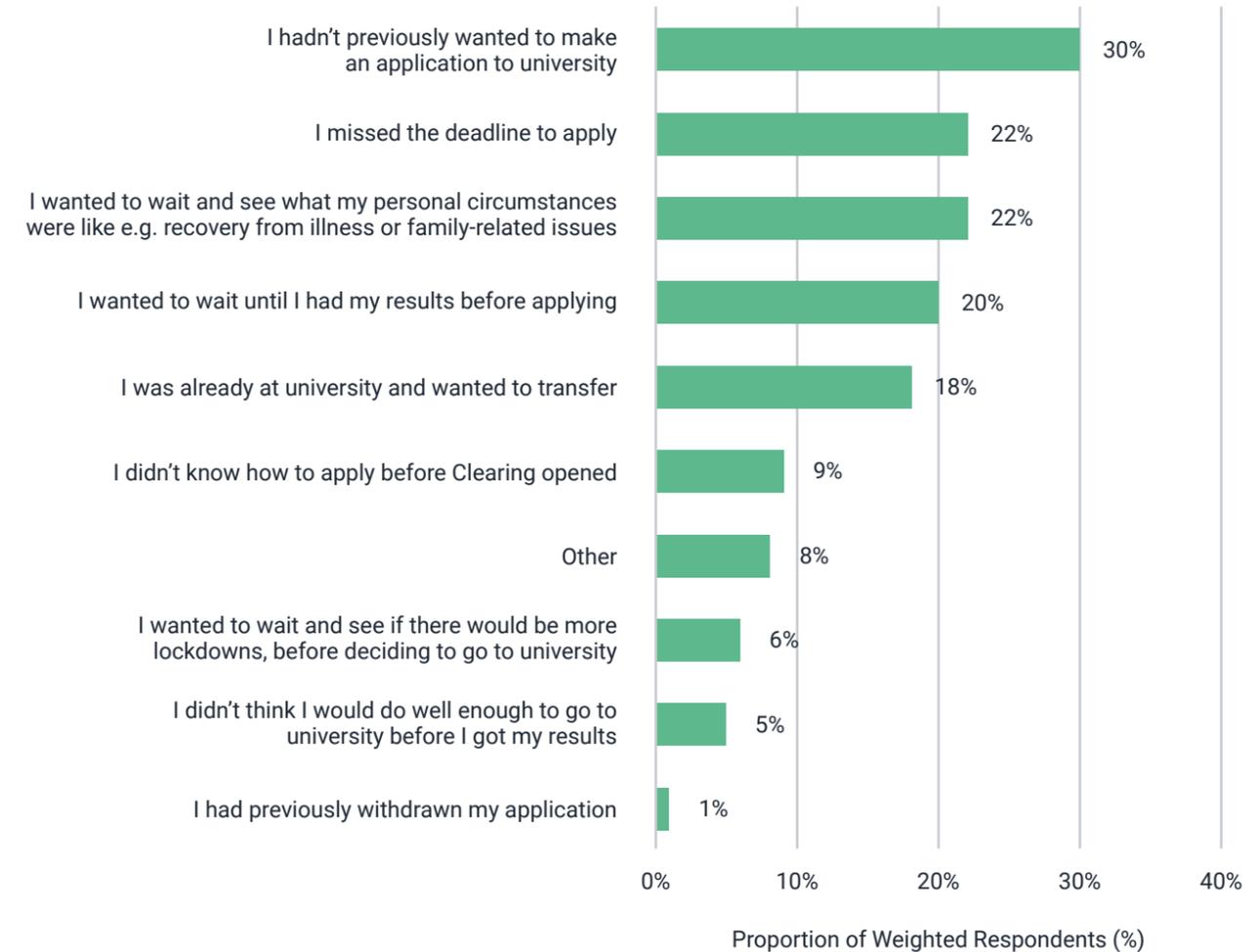
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 284

Clearing offers a path to higher education that is more flexible

- ▶ Their reasons are focused on flexibility, although some did miss the deadline.
- ▶ Some had not decided to go to university originally, whilst others had simply changed their mind about what they wanted to study.



Why did you decide to apply directly to Clearing? Please select all that apply.

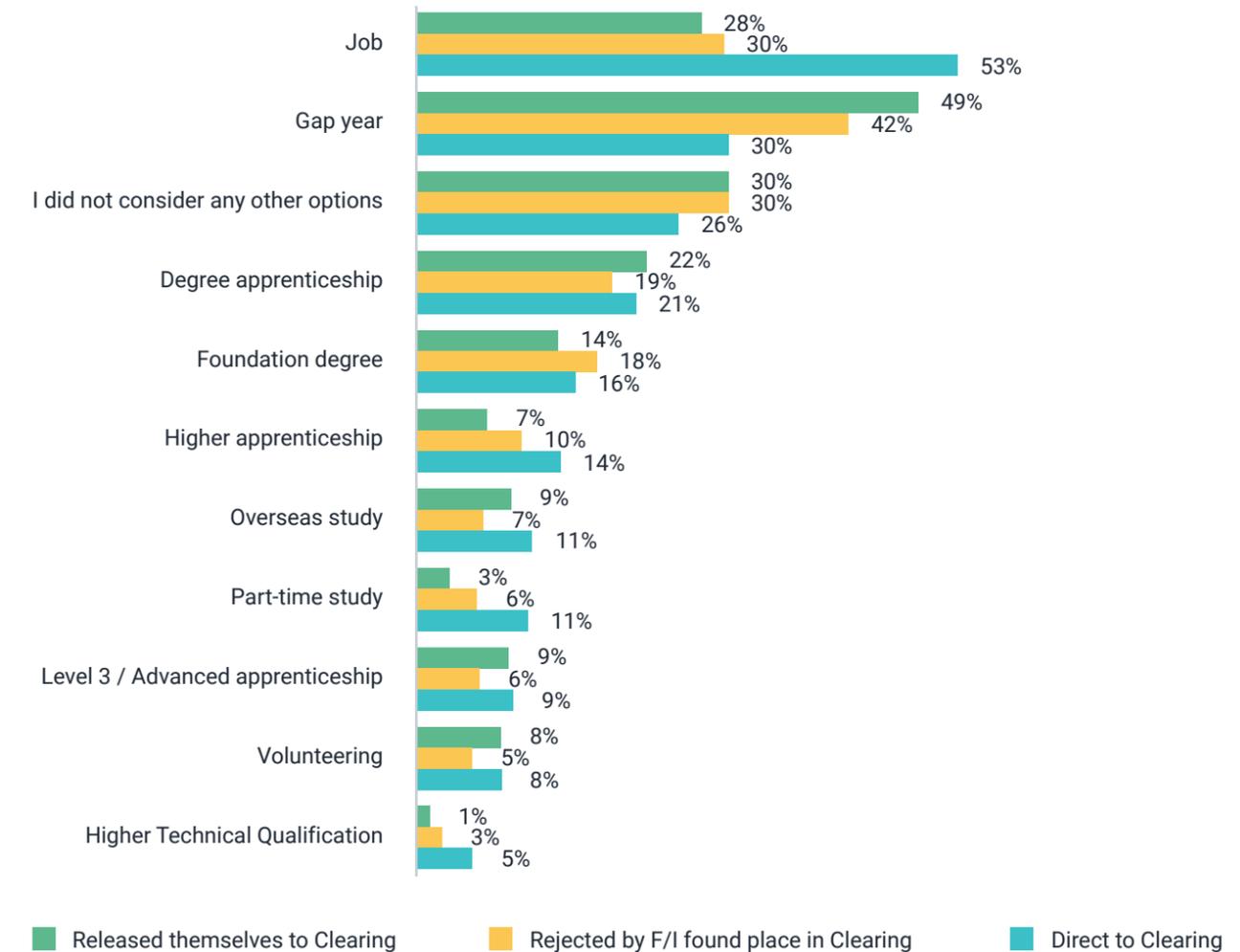


Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 99

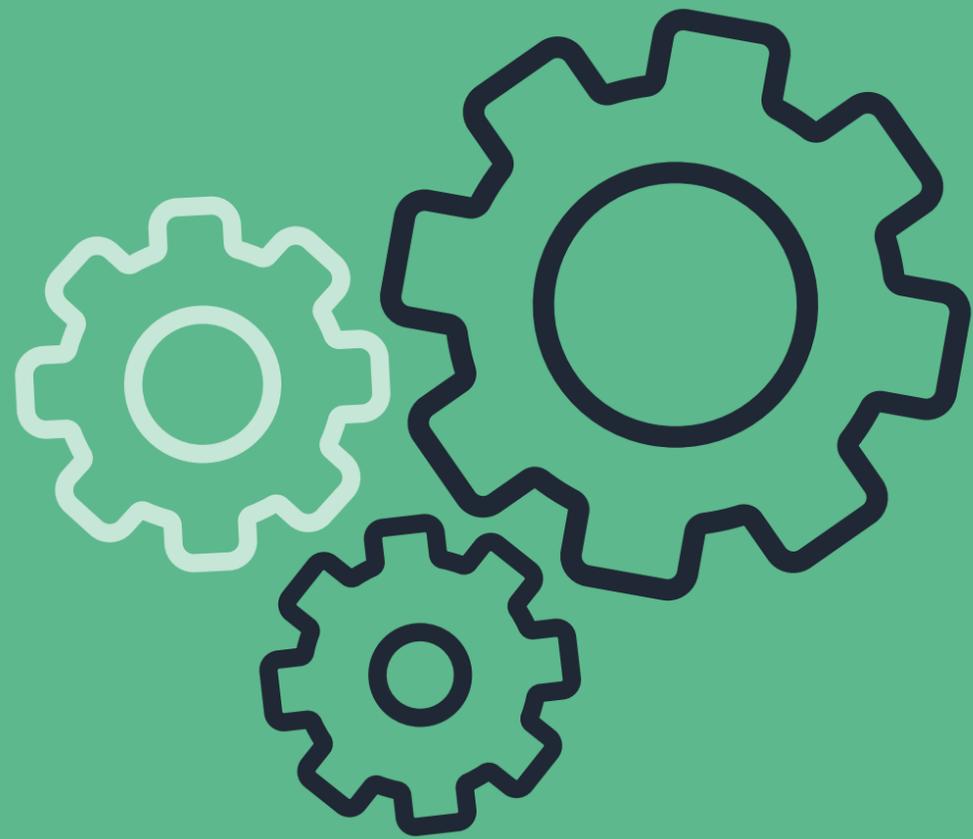
Direct to Clearing students were significantly more likely to consider a job as an alternative to university, whilst a gap year was less likely



While you were searching for a place in Clearing, did you at any point consider any of the following options instead of going to university or college? Please select all that apply.



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,289



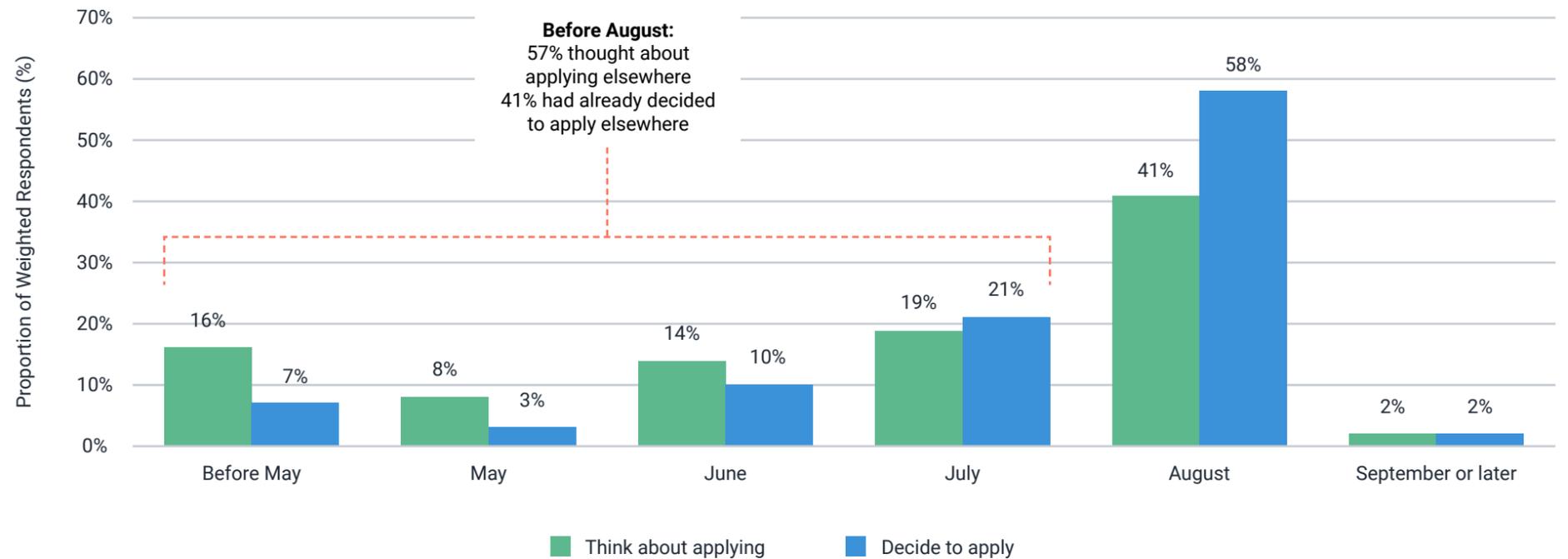
Those who release themselves into Clearing were also often considering well in advance

Over 50% of those who had declined their place had already considered this option before August

46%

say that they changed their mind about studying at their original choice before results day, up +3%pts year on year, and up +12%pts vs 2019

When did you start thinking about applying somewhere else?
When did you decide you would apply somewhere else?



Questions only asked to those who released themselves into Clearing
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 408

Again the main influences are flexibility - responding to changing mindsets since the original application stage

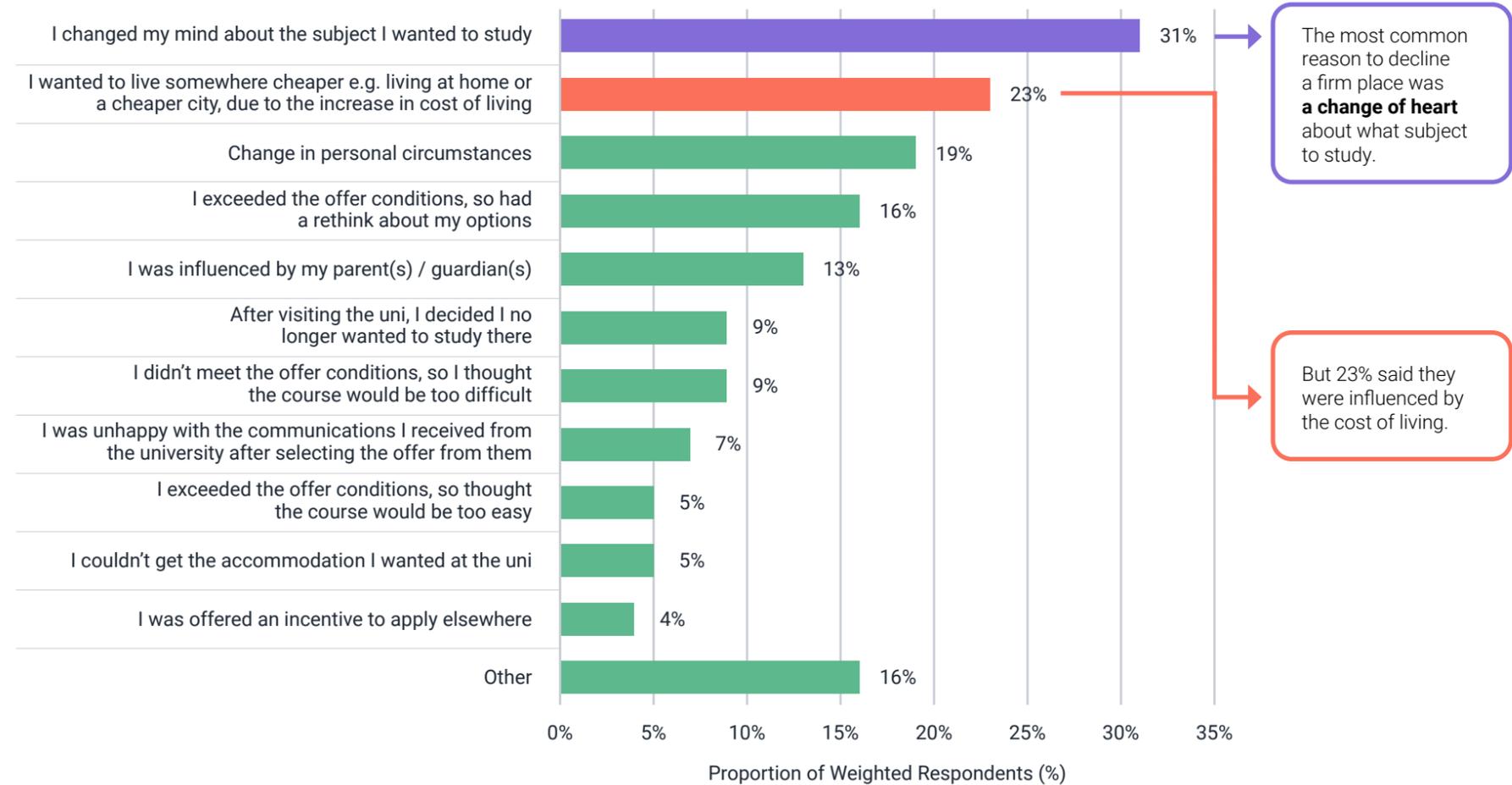
“I no longer wanted to study the initial course which I had applied to but I still wanted to study at the university of my firm choice.”

“I realised the course and uni wasn't right for me a few months after firming my offer.”

“I had changed my mind, since I felt the Clearing course was more appropriate within the field”

“I decided to release to Clearing and go for the uni in my hometown due to family circumstances”

Which of the following factors, if any, influenced your decision to decline your firm choice university or college?
Please select all that apply.



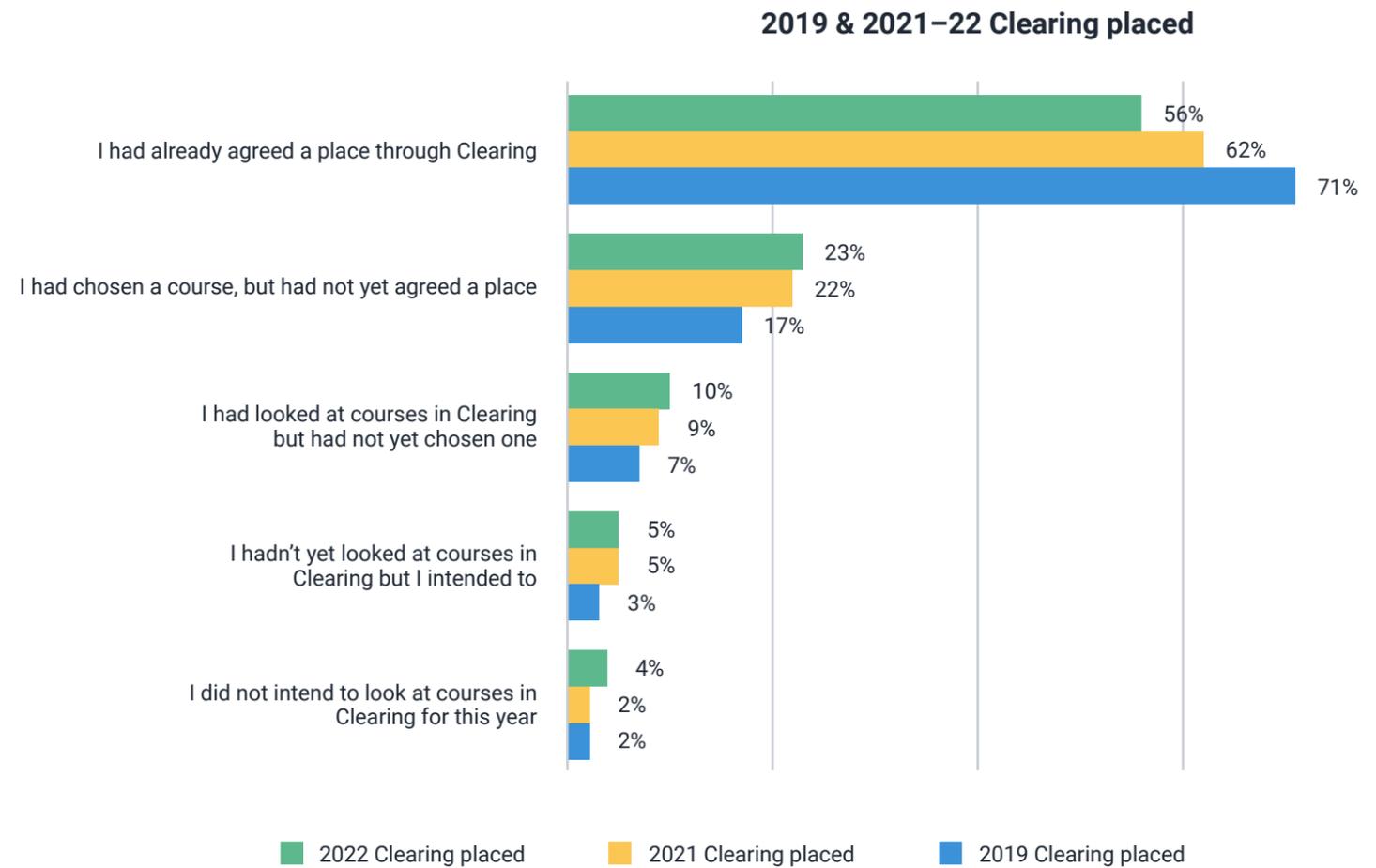
Question only asked to those who released themselves into Clearing
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 408

There has been a decline in those who had a firm place already decided

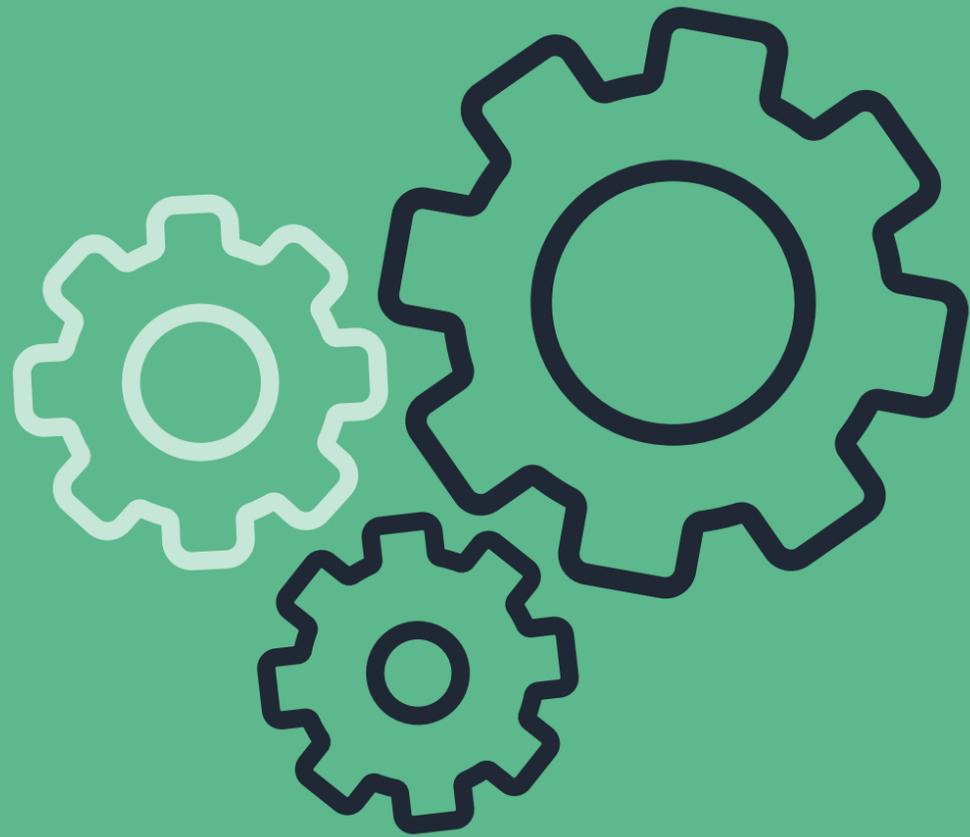
- ▶ The proportion of applicants who released themselves into Clearing and already had agreed a place continues to decline.
- ▶ This may indicate an increasing level of trust in the process.



When you declined your firm choice and released yourself into Clearing, what were your plans?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 411

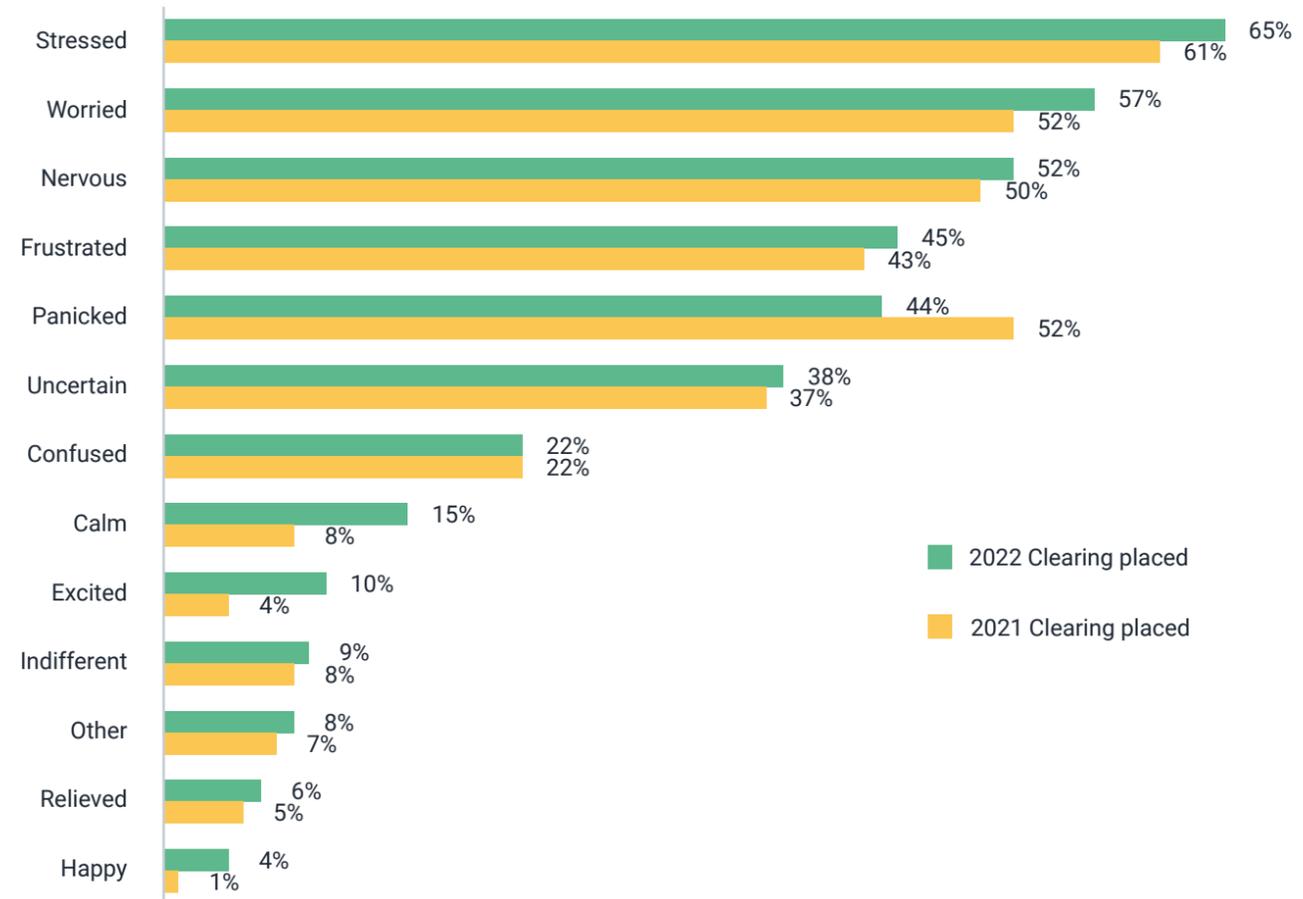


**Those who did
not plan to use
Clearing often
find it stressful**

Entering Clearing due to not being accepted at the university of choice can be a stressful time, particularly at the moment they realised they would need to find a place

Stress, worry and nervousness are all up year on year, perhaps relating to other external factors, such as the return to exams.

Which of the following emotions, if any, do you remember feeling the moment you realised you needed to find a place in Clearing? Please select all that apply

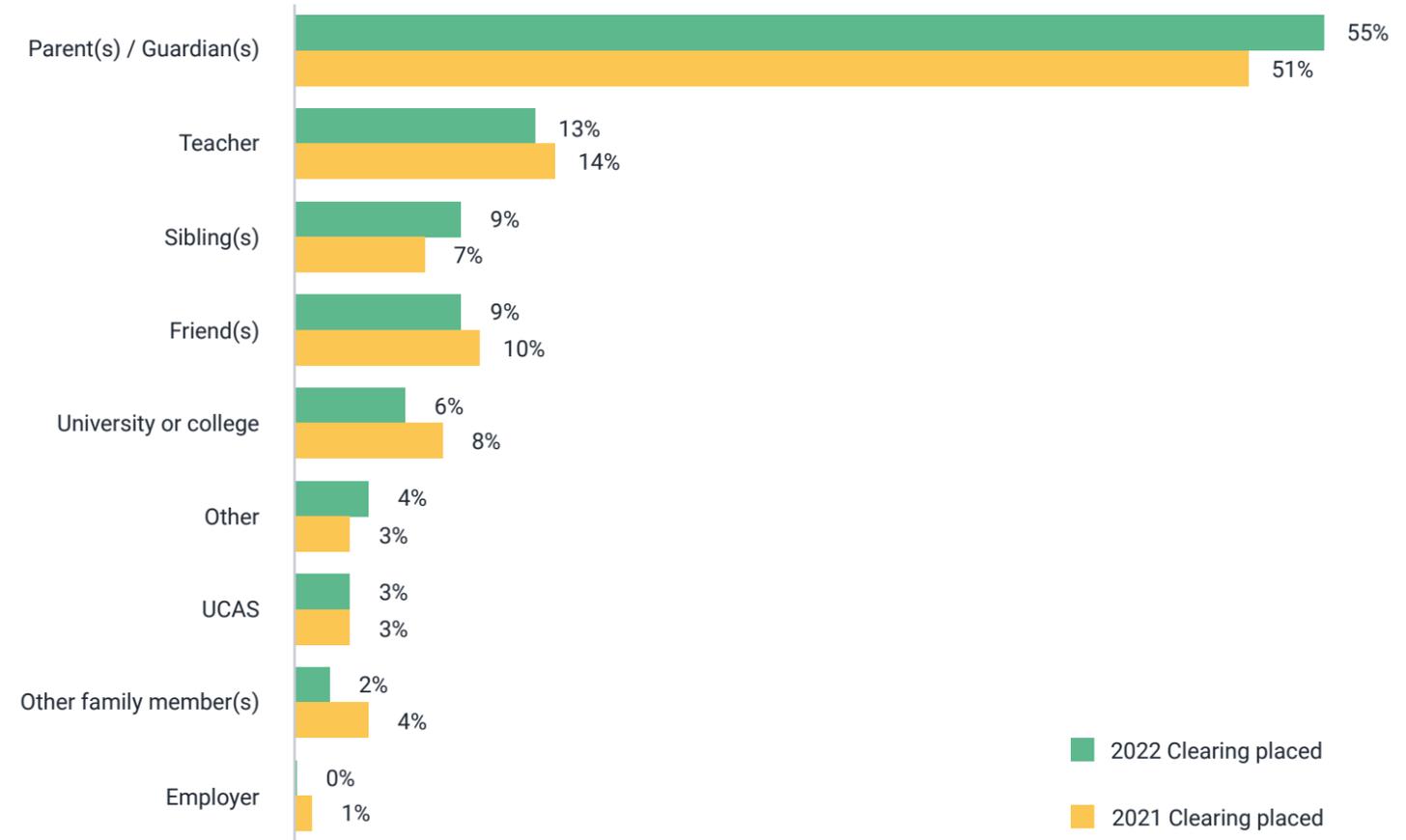


Question asked to those who weren't accepted at their firm/insurance but found a place in Clearing
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 350

Entering Clearing due to not being accepted at the university of choice can be a stressful time, particularly at the moment they realised they would need to find a place

Parents or guardians are the first people applicants go to when they find out they are entering the Clearing process.

Who did you speak to first after finding out you needed to find a place using Clearing?

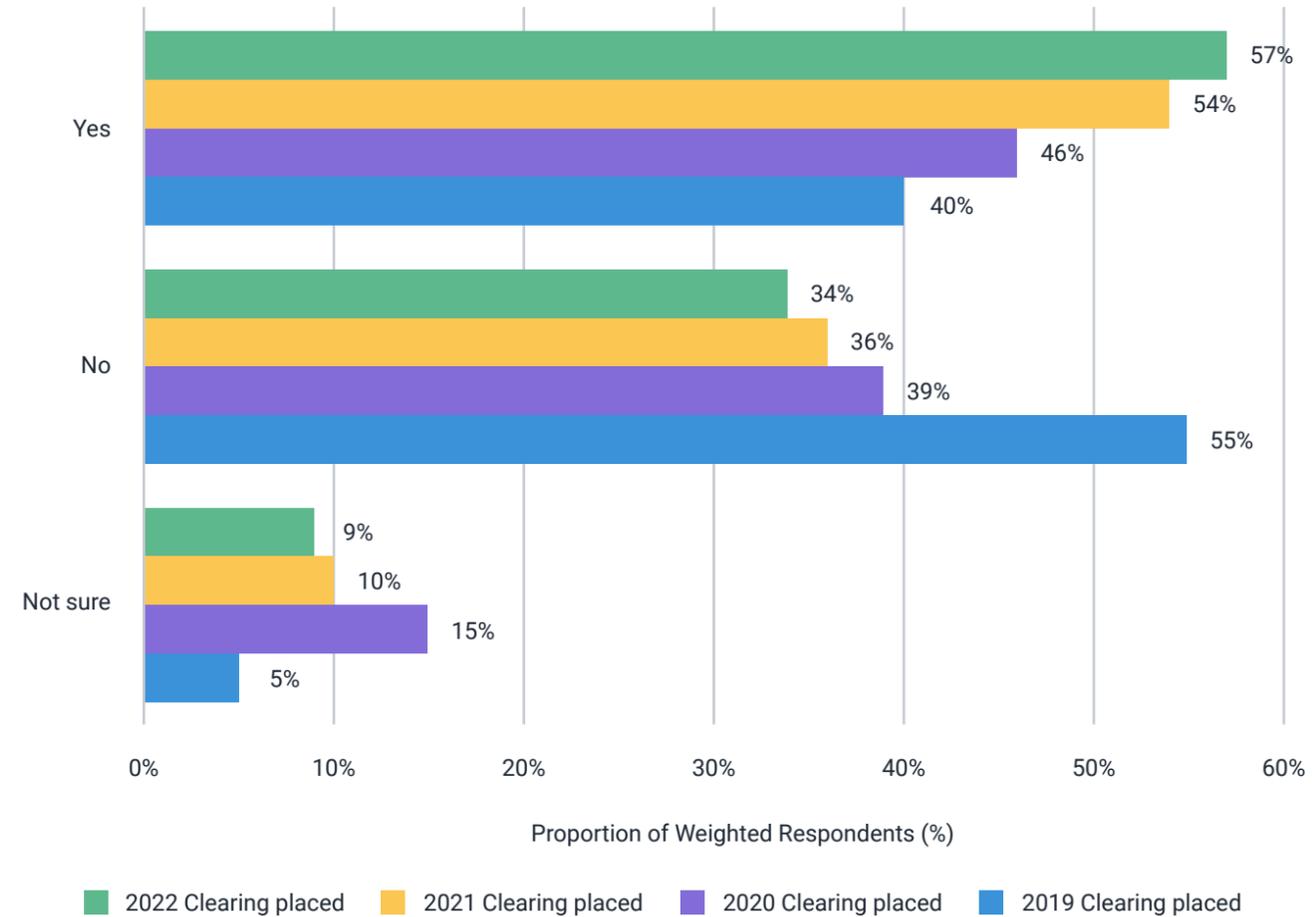


Question asked to those who weren't accepted at their firm/insurance but found a place in Clearing
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 348

At the same time there has been an increase in universities setting a deadline for applicants to make a decision



While you were searching for a place in Clearing, did any university or college ask you to make a decision by a certain time?



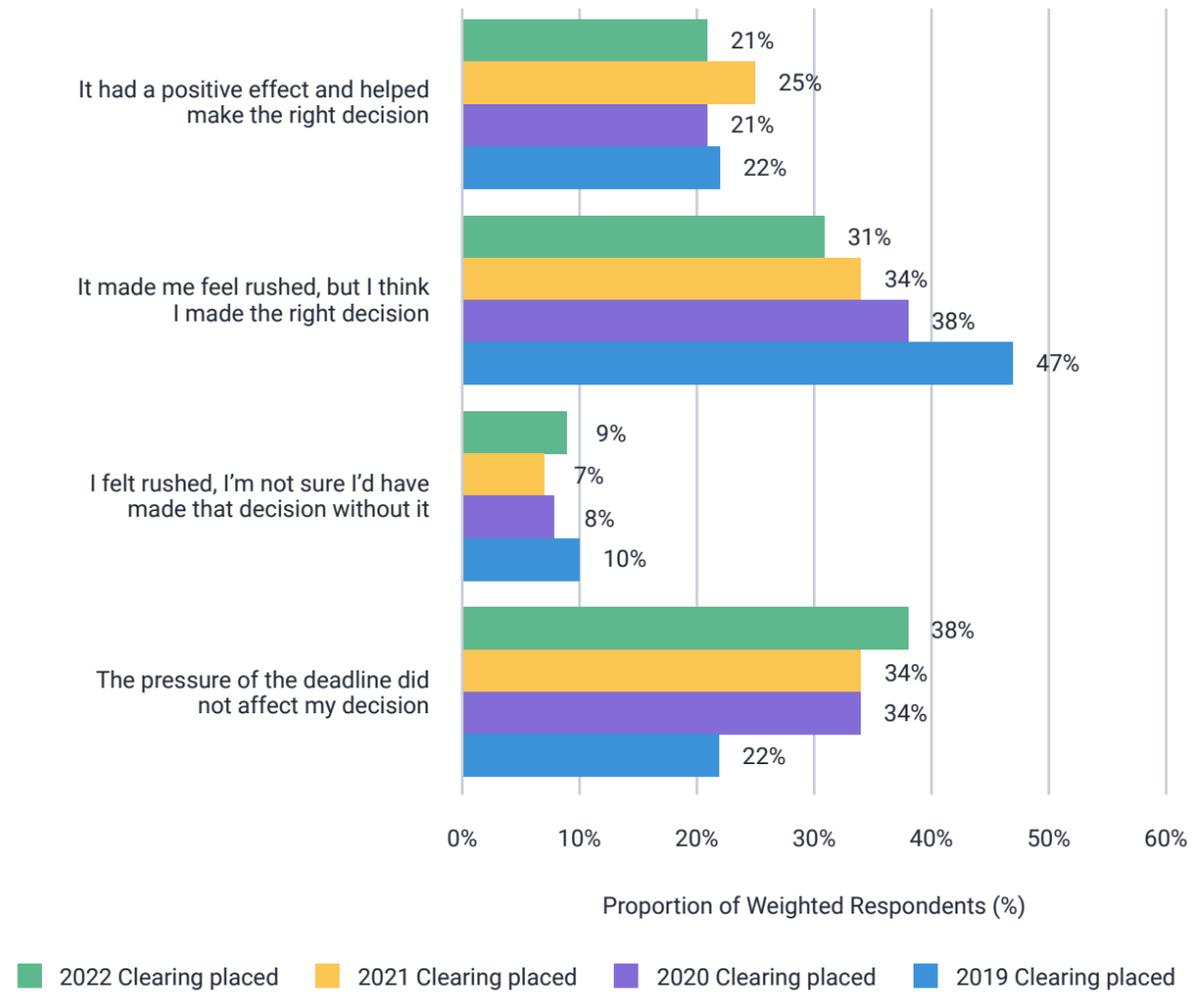
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,294

At the same time there has been an increase in universities setting a deadline for applicants to make a decision

40%

say this made them feel rushed

Which of the following do you think best describes how the deadline affected your decision?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,294

CHANGE WITH THE CHANGES

1 Clearing is considered as a flexible, alternative route into Higher Education – not a last chance saloon. Those who apply directly through Clearing plan to well in advance.

2 Of those who decline their place and voluntarily enter Clearing, half have considered it pre-August. A lot changes between application and decision – students tell us their mindsets are often different. There are also now fewer with a firm place already decided.

3 But for all this change, there are still students who enter Clearing because they don't get accepted at their choices: **The Still Searching.** It can be stressful, but the pressure didn't impact their decision.

Giving themselves flexibility is the driver, so they expect flexibility from providers too.

It's not just **The Mind Changers** who value choice and autonomy, it's a strong trait of Gen Z. Providers who are open and responsive to the changing status quo are likely to be the ones who benefit most.

Alongside this new way of using Clearing is a new way of seeing it. It's now considered a place of

trustworthy opportunity. For the third year running, fewer applicants releasing themselves into Clearing had already agreed a place through it.

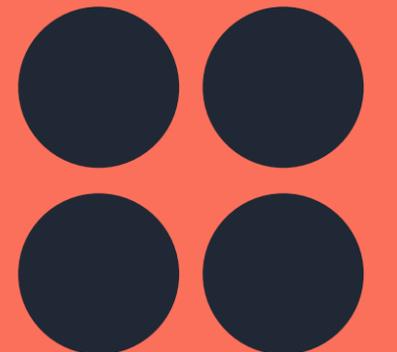
Those students who don't have a place at all, **The Still Searching**, come to rely on their parents for help through the unexpected Clearing process.

They become the most influential adviser on final decision making and choosing a university.





THEIR INFORMATION NEEDS



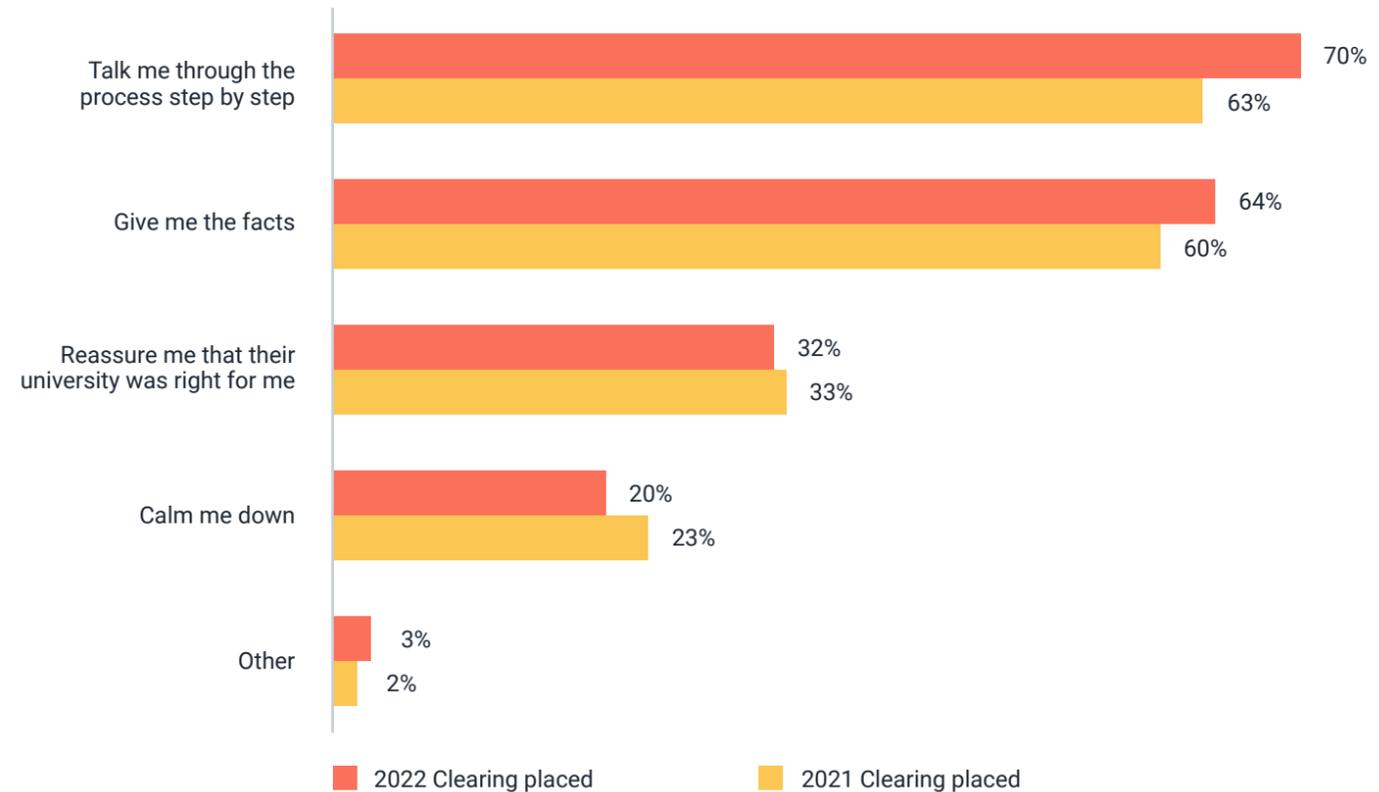


**Access to detailed,
practical information
is expected from
potential universities**

Applicants want to understand Clearing fully, through detailed information around the process and courses

Where family and friends can provide emotional support, the majority want practical tips from their university or college.

While you were searching for a place in Clearing, how did you want the universities or colleges you contacted to communicate with you?

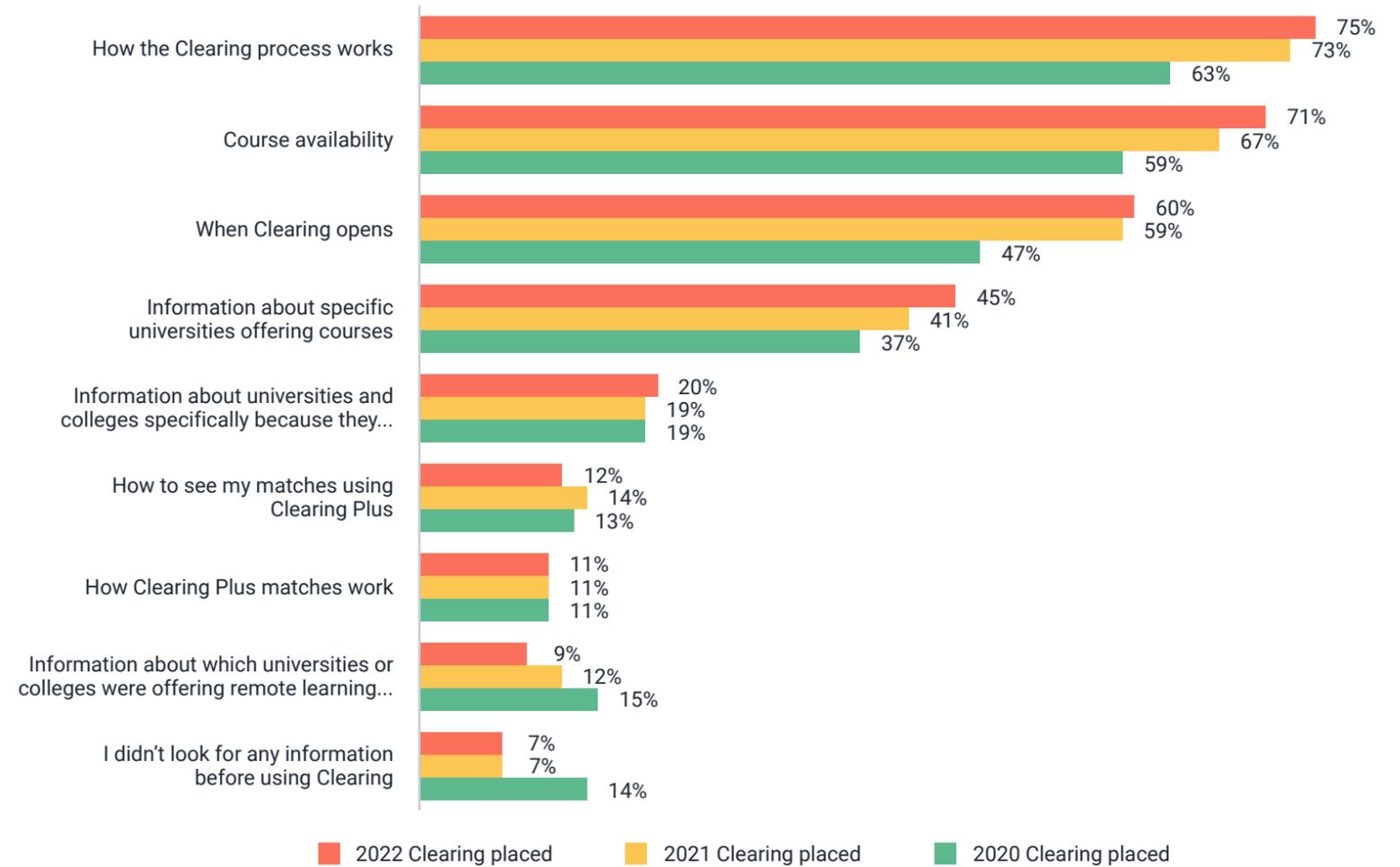


Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,286

There is an increasing need for information, with more applicants seeking detail

Technical information about the Clearing process and options are the most sought after.

What information did you look for about Clearing before you used the Clearing service?

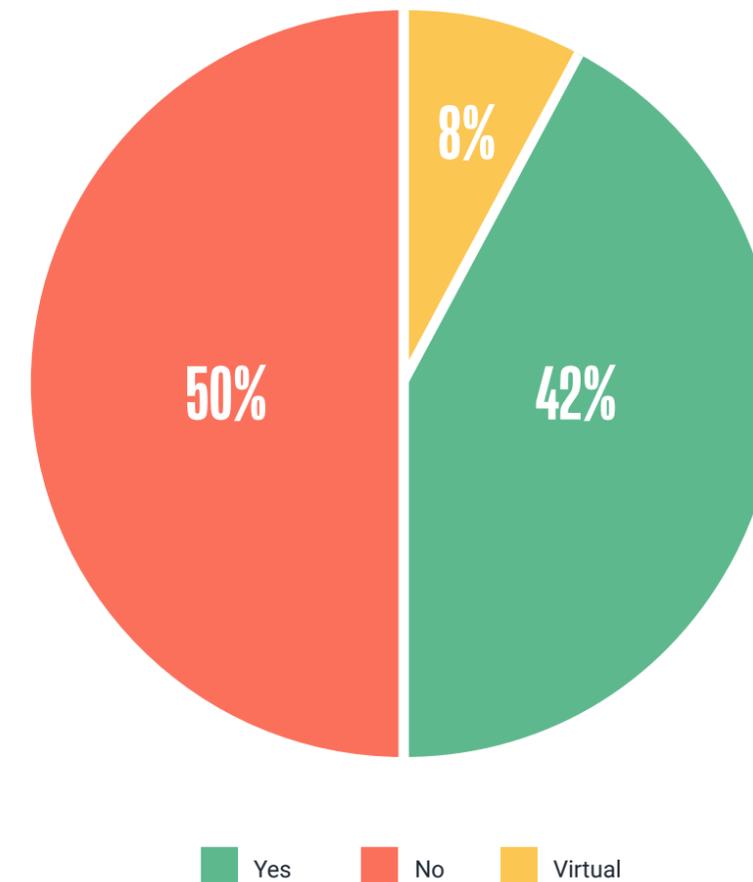


Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,294

Not all Clearing applicants are able to visit their chosen university, making accessible information even more important

Less than half of Clearing applicants have visited their chosen university in person – lower than 2021

Have you visited the university or college you're now placed at?



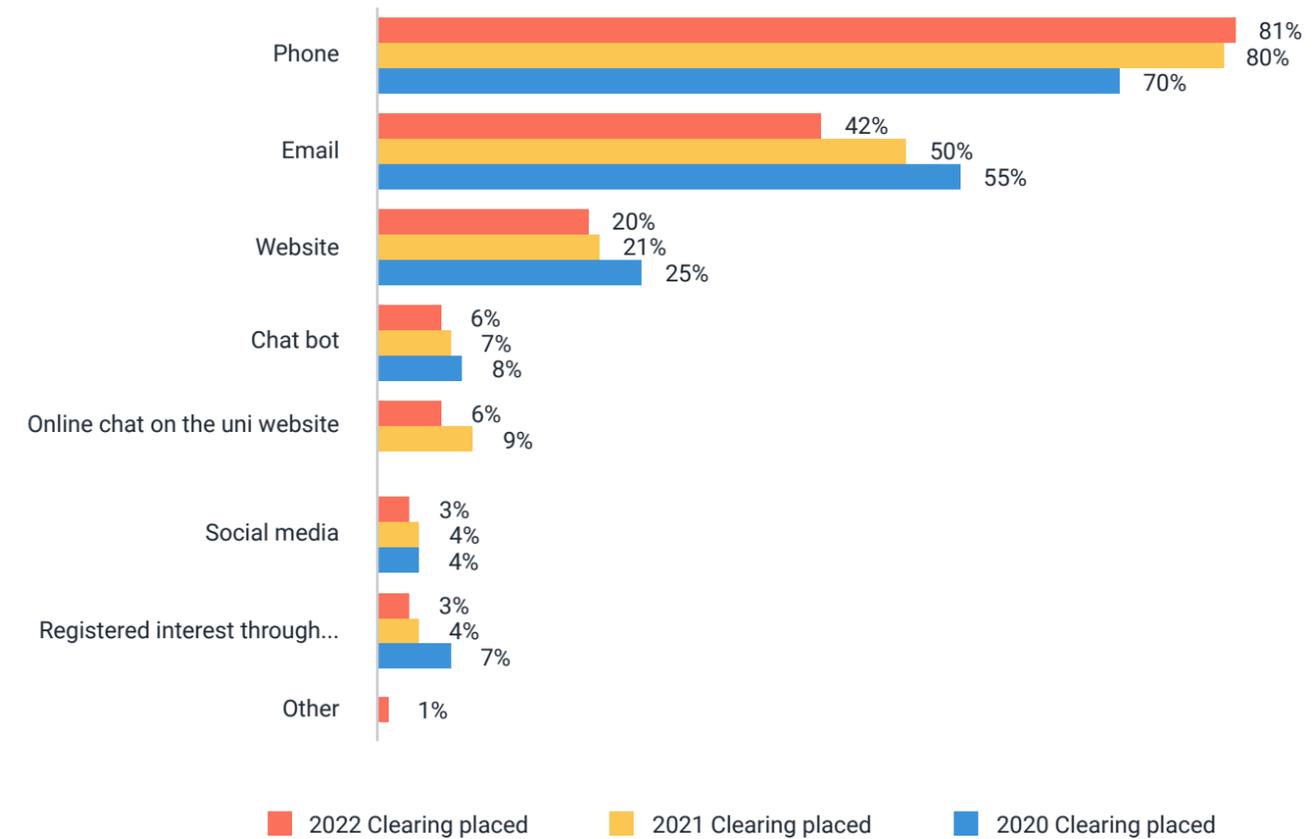
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,289

There is a changing use of channels – more direct contact may allay anxieties about getting a place

Phone is still the most common way to reach universities and email is falling back.

26% of applicants accepted the first offer they were made during Clearing

How did you contact universities or colleges to discuss finding a place through Clearing? Please select all that apply.



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,287

There is a changing use of channels – more direct contact may allay anxieties about getting a place

Many students believe that phone calls gave them the best chance at finding the right university.

If you could give one piece of advice to a student looking for a place through Clearing in future, what would it be?

“Wake up early from 8 as you’re against the rest of the UK and leaving it too late especially if Clearing through a competitive uni is just such a huge gamble”

“Talk to them on the phone”

“Call Clearing as early as possible and don’t worry there’s always likely a place.”

“Start calling as soon as Clearing opens, and talk to all the unis yourself.”

“Call early.”

Advice from **Clearing** applicants



**UCAS is a key source
for finding university
places in Clearing**

APPLICANTS FIND OUT ABOUT CLEARING IN TWO WAYS

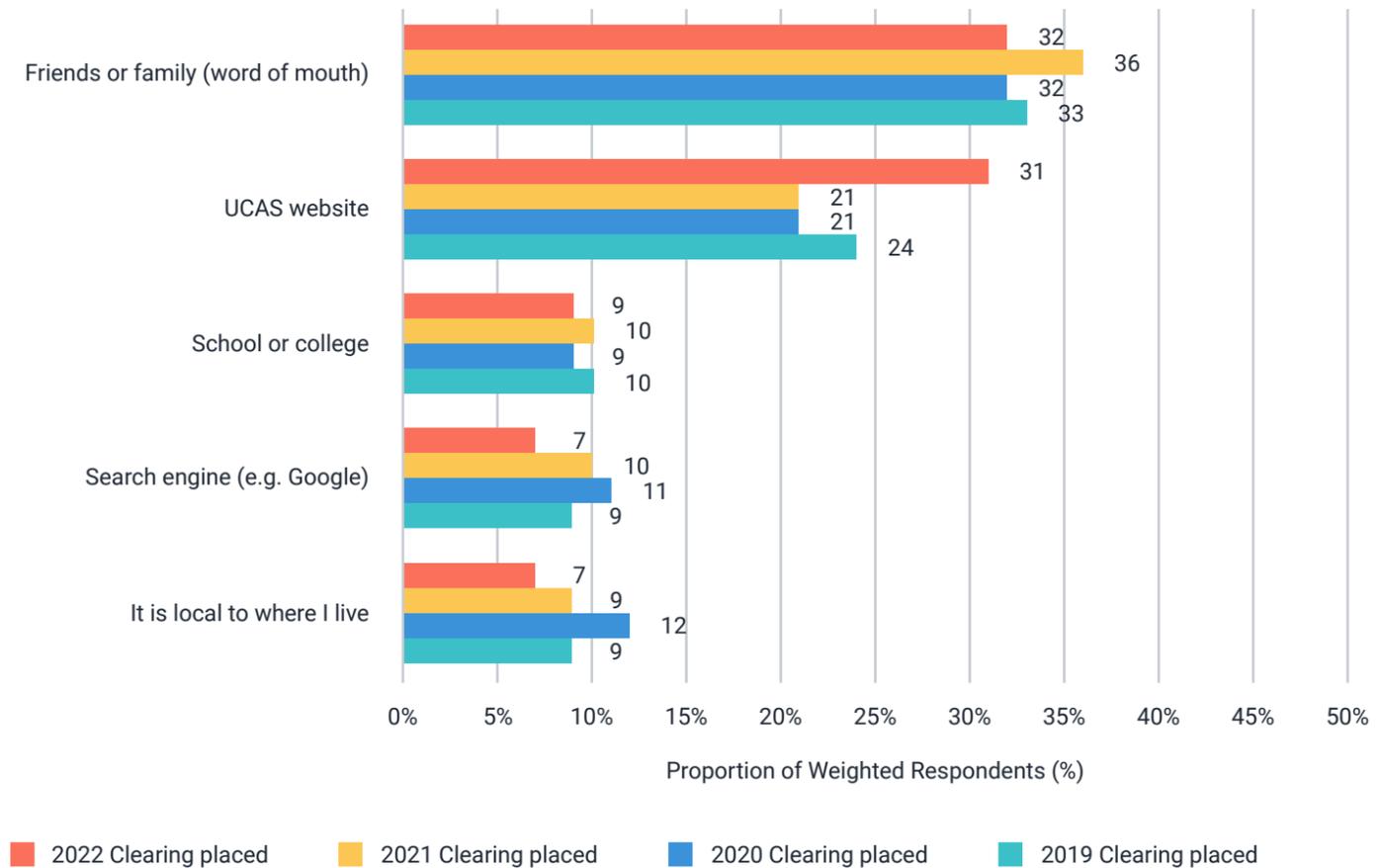
PASSIVE (DISCOVERY)	ACTIVE (SEARCHING)
<p>UCAS is now as influential as word of mouth</p>	<p>When directly searching, university websites become more important, and UCAS is still the preferred option</p>
<p>Their most cited sources of hearing about Clearing places were word of mouth, and the UCAS website was only -1%pt behind</p>	<p>Passive discovery is not happening through out of home advertising, but is instead focused online</p>

UCAS is now as influential as word of mouth for hearing about Clearing places

- ▶ In 2022, the largest proportion (32%) first heard about the university or college they found a place at in Clearing through **friends or family**.
- ▶ **The UCAS website** as a source was up +10%pts year on year and at its highest response rate ever.
- ▶ **Search engines** fell down the ranking to #4, swapping places with **school or college**.



Where did you first hear about the university or college you found a place at in Clearing?



(Top five responses vs 2021, 2020 and 2019)
 Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
 No. respondents: 1,294

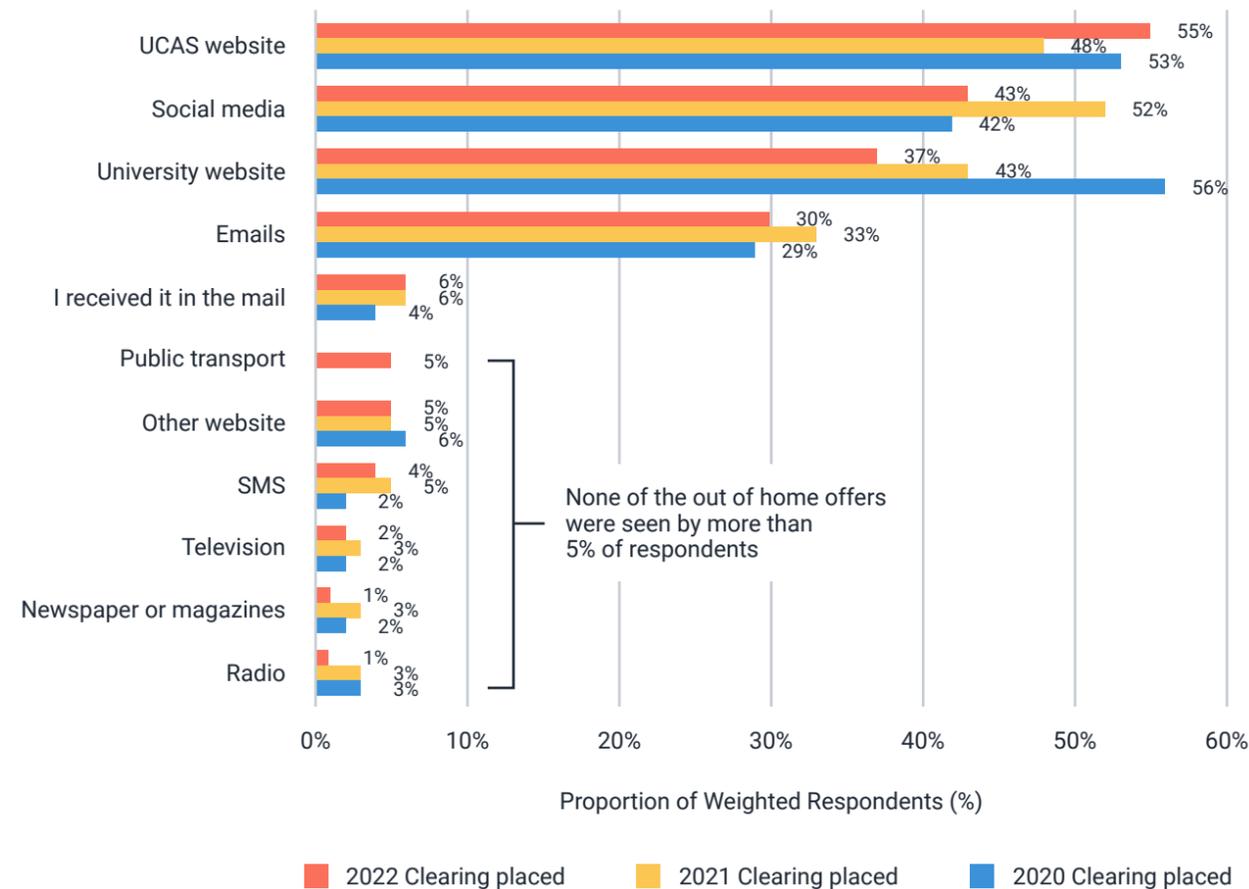
Most placed students discovered their university through the UCAS website

- ▶ This year the UCAS website was the most likely to get their attention, but social media has a key role to play.



PASSIVE (DISCOVERY)

In which of the following places, if any, did you see advertisements from the university or college you're currently placed at during the Clearing period? Please select all that apply.



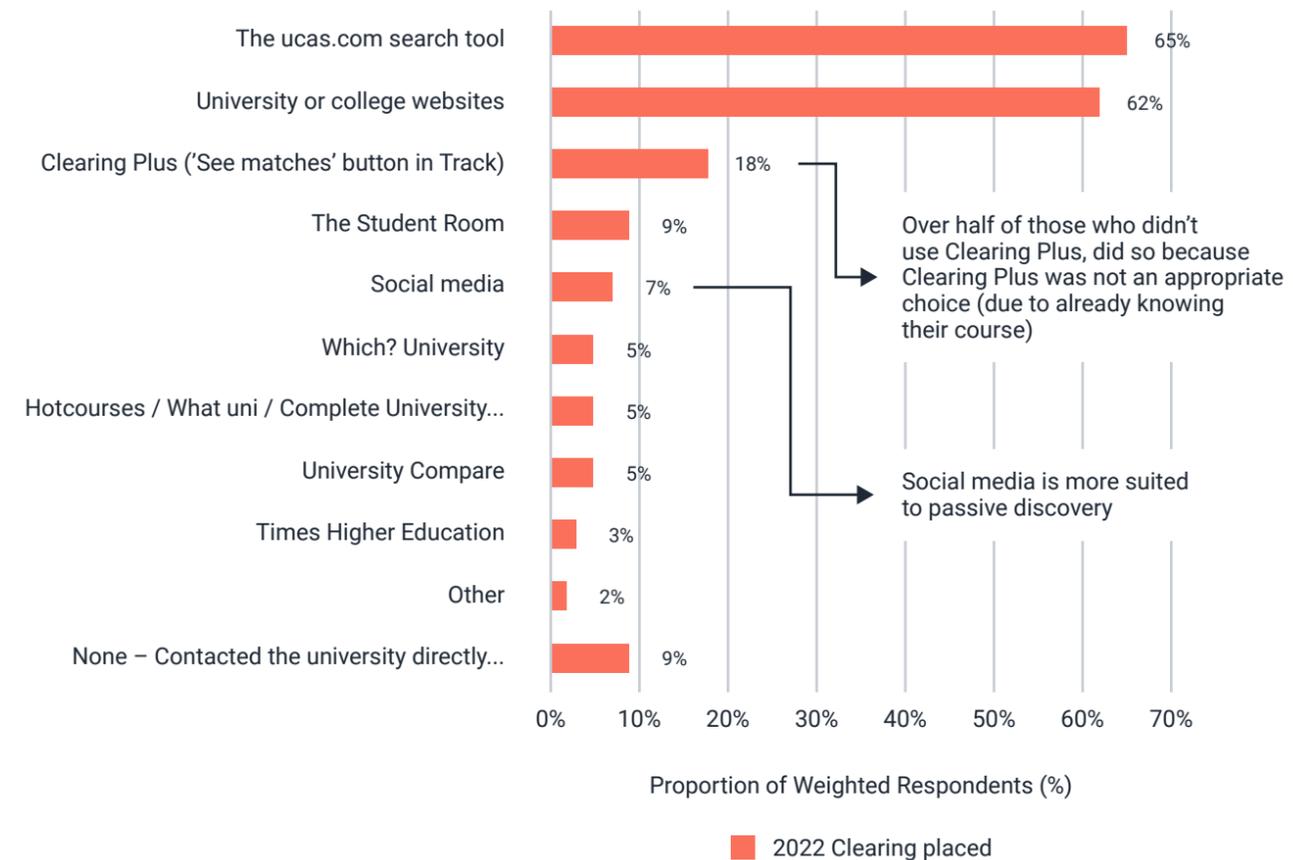
vs 2021
Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,294

When directly searching, university websites become more important, although UCAS is still the preferred option



ACTIVE (SEARCHING)

When you were looking for a place in Clearing, where did you search for places? Please select all that apply.



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,289

BE VISIBLE, PRESENT, AND ULTRA-AVAILABLE

1 Prospective students are amateur detectives. They want all of the information before they make a decision, especially about the way Clearing will work and what's available. But less than half will visit their university, even fewer than last year. So find another way to get the information to them.

2 More students are calling universities directly by phone, whilst fewer are emailing or using their websites to get in touch. When the information they're looking for determines their future, they don't want to wait for a response or have to search for the answers.

3 UCAS has become as influential as word-of-mouth and most placed students discover their university through ucas.com

Guidance needs to be clear, lines of communication open, and information easy-to-find in multiple places.

Clearing is unfamiliar territory for most who use it and every provider has a different process. Help your future students out by giving them what they need, when they need it. Making it as simple as possible will alleviate their anxieties and earn you some invaluable brand loyalty.

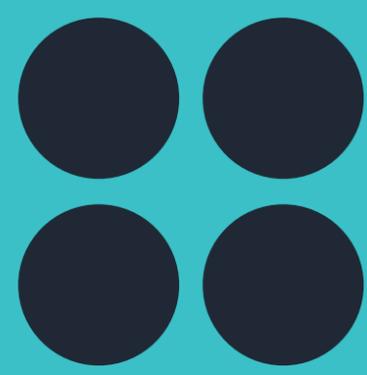
Make your phone number easy to find, alongside other ways of getting in touch, and make sure your call handlers are those with the answers.

Being present on ucas.com is essential too, beyond simply advertising your Clearing places in August. Create your own provider page (for free) and take advantage of the ability to present and promote your university, as early as possible, in your own words.





MOTIVATIONS AND DECISIONS





Access to the desired course remains the most important factor in choosing a university through Clearing

Applicants still want to know that they are getting a quality education, in spite of other concerns

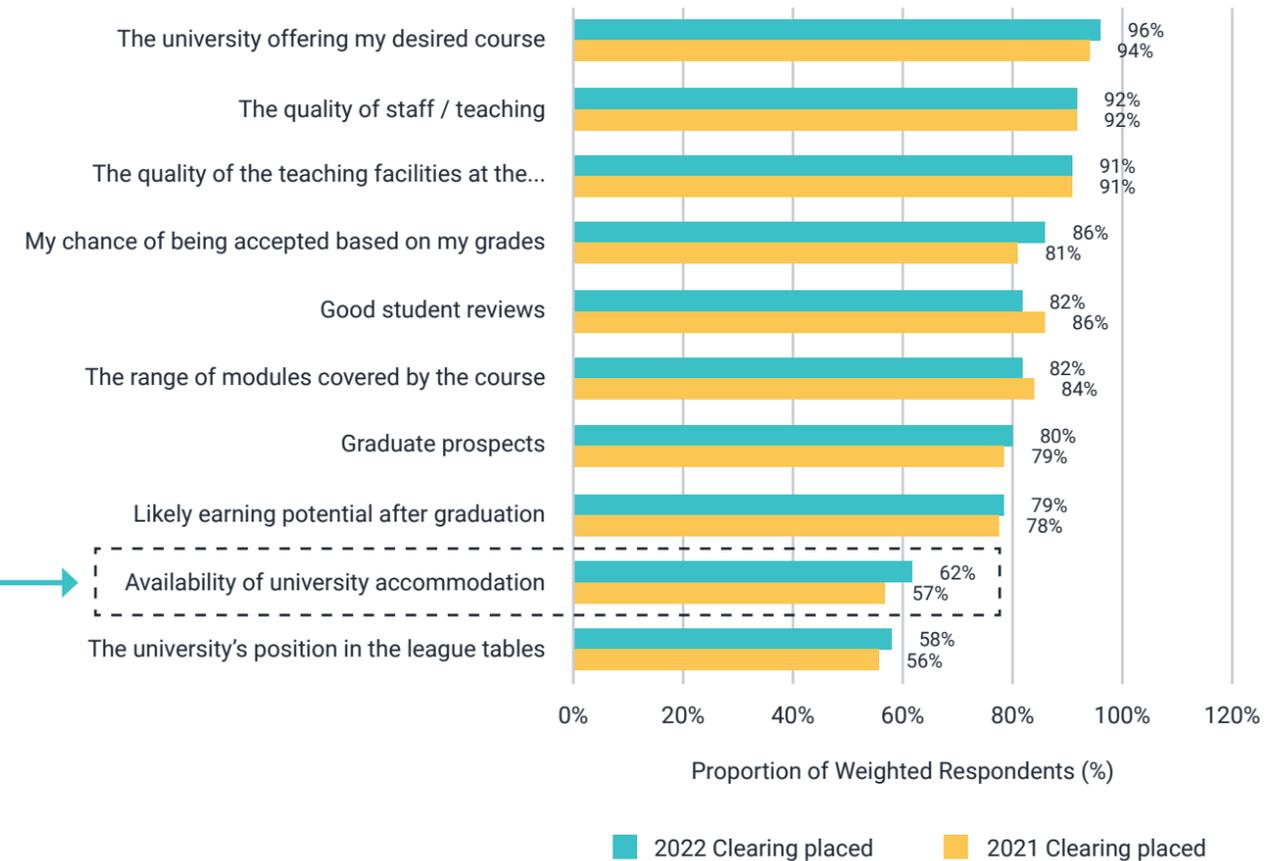
- ▶ **There is an increase in students looking for accommodation -** The availability of uni accommodation was 5% more important to placed applicants than in 2021. This factor was also up by 12% vs 2019.

“Make sure to check that your university of choice has sufficient accommodation and would guarantee you a place.”
- Advice from a Clearing applicant

“I had to decline my desired place as I wasn’t made aware of the lack of accommodation.”
- Clearing applicant

“I am very happy with my choice, but feel it could have been different dependent on other uni’s accommodation situation.”
- Clearing applicant

How important were the following factors when choosing your place in Clearing?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022 - Very important + Important
No. respondents: 1,293

Academic support is the most important lifestyle factor, but cost of living is increasingly playing a large part in the decision

Cost of living increased as a lifestyle factor for the fourth year in a row. In 2022 it was +6%pts more important to placed applicants than in 2021. This factor was also up by +16%pts vs 2019.

How important were the following lifestyle factors when choosing your place in Clearing?



Top five responses vs 2021, 2020 and 2019 - Very important + Important
 Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
 No. respondents: 1,294

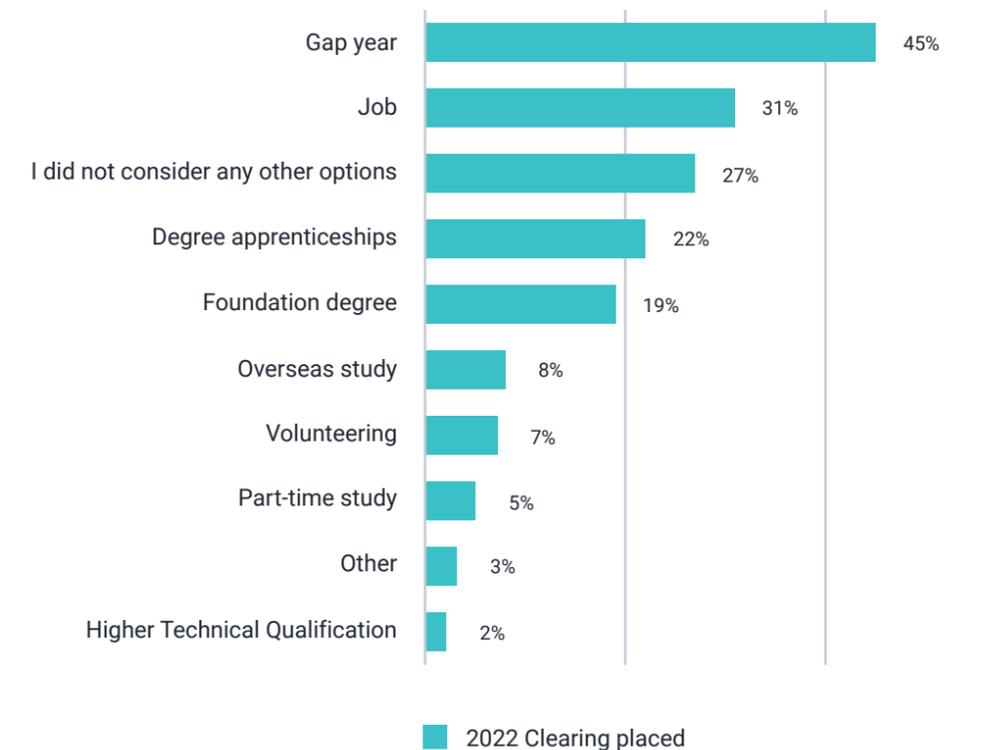
Those who got a place in Clearing often considered other options as well as Clearing

27% of applicants said they did not consider any other options (-7%pts vs 2021).

'Degree apprenticeship' rose from a low of 15% in 2020 to a high of 22% in 2022, perhaps reflecting considerations around cost of living.

'Gap year' rose from a low of 32% in 2020 to a high of 45% in 2022, likely reflecting how travel has opened up again.

While you were searching for a place in Clearing, did you at any point consider any of the following options instead of going to university or college? Please select all that apply.



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,289

STICK TO YOUR STRENGTHS

1 However they've arrived at Clearing, and whatever other concerns they have for their time at university, applicants still want to know they're getting a quality education.

2 The cost of living will be the basis of more conversations with students this year, as will concerns about accommodation, but the most important lifestyle factor when choosing a university is the level of academic support available.

3 Students will keep their options open, right to the bitter end. Clearing is empowering them to take control of their decision-making and be in the driving seat of their own futures. Respect and respond to it.

Convenience, accessibility, and information are important – but quality will always differentiate.

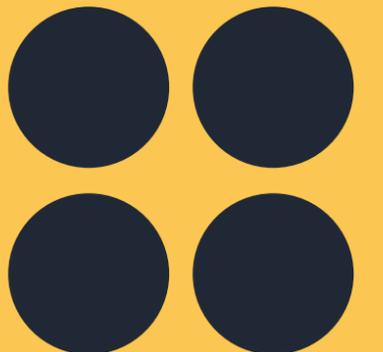
Highlight your academic strengths at both provider and subject level, but do so in the way that applicants want to see them. Student reviews have overtaken league tables in terms of influence, so obtain and promote reviews that say the things your applicants want to hear.

Highlight and explain the support on offer too. The economic climate means students are looking for financial help and advice, but they also want to know that there's enough academic support on offer – they don't want their course to be an added source of stress. If guaranteed accommodation is available for Clearing applications, make it a big part of your narrative and you'll allay another big worry for 2023 applicants.





OVERALL EXPERIENCE



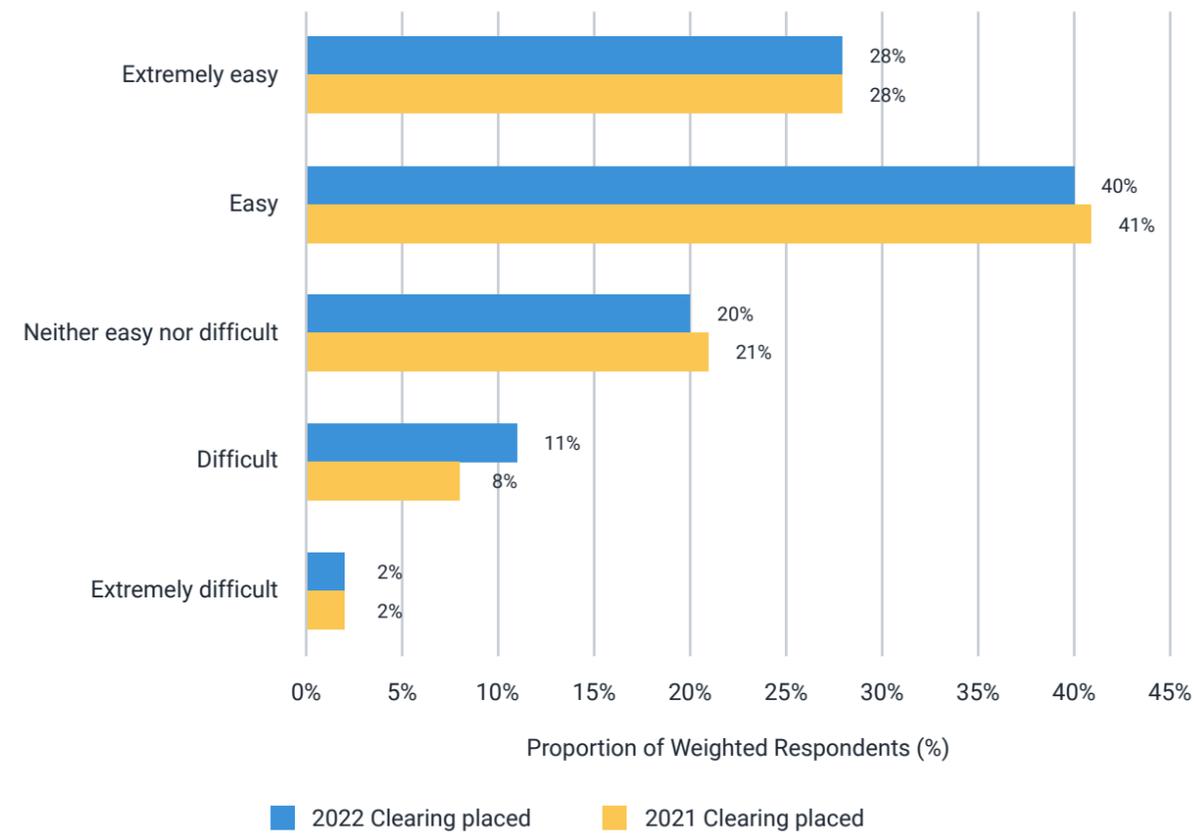


**Most people that find
a place in Clearing
consider it a positive
experience**

Clearing is overall a positive experience, and most get out what they want from the process without much difficulty



How easy or difficult do you feel it was to find a course you wanted to study in Clearing?

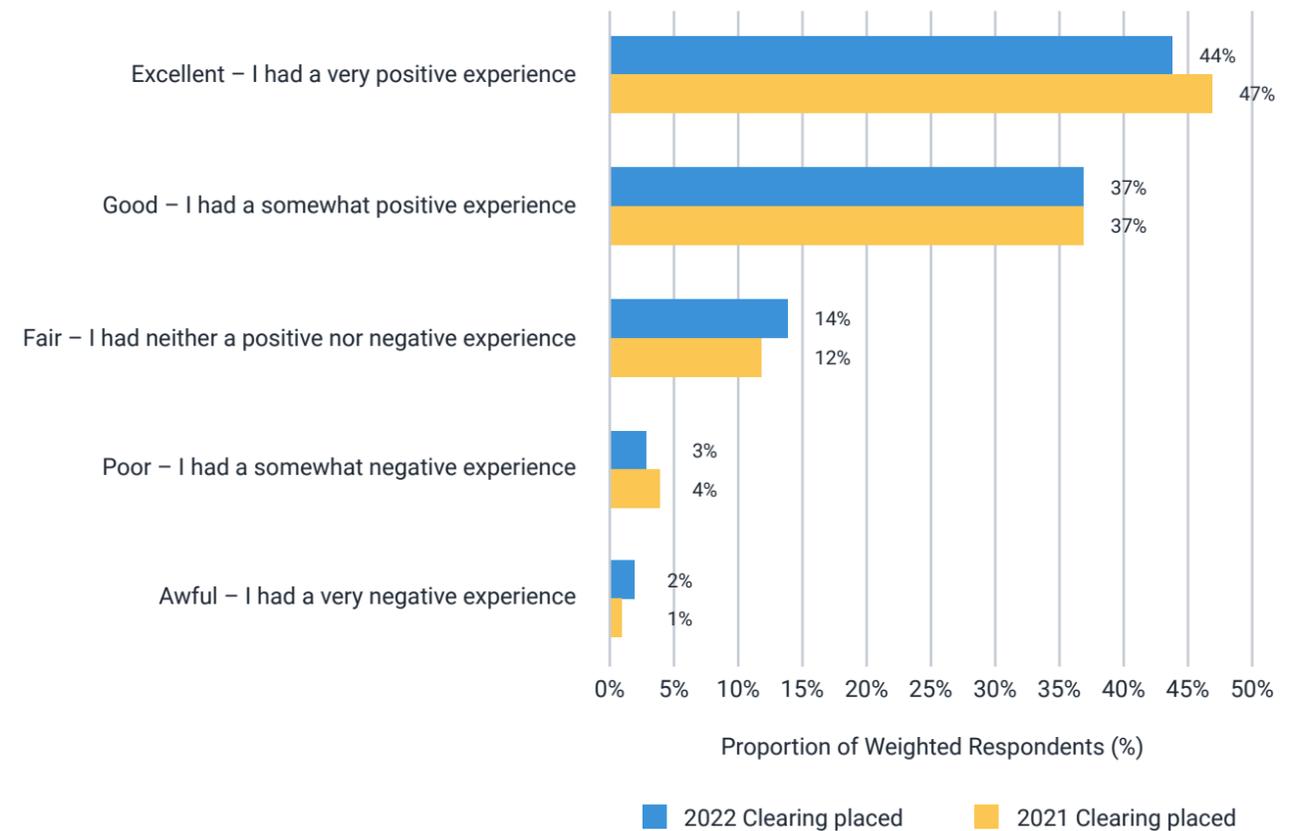


Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,293

Clearing is overall a positive experience, and most get out what they want from the process without much difficulty



Overall, how do you rate your experience of finding a university or college place through Clearing?

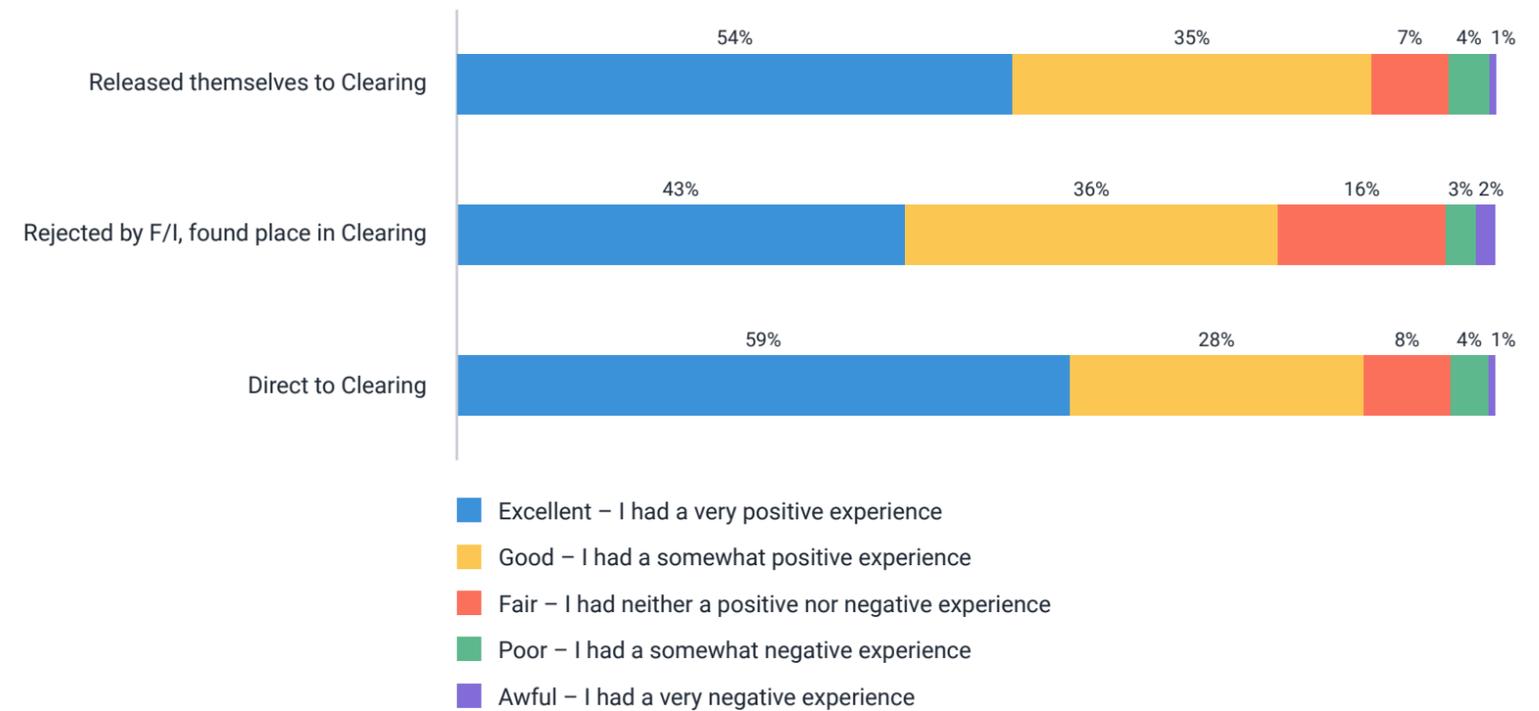


Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,291

The experience was mostly positive for all of the Clearing groups



Overall, how do you rate your experience of finding a university or college place through Clearing?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
2022 survey; No. respondents: 1,292

They are generally happy that the end result was the right one

“Clearing helped me find a course that was completely suited to me; so while I felt disappointment over not getting into my first choice, my Clearing choice has made me hopeful and excited for what the future has to offer! “

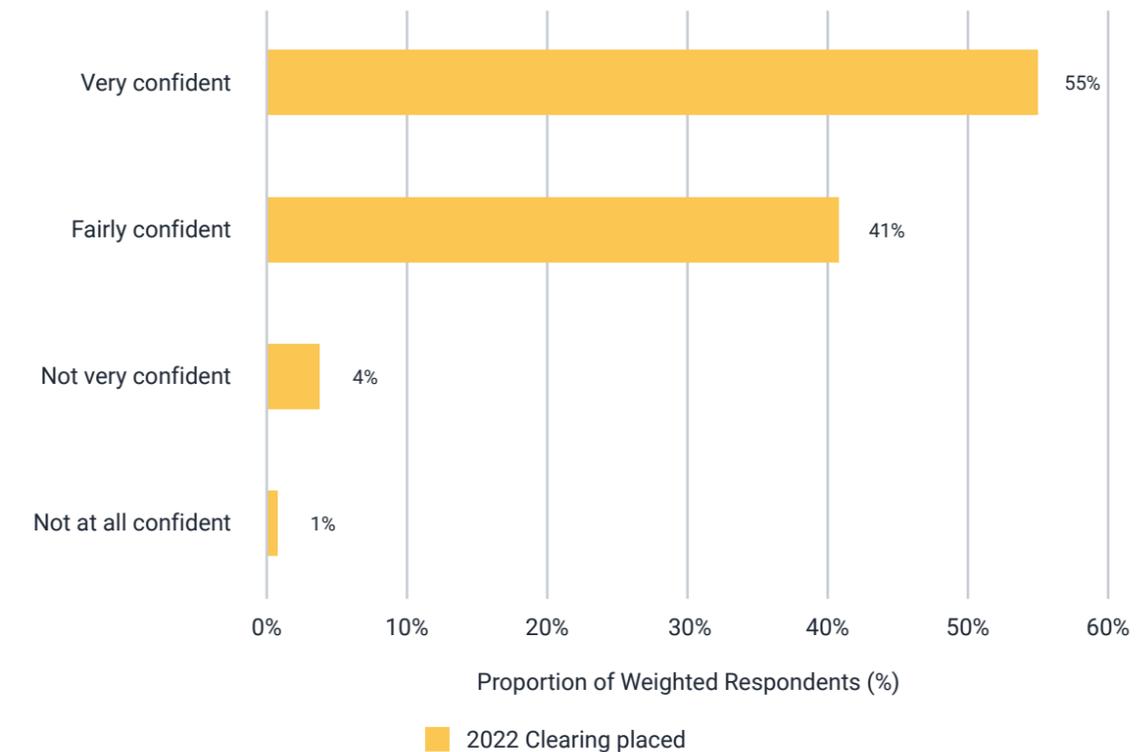
“Absolutely buzzing about this course, is far better for me than any of my original courses and I cannot wait.”

“Happier with the course than my original application and excited for the university I will be studying at”

“Clearing can open your mind to new options you hadn't considered when you made your first choice.”

“I finally discovered Clearing I didn't feel supported but they reassured me and it sounded so easy”

How confident are you that, in Clearing, you made the right choice for you?



Source: UCAS Clearing Survey September 2022
No. respondents: 1,287

WHAT TIPS OR ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS?

"Clearing isn't bad all! There's a stigma around clearing that it's a bad thing. It was how I applied directly for what I wanted and got it. Easy! There's no shame in clearing spaces at all!"

"Go for it! If you're late to the party why shouldn't you still have a drink?"

"Use Clearing to weigh all options across the country rather than go in hoping to find what you think you want."

"I had a fantastic experience using UCAS for the first time ever. Simple, informative and tonnes of courses and study options"

"Don't be put off by the stereotypes about clearing that 'people who fail go through clearing.'"

"Don't worry about the clearing process because everyone is very helpful and explains things step by step"

"Never give up! Always fight for your place, if you really believe it and want it from your heart, it will come to you. It has to!"

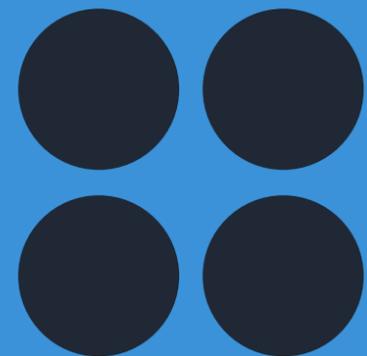
"The world is your oyster and there are loads of courses available"

"Be patient and you haven't missed anything that people who applied earlier would have done."

"You will always end up where you belong and it may not always be where you had planned but that doesn't always have to be negative."



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



THE BIG FOUR TO FIX:

START YOUR AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS YESTERDAY

The timeline has moved up a notch. Everything is happening earlier than we're all used to. Research sometimes kicks off a year ahead of applications, and decision-making isn't waiting for results day.

Building brand loyalty before prospects become applicants is vital to winning them over.

BE EMOTIVE AND SYMPATHETIC

This is the first return-to-exams generation, the home-school generation, and the cost-of-living generation. Applicants have plenty on their plate before they enter Clearing, so it's time to meet them halfway.

Bring your support options to the fore, equip your staff with answers to questions about the whole university offer, and outline how Clearing works in the simplest terms possible.

PROMOTE YOUR DIFFERENT CONTACT OPTIONS

Clearing applicants are expert information hunters and have a long list of details they need to check before they make a decision.

Make sure your phones are manned by people with the answers, and don't hide information or contact details deep within your website.

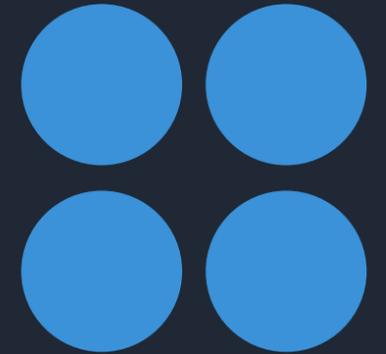
Be open, be available, be an easy option.

A SINGLE STRATEGY FOR CLEARING ISN'T ENOUGH

The **Mind Changers** decline their offers and join Clearing voluntarily to improve their options. **The Direct Routers** don't apply for university before July, and then do so directly through Clearing. And **The Still Searching** are those who don't get the grades, so enter Clearing to search for a plan B.

Get to know these groups, the big differences between them, and their alternate timeframes for decision-making.

CONNECT WITH STUDENTS IN CLEARING



To help you connect with the different students in Clearing, we've created multichannel packages, using the right channel combinations to reach different types of students at touchpoints throughout Clearing. There's a range of options with different price points – offering choice and meeting needs of different types of providers with different objectives and budgets.

RESPONSIVE



Meeting current customer needs & market trends

EFFECTIVE



Coherent & powerful packages that amplify performance

TRANSPARENT



Simple & without unexpected product combinations

Get in touch with your UCAS Customer Manager, or email clearingmedia@ucas.ac.uk to find out more.

UCAS