

# THE NEW NORMAL

A report on how students feel about COVID-19

Series 2, Report 3  
15/07 - 28/07



## INTRODUCTION

**Over the last few months, COVID-19 has impacted almost every area of daily life.** Students are no longer taking exams in person, education has moved online, and the UK is socially distant. But things are slowly returning to normal; shops and restaurants are reopening their doors, some school year groups have returned, and many universities are welcoming back students come September.

To be agile and understand how the ever evolving COVID-19 pandemic is impacting students' views, actions, and mental health, we need to talk to them. And you need tangible insights to inform how to support and engage a student audience.

**During unprecedented times, there is no data, but there can be insights.**

So we must ask; how do students feel about COVID-19? Do they feel at risk? Do they still plan on studying abroad? How about university, is that still on the cards? Do they still even want to go to university? Let's find out.

This research will give you an insight into what *really* matters right now for students. At a time of such uncertainty, all brands should consider very carefully *what* and *how* they're communicating with their student audience.

**The need to 'think student' is now more important than ever.**

## WHAT'S HAPPENED IN THE LAST 14 DAYS?

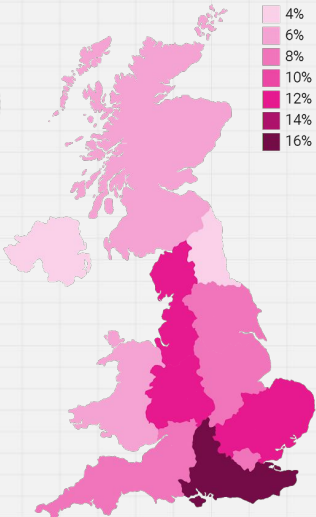
(15/7 - 28/7)

1. In the UK, lockdown restrictions have eased further. From 25th of July in England, sports facilities and venues were allowed to open.
2. On the 17th July, the prime minister announced that 'from 1st September, schools, nurseries and colleges will open for all children and young people on a full-time basis and universities are working to reopen as fully as possible'.
3. There have been more than 300,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19 so far in the UK and over 45,000 people have died, government figures show. The [downward trend in Covid-19 cases appears to have stalled](#), a further 685 cases were reported on Monday 26th.
4. [Last week, Ofqual announced that GCSE exam results would be more generous this year](#) - with 2% more pupils getting A grades or above at A-level and 1% more getting grade 4 or above at GCSE.

# METHODOLOGY

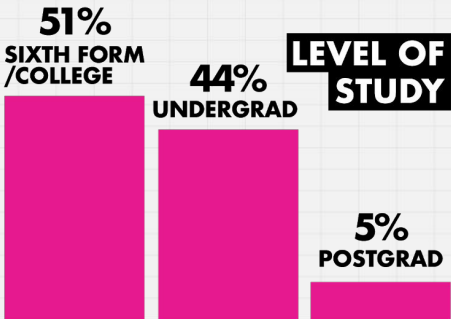
This is the second installment of the Covid-19 student tracker, and is running fortnightly from 30th June to 15th December. This research was run **24th - 26th July** and is report **3 of 12**. We shared a survey with our audience on the Student Hut Panel, the UK's most diverse and engaged youth panel. Equal weighting was given to each participant's response.

SAMPLE

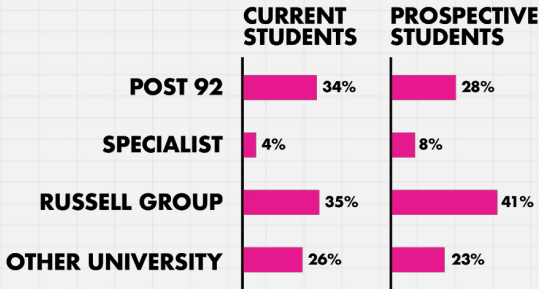


**313**  
RESPONSES

**AGE**  
16 34



## INSTITUTION TYPE



The survey was designed and analysed by the Research division at Natives, the team behind the National Clearing Survey, the European MBA Survey, the Student Media Insights Report and other global research projects and led by our award-winning Director of Research, Kas Nicholls. Accredited partners with the Market Research Society, demonstrating our commitment to research and insight excellence.

# KEY FINDINGS



**1** 8 in 10 students told us they would want their lecturers or tutors to wear PPE at least some of the time.



**2** 7 in 10 students want to wear masks in lectures.

**3** 4 in 10 students feel that wearing PPE at university will hinder them making friends and 1 in 4 believe it will hinder them in finding love.



**4** Around half of students feel that their university could support their mental health by providing more information about how Covid-19 will be affecting the university.



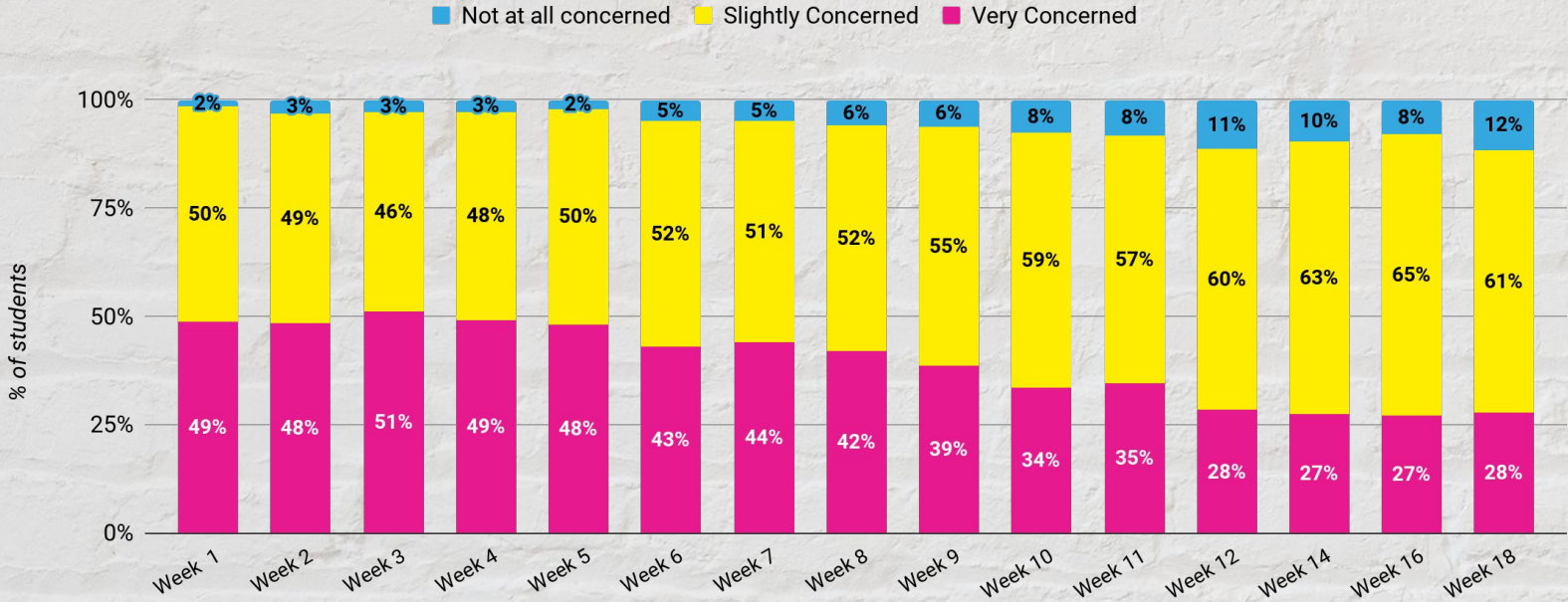
**5** Over half of students say that the uncertainty of career prospects and the financial implications of Covid-19 are impacting their mental health. Around 2 in 5 students say universities could help this by providing financial or careers advice.

# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

## HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT CORONAVIRUS?

28% of students said they were 'very concerned' about Covid-19; this is down 21% from week 1 where 49% of students said they were very concerned.

Compared to the last report (week 16), 4% more students said they were not at all concerned about Covid-19, up from 8% to 12%.



# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

## WHAT ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT?

	Very concerned	Slightly concerned	Not at all concerned
How long this is going to go on for	56%	45%	20%
Impact on the NHS	54%	45%	4%
Impact on my education	52%	40%	5%
My family/friends health	50%	48%	6%
Impact on economy	45%	49%	34%
Employment/job prospects	45%	38%	15%
My mental/physical health	35%	40%	6%
Using public transport	27%	40%	4%
Missing social events	16%	52%	16%

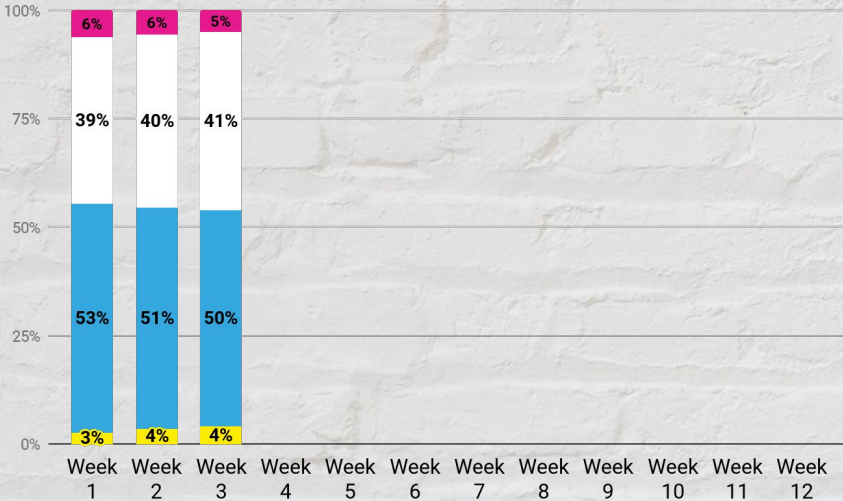
Students' biggest concern was *how long the Covid-19 pandemic is going to go on for* - with **56% saying they are very concerned** about this. The second and third most concerning factors are **impact on the NHS (54% of students very concerned about this) and impact on education (52% of students very concerned about this)**.

Similarly to the findings in the previous report, **the health of friends and family, the economy, and job prospects** are all factors that are still very concerning to many students. The *least* concerning factors for students this week are using public transport and missing social events.

# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

## HOW WELL DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT IS MANAGING THE CRISIS?

■ Unsure   ■ Not effectively at all   ■ Somewhat effectively   ■ Very effectively



This week, when asked about the government’s response to Covid-19, half of students said it was **somewhat effective (50%)**, followed by **not effective at all (41%)**. This means that **2 in 5 students** feel that the government’s management of the Covid-19 crisis is **not effective at all**.

# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

HOW WELL DO YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT IS MANAGING THE CRISIS?

FURLOUGH INCOME SUPPORT SYSTEM HAS BEEN EXTREMELY HELPFUL FOR MY FAMILY. HOWEVER, ASPECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE HAS BEEN POOR, FOR EXAMPLE IN CARE HOMES.

THERE'S A LOT OF CONFLICTING AND CHANGING "FACTS" STATED ON THE NEWS WITH LITTLE TO NO CLARIFICATION ON WHAT THE EVIDENCE ACTUALLY SUPPORTS.

I THINK RESTRICTIONS LIFTED TOO EARLY AND MASKS SHOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN MANDATORY SINCE MARCH.

WILLING TO REIMBURSE UP TO £10 PER PERSON FOR SELECTED MEALS MONDAY-WEDNESDAY IN AUGUST, BUT NOT BOTHERED ABOUT FEEDING THE LESS FORTUNATE THAT CAN'T AFFORD FOOD, NOR NO SIGNS TO RAISE PAY FOR THE HARD WORKING MEDICAL STAFF.

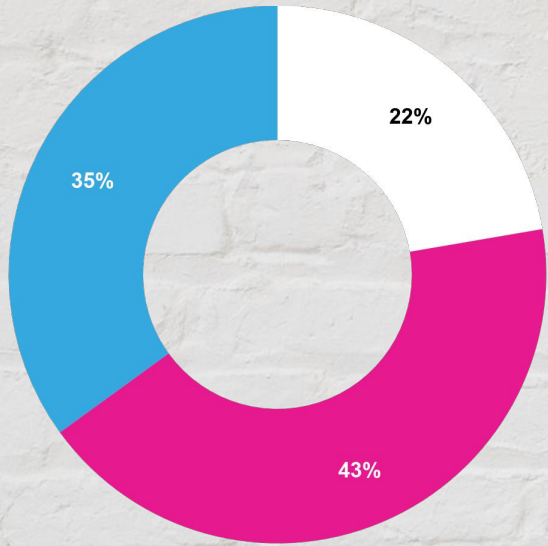
Only 4% of students said the government was handling the crisis **very effectively**, and 5% said they felt unsure.

This is reflected in written responses, where common themes that came up were the government's late response, conflicting information and unclear rules. However, like last week, some students did comment on the positive nature of the furlough scheme.



# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH RIGHT NOW?



● Very concerned ● Slightly concerned ● Not at all concerned

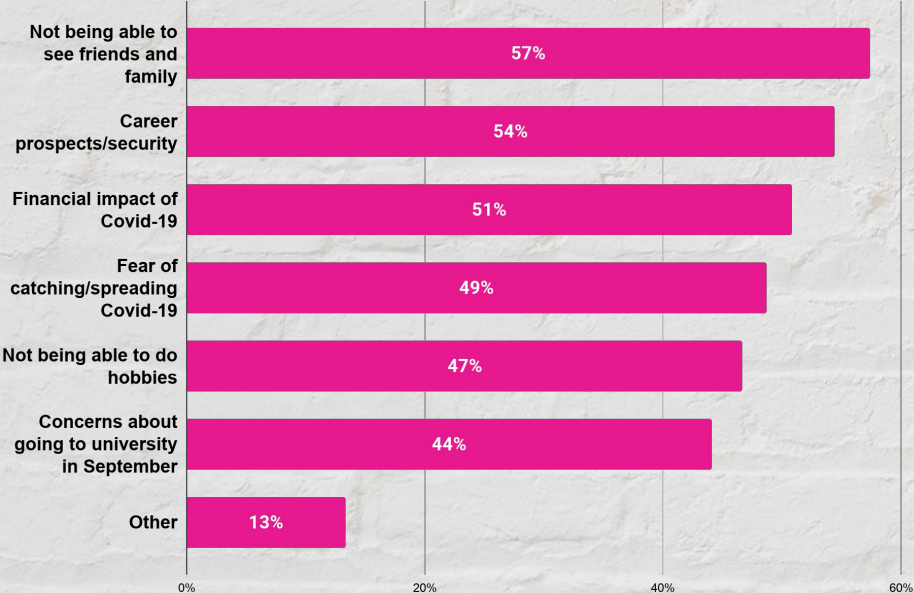
When asked about their **mental health**, **6 in 10 students said they were concerned** about it.

The majority of students - 43% - said they were slightly concerned about their mental health.

22% said they were very concerned, and 35% said they were not concerned at all.

# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

## WHAT IS CAUSING YOU TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?



Over half of students (57%) say that not being able to see friends and family is causing them to be concerned about their mental health.

This is closely followed by career prospects / security, and the financial impact of Covid-19 - over 50% of students said these factors were impacting their mental health.

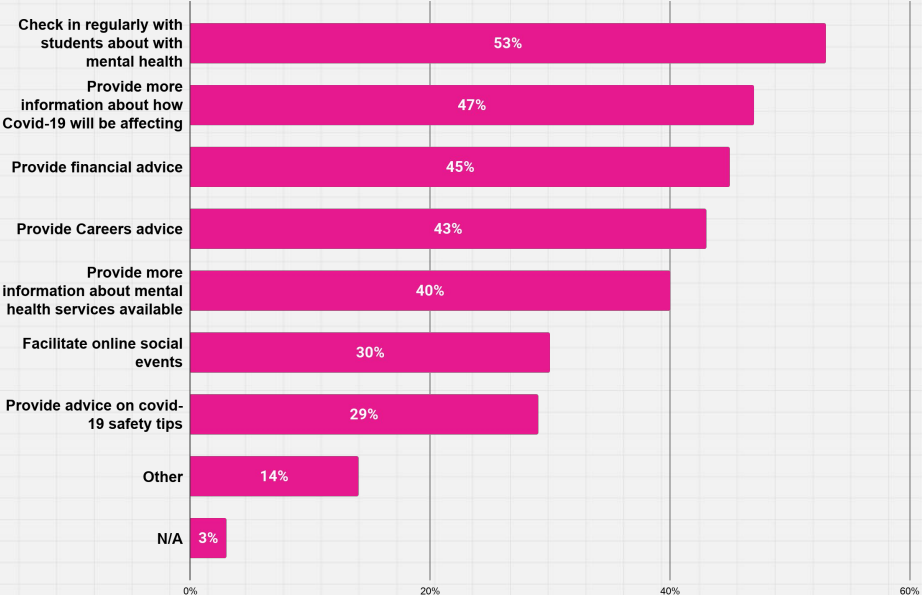
49% of students are worried about catching or spreading Covid-19, which is affecting their mental health.

Not being able to do hobbies caused 47% of students to feel concerned about their mental health, and 44% feel concerned about going to university in September.

*Question asked to those who answered 'very' or 'slightly'*

# SECTION 1: WHAT IS CONCERNING STUDENTS?

## WHAT COULD YOUR UNIVERSITY DO TO SUPPORT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

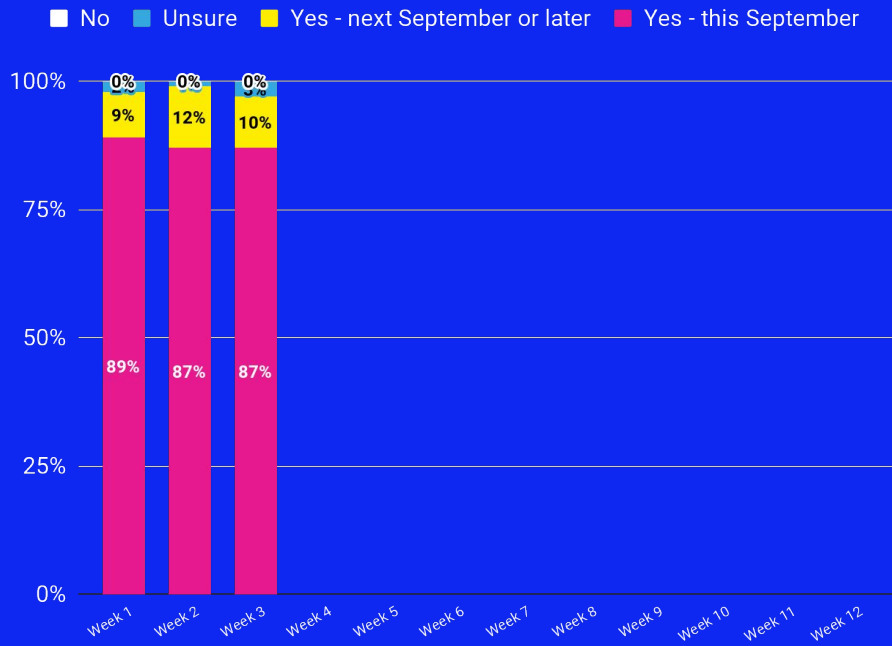


53% of students feel that their university should be checking in regularly in regards to their mental health. 47% feel that their university could support their mental health by providing more information about how Covid-19 will be affecting the university. 45% would like their university to provide financial advice, and feel that this would support their mental health.

14% of students selected 'other' - and when asked to specify what universities could be doing to support mental health, provided answers such as 'youth workers and counselors to talk to', 'improve mental health funding. Check in with high-risk students as a matter of policy' and 'provide counsellors on campus and have it included in student fees, so that those with limited financial access can seek support like anybody else'.

## SECTION 2: FUTURE PLANS

### ARE YOU STILL PLANNING TO GO TO UNIVERSITY?\*



Over the next 12 reports, we will be tracking prospective student's university plans - are they still planning to go, are they unsure? Will they attend this September or later?

Like the previous report, **87% of students told us that they were still planning to attend this September** this week.

Over **1 in 10 students** said they were still planning to go to university, but that they were **now planning to attend next September or later**.

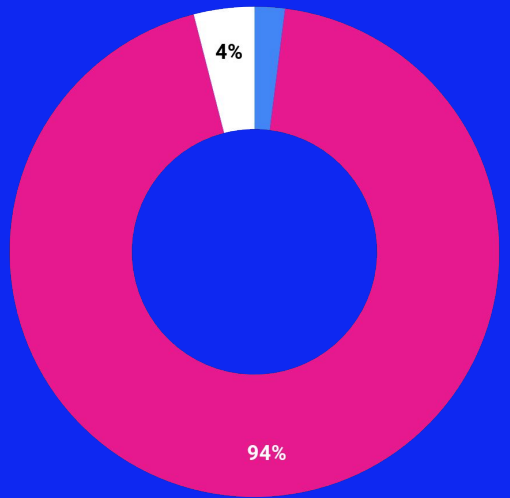
3% of prospective students said they were unsure whether they are still planning to attend university.

*\*Asked to prospective students*

# SECTION 2: FUTURE PLANS

## ARE YOU PLANNING ON DEFERRING A YEAR?

● Yes ● No ● Unsure



## WHY MIGHT YOU BE DEFERRING?

**I WANTED A YEAR OFF TO LOOK AT COURSES.**

**THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE WON'T BE THE SAME.**

**SAFETY MEASURES FOR HEALTH.**

**GRADES.**

**I'D RATHER WAIT UNTIL EVERYTHING IS BACK TO NORMAL SO I CAN HAVE THE WHOLE UNI EXPERIENCE AND MORE FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING.**

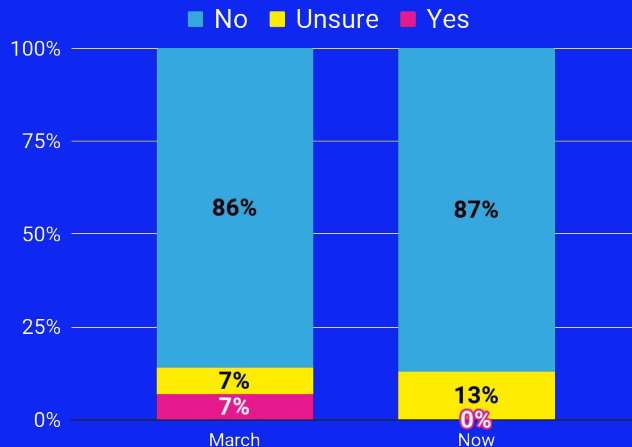
The majority of students are not planning to defer. Just 2% of current students **are planning on deferring** a year, whilst 4% of students are **unsure** whether they are going to defer or not.

When asked why, students said that uncertainty due to coronavirus, grades and their health came up as reasons why they may defer.

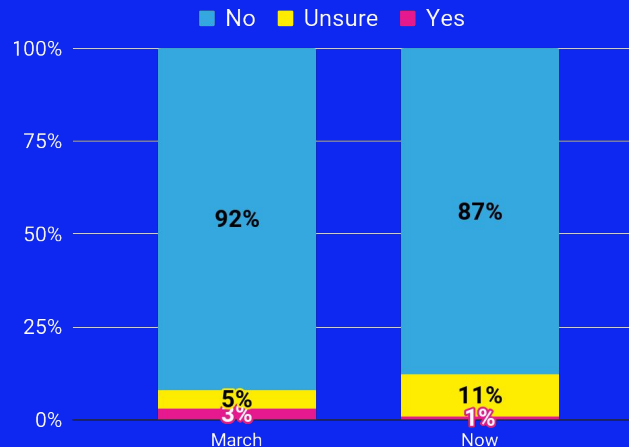
Students also cited the university experience, with some saying they are deferring as they experience will be negatively affected by Covid-19.

## SECTION 2: FUTURE PLANS

### ARE YOU PLANNING TO CHANGE YOUR UNIVERSITY?



### ARE YOU PLANNING TO CHANGE YOUR COURSE?

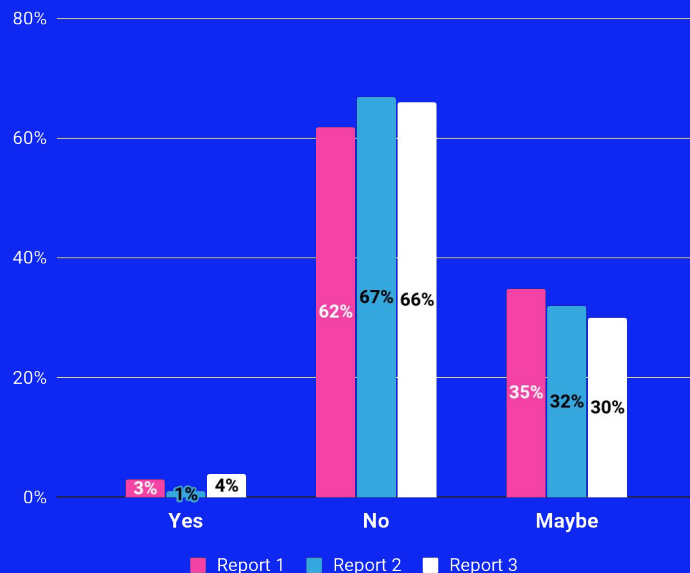


The majority of students (87%) said no, they are not planning to change their university choice. 13% said they were unsure, and no one said yes.

We also asked students whether they were planning to change their course. 87% said no, compared to 92% in March.

## SECTION 2: FUTURE PLANS

### ARE YOU PLANNING ON APPLYING THROUGH CLEARING?



When exploring future plans, we asked prospective students whether or not they are planning to apply for university through clearing.

The majority of prospective students (**66%**) are not planning to apply for university through clearing.

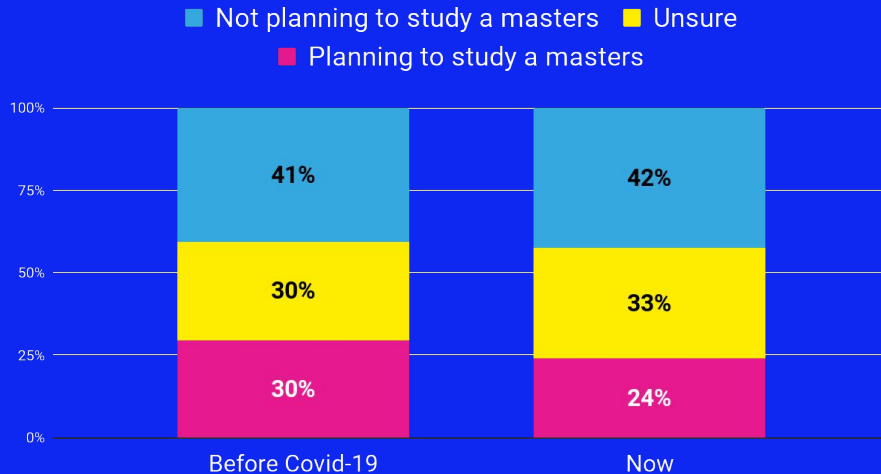
However, like the previous report, around **3 in 10 students answered maybe**, suggesting that this is something **many students are considering**.

**4%** of prospective students are planning to apply directly through clearing.

## SECTION 2: FUTURE PLANS

Before Covid-19, 30% of UG students were planning to study a masters, which has now fallen to 24%. When asked why, students cited the weak job market, uncertainty due to coronavirus and career changes.

### HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUR DECISION TO STUDY AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL?



### WHY HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR DECISION?

IT'S IMPACTED MY ABILITY TO DO MY BEST AS I DID NOT GET THE GRADE I WANTED. IN ADDITION IT MADE ME REALISE I MAY NOT NEED A MASTERS TO SUCCEED. I JUST NEED TO ENSURE I HAVE A STABLE JOB.

UNCERTAINTY OF HOW LONG IT WILL GO ON FOR.

WILL I EVEN GET ANY TEACHING THIS YEAR?

DUE TO THE POOR JOB PROSPECTS AT THE CURRENT TIME, IF I WERE TO WANT TO DO A MASTERS, I FEEL LIKE NOW WOULD BE THE MOST APPROPRIATE TIME.

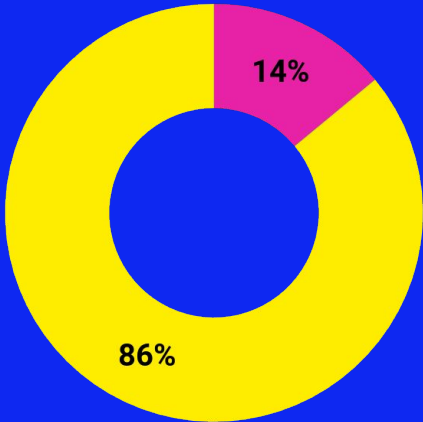
I AM CONCERNED ABOUT MY FUTURE JOB PROSPECTS SO I DON'T WANT TO GET INTO FURTHER DEBT.



# SECTION 2: FUTURE PLANS

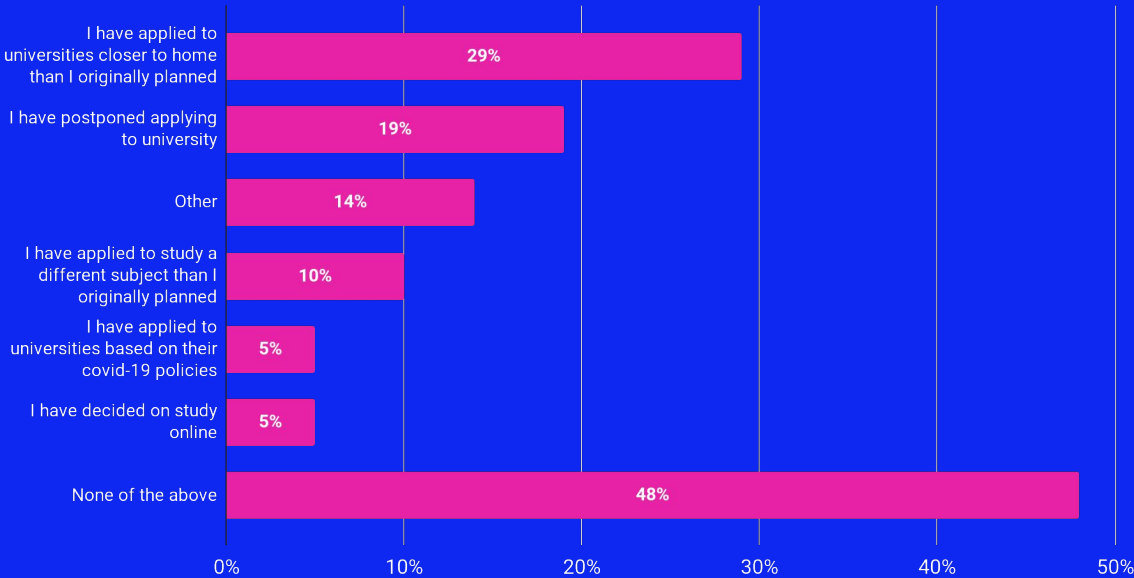
14% of prospective students say that their parents' concerns about Covid-19 have impacted their university choices. When asked how their parents concerns impacted their choices, 29% students cite applying for university closer to home. This is followed by 19% who have postponed applying to university, and 10% who have applied to study a different subject than originally planned.

## HAVE YOUR PARENTS' CONCERNS ABOUT COVID-19 IMPACTED YOUR UNIVERSITY CHOICES?



● Yes ● No

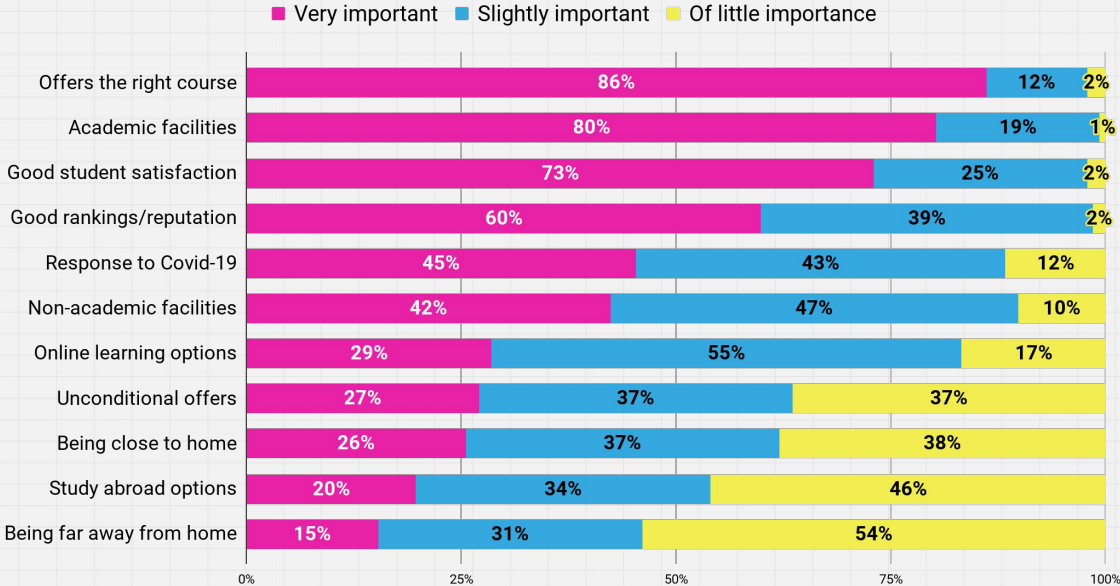
## HOW?



Question asked to prospective students

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

## HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS WHEN DECIDING ON A UNIVERSITY PLACE?



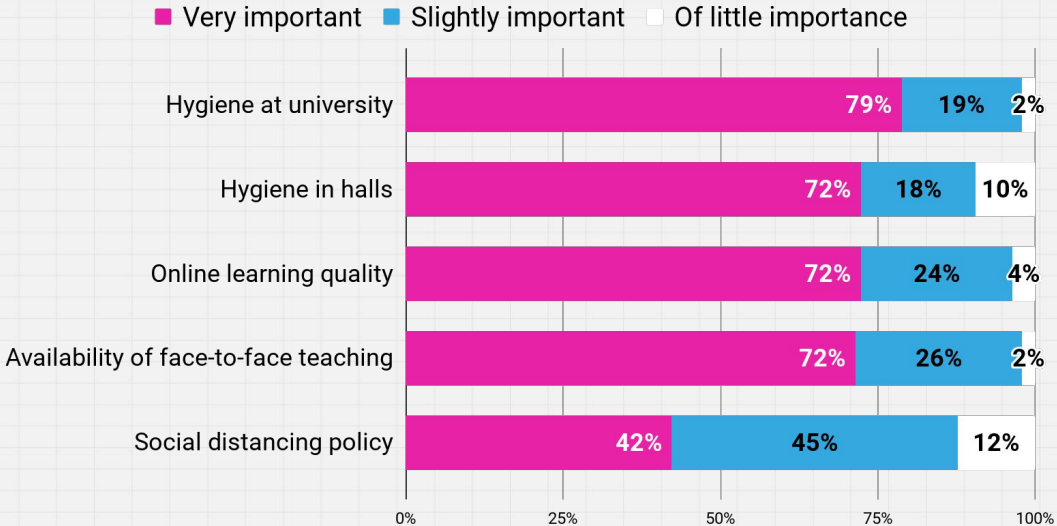
86% of students told us that a university offering the right course was very important to them, while 80% said academic facilities were very important. After that, academic student satisfaction and rankings / reputation were rated the most important.

45% of prospective students said that a university’s response to Covid-19 was very important. This remains at the same percentage as the previous report, showing that this continues to be an important factor to students.

*Question asked to prospective students*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

**WHEN IT COMES TO A UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19, HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING FACTORS WHEN DECIDING ON A UNIVERSITY PLACE?**



When we asked students what's important to them when it comes to a university's Covid-19 response, the **hygiene at the university** was the most important factor to prospective students, with **98% of students saying important to them in some way**, 79% saying it was very important.

72% of students said hygiene in halls was **very important** to to them, 72% said the quality of online learning was very important and 72% also said availability of face-to-face teaching was very important.

Social distancing policies were the least important to students, with 42% saying this was very important to them.

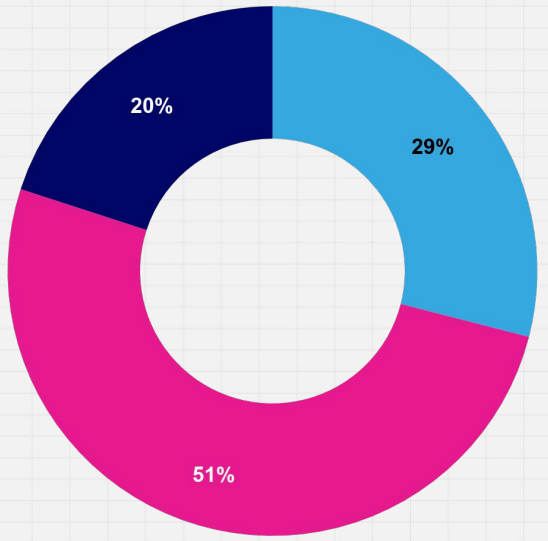
*Question asked to prospective students*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

1 in 2 students told us that they would want lecturers and tutors to wear PPE some of the time. The second most popular answer was yes, lecturers and tutors should wear PPE all the time, with 29% of students answering this way. 20% of students said that no, they would not want lecturers and tutors to wear PPE.

**WOULD YOU WANT LECTURERS/TUTORS TO WEAR PPE?**

**WHY?**



● Yes - all the time ● Yes - some of the time ● No

**I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO WEAR MASKS WHEN LISTENING TO LECTURES, HOWEVER, IF DOING A PRESENTATION IT MAY BE MORE EFFECTIVE NOT TO WEAR A MASK, JUST WHILE ADDRESSING THE ROOM.**

**THEY HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO PROTECT THEMSELVES.**

**BECAUSE WHEN YOU'RE IN A LECTURE AND THE SPEAKER ISN'T TALKING VERY LOUDLY YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO LIP READ THEM IF THEY HAVE A MASK ON. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR THOSE HARD OF HEARING WHO RELY ON LIP READING.**

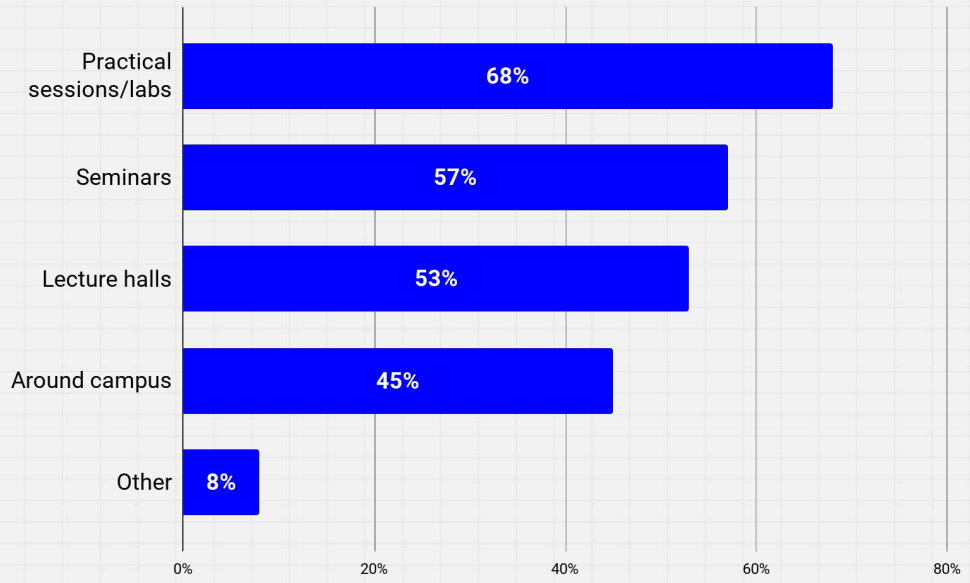
**WE CANNOT AFFORD TO TAKE CHANCES AND MUST AVOID A SECOND SPIKE.**

**THEY NEED TO PROTECT EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY WHEN PROJECTING THEIR VOICES.**

*Question asked to prospective students*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

## WHERE WOULD YOU WANT LECTURERS/TUTORS TO WEAR PPE?



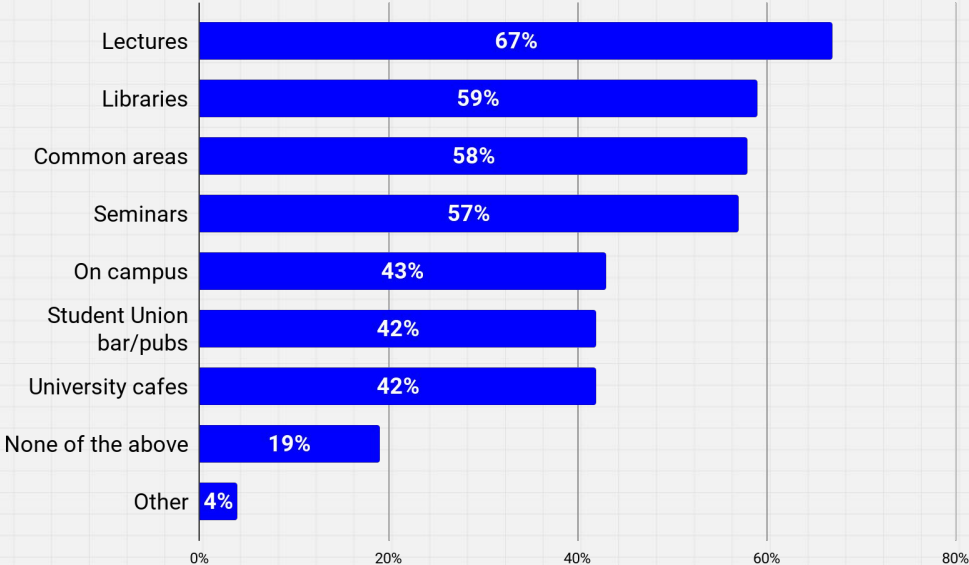
We asked students where they would want their lecturers/tutors to wear PPE. 68% said they would want lecturers and tutors to wear PPE in practical sessions/labs. 57% said they'd want lecturers/tutors to wear PPE in seminars, and 53% said in lecture halls. 45% of students said they'd want staff to wear PPE around campus.

Some students also stated they'd want staff to wear PPE in '1-2-1 tutorials' and 'when walking in busy areas, ie, corridors'.

*Question asked to those who answered yes*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

## WHERE WOULD YOU WANT TO WEAR MASKS AT UNIVERSITY?



Students have told us that they would want their lecturer or tutor to wear PPE - but do they want to wear it themselves?

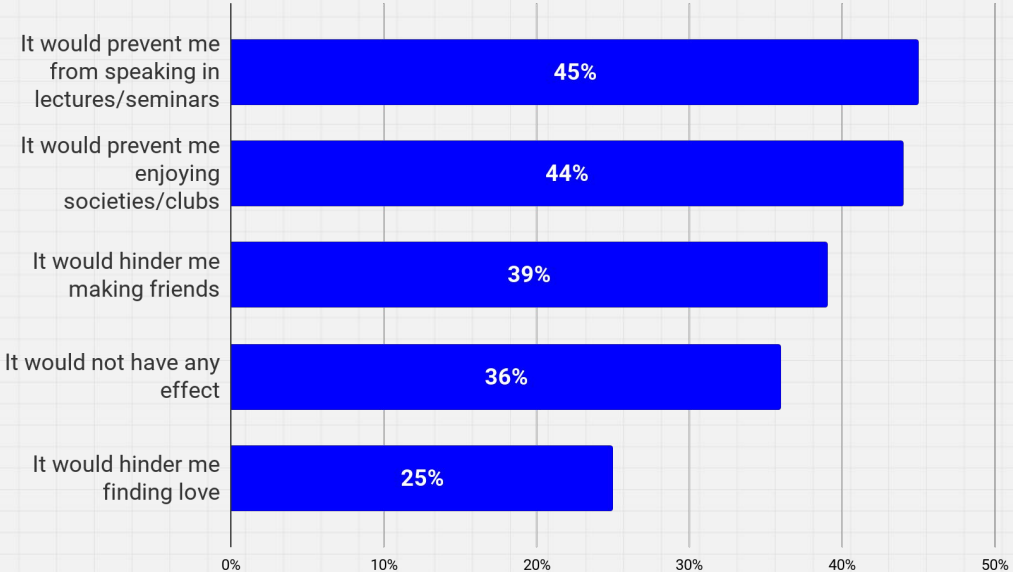
7 in 10 students told us that they would want to wear a mask in lectures, whilst 6 in 10 said they'd want to wear them in libraries, seminars and common areas.

43% of students said they'd want to wear a mask on campus, and 42% said they'd want to wear one at campus bars or cafes.

19% percent of students said they would not want to wear a mask at any of the above.

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

## HOW DO YOU THINK WEARING PPE WOULD AFFECT YOUR UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE?



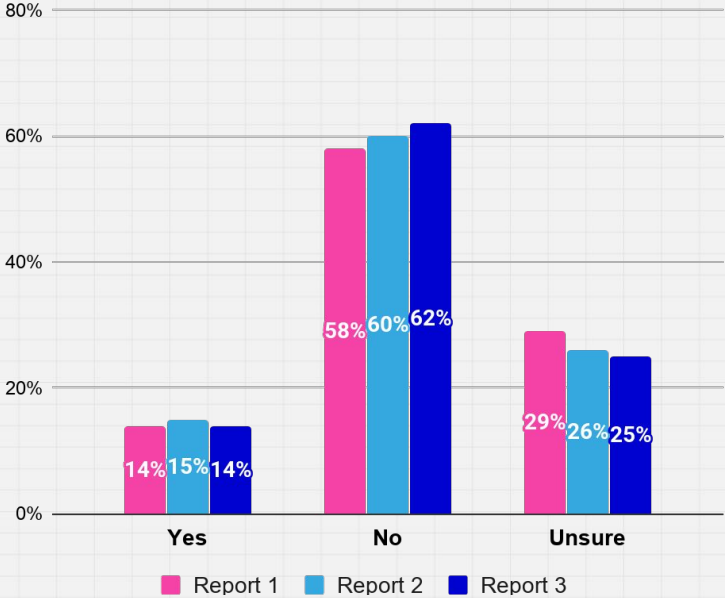
This week we asked students how they felt wearing PPE would influence their experience at university.

Nearly half of students said that wearing PPE would prevent them from speaking in lectures or seminars - suggesting that teaching could be affected.

There were also a number of social factors that students felt would be impacted by wearing PPE at university. 44% said it would prevent them from enjoying societies/clubs, 39% said it would hinder them making friends, and 25% said it would hinder them finding love.

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

**DO YOU THINK TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY  
WILL RETURN TO NORMAL BY SEPTEMBER?**



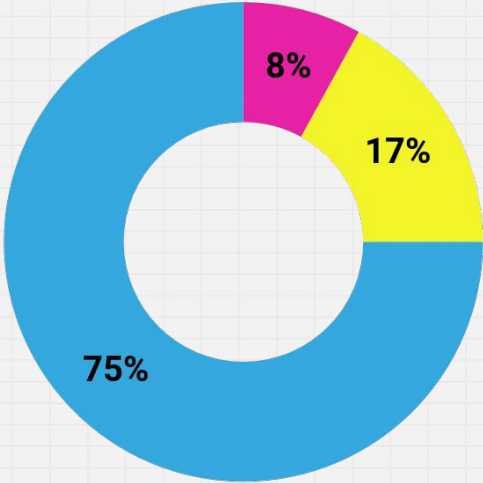
We asked students whether they think teaching will return to normal by the time the new academic year begins in September.

**In line with the findings of the previous report, 6 in 10** of students said they **did not** think things would be returning to normal by September, but **14%** said they **did think they would be receiving normal teaching in September**. 25% said they were unsure whether teaching will have returned to normal by then.



# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR TEACHING  
WILL BE IMPACTED BY COVID-19?



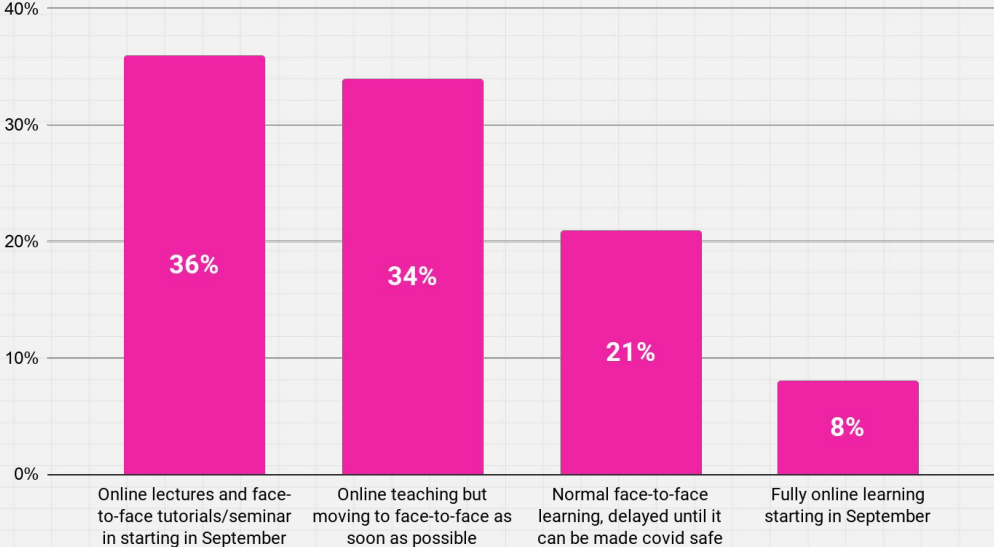
● Better ● No impact ● Worse

75% of students said they think their **teaching will be negatively impacted** by Covid-19, while 17% said they thought there would be no impact. This is up from the previous report, where 13% of students felt there would be no impact.

8% of students said they thought teaching would be improved by Covid-19.

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

**COVID-19 MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON UNIVERSITIES THIS SEPTEMBER, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD YOU PREFER?**

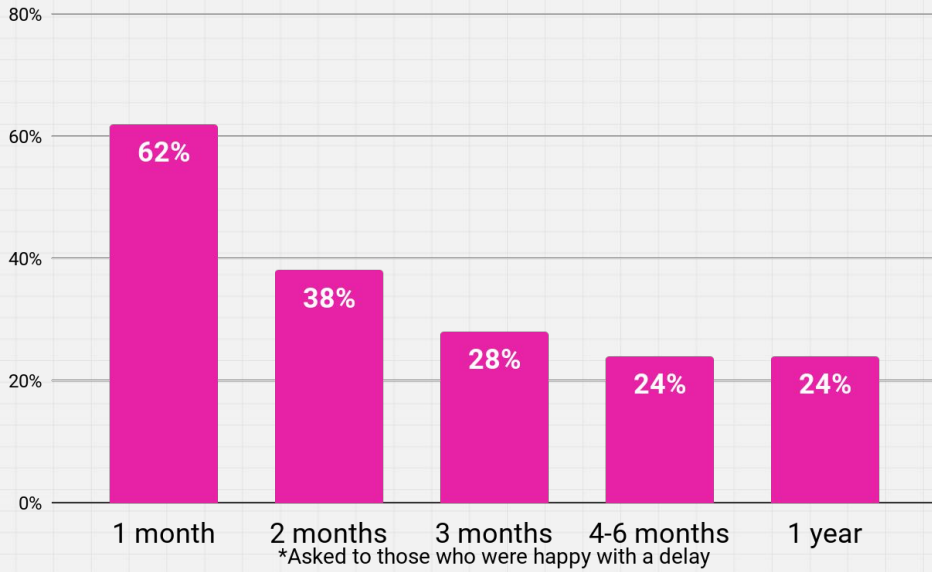


We asked prospective students what approach they would like their university to take if teaching is impacted by Covid-19 in September. Only 8% said they would want fully online learning. However, 34% said they'd want online teaching but moving to face-to-face as soon as possible.

This week, the most popular choice (36%) was to have **online lectures and face-to-face tutorials/seminars**. 21% of students said they would want to have normal face-to-face learning but delayed until it can be made Covid-19 safe.

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

**HOW LONG WOULD YOU BE HAPPY FOR IT TO BE DELAYED FOR? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY**



We asked those who said they would prefer normal face-to-face teaching but delayed until it could be made Covid-19 safe how long they would be happy to delay their learning.

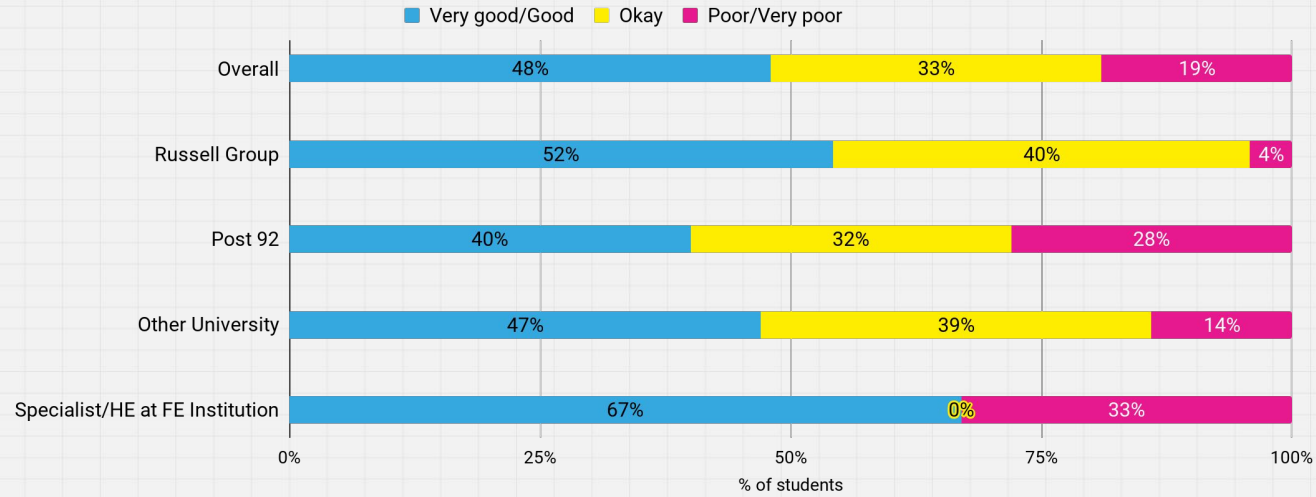
The most popular answer was **1 month**, with 62% saying they would be happy to postpone learning for this long.

Only 35% would want to delay for an entire year.

*Question asked to those who were happy with a delay*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

## HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE ONLINE LEARNING PROVISION FROM YOUR UNIVERSITY?



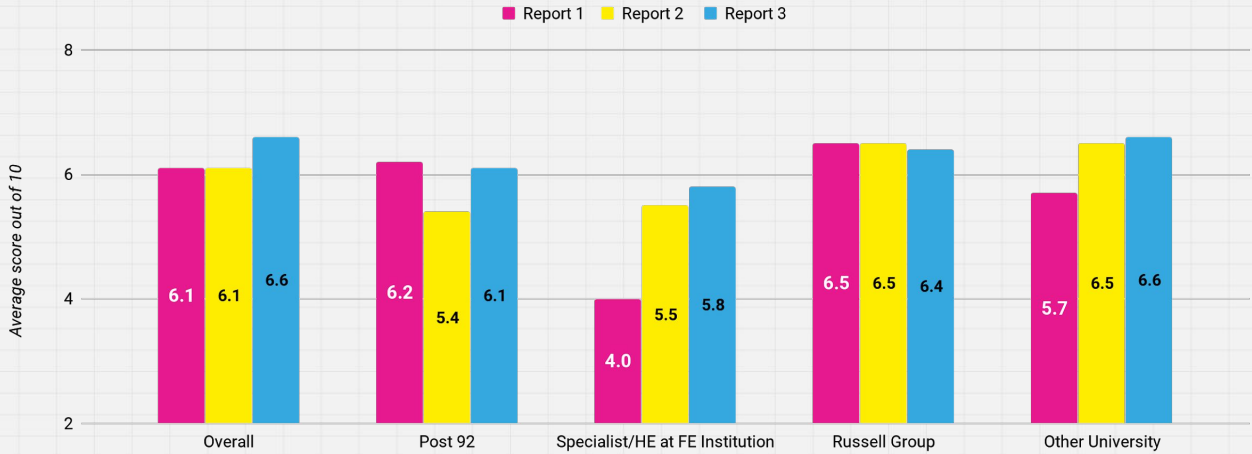
We asked current students how they would rate the quality of their online learning, and overall, **48% said very good/good** and **41% said okay**.

Specialist Universities online learning provision had the highest rating, with 67% of students rating it as very good or good. Russell Group universities were the next highest, with 52% of students rating their online learning provision as good or very good.

*Question asked to current students*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

**ON A SCALE OF 0 TO 10, WHERE 10 IS EXTREMELY WELL, HOW WELL DO YOU THINK YOUR UNIVERSITY IS HANDLING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?**



Overall, current students rated their university's handling of the pandemic as 6.6 out of 10, which is higher than we have seen in the two previous reports.

Other Universities students and Russell Group students rated their universities highest this week, at 6.6 and 6.4 out of 10 respectively.

Specialist / HE at FE institutions scored the lowest this week with a score of 5.8.

*Question asked to current students*

# SECTION 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

When analysing why students felt their universities were handling this well or not so well, the key positive themes this week were around being **open with plans for next year** and **regular communication**. Students rated universities poorly in regards to their lack of financial or learning support.

## WHY HAVE YOU RATED YOUR UNIVERSITY THIS WAY?

AS A PART-TIME LONG DISTANCE COURSE THE FUNDAMENTALS OF TEACHING REMAIN UNCHANGED, HOWEVER I DON'T FEEL THE UNIVERSITY HAS REACHED OUT TO IT'S STUDENTS TO ENSURE WE ARE STILL ABLE TO COMPLETE THE ASSESSMENTS IN THE SAME MANNER AS PRE-COVID, AS NOW THERE IS OTHER EXTERNAL FACTORS IMPACTING OUR LEARNING.

TERRIBLE EDUCATION SOLUTIONS AND NO FINANCIAL ACTION.

THE UNIVERSITY HAS OFFERED US FREE MASKS AND OTHER PARAPHERNALIA AND HAS OFFERED REMOTE TEACHING FOR MOST ASPECTS OF COURSE, WHICH NOW WON'T BE STARTING UNTIL OCTOBER, ALLOWING ME TO GET A JOB AND CARRY ON WORKING DURING CLASS.

NECESSARY PRECAUTION WAS TAKEN AND GOOD COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT.

THERE WAS LITTLE TO NO SUPPORT DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS FROM THE UNIVERSITY.

DOCKING STUDENT FINANCE PAYMENTS AND DELAYING THEM UNTIL OCTOBER SO NO ONE CAN AFFORD TO PAY RENT, ONLINE TEACHING IS THE BARE MINIMUM AND THE CHANCELLOR NOT INTRODUCING A NO-DETRIMENT POLICY, LIMITED ONLINE RESOURCES FOR UNITS WHERE READING IS NOT ONLINE.

EXAMS WERE QUITE STRESS FREE.

GOOD MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES SYSTEM FOR AFFECTED STUDENTS, CLEAR COMMUNICATION FROM DEPARTMENTS, ALTERNATIVE EXAMINATIONS WERE SMOOTH WITH CLEAR GUIDELINES, AND GENERALLY GOOD COMMUNICATION

MY UNI IS LEADING IN THE RESEARCH FOR THE COVID-19 VACCINE.

## SECTION 4: QUOTES OF THE WEEK

IF THERE IS ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH US ABOUT COVID-19, THEN PLEASE LET US KNOW.

“

Considering taking a gap year due to a weak job market.

It has hugely affected young individuals including both myself and those surrounding me. Mainly the lack of stability or clear future (including near future and socialisation with peers and further career opportunities).

**More needs to be done to support the younger generation.**

The government's recommendations on social distancing haven't taken students (and others) living in shared housing into account at all. There was literally no way I could have avoided people in the shared kitchen or bathroom.

**I wish we were back to normal life again.**

”

# CONCLUSION:

This week, students told us that personal protective equipment is an important factor to them feeling safe on university campuses, with the majority of students wanting to wear it themselves, and wanting their tutors and lecturers to wear it too.

70% of students told us that they would want to wear a mask in lectures, whilst 60% said they'd want to wear them in libraries, seminars and common areas. Additionally, 1 in 2 students told us that they would want lecturers and tutors to wear PPE some of the time. And 3 in 10 told us they would want lecturers and tutors to wear PPE all the time.

However, students did tell us that they felt wearing masks would hinder them socially, commenting on the impact on their university experience. 4 in 10 students said it would prevent them from enjoying societies/clubs, and 4 in 10 also said it would hinder them making friends. Nearly half of students said masks would prevent them speaking up in lectures or seminars.

One student told us "safety must be a priority but wearing it all the time could hinder education", suggesting universities must strive to find a balance whilst keeping students and staff safe.