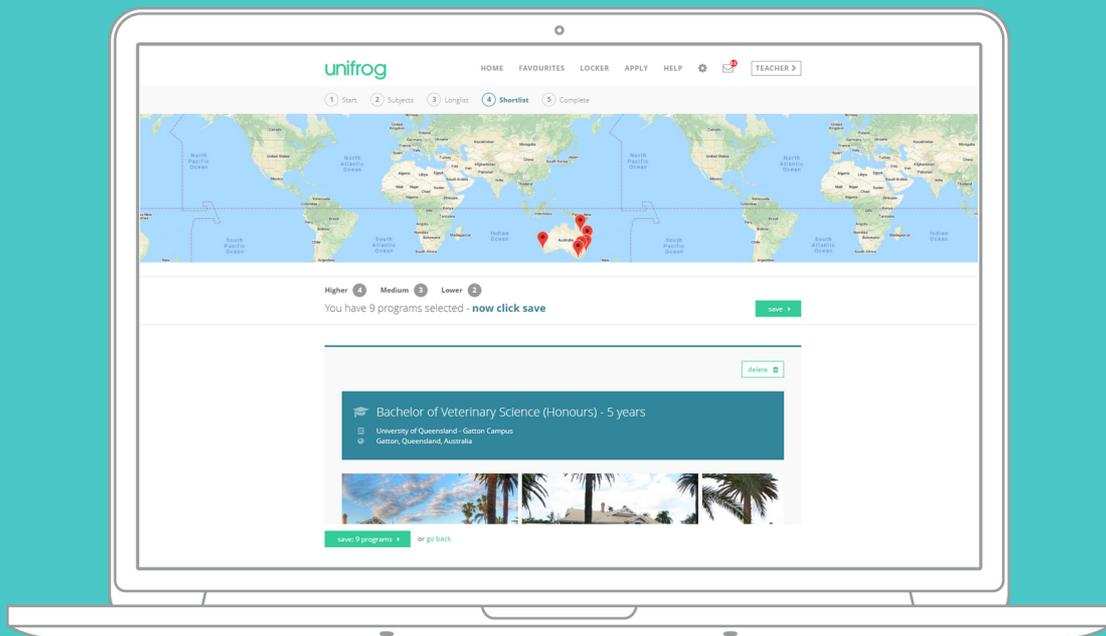


# Global Higher Education



A report on international students' attitudes towards higher education

## THE REPORT'S SIX KEY FINDINGS

1

**12%** of students say the **COVID-19 pandemic** has made them **more likely to apply to university**, rising to **20% of students in China**.

2

Students **value in-person teaching**. **88%** would apply to a university offering all teaching in person, whereas **only 17%** would apply somewhere offering **online-only teaching**.

3

**Australasia** has seen the **biggest rise** in the number of university shortlists made, with students making **126% more Australasian shortlists** than last year.

4

**Brexit** has made the **UK a less attractive destination** to apply to for **31%** of students, while **over a third** no longer want to apply to the **US as a result of the current political situation**.

5

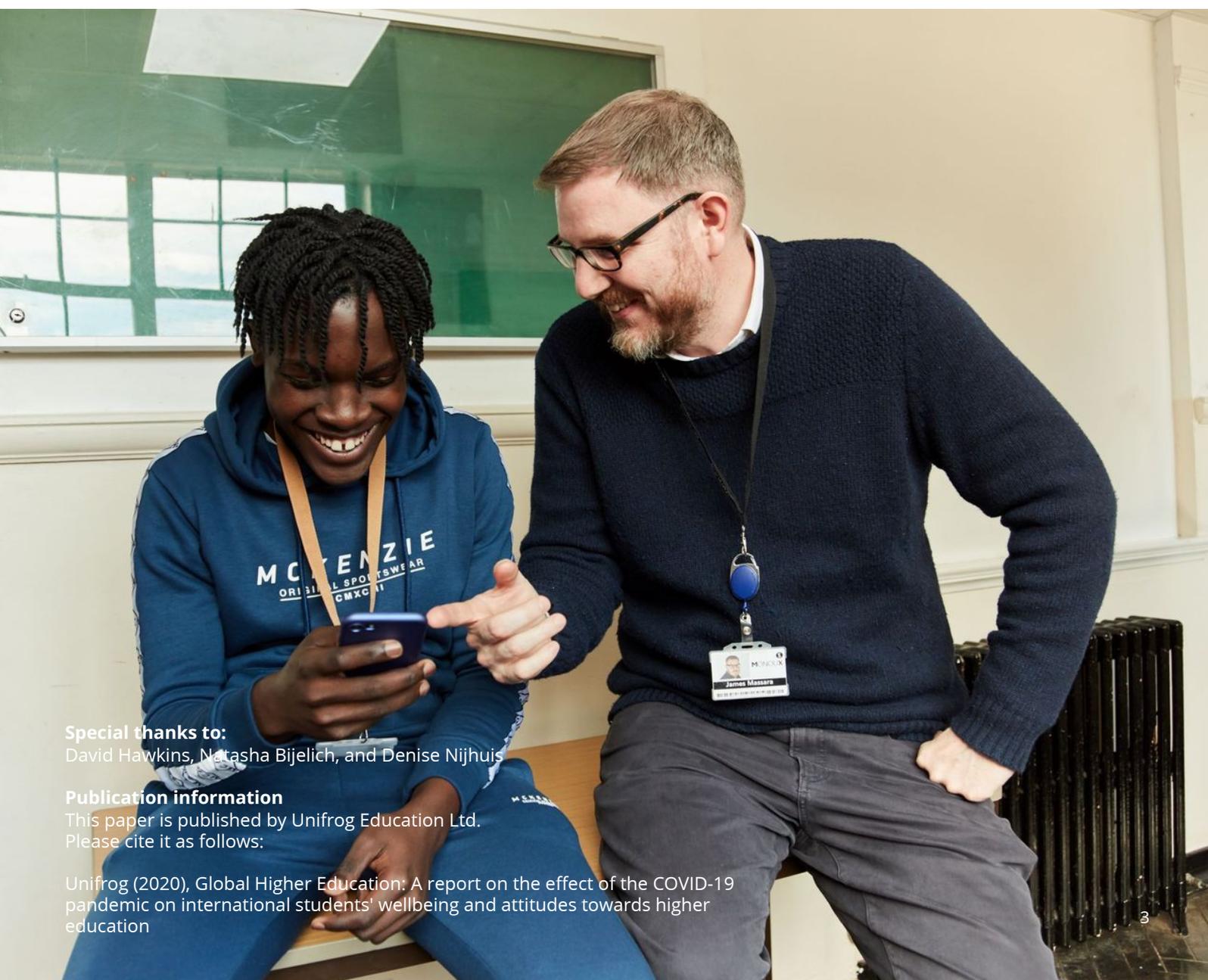
Students who feel they have **good levels of support** from their teachers and counselors are **happier and more motivated** than those who feel they do not.

6

Students remain **apprehensive** about the future, with **59%** of students **'very concerned' about upcoming exams**.

## CONTENTS

Foreword.....	4
Introduction.....	5
<b>1</b> Higher Education.....	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b> Global destinations.....	<b>12</b>
<b>3</b> Student wellbeing.....	<b>21</b>



### Special thanks to:

David Hawkins, Natasha Bijelich, and Denise Nijhuis

### Publication information

This paper is published by Unifrog Education Ltd.  
Please cite it as follows:

Unifrog (2020), Global Higher Education: A report on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students' wellbeing and attitudes towards higher education

## FOREWORD

After the many challenges that students have faced, the summer results and confirmation period reinforced the importance of guidance on post-secondary options. Whether students are considering a degree, apprenticeship, or one of many other routes, it's vital that they get access to high-quality guidance.

To use an analogy, those of us guiding students to make their choices and their applications for life beyond school are 'building the plane while we're flying it'. We need to remember that while we are doing so we have our learners and their supporters strapped in at the back, trusting us to do a good job and help them to make as soft a landing as possible.

It's also clear from this report that the pandemic will push students towards what they feel are 'safer' destinations choices. For some, stepping away from their home community to aspire to university – be it down the road or the other side of the planet – will bring worry.

For others, a retreat to a degree with a clear vocational path or a university with brand-name cachet may be that safety net. Here again, advisers are key.

For us with our focus on supporting schools and students with global applications, it's concerning to see students say that they have been put off applying to some destinations. But perhaps given the seismic shifts going on right now it is completely understandable.

So, this report gives us all much to think about, and some challenges to ponder. But it's also a call to action. Young people need guidance. Young people need to aspire. Most importantly, young people need committed advisers who have their best interests at heart to dig in, stand behind them, and show them a path to a brighter future.



**David Hawkins**

Director and Founder, The University Guys

## INTRODUCTION

Our COVID-19 Impact report - published in May 2020 - looked at the initial impact of the pandemic on international students across the world. With the majority of students now back in the classroom, we look at the longer-term impact of the extended period of distance learning. We explore the effects it has had on students' wellbeing, motivation, and their attitudes towards higher education and global study destinations.

At Unifrog, we're in a privileged position to do this. We surveyed 700 international students in schools across the globe and analysed the behaviour of over 64,000 active international students on the platform. We also spoke to counselors at international schools, admissions staff at universities around the world, and international applications experts, The University Guys.

The first chapter looks at how the pandemic has affected students' attitudes towards higher education. The number of university shortlists has continued to rise as students spent more time learning online and evaluating the many higher education options on offer. It's clear that the experience of

prolonged online learning has made students appreciate the value of in-person teaching with an overwhelming majority keen to apply for universities where this is on offer.

We then look at the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and other political factors have changed students' attitudes towards which destinations they want to apply to. While the US and UK remain the most popular destinations for international students, their popularity is on the decline while Australasia and Canada's popularity is rising. We also explore the trend for aspirational applications, with the most prestigious, well-known universities far more shortlisted than other institutions in their university systems.

In the third chapter we come to the ongoing impact the pandemic is having on students' mental wellbeing. While still feeling demotivated and concerned about upcoming exams, they're finding it easy to adjust to being back in the classroom, and support from teachers continues to have a positive effect on their reported levels of happiness and motivation.



# 1 Higher Education



## INCREASED UNIFROG PLATFORM USAGE

As we saw in our previous COVID-19 Impact report - published at the start of the pandemic - there has been an increase in the number of shortlists made on the Unifrog platform.

This is a result of both the shift to online learning and the need for students to spend more time evaluating the various options now available to them - including online learning, switching destinations, or taking a gap year.

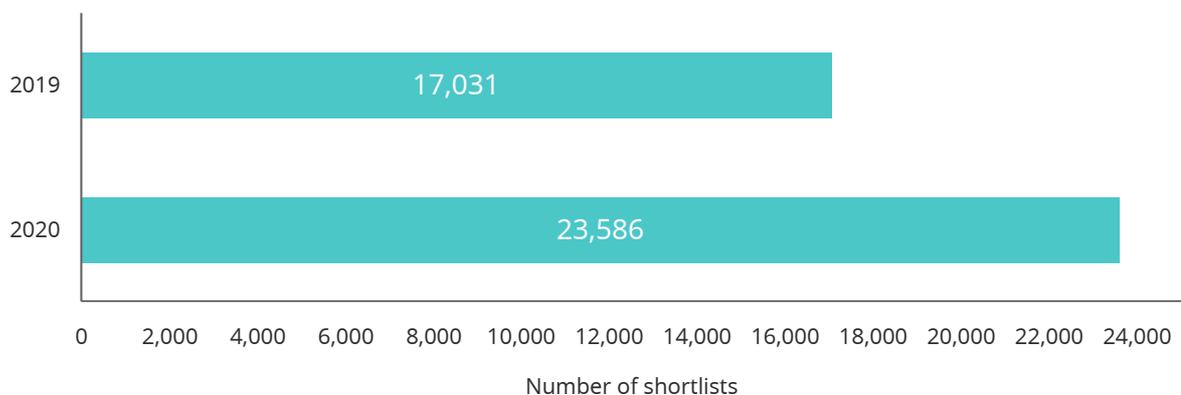
In the period from 16 March to 31 August this year, there was

an increase in the number of shortlists made across all of the university search tools, with the exception of the UK universities tool. This increase in the number of university shortlists created was backed up by the survey of over 700 international students with 12% saying the COVID-19 pandemic has made them more likely to apply to university.

Interestingly, the pandemic has had the biggest impact on students at international schools in China. Among Chinese students, the proportion who say they are more likely to apply to university as a result of the pandemic rises to 20%.

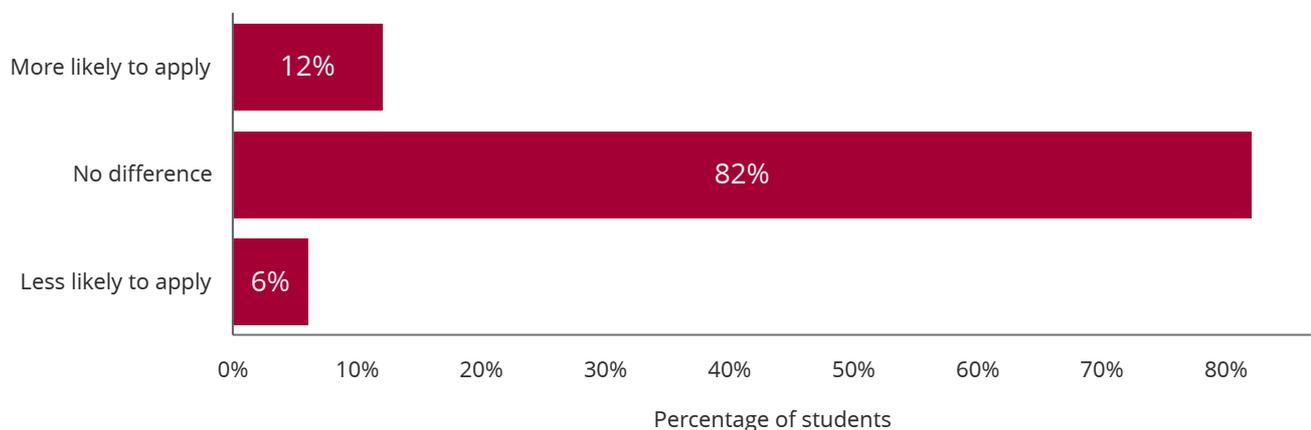
**Figure 1.1**

**How many shortlists were made on Unifrog's university search tools from 16 March - 31 August 2019, compared to the same period in 2020?**



**Figure 1.2**

**Has the COVID-19 pandemic made students more or less likely to apply to university?**





## UNIVERSITY'S NEW NORMAL

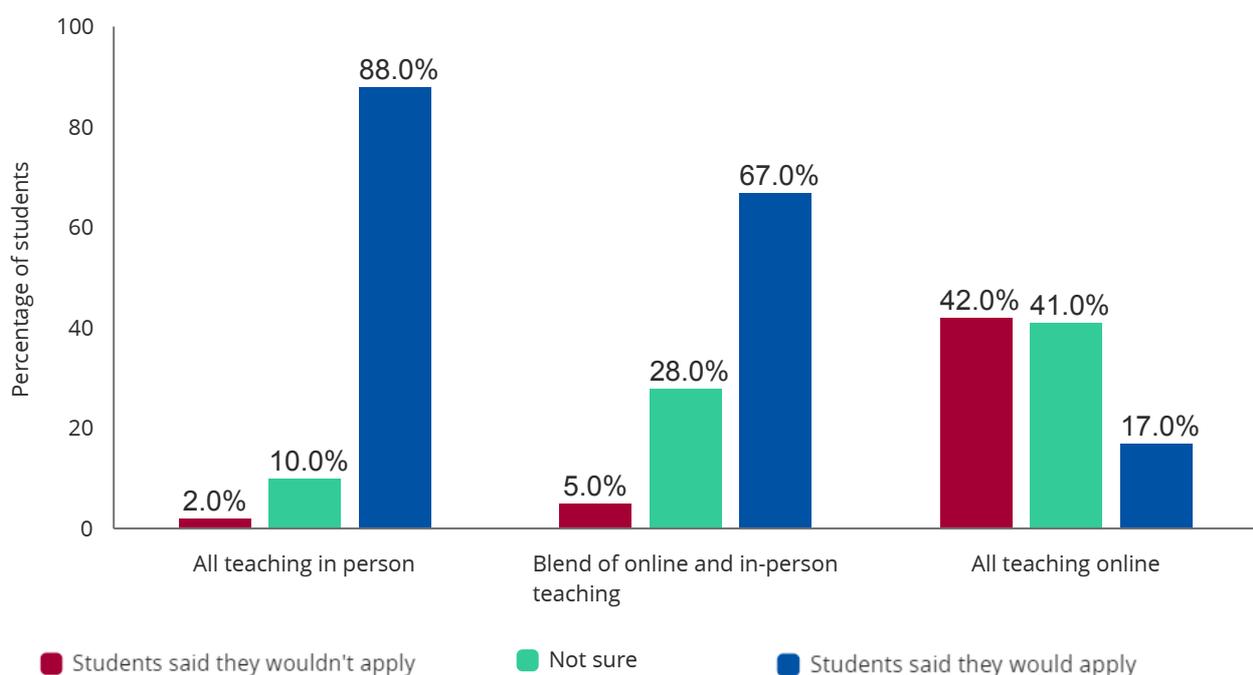
There is continued uncertainty around what university will look like in the coming years. This is likely to be one of the factors driving the increase in the number of university shortlists as students are keen to research all their options fully before making a decision.

In the survey, students report finding it easier to concentrate at school than at home, and they're keen to experience in-person teaching at university. When asked which universities they would apply to, just 17% said they would apply to a university offering online teaching only. 67% would apply to a university offering a blended model of teaching and well over three quarters of students (88%) would apply to a university offering all teaching in person.

For the majority of students, the experience of distance learning during lockdown seems to have made them realise the value of in-person teaching and made them more likely to apply to universities where this is on offer.

**Figure 1.3**

**What proportion of students would apply to a university offering the following learning experiences?**



## DECIDING FACTORS

Students at international schools have traditionally relied on in-person university open days and in-person visits from university representatives. Now, students are entirely reliant on online means of finding information - including social media and online discussion boards. It's important that counselors provide students with reliable sources of information about university applications to counter any misinformation they may pick up during their independent research.

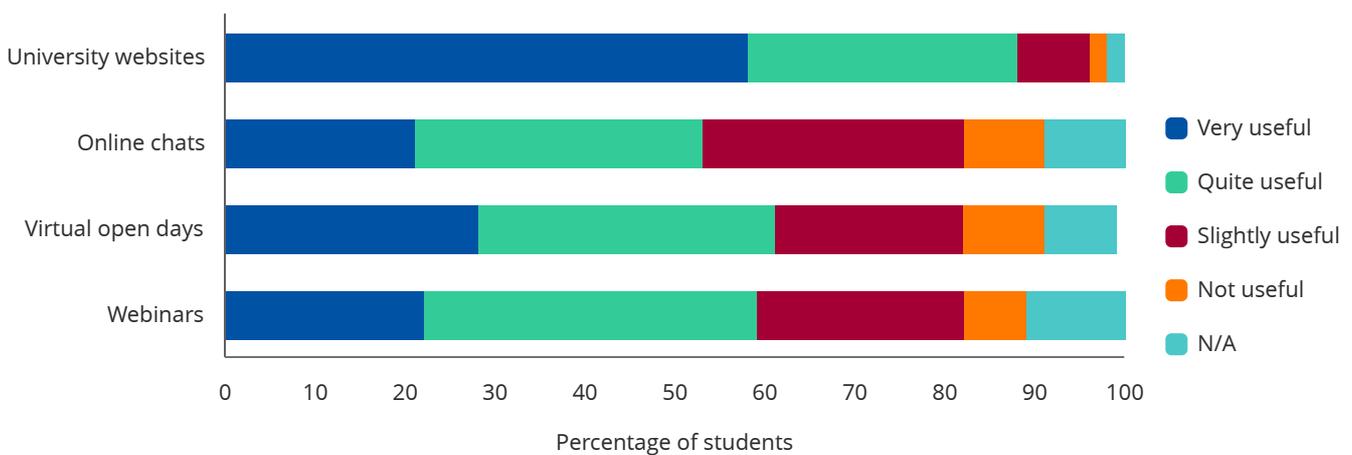
When we asked students how they're researching different universities in the absence of in-person open days and visits, the resource they find most useful is a university's website. 60% of students report that they find university websites 'very

useful'. This is compared to 31% who find virtual open days 'very useful' and just 22% who say the same about webinars. However, 11% of students responded that webinars were 'not applicable' to them, which may suggest that students are simply not aware of them.

In a sign of the times, a university's response to COVID-19 now ranks as the third most important factor when students are considering where to apply. 62% of international students rate it as 'quite important' or 'very important'. Academic experience remains most important, with 83% of students rating it as 'quite' or 'very important'. This is followed by the campus experience, ranked by three quarters of students as 'quite' or 'very important'.

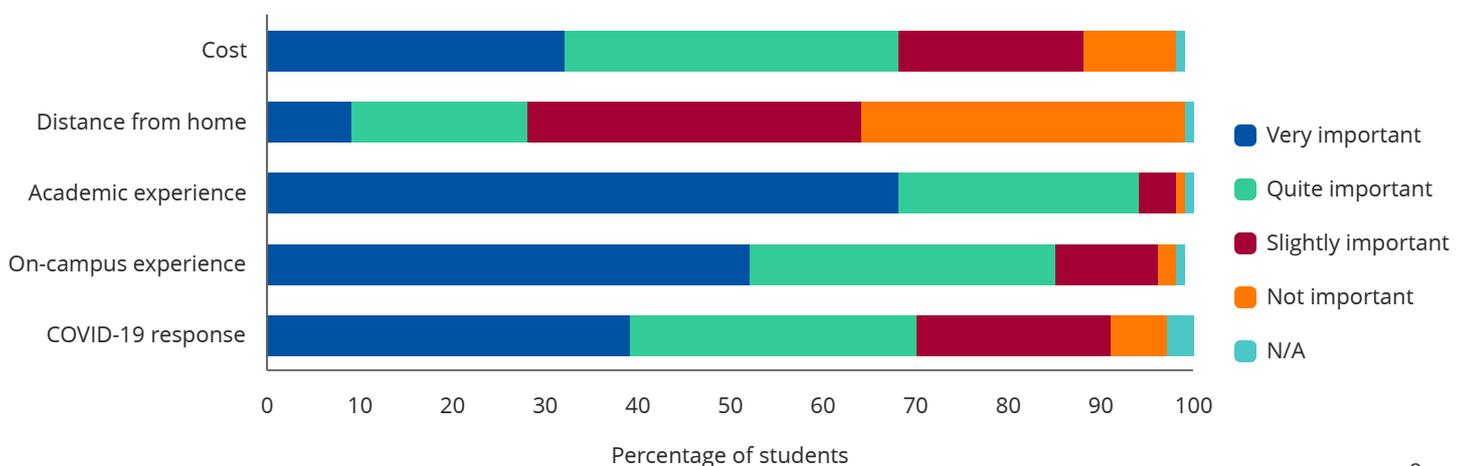
**Figure 1.4**

**How useful do students find these different online resources when deciding where to apply to university?**



**Figure 1.5**

**How important to students are these different factors when thinking about applying to a university?**



## WHAT TO STUDY

When it comes to which subjects students are interested in applying for, Business and Business-related degrees are the most shortlisted across all of the university search tools.

Medicine is significantly more popular on the European universities tool than on the US and Canadian universities tools. It's the second most shortlisted subject for students looking to apply to university in Europe, compared to the sixth most popular for students looking to apply to Canada and the US. This reflects the growing awareness among international students of the well-regarded and relatively affordable Medical degrees on offer at many Eastern European universities.

When broken down by gender, Psychology and Medicine are the most shortlisted degree subjects for girls whereas boys show a preference for Economics and Computer Science. On the US universities tool, 'undeclared' is the most popular major for girls whereas it only ranks fourth for boys. As 'undeclared' is the most common way to apply to university in the US, this may indicate that girls are more aware of how the US application process works.

**Figure 1.6** What are the most shortlisted majors on the US universities tool?

All students	Girls	Boys
Business	Undeclared	Business
Undeclared	Business	Computer Science
Computer Science	Psychology	Economics
Economics	Biology and Biological Sciences	Undeclared
Biology and Biological Sciences	Medicine	Aerospace Engineering

**Figure 1.7** What are the most shortlisted majors on the Canadian tool?

All students	Girls	Boys
Business and Management	Psychology	Computer science and AI
Psychology	Business and Management	Business and Management
Computer science and AI	Biology and Biological sciences	Mechanical engineering
Biology and Biological sciences	Medical and health sciences	Economics
Economics	Economics	Medical and health sciences

**Figure 1.8** What are the most shortlisted majors on the European tool?

All students	Girls	Boys
Business and Management	Business and Management	Business and Management
Medicine	Psychology	Medicine
Psychology	Medicine	Economics
Economics	Politics and Int. relations	Computer science and AI
Politics and Int. relations	Law and law studies	Mechanical engineering

## KEY ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS

---

### 1

Encourage students to create a university shortlist. This will give them a goal to work towards and help boost their motivation to study and do well.

### 2

Provide students with reliable sources of information to counter any misinformation they may have picked up from social media and online message boards.

### 3

Highlight all the online resources that universities provide in addition to their websites such as webinars, virtual open days, and one-to-one or small group online chats.

### 4

Make sure students are aware of the ways in which applications processes vary between destinations so they stand the best chance of application success.

# 2 Global destinations



## THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

While international students are making more university shortlists on Unifrog, the increase isn't shared equally across the different university search tools.

As we saw earlier, the tool that has seen the biggest increase is the Australasian universities tool, with a huge 126% rise in the number of shortlists made compared to the same period last year. This is likely a reflection of how well Australia, and New Zealand in particular, are seen to be managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

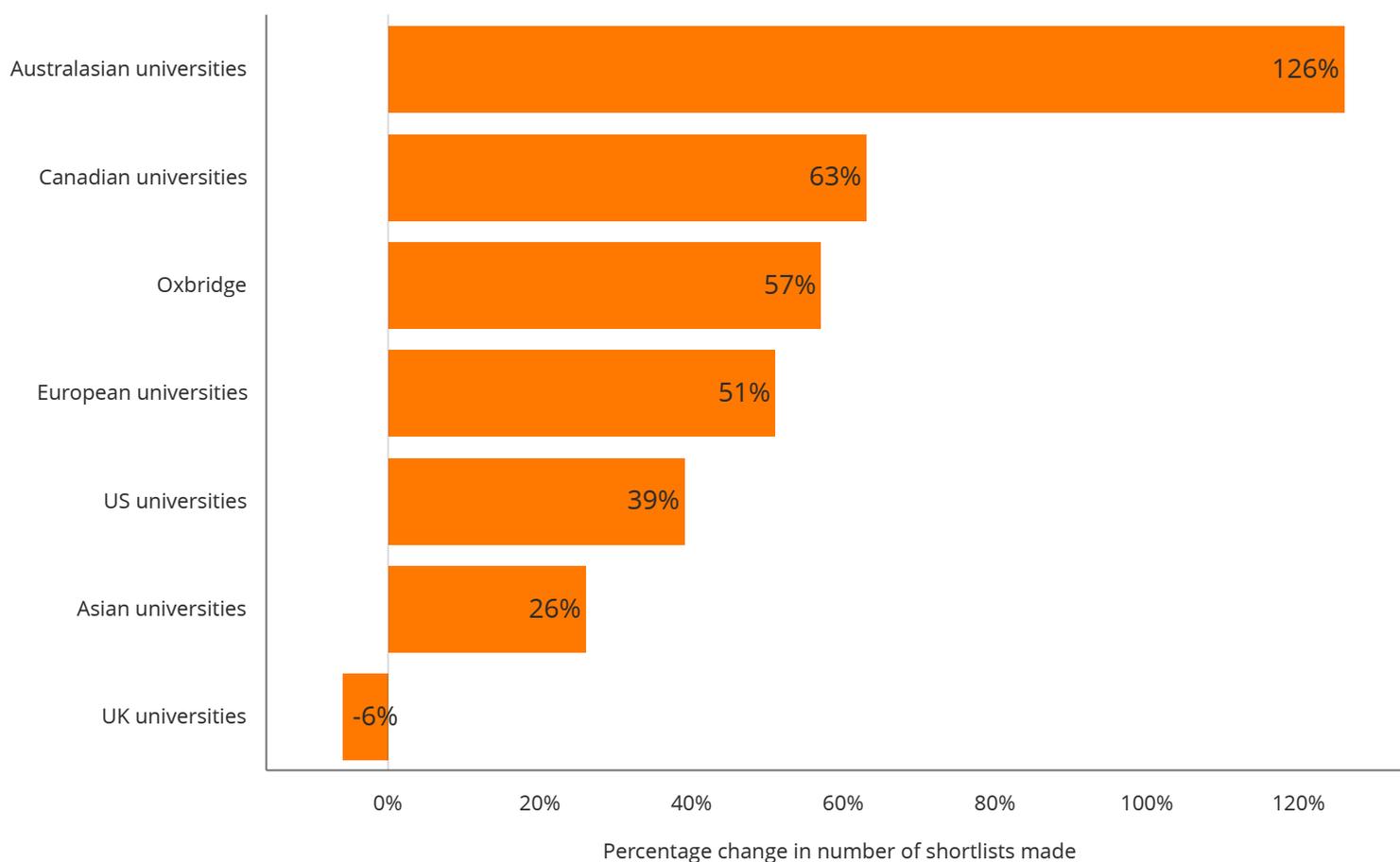
The Australasian tool is followed by the Canadian universities tool which has seen a 63% increase and - interestingly - the Oxbridge tool. The Oxbridge tool allows students to compare

different colleges at Oxford and Cambridge and has seen a 57% increase in the number of shortlists created.

In contrast, the only tool to see a decline in the number of shortlists made is the UK universities search tool. International students made 6% fewer UK universities shortlists than in the same period last year. In the context of a 22% overall increase in the number of shortlists made across all the university search tools, this 6% decline is particularly significant. Neither is this trend confined to the Unifrog platform. UCAS figures showed that by 30 June this year, the number of EU applicants to university in the UK was down 2% on last year, with just over 49,500 applicants from the EU<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 2.1

What has been the percentage change in the number of shortlists made on Unifrog's university search tools from 16 March - 31 August, compared to the same period in 2019?



<sup>1</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jul/09/uk-universities-record-number-applications-lockdown>



## TOP DESTINATIONS

Despite the significant fall in the number of UK university shortlists, the UK remains the most popular destination for international students from the five countries where we have the most partner schools: the United Arab Emirates, Spain, Hong Kong, Qatar, and Italy.

It is important to note that many of Unifrog's partner schools are British international schools, which helps to explain the UK's prominence in the rankings.

Figure 2.2

What are the 10 most shortlisted destinations for students?

Students in the UAE	Students in Spain	Students in Hong Kong	Students in Qatar	Students in Italy
UK	UK	UK	UK	UK
USA	USA	USA	USA	USA
Canada	The Netherlands	Hong Kong	Canada	The Netherlands
The Netherlands	Spain	Australia	Australia	Ireland
Australia	Ireland	Canada	The Netherlands	Italy
United Arab Emirates	Canada	Singapore	Ireland	Canada
Ireland	Australia	The Netherlands	Singapore	Spain
Singapore	Italy	Ireland	Qatar	Australia
Italy	France	New Zealand	Germany	Hong Kong
India	Denmark	Germany	Italy	France

## EXPERT VIEW



### Denise Nijhuis

**Coordinator Student Recruitment and Admissions**

**University Centre Roosevelt**

University College Roosevelt is a Liberal Arts and Sciences college located in Middelburg, The Netherlands.

### “Top-notch education”

University in the Netherlands is so popular among international students because it offers a top-notch education. The quality of education is similar to that in the UK and the US, but much more affordable.

I think the COVID-19 pandemic and global political factors have had an impact but I think it's really the quality of education at an affordable rate that is the main reason why the Netherlands has been increasing in popularity over the last few years.

### Hyper multi-cultural environment

Universities in the Netherlands are highly international. At most English-taught programmes, international students make up 30-80% of the student population. This means that not only will students receive an international education, but they'll be in a hyper multi-cultural environment, meeting people from all over the world.

### Hybrid teaching model

COVID-19 restrictions vary across the Netherlands. At the moment, most universities are on a hybrid model of teaching with around 20-40% of classes in-person.

### English speaking

The ability to experience a wide scope of English-taught programmes in a country with high levels of English proficiency is another big draw for international students. They're able to settle into life in the Netherlands without the added challenge of having to learn a new language.

### Ease of travel

Not only is the Netherlands a remarkably safe country, it's also super easy to get to from other countries. This makes it a great choice for international students who want to study somewhere that's relatively easy to get to, but also want to explore Europe while they're studying here.

## STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS

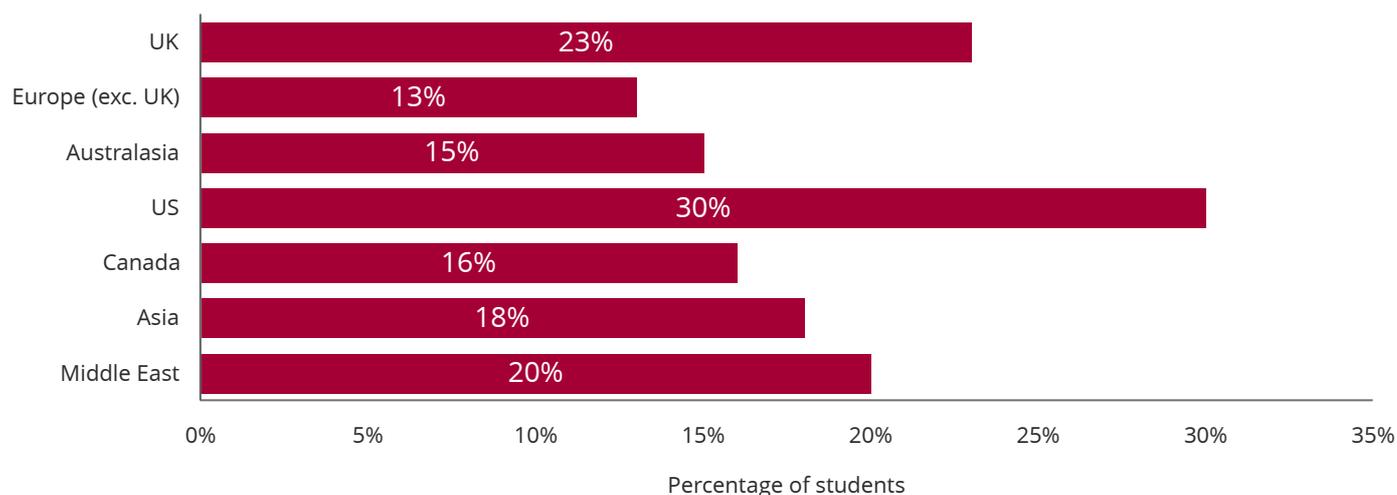
Global higher education has experienced some big changes over the past year. We've seen Brexit negotiations stall, civil disorder in the US and Hong Kong (two of the top destinations for international students), as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

We asked students if the past year had had an impact on their thoughts regarding where to apply to university and if any destinations had come off their list of possibilities. Just under half the students surveyed (47%) said there had been no change to where they want to apply. However, nearly a third of students (30%) said the US had come off their list of possibilities, followed by the UK which 23% of students said they no longer wanted to apply to.

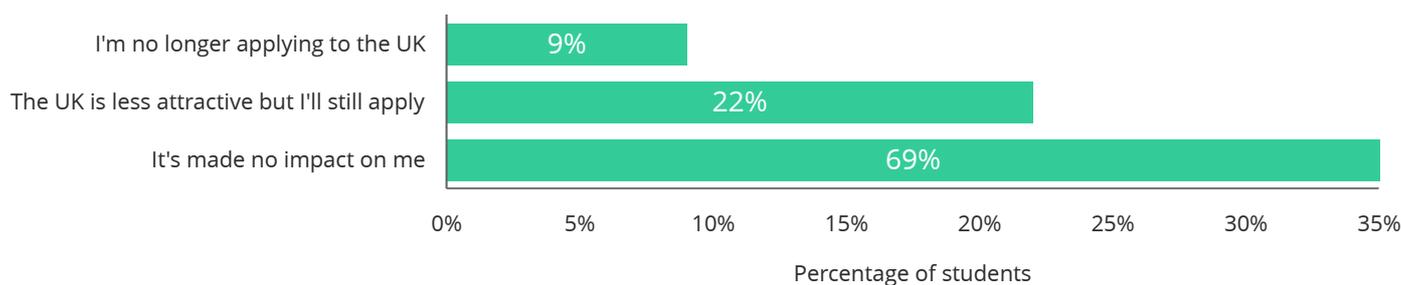
We asked students whether the recent fee changes for EU students has affected whether they want to apply to the UK. On 23 June this year, the UK government announced that students from the EU, EEA, and Swiss nationals will lose their home fee status and be subject to international student fees for courses starting from September 2021.

The majority of students surveyed (69%) said it had made no difference to how attractive the UK is to them. 22% said it had made the UK less attractive but they would still be applying while 9% said that as a result they would no longer be applying to the UK.

**Figure 2.3** For how many students have these destinations come off their list of possibilities over the last year?



**Figure 2.4** Has the fee change for EU students at UK universities affected whether students want to apply to the UK?

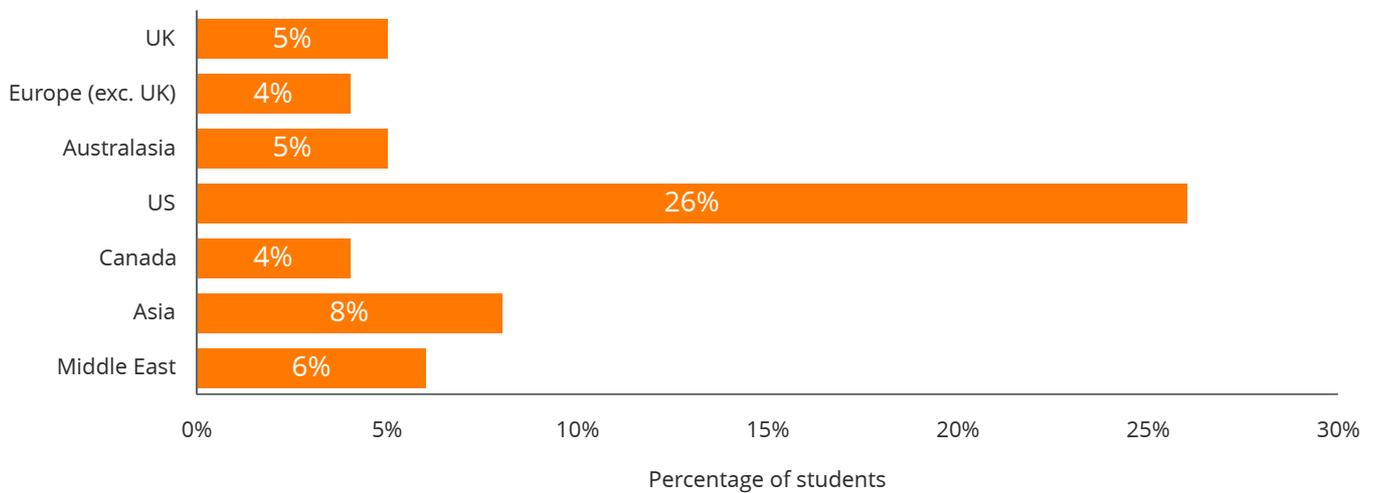


## IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC AND POLITICS

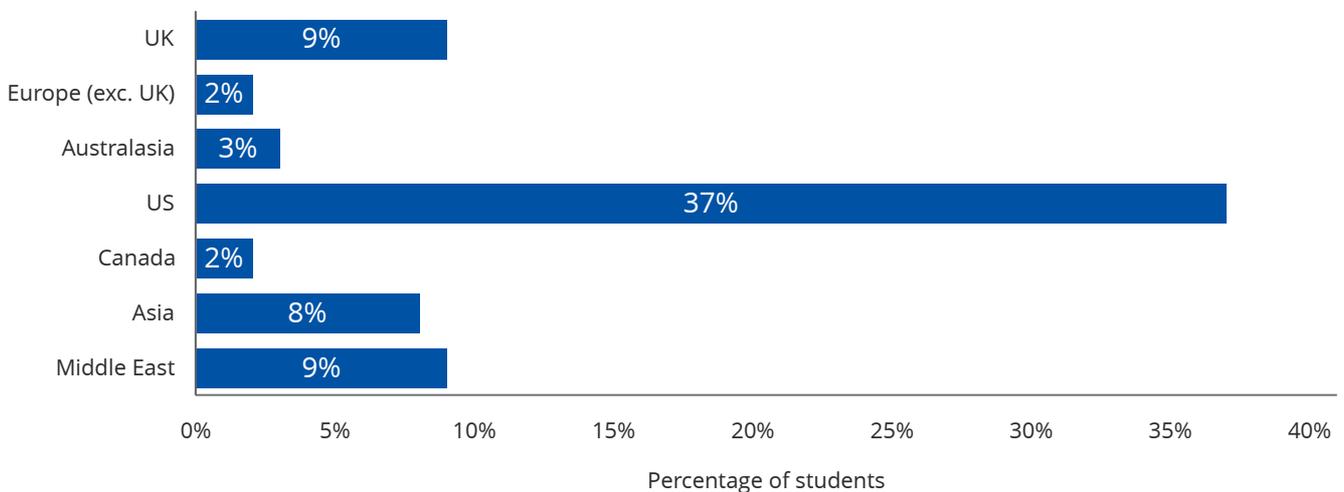
We also asked students if the COVID-19 pandemic was the main reason they no longer wanted to apply to certain destinations. While the majority (70%) said the pandemic hadn't put them off applying anywhere, over a quarter (26%) said it was the main reason behind their decision not to apply to the US anymore. A further 8% said it had caused them to no longer consider applying to Asia and 5% to no longer want to apply to the UK.

The political situation has also had a substantial negative impact on students' attitudes towards applying to university in the US. Over a third of students (37%) say they no longer want to apply to the US mainly because of the political situation. This is significantly higher than the percentage of students who no longer want to apply to university in the UK (9%) or Asia (9%) as a result of the political situation in those destinations.

**Figure 2.5** For these destinations, what percentage of students feel the pandemic has put them off applying?



**Figure 2.6** For these destinations, what percentage of students feel the political situation has put them off applying?



## EXPERT VIEW



### Natasha Bijelich

**Assistant Director, International Student**

**Recruitment**

**University of Toronto**

The University of Toronto is a public research university in Ontario, Canada,

## Why Canada?

There are several key reasons why students find Canada an attractive destination to study:

- Canada consistently ranks as one of the safest and best places in the world to live, with a high standard of living across the country.
- Our education system is recognized internationally and Canada is one of only a handful of countries where public investment in the post-secondary sector is above the global average.
- International students are encouraged to stay in Canada after they graduate, with a generous post-graduation work permit program that allows eligible students to stay in Canada for up to three years after graduation.
- Our education system offers students tremendous flexibility and experiential learning opportunities. Students can combine majors and minors across different subject areas and tailor their academic experience to their unique interests, including paid work experience and meaningful undergraduate research.

## Cautious COVID-19 approach

Canada has taken a cautious approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our government officials have heeded the advice of public health officers, and our nationwide strategy has helped to slow the spread of the virus. The University of Toronto has adopted the same prudent approach.

This fall, our students could choose to take online courses, with both synchronous and asynchronous options, or to take part in carefully monitored in-person classes. Other on-campus activities have also slowly resumed, in a limited fashion.

During the pandemic, we provided over \$4M in COVID-19 emergency grants to more than 4,000 undergraduate students to cover unexpected costs arising from the pandemic – everything from overdue rent to last-minute flight costs.

## Tips for teachers and counselors

For teachers and counselors working with students who may be interested in pursuing their university degree in Canada, here are a few pieces of advice:

- Check us out online! Many of us are offering regular webinars, for students and counselors, to keep you up-to-date on any changes.
- Encourage students to apply early, giving them more time to submit any required documents for admission.
- Reach out if you have any questions! Our staff continue to be available, as always, to help you and your students navigate the application process.

## TOP INSTITUTIONS

When we look at the universities most shortlisted by international students, they're all well-known, highly-competitive institutions such as Trinity College Dublin and Harvard University. It's clear that international students on Unifrog are aspirational and are looking to apply to the world's most well-regarded institutions.

University College London (UCL) is particularly popular. In four out of the five countries where Unifrog has the most partner schools (the United Arab Emirates, Spain, Hong Kong, and Italy) UCL is the most shortlisted institution and is the fourth most shortlisted by students in Qatar. UCL has a large international student population with just over half of its student body (53%) made up of students from outside the UK.

With the exception of Hong Kong, no domestic institutions feature in a country's top five most shortlisted institutions.

This indicates that the majority of students at international schools are keen to study abroad, rather than apply to university in the country where they go to school. Unlike their peers studying in international schools in other countries, many students at international schools in Hong Kong seem interested in staying put, with three domestic universities featuring in the top five. This may be because Hong Kong has its own world-renowned universities, with Hong Kong University, the most popular domestic university for students in Hong Kong, ranked number 22 in the QS World Ranking.

It seems that students at international schools across the world are aware of the challenges they're likely to face when they enter the job market as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's long-term economic repercussions. They understand the weight of a degree from one of the world's leading universities and are motivated to apply to these institutions.

**Figure 2.7**

**What are the top five most shortlisted institutions for students from the five countries with the most Unifrog partner schools?**

Students in the UAE	Students in Spain	Students in Hong Kong	Students in Qatar	Students in Italy
University College London	University College London	University College London	Oxford University	University College London
Oxford University	King's College London	The University of Hong Kong	University of Manchester	King's College London
King's College London	Oxford University	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Cambridge University	University of St Andrews
University of Toronto	University of Bath	King's College London	University College London	Oxford University
University of Manchester	University of St Andrews	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	King's College London	University of Bath

## KEY ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS

---

### 1

Motivate students to explore international opportunities and broaden their horizons by creating a shortlist for a destination they may not have previously considered.

### 2

Encourage students to make use of all the ranking factors on the Unifrog university search tools - such as the QS World Ranking and Times World Ranking - to identify highly-regarded universities they may not have heard of.

### 3

Direct students who express an interest in studying in a particular destination to the Unifrog Know-how library. It contains 100s of guides on what it's like to study in all the top international destinations, as well as information on fees, visas, and how to apply.

### 4

Make students aware of the wide range of special opportunities out there such as contextual offers, scholarships, and summer schools. These will boost their chances of gaining a place on a competitive university course.

# 3 Student wellbeing



## CURRENT STATE OF MIND

Our survey of over 700 international students found that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a challenging time for students and that it's having a clear impact on their mental wellbeing.

We asked students how happy they had felt over the last week, on a scale of 1 to 10. The average response was just 5.7 out of 10. When we split this by gender, boys were slightly happier than girls, scoring their happiness half a point higher on average than girls.

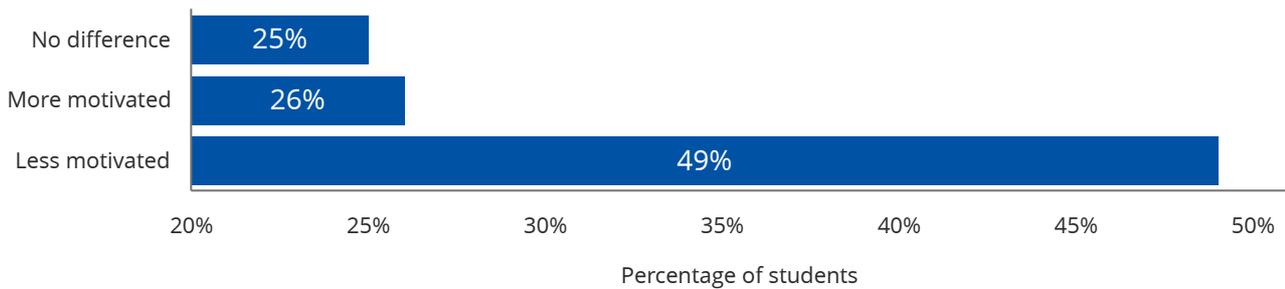
With considerable uncertainty around the future of higher education and employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's unsurprising that students' motivation has taken a hit. Just

under half the students surveyed (49%) said the pandemic had made them less motivated to study and do well.

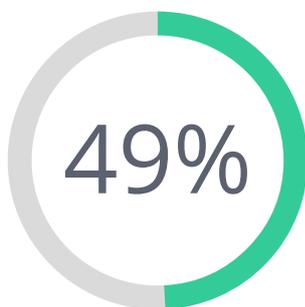
The impact on motivation is most pronounced among students who report finding it more difficult to concentrate at home than at school. When we look at students who struggle to concentrate at home, the percentage who feel less motivated to study and do well increases from 49% to 61%.

For these students, the extended period of learning from home and its impact on their ability to concentrate seems to have had an ongoing effect on their motivation. The hope is that, with the majority of students now back in school full time, motivation levels can start to increase.

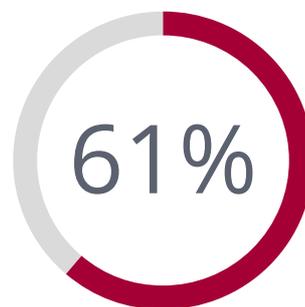
**Figure 3.0** How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected students' motivation to study and do well?



**Figure 3.1** What proportion of students say that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on their motivation to study and do well?



All students surveyed



Students who find it more difficult to work at home

## SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS: MOTIVATION

In our last report we identified support from teachers and counselors as one of the key protective factors for students' mental wellbeing. This continues to be the case.

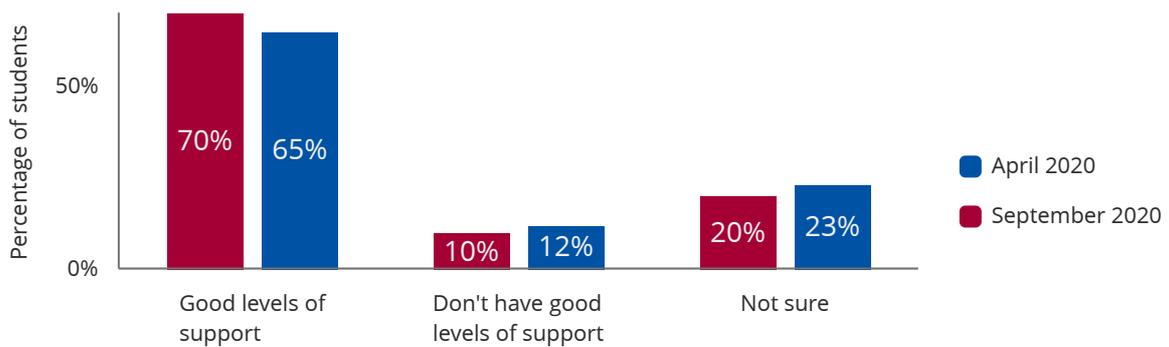
Fortunately, 70% of students currently feel they have good levels of support from their teachers and counselors, an increase of 5% from the start of the pandemic, when most students were learning from home.

Students who feel they have good levels of support from their teachers and counselors have a less than one in two chance (42%) of reporting that the pandemic has made them less motivated to study and do well. For students that don't feel like they have good levels of support, this rises to 70%.



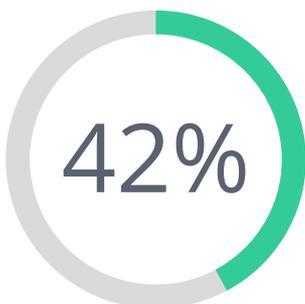
**Figure 3.2**

**What proportion of students feel they have good levels of support from their teachers and counselors, compared to at the start of the pandemic?**



**Figure 3.3**

**How likely are students to say that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their motivation?**



of students who feel they have good levels of support report their motivation has been negatively impacted



of students who do not feel they have good levels of support report their motivation has been negatively impacted

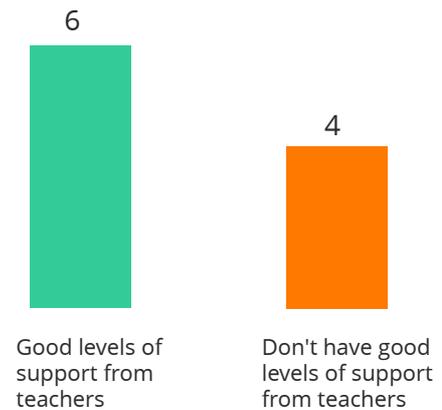
## SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS: HAPPINESS

Support from teachers and counselors also has a positive effect on student's happiness. On average, students with good levels of support report their happiness over the past week as 6 out of 10. This is almost two points higher than those who don't feel as though they have good levels of support. These students report their happiness over the past week as just 4 out of 10.

This highlights how important it is for students to feel as though they have good levels of support from their teachers and counselors. As students navigate the ongoing changes to their lives and education, those with good levels of support from their teachers and counselors are likely to cope much better than their peers who feel they lack this support.

Figure 3.4

How happy (out of 10) are students who do and don't have good levels of support?



## BEING BACK IN SCHOOL

After months of schools being closed across the world, half the students we surveyed (51%) were back in the school building full time, with a further 16% back some of the time. A substantial 29% are not back in the school building at all.

On the whole, students seem positive about being back. We asked them how easy they were finding it to adjust to three different aspects of being back in the school building - having lessons in a classroom, social distancing, and wearing a mask.

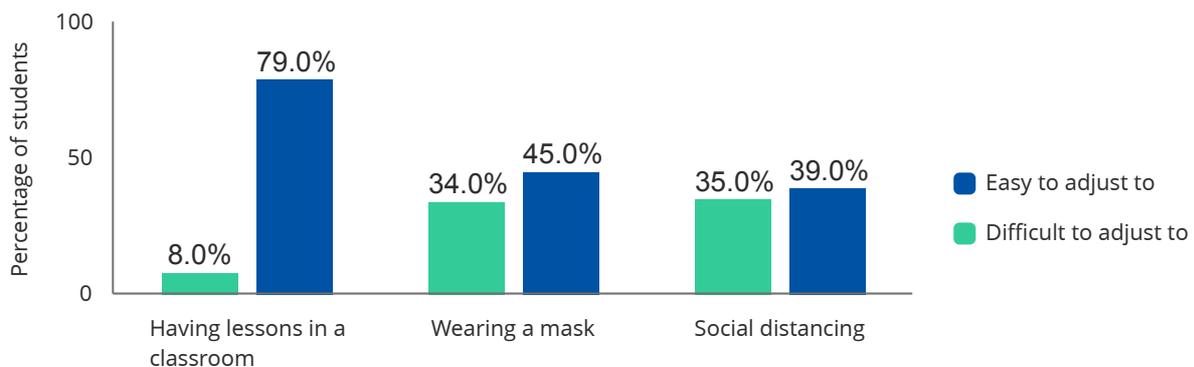
Students are finding having lessons in a classroom again the most straightforward aspect to get used to, with 79% finding it easy to adjust to. When it comes to masks, just under half (45%) are finding it easy to adjust to wearing a mask, with 34% saying they're finding it difficult. The aspect students are

finding most challenging is social distancing. 39% are finding it easy to adjust to new social distancing restrictions in school and just over a third (35%) say they're finding it difficult.

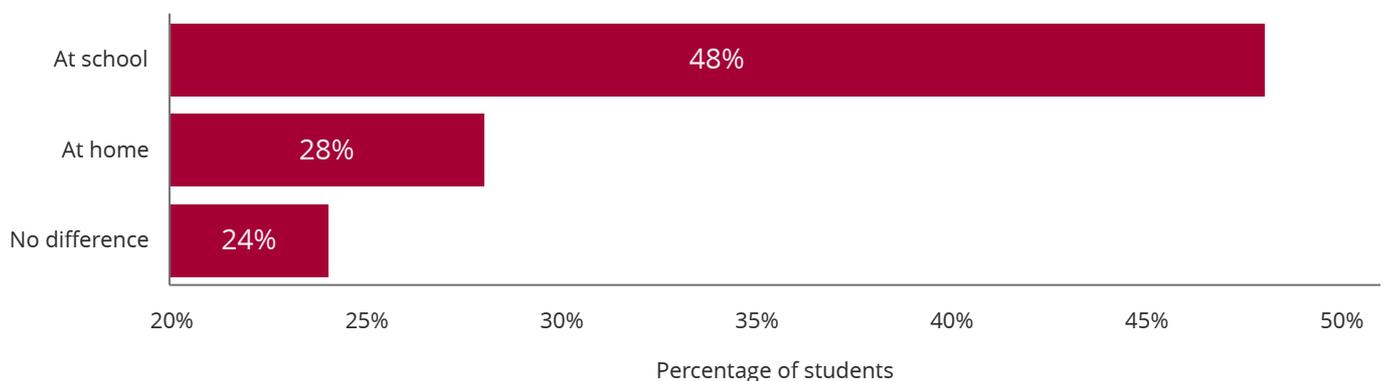
One reason students are finding it easy to adjust to having lessons back in the classroom is that the majority find it easier to concentrate in a classroom setting. Just under half the students surveyed (48%) say they find it easier to concentrate in school, compared to only 28% who find it easier to concentrate at home.

It's important schools consider this and the additional support many students need to learn from home effectively. This will become particularly relevant if schools face partial school closures, or if individual students need to learn from home for an extended period of time.

**Figure 3.5** How easy are students finding it to adjust to different aspects of being back in the school building?



**Figure 3.6** Where do students find it easier to concentrate, at home or at school?



## EXPERT VIEW

### Guidance Department

---

International school  
Japan

All schools in Japan were asked to close from Monday 3 March 2020 to halt the spread of COVID-19, returning after the summer break with social distancing measures in place.

### Grateful to be back

We're a small, community-based school in Japan and so it was particularly difficult for our students to learn from home. They missed out on all the social aspects of school which I believe are big drivers of happiness. Even with face masks and temperature checks, the students are really grateful to be back.

### Challenges of learning from home

We found it was difficult for lots of students to maintain their study skills when learning from home and lots of them were struggling to sleep properly. They were functioning the best they could but sometimes school work fell by the wayside. Saying that, some students did find Maths easier as they were able to pause and rewind the lesson until they understood.

### Focus on wellbeing

I was lucky as my school administration let me shift the focus onto wellbeing while students were away from school. We had seen the effect of lockdown in China so were more prepared and had a good understanding of how stressed students may be. We're having to fill in the gaps now, but it was definitely worth it. Teachers and staff prioritised wellness and understand the challenges of working from home, which greatly benefited students.

### Changes to university plans

Although still motivated to apply to university, most students have changed their plans in some way. We've done lots of work helping students understand that the reality of university for the next year or so may be online learning. As a result, there's a growing understanding of just how important a support network is which has led quite a few students to consider staying in Japan.

### Gap years

We've also got a number of students planning on taking a gap year as things are still so uncertain. They're going to take a year out to pause, focus on what really matters to them, and enjoy another year with their families.

## LOOKING FORWARD

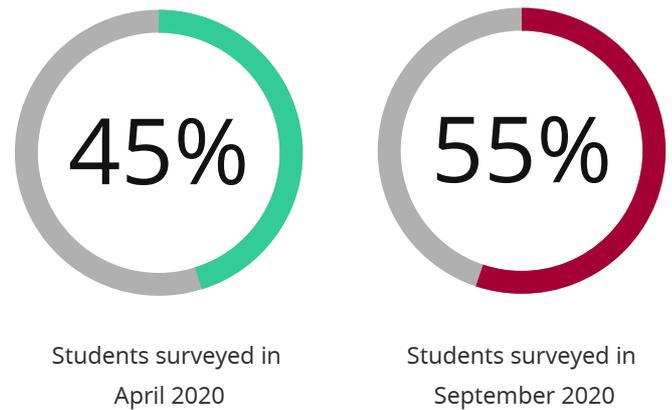
In addition to feeling positive about being back at school, students feel more optimistic about the future, compared to when we surveyed them at the start of the pandemic.

When we asked students how they felt about the future at the start of this academic year, 55% reported feeling optimistic, compared to 45% back at the start of the pandemic. While it's encouraging that there has been an improvement, a substantial number of students still don't feel positive or optimistic about the future.

One possible reason for students' pessimism is the ongoing uncertainty around the exams at the end of this academic year, with 59% of students feeling 'very concerned' about their future exams.

**Figure 3.7**

**What proportion of students feel positive and optimistic about the future?**



## KEY ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS

---

### 1

Prioritise the mental wellbeing of Year 13/ Grade 12s. Reassure them that you're listening to their concerns around this summer's exams and the continued uncertainty surrounding higher education.

### 2

Speak to students to identify those who found it difficult to concentrate while learning from home. Work with them to put steps in place to mitigate the impact of future periods of distance learning.

### 3

Continue to offer one-to-one support to students, wherever possible. Students who feel as though they have good levels of support from their teachers are happier and more motivated.

### 4

Encourage students to record and reflect on the digital skills they've developed learning online, these might be useful in future university and job applications.

