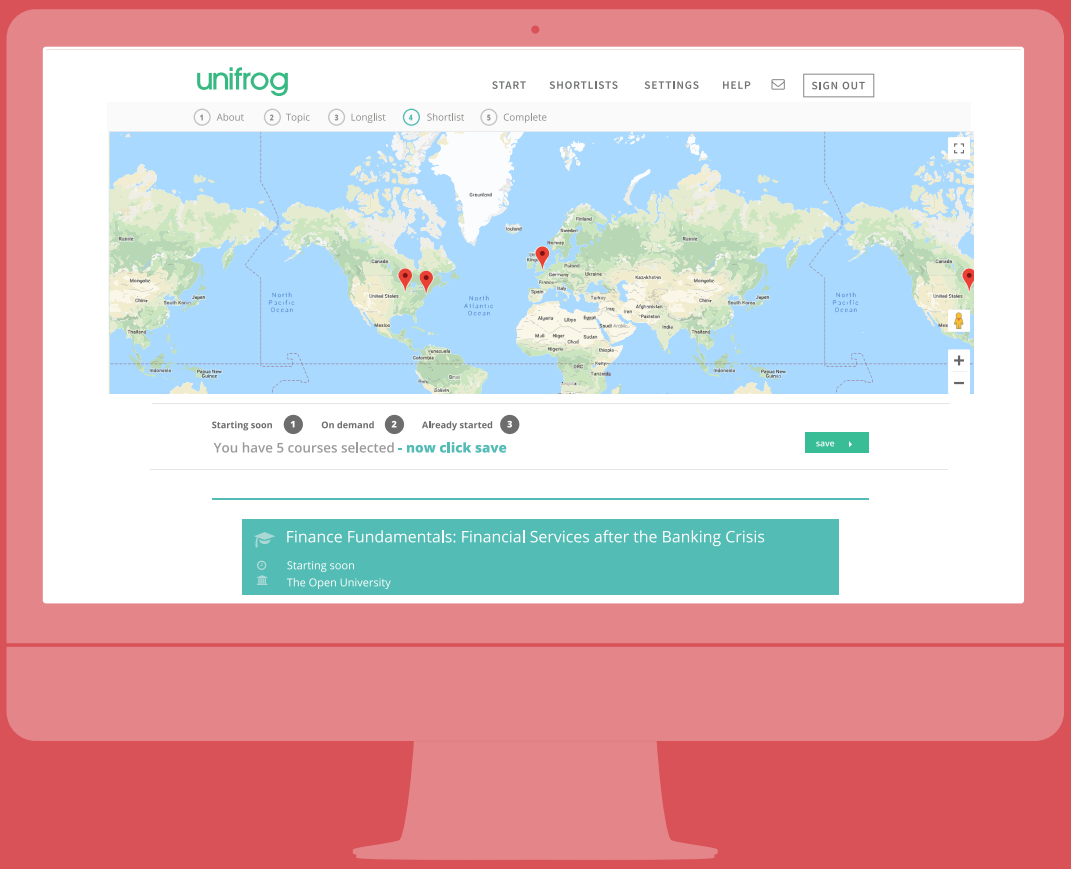
Horizons



A report on the motivations behind students' choices

unifrog

May 2019

Special thanks to:
Andrew Berwick, Fay Lofty, Professor Carl Gombrich, Mary Curnock Cook, Michael John, Christopher Norman, Yousuf Bakshi and **Jim Brown.**

Publication information

This paper is published by Unifrog Education Ltd.
It should be cited as follows:

Unifrog (2019), Horizons: a report on the motivations behind students' choices.

THE REPORT'S SIX KEY FINDINGS

1) **Only one in four disadvantaged students** predicted AAA+ at A-level shortlist an Oxbridge university course compared to **one in two independent school students**

2) **Aspirations have increased** across all education pathways

3) **Over a third of students** are considering studying their first degree overseas

4) **State school students** feel held back when considering study abroad opportunities due to a **lack of role models**

5) Liberal Arts (including Liberal Arts and Sciences) **is the number one** university course shortlisted by current year 12s

6) The gender gap for interest in STEM courses at UK universities is closing but there is still a **heavy male bias** towards mathematics, engineering and computer science

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

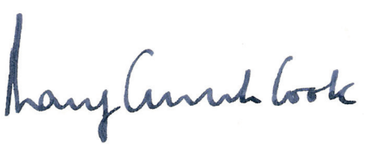
What's fascinating about this report is that it is a live commentary from students as they ponder and develop their plans for what to do when they leave school. Covering three previous cohorts and three future cohorts we can see the developing changes in university preferences, course choices and the things that really matter in making these crucial decisions. Now that Unifrog's data covers almost 500,000 students over six cohorts, there's even more scope for understanding the differences between state and independent schools, boys and girls, affluent and not-so-affluent students.

While the underlying trends are relatively well known from UCAS and HESA data, this Unifrog report adds some important context. Qualifications are still the single most important future-shaping factor and students know this because the most-clicked ranking factor is 'university entry requirements'. Savvy students have also caught on to the idea of a 'stretch' application, knowing that some universities lower their grade thresholds once results are out.

But the difference in aspirations between independent and state school students with similar grade predictions is stark. Just one in four disadvantaged students with an AAA+ grade prediction even shortlists Oxbridge as they think about their futures compared to one in two independent school students. There's welcome news of a narrowing in the STEM gender gap in both state and independent schools with the latter now showing almost no gap. Within STEM subjects however, the continuing preference from girls for biological sciences and psychology contrasts with strong male bias for mathematics, engineering and computer science. Other standouts from the report include the rising popularity of Liberal Arts (and Science) courses which rank as the first and third most shortlisted courses for the next two cohorts, and the increasing interest in studying outside the UK. For the latter, knowing someone who has studied overseas is a big pull factor but, unsurprisingly, the lack of such role models for state school pupils is holding them back.

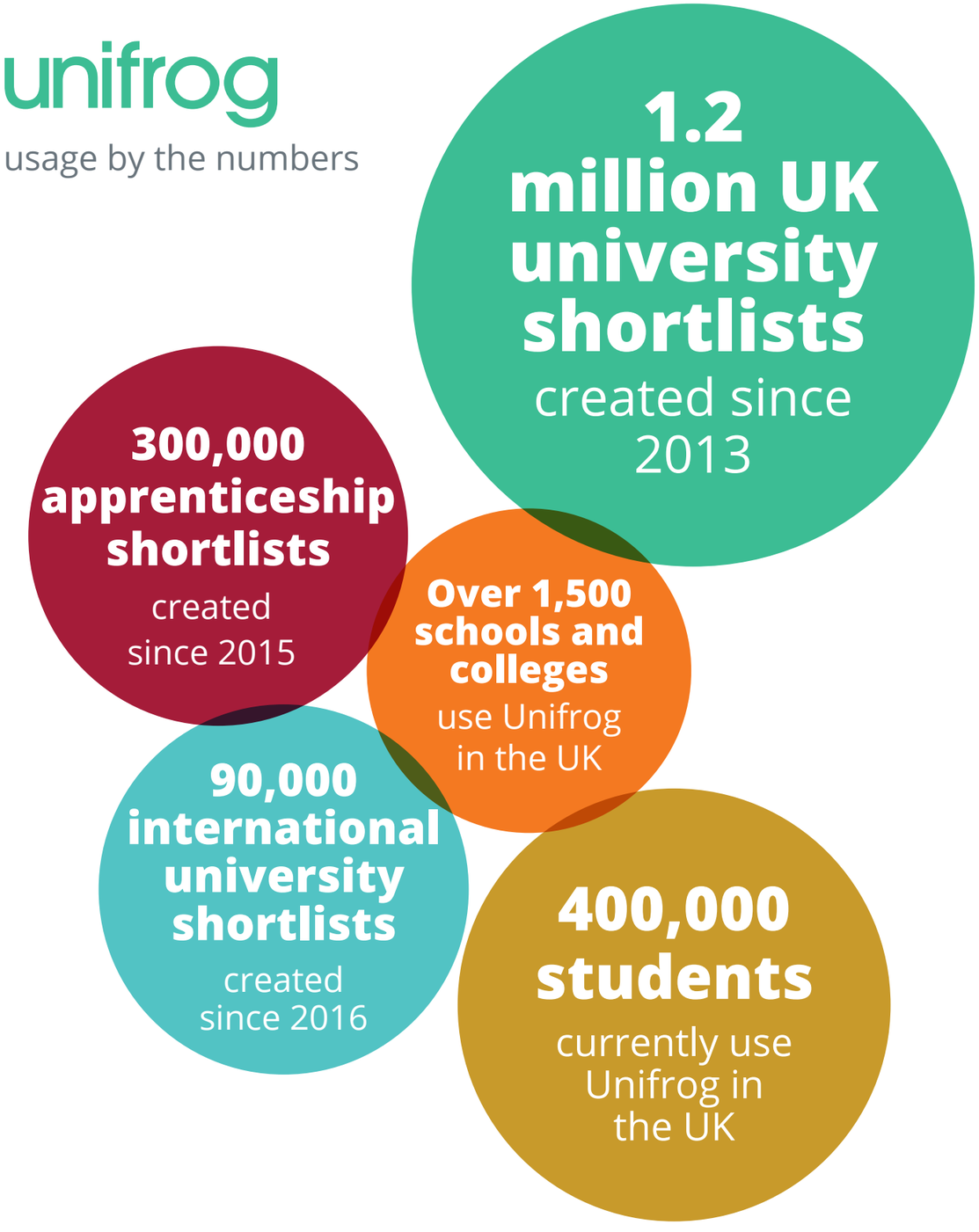
For league table watchers, Unifrog's 'most popular' tables will land in a few Vice-Chancellors' in-trays with an overall top spot for the University of Leeds plus a sorry-not-sorry first place for Exeter in independent schools. And any university not already planning to offer degree apprenticeships will realise they're likely to be missing out as there's plenty of untapped demand from students here.

Mary Curnock Cook,
Unifrog Advisor, **Former CEO of UCAS**



unifrog

usage by the numbers



INTRODUCTION

The last 5 years have seen a huge change within the UK higher education and apprenticeships landscape; just think about the emergence of degree level apprenticeships and the rise of unconditional offers. Unifrog's online platform makes this landscape as easy as possible for young people to navigate. This year almost 140,000 young people in year 13 in the UK used Unifrog to help them decide where to go next.

This report examines the platform's data to help us understand how students' preferences and research changes over time. As well as looking at Unifrog's UK student population as a whole, we also look at the data on specific groups of students (such as boys, girls, independent school students, and students that come from an area with low university participation) to analyse the underlying trends - this study throws up some valuable insights.

We start by exploring how aspiration has increased across every education pathway across the last three cohorts. Despite this, we find that girls are much more ambitious than boys when considering their university options, and those from low-participation areas are still hesitant when considering the most selective universities. For Oxbridge in particular, only 26% of the highest attaining disadvantaged students shortlist an Oxbridge college, compared to 50% of independent school students.

We then take a closer look at students' preferences and choices when considering higher education. Although relatively new in the UK, Liberal Arts and Sciences is the most popular subject shortlisted by Unifrog users in year 12 this year. Elsewhere we see what's driving an increasingly smaller gender gap in STEM interest among Unifrog users, and which subjects have a particularly high gender bias.

In chapter three, we analyse the rise of degree apprenticeships and what's driving students' decisions in their research. The key factors in apprenticeship choice appear to be the location and weekly earnings of apprenticeship opportunities. With degree apprenticeships being few and far between, local links are key.

Finally, we use insights from our recent survey of UK Unifrog users (2,173 respondents) in years 11, 12 and 13 on studying abroad. A large proportion of pupils are interested in studying abroad, but the biggest barrier to this appears to be a lack of contact with students who are currently doing so or have done in the past.

Unifrog's student population breakdown	
Combined students sampled (Cohorts 2017-2021)	**473,923**
MALE STUDENTS	**47%**
FEMALE STUDENTS	**53%**
STATE SCHOOL STUDENTS	**87%**
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STUDENTS	**13%**
DISADVANTAGED* STUDENTS	**25%**
Total students surveyed (chapter four only)	**2,172**

***POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2 - students living in areas with the lowest participation rates in higher education.** **See page 46 for more information.**

[1] DfE (2018), Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 year olds in England: End 2017

1 Aspirations

STUDENTS ARE AIMING HIGHER AND HIGHER

A critical stage of any student's Unifrog journey is the process of researching and creating shortlists for the destinations areas they are interested in. This provides a strong indication of where students are interested in applying to. Unsurprisingly, most students are thinking about applying to a UK university: each year around three quarters of the cohort creates a UK university shortlist. Within the cohort of current Year 13s, we've seen increasingly aspirational application behaviour.

In 2019, 16% of the cohort created an Oxbridge shortlist, compared to just 12% in 2017. Similarly, 59% of the cohort included a Russell Group university in their shortlist, compared to only 54% in 2017. Even more remarkably, in 2019 41% of students included university courses that were 'out of range' given their predicted grades - compared to only 31% in 2017.

This may reflect students' awareness that many more selective universities increasingly make offers below their advertised UCAS points tariff.

For instance, applicants with BBC at A-level were 2.4 times more likely to be accepted to a high tariff university in 2017 compared to 2012; applicants with DDE were almost 3 times more likely to be accepted to a medium tariff university in 2017 compared to 2012 [1].

Table 1.1 **How have proportions of students making different types of shortlists changed?**

Shortlist type	Cohort 2017	Cohort 2018	Cohort 2019	Growth (2017-19)
UK university	70%	76%	73%	**+3%**
Oxbridge	12%	16%	16%	**+4%**
Russell Group	54%	60%	59%	**+5%**
UK uni courses that are 'out of range'	31%	43%	41%	**+10%**
Higher and Degree apprenticeships and school leaver programmes	15%	23%	25%	**+10%**
Intermediate apprenticeships	14%	17%	14%	**+0%**

[1] UCAS (2017), End of cycle report 2017: Qualifications and competition

ARE YOUR ASPIRATIONS DETERMINED BY WHERE YOU COME FROM?

Where you live has a huge impact on whether you go to university. Many commentators have suggested that this may be driven by a lack of awareness and aspiration amongst students in some areas of the country.

Our data supports a more nuanced view.

We looked at students from the lowest participation areas in the country and found that students from these areas do consider applying to university: almost seven in ten created a UK university shortlist in 2019.

There's also been a significant rise in students from these areas looking at degree apprenticeships as a post-school destination.

Table 1.2 **How have proportions of DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS making different types of shortlists changed?**

Shortlist type	Cohort 2017	Cohort 2018	Cohort 2019	Growth (2017-19)
UK university	64%	68%	67%	**+3%**
Oxbridge	8%	10%	11%	**+4%**
Russell Group	45%	49%	50%	**+5%**
UK uni courses that are 'out of range'	28%	37%	37%	**+9%**
Degree apprenticeships	15%	22%	25%	**+10%**
Intermediate apprenticeships	17%	19%	17%	**+0%**

Disadvantaged students = pupils from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2

CASE STUDY

Sussex Learning Network

Fay Lofty

Schools Liaison Programme Manager, **Sussex Learning Network**

Fay works with schools and sixth forms across Sussex to help NCOP (National Collaborative Outreach Programme) eligible students to recognise and reach their full potential. Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council, NCOPs identify and address issues around progression to higher education for young people living in areas where progression is low. During 2017-18, over 100,000 young people took part in higher education outreach programmes through the NCOP.

Engaging disadvantaged students through regional NCOPs

Formerly a Widening Participation Officer at the University of Brighton, I've been working for the SLN:COP since July 2017. My role is to project manage NCOP activity related to selected schools across Sussex. I also oversee the relationships with them in order to identify targeted students who will benefit from high quality interventions. Working in collaboration with Careers Leaders and School Coordinators, SLN:COP develop tailored programmes focused on raising aspiration and attainment, developing soft skills and resilience, and introducing the 'world of work'.

Impact on the ground

We take a consultative approach with the schools we work with to find out about their priorities and identify the obstacles to progression for these young people. Since 2017, 52% of targeted students in Sussex have received some form of IAG activity from SLN:COP. This includes, but is not limited to: mentoring, trips to HEIs, access to residential/summer schools, careers workshops and parental engagement. NCOPs are playing a vital role in providing an impartial voice of IAG and we try to support students with every tool they need to progress to higher education.

TOP TIPS FOR SCHOOLS

- Take a long-term view to student progression. It's important for students to be researching subjects and learning about careers from at least Year 9 onwards. Make sure this is part of acohesive careers strategy that supports them right the way through until they leave school.
- Engage parents when offering IAG to your students.

ACADEMICS AND ASPIRATIONS

Many commentators have observed that students from independent schools are far more likely to attend the most selective universities. At the other end of the spectrum, 2018 saw only 5% of students from the lowest participation areas actually go to the most selective universities [2]. Our data gives us some insight as to how far this is driven by students' application behaviour, and how far it is driven by their attainment.

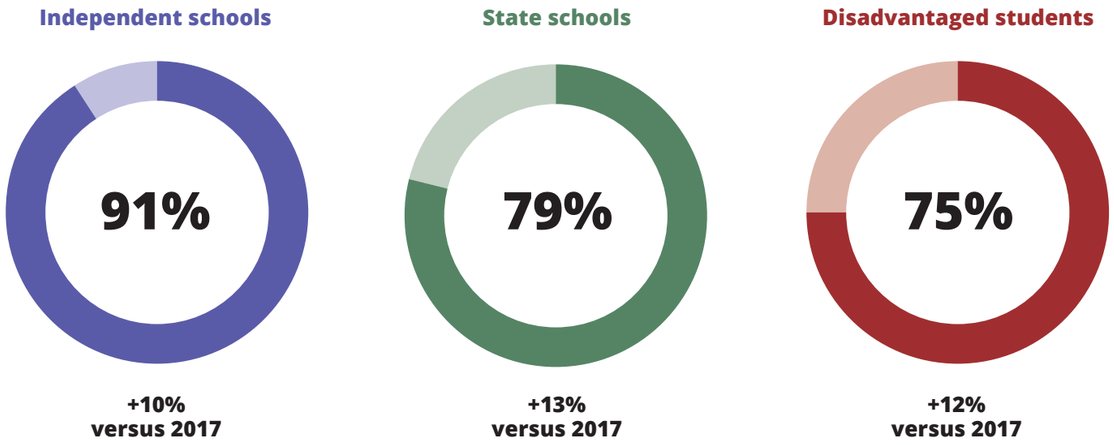
Looking only at students predicted BBB+ at A-level, we see that independent school students are around 12 percentage points more likely to shortlist at least one Russell Group university than students from a state school.

Students from low participation areas at state schools are the least likely to shortlist a Russell Group university; 75% do compared to 79% of all state school students. This gap is even more pronounced when looking at the highest achievers' attitudes to Oxbridge.

Of students predicted AAA+ at A-level, students from independent schools were much more likely than state school students to shortlist an Oxbridge college (50% vs 32%).

Most strikingly, three quarters of AAA+ students from low participation areas don't even shortlist an Oxbridge college, suggesting that they don't think this is 'for them'.

Table 1.3 What proportion of students predicted to get three Bs or more at A-level in 2019 shortlisted a **RUSSELL GROUP** university?



Disadvantaged students = pupils from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2

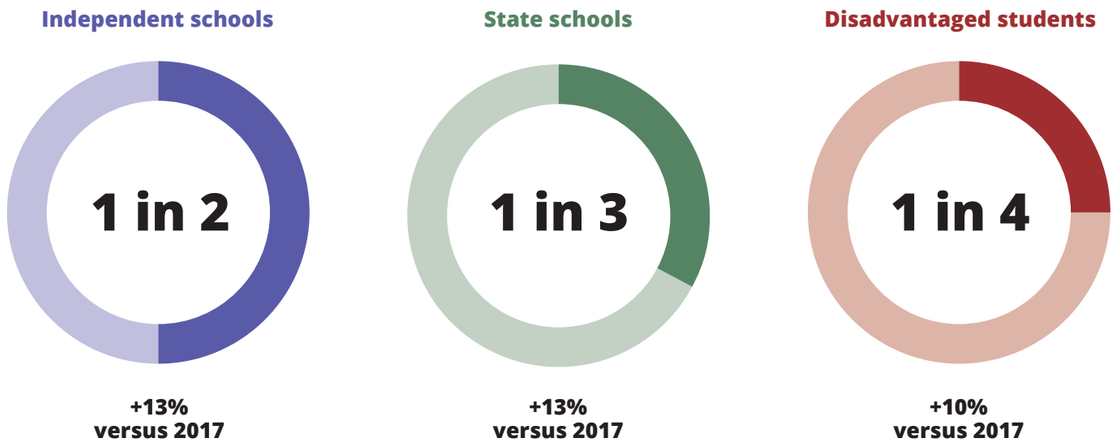
[2] UCAS (2018), End of cycle report 2018: 'UK 18 year old entry rates by POLAR4 quintile and provider tariff group'

> "...three quarters of AAA+ students from low participation areas don't even shortlist an Oxbridge college."

However, it does appear that students from all backgrounds are becoming increasingly aspirational with their choices: all groups saw a 10-13 percentage point increase in the likelihood of shortlisting either a Russell Group university or an Oxbridge college between 2017 and 2019.

Nonetheless clearly more work needs to be done to ensure that students from the lowest participation areas feel comfortable considering more selective institutions when they do in fact have the requisite grades.

Table 1.4 What proportion of students predicted to get three As or more at A-level in 2019 shortlisted an **OXBRIDGE** university?



THE GENDER GAP

For a number of years, the proportion of young women in the UK going on to university has increased more quickly than the proportion of young men: women are now 37% more likely to enter HE than men [3].

These trends are reflected in students' behaviour on Unifrog. 79% of girls created a UK university shortlist, compared to only 73% of boys. What's interesting is that, in contrast to the common assumption that boys are more self-confident than girls, a higher proportion of girls shortlisted Russell Group universities as well as courses that were 'out of their range'. The exception is Oxbridge, for which a slightly higher percentage of boys shortlisted opportunities.

In contrast, boys were far more likely to shortlist a higher or degree level apprenticeship than girls (30% compared to 23%), which echoes national data showing that young men (under 25) are more likely to enter apprenticeships than young women [4].

Table 1.5 What's the difference in UK university shortlisting behaviour between Boys and Girls?

Proportion of Girls	Shortlist type	Proportion of Boys
79%	UK universities	73%
65%	Russell Group	59%
17%	Oxbridge	18%
45%	UK university courses that are out of range	41%

Table 1.6 What's the difference in apprenticeship shortlisting behaviour between Boys and Girls?

Shortlist type	Proportion of Girls	Proportion of Boys
Intermediate apprenticeships	15%	13%
Higher, SLP or degree apprenticeships	23%	30%

[3] UCAS (2018), End of cycle report 2018: 'Patterns by applicant characteristics'
[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships

Key points for teachers and advisors:

1

Students are demonstrating increasingly aspirational behaviours around university application - reflecting the increased likelihood of getting into a selective university with slightly lower grades.

2

As well as showing a higher overall interest in entering higher education, girls are much more ambitious when considering their university options than boys.

3

Students from low-participation backgrounds are increasingly considering applying to university but they're still hesitant when it comes to applying to more selective institutions.

4

Only 26% of the highest attaining disadvantaged students shortlist an Oxbridge college, compared to 50% of independent school students.

2 Higher education

WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH STUDENTS' HE CHOICES?

Whether to go to university, where, and which course to study, are among the biggest decisions a young person will ever have taken. Unifrog provides students with a wealth of information to help inform their decision, from acceptance rates to accommodation costs to social life.

What information do students think is most important?

In short, students want to know where they might be able to get in, and the likely economic benefits of undertaking their degree (starting salary, and the proportion who go on to full time employment within six months of graduating).

Table 2.1 What are the most popular ranking factors for students on the UK university tool? (2018/19 academic year)

1	Entry requirements	18,522 clicks
2	Starting salaries	13,601 clicks
3	% graduate jobs	10,623 clicks
4	Social life	7,572 clicks
5	% student satisfaction	7,150 clicks

THE STEM DIVIDE

Although young women are far more likely to go on to university than young men, they are less likely to study STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths): 50% of men starting undergraduate courses in the UK in 2017 were studying science subjects, compared to only 42% of women [1].

Closing the STEM gap is a priority for many schools, not least because STEM graduates are in short supply in the labour market, and command a wage premium.

Our data suggests it is possible to close the gap, although some subjects within STEM still require a lot of attention to achieve this (please see page 46 on how we define STEM in this report).

> "...it's chiefly at all-girls schools where we're seeing the highest proportion of girls shortlisting STEM subjects."

For the 2017 cohort, only 36% of girls at independent schools included a STEM subject on one of their university shortlists compared to 44% of boys; for this year's school leavers, the gap has all but closed at these schools (44% vs 45%). There has also been some progress in closing the gap at state schools, where it has shrunk from nine percentage points to only six percentage points when comparing 2017 and 2019 school leavers (37% girls vs 43% boys in 2019).

Table 2.2 What's the difference in STEM subject shortlisting behaviour between boys and girls at **INDEPENDENT** schools?

Proportion of Girls shortlisting STEM	Cohort	Proportion of Boys shortlisting STEM
36%	2017	44%
42%	2018	46%
44%	2019	45%

Table 2.3 What's the difference in STEM subject shortlisting behaviour between boys and girls at **STATE** schools?

Proportion of Girls shortlisting STEM	Cohort	Proportion of Boys shortlisting STEM
31%	2017	42%
38%	2018	47%
37%	2019	43%

[1] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study

We wanted to look more closely at what was driving these changes around the STEM gap and two things jumped out. The first was that it's chiefly at all-girls schools where we're seeing the highest proportion of girls shortlisting STEM subjects. When looking at 2019 leavers at independent schools, we found that 49% of girls at all-girls schools shortlisted a STEM course as opposed to just 41% of girls at co-ed schools.

The second area of interest was around the STEM subjects that girls have been shortlisting. Upon looking at the top ten shortlisted courses by girls and boys in the 2019 cohort, we found that:

- **Biological Sciences and Psychology made the top five shortlisted courses for girls but not for boys**
- **Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science all featured in the top five for boys but not for girls**

It is only at independent schools where we've seen the STEM gender gap close in subjects like Mathematics and Physical Sciences. Beyond this, it seems clear that a strong interest in Biological Sciences and Psychology is the main driver behind girls shortlisting STEM subjects - if you discount these subjects the gender gap would be much larger.

Table 2.4 What are the top five most popular STEM courses shortlisted by students? (Cohort 2019)

	ALL		GIRLS		BOYS
1	Psychology	1	Psychology	1	Computer science
2	Mathematics	2	Biological sciences	2	Mechanical engineering
3	Biological sciences	3	Biochemistry	3	Mathematics
4	Computer science	4	Biomedical science	4	Engineering
5	Mechanical engineering	5	Biology	5	Physics

CASE STUDY

Michael John

Co-ordinator of Higher Education and Professional Guidance, **Badminton School**

Badminton School is an independent, boarding and day school for girls aged 3 to 18 years situated in Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, England. Badminton's pioneering approach to girls in STEM is helping to create the next generation of scientists and this is contributing towards redressing the STEM gender balance.

Increasing STEM uptake

It has been our long term aim to increase the number of students taking STEM subjects in the Sixth Form. Our ethos is that it's for everyone and each student will make their own unique journey within the world of STEM to help enhance their own future outcomes. To achieve this we have introduced a breadth of activities to capture interest and develop curiosity. Each Year Group have access to STEM based activities every year and opportunities to mentor within and between year groups. Activities include:

- 'Hands on' engineering challenges involving most year groups sponsored and mentored by young professionals within industry.
- Life Sciences where students undertake animal studies at Jersey-Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, in Operating Theatre Live, applied microbiology sponsored by MiSAC.
- CREST Award investigations at all levels Bronze, Silver and Gold across all STEM disciplines linked to Bristol, Gloucester & Bath universities.
- Competitions both national and international e.g. Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry, Royal Society of Biology, Oxbridge essay competitions.

Popular STEM subjects at Badminton

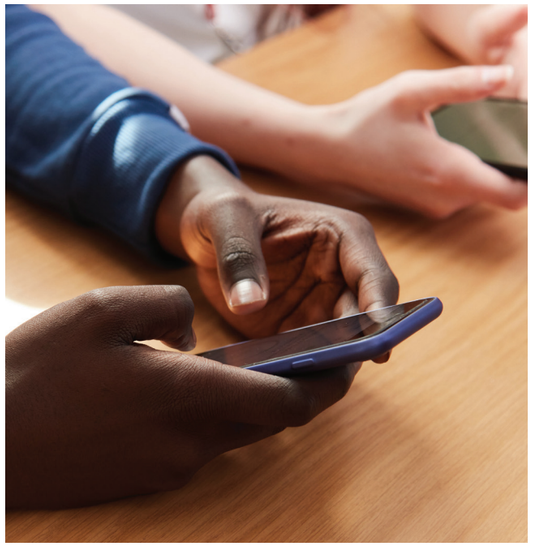
Mathematics, closely followed by Chemistry are most popular. However, there is a good uptake in all the main STEM A-level subjects, requiring at least two or three sets per subject in each year group in the Sixth Form. Most noticeably in the last two years we have seen a shift from one Physics A-level group within the year to a requirement for two. It is assumed that all students at GCSE will do Triple Award (Separate Sciences) and that expectation is set from Y7. Some students in Y11 will shift to Double Award, but that will be less than 5% and only after all support measures have been exhausted and it is deemed to be in the student's best interest.

SOMETHING NEW

Looking at what younger students are exploring on the platform gives us an insight into trends further into the future.

Something that jumps out right away is that for both current Year 12s (entering university in 2020) and current Year 11s (entering university in 2021), Liberal Arts is in the top 10 most popular subjects. It has never appeared in the top 10 before.

This evidences the impressive rise of a subject that was still an 'outside' choice until relatively recently, and suggests that students are interested in courses that more closely adhere to the American model of higher education.



> "Students are interested in courses that more closely adhere to the American model of higher education."

Table 2.5 **What are the most popular UK university shortlist subjects by students?**

	Cohort 2019		Cohort 2020		Cohort 2021
1	Law	1	**LIBERAL ARTS**	1	Medicine
2	Psychology	2	Medicine	2	Law
3	Medicine	3	Law	3	**LIBERAL ARTS**
4	Criminology	4	Psychology	4	Psychology
5	Economics	5	Economics	5	Mathematics
6	Business management	6	Criminology	6	Computer science
7	History	7	Mathematics	7	Criminology
8	Accounting and finance	8	History	8	Mechanical engineering
9	Mathematics	9	Biological sciences	9	Economics
10	Biological sciences	10	Business management	10	Engineering

CASE STUDY

Professor Carl Gombrich

Academic Lead and Head of Teaching,
London Interdisciplinary School

In September 2010, Carl was appointed to lead the development and launch of University College London's major new interdisciplinary Liberal Arts and Sciences BASc degrees. Carl has also been a regular speaker at events on interdisciplinarity and liberal arts and sciences both in the UK and abroad. This year, he left UCL and joined the London Interdisciplinary School, a new university opening in 2020 that prepares students to tackle the most important and complex global problems.

Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) - what's it all about?

In an increasingly interconnected, globalised world, the notion that a liberal and interdisciplinary education in arts and sciences is the best way to prepare students for work is only growing stronger. Now offered by at least 20 universities across the UK, LAS provides a contemporary education by giving students the chance to study a variety of subjects that suit their interests. It's an excellent, exciting way to approach higher education study.

Connecting the knowledge that underpins the world

In the 21st century, most modern expertise requires you to know about different subject areas and this is where the benefit of a broad education lies. Globalisation and the explosion of technology are impacting all types of professions and we're now seeing this across many industries.

Take the legal sector, for example - artificial intelligence is beginning to transform the legal profession in many ways and individuals entering this sector will need to be able to adapt.

Almost every job that graduates now enter requires some combination of science and non-science components, and LAS equips students with the skillset to adapt to these modern challenges.

Going forward, it's vital that students are empowered to make connections across different disciplines and industries to find new solutions to complex problems.

TOP OF THE TABLE

We wanted to share which institutions are the most shortlisted amongst this year's leaving cohort of students. Our winner in the overall table is the University of Leeds, which is unsurprising: we know from UCAS data that it recruits more 18-year-old students from the UK than any other university. Perhaps more surprising is the University of Exeter's position at the top of the independent school table. Exeter was only the 9th biggest recruiter of UK-based 18-year-olds in 2018, suggesting that it punches above its weight with Unifrog's independent school students.

Finally, this was undoubtedly a sad year for both the University of Southampton and Manchester Metropolitan University as they dropped out of the top 10 for the first time in five years and four years, respectively.

See Appendix A on page 40 for a regional breakdown of students' top ten universities shortlisted across the UK.

Table 2.6 Unifrog's UK university league table

	Cohort 2019
1	University of Leeds
2	University of Bristol
3	University of Nottingham
4	University of Exeter
5	University of Manchester
6	Kings College London
7	Durham University
8	University College London
9	University of Edinburgh
10	University of Birmingham

Table 2.7 Unifrog's UK university league table for **STATE** schools

	Cohort 2019
1	University of Leeds
2	University of Nottingham
3	University of Manchester
4	University of Bristol
5	Kings College London
6	University of Exeter
7	University of Birmingham
8	Durham University
9	University College London
10	University of Liverpool

Table 2.8 Unifrog's UK university league table for **INDEPENDENT** schools

	Cohort 2019
1	University of Exeter
2	University of Bristol
3	Durham University
4	University of Edinburgh
5	University College London
6	University of Leeds
7	University of Nottingham
8	University of Oxford
9	University of Warwick
10	Kings College London

Key points for teachers and advisors:

1

The most important factors to students when researching university courses are their chances of getting in, and the economic prospects of the course.

2

The STEM gender gap is closing - although this is chiefly driven by a heavy female bias towards Psychology and Biological Sciences.

3

More and more students are considering Liberal Arts as a degree option - you might want to consider how you can help students to understand the structure and career options associated with this course.

3 Apprenticeships

Horizons Chapter 3: Apprenticeships

unifrog

APPRENTICESHIPS ON THE UP

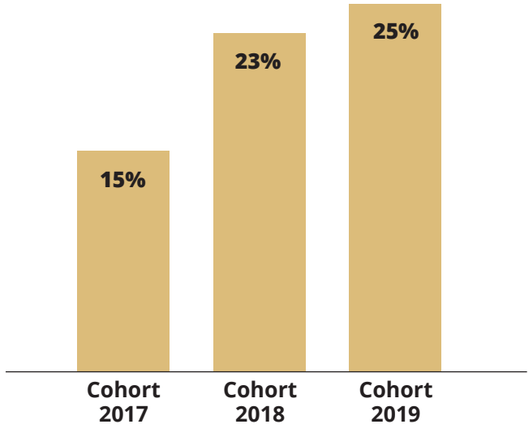
We're really excited about apprenticeships as a route for more young people to develop skills and find a way into the career they love. That's why we've pulled together the most comprehensive data available on apprenticeships across the country.

It turns out it's not only us that are excited. We have seen a rapid increase in the proportion of young people shortlisting apprenticeships in the last three cohorts, from 28% to 34% - and alongside this there is clearly a lot of interest in more advanced forms of apprenticeships. Looking at the cohort of 2019 leavers, a quarter of all Unifrog students shortlisted at least one degree level apprenticeship, compared to just 15% two years earlier.

Professor Alison Wolf once spoke about previous reforms to vocational education being "a great idea for other people's children", suggesting that more affluent parents don't push their children towards vocational routes. Our data suggests that stigmas around apprenticeships (even at the highest levels of apprenticeships) do persist and that fewer students from well-off backgrounds are exploring these opportunities. 31% of high-attaining students from state schools shortlisted a higher or degree apprenticeship, compared to just 19% of high attaining students from independent schools.

> "Looking at the cohort of 2019 leavers, a quarter of all Unifrog students shortlisted at least one degree level apprenticeship."

Table 3.1 **What proportion of students shortlisted a degree level apprenticeship?**



As aforementioned, it's worth noting the rapid rise of interest in higher and degree apprenticeships with students of all backgrounds and school types. Students in the 2019 cohort were 10 percentage points more likely to shortlist one of these opportunities than an equivalent student in the 2017 cohort.

Although interest in these courses is surging, they remain relatively scarce. According to DfE data only 3,100 students under 19 started a higher or degree apprenticeship in England in 2017-18, and even looking at all young adults (under 25) this total was just 17,100 [1]. This compares to around 205,000 English 18 year olds being accepted to UK HEIs in 2018 [2]. Given the relative paucity of these courses and the fact that availability varies widely in different areas of the country, understanding what is available locally is crucial.

When students are weighing up apprenticeships, the most significant factors appear to be the weekly wage on offer and the distance of the place of work from the student's home. Given the sometimes modest initial wages on offer (the national minimum apprentice wage is £3.70 per hour), it is unsurprising that students are keen to find the best-paying opportunities. Also, given that they will need to travel to a workplace every day rather than being able to stay in purpose-built university accommodation, it's no surprise that students considering apprenticeships feel more geographically constrained in their choices than students selecting university courses.

Table 3.2 **What proportion of students predicted BBB+ at A-level made apprenticeship shortlists CONTAINING HIGHER, SLP, DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS?**

Shortlist type	Cohort 2017	Cohort 2018	Cohort 2019	Growth (2017-19)
Independent schools	8%	15%	19%	**+11%**
State schools	16%	27%	31%	**+15%**
Disadvantaged students	15%	22%	25%	**+10%**

Disadvantaged students = pupils from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2

Table 3.3 **What are the most popular ranking factors for students on the Apprenticeship tool? (2018/19 academic year)**

1	**Weekly wage**	6,380 clicks
2	**Distance from home**	2,365 clicks
3	**% students recommend**	1,531 clicks
4	**% employers recommend**	981 clicks
5	**Start date**	969 clicks

[1] DfE (2019), retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-and-traineeshipsannualdata
[2] UCAS (2018), End of cycle report 2018, retrieved from https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources/applicants-and-acceptances-groups-applicants-2018

CASE STUDY

Christopher Norman

Digital Solutions Apprentice,
Staffordshire University

Chris is a current degree apprentice in the digital & technology solutions team at Staffordshire University. As an apprentice, Chris works on the job whilst studying towards a full undergraduate Bachelor's degree. This allows him the opportunity to develop, build industry contacts, and learn the skills and knowledge necessary to work in a number of graduate-level tech positions.

The appeal of a degree apprenticeship

Getting paid to learn was something that interested me from the outset. I was concerned about how effective an undergraduate degree would be for preparing me for the world of work and wanted to find an opportunity that provided real life skills to give me a head start in my career.

The fact that I could also be awarded a degree level qualification in the process made doing an apprenticeship a really strong option for me when considering my next step after school.

Researching opportunities

Higher education seemed like the only viable pathway when in sixth form - it wasn't until my mum suggested the idea of a degree apprenticeship following a work experience placement I did that I began to broaden my horizons.

I come from Somerset in the South West and local degree apprenticeship opportunities were scarce, but I was happy to look further afield when researching online; I just knew that I wanted to do something that was related to software engineering. Work experience prepared me really well for starting at Staffordshire University in the Digital Solutions team, particularly with self-management and organisation.

I would encourage teachers to do what they can to present all the options to students and develop students' readiness for the world of work as much as possible.

Key points for teachers and advisors:

1

Much of the increase in interest in apprenticeships has been driven by higher and degree apprenticeships. There aren't many of these to go around, so students will need to research these opportunities carefully.

2

The key factors in apprenticeship choice are geography and weekly earnings.

4 Studying abroad

HOME OR AWAY?

In recent years, high profile schemes like the Sutton Trust US Programme have increased awareness of the possibility of studying for a degree overseas. This can be attractive to students who want to gain experience of living abroad, learn a new language, or to save money on study costs by applying for scholarships or studying in a country with low or no tuition fees.

Students can use the Unifrog platform to explore undergraduate courses taught in English across Europe, North America, Australasia and Asia. Although the thought of packing your bags and heading off overseas might be intimidating for many, our survey of over 2,000 students found that over one third of students aged 14-18 are considering studying overseas.

For some students, taking the plunge and choosing to study their whole degree abroad can feel like a huge jump. Fortunately, UK universities offer a range of options to study abroad as part of your degree - and there is good evidence that this can deliver

> “Our data suggests that many students are open to the idea of a study abroad element to a UK degree.”

results. According to analysis from Universities UK, graduates who studied overseas at some point during their degree were less likely to be unemployed after 6 months (3.7% compared to 4.9%), and amongst those in work, students who have studied overseas were more likely to be in a graduate level job (76.4% compared to 69.9%) [1].

Our data suggests that many students are open to the idea of a study abroad element to a UK degree: around 29% of state school students and 41% of independent school students shortlist at least one study abroad programme. However, as recently as 2015 only 7.2% of graduating students had participated in some form of study abroad during their degree, suggesting many students are not able to realise their interest in studying abroad [2].

Table 4.1 What proportion of students shortlisted a UK university study abroad programme?

State	Cohort	Independent
25%	2017	33%
30%	2018	42%
29%	2019	41%

[1] Universities UK International (2017), Gone International: Mobility Works [2] Ibid.

THE FACTORS THAT MATTER

Our survey asked students which factors were most important in encouraging them to study overseas - and the response was emphatic. 48% of state school students and 44% of independent students chose 'being able to speak to someone who's studying overseas'. However, many students in state schools in particular will need support to make this connection: only 13% of state school students know someone from their school who did their first degree overseas, compared to 41% of independent school students.

Table 4.2 What proportion of students say speaking to someone who has studied overseas is important?

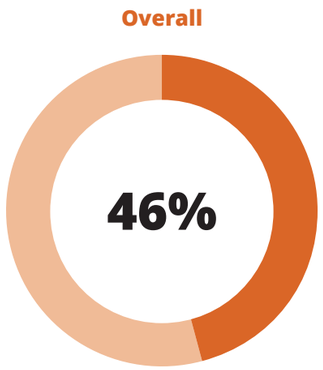
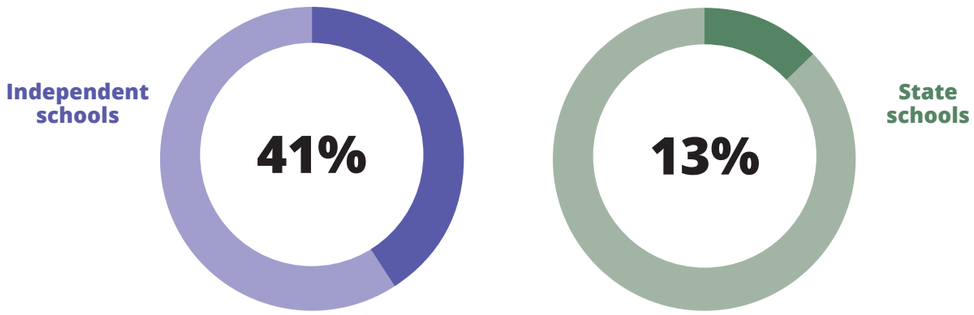


Table 4.3 What proportion of students know someone from their school who did their first degree abroad?



CASE STUDY

Yousuf Bakshi

Current student at Fitzalan High School

Yousuf, 17, is the first student from Cardiff's Fitzalan High to apply to a US university - in August 2019 he will go to Harvard to study computer science and politics. One day, Yousuf hopes to set up his own tech company in Silicon Valley.

Opting to study abroad

It was during Obama's first inauguration speech on 20th January 2009 that I made my decision - I wanted to study in America. This dream motivated me to apply myself at school and do as well as I could. I had no idea as a child how I would make my dream a reality, but my mum told me that if you work hard then the world is your oyster and anything is possible. When the time came to research higher education opportunities, I just wanted to find out as much information as I could about US universities. I attended Seren Network events in Wales and was accepted onto the Yale Young Global Scholars and Sutton Trust summer schools which gave me the chance to experience student life at Yale, MIT and Harvard. What really stood out to me about the US university system was that I could study a range of subjects across different disciplines - this is great for me as I have interests in very different areas!

The challenges

The biggest barriers to applying and getting into a US university were finding out information on their admissions system and finance. No one from my school had ever applied to a US university before so they lacked information. I had to do lots of independent research at the beginning and be really proactive about it. I started by attending a US college fair in London where I found out about summer schools, need-blind institutions and financial aid which opened a lot of doors for me. My school were incredible with the support they gave me when I decided I wanted to apply to Harvard - one of my teachers went on a course to find out how to be a great counselor for my application. They learnt about how to write a Letter of Recommendation and what other supporting documentation the school needed to provide. I can't thank my school enough for this. There is a whole world out there and I hope the experience my teachers and I have had will mean more students from Fitzalan will study abroad in the future!

Table 4.4 What proportion of students are thinking about studying overseas for their first degree?

Girls		Boys
37%	Yes	37%
28%	No	31%
35%	Don't know	32%

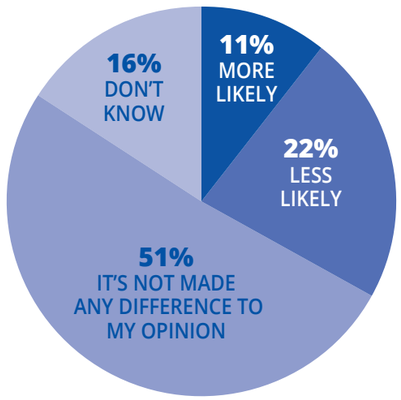
Interest in doing a first degree abroad is evenly split between boys and girls.

Table 4.5 What proportion of students shortlisted a UK university study abroad programme? (Cohort 2019)

Girls	School type	Boys
34%	State	27%
46%	Independent	37%

But girls are far more interested than boys in a study abroad element to a UK degree.

Table 4.6 What proportion of students feel Brexit has made them more or less likely to consider studying overseas?



The potential political disruption from Brexit does not appear to have had a huge dampening effect on students when considering studying overseas.

See Appendix B on page 45 for further results from Unifrog's survey on students' opinions on studying a first degree overseas.

Key points for teachers and advisors:

1

A large proportion of students from both independent and state schools are interested in studying abroad.

2

However, only a small proportion of students will go on to undertake some form of study abroad. For state school students in particular it appears that one barrier might be a lack of contact with students who are currently studying abroad or who have done so in the past.

CONCLUSION

1 Aspirations: students from different school types and backgrounds are being more aspirational when considering higher education and apprenticeship pathways.

- Students seem to be alive to the fact that come results day, many universities now lower their entry requirements
- The highest attaining disadvantaged students are more hesitant when considering selective universities than their peers at both state and independent schools

2 Higher education: students care most about how much they will earn, and boys still outnumber girls in applying for subjects which carry the biggest wage premium.

- Entry requirements are still the most important factor for students when comparing university courses, closely followed by average starting salary upon graduating
- The STEM gender gap has narrowed, but there is work to be done to encourage more girls into subjects such as mathematics, engineering and computer science
- Current Year 11s and Year 12s are showing a notable interest in interdisciplinary degrees

3 Apprenticeships: largely driven by interest in degree apprenticeships, across the last three cohorts we've seen a significant increase in young people shortlisting apprenticeships.

- The lack of interest in apprenticeships among more affluent students continues, whereas interest has more than doubled for high attaining state school pupils
- Location and weekly wage are the most crucial factors for young people when looking at apprenticeships - local opportunities are key

4 Studying abroad: our data suggests a significant interest among young people in studying some or all of their first degree overseas.

- Finance and access to information are two of the most important factors affecting students' decisions
- Around a third of all students now consider either a study abroad element to a UK degree or studying a whole degree overseas
- Almost half of students say that knowing someone who studied abroad would be an important influence in them deciding to study overseas, but state school students are far less likely than independent school students to know anyone who's got this experience

APPENDIX A

Here's some interesting data that we'll examine as part of our next report, looking at how specific universities are viewed by different types of students.

Each table shows - for state school students in a particular region - the top 10 most shortlisted UK universities. 2019 cohort.

Here we **only include state school students** because we found there is very little difference between the choices made by independent school students from different regions.

A.1 STUDENTS FROM LONDON

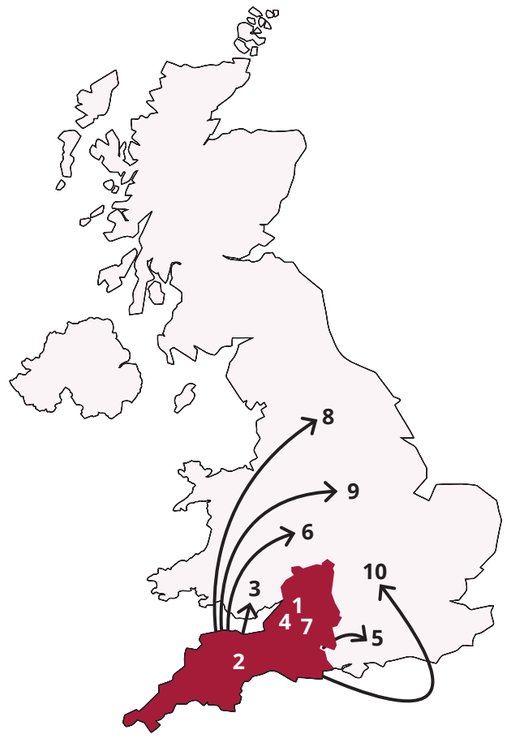
MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	Kings College London
2	Queen Mary University of London
3	University College London
4	University of Bristol
5	University of Nottingham
6	University of Exeter
7	University of Warwick
8	University of Leeds
9	University of Southampton
10	Imperial College London

A.2 STUDENTS FROM THE SOUTH WEST

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	University of Bristol
2	University of Exeter
3	Cardiff University
4	Bristol, University of the West of England
5	University of Southampton
6	University of Birmingham
7	University of Bath
8	University of Leeds
9	University of Nottingham
10	University of Oxford



A.3 STUDENTS FROM THE SOUTH EAST

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	University of Southampton
2	University of Exeter
3	University of Bristol
4	University of Nottingham
5	University of Surrey
6	University of Leeds
7	Kings College London
8	University of Birmingham
9	University College London
10	University of Warwick

A.4 STUDENTS FROM EAST MIDLANDS

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	University of Nottingham
2	Nottingham Trent University
3	University of Leeds
4	University of Derby
5	University of Sheffield
6	Sheffield Hallam University
7	University of Birmingham
8	University of Manchester
9	University of Lincoln
10	Manchester Metropolitan University

A.5 STUDENTS FROM WEST MIDLANDS

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	University of Birmingham
2	University of Nottingham
3	Birmingham City University
4	University of Manchester
5	University of Leeds
6	University of Bristol
7	University of Liverpool
8	Keele University
9	University of Warwick
10	University of Wolverhampton

A.6 STUDENTS FROM THE EAST

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	University of Nottingham
2	University of Leeds
3	University of Exeter
4	University of East Anglia
5	Loughborough University
6	University of Bristol
7	University of Southampton
8	Kings College London
9	University of Birmingham
10	University of Warwick

A.7 STUDENTS FROM THE NORTH WEST

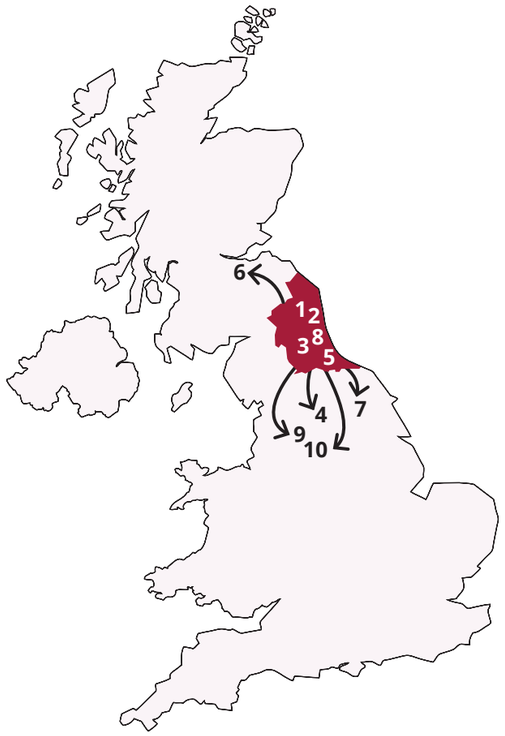
MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1	University of Manchester
2	Manchester Metropolitan University
3	University of Leeds
4	University of Liverpool
5	Liverpool John Moores University
6	University of Salford
7	Edge Hill University
8	University of Edinburgh
9	University of Chester
10	University of Sheffield

A.8 STUDENTS FROM THE NORTH EAST

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1. Newcastle University
2. Northumbria University
3. Durham University
4. University of Leeds
5. Teesside University
6. University of Edinburgh
7. University of York
8. University of Sunderland
9. University of Manchester
10. Manchester Metropolitan University



A.9 STUDENTS FROM YORKSHIRE & HUMBER

MOST POPULAR UNIVERSITIES SHORTLISTED

1. University of Leeds
2. University of Manchester
3. University of Sheffield
4. Manchester Metropolitan University
5. University of York
6. Leeds Beckett University
7. University of Huddersfield
8. Sheffield Hallam University
9. Newcastle University
10. University of Nottingham

APPENDIX B

The following tables provide further results from Unifrog's 2019 survey of over 2,000 year 11, 12 and 13 students in the UK on studying abroad.

B.1 Which countries did students pick as their number one preference if they were to study outside of the UK?

USA	**35%**
Canada	**14%**
Australia	**13%**
Other	**13%**
France	**6%**
Germany	**5%**
Netherlands	**4%**
Hong Kong	**3%**
Italy	**3%**
Ireland	**2%**
Switzerland	**2%**

B.2 What proportion of students selected the following factors as important in encouraging them to consider studying overseas?

Easier access to student loans/funding	**56%**
More information on opportunities available	**51%**
Being able to speak to someone who's studying overseas	**46%**
An easier application process	**31%**
Knowing that the university would provide language tuition	**27%**
Knowing that school friends would also be studying at same university	**20%**
Other	**7%**

B.3 What proportion of students think it would be easier or more difficult to get a job after studying abroad?

Easier to get a job	**28%**
More difficult	**22%**
It wouldn't make any difference	**19%**
Don't know	**31%**

B.4 What would be students' single biggest concern if they were to decide to study abroad?

Fees / living costs	**39%**
Leaving family and friends	**30%**
Lack of confidence in language skills	**15%**
Making new friends	**10%**
Getting a UK job	**5%**
Exchange rate volatility	**1%**

B.5 What would be students' biggest motivating factor if they were to decide to study abroad?

A love of travel, adventure and different cultures	**41%**
Excellent reputation of an overseas university/course	**18%**
Financial incentive (scholarship, bursary or reduced expenses)	**14%**
The chance to build confidence and other personal skills	**12%**
The opportunity to improve job prospects	**12%**
The chance to make international friends	**3%**

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Higher / Medium / Lower tariff	Tariff grouping is a statistical categorisation by UCAS of HE providers based on the average levels of attainment of their accepted applicants (summarised through UCAS tariff points) over a number of years. Each group of providers accounts for around a third of all UK 18 year old acceptances in these cycles, with the following categories: 'Higher tariff', 'Medium tariff', 'Lower tariff'.
Higher, SLP or degree apprenticeships	Higher apprenticeships provide an opportunity to gain Level 4 qualifications or above (note A-levels are a Level 3 qualification). Qualifications may include an NVQ Level 4, HND, foundation degree, or undergraduate degree. A degree apprenticeship is one qualification within the overall category of higher apprenticeships, and allows students to attain a full undergraduate degree through their studies. Most programmes will allow you to gain a Level 5 or 6 qualification (equivalent to a foundation degree, bachelor's degree or professional qualification, such as a Level 6 Professional Higher Diploma in Law).
Intermediate apprenticeships	Intermediate apprenticeships are Level 2 apprenticeships, and generally considered to be the same level as five GCSE passes.
POLAR4 / low participation areas	The participation of local areas (POLAR4) classification groups areas across the UK based on the proportion of the young population that participates in higher education. POLAR classifies local areas into five groups (quintiles) based on the proportion of 18 year olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile one shows the lowest rate of participation. Quintile five shows the highest rate of participation. In this report we conduct some analysis of the behaviours of students from Quintiles 1 and 2 – i.e. students from the 40% of areas in the country with the lowest university participation rates.
Russell Group	The Russell Group is a group of 24 research intensive UK based universities. Its members have relatively high entry requirements for undergraduates and so it is sometimes used as a proxy for more selective universities.
Shortlist	A list of opportunities that can be created and saved by students on the Unifrog platform. To create shortlists, students use different ranking and filtering criteria so that they can compare opportunities on the factors that they care about most.
STEM	For the purposes of this report, STEM subjects are defined as those under JACS codes C (Biological Sciences); F (Physical Sciences); G (Mathematical Sciences); H (Engineering); I (Computer Sciences).

Please contact us if you have any questions, comments, or would like to join our growing network of partners.

Email
freddie@unifrog.org

Website
www.unifrog.org

Telephone
+44 (0) 20 3372 5991