

UNITE STUDENTS

Applicant Survey
June 2021



About the survey

This slide deck gives the results of a survey of university applicants which was conducted in June 2021 by YouthSight on behalf of Unite Students.

There were just over 1000 respondents to the survey, all of which have applied to go to university this September. The sample was demographically diverse and was weighted to be representative of the applicant population.

The majority of the questions can be benchmarked against applicant survey conducted for Unite Students and HEPI by YouthSight in 2017 and/or 2019, allowing us to get an absolute fix on how applicants' attitudes, needs and behaviours have changed over recent years.

We have included the four standard ONS wellbeing questions, which can be benchmarked against the 16-19 year old general population. We have also compared our findings with HEPI and HEA's Student Academic Experience Survey 2021.

Headlines

This cohort is **less socially confident** than those of previous years and they are much more keen to contact flatmates in advance. However they are slightly less keen on social events – possibly due to social anxiety.

The social opportunities offered by university are extremely important to them. **Making friends and meeting new people** is the top thing they are looking forward to at university.

They feel **less ready and less well informed** about going to university compared to 2017.

They have a higher incidence of **mental health condition** and **neurodiversity** and are more likely to have anxiety or an eating disorder than previous cohorts. The cohort as a whole has slightly lower wellbeing than in previous years.

They are **less likely to drink too much or take drugs**, but more likely to have issues with eating.

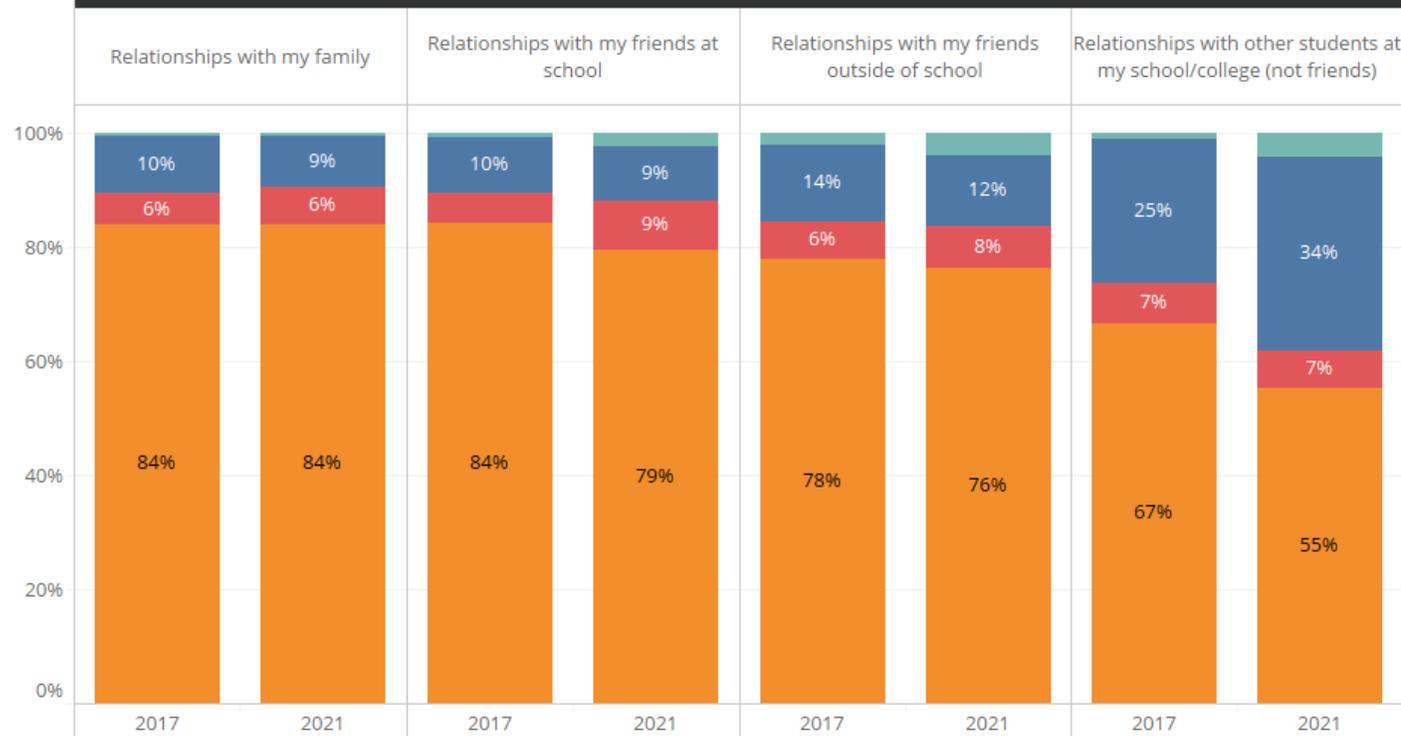
They also have a stronger preference for **going to staff and specialist services with problems** rather than other students – though many still do want peer support.

Almost all want a **sense of belonging** when they are at university but the majority are anxious about fitting in.

They are slightly *more* confident about getting a **graduate job** than the 2017 cohort.

They have a **stronger drive towards face to face learning** compared to the 2019 cohort.

2. On the scale below, please indicate how happy or unhappy you feel about each of the following relationships at the moment



Net Happy	0%	-2%	-5%		-12%
Net Unhappy	0%	2%	4%		0%
Neither happy nor unhappy	-1%	-2%	-1%		9%

■ Don't know
■ Neither happy nor unhappy
■ Net Happy
■ Net Unhappy

Happiness in relationships with family and friends are similar to 2017.

Happiness in relationships with friends outside of school and other students who aren't friends has gone down. This is likely to be due to limited social opportunities over the last 15 months.

Unite Students Applicant Survey

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (Low Anxiety)



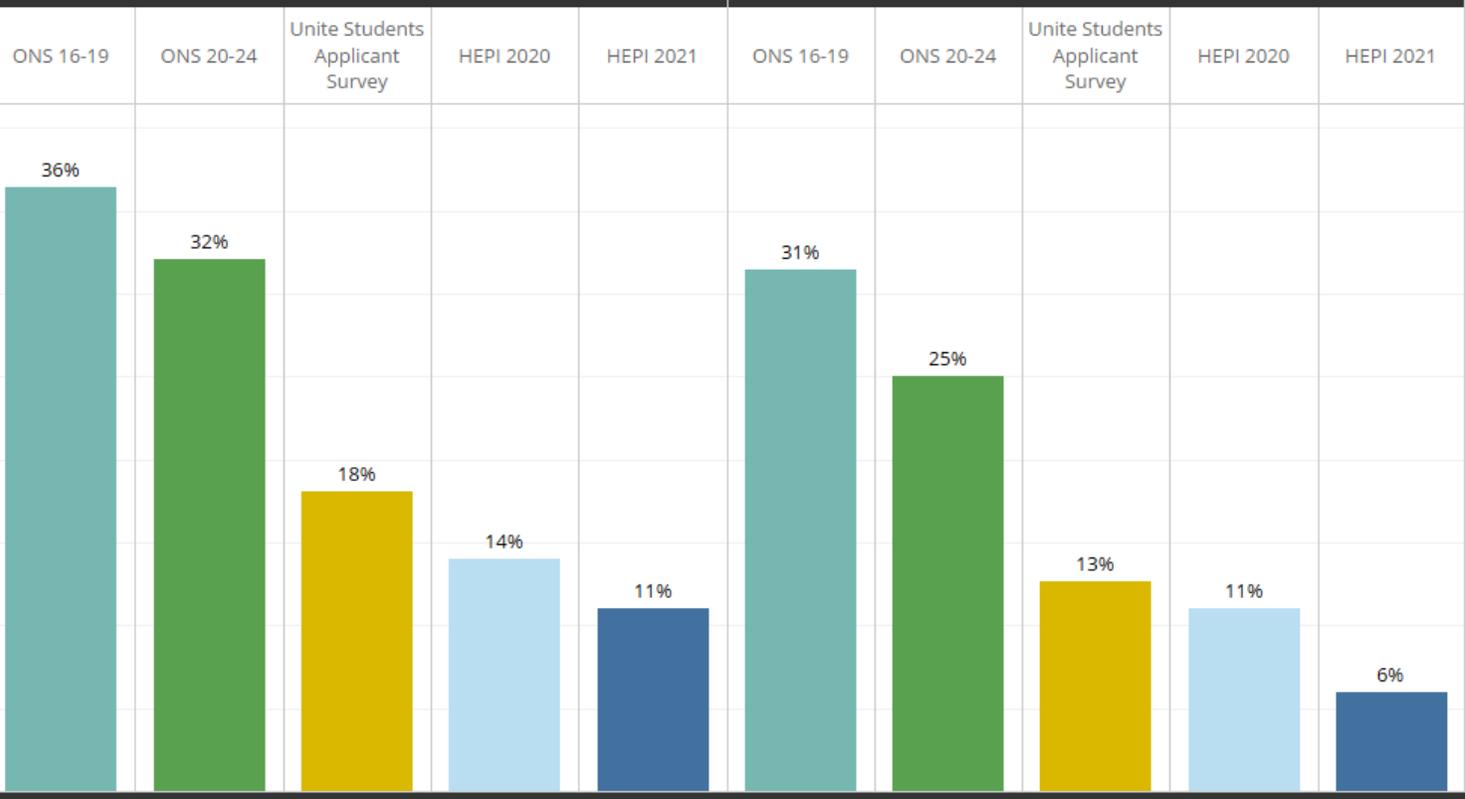
There are small drops in those in all of the ONS standard wellbeing questions since 2019.

Given the timescales involved, the pandemic is likely to be the most significant cause of the change.

Percentages Calculated from all students scoring 9-10 out of 10 for life satisfaction, life worthwhile, happiness, 0-1 out of 10 for Anxiety

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?



Survey
 ONS 16-19
 ONS 20-24
 Unite Students..
 HEPI 2020
 HEPI 2021

Percentages Calculated from all students scoring 9-10 out of 10 for life satisfaction, life worthwhile, happiness, 0-1 out of 10 for Anxiety

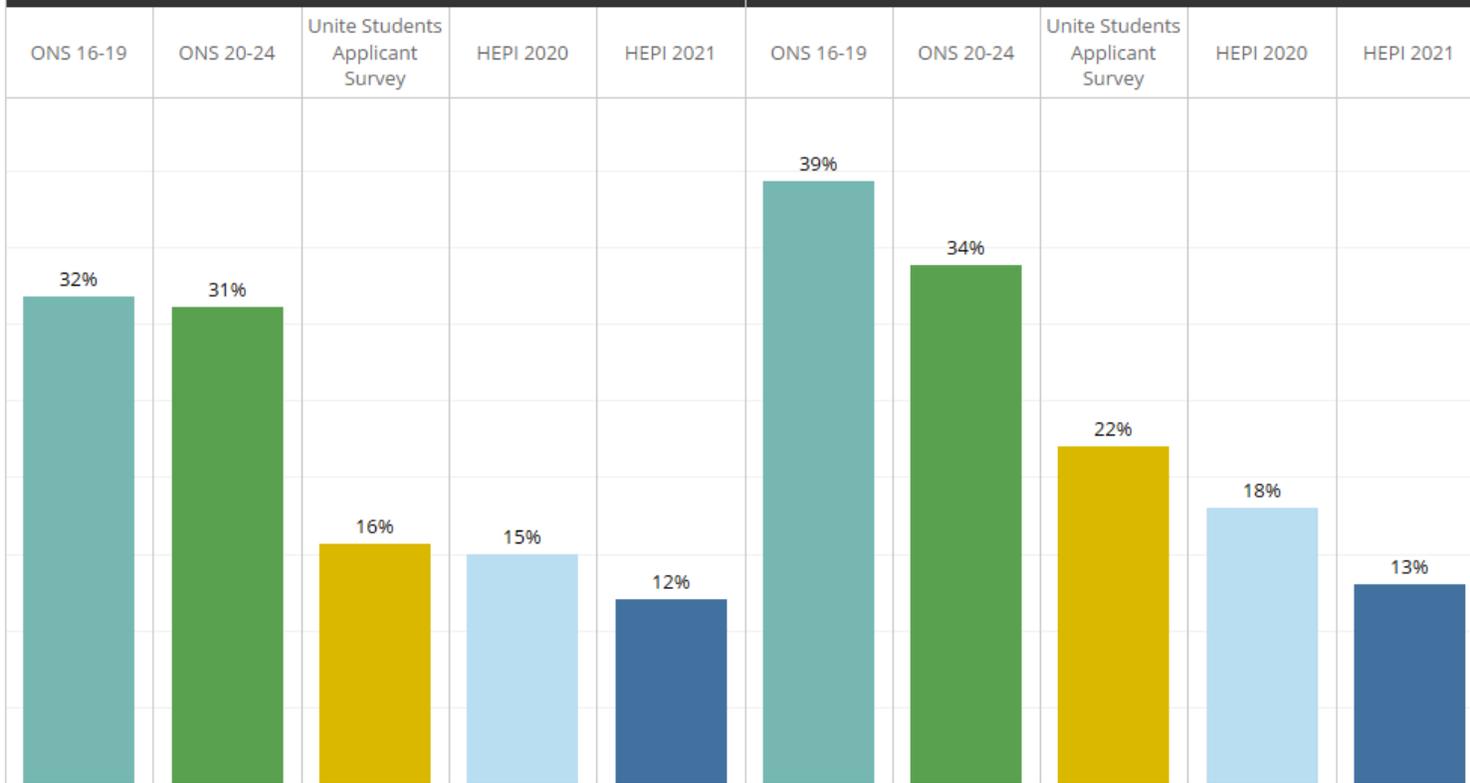
HEPI/HEA have seen similar drops in wellbeing among the student population.

Students score lower than applicants on these questions who in turn score lower than the general 16-19 and 20-24 population.

Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (Low Anxiety)

See previous slide for commentary



Survey
 ONS 16-19
 ONS 20-24
 Unite Students..
 HEPI 2020
 HEPI 2021

Percentages Calculated from all students scoring 9-10 out of 10 for life satisfaction, life worthwhile, happiness, 0-1 out of 10 for Anxiety

	Always & Often	Sometimes	Never
Capable of making decisions about things	67%	30%	3%
Loved	66%	29%	5%
Able to enjoy life	65%	32%	4%
Optimistic about the future	59%	35%	6%
Cheerful	59%	39%	2%
Calm and relaxed	54%	40%	5%
Coping well with problems	51%	43%	6%
Confident in yourself	46%	44%	10%
Playing a useful part in things	43%	46%	11%

2019 VS 2021			
Capable of making decisions about things	-4%	4%	0%
Loved	-3%	1%	1%
Able to enjoy life	5%	-5%	1%
Optimistic about the future	0%	-1%	1%
Cheerful	-2%	1%	0%
Calm and relaxed	9%	-8%	-2%
Coping well with problems	0%	-1%	1%
Confident in yourself	1%	0%	0%
Playing a useful part in things	1%	-1%	0%

Applicants are feeling more calm, relaxed and able to enjoy life compared to 2019. This is possibly because the 2019 survey took place just before their A-level exams, whereas this year's survey came after A-levels were complete.

Other than that, it is surprising how little has changed.

	Always & Often	Sometimes	Never
Tired or lacking in energy	56%	39%	5%
Stressed or worried	49%	45%	6%
Less interested in things you used to enjoy	36%	43%	20%
Under strain	34%	50%	17%
Isolated or lonely	30%	48%	22%
Down or depressed	29%	49%	22%
Rejected by others	20%	45%	35%
Ashamed	16%	37%	47%

2019 VS 2021

Tired or lacking in energy	-16%	13%	2%
Stressed or worried	-14%	13%	2%
Less interested in things you used to enjoy	1%	2%	-4%
Under strain	-25%	17%	10%
Isolated or lonely	0%	5%	-5%
Down or depressed	-2%	-1%	3%
Rejected by others	2%	3%	-4%
Ashamed	2%	0%	-3%

Similarly, the drop in tiredness, worry and strain is likely linked to the timing of this year's survey coming after exams rather than before. However, spending more time at home may have also have an impact.

11. Which of the following if any, have you ever experienced during the last year?



There is a notable rise in applicants experiencing issues with eating compared to 2017

They have had much less experience with alcohol and drugs vs 2017. This may in part be due to reduced opportunity.

13. Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition? (Please pick all that apply)

	No known disability or health condition	A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder	Specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia or ADD/ADHD	Illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy	Communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder	Prefer not to say	Impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using arms, using a wheelchair or crutches	Blind or serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses	Deaf or a serious hearing impairment
2021	72%	15%	6%	4%	4%	4%	2%	1%	0%
2017 Vs 2021	-3%	2%	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%

Mental health conditions and social/communication disorders have both increased. This may in part be linked to improved diagnosis.

Among those who have a mental health condition, eating disorders shows a notable increase of 6 percentage points.

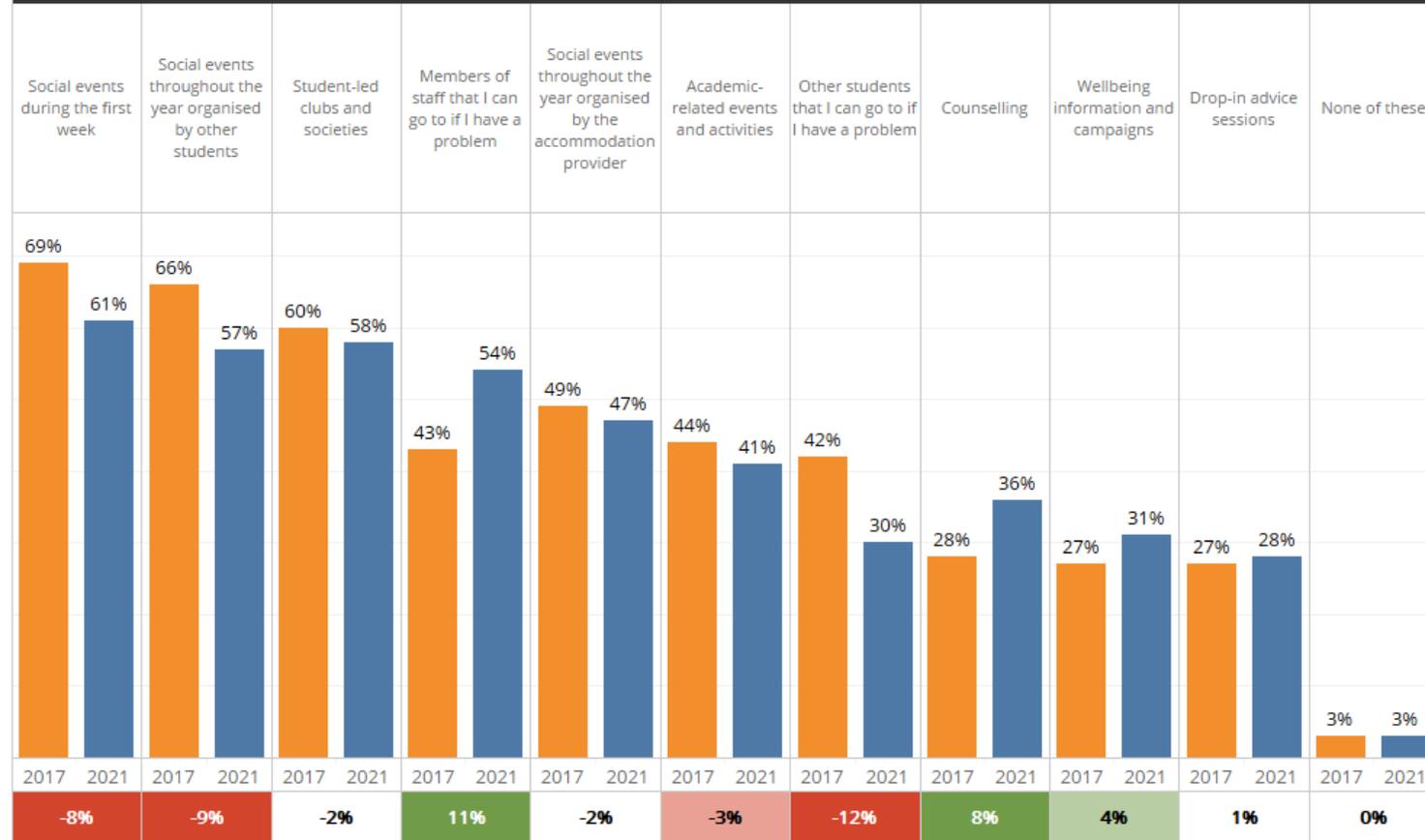
14. Which, if any, of the following best describe the mental health issues you have experienced in the last two years? (Those who selected a mental health condition)

Vs 2017

Mental Health Issue	2021	Vs 2017
Anxiety	88%	7%
Depression	63%	-10%
Eating disorder (including Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating Disorder)	31%	6%
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	15%	3%
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	11%	5%
Personality disorder	7%	2%
Bipolar	5%	0%
Other (specify)	3%	-1%
Schizophrenia / psychosis	1%	-2%
Prefer not to answer	1%	0%
Don't know	1%	1%

Among those with a mental health condition, anxiety is now much more common than depression whereas in 2017 the rates were very similar.

16. Which of the following would you like to see provided in your student accommodation?

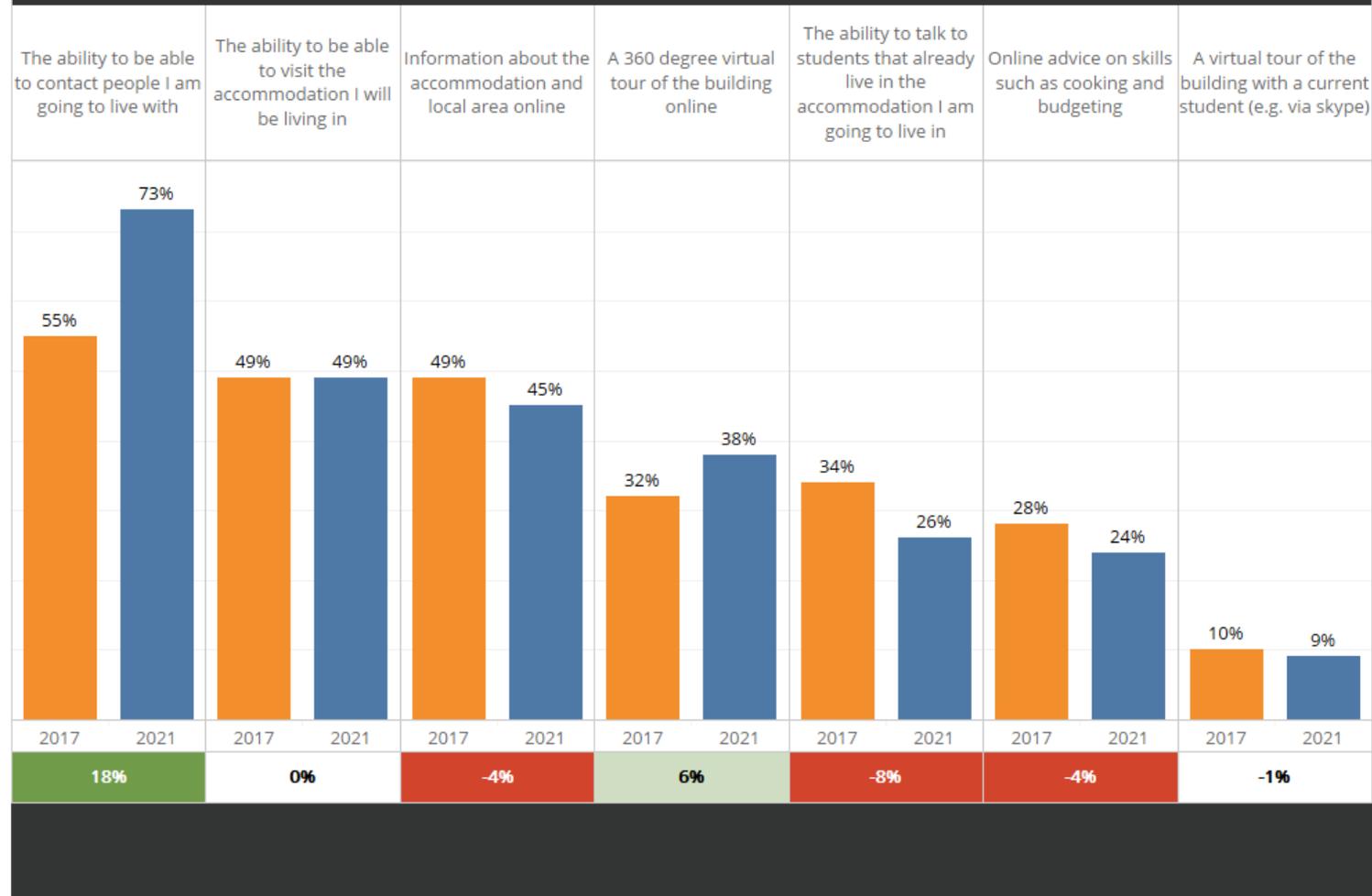


This year's applicants have a greater preference for members of staff they can go to if they have a problem, and counselling, vs 2017.

Although still very popular, social events during the first week and those provided by other students see notable declines.

Overall, there is a trend away from wanting to go to other students with their problems, and towards support from staff and specialist services.

17. Which of the following opportunities would you like to have before you arrive at your accommodation?

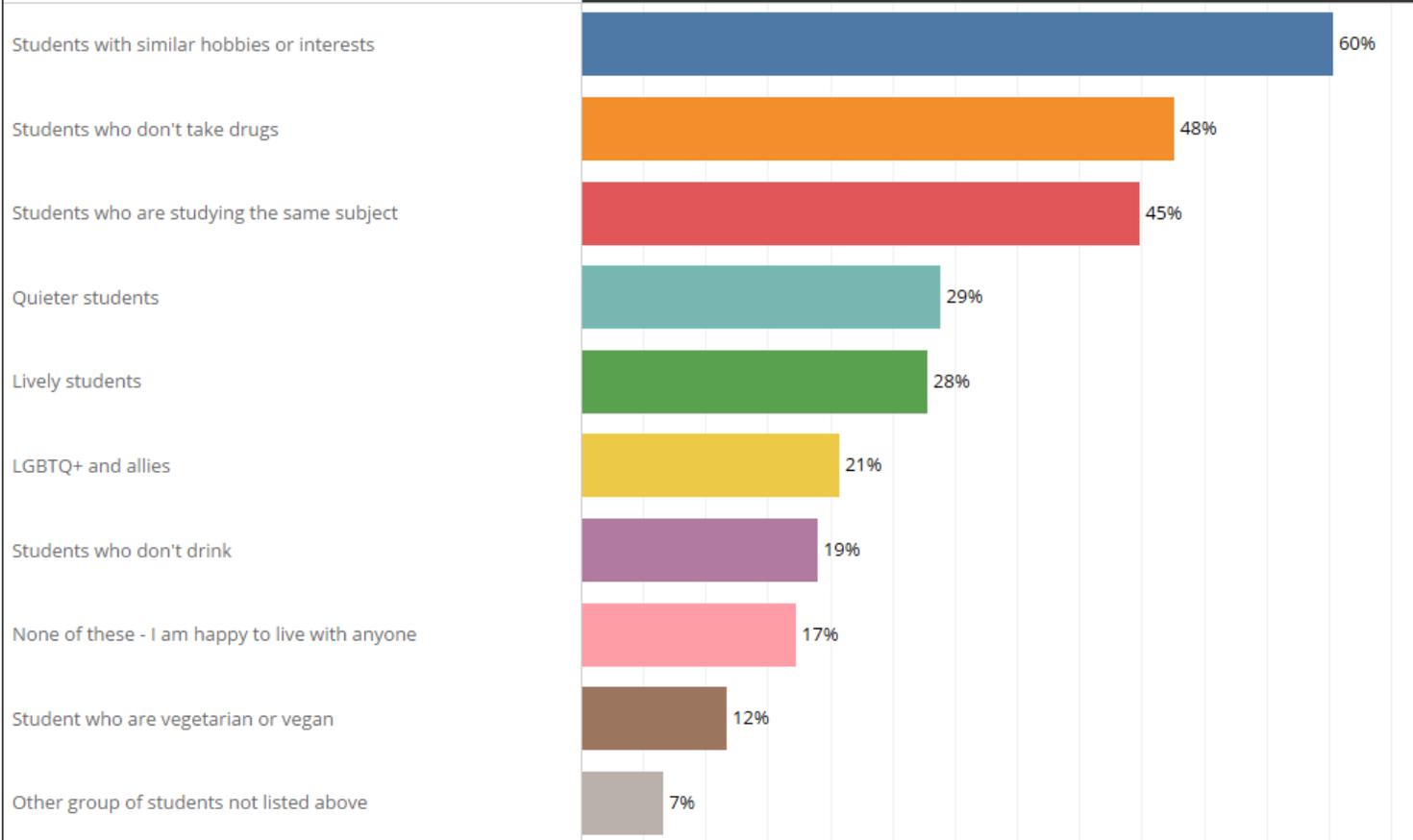


Nearly three quarters of applicants want the ability to contact the people they are living with prior to arriving at University versus 55% in 2017 – a considerable increase.

Applicants would also like to be able to have a 360 degree virtual tour of their building +6 percentage points vs 2017.

The desire to talk to students who already live in the accommodation has declined.

18. Thinking about who you might live with next year, are you interested in any of the following living arrangements? (Please tick any that apply)



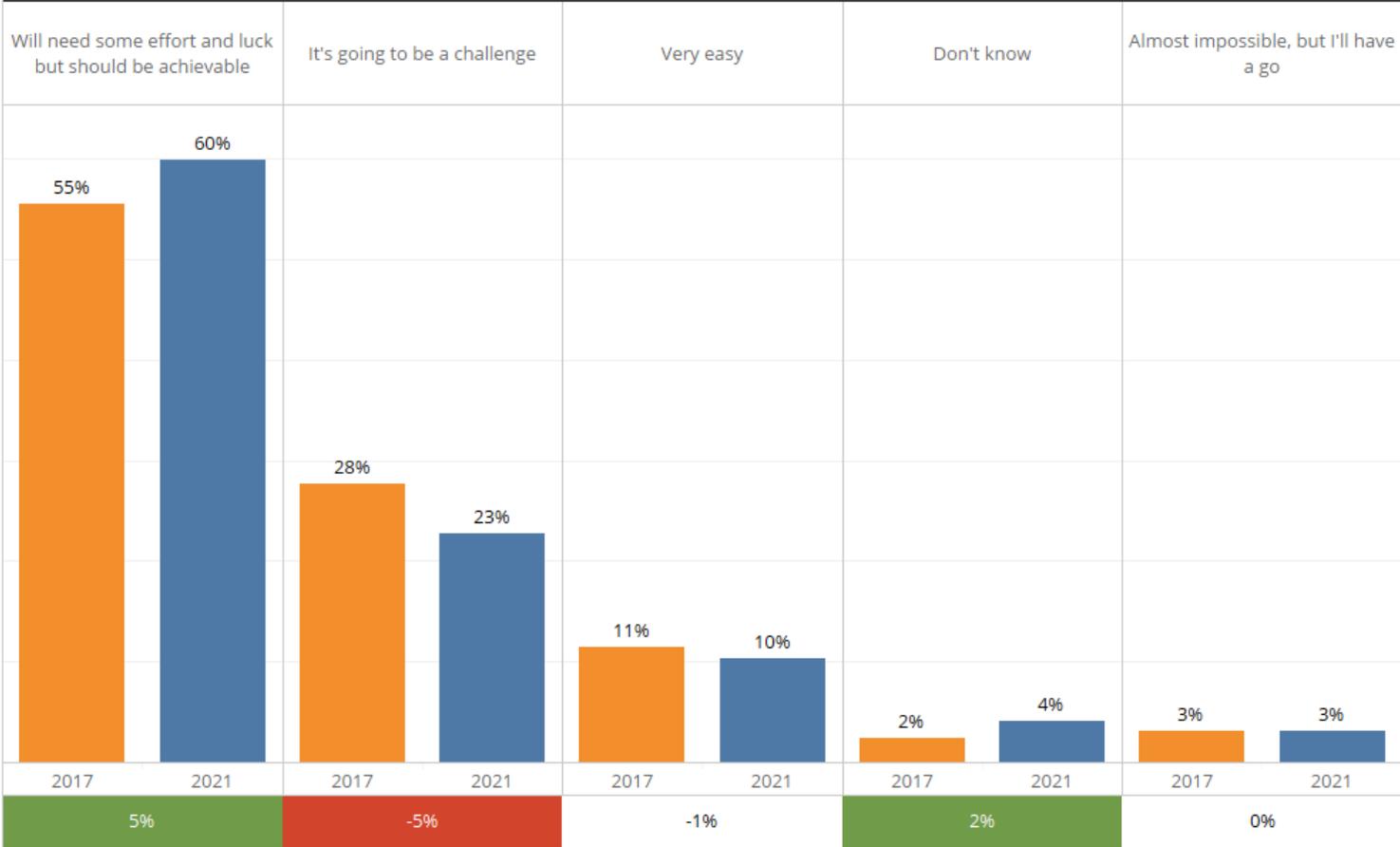
Please Note: New Question

A new question for 2021 sees applicants interested in living with students who share similar hobbies, interest and study the same subject.

Nearly half of applicants prefer to live with student's who don't take drugs.

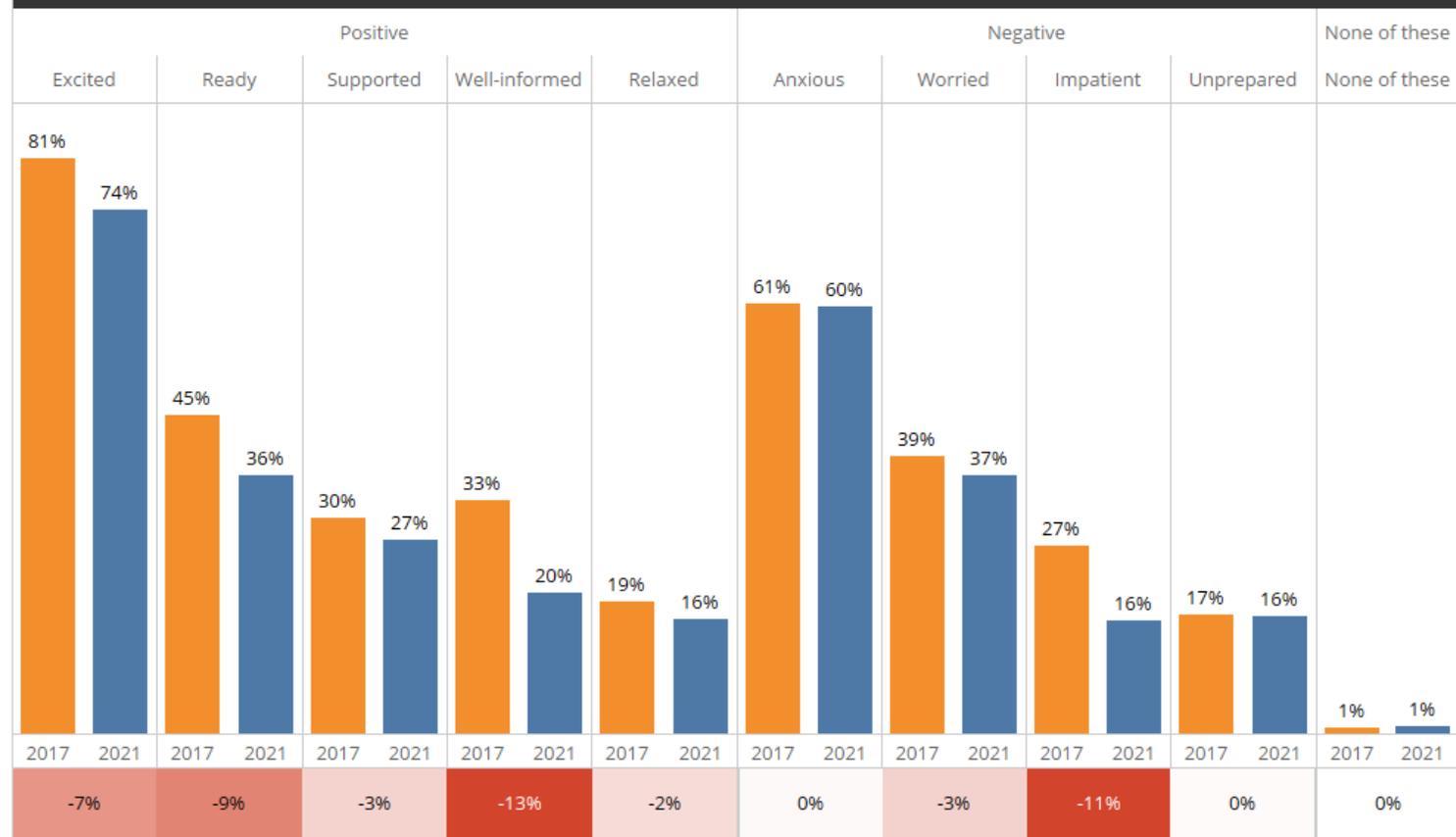
Only 17% are happy to live with anyone.

21. How easy or difficult do you think it will be to find the job that you want after graduating from university?



Surprisingly, applicants are more confident about getting a job than they were in 2017.

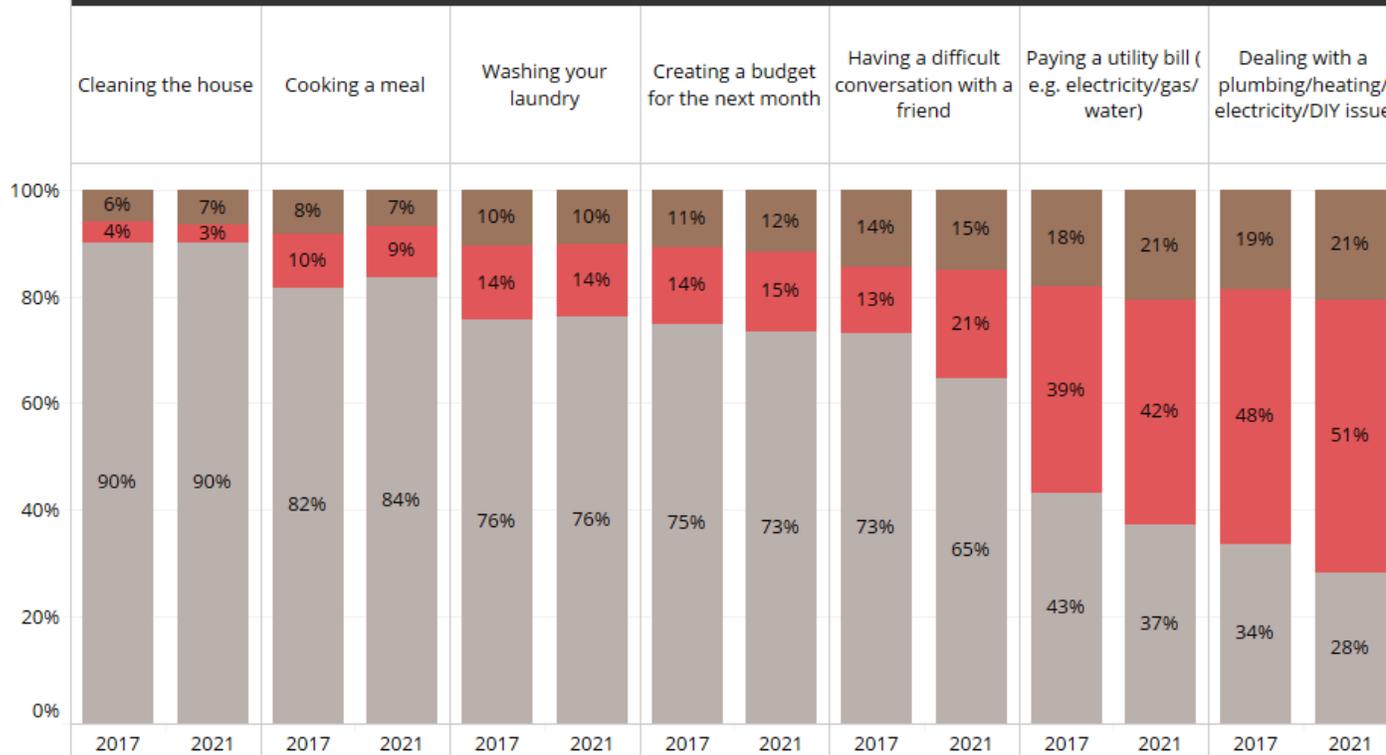
5. Which of the following describes how you currently feel about going to university?



Applicants are feeling less excited informed and ready for university vs 2017. They are also less impatient.

These findings are surprising given that the 2017 survey was conducted in March-April. We would have expected this year's respondents to be more informed and ready in June.

3.If you were asked to do the following tomorrow, how confident are you that you would be able to do it?



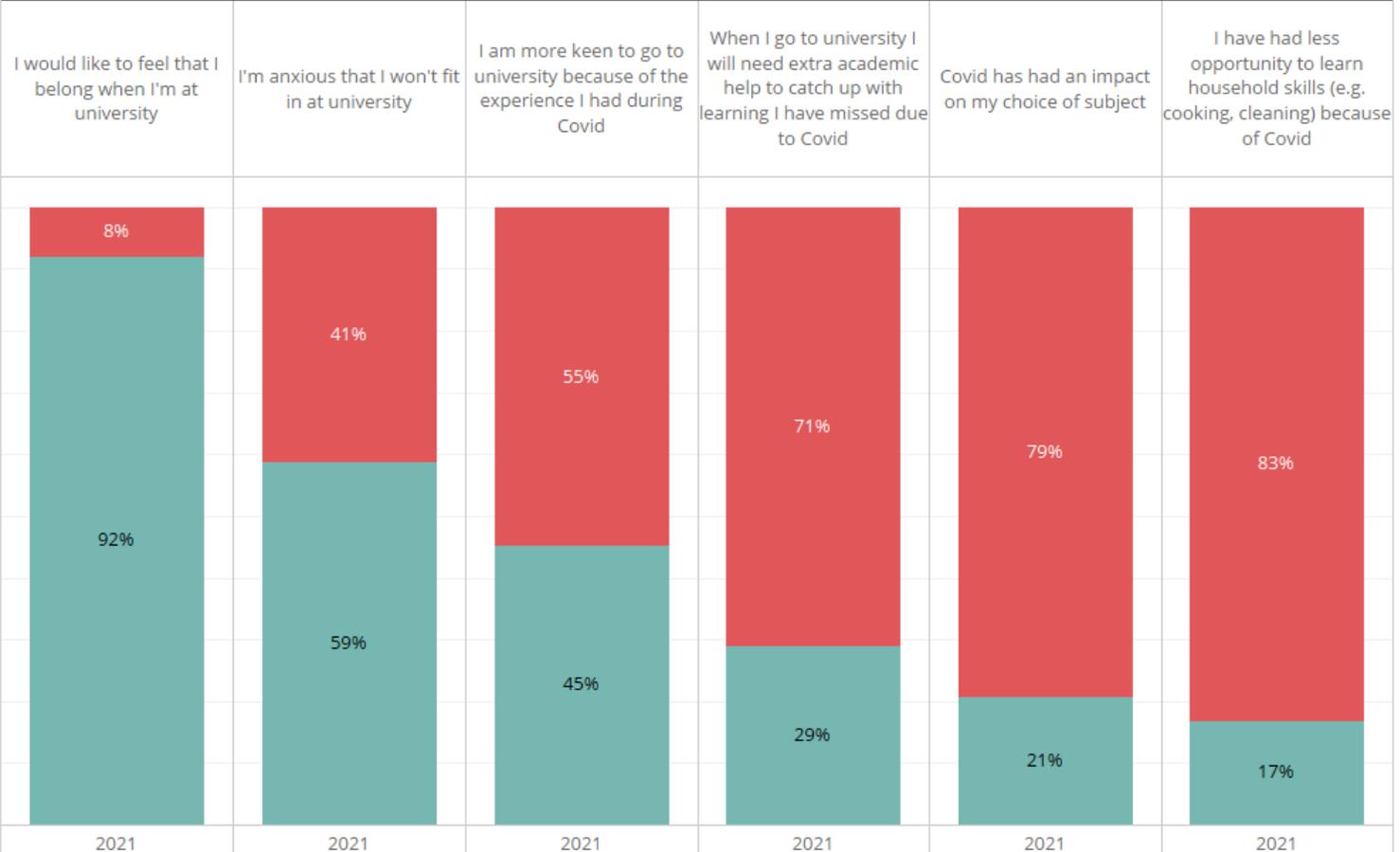
The largest drop in confidence for applicants is having a difficult conversation with their friends, which is down 8 percentage points vs 2017.

They are also less confident in household management tasks such as paying bills, dealing with maintenance issues.

Net Confident	0%	2%	0%	-2%	-8%	-6%	-6%
Net Unconfident	-1%	-1%	0%	1%	8%	3%	3%
Neither nor	1%	-1%	0%	1%	1%	3%	2%



24.To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?



■ Net Disagree
■ Net Agree
 Please Note: This is a new question for 2021

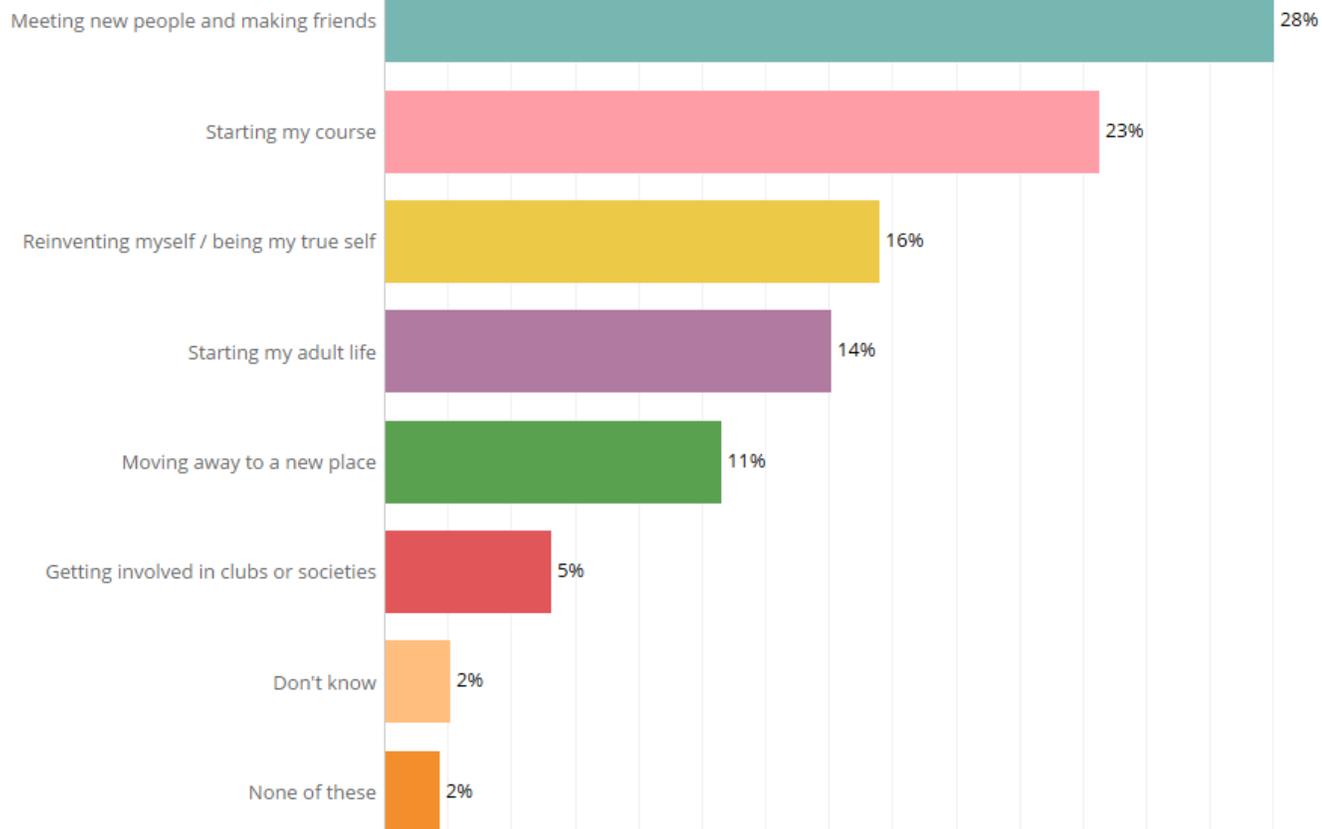
Almost all applicants would like to feel that they belong when at university but over half are anxious about fitting in.

Anxiety about fitting in may be linked to imposter syndrome as a result of disrupted schooling and cancelling of external exams.

29% think they will need additional academic support to catch up loss learning.

21% say Covid has impacted their choice of study subject.

25. What are you MOST looking forward to about going to university?



More applicants are most looking forward to making friends than starting their course.

Reinventing themselves or being their true self is the third most popular answer.

26. Rank the below ways to learn in order from those you think would be most to least useful for you.

Ranked	Smaller working groups like seminars	One-on-one in person	In a lecture	Learning independently on your own	Online one-on-one	Small online group	Webinar or lecture recording
1st & 2nd	27%	25%	22%	9%	5%	5%	7%
3rd - 5th	12%	12%	14%	16%	17%	17%	12%
6th & 7th	5%	7%	7%	17%	19%	20%	25%

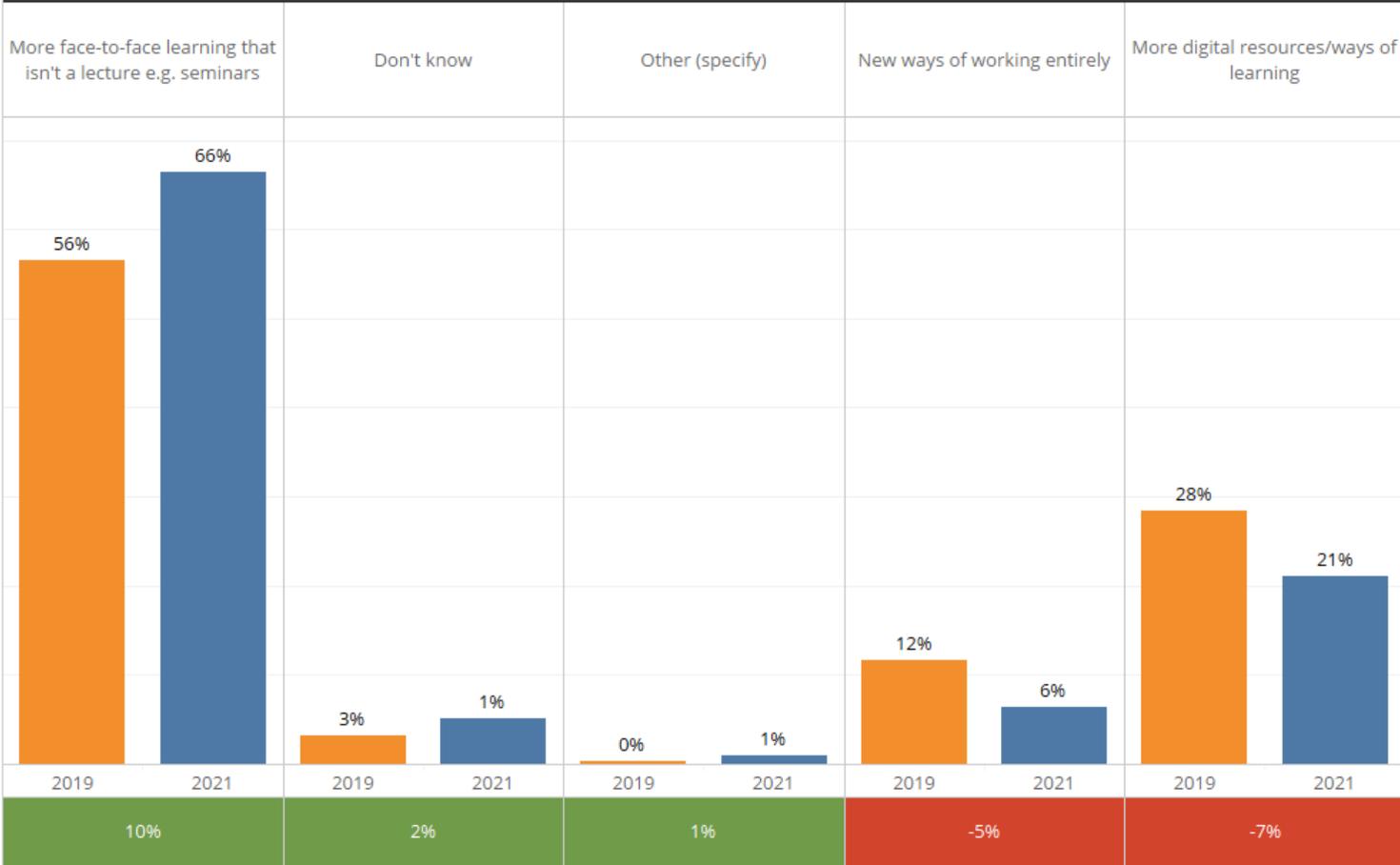
Difference Vs 2019

1st & 2nd	9%	4%	5%	-8%	-2%	-4%	-2%
3rd - 5th	-2%	-1%	1%	-1%	6%	9%	-9%
6th & 7th	-5%	-2%	-3%	9%	-3%	-7%	12%

Although the pandemic has accelerated universities' digital capabilities, the face to face model is the overwhelming preference for this year's applicants.

These preferences have become more pronounced since 2019.

27.If face-to-face lectures at university were discontinued, which of the below would you most like to take their place?



The preference for face to face learning is underlined in this question. If lectures were discontinued, the majority would prefer a different face to face mode of learning.

Those opting for digital resources in place of lectures has declined since 2019.

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