

JOURNEYS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE

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Report: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/study-at-lse/Undergraduate/widening-participation/News/he-journeys-and-covid>



Executive Summary



Students from low-income households will likely experience increased financial stress or even an inability to cover essential living expenses due to a loss of income from hard-hit sectors like hospitality and retail. Research indicates that these kinds of financial problems present a real barrier for students achieving their full academic potential.



A greater number of students are likely to choose to study close to home and commute to university due to an increase in relative costs. Research shows that living at a distance to your institution can have negative implications for accessing university support networks, feeling part of an academic community, and taking up valuable extra-curricular activities.



Access to career guidance and work experience opportunities has been significantly limited; not only will this worsen employment prospects, but a lack of quality careers support and first-hand work experience could negatively impact students' confidence and ability to make informed decisions around post-16 choices.



Given the loss of contact hours with schools, students' interaction with key sources of information, advice and guidance including subject teachers, advisers, and pastoral support has decreased. Our research indicates that students without a family history of higher education are likely to be most impacted by the loss of this help in confidently navigating the HE application process.

Methodology

Key Findings

- £ Financial Stress
- ⟳ Commuting
- 💼 Careers IAG
- 🎓 HE IAG

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The research was conducted by three WP practitioners at LSE and included a large-scale survey of students, focus-groups and a literature review

- The research was design in collaboration with Ellen Austin (Education and Student Experience Analyst, LSE) and Jessica Benson-Egglington (External Researcher)
- Objective: understand patterns of work and finance in WP project participants, contextualised by changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- We conducted a literature review and commissioned a literature review by the Bridge Group
- We conducted three focus groups in April 2018, involving year 13 participants from three of our sustained WP programmes
- We conducted a survey of 700 young London residents, aged 14-17, who had applied to one of LSE's pre-entry WP programmes, in July and August 2018



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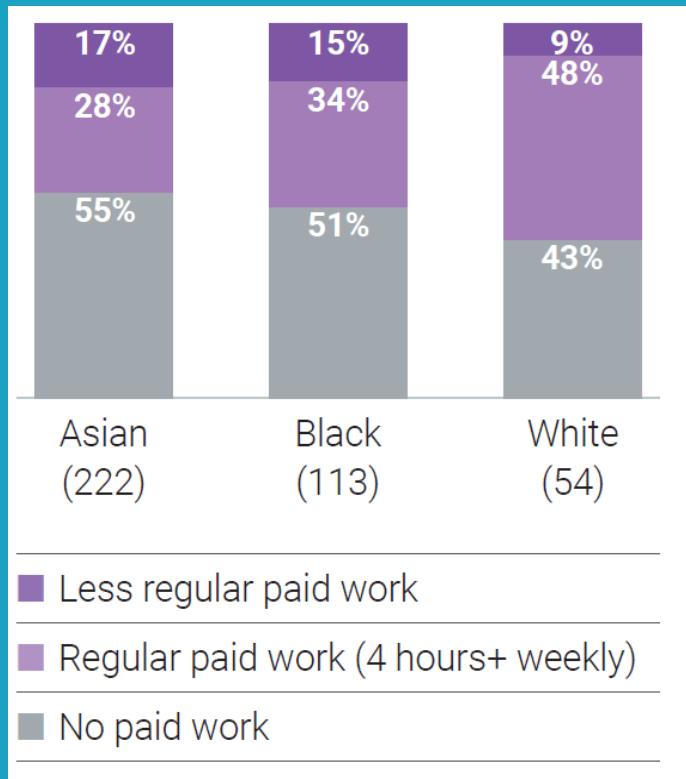
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Research shows that lockdowns have lead to earning losses across the economy. However, as our research confirms, students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds might be particularly hard hit.

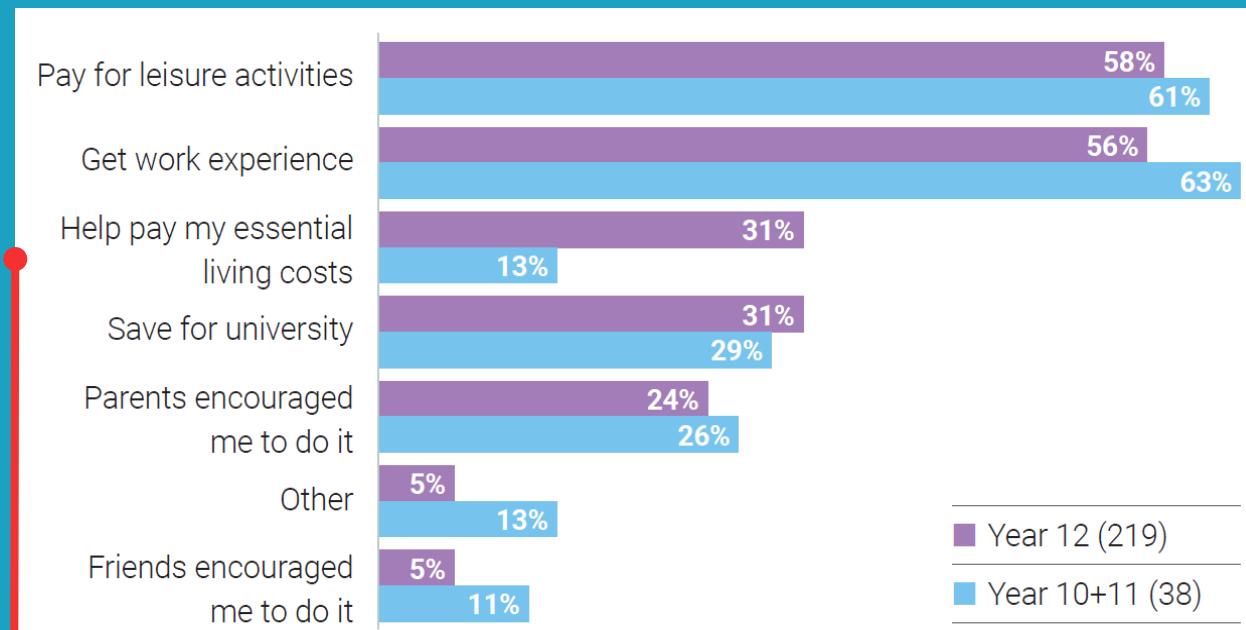
Work up-take by ethnicity (yr. 12 only)



- “Those aged 16-25 were over twice as likely as older employees to have suffered job loss, with over one in ten losing their job, and just under six in ten seeing their earnings fall. Labour market losses are more pronounced for women, the self-employed and those who grew up in a poor family” – Mayor et al. (2020)
- Our research indeed suggests that economic losses might be felt unevenly amongst students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, given uneven take-up of work in the first place:
 - Age was a key factor for the take-up of work. Only **10% of year 10 pupils** were working, while **47% of year 12 pupils** reported some form of paid work.
 - Among year 12 students, ethnicity further significantly influenced patterns of work, with white students being the most likely to report undertaking regular paid work; conversely, pupil identifying as Asian were least likely to report regular work, but most likely to report occasional work.

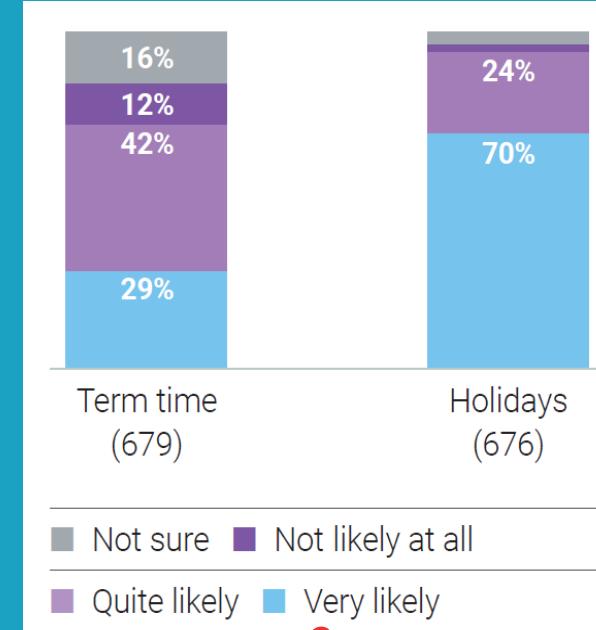
This loss of income will likely increase existing financial problems for young people. A sizeable share might even lose the ability to pay for essential living cost, especially if they were already receiving FSM.

Reasons for work



41% of students who received Free School Meals (FSM) at any point stated that they worked to “pay for essential living cost” (as opposed to 24% of students without FSM).

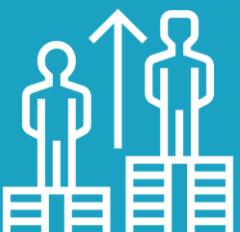
Planned uptake of work



81% of respondents wanted to work to pay for essential living cost.

This loss of income is likely to affect young people's educational attainment and wellbeing and thereby compound existing disadvantage compare to more affluent student groups.

- According to UCAS, pupils receiving FSM face worse educational outcomes
 - Attainment 8 scores are on average 14 points lower for students receiving FSM than for students who don't
 - The proportion of students in receipt of FSM that achieve at least three A/A* grades is less than half of that of students not receiving FSM (4.9 per cent vs. 11 per cent in 2015/16)
- Income losses may compound this relative disadvantage
 - Unlike their wealthier peers, students on our WP projects could be left unable to pay for technical equipment or tutoring; pupil from households in the lowest income quintile were more than 4 times less likely to receive private tutoring than pupil from households in the highest earnings quintile (3.8% compared to 15.7%) (Mayor et al. 2020)
 - Research also outlines the toll of financial stress more broadly; financial stressors such as concerns about being able to pay for education or the need to work full-time to finance education are linked to worse physical health, worse mental health and lower educational attainment. (Britt et al., 2016)



Addressing these issues requires a political response and sector-wide collaboration. Financial aid and contextual admission policies are essential to minimising disadvantage at the university level.



Financial Support

- LSE launched a Digital Support Fund that provides up to £500 for digital learning equipment, including laptops, additional monitors or the cost of internet access.
- LSE's bursaries guarantee financial support between £500-£4000 to UK students with a household income below £42,875.
- We are reviewing financial support communication to ensure accessibility of this support



Contextual Admission

- In response to the pandemic we pushed to broaden our current contextual admission policy
- We broadened the criteria used in contextual admission, making additional students eligible
- We also convinced all departments to join our contextual offer-making scheme

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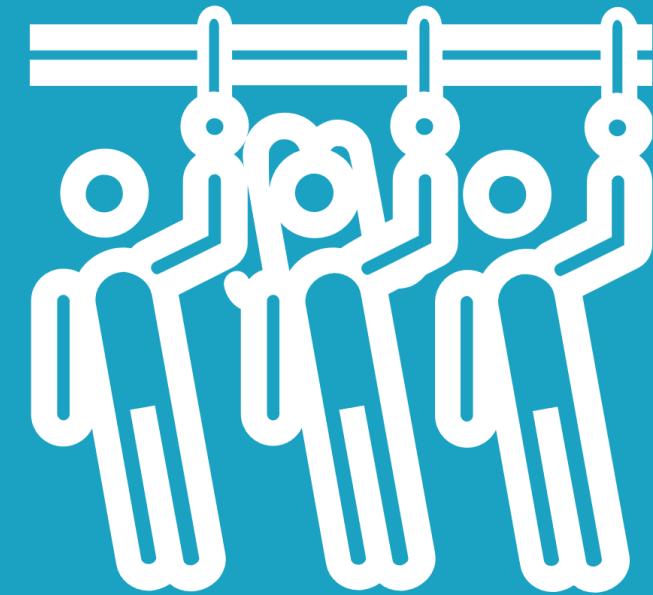


Our survey highlights that money is a driving factor behind students choosing universities that are closer to home, closely related to wanting to live at home while studying.

- The discussed decrease in income will also affect patterns of student access to university, especially for the 30% of survey participants that had been working to save for university.
- HE access generally does not appear affected, however: UCAS data highlights that students from “virtually all demographic groups entered HE in line with historic trends” (WonkHE, 2020) in the 2020/21 admission cycle.
- Instead, students might become more likely to study closer to home, given a close link between studying locally, living at home while studying, and wanting to save money:
 - **42%** of survey respondents stated that due to the cost of university they would “probably choose to live at home while studying”.
 - **42%** also agreed or agreed strongly with the statement “Because of the cost of university, I’ll probably choose to study near where I live (24% were neutral, and 34% disagreed or disagreed strongly).
 - Research by AccessHE (2021) supports this link: **42% of surveyed English pupil in receipt of FSM said that COVID had made them more likely to study close to home** – for students without FSM, this was only 30%.
 - In the same AccessHE study, a further **42% of students stated that COVID had made it more likely that they will live at home while studying**.

Wanting to study close to home reduces the university choices of students. Students who also live at home during their studies might face additional barriers to belonging at succeeding at university.

- If students study closer to home to save on cost of living, they will have fewer universities accessible to them, and might be less likely to find a provider and course that suits them and their interests.
- Living at home while studying or commuting to university, has been linked to a range of adverse outcomes:
 - Students living at home while studying have been shown to be less likely to report strong learning gains, while they are more likely to report regretting their choice of institution and course (Neves and Hillman, 2017)
 - Commuter students face higher drop-out rates and lower attainment (Crawford, 2014)
 - Commuter students also face barriers to build social networks, partake in extra-curricular activities, or develop a sense of belonging at university (Thomas and Jones, 2018)



Again, financial support especially for accommodation can help in convincing students to live closer to their university. Additionally, building an inclusive student community becomes more important.



Financial & Accommodation Support

- The LSE accommodation bursary supports students living in halls with bursaries between £750 and £2,500, based on financial need.
- We are also working with the accommodation team to flag support from wardens and finding ways to enable longer renting terms to help students build a stable support network while living away from home.

Building a student community

- Expanded transition scheme at LSE supporting outreach participants in their transition to LSE

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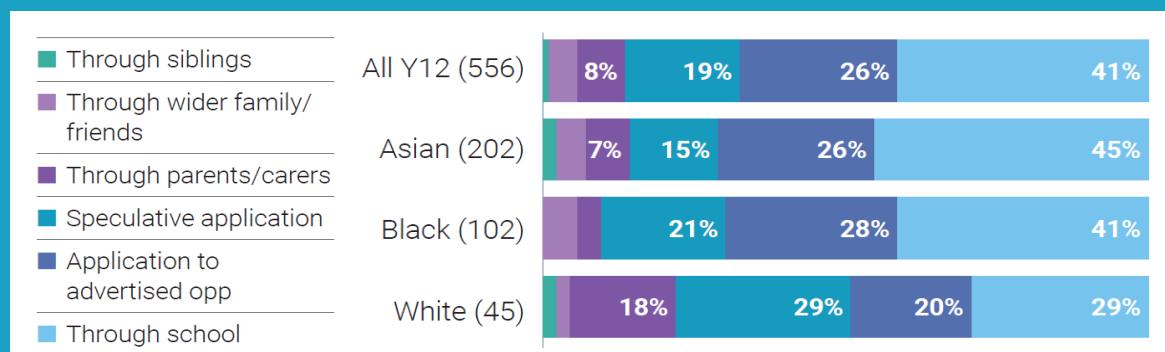
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In addition to losing income, students likely also lost out on work experience, both for paid work and internships, as fewer opportunities are available and remaining opportunities become harder to access.

- In our survey, 56% of year 12 students and 63% of year 10 and year 11 students stated that they were working to gain work experience; 65% of all respondents wanted to work at university to gain work experience. In losing these jobs, students will likely have missed out on opportunities to gain work experience as well.
- The loss of opportunities also affects placements and internships: “just over three fifths (61 per cent) of employers surveyed [cancelled] some or all of their placements” during 2020; 48% of employers also stated that they would have fewer work opportunities available in their business in 2021 (The Sutton Trust, 2020).
- Additionally, remaining work placements might become more difficult to access for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds: our research highlights that students were relying on schools to access placements. However, with COVID disrupting schooling, teacher and school support may be reduced.

Ways of securing work placements, by ethnicity (year 12 students only)



Loosing work experience will likely reduce student's confidence in their career and HE choices at the post-16 stage.

- Participant statements in our focus groups highlighted how important pre-university work placements were:
 - “The only way that I’ve really been given any advice on how to get into the financial sector is from the work experience I did, if you’re talking to them. I haven’t really had any advice through any other method.”
- Similarly, work our focus groups highlighted the importance of work placements for HE choice:
 - “I think it was good because it sort of did like affirm the fact that I want to go into Law.”
 - “[The internship] was really good because I kind of realised how much I hated accountancy. “
 - “I was speaking to one of the investment bankers there and they were saying that a lot of them actually did Engineering degrees and got into Finance, and I thought that was quite relatable to me, because I’m doing Physics A Level and I’m quite interested in that, but at the same time I’m interested in Economics as well. So I think in terms of like options, like Finance is quite wide because you could get into it through something which has like maybe maths in it or something quite academic.”
- Losing work opportunities might mean that students lose this information, advice and guidance.
- Worryingly, students’ career readiness at the point of entering HE can be linked to graduate outcomes; those that enter HE with a career in mind are more likely to take up the opportunities available to them, and in turn increase their employment outcomes (Greenbank, 2010)

Our WP outreach can support some students to gain both general careers IAG and work opportunities. Within the limited scope of our undergraduate intake, the Careers service will also take on a key supporting role.



Widening Participation Outreach

- Thanks to our partnership with the Sutton Trust, we are able to offer Pathways to Banking & Finance and Pathways to Law projects which include work placements for participating student.
- All our long-term projects include careers IAG sessions to highlight the careers options with a social science degree.



Careers Service

- For the 2021/22 intake, we have introduced questions around career planning into the student registration survey
- This allows us conduct further research into patterns of career readiness among students.
- It also means that we can proactively reach out to students and offer support.
- The Careers service also offers funding for students to undertake otherwise unpaid internships.

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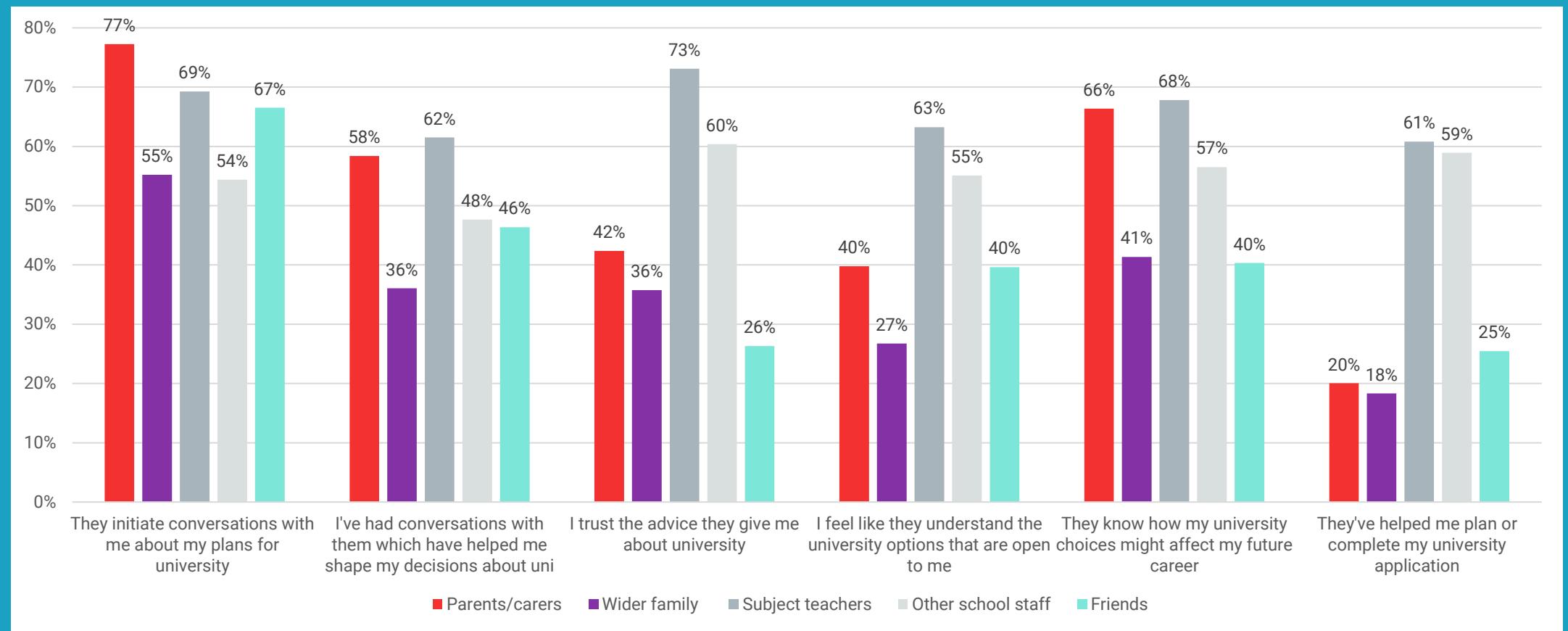
During lockdown, schools closed and teaching hours decreased. However, state school students were more likely to experience a loss of teaching – exacerbated by a gap in digital learning equipment.



- During the first lockdown in Spring 2020, pupils were on average experiencing 42% of their normal teaching time; however, splitting this average by school type, 74% of private school pupils were still experiencing full school days, compared to just 39% of state school pupils. (Major et al., 2020)
- Reduced teaching hours were intensified by an uneven access to digital learning equipment: in the most deprived schools, 32% of teachers reported that more than 1 in 5 pupils lacked devices; this figure was only 5% for more affluent schools (The Sutton Trust, 2021)
- There is rich anecdotal evidence of teachers struggling to meet increased workloads and feeling like it impacts the quality of their teaching

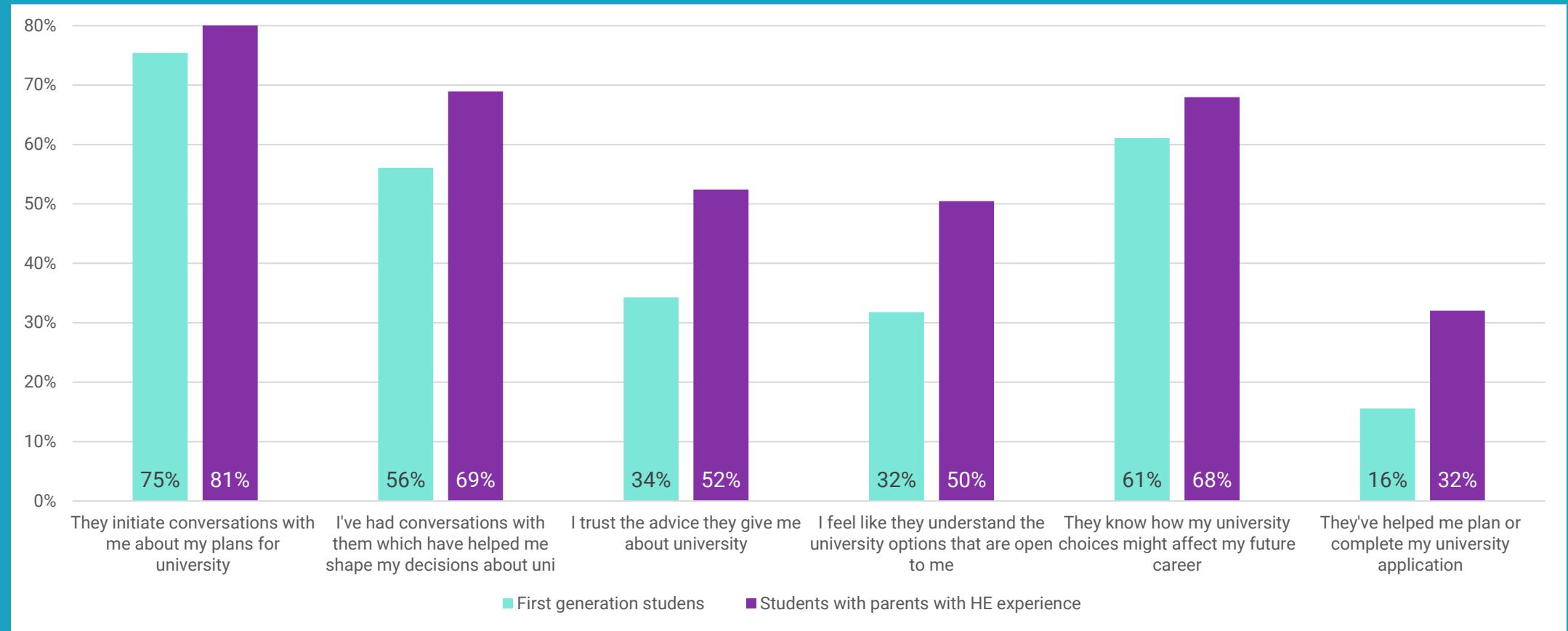
Fewer opportunities to interact with teachers and other school staff will likely reduce university IAG, student's confidence in HE choices and support for applications substantially.

Attitudes towards HE IAG and support from different sources.



This effect of lower confidence in the given advice and less support with university applications is likely even more pronounced for students who would be the first in their family to attend university.

Attitudes towards parental HE IAG and support by parental education.



Within the limited scope of our undergraduate intake, we want to address the problem of lower careers IAG. Outside of this, we want to contribute to sector-wide initiatives such as the Sutton Trust's Online Platform.



Widening Participation Outreach

- On a small scale, our outreach can support students in making choices about HE, including application support sessions.
- We are grateful to be working with the Sutton Trust on its “Sutton Trust Online” platform together with other partner universities, providing life chats with LSE student ambassadors and LSE specific IAG
- The platform will be accessible to 6,000 students who are eligible for one of the Sutton Trust projects.

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