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Two thirds of students worried about getting university place

A survey of UK students has revealed that 66% fear they won't get the results they need for their chosen university as A-Level results day looms.

With students worried about achieving their target grades, the survey, involving more than 1,000 UK students and carried out on behalf of Northumbria University, Newcastle, also found that 40% don't fully understand the Clearing process and the vital role it can play in helping students who just miss out on their grades to find a place at university.

Students are also in the dark about Adjustment, which provides them with the chance to swap their place for another course or university if their results are better than expected. More than three quarters (79%) either hadn't heard of Adjustment or had heard of it but don't understand what it is, or how they can benefit from it.

The findings also revealed that, despite the lack of knowledge around the options available, almost half of students questioned (49%) expect their grades to change from when they first applied for university.

Stephen Welsh, undergraduate marketing manager at Northumbria University, Newcastle, said: "The survey findings show that for many students, the Clearing process isn't, in fact, clear. Students may therefore not be benefiting from the huge opportunities Clearing and Adjustment can offer in terms of the best study option and right career path for them as an individual.

"The Clearing process has changed significantly in recent years and the option to 'trade up' using Adjustment now gives students the ability to reconsider their original choice if they have done better than expected.

"We recognise how important it is as a university to provide students with clear and simple messages around the Clearing and Adjustment process and ensure they are supported through it appropriately.

"Given the enormity of results day, many students, unsurprisingly, feel overwhelmed, but the key is not to panic. There is plenty of support and advice out there. Options like Clearing and Adjustment give students more flexibility and can match them to a university that best meets their needs and prepares them for a career path of their choice."

The survey highlights the importance of students having a full understanding of the options available to them as A Level results day edges closer. It also looked at the hopes and aspirations of students, their reasons for choosing the university they selected, and the factors that influenced their decision-making process.

Having a happy and healthy life was among the top aspirations for 47% of those questioned, with being financially comfortable (41%) and being successful in their career (39%) also ranking highly.

The survey also revealed that teaching standards was one of the key deciding factors for 49% of students when choosing a course, with future job prospects

(45%) and university facilities (42%) close behind.

With the first results from the new Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) published last summer, students applying to university this year have had even more information available to help them reach a decision.

Stephen Welsh added: “It is clear from Northumbria’s survey that teaching standards are high on the agenda for students when looking at where they want to study. There has never been a better opportunity to find out about teaching quality, along with many other aspects of university life, and students today are better informed than ever before when it comes to researching potential courses and universities.”

The survey also showed some interesting regional differences:

- In **Scotland**, 94% of students don’t fully understand the Adjustment process, higher than the national average of 79%.
- In **Northern Ireland**, 39% of students were worried they have chosen the wrong course, higher than the national figure of 23%.
- In **Wales**, 68% fear they will not get into the university of their choice, higher than the national figure of 47%.
- In the **North West**, 75% (three quarters) of students were worried they will not get the grades they need, higher than the national figure of 66%.
- In the **North East**, 44% of students decided on their chosen university because of its academic reputation, higher than the national figure of 35%.
- In **Yorkshire**, students were more worried about not getting into their chosen university – 51% compared to the national figure of 47%.
- In the **East Midlands**, 52% of students felt graduate job prospects are important, slightly higher than the national figure of 45%.
- In the **West Midlands**, 56% of students felt that teaching standards are important when choosing a course, slightly higher than the 49% national average.
- In **East Anglia** 44% of students were worried about leaving their friends and family, higher than the national figure of 30%.
- In the **South East**, 51% of students said having a happy and healthy life was their top aim and aspiration, slightly higher than the national figure of 47%.

- In **London**, 36% of students said they understood the process of Adjustment, higher than the national average of just 19%.
- In the **South West**, 38% of students felt that a university's links with industry are important when choosing a course, higher than the national figure of 29%.

21-year-old Alexia Savar, from Leeds, had originally applied to another University to study Law. However, while taking part in a summer school in Newcastle while awaiting her A level results she changed her mind having found out about an Integrated Masters course at Northumbria University. The MLaw (Exempting) course covers both the theory of law as well as the professional skills needed to succeed as a solicitor, meeting the requirements of a Qualifying Law Degree.

Alexia said: "I had researched the course in advance and knew it would be perfect for me so as soon as the Clearing hotline opened on results day I called the University to see if I could get a place. I was able to talk to the course leader which allowed me to ask questions and reassured me I was definitely making the right choice. I already had the points required for the MLaw course so was offered a place while on the phone. Once I got in touch with the University the whole process of changing my course was relatively quick and straightforward.

"Changing my mind quite late in the application process was a bit scary and it did mean I had to be released from my original course through UCAS before I could accept my new course at Northumbria. But I'm really glad I did as I'm really enjoying the course and I know I made the right decision."

When asked what advice she would give to other students considering applying to University through the Clearing process, Alexia said: "Make sure you research the course you're interested in beforehand if possible and have a list of any questions at the ready when you call in. Other than that just try and stay calm as the people on the other end of the phone will do everything they can to help you."

Student Deri Ford from Ulverston, Cumbria, lost out on her firm choice of university after discovering her initial grades weren't as she'd expected. Luckily she had prepared a 'Plan B' and secured a

place at Northumbria University to study a BA in Psychology.

Deri said: “Applying through Clearing was so straightforward and I had confirmation of my place by lunchtime on results day. The staff on the helpline made it feel like a really simple process. I was so relieved that I could sort out my future in just a morning. The Clearing team who looked after my application took the stress right out of everything.

“When I got confirmation that I had a place at university through Clearing, it was such a relief. I’d already done my research so knew the University offered an excellent programme in Psychology, plus I’d visited a few times and just loved the city.” The survey commissioned by Northumbria University involved a self-selected sample of A Level and A Level equivalent students (a total of 1,016 respondents) and was carried out in May 2018 by independent market research agency, Public Knowledge, a division of DRG. The survey was multiple choice and students were asked to select their top three answers to some of the questions, therefore some of the answers do not add up to 100%.

Northumbria University, Newcastle, has a limited number of places available for high quality students through Clearing this summer. The University offers a range of helpful hints and tips, available for students, parents and teachers, on its website and apps, including coping with stress in the days leading up to and on results day, advice for what to do before ringing your chosen university following your results and information about accommodation, student finance and health and wellbeing.

For more information, visit: www.northumbria.ac.uk/clearing or call the Clearing Hotline on 0800 085 1085 to speak to us about your application needs. You can also download the NU Clearing Guide

Top tips to remember when it comes to Clearing

1. Check UCAS and university web pages to see what courses are available through Clearing and Adjustment. At Northumbria we’ll be updating our website with live information throughout the

- day at www.northumbria.ac.uk/Clearing
2. Have your UCAS personal ID number to hand, plus all of your qualifications to give the university all of the information they will need. If you know the name of the course you're interested in, have the title and UCAS code to hand too.
 3. Consider all your options. Choosing the right university is a big decision and it's important to think carefully before you commit. Don't feel pressured to go for any option – it's your choice.
 4. Always speak to the university yourself. They will have questions for you, and vice versa, and you'll also be able to speak with subject tutors who will want to talk to you, not a parent.
 5. Make a note of your work and life experiences. These could prove very useful when you're talking to the university if you can demonstrate additional skills that others may not have.
 6. You may be asked to come in for an interview or to share your portfolio of work. If so, you'll need to note down the date, time and location of your interview, as well as who you'll be meeting, or any instructions you are given about sending us your portfolio.

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