

The Benefits of Hindsight: Reconsidering higher education choices

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Findings reveal that a large proportion of UK undergraduates and an even larger proportion of graduates think that with hindsight they would have made a different decision as to what and where to study.

The research is based on the results of surveys and focus group discussions with undergraduates and graduates carried out in 2024. The findings show that while the vast majority of those surveyed do not regret their decision to go to university, 35% of the undergraduates and 52% of the graduates surveyed would have chosen a different course or university (or both) or done something different.



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Policy recommendations

1. School and college students thinking about higher education should be encouraged and supported by their teachers and careers advisers to carry out more research into different course and university options at an earlier stage.
2. The perspectives of undergraduates and graduates should explicitly inform guidance given to young people thinking of applying to university, and it should not be assumed that any higher education outcome is necessarily the right option.
3. Higher education institutions must provide accurate and realistic information to prospective students which should not blur with marketing and promotional materials.
4. More information and guidance should be made available to undergraduates to support course or institutional transfer, with UCAS playing a more visible coordinating role in supporting students who wish to transfer.
5. The development of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement in England should take into account the position of undergraduate students who may wish to change their course.

Key Findings

The most common reasons given by the undergraduates were:

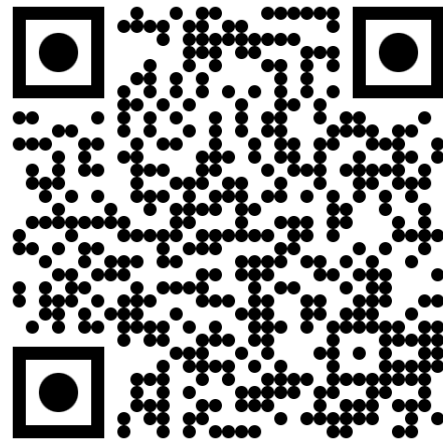
- That they would have been happier or fitted in better
- Their academic studies would have been more interesting or challenging
- A different decision would have enabled more career options (the latter particularly identified by undergraduates in the later years of their studies).

For the graduates the most common reason - by far - was that a different choice would have supported more career options: 'my degree didn't help me get a job'.

Of those surveyed who thought they would have made a different decision, 59% of the undergraduates and 63% of the graduates thought that had the option been open to them they would have wanted to transfer course or university. Reasons for not transferring included being unaware that transfer was an option, though many also said transferring would not be worth the disruption.

It was acknowledged in focus group discussions that there is no such thing as a perfect decision, and however good the information, advice and guidance provided, young people's views are always likely to change. However, the numbers who said they would have made a different choice were substantial and an overwhelmingly large proportion stated that a different decision would have made a lot of difference to them. Of those who did regret their decision, many were not aware of options for transferring course or institution.

Read the full report here:



Further information

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