

How do schools and colleges support students with university information, advice and guidance?

Between April and July 2026, UniTasterDays and the University Alliance collaborated on a research project exploring the experiences of school and college staff when providing university information, advice and guidance to students.

This research builds on a previous collaborative study undertaken by UniTasterDays and the University Alliance between May and June 2024, enabling comparisons to be made between the two studies.

The survey explored the experiences of school and college staff in supporting students with higher education progression. It examined when university engagement typically begins, the barriers schools and colleges face in accessing university outreach, perceptions of the quality of university information and opportunities available to students, the barriers educators believe discourage higher education participation, and the extent to which students experience anxiety around university and post school choices.

A total of 152 responses were received from school and college staff across the UK, including 149 responses from colleagues based in England.

This report presents the findings, beginning with a high-level summary before providing a detailed breakdown of each question. Throughout the report, comparisons with the 2024 research are used to highlight emerging trends, changing priorities and areas of consistency over time.

The report was prepared by Jon Cheek, Director of UniTasterDays, on 24 July 2026. Commentary throughout is based on the survey findings, a comparison to the research in 2024 and is intended to provide context and interpretation where appropriate.

Overview

Survey respondents

- The highest demographic of respondents were careers staff working with post-16 level students in academy trusts across England.

School engagement

- Year 12 is the most common year for university engagement to begin (28%)

- 84% of respondents rated the university information and opportunities provided to students as either 'Good' (46%) or 'Very good' (38%).

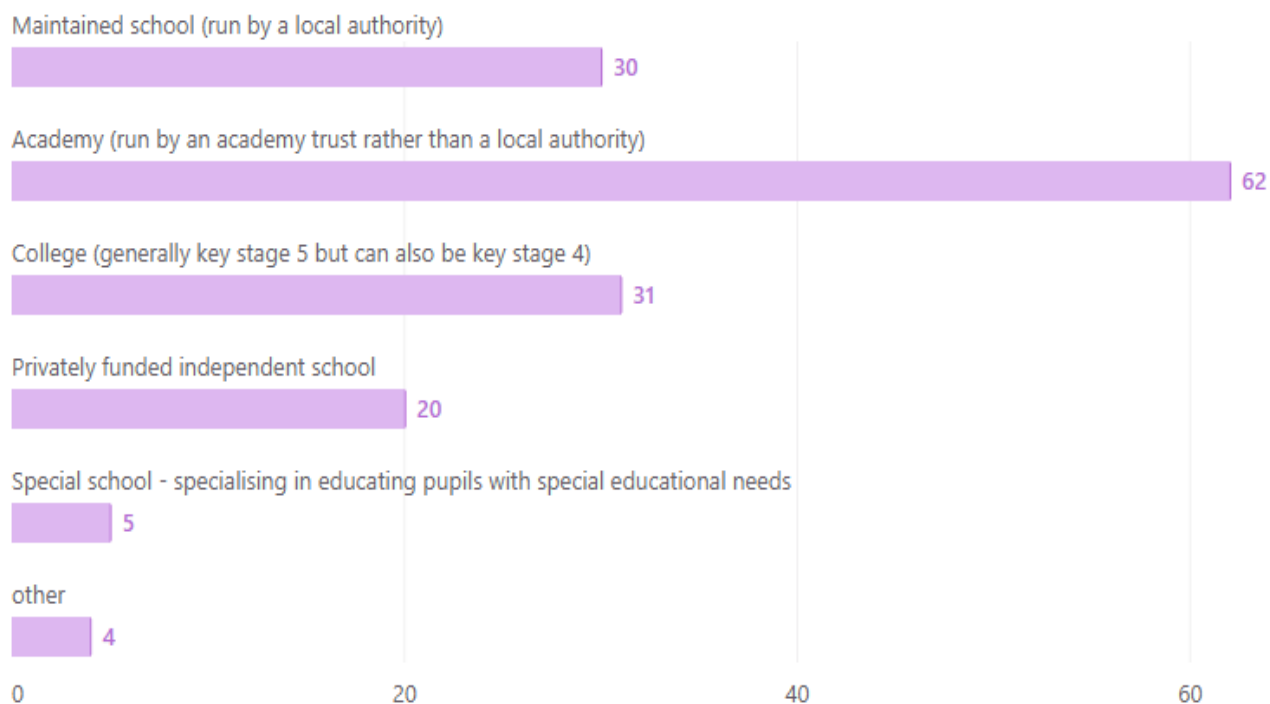
School barriers

- The most common barrier preventing schools from accessing university events is a lack of funds for transport - 77% of those answering stated this was a barrier for them. This is significantly higher than all other barriers. This is consistent with similar research undertaken by UniTasterDays in 2019 and the collaborative research with the University Alliance in 2024.
- If we look at trends relating to the barriers, the most common barriers are financial, second highest was a lack of funds to book external organisations to deliver events.

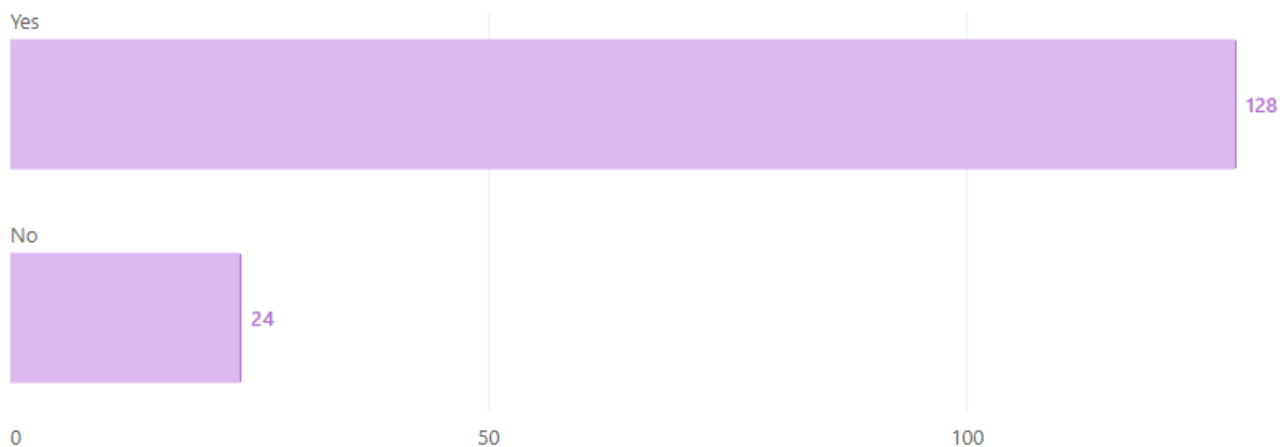
Student barriers

- The most common reason school and college colleagues believe students do not consider higher education is financial. The biggest perceived barrier is concern about the cost of living while at university, followed by concerns about tuition fees. This represents a shift from the 2024 collaborative research, when tuition fees were identified as the greatest barrier, with living costs ranking second.
- 99% of respondents report that their students have a moderate (76%) or high (23%) feeling of anxiety around making their university choices.

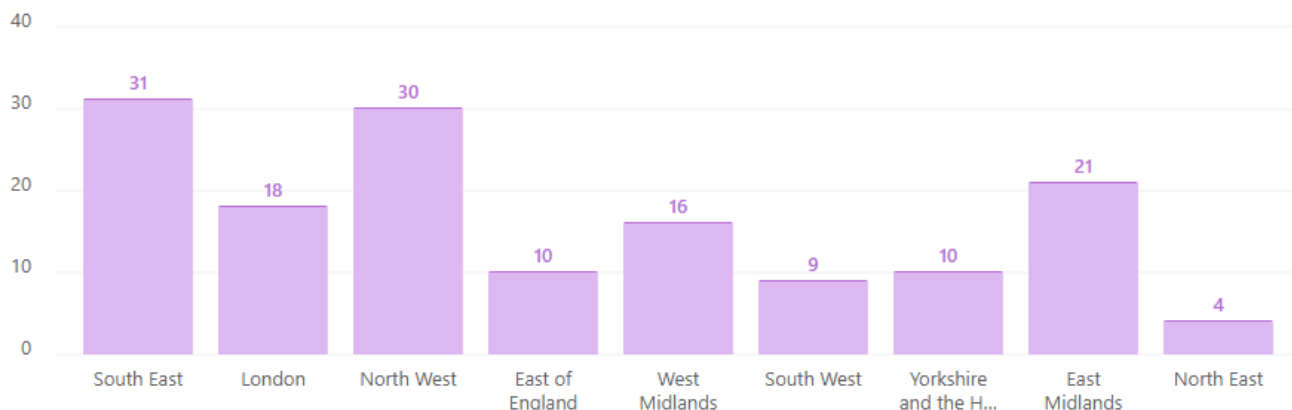
1.1 Type of school or College



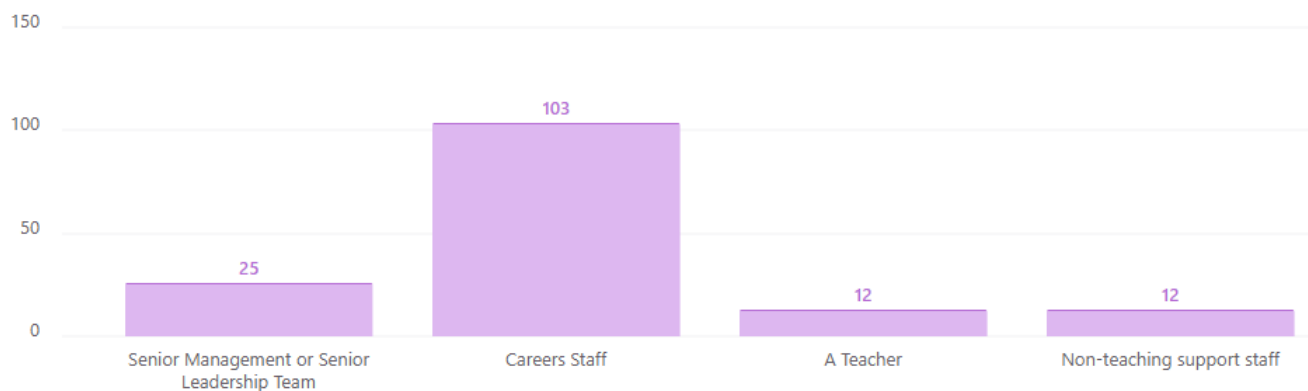
1.2 Does your school or college teach students at post-16 (key stage 5) level?



1.3 Which region in England is your school and college in?

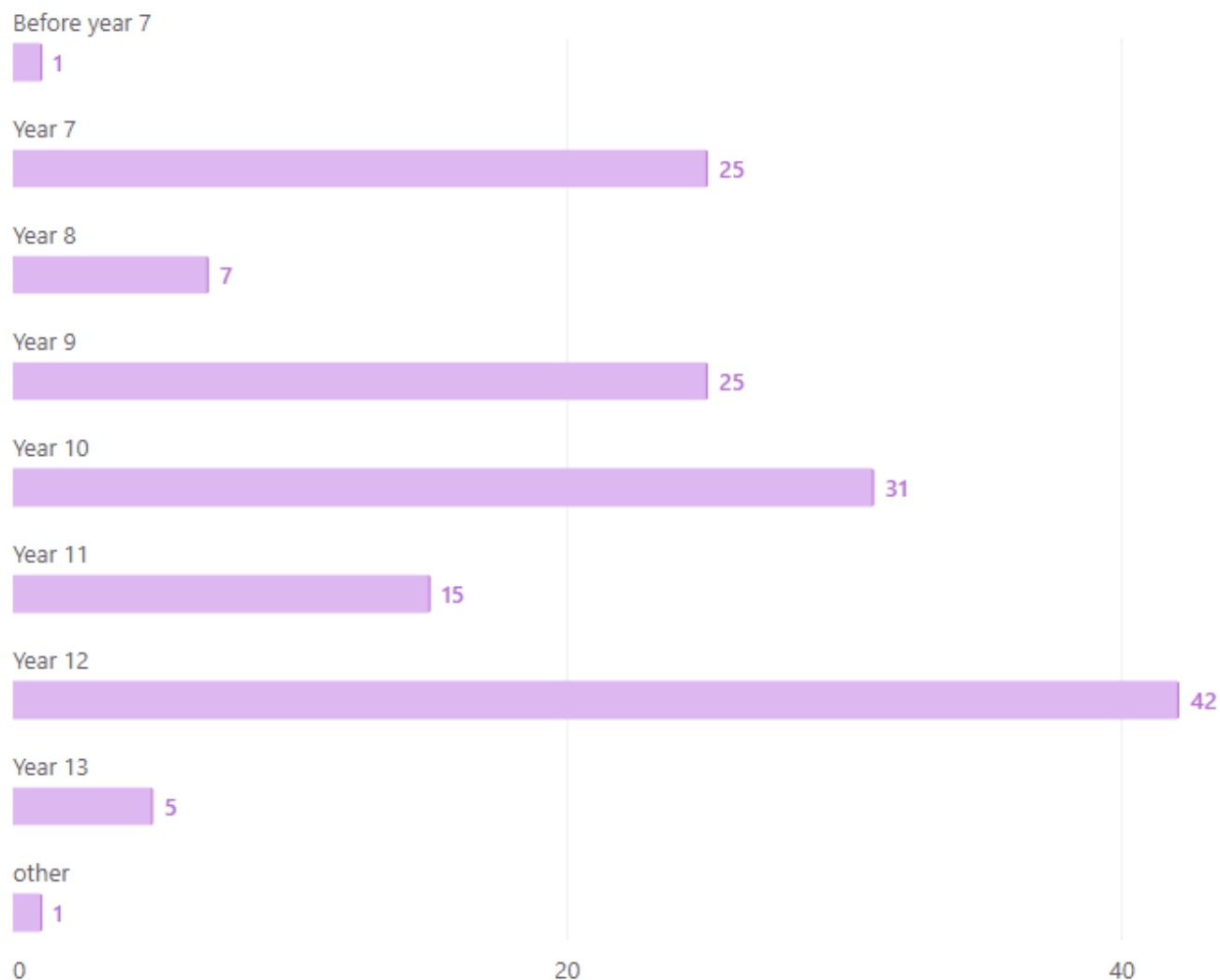


1.4 Which of the choices would provide the best match to your job role?



Section 2: School engagement and barriers

2.1 For which year group do you think university engagement (such as visits, talks or advice) starts for your school or college?



Here, we explored when university engagement in schools is starting. This is an important area to explore, for several reasons, including Gatsby Benchmark 7, which state:

- By the age of 16, every pupil should have had meaningful encounters with providers of the full range of learning opportunities, including sixth forms, colleges and universities.
- By the age of 18, all pupils who are considering applying to higher education should have had at least two visits to higher education providers to meet staff and learners.

The findings suggest that university guidance may be starting later in schools and colleges. The proportion of respondents reporting that university guidance begins during Years 7 to 9 has fallen from 45% in the 2024 research to 38% in 2026.

2.2 Does your school or college experience any of the following barriers in accessing university events?

Respondents were provided with ten general barriers to higher education engagement - and asked to select any which applied to them. 132 of the 152 respondents answered this question.



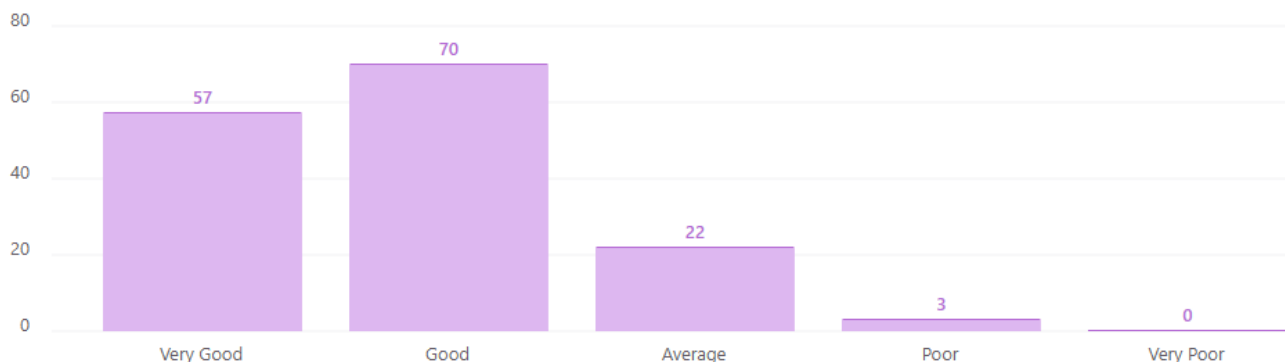
The findings highlight that the barriers to arranging university events are predominantly financial, strengthening the case for additional funding to support greater university engagement in schools and colleges.

As in the 2024 previous research, a lack of funding for transport remains the most significant barrier. The proportion of respondents selecting this option increased from 61% in 2024 to 77% in 2026. Similarly, a lack of funding to book external organisations to deliver events remained the second most commonly identified barrier, increasing from 38% in 2024 to 48% in 2026.

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by UniTasterDays, indicating that financial constraints continue to be the primary challenge preventing schools and colleges from accessing more university engagement opportunities.

Twenty one respondents selected "Other" and provided additional comments. These included comments relating to schools experiencing no barriers, independent schools not being eligible for some activities, and a lack of opportunities for younger students, particularly those in Years 7 and 8.

2.3 How would you rate the university information and opportunities provided to your students?



In this section, schools and colleges were asked to rate the quality of the university information, advice and guidance they provide to students. It is encouraging to see that the vast majority of respondents continue to rate their provision as “Good” or “Very Good”.

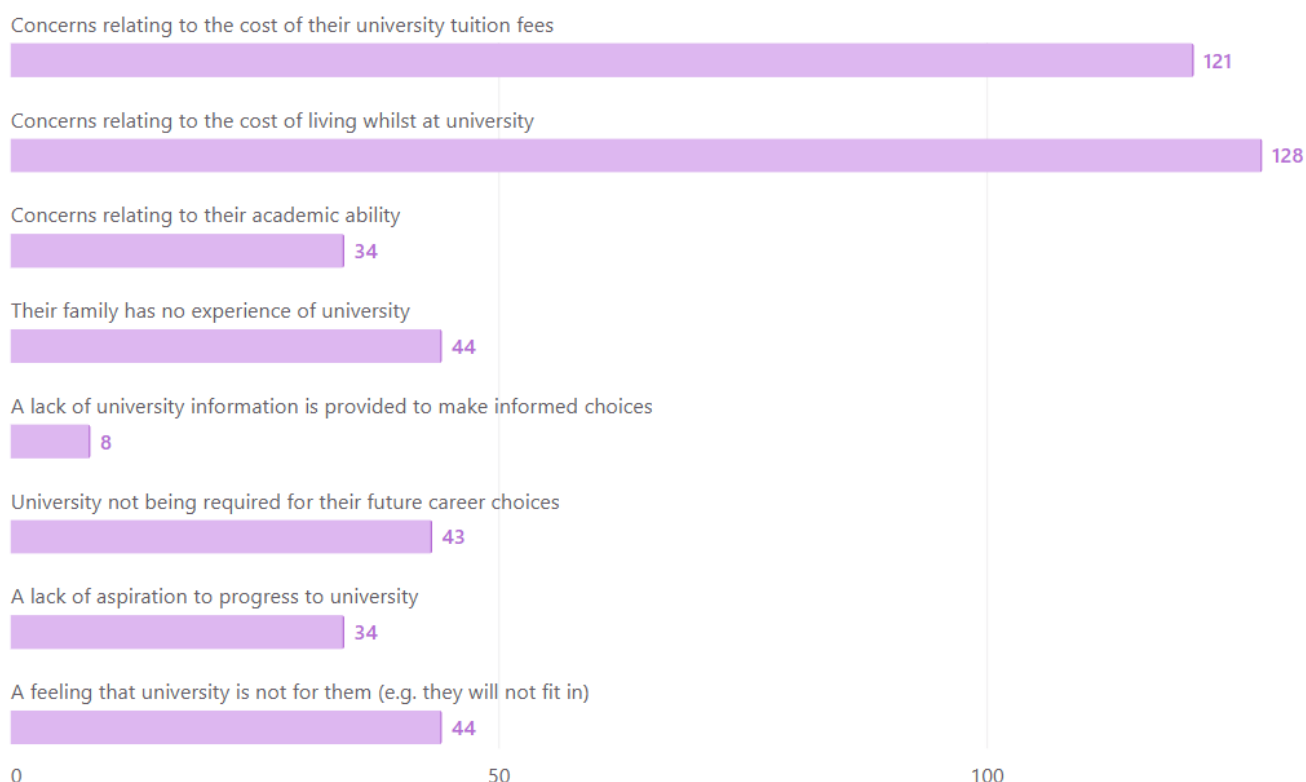
The findings indicate that perceptions of the quality of university guidance have remained consistent since the 2024 research. In 2024, 84% of respondents rated their provision as

Good (48%) or Very Good (36%). This remained virtually unchanged in 2026, with again 84% rating their provision as Good (46%) or Very Good (38%).

Section 3 – student engagement and barriers

3.1 When speaking to students, what do you consider to be the biggest three barriers of these eight choices to their university participation?

Respondents were provided with eight common barriers to university and were asked to indicate what they considered to be the three greatest barriers to their students' university participation. The choices of barriers they could select and the results are provided below:

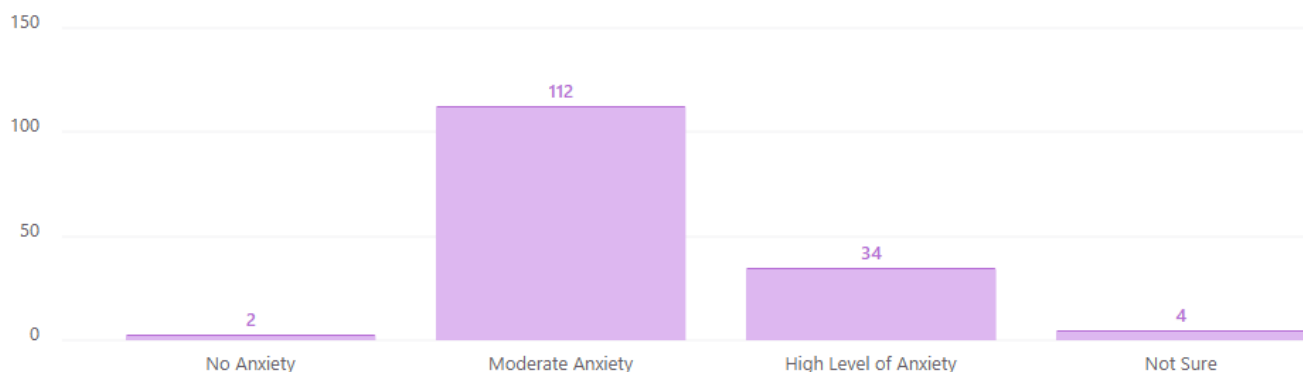


This question was also included in the 2024 research using the same response options, allowing direct comparisons to be made.

Financial concerns remain the most significant barriers to higher education. In both 2024 and 2026, tuition fees and living costs were identified as the two leading barriers. However, the order changed in 2026, with living costs overtaking tuition fees as the most commonly

selected concern. This suggests that the day-to-day cost of attending university is becoming an increasingly important consideration for prospective students.

3.2 To what extent do you believe your students experience anxiety around their university or post-school choices?



There remains a high level of anxiety around university and post-school choices. This further strengthens the value of university guidance in schools and colleges, which is essential for the future of young people.

Further information

This research was a collaboration between the University Alliance and UniTasterDays, and this report was completed by UniTasterDays in July 2026.

To discuss the research findings further, or for any media comment, please contact Jon Cheek in the first instance by email: jon@unitasterdays.com or 01746 769269.