

# University applicant myth busting – omnibus survey results

## Introduction

Savanta interviewed 567 UK university applicants (defined in the survey as someone who applied to start at a UK university at undergraduate level in September / October 2024) via an online survey between 20-27 June 2024. Data was weighted to be representative of applicants by age, gender, and school type. Savanta is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

As well as two general questions which asked applicants how anxious they felt about making the right university choice and how anxious they felt about the university application process, the survey investigated reactions to eight 'myths' related to university attendance.

**The 'myths' that were tested were identified through qualitative research conducted by REmind Research on behalf of University Alliance in Spring 2023, during which 48 14–17-year-olds and 14 mature students (25+) were engaged through focus groups and mobile ethnography journeys.**

The focus groups identified a range of concerns, which were often framed through the lens of future employability.

For example:

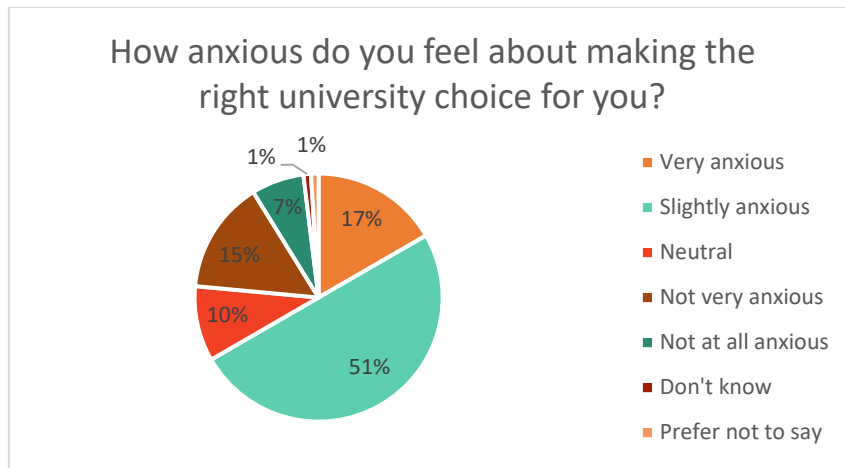
*"I've got a little bit of anxiety about what I'm going to graduate with, and how that's going to look to a potential employer...when I've got somebody else that's applied for the same position who might have come from a more prestigious university...that is something that I do think about"*

**Male, England**

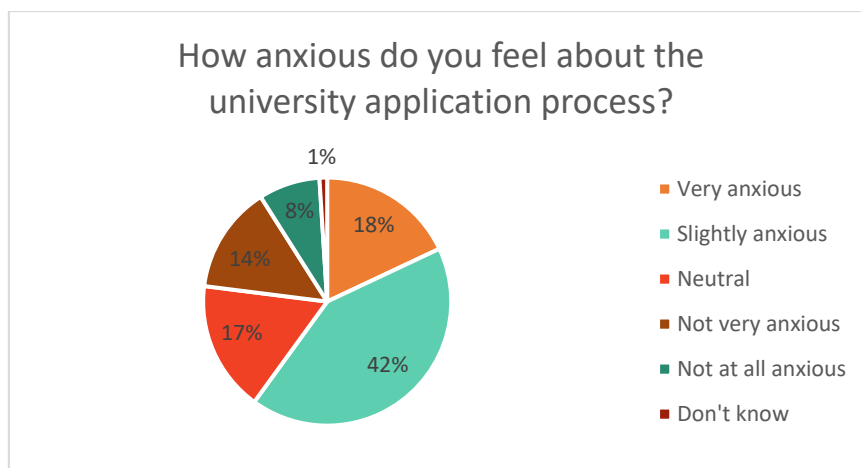
The purpose of the polling was to assess whether the misconceptions and concerns held by focus group participants were consistent across a larger sample of university applicants.

## General anxiety about making the right choice of university and the application process

The survey revealed that a majority of applicants experience anxiety concerning their university selection, with 68% selecting that they were either slightly anxious or very anxious. Moreover, a majority of applicants also experience anxiety about the overall application process, with 60% selecting that they were either slightly anxious or very anxious.

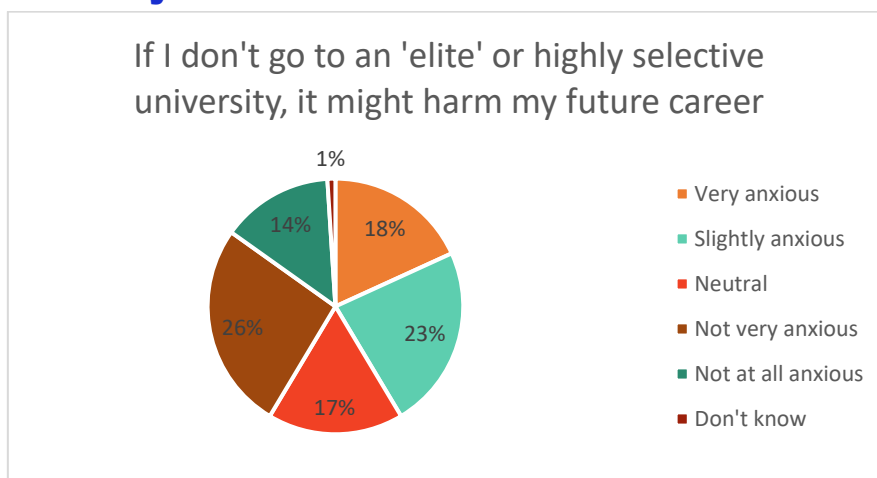


It is more common for women to report feeling very or slightly anxious about this choice (76%) than men (59%). The youngest people surveyed were also more anxious than other age groups surveyed with 73% of 16-17 year olds identifying this, as did 77% of applicants in the North West and West Midlands. Perhaps surprisingly, those whose parents had attended university were more anxious about this choice (71%) than those who were first in family to attend (63%).



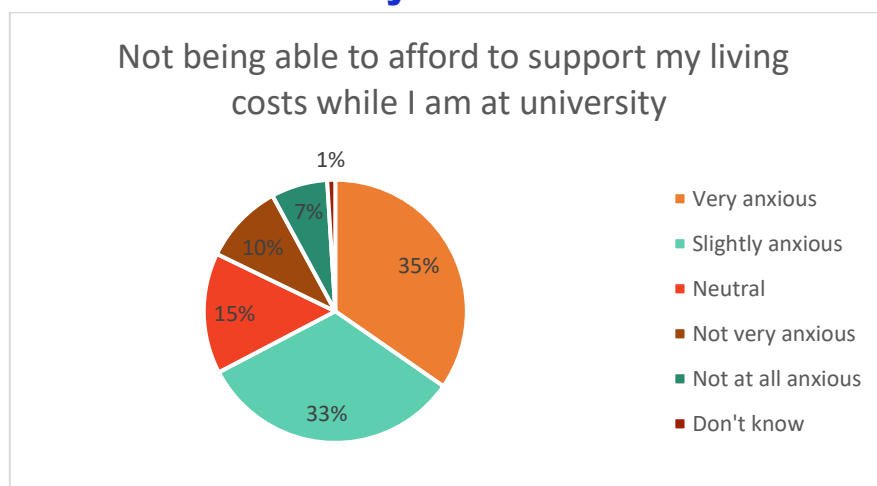
Regarding the application process, again women were more likely to be very or slightly anxious (67%) than men (52%). However, the very youngest respondents (16-17 year olds) were least anxious, perhaps because they had not started the process yet or had more support within the school environment. While a small number of private/fee paying school attendees responded to the survey, they reported the lowest anxiety (48%), again perhaps indicating a greater availability of support. The highest levels of anxiety were in Northern Ireland (77%), although there was a low base size for this group.

## Myth 1 – If I don't go to an 'elite' or highly selective university, it might harm my future career



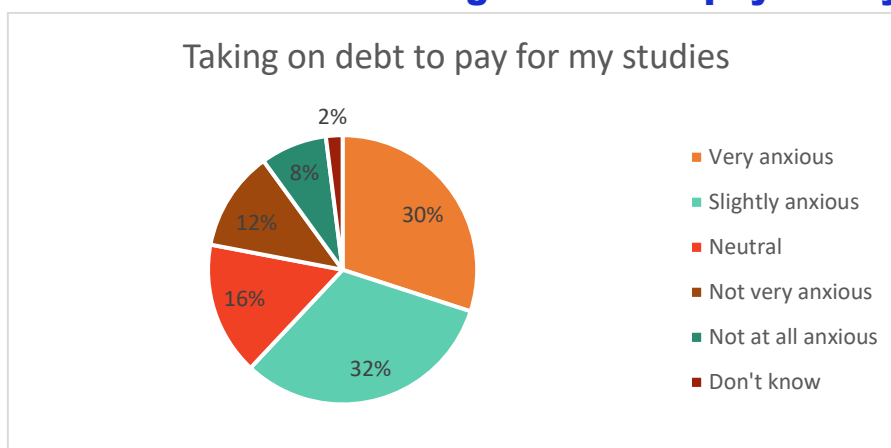
While the proportion of applicants who were very or slightly anxious about this is lower than for the general questions (41%), it is reported more by women (44%), the oldest people surveyed the 24-25 year olds (50% - though from a low number of respondents), and those from private/fee paying schools (52%). Anxiety was also more common in those from the North East (from a low number of responses) and North West of England. The least anxious at 24% were those respondents in Wales (low number of responses).

## Myth 2 – I worry about being able to afford to support my living costs while I am at university



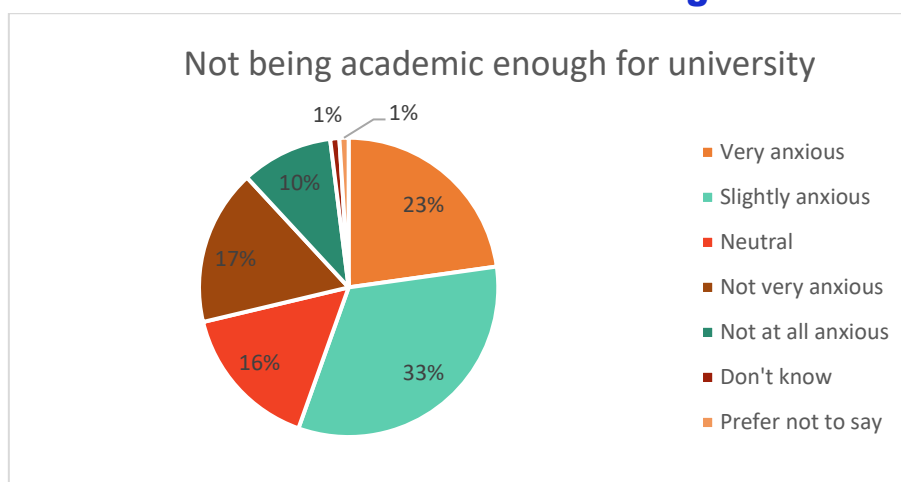
Over two thirds of all respondents reported being very or slightly anxious about affordability of living costs. This went up to three quarters of women, over three quarters of 20-21 and 22-23 year olds (low number of responses from those age groups), 85% of those from Northern Ireland and 78% of those from South West England (low number of responses from those regions), and 71% of those from C2DE parental social backgrounds. The least anxious (48%) were respondents from Wales.

### Myth 3 – I'm worried about taking on debt to pay for my studies



Just under two thirds of respondents report being very or slightly anxious about the debt they will incur by attending university. Again, this is more commonly reported by women (69%). The least anxious respondents are in Scotland (50%), where there is a different HE funding regime, and in Wales (52%) and the South East of England (53%) (low number of respondents from Scotland and Wales).

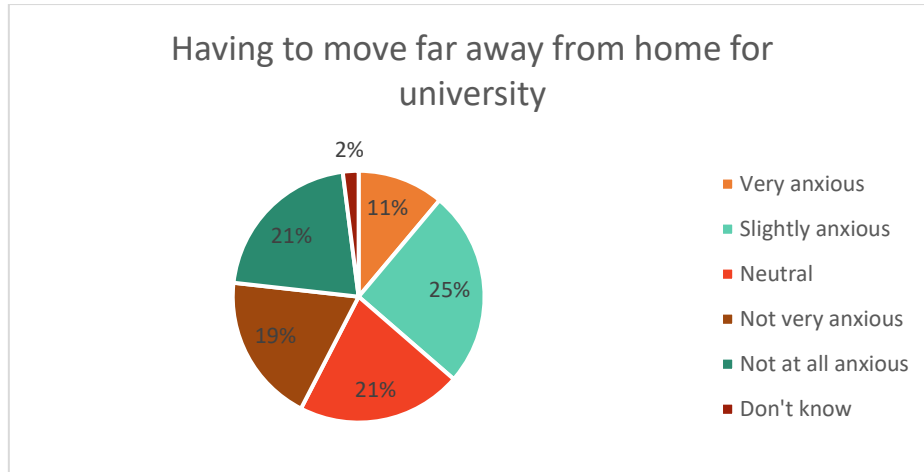
### Myth 4 – I'm worried I'm not academic enough for university



Over half of respondents reported being very or slightly anxious regarding this. Again, this is particularly the case for women (62%) and those from Northern Ireland (85%) and South West England (70%) (low numbers of respondents in those regions). Those who are less anxious about being academic enough are the respondents over 20 years old who may already have results which reassure them to some extent, bringing their reported anxiety down to around 50%. There were however fewer survey responses from those older age groups. An outlier is respondents from North East England reporting only 36% anxiety (although a low number of respondents were from that region).

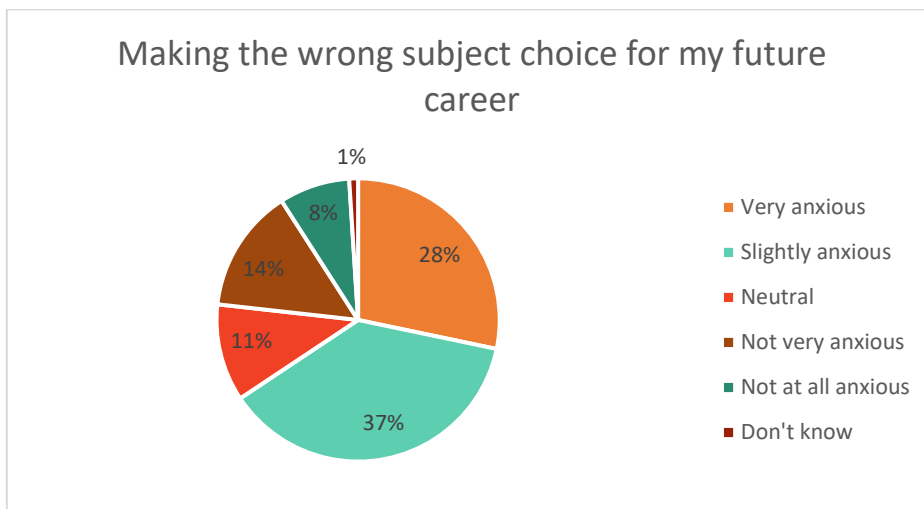
### Myth 5 – I'm worried about having to move far away from home for university

This is much less of a cause for concern compared to the other myths tested with only 37% of respondents reporting they are very or slightly anxious about it.



Those most anxious are women (42%), students from private/fee paying schools (45%), respondents from the East Midlands (42%) and Eastern England (44%), and those who will be first in their family to attend university (42%).

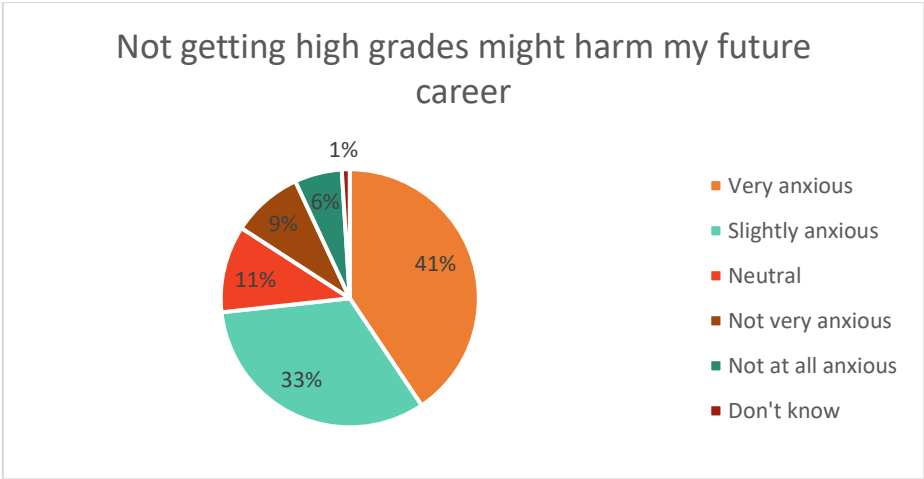
### **Myth 6 – I’m worried about making the wrong subject choice for my future career**



Around two thirds of respondents reported being very or slightly anxious regarding subject choice. This was particularly the case for women (72%), students from private/fee paying schools (70%), and respondents in the South East of England (74%).

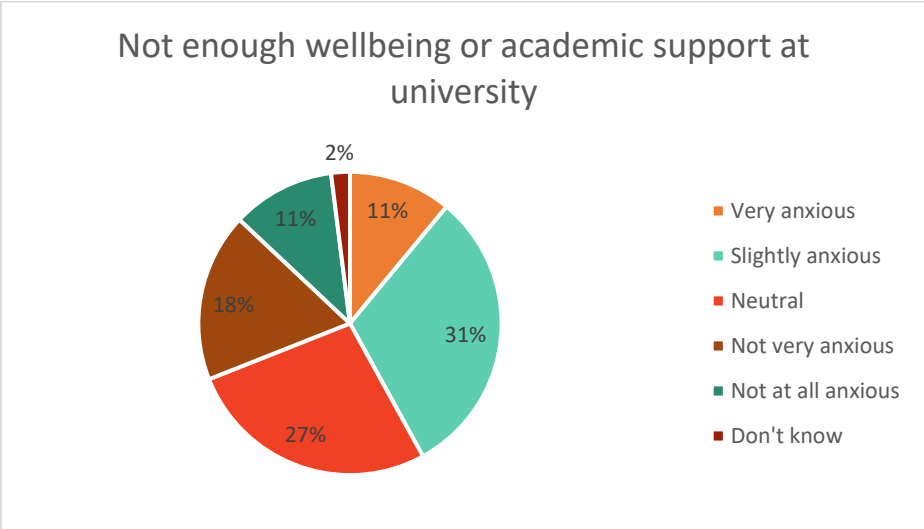
### **Myth 7 – I’m worried about not getting high grades, and that might harm my future career**

74% of respondents reported being very or slightly anxious about this, the highest for any of the myths presented.



Those most anxious are in Northern Ireland (92% - from a low number of responses) and Eastern England (83%). Although those from private/fee paying schools reported lower levels of anxiety about the issue, it was still high compared to other myths at 64%.

**Myth 8 – I’m worried there not being enough wellbeing or academic support at university**



This was the second lowest cause for concern from the myths presented with 42% reporting being very or slightly anxious. It was however reported by a higher proportion of respondents over 20 years old (small number of respondents), in particular 64% of 22-23 year olds and 56% of 24-25 year olds. Those least likely to report anxiety were respondents from private/fee paying schools (31%) and those in Wales (28% - from a low number of respondents).