PULSAR ✳

The
Clearing
Report

Introduction

Clearing is a confusing time for students and universities alike.

Using our expertise in the world of education, we've gathered a specialist set of insights on the social landscape and specifically, which universities were most engaging and supportive to their prospective students.
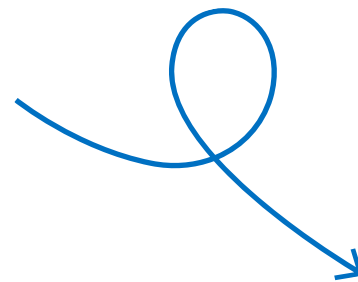
In this first edition we can see that, overall, universities approached clearing enthusiastically, pushing discussion, but perhaps not engaging in the right places. Read on to discover our insights.

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Results day

What have we found?

Most posts were seen in the morning between 9 and 12: this is a key time for universities to broadcast to students, before they collect their results.

The main sentiment was joy at 79% felt as people discuss the results and their meaning. It's important for universities to read between the lines to find out what they think about clearing later in the day, but also to keep their messages positive and not treat clearing as a failure.
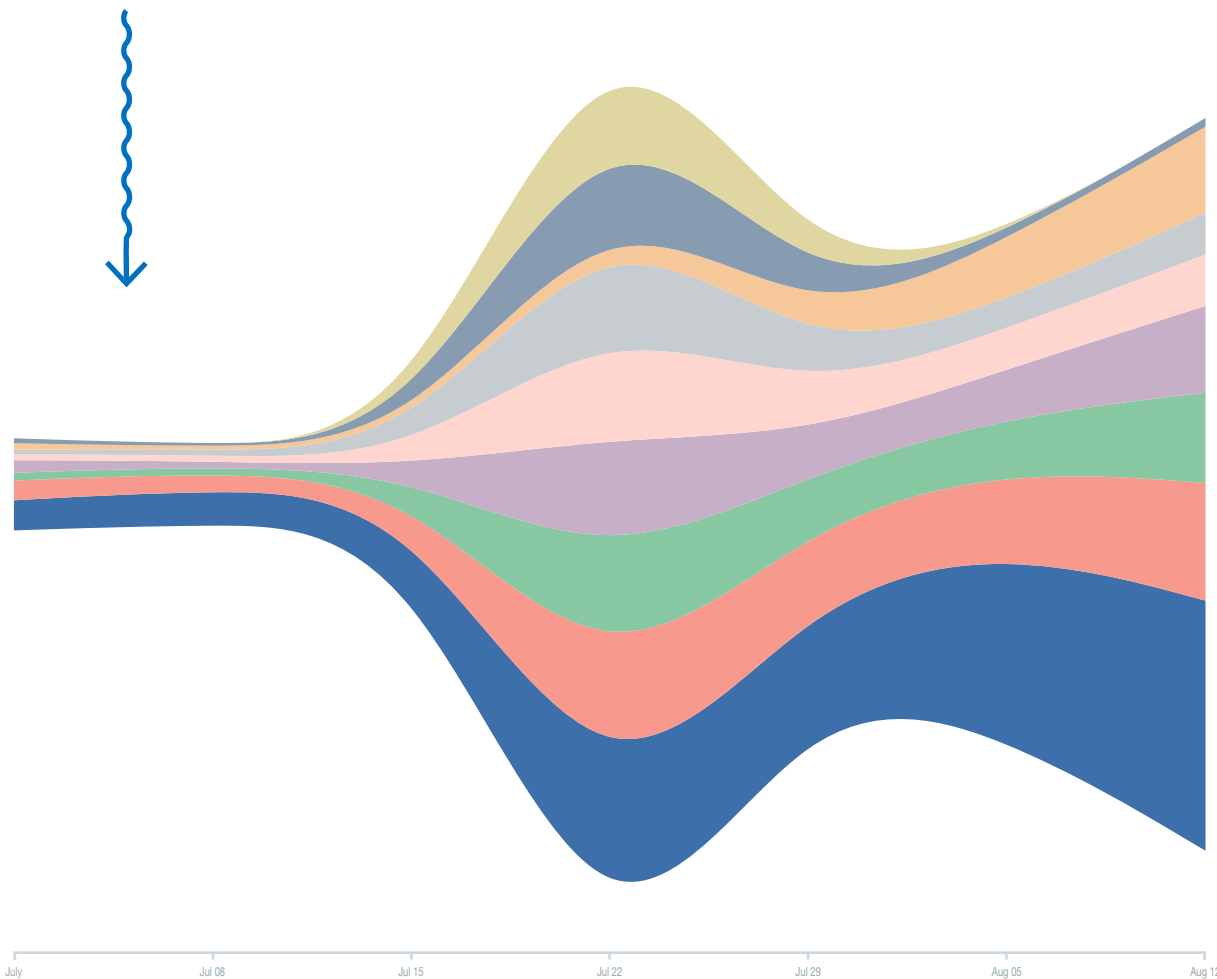

Engagements · Posts

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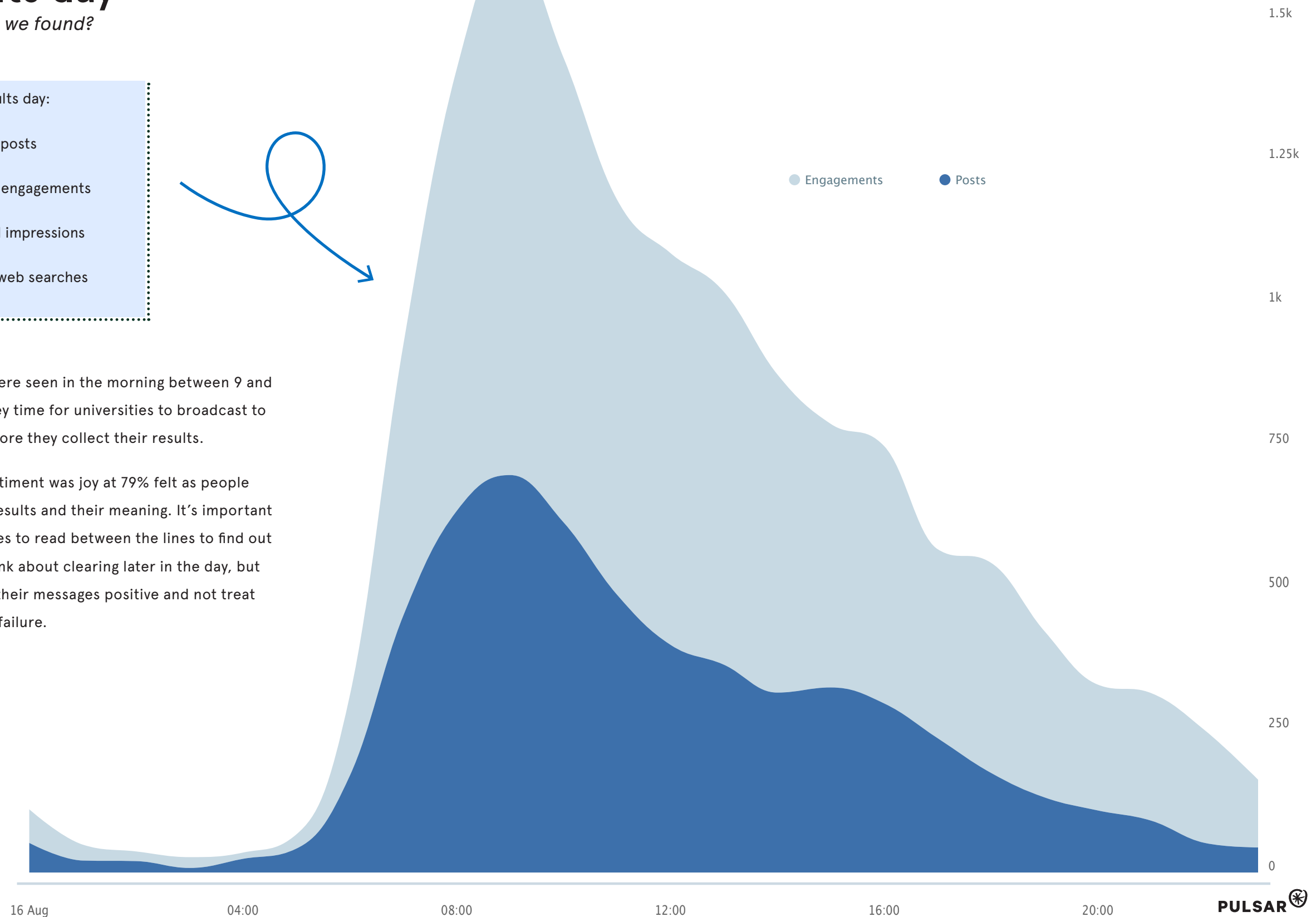
Pre-results day
1 July - 15 August

In the build up to clearing, keywords included expected terms like 'results', 'place' and 'course', showing students are thinking about what their results will mean for their university future.

The word 'pressure' also comes up, illustrating that this is a confusing time between taking the exams and getting the results: universities would do well to offer ways to alleviate this pressure.

Post-results day
17 August - 4 Sept

In the period of clearing, sentiment is still generally positive, and other concerns enter the fray, such as accommodation, campus and tuition.

Students respond well to friendly phone operators, although interestingly the Russell Group came up negatively.

Legend:
- pressure
- offer
- ucas
- course
- place
- results
- students
- clearing
- university

Word cloud (Post-results day): accommodation, #resultsday, universities, apply, friendly, considering, check, options, scottish, career, campus, help, open, great, #clearing2018, means, time, visit, english, russell, offer, forget, course, look, thank, tuition, good, thread, year, fees, ucas, place, september, courses, study, need, glasgow, superb, aberdeen, hotline, degree, poor, dundee, looking, uni, secure, grabs, start, today, cap 18, team, scots, join, late, new, results, available, difference, applying

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Audience

The primary audience discussing clearing during the entire summer period:

> → Slightly more female than male (53%)
>
> → Highest proportion from London (9%)
>
> → Mixed between students and faculty members

The audience profile breaks down into a dominant sub community of Russell Group faculty members, followed by members of certain courses like nursing and criminology, as well as the communities around specific universities like Hull or Central Lancashire.

Some of the highest volume posts were from lecturers: hearing from someone directly involved with the course clearly is encouraging!
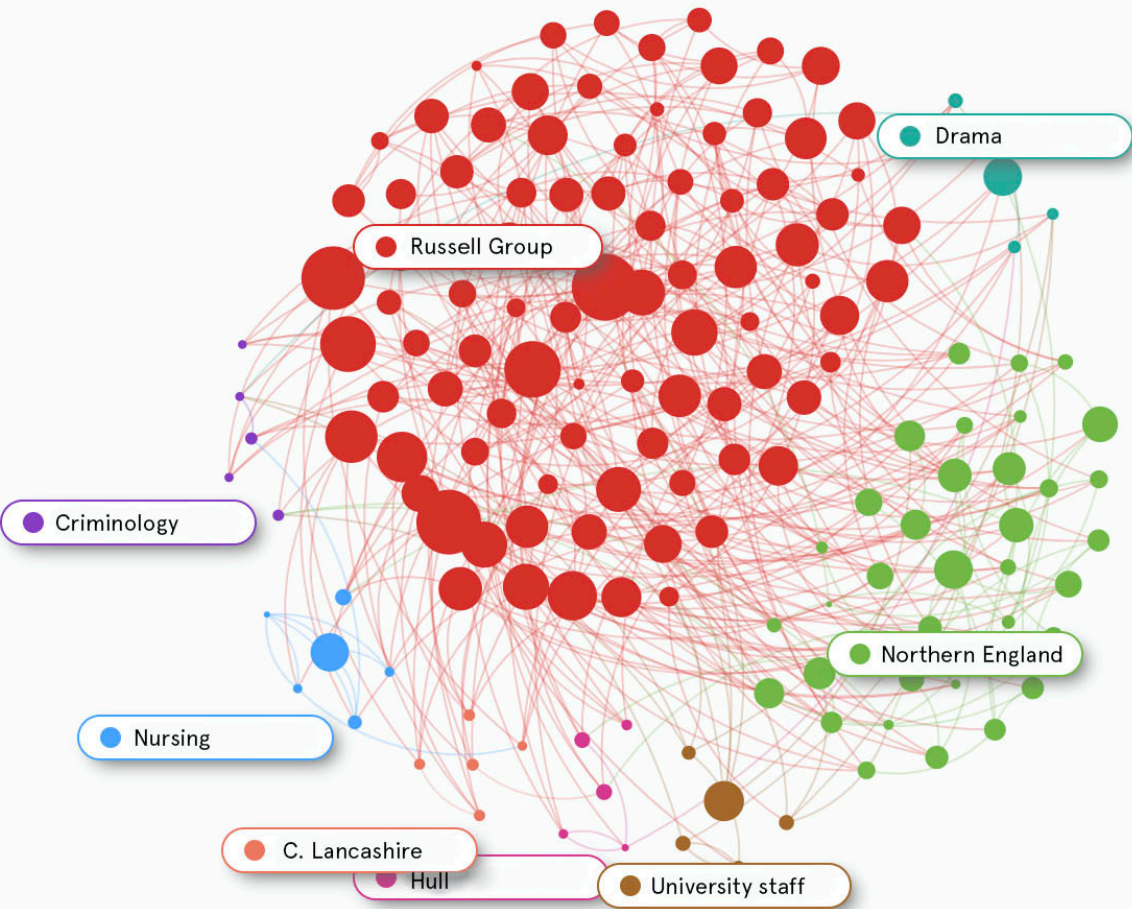
Bradford and Swansea's websites had the highest shares of university sites from all posts from results day.

We have a few places on our BSc #OccupationalTherapy starting September on our brand new campus! If you are interested in becoming a passionate occupational therapist, then we are here to enable you to achieve an amazing career! Call our #Clearing2018 hotline from Thursday

We're preparing for clearing! Spaces available for Adult Nursing at Plymouth Uni. Give us a call on Thursday! @UniPlym @PlymUni @PlymUniApply @PUNC14 #nursing

canterbury.ac.uk | herts.ac.uk | plymouth.ac.uk | coventry.ac.uk | swansea.ac.uk
tees.ac.uk | leedstrinity.ac.uk | sheffield.ac.uk | kcl.ac.uk
uwtsd.ac.uk | bbk.ac.uk | theconversation.com | digital.ucas.com | york.ac.uk | bradford.ac.uk

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Different channels

Twitter was the most highly used channel on results day for clearing discussions with a hearty 88% share of voice, followed by forums – mainly The Student Room – as universities, staff, current students and alumni offer advice to those considering their clearing options.

Twitter 88.4%

Facebook 2.0%

Instagram 2.0%

Blogs 0.2%

Forums 7.3%
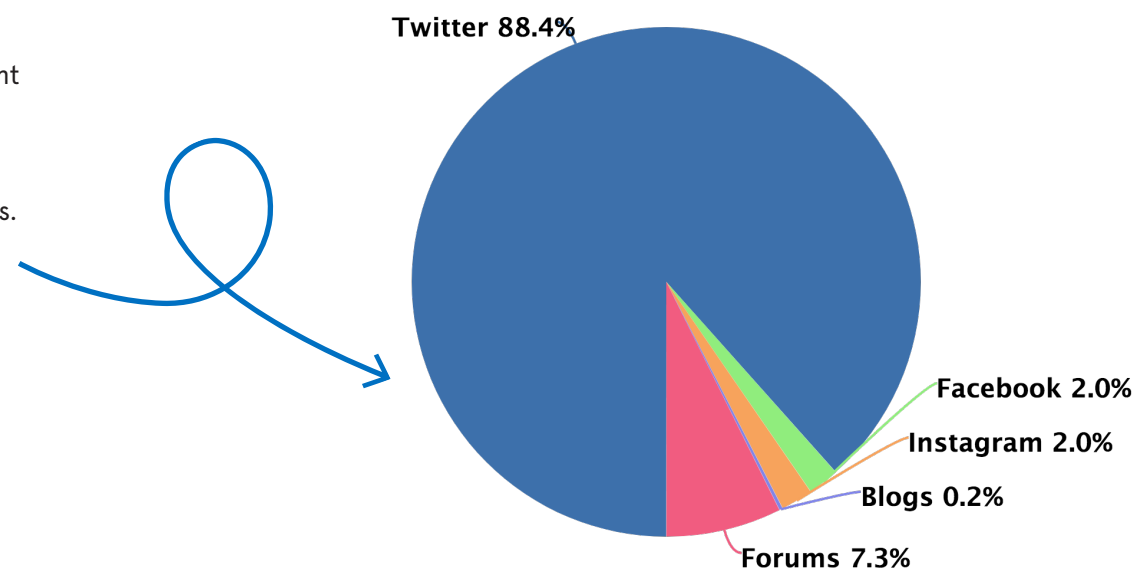
Share of voice: Russell Group

Although they don't offer clearing places, Cambridge featured highly in this conversation – mainly because of the announcement of the Stormzy scholarship that day (there were only 71 posts mentioning clearing and Cambridge without this discussion featuring).

The Russell Group came up with negative sentiment following clearing due to a set of stories about students with good grades trying to use clearing to get a 'better offer'

University share of voice on results day:

#	University	Posts	#	University	Posts	#	University	Posts
1.	Cambridge	1169 posts 19%	9.	Leeds	223 posts 4%	17.	Birmingham	151 posts 2%
2.	Sheffield	488 posts 8%	10.	Exeter	219 posts 4%	18.	Oxford	146 posts 2%
3.	Glasgow	475 posts 8%	11.	Bristol	204 posts 3%	19.	Liverpool	139 posts 2 %
4.	Nottingham	424 posts 7%	12.	York	201 posts 3%	20.	UCL	127 posts 2%
5.	Cardiff	325 posts 5%	13.	Queen's Belfast	194 posts 3%	21.	Edinburgh	116 posts 2%
6.	Manchester	282 posts 5%	14.	King's College	184 posts 3%	22.	Durham	100 posts 2%
7.	Queen Mary	245 posts 4%	15.	Southampton	176 posts 3%	23.	LSE	61 posts 1%
8.	Warwick	239 posts 4%	16.	Newcastle	174 posts 3%	24.	Imperial College	49 posts 1%

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Share of voice non-Russell Group

The non Russell Group unis had a fairly equal level of discussion, with no huge standout high performer in the clearing discussion. Without a specific campaign outside of clearing going on, many universities struggle to get traction amongst students. For example, Swansea used their medical school to push content as well as local influencers like members of Swansea Football Club.
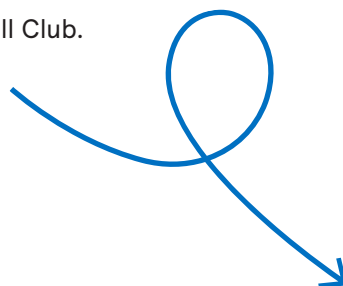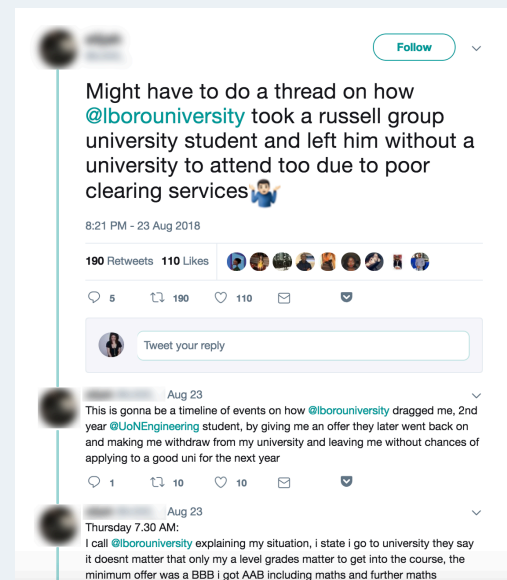
University share of voice on results day:

1.	Swansea	766 posts 5%	21.	Suffolk	268 posts 2%	41.	Kent	165 posts 1%
2.	Hull	485 posts 3%	22.	Westminster	259 posts 2%	42.	Surrey	155 posts 1%
3.	Plymouth	460 posts 3%	23.	Sussex	248 posts 2%	43.	Salford	153 posts 1%
4.	Cumbria	444 posts 3%	24.	Strathclyde	241 posts 2%	44.	Lincoln	149 posts 1%
5.	Leicester	442 posts 3%	25.	Bangor	239 posts 1%	45.	Heriot-Watt	148 posts 1%
6.	Hertfordshire	420 posts 3%	26.	Northampton	225 posts 1%	46.	Bedfordshire	146 posts 1%
7.	Coventry	417 posts 3%	27.	Aberystwyth	220 posts 1%	47.	Bolton	136 posts 1%
8.	Teesside	394 posts 3%	28.	Staffordshire	219 posts 1%	48.	Bournemouth	135 posts 1%
9.	Loughborough	378 posts 2%	29.	Kingston	211 posts 1%	49.	London South Bank	131 posts 1%
10.	Central Lancashire	376 posts 2%	30.	Greenwich	196 posts 1%	50.	Brunel	130 posts 1%
11.	Bradford	367 posts 2%	31.	Anglia Ruskin	191 posts 1%	51.	East Anglia	129 posts 1%
12.	Leeds Beckett	347 posts 2%	32.	Cardiff Metropolitan	189 posts 1%	52.	Leeds Trinity	125 posts 1%
13.	Dundee	346 posts 2%	33.	Worcester	187 posts 1%	53.	Birmingham City	115 posts 1%
14.	Sheffield Hallam	336 posts 2%	34.	Aston	179 posts 1%	54.	Stirling	115 posts 1%
15.	Canterbury Christ	300 posts 2%	35.	Brighton	176 posts 1%	55.	Ulster	109 posts 1%
16.	Aberdeen	299 posts 2%	36.	Northumbria	175 posts 1%	56.	Royal Agricultural	103 posts 1%
17.	De Montfort	299 posts 2%	37.	UWE Bristol	175 posts 1%	57.	Nottingham Trent	102 posts 1%
18.	Sunderland	288 posts 2%	38.	Huddersfield	173 posts 1%	58.	Middlesex	97 posts 1%
19.	Derby	284 posts 2%	39.	Wolverhampton	172 posts 1%	59.	Chester	94 posts 1%
20.	Essex	280 posts 2%	40.	Lancaster	171 posts 1%	60.	London Metropolitan	94 posts 1%

Engagement

High engagement around clearing isn't always positive – one of the most highly engaged with posts on results day discussing their poor experiences with clearing.

Didn't get into my firm uni, only to go through clearing and get into a uni that was even higher ranked for my course. Sometimes God's plan isn't your plan, but trust it.

7:40 PM - 18 Aug 2018

54 Retweets   167 Likes

However, posts about a 'successful' clearing gained higher engagement overall, even if they didn't mention the university they got into.

Might have to do a thread on how @lborouniversity took a russell group university student and left him without a university to attend too due to poor clearing services

8:21 PM - 23 Aug 2018

190 Retweets   110 Likes

Leeds Beckett proactively reached out to students on results day, prompting high impressions and visibility

Derby posted thought leadership content, as well as tailored messages to specific courses, across multiple platforms (Twitter, Instagram) throughout the day, gaining high visibility

University of Derby
@DerbyUni

Did you know? We are an official academic partner with Microsoft, SAS, CISCO and Epic. Join one of our Computing courses this September by calling our Clearing hotline on 01332 592018: buff.ly/2nGGVVS #clearing #derbyuni

3:50 PM - 16 Aug 2018

Best visibility on results day

Leeds Beckett and Derby both high visibility of over 3k, showing their content had a high impact with those receiving it.
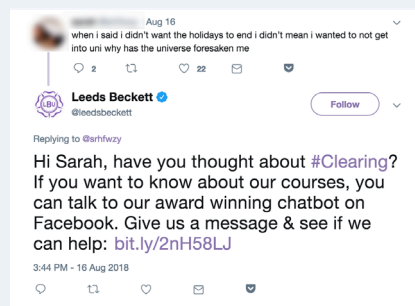

Most impressions on results day

Leeds Beckett has the most impressions on results' day, although at 190k, this was still a fraction of UCAS's impression at 478k.


when i said i didn't want the holidays to end i didn't mean i wanted to not get into uni why has the universe foresaken me

Leeds Beckett
@leedsbeckett

Replying to @srhfwzy

Hi Sarah, have you thought about #Clearing? If you want to know about our courses, you can talk to our award winning chatbot on Facebook. Give us a message & see if we can help: bit.ly/2nH58LJ

3:44 PM - 16 Aug 2018

University of Derby
@DerbyUni

We're proud to be ranked Top 30 in the Guardian University Guide 2019. Want to study with us this September? Call our #Clearing hotline on 01332 592018 to secure your place. #DerbyUni #resultsday2018 #alevelresultsday2018 #ALevelResults

WE'RE PROUD TO BE IN THE TOP 30 GUARDIAN UNIVERSITY GUIDE 2019

TOP 30

6:28 PM - 16 Aug 2018

5 Retweets   19 Likes

derbyuni • Follow

derbyuni Our Vice-Chancellor Professor Kathryn Mitchell has been speaking to Channel 4 News about widening access to higher education. #DerbyUni #ALevelResultsDay2018 #Clearing2018

jimmyallen76 Is that in someone's garden?

132 likes

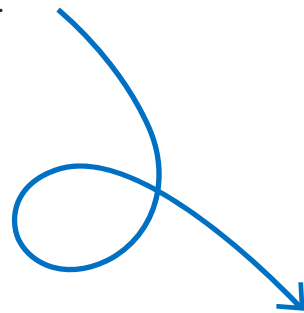AUGUST 16

Add a comment...

Web searches

Web searches around clearing tells a very different story to social engagement: peaking two weeks before results day, with spikes during the period as students research their options.

This shows that clearing is not out of mind throughout the period so it's important to keep targeting students, but as discussion peaks on results day, it's vital to analyse sentiment that day to truly understand how students are feeling about the recruitment process.

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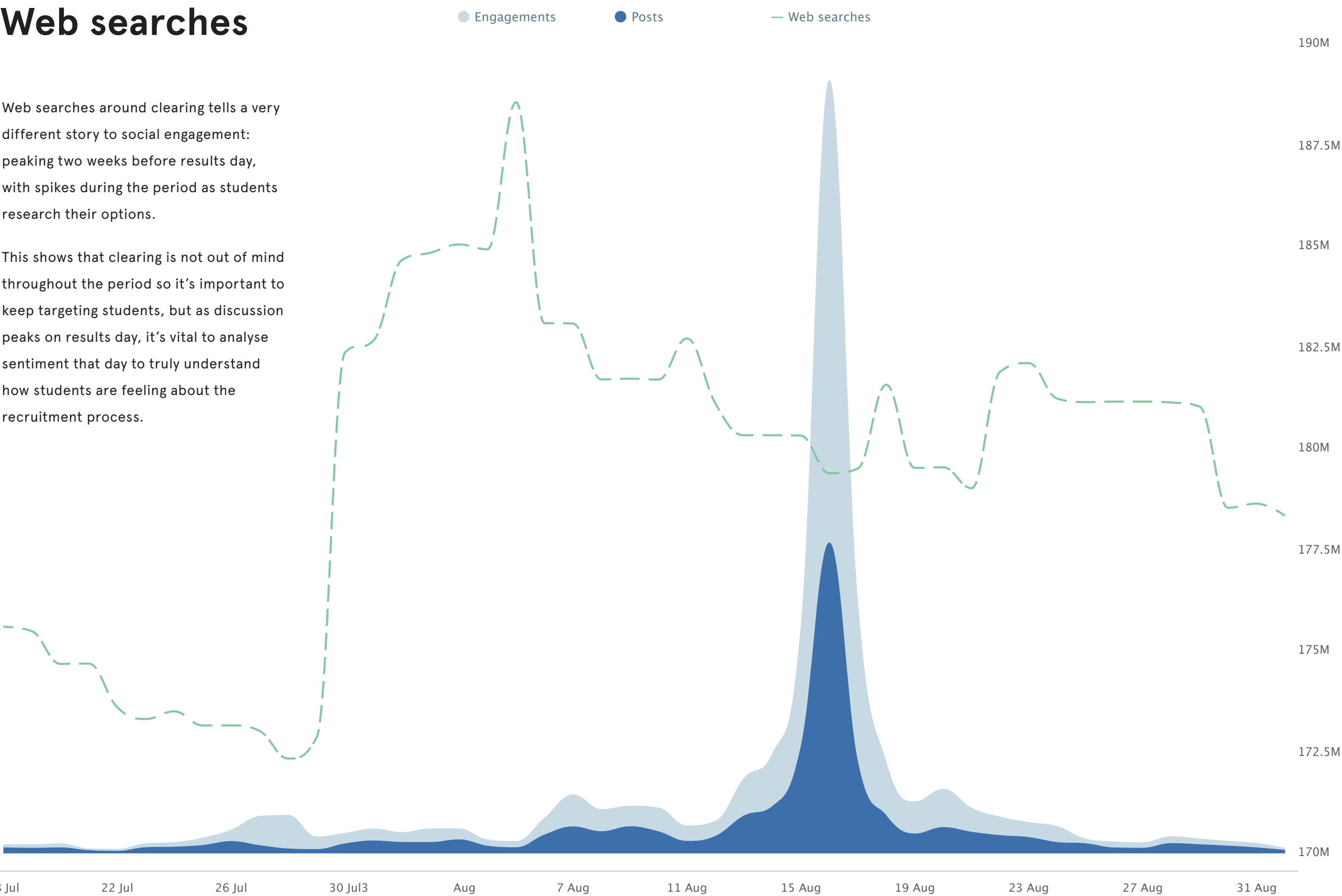
The Student Room

Discussions on forums were the most supportive of the networks we analysed (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, forums, news), with keywords like 'ask' 'faq' 'advice' 'choice' 'ama' (ask me anything) and 'consider' trending during the clearing period, and are a key place to truly connect with clearing students.
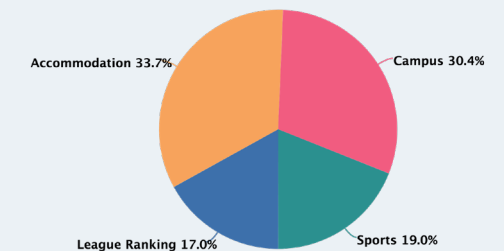
consider

faq

student

medicine

ama

adjustment

offer

insurance

need

thread

grades

choice

firm

course

advice

ask

year

level

help

Forums

Concerns
Students' concerns change over the clearing period.

Before results day, 17 % of posts mentioning clearing also discussed league rankings, whereas on results day this dipped to just 12%, and increasing slightly to 13.1% in the August–September clearing period

Accomodation was the most discussed topic alongside clearing, increasing to 37.1% of discussion during the August–September clearing period as students arranged their future. Consideration of the campus itself also increased during the clearing period, showing students being more realistic about their futures, rather than aspiring to lofty heights before results day.
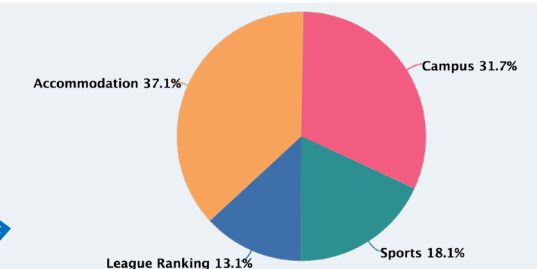
Pre results day

Accommodation 33.7%
Campus 30.4%
League Ranking 17.0%
Sports 19.0%

Results day

Campus 28.3%
Accommodation 33.8%
Sports 25.9%
League Ranking 12.0%

Post results day

Accommodation 37.1%
Campus 31.7%
League Ranking 13.1%
Sports 18.1%
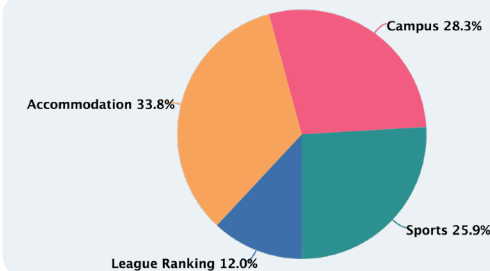
Feelings

Clearing is an accelerated version of university recruitment, and understandably student considerations and feelings change throughout the period.
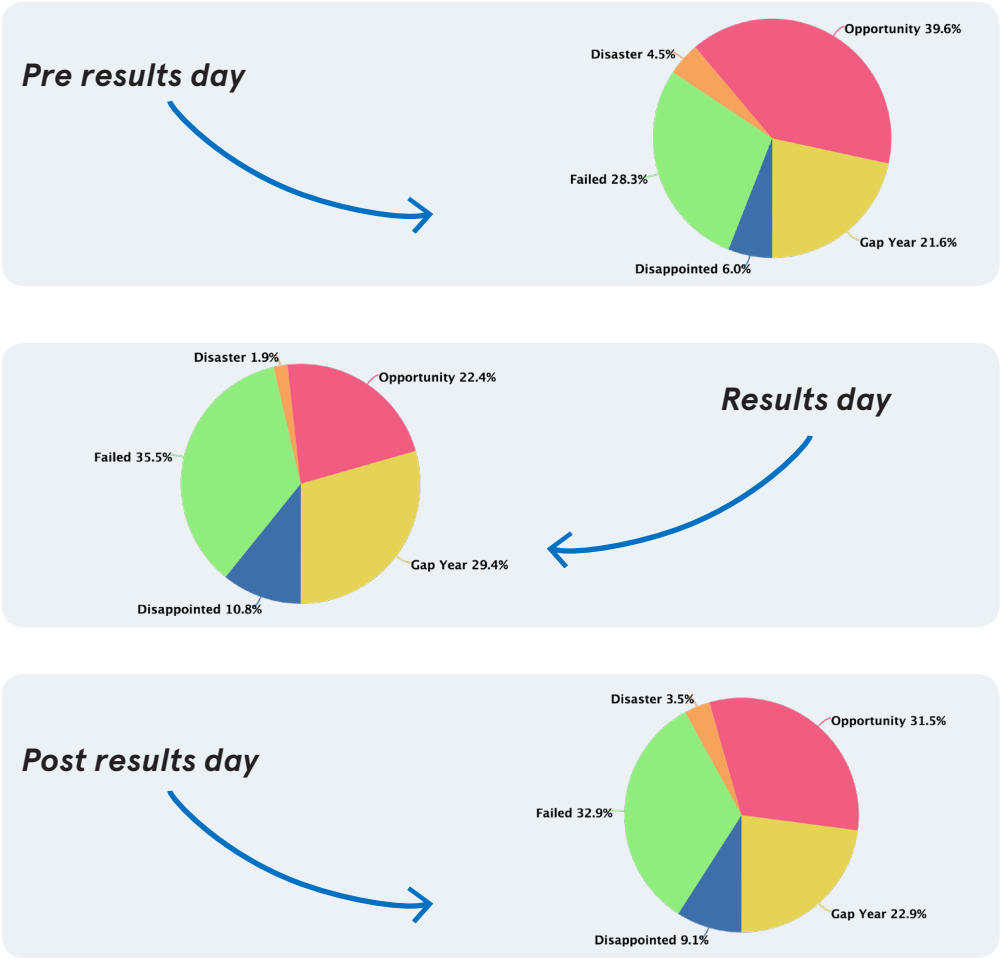
Before results day, the opportunity of university was discussed most alongside mentions of clearing at 39.4%. This slimmed to 22.4% on results day as many students' plans changed, but encouragingly discussions of opportunity increased again to 31.5% again in the August clearing period.

There is also a fear of failure associated with clearing, and that was a strong theme discussed alongside the topic on results day, at 35%. However, mentions of disaster were at their lowest on results day, at just 1.9%, showing that students don't necessarily see clearing as a crisis, but may choose to reframe their narratives, especially as mentions of gap years stayed steady throughout the period, showing students keep this option in mind.
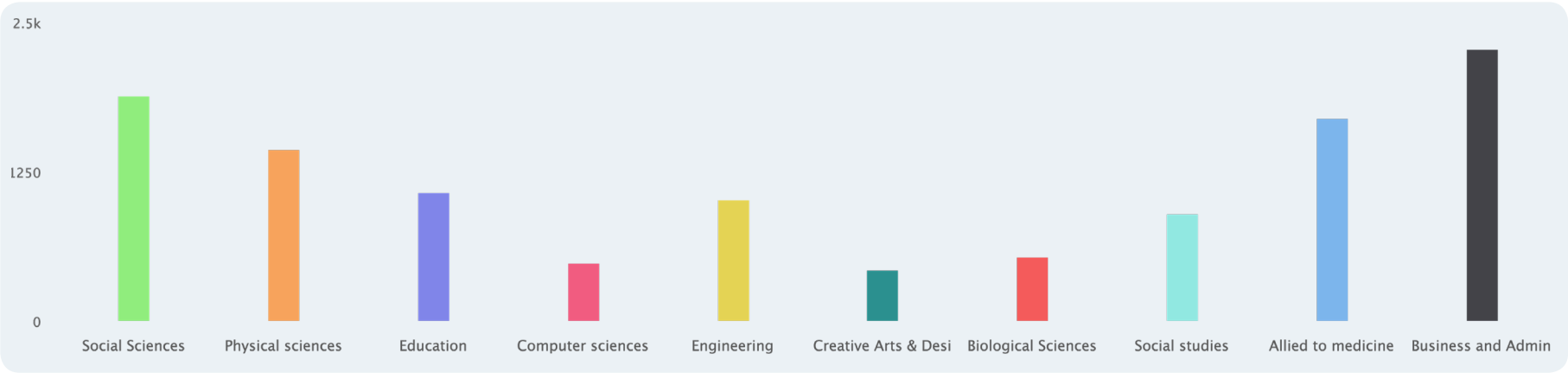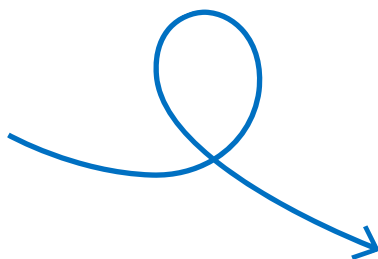
Courses

From a sample of courses, vocational courses seemed to have more discussion points in the clearing conversation.

Pre results day

- Opportunity 39.6%
- Disaster 4.5%
- Failed 28.3%
- Disappointed 6.0%
- Gap Year 21.6%

Results day

- Disaster 1.9%
- Opportunity 22.4%
- Failed 35.5%
- Disappointed 10.8%
- Gap Year 29.4%

Post results day

- Disaster 3.5%
- Opportunity 31.5%
- Failed 32.9%
- Disappointed 9.1%
- Gap Year 22.9%

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Testimonials

University of Sunderland

"Pulsar provided extremely useful insight into understanding our social footprint though our clearing period. During a critical time, the platform, thanks to its advanced analytics and our account managers clear understanding of our objectives, allowed us to both measure and track our own channels performance to then benchmark against our competitors. From being able to see our share of voice to gaging our average sentiment reading, Pulsar ensured we were not only able to deliver our findings but understand them also."

Kelly Shotton
Social Media Coordinator
University of Sunderland

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

"Pulsar was key in helping us cut through the noise and understand the different conversations taking place amongst students, other universities, the general public and the media."

Daniel Preston
Social Media & Web Analyst
University of Leeds

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Takeaways

This clearing period has taught us a few things:

→ Lecturers contributed hugely to the clearing conversation, and universities could take advantage of popular lecturer accounts by coaching significant faculty members in social media usage.

→ There's no formula to a successful clearing presence: a mix of informational posts and conversations were both popular. Some of the most successful posts came from interacting with students, but although this might not be every university's strategy, thought leadership and PR exercises like the Stormzy scholarship get a lot of attention during the results period.

→ A lot of students discuss the full picture around university results not going to plan during the August – September clearing period from the potential of having a gap year, to what accomodation they will get if they go through clearing. Universities would do well to support this journey from start to finish, rather than just advertising places.

**Contact Pulsar
to see what the
platform can
do for you...**

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