

Collaborative problem-solving, A-level exams & settling the board marker debate...

[Collaborative Problem-Solving](#)

[A-levels](#)

[Bullet vs Chisel](#)

[Hairstyle Policies](#)

[Daily reads](#)

Last week was the return of A-level exam results day! One set of exam results down, one to go ■■

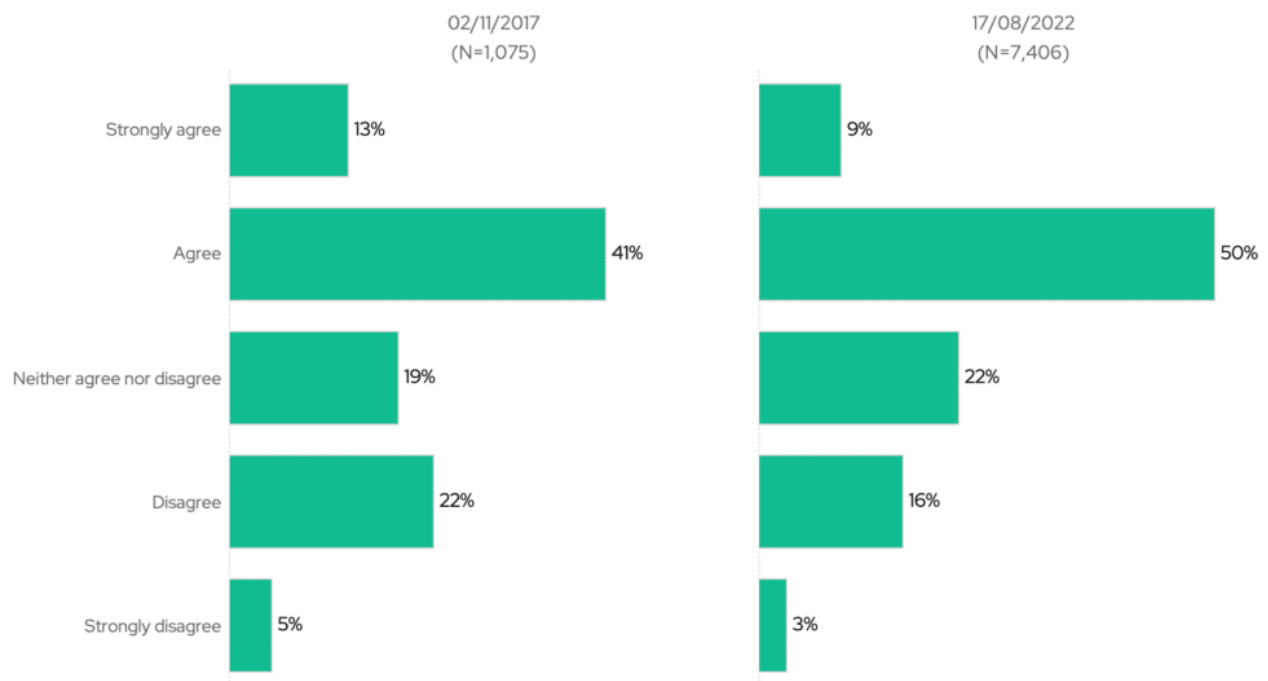
1. What's with collaborative problem-solving?

Back in 2015, the global education tests for 15-year-olds, PISA, introduced a new [collaborative problem-solving assessment](#) - and today The Tony Blair Institute is advocating for collaboration to become part of the national curriculum. But is it a skill that teachers would embrace teaching?

You first gave Teacher Tapp your views on this back in 2017, and not much has changed since then. Which isn't entirely surprising seeing as the national curriculum doesn't include the phrase 'collaborative problem-solving' anywhere and the government hasn't made it part of what's going on in schools in recent years.

Nevertheless, more than half of you say you clearly understand what collaborative problem-solving means. However, only 6% of you have received training in the past two years on how to incorporate collaborative problem solving into your lessons (down from 11% in 2017).

I have a clear understanding of what collaborative problem solving means in practice in the classroom.



Teacher responses vary from 1,075 to 7,406, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Does this mean collaborative problem solving is absent from classrooms? Not really.

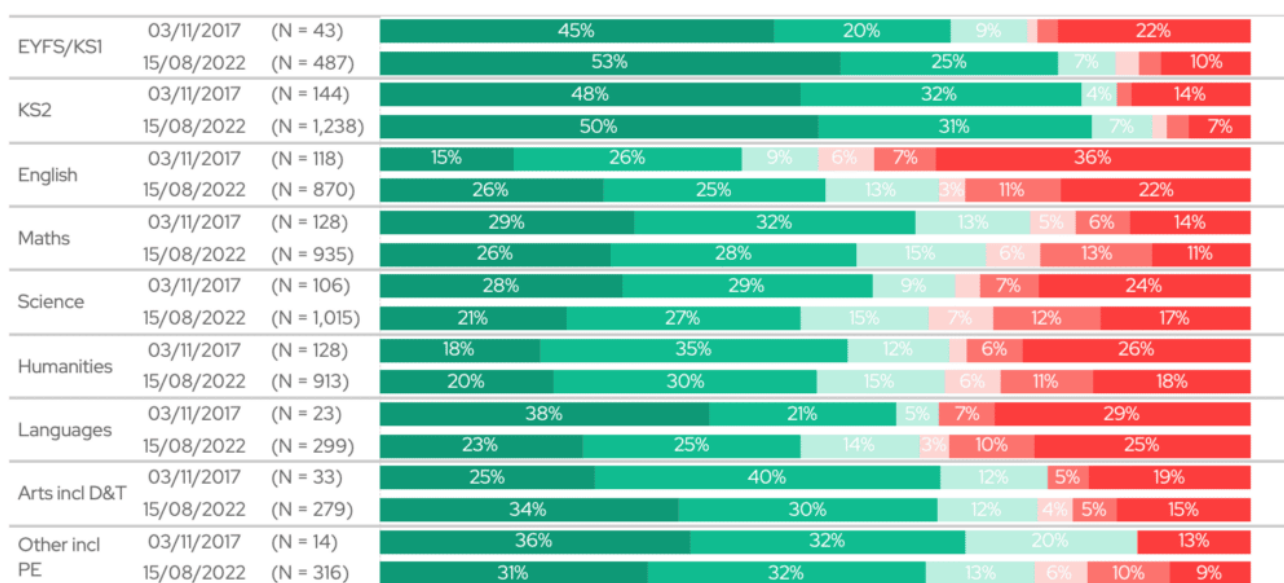
Many of you are fans of it, with 3 in 4 saying you use the approach at least once a term in your lessons, and more than a third use it at least once per week.

Looking closely at who is doing collaborative problem-solving shows a few changes since 2017. Primary school colleagues and English teachers are now more likely to say they regularly use it in lessons, compared to 2017. On the other hand, modern languages teachers are less likely to use it (down from 59% using once per half term in 2017, to 48% now)

A further note of interest: fewer teachers say they have never tried collaborative problem solving activities in their lesson plans, compared to 2017. Could it be that more people tried it, but didn't find it useful?

Collaborative problem-solving brings together individual problem-solving and the social process of students working together...

How often do you include collaborative problem solving in your lesson plans?



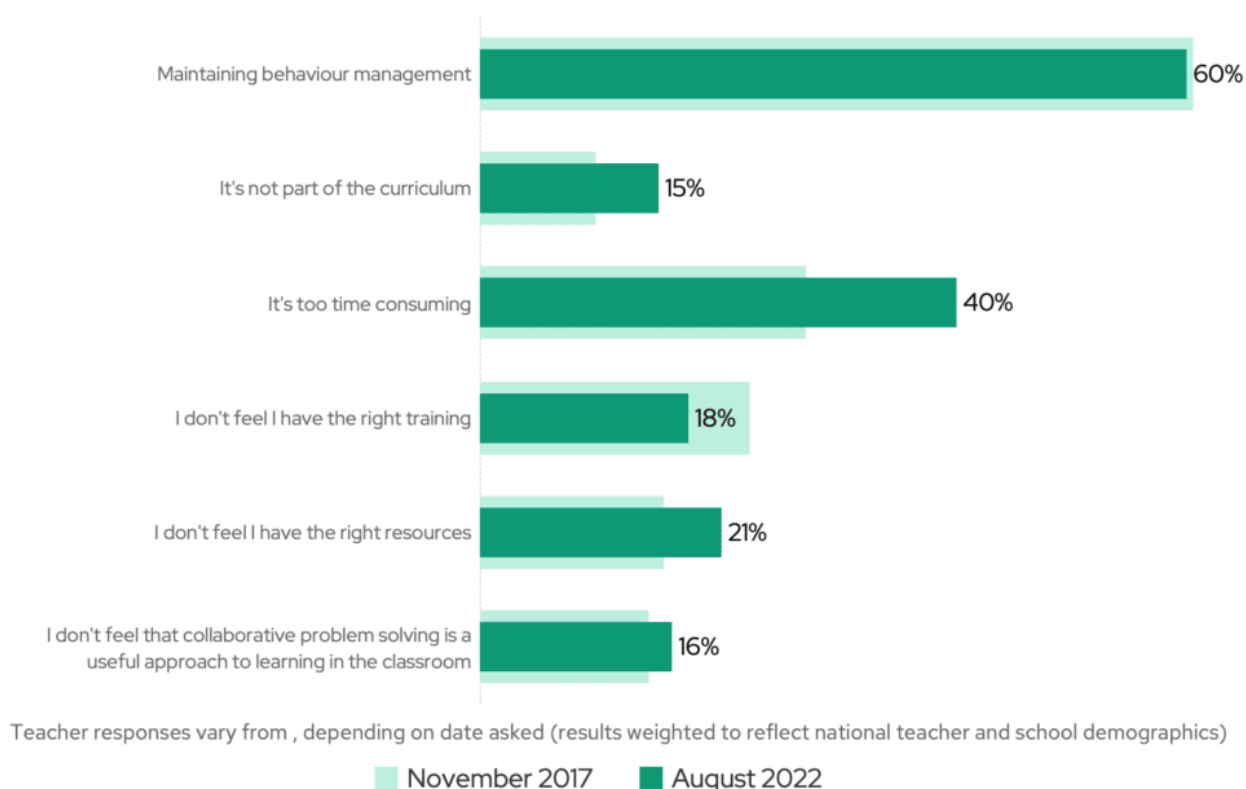
Teacher responses vary from 737 to 6,352, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)



In terms of barriers, behaviour management remains the number one obstacle that teachers face when trying to facilitate collaborative problem-solving. More of you also now report that collaborative problem-solving is too time-consuming (40%) than in 2017 (28%).

In past questions, MFL teachers have flagged more behaviour issues and a struggle to get through their curriculum, which might explain why collaborative problem-solving has dropped out of favour most for this group.

What are the biggest obstacles to facilitating collaborative problem-solving in lessons?



Is it a problem if children don't have as many opportunities to experience lessons with activities focused on collaborative problem-solving skills? Back in 2017, 61% of you felt the education system wasn't equipping young people with '21st-century skills', like collaboration and creativity. Today, this has increased to 72%. And 90% of you do believe it is important for children to learn these skills in lessons.

Unless behaviour management gets easier, it may be too difficult to achieve that.

2. What A-levels would teachers opt to sit and what would they do next?

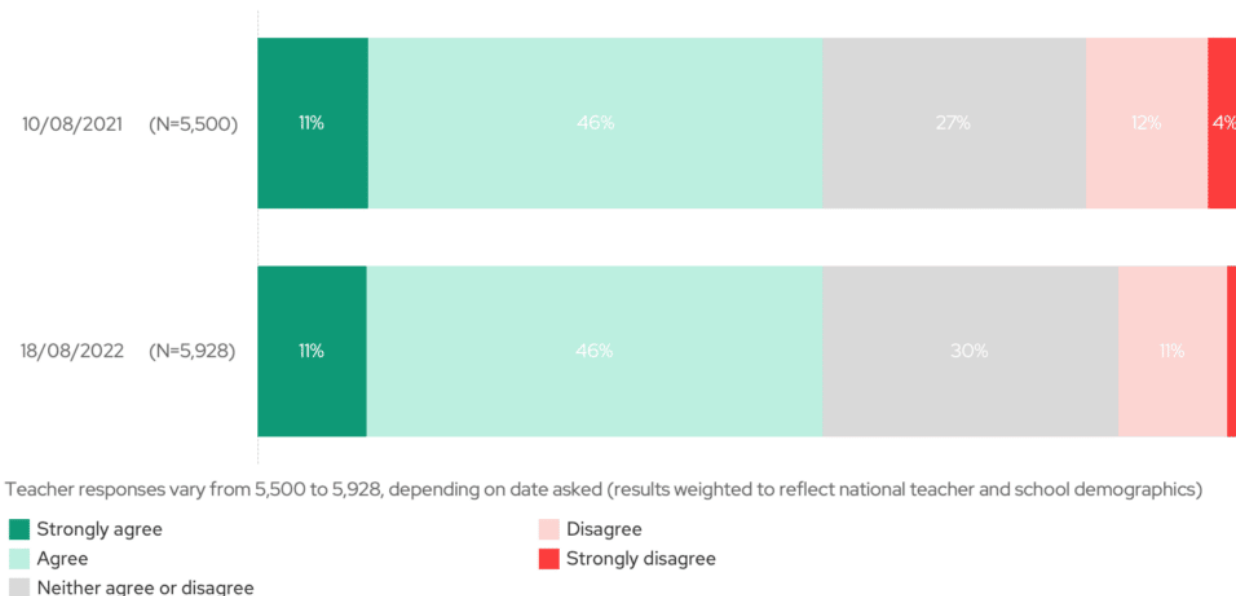
Last week was A-Level results day! And exams were back. It's been a challenging couple of years amid TAGs, CAGs and many other acronyms.

So how did it go this year?

Over half of you (57%) feel the way A-level qualifications were decided this year was fair, exactly the same percentage as 2021. Given all of the changes made by the exams board, they may feel a bit dejected that teachers didn't feel it was more fair. But given the relative lack of furor over the past two years on results day - especially compared to 2020 - perhaps everyone should just be pleased we are all on the other side (mostly) unscathed.

It's Exam Results day today!

'The way A-level qualifications were decided this year was fair.'



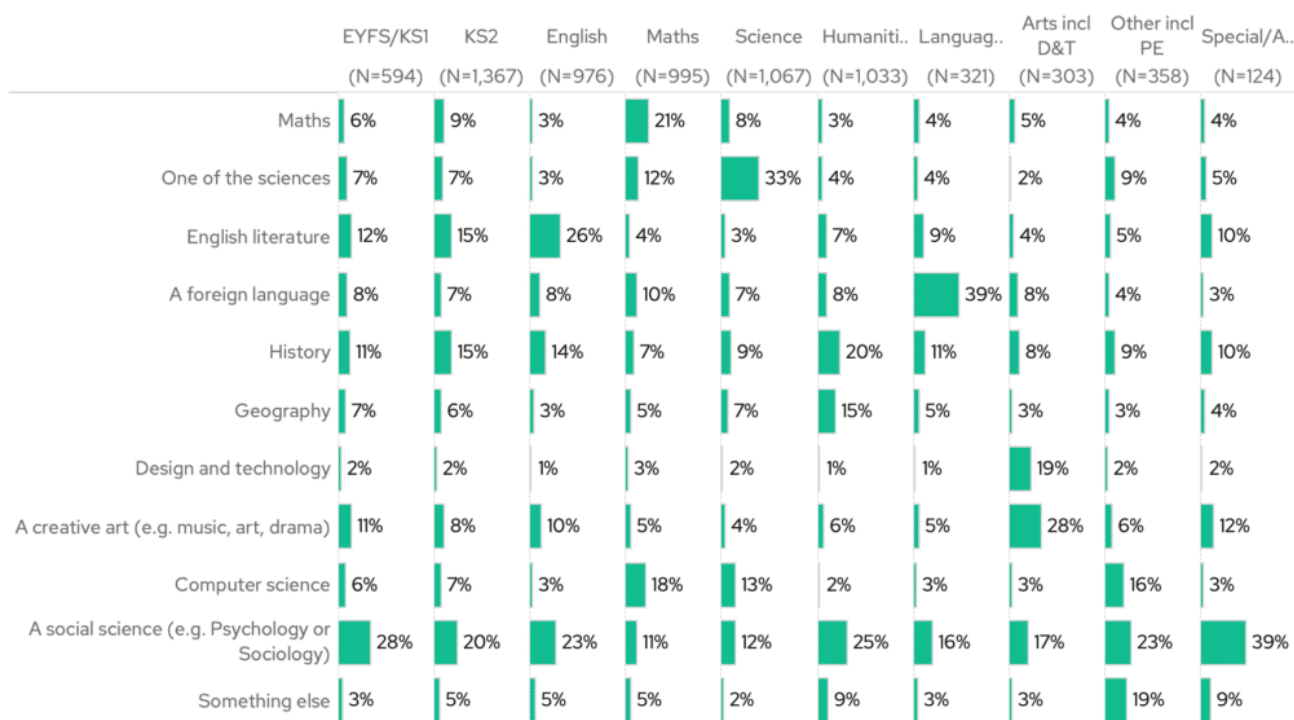
You were also asked to consider what A-Level you would choose- to study, if given the chance.

Many opted for your own subject, even though an instruction asked you not to select any you'd already done. So either, you really love your subject and turned a blind eye to this instruction, or you didn't sit an A-level in your subject!

Social sciences were the most popular choice (21%), particularly amongst those of you working in specialist provision (39%) and EYFS/KS1 (28%).

Maths teachers (18%) were more likely to choose computer science than teachers of other subjects. We might suggest here that they'd be a good group to re-train up given the computer science teacher shortage, but it's not as if we are drowning in maths teachers already. We may need to look to the 16% of 'other' subject teachers (including PE and business studies) to be the ones to take on that mantle.

If you were forced to study for an A-level this year, which would you pick?



Question answered by 7,138 teachers on 18/08/2022 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

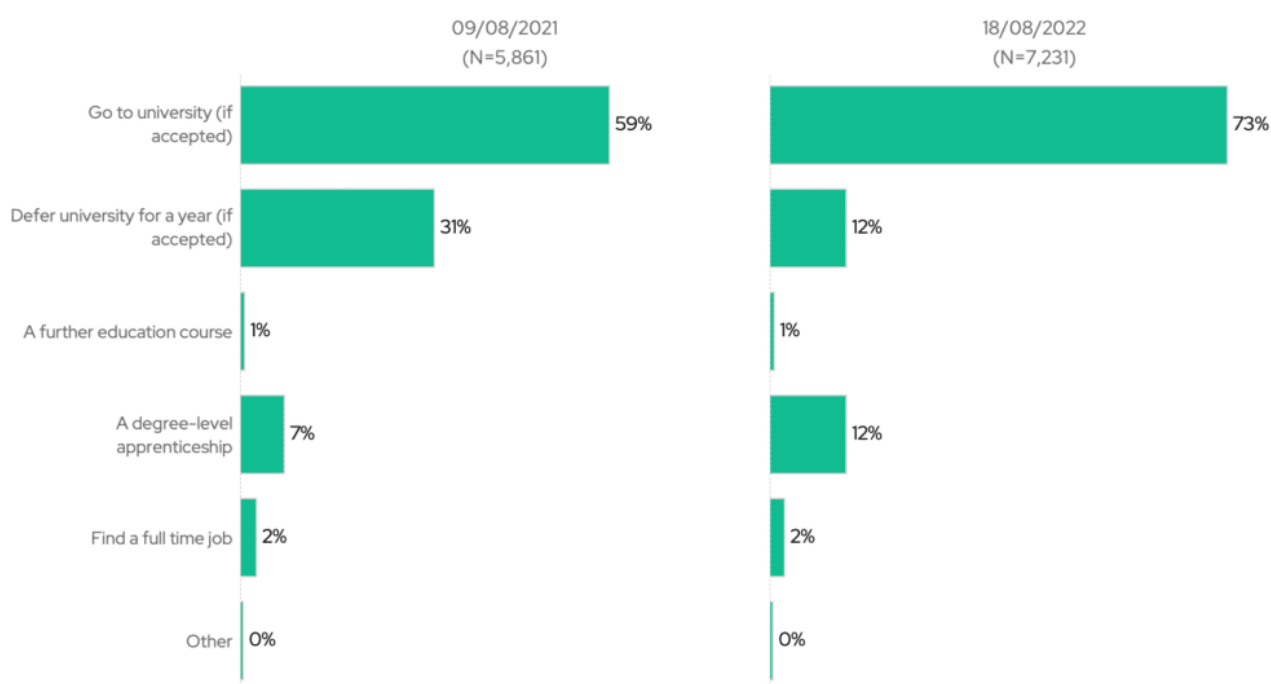
Beyond studying for A-Level, we noticed a slight shift in what you would do if you were receiving A-Level results as an 18-year-old yourself last week.

Back in 2021, when university re-openings were uncertain, only 59% of you said back then that you'd go to university – and a lot more of you would defer. Given the greater normality of this year, the percentage going to university was much higher.

But notice the shift in degree apprenticeships. It's a small percentage point change – from 7% last year to 12% this year. But in relative terms, that's a big shift! The government and media have endlessly pointed out the equivalence of apprenticeships over the past year and it seems like the message might be getting through.

(For more on this topic, see our report with PLMR [here](#)).

Imagine you had been sitting A-levels/BTECs this year. What would you choose to do in September?



Teacher responses vary from 5,861 to 7,231, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

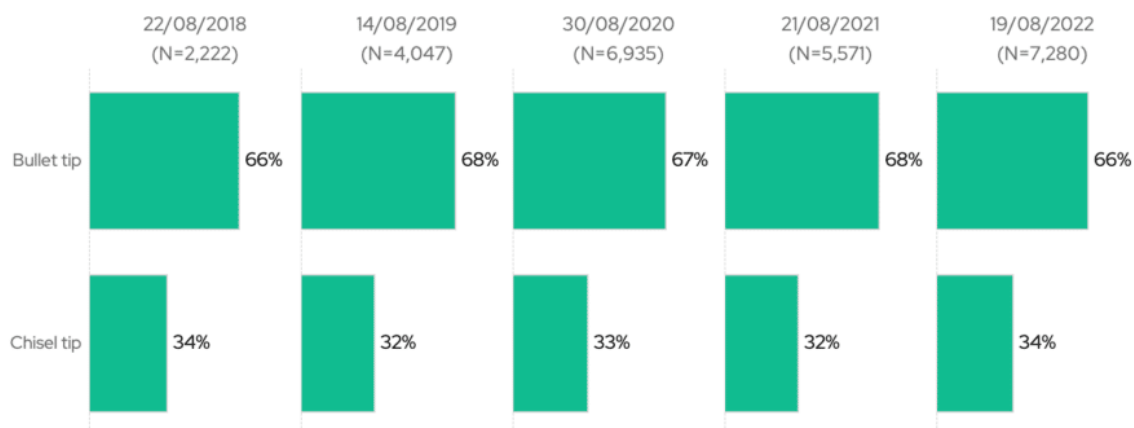
3. Team Bullet vs Team Chisel (Round Five)

It was THAT day on Teacher Tapp last week, where you tell us what type of board pen is the best: bullet tip or chisel tip. Team bullet pointed out that they've had a clean swoop over the past four years but has that changed?

Nope. Team bullet are still ahead (66%) ■■■■■

With five years of data on bullet tip versus chisel tip, it can now confidently be said that bullet tips are the favoured choice of board pen among teachers.

What is the best type of board marker?

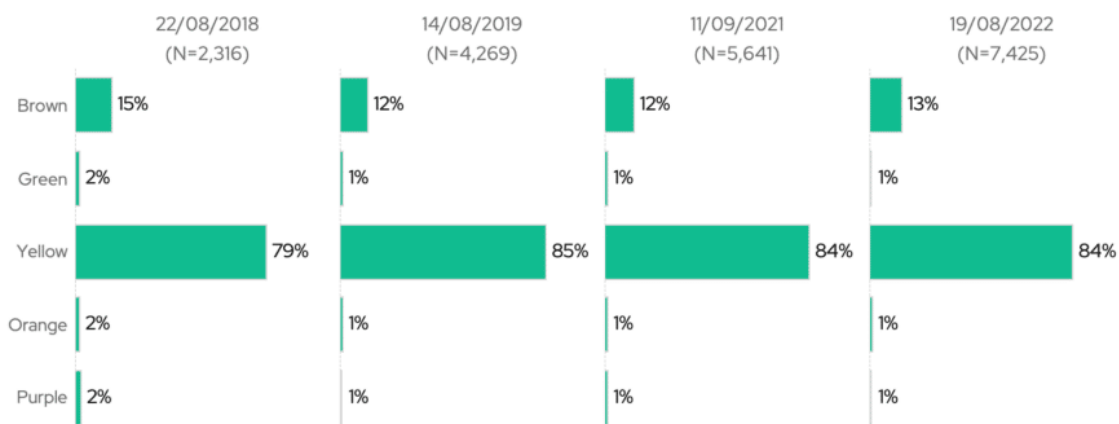


Teacher responses vary from 2,222 to 7,280, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

In four years of asking which colour board marker you wish the manufacturers would remove from a multi-pack, yellow has always come out on top. This year, it's no different with 84% of you wanting to see the back of yellow.

A Tappster reached out and explained that you could use a yellow whiteboard pen to prepare complex drawings or calculations and then draw over them with a darker colour, whilst explaining the process. Not a bad idea, although from your Twitter debates about board markers, the idea of having yellow ink on your favourite marker might be a step too far ■■

In a multi-pack of board markers, which one colour do you most wish they would remove?



Teacher responses vary from 2,316 to 7,425, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

4. The Complexities of Hair

For reasons we still can't work out, our most popular page on the Teacher Tapp blog is from when we asked about 'extreme hair styles' way back at the start of the app.

The first questions were asked in 2017, because co-founder Laura had collected several years'

worth of news stories about children sent home for uniform infractions, including for their hair. One of the current themes in the stories was that schools said their policies banned 'extreme hair styles'. Laura always found the phrasing offensive, and wanted to know how often teachers agreed that certain styles were actually 'extreme'.

Today, there are still media [reports](#) of students' being sent home due to their hairstyles. But we wanted to update the page so that people weren't getting old information. And what we found is that...

Teachers are more likely to reject labels of 'extreme' than they were in 2017 or 2019.

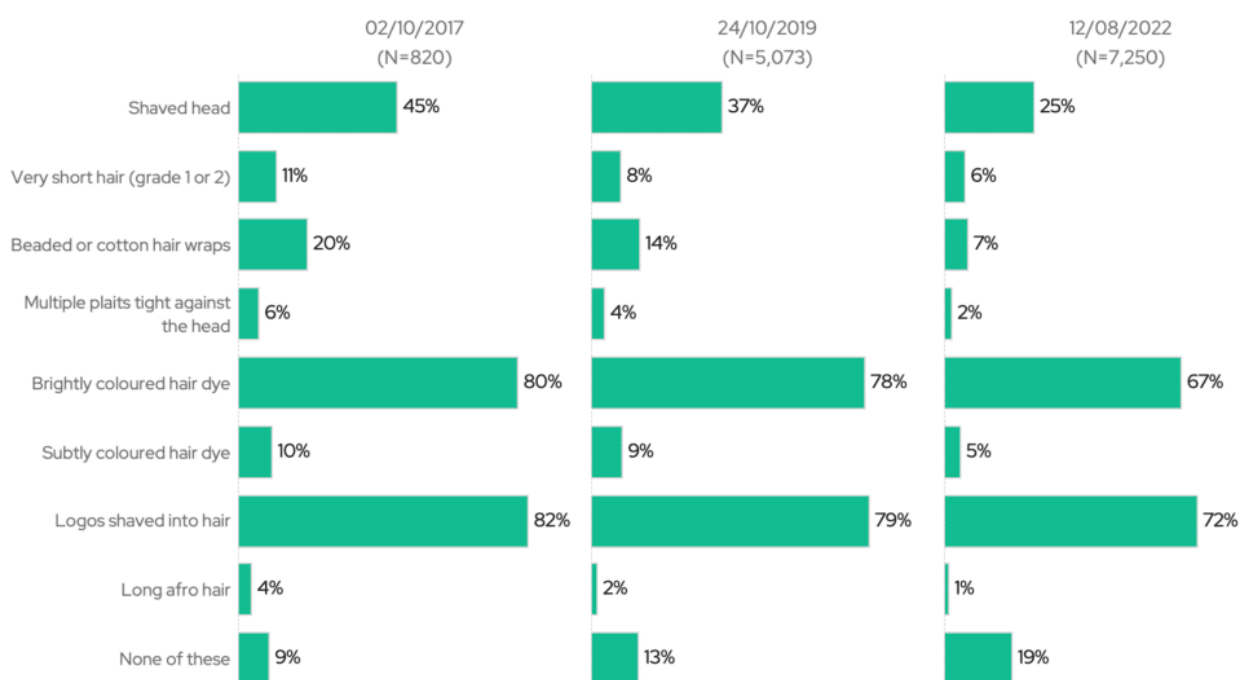
Nearly a fifth of you (19%) do not consider any of the listed hairstyles as 'extreme'. That's a 6 percentage point increase from 2019 - and shows the trend is towards a more liberal attitude all hairstyles.

It's important to note here that these are not styles that we at Teacher Tapp feel are, or even should be, labelled as 'extreme'. The hairstyles were chosen because they came from news stories and, from a research perspective, keeping the wording the same is important for comparability over time.

However, without full context, it's not always clear to Tappers what our purpose of asking is, and the inclusion of hair types from specific groups caused hurt among some users. Even with context, the wording of the question hasn't aged well (the phrase 'extreme' can seem jarring, despite it being used in the media [then](#) and more [recently](#)). We were grateful to Tappers who got in touch to discuss how we might improve the question in future.

The results are important for showing real social change, though. As uncomfortable as it is to say: in 2017, 4% of people felt long afro hair was 'extreme' - the truth is, that's what we found. That figure is now to a (rounded) 1% - which is so low it could almost entirely be down to error. Meanwhile, those who think shaved heads are extreme has reduced from 45% to just 25%. And people worried about subtly coloured hair dye has also fallen by half. This is a real example of social attitude shift in a short period.

Every year there are headlines about pupils sent home for having 'extreme haircuts'. The examples below are from real news stories. Which would you consider 'extreme'?

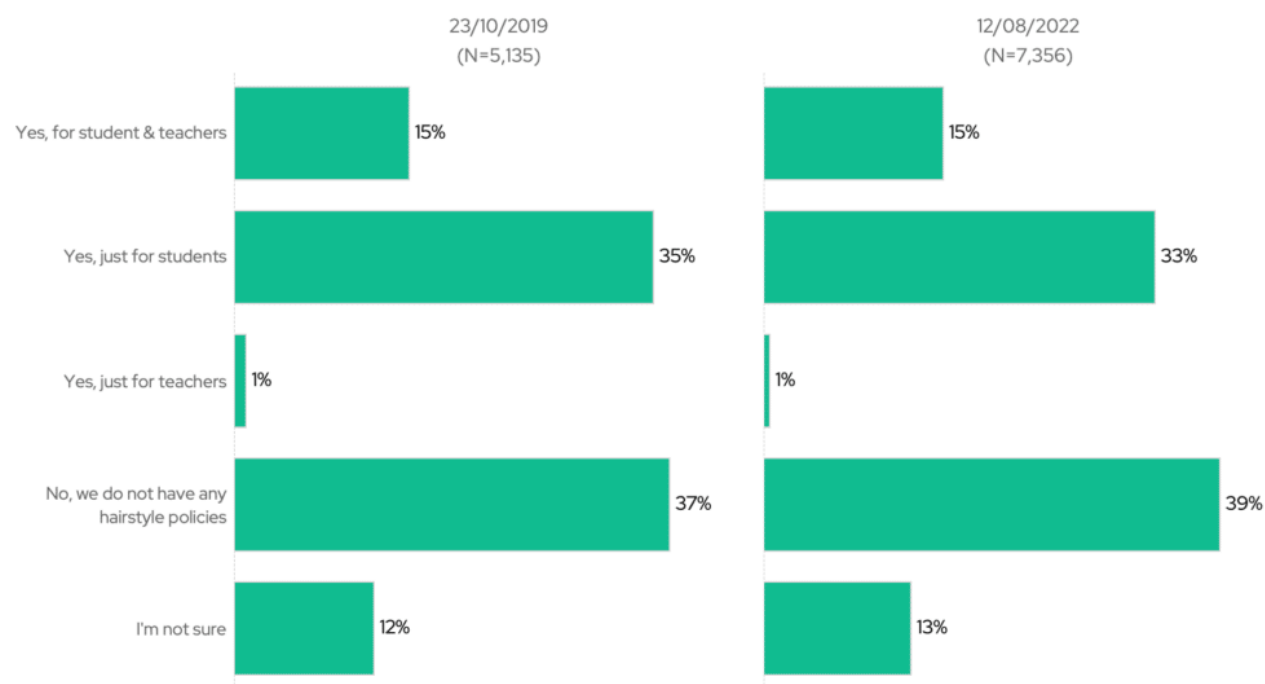


Teacher responses vary from 820 to 7,250, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Several users noted that just because attitudes are changing, it doesn't mean school policies will change at the same rate. As it stands, around half of teachers said their school had an acceptable hairstyles policy for students (and 15% include teachers in that too).

However, these policies might have changed in terms of what they specify. We will need to look at this more closely in the coming months to find out.

Does your school have a policy that sets out acceptable hairstyles for students and/or teachers?



Teacher responses vary from 5,135 to 7,356, depending on date asked (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

Finally... we know you love the daily read, so here are the ones from last week

The most read tip from the past week was: [Teachers working with working memory](#)

Here are the rest of the week's reads for your reference:

- [The psychology of beach reading](#)
- [For schools, accepting student mobile phone use may be a better approach than banning them](#)
- [A-level results 2022: Top grades drop 19% but remain higher than 2019](#)
- [Summer 2022 exam series: Reflections from a Headteacher](#)
- [The Extraordinary Case of Mr Yamazaki](#)