

Part of Unite Students'
Insight Series 2017

EVERYONE IN

INSIGHTS FROM
A DIVERSE STUDENT
POPULATION



**UNITE
STUDENTS**



CONTENTS

	FOREWORD	03
	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	04
	METHODOLOGY	05
1	▶ SOCIAL INTEGRATION	06
2	▶ ACCOMMODATION	13
3	▶ FINANCIAL MATTERS	19
	RETENTION – THINKING, TALKING AND ACTING	24
4	▶ PREPAREDNESS FOR WORK	27
5	▶ MENTAL HEALTH	33
	CONCLUSIONS	36
	HEPI POLICY RESPONSE	37
	APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE	38
	APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE	39



FOREWORD

BY RICHARD SMITH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
UNITE STUDENTS

We live in a highly diverse society, and one that is becoming more conscious of its own diversity. A recent survey by Ipsos Mori found that young people age 16-22 were more concerned about gender equality, racism and prejudice towards LGBT+ people than any of the previous three generations.¹ It is against this background that we explore the experiences of diverse groups of students within this report.

Going to a UK university has long been recognised as offering a world-class opportunity to harness ambition and explore potential. I believe it remains so. It is therefore encouraging that some 74% of students find university life a positive and satisfying experience.

That is not to say that students find every aspect of university life easy or comfortable. This is neither surprising nor, in itself, a bad thing: learning to cope with new situations and challenges is very much part of the university experience.

What is of concern is that there are some groups of students who consistently appear to find university more challenging than their peers. The extent and persistence of this challenge suggests that the current system is not yet fully addressing their needs.

This becomes more pertinent in the light of growing evidence that some groups have different outcomes from higher education. These include the 'attainment gap' between white and BAME students highlighted recently by Wonkhe², the greater likelihood that lesbian, gay and bisexual students will think about dropping out of university highlighted by the NUS³ and the lower participation, attainment and career success of poorer student from working class backgrounds.⁴

In our 2016 Insight Report, *Student Resilience*, we demonstrated the link between poorer experience in a range of non-academic areas of student life, and poorer student wellbeing, retention and life satisfaction.⁵

This year's report builds on that learning to explore the experiences of different groups of students within these non-academic areas. While our findings do, as usual, shed light on the experiences of all students, this year we have particularly focused on differences of experiences between groups.

The non-academic spaces and services on offer should enable all students to thrive and do their best. They also need to take account of the growing diversity of the student population, not just in areas linked to widening participation such as socio-economic group and ethnicity, but also in terms of wider equality issues such as sexuality, disability and mental health.

This report presents a series of findings which show that some groups of students are at risk of disadvantage within the non-academic student experience, and explores the implications of this.

To address the issues raised in the report requires two levels of thinking. On a universal basis, it means ensuring every service and opportunity has been designed with all possible students in mind. On an individual basis it means ensuring that targeted services are appropriately available and feel accessible to those they are aimed at.

We have already used these insights to review our own practice as an accommodation provider. We have, for example, carried out an equality impact assessment on a pilot digital service, revealing and addressing ways in which it could inadvertently disadvantage trans students. We have ensured our professional student welfare signposting service is consistently available to all students living with us. We are currently running a campaign using the student voice to encourage disclosure of mental health conditions to their university and to encourage appropriate help-seeking.

However this points to a further conclusion arising from this research. Many non-academic services are either provided by, or draw significantly on, partners external to the university. Taking a collaborative approach is therefore an essential aspect of addressing disadvantage.

I firmly believe that every student should have a fair opportunity to achieve their best while at university. We will continue to work towards this goal within Unite Students and through our partnerships with universities. In the meantime I have great pleasure in sharing these important findings with you, and hope you find them equally as valuable as I have in working towards a more inclusive and fairer society.

Richard Smith
CEO, Unite Students

¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/opinions-generation-zs-ambitions-and-priorities-differ-greatly-between-generations>

² <http://wonkhe.com/blogs/analysis-universities-shame-black-attainment-gap/>

³ <https://www.nus.org.uk/Global/lgbt-research.pdf>

⁴ See for example <https://thebridgegroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/BG-Employability-Report-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.unitestudents.com/about-us/insightreport/2016-full-report>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year since 2013, we have surveyed students about their experience at university. We do not focus on the academic aspects of that experience, but rather on how students live, navigate support services, manage independently and the impact of this on their satisfaction, wellbeing and success.

This year's survey shows once again that the majority of students (74%) are, on the whole, satisfied with their life while at university.

However, our results show that there are some important differences in life satisfaction among particular segments, for example, among students who have a mental health condition, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, students with a disability, lesbian, gay and bisexual students and those from socio-economic groups D and E.

For a significant minority of students, university life appears to be more challenging and for those who belong to multiple groups, more challenging still. While 13% of students in just one of these highlighted groups report that they are dissatisfied with their lives, this rises to 29% for those students who belong to three or more groups.

Students who have a declared mental health condition (15% of our respondents) face challenges with where they live, how they socialise and in building the "soft skills" that will help them to navigate the world of work.

A gap exists between applicants' expectations of a busy and fulfilling social life at university, and the reality that making friends cannot be guaranteed, especially with those you live with.

Students with a disability are less likely to feel integrated in their accommodation than those without a disability, particularly among those in a flat or house. They are also less likely to feel happy with their relationships with housemates. Six in ten (59%) of those with a disability are happy with housemate relationships, compared to 65% of those without a disability.



THERE ARE SOME SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN LIFE SATISFACTION BETWEEN GROUPS.

Three-quarters of all students (74%) feel that they are doing a good job managing their finances. Students who are first in their family to attend university are more likely to face financial difficulties, and are less likely (64% compared to 68% who are not first in family) to seek help from parents. Findings also show that black students are more likely to have financial difficulties, to say they often spend more than planned, and to say they haven't been able to afford food or bills while at university.

When it comes to life after university, students are feeling a mixture of nervousness and excitement. Almost half of all students (48%) are concerned about the potential negative impact of Brexit on employment.

Students with a mental health condition, are also concerned about support they might receive to cope with employment after university.

Almost four in ten (38%) students have had thoughts about dropping out. Financial and academic pressure, loneliness and stress are just some of the reasons given by students for thinking about leaving their course. Specific groups of students, particularly lesbian, gay and bisexual students, those with a disability and those with a mental health condition, are more likely to consider dropping out and subsequently, more likely to act on this.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Unite Students worked with YouthSight to survey 6,578 students at universities across the UK. The research methodology comprised an online survey that took participants, on average, 20 minutes to complete.

The Unite Students Insight survey has been running since 2013, and has tracked and analysed the non-academic student experience. Throughout this period it has worked to develop a greater understanding of the role that the non-academic experience plays in student wellbeing, satisfaction and success. It has also uncovered areas in which this experience varies between different groups of students.

This year we have taken our analysis a step further, highlighting areas of difference and potential disadvantage for particular groups of students.

For some aspects of university life, the findings have been analysed for particular groups within the student population. It is important to remember that these categories are not mutually exclusive and students may belong to multiple groups.

A note about selected groups:

Disability – 1520 (23% of total sample).

This includes all students with a self-declared disability, impairment or long-term health condition, with almost two-thirds of these (64%) self-declaring a mental health condition either as a single disability or in combination with another disability. Where relevant we have also provided the specific findings for students who self-declared a mental health condition.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and other sexuality (LGB) – 958 (15%) of total sample.

This includes lesbian, gay and bisexual students and those identifying with 'other' sexuality. There were also populations of trans and genderqueer students represented in overall survey, but these were very small samples and have not been included in this analysis for that reason.

Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) – 1055 (16%) of total sample.

This is made up of Black Caribbean, Black African, Black other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other Asian, Mixed and Other.

In some instances we have analysed sub-groups within the BAME population – Black, Asian and Chinese students. 'Black students' are those who are Black Caribbean, Black African or Black other; 'Asian students' are those that are Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Other Asian.

Where we have analysed differences by ethnicity we have looked at UK students only in order to prevent the distinct experiences of international students influencing the results.

Socio-economic groups D and E – 1481 (22%) of total sample.

This includes students from semi-skilled, unskilled manual and workless households assessed by either parental occupation or own pre-university occupation.

First in family – 2405 (37%) of total sample.

This includes students who answered that they were the first person in their family to go to university. It is important to acknowledge that this group is significantly affected by socio-economic background given that 53% of DE students are the first in their family to go to university, as compared with 42% of Cs and 24% of ABs.

Living at home – 1376 (21%) of total sample.

This includes students who live in either their parental home or their own home which they own. Students from socio-economic groups D and E and BAME students are over-represented in this group.

Statistically significant differences between groups are reported where they are significant to at least the 95% confidence level.

More detail on methodology can be found in Appendix 1 and the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Making new friends and enjoying a busy social life plays an important role in life satisfaction for students, but some students are finding it more difficult.

1



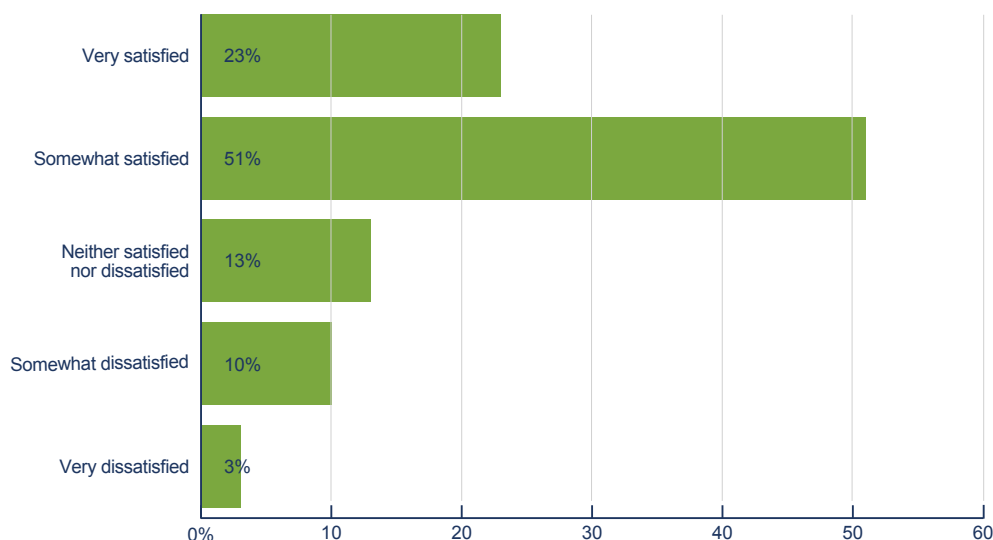
Student satisfaction and happiness

The overall response from this year's cohort of students is positive, showing that almost three-quarters (74%) of students are satisfied with their lives.

Figure 1: How satisfied are you with life at the moment?

Base:

All students: 6578



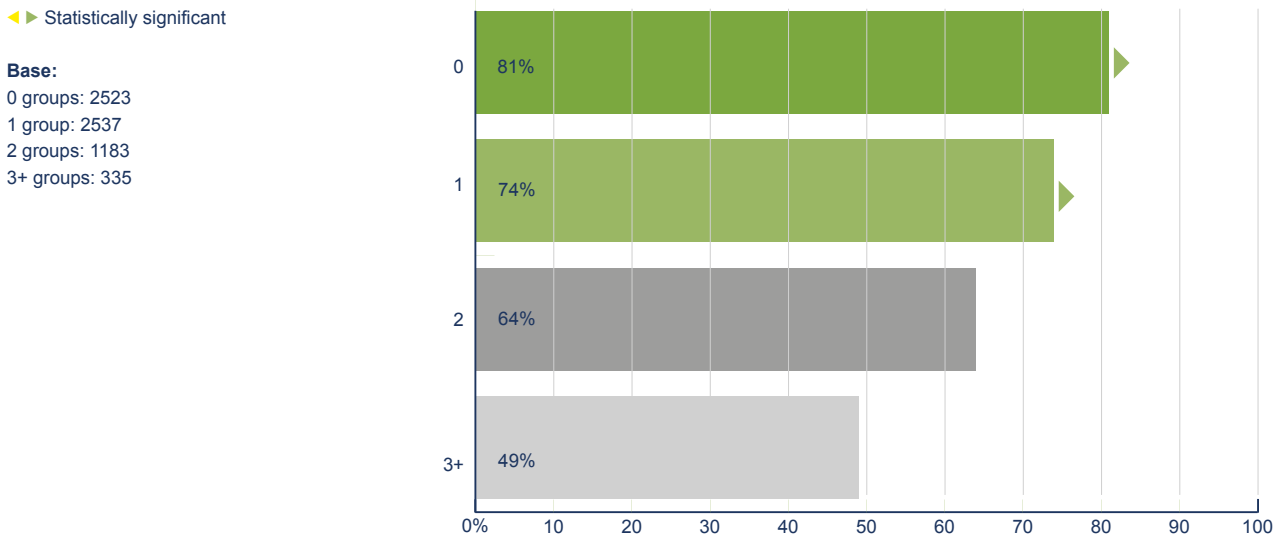
This level of life satisfaction is comparable with last year's survey, where 73% of students were satisfied with their lives.

Experiencing lower levels of satisfaction

The data shows specific groups of students reporting lower satisfaction with their lives than the overall student population. While we cannot expect that all students will experience a similar level of life satisfaction while at university, significant differences at the group level may point to areas of disadvantage within the student experience.

In addition, levels of satisfaction are lower still for students who fall into a number of these groups.

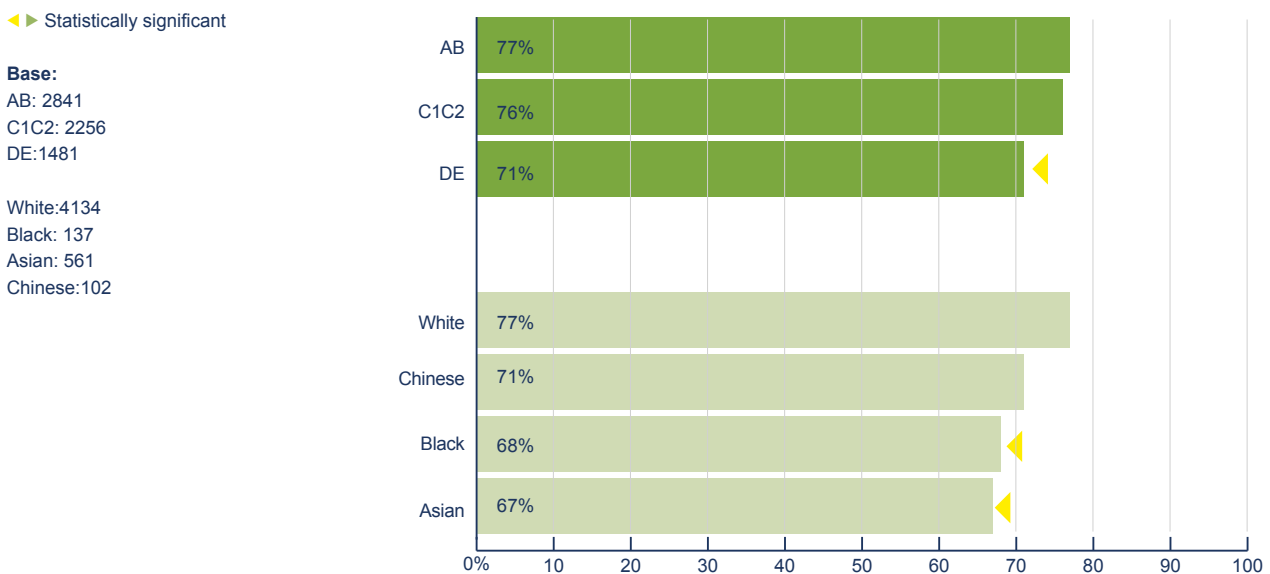
Figure 2: How satisfied are you with your life at the moment? (by number of groups).



Course satisfaction

The 2017 HEPI-HEA Student Academic Experience Survey found that life satisfaction was moderately correlated with course satisfaction.⁶ The vast majority of students (75%) are satisfied with the quality of their course.⁷ Satisfaction starts out higher for Year 1 students (79%) and then drops in Year 2 (72%) and Year 3 (73%).

Figure 3: How satisfied are you with the quality of the course?



Black (68%) and Asian students (67%) are significantly less satisfied with their course than both white students (77%) and Chinese students (71%).

⁶ <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2017/06/07/2017-student-academic-experience-survey/>

⁷ This is somewhat lower than the result from the equivalent questions in the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS) which was 84 in England and Wales and 85 in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This may be due to the broader nature of this survey which provides a different context for students to consider course quality. Although this makes direct comparison with the NSS difficult it does not invalidate comparisons and correlations with this finding within the bounds of this survey.

The realities of social relationships

Going to university means new friends, new relationships and, many hope, a busy social life, but our research suggests some students will be disappointed.

Before coming to university, applicants have high expectations about their social lives with 81% expecting that they would spend more time socialising than at school. Yet the reality is that just 59% of all students agreed that they have a fuller social life than at school.

This means that to some degree all students are at risk of disappointment about the social experience at university. When we look at specific groups of students, this difference is more striking.

The highest divergence in expectation versus reality occurs for students who have a disability or a mental health condition, and those students from socio-economic groups D and E.

Figure 4: % agreeing that they would expect to spend more time socialising than they did at school.

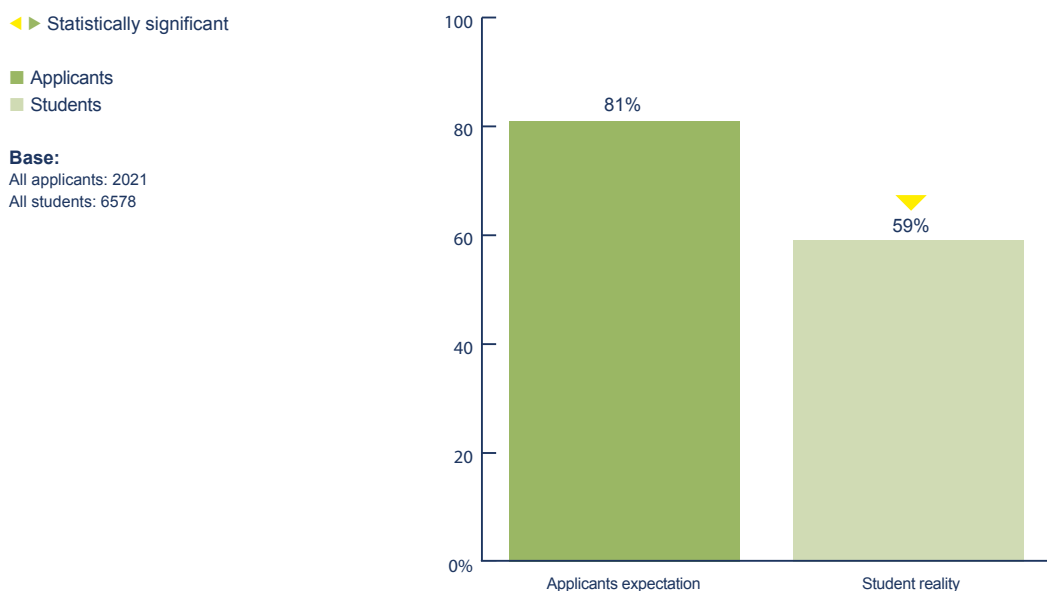
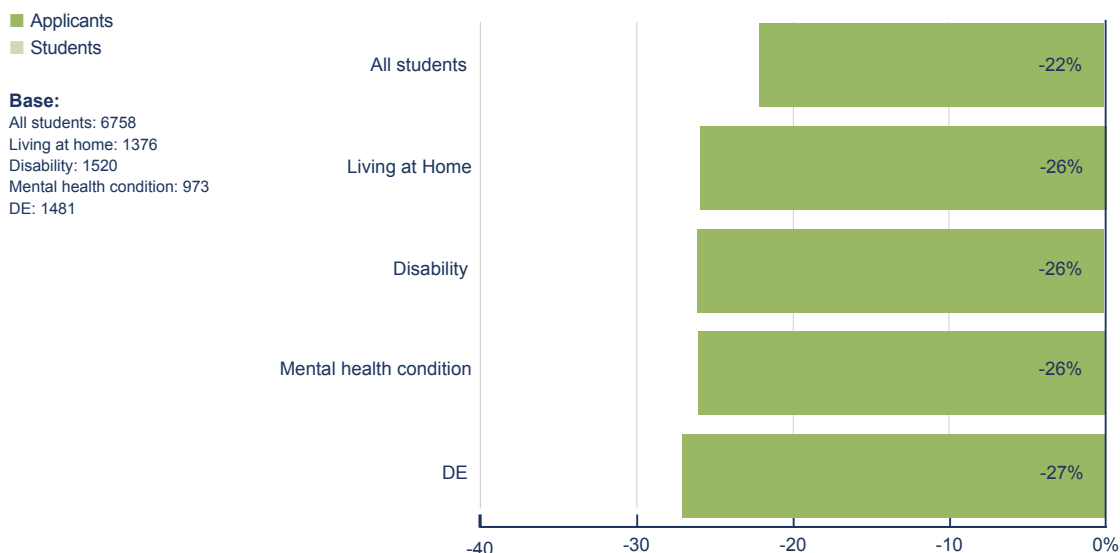


Figure 5: Difference between applicant expectation and student experience of time spent socialising at university compared with school.



Focus on: living at home

Perhaps unsurprisingly, students who live at home find themselves socialising for less time than those living away from home, with just 41% of those living at home agreeing that they spend more time socialising than at school. Almost two thirds (65%) feel that university has improved their social skills, compared to 74% of students living away from home.

Figure 6: I spend more time socialising at university than I did at school.

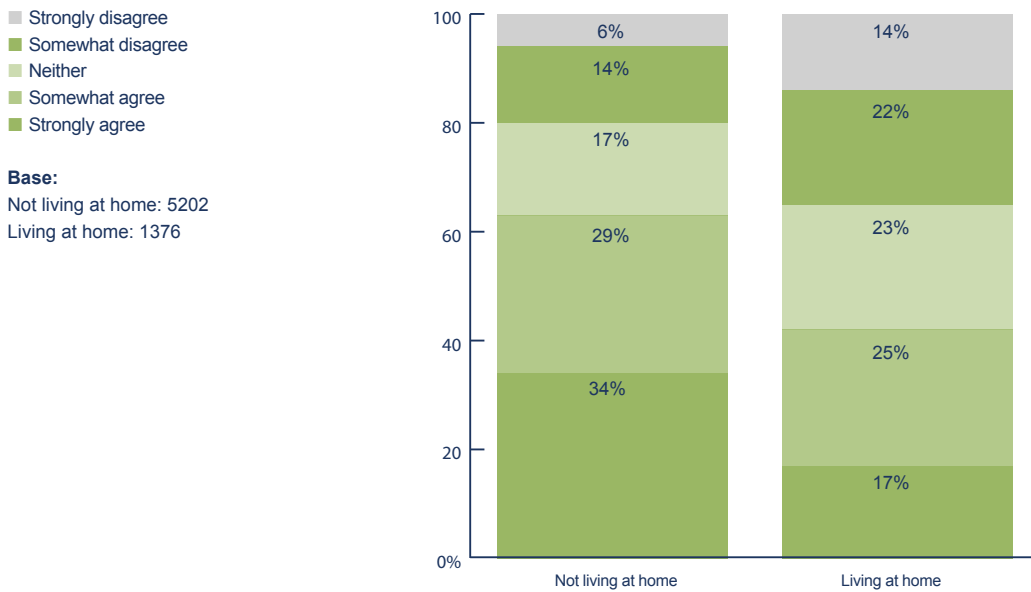
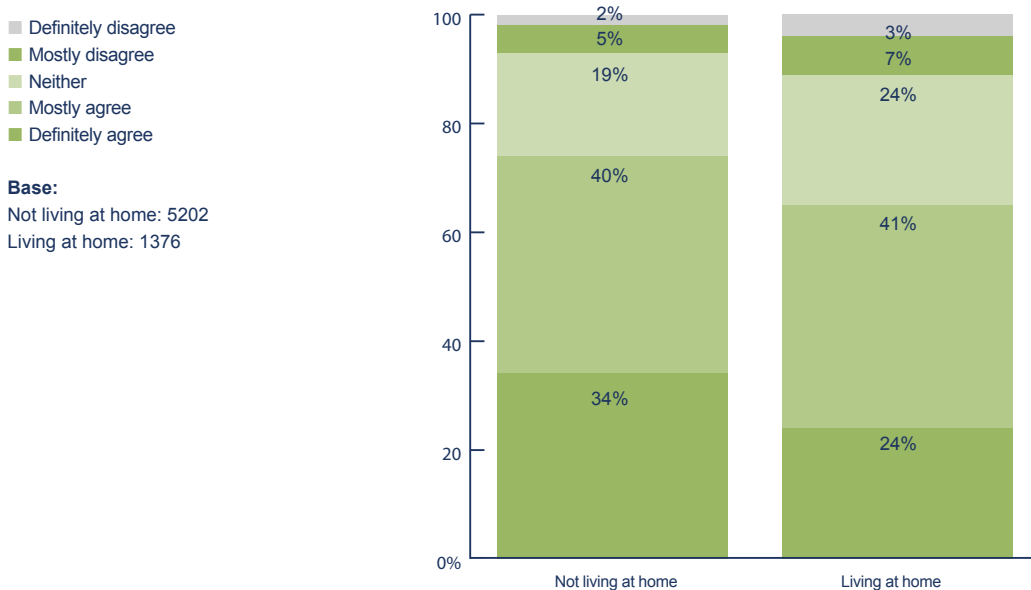


Figure 7: Since starting university I have improved my social skills.



Students from socio-economic groups D and E are over-represented among those living at home, with 33% of DEs living at home, as compared with 21% of C1C2s and 14% of ABs.

More than half (57%) of Asian students are living at home as compared with one in five (19%) of white students who live at home. Asian students are less likely (38%) to say that they spend more time socialising at university than they did at school when compared with white students (63%).

MY EXPERIENCE: JOSIAH SENU, AGE 19**STUDYING LAW AT LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

I'm from Walthamstow in North-East London. There is a strong feeling of community, but it can be a hostile environment to grow up in. Generally, there is little aspiration and whilst some of my friendship group had dreams to pursue their studies further, most kids wanted to drop out of school and get a job. There wasn't much careers advice at my secondary school and even those who were bright were not encouraged to push themselves to be the best that they could be.

I never imagined I'd end up going to a top flight university like LSE, as I just didn't set my sights that high. Fortunately, I found out about the Sutton Trust Cambridge Law Summer School and I was amazed to get offered a place in July 2015. That opportunity has had a lasting impact on me as it made me push myself much harder.

I live at home, like quite a lot of students from a similar background. It means it can be difficult to assimilate into university life because you don't have as much time to socialise and also are likely to have less money to go out and about. You can feel more isolated than the students who live together, especially if you're shy or reserved.

It's been good that at LSE there is an Off Campus Mentoring Scheme that is designed to help immerse students who live at home. I had my own mentor who was a second-year Law student at LSE. I also met other students who were living off campus so I was able to develop some friendships. When we first started, LSE brought us all together for a week of events and activities so we could get familiar with each other and our surroundings.

The more we can make people applying to university recognise that it's not just for privileged students the better. Irrespective of background, everyone should and can apply to university and have a good experience. Next, I hope to do a Masters at Oxford, and after that, to train as a commercial barrister. That will be quite something for a boy from Walthamstow.



IT'S BEEN GOOD THAT AT LSE THERE IS AN OFF CAMPUS MENTORING SCHEME THAT IS DESIGNED TO HELP IMMERSE STUDENTS WHO LIVE AT HOME. I HAD MY OWN MENTOR WHO WAS A SECOND-YEAR LAW STUDENT AT LSE. //

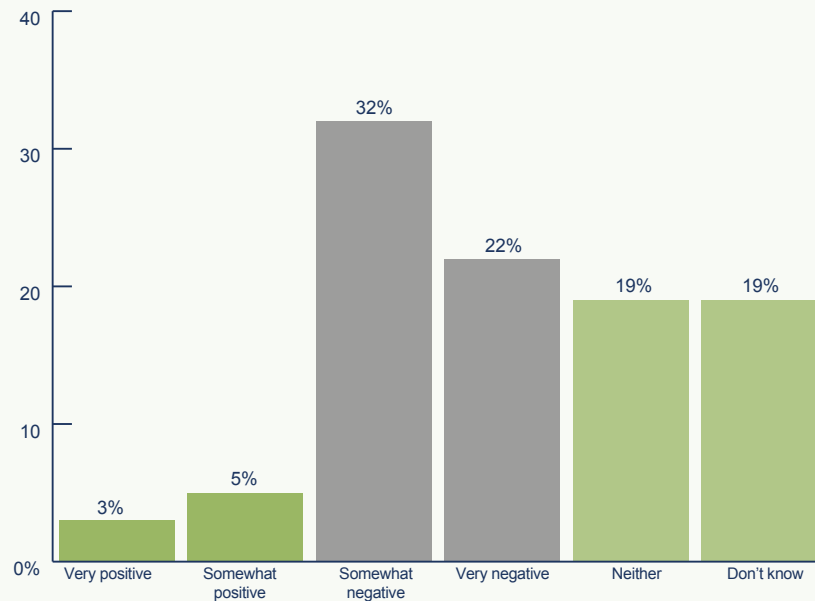
Studying in the shadow of Brexit

This is the first year in which students are considering the implications of Brexit on their time at university and their future career.

Over half of all students (54%) feel that Brexit will negatively affect their university. The proportion of those answering 'don't know' is high at almost a fifth, suggesting continued uncertainty about the impacts.

Figure 8: How do you think the decision to leave the EU will impact your university?

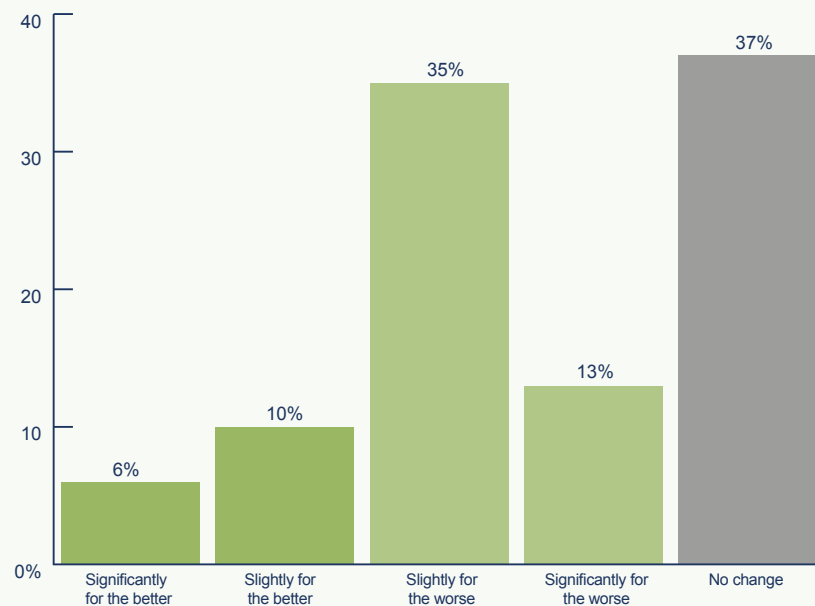
Base:
All students: 6578



Almost half of all students (48%) feel that Brexit will negatively affect job prospects, compared to just 16% that feel it will have a positive impact.

Figure 9: How do you think the decision to leave the EU will impact job prospects?

Base:
All students: 6578



These findings are consistent across all groups of students with no statistically significant differences.

ACCOMMODATION

All students need to feel that where they live, and who they live with, is helping them to integrate, socialise and succeed.

2



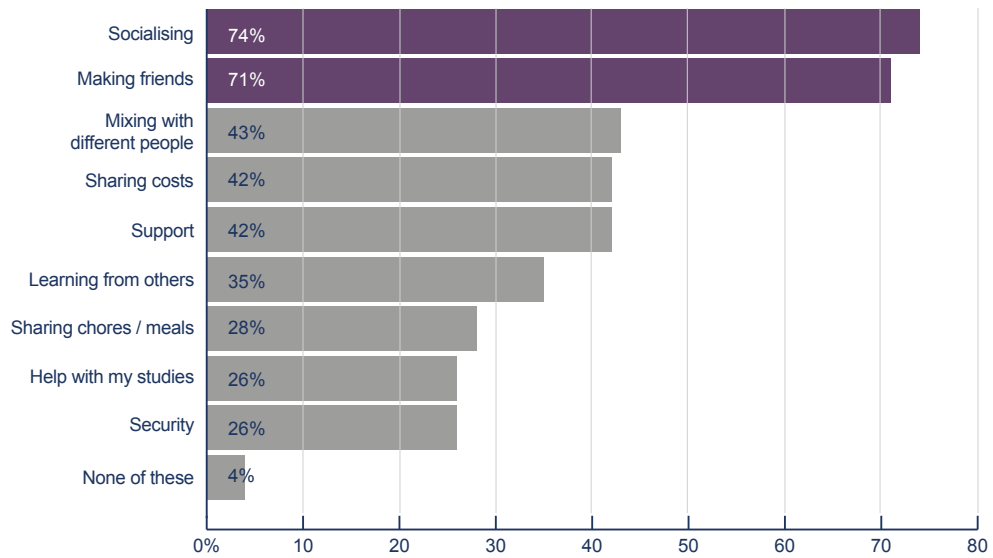
The importance of accommodation for social integration

Living with people they like and trust is hugely important for students, with 83% of students placing a higher priority on who they live with, rather than where they live.

Almost three quarters (74%) see the main benefit of living with other students as being the ability to socialise.

Figure 10: Which of the following, if any, do you think are the main benefits of living with other students? (can choose more than one answer).

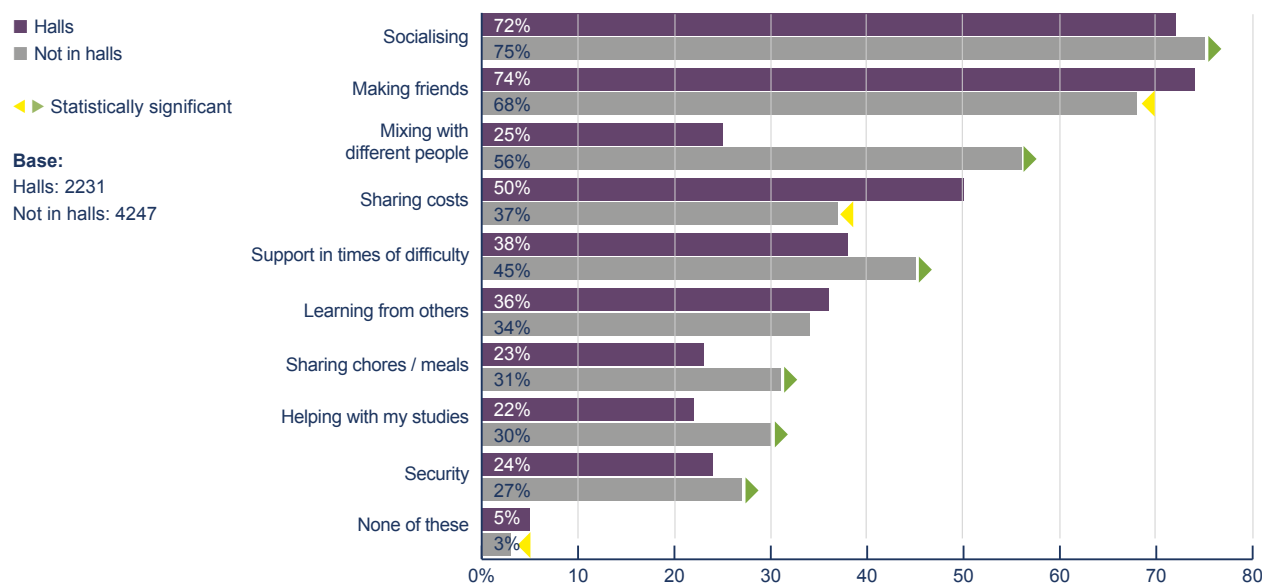
Base:
All students: 6578



Social integration is important to students' success. Our [2016 Insight Report](#) showed that students who were well integrated with other students in their accommodation were less likely to have considered dropping out of their course.

Making friends, and mixing with people from different cultures, are rated as of higher benefit for students living in halls (74% and 50%) when compared with students living elsewhere (68% and 37%).

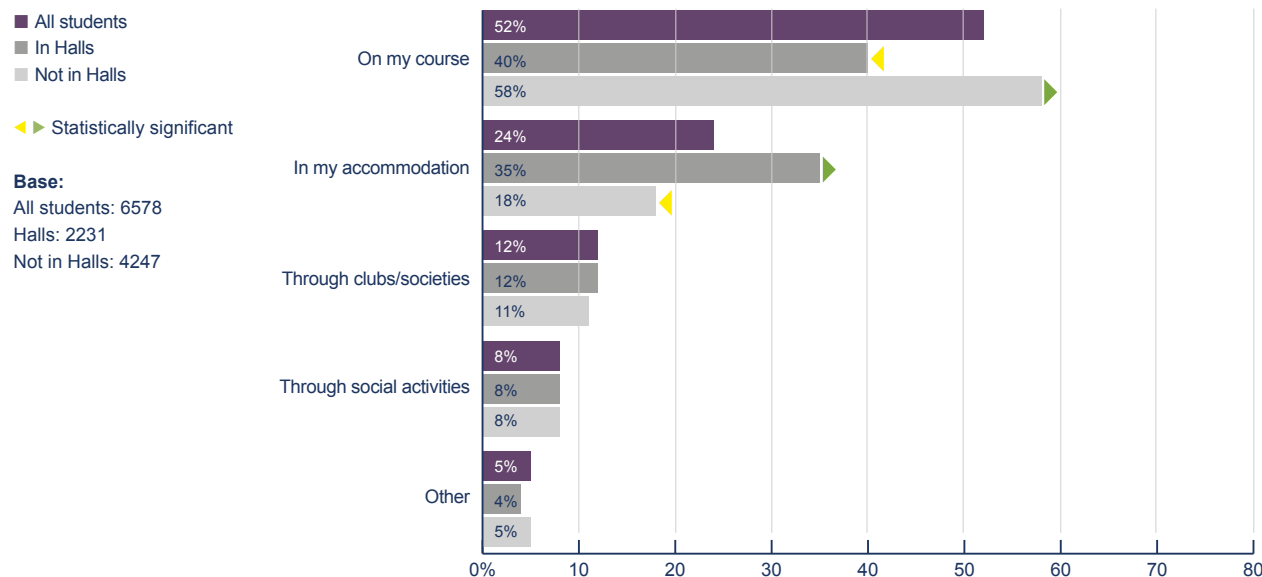
Figure 11: Which of the following, if any, do you think are the main benefits of living with other students?



Over half of all students (52%) have made most of their friends on their course. A quarter of all students (24%) have made most of their friends in their accommodation.

For students living in halls, accommodation is relatively more important for making friends, with 35% saying they have made most of their friends in their accommodation.

Figure 12: Where have you made most of your friends at university?



We asked students their reasons for choosing the university that they did. Those students who are the first in their family to go to university are more likely to factor in how close a university is to home when choosing which university to go to. Over a third of students (36%) said that the fact their university is close to home was a reason for choosing the university they attend. This compares to 26% of students who are not first in family.

LGB+ students, on the other hand, are more eager than other students to want to live away from home, with 17% of gay, lesbian, bisexual students citing moving away from home as a motivation for going to university as compared with 13% of heterosexual students.

How well are students integrating in their accommodation?

Most students who live in shared student accommodation feel integrated. Almost 9 out of 10 (89%) feel integrated with students in their flat or house and almost three quarters (74%) with students in their accommodation block.

However LGB+ students and BAME students are less likely than average to feel integrated.

Figure 13: How integrated, if at all, do you feel at university in the following areas?



15% of LGB+ students say they are not integrated with students in their flat, as compared to 11% of heterosexual students, and 30% don't feel integrated with students in their accommodation block, compared to 25% of heterosexual students.

They are more likely to believe they have fewer friends than other students (47% versus 39%) and more likely to be stressed about getting on with flatmates (21% versus 15%).

UK BAME students are also less likely to feel well integrated in their flat than other students, with 15% reporting that do not feel integrated compared to 11% of white students.

Focus on: students with a disability

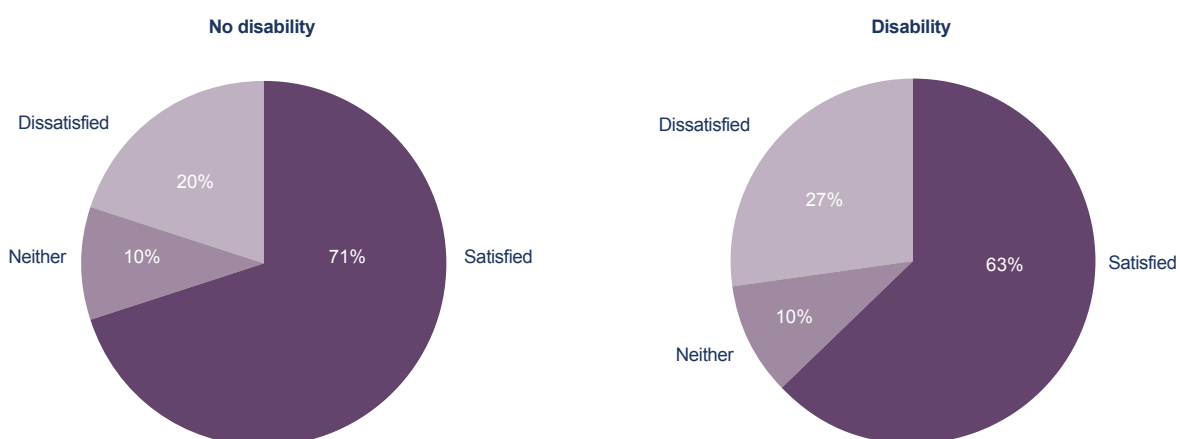
Students with a disability are less likely to be satisfied with where they live, with 63% satisfied, compared to 71% of students who do not have a disability.

Figure 14: How satisfied are you with where you live at university?

Base:

Disability (including mental health): 1520

No disability: 4795



Students with a disability are less likely to feel integrated in their accommodation than those without a disability, particularly among those living in a flat or house. They are also less likely to feel happy with the quality of their relationships with housemates. Almost six in ten (59%) of those with a disability are happy with relationships with their housemates, as compared with 65% of those without a disability.

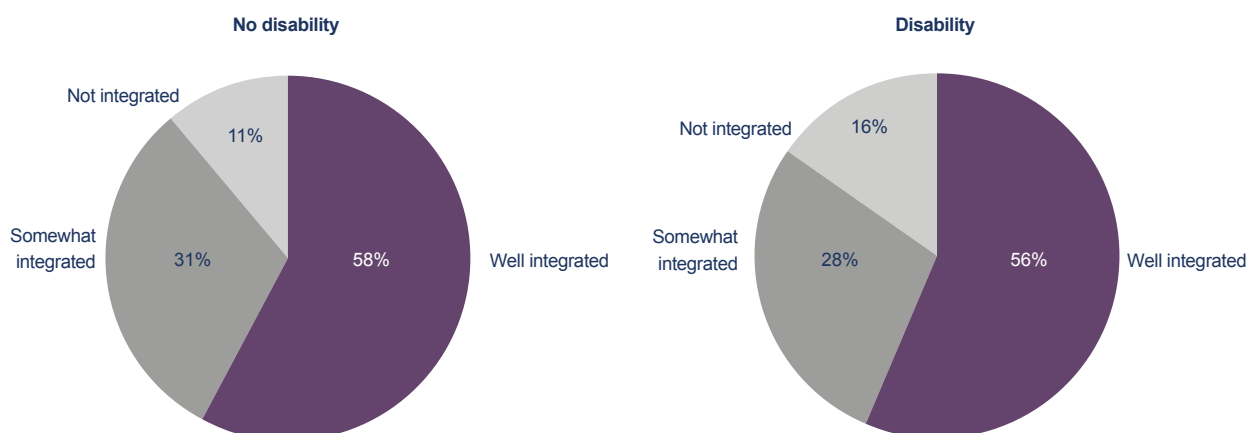
Figure 15: How integrated do you feel in your flat/house?

Base:

Disability (including mental health): 3605

No disability: 1112

Excluding N/As



We do not know from the data how - or whether - this is linked to students being able to obtain reasonable adjustments within their accommodation. Additionally, given that mental health conditions form the majority of reported disabilities within the survey, there is a need to explore what reasonable adjustments may be appropriate to support students with a mental health condition to integrate more effectively within their accommodation.

MY EXPERIENCE: AISHA PEGLEY, 23

STUDIED HISTORY OF ART,
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

I came very close to leaving university at the end of my second year. Although I knew that getting a university education would be good, I just wasn't sure it was necessary for me. I'd done internships at different companies over a couple of summers and I felt I had sufficient experience to go straight into employment. I also wasn't really enjoying the content of my course; it wasn't what I had expected and it didn't hold my interest.

I had long talks with my dad about it; he wanted me to stay and finish my degree as he said it would open more doors for me. But I didn't have anyone else I could talk to who could give me a more balanced view about what would be best in order for me to be able to make the most of my skills and my interests and get a job that I'd enjoy. I found career services weren't really that geared up to help people in my situation who were trying to decide whether or not to stay at university.

I deliberated back and forth and in the end I decided to stay, and finish what I had started. I'd already invested time, and money and so I felt I should make something of that. Now I'm so glad I completed it. I liked London, I had made good friends and the course content really improved when it included more politics and sociology, which I found much more interesting. It's really satisfying to have completed it and I'm proud to be able to say I have a degree from UCL. It would have been a waste to throw that away.

It's wasn't easy though, because things did unravel for me for a period of time. As I wasn't enjoying my course in my second year I had started to miss lectures. Initially it was the odd one here and there but as the weeks went on I found myself sleeping for half the day, most days. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy as the more I slept, the less I did, the less good I felt about myself, and the more I slept. I'm aware that lots of university

halls have wardens for the general safety of the students, but I think it could be really beneficial for them to have a more proactive role in student welfare and for it to be better advertised, and made universal at all universities. They could have appointments to meet up with every first year student over the first few weeks/month of their arrival. In addition, they could informally check in on people by knocking on doors every now and again, and having set times when students could call in on them. I see real value in having someone to speak to outside of your personal academic bubble.

My worry is that not enough is being done to make sure students are coping; instead it's too easy to start struggling and become more and more isolated. I felt I could have started to grow mould stuck in my room and no-one would have known.

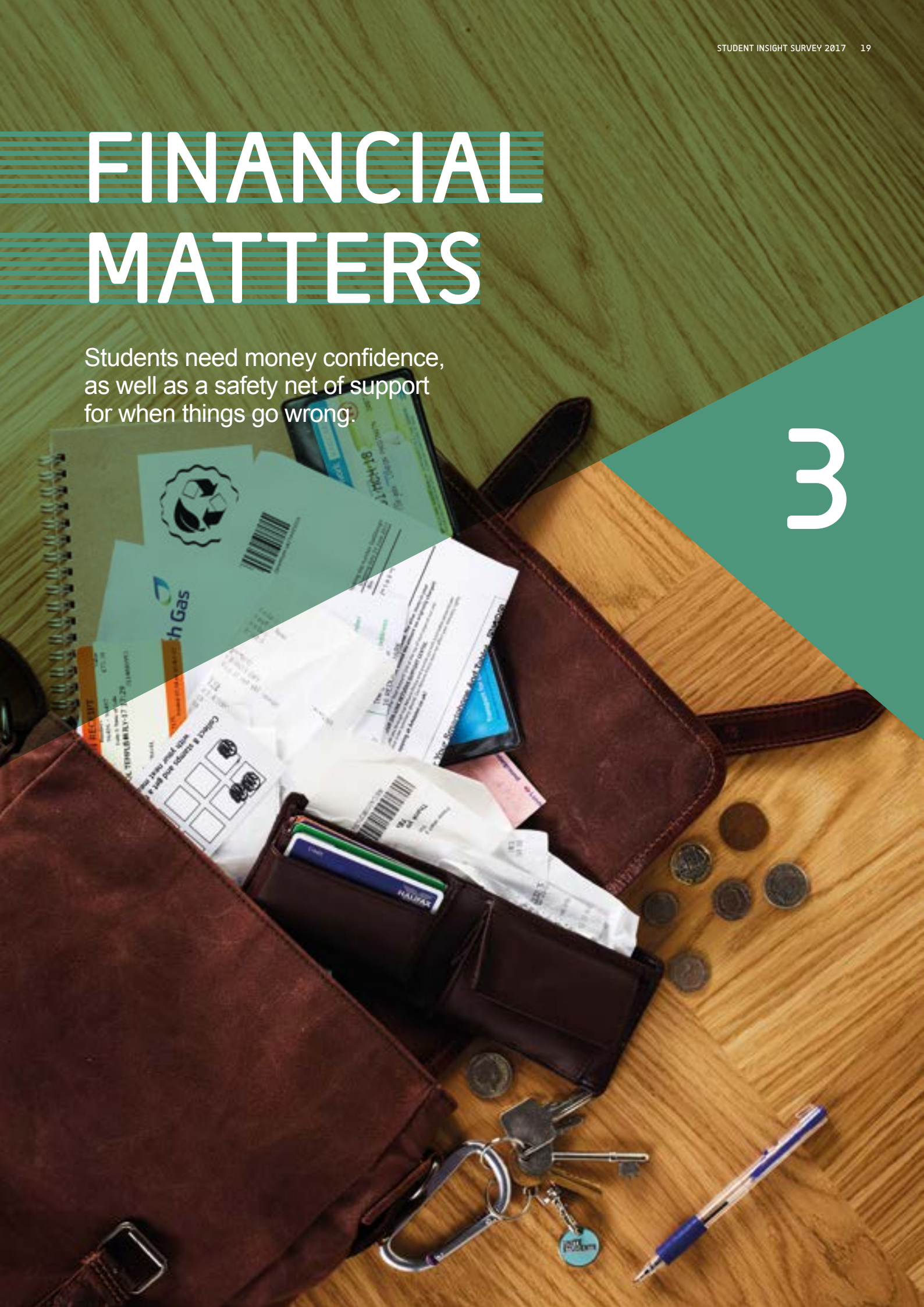


I SEE REAL VALUE IN HAVING SOMEONE TO SPEAK TO OUTSIDE OF YOUR PERSONAL ACADEMIC BUBBLE. //

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Students need money confidence, as well as a safety net of support for when things go wrong.

3



Managing money and budgets

Overall, more than eight in ten students feel confident about their ability to manage money while at university.

Three quarters of all students (74%) believe they are successful managing their money and 81% are confident in their ability to budget.

Figure 16: How successful do you consider yourself to be at managing your finances throughout the year?

Base:
All students: 6578

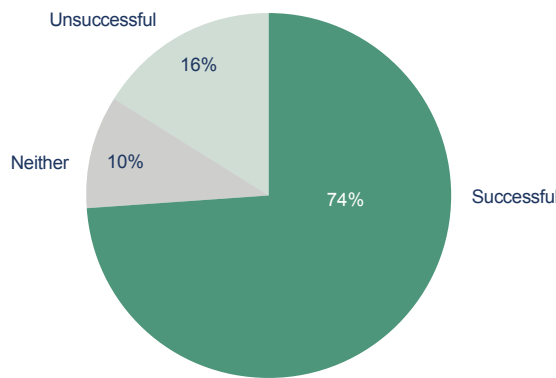
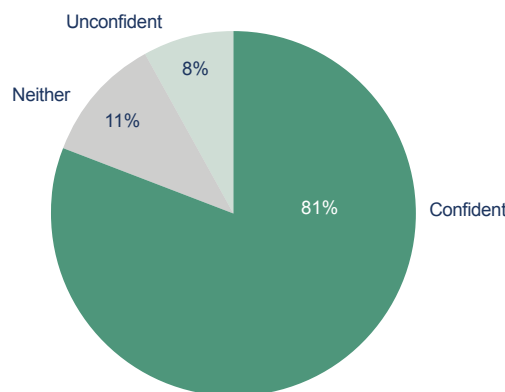


Figure 17: If you were asked to create a budget for the next month how confident are you that you would be able to do it?

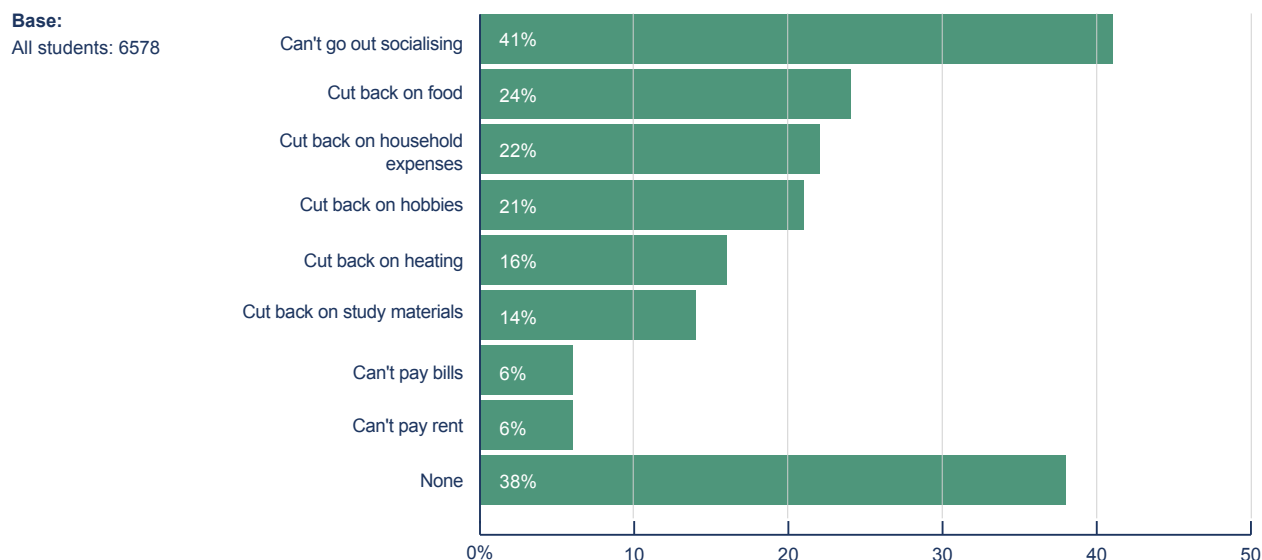
Base:
All students: 6578



This confidence grows slightly over the years that students spend at university, with 84% of students in their third year at university feeling confident in their budgeting skills, compared with 80% of first year students. Two-fifths (40%) of students report that they have learned to budget while at university.

Students were asked to select which type of financial difficulties they had experienced at university from a list of nine financial problems. Two-fifths (41%) of all students have not been able to go out socially, with almost a quarter (24%) cutting back on food. On the whole, however, the majority of students have not faced financial difficulties to the point where they cannot pay rent or bills.

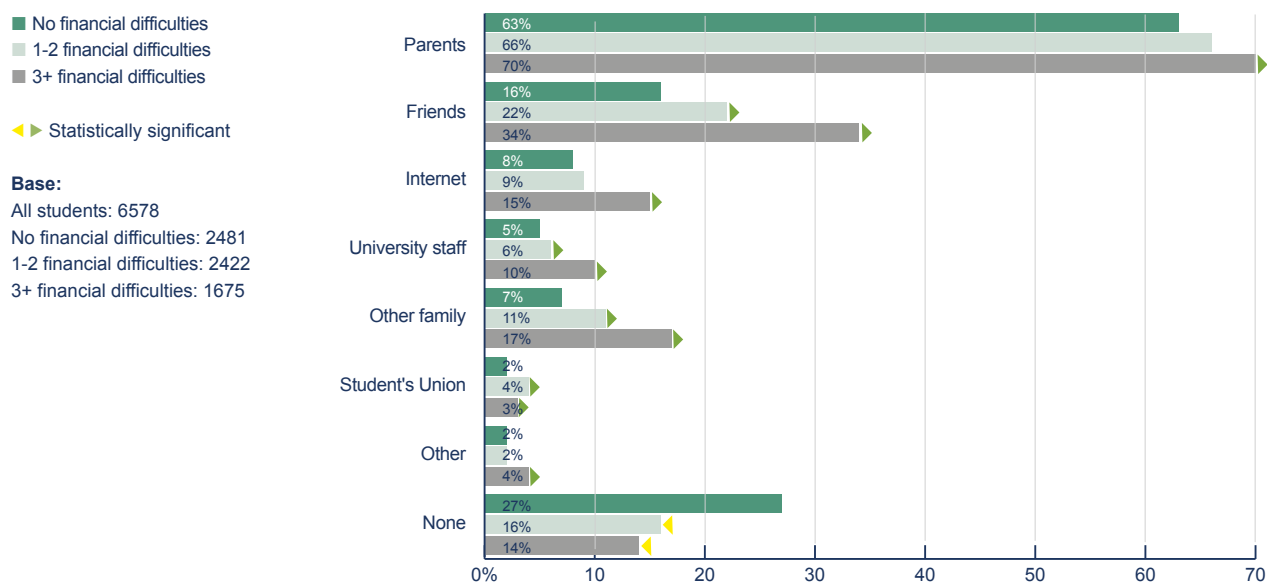
Figure 18: % agreeing that the following have occurred due to financial difficulties.



Those students who do have worries about finances mostly turn to their parents for support, but they may also turn to friends, online resources and to a lesser extent, university services for help when needed.

Students were asked to select which financial difficulties they had experienced at university from a list of nine. Students were then grouped according to how many of these nine financial difficulties they had experienced. Positively, we see that students experiencing financial difficulties were actively seeking financial support, with students who had experienced more than three financial difficulties more likely to have turned to their parents, family, friends, the internet and university staff for support about financial or money worries than students who had experienced fewer financial difficulties.

Figure 19: Who, if anyone, have you turned to for support with money or financial worries?



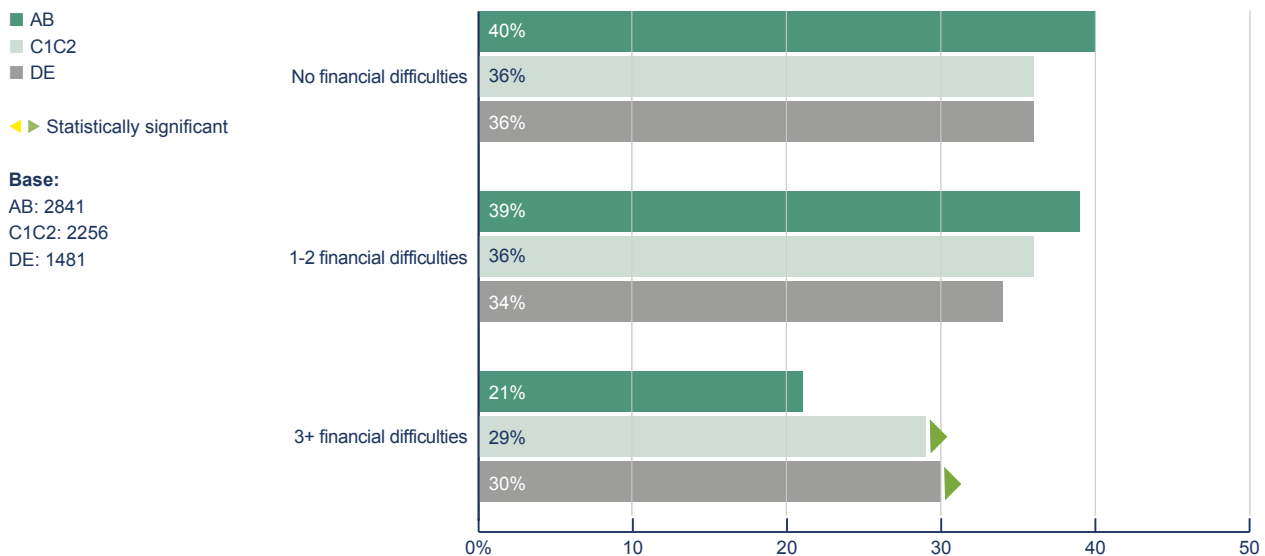
Students from AB socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have to cut back spending on study materials and have been unable to pay bills or rent due to financial issues.

Figure 20: Which of the following, if any, have occurred due to financial difficulties during your time as a student?



Students self-rated their financial competency equally across all the socio-economic groups. However, when asked about how many of the above financial issues they had encountered, students from C1, C2, D and E groups were more likely to have experienced more than three financial issues during their time at university. This strongly suggests that their disadvantage lies not in their financial management skills, but in a lower level of financial resource available to them.

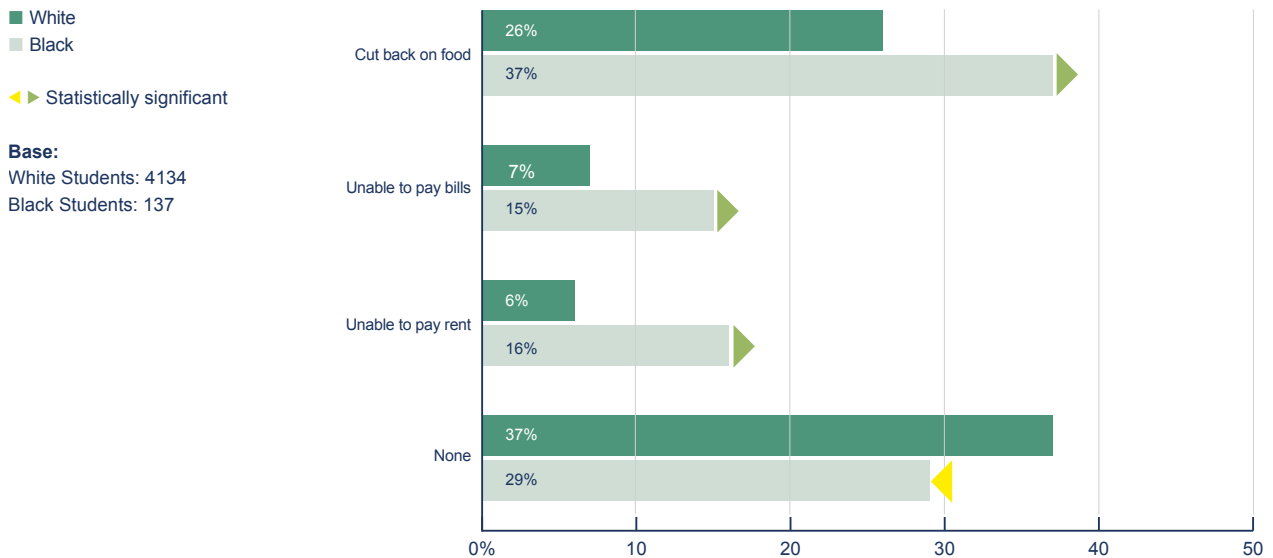
Figure 21: % agreeing they had experienced financial difficulties from a list of nine financial problems.



Those students who are first in their family to attend university are also more likely to face financial difficulties, and are less likely (64% compared to 68% who are not first in family) to seek help from parents.

Findings also show that black students are more likely than white students to have financial difficulties. They are more likely to say they often spend more than planned, and more likely to say they haven't been able to afford food or bills while at university.

Figure 22: Which of the following, if any, have occurred due to financial difficulties during your time as a student?



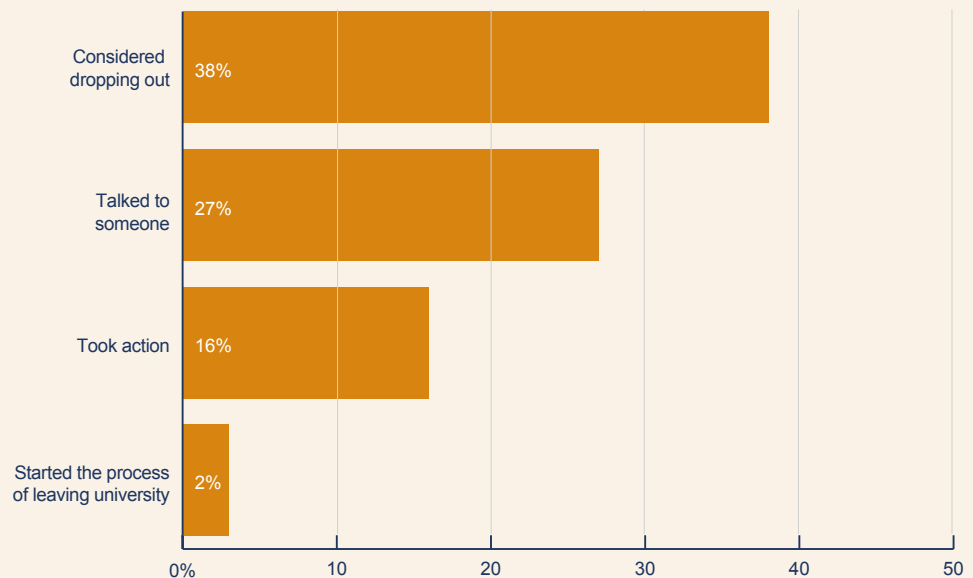
RETENTION – THINKING, TALKING AND ACTING

UK universities have good retention rates that compare well internationally and have improved over the last 15 years. Non-continuation rates for full time undergraduate students between years 1 and 2 are just over 6%, according to HESA.⁸

However the decision to leave university before the end of the course is a significant one, and it is therefore not surprising to learn that it has a long 'tail'. Almost four in ten students (38%) think about dropping out at some point, and just over a quarter (27%) of all students talk to someone about leaving university. Around a sixth (16%) take some manner of action, usually undertaking research, though a smaller proportion will miss lectures or assignments.

Figure 23: Leaving university – from consideration to action.

Base:
All students: 6578



Pressure relating to coursework was the most cited reason for considering leaving university. Qualitative responses from survey participants suggests that this academic pressure can be a significant risk to students' mental health and sense of self worth.

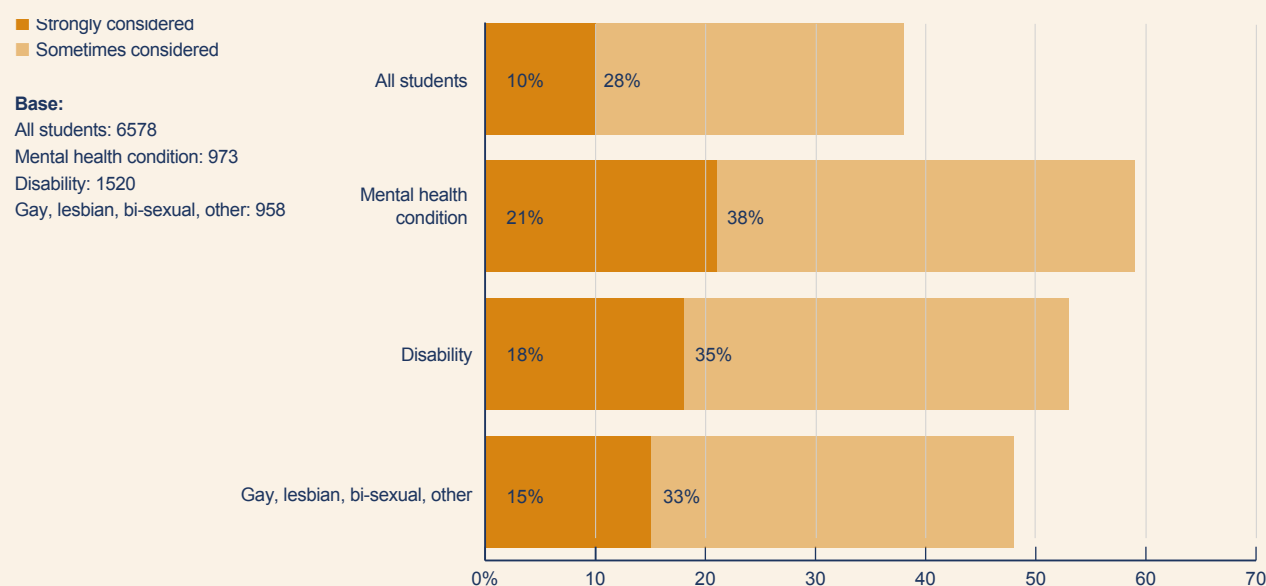
Qualitative responses also indicate that financial difficulties can lead to students thinking about dropping out of their course. Some respondents have said that the financial burden of going to university can feel enormous, and for some students this pressure can lead them to question if being at university is worth it. The importance of social integration and a strong social support network were also mentioned. Without these, students appeared more vulnerable to considering dropping out.

The majority of those students (59%) who have considered dropping out do not take any additional steps towards leaving after these initial thoughts. A quarter of them (26%) go on to research the practicalities of leaving university and a sixth (12%) miss lectures or coursework, but just 5% (2% of all students who answered the survey) had started the process of leaving university. Qualitative responses show that in the end it is often the time and money that students have already invested that stops them from taking subsequent steps towards leaving university.

⁸ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation>

Some groups of students are more likely to think about leaving university before the end of their course.

Figure 24: Consideration of dropping out of university.



This highlights groups who may be at greater risk of dropping out and therefore may benefit from additional targeted services. Furthermore, those who subsequently decide to stay may be at greater risk of being less satisfied with their course or under-achieving.

Indications that a student is having these thoughts may not manifest itself in obvious or even seemingly accessible places. Students who discuss their thoughts about leaving with others will usually turn to family, friends or flatmates. These thoughts may arise in response to disadvantage or unhappiness highlighted elsewhere in this report.

Unhappiness and the desire to leave may well be expressed or observed within the student's own home. Front line accommodation staff may become aware of it a long time before it becomes apparent to the university through formal conversations with tutors or learning analytics. This is where partnership working – across teams and with external organisations – may be of great value in co-ordinating early interventions.

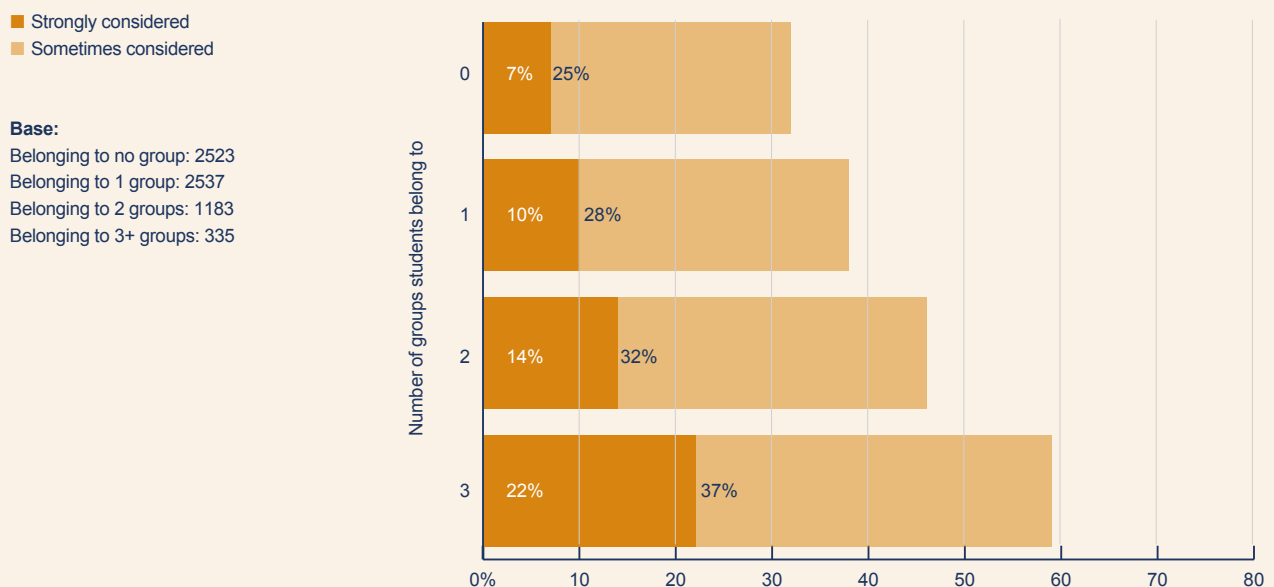
Focus on: intersectionality

The groups explored in this report are not mutually exclusive. Some students belong to more than one group (for example they may have a disability and come from a DE socio-economic background). We conducted analysis to investigate whether belonging to multiple groups confers additional disadvantage. Thinking about leaving university was used as a proxy for disadvantage within this analysis.

We grouped students according to how many of five highlighted groups they belonged to (disability, mental health condition, BAME, LGB+, DE socio-economic background). For the purpose of this analysis we took students with a mental health condition out of the wider group of students with a disability, to avoid counting them twice. Students with an additional disability or long term health condition in addition to a mental health condition were counted as belonging to both groups.

We found that the more groups a student falls into, the more likely they are to think about dropping out of university, from 32% for those students in no specific group, to 59% of students in three groups or more.

Figure 25: Intersectionality of number of groups and consideration of dropping out of university.



These findings are important because there is a risk that group memberships can be viewed and addressed in isolation. For example, socio-economic group is usually seen through a widening participation lens, whereas sexuality is viewed as a diversity and inclusion issue. This may mitigate against providing a seamless experience for the students concerned, and in some cases risks compounding disadvantage further.

4

PREPAREDNESS FOR WORK

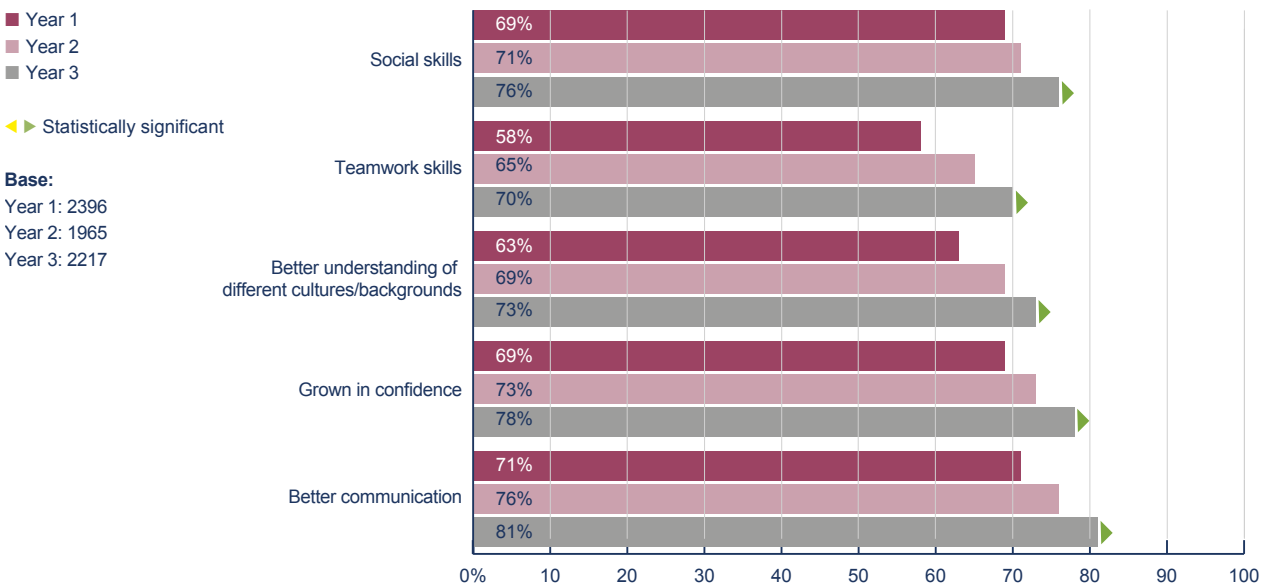
It takes more than a degree to succeed in the workplace, but are all students equally prepared for work?

Preparing for employment

Students are generally positive about the support they have received from their university in preparing them for their career, with 70% agreeing that university has prepared them well.

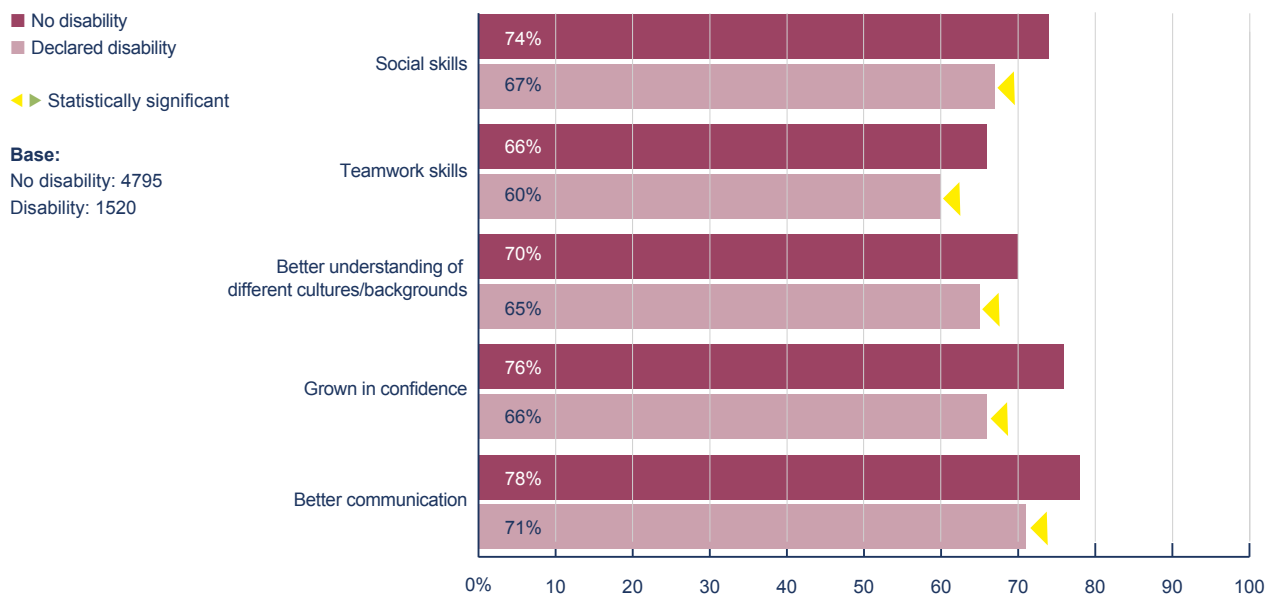
A broad range of competencies, such as teamwork, communication, confidence and social skills are essential in the workplace and students believe they are gaining these valuable proficiencies during their years at university.

Figure 26: The extent to which students consider they have developed soft skills while at university.



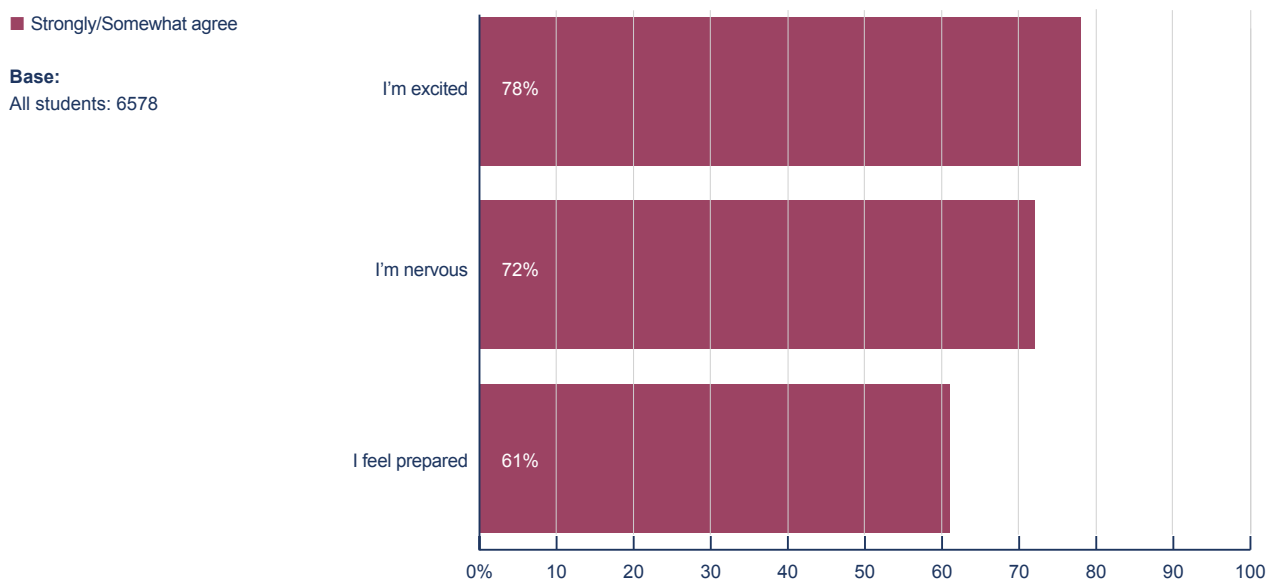
Students with a disability are less likely to report they have gained these skills.

Figure 27: The extent to which students with a disability have developed soft skills while at university?



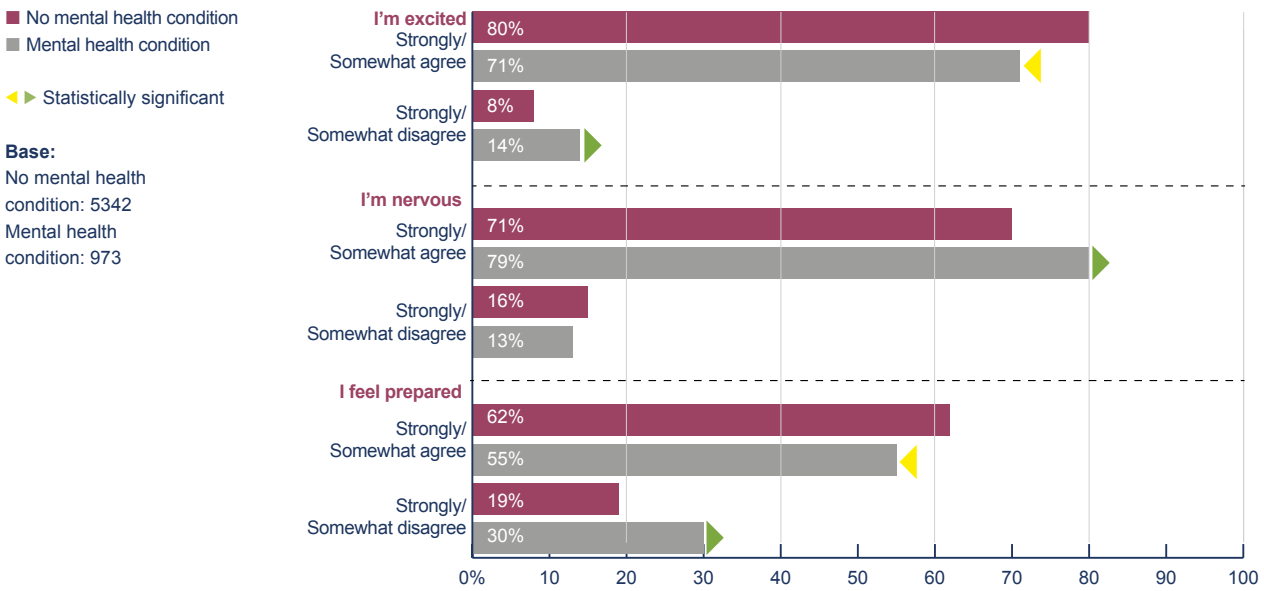
Students experience a mixture of nervousness and excitement about graduating and embarking on their chosen career.

Figure 28: Thinking about getting your first job, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?



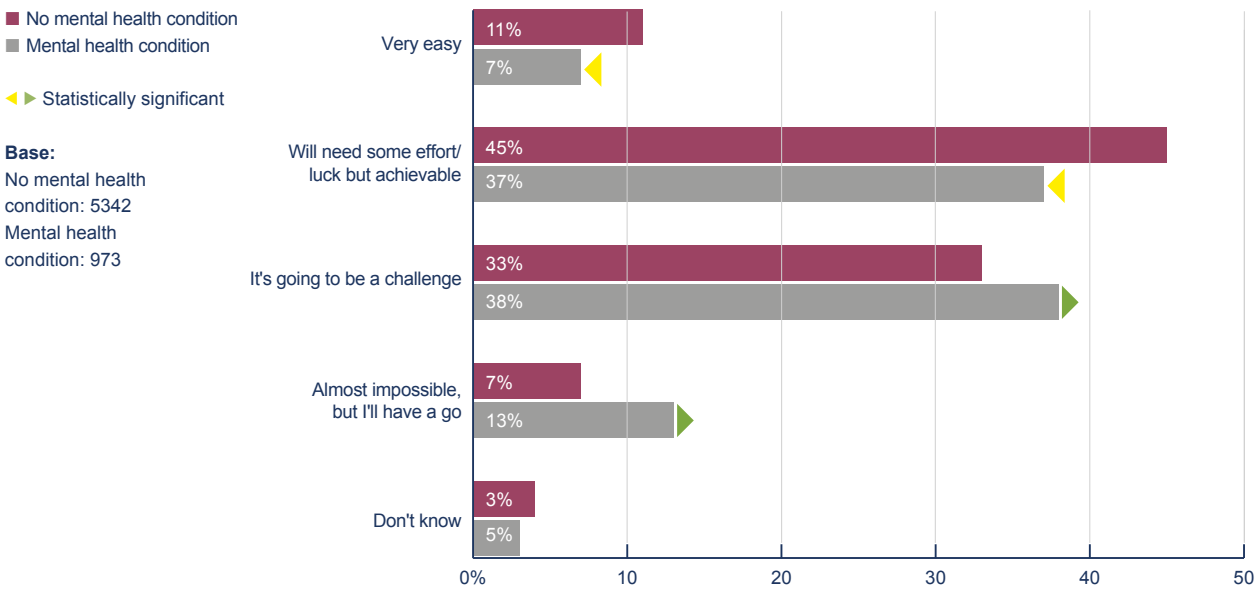
Focus on: students with a mental health condition
 Students with a mental health condition feel less excited and more nervous about getting a new job, and less prepared to enter the workforce.

Figure 29: How do you feel about getting your first job?



Students with a mental health condition also feel less confident about getting a job after graduation.

Figure 30: How easy or difficult will it be to get a job?



There is also an expectation that the workplace may not be as understanding of their mental health condition, with less support available than at university.

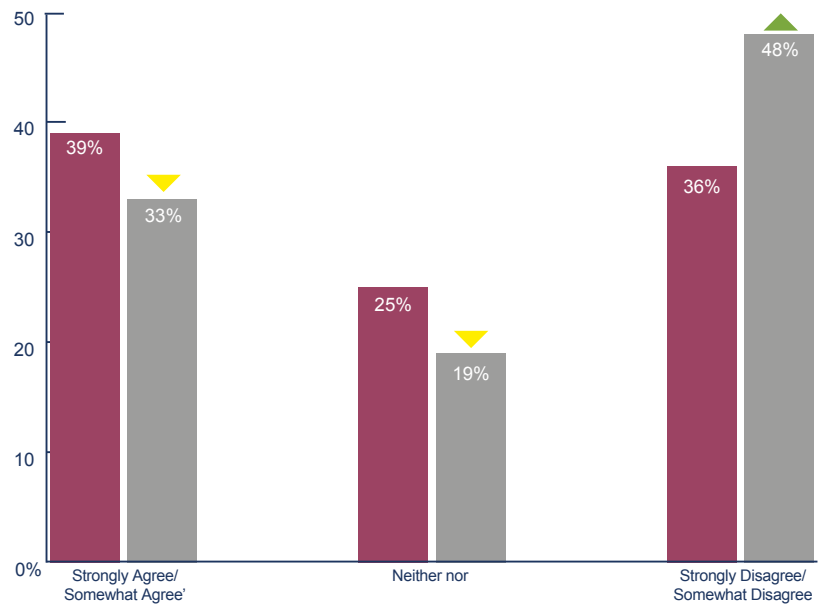
Figure 31: I expect to receive a similar level of support from my employers as I get from my university.

■ No mental health condition
 ■ Mental health condition
 ▲ Statistically significant

Base:

No mental health condition: 5342

Mental health condition: 973



MY EXPERIENCE: OWEN KNIGHT, AGE 24



STUDIED LAW AT UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

I was not immediately open about my sexuality when I first started at university as I didn't want it to be my defining characteristic. I wanted to make new friendships and start my adult academic career without being 'the gay one' - quite frankly I'd rather be known for anything else (humour, intellect, compassion, talking the hind legs off a donkey, whatever). This then morphed into a slightly deeper concern when choosing my second year house share with my four closest friends, who happened to be four straight rugby players. I was concerned that if I was open about my sexuality I could possibly lose both my closest friends and my home.

I decided to formally 'come out' to my uni friends in the January of my second year. And I needn't have worried, my flatmates turned out to be my biggest support network, advocates and companions. They respected how I wanted to approach telling our wider friendship group and supported me when I decided to tell others, including my Mum and Dad.

Given their positive reaction I didn't then have any concerns about telling others such as my course mates, lecturers etc and, to date, it is not something I have hidden from my employer, colleagues or clients.

I chose Exeter for its academic and career opportunities, rather than its approach to LGB+ students. But even though there wasn't a huge network of LGB+, or other minorities, I did feel the university was inclusive. For example during Pride Week a rainbow flag was placed around the entire perimeter of the Forum (the central student building) and numerous events were put on in public areas. There was also a LGB+ society who were visible and offered a tailored support service.

I think the most important focus for universities' support should be on those gay students who come to university and are still in the closet. These are the students who are less likely to become involved in any LGB+ initiatives and support groups for fear of being 'outed'.



UNIVERSITIES SHOULD ENSURE THAT LGB+ STUDENTS ARE EQUALLY PREPARED FOR A FULFILLING CAREER. //

Universities should promote counselling services in relation to all mental health and pastoral issues, not just LGB+ focused, so that this does not daunt those who may need someone to talk to.

Thankfully I did not need to use any such systems, but every university's complaints systems should be robust and any allegations of prejudice (regardless of motivation) should be investigated and addressed as the highest priority. A zero tolerance approach should be adopted, regardless of staff tenure, prestige or value.

Ultimately, students go to uni in search of employment prospects and opportunities. I think universities should therefore engage actively with LGB+ friendly employers, host diversity careers fairs and promote the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index to ensure that LGB+ students have equal access to the job market, and can find a career in which they can be themselves, thrive and be supported post-degree.

MENTAL HEALTH

Student mental health and wellbeing remains a priority for everyone in the sector. We look at the importance of signposting and support.



5

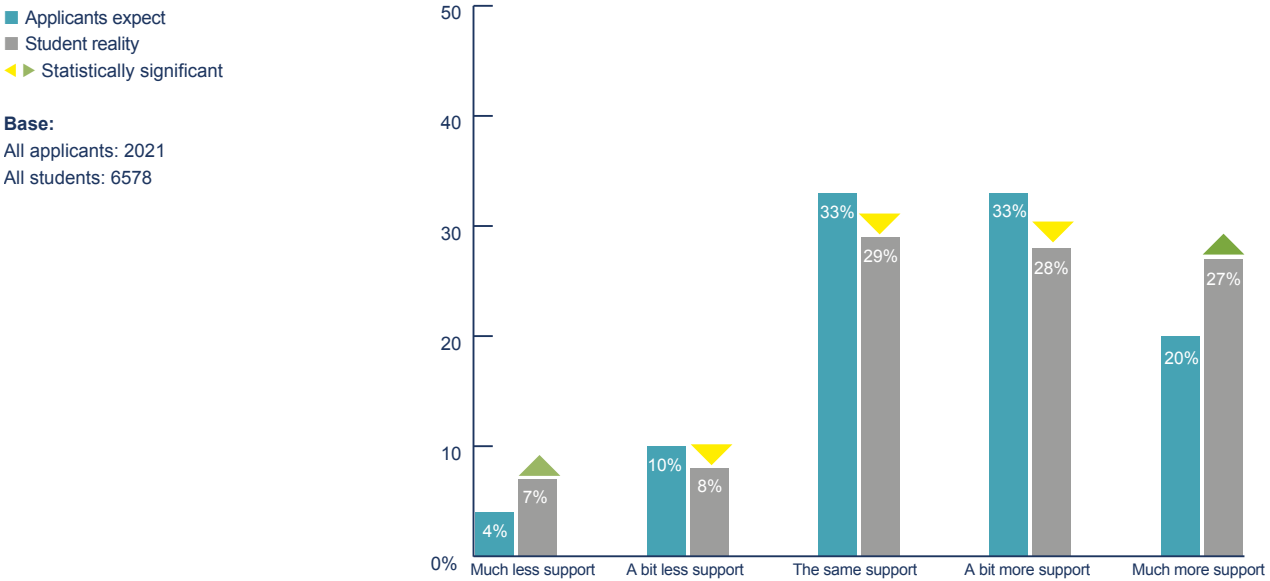
Students with a mental health condition

The proportion of students self-identifying a mental health condition has risen this year to 15%

12%	15%
2016	2017

Among those who self-declare a mental health condition, students report that the support provided at university exceeded their expectations.

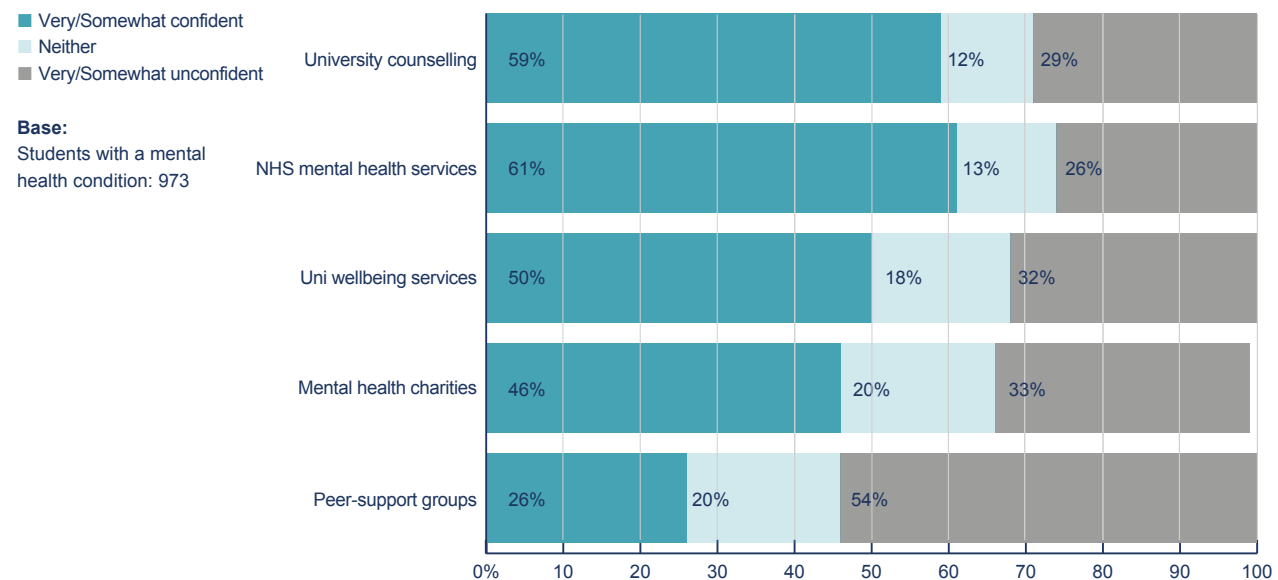
Figure 32: Support for mental health conditions at university vs school.



However, just under half (48%) of students with a mental health condition have disclosed this to their university. This limits the ability of the university to provide appropriate support and adjustments for these students. It also means that because their disability is not known, some students with a long-term mental health condition are not affording themselves the protection provided by the 2010 Equality Act.

The Unite Students' Insight Report 2016, *Student Resilience*, revealed that feeling able to turn to appropriate support played an important role in retention. However, this year's survey data shows that a significant minority of students with a mental health condition do not feel confident about accessing services that may help them. Confidence is particularly low in relation to peer support groups.

Figure 33: % confident seeking out support from following services (respondents with a mental health condition).



MY EXPERIENCE: ROSE ANNE EVANS, AGE 21



STUDYING FRENCH AND GERMAN AT UNIVERSITY OF YORK

I've struggled with anxiety and the need to act out certain rituals and repetitive behaviour from quite an early age. For years I didn't really talk to anyone about what I was going through, not even my parents.

My mental health really started to deteriorate in the summer of 2015 when I was preparing for my A-levels as I put so much pressure on myself to achieve high grades and to be liked by everyone.

I had been offered a place to study at York that autumn but instead I had to be hospitalised. It meant I had to tell the university about my problems and I was really grateful that they agreed to defer my place, especially given that I hadn't achieved the required entry grades. It was eight hard months of supervision, therapy and self-determination until I recovered and was able to take up my place in 2016.

Before I started I was nervous and concerned about whether university life, with all the changes it entails, would re-trigger my ill-health. So before my first term, I contacted Disability Services at York and they met with me to talk about what support they could offer. Together we devised a Student Support Plan and it made me feel much more comfortable knowing it was there. The provisions included allocating me self-catered accommodation and my own ensuite room, encouraging staff to ask me if I felt OK and flagging to all the lecturers the issues I face. They also agreed I could sit in a small room for my exams and have extra time. I hope all universities are equally welcoming and willing to adapt to students' needs.

I spent the month before uni trialling my budgeting by buying and preparing all my own food and everything else I might need for university. Although that still didn't really prepare me well for the reality of independent living and being responsible for all my purchases. I also made sure the local York mental health services knew about me and my history. That way they would be prepared if I did fall unwell. I'd recommend this to other new students with a mental health problem.

Probably the most important preparation though was being told about my flat mates in advance so we could contact each other and meet up beforehand. That really helped reduce my anxiety about being among new people.

Actually being at uni was still really tough at the beginning, as I had to go to a new city, make new friends and fend for myself, especially when you consider I had only been out of hospital for three months. But during the times I felt isolated, frustrated and helpless it made all the difference to know my tutors and my friends knew about my mental health and would help me when I had a wobble.

I have settled in well though, in no small part because of the attitude and approach of York. Most recently the most stressful aspect has been finding suitable accommodation for our second year.

Since I have opened up about my mental health things in my life seem to be getting better as I'm able to get support. I hope now to use my experience to build a career as a psychologist helping children with eating disorders to recover and rebuild their lives.



I THINK IT'S VITAL UNIVERSITIES CREATE A PERMISSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT TO DISCLOSE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS. //

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that can be drawn from this report are largely positive in nature. The potential for disadvantage, that has been set out here and explored, sits within a national context of a positive student experience that produces excellent outcomes.

Moreover, without in any way minimising the impact of this disadvantage, it is helpful that the findings point towards solutions because they articulate specific issues that need to be addressed.

Among the findings of this report are:

- Students with a disability are less likely to feel integrated with other students they live with. They are less likely to believe they have gained important soft skills while at university.
- Students with a mental health condition are less happy and more likely to think about dropping out of university. While they are positive about the support offered by their university, many are not willing to disclose their condition to their university and many lack confidence to seek support when they need it.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and 'other' sexuality students are more likely to experience lower confidence socially, particularly among students they live with.

- Students from socio-economic groups D and E, and black students, experience more actual financial hardship than their peers, which in some cases includes an inability to meet basic needs.

Each of these will require a different approach, which in turn may vary between institutions based on local context.

For some, a universal approach will be the right one, widening out the scope of existing services to take into account the needs and requirements of the whole of the current and future student body.

In other cases, and particularly in the case of students with a mental health condition, there will be a need to ensure targeted services are more fully accessible to students at the time and place they are needed, and that issues of confidence are addressed.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY INSTITUTE (HEPI) POLICY RESPONSE

It is sometimes said higher education is the only part of our education system where prior disadvantage is wiped out. This is because the most advantaged students sometimes perform less well academically than other students between enrolment and graduation.⁹ Yet the research behind such claims includes more sobering facts too. The most notable is that people who enter university with the cards stacked against them struggle to reach their full potential.

This report proves this inconvenient truth beyond all doubt. Outcomes are less good for BAME students, disabled students, LGB+ students and those with a declared mental health condition, while students who combine two, three or four of these characteristics face an escalating scale of disadvantage. Similarly, commuter students face challenges because our university system is based, on a 'boarding-school model'.¹⁰ None of this is a surprise to people who work with students every day. But the fact that such unequal outcomes persist is the next big challenge for our higher education sector to address.

One distinctive feature of higher education regulation is that policymakers have seemed to put more emphasis on socio-economic indicators – for example, in their advice to the Office for Fair Access – than on the so-called 'protected characteristics', such as sexual orientation, listed in the Equality Act (2010). As a result, opportunities to address disadvantage may have been missed. The incoming Director of Fair Access and Participation, Chris Millward, and the new Office for Students should make use of their broader responsibilities to measure equality of participation more precisely alongside equality of access, and then to help tackle it more methodically. One advantage would be the positive signal this sends to people who want to attend higher education but worry it is currently out of their reach.

Universities stopped being *in loco parentis* for young undergraduate students when the age of majority fell to 18 almost half a century ago. That was liberating and welcome. There is nonetheless a growing sense that higher education institutions have a bigger duty of care to their younger students than has been recognised in the recent past. Entering higher education is the start of a transition process not a one-off event. There are

stark differences between first-year students just out of school and final-year students on the cusp of entering the labour market, even though this survey shows the latter group face separate fears of their own, partly linked to Brexit.

We also all need to think more deeply about the non-academic aspects of university life. For example, accommodation choices have a direct impact on the quality of the student experience. Individual students need more support to make the best personal decisions over where to live, perhaps setting impressive hotel-style accommodation against other features more aimed at helping them integrate. When choosing accommodation partners, higher education institutions have a responsibility too: they should be asking more questions, not just 'how many beds will there be?' Universities additionally need to think about the specific needs of commuter students, and further explore the exciting 'sticky campus' concept.

To me, the data provided here show above all that people who are on the way to higher education should follow their hearts as well as their heads when choosing their institution, their course and their living arrangements. They should also listen to the experiences of those who have entered university already, as laid out in this report. The overall goal should be to make it as easy as possible for students to learn, to integrate and to flourish.

Nick Hillman
Director, Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)

Footnotes:

⁹ Anthony Hoare & Ron Johnston (2011) Widening participation through admissions policy – a British case study of school and university performance, *Studies in Higher Education*, 36:1, 21-41

¹⁰ Nick Hillman, 'Why do students study so far from home?', *Times Higher Education*, 23 July 2015

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

YouthSight is an award-winning insight agency which helps clients grow within the youth market by better understanding Millennials and Gen Z. It delivers insight that gives clients confidence in the business decisions they need to make. YouthSight monitors and tracks the HE sector, working with over 100 universities, collecting data for the annual The Student Experience Awards, as well as working closely with HEPI on topical reports and their annual Student Academic Experience report.

The research methodology comprised of an online survey that took participants, on average, 20 minutes to complete. The study was fielded between 24th March and 24th April 2017.

To allow for comparison to previous years, many questions were maintained from the 2016 survey, though some updates and improvements were made. The questionnaire was reviewed by a steering group of relevant bodies within the higher education sector to ensure it included areas of key interest to the sector.

In total 6578 undergraduate students who are UK residents and studying at UK universities participated in the survey. All participants were existing members of YouthSight's OpinionPanel. All participants received £2 in Amazon vouchers in return for completing the survey.

To ensure we gained a representative view of the UK student undergraduate population we set quotas based on HESA student population data. Recruitment quotas were set to ensure we gained responses from the correct proportions of EU and non-EU international students. For the remaining sample of domestic students, representative interlocking quotas were set across gender, university group and current course year. During analysis, the data was weighted in line with these representative quotas.

The data was analysed paying particular attention to any statistically significant year-on-year changes in the data and to identify any significant differences between groups within the student sample.

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

UNITE STUDENTS INSIGHT SERIES 2017 – STUDENT SURVEY

Sample definition

6,500 UK undergraduate students

Read-in variables

These panel variables to be read-in for analysis and screening purposes:

Gender

Ethnicity

Nationality (UK - UK-Overseas - EU - Non-EU)

Home Region

Intro screen

Welcome to this survey about your university experiences and lifestyle. Your responses will go on to inform a published report which will be used to provide a national perspective on the experience of students at university in the UK.

The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete and is worth £2 in Amazon vouchers.

Our research is confidential and in line with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct. We are an MRS Company Partner. We only do market research. That means no selling, no marketing and we never disclose any of your personally identifiable details.

Please click 'Next' to begin.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ask all

A1a. How old are you?

Please give one answer only

Under 16 – *Screen Out*

List 16 -50

51+

Ask all

A1b. What is your current gender identity?

Please select one option

Male

Female

Trans male/Trans man

Trans female/Trans woman

Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming

Different identity

Ask all

A2. Which of the following best describes your current level of study?

Please give one answer only

Basic Skills, ESOL, foundation diploma, NVQ 1 or similar – *Screen Out*

Standard Grades, GCSEs, NVQ2, Apprenticeship or similar – *Screen Out*

Highers, Advanced Highers, A-Levels, Advanced apprenticeships or similar – *Screen Out*

HND, HNC or similar – *Screen Out*

Undergraduate degree

Postgraduate degree, PHD,

or similar – *Screen Out*

Ask all

A3. What year of study are you in?

Please give one answer only

Foundation – *Screen Out*

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Year 4

Year 5 or higher

I have already graduated – *Screen Out*

Ask all

A4. Which university do you attend?

*Please give one answer only
[drop down box]*

Ask all

A7. Is your study full or part time?

Please give one answer only

Full time study

Part time study

Other, please specify

Ask all

A10. Please can you give us your term time postcode?

Please enter your term-time postcode in the box below

[single line open text]

Ask all

A11. Please can you give us your 'holiday' time postcode

(if different to your term time postcode)?

Please enter your holiday postcode in the box below [single line open text]

[checkbox] 'My holiday postcode is the same as my term-time postcode'

Ask all

A12. Which of the following best describes the subject you are studying?

Please give one answer only

Architecture, building and planning

Biological sciences

Business, Management and administrative studies

Creative arts and design

Education

Engineering

Language, literature, linguistics, classics and related subjects

Historical and philosophical studies

Law/Criminal Justice

Mass communications and documentation

Mathematical and computer sciences

Medicine and dentistry

Physical sciences

Social studies

Subjects allied to medicine

Technologies

Veterinary science, agriculture and related subjects

Combination of subjects

Other

Student Decision Making

We'd now like to find out a little more about what is on your mind during your time as a student

Ask all

Ea1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Please select one answer per row

Randomise

I work harder at university than I did at school

I have more one-to-one academic support at university than I did at school

I do more group work at university than I did at school

I do more independent learning at university than I did at school

I spend more time socialising at university than I did at school

I spend more time in lectures than I did being taught in the classroom at school

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither nor

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Ask all

E1. What were your motivations for going to university?

Please select up to three from the following list of reasons.

Randomise

Moving away from home

The location of the university

Interest in my chosen subject

To get a better job

To gain a higher level of education

To have a good time

My family expected it

My school/teacher expected it

Seemed like the thing to do

I couldn't get / didn't want to get a job

Most of my friends were going

To become more independent

To study in the UK

Other (specify)

Ask all who selected 2 or 3 options at E1

E1a. What was your main motivation for going to university?

Please select one option

Show all options selected in E1. Show "specify" text.

Ask all

E2. Which of the following describe your reasons for choosing the university that you did?

Please select up to five from the following list of reasons.

Randomise

Good impression from the prospectus
 Its academic reputation
 It offered the course I wanted
 It offered the clubs and societies I wanted to join
 I liked the accommodation
 It offered the level of academic or student support I need
 I liked the city/area
 The nightlife is great
 It is a university that shares my values
 It is close enough to home
 It is far enough away from home
 I had friends going to the same university
 Future job prospects
 Good impression from open day
 Recommendations
 Campus facilities
 None of these - fix, exclusive

Ask all who selected between 2 and 5 options at E2

E2a. And what was the most important reason for choosing the university that you did?

Please select one option

Show all options selected in E2.

Ask all

E7. Knowing what you know now do you think there is anything that universities should include/ include more of in their open days?

Write in:

STUDENT SOCIAL LIFE

We'd now like to ask you a few things about your social life at university and outside university.

Ask all

E5. How integrated, if at all, do you feel at university in the following areas?

Please pick one option only for each statement

Rows – Randomise

Students in my flat or house
 Students in my accommodation block
 Students on my course
 Students at my university overall

[Columns]

Well integrated
 Somewhat integrated
 Not integrated
 Not applicable

Ask all

I1. On the scale below, please indicate how happy or unhappy you feel about each of the following relationships at the moment

Please select one option in each row

Rows - randomise

Relationships with my family
 Relationships with my house/flat mates
 Relationships with friends not at university
 Relationships with other students on my course
 Relationships with my friends at university (who are not house mates or on my course) – Pin

[Columns]

Very happy
 Fairly happy
 Neither happy nor unhappy
 Fairly unhappy
 Very unhappy
 Don't know

Ask all

I2. Compared to other people you know, to what extent do you have each of the following?

Please select one option in each row.

[Rows]

Have friends and acquaintances
 Belong to groups/cliques of friends or acquaintances
 Belong to clubs or organisations

Columns

Far less than others
 Less than others
 About the same as others
 More than others
 Far more than others

Ask all

I3. Which of the following statements, if any, about your friends at university do you feel applies to you?

Please select all that apply.

Randomise

My best friend goes to my university
 Excluding house mates, I have friends who I meet to socialise with (outside of study) at least twice a week
 I have friends at university who I speak to for dating or relationship advice
 I have friends at university that I trust with deeply personal secrets
 I have spoken to a friend at university about my financial concerns
 I have spoken to a friend at university about my health concerns
 I have better friends at university than at home
 None of these – fix, exclusive

Ask all

14. To what extent, if at all, do each of the following cause you stress while at university?

Please select a rating from 1 to 5 where 1 means "not at all stressed" and 5 means "very stressed"

Rows - randomise

Managing your money
Getting on with housemates/flatmates
Dating and relationships
Finding new friends
Keeping up socially with your friends
Managing your time
Keeping up with study
Getting enough support from your university
Performing well in tests and coursework
[Columns] – 1-5 scale labelled Not at all stressed to Very stressed

Ask all

15. Where have you made most of your friends while at university?

Please select one option

Randomise

In my accommodation
Through clubs/societies
On my course
Through social activities
(not organised by a club/society)
Other

Ask all

17. Looking back which of the following do you wish you had been given more advice about before starting university?

Please select one option

Randomise

Making friends
Finding accommodation
Coping with the course workload
Budgeting
Getting along with the people I live with
Living in a different town/city
Practical skills such as cooking and cleaning
Other
None of the above

RESILIENCE

We'd now like to hear a bit more about how you are feeling at the moment. Please be assured that all your answers are anonymous and analysed in a confidential way.

Ask all

R1. How satisfied are you with your life at the moment?

Please select one answer only

Very satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Somewhat dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Ask all

0b. Overall, (on a scale of 0 to 10), to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Please select one answer only

SCALE: 0 to 10 where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'

Ask all

0c. Overall, (on a scale of 0 to 10), how happy did you feel yesterday?

Please select one answer only

SCALE: 0 to 10 where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'

Ask all

Q0.d Please note that for the next question, the scoring scale is reversed so that 0 is the most positive answer and 10 is the most negative answer.

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Please select one answer only

DP INSTRUCTION: Insert red text under question saying: 'Scale reversed, 0 is the most positive and 10 is the most negative'

SCALE: 0 to 10 where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'

Ask all

Q0.d.i You selected [Q0.d score] for how anxious you felt yesterday on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all anxious and 10 is completely anxious. Is that correct?

Please select one answer only

Yes
No

DP INSTRUCTION: If no re-route back to Q0.d then ask Q0.d.i again.

Ask all

R2. Feelings come and go. Over the last 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you felt the following?

Rows - randomise

Optimistic about the future
 Able to enjoy life
 Tired or lacking in energy
 Stressed or worried
 Under strain
 Less interested in things you used to enjoy
 Calm and relaxed
 Down or depressed
 Coping well with problems
 Capable of making decisions about things
 Playing a useful part in things
 Confident in yourself
 Loved
 Ashamed
 Rejected by others
 Isolated or lonely
 Cheerful

Columns

Always
 Often
 Sometimes
 Never

Ask all

R3. Which of the following if any, have you experienced during the last year at university?

Please select all that apply

Rows - randomise

Trouble sleeping
 Problems concentrating that have affected study
 Drinking too much
 Using illegal drugs
 Starving myself, binge eating or otherwise experiencing an eating disorder
 Panic attacks
 None of these - fix

Ask all

R4. To what extent, if at all, have you considered dropping out of your course?

Please select one answer only

Randomise

I have strongly considered dropping out
 I sometimes consider dropping out
 I have never considered dropping out

Ask all that answered strongly considered and sometimes considered dropping out at R4
R4a. Why have considered dropping out?

Write in:

Ask all that answered strongly considered and sometimes considered dropping out at R4

R4b. When you have thought about dropping out of university who did you speak to about it?

Please select all that apply

Randomise

Family member
 Friends/course-mates/flatmates
 Lecturer/Course Leader
 University Administration
 University Counselling Service
 Counselling Service (not provided by university)
 Student support
 Personal Tutor
 Student's Union
 Other
 None of these

Ask all that answered strongly considered and sometimes considered dropping out at R4

R4c. Which of the following steps did you take towards leaving university?

Please select all that apply

Randomise

I researched the practical consequences of leaving university
 I researched the process for leaving university
 I started the process of leaving university
 I stopped going to lectures and completing coursework
 I missed a semester of university
 I missed a year of university
 None of the above
 None of these - exclusive

Ask all that answered strongly considered and sometimes considered dropping out at R4

R4d. What stopped you from dropping out? Write in:

Ask all

R5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Please select one answer in each row

Rows - randomise

If something is worth starting, I'm going to finish it
 I tend to panic under pressure
 I can become upset when things do not work out as planned
 I am quick to get help from others when I encounter problems.
 I depend on myself to find a way through anything
 I consider the impact of my actions on others
 I tend to take on short term discomfort for long term gain
 I have a clear idea of goals I would like to achieve in the year ahead
 Disappointment doesn't stop me from trying again
 I tend not to complain if I can help it
 I am able to plan my way out of negative situations

Columns

Strongly agree
 Somewhat agree
 Neither
 Somewhat disagree
 Strongly disagree

Ask all

R6. Everyone experiences setbacks in life. Which of the following have you experienced in the last year at university after a setback? Please try to think of specific circumstances when answering.

Please select all that apply

Randomise

I have dwelt on negative experiences for longer than I should have
 A setback negatively impacted on my confidence for some time
 I overreacted to a setback, damaging relationships with friends or flatmates
 My reaction to a situation made things worse
 I have not faced up to my failure and blamed others instead
 I have relied too much on others to make decisions for me
 I have avoided doing something from fear of failure
 I don't think that I have experienced a setback – exclusive
 None of these – exclusive

Ask all

R7. Thinking of the same setbacks, did you turn to anyone in order to help resolve it? Who did you turn to and who could you have turned to but didn't?

Please select one answer in each row.

Rows – Randomise

University support staff
 Tutors
 Wardens or residential assistants
 Designated student mentors/buddies
 Staff in my accommodation
 House/flat mates
 University counsellors
 Family
 Friends at university
 Friends from home (i.e. not at university)

Columns

Would not be able to turn to
 Could turn to
 Could turn to and have turned to in the past

Ask all

R8. Do you have a personal tutor (sometimes called a Director of Studies) with whom you can discuss academic or other issues privately?

[single code]

Yes
 No

Ask all

R11. Looking at the list of issues below, do you receive more, less, or the same amount of support from your university than you did at school?

Please select one option per row

Randomise - rows

Helping you to resolve disputes with other students
 Helping you with your academic studies
 Helping you to resolve financial problems
 Counselling and support for mental health issues
 Helping you to plan your future career

Columns

Much more support at university than at school
 A bit more support at university than at school
 The same level of support
 A bit less support at university than at school
 Much less support at university than at school

Ask all

R13 Thinking more specifically, how confident would you be about seeking out assistance from the following services in relation to mental health while at university?

Your university's pastoral or wellbeing services
Peer-support groups for student mental health
Support provided by mental health charities
University counselling services
NHS mental health services

Very confident
Somewhat confident
Neither nor
Somewhat unconfident
Very unconfident

ACCOMMODATION

We'd now like to ask you a few questions about your living arrangements

Ask all

C1. Where do you live while at university (i.e. this academic year)?

Please select one answer only

Randomise

University halls
Private halls (e.g. provided by Unite Students, Nido, Victoria Halls, Derwent, UPP, Digs The Student Housing Company, etc)
Privately rented house or flat with other students
Privately rented house or flat NOT with other students
Your own home which you own
Parents' or guardians' home
Other - fix

Ask those who live at home (C1=6)

C2. And why did you choose to live at home?

Please select all that apply

Randomise

It was more affordable
It is close to my place of study
It works well with other commitments in my life e.g. work, hobbies
It was convenient
To continue living with my family / partner
I don't like the idea of living in halls of residences
I don't like the idea of sharing a house
Other - fix

Ask all

C2a. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with where you live whilst at university?

Please select one answer only

Very dissatisfied
Somewhat dissatisfied
Neither
Somewhat satisfied
Very satisfied

Ask all who live in shared houses (C1=3)

Ca4. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the process of securing the accommodation you are living in this year?

Please select one answer only

Very satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
Neither
Somewhat dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Ask all who living in rented accommodation (C1=3,4)

Ca5. To what extent do you agree with the following statement 'I trust my landlord'?

Please select one answer only

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither nor
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree

Ask those who live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

Ca11. Ignoring price, which of the following accommodation options would you pick?

Please select one option only

Living in very high end accommodation with people you really don't like
Living in very basic accommodation with people you really like

Ask those who currently live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

Ca12. Which, if any, of the following experiences are currently provided in your student accommodation? And which have you used/attended so far?

Please select one answer in each row

Rows - randomise

Social events during the first week
 Social events throughout the year organised by other students
 Social events throughout the year organised by the accommodation provider
 Student-led clubs and societies
 Other students that I can go to if I have a problem
 Members of staff that I can go to if I have a problem
 Drop-in advice sessions
 Academic-related events and activities
 Counselling
 Wellbeing information and campaigns

[Columns]

Are provided in my accommodation but haven't yet used/attended

Are provided in my accommodation and have used/attended

Are not provided in my accommodation

Ask those who currently live in student accommodation (C1=1,2) and selected at least one item "Are not provided in my accommodation" at C12

C12. Which of the following, if any, would you like to see provided in your student accommodation?

Please select all that apply [Show only all options "not provided" at Ca12] None of these - fix

Ask those who live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

C4. And how satisfied, if at all, are you with the living spaces/communal areas in your current student accommodation?

Please select one answer only

Very dissatisfied
 Somewhat dissatisfied
 Neither
 Somewhat satisfied
 Very satisfied
 Not applicable

Ask All

C7. Do you or have you ever lived with other students during your time at university?

Please select one answer only

Yes – I share / have shared a house or flat with other students

Yes – I live / have lived in a self-contained studio within a block of student accommodation

No

Ask those who have lived with other students (C7=1,2 OR C1 = 1-3)

C8. Which of the following, if any, do you think are the main benefits of living with other students?

Please select all that apply

Randomise

Security
 Making friends
 Socialising
 Support in times of difficulty
 Sharing costs
 Mixing with people from different cultures and nationalities
 Sharing chores / meals
 Learning from others
 Help with my studies
 None of these - fix

Ask those who currently live in student accommodation (C1=1,2)

C9. Which of the following, if any, do you think are your biggest challenges within your student accommodation?

Please pick your top three

Randomise

Making friends
 Getting on with housemates / flatmates
 Noise from other students
 Living with people from different cultures and nationalities
 Living with people with different standards of tidiness/cleanliness
 Living with people who have different interests
 The accommodation not being up to standard
 Poor service from accommodation provider
 Having to cook / clean for yourself
 None of these - fix

STUDENT FINANCES

We'd now like to hear your thoughts around your finances and funding for your time in study. Please be assured that all your answers will be anonymous and analysed in a confidential way.

Ask All

F1a1. How successful or unsuccessful do you consider yourself to be at managing your finances throughout the year?

Please select one option only

Very successful
Somewhat successful
Neither
Somewhat unsuccessful
Very unsuccessful

Ask All

F1a2. Which of the following statements, if any, apply to you?

Please select all that apply

Randomise
I set a spending limit for my weekly spending
I know what my account balance is now
I often spend more than planned
I often need help with financial matters
None of these - fix

Ask all

F1c. Which of the following, if any, have occurred due to financial difficulties during your time as a student?

Please select all that apply

Randomise
Not been able to go out socially
Not been able to take part in hobbies or sports
Not been able to buy books or study materials
Not being able to afford food or eating less
Cut back on household expenses
Not been able to pay rent on time
Not been able to pay bills on time
Not turning heating on to save costs
Cut back on other expenses (Specify)
None – I have not had to adapt to financial difficulties

Ask all

F1d. Who, if anyone have you turned to for support with money or financial worries?

Please select all answers that apply

Rows - randomise

Parents
Other family – keep this below parents
Friends
University support staff
The internet
The Student's Union
Other
I wouldn't seek advice and support on this - exclusive

Ask all

F4. Which of the following most applies to you?

Please select one answer only

Randomise

I have taken on more debt than I expected to
I have taken on as much debt as I expected to
I have taken on less debt than I expected to
I have not taken on any debt

Ask all

F5. How concerned are you about being able to repay student debt when you start working after your studies?

Please select one answer only

Very concerned
Fairly concerned
Neither concerned nor unconcerned
Fairly unconcerned
Completely unconcerned
Not applicable
Outcomes

Ask all

O1. Thinking about your experience at university, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements

Please select one option per row

Randomise

Since starting university I have improved my social skills
Since starting university I have improved my teamwork skills
Since starting university I have a better understanding of different cultures and backgrounds
Since starting university I have grown in confidence
Since starting university my communication skills have improved

Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree

Ask all

O2. Now thinking about your course, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: 'Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the course'

Please select one option

Definitely agree
Mostly agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Mostly disagree
Definitely disagree
Not applicable

Ask all

O3. Which of the following have you done since starting university?

Please select all that apply

Randomise

Taken part in a new sport, arts or cultural activity
Learned how to cook
Learned how to budget
Made a significant friendship
Started a romantic relationship
None of these - fix

Ask all

O4. If you were asked to do the following tomorrow, how confident are you that you would be able to do it?

Please select one option per row

Randomise

Cooking a meal from scratch
(with ingredients only)
Washing your laundry
Paying a utility bill (e.g. electricity/gas/water)
Dealing with a plumbing/heating/electricity/DIY issue
Cleaning the house
Having a difficult conversation with a friend
Creating a budget for the next month
Very confident
Somewhat confident
Neither nor
Somewhat unconfident
Very unconfident

Ask all

O6. Have you heard of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating system for universities?

Please select one answer only

Yes
No
Not sure

Ask all

O7. The TEF is a scheme being introduced by the government to measure the quality of teaching at Higher Education Institutions in England. Universities will be given a Gold, Silver or Bronze rating to indicate the level of teaching they provide.

How important to you is it for your university to have a GOLD TEF rating?

Please select one answer only

Very important
Somewhat important
Neither nor
Somewhat unimportant
Very unimportant

Ask all

O9. How do you think the decision to leave the EU will impact your university?

Please select one option

It will have a very positive impact
It will have a somewhat positive impact
Neither nor
It will have a somewhat negative impact
It will have a very negative impact
Don't know

EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREERS

We would now like to ask you a few questions about your future career.

Ask all

G3a. How well or poorly do you feel your university is preparing you for employment after graduation?

Please one answer only

Very well
Somewhat well
Neither well nor poorly
Somewhat poorly
Very poorly

Ask all

G4. Does your current course offer an integrated work placement opportunity?

Please pick one

Yes – sandwich year
Yes – periods of professional placement
Yes – other work placement or internship integral to the course
No, but I have been offered a work placement or internship opportunity by my university anyway
No
Don't know

Ask all

G5. Have you taken up, or do you intend to take up, an internship or work placement opportunity?

Please select one answer only

- Yes – the work placement integrated into my current course – Hide unless G4=1-3
- Yes – the internship arranged by my university – Hide unless G4=4
- Yes – a work placement organised by myself
- Yes – an internship I arranged myself
- No – I have not yet decided or do not know

Ask all

G8. And where do you believe you will be 6 months after you graduate?

Please select one answer only

Randomise

- In a job in which I need the specific qualification I am studying as a pre-requisite
- In a job in which I need an undergraduate degree as a pre-requisite, but is not dependent on the subject I am currently studying
- In a job that does not require a degree
- Travelling / gap year
- Postgraduate study
- Unemployed
- Other study
- Volunteering
- I don't know - fix

Ask all

G9. How easy or difficult do you think it will be to find the job that you want after graduating?

Please select one answer only

- Very easy
- Will need some effort and luck but should be achievable
- It's going to be a challenge
- Almost impossible, but I'll have a go
- Don't know

Ask all

G10. Thinking about getting your first job, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Please select one answer per row

Randomise

- I am excited about having a job
- I feel nervous about having a job
- I feel prepared to have a job
- I expect to receive a similar level of support from my employers as I get from my university

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither nor
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Ask all

G11. How do you personally feel your future employment prospects will be affected by the decision to leave the EU?

Please select one option

- My employment prospects will significantly change for the better
- My employment prospects will slightly change for the better
- No change
- My employment prospects will slightly change for the worse
- My employment prospects will significantly change for the worse

CLOSING DEMOGRAPHICS

You're nearly finished. We'd just like to ask you a few more questions about yourself.

Ask all aged 19-24 (Panel Variable)

H1. Have you supported yourself financially for a total of three years or more before the start of your university course?

- Yes
- No

Ask all where H1=Yes or Aged 25+ (Panel Variable)

H2. Which best describes your main occupation [before you started your current degree course]?

Please choose one answer

- Professional / higher managerial (e.g. doctor, lawyer, chairman or managing director of medium or large firm)
- Manager / senior administrator (e.g. senior manager, owner of small business, head teacher)
- Supervisor / clerical / skilled non-manual (e.g. teacher, secretary, junior manager, police constable)
- Skilled manual worker (e.g. fireman, plumber, electrician, hairdresser)
- Semi-skilled / unskilled manual worker (e.g. assembler, postman, shop assistant)
- Receiving state benefits for sickness, unemployment, old age or any other reason

Ask all aged under 19 (Panel Variable) or H1=No

H3. Which of these best describes the chief income earner in your PARENTAL household?

Please choose one answer

- Professional / higher managerial (e.g. doctor, lawyer, chairman or managing director of medium or large firm)
- Manager / senior administrator (e.g. senior manager, owner of small business, head teacher)
- Supervisor / clerical / skilled non-manual (e.g. teacher, secretary, junior manager, police constable)

Skilled manual worker (e.g. fireman, plumber, electrician, hairdresser)

Semi-skilled / unskilled manual worker

(e.g. assembler, postman, shop assistant)

Receiving state benefits for sickness, unemployment, old age or any other reason

Ask all

H4. Are you the first person in your family to go to university?

Please choose one answer

Yes

No

Don't Know

PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

We would now like to ask you some questions to ensure that this survey is as inclusive as possible. You do not need to answer all of these questions if you do not wish to – there are options for prefer not to say in each question.

Ask all

B1. Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition?

Please select all that apply

Randomise

Specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia or ADD/ADHD

Blind or serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses

Deaf or a serious hearing impairment

A physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using arms, using a wheelchair or crutches

A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder

A long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy

A social/communication impairment such as

Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder

Prefer not to say [exclusive, fix]

No known disability or health condition [exclusive, fix]

Ask all who select B1_5 (A mental health condition...)

B1a. Which, if any, of the following best describe the mental health issues you have experienced in the last two years?

Please select all that apply

Depression

Anxiety

Bipolar

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Personality disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Schizophrenia / psychosis

Eating disorder (including Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge

Eating Disorder)

Other (specify)

Don't know

Prefer not to answer

Ask all who select B1_5 (A mental health condition...)

B1b. Have you declared your mental health condition to your university?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Prefer not to answer

Ask all

B2. And have you ever been in local authority care (for example children's home, foster placement, etc)?

Please select one answer only

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Ask all

B3. Which of the following options best describes how you think about yourself?

Please select one answer only

Heterosexual or Straight

Gay / Lesbian

Bisexual

Other

Prefer not to say

Ask all

B4. Are you estranged from your parents? By this, we mean that you have no current relationship with your parents.

Please pick one option only

Yes

No

Prefer not to say



THIS REPORT PROVES THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH THAT PEOPLE WHO ENTER UNIVERSITY WITH THE CARDS STACKED AGAINST THEM STRUGGLE TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.



Nick Hillman

Director, Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)

Unite Students

Unite Students is the leading provider of student accommodation in the UK, providing homes for 50,000 students, in more than 140 properties, across 28 cities. Since our foundation in 1991, we have housed more than half a million students and we work in partnership with more than 60 higher education institutions.

**UNITE
STUDENTS**