Coronavirus Student Survey phase III
November 2020

Mental health and wellbeing

Commissioned by NUS, NUS Charity, TOTUM and the Co-op
Delivered by NUS Insight

Embargoed until 9 December 2020
Project Overview

Objectives

This is the third survey in the series commissioned by NUS, NUS Charity and TOTUM to understand more about how students and recent graduates feel about the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the impacts they are experiencing. The Co-op is also now a partner in this study. Previous surveys – phases I and II - took place in March and July 2020 respectively.

Methodology

A sample of 4,193 was achieved.

Respondents were given a chance to win £500 to encourage response.

The survey was promoted via the NUS Student database, the TOTUM database, and through social media in November 2020.

The survey took around 25 minutes to complete and was in field from noon 6 November to 9.00 am 23 November.

What we look for

Within this report, a number of questions have been broken down by demographics, which have been compared with each other. Where applicable and the base size is large enough (n>50), statistically significant differences between demographics and their answers have been shown. A difference is significant when it is likely to have been caused by something other than random chance.
Sample weighting

Explanation of weighting

NUS achieved an original sample of 4,241 students. The response rate reflected the trend that females participate more than males in completing surveys - the initial gender split was: 65% female and 27% male.

While this survey sampled both HE and FE, our practice is to reflect a student population where possible. In the absence of any national FE statistics, NUS practice is to use HESA. According to HESA statistics the gender split within Higher Education is 56% female and 45% male. In order to reflect this, 'weighting' was applied to the data in this report. In this case, we adjusted the profile of the sample by applying weights so that the over represented group, females, are down weighted and the under represented group, males, are up weighted. This resulted in a gender split in this survey of 56% female and 36% male and a sample of 4,193.
Health, wellbeing & welfare
Summary

Key findings:

Students fear of contracting Coronavirus remains stable and is not their biggest concern; they are more worried about their family than themselves.

On the whole the physical needs of students are being met, but when it comes to mental health and wellbeing it is a different story.

Many are not getting enough sleep and feelings of self esteem and achievement are low. Worryingly the proportion of students who agree they have sufficient contact with others since their studies have resumed has dropped; indeed, large proportions of students are interacting with friends, course mates and other students far less than they did before.

Loneliness appears to be a having a huge impact on students’ wellbeing.

Half of students say their mental health is worse than what it was before the Coronavirus pandemic, with loneliness, anxiety, stress and depression among some of the key emotions being identified as behind this. Over three in five have not sought support, suggesting a lack of awareness or availability of who or what can help them. The main thing students want is someone to talk to!

Disabled students, those in higher education, living in university accommodation/other rented accommodation and who identify as non-binary or gay, lesbian, bi or queer, appear to be more likely to be affected by negative mental health.
Fear amongst students of contracting Coronavirus is remaining fairly stable over time. Similar to March and July, the largest proportion (two in five) feel ‘somewhat scared’ about contracting Coronavirus and around a quarter feel ‘not very scared’. 5% say they have tested positive for Coronavirus (a new option in this wave of the survey).

Weighted Base: 4180 respondents. Balance: no response

B1. Which, if any, of the following statements best describes your feelings towards contracting the Coronavirus (Covid-19)?
Within the context of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs students largely agree that their basic (food, water, warmth) & safety needs (resources, health, property) are being met. This is with the exception of sleep - only 45% agree to some extent that they are sleeping well. Feelings of love and belonging have fallen since the summer, with under two thirds feeling they have sufficient contact with others.

**Agreement with statements**

- **I feel safe in my current accommodation/living circumstances**: 44% Strongly agree, 38% Agree, 5% Neither agree nor disagree, 5% Disagree, 2% Strongly disagree
- **I am eating sufficiently (getting enough, good quality food)**: 38% Strongly agree, 40% Agree, 9% Neither agree nor disagree, 10% Disagree, 3% Strongly disagree
- **I have sufficient contact, whether in person with people I live with or virtually with others outside...**: 25% Strongly agree, 39% Agree, 15% Neither agree nor disagree, 14% Disagree, 7% Strongly disagree
- **I am able to study sufficiently in my current accommodation**: 20% Strongly agree, 43% Agree, 15% Neither agree nor disagree, 14% Disagree, 6% Strongly disagree
- **I have enough money/financial support to afford the basics I need right now**: 24% Strongly agree, 37% Agree, 15% Neither agree nor disagree, 14% Disagree, 8% Strongly disagree
- **I am able to exercise**: 20% Strongly agree, 38% Agree, 17% Neither agree nor disagree, 17% Disagree, 7% Strongly disagree
- **I am sleeping well**: 15% Strongly agree, 30% Agree, 15% Neither agree nor disagree, 26% Disagree, 14% Strongly disagree
- **I am achieving what I want to in life**: 11% Strongly agree, 32% Agree, 2% Neither agree nor disagree, 19% Disagree, 9% Strongly disagree
- **I am feeling good about myself**: 11% Strongly agree, 28% Agree, 24% Neither agree nor disagree, 24% Disagree, 12% Strongly disagree

Average weighted Base: 4116. Balance: No response
When looking at the data across different demographics we can see some significant differences within the levels of needs being met.

**Agreement with statements**

I am eating sufficiently (getting enough, good quality food)

I am sleeping well

I am able to exercise

I feel safe in my current accommodation/living circumstances

I have enough money/financial support to afford the basics I need right now

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**Less likely to agree:** Aged 18-22, UG, those living in halls or rented property, non-binary, trans, disabled, carers, socio-economic groups D and E

**Less likely to agree:** UG, UK, living in halls, full time, non-binary, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled, carers, white

**Less likely to agree:** 18-22, commuting on public transport, living in halls, full time, Trans, non-binary, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled, BAME

**Less likely to agree:** 18-22, UG, International, Commuting, living in halls, non-binary, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled, carer, BAME

**Less likely to agree:** 23-29, FE, International, Commuting by public transport, Living in halls or rented, full time, Disabled, Parent or carer, Socio-economic groups C2, D E, BAME

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B2. Please tell us how far you agree, if at all, with the statements below within the context of the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic?
When looking at the data across different demographics we can see some significant differences within the levels of needs being met.

**Agreement with statements**

I have sufficient contact, whether in person with people I live with or virtually with others outside my home, to make me feel connected and/or loved

I am feeling good about myself

I am able to study sufficiently in my current accommodation

I am achieving what I want to in life

**Less likely to agree:**
- 18-29, HE, living in halls or rented, Non binary, Trans, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled
- 18-29, UG, living in halls, rented or with parents, full time, non-binary, Trans, or rented, Non binary, Trans, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled, White
- 18-22, living in halls or rented, full time, non-binary, Trans, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled

**Average weighted Base:** 4116. **Balance:** No response

**B2. Please tell us how far you agree, if at all, with the statements below within the context of the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic?**
Continuing the pattern of previous phases, students are more likely to be concerned about the wellbeing of their family than of themselves or their friends.

**November 2020**

**Agreement with statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know/Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about the wellbeing of some/all of my family</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about the wellbeing of some/all of my friends</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about my own wellbeing</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned as to whether I have the tools and skills to manage my own wellbeing</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**More likely to agree:**
- 23+, disabled, carer
- 18+, HE, Trans, Disabled, Carer
- HE, PhD, international, Women, non-binary, Trans, Queer, disabled, BAME
- HE, PhD, international, living in halls or rented, full time, non-binary, Trans, queer, gay/lesbian or bi, disabled, carer, BAME

Agreement 43%; up from 37% in July

Weighted average base: 4124 Balance: No response

**B3.** How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements as a result of Coronavirus (Covid-19)?
Worryingly, over half of students indicate that their mental health is worse than it was before the coronavirus pandemic.

**New to phase 3**

**Current mental health and wellbeing**

- **It is better**: 8%
- **It is the same**: 35%
- **It is worse**: 52%
- **Prefer not to say**: 4%

**More likely amongst:**
- BAME
- Rented, full time, women, non-binary, Trans, queer, Disabled, White

Weighted Base: 4180. Balance: No response

B4. How would you describe your mental health and wellbeing currently compared to life before the Coronavirus pandemic?
Students who feel the impacts of Covid on their mental health have had a multitude of negative experiences. Not being allowed to see people is causing isolation and loneliness, leading to increased anxiety, stress and worry.

B5. Please tell us how you feel your mental health has been negatively affected by the pandemic

**Key themes:**
- Isolated / lonely
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Can’t see or make new friends
- Stress and worry
- Not seeing family
- Depression

*Negative impact on mental health*

“My online lectures have placed me in virtual isolation as I moved to a new area, knowing no one. I am in a self-contained flat so unless I shop for food or check for postal deliveries, I no longer 'see' anyone.”

“My anxiety and depression has taken a turn for the worse, so I’m having more trouble sleeping and studying. While I’m staying on top of my work to the best of my ability and I’m carrying on, I miss live music and making music with friends, I miss socialising, and I miss seeing my family on a regular basis. Some days the stress of my degree on top of the stress caused by covid-19 can be unbearable.”

“Self isolation, away from family and friends, in an unfamiliar city, only online teaching sessions - no integration, struggled with moving into halls where I was constantly monitored and felt guilty - blamed by media and politicians.”

“Loneliness, social isolation and staying at home the whole day cause me more stress, anxiety, sudden drops of self-esteem and loss of confidence.”

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B5. Please tell us how you feel your mental health has been negatively affected by the pandemic
Only 20% of students have sought mental health support (29% of those with worsening mental health) during the pandemic.
Students who have accessed support listed a range of help including counselling, their GP, services offered by their institution, medication and CBT therapies.

**Key themes:**

- Counselling: NHS, Institution, Private, Work
- GP / Psychiatrist
- Institution support and services
- Medication
- CBT / mindfulness

**Mental health and wellbeing support**

"The university counselling service which has moved online."

"Counselling due to struggling to manage uni work as a result of feeling overwhelmed and not being able to cope."

"My Dr has provided emotional support and signposted me to more focused help, already on antidepressants."

"During first lockdown I contacted my GP who prescribed me antidepressants and got me in contact with mental health support services. I have also had a counselling session with my university wellbeing service."

"Support with wellbeing, I have read up on ways to manage my wellbeing and develop a more positive mindset."

"Online CBT Counsellor through university via zoom calls."

B7. Please tell us briefly what support you have accessed to help with your health and wellbeing throughout the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic
Of those who have sought support, around three in five have been satisfied with what they have received.

**New to phase 3**

**Satisfaction with support**

- Very satisfied: 22%
- Somewhat satisfied: 35%
- Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied: 17%
- Somewhat dissatisfied: 12%
- Very dissatisfied: 7%
- I didn’t receive any support: 6%

**Less likely to be satisfied:** Non-binary

**More likely amongst:** non-binary, Trans,

Survey details:

Weighted Base: 850. Balance: Those not seeking support

B8. How satisfied are you with the mental health support you have received?
Regarding desired support, students would simply like someone to talk to.

**New to phase 3**

**Key themes:**
- Access to a councillor
- Someone to talk to
- Online support
- Support from institution

**Desired mental health and wellbeing support**

"I would like to start seeing a therapist however I am on a waiting list and am uncertain about when I may start seeing one."

"I just think there should be more awareness on how it has affected people and also arranging online therapy for people who really need it but aren't able to leave their house."

"Free online counselling. Maybe group counselling to meet people that could help me to improve my mental health."

"Being able to talk to somebody and details of who that might be at university."

"Just simply someone different to talk to, I keep everything bottled up and push my thoughts to the back of my head to not deal with them at the time."

B9. Please tell us briefly what support, if any, you would like access to, to help with your health and wellbeing throughout the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.
Students are connecting more with family and friends online since the pandemic began. They are also watching films and reading books. Over half have found their caring duties have increased. While drinking has increased for around a third, partying and going out has, for obvious reasons, decreased.

Amended for Phase 3

Connect with friends/family remotely e.g. online
Watch films
Support and care for others
Read books
Gaming
Be creative / do crafts
Eating healthy food
Drinking
Exercise
Look for self-help wellbeing guidance/apps
Try to find work in a supermarket/pharmacy/other key...
Maintain some sort of daily routine
Volunteering / giving something back to the community
Gambling
Partying in my student accommodation / a friends...
Going out to bars and pubs

Activities

The same
Less
More

Weighted average base: 4075. Balance: No response

B10. Thinking about the current pandemic, please tell us if you do more / less / the same of the following as you did pre-Covid.
Family interactions have increased for almost half of students since the pandemic began while interactions with fellow students, course mates and friends are down dramatically.

**November 2020**

**Interactions...**

- I am interacting with my family... -27% -28% 45%
- I am interacting with my friends... -53% -22% 25%
- I am interacting with my coursemates... -51% -31% 18%
- I am interacting with other students in my institution... -57% -32% 11%
- I am interacting with clubs and societies... -65% -28% 7%

Weighted average base: 4072. Balance: No response

**B11. Thinking about your interactions with people since the coronavirus pandemic began, please indicate how much you are interacting with the following now compared with before the pandemic...**
Students most commonly see their partners face to face on a daily basis – however, two in five also indicate they never see their partner – likely to be reflective of those not living with their partner at present. Workmates are the most likely never to be seen face to face. Friends are most likely to be seen semi-regularly.

### November 2020

#### Face to face meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Few times a week</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Few times a fortnight</th>
<th>Couple of times a month</th>
<th>A few times a term</th>
<th>Less frequently</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workmates</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursemates</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family who I don’t live with but am in a support bubble with</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-family members who I am in a support bubble with</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weighted average base: 3637. Balance: No response

B12. Following the movement and social interaction restrictions, how often are you currently seeing the following people in person?
While a campaign for reducing fees is the main priority, over two thirds of students rate NUS campaigning for mental health support as priority 1, 2 or 3.

### Ranking of NUS campaign priorities

- **Campaigning for mental health support**: 9% 11% 13% 20% 23% 24%
- **Campaign for reduced fees / refund**: 15% 10% 10% 11% 14% 39%
- **Campus Covid testing**: 11% 15% 17% 20% 18% 18%
- **Support with accommodation issues**: 16% 20% 20% 19% 19% 6%
- **Campaigning around exam and assessments**: 20% 21% 19% 16% 15% 9%
- **PPE provision on campus**: 25% 21% 21% 14% 13% 5%

Weighted Base: 3789. Balance: No response

15. During the last phase of this research, students told us that NUS should concentrate on the following priorities for students. Can you please rank them, where 1 is top priority for you and 6 is lowest priority.
Demographics
### Key demographics (weighted base)

#### Gender
- Man: 35%
- Woman: 57%
- Non-binary: 2%
- I prefer to self-describe: 1%
- Prefer not to say: 1%

#### Age
- 16-17: 14%
- 18-22: 30%
- 23-29: 16%
- 30-39: 18%
- 40+: 22%

#### Level of study
- FE: 53%
- HE: 39%
- Apprentice: 4%

#### Full time: 69%
- Part time: 21%
- Distance learner: 15%

- I am a UK citizen studying in the UK: 85%
- I am an Irish citizen from the UK studying in the UK: 6%
- I am an international student from within the EU studying in the UK: 2%
- I am an international student from outside the EU studying in the UK: 1%
# Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>England Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ireland</strong></td>
<td><strong>3%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Living in areas of lockdown

- I live in England: 75%
- I live in Wales where there is a ‘firebreak’ lockdown: 5%
- I live in Northern Ireland where temporary identified restrictions on what we can do have been introduced: 3%
- I live in an area of Scotland where there are level 1 restrictions: 1%
- I live in an area of Scotland where there are level 2 restrictions: 3%
- I live in an area of Scotland where there are level 3 restrictions: 11%
- I live in an area of Scotland where there are level 4 restrictions: 1%
- I live in an area of Scotland where there are level 3 restrictions: 0%
- Other: 2%
- I don’t know: 1%

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents

A5. Please tell us which of the following applies to where you live during term time:
A6. Which of the following modes of transport do you use regularly in order to get to and from your campus?
K1. What year of study are you in?

Demographics

Year of study

- 1st year: 46%
- 2nd year: 24%
- 3rd year+: 30%

Weighted Base: 1522 respondents  Balance : FE students, no response
K4. Which of the following best describes your course (or your most recent course)?

- Business and management: 12%
- Design, creative and performing arts: 10%
- Social sciences: 10%
- Education and teaching: 8%
- Psychology: 8%
- Computing: 7%
- Engineering and technology: 6%
- Historical, philosophical and religious studies: 5%
- Subjects allied to medicine: 5%
- Biological and sport sciences: 4%
- Medicine and dentistry: 4%
- Physical sciences: 4%
- Law: 3%
- Agriculture, food and related studies: 2%
- Combined and general studies: 2%
- Geography, earth and environmental studies: 2%
- Language and area studies: 2%
- Mathematical sciences: 2%
- Media, journalism and communications: 2%
- Architecture, building and planning: 1%
- Veterinary sciences: 1%
Does your gender identity match the gender you were assigned at birth?

- Yes: 93%
- No: 3%
- Prefer not to say: 5%

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents.

K6. Does your gender identity match the gender you were assigned at birth?
K7. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation/preference?

- Heterosexual / Straight: 71%
- Bisexual / Bi: 11%
- Prefer not to say: 9%
- Gay / Lesbian: 6%
- Queer: 2%
- I prefer to self describe: 2%

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents.

Demographics

Sexual orientation/preference

nus national union of students
K11. Do you consider yourself to have a specific learning disability, other disability, impairment, long-term illness or health condition?

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents.
K12. Please describe your disability, impairment or long-term health condition

- Mental health difficulties e.g. depression, schizophrenia: 26%
- An unseen disability or health condition e.g. diabetes: 14%
- Learning difficulty where a person learns in a different way: 12%
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder: 5%
- Physical impairment such as using a wheelchair to get: 4%
- A disability not listed above [please describe below - optional]: 4%
- Prefer not to say: 4%
- Deaf or hard of hearing: 3%
- Blind or partially sighted: 1.0%
- Profound and/or multiple learning difficulties: 0%
- No known disability, impairment or long-term health condition: 51%
K8. Which of the following best describe your marital status?

- Single: 51%
- Partner: 24%
- Married/in a civil partnership: 18%
- Prefer not to say: 5%
- Other: 2%

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents.
K9. Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?

- White – English: 46%
- White – Scottish: 12%
- White – Welsh: 3%
- White – Northern Irish: 2%
- White – British: 7%
- White – Irish: 3%
- White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller: 0%
- White – Roma: 0%
- Any other white background: 8%
- Mixed / multiple ethnic – White and black...: 1%
- Mixed / multiple ethnic – White and black...: 0%
- Mixed / multiple ethnic – White and Asian: 1%
- Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background: 1%
- Asian or Asian British – Indian: 3%
- Asian or Asian British – Pakistani: 2%
- Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi: 1%
- Asian or Asian British – Chinese: 1%
- Any other Asian / Asian British background: 1%
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British –...: 1%
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British – African: 1%
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - British: 1%
- Any other Black/African/Caribbean/Black...: 0%
- Arab: 1%
- Jewish: 0%
- Latin/South/Central American: 1%
- Mixed British and Latin/South/Central American: 0%
- Any other ethnic group: 1%
- I would prefer not to say: 3%
K10. What is your religion, faith or belief?

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents.

Religion, faith or belief

- None: 30%
- Christian (including Catholic, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Protestant and all other...): 30%
- Atheist: 19%
- Prefer not to say: 9%
- Any other religion or belief: 5%
- Muslim: 4%
- Buddhist: 1%
- Hindu: 1%
- Jewish: 1%
- Sikh: 0%
K13. Do you have any caring responsibilities?

- No: 72%
- Yes – I am a parent of children beneath the age of 18: 14%
- Yes - I care for someone in need of support because of illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction: 8%
- Prefer not to say: 6%

Weighted Base: 4193 respondents.
K14. Which of the following best describes the kind of job your parents / guardian did when you were 16 years of age?
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Mental health and wellbeing

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