Cost of living and student belonging

October 2023
In the spring and summer of 2023 Wonkhe and Pearson advertised a student survey via Wonkhe SUs-subscribed students’ unions exploring the ways that rising cost of living is shaping students’ educational experience and sense of belonging.

We also invited students who had taken part in our earlier research on belonging to complete the survey.

908 students took the survey. Students from two institutions - one a large research-intensive university in the North of England, and the other a post-92 university in the South of England - constituted the majority of the sample.

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Gender**  
Female 65.7% | Male 28.9% | Non-binary 3.3%

**Domicile**  
UK 76.4% | Outside UK 23.6%

**Disability**  
Disabled 19.1% | Non-disabled 74.1

**Age**  
17-22 56.5% | 23-30 28.9% | 30+ 14%

**Ethnicity**  
White 68% | Asian/Asian-British 17.3% | Black/Black-British 6% | Arab 0.5% | Mixed 5%

**Qualification**  
Bachelors or other UG 70.5% | Masters or MBA 20% | Other PG 4.4%

**Parental education**  
One parent/caregiver attended university 23.4% | Two attended university 23.8% | None attended university 50.8%
Adverse impact on students of cost of living challenges

What areas of your life are adversely affected by cost-of-living challenges?

- Food - I skip meals, or buy less food, shop in different places etc.
- Utility bills - I have scaled back on use of gas, electricity, wifi, TV license or other bills
- Lecture/seminar attendance
- My academic performance
- Student activities – I engage less with clubs or societies than I want to
- Social life – I take part in fewer social activities than I want to
- Employment – I’m working more
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

I am generally able to cover basic living costs such as heating, food and rent
I am struggling to cover basic costs such as heating, food and rent
Access to teaching and learning

Which of these things regularly impact on your ability to access your teaching or learning (on campus or online)?

- Transport /commuting challenges
- Paid work
- Unpaid work such as caring or childcare
- Physical health or disability
- Neurodiversity
- Mental health
- Digital access issues e.g. internet access, access to a device
- Timing (e.g. lecture times, office hours etc)
- Limited access to study materials/ resources.
- None - I don't have any challenges with accessing teaching and learning

[Graph showing percentages of respondents for each challenge]

- All respondents
- I am generally able to cover basic living costs such as heating, food and rent
- I am struggling to cover basic costs such as heating, food and rent
Course experience and connections

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements about your course this semester (% strongly agree/mostly agree)

- I feel a sense of community with others on my course
- I feel confident about my academic skills
- There are adequate opportunities to interact with other students
- My course offers me the flexibility I need
- I feel like I have a support network of friends/course-mates
- I feel supported by department/faculty/course tutors
- I am on track with my learning
- I am able to focus on my learning whilst at university
- I am able to cover basic living costs such as heating, food and rent
- I am struggling to cover basic costs such as heating, food and rent
Mental health and financial challenges

In your opinion, how has your mental health changed since coming to university this year?

- **It's improved**
- **No change**
- **It's got worse**

- **All respondents**
- I am generally able to cover basic living costs such as heating, food and rent
- I am struggling to cover basic costs such as heating, food and rent
Feelings about university

How far would you agree with these statements about how you feel when at university? (% strongly agree/mostly agree)

- I feel connected to my university community
- I feel excluded from my university because of my financial circumstances
- I feel like my time and experience at university is valuable
- I feel positive about my future after university
- I feel my university is trying to support students with the cost of living
- I feel my students' union is trying to support students with the cost of living
- I feel my university has communicated the support available for students to help with the cost of living
- I feel like I belong at my university

How far would you agree with these statements about how you feel when at university? (% strongly agree/mostly agree)
Feeling like university is the right choice

Do you still feel that university is the right choice for you?
Thank you

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