

Students' Union's Monthly Student Feedback Report

The following provides insights into the most noteworthy issues faced by Sheffield Hallam students in December 2020. This document collates comments, enquires and data received from our Officers, Department Reps, Advice Centre, Helpdesk, and through our research and insight activity.

This month, we are focussing on student comments from our 'Hallam How Are You' survey, which had 10 open comment questions, receiving nearly 6000 responses from students between 9 and 22 November 2020. In this report, we highlight four open-ended questions from the survey. Whilst some of these comments were shared in the November 2020 Monthly Student Feedback Report, this report provides an in-depth analysis and a more comprehensive narrative.

*Table 1: Data sources used for this report. *NB: Advice Centre and Helpdesk statistics are from 25 November to 15 December.*

Source	Question	Number of responses
'Hallam How Are You?' Survey	How do you think the Students' Union should be adding value to your course or university experience?	1069
'Hallam How Are You?' Survey	What would you like to see offered going forward that would support your wellbeing?	726
'Hallam How Are You?' Survey	If there is anything that you think Hallam could do to support you with regards to your financial situation, please tell us below.	353
'Hallam How Are You?' Survey	You indicated that you live in university provided accommodation. Can you please share with us how this is going for you?	183
	Advice Centre New Enquiries*	61
	Helpdesk Queries*	83

The Students' Union

To better understand the needs of our students, respondents were asked to comment on what the Students' Union should be doing to add value to their course or their university experience in the 'Hallam, How Are You?' survey. Of the 1078 respondents, 1069 students left a comment for this question and these questions were themed to represent the most common topics mentioned by students (see Figure 1).

Support

As the figure displays, 198 comments were from students wanting the Students' Union to **provide continued or more support**. Whilst the majority of students wanted **support for their wellbeing**, with the Students' Union providing information or advice, there were also some students that **want support for issues that they were struggling with**: exams and assessments, accessing and using IT equipment, or international students and integration to life in the UK, for example. There were also some students that want the Students' Union to continue to offer support to students through the

use of extracurricular or societies, or the **check-in on their welfare** to ensure that they are doing well during these times.

Community

The 149 comments within this theme were from students that want the Students' Union to provide **social activities** for them to take part in, normally in the form of events or opportunities for them to make friends. There were some comments from students that want to **form a community with students that share similar identities** to them (e.g. mature students or LGBTQ+). There were also a number of comments from students that mentioned their **course community could be made stronger** and felt that the Students' Union should be adding value to their experience in this way.

Events

Of the 143 comments within this theme, similarly to the theme on 'Community', students want the Students' Union to provide events; comments within this theme were generally more related to **ideas for specific events** that students had in mind. The types of events that students mentioned were: quizzes, competitions to win prizes, giving out free items, continuing to provide celebration events, events related to skill development or their course, organising trips, and music events.

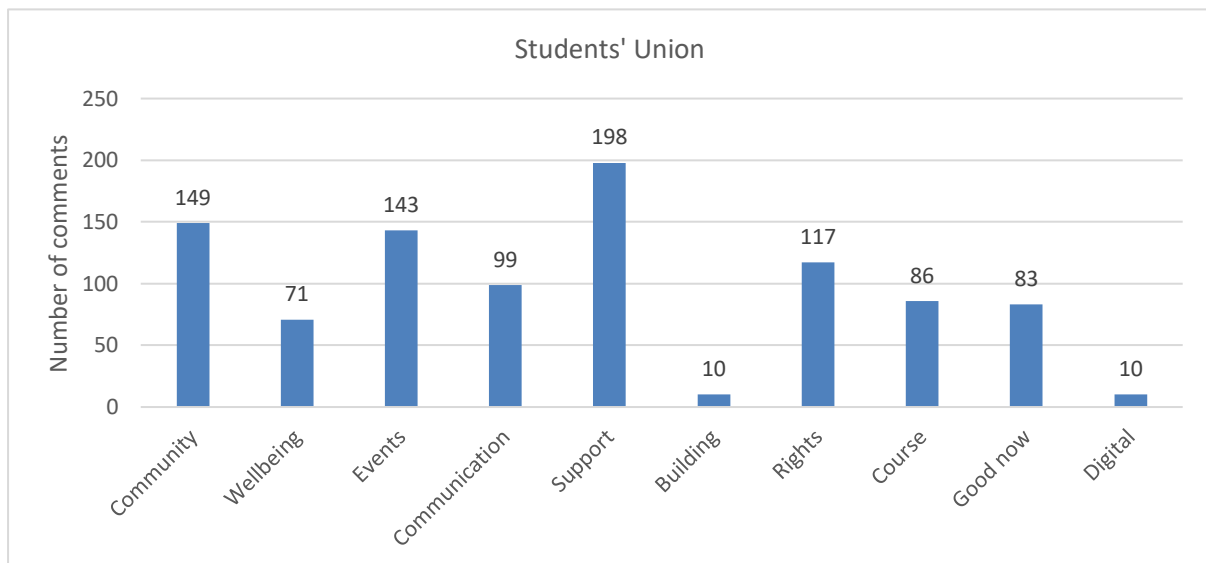


Figure 1: Responses to "How do you think the Students' Union should be adding value to your course or university experience?" (n=1069)

Wellbeing

As Figure 2 indicates, 726 respondents to the 'Hallam, How Are You?' survey shared opinions about what wellbeing support they would like to see going forward. The three largest themes are **events**, **informal support**, and **professional support or advice**.

Events

Comments within this theme were from students wanting to see more or similar amounts of events hosted by the University or the Students' Union, where they can **meet other students, socialise, and have fun together**. There were some suggestions about the types of events that should be offered: mental health related, TED talks, online quizzes or bingo, DJ sets, cultural themed, festive and Christmas themed, cooking, dancing, yoga, comedy shows, or more events run by student societies.

Informal Support

This theme was largely derived from students wanting more interaction with others at the university. Generally, comments in this theme were about wanting to receive informal support from the Students' Union or the University through **drop-ins or check-ins** with them, directly. At the moment, students are receiving a lot of digital communication from the University, but are having less **informal opportunities to have just talk with others**. Comments within this theme were not about formal support or advice for those struggling with their mental health, but rather **a friendly and supportive person to chat to**.

Professional Support or Advice

This theme is about professional help and advice for mental health. Comments within this theme were from students that wanted **counselling, one-to-one professional support, timetabled appointments, drop-in support from a professional**. There were a few comments within this theme from students that wanted more counsellors employed by the University, so that they could receive an appointment quickly.

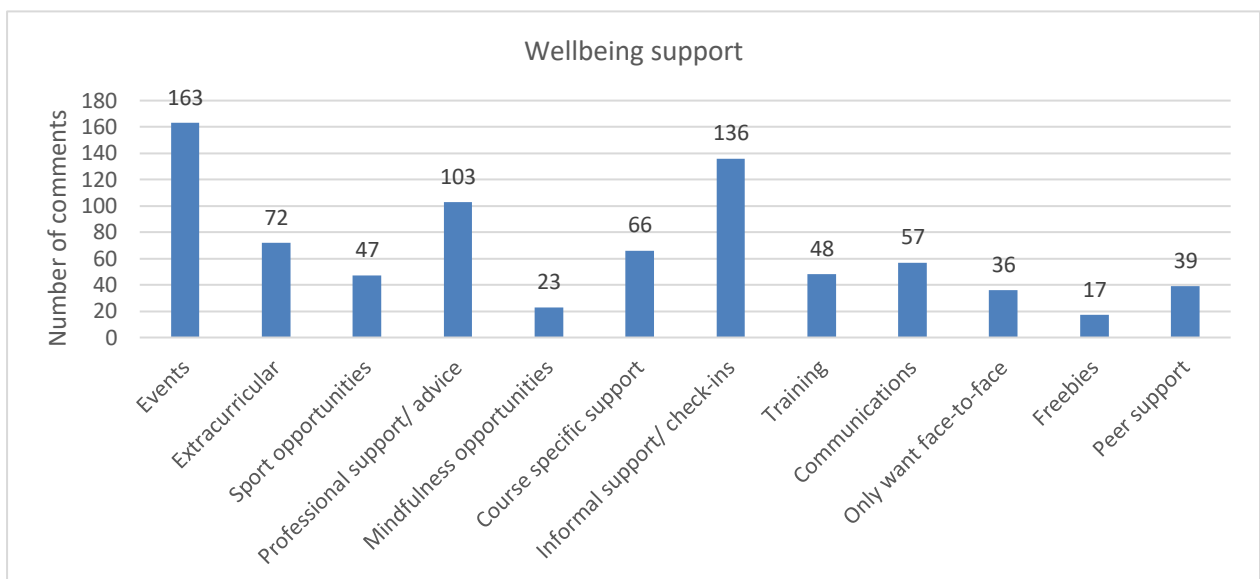


Figure 2: Responses themes to "What would you like to see offered going forward that would support your wellbeing?" (n=763).

Finances

Our Advice Centre had 17 new enquiries related to finances, with six students contacting about student finance loans related issues (miscalculation, found ineligible, etc.) and five about finding themselves in financial hardship. Others were about debt-related issues (includes rent arrears), about bursaries/scholarships, placement expenses, and employment issues.

When respondents were asked to provide a comment about how the University or the Students' Union could help them financially in the 'Hallam, How Are You?' survey, if needed, 353 students left a comment. The largest themes from this question, as displayed in Figure 3, were reduce course fees, support, and bursaries/ grants.

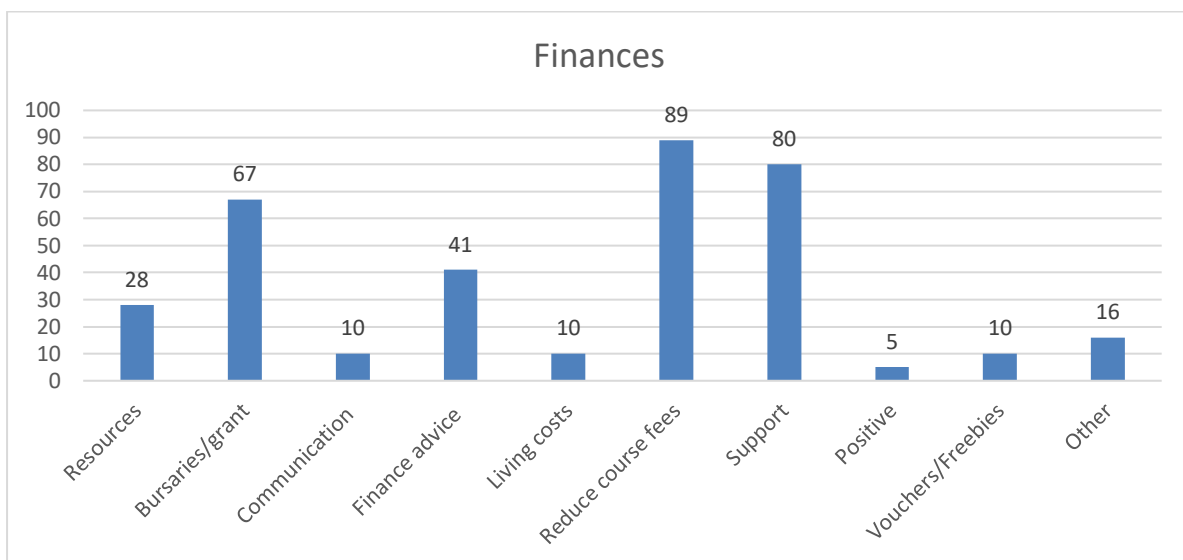


Figure 3: Responses themes to "If there is anything that you think Hallam could do to support you with regards to your financial situation, please tell us below." (n=353).

It is clear that some students are struggling financially, with a number of our students struggling to pay their rent or to pay basic necessities, like food. Other students commented that they are struggling to find a part-time job alongside their studies, with the pandemic significantly impacting this.

"Support with food packages if required because someone finances are so dire that I am having to lend money in order to buy food or more awareness of the hardship fund."

Reduce course fees

There were 89 comments from students urging the University and the Students' Union to reduce their tuition fees. Generally, respondents commenting that the **standard of education** has not been the same as it would be normally, citing a **lack of on campus teaching** as the reason to reduce these fees. Some of these respondents felt that the lack of access to facilities or equipment for their course was also a reason for the University to reduce fees.

Support

Comments within this theme were from students that wanted **additional support to find jobs**. There were also some students that would like support with their accommodation, but more information regarding accommodation will be covered in the section below.

Grants/ Bursaries

There were 67 comments from students that mentioned bursaries or grants. Some of these comments were from students wanting to know where they could find out **information about the different types of grants** offered by the University; there were others that mentioned they had applied for a bursary, but had been denied, even though they are struggling to pay for their accommodation and living expenses. There was a small group of students that mentioned their bursary amount had decreased this year, which was unexpected. Generally, students want **more financial assistance and to be made aware of these more widely**.

Accommodation

Students across the country are actively taking part in rent strikes, as many students have returned to live with family and loved ones, instead of occupying their normal student accommodation; much of their teaching and learning happened virtually in the first half of the academic year. This is especially important given the successful action from students at the University of Manchester, where rent has been cut by 30 percent for the remainder of the academic year.¹ Most of our Advice Centre's new enquiries in the last three weeks were about housing and accommodation. The majority of students sought advice on leaving their tenancy. Others sought advice on how to find accommodation, issues with getting back their deposit, inter-tenant disputes, and issues with landlords.

In addition, having been made aware of some dissatisfaction from a some students with their accommodation prices and lack of on campus teaching, our Officers asked students to share comments about their accommodation in the 'Hallam, How Are You' survey. Of the 1078 respondents to the survey, 189 students were currently living in student accommodation and provided comments. For the majority of these students, their experience has been relatively positive, though they or their housemates might not be physically in their accommodation, having moved in with family. Other students, however, have struggled with **feelings of isolation**, their accommodation **not being what they expected** or what was advertised to them, or **inter-tenant issues**.

"I am loving my accommodation, though my flatmates have all left due to coronavirus so I am currently living alone."

¹ The Guardian (6 December 2020). "We won't be cash cows': UK students plan the largest rent strike in 40 years". Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/dec/06/we-wont-be-cash-cows-uk-students-plan-the-largest-rent-strike-in-40-years>

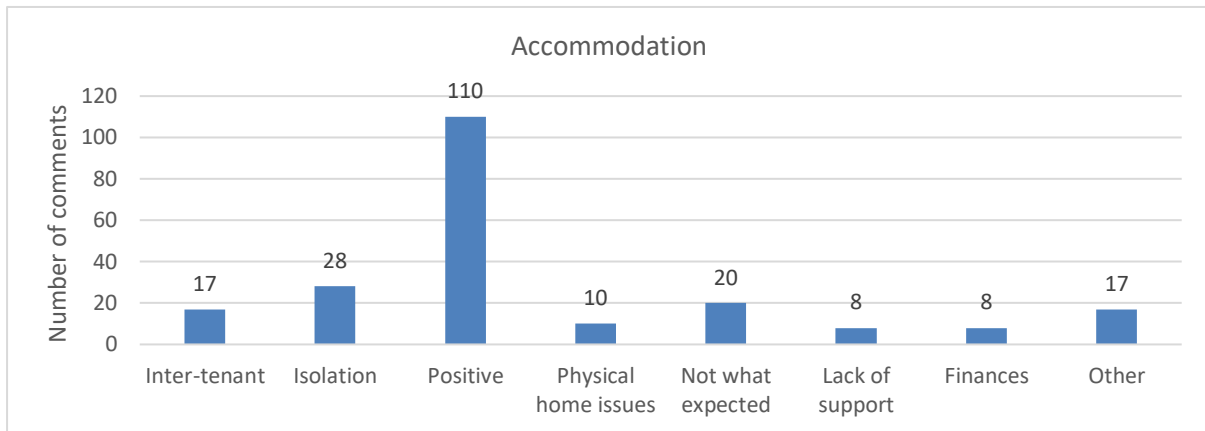


Figure 4: Response themes to "You indicated that you live in university provided accommodation. Can you please share with us how this is going for you?" (n=183)

Isolation

Comments within this category were from students that felt **segregated from their friends and course mates**; for some students, this was impacting on their mental health. Respondents did not like the inability to make friends with other in their accommodation blocks or that their course was largely delivered virtually, further exacerbating their feeling lonely.

Not what expected

These comments were in relation to their course, and therefore their experience in their accommodation, not being what they expected it to be. Most of the comments within this theme were from students that had **moved from their student accommodation to live with family or friends, so as not to be so isolated and alone**. There were a few comments from students within this theme about **wanting to use their accommodation facilities fully** (e.g. gyms or other shared spaces) and were disappointed that this was not available to them.

Inter-tenant

The 17 comments within this theme were from students that were dissatisfied with their accommodation due to inter-tenant issues. Some of these comments were from those that **did not get along well with their housemates**, and the compounded factor of being at home more than normal has made this difficult. There were some comments, though, where students shared that **their housemates were unsafe and not following government guidance for the Coronavirus**.

END.