

## Students' Union Monthly Student Feedback Report

The following provides insights into the most noteworthy issues faced by Sheffield Hallam students in January 2020. This month's report includes data from our Advice Centre, our Helpdesk, as well as collated feedback from our Department Reps. As Table 1 displays, the Advice Centre received 95 new enquiries between 1<sup>st</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and our Helpdesk saw 125 students that contacted us for help between 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

*Table 1: The source and number of enquiries received in January 2021.*

*\*These were received between 1 - 26 January 2021.*

*\*\*These were received between 4 - 24 January 2021.*

Source	Number of queries
Advice Centre	95*
Helpdesk	125**
Department Reps	18

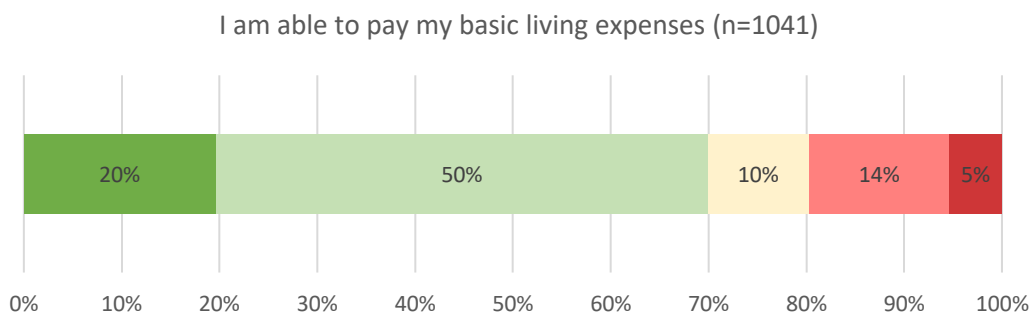
### Accommodation, Fees & Funding

Our Helpdesk and the Advice Centre have received the most queries from students in relation to their accommodation; the Helpdesk received 40 queries and the Advice Centre received 34. From the 34 new cases in the Advice Centre, these were from students seeking refunds on their accommodation due to their course being delivered mostly online for this academic year. These students have not returned to their accommodation and feel frustrated about paying for something they are not using. These students also feel that this issue has been largely out of their control, as a result of the ongoing pandemic and being told their course was going to be delivered as a hybrid online and in-person. For some of these students, they have chosen not to continue to live in their accommodation and have thus stopped paying their rent, something which our Advice Centre warned could be a concern for future financial security for these students. Comments from our recent survey revealed that students feel that, where they are struggling financially, one thing that might help is to receive refunds or discounts on their student accommodation. Though, as a [recent WonkHE article](#) discusses, rent rebates should not focus on student hardship: *"It's not about whether you're rich or poor, thriving or struggling – arguably, as a society, we shouldn't be requiring people to pay rent on properties that students have had no use for all year."*

We recognise that significant work has already taken place to ensure that students are receiving vital information and support, whether through refunds or discounts, about their accommodation, where necessary. Our Officer Team and Advice Centre have worked closely to [develop guidance for students regarding their accommodation](#), encouraging these students to consider their options and their future. The VC and SHSU President have also recently [shared an open letter](#) with accommodation providers in the Sheffield city. As a Students' Union, we will continue to monitor student opinion on accommodation in the coming weeks and months.

Furthermore, Our Advice Centre received 29 new enquiries from students seeking advice on money and funding related issues. As the November and December 2020 Monthly Student Feedback Report discussed, students are concerned about their finances more generally, as the ongoing pandemic has meant that some are not able to afford to pay for basic living expenses. In addition to those students

discussing accommodation and finances, there were some students that are still facing financial hardship. Comments revealed that these students would like additional funding, especially those that fall into a 'gap' where neither they nor their family normally qualify for hardship funding but find themselves unable to afford education as they have in previous years. As the below figure displays, 19 percent (or n=205) of respondents to our recent survey felt unable to pay their basic living expenses.



Furthermore, some Department Reps (from Service Sector Management and Art & Design) have noticed a trend in students that they represent discussing and asking about tuition fee reimbursement. Specifically, for Service Sector Management, international students feel that the amount they have paid is not appropriate for the amount of in-person teaching they have received. Though at the time of writing this report not all Department Reps had shared all of the data received from students, the Students' Union will continue to monitor this in the coming weeks and months, especially with [recent information from the Office for Students](#) on tuition refunds.

### Course

Our Advice Centre also received 30 new queries from students related to academic issues; the majority of these were either about academic misconduct or progression through a course due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. Our Department Reps, however, have shared student course-related concerns and below are common cross-Departmental and cross-College themes.

#### *Academic Support & Advising*

Department Reps from Biosciences & Chemistry, Engineering & Maths, and Natural & Built Environment mentioned academic support, with specific mention to Academic Advisors. Some students feel that more support could be offered. As mentioned in previous monthly reports, there have been pockets where some students are not receiving enough support whilst learning virtually; this does, however, vary from course to course and it appears that the level of support received is not consistent across Departments.

Within the Department of Engineering & Maths, specifically, the Department Rep has been working on developing more guidance about what the academic advising offer is at Sheffield Hallam. This is to encourage more students to utilise this service and to be aware that additional support is available for them, should they need it.

### *Safety Net*

There were a few Department Reps from across all three Colleges that mentioned assessments. Students wanted more information about possible safety nets or provisions in place to provide additional support. Between receiving this feedback from Department Reps and the writing of this report, the Students' Union and the University have [published new agreed approach](#) with this in mind. Two Department Reps, from Nursing & Midwifery and Biosciences & Chemistry, mentioned their appreciation for this guidance.

### *Placements*

Placements were, and still remain, a concern for some of our students. The Department Rep from Nursing & Midwifery highlighted the extensive issues that students within this Department have been experiencing in the past months: the placement team are no longer allocating placements, and this has become the responsibility of the NHS Trusts, but due to Coronavirus, allocations are delayed, and students are receiving their assigned placements much later than normal. This has meant that many students are unable to make arrangements.

A concern in Nursing & Midwifery, as well as some courses in College of Business, Technology & Engineering, are the number of placements hours required and their ability to complete a placement. Students are concerned that, without the required amount of placement hours, how they will progress through their course and be prepared for employment.

### **Student Life**

A common thread throughout feedback received from Department Reps was the difficulties that students, and indeed many individuals, are facing with the ongoing, reverberating effects of the pandemic. Whilst the regular communications from the University have been well received, the tone and messages have not especially remarked on the issues that students are facing. Being a student in this academic year has been difficult: the promise of hybrid study; the drastic change within weeks of starting their studies in the first semester towards a model of mainly virtual learning; the sacrifices and hard work of our healthcare students; the loss of income and financial difficulties for some; and the lack of student community because of social distancing measures. As one Course Rep from Biosciences & Chemistry noted, there could simply be *"more recognition about the difficulties that students are facing at the moment."*

END.