



Sheffield Hallam Students' Union
Student Voice Report 2022-23

Introduction

In 2022-23, our Hallam community shifted from a pandemic to an ever more real and fast-changing first 'post-covid' academic year, and direct student feedback has established that the student experience has been and will be different from pre-covid times. While being mindful of the positives from our pre-pandemic times and building on those strategies and incorporating new adaptive techniques, delivering an inclusive student experience for our diverse student body remains at the heart of our new developing plans.

The priorities at the beginning of the year, and the major shifts we faced, were exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. The state of constant insecurity that the student community has faced has been like never before, giving rise to a broad spectrum of issues that have been an important focus of the Students' Union's work this year. The results from our 'Hallam How Are We Doing' survey have been key in understanding the specific areas of the student life that have been affected and have helped us devise projects tailored to those needs.

As if our students and staff have not already been working in a volatile environment, Artificial Intelligence remains another topic area impacting on the academic experience, while we all try and establish whether this is a major threat to academic integrity or a valuable resource to enhance understanding. If we are now more accepting of AI's resourceful nature, the underlying factors of its practical implementation are still to be fully explored within different areas of teaching, learning and the whole of academic delivery.

The objective of all the Students' Union's Student Voice Reports, over more than a decade, has been to keep a track record of the changes and recommendations that have been suggested by the students through constant feedback and to ensure that these recommendations are discussed and delivered through partnership working. After a year full of reviewing, refining and gauging student engagement, including fully utilising our data and information in the TEF Student Submission, the Students' Union has importantly used student feedback to drive our strategies and develop an even better student-focussed, customer journey approach to delivery, ranging from academic representation to events, and to areas such as wellbeing and belonging. The range of student issues, enquiries and cases, has helped us appreciate the change in the student needs and expectations, and the need to tailor services to our whole student body, as well as individual students, while encouraging and prioritising practices that build a stronger connection to the institution and engender a more real sense of belonging.

Sabah Khan

- Sheffield Hallam Students' Union President 2022-23

Contents

Introduction	2
Contents.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Recommendations.....	6
Methodologies.....	8
Impact review from 21/22.....	9
Section 1 – Our learning experiences	10
1.1 Teaching Delivery	10
1.1.1 Our Data	10
1.2 Timetabling and Course Organisation.....	14
1.2.1 Our Data	14
1.3 Placements.....	16
1.3.1 Our Data	17
1.4 College Insights.....	18
1.4.1 BTE.....	18
1.4.2 HWLS.....	19
1.4.3 SSA.....	23
Section 2 – Our Wellbeing and Community.....	27
2.1 Overview.....	27
2.1.1 Our Data	27
2.2 Cost of Living	28
2.2.1 Our Data.....	29
2.3 Welcome.....	34
2.3.1 Our Data.....	34
2.4 Wellbeing and Extracurricular Activities.....	36
2.4.1 Our Data.....	36
Closing Statement.....	39
Appendix A: Research & Data Sources	41
Appendix B: Summary of Progress on 21/22 Student Voice Report.....	45
Appendix C: Feedback submitted via UnionVoice	49
Appendix D: Disability Support for Students on Placement Infographic.....	50

Executive Summary

The 2022-2023 Academic year saw Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) students continue to adjust to a post-covid world. But just as teaching and learning provision approached something like 'normal', and the social disruption wrought by the pandemic began to dissipate, a new challenge, in the form of the cost-of-living crisis, arrived and impacted our members' wellbeing and learning experiences in profound and diverse ways.

Our research and collated student voice feedback from the last academic year indicates that there are pockets of high student satisfaction and excellent academic provision at SHU, undercut by a lack of consistency within and across departments and colleges.

- This manifests in a teaching and learning offering that does not universally reflect the realities and expectations of a post-covid world. Whether this is because not all SHU students benefit from the latest innovations in blended and interactive learning that were promoted and adopted in some areas during the pandemic, or because of timetabling and delivery models that fail to acknowledge the opportunity cost of travelling to campus for our large commuter cohort.
- Similarly, and somewhat unfortunately given SHU's emphasis on vocational learning, basic levels of academic support for students whilst on placement are inconsistently delivered, and standards vary from course to course. This means that whilst excellent support exists for some of our members, there is no obvious best practise, and it is often dependant on individual members of SHU staff going 'above and beyond' to help students. This is particularly relevant to those students with disabilities, for whom reasonable adjustments made in the practice environment can make or break a placement experience, and who can often find themselves left to negotiate such adjustments directly with the placement setting.

Data collected from our regular pulse survey suggests that SHU's non-academic support provision is well regarded by students and performs well against sectoral benchmarks. However, our cost-of-living research points to the need for more proactive interventions from the university, with SHU students increasingly contending with:

- the rising costs of food and university-related travel, particularly travel to mandatory placement settings which can be anything up to 2 hours away,
- the cost and availability of housing, where affordable supply is beginning to contract and the market is failing to accommodate some cohorts - particularly international and mature students with dependents,
- balancing their academic commitments with work demands, as well as finding good quality paid employment (as students look to take on more hours and longer shifts to help cover their basic living expenses).

In this context, SHU students are struggling to generate a sense of belonging during their studies, with our survey data and qualitative reports continuing to point to:

- A tailing off of student satisfaction over the course of their undergraduate degree, with increasing dissatisfaction with the sense of community at SHU among 2nd & 3rd year students mirroring an increase in them seriously considering dropping out.
- High levels of ambivalence toward the existing provision of sports and exercise, as well as other social extracurricular activities at the university that might otherwise help build a feeling of community and belonging.

This report expands upon each of these points, outlining the wider context and providing our own data to support our arguments. A list of the recommendations made throughout the report is compiled below.

Recommendations

Below is a list of recommendations made throughout the report.

Section	No.	Recommendation	SHU	HSU
1: Our learning experiences	1	Teaching staff should be supported to share and adopt approaches that make full use of a blended learning environment to encourage student engagement, improve accessibility and maximise learning opportunities. Expectations of learning experiences should be clearly communicated to students at the beginning of each academic year.	•	
	2	SHU should ensure the upcoming Delivery Models project findings are adopted consistently across the university, while maintaining: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A long-term iterative process for timetable planning, responsive to student feedback. b) The flexibility to continue to accommodate those students actively disadvantaged by the new timetables/consolidation of teaching hours. 	•	
	3	SHU should identify internal best practise in the communication and implementation of reasonable adjustments for disabled students on placement, and ensure the process is standardised, wherever possible, across the whole university.	•	
	4	SHU should continue to work with HSU in promoting resources for student support, including, but not limited to, lecture slides and video content that will market the Student Union offer, including student representation.	•	•
	5	SHU should continue to engage fully with the findings of the HSU Nursing & Midwifery Recovery Plan Report, maintaining the serious steps taken to improve placement allocation and flexibility, safeguarding/whistleblowing processes whilst on placement, and ensuring that the appropriate allocation of placement support contacts are in place for each student. Placement best practise should be shared across all Health and Social Care departments.	•	•
	6	SHU should encourage and support staff (ASELs, Student Experience Leads, etc) to work with HSU during the first semester of 23/24 academic year to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Improve awareness of the function and processes of academic societies, as well as the benefits they can bring to the student experience, 	•	•

		b) Increase both the number of academic societies (thereby reducing the number of courses without an academic society option) and the number of students engaged with those societies, so that every student has access to an appropriate academic society option.		
2: Our wellbeing and community	7	In addition to a continuing commitment to targeted food promotions such as £1 Wednesdays, all food outlets across campus should offer at least one affordable, healthy, hot food option, all day every day.	•	
	8	SHU should raise placement mileage reimbursement for mandatory placements, subject to eligibility, from 28p to 59p per mile for the first 3,500 miles and 24p thereafter, as per Royal College of Nursing guidelines.	•	
	9	SHU should explore the creation of an integrated, city-wide and multi-university partnership approach to housing, such as the partnership housing strategy in Nottingham, which considers affordability for students, diversity of student need (such as family housing, single housing, etc).	•	•
	10	SHU and HSU should offer more part-time student job opportunities. All job descriptions need to include minimum and estimated average weekly hours and some should not exceed 20 hrs per week to ensure that all students, including international students, can apply. All student jobs should be paid at the Real Living Wage, regardless of a students' age.	•	•
	11	SHU should expand their careers and employability offer to provide greater in-study work support, including events such as a student job fair, to assist students' progression into highly skilled employment.	•	
	12	SHU and HSU Welcome events should encourage the participation of returning students and specifically target some activities at those students continuing their studies.	•	•
	13	SHU and HSU should organise regular, free or low-cost social wellbeing activities, particularly social sport (e.g. a campus running club or GoodGym team, lunchtime walks from Collegiate Crescent, regular social team sports, morning walking bus from City campus to Collegiate, etc).	•	•

Methodologies

This report has been written and compiled by Hallam Students' Union's (HSU), Research, Insight and Student Voice (RISV) team, with contributions and input from various other functions within our organisation, including Representation and Democracy, Student Rights and Campaigns, and Student Communities and Development as well as the Advice Centre and our Elected Officers from the 2022/23 academic year. Most of the primary data referenced throughout this report (and outlined in [Appendix A](#)) has been collected through RISV's formal research activity, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including surveys, focus groups and interviews. The exception to this is our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' pulse survey which is commissioned by HSU and carried out by a third-party provider. This report also collates secondary data collected from other sources to support and validate our research, where appropriate these sources are referenced in footnotes. As always, we are pleased to have been able to co-create research using participatory methods with students and Elected Officers. Our 'Nursing & Midwifery Disability students Disclosure and Experience' research project was co-created with Elected Officers, and our Student Researcher was involved in the analysis and production of several of the research projects referenced in this report.

This year two of our research projects received formal ethical approval from SHU Research Ethics Committee: "Cost of Living Survey Report – Spring 2023" (Converis ID ER53139115) and "Nursing & Midwifery Disability students Disclosure and Experience" (Converis ID ER51606886).

In many ways the distinction between 'Teaching and Learning' and 'Wellbeing' in the overall student experience is a false one. We know that the quality of teaching delivery or timeliness of assessment feedback, for example, can impact student mental health and levels of anxiety. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis – something largely seen as a 'wellbeing' issue for the population in general – has had a direct effect on students' ability to engage fully with their course. So, while this report retains separate sections broadly describing first academic and then non-academic topics as a useful heuristic, the intersection of these spheres is highlighted throughout.

Impact review from 21/22

Following last year's Student Voice Report,¹ recommendations were made based on the collation and analysis of student feedback, formal research, and external data sources. The Students' Union, in partnership with the University, has worked hard to ensure that these issues have been addressed to improve the university experience for students. Below are some of the most significant changes that occurred based on recommendations from 2021/22 Student Voice Report. To read the full responses for each recommendation, please see [Appendix B](#).

- The University has moved to ensure that there has been a demonstrable increase in sessions taught on campus for 2022/23 academic year, while the Delivery Models project has included student feedback on benefits of online learning as part of its planning for future years.
- The College of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences implemented a raft of measures including a placement recovery plan to help deal with Covid-related disruption to Nursing and Midwifery courses.
- The College of Business, Technology and Engineering reduced the number of examinations, provided greater notice of exam timetabling and outlined an exam support package for students.
- The University has provided international students with targeted provision for study skills and student support, including an enhanced induction programme.
- The Students' Union has, in conjunction with the Hallam fund, launched our Period Products Subscription Scheme to provide for those struggling with access to menstrual products.
- Students' Union related activities such as Society membership, volunteering and events organising are now eligible for Hallam Award consideration, to reflect the important role involvement with the student Union can play in university life.

¹ HSU (2022). Student Voice Report 2021/22. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/pageassets/union/publications/Student-Voice-Report-2021-22.pdf>

Section 1 – Our learning experiences

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the way higher education in this country was delivered over the last few years.² Although the impact of social distancing measures on the university experience are acknowledged, there is far less consensus on which of the innovations and new practices brought about by Covid should be retained in the post-pandemic landscape. There are on-going debates as to the optimal balance of remote and in person learning, the impact of greater levels of remote delivery, and the corollary – less time on campus – will have on academic outcomes,³ as well as student's sense of community, belonging and wider wellbeing.⁴

Furthermore, while the negative aspects of the commodification of higher education and the student-as-consumer model are now something of a truism, it is clear that students are continuing to question the value for money their degrees provide.⁵ National survey data suggests that perceptions of value for money have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, despite the large-scale return of face-to-face teaching, and that teaching quality and course content remain significant reasons for this.⁶

1.1 Teaching Delivery

The absence of further lockdowns and relaxing of social distancing measures this academic year has allowed Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) to respond to students' concerns around the quality of course provision and the wider learning experience inherent in a majority on-line program, by providing a demonstrable increase in sessions taught on campus.⁷ Indeed, survey data from 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' suggests overall student satisfaction with the university experience has increased, as something approaching a traditional learning model has returned.

1.1.1 Our Data

'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' (HAWD) is Hallam Students' Union's (HSU) regular pulse survey, which looks at student satisfaction with the university experience, their engagement and satisfaction with the student union, as well as their broader wellbeing and sense of community. The survey has three waves and was open to all students. The first wave ran from 7th November to 12th December and received 1,675 responses (approx. 5% response rate based on the whole SHU population), the second was open between 20th February and 19th March 2023 and received

² Studente, S., Ellis, S., and Desai, B. (Eds.). (2021). *The impact of covid-19 on teaching and learning in higher education*. Nova Science Publishers.

³ Barber, M. (2021). Gravity assist: Propelling higher education into a bright future. Office for Students. Accessed on 13 May 2021, from:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/gravity-assist-propelling-higher-education-towards-a-brighter-future/>

⁴ Liasidou, A. (2023). Inclusive pedagogies in digital post-Covid-19 higher education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 50(1), 6–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12436>

⁵ Neves, J. and Stephenson, R. (2023). Student Academic Experience Survey 2023. *Higher Education Policy Institute*. Accessed 22 June 2023 via [Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf \(hepi.ac.uk\)](#)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ HSU (2022). Student Voice Report 2021/22. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/pageassets/union/publications/Student-Voice-Report-2021-22.pdf>

1,307 responses (approx. 3.8% response rate), while the third wave ran from 9th May to 5th June and received 1,148 responses (approx. 3.4% response rate).

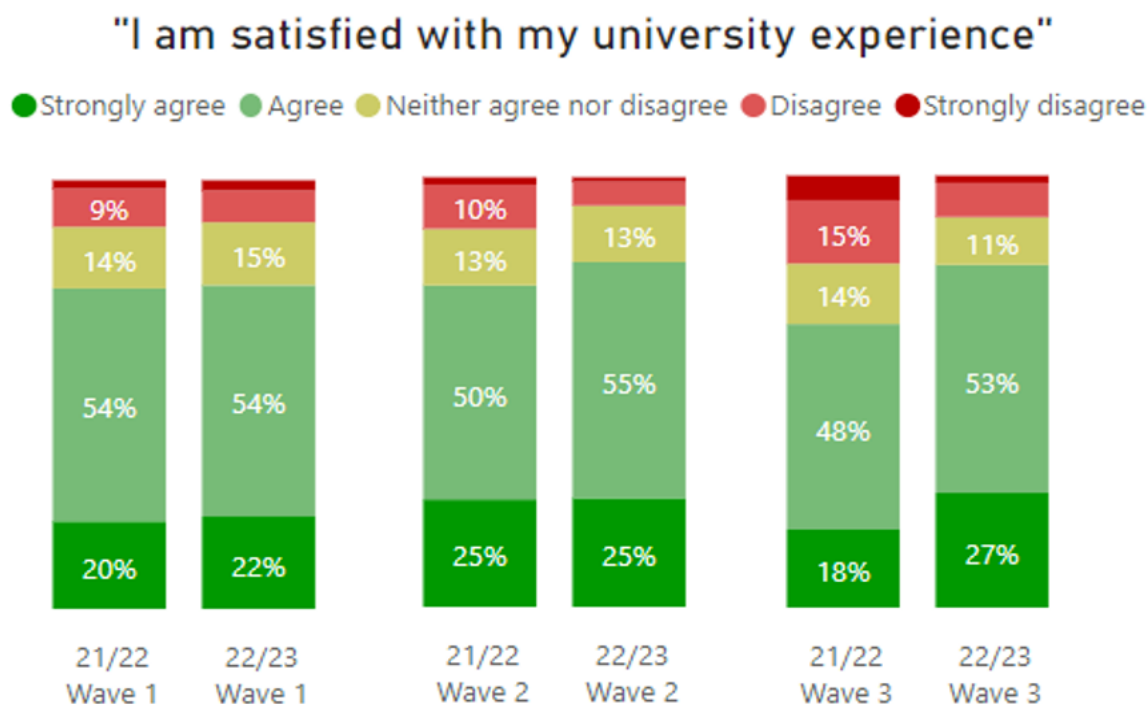


Figure 1: Wave on wave, year on year comparison of HHAWD data. 21/22 W1 n=3365, 22/23 W1 n=1675, 21/22 W2 n=1368, 22/23 W2 n=1307, 21/22 W3 n=1356, 22/23 W3 n=1148 (N/A's removed)

As figure 1 demonstrates, all three waves of this year's survey showed improved year on year sentiment, with Wave 3 fully fourteen percentage points higher than the same time last year, at 80%. Our students are generally happier and more satisfied with university than at any point in the last two years, and this improvement in sentiment grew as the academic year progressed.

Yet this return to 'normal' still reflects some of the changes brought about by Covid. Blended learning, combining in-person lectures and seminars, pre-recorded asynchronous delivery, and on-line sessions, are now the norm across all three colleges. However, feedback from our course and department reps suggests there is considerable variation both inter and intra-college as to how these methods are used, with exact delivery models left largely at the discretion of individual course leaders. Indeed, HHAWD survey data examining student satisfaction with their course and learning experience, from all three waves by department, shows as much variance within colleges as there is between them (see fig. 2).

Overall, the percentage of students satisfied by their course and/or learning experience in Wave 3 has increased significantly from this time last year (from 65% to 76%), but in the combined data from all three waves there is a substantial difference in satisfaction levels between the best performing departments, Natural and Built Environment (84%), Sheffield Institute of Education (83%), and the worst performing Nursing and Midwifery (64%), and Social Work, Social Care

and Community Studies (71%). While there are many factors that contribute to a student's learning experience, delivery of course content and learning materials, i.e., teaching itself, clearly remains a major one.⁸ Even accounting for the inherent differences in subjects and courses, this differential between departments points, at least in part, to some inconsistency in delivery.

Student satisfaction with their course and/or learning experience, by department

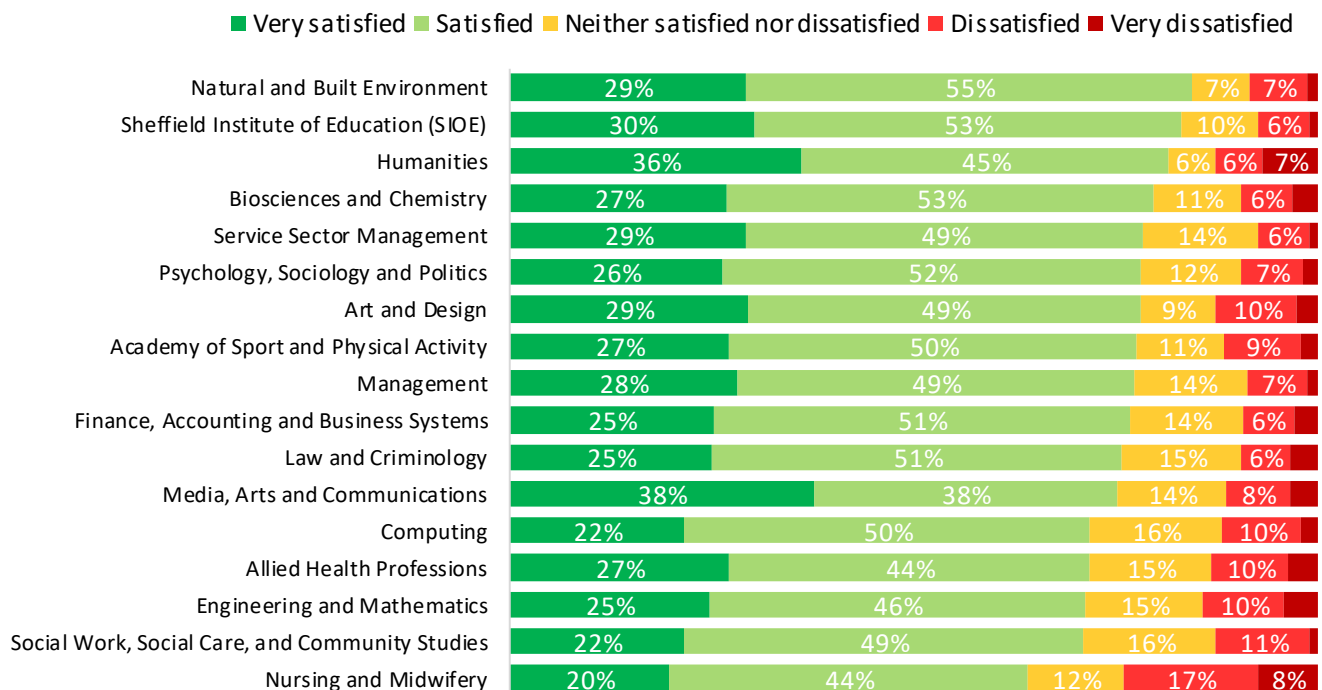


Figure 2: HHAWD 22/23, Waves 1, 2 & 3. Satisfaction with course / learning experience, by department. n=3987 (N/A's removed)

Focus group data, collected from students of all 3 colleges as part of HSU's Student Submission for the Teaching and Excellence Framework, suggests that in the worst cases lectures rely on rote repetition of material on the slide show with no interactivity, are rushed or truncated thereby missing much of the lesson material, and with some not recorded for students to watch back.

'I think everyone has that same problem of not enjoying online lectures. I mean personally I'm not a fan of them at all, and I kind of avoid doing it. Then I will come back and go through all the lectures after I've done one assessment, or whenever I need them done by, I will go through them. And I am looking forward to that change of platform [back to in-person].'

'In lectures, like there is no engagement. Maybe if they are online that's why as well'

⁸ Burgess, Senior, and Moores (2018). A 10-year case study on the changing determinants of university student satisfaction in the UK. *PLOS ONE* 13(2): e0192976. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192976>

'I just think I would rather go through the PowerPoint and Reading it from that. Instead of having an hour of my time to listen to someone read out what I can read in ten minutes. At the moment it's a little bit of a waste'

'There is an inconsistency as well [...] it's the idea that we can get a really, really good module and get really good input from it and then the next module is kind of like 'the zoom sessions are online' or 'all materials are online, go and do it''

Seminars reportedly faced issues of student engagement, with online sessions seeing students often unwilling to participate, silent with screens off or dropping out of breakout rooms, and in person sessions suffering from low attendance.

'You get put in these little breakout rooms on Zoom, and you will find that the majority of the group of students, they will just leave, which I can't blame them, because you can't really have that interaction with other students'

'I think that there was one [seminar] not too long ago about violence against women and girls, which I think that out of the class only four attended, including myself'

A recurring theme in the comments is of teaching failing to adapt to the shift to a blended paradigm and provide an engaging and interactive experience for students. In other cases, it seems the worst aspects of pandemic-era teaching have remained despite the reversion to in-person sessions. Yet this is not inevitable. New and innovative pedagogies have, and continue to be, developed that take advantage of a combination of distance and face-to-face learning to provide a rounded and more flexible learning experience.

When done well, these hybrid learning designs combine the strengths of synchronous and asynchronous learning to create interactive and engaging experiences, and actively increase accessibility⁹. Most commonly, recorded lectures aid those students not able to attend synchronous sessions due to financial and health-related problems, and caring responsibilities¹⁰. This is pertinent, not only as SHU is a widening participation institution, but also in view of the longer-tail implications of Covid for disabled students.¹¹ For those who can attend synchronous sessions, 'watch parties' can allow tutors, freed from presentational duties, to focus on creating interactive learning experiences, using pre-recorded material as a prompt for further academic discussions and debate. This hybrid arrangement can be especially beneficial for students who need

⁹ Kuepper-Tetzel, C., & Nordmann, E. (2021). Watch party lectures: synchronous delivery of asynchronous material. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 22. <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi22.696>

¹⁰ Liasidou, A. (2023). Inclusive pedagogies in digital post-Covid-19 higher education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 50: 6-27. <https://doi-org.hallam.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12436>

¹¹ Boys, J. (2022). Exploring Inequalities in the Social, Spatial and Material Practices of Teaching and Learning in Pandemic Times. *Postdigit Sci Educ* 4, 13-32 <https://doi-org.hallam.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s42438-021-00267-z>

structure in their learning, have poor self-regulation skills, have learning disabilities and/or come from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹²

Covid-era adaptations can also be used to ensure on-line delivery better responds to students' differing learning styles. For example, remote, synchronous lectures can include audio, visuals, and text, as well as interactive features such as integrated chat and whiteboards.¹³ Indeed, the more positive teaching and learning feedback we receive suggests that, in many departments, these practises already exist at Hallam. SHU provides extensive guidance on course and module delivery on its Academic Essentials page.¹⁴ The issue is, instead, one of cultural inconsistency and failure to foster extant good practice more widely.

Recommendation 1: Teaching staff should be supported to share and adopt approaches that make full use of a blended learning environment to encourage student engagement, improve accessibility and maximise learning opportunities. Expectations of learning experiences should be clearly communicated to students at the beginning of each academic year.

1.2 Timetabling and Course Organisation

Last year's NSS data pointed to the perennial issues of timetabling and course organisation as particular pinch points, with combined satisfaction for those two aspects dropping to 64% and 54% respectively.¹⁵ The tail end of the pandemic likely played a part in some of this loss of satisfaction.

1.2.1 Our Data

However, focus group data, collected by HSU in the autumn of 2022 as part of our Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Student Submission, and which looked at departments that were materially below benchmark for student experience measures,¹⁶ as well as consistent course and department rep feedback recorded in our Monthly Student Feedback Reports,¹⁷ suggest incoherent timetabling remains a significant issue for students. Most commonly with:

- contact hours spread sparsely across the entire week, meaning some students may be traveling to campus for a single 1- or 2-hours in-person session on a given day,

or,

- Sessions with differing delivery methods scheduled too close together, with in-person and synchronous remote sessions following directly after one

¹² Nordmann, E., Hutchison, J. and MacKay, J. R. (2021). Lecture rapture: the place and case for lectures in the new normal, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27 (5), 709– 716

¹³ Liasidou, A. (2023). Inclusive pedagogies in digital post-Covid-19 higher education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 50: 6-27. <https://doi-org.hallam.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12436>

¹⁴ [Academic Essentials - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

¹⁵ The Source (2022). National Student Survey 2022 Report. Accessed 23 June 2023 via [Workbook: NSS Report \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ OFS (2022). TEF data dashboard. Accessed 26 June 2023 via [TEF data dashboard: Data dashboard - Office for Students](#)

¹⁷ See: Monthly Student Feedback Reports for 22/23 available from: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/union/publications/>

another, leaving students struggling to find suitable on-campus space to do both.

These issues are complicated by the unusual and diverse demographic makeup of the SHU student body. In the 2022/23 year over 20,000 Sheffield Hallam students declared themselves as 'commuters', i.e., their home postcode matched their term time postcode.¹⁸ While this statistic does not perfectly capture the split between those students who face onerous travel to campus and those who do not, it does give us an indication that most SHU students face some barriers (distance, time, cost, etc...) to attending university in person. Indeed, a recent study completed by academics from SHU showed that, while commuter students were very committed to maintaining their academic engagement as best they could, this became increasingly untenable when asked to attend short academic sessions, such as a single one hour session on campus that day.¹⁹ This is especially the case as a primary motive for students to decide to commute in the first place is to save money.²⁰

This dynamic is even further complicated by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Students, commuter or otherwise, are working longer hours in paid employment than ever before to help supplement their incomes.²¹ Our Cost of Living survey of 1,512 SHU students, carried out between 18th April and 8th May 2023, found that fully 64% of respondents are now in paid employment of some kind. Furthermore, recent nation-wide survey data found that for those in employment, the mean hours worked per week by full-time undergraduates has increased to 13.5.²²

Qualitative responses in our Cost of Living survey paint a bleak picture of students having to make almost impossible choices to survive, while maintaining their studies.²³

'Everything is a lot more expensive, I'm close to working a full-time job alongside doing a masters, with student loan and NHS bursary and I still barely get by each month'

'Everything has gone up, in the inflation, that I tend to enjoy or need and my maintenance loan barely covers rent alone. I have to work two jobs alongside uni to enable a somewhat stable lifestyle'

¹⁸ The Source (2023). Student Enrolment Report – Demographics. Accessed 19 June 2023 via [Workbook: Enrolments and Targets Report \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.shu.ac.uk/workbook/enrolments-and-targets-report)

¹⁹ Stalmirska, A. M., and Mellon, V. (2022). "It feels like a job ..." Understanding commuter students: Motivations, engagement, and learning experiences. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*. Volume 30. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2021.100368>

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Neves, J., and Stephenson, R. (2023). Student Academic Experience Survey 2023. *Higher Education Policy Institute*. Accessed 22 June 2023 via [Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf \(hepi.ac.uk\)](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/student-academic-experience-survey-2023.pdf)

²² Ibid

²³ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/microsoft-word-cost-of-living-report-june-2023.docx)

'I work over 20 hours a week and to do this alongside my studies is very difficult and it's affecting my studies and means I have less time and creates stress'

'I am significantly struggling to manage university commitments and having to work to pay my bills. It's a constant battle and every aspect has suffered as a result'

These pressures interact with, and are compounded by, other commitments like commuting and caregiving, and mean that contact hours scheduled at the extremities of the working day, especially those towards the end of the week when the preponderance of hospitality job hours are located, will further pressure students to choose between earning enough to live, and engaging fully with their studies.

SHU's ongoing Delivery Models project (for which HSU helped facilitate the student consultation) is being carried out in tandem with the wider portfolio redevelopment underway at the university. It aims to establish a clear approach for planning, scheduling, and delivery of the curriculum through clarity in how the university resources modules and courses. This includes a faster, simplified and more stable approach to timetabling.²⁴ The project's final proposals have yet to be published, but we hope they will address at least some of the above concerns by including the aspiration to consolidate the number of in-person study days on campus, while giving students a greater understanding of the totality of their learning experience, beyond their core timetabled hours. A simplified and standardised approach to timetabling should also facilitate timetables being confirmed and released to students earlier, which is a key concern for students with childcare or caring responsibilities and jobs which need coordinating around their studies.²⁵ It is also important from the perspective of student equity that these models, and the principles that underpin them, be adopted across the university where at all possible. Moreover, ongoing student feedback should be integrated into the long-term design and improvement of timetables, as an iterative and co-creative process.

Recommendation 2: SHU should ensure the upcoming Delivery Models project findings are adopted consistently across the university, while maintaining:

- a) A long-term iterative process for timetable planning, responsive to student feedback.
- b) The flexibility to continue to accommodate those students actively disadvantaged by the new timetables/consolidation of teaching hours.

1.3 Placements

SHU promotes itself as an applied university that equips its students with practical skills they can take into their lives after university, via vocational

²⁴ [Delivery models \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)

²⁵ Tones, M., Fraser, J., Elder, R. et al. (2009). Supporting mature-aged students from a low socioeconomic background. *High Educ* 58, 505–529. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9208-y>

teaching embedded within its curriculum.²⁶ As part of this approach, an analysis of course prospectus and departmental websites carried out by HSU suggests most courses at the university offer some form of vocational placement experience, either as a part of the course itself or via a sandwich year. The diversity of disciplines and placement settings results in an inevitable amount of variation in student experience. Certain sectors, in particular those in the public sphere, have now faced well over a decade of real-terms funding cuts with the inevitable impact on working conditions, staff morale, etc., which affects the placement experience for those courses.²⁷ Some professions have a statutorily mandated number of placement hours that must be completed for a student to qualify or be accredited, and this places a different onus on the placement experience.

Less explicable, however, are the differences experienced by students caused by inconsistent internal SHU practices and procedures. Specifically, over 4,500 SHU students currently have learning contracts, which identify reasonable adjustments for teaching, learning, and assessment for study. These cannot be directly implemented in placement settings and need to be negotiated individually with placement providers.

1.3.1 Our Data

Yet our Nursing and Midwifery Disability Students Disclosure report²⁸ has found students with disabilities will find a significantly different process for disclosing impairments to/seeking reasonable adjustments from placement settings, depending on their department. For example, students in Nursing and Midwifery will currently find that they are entirely responsible for disclosing their disability to, and negotiating any reasonable adjustments they require with, their placement setting. A potentially daunting and stressful task. Furthermore, this can only be done once placement allocation has already taken place, and little or no consideration of a student's likely requirements is taken in the allocation itself.²⁹ Students in some other departments on the other hand, will find themselves supported throughout the disclosure process, with learning contracts being translated into setting-specific adjustments, and management strategies developed in conjunction with their personal tutor, before being discussed with the placement. Both Universities UK (UUK) and work-based learning charity ASET advocate HE institutions provide comprehensive support for students with disabilities, both prior to and during placements, which should include assistance negotiating reasonable adjustments with placement settings.³⁰ At present, that cannot be said to be the case for all students at Sheffield Hallam.

²⁶ SHU. (2023). Transforming Lives. Accessed 28th June 2023 via https://www.shu.ac.uk/-/media/home/about-us/governance-and-strategy/strategy/transforming-lives.pdf?sc_lang=en

²⁷ [Record numbers of teachers in England quitting profession, figures show | Teacher shortages | The Guardian](#)

²⁸ Kemhadjian, K., Rogers, K., and Garvin-Smith, S. (2023). Nursing and Midwifery Disability Students Disclosure and Experiences: A Qualitative Assessment. Accessed 28 June 2023 via [Nursing-and-Midwifery-Disability-Students-Disclosure-and-Experience-Report-April-2023.pdf \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](#)

²⁹ See Appendix 1: Disability Support for Students on Placement Infographic.

³⁰ [Suicide-safer universities \(universitiesuk.ac.uk\); eASET-Good-Practice-Guide-for-Supporting-Students-with-Disabilities-on-Placement.pdf \(asetonline.org\)](#)

Recommendation 3: SHU should identify internal best practise in the communication and implementation of reasonable adjustments for disabled students on placement, and ensure the process is standardised, wherever possible, across the whole university.

1.4 College Insights

The following section draws on insights gained from the three university colleges. While the findings are often based on college-specific data, our intention is that the subsequent recommendations will have utility across the university.

1.4.1 BTE

Business, Technology & Engineering (BTE), is one of the more diverse colleges at SHU, containing both the most Post-grad (PG) students and the most international students, albeit these two groups overlap quite heavily.³¹ The last academic year has seen significant concerns from students, many of whom sit in this international postgrad cohort, around the return of in-person assessments. This was fed back consistently via course and department reps into the Departmental Student Forums for the college and became a fixture of the department rep write-ups for BTE in our Monthly Student Feedback Reports.³² For some on engineering courses who, due to Covid and social distancing, had never sat an in-person exam, or for whom English is a second language, this was a daunting change. Data collected from focus groups for HSU's TEF submission indicated that student dissatisfaction with the move back to in person exams was born, not just of a lack of familiarity with the format, but in a genuine belief in the previous assessment approach. As one student put it:

'So online exams were really helpful, and I think that they are a lot more realistic to life. Because it's very rare that you are going to be put in the situation where you can't access Google or your Note or have things that help you because that is just completely counterintuitive to actual life. You want people to succeed in a job. Why restrict them to what they've got in their memory?'

Furthermore, there was some concern amongst students that SHU had unilaterally decided on the return to in-person exams without full consultation on the options:

'[We] were told by the head of department that exams could not be online, that it's a uni decision, and obviously it's impossible for it to be online. Obviously instead of doing the right step, which was to go to the accreditation and obviously see what the actual ruling body says as opposed to just saying 'Ah, well it's something that can't happen''

However, after extensive liaison with HSU, an agreement was reached with college and departmental leadership to heavily promote exam support and skills sessions, to make the transition back to in-person as manageable for the students as

³¹ The Source (2022). Student Enrolment Report. Accessed 23 June 2023 via [Workbook: Enrolments and Targets Report \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/union/publications/workbook-enrolments-and-targets-report-shu.ac.uk)

³² See: Monthly Student Feedback Reports for 22/23 available from: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/union/publications/>

possible. While we may need to await the upcoming NSS results to see how successful these measures have been in improving student sentiment in respect of assessment and feedback, we believe it vital that the excellent progress of the past 12 months be maintained, and extensive promotion of additional student support remain in place in the coming year. To this end HSU have prepared promotional material that can be added to course leader slide decks and shown in tutor sessions that will promote the union and its support offer. This includes promotion of our representation function as Course and Department Reps are a great resource to signpost students to other support systems, like SHU Skills Centre and The HSU Advice Centre. It simply requires buy-in from course-leads and tutors to incorporate these materials into their existing teaching material.

Recommendation 4: SHU should continue to work with HSU in promoting resources for student support, including, but not limited to, lecture slides and video content that will market the Student Union offer, including student representation.

1.4.2 HWLS

The college of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences (HWLS), this year, continued to face some long-term, structural challenges. The sectors most of its department's feed into (namely Health and Social Care), already subject to over a decade of real-terms cuts to funding, have been profoundly impacted by the Covid pandemic.³³ While Biosciences and Chemistry, and Academy of Sport and Physical Activity students showed relatively high levels of satisfaction with their course and university experience, the concerns around the teaching and learning experience of student nurses, discussed in last year's HSU Student Voice Report,³⁴ appeared to be supported by the 21/22 NSS results. Regrettably, SHU Nursing and Midwifery (N&M) students were, across a range of metrics, among the least satisfied, and the department among the worst performing of its kind, in the country.³⁵

N&M is one of the largest subject areas at SHU, with most of these students studying full-time. The national removal of placements available for students due to the pandemic meant that many N&M students across the country, including SHU, were unable to fulfil their placement hours needed for qualification.³⁶ HE institutions explored a range of measures to allow students to learn, whilst keeping them and staff safe.³⁷ This saw SHU taking advantage of the Nursing and

³³ [COVID-19: Impact of the pandemic on healthcare delivery \(bma.org.uk\)](https://www.bma.org.uk/covid-19-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-healthcare-delivery)

³⁴ HSU (2022). Student Voice Report 2021/22. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/pageassets/union/publications/Student-Voice-Report-2021-22.pdf>

³⁵ The Source (2022). National Student Survey 2022 Report. Accessed 23 June 2023 via [Workbook: NSS Report \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.shu.ac.uk/workbook/nss-report)

³⁶ Nursing Times, 10 June 2020. 'Concern over student placement hours lost to pandemic'. Accessed on 30 November via <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/education/concern-over-student-placement-hours-lost-to-pandemic-10-06-2020>.

³⁷ NHS Employers, 17 March 2022. 'Expanding placement capacity'. Accessed on 30 November 2022 via <https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/expanding-placement-capacity>.

Midwifery Council's pragmatic decision to increase the number of the 2,300 mandated clinical placement hours that could be 'simulated' to 600, by using tools like the Oxford Medical Simulator, to allow students to practice clinical skills in a virtual or simulated way. The simulated software and other simulated placement activities helped some students, in extremis, to graduate, albeit slightly later than anticipated, and progress into highly skilled roles or further education. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, many students were still behind on placement hours, and the competencies to be signed off thereon. During data gathering for the TEF Student Submission, Nursing students disclosed feeling ill-prepared for employment, particularly those in level 6 (final year).

'We had a first year of 600 hours of simulated placement and most of my simulated placement so far as been learning online. That is 600 hours of that, which is not the same as working in theatres, in A&E, on a ward.'

Following negative feedback from course and department reps in the early part of the autumn semester, the college leadership drew up a recovery plan to clear the placement backlog. In turn, HSU (working with the university) undertook focus group research with N&M to help track the implementation of said recovery plan. The subsequent report found concerning failures within the department, that extended beyond lost placement hours.³⁸

The data compiled in our report, 'Nursing and Midwifery Recovery Plan: A Qualitative Assessment', was taken from two 2-hour long focus groups comprising of twelve participants. Participants were recruited from across the Nursing and Midwifery department and included students at levels 5, 6, and 7 from child, adult and mental health nursing courses, and a combination of course reps and lay-students.

The report's findings included serious student concerns related to placements. In particular:

- an opaque and unfair allocation system
 - students described being allocated to the same placement more than once, despite this conflicting with accreditation requirements for variation in placements. One student reported being sent back to a setting they had raised a serious complaint about, during their previous placement window. Students stated the grounds to appeal a placement allocation were too narrow, had been changed without consultation, and were not clear. Learning contracts were not properly considered in allocation decisions.
- extremely poor communication from the Placement Team

³⁸ Rogers, K., Mallinder, A., and Garvin-Smith, S., (2023). Nursing and Midwifery Recovery Plan: A qualitative Assessment. Accessed 4th July 2023, via [Nursing-and-Midwifery-Recovery-Report-March-2023.pdf \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/Nursing-and-Midwifery-Recovery-Report-March-2023.pdf)

- Students described the Placement Team's communication style as "rude", "blunt", "unresponsive" and "corporate". The availability of the Placement Team was also critiqued, with the timing of allocation emails and Placement Team holidays meaning an extremely truncated window to appeal decisions. Furthermore, their communication with placement settings was also considered substandard. Students believed that their required proficiencies were not clearly communicated to placement organisations, nor was what was required of the student to demonstrate proficiency in order to receive sign-off.
- Placement preparation/simulated placements
 - Participants recognised the potential value of simulated placements in preparing them for placements but felt that they needed significant improvement. They described broken or insufficient equipment (including dummy arms for venepuncture, and broken iPads), lack of staff oversight, and a mismanaged and poorly briefed community project.
- the unsafe situations students found themselves in during placement, and the lack of support and supervision.
 - Students described being left unsupervised on busy wards, working long shifts, and being treated as normal staff members rather than as supernumerary. A focus group member described being left alone on a COVID ward and having to shout down a corridor to seek assistance. Another described a student being placed on a locked Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit ward with no key and no access to toilets. One student, with previous healthcare experience, was asked to supervise a trainee healthcare assistant with no supervision themselves. Students often found themselves on shift when their practice supervisors or assessors were not.

Students did feel that the need for recovery had been acknowledged, that the university had made significant progress towards addressing concerns, and that students had been listened to, but that the plans for recovery had not always been fully or effectively implemented. One focus group member described the university's approach as 'great ideas, poor execution.'

Satisfaction with course / learning experience

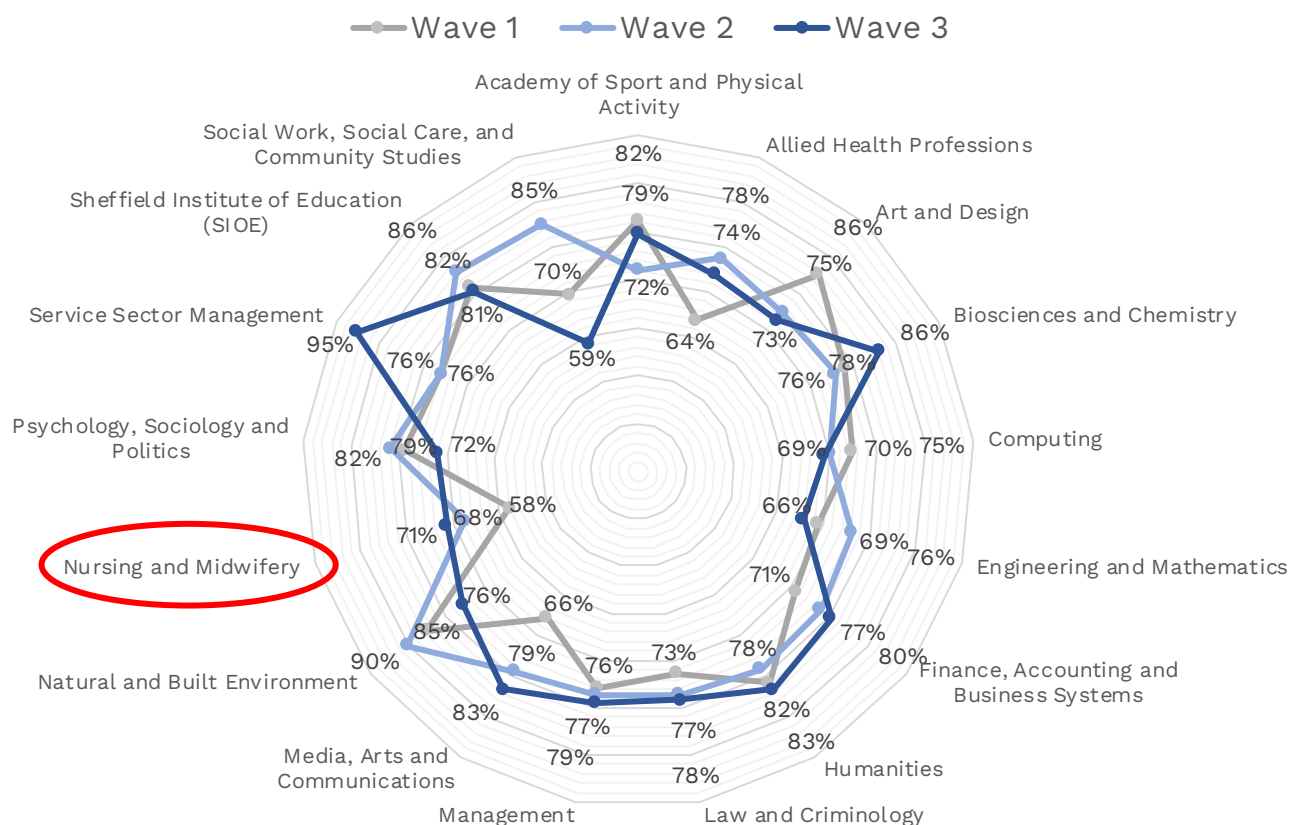


Figure 3: HHAWD 22/23 Waves 1, 2 & 3, Percentage of students satisfied or very satisfied with their course/learning experience. n= 3987 (N/A's removed)

The response to the N&M report from college management has, thus far, been encouraging and steps are clearly being taken within the department to address some of these issues. However, it is also clear from our pulse-survey data (see fig. 3) that satisfaction with the course and learning experience within the department, despite improving wave-on-wave, is still amongst the lowest at the university.

With trainee nursing spaces due to increase by a third nationally in the next five years and existing training institutions like SHU no doubt expected to pick up the slack, it is vital that the university continues to grapple with the underlying organisational problems currently impacting the student experience.³⁹

Recommendation 5: SHU should continue to engage fully with the findings of the HSU Nursing & Midwifery Recovery Plan Report, maintaining the serious steps taken to improve placement allocation and flexibility, safeguarding & whistleblowing processes whilst on placement, and ensuring that the appropriate

³⁹ [Government aims to boost NHS with thousands more doctors and nurses | NHS | The Guardian](#)

allocation of placement support contacts are in place for each student. Placement best practise should be shared across all Health and Social Care departments.

1.4.3 SSA

Social Sciences and Arts (SSA) is the largest of SHU's three colleges and includes an extremely broad diversity of departments and subject types. This diversity, encompassing courses from Fine Art to Professional Policing, makes summarising student voice within the college a tricky proposition. But it also, perhaps helps explain one of the more consistent strands of feedback we can identify, namely that of a lack of community or sense of belonging.

As documented in the HSU Monthly Student Feedback Reports, department reps from SSA have consistently described a lack of cohesive community in departmental student forums, with reps in the Sheffield Institute of Education (SIOE), Humanities, Law and Criminology (L&C) and Art and Design (A&D) undertaking various initiatives to try and foster a sense of belonging, they felt was lacking.⁴⁰

This is largely supported by data from our HHAWD surveys. Combining all three waves for 22/23, we see that departments from SSA occupy six of the bottom nine spots when ranked by 'satisfaction with student community and/or sense of belonging':

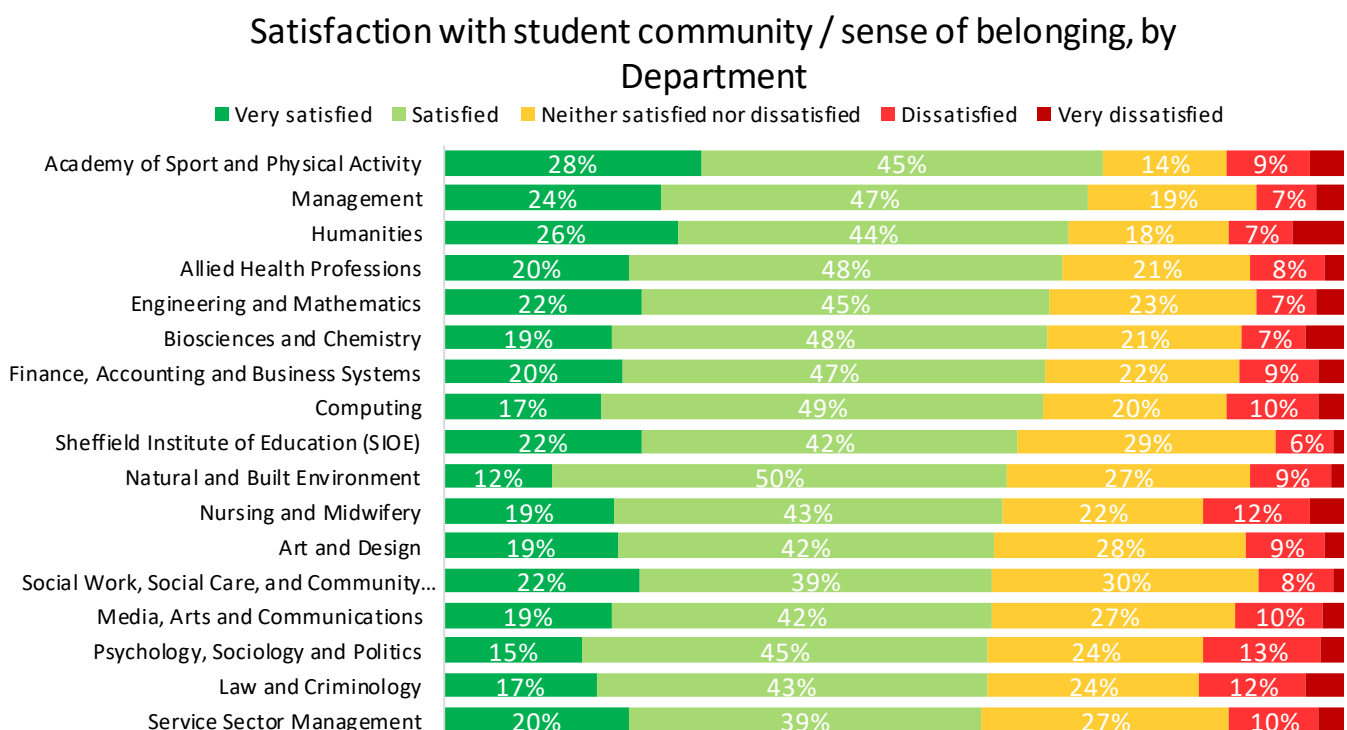


Figure 4: HHAWD 22/23, Waves 1, 2 & 3. Satisfaction with student community / sense of belonging. n=3878 (N/A's removed)

⁴⁰ See: Monthly Student Feedback Reports for 22/23 available from: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/union/publications/>

It is, of course, important to consider innate differences in the learning experience different courses will provide, and the different kinds of students these courses will attract, when making comparisons across departments. However, 2022 NSS data shows courses for Law, Education, Psychology, Criminology, and Geography at SHU are all significantly below sectoral top quartile benchmarking for question 21, “I feel part of a community of staff and students”.⁴¹

The link between the strength of student’s sense of community and belonging, mental health, likelihood of dropping out, and, ultimately, their final grades, is nuanced but well established.^{42,43} What is more, there are clearly aspects of teaching and learning provision that can help foster community amongst student groups.

For instance, participants in our TEF data gathering from Psychology, Sociology and Politics (PSP) described being assigned to Academic Development and Personal Tuition (ADAPT) groups, tutor-led sessions which students can use as forums to discuss any issues or difficulties they may have. Yet, as helpful as these have undoubtedly been, they have their limitations. As one student put it:

‘We never met each other and not that much of great friends, but we do know of each other. We don’t see each other a lot, as well. But we know if are struggling with something, we can always message in.’

Another area that may prove even more fruitful in generating a sense of community is academic societies. There are currently forty-six active academic societies at SHU, covering a range of subject areas and providing a raft of extra-curricular activities for students on related courses. As per figure 5, our HHAWD data suggests there is a strong relationship between satisfaction with the provision of extracurricular activities and events, and satisfaction with student community and sense of belonging.

⁴¹ [Workbook: NSS Report \(shu.ac.uk\)](#) ; “I feel part of a community of staff and students” – This question has been removed from the 2023 core question set: [Annex A: Questionnaires for NSS 2023 and 2022 \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

⁴² Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., and Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2022). A sense of belonging at university: Student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(3), 397–408. <https://doi-org.hallam.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1955844>;

⁴³ Fernández, D. P., Ryan, M. K., and Begeny, C. T. (2023). Recognizing the diversity in how students define belonging: evidence of differing conceptualizations, including as a function of students’ gender and socioeconomic background. *Social Psychology of Education*, 26(3), 673–708. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-023-09761-7>

		Student Satisfaction with Extra-curricular activities and events					
		Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Grand Total
Student Satisfaction with Student community/sense of belonging	Very satisfied	57%	29%	13%	1%	0%	100%
	Satisfied	14%	55%	27%	4%	1%	100%
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6%	32%	53%	9%	1%	100%
	Dissatisfied	6%	30%	37%	24%	4%	100%
	Very dissatisfied	1%	13%	33%	26%	27%	100%
Grand Total		20.00%	40.96%	30.71%	6.66%	1.67%	100%

Figure 5: HHAWD 22/23, Waves 1, 2 & 3. Satisfaction with Extra-curricular activities and events, by satisfaction with student community/sense of belonging. n=3530 (NA's removed)

As such, SHU and HSU have worked collaboratively to establish academic societies that help to build community within a subject area, with HSU working to reduce the bureaucracy and streamline the process for creating a society and SHU creating the role of Academic Societies and Enhancement Lead (ASEL) to promote societies to students. However, HSU's experience suggests the implementation of this role has not been flawless and that there is still room for even greater collaboration and work in this area, with some university staff lacking awareness of the benefits of, and stipulations surrounding, the establishment and running of academic societies. Furthermore, not all students across the university have access to an academic society relevant to their area of study, despite this being a SHU ambition. As we can see from figure 6, there was a particular disparity within SSA, where over half of courses lacked a viable academic society option for their students during the 22/23 academic year.

Breakdown of represented courses by college:

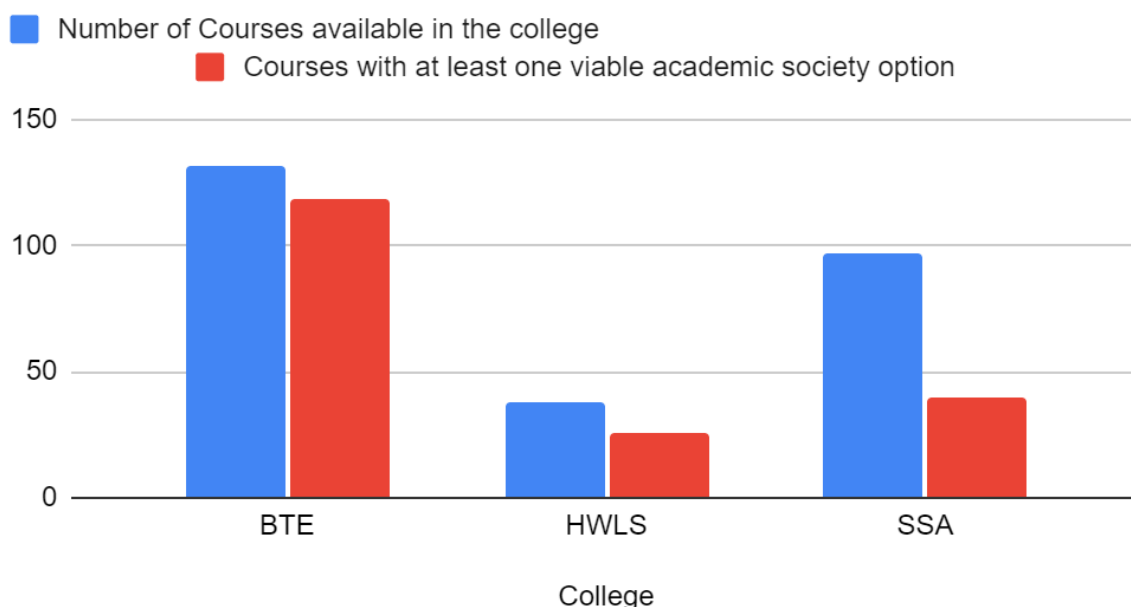


Figure 6: The number of course subjects at all levels, by college, represented by a current academic society. Based on internal HSU research for academic year 22//23.

SHU should strongly advise nominated academic staff to liaise with HSU around the running of and, where necessary, establishment of new academic societies. This would significantly improve the promotion of societies to students and ultimately help reduce the shortfall of society options in SSA and other colleges, as more students realise the benefits academic societies can bring and, with the support of academic staff and HSU, set up new ones. Implementation of this work has already started within some areas of the university which has resulted in a positive improvement in the later part of the 22/23 academic year. The challenge is now to build on that work.

Recommendation 6: SHU should encourage and support staff (ASELs, Student Experience Leads, etc) to work with HSU during the first semester of 23/24 academic year to:

- Improve awareness of the function and processes of academic societies, as well as the benefits they can bring to the student experience,
- Increase both the number of academic societies (thereby reducing the number of courses without an academic society option) and the number of students engaged with those societies, so that every student has access to an appropriate academic society option.

Section 2 – Our Wellbeing and Community

2.1 Overview

Research carried out at one UK university during Covid discovered that self-reported anxiety and depression among students increased as the pandemic went on.⁴⁴ At first, students were relieved from the pressures of social expectation and on-campus activity, and lockdown enabled them to prioritise individual need. However lengthy periods of social restriction and uncertainty led to higher anxiety and lower wellbeing as the pandemic continued throughout 2021.⁴⁵ Although it is too early for significant longitudinal research to have been undertaken into the effect of the pandemic on university students, the 2022 cohort is likely to still be impacted by the detrimental effect of prolonged lockdown on mental health and wellbeing whilst simultaneously navigating a return to on-campus learning which is substantially different socially and academically to most of their recent learning experiences. As has been noted, living through a traumatic experience such as a global pandemic can cause long-lasting mental health issues, many of which do not manifest themselves in the immediate aftermath.⁴⁶

2.1.1 Our Data

That said, initial signs at SHU are positive. As has already been described in [section one](#), our HHAWD survey data suggests that student satisfaction with the overall university experience has improved throughout the year and is now at its highest point in the last 2 years.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as figure 7 shows, the percentage of students rating their enjoyment of university as eight-or-more out of ten has increased across this year's three waves and, at 45%, is five percentage points higher than this time last year.

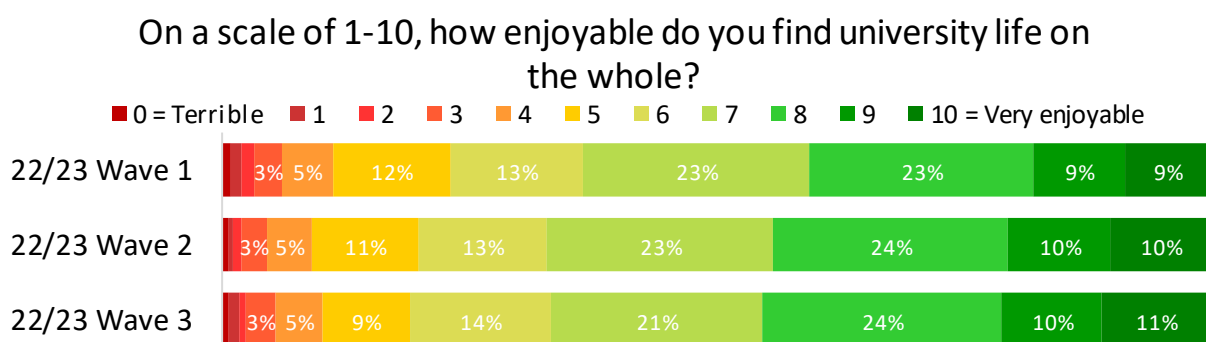


Figure 7: HHAWD 22/23, Waves 1, 2 & 3. Student enjoyment of university life, on a scale of 1-10. n=4130

Similarly, the rate at which students declare having seriously considered dropping out has dropped from 31% in Wave 3 21/22, to 25% in Wave 3 22/23.

⁴⁴ Bennett, J., Heron, J., Gunnell, D., Purdy, S., and Linton, M.J. (2022) The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student mental health and wellbeing in UK university students: a multiyear cross-sectional analysis, *Journal of Mental Health*, 31 (4), pp. 597-604. From <https://www-tandfonline-com.hallam.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/09638237.2022.2091766>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Morgan, B., Simmons, L. (2021) 'A 'PERMA' Response to the Pandemic: An Online Positive Education Programme to Promote Wellbeing in University Students' *Frontiers in education*, 6, From: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.642632/full>

⁴⁷ HHAWD data collection only began in 2021/22, giving 2 years of longitudinal data.

Unfortunately, it is not all good news. As figure 8 demonstrates, significant numbers of students are struggling with stress and anxiety, work/life balance, workloads.

During your time at university, which, if any, of the following would you say you have struggled with to the extent that it has had a significant negative impact on your personal wellbeing?

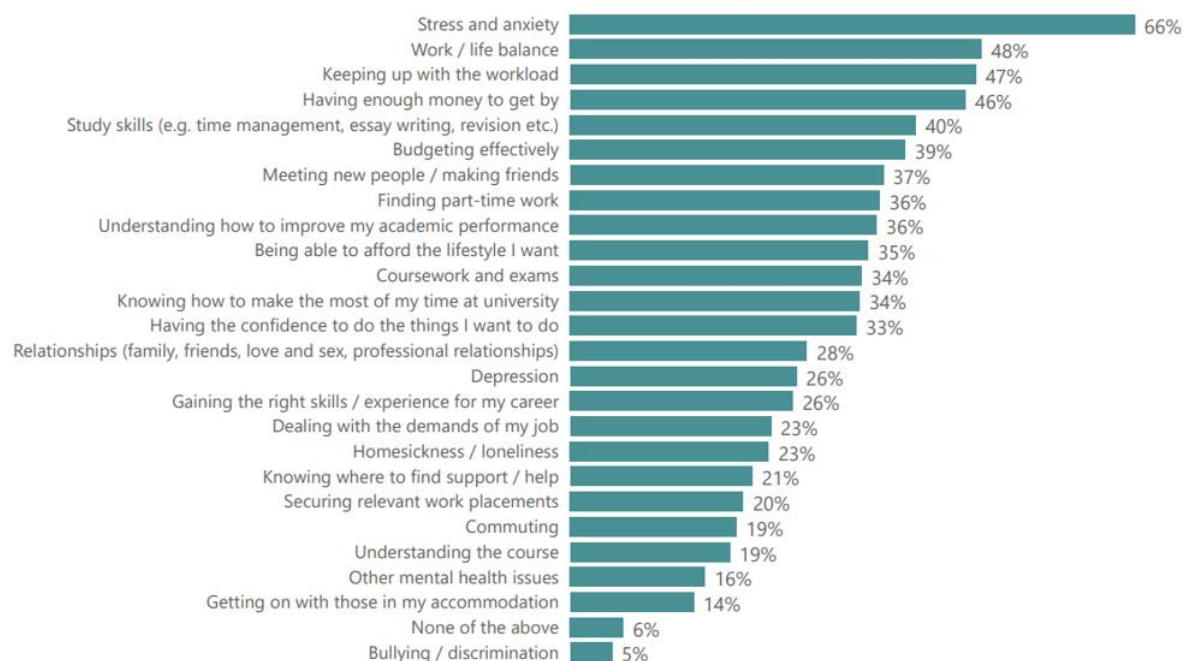


Figure 8: HHAUD 22/23, Wave 3. Factors that have negatively impacted student wellbeing. n=1148

On this latter point 46% of respondents said that worrying about having enough money to get by was negatively impacting their personal wellbeing, up fully nine percentage points from this time last year. No doubt a consequence of the on-going cost-of-living crisis.

2.2 Cost of Living

The cost of living across the UK has risen drastically in the past year; as the Office for National Statistics states, nine in ten higher education students reported that their cost of living had increased compared to last year⁴⁸. The Russell Group Students' Unions Cost of Living Report found that, after housing costs, the majority of respondents to their survey fell below the poverty line.⁴⁹ Study after study show, that the impact of rising costs are felt across all areas of the student

⁴⁸ Johnston, C., and Grant, C. (2022). Cost of living and higher education students, England: 24 October to 7 November 2022. Retrieved from Office for National Statistics: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/costoflivingandhighereducationstudentsengland/24octoberto7november2022>

⁴⁹ Russell Group Students' Unions. (2023). *Student Cost of Living Report*. Russell Group Students' Unions. From: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63f4ed73056f42572785c28e/t/640b4a3d20fc6122160c275e/1678461513650/Cost+of+Living+Report+-+March+2023.pdf>

experience.^{50,51} Although cited less than mental health pressures, financial difficulties and the difficulty of balancing work and other commitments were both listed as the reasons students were considering dropping out in the Student Academic Experience Survey, and both increased as a factor for the second year in a row.⁵² The survey also stated that approximately 40% of students cited 'cost of living' as a factor influencing a perception of university as a poor value for money; for students in England, Wales and Scotland it was the dominant factor.

2.2.1 Our Data

HSU, seeking more bespoke data, undertook our Cost of Living survey between 18 April and 8 May. It was open to all SHU students and attracted 1,512 responses⁵³. Our survey found that the main area which is currently substantially impacting students is the rising cost of food. 69% of respondents said that the cost of food had a substantial impact on them and their finances this academic year, and only 2% said they felt no impact from the rising cost of food. Overall, students suggested that behind the rising cost of food, they were most impacted by growing energy bills (57%), the cost of socialising (51%) and rent (48%).

When asked which top three changes they wanted to see, almost all students wanted interventions or help with the cost of food. 425 respondents asked for support with the cost of food on campus and 372 respondents wanted help with the cost of groceries. Only 30% rarely or never skipped meals, suggesting that 70% were cutting back on food or meals in some form. Worryingly, 30% of respondents stated that they were often or always skipping meals. In the words of one respondent,

'I have gone days without food before because I had to pay rent and bills and could not afford to buy food afterwards.'

Recommendation 7: In addition to a continuing commitment to targeted food promotions such as £1 Wednesdays, all food outlets across campus should offer at least one affordable, healthy, hot food option, all day every day.

Whilst only 31% of students identified the cost of travel as having significant impact, some sections of the student population felt the impact more keenly, particularly mature students aged 26-30 (36%) and students in HWLS (41%). The impact of travel costs on HWLS students is reflected in the Nursing and Midwifery Placement Recovery Report; students identified financial recovery from the disruption of placements as a pressing issue and stated that the cost of travelling to placements was a significant contributory factor. While it is perhaps worth noting that most respondents declared they travel to campus on foot, students

⁵⁰ Savanta polling and the Sutton Trust. (2023). COST OF LIVING AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. The Sutton Trust. From: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Cost-of-Living-University-Students.pdf>

⁵¹ NUS. (2022b). *Student Cost of Living Report*. National Union of Students. From: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/37/attachments/original/1666093713/Student_Cost_of_Living_-_NUS_report.pdf?1666093713

⁵² Neves, J. and Stephenson, R. (2023). Student Academic Experience Survey 2023. *Higher Education Policy Institute*. From: [Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf](https://hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf) (hepi.ac.uk).

⁵³ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx](https://hallamstudentsunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Microsoft-Word-Cost-of-Living-Report-June-2023.docx) (hallamstudentsunion.com)

undertaking mandatory placements may be asked to travel up to 2 hours to their setting, incurring travel costs accordingly. While there is currently a reimbursement scheme for eligible students to claim back travel expenses at a rate of 28p per mile, that is less than half the rate advocated for by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) for student nurses,⁵⁴ who make up a sizable proportion of those SHU students undertaking such placements.

Recommendation 8: SHU should raise placement mileage reimbursement for mandatory placements, subject to eligibility, from 28p to 59p per mile for the first 3,500 miles and 24p thereafter, as per Royal College of Nursing guidelines.

Our Cost of Living survey also pointed to housing as a particular issue, with over 75% of respondents identifying the rising cost of rent as having a slight or substantial impact on their finances.⁵⁵ International students were especially affected by rising rents; this is partly because international students tend to have more limited choice with respect to housing, live in non-student housing and may have dependents.⁵⁶ Whilst the survey compartmentalised rent, energy and food, it is apparent from student comments that it is the compound effect of these essential costs that is having a significant impact on Hallam students.

'I have been at university for 3 years, lived in the same areas, paid the same amounts for rent but only this year have I been unable to afford to eat. My money completely ran out'

'My rent and has gone up and the energy cap has gone, we cant afford to heat the house so its freezing constantly, I haven't been out with friends to save money because of this. And the cost of my food shops has slowly been climbing'

'I paid £850 monthly for a 2-bedroom flat, which is way too much compared to other locations, but I have no choice I need to stay close to school. Suddenly, my energy bill increased to 117 pounds because the government stopped paying the 50 percent. This is just too much right now. I'm struggling'

As a result of historical decisions to outsource its purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), SHU is limited in the extent to which it can assist students with essential costs. Based on 2021 HESA statistics, SHU actually provides slightly more cash support to its students than the average for all universities (£1,436 per student helped, versus £1,409 national average). However, for many universities, support with respect to discounted accommodation is a significant part of their offering (accounting for £825 per student on average). As SHU does not own its own PBSA, and is limited in its support for accommodation costs to lobbying its private partners to minimise rental increases, the total

⁵⁴ RCN. (2023). *NHS Mileage Allowance*. Retrieved from Royal College of Nursing: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/employment-and-pay/NHS-Employment/NHS-mileage-allowance>

⁵⁵ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid

support package available to students (£1,513 per student on average) falls significantly below the national average (£2,821).⁵⁷

In early May this year, UUK released a good practice statement which investigated current good practice in the student housing market.⁵⁸ Among their case studies on varied good practices in terms of housing data, student number planning, and housing strategies, was a look at the city of Nottingham, where the universities and city council have created a student living strategy to partner to create a more sustainable, and medium-term focused student housing strategy.⁵⁹ This form of partnership could be beneficial to Sheffield, where the city's private student housing market is shared with the University of Sheffield and is seen to be shrinking.⁶⁰ A more holistic and integrated city-wide approach could help support students with the housing offer and cost if a city-wide partnership was revisited, and such a scheme would complement Sheffield's existing Snug student housing quality assurance scheme.⁶¹

Recommendation 9: SHU should explore the creation of an integrated, city-wide and multi-university partnership approach to housing, such as the partnership housing strategy in Nottingham, which considers affordability for students, diversity of student need (such as family housing, single housing, etc).

A common response from students to financial pressures brought about by the cost-of-living crisis is to take on more hours paid work. Our own Cost of Living survey asked respondents to indicate how much they were working (see Fig. 9). This shows 66% of respondents are in some form of employment, and 10% are working full time, at least 35 hours a week. While we do not have any longitudinal data to compare it to, it seems reasonable to assume this is part of an upward trend. A recent OFS report found students were taking on increasing paid employment hours alongside their studies. Similarly, 26.6% of students in recent external polling had taken on more hours at work,⁶² while another study found 31% of students were working more than 15hrs a week.⁶³ Although in extant literature this is seen as a positive trend, as students who work tend to feel greater control

⁵⁷ <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/we-need-to-talk-about-bursaries-and-hardship-funds/> (Accessed 10 July 2023)

⁵⁸ Universities UK. (2023). *Supporting good practice in student accommodation: considerations for senior university leaders*. Universities UK. From <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Reports/Supporting-good-practice-in-student-accommodation.pdf>

⁵⁹ Nottingham City Council (NCC), University of Nottingham (UofN) and Nottingham Trent University (NTU). (2023). *Draft Nottingham Student Living Strategy: 2023-2028*. From <https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/media/3376246/draft-nottingham-student-living-strategy.pdf>

⁶⁰ Johnston, C., & Westwood, A. (2023). *Cost of living and higher education students, England: 30 January to 13 February 2023*. Retrieved from Office for National Statistics: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/costoflivingandhighereducationstudentsengland/30januaryto13february2023>

⁶¹ [snug property and management standards from 1 august 2023 0.pdf](https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/snug-property-and-management-standards-from-1-august-2023-0.pdf) (sheffield.gov.uk)

⁶² Savanta polling and the Sutton Trust. (2023). *COST OF LIVING AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS*. The Sutton Trust. From <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Cost-of-Living-University-Students.pdf>

⁶³ Blackbullion. (2023). *Student Money and Wellbeing 2023: What is the cost of living crisis really costing students?* Blackbullion. Retrieved from <https://bbb2bprod.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Student-Money-Wellbeing-Report-2023--Blackbullion-1.pdf>

over their lives, the OFS participants were concerned about balancing work and study.⁶⁴

Student Employment Alongside Studies

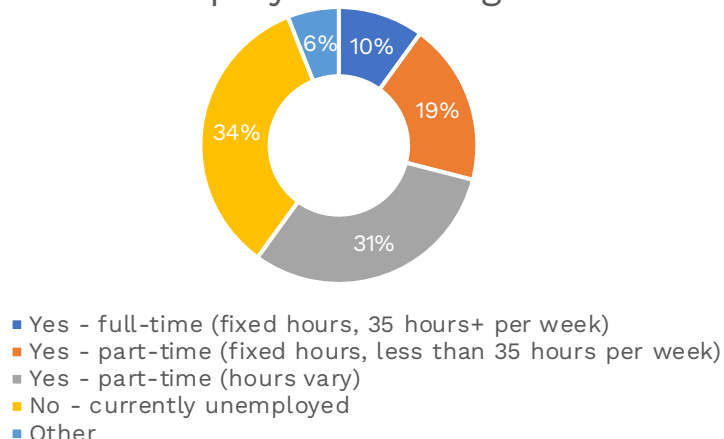


Figure 9: SHU UG and PG student employment type, HSU Cost of Living survey, n=1512

One group in particular are struggling to find sufficient good quality employment, to cover the increased living costs. International students completing the HSU Cost of Living survey repeatedly commented that finding suitable part-time roles at or below the current legal cap of 20hrs per week was increasingly challenging.⁶⁵ Whether this is because of a lack of part-time, fixed-hour contracts in general at or below 20 hours a week is hard to say for certain, although anecdotally this certainly seems to be the case.

'Lift [the] work limit for international students, because this is the reason I have not been able to get a part time job'

SHU and HSU could help address this apparent shortfall by specifically advertising roles that fall at, or just under, the 20 hour cap, thereby enabling international students to maximise their employed hours without breaking the law. Another, complementary, way to help ensure that employed students can meet their living costs is to pay all roles at least the Real Living Wage, which currently stands at £10.90 outside of London.⁶⁶

Recommendation 10: SHU and HSU should offer more part-time student job opportunities. All job descriptions need to include minimum and estimated average weekly hours and some should not exceed 20 hrs per week to ensure that all students, including international students, can apply. All student jobs should be paid at the Real Living Wage, regardless of a students' age.

⁶⁴ OFS. (2023). *Insight 17: Studying during rises in the cost of living*. OFS . From <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/6981/insight-brief-17-studying-during-rises-in-the-cost-of-living.pdf>

⁶⁵ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/microsoft-word-cost-of-living-report-june-2023.docx) ([hallamstudentsunion.com](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com))

⁶⁶ [Real Living Wage increases to £10.90 in UK and £11.95 in London as the cost-of-living rises](https://www.livingwagefoundation.org.uk/news/real-living-wage-increases-to-10-90-in-uk-and-11-95-in-london-as-the-cost-of-living-rises) | Living Wage Foundation

Beyond the above, SHU should look to enhance their already strong careers and employability offering by more strongly supporting students looking to find work (both on and off campus) during their studies. Students completing our Cost of Living survey repeatedly asked for greater assistance in this area.⁶⁷

'More accessible campus jobs, especially for things like editing - I've only just got a temporary job as a website content editor and it's the perfect role for me. I didn't really know about campus jobs before and it would also be good if it was a longer/permanent position'

'More part-time/full-time job opportunities provided by the University. More assistance is required. There is barely anything now'

'More part time jobs that suit student life'

'Flexible job opportunities for students who have term-time placements full time but may want to pick up extra work in the holidays or on a weekend'

Furthermore, fears around work-study balance may be overstated, at least to a point. A 2018 study by the University of Aberdeen found that term-time employment (TTE) positively impacted student attainment in HE when the work was up to 10hrs a week, and only negatively affected attainment when TTE was more than 30hrs a week.⁶⁸ These differences were magnified when role skill was considered. Students who worked low hours at skilled jobs had significantly better attainment than those who worked high levels of work at low skilled jobs. This suggests any further support SHU can offer in terms of finding higher skilled term-time employment for students, will pay dividends in terms of outcomes.

Recommendation 11: SHU should expand their careers and employability offer to provide greater in-study work support, including events such as a student job fair, to assist students' progression into highly skilled employment.

In summary, when we consider the most pressing issues that Hallam students will face in the immediate future, it is difficult to ignore the warning from the Student Academic Experience Survey on the cost-of-living crisis:

'Students whose studies are being significantly impacted by the cost-of-living crisis are [...] students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, LGB+, trans and non-binary students, older students, those with caring responsibilities, care-experienced and first-in-family students. Failing to address these inequalities risks embedding inequality within the higher education system and beyond'.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](#)

⁶⁸ Dennis, C., Louca, V., and Lemon, J. (2018). Term-time Employment and Student Attainment in Higher Education. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(1), 28-38. doi: <https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i1.294>

⁶⁹ Neves, J. and Stephenson, R. (2023). Student Academic Experience Survey 2023. *Higher Education Policy Institute*. From: [Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf \(hepi.ac.uk\)](#)

2.3 Welcome

Welcome events are very effective in making students feel engaged and included at the start of the year, but that engagement, with both the university and the Students' Union rapidly dissipates for some students. SHU's Welcome survey, conducted by the university between 31st October to 13th November 2022, was sent to all new undergraduate students. It received 655 responses 91% of whom said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall Welcome and induction week programme.⁷⁰ However, only 47% of respondents agree that HSU played an important role during Hallam Welcome. Only one-third of students stated that they had visited, engaged or connected with the Students' Union, despite more than half of them indicating that they had attended the Freebies Fair, the biggest HSU organised event of Welcome. It is evident that there is a failure to communicate effectively, particularly to new students, the central role that HSU plays in their Welcome experience.

Over 84% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with social activities and sessions during Welcome. Indeed, the Welcome survey reveals that, broadly speaking, the experience of new students arriving at the university is extremely positive, and that students are given plenty of information and support to prepare them for the transition to university. However, 40% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the opportunities to make friends with students not on their course. It is interesting then, whilst a significant proportion of students felt that they lacked opportunities to make friends outside their course, that the physical activity and sports offer, which should be an opportunity to build cross-course social connections, was the second least engaged-with activity during Welcome, with only Careers and Employability being less engaged-with. Unlike other poorly attended activities, students who did not engage with these events tended to indicate that they knew about the activities but chose not to engage (as opposed to missing out because they did not know).

WonkHE's Building Belonging report also identified the importance of a Welcome or 'freshers' experience in building community, this time amongst returning students, who hankered after a welcome week of their own.⁷¹

2.3.1 Our Data

This seems to be supported by some of the feedback from HSUs Freebies Fair satisfaction survey⁷², given by returning students who made the specific point that they were attending because it was their first opportunity, due to Covid, to attend a traditional Welcome Week. A submission to Union Voice, HSU's online student feedback platform, told a similar story:

'I am a third year student who hasn't been making the most of my uni experience as I don't know where to begin'

⁷⁰ Welcome presentation available from:

https://sheffieldhallam.sharepoint.com/:p:/t/T000323-SensitiveResearchandInsight/Eb_PZpkuBURMqlWid1EMMTsBcYSLpsjfBCmh1St8EptzjQ?e=hUL34g

⁷¹ Blake, S., Capper, G., Jackson, A., (2022) *Building Belonging in Higher Education: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach* Pearson / WonkHE From <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf>

⁷² Unpublished

The student described feeling unsupported by the Hallam community and unfulfilled in university life. The return to university, and progression to a new year, can be particularly challenging for some students. For instance, HSU's Higher Education Engagement among Students with Armed Services Backgrounds report identifies that those students are at particular risk of dropping out at point of continuation between first and second year.⁷³ SHU currently has in the region of 1,200 students from the Armed Forces Community and SU will be working closely with the University to explore how to best support students from military/armed forces families, military veterans and service leaver and those with experience of serving in the armed forces. However, data from HHAWD suggests this is an issue for the broader student population too.

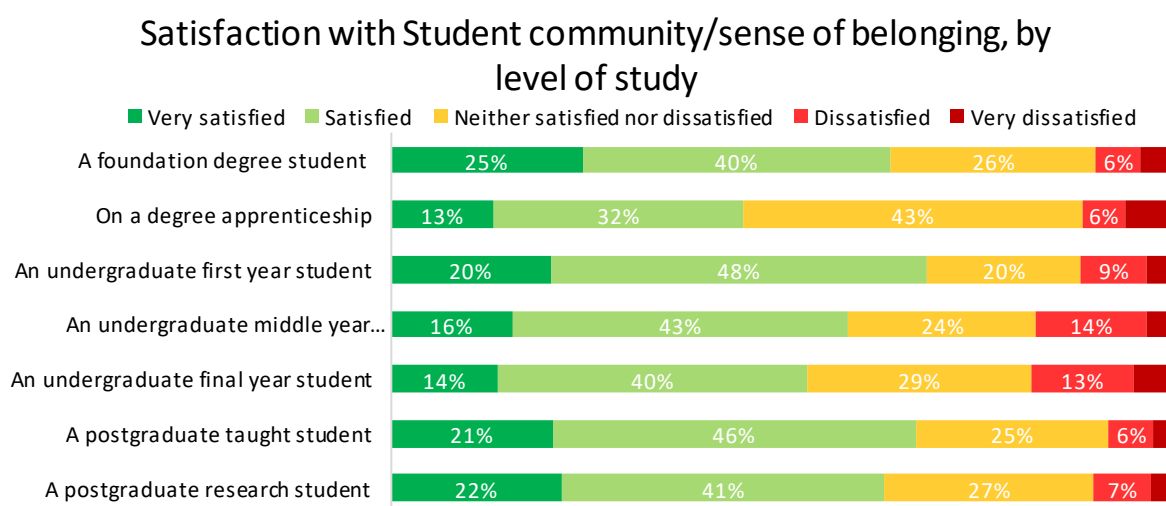


Figure 10: HHAWD 22/23, Wave 1, Satisfaction with student community and belonging, by level of study, n=1624 (N/As removed)

Figure 10 shows data from Wave 1 of this year's survey, collected just weeks after Welcome. The difference in levels of satisfaction with student community and sense of belonging, between (new) first year undergrads (at 68%) and, returning, middle (57%) and final years (54%) is stark. This diminishing return of undergraduate sentiment is repeated across almost all metrics of student satisfaction gathered by the survey. Clearly there remains much work to be done to identify and ameliorate the causes behind this drop off in satisfaction, but a perceived lack of designated activities for returning students over Welcome is likely a contributing factor.

Recommendation 12: SHU and HSU Welcome events should encourage the participation of returning students and specifically target some activities at those students continuing their studies.

⁷³ Rogers, K., (2023). *Higher Education Engagement among Students with Armed Services Backgrounds: A Literature Review*. [STEER Evaluation Collection]. From <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/31850/>

2.4 Wellbeing and Extracurricular Activities

It is difficult to disentangle belonging, wellbeing and community in a higher education context, but building friendships and peer connections has been identified as most important for increasing the sense of belonging.⁷⁴ Indeed, Ahn and Davis's Ten Word study suggests the dominant words describing university for students were 'friends' and 'societies'.⁷⁵ Yet, according to a recent survey only 25% of students rarely or never feel lonely; 26% feel lonely most or all of the time. What is more, levels of loneliness were significantly higher amongst those that lived at home with family, those in non-university halls and those living alone as opposed to those living in shared houses or university halls. Moreover, those not studying bachelor's degrees were also significantly more likely to suffer from loneliness.⁷⁶ This situation was not helped by the Covid-enforced remote learning of the last few years, but with many students staying home after Easter this year and last, and reportedly low rates of student residency this semester⁷⁷, we should not expect dramatic improvements too soon.

2.4.1 Our Data

The cost-of-living crisis is yet further exacerbating matters, as the HSU Cost of Living survey clearly identifies, the rising costs are having a significant and disproportionate impact on students' social activities.⁷⁸ Just 29% of respondents declared skipping classes due to travel costs, but 55% sometimes, often, or always skip optional academic events and 65% skip extracurricular SHU/HSU events because of travel costs (see fig 11).

⁷⁴ Blake, S., Capper, G., Jackson, A., (2022) *Building Belonging in Higher Education: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach* Pearson / WonkHE From <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf>

⁷⁵ Ahn, M.Y. & Davis, H.H. (2020). Four domains of students' sense of belonging to university. *Studies in Higher Education* 45:3, pp. 622-634 From <https://www.tandfonline.com/hallam.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564902>

⁷⁶ Neves, J. and Stephenson, R. (2023). Student Academic Experience Survey 2023. *Higher Education Policy Institute*. Accessed 22 June 2023 via [Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf \(hepi.ac.uk\)](https://hepi.ac.uk/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2023.pdf)

⁷⁷ Internal SHU data

⁷⁸ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](https://hallamstudentsunion.com/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Cost%20of%20Living%20Report%20(June%202023).docx)

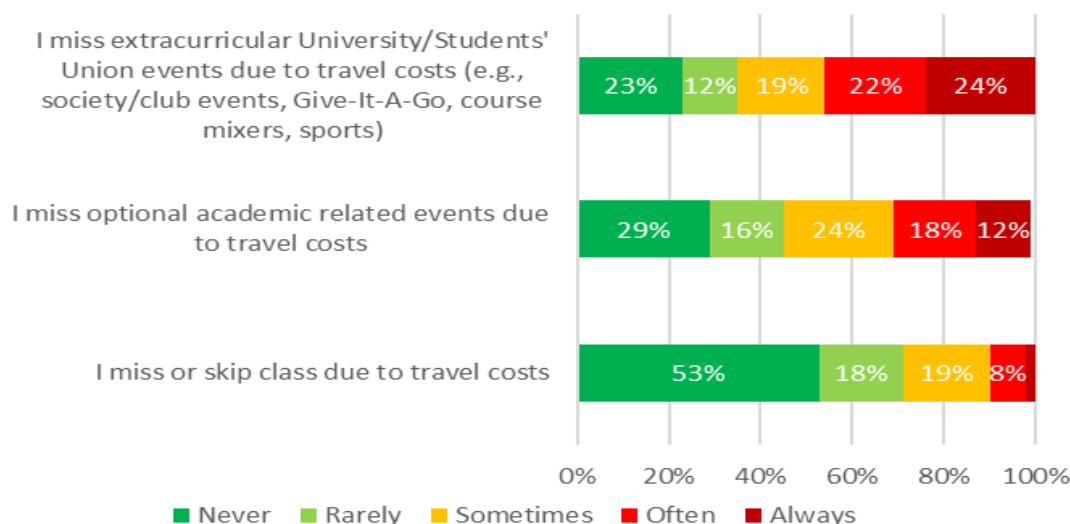


Figure 11: Likelihood of skipping university and related events due to travel costs, of all respondents, Cost of Living survey, (n=1512).

Students' reports, of the impact reduced levels of socialising are having on them, point to poorer mental health, less time spent with friends, and an increased sense of loneliness. It is little surprise then that a recurrent theme throughout the survey was a desire for cheap or free social events.⁷⁹

Another recurring theme was that extracurricular activities are inconveniently timetabled for many students. Commuter students may not want to extend an already-lengthy day by staying on campus for evening events.⁸⁰ Our Parents and Carers' Survey, was commissioned by our HWLS college officer, and carried out by HSU between November 2022 and February 2023, attracting 26 responses. In it, respondents requested events be timetabled with regard to school hours, with activities held over lunchtime and at weekends. Events suggested by respondents included board game sessions, a playgroup or coffee mornings. In a similar vein, several responses in SHU's Welcome survey and HSU's Students Lifestyle and Events survey mentioned a desire for non-alcohol focused events.

The Events and Activities Survey was a questionnaire directed at international students in the summer of 2022; it attracted 354 responses, 218 of which were complete. When asked what international students wanted from their Students' Union, the second most popular answer was 'events' ('help and support' was first). When international students were asked what would encourage them to visit the SU building, overwhelmingly (with 156 comments compared to 15 for the next most popular answer) was 'events', with suggestions including welcome events, games, careers fairs and cultural evenings. Whilst Give-It-A-Go trips and activities are clearly popular with students, the Events and Activities Survey revealed that students prefer more frequent events; the majority specified monthly (although weekly was not an option).

Across all three waves of this year's HHAWD, students were least satisfied with the sports and exercise offering; only 52% of students in Wave 1, 57% in Wave 2, and 55% in Wave 3 were satisfied with it. This is not reflected in high dissatisfaction, but rather in high levels of apathy: across all three waves, over

⁷⁹ Kemhadjian, K., Garvin-Smith, S., and Rogers, K. (2023). Cost of Living Review. Accessed on 15 June 2023 via [Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report \(June 2023\).docx \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](#)

⁸⁰ Ibid

37% of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. It was a similar story for extra-curricular activities and events; across all three waves 61% of respondents were satisfied while 31% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. That is not to say there isn't an appetite for these kinds of events. SHU's Student Lifestyles and Events survey highlighted the appeal of social sports and activities. 'Walks' were the second most popular spare time activity, and when asked what they wished was available, twenty-seven respondents mentioned sporting activities in some form. Rather, that current provision for non-competitive social sport, and physical activities across the Hallam community is lacking and under promoted where it does exist.

The value of social sport, particularly outdoor sport, is well established. As Eigenschenk *et al.* suggest 'green and blue environments seem to have especially positive effects that go beyond the benefits of being physically active in a non-natural environment', identifying physical health benefits, the prevention and alleviation of mental health problems, and a positive association between sports and educational performance and motivation.⁸¹ White *et al.* identify 'walking in nature' as an important public health intervention.⁸² As such, the benefits of such activities for groups as vulnerable to poor wellbeing as students should be obvious.

One possible route to these kinds of activities for students is student societies. This year there were 4436 student society members across 119 societies (69 social, 44 academic, and 6 volunteering). This represents just over 12% of the total student population, with plenty of room for increased engagement. Disappointingly, 56% of students in Wave 2 of HHAWD considered joining a society, but never did. Survey comments suggested a communication issue which stopped or hindered students interested in joining societies due to society pages appearing out of date or with outdated emails, to which students reached out to join a society and never got a response. Those that did manage to reach out to societies mentioned that in some cases they were not inclusive, or deemed 'cliquey'.

'Lack of communication and leadership within the society. Never made aware of any events and never got the chance to actually go to a social event or meeting because was never told about any.'

'No easy channels for communication, or lack of information / out of date information made me lose a lot of confidence in whether the society was even still active at all'

The data suggests, however, that there is value in persevering to broaden the appeal and uptake of these kinds of extra-curricular activities and events, and HSU is already working to expand the range of its 'Give it a Go' event offering. HHAWD findings for all three waves of this academic year point to a strong relationship between student satisfaction with student community/sense of belonging and *not* considering dropping out (see fig. 12).

⁸¹ Eigenschenk B, Thomann A, McClure M, Davies L, Gregory M, Dettweiler U, Inglés E. (2019) Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society. A Systematic Literature Review and Reflections on Evidence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 16(6):937. From <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16060937>

⁸² White, M.P., Elliott, L.R., Taylor, T., Wheeler, B.W., Spencer, A., Bone, A., Depledge, M.H., Fleming, L.E (2016). Recreational physical activity in natural environments and implications for health: A population based cross-sectional study in England. *Preventative Medicine*, 91.

Satisfaction with Student community / sense of belonging, by Consideration of dropping out.

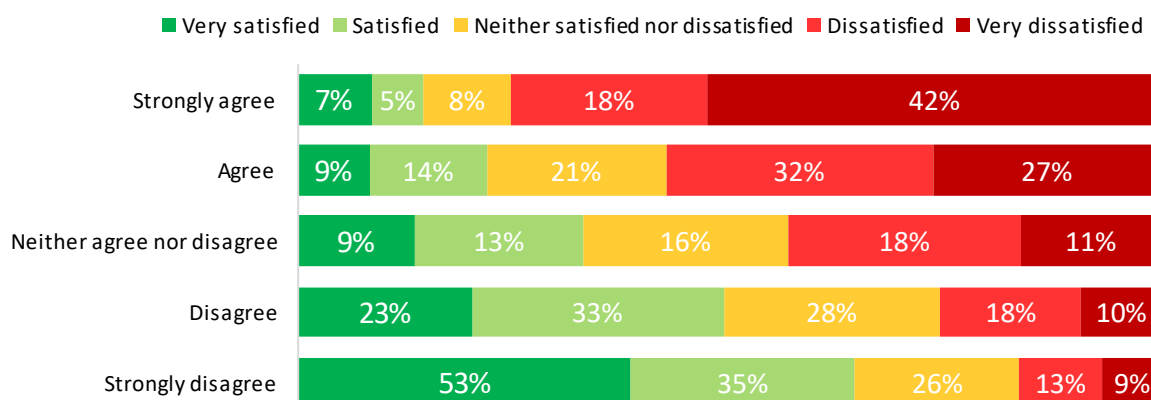


Figure 12: Satisfaction with student community and belonging, by Consideration of dropping out, HHAWD 22/23, Waves 1, 2, & 3. n=4001 (N/As removed)

76% and 68% of students who are very satisfied or satisfied, respectively, with the sense of student community and belonging at SHU, disagree or strongly disagree that they have considered dropping out. Furthermore, as discussed [above](#), there is an even stronger relationship between Satisfaction with sense of community / student belonging and Satisfaction with extra-curricular activities and events. As such, a program of inclusive and low cost social and physical wellbeing activities, should be implemented to boost students' sense of belonging, improve continuation rates, and ultimately, benefit outcomes.

Recommendation 13: SHU and HSU should organise regular, free or low-cost social wellbeing activities, particularly social sport (e.g. a campus running club or GoodGym team, lunchtime walks from Collegiate Crescent, regular social team sports, morning walking bus from City campus to Collegiate, etc).

Closing Statement

Clearly the 2022-2023 academic year has been challenging for many SHU students as they adapt to the post-covid higher education environment. The latest generation of students interacts with the university experience differently, with altered expectations and motivations for going to university. Our world has changed dramatically, with a global pandemic, but also new challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis, industrial action, and several technological and social changes have affected how we can best work to improve the lives of our students. This report reflects students' current concerns about teaching delivery, placements, cost of living, housing, employment, and extra-curricular activity and wellbeing.

As we move into the new academic year, the University is going through times of change, with a new Vice-Chancellor starting in 2024. The University is also planning and developing a new satellite campus in London and introducing a programme of online course provision; both of which will impact on the Students'

Union, in terms of offer and reach. We have started working with SHU colleagues on how we can expand our scope to embrace, represent and support all our students, near and far.

We express our gratitude to all the students who have been willing to share their experiences, feelings and opinions, both formally and informally, with us via our surveys, focus groups, meetings, discussions and on social media.

We would also thank our university professional and academic colleagues for their continued support of the Students' Union, their recognition of the Student Voice Report, and their readiness to work with us to implement its recommendations.

Appendix A: Research & Data Sources

Throughout the 2022/23 academic year, the Students' Union conducts primary research to understand our students' experiences. Below is a list of research projects and data sources referenced in this report that were conducted by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, including the research methodology and the number of participants or respondents.






Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
<p>Hallam, How Are We Doing?' Survey</p> <p>This pulse survey took place three times in the academic year: November 2022, March 2023, and May 2023. The survey asked student opinions about the university, the Students' Union, and their experiences with both, as well as tailored questions for each time of year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nov 2023: 1675 • March 2023: 1307 • May 2023: 1148 	Quantitative
<p>Union Voice</p> <p>This is a new digital system where students can share feedback about their course-related concerns with the Students' Union to enable the Union to gather feedback and fix issues, where applicable.</p> <p>unionvoice.org.uk</p>	101 submissions from 96 students	Qualitative and Quantitative
<p>Events and Activities Report – International Students</p> <p>The Events and Activities Survey was sent from Sheffield Hallam Students' Union to all international students in summer 2022, to gain a better understanding of what they would like to see from their Students' Union. Overall, 354 students started the survey, with 218 fully completing.</p>	354	Quantitative
<p>Parents and Carers Survey</p> <p>The parents and carers' survey took place between November 2022 and February 2023. It asked six questions, two of which were demographic questions (college, fee status); remaining questions asked about what events parents and carers wanted from the Students' Union and what barriers to attendance they faced.</p>	26	Quantitative





Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
<p>Democratic Structures</p> <p>In order to gain a better knowledge of what students understand about the Students' Union offer, the Officers and how ideas/changes can be submitted and voted upon, three focus groups were conducted; the focus groups were with one with very engaged students, one with engaged International students, and one with engaged home students (no unengaged students attended their focus group). Questions were kept very broad in order to gain students' uninfluenced feedback, with the intention of this feedback helping to shape any models moving forward.</p>	20	Qualitative
<p>Higher Education Engagement among Students with Armed Services Backgrounds</p> <p>A systematic review of the literature relating to British military families (service and ex-service personnel, spouses and partners and children) and access to, and retention in, higher education; the review evaluates twenty-one articles and reports. By synthesizing the literature, this report makes recommendations about actions to improve access to university, and retention, of students with an armed services background. Students with an armed services background are not a single homogenous group; the Centre for Military Research, Education and Public Engagement identifies at six distinct groups. This report examines the different barriers encountered by different groups and makes specific recommendations for different groups of students with an armed services background.</p> <p>shura.shu.ac.uk/31850/1/Rogers_2023_students_with_armed_services_backgrounds.pdf</p>	N/A	Literature Review
<p>Cost of Living survey</p> <p>This research was conducted via a short, twelve-minute survey. The questions focused on the impact of the cost of living on students' lives, to see the extent to which Hallam students are feeling the impact in the rise of</p>	1512	Quantitative

Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
costs, whether there are differences in impact by key demographics, and most importantly, to find ways the university and the students' union can work together to mitigate some of the impact and expense for these students. All SHU students were asked to take part in the survey. Microsoft Word - Cost of Living Report (June 2023).docx (hallamstudentsunion.com)		
Department Rep Feedback This feedback is collected from Department Reps (via a combination of opinions from students and Course Reps) monthly.	17	Qualitative
Course Rep Mid-Year Survey 2023 This annual survey asks Course Reps to share how they found their experience of being a Course Rep.	252	Quantitative
Cost of Travel survey The Cost of Travel Survey was open between 11 th October and 8 th November 2022. The survey received 2383 responses in total. The questions were included in the Cost of Living Survey, which was circulated to all undergraduate students. After each survey closed (Cost of Travel (sent only to postgraduate students) and Cost of Living (sent only to undergraduate students)), responses were combined and duplicates removed.	2383	Quantitative
Nursing and Midwifery Recovery Plan: A qualitative Assessment The Nursing and Midwifery Recovery Plan was a qualitative study; data was collected via two 2-hour long focus groups, carried out on 6 th and 8 th February 2023. 12 participants were recruited from across the Nursing & Midwifery (N&M) Department and included students: - at levels 5, 6 and post-grad - from Child, Adult and Mental Health nursing courses - a combination of Course Reps and lay-students Nursing-and-Midwifery-Recovery-Report-March-2023.pdf (hallamstudentsunion.com)	12	Qualitative





Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
<p>Nursing and Midwifery Disability Students' Disclosure(s) and Experience(s): A qualitative assessment</p> <p>This research consisted of two parts: a look at the overarching picture of the stages and experiences of students with disclosures to the university and placements, with an eye to record best practices for the department's review, and students' experiences on placement receiving accommodations for disclosed disabilities. . The data for this qualitative study was collected via two 2-hour long focus groups, carried out on the 31st of March 2023. 13 participants were recruited from across the Nursing & Midwifery (N&M) Department. The whole Nursing and Midwifery department was emailed to volunteer for the paid focus groups, if they self-identified as disabled, regardless of whether they had told the university, occupational health, or their placement(s).</p> <p><i>Ethical approval was obtained for this study by the Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee, Ethical approval number: ER51606886</i></p> <p>Nursing-and-Midwifery-Disability-Students-Disclosure-and-Experience-Report-April-2023.pdf (hallamstudentsunion.com)</p>	13	Qualitative
<p>Monthly Student Feedback Reports</p> <p>The monthly student feedback reports collate information from Union Voice, Ask Us, the Helpdesk and Advice Centre, in addition to feedback from Department Reps. The reports aim to provide a summary of the most prominent issues and concerns raised by students with SU within the previous month.</p> <p>https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/union/publications/</p>	N/A	Quantitative and Qualitative



Appendix B: Summary of Progress on 21/22 Student Voice Report



Our Learning Experiences		
Recommendation	Summary Update, April 2023	Progress Indicator
1 The University to provide more on-campus learning throughout the 2022/23 academic year, whilst also keeping useful aspects of online learning in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrable increase in sessions taught on campus for 2022/23 academic year. • Delivery Models work has included student feedback on benefits of online learning as part of its planning for future years. 	 completed
2 The Students' Union to continue to monitor students' opinions of transition throughout their undergraduate course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 'Hallam How Are We Doing' surveys conducted (Nov, April, May). • Interim results shared with the University, added to the Student Voice Repository, and summarised in the relevant Student Voice Bulletin. • Final results available in June 2023. 	 ongoing
3 The University to provide further support for students on how to interpret and utilise their feedback to benefit students' academic progression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills Centre (SC) support is available inc. goal setting, task planning, reflection and organising and structuring assignments. • Feedback Forums, drop-in group sessions and 1-2-1 sessions where feedback can be discussed and SC Workshops encourage students to reflect and clarify why they have done well in an assignment, and where improvements can be made. • Academic Advisers provide academic support that continues to evaluate well with students. 	 ongoing
4 The College of Business, Technology, & Engineering to clearly communicate to students their specific exam arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall reduction in number of examinations and Exams schedules published on timetables several weeks in advance. • Module leaders have outlined exam support package for students. • A significant number of examinations will be delivered in person, on paper, on campus, in a time bound and invigilated environment. In part this is to reduce Academic Misconduct cases. • Some exams where misconduct was not an issue will continue to be delivered online. • Extra support offered to L6 Eng & Maths students including limited handwritten notes to be allowed into on-campus exams. 	 ongoing
5 The College of Health, Wellbeing & Life Sciences to provide regular and consistent communication for Health & Social Care students which should include the following: placement allocation, changes to timetabling, keeping students updated,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Professional Placements team now have a clear process in place for placement allocation and communication SLAs are in place with agreed time limits on communications responses. • Nursing – Weekly email to students inc. 'make up' opportunities, wellbeing, disability support plus a student facing Padlet for students to ask questions. • Placement Recovery Team now have a dedicated email address and Sarah McDonald (Academic Lead Placement Recovery) has attended Student Voice meetings to work with Student Representatives. 	 ongoing

and general student support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement Recovery Team have hosted 'drop-in' sessions for the S20 cohort. • Academic Timetabling Lead (ATL) meets weekly with the department's Timetabler, and HUB Manager, and monthly with Space Manager to maintain operational oversight. • Timetabling change requests (e.g. Online to on-campus) can be refused if judged to be detrimental to students who have conflicting commitments. 	
6 The College of Social Sciences & Arts to standardise communication with students to ensure that key messages are being heard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSA aspired to undertake a review of student communication strategies including working with students. • SSA HoTLE continuing to work with SE and T&L leads to collate information. • Anecdotal evidence from Student Department Forums that communications can sometimes be unhelpful and overwhelming. 	 ongoing
7 The University to continually update students on projects designed to eliminate the BAME awarding gap to ensure that students made aware and held accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University has produced a data-driven executive plan of the Race Equality Corporate Equity Plan. • #decolhallam project initiated between Academic Development and Diversity (ADD) and the Students' Union . • Student Voice opportunities for minoritised student groups in each department. • Listening Rooms – Decolonisation. • Hallam student communications are being reviewed for inclusive language and imagery. 	 ongoing
8 The University and the Students' Union to continue the progress of decolonising and diversifying reading lists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New SU roles will contribute to research in this area (Student Research and Student Marketing and Engagement Ambassadors). • Library have updated guidance for academic staff on diversifying reading lists. • #DecolHallam project to provide resources and accompanying workshops to support staff to decolonise the curriculum. • 'Big Read' – 3 of the 4 authors are from an ethnic minority and Hallam has contributed to a national research project to understand black students experience of academic libraries. 	 ongoing
9 The University to increase international student awareness of study skills and support sessions available pre-arrival/on arrival to enable understanding and progression through their course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear messages to all students prior to arrival re: Orientation and course induction and enhanced Orientation programme with repeat sessions. • 2,200 students (about 60% of the new intake) took part in the international orientation in September and in January with sessions on: Maintaining your student visa, Introduction to academic advisers and achieving academic success. • All new students invited to complete the Essentials Skills for academic success module. • New Success at Level 7 project launched. All Level 7 students are enrolled on four core study skills 	 ongoing

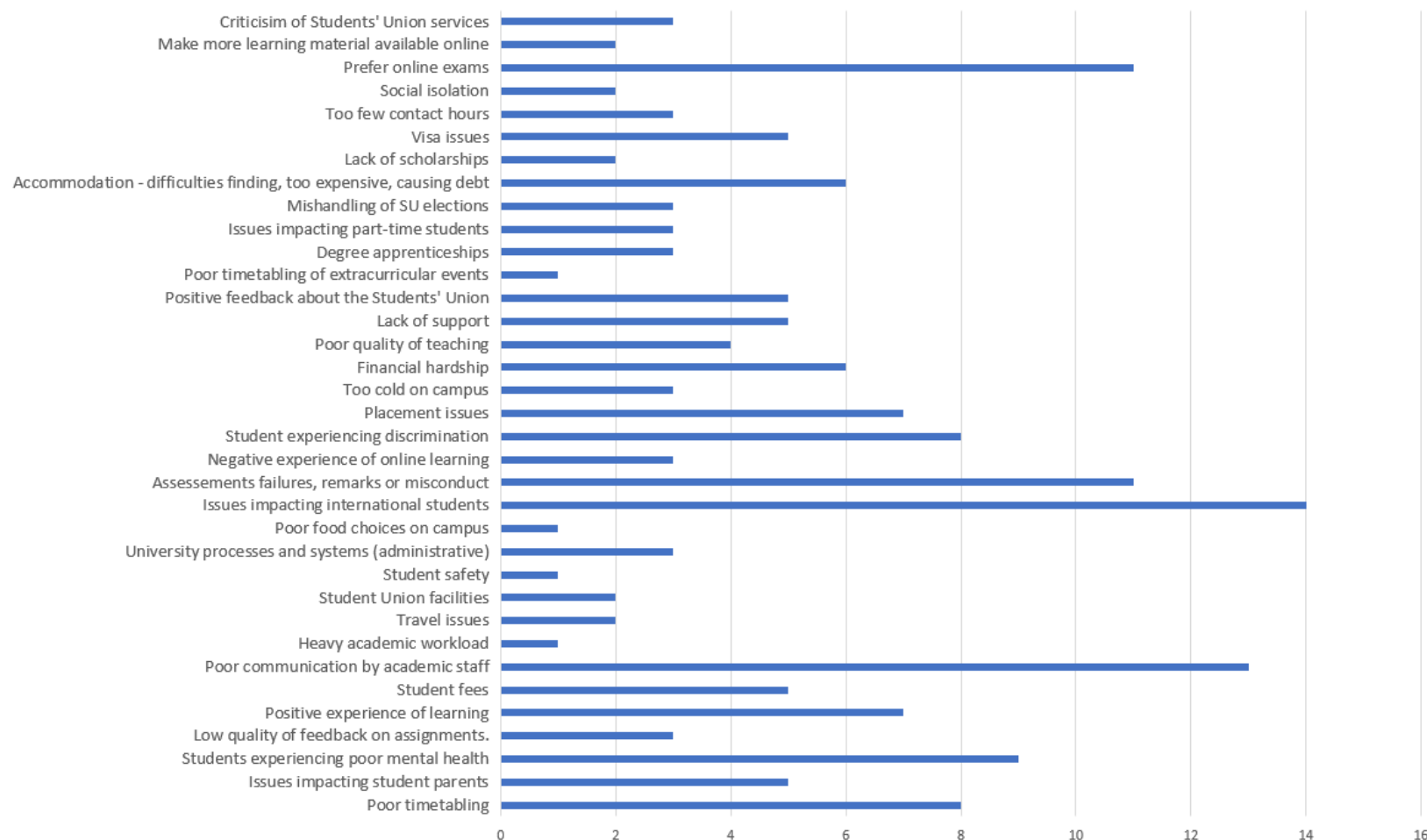
	<p>sessions in the Library which are delivered via MS Teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare to study and live in the UK course run by the British Council (engagement unknown). • 'Prepare for Success' session which outlines the main differences in teaching / learning and assessment in the UK. • Additional training for academic staff to make them aware of the academic culture shock affecting new international students. 	
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Our wellbeing and community		
Recommendation	Update	Progress Indicator
10 The University to increase awareness of student well-being service and resources available through coproduced slides on display pre/post lectures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From January 2023 this work is led by Charlie Breen, Wellbeing, Sport and Physical Activity Officer. • Plan for 23/24 to be aligned to the revised single plan for the Student Wellbeing Programme and University Mental Health Charter. 	 ongoing
11 The Students' Union continue to monitor student need regarding menstrual product accessibility to ensure an inclusive learning experience for all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Union's Cost of Living survey found that 10% of respondents are struggling to pay for menstrual products. • Working with Hallam Fund, the Union now has a Period Subscription Scheme. Products have been ordered and packs will be given to those struggling with access to menstrual products. 	 complete
12 The University to review student community and provide tailored events and activities for each level of study, recognising the nuanced differences between academic levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67 Student Community Leaders were recruited and have collectively delivered over 2200 hours of community work to date. • Catering outlets provided discounts (Eat Together for Less campaign and £1 Wednesday campaign) for students to help with the cost of living, which have been popular. • Gather events throughout the academic year have promoted services and brought students together; this was delivered with the Students' Union. • Work is currently underway focussing on campus spaces with students involved in co-creation of spaces they want to use. • Evaluation of the Student Community Leaders project is currently underway. 	 ongoing
13 The Students' Union to review Collegiate Campus presence to increase student activity and engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Union has been staffing the office at Collegiate since October 2022, including bookable appointments and drop-ins at Collegiate with the Advice Centre. • Good engagement for specific initiatives (e.g., Cost of Living Survey, work on sexual violence, or the Swap Shop). 	 ongoing

14 The University and the Students' Union to provide more information for international students with families about the considerations involved in finding somewhere to live - and ensure this is better publicised to them before they and their families leave their home country. The University to work to increase the number of partners within the Snug scheme who can provide family accommodation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Mentors are being recruited to assist and advise international students with families. Comms and messaging have been updated to make sure that challenges are made clear to incoming students. • Monthly drop-ins sessions (recorded) has led to a significant reduction in number of students requiring support on arrival. • Hallam is working with international students, providers/landlords to monitor situation and inform the University. 	 ongoing
15 The Students' Union to review the lack of participation in societies, clubs, and sport amongst UK-domiciled BAME students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Union has been conducting additional research, delayed due to ethical approval processes, and getting students to engage with the research. • Data collection is complete, and outcomes will be shared in due course. 	 ongoing

Our collective voice		
Recommendation	Update	Progress Indicator
16 The Students' Union and the University communicate and promote the Department Rep roles, including their remit and their positionality in the representation system, with academic staff of all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From January 2023 Union resources being shared across the university (Find My Rep tool; Department Rep pull-up banners with QR codes; all students emailed with introduction from their respective Rep). • Union 'roadshow' with academic departments to outline the Rep roles and responsibilities for staff. 	 ongoing
17 The University to work with the Students' Union to better promote the Union's services and offers to ensure all staff and students are aware of how and why getting involved with the Students' Union is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good relationship between the Union and Hallam's Student Communications Team has helped to promote the Union's work to students more effectively. • Work on academic societies, including the Union co-chairing a staff forum for those supporting academic societies; upcoming work includes a pilot project for auto enrolment. • Union activities (i.e., societies, volunteering, events) are included as eligible activities for the Hallam Award. Linking the Hallam Award winners with the Union's new SET Programme to enhance student employability and skills. 	 ongoing

Appendix C: Feedback submitted via UnionVoice



101

submissions were received between July 2022 and June 2023 from 96 different students; responses have been categorised, some into more than one category.

Appendix D: Disability Support for Students on Placement Infographic.

Disability Support for Students on Placement

1

Step one:
Ensure you are open and honest by declaring any disabilities or health issues on the health screening before starting your course. You will also be asked to declare any changes to your health during your re-enrolment into Year 2 & 3. You should ensure you discuss your disability with a disability support adviser to see what support you can get for campus learning.

The Professional Issues team will send out an online health questionnaire before the start of your course as this is a requirement of entry and is needed to assess your fitness to undertake the occupation. On this form you are asked to disclose any disability or health issues you have, as well as any previous medical history and medication you take.

Depending on your submission, you may need further assessment by a specialist nurse or physician. They can then identify any adjustments you may need and provide these to the University so we can support with this on placement. If you are already enrolled onto the course and you have a change in health status, you may need a referral to Occupational Health for a new assessment and to see how we can support you following a change in your health. This will be arranged by your course team and student support advisor. Please be aware that non-disclosure of health conditions is a breach of your enrolment agreement and can lead to fitness to practise procedures.

Step two:
If you have had adjustments identified at point of entry via your Occupational Health assessment, or as part of an Occupational Health referral whilst progressing through the course and these reasonable adjustments are applicable to placement, you will need to speak with your placement provider after you have received your allocation about your reasonable adjustments.

Please ensure you do this 2 weeks prior to your placement starting, we advise that you do not leave this until your first day as the placement may not be able to support your adjustments without adequate notice.

2

Important

It is your responsibility to inform the placement area of any adjustments, the placement team cannot disclose this information for you.

Before your placement, you may think that disclosure is unnecessary because your health condition is not relevant to the work. However placement staff are likely to have a better understanding of what the placement entails so an open discussion with relevant staff before the placement starts may forestall problems and enable you to plan for situations that you had not previously considered.

Contacts

Professional Issues - 0114 225 5637
hwb-professional-issues@shu.ac.uk

To register a disability:
Students are asked to register a disability through My Student Record. There is a page on the Sheffield Hallam website with further details on how to register.

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