



Student Voice Report

2024/25

President's Foreword

“For over ten years, Hallam Students’ Union has been publishing the Student Voice report to act both as a record of student feedback and a way to collaborate with the University to ensure positive changes are discussed and implemented.

This report would be nothing without student feedback from across the year. This report has compiled and analysed feedback from three waves of our “Hallam How Are We Doing?” Survey, Wellbeing Report, Cost of Living Survey, Speak Week, the National Student Survey, our Advice Centre statistics as well as feedback from our Lead Reps and Officer Team. The variety and range of feedback is a strong reminder that we must continue to listen to our students to make their student experience as incredible as it can be.

The 2024/25 Student Voice Report focuses on four main areas which have affected students over the past year. These areas are Placements and Employability, Access and Participation, Cost of Living and Wellbeing. Unfortunately, these areas will not be surprising given the current context of higher education, but our hope is by highlighting and working on these issues we will be able to improve them for our students.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody at Hallam Students’ Union for their work over the year in supporting students and gathering their feedback. A special mention to our incredible Research and Insight Team who have compiled the data and worked to create this report.”

~Martha Mitchell

Hallam Students’ Union President, 2024/25

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Introduction

The Student Voice Report collates multiple sources of student data undertaken by Hallam Students' Union's Research team, emphasising the key areas in which students at Hallam may be struggling. Via the Report, recommendations will be made which will help structure the university's response to rectifying said student voice issues. Over the years, the Student Voice Report has formed a significant portion of the student representative process, effectively channelling the student voice from the individual level to the University Executive Board. The Student Voice Report plays a crucial role as the Students' Union's main lobbying tool, supporting student concerns with empirical quantitative and qualitative research data.

The Student Voice Report is foundational in anchoring the student experience as the priority of both organisations, Sheffield Hallam University and Hallam Students' Union. It highlights and praises the continued efforts of both organisations in their commitments to improving the Hallam experience, whilst simultaneously outlining the areas in which help could be needed. The report continues to represent the ongoing collaborative relationship between both organisations.

This year's report takes a different approach from previous years. Historically the report would cover broad topics with multiple recommendations. This year there is a more targeted approach with fewer, tailored recommendations. The report highlights four distinct areas which research insights have repeatedly identified as areas for improvement. It is hoped that, in response to student feedback, this work will contribute to ongoing collaboration between Sheffield Hallam University and the Students' Union to enhance the student experience.

Executive Summary

This year's Student Voice Report explores how Hallam students are navigating university life amid ongoing economic, social, and institutional pressures.

This report draws from primary data collected from our three-part 'Hallam, How Are We Doing' pulse survey, and our formal research activity including other large-scale surveys such as the Cost of Living Survey. The report utilises both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including surveys, postcard data collection, focus groups and interviews, supported and validated by secondary data collected from other sources.

The report identifies persistent barriers across four key areas for improvement:

- **Placements and Employability:** While Sheffield Hallam University maintains its reputation for applied learning, many students report inconsistent support during placements and difficulty engaging with employability services.

- **Access and Participation:** Practical issues, such as limited access to essential software and inflexible timetabling, continue to impact students from underrepresented groups despite targeted institutional efforts.
- **Cost of Living:** Rising costs are placing pressure on all aspects of student life, with many reporting they are skipping meals, missing classes to work, and feeling anxious about their finances.
- **Wellbeing:** Mental health support services remain under strain. Students have called for more proactive wellbeing initiatives, including opportunities for social connection and community-building.

In response, the report outlines seven recommendations for action by Sheffield Hallam University and the Students' Union. Broadly, these include strengthening placement guidance and employability access; improving timetabling and digital learning resources; expanding cost of living support; and embedding social wellbeing activities into campus life.

Collectively, these recommendations reflect students' call for a more accessible, supportive, and responsive university environment.

Methodology

This report is a collation of feedback from students at Hallam throughout the 24/25 academic year. Most of the primary data referenced throughout this report (and outlined in Appendix A) has been collected through the Research team'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 student staff at HSU. Our Wellbeing research project was commissioned by the Campaigns Team but co-created with student staff and students.

Impact Report

Following the 2023/24 Student Voice Report¹, there were recommendations made based on collation and analysis of various sources, including student feedback, empirical research and external data. In partnership with the University, HSU has strived to find solutions for these issues that have impacts on students' lives and experiences of university.

Below are some of the most significant changes that occurred based on the recommendations from the 2023/24 Student Voice Report and areas of concern that continue to be highlighted by students:

- The Students' Communication Team has made a conscious effort to share and collaborate on content that promotes the Students' Union offer whilst maintaining its identity. The University and HSU have successfully dual-branded a number of campaigns including Varsity, Welcome, Hallam Together and Pride. We encourage ongoing partnership working between the two teams.
- SHU has rooted lecture capture and other Baseline Inclusive Measures into Learning, Teaching and Assessment offer, in-line with the 2025/26-2028/29 Access and Participation Plan. This ensures that some steps are being taken to remove barriers to participation for marginalised groups at Sheffield Hallam.
- Steps have been taken to improve software availability, currently there is a project with DTS and Student Researchers to help refine and launch 'Keyserver':
 - o Keyserver is a new tool designed to help students/staff find out where specialist software is installed on campus. It will allow people to:
 - o Search by room to see what software is available there.
 - o Search by software name to find out where they can access it.

With the aim that this will go some way to improving access to specialist software on campus. Whilst it is acknowledged there is ongoing projects to improve software availability, Student Reps are still reporting issues with this over this academic year (see Section 2).

Please see Appendix B for a detailed table of recommendation progress.

¹ HSU Student Voice Report 23/24.

<https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/pageassets/union/publications/SVR-2023-24.pdf>

2024/25 Recommendations

Section	Recommendation	SHU	HSU
Placements and Employability	1a) Implement a basic support plan, similar to the Nursing Placement Support Plan, across all placements at SHU to ensure a blanket provision of wellbeing support that can be adapted for various placement settings. <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish basic criteria needed for support plan across placements. Roll out plan across placements ensuring SHU placement staff and external staff are on board. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate the time to go through and embed the plan at the start of each placement. Whilst on placement ensure students are aware of wellbeing catch-ups and how to engage with them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the success of the wellbeing plan at the end of each placement. 	x	
	1b) Adapt and promote the current careers and employability support package for students to ensure they are aware of the support available, how they can engage and its relevance to their subject or career field. <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure there is sector specific careers advice including targeted careers fairs. Develop a template for careers talks to ensure tangible advice for students. Promote accessible digital and face-to-face careers and employability support that students know how to access by ensuring academic and support staff are aware of the offer. 	x	
Access and Participation	2a) Continue to provide high quality Learning, Teaching and Assessment provision, support and materials, both digitally and in person, in line with a commitment to support underrepresented groups. <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidate the LTA offer in wake of the removal of Studiosity. Conduct Department-level audits of access and participation issues including provision of physical and digital learning materials. 	x	

	2b) Conduct review around teaching attendance and how this can be improved. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge the timetabling issue and the impact other commitments and engaging in social experiences can have on this. Work with HSU to fully understand the extent the impact timetabling issues can have on the student experience. 	x	x
Cost of Living	3a) Expand the inclusion fund for the next academic year to continue to support students engaging in social activities. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate with SHU stakeholders to promote the Activities and Inclusion Fund. Review HSU internal budgets to assess the feasibility of expanding. 		x
	3b) Be more explicit about the cost of studying on certain courses and raise staff awareness of its potential impact on the teaching experience. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure there are cost effective alternatives for required teaching materials or resources. Create a digital directory of hardships funds and financial resources that can assist students in paying for additional course resources. 	x	
Wellbeing	4) Provide a range of academic and social extracurricular activities centred around enhancing students' sense of belonging, and thus student wellbeing. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boost awareness of SHU and HSU social and academic activities. Expand on the idea of the Engineering Café and other spaces, developing similar initiatives across other cohorts. 	x	x

Section 1: Placements and Employability

Context: An Applied Learning Experience

Sheffield Hallam University promotes an applied learning approach, which blends theory and practice, as a distinguishable and central tenet of its pedagogical philosophy². As such, placements and industry-based work experience form an integral part of Hallam's university experience. According to the SHU Placements webpage, the university offers over 23,000 placement opportunities across over 1000 employers³, and HSU research insights point to this vocational focus for being a main reason why students choose SHU as a Higher Education (HE) provider. Additionally, some of the courses with the most enrolled students at Hallam are ones that require significant placement hours, such as Adult Nursing, Physiotherapy, and Teaching⁴.

Closely associated with this industry focus is the careers and employability service, which offers essential advice, guidance and support for following their course at SHU in the job market. The SHU Careers and Employability service offers a wealth of in-person and digital resources such as support in writing applications, or appointments with careers advisors. Similarly to placements, students at Hallam have indicated that the tailored careers and employability support was a deciding factor for enrolling at SHU specifically. Despite this, there are reported ongoing issues regarding both course-related **placements** and the **careers and employability support** offer at Hallam, that have been impacting students' academic experiences.

Placements

Placements form an integral part of many courses offered at Hallam, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Whilst organising placements for such a large volume of students will not always run seamlessly, it's important to acknowledge where students have fed back areas for improvement.

Data from Wave 3 of Hallam How Are We Doing⁵ paints an overall positive picture of satisfaction with placements at Hallam with 80% stating they are 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their experience. One issue with this however, is that this does not distinguish between those on sandwich courses and those who have placement integrated into teaching. Having the ability to break the data down by this may differ satisfaction scores.

² SHU (2025) 'Applied'. <https://lta.shu.ac.uk/high-quality-teaching/applied>

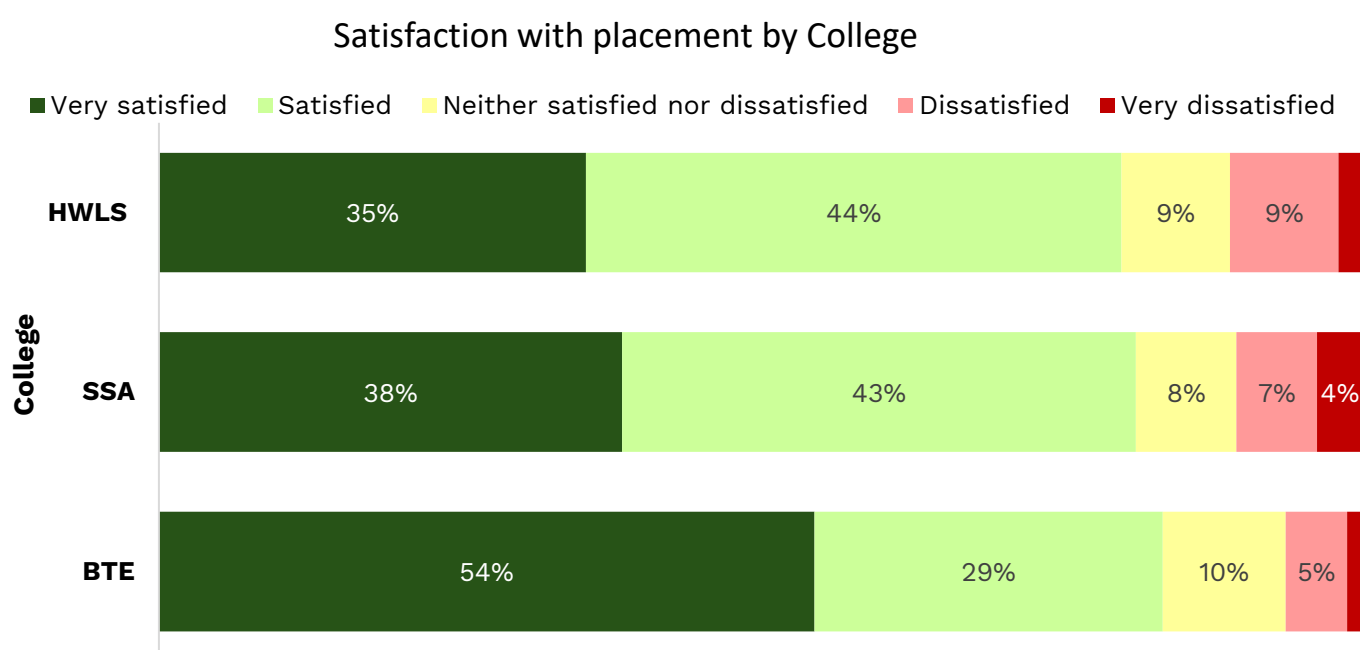
³ SHU (2025) 'Placements'. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/careers/work-experience/placements>

⁴ SHU Strategy, Planning & Insight (2025) 'Student Enrolment Report | Course Overview'. <https://tableau.shu.ac.uk/views/EnrolmentsandWithdrawalsReport/CourseOverview>

⁵ West, V., and Colburn, J. (2025) 'Hallam, How Are We Doing? Wave 3 Report'.

Nevertheless, when the data is broken down by College (as shown in the below figure) a slightly different picture is painted. Although satisfaction remains positive overall, there is a significant difference between Colleges and percentages of students that have selected they are 'very satisfied' with their placement. Those from the College of BTE are considerably more likely to state they are 'very satisfied' in comparison to those from HWLS and SSA. It could be argued this is due differences in support and allocation of placements across the Colleges.

Figure 1: HHAWD 2024/25 Wave 3: Satisfaction with placement by College (n=361).



Student Voice Meetings form an important part of the Representation System involving Reps meeting with SHU Student Voice and Engagement staff. From these meetings issues with placements were mentioned 132 times throughout this academic year, which is logged via the Student Voice Meeting log.

Further research conducted through Hallam Students' Union has highlighted issues in two main areas, placement **support** and **language** used when promoting placement opportunities.

Support while on placement

Support whilst students are on placement is a topic that has come through student feedback in numerous research projects run by Hallam Students' Union, as well as through our Advice Centre and our student representation system. Those on specific placements such as in healthcare and teaching settings will be subject to experiences that require adequate support and supervision. Despite this, there has been repeated evidence of longstanding issues across these kinds of placement.

Firstly, consistent with the above figure, feedback from HSU's Speak Week⁶ showed that students on placement within the College of SSA and HWLS were dissatisfied with the level of support offered. Some wanted specific support for things such as wellbeing whilst on placement, whereas others requested more generic support simply stating that there needed to be more offered.

In the Student Voice Meetings, previously known as Staff-Student Committee Meetings, placement support was continually called into question by student reps too. Reps from the Sheffield Institute of Education reported that they would like to see more placement check-ins to support their wellbeing and learning. Similarly, Reps from the School of Engineering and Built Environment echoed the need for more structured placement support, with one student missing out on placement due to the tight deadline to source one and from insufficient support from SHU during that stage.

Placement supervisory check-ins play a vital part in the support package for students whilst on placement. To measure engagement with these a Freedom of Information was requested by HSU from Hallam University. Statistics around this show that out of the 437 records (solely in relation to Undergraduate sandwich placements and Postgraduate Work Experience), 55% of the students received three or more touchpoints over their placement year. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that engagement is optional, encouraging students to utilise this service as well as ensuring they are actively promoted may be a remedial solution for students requesting more support.

Feedback from HSU's Lead Reps also supports the idea that support could be improved for placement students at Hallam. It has become apparent that the notion of support whilst on placement does not necessarily mean just wellbeing support, students would also like to see improved support around finding placements. For example, Level 5 students on computing courses expressed a need for more information and guidance regarding work placements, stating, "even though we are supposed to be applying right now, we have had nobody mention anything about it". Similarly, feedback from students in SBS has ascertained that they would like more information and guidance on attaining placements, expressing the need to begin planning and applying for work placements further in advance.

One Lead Rep who has worked attentively on issues of placement support is Aimee Hastings, Lead Rep of Health and Social Care (previously of Nursing and Midwifery). Aimee has, alongside HWLS College Officer Abi, developed the Personal Placement Support Plan, designed to be a space for students to openly disclose and develop a schedule for their own wellbeing needs while on placement (see Appendix C for the full plan). Aimee discusses her account here:

"Within the Department of Nursing and Midwifery, there has often been negative feedback from Nursing students around placements. This includes placement allocation, assessment of placements not being completed on time, and overall wellbeing of students. I spent a lot of time with students, Course

⁶ West, V., and Colburn, J. (2024) 'Speak Week Report- October 2024'.

Reps, Course Leaders and Link Lecturers, to identify where these problems stem from and how they can be overcome. After undertaking research into the deeper problems with student experience, it is profound in the wellbeing of students when starting a new placement and attending their placement block.

The research highlighted to me that there was nothing on placement for Nursing students to benefit their wellbeing. There was a real lack of “check-ins” from both university staff and clinical staff, and no place for students to document their needs and preferences to enhance their mental health. This was something that I was really passionate about improving, after experiencing negative placement experiences that declined my mental health.

The Personal Placement Support Plan was developed as a tool for students to be optionally open and honest about their requirements for good wellbeing on placement. It asks the important questions around how supervisors can support students, what may trigger poor mental health and what steps to take. Collaboratively working with the College Officer, it was developed with the addition of a disability/health plan, and culture/faith plans to enhance personal safety and wellbeing.

It was very well received by members of staff who wanted to get involved, who ultimately initiated the rollout after being watermarked and successfully verified. The plan is currently being piloted by a group of Level 6 Child Nursing students who are on placement for the duration of summer. The future of the plan is to implement this across all placement providers and create a space for the digital copy to be held and students to access, e.g. on Blackboard or uploaded to MYEPAD.

All staff within the department were very keen for the plan to be successfully implemented, as this will boost student wellbeing and engagement – creating a new workforce of nurses. I had the opportunity to present this plan to all practice supervisors, assessors and learning environment managers at Sheffield Children’s Hospital to inform them of the plan for when this is rolled out to the trust. I received very positive feedback, and I hope to improve student nurses’ wellbeing on placement through the tough times they face.”

~Aimee Hastings

(Health and Social Care Lead Rep, 2024-25)

This example given of the Personal Placement Support Plan shows the impact student-led interventions can have on the Hallam experience when working alongside both university and Students’ Union stakeholders. Aimee’s support plan framework and the positive buy-in from placement providers gives hope that these ongoing issues regarding mental health and wellbeing support whilst on placement can be mitigated through collaborative efforts and with student rep input. Not all

placements in other Departments or Colleges would need a similar structure to this support plan framework, but having a core set of criteria for a support plan would be a good place for other placement-heavy courses to start.

Recommendation 1a) Implement a basic support plan, similar to the Nursing Placement Support Plan, across all placements at SHU to ensure a blanket provision of wellbeing support that can be adapted for various placement settings.

Suggested actions:

- Establish basic criteria needed for support plan across placements.
- Roll out plan across placements ensuring SHU placement staff and external staff are on board.
- Allocate the time to go through and embed the plan at the start of each placement.
- Whilst on placement ensure students are aware of wellbeing catch-ups and how to engage with them.
- Review the success of the wellbeing plan at the end of each placement.

Language while promoting placements

Another key area of feedback in relation to placements is around promotional language used, or the reality of being on placement differing to how it was originally described.

During HSU's Third Year Focus Groups⁷ attendees discussed how the cost of placements had been more than they expected, and this was not made clear at the start. One psychology student expressed confusion around the provision of financial aid, suggesting that they were encouraged to go on a placement, however, as it was optional, they would no longer receive financial assistance. It's reasonable to suggest that this confusion may be indicative of a need for revised language and communication around the realities of being on placement.

Similar cases have also come through Lead Reps in BTE, those on the Computing MSc course have expressed confusion around the language the University use around placements. For the work experience route of an MSc course, students can pay an extra £1200-£1500 fee so they can "have the opportunity to go on a work placement for up to 12 months, where you'll apply academic theory and your skills in a real-world setting. This hands-on experience will enhance your professional development..."⁸. However, when students begin their course, they are expected to source their own placement, and when they do not attain this, they are placed on the non-work experience route with no refund. As expected, students would like the wording on the webpages to be changed, with more placement opportunities sourced by the University.

Upcoming legislation changes by the Office for Students will make it necessary for higher education institutions to give students accessible and clear information about any changes to their courses, as well as fair processes for refunds, compensation and complaints. With the aim of ensuring students are receiving high quality education, treated fairly from the moment they receive an offer and during their studies.⁹ As a result, this means that accepting material changes or changes to service alterations is now part of the protected consumer decision-making process¹⁰. Considering this, it feels imperative that Hallam are clear on wording that helps students to better understand what the placement entails, both in terms of finance, and in support.

⁷ West, V., and Colburn, J. (2024) 'Third Year Focus Groups Report'.

⁸ Sheffield Hallam University (2025) 'MSc Computing with cloud technologies'. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/courses/computing/msc-computing-with-cloud-technologies-work-experience/full-time>

⁹ Pincet Masons (2025) 'Universities face 'fair treatment' requirement beyond consumer law under new OfS proposal' [Universities face 'fair treatment' requirement beyond consumer law under new OfS proposal](#)

¹⁰ WONKHE (2025) 'Consumer protection law has changed, and the changes apply to universities now'. <https://wonkhe.com/wonk-corner/consumer-protection-law-has-changed-and-the-changes-apply-to-universities-now>

Careers and employability offer

Issues around career support, particularly amongst third-year students nearing study end, appear repeatedly in research conducted by HSU. Data from HHAWD Wave 1¹¹ and 2¹² continues to highlight generalised dissatisfaction with careers support. Specifically, satisfaction rates with career and employability support from the University are particularly low, with 61% stating they agree that they are satisfied with support provided. In response, students have stated that they would like to see more employment support from the Students' Union and the University around CV building, preparing for interviews and sourcing relevant opportunities.

Interestingly, despite the want for careers and employment support, engagement with these services is low. From those who stated they have engaged, only 18% had used the Careers and Employability service and 13% had used their Employment Adviser. It may be that adequate support exists, but simply students don't know how to access it. Feedback from our Autumn Voter Survey¹³, further highlights this potential issue:

"Making sure that all students know who to contact/where to turn to for what to do for a career in their course type. I would find it valuable to have resources that can help me see what jobs are available for the future and what I can be doing to achieve those goals."

In our recent Third Year Focus Groups, students discussed their anxieties about the lack of preparation and guidance for their careers and employment after university. One student mentioned that there was so little support available regarding skills and advice for applying for jobs, especially compared with previous years:

"In second year, they emphasise CVs and applications for those going on placement year but there is no [employability] support for those graduating this year."

The gap in employment support also affects Careers Fairs hosted by the university. Students within these focus groups discussed their dissatisfaction with fairs they have attended, with one student describing them as, "absolutely crap". It appears the dissatisfaction may centre on the fairs not being targeted towards specific courses, career pathways or industries. For example:

"For my careers fair, there was only one stall related to my course [Politics] and the person there couldn't offer any relevant advice. I felt very left out."

As well as fairs targeted towards courses and industries, students have also discussed how they would like more industry-relevant talks being held at the University or Students' Union. Interestingly, one focus group discussion suggested that there is a tendency for 'industry experts' to focus on the promotion of their

¹¹ West, V., and Colburn, J. (2025) 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' 2024/25 Wave 1 Report'.

¹² West, V., and Colburn, J. (2025) 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' 2024/25 Wave 2 Report'.

¹³ Colburn, J., and West, V. (2024) 'Autumn Voters' Survey 2024'.

own achievements in isolation, and in-place of the provision of practical careers advice. As such, it should be noted that the content of these events must be relevant and helpful to students.

It was also suggested that there was a need to create similar networking events or mentorship programmes:

“As an international student balancing studies and job hunting, I truly appreciate the support from Hallam Students’ Union. However, one area where additional support could be beneficial is career-focused mentorship and networking. While career fairs are helpful, a dedicated mentorship program—where alumni or industry professionals guide students through job applications, interview preparation, and career pathways—would be invaluable, especially in fields like Accounting, Finance, and Fintech.”

Similarly, feedback through Lead Reps across the University mirrors the dissatisfaction from students around the careers fair offer. In previous years, there has been one careers fair per School/Institute which had companies tailored to that subject area. However, this academic year there have been 2 university wide careers fairs presented to all students. On attending the first fair, students reported that the fair did not cater for most subject areas across the University and many companies in attendance were only offering undergraduate placement opportunities rather than graduate jobs. In particular, Reps from the Built Environment subject group feel particularly strongly about this as they have been moved to the School of Engineering (and Built Environment) and feel the opportunities at the university-wide career fairs only had engineering opportunities.

Recommendation 1b) Adapt and promote the current careers and employability support package for students to ensure they are aware of the support available, how they can engage and its relevance to their subject or career field.

Suggested actions:

- Ensure there is sector specific careers advice including targeted careers fairs.
- Develop a template for careers talks to ensure tangible advice for students.
- Promote accessible digital and face-to-face careers and employability support that students know how to access by ensuring academic and support staff are aware of the offer.

Part-time work

As the Cost of Living section will show, the crisis continues to have a significant impact on students. One opportunity that may alleviate some of this pressure is the ability for students to engage in part-time work alongside their studies and other commitments.

As shown in the table below from the Cost of Living survey¹⁴, a large proportion of students (41%) are currently unemployed. It could be argued the most advantageous position for students would be to have part-time fixed hours, these would fit around their studies, and they would have a clear understanding of their expected weekly or monthly income. For this, only 14% have stated this is the case.

Table 1: Cost of Living Report 2024/25: Do you currently work alongside your studies? (n=1248):

	%
No – Currently Unemployed	41%
Yes – full-time (35+ hours per week)	10%
Yes – Part-time (fixed hours, less than 35 hours per week)	14%
Yes – Part-time (hours vary, less than 35 hours per week)	34%

When students were asked what future services or support they would like to see from Hallam Students' Union, 57% would like more flexible job opportunities. This suggests that there is a demand for more of these opportunities across the student body. However, it is important to acknowledge that the issues students have raised with timetabling (see Access and Participation section) may create barriers for them to engage in part-time work opportunities. Even students on a full-time course may now need to work part-time alongside their studies to support themselves during the cost of living crisis. Having timetables or flexible job opportunities that allow them to do this should be reviewed.

In the same vein, HHAWD Wave 3 data continues to show the impact sourcing part-time work can have on students. During their time at University, 37% stated that a struggle to source part-time work had a detrimental impact on their wellbeing. Qualitative data further illustrates this picture, with students stating:

“Helping students find part-time work that can go alongside a uni timetable”

“More help with job opportunities. I’m an international student and several times I have applied for jobs posted on the school website and Handshake, I have never gotten any feedback on the status of these applications. These affect my mental health, self-esteem and makes me feel unworthy. Getting feedback helps you to work on your areas of improvement but with no feedback whatsoever, I feel unseen and unheard.”

¹⁴ West, V., Colburn J., and Bebbington, M. (2025) ‘Cost of Living Report 24/25’.

Section 2: Access and Participation

Context: Hallam as a Widening Participation University

According to data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Sheffield Hallam University hosts more students from underrepresented backgrounds than any other UK university¹⁵, with data suggesting 70.7% of new students in the academic year 2022/23 belonging to one or more Access and Participation (A&P) groups, for example, being mature, from a minoritised ethnicity, disabled, and/or from a low participation area as measured by Tundra¹⁶.

As a widening participation¹⁷ university, SHU sets out its provisions for ensuring equality of opportunity for these underrepresented groups in their Access and Participation Plan (APP), which the OfS approves and monitors¹⁸. The APP outlines the provisions in place to reduce barriers to education, such as bursary support for students that meet specific criteria, and reasserts what needs to be addressed going forward to understand the barriers to participation as well. Therefore, access and participation form a central part of the ethos and culture at Hallam, in representing inclusivity from both the university and Students' Union.

Despite the strategic endeavours of the university to promote equality of opportunity, there have been a few challenges raised throughout the year which, understood within the context of A&P, pose issues for underrepresented students at some part of the student life cycle.

Student insights from our feedback channels and from various research projects indicate that these specific Access and Participation challenges typically fall into one of two categories: those affecting students' **access to learning**, and those affecting students' **ability to participate** in extracurricular academic and social activities. These two categories of A&P issues are specified in more detail below.

¹⁵ Sheffield Hallam University (2021) 'Educating more students from under-represented backgrounds than any other UK university'. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/news/all-articles/latest-news/widening-participation-statistics>

¹⁶ Sheffield Hallam University (25/26) 'Summary of 2025/26 to 2028/29 access and participation plan.' <https://www.shu.ac.uk/-/media/home/about-this-website/legal-information/files/summary-of-2025-26-to-2028-29-sheffield-hallam-access-and-participation-plan.pdf>

¹⁷ Connell-Smith, A., and Hubble, S. (2018) 'Widening participation strategy in higher education in England'. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8204/CBP-8204.pdf>

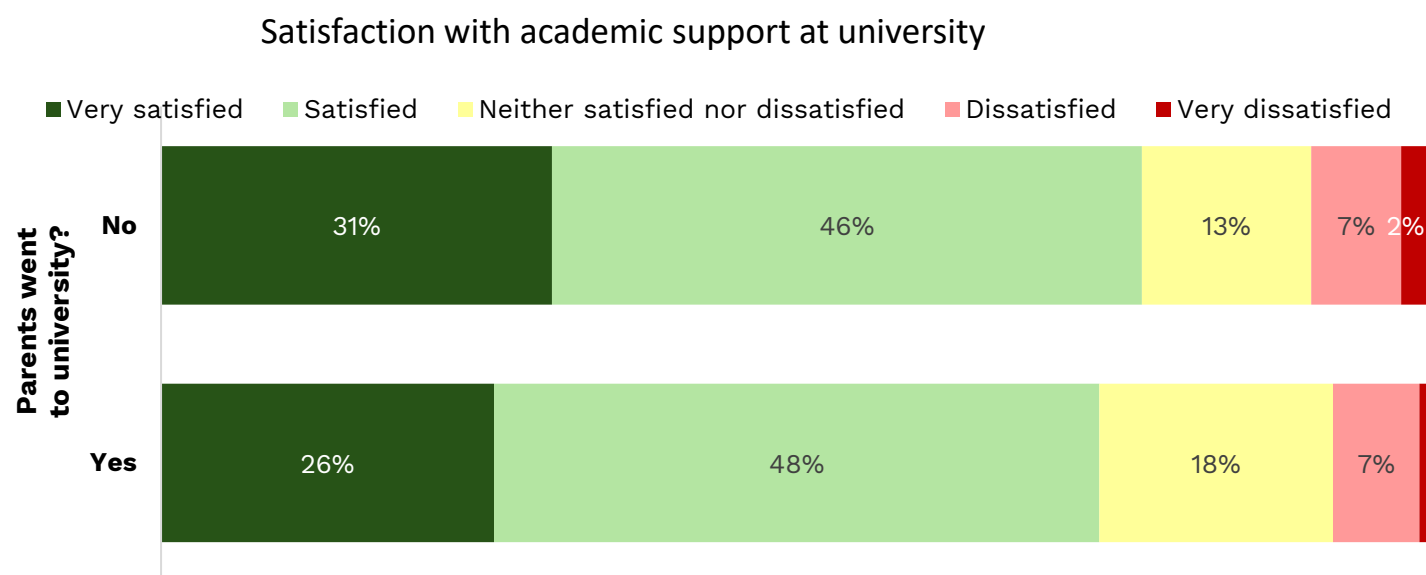
¹⁸ OfS (2025) 'Find an access and participation plan or access agreement'. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/regulatory-resources/search-for-access-and-participation-plans/#/AccessPlans/>

Access to Learning

Hallam has a plethora of procedures and services in place, in line with the APP, to remove barriers to learning for students from disadvantaged groups or backgrounds. A key example of this ongoing work is around Baseline Inclusive Measures, which are a set of “reasonable adjustments that the university can apply universally to ensure that all students can access their teaching, learning, and assessment with fewer barriers at the start of their course”¹⁹. Baseline Inclusive Measures were instigated so that all students from A&P groups could access learning support more freely.

One of the underrepresented student groups that Hallam supports through these Baseline Inclusive Measures and across other policies and interventions is students whose parents did not go to university. Hallam prides itself on its reputation for promoting social mobility via increasing participation for those such as ‘first in family’ students²⁰. These efforts are having recognisable impact, as evidenced throughout student data. Figure 2 shows satisfaction with academic support at university, by whether the students are ‘first in family’, from ‘Hallam, How Are We Doing?’ Wave 3. These results show that ‘first in family’ students reported higher levels of satisfaction with academic support (77% ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’) compared with those whose parents went to university (74% ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’).

Figure 2: HHAWD 2024/25 Wave 3: Satisfaction with academic support at university, by whether students’ parents went to university (n=902).



¹⁹ SHU (2025) ‘Baseline Inclusive Measures’. <https://lta.shu.ac.uk/high-quality-teaching/inclusive-teaching/baseline-inclusive-measures#:~:text=The%20Baseline%20Inclusive%20Measures%20are,the%20start%20of%20their%20course.>

²⁰ SHU (2021) ‘Hallam named University of the Year for social mobility’. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/news/all-articles/latest-news/hallam-university-of-the-year-social-mobility>

These results show that SHU's commitment to removing barriers to learning for all students across dedicated policy is proving successful and having tangible impact on underrepresented student groups. Despite this, there are still challenges that, if left unaddressed, will have undeniable impact on access to teaching, learning and assessment for students from these underrepresented groups.

In last year's Student Voice Report, issues were raised around the accessibility of specialist software provision in the College of BTE. These concerns came from student rep feedback around software required for teaching delivery and assessment across multiple courses, and how said software was only available on computers at certain campus buildings²¹. This disparity in access to the required software posed significant issues for Access & Participation from the outset, with conditions forcing students to purchase the software individually.

These issues pertaining to software access were relevant through feedback from student reps and not limited to the College of BTE. Reps from Creative Industries Institute in the College of SSA reported via Student Voice Meetings that students want to be able to access the Marmoset software remotely. Student Voice Meetings in the College of BTE have indicated that the software accessibility issues have continued into this academic year. Reps across Engineering courses have channelled students' frustrations about specialist software such as Aspen Plus, PowerFactory, RenderDoc and Revit still not being widely accessible to students. Reps from Chemical Engineering courses mentioned that Aspen Plus provision needs to be expanded for students as it is currently only available on three library computers.

Case study: Studiosity

Undoubtedly, this inconsistent access to academic software poses an issue for Access and Participation, creating a barrier to learning rather than removing it. However, multiple changes in additional learning support were noticed by students across Colleges this academic year, as the university grappled with difficult decisions under financial strain.

A notable example of access to learning software being revoked is that of Studiosity. Studiosity is a free-of-charge online service that delivers feedback on academic writing and is available via Blackboard²². In September, a Student Engagement Lead informed HSU that the service had been removed from most students with no warning, with the service's accessibility restricted solely to postgraduate students (Level 7).

²¹ Churchill, M. (2024) 'Software issues in the College of Business, Technology and Engineering 2024'.

²² SHU Library (2025) 'Editing and Proofreading'. [Studiosity - Editing and Proofreading - LibGuides at Sheffield Hallam University](#)

Without a doubt, this poses significant issues for the students from A&P groups that benefitted from the service. University data shows that despite postgraduate taught students making a significant proportion of the total Studiosity submissions for the 2022/23 academic year (37% of total usage), submissions from undergraduate students totalled 60%, indicating that there is a student voice case for undergraduate access. Unfortunately, there are no statistics over the demographic breakdown of the users of Studiosity, other than stage of study, but it is assumed through anecdotal evidence that students whose first language is not English and those on Learning Contracts would use the service more regularly than other student groups.

Our elected SSA College Officer and incoming HSU President, Molly Pemberton, has worked alongside the university and liberation groups to better understand Studiosity and what its removal means for some students:

“At the start of this academic year, the decision was made to remove Studiosity (an academic writing and peer-mentoring service) for most students, due to financial restraints. The service remains available to post-grad students, however, by reducing our Studiosity offer, the rest of our student population, especially international students and students with learning disabilities have been impacted.

Students from the Sheffield Institute of Law & Justice stated that they felt as though there were not enough summative writing feedback opportunities across the year to check their writing styles, especially without Studiosity.

In the Sheffield Institute of Education, students reported that occasionally students with Learning Contracts have been given extra credits to submit essays via Studiosity and that there is no equivalent support for these students.

We recognise that the University is in a time of great financial struggle but cuts to student services are detrimental to students' learning experience and academic potential, particularly with a widening gap of academic support.”

~Molly Pemberton

(SSA College Officer, 2024-25)

The limiting of Studiosity to postgraduate students, paired with the various and numerous instances of inaccessible software required for academic success pose as a serious threat to Access and Participation. Students, in line with the principle of inclusive practice, should all be able to access and participate fully in the learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) experience at Hallam, and should equally be able to freely engage with materials and support pertaining to LTA too. SHU has a responsibility to its students and via its commitment to inclusivity and A&P to offer adequate LTA provision to its students, and in the context of Studiosity, offer replacements or substitutes in its place.

Recommendation 2a) Continue to provide high quality Learning, Teaching and Assessment provision, support and materials, both digitally and in person, in line with a commitment to support underrepresented groups.

Suggested actions:

- Consolidate the LTA offer in wake of the removal of Studiosity.
- Conduct Department-level audits of access and participation issues including provision of physical and digital learning materials.

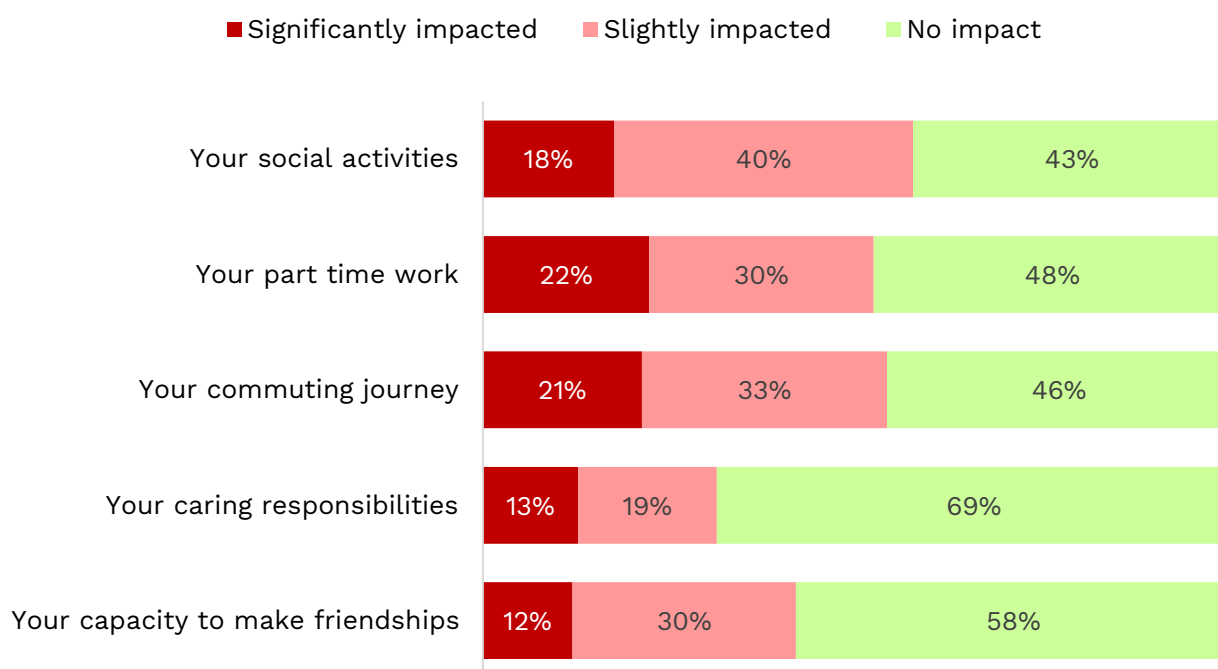
Ability to Participate

Timetabling issues have been an ongoing issue for students at Hallam, with it appearing as an issue in the past three Student Voice Reports. However, research into the student experience shows that issues with timetables and scheduled learning sessions also impact students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities or paid employment, which can disproportionately affect students from marginalised backgrounds or A&P groups.

Recent data from Wave 3 of 'Hallam, How Are We Doing' highlighted the significant impact issues with timetables can have on various aspects of the student experience. As shown in the figure below, 58% of surveyed students reported an impact on their social activities as a result of their timetable and 42% reported an impact to their capacity to make friendships - both of which can be argued to be an imperative part of supporting student wellbeing. Worryingly, during a cost of living crisis, 52% reported an impact to their part-time work.

Figure 3: HHAWD 2024/25 Wave 3: To what extent has your timetable impacted the following? (n=941)

Impact of timetabling on various parts of students' lives



When breaking the above data down by commuter status, some differences were established. As expected, commuters were more likely to report an impact to their commuting journey (79%) in comparison to non-commuters (41%). Additionally, commuters were more likely to report impacts to their caring responsibilities (37%) in comparison to non-commuters (27%). Commuters constitute a significant proportion of the student body at Hallam, and so it is crucial to understand and address the implications that these issues with timetabling and scheduling of learning sessions can have regarding their university experience.

Further qualitative feedback from Wave 3 further reinforces the impact timetabling can have on students' ability to engage in social activities, for example:

"Can't really commit the time to attend socials or events down in city campus as they usually clash with our timetable."

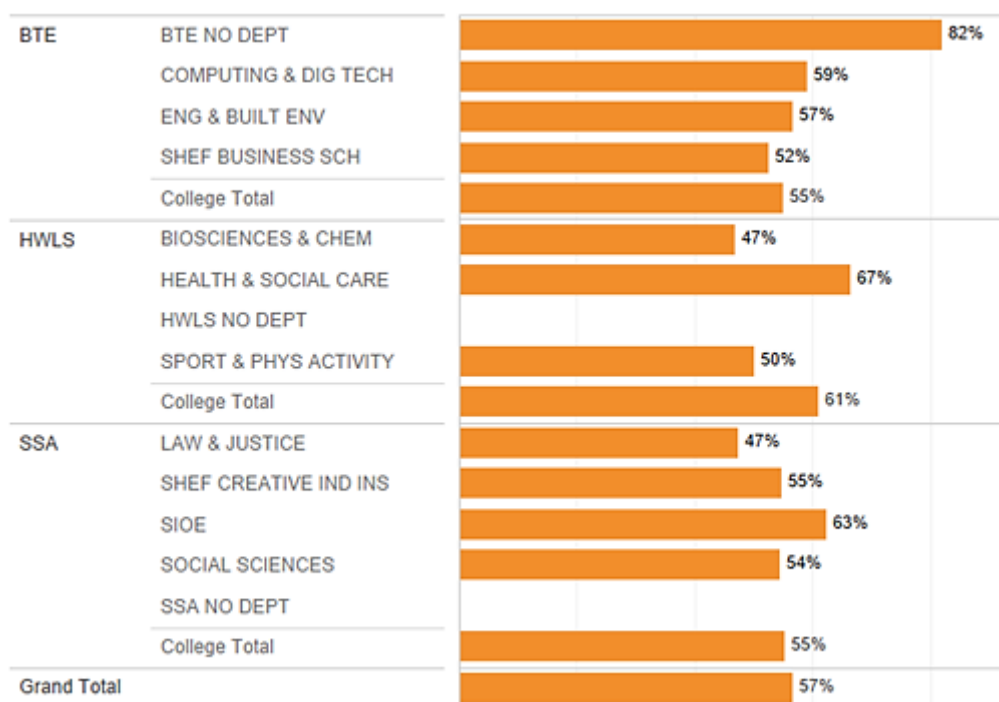
"...I also think the very mature students aren't catered for very well and fly under the diversity and inclusivity radar around events and timetabling."

In support of this, feedback gathered from students during Speak Week showed that students found timetabling that was scheduled into the evening (e.g. after 5pm) impacted their ability to engage in extracurricular activities such as playing sports. Not only have timetabling issues impacted students' abilities to participate in extracurricular activities, they have also had an impact on allowing them to work alongside their studies and with an ongoing cost of living crisis, this may have a detrimental impact.

Data obtained from our Cost of Living survey shows 45% (an increase from 37% on the previous year) have missed or skipped teaching to partake in paid employment or due to financial constraints. Additionally, data accessible via The Source further

illustrates the picture that students are missing or skipping teaching (as shown in the figure below), whilst we cannot establish the exact reasons for this, it could be argued this is due to wanting to also experience the social side of University and attend extracurricular activities or the need to engage in paid work.

Figure 4: The Source: Attendance data by College



Many departments report attendance below 60%, which illuminates a wider issue of student disengagement. Some Departments for example, Law and Justice or Biosciences and Chemistry report attendance at 47%. With such low attendance, it seems imperative to look at ways to increase this among the student body. Addressing the issues with timetabling and on campus teaching schedules seems essential to understanding the lack of student engagement.

Recommendation 2b) Conduct review around teaching attendance and how this can be improved.

Suggested actions:

- Acknowledge the timetabling issue and the impact other commitments and engaging in social experiences can have on this.
- Work with HSU to fully understand the extent the impact timetabling issues can have on the student experience.

Section 3: Cost of Living

Context: Students' Financial Struggles

The Cost of Living crisis has and continues to impact students in profound ways. As the Office for National Statistics states²³, 9 in 10 higher education students reported that their cost of living had increased compared to the previous year. The Russell Group Students' Unions Cost of Living Report²⁴ found that the median income per month for students is £824. After housing costs (with the average student rent estimated at £535/month), the average student respondent to this survey is likely to fall under the UK poverty line. This bleak statement is repeated in The National Union of Students (NUS)'s cost of living survey, which found that the crisis is further pushing students into debt, resulting in loss of economic stability, undermining their studies, and ultimately in some courses leading to withdrawal²⁵

With Sheffield Hallam being more likely to recruit students from Polar 1 and 2 backgrounds it could be argued the Cost of Living impacts them more. Hallam Students' Union reran the Cost of Living survey for the fourth time to further assess how the crisis is impacting our students. As expected, it continues to have a profound negative impact on our students, with those being negatively impacted by the rising costs of basic human essentials such as food, healthcare and clothing. (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Cost of Living Report 2024/25: Negative impacts of increases in the costs of various items (n=1145)

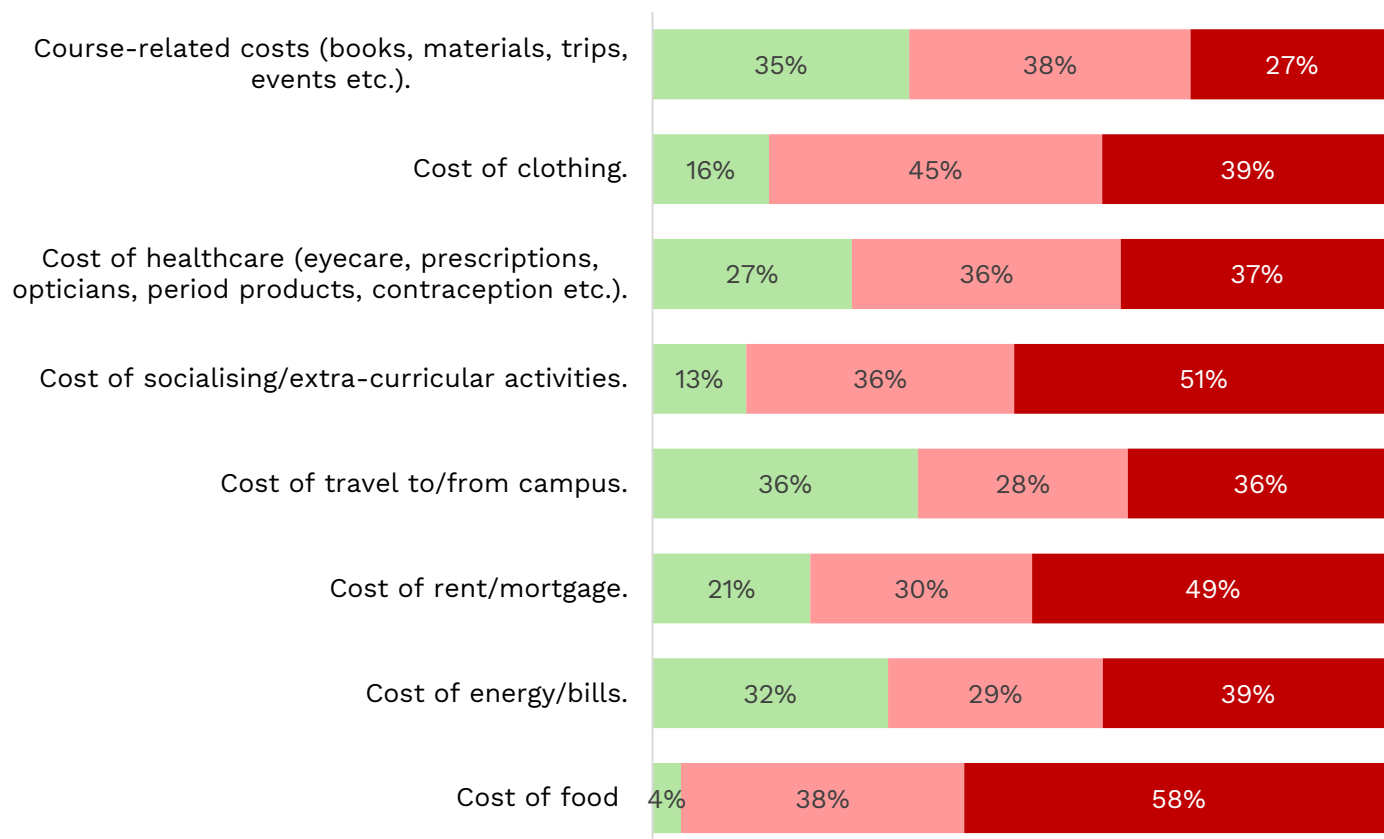
²³ Office for National Statistics (2023) 'Cost of living and higher education students, England: 30 January to 13 February 2023'.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/costoflivingandhighereducationstudentsengland/30januaryto13february2023>

²⁴ Russell Group Students' Union (2023) 'Student Cost of Living Report'.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63f4ed73056f42572785c28e/t/640b4a3d20fc6122160c275e/1678461513650/Cost+of+Living+Report+-+March+2023.pdf>

²⁵ NUS (2022) 'Cost of Living Crisis'.
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/181/attachments/original/1669035472/NUS_Cost_of_Living_Research_November_2022_-_Higher_Education_Students.pdf?1669035472.

Impact of increasing costs of student life

■ No impact ■ Slight impact ■ Substantial impact



Qualitative feedback from students paints an even starker picture with many giving detailed and lengthy feedback about the impact on them. Many students spoke about the significant impact the crisis has on every aspect of their University experience and personal life, for example:

“It’s the silent stress of checking my bank balance before buying food, of deciding whether I can afford both rent and a warm meal in the same week. It’s the exhaustion of juggling work and studies, knowing that missing a shift means falling behind on bills, but missing a class means falling behind on my future. It’s the loneliness of saying no to social events, not because I don’t want to go, but because I can’t justify spending money on something that isn’t essential. It’s the shame of pretending I’m not hungry when I skip meals, or of making excuses for why I can’t join friends for coffee. More than anything, it’s the mental weight of constantly worrying. Of feeling like no matter how hard I try, I’m always one unexpected expense away from real trouble. The pressure is relentless, and it makes it hard to focus, to learn, to feel like I belong in a place that was supposed to be about opportunity. All I can do is keep going and hope that one day, things will be different. That this struggle will be worth it. That education will lead to a future where I don’t have to choose between surviving and living.”

University experience

Attending University encompasses many different experiences, from academic through to social and extracurricular – all of which have been significantly impacted by the cost of living. In our Cost of Living Survey, 89% stated their social experience has been impacted by financial constraints and 77% for academic experience.

Social experience

In terms of the social experience, Wave 2 of our Hallam, How Are We Doing survey highlighted financial constraints as a primary reason for not joining a club or society. Similarly, in the Cost of Living survey, students commented on how they struggled to engage in social activities due to impact of finances. It is suggested that socialising has become an indulgent activity, and the impact of not socialising means they have not been able to form a friendship group, for example:

“Not having enough money to meet basic survival needs means that studying and socialising are impossible.”

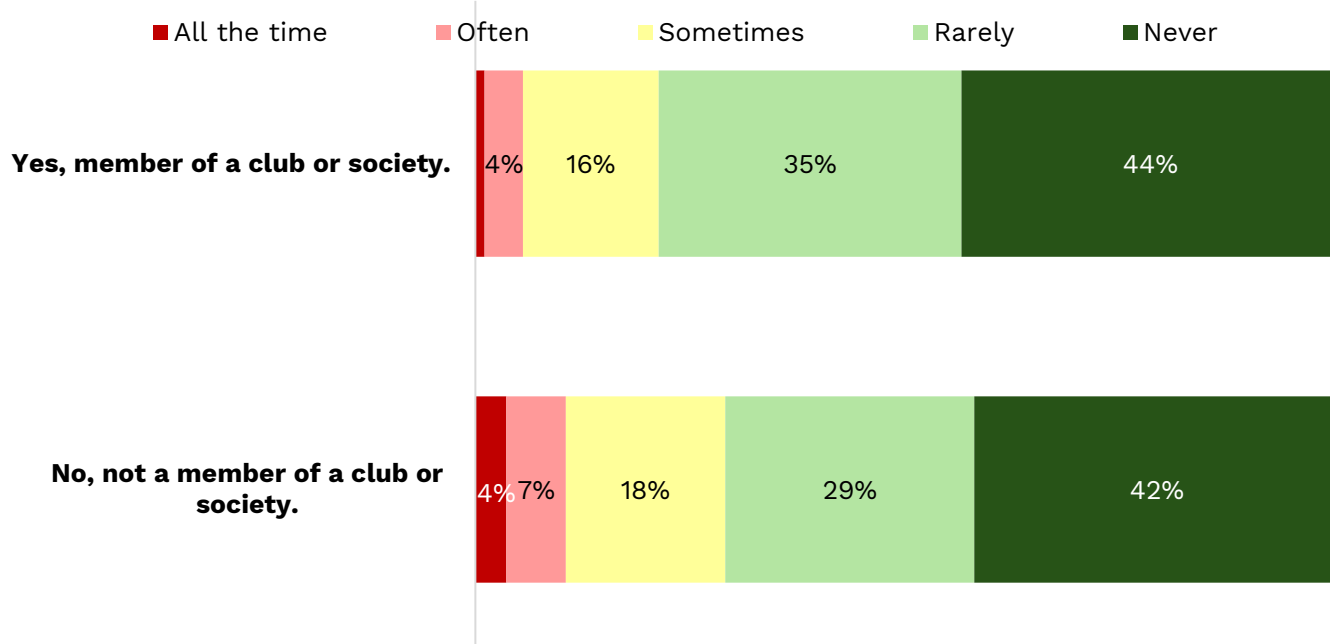
“Socialising has become a luxury whilst at university with the cost of everything as it is at the moment. My emotional wellbeing has suffered as a result.”

“It would cost me about £100 to attend a social event at uni as I have to pay for taxis to get there and back which I cannot afford so I miss out on socialising and don’t really have any friends at uni”

As shown in the below figure, those who are part of a society are less likely to consider dropping out of university (21%), in comparison to those who are not (29%). Therefore, it could be argued that the ability to be part of a society and is a key contributor to a positive university experience and to greater student retainment. With this in mind, encouraging and enabling students to access other social experiences whilst at university may further positively impact retainment.

Figure 6: HHAWD 2024/25 Wave 2: Considering dropping out of University broken down by society/club membership (n=1446):

How often students consider dropping out, by society or club membership



Academic experience

The impact the crisis has had on social experiences has also had a significant impact on the academic experience. In HSU's Cost of Living report, 74% of respondents report missing or skipping academic events, this is a significant increase from 61% from the previous year. Additionally, and potentially of more concern, 45% report missing or skipping university classes – representing an increase on the previous year from 37%. Unsurprisingly perhaps, financial stress has impacted students' ability to focus on their studies, leaving some with no choice but to leave their course:

"I am planning on leaving my studies early as I can't raise my children properly and maintain my home. Desperately need more money."

"Yes, the rising cost of living has impacted both my mental wellbeing and academic focus. Constantly worrying about how I'll afford rent or my next meal makes it difficult to concentrate fully on my studies. I've had to make sacrifices, skipped meals even. I'm doing my best to stay hopeful and continue my education, but without stable income or support, it's becoming increasingly difficult."

Initiatives to help

It is clear, from the data, that current nationwide economic decline negatively impacts students' social and academic experience. In response, Hallam Students' Union has run several initiatives to try and help, all of which have been received positively by users.

Firstly, the Activities Inclusion Fund which provides funding to help students participate in extracurricular activities, such as SU events and societies. Overall, 32 students utilised the fund in the 24/25 academic year and where feedback was provided it was overwhelmingly positive²⁶, for example:

"This has really supported me as I may not have had this opportunity without the funds support."

However, there were calls for it to be publicised more, increasing awareness of its existence, and ensuring students know how it is accessed.

HSU's Cost of Living shop was developed to enable students to access the Community Fridge, Clothing Swap Shop and Book Swap. Interestingly, whilst research from HSU's Cost of Living survey shows that financial issues are widespread amongst students, engagement with the shop service is low, at only 6%. However, when students were asked what services they would like to see 28% asked for a community fridge and 22% a clothing swap shop, suggesting there is appetite for the service. Therefore, it may be that support around promoting the Cost of Living Shop to students may be beneficial.

Finally, to alleviate the financial burden of period products, HSU has run the Period Product Subscription Scheme, which received positive feedback from users²⁷. Overall, 100% of those who had used the scheme had found it helpful in some capacity. It is important to note that 57% of users stated it helped them to attend university and 98% reported it had eased their financial worries. Qualitative feedback further highlights the positive impact:

"This scheme had a great impact on my physical wellbeing as well as my mental wellbeing. It certainly eased my financial worries and also in some cases helped me attend more lectures and extracurricular activities."

"As an international female student with the fluctuation in the economy around the world, having this scheme around is a boon. I did not need to shop for sanitary napkins; I received them through this scheme. I saved money on personal hygiene and could use that few pounds to buy more nutritious food. As a student, I find this scheme to be the best blessing."

Feedback from HSUs Autumn Voter Survey, which evaluates the recent elections process and establishes candidate focuses, showed students would like to see more financial support and initiatives to help with the cost of basic essentials. With this

²⁶ Bebbington, M. (2025) 'Activities Inclusion Fund Evaluation'.

²⁷ Bebbington, M. (2025) 'Period Product Subscription Scheme Evaluation'.

in mind, and the with the above initiatives having a positive impact on students impacted by the crisis, it is suggested that greater resource is committed to running, developing and promoting these services to students who need them the most.

Recommendation 3a) Expand the inclusion fund for the next academic year to continue to support students engaging in social activities.

Suggested actions:

- Communicate with SHU stakeholders to promote the Activities and Inclusion Fund.
 - Review HSU internal budgets to assess the feasibility of expanding.

Hidden costs whilst at University

Whilst the impact of 'standard' costs of attending University for Hallam students is evident, for example, the rising cost of accommodation and travel, it's apparent that the 'hidden' costs are also having a significant impact. These include things that students were potentially unaware they may need whilst studying or that are more expensive than expected.

HSU's Cost of Living survey included options around course related costs for the first time this academic year. Nearly three quarters (65%) of surveyed students state they have been slightly or substantially impacted by course related costs (e.g. books, materials, trips and events). All of which, can be argued, are basic components of enabling a student to be successful whilst at university. As a result of these financial constraints, 77% state their academic experience has been slightly or substantially impacted and 18% have cut back on spending around course related items as a result. Qualitative feedback from respondents further supports this picture, for example:

"...Course-related Costs: Essential academic materials such as textbooks, software, and course-related trips have become increasingly expensive, limiting my ability to fully engage in my education."

"... I do not earn enough to pay off overdrafts or credit card bills incurred from deposits, course costs and necessary bills like food and heating..."

"...As a law student my course requires lots of research and textbooks which average around £30-£40 per book which is a lot and hard to find up to date second hand versions for cheaper..."

Additionally, in our Third Year Focus Groups, third year students discussed how they had experienced additional course costs in addition to paying for things that were otherwise included in their first and second years. For example, some stated that trips that would have normally been included in previous years were now an additional cost. Additionally, some discussed frustration at the expense of new

buildings on campus when students were struggling to pay for extra resources for their courses.

Lead Reps' Cost of Living Initiatives

Feedback from our Reps in Art and Design has expressed how students in the department are concerned about the rising costs of course materials will have on their grades. There are further concerns the documents around additional course costs underestimate how much students actually have to pay. This also raises concerns that if this is the case in one department, these concerns may also be evident in others.

In response to additional course costs and the impact the cost of living crisis may have on this, HSU has set up the Art Materials Swap Shop as part of the Cost of Living Shop. Supported by SHU staff who have donated supplies to the shop, students are able to swap, purchase for a low-cost donation and donate to the shop art materials needed for courses. The aim is to help students with a sustainable affordable way to get creative on their course without the financial stress.

Recommendation 3b) Be more explicit about the cost of studying on certain courses and raise staff awareness of its potential impact on the teaching experience.

Suggested actions:

- Ensure there are cost effective alternatives for required teaching materials or resources.
- Create a digital directory of hardships funds and financial resources that can assist students in paying for additional course resources.

Section 4: Wellbeing

Context: A Student Mental Health Crisis

Much of wider discourse surrounding university students and the student experience has been saturated with mentions of a 'student mental health crisis'. Ultimately, nationwide reports cite rapidly increasing rates of mental health diagnoses among student populations; statistics that have reached parliamentary discussions²⁸. Despite the continued political and media focus on students' mental health and wellbeing, support and provision across HEIs seems to be inconsistent and overwhelmed by high demand²⁹.

These trends are recognisable in data concerning the student experience at Hallam as well. The first iteration of the 2024/25 academic year's 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' survey saw 27% of students reporting that they had considered dropping out of university frequently ('sometimes', 'often' or 'all the time'); and of these students, 57% saw mental health such as stress, anxiety or depression, as the main reason for which they have considered dropping out. 'Mental health' was the most selected reason among all participants for this question.

Figure 7 shows the proportion of students, who consider dropping out regularly and attribute mental health as their main reason for doing so, by level of study. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the proportion of students attributing likelihood of dropping out to poor mental health increases as year of study increases in undergraduate study, from 49% of undergraduate first years to 67% of second years to 68% of third years.

These trends are not solely limited to the quantitative data too, with many comments stressing the need for a stronger mental health and wellbeing offer at Hallam. When asked if there was any way in which Hallam Students' Union can support them at university, respondents to 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' Wave 1 suggested additional support for wellbeing. Below are a few comments:

"Raising more awareness for certain services they provide in aiding students mental health."

"Mental health support for those with ADD/ADHD"

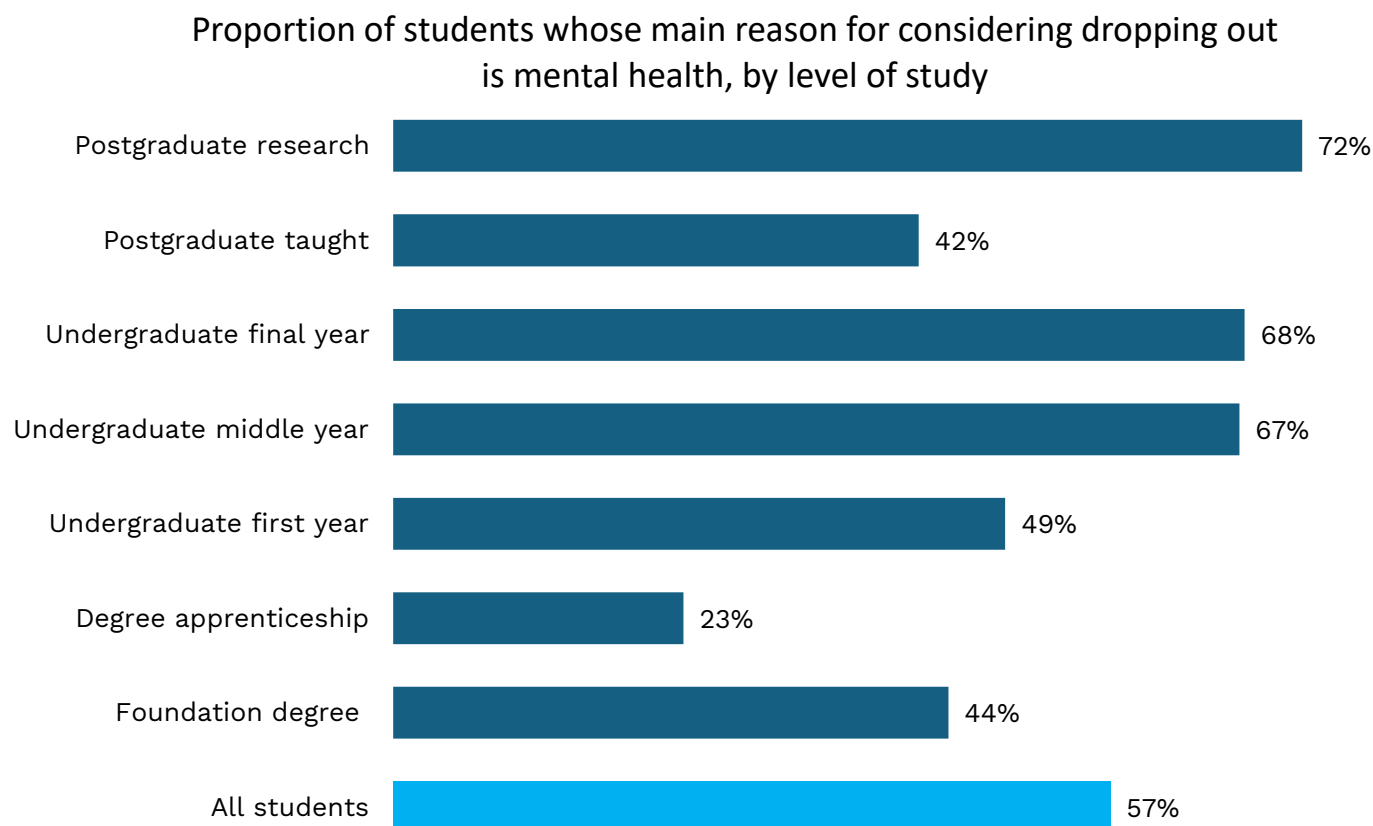
"Maybe more accessible emotional/physical wellbeing services"

²⁸ Lewis, J., and Stiebahl, S. (2024) 'Student mental health in England: Statistics, policy, and guidance'. House of Commons Library.

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8593/CBP-8593.pdf>

²⁹ NUS (2025) 'Mental Health Policy'. https://www.nus.org.uk/mental_health

Figure 7: HHAWD 2024/25 Wave 1: Proportion of students who consider dropping out of their course frequently ('Sometimes', 'Often', 'All the time') who cited mental health as the main reason for doing so, by level of study (n=352).



Additionally, in our Speak Week campaign, there were some comments where students spoke about mental health support on their course. A few of these, which were provided majorly by students from the College of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences, asked for better access to wellbeing support, as well as more frequent mental wellbeing check-ups.

Voters in the Autumn 2024 HSU Student Trustee Election also commented on mental health as being one of the most prominent issues facing students, and that mental health support is the issue that the trustees, and HSU more generally, should be focusing on:

"I believe the candidates should prioritise improving mental health support for students. With the increasing pressures of academic life, it's crucial that we have accessible and effective mental health resources on campus. This includes expanding counselling services, creating awareness programs, and providing spaces for students to connect and share their experiences. By focusing on mental health, we can foster a healthier, more supportive environment that enables all students to thrive academically and personally."

Mental health and wellbeing thus seem to be central to the student experience, and accessing mental wellbeing support has itself become a fundamental student voice

issue. Despite this, student wellbeing support services are facing difficult demands among budgeting restraints.

Current offer at Hallam

Professional and support services at Hallam, like all institutions across the sector, continue to face increased demand for student mental health and wellbeing support, yet limits in available NHS and social care provision.³⁰ Financial difficulties in the sector have meant that support services, such as the SHU Wellbeing Service have undergone structural and personnel changes which have restricted their capacity.³¹

These strains to the service have been felt by some students. A few open comments in the second wave of 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' asked for more mental health and wellbeing support from the university:

"I would like to have more information about the wellbeing services offered by the SU. When I have tried to book a wellbeing appointment through the university there has been no available appointments so I have not been able to access the support I hoped to."

These stresses to the SHU Wellbeing Service were felt too by the Students' Union's peer support program, Student Social Connect. Based on social prescribing, Student Social Connect sees student 'Connectors' being paired with students who are feeling lonely, isolated, or low in confidence.³² This year, the service saw unprecedented uptake in both student self-referrals and referrals from the SHU Wellbeing Service, due to the overwhelming demand on the latter.

The demand for wellbeing provision posed an opportunity for us at HSU to think differently about what students' wellbeing needs actually looked like, and specifically, how we could adapt and deliver our wellbeing offer through already established and recognised Students' Union services; and this could only be achieved through bespoke research.

Research: Wellbeing Workshops at HSU

In February 2025, three sets of 'wellbeing workshops' took place with the aim of understanding better students' wellbeing needs.³³ These workshops were facilitated by student staff who were trained especially. The workshops were rooted in the

³⁰ Hughes, G., Priestley, M., and Spanner, L. (2025) 'Stretched at Both Ends: Pressure on Student Services and the Impact on Academic Staff at UK Universities'. *Education Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010013>

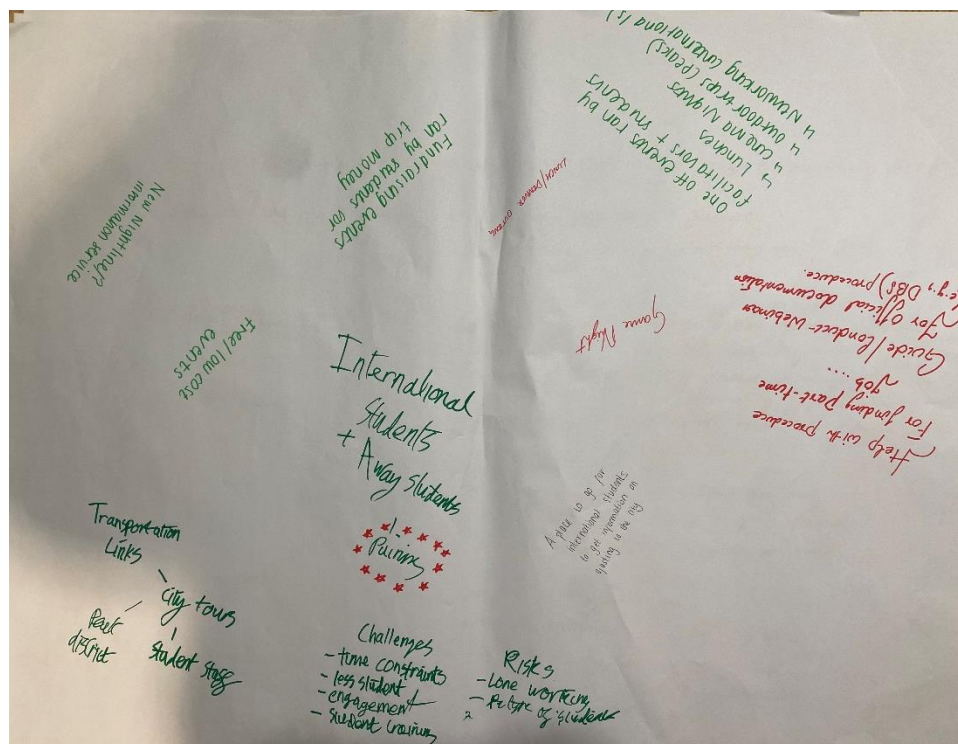
³¹ SHU (2025) 'Changes at our University'. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/myhallam/university-changes>

³² For more information see: HSU (2025) 'Social Connect'. <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/support/wellbeing/social-connect/>

³³ Colburn, J. (2025) 'Wellbeing at HSU: Understanding Students' Needs through Peer-led Research'.

principles of participatory action research (PAR)³⁴ and centred the students as participants and as problem solvers. Student participants were encouraged to share their thoughts as to how a wellbeing offer should be developed and delivered, and which students exactly would benefit from it (see Figure 8 for an example of the ideas shared by students during the workshops).

Figure 8: Wellbeing at HSU: an example of the different ideas that students contributed around wellbeing.



The findings from the workshops focused on wellbeing needs for students being relatively simple. Most conversations stressed the importance of social and community-based interventions which could be adapted within HSU's current student groups offer, rather than novel therapeutic, medical or clinical endeavours such as therapists or counsellors.

Students who took part saw peer-led activities such as Give it a Go (GIAG) events or societies as being central to a low-commitment, low-cost, and low-pressure model of social support for students wanting to support their wellbeing without the possible stress or stigma of accessing more 'formal' mental wellbeing support such as via the university service or via the NHS.

The research thus found that student community is central to the basic wellbeing needs of Hallam students, and that SHU and HSU should consider interventions that emphasise and encourage these student communities as support networks.

³⁴ See Sally Lloyd-Evans (2023) 'Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit.' [Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit](#)

Supporting Sense of Community

This association of students' sense of community with support network is not a new one. Students in both waves 1 and 2 of 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' were asked to explain what community means to them at Hallam via a free comment box. 21% and 24% of students in wave 1 and wave 2 respectively discussed community as meaning academic, emotional, social and wellbeing support.

"Community means having a support system of staff and other students, so you feel safe enough to raise concerns when you have them and feel as though something would be done about them."

Student when asked 'What does community mean to you at Hallam?',
Hallam, How Are We Doing? Wave 1

"I am supported, know where to get help if I need it and part of an academic team whilst at university who double up as my colleagues."

Student when asked 'What does community mean to you at Hallam?',
Hallam, How Are We Doing? Wave 2

Our elected HSU Officers have worked on numerous projects to address challenges to and support for mental health and wellbeing for students at SHU. In fact, mental health and wellbeing support was voted by our elected Officers as an organisational priority in both semesters one and two³⁵.

In our student representation system, our Lead Reps have set objectives bridging the gap between student community spaces and activities and wellbeing support at an institute level across the year. For example, Lead Reps in the College of Social Sciences and Arts have worked on transforming unused, empty spaces into comfortable areas where students can socialise and study freely.

Case study: Engineering Café

Each Wednesday afternoon in the Sheaf Building, students from Engineering subjects are welcome to attend a drop-in session where teaching staff will assist with any questions and give course-related advice. This weekly academic activity is known among the Engineering cohort as the Engineering Café. During research with third year students, when asked how HSU can improve their academic experience, a Mechanical Engineering student spoke about the Engineering Café, and how, unfortunately, there was little staff or student buy-in. This student praised the benefits of having a weekly drop-in event such as boosting sense of community across Engineering courses, and asked whether the SU could help this event by promoting or sponsoring it.

³⁵ HSU (2025) 'What we're working on'. <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/making-change/priorities/>

Below is an account from our Lead Rep for Engineering and Built Environment, Cameron Swann, and how he approached this issue.

“The Engineering Café is a collaborative working environment that unites staff and students, providing a comfortable environment to ask questions, revise for exams, discuss coursework, and much more. From a student perspective, this space brings an element of humanity to staff and builds relationships between teaching staff and students to enhance their long-term success. The space also helps tackle the imposter syndrome students may face in the intense courses within engineering while encouraging them to build their social network with other students.

Following student feedback about its declining engagement, I attended one of the café meetings to understand what might be deterring students. From this experience, I took the opportunity to collaborate with the staff that host the café, and we decided that we needed some advertisement and possibly some funding for refreshments for attendees to encourage more students to come in. Advertisement posters were provided to the staff alongside cards to encourage students to send feedback on the event and enhance it further long-term. Unfortunately, it was too late in the semester to obtain funding for the refreshments, but conversations did take place with senior staff in my college to pave the perfect opportunity for the next Rep as a project to further improve this space and increase student engagement.

I believe this is an important project to develop further as it will ensure students are able to connect with academics and peers of all levels, building their confidence in asking questions, and socialising outside of their university classroom, positively impacting their wellbeing. There is an opportunity to obtain funding and further enhance this space while using the promotional material we have cocreated to spread awareness of the space to more students.”

~Cameron Swann
(Engineering and Built Environment Lead Rep, 2024-25)

The Engineering Café acts as one of many examples of SHU-HSU collaborative partnerships across the academic year, where campus space has been used for extracurricular academic or social activities, to boost a sense of student community and positive wellbeing across campus.

Building Student Communities: Where Next?

Data from HSU’s research illustrates that students associate low commitment, low cost, easily accessible activities such as GIAGs with being ideal to aid wellbeing by encouraging academic and social support networks. The Engineering Café poses as a perfect example of this sort of drop-in event which allows for those academic

and social student communities to be built. The Engineering Café also acts as a key example of effective collaboration between SHU and HSU in developing and promoting these opportunities.

The example of Engineering Café, of course, only applies to students of Engineering courses, bringing those students together through shared academic interests. The success of the HSU intervention in the case of the Engineering Café rests heavily on the efforts of the student representatives involved, especially Lead Rep Cameron.

Thus, if SHU and HSU collaborated on a range of events across all 10 schools and institutes, utilising unique insight and feedback from our student reps, there would be multiple opportunities for students who are seeking low-level wellbeing support via academic and social networking.

Recommendation 4) Provide a range of academic and social extracurricular activities centred around enhancing students' sense of belonging, and thus student wellbeing.

Suggested actions:




- Boost awareness of SHU and HSU social and academic activities.
- Expand on the idea of the Engineering Café and other spaces, developing similar initiatives across other cohorts.





Appendix A- Research and Data Sources





Source	No. of responses/participants	Methodology
Hallam, How are We Doing? Survey This pulse survey took place three times in the academic year: November 2023, March 2024, and May 2024. 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.	Wave 1: 2344 Wave 2: 1446 Wave 3: 941	Quantitative/Qualitative
Cost of Living Survey 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 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.	1355	Quantitative/Qualitative
Autumn Voter Survey The Autumn Voters' survey was sent to all who voted and asked why they voted and how the experience of voting felt for them.	423	Quantitative/Qualitative
Speak Week Students' Union staff, including student officers, approached students across both campuses every day during the Speak Week (14 th -17 th October) and asked them to complete a postcard, telling us	2212	Qualitative




one thing they'd like to keep the same about their university experience and what they'd like to change.		
Third Year Focus Groups Focus groups with third years to understand their experiences in their final year, as well as their understanding and engagement with HSU and what we can offer them to support their final year. A session held with, non-engaged, low scoring NSS courses and super engaged with HSU.	32	Qualitative
Wellbeing Workshops This research project was influenced greatly by participatory action research. Student staff worked with participants to design wellbeing intervention which could help to inform future services from HSU.	28	Qualitative
Activities Inclusion Fund Evaluation A short evaluation into the impact the Activities Inclusion Fund has had on students who utilised it this academic year.	4	Quantitative/Qualitative
Period Product Subscription Scheme Evaluation A short evaluation into the impact the Period Product Subscription has had on students who utilised it this academic year.	66	Quantitative/Qualitative
Software issues in the College of BTE Logged feedback through BTE Lead Reps around software issues in the College.	N/A	Qualitative

Appendix B- Recommendation Tracker 23/24

Section	No.	Recommendation	Progress
1: Our Learning Experiences	1	<p>1.1: SHU delivers a package of student communications around the new timetabling models, to make clear to returning students the broad changes they can expect compared to previous years' models, and to properly set and manage the expectations of new students (including their rationale, the anticipated benefits, and the potential impacts on other activities e.g. Wednesday afternoons).</p> <p>1.2: SHU raises staff awareness of, and promotes consistent use of, the SHU Short Messaging Service to provide students with prompt and accurate information on last minute or same day timetabling changes, including cancellations and postponements.</p>	
	2	The SHU guidance for staff on the preparation and delivery of formative assessment feedback is expanded to provide more explicit structure and minimum standards, improving consistency and helping staff meet student expectations in the face of ever more challenging workloads.	
	3	<p>3.1: SHU ensures that any specialist software required for summative assessments is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> readily available, in its latest version/iteration, on a sufficient number of campus library computers and not restricted to computers in non-bookable teaching spaces, 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not subject to licence user caps lower than the number of students actually completing that module, available, if possible, for students to download onto their personal laptops/devices. <p>3.2: SHU reviews the suitability of AppsAnywhere and Azure Virtual Desktop as hosting platforms for any specialist software, in consultation with both staff and students, with a move to dedicated licenses where AppsAnywhere and Azure Virtual Desktop are subsequently deemed unsuitable.</p>	
	4	SHU works with students, local businesses and other employers to source a greater range and number of acceptable sandwich placement and work experience opportunities, enabling all students, especially those on international student visas, to maximise their potential employability whilst at Hallam.	
	5	SHU reviews its academic assessment timeframes to ensure International Students receive their marks from re-takes and reassessments <i>prior</i> to their visa expiry dates.	
	6	SHU provides academic staff with the training, resource and technological support, to ensure that lecture capture is the default position at the university, and that it is used consistently across as many types of synchronous teaching delivery session as possible.	
	7	7.1: HSU continues to collaborate with SHU to expand the number of academic events available to our students and to encourage academic societies to offer extracurricular events and opportunities within their respective departments.	

		7.2: SHU ensures the functions of the former Academic Society and Enhancement Leads is maintained in the new organisational structure and that the recent progress made in expanding academic society provision at Hallam is maintained and built-upon.	
2: Our Wellbeing and Community	8	SHU works with HSU to help promote the Student Advice Centre and its services, raising awareness and ensuring as many students and SHU staff as possible know students have access to free, and independent advice and support from their Students' Union.	
	9	SHU increases opening hours and expands provision at the Head Post Office and Eric Memsforth Building cafes, in order to provide a retail catering solution for students based in Aspect Court. This expanded offer should be clearly signposted to Aspect Court students.	
	10	HSU & SHU continue existing partnership initiatives addressing the impact of cost of living, while also working with local politicians and other HE organisations to lobby the new government to increase parental earning thresholds and maintenance amounts to levels that ensure financial support reflects the actual cost of living for students.	
	11	SHU works with HSU to enable the expansion of the Student Social Connect pilot, by committing to joint-fund and resource the scheme and to a longer-term partnership with HSU on the scheme, by embedding the provision with their upcoming OfS Access and Participation Plan.	

	12	SHU works to ensure that its Professional and Support Services Staff are representative of a diverse range of ethnic identities, so that all SHU students feel that they are represented.	
3: Our Student Voice	13	Following the university restructure, SHU ensures all colleges retain nominated student experience leads at both college and schools/institute level in their new structures, allowing sufficient staff resource and support to meaningfully engage with student voice activity and HSU's existing student representation structure.	
	14	SHU positions HSU more centrally to their written, digital and face-to-face communications with all students, so that HSU's services, outputs, and impacts are more visible and more fairly represented.	

Appendix C – Personal Placement Support Plan

Personal Placement Support Plan

We understand that going on placement can be a stressful time for students. Our goal is to ensure you feel fully supported throughout your experience.

This template is designed to help you create plans for your wellbeing, health, and safety while on placement. Use it to develop resources and personalised strategies to feel more secure and confident during this time.

You can include as much or as little information as you like. This plan can remain personal or be shared with your supervisor(s).

Useful links for support

Wellbeing support:

- Hallam SU Wellbeing hub: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/support/wellbeing/>
- SHU Wellbeing: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/wellbeing>

Disabled student support:

- Hallam SU disability support: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/support/disability/>
- SHU disability support: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/disabled-student-support>

Other issues (e.g., academic misconduct, appeals, complaints, etc.):

- Student Advice Centre: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/support/advice/>

For urgent or out-of-hours help, please contact one of the following services:

- In an Emergency - Call 999 or visit A&E for life-threatening emergencies. Northern General Hospital is the nearest A&E department to the university.
- Urgent, but not life-threatening - phone NHS 111 and select option 2 to talk about mental health, available 24 hours.

Name:

Supervisor(s):

Course and Year:

Personal Wellbeing Plan

Creating a *Wellness Action Plan* can help you stay mentally healthy during your placement. This section is adapted from [Mind's Wellness Action Plan](#).

1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at placement?
2. How can your supervisor(s) support your mental health?
3. Are there specific aspects of your learning style or temperament your supervisor should know about?
4. What situations might trigger poor mental health for you?
5. How could poor mental health impact your practice?
6. What early warning signs might your supervisor(s) notice if your mental health is declining?
7. If they notice these signs, what actions would you like them to take?
8. What measures can be put in place to minimize risks or manage the impact of poor mental health?

9. What steps will you take if you start to experience poor mental health during placement?

Disability/Health Plan

This section is based on the [NHS Health Passport](#) and can help communicate your needs effectively. Please use this to guide your discussion with occupational health/HR.

1. Do you have a disability or health condition you wish to disclose? If so, provide relevant information.
2. What adjustments can your supervisor(s) make to support you?
3. Are there tasks you may need assistance with?
4. How might your condition impact your placement if it worsens?
5. What actions can your supervisor(s) take in such cases?
6. Are there medications or interventions relevant to your placement?
7. Is there any additional information you'd like to share?

Culture/Race/Faith Plan

Below are some questions that you can consider to guide conversations with your supervisor and/or colleagues to ensure you are supported with your culture and faith needs while on placement

1. Is there a network/forum in this organisation that supports staff/students who are racially minoritised?
2. *'I would like to be called and this is how you say it phonetically'*
3. Is there anyone who is familiar with supporting students with microaggressions or racial incidences that you would be able to speak to in case you experience these on your placement?
4. Do you have requirements for prayer and who can you discuss this with to manage this with the demands of the team/ward?
5. Could you discuss your communication style with your supervisor and how these may be related to culture e.g. volume, tone, eye contact, interaction?
6. What are the expectations of behaviour/communication from you as these can differ in different settings? (e.g. informal time, interaction with team, lunch time/breaks, use of mobile phones etc.,) This could be discussed with your supervisor.
7. You could discuss with a supervisor how you would like to be communicated with regarding assessment: *'If there are issues related to the placement assessment, I would like these to be discussed clearly as early as possible and given constructive feedback and a clear plan of what needs to be improved and how I can achieve it.'*

Additional Information

You may wish to discuss reasonable adjustments for various needs, such as:

- Extra breaks during placement hours.
- Access to prayer spaces.
- Adjustments for fasting (e.g., during Ramadan).

[Report and Support](#) is a service at Sheffield Hallam that can support you with bullying, harassment, hate crimes, and other issues. Reports can be made anonymously or with personal details for support from trained practitioners.

Personal Safety Plan

Your safety is a priority. Use this plan to prepare for any risks during your placement.

1. How will you travel to and from placement?
2. What's your backup plan if travel is disrupted?
3. What will you do if something happens?

In an emergency: Call 999.

Key Information:

- [Ask for Angela Scheme](#): In participating venues, request "Angela" to discreetly get help if you feel unsafe. Staff can assist with contacting security, police, or helping you leave safely.
- [WalkSafe App](#): Plan safe routes, locate nearby safe spaces, and share your live location with trusted contacts. Learn more and download the app [here](#).
- [Safe Rides with Veezu](#): Call 0114 239 39 39 and quote "Sheffield Hallam University Safe Rides." Present your student ID as temporary payment and collect it after paying at HUBS within three days.
- [Report and Support](#) is a service at Sheffield Hallam that can support you with bullying, harassment, hate crimes, and other issues. Reports

can be made anonymously or with personal details for support from trained practitioners.

For more information, visit the HSU website:

<https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/support/>