



## **Cost of Living Review**

Kayla Kemhadjian, Seth Garvin-Smith, & Katherine Rogers

June, 2023

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## **Introduction**

The cost of living across the UK has risen drastically in the past year; as the Office for National Statistics states, nine in ten higher education students reported that their cost of living had increased compared to last year (Johnston & Grant, 2022). Russell Group Students' Unions Cost of Living Report found that the median income per month for students is £824 (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023, p. 4). This includes income from maintenance grants, part-time and full-time employment, as well as contributions from family. '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' (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023, p. 5). 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 leading to withdrawal (NUS, 2022b, p. 14).

Whilst the NUS, ONS, and Russell Group results are helpful to understand a national picture, SHU's unique student body means that some of the key findings are not applicable. For example, SHU's higher numbers of students from POLAR 1 and 2 areas (students that commute, mature students, etc.) means that some of the 'traditional' student notions within these reports cannot be generalised for our student body. Worryingly, the Russell Group Student Unions' report found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be taking out loans or using their overdrafts to pay for day-to-day living costs during their studies (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023, p. 6). Additionally, mature students or student carers are working more hours on average than the traditional student group. The ONS report highlights that while all students are working more hours on average to make up the deficit in their maintenance grant, 'disadvantaged entrants have higher drop-out rates than expected after accounting for factors such as age, subject studied, and entry qualifications' (Johnston & Grant, 2022). They explain that we have evidence that this disparity grows in line with financial uncertainty due to the cost of living crisis. The HEPI and Advance HE report shows an increase in the amount of students considering dropping out of HE due to financial difficulties from 2021 to 2022 (Neves & Brown, 2022, p. 24).

SHSU and SHU have a duty of care to their students and endeavour to reduce the inequality and attainment gap in HE. As the impacts from the cost of living crisis entrench and compound inequality for already disadvantaged students, targeted support is needed to address these disparities. As such, SHSU has implemented this study to identify where our students are the hardest hit, if that is the same as what more traditional student facing reports suggest, and create recommendations for effective, targeted support.

## **Methodology**

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. A copy of the survey questions can be found in the Appendix.

All SHU students were asked to take part in the survey. They were sent an initial invitation email, with one reminder email, and some recruitment via posters and flyers on campus. Ethical approval was obtained for this study by the Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee, Ethical approval number: **ER53139115**.

Participants were given a brief prior to completing the survey which explained the use and intention of use for their data. They were provided pre- and post-debriefing information with links for the current SHU and SHSU support pages, both for general distress and for cost of living support should they require it.

The survey was open during the second semester 2022/2023 from the 18<sup>th</sup> of April until the 8<sup>th</sup> of May. The survey was filled out by 1512 students.

The researchers used multivariate analysis and looked for headlines and differences between student demographics responses (e.g., by college, level of study, domicile, gender, commuter status). They analysed quantitative data in Excel, while qualitative responses were inputted into NVIVO, collated into themes, thematically arranged, and anonymised quotations were picked to highlight student voice and opinion in this report.

Any significant differences reported are at a 95% confidence level. Throughout, any subgroup differences listed are considered meaningful and relevant to this research.

### Demographics

Comparison data for the whole student population was pulled from the internal insight and data portal, *The Source*. The survey was skewed in several ways when compared to the overall SHU student population. There were significant differences in gender (more women respondents than in the general student population (68% female respondents vs 57% whole student population), more disabled students (30% respondents vs 20% whole student population), more international students (30% respondents vs 19% whole student population), and more postgraduate students than in the whole student population (40% vs 32%).

The number of BAME respondents was proportionate to that of the whole student population; the number of students at each college were broadly even, and although the age(s) of survey respondents are not proportionate to the whole student population (there are 32% 18-21yr olds in the survey respondents while there are 74% of the whole student population), they are a good sample size.

The table below details the demographic breakdown for postgraduates and undergraduates by age, sex, ethnicity, year of study, fee status, college, disability, and current residence. Respondents were coded in the following age groups: 18-21, 22-24, 25-30, and 30+. Respondents' ethnicities were coded as either white or ethnic minority (ETM), which is made up mainly of BAME students. Individual non-white groups were small, and more robust comparisons are made when the data is combined.

Category	Options	Undergraduates	Postgraduates	Total
<b>Sample Size (n)</b>		872	480	1452
<b>Age</b>	18-21	481	8	489
	22-25	202	175	377
	26-30	82	165	247
	30+	107	232	339
<b>Sex</b>	Female	654	365	1019
	Male	214	214	428
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	672	131	803
	Ethnic Minority	147	401	548

<b>Year of Study</b>	1	293	388	681
	2	255	167	422
	3	255	13	268
<b>Fee Status</b>	Home	837	156	993
	Overseas	21	423	444
<b>College</b>	BTE	202	321	523
	HWLS	312	104	416
	SSA	358	155	513
<b>Disability</b>	Yes	273	53	326
	No	561	489	1050
<b>Term-time address</b>	Within postcodes, did not move for Uni	107	100	207
	Within postcodes, moved for Uni	283	155	438
	I commute from outside those postcodes	482	325	807

## Findings and Key Themes

Students were asked to rate the level they have been impacted by rises in the cost of healthcare, travel, rent, socialising, energy, and food. Although rent, bills, and travel are some of the most impactful for the public, students are being hardest hit by food, energy, socialising, and rent. Those who are impacted by travel, however, are deeply impacted. The NHS similarly mitigates the negative impact of healthcare, but qualitative responses showed a deep impact of the waitlists for NHS dentists, cost of private dental care, and eye care:

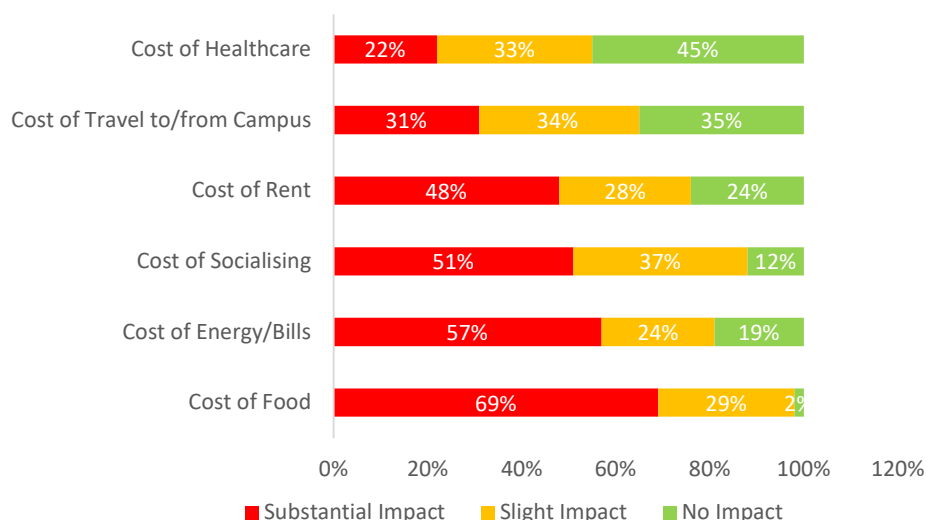


Figure 1: Extent to which respondents have been personally negatively impacted by the following in this academic year, (n=1479).

This report analyses the areas in which students felt negatively impacted by the cost of living crisis. In addition to sections which investigate the impact of food, travel, housing, and socialising, this report also examines the impact of taking on additional part-time work due to the crisis.

Students were asked to tick boxes related to provisions they would take up if offered by SHU or SHSU. Nearly all respondents wanted some form of discount on food, and many wanted access to more funding, and discounts on travel arrangements:

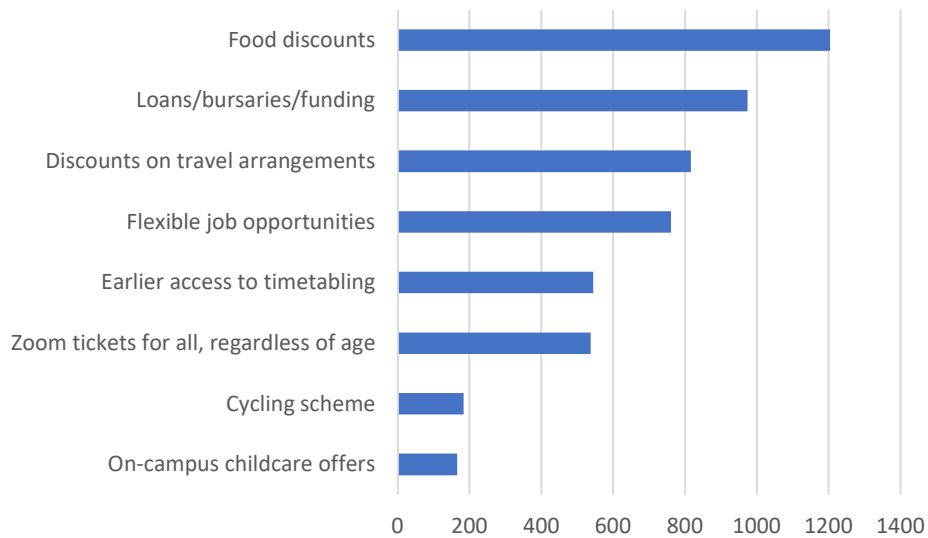


Figure 2: Support Respondents would like to see from SHSU or SHU, (n=1373).

If nothing else is taken away from this report, it should be that students want and need help with rising cost of food.

## Recommendations

Support related to food:

1. Work with local supermarkets to offer discounts to students on groceries, such as evaluating and extending the Tesco voucher offer, and offering in-store discounts to students with their student card.
2. Continue and where possible, extend the £1 Wednesdays offer in the canteens, including to be on rotating days of the week.
3. Offer hot water facilities at all main buildings and campuses. Create a microwave map to highlight where the options are on campuses and evaluate whether this offer is evenly spread out for students.

Support related to housing:

4. Create a holistic and integrated city-wide and multi-university partnership approach to housing, such as the partnership housing strategy in Nottingham, which considers affordability for students, diversity of student need (such as family housing, single housing, etc). This would be similar to continuing the student housing strategy which ceased in 2019. This offer should seek to keep rent costs down.
5. Support students with finding and evaluating non-student housing with virtual advice appointments, especially where student housing applications have been denied.
6. The hardship fund should include increases in bills to help students with the rising costs of bills, which are themselves exceptional.

Support related to travel:

7. Work with SYMCA, University of Sheffield, and SHU to create a ZOOM mature student pass (22+) for all students across South Yorkshire.
8. Raise placement mileage reimbursement for HWLS from 28p to 59p per mile for the first 3,500 miles and 25p thereafter NHS standard (RCN, 2023).

Support related to work:

9. All SHU and SHSU job descriptions need to include the minimum number of hours and an estimated number a student job will provide. These descriptions also need to include the hourly rate. We recommend that all student jobs are paid at the living wage, regardless of applicant age.
10. Handshake should include a filter for part-time roles by the number of hours. SHU and SHSU should work with Handshake to ensure that the site includes this filter.
11. Where possible, SHU and SHSU should evaluate where they can offer more part-time student roles. Moreover, as international students can currently only work up to 20hrs a week, it is suggested that a review of part-time roles offered by SHU and SHSU ensure that no student roles are more than 20hrs to allow all students to apply. SHSU should investigate lobbying to raise the international student hour cap.
12. Evaluate practices around student employment at SHU and SHSU. This could involve signing up to and working with the good student employment charter (Hospitality Now and the University of Lincoln, 2023).
13. The Careers and Employability team at SHU should evaluate the offer for in-study work support, including promotion of the current offers.

Support related to socialising:

14. Create a robust business partnership to offer discounted events and activities for SHU students.
15. Revisit use of the Hubs for events, especially for offering drop-in events for student groups where free tea, coffee, or food is on offer (ex: Tuesdays at 12-2pm come to the Hideout for Parent's Lunch).

Support related to healthcare:

16. Support students who have moved to Sheffield with accessing an NHS dentist.
17. Work with local community to offer discounts to students for private healthcare, mainly dental treatments and eyecare.

## Student Income

Students were asked to disclose their average income sources for the past academic year, which highlighted that SHU students are likely to be paying for their living expenses with money from job(s) they work and/or their student finance.

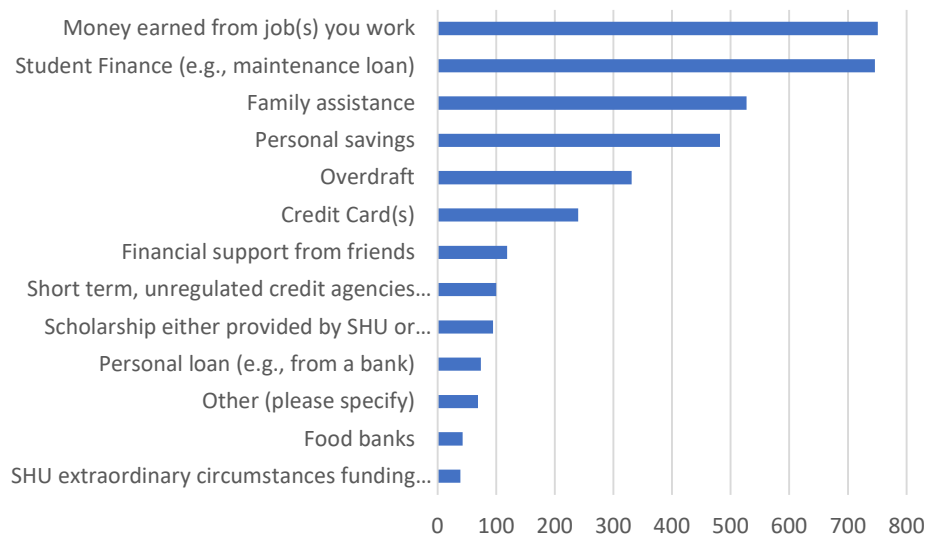


Figure 3: Respondents' average income sources in the past academic year, (n=1512).

Male students, and those 30+ were the most likely to be using personal savings (39% and 38% respectively). This is followed shortly by international students (37%), compared to 32% of all respondents.

Overseas (51%), 30+ (42%) and BTE (41%) were the most likely to use family assistance (compared to all respondents (35%)).

49% of respondents said their income comes from paid work, compared to students who have said they are working (66%). The difference between students' saying their income comes from paid work, and those that say they are working suggests that students are unable to cover their expenses with income from paid work. As 31% said they were working varied part-time hours, it is likely that their income is too variable to consistently cover their bills or be counted when they were asked where their income is derived.

74% of disabled respondents say they use student finance. The percentage of students using student finance went down as they aged, so that 72% of 18-21yr olds were using student finance, 49% of 22-25yr olds, and 29% of those 25+.

Respondents were asked, 'not including your maintenance loan (if you have one), how much additional income from different revenue sources (family, work, etc) do you make per month? Please write your answer as a whole number.' They were told they could skip this question. Over half of all respondents gave a response to this question, and over 60% of respondents said they took home less than £500 a month, excluding maintenance:



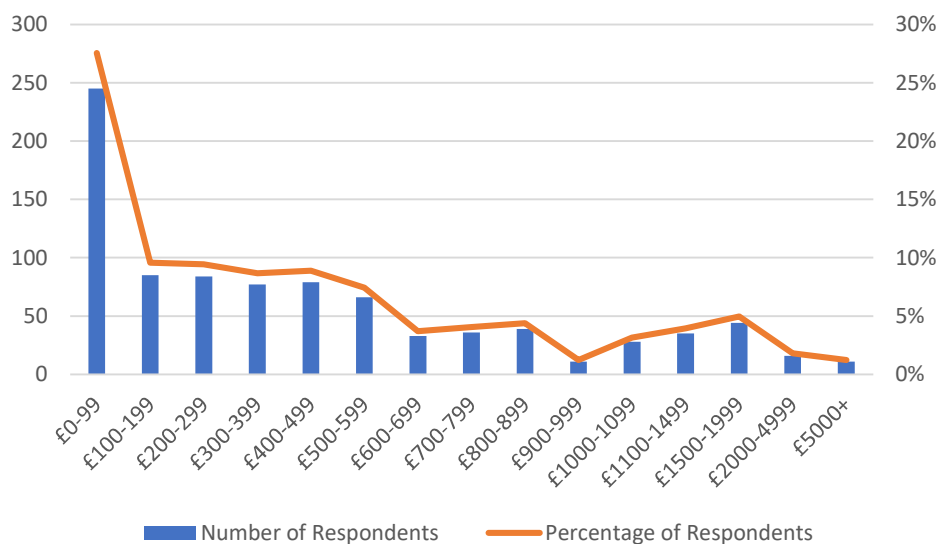


Figure 4: Monthly income of respondents, excluding maintenance loan, (n=889).

BAME respondents were more likely to make between £0-99 a month compared to White counterparts, but this was not found to be statistically significant in this instance. As it is likely that some students misunderstood the question and inputted annual income, included their maintenance grant, or inputted additional zeros by mistake, this is an area for future research.

Nick Hillman, director of Higher Education Policy Institute, calls for just this: an urgent investigation by Whitehall into the student shortfall for this academic year (2022/2023), and a ‘quick official stop-gap alternative’ to the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES), which disappeared in 2015 (NUS, 2022b, p. 5). Hillman identifies that the income shortfall is likely to especially hard hit those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as students with disabilities, students from low-income backgrounds, BAME students, and students who moved to more expensive cities.

The Russell Group survey found that their average respondent had a median income of £824, whereas the median income in our survey (without excluding any of the respondents’ data) is £300 (Russell Group Students’ Unions, 2023, p. 5). The Russell Group authors calculate that their average survey respondent is likely to fall under the poverty line after paying for all expenses, including bills and food. The same, and more could be said for our average respondent.

## Food

Respondents highlighted that the rising cost of food has the most substantial impact for all types of students. Only 2% of respondents said that the cost of food had no impact on them. This should come as no shock, as, according to the ONS, the cost of food is up 19.2% this year (ONS, 2023a). Moreover, students were explicitly asked to check a box if they would want to receive discounts on food, and 87% of respondents wanted to see discounts in this area (n=1373).

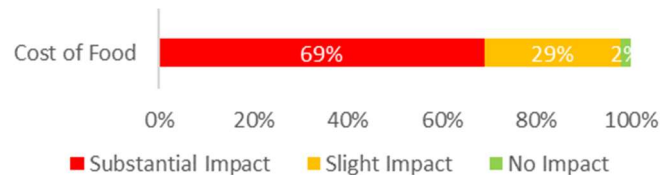


Figure 5: Impact of the Cost of Food (n=1479).

In addition to sharing the impact of the cost of food, 392 students shared qualitative feedback which explained that they are being hit hardest by the rising cost in food and groceries (out of all respondents, n=1512).

Additionally, students were asked: ‘thinking about how the cost of living is affecting you, what are the top 3 things that you would like to see changed?’ 863 comments were about food in general, in three, slightly more granular themes: the food on campus, cost of groceries, and food support (out of 1372 comments).

### Campus Food

425 respondents, when asked to note the top three things they wanted to see changed, mentioned something about the food offer on campus, either in terms of it being too expensive, or requesting more support from it. Nearly all the comments in this theme wanted some extended form of £1 Wednesdays. Students expressed that the on-campus meal deal is too expensive:

*The cost of living CRISIS is causing inflation in just about every avenue, meaning prices of cheap to make products, e.g. coffee, have gone up in price considerably. Considering I work to make ends meet, the University hasn't helped with the crisis by having very expensive food and drink... pointless to use considering higher quality resources are available for a fraction of the prices just minutes walk away from campus.*

Respondents expressed a need for cheaper, and healthy options for food on campus. Some students added that the offerings on campus are not varied enough, while ten students mentioned a desire for free hot water, tea, or coffee on all campuses.

Ten comments asked for access to water, hot water, and free or reduced drinks on campus:

*Free hot water and cups!!!! Can't even bring coffee from home it's outrageous!! Even better to have free hot drinks basic level available in each building.*

*More access to facilities like microwaves and hot water to allow bringing own food and hot drinks to campus*

As there is already an offer for students for free hot water and microwave stations, adding a map with these locations to the University and SU websites, and expanding the offer to include tea and coffee would likely be supportive (Sheffield Hallam University, 2023a).

## **Groceries**

372 comments by respondents asked for support buying groceries. Students asked for discounts, vouchers, partnerships, etc., so that they can get fresh, healthy food and their normal shop cheaper as the cost of food is hitting them especially hard.

The cost of food is negatively impacting students across the sector and is not SHU specific. 93% of respondents in the ONS survey explained that the cost of their food had increased (Johnston & Westwood, 2023). Unfortunately, the increasing cost of food has been distressing to students, as they have explained that they can no longer afford to cook healthy, fresh food.

*Food prices are now extortionate, and it is upsetting that I can't now cook from scratch every meal because I simply can't afford to.*

An alarming number of students have explained that they have been cutting back on costs by skipping meals to varying frequencies, mainly over undisclosed periods.

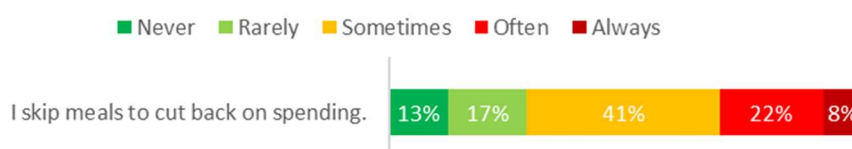


Figure 6: Likelihood of respondents to skip meals to cut back on spending (n=1419).

30% of respondents are skipping meals often or always to cut back on spending. From the data, it is unclear how many meals a student is skipping, and over what period, to cut back on spending. However, some students explained that this was whole days without food due to high bills in other categories:

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

43% of respondents in the Savanta report commissioned by the OFS had cut back on food, with more women seen to be cutting back on food costs than men (Savanta, 2023). In our study, however, more men were skipping meals than women, though this was not found to be statistically significant. Overall, BAME students were more likely to be skipping meals to cut back on costs (36%). The likelihood of skipping meals increased if a student was also disabled. Disabled students as a subgroup were the most likely to skip meals (39%).

Despite the likelihood of students skipping meals, very few students (about 2%) mentioned or requested some form of food bank provision as support from the university or SU.

## **Food Bank/ Free Food**

Twenty-seven respondents requested food banks at the university, food pantries, or food support packs as a form of support they would like to see. In some cases, it was clear that they had made use of the service already on offer:

*Food bank in the uni not go collect at other places (not just food but hygiene stuff)*

In most comments, however, it seems likely that what students are looking for is a free food offer that feels less stigmatising than a 'food bank'. Some students described a food bank but used terms such as a 'food pantry' or 'food support packs'.

Twenty-two comments asked for free food in general, food vouchers, free food on campus as an incentive to attend events, or as a partnership with businesses to reduce their waste and provide free food to students.

*Free food bags or end of the day bags for food that would have been wasted (like too good to go)*

*Place for businesses to drop of food thats about to go off.*

The SU is already working on a community fridge to distribute food that would otherwise go to landfill that shops and supermarkets can no longer sell as a sustainable initiative to get free food to the student community, made possible with a grant from the Hubbub Foundation (Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, 2023a). This provision will likely go some way towards filling this gap in student need when it goes live. However, other provisions and the efficacy of the community fridge will need to be evaluated over the course of the next year.

## Travel

The rising cost of transportation has had a significant impact on some students. When asked 'to what extent since the beginning of this academic year, have you personally been negatively impacted by increases in any of the following?' (cost of food, energy/bills, rent, travel, socialising, and healthcare), respondents were given an optional follow-up to elaborate on their response to the Likert scale. 911 students responded to this question, and in these responses, 148 references travel costs (16%).

Moreover, when students were asked to tick a box of options for provisions they would take up, if offered by SHU, 13% of students said they would benefit from cycling schemes, 39% said they would like ZOOM passes for mature students, and 59% said they wanted travel discounts in general.

Furthermore, travel was listed 768 times when students were asked what their top three cost of living priorities were (56%). In response to this priority, respondents asked for reduced travel costs all over South Yorkshire for students. They asked for assistance with the bus, train, tram, and taxi fares. Students also wanted the mileage rate to increase with inflation:

*because I commute by train, travel costs can add up each month*

*A decrease in travel costs, whether that being students being sent a set amount to help towards fuel, or cheaper train tickets (although I do really want to note, even offering cheaper train tickets may not always be the best solution as then there is also paying for parking for individuals as a train station is not always in walking distance, then the train, then 2.6 mile walk from the train station or taxi to campus). I live at the other side of barnsley, and rounding up my train fare and parking can range between £10-15 a day just to attend university, which in the crisis we are under, is a lot of money for extra travel costs. hope this helps!*

*Travel costs going down would help alot, i have developed health issues in the past year and i cant feasibly walk to collegiate now, but using things like uber is too expensive.*

*Bus fares frozen and only increased with inflation. Not 25%! Student nurse mileage rate raised to HMRC levels (last time I checked this was 45p per mile, not the 28p that hadn't been adjusted for 10 years).*

Although most students reported travel having a slight or substantial impact on their finances this academic year, mature students aged 26-30 and those in HWLS were hardest hit by the cost of travel (36% and 41% respectively):

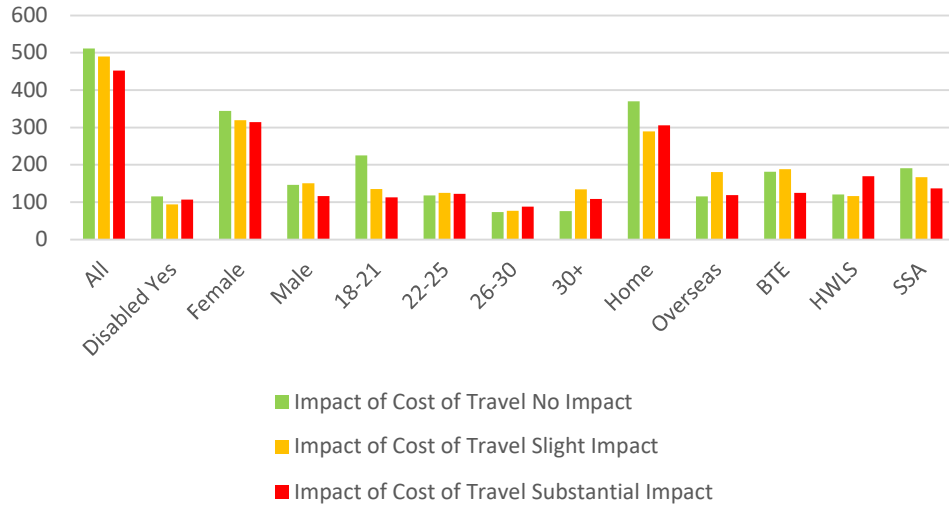


Figure 7: Impact of the cost of travel across different demographics, of all respondents (n=1512).

41% of HWLS said they were substantially impacted by the cost of travel, compared to 30% of all students. This is likely due to the cost of travel to and from placements, as well as the amount of time students are on placement and therefore unable to take up paid work. Most of the negative comments about placements for the qualitative questions were from HWLS students.

Students were asked to share their main form of transport to and from university this academic year and were allowed to select more than one option. Most respondents selected 'on foot' or by bus or train as their main transports (55%). 48% of survey respondents selected multiple options for their form of transport.

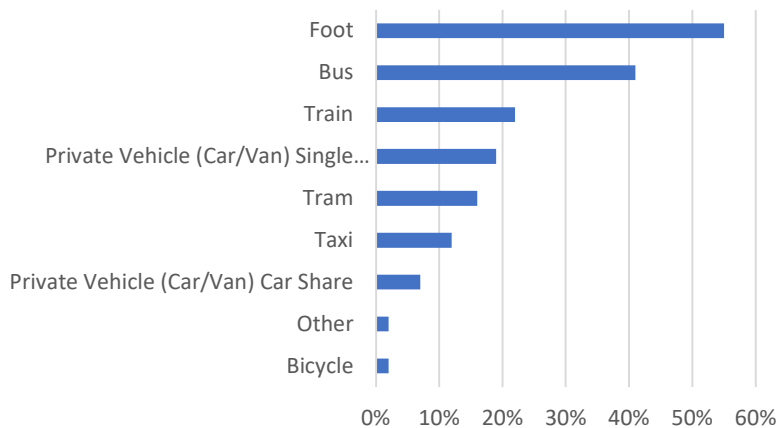


Figure 8: Transport Type, (n = 1419).

Given that 69% of respondents live within the S1 - S14, or S20 postcodes, it may be unsurprising that the major forms of transport are by foot or public transport.

Across the different colleges, HWLS was the most likely to use single occupancy cars as transport, most likely due to the integrated nature of placements for their course. As they were also significantly more likely to be substantially impacted by the cost of travel, implementing student suggestions of allocating placements closer to a student's home, upping the mileage refund for placements, and enacting some form of car share would go a long way to support students in HWLS with the burden of the cost of travel. Students in the qualitative sections from HWLS asked for more

help with the mileage refund for placements, which is low compared to the sector average. The current placement mileage reimbursement for HWLS is 28p, whereas the RCN standard is 59p per mile for the first 3,500 miles and 25p thereafter (RCN, 2023). Raising the mileage reimbursement for students to match that of the RCN and NHS sector average would go some way towards supporting students with additional course-related costs.

Additionally, 59% of the whole students in HWLS are twenty-two and over, which means they would benefit from a mature Zoom travel pass.

Students were asked to indicate what changes to their attendance they have made in this past academic year due to travel costs.

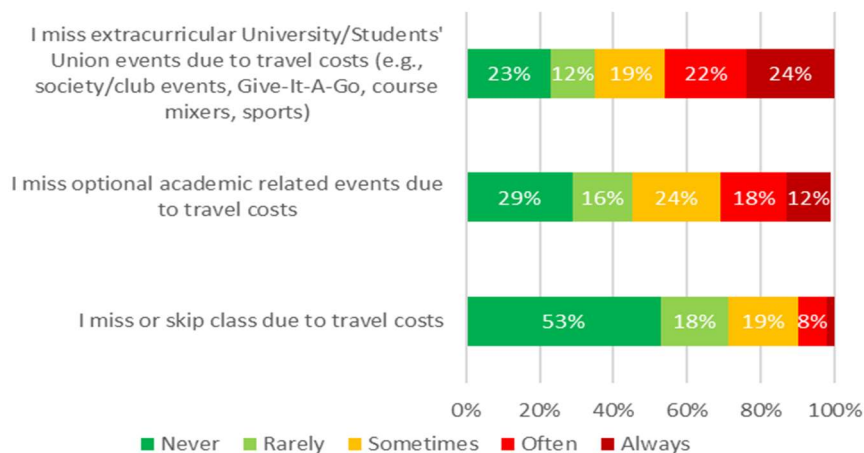


Figure 9: Likelihood of skipping university and related events due to travel costs, of all respondents (n=1512).

Respondents were least likely to skip class due to travel costs, with 71% saying they never or rarely did so this academic year. However, the likelihood of respondents' skipping a university or SU activity due to travel costs went up in line with the perceived optionality of the event. This confirms what students are saying in the qualitative sections, which is that they have less and less available funds and time for their wellbeing and elective pursuits.

According to ONS data, 53% of students' public transport costs have increased, and 51% of students are cutting back on travel costs, including attending fewer classes because they simply cannot afford to attend 5 days a week (Johnston & Westwood, 2023). This is expected to negatively impact the attainment gap for BAME and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as well as mature students and carers, only serving to embed existing inequalities, and make higher education a luxury (Johnston & Westwood, 2023). Although this was not seen in this study, the high amount of cross-over between BAME students and Internationals is likely to have affected the results. Due to the nature of student visas and home office reporting, it is likely that there is a disparity between home BAME student attendance and international student attendance, as the cost-benefit analysis for international students' non-attendance is likely impacted by the threat of deportation (Home Office, 2021). While there was a low proportion of home BAME students in our study (n=149), responses did point to a disparity in home and international BAME student decisions and impact. Of those who were skipping class often, or regularly due to travel costs, the majority were home BAME students 17% (out of a total 29%).

48% of survey respondents selected multiple options for their form of transport, with most selecting a combination of public transport(s) and walking. The NUS conducted a travel survey to investigate the high cost of transport on students throughout the cost of living crisis. In their survey, they

similarly found that students were walking or taking the bus to campus, which was attributed to cost efficiency and proximity to campus (NUS, 2023). They found that the bulk of students spent around £11- £30 on weekly travel alone, and 9% of students spent as much as £50 a week on transport.

SHU students tend to commute from the wider South Yorkshire region and are therefore subject to higher travel costs than those who commute from within Sheffield city centre, where most operators (First and Stagecoach) offer discounted single fares for students of all ages, for £1.20. Students aged 18-21 can apply for a Zoom Beyond 18-21 Travel Pass, where they are entitled to 80p single tickets on any bus or tram, anywhere within South Yorkshire, as well as half off Northern rail fare. While this is a great deal, it is unavailable to a large proportion of SHU students. 48% of SHU students are 22 years old or older, and therefore are ineligible for the Zoom Beyond pass. Mature students are less likely to live within Sheffield city centre, and more likely to commute from all over South Yorkshire, the older they are, as illustrated below:

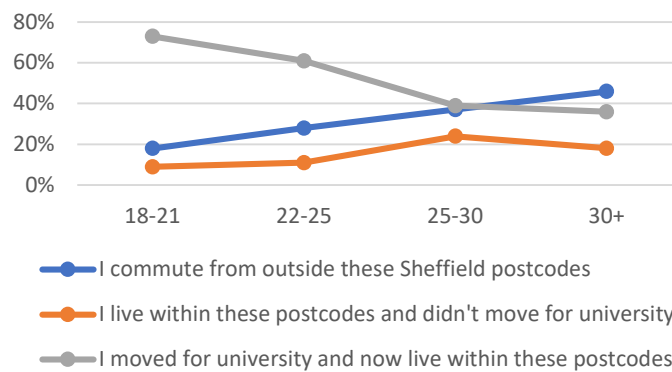


Figure 10: Student commuter status by age, of all respondents (n=1512).

Unfortunately, as older students are more likely to commute from the wider region, it is likely that the additional costs to mature students for travel is between two and five times that. For example, a 22-year-old traveling from Bramley would pay £15 pounds a week for a TM UGO bus pass, a 22-year-old taking a bus and tram within Sheffield could pay between £19.20 and £25 for a weekly pass, and a 22-year-old traveling from Barnsley by Northern Rail could pay between £14.50 and £39.50 a week. This means that a 22-year-old student from Barnsley would likely pay around £1,896 a year for travel, whereas a student using a ZOOM travel pass would only spend £948, saving them £947.



## Housing

Students explained that one of their biggest costs was rent/housing costs. 165 comments mentioned the negative impact of the cost of rent, inaccessibility for affordable housing, or housing for their dependents and partners, while 235 comments explained that the cost of utilities had increased, which was making it hard for students to make ends meet. When they were asked to give their top three priorities, 234 respondents gave housing as one of their top priorities for university and SU support.

Respondents were additionally asked to detail the impact of their housing expenses, so that these could be broken down into areas for support. The thrust of the issues in this area seems to be with sky-high rent and ever-rising utility bills, which are impacting the whole country. Disproportionately, however, within the SHU population, they are hitting international students with dependents harder than others.

## Rent

The average rent in Sheffield varies for students depending on various criteria: how many bedrooms, whether they want to have flatmates, how much shared space there is, access to a garden, proximity to the city centre, etc. Rates for purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) for SHU students are between £320 and £672 a month and private accommodation suggested by the university goes between £258 – £612 (Sheffield Hallam University, 2023b). These do not include any non-shared accommodation, which is likely to start at £400+, and is increasing each year (Sheffield Hallam University, 2023c). Average rents on new leases in the North have gone up 9.8% from 2022, where the average tenant taking on a new lease is likely to pay an extra £1,452 each year (Hamptons, 2023).

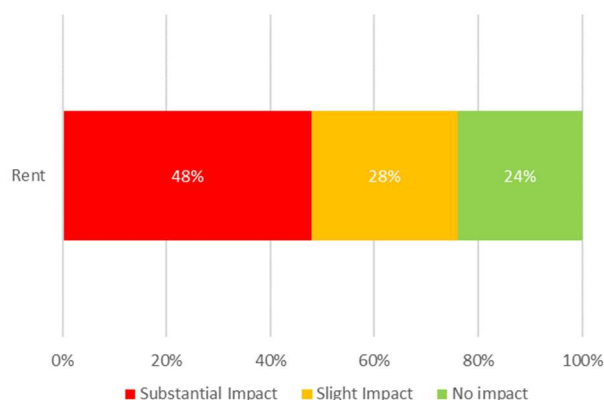


Figure 11: Impact of the cost of rent this academic year, of all question respondents (n= 1479).

Although most students (76%) have been hit by rent increases to some degree, international students were more likely to be substantially impacted by the rise in the cost of rent: 68% versus 46% overall. This likely has something to do with the fact that international students are more likely to rent, lack the same access to the market, are hit with harsher rules for what and how they can rent, and where they are likely to be renting.

In their qualitative responses, respondents explained that they cannot afford their rent, and that this is eating into their savings, if they had any, and into their food and social budgets:

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

*My rent and has gone up and the energy cap has gone down, we cant afford to heat the*

*house so its freezing constantly, I haven't been out with friends to save money because of this. And the cost of my food shops has slowly been climbing.*

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

Students from all backgrounds expressed that they were being priced out of their current accommodations due to rises in rent. These rises are expected to continue, even in purpose-built student accommodation, as there is an increase in demand and shortfall in available beds for students (Universities UK, 2023a).

According to the ONS, Yorkshire as a region has second highest rent in the country, after London (Pateman & Richardson, 2023).

*My rent where I live now will rise from £152 a week to £180 so I have had to find alternative accommodation for next year.*

*Cost of energy and rent had made it hard to pay bills and I have been struggling to provide for myself after that*

*Paying an extra £200 a month for a house that last year was much cheaper.*

One student especially hard-hit by the rise in costs explained the extent of their situation, and the impact that falling behind on their rent had for them:

*From November- January I couldn't afford my rent, and slipped behind massively because of how expensive everything was getting. [...] It was a gruelling period to live through, extremely degrading and demoralising. It's incredibly hard to be passionate as a student in these circumstances because you just sit and think "I could work full time and get by better." It's hard to be passionate about your degree when you can't even afford the basics, and students should not be expected to live like this, in the name of "student life"*

As the above quote illustrates, the cost of living is having a direct impact on student wellbeing and attainment. This is in line with other studies, which shows rent as one of the most impactful areas of students' budgets, with 52% of students thinking of dropping out of university due to financial concerns in Save the Students' 2022 study (Brown, 2022).

### **International and Postgraduate Housing**

At the time of writing, the government have announced changes to the student visa route. From January 2024, students may only bring family members with them to the UK if they are on a post-graduate research route (Home Office, Department for Education, The Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP, and The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, 2023). This will significantly impact the intake and cohort at Sheffield Hallam, as well as the housing needs of these students. The following sections detail the current landscape of the housing market and needs of our current postgraduate students. It is extremely likely that this incoming change to the student route will impact the January 2024 and September 2024 intakes, and there may be a spike in international students with dependents for this coming September 2023. As this is planned policy, it is still subject to changes. It is therefore

important that the following comments about the current state of housing for international students, and those with dependents, not be ignored due to the recent change in policy.

HEPI published a report on the developments in student accommodation this year (Blakely, 2023). They explain that the number of international students from India and Nigeria account for more of the PGT growth in the sector and are concentrating in post-92 lower and middle-tariff universities, such as Sheffield Hallam. The priorities and needs of these students are different from that of the home students, mainly undergraduates, who tended to commute from home.

The shape and need of intakes have been shifting towards more housing dependents in non-student accommodation as more and more PGT international students enter the market. This is, of course, likely to be greatly affected by recent legislation. However, as the HEPI report states, only 59% of institutions had an accommodation strategy, and 89% of CUBO members explained that accommodation had been factored into their recruitment plans 'very little or not at all', painting a worrying picture for decreasing the rising cost of housing for SHU students.

In their qualitative responses, international respondents explained that they cannot find or have trouble finding affordable housing in Sheffield for them and their dependents:

*Rent cost is over the moon. you don't get a reasonable room under 100 pounds per week near uni campus. If you are lucky enough to find a room less expensive then it is far away from uni which further increases cost due to bus and tram tickets.*

*As a student living in the UK, the cost of living can be quite challenging, and it affects me in several ways. For instance, the cost of accommodation is a significant burden, and finding affordable housing can be quite a challenge. Whether living in university accommodation or private rental properties, the rent prices are typically high, and this makes it challenging to find a decent place to live that won't break the bank. Energy bills are also a concern, especially during the colder months, and I often find myself having to keep a tight watch on my energy usage to keep costs down.*

*Rent and bills have been a huge challenge and I guess this is due to huge influx of students into Sheffield schools. Agents and landlords seem to be extorting international students and this causes a huge impact negatively on the cost of living.*

*I was in need of accommodation as my husband was coming in few months and I couldn't find one so I had to take a accommodation of 500 pounds without bills with my salary of 700 pounds it's difficult to meet ends and my husband is yet to come*

As the students themselves explain, finding affordable accommodation has become increasingly difficult. 14% of home students moved back in with their parents or stayed with their parents longer than they intended due to the rising cost of living. This is a luxury most international students do not have.

### **Good Practice**

In early May this year, Universities UK (UUK) released a good practice statement which investigated current good practice in the student housing market (Universities UK, 2023a). Among their case studies on varied good practices in terms of housing data, student number planning, and housing strategies, was a look at the city of Nottingham, where the universities and city council have created a student living strategy to partner to create a more sustainable, and medium-term focused student housing strategy (Nottingham City Council (NCC), University of Nottingham (UofN) and Nottingham

Trent University (NTU), 2023). This partnership could be beneficial to Sheffield, where Hallam’s private student housing offer is shared with the University of Sheffield and is seen to be dwindling (Johnston & Westwood, 2023). A more holistic and integrated city-wide approach could help support students with the housing offer and cost if a city-wide partnership was revisited.

### **Bills**

According to the NUS, ‘92% of students revealed that their cost of living had increased over the past year with bills making up the lion share of their expenses’. The ONS explains that rising costs in energy and food have a higher impact on the inflation rate experience by low-income households versus high-income households, of which students tend to be in lower income thresholds (Arthur-Eaton, Chapman, O’Connor, & Saeed, 2022).

Respondents shared the level of impact of the increases in their energy bills in the form of ‘substantial impact’, ‘slight impact’, and ‘no impact’, alongside five other major categories. 57% of respondents said that the impact of energy bills has been substantial:

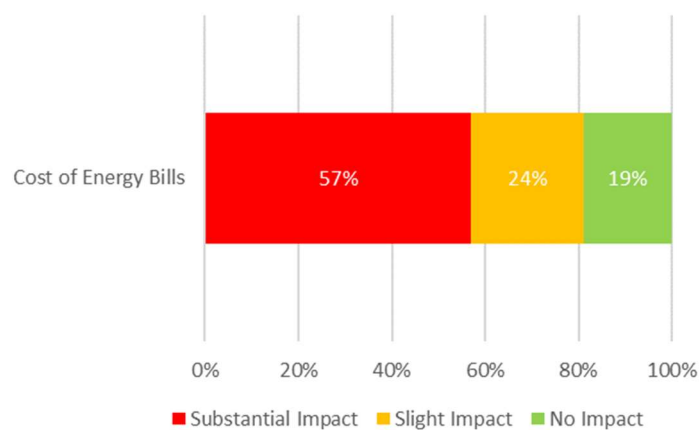


Figure 12: Impact of energy bills, (n=1479).

When broken down across demographics, those hit most by the cost of energy bills are mature students (73% for those aged 26+), students in HWLS (62%), and overseas students (60%). There is little overlap between HWLS and overseas students in the whole SHU population (7%), and although the survey population is higher (10%) it is not skewing this data significantly.

It is likely that the main factor contributing to older students and overseas students’ substantial impact of energy bills is the likelihood of them living in non-student housing and having lower income(s). 59% of HWLS students at SHU are 22+, compared to 68% in the survey. However, while HWLS has the highest percentage of mature students at SHU (49% of BTE are 22+ and only 39% of SSA in the whole student population), BTE had the highest number of mature respondents (76%) in this survey. This, therefore, was expected to show a higher proportion of BTE students feeling substantial impact on their energy bills when compared to HWLS in this survey. The fact that it does not suggests that although age is a primary factor, there is something about the HWLS cohort that lends them to being hit harder by the cost of energy than students in other colleges, which certainly needs more research. Additionally, the impact of placement costs should be compared between HWLS and SSA.

One international student with dependents explained that the cost of heating was expensive throughout this past winter, and due to having a young daughter, the student couldn’t choose to not use the heating.

Many students' bills were shielded from the volatile costs of energy through inclusive bills, but this was in many cases used to justify rent increases:

*because the first three are the essentials for living and these costs have been getting higher and higher. Luckily, I am living in an all-bills included apartment where energy bills are fixed, but the increase in energy bills was then reflected in the £100 increase in the monthly rent.*

Other students explained that due to the rise in energy costs, they have been forced to go without heating. In some cases, this was a preventative measure, and in others, this was due to falling behind on payments:

*My energy bills have increased 3X the amount I initially budgeted for when I moved into my accommodation. Meaning that I haven't been able to afford it, and now I'm in debt to energy companies by hundreds of pounds as iv slipped behind on bills. Through the winter, hallam offered £80 to help with this, however it just is not enough when you look at the bigger picture. My bills have been £100 per month, and through the cold winter we've just had it's been heartbreaking sitting inside and freezing because I don't have the means to afford it.*

Unfortunately, more than half of the survey respondents explained that they had cut back on heating their house/room due to the rising energy costs, and so the above case is not an isolated story. Students were asked about the areas of their housing costs that they might be cutting back on. The majority cut back on 'optional' costs, such as media subscriptions and heating:

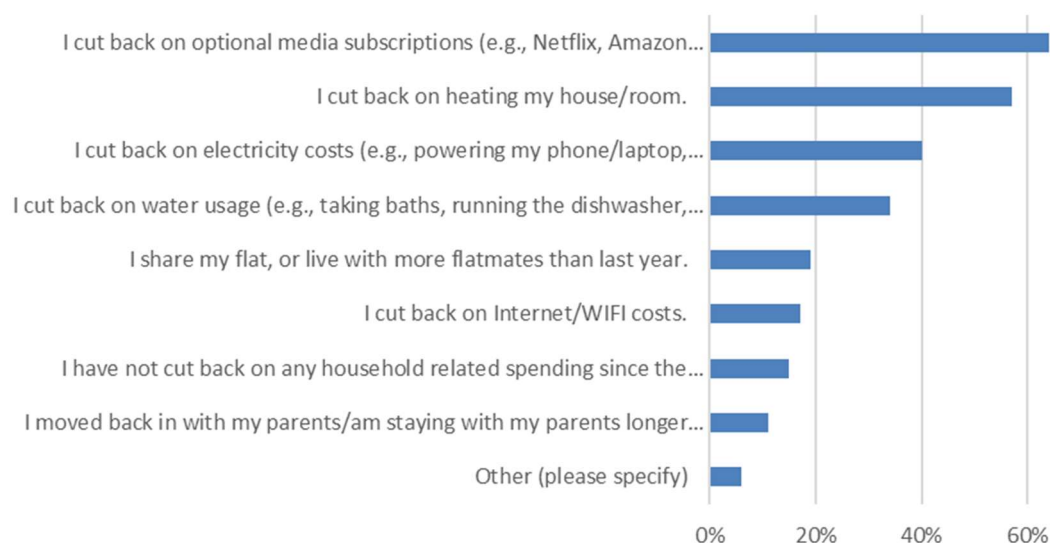


Figure 13: Household cuts, (n= 1401).

International students were more likely to share their flat (27% vs 16%) and cut back on internet/Wi-Fi costs than home students (24% vs 12%), but 57% of respondents were affected by the cost of heating their home or room.

Although the city, SHU, and SHSU have offered warm banks and support with energy bills, students are still adversely affected by energy costs and more support is almost certainly necessary. Whilst energy costs may be nearing their peak, they will remain very high and it is unclear, at the time of writing, what impact government support (or reduction in support) will have on bills.

Additionally, as with all warm banks/space provision(s), students will still face the negative effects of cold homes, especially if they have respiratory problems, when they sleep in a cold or damp house

during winter (William, et al., 2020). While warm banks offer some support, they do not eliminate the danger or burden of students being unable to afford to heat their homes.

Sixty-seven students specifically asked for financial support with the increasing cost of utility bills, either in the form of pressuring the government to introduce a cap, providing bursaries to tackle the increase in fees, or subsidising bills for students specifically. Two students requested council tax assistance, sixteen asked for support with electricity bills and sixty-three with energy bills. Overall, the atmosphere around energy bills is distressing and exasperated:

*Energy bills for students should not be as high as they are*

*reduced energy bills (energy companies are raking in record profits why are we paying for this?!!!)*

*There should be discounts for the student on Energy bills instead of these suicidal bills given all the time*

*Government help for students to combat the rise in energy and food prices*

In addition to requesting financial support for energy bills, one student asked for the university to provide energy saving products like lightbulbs, water tap attachments, etc. This was similar to more general statements made by students, about wanting freebies for 'necessities', such as soap, shampoo, menstrual products, and food.

## Socialising

Respondents were asked about the impact the cost of living has had on their ability and budget for socialising. Only 12% of students said there was no impact to the cost of their socialising.

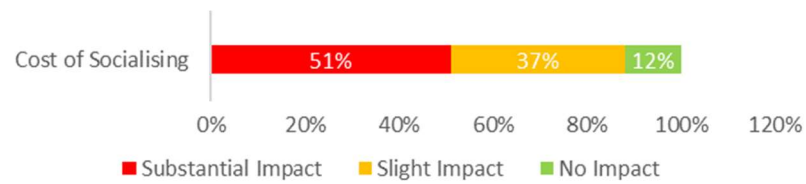


Figure 14: Impact of the Cost of Socialising, (n=1512).

Home students were some of the most highly impacted by the cost of socialising, 56% vs 35% of International students. As in nearly every category, disabled students were substantially more affected by the increase in costs in this category (63% vs 51% total respondents). Furthermore, 57% of under 25s were negatively impacted.

54% of the respondents in the OFS report said that their social life had been negatively impacted by the cost of living crisis (Savanta, 2023). 56% said they had cut back on associated socialising costs. These associated costs included costs affected by other categories of rises, such as food or transport, which makes the OFS data harder to align with our own. Additionally, although 51% of our total respondents said they had been highly impacted by the cost of socialising, a further 37% said they were slightly impacted. It is these two sections together that map best onto the respondents from the OFS report who were negatively impacted, which suggests that Hallam students are more greatly affected in this area than general respondents of the OFS report who were less likely to be in the north of the UK, as well as from post-1992 universities.

The travel section briefly covered respondents skipping optional events, such as academic events that do not count for course credit, and extracurricular events. In both cases, these events relate to a student's ability to socialise cheaply with students who share either a course or special interest. Students were more likely to skip extracurricular events, such as society/club events, Give-It-A-Go, course mixers, and sporting events due to the cost of travel. Although this was specifically asked in relation to travel, the cost of socialising and travel are interconnected. As previously noted, a high proportion of our students commute from outside Sheffield city centre. 46% of students often or always skip these events due to the cost of travel:

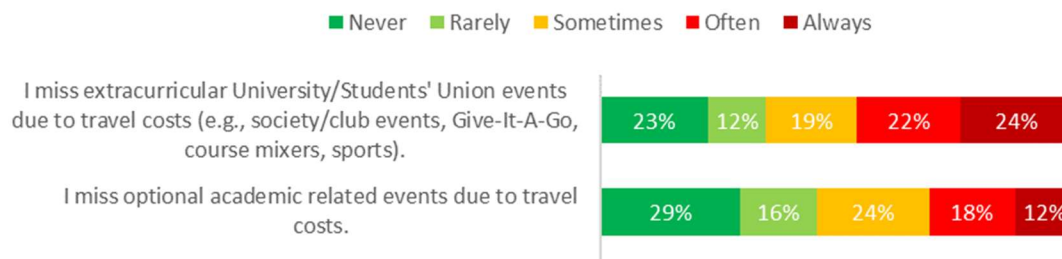


Figure 15: Missing Events Due to Travel Costs, of all respondents (n=1512).

Of those skipping extracurricular events, 57% were 30+ years old, while students 18-20 were the least likely to skip these events. This likely points to several protective factors: living in purpose-built student accommodation within walking distance to the campus, working less hours, having less responsibilities, and having more options for social opportunities (different times of day, days of the week, etc).

182 students explained in the question about why they chose whether they were substantially or slightly impacted, that they can no longer afford to budget for 'fun' things like socialising with course mates or going to activities.

In response to the qualitative question where respondents were asked to list their top three areas for support, 144 comments were about socialising. These could be broken down further into four more granular categories: Sheffield events, SU events, SU discounts, and Field trips:

Sheffield Events (50): Comments centred on the university or SU hosting or partnering with businesses in Sheffield to have free or discounted events for students, or events where students could get access to free or discounted things:

*More opportunities for students around sheffield which don't cost alot to participate in*

*Host events for buying and selling items for students, maybe a vintage clothes sale or similar*

Students also asked for more of the same event offered at different times/days so that they can fit them around their schedules:

*More events/multiples of the same event, this would allow me to plan accordingly for university events and could prevent missing out.*

Students also asked for help with cheaper to travel to events, such as carsharing:

*More notice for events so I can plan a cheaper way to travel, e.g. carsharing*

Finally, there respondents in various forms asked for events where free hot food is provided:

*More events where free hot food is provided*

*Perhaps cooking classes could help people?*

SU (42): Comments in this theme requested discounts at the SU and for joining societies. Respondents specifically asked for cheaper SU events, society events students could do



remotely to cut down travel costs, more free events at the SU, events which give students free items or food, and a study group:

*more resources and events from student union where things are cheaper so people can socialise easier without as much cost constraints*

*Some type of study group. I know that there may be some on in the library but they are limited it would be great if there was something weekly for students to come together and study for lessons or even upcoming assignments.*

*more student unions events at the union (bingo, karaoke etc)*

*Society costs the ones I was interested in are too expensive*

Field Trips (11): Respondents asked for cheaper or free field trips:

*maybe more local student union trips as the give it a go is great but I've only been able to afford it once in my situation*

*Cheaper abroad trips so that we can actually go*

Clearly, from the qualitative sections, students are negatively impacted by the cost of socialising. Although few students mentioned the direct impact of reducing their socialising because of the cost of living, several students mentioned the cost of socialising or result of high costs in other areas eating their 'fun' or 'social' budgets as the cherry-on-top of an already depressing sundae:

*I have £50 a week to live off after rent so I can't afford to do social activities and eat. I have to choose my priorities each week*

*Due to living away from home, the price of food and energy bills have increased massively. This is paid for with my earnings from my part-time job, however with both combined it costs roughly 3/4 of my wages and leaves little to no money left to socialise.*

*I've been struggling to be able to afford food, as well as having funds to socialise and buy myself things. Rent takes up half of my monthly income, and the rest is pretty much spent on food. I don't have any spare money to do anything socially*

Some parents explained that their caring responsibilities mean that where they have any additional income, their social life is not a priority:

*Food prices are now extortionate, and it is upsetting that I can't now cook from scratch every meal because I simply can't afford to. I am currently in a lot of debt with my energy supplier due to the increase of rates. Having a child I have full responsibility to keep him warm and ensure his clothes are clean, and I will do this regardless of the cost. It is costing so much now, and I have no extra money to pay the debt off it just keeps increasing. The cost of socialising is now a lot more than what it was before, and I can barely afford to have nutritional meals everyday mind go out and spend money on socialising.*

*My food bill has increased exponentially so I'm having to change a lot of habits. My energy bills have been so high over the winter period that we've kept the heating off for most of that time. I don't really socialise too much now because I need to use that pot of money on feeding the family*

Not all respondents connected the reduction of a social or 'fun' budget to their mood or explained the impact these changes have on their mental health. However, several did explain that their mental health was being negatively impacted and they were feeling lonelier and more out of touch since reducing or eliminating their social budgets:

*My rent was fixed before the start of the academic year. My bills however have gone up by over 100 per month. With food being more expensive I cannot afford to eat as healthy as I used to therefore having a negative impact on health and mental health. This is further impacted as I can't enjoy nights out or coffee with friends as I need to prioritise my food and bills*

*Not being able to eat as frequently or go out with loved one affects personal mood and energy levels from time to time.*

*Over the recent months I have found it significantly more difficult to afford even the essentials of food shopping, let alone being able to socialise which has severely impacted my mental health*

*I'm finding myself at a vulnerable place at the moment I'm only eating one meal a day to survive the cost of living I can't afford a ticket to go back home and visit my family nor can I afford money for social activities with my friends! I've just become so isolated and depressed*

Many students explained that they had noticed that this was affecting their friends as well, but that this did not make them feel less isolated:

*everything has gone up not just for you but friends too- this means that they are also struggling, it means going out is less of an option. It can lead to isolation and with the stress of how you are going to pay bills and pay for food. I feel like I'm just working and not living.*

Some students explained that their friends were meeting without them, which was making them feel lonely:

*I am not able to socialise with friends because they all go out to cafes or drinks and I can't afford that, as an affect it is starting to feel very lonely*

Clearly, the negative impact of cutting back on socialising for students is high. In February, the ONS reported that the average level of life satisfaction is significantly lower in HE students (5.8) than in the adult population (6.9) (Johnston & Westwood, 2023). However, while life satisfaction was found to be low, 54% of the students in their survey said they were satisfied with their overall social experience. Although students in this survey were not asked about their satisfaction with their social life, the combined information from impact comments and numbers of students who selected 'substantial impact' suggest that students are becoming increasingly unhappy with their lessening social lives, which is likely to have a knock-on effect on student attainment.

## Healthcare

Although healthcare is by and large paid for by the NHS, the Russell Group report highlighted a trend of students cutting back on 'non-essentials' such as preventative health care or mental health support (i.e., dental care and counselling) (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023). Additionally, 41% of students from the NUS survey said they had cut back on healthcare (NUS, 2022a). In the NUS study, however, healthcare, toiletries, and sanitary products were all separated out as disparate categories. Students in this study were therefore asked about healthcare, both in general and in more granular ways.

Healthcare had the highest number of 'no impact' responses to the question where respondents rated the impact of the cost of living this past year on their finances:

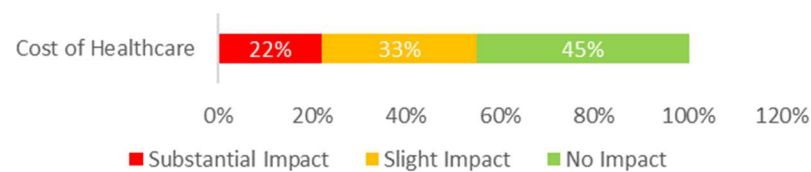


Figure 16: Impact of Cost of Healthcare, (n=1479).

22% of respondents said the cost of healthcare had a substantial impact on them, and 55% said it had a substantial or slight impact, with disabled and BAME respondents more negatively impacted (30% and 27% respectively).

120 students shared their thoughts on why they rated healthcare as having substantial, slight, or no impact. In these responses, students often rated healthcare as having no impact, but then wrote a comment that detailed the negative or strongly negative impact that the cost of healthcare had on them this year. It seems likely that students were not always attributing the cost of healthcare or their trouble accessing healthcare with the cost of living crisis, which they did do for other categories, such as energy and food. This could be because they either did not previously have to access healthcare, and therefore were unaware of the costs, or because it is not a recurring cost for them, and therefore seen as a lesser issue as the costs in other places are what is pressuring the student to reduce their budget in this area. No matter the cause, the qualitative responses highlight healthcare as a burden for students:

*As for healthcare, the cost of living crisis has forced me to think twice before seeking medical help, even when it's necessary. With increasing prescription charges and the cost of dental care, I'm finding it harder to access the healthcare services I need without worrying about the financial burden.*

*During the year because of stress I have ended up making myself incredibly ill and on a number of occasions had to take antibiotics, this went on for a number of months, everything in the UK is unbearably expensive and I'm not sure what to do anymore*

As seen above, in some cases, students' worry about the cost of living is exacerbating or creating health issues which then add to their financial burden and the cycle of ill-health (Blackbullion, 2023).

In some cases, students bemoaned the rising costs of NHS treatment, but they attributed this to the government and not to the cost of living. This may be why some students rated the impact of the cost of healthcare due to the cost of living as only a slight impact:

*Less and less is on the NHS (fuck the Tories) I have to pay for prescriptions and dental care, as*

*well as glasses/contact lenses. All feels like a rip off, why do I have to pay to see? and none of the 'special circumstances' that get you discount apply to students.... again F the Tories.*

In some cases, even where students rated the impact as 'slight', students explained that they are choosing to forgo seeking medical help:

*I don't pay for anything towards healthcare, although I need to see a physio for a running injury and know I won't be able to be seen in time through the NHS and can't afford the increased prices of physio treatment now privately.*

*Only healthcare doesn't because I just wait out the illness instead of going to a doctor as I couldn't afford the prescription.*

*I have been able to avoid/push back social events and health care needs until I have more money in the future, yet the essentials have risen dramatically.*

Similar to what was seen in other areas, students tend to cut back on costs anywhere they can, whether or not this is viewed as healthy or sustainable.

Respondents were also asked to point to the health areas where they had made cuts in the past year:

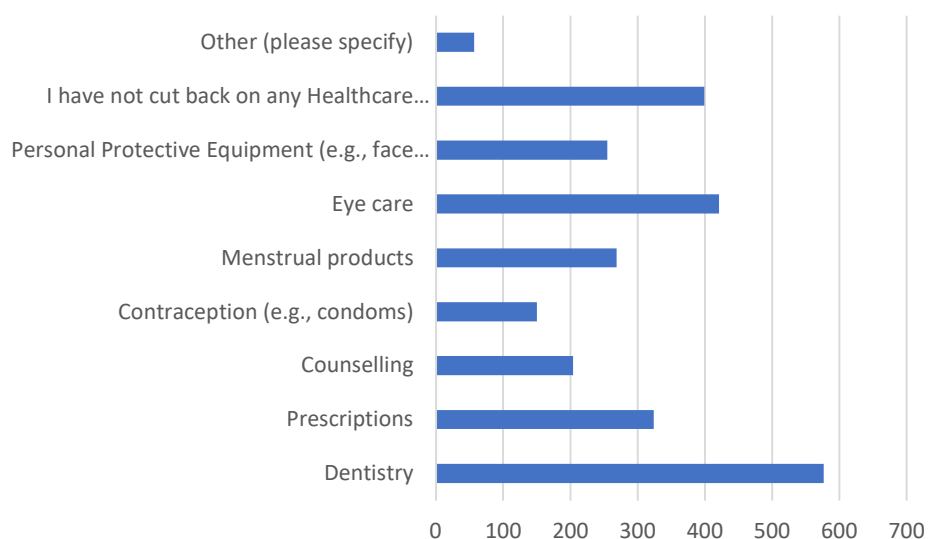


Figure 17: Healthcare costs respondents' cut back on in the last year, (n=1381)

### **Dentistry**

Of the cuts students made in the past year related to healthcare, most students had cut back on dentistry (42%). Those aged 22-25 were the hardest hit age group (44%), and disabled students were the most likely to have cut costs in this area (48%).

More white students than BAME students cut back on dentistry in the past year (43% vs 34%), but this is likely to fall in line with more home students cutting dentistry costs than international students (43% vs 27%). This could be due to the extraordinarily long waitlists for NHS dentists and expectations international students have about the costs of dentistry. It could also be that international students who are only on one-year courses either forgo going to the dentist for the entirety of their course or attend a check-up at their regular dentist when they visit home.

At the point of writing, 55% of SHU's PGT students are international students, and only 24% of those on a research post-graduate are international. Put simply, SHU international students are typically here for 1-2 years, and this is likely to impact their ability and decision to access an NHS dentist.

At the time of writing, waitlists for an NHS dentist within five miles of Sheffield city centre were between 18 months and 4 years long. Resultingly, it is incredibly unlikely that home students, let alone international students, can access a dentist if they have moved to study in Sheffield, having come from outside the region.

Students explained that they have been struggling to get an NHS dentist upon moving to Sheffield, which has impacted their decision to access preventative health care:

*I am also wanted to go and see a dentist as I have had one since moving to Sheffield but I currently cannot afford that.*

*the struggle of trying to find an NHS dentist has resulted in paying for private treatment Healthcare has always been a big one unfortunately as a student with a minimum loan you still have to pay for prescriptions, opticians and dentists. Dentists for me personally are a big issue no where in my area takes on NHS patients so I have no choice but to pay privately even if it is £50 a check-up.*

Ten respondents, when asked what support they would like to see from the SU, explained that where possible, they would like assistance with either the high costs of private dentistry, or accessing and speeding up the NHS waitlists:

*I have had to skip out on dentist and eye care due to the high costs and not being on NHS dentistry due to the large waiting list, if something could be done about this perhaps student discounts for these things?*

According to publicly available NHS data, since 2015 the percentage of adults seen by a dentist in the last 24 months has steadily decreased. In 2023 only 48.6% of adults in Sheffield had been seen by a dentist, nearly 11% lower than in 2015 (NHS Digital, 2022). Across the board, accessing low-cost dental care in Sheffield is an increasing burden.

Although students clearly need support in accessing dental care in non-emergencies, as the qualitative responses from our survey show, students need support for accessing dental care in emergencies, due to the likelihood of not having an NHS dentist. According to the Russell Group report, 7 in 10 students are unable to afford the cost of an emergency dental or medical treatment (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023, p. 13). Therefore, supporting students to access emergency NHS care, or working with the local authority to offer more low-cost dental services would eliminate some of the burden to students and allow them to continue to look after their health.

### **Eyes**

28% of respondents said they had cut back on eye care and eye related costs due to the cost of living crisis. Women were more likely than men to cut back on costs in this area (31% vs 21%). Although research is being done on gender differences in vision, current research seems to suggest that women are more likely to lose their sight or have problems and/or vision loss (Shaqiri, et al., 2018). While the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) reported that about 60% of those living with sight loss are women, this was comorbid with other factors, including older age (RNIB, 2023). This gender difference could account for the disparity in survey response.

Five out of the thirty-one comments asking for specific health-related support from the SU asked for

discounts or assistance with eye-care costs, and eleven mentioned eye care in explanations of why they rated healthcare as having a substantial impact on them. Eye care is therefore likely lower issue for students than other optional health-related costs.

### **Mental Health**

Thirty-nine students mentioned that their mental health had taken a turn due to the cost of living crisis. Seven students mentioned that they wanted free or discounted access to counselling and mental health support. Others asked for mental health training and resources to support students.

In comments about the cost of living and student health, several students mentioned that they could not afford counselling services, and these were viewed as optional.

15% of Home students explained that they had cut back on counselling in the past year due to the cost of living crisis, which is two percentage points above all respondents (13%). Disabled students were more likely to reduce costs in this area than any other group (22%), though students in SSA and those aged 22-25 were equally as likely to cut back in this area (18%).

58% of students in the Blackbullion survey said the crisis was impacting their mental health (Blackbullion, 2023, p. 7). The authors explain that students need greater support to discuss their money worries and find strategies to cope, which will help their mental health in the longer term (Blackbullion, 2023, p. 23). Sixty-nine comments asking for support from the SU with their finances in ways other than asking for more funding. These requests included: advice (how to budget, make cheap meals, apply for funding, etc), meetings with financial advisors, and emails with tips for different audience segments. In addition to offering students more counselling appointments, wellbeing support, and free or low-cost activities, students could do with more support from the SU surrounding how to budget or alleviate the financial strain they are under.

### **Menstrual Health**

1 in 4 students had cut back on menstrual products due to the cost of living crisis. This is significantly more than in the comparable Blackbullion survey, where only 9% of female students were going without or considering going without period products due to the cost of living crisis (Blackbullion, 2023, p. 24).

Twenty-two students asked for help in this area when asked what support they wanted from the university. Those that requested it asked for free menstrual products in and around the toilets on campus:

*Free menstrual products around campus toilets*

*Free sanitary products in the bathrooms*

*I also think there should be more period products like tampons and pads around the campus as I have been in situations a few times where there isn't any and they are expensive to buy.*

SHSU has recently begun a free period product subscription scheme, which should be evaluated to assess whether it is alleviating this burden for students (Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, 2023b). In addition to this scheme, there is a 'caught short' scheme run by SHU which offers free tampons and pads from help points on campus. Neither scheme currently offers free period products in bathrooms, which is what students have mainly requested (Sheffield Hallam University, 2023d). Comparative schemes should be evaluated to see if any comparable universities or students' unions have successfully offered free period products in bathrooms, as Blackbullion points out that a lack of

access to period products can deepen existing inequalities on campus, including through adding to feelings of shame and embarrassment a student already feels about their financial situation being deepened or highlighted through accessing a public scheme (Blackbullion, 2023, p. 24).

### **Prescriptions**

Prescription costs in the UK have gone up 30 pence to £9.65 per item (NHS, 2021). Students explained that this has affected their ability to pay for necessary care to keep up with their conditions, especially where they require multiple prescriptions. Although this affects a small proportion of the student body, for those that were affected, they were substantially impacted by this burden. 36% of disabled students had cut back on prescription costs.

One non-disabled student explained that medication and food are their highest costs:

*Providing for myself when living at university has meant a majority of my money goes towards necessities such as food and medication. I have been unwell quite a few times which has resulted in me needing prescriptions and at times haven't been able to afford them.*

Finally, younger students were more likely to cut back on prescription costs than those that were 25+.

## Work

In the OFS report, students were found to be taking on increasing paid employment hours alongside their studies. Although in extant literature this is seen as a positive trend, as students who work tend to feel greater control over their lives, the OFS participants were concerned about balancing work and study (OFS, 2023). 26.6% of students in the Savanta polling had taken on more hours at work (Savanta polling and the Sutton Trust, 2023, p. 2). 31% of students in the Blackbullion study were working more than 15hrs a week (Blackbullion, 2023, p. 6).

In our study, respondents were asked to indicate how much they were working:

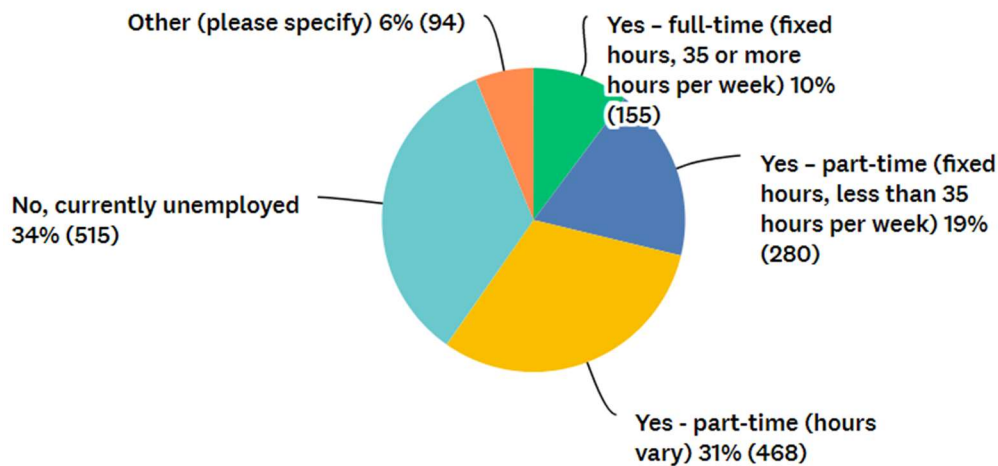


Figure 18: Respondents' Work Alongside Your Studies, of all respondents (n=1512).

Respondents were asked to share whether they work alongside their studies, to which the majority said yes in some form (60% of all respondents). Although we do not have access to data from last year about how many students are likely to be working, we can conclude from the comparable OFS, ONS, Russell Group, and Savanta data that students at Hallam are working more than the sector average. More than 50% of students in the Russell Group report were working over 11hrs a week (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023, p. 6). Available ONS data suggests that the average hours for part-time work in the UK is slowly increasing, and the average part-time worker in the UK between January and March this year works 16.9 hours a week (ONS, 2023b).

Respondent data shows that a bit more than a third of international students are working on part-time, varied hour contracts, such as zero-hour contracts. International students, BAME students, and students in BTE were the least likely to be working full-time during their studies (3%, 4%, and 5% respectively). Whereas home students and those in SSA were the most likely to work full-time during their studies (12%). First year students were the most likely to not be currently employed (37%), while second year students were the most likely to be employed in some form (69%).

Although students were not asked explicitly about the impact of the cost of living crisis on their work/study balance, the comments in the qualitative sections bore this theme out as an area of great importance.

When students were asked to detail the reason they rated different areas as having substantial impacts, slight impacts, or no impacts, fifty-seven respondents explained that they are struggling with costs and the decision to work more to cover the deficit. They viewed this as a choice between doing worse in their academics, or not earning enough to support themselves:

*I work over 20 hours a week and to do this alongside my studies is very difficult and it's affect*



*my studies and means I have less time and creates stress*

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

Students explained that they've had to up their hours due to the crisis, with many explaining that they're nearly working full-time across one or more roles, and are still concerned about costs:

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

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

*I am a post grad student working 30hrs/week alongside my studies*

Some students explained that they had anticipated certain costs and worked really hard to put aside enough money to support themselves during their studies, but that the crisis has meant they are unable to cover all necessary costs which were budgeted for:

*Huge increases in food, energy and rent have impacted how much I am having to spend on a monthly basis. I did take a gap year between finishing my undergraduate degree and starting my postgraduate degree to work full time and build up savings to cover a year's living costs (rent being the main cost) so that I wouldn't have to work alongside a course that required a full time placement (teaching). However, I had anticipated that I would have plenty left at the end of the year but with increasing costs that isn't the case.*

110 respondents shared that they wanted support with various aspects of work: accessing part-time work alongside their studies, raising the working hours for international students, assisting with work-study balance, and supporting graduate teaching assistants with their contracts.

### **Hours of Work**

Twenty-one respondents explained, in the section asking about what support they would like to receive from the SU, that they want the hours of work to increase for students inside and outside of term-time:

*Give opportunity for students to work 40hrs a week on all breaks and holidays.*

*Student should allowed to work for more than 20 hours due to such an high inflation rate*

*Having to study and only have 20hrs to pay all bills with little support is draining and overwhelming*

International students explained that with the cost of living crisis, price hikes, and the 20hr cap, they're struggling to make ends meet and pay tuition costs:

*Have paid last year 16900 pounds and this year so far 8500 and I still have 7500 to pay. I am really worried. It's been a hell with expenses staying with daughter and only able to work less than 20 hours. Really struggling to make ends meet and all this high costs have added to my mental health.*

*Before moving to UK for my master programme, I have planned carefully about monthly cost*

*of living and made my budget. The increase in energy bill and house rent really affected my plans, because now, am spending more than amount I budgeted for.*

Others explained that the 20hr limit affected their ability to get a part-time role:

*Lifting of work limit for international student because this is the reason I have not been able to get a part time job.*

This anecdotal evidence from international students points to a lack of availability of part-time roles below or at 20hrs a week. More research is needed to identify whether there is a lack of available part-time roles in fields international master's students are interested in (such as roles they may have worked in full-time prior to their studies in the UK), or if there is a lack of part-time, fixed-hour contracts in general at or below 20 hours a week.

Most SHU students are either on varied hour contracts or not in work. This may point to a lack of availability of minimal, fixed hour contracts across the labour market. Though 36.4% of roles in Sheffield are part-time, more granular data on hourly contracts is not publicly available (NOMIS, 2023).

Students in the Russell Group report were more likely to work 21+ hours if they were mature, had caring responsibilities, or were estranged from their families (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2023, p. 6). From the qualitative responses, there is a desire on behalf of international students, especially from these groups, to work 20+ hours, like their Home counterparts. In January of this year, the Times reported on government discussions to raise the 20hr working cap for international students, among other policies and measures affecting the group (Smyth & Dathan, 2023). To date, nothing has yet been addressed in parliament that would point to easing of these measures, and concerns were raised by sceptics about the types of employment international students would want to take up should the measures be lifted. More work needs to be done to identify what measures would best support international students who are looking to take on additional hours to increase their overall pay due to the cost of living.

Although lifting the hour cap would be beneficial for students looking to earn more money, there is a direct correlation between students' working hours and their academic attainment.

### **Work-Study Balance**

A 2018 study by scholars at the University of Aberdeen looked at repercussions of term-time employment (TTE) on student attainment and found that TTE positively impacted student attainment in HE when the work was up to 10hrs a week, and only negatively affected attainment when TTE was more than 30hrs a week (Dennis, Louca, & Lemon, 2018). These differences were magnified when role skill was considered. Students who worked low hours at skilled jobs had significantly better attainment than those who worked high levels of work at low skilled jobs. The current cost of living studies cited in this report have not asked students to specify whether their part-time work is skilled or unskilled, which may have more bearing on their work-study balance than the hours worked indicates alone.

In their comments asking for support or detailing the impact of the rises in different areas, twenty-nine students explained that they need support with balancing work and study, and seventy-two asked for help finding suitable part-time work.

Of the seventy-two comments asking for support with part-time work, several students specifically asked for more on-campus jobs, as they believed that campus or university jobs would be more

flexible and understanding of the need to prioritise studies at different points in the year.

Students asked for more fixed-term, longer hour jobs:

*More consistent campus job opportunities (more hours, longer fixed term)*

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

Equally, students asked for more ad-hoc, flexible roles on or around campus:

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

*more part time jobs that suit student life*

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

Respondents explained that part of the issue with accessing work opportunities was inconsistent timetabling:

*Due to lecture timing issues held in evening again affecting me for not getting job.*

*Can't work during assessment season- having assignments spread out so I can still earn and don't have to take holiday leave*

Students asked for the university to reduce the amount of days students are in for classes, which would free them up to accept paid work:

*Longer academic days, so having a day or two off in the week to work*

*More classes on the same day rather than going in a few times a week for one hour here and there. More set days so when applying for a job it is easier to tell the employer when I am off.*

Others asked for earlier access to their timetables so that they can organise and identify their availability for part-time work.

Students additionally asked for support in balancing the work and studies they have already committed to. Some students requested 'free coaching', and more support for students who are working while completing their studies. These asks were general and minimal, though an analysis of the current support offer geared towards working students would likely be beneficial.

### **Placements**

Twenty-one students mentioned that their placements were getting in the way of their budget, as they cannot take up paid work while on placement. Some of these respondents called for placements to be paid, especially those in healthcare, social work, or teaching.

In response to what support students would like from the SU, thirty-four students requested placement support, such as help with associated travel costs, parking fees, hotel costs, and more funding:

*There were automatic funding options available for extra placement it would be good to get similar for cost of living especially since nearly everyone is having to struggle more*

*Placement areas closer to home address due to not being able to work whilst on placement*

*I would also like the placement team to take into account those who may not be able to afford to travel to an area other than Sheffield*

*Transport to and from placement and also during my community placement is also a big cost. I can get this reimbursed but you have to spend it first before you get it back which leaves me short sometimes*

Some students explained that the timetabling of summers on placement make it hard to get a part-time role. One specific respondent asked for timetabling to block off some time for placement students to pick up paid work:

*My whole summer is me being on placement, from May until September it's impossible to get a job to help me afford university so I am really struggling, so at least a month or two off university to get a job*

Overall, students explained that support for associated placement costs would go some way towards alleviating the unexpected financial burden of their course.

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## Appendix: Questionnaire



### Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

#### **What is this about?**

The aim of this questionnaire is to understand the impact of the cost of living on Sheffield Hallam Students so that we, Sheffield Hallam Student's Union (SHSU), can offer you better, targeted support and assist the University in doing the same.

#### **How long will it take?**

This survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

#### **Prize Draw**

As a thank you for completing the whole survey, you will be entered to win a first prize draw of £100 and a second and third draw of £50 cash! You can provide your preferred contact details at the end of the survey.

#### **Important information:**

- By clicking 'submit' you consent to your responses being entered into this study.
- The information from this study will be published in a report by the SHSU research team. Anonymised survey responses, and anonymised data tied to your student ID such as demographic data, course, level, of study, etc, will be published to the university research archives at the end of the project.
- Once anonymised (so that you cannot be identified), you consent for this information to be used and preserved for any other research purposes on the university archive, and by SHSU to support efforts in aiding students with the cost-of-living crisis.

#### **Your rights:**

- You can withdraw from submission at any time before completion of the survey.
- Within 2 weeks of your survey completion, you can contact the Researcher to omit, change or delete any data (contact details at the bottom of page).
- Your responses to this survey are entirely confidential.
- The survey data will be analysed by SHSU staff and, as such, is stored in line with our [GDPR policies and practices](#). SHSU undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status, in conjunction with the University. Should you have questions about this survey, please email us at [uusresearch@shu.ac.uk](mailto:uusresearch@shu.ac.uk) or should you have questions about the use of your data, please email [su\\_gdpr@shu.ac.uk](mailto:su_gdpr@shu.ac.uk).
- This study was approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee with reference number ER53139115. If you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated, please email [ethicssupport@shu.ac.uk](mailto:ethicssupport@shu.ac.uk).

#### **Researcher contact details:**

Name: Seth Garvin-Smith

Email: [S.Garvin-Smith@shu.ac.uk](mailto:S.Garvin-Smith@shu.ac.uk)



### **Support**

For information on scholarships, bursaries, hardship funding, and support, please see [Student Funding](#). If you experience any adverse side effects by taking part in this study, please contact the relevant support services:

[Student Advice Centre](#) - 0114 225 4148. You can also come to Level 1, The HUBS to talk to someone or schedule an appointment.

[University Wellbeing](#) - 0114 225 2136. You can also come to Level 1, Surrey Building, City Campus to talk to someone.

Samaritans - 116 123. 24hr support to discuss personal issues.

Shout - text 'steel' to 85258. 24/7 crisis text service.



## Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

### Background

**These questions will help us identify trends across different student communities.**

\* What is your Student ID (e.g., 31000000)?

\* Do you currently live on or near campus? (For the purposes of this survey 'near campus' means that you live within the following postcodes: S1 - S14, or S20).

- Yes, I moved to live within the above postcodes for university.
- Yes, I live within the above postcodes and did not move for university.
- No, I commute from outside those post codes.

\* Do you currently work alongside your studies?

- Yes - full-time (fixed hours, 35 or more hours per week)
- Yes - part-time (fixed hours, less than 35 hours per week)
- Yes - part-time (hours vary)
- No, currently unemployed
- Other (please specify)

\* How do you currently pay for your day-to-day living expenses (i.e., this could include your course related costs like books and also your food, rent, etc)? *(select all that apply)*

- Student Finance (e.g., maintenance loan)
- Money earned from job(s) you work
- Family assistance
- Personal savings
- Scholarship either provided by SHU or elsewhere (e.g., study scholarship)
- SHU extraordinary circumstances funding (e.g., hardship fund, international student fund)
- Personal loan (e.g., from a bank)
- Short term, unregulated credit agencies (e.g., Klarna, Zilch, ClearPay, etc)
- Food banks
- Credit Card(s)
- Financial support from friends
- Overdraft
- Other (please specify)

Not including your maintenance loan (if you have one), how much additional income from different revenue sources (family, work, etc) do you make per month?

Please write your answer as a whole number. Your answer will remain confidential and is not compulsory. If you prefer not to answer, please skip to the next question.

\* At what location do you primarily study?

- City Campus
- Collegiate Campus

If you live in private rented accommodation (e.g., not student halls or where you have a mortgage), please tick the boxes below that apply to your housing situation in the last year.

- I have had to move in the last year because I was 'no fault' evicted.
- I have had to move in the last year because my rent was raised too high for me to be able to afford.
- I have not raised housing concerns with my landlord for fear of being 'no fault' evicted, or having my rent raised.
- None of these situations apply to me this year.

Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements as a result of changes you have made to your spending in the past year.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I skip meals to cut back on spending.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I miss or skip class at University due to travel costs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I miss or skip class in order to take up paid work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I miss optional academic related events due to travel costs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I miss extracurricular University/Students' Union events due to travel costs (e.g., society/club events, Give-It-A-Go, course mixers, sports).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



### Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

#### Increases

\* To what extent since the beginning of this academic year, have you personally been negatively impacted by increases in any of the following?

	Substantial impact	Slight impact	No impact
Cost of food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of energy/bills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of rent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of travel to/from campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of socialising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of healthcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Can you tell us why you answered the above question as you did?



## Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

### Transport

\* Which mode(s) of transport do you use most frequently when travelling to and from university? *If you use more than one mode of transport, please select as they apply to you.*

- On Foot
- Bicycle
- Bus
- Tram
- Train
- Motorbike/Scooter
- Taxi
- Private Vehicle (Car/Van) Single Occupancy
- Private Vehicle (Car/Van) Car Share
- Other (please specify)



## Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

### Suggestions and Future Support

\* Thinking about how the cost of living is affecting you, what are the **top 3** things that you would like to see changed? *(this might be, for example, discounts on campus or in Sheffield for students, or decrease travel costs, but could be anything you think would improve your time as a student at Hallam).*

\* What types of support or discounts might you use if they were offered for Sheffield Hallam students? *Tick all options that apply.*

- Zoom tickets for all, regardless of age
- Discounts on travel arrangements
- Cycling scheme
- Loans/bursaries/funding
- Food discounts
- On-campus childcare offers
- Earlier access to timetabling
- Flexible job opportunities

Do you have any additional comments or concerns regarding support from Sheffield Hallam on the cost of living crisis?



## Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

### Stay Updated

To stay updated on the Cost of Living Campaign, [please see here](#).

**You can also sign up for our mailing list to keep informed about all of the work we do for students' rights!** Please note, to sign up for the mailing list, you need to first sign in to the Students' Union's website. You can sign in to the website with the same login details at Blackboard. Just click 'Log In' in the upper right corner.

The area to sign up for the mailing list looks like the image below. If you are struggling to sign up, please contact us at [StudentRights@shu.ac.uk](mailto:StudentRights@shu.ac.uk).

## Join our mailing list

Sign up to receive updates from your Student Rights team.

Simply tick the following box and click the button 'Join student mailing list'.

Student Rights - Mailing List

Join student mailing list

No option to sign up? Please make sure you're logged in.



## Cost of Living Survey (Spring 2023)

If you would like to be entered into our prize draw to win either **£100 or £50 in cash**, please tell us your preferred email below. *We will be contacting winners from 7th May, so keep an eye on your email from then. Your contact details will be kept separate from your survey results and will not be used for any other purpose.*

**Email Address**

Thank you completing our questionnaire. If you have questions about this survey or the use of your data, please get in touch with us at [uusresearch@shu.ac.uk](mailto:uusresearch@shu.ac.uk).

For information on scholarships, bursaries, hardship funding, and support, please see Student Funding. For advice and support regarding your personal finances, please see the Students' Union's Advice Centre. If you experience any adverse side effects by taking part in this study, please contact the relevant Students' Union, University, or external support services which will be able to help you further:

Student Advice Centre - 0114 225 4148. You can also come to Level 1, The HUBS to talk to someone or schedule an appointment.

University Wellbeing - 0114 225 2136. You can also come to Level 1, Surrey Building, City Campus to talk to someone or schedule an appointment.

Samaritans - 116 123. 24hr support to discuss personal issues.

Shout - text 'steel' to 85258. 24/7 text service which aims to take you from a 'hot moment' to feeling calmer.