

Student Happiness Index 2024



HOWDEN

Insights into students' happiness, mental health, concerns, motivations, and aspirations for the future.



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Introduction

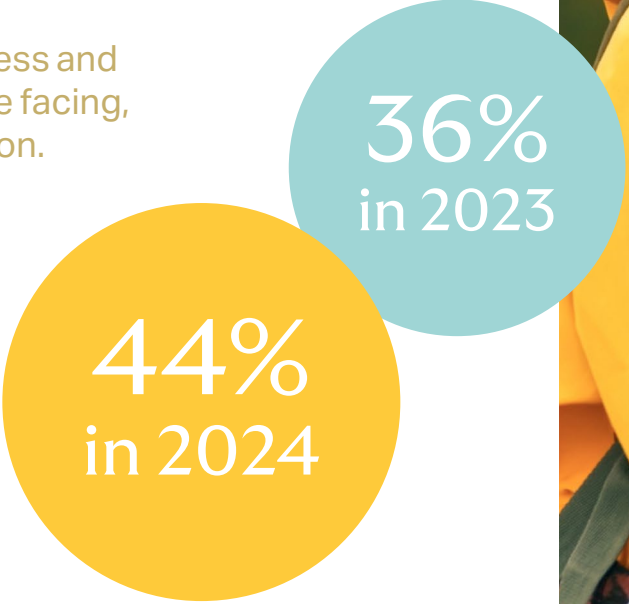
We're pleased to share the fourth annual Student Happiness Index

in which we explore students' happiness and mental health, the challenges they are facing, and their outlook on life after education.

When it comes to happiness, the findings are encouraging. Since publishing the Student Happiness Index 2023 report, the Student Happiness Index score has risen from 36%¹ to 44%.

However, further exploration indicates that many are not as happy as they could be.

In fact, 43% report that their mental health has worsened in the past year.²



77%
have struggled with their mental health in the past 12 months

It's easy to see why as the survey results make abundantly clear that the continuing high cost of living is weighing heavy on students' minds. For example, high percentages of students appear to be struggling to focus on their studies while also undertaking part-time work to alleviate their financial stress.

Students are seeking help for their declining mental health. However, the findings reveal that there's an opportunity for universities and colleges to improve the level of mental health and wellbeing support on offer as well as improving signposting on how to access these services.

This is especially important for members of the LGBTQ+ community. In this year's survey, we looked specifically at how students who identify as part of this community feel towards their mental health and the services on offer at their university or college.

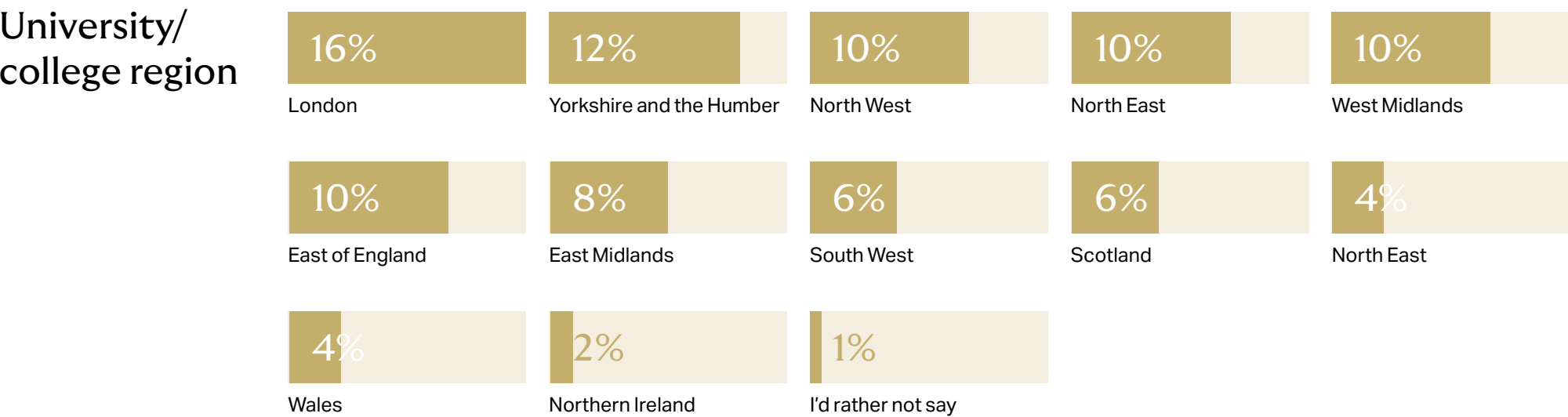
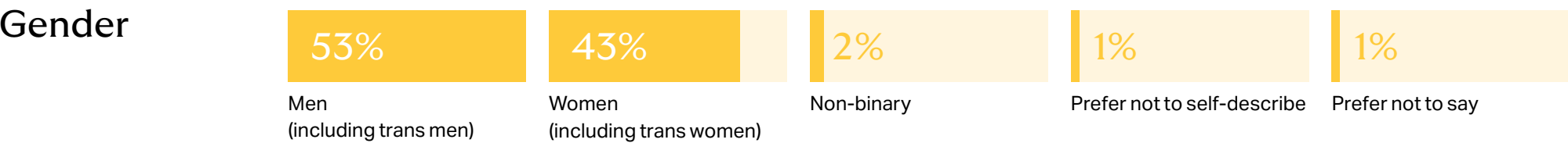
Concerningly, we discovered that almost 4 in 5 (77%) of those we surveyed have struggled with their mental health in the past 12 months², showing how important it is for institutions to ensure that adequate support is available.

For the first time, this report also explores insights from further education students to provide a complete view of the student experience as they progress along their educational journey.

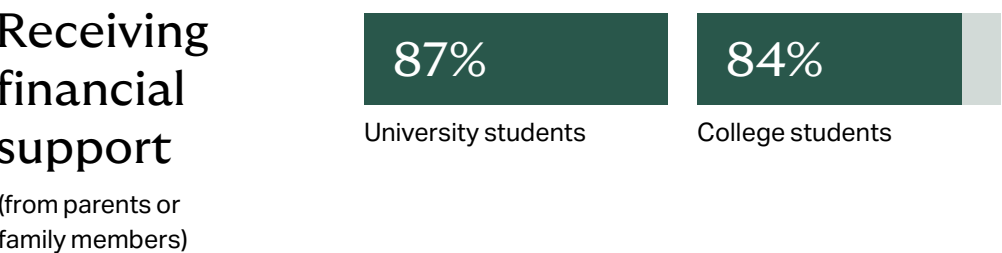
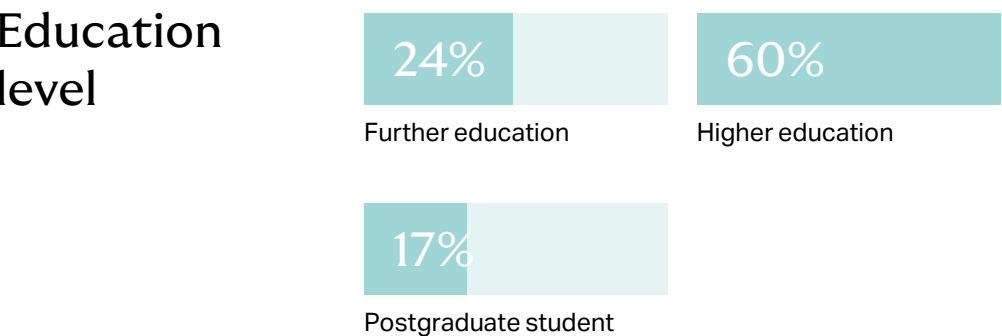
Overall, the research shows how vital it is that universities and colleges support the mental health and wellbeing of their students. Not only so they're equipped with the tools to cope with the significant financial pressures they're under, but so these pressures are less likely to negatively impact what should be an enjoyable and exciting chapter in their lives.

Methodology

Who we surveyed



Howden partnered with Censuswide to survey 2,382 students between 02.12.2024 and 03.01.2025



About the Student Happiness Index

The Student Happiness Index scores are calculated by taking the percentage of unhappy students away from the percentage of happy students based on the survey responses given.

It is presented as a score on a range of -100 (if all students were unhappy) to +100 (if all students were happy). Consequently, a neutral result would be a score of zero. We applied the same methodology to calculate scores for optimism.

01 Executive summary

This year's survey shows that overall student happiness has risen since 2023.

However, a closer look at the data reveals that students are still experiencing mental health challenges and are finding it difficult to focus on their academic studies while under financial strain. With student mental health expected to worsen in 2025, universities and colleges across the country have an opportunity to improve their support services and ensure that all students understand how to access these if needed.

Key findings



Happiness and mental health

The Student Happiness Index score has risen from **36% in 2023 to 44% in 2024**

61% of students surveyed say they've felt happy this year²

However, 43% agree their mental health has worsened in the past 12 months³

77% of members of the LGBTQ+ community agree they've struggled with their mental health in the past 12 months³



Enjoyment vs expectation

33% of students
surveyed say they've enjoyed their university/college experience less than expected⁴

Student safety

85% of students
surveyed say they've felt safe when on their university/college campus

Student concerns

Cost of living
tops the list of students' biggest current and future concerns

Life after education

The overall student optimism score for 2024 is
57% - up from 38% in 2023¹

67% of students
surveyed say they feel optimistic about life after university/college⁶

50% of students
are worried their mental health will worsen in the next 12 months²

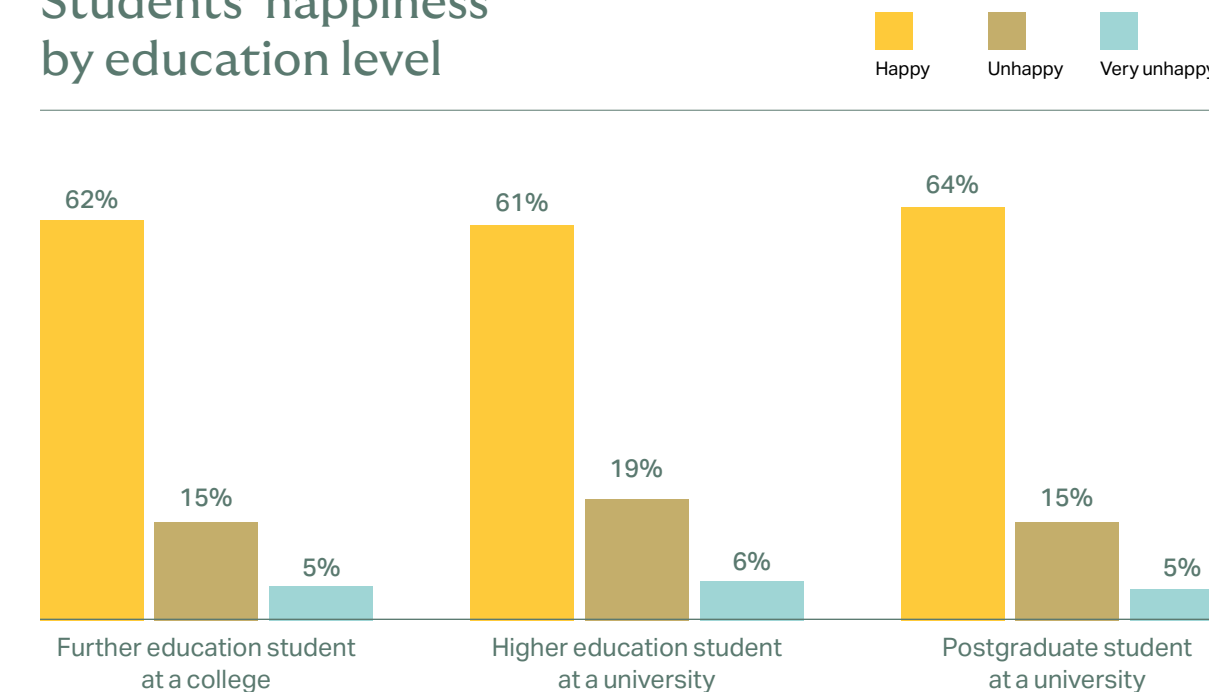


02 Student happiness and mental health

According to our latest survey, student happiness appears to be on the rise.

This year, just over 3 in 5 (61%) of students surveyed say they've felt happy², while just half (50%) of those surveyed in 2023 said the same.³ The data is promising. However, the findings do indicate that students' happiness levels are not as high as they could be. In fact, fewer than 1 in 5 (19%) say they've felt very happy this year.

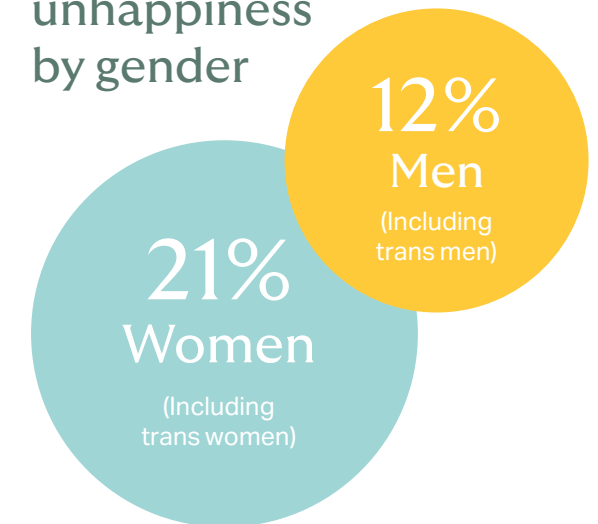
Students' happiness by education level



44%

The overall Student Happiness Score for 2024 has risen to 44% from 36% in 2023¹

Students' unhappiness by gender

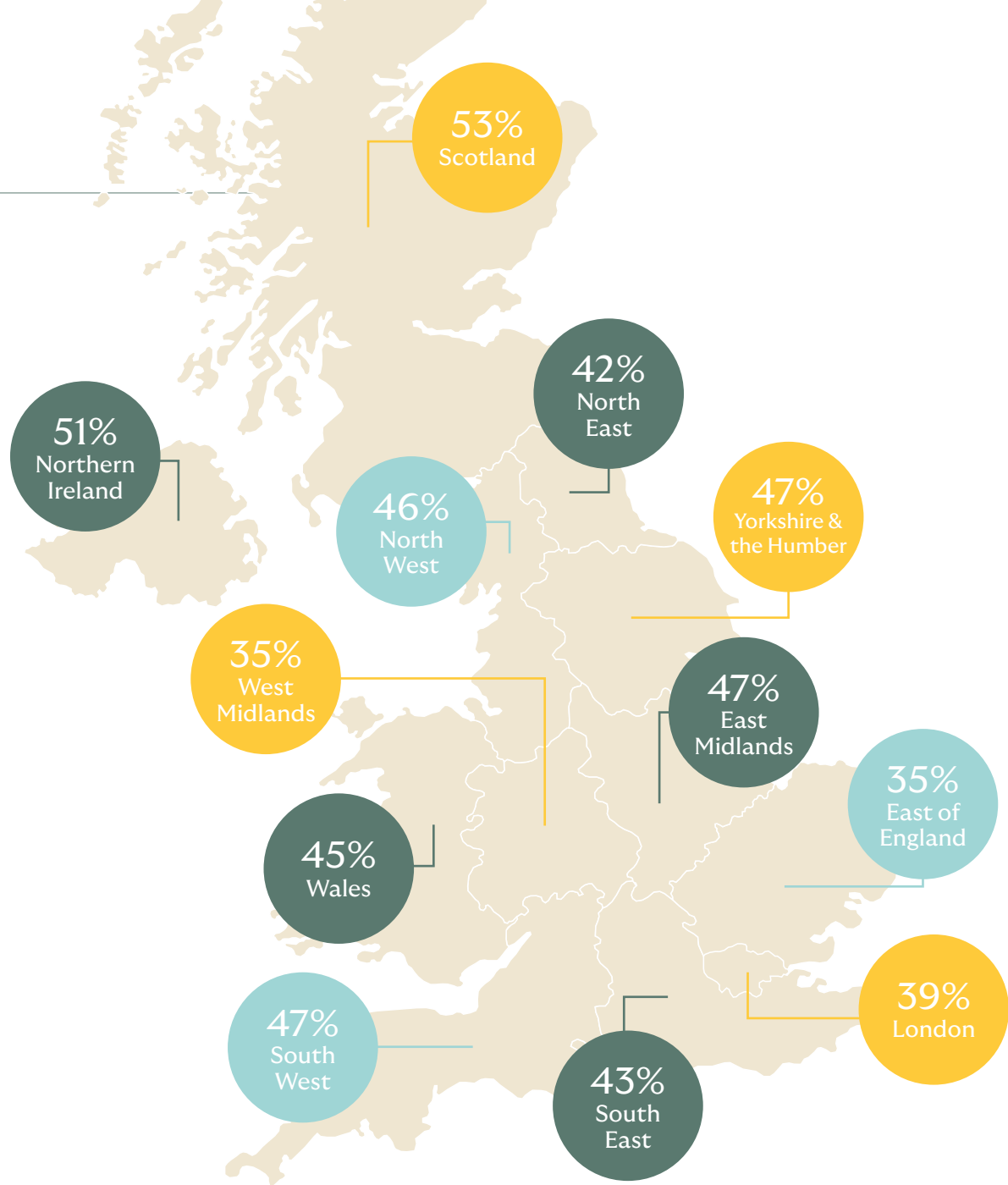


Mental health decline
by university/college location

Does region
have an impact?

There's also a link between the region in which students are attending university or college and the extent to which they have felt happy this year.

For example, almost 7 in 10 students surveyed who attend university or college in Wales (68%), the North East (67%) and East of England (67%) say they've felt happy² this year, while fewer than 3 in 5 of those in Yorkshire and the Humber (57%) and the North West (57%) say the same.



43% agree
their mental health
has worsened in
the past 12 months

The research shows that students have experienced a decline in their mental health, with over 2 in 5 (43%) agreeing⁵ that their mental health has worsened in the past 12 months.

A possible reason for this decline may be that students are spending less time doing what makes them happy.

According to the research, respondents are most likely to cite socialising with friends (14%) had contributed most to their happiness in the past year. However, almost half (47%) agree⁵ that they've been socialising less during that time.

Top five things improving student happiness



41%
have accessed professional support for their mental health in the last 12 months

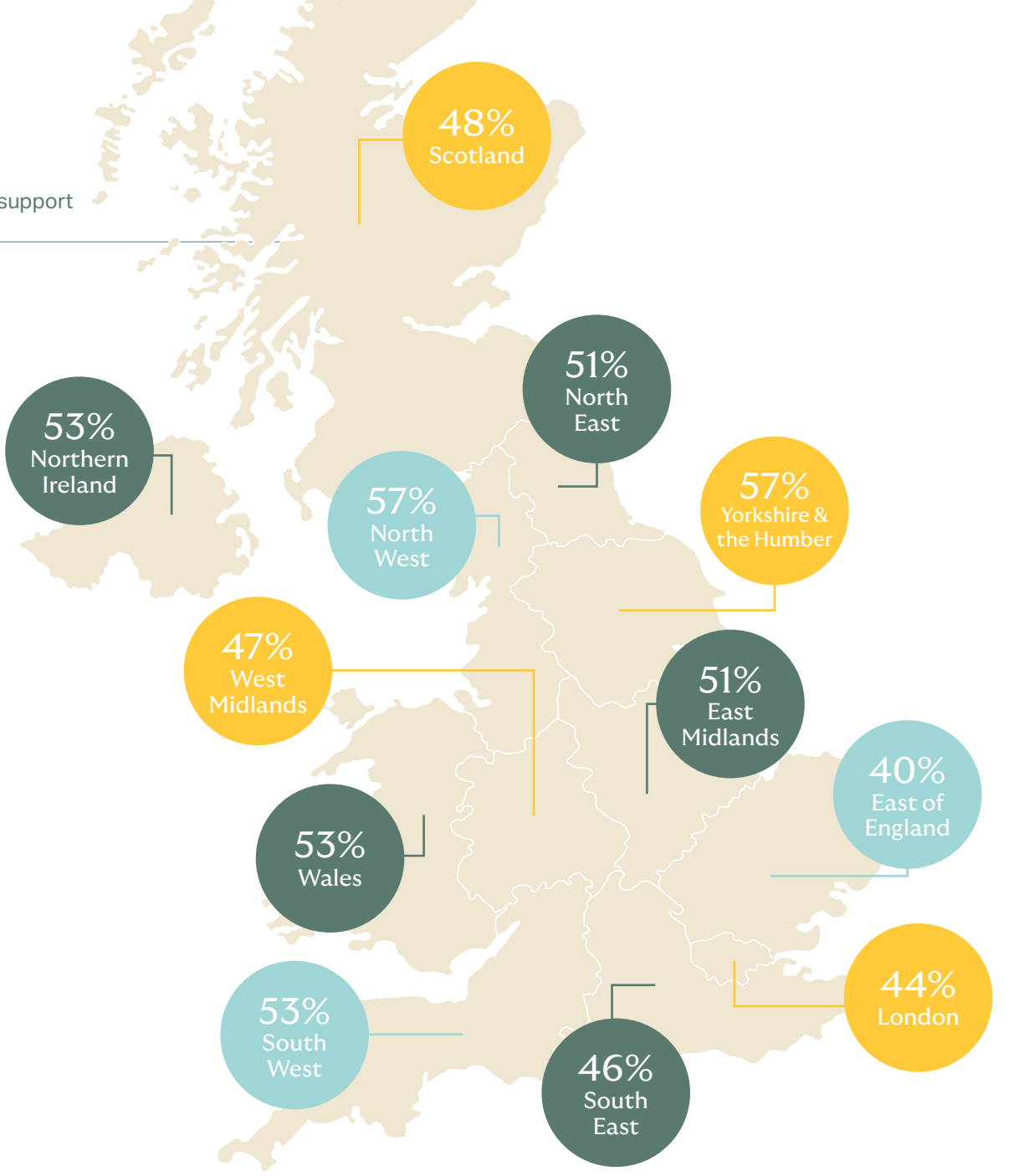
Mental health and wellbeing support levels by region

% of students who agree their college/uni provides the right level of support

Access to mental health support

Our survey shows that just over 2 in 5 (41%) of the students surveyed agree⁴ that they've accessed professional support for their mental health, increasing from just over a third (34%) who said the same in 2023.⁶

However, the findings indicate that colleges and universities could be doing more to support students and their mental health. In fact, **under half (49%) of those we surveyed agree⁴ their college/university provides the right level of mental health and wellbeing support**, while just 1 in 5 (20%) strongly agree that they know how to access the services on offer. The level of support provided also appears to differ according to region.



LGBTQ+ community

The findings indicate that a high proportion of the LGBTQ+ community surveyed have experienced challenges when it comes to their mental health in the past 12 months.

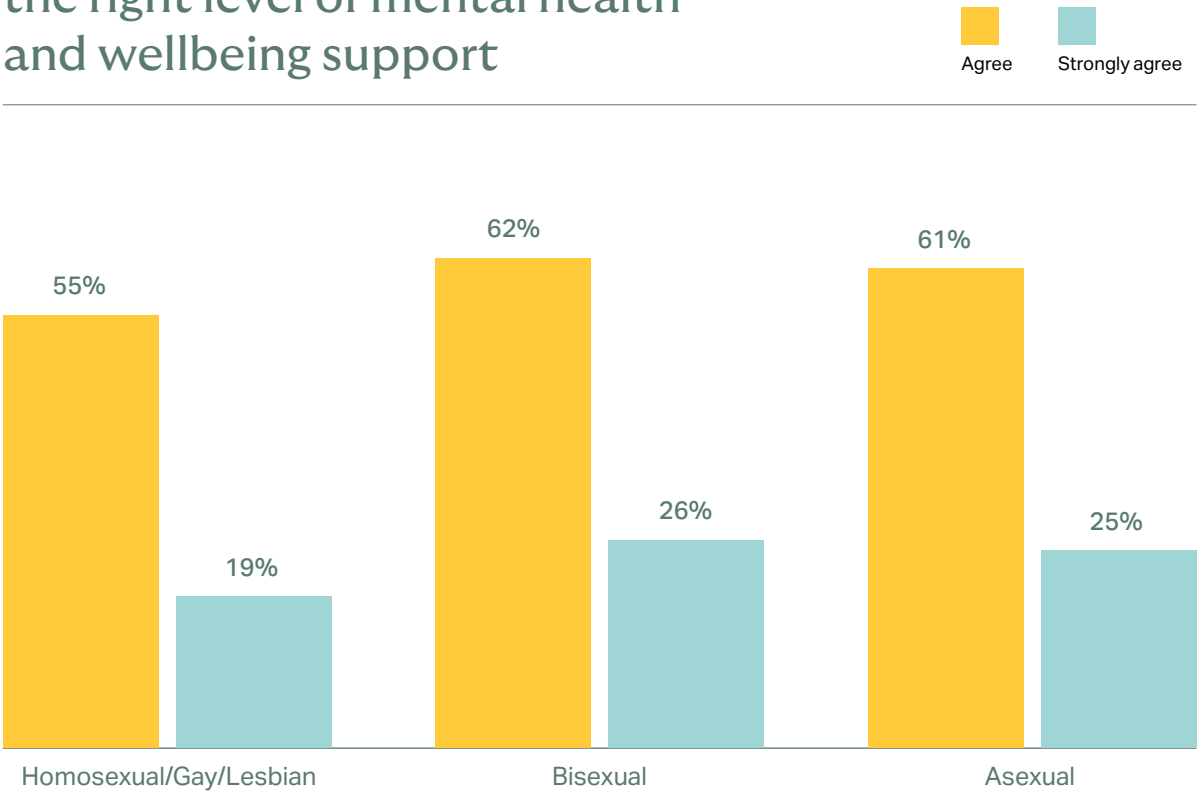
- Almost 8 in 10 (77%) agree⁵ they've struggled with their mental health during this time, with almost half (48%) saying they strongly agree.
- Students surveyed who identify as bisexual (56%), asexual (39%) and homosexual (38%) all cite mental health as one of their topmost pressing concerns.
- According to the data, there's an opportunity for universities and colleges to improve the level of support on offer for members of LGBTQ+ communities.
- Currently, just under a quarter (24%) of those surveyed from this group strongly agree that their institution provides the right level of mental health and wellbeing support.
- Only 32% strongly agree that they know how to access the mental health and wellbeing support provided by their college/university.

77%

of the LGBTQ+ community agree⁵ that they've struggled with their mental health in the past 12 months



My college/university provides the right level of mental health and wellbeing support

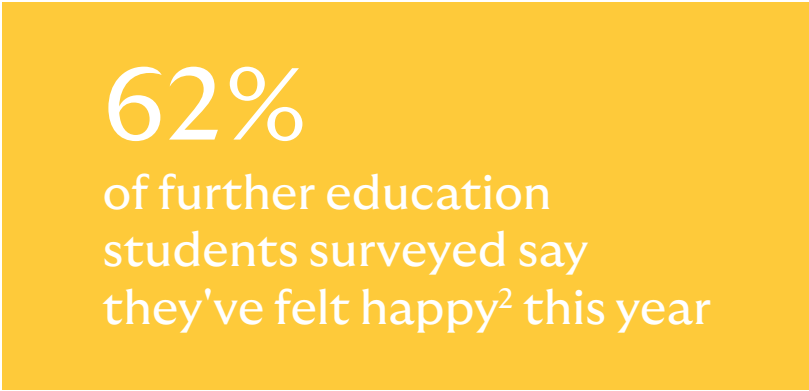


Further education/ college students

Over 3 in 5 (62%) further education students surveyed have felt happy² this year, and are most likely to state that socialising with friends (14%), meeting new friends (14%) and doing well in their studies (9%) are the main things that have improved their happiness.

However, the data highlights that very few further education students felt at their happiest in 2024.

In fact, just under 1 in 5 (19%) further education students say they've felt very happy in the last 12 months, while almost 3 in 10 (29%) post-graduates surveyed say the same.



40% of further education students surveyed agree⁵ their mental health has worsened in the past 12 months.

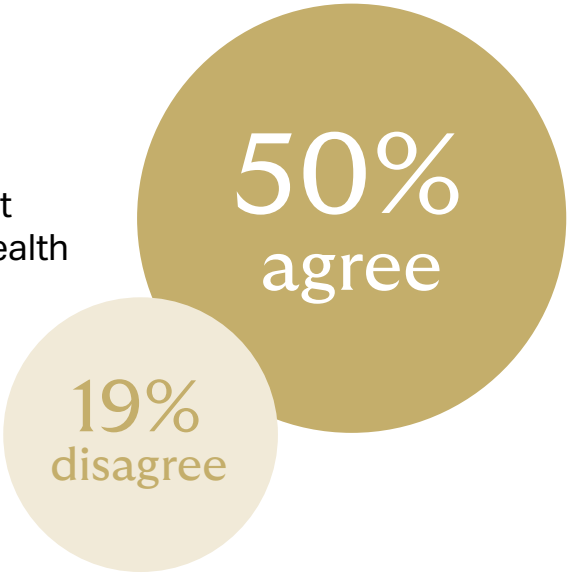
With so many further education students reporting a decline in their mental health, it's important for institutions to ensure that help is at hand, particularly as almost half of those surveyed⁵ are worried their mental health will worsen in the next 12 months.

Just half (50%) agree⁵ their college provides the right level of mental health and wellbeing support, while almost 1 in 5 (19%) disagree⁷ that this is the case. At the same time, just 54% of further education students surveyed agree⁵ they know how to access mental health and wellbeing support at their college.

40%
agree⁵ their
mental health has
worsened in the
past 12 months

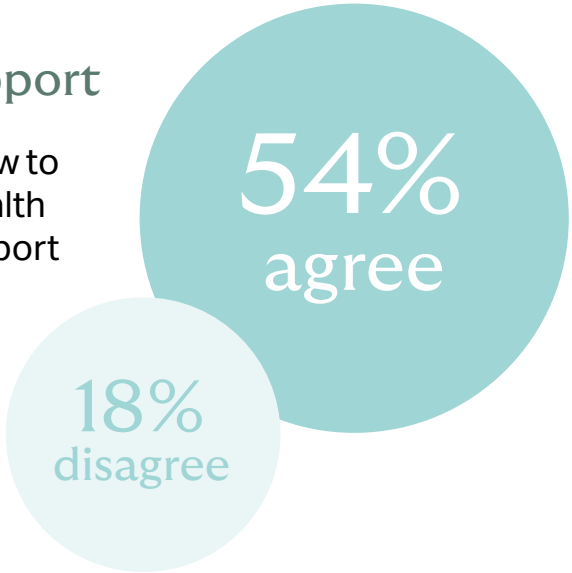
Wellbeing provision

Their college provides the right level of mental health and wellbeing support



Access to wellbeing support

Students know how to access mental health and wellbeing support at their college



International students

The research shows that international students are more likely than UK students to say they've felt happy this year.

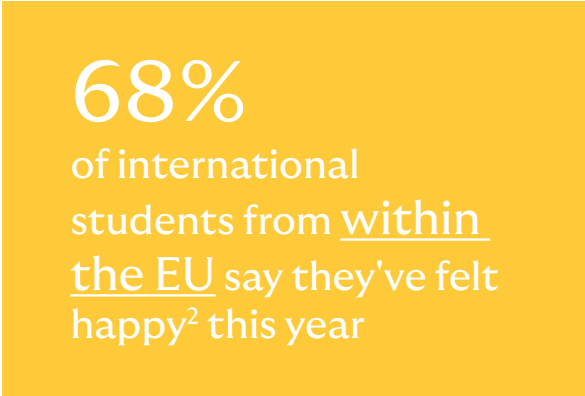
Almost 7 in 10 (68%) students from within the EU and two thirds (66%) of those from outside the EU say they've felt happy² this year, compared to just under 3 in 5 (59%) who are UK citizens.³

However, all is not as rosy as it seems for international students.

Many EU (44%) and non-EU (44%) international students report⁵ that their mental health has worsened in the past 12 months.

Almost half (46%) of those we surveyed from the EU have accessed professional support for their mental health, while almost 2 in 5 (38%)⁵ of those from outside the EU say the same.

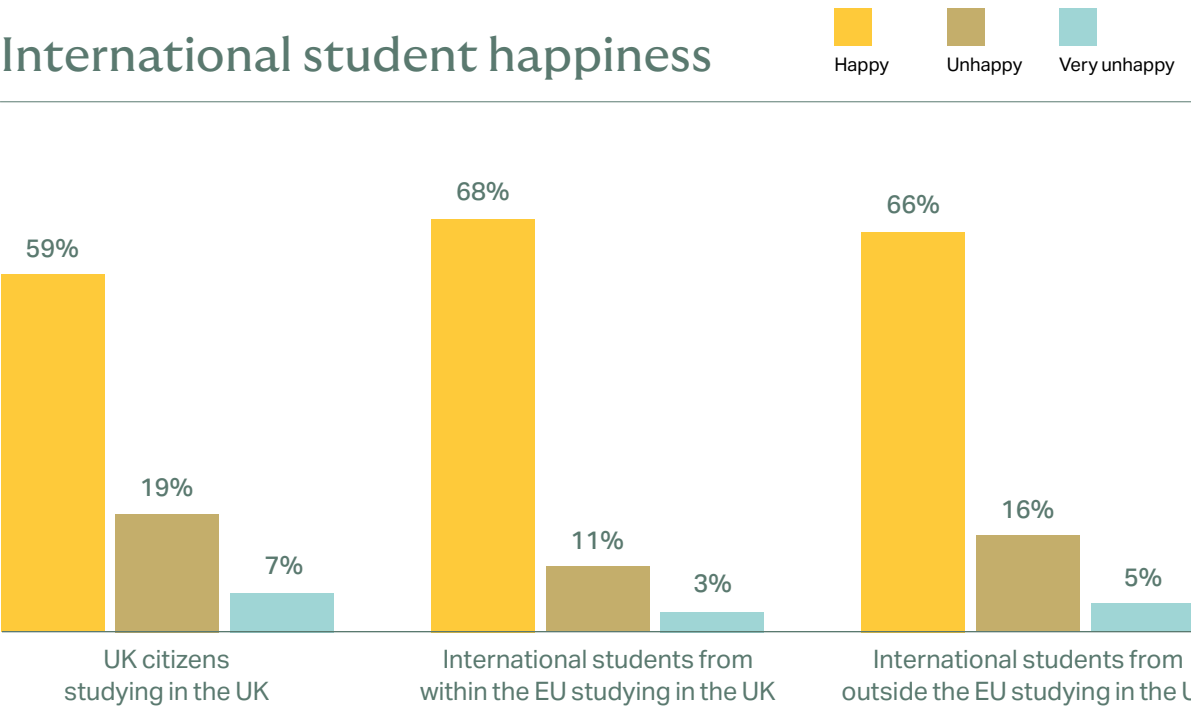
The findings indicate that there's an opportunity for colleges and universities to improve the mental health services on offer, and to make them more accessible for international students.



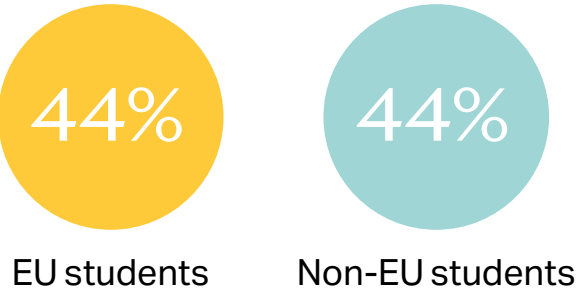
For example, the data reveals that under half (49%) EU international students agree⁵ their college or university provides the right level of mental health and wellbeing support, while just 53% agree⁵ they know how to access the support on offer.

Given that almost half of EU (48%) and non-EU (47%) international students surveyed agree⁵ they're worried their mental health will worsen in the next 12 months, it's particularly important that colleges and universities work to improve the quality of their wellbeing services as demand is likely to rise in the coming year.

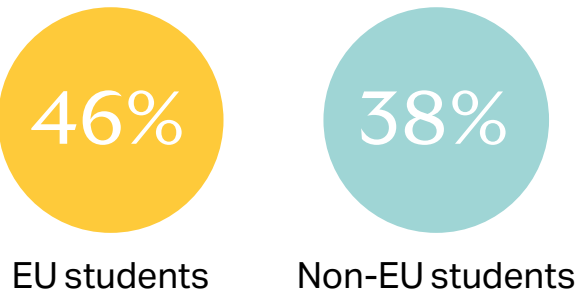
International student happiness



Mental health has worsened in the past 12 months



Accessed professional support for their mental health



Interview with Anna

Background

Anna is a third-year undergraduate student studying Creative Writing at the University of Gloucestershire. She's faced significant financial hardship throughout her degree. Initially, she attended a different university, commuting from home during her first year.

However, due to unforeseen circumstances, Anna had to transfer to the University of Gloucestershire to complete her final two years. She lives in a shared student house, relying on her student maintenance loan to cover rent. Despite receiving above the baseline amount, the loan is insufficient, forcing Anna to work part-time to make ends meet.

Balancing work and studies

For the past two years, Anna has worked as an assistant manager at a chain coffee company, clocking in at least 20 hours a week to support herself. Balancing this job with her studies has proven challenging. The demands of her position often require her to cover additional shifts, from as early as six in the morning, which has led to her missing lectures and struggling to keep up with coursework. This work schedule has not only impacted her academic performance but also strained her relationships with peers.

Anna shared feelings of being disadvantaged compared to her classmates, as she's among the few who must work to support themselves without parental financial assistance.

Despite these challenges, Anna is grateful to her lecturers, who've been understanding and accommodating, helping her stay on track with her studies.

The pressure of maintaining a part-time job is compounded by her weekend caregiving responsibilities. As a former young carer, Anna continues to commute home every weekend to provide care - a commitment she and her family agreed upon when she transitioned from commuting to living at university. Balancing work, full-time studies, and caregiving leaves little room for a social life, adding to her sense of isolation.



Mental health at university

The strain of juggling work, studies, and caregiving has taken a toll on Anna's mental health. She battles with depression and frequently experiences burnout, finding it difficult to motivate herself to attend lectures, particularly on days when she has work. Initially hesitant to seek help, Anna recently reached out to her lecturers and was met with immediate support and encouragement - a step she wishes she had taken earlier.

Financial stress has also deeply impacted Anna's mental well-being. Growing up without guidance on managing finances, she initially struggled with budgeting, finding it challenging to balance being frugal while allowing herself occasional spending. This financial strain has forced her to decline various social activities, including family holidays and outings with friends - something she anticipated before attending university, but the reality has been more challenging than expected.

Looking to the future

Despite the financial and emotional setbacks, Anna remains hopeful about her future. She's determined to complete her degree and move forward with resilience and optimism. Her experience underscores the difficulties

many students face balancing academic responsibilities with financial and personal challenges, highlighting the need for greater support systems within universities.

03 Enjoyment vs expectation

Our survey shows that for many students the university experience is not living up to expectations.

In fact, the percentage of students surveyed who enjoyed their university more than expected has decreased since 2023 (47% to 36%²).

Meanwhile, a third (33%) of students surveyed this year say they've enjoyed their university/college experience less than expected.¹

Findings suggest a possible reason for this is that students have been doing less of the things they love. Almost half (47%) of students surveyed agree³ that they've spent less time following passions in the arts such as music, drama, comedy etc.

33%
have enjoyed their
university/college
experience less
than expected¹



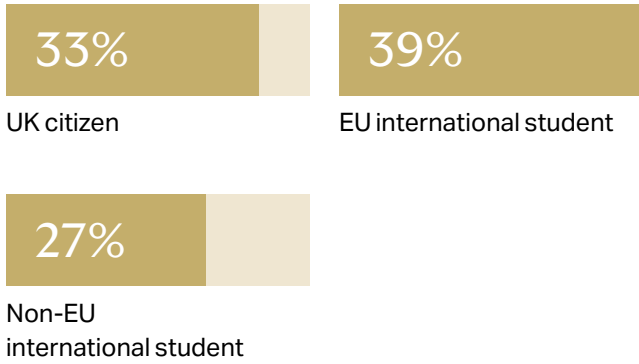


% of respondents who say they enjoyed their college/university experience less than expected¹

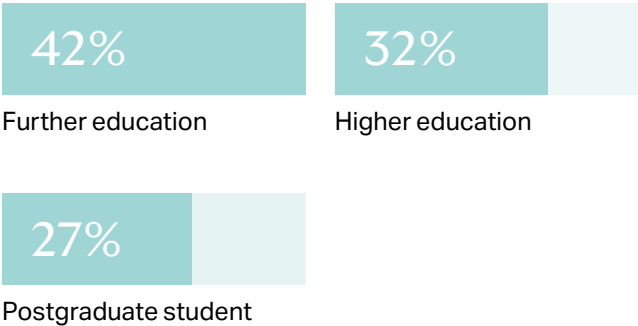
Enjoyment by student type



Enjoyment by nationality



Enjoyment by education level



The results indicate that further education students are most likely to say they enjoyed their college experience less than expected (42%).¹

This isn't surprising considering over 2 in 5 (44%) further education students surveyed agree³ that they feel lonely most of the time, and over 2 in 5 (43%) agree³ they've been socialising less.

It's important for colleges to offer adequate support for these students and guide them through these challenges as 2 in 5 (40%) also agree³ that they've considered dropping out of college to enter a full-time job, apprenticeship, or similar scheme.

The data shows that some international students are more likely to have enjoyed their university/college experience than others.

Over a third (35%) of non-EU international students surveyed say they enjoyed their experience more than expected², while under a quarter (23%) of those from within the EU say the same.

At the same time, both groups are less likely than UK students surveyed (40%) to say that their experience surpassed expectations, highlighting perhaps an opportunity for institutions to ensure that international students are receiving the right level of support on their educational journey.

04 Student safety

Our research reveals that while colleges and universities are doing a good job of ensuring students' safety, there is still room for improvement.

Over 4 in 5 (85%) students surveyed¹ say they've felt safe² when they've been on their university/college campus, a slight increase from 82% in 2023.³

However, under half (46%) say they've felt very safe, while just 21% of students surveyed strongly agree that they feel safe when living in their student accommodation.

Meanwhile, almost a quarter (23%) of students surveyed agree⁴ that they've had possessions stolen whilst at university or college.

85%
have felt safe²
on campus
this year

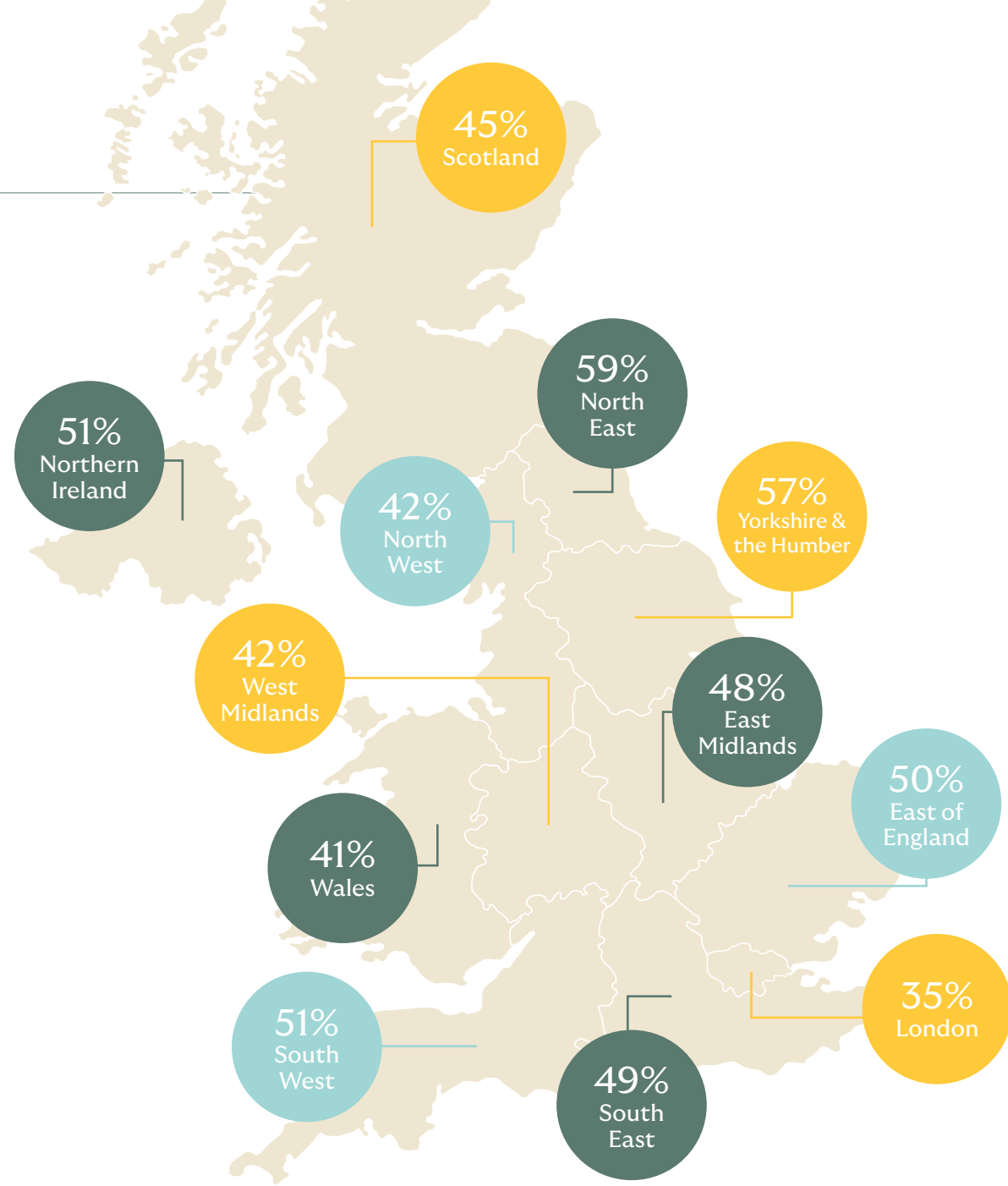


% of students who say they have felt very safe

Student safety by region

The findings also show the extent to which students feel safe on campus varies according to the region.

For example, almost 3 in 5 respondents who attend university or college in the North East (59%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (57%) say they have felt very safe on campus, while just 35% of those in London say the same.

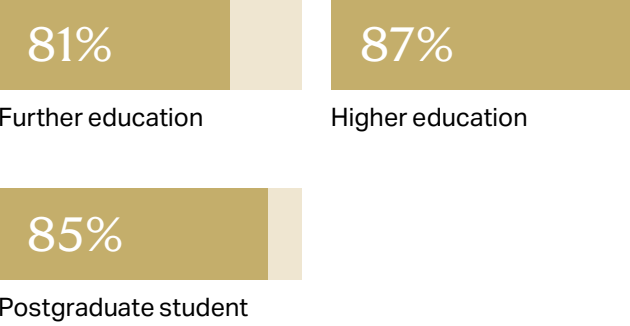


The data highlights safety as a possible area for improvement that colleges may wish to focus on.

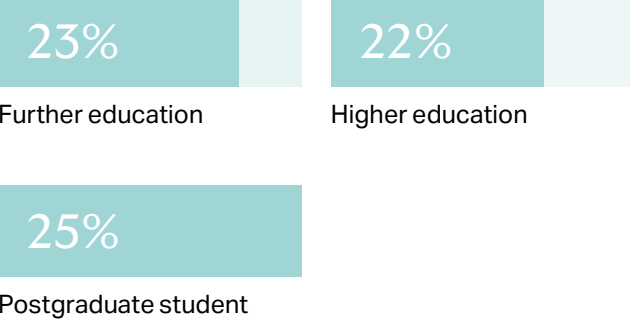
Further education students (40%) surveyed were least likely to state that they feel very safe on their campus when compared with postgraduate students surveyed (51%) and those in higher education (47%).

Meanwhile, almost a quarter (23%) agree⁴ they've had possessions stolen whilst at college, and a fifth (21%) disagree⁵ that they feel safe when living in their student accommodation.

Feel safe on their university/college campus



Possessions stolen at university or college





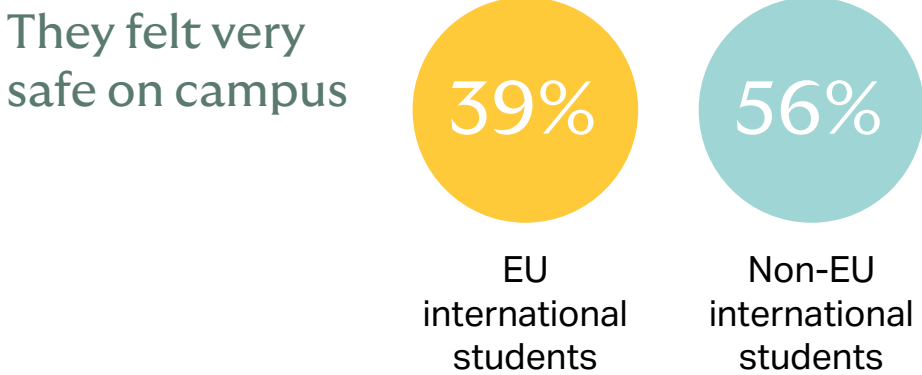
The findings highlight a discrepancy in the extent to which international students feel safe on their university/college campus

Further findings also show that while two thirds (66%) of non-EU students surveyed agree⁴ that they feel safe when living in their student accommodation, just 53% of EU students surveyed say the same.

Meanwhile, EU students surveyed are also more likely than those from outside the EU to agree⁴ they've had possessions stolen whilst at university or college (37% vs 27%).

There's an opportunity for universities to investigate why EU international students in particular feel less safe than others, and tackle these issues with a view to ensuring all students have a safe and enjoyable experience while on campus.

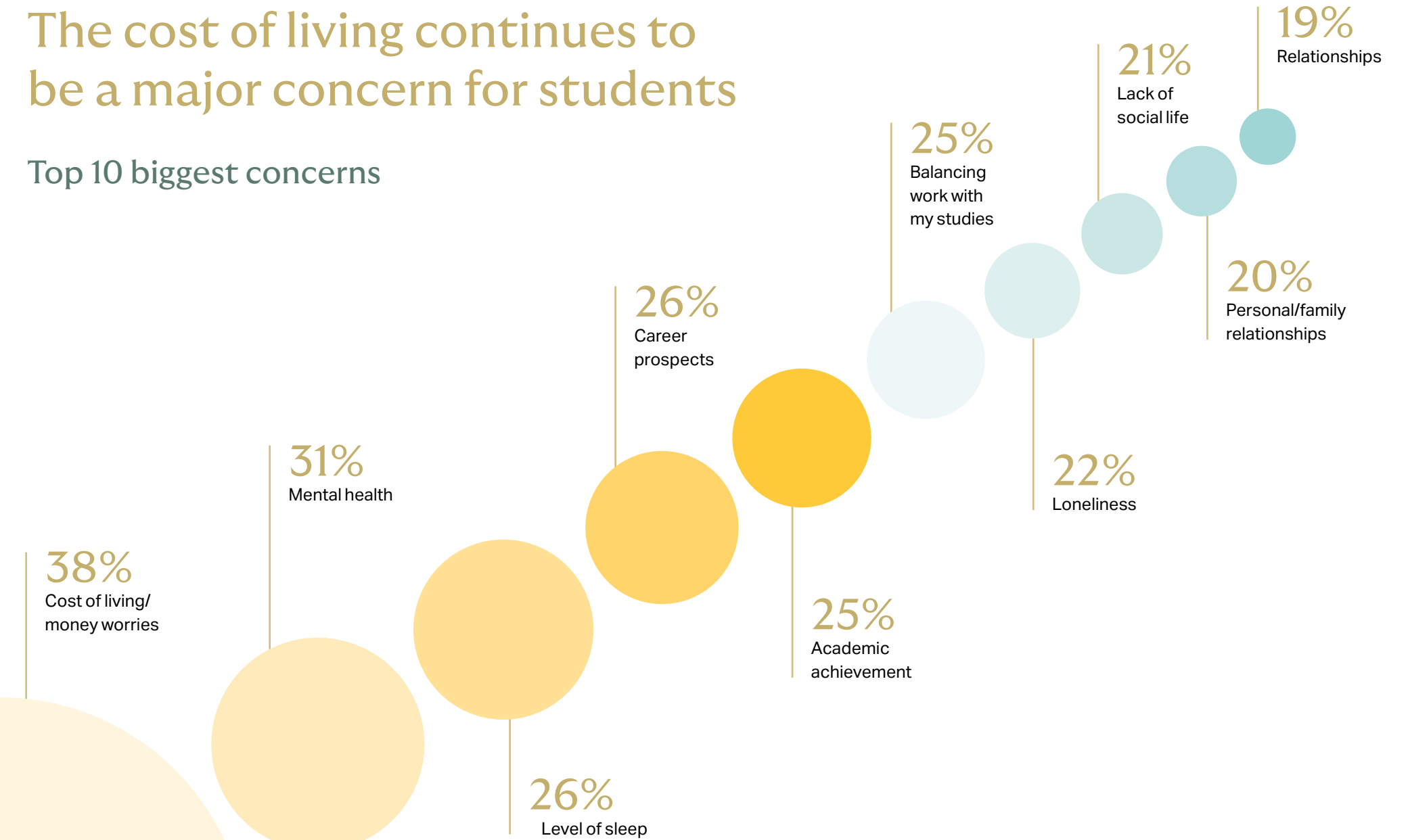
Almost 3 in 5 (56%) non-EU international students say they felt very safe on campus, while under 2 in 5 (39%) of those from within the EU say the same.



05 Student concerns

The cost of living continues to be a major concern for students

Top 10 biggest concerns



Cost of living and money worries are concerning students the most

Unsurprisingly given the current economic climate, students cite the cost of living and money worries (38%) as their biggest concerns.

When asked to name what, if anything, is concerning them the most, the cost of living/money worries was the top response for students attending university/college in all regions except Northern Ireland, where they were most likely to say that accommodation (24%) is their biggest concern.



“ Being able to continue in my studies whilst having a part-time job to pay for it but also to keep a roof over my head daily is a struggle for my mental health.

“ Being financially unstable has added tremendous pressure to studying. You can't focus on your course, instead you're thinking how am I going to eat this week.

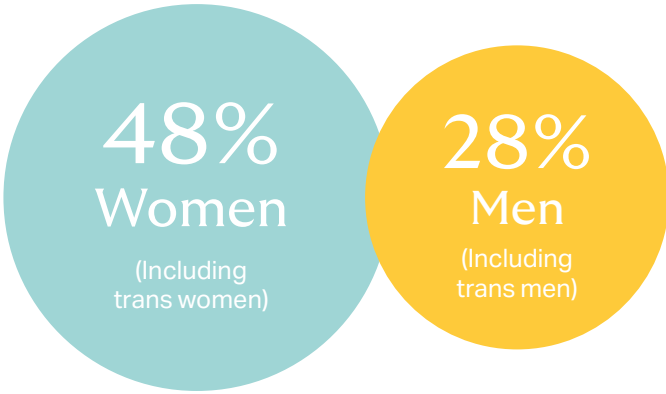
“ [I am] constantly watching how much money I have and not spending. [I have] not been eating properly to save money. [I] don't go out with friends either as I cannot afford it.



Concerns over finances are affecting students up and down the country.

Concerningly, the research shows that over 2 in 5 (43%) students surveyed agree¹ that they've struggled with affording food and essentials, and that financial stress is impacting their overall happiness.

Most concerned about the cost of living/money worries



Many students are taking on paid work to cope with the high cost of living. In fact, over 2 in 5 (44%) agree¹ that they've had to take on a part-time job to help ease financial pressures.

However, the research also reveals that students are finding it hard to balance this with their academic studies. Over a third (35%) of students surveyed agree¹ they've had to miss lessons/lectures/seminars to take on paid work, which has increased from just under a quarter (24%) of students in 2023.

At the same time, almost 2 in 5 (37%)¹ had to miss work because of their academic studies, and over 2 in 5 (44%) struggle to balance their part-time job, academia, and social life.

Sadly, many students are getting themselves deeper into debt. Almost 2 in 5 (39%) have had to apply for a credit card, overdraft or loan to support their expenses, this has risen from just under a third (32%) in our 2023 study.

Also concerning is the fact that almost half (45%) of students surveyed agree¹ they've turned to AI to improve their efficiency when it comes to their studies, compared with just a quarter (25%) the previous year. This is perhaps an indicator of how time-poor students have become, perhaps as a result of needing to cope with the heavy financial pressures they are under.

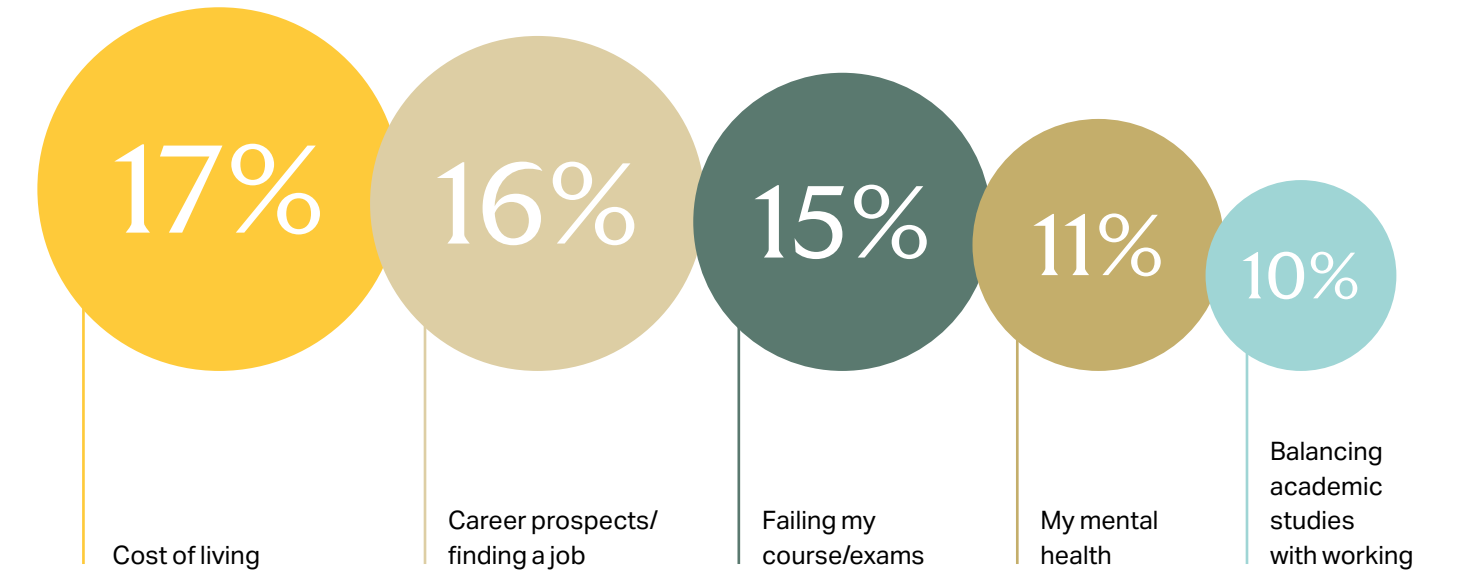
44%
have taken
on paid work¹



The cost of living tops students' list of future concerns

Our survey reveals that students' financial challenges will continue to be a major concern in the coming year.

Top five main concerns for the next 12 months





The findings show that students have a great deal on their minds when it comes to their finances.

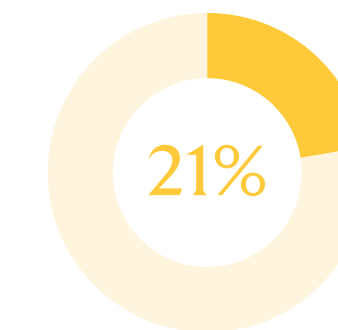
Half (50%) of those we surveyed are worried about turning to their parents/carers for financial support in the next 12 months.

Meanwhile, the percentage of students surveyed who say¹ the increased cost of living means they're most likely to get a part-time job while at university/college, or increase the hours they work in the next 12 months has risen from 35% in 2023 to 55% in this year's survey.²

At the same time, almost half (48%) of those we surveyed agree¹ the increasing cost of living means they're more likely to take on debt in the next 12 months.

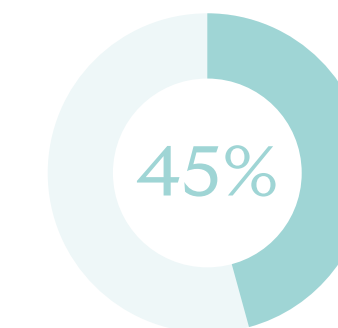


The findings highlight a considerable difference in the extent to which EU and non-EU international students are concerned about the cost of living/money worries.



21% of EU international students

surveyed say the cost of living/money worries concerns them the most



45% of non-EU international students

surveyed say the cost of living/money worries concerns them the most

There may be a case for universities and colleges to build a strategy for communicating with non-EU international students, and provide tailored guidance on how to effectively manage their finances while in education.

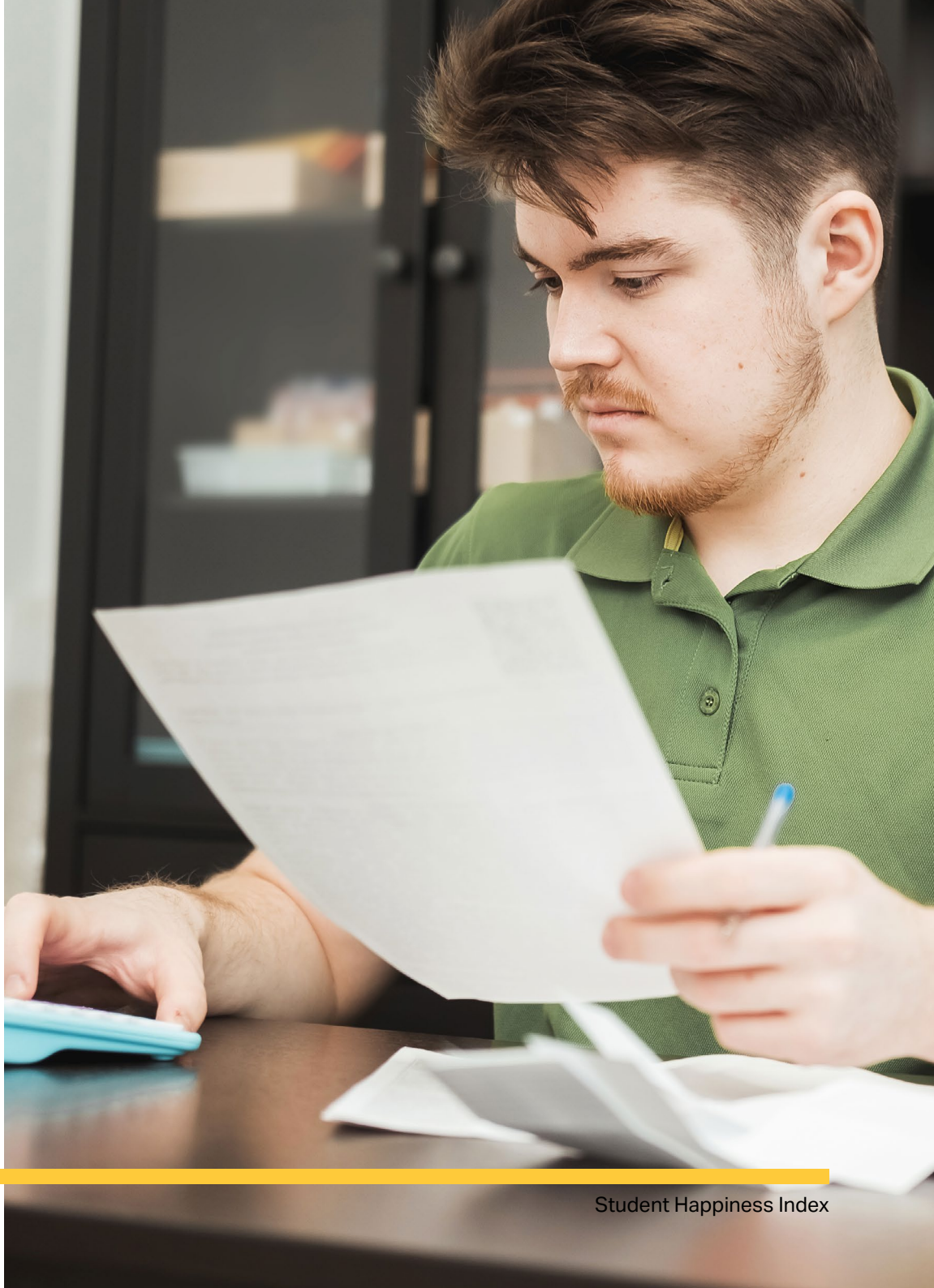
Interview with David

Background

David is a first-year Computer Science student at Loughborough University. Unlike many students, David doesn't need to work alongside his studies and has chosen to take only the baseline maintenance loan to minimise future debt.

However, despite this, David has chosen to take on a zero-hour contract with his student union to gain work experience. While he's fortunate to receive financial support from his parents, he's still had to navigate the challenges of budgeting and managing university expenses responsibly.

Living in university halls and paying rent in three instalments, David admitted that adjusting to financial independence was initially difficult. However, he's made a conscious effort to refine his budgeting skills, ensuring he stays in control of his expenses while maintaining a balanced student experience.



Managing money at university

David takes a proactive approach to money management, setting aside time to budget and track his spending. While finances don't directly impact his academic performance, he acknowledges that managing money can be time-consuming and sometimes overwhelming when studies are the priority.

To maintain control over his finances, David divides his money into separate "pots" to create clear spending boundaries. For example, while his current budget allows him to enjoy a social life, he's strict about not exceeding his set limit. If he reaches the cap on his social budget for the week, he consciously chooses to skip events rather than overspend.

Through his experience, David's also become more aware of the different financial realities students face. He's seen friends miss out on social events due to work commitments and recognises the sacrifices they make to support themselves. Watching a friend juggle studies with a part-time job at the students' union bar gave him insight into how financial pressure affects sleep, scheduling, and mental well-being.

While David doesn't face these challenges personally as he has the freedom to choose when or if he works, he is deeply aware of how financial strain shapes university life for many students.

Discussions around finances

David was open about the fact that he relies on his parents for financial support. While he's grateful for their help, he acknowledged that talking about money with them felt awkward at first. Over time, he's learned to navigate these conversations in a healthier way, fostering open communication about financial expectations and

responsibilities. When it comes to discussing money with friends, David believes the level of transparency depends on the relationship. While all students share financial concerns to some extent, he finds that people often hesitate to talk openly about money, making it a tricky subject to navigate in social settings.

Looking to the future

David believes that financial awareness is key to reducing stress and making smart decisions for the future. While he's not overly concerned about his finances at this stage, he knows that his position is different from many of his peers. As he looks ahead to his placement year and

beyond, he's eager to gain professional experience and broaden his horizons. He hopes to develop his skills further, make valuable industry connections, and ensure that he's in a strong position financially and professionally after graduation.

Interview with Helena

Background

Howden had the privilege to talk to Helena about her experience with finances, as well as her mental health during her time at university. Helena is currently a first-year postgraduate student at Leeds Arts University, studying Illustration after completing her undergraduate degree in Creative Writing several years ago. She now lives independently with her partner and works full-time as a marketing assistant alongside her studies.

Having previous experience of university life, she understands both the struggles of financial instability and the benefits of financial independence. While she's found ways to manage her money effectively, she's also seen first-hand how difficult it can be for many students,

especially those studying full-time and struggling to secure jobs in the current economic climate.

Having faced financial difficulties during her undergraduate years, Helena expressed that this did have some influence on her decision to study her master's part-time, allowing her to work full-time and avoid the financial stress she previously endured. To avoid unnecessary stress, her approach to money is meticulous - she tracks her spending through budgeting apps and a Google spreadsheet, ensuring she remains in control and has a visual representation of her finances.



The mental toll of financial pressure

Helena's financial struggles during her undergraduate years had a significant impact on her mental health. Fortunately, Helena has the ability to acknowledge when she's struggling and reached out to her university for support as soon as possible. She is very open about the fact that she has autistic spectrum disorder and voiced this to her tutors when meeting them. Due to her open and candid nature, she received amazing support from her university. These services are advertised well around campus, with posters being in the students' union and a strong social presence on social media.

Although she's in a more stable position now, Helena still experiences stress related to balancing work and university. Managing full-time hours alongside postgraduate studies can be exhausting, and she acknowledges that it sometimes takes a toll on her wellbeing. The pressure to excel in both areas can lead to burnout, but she has developed strategies

to mitigate this, such as setting boundaries with work, planning study time in advance, and ensuring she takes breaks when needed.

Helena also highlighted the emotional burden that financial stress places on students. She has seen friends struggle with anxiety and feelings of isolation due to their financial situation, especially those who cannot afford to socialise or take advantage of university experiences. She believes there is still a stigma around discussing financial difficulties, which can make students feel like they're struggling alone.



Balancing finances and studies

Unlike many students who work part-time, Helena has taken on a full-time job while completing her studies. By taking a gap between her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, Helena was able to establish herself within the workplace and found an environment which allows her to study alongside her work. While this has given her more financial stability, it has also created some challenges in managing her workload.

Balancing a demanding job with university coursework requires strict time management, and she acknowledges that it can sometimes be overwhelming. Helena described some of the 'small sacrifices' she's had to make such as using her holiday allowance around assessment times to ensure she can complete assignments.

Despite her financial independence, Helena recognises that not all students have the same opportunities. Many of her peers, especially those who transitioned directly from an undergraduate degree, struggle to secure employment, often facing job rejections due to their lack of experience. The competitive job market, combined with the cost of living crisis, makes it even more difficult for students to support themselves while studying.

Financial awareness and student support

Helena strongly believes that universities should provide better financial education and resources to students. Many young people enter university without a clear understanding of budgeting, loans, or the cost of living, which can lead to financial mismanagement. She feels that more accessible financial workshops or one-on-one support sessions could make a significant difference in helping students develop better

money management habits early on. She also acknowledges there can be a gap in financial support for part-time students. While full-time students often have access to maintenance loans, part-time students can sometimes fall through the cracks, as they're expected to support themselves but may not always have the means to do so.

Looking to the future

Helena's financial situation has improved significantly since her undergraduate years, and she feels confident in her ability to manage money effectively. As she continues her master's, she hopes to maintain a healthy balance between work, studies, and personal life. She's also focused on building her career in marketing and illustration, aiming to secure a job that aligns with both her creative passions and financial goals.

While she recognises the challenges that come with financial independence, Helena believes her past experiences have prepared her well for the future. By continuing to budget carefully, set career goals, and prioritise her well-being, Helena hopes to graduate feeling financially secure and ready to take on new opportunities.

Case Study



06 What's motivating students to study?

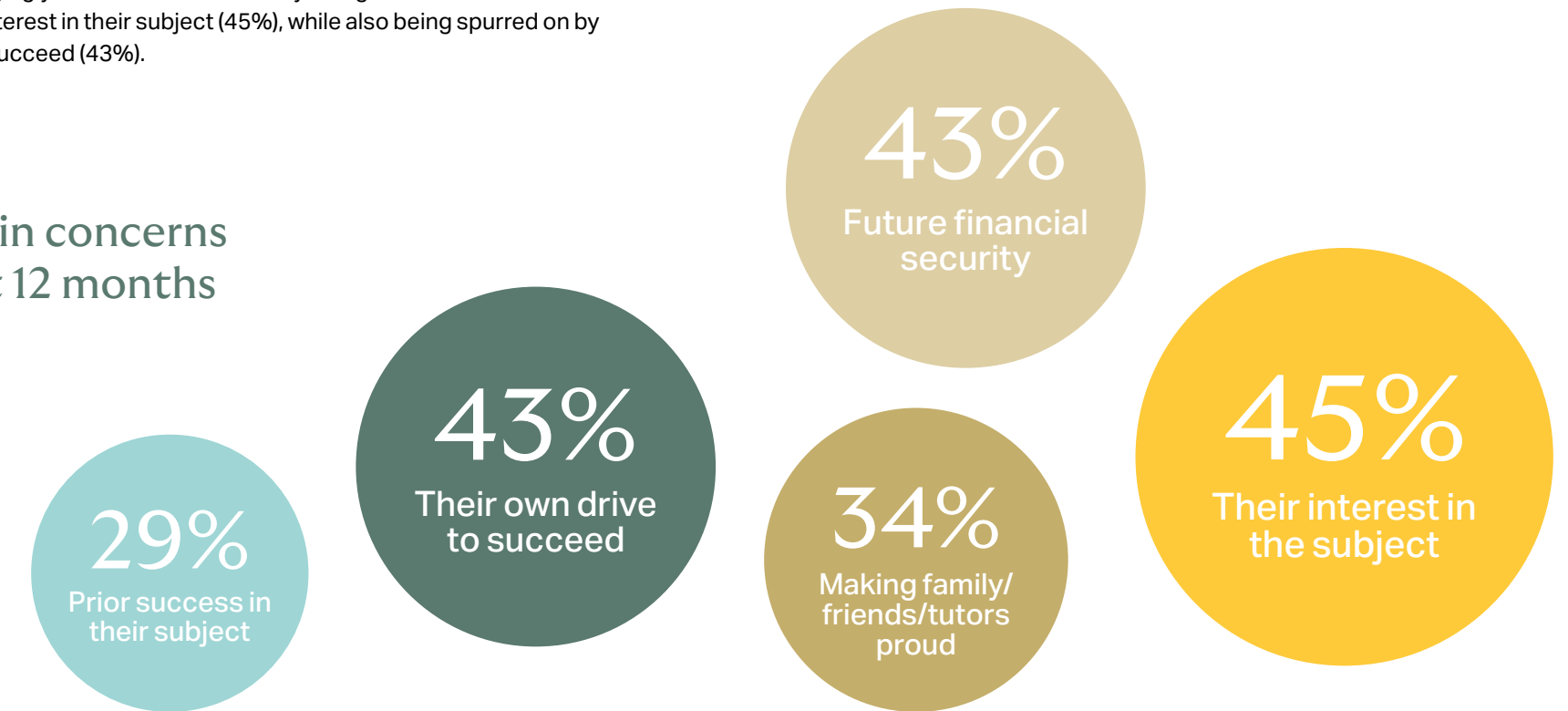
Students are still feeling motivated to study

Despite the challenges they're facing when it comes to focusing on their academic studies while under intense financial pressure, students are still feeling motivated to study.

Money is certainly a factor in students' motivation to succeed. Over 2 in 5 (43%) students surveyed say they're motivated by future financial security, making this one of the top responses.

However, encouragingly, students are most likely being driven to continue their studies by a true interest in their subject (45%), while also being spurred on by their own drive to succeed (43%).

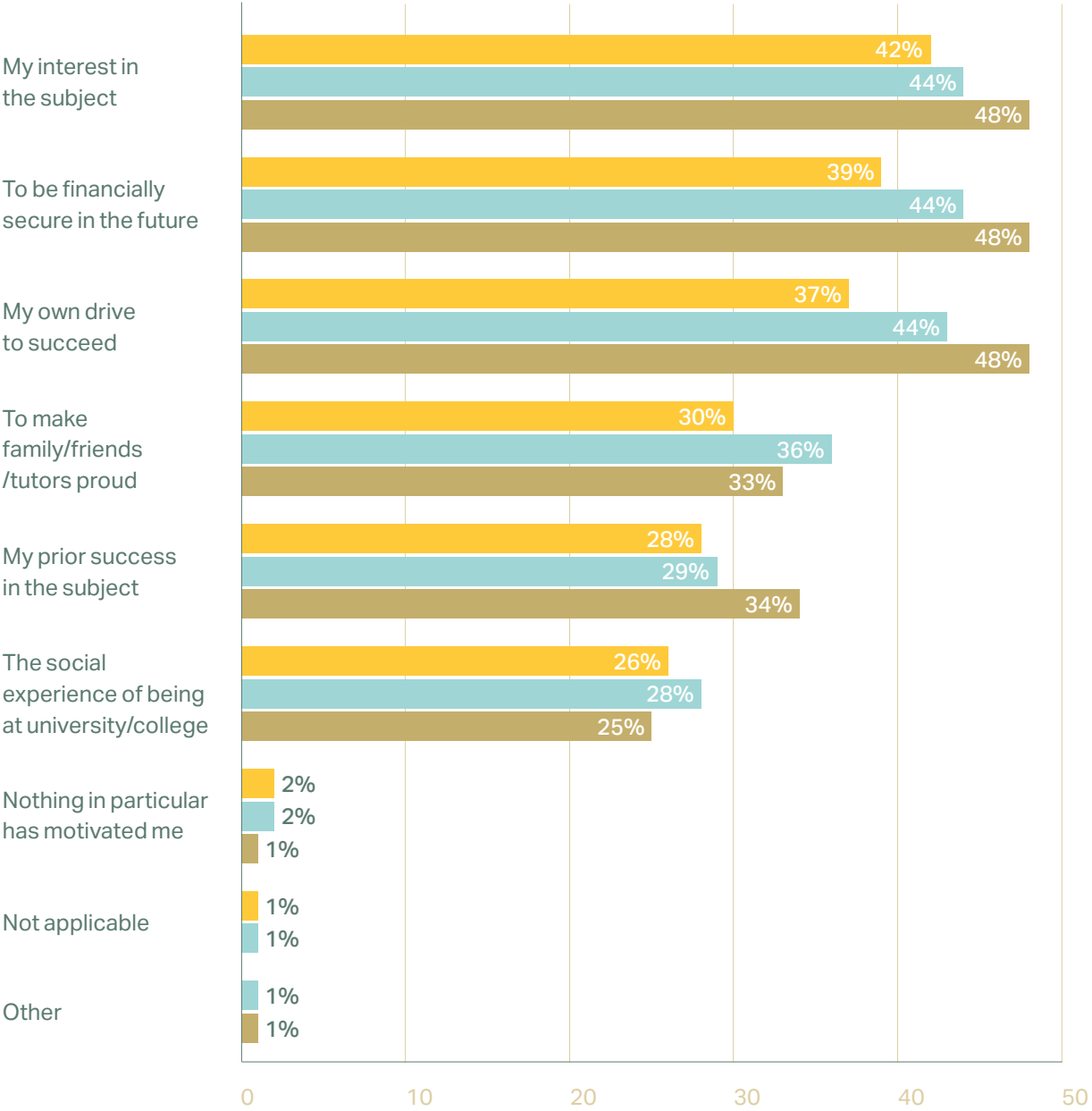
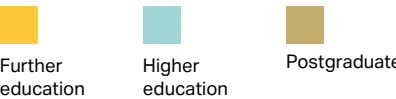
Top five main concerns for the next 12 months



The findings show some slight differences in factors motivating students at different stages of their educational journey.

For example, students become more likely to be motivated by their interest in their subject, financial security, and their own drive to succeed as they progress from further education to higher education and postgraduate studies.

What, if anything, has motivated you the most?



There are also some interesting differences in the extent to which UK, EU and non-EU students are motivated by certain factors.

For example, 51% of non-EU international students are more likely than those who are UK citizens (45%) and EU international students (39%) to say their interest in their subject has most motivated them to study this year.

Meanwhile, half (50%) of non-EU international students surveyed say they have been most motivated by their own drive to succeed, while just a third (33%) of those from within the EU say the same.

07 Life after education

Overall, students' attitudes towards life after education are positive.

57%

The overall student optimism for the future score for 2024 is 57%.
Up from 38% in 2023.¹

67%

feel optimistic² about life after university/college

50%

are worried that their mental health will worsen in the next 12 months³



What, if anything, is the main thing you are looking forward to over the next 12 months?

- “ Feeling more motivated to go to lessons and feeling less lonely.
- “ Achieving a good grade and getting an internship or work experience in my desired job sector.
- “ Finishing university so I can do something I enjoy, live close to the ones I love and take a job so I don't have to worry about money anymore.

Almost 7 in 10 (67%) students say they feel optimistic² about life after university/college, a notable increase on the percentage who said the same in 2023.¹

Those we surveyed are looking forward to advancing in their career and career growth opportunities, undertaking further studies, and financial freedom.

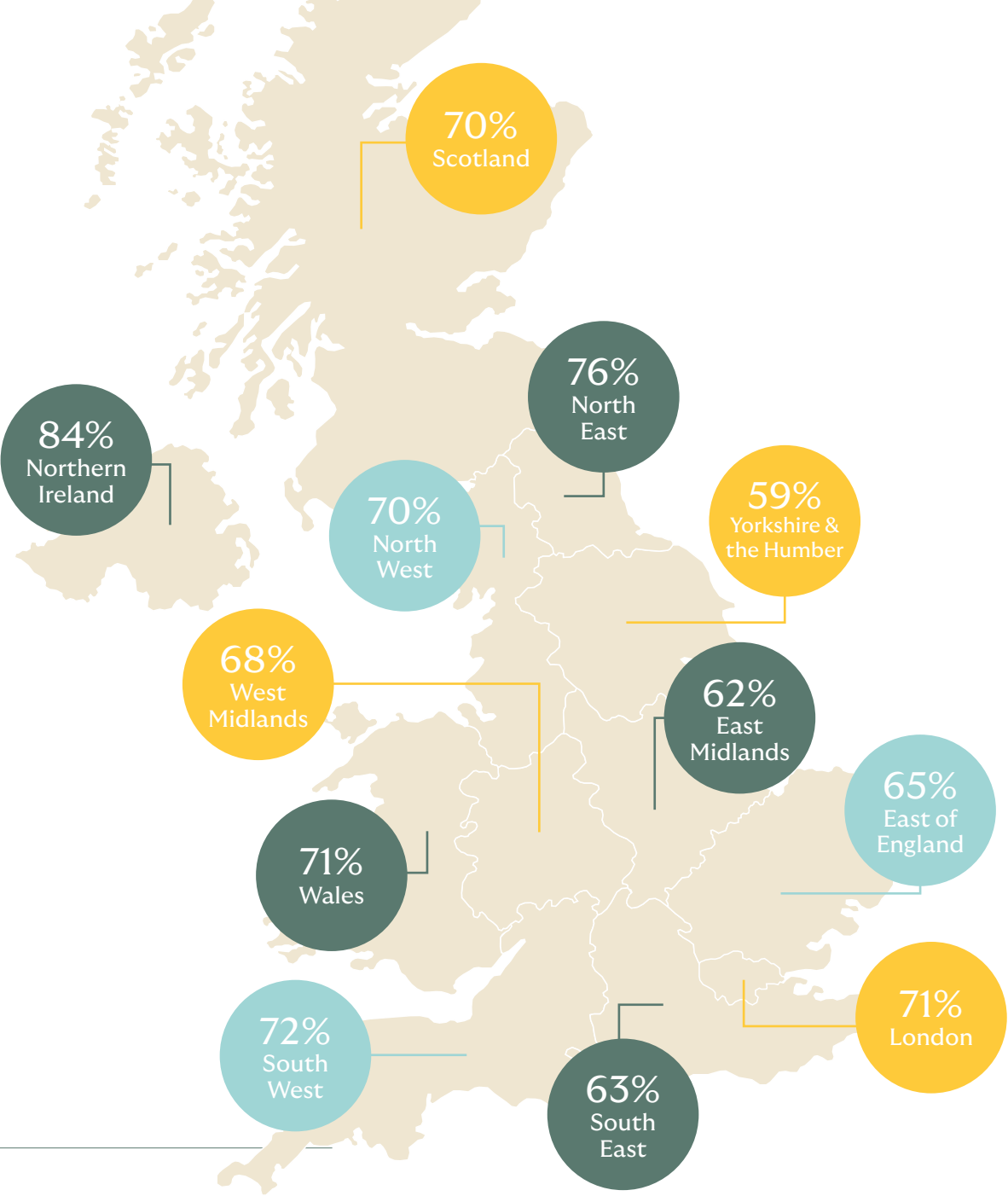


Optimism by region

According to the research, the extent to which respondents feel optimistic about the future is dependent on their region.

The findings also highlight that students feel a level of uncertainty when it comes to life after education. In fact, less than a quarter (23%) say they feel very optimistic about life after college or university, while 1 in 9 (11%) go as far as to say that they feel pessimistic³.

% of respondents who feel optimistic²



Students express a range of concerns

- Just 2 in 5 (40%) agree⁴ they feel prepared for their financial future, while almost half (47%)⁴ are concerned about their level of student debt.
- Meanwhile, 48%⁴ are worried about the changes in student loan policies (up from 35% in 2023), and almost 3 in 5 (56%)⁴ are concerned about their career prospects after university/college (up from 32% in 2023).⁵
- In addition, almost half (46%)⁴ believe that AI will have a negative impact on their job prospects.

These concerns look set to negatively impact many students' mental health in future.



Worries their mental health will worsen

Half (50%) of those we surveyed are worried that their mental health will worsen in the next 12 months.



08 Summary

The study shows that while overall student happiness appears to be on the rise, beneath the surface various concerns are affecting students' mental health, and the extent to which they're able to enjoy their university/college experience.

The high cost of living is undoubtedly students' most pressing concern. Under considerable financial pressure, students have opted to take on part-time work, often to the detriment of their studies, social lives and hobbies.

The constant balancing act has taken its toll. Students report that their mental health declined in 2024, with many expecting that this will continue in the coming year.

Universities and colleges are in a unique position to offer support, not only by providing excellent mental health services, but also by offering the guidance students need to effectively manage their finances during their time in education.





References

Section 1 - Executive summary

- ¹Student Happiness Index 2023
- ²'Very happy' and 'Somewhat happy' responses combined.
- ³'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined.
- ⁴'Much less than expected' and 'Somewhat less than expected' responses combined.
- ⁵'Very safe' and 'Somewhat safe' responses combined.
- ⁶'Very optimistic' and 'Somewhat optimistic' responses combined.

Section 2 - Student happiness and mental health

- ¹Student Happiness Index 2023
- ²'Very happy' and 'Somewhat happy' responses combined.
- ³Students were asked 'Overall, how happy have you felt this year? - Happy/Neutral/Unhappy.'
- ⁴'Very unhappy' and 'Somewhat unhappy' responses combined.
- ⁵'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined.
- ⁶Students were asked 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to the past 12 months: My mental health has worsened - Strongly agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly disagree'.
- ⁷'Strongly disagree' and 'Somewhat disagree' responses combined.

Section 3 - Enjoyment vs expectation

- ¹'Much less than expected' and 'Somewhat less than expected' responses combined.
- ²'Much more than expected' and 'Somewhat more than expected' responses combined.
- ³'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined.

Section 4 - Student safety

- ¹Students who are not distance learners.
- ²'Very safe' and 'Somewhat safe' responses combined.
- ³Students were asked 'When you have been on your university campus, how safe have you felt there? (Safe/Neutral/Unsafe)'.
- ⁴'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined.
- ⁵'Strongly disagree' and 'Somewhat disagree' responses combined.

Section 5 - Student concerns

- ¹'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined.
- ²Students were asked 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to the next 12 months: The increasing cost of living means I am more likely to get a part-time job while at university, or increase the hours I work (Strongly agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly disagree)'.

Section 7 - Life after education

- ¹Student Happiness Index 2023
- ²'Very optimistic' and 'Somewhat optimistic' responses combined.
- ³'Very pessimistic' and 'Somewhat pessimistic' responses combined.
- ⁴'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined.
- ⁵Students were asked 'Now looking ahead, how optimistic do you feel about your life after university? (Optimistics/Neutral/Pessimistic)'.
- ⁶Students were asked 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to the next 12 months: I am worried about the changes in student loan policies (Strongly agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly disagree)'.



Get in touch

T: +44 (0)333 234 1198

E: studentwellbeing@howdeninsurance.co.uk

howdenbroking.com/studentwellbeing

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