SPARK CHANGE

TAKE THE SURVEY!

FROM SMALL CHANGES TO BIG WINS - CREATE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE YOU DESERVE.

What Matters Most

2025/2026

Exeter Students' Guild

insights@exeterguild.com

THANK YOU!

EXETER STUDENTS' GUILD

What Matters Most in Numbers

86%

Settling In "Well" or "Very Well".

82%

"Agree" or "Strongly Agree" they feel a sense of Belonging at university.

66%

Feel they are unable to effectively take part in activities outside of their studies.

34%

Know where all support services are and who to contact.

84%

Satisfied with their teaching quality they receive.

86%

Satisfied with their course's content.

82%

Agree their course will prepare them for employment in the future.

4192 Student Responses

SPARK CHANGE

What are students' biggest challenges?

Are there any challenges you're currently facing as a student right now?

Balancing Student Responsibilities
1105

Mental Health and Wellbeing
394

Employability
340

Community
306

Financial Struggles
252

Student Living
212

What changes would students want to see?

What one change would you like to see to improve your student experience?

Accessibility
896

Student Living
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Course Teaching
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Social Opportunities
533

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Contents

Executive Summary

The *What Matters Most* Project is an annual survey that collects student opinions on a range of issues to influence university and Guild decision-making. This year, we heard from **4192 students** who gave their feedback on both university and academic life, informing a range of recommendations to improve the student experience.

Student Life

Settling In and Belonging:

Overall, most students are *Settling In* "well/very well" and "agree/strongly agree" they feel a sense of *Belonging*, but transitions to university life, homesickness, and workload remain key challenges. Disabled, mature, postgraduate, non-binary, and commuter students are also more likely than average to face challenges to *Settling In* and *Belonging*, calling for more targeted initiatives and communication.

Balancing Responsibilities:

66% of students are unable to get involved in activities outside their studies, with balance identified as the main challenge. This pressure is felt most strongly by first-year students, who often feel overwhelmed managing new commitments. PGR, international, male, and non-undergraduate students are also more likely to opt out of involvement, with students outside of the traditional undergraduate experience more likely to be constrained by scheduling or outside commitments. In response, students have highlighted the need for better time-management advice and stronger transition support.

Support Services:

34% of students know where support services are and who to contact, and those that don't note that poor communication, disjointed services, and inaccessible scheduling are significant barriers to accessing them. Students called for a more streamlined support service provision and developed peer support services.

Other Challenges:

Students highlighted challenges around mental health and wellbeing, finances, housing, food, and transportation, and called for improved support and training, more affordable options, and clearer information about their rights as tenants and employees.

Academic Life

Teaching Quality

84% of students are satisfied with teaching quality, valuing passionate, engaged, and accessible staff who provide constructive feedback. However, reduced contact hours and disengaged teaching have negatively affected learning, prompting calls for clearer use of module feedback, more high-quality contact hours, and greater opportunities to learn from university researchers beyond the classroom.

Course Content

86% of students are satisfied with their course content, with students highlighting workload and content quality as the two biggest drivers of dissatisfaction. In response, students called for realistic workload expectations to be communicated, more academic upskilling, and more industry experience.

Employability

82% of students feel their course will prepare them for future employment, but confidence is lower among Year Three and Four students and those in creative industries. Students are calling for more personalised and tailored career support, increased paid opportunities to build research and industry skills, and clearer guidance on finding and sustaining part-time work.

Introduction

The student experience is constantly evolving. Each year, over 7,000 new students arrive at the University of Exeter, joining a community of more than 35,000 who learn, shape, and grow together. At the Guild, our mission is to help every student Love Exeter, and that starts with staying connected to how other students feel about both their academic and extracurricular life.

Launched last year as the *Your Say, Your Way* Project, the *What Matters Most* Project is an annual survey that collects student feedback on a range of issues to influence university decision-making, inform future Guild projects, and empower student leaders with the data to turn problems into solutions.

Whether you are student on a committee, an academic rep, a department officer, a trustee, a member of staff, or just curious about how students are feeling, this report will give you the information to understand *What Matters Most.*

Want to Know More?

This report serves to give readers an overview of *What Matters* Most, providing over 20 recommendations to help improve the student experience and benchmarking the improvements since last year's report.

However, if you want to know more, Exeter Students' Guild Insights & Policy Team has been hard at work making this data as accessible as possible.

[The following link contains a PowerBI dashboard](#) with an overview of the data, allowing you to filter and breakdown the data yourself! Note: quotes are not available to protect the privacy of individual students.

If you have a specific question, feel free to email insights@exeterguild.com and we'll aim to respond to your query within 3-5 days.

Method

The Survey

The *What Matters Most* survey was open from 13 October to 28 October 2025 and was available to all students across all study levels, modes of study, and demographics. **4192 students** completed the survey, representing approximately 12% of the University's student population (see Appendix A for a full demographic breakdown).

The survey asked seven multiple choice questions and four free response questions covering student challenges, potential improvements to the student experience, and course feedback (see Appendix B for a list of questions and their scales). In order to enable cross year comparisons from the *Your Say, Your Way* survey from 2023/2024, most questions and their responses remain unchanged; however, the survey changed in two ways to better capture student sentiments.

First, the *Support* question wording was slightly changed. Its responses were also changed from an ordinal to a nominal scale. Second, a new *Employability* question, "To what extent do you feel your course will effectively prepare you for employment in the future", was added to assess students sentiment towards their courses' utility towards future work.

Focus Groups

Following a thematic analysis of the survey's quantitative and qualitative responses, five focus groups were conducted from 10 November to 12 November 2025 on the following themes: *Finding and Preparing for Employment*, *Finding Belonging*, *Staying (Academically) Motivated, the Accessibility of Support Services,* and *The Effects of Affording Exeter*. During each focus group, students were invited to share their personal experiences, comment on snapshots of the survey data, and co-create solutions to the challenges identified. Their recommendations are included throughout this report.

Incentives and Distribution

To encourage participation, students who completed the survey entered a giveaway with prizes including an Apple iPad, a pair of Apple Airpods, and a Nintendo Switch. Students were also invited to fill out the survey through a variety of in-person and digital channels.

Interactive stalls were run on both Streatham and St Luke's campuses between the 13 and 24 October. Students who completed the survey at these stalls could earn small prizes including Guild branded merchandise, candy, protein bars, and snacks.

Students could also access the survey by scanning QR codes on posters and digital screens around both campuses or following the links on the Guild's social media channels, website, or emails sent to promote the survey.
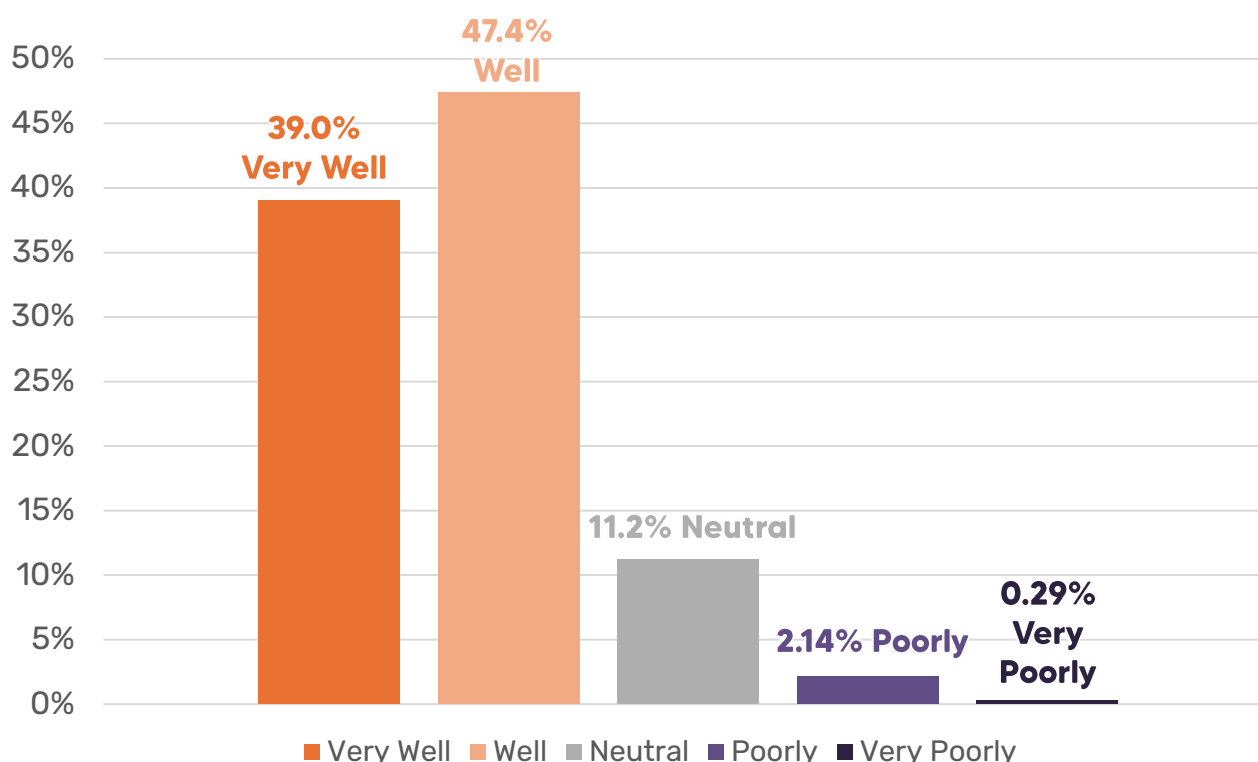
Duplicate Responses

Due to a technical error, some students were able to fill out the survey more than once. In these cases, only the first response was counted for both incentive draws and analysis.

Student Life

Student Life | Settling In

How are you settling into university life this term?

| 86% of students are *Settling In* "very well" or "well".

Overall, students are *Settling In* well to university life this term.

A combined 86.4% (n= 3592) report *Settling In* either "very well" (39.0%, n= 1622) or "well" (47.4%, n= 1970), representing a 2pp increase since last year's survey and the highest proportion of "very positive" responses across all survey questions. In contrast, a combined 2.43% of students report *Settling In* either "poorly" (2.14%, n= 89) or very poorly (0.29%, n= 12), a 1pp decrease since last year's survey and the lowest negative response rate across all themes.

These increases hold when broken down by campus and domicile.

St Luke's students report a 4pp increase in *Settling In* "well/very well" compared with last year, with the proportion of students settling in "very well" rising by 7pp from 34.0% (n= 229) to 41.0% (n= 332). Similarly, Streatham's proportion of students *Settling In* "very well" increased by 2.50pp from 36.0% (n= 1419) to 38.5% (n= 1289).

Home students reporting they were *Settling In* "very well" increased by 2.4pp (36.0% to 38.6%) and international students reporting "well/very well" rose by 5.60pp (81.0%

to 85.6%). Few home (2.50%, n= 80) or international (2.32%, n= 21) students reported *settling in* "poorly/very poorly", indicating that efforts to support students' transition or return to university life are broadly effective.

Key Demographic Influencers│Settling In

│ Full time students, those without disabilities, in Year Two and Three, Male, or 21–30 are more likely than average to be Settling In **well**.

│ Students whose gender is Other, have at least one disability, or are Black are more likely than average to be Settling In **poorly**.
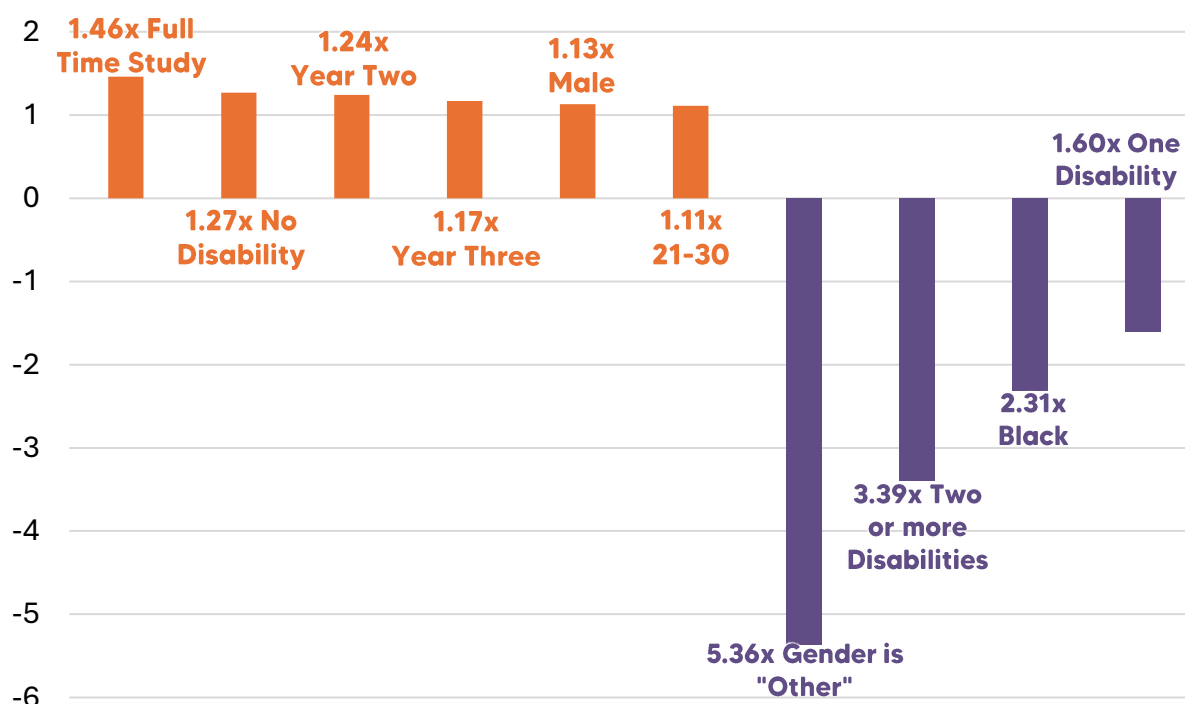
However, students whose gender is recorded as "Other," students with disabilities, and Black students are all significantly more likely to report *Settling In* "poorly" or "very poorly".

Male (87.2%, n=1,274) and female students (86.2%, n=2,257) report *Settling In* "well/very well", but students identifying as 'Other' (77.4%, n=24) report approximately 10 pp lower than both groups. They were also 5.36 times more likely than average to report settling in "poorly," indicating that students outside the gender binary face greater difficulties adjusting to university life.

In terms of disability status, those without a disability reported *Settling In* "well/very well" at a slightly higher than average rate (88.1%, n= 2626); however, this decreases by 4pp when students have a disability (84.31%, n= 704) and by 13pp when students have two or more disabilities (75.85%, n= 201). Students with one disability are also

1.60 times more likely than average to have settled in "poorly", increasing to 3.39 times more likely for those with two or more disabilities.

Finally, while White students reported *Settling In* "well/very well" at above-average rates (87.44%, n= 2415), Black students (79.39%, n= 104) reported the most difficulty, being the only group more than twice as likely (2.31x) as others to be *Settling In* "poorly/very poorly".

Transitioning to university living, homesickness, and workload are some of the biggest barriers to *Settling In*.

58 text comments explicitly mentioned *Settling In* as a challenge. Many students described feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to quickly form close friendships, adjust to living away from home, and prepare for more demanding coursework.

For Year One students, these pressures are often intensified at the very start of the year, with proportion of students *Settling In* "very well" (33.1%, n= 533) 10pp below the undergraduate average. The expectation to secure friendship groups early, particularly to arrange housing agreements, and coping with imposter syndrome can feel daunting, making the *Settling In* process even more difficult. Some gap year students also reported feeling more isolated, with less people their age to connect with.

> "The race for second year student houses was quite stressful, having only just settled in and feeling like I already had to find a second year house."
>
> **Year One, Home**

> "Sometimes, I feel a sense of imposter syndrome and don't belong here. It can feel like I am constantly behind on all the work and that everyone else knows what they're doing, but I am falling behind. Finances can also be a struggle, especially as a fresher."
>
> **Year One, Home**

> "I'm still trying to find like-minded people. I'm a gap year student and have an early birthday so I'm a little older than a lot of students my year and trying to find the right people is hard."
>
> **Year One, Home**

Transfer and international students faced added transition challenges, navigating the same issues as new home students while also trying to integrate themselves into pre-existing friendships (cliques) and adapting to a completely new environment.

> "I'm international so moving away has not been the best for my mental health, which is my main issue. Also having trouble making friends."

Year One, International

> "Transferring into second year to Exeter has been pretty difficult. Everyone seems to have their own friend groups and understand the scope of the course. I am still trying to settle in but it has been a challenge especially having to adjust to something new."

Year Two, Home

> "It is kind of a personal challenge, I do not think I am doing well and I am feeling down most of the time and homesick. I still cannot feel that I belong."

PGT, International

Across all categories students have expressed that the workload is affecting their ability to socialise with others and settle in. This is consistent across all years of study:

> "It is difficult to get used to the workload whilst also trying to settle in and socialise."

Year One, Home

> "I am finding settling back into uni life difficult. With the intense start to academics with many deadlines alongside managing multiple coursework assignments, I already started to struggle a lot."

Year Four, Home

For more student feedback on *Settling In*, see the Guild's *Settling In* report.
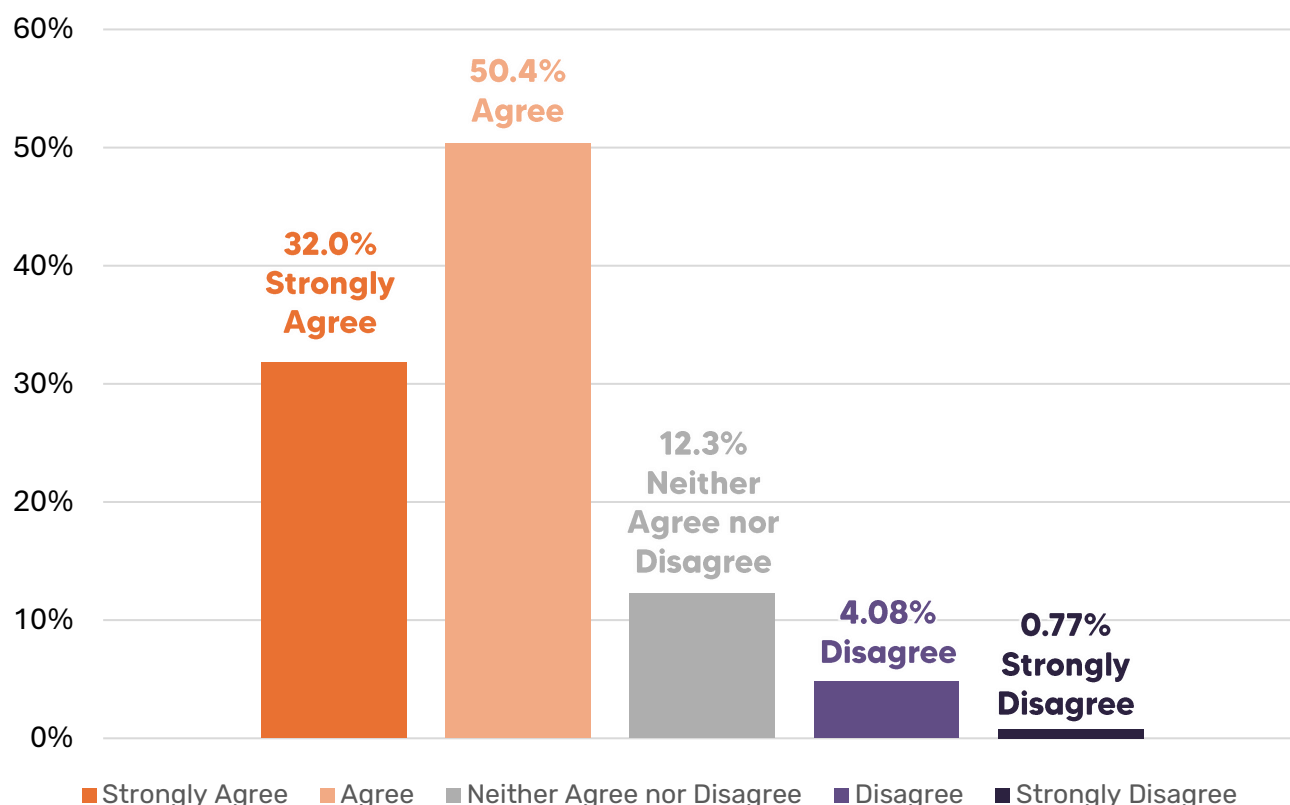
Student Life | Sense of Belonging

What is *Belonging*?

Belonging at university is different to everyone. It includes a range of different ideas including being part of a community, having friends, feeling comfortable, fitting in, being accepted, and being your most authentic self. For more information, see the Guild's *Belonging Report* (2024).

To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging at university?

| 82% of students "strongly agree" or "agree" they feel a sense of belonging at university

50.4%
Agree

32.0%
Strongly Agree

12.3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree

4.08%
Disagree

0.77%
Strongly Disagree

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Agree   ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly Disagree

Most students reported feeling a sense of *Belonging* at university.

A combined 82.2% (n= 3418) either "strongly agree" 31.8% (n= 1330) or "agree" 50.4% (n= 2088) they feel a sense of *Belonging* at university, an increase of 7pp since 2024. Negativity slightly decreased by 0.43pp, where a combined 5.57% (n= 231) of students either "somewhat disagree" (4.80%, n= 199) or "strongly disagree" (0.77%, n= 32). Similar to the responses for *Settling In*, there are no significant differences between domicile or campus, further suggesting that efforts to strengthen students' sense of belonging are proving effective.

Key Demographic Influencers | Belonging

| Students who are full-time, without disabilities, in Year Two, or 20 and under are more likely than average to **agree** they feel a sense of Belonging at university.

| Students whose gender is 'Other', have two or more disabilities, mature students (21-30 and 41-50), PGR students, and Year Four students are more likely than average to **disagree** they feel a sense of Belonging at university.
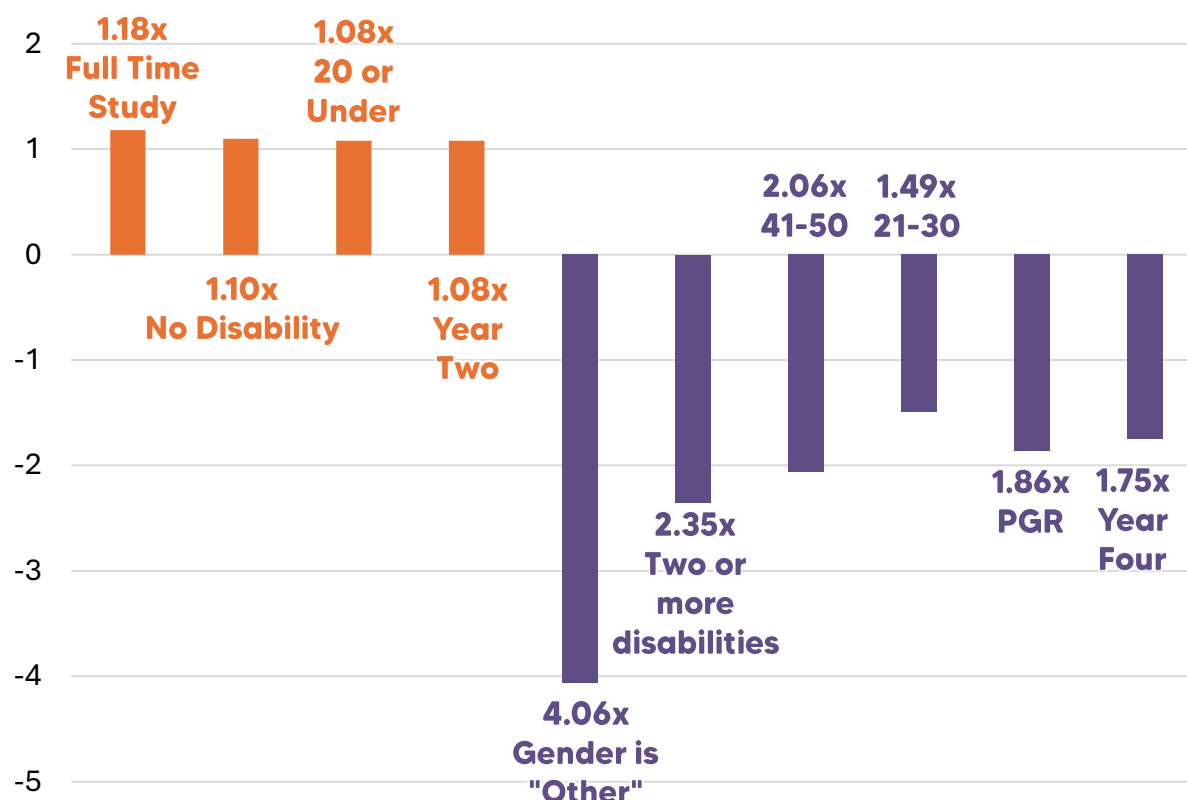
However, students identifying as 'Other', those with multiple disabilities, and distance or part-time learners are all more likely than average to "disagree" that they feel a sense of belonging at university.

One in five students whose gender is 'Other' (22.9%, n= 7) at least "somewhat disagree" that they feel a sense of belonging at university, 4.06x more likely than average.

Students who at least "somewhat disagree" they feel a sense of belonging at university also increases with disability status: 4.20% (n= 125) among students with no known disability, 7.93% (n= 66) among those with one disability, and 12.08% (n= 32) among those with two or more disabilities. While a single disability did not significantly affect belonging, students with multiple disabilities were 2.35x more likely than average to disagree that they feel a sense of belonging. These students often reported difficulty finding supportive social groups and managing time due to health issues.

> *"Just trying to get into a friend group, I feel like I missed my opportunity to make some real connections, and now I don't know where to go for friends or even housemates next year."*

Year One, Home (Two or More Disabilities)

Among modes of study, 65.31% of part-time students (n= 90) and 62.96% of part-time distance learners (n= 34) report that they at least "somewhat agree" they feel a sense of belonging. While full-time students generally feel well prepared and welcomed, distance and part-time learners need additional support to develop a comparable sense of belonging, especially as they spend less time on campus and feel that part-time or distance learning may never allow them to feel a deep sense of belonging.

> *"Trying to fit in whilst getting involved in different activities."*

Year One, Home (Part-Time)

> *"That's difficult to say because as an online student I have quite a detached experience of university, it would be great to see the university but with the nature of the course that's not really possible."*

PGT, Home (Part-Time)

PGR students, those in Year Four, and mature students were also more likely than average to "disagree" they have a sense of belonging at university.

PGR (9.00%, n= 20) and Year Four students (9.38%, n= 21) were, respectively, 1.86x and 1.75x more likely than average to disagree that they feel a sense of belonging. Both groups cited heavier workloads and limited time with peers as key barriers to belonging, with PGR students often mentioning a lack of targeted social opportunities and Year Four students highlighting pressures around graduate job applications.

> *"There are a lack of opportunities to connect with other PhD students and my department don't hold many events which has got less and less since I became a student."*

PGR, Home

> *"I find it difficult to find a healthy balance between uni work and other things e.g. hobbies and seeing friends. I find it difficult to stop working in the evenings as I worry about keeping up. This means that, in order to make time for hobbies and seeing friends, it is sleep that gets reduced and I usually get less than 5h sleep each night."*

Year Four, Home

Students aged 21-30 and aged 41-50 were 1.49x and 2.06x more likely to "disagree" they had a sense of belonging at university, often reporting difficulty connecting with the younger majority of students, feeling out of place in most societies, a lack of targeted university events which help them feel a sense of belonging, and caring responsibilities often clashing with timetables.

> *"Being a mature student, it's difficult to feel accepted in societies other than mature student society."*

Year One, Home (21-30)

> *"Struggling to find friends as a mature student, and commuting in from over an hour away with a really spread out timetable makes me do most of the work from home."*

Year One, Home (21-30)

To increase their sense of belonging, students want more accessible and targeted social opportunities, especially those related to sport.

533 students mentioned "social opportunities" as a change which would improve their student experience, noting that more varied event schedules, more pop-ups, more targeted events (i.e. for mature students, gap year students, etc.), and more casual/free events would help improve their sense of belonging.

> *"More casual events like pitch up and play that don't require society membership."*

Year Two, Home

> *"More accessible events (in terms of timings) which are advertised more since it seems easy to miss things that are going on campus."*

Year Three, Home

> " *"More opportunities to engage in activities, workshops, talks, seminars, informal meetings ups in my department with both staff and student."*

<div align="right">**PGR, Home**</div>

Of these students, 57 mentioned "sports". As affirmed in the *Finding Belonging* focus group, students note that many sports socials are cost-prohibitive due to high membership fees or lack casual entry routes, with some taster events still feeling competitive.

> " *"The opportunity to play trial more sports for free because sports memberships are really expensive."*
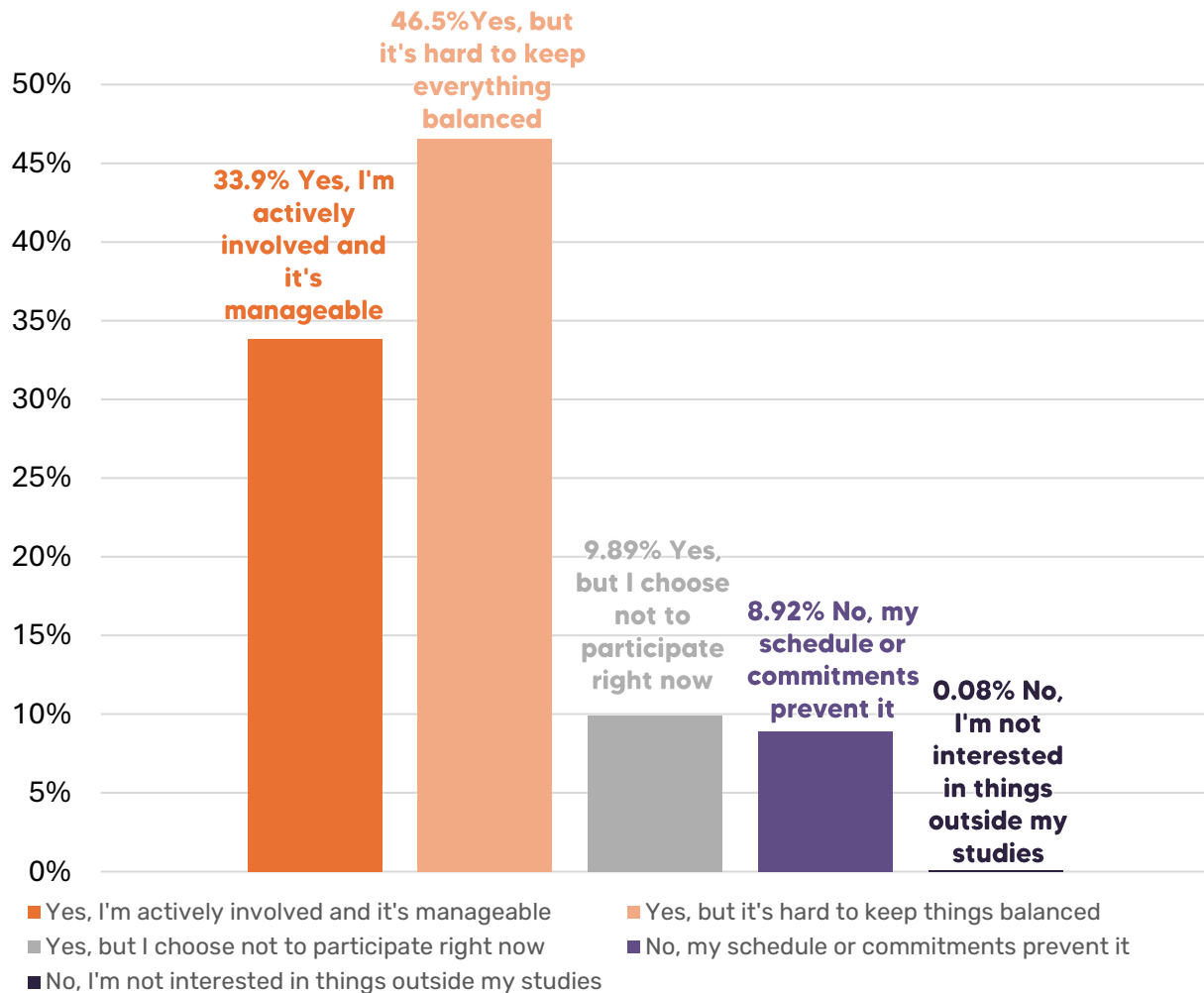
<div align="right">**Year Two, Home**</div>

> " *"I would love there to be a cap on how expensive [clubs and] societies are. I would love to play sport but it is too expensive for a £100+ membership. I don't have enough money to buy a membership but I'm not "poor" enough for society [hardship] funds."*

<div align="right">**Year Four, Home**</div>

Student Life | Balancing Responsibilities

Do you feel you are able to get involved in things outside of your studies?

| Nearly 66% of students experience barriers to getting involved in things outside of their studies.

46.5% Yes, but it's hard to keep everything balanced

33.9% Yes, I'm actively involved and it's manageable

9.89% Yes, but I choose not to participate right now

8.92% No, my schedule or commitments prevent it

0.08% No, I'm not interested in things outside my studies

- ■ Yes, I'm actively involved and it's manageable
- ■ Yes, but it's hard to keep things balanced
- ■ Yes, but I choose not to participate right now
- ■ No, my schedule or commitments prevent it
- ■ No, I'm not interested in things outside my studies

Despite most students *Settling In* well and feeling a sense of *Belonging*, most students are also struggling to balance student and academic life.

Only one in three students (33.9%, n= 1404) said they are "actively involved in things outside of their studies and it's manageable" while the remaining two thirds (65.39%, n= 2788) are either "struggling to keep everything balanced" (46.5%, n= 1930), "choose not to participate right now" (9.89%, n= 410), "have a schedule or commitments which prevent it" (8.92%, n= 370), or are "not interested in things outside of their studies" (0.08%, n= 33). Moreover, when asked "Are there any challenges you are facing as a student right now?", "Time Management" was the number one challenge students face (14.3%, n= 363).

> *"Balancing all of my deadlines with sports, friends, good sleep, cooking, committee position – it's a lot to manage."*

Year Four, Home

For the two thirds of students who are unable to effectively manage things outside of their studies, they often report being unable to eat properly due to a lack of time to cook, experience poor mental health from not having time to join or participate in social events, and struggle to maintain friendships or personal relationships, which further compounds feelings of stress and isolation.

> *"Struggling to balance my healthy lifestyle and applications, and university work. I haven't been going to the gym as much this year or eating as healthily because I don't have the time to make healthy meals and work out."*

Year Three, Home

> *"Since my course is really intense, I've been struggling to plan my meals for the day. I think I'm also struggling to get involved in clubs and societies."*

PGT, International

These impacts are exacerbated for students who are forced to work to afford rent, bills, or university tuition, especially as many part-time opportunities require students to work at least once a week or at times fail to take into account timetables when scheduling shifts.

> *"I find it hard to juggle part-time work alongside my studies but cannot afford to finance uni without working."*

Year Two, Home

> *"Balancing my studies with having a job to ensure I can live comfortably in the city has been a challenge. I can barely afford month to month and am always slightly behind on my studies."*

PGT, International

Key Demographic Influencers | Yes, I'm Actively Involved and it's Manageable

| Students on placement, studying full-time, have no disability, male, in Year Two or Three, or are aged 20 or under are **more likely than average to be actively involved and managing well**.

Students who are more likely than average to be "actively involved and managing well" have time and capacity to develop a sense of belonging and community.

Placement students (66.7%, n= 12) and full-time students (34.76%, n= 1320) reported they were "actively involved and managing well" at higher rates than other modes of study, with the former spending at least two years within the wider student community and the latter able to spend a significant proportion of their time on campus. By contrast, students who spend a substantial amount of time away from the wider student community - including part-time (17.34%, n= 30), part-time distance (12.96%, n= 7), and full-time distance learners (9.09%, n= 1) - reported the lowest levels of activity.

Similarly, students in Year Two (38.67%, n= 309) and Year Three (39.79%, n= 224), or aged 20 or under (36.38%, n= 823) reported the highest levels of activity and good management within their respective categories. Nevertheless, this segment of students still say "time management" is their number one challenge (n= 92), indicating that while they are generally managing fine, acute periods of stress or high workload remain problematic. As noted by one Year Three student:
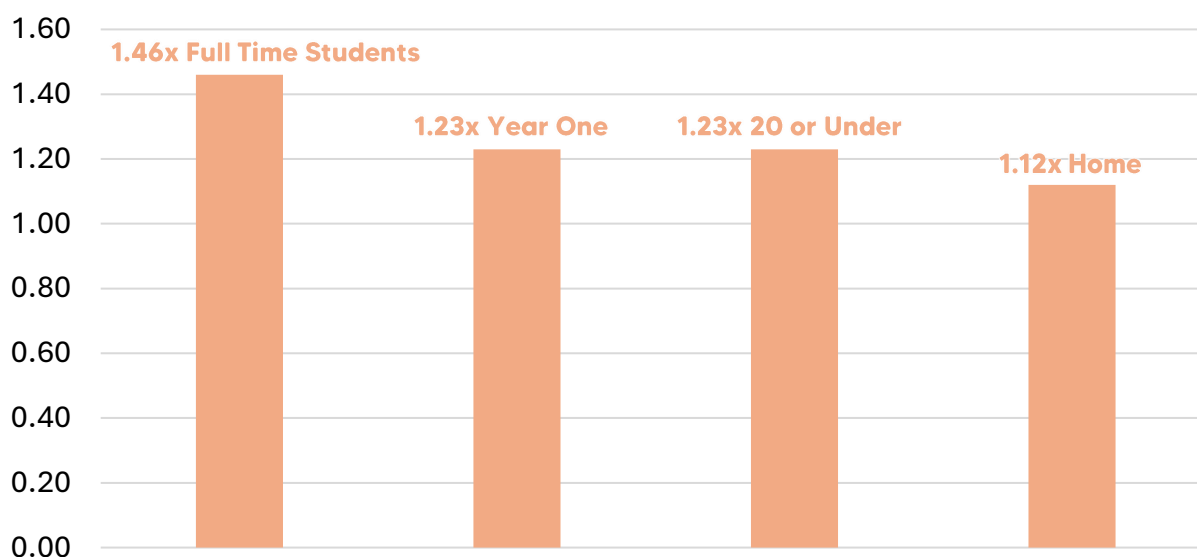
Key Demographic Influencers | Yes, but I Struggle to Keep Things Balanced

| Full time, Year One, 20 or Under, and Home students are **more likely than average to be involved, but struggle to keep things balanced**.

1.46x Full Time Students

1.23x Year One

1.23x 20 or Under

1.12x Home

Students at the beginning of their university life were more likely to be involved, but struggle to keep things balanced.

Nearly 30% of all survey responses (29.9%, n= 1253) came from full-time, Year One, home students aged 20 or under, broadly representing those who have just come from college or may have taken a gap year. Notably, more than half of this group (54.31%, n= 674) reported that, although they feel able to "get involved in activities outside their studies", they struggle to maintain balance, with time management (12.5%, n= 282) being the most commonly mentioned challenge. Once again, pressure to dive into the university experience without proper transition support or time management advice leads to students struggling and becoming overwhelmed.

> "Balancing social life with studies. I don't want to say 'no' to any potential activity, however the large work load is challenging to balance."

Year One, Home

> *"I feel like there is a lot of pressure to go out in the evening and engage in activities such as drinking or clubbing, which sometimes makes me feel quite left out as I do not drink and go to clubs only occasionally. It's also a bit of a struggle to balance all the aspects of student life such as coursework, societies, chores, finances, health, social life, sport, etc. leading to me feeling overwhelmed quite often."*

<div align="right">

Year One, Home

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Key Demographic Influencers | Yes, but I Choose Not to Participate Right Now

| PGR, International, and Male students are **more likely than average to choose not to participate in things outside of their studies**.
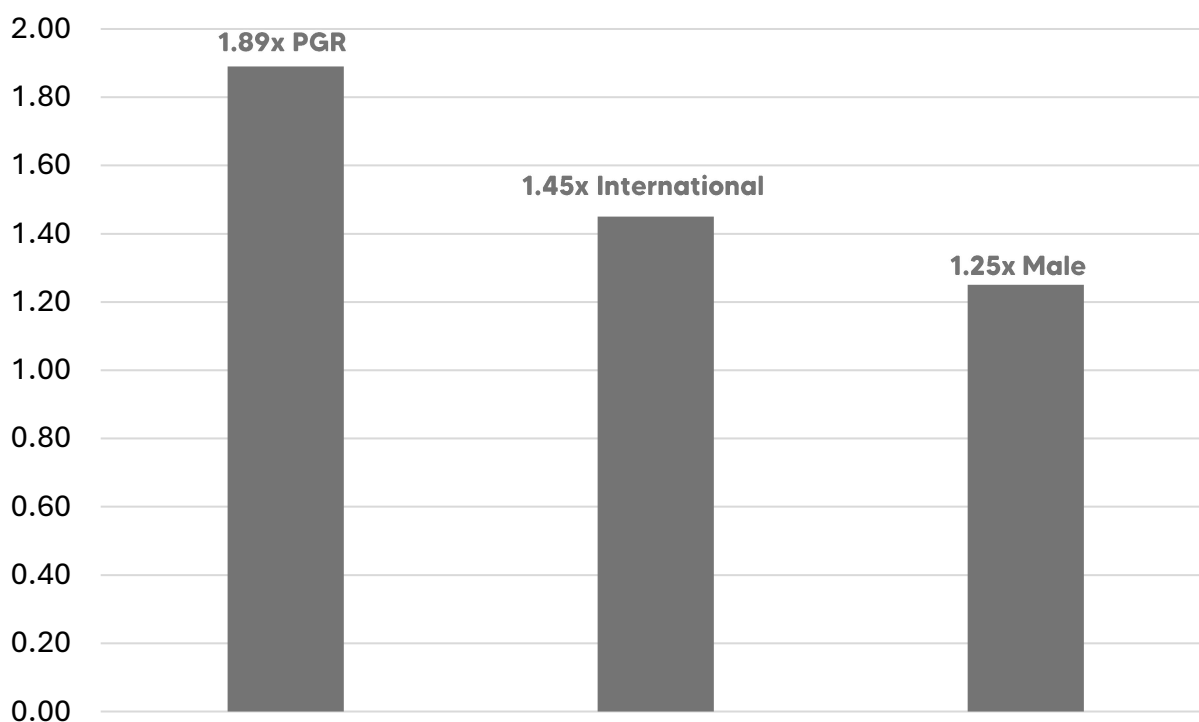
Three very distinct groups (PGR students, International students, and Male students) are more likely than average to choose not to participate in things outside of their studies.

PGR students (17.82%, n= 36) had the highest proportion of respondents choosing not to participate in things outside of their studies, nearly double the average of students in Years 1-5 (9.50%) and 6pp higher than PGT students (11.74%, n= 75). Comments from this segment of PGR students (n= 33) were varied, often mentioning other facets of their student identity as barriers to getting involved such as being on

St Luke's with few PGR-specific events, being a student who often works from home, or being an international student managing a language barrier.

> *"As a PGR on St. Luke's, it often feels isolating as there's no PGR specific events on and hard to locate others."*
>
> **PGR, Home**

> *"I feel that interacting with academic staffs and supervisors is one of the big challenges as an international student. I am worried about misunderstanding instructions or suggestions during supervision meetings."*
>
> **PGR, International**

International students (13.10%, n= 118) had a greater proportion of respondents choosing not to participate in things outside of their studies than home students (9.13%, n= 291) by 4pp. While comments from this segment of international students were broadly consistent with home students, the increased distance from home and limited awareness of support worsens anxiety and poor mental health.

> *"Yes, as an international student, I need to step out of my hometown and come to a new place to live and study. As a person never study abroad, I feel anxious as I need to solve everything alone…"*
>
> **Year One, International**

Finally, while male students (11.3%, n= 165) were only 1.2pp greater than the average response rate for this choice across gender categories (10.1%, n= 410), they were 1.25x more likely to choose it. Like most students in this category, this group's top three challenges at university are "Time Management" (n= 32), "Education" (n= 31), and "Mental Health and Wellbeing" (n= 18). While this often results in them prioritising their studies over social opportunities, they still ultimately want to take part in some activities.

> *"Personally, I'm finding it hard to connect with many people… whilst I know there's so many people in the same exact point of life as me it's somehow still a bit of a struggle."*
>
> **Year One, Home**

Key Demographic Influencers | No, my Schedule or Commitments Prevents Engagement Outside Studies

| Mature, part-time, distance learners, postgraduate, non-binary, and disabled students are all **more likely than average to not engage in activities because their schedule prevents it.**
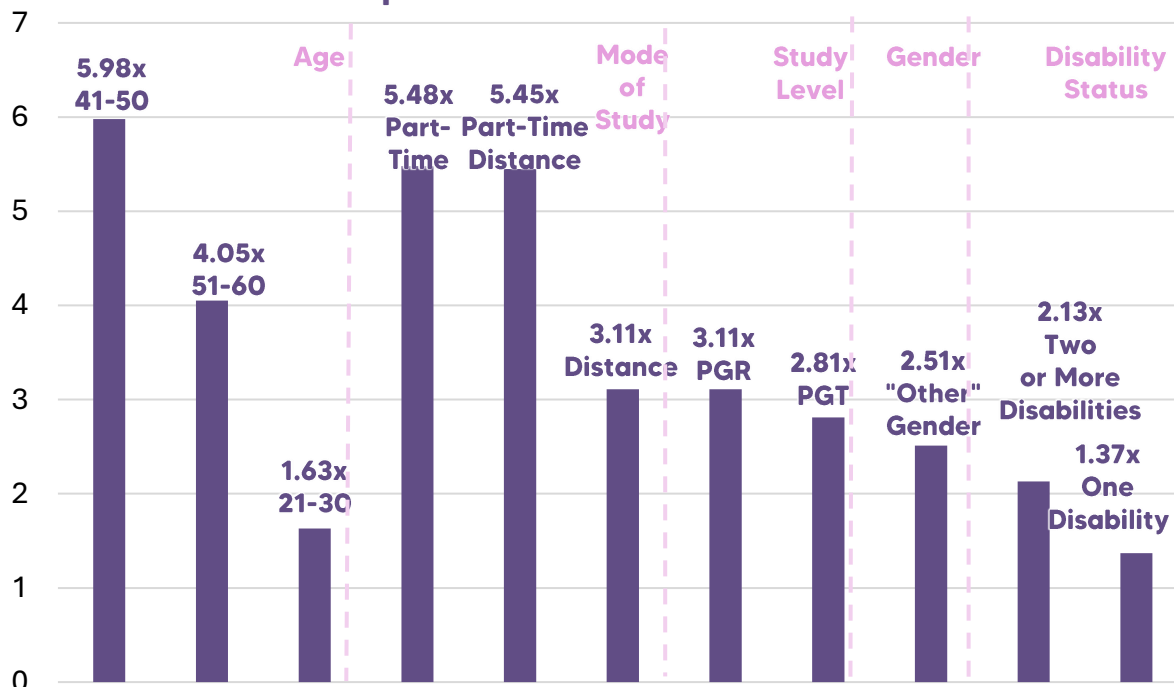
Students outside the undergraduate student experience are more likely than average to not engage in activities outside of their studies because their schedule prevents it.

In addition to lacking social spaces to create belonging, mature students, part-time and distance students, postgraduate students, students whose gender is 'Other', and students with disabilities report extra responsibilities which further prevent them from engaging on campus – with timetables often making it even more difficult to plan around.

> *"As a PGR, sometimes it's difficult to build one's own routine and timetable to make space for all the activities that you want to participate in."*

PGR, International

Older Students Report Greater Difficulty Engaging in Extracurricular Activities Due to Their Schedule

| As **age** increases, larger proportions of students report being unable to get involved in things outside their studies.
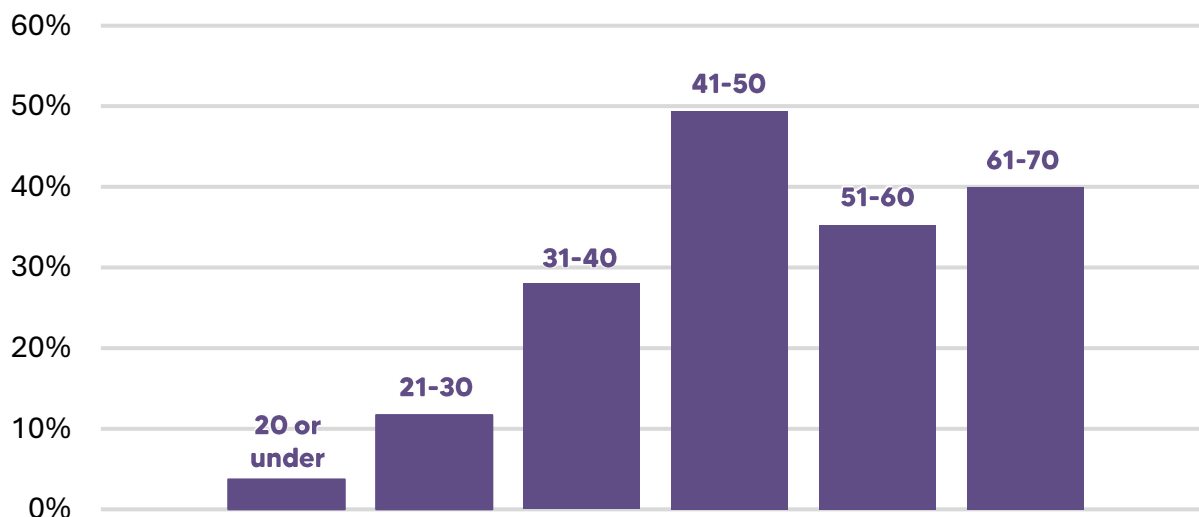
| As **study level** increases, larger proportions of students report being unable to get involved in things outside their studies.
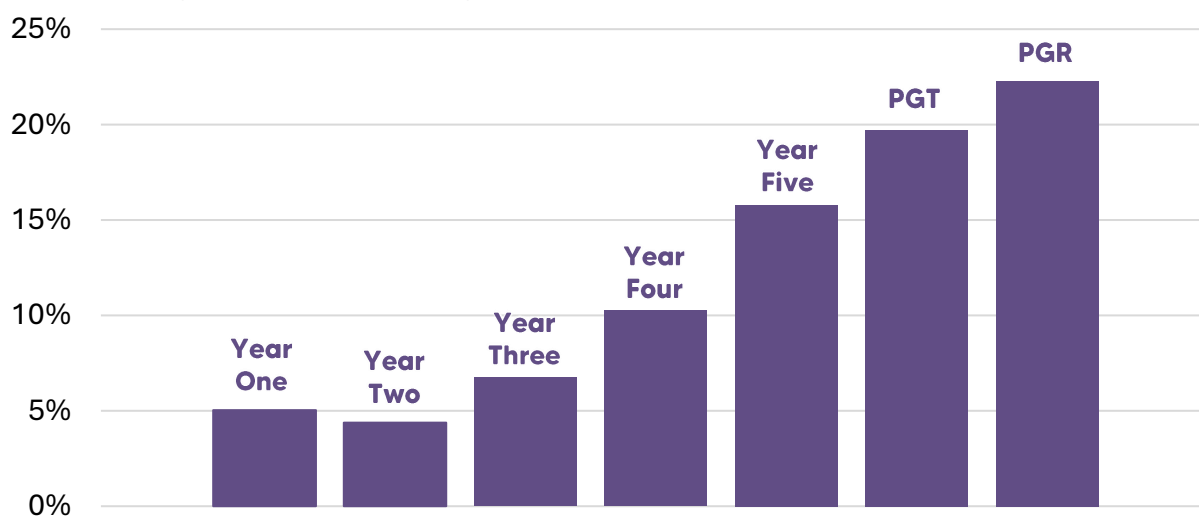
This trend is evident across both age and study level: as each increases, more students generally report being unable to get involved in things outside their studies. With growing responsibilities inside and outside the university, including families, jobs, and intense research, mature students have less time to engage in other activities and often feel less like students. As one student notes:

> *"Lack of time to do extra curriculars. On one hand I am a student and can join societies, but after essentially working a 9-5, there isn't a lot of time remaining to enjoy societies. There seems to be very blurred lines as to whether we are students or employees."*

PGR, Home

A similar pattern emerges across mode of study, gender, and disability status. Students studying part-time (41.62%, n= 72), part-time by distance (46.3%, n= 26), or full-time by distance (27.27%, n= 3) report the highest proportions of inactivity across different modes of study. With part-time students dividing time between campus and their place of employment, distance students spending more time away from campus than the average student, and long commutes preventing regular event attendance, many of these students feel excluded from the student community.

> *"More acknowledgement/involvement of distance-based students. Which may be hard to implement, but it can feel as though we are sometimes left behind/an afterthought."*

PGR, Distance

> *"As a distant learning student, I'd appreciate teams coffee morning with other researchers."*

PGR, Distance

Elevated negative response rates are also seen among students who identify their gender as "Other" (22.58%, n= 7), those reporting one disability (11.42%, n= 95), and students reporting two or more disabilities (17.74%, n= 47), with chronic illness inhibiting attendance at social events and some events not being accessible enough to student needs.

> *"Greater awareness and consideration of neurodiversity. For example, events on my course like the "pizza social" were quite challenging for me as someone who is neurodivergent."*

Year One, Home

> *"I'm a chronically ill and disabled student, and after getting the flu at the start of the year it really flared up all my symptoms and made me worse. I'm still struggling to catch up as the workload feels impossible."*

Year Three, Home

Student Life | Support Services

Do you feel like you can access the university's support services if needed?

| About 1 in 5 students (22.2%) need more information on how to access university support services.
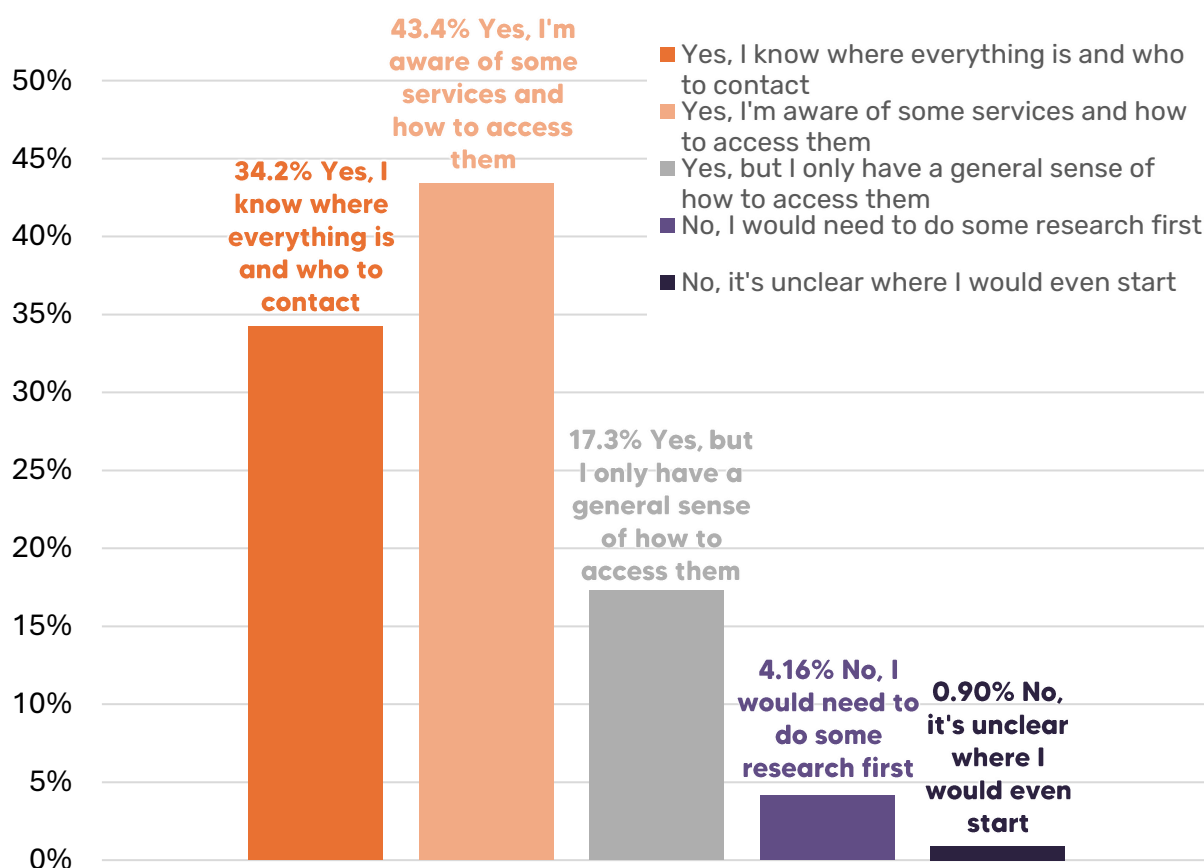
Note 1: This question was changed from "How confident are you that you can access the university's support services if needed" to "Do you feel like you can access the university's support services if needed", so cross-year comparisons are limited.

Though most students are aware of how to access at least some support services, nearly 1 in 5 students are not as aware of how to access these services.

Whereas 34.2% (n= 1414) of students "know where everything is and who to contact" and 43.4% (n= 1793) are "aware of some services and how to access them", 17.3% (n= 714) only have a "general sense of how to access them", 4.08% (n= 172) "would need to do some research first", and 0.77% (n= 37) are "unsure where they would even start" to search for information. Mapping these responses to last year's "low confidence" to "high confidence" scale, the proportion of students who only had "some" or "low" confidence in accessing support services decreased by 5pp from 27.0% to 22.2%. This indicates that students are generally increasingly able and

willing to utilise support services when needed; however, there is significant work to be done.

Students note that poor communication, disjointed services, and inaccessible scheduling are significant barriers to accessing these support services.

348 students mentioned "support services" as one change they would like to see to improve their student experience, with nearly half requesting more coherent information, resources, or communication on where to access support services. As several students noted:

> "There's a ton of support services (which is great, although a bit confusing where to go for which areas)! I wonder if they could be summarised on one page with purpose of each, with links to the different services."

PGT, Home

> "A lot of the admin/registration is difficult. Certain links of the Exeter website have errors that make navigation to information hard."

PGR, Home

Similarly, students in the *Accessing Support* Focus Group described feeling trapped by bureaucratic and disjointed systems. On the website, students reported that links often sent them in "circles", leading to websites or resources they had already visited, which made booking appointments with the relevant service particularly difficult. Moreover, limited appointment spaces, in conjunction with either emergency situations or busy timetables, made it difficult to get in-person support. When emailing staff, they reported having to send emails to different departments, between different staff members, and failing to get the support they need until it is too late – regardless if it was to access mental health and wellbeing support, transition support, or housing support. Ultimately, participants wanted to see improved support systems, better cohesion across services, and more availability for timely appointments.

Key Demographic Influencers | Support

| Students on St Luke's, Public Health, Sport and Health Sciences, Neuroscience, Medicine, or are aged 21-30 are more likely than average to **know where everything is and who to contact**.

| Students studying Mathematics and Statistics, Accounting, Male, and are aged 20 or under are more likely than average to **need to do some research first**.
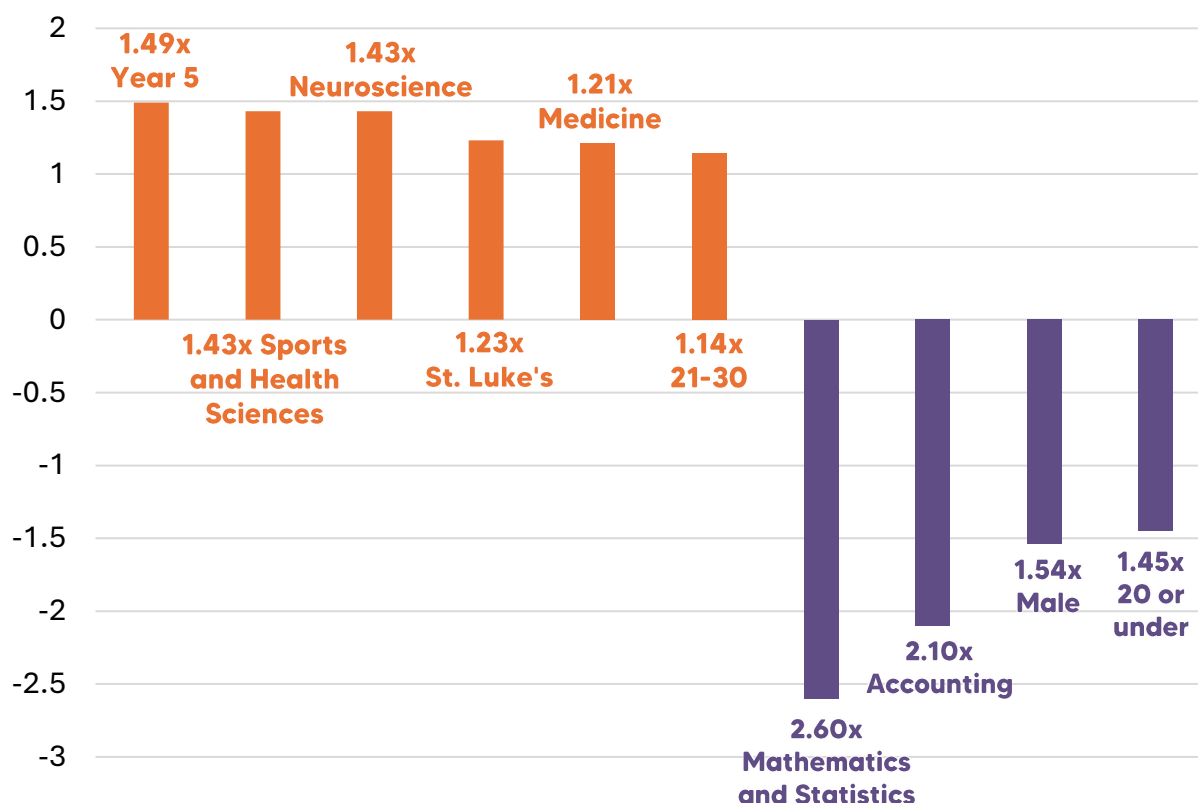
Students based on St Luke's campus, and those on courses closely linked to it, appear more confident than average in knowing where to go and who to contact for support.

While similar proportions of students at St Luke's (42.0%, n= 338) and Streatham (43.8%, n= 1454) report that they know about *some* support services and how to access them, a noticeably larger share of St Luke's students feel fully informed. Specifically, 40.30% (n= 324) of St. Luke's students say they "know where everything is and who to contact", compared with 32.74% (n= 1088) of students at Streatham - an 8pp difference.

At the departmental level, only a few subjects appear to meaningfully influence whether students chose this response. Sport and Health Sciences (48.2%, n= 54), Neuroscience (48.4%, n= 44), and Medicine (41.0%, n= 100) all had notably higher proportions of students reporting full awareness of support routes. Conversely, students in Mathematics and Statistics (10.37%, n= 14) and Accounting (8.33%, n=

110) were among the most likely to say they would need to do some research before seeking supports.

Notably, male students (5.36%, n= 78) were 1.45 times more likely to say they would need to do some research first. While this is only 1.82pp greater than female students (3.54%, n= 92), it may indicate that male students are marginally less certain and feel a greater need to seek information before accessing support services.

Student Life | Other Challenges

Mental Health and Wellbeing

390 students raised challenges connected to their **mental health and wellbeing**. These comments covered a wide range of impacts stemming from the student and academic experience, including anxiety (n= 42), general health concerns (n= 85), homesickness (n= 45), loneliness (n= 73), low motivation (n= 79), and feelings of being overwhelmed (n= 68).

Disabled students were especially likely to report difficulties related to mental health and wellbeing, noting that long wait times for appointments and limited support for managing symptoms left them falling behind and feeling even more anxious about their workload.

> *"I'm a chronically ill and disabled student, and after getting the flu at the start of the year it really flared up all my symptoms and made me worse. I'm still struggling to catch up as the workload feels impossible."*
>
> **Year Three, Home**

> *"Accessing support for neurodiversity and mental health – the wait is very long for appts. Also there's not a lot of support for mature postgrads."*
>
> **PGT, Home**

Money

252 students mentioned **Money** as one of their biggest challenges and 242 students mentioned **Money** as one change which would improve their student experience.

Students reported several financial challenges, including managing their finances (28.7%, n= 83), coping with the cost of living (11.8%, n= 34), paying rent and bills (6.57%, n= 19), and covering tuition fees (6.23%, n= 19), affirming similar mental health and socialising challenges found in the Guild's Cost of Living Report (2024). While these concerns were broadly consistent across year groups, "financial management" issues were raised twice as often by Year One (20.0%, n= 27), Year

Three (18.5%, n= 25), and PGT students (n= 24). Students highlighted difficulties budgeting, hidden costs such as inter-campus travel and food, and limited time for part-time work due to heavy workloads and an inability to work holidays.

> *"Financially, being a student is so hard. Maintenance loans do not reflect how much my parents support me financially, and my schedule doesn't always allow for paid employment. Where it does, it means I miss out on societies. Places like Marketplace are expensive too, so it's not like being on campus saves me money."*

Year One, Home

> *"Managing finances is a huge struggle. Although I make a calculated purchases, sometimes it's hard to keep track."*

PGT, Home

Notably, some students mentioned that while they were aware of opportunities for financial support, limited awareness of where to access this support from the University, limited outreach, and a lack of peer support makes inhibits their utilisation.

> *"Greater reach for people like me who are in financial hardship, they're already great resources available but it takes some digging to find the right people to speak to, it seems as I am in the 'minority' of financial challenged students at Exeter Uni, so being more progressive and encouraging that it is okay and resources are available."*

Year 2, Home

Housing

A total of 140 students raised **Housing** as one of their biggest challenges, the majority of which being in Year One (65.0%, n= 91), followed by Year Two (13.6%, n= 19), and finally PGT students (8.57%, n= 12).

Year One students primarily raised concerns surrounding finding and securing housing for second year, emphasising the stress associated of finding an accommodation before they get to know many people, and managing this search while getting used to university coursework. Other issues included getting used to living with other people in shared spaces, struggling to pay rent, and value for money.

> *"Having to think about student housing as it feels very early, but I feel I need to start looking as everyone already is, and some even have houses already."*

<div align="right">

Year One, Home

</div>

Year Two students, meanwhile, emphasised their current living conditions including high rent and living costs, struggles commuting to campus, and finding accommodation for third year.

> *"Living situation hasn't been great, which results in constant mental exhaustion."*

<div align="right">

Year Two, Home

</div>

Future placement students further highlighted that they experienced the same stress and pressure to secure housing, despite not even knowing whether they will be in Exeter the following year.

> *"As a placement student, the idea of losing deposit by having to get a house as soon as possible. That alongside my other studies are a little hard to manage."*

<div align="right">

Year Two, Home

</div>

PGT students mentioned a broad mix of housing related issues, including difficulty commuting between their accommodation and campus due to poor transport links and difficulty securing an accommodation.

> *"My timetable is really sparse, so it takes me a lot of time walking from my accommodation to campus and back."*

<div align="right">

PGT, International

</div>

In response to what would improve their experience, students primarily wanted more opportunities to meet potential flatmates which also feel more inclusive to older students, to see more information surrounding their rights as tenants both on and off university property, communicated timelines of when housing should really be considered, and ultimately more affordable housing through greater university-market collaboration.

> *"More directness of when things should be happening, such as when specifically do I need to get more serious about student housing, and better communication on the options along with an estimated price and what I should expect to be included or not included along with that."*

Year One, Home

> *"Would have been nice to of had a face to face chat with somebody in the uni, about all the admin stuff that had to take place at the start. Such as if I had done all the online introduction stuff properly, when accommodation rent would be due, etc."*

Year One, Home

> *"Seeing the university working with landlords to reduce rent. The cost of rent seems to be increasing each year at an unreasonable rate, so that student finance doesn't even cover it. Our landlord advised us that her price increases were done in line with recommendations with the university advice."*

Year Four, Home

For more student feedback on Housing, see the Guild's Housing report.

Food

Food remains a top challenge for many students, with a total of 44 students mentioning it as one of their top challenges and 97 students mentioning it in their one change that would improve their student experience.

Half of the students who mentioned food reported struggling to find the time and money to cook healthy, affordable meals. Although Lidl and Aldi offer cheaper options, they require an extra 45–60 minutes of travel, forcing students to choose between saving money and spending time on academic work. As a result, many either rely on quicker, less healthy alternatives which can make it harder to maintain healthy habits, or go home for lunch, which reduces time spent with friends and studying on campus.

> *"I'd love to have more contact hours so I can meet more people from my course and if the food at uni wasn't so expensive because I can't keep walking home to have lunch since then I don't want to walk back to uni because it's so far."*

Year One, Home

> "The cost of living here sometimes, rent, bills, and then food-when studies get a lot busier doing a proper food shop gets harder and eating on campus can be expensive."

PGR, Home

A similar number of students mentioned a lack of affordable and varied on-campus food options. The £2 meal deal has increased each year since its introduction, and prices in the Ram have risen considerably. International students were particularly disappointed by the limited availability of food from their home countries, and St Luke's students highlighted the lack of options beyond Cross Keys. For some, campus alternatives are even more limited due to dietary restrictions such as those who are gluten-free, kosher, or halal.

> "I feel like the food options on campus have been dwindling and aren't varied/affordable enough."

PGR, Home

> "Pretty specific, but the gluten free sandwiches in marketplace are not a part of the meal deal. I have celiac and have to pay extra, which doesn't seem fair."

Year One, International

> "Financial and the cost of a simple sandwich or lunch at St Luke's is so expensive, who would have thought you could get a cheaper sandwich at Waitrose?!"

PGT, Home

For more student feedback on food security, see the Guild's Food Security report.

Transportation

Transportation is a significant concern for students commuting into Exeter as well as those living in the city. 62 students identified it as a major challenge, and another 66 highlighted transport improvements as something that would meaningfully enhance their experience.

For regular commuters and students based at St Luke's, distance is a key barrier to feeling a sense of belonging. Long commutes limit how much time they can spend on campus, and many must juggle traffic, public transport schedules, and fatigue after a full day of classes. Delayed or cancelled buses and trains affects punctuality, limits participation in campus life, and gives students less time to decompress after

class – leading to burnout. Alternatives, such as buying a bicycle, are cost-prohibitive, leaving many students forced to walk.

> "*Since I live off campus commuting to the university requires me to spend 2-3 hours traveling back and forth that consumes a lot of time, as the buses are either delayed or sometimes even cancelled.*"

Year One, Home

> "*I feel burnt out even though it's the beginning of the year and I'm finding it difficult to get back into routine. It might be because I'm commuting this year and my energy is going towards that.*"

Year Three, Home

Even students with cars report difficulties, including limited, expensive parking or living just far enough away that, while they are ineligible for parking, walking can take nearly an hour.

> "*I am a commuter student and although I have a permit, finding parking on campus can be particularly difficult - meaning I have to park elsewhere costing lots of money.*"

Year One, Home

As a result, students requested more frequent and direct bus routes from St Luke's to Streatham campus, greater access to parking spaces, and more opportunities for commuter students to meet and support each other.

> "*I would like to see more support for commuting students, particularly when joining the university in first year, as this can be even more intimidating and stressful. For example, a way of meeting others in a similar position so that you don't have to be alone in welcome week.*"

Year One, Home

> "*I'm a student on St Luke's and while getting to Streatham for society events isn't impossible, a more reliable bus route or a free shuttle would be better.*"
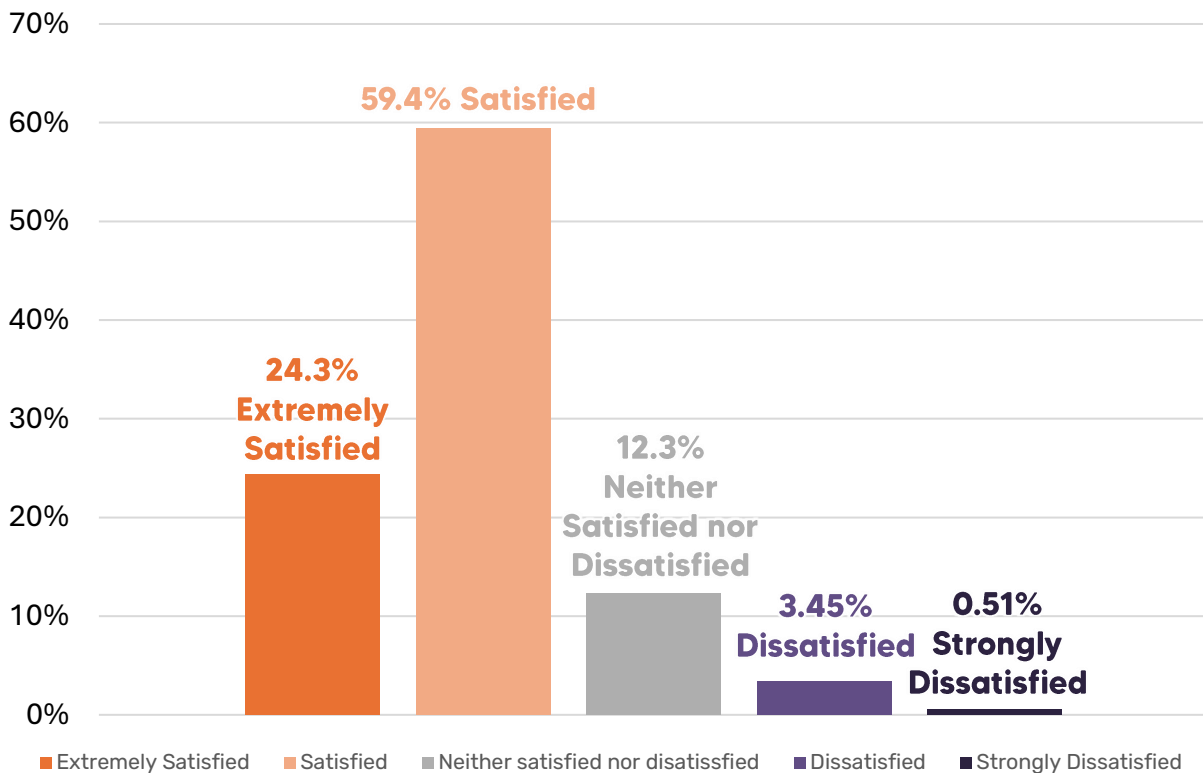
Year One, International

Academic Life

Academic Life | Teaching Quality

How satisfied are you with the quality of teaching on your course?

| 84% of students are satisfied with the teaching on their course.

Students are generally satisfied with the teaching on their course.

A combined 83.7% (n= 3,469) of respondents reported being either "extremely satisfied" (24.3%, n= 1,008) or "satisfied" (59.4%, n= 2,461) with their course content, an increase of 3pp from 2024. Dissatisfaction has also declined, falling from 5% in 2024 to 3.96% this year, with 3.45% (n= 143) "dissatisfied" and 0.51% (n= 21) "extremely dissatisfied". The proportion of students who were neutral ("neither satisfied nor dissatisfied") decreased by 0.8pp, from 13% to 12.3%.

Across disciplines and years, students consistently value passionate, engaged, accessible, and supportive teaching, marked by improved constructive feedback and learning.

1063 of text comments identified "course teaching" as a positive aspect of students' experience. Students noted that lecturers who are friendly, genuinely enthusiastic about their subject, approachable for questions and constructive feedback, and able

to explain concepts clearly, using slides as a tool to facilitate discussion, create a more engaging, easier-to-follow, and ultimately more effective learning environment.

> "Being taught by very kind and smart lecturers, each lecturer is passionate about what they teach and it makes me want to learn more."

<div align="right">**Year Two, Home**</div>

> "The third year modules are well staffed and the lecturers clearly really care about the topics and it makes me enjoy the content so much. I really appreciate the work being put in."

<div align="right">**Year Three, Home**</div>

> "The content is interesting. Feedback from the teachers is constructive and helpful."

<div align="right">**PGT, Home**</div>

Nevertheless, reduced contact hours and disengaged teachers harm the academic learning experience, for both students and postgraduate teaching assistants (PTAs).

740 text comments identified "course teaching" as a negative aspect of student's experience. With limited contact hours per week (n= 380) and large lecture/seminar sizes, students note that lecturers and seminar leaders are often forced to cover surface level material, avoid deep discussion, and speed through often very complex material by reading off slides – limiting the value added from attending lectures or seminars as opposed to working from home or managing other aspects of student life. This makes some students feel like they are constantly falling behind, overwhelmed, and unprepared for exams and other assignments at the end of the term.

> "Some of my lecturers are not very engaging when they are talking or they are just reading off slides so providing zero value above what could be read off the PowerPoint given to us at the start of term. More value can be found in textbooks which we already have."

<div align="right">**Year One, Home**</div>

"Low contact hours (4 hours a week) can feel demotivating."

PGT, Home

As much as they want to help, PGR students who also work as postgraduate teaching assistants (PTAs) face their own pressures. Cuts to funding limit how long they can spend preparing for seminars or providing feedback, with one PTA from the *Staying (Academically) Motivated* focus group reporting that they can only afford to spend 15 minutes per assignment before moving on to the next one. With less time to read, process, and effectively evaluate student work, they are unable to produce the personalised and explanatory feedback which facilitates student learning and growth.

"The cut back in the number of seminars across different departments. The proposed funding cuts that will reduce contact hours with MCs and PTAs. I am concerned for the quality of education. The cuts are obviously impacting staff and students, with redundancies being pushed, research allowances and centre budgets being cut. it seems that neither the Guild nor the university management takes into account how this impacts students. instead the focus is on entertaining students without addressing any of these structural issues."

PGR, Home

Key Demographic Influencers | Teaching

| Students who are studying Drama, Neuroscience, Education, and History are more likely than average to be **satisfied** with teaching quality.

| Students who are studying Operational Analytics, Medical Imaging, Engineering, and Computer Sciences or are in Year 2 or 3 or have one disability are more likely than average to be **dissatisfied** with teaching quality.
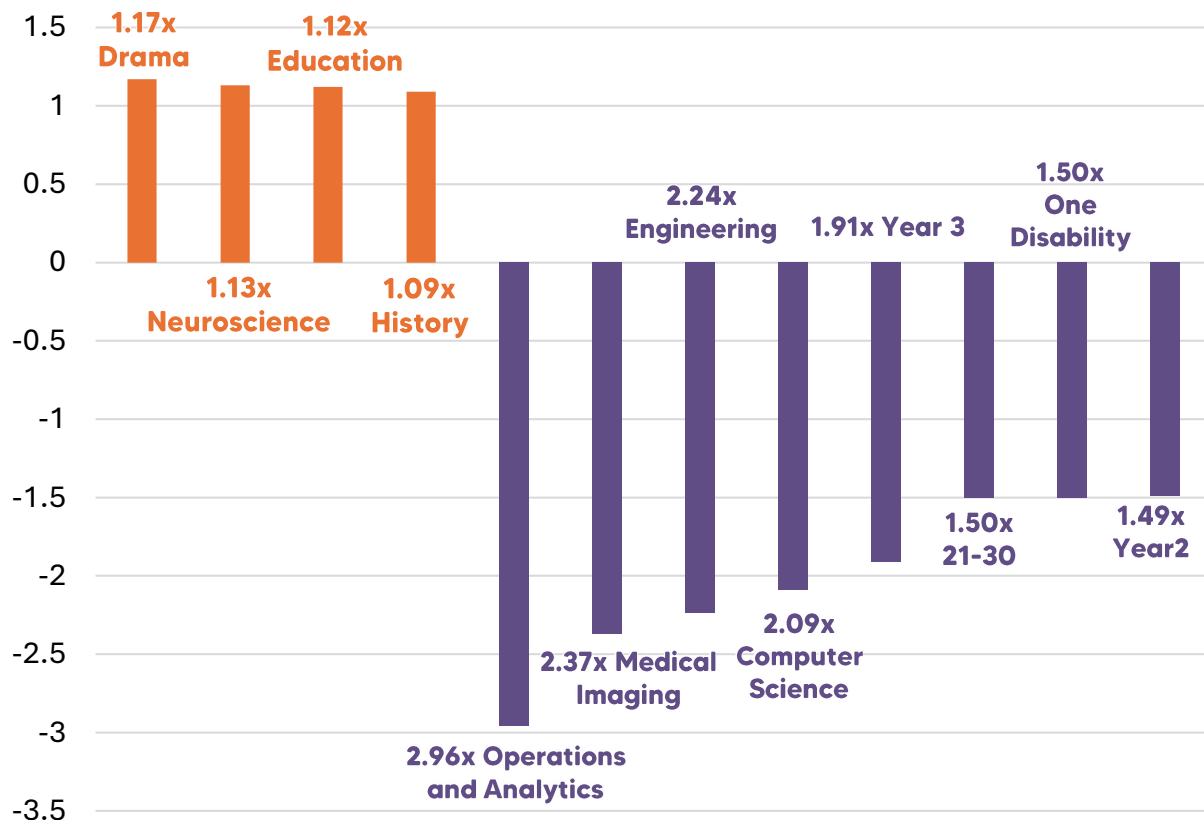
Teaching satisfaction varies dramatically by faculty and department.

At the faculty level, teaching satisfaction is lower than average in Environment, Science, and Economy (ESE) (79.26%, n= 1212) and higher than average in Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) (86.17%, n= 1146) and Health and Life Science (HLS) (86.9%, n= 1048). In terms of departments, 33.0% (n= 17) had below average teaching satisfaction, with the majority (n= 8) being in ESE, followed by the faculty of HASS (n= 5), then the faculty of Health and Life Sciences (HLS) (n= 4). Notably, the key departments which are more likely to be dissatisfied than average are in ESE.

Students in Year Two and Year Three are more likely than average to be dissatisfied with their teaching quality.

Although students in Year 2 (81.7%, n= 651) and Year 3 (80.8%, n= 455) surpass 80% teaching satisfaction, they are 1.49x and 1.91x more likely than average to be dissatisfied with their course's teaching.

Comments from Year 2 students (n= 111) are broadly consistent with other feedback on poor-quality teaching, with many describing unclear lecture delivery and weak structure that leave them confused and reliant on additional independent study.

> *"Some of the teaching is not good enough and I have to spend double the time at home teaching myself."*

Year Two, Home, ESE

> *"Quality of teaching is not consistently high - some lectures feel very disjointed, unclear and lacking in structure, which makes it very difficult to engage in the content."*

Year Two, Home, HLS

By contrast, Year 3 students (n= 100) highlight knowledge gaps between students and staff. They note that lecturers sometimes assume foundational knowledge students lack, or conversely, repeat basic material that limits deeper learning. For those falling behind, fast-paced teaching and poor communication can widen these gaps; for those seeking more advanced discussion, repeated foundational content can feel disengaging and frustrating, especially given the heavier demands of final year.

> *"Some basic concepts that are necessary to understand larger ones are expected rather than taught, as such it is difficult to understand what is going on, use of jargon etc."*
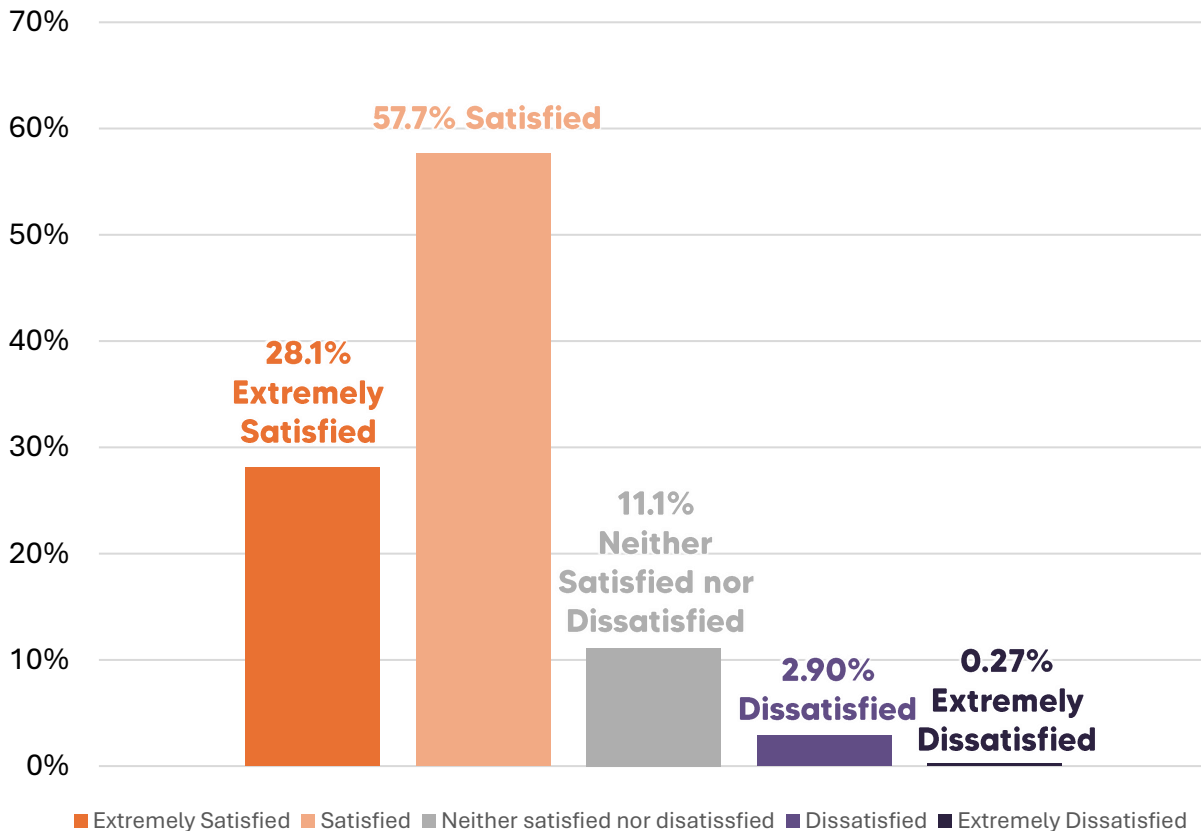
Year Three, Home, ESE

> *"Some of the content is being taught too slowly/being repeated which means we have less time to do more interesting things"*

Year Three, Home, HLS

Academic Life | Course Content

How satisfied are you with the content on your course?

| 86% of students are at least satisfied with the content on their course.

57.7% Satisfied

28.1% Extremely Satisfied

11.1% Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied

2.90% Dissatisfied

0.27% Extremely Dissatisfied

■ Extremely Satisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Neither satisfied nor disatissfied ■ Dissatisfied ■ Extremely Dissatisfied

Most students are satisfied with their course's content.

A combined 85.8% of students report being "extremely satisfied" (28.1%, n= 1162) or "satisfied" (57.67%, n= 2388) with their course's content, a 1pp increase from the previous year. This is a result of a 1.9pp decrease in the number of students who were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with their course (11.1%, n= 460). By contrast, only 3.17% of students report being dissatisfied (2.90%, n= 120) or extremely dissatisfied (0.27%, n= 11), the same as the previous year.

"I really like the content on my course, I find it interesting and the practicals help to improve my understanding."

Year One, Home, HLS

"I really enjoy my tutorials and diving deeper into the content, the pointers towards wider reading are also very helpful"
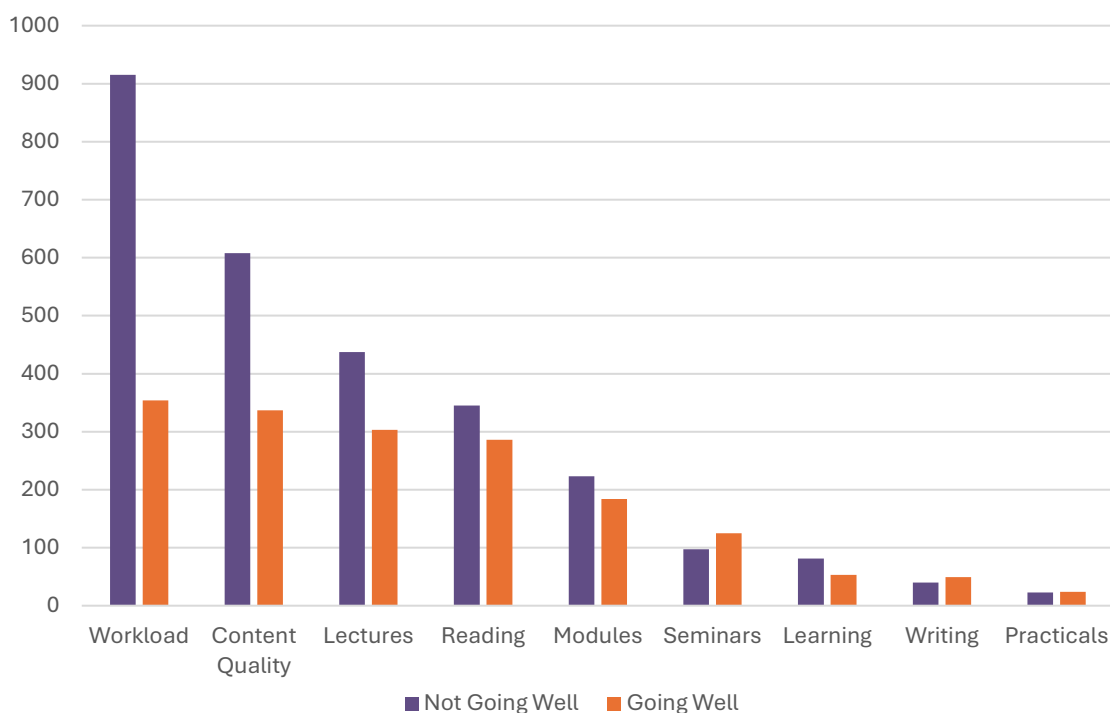
Year Three, Home, ESE

However, more students mention aspects of their course's content which is "not going well" than going "well".

What's going well on your course?|Content

|78.3% of comments related to "Workload" are negative.
|65.3% of comments related to "Content Quality" are negative.

More comments (n= 374) mentioned that "Course Content", including workload, lectures, reading, modules, seminars, writing, and practicals, were "not going well" (n= 1797), than "going well" (n= 1423). Notably, the ratio of comments reporting that things were "going well" to those "not going well" is approximately tripled for "Workload" (not going well = 915, going well = 354) and nearly doubled for "Content Quality" (not going well = 608, going well = 337), with the only components which were more positive than negative being "seminars" and "writing".

Interestingly, 90.0% (n= 822) of those who are struggling with "workload", also said they were "satisfied" (n= 567) or "extremely satisfied" (n= 255) with their course's content, finding it interesting and engaging. However, balancing that workload remains their key issue, needing more support and advice of how to manage university workloads and what workload expectations are.

> *"More assistance with ways of balancing work and life that don't feel like more work"*
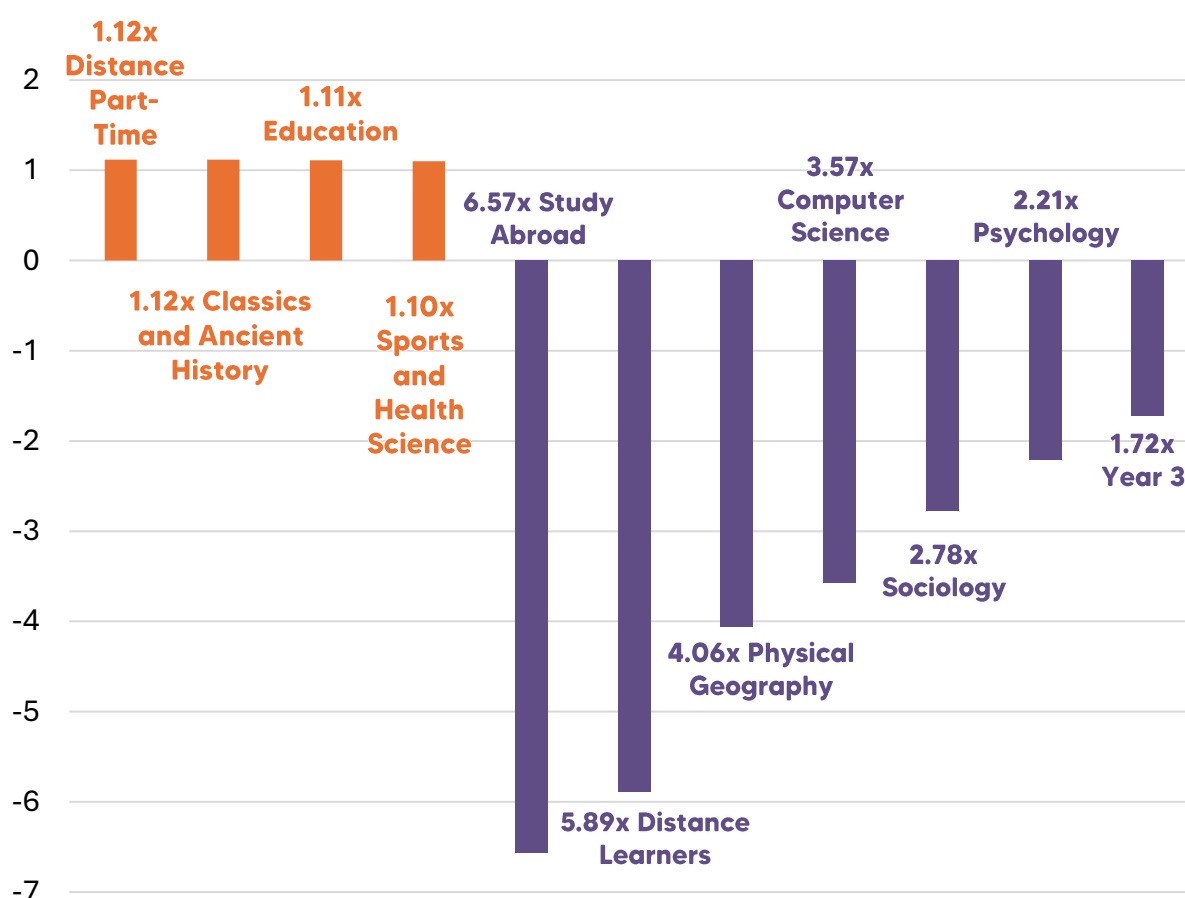
Year Three, Home, ESE

Key Demographic Influencers | Content

| Students who are distant part-time learners or studying Classics and Ancient History, Education, and Sports and Health Science are more likely than average to be **satisfied** with their course's content.

| Students who are studying abroad, Phyiscal Geography, Computer Science, Sociology, Psychology, are in Year 3, or are distance learners are more likely than average to be **dissatisfied** with their course's content.

Chart showing demographic influencers on content satisfaction. Satisfied (orange, positive): 1.12x Distance Part-Time, 1.11x Education, 1.12x Classics and Ancient History, 1.10x Sports and Health Science. Dissatisfied (purple, negative): 6.57x Study Abroad, 5.89x Distance Learners, 4.06x Physical Geography, 3.57x Computer Science, 2.78x Sociology, 2.21x Psychology, 1.72x Year 3.

The negative impacts of high workloads and poor communication culminates in Year Three.

Year Three students (4.80%, n= 27) are 1.72x more likely than average to be dissatisfied with their course's content, reporting the same workload struggles as other students, but facing more intense pressures as a result of it being final year and

> *"I am really behind on the reading materials because there is just a lot and its really overwhelming."*

> *"One of the modules that I was really looking forward to was cancelled. Now I have to do a less interesting module instead."*

Content satisfaction varies dramatically by department, with slightly more dissatisfaction from the Faculty of Environment, Science, and Economy (ESE).

Similar to teaching quality, the four departments which are more likely than average to be dissatisfied with their course are in ESE: Physical Geography (4.06x), Computer Science (3.57x), Sociology (2.78x), and Psychology (2.21x). By contrast, the departments which are more likely than average to be satisfied with their course are in HASS: Classics and Ancient History (1.12x) and Education (1.11x) or HLS: Sports and Health Science (1.10x).

Academic Life | Employability

To what extent do you feel your course will effectively prepare you for employment in the future?

| 81.9% of students agree that their course will prepare them for employment in the future.
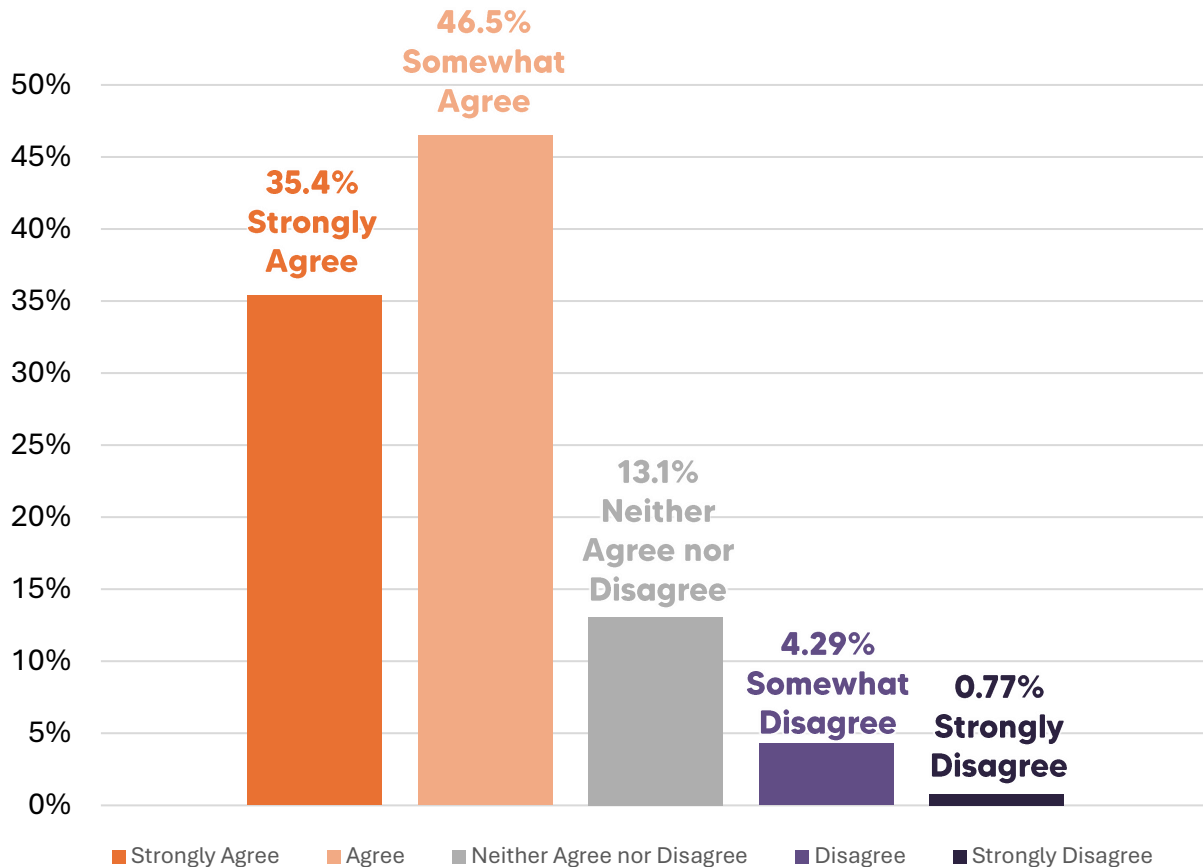
Overall, students feel their course will effectively prepare them for employment in the future.

A combined 81.9% of students either "strongly agree" (35.4%, n = 1461) or "agree" (46.5%, n= 1920) that their course will effectively prepare them for employment in the future. By contrast, a combined 5.06% of students either "disagree" (4.29%, n= 177) or "strongly disagree" (0.77%, n= 32). The remaining 13.1% (n= 540) of students "neither agree nor disagree".

However, students point out that many courses lack the practical skills needed for employment or the depth required for a future academic career.

> *"The content doesn't seem to prepare students either for a future in academia, or in the wider world. This is something with room for improvement."*

PGT, Home, ESE

> *"One thing that isn't going well on my course is the limited practical industry exposure. Guest lectures alone are not enough because, after completing a master's degree, employers expect students to have some hands-on industry experience. While extracurricular activities are helpful, students need at least a short internship or real industry project to be better prepared for employment."*

Year Three, Home, ESE

Key Demographic Influencers │ Employability

│ Students in **creative fields**, **Year 3**, or on **Placement** are more likely than average to believe their course won't prepare them for employment in the future, especially compared to some **STEM students**.

Chart values:

- 1.12x Distance Part-Time
- 1.12x Medicine
- 1.11x Finance
- 1.10x Accounting
- 1.05x No Disability
- 4.43x Sociology
- 3.2x Placement
- 2.99x Liberal Arts
- 2.8x Year 3
- 2.31x Classics and Ancient History
- 2.14x English and Creative Writing
- 1.86x Year 4
- 1.53x One Disability
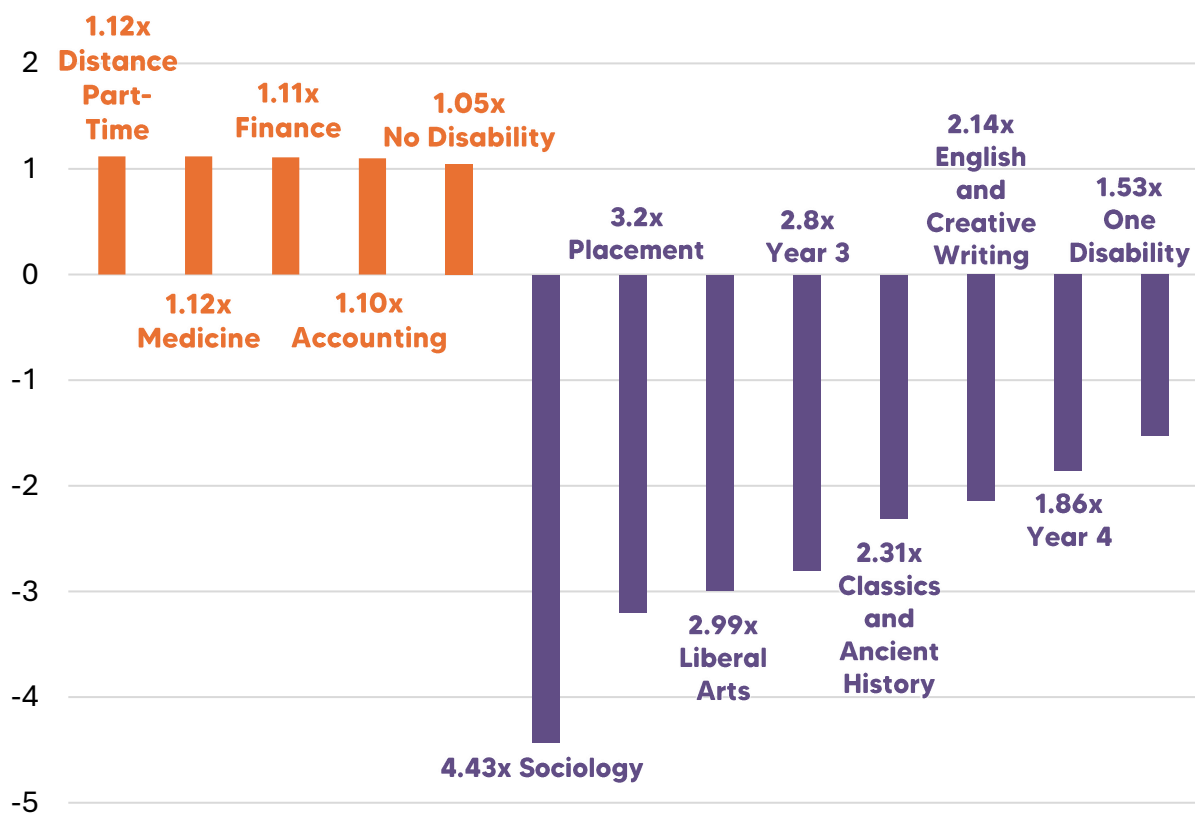
Notably, those in Year Three or Year Four, who are about to enter the work force, are more likely to say their course won't effectively prepare them for employment.

The proportion of undergraduate students who responded "disagree" to this question rises with each year, peaking in Year Three (9.64%, n= 54) and only slightly dipping in Year Four (8.04%, n= 18). Students in these years note that a lack of practical coursework, career support to enter relevant job markets, and motivation issues in response to rejection inhibit their confidence for future work.

> *"I'm finding it a little difficult to find motivation to manage job searching and general employability related work."*

> **Year 3, International, ESS**

This is particularly acute for students in creative fields who believe their course lacks practical support for employable skills.

Whereas students in medicine (93.5%, n= 95), finance (91.3%, n= 84), and accounting (90.2%, n= 119) were more likely than average to say their course will prepare them for employment in the future, students in creative fields, including liberal arts (14.7%, n= 6), classics and ancient history (11.3%, n= 6), English and creative writing (10.4%, n= 14), and sociology (22.2%, n= 10) were more likely to disagree.

> *"I think that the course does not put enough time into supporting students in understanding how to cope with future employment."*

> **Year 3, Home, HASS**

Outside of their course, students are struggling to find and maintain employment.

339 students mentioned "employment" as one of their biggest challenges, including finding and managing jobs (n= 248), finding placements or internships (n= 93), and accessing career support (n= 46).

Despite a growing need to supplement student income with work, a shortage of part-time student work has made finding flexible employment difficult, both related and unrelated to students' degrees. PGT students (33.1%, n= 82) were particularly struggling, either facing difficulties finding a part-time job that they can balance with their studies or managing their existing work.

> *"Yes. I'm currently working part-time while studying and it's a tiring balance."*

> **PGR, Home, HASS**

"Managing to fit in online study around full-time work."

PGT, Home, HASS

Year One, Year Two, and Year Three students, on the other hand, often mentioned difficulties finding career-related work or receiving tailored career support.

"Number of research opportunities – not enough options available for paid research opportunities."

Year 2, Home, HASS

"One thing that isn't going well on my course is the limited support for career development and internships. There aren't enough clear pathways or guidance to help students find relevant work experience in our field, which makes it harder to prepare for future employment."

Year 2, International, HASS

International students face added challenges and feel especially vulnerable to policy changes affecting their employability, which they are often uninformed about.

On top of existing challenges to finding employment, international students are particularly vulnerable. Although they "strongly agree" (35.7%, n= 320) and "somewhat agree" (48.6%, n= 435) that their course will prepare them for employment at similar rates to home students, visa restrictions limiting part-time work to 20 hours per week and limited practical career support advising them on their on finding future employment in the UK adds an extra layer of stress.

"Yes, mostly my challenges are associated with visa regulations and prices which are, unfortunately, too expensive and I cannot work more than 20 hours. Also as an international student, the job market for me is quite limited so I fear not fulfilling my full potential."

PGT, International, HASS

"Being an international student who is distance learning, I feel like I am not well informed by the university on what to do career wise, who to talk to etc."

PGT, International, HLS

Recommendations

University Recommendations

Theme 1 | Settling In and Belonging

1 Co-create targeted outreach for disabled, mature, postgraduate, non-binary, and commuter students, ensuring they are proactively included in belonging initiatives and communication.

Disabled, mature, postgraduate, non-binary, and commuter students face the greatest barriers to Settling In, Belonging, and Getting Involved due to busy schedules, limited targeted opportunities, and inaccessible events. The University should partner with the Students' Guild and these students to co-design flexible, inclusive engagement, such as cohort coffee mornings, a mix of day and evening events, and initiatives that ensure students feel seen, heard, and supported.

2 Increase the variety and accessibility of low-cost, low commitment events offered by the University, including Pitch up and Play.

Students are struggling to manage their time, but this does not reflect a lack of interest in getting involved. Instead, they want more targeted and more meaningful opportunities that fit around existing workloads and do not require additional time or financial commitment, such as pitch up and play activities, short drop-in sessions, or low-cost, targeted events scheduled at varied times.

Theme 2 | Balancing Responsibilities and Workload

3 Communicate realistic and student-oriented expectations of timelines and costs of student and academic life.

While new students expect a heavier academic workload, many are unprepared for the wider time and financial demands of student life, and returning students often face increasing academic, social, and employment pressures. Current resources are ad-hoc and course pages also fail to mention the total cost of studying at the university, including the hidden fees. The University should work with departments to integrate clear student living advice, timelines, and cost expectations into welcome and course materials.

4 **Work with students to co-create timetable structures which provide consistency, minimise scheduling gaps, and maximise the value of student contact hours.**

Timetable gaps reduce students' flexibility and make balancing academic, work, and personal responsibilities more challenging. While simply adding more contact hours can quickly become overwhelming for both students and teachers, students are frequently reporting that they lack contact hours in key modules. As the University reforms room bookings to enable better timetabling, it should actively incorporate student feedback and involve them in co-designing timetables that better meet their learning and life needs.

5 **Work with students and university catering to continue to increase the variety, inclusivity, and affordability of on-campus food options.**

Food is a major barrier to staying focused on campus, with limited affordable options and variety prompting students to leave early to eat or skip meals altogether. The University should continue to work with students through continuous feedback and discussion mechanisms, to ensure food is affordable, accessible, and inclusive of student needs.

Theme 3 | Accessible Support

6 **Streamline and proactively communicate the range of support services offered by the University of Exeter, especially wellbeing and budgeting advice.**

Students face a range of financial pressures, from hidden costs to rent, bills, and food, yet many are unaware of where to access support, find current services disjointed, or are unaware of what processes and outcomes to expect when contacting a service. The University should work with the Guild to review, consolidate, and clearly communicate support services, ensuring information easy to navigate and is accessible wherever a student might be.

7 **Develop and improve the visibility of Peer-Support Programs offered by the University.**

Students value peer support but are often unaware of existing mentorship programs, find them underdeveloped for their course, or see ad-hoc support primarily targeted towards first year students. The University should improve promotion, tailor schemes to course-specific needs where they are underdeveloped, and involve

students in their design to ensure mentorship is meaningful, accessible, and embedded in the student experience.

8 **Collaborate with students to develop a single online platform for housing listings, reviews, and up-to-date Exeter housing information.**

First year and PGT students spend their time *Settling In* stressed about finding housing. Most students, especially second and third year students, are unaware of their rights as tenants. The new Renter's Rights Bill, effective 1 May 2026, is set to alter the already costly Exeter student housing market in several ways.

The University, with consultation from Guild leaders and staff, should work to improve and promote a single housing platform across campuses, offering up-to-date renters rights information and student accommodation reviews.

Theme 4 | Up-to-Date and Accessible Teaching

9 **Communicate accountability mechanisms to ensure real action on module and teaching feedback is taken.**

With module feedback often acted on only after the term ends, students are left uncertain whether their concerns are heard, particularly when the year below faces similar issues including outdate slides and poor lecturing. The University should require module leads to clearly communicate how feedback is reviewed, with students such as Department Officers, and implemented ensuring students see the impact of their input while they may still be impacted by it.

10 **Embed transition support and upskilling for all year groups into students' timetables and courses.**

Students, particularly in their final year, report an information gap between themselves and lecturers, with teaching sometimes assuming too much prior knowledge or, conversely, overexplaining basic concepts. This also affects skills development, with some students needing additional support in academic writing, referencing, or other discipline-specific skills. The University should continue to consult with students on how to embed transition support and targeted upskilling opportunities into timetables and courses across all year groups to ensure students are equipped to meet academic expectations and maximise their learning.

11 Embed and expand opportunities for students to engage with research staff in their academic experience.

While some lecturers already teach modules aligned with their specialisations, students noted that the breadth of material in first and second year courses limited how much time they had to discuss new research and concepts. Students want lecturers and postgraduate teaching assistants to share what excites them about their subject, including discussing their own research and referencing papers they have authored during class, and have plenty of opportunities to attend optional lecturers/workshops outside of class.

Theme 5 | Career Support

12 Integrate industry experience and project-based opportunities across and between departments to build relevant skills, especially in creative fields.

Students towards the end of their degree are more likely to believe their course won't prepare them for employment in the future. This is especially true for those in creative fields. Students want to see the university leverage its reputation and relevant industry networks to embed employability experience into the academic experience and develop project-based opportunities to put their learning into practice.

13 Expand the current availability of career support services to provide tailored advice on individual career goals and reduce the barriers to entry.

Students value Career Zone resources but want more accessible, tailored guidance that pushes them towards their specific career goals that are relevant to departments. This includes increasing capacity for personalised support, such as expanding the Career Mentor Scheme, offering industry-specific CV and assessment centre advice, and providing guidance aligned with different career paths, while reducing the time and effort required to access these resources. This is particularly needed for international students who should be informed on their rights and options post-graduation. Students also want the ability to participate and develop skills for future research and industry careers.

14 Offer more proactive guidance on securing part-time, flexible, or online work, especially for international students.

While students struggle to manage their time, many need part-time work to cover living costs, and the search can be demoralising without guidance. Visa restrictions and limited flexible opportunities exacerbate challenges for international students, often leaving them stressed and in uncertain. University communications should provide proactive guidance on securing part-time, flexible, or online work that fits around study commitments and financial needs.

Guild Recommendations

Theme 1 | Settling In and Belonging

1 Continue to innovate and improve the provision of Guild events, activities and initiatives to foster long-term belonging, whether on or off campus.

We want to remove barriers to students being able to build connections and belonging. To do this we believe that co-designing to improve relevancy and tailoring low cost, low barrier activities (e.g. Give it a Go) is part of the solution. Moreover, in developing our training and support for student leaders will improve inclusion for societies and clubs, and therefore enhance student-led belonging with peers.

2 Increase collaboration with the Athletic Union (AU) throughout the year to ensure the equitable provision of casual and inclusive events.

Although the Guild has expanded "Welcome Week" into a longer "Welcome Period," many students who arrive late or miss the initial week report challenges in getting involved due to a lack of flexible, beginner-friendly opportunities. This issue is particularly pronounced for students interested in sports societies, who feel they have missed their chance to join. To address this, the Guild should continue collaborating with the AU to provide ongoing, accessible opportunities that foster student belonging throughout the academic year.

For more information on student feedback on Welcome Week, see our Welcome Week Report (2025).

3 Strengthen the promotion of opportunities for students to get involved in the local community beyond the University.

Fourth-year students often report a reduced sense of belonging, particularly as friendship groups change following placements or years abroad. Other students seek opportunities beyond the University that better fit their schedules. Strengthening connections with local organisations and government can support students settling into Exeter as a place and help returning students maintain a sense of belonging.

4 Collaborate with University departments and Department Officers to strengthen course-level belonging by creating more opportunities for students on the same course to connect.

Students have expressed a greater desire to connect with others on their course outside of their immediate timetabled studies. The University should work with students and Department Officers at the Guild to co-design course-based community building, with potential approaches including low-pressure, subsidised social opportunities, dedicated study spaces, and regular timetabled casual events or skills workshops embedded into academic life.

5 Empower St Luke's students to develop their community and create relevant and tailored opportunities for belonging.

Despite more events on St Luke's campus, long commutes to Streatham leave students feeling isolated from main campus activities. In the short term, the Guild should work with St Luke's department reps to deliver a wider range of fun, engaging events and pop-ups, consulting on timing and attractions, with the new student representation structure in mind to support this. In the long term, the Guild should support St Luke's students to growth and develop societies on St Luke's.

Theme 2 | Balancing Responsibilities and Workload

6 Informing and empowering students with knowledge on workers' rights and ensuring the Guild maintains the level of student jobs it offers.

Students with part-time jobs or placements face additional time-management challenges due to employer schedules and minimum hours. Those seeking work, particularly international students and postgraduate teaching assistants (PTAs), may also lack clear information about their rights as students and employees.

With changes to the Employment Rights Bill expected before Christmas, the Guild should understand and communicate the impact on students, empower them to

address employment issues, and continue offering flexible student jobs while encouraging the University to do the same.

Theme 3 | Accessible Support

7   **Proactively communicate students' current and new rights as renters, especially with the new Renter's Rights bill.**

New students struggle *Settling In* partly because they are stressed about finding housing. Current students, especially those in difficult housing situations, are at times unaware of their rights as tenants. The new Renter's Rights Bill, effective 1 May 2026, is set to alter the already costly Exeter student housing market in several ways.

The Guild should therefore update its own knowledge on renter's rights, proactively communicate these changes to students, provide guidance for dealing with the impact, and be prepared for market shifts expected to occur over the next few years.

8   **Lobby the local council and bus services for low-cost transportation connecting major student locations.**

St. Luke's students incur additional costs to building belonging on Streatham campus, both in terms of money and time. Many students seek better general connectivity between student hubs to quickly reach more affordable food and housing options. The Guild should therefore advocate for safe and improved bus services and ensure students can easily, by public transport, access low cost supermarkets, such as Lidl and Aldi.

Appendix

Appendix A : Demographics

The table below outlines the survey sample size alongside the university's total population, broken down by demographic group. Percentages represent the relative share of students in each category within the survey sample and within the university population. For example, there are 2282 students aged 20 or under in the survey's sample, which is 54.4% of the total sample size.

Category	Survey Sample	University Population
Age		
20 or under	2282 (54.4%)	14070 (38.8%)
21-30	1625 (38.8%)	16148 (44.5%)
31-40	177 (4.22%)	3231 (8.90%)
41-50	81 (1.93%)	1938 (5.34%)
51-60	17 (0.41%)	719 (1.98%)
61-70	5 (0.12%)	155 (0.43%)
71 or above	3 (0.07%)	26 (0.07%)
Campus		
Streatham	3371 (80.4%)	29878 (82.3%)
St Luke's	816 (19.5%)	5688 (15.68%)
Unknown	3 (0.07%)	721 (1.99%)
Disability Status		
No known disability	2837 (67.7%)	25896 (71.4%)
A disability or impairment	804 (19.2%)	7551 (20.8%)
Two or more disabilities	249 (5.94%)	2119 (5.84%)
Prefer not to say	84 (2.00%)	721 (1.99%)
Domicile		
Home	3219 (76.8%)	27428 (75.6%)
International	912 (21.8%)	7907 (21.8%)
Other	59 (1.41%)	952 (2.62%)
Ethnicity		
Arab	61 (1.46%)	594 (1.64%)
Asian	813 (19.4%)	7047 (19.42%)
Black	131 (3.13%)	1096 (3.02%)
Mixed	276 (6.58%)	1914 (5.27%)
Not Given (Home)	0 (0.00%)	2 (0.01%)
Not Given (International)	60 (1.43%)	504 (1.39%)
Other	50 (1.19%)	380 (1.05%)
Unknown	15 (0.36%)	797 (2.20%)
White	2784 (66.41%)	23953 (66.0%)
Faculty		
Environment, Science, and Economy (ESS)	1543 (36.8%)	14955 (41.2%)

Health and Life Sciences (HLS)	1223 (29.2%)	8937 (24.6%)
Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS)	1347 (32.13%)	11334 (31.2%)
INTO	73 (1.74%)	331 (0.91%)
Unknown	3 (0.07%)	720 (1.98%)
Gender		
Female	2640 (63.0%)	19136 (52.7%)
Male	1470 (35.07%)	15799 (43.5%)
Other	32 (0.76%)	210 (0.58%)
Prefer Not to Say	40 (0.95%)	287 (1.07%)
Unknown	8 (0.19%)	755 (2.08%)
Mode of Study		
Full Time	3833 (91.44%)	27583 (76.0%)
Full Time (Distance)	11 (0.26%)	102 (0.28%)
Full Time (Industry Placement)	19 (0.45%)	537 (1.48%)
Full Time (Studying Abroad)	20 (0.48%)	299 (0.82%)
Other	75 (1.79%)	1585 (4.37%)
Part Time	177 (4.22%)	5024 (13.85%)
Part Time (Distance)	55 (1.31%)	1155 (3.18%)
Study Level		
Year 0	7 (0.17%)	35 (0.10%)
Year 1	1620 (38.7%)	8446 (23.3%)
Year 2	809 (19.3%)	6703 (18.5%)
Year 3	571 (13.6%)	6781 (18.7%)
Year 4	226 (5.39%)	1710 (4.71%)
Year 5	38 (0.91%)	290 (0.80%)
PGT	649 (15.5%)	8814 (24.29%)
PGR	203 (4.84%)	2384 (6.57%)
Unknown	67 (1.60%)	1124 (3.10%)

Appendix B: Questions and Responses

Multiple Choice Questions and Responses

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
How are you settling into university life this term?				
Very Well	*Well*	*Neutral*	*Poorly*	*Very Poorly*
To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging at university?				
Strongly agree	*Somewhat agree*	*Neither agree nor disagree*	*Somewhat disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
Do you feel you are able to get involved in things outside of your studies?				
Yes, I'm actively involved and it's manageable.	*Yes, but it's hard to keep everything balanced.*	*Yes, but I choose not to participate right now.*	*No, my schedule or commitments prevent it.*	*No, I'm not interested in things outside of my studies.*
How satisfied are you with the quality of teaching on your course?				
Extremely satisfied	*Satisfied*	*Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*	*Dissatisfied*	*Extremely dissatisfied*
How satisfied are you with the content on your course?				
Extremely satisfied	*Satisfied*	*Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*	*Dissatisfied*	*Extremely dissatisfied*
To what extent do you feel your course will effectively prepare you for employment in the future?				
Strongly agree	*Somewhat agree*	*Neither agree nor disagree*	*Somewhat disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
Do you feel like you can access the university's support services if needed?				
Yes, I know where everything is and who to contact.	*Yes, I'm aware of some available services and how to access them.*	*Yes, but I only have a general sense of how to access them.*	*No, I would need to do some research first.*	*No, it's unclear where I would even start.*

Free Response Questions

1. Are there any challenges you are facing as a student right now?

2. What one change would you like to see to improve your student experience?

3. What is one thing that is going well on your course?

4. What is one thing that isn't going well on your course?