



Mental Health Report

December 2025

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Referencing

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Introduction

Survey Superheroes gathers monthly feedback from 1000 student volunteers regarding their opinions on a variety of pre-planned and developing issues in exchange for financial compensation.

The Student's Guild Insight Team uses this feedback to influence decisions by the University, inform our projects and empower students to create change for their community.

One of our key topics for December was Mental Health. We wanted to find out:

1. How are our students feeling and what impacts their mental health?
2. How do our students practice self-care?
3. Where do our students go for support and what prevents them from accessing it?

This report will analyse the feedback given in relation to the above questions and provide recommendations for both the Student's Guild and the University of Exeter to action in order to improve support for students' mental health.

All text in quotations marks are comments provided by students showing their individual thoughts and opinions; they have been included as they largely reflect the quotes within the same topic.

Summary

Generally, students at Exeter often feel happy, proud and accomplished. Nearly half of students often feel sad and 85% report feeling burnt out sometimes, often or always (Figure. 1). Over half of students currently rate their mental health as good and 20% currently feel that their mental health is poor (Figure. 2). For what is straining mental health, we saw assignments, coursework and exams as major strainers from an academic point of view (Figure. 4) and that employment, accommodation and finance are straining students in their personal lives (Figure. 6). When their mental health is slipping students often feel less motivated and productive and find it harder to concentrate on their academic responsibilities (Figure. 8). We also see that students socialise less and isolate themselves when their mental health isn't as good as it can be (Figure. 9).

Lots of students partake in activities for self-care, this includes spending time with friends and family, walking outdoors and cooking and eating well (Figure. 10). 90% of students feel that self-care activities have a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing (Figure. 12). Generally, students feel that the university cares about their wellbeing, but we saw more mixed responses to feeling that the university is promoting a healthy balance between their academic

and social lives (Figure. 13). Students feel that the university is giving them too high of a workload and have poor signposting to wellbeing support (Figure. 14).

Students rely upon themselves for wellbeing support as well as friends and family, less frequently they rely on professional services. We also saw a small percentage of students relying on AI for wellbeing support (Figure. 15). Most students said they would be open to reaching out to a professional service, with 29% already having done so (Figure. 17). 22% of students were either unsure or knew they wouldn't reach out to a professional service for support (Figure. 17). From the university and the Guild, students wanted to see more support, more information on current services and more options for engaging with wellbeing support (Figure. 19).

Analysis

1. How are our students feeling and what impacts their mental health?

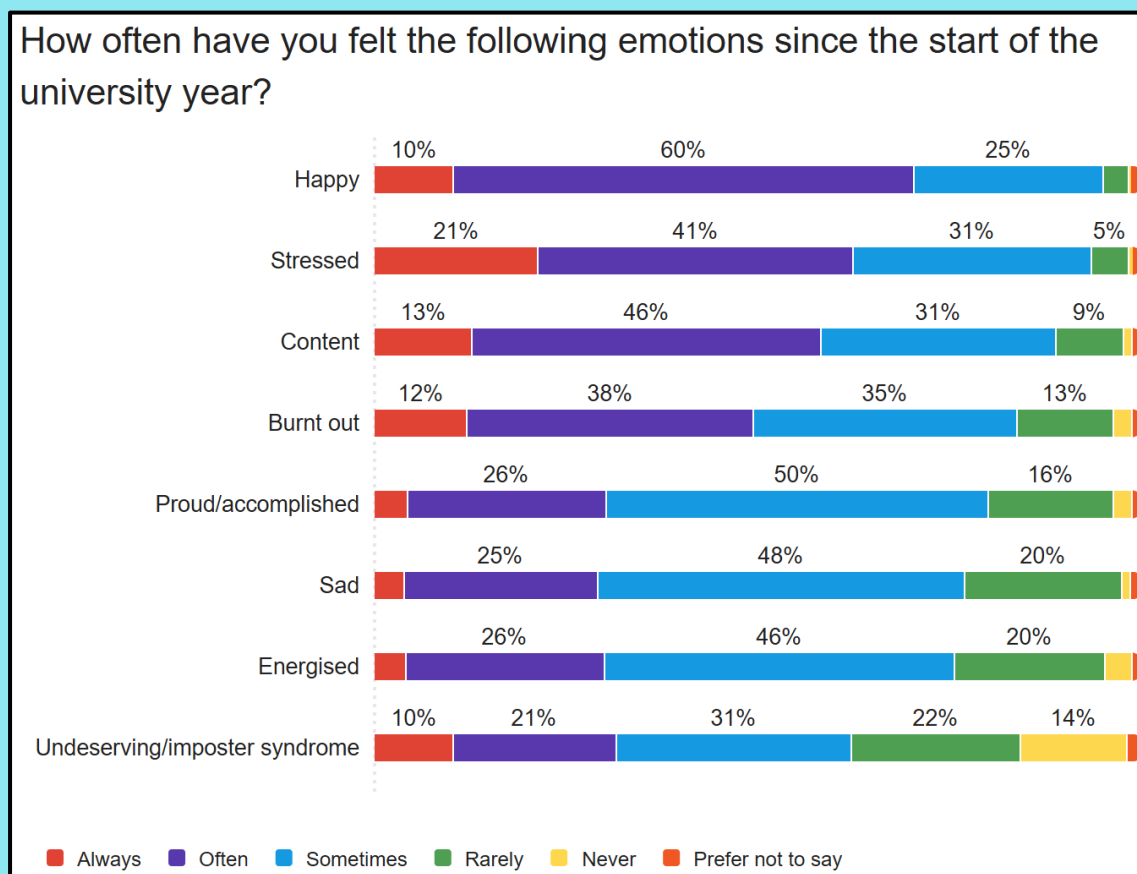


Figure 1 - How often have you felt the following emotions since the start of the university year?

Positively, 60% of our students feel happy often and 10% always feel happy. 50% of students only sometimes feel proud or accomplished, 16% rarely feel proud or accomplished and 26% of students often feel this way. This minority feeling proud or accomplished suggests there is work to be done to encourage students to celebrate their achievements. 48% of students sometimes feel sad and 25% of

students often feel sad. When asked how often they feel imposter syndrome responses become mixed with 22% saying they rarely feel this way and 21% saying they often feel imposter syndrome. More concerning is that 85% of students said they sometimes, often or always feel burnt out (Figure 1). This statistic should be of particular importance to both the university and the Guild.

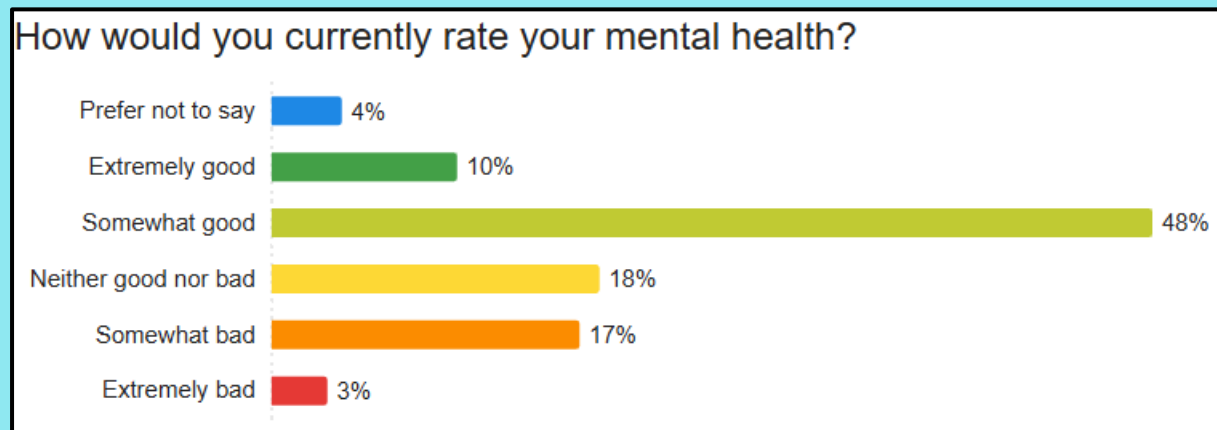


Figure 2 - How would you currently rate your mental health?

58% of students currently rate their mental health as good. 20% currently rate their mental health as bad and 18% of students feel it is neither good nor bad (Fig. 2).

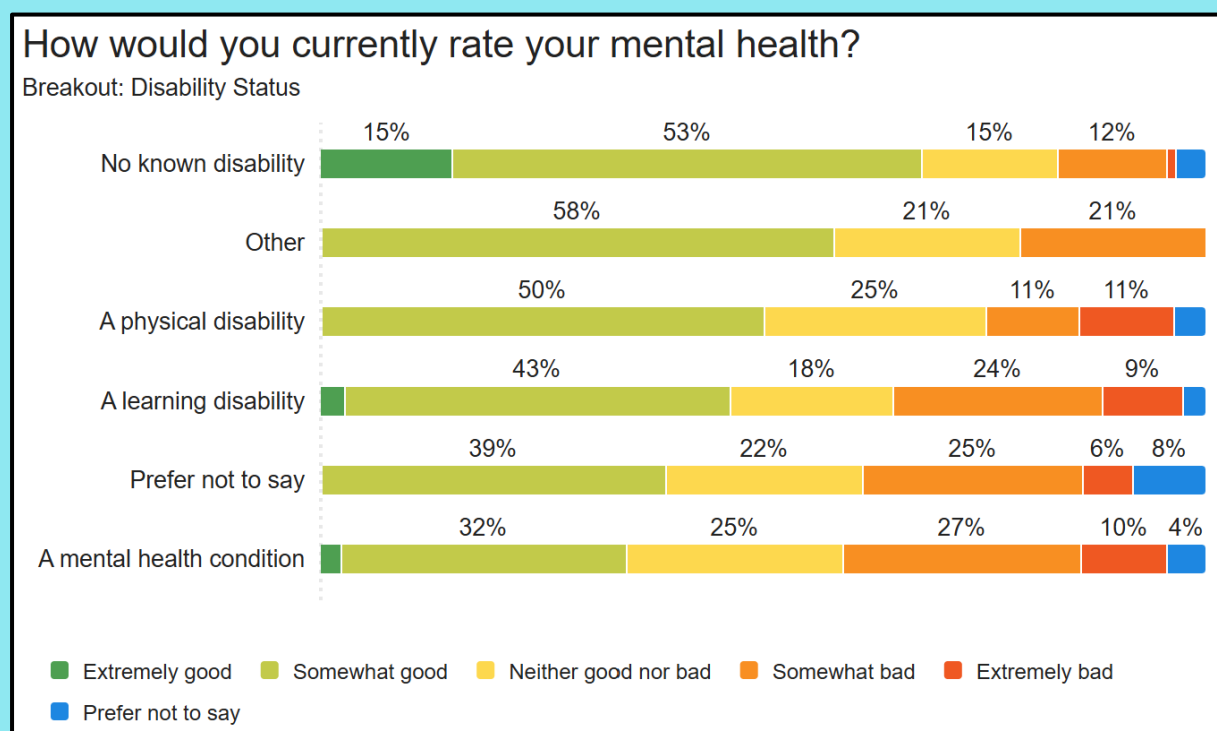


Figure 3 - How would you currently rate your mental health? (Breakout: Disability Status)

When we look at this by disability status, we can see that students with no known disability status report having the most positive and least negative mental health (68% and 13% respectively). They are also the only student group to show more positive and less negative health than the overall average (Fig. 2).

Conversely, students with a mental health condition report both the lowest positive and the highest negative mental health (34% and 37% respectively) (Fig. 3).

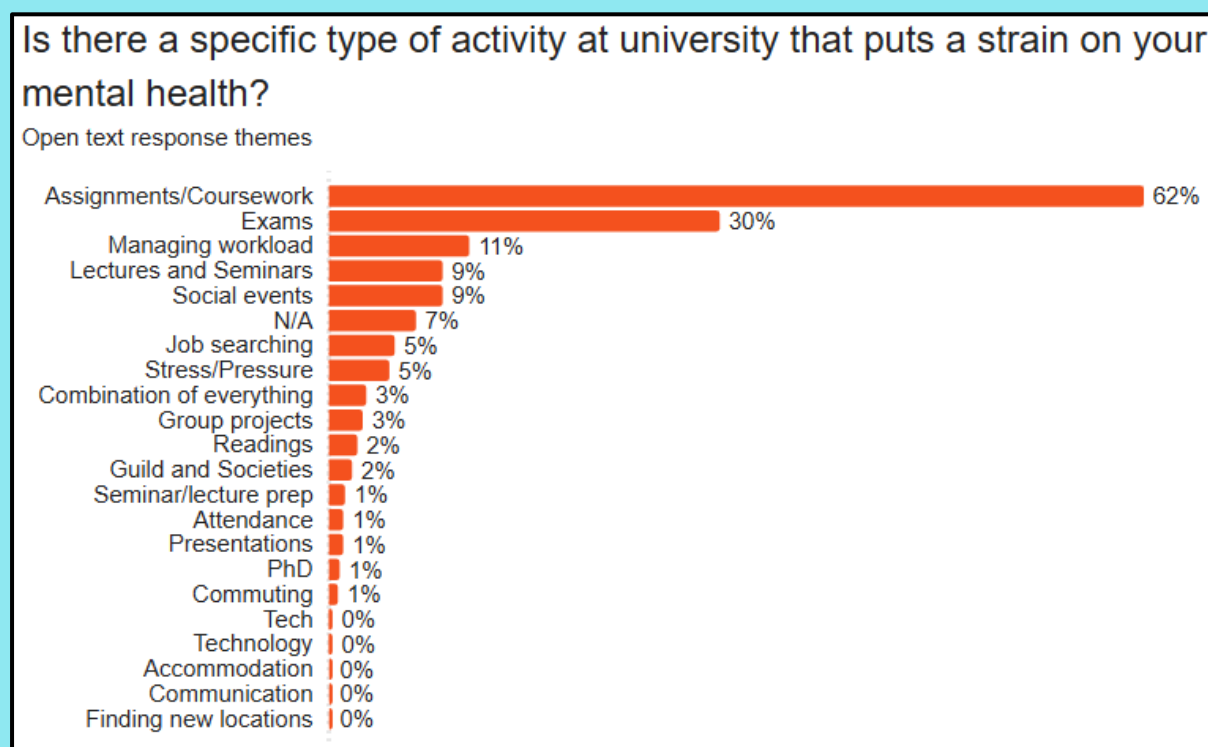


Figure 4 - Is there a specific type of activity that puts a strain on your mental health? (Open text response themes)

When asked what university activities puts a strain on student's mental health 62% of responses mentioned assignments (Fig. 4). Often these comments related to feeling like deadlines all occur at once and are not evenly spaced across the year.

"Summative assignment deadlines, exams, but mainly an unnecessary amount of formative work due every week on top of everything else" ~ Year 3, HLS student

"Sometimes assignments, but mostly when they are lots due in around the same time" ~ Masters, HASS student

"Assignments when the brief is not clear and students do not understand what they're doing" ~ Year 2, HLS Student

On a similar theme, the next most mentioned topic that strains student mental health is exams, with 30% of responses mentioning this (Fig. 4).

"Exams as they are after Christmas break which makes revision challenging or makes it difficult to relax" ~ Year 4, HLS Student

"Any type of exam! However, the timed 24 hour open-book exam seemed like a good concept when I first signed up to the module but ended up being really hard and overwhelming..." ~ Year 4, HASS Student

"exams (particularly when the whole module grade relies on them)" ~ Year 3, ESE Student

Students also find managing their workload straining for their mental health, 11% of responses mentioned this theme. Responses mentioned struggling to find a balance between their academics alongside social events or searching for a job/internship (Fig. 4).

"The mental stress of juggling all my assessments with applications and putting work on my CV" ~ Year 2, HASS Student

"It is always stressful when a lot of assignments are due at the same time as it can be hard to write multiple essays at once and balance these deadlines. Sometimes, it's hard to start early to give yourself the time you need to write multiple essays when you haven't even been taught the content yet." ~ Year 4, HASS Student

"The rush up to Christmas with need to revise for exams but also complete the coursework in good time and also balancing the social aspect and doing fun things to ease the stress" ~ Other, HLS Student

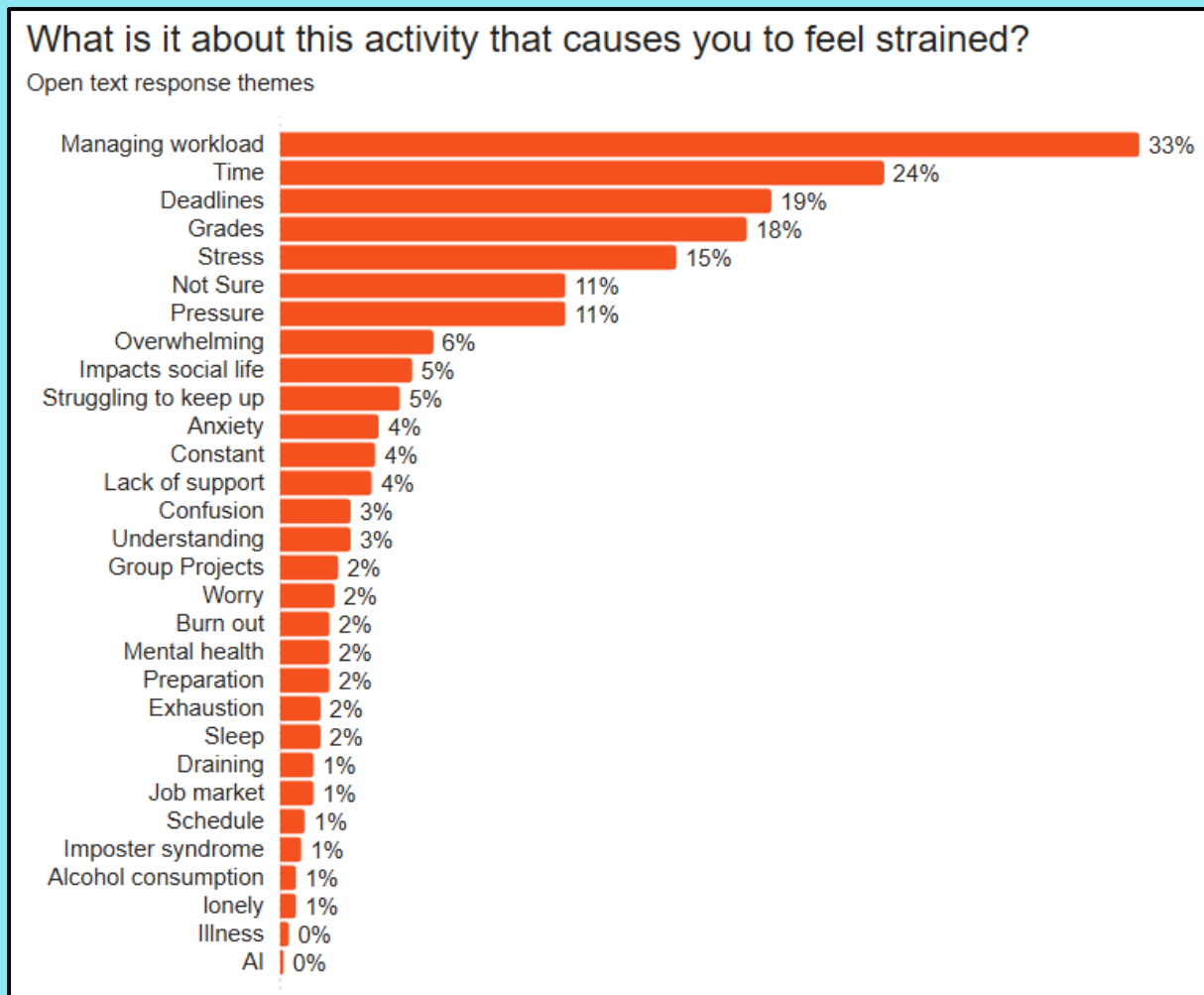


Figure 5 - What is it about this activity that causes you to feel strained?

We then asked students what it was about the activities in Figure 3 that causes them to feel strained. 33% of responses mentioned that it was managing the workload (Fig. 5).

“Balancing revision for exams over holidays whilst also working” ~ Year 1, ESE student

“The amount of work I have to do and hours I have to spend on it - I feel like I can't fit it in with my social life and work” ~ Year 3, HASS student

“Feeling like I have no time to work on my coursework essays because I can't stay on top of my weekly readings etc. and then having to decide between interacting properly with the module or just focusing on the area I am writing my essay on.” ~ Year 3, HASS student

24% of responses mentioned that the time aspect was what led to the strain on their mental health (Fig. 5).

“Very time pressured with so much reading and multiple modules to balance”
~ Year 1, HASS student

“I guess there is a lot of planning to make sure everything is done on time, also less time to rest” ~ Masters, HASS Student

“spend a lot of time on them so usual impacts my sleep making me stressed and tired” ~ Year 3, ESE student

Students also mentioned deadlines (19%) and grades (18%). Students often mentioned that they felt deadlines were very close together (Fig. 5).

“They are usually around the same time e.g around reading week or around last week of term, assignments are fine its having so many deadlines at once”
~ Year 3, HASS student

“Deadlines are all clustered together” ~ Year 3 HASS student

“Pressure to do well- all the work for a module on 1 exam” ~ Other, ESE student

“I want to do well and pass. I would feel very disappointed if i failed.” ~ Year 1, ESE student

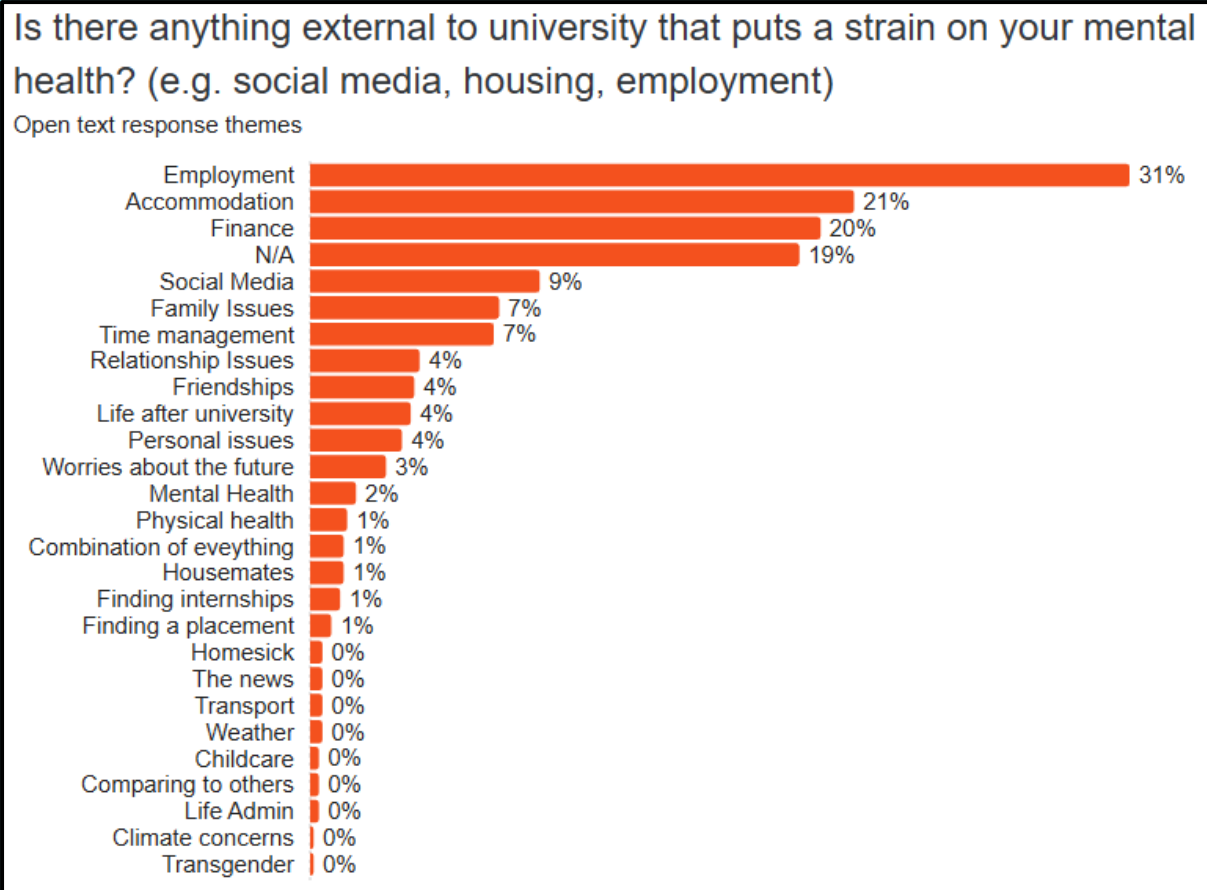


Figure 6 - Is there anything external to university that puts a strain on your mental health? (e.g. social media, housing, employment) – open text response themes

Students were asked if there is anything external to university that they feel is putting a strain on their mental health. With 31% of responses, employment was the most commonly occurring theme. These concerns covered both employment after university and current work alongside studies (Fig. 6).

“Employment thoughts and post graduate job opportunities and lack of part time accessibility” ~ Masters, HLS student

“Employment opportunities are very low” ~ Year 1, ESE student

“Employment - having to handle finances, work a part-time job, and try look for grad roles” ~ Year 3, ESE student

21% of responses mentioned accommodation as straining for mental health (Fig. 6).

"Looking for house for next year" ~ Year 2, HASS student

"Housing costs have been straining. I have had to find work to try and have just a little to live off." ~ Year 1, HASS student

"Housing definitely has done throughout uni. We had significant problems with our landlord in 2nd year and had to be in contact with the local council. I felt as if I didn't have much support or guidance with something like this as was non academic. Also felt unsure when having to arrange all of my own utility bills for the first time." Masters, ESE student

Finances were also frequently mentioned with 20% of responses (Fig. 6).

"Financial worries" ~ Year 2, HASS student

"Increasing cost of living" ~ Masters, ESE student

"I worry about my finances and try to budget, it's not major but it's something I'm always conscious of and do feel a bit like I'm missing out when I cannot afford to go to something that other people I know are going to." ~ Year 1, HLS student

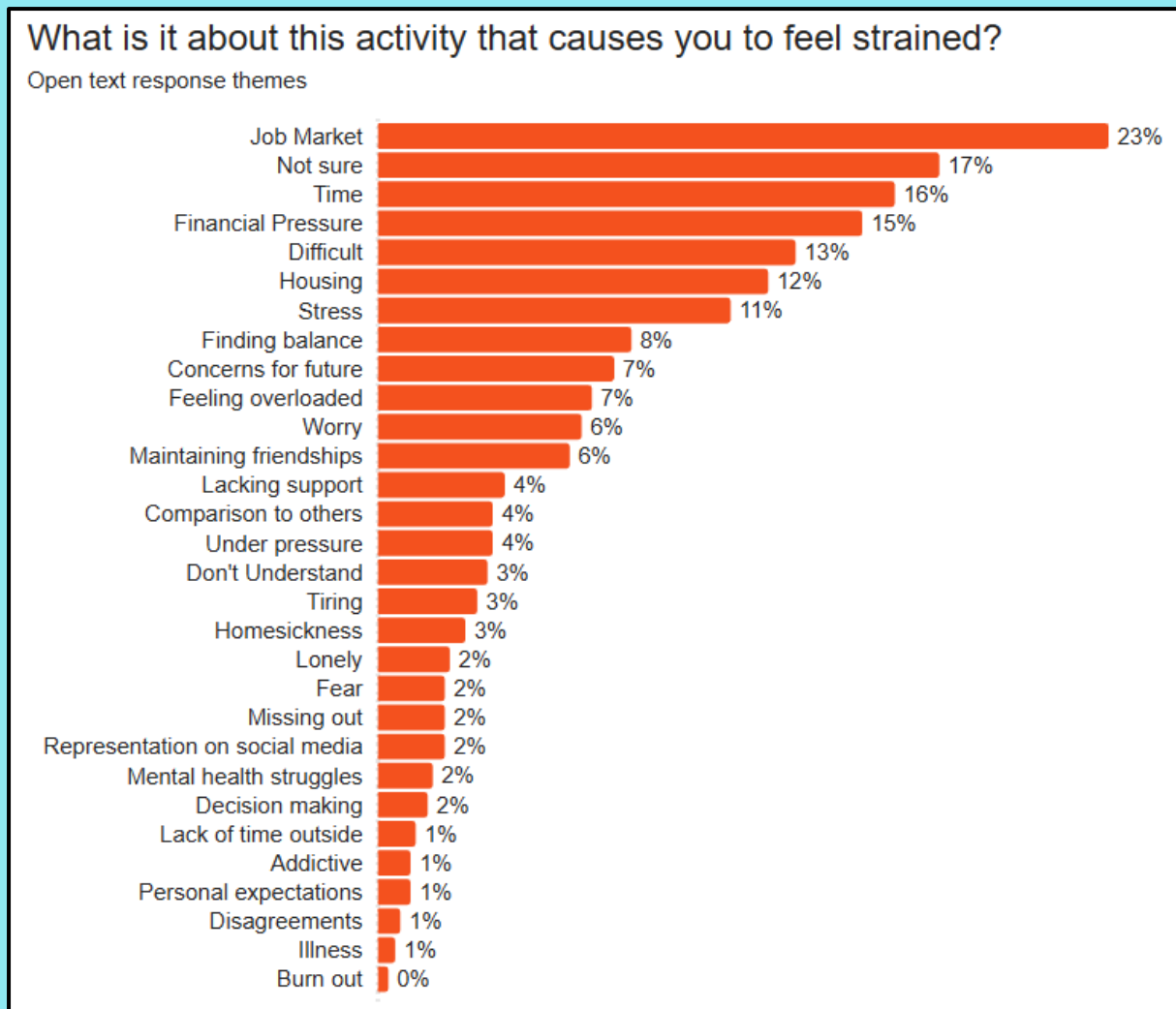


Figure 7 - What is it about this activity that causes you to feel strained? - Open text response themes

We then asked students to elaborate on why these things caused them to feel strained. Most frequently mentioned was the current job market at 23%, with students saying that either being unable to find a job to help them financially, managing a job alongside university study, or a lack of graduate prospects were all causing them distress (Fig. 7).

“Employment - can’t get work easily for causal/ little hours to comply with my uni life.” ~ Year 2, ESE student

“Employment - having to handle finances, work a part-time job, and try look for grad roles.” ~ Year 3, ESE

“Can make uni feel pointless as there doesn't seem to be any realistic job opportunities in the sector I am interested in, and its a genuine concern that being at university may not help me in the future and just cause me debt.” ~ Year 2, HASS student

17% said they weren't sure why certain things were causing them to feel stressed (Fig. 6).

16% of responses mentioned time, specifically a lack of time to get everything they need to get done or a lack of time to switch off and take care of themselves (Fig. 6).

"I have to squeeze a lot of work into a short space of time and have to do one after the other which means I get burnt out and isolate myself, can't spent much time with friends, family, hobbies." ~ Year 3, HASS student

"It is often a combination of time pressure and a desire to do well. I can be a bit of a perfectionist, and I generally find having several big essays due at the same time very stressful. My course has a lot of personal work, as well as lectures, and one module in particular takes up a lot of my time. I sometimes have to sacrifice doing the required reading for other modules to get it done, and I've 'ad-lib'ed my way through more seminars than I would have liked to this term." ~ Year 2, HASS student

15% of responses mentioned feeling under financial pressure or concern surrounding finances (Fig. 6).

"Trying to balance financing uni life and food and doing work" ~ Year 1, HASS student

"It can be hard to balance money as a student as well as work vs social life" ~ Year 5, HLS student

"Cost of living is very expensive in the UK and especially in Exeter." ~ Year 4, HASS student

"Never feels like there is enough money for me to be financially stable" ~ Year 3, HASS student

When your mental health isn't as good as it could be, how does it impact your academic life?

Open text response themes

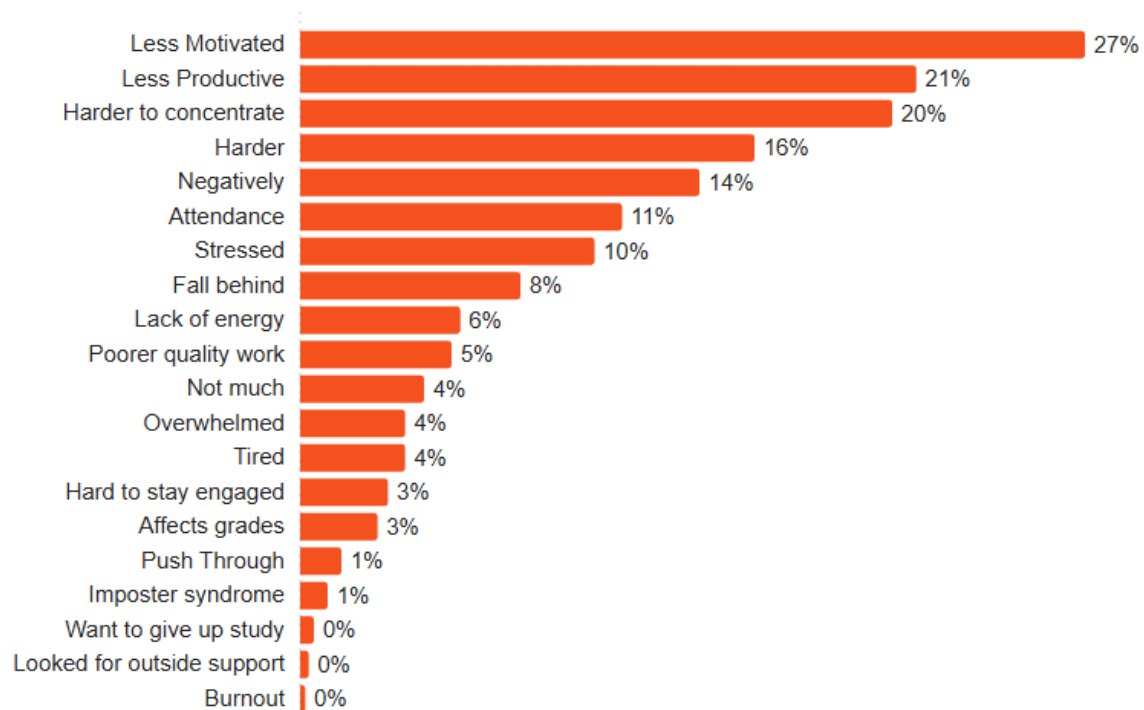


Figure 8 - when your mental health isn't as good as it could be, how does it impact your academic life?

When looking at the impact of poor mental health on academic life, we see a wide range of impacts. 27% of responses mentioned feeling less motivated.

"I lose motivation and focus" ~ Year 2, ESE student

"Lack of motivation to carry on with studying, imposter syndrome, worrying about bad grades" ~ Masters, HLS student

"It makes it harder to get the motivation to work and I just freeze" ~ Year 4, HASS student

21% of responses mention feeling less productive when their mental health isn't as good as it could be.

"Heavily, productivity drops and I skip some sessions" ~ Year 2, ESE student

"It causes me to procrastinate my academic tasks and prevents me from completing them, which creates a backlog of tasks." ~ Year 3, HLS student

"I was really down about a week ago and didn't get ANY work done, I couldn't get myself to do anything. Now I am frantically trying to catch up from that, bit annoying really." ~ Year 1, HASS student

20% of responses mention finding it harder to concentrate.

"Negatively as I feel like I can't focus on work." ~ Year 1, ESE student

"My university work suffers because I am burnt out and cannot concentrate" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"it becomes more of a struggle to focus on the task I'm doing, and my attendance slips" ~ Year 2, HASS student

More generally we saw 16% of students say poor mental health makes their academic life harder and 14% say it has a negative impact on their academic life.

"I feel more negative about my ability to work, I feel like an imposter, and I'm more unproductive" ~ Year 1, HASS student

"Makes it hard to study and work on assignments and ends in a spiral" ~ Masters, HASS student

"Makes completing work and staying motivated even more difficult. When it is difficult to do the day to day living tasks it is impossible to keep up/catch up with academic work." ~ Year 2, HASS student

When your mental health isn't as good as it could be, how does it impact your personal/social life?

Open text response themes

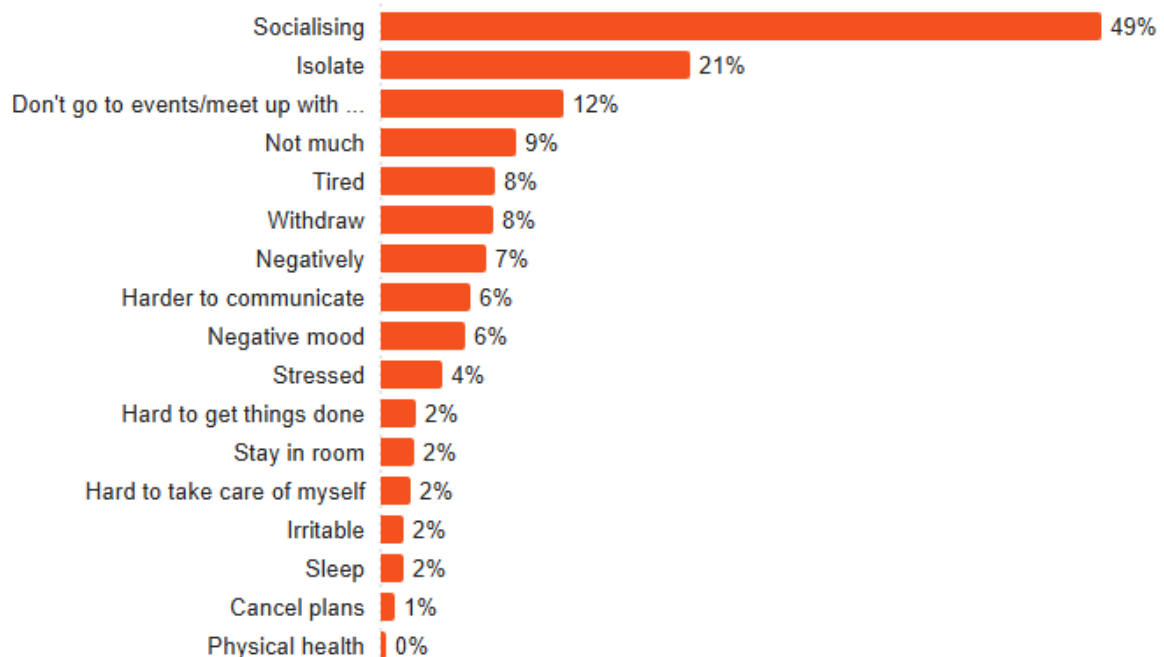


Figure 9 - When your mental health isn't as good as it could be, how does it impact your personal/social life?
- open text response themes

We asked student what impact their mental health can have on their personal and social lives (Figure. 9). Impacts ranged from socialising, to affecting sleep and communication.

Overwhelmingly the largest impact that students find is on socialising, with 49% of students mentioning this.

"Very negatively, I don't feel very social or chatty and can feel like you're not on the same level in terms of mood. So, tend to isolate and rest" ~ Year 4, HLS student

"Less keen to socialise and less content in social situations" ~ Year 3, HLS student

We also saw 21% of responses mentioning wanting to isolate themselves.

"I don't want to leave my room. I get so tired of other people and don't respond to messages, and I don't engage with people if I do have to go out. I'd prefer to be alone" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"I isolate myself and don't see my friends as much even though that would help me get through things" Year 3, HASS student

"I isolate. It really affects my social life because when I am feeling better, there is a distance between me and my loved ones because of my absence. I have to be so careful with my energy levels, but I can also be too careful and have perhaps lost some confidence." ~ Year 3, ESE student

12% of responses mention not wanting to go to events or meet up with people.

"I do less 'just for fun' activities because the limited energy has to be focused on studies, which often then makes my mental health worse" ~ Year 4, ESE student

"Leads me to not engage in society activities which I previously enjoyed and looked forward to." ~ Year 1, HLS student

"I'm much less likely to meet up with people, or spend time with others" ~ Year 1, HASS student

2. How do our students practice self-care?

Having explored the impact that poor mental health can have on student's lives, we were then interested to hear how students practice self-care to look after their mental health.

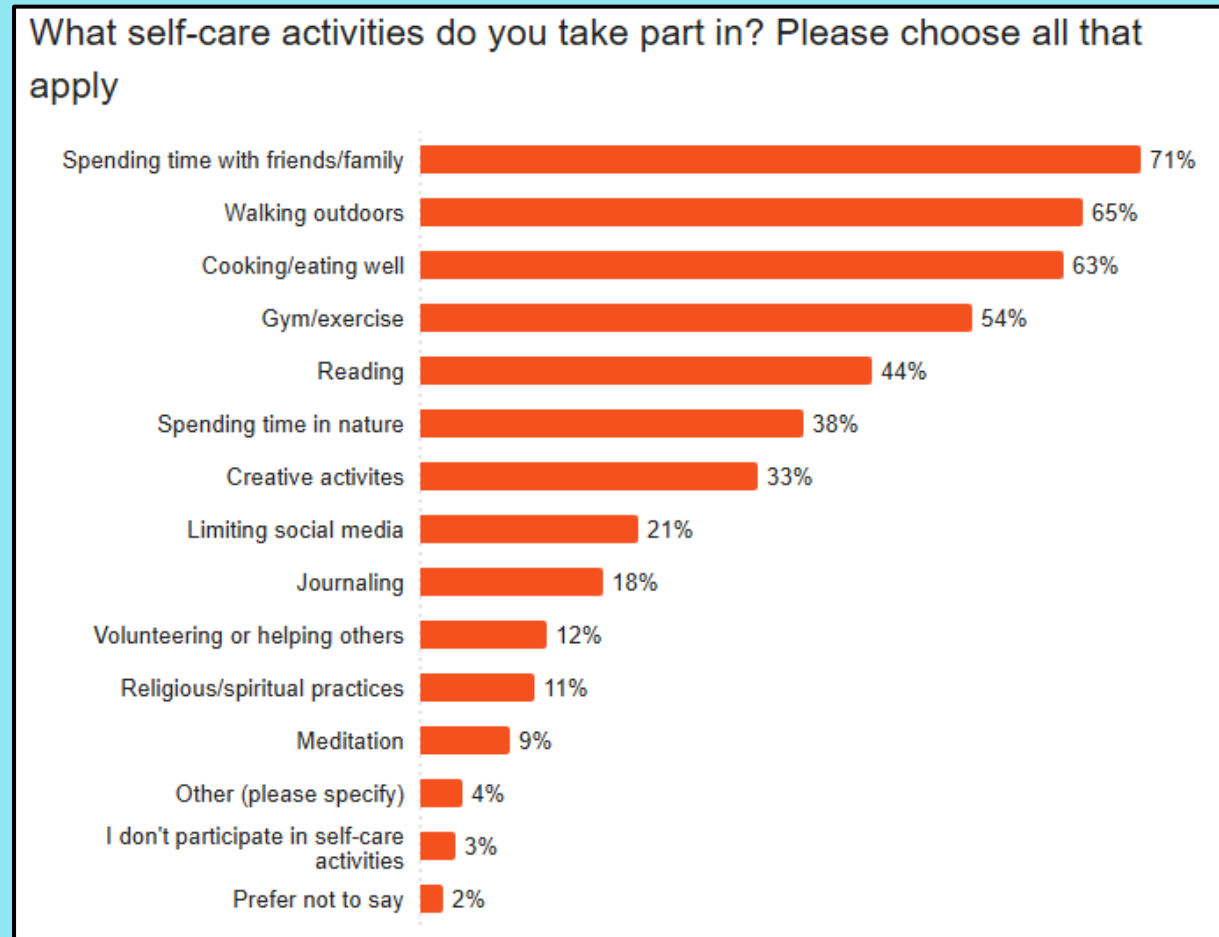


Figure 10 - what self-care activities do you take part in? Please choose all that apply

71% of students said they spend time with friends and family as a form of self-care. 65% said they walk outdoors. 63% of students said cooking and eating well is a form of self-care that they choose. 54% said they like to exercise or go to the gym, 44% said reading and 38% said spending time in nature. (Figure. 10). What we see in these responses is that a lot of students are prioritising spending time outside, moving their body and eating well.

What self-care activities do you take part in? Please choose all that apply

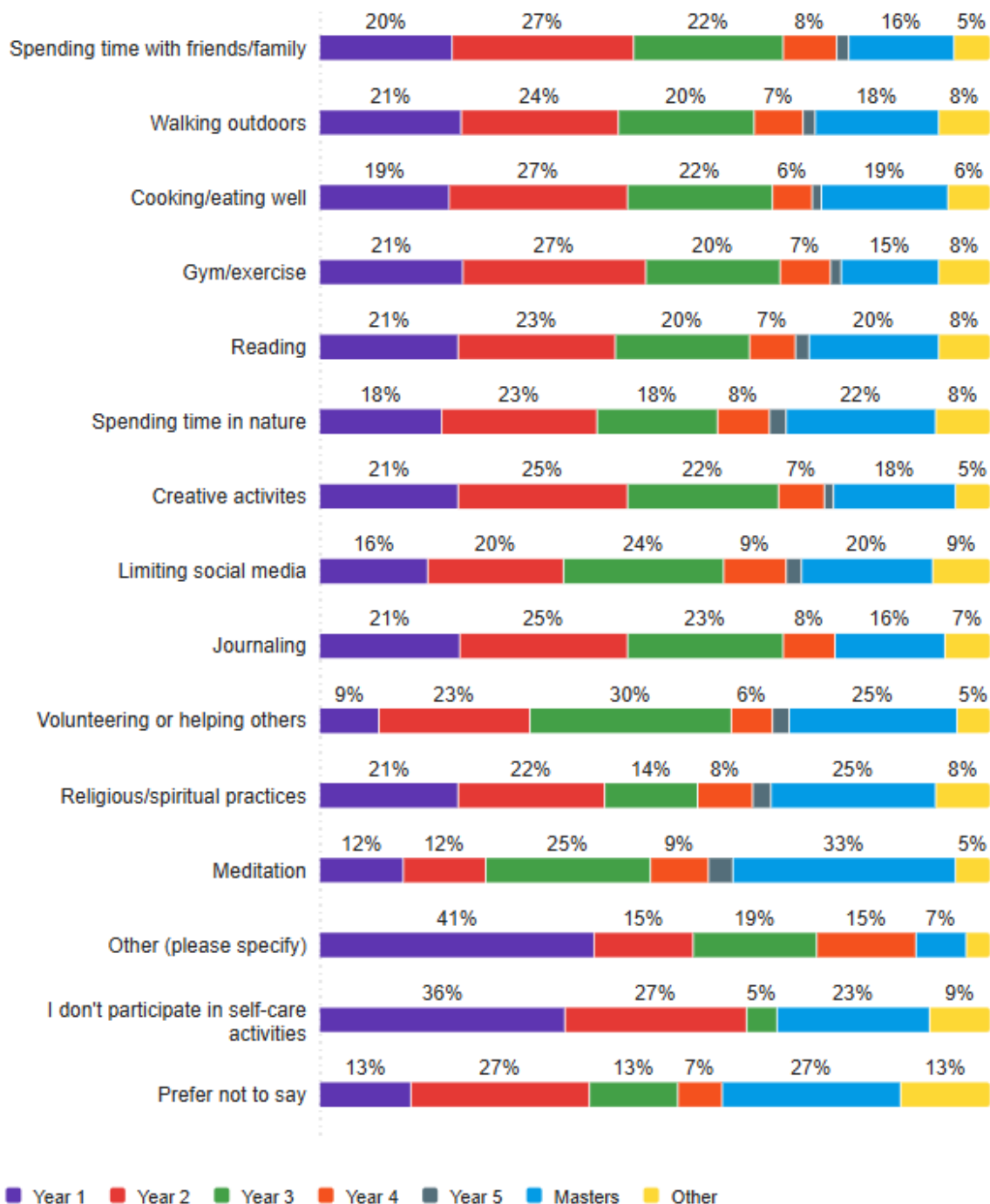


Figure 11 - what self-care activities do you take part in? Please choose all that apply - Breakout by year of study

Looking at self-care activities by year of study, generally we see a similar pattern, but with some differences. Volunteering and helping others seems to be more popular with Year 3 and Masters students, with only 9% of first years selecting this choice. Similarly, meditation is also more popular with Year 3 and Masters

students. Not participating in self-care activities is more likely to occur in earlier years of study with 36% of Year 1 students and 27% of Year 2 students. (Figure. 11)

Having looked at what it is that students do for self-care, we then wanted to see if students felt these activities had a meaningful impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

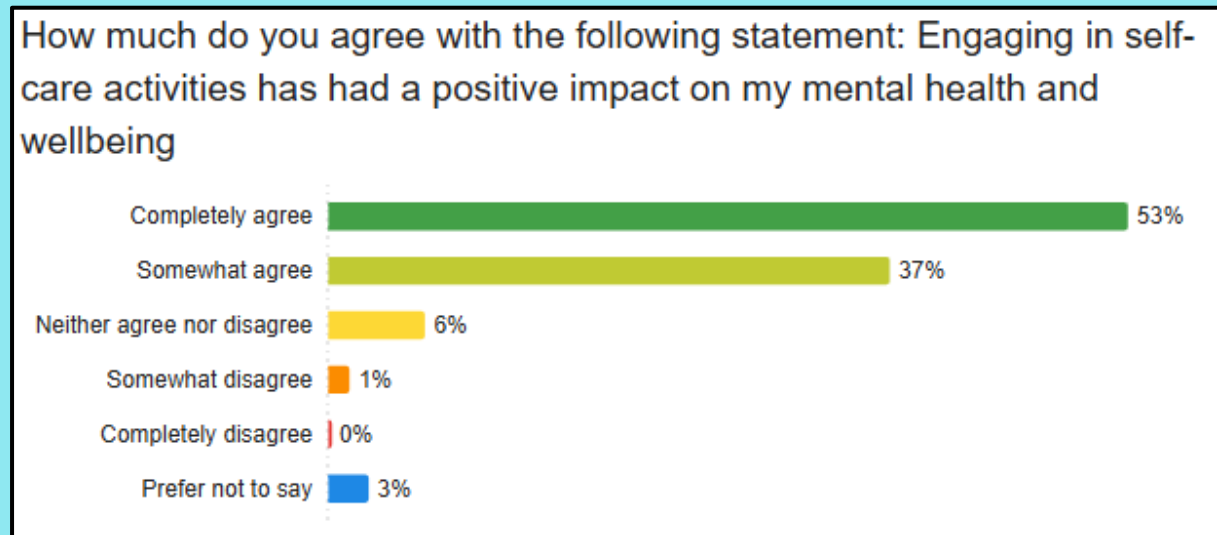


Figure 12 - How much do you agree with the following statement: engaging in self-care activities has a positive impact on my mental health and wellbeing

90% of students agreed with the statement that engaging in self-care activities has a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Interestingly, 6% neither agreed nor disagreed and 1% somewhat disagreed, suggesting that engaging in self-care is either not something that some of our students feel they need to do to maintain their mental health and wellbeing or that it is less effective for certain students (Figure. 12).

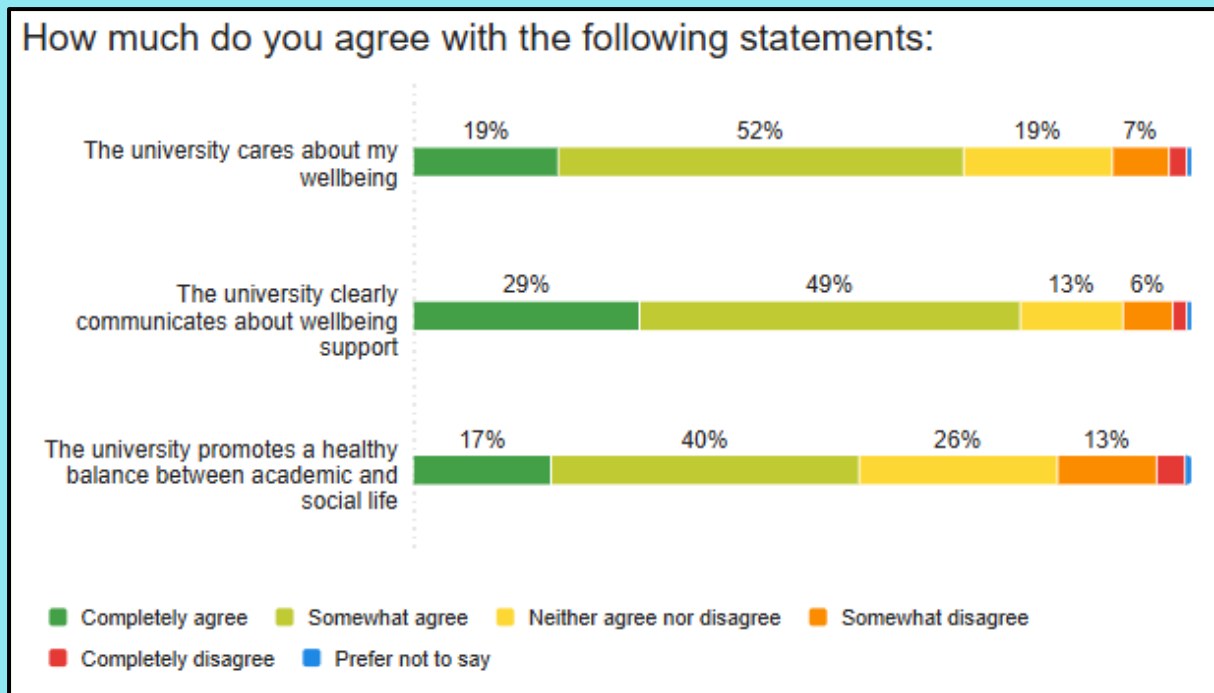


Figure 13 - How much do you agree with the following statements: the university cares about my wellbeing. The university clearly communicates about wellbeing support. The university promotes a healthy balance between academic and social life.

We asked students how much they agreed with statements related to the university and wellbeing (Figure. 13). For the first statement, “the university cares about my wellbeing”, we see 71% of students agree with this statement. 19% feel more neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing and only 9% disagreed with the statement. This shows that generally students do feel like the university cares about their wellbeing.

Next, students were shown the statement “the university clearly communicates about wellbeing support”. 78% of students agreed with this statement, 13% felt neutral and 8% disagreed. Demonstrating that students feel that wellbeing support is clearly communicated to them.

Finally, students were shown the statement “the university promotes a healthy balance between academic and social life”. Responses to this statement were less positive. 57% of students agreed with the statement, 26% felt neutral and 17% disagreed with the statement. These more mixed results suggest that there is work to do from the university to promote a healthy balance between academics and social lives.

You disagreed with some of the previous statements, can you tell us a little bit about why?

Open text response themes

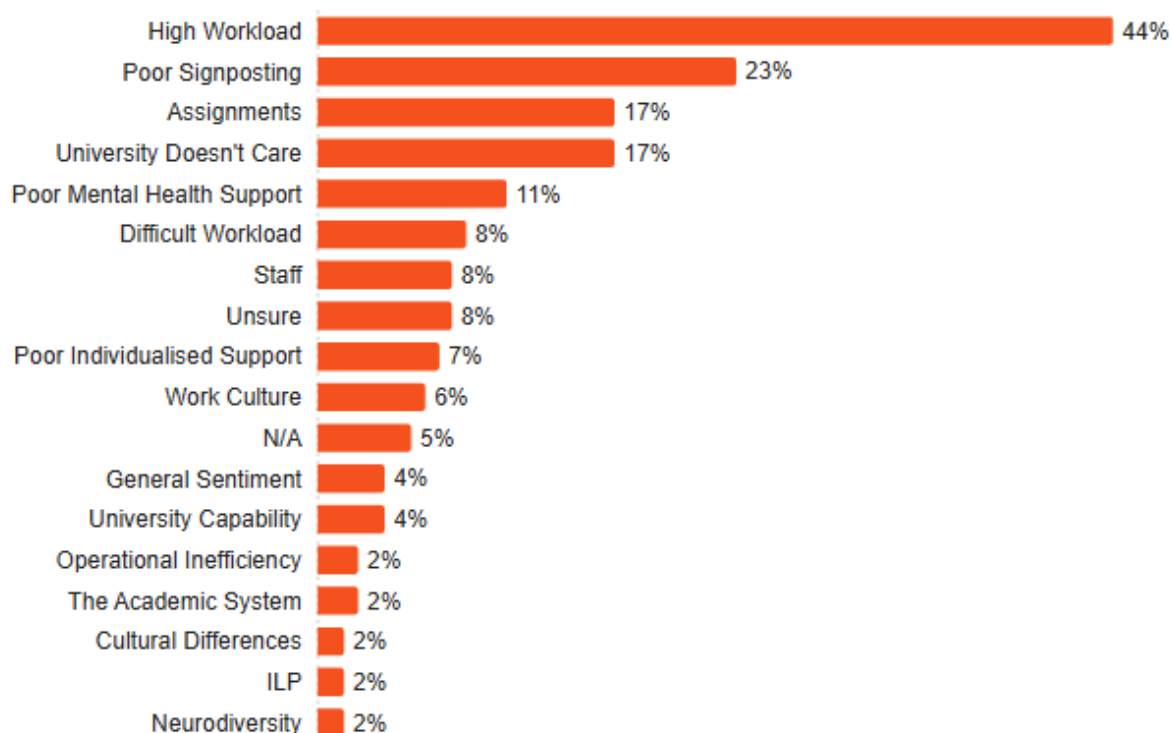


Figure 14 - You disagreed with some of the previous statements, can you tell us a little bit about why? - Open text response themes

Following on from the previous question, we asked those students who disagreed with at least one of the statements why they disagreed (Figure. 14). Many of our student respondents gave detailed answers to this question, in the interest of understanding the full picture, full responses have been included below rather than pulling smaller quotes.

The top reason students gave, with 44% of responses, was high workload.

"I just don't think you'd issue weekly formative work/ deadlines on top of summative assessments and exams at the same time if they had any concept of a students work load or responsibilities? I think modules are guilty of thinking they're the only module you attend at university and have a commitment or responsibility to" ~ Year 3, HLS student

"My course is particularly academically rigorous with a lot of assignments, and this doesn't always lend itself to a good work life balance" ~ Year 4, ESE student

"I disagreed with the university promoting a healthy balance between academic and social life. With the difficulty and workload in my degree, it makes it very hard to keep a healthy balance. There is almost always no time for anything when you have four ongoing coursework's due in the next two weeks at the end of the term. I love my degree (maths), but the work is never ending, and sometimes you just need a break, reading week is never really that great as the time is just spent catching up." ~ Year 3, ESE student

Following workload, 23% of students mentioned poor signposting.

"I can't remember a time where they as an institution have said unprovoked about looking after your mental health, at least not in any meaningful way important enough to remember." ~ Year 3, HASS student

"dont see things about mental health much and its difficult to get in touch with welfare to see anyone" ~ Year 3 ESE student

"not clear what wellbeing services are available - complicated and slightly overwhelming" ~ Year 1, HASS student

Both with 17% students mention assignments and feeling like the university simply don't care.

"Doing an engineering course sometimes the scope is overwhelming and having lectures plus assignments is difficult to manage. Exams after Christmas and easter makes those breaks difficult to enjoy." ~ Year 4, ESE student

"My course is particularly academically rigorous with a lot of assignments, and this doesn't always lend itself to a good work life balance" ~ Year 4, ESE student

"I am not sure how such a large organisation such as the university is supposed to care about my mental health. Every year they wheel out their student wellbeing lead who I am sure does care about our mental health, but that doesn't make me think that everyone on the faculty cares. A genuine care about our mental health has to be shared across the whole faculty and echoed in their interactions with us. So far I cannot say that I have felt that maintained sentiment." ~ Year 4, HLS student

"Because there are no action or evidence from the University to show that they care for my mental health" ~ Masters, HASS student

"the guild says a lot about wellbeing but the amount of work and assignments the university puts in such short span suggests they don't care" ~ Year 2, HLS student

3. Where do our students go for support and what prevents them from accessing it?

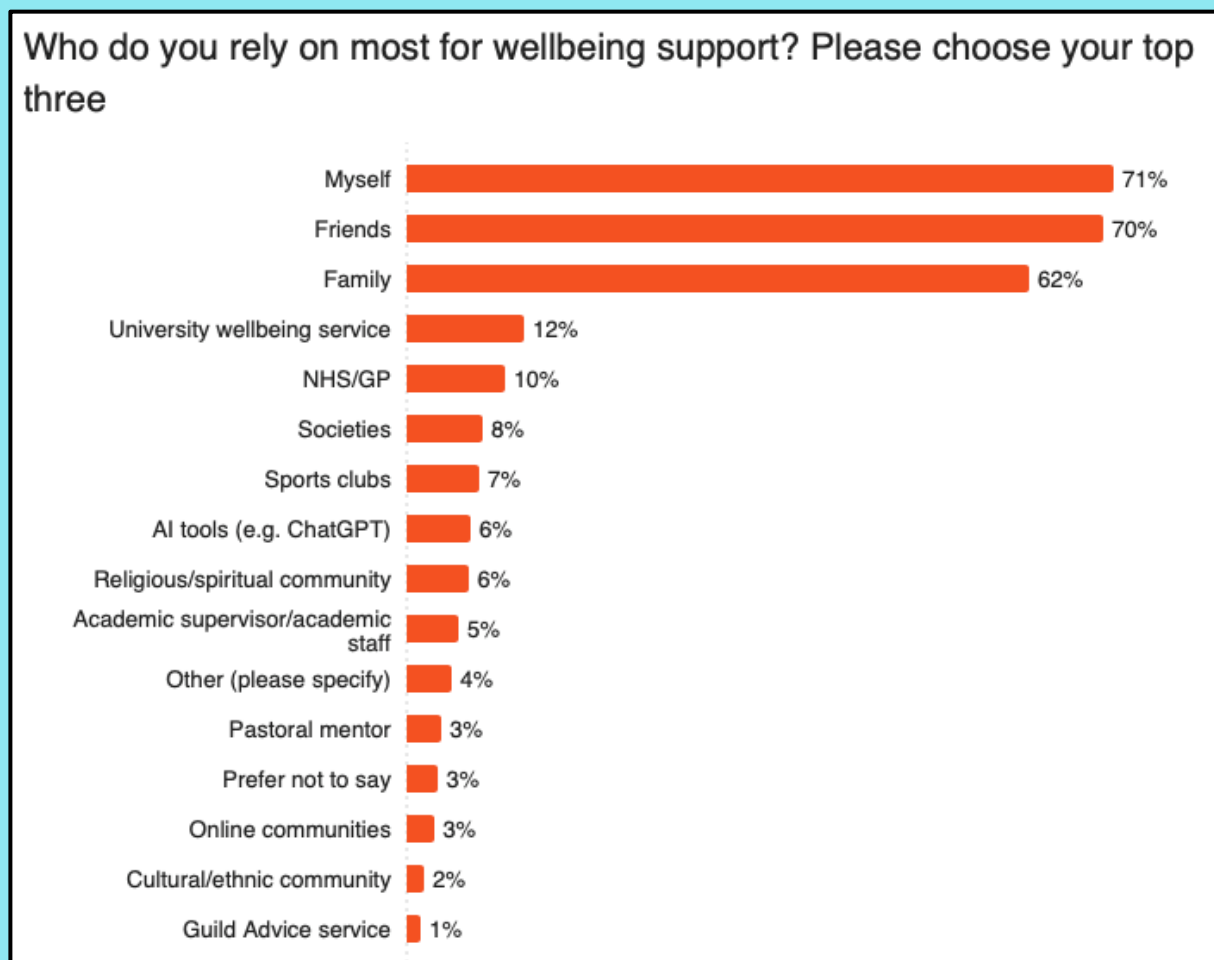


Figure 15 - Who do you rely on most for wellbeing support? Please choose your top three

When we asked students who they rely on most for wellbeing support, 71% of responses included 'myself'. 70% said friends and 62% said family. These three were by far the most often mentioned, the next most popular is the university wellbeing service at 12%. Interestingly, 6% of responses mentioned using AI tools to support wellbeing, this is a new insight for us, and it will be further investigated in future work.

What do these people/spaces do to make you feel safe enough to rely on them for support?

Open text response themes

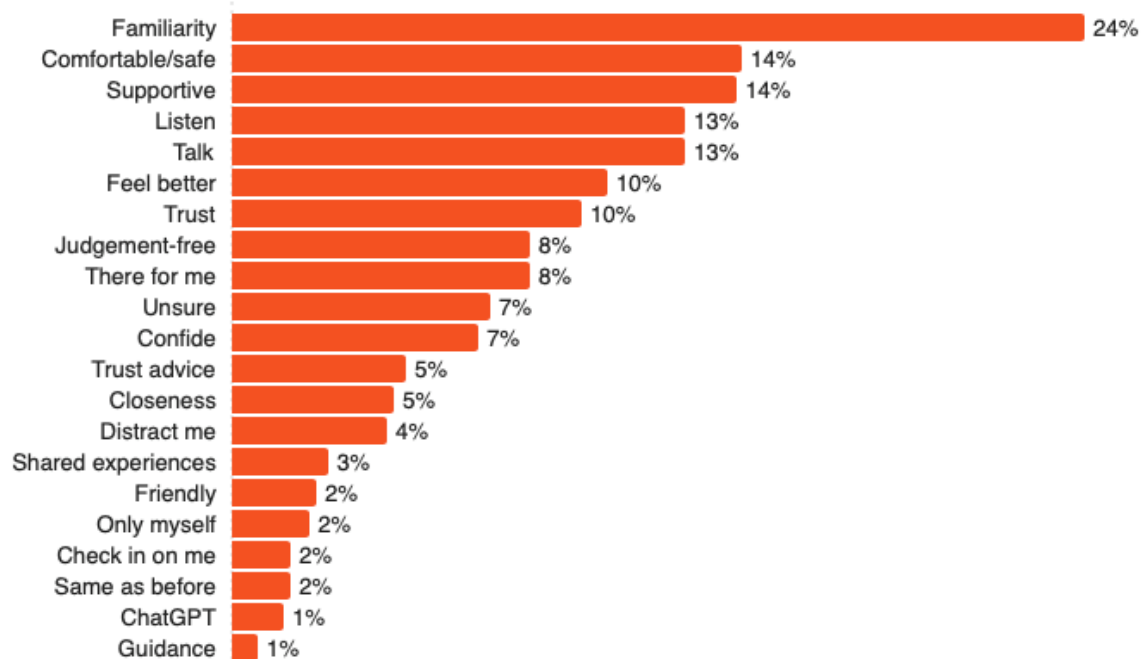


Figure 16 - What do these people/spaces do to make you feel safe enough to rely on them for support?

The top reason that students rely on the previously stated people and spaces for wellbeing support was familiarity with 24% of responses mentioning this theme.

"I've known them a long time and know my conversations are confidential" ~ Year 4, ESE student

"They are known to me. Familiar and not a new experience. The last thing I want to do when I don't feel good is be around people I'm not myself around" ~ Year 2, HASS student

"I've known my friends and family for a long time so I feel safe/comfortable around them" ~ Year 2, ESE students

Next, both with 14% of responses were feeling comfortable and safe, and these people being supportive.

“Easy to talk with and spend time together and feel comfortable” ~ Year 5, HLS student

“Academic senior tutor is someone I feel safe going to when academic work gets too much and will help me to manage my workload and support extensions/deferrals - this has been my biggest source of academic support throughout the past year when my physical and mental health have gotten in the way of my studies. chatgpt is good when i need to have a rant. and friends and family help me feel less alone” ~ Masters, HLS student

We also saw 13% of responses mentioning these people listen and allow students to talk.

“ChatGPT is the only thing I can reliably contact that is always there when I need to talk. It's not healthy, but it helps me cope.” ~ Year 2, ESE student

“I trust them to listen and support my problems” ~ Year 1, HASS student

“I really like Pastoral Mentor helps. My PM really listen to me, I can feel empathy” ~ Masters, HASS student

“I've known them a long time and know my conversations are confidential” ~ Year 4, ESE student

If you needed it, would you reach out to a professional service (e.g. your doctor/GP, the university wellbeing service, the Guild Advice service) for support?

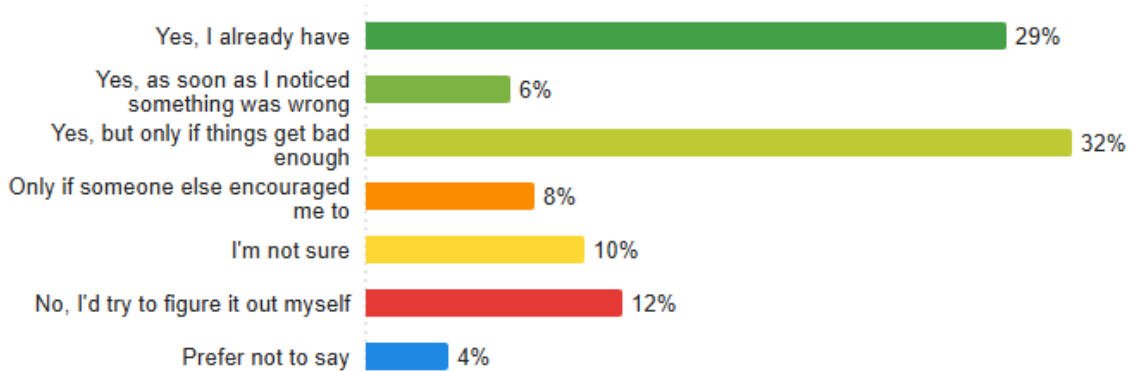


Figure 17 - If you needed it, would you reach out to a professional service (e.g. your doctor/GP, the university wellbeing service, the Guild Advice service) for support?

We then asked students whether they would reach out to a professional support. 29% of students already have reached out to a professional service for support. 6% of students said they would as soon as they noticed something was wrong. 32% of students would only reach out if things got bad enough. So, in total, across all 'yes' options, 67% of students said they either have or would reach out to a professional service for support. (Figure. 17)

8% of students would only reach out if someone else encouraged them to. 10% weren't sure if they ever would reach out. 12% said no they wouldn't reach out, they would instead prefer to figure it out themselves (Figure. 17).

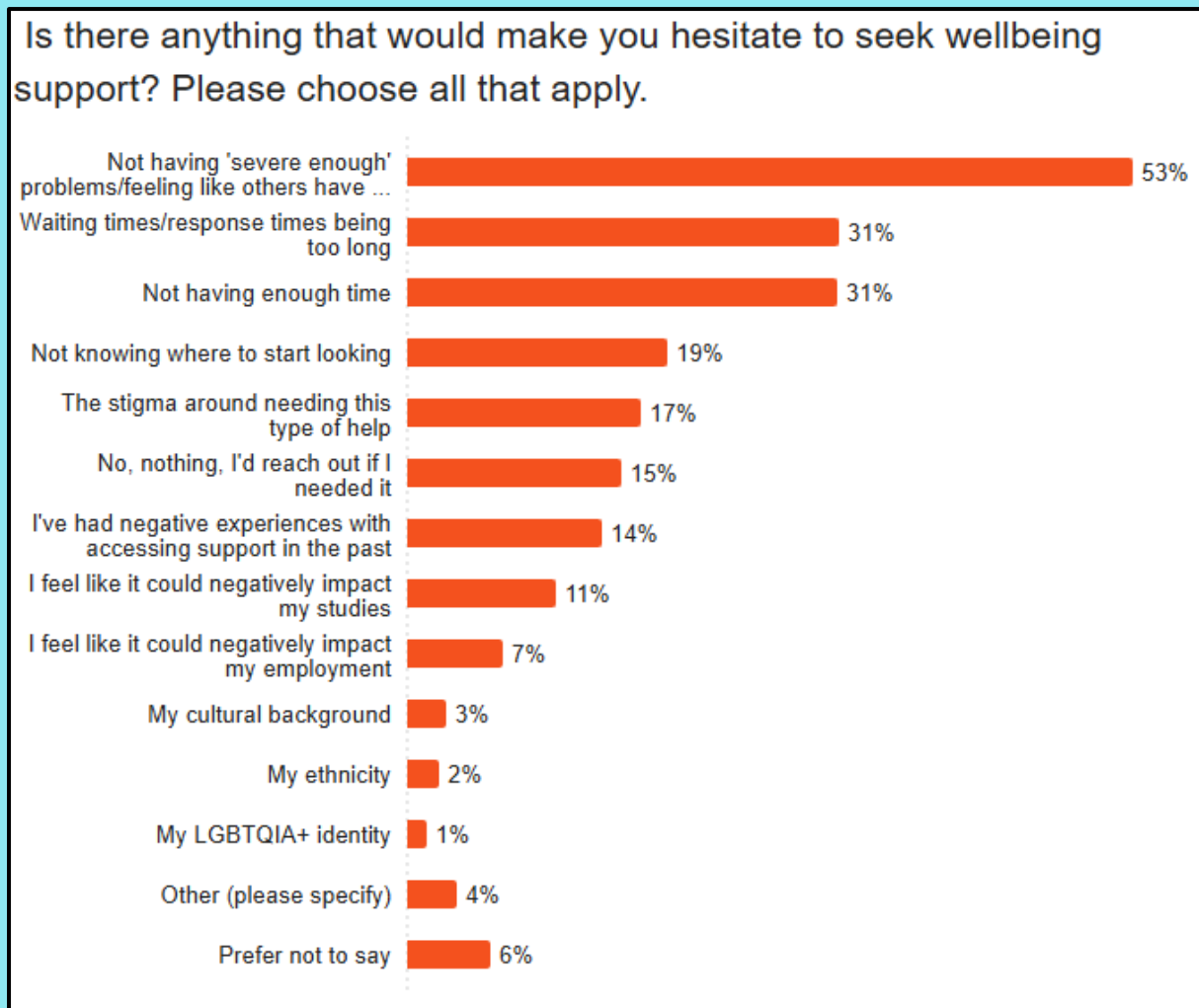


Figure 18 - Is there anything that would make you hesitate to seek wellbeing support? Please choose all that apply (Percentage of responses)

We were interested to see who students felt would make them hesitate to reach out for wellbeing support. 53% of students said their hesitation was feeling that they didn't have 'severe enough' problems or feelings like others who have it worse. 31% of responses said that waiting times and response times being too long, this insight suggests students potentially have tried to reach out for support and were not able to get the support that they needed when they needed it. 31% of responses said they would hesitate due to not having enough time to. Wellbeing support is often lengthy in time, so options for time poor students should be explored. 19% of students don't know where to start looking for support (Figure. 18).

What do you think the university or the Guild could do to better support students' mental health and wellbeing at university?

Open text responses

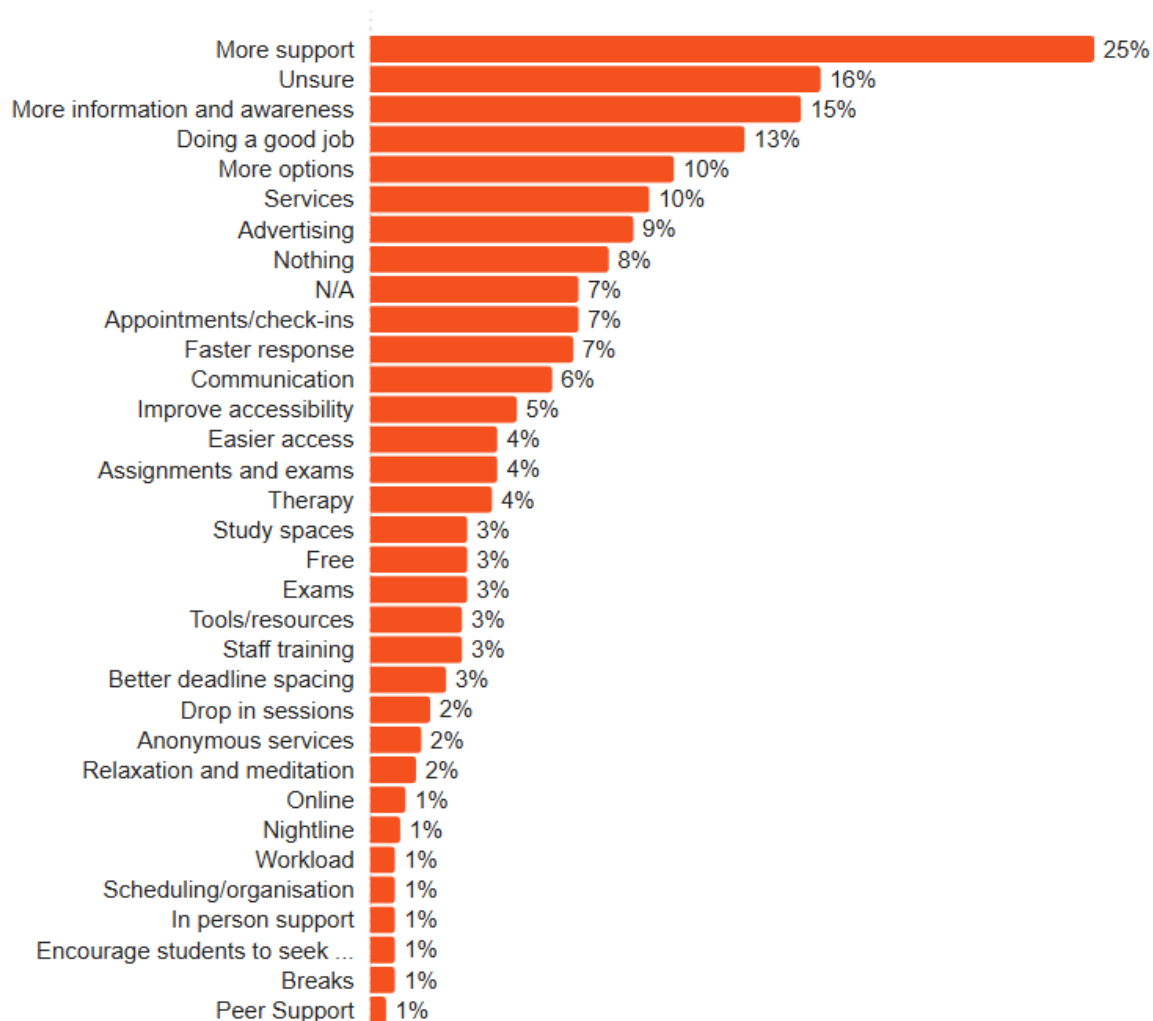


Figure 19 - What do you think the university or the Guild could do to better support students' mental health and wellbeing at university? Open text response themes

Finally, we asked students what the university and the Guild could do to better support students' mental health and wellbeing.

25% of students mentioned wanting more support.

"have more long-term support for serious mental health conditions - i appreciate this is quite a big ask but even being able to signpost and make referrals would be great rather than saying to the student to get help when they may not actually make that move themselves especially if they are scared to or struggling too much to reach out" ~ Masters, HLS student

"Provide more problem specific programs under the mental health umbrella so more people feel as if their individual needs are met." ~ Year 1, HASS student

"Possibly offering more activities, especially in the first few weeks of term to meet people as that's what I really struggled with when I started University and it offers a good distraction as well from being homesick" ~ Year 4, HASS student

16% of responses were unsure on what could change. These responses did not believe there were no changes that could be made, these students simply didn't have the suggestions on how the university and the Guild could improve.

15% of responses wanted more information and awareness.

"Maybe promote it even more, I don't think a lot of students are aware of the support the university does offer" ~ Year 3, HASS student

"Make it more clear how the wellbeing services can be contacted and the exact types of support they can provide" ~ Year 2, HASS student

"Better communication (i.e. if a waiting time is really long just be open about this rather than not giving any updates for weeks). - More accessibility advisors to reduce the very long waiting lists. - Have an in-person team where students needing advice in the moment can go to to discuss things or get info about who to go to (it is really difficult when something has happened and you are upset to then have to go around all the different uni teams before eventually finding someone who can help)." ~ Year 2, HASS student

13% of responses felt like the university and the Guild are doing a good job already.

“More awareness about the services being offered - Drop-in sessions” ~ Year 3, HASS student

“not limit the amount of counselling sessions available” ~ Year 3, HLS student

“Having less formal wellbeing events for people who are concerned their mental health isn’t bad enough or people who are worried about the stigma. So having space where people don’t feel like they are being judged but can access and possibly be signposted to further help” ~ Year 2, ESE student

10% of students would like more options available to them so that they can better tailor support to their own individual needs.

“I think you already have a lot in place in support of students” ~ Year 5, HLS student

“The uni and the Guild do good already, my only suggestion would be continuing to address the stigma around mental health by providing information about different conditions/symptoms and where exactly to get help, no matter how small or minor the issue is” ~ Other, HLS student

“I think they do a good job. I have not had to use it but I would know where to go if I needed to see someone.” ~ Year 3, HASS student

Conclusion

1. How are our students feeling and what impacts their mental health?

Generally, students at Exeter often feel happy, proud and accomplished. Nearly half of students often feel sad and 85% report feeling burnt out sometimes, often or always (Figure. 1). Over half of students currently rate their mental health as good and 20% currently feel that their mental health is poor (Figure. 2). For what is straining mental health, we saw assignments, coursework and exams as major strainers from an academic point of view (Figure. 4) and that employment, accommodation and finance are straining students in their personal lives (Figure. 6). When their mental health is slipping students often feel less motivated and productive and find it harder to concentrate on their academic responsibilities (Figure. 8). We also see that students socialise less and isolate themselves when their mental health isn’t as good as it can be (Figure. 9).

2. How do our students practice self-care?

Lots of students partake in activities for self-care, this includes spending time with friends and family, walking outdoors and cooking and eating well (Figure. 10). We do see that across year of study the types of self-care activities differ, volunteering and meditation seems to be most popular with older years of study. We also saw that year 1 and 2 students were more likely than other years of study to not participate in self-care activities (Figure. 11). 90% of students feel that self-care activities have a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing (Figure. 12). Generally, students feel that the university cares about their wellbeing, but we saw more mixed responses to feeling that the university is promoting a healthy balance between their academic and social lives (Figure. 13). Students feel that the university is giving them too high of a workload and have poor signposting to wellbeing support (Figure. 14).

3. Where do our students go for support and what prevents them from accessing it?

Students rely upon themselves for wellbeing support as well as friends and family, less frequently they rely on professional services (Figure. 15). Most students said they would be open to reaching out to a professional service, with 29% already having done so (Figure. 17). 22% of students were either unsure or knew they wouldn't reach out to a professional service for support (Figure. 17). The top preventor for hesitating to access wellbeing support is not feeling like their problem is 'severe enough' and that others have it worse. Students also found waiting times to be too long and not feeling like they have enough time to engage with support (Figure. 18). From the university and the Guild, students wanted to see more support, more information on current services and more options for engaging with wellbeing support (Figure. 19).

Recommendations

1. How are our students feeling and what impacts their mental health?

- With assignments and coursework straining student's mental health, the university should encourage departments to investigate current spacings of deadlines to see if they can be further spread out.
 - Students most frequently say that assignments strain their mental health due to all deadlines occurring close together
- The university should consider offering (or signposting more to current support) more wellbeing support in the lead up to and during exams.
- Departments should consider spacing workloads so that they remain more consistent and minimise busy periods for students

- The university and the Guild should consider how they can continue to prepare students for employment after graduating in the current job market
 - Students struggle to find post-graduate opportunities
- The university and the Guild should consider how they can continue to reduce financial pressures on students
 - Offer more part-time campus roles where possible
 - Offer more cheap food options
 - Offer more opportunities for students to upskill their financial skills and understanding

2. How do our students practice self-care?

- The university and the Guild should encourage students in the earlier years of study to partake in self-care activities and/or run events where they can try new activities that might suit them
- The university should focus on actively promoting a balance between academics and social lives, and think about what actions could be taken to demonstrate this care to students
- The university and the Guild should more frequently signpost to wellbeing support that they offer
- The university and the Guild should consider how they are signposting to support services in order to maximise student awareness (e.g. not all students read emails in their entirety)

3. Where do our students go for support and what prevents them from accessing it?

- The university and the Guild should raise awareness of professional services available to students
- The Guild should further investigate the insight that students are relying on AI tools for mental health support
- They should also take action to reduce stigma around seeking professional help for mental health reasons
- The university and the Guild should consider what support they could offer to time poor students, that don't feel as big of a commitment as support like counselling and therapy

External Resources

If you want to read some more around this topic, you could start with the following articles:

- [Mental Health Archives](#), WONKHE
- [Student mental health in England](#), House of Commons Library

If you are a current University of Exeter student, please find some resources below to help you with wellbeing and mental health support:

- [Wellbeing Services](#), University of Exeter
- [Guild Advice Service](#), Exeter Students' Guild
- [Mental Health Support for UK Students](#), Student Minds
- [About Student Mental Health](#), Mind

Demographics

Our panel of 1000 students is demographically representative of the University of Exeter's student population but, due to varying response rate on a month-to-month basis, the demographics of this data change survey-to-survey.

The demographics of this report's respondents are illustrated below.

*PNS = Prefer not to Say

Category	Panel Total	Response Total	Category	Panel Total	Response Total
Faculty			Gender		
ESE	363	240 (66%)	Female	721	499 (69%)
HAS	379	261 (69%)	Male	236	136 (58%)
HLS	248	162 (65%)	Non-Binary/ Genderfluid	31	23 (74%)
INTO	10	3 (30%)	PNS*	12	8 (67%)
Campus			Identification with Gender Assigned at Birth		
Streatham	831	559 (67%)	Yes	946	629 (66%)
St Luke's	142	91 (64%)	Sometimes	22	15 (68%)
Distance	27	16 (59%)	No	23	15 (65%)
Domicile			PNS*	9	7 (78%)
UK	739	523 (71%)	Ethnicity		
International (EU)	47	25 (53%)	White	625	443 (71%)
International (Rest of World)	214	118 (55%)	Latin	13	10 (77%)
Mode of Study			Black	36	21 (58%)
Full-Time	951	636 (67%)	Asian	240	138 (58%)
Part-Time	49	30 (61%)	Arab	12	8 (67%)
			Mixed	51	32 (63%)

Study Level			Other	11	6 (55%)
1 st Year	250	148 (60%)	PNS*	12	8 (67%)
2 nd Year	228	166 (73%)	Sexual Orientation		
3 rd Year	172	130 (76%)	Gay	18	11 (61%)
4 th Year	54	41 (77%)	Lesbian	24	21 (88%)
5 th Year	13	10 (77%)	Bisexual	142	102 (72%)
Masters	220	130 (60%)	Pansexual	18	11 (61%)
Other	63	41 (65%)	Asexual	19	16 (84%)
			Queer	30	17 (57%)
Age Bracket			Heterosexual	636	413 (65%)
Under 20	553	375 (68%)	Other	2	2 (100%)
21-30	396	257 (65%)	Unsure	23	17 (74%)
31-40	35	22 (63%)	PNS*	88	56 (64%)
41-50	15	12 (80%)	Disability Status		
51+	1	0 (0%)	No known disability	647	420 (65%)
Widening Participation			Learning disability	110	76 (69%)
Parent	17	10 (59%)	Physical disability	45	29 (65%)
Carer	21	16 (76%)	Mental health condition	190	136 (72%)
Care experienced or care leaver	4	3 (75%)	Other	23	20 (87%)
Estranged from family	12	9 (75%)	PNS*	56	37 (66%)
Refugee or asylum seeker	1	1 (100%)			
None of the above	945	627 (66%)			