



Student Voice Report
Academic Year 23/24

Introduction

In 2023-24, our Hallam community faced the impact of cost of living, which has affected student experience leading to academic, health, and wellbeing issues. Life as a student today is challenging, with one in four students regularly going without food or necessities. Empirical evidence from students themselves has demonstrated that, given increased support, the student experience has been and will continue to differ. Providing an inclusive learning environment for our varied student groups is still at the core of our newly developed programmes, even as we maintain an eye on the positives, expand on those strategies, and add new adaptive techniques.

The cost of living crisis made the substantial changes we had to make at the beginning of the year and our priorities much more pressing. The student body has never experienced such a persistent sense of unease, which has given rise to a wide range of problems that have occupied much of the Students' Union's attention this year. As if our students and staff haven't already been working in a volatile environment.

Over the course of more than ten years, the goal of every Students' Union Student Voice Report has been to maintain a record of the modifications and suggestions made by students through ongoing feedback, and to make sure that these suggestions are discussed and implemented through collaborative efforts. The Students' Union has, after a full year of evaluating, improving, and measuring student engagement used feedback from students to inform our strategies and create an even better student-focused, customer journey approach to delivery, covering everything from academic representation to events to areas like wellbeing and belonging.

Our "Hallam How Are We Doing" survey results have been crucial in helping us identify the precise aspects of student life that have been impacted and in creating projects that are suited to those needs.

The variety of issues, enquiries, and cases pertaining to students has enabled us to recognise the evolving demands and expectations of our student body as well as the necessity of customising services for each individual student. Additionally, we have been able to prioritise and support initiatives that foster a deeper sense of institutional connection and genuine belonging.

Jeremiah Abiola Fasipe- Sheffield Hallam Students' Union President 2023-24

Contents

Introduction	2
Executive Summary	4
Recommendations	6
Methodologies	10
Approach	10
Impact Report.....	10
Section 1- Teaching and Learning Experience	12
1.1 - Timetabling.....	12
Our data.....	13
1.2 - Formative Assessment Feedback	15
Our Data.....	16
1.3 - Specialist Software Provision	19
Our Data.....	19
Case Study 1	21
1.4 - Placements and Work Experience	22
Our Data.....	23
Case Study 2.....	26
1.5 - International Student Reassessments.....	27
1.6 - Inclusive Practices	28
Our Data.....	29
1.7 - Academic Societies.....	31
Section 2 - Wellbeing and Community.....	34
2.1 – Advice and Support.....	34
Our Data.....	35
2.2 - Catering.....	37
2.3 - Cost of Living	38
2.4 – Loneliness and Isolation.....	40
Our Data.....	41
2.5 - Addressing the Ethnic Degree Awarding Gap.....	42
Our Data.....	43
Section 3 - Student Voice	46
3.1 - College Restructures and Student Voice.....	46
3.2 – HSU’s Profile within University Communications with Students and Academic Staff.....	47
Closing Statement	50

Appendices.....	51
Appendix A: Research & Data Sources.....	51
Appendix B - Summary of progress on The Student Voice Report 22/23 Recommendations for 23/24	54
Appendix C – Feedback from Union Voice.....	57

Executive Summary

The world is in a period of readjustment. People from every walk of life are having to readapt to life as it was before Covid. Before we can shake off the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and embrace the return to normalcy, it is worth taking time to address the ripples caused. Last year's Student Voice Report indicated that students were struggling to align the University's post-Covid teaching and learning, and vocational and placement offerings with their expectations and experience.

This year's report appears to reflect a student body that is trying to settle into a "new normal" characterised by living further from campus, taking on more time part work and suffering from high anxiety that is often related to both disability and mental health conditions.

Our primary data is collected from our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' pulse survey, and our own formal research activity, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including surveys, postcard data collection, focus groups, and interviews, and is supported and validated by secondary data collected from other sources where appropriate and helpful to do so. An interrogation of our empirical evidence has outlined three key areas of student life in need of help: Hallam's teaching and learning experience, wellbeing and community, and student voice.

- **Timetabling issues** continue to dissatisfy students' experiences of teaching and learning, with over a quarter (27%) of students saying they would change how it is done if they could.
- The quality of **formative assessment feedback** was an issue for students from the College of HWLS, especially Social Work courses, who stated that feedback received on assessments was often brief, undetailed and untailored.
- Students from courses in the College of BTE reported repeated issues with accessing **specialist software** such as SolidWorks and MATLAB; with its limited availability on Campus at the Sheaf and Cantor Buildings being noteworthy.
- **Placement issues** persist as central to the experience of many students, with students continuing to feel unsupported by SHU staff

during placements. International students are most impacted by these placement issues.

- New visa laws have seen that **reassessment periods are falling outside of visa extension dates**, meaning that many international students are unable to retake their assessments at SHU.
- **Inclusive efforts such as lecture capture** would improve the learning experiences of many students with mental health difficulties and disabilities, but also wider groups such as commuters and carers.
- There is a clear link between participation in extracurricular academic activities and **membership of academic societies**, and a student's satisfaction and enjoyment of university.
- Those who access the **HSU Advice Centre** are associated with a 10% lower rate of considering dropping out compared to their counterparts who have not accessed it.
- A quarter of students who took part in our Speak Week campaign wanted to see improvements being made to **food and drink facilities** on campus.
- **The cost of living crisis** continues to have profound impacts on the wellbeing of the student body, and disproportionately those from lower income backgrounds.
- **Loneliness and social isolation** have become a growing issue for Hallam students, with over a quarter (27%) of students stating loneliness as a reason for why they have considered dropping out of university.
- Three quarters (75%) of students have not heard of the **ethnicity degree awarding gap**, an issue which impacts on the academic attainment of many students at Hallam.
- The incoming changes to personnel as a result of **the university restructure** must be considered so that student feedback is effectively listened to and acted upon, and so that HSU services are platformed alongside those of SHU.

Recommendations

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

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • available, if possible, for students to download onto their personal laptops/devices. <p>3.2: SHU reviews the suitability of AppsAnywhere and Azure Virtual Desktop as hosting platforms for any specialist software, in consultation with both staff and students, with a move to dedicated licenses where AppsAnywhere and Azure Virtual Desktop are subsequently deemed unsuitable.</p>		
	4	SHU works with students, local businesses and other employers to source a greater range and number of acceptable sandwich placement and work experience opportunities, enabling all students, especially those on international student visas, to maximise their potential employability whilst at Hallam.		
	5	SHU reviews its academic assessment timeframes to ensure International Students receive their marks from re-takes and reassessments <i>prior</i> to their visa expiry dates.		
	6	SHU provides academic staff with the training, resource and technological support, to ensure that lecture capture is the default position at the university, and that it is used consistently across as many types of synchronous teaching delivery session as possible.		
	7	7.1: HSU continues to collaborate with SHU to expand the number of academic events available to our students and to encourage academic societies to offer extracurricular events and opportunities within their respective departments.		

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

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

Methodologies

This report has been written and compiled by Hallam Students' Union's (HSU), Research & Insight team (RIS), with contributions and input from various other functions within our organisation and our Elected Officers from the 2023/24 academic year. Most of the primary data referenced throughout this report (and outlined in [Appendix A](#)) has been collected through RIS's formal research activity, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including surveys, focus groups and interviews. The exception to this is our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' pulse survey which is commissioned by HSU and carried out by a third-party provider. This report also collates secondary data collected from other sources to support and validate our research, where appropriate these sources are referenced in footnotes. As always, we are pleased to have been able to co-create research using participatory methods with students and Elected Officers. Our 'Formative Assessment Feedback' and 'Sandwich Placements' research projects were commissioned by and co-created with Elected Officers, while students from our representative structure, our Student Engagement Assistants and other student placement staff have all been involved in the analysis and production of several of the research projects referenced in this report, including our new 'Speak Week' pilot.

This year, two of our research projects received formal ethical approval from SHU Research Ethics Committee: "The HSU Cost of Living Survey Report – Spring 2024" (Converis ID ER64440921) and "Inclusive Standards: Embedding Student Voice in University Inclusive Standards and Reasonable Adjustments Review" (Converis ID ER58204851).

Approach

In many ways the distinction between 'Teaching and Learning' and 'Wellbeing' in the overall student experience is a false one. We know that the quality of teaching delivery or timeliness of assessment feedback, for example, can impact student mental health and levels of anxiety. Meanwhile, the cost of living crisis – something largely seen as a 'wellbeing' issue for the population in general – has had a direct effect on students' ability to engage fully with their course. So, while this report retains separate sections broadly describing first academic and then non-academic topics as a useful heuristic, the intersection of these spheres is highlighted throughout.

Impact Report

Following the 2022/23 Student Voice Report¹, there were recommendations made based on collation and analysis of various sources, including student feedback, empirical research and external data. Hallam Students' Union, in partnership with the University, has strived to find solutions for these issues that have impacts on students' lives and experiences of university.

Below are some of the most significant changes that occurred based on recommendations from the 2022/23 Student Voice Report (for the full recommendations see [Appendix B](#)).

- In order to make fuller use of a blended learning environment, the University's taught portfolio redevelopment, and their Delivery Models Project and Digital Learning Transformation Programme has begun to establish a clearer approach to the delivery of the curriculum and how they engage students in learning, including elements of online learning and the enhancement of digital skills, teaching and the overall student experience.
- Despite it being a central concern last year, the allocation of placements for students in the department of Nursing and Midwifery continues to be inconsistent, with many students on Physicians' Associate courses being very behind on the number of placement hours needed for national qualification standards. Although not being included in this edition, the Nursing and Midwifery department and student experience issues associated with its courses continues to be on HSU's radar.
- The University implemented the government's 50% uplift to placement associated Travel and Dual Accommodation Expenses which students on most health courses will be able to claim following attendance on placement learning experiences. The uplift proposed by the government increases the payment per mile to 42p, which does not match the level suggested by the Royal College of Nursing.
- HSU and SHU should continue in its collaboration to encourage participation of returning students in Welcome events, as this remains a concern. It is anticipated that there will be provisions in place at the next set of Welcome events which will be more inclusive and centred around the needs and interests of returning students, and not just new students.

¹ HSU (2023) *Student Voice Report 2022-23*. Available from: [Student Voice Report 2022-23.pdf](#)

Section 1- Teaching and Learning Experience

As the world shifts to a post-Covid landscape, the ripples of disruption from the pandemic are still felt throughout university. Similarly, there are questions that arise about whether lessons learned from the pandemic and adjustments made within universities should be adhered to still such as, but not limited to, blended teaching modes.² Unsurprisingly it is the learning experience of a few marginalised groups that is still reeling from the effects felt from the pandemic, with our disabled and international student cohorts feeling those impacts most.

The marketisation of higher education continues to exert new pressures on student-consumers on post-Covid campuses, with additional pressures on potential students' selection processes³ and the various digitised ways in which teaching methods have been disseminated⁴. In this first section, the ways in which teaching and learning experiences of students at Hallam could be improved and how best to do so are outlined using bespoke and compiled data.

1.1 - Timetabling

As in previous Student Voice Reports, timetabling issues featured prominently in student feedback this year. Research has consistently shown the positive impact effective timetabling of classes and learning sessions can have on the student experience, as well as improving access and participation amongst underrepresented and minoritised groups.⁵ However, Sheffield Hallam's significant commuter student population, its large number of technical and vocational courses necessitating specialised teaching spaces, and the overlapping impact of the cost of living crisis undoubtedly present particular challenges.

² Imran, R., Fatima, A., Salem, I. E., and Allil, K. (2023) 'Teaching and learning delivery modes in higher education: Looking back to move forward post-COVID-19 era', *International Journal of Management Education*, 21(2), pp. 1-12. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2023.100805>

³ Hove, K. M. (2024) 'Resetting Institutional Priorities Post-COVID-19: An Analysis of College Selection Criteria and Student Consumerism in Higher Education' (Thesis), Notre Dame of Maryland University: Maryland, USA. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/jc7390/Downloads/pics%20for%20SFU/Resetting Institutional Priorities.pdf](file:///C:/Users/jc7390/Downloads/pics%20for%20SFU/Resetting%20Institutional%20Priorities.pdf)

⁴ Czerniewicz, L., Mogliacci, R., Walji, S., Cliff, A., Swinnerton, B., and Morris, N. (2023) 'Academics teaching and learning at the nexus: unbundling, marketisation and digitisation in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(6), pp. 1295-1309. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1876019>

⁵ Page, N., Forster-Wilkins, G., & Bonetzky, M. (2021) 'The Impact of Student Timetables and Commuting on Student Satisfaction', *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences*, 16(1). Available from: [ERIC - EJ1295239 - The Impact of Student Timetables and Commuting on Student Satisfaction, New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences, 2021 \(ed.gov\)](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1295239)

Our data

Our HSU Speak Week event, held between 6th and 10th November 2023, saw thirty members of SU staff, including student officers, talking to hundreds of students across both campuses each day. Students were asked to complete a postcard, telling us one thing they'd like to keep the same about their university experience, and what they'd like to change.⁶ It was an amazing success, engaging more than 10% of the student population, with 3157 postcards completed, containing almost 9,000 snippets of feedback!

Speak Week topics, by % of respondents who would change them or keep them the same.

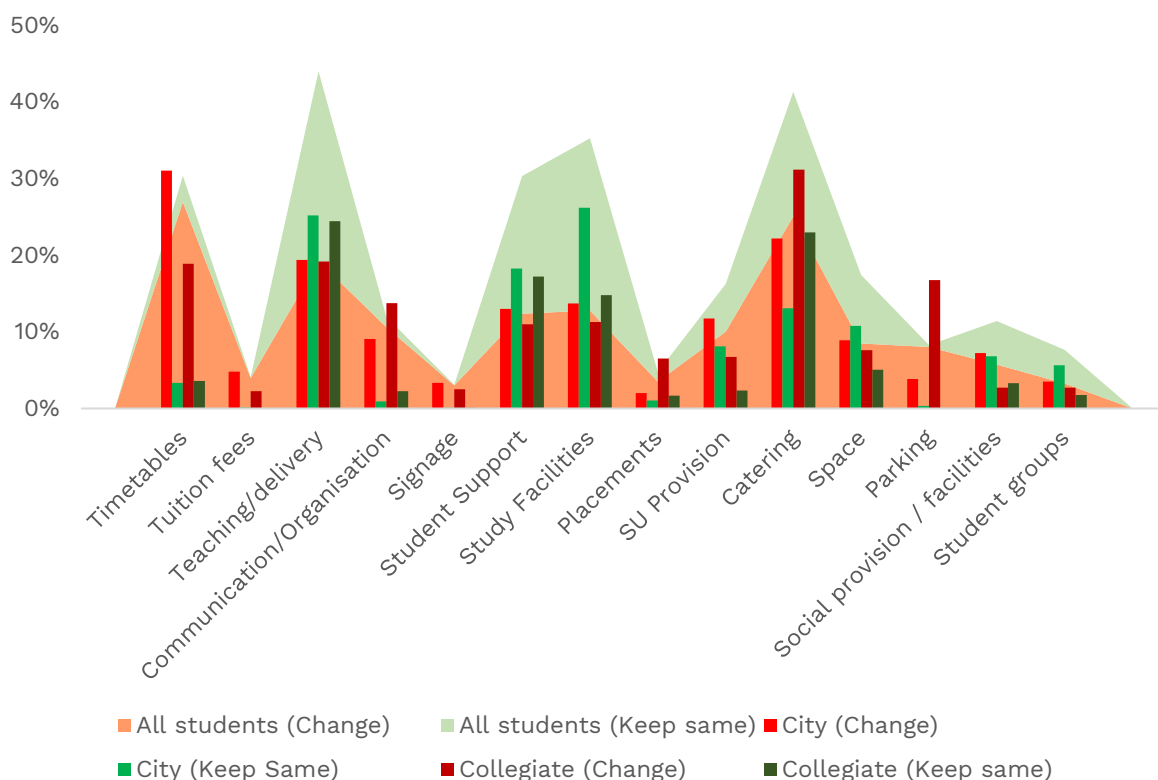


Figure 1: Percentage of Speak Week respondents who commented either on a given topic that they would either change something or keep it the same, split by whether they were at City or Collegiate campus. (n=3,157)

While many aspects of the student experience were touched upon in the Speak Week feedback, as **Figure 1** shows, timetabling stood out as the subject students felt most unambiguously negative about. 27% of respondents said they'd change their timetabling if they could (including 31% of City Campus respondents), with just 3% saying they'd keep it the same.

Issues raised by respondents included:

⁶ Rogers, K. (2024) *HSU Speak Week Report 2023/24*. Available from: [HSU-Speak-Week-Report-January-2024.pdf](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/HSU-Speak-Week-Report-January-2024.pdf) ([hallamstudentsunion.com](https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com))

- A general lack of consistency and structure, making it difficult to hold down a part-time job or make plans.
- Only being timetabled for one hour per day, which proves challenging if you commute from far away.
- Large gaps between lectures in a day (4+ hrs), again affecting when students can work a part-time job alongside studies.
- Poor communication regarding late changes to timetables, with students not notified of changes until the very last moment, or in some cases not at all.
- Seminars being scheduled before the corresponding lectures (respondents felt this was counter-intuitive and made learning harder).
- Different buildings for back-to-back lectures as students are sometimes being sent across campus and having to rush to get there in time.
- Early starts and late finishes which causes difficulties for commuter students, carers, or those with parental responsibilities.

Many of these issues have also been fed back throughout the year via our course and Department Reps⁷ and, as mentioned above, timetabling is something of a perennial issue. Last year's Student Voice Report identified the same concerns, and recommended implementation of a condensed timetable with more consideration of the opportunity cost of attending campus for commuter students, carers, and those needing to work along their studies to make ends meet. Although small in number, as [Appendix C](#) shows timetabling seemed to be the third most frequent topic of feedback given to our online feedback platform Union Voice.

Pleasingly, SHU have listened to this feedback, and the 24/25 Academic year will see the rollout of new Timetabling Models, part of the university's broader Delivery Models project.⁸

The principles behind these models are relatively simple (although the logistics of implementing them are unlikely to be) and include:

- For courses that do not require specialist space and that follow a standard 12-week pattern, SHU will aim to deliver models where students have 2-3 days on campus, 1 day online (College of HWLS), and 1-2 days off-timetable.
- Other timetabled sessions (i.e., Academic Advising) should also be scheduled into these same 2-3 days wherever possible.
- On-campus sessions to standard groups are a minimum of 90 minutes, with no 1hr sessions, and are usually multiples of either 2 or 3hrs (again, to improve student timetable experience).
- Online synchronous sessions are multiples of 1 hour, up-to a maximum of 3hrs.
- All sessions of all types will be a maximum of 3hrs to support efficiency in timetabling and provide timetable models that work for most modules.

⁷ See the HSU Student Feedback updates here: [Publications \(hallamstudentsunion.com\)](https://publications.hallamstudentsunion.com)

⁸ [Timetabling and Scheduling \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Unfortunately, while these new principles have the potential to address the timetabling complaints of a large number of students, awareness of the upcoming changes amongst the student population is inconsistent. We believe this is a missed opportunity, both in showing returning students that their concerns have been listened to and are being addressed, and also to help manage the expectations all students around the impacts these changes will have on other aspects of the student experience. There are inevitable trade-offs with a more condensed timetable, and it seems likely that some students will have sessions scheduled into the early evening, or in the traditionally empty Wednesday afternoon slot, for instance.

In the main though, these new models, and the considerable efforts behind them, are laudable, with the potential to significantly improve the learning experience for many students. SHU should use 'timetabling' to demonstrate that student feedback matters and, where possible, will be acted on.

Recommendation 1.1: SHU delivers a package of student communications around the new timetabling models, to make clear to returning students the broad changes they can expect compared to previous years' models, and to properly set and manage the expectations of new students (including their rationale, the anticipated benefits, and the potential impacts on other activities e.g. Wednesday afternoons).

Of course, there are some challenges that the new timetabling models will not address, and a consistent stream of feedback, both within the Speak Week data and from our representative structure, points to one such; poor communication around last-minute or emergency changes to timetabled sessions. Students arriving on campus to find their lecture or seminar has been cancelled are thankfully rare, but the impact on those students who have spent money to commute in, had to arrange childcare, or passed up paid employment in order to be there should not be underestimated. Compounding student frustrations is the fact a solution to this issue, the SHU Short Messaging Service, exists for precisely these occurrences, however inconsistent use of the text messaging system by staff has rendered it only a partial success so far. A concerted effort should be made to drive staff engagement with the service, thereby providing students with the notice they to avoid wasted or unnecessary trips to campus, and the resultant financial or opportunity cost.

Recommendation 1.2: SHU raises staff awareness of, and promotes consistent use of, the SHU Short Messaging Service to provide students with prompt and accurate information on last minute or same day timetabling changes, including cancellations and postponements.

1.2 - Formative Assessment Feedback

Formative assessment is a key pedagogical intervention which, when used consistently and correctly, by both tutors and students, can be one of the most

powerful tools available to elevate a student's learning experience and outcomes.^{9,10} This can be particularly important in courses with a greater emphasis on practical work or placement learning, and fewer written assessments to enable students to gauge their own learning and highlight areas for improvement. However, while the use of feedback from formative assessment in Higher Education is growing rapidly, its implementation is often inconsistent both in quality and coverage.¹¹

Our Data

HSU's Formative Assessment Feedback Survey¹² was open between 17th February and 1st March 2024 and distributed to Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences students and received 179 responses. Respondents were asked their experiences of receiving formative feedback whilst studying at Hallam, how useful they found it, and what could be done to improve it, amongst other things.

Our survey found that where formative feedback *is* provided it is valued. Students consider it to have a clear impact on their understanding of the subject and the quality of their work.

"Has the formative assessment feedback you have received improved your quality of work and understanding of the subject?", by Department

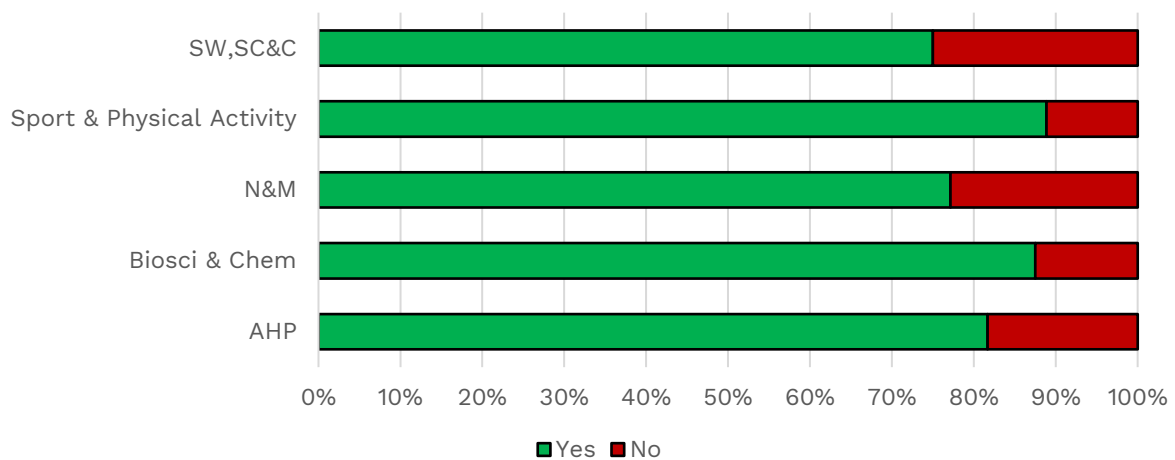


Figure 2: HSU Formative Feedback Survey of HWLS students, showing perceptions of the link between feedback from formative assessment and academic improvements, by department (n=132)

⁹ Nicol, D. and Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2004) 'Rethinking formative assessment in HE: a theoretical model and seven principles of good feedback practice'. Available from: [The Web-site \(villanova.edu\)](http://www.villanova.edu)

¹⁰ Irons, A. (2007) *Enhancing Learning through Formative Assessment and Feedback*. London: Routledge.

¹¹ Gedye, S. (2010) 'Formative assessment and feedback: a review', *Planet*, 23(1), pp. 40-45. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.11120/plan.2010.00230040>

¹² Garvin-Smith, S. (2024) *Formative Assessment Feedback Survey Report – Spring 2024*. Available from: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/pageassets/union/publications/Formative-Assessment-Feedback-Full-Report.docx>

As **Figure 2** shows, only in the departments of Social Work, Social Care and Community (SWSCC), and Nursing & Midwifery (N&M) did less than 80% of respondents say that the formative feedback they had received had improved their work or their understanding of the subject.

However positive sentiment was tempered by a feeling that formative feedback is often brief and lacking detail, with academic staff workloads leading to a generic cut and paste approach in some cases.

When asked why the formative feedback they had received did not improve their understanding of the subject, respondents felt comments were often far too brief to provide real insight and lacked specific examples or areas to work on.

“Multiple times I have received a “?” with no context, or one-word answers that really don’t say anything are just filler words to put something down. Have also once got feedback saying “you have gone over word count” when they said you can go over, but we’ll only mark the first 150 words. Most of the time it’s not constructive at all.”

“[Need] more in-depth feedback, not one word comments. [...] one comment on an A4 (sic) doesn’t say much about how correct or incorrect it is. If it’s wrong, please highlight and explain so I can use that to ensure I don’t make similar mistakes in future.”

Another aspect of this overarching theme of wanting more tailored and individualised feedback, was respondents desire for greater opportunity to discuss formative feedback directly with tutors, either in groups sessions or one-to-one, where it could be expanded upon and explored in greater detail. Other suggestions included the looping in of Academic Advisors (AAs) to aid delivery of this, and the use of audio files of feedback to help reduce workloads for staff.

“[I’d like to] have personalised plans made with AA tutors to help develop weaknesses. Can be tricky developing them by yourself.”

“This could be improved through one-to-one sessions with the student, as every student learns at their own pace.”

Respondents to our survey also asked for greater consideration of how formative feedback opportunities are impacted by mandatory placement blocks, common in health and social care courses, and that on-line or asynchronous delivery could be used to overcome these hurdles.

“Giving enough time between formative assessments and the assessment deadline to give time to improve and not giving formative results [when] we are gone on placement.”

“Have an online lecture that goes over common feedback given in detail. Should be online as there are too many lessons in uni especially when at placement with specific hours you can work.”

Although the need for effective formative feedback seems particularly acute in courses and subject areas with a significant placement component, our ‘Hallam,

How are We doing?' data makes it clear that dissatisfaction with feedback is not simply an issue restricted to Health and Social Care.

Satisfaction with Academic Feedback, by department

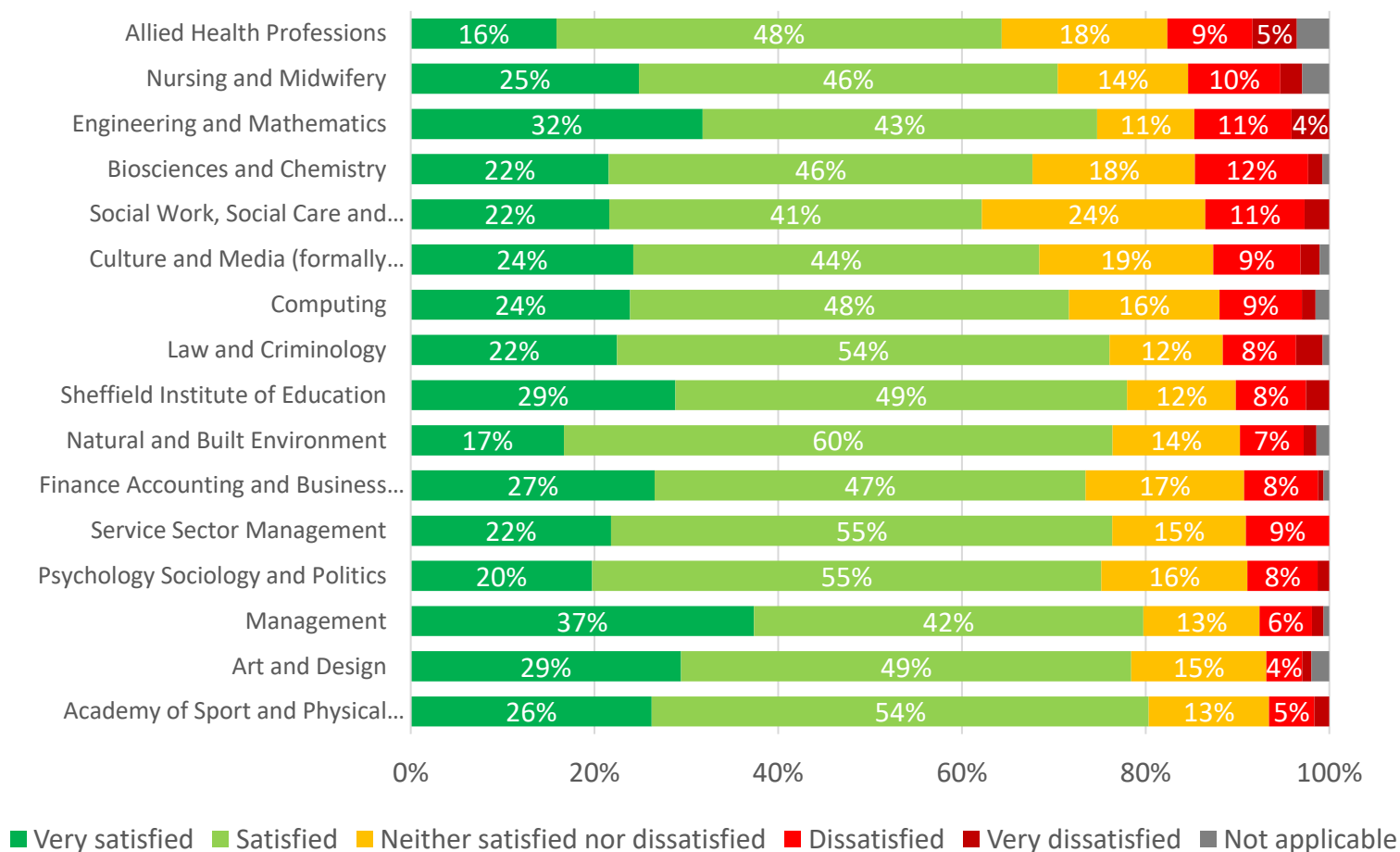


Figure 3: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' 23/24 Wave 2. Satisfaction with academic feedback, by department. 'Don't knows' removed. (n=1985)

Figure 3 shows HHAWD Wave 2 respondents in Engineering & Maths (E&M), Biosciences & Chemistry (BioChem), and Culture and Media (CAM), among others, show relatively high levels of active dissatisfaction with feedback. The recently published 2024 NSS results¹³ highlight satisfaction rates materially below benchmark for either question 10 (How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?), question 12 (How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?) and/or question 14 (How often does feedback help you to improve your work?) in CAH1 level subjects Education & Teaching, Engineering & Technology, Biological & Sport Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, as well as subjects allied to Medicine (especially Social Work).

¹³ [Workbook: NSS Report 2023 onwards \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.shu.ac.uk/nss-report-2023-onwards)

Together, this suggests that there are multiple subject areas across SHU where students wish to see a rubric applied in practice either with exemplars or via their own work, require more opportunities to apply their learning *prior* to summative assessment, and that the delivery of their formative feedback need be more detailed and personalised for them to maximise its benefits.

Clearly there are areas of excellent practise in respect of formative feedback at SHU and we understand much work has been done to embed the use of feedback from formative assessment in teaching delivery. The Marking and Feedback section¹⁴ of the SHU Academic Essentials intranet page contains some useful guidance on the implementation of feedback more generally, with excellent examples of formative feedback in practice. However, our feedback suggests this approach is still not being used to a consistent standard across the university, either through a lack of awareness of the guidance available, punishing workloads for staff inhibiting the delivery of in-depth feedback more generally, or a combination of both. We hope SHU will do more to ensure the widespread adoption of best practice in this area, especially in view of the increased levels of autonomy granted to schools/institutes under the new university structure, and the potential for diverging standards this creates.

Recommendation 2: The SHU guidance for staff on the preparation and delivery of formative assessment feedback is expanded to provide more explicit structure and minimum standards, improving consistency and helping staff meet student expectations in the face of ever more challenging workloads.

1.3 - Specialist Software Provision

SHU's College of Business Technology and Engineering is home to an array of courses that utilise specialist software as part of their teaching delivery and assessment. AppsAnywhere¹⁵, a centralised, cloud-based platform, is SHU's main software solution, offering access to a wide range of applications that serve the needs of most students at the university and is available when off-campus. This is supplemented, for high specification software like SolidWorks and MATLAB, by the Azure Virtual Desktop¹⁶ (AVD), which is also available remotely.

Our Data

Unfortunately, throughout the year HSU has received feedback from students within Maths & Engineering, and Computing Departments in particular, that AppsAnywhere was failing to meet their needs; either because the required software was sometimes not accessible, or because the performance lag caused by accessing the

¹⁴ [Marking and Feedback – Assessment Essentials \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ [AppsAnywhere \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

¹⁶ [Azure Virtual Desktop | Sheffield Hallam University \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

application 'virtually', rendered its use away from campus and university PCs non-viable.

With AppsAnywhere, students have reported tasks that would take seconds on software downloaded locally, taking 5-10 minutes. When some more complex computations can take upwards of 6 hours, a lag of that order makes using those programs via AppsAnywhere simply unfeasible. Added to which, students noted AppsAnywhere has a propensity to crash or disconnect at random, losing student's work in the process.

While core performance seems less of an issue with AVD, reliability and stability when using the platform away from campus appear equally troublesome. The university webpage for the platform states that accessing AVD on a shared network with multiple users that might be, for instance, streaming will affect its performance. Given most students will be living in a shared house or sharing with family members, this would seem a significant impediment to using the service at home. As one student put it:

"I personally don't like [AVD]. To start with I was using it will back home over Easter and it didn't like my internet and was lagging every time I clicked/did something on it. It didn't save my work after I had clicked the save button and so I lost all my coursework on SolidWorks. It has also been known to spontaneously crash and as a result delete everything that is currently being worked on. It only seems to work properly when you use it on the computers in Sheaf or connected to the internet in Sheaf. I think the idea of it is good but it doesn't work effectively so I don't use it."

In practice, this means that many students will have to attend campus physically to use more advanced software effectively, with all the logistical implications for commuter students or those unable to attend campus during the day that this brings. Clearly this defeats at least some of the points of having a virtual desktop in the first place.

A related issue, also raised via Course and Department Reps in BTE, is one of software, licensed by the university (for instance SAP), where the number of users at any one time is capped at a fixed amount. Students on large courses have reported being unable to access software because the use cap had been hit. It is worth noting that this software was expected to be used to successfully complete assignments on respective courses, and so having caps on the number of students using it came with an array of assessment-related issues and concerns. We also saw reference to specialist software installed on only a handful of PCs located in teaching spaces, meaning students only had access to them if no class was scheduled in that room at the time. These specialist software programs seem to be exclusively at the Sheaf and Cantor Buildings, meaning students having to utilise the software are limited as well to the specific times the buildings are open to students which may be difficult to students with work or care commitments.

Finally, Department Student Forums at the turn of the year saw reps feeding back that some course leaders in E&M and Computing, were either insisting on assignments being completed on a particular version of a software program, that

students had no, or at least limited access to via university systems, or 'suggesting' (as in **Case Study 1**) that students use expensive additional software, not supplied by the university, as a solution to aid remote group work assignments.

This latter issue in particular raises concern around access and participation, especially as digital poverty' is a growing concern for students generally.¹⁷ Our Cost of Living Survey Report¹⁸ indicates nearly a fifth of students (18%) are cutting back on internet and/or WiFi costs due to financial constraints. That being the case, it seems certain that some students will be excluded from the use of optional software due to cost, while others won't, leading to a differential learning experiences, and potentially widening outcome inequalities.

Case Study 1

"During my second semester, I was particularly affected by non-accessibility to software that would've greatly improved collaboration on my group project. This was due to a large portion of the work being completed during this semester was done from at home or during each students own time. For this group project, we were tasked to complete a piece of software for a chosen client, where we had to create the front-end and back-end.

The front-end creation of our project wasn't an issue, but when creating the back-end, primarily the database, we struggled to collaborate seamlessly as we had restricted access to the different software available for this. It was advised by our lecturers to use an online tool (freesqldatabase.com) where we could work on the database together, but this software was not provided by Hallam therefor we either had to opt out of using it or pay for it. This resulted in being limited to using one person's device for working on the database, and only being able to work on it in our tutorial hours. If someone were to edit it from home, we had to download and upload the file again after each edit, and then proceed to redownload it on each members device.

I believe if we were provided access to this software by the university, we would've been able to work more efficiently and seamlessly together. Accessibility to collaborative tools can make an impact on group work, especially for my degree (Computer Science) where almost all of our work is done online or via a device."

¹⁷ [Shining a spotlight on digital poverty - Jisc](#)

¹⁸ West, V., Bebbington, M., and Garvin-Smith, S. (2024) *Cost of Living Report 23/24*. Available from: [Cost of Living 2324.pdf](#)

While we understand the benefits of, and the case for, virtual application platforms like AppsAnywhere and accept that it is sufficient for most students at Hallam, there remain a significant minority for whom it's poor performance and relative instability present significant challenges. Any specialist software solution that is contingent on a high performing internet connection, of the type they may only have access to on campus, is an active barrier to participation for many students who live further away or were otherwise not due on campus on a given day and, in our view, would be best replaced by separately licensed and locally installed software.

Recommendation 3.1: SHU ensures that any specialist software required for summative assessments is:

- **readily available, in its latest version/iteration, on a sufficient number of campus library computers and not restricted to computers in non-bookable teaching spaces,**
- **not subject to licence user caps lower than the number of students actually completing that module,**
- **available, if possible, for students to download onto their personal laptops/devices.**

Recommendation 3.2: SHU reviews the suitability of AppsAnywhere and Azure Virtual Desktop as hosting platforms for any specialist software, in consultation with both staff and students, with a move to dedicated licenses where AppsAnywhere and Azure Virtual Desktop are subsequently deemed unsuitable.

1.4 - Placements and Work Experience

As an applied university, SHU equips its students with practical skills they can take into their lives after university, via vocational teaching embedded within its courses, either as part of a “sandwich year”, or as a more integrated work experience placement. Indeed, their website guarantees “that all of our students will gain a placement during their degree”.¹⁹

The reality looks somewhat different. According to the latest data submitted to HESA, just 570 students out of an estimated 8,000 eligible across all levels of study were on ‘industrial (or other) placement for the year as a whole’.²⁰ Admittedly this relates to the academic year 21/22, when Covid restrictions will have undoubtedly impacted work placement availability. However, Hallam still lagged some way behind competitor/comparator institutions Bournemouth, Leeds and Nottingham Trent, in terms of both absolute numbers, and percentage of eligible students, on

¹⁹ [Who we are | Sheffield Hallam University \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

²⁰ Figure calculated using [Where do HE students study? | HESA](#) and [Workbook: HESA Student Placements \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

placement in that same period, and were significantly adrift of sector leaders Bath, Aston and Loughborough.²¹

More recent SHU-only data suggests that these numbers have not dramatically improved with 482 undergraduate placements and 198 post-graduate placement years secured in the academic year 22/23, with numbers on track to achieve similar this year.²² The number of shorter-form 'work experiences' was larger, but still only amounted to 967 secured across the whole of 22/23. Furthermore, the majority of these placements are taken by students in the college of BTE, meaning that a significant proportion of students in HWLS and SSA that *don't* have compulsory placement blocks, such as those on Nursing or Teaching courses, are not getting the placement experience they were seemingly promised.

Our Data

While we understand that not all courses can offer full industry placement years, data from our Course Rep Placement Survey (open during the last two weeks of January 2024 and completed by 82 Course Reps - representing some 1,700 students) suggests that even in subjects where sandwich years or shorter-term work experience are an option in theory, students feel unprepared and unsupported in finding suitable placements.

Did students on your course secure placements that they are satisfied with? Please tick all that apply.

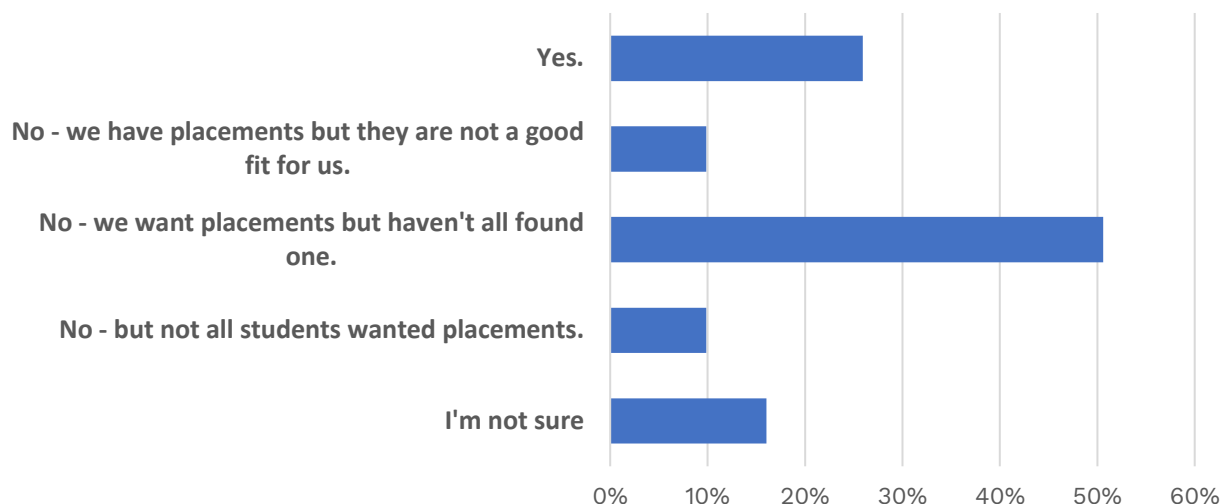


Figure 4: Course Rep Placement Survey - measuring course rep perceptions of student satisfaction of placement provision on their course. (n=81)

²¹ [Workbook: HESA Student Placements \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.shu.ac.uk/workbook/hesa-student-placements)

²² [Workbook: Placements & Work Experience Reporting \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.shu.ac.uk/workbook/placements-work-experience-reporting)

As **Figure 4** shows, while 25% of Reps indicate their course mates had found placements they were satisfied with, over half of respondents said that some students on their course had been unable to find a placement. A further 10% stated that they had found placements, but they were unsatisfied with them.

Just 10% said that they didn't have placements but hadn't wanted one anyway.

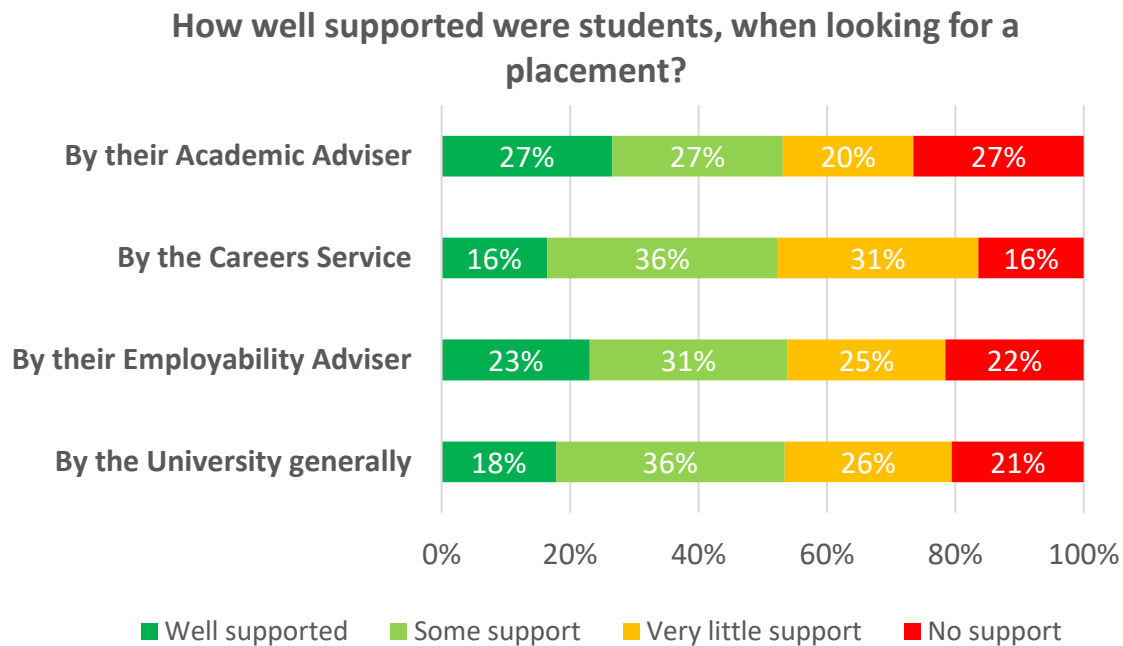


Figure 5: Course Rep Placement Survey - course rep perceptions of support students received while looking for placements. (n=81)

When asked how supported they had felt students were while looking for placements (see **Figure 5**), a narrow majority suggested they had been well or moderately supported, and this was consistent across the various support mechanisms at the university. The corollary, of course, is that nearly half of respondents said students received very little or no support during their search for a suitable placement.

This is backed up by the qualitative comments from the same survey, many of which show students frustrated by a perceived lack of support. Reps reported students being initially encouraged to seek a placement then given no guidance, while some were actively discouraged due to the apparent challenges they would face.

“Students, myself included, were often discouraged from even looking for one since ‘year-long placements in the legal field are very hard to come by’. I have found (since searching from basically the start of my degree) this to be somewhat true however it would help if the tutors, who have experience in applications and who know students who have secured placements, to offer their support!”

“We were encouraged to do them and then we were given no guidance on how to secure a placement.”

Other comments focused on the university’s job and work experience search platform, Handshake, as not having sufficiently broad a variety, or total number, of placement opportunities

“The placements offered by the university are not applicable to screenwriting students. None of the placements listed on Handshake can be used by us.”

“Some placements are either not suited to our course or to what some of the students are looking for in terms of what they want to do in the future.”

There was also a general sense that SHU had failed to effectively build and leverage business contacts and local employers to supply sufficient placements. Students sought better links with a broader range of industries, more aligned with their course subjects.

“The university should help in finding placement because the industries are not hiring candidates who apply from their portal. They say its an entry level job but want some experience how can this be possible. So university should help in providing some industries so that a fair chance should be given to every student to apply.”

“Hallam should make agreement with local industries, business, retail chain stores to accommodate SHU placement students instead of [the student] stressing to find and secure placements all over in UK. “

“University should push working with smaller companies on placements due to the vast amount of responsibilities given and greater opportunity to learn more things related to your course or not.”

International postgraduate students find the situation even more problematic. Firstly, they are liable for an additional fee of around £1,200 in order to partake in an industrial placement year. Furthermore, anecdotally the university, as their visa sponsor, is generally much more stringent when deciding whether to approve their placements, presumably out of concern for breaching Home Office rules on student visas and employment, and thereby potentially endangering their good standing as a visa awarding institution.

“No support from university to secure placement. It's not worth to taking placement year. In reality there is no placement year available in the industry for Master student, more than 90% employers demand bachelor-degree-pursuing as a basic eligibility criteria.”

“What is the £1,200 tuition for? We fill out three forms with minimal contact with the university. Also several students on my course were not even told about the forms.”

This clash of priorities can lead to unfortunate situations like the one detailed in **Case Study 2**. An international student, who has paid the additional fees to SHU to facilitate a placement or work experience year and then sourced their own

placement by being elected as a sabbatical officer with the Students' Union, was told that this was not sufficiently aligned to their subject of study, despite the Home Office guidance explicitly allowing for sabbatical officer roles to be taken under an international study visa²³.

Case Study 2

“My agreed work experience placement (that of Sabbatical Officer with the Students' Union), that was previously approved, was taken away under the guise that it does not really relate to my course of study. This only came to light after I had probed the cancelling. The effect this had on me was huge. I have to spend a whole extra year on my course as I had already committed to the year as a 'sab' and, ultimately, if I don't get an approved placement, I graduate with an ordinary master's degree even after having paid the extra fees attached to the work experience year. It also affected my visa status as I had to request an emergency visa renewal which wasn't going to be the case before. “

In summary, placements are sold to students as an integral part of their course (to the extent that literally all undergraduates are initially enrolled as 'sandwich year' students), and yet support to arrange these is perceived as insufficient or patchy, and relies on students sourcing roles via Handshake, which are often completely inappropriate. The alternative to this is students arranging them themselves, thereby disadvantaging those (usually less well off) students without existing contacts or the social capital of their wealthier peers. For International students these challenges are exacerbated by a more stringent visa-related approval process, leaving many disillusioned and without a placement at all. We believe more can be done to encourage local employers, especially, to offer suitable work experience opportunities, while also taking a more pragmatic approach to approving placements for those students able to source their own.

Recommendation 4: SHU works with students, local businesses and other employers to source a greater range and number of acceptable sandwich placement and work experience opportunities, enabling all students, especially those on international student visas, to maximise their potential employability whilst at Hallam.

²³ See the official Home Office guidelines for study visas: <https://www.gov.uk/student-visa> or UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) for more specific information: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Visas-and-Immigration/Students-union-sabbatical-officers>

1.5 - International Student Reassessments

International students represent a significant and important cohort at Hallam (and indeed HE across the UK more generally), with 5,618 overseas students (16.6% of the population) enrolled in academic year 23/24. Their importance to the university was underlined this year when significant under-recruitment of international students, due to new visa restrictions, and the subsequent drop in fee income, impacted on the financial position for many universities.

With the university keen to attract more international students, SHU published its 'Post Graduate Assessment-Supporting Successful Outcomes' paper.²⁴ This highlighted that the University in recent years has had to repeatedly intervene to prevent international students who are undergoing re-assessments from running out of time on their Student Visa. The standard Student Visa allows for the duration of the course with an additional 4 months after the fact, so if an International student has not completed their re-assessment during this period, or not had enough time to apply for a Visa extension, they are expected to go back to their home country and complete there, which then closes off the Graduate Route that would otherwise allow them to reside and work in the UK for a further two years.

Following engagement and data collection by our International Students' Officer, and analysis of feedback received via our 'Share Your Experience' platform, it has come to our attention that the trend this year indicate that large groups of international students are in danger of falling into this situation. In many cases the University has needed to authorise 'Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies' (CAS) extensions in order to support students forced to complete outside the terms of their original Visa, a practise SHU's International Student Experience Team has already noted is an inefficient use of the limited CAS extensions allocation. The International Experience Team has also had to undertake resource-heavy and short-term fixes for students falling within this category, including In-Module Retrieval (IMR) at Level 7, while simultaneously trying to identify engagement concerns with individual students in advance. There were also cases, this January assessment period, of marks being requested early to try and avoid breaching the Student Visa cut off.

These somewhat exceptional mitigative efforts came to a head in May this year, when agreement was successfully sought to offer an earlier reassessment date for 177 International students that would have otherwise missed the Visa extension deadline whilst awaiting their re-take marks. Whilst this indicates a tremendous effort to provide for these students, a further 35 international students are on courses with fixed re-examination dates and so will miss the Visa extension deadline. It is important to stress that these numbers are not exceptional, and that similar figures have been reported in previous cohorts, for example in January 2024 and September 2023. It will be difficult to sustain this ad hoc problem-solving approach longer term.

HSU feel this issue poses a risk to the University in several ways; not only is it an ineffective use of Hallam's limited CAS extensions, but also the Students' Union and

²⁴ [PG Assessment - Student Visa Holders.docx](#)

the International Experience Team have committed significant time and resource into properly supporting these students, both in terms of academic advice, and wellbeing support. Furthermore, against a backdrop of profound challenges with international student recruitment, there must be consideration of the reputational harm that a perceived risk to accessing the Graduate Route Visa via Hallam would have, and the implications this may have for future recruitment rates.

To best mitigate this risk to our international student members, we suggest that SHU reviews the academic assessment periods to incorporate time for re-assessments and re-takes to ensure that marks will be released before fixed International Student Visa expiry dates. While we understand this has implications for timetabling and resources, and that there will always be small groups that may not be able to access the Graduate Route Visa, we believe that inaction on this issue will lead to far worse implications for both students and the University in years to come.

Recommendation 5: SHU reviews its academic assessment timeframes to ensure International Students receive their marks from re-takes and reassessments *prior* to their visa expiry dates.

1.6 - Inclusive Practices

In semester 1, SHU's Disabled Student Support (DSS) Team approached HSU with a view to undertaking a project to better understand the perceptions of 'inclusive practice' within HE, as well as investigating the discrepancy between the number of students disclosing a disability at application and enrolment and the number of students supported with a learning contract. Following feedback from previous surveys, the research aimed to consider streamlining the learning contract, considering the naming of the document used for reasonable adjustments, improving implementation, and agreeing on some Baseline Inclusive Measures (BIMs) across the university to improve consistency and equity of experience for students.

According to the OfS, the number of students with disabilities coming to university in the UK has increased to 15.7% of all students in 2021/2022, compared to 15% in 2020/2021.²⁵ As a widening participation institution, SHU has a higher-than-average percentage of disabled students, with 19.2% of the whole student population at SHU disclosing a disability of some kind in the 2023/2024 academic year.²⁶

Although the number of students disclosing disabilities is rising, there are still many barriers to disclosure and access to support, especially for the growing number of students with invisible disabilities such as specific learning needs or mental health

²⁵ Office for Students (2023) 'Student characteristics data: student populations - key findings', Office for Students. Available from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/0568cbe3-02d7-449c-b3d4-1691233cb4df/sc_data_populations.pdf

²⁶ [Workbook: Enrolments and Targets Report \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

conditions. As such inclusive practices, such as BIMs, become have even more pertinent, providing benefits to both disabled and non-disabled students alike.²⁷

Our Data

Our research consisted of three focus groups carried out in December 2023, featuring a total of 21 disabled and non-disabled participants.²⁸ The groups were recorded and transcribed, with the outputs analysed thematically with a combination of pre-defined codes alongside those formed more inductively in response to the data. The main generated themes resonate with the findings from earlier work, particularly in terms of communication and awareness of learning contracts and the support available, as well as the importance of implementing recommendations. **Figure 6** depicts the main themes (Communication, Responsibility, Implementation, and Trust) and the numerous sub-themes that participants discussed during the sessions.

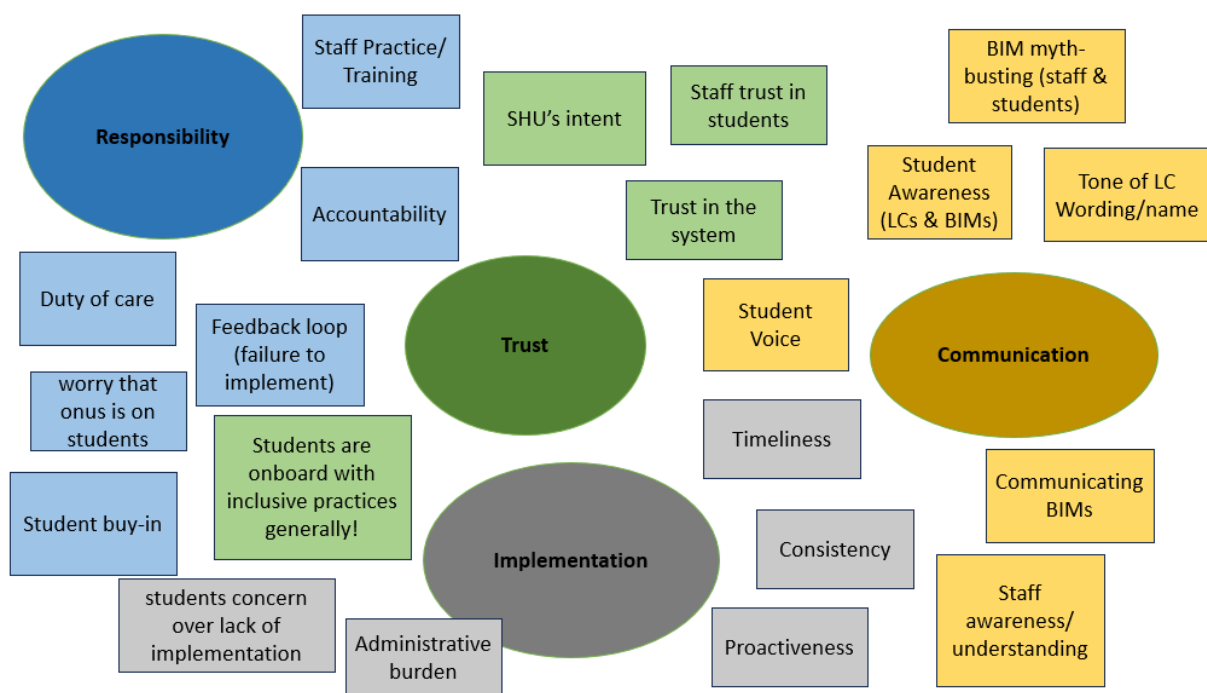


Figure 6: Inclusive Practices Study – Focus Group Themes

A particular theme that emerged from the groups was one of frustration at the failure to consistently implement supposedly extant inclusive practices, with differences emerging within departments, let alone colleges. Lecture Capture was

²⁷ Roldán, S. M., Marauri, J., Aubert, A., & Flecha, R. (2021) 'How inclusive interactive learning environments benefit students without special needs', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661427>

²⁸ Hill, M. (2024) *Inclusive Practice and Reasonable Adjustments Review 23/24*. Available from: [Inclusive Practice and reasonable adjustments review 23-24.docx](#)

a case in point. Some students described accessing lecture recordings within a few hours of the session, which positively impacted their learning, while other students were not getting any recordings, even with a learning contract, and had the additional burden of trying to organise access to the recordings themselves. This is hugely frustrating as, in theory, the facilities to record lecture have been in place for several years, leaving students to assume that teaching staff simply did not see it as a priority. As one participant put it:

“I feel like it would be really helpful if they could understand why these things were so important and then it would probably be executed better.”

Another saw the idea of launching a coherent package of BIMs as a way of driving greater consistency:

“a commitment of doing accessibility for everyone, so it’s like the culture of not only the staff but all the stakeholders to have the accessible culture”

Participants also intuitively understood that such measures would have benefits beyond the disabled student community. Non-traditional students, such as those with caring responsibilities, or our large commuter cohort for whom travel to campus comes at an ever-increasing cost, could all see improved learning experiences from such straightforward measures.

“I think that it’s good that we’re kind of branching out and maybe students who don’t have learning contracts but have other issues that haven’t maybe been addressed by the university or they haven’t brought it to anyone’s attention, still have access to support and help.”

“They are all really relevant and really important when considering both learning contract students and those without.”

Indeed, other research carried out at SHU has shown the pressures and barriers felt by commuters and carers, could potentially be eased by a blended program incorporating the asynchronous learning opportunities that lecture capture would afford.²⁹ As such we feel a greater emphasis on consistency of implementation of this measure.

Recommendation 6: SHU provides academic staff with the training, resource and technological support, to ensure that lecture capture is the default position at the university, and that it is used consistently across as many types of synchronous teaching delivery session as possible.

²⁹ Stalmirska, A. M., and Mellon, V. (2022) “It feels like a job ...” Understanding commuter students: Motivations, engagement, and learning experiences.’ *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 30. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2021.100368>

1.7 - Academic Societies

Membership of extracurricular activities, such as academic societies or sports clubs, has been proven to have overwhelmingly positive impacts on the development of student identity, sense of belonging, and wellbeing³⁰, and on a wider scale, on students' academic success.³¹ These trends are exemplified within the widescale data collected at Hallam, as well.

Figure 7 shows data from wave 2 of our HHAWD survey of satisfaction with sense of community at Hallam based on membership of an academic society. 71% of those responding who were members of an academic society were satisfied with the sense of community at university, with 9% dissatisfied. For those that were not members of an academic society, these numbers differ greatly, with just 62% of this cohort satisfied with the sense of community, and 11% dissatisfied.

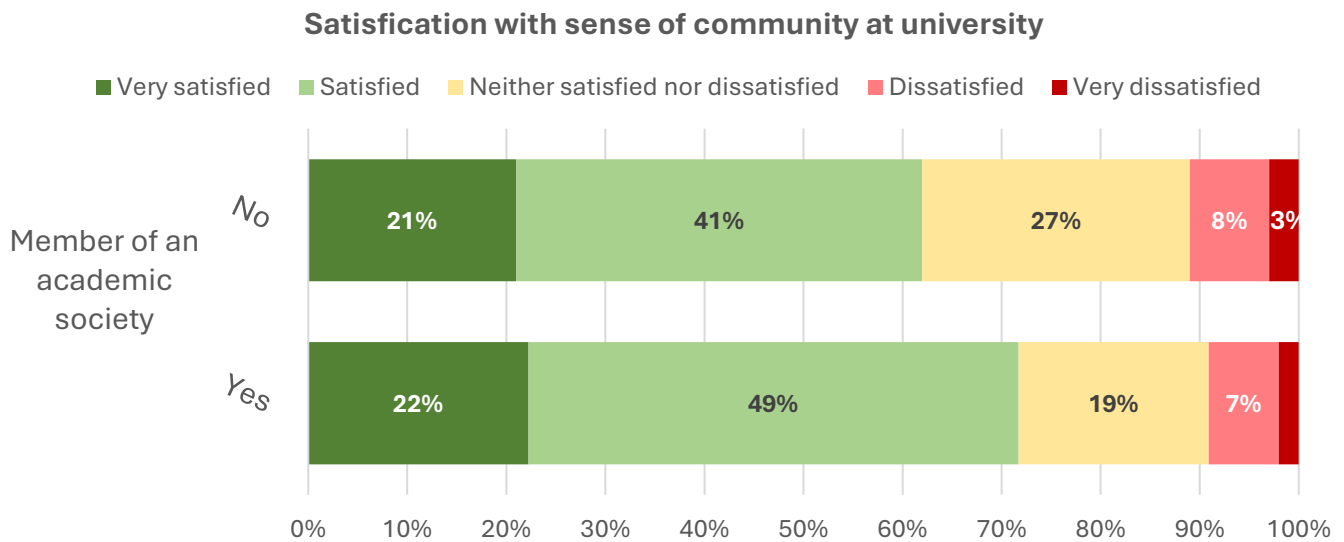


Figure 7: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' 23/24 Wave 2. Satisfaction with sense of community at university, by membership of an academic society. (n=2068)

³⁰ Winstone, N., Balloo, K., Gravett, K., Jacobs, D., and Keen, H. (2022) 'Who stands to benefit? Wellbeing, belonging and challenges to equity in engagement in extra-curricular activities at university.' *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 23(2), pp. 81-96. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787420908209>

³¹ King, A. E., McQuarrie, F. A. E., and Brigham, S. M. (2020) 'Exploring the Relationship Between Student Success and Participation in Extracurricular Activities'. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, 36(1-2), pp. 42-58. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156X.2020.1760751>

Perhaps more interestingly, our HHAWD data from the same wave shows that being a member of an academic society is associated with a reduced likelihood of thinking about dropping out of university. **Figure 8** shows that 76% of academic society members 'rarely' or 'never' thought about dropping out of university, compared to 69% of non-members. Additionally, 11% of respondents who were not members of an academic society thought about dropping out 'all the time' or 'often', whereas only 5% of academic society members answered the same way. This is an evident and marked variance that only stresses the academic and wellbeing benefits of being a member of an academic society.

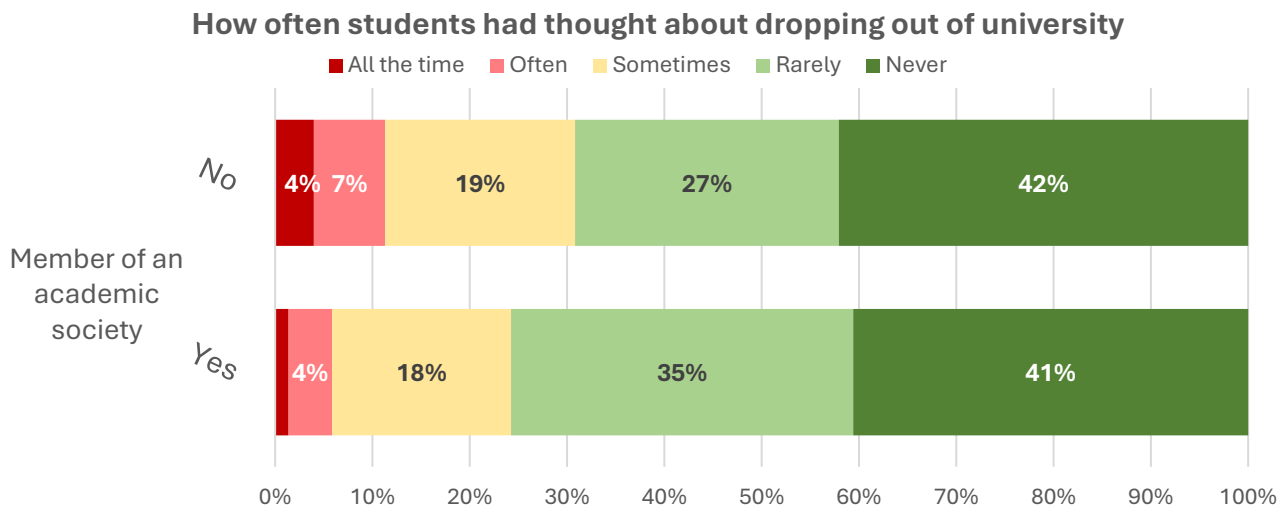


Figure 8: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' 23/24 Wave 2. How often respondents had thought about dropping out of university, by membership of an academic society. (n=2068)

Our Cost of Living report shows students, faced with the twin demands of paid employment needed to cover their basic living costs and their compulsory academic commitments and independent study, are increasingly finding it tough to afford the social and extracurricular activities needed for an improved wellbeing while studying. Many students spoke about the cost of living crisis' impact on their social lives, and subsequently their mental wellbeing as a result. Below are just a few of those comments:

"Everything is so expensive, I've had to cut down on a lot of costs like hobbies, healthcare, social life."

"Going out becomes nearly impossible which impacts my social life as I can't even afford to go out and have a meal with friends leaving me isolated."

"I have no social life at Uni because to have one costs money. If there were free societies and activities, that would be extremely well received and would benefit my emotional well-being hugely."

Extracurricular activities have never been more important to students and the empirical data distinctly supports that being a member of an academic society is advantageous to students' academic wellbeing and success. It seems that within this vein, participation in academic societies and extracurricular events such as Give It a Go's (GIAGs) should be encouraged more to fully ensure their benefits.

Recommendation 7.1: HSU continues to collaborate with SHU to expand the number of academic events available to our students and to encourage academic societies to offer extracurricular events and opportunities within their respective departments.

Additionally, it is worth noting that following the university organisational restructure, the Academic Society and Enhancement Leads' roles may also be affected. This will undoubtedly impact student experience with regards to academic societies and so efforts must be made to ensure that there are still appropriate provisions in place following the restructure.

Recommendation 7.2: SHU ensures the functions of the former Academic Society and Enhancement Leads is maintained in the new organisational structure and that the recent progress made in expanding academic society provision at Hallam is maintained and built-upon.

Section 2 - Wellbeing and Community

The Covid pandemic has taught all just how central the student sense of community is to student experience, and how student experience looks once this sense of community is lost³². On our post-pandemic campus, a variety of issues new and old are taking effect on the lives and wellbeing of Hallam students. Paired with the ongoing cost of living crisis which continues to restrict the opportunities available to students, these ripples still felt from Covid, and the university's readjustment is leaving Hallam's wellbeing and community feeling a little incomplete.

It is worth noting the ongoing restructure of university personnel as well, and the ways in which wellbeing services may be impacted. In this section, there will be discussions into the various issues that have arisen this year in student experience, or more specifically in student wellbeing and community, and recommendations for how these changes to wellbeing services could be addressed in the light of the restructure.

2.1 – Advice and Support

The Advice Centre is central to the services provided by HSU but also the experiences of the students who access it. For some students, the Advice Centre is somewhat synonymous with the Students' Union more generally. Despite this, many students and SHU academic staff are unaware of the free advice that students could access through the SU's Advice Centre, or uncertain of the exact services it offers. The Wave 3 results of HHAWD indicates that only 26% of respondents are aware of the Advice Centre. For respondents who have never engaged with the SU and its services, less than 18% are aware of the Advice Centre.

The consensus across the literature about Students' Unions, despite being sparse, is that advisory services provided by SU's are central to the student experience in terms of their impartial advice³³ and supporting students from underrepresented or marginalised backgrounds.³⁴ This is also echoed within our HHAWD results.

³² Tice, D., Baumeister, R., Crawford, J., Allen, K., and Percy, A. (2021) 'Student belongingness in higher education: Lessons for Professors from the COVID-19 pandemic', *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(4), pp. 1-14. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.4.2>

³³ Dubber, J. (2024) "Doin' it for themselves: how empowering and supporting Students' Unions is key to tackling challenges facing students", *Perspectives, Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 28:3, pp. 132-140. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2024.2311916>

³⁴ Islam, M., Burnett, T., and Collins, S. (2021) 'Trilateral partnership: An institution and students' union collaborative partnership project to support underrepresented student groups', *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 5:1, pp. 76-85. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.15173/ijasp.v5i1.4455>

Our Data

Figure 9 shows the levels of satisfaction with university experience based on whether respondents had approached the HSU Advice Centre from Wave 2 of HHAWD. 85% of those who had accessed advice or support via the Advice Centre were satisfied with their university experience, compared with 77% of those that had not accessed the service.

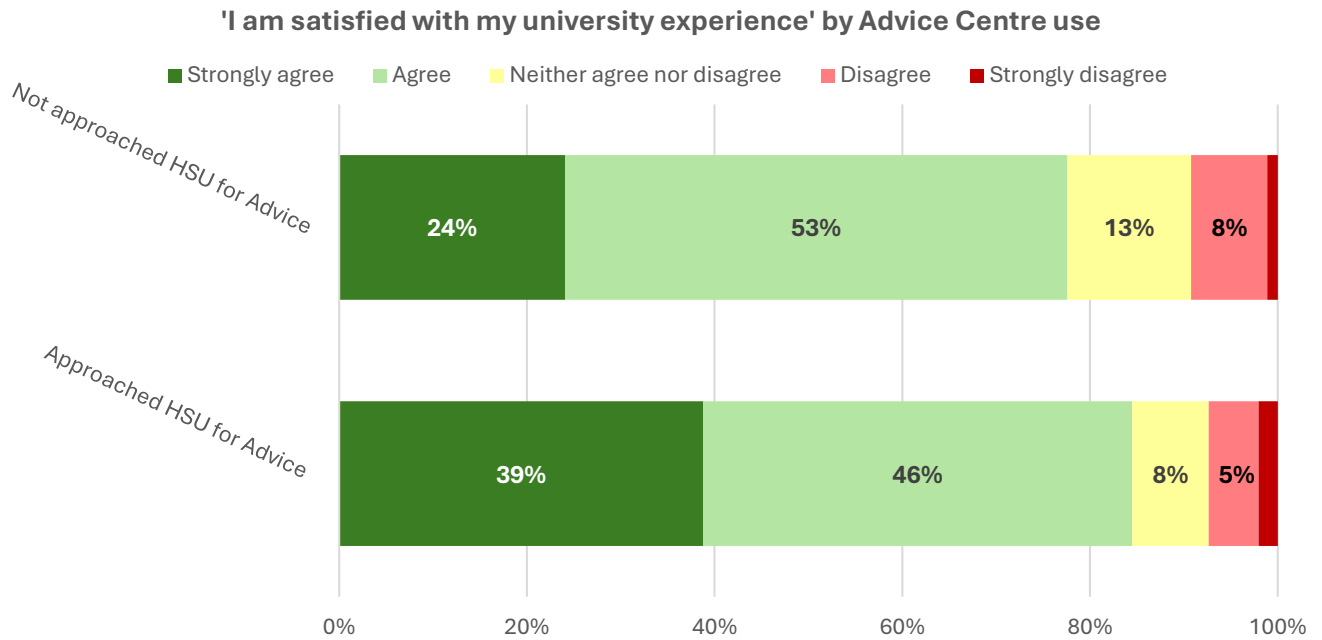


Figure 9: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' 23/24 Wave 2. Satisfaction rates with university experience by whether the Advice Centre had been accessed (n=2068).

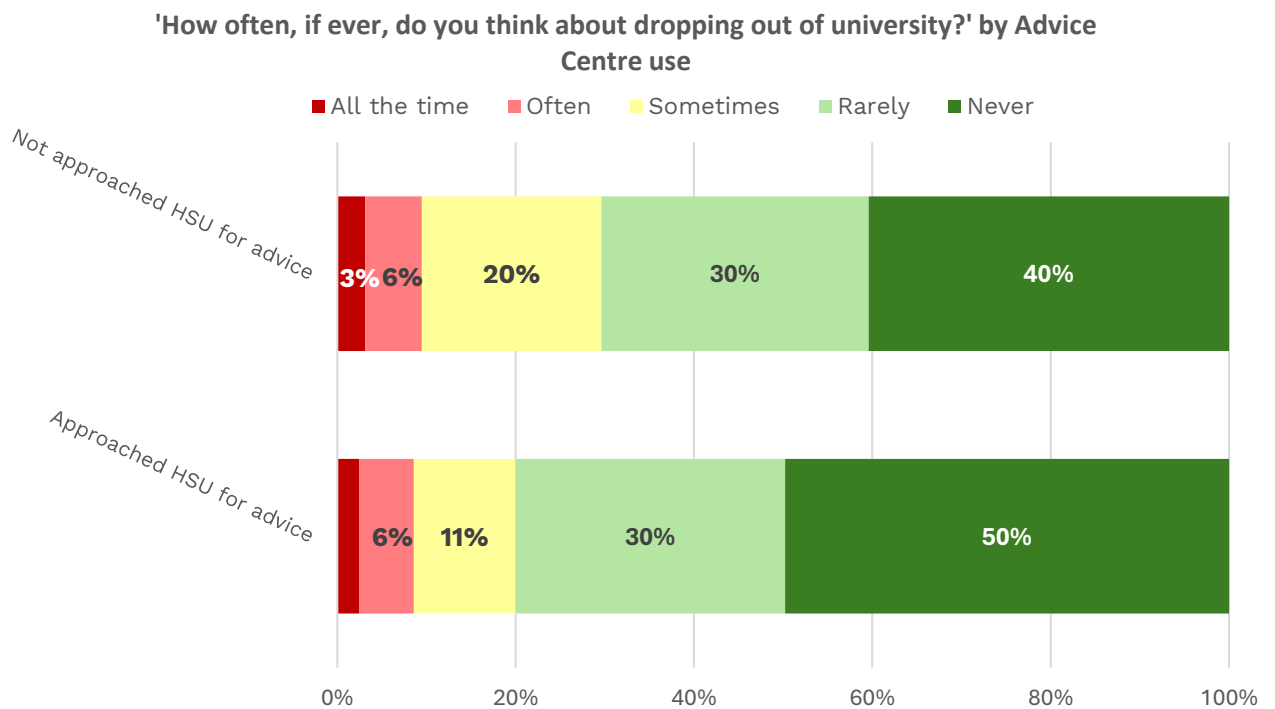


Figure 10: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' 23/24 Wave 2. Frequency of thinking about dropping out of university by whether the Advice Centre had been accessed (n=2068).

Figure 10 also shows results from HHAWD Wave 2 of this academic year, specifically how often respondents think about dropping out of university against use of the Advice Centre. As the data suggests, those that approached the Advice Centre report much lower frequencies of thinking of dropping out. Half (50%) of those that had approached the HSU Advice Centre stated that they never think about dropping out. For those that had never approached the HSU Advice Centre, this figure was 10 percentage points lower.

These data visualisations indicate that the Advice Centre may be a significant influence in the retention of students on their courses, and their satisfaction with university experiences. In light of the ongoing cost of living crisis and challenges posed by the university restructuring of personnel, it seems that the Advice Centre could take a central position in providing support for many students' anxieties. Equally, efforts must be made so that students are more aware of the different kinds of support and advice that are available from the SU Advice Centre.

Recommendation 8: SHU works with HSU to help promote the Student Advice Centre and its services, raising awareness and ensuring as many students and SHU staff as possible know students have access to free, and independent advice and support from their Students' Union.

2.2 - Catering

Catering and commercial outlets across both City and Collegiate Campuses arose as a significant issue during Speak Week, with over 36% of all postcards mentioning food and drink on campus. A quarter of students (25%) who participated in the postcard activity wanted to see improvements being made to catering across campus.

Figure 11 below shows the frequencies that students mentioned food and drink outlets across both campuses during the Speak Week postcard data collection. Overwhelmingly, just under 30% of respondents who mentioned food and drink outlets discussed the varied choice (or lack thereof) in meals across both campuses. Individual comments focused on the halal and vegetarian or vegan options, which appears to be an issue according to a few comments left on Share Your Experience as well.

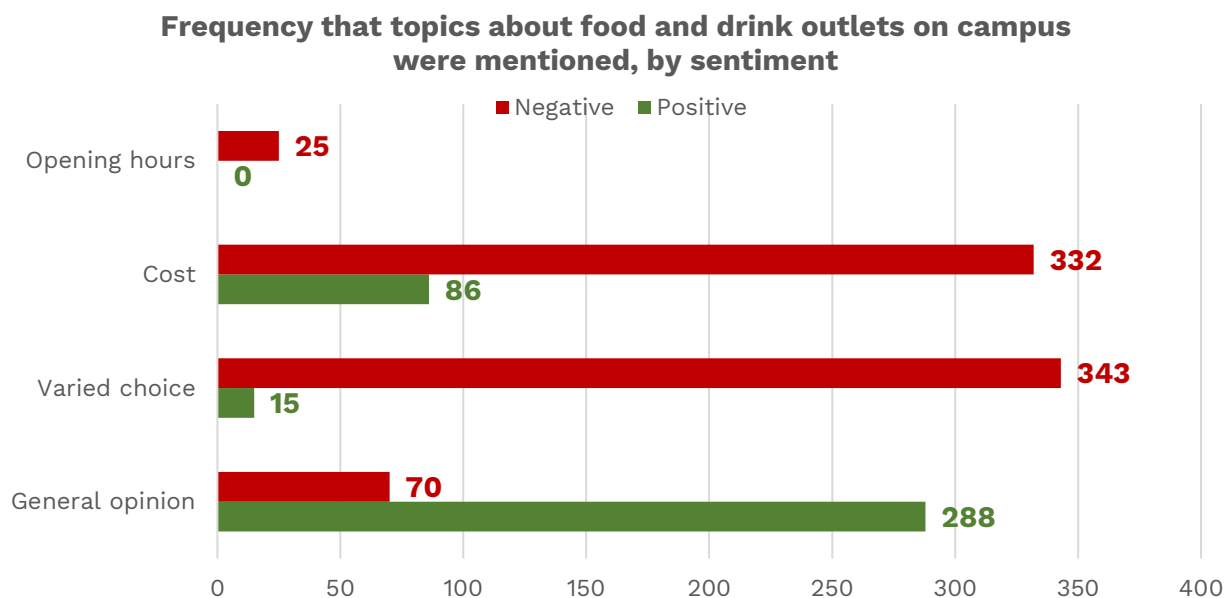


Figure 11: 'Speak Week' 2023/24. Frequency of topics about food and drink outlets on campus were mentioned, by whether they were positive or negative in sentiment (n=1159).

Moreover, 29% of respondents who mentioned food and drink specifically mentioned the cost from these outlets negatively. This finding was mirrored throughout the qualitative comments left by respondents to our Cost of Living survey. Of 1354 comments left by respondents to this survey suggesting what Hallam can do to help, 218 comments specifically mentioned the catering outlets across campus, or even more specifically their prices being too high. Below are just a few comments within this theme from our Cost of Living research:

"I guess you could provide specific cafeterias that offer free food (little snacks) where we wont have to pay extra for it."

“Food especially food on campus is too much for too little and the vegetarian options are abysmal.”

“The Hallam eat for £1 on campus was really good as if you were in uni all day or half a day you could pick a hot food box or sandwich for £1.”

These suggestions were not just limited to our Speak Week and Cost of Living research, however, with feedback being received from our online platform Share Your Experience emphasising students’ disappointment in campus facilities with regards to catering as well. Five students left feedback regarding the lack of catering options at Aspect Court specifically, with one saying:

“The canteen was removed from Aspect Court which means we now have to walk to the Owen Building for lunch which is a long way. It would be appreciated if it could be reinstated.”

In line with their Officer Priorities for their role, our SSA College Officer has worked extensively to improve not only the hot and cold food and drink outlets across both campuses, but also to ensure that there are food preparation areas (microwaves, hot water stations, etc) that are functioning as well for those that bring their own food. It is crucial that Hallam remains committed to improving these services, especially in perhaps the more ‘neglected’ areas of campus, such as Aspect Court, the Head Post Office and Eric Memsforth Building, where there have been issues raised by multiple students.

Recommendation 9: SHU increases opening hours and expands provision at the Head Post Office and Eric Memsforth Building cafes, in order to provide a retail catering solution for students based in Aspect Court. This expanded offer should be clearly signposted to Aspect Court students.

2.3 - Cost of Living

Financial challenges continue to shape student experience in profound ways.³⁵ Our most recent Cost of Living survey shows how student behaviours continue to evolve to meet conflicting demands on their time & resources. The previous sections detail the profound impact the cost of living crisis continues to have on students at Sheffield Hallam, but the effects can be felt by students across the sector, and the

³⁵ Neves, J., Freeman, J., Stephenson, R. & Sotiropoulou, P. (2023) ‘Student Academic Experience Survey 2024’, *Higher Education Policy Institute*. Available from: [SAES-2024.pdf \(hepi.ac.uk\)](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/SAES-2024.pdf)

underlying causes significantly pre-date the spiralling inflation of the post-pandemic period.

The parental earnings threshold of £25,000 to receive the highest level of maintenance loan has remained unchanged since 2008, meaning that as median household incomes increased year-on-year, fewer and fewer students have qualified for this higher amount. Roughly half the number of students now receive the highest-level loan than would do if the threshold had been index linked.³⁶

What amounts to real terms cuts in available support for a huge number of students has been compounded by the failure to uplift the actual loan amounts in the face of higher inflation since 2021. The shrinking number of students eligible for the highest loan amount are now around £2000 a year worse off, in real terms, due to insufficient loan increases.³⁷

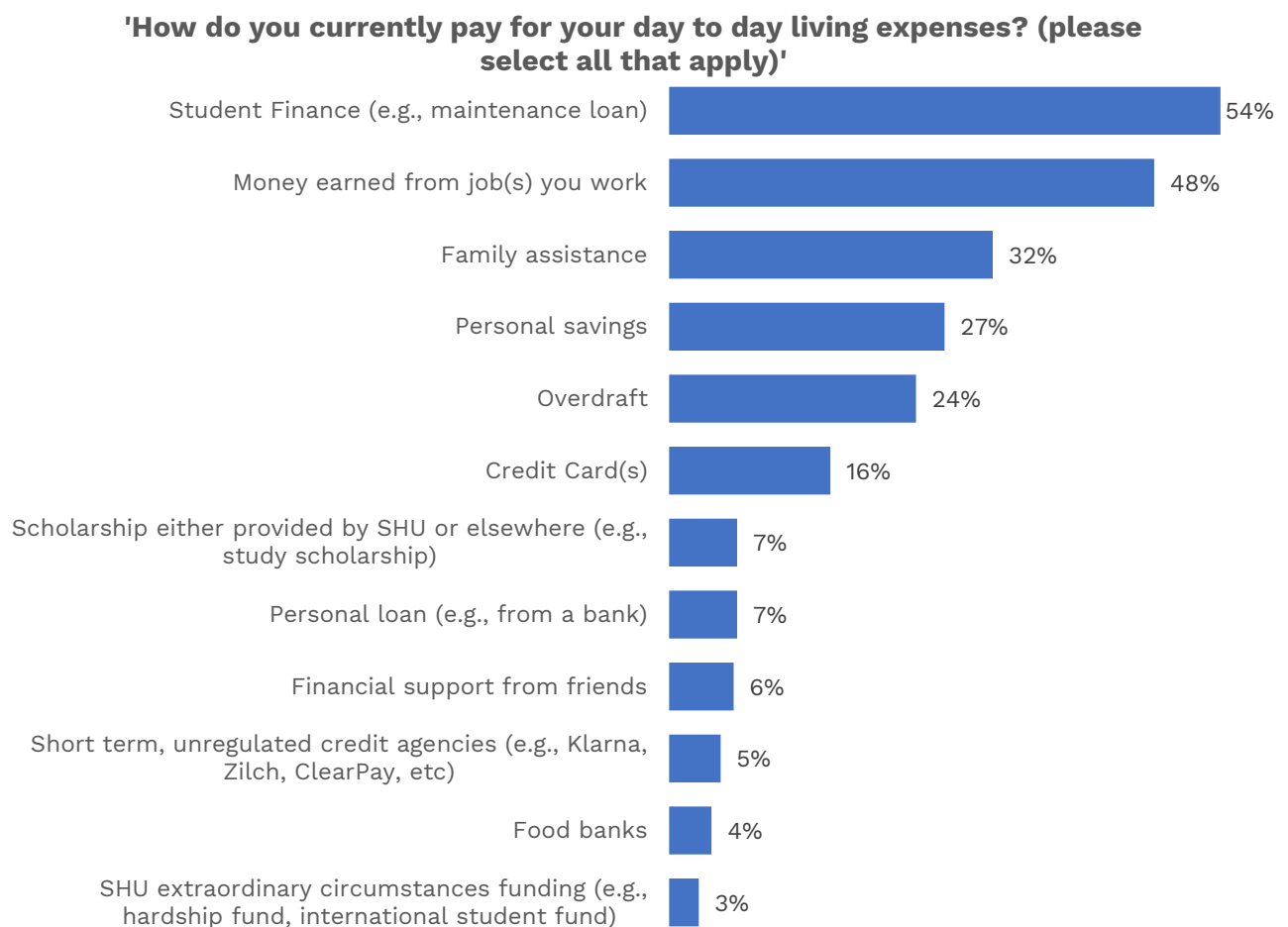


Figure 12: Cost of Living survey 2023/24. Ways in which respondents pay for their day to day living expenses. (n=2284).

³⁶ Waltmann, B. (2022) 'Government uses high inflation as cover for hitting students, graduates and universities' [Comment], *Institute for Fiscal Studies*. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/government-uses-high-inflation-cover-hitting-students-graduates-and-universities>

³⁷ Godin, M. (2024) 'The increase in student maintenance hides a critical shortfall in financial support for students' [comment], *HEPI*. Available at: [The increase in student maintenance hides a critical shortfall in financial support for students - HEPI](#)

The implicit assumption within these policy decisions, that ‘bank of mum and dad’ will simply step up and mitigate students’ financial shortfall, is misplaced, especially as many of the poorest households will themselves struggling with cost of living related challenges. As **Figure 12**, above, shows, less than a third of students can rely on family support to cover their day to day living expenses.

It is, therefore, essential that HSU & SHU coordinate with other widening participation institutions to lobby politicians, both locally and nationally, and influence the new government to increase thresholds and maintenance amounts to levels commensurate with the actual cost of living for students undertaking higher education study. Without this change, there is a very real danger that HE in this country will once again become the preserve of a wealthy few, with decades of progress in educational equality lost.

Recommendation 10: HSU & SHU continue existing partnership initiatives addressing the impact of cost of living, while also working with local politicians and other HE organisations to lobby the new government to increase parental earning thresholds and maintenance amounts to levels that ensure financial support reflects the actual cost of living for students.

2.4 – Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness, dislocation, and poor mental health persist at worrying rates on a post-pandemic campus. Students are grappling with impacts from the ongoing cost of living crisis as well as (re)adjusting to socialising after Covid³⁸, which is proving increasingly difficult³⁹. In the third wave of ‘Hallam, How Are We Doing?’ in 2022/2023, one quarter (25%) of respondents had seriously considered dropping out of university. The first wave of the survey in the 2023/24 academic year found that mental health (anxiety, depression, etc) was the main reason for 54% of students considering dropping out and loneliness being the main reason for 27% of students. In order to help address some of these issues, HSU has worked with the university to develop a peer support, social prescribing program.

Student Social Connect is a peer-to-peer social prescribing program. According to the NHS, social prescribing is:

“an approach that connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing”.⁴⁰

Student Social Connect ran from January to June 2024 as a collaborative pilot between Sheffield Hallam University and Hallam Students’ Union, utilising staff

³⁸ Ellard, O. B., Dennison, C., and Tuomainen, H. (2023) ‘Review: Interventions addressing loneliness amongst university students: a systematic review’, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 28:4, pp. 512-523. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12614>

³⁹ See Skopeliti, C. (2023) for The Guardian: [‘Socially stunted’: how Covid pandemic aggravated young people’s loneliness | Loneliness | The Guardian](#)

⁴⁰ NHS. ‘Social prescribing’. Available at: [NHS England » Social prescribing](#)

resources from both organisations to project manage and run the pilot and Hallam Fund finance to pay for the connectors.

Our Data

15 'connectees' participated in the pilot, alongside 3 student staff 'connectors'. The following data were collected and analysed within a realist evaluative framework:

- An overview of service-user needs and issues
- An overview of support offered and provided
- Wellbeing scores (using ONS⁴¹ and SWEMWBS⁴²); collected before and after the trial
- Qualitative comments from the connectees and connectors

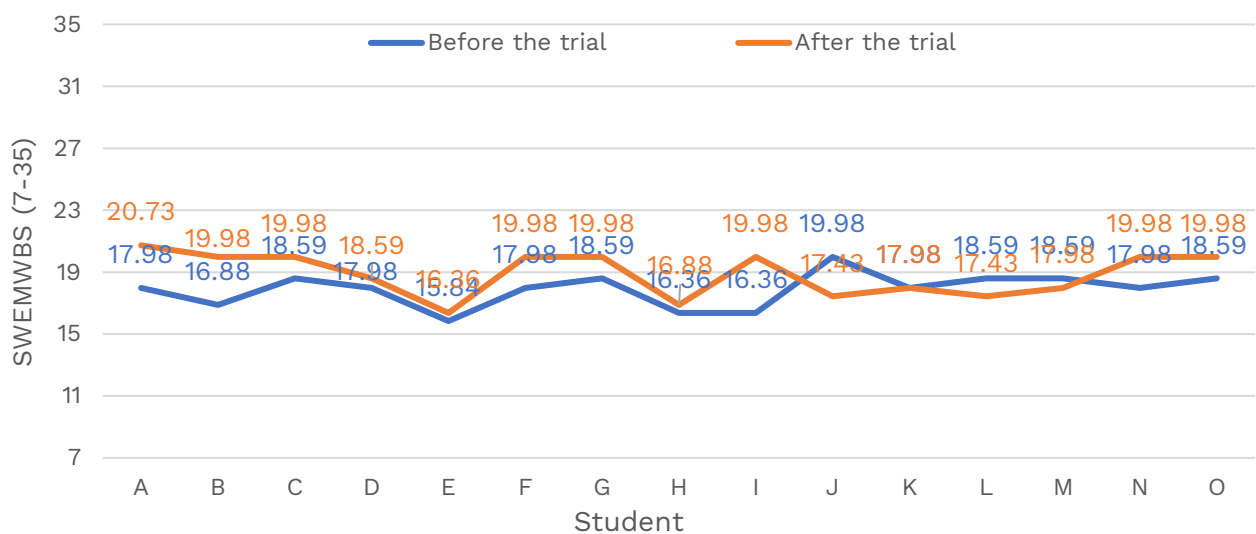


Figure 13: Wellbeing scores (SWEMWBS) of all service-users, before and after the trial (n=15).

Figure 13 displays the scores (SWEMWBS) for each service-user before and after the pilot. 11 of the 15 service-users in the trial, or 73% were associated with an increase in their overall wellbeing when SWEMWBS is used as a framework for measurement. For some of these service-users, the scores increased by significant amounts. For example, Student I's overall wellbeing score increased by over 22%.

The mean of all service-users at the beginning of the trial was 18.6 (out of a possible 35). At the end of the trial this average was 20.3, so an increase in average wellbeing score was reported as about 1.7. These figures show that there was a reported increase in overall wellbeing scores across the student social connect pilot.

⁴¹ Office for National Statistics (2018) 'Personal well-being user guidance'. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingsurveyuserguide>

⁴² Putz, R., O'Hara, K., Taggart, F., and Stewart-Brown, S. (2012) 'Using WEMWBS to measure the impact of your work on mental wellbeing: A practice-based user guide'. Available from: https://www.corc.uk.net/media/1244/wemwbs_practitioneruserguide.pdf

Some headlines from the qualitative comments include:

- All the students taking part in the pilot have been positive about their Connector, commenting on them being friendly, calm, approachable. Several students have commented that they really enjoyed meeting their Connector. One commented that they were pleased the Connector was a student.
- Not all students went to activities with their Connector. Many only had contact over Teams messaging. One student who went with connector commented that it made him feel less alone. Without this he may not have gone. Someone else commented that having a connector there at a sports activity helped.
- Student connectors who took part in the pilot were overall very positive about their roles and about the wider scheme in general, and that they had developed leadership, communication and interpersonal skills.

The quantitative and qualitative data highlights that this social prescribing pilot has had remarkably positive impacts for the wellbeing of the students taking part, with one student stating that they “feel much more stable in [their] mental health” as a result of the trial. This service would also benefit from a more widespread implementation via a longer-term SHU-HSU partnership.

Recommendation 11: SHU works with HSU to enable the expansion of the Student Social Connect pilot, by committing to joint-fund and resource the scheme and to a longer-term partnership with HSU on the scheme, by embedding the provision with their upcoming OfS Access and Participation Plan.

2.5 - Addressing the Ethnic Degree Awarding Gap

Students from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds continue to be impacted negatively in UK Higher Education, from admissions into universities to microaggressions in teaching and learning spaces, and most prominently in degree outcomes⁴³. Despite continued efforts from Hallam to close what is called the Ethnic Degree Awarding Gap (EDAG), it remains an issue. The EDAG is concerned of course with learning experience but arguably, and especially within the ways discussed below, is more of a student wellbeing issue. Much of the established literature take this approach to the EDAG as well.⁴⁴

At SHU, the EDAG is predominantly wide compared with other HEIs. For those graduating in the academic year 2021/22, the difference between white and BAME

⁴³ For two collections of essays on race and experiences within HE, see Jason Arday and Heidi Safia Mirza (2018) *Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan) and Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (2018) *Decolonising the University* (London: Pluto Press).

⁴⁴ Marandure, B. N., Hall, J., and Noreen, S. (2024) “... They're talking to you as if they're kind of dumbing it down’: A thematic analysis of Black students' perceived reasons for the university awarding gap’, *BERJ*, 50:3, pp. 1172-1188. From: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3963>

students achieving a Good Honours degree at Sheffield Hallam was 15.3%, compared with 8.2% as the average across the sector⁴⁵.

As part of HSU's commitment to principles of equality, diversity and anti-racism more specifically, the BAME Ambassadors for the 2023/24 academic year focused on raising awareness of the concept of the EDAG.

Our Data

To evaluate the impact that interventions into raising awareness of the EDAG have had, HSU undertook a two-stage project⁴⁶ which utilised survey and focus group data. The first stage of data collection utilised Wave 3 of HHAWD and included bespoke questions about students' awareness of the EDAG.

As **Figure 14** shows, three quarters (75%) of respondents do not know what the EDAG is, and 16% were somewhat or very aware of what it is. When respondent ethnicity was considered, 12% of white students were somewhat or very aware of the EDAG compared with 23% of BAME students.

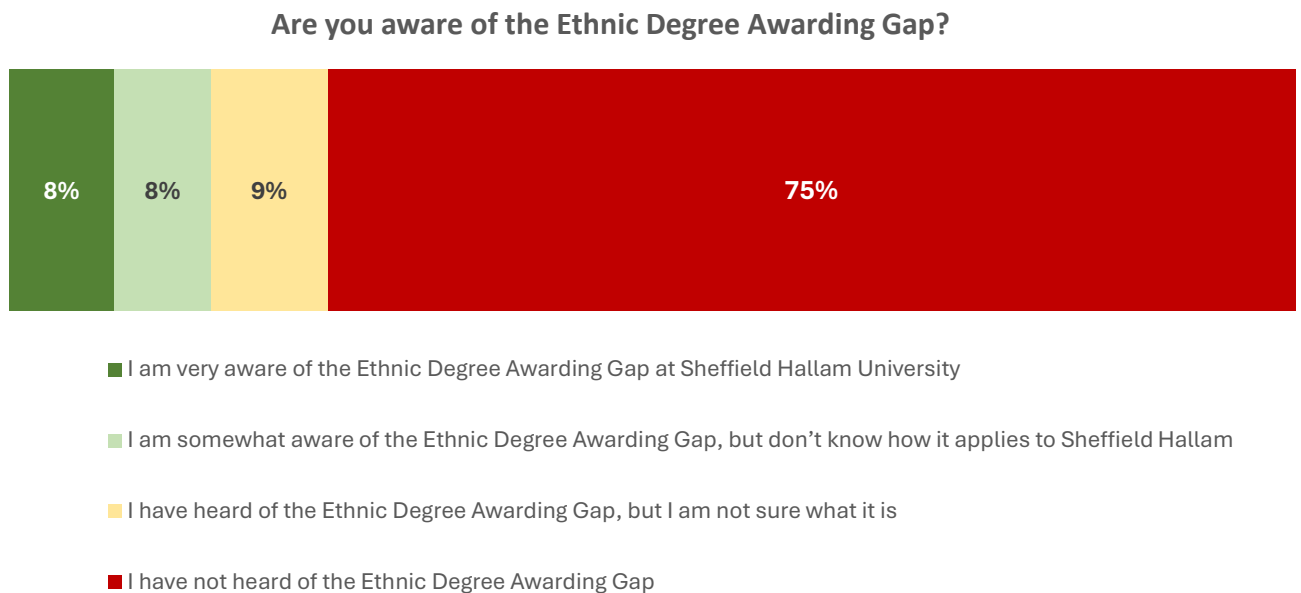


Figure 14: 'Hallam, How are we doing' Wave 3. Awareness of the EDAG by all respondents (n=1186).

Students were also asked about various aspects of university experience and whether they agreed Hallam promoted equality and representation in them. 5% of respondents disagreed that Hallam has support staff that they can identify with, but 22% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the same question. These results differed greatly when both ethnicity and fee status were considered as

⁴⁵ Sheffield Hallam University (2024) 'B.A.M.E. Degree Awarding Gap: How does SHU compare to the Sector?', *SHU Strategy, Planning & Insight*. Available from: https://tableau.shu.ac.uk/views/BAMEDegreeAwardingGap/Sectorranking?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aembed=y#5

⁴⁶ Colburn, J. (2024) 'Raising Awareness of the Ethnicity Degree Awarding Gap', Accessed on 26/06/2024 from [Raising Awareness of the EDAG Report.pdf](#)

variables. A quarter of Home-based BAME students neither agreed nor disagreed with whether they could identify with support staff (see **Figure 15**).

'Do you believe that Sheffield Hallam University has effectively fostered a diverse environment where all students feel safe and included with support staff you identify with?' by Home students and ethnicity

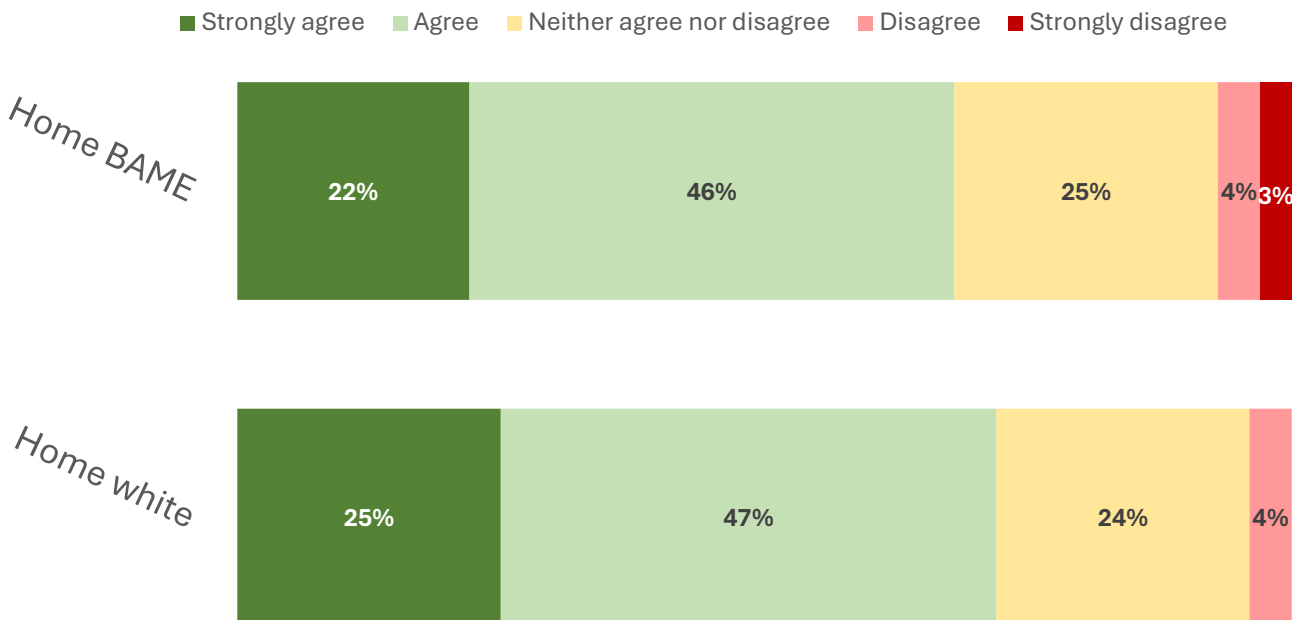


Figure 15: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' Wave 3. Extent to which Home students feel they identify with support staff at Hallam, by ethnicity (n=981).

These results reflect a high level of ambivalence across the Home-based BAME population about whether they feel they are represented in the university among support services or other administrative staff. Many interventions to increase representation within HEIs are usually limited to teaching staff which often means support and professional services are forgotten.⁴⁷⁴⁸

Representation among university staff remains a known factor influencing the EDAG⁴⁹, with many students of ethnic minority backgrounds feeling more 'welcome'

⁴⁷ Arday, J., Branchu, C., and Boliver, V. (2022) 'State of the Art: What do we know about Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Participation in UK Higher Education?', *Social Policy and Society*, 21:1, pp. 12-25. From <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/what-do-we-know-about-black-and-minority-ethnic-bame-participation-in-uk-higher-education/D603F9ECA65148D8C583653E40DC02EE>

⁴⁸ Bhopal, K. (2020) 'For whose benefit? Black and Minority Ethnic training programmes in higher education institutions in England, UK', *British Educational Research Journal*, 46:3, pp. 500-515. From <https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/berj.3589>

⁴⁹ Bannerjee, P. (2024) 'Connecting the dots: a systematic review of explanatory factors linking contextual indicators, institutional culture and degree awarding gaps', *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, 18:1, pp. 31-52. From <https://doi.org/10.1108/HEED-07-2023-0020>

in university spaces with more diverse and representative staff members⁵⁰. Although the nature of the EDAG and its causes represent a more complex and multidimensional issue, the solutions for eradication of the EDAG should be tied to Hallam's principles of equality and diversity. Addressing the EDAG, therefore, should be more a commitment to social justice than an obligation to sector standards.

Recommendation 12: SHU works to ensure that its Professional and Support Services Staff are representative of a diverse range of ethnic identities, so that all SHU students feel that they are represented.

⁵⁰ Islam, M., and Valente, I. (2021) 'A critical dialogue reflecting on the potentials of black, Asian and minority ethnic student-staff partnerships', *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, 7:1. From: <https://doi.org/10.21100/jeipc.v7i1.1037>

Section 3 - Student Voice

The recent redundancies and restructure have seen (among other things) previously dedicated roles for enhancing student's teaching and learning experience compressed into the duties and responsibilities of already busy Associate Deans and other staff. These incoming changes are to undoubtedly reshape students' experiences at Hallam, with regards to teaching and learning, wellbeing and community, and how their student voice is heard. With key teams within the university changing structure, it is worth considering the real life impacts that these could have on how the student voice is channelled and how feedback is listened to and acted upon.

3.1 - College Restructures and Student Voice

The restructure raises serious questions as to how the university plans to meet its requirements under OfS Registration condition B2(b)⁵¹, i.e. that there be student membership of or *effective contribution to both "a provider's committees responsible for academic governance and learning and teaching" and "learning and teaching committees, or course-level committees, in a subject area, or department"*.

The University and Students' Union collaborate to ensure that students' opinions and feedback contribute meaningfully to the University's decision-making, and a key part of this process is ensuring that student representatives (Course Reps, Department Reps and College Officers) have agreed and clear channels to make the case for students' interests. For the College Officers, the former Heads of Teaching & Learning Enhancement fulfilled this role, and it is unclear from the restructure proposals how these channels will continue. If this function is absorbed into an Associate Dean role with many other responsibilities, and student representatives will find themselves unable to regularly present their feedback to the University, this will likely have a negative impact on the student experience. Similarly, the Student Experience Lead role in each Department is crucial in ensuring that students are able to provide meaningful student feedback, and any new structure should ensure that this function is retained.

In addition, the former Heads of Teaching & Learning Enhancement played a key role in developing the University's academic representation structure, which has implications for representation and effective student feedback on every course. Again, it is unclear how this will be resourced in the proposed structure.

In the proposal, it is stated that "[The University has] taken care to ensure that student experience and student interests are protected, and that changes do not cause issues with regulators (Office for Students, PSRBs) and accrediting bodies".

⁵¹ Office for Students (2022) 'Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England'. Available from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/part-v-guidance-on-the-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/condition-b2-resources-support-and-student-engagement/>

However, point 333K (relating to Condition of Registration B2(b)) of the Office for Students' regulatory framework for Higher Education in England states that:

"An absence of student membership of, or effective contribution to, a provider's committees responsible for academic governance and learning and teaching would likely be of concern.

An absence of student membership of, or effective contribution to, learning and teaching committees, or course-level committees, in a subject area, or department, would likely be of concern."

Here, effective contribution can be taken to mean equipping student members of Department & College governance to form meaningful and independent opinions on relevant matters, rather than just allowing them to attend, and having sufficient support and resource from the University is crucial in ensuring that this happens. Therefore, the University should consider whether the removal of the Head of Teaching & Learning Enhancement role has implications for OfS compliance, or else agree clear minimum standards with the Students' Union to ensure there is capacity to engage with representatives.

It is worth noting that, while other feedback channels exist, such as Module Evaluation Questionnaires and other surveys, these alone do not meet the criteria for OfS registration condition B2(b).

Recommendation 13: Following the university restructure, SHU ensures all colleges retain nominated student experience leads at both college and schools/institute level in their new structures, allowing sufficient staff resource and support to meaningfully engage with student voice activity and HSU's existing student representation structure.

3.2 – HSU's Profile within University Communications with Students and Academic Staff

Mainstream discussions of students' lives often conflate the positive contributions of students' unions to their partner university, and the case is no different at Hallam. Students are increasingly confusing the services and benefits of HSU such as societies and events, to those of the university, which leaves HSU as often a peripheral influence on student experience and not as a partner of the university. HSU's outputs have on occasion not been acknowledged appropriately through SHU communications with students and even its staff.

As weaved throughout this report, students at Hallam are consistently less aware of the SU's services, or that the lines between what they consider to be the University and the SU become so blurred that they are not easily distinguishable. **Figure 16** shows that over a third of respondents to HHAWD Wave 2 (38%) would not approach HSU for help owing that they are unaware of what advice and support they can offer. Additionally, 34% of respondents also answered that they were unsure where to go to access this help, and 22% did not know how to contact HSU.

'Why wouldn't you approach the Students' Union for help?'

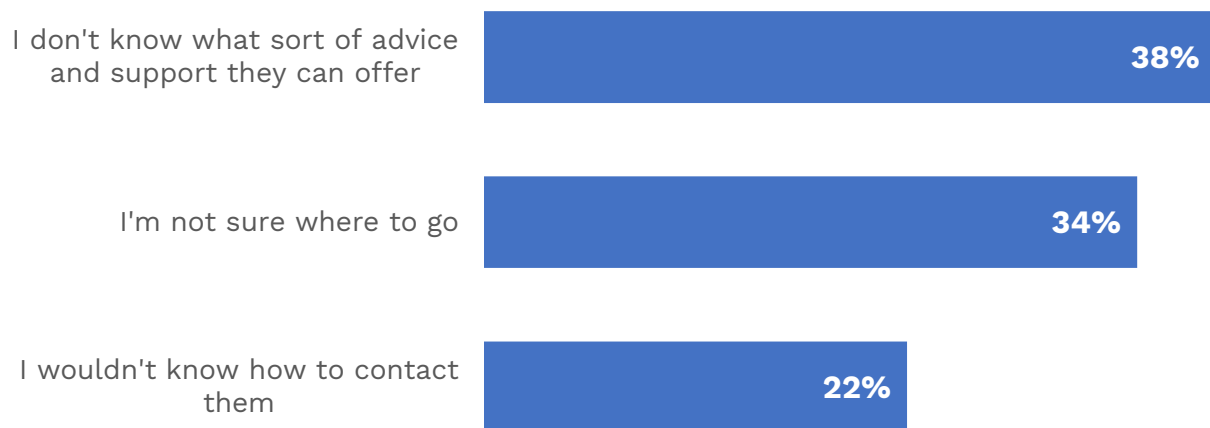


Figure 16: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' Wave 2. Reasons why the respondent would not approach the SU for help (n=1620).

These figures represent at the crudest level that students do not really have a clear idea of what kinds of support their Students' Union can offer, but also at a more profound level these figures reflect that students are perhaps less likely to be able to distinguish clearly the university from the Students' Union and their respective services.

Alongside this, there are other discernible issues that arise for both the SU and SHU regarding awareness of the SU and its services. In various iterations of HHAWD, an evident trend appears in student engagement with HSU and enjoyment or satisfaction with their university life. **Figure 17** shows the differences between enjoyment of their university experience by engagement with the SU.

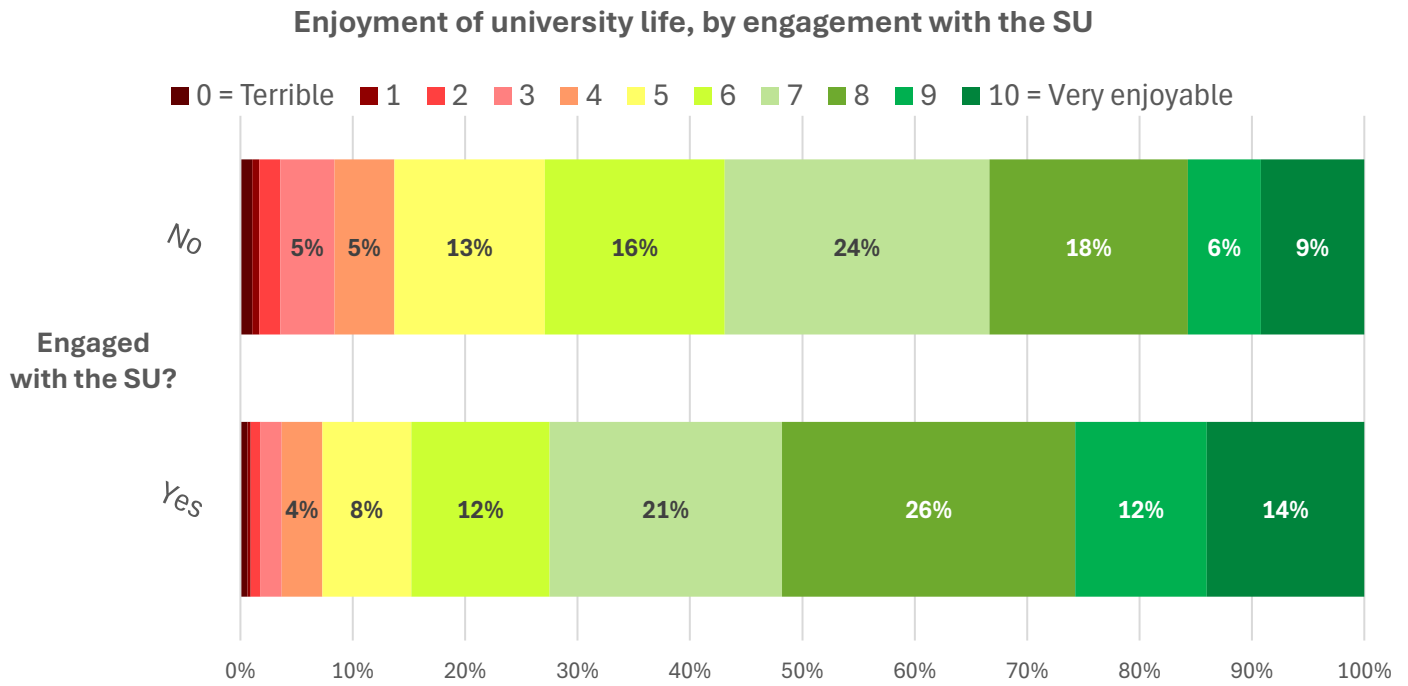


Figure 17: 'Hallam, how are we doing?' 23/24 Wave 2. Enjoyment of university, by engagement with HSU or its services (n=2068).

On a scale where 10 is very enjoyable, those that had engaged with the SU and its services rated their enjoyment much more highly than their counterparts that had not engaged. Over half (52%) of those that had engaged had rated their enjoyment very highly (8-10); those that had not engaged made up less than a third (33%) of this same category. As **Figure 17** shows too, low scores of enjoyment with university life are more associated with those that had not engaged with HSU. 14% of unengaged respondents rate their enjoyment very lowly (0-4), compared to just above 7% of their engaged cohort.

It seems only beneficial to all parties that there are more efforts made to establish the HSU's profile as a network of support, entertainment, and representative services more centrally within the university's own communications to students. In grounding the Students' Union alongside but distinct from the University, students will clearly know the various places where they can obtain various services and support.

It would make sense in this case to anchor HSU and its services more centrally in the student eye from the beginning of Hallam students' journeys to their graduations. This would mean that the Students' Union's services are platformed alongside those provided by the university, in face-to-face and digital

communications with students. The SU would be fairly represented as a partner of the university in this case, and not an afterthought.

This promotion of HSU through university channels would aid the services as well as the university following the restructure of the colleges and their staff which, as outlined prior, is expected to disrupt personnel, communications, and services.

Recommendation 14: SHU positions HSU more centrally to their written, digital and face-to-face communications with all students, so that HSU's services, outputs, and impacts are more visible and more fairly represented.

Closing Statement

Our research during the academic year 2023-24 indicates that our students are continuing to adapt to the post pandemic University environment but that the added challenges of the cost of living crisis are making this transition particularly hard for some of our student community.

This is particularly true in relation to the teaching and learning experience at Hallam. The current environment has led to a questioning of how and what works for academic experience, with students continually impacted by how they are taught, assessed, and given feedback. Personal wellbeing and sense of community are also still reeling in the aftermath of the pandemic and cost of living crisis. More students are reporting themselves as socially and economically marginalised and in need of our support. These predicaments are not unresolvable, but are perhaps exacerbated in light of the recent changes to the university's professional personnel, which will have consequences that should not be underestimated.

Over the course of the 2024-25 academic year, we will champion the recommendations outlined in this report, and will work collaboratively with the University to implement the recommendations, monitoring and feeding back to students on our progress.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the students who have given up their time to complete our surveys, fill in our Speak Week postcards, submit their views on our online platform and participate in our focus groups and interviews, as well as freely and informally making us aware of how it feels to be a Hallam student now.

We would also like to thank the professional and academic personnel at SHU who have continued to support the Student Voice Report and the Students' Union as a whole. At this time, we would especially like to send our thanks and very best wishes to our colleagues who are leaving the University and who have been part of our Student Voice Report journey during its 12-year life.

Appendices

Appendix A: Research & Data Sources






Throughout the 2023/24 academic year, the Students' Union conducts primary research to understand our students' experiences. Below is a list of research projects and data sources referenced in this report that were conducted by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, including the research methodology and the number of participants or respondents.


Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
<p>Hallam, How Are We Doing?' Survey</p> <p>This pulse survey took place three times in the academic year: November 2023, March 2024, and May 2024. The survey asked student opinions about the university, the Students' Union, and their experiences with both, as well as tailored questions for each time of year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nov 2023: 1308 • March 2024: 2068 • May 2024: 1186 	Quantitative
<p>Share Your Experience</p> <p>Our digital feedback system where students can share their course-related concerns with the Students' Union to enable the Union to gather feedback and fix issues, where applicable.</p> <p>unionvoice.org.uk</p>	101 submissions from 96 students	Qualitative and Quantitative
<p>Course Rep Placement Survey</p> <p>Carried out in January 2024, This survey sought to gauge student perceptions of the opportunities and support available to engage in sandwich year or work experience placements.</p>	82	Quantitative and Qualitative
<p>Democratic Structures</p> <p>In order to gain a better knowledge of what students understand about the Students' Union offer, the Officers and how ideas/changes can be submitted and voted upon, three focus groups were conducted; the focus groups were with one with very engaged students, one with engaged international students, and one with engaged home students (no unengaged students attended their focus</p>	20	Qualitative






Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
group). Questions were kept very broad in order to gain students' uninfluenced feedback, with the intention of this feedback helping to shape any models moving forward.		
<p>EDAG Workshop</p> <p>A workshop conducted with the HSU BAME Ambassadors, lasting one hour. Department Reps were invited and discussions were held about awareness of the EDAG and how SHU and HSU can work together to make more students aware. The rationale for this choice was to include students who were nuanced in their knowledge of SHU and HSU structures, policies, and processes.</p>	4	Qualitative
<p>Cost of Living survey</p> <p>This research was conducted via a short, twelve-minute survey. The questions focused on the impact of the cost of living on students' lives, to see the extent to which Hallam students are feeling the impact in the rise of costs, whether there are differences in impact by key demographics, and most importantly, to find ways the university and the students' union can work together to mitigate some of the impact and expense for these students. All SHU students were asked to take part in the survey.</p>	2284	Quantitative
<p>Department Rep Feedback</p> <p>This feedback is collected from Department Reps (via a combination of opinions from students and Course Reps) monthly.</p>	17	Qualitative
<p>Course Rep Mid-Year Survey 2023</p> <p>This annual survey asks Course Reps to share how they found their experience of being a Course Rep.</p>	70	Quantitative



Source	No. of responses / participants	Methodology
<p>Speak Week 2023/24</p> <p>30 Students' Union staff, including student officers, approached students across both campuses every day during the Speak Week (6-10 November) and asked them to complete a postcard, telling us one thing they'd like to keep the same about their university experience and what they'd like to change.</p>	3157 postcards	Qualitative
<p>Student Social Connect Pilot Evaluation</p> <p>Mixed methods evaluation of the SSC Pilot which incorporated a short survey at the beginning and end of the trial with all participants (using ONS4 and SWEMWBS as frameworks) and short, qualitative open-ended interviews.</p>	15 (connectees). 3 (connectors)	Quantitative/ Qualitative
<p>Inclusive Practice and Reasonable Adjustments Review</p> <p>Disabled Student Support (DSS) wanted to work more collaboratively with students and the SU to understand perceptions of inclusive practice. Three focus groups were conducted, with a mix of disabled and non-disabled people attending.</p>	21	Qualitative
<p>Monthly Student Feedback Reports</p> <p>The monthly student feedback reports collate information from Union Voice, Ask Us, the Helpdesk and Advice Centre, in addition to feedback from Department Reps. The reports aim to provide a summary of the most prominent issues and concerns raised by students with SU within the previous month.</p> <p>https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/union/publications/</p>	N/A	Quantitative and Qualitative

Appendix B - Summary of progress on The Student Voice Report 22/23 Recommendations for 23/24

No.	Recommendation	Hallam	HSU	Progress indicator
Our learning experiences				
1	Teaching staff should be supported to share and adopt approaches that make full use of a blended learning environment to encourage student engagement, improve accessibility and maximise learning opportunities. Expectations of learning experiences should be clearly communicated to students at the beginning of each academic year.	•		
2	SHU should ensure the upcoming Delivery Models project findings are adopted consistently across the university, while maintaining: a) a long-term iterative process for timetable planning, responsive to student feedback and b) The flexibility to continue to accommodate those students actively disadvantaged by the new timetables/consolidation of teaching hours.	•		
3	SHU should identify internal best practice in the communication and implementation of reasonable adjustments for disabled students on placement, and ensure the process is standardised, wherever possible, across the whole university.	•		
4	SHU should continue to work with HSU in promoting resources for student support, including, but not limited to, lecture slides and video content that will market the Student Union offer, including student representation.	•	•	
5	SHU should continue to engage fully with the findings of the HSU Nursing & Midwifery Recovery Plan Report, maintaining the serious steps taken to improve placement allocation and flexibility, safeguarding/whistleblowing processes whilst on placement, and ensuring that the appropriate allocation of placement support contacts are in place for each student. Placement best practise should be shared across all Health and Social Care departments.	•	•	

6	SHU should encourage and support staff (ASELs, Student Experience Leads, etc) to work with HSU during the first semester of 23/24 academic year to: a) improve awareness of the function and processes of academic societies, as well as the benefits they can bring to the student experience, and b) increase both the number of academic societies (thereby reducing the number of courses without an academic society option) and the number of students engaged with those societies, so that every student has access to an appropriate academic society option.	•	•	
---	--	---	---	---

Our wellbeing and community				
7	In addition to a continuing commitment to targeted food promotions such as £1 Wednesdays, all food outlets across campus should offer at least one affordable, healthy, hot food option, all day every day.	•		
8	SHU should raise placement mileage reimbursement for mandatory placements, subject to eligibility, from 28p to 59p per mile for the first 3,500 miles and 24p thereafter, as per Royal College of Nursing guidelines	•		
9	SHU should explore the creation of an integrated, city-wide and multi-university partnership approach to housing, such as the partnership housing strategy in Nottingham, which considers affordability for students, diversity of student need (such as family housing, single housing, etc).	•	•	
10	SHU and HSU should offer more part-time student job opportunities. All job descriptions need to include minimum and estimated average weekly hours and some should not exceed 20 hrs per week to ensure that all students, including international students, can apply. All student jobs should be paid at the Real Living Wage, regardless of a students' age.	•	•	
11	SHU should expand their careers and employability offer to provide greater in-study work support, including events such as a student job fair, to assist students' progression into highly skilled employment.	•		

12	SHU and HSU Welcome events should encourage the participation of returning students and specifically target some activities at those students continuing their studies.	•	•	
13	SHU and HSU should organise regular, free or low-cost social wellbeing activities, particularly social sport (e.g. a campus running club or GoodGym team, lunchtime walks from Collegiate Crescent, regular social team sports, morning walking bus from City campus to Collegiate, etc).	•	•	



Complete
in 23/24



Satisfactory
progress in
23/24



insufficient
progress in
23/24

Appendix C – Feedback from Union Voice

101 Union Voice submissions, received between July 2023 and June 2024, categorised based on their subject matter

