

Students' Union Student Feedback Report

This monthly report shares the most prominent concerns from students received within that month. This report, however, showcases insights from November 2022, including statistics from our Helpdesk, Union Voice, Department Reps, and results from the Students' Union's [Cost of Living Survey](#) (open from 11 October to 8 November 2022, and promoted only to undergraduate).

*Table 1: The source of data used throughout this report, as well as the number of queries or responses. *NB: The number of queries for Helpdesk and Union Voice were collated based on those received between 1st and 30th November 2022.. The Cost of Living Survey was open between 11 October and 8 November 2022.*

Source	Number of queries / respondents
Helpdesk*	442
Union Voice*	3
Cost of Living Survey	1547

Summary of this report

- The **Students' Union's Helpdesk** received 442 queries from students during November. The types of queries were about merchandise, facilities / way finding, societies, events and Give It A Go, or Student Reps. Only a small number (n=29) contacted the Helpdesk for academic issues.
- **Union Voice** received 3 queries during November. Whilst each of these queries was individual, the types / themes of these queries were from ongoing issues that the Students' Union are aware of or will be exploring more moving forward: on-campus exam arrangements, temperature of campus buildings, and international students housing concerns.
- Health, Wellbeing & Life Science **Department Reps** raised concerns over placements, an ongoing issue. Other key themes from Department Reps feedback include library resources, finances and financial support, timetabling, communication, and on-campus exams.
- The **Cost of Living Survey** received 1547 responses from undergraduates across the university. The rising costs of food and energy bills are having the most impact on students, with the data more mixed for rent and travel costs. Commuter students, a non-homogenous group, displayed a complex picture of contrasting spending priorities dependent on age and housing tenure, with students based in the city centre much more likely to be affected by increased rental costs than those based further afield. Nearly two-thirds of respondents sought additional financial support from family, friends, and/or 'buy now, pay later' schemes. Areas that respondents would like the Students' Union and the University, working together, to focus their efforts are decreasing the cost of travel and decreasing the cost of food.

Monthly Statistics from the Students' Union

The **Students' Union's Helpdesk** received 442 queries from students during the month of November. Of these, the majority (n=267) were received face-to-face at the Students' Union Helpdesk located in the Hubs. The most common type of queries received were about merchandise (n=65), facilities / way finding (n=49), societies (n=46), events and Give It A Go (n=34), or Student Reps (30). All of these students will have been signposted to the relevant service within the Students' Union. Only 29 students contacted the Helpdesk about academic issues, which were generally about specific queries

with their course. Academic issues tend to be signposted to students' representatives (i.e., Course or Department), the University's Hallam Help, Course Leaders, or the Advice Centre, dependent on need.

The Students' Union's feedback platform, [Union Voice](#), received only 3 new submissions.

- Assessments and exams within engineering and mathematics. On-campus exams remains an ongoing concern for students within this department. This is being addressed with the BTE College Officer and Department Rep. This is a 'Trending Topic' as linked below.
- Temperature of Collegiate Campus, with this student saying campus is too cold. Anecdotally, students have shared this feedback with staff and Officers. This is a topic area that the Union will seek opinions from more students about and will share updates in future reports.
- Accommodation for an international student. This is a continual issue raised by international students; this query has been shared with the International Student Officer. This is a 'Trending Topic' as linked below.

The [Trending Topics](#) from Union Voice queries are updated regularly and students are shared this information if their query fits into one of these topic areas. The appendix of this report includes details of each theme, count of comments, and a summary of what students said.

Department Reps

Within Health, Wellbeing & Life Sciences, students raised concerns over timetabling, finances and financial support, placements, library resources and communication concerns as key themes. Some feedback detailed reflection that information, such as library resource, were not timed ideally, and largely feedback sought more support/communication throughout all these areas. These are themes we have seen throughout ongoing work.

Within Business, Technology & Engineering, the Department Rep for Engineering & Maths has been continuing to resolve concerns and increase student support around online vs in-person examination queries from students (as highlighted above within Union Voice).

Further feedback from Department Reps in Business, Technology & Engineering and Social Sciences & Arts is still be collected and collated. This will be included in the next monthly report.

Cost of Living Survey

The Students' Union ran another survey exploring the impact of the cost of living between 11th October and 8th November 2022. The survey was circulated to all undergraduate students and received 1547 responses in total.

- Student finance (71%) is the single largest source of funds for covering day-to-day costs for students, with over half (51%) also working at least part-time hours, to supplement their income. A quarter of students (24%) also rely on regular family assistance to make ends meet.
- The rising costs of food and energy bills are having the most impact on students, with the data more mixed for rent and travel costs.
- SHU's large commuter population helps create a complex picture of contrasting spending priorities dependent on age and housing tenure, with students based in the city centre much more likely to be affected by increased rental costs than those based further afield.

- Furthermore, commuter students themselves are not homogenous. Younger commuters, presumably still living with parents, are impacted far less by increased energy costs than older commuters who are directly responsible for paying the bills.
- Approaching two-thirds of students (61%) have had to seek additional financial support or credit in the last 12 months, borrowing from family and friends or using 'buy-now-pay-later' schemes to cover essentials. One-third of respondents (33%) have taken out credit cards, overdrafts, or loans to make ends meet.
- At the same time, the use of available institutional support from SHU is sparse, being accessed by disproportionately low numbers of 1st year students (14%), compared to 2nd and 3rd years (31% & 41%).
- When asked what measures they would like to see implemented, the response from students was very clear: **improved/cheaper transport options** and **food discounts**, both on and off campus.

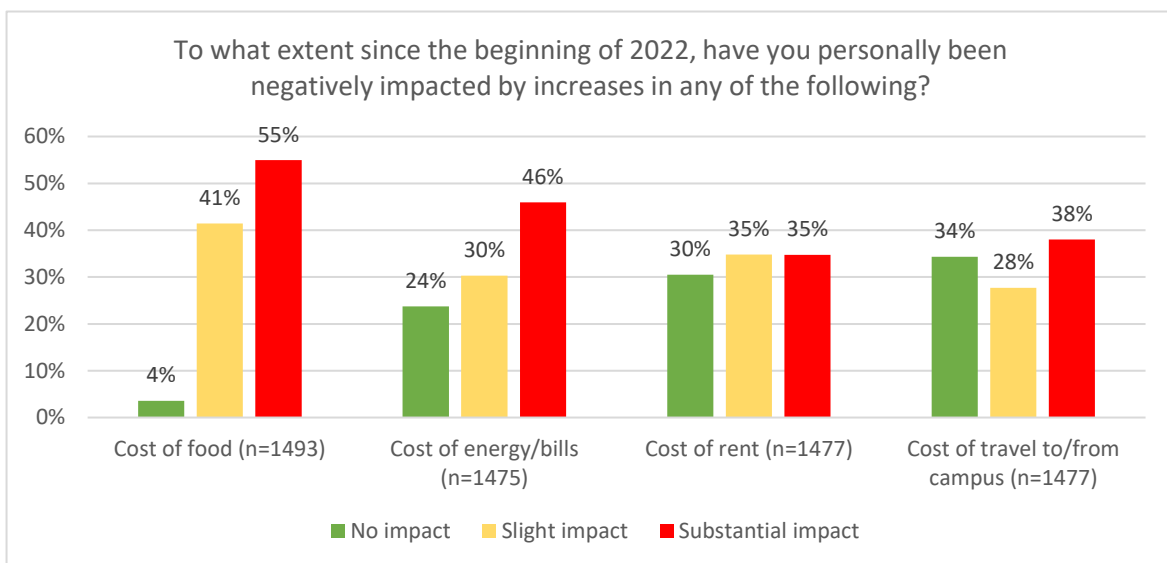


Figure 1: Level of impact, on all respondents (n=1501), of changes in certain essential costs.

Respondents were asked how they had been affected by increases in the cost of certain essential outgoings, specifically Food, energy, rent & travel (see Figure 2). While high numbers reported 'substantial negative impact' across all 4 categories, the amount of students substantially affected by the rising cost of **food** and **energy** bills were particularly high – just over or just under half of respondents. There were, however, relatively high numbers of respondents reporting 'no impact' from rises in **rent** (30%) and **travel** (34%) costs. This contrasts with the findings nationally¹ where housing costs are held up as the single greatest pressure on student finances, while travel is, in fact, considered even less of a concern.

A factor specific to Sheffield Hallam that may account for this differential is our large commuter population, with many students living further afield and/or with family and therefore less affected by fluctuations in the rental market but are, at the same time, more exposed to changes in cost of public transport or petrol. Also, overseas students (who might be more likely to live locally) are significantly more likely to have been impacted by the cost of rent (59%) in comparison to home

¹ National Union of Students. (2022). Cost of Living Crisis: HE Students. Nov 2022. Available from: https://www.nus.org.uk/nus_sets_out_cost_of_living_policy_proposals_to_support_students.

students (33%). SHU's large commuter student cohort could explain some of the variance, with those commuting who are 22 years or older might be more likely to be responsible paying their household bills and, therefore, feeling the impact of rocketing energy prices (see Figure 3).

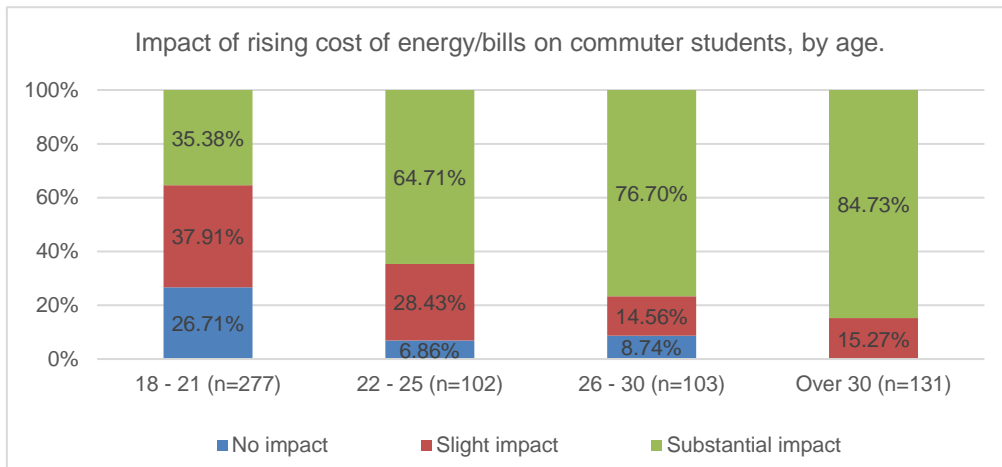


Figure 2: Impact of rising cost of energy/bills on all commuters (n=613), by age.

When asked which areas of spending they had cut back on this year (see figure 4), three-quarters of respondents highlighted **clothes** (76%) and **luxury items** (74%), while 70 percent named **socialising**. Fifty-nine percent pointed to **food** and **holidays**, while **transport** costs and **heating** were noted by 49 percent & 41 percent respectively.

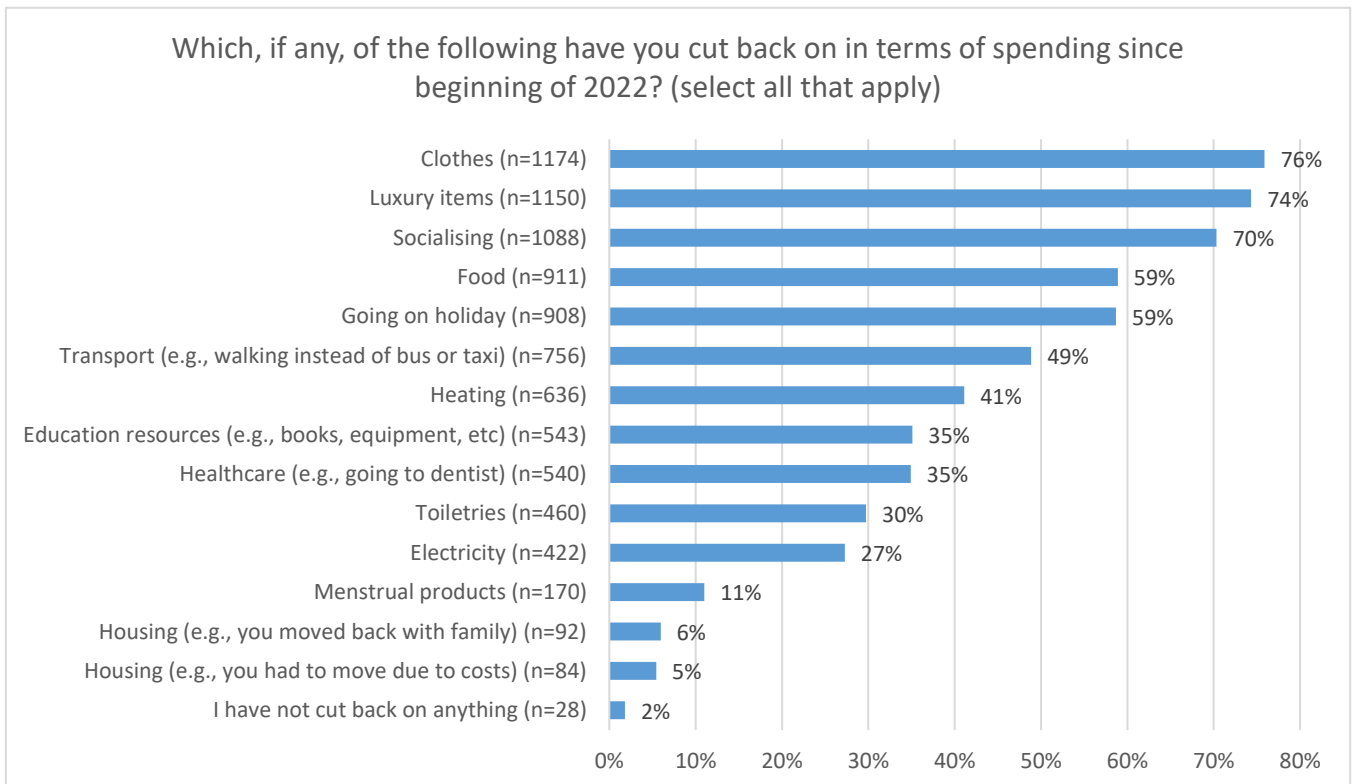


Figure 3: Areas of spending cut back on by all respondents (n=1485).

Finally, respondents were asked to share the top three things they would like to see changed. The two largest themes were travel arrangements / discounts and food discounts.

- **Travel arrangements / discounts:** Comments were about discounting travel arrangements, such as public transport or taxi services, for students across the city. For more details on this, please see the accompanying Cost of Travel Report.
- **Food discounts:** Comments were about wanting cheaper or free food on campus. Students also commented on expensive food outside of university as well (e.g., during normal food shop at supermarkets).

Other things students would like to see changed (with over 150 comments about each of these) were regarding loans / bursaries / fundings; essentials / requirements; energy costs / bills; and student support.

- **Essentials / Requirements:** Majority of comments were grouped under this theme as they mentioned wanting 'discounts on campus'. 23 students mentioned wanting access to free sanitary/health products such as condoms. Comments included wanting these available in toilets rather than having to ask at helpdesks. Another suggestion included wanting monthly packages to be available if students cannot afford them themselves. 8 comments mentioned healthcare as an issue - accessing dentists and opticians. Students would like more access to these resources and would like Hallam to signpost any information that could help. Also pointed out that these can be costly so any funding for healthcare could be appreciated. Other comments include setting up a Hallam 'too good to go' at the end of the day from the cafes - could make food more affordable than eating out/meal prepping.
- **Loans / Bursaries / Funding:** Majority of comments were about increasing student loans or bursaries, or the university offering additional funding for students in other ways.
- **Student Support:** Comments under this theme were from students wanting support from the university through various means, such as those with children, those with disabilities, or those studying subjects where they are unable to work alongside studying (e.g., nursing). Comments were also about wanting increased understanding from the university that the cost of living is having an impact on student livelihoods.
- **Energy cost / bills:** Comments were about assisting students / their families to pay for the cost of energy and bills generally.

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