Sheffield Hallam Students' Union

Student Voice Report 2018/19

SHEFFIELD
HALLAM
STUDENTS'
UNION

Written by:
Elizabeth Chitwood
Researcher
Sheffield Hallam Students' Union
e.chitwood@shu.ac.uk

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Education Officer's
Foreward

Having the opportunity to represent over 32,000 students locally, nationally and internationally here at Sheffield Hallam University has been an incredible experience for me. Moreover, I appreciate the opportunity to share my journey and my sincere thoughts about my role as the Education Officer. I can do this best by beginning to give insights from my journey and giving everyone an idea about how I have contributed positively to student experiences at Sheffield Hallam University.

It is essential as a Students' Union that we challenge the behaviour that perpetuates a feeling that the student voice is superficial, only being valued where it is welcomed. It has to be the priority of Students' Union's to stand up for the rights of all students and project the student voice, and for the University to listen and act on it regardless of how hard the subject and/or the result may be. Though, on the other hand, while Sabbatical Officers tend to focus on the University, it is necessary for the Students' Union to also pay close attention to the student voice. Winning an election and subsequently progressing with the role are entirely different things, but through working in partnership with allies across the University and support from Students' Union staff, we have accomplished our best within this academic year.

Some highlights of my time as Education Officer include: organising and running the Perspectives On Higher Education Conference to better inform our students about how student finance, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) attainment gap, mental health support, Brexit developments, and the removal of international students from Net Migration Figures in the UK have shaped their experiences; lobbied the University to wave laptop loan charges for students, resulting in 24 hours extension of the loan period in the Students' Union; lobbied the University to make SHU GoGlobal fund available for all students to broaden their horizons by enhancing their skills and future employability while undertaken project abroad, worked with the University and SHSU President to make additional microwaves and hot/cold water facilities in eight university buildings; lobbied for a guarantor scheme for all students at Charlotte Court and Bramhall Court, helping students pay their rent if they fall into debt whilst studying at Sheffield Hallam University based on meeting the requirements; and have begun work on the 'Know Your Academic Rights' campaign, which ensures that our Students' Union runs an annual campaign which explains to students their academic rights to help ease any stress related to course workload or exam bunching, passed Post Study Work Visa policy to support the request of International Students to stay and work after their studies, and organised Hallam Union BME & International Students and Staff Awards to celebrate their successes.

One of the areas that need substantial improvement and attention is related to the attainment gap between White and 'BME' students. Though a lot of work this academic year has been led by the SHSU President, Abdullah Okud, and his 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' campaign, it's crucial that the University work towards decreasing this gap, especially as Sheffield Hallam has one of the largest gaps in attainment between Black and White students across the UK. Though some small pockets of attainment gap related work has been happening in faculties at Sheffield Hallam, the University needs to do much more for all of our non-White students. They deserve an equitable student experience, an opportunity to feel empowered, which can only be achieved through momentous change in the culture of Sheffield Hallam. Why is it acceptable that, based on the colour of student's skin, they are less likely to achieve a 'good honours' degree at this University? Why is it acceptable that some University staff think that 'BME' students attaining a lower degree classification is due to student's shortcoming? Why is it acceptable for a University to not prioritise the needs of over 20% of our student population?

Also, my aim was to improve timetabling this academic year by working closely with the University. As our research this year found, generally, students with large timetabling gaps would like the gaps to be decreased. Some students, such as students that commute into university, struggle with their timetable and would find amendments which consider their experience helpful, especially as the number of students commuting into university increases. This should be a priority for the University: providing support to ensure that all our students can succeed.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed substantially in the compilation of this report. Thank you to the Students' Union staff who have worked tremendously throughout this academic year to ensure the report reached its expected outstanding calibre. Thank you to so many other passionate and talented colleagues from all departments within the Students' Union and University for your assistance and guidance.

Peace,

Sheriff Muhammed

SHSU Education Officer, 2018/19

Introduction

A student's experience at University encompasses many aspects, including, of course, their curriculum and their experience in the classroom, but it should also consider their wellbeing, their finances, and their future after University study.

The Student Voice Report is an annual report which presents the findings from research, insight and feedback undertaken and received by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union throughout each academic year. This report collates these findings in order to present a snapshot of the student experience at Sheffield Hallam University. This report is used to highlight challenges that our students experience, but to also bring necessary change through recommendations and actions. These recommendations are for both us, Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, and for Sheffield Hallam University to work together in partnership towards creating a better, more equitable experience for all students at the university.

Sheffield Hallam Students' Union has conducted numerous research projects throughout the 2018/19 academic year on the student experience. This year's report explores the student journey, asking students about the diversity of their curriculum, their opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity, and the barriers and financial implications of additional costs to students. The first section of this year's report will explore the academic experience of students and presents findings from the 'University Experience' survey, the 'How Diverse Is Your Curriculum' survey, feedback from students via the Student Rep system, and research on classroom size and timetabling. The second section highlights student wellbeing, including how postgraduate research students are coping with studies and how sport and physical activity can influence student mental health and wellbeing. This section also looks at differential student experiences of safety on campus and in public places. Our final section on finances presents the barriers to increasing physical activity and how the cost of additional material impacts students. This section also examines student placements and employability.

Our aim is that this report acts as a tool which can enact change where improvements need to be made, and that this account of the student experience is valuable to better understanding our students.

Methodology

The Student Voice Report collates research conducted by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union throughout the 2018/19 academic year into a single report which presents some of the biggest issues our students are facing. The Students' Union has used various methods to collect student feedback, with a substantial focus this academic year on curriculum and wellbeing. We have also utilised national reports, such as previous research conducted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) or the National Union of Students (NUS) and academic research which was used to inform and support our findings.

Our three largest research projects this academic year have looked at diverse aspects of the student experience at Sheffield Hallam:

1) student expectations and academic experience, which received nearly 2000 responses

2) the wellbeing of postgraduate research students at Sheffield Hallam University, which saw 162 out of 723 PGR students respond

3) the activity level of students and barriers to accessing sport and physical activity which saw more than 1,500 students reflect on their experiences in this area

In each of these larger research projects, quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to understand associations and differences in demographic data. Throughout all research, qualitative comments were thematically analysed. The research project on postgraduate research student wellbeing used mixed methods and the qualitative data from this was also analysed thematically to create a richer, more representative depiction of postgraduate research student experience at Sheffield Hallam. This academic year, to ensure ethical research practices, we have submitted research projects through the Sheffield Hallam University research ethics process. For this report, the Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing research project underwent Sheffield Hallam University ethical scrutiny and was approved (Converis number ER9072659).

In addition, to gather data from a wider range of students, we have been more creative with our approach to data collection, utilising Student Representatives, social media, and statistics from our Advice Centre. This more resourceful approach to data collection allows us to hear from students that might not otherwise take part in traditional, more formal research methods. Our aim, with all research, is to ensure students are given equitable and ample opportunities to get their voice heard. Appendix B lists and explains all of the research undertaken by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union used to inform this report.

The impact of the 2017/18 Student Voice Report

As in previous iterations of the Student Voice Report, the University and the Students' Union work together to ensure that recommendations made are acted upon. Some of the key recommendations in which changes have been made to improve the student experience at Sheffield Hallam include:

· The University have established earlier Department assessment resit boards, with Semester 2 resits occurring earlier in the academic year and summer resits occurring in August.

· To establish safer routes between campuses, the University is introducing an app which provides a map of the safest walking routes between campuses. These maps are also available on the Sheffield Hallam University website.

· The University have introduced a guarantor scheme which allows students to pay a one-off £100 as part of their insurance policy which will cover a maximum of £450 per month should student be unable to pay their insurance cover. This scheme is available to students from September 2019.

· The Students' Union and University have created and shared action logs, which requires members of staff and Student Reps to log minutes and record any actions which need to be addressed after Staff - Student Committee Meetings. The University's Student Administration Leadership Team have also been working to improve Rep training, support and recognition.

· The University have provided additional facilities for students to heat their food, adding an additional microwave and hot water tap to the Heart of Campus Building at Collegiate Campus.

In light of these shared goals and actions in response to the Student Voice Report recommendations, the Students' Union and the University have created the Student Voice Principles, which ensures that we listen and respond to our students to a set standard.

1. Regular Activities

Student voice activities should be undertaken regularly to make a positive and demonstrable impact on the student experience at Hallam. Students should be encouraged to lead, participate and/or contribute their opinions to, from and about all aspects of the student journey.

2. Responsive Actions

Actions taken in response to the student voice must be communicated clearly, effectively and in a timely manner to reassure students that they are being listened to.

3. Accessible Methods

Methods used to obtain the student voice should be accessible for all students, regardless of their location or mode of study, and should be offered multiple opportunities for their voice to be heard.

4. Ethical Standards

Student voice activity must be conducted within strict ethical guidelines, including data integrity, confidentiality and anonymity of respondents. Students must be informed of the purpose of the SV activity and how results will be communicated.

5. Fully Inclusive

Student voice should promote the values and respect the views of all members of the Hallam community and should not breach the University's Student Code of Conduct.

6. Formal Student Representation

The University and the Students' Union are responsible for making formal student representation mechanisms and governance structures clear and formal representation is only one dimension of student voice activity.

The Student Voice Principles—

Recommendations

Section	Sub-section	Recommendation	SHU	SHSU
1. Academic Experience	1.1 Course Curriculum	1. The University to implement a work plan based on sector best practice with proven strategies to create a more culturally diverse curriculum, with the ultimate goal of decreasing the gap in attainment between White and BME students.	●	
	1.2 Class Size	2. The University and the Students' Union research factors that impact the drop off in attendance.	●	●
	1.3 Timetabling	3. The University consolidate course timetables, taking into consideration the impact that a fragmented timetable has on commuter students.	●	
	1.4 Academic Workloads	4. The Students' Union conducts additional research into the effect of course work-loads on student satisfaction and success.		●
2. Student Wellbeing	2.1 Physical Activity & Wellbeing	5. The University and the Students' Union to launch a campaign which encourages students to take part in different sport and physical activity opportunities throughout the academic year, whilst also educating students on the importance of activity for their physical and mental wellbeing.	●	●
	2.2 Student Support	6. The University to develop Student Wellbeing to be a more accessible service, and look to increase the number of demographically diverse counsellors and practitioners.	●	
	2.3 Student Safety	7. The Students' Union and the University equip students with skills to: stay safe whilst at Sheffield Hallam, navigate difficult relationships, and build resiliency whilst at university.	●	●
	2.4 Postgraduate Research Wellbeing	8. The Students' Union and the University provide opportunities and events which increase the sense of community amongst PGR students and academic staff across the university.	●	●

Section	Sub-section	Recommendation	SHU	SHSU
3. Student Finances	3.1 Financial Barriers	9. The Students' Union and the University provide additional free or low cost sport and physical fitness opportunities.	●	●
	3.2 Additional Costs	10. The University reduce costs or provide a printing allowance for all students to ensure additional costs at university are mitigated.	●	
	3.3 Placement & Employability	11. The University to broaden the consultation of the work experience aspect of the Hallam Model with the student body to ensure implementation is done with the student voice in mind.	●	
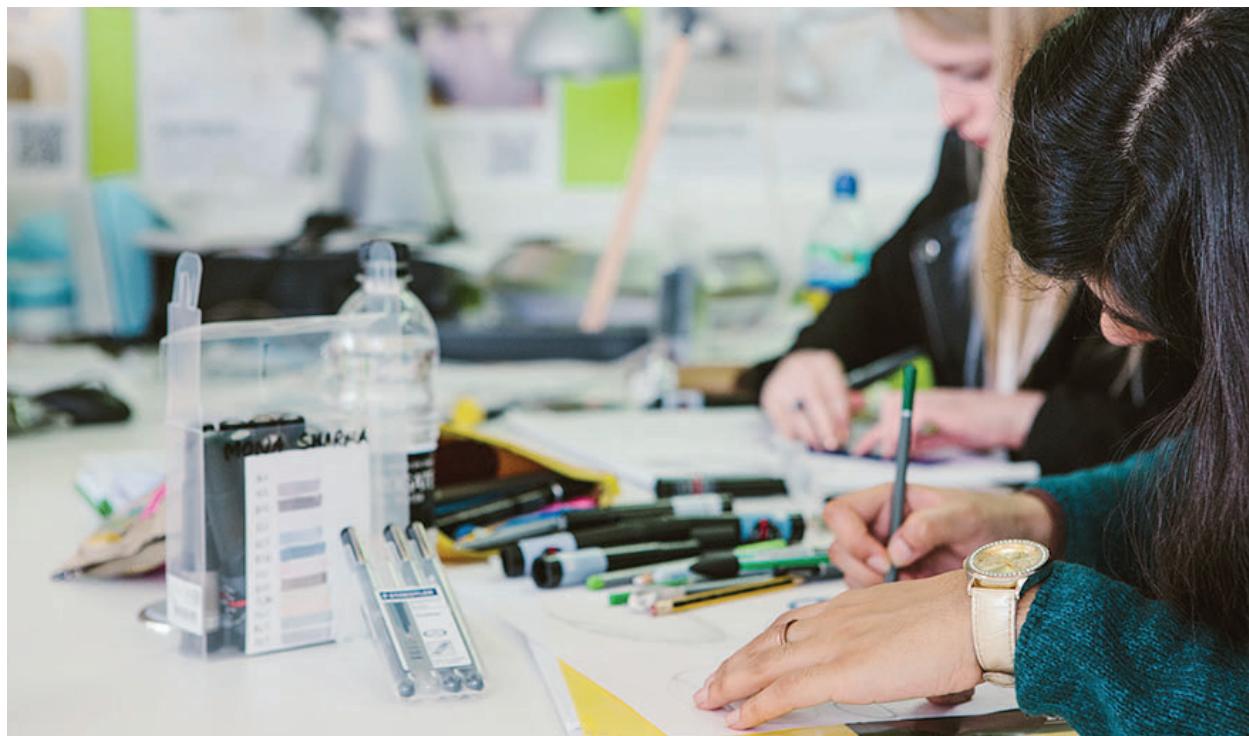
Section One
Academic Experience

For the majority of students, attending university is primarily about learning, expanding knowledge and developing skills. This year, we explored four core elements that make up a student course: their curriculum, class sizes, timetabling, and academic workload.

Expectations of university life can, at times, not match students lived experiences. This year, the Students' Union conducted a survey exploring expectations prior to attending university and, if these expectations were met. As noted by Sander et al., expectations of university can meaningfully impact student performance and retention.[2] Our research found that 72% of respondents to the 'University Experience' survey thought that their course at Sheffield Hallam is what they expected it to be, though, conversely, indicates that more than a quarter of respondents to our 'University Experience' survey thought that their course was not what they expected.

1.1 Course Curriculum

Our 'University Experience' survey also asked our students questions related to their curriculum, as did research conducted to inform the 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' campaign. The latter specifically focussed on the diversity and inclusivity of the Sheffield Hallam student curriculum. Throughout this report, the term 'BME' will be used to classify students that identify as 'Black or Minority Ethnic'. We, as a Students' Union, recognise that this term does not take into consideration the broad experiences of our non-White students. However, this classification does enable researchers to explore the differences in student experiences by ethnicity and allows this report to make comparisons to previous research on 'BME' students.

Based on responses from the 'University Experience' survey, the majority of students (83%) agreed that their course curriculum sparks meaningful conversations, with students also commenting that their learning community positively contributed to their academic experience. The National Student Survey (NSS),[3] which asks final year undergraduate students nationally to feedback about their course experience, found that, of Sheffield Hallam students, 85% of respondents thought that their course was intellectually stimulating. There were, however, slight differences within faculties from the 'University Experience' survey, where respondents from the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing felt much more positive about their curriculum in general, whilst students from the Sheffield Business School responded less optimistically. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate if their course curriculum is what they expected before attending Sheffield Hallam, with 71% of respondents indicating that it is. There were also significant differences between students from the UK (72%) and students from EU or international countries (62%) and their expectation of their course curriculum.

Furthermore, whilst 79% of respondents to our 'University Experience' survey agreed that their course curriculum was diverse and represented a wide range of opinion and voices about their subject, students from the UK were significantly more likely to agree that the course curriculum largely represents what the majority of their course mates want to study compared to students from the EU or international countries. It is, however, unclear whether these differences in expectations of EU or international students

2. Sander, P., Stevenson, K., King, M., & Coates, D. (2000). *University students' expectations of teaching*. Studies in Higher Education, 25(3), 309-323.

3. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). (2018). Unistats dataset. Retrieved from: *www.hesa.ac.uk/support/tools-and-downloads/unistats*.

are positive or negative. Particularly for EU or international students, the ways in which higher education is delivered in the UK might be fairly different from their home country. As Maringe & Sing indicate, there are cultural nuances to the experience of EU or international students which should be considered when recruiting, teaching, and supporting these students.[4]

Our 'University Experience' survey also explored diversity in the curriculum, with only 69% of 'BME' respondents indicating that their course curriculum represents largely what the majority of their course mates want to study. In addition, previous research from the National Union of Students[5] found that 42% of Black students do not think their course represents issues of inclusivity, diversity, and equality and that some students felt that their course was framed around White discourse and White pedagogy. In February 2019, the Students' Union launched the 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' campaign which encouraged Hallam students to think about the diversity of their course. Whilst research which was part of this campaign has received relatively low response rates at the time of this report publication, results indicate that our students would like to be more involved in the co-creation of course curriculum and that the majority of respondents thus far think their learning experience would be improved by having culturally diverse lecturers and tutors.

Furthermore, the questions on diversity and inclusivity of Sheffield Hallam students' curriculum are pertinent to the current conversation on the attainment gap, or the difference in academic achievement between White and 'BME' students from the UK. The attainment gap between differential student groups has been a contentious issue throughout Higher Education,[6] and this is true for Sheffield Hallam University as well.[7] Looking comparatively at the degree outcomes for White and 'BME' students at Sheffield Hallam, there is nearly 20% difference in attainment between these student groups and a 32.6% difference in attainment between ethnically White and Black students.[8]

This year the Students' Union President has led our 'Why Is My Curriculum White' campaign, which seeks to actively engage 'BME' students in this debate, and also allows a safe space for White students to think critically about their academic experience as well. As Madriaga highlights, differences in academic achievement based on race have been explained away as deficits, either due to students' cultural or social class differences from the pervasive norm of White education.[9] The experience of all students is only enhanced when their curriculum is diverse and considers different cultural perspectives, particularly as Sheffield Hallam encourages students to 'lead locally, engage globally.' Not only is diversity in the curriculum important to enrich the majority of the Sheffield Hallam population, but introducing a more diverse curriculum, one which supports 'BME' students by recognising the 'BME' experience as not just valid, but as an important contribution to the knowledge base for all students, is beneficial for the whole of the student body.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The University to implement a work plan based on sector best practice with proven strategies to create a more culturally diverse curriculum, with the ultimate goal of decreasing the gap in attainment between White and BME students.

4. Maringe, F., & Sing, N. (2014) *Teaching large classes in an increasingly internationalising higher education environment: Pedagogical, quality and equity issues.* Higher Education, (67), 761-782. doi:10.1007/s10734-013-9710-0.

5. National Union of Students (NUS). (2011). *Race for equality: A report on the experiences of black students in further and higher education.* London: National Union of Students. Retrieved from: *nus.org.uk/en/news/race-for-equality/*.

6. National Union of Students (NUS), & Universities UK (UUK). (2019). *Black, Asian and minority ethnic student attainment at UK universities.* London, UK: Universities UK (UUK); National Union of Students (NUS). Retrieved from: *universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/ Pages Universities-acting-to-close-BAME-student-attainment-gap.aspx.*

7. Singh, G. (2011). *A synthesis of research evidence: Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: Improving retention and success.* York: Higher Education Academy.

8. Office for Students. (2019). Access and participation data dashboard. Retrieved from: *www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/*.

9. Madriaga, M. (2018). *Antiblackness in English higher education.* International Journal of Inclusive Education, doi:10.1080/13603116.2018.1512660.

"Decolonising the curriculum is, first of all, the acceptance that education, fictional or otherwise, needs to enable self-understanding. It is about pin-pointing colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not 'integration' or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures.

Rather, it involves a hypothesis shift from a society of marginalisation and rejecting the space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It is imperative now more than ever that we diversify our curriculums, embrace diversity and proactively engage with all our student's & staff cultures and uniqueness, it is about involving the many in our curriculums, not the few, and education must be a space for critical thinkers in the making not trying to be something we are not. We must decolonise to be the leading applied university so that we can be engaging globally, henceforth the why is my curriculum campaign is an essential part of decolonising Sheffield Hallam and produce student leaders in various fields and celebrating scholars from the globe."

Abdullah Okud, SHSU President 2018–19

1.2 Class Size

For some students, class size (defined as: the number of students in a lecture, seminar or other formal learning environment) can affect their academic experience, particularly the transition into Higher Education, where larger lecture sizes could be daunting for some. The 'University Experience' survey also explored the effect that class size can have on students' academic experience. The size of a class can influence a students' ability to engage with their learning and the larger the class size, the less satisfied students are with their learning experience.[10]

For Sheffield Hallam students, 83% of respondents to the 'University Experience' survey felt that their lecture size was adequate for their learning. Despite this, 17% of respondents indicated that their lecture size was 'too big' and respondents from the Faculty of Health & Wellbeing were slightly more likely than any other Sheffield Hallam faculty to indicate that lecture sizes were 'too big.' As Maringe & Sing suggests, large class sizes (though loosely defined as more than 100 students in a given lecture) can impact on learning outcomes and student thinking, student engagement, retention, student achievement and performance, satisfaction, and the amount of curriculum covered.[11] That is, the larger the class size, the less likely students will be engaged, satisfied with their experience, or to achieve at a higher level and the more likely they will be to leave university. This research also suggests that larger class sizes influence the quality of the curriculum delivered and the type of learning strategy a student will use (e.g. surface learning vs deep learning). From responses to the 'University Experience' survey, when students had a positive experience with their class size, this was typically related to a smaller, more cohesive course experience. One student commented:

> "*I am part of a small cohort (almost 50) and I feel this has a profoundly positive impact on my learning. I enjoy being able to talk to anyone in my cohort and like that, I can walk into a lecture theatre and recognise every face; especially as I know this is not the case for many other subjects.*"

This is particularly important with regards to differential student experiences and a student's ability to engage with their learning and their course. Based on results from the 'University Experience' survey, only 42% of respondents agreed that they felt confident asking questions in a lecture and male students were significantly more likely than female students to agree that they felt confident asking questions in a lecture. Future research could explore how different student groups navigate tutor and lecture support in larger and smaller class sizes.

In addition, through Departmental-specific focus groups and in the qualitative comments from the 'University Experience' survey, students revealed that, whilst the number of students attending a lecture or seminar was high in the first few weeks of the academic year, the number of students attending after this point was much lower. Students thought this negatively impacted their feelings of course cohesion, sense of community and learning.

10. Sander, P., Stevenson, K., King, M., & Coates, D. (2000). *University students' expectations of teaching.* Studies in Higher Education, 25(3), 309-323.

11. Maringe, F., & Sing, N. (2014). *Teaching large classes in an increasingly internationalising higher education environment: Pedagogical, quality and equity issues.* Higher Education, (67), 761-782. doi:10.1007/s10734-013-9710-0.

"Tutor groups are too large, in the first semester I have struggled to ask questions or gain feedback from the tutor due to the sheer number of people in the group all wanting time from the tutor. If a tutorial opportunity is not given [enough time] to re-cap anything and if you fall behind on a software tutorial or maths tutorial you don't get chance to catch up, leaving you completely lost."

Although we are unable to mandate compulsory attendance, course cohesion is crucial for student learning, specifically where discussion and dialogue leads to progressive thinking and creativity. In addition, this is central for students from courses which do require more group work based assessment, where their overall mark might be negatively impacted by other student's attendance record.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The University and the Students' Union research factors that impact the drop off in attendance.

1.3 Timetabling

Using social media to engage a wide-range of students, predominantly for those that might not engage with formal research, we asked students to feedback on their timetable. We found that whilst a timetable might work perfectly well for one student, the timetable might not be as ideal for another student. Nearly every student with large timetable gaps (i.e. four hours or more) that fed back their opinion on their timetable would like to see this decreased or consolidated with other days. For students that commute into university, a timetable which is spread through the week or with large gaps means they are paying more for travel or parking or spending more time travelling to and from university when they could be allocating that time to study. When students were asked to comment what their ideal timetable would look like, students regularly commented that increased consistency would benefit them and many other students (e.g. students that work part-time or students that commute).

"Consistency to allow people to find routines that work for them (e.g. similar hours each week, possibly even each day)... also brings structure to the independent work as students could easily spend the rest of the portion of time doing the associated work before/after the class itself. The week could be divided in other ways (not necessarily half-days) to allow for society/sport time etc"

Furthermore, our 'University Experience' survey found that 60% of students that responded would prefer around 10-19 hours of contact time per week. When students were asked how often they are actually spending in class or other learning environment, 29% indicated that they are only in 9 or less hours per week (see Figure 1). As previous research has found, the more contact hours a student encounters, the higher their satisfaction, though different courses do require different types of contact hours (e.g.

humanities courses will require students to take part in more independent study compared to medically-based courses).[12] This is true for students at Sheffield Hallam as well: 23% of respondents from the Faculty of Health & Wellbeing indicated that they are in university 20-29 hours per week and this was the highest of all of the faculties. Only 53% of all respondents to the 'University Experience' survey thought that the amount of contact time they experience is what they expected before they came to Sheffield Hallam.

> "I was told on open days that my contact hours would be around 12-14 hours a week. I don't understand why I'm paying so much to only be in lectures/seminars for 9 hours a week when it was advertised as being much more"

12. Maringe, F., & Sing, N. (2014). *Teaching large classes in an increasingly internationalising higher education environment: Pedagogical, quality and equity issues.* Higher Education, (67), 761-782. doi:10.1007/s10734-013-9710-0.

Although different courses will require different amount of contact hours, what is advertised to students and thus expected as part of their course is an important and often a deciding factor for students. What our research has identified is that, whilst student needs are different, honest communication with students can go a long way to improve the university-student relationship (i.e. why timetables are scheduled in certain ways, why exams take place in short space of time, why they are only in lectures for nine hours in a week when they expected much more). When considering ways in which their University and their Students' Union can help, treating students less like transactional customers and more like pedagogical partners might assist with this.

Figure 1: How many hours per week is spent (actual hours) vs. preferred time spent in lectures, seminars, and other formal learning environments, aggregated (n=1766)
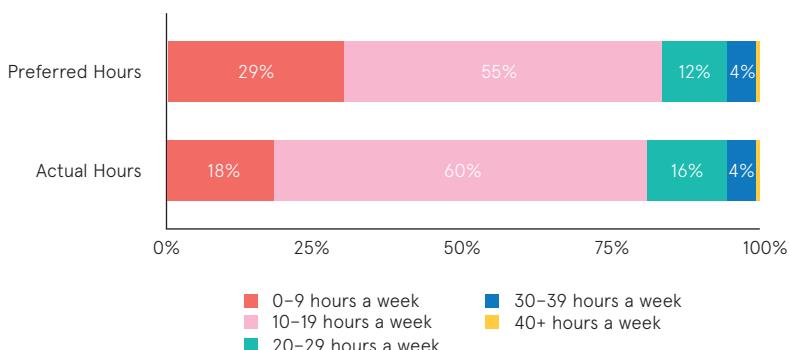
Whilst we, as a Students' Union, recognise that timetabling is an important issue for students, previous iterations of the Student Voice Report have identified the need to improve course timetabling. The 2016/17 Student Voice Report recommended that the University have a measured annual reduction in timetable gaps; in response to this, Sheffield Hallam has been reviewing timetabling and teaching spaces, with the aim of reducing gaps to no more than three hours between sessions. Furthermore, Sheffield Hallam has created a work stream focussed just on timetabling and it is expected that work within this area is continuing.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The University consolidate course timetables, taking into consideration the impact that a fragmented timetable has on commuter students.

1.4 Course Workload

The 'University Experience' survey also explored Sheffield Hallam students experience with their academic workload. Sixty-nine percent of respondents indicated that their academic workload is what they expected before coming to Sheffield Hallam. Conversely, 14% of respondents feel that they are unable to meet their submission deadlines without affecting the quality of their work and 18% feel they are not given enough time to understand and complete their academic workload.

In addition, Department-specific focus groups found that some students are unhappy with their current assessment process, with participants from the Sheffield Business School indicating that they engage in too much group work and some students from the Faculty of Science, Technology and Art (STA) mentioning that assessment guidelines are unclear to them. This issue with assessments is a common issue that both our Officer Team and Student Reps have found as well. Students felt that there is, at times, a lack of communication on changes to deadlines or a lack of communication as to why some deadlines are so close together. This increased their feelings of stress and considerably increased their academic workload within a short span of time. Though these students understood that workloads fluctuate and they should be working hard towards their degree, this type of exam and assessment bunching could affect the quality of their work. This is an area that previous Student Voice Reports have acknowledged as an issue; the 2015/16 report identified that bunching of assessments is stressful for students and it should be reduced. In response, Sheffield Hallam have required faculties to use an assessment scheduler. Whilst some progress has been made, this area still requires additional work to ensure that academic workloads are appropriate and manageable.

Future research could also explore the ways in which students deal with their academic workloads and if there are differences for students from different backgrounds (e.g. first-generation university students, ethnicity, social class, etc.) Particularly for certain groups of students, this may or may not impact on their wellbeing, their ability to handle stress around exams and deadlines at the university level, or their ability to feel confident asking questions in the Higher Education environment.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The Students' Union conducts additional research into the effect of course workloads on student satisfaction and success.

Section Two
Student Wellbeing

Last year's Student Voice Report drew heavily on a major piece of research Sheffield Hallam Students' Union took part in on student mental health entitled 'Being Well, Doing Well' which found that, compared to respondents from thirteen other Students' Union, respondents from Sheffield Hallam had lower levels of life satisfaction. Mental health has remained a major focus of our research, our campaigning activity and featured prominently in Election candidate manifestos. The 'Being Well, Doing Well' research also revealed that 31% of Hallam respondent's wellbeing on a day-to-day basis had become worse since starting university study. In addition, a national survey on mental health found that, of the over 19,500 respondents, 33% of students had a previous mental health problem before coming to university and that 69% of respondents had suffered from worry or anxiety throughout their university studies.[13] While there are actions that students can take to help with their wellbeing, multiple studies have identified the positive influence that physical activity has on mental health, as increased activity tends to increase mental wellbeing.[14]

2.1 Physical Activity and Wellbeing

In a study on University students, high levels of physical activity were found to have a beneficial effect on student wellbeing; students that exercised more often had lower levels of anxiety and depression than students with medium and low levels of activity.[15] This academic year, our Sport and Physical Activity Officer commissioned research to explore barriers to students taking part in sport and physical activity whilst at Sheffield Hallam. We also wanted to understand if activity levels changed once students came to university. This research found that only 60% of respondents currently take part in some form of physical activity, but that prior to university, 82% of respondents indicated that they were active. For this research, physical activity was defined as: '*any bodily movement that results in energy expenditure, this could include: brisk walking, jumping rope, dancing, lifting weight, climbing, yoga or any type of casual or organised sport such as football, running, swimming, etc.*' which included added activities, not just traditional sport and exercise.[16] This more inclusive definition of activity was aimed at recognising any form of activity which might be beneficial and provide protective characteristics for ill-mental health of students.

Our research also found that 81% of respondents that are currently active agree that they are part of a community of friends at university, compared to 69% of respondents that are not active and this was a statistically significant difference. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they are with life nowadays, with nearly half (47%) of respondents indicating they are highly satisfied (7 or 8 on a 10 point scale). When respondent life satisfaction scores are averaged, Sheffield Hallam students have an average score of 6.4. Looking comparatively at Hallam students that are currently active and those that are not and national data,[17] those that are currently active were more likely to indicate that they are highly or very highly satisfied with life nowadays and there was a significant difference between activity levels and satisfaction (see Table 1).

13. Pereira, S., Bottell, J., Walker, L., Dzikiti, C., & Platt, C. (2018). *University student mental health survey 2017. London, UK: The InSight Network; Dig-In*. Retrieved on 4 April 2019 from: *www.diginbox.com/mental-health-report-2017*.

14. Bize, R., Johnson, J. A., & Plotnikoff, R. C. (2007). *Physical activity level and health-related quality of life in the general adult population: A systematic review*. Preventive Medicine, 45(6), 401-415. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2007.07.017;

Cerin, E., Leslie, E., Sugiyama, T., & Owen, N. (2009). *Associations of multiple physical activity domains with mental well-being*. Mental Health and Physical Activity, 2(2), 55-64. doi:10.1016/j.mhpa.2009.09.004.

15. Tyson, P., Wilson, K., Crone, D., Brailsford, R., & Laws, K. (2010). *Physical activity and mental health in a student population*. Journal of Mental Health, 19(6), 492-499. doi:10.3109/09638230902968308.

16. World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). *Physical activity*. Retrieved from: who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity.

17. The Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2016). *Measuring national wellbeing: Life satisfaction*. Retrieved from: *www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/measuringnationalwellbeinglifesatisfaction*.

Table One:

Life Satisfaction comparing data from the Office for National Statistics and respondents from the 'SHSU Sport & Physical Activity Survey', by current activity level at university.

Satisfaction rating	Office for National Statistics	SHU – Currently Active	SHU – Not Currently Active
Low 0–4	5.42%	15.12%	26.62%
Medium 5–6	15.95%	17.20%	22.30%
High 7–8	51.15%	51.04%	41.60%
Very High 9–10	27.48%	16.65%	9.48%

18. Beiter, R., Nash, R., McCrady, M., Rhoades, D., Linscomb, M., Clarahan, M., & Sammut, S. (2015). *The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students*. Journal of Affective Disorders, (173), 90-96.;

Tyson, P., Wilson, K., Crone, D., Brailsford, R., & Laws, K. (2010). *Physical activity and mental health in a student population*. Journal of Mental Health, 19(6), 492–499. doi:10.3109/09638230902968308.

Both respondents that are currently active and respondents that are not active were asked to indicate if they face any barriers to accessing sport and increasing their physical fitness, with 43% of all respondents indicating that they have a lack of time to be active. As being physically active has a dose-response effect on mental health (i.e. the more physically active an individual is, the more likely there is to be a reduction in depression and anxiety)[18] ensuring that our students take part in some form of physical activity is crucial.

Furthermore, of students that completed the 'Sport & Physical Activity' survey, only 28% of respondents are currently meeting the recommended amounts of physical activity in an average week (151 minutes, or 2.5 hours, per week). Although education does not always lead to behaviour change, creating an environment which supports and encourages change can. University life for students is busy, but ensuring that students see the benefit of being physically active, for both their mental and physical health, is important. Providing the space and communicating the importance of activity for all students can also help them thrive academically.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

The University and the Students' Union to launch a campaign which encourages students to take part in different sport and physical activity opportunities throughout the academic year, whilst also educating students on the importance of activity for their physical and mental wellbeing.

2.2 Student Support

In our research with postgraduate research (PGR) students, respondents were asked various questions about their experience accessing student support at Sheffield Hallam and in the Students' Union, with 65% of respondents indicating that they are aware of the Student Wellbeing support and 23 respondents having previously used the service. Qualitative comments and focus groups with PGR students revealed that this population do not feel that student support at Hallam is aimed at them and that it is much more tailored to undergraduate students. In some cases, where students had accessed the service, they felt let down by the service or, if students were unable to get an appointment, opted to get support from elsewhere in the Sheffield City Region.

> *"I don't think [the wellbeing service] is fit for purpose for PGR students. PhD is a long term commitment. Having a relationship with a counsellor is key, but this is not facilitated"*

Students' feeling there is a lack of support is not a unique experience of postgraduate research students; our Officer Team as well as Student Reps have also identified areas where support for students could be improved. Informal feedback received by the Officer Team, as well as from the 'PGR Wellbeing' survey, indicate that obtaining an appointment quickly from Student Wellbeing is difficult; of PGR students that utilised the Wellbeing Service, 42% had to wait four or more weeks to get an appointment.

Furthermore, our Welfare & Community Officer also conducted research to explore students' experiences accessing and navigating support services considering their cultural background and upbringing. This research found that BME participants that chose not to access support through the university did not because they thought the counsellor would not understand their experience. Of the BME students that had accessed support through the university, they felt that some counsellors did not consider their cultural background when offering support and guidance. As one BME student said when asked about their mental health and accessing university services:

> *"Race definitely affects it. It can be so exhausting explaining your experiences of racism and explaining how that impacts your mental health that by the time you actually get to talking about how you're feeling you're already fed up and your session is almost over, so I came out feeling more tired than when I went in."*

The exhaustion students feel, having to navigate a care system which is culturally naïve, is similar to previous research on BME university students accessing healthcare.[19] In addition, our research also found that students from certain cultures tended to have different relationships with their parents compared to students from ethically White backgrounds; they might be uncomfortable discussing mental health with family members or unable to take-on the advice given. For example, a female student whose heritage is South Asian was told to simply 'move out' of her family home to help her mental health problems, yet not taking into consideration the cultural significance that moving from her family home would have.

19. Arday, J. (2018). Understanding mental health: What are the issues for black and ethnic minority students at university. Social Sciences, 7(196), 1-25.

Some participants were also wary to share their mental health problems with the university at all, due to financial and course implications. For students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, they were afraid that if they disclosed a mental health problem, they would be encouraged to take a break in study, though this would not be a financially feasible option. Students studying nursing courses were also afraid to disclose a mental health problem for fear that this would affect their fitness to practice.

Our Culturally Competent Care and PGR Wellbeing research found that for some student populations, such as BME students or PGR students, the Wellbeing Service is not fit for purpose for their needs. Whilst the service is likely helpful for many students in times of need, such as students that identify as White or are completing an undergraduate course, smaller pockets of the student populations feel that the service could be made more inclusive. If Sheffield Hallam were to introduce a more diverse support service, this would go a long way to help ensure that these students are getting the care that they need.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The University to develop Student Wellbeing to be a more accessible service, and look to increase the number of demographically diverse counsellors and practitioners.

2.3 Student Safety

It has been identified in previous Student Voice Report's that measures to increase student safety on campus and in accommodation should be taken. This year, the Students' Union conducted a small research project on the Shuttle Bus, a free bus which is operated by Campbell Properties. This bus is accessible to all Sheffield Hallam students and is a way in which students can safely travel from one campus to another. This research revealed some areas for improvement, particularly with regards to safety on campus. Of the 155 students that completed the survey, if students were unable to take the bus due to lack of space, some opted to walk from campus to campus instead. Though we want to encourage students to walk, for both their health and sustainability reasons, we also recognise that walking can sometimes feel and is unsafe for some students. This survey revealed worrying comments, with one student in particular noting that they witnessed someone being threatened with a knife in an underpass. In addition, this idea of students feeling unsafe is especially pertinent during winter, where the hours of sunlight decrease and students are walking to and from campus in the dark. The shuttle bus offers a helpful refuge for certain groups of students, such as students that identify as female or from the LGBTQ+ community, whom are more likely to experience instances of harassment in public spaces.[20]

20. House of Commons, Women & Equalities Committee. (2018). *Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places*. London, UK: House of Commons. Retrieved from: *www.parliament.uk/ business/committees/committees-a-z/ commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/ sexual-harassment-public-places-17-19/.*

Furthermore, numerous recent reports have highlighted harassment in universities, with worrying data about harassment and misconduct of students by staff.[21] Whilst more serious forms of misconduct, such as harassment and assault, should undoubtedly be reported and the student should be offered support, smaller forms of misconduct by staff, such as sexist attitudes and behaviour, can also have an impact on a student's experience. The environment in which our female students are educated and receive support is important. Some students have reported to our Officer Team that they have experienced discriminatory and sexist comments from their academic staff. The launch of the University's Report & Support tool is absolutely necessary and shows a commitment to tackle issues of sexual misconduct and hate crimes. The University culture should be one that reflects that and supports and encourages our 16000 plus female students.

Moreover, our Advice Centre has also identified a trend with students accessing help related to inter-tenant disputes. Though not always the case, some students have experienced instances of bullying or other forms of discrimination in their accommodation. The Support & Report tool, whilst absolutely necessary, might not always be and feel appropriate, especially if education and training could prevent issues of bullying or harassment from happening in the first place.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

The Students' Union and the University equip students with skills to: stay safe whilst at Sheffield Hallam, navigate difficult relationships, and build resiliency whilst at university.

2.4 Postgraduate Research Wellbeing

Postgraduate research student wellbeing has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years,[22] with reports of up to forty-percent of PhD students suffering some form of mental health problem at one university.[23] Indeed, postgraduate research (PGR) students engage differently with the university, compared to other student groups (i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate taught) and their needs will likely not be the same.

Previous research on student wellbeing, whilst it included PGR students, was focussed heavily on undergraduate students. In addition, research that is conducted on and for the benefit of PGR students requires a more tailored approach and should consider the myriad of factors which can significantly influence PGR student wellbeing. PGR students are a considerably smaller population compared to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, though their experience is valid. Whilst Sheffield Hallam does conduct research into the PGR experience at SHU, as a Students' Union, we are in a unique role to explore issues which arise for PGRs that they might not otherwise be comfortable discussing.

21. Bull, A., & Rye, R. (2018). *Silencing students: Institutional responses to staff sexual misconduct in UK higher education.* Portsmouth, UK: The 1752 Group/ The University of Portsmouth. Retrieved from: *1752group.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/ silencing-students_the-1752-group.pdf;*

National Union of Students (NUS). (2018). *Power in the academy: Staff sexual misconduct in UK higher education.* London, UK: National Union of Students (NUS). Retrieved from *www.nusconnect.org. uk/resources/nus-staff-student-sexual-misconduct-report*

Tune, N., & Little, K. (2017). *Student expectations of university responses to sexual misconduct disclosures.* Liverpool: AMOSSHE. Retrieved from *www.amosshe. org.uk/insight-2016-17-disclosures;*

Universities UK (UUK). (2016). *Changing the culture: Report of universities UK taskforce examining violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students.* London, UK: Universities UK. Retrieved from: *universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/ reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-final-report.aspx.*

22. Anonymous Academic. (2014). T*here is a culture of acceptance around mental health issues in academia.* The Guardian Retrieved from *www.theguardian.com/ higher-education-network/blog/2014/ mar/01/mental-health-issue-phd-research-university*

Cumerma, A. (2018). Smart people problems: *We need to talk about PhD mental health.* Times Higher Education Retrieved from: *timeshighereducation. com/blog/smart-people-problems-we-need-talk-about-phd-mental-health*

23. Else, H. (2015). *Forty per cent of PhDs at Exeter suffer ill health, study reveals.* Times Higher Education Retrieved from: *timeshighereducation.com/news/forty-per-cent-of-phds-at-exeter-suffer-ill-health-study-reveals/2019540.article*

Previous research on student wellbeing, whilst it included PGR students, was focussed heavily on undergraduate students. In addition, research that is conducted on and for the benefit of PGR students requires a more tailored approach and should consider the myriad of factors which can significantly influence PGR student wellbeing. PGR students are a considerably smaller population compared to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, though their experience is valid. Whilst Sheffield Hallam does conduct research into the PGR experience at SHU, as a Students' Union, we are in a unique role to explore issues which arise for PGRs that they might not otherwise be comfortable discussing.

To better understand the wellbeing of PGR students at Sheffield Hallam University, the Students' Union conducted research and found that, of the 162 PGR students that replied to the survey, 31% felt that their wellbeing had decreased since starting their PGR studies. Generally, if wellbeing had decreased for PGR students, students commented that they felt a lack of support, increased stress or anxiety due to their studies, and worries about funding. Previous research has also shown that PhD students are likely to experience feelings of unhappiness or depression, experience problems with sleep, be unable to enjoy day-to-day life less and are more at risk of developing poor mental health.

As one of the respondents indicated:

> "I feel a lot more anxious about work and other aspects of my life, prioritising slogging through work rather than having a break. I would say this has also made me feel more depressed and not really enjoying life and the other things around me. All confidence I have seems to have been shattered and this process has been a struggle."

The PGR experience is intrinsically linked to the supervisor relationship, as PhD study is a relatively solo activity, and having the advice, expertise, and help from a supervisor can act not just as support for research studies, but also as more general welfare support. Findings from the 'PGR Wellbeing' survey indicate that though most PGR students felt comfortable to approach their supervisor for study-related issues (79%), they felt less able for personal issues (55%). In addition, most PGR students indicated that they generally have someone in their life they can speak to about issues (86%), although just over a third of respondents did not know where to look for support in their Faculty, Department or Research Centre.

Generally, one of the biggest areas of concern for PGR students is the research community at Sheffield Hallam. For example, some respondents felt happy and grateful to be studying for a PhD or other PGR-level study, but some felt let down by the research environment. Our research has found that some PGR students feel an underwhelming amount of support and appreciation from their university. Undeniably, facets of the PGR experience can be tremendously positive, particularly if a student has had exceptional support from the supervisor. Nonetheless, just over one in four (27%) respondents did not feel part of the Sheffield Hallam research community and some PGR students commented that they did not feel valued by their Faculty or Research Centre.

> "Research culture [in] the Faculty – it's not a healthy environment, lots of politics and poor communication"

PGR students are still students and their experiences at the university are absolutely important, for the reasons mentioned above, but also for the advancement and future of universities themselves. PGR students are doing meaningful research, which is beneficial for them as students, but equally as beneficial for the reputation and status of the University itself. As research from the University of California, Berkeley suggests, PGR study *"... is a formative experience where the self is reconceived, possibilities for one's life are imagined, and life-long habits are adopted."*[24] The environment in which PGR students are indoctrinated into academia can influence the way in which these students work in the future and can significantly impact their wellbeing, as value and inclusion are a key predictor of depression.

Furthermore, PGRs have commented that their working spaces could be improved, with some mentioning that the *"equipment is so out of date"*, *"people will get in 20 minutes early because they have to turn their computers on"*, or *"I think the workspace for my department in particular at university is not very inviting, it's very stuffy, dark and sort of a bit depressing."* Whilst there are some issues with PGR work space, focus groups with PGRs identified that they opt to come into the office to maintain feelings of cohesion and community; these spaces provide an opportunity for PGRs to come together, discuss success or struggles, explore their research ideas, and be around peers that understand their experience. With that in mind, some students were concerned about the campus improvement plans and the changes to university buildings (e.g. Science Park Building), especially if work space positively influences wellbeing and feeling a part of the research community.

Lastly, in line with previous research, postgraduate research students were happy to have been provided a space to discuss challenges they have faced. Throughout the 'PGR Student Wellbeing' research projects, students commented that they were grateful this research was being conducted at all. This research received a relatively high response rate (22.4%) and PGR students are eager to get additional support during their studies at Sheffield Hallam. Additional work in the Students' Union will continue, given the changes to SHSU democratic structures and the addition of the Postgraduate Research Representative.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

The Students' Union and the University provide opportunities and events which increase the sense of community amongst PGR students and academic staff across the university.

24. The Graduate Assembly. (2014). *The graduate student happiness and well-being report 2014*. Berkeley, California: The Graduate Assembly, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from: *ga.berkeley.edu/wellbeingreport/*

Section Three
Student Finances

One of the biggest causes of concern for all students at Sheffield Hallam University is finances, with 82% of respondents to the 'SHSU Satisfaction Survey' indicating they are concerned or very concerned with money. In addition, our annual 'All I Want for Christmas' campaign found that the majority of students would like some form of financial assistance through additional scholarships, bursaries, or any other, even seemingly minute, help to cover costs. Indeed, this is a concern from undergraduate level to postgraduate research students.

3.1 Financial Barriers

As previously mentioned, taking part in some form of sport or physical activity can positively impact on mental health. Findings from the 'Sport & Physical Activity' survey also indicate that a considerable barrier to students assessing sport or taking part in physical activity is the cost. Of respondents that are currently active, 58% indicated that they are unable to take part in sport or physical activity more than they currently do because of financial reasons or the cost of travel. In addition, 58% of respondents that are not currently active said that cost is a reason they are not physically active at all. In some instances, fees to take part in sport through the university are seen as being too high, either through social sport or a club or exercise and fitness classes were too expensive. As previously mentioned, taking part in physical activity is important for your health and wellbeing, which is key given the current state of student mental health nationally.

In addition, whilst sport and physical activity can undoubtedly help student wellbeing, it can also aid in retention. Our research found that students that are physically active are more likely to feel that they have a community of friends at university; previous research has found that when university students have a sense of community, they are more likely to stay at university and be more satisfied with their course.[25] Sense of community can be achieved through numerous activities and opportunities provided by the university, but can also be influenced by increase student involvement. That is, the more involved a student is in their university, the more likely they are to feel part of their university community and thus less likely to leave university.[26] Improving access to sport and physical activity can increase student involvement in their university, leading to improvement in their wellbeing and increased feelings of belonging to the university community. The University and the Students' Union both have a role in increasing and improving opportunities to sport and physical activity at Hallam.

As a Students' Union, offering discounted opportunities for students to become more physically active is something which is currently offered, through some of our 'Give It A Go' activities and the social sport societies through the University. The 'Sport & Physical Activity' survey also revealed that, whilst some students were inactive because of the cost, they were also discouraged from social forms of activity because of the sporting or activity environment, which can feel daunting for any individual that has not been active previously or have been inactive for a while.

25. Wiseman, R., Gonzales, S., & Salyer, K. (2004). *A cross-cultural analysis of students' sense of community, degree of involvement, and educational benefit. Intercultural*. Communication Studies Journal, 8(1), 173-190.

26. Astin, A. (1999). *Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education*. Journal of College Student Development, 40(5), 518-529

McClymont, A. (2013). *The role of sports clubs in university recruitment and retention: A mixed-methods case study* (Education Administration). Available from Digital Commons at University of Nebraska - Lincoln. (167). Retrieved from: *digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/167.*

To ensure all students are provided with equitable opportunities to be active, both the Students' Union and the University could offer additional reduced or free opportunities for our students to increase their activity levels. Some of this activity is already happening across the university, linking free opportunities to student wellbeing, such as the Therapeutic Running Groups and other wellbeing related Hallam Guild groups.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

The Students' Union and the University provide additional free or low cost sport and physical fitness opportunities.

3.2 Additional Costs

Being a university student is an expensive undertaking, with the under-graduate class of 2020 experiencing the highest tuition fees to date (£9,250 for most undergraduate courses, totalling to £27,750 for a three-year degree). Research from the Office for Students indicate that only 38% of students think their tuition fee is value for money and Universities UK found that 75% of undergraduate students are worried about the total amount of debt they will incur from their student loans.[27] In addition to this rise in tuition fees, students are expected to pay for their living expenses and additional university costs, which might include their books, their printing, or other necessary supplies. This can increase student stress leading to an increase in poorer mental health outcomes.[28]

We conducted smaller research projects looking at both printing fees and charges on laptops loans. With the feedback from research conducted on the laptop loan process, swift changes have been made to the laptop loan process; fees can be waived and students can now loan laptops from the Students' Union for up to twenty-four hours. In addition, our research on printing found that, the cost of printing is a concern for Hallam students and that the majority of respondents would find a printing allowance helpful of their studies. Furthermore, printing has an added cost that can affect certain students much more than others. This research also revealed that some students have to choose between paying for added university expenses, like printing, and paying for food. As one student noted:

> "... there are minimal perks of student life within university itself and the vast amount of reading I have to do, costs an awful lot... whereas free printing may encourage more people to read around their subject area, enhancing their ability to succeed. Additionally, for those with limited funds, it would ensure that all students have the same access to resources."

This type of access to resources is also applicable for students that may have a disability or are required to print, who can be affected much more than other groups of students. The ways in which the university support students can, and does, make a difference. Additional costs which our students pay out-of-pocket can profoundly affect their wellbeing and their overall experience at university.

27. The Officer for Students (OfS). (2018). *Value for money: The student perspective*. London, UK: The Office for Students. Retrieved from: *studentsunionresearch. files.wordpress.com/2018/03/value-for-money-the-student-perspective-final-final-final.pdf*

Universities UK (UUK), & the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON). (2018). *The financial concerns of students*. London, UK: Universities UK. Retrieved from: *www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/the-financial-concerns-students.pdf*

28. Richardson, T., Elliott, P., Roberts, R., & Jansen, M. (2017). *A longitudinal study of financial difficulties and mental health in a national sample of British undergraduate students*. Community Mental Health Journal, 53, 344-352. doi:10.1007/s10597-016-0052-0.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

The University reduce costs or provide a printing allowance for all students to ensure additional costs at university are mitigated.

In addition, it is not just undergraduate students that are concerned with the financial implications of university study. Though some postgraduate research study is funded, and therefore students are allotted a stipend, the 'PGR Wellbeing' survey indicated that only 69% of PGR students felt they are able to pay for their living expenses, with significant differences between students that study part-time and full-time (where part-time students are more likely to be supported through other forms of work). Finances for this group of students becomes much more difficult and complicated if a student is unable to finish their research within the designated time of their funding or are asked to make major changes to their thesis.

PhD's and other postgraduate research programmes are difficult, multi-year long endeavours that require dedication and persistence, but some PGR students are unable to complete their thesis due to financial reasons. Focus groups and interviews with PGR students also explored the implications of being unable to complete their research within the timeframe of their stipend or funding; not only are students not completing their thesis and ultimately their research degree, they are also concerned about applying for and finding an appropriate job in their field, particularly if they do want to work in competitive fields like academia and research.

For many students, employability outcomes will substantially impact on their decision when attending university. Indeed, for UK students, employment outcomes are embedded in the student experiences from the moment they decide what to study in school. Attending university can, and should, impact on what type of employment students will be qualified for and, for some, university education is a necessary requirement. With the rise in student fees and the continued conversation on value for money in higher education, ensuring that our students have the necessary financial support in place to succeed in their degree is crucial.

3.3 Placement & Employability

Our Advice Centre has noticed an increase in students coming to the Students' Union this academic year for help with problems related to their placement. Though the underlying reasons for placement issues can be varied, some of the issues our Advice Centre have seen are related the communication and accommodation of needs for students with a disability or the quality of placements and respect for student cultural differences. Whilst placement issues do vary by individual experience, they are still an undeniable experience that some students face.

Results from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Longitudinal survey, which asks graduates three and half years after completing their degree what they are doing now, indicate that undertaking a placement was an important factor to get their current job (24%) or that doing a placement substantially helped them to get their current job (14%). In addition, this same research found that recent Sheffield Hallam graduates who completed a placement earned 31% more on average than students who did not.[30] Thus, completing a work placement is important for students to obtain necessary skills and to apply theory into practical learning, which can significantly help to obtain employment.

Placements and work experience are unquestionably good experience for Hallam students, especially for increasing a students' ability to obtain a 'highly skilled' job. Despite this, there are some issues that students may face with placements, specifically if the placement is a requirement for their course and has been assigned to them. In addition, students may lack support or be unaware of what support is available from their University if they do face difficulties. The University's restructure has caused substantial changes to ways in which Hallam works and students are supported. Recently, the University announced 'The Hallam Model' which proposes to introduce mandatory work experience for all SHU students. If the support, especially for students that have learning contracts or have disability adjustments which need to be considered, or the organisation of the placement is not properly managed, this could result in even more students experiencing problems with their placements. Additionally, feedback from the National Student Survey[31] indicate that some courses are not particularly satisfied with the information they received prior to their placement (for example: only 58% of respondents from Adult Nursing at Hallam thought that they received sufficient preparatory information prior to my placement(s)). If placements or work experience are to be mandatory for all courses at Sheffield Hallam and placements are to be allocated, organised, or supported by the University, the logistics of planning this implementation should be well thought through to ensure that all students receive an equitable placement experience.

30. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). (2018). *The destination of leavers from higher education longitudinal survey*. Retrieved from: *www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/long-destinations-2012-13.*

31. Unistats. (2018). *Compare official course data from universities and colleges*. Retrieved from: *unistats.ac.uk/Institutions/Details/10005790/ReturnTo/Institutions.*

As a Students' Union, we were surprised that neither we, nor the students themselves, were consulted on the Hallam Model proposed changes to placement and work experience. For such a formative, but also at times unpredictable experience, to enact mandatory work experience, students and student representatives should have a say; we look forward to seeing greater student feedback and consultation as the Model is implemented over the coming months and years.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

The University to broaden the consultation of the work experience aspect of the Hallam Model with the student body to ensure implementation is done with the student voice in mind.

Closing Statement

Although students come to university and pay their tuition fee, students are and should be treated as partners in the university community throughout their student journey. The curriculum that they learn should be led by experts in their respective field, but should also provide a space for safe discussion and growth for all students, regardless of their ethnicity. The classroom in which they learn is important, though some lectures will always be filled with students and seminars should remain intimate. Creating course cohesion for all students is central for the development of student skills, confidence, and preparedness. Their timetable should be fair, consistent, and communication about this should be reliable. Student workloads should be manageable and students should be prepared and know what to expect when it comes to attending university. Their wellbeing should be considered, and opportunities to improve their wellbeing through sport and physical activity should be provided and embedded throughout their learning experience. Whilst finances are undeniably complicated, resources linked to their learning should be kept low, including access to laptops, printing, books, course materials, and other additional costs which students might encounter.

As with the recent conversation on student mental health, the university community has a unique opportunity to create a positive environment for all students. Whilst we recognise that work is underway across the university to improve student wellbeing, there is still work that needs to be done. University education is more than just course related education, it should consider training and education which can support students in all aspects of their life – their physical health, their mental wellbeing, and their finances. The time students spend at Sheffield Hallam University is formative and ensuring that all students receive equitable experiences should be our collective goal, as a Students' Union and a University. As this report outlines, there are clear areas that students are enjoying, but there are definite areas which could and should be improved.

Appendices
Appendix A. Key Terms & Abbreviations

Academic Year   Defined period between 1 August and 31 July of the following year.

Advice Centre   The Students' Union Advice Centre.
A team of professionally trained and experienced advisers who are independent of the University. The service is free, independent, and confidential.

Attainment Gap   The difference in attainment between differential student groups obtaining a first or 2:1 degree classification.

Commuter Student   Any student that travels or commutes into university from their own or their family home.

DLHE   The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey. This a survey which is run by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and asks graduates what they are doing 6 months after they finish. The Longitudinal DLHE asks graduates what they are doing 3 and a half year after they finish.

Faculty of HWB   Faculty of Health & Wellbeing at Sheffield Hallam University.

Faculty of SSH   The Faculty of Social Science and Humanities at Sheffield Hallam University.

Faculty of STA   The Faculty of Science, Technology and Art at Sheffield Hallam University.

Give It A Go   A programme of events organised by Sheffield Hallam Students' Union which offers free or discounted activities for all Hallam students.

Hallam Guild   A group of cross-university community of staff and students with shared goals and common interests, working together to develop a culture of educational excellence in the University, by building expertise and sharing best practice.

NSS	Abbreviation for 'National Student Survey' – a national survey aimed at final year undergraduate students which ask their opinions about their time in higher education at their institution.
The Officer Team	The five elected Officers at Sheffield Hallam Students' Union which includes: President, The Education Officer, The Activities Officer, The Welfare & Community Officer, and The Sport & Physical Activity Officer.
PGR student	Postgraduate research student, this includes PhD, MA by Research, MPhil, and Professional Doctorate (e.g. DBA, EdD) students.
PGT student	A 'masters students'. A student on a postgraduate taught course working towards a postgraduate degree (e.g. MSc, MA, or PGCE).
SBS	The Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University.
Student Reps	The voice of students on their course. These students are elected or have volunteered to provide a link between the student body on their course, the University and the Students' Union.
Support & Report	An online reporting tool developed by Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield Hallam Students' Union aimed at encouraging students that have experienced sexual violence, abuse, harassment or hate crime to report it. The website features support resources for students and staff and, of students that do not anonymously report, are offered support.
The Hallam Model	A model proposed by Sheffield Hallam University which proposes a set of six principles for all undergraduate courses.
UG Student	An 'undergraduate student'. A student on a course working towards a first degree (such as a BA or BSc), foundation degree, HE certificate/diploma.

Appendices
Appendix B. Data Sources

Students' Union Formal Research

Source	No. of Responses/ Participants	Research Method
The University Experience Survey This survey encouraged all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students to feedback on their curriculum, classroom size, academic workload, contact hours and expectations.	**1909**	**Quantitative**
The Postgraduate Research Student Wellbeing Research This survey asked all postgraduate research students about their wellbeing, supervisor relationship, finances, employability, awareness of and use of support services. The subsequent focus groups and interviews explored more in-depth student's experiences at SHU and what forms of support they would ideally like to have access to.	**162**	**Mixed**
Timetabling Research This research was conducted on social media, to increase response from students that might not otherwise engage, and asked students questions based on the University Timetabling Principles.	**168**	**Mixed**
Shuttle Bus Survey This short survey was circulated to students by our Officer Team and Part-Time Reps via social media and asked students to feedback about their experience using the free shuttle bus operated by Campbell Properties.	**156**	**Qualitative**
Sport & Physical Activity Survey This survey asked all students to feedback about their participation in sport and physical activity at university and compared their level of activity to what it was prior to university. This survey also asked students about their wellbeing, looking comparatively at students that are currently active and those that are not.	**1615**	**Quantitative**

Students' Union Formal Research

Source	No. of Responses/ Participants	Research Method
Departmental Focus Groups

These focus groups took place across four different departments and each department discussed key issues such as academic support, assessment and feedback, learning community, organisation and management, and student finances, where appropriate. | **20** | **Qualitative** |
| **How Diverse Is Your Curriculum Survey**

This survey asks questions about the diversity of the curriculum and explores the differences between different student groups. This research is part of the 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' Campaign which seeks to start a conversation and bring awareness to the lack of representation and inclusion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BME) authors. | **29** | **Quantitative** |
| **SHSU Satisfaction Survey**

This annual survey, led by our Marketing Team, asks students about their satisfaction with SHSU activity and their top concerns to help us to better understand our student population. | **1617** | **Quantitative** |
| **The annual 'Student Rep' Survey**

This survey asks Student Reps to feedback about their experience, highlighting both their successes and their challenges and is used to inform our Rep system. | **227** | **Quantitative** |
| **Rep Impact Interviews**

These interviews were conducted by our Academic Representation team to quantify the impact that Student Reps have had. This also allowed students to have the opportunity to showcase what they have achieved. | **5** | **Qualitative** |
| **The 'All I Want for Christmas' Campaign**

Our annual postcard campaign asks students to feedback what they would like (for Christmas) from their university. This year we asked students to feedback one thing they would also like to see from their Students' Union. | **241** | **Qualitative** |

Students' Union Formal Research

Source	No. of Responses/ Participants	Research Method
Being Well, Doing Well Research (Alterline) This research, conducted last academic year, asked students nationally about their mental health and wellbeing, and their use and awareness of student support. This research was conducted by Alterline and Sheffield Hallam specific data was also shared and analysed.	**551**	**Quantitative**
Culturally Competent Care: A Look At Provisions on Offer This research, conducted by our Welfare & Community Officer, asked students to feedback their experience using university services and how their culture impacted their navigation of these services.	**17**	**Qualitative**
Advice Centre Statistics The Advice Centre is a free, independent and impartial service to all students at Sheffield Hallam University on issues such as housing, finances, wellbeing, and academic related. Our Advice Centre anonymously records the top issues our students are facing to track trends.	**-**	**Quantitative**
Staff-Student Committee Meetings (SSCM) Minutes from Student Rep Staff-Student Committee Meetings (SSCM), where staff and Student Reps work together to improve the student experience. Common themes and trends across the university are found in the minutes.	**-**	**Qualitative**

Appendices
Appendix C. Progress from the 2017/18 Student Voice Report

Teaching and Learning					
Sub-Section	**Recommendations**	**Comments on Progress**	**SHU**	**SHSU**	**Has this been achieved?**
1.1 Mental Health	1. The University works together with the Students' Union to develop a 'Mental Health Charter', ensuring all staff are provided with tools and knowledge to proactively help and support students.	The University and the Students' Union have undertaken substantial work on student mental health this academic year. This includes developing a Student Wellbeing Programme which provides resources for staff and additional help for students, in their Academic Advisor. The University and the Students' Union also have plans to develop work on social prescribing. Though there are no plans to develop a Mental Health Charter at the local level, the University and the Students' Union have been meeting with Student Minds on a national charter and will be re-signing the Time To Change Pledge.	●	●	Achieved / Ongoing
1.2 Transition	2. Further research is conducted by the Students' Union into transitional phases across the Hallam experience, including student support and teaching quality.	The University conducted a detailed audit of the student experience, from pre-arrival and welcome. Findings and recommendations from this audit have been signed-off by the Hallam Welcome Board and has been managed by the Student Experience Committee. Although this recommendation was for the Students' Union, the University have involved the Students' Union in a stakeholder capacity. The Students' Union also conducted research which explored the student experience and their expectations of university, with a focus on whether these experiences have been matched throughout their time at Hallam.		●	Achieved / Ongoing
	3. The University establishes earlier dates for Department assessment boards to inform resit students of their status in July/August.	The University have set earlier Department assessment resit boards. This means that, for this last academic year, students completed refer/defer work in Weeks 50 and 51 and received their results in Week 1. This work has been supported by professional service teams to ensure that operational requirements in preparation for both Semester 2 and Summer reassessment boards is properly managed for academic teams.	●		Achieved

Sub-Section	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
1.3 Money	4. The University and the Students' Union work together to understand the gaps in student accessibility of extracurricular activities and put measures in place to ensure affordable access for all students.	Joint work between the Students' Union and the University has shown that there are clear costs associated with involvement in sports (e.g. uniform, membership fees, travel, and competitions). Further work needs to be done to see how these additional costs could be offset. Furthermore, the Students' Union conducted research on barriers to accessing sport (findings can be found in Section 3 of this report). Additional work is being conducted to obtain precise details of costs and helping students who are struggling to afford participation in sports, societies, or other extracurricular activity.	●	●	Some Progress / Ongoing
	5. The University and the Students' Union jointly conduct research into student financial issues and concerns, and the extent to which students earn money in unsafe ways.	In 2017/18 academic year, the University ran a survey which explored students' financial concerns and the impact on wellbeing; this research led to creating the online money skills resource. In addition, the University conducted a summative assessment of the Student Success Scholarship, which provides additional funds for students in need that meet requirements and apply. This report is currently being reviewed by relevant committees and actions will be determined as the University's Access & Participation Plan is developed.	●	●	Some Progress / Ongoing
	6. The University reviews and promotes provisions available to particular student groups who may struggle to access University, particularly asylum seekers and migrants.	Refugee students have been added as a priority group in the University's Access & Participation Plan; applicants that identify as refugee status at the application stage will be supported through SHU Progress and given a named advisor for additional support once enrolled. Refugee students are a priority group for the Student Success Scholarship. The University have also proposed a 'Sanctuary Scholarship' which would cover full tuition fees and provide a maintenance bursary for asylum-seeker students. The 'Sanctuary Scholarship' has been referred by the University Leadership Team (ULT) to Shaping Futures Board and will be taken forward by the Access & Participation Plan Steering Group.	●		Some Progress / Ongoing

Sub-Section	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
1.4 Accommodation & Safety	7. The Students' Union and the University work together to create a measurable increase in the number of Snug accredited properties, with increased awareness of the Snug scheme amongst staff and students.	Limited work has been taken forward this academic year in relation to SNUG for both the University and the Students' Union, though each organisation does continue to work together to ensure that the SNUG Scheme remains accessible for students. As with last year, there has been an increase in SNUG accredited properties, due mainly to the University of Sheffield also signing up to the scheme.	●	●	Not Achieved / Ongoing
	8. The University works with the City Council to establish safer routes between campuses, University buildings and student accommodation.	The University are currently developing an app that supports students travelling between accommodation and campuses which provides a map highlighting the safest route between sites for students. There is also substantial work taking place on Fitzalan Square, as part of the Knowledge Gateway Project and along Arundel Gate, improving access and safety around the Sheffield Institute of Arts (SIA). The University have also introduced a pilot in the SIA Building which enables students, free of charge, to borrow a panic alarm from reception and return the next day. If successful, this could be rolled out in the University libraries.	●		Achieved / Ongoing

Student Voice

Sub-Section	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
2.1 Differential Student Experiences	9. The University looks into developing a guarantor scheme for International students.	The University carried out a comprehensive review of different guarantor schemes at other universities and found that only one other university offers a fully financed scheme. The University has, therefore, worked with the insurance company at Bramall and Charlotte Court, whom have agreed to underwrite the guarantor scheme. Students will be able to pay an additional one-off payment of £100 as part of their insurance policy which will cover up to a maximum of £450 per month should the student be unable to pay their insurance cover. This scheme is available to students from September 2019.	●		Achieved
	10. Ensure equitable experiences of BME students through an increased understanding of the cultural and variable differences of BME students, with more opportunities to voice their concerns.	At the Department-level, work has been underway to improve differential student outcomes but has yet to have any significant impact. Some examples of this work include: launching the Race Equality Charter in October 2018, conducting a survey with students and staff to develop a baseline and inform future work, and developing a university-wide plan of action. In addition, to increase inclusive student voice opportunities, the University and the Students' Union have developed a set of Student Voice Principles (noted in the Impact Section of this report), which ensures all students have equal and equitable opportunities to make their views known.	●	●	Not Achieved / Ongoing
	11. The Students' Union and the University work in partnership to develop evidenced based interventions to improve the student experience of marginalised students.	The University and the Students' Union have been conducting research with LGBTQ+ students, to better understand their experience. This has been in the form of a photo-elicitation research method and through Listening Rooms. The former project is ongoing, as there was initially low-uptake for research participants. It is also planned that this research will be presented as a exhibition, which will allow for students and staff to understand the experience of this student group.	●	●	Not Achieved / Ongoing

Sub-Section	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
2.2 Student Representation	12. The University and the Students' Union jointly develop clear forms of accountability for Student Rep meetings, with actions recorded clearly and consistently and methods for escalation made clear.	The University and the Students' Union have worked together to create an 'action log' template, which enables meeting minutes to be tracked and actions to be regularly recorded. This helps to inform Student Reps of any changes which will be happening, but also holds all parties accountable for agreed actions. In addition, any work and changes related to Student Reps are communicated with University staff via the Student Reps Blog. Additional improvements for students include providing a link to 'Find My Rep' on Blackboard module sites and increased recruitment for Departmental Reps. All of this work is now embedded as business as usual.	●	●	Achieved
2.3 Campus Experiences	13. The University works to provide more areas for students to heat and eat their own food on campus, with a particular focus for Collegiate Campus.	Self-help facilities have been provided and sign-posted in the Heart of Campus Building, Collegiate Campus, and this includes hot water and a microwave oven.	●		Achieved
	14. The Students' Union has a significantly stronger permanent presence at Collegiate Campus, with an increase in the number of events for Collegiate Campus students.	The Students' Union undertook refurbishment work in January 2019 to improve the facilities at Collegiate Campus, which included creating a welcome desk and a formalised staff rota for drop-ins, 1-1 appointments, and general enquiries. In addition, the Student Advice Centre have been providing additional drop-in times at Collegiate Campus (Oaklands Building) as well as pre-bookable appointment slots, with the aim of increasing student awareness and uptake, when needed. The Student Advice Centre has also run a number of wellbeing events at Collegiate, partnering with Sexual Health Sheffield and local Sheffield police.		●	Some Progress / Ongoing

Although some of the recommendations are yet to be achieved, these recommendations and progress will be revisited throughout the 2019/20 academic year and presented in the 2019/20 Student Voice Report.

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