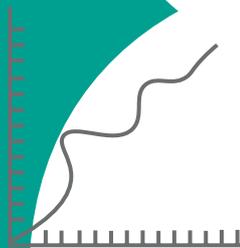


Sheffield Hallam Students' Union



STUDENT VOICE REPORT



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Education Officer's Report

I don't even know where to begin in my attempt to summarise an entire year's worth of memories, experiences and achievements. It seems like such an impossible task to narrow it down to a page of content... but here we go!

Perhaps it would be fitting to start with my first week serving as the 2017/18 elected Education Officer. It was a week spent as a crash course introduction to government policy, issues affecting HE providers and seemingly endless new acronyms to learn and decipher. I felt like I had huge shoes to fill, following in the footsteps of many vocal and successful Officers who had come before me.

Before I knew it I was taking each day in my stride and trust me when I say no two days of this role have ever been exactly the same! From hosting grime artist Big Narstie in the Charles Street lecture theatre, to grass roots campaigns fighting for students who had been awarded unfair grades.

You don't always visually get to see the work of an elected Officer, but take it from my experience when I say we're out there fighting for and representing you in committees, offices and boardrooms.

One thing that has amazed me this year has been the vast improvement in engagement when it comes to students wanting to create changes to both their courses and university experience. I've had so many meetings with and messages from frustrated Hallam students, who have realised they have the power and potential to challenge the status quo. Positive change and action can only come from open and candid conversations between staff and students, and nobody should feel that their opinion or recommendation won't be the spark that ignites that change.

Our Student Representation system is probably the most active, diverse and effective that it has ever been. We have well over a thousand Course and Department Reps volunteering their time to serve as your voice in matters which can be vital during your time studying at Hallam.

We finally have student representation on some of the most senior decision-making boards within the University. The next challenge is to ensure that those students are properly given the platform and reassurance that their opinion truly matters. I want to see an end to the days when students sit in the same rooms as senior management as just an empty and tokenistic gesture. I'm confident we will see this shift in the coming years, as I do believe there are genuine allies seated at the top of the organisation, who now see students as students... not numbers on a spreadsheet.

Due to the nature of the two organisations there are times when the Union and University will not see eye to eye. This is not necessarily a problem and does not make us enemies. We should remember that we both have the duty to support students throughout their academic journeys during their time in Sheffield. In a strange way, it's often our differences in opinions and approaches that drives us closer together, and is an essential part of a healthy and effective working relationship.

I've been blessed this year to share an Office with an amazing Sabbatical Team, while also having the support and guidance from so many passionate and talented colleagues from all departments within the Union and University. Many of my achievements would not have been possible without them and for that I'll be forever grateful.

Goodbye and thank you.

Davey Silver
Education Officer 2017/18

Introduction

This annual report, produced by Sheffield Hallam Student's Union, reflects the student experience through the collection and analysis of feedback from students at Sheffield Hallam University. By collating information and feedback that the Students' Union has received from students into a single report, we are able to establish clear actions, priorities and goals which can be reached through a joint partnership with students and the University.

The Students' Union wishes to not only highlight where improvements can be made to the Hallam student experience by the University, but where we can make improvements to our own services and provision. The student experience is not solely impacted by the University, but also by the Students' Union, and we remain committed to our goal of representing not only Hallam students' academic interests, but also their wider interests as students of Sheffield Hallam.

Feedback has been gathered directly from Sheffield Hallam students in the form of research projects, as well as indirectly in the form of meeting minutes, notes from our Student Reps, and service usage statistics at the Students' Union. We use this information to build a balanced view of the Hallam student experience, with a particular concern for what could be changed and improved in the form of 'recommended actions'.

The main body of this report examines a number of thematic areas which have come forward from our research and representative work this year. Within the report we consider some of the big recurring issues within society and Higher Education in particular, including mental health, accommodation, and finance. We also look at areas which are specific to the University experience at Hallam, with recommendations coming from our research of student transitions into and within Higher Education and the differing experiences of students studying at different campus' at the University. We also wanted to consider the unique challenges for specific groups of students; namely international students and black and minority ethnic (BME) students. We understand and acknowledge that there exists many other groups of

students, such as LGBT+, disabled students, mature students, commuter students, and many more who experience very real and significant challenges. We hope to work closely with these groups in future academic years to conduct more in depth research into these student experiences. We also consider the primary route for student feedback in the University, the student representative system, highlighting some of the achievements of the system this year, as well as considering some of the ways in which the effectiveness of the system is hampered. We conclude by looking at the student experience as a whole, and ask the question 'Is Sheffield Hallam value for money?', considering our institution in the context of the national focus on value being explored by the newly constituted Office for Students'. Each of these sections are broad and far reaching, and emphasise that the student experience at Sheffield Hallam is far from limited to the classroom, but to many more aspects of student life, and that very real issues exist in all of these areas that the University and the Students' Union can address.

Whilst this report reflects a wide range of student concerns and opinions of particular University and Students' Union processes and/or procedures, we also highlight where the University has helped students on an individual and collective level, of which there are numerous examples. The Students' Union and the University has developed a strong working partnership, and we hope to continue this relationship in a spirit of openness and honesty, to ensure that we all do the very best for Hallam students, and to ensure that they receive value for money and a positive experience as a student in Sheffield.

Methodology

The Student Voice Report is commissioned by 2017-18 Education Officer, Davey Silver, and is compiled and written by staff in the Representation and Advocacy Team. A Student Voice Editorial group supports the process of compiling the report, ensuring the report not only reflects the views of students, but that these views are communicated effectively with strong and effective recommended actions for both the University and the Students' Union.

These views are formed using a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as feedback that has been provided indirectly from students, and statistics from our Advice Centre, that highlights the issues experienced by our students. Research this year has been conducted into specific but broad issues highlighted by students and Officer Candidates in their manifestos. When investigating these issues, often other student concerns or problems are revealed, illustrating the impact that seemingly minor problems may have on attainment, retention, and the futures of individual and groups of students. Our research methodology included the use of surveys, focus groups, interviews, longitudinal journey entries, meeting minutes, raw statistics, and indirect feedback that we have gathered digitally, with different methods being used depending on the research question. In some cases, underpinning these findings are surveys that the University itself has conducted, as well as research conducted on a national level.

Research projects conducted by the Students' Union often do not receive the same levels of response or student input as those conducted by the University or even nationally, and therefore the conclusions made in this report are based on a triangulation of opinion; concluding that issues are a problem for many when they are raised in various feedback pathways throughout the year. We view issues raised in more than one medium, by even a few students, as an issue significantly more likely to be affecting a larger group of students, or even the wider student population.

Where possible, appropriate and helpful, we have broken our data down by demographic details, such as gender, faculty, year group, etc., and highlighted where a concern may be more strongly affecting specific groups of students. Quotes and comments are listed in each section throughout the report, emphasising particular points, and these are direct quotes from Hallam students. These comments are not the complete list of comments that we have received from students about their experience, but give more specific examples of the issue being discussed.

For a full list of recommendations from the 2016-17 report and the actions taken, see Appendix C.

Impact

After the publication of the Student Voice Report, the University and the Students' Union work in partnership to deliver the recommendations made throughout the report based on student feedback. These recommendations aim to enact real change that will significantly and positively affect the student experience at Sheffield Hallam University.

Based on the 2016-17 Student Voice Report recommendations, the following changes have taken place:

- The University implemented a Student Success Scholarship, which was open to UK undergraduate students from September 2017. Successful applicants can receive up to £2000, depending on need.
- The Students' Union has developed the 'Find My Rep' resource, which allows students to communicate with their Rep and for other Reps to communicate and collaborate together.

- The University has worked with the Sheffield City Council and the University of Sheffield to ensure that expensive accommodation options, such as studios, are mitigated. The University ensured that 250 studios were redesigned into four and six bed flats.
- The Library has been increasingly adding eBooks to their catalogue and last year they added 27,278 eBook titles to their stock.
- Based on student feedback, a cash machine has been installed at Collegiate Campus.



Recommendations

Section	Sub-section	Recommended Outcomes	Responsibility	
			SHU	SHSU
Student Life	1.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing	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.	●	●
	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.		●
		3. The University establishes earlier dates for Department assessment boards to inform resit students of their status in July/August.	●	
	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.	●	●
		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.	●	●
		6. The University reviews and promotes provisions available to particular student groups who may struggle to access University, particularly asylum seekers and migrants.	●	
	1.4 Accommodation and 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.	●	●
		8. The University works with the City Council to establish safer routes between campuses, University buildings, and student accommodation.	●	

Section	Sub-section	Recommended Outcomes	Responsibility	
			SHU	SHSU
Student Voice	2.1 Differential Student Experiences	9. The University looks into developing a guarantor scheme for International students.	●	
		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.	●	
		11. The Students' Union and the University work in partnership to develop evidence based interventions to improve the student experience of marginalised students.	●	●
	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.	●	●
	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.	●	
		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.		●

1.0

Student Life



1.1 Mental Health

In recent years, student mental health has become the key issue raised by our students, with 70% of respondents to the Students' Union membership survey stating they were either concerned or very concerned about their mental health and wellbeing. Mental health or wellbeing featured in the majority of candidate manifestos in our March 2018 elections, and was the number one priority for most. This increasing awareness of the issue at Hallam runs in line with national research showing a growing number of undergraduates reporting mental health problems across the country. Because of the profile of this issue, this section is purposefully placed at the top of the report, and the issue will be referenced in subsequent sections.

"Increase the reach of mental health support within the University, so that students never feel alone or abandoned, and that they always have someone to turn to"

Candidate Manifesto, SHSU Elections 2018

This year, the Students' Union worked in partnership with Alterline, a research agency specialising in the student experience, to explore the mental health of students at Sheffield Hallam, and 13 other Students' Unions across the country. Multiple measures were used to assess the mental health of our students, revealing a worrying picture of mental distress and despair in our student population that, due to low reported disclosure, remains largely hidden. For example, out of the nearly 13,000 students who completed the survey nationally, one third reported having deliberately harmed themselves at some point, and one in 10 students completing the survey responded that they have in the past made an attempt on their own life.

This research was not marketed as purely 'mental health', but rather as 'Being Well, Doing Well' and explored the experiences of all students, regardless of their experiences with mental health difficulties. This research further adds to the argument that mental health is not just something that is experienced by a minority group, but rather more accurately portrays what all students may experience now. An investigation by the think-tank IPPR found that University student suicide rates have nearly doubled in the last 10 years¹, suggesting that not only is this problem enormous, but it is also growing.

Furthermore, the results from the survey show that the mental wellbeing of our students is worse in several measures in comparison to the overall student population, which are

already showing worrying figures. Hallam students showed lower than average life satisfaction, higher proportions of behaviours that lead to isolation (e.g. drinking alone and not being as happy with their close friends at university), and on all measures of the 'Warwick-Edinburgh' Mental Wellbeing scale. A notable concern was also the impact that university has had particularly on our students. Participants were asked 'thinking about how you've been feeling on a day-to-day basis since you started University, compared to before, has your wellbeing...' and given the options 'Got worse', 'Got better' or 'Stayed the same'. The average across the 13 other participating Students' Unions showed equal proportions of students responding 'Got worse' and 'Got better', whereas at Hallam, over 40% of participants stated 'Got worse', and only 24% stated 'Got better', showing more students are struggling with their mental wellbeing since starting University. Compounding the issue, general awareness and staff support at Hallam was perceived to be lower, and the proportion of students who had needed to support someone else experiencing mental health problems was higher.

Despite the fact that there are clear mental wellbeing issues for many Hallam students, many still find it incredibly difficult to disclose their mental health problems to a professional, a member of staff, and even to those closest to them.

"I told a couple of my immediate friends and then I realised they were never interacting with me in the same way again. And that was very formative. Now I tell very few people because it's easier to not..."

Hallam student, Being Well Doing Well, 2018

Experiencing a mental health problem and facing increased social isolation go hand in hand, often with the one intensifying the other. The 'Being Well, Doing Well' research highlighted that students experiencing mental health problems spend more time alone, are less likely to engage in group activities, are more likely to have difficulties in relationships with other students, and are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities or attend scheduled teaching. These students are also less likely to give a positive response to the NSS question 21 regarding feeling part of a community. However, there is a socialisation dichotomy that exists: while those with mental health difficulties are more likely to isolate themselves, they might also find that forced social interaction does not necessarily improve their

1.2 Transition

experience. Social withdraw can sometimes be a means of coping, particularly for students learning to deal with the transitions and stressors in university life. There are nuances with student mental health that should be recognised and taken into consideration; the answer is certainly not to just 'encourage students to get out more.'

The 'Being Well, Doing Well' research also highlighted how important support from both staff and fellow students can be in helping students with mental health difficulties address their problems, not allowing the problem to overwhelm them completely. Additionally, services that are most likely to have been accessed by students, and services that are often most effective in helping, have the longest reporting waiting times. It is during this waiting period that students that are isolated and struggling often give up on their academic life, and where the significant effects of the problem can take their toll. Immediate and proactive support from peers and from staff is crucial, therefore, in dealing with the mental health crisis. This requires a significant culture shift, from waiting for students to declare their issues and staff only signposting students when a student discloses, to ongoing active and pre-emptive support from staff and students alike.

"The fact that it is entirely a process of you having to bring things to them every time... People who are really struggling, don't do that... it's very easy to give up on these things when you're in your own head feeling low, feeling distracted."

Hallam student, Being Well Doing Well, 2018

The University has taken some steps already towards this approach with attendance monitoring that is used in a wellbeing capacity only, and with the University restructure that should give more of a focus to individual student support. The Students' Union believes this can be taken further, and that, working together, the University and the Students' Union need to ensure strategies addressing the mental health crisis are written into the very heart of its processes. The production of a mental health charter would help to embed this culture, and to ensure that mental health is considered in every aspect of the University, and not just having the responsibility left with student support services alone.

The findings from the 'Being Well, Doing Well' research will be formally published in summer 2018 and will help to inform other aspects of the student experience. This research will therefore be referenced throughout the report.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.



Starting University can be a daunting process, which some find an easy and exciting transition into Higher Education, whereas others may face significant challenges. This is often not down to individual attitudes, but the previous experience of the individual, the support they receive, and the issues that students may face.

The Students' Union aimed to measure the views of these students through a short 'Introduction and Expectations' survey, hoping to better understand what students feel the challenges ahead may be, whether they feel prepared and able to face those challenges, and what their expectations of university might be.

Naturally, the majority of students surveyed indicated they were nervous about not getting a good grade and their biggest fear was to fail their modules. Respondents listed exams, assignments and assessment as factors which they fear, are nervous about and find challenging. It was also highlighted that students believe motivation is a challenge and many mentioned they were nervous about being unable to stay motivated and maintaining the quality of their work. The University's Welcome Survey suggested that some students felt they needed "more support or interaction from lecturers"; this is likely linked to these fears some students have when they start their course. Our research provides a direction for what support new students may need from lecturers and reassurance that they will be able to achieve. We also know from previous research on student retention that self-perception of how well a student is progressing has a strong link to retention and attainment^{2,3}. Our 'Being Well, Doing Well' research has also revealed that Hallam students are less likely to feel they are doing as well as they want to be doing, in comparison to students at other institutions, highlighting the importance of student support in relation to transition and retention.

"...not being able to understand everything or not being as good as I am expected to be"

Introduction and Expectations survey, 2017

Data from our research projects has shown that the course itself can be challenging for students, and some believed that the difficulty level of their course might not be manageable. Students also mentioned they fear that they do not understand the course content or what they are expected to do and achieve. Some students also stated that they are nervous about academic writing and, particularly for international students, felt nervous about their understanding of the English language and major vocabulary, which will be explored further in this report.

While students may report feeling nervous about starting their new course, modules, meeting new lecturers and academic staff, they have frequently fed back to the Students' Union that all staff across the University are very welcoming, warm and helpful. This is a real positive and something we wish to encourage. However, existing literature relating to this area reflects the importance of regular ongoing feedback to students that contain suggestions for future improvements (as opposed to feedback that only highlights what went wrong), online visual learning environment (VLE) platforms that can give students real-time reports on their own engagement and progress on their course, and being able to easily contact tutors and teaching staff outside of the classroom.

"I have anxiety so I find it hard to move around the different places"

Introduction and Expectations survey, 2017

Of course, the idea that a student will have a fixed transition into University during only the first few months of their first year is one that we challenge. Our students are constantly in transition in some form, from year to year and ultimately to becoming a graduate. Our 'Being Well, Doing Well' research found that students in second and third years are more likely to experience mental health difficulties in comparison to first year students. Therefore we need to look not only at the student experience of 'Welcome' to the University, but what support is available to students as they progress through the years, and where barriers may be experienced that prevent smooth transition.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 2: Further research is conducted by the Students' Union into transitional phases across the Hallam experience, including student support and teaching quality.

² Cole, J. (2017). Concluding comments about student transition to higher education. *Higher Education*, 73 (3), p539-551.
³ Briggs, A. R., J., Clark, J., and Hall, I. (2012). Building bridges: understanding student transition to university. *Quality in Higher Education*, 18 (1), 3-21.



In relation to student support and transitions, one of the barriers our students experience is exam resits during the summer break. At the start of academic year 2017/8 the Students' Union Advice Centre saw a substantial number of students who had been impacted by the date of which the assessment boards assemble for exam resits. Currently the boards do not sit until September; students are notified about a pass or fail very close to their expected enrolment date. This leaves resit students in very difficult positions. They will be unsure if they can actually progress, and they could be leaving University altogether, failing their course. Without knowing what may lie ahead, the student is transitioning into the unknown.

Additionally, a student could be in an external resit position, in which they resit an exam but not the full module, and are unable to utilise a student loan and access to benefits is very limited. Students often sign up for housing as they are unsure what steps to take and no one is able to offer them any advanced information about their status for the next year. If they do pass, they will have a very short period of time to secure housing and be prepared to return to university. Students can appeal a fail mark, if they have grounds, but this can take up to 40 working days just for the first stage. Students feel greatly disadvantaged by the boards being held in September so close to the start of the next academic year. This issue has been flagged by the Students' Union Advice Centre, and has already proved to have a significant impact on our students.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 3: The University establishes earlier dates for Department assessment boards to inform resit students of their status in July/August.

Whilst the University may focus on the student transition into Higher Education, it is the student transition as they progress through University that may require more time and focus. As a final note, the NUS in their 'Debt in the First Degree' research project⁴, raised concerns about transition rates into postgraduate study. This was, however, more heavily linked to financial concerns, an issue affecting many students, and which is discussed in the next section of this report.

⁴ NUS. (2015). Debt in the first degree: Attitudes and behaviours of the first £9k fee paying graduates. Retrieved 21 March 2018, from <https://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/Debt%20in%20The%20First%20Degree%20-%20Graduates%20Survey%202015%20Report.pdf>

⁵ Office for Students. (2018). Value for money: The student perspective. Retrieved 20 June 2018, from <https://studentsunionresearch.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/value-for-money-the-student-perspective-final-final-final.pdf>

1.3 Money

We've discussed the impact that University can have on mental health, and on attainment and retention as the student transition into and through higher education. There is another immediate impact that university has on the vast majority of our students: a financial one.

The Students' Union continues to oppose rises in tuition fees, and whilst this presents a longer term financial barrier to choosing University as a path, there are more pressing financial costs. The impact of living costs and 'hidden' costs while studying is something that the University and Students' Union can directly help to address.

Sheffield Hallam Students' Union joined a consortium of Students' Union's from across the country participating in a research project for the Office for Students entitled Value for Money: the student perspective. This research did focus exclusively on additional expenditure and the student financial experience, choosing instead to focus on student perceptions of the value added from their degree and the relative merit of tuition fees. However, there are clear concerns around students understanding of the levels of financial hardship they may require during their studies. Nationally, "24% of students do not feel that they were informed about how much everything would cost as a student"⁵. In addition to frequently discussed factors such as accommodation and books, money was cited as a barrier to accessing extracurricular activity for many. University research has shown a direct correlation between students accessing co-curricular activities, such as joining a society, a sports club, or volunteering, and retention within Higher Education. It is concerning that a number of students feel unable to participate in co-curricular activities for financial reasons.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.

"Set up a small loans fund that all students can access if their student loan doesn't arrive on time or they find themselves in unexpected financial hardship"

Candidate Manifesto, SHSU Elections 2018

Last year, the Students' Union conducted a large scale survey receiving over 2,500 responses, primarily aimed at measuring the financial impact of going to University. This survey found that three quarters of the respondents persistently worried and were anxious about money, with some respondents stating they were prepared to go to extreme lengths in order to earn money. These methods of getting more cash included borrowing in full knowledge that they would not be able to pay the money back, medical trials, 'camming' (a term for being paid to take clothes off on webcam), and gambling.

"Seek to open up if at all possible, further financial support to Students who are in great need; particularly those from Minority Backgrounds, Disabilities & Student parents"

Candidate Manifesto, SHSU Elections 2018

The issue of gambling in particular is one we've seen grow in recent years, and the 'Being Well, Doing Well' research project highlighted that Hallam students are slightly more likely to gamble (18%) in comparison to students from other institutions (14%). Both the Students' Union and the University need to work together to understand exactly how this gambling occurs, and what effect it is having, in order to address the issue. The issues of funding, finance, and debt were the most frequently occurring reason for students to visit the Students' Union Advice Centre in the last academic year (almost 500 of the 1,117 new clients seen by our Advice Centre in the 2016-17 academic year were related to finance and money issues).

This year, the Students' Union planned to continue its research into student financial issues, however due to a timing clash with a similar piece of research conducted by the University, this has been postponed until the next academic year. Findings from the University's 'Money Skills' survey reflect our own previous research highlighting how almost three quarters of students worry about their finances on at least a weekly basis, and that over three quarters felt it impacted their ability to study for their degree in some way.

1.4 Accommodation and Safety

“I’ve gambled. I had to do it so I’d have enough money for my petrol to get into uni.”

Cost of University Research, 2017

Whilst the University ‘Money Skills’ research helps to understand students’ financial concerns and where they may lack financial knowledge, it does not look in detail into issues around gambling, camming, or other ways in which students may put themselves at risk in order to earn money. Understanding student financial issues, particularly concerning the lengths students may go to obtain money, needs to be a priority for both the University and the Students’ Union alike, and therefore the Students’ Union proposes an action for jointly working together to investigate this issue into more detail in the coming academic year. A partnership approach is critical for all perspectives to be considered, and to allow for students to engage using various pathways, in order to build a clear and accurate picture of the issue.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.

The NUS this year carried out a Poverty Commission, aimed at addressing what it perceives as systematic socioeconomic barriers to Higher Education. The commission’s findings were unfavourable towards the sector, stating that student income is inadequate and “the average student expenditure routinely exceeds the income available through student support”. The report is critical of institutional bursaries and hardship funds nationally, although Sheffield Hallam Students’ Union recognises that Sheffield Hallam University offers one of the more comprehensive packages of student support in the country, in particular for students mentioned in the Access Agreement. The report does, however, make particular reference to students who can’t access funding, namely part-time and distance learning students as well as asylum seekers and migrants.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 6: The University reviews and promotes provisions available to particular student groups who may struggle to access University, particularly asylum seekers and migrants.

Naturally, one of the biggest costs for students is rent for accommodation during their studies. This academic year, the Students’ Union Welfare and Community Officer and our Advice Centre have seen several cases of students struggling particularly with the initial deposit for securing a property for a full year. This is a particular issue for international students (financial issues for this particular group are discussed further in this report), and for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This significant barrier for groups of students, often from a disadvantaged background, is discussed in following section.

Student accommodation represents not only a significant cost for students, but can also have a negative impact on the student as a mental stressor. Our ‘Being Well, Doing Well’ research revealed that those who lived in University accommodation were significantly less likely to experience mental stressors, which can often develop into more serious issues. Furthermore, students who were privately renting accommodation showed higher rates of mental health difficulties in comparison to those in other types of student accommodation. Being able to identify and address these issues is critical in ensuring a great experience for our students both in and out of the classroom.

“...allows you to make lots of friends and you feel you have support from people who are going through the exact same experience as there can be some tough times at uni when you feel like giving up, friends you live with support you”

[on living in University accommodation] Housing and Accommodation survey, 2018

The Students’ Union conducted research into student accommodation and safety in and around Sheffield, with over 850 Hallam students giving their feedback. When moving into their accommodation, almost half of respondents actively sought out contact with future housemates, with suggestions that pre-arrival contact was helpful. Initial issues when moving in to new accommodation centred on not knowing where to park and arrival instructions being unclear. There is a particular lack of knowledge of parking with students who move to University managed accommodation, with more than a quarter of those students informing us that they did not know where they could park, or if parking was available at all. The University may want to ensure that parking details are more clearly listed in all communication about the University managed accommodation, as there is a clear knowledge gap here.

“I feel safer living with different people in university halls and it’s a good way to get to know new people...it will be nicer to have more space and live closer to campus.”

Housing and Accommodation survey, 2018

“Not got taxis home at night and walked in the dark, drunk because I can’t afford a simple taxi fare” –

[on the consequences of lack of money] – Cost of University Research, 2017

Once in accommodation, many students have had a range of issues from faulty appliances, to damp living spaces, and issues around security within the property. Our survey, ‘Housing and Accommodation’, found that surprisingly, more than one in three students had a particular issue around water and heating, as well as a third having issues with faulty appliances in their accommodation. More than one in 10 students reported damp and mould issues in their property, and this can pose a significant health risk.

When breaking the answers down by type of property, students living in University managed accommodation also experienced problems with damp and mould (10%), as did students living in private accommodation (16%). However, students in University managed accommodation were more likely to experience problems with faulty appliances (38%) compared to private accommodation (27%). This suggests that there are problems throughout all types of student accommodation.

The best way in which we, the Students’ Union, and the University can deal with these issues is for the Snug scheme (the student accommodation scheme, developed and managed by the Students’ Union, the University and the City Council) to be a powerful and recognised accreditation scheme. The 2017 Student Voice Report recommended that the profile of the Snug scheme to be raised amongst landlords and the student population. Whilst there has been a slight increase in the number of properties that are Snug registered this academic year, this may well be as a result of the University of Sheffield joining the scheme, and the increase is not nearly large enough to have the impact it needs. Once the Snug scheme becomes standard, we can then increase the standards of living for all students, which is the long term aim of Snug.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.



Whilst rent and quality are key factors in finding accommodation and living in Sheffield, the location of the accommodation itself is also important. This is not limited to trying to find accommodation that is close to University or near friends, but one that allows students to engage in the full range of student activities. One in 5 participants of our Housing and Accommodation survey responded that location of their accommodation stops them from taking part in extra-curricular activities. In this instance, the Students' Union particularly has a part to play in ensuring that activities available to students can be accessed by all, and not just those that can easily get to the Hubs building. For many, safe transport particularly later in the evening to and from University locations, is not available and this is a barrier for participation in extra-curricular activities.

"Provide a safe and reliable transport for students: a free shuttle bus between campuses for Hallam students running every day from 7am-11pm" -

Candidate Manifesto, SHSU Elections 2017

Our research has found that for many students, location of a property is intrinsically linked with safety, and this is an understandable concern. According to crime statistics nationally at universities, students at City Campus are more likely to fall victim to violent and sexual offences than students at Collegiate Campus (41.5 per 1000 persons at City, compared to 21.1 per 1000 persons at Collegiate)⁶. The Housing and Accommodation survey also revealed that our female students are much more likely to look for safe accommodation whereas our male students are more likely to prioritise cost.

In the 2017 Student Voice Report, the Students' Union highlighted safety concerns around the new SIA building; however this issue appears to be far more widespread, with some students being targeted specifically by criminals. This has been fed back to the Students' Union via formal research, as well as through anecdotal feedback, with particularly shocking accounts of students as victims of crime just by monitoring traffic on social media.

Even research we have conducted independently of living and safety highlighted student concerns about their own safety, such as the following quote from a student in one focus group:

"...my friend was crying, as he had been taken to the bank and forced to get money out and stuff, and I was on a night out a few days later, and it came through, everyone was talking about it, that tonight, someone was targeting loads of students in this area with dirty needles and stuff, and they got into the student accommodation..." -

'Your Student Experience' Research, 2018

Students within this focus group also made suggestions for signposting from student accommodation areas to both City and Collegiate Campus, to not only help students who may get lost, but also to increase the sense of safety and not wandering into areas that may be more prone to higher levels of crime.

As evidenced, the Students' Union has found that Hallam students have a significant concern for their safety, with links to where they live and study in Sheffield. As students are being targeted for robberies and assaults, we need to ensure that student safety is prioritised in and around the city. The first step to achieving this is for the University and the Students' Union to work with the City Council in partnership to establish safe walking and cycle routes between University buildings, and areas of concentrated student accommodation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 8: The University works with the City Council to establish safer routes between campuses, University buildings, and student accommodation.

Although above highlights more general experiences with accommodation and safety, there are undoubtedly differences between particular student populations. Therefore, the Students' Union will conduct more in-depth research into the difference between female and male student experience with accommodation and potential influence this may have in relation to mental health, wellbeing and the differential experiences of particular student groups.

"...Police have told me to inform you all that there's a group of people targeting students around waitrose, the forge and general student areas. There's been 6 over the last two weeks where they've been ordered to go to Waitrose's cash machine at knife point with another case they used a dirty syringe. They demand u [sic] take out maximum amount you can withdraw. It happened to my friend last night at 9pm she was walking by the underpass near aldi...." -

Anonymous Hallam student, social media.



2.0

Student Voice



2.1 Differential Student Experiences

It is clear that not all students' experiences of University are comparable, with certain individuals and demographic groups facing differing barriers to Higher Education. The Students' Union recognises this in many ways, such as through providing dedicated representation and groups for students who self-identify into liberation groups, and the University have taken steps in recent years to address institutional issues such as the BME Attainment Gap.

Within this section of the student voice report, we will reflect upon research carried out this year into two distinct demographics of students. We recognise that not all students who define into these groups will share the experiences outlined, but feel there are measurable and achievable changes the University and Students' Union can make to improve the student experience of these groups as a whole. This section will look at the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Students (BME) and International Students; reflecting our research priorities in these areas this year. We recognise there are a number of other groups with complex needs not covered by this research, and future research priorities for the Students' Union and University are suggested at the end of this chapter.



2.1.1 International Students

Starting university is a daunting prospect for any individual, particularly those moving to a new city and living in a new environment. In 2017-18, Sheffield Hallam enrolled 2,349 students who not only moved to a new city, but moved from another country to the UK to study. Taking this step presents a whole host of additional challenges, often overlooked by the University and the Students' Union alike. Many issues affecting students such as isolation and loneliness, accommodation problems or complications in student finance are greatly exacerbated by the sheer fact that these students are international. Our 'Introduction and Expectations' research highlighted that International students have a particular concern about writing, vocabulary, and correctly referencing sources in their written submissions, the latter point might lead to international students finding themselves being taken through the academic misconduct process.

One of the main examples of a unique issue experienced by international students is caused by complicated visa regulations, and the support sorely needed for students to overcome it. Our Advice Centre has flagged a recurring issue experienced by European Economic Area (EEA) Migrant Worker students having difficulties proving that they are working enough to support themselves without student finance. There are long time frames for evidence to be processed and employment which normally attracts students (such as zero hours fluctuating contracts) mean that students are often left for long periods of time without confirmation of funding or ultimately no maintenance loan support.

Whilst the University cannot change national visa regulations, it can provide support and help for our students when issues inevitably arise. Firstly, this needs to come in the form of regular contact with students who are experiencing visa issues. International students who have had visa problems often feed back to the Students' Union that the biggest concern they have is not knowing the current status of their application. Visa issues often take a long time to resolve, however students who are experiencing the problem are expected to wait without a clear understanding of the next steps. As we've mentioned in the section discussing student transitions, students that are left with uncertainty about whether they can progress, or whether they could be leaving University and the country altogether, will face significant stress which they must be supported through.

As mentioned previously, issues around accommodation and financial worries are prevalent among many students, and International students are no different. Indeed, our research this year and the interactions with our Advice Centre have shown there is serious anxiety around accommodation from International students, leading many to make dangerous choices and live in unacceptable accommodation. A particular issue many international students have faced is the requirement to pay high levels of rent in advance due to an inability to find a UK based guarantor. The prohibitive costs involved present serious problems to many students, something the University could help to alleviate. We, at the Students' Union, urge the University to give serious consideration to introducing a guarantor scheme for International students moving into private accommodation. Whilst there are financial and policy implications to such a scheme, similar schemes are operated by several universities in the UK such as the University of York and the University of Edinburgh, and we believe that Sheffield Hallam University should consider this so as to remain a University of choice for the international community.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 9: The University looks into developing a guarantor scheme for International students.

There are also concerns raised by International students as to how they are represented within the University. Respondents in our focus groups with International students felt like representation within the University and the Students' Union was geared towards UK students and they had limited opportunity for their voice to be heard. Turnout in the Students' Union Elections was high amongst International students this year, and for the second year in a row one of the full time elected officers is an International student, which could help this group feel more represented. However, just 4.5% of student representatives, including both course and department representatives, at Sheffield Hallam University, are International students. Some work may need to be done between the University and the Students' Union to ensure the course and department representative cohort is more reflective of the University.

2.1.2 BME Students

For the purposes of this report, we are using the term BME as it tends to be the term used nationally by both the Government and the NUS. Significantly, some participants of our focus groups expressed that this wording isolated and separated them personally from the wider society and from other white British students.

This 'othering' of a group of people may contribute towards feelings that university isn't for them, especially as it encourages direct comparisons with white people. It was discussed how this perception of being 'othered' can affect the chances of BME students in being selected for things that they apply for, which could affect confidence and aspirations. Research carried out by Sheffield Hallam University has also found that there is some suspicion among minority groups over targeted initiatives from both institutions, which is something both the Students' Union and the University must bear in mind when carrying out research and interventions in the future.⁷

There is a strong perception amongst some BME students, particularly expressed through our BME Committee, that the University does not consider the barriers that these students face. Furthermore, views are often heard that these students fail to see the benefit of giving feedback to the University to address the issues, as it is felt that no action will come of it. Students we have spoken to through focus groups, Student Reps, and other feedback channels suggest a real disconnect between the University and the wider BME student population at Hallam. This does not necessarily apply to individuals communicating with their personal tutors, but rather the broader BME voice not being heard by University management, and actions not being taken as a result of feedback. Some of the candidate manifestos during our March 2018 elections mentioned the need for more of a platform for BME students, to allow them to have a more prominent, and indeed necessary, voice.

"I will continue to work alongside students across our University to fight for full-time representation of International students and BME students"

Candidate Manifesto, SHSU Elections 2018

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.

Participants in our BME focus groups voiced concerns that there was not only a disconnect between the University and BME students, but that the success of BME academics was rarely celebrated. Some participants felt that when BME success is recognised, it is only at events or awards specifically labelled as 'BME'. This visible lack of role models in mainstream academia may unconsciously contribute to perceptions that it is harder for these students to be successful and thus can demotivate individuals.

"It's nice when you see someone who's really high up or really inspirational, but they happen to be Black... Not like, 'this is a Black event, so we're going to show you a couple of successful Black people and then you can go home' I'd rather it was an event where there's different ethnicities but there happened to be a Black person there who's really good at what they're doing."

BME Focus Group Research

Despite this feedback, participants in our focus groups were aware that the University makes efforts to ensure inclusivity for all. Issues arise however in the lack of knowledge of specific cultures, particularly with front facing staff, and a lack of awareness of issues affecting students from differing cultures and backgrounds. This relates back to the idea that the term 'BME' can inadvertently group very diverse students, and does not identify a particular culture or explain behaviours of some students in comparison to others. There is also the perception that some staff members may be uncomfortable talking about race for fear of using the wrong terms or causing offence. Staff members not only need to be given more guidance in addressing the needs of students from specific cultures, but given the confidence that they can address these needs correctly. We believe that the majority of University staff members wish to be as open and inclusive as possible, and some of our students have also experienced this. Along with the BME attainment gap, there is much more that still needs to be addressed, particularly as these problems affect such a large proportion of our student population.

⁷ Austen, L., Heaton, C., Jones-Devitt, S., & Pickering, N. (2017). Why is the BME attainment gap such a wicked problem? *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, 3(1), 147-158.

2.2 Student Representation

“I think it’s even exceeded my expectation to be honest...Sheffield Hallam is, as far as I’m concerned, helping me now. Because I’ve got all this experience so it helps me to find my interest, really, my aspiration.”

BME Focus Group Research

Incidents of alleged racism that have taken place within both the City of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University have also contributed to a culture of fear and mistrust amongst some BME students. Several students have complained on social media, and in person to the Students’ Union and wish to see strong action taken by both the Students’ Union and the University. The willingness to speak up and raise issues that students find unacceptable should be applauded and is a sign that these students expect positive changes to be forthcoming. It is vital that both Sheffield Hallam Students’ Union and Sheffield Hallam University are open and transparent about the challenges they face, as well as showcasing positive improvements being made, such as the Students’ Union’s ‘Investors in Diversity’ accreditation and the University’s work towards the Race Equality Charter.

We recognise that the student groups we have highlighted are not the only groups who face systemic barriers to their Higher Education experience. There are numerous other groups such as mature students, commuter students, transgender students, amongst others. For example, our ‘Being Well, Doing Well’ research found that students that identify as LGBT+, students with a disability, and students from POLAR groups 1-4, have higher rates of mental health difficulty, which undoubtedly has an impact on their time at university. The experience of students who feel marginalised within Higher Education, and how incremental improvements can be made that enhances their student experience, should be a key focus for both the Students’ Union and the University moving forward. We feel that, through working in a spirit of genuine partnership, the two institutions are well placed to work together to better understand the student experience and make meaningful interventions to ensure we achieve outstanding outcomes for all our students.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 11: The Students’ Union and the University work in partnership to develop evidence based interventions to improve the student experience of marginalised students.

The Student Representative system is at the very heart of the student voice at Sheffield Hallam. Operating at all levels from course to faculty, through to institutional level representation provided by elected officers, all students at Sheffield Hallam have someone who can represent their views to the University. Where the rep system works well, Student Reps work in a spirit of genuine partnership with academics and support staff to deliver meaningful learning enhancement. Student Staff Committee minutes, feedback at Your Education Zone, and one to ones with Department Reps have shown us the levels of positive change brought about by student reps working with staff over the last year. These have included additional lectures being added for coursework support alongside increased drop in sessions, alterations to feedback to make it more specific and relevant for students, making module guides more accessible to the cohort and providing different and new trips for students.

“When an issue on your course crops up, who you gonna call? Your Course Rep, of course..”

Nomination, Student Rep Awards 2018

This academic year we have seen Student Reps for the first time working together and alongside the Students’ Union to take collective action on behalf of student groups. This collective action shows the ever increasing profile of Student Reps amongst the student body and the different ways it can achieve successes to improve student life at Sheffield Hallam University. The Students’ Union membership survey shows that more than three quarters of the student body are aware of the rep system, which is undoubtedly positive.

Although there have been some great successes from the Student Rep system, there are still some areas that can be improved. Firstly, Staff Student Committee Meeting minutes can vary widely in terms of content, dissemination and turn around, within the same Faculty and even Department. In some contexts it can be challenging to find the Staff Student Committee Meeting minutes and often they can lack action points or any impact as a result of student feedback. This is frustrating to us as it makes it more difficult to evidence the impact of reps, and even more frustrating for reps themselves who take the time and effort to raise feedback which can, in theory, be subsequently ignored.

This has led to questions amongst reps as to the accountability surrounding meetings that they attend. In numerous instances we have seen issues or concerns being raised in a timely manner at the relevant meeting or forum, however no appropriate action has been taken as a result of this. In one instance, this has led to major problems for an entire cohort and issues needing to be escalated to senior University management through the Students’ Union’s Education Officer. This raises a number of concerns across Sheffield Hallam University, as to the accountability of meetings that Student Reps attend and how we can ensure that all actions that are agreed upon are taken up where possible. There is a lack of clarity as to the ways in which issues are escalated, with some faculties – for example Health and Wellbeing – having established formal methods of escalating issues, with others perhaps offering less clarity to student reps looking for their concerns to be dealt with. In the future it is suggested that there are clear and consistent guidelines to show how Student Reps can escalate relevant issues or concerns across Sheffield Hallam University. We also feel that guidelines should be produced to ensure actions in meetings are clearly defined and acted upon, with clear accountability for agreed actions.

The Student Rep system was last comprehensively reviewed in 2015, and it is clear there have been substantial improvements over the last few years. Within the next academic year, the Student Rep system will be reviewed for further development opportunities; this review and subsequent development will be co-delivered with the University.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.



2.2 Campus Experiences

In last year's Student Voice Report, the Students' Union resolved to conduct further research into the difference in student experience between City and Collegiate campus.

Whilst the experience will undoubtedly be different between the two, the Students' Union wish to ensure that there are equal opportunities for students and both campuses, equal support available, and that one group of students do not feel forgotten or side-lined in favour of the other. This academic year, we have made sure to identify, where possible, the campus a student is based at when collecting feedback, and conducting both a survey ('Your Student Experience' survey with a response rate of nearly 1,500 students) and focus groups to investigate this issue.

We aimed to measure the behaviour of students on and off campus, and found that students studying at Collegiate Campus were significantly more likely to stay on campus between classes (39% strongly agree) than students at City Campus (28% strongly agree). Furthermore, a larger proportion of Collegiate Campus students say they socialise on campus after classes (73% agree or strongly agree) in comparison to City Campus students (60% agree or strongly agree).

"with the majority of 2nd and 3rd year students living on Ecclesall Road, we need to make sure that collegiate gets as much attention as city campus"

Candidate Manifesto, SHSU Elections 2017

Despite students revealing that they are more likely to spend time between classes or on campus at Collegiate in comparison to City campus, amenities on and around campus were rated as being worse at Collegiate Campus. Students were asked what the best and the worst things were about each campus, revealing several different themes. Firstly, participants to our research suggest that whilst the price of food at University outlets was seen as a negative for students at both campuses, City Campus students had much more access to both cheaper and more varied food in supermarkets and University offers than at Collegiate, and also had access to more facilities in order to prepare and heat their own.

"...food places that are off and on campus which are so much better than collegiate"

Your Student Experience' Research, 2018

City Campus students had much more access to both cheaper and more varied food in supermarkets and University offers than at Collegiate, and also had access to more facilities in order to prepare and heat their own. Issues with price and quality of food and drink, as well as facilities for students to prepare their own food, have been a recurring theme in previous Student Voice Reports. Our research has highlighted how this issue differs between campuses. There appears to be the need to focus specifically on Collegiate in this area therefore, to ensure students at Collegiate are able to prepare food themselves, particularly in relation to the fact that they spend more time socialising on campus between teaching hours, and have a lack of cheap food outlets on and around campus.

RECOMMENDED ACTION 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.

Other themes that were pulled from the free-text comments highlighted several other issues. Library space, which is considered a benefit to students at both campuses, also had different levels of availability between campuses, as there were many more complaints about the size of the library and available study space at Collegiate Campus.

Many students at Collegiate Campus felt that distances between buildings and from the campus to the centre of the city enhances a feeling of isolation and weakens the sense of belonging to the wider student population. Again, those feelings of isolation will be enhanced by the fact that

Collegiate Campus students are more likely to stay on campus, rather than return back to their accommodation or to another location in the city to study. The issue of signposting has been mentioned in a previous sections, however it was raised in this research that there are many examples of signposting around the city for "Sheffield Hallam University", that will direct you to the City Campus rather than Collegiate Campus. This again emphasises to those Collegiate Campus students that they are not the main focus of the University.

"Location, feel isolated from what is happening at the rest of uni e.g. so far away from students union"

[on Collegiate Campus] 'Your Student Experience' Research, 2018

Establishing a sense of belonging and community is a priority not just for the University, but for the Students' Union, and we too need to bear the responsibility for ensuring students feel they have all they need at University. The Students' Union at the Hubs building provides a wide range of services for students; however this is currently not totally reflected at Collegiate Campus. The Students' Union office at Collegiate Campus, whilst small and somewhat hidden, is under-utilised, and our events throughout the year often take place within the Hubs which is located at City Campus.

This academic year, our Brand Development team conducted research that aimed to explore student awareness of the Students' Union at Collegiate Campus, and their satisfaction with their overall presence. We found that around half of students were not even aware that there is a Students' Union office at Collegiate Campus, and only one in ten of students that completed the survey were aware of the Students' Union Advice Centre service available in the Oaklands building. There is substantial room for improvement here for the Students' Union to increase its presence for these students, in order to address some of the issues highlighted in this section.

"Past two years I have never seen anyone there apart from the course rep training days"

[on the Students' Union at Collegiate Campus] 'Students' Union: Collegiate' Research, 2018

Students again gave their views on what they would like to see the Students' Union provide at Collegiate Campus, with the option to leave their comments. Suggestions included events related to employability, food and drink, evening social events, and clothing sales. Many comments also asked for more relaxation areas such as free table tennis and pool tables, and a larger permanent commercial outlet. These suggestions therefore need to be taken forward and for Students' Union needs to significantly increase its presence at Collegiate Campus in the coming academic year.

RECOMMENDED OUTCOME 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.

Closing Statement

Is Sheffield Hallam Value for Money?

Being a student in 2018 is an expensive undertaking. A combination of tuition fees, rising accommodation costs, student finance and the variable 'hidden' costs of a degree, mean that being a student has never been as costly an investment as it is now. The Office for Students' research into Value for Money, carried out by trendence, a student focused market research business, in conjunction with a number of Students' Union's including Sheffield Hallam Students' Union gives some alarming top line results. Just 38% of students in participating institutions felt their tuition fee was good value for money and a quarter of students do not feel they had sufficient information as to how much their student experience would cost them. Whilst we do not have the Sheffield Hallam specific results, we expect these results to be representative of all participating institutions.

The study showed that quality of teaching, assessment and feedback and learning resources were the primary drivers in assessing value for money. We know from the NSS that students at Hallam are broadly positive about the quality of teaching in particular, although we feel that as a Students' Union and a University we can do more to ascertain exactly what students feel is good teaching and why they feel some teaching falls below those standards.

The progress from previous years Student Voice Reports will no doubt have contributed to ensuring Sheffield Hallam University is reasonable value for money. As outlined in last year's Impact Report (pg. 8), the University have clearly taken student feedback seriously and put into place comprehensive measures to improve the student experience. The new University strategy is explicit and ambitious in its mission to shape students' futures, and we believe the University and Students' Union have a genuine dedication towards providing and demonstrating value for money.

That said, this Student Voice report shows that the experience at Sheffield Hallam is not perfect and does not represent resoundingly good value. We believe this report demonstrates there are improvements that need to be made to ensure an equitable experience for students of different backgrounds, who study in different locations, and who study different subjects. The report also shows there is a great deal of work to do to ensure students are supported with their mental health, housing and finances. We also believe this report shows that there is work that both the Students' Union and University can do within our representative structures to ensure problems are dealt with swiftly and effectively and are not allowed to escalate into more serious issues.

We believe all the recommendations put forward in this report are realistic, achievable and will go some way to ensuring Sheffield Hallam is value for money for all students who attend this University. We recognise that, in many areas, more research is needed and that some interventions have already been put in place and need time to come to fruition. We look forward to working with the University to address the challenges outlined in this Student Voice Report and ensuring we are a University and a Students' Union that transforms students' lives and gives Sheffield Hallam students the edge.

A. Key Terms and Abbreviations

Appendices

Academic Year	Defined period between 1 August and 31 July of the following year.
ACES	The faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences at Sheffield Hallam University.
Attainment	Refers to the level of the highest degree of education that a person has been awarded or has completed.
BME	'Black and Minority Ethnic'. Used to describe students of non-white descent.
BME Attainment Gap	The difference in attainment between BME and White student obtaining first or 2:1 degree classification.
D&S	The faculty of Development and Society at Sheffield Hallam University.
Distance Learning	A way of studying which is done without attending lectures in person.
EEA Migrant Worker	Refers to European Economic Area (EEA) Migrant Worker; a student who has moved from an EU or EEA country to attend FE or HE in the UK.
Fees	Refers to tuition fees unless explicitly stated otherwise. Tuition fees are paid to a University or College to attend a course with that institution.
FT Student	'Full-time student'. Students who are on a course that lasts at least 24 weeks, involves at least 21 hours of study/tuition/work experience during term time.
Graduate	A person who has attained a bachelors or higher degree.
H&WB	The faculty of Health and Wellbeing at Sheffield Hallam University.
HE	'Higher Education'. Optional final stage of formal learning occurs after completion of secondary education. Includes undergraduate and postgraduate level study, and courses leading to HNCs or HNDs.
Home Student	Students who were a resident in Great Britain and Northern Ireland when they started their course.
Investors in Diversity	An award given to organisations that embody inclusivity, diversity, and equality in the workplace.
Mature Student	Generally defined as students who are 21 or over when they started an undergraduate course.

B. Table of Data Sources

NSS	Abbreviation for 'National Student Survey' – a national survey aimed at final year undergraduate students which asks their opinions about their time in higher education at their institution.
NUS	The National Union of Students. The NUS is the national voice of students, helping them to campaign, get cheap student discounts, and provide advice on living student life to the full.
Office for Students	The UK government regulatory body for higher education, established on 1 April 2018, abbreviated to OfS.
PG Student	'Postgraduate student'. A student on a course such as a Masters, PGCE, or PhD, normally requiring a first degree as a condition of entry.
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) classification groups across the UK based on the proportion of young people that participate in higher education.
PT Student	'Part-time student'. Students who are on a course that lasts less than 24 weeks or involves less than 21 hours of study/tuition/work experience during term time.
Rep	(also; 'Student Rep') 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.
Resits	A second attempt of taking or sitting an exam or completing an assignment which is required to pass a module or course.
Retention	Completion of the course from start to finish. High retention rates generally relate to low proportion of 'drop outs' or 'withdrawals' from a course.
SBS	The faculty of Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University.
SHSU	Abbreviation for 'Sheffield Hallam Students' Union'.
SHU	Abbreviation for 'Sheffield Hallam University'.
Snug Scheme	A property inspection standard which requires the student accommodation to meet high standards which are set by SHSU, SHU, and Sheffield City Council.
SSCM	Abbreviation for 'Staff-Student Committee Meeting'.
TEF	The 'Teaching Excellence Framework'. This is a Government initiative designed to recognise, reward, and improve teaching excellence in Higher Education providers across the UK. Institutions will be given an institutional rating of Gold, Silver and Bronze for their teaching quality.
UG Student	'Undergraduate student'. A student on a course working towards a first degree (often such as a BA or BSc), foundation degree, HE certificate/diploma.
VLE	Abbreviation for 'Virtual Learning Environment' – a web-based platform used for digital learning on a course

Students' Union Formal Research:

Source	Year	No. of Responses	Type of Data
Introduction and Expectations Survey: This was a survey of first year students which asks open questions investigating individual challenges, issues, concerns, and expectations at the start of the academic year.	2017	145	Qualitative
The 'Cost of University' Research Project: A survey was created that measures student views in 4 main areas: finances at University, bursaries and placement support, winter exams and the Students' Union.	2017	2,519	Quantitative & Qualitative
The 'Being Well, Doing Well' Research Project (Alterline): The Students' Union teamed up with Alterline, to conduct a research project with 13 other institutions across the UK. This research used both qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand various aspects of student mental health and support at both Sheffield Hallam and the wider student population.	2018	12,731 (overall)	Quantitative & Qualitative
The 'Housing and Accommodation' Survey: This survey was conducted in order to understand the issues that students faced in both University managed and private accommodation, and the stresses that were associated with house-hunting and living as a student in Sheffield.	2018	869	Quantitative & Qualitative
The 'Your Student Experience' Research Project: This research included both a survey and focus groups in order to understand students views on the differences between the two campuses, as well as 'hot topic' issues such as attendance monitoring, anonymous marking, and student-University disputes. Lead by our Research Placement student Sam Woodward.	2018	1,469	Quantitative & Qualitative
The 'Living and Belonging' Survey: This survey was conducted early in the academic year and aimed to understand how student feel during their time at University, from motivations, to work, to attitudes of fellow students. This also subsequently fed into BME focus groups.	2017	167	Quantitative & Qualitative
International Student Focus Groups: Following the Living and Belonging Survey, Focus groups were conducted specifically with International students in order to better understand the issues experienced by that specific group of students. This rich feedback was then analysed in conjunction with existing research in this area.	2018	19	Qualitative
BME Focus Group Research: Following the Living and Belonging Survey, Focus groups were conducted specifically with non-'white-British' students in order to better understand the issues experienced by that specific group of students. This rich feedback was then analysed in conjunction with existing research in this area.	2017	15	Qualitative
The 'Investors in Diversity' (IID) Research Project: In the 2017-18 academic year, the Students' Union participated in this project in order to assess and improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices in the workplace. This involved surveying our student body with relation to their views on EDI at Sheffield Hallam.	2017	1,398	Quantitative & Qualitative

C. Progress from the 2016–17 Student Voice Report

Source	Year	No. of Responses	Type of Data
The 'Equality in STEM' Research Project: Lead by our Research Assistant Holly Brumby, the Students' Union wished to better understand issues in equality and diversity for our Women students, particularly in traditionally more male-dominated courses, with a consideration for opportunities, and self-perception.	2018	330	Qualitative
The 'Students' Union: Collegiate' Research Project: Our Market Research team gathered feedback from students to better understand how they view the Students' Union presence at Collegiate Campus, and what we can do to improve our outreach at that campus.	2018	141	Quantitative & Qualitative
The 'All I Want for Christmas' Campaign: In December 2017, the Student Officer Team ran their annual postcard campaign, collecting feedback on what students would like the University to improve, which was subsequently analysed.	2017	407	Qualitative
The 'Annual Student Rep' Survey: This is based on an annual survey that is sent to all Student Reps asking for feedback on their experiences of the Student Rep system, and the support available to Reps from both the Students' Union and the University.	2017	422	Quantitative & Qualitative

Informal and Rep-based Feedback

Source	Year	No. of Responses	Type of Data
Social Media Review: The Students' Union ensures that it reviews social media traffic from Hallam students on an ongoing basis, in order to monitor for issues or events that may affect students.	2017-18	n/a	Qualitative
Advice Centre Statistics: Our Advice Centre offers free, independent and impartial advice on all issues such as housing, academic, money matters, wellbeing, and employment. The data collected through the Advice Pro system indicates issues students are facing.	2017-18	n/a	Quantitative
Staff-Student Committee Meeting Minutes (SSCM) Minutes from Student Rep Committee Meetings, where staff and Student Reps work together to improve the student experience. Common themes are found within the minutes.	2017-18	n/a	Qualitative
Education Zone Meetings Students may submit any idea they have about their education to the Education Zone. This allows the issue to be discussed and debated, and zone committees can vote on whether a change in policy is to be passed as a result.	2017-18	n/a	Qualitative
Community Zone Meetings Students may submit any idea they have about the student community to the Community Zone. This allows the issue to be discussed and debated, and zone committees can vote on whether a change in policy is to be passed as a result.	2017-18	n/a	Qualitative
Candidate Manifestos - SHSU Elections Students running as candidates in the SHSU Elections ran with manifestos on what they feel are the biggest issues affecting students. These were analysed and themed, highlighting trends in the Hallam student experience.	2018	n/a	Qualitative

1.0 Teaching and Learning					
Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
1.1 Teaching Quality	1. Students report teaching to be consistently interactive and engaging, with the use of PowerPoint reduced where possible.	The University continues to support academic staff to remain interactive and engaging through multiple efforts including the UAPC in Higher Education Practice course, the PgCLTHE course which focuses on practical teaching skills, and the encouragement of experienced staff to complete the HEA Fellowship. Additionally, SHU runs staff development sessions aimed at improving the quality of teaching within faculties, including support for staff on making interactive and effective use of PowerPoint. Teaching Essentials is an online resource available to academic staff and it continues to be used and has recently been updated to focus on active learning. SHU has also developed a new Academic Careers Framework, launched in June 2018, which places a strong emphasis on student feedback as evidence of quality of teaching as criteria for career progression.	●		Significant Progress / Ongoing
1.2 Course Organisation & Communication	2. There is a measured annual reduction of timetabled gaps.	The University recently reviewed the timetabling and teaching spaces and identified the need to reduce timetable gaps, with a particular focus on reducing gaps to no more than 3 hours between sessions. A work stream focussing on timetables has been developed and effort is being made to improve the teaching schedule and ensure sessions are scheduled in closer proximity to each other.	●		Significant Progress / Ongoing
	3. Regular and consistent communication is made with students regarding scheduled teaching, changes to timetables, and effective use of non-contact time.	Following from the recent University timetable review, schedule changes have significantly reduced in academic year 2017/18 (from less than 300 changes in 2017/18 in contrast to thousands of changes in previous academic years). Communication with students is also currently being improved and a monthly department-led message including how to make effective use of non-contact time will be explored. In addition, the use of social media to communicate with students, in an effort to reduce email communication, is currently being explored.	●		Some Progress / Ongoing

Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
1.3 Wednesday afternoon scheduled teaching	4. There is a measured annual reduction of scheduled teaching on a Wednesday afternoon.	The University recently reviewed timetabling and has also identified the need for undergraduate teaching to take place before 13:00 on Wednesdays, so students are free in the afternoon. Work is currently underway for academic year 2018/19 with a focus on working with faculties to ensure enough spaces are available for Wednesday before 13:00.	●		Achieved / Ongoing
	5. There is clear communication with students as to why teaching may be scheduled at this time.	In addition to department-led email messages and the potential use of social media, teaching timetables are available to students on their mobile phones. Further work in this area is a priority and is being carried out led by the PVC for Student Experience.	●		Not Achieved / Ongoing

Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
2.3 Accommodation & Living	10. Students across faculties consistently receive accurate and timely communication throughout their placement.	SHU has invested in a corporate system to manage and monitor placements for students and further work is planned to review how the University communicates with students and to identify the most suitable channels. In addition, in the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, a new online feedback platform is being piloted which will help to facilitate communication with students on placements. In the Institute of Education, a new website and online signing-up process have been implemented to improve the relationship with partner schools. Due to this improved relationship, students on primary courses all had five weeks advance notice of their placement in academic year 2016/17 and far fewer students were travelling long distances in 2017 than in previous years.	●		Some Progress / Ongoing
	11. Through work with the City Council, assurances can be made that the type of new accommodation being built matches student demand.	SHU has worked in partnership with Sheffield City Council Planning Department and the University of Sheffield to review the issue of student housing, in particular the problem with expensive studios. Due to the concern with the price of studios, SHU has declined to take part in further developments which involved more studio housing. Recent housing developments have also been redesigned from 250 studios into 4 and 6 bed pods.	●		Achieved / Ongoing
	12. The profile of the snug scheme is raised amongst landlords and the student population, to increase the number of snug accredited properties.	The Snug scheme was recently shortlisted for a Green Gown Award and through partnership work between Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, the University of Sheffield and external housing organisations, the scheme will become Sheffield-wide from October 2018. A 'Love Where You Live' event was held during National Student Money week to educate students on the importance of budgeting and the Snug scheme was promoted at the event. Additionally, the Snug scheme is promoted during Welcome Week, Housing Fairs, and every other event the Students' Union Advice Centre attends throughout the academic year.	●	●	No Progress / Ongoing

2.0 Student Environments

Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
2.1 University Spaces	6. Investment is made to ensure the safety of Sheffield Hallam students in and around the new Sheffield Institute of Arts (SIA) building.	SHU is working in partnership with Sheffield city centre organisations; the initiatives which will directly affect the SIA building include Sheffield City Centre Residents Action Group (SCRAAG) collecting and disseminating information and lobbying in relation to cleaning, litter regulations and graffiti; the Sheffield Business Improvement District (BID) which has funded further policing of unsociable behaviour in the areas around all university sites in the city centre; Sheffield Council investing to improve Fitzalan Square and Pond Street; additional security during out of hours business at the SIA building and permanent CCTV; and a South Yorkshire Police introduction of a Public Space Protection Order.	●		Achieved / Ongoing
	7. In-depth research is conducted into the difference in student experience between City and Collegiate Campus.	Research was carried out by the Students' Union, with further recommendations based on the research outcomes; this will be explored in Campus Experiences (Section 2.3). In addition, SHU and the SU have worked in partnership to develop the Estates Master Plan, with particular focus on academic and support services for both Collegiate and City Campus.		●	Achieved / Ongoing
	8. Students at Collegiate Campus are able to withdraw cash on campus.	The University investigated options to install a cash machine at Collegiate Campus and a machine was installed June 2018.	●		Achieved / Ongoing
2.2 Placements	9. The effectiveness of financial aid processes for placement students in fully reviewed.	Students on placements are able to access financial aid within their faculty or through the Student Success Scholarship, which was implemented in September 2017 after a review of financial support in 2014/15. The fund is available to undergraduate students and is based on multiple criteria. The fund has been accessed by a high proportion of students on health courses with integrated placements.	●		Some Progress / Ongoing

3.0 Representation, Support and Opportunities

Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
3.1 Student Reps	13. Agendas are sent out before staff-student meetings and minutes are recorded and issued in a timely manner.	The University is continually working to improve the relationship of the Student Rep system with course leaders and administrators. In 2018/19, a web page will be piloted in the Faculty of Development and Society to host and share student-staff committee agendas and minutes. It is anticipated that this will be rolled out across the institution.	●		Some Progress / Ongoing

Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
	14. Staff and student engagement with the Student Rep system is improved, and Reps are better supported in engaging a wider range of students.	The University has developed an online resource to support staff in working effectively with student representatives and training is delivered to students by University staff and the Students' Union. In addition, the Students' Union has continued to host staff breakfasts to encourage engagement and discussion in the student representation process and management from faculty staff. The Students' Union has also developed and introduced the Find My Rep feature which enables students to find and communicate effectively with their representatives. The Find My Rep tool relies on the University consistently maintaining the SITS database, which holds the Student Rep details; however the updating of this system has been inconsistent amongst faculties.	●	●	Significant Progress / Ongoing
	15. Funding to support the most disadvantaged students continues at the same level or higher.	The Student Success Scholarship launched in September 2017; eligible students are able to apply for up to £2000 in additional funding. 630 students had applied for the Scholarship by October 2017. The Hallam Hardship Fund will also be available to students beginning September 2018, but the standard fund did close in April 2018 due to high demand. The hardship fund, in particular, is for students in financial hardship or for emergency purposes. The division between the scholarship and the hardship funds are currently being reviewed.	●		Achieved / Ongoing
3.2 Bursaries & Funding	16. Students are educated on the support available when they need money urgently.	As part of the Student Success Scholarship, students are also given financial training and information. In addition, the University's Financial Support Team have also developed a Money Skills Assessment tool, which helps students to assess their financial skills and awareness which, depending on their entitlement level, offers one-to-one support, workshops, online skills development sessions, and sessions on managing unexpected circumstances. SHUSpace has also been refreshed with financial support information and now includes an entitlement calculator which allows students to see more easily if they are likely to be entitled to additional financial support. The Students' Union Advice Centre works closely with the Student Funding and Access Support team, to ensure smooth referrals between teams when students need advice on their student finance and benefits entitlement and managing their existing debts, as well as help with getting financial awards.	●	●	Some Progress / Ongoing
3.3 Learning Resources	17. All core texts and recommended reading materials are accessible online for all Hallam students.	Although there have been difficulties with reading materials being made available in an online format, the Library is actively working to improve this. Some of the ways in which more material has and is being made available online includes adding more eBooks and always opting for the eBook version when the book is listed as a core textbook on a Reading List Online; monitoring reservations and looking for eBook versions when large numbers of a particular book have been reserved; monitoring 'turn-aways' to ensure that all students can access eBooks; buying the eBook version when it becomes available and reviewing this process each month; and reviewing the Document Supply Service to look for books which have been requested to consider purchasing.	●		Significant Progress / Ongoing
	18. A free printer is installed at Collegiate Campus.	The free printing service is currently being reviewed and, due to commercial changes, an alternative supplier is being sought.		●	No Progress / Ongoing

2.0 Student Environments					
Themes	Recommendations	Comments on Progress	SHU	SHSU	Has this been achieved?
	19. Support sessions are available for all students around exam times and coursework deadlines.	Priorities have been agreed by the Healthy University Steering Group, with representatives from both the University and the Students' Union as co-chairs of the group. Support sessions on wellbeing, mindfulness and anxiety management were delivered during exam period in 2017/18, including additional support on understanding exam questions which was developed by the Institute of Education, and the Departments of Natural and Built Environment, Humanities, and Engineering and Maths. In addition, further support has been made available for students preparing for resit examinations through face-to-face and virtual resources provided through the Library resource, The Bridge.	●		Some Progress / Ongoing
4.1 Mental Health & Wellbeing	20. Peer networks supporting students with mental health issues are developed and greater resource is utilised to combat stigmas associated.	The SU organised a 'Feel Good Fair' during Welcome Week, bringing together a range of local support services and wellbeing offers as a way of normalising the need to look after students' mental and physical health from the onset of university. The Healthy University Steering Group, with representatives from both the SU and SHU, actively promoted World Mental Health Day, with stalls at both City and Collegiate Campuses, and promoted Sheffield Mental Health week and 'Look After Your Mate' week. With regards to peer networks, the University trained students working as Residential Support Mentors, which has led to further development of peer support networks. The SU delivered a session on signposting to Course Reps and further training on mental health first aid for students in society leadership positions is planned for September 2018, as well as training sessions for culture connect and other SHU mentors to encourage them to help their mentees to access Students' Union and support services. The SU is also producing a selection of written resources for friends and family to help them support students who are struggling.		●	Significant Progress / Ongoing
	21. A 'Proven Bakehouse' style outlet is developed at Collegiate Campus.	Planning for a 'Proven Bakehouse' style outlet is currently underway for Collegiate Campus. In the meantime, the University has put in a mobile unit in the Heart of the Campus building. In addition, discounted everyday food items have also been introduced at Collegiate Campus.	●		Achieved / Ongoing
4.2 Student Meals	22. Students are given advice and information on cost effective ways of buying and preparing healthy and wholesome meals at home.	The SU ran a 'Feel Good Fair' and distributed healthy eating recipe cards and hosted a 'Love Your Leftovers' pop-up café during Welcome and Hallam Holidays. The University and the SU jointly hosted a series of Eat Well Socials which were designed to demonstrate healthy cooking on a budget, but lacked student engagement. The SU is looking at continuing the work on this but with a more clear and targeted focus and publicity; consideration will be given to time and location, and is likely to involve roaming stalls giving out 'ingredient packs' and recipe cards for a bargain price.	●	●	Achieved / Ongoing
4.3 Extracurricular Activities	23. Academic societies, covering every course, are available to Sheffield Hallam students.	The SU and the University are working in partnership to develop an approach that will extend the coverage of Academic Societies to all students, so that each student has the opportunity to join a relevant academic society within the Students' Union. Analysis has taken place which has identified coverage and gaps of academic societies. Further work is ongoing to overcome potential barriers (e.g. access to funding and automatic membership) and produce feasible solutions.	●	●	Significant Progress / Ongoing

D. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to the students of Sheffield Hallam University for sharing your experiences, thoughts, and feedback through surveys, focus groups, meetings, on social media, and through other informal feedback means. Your contributions have allowed us to compile this Student Voice Report on your behalf, to lobby for what you need and want, and to create an inclusive, supportive, and enriching educational experience.

We would also like to thank members of University staff and students for facilitating and promoting the Students' Union research, working in partnership with the Representation and Advocacy Team to ensure we can gather feedback effectively, and helping to produce the Student Voice Report itself.



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