

Statistical bulletin

Coronavirus and higher education students: England, 4 to 12 May 2021

Experimental Statistics from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS) in England. Includes information on the behaviours, plans, opinions and well-being of higher education students in the context of guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

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1 . Main points

- Over half (56%) of students who were in higher education prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic reported that the lack of face-to-face learning had a major or moderate impact on the quality of their course; around half (49%) said that the pandemic had a major or significant impact on their academic performance.
- The majority of students (86%) said that they were living at the same address as they were at the start of the autumn term 2020; this has statistically significantly increased since March 2021 (76%).
- Most students (71%) stayed in their current accommodation over the Easter break; however, around one in five (22%) students travelled to stay with family or friends over the Easter break, with the majority (84%) of those staying for more than two nights.
- Almost half (47%) of students that left the house in the previous seven days reported they had met up with family or friends they do not live with indoors; this was more than double those who reported the same in March 2021 (21%).
- Of all students, almost two in five (39%) reported that they had had at least one COVID-19 test (even if they did not have symptoms) in the previous seven days; this was a statistically significant increase compared with April 2021 (30%).
- Average life satisfaction scores among students remained stable in May 2021 at 5.8 (out of 10) in May 2021 following the improvements seen in April 2021; however, average scores still remained significantly lower than the adult population in Great Britain (7.0).

The statistics presented are Experimental Statistics, so care needs to be taken when interpreting them. This survey has a relatively small sample size and low response rate. While this has been weighted and is comparable with previous findings, this has an impact on the level of certainty of this research.

Statistician's comment

"Like many of us, with the loosening of restrictions students have begun to meet others and socialise. However, over half still report their mental health has suffered since autumn 2020 and they continue to have lower life satisfaction than the adult population.

"Although universities have undoubtedly tried to accommodate students in the face of restrictions, we found that nearly half of students reported the pandemic has significantly impacted their academic performance.

"It is important we continue to monitor the feelings and behaviours of students as restrictions are eased and the university experience returns to some normality."

Tim Gibbs, Public Services Analysis Team, Office for National Statistics
Follow the Public Services Analysis team on Twitter: [@HughStick](https://twitter.com/HughStick)

2 . University experience

Three-quarters (75%) of all students reported that scheduled live online lessons or lectures was the most common form of distance learning adopted by their university since the start of the autumn term 2020.

Of students who were in higher education prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, over half (56%) reported that the lack of face-to-face learning (such as lectures and seminars) since the start of the pandemic had a major or moderate impact on the quality of their course. Around half (49%) also said that the pandemic had a major or significant impact on their academic performance.

Almost a third (31%) of students reported being dissatisfied with their academic experience since the start of the autumn term 2020; this has continued to fall from a peak of 45% in January 2021. Over half (55%) reported being dissatisfied with their social experience since the start of the autumn term 2020, again, falling from a peak of 64% earlier in the year.

3 . Student migration

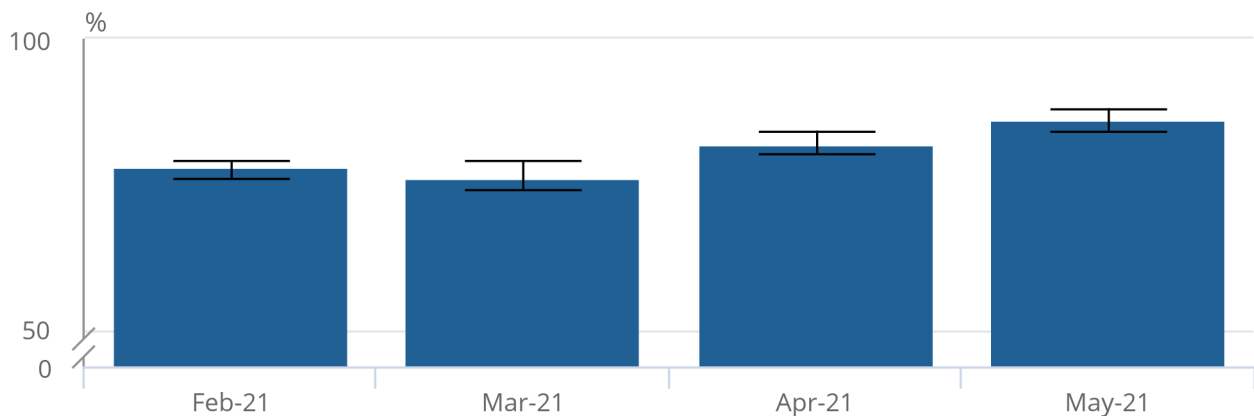
The majority (86%) of students said that they were living at the same address as they were at the start of the autumn term 2020. The proportion who have returned to their accommodation has been increasing in recent months since the three-quarters (76%) of students who reported the same in March 2021 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The majority of students were living at the same address as they were at the start of the autumn term 2020

Proportions of students who said that they were living at the same address as they were at the start of the autumn term 2020, England, February to May 2021

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Proportions of students who said that they were living at the same address as they were at the start of the autumn term 2020, England, February to May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Student COVID-19 Insights Survey, 4 to 12 May 2021

Notes:

1. The upper and lower confidence interval limits for each bar can be found in the [accompanying dataset](#).
2. The 95% confidence intervals highlight the degree of uncertainty around an estimate.
3. Non-overlapping confidence intervals suggest a statistically significant difference between groups.

The number of students who said they were currently living in university or private halls of residence increased between March 2021 (16%) and May 2021 (20%). This is despite some students not being permitted to return to university until 17 May 2021.

Most students (71%) stayed in their current accommodation over the Easter break. However, around one in five (22%) students travelled to stay with family or friends over the Easter break, with the majority (84%) of those staying for more than two nights. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those who travelled to stay with family or friends requested a test to confirm whether they had COVID-19 before travel.

More about coronavirus

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- [Explore the latest coronavirus data](#) from the ONS and other sources.
- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [coronavirus roundup](#).
- View [all coronavirus data](#).
- Find out how we are [working safely in our studies and surveys](#).

4 . Student activity

As restrictions were eased, and compared with previous months, more students left their accommodation to:

- spend time outdoors for recreational purposes or exercise (75%)
- to go to the shops for something other than groceries or medicines (57%)
- go out to work (40%)
- travel to different areas (30%)
- study indoors (28%)

As a result of restrictions easing, the proportion of students who reported limiting contact to their household, support bubble or childcare bubble, always or most of the time, fell between March (87%) and May (78%) 2021.

Almost half (47%) of students that left the house in the previous seven days reported they had met up with family or friends they do not live with, indoors; this was more than double who reported the same in March 2021 (21%).

Of all students, around two in five (39%) reported that they had had at least one COVID-19 test (even if they did not have symptoms) in the previous seven days; this was a statistically significant increase compared with April 2021 (30%).

However, fewer students (77%) reported that they would self-isolate for 10 days if they developed symptoms of COVID-19 compared with March 2021 (83%).

5 . Student well-being

Average life satisfaction scores among students remained stable in May 2021 at 5.8 (out of 10) following the improvements seen in April 2021 (Figure 2). However, average scores remained statistically significantly lower than the adult population in Great Britain (7.0 out of 10).

Figure 2: Average ratings of life satisfaction continue to improve for students

Average personal well-being ratings for all students, England, November 2020 to May 2021

Notes:

1. Estimates for “university students” are calculated from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS) for students at universities in England, between 4 and 12 May 2021 (see [Glossary](#)).
2. Estimates for the “adult population in Great Britain” are calculated from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module) for adults in Great Britain, between 11 to 15 November 2020 and 28 April to 3 May 2021.
3. Please note that these two surveys have different data collection methods, therefore they should not be compared directly but can be considered in reference to each other.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

The proportion of students reporting a worsening in their mental health and well-being since the start of the autumn term 2020 also remained stable at just over half (51%) of all students in May 2021; this follows a peak of over two-thirds (68%) of all students reporting the same in January 2021.

6 . Coronavirus and higher education students data

[Coronavirus and higher education students](#)

Dataset | Released 24 May 2021

Experimental Statistics from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey. Includes information on the behaviours, plans, opinions and well-being of higher education students in England in the context of guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

7 . Glossary

University students

Students included in this study are studying on foundation to postgraduate level programmes at universities in England.

Adult population in Great Britain

Where possible, comparisons have been drawn with the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey \(OPN\)](#) to compare the experiences and behaviours of students with the adult population in Great Britain. The comparisons are used to give a broad idea of the different experiences of each group but the statistics measure data from different time frames, slightly different questions, and different sampling methods, so are not directly comparable. The period of the OPN used for comparison was 28 April to 3 May 2021.

Return to in-person teaching and learning

At the beginning of the spring term 2021, the government prioritised the return to in-person teaching and learning for students on courses that had to be delivered in person. Guidance then advised providers that they could resume in-person teaching and learning for students who are studying practical or practice-based (including creative arts) subjects and require specialist equipment and facilities from 8 March. The government then announced that [all remaining higher education students can return to in-person teaching and learning no earlier than the 17 May](#).

Statistical significance

The statistical significance of differences has been determined by non-overlapping confidence intervals. A [confidence interval](#) gives an indication of the degree of uncertainty of an estimate, showing the precision of a sample estimate. The 95% confidence intervals are calculated so that if we repeated the study many times, 95% of the time the true unknown value would lie between the lower and upper confidence limits. A wider interval indicates more uncertainty in the estimate.

8 . Measuring the data

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is conducting a survey analysing student behaviour during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This survey is called the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS).

The survey was conducted between 4 and 12 May 2021, using an online survey tool and all answers were self-reported. A total of 100,000 students in English universities were invited to take part via their email address held by the National Union of Students (NUS) with an email sent from the NUS, with a response rate of 1.1%. We would like to thank and acknowledge the important role the NUS had in conducting this survey.

9 . Strengths and limitations

Strengths

An important strength of this survey is that it allows for timely estimates to be produced. In addition, the National Union of Students (NUS) sample frame provides good coverage of students across universities in England.

Estimates in this report are based on weighted counts that are representative of the population of students studying at universities in England; population totals are taken from the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) 2019 to 2020 estimates. Estimates are weighted to adjust for sex, age, and region of university provider.

Uncertainty in the data

The Experimental Statistics presented in this bulletin contain [uncertainty](#). As with all survey data based on a sample, they are susceptible to respondent error and bias. This survey has a low response rate of 1.1%, which increases the uncertainty and the chances of non-response bias in these statistics. In some cases, we have used confidence intervals to determine whether differences across periods and between students and the general population of Great Britain, are statistically significant.

10 . Related links

[Coronavirus and higher education students, additional demographic breakdowns: England, 19 February to 1 March 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 18 March 2021

Experimental Statistics from the fifth wave of the Student Covid-19 Insights Survey. Includes breakdowns of several key variables from the survey by age group and by region.

[Coronavirus and university students, 12 October to 18 October 2020, England](#)

Dataset | Released 5 November 2020

Experimental statistics from an initial pilot of the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey. Includes information on the behaviours and well-being of university students attending three English universities in the context of guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19).

[Coronavirus and university students, 3 to 8 November 2020, Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 18 November 2020

Experimental statistics from a pilot of the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey. Includes information on the behaviours and well-being of university students attending four British universities in the context of guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19).

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest data and analysis](#)

Web page | Updated as and when data become available

Latest data and analysis on the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK and its effect on the economy and society.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) roundup](#)

Article | Updated as and when data become available

Catch up on the latest data and analysis related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest insights](#)

Interactive tool | Updated as and when data become available

Explore the latest data and trends about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic from the ONS and other official sources.