

Statistical bulletin

Coronavirus and third year or higher students in higher education, England: 29 November to 20 December 2021

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

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1 . Main points

- Two-thirds (67%) of third year or higher students said that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had a major or significant impact on their academic performance, significantly higher than the student population as a whole (48%).
- Half of third year or higher students (50%) felt very or fairly likely to achieve the level of attainment they expected at the start of their degree or course.
- Around four in ten (43%) third year or higher students said they felt fairly or very unprepared for their next step after graduating or finishing their course.
- Current levels of satisfaction with both academic and social experience have increased significantly from the 2020 to 2021 academic year, the year most affected by the coronavirus pandemic, but for social experiences, it is still significantly lower than in 2019 to 2020.
- The average level of life satisfaction was significantly lower among third year or higher students (6.0) than both all students (6.7) and the adult population in Great Britain (7.0).
- Third year or higher students were significantly more likely to report their mental health and well-being had worsened since the start of the Autumn 2021 term (46%) than all students (28%).

The statistics presented are experimental statistics, so care needs to be taken when interpreting them. This survey has a relatively small sample size of 870 and low response rate of 1.8%. While this has been weighted and is comparable with findings of similar surveys, this has an impact on the level of [uncertainty](#) of this research.

Statistician's comment

"The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted student's studies, with the majority saying their academic performance has been affected and that they are feeling under prepared for their next steps after graduation.

"Notably, nearly half of third year or higher students report a worsening in their mental health and their life satisfaction is still significantly below the general population.

"We thank them all for taking part in our survey and helping to provide this valuable insight."

Follow the Public Services Analysis team on Twitter: [@HughStick](#)

2 . Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on academic performance

The aim of this survey is to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the experiences of students. To achieve this, we surveyed a sample of undergraduate students who attended university in the academic years of:

- 2019 to 2020, which was mostly complete before the start of the coronavirus pandemic
- 2020 to 2021, which was the year most strongly affected by the coronavirus pandemic
- 2021 to 2022, the current academic year

This means the surveyed students were in their third year of study or higher.

Two-thirds of third year or higher students (67%) reported that the coronavirus pandemic has had a major or significant impact on their academic performance.

Students were asked to reflect on their academic performance in this and the previous two academic years, and how well they felt they performed comparatively in each year.

Over one-third (38%) of third year students said that their academic performance was better or much better in the current academic year (2021 to 2022) compared with the previous academic year (2020 to 2021). This is significantly more than the one-quarter (26%) of current third year or higher students who reported better or much better academic performance in the 2020 to 2021 academic year compared with the previous year (2019 to 2020).

Figure 1: Students felt their academic performance improved more in the current year than the previous academic year

Feelings of academic performance changes between academic years, England, 29 November to 20 December 2021

Notes:

1. Estimates are calculated from the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS) for third year or higher students in England, between 29 November and 20 December 2021 (see [Glossary](#) for more detail).
2. Estimates for the percentage of students for whom this does not apply, preferred not to answer, or did not know are not shown, therefore percentages may not add up to 100.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Level of attainment

Students were asked about the level of attainment, such as degree grade or classification, that they expected when they started their undergraduate degree course and whether they now felt it was likely they would achieve this.

Half (50%) of students surveyed felt fairly or very likely to achieve their expected attainment level, significantly more than the quarter (26%) who felt fairly or very unlikely to do so.

However, the majority (58%) of third year or higher students reported that the coronavirus pandemic made them feel less likely to achieve the level of attainment they expected at the start of their degree course. This feeling was much stronger among the students who felt fairly or very unlikely to achieve their expected level of attainment. Nearly nine in ten (89%) of those students said that the coronavirus pandemic had made them less likely to do so.

Learning methods

At the time the survey was conducted, there were no restrictions on in-person activities for university students. Higher education providers were advised they should continue to deliver face-to-face teaching but should implement sensible and proportionate control measures.

The percentage of third year or higher students in the current academic year who reported their main method of learning delivery was remote or online learning was 45%. This is significantly higher than in the 2019 to 2020 academic year (32%) but significantly lower than in 2020 to 2021 (87%). Classroom-based learning was at 63% in 2019 to 2020, fell to 4% in 2020 to 2021 and is now 41% in 2021 to 2022. The differences between each year are all significant.

Please note that current third year or higher students were at different stages of their degree or course during these previous years, which may affect how much time they would spend in the classroom or learning remotely, regardless of any impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, students may be choosing to take measures in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic beyond the guidance provided to, or by, their universities. The end of the 2019 to 2020 academic year was also affected by a national lockdown, which may have influenced how students reported their overall experience of the year.

3 . Preparedness for next steps after university

Around 4 in 10 third year or higher students (43%) said they felt very or fairly unprepared for their next step after graduating or finishing their degree or course. This is similar to those who said they felt very or fairly prepared (38%)

There were no significant differences in how prepared students felt by whether their current teaching was in-person or remote. Around 39% of students that had zero hours of in-person teaching in the last seven days felt very or fairly prepared for their next step after graduating or finishing. This was similar to those who had more than zero hours (38%).

Around 40% of third year or higher students that were taught in-person, aside from in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, felt that they were very or fairly prepared for their next step. This was not significantly different to students who had experienced a different pattern of learning delivery methods during the same time period (44%).

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on feelings of preparedness

When asked if the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had an impact on how prepared they felt for their next steps after graduating or finishing their degree or course, the majority (67%) said yes, with only 22% saying there was no impact. Of those reporting an impact, 88% reported it had been a negative impact and 12% reported a positive impact.

Over half (58%) of third year or higher students who were taught in-person, aside from in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, said that the pandemic made them feel less prepared for their next steps after graduating or finishing their course. This was not significantly different to students who had experienced a different pattern of learning delivery methods during the same time period (59%).

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 satisfaction and well-being

Between the academic year that started before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (2019 to 2020) and the academic year most affected (2020 to 2021), the proportion of current third year or higher students reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with their academic experience fell significantly from 56% in 2019 to 2020 to 27% in 2020 to 2021. Satisfaction increased in the current academic year (2021 to 2022), with half (50%) of third year or higher students now satisfied with their academic experience. This is not significantly different from 2019 to 2020, but significantly higher than 2020 to 2021.

The proportion of current third year or higher students reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with their social experience fell significantly from 50% in 2019 to 2020 to 14% during 2020 to 2021. This has increased to 41% in the 2021 to 2022 academic year, which is significantly higher than 2020 to 2021, but still significantly lower than satisfaction in 2019 to 2020.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with academic experiences has returned to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels, but satisfaction with social experiences is still significantly lower

Satisfaction with academic and social experiences, England, 29 November to 20 December 2021

Notes:

1. Estimates are calculated from the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS) for third year or higher students at universities in England, between 29 November and 20 December 2021 (see [Glossary](#) for more detail).

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Student well-being

The average results for third year or higher students for life satisfaction, happiness and whether the things they do are worthwhile were all significantly lower compared with all students and the adult population in Great Britain.

When asked to rate how anxious they felt yesterday, third year or higher students rated themselves significantly higher on average than all students and the adult population in Great Britain.

Third year or higher students (46%) were significantly more likely than all students (28%) to say their mental health and well-being has got slightly or much worse since the start of the Autumn term 2021.

Less than one in five (17%) third year or higher students said they feel lonely often or always, significantly higher than the adult population in Great Britain (6%).

Figure 3: Average life satisfaction for third year or higher students is significantly lower than all students and the adult population in Great Britain

Average personal well-being ratings for third year or higher students, England, November and December 2021

Notes:

1. Estimates for “third year or higher students” are calculated from the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS) for third year or higher students at universities in England, between 29 November and 20 December 2021 (see [Glossary](#) for more detail).
2. Estimates for “all students” are calculated from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS) for a representative sample of all Higher Education (HE) students in England, between 19 and 29 November 2021.
3. Estimates for “adult population in Great Britain” are calculated from the Opinions and Lifestyle survey (OPN), between 1 and 12 December 2021.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

5 . Student behaviour

The majority (94%) of third year or higher students said they would request a test if they developed coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms. Similarly, nearly nine in ten (88%) third year or higher students would request a test if someone in their household were to develop COVID-19 symptoms.

At the time of the survey, booster doses of vaccines against COVID-19 were not available to most third year or higher students. Students were only asked if they had had one or “both” doses. No data were collected about third or booster vaccinations.

The vast majority (92%) of third year or higher students reported having at least one vaccine dose, with 89% reporting having had two doses.

6 . Coronavirus and third year or higher students in higher education data

[Coronavirus and third year or higher students in higher education, England](#)

Dataset | Released 24 January 2022

Experimental statistics from the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS) in England. Includes information on the behaviours, plans, opinions and well-being of higher education students in their third year or higher in the context of guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The period covered in this dataset is 29 November to 20 December 2021.

7 . Glossary

Third year students

Students included in this study are undergraduate students in their third or higher year of study at universities in England.

All higher education (HE) students in England

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published a similar survey of a representative sample of all higher education (HE) students in England. This survey is called the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS).

Where possible, comparisons have been drawn with the SCIS to compare the experiences and behaviours of third year or higher students with that of all students. Where possible, questions have been asked with identical wording in both surveys to facilitate this, but please note that the different time frames and sampling methods mean statistics are not directly comparable. The period of the SCIS used for comparison was 19 to 29 November 2021.

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 timeframes, slightly different questions and different sampling methods, so are not directly comparable. The period of the OPN used was 1 to 12 December 2021.

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. More information is available on our [uncertainty pages](#).

8 . Measuring the data

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is conducting a survey analysing third year or higher student behaviour and attitudes during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This survey is called the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS).

The survey was conducted between 29 November and 20 December 2021, using an online survey tool and all answers were self-reported. A total of 47,912 undergraduate students in their third or higher year of study at a selection of partner universities in England were invited to take part via their email address held by their institution. The response rate to the survey was 1.8%.

At the time the survey was conducted, there were no restrictions to teaching and learning in higher education providers as a result of COVID-19. More information can be found in [Higher education COVID-19 operational guidance](#).

9 . Strengths and limitations

Weighting

Estimates in this report are based on weighted counts that are representative of the population of third year or higher students studying at participating universities in England. Population totals are taken from the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) 2020 to 2021 estimates. Estimates are weighted to adjust for sex and 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 1.8%, 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 between third year or higher students, all students, and the general population of Great Britain, are statistically significant.

10 . Related links

[Coronavirus and higher education students, England, 19 to 29 November 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 December 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.

[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. User requested data including breakdowns of several key variables from the survey by age group and by region.

[Coronavirus and first year higher education students, England, 4 to 11 October 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 27 October 2021

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

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

Dataset | Released 5 November 2020

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

[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. User requested data including information on the behaviours and well-being of university students attending four British universities in the context of guidance on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

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

Web page | Updated as and when data become available

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

[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 Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other official sources.