Cost of Living Crisis

HE Students

November 2022
Project Overview

Objectives
NUS have carried out this research to look into how the cost of living crisis is continuing to impact students.

Methodology
Online Survey: A total of 4524 students in HE were consulted via an online survey. The survey was promoted via NUS emails. The survey took around 10 minutes to complete and was in field in October 2022. Respondents were offered the chance of winning a share of £250 for taking part.

Reading the report
Were there are any significant differences within demographic groupings, selected differences are highlighted on the chart. All demographic grouping charts are available.

We have clearly marked where we have tracked the data from previous reports. We track the data in order to understand any changes over the past terms.
Current Finances
Means of financial support

The majority of students in HE have a loan or bursary / grant. The majority of these do not agree that it covers their cost of living or their bills, or that it is likely to cover these costs in the future.

Additional help and support with the cost of living is sought by most students in HE; they particularly look to family or savings.
Financial pressures

Two in five students in HE are concerned with their ability to manage financially, with almost all cutting back on something. The proportions cutting back on heating, electricity and transport have increased slightly since June.

Indeed, the cost of running a house is the number one pressure on finances, although slightly fewer indicate an increase in their housing costs since the previous findings in June.
Over half of HE students have a loan while a further 15% have a bursary or a grant.

Base: 4516 Respondents.

B1. Do you have a UK student loan or a student bursary?

More likely amongst:
- 18-22
- UG (1st and 2nd year)
- Living with parents
- Full time
- UK
- Students in Wales
- Trans
- White
- Disabled students
- Estranged
- Socio-economic grouping D and E

### Chart: Student loan / bursary

- **Yes – I have a student loan**
  - Autumn 2022: 55%
  - Summer 2022: 51%
- **Yes – I have a student bursary / grant**
  - Autumn 2022: 15%
  - Summer 2022: 21%
- **No**
  - Autumn 2022: 38%
  - Summer 2022: 38%
- **I’d prefer not to say**
  - Autumn 2022: 2%
  - Summer 2022: 2%
- **NA**
  - Autumn 2022: 1%
  - Summer 2022: 2%

nus national union of students
Similar to the summer findings, those who have a loan or a grant, are most likely to disagree that their funds cover the costs of living comfortably or the cost of energy bills.

**Agreement that student loan / bursary...**

- **...covers the cost of energy bills?**
  - Strongly agree: 10%
  - Agree: 12%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 25%
  - Disagree: 36%
  - Strongly disagree: 15%

- **...covers the cost of living comfortably?**
  - Strongly agree: 13%
  - Agree: 10%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 34%
  - Disagree: 35%
  - Strongly disagree: 6%

- **...covers the cost of transport to your education provider?**
  - Strongly agree: 4%
  - Agree: 21%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 12%
  - Disagree: 23%
  - Strongly disagree: 24%
  - Not applicable: 16%

- **...covers the cost of educational materials for your course? (e.g. books, study resources)**
  - Strongly agree: 5%
  - Agree: 23%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 1%
  - Disagree: 25%
  - Strongly disagree: 27%
  - Not applicable: 7%

- **...covers the cost of a weekly shop**
  - Strongly agree: 4%
  - Agree: 28%
  - Neither agree nor disagree: 12%
  - Disagree: 25%
  - Strongly disagree: 25%
  - Not applicable: 7%

Average Base: 2647 respondents. Balance: do not have a loan / bursary.

**B2. How far do you agree that your student loan / grant currently...**
Looking agreement levels between June and October 22, students in HE are slightly less likely to agree that their loan covers the cost of energy bills than in June 22. They are more likely, however, to believe their loan covers the cost of a weekly shop, educational materials and the cost of transport.

**Agreement that student loan / bursary...**

- ...covers the cost of a weekly shop: October 22 - 32%, June 22 - 30%
- ...covers the cost of educational materials for your course? (e.g. books, study resources): October 22 - 28%, June 22 - 21%
- ...covers the cost of transport to your education provider? : October 22 - 25%, June 22 - 23%
- ...covers the cost of living comfortably: October 22 - 16%, June 22 - 15%
- ...covers the cost of energy bills? : October 22 - 11%, June 22 - 13%

Average Base: 2647 respondents. Balance: do not have a loan / bursary

B2. How far do you agree that your student loan / grant currently... Showing those who strongly agree or agree.
Thinking to the future, students in HE continue to show a lack of confidence that their loan or grant will cover their living costs or energy bills...

Oct 22

Confidence that Student loan / grant...

- ...cover the cost of energy bills?
  - Strongly agree: 6%
  - Agree: 9%
  - Neither: 26%
  - Disagree: 44%
  - Strongly Disagree: 14%

- ...cover the cost of living comfortably?
  - Strongly agree: 7%
  - Agree: 10%
  - Neither: 32%
  - Disagree: 43%
  - Strongly Disagree: 6%

- ...cover the cost of transport to your education provider?
  - Strongly agree: 16%
  - Agree: 13%
  - Neither: 22%
  - Disagree: 31%
  - Strongly Disagree: 15%

- ...cover the cost of a weekly shop?
  - Strongly agree: 17%
  - Agree: 1%
  - Neither: 31%
  - Disagree: 33%
  - Strongly Disagree: 6%

- ...cover the cost of educational materials for your course? (e.g. books, study resources)
  - Strongly agree: 18%
  - Agree: 15%
  - Neither: 25%
  - Disagree: 32%
  - Strongly Disagree: 7%

Average Base: 2628 respondents. Balance: do not have a loan / bursary

B4. How confident are you that your student loan / grant will continue to...
Agreement levels between June and October 22 show that students in HE demonstrate less confidence that their loan will cover the cost of educational materials, but appear slightly more confident that their transport costs will be covered.

**Confidence that student loan / bursary...**

- **...cover the cost of educational materials for your course? (e.g. books, study resources)**
  - Oct-22: 22%
  - Jun-22: 24%

- **...cover the cost of a weekly shop**
  - Oct-22: 19%
  - Jun-22: 18%

- **...cover the cost of transport to your education provider?**
  - Oct-22: 18%
  - Jun-22: 15%

- **...cover the cost of living comfortably**
  - Oct-22: 9%
  - Jun-22: 9%

- **...cover the cost of energy bills?**
  - Oct-22: 7%
  - Jun-22: 8%

Average Base: 2628 respondents. Balance: do not have a loan / bursary.

**B4. How confident are you that your student loan / grant will continue to...**

Showing those who strongly agree or agree.
Support and assistance sought from various sources has decreased slightly since June 22, except with regards to family and savings.

**Assistance / support sought**

- Financial support from family: 47% (Oct-22) vs. 42% (Jun-22)
- Savings: 42% (Oct-22) vs. 42% (Jun-22)
- Loan from family: 25% (Oct-22) vs. 25% (Jun-22)
- Credit cards: 23% (Oct-22) vs. 23% (Jun-22)
- Credit schemes e.g. Klarna, Clear Pay: 16% (Oct-22) vs. 16% (Jun-22)
- Support from UK Government / devolved...: 15% (Oct-22) vs. 15% (Jun-22)
- Bank loans: 10% (Oct-22) vs. 10% (Jun-22)
- Financial support from friends: 9% (Oct-22) vs. 9% (Jun-22)
- Loan from friends: 8% (Oct-22) vs. 8% (Jun-22)
- Food banks: 7% (Oct-22) vs. 7% (Jun-22)
- Institution hardship fund / other institution support: 7% (Oct-22) vs. 7% (Jun-22)
- Other: 3% (Oct-22) vs. 3% (Jun-22)
- Financial assistance from local authority: 3% (Oct-22) vs. 3% (Jun-22)
- I have not sought any financial assistance: 18% (Oct-22) vs. 18% (Jun-22)

More likely amongst:
- 40+
- Living in rented accommodation on own / with family
- Non-binary
- Trans
- Disabled
- Estranged students
- Socio-economic group E

B6. Which of the following, if any, have you sought support / assistance from since the beginning of 2022? *New
Students continue to demonstrate concern that they will be able to manage financially at present.

**Concern about ability to manage financially**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern Level</th>
<th>Oct-22</th>
<th>Jun-22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely concerned</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very concerned</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat concerned</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all concerned</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/prefer not</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More likely amongst:
- 23+
- PG
- Rented accommodation
- International
- Not white
- Disabled
- Parent / carer
- Estranged
- Socio-economic groups D and E

Base 4498 respondents. Balance: No Answer

B7. How concerned are you about your ability to manage financially at present?
Socialising continues to take biggest hit in terms of cutting back since the start of 2022, followed by luxury items, clothes and going on holiday. Over half have had to cut back on food and over two in five have cut back on heating (this has increased slightly since the summer findings).

B8. Which, if any, of the following have you cut back on in terms of spending since the beginning of 2022?

- Socialising
- Luxury items
- Clothes
- Going on holiday
- Food
- Transport (e.g. walking instead of getting public transport)
- Heating
- Healthcare e.g. going to the dentist
- Electricity
- Educational resources (e.g. books, study materials)
- Toiletries
- Sanitary products
- I have not cut back on anything
- Other

More likely amongst:
- UK
- White
- Disabled
- Parent / carer
- Estranged

More likely amongst:
- 30+
- Rented / own home
- UK
- Women
- White
- Disabled
- Parent / carer
- Estranged
- Socio-economic groups D and E

Base: x respondents. Balance: no response
The costs of housing is the number 1 pressure on finances for over a third of respondents, followed by the cost of energy. The cost of learning is, again, least likely to be a financial drain.

### Ranked pressure on finances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The cost of housing (e.g. rent, energy and water bills)</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of energy</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of food</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of travelling</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2...</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of learning (e.g. books and study resources / tools and equipment for apprentices?)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Base: 4073 respondents. Balance: Did not use this as support

**B9. Please rank the following in terms of which are currently putting pressure on your finances**
Just over a third have seen their housing costs increase since 2022, a smaller proportion since the summer findings. A quarter indicate they don’t know, perhaps an indication of the new term and new accommodation.

Base: 3721 Respondents. Balance: living with guardians / parents

B10. Have your housing costs (e.g. rent, energy, water bills etc) increased since last year (2021)?

More likely amongst:
- 30+
- UK
- Women
- White
- Disabled
- Parents / carers
- Estranged
- Socio-economic groups E and D

Base: 2554. Balance: housing costs not gone up

B11. By approximately how much have your housing costs (e.g. rent, energy, water bills etc) increased?
A quarter have under £50 left over each month.

B12. Approximately how much money do you have left each month once you’ve paid your housing costs (e.g. rent, energy, water bills etc)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Oct-22</th>
<th>Jun-22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;£50</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£50-£100</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£101-£150</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£151-£200</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£201-£250</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£251-£300</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£301-£350</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£351-£400</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£401-£450</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£451-£500</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£501+</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cost of living crisis
Summary

Cost of living crisis

Continuing the pattern from June, almost three quarters believe there is a current cost of living crisis. The evidence they give is similar, with the increase in bills, particularly food and heating.

Two in five indicate that the cost of living crisis is having a major impact on their income, while a third claim it’s having the same affect on someone who supports them financially. International students, non-white students, disabled students, parents and carers, estranged students and those in socio-economic group E are particularly affected.
Summary

Support from government

Students in HE continue to disagree that government is doing enough to support them and could be doing more by offering a number of financial packages such bursaries. Support with food and energy costs is a prevalent theme in the feedback, along with subsidies and addressing the cost of tuition fees.

Support from institutions

Around a third of students believe institutions could be doing more to support them, including financial support with food and transport costs and addressing the cost of tuition fees.
The vast majority of students in HE continue to agree that there is currently a cost of living crisis.
There is a cost of living crisis because...

Key themes:

Bills have gone up

- Costs have increased:
  - Food
  - Rent / mortgage
  - Heating

- BUT salaries / benefits / student loan have stayed the same

"Costs of food, energy etc are going up faster than I have ever seen and rents are unmanageably high."

"The increases in energy, travel and food are unmanageable for many people. I can't afford to live near my university this year and have to commute long distances. This is further affected by transport costs."

"Food is noticeably more expensive. Energy bills are going to be unpayable on current student loan. Inflation is causing all prices to rise."

"And it's only getting worse. Most people I know are living in poverty. Another interest rate hike away from homelessness and bankruptcy."

C2. Why do you say that?
One in four students in HE indicate that the cost of living crisis is having a major impact on their income (although this is a slightly smaller proportion than in the summer findings).

More likely amongst:
- 30+
- PG
- Rented on own / with family
- International
- Not white
- Disabled
- Parent / carer
- Care leaver
- Estranged students
- Socio-economic group E

Impact of cost of living on income

- Major impact: 39% Oct-22, 44% Jun-22
- Moderate impact: 33% Oct-22, 33% Jun-22
- Slight impact: 14% Oct-22, 13% Jun-22
- No impact: 6% Oct-22, 4% Jun-22
- Don’t know/prefer not to say: 9% Oct-22, 6% Jun-22

Base 4508 respondents. Balance: No response

C3. How big an impact has the current cost of living had on your income?
Over a third of respondents claim the cost of living crisis is having a major impact on someone who supports them financially – with this proportion increasing slightly since June.

Impact of cost of living on someone who supports you financially

- **Major impact**
  - Oct-22: 37%
  - Jun-22: 34%

- **Moderate impact**
  - Oct-22: 29%
  - Jun-22: 28%

- **Slight impact**
  - Oct-22: 12%
  - Jun-22: 11%

- **No impact**
  - Oct-22: 3%
  - Jun-22: 3%

- **Don’t know/prefer not to say**
  - Oct-22: 5%
  - Jun-22: 6%

- **Not applicable**
  - Oct-22: 15%
  - Jun-22: 18%

More likely amongst:
- Rented on own / with family / live with parents
- International
- Not white
- Disabled
- Parent / carer
- Care leaver
- Socio-economic group E

Base: 4510 respondents. Balance: No response

C4. How big an impact has the current cost of living had on anyone who helps to support you financially?
Students believe the government should be providing grants and bursaries to students to help with the cost of living crisis, particularly to help with the costs of food, energy, accommodation and travel. Caps and subsidies on some of these areas were highlighted, and action on tuition fees is considered crucial.

What should the government be doing for students during the cost of living crisis?

**Key themes:**

- **Provide grants / bursaries**
- **Support with increasing costs**
  - Food
  - Energy
- **More financial support**
  - accommodation
- **Subsidies / discounts**
  - Particularly travel
- **Action on tuition fees**
  - Scrap them
  - Reduce repayment terms
  - Flexibility on repayment terms
- **Cap / reduce charges e.g.**
  - Rent
  - Fuel
  - Living costs

"There needs to be a lot more affordable housing and student accommodation specifically with capped prices. They should reduce university fees, provide bursaries and grants in a way that helps a lot more people to access education and also stay in education regardless of their background. There should be student rates on local travel such as buses and metros. Subsidise food in cafeterias and vendors on campus properly so that it is actually an affordable and nutritional meal."

"They could cover some of the costs for housing and energy bills for students to help them get through the winter and continue to offer financial support through bursaries by making it easier to apply for one."

"Student discounts on basic amenities e.g. food, toiletries, sanitary products. These are luxuries, not necessities. Either give us more money, train us to budget, or reduce the cost of university tuition loan and provide bursaries for our accommodation."

"Apply restrictions to universities on the tuition fees that can be charged."
Like the findings in June, the vast majority of students in HE do not believe the government is doing enough to help them during the cost of living crisis.

Is the government doing enough to help students during the Cost of living crisis?

- Strongly agree: 3% (Oct-22), 4% (Jun-22)
- Agree: 4% (Oct-22), 3% (Jun-22)
- Neither agree nor disagree: 17% (Oct-22), 17% (Jun-22)
- Disagree: 32% (Oct-22), 31% (Jun-22)
- Strongly disagree: 40% (Oct-22), 40% (Jun-22)
- Don't know: 5% (Oct-22), 5% (Jun-22)

More likely amongst:
- 18+
- UK
- Women / non-binary
- Trans
- White
- Disabled
- Parent / carer
- Socio-economic groups D and E

C6a. To what extent do you agree that the UK Government / your devolved government is doing enough to help students during the current cost of living crisis?
Financial support was the key theme highlighted across student comments; support with food, travel and transport and accommodation were the most common areas discussed. Addressing tuition fees was also a prominent theme.

What should institutions be doing for students during the cost of living crisis

Key themes:

- Support with food
  - Work with foodbanks
  - Offer food vouchers
  - Cheaper food on campus

- Support with travel and transport

- Support with accommodation

- Tuition fees
  - Lower them
  - Address repayment schedule

- Financial support
  - Bursaries
  - Hardship fund

“Help with travel expenses and lower the cost of food at university.”

“Make food and transport more easily available and support with finding additional financial support.”

“Improve with accommodation, price and availability. I haven’t been able to get a place in Edinburgh this year due to prices so now I travel.”

“Institutions can support students by cutting on the fees or offer scholarships.”
A slightly higher proportion of HE students than in June believe that institutions are doing enough to help students during the cost of living crisis; however, over a third continue to have no opinion on this.

Are institutions doing enough to help students during the cost of living crisis?

- Strongly agree: Oct-22 3%, Jun-22 3%
- Agree: Oct-22 16%, Jun-22 12%
- Neither disagree or agree: Oct-22 36%, Jun-22 36%
- Disagree: Oct-22 22%, Jun-22 22%
- Strongly disagree: Oct-22 13%, Jun-22 15%
- Don’t know: Oct-22 9%, Jun-22 12%

More likely amongst:
- International
- Non-white
Health and Wellbeing
Summary

Impact on Mental Health

90% of students indicate the current cost of living crisis is having an impact on their mental health, including a quarter who claim it’s a major impact.

Students continue to speak of feeling anxious and depressed, they can’t sleep, and are worried about how they will manage to feed themselves and their families.
The cost of living crisis continues to have a big impact on the majority of students' mental health, although the proportions indicating this to be major have fallen since June.

**Impact of cost of living crisis on mental health**

- **Major impact**: 24% (Oct-22) vs 30% (Jun-22)
- **Moderate impact**: 36% (Oct-22) vs 35% (Jun-22)
- **Slight impact**: 30% (Oct-22) vs 26% (Jun-22)
- **No impact**: 8% (Oct-22) vs 7% (Jun-22)
- **Don’t know/prefer not to say**: 2% (Oct-22) vs 2% (Jun-22)
- **Not applicable**: 1% (Oct-22) vs 1% (Jun-22)

More likely amongst:
- 40+
- Rented accommodation
- Non-binary
- Disabled
- Parents and carers
- Care leaver
- Estranged students
- Socio-economic group E
Findings are similar to June. Students indicate the major impact that the cost of living crisis is having on their anxiety levels and depression. Worries about looking after and feeding their families and paying bills are common

**Impact of cost of living on mental health**

**Key themes:**

- Negative impact on mental health
  - Adding to anxiety and depression
  - Constant worry and stress
  - Not sleeping

- Struggling to eat and feed family

- Worried about family

- Worried about paying bills

"Not eating as I can't afford to do so, leaving me depressed tired and exhausted."

"I'm stressed about making ends meet, there is no 'nice' element of life anymore, it is simply about eating pasta everyday, walking everywhere by foot and saying no to social events or holidays because it is simply out of reach."

"Having to choose between travelling to university, heating my house or feeding myself or my child is just so depressing."

"The lost of living crisis is making me anxious of how I will carry on affording my bills especially through my studies when money is already tight. Furthermore how I will provide for my children and keep a house over their heads."

D2. Why do you say that?
Demographics
39% of respondents are aged 16-22, 25% aged 23-29 and 36% aged 30+

29% of participants have a disability, impairment or long-term health condition

81% are full time, 15% are part time and 10% are distance learners

61% are UG, 39% are PG

57% of the respondents are women and 39% are men
Cost of living Crisis

Autumn 2022

HE students