



STUDENT PRIORITY REPORT

**24 /
25**

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Foreword

'To be a student' is to not be 'one thing'; it's a period of time in which individuals from different backgrounds, areas, and upbringings navigate myriad experiences across their curricula, co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Students' interests aren't fixed, but there are deep-rooted issues which we've seen our students interact with over the past 200 years of the University, and 167 years of the Students' Union.

The landscape we study, learn, and research in is changing. The University's current cohort of 48,000 students have entered Higher Education at a time when governments have historically overpromised and underdelivered. Their experience is directly shaped by a sector which is underfunded and undervalued. Communities are becoming fractured by an increase in individualism, which is compounded by the rise of technology and underinvestment in public sectors. Inequalities are pervasive, whether that is from access to education, to socioeconomic backgrounds, to geopolitics which students care deeply about. The vast mix of intersectional identities which make up our student body cannot be homogenised; all students must be treated as individuals with care, respect, attention, and dignity.

Being a University of Manchester student in 2025 is to be navigating the intersections of a University deeply rooted in its 200-year history, while also looking ahead to the future and the possibilities and opportunities it brings; many of which we don't currently know enough about yet. Our insight work highlights the breadth of issues students face, whether that's the rising cost of living, noise around the literal and numerical value of education, accommodation and housing, social inequalities, sense of belonging, employability, climate change, debates around liberation and inclusion, tech development and the rise of AI, and political unpredictability.

All of these present considerable opportunities and are formative to the individual and collective student experience, often shaping students' worldviews as they become the generation tasked with figuring the different issues out, both inside the classroom and outside.

From the point of considering whether to apply for University, straight through to stepping onto the Whitworth Hall stage at graduation, students grapple with numerous challenges, expectations and encounters. Often, students tread the tension of university being on one hand, the most exciting thing ever, and on the other, the scariest, and feel every emotion in between. At Manchester, every single one of our 48,000 students has an incredibly unique experience; but as we enact Manchester 2035, it should be this inconsistency – and its numerous consequences – which we try to tackle.

Manchester 2035 presents a unique opportunity to turn the dial on student satisfaction and the student experience. As we look ahead to our next decade, we must reevaluate what it means to be putting students at the centre and core of our work, at the Students' Union and across the University. Being a student-centred University will be the key to success here; to achieve it, the Students' Union and University must maintain and enhance our strong partnership, working together collaboratively and innovatively to serve the interests of our students. We must co-create our own North Star; to provide the best student experience – academically, socially, culturally – in the Higher Education sector, setting up our students to learn, lead, and succeed, from when they join us to graduation and beyond.

Lexie Baynes
Union Affairs Officer





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Executive Summary

Over the past year, we've heard from more than **18,000 students** through key research projects such as Educate MCR, Build Your MCR, Decolonise the Curriculum, the International Student Survey, and the Student Leadership Survey; and through **1536 academic reps** that represent **48,000 students** at the University, talking about their experiences in 236 SSLC reports. These insights reveal how students engage with learning, manage financial pressures, navigate well-being challenges, and prepare for life after university.

Education and Research Experience

Teaching Delivery:

58.6% of students agree teaching is personalised to their learning needs and 70.8% of students agree staff use a variety of teaching methods.

Course Content:

65.7% of students agree their course has aided them to develop leadership skills and 40% of Black Heritage students agree they are exposed to research and ideas from diverse backgrounds.

Assessment and Feedback:

Quality and timeliness of assessment and feedback had positivity rates 7.7 and 4.8 percentage points below benchmark in the 2025 National Student Survey, which also had low satisfaction rates in Educate MCR.

Learning Resources:

Students had high satisfaction rates with support services such as School Hubs (90.8%) but found academic advising less satisfactory with 76.3% agreeing their advisor is a useful source of information.

Research Experience:

89.3% of Postgraduate Research students reported satisfaction with their own performance in their research degrees and 87% feel confident in their ability to overcome challenges. Over 62% of Postgraduate Research students report feeling lonely during their time at university.

Student Needs

Cost of Living:

51.5% of students reported their maintenance loan only partially covers their rent and 32.0% of students reported not feeling in control of their finances.

Wellbeing:

Only 30% of students described their mental health as good with some students feeling neglected and expressing their unique needs were not addressed.

Safety and Transportation:

57% of female students reported they feel safe in Manchester, compared to 74% of male students reporting feeling safe.

Accommodation Support:

75% of students were satisfied with accommodation support, with many expressing dissatisfaction with maintenance and hygiene issues, leading to a decline in quality of life and academic performance.

International Student Experience:

International students face challenges around visas and finances with 48.2% worry frequently or always worry about money. Only 37.3% rated their mental health as good and, when discussing mental health support available at the University 39.0% reported improvements could be made around the services' cultural sensitivity.

Student Futures

Careers Support:

77.3% of students agree the University offers effective career counselling and guidance, with calls for practical learning opportunities, real-world case studies in their curricula and more talks from industry professionals.

Student Employment:

39.1% of students work part-time, with 55% of those students working due to financial reasons. 22.5% of students reported working more than 25 hours a week alongside their studies.

Student Leadership:

81% of student leaders believe their role enabled them to positively impact their community and 85.9% report their leadership experience helps them become more employable.

Student Community:

89.3% of students agree a sense of belonging is important to them, but 66.0% agreed that building a sense of belonging requires emotional effort they don't have the energy for. 65.1% of students reported they feel lonely at least once a month. 72.6% of society members reported a strong sense of belonging within their societies.

Student Voice and Feedback

Decision-making:

Only 46% of students feel they can influence decisions at the University level, with only 40% of academic representatives agreeing. Students want to co-design their education and be active contributors to decision-making.

Recommendations for the University

Education Experience

1. Assessment authenticity should be improved by determining the most authentic range of methods of assessment to ensure students feel a tangible link between marking criteria and their links to employability skills and real-world application.
2. For the University to meaningfully collaborate and appropriately resource with the Union on the further development and implementation of the decolonisation strategy and culture shift to ensure all students feel a strong sense of belonging and representation in the University.
3. Provide ongoing teaching training to academics targeted around improvement areas to ensure excellence and relevance of teaching and improve student satisfaction with course content and delivery.
4. Professionalise academic advising and curate a more personalised advising experience to ensure students feel well supported consistently across the institution.
5. Conduct an independent accessibility review on online resources to ensure all students have equitable access to resources without barriers in usage.

Student Needs and Support

1. Develop more tailored, intersectional mental health support and use ties to Greater Manchester services to aid students in accessing support and address long waiting lists to support students facing mental health challenges.
2. Link CRM systems together across the institution to provide a clear picture of each student's circumstances, needs and potential trajectory to ensure they receive the personalised support they need.
3. Provide clearer financial information in a centralised space and increase provision of access grants and grants for hidden course costs.
4. Maintain in-person support in the form of School Hubs and make finance and visa teams easier to access to ensure students can access support in a timely and personalised manner.

Student Futures

- 1.** Make pathways clearer for students who want to pursue careers less 'related' to their degrees by expanding offerings such as Careers Fairs to ensure all students receive equitable support when thinking about their future.
- 2.** Ensure any compulsory placements are paid and grants are provided to cover transportation costs consistently across the institution to alleviate the financial and time burden of unpaid placements on students and better support them through the cost-of-living crisis.
- 3.** Improve provision of specific support for international students, particularly when it comes to post-graduate options and the Graduate Route Visa to assist them with the next steps after their studies.
- 4.** Provide accelerated pathways for students who have had careers before University to enable a tailored University experience based on students' lived experiences
- 5.** Curate tailored pathways for students to develop skills they self-assess require development and clearly communicate this to target demographics such as student who work part-time or students with no parental HE experience to aid them in developing beneficial skills for their life post-graduation.

Student Voice and Feedback

- 1.** Create culture of respect of student voice in decision-making spaces to empower students when speaking up and enhance their sense of belonging and identity within the institution.
- 2.** Reassess the purpose of any surveys communicated to students and ensure they are contributing solely to the enhancement of the student experience to improve student voice across the whole institution and reduce survey fatigue.

Recommendations for the Students' Union

Education Experience

1. Collaborate with the AI Strategy group to develop practical and responsive AI guidance which is co-owned between the Students' Union and the University of Manchester to support students in a rapidly changing digital environment.
2. Develop a strategy for building and maintaining sustainable academic communities for each course, as well as faculty/school community structures to ensure students feel a strong sense of belonging and personal identity within their courses.

Student Needs and Support

1. Increase external investment in the Basic Needs centre to support students during the cost-of-living crisis by providing pantry items, food packages, clothing and toiletries as well as financial advice.
2. Continue lobbying the University for affordable rents in student accommodation to support students facing financial hardships, as most students report their maintenance loan does not currently cover their rent.
3. Effectively communicate varying student needs and lived experiences to University Senior Leadership and academic staff to create awareness of student hardships and create a culture shift around expectations of students.
4. Lobby local governments and MPs to improve student living and safety within areas with high student populations to address student concerns around safety, transport and other citizen issues.
5. Lobby private PBSA companies (such as Unite Students) to create change in the sector to eliminate extortionate prices.

Student Futures

- 1.** Provide more targeted interventions during WIT to support working class students to go into student leader roles to ensure a stronger sense of belonging and smoother transition to university life.
- 2.** Raise issues around students' working rights and conditions within University spaces to ensure students are fully equipped to enter the workplace and are aware of their rights as employees. Lobby for increased support for students working in exploitative conditions such as better signposting to resources and active engagement
- 3.** Create a strategy to provide academic credit or accreditation for student leader roles and lobby the University to consider part-time work as credit-bearing activity.
- 4.** Influence careers service to create stronger links with local alumni and organisations and to work more closely with other providers such as Unit M and Manchester Metropolitan University to increase the careers offering available for students navigating a difficult job market.
- 5.** Work with the University via JobShop to embed students in temporary roles across the University in order to enhance their leadership skills, using the SU Student Leader model as an example of best practice.
- 6.** Develop a strategy to meaningfully engage time-poor students in student leaders role to improve their satisfaction with their university experience.

Student Voice & Feedback

- 1.** Create an international student advisory board to ensure effective implementation of the International Student strategy, as well as consultation and consideration into Union and Uni activities, preventing their treatment as a homogeneous group to improve international students' experience and engagement.
- 2.** Embed the Union into a leading role in students as partners initiatives in the University to design programmes to ensure student voice is at the centre of decision-making.
- 3.** Develop a PGR engagement strategy to strengthen the Union as their representative and improve their sense of belonging within the Union and the University.

EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

1

1. Education Experience

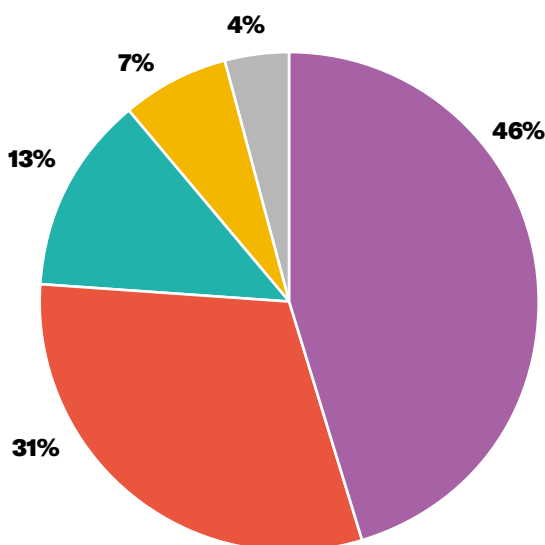
1.1 Teaching Delivery

Teaching delivery refers to the methods used by lecturers, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and any other teaching staff to disseminate information to students within lectures and seminars. This is one of the most important aspects of students' academic experience, as it builds the foundation for them to complete their studies through further independent study and assessments.

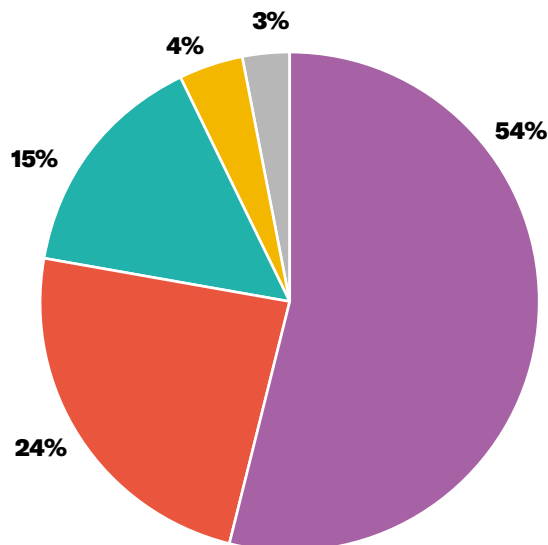
In UMSU's Educate MCR research project, students were asked about their **in-person learning experience**, where 78.2% of students were satisfied with their experience [Educate MCR dashboard]. This was a higher satisfaction rate compared to 2023, where 72.9% of students indicated they were satisfied [Educate MCR dashboard], suggesting remnants of the COVID-19 pandemic that were affecting the in-person teaching experience have been improved upon.

However, from the qualitative comments, it is clear that not all students are satisfied with in-person teaching. Comments explored significant challenges and concerns, particularly around lecture scheduling. Students cited issues around inconvenient lecture timings, long gaps between lectures, and a lack of consideration for commuter students with early or late scheduled sessions. In particular, one student said, "If I had known the scheduling would be outside normal timetabling before the course started, I would not have done this one" [Educate MCR report].

The teaching on my course is personalised to my learning needs



I feel satisfied with the in-person learning experience on my course



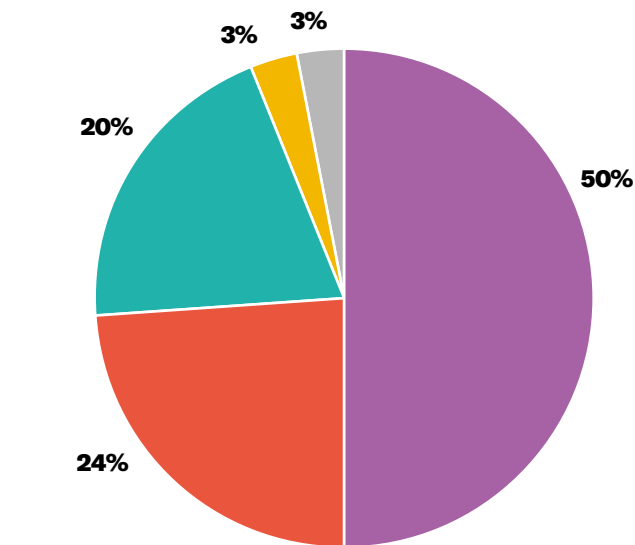
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Lecture scheduling was also mentioned frequently in Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs), which are regular meetings between University staff (academic and professional services) and students (academic representatives) to discuss feedback from student cohorts. In 2024/25, timetabling concerns were mentioned 94 times across all faculties, with students highlighting issues with module clashes, particularly involving optional modules. In the Faculty of Humanities, students were disappointed with the limitations imposed by timetable clashes on their module options [SSLC Data].

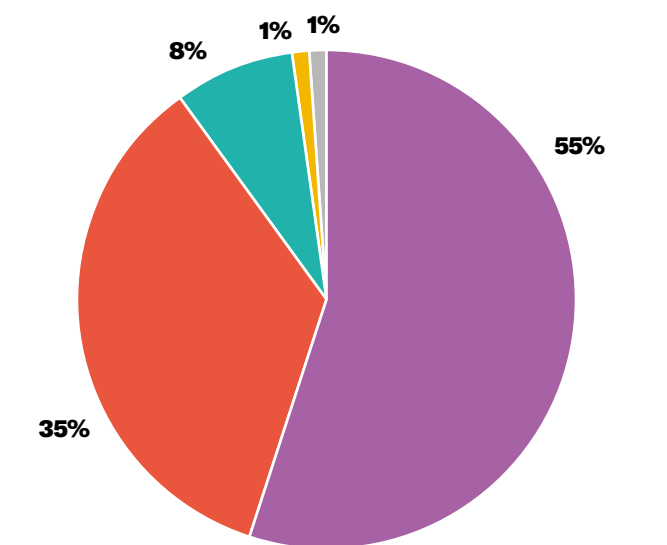
Students seem to be less satisfied when it comes to how well teaching considers their individual needs. In Educate MCR, only 58.6% of students agreed that teaching is **personalised to their learning needs** [Educate MCR dashboard].

Personalised learning refers to adopting a learner-centred approach where students are involved collaboratively in their learning. This also includes paying attention to accessibility requirements for disabled students and substantive representation amongst teaching staff for students in liberation groups. In UMSU’s Decolonise the Curriculum research, students were asked a similar question with significantly lower agreement rates.

My teaching staff use a variety of teaching methods inclusive to all student experiences



My teaching staff integrate real-world applications and current, diverse research



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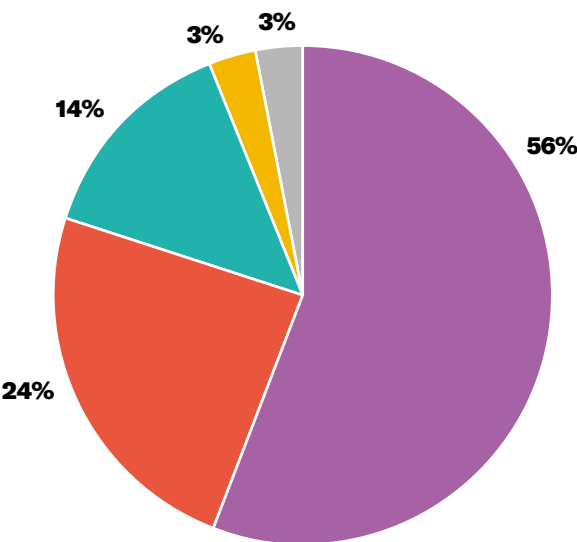
Only 33.1% of students belonging to the target demographics identified in the Access and Participation Plan (APP) agreed that their teaching was personalised to their lived experiences. The ethnicity demographics identified by the APP are Black Heritage, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani. [Decolonise the Curriculum report]. Furthermore, only 59.0% of students from these target demographics agreed that teaching is personalised to their learning needs in Educate MCR [Educate MCR Dashboard]. This highlights the importance of personalised learning, particularly for liberation groups.

When asked about teaching methods in Educate MCR, 70.8% of students agreed their staff used a **variety of teaching methods** [Educate MCR dashboard]. This is supplemented by the National Student Survey (NSS) findings in 2025, where the positivity measure for the question “How good are teaching staff at explaining things?” was 92.0%%, which is 0.6% below the sector-average benchmark. Similarly, the positivity measure for “How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?” was 76.6%, which is significantly lower than the benchmark (-4.4%) [NSS provider-level data dashboard]. This suggests an area of underperformance in the University, highlighting the importance of reviewing teaching structures in the institution to ensure personalised learning and diverse teaching methods are enshrined and utilised consistently across all courses.

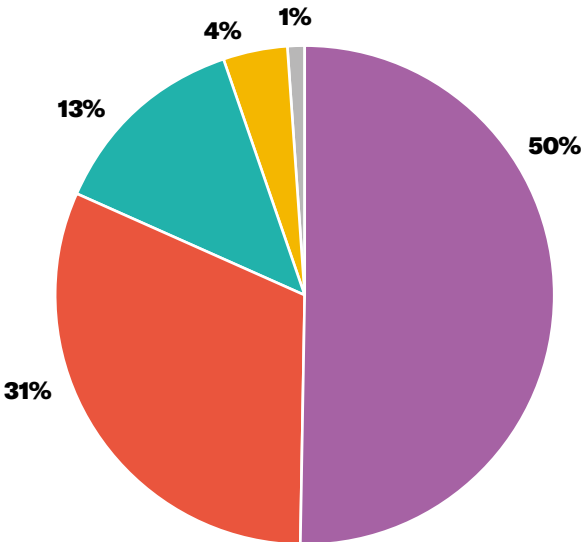
In SSLCs, students also expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of lecture delivery, with some students expressing that lecturers were teaching at a fast pace making it difficult to take notes. Students also highlighted that some lecturers did not provide enough information when teaching [SSLC Data]. In the UMSU Decolonise the Curriculum research project, students were also asked about the extent to which their teaching integrates diverse teaching methods. Agreement rates were low here as well, with only 59.3% agreement from students belonging to the demographics identified in the APP.

Education Experience

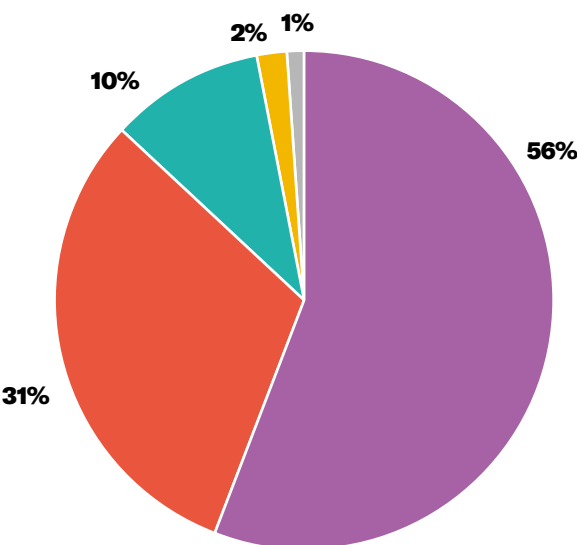
My curriculum represents a diverse variety of experinces



I have collaborative discussions with my peers on my course



I feel challenged by the content taught on my course



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1.2 Course Content

When discussing course content, we consider the curricula students are taught, as well as the learning outcomes and opportunities that are present within the curricula. Course content is paramount to the student experience as it underlines student engagement with their course and the opportunities for students to develop skills needed for future success. During their time at university, successful students will build not only their academic knowledge but also transferable skills that will help them in their future steps, such as pursuing further study or entering employment. Courses should be designed in a way that enables and encourages the **development of transferrable skills**, such as leadership skills, time management, critical thinking skills, and analytical skills.

In Educate MCR, students indicated their courses were most successful in building their analytical skills (91.1% agreement rate) but fell short when it came to leadership skills (65.7% agreement rate) [Educate MCR Dashboard]. This variation in the ability of courses to build required skills is also highlighted in the NSS data, where there was a 80.8% positivity rate for the question “How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you will need for your future?”. This is 3 percentage points below the benchmark, highlighting an area of underperformance of the University [NSS 2024 provider-level data dashboard]. In SSLCs, students highlighted that lectures often felt quite monotonous and would benefit from more interactive structures such as group discussions or activity-based learning [SSLC Data].

Part of evaluating the quality of course content is also assessing how diverse it is. **Diverse curricula** ensure all students feel represented within their courses and are exposed to multiple modes of thinking from across the world, rather than being restricted to Western knowledge only. In Educate MCR, 80.5% of students agreed their curricula represent a diverse variety of experiences [Educate MCR dashboard]. However, agreement was lower in the UMSU’s Decolonise the Curriculum project, with only 40% of Black Heritage students agreeing they are exposed to research and ideas from diverse backgrounds, followed by a 54.8% agreement rate by Bangladeshi students and a 70.8% agreement rate by Pakistani students [Decolonise the Curriculum report]. Therefore, while the general student population considers their curricula diverse, liberation groups do not agree with this sentiment. The University needs to work with liberation groups to ensure curricula represent all students and enhance underrepresented voices.

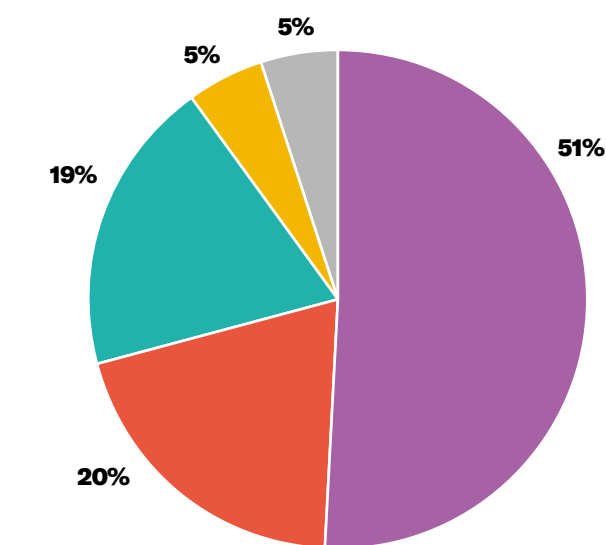
1.3 Assessment & Feedback

Assessment and feedback is a consistently underperforming area for the University, as seen both in UMSU research projects and sector-wide research such as the NSS.

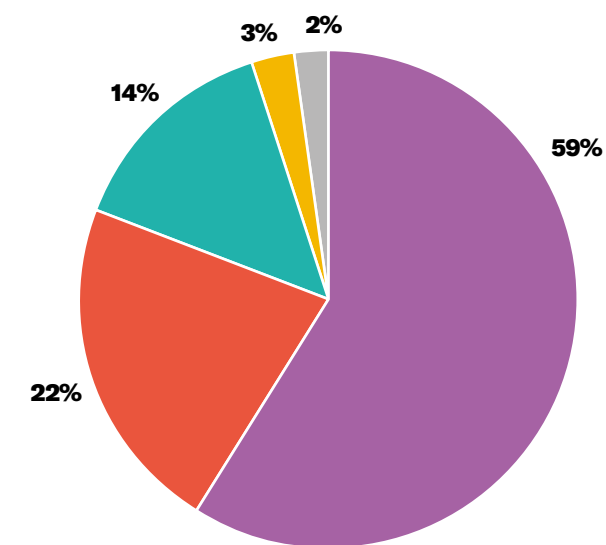
When considering the **quality** of assessment feedback, only 68.8% of respondents in Educate MCR were satisfied with it [Educate MCR Dashboard]. This is amplified by the NSS data, with only a 68.5% positivity rate when discussing the clarity of marking criteria and only a 62.8% positivity rate when discussing the usefulness of feedback in improving students' work. These were respectively 5.9 and 7.7 percentage points, emphasising subpar University performance compared to the sector [NSS Provider-level dashboard]. Low-quality feedback is not helpful to students as it does not allow them to effectively evaluate and reflect on their work, preventing them from further improving.

The picture looks similar when discussing **timeliness** of feedback, with only 69.7% of Educate MCR respondents indicating satisfaction [Educate MCR dashboard], supplemented by only a 75.2% positivity rate in the NSS data for the question "How often have you received assessment feedback on time?". This positivity rate is 4.8 percentage points below the benchmark [NSS provider-level dashboard]. Timeliness of feedback is paramount for students as it enables them to improve their work based on the feedback received from their teaching staff. Lack of timeliness means students often don't receive their feedback before completing their next assessment, preventing them from improving their work.

The timeliness of assessment feedback provided



The ability of assessments to enhance my skills

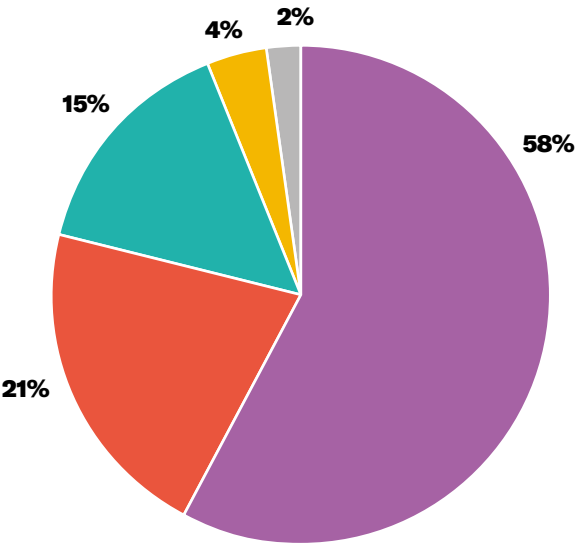


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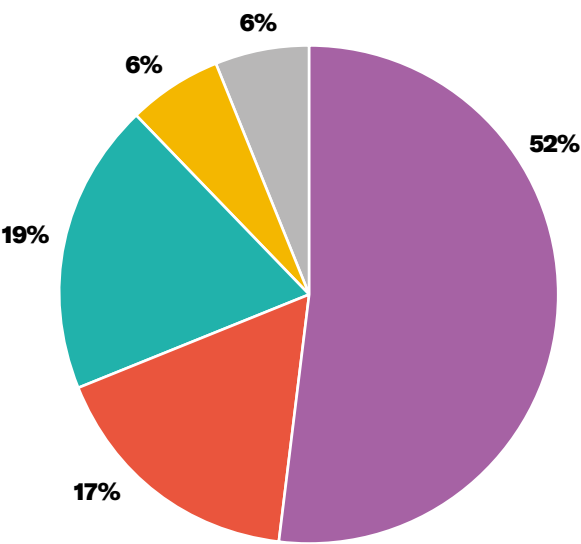
The UMSU researched student experiences of **assessment rubrics**, where students highlighted that rubrics could be a useful resource for assessments if they are consistently of high quality. It was recommended that rubrics be detailed with clearly defined measures of success. Students also highlighted the need for accessible rubrics, by using concise language without jargon and an easily readable layout. The use of rubrics could help mitigate issues with feedback quality and timeliness by creating a consistent framework for feedback [Rubrics report].

Students from liberation backgrounds were asked if assessments in their course considered life experiences from the global South, with significantly low agreement rates. Only 24.2% of students from the demographics identified by the APP agreed. This highlights that the current design of assessments fails to include non-Western perspectives, providing an incomplete picture of the relevant subjects [Decolonise the Curriculum report].

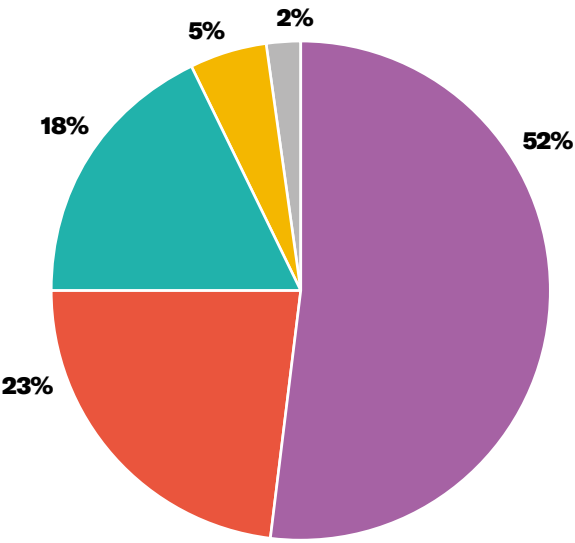
The variety of assessment methods on my course



The quality of assessment feedback provided in order for me to improve my next piece of work



The clarity of instructions provided to help me do my best when completing assessments



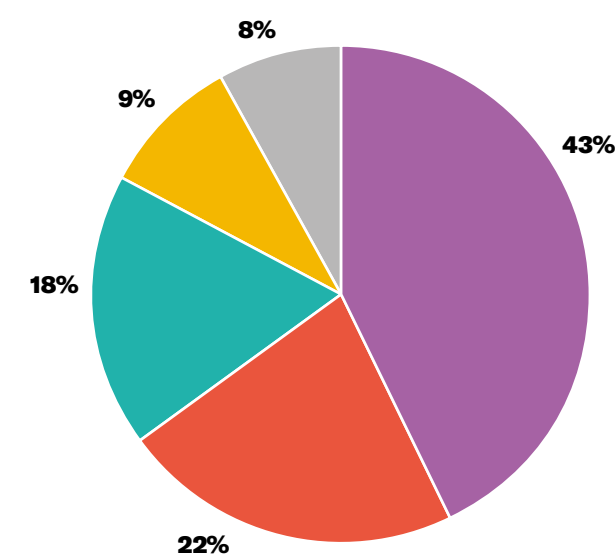
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1.4 Learning Resources - Academic Advising & Staff Support

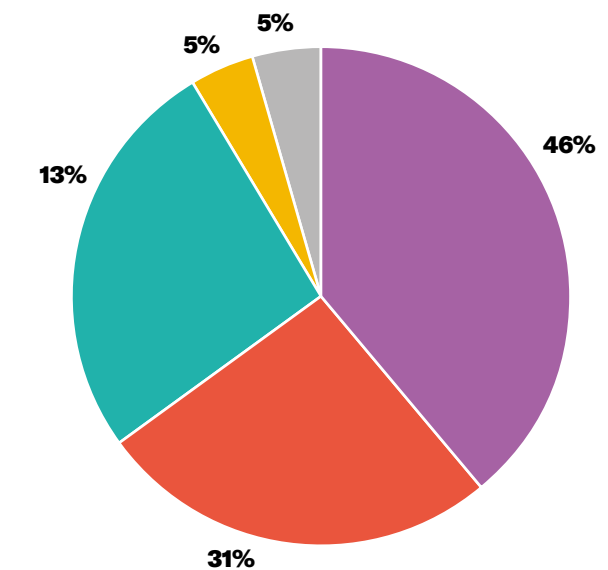
Academic and professional services staff provide vital support to students, clarifying lecture contents, questions about assessments, and other academic matters such as module choices. Students’ main support avenue is their academic advisor who is a port of call for them throughout the year, but they can also seek support through other teaching staff, as well as services such as School Hubs. It is vital that students receive accurate and useful information in a timely manner to aid them through their studies. Educate MCR indicated that students feel highly confident when accessing support to help their academic performance, with an 85.0% agreement rate. This was slightly lower for Black Heritage students with an 82.4% agreement rate, as well as neurodivergent students with 77.6% agreement rate, suggesting a disparity in access to support for underrepresented groups [Educate MCR Dashboard].

In the NSS, students indicated an 87.2% positivity rate when asked “How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?” and an 84.7% positivity rate when asked “How well have teaching staff supported your learning?”. While these positivity rates seem good at first glance, they are 0.7 and 2.9 percentage points below the sector-wide benchmark, respectively. This suggests improvements need to be made in support provision [NSS Provider-level dashboard].

I feel confident in using generative AI (e.g. ChatGTP) to supplement my learning



My academic advisor is a useful source of information and academic support



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School hubs had a high level of satisfaction in Educate MCR, with 90.8% of the respondents who had used the service indicating they were satisfied [Educate MCR Dashboard]. This highlights that the School Hubs are a major source of reliable and effective support for students, with particular praise for the in-person provision in previous UMSU insight work [Student Support Hubs Report]. Multiple students expressed their satisfaction with School Hubs in the Student Support Hub insight work, with highlights such as “The student support hub is well organised, with friendly and supportive staff” and “Everyone in the hub has been very supportive over my last three years at uni and it’s been so lovely!” [Student Support Hubs Dashboard]

When asked specifically about academic advising, 76.3% of students agreed their academic advisor is a useful source of information and academic support (Educate MCR Dashboard). This was slightly contrasted in the qualitative comments left by students, where concerns were raised about the support received from advisors. These concerns included a lack of communication, inadequate support, and slow response times. Students highlighted the need for improved communication, empathy, and responsiveness from the staff supporting them [Educate MCR report].

One student commented “My main gripe with my experience is lecturers not being supportive enough, presumably due to being too busy. The university needs to develop ways to support lecturers to support students. Whether that be creating roles for PhD students to be more involved in student support (e.g employing them to deal with student requests / office hours) to take pressure off lecturers, or better signposting to students to services/support which takes pressure off of lecturers”.

Learning Resources - IT Resources

IT provision is a major part of every student's experience, dictating how they access and interact with their learning materials, course resources, assessments, and even their teaching staff and course mates. When students were asked about IT services, satisfaction was high, with 87.8% of students agreeing that IT resources are helpful in supporting their learning [Educate MCR dashboard]. However, this was significantly contrasted in the qualitative sections of Educate MCR, where many students had concerns with Wi-Fi and Blackboard.

Over 100 students identified usability issues with Blackboard, including inconsistent module organisation, a lack of search functionality, and difficulty navigating resources. With Canvas being introduced as the central learning environment (CLE), there is a significant opportunity to rectify these issues and integrate features that would enable students to use learning platforms to their full extent. Students also highlighted unreliable Wi-Fi in university buildings such as halls of accommodation and library buildings, highlighting how this disrupts their learning by preventing them from submitting work or accessing online resources [Educate MCR report].

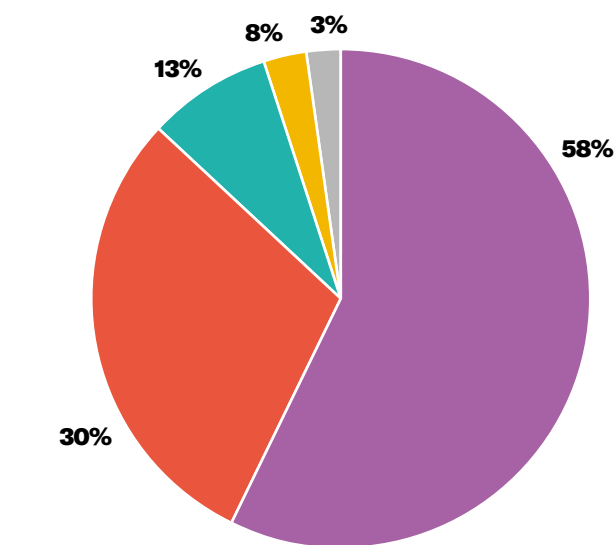
Students with disabilities also raised concerns about digital accessibility, highlighting that some online learning platforms are not compatible with or optimised for assistive technologies, creating significant barriers to learning and participation for assistive technology users [Educate MCR report]. IT resources were another underperforming area in the NSS data, with the positivity rate being 5.0 percentage points below the sector-wide benchmark. This greatly disadvantages students across the University and needs to be addressed to ensure equitable access to resources and platforms for all students [NSS Provider-level dashboard].

Learning Resources - Library resources

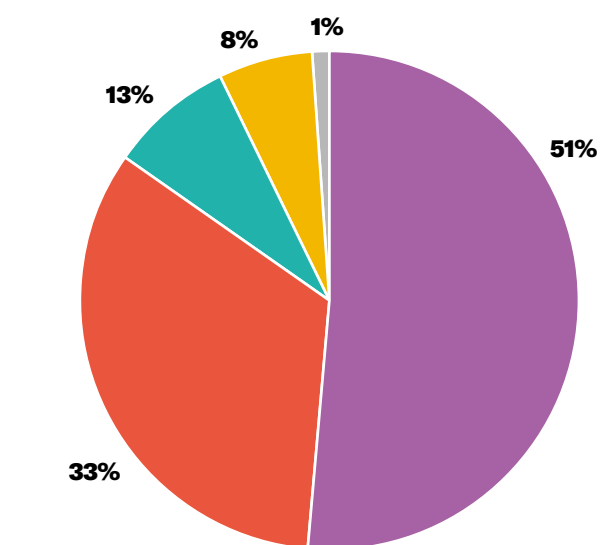
The University of Manchester Library provides numerous high-quality resources, including access to physical and online academic texts, workshops designed to help students with their assessments and research, as well as drop-in sessions to answer student queries around academics or digital skills. These resources allow students to make the most of their studies by providing them with the correct tools and skills to succeed.

Student satisfaction with the library services was high both in Educate MCR and the NSS, with 84.3% of Educate MCR respondents agreeing the library resources are useful in supporting their learning [Educate MCR Dashboard] and an 89.6% positivity ratio when asked “How well have library resources supported your learning?”. However, this is still 0.8 percentage points below the benchmark, suggesting improvements need to be made [NSS Provider-level dashboard]. In the Educate MCR qualitative comments, student also raised concerns around the lack of study spaces, particularly during exam seasons [Educate MCR report].

IT resources and facilities are useful in supporting my learning



Library resources (reading materials, workshops, drop-ins) are useful in supporting my learning



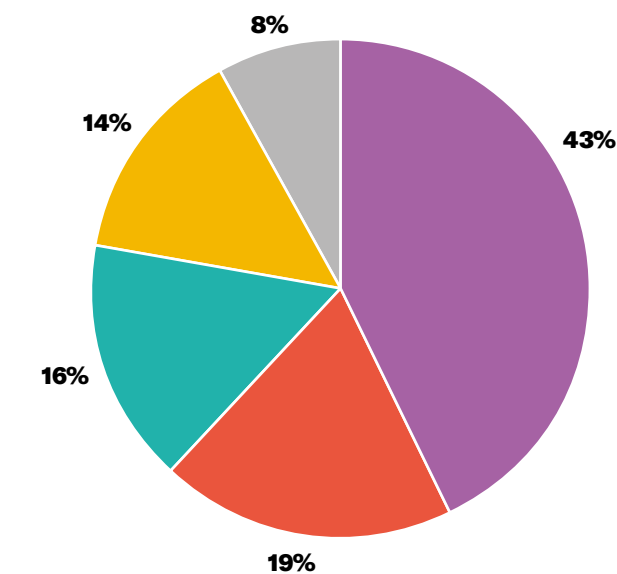
STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NOT APPLICABLE

1.7 Learning Resources - Timetable Scheduling

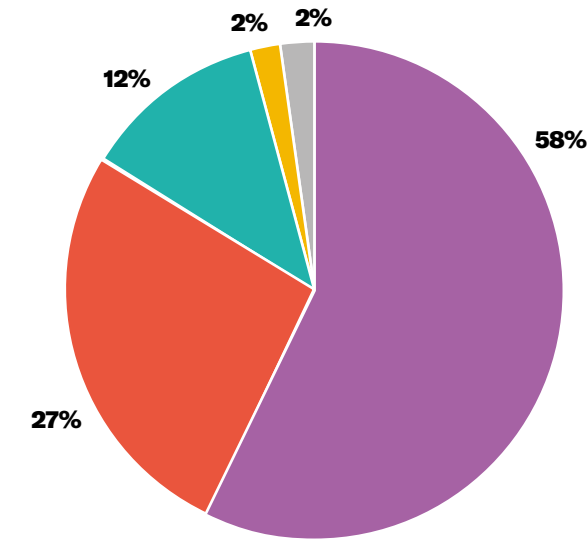
The general satisfaction rate for timetabling is 74%, with 26% of students expressing dissatisfaction. Some of the main issues highlighted include inconvenient lecture timings, gaps between lectures, early morning classes and lack of consideration for commuter students. A student commented that ‘lectures scheduled until 8pm is unreasonable for commuters’. They go on to mention that they would not have chosen the course if they were of the lectures being scheduled outside the normal timetable hours.

This not only impacts the student’s daily commute but also discourages them from choosing courses with late classes, which can negatively impact their educational experience. Furthermore, students have expressed their concerns regarding the gaps between lectures. While some students find the gaps between lectures too short, others have found them to be too long, which disrupts their daily routine. Students have suggested having a ‘bigger gap between lectures and tutorials eg:10-15 minutes’ as ‘some classes are back-to-back but are on opposite ends of campus’.

The extra costs involved in completing my course are managable (study texts, trips etc)



I feel confident accessing support to help my academic performance (peer support, library drop-ins etc)



STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE NOT APPLICABLE

The lack of time can lead to students missing the beginning of a class, which can particularly affect students who rely on every minute of the lecture to grasp complex concepts. Having no breaks can also lead to students not having enough time to eat, rest or use the restroom, hence hindering their ability to concentrate during lectures. On the other hand, having a lecture at 9 am and then at 5 pm can cause an inefficient use of time. Commuter students have found it challenging to make productive use of their day as they cannot return home or engage in meaningful activities [Professional services report, 2025].

Altogether, students have been clear in articulating what works and where change is needed. While many students express satisfaction with teaching delivery, course content, learning resources, and staff support, there remain significant disparities, particularly for commuter students, liberation groups, and those requiring personalised learning. Key priorities include improving the consistency and accessibility of feedback, resolving timetable clashes, diversifying curricula, and embedding inclusive teaching methods.

Students also want to see more engaging and interactive delivery styles, alongside stronger development of transferable skills like leadership. Digital infrastructure needs attention, with concerns around Wi-Fi reliability, accessibility, and the usability of education platforms. Similarly, while academic and library support is broadly well-received, the variation in advisor support and seasonal pressure on study spaces limits student success.



2 RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2. Research Experience

Research experience is defined as the comprehensive development of a student through hands-on inquiry, skills training, mentorship, and community engagement. It goes beyond conducting research to include opportunities that build confidence, expertise, and professional readiness. In joining our research-rich environment, students immerse themselves in a culture of curiosity, innovation, and real-world problem-solving, equipping them to lead, inspire, and drive meaningful change. Through the Manchester 2035 strategy, the University is accelerating the journey from world-class research to global impact, tackling urgent challenges like cancer, poverty, and climate change through interdisciplinary collaboration. As a result, Manchester is now ranked 1st in Europe and 2nd in the world for social and environmental impact [Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2025].

According to UMSU's Build MCR 2025 report, over 90% of our postgraduate research students reported satisfactory feelings regarding their overall university experience and their research experience, and nearly 89.3% reported satisfaction with their own performance in their research degrees. This reflects a supportive academic environment where researchers feel equipped to succeed. Strong academic supervision and resource provision are also evident, with 83% and 90% of students respectively satisfied with the guidance and tools available to enhance their academic journey [EducateMCR 2025]. Furthermore, in addition to around 87% of our student researchers feel confident in their ability to overcome challenges, but also well above 90% of the researchers demonstrate high levels of core employability skills such as adaptability, analytical thinking, and time management.

Nonetheless, one key area for improvement highlighted is community building, as over 62% of students reported feeling lonely at least once a month and more than half have not engaged with any student societies or sports [Build MCR 2025]. While this might be a result of the lack of time and work nature undergone, strengthening social and peer networks is essential to ensure that research excellence is matched by a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

While our postgraduate researchers develop a wide range of invaluable applied skills, according to the Build MCR 2025, many also view undertaking teaching opportunities as a crucial step for professional growth, one that allows them to further refine and apply their expertise. To better support this aspiration, expanding access to teaching roles, alongside offering more flexible, online, and interdisciplinary training options, is essential. Recognising that our researchers see themselves as lifelong learners, the University's mission is to empower and support their ongoing development [The Manchester 2035 Podcast]. Although further research is needed to fully understand the dynamics of this area, we recommend allowing postgraduates to participate in interdisciplinary courses at their level. These could be offered as optional credits, enabling students to pursue diverse interests such as language acquisition, technical training, or creative modules. Such opportunities would not only enhance their research capabilities but also boost their confidence, adaptability, and potential impact.

Postgraduate researchers at Manchester benefit from a strong academic foundation, one characterised by high-quality supervision, excellent resources, and a culture that fosters innovation, resilience, and professional growth. They leave equipped with not only advanced research expertise but also highly developed transferable skills that prepare them to lead and contribute to global challenges. However, as the University looks ahead, it is essential to recognise that academic success must be supported by a deeper sense of community and belonging. With over 60% of researchers experiencing loneliness and limited engagement in wider university life, efforts to strengthen social connection and integration must become a core priority.

Creating more accessible, flexible avenues for community-building, tailored to the unique nature of postgraduate research, will ensure that every student can thrive, both intellectually and emotionally, during their time at Manchester.



STUDENT NEEDS & WELL-BEING 3

3. Student Needs & Well-being

Understanding students and the realities of their lives is essential to effectively meeting their needs and providing meaningful support. Addressing these needs creates a positive, inclusive, and empowering university environment where students feel academically, financially, and socially supported. Prioritising accessible services, promoting wellbeing, encouraging student participation, and ensuring equity and opportunity allow students to thrive and fully engage with their studies and community. When students receive this support, they experience better mental health, academic success, and stronger social connections, building a resilient community that contributes to both the university and the wider city. This foundation is vital for nurturing a generation of capable, resilient students prepared for future challenges.

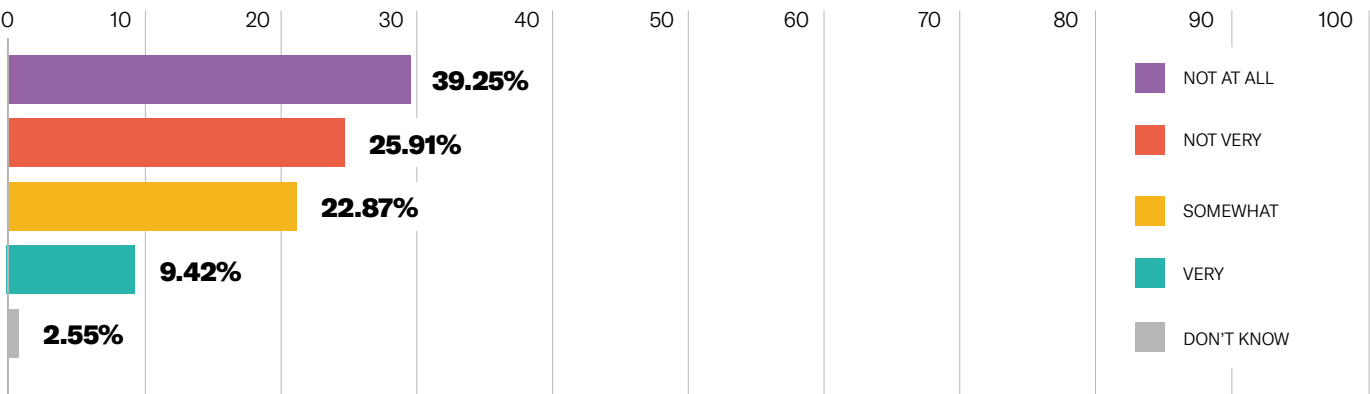
3.1 Cost of Living & Financial Situation

The UK's cost-of-living crisis has intensified financial pressure on students, affecting their well-being and academic performance. The impact of the crisis on the student experience was investigated in the UMSU's Build Your MCR research project. Many struggle to afford essentials, leading to worsening mental health. A third of students (32%) reported feeling not in control of their finances, struggling to afford essential costs. While 73% can afford accommodation and 88% can cover food expenses, 27% and 12%, respectively, cannot.

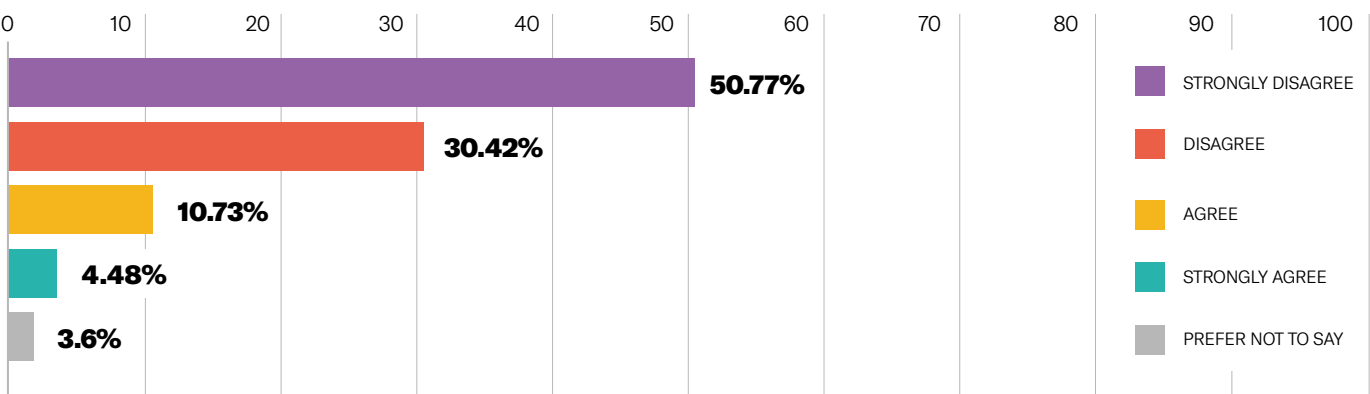
Nearly one in five students (19%) are unable to afford transportation, and 24% report that they cannot afford to be on campus to engage in university life. Financial constraints also limit participation in social and extracurricular activities, with over a third of students (37%) unable to afford attending social events and 36% unable to join societies and sports clubs. This potentially affects their sense of belonging. [Financials: affordability BYMCR 2025].

About 1 in 3 students (33%) reported being concerned that their food would run out before they had money to buy more in the past month while 15.2% said they or someone in their household ran out of food in the past month and couldn't afford more. This indicates that 1 in 7 students is facing a serious level of hardship that warrants attention and support.

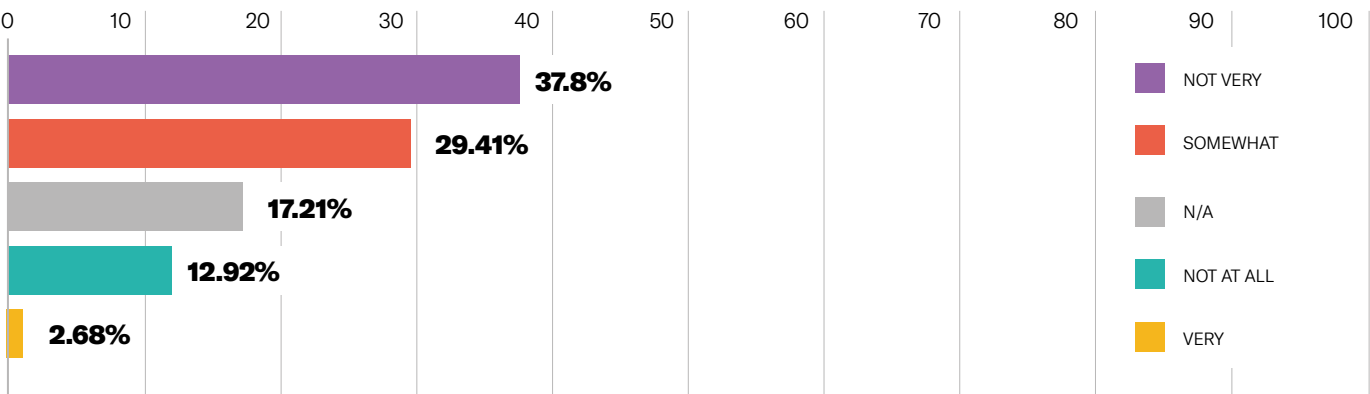
In the past month, how concerned have you been that your food would run out before you had got money to buy more?



In the past month I (or my household) have run out of food and could not afford to buy more.

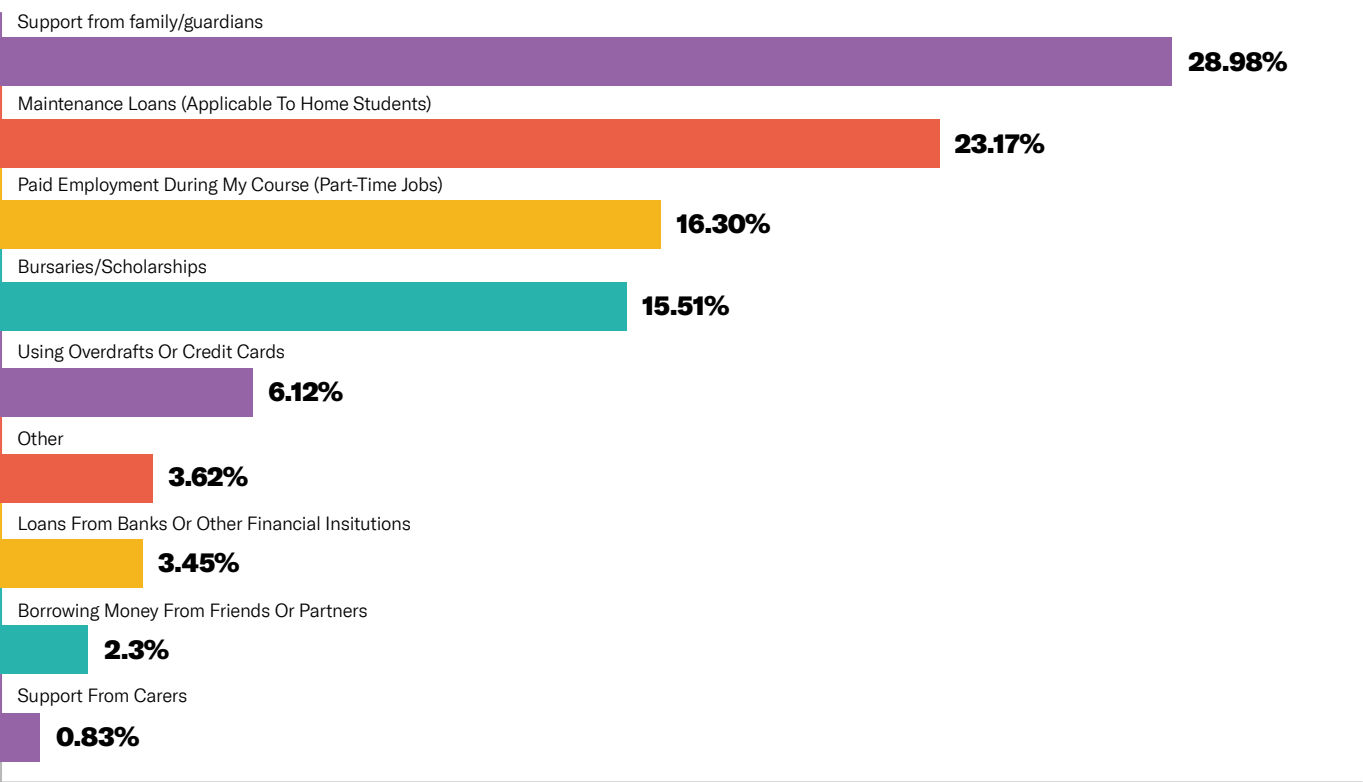


How affordable is the food at Unicafe?
Unicafe is managed by the University across various buildings on campus.



Students at Manchester rely on a wide range of financial sources to support themselves during their studies. 29% of students finance themselves through family support, while 23% use maintenance loans. 16% earn money from part-time jobs, and 16% receive bursaries or scholarships. Of those with a maintenance loan, 51.47% said it only partially covers their rent. 14.26% reported that it covers both rent and living costs, while 13.95% said it covers their full rent. Another 11.01% indicated it covers rent and some living costs, and 9.3% said it covers the total cost of their accommodation, including bills. This shows that the majority of students still face financial gaps even with maintenance loan support. [Financing demographics BYMCR 2025].

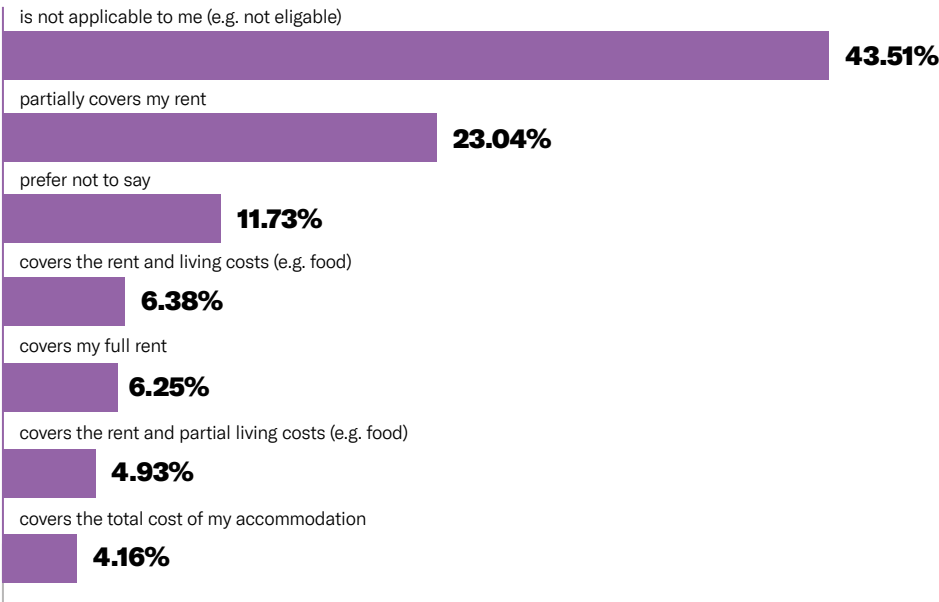
Student Financing



There is a consensus about the limited availability of financial support, particularly regarding bursaries, scholarships, and emergency funding. Many students mentioned that the financial aid system was difficult to navigate, often involving lengthy processes with unclear eligibility criteria. Students highlighted their frustration with funding opportunities by stating;

“I myself have struggled to afford it here, I’ve gone some days without eating because all my maintenance loan goes to my accommodation. Thus I don’t have any money to eat, let alone engage in much of University life.” [2025 Build MCR]

In an academic year my maintenance loan...

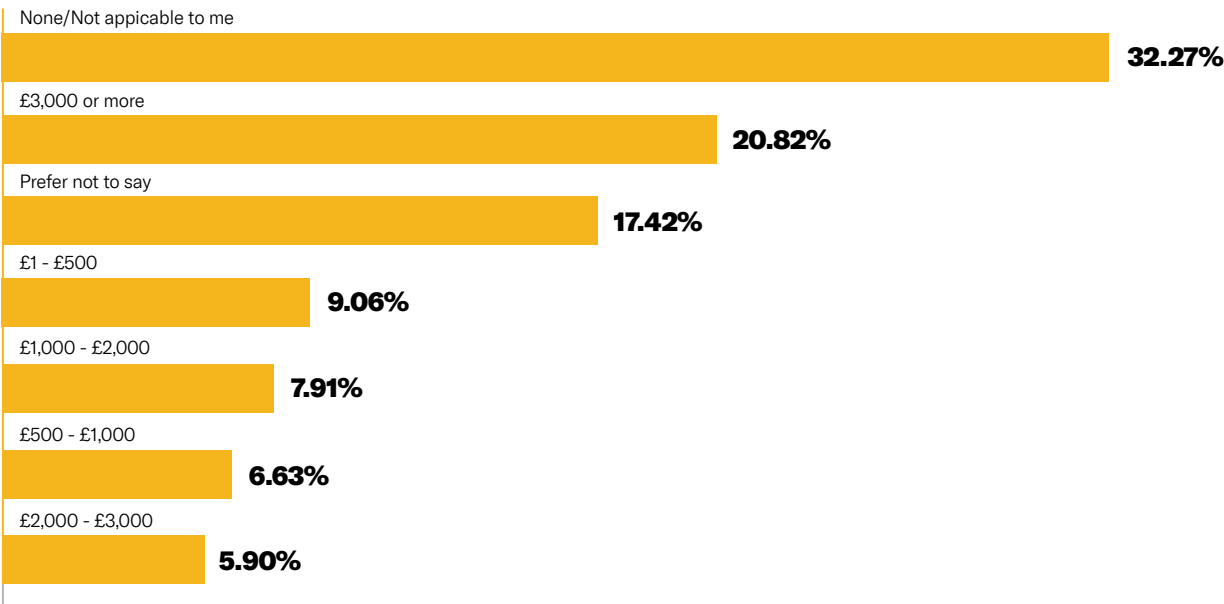


712
Bursary

134
Prefer not to say

2036
No Bursary

If you receive financial support from your parents/guardians, in an academic year, how much money do they support you with?



3.2 Well-being

Student mental health and general well-being have consistently struggled over the years. The 2025 Build MCR survey asked students to rate their health and well-being in the past month. Most students rated their general well-being positively, with 43% describing it as good and 9% as extremely good. Around 35% felt their well-being was just okay, while 11% rated it as poor and 5% as extremely poor. Mental health ratings were less positive. While 30% described their mental health as good and 34% as okay, 22% said it was poor and 8% reported it as extremely poor. This suggests that while general well-being is relatively stable for many students, mental health remains a more pressing concern.

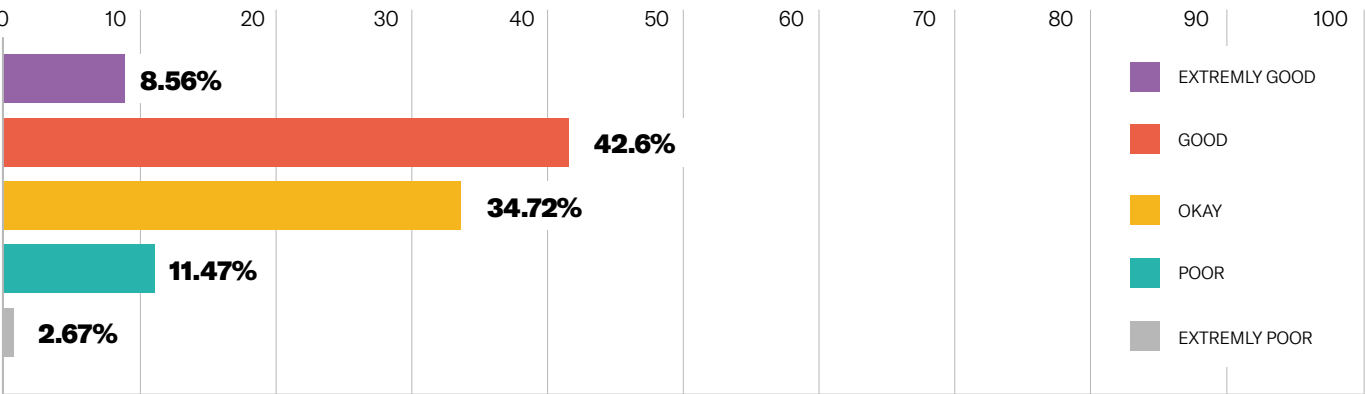
The Educate MCR survey takes a closer look at students' mental health and overall well-being. According to the findings, 58.58% of postgraduate research (PGR) students, 53.32% of postgraduate taught (PGT) students, and 44% of undergraduate (UG) students rated their general well-being over the past month as good or extremely good. When it comes to mental health specifically, 44.77% of PGR students, 48.79% of PGT students, and 38.4% of UG students described their mental health during the same period as good or extremely good.

Wellbeing and mental health were significantly worse for UG Black Heritage students, with 29.0% rating their general well-being good or extremely good, as well as students with mental health conditions where only 39.9% of them rated their mental health as good or extremely good. The qualitative data revealed that some students felt neglected, with 50 commuter, part-time, and distance learners highlighting that campus-centred communication failed to address their unique needs. [Educate MCR Undergraduate Insight Report 2024-2025]

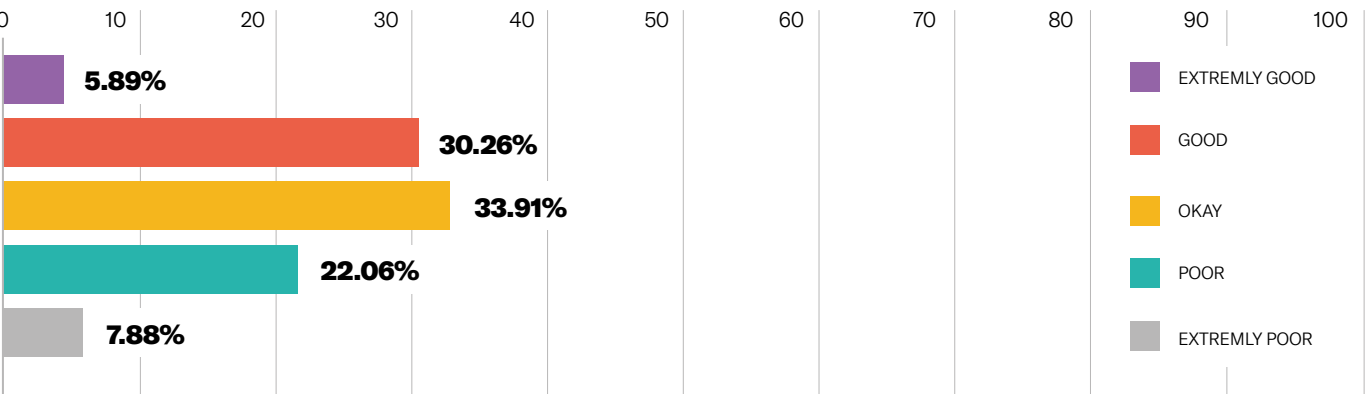
Barriers to accessing support were common: the most cited reason was a previous negative experience with services, followed by a belief that support would not be helpful. These findings point to urgent gaps in mental health provision, particularly for neurodivergent students [NUS priorities].

In the past month, how are your overall feelings towards mental health and well-being?

General Well-being



Mental Health

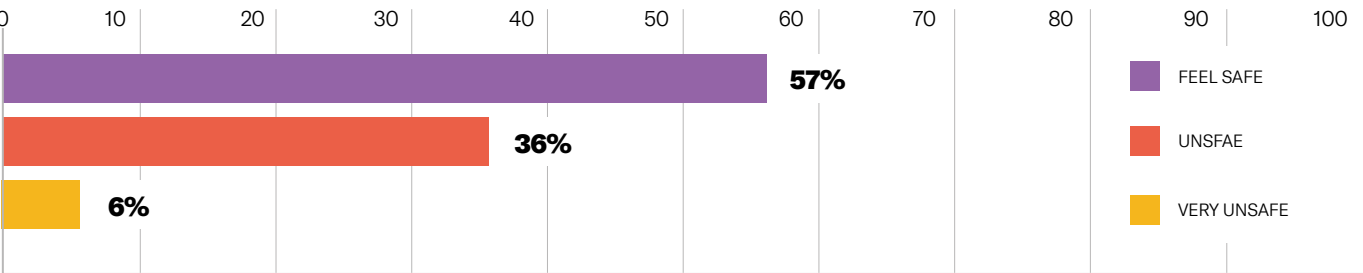


3.3 Safety & Transportation

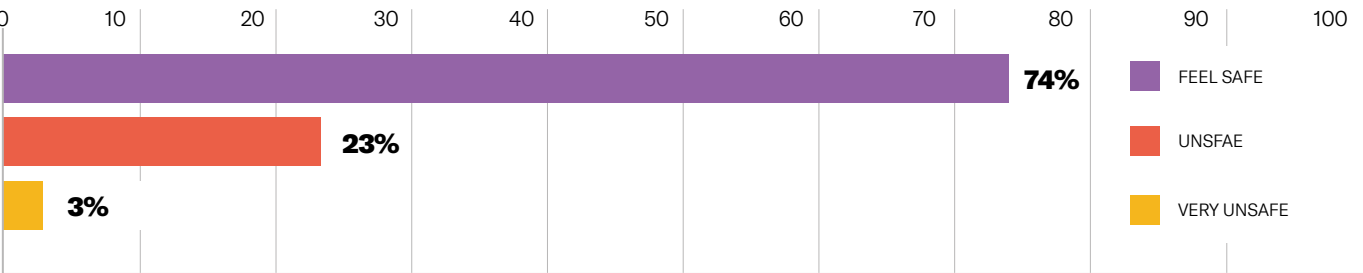
Safety and transportation significantly impact students’ daily lives. Most students (64.9%) reported feeling safe in Manchester, though a notable proportion expressed concerns, with 27.7% feeling somewhat unsafe and 6% feeling very unsafe. Gender differences were evident: 74% of male respondents felt safe, only 57% of female respondents said the same. Additionally, 35.8% of women reported feeling somewhat unsafe compared to 22.9% of men, and women were twice as likely to feel very unsafe. These findings highlight a significant gender gap in perceived safety and suggest the need for targeted measures to address safety concerns, particularly among female students. This report shows a strong link between gender, safety, and public transport dissatisfaction among students. While most feel safe, the significant gender gap in safety concerns highlights a deeper issue affecting female students’ well-being and mobility.

When asked about the value of money for Manchester’s public transportation, most students (60%) expressed dissatisfaction, disagreeing that it provides good value. Only 28.6% felt it was good value, while 11% were neutral. The areas investigated here highlight the urgent need for gender-sensitive safety measures and more affordable, student-friendly transport policies to ensure equal access and security for all students [Report: Safety and Transport in Manchester].

Women



Men



3.4 How current University structures affect student needs & well-being

Careers Service:

Career services play a vital role in supporting student transitions into professional life. The Careers Service received an overall satisfaction rating of 81%. However, certain groups of students reported notably different experiences. Student parents, for instance, reported a significantly lower satisfaction rate of 71%, pointing to potential gaps in how the service meets their needs. Experiences among students with disabilities were more mixed. While blind students reported lower satisfaction at 67%, neurodivergent students indicated a relatively higher rate of 83%. [Educate MCR 2024/25 Dashboard]

These disparities highlight the importance of ensuring that career services are inclusive, accessible, and tailored to the diverse needs of the student population. Understanding the specific challenges faced by students in different year groups or with varying levels of engagement with career services could help refine the support offered and better align it with students' evolving needs throughout their academic journey.

Counselling Service:

Students have reported an 82% satisfaction with the counselling service, however, some students have found it challenging to access the counselling services due to the first-come, first-served system. This has led to wait times of up to 18 months to contact a counsellor and access the counselling services. Students suggested increasing the number of counselling sessions since the current limit is three sessions. [Professional Services Student Satisfaction Report 2024-25]. It is apparent that there is a significant portion of students who express satisfaction with the services provided, indicating that counselling support is meeting the needs of many.

However, a substantial number of students remain unsatisfied. Further investigation into the specific needs of different student groups could help tailor counselling services more effectively. This includes considering factors like accessibility, the diversity of services offered, and how well these services cater to specific student populations such as those with mental health concerns, disabilities, or unique personal circumstances. Understanding the barriers to accessing counselling, whether they be logistical, psychological, or cultural, could provide valuable insights into enhancing the overall support structure. Additionally, examining the reasons behind the dissatisfaction could offer practical solutions, such as improving communication about available services or increasing awareness and engagement across diverse student groups.

Student Finance Support:

Student finance support received a 76% overall satisfaction rate, but significant disparities emerged across student groups. Students with learning disabilities and longstanding conditions demonstrated satisfaction rates of 72% and 71% respectively, suggesting that existing financial support may not fully address their unique needs respectively. Financial support satisfaction tends to decline as students' progress through their studies, with those in later years reporting the lowest levels dropping to 70% in second-year students, and 66% in fourth-year students).

These figures reflect ongoing concerns, including restrictive eligibility criteria, insufficient funding for postgraduates and international students, and poor communication about available financial resources. [Professional Services Report March 2025]

Student Support Hubs:

From the Student Support Hubs survey, over 90% of students reported feeling supported, welcomed, and likely to return. Staff friendliness, ease of access, and efficient query resolution were key strengths. However, some students raised concerns about disorganised or unprepared staff unfamiliar with their cases, slow responses often exceeding five working days, confusing communication from multiple staff, and misleading advice in complex situations like long-term placements abroad.

Additional issues included limited physical access to hubs, especially those located behind access-controlled doors, impersonal support lacking understanding of individual needs, unwelcoming front desk interactions, and delays in ID card printing caused by insufficient staff training. [Student support hubs survey- Power BI dashboard]

Accommodation Support:

Accommodation and student support services are crucial for student well-being at the University of Manchester. While many students are satisfied with their accommodation (75%), significant disparities were observed among different student groups. Student parents reported the lowest satisfaction at 69%, while independent students (80%) and student carers (79%) expressed slightly higher satisfaction. Mature students reported a modest dip at 72%, while UK students had the lowest satisfaction at 71% compared to their international counterparts.

Final-year students reported 73% satisfaction, compared to 77% among non-final-year students. Postgraduate Research students had the lowest satisfaction by level of study at 66%. Students expressed dissatisfaction with maintenance and hygiene issues, including mice infestations, old and dirty facilities, and lack of hot water. Living in poor, unkept conditions can lead to increased absenteeism, lower academic performance, and a general decline in a student's quality of life. One student commented that "UOM continue to raise rents making it an unaffordable way to experience university and putting more students into poverty." [2025 Build MCR]. The findings highlight that certain student groups face more significant challenges with accommodation support, necessitating further investigation and targeted interventions.

Disability Advisory & Support Service (DASS):

Disabled students make up over 19% of the student population at the University of Manchester. Accessibility services, including the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) and counselling, are vital in ensuring equitable participation for these students. DASS received an overall satisfaction rating of 87%, yet disparities were evident. Neurodivergent students reported the lowest levels of satisfaction (81%) among students with disabilities, pointing to a gap in support services that adequately meet their needs. Second- and fifth-year students reported lower levels at 78% and 77%, respectively [Professional Services Student Satisfaction Report 2024-25].

DASS has been criticised for not adapting its support plans to cater to each student's needs, and students have complained about long wait times for support and guidance. One student mentioned how they didn't receive support throughout the first semester, despite initiating the support process in the summer. Students have also raised concerns about DASS contact points not being accessible and clear. Lack of a clear indication about whom to approach can delay the support that students receive. DASS has also been described as overbooked. While DASS achieves high overall satisfaction, it masks significant gaps in service delivery. Students report notably lower satisfaction levels, suggesting that current support structures are not sufficiently adaptive or responsive to the evolving needs of different disability groups and academic stages. Long wait times, generic support plans, and unclear communication channels further hinder timely and effective access to services. This highlights an urgent need for more personalised, transparent, and scalable support models [Educate MCR Report 2025 -Qual Report].



4 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

4. International Student Experience

Approximately 33% of the University of Manchester student population is international (non-EU). While the majority (80.6%) report satisfaction with their general university experience, many international students face distinct challenges related to finances, accommodation, and support services. [International Student Survey Dashboard]

Visas & Immigration

The professional services report indicated positive feedback for visa and immigration services, with an overall satisfaction rate of 87%. However, a review of the International Experience Survey revealed several challenges. The most common issues during the student visa application process included delays in receiving the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS), visa processing delays, and the high cost of the application fee.

Many students also faced difficulties with communication, both with the university and with visa offices or embassies, which often led to confusion or uncertainty. Technical issues with the online application portal and problems accessing clear, reliable guidance further complicated the process for several applicants. Administrative errors and challenges in understanding eligibility criteria or meeting financial documentation requirements were also frequently mentioned [International student survey dashboard].

One student suggested that the university should;

“Help international students with the visa stuff, helping them find opportunities were they have a chance to be sponsored or at least eligible, and helping with the wellbeing of that season of uncertainty that is more likely to be from dissertation until the end of the visa...” [2025 Build MCR]

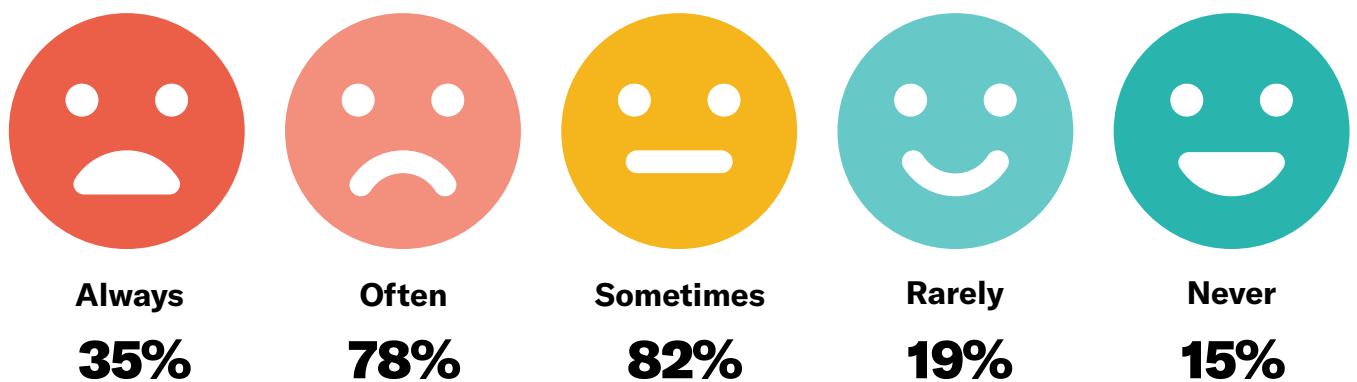
Finances & Funding

International students face a significant financial burden associated with their studies. High tuition fees, inflexible payment plans, and additional costs like textbooks and software subscriptions strain students. Accommodation costs are particularly challenging, especially as prices rise annually. Payment in instalments often requires a UK guarantor, whose services are expensive. [Professional services report] The lack of scholarships and financial aid exacerbates these difficulties, with 71.35% of international students reporting not receiving a university bursary. [BUILD MCR 2024].

The recent international student survey revealed that 48.2% of students frequently or always worry about money, indicating that nearly half of the students experience frequent financial stress. While 36.8% worry sometimes, only about 15% worry rarely or never. Furthermore, students often feel that financial assistance options are limited, making it difficult to sustain their studies. The most common sources of income for students were family, guardians, or friends, with 40.87% of respondents relying on these sources. This was followed by scholarships or bursaries (19.18%), savings (11.42%), and part-time work (10.05%).

Less common sources of income included bank loans or credit (6.85%), government loans or grants from home countries (4.79%), and UK government student finance (3.88%). Less than 1% of students reported income from full-time work, research council studentships, postgraduate doctoral loans, university hardship funds, or self-employment. These figures highlight the reliance on personal networks and limited access to diverse or substantial financial support systems (International student survey, 2025)

Students worry about money..



Accommodation

Accommodation issues are a recurring theme among international students. Many reports being placed in accommodations they didn't choose, which can lead to unaffordable living situations without sufficient financial support. This, coupled with the fact that 28.2% of international students report not having friends in their accommodation and 25.9% not feeling a sense of belonging, highlights the social and financial challenges of student housing [The student model 2024; University experience]. Asked about their view on what should be the university's top priority, one international student said;

"Affordable accommodation because being an international student trying to find private accommodation is difficult with the crazy demands private landlords make from international students. Sometimes they can even ask for 12 month's rent in advance which is really unfair on international students just trying to find a decent, affordable place to live." [2025 Build MCR]

Well-being

Despite these challenges, most international students continue to report moderate to positive levels of well-being. When asked to rate their mental health over the past month, 42.54% rated it as okay, 37.31% as good, and 16.42% reported poor or extremely poor mental health. For general well-being, 32.84% rated themselves as okay, 58.21% as good or extremely good, and 8.21% as poor or extremely poor. [BUILD MCR 2025]

Regarding physical health support, 42% of students feel somewhat supported but believe more could be done, while 21% feel fully supported. Around 18% have not sought support, and another 18% feel they are not adequately supported. Approximately one-third (33%) of students believe sufficient mental health support is available, while nearly 29% think more support is needed. About 25% are unsure of the support available, and 13% feel that there is not enough mental health support. When it comes to cultural sensitivity, 45% of students feel mental health services are very culturally sensitive, while 39% think improvements could be made. Around 7% believe the services are not culturally sensitive [International student survey dashboard].

General UK Experience

International students shared a wide range of perspectives on their UK experience. While many described their time as enjoyable, welcoming, and enriching, appreciating diversity, high-quality education, and cultural exchange, others highlighted serious challenges. These included limited interaction with UK students, a sense of cultural isolation, and reports of racism and xenophobia, particularly among Eastern European students. 30.04% of international students reported experiencing racism, while 55.66% said they hadn't, and 14.3% were unsure. Similarly, 29.64% of students experienced xenophobia, 56.06% didn't, and 14.3% were uncertain.

Many expressed frustrations over job opportunities due to visa sponsorship barriers, high living costs, and limited institutional support, especially for self-funded students. Some also felt exploited financially by universities, while others found the academic and social experience personally rewarding. [International student survey dashboard]. International students' comments include "Helping students, especially international students with the job markets, may it be part time as well full-time jobs. More free food as to help students and perhaps promoting more social groups." [Build MCR 2025].

While most international students report satisfaction with their overall university experience, their journey is often marked by systemic and structural challenges. These challenges impact their financial stability, sense of belonging, and mental well-being. High tuition costs, limited access to financial aid, visa-related hurdles, and accommodation issues create a compounded burden. Additionally, experiences of racism, xenophobia, and cultural isolation, particularly for students from Eastern Europe, highlight the need for more inclusive and targeted support. Despite these challenges, many still find value in the academic and cultural opportunities, suggesting that improving institutional responsiveness could significantly enhance the international student experience.



5. Student Futures

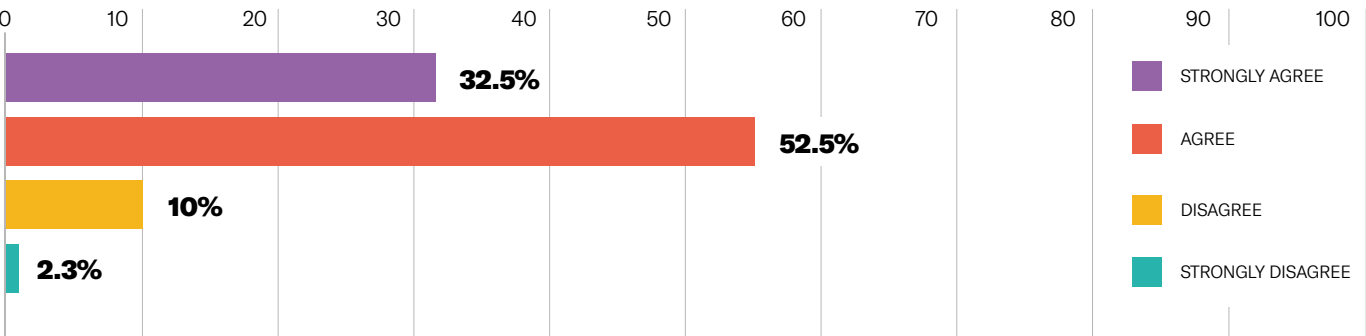
A meaningful university experience must prepare students for what comes next. Through both curriculum and wider experiences, the institution plays a vital role in equipping students with the skills, confidence, and values they need to thrive beyond graduation and contribute to a socially responsible society.

5.1 Skills Satisfaction & Support

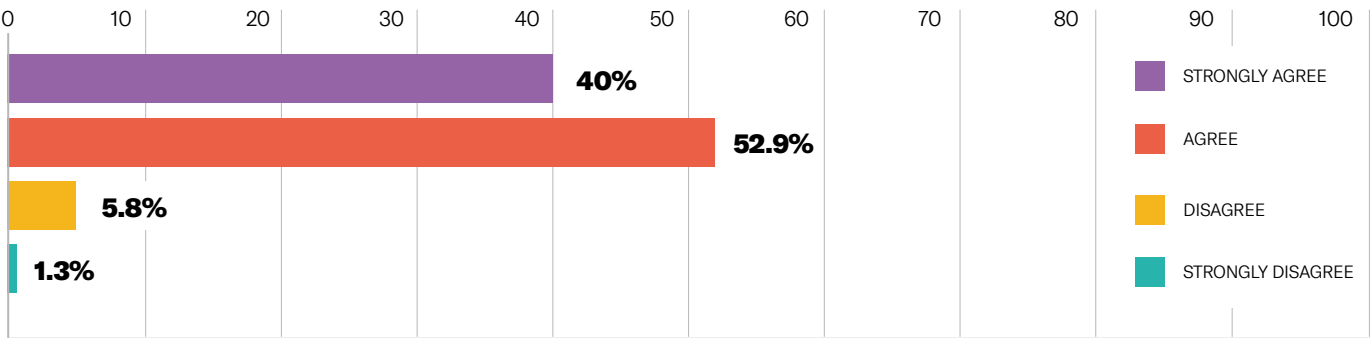
While the section on Course content talks about specific skills that link to employability skills through the curriculum, we found that 87.7% believe the skills they are gaining will be beneficial to their future, with a smaller proportion (12.3%) expressing disagreement [Build MCR 2024]. Furthermore, 92.9% of students reported feeling happiness and fulfilment when acquiring new knowledge and skills, while only 7.1% disagreed.

While all groups of students expressed satisfaction with this aspect, the highest level was observed among international students (including EU students), with 90.4% believing that what they learn will be beneficial, followed by UK students at 87.2%. [Student Career Experience Summary Report 2024]. Focus group discussions revealed demand for practical learning opportunities, such as field trips, real-world case studies, and talks from industry professionals. A suggestion also included finding international career opportunities. [Academic Advising Focus Group Report, 2024]

I believe what I learn will be beneficial to my future.



I feel happiness and fulfilment when I acquire knowlege and skills.



A further 77.3% of students agreed that the university offers career counselling and guidance to help them plan for their future beyond graduation. However, 22.7% expressed disagreement, indicating a minority who may not feel adequately supported in this area. However, satisfaction levels varied, with lower levels among home students, as only 76.6% of UK students expressed satisfaction, compared to 80.1% of international students. While most students feel confident in their career preparedness, with a 66.5% agreement rate, a significant 33.5% reported disagreement. [The student model -Power BI]

This suggests that most students perceive a clear connection between their current learning and their future goals, and that they are not only acquiring valuable skills but also finding personal satisfaction and motivation in the learning process. The relatively high level of uncertainty among one-third of respondents suggests that students may lack confidence in how their current experiences translate to real-world employment. This could be due to differences in individual experiences, access to support services, or levels of self-assurance.

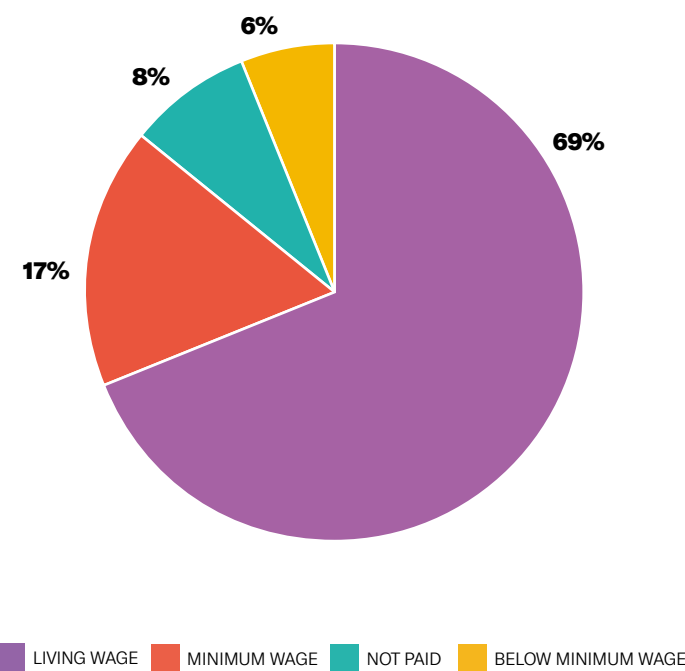
5.2 Employment Experience & Skills

A survey on the employment experience among students, including internships, reveals varying patterns across different groups. 39.1% of students work part-time, while 6.6% are involved in unpaid internships or placements, 6.3% in paid internships or placements, and 5.5% in full-time work, often alongside or integrated with their academic responsibilities. The remaining 42.5% are unemployed.

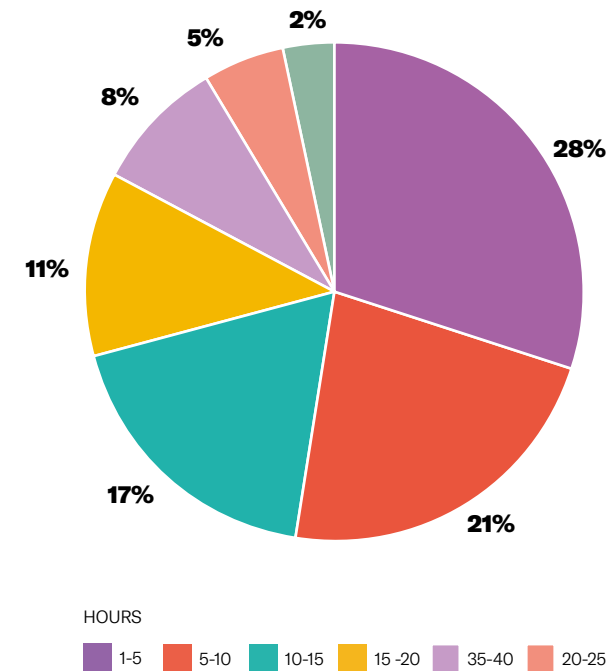
Many students turn to part-time work not only to build skills but also to make ends meet. While 32% of students reported working to boost their employability and gain experience for their CVs, nearly 55% cited financial reasons, 29% to supplement their lifestyle and 26% because they rely on the income to financially support themselves. This reflects the reality that, for many, part-time jobs are a financial necessity rather than just a career-building opportunity. Working hours vary widely. 67% of students work 15 hours or fewer per week, helping balance work and study.

However, a notable number, about 14%, reported working more than 25 hours per week, and 8.5% work full-time hours (35–40 hours). Such workloads may negatively impact academic performance and student well-being.

Students Pay Rate Distribution



Students Work Hours Distribution



Student Job Distribution



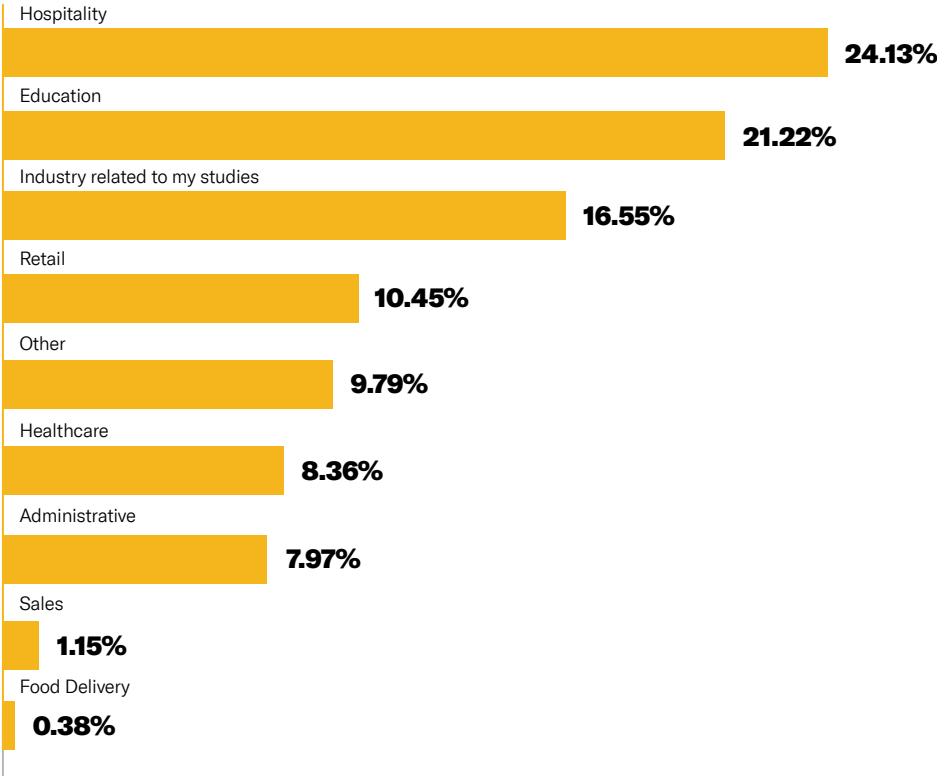
1142
Students
with 1 job

305
Students
with 2 jobs

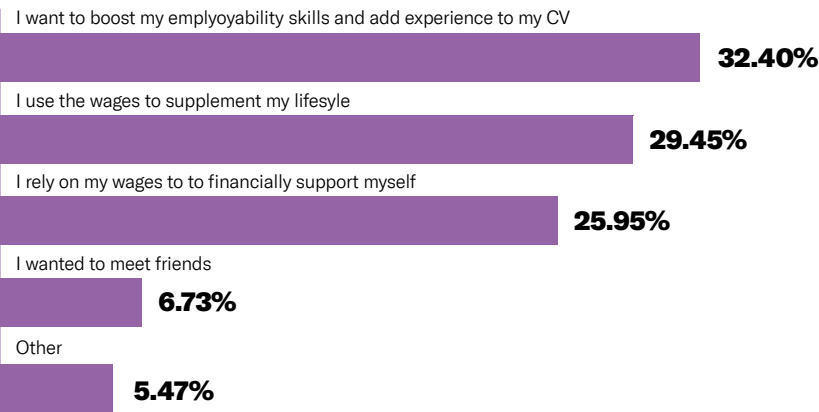
60
Students
with 3 jobs

20
Students
with 3+ jobs

Job Industry Distribution



Job Reasons Distribution

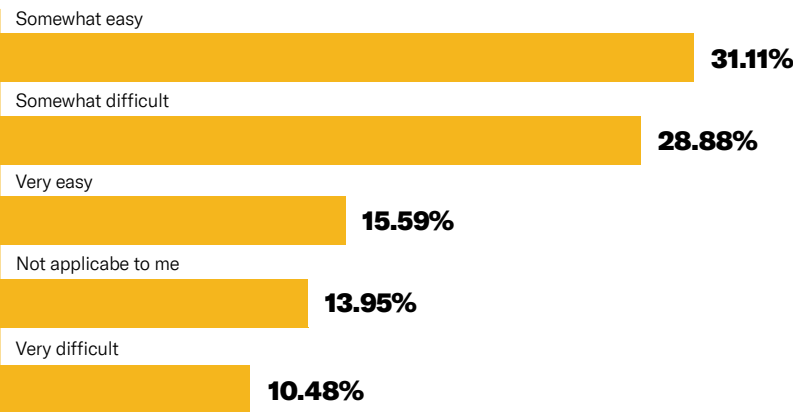


409
UoM
Employed

68
SU
Employed

1149
Other
Employed

Current Job Finding Difficulty



In terms of pay, nearly 70% of students earn the national living wage. However, over 12% are either unpaid or earn below the national minimum wage, often in internships, placements, or exploitative work arrangements. This disparity raises concerns about fair compensation and the accessibility of opportunities. While 54.3% of students found the job search for these roles easy, 45.7% reported difficulty, suggesting unequal access to work opportunities. This disparity could be exacerbated because some students work long hours or struggle to secure employment, particularly those already facing financial hardship.

In conclusion, student jobs are not solely a means of building employability for many; they are essential for survival. However, work demands, such as long hours and low or no pay, can pressure students significantly. These challenges may deter some from working or pursuing opportunities that could enhance their academic or professional development. [Build MCR 2025].

5.3 Student Leadership

Student Leaders are students who take up a leadership role in the University and Union during their studies. These can be committee leaders, volunteer leaders or part-time jobs. An analysis of student leadership experiences reveals two key predictors of higher career readiness: contributing to the university community and satisfaction with training [Student Model, 2024]. Many student leaders (81%) believed that their roles enabled them to positively impact the community through activities such as mentoring, event planning, and advocacy.

These experiences helped build transferable skills, including collaboration and decision-making. A strong sense of fulfilment and growth was evident, with 93% expressing satisfaction with their roles. They cited increased confidence, adaptability, and self-awareness as reasons for their satisfaction. In terms of training, 86% of leaders were satisfied with the support provided. However, nearly a third (32.86%) expressed interest in more advanced workshops to further enhance their strategic and interpersonal skills. This underscores the value of continuous development for student leaders. [Student Career Experience Summary Report 2024].

The UMSU's wide range of student-led services enable our student leaders to develop transferrable skills that are valuable for their progression beyond their studies. Student leaders report high skill confidence across a variety of skills, such as persuasion and negotiation skills, collaboration and conflict management.

Most notably, 95.0% of student leaders feel confident in their ability to lead group discussions and solve problems as a result of their leadership experience. 96.9% also feel confident in their ability to collaborate with others. In terms of employability, 85.9% of students agree their student leadership experience helps them become employable, and 86.8% of students agreed it helps them gain valuable leadership experience [Student Leaders Dashboard 23/24].



6 **STUDENT COMMUNITY**

6. Student Community

Community is an integral factor of the student experience. During their time at university, students are exposed to a wide variety of new people and experiences for the first time, and finding their community can help them navigate any hardships and difficulties they face. Student communities are built through a variety of experiences in student life, including academic contexts, halls of residence, and extra-curricular commitments.

6.1 Belonging & Loneliness

A deeper sense of belonging refers to a combination of factors such as a sense of belonging on a course level, a sense of belonging at university-level and feeling like students are making the most of their time. Belonging is important for shaping academic and professional identity, which plays a part in retention and progression through studies [Student Model].

Students who integrate into their community are more likely to develop deep connections with staff and students, leading to them feeling valued and confident about their competencies [Student Model]. Belonging is also a factor contributing to students' career readiness, which indicates that belonging can help predict a student's confidence in their ability to obtain employment or pursue further study as a result of their degree [Student Model].

In our most recent research, we wanted to understand the relationship between belonging and the effort it takes to belong to help us understand the barriers of belonging. 89.3% of students agreed that a sense of belonging is important to them to feel fulfilled during their time at university. However, 66.0% also agreed that belonging requires emotional effort they don't have the energy for, and 59.1% agreed they don't have time to engage in community-building activities [Build MCR 24/25 dashboard]. This is supported by the current student climate where students are time poor and often do not have time or energy to participate in community-building due to external pressures such as part-time jobs and financial strain.

This can have an effect on student loneliness which has a negative effect on academic achievements and health. Particular demographics are at higher risk of social isolation, such as liberation groups. [A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students | Science] 65.1% of students responded they feel lonely at least once a month, despite 88.1% of students agreeing they have friends at University [Build MCR 24/25 dashboard]. This highlights the difference between simple friendships and deep belonging in university contexts. Addressing these challenges requires a more intentional, inclusive approach that lowers the effort required to belong and creates accessible, meaningful opportunities for all students to connect, particularly those at greater risk of isolation.

6.2 Building Community through the Students' Union

The UMSU aims to enable students to create, find, and uplift student communities through a wide range of services, led by students for students. Student leader roles include our studying staff, society committee members, volunteering project leaders, academic representatives, association chairs, sport leaders and student media contributors. Students take on these roles for a variety of reasons, including to boost their employability, create a project or improve upon an existing one, as well as enjoying the project during their involvement [Student leader 23/24 dashboard]. 82.5% of our student leaders feel they are able to contribute to the community, and 94.7% believe their student leader experience enables them to positively impact the lives of others [Student leader 23/24 dashboard].

Societies:

Student-led societies play a crucial role in building community and addressing loneliness by creating inclusive spaces where students can connect through shared interests, form genuine friendships, and feel part of something bigger. Each society is run by a committee of elected student leaders who organise events, manage operations, and ensure their groups remain accessible and welcoming to all. These leaders are central to campus life, fostering environments where students can find belonging and support.

According to the 2023/24 Student Leader Survey, 97.6% of society leaders reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their leadership experience [Student Leader 23/24 Dashboard], an experience shown to positively influence students' sense of belonging and development of a citizen mindset. Among society members, 72.6% agreed they feel a sense of belonging within their society, highlighting the essential role societies play in creating social bonds and reducing feelings of isolation [BuildMCR 2025]. Overall satisfaction with the SU, including societies and clubs, stands at 86.1%, with satisfaction closely linked to improved wellbeing, academic progression, and career readiness. Through shared leadership, peer connection, and purposeful activity, societies serve as a vital pillar in helping students thrive both socially and academically.

By offering spaces for connection, shared interests, and inclusive leadership, societies help students form meaningful relationships and navigate university life with greater confidence. With high satisfaction among society leaders and members, these groups not only enhance the student experience but also contribute to wellbeing, progression, and a stronger sense of identity, making them a key pillar in supporting student success and embedding a lasting sense of belonging.

Academic Reps:

Academic representatives play a key role in fostering connection and belonging across the University by acting as trusted, approachable links between students and the institution. As volunteers embedded within their course communities, reps create spaces where students feel heard, supported, and less alone in their academic journeys. By gathering feedback, sharing concerns, and working closely with UMSU Faculty Exec Officers, academic reps ensure student voice is visible in decision-making at every level.

Their proximity to peers helps build trust and strengthens the sense of community within cohorts, particularly in academic settings where students may otherwise feel isolated [Academic Reps, UMSU Website]. According to the 2025 Rep Survey, 90.0% of reps are satisfied with their experience, 89.0% believe they can make change, and 83.0% feel they are part of a rep community themselves - showing that the rep structure not only empowers individuals but also builds peer support networks that reduce loneliness and create a more connected student experience [Rep Survey 2025].

Association Chairs, Volunteering & Media:

Beyond academic life, UMSU supports a wide range of student-led groups that foster connection, purpose, and belonging, key to reducing loneliness and building stronger communities. Volunteering projects such as Access All Areas and Student Action empower students to engage with local causes and lead outreach initiatives, helping others while forming meaningful bonds with their peers.

Associations, led by elected student Chairs, provide safe and empowering spaces for underrepresented groups to build community, advocate for their needs, and shape the Union's direction in ways that reflect their lived experiences. Meanwhile, student media groups like The Mancunion, Fuse FM, and Fuse TV serve as creative, collaborative hubs where students connect through storytelling, production, and shared interests. Across all of these groups, students not only gain valuable skills, they also find connection, identity, and purpose, making them essential in tackling isolation and supporting wellbeing throughout the student journey.

A meaningful university experience relies on students feeling a genuine sense of community and belonging. While many students recognise the importance of connection, barriers such as time pressures, emotional fatigue, and financial strain can make it difficult to engage, contributing to loneliness and isolation. Addressing these challenges means creating accessible, student-led opportunities that make belonging easier, not harder.

The Students' Union plays a central role in this effort, whether through societies, volunteering, academic representation, student media, or associations, by providing spaces where students can build relationships, find purpose, and contribute to something bigger than themselves. These experiences don't just combat loneliness; they empower students with the confidence, skills, and support needed to thrive both during and beyond their time at university. As we shape the future of the student experience, it's clear that building community and reducing isolation must remain core priorities.

Student Voice & Feedback

The Student Voice Strategy 2024 outlines a joint commitment by the University of Manchester and the Students' Union to become a sector leader in student voice and satisfaction by 2027. Centred on partnership and co-created change, the strategy is guided by four principles - fundamental, authentic, empowering, and accountable - and structured around four key themes: Belonging, fostering inclusive academic communities; Voice, enabling diverse and accessible feedback; Change, positioning students as active drivers of improvement; and Partnership, embedding mutual respect and collaboration. Together, these elements ensure student voice is central to decision-making and educational development across the institution.

In alignment with the University's Student Voice Strategy, we are committed to ensuring that student voice is fundamental, authentic, empowering, and accountable across all levels of institutional practice. Our approach is built on a strong infrastructure of over 1,600 Academic Reps and eight full-time Executive Officers who actively listen, amplify, and act upon the views of students. Through this model, we don't just support students through their academic journey, we shape what it means to study at Manchester in genuine partnership with them.

Academic Reps engage directly with students in their course areas, bringing forward concerns, successes, and suggestions to staff through SSLCs and faculty meetings. However, our data shows that while 79% of reps feel heard at the course level, only 40% believe they influence decisions at the university level, a troubling gap that points to limited impact on strategic decision-making [Educate MCR]. Furthermore, only 46% of undergraduate students feel they can influence decisions made by the University, a number that drops even further among Black Heritage students (32.7%) and independent students (42.6%). At the course level, 62.3% of undergraduates feel their feedback influences decisions. However, this perception declines over time, 67.7% of first-year students agree, compared to just 57.6% in third year.

Students want to play a greater role in co-designing their education, influencing supervision practices, shaping research policy, and developing training opportunities, particularly at the postgraduate level. The **Voice** and **Partnership** pillars of the Student Voice Strategy call for students to be active contributors to decision-making, and for their lived experiences to inform policies at every stage. Our representatives are trained, knowledgeable, and embedded within university structures, work to ensure that this happens, using their insights to shape teaching, supervision, and policy development.

UMSU's Executive Officers sit on a wide range of institutional committees and boards, including senior-level governance groups related to academic strategy, student life, equity and inclusion, finance, and estates. These positions allow student voice to be brought directly to the highest levels of the University. Officers use their platform to represent student needs, challenge assumptions, and advocate for proactive, student-led solutions. In supporting the **Change** pillar, our Executive Officers have led transformative work in this area, from launching a Gender Expression Fund to securing academic belonging grants and advocating for fairer student rent policies. Their experience reflects the **Authentic** and **Empowering** principles: they are trusted voices who bring not only evidence but lived perspective to shape decisions that affect the whole student body.

We advocate for more diverse, and responsive channels of engagement. While surveys are valuable, they are not sufficient on their own. Students at the University of Manchester are frequently inundated with a high volume of surveys, from national tools like the NSS to numerous internal questionnaires and unit evaluations. While these mechanisms are well-intentioned, they often result in survey fatigue, leading to reduced engagement, lower response rates, and a weakening of authentic feedback. Students have been clear in their preference for feedback systems that are meaningful, dynamic, and responsive rather than repetitive and data-heavy.

Students increasingly prefer meaningful, two-way feedback mechanisms such as focus groups, digital feedback tools, co-creation panels, and real-time in-course reflections [Collecting Student Feedback]. This also aligns with the **Belonging** and **Voice** pillars, ensuring students feel seen, heard, and respected as integral members of the academic community.

Looking ahead, we are investing in the leadership development of our student representatives. Around 30% have expressed a desire for more advanced training to strengthen their impact. In response, we are developing a comprehensive programme to build their strategic, interpersonal, and advocacy skills. This investment supports long-term cultural change, strengthens our **Partnership** with the University, and ensures that student leadership continues to drive academic enhancement at every level.

Through the structured training provided to Academic Reps, the presence of our Exec Officers, and the ongoing collection of student feedback across a range of channels, the Students' Union is well placed to represent a student voice that is both grounded in lived experience and informed by evidence. This voice is shaped collaboratively with students, ensuring it reflects the breadth and diversity of the community, and can meaningfully contribute to shaping institutional decisions.

Future Research

As we look ahead, it is clear that enhancing the student experience relies on an even deeper commitment to partnership and co-creation between the University and the Students' Union. Future research must continue to amplify the voices of students, ensuring their insights drive real change across all areas of university life.

A priority for future work is to focus on underrepresented groups whose experiences are often less visible in mainstream data. Faith-observing students, those studying Joint Honours courses, and students from working-class backgrounds each face unique challenges and barriers that deserve greater exploration. By engaging directly with these communities, we can co-create solutions that ensure the University experience is genuinely equitable and accessible for all.

Equally important is the need to evaluate recent changes that directly impact the student journey. With the University's transition to Canvas as its central learning environment, future research should examine whether this shift has meaningfully improved the digital learning experience, addressed past frustrations with usability, and created more accessible, engaging learning spaces for all students. Similarly, as the University and the Students' Union work on the Student Voice Strategy, it will be vital to assess how effectively students now feel heard, empowered, and able to influence decisions at all levels of the institution.

There is also significant scope for more focused research into the experiences of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and Postgraduate Research (PGR) students. By collaborating closely with relevant academic schools, research institutes, and support services, we can gain a fuller picture of the unique challenges and aspirations of these groups, ensuring their voices inform tailored support and strategic planning.

Beyond demographics and structural changes, there is a need to explore the evolving context of students as consumers in a marketised higher education system. Many students are navigating university life for the first time, balancing significant financial pressures and seeking services that feel personalised rather than transactional. Research should investigate how students perceive the value of their university experience, including how financial strain shapes their sense of belonging, participation, and engagement. This could involve qualitative deep dives into how students manage maintenance loans, budget for essential costs, and make choices about engaging in university life beyond the classroom.

Additionally, there is huge value in exploring the gap between students' expectations and the reality of university life. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches, tracking students across their university journey to capture how experiences, challenges, and support needs evolve over time. Innovative methods, such as collecting insights through "postcard" reflections, could provide powerful snapshots of students' feelings and realities in the moment, helping to break down the generalisation of the student experience and highlight areas for timely intervention.

Ultimately, we must ensure that the student experience is woven into every aspect of the University's plans, not just within teaching and curricula, but across services, community building, and strategic decision-making. Embedding student and Students' Union voices meaningfully into decision-making spaces will be crucial to achieving the vision of Manchester as a truly great university. Together, we can create a future where every student feels seen, supported, and empowered to succeed.

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Annex

Report	Number of Respondents	Demographic Breakdown
Academic Representative Survey 2024/25	275	
Build MCR 2023/24	4073	Students with disability: 155 Neurodivergent students: 50 International students: 869
Build MCR 2024/25	3117	UK students: 783 EU students: 39 International students: 251 Postgraduate Students: 302
Decolonise the Curriculum	420	Demographics identified in the APP (Black Heritage, Bangladeshi and Pakistani): 80
Educate MCR 2023/24	2239	
Educate MCR 2024/25	1493	Demographics identified in the APP: 192 Black Heritage students: 91 Neurodivergent students: 118 Students with mental health conditions: 83 Postgraduate Students: 29
NSS 2024/25	6084	
Safety & Transport in MCR	422	
Student Career Experience		International and EU students: 688 UK Students: 1392
Student Leader Survey 23/24	515	Society leaders: 146
Student Model	6299	
Student Support Hubs Survey	252	

The SSLC Data was extracted from 236 reports. For more information and access please contact studentreps@manchester.ac.uk

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