

# Unite Students / HEPI Insight Research 2019

## Methodology

Unite Students and HEPI worked with YouthSight to investigate young people's transition to university and the first-year experience (both academic and non-academic), as well as their expectations of university and who or what shapes that thinking. The study also analysed details on student lifestyles, with a focus on first-year students.

The research incorporated four stages:

- Desk research
- Online communities
- Friendship triads
- Quantitative survey

### 1. Desk research

YouthSight carried out a two-stage process. Initially, this involved reviewing sources and identifying emerging knowledge gaps. Using published evidence from a wide range of sources (see Appendix A), from industry bodies such as HEPI to student resources such as The Student Room, YouthSight developed insight into the personal stories behind the transition to university and the first-year experience.

This research identified four key areas (full details in Appendix B):

- Identity
- Wellbeing
- Student life
- 'Adulting'

### 2. Online communities

Separate multi-day community meetings took place with applicants and students in March 2019. Conducted with 15 undergraduate applicants and 16 first-year undergraduates in the UK, the community discussion was structured over three days:

Day 1 – Perceptions of university and socialising

Day 2 – Preparation for university (applicants), Fresher's Week (students), academic life and mental health and support

Day 3 – Student activism and ideology, what the future looks like and analysing the ideal student.

### 3. Friendship Triads

In March 2019, YouthSight held seven discussion sessions with first-year undergraduate student friendship groups (three students per group). They covered four key areas:

- Social life – Social groups, time spent with friends and social media
- Academic life – How they learn and digital resources
- Support systems – Wellbeing at university and sources of support

- Perceptions of university – Why they came to university, what success looks like and what their future might look like.

The student community consisted of nine males and seven females, whilst the applicant community had seven males, seven females and one non-binary applicant.

#### **4. Quantitative survey**

Six areas were identified for further analysis in the quantitative survey (see Appendix C for further details):

- Perceptions of university
- Appearance and diet
- Student friendships
- Wellbeing
- Academic life
- Values

This stage comprised of an online survey, comprising of 2,535 applicants and 2,573 first-year undergraduate students in the UK (See Appendix D for a full breakdown). It was fielded between 7<sup>th</sup> May and 28<sup>th</sup> May 2019 and the full question set can be found in Appendix E.

To ensure a representative view of the UK student undergraduate population, quotas were set based on HESA student population data. Recruitment quotas ensured we gained responses from the correct proportions of EU and non-EU international students. For the remaining sample of domestic students, representative interlocking quotas were set across gender and university groups. During analysis, the data was weighted in line with these representative quotas.

Quotas were also set for the applicant sample for EU and Non-EU applicants, with domestic applicants structured according to UCAS data. Quotas were set and data weighted across gender, age and school type.

#### **About YouthSight**

YouthSight is an award-winning insight agency, which helps clients grow within the youth market by better understanding Millennials and Gen Z and works with more than 100 universities. The agency collects data for the annual The Student Experience Awards, as well as working closely with HEPI on topical reports and its annual Student Academic Experience report.

## Appendix A – Desk research sources:

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## Appendix B – Desk research knowledge gaps

Topic	Identity	Wellbeing	Student Life	Adulting
Sub topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fitting in</li> <li>• Role of parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health</li> <li>• Support system</li> <li>• Emotional highs and lows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic life</li> <li>• Social life</li> <li>• Living with others</li> <li>• Politics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sources of expectations</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Financial savviness</li> <li>• Looking to the future</li> </ul>
Key questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who thrives at university?</li> <li>• Influential figures – who are they and how do they impact student and applicant decisions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the future of mental health support?</li> <li>• Openness to support – how open are students and applicants to support?</li> <li>• What are the positive realities of university?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the new concerns around quality of academic delivery?</li> <li>• What are the new rules of socialising?</li> <li>• What is the impact of off-campus living?</li> <li>• Who is the student activist?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we map out applicants' preparation journey?</li> <li>• How is independence measured by students and applicants?</li> <li>• How do students prioritise spending?</li> <li>• What life do students and applicants want for their future?</li> </ul>

## **Appendix C – Focus of quantitative survey:**

### Perceptions of university

- What sources they use to learn about student life and which are most accurate
- Why they came to university
- What makes a successful student experience
- What they see their future looking like

### Appearance and diet

- How they feel about their appearance
- What their dietary habits are

### Student friendships

- Do they join student societies and are they active in them?
- What types of friendship groups they have and what size they are
- How they feel about Fresher's Week

### Wellbeing

- How do they feel about certain aspects of their life (i.e. satisfaction, anxiety)
- How comfortable they are with disclosing a disability
- How do they manage their physical and mental wellbeing
- Have they used university support services and what are the barriers?

### Academic life

- Which method of learning is most useful for them?
- What is their feeling towards digital learning resources?

### Values

- The issues that concern them
- Which political parties align with their views

## Appendix D – Survey respondent demographic breakdown

Demographic		Applicants	Students
Total respondents		2,535	2,573
Age	16-17	700 (28%)	-
	18-19	1,806 (71%)	1,885 (73%)
	20+	29 (1%)	688 (27%)
Gender	Male	1,060 (42%)	1,015 (39%)
	Female	1,475 (58%)	1,558 (61%)
Nationality	UK	2,087 (82%)	2,161 (84%)
	EU	238 (9%)	243 (9%)
	Non-EU	210 (9%)	169 (7%)
Ethnicity	BAME	763 (30%)	675 (26%)
	White	1,772 (70%)	1,898 (74%)
Social Grade	ABC1	1,574 (62%)	1,493 (58%)
	C2DE	638 (25%)	704 (27%)
LGBT+		461 (18%)	446 (17%)
Disability	Physical	599 (24%)	703 (27%)
	Mental health	442 (17%)	522 (20%)
	No disability	1,802 (71%)	1,703 (66%)