

Statistical bulletin

Coronavirus and higher education students: 12 March to 22 March 2021

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

Contact:
Mark Hamilton
publicservicesanalysis@ons.gov.
uk
+44 (0)1633 455044

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1 . Main points

- Average life satisfaction scores among students improved, returning to the same levels seen in November 2020 (5.2 out of 10), having been significantly lower in both January (4.6) and February (4.9) 2021.
- The improvement in average life satisfaction scores mirrors the trend seen for the adult population in Great Britain; however students' average ratings of life satisfaction (5.2) still remain significantly lower than the average ratings of the adult population in Great Britain (6.8) over a similar period.
- The proportion of students reporting a worsening in their mental health and well-being, since the start of the autumn term 2020, fell between February (67%) and March (63%), consistent with the other well-being findings.
- The proportion of students reporting feeling lonely often or always (29%) remained at a similar level to February; this is far greater than the 7% of the adult population in Great Britain reporting the same over a similar period.
- Around three-quarters of students (76%) are living at the same address as they were at the start of the autumn term 2020; of those students who have moved, almost half (49%) are still planning on returning to their original address before the end of the academic year.
- Almost a quarter (24%) of students said that they expected to stay with people who are not part of their current household for a period of two weeks or more, over the next two months.
- Almost a quarter (23%) of students reported receiving a COVID-19 test in the last seven days; of those students, the majority (73%) reported taking a rapid result test, known as a Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test.

These are experimental statistics, so care needs to be taken when interpreting them. This survey has a relatively small sample size and low response rate. While this has been weighted and is comparable with previous findings, this has an impact on the level of certainty of this research. Historical estimates have been revised to account for differences in the age structure between the sample and the student population.

2 . Coronavirus and higher education students data

[Coronavirus and higher education students](#)

Dataset | Released 7 April 2021

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

3 . Glossary

University students

Students included in this study are studying on Foundation to Postgraduate level programmes at universities in England.

Adult population in Great Britain

Where possible, comparisons have been drawn with the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey \(OPN\)](#) to compare the experiences and behaviours of students with those of the adult population in Great Britain. The comparisons are used to give a broad idea of the different experiences of each group but be aware that the statistics measure data from different timeframes, slightly different questions and different sampling methods so are not directly comparable. The period of the OPN used for comparison was 10 to 14 March 2021.

Statistical significance

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

National lockdown

From 5 January 2021, government guidance in England advised people to stay at home and avoid meeting others they do not live with, except for specific purposes. Guidance recommended that students only return to face-to-face teaching during national lockdown restrictions if they are on courses that are most important to be delivered in person to support the pipeline of future key workers. [Updated guidance](#) came into effect on 8 March 2021 enabling university providers to resume some in-person teaching and learning for students who are studying practical or practice-based subjects.

4 . Measuring the data

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

The survey was conducted between 12 March 2021 and 22 March 2021, using an online survey tool and all answers were self-reported. A total of 51,759 students in English universities were invited to take part via their email address held by National Union of Students (NUS) with an email sent from the NUS, with a response rate of 2.8%. We would like to thank and acknowledge the important role the NUS had in conducting this survey.

An important strength of this survey is that it allows for timely estimates to be produced. In addition, the National Union of Students (NUS) sample frame provides good coverage of students across English universities. Estimates in this report are based on weighted counts that are representative of the population of students studying at universities in England, population totals are taken from the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\) 2019/20 estimates](#). Of the responses received, a disproportionate number came from female students, and from students 30 years and over. In addition, responses varied by region. To address this, we apply weighting to ensure that the sample is representative of sex, age, and the student population in different regions of England.

Revised estimates

We have implemented age into our weighting process in order to improve the accuracy of our estimates, so that they are more representative of the student population. As a result, we have also revised all estimates from previous waves to account for the additional age weighting, so that estimates are comparable over time and to improve accuracy. The revised historical estimates can be found in the accompanying [Coronavirus and higher education students data](#).

Comparing the previous estimates (adjusted by just region of provider and sex) and the new revised estimates (adjusted by age, region of provider and sex), the biggest differences appear to occur for variables related to living arrangements, experiences and students' mental health and well-being.

Uncertainty in the data

Out of the 51,759 invites sent there were 1,450 complete responses, giving us a response rate of 2.8%. The experimental statistics presented in this bulletin contain [uncertainty](#). As with all survey data based on a sample, there is an element of uncertainty as they are susceptible to respondent error and bias. In some cases, we have used confidence intervals to determine whether differences across periods and between students and the general population of Great Britain are statistically significant.

5 . Related links

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

Dataset | Released 18 March 2021

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

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

Dataset | Released 5 November 2020

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

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

Dataset | Released 18 November 2020

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

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

Web page | Updated as and when data become available

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

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

Article | Updated as and when data become available

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

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

Interactive tool | Updated as and when data become available

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