

Life in residential further education

The experience of students under 18
by the Children's Rights Director for England



PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Contents

About the Children's Rights Director	3
How we asked for students' views	4
The students who gave us their views	4
The best things about living at college	5
The worst things about living at college	6
College residential buildings	7
Where the college is	9
How does living at college differ from attending a day college from home?	10
How living at college affects studying	11
College staff	12
Supervision of students at college	13
How are students under 18 treated differently from adult students?	15
Welfare help for students	16
Dangers to students	17
Keeping students safe	18
What stops bullying?	18
Hobbies and activities	19
Keeping healthy	19
Advice for any future residential college	20
Final words	20

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



About the Children's Rights Director



Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England

The law sets out my duties as Children's Rights Director for England. One of my main duties is to ask children and young people for their views about how children and young people are looked after in England. This includes students aged under 18 living in residential further education colleges. My duties also cover children and young people living away from home in all types of boarding schools or residential special schools, children and young people living in children's homes, in family centres, in foster care or who have been placed for adoption, and children or young people getting any sort of help from council social care services.

As well as asking young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, I and my team also give advice on children's and young people's views and on children's rights and welfare to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the Government. We have a duty to raise any issues we think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people living away from home or getting children's social care support. We do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

We have written reports about many things that are important to children and young people living away from home or in care or being helped by social care services. These reports have often included the views of students under 18 living in further education colleges. But we have never written a report that simply says what it is like to live as a residential student at a further education college. That is what this report is about.

We are publishing other reports about young people's experiences of living in different types of residential establishment. *Life in children's homes* is about the experiences of children and young people living in children's homes, *Life in secure care* is about young people's experiences of living in secure children's homes, and *Life in residential special schools* is about people's experiences of having both residential care and education in a special school. We have already published reports about the experience of being adopted, of living in foster care, of being a boarder in a boarding school, and of life in residential family centres.

For people who know about residential further education colleges, or who run them or work in them, I hope this report will give a useful national picture of what living in college is like from the student's viewpoint, so that life in any particular college can be checked against it. For those who do not know a great deal about residential colleges, I hope this report will give a fair picture of what it is like to live in one.

Like all my reports, this report is being published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my reports on our website www.rights4me.org.



How we asked for students' views

We asked for students' views by using a secure web survey about their experiences of living in college. We invited residential students from different colleges across the country to fill in the survey for us. We picked the colleges at random from a national list of residential colleges. This listed the 51 further education colleges in England with residential students aged under 18. We sent each college its own survey username and password, to make sure as far as we could that only the students invited to fill in the survey could log on to it.

In most of the survey questions asking for students' views, we asked for their views without us suggesting any answers, and we analysed their answers afterwards for this report. Where we have listed students' answers in a bar chart in the report, we have included all the answers that came from at least one in 10 of the students answering that question. The students could give up to two answers of their own to each of those questions, so percentages on the bar charts do not add up to 100. In this report, we have not left out any views that we might disagree with, nor made our own comments on anything students told us. We have not added our own views or ideas.

The students who gave us their views

Altogether, we received survey responses from **149 students from 14 different residential further education colleges**. All were aged under 18, as that was the age group we surveyed; 48% were aged 16 and 52% were 17; 51% were male and 49% were female.

Most (92%) said they were white, seven said they were Asian, two said they were black, and two said they were of a mixed ethnic background. Out of the 147 who told us whether or not they had a disability, 97% said they had no disability. Four said they had a disability of some sort.

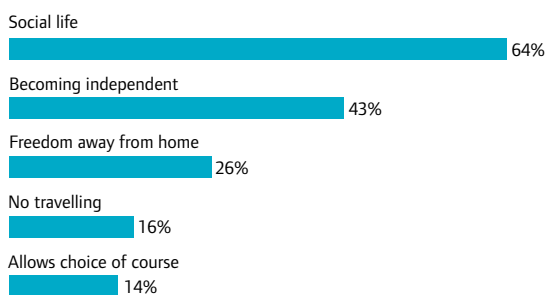
Almost all (94%) of the students were living in a college hostel or a residential unit on the college site. Six were living in a shared house or flat with other students, one was living with a family, and one was living in a college residential unit away from the rest of the college site.

'You are surrounded by a lot of friends from different countries'

The best things about living at college

Our first survey questions asked students what they thought were the best, and the worst, things for them about living away from home at their residential college. The chart shows the top 'best things' about living at college, according to the 148 students who responded to this question.

Best things about living at college (percentages of the 148 students answering this question)



Clearly, **the social side of residential college life is of top importance; living away at college brings social life and activities with other students, helps students to learn to be independent, and enables students to enjoy new freedoms away from home.** Quotations from the answers we received were: 'you're always with your mates'; 'you meet many new people'; 'you are surrounded by a lot of friends from different countries'; 'a chance to become more independent than living at home'. Being away from parents was seen as a good thing, 'the freedom away from parents', but it could also have other advantages: 'I like living away from my parents as now we get along better.'

Not having to spend a lot of time and money travelling between home and school or college was an advantage for some, and some were clear that becoming a resident student allowed them to study the college course they wanted, which might not have been possible as a day student going to a college near home. These views were summed up by the students who wrote: 'it means I don't have to travel long hours a day'; and 'couldn't do my course without living in'.

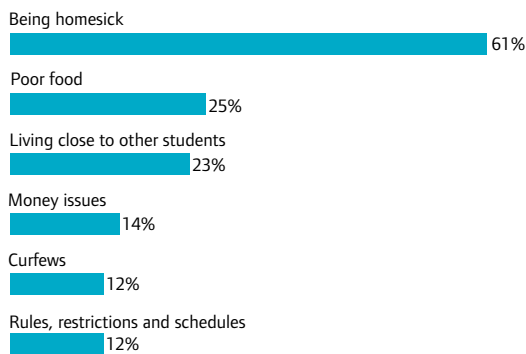
Just under one in 10 students wrote that living at college meant they had more facilities and resources than day students would have, and that they could study with fewer distractions than they would have at home. 'Get the best of both worlds, social and educational'; 'access to college facilities after the college day ends'; 'easier to study away from siblings at home'. Only two students wrote that they could not think of anything 'best' about living at college.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

The worst things about living at college

As well as the best things, we also asked students to tell us the worst things about living away from home at college. The next chart shows the top answers from the 146 students who answered this question.

Worst things about living at college (percentages of the 146 students answering this question)



By far, **the most common worst thing about living away from home at college was feeling homesick. The majority of students told us they felt homesick** when at college. One student wrote to us that: ‘there isn’t a good thing for me, I miss home too much’, another that there is ‘no one to comfort you’ at college.

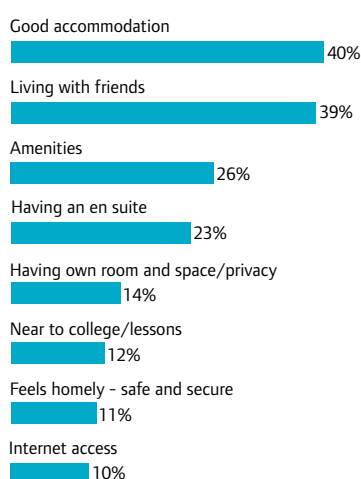
Poor food, and the lack of privacy, noise, tensions and distractions of **living closely with other students** came a long way behind homesickness as ‘worst things’ about residential college life, as did shortage of money and various college rules and restrictions. It is important to note that some students specifically mentioned **curfews**, rather than rules and restrictions generally, as something they disliked at college. Examples of what students wrote in their answers are: ‘your whole time is scheduled’; ‘there are 30 other teenagers around all the time, with problems, and you don’t get any peace’; ‘having the chance to be independent taken away from you by the curfew’; ‘no private space’; ‘no access to internet in room, easily distracted and unable to concentrate in the computer room’; ‘you have to accept other people’s behaviour’; ‘it is sometimes quite hard to work as you can always be socialising’.

‘There isn’t a good thing for me, I miss home too much’

College residential buildings

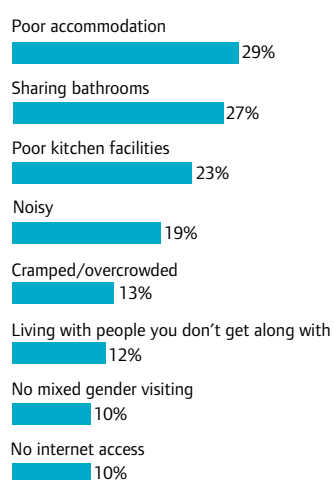
Our next two questions to students asked their views about the best, and the worst, aspects of the residential buildings they lived in at college. The chart shows the top 'best things' listed by the 145 students who answered this question.

Best things about the building students live in (percentages of the 145 students answering this question)



The next chart shows the top 'worst things' from the 146 students who told us what they thought were the worst things about their residential college buildings.

Worst things about the building students live in (percentages of the 146 students who answered this question)



Students listed similar numbers of 'best' and 'worst' things about their accommodation (altogether, 266 'best' things from 145 students and 277 'worst' things from 146 students).

Overall, **students tended to rate their accommodation as simply 'good' or 'poor', without always having reasons for this judgement. The biggest specific factors were how people living there got on with each other and what facilities students had in their accommodation.** Living with friends was a positive, but sharing bathrooms was often a negative, as was feeling overcrowded and accommodation being noisy. Not getting on with one or more other students could make living together a negative experience. An en suite bathroom, having your own bedroom and good privacy were all important positives. The most important facilities that made a difference to whether accommodation was seen as good or bad were **kitchen and bathroom facilities, and whether or not students had internet access.**

The following quotations illustrate the qualities of what students rated as good accommodation: 'you have your own room'; 'en suite accommodation'; 'the facilities are good and clean'; 'very good friends live in my building'; 'social atmosphere with friends living more close'; 'good community of people'; 'our hostel is in the middle of everything'; 'rooms have good locks, they're safe'; 'security keep it safe'. By comparison, bad accommodation 'is old and needs upgrading', has 'shared bathrooms which are old and dirty', or 'facilities such as shower toilets and common rooms which are horrible to be in'. Accommodation can be bad to live in if 'you can hear noise from other rooms very clearly from your room', and there are 'other people leaving the kitchen in a mess' and 'causing problems eg keeping people up at night, some vandalism'. Although many students told us that CCTV helped to keep them safe, a few disliked 'the security cameras inside the building'.

Specific positive points included not having to spend time and money travelling from where you lived to college lessons and accommodation feeling generally **homely, safe and secure.** One specific negative for some was **not being allowed to have visitors of the opposite sex** in residential accommodation. Some students told us that they thought their parents were paying more for their student accommodation than the students themselves thought it was worth.

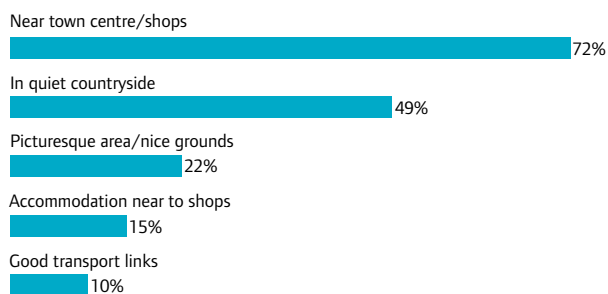
PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Where the college is

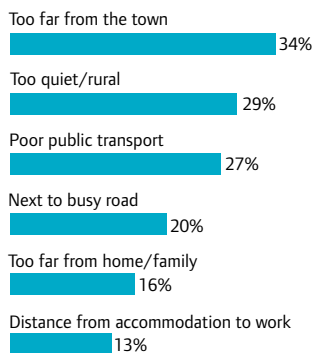
The next two charts show students' views about what is best and worst about the location of their college. Here are the top 'best' things about their college's location, from 148 students.

Best things about the college's location (percentages of the 148 students answering this question)



And, from 140 students, here are the top 'worst' things about their college's location.

Worst things about the college's location (percentages of the 140 students answering this question)



There is one factor that makes a big difference to students – whether the college is close to a town and shops. **Being close to town and shops is the biggest positive factor about location, while being too far from town is the biggest negative factor.** Some examples of comments on this issue from students' answers are: 'close to town and supermarket'; 'town is easy to get to, plenty of shops'; 'a long walk to the supermarket'; 'no public transport links to town'; 'it's in the middle of nowhere'; 'no cash point nearby'.

Whether students like their college to be in a rural area is very much a matter of personal taste. For many, the countryside is a good location, while for others it was listed as a bad thing. One student wrote as a positive: 'you're surrounded by countryside'; another enjoyed the 'amazing scenery because of the countryside'; but others wrote as a negative: 'it's very rural'; 'near farm land so smells in the air'; and when it rains, 'it gets very wet, muddy puddles'.

For some, a **picturesque location with pleasant grounds, without the dangers of busy roads**, was an important positive. One student wrote: 'It's a pretty place which has a lovely view.' **Being a long way from home** can also be a negative factor. One student, though, reminded us that we shouldn't just think about how far a college is from homes in this country – for them, college was '8,500 miles from my house', so where it was within the UK didn't make much difference.

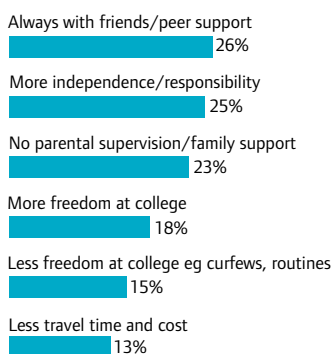
Having good transport links, and residential accommodation being close to college work areas and buildings, are also important factors for students.

Comments from students illustrate the importance of good or bad transport links: 'near train station/transport services'; 'transport links are available most of the time'; 'transport across country is awful'; 'public transport is terrible'; 'no public transport link to town'. For some this meant other problems too: 'can't get an evening job because hard to get there'. For students on some courses, the journey from hostel to animal husbandry areas could be more important than the journey to the college campus buildings: 'equine located away from campus'.

How does living at college differ from attending a day college from home?

The next chart shows what students thought were the main differences between living at college and attending college while living at home. There were answers from 141 students.

Main differences between living at college and living at home (percentages of the 141 students answering this question)



The key **advantages of going away from home to a residential college, from the students' point of view, are being with friends, having more independence away from parents and family, and, to a lesser extent, not having to spend time and money travelling to college every day.** The issue of how much freedom there is while living away at college is complicated though. For many, living at college affects how much freedom you have, but **for some there is more freedom at college, while for others things like curfews and college routines mean that there is less freedom than at home.**

The following quotations illustrate students' views of life away from home at college.

'You're responsible for everything you do whilst at the college, not just while you're learning'

'If you don't wake up your parents aren't there to make sure you do!'

'You have to look after yourself. You must cook, go shopping, wash. All by yourself. You get new experiences how to deal with money, when you see how much one person actually needs in one month. You get a different relationship with your friends, because you live with them'

'You get the social life at college at night time whilst not having to travel for hours everyday to get to and fro, also you can work more just after college instead of sitting on a bus'

'Living at home you constantly have someone telling you NO, but living away you can do what you want and make your own decisions'

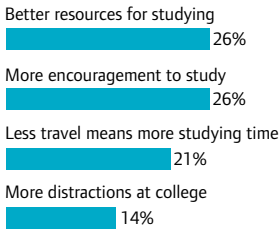
'You get a lot more responsibilities and it makes you grow up a lot quicker than you would if you lived at home! You don't always have your parents to fall back on'

'We don't get to see our parents very often, which is a massive difference in my life. Also, you gain very close friendships to people that are closer than normal friends as they become your family away from home, even though they are slightly dysfunctional'

How living at college affects studying

The next chart shows the main ways that students found their studying was affected by living at college instead of at home. The question was answered by 140 students.

How living at college affects studying (percentages of the 140 students answering this question)



Overall, students told us that **living at college helps with studying**, although some said that there were more **things at college to distract them** from getting on with studying. The three main ways that living at college helps with studying were having **better studying resources** at college than at home, **being encouraged to study more at college** where everyone else was also studying, and, as we have heard in answers to other questions, **not spending time travelling** between home and college. One student wrote: 'you've got the IT room till 11. You can get help easily from tutors and friends as you are on campus'; another said: 'you have more time for doing assignments instead of travelling'. One student summed up the balance between being helped to study and being distracted from studying: 'sometimes easier because of easier access to facilities although sometimes it's easy to get distracted living with lots of people'. As someone else put it: 'sometimes hard, as socialising can get in the way'.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

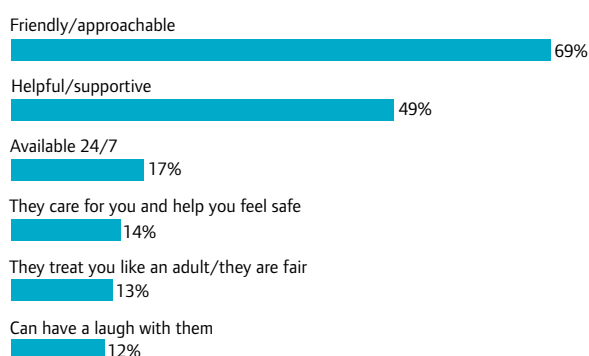
'You can get help easily from tutors and friends as you are on campus'

College staff

Next, we asked students for the best and worst things about staff who work in colleges. We asked about staff generally, not just residential, welfare, warden or student services staff.

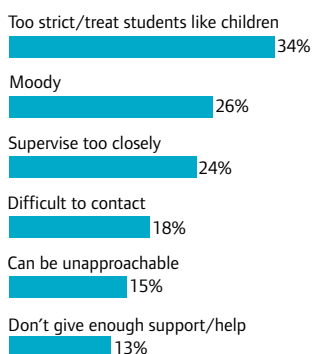
The top 'best things' about staff, from the 140 students who answered this question, were:

Best things about college staff (percentages of the 140 students answering this question)



The most common 'worst things' about college staff, from the 131 students who responded to this question, are shown in the next chart.

Worst things about college staff (percentages of the 131 students answering this question)



Out of the 481 comments we received about staff, 56% were positive. From these charts, it is clear that **students most appreciate staff who are friendly, helpful, fair and both approachable and easy to contact**. Good staff 'treat you like an adult', are 'really nice, helpful and easy to get along with', are 'approachable and friendly', 'you can talk to them like normal people' and they 'treat us with respect so we have respect for them'. It is good when it is 'easy to get hold of a member of staff 24 hours a day', and when staff are 'easy to talk to and get on with, most [are] like they are mates'. A few students wrote about how staff made them 'feel safer on campus'.

Students dislike staff treating them 'like children', supervising them too closely or being too strict with them, and being moody rather than ready to help and 'have a laugh'. An example of how students disliked the way some staff supervised them was: 'You feel like you're being watched all the time.' One person wrote 'sometimes irritable, but they're only human'. Poor staff were sometimes 'extremely difficult to track down and find'. The one group of staff students most often criticised were the catering staff at college, a typical comment being 'catering staff are moody'.

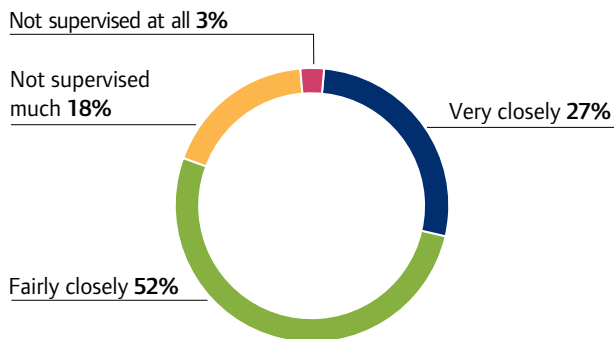
Some students wrote to us about times when they felt staff didn't get the balance right in the ways they both pushed students and looked after them. An example was: 'Sometimes they seem more concerned with the grades their students are getting, than their well-being and push too hard on people who really need for that to not happen at that particular moment.' Another student thought that it was difficult for staff to keep everything in balance: 'Sometimes they care too much.'

Supervision of students at college

How much students aged under 18 are supervised at college outside work time, and how their supervision differs from the supervision of students who are over 18, are important issues for students under 18.

We asked students how closely their college staff supervised them outside teaching time. The next chart shows their answers, which came from 147 students. All of the students we asked were under 18.

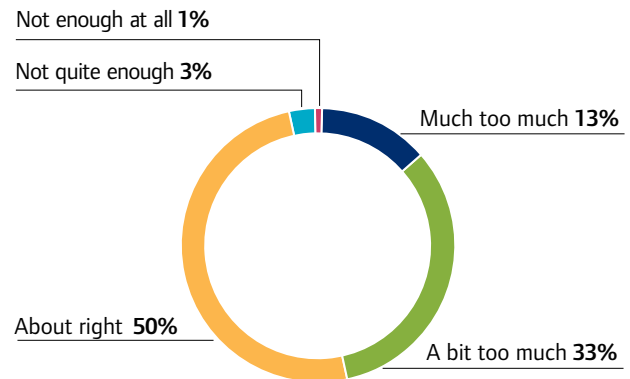
How closely are students under 18 supervised (percentages of the 147 students answering this question)?



In summary, **over three quarters of the students (79%) said they were supervised 'fairly' or 'very' closely by staff outside teaching time.** The other 21% said they were not supervised 'much' or 'at all' outside teaching time. We checked to see whether there were any major differences between male and female students in how much supervision they reported. There were no big differences between genders.¹

We also looked at what students under 18 thought about how much they were supervised outside teaching time. The next chart shows their views on this, which came from 148 students answering the question.

What students think of how much they are supervised (percentages of the 148 students answering this question)



As can be seen from the chart, **exactly half the students thought the supervision they were getting outside teaching time was 'about right', a third (33%) thought they were supervised 'a bit' too much and 13% that they were supervised 'much' too much, but only 4% thought they needed more supervision.**

How closely students were supervised made a great difference to whether they thought they were supervised too much or not enough. **The more students were supervised, the more likely they were to say they were supervised too much.** Nearly eight out of 10 students who said they were supervised 'very' closely thought this was too much, nearly half of those who said they were supervised 'fairly' closely thought this was too much, but only two out of the 30 students who said they were supervised 'not much' or 'not at all' thought that was too much. Looking at the differences between male and female students, **girls were more likely than boys to see 'very close' supervision as too much supervision.**

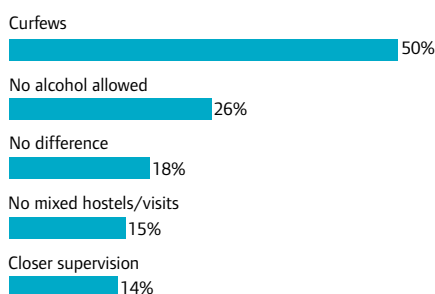
¹ In such comparisons, we define a 'big difference' as one of 10 percentage points or more.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

How are students under 18 treated differently from adult students?

There are many different views about how far students aged under 18 should be treated differently from adult students at college. We asked what the main differences were, and had answers from 121 students, all of whom were of course aged under 18.

How are students under 18 treated differently from adult students (percentages of the 121 students answering this question)?



For some students, our survey showed that there is no difference at their colleges. 'They're not really treated differently, the same rules apply'; 'haven't noticed any difference, it is hard to tell who is under 18 and who is not, mostly all of us are treated equally'.

By far the biggest difference though was that there are **curfew times for students aged under 18** to be back in their residential accommodation. Exactly half the students who answered this question told us that curfews were the main difference for students under 18. Other differences, reported by far fewer students, were **not being allowed to drink alcohol** at college, living in **single sex hostels**, and generally being **supervised more closely**. As one student put it: 'under 18s can't drink, curfew, no mixed hostels'. Some students agreed with under 18s being more closely supervised: 'We are more under control than students over 18. But that is only good.'

Some students told us they thought under and over 18s should be treated the same in college. Two quotations sum up this view: 'why are under 18 boys and girls not allowed in each others' hostels? It makes no difference how old you are as to how you would act, that's down to an individual's personality. Over 18s can go in friends' rooms, why can't we?'; 'under 18s should be treated like everyone else living there and shouldn't have a curfew. They should have a chance to prove they're grown up enough to have the independence like the over 18s have'. One person raised the issue of passing your 18th birthday while still living in a hostel with students under 18: 'When I'm 18 I'll still be in the under 18 hostel so I have to stick by the under 18 rules which I will find annoying.'

In their written comments, some students said that the greater supervision they had as under 18s felt as if staff simply didn't trust younger students: 'We are not seemingly trusted as much.' One wrote to us about being treated the same as older students in their college work, but very differently in the residential side of their college life: 'We are treated like children in the halls, whereas whilst at college we are treated like "young adults". I feel it should be one or the other, and not just to suit.'

Welfare help for students

Colleges are expected to provide welfare support for students aged under 18 who live at college. We therefore asked students to tell us about the main types of welfare support they received at their colleges. As always, we made no suggestions. We had responses from 128 students. One answer stood out. Half the students who responded told us that **the main welfare support was special staff being there to give personal support when it was needed**; these included wardens, tutors, student welfare officers, and sometimes nurses and counsellors. Students told us that this support was sometimes giving advice, sometimes giving information, sometimes discussing a problem, and sometimes giving practical help such as taking a student to the doctor, teaching a student how to cook, or helping over difficulties with fees.

These quotations illustrate students' views about the welfare support they get at college.

'You can talk to a warden if you need to talk about any problems you may have'

'You can get appointments with a doctor or get medicine from house. There are college counsellors or you can talk to your tutor'

'They help you in any way that they can within reason and they don't say no to anything, they always give their best efforts for the students'

'There's always someone to talk to who understands situations and you don't feel like you're being judged'

'The help I'm provided includes help with financial problems, college assignments, everything'

'Student Services is brilliant for anyone to talk about any issues and they offer counselling. Welfare in Halls of Residence is well catered for by the wardens in the ways of being able to talk to us about anything (in confidence) and offer help, driving to places eg for food or for a night out (cinemas, bowling). The night warden is there to ensure we are safe during the night'

We also asked students to tell us whether there was any more welfare help they wanted their colleges to give them. We had answers from 114 students. By far the most usual answer, which came from **almost half of those students (49%) was that they didn't think their colleges needed to give them any more welfare help than they already gave**. These students were happy with the amount of welfare help they were getting: 'No, they pretty much have it covered.'

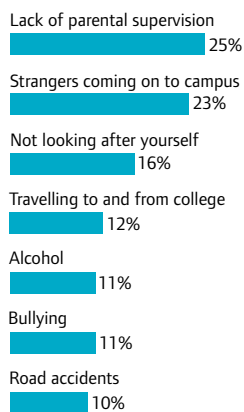
The two sorts of extra help asked for by some students were **financial help** for students without enough money, and help with food and cooking, such as provision of **more food and better cooking facilities**. As one student put it: 'Bigger meals on the plate, for less, more variety.' Being able to contact support staff at all times was very important, and this was not always the case: 'Welfare officers are not available after teaching times.'

Overall, it looks from the students' reports to us that most students were happy with the amount of personal advice and support that they were getting at college.

Dangers to students

For all our reports on what it is like to live in particular kinds of residential establishment, we ask young people what they see as the biggest dangers to themselves, and what most helps to keep them safe from harm. In our survey for this report, 139 students told us what they saw as the biggest dangers to students under 18 living in further education colleges. The next chart shows the top dangers reported.

Biggest dangers to students (percentages of the 139 students answering this question)



This is a very mixed list of dangers, including dangers that come from **being away from supervision by parents and not looking after yourself properly, perhaps drinking too much alcohol; the danger of strangers around the college campus; and bullying between students.** Examples sent to us were: 'strange people walking about'; 'not knowing how to live away from home'; 'too much freedom'; 'irresponsible people first time away from home get into trouble much easier'; and 'easily misled without parental supervision eg pressures to drink etc'. Road accidents were the main sort of accident to make it on this list of top dangers. It is interesting that travelling between home and college comes up in students' answers to many of our questions. So far in this report, we have seen this issue come up because of the saving in travelling time and cost if you live at college. In this question the issue was that **one in eight students saw travelling between home and college and back again as a particularly dangerous time at the beginning and end of periods living at college.** Travelling, especially alone and when walking, was quoted in many examples sent in by students: 'walking on your own in the dark'; 'being off campus at night by yourself'; 'being alone and feeling vulnerable'.

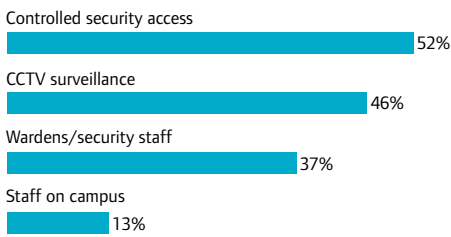
Not all dangers were about something happening to you. A few students wrote about dangers of not getting on well at college, either in the work or socially: 'not completing the work to a 'satisfactory standard'; 'making yourself a recluse'.

'Easily misled without parental supervision, eg pressures to drink etc'

Keeping students safe

The next question after asking about dangers is of course what young people see as the main things that keep them safe at the establishments where they live. For this question, we received answers from 145 students, and the next chart gives their top answers.

What keeps students safe (percentages of the 145 students answering this question)?

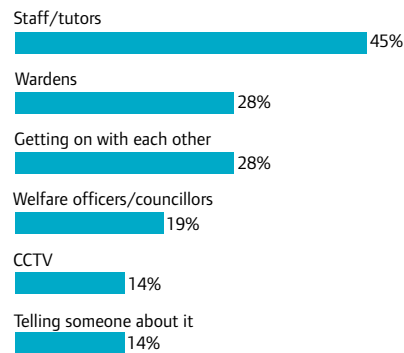


From these answers, students living at further education colleges clearly regard two main things as keeping them safe at college. First are **physical safety measures** such as electronic controls on people getting into college buildings and CCTV cameras watching public areas; second are **staff (including special security staff) being around the campus and buildings** to keep students safe. Two quotes illustrate the importance of staff keeping students safe: ‘staff always around 24 hours a day’; ‘always doing risk assessments’. A few students wrote that the curfew for students under 18 did actually help to keep them safe: ‘the time curfew’; ‘our curfew keeps us all together’.

What stops bullying?

One particular danger that young people in many settings tell us about is bullying. This also came up as one of the top dangers on the list reported by students living in college. Here are the top answers, from 137 students, to our question about what really works to stop bullying at college.

What stops bullying at college (percentages of the 137 students answering this question)?



These answers show that **the main thing that stops bullying between students at college is the college staff**, with **students simply getting on well with each other** and physical things like **CCTV** surveillance also being important: ‘CCTV helps a bit’. Students wrote to us about their colleges having ‘no bullying tolerance policy’ and a ‘good community between students’. Some told us that bullying was not an issue in their college: ‘college has, I feel, a low rate of bullying. I think this is because people feel they can talk to anyone here about a problem and have it resolved’; ‘so many people, not many problems’.

Hobbies and activities

We had 143 responses back to a survey question about what hobbies and activities students did outside work time while living at college. Two answers stood out. One was that **72% of the students told us that they did sporting or fitness activities**, such as football, rugby, netball, horse riding, rock climbing, swimming, jogging, table tennis, yoga, ice skating, or bowling. The other was that **35% of students told us they spent their spare time socialising together**. Examples of social activities included spending time in the student bar, going to discos, parties, or theme nights, and playing indoor games together such as board games, pool, darts or cards.

We did ask whether there were any hobbies or activities that students would like to be able to do at college, but were for some reason unable to do. We had responses from 132 students. **A quarter (25%) of those students, said that there were no hobbies or activities that they wanted to do at college but could not do**. Some told us that they were happy with the range of activities and facilities at their college, others said that if there was sufficient interest in a new activity, their college would usually try to organise it.

Where students told us they wanted to do an activity but could not, this was usually because there were **no facilities for the activity at college or locally**, or that the **college would not allow the activity**. Examples of activities for which there were no college or local facilities were diving, ice skating and, in some places, swimming. Examples of activities students told us were not allowed on safety grounds were skateboarding, archery and shooting. Some students told us that they would have liked to go horse riding, but the horses at the college were for educational purposes and not for riding. Others said that they had been unable to take part in some local activities because of their college curfew times.

Keeping healthy

When we asked students what helped them to keep healthy at college, we heard from 141 students, who gave us two main answers. What keeps students healthy is **exercise from sports activities and sometimes the amount of walking they do, and a good diet**, with healthy food and plenty of fruit and vegetables available at college. In good college canteens, 'they tend to do healthy food'. Exercise was reported by 69% of students, and diet by 62%. Some college courses included plenty of exercise in themselves; 'dog walking and general animal care duties as part of my course'.

We had 117 answers to a question about what stops students from being healthy at college. Nine percent said there was nothing that stopped them from being healthy. The **most common thing quoted as stopping students from being healthy was their diet**, where this was not a healthy one. Examples given were college canteens that had a limited and poor quality menu, and colleges where students often ate takeaways or junk food. Examples of what students told us about this are: 'no decent food in the canteen'; 'chips every day'. 'Not much appetising food. Not organic food. Meat hard to cut into'; 'healthy food is too dear'; 'some of the foods that are offered aren't so healthy because they have too much oil or fat. And the panini sandwiches all have cheese!'. One student said: 'the poor food leaves you hungry, so it makes you want to order a take away', and another: 'I'm currently a student and so I am not that rich. Cheap foods generally aren't as healthy as they could be.'

Advice for any future residential college

We asked students to suggest any advice they thought we should give, as the student view, to anyone thinking of setting up a new residential unit at a further education college. We received suggestions from 121 students.

Nineteen per cent said that there was nothing they thought a new residential college should do differently from their own college. One wrote: 'They should look at my college and use it as a template.'

The top advice about buildings was that any new residential college should have **modern buildings with modern facilities, including en suite bathrooms, sports facilities and internet access.** One student wrote: 'more varied activities, larger rooms with en suite, designated work areas for residents with up to date computers'.

The top advice about how future residential hostels or units should be run was that there should be **more freedom for students, with fewer rules and later curfew times, and that male and female students should be allowed to interact more.** Quotes from students' answers were: 'should have mixed hostels for under 18s'; 'give under 18s more freedom, allow boys and girls to go into each others' hostels with a time to leave'.

One student thought hard about how curfews for under 18s might be relaxed without taking away their protection for younger students, and suggested to us that colleges might 'use curfew as a measure of punishment possibly, meaning people would abide as though there were rules, to stay on the right side of it'.

Final words

We ended our survey by giving students the opportunity to tell us anything else they thought we should know about living in a residential further education college. Here is a selection of what they wrote in to us.

'Overall it is very good and I feel there are only minor changes that are needed to the college and its systems'

'Living away from home has really helped me grow up quicker than most people at home, it's great'

'They are a lot better than other boarding schools as you have more freedom'

'It's cool being away from home'

'It is good to have a residential place for people from other places of the world there'

'I think you should be more lenient on rules and drinking and curfews'

'Curfew is very early and not fair'

'Bedrooms need to be bigger'

'I think they are a good thing as they keep us under control and give our parents a sense of security'

'Lose or extend the curfew'

Like every sort of residential life we have asked young people about, living in a residential further education college suits some people but not others. In their final comments for this report, we were sent both extremes. One student wrote back to us just saying, 'It's f***ing awful,' while the very next student wrote, 'It's very good and successful, it's the best time of your life.'

Staff of the Children's Rights Director

Dr Roger Morgan OBE, Children's Rights Director
Rachel Cook, Head of Advice
Jayne Noble, Head of Consultation
Lilian Clay, Project Officer – Web and Information Systems
Alison Roscoe, Project Officer – Consultation
Eleni Georgiou, Project Support Officer
Belinda Panetta, PA to Children's Rights Director

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects registered childcare and children's social care, including adoption and fostering agencies, residential schools, family centres and homes for children. It also inspects all state-maintained schools, non-association independent schools, pupil referral units, further education, initial teacher education, publicly funded adult skills and employment-based training, the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), and the overall level of services for children in local authority areas.

If you would like a version of this report in a different language, or in large print, Braille or audio, please email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or telephone 08456 404040.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 080251
© Crown copyright 2009

