

Advice Service Insight Report

September – December 2022

where **more** happens



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Term One at a Glance

700+

Students supported in Term 1

273

Undergraduate
students supported

£40,000+

Financial support distributed

38%

Of all cases concerned
housing

2

Full-time money and budgeting
advisors hired

205

Postgraduate Taught
students supported

30,000+

Times our webpages have been visited -
doubling engagement since last year

60

Postgraduate Research
students supported

About Students' Union Advice Service

Students' Union UCL's Advice Service is a free service, available to all students studying at UCL. The service is also available to prospective students who hold an offer for a UCL programme of study, students on interruption of studies with matters relating to their studies, or recent graduates where there is an ongoing matter. Students can access support and advice in-person, or via email, telephone, and video/ voice chat on Microsoft Teams.

The service offers confidential and independent advice and support. The trained and experienced team provides students with advice about:

- Academic issues – including extenuating circumstances, plagiarism, and complaints.
- Housing – including contract checks, housemate disputes and finding housing.
- Employment – including unpaid wages and part-time employment contracts.
- Money and Debt – including budgeting and welfare benefits.

The service also oversees a range of financial assistance funds. These include the Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund, Activities Participation Fund, and the Gender Expression Fund.

All cases are recorded via AdvicePro, a secure web-based case management system developed specifically for advice organisations.

The advice service also provides a range of advice and support online via digital resources. These resources allow students to independently seek out information, offering a trusted source of information to individuals who do not need or want to speak directly to an advisor. All resources are thoroughly researched and regularly maintained.

The service also provides free period products and condoms.



About Students' Union Advice Service CONT.

How do students hear about us?

When asked how they found out about the Service, the top five responses were:

1. UCL Website (**29%**, N = 206)
2. Students' Union website (**16%**, N = 112)
3. University service (**13%**, N = 94)
4. Department/ tutor (**11%**, N = 79)
5. Other (**10%**, N = 71)

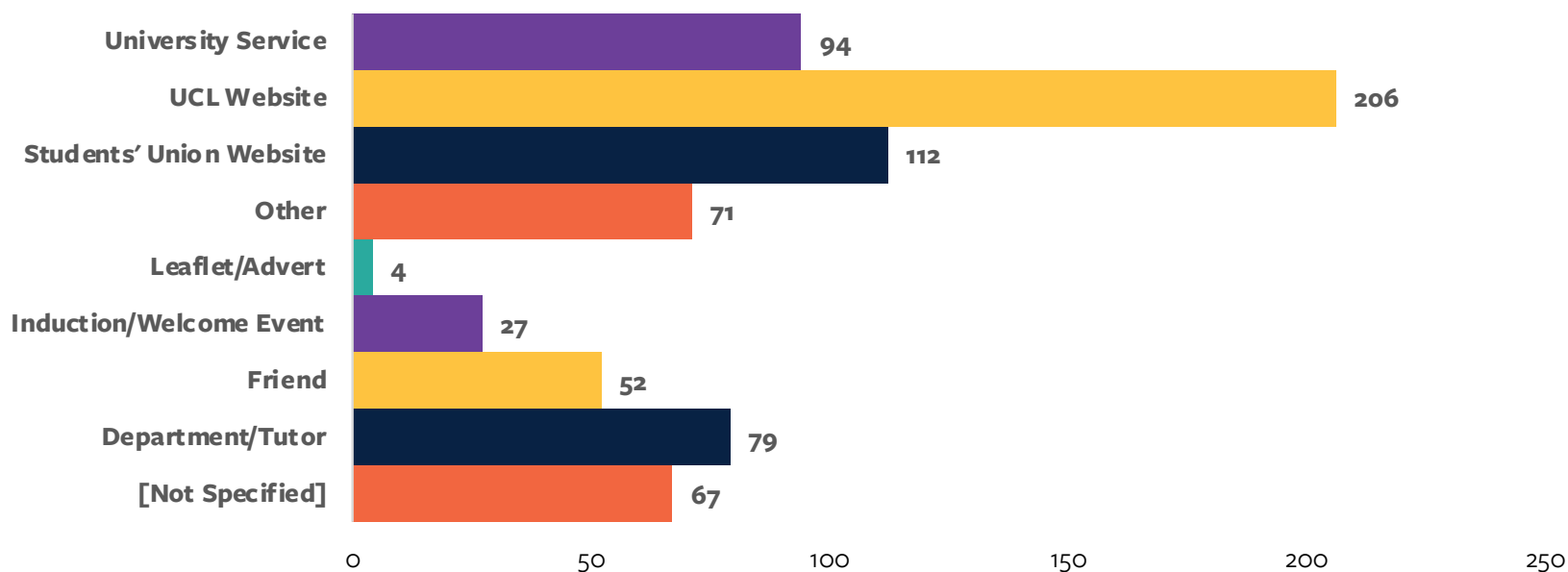


Figure 1. Clustered bar chart showing distribution of responses to the question “How did you hear of the service?”. N = 712

Term One: An Overview

With almost 50,000 students, Students' Union UCL's Advice Service serves the largest on-campus student population in the UK. Between September and December 2022, the service was staffed by four advisors (three full-time, one part-time) and a supporting manager. In January 2023 two new advisors joined the team as specialist money and budgeting advisors.

Case/ Enquiry Insight

Between September and December 2022, the service opened 712 cases. During the same period in 2021, the service opened just 366 cases, representing an almost 100% increase. This is a considerable rise given that the staff capacity did not change in this time, and that the complexity of cases has continued to grow.

Between September and December 2022, the top five matters were:

1. **Housing (N = 269)**
2. **Academic (N = 143)**
3. **Activities Participation Fund (N = 109)**
4. **Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund (N = 99)**
5. **General Enquiries (N = 42)**

The distribution of matter categories can be seen in Figure 3.

Looking at monthly trends for September – December 2021 and 2022, similar patterns were observed within case matters. However, in 2022, the number of students seeking advice and support saw a significant increase.

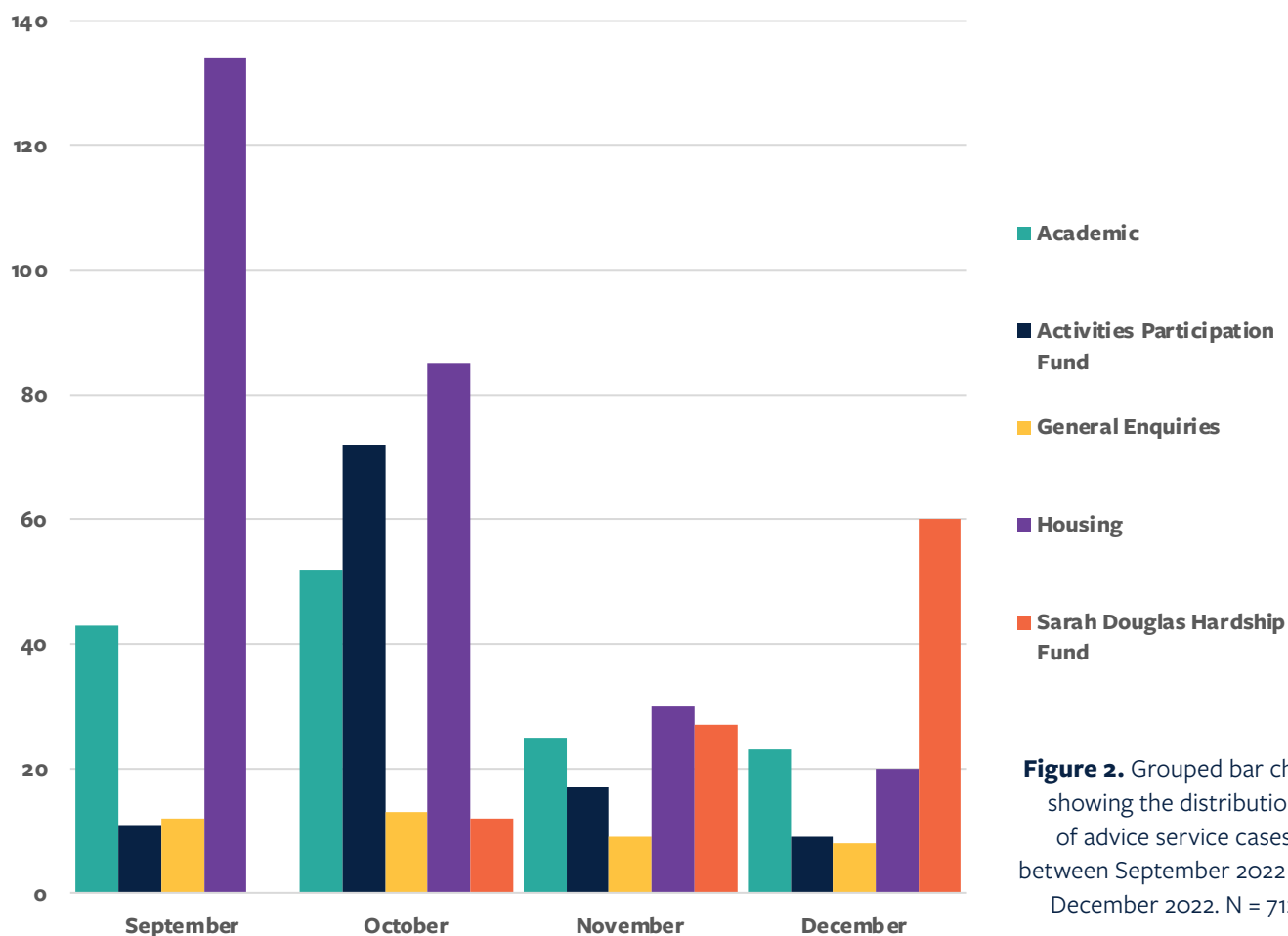


Figure 2. Grouped bar chart showing the distribution of advice service cases between September 2022 and December 2022. N = 712

Term One: An Overview CONT.

Most notably housing, general enquiries, and financial support have each seen substantial increases in comparison to last year.

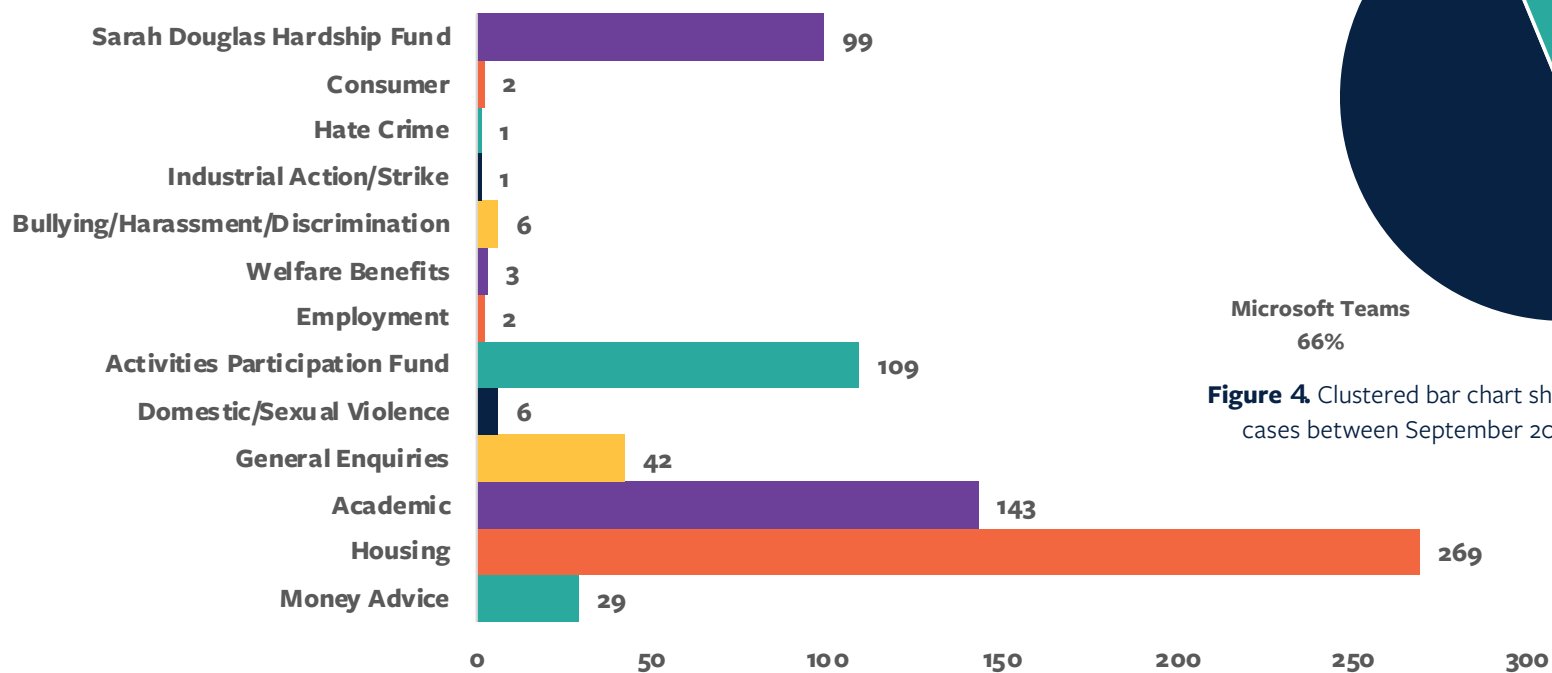
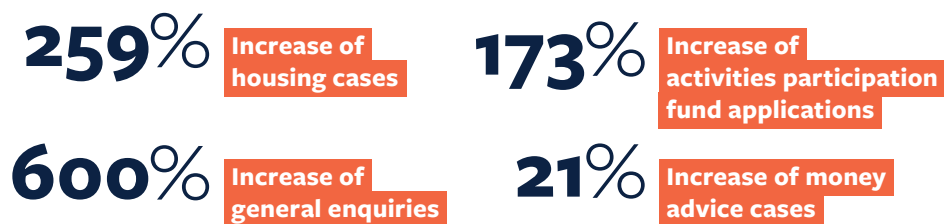


Figure 3. Clustered bar chart showing distribution of advice service cases between September 2022 and December 2022. N = 712

Based on the 369 cases where delivery channel was recorded, 88% of these appointments took place remotely, with Microsoft Teams being the most common delivery channel*.

*Delivery channel refers to the means by which students received support/advice from the advice service

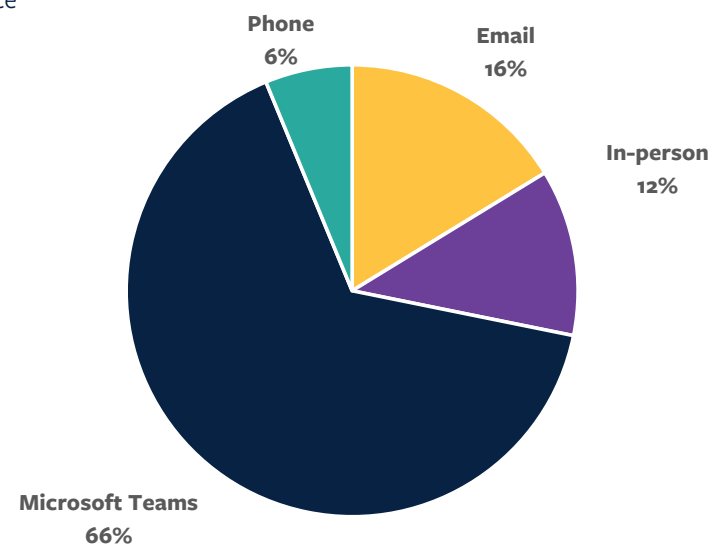


Figure 4. Clustered bar chart showing distribution of advice service cases between September 2022 and December 2022. N = 712

Term One: **An Overview** CONT.

Website Insight

Navigating online advice and support can be an overwhelming and confusing experience due to the challenge of locating reliable, trustworthy advice. Luckily, the advice service provides reliable, UCL specific information directly to students.

Between September and December 2022, the 'Advice and Support' page on the Students' Union UCL website received over 32,500 views. This equated to 0.59% of all page views on the Students' Union UCL website. In comparison, the same page received 15,496 views between September and December 2021 and accounted for only 0.30% of all page views. Following this initial landing page, 46% of users continued to 'Support', 40% visited 'Advice', 12% visited 'Find Help', and 2% visited 'Safety'. 89% of visitors were unique visitors.

On average, visitors spent longest on 'Find Help' (195 seconds). This was followed by 'Advice' (185 seconds), and 'Support' (153 seconds). Visitors spent the shortest time on 'Safety' (136 seconds).

Compared to the same period in 2021, visits to 'Advice' have increased by 123%, from 5,819 to 12,970, and visits to 'Support' have increased by 172%, growing from 5,527 in 2021 to 15,020 in 2022. From these numbers, it is clear that not only are more students seeking support and advice from the advice service, but areas of demand have also changed, with 'Support' now superseding 'Advice'.

Within the 'Support' pages, the 'participation fund contact form' and 'financial support', were the most visited pages, accounting for 58% of all 'Support' page views. Given that students

are currently facing a nationwide cost of living crisis where inflation is at a 40-year high¹ and only one in two students are confident that they have enough money to cover their basic cost of living², it is unsurprising that students are actively seeking additional financial support.

During this period, the top ten digital resources accessed were:

1. **Support > Participation fund contact form (N = 4,457)**
2. **Find help > Advice service (N = 3,887)**
3. **Support > Language writing support programme (N = 3,649)**
4. **Advice > Finding accommodation (N = 2,515)**
5. **Support > Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund (N = 2,165)**
6. **Advice > Extenuating circumstances (N = 1,936)**
7. **Advice > Money and debt (N = 1,100)**
8. **Support > Financial support (N = 1,043)**
9. **Advice > Academic misconduct (N = 998)**
10. **Support > Gender Expression Fund (N = 809)**

Advice for student sex workers (N = 785) and advice regarding types of accommodation (N = 775) were also viewed a substantial number of times.

Accessing information online appeals to young people for many reasons: it is free, informal, private, confidential, anonymous, convenient, carries no stigma, and gives an individual control over their advice-seeking journey³.

Term One: **An Overview** CONT.

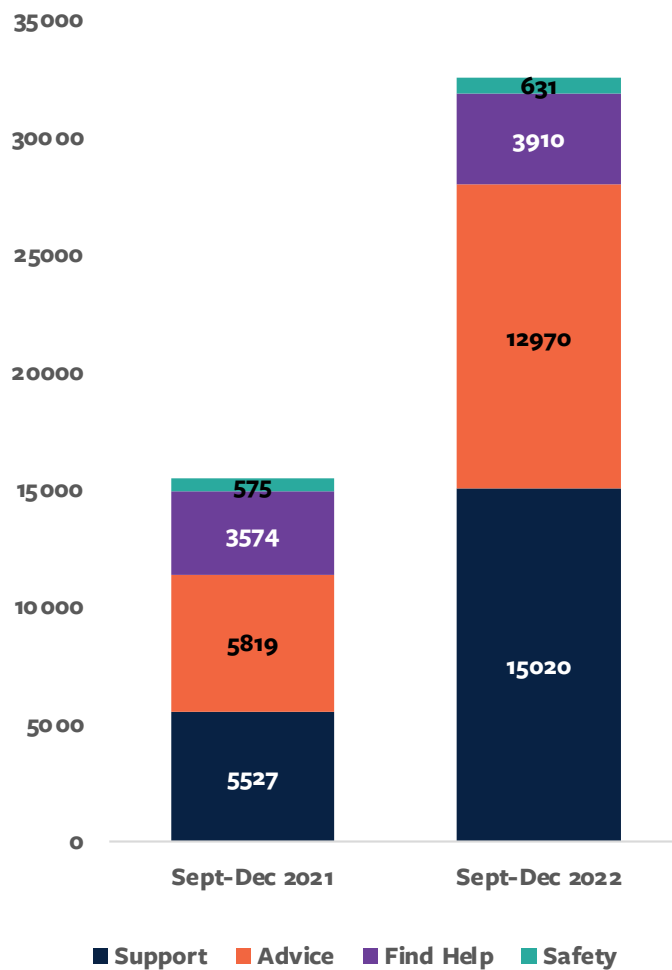


Figure 5. Stacked bar graphs showing a comparison of the distribution of advice service page visits between September and December 2021 and 2022. N = 15496 and N = 32500, respectively.

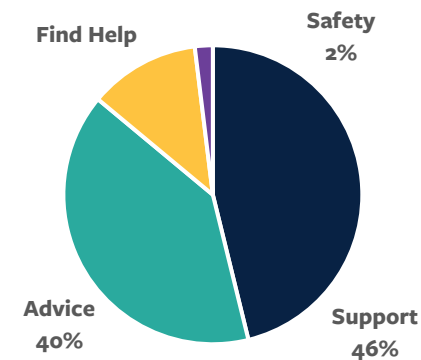


Figure 6. Pie chart showing distribution of advice service page visits between September and December 2022. N = 32500

The Problems our Students Face

Financial Support

Matters concerning money and financial support include, but are not limited to, student finance, hardship funds, budgeting/ money management, and the activities participation fund.

The 2022/2023 academic year has been a challenging year for UCL students, and an ever-increasing number of students are seeking support from the advice service. The impact of the cost of living crisis is universal. Although this data has not been captured within the service, wider research shows that not all students have been impacted equally. Students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds are bearing the brunt of the crisis; many are struggling to make ends meet and facing financial pressures that touch all corners of their life.

Hardship Fund	Contact Forms Received	Applications Received	Successful Applications	Total Funding Awarded
Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund	41	11	11	£20,672
Gender Expression Fund	N/A	59	50	£3,011
Activities Participation Fund	174	89	86	£15,441.14
Emergency Grants	128	66	49	£7,350

Throughout term one the service saw 237 cases concerning money advice/ financial support. In the same period for 2021, the advice service saw only 64 cases. This represents a 270% increase.

The most common sub-matters were:

- **Activities Participation Fund** (46%, N = 109/237)
- **Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund - Emergency grant** (30%, N = 70/237)
- **Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund** (12%, N = 29/237)

In term one, the advice service awarded £46,474.14. The breakdown of these awards can be seen in the table.

Home students (N = 61/102) accounted for **66%** of all Activities Participation Fund cases.

Undergraduate students (N = 59/102) accounted for **58%** of all Activities Participation Fund cases.

Estranged students (N = 9/75) accounted for **12%** of all Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases.

The Problems our Students Face CONT.



Advice Hub Insight

In term one, the **Activities Participation Fund** contact form specifically received 4457 page views. The majority of these views (50%) took place in October. Within the advice service, this has translated into 109 cases, and 86 successful applications.



Advice Hub Insight

In term one, the **Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund** webpage was viewed 2165 times. Within the advice service, this translated into 99 Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases in term one.



Advice Hub Insight

In term one, the **Gender Expression Fund** webpage was viewed 809 times. Within the advice service, this translated into 50 successful applications in term one.

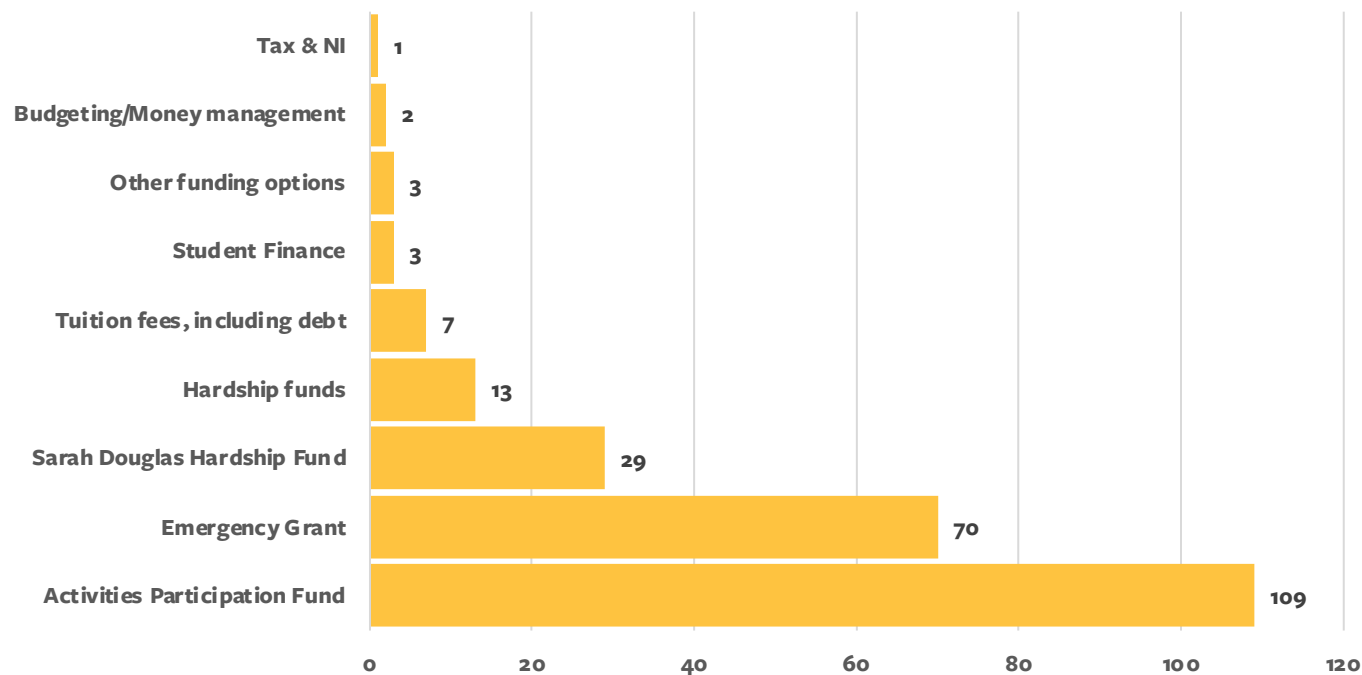


Figure 7. Clustered bar chart showing distribution of money advice and financial support cases between September 2022 and December 2022. N = 237

The Problems our Students Face CONT.

To support students, Students' Union UCL has a significant package of financial support available. The advice service is responsible for awarding and distributing these funds. The available support includes:

Activities Participation Fund: The Activities Participation Fund is available to help all students access activities to aid their personal development, avoid loneliness and isolation, and live a fulfilling student life whilst at UCL regardless of their financial circumstances. These grants can support students with society and club membership fees, travel expenses, specialist kit and equipment, and can also be used to help students access developmental opportunities for their studies, such as academic conferences.

Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund: These grants are open to all students and can be awarded to assist with one-off urgent expenses and short-term financial shortfalls for finite periods. The fund is available if students are in financial need and have exhausted all other financial support options. Students must first apply to UCL's Financial Assistance Fund but can apply to the fund if they have been unsuccessful or need further financial support.

Emergency Grants: If students find themselves in urgent need, they can apply for an emergency grant. These are for a maximum of £150 and help with immediate urgent living expenses. This money also comes from the Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund.

Gender Expression Fund: The Gender Expression Fund provides financial assistance for students who experience stress and anxiety at the disconnect they feel between their gender identity and appearance. Grants up to a maximum of £100 are available for



Housing Support

Housing support ranges from contract advice to tenant disputes, from problems with landlords to actual homelessness.

Between September and December 2022, the advice service experienced a large increase in the number of housing cases, with 38% (N = 269/712) of all cases concerning housing. This represents an increase of 259% in comparison to the same period in 2021. Digital resources also saw a substantial increase, with the number of students seeking advice on finding accommodation increasing by 231%.

The most common sub-matters were:

- **Looking for accommodation** (48%, N = 130/269)
- **Contract checking advice** (14%, N = 37/269)
- **Struggling with disrepair** (8%, N = 23/269)

Concerningly, the service has also seen 19 student homelessness cases.

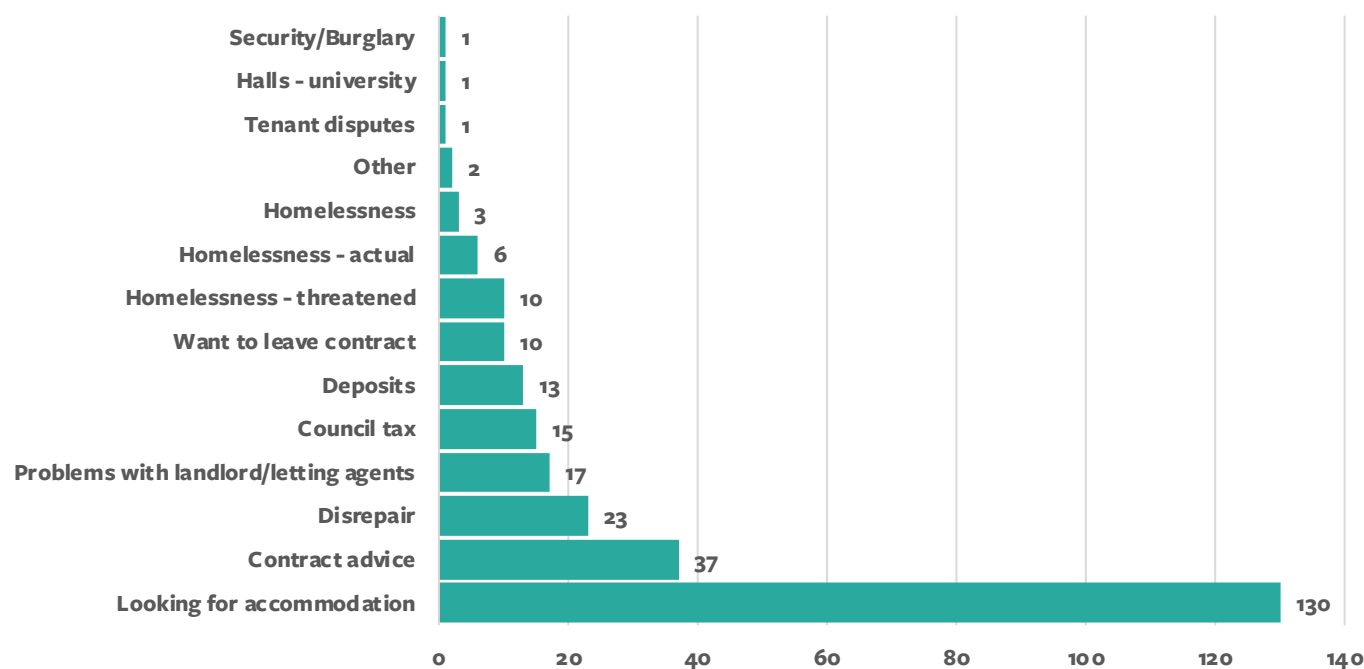


Figure 8. Clustered bar chart showing distribution of housing cases between September 2022 and December 2022. N = 269

Housing Support CONT.

This increase in demand for housing support aligns with the national context. Recent analysis shows that rents on new listings are up by almost a third since 2019, with some people facing increases of up to 60%.⁴ Data from the property website Rightmove shows that the average advertised rent in Greater London is 16.1% higher than a year ago. This is the highest rate of growth of any region on record. With students less likely to be on long-term contracts, they are more likely to feel the impact of these increases.⁵ Despite these substantial increases, students have seen no real increase in their maintenance loans. Russell Group analysis shows that the Department of Education decision to uprate maintenance loans in England by just 2.8% for 2023/24 means a full-time student living away from home outside London will receive just £9,978, leaving them £1,523 short of the £11,501 that the loan would be had it increased by actual inflation since 2020/21. Students' Union UCL should therefore anticipate this increase in demand continuing.

International (non-EU) students (N = 91/166) accounted for 55% of all housing cases.



Academic Matters

Academic matters include, but are not limited to, extenuating circumstances, plagiarism, complaints/ disputes, withdrawal from studies, and the student disciplinary procedure.

Throughout term one the service saw 143 academic cases. Taking increased student numbers into account, this is consistent with last year's 129 cases.

The most common sub-matters were:

- **Complaints/ disputes - course** (25%, N = 36/143)
- **Extenuating circumstances** (21%, N = 30/143)
- **Consequences of failure** (12%, N = 17/143)
- **Plagiarism** (11%, N = 16/143)

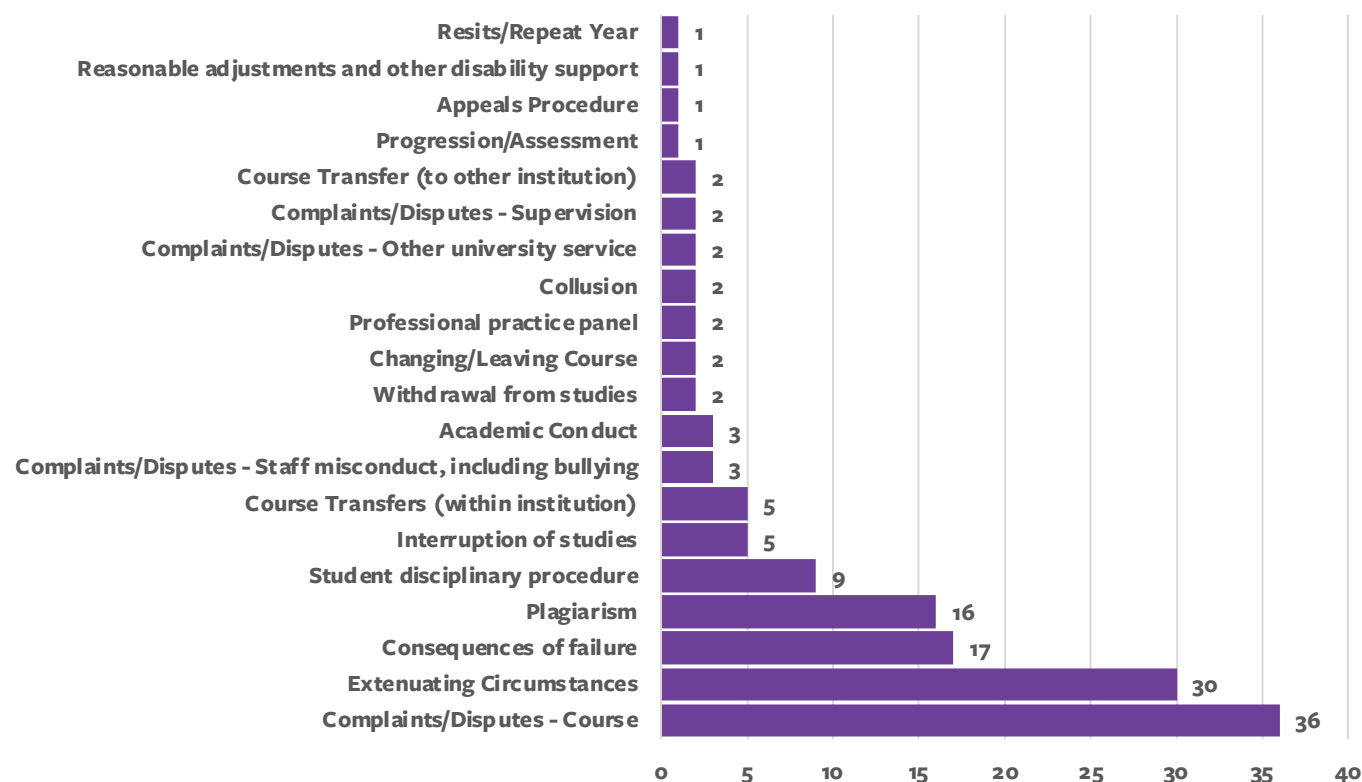


Figure 9. Clustered bar chart showing distribution of academic cases between September 2022 and December 2022. N = 143

Academic Matters CONT.



Advice Hub Insight

In comparison to the same period in 2021, page visits to extenuating circumstances saw an increase of 543%. Interestingly, this increase has not translated to cases within the advice service; this may be due to increased awareness of the Advice Hub.

Disabled students (N = 25/74) accounted for **34%** of all academic cases.

White students (N = 29/85) accounted for **34%** of all academic cases.” and “Asian students (N = 29/85) accounted for **34%** of all academic cases.



Different Groups Facing Different Challenges

When compared to data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)...

- **Disabled students are overrepresented within the service** (23% vs 11%)
- **Asian students are overrepresented within the service** (42% vs 27%)

- **White students are underrepresented within the service** (36% vs 54%)
- **Level of study, gender and fee status are accurately represented within the service**

252

Home student cases

55 housing cases

66 academic cases

118 financial support cases

48

EU student cases

9 academic cases

20 housing cases

14 financial support cases

236

International (non-EU) student cases

43 academic cases

91 housing cases

86 financial support cases

91

Disabled student cases

15 housing cases

42 financial support cases

↳ 33 Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases

60

PGR cases

17 housing cases

31 financial support cases

↳ 18 Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases

205

PGT cases

44 academic cases

62 housing cases

84 financial support cases

↳ 40 Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases
36 Activities Participation Fund cases

273

UG cases

68 academic cases

88 housing cases

104 financial support cases

↳ 38 Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases
59 Activities Participation Fund cases

189

Asian student cases

29 academic cases

85 housing cases

26 Sarah Douglas Hardship Fund cases

Demographics of Service Users

All: N = 712

Gender: 62% women (including trans women) | 37% men (including trans men) | 1% non-binary

Level of study: 51% undergraduate | 38% postgraduate taught | 11% postgraduate research

Fee status: 47% home/ UK students | 44% International students | 9% EU students

Ethnicity: 42% Asian | 7% Black | 10% Mixed | 5% Other* | 36% White

Disability: 23% disabled | 77% no disability

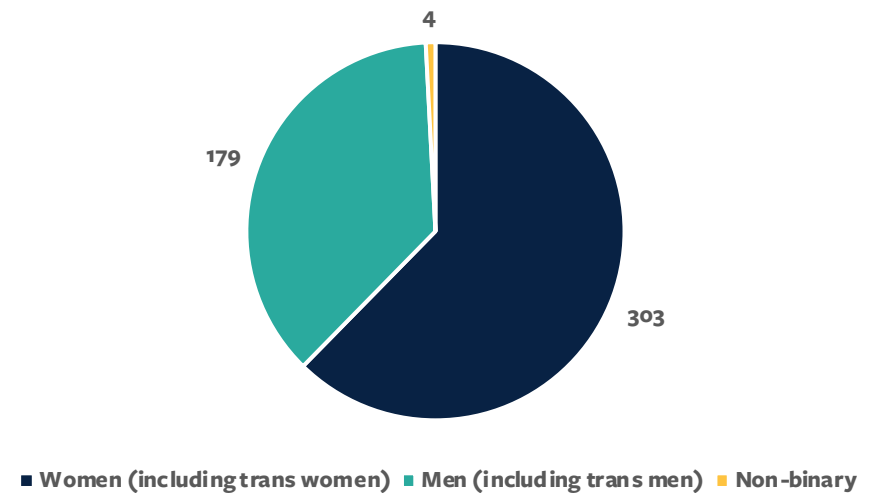
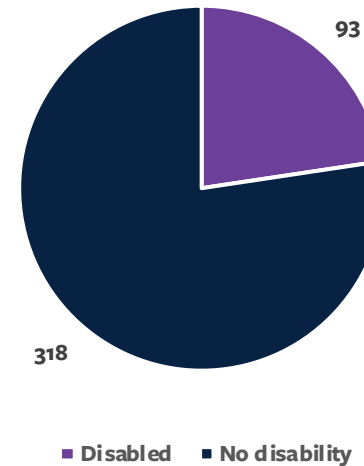
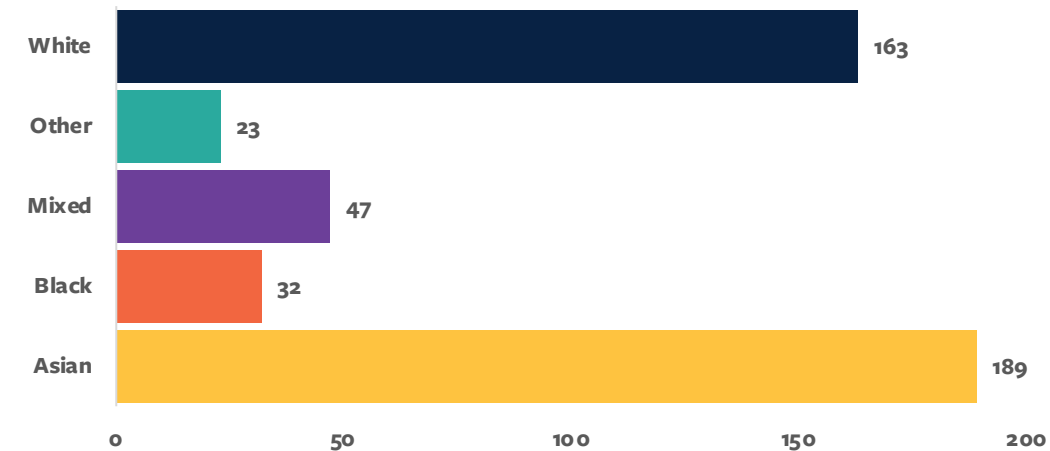
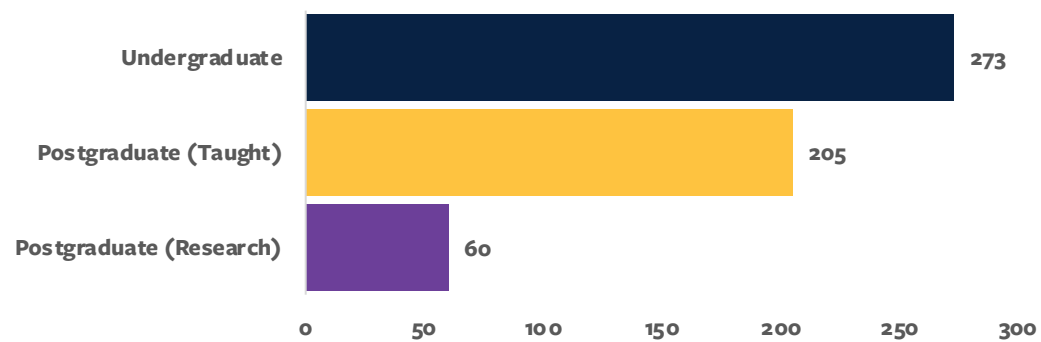
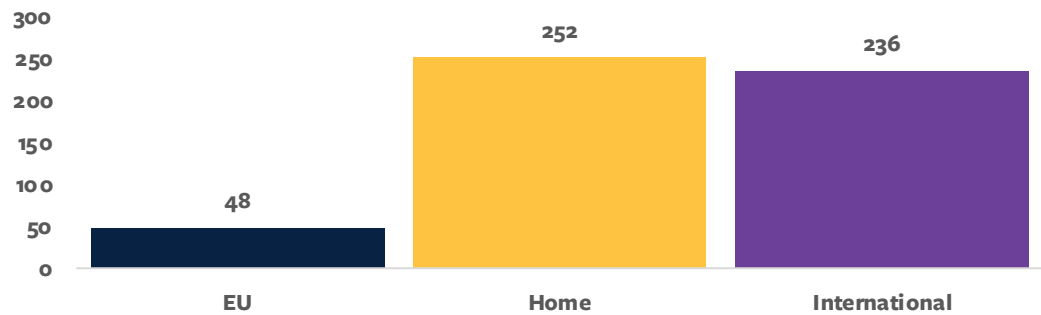
*Other includes Arab, Hispanic/ Latino/ Latinx, Irish Traveller, Romani or Traveller, and ethnic background not listed

About the author:

This report was written by Meg Haskins, Policy and Research Coordinator within Students' Union UCL's Policy and Research department.



Demographics of Service Users CONT.



Footnotes

¹ Office for National Statistics. (2023, January 18). Consumer price inflation, UK: January 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/january2023>

² UK National Statistics. (2023, March). Cost of Living Report - March 2023. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63f4ed73056f42572785c28e/t/640b4a3d20fc6122160c275e/1678461513650/Cost+of+Living+Report+-+March+2023.pdf>

³ Graham, B., & Brady, L. M. (2021). Young people and money: a review of young people's use of online information and advice. Money and Pensions Service. Retrieved from <https://moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/young-people-and-money-literature-review.pdf>

⁴ Office for National Statistics. (2022, December). Index of private housing rental prices, UK: December 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/indexofprivatehousingrentalprices/december2022>

⁵ The Guardian. (2022, December 1). Soaring rents making life unaffordable for private UK tenants, research shows. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/dec/01/soaring-rents-making-life-unaffordable-for-private-uk-tenants-research-shows>

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