

## Briefing: WonkHe & Trendence Non-continuation Survey

November 2020

### Introduction

WonkHe and Trendence, a student-focused market research company, have conducted a survey on student retention and non-continuation. Their aim was to know “whether students are considering dropping out, who is most at risk, and the reasons why they’re thinking about it.” Over 30 students’ unions (including Students’ Union UCL) offered feedback on the question set. The survey was open throughout October and over 7,000 responses were received from 121 providers, including over 450 responses from UCL students. This briefing will explore the key findings of this survey both at UCL and across the UK.

### Survey Data

- » Almost 1 in 8 UCL respondents (11.2%) have considered dropping out of university on a daily or weekly basis. While concerning, this is lower than the national response average (12.6%). Disabled respondents were far more likely to have considered dropping out on a daily/weekly basis at both UCL and nationally (21.3% at UCL, 20.5% nationally).
- » Amongst UCL respondents, almost half (46.7%) scored their happiness over the last two weeks at a 5/10 or lower, which is broadly in line with the national average within this range (45.9%), as well as the London average (44.3%). 59.7% of UCL respondents reported feeling lonely on a daily or a weekly basis, which is above the national response average (50.4%) and the London average (50.5%).
- » At UCL, satisfaction with the academic experience so far this term is at 56.6% with national satisfaction at 54.3%. These low figures are likely due to Covid disruptions to normal teaching, and widespread remote learning.
- » The number of UCL respondents who were satisfied with the wider student experience this term was just 31.8%, lower than the national response average (35.9%). This figure was significantly lower for disabled respondents at UCL (21.1%).
- » Only 46.5% of UCL respondents feel a part of a community of staff and students, compared to 50.4% nationally. The UCL figure is also behind the average for London responses (49.8%). At UCL, male respondents were less likely to report feeling a part of this community than female students (39.6% vs 48.9%).

### Survey Comments

- » UCL respondents reported issues with adjusting to online learning and many suggested in their comments that this is not something that they enjoy. However, responses largely avoided criticism of the organisation's role in online learning:

*"I wish we could do things in-person but appreciate all the university and staff are doing to provide us the best alternative experience possible."*

- » This attitude is also reflected by respondents when considering their wider student experience. Respondents are largely frustrated by the lack of student community and would like a more in-person experience however this is not generally blamed on the Union or UCL:

*"The university and SU are making an effort, but coronavirus makes it difficult to enjoy wider university life to its fullest."*

- » Amongst students who are considering dropping out, many factors were attributed to this, including feeling cut-off from their studies, feeling ignored by UCL, extra stress from the pandemic and a reduced university experience compared to normal years:

*"Because of the amount of debt I'm getting into for half a uni experience. How they treat us in halls also makes me feel very isolated and like I might as well be at home. I don't feel like any risk assessment between young people's mental health issues vs risk from coronavirus has been done."*

- » Suggestions for what UCL and the Union could do to support students who feel lonely include creating smaller virtual communities, more online social events, more face-to-face activities (although this may not be possible it is worth acknowledging that many students suggested this) more mental health support/ counsellors and a buddy system.
- » Many students still requested fee reductions, and aside from more social events this may have been the most common piece of advice for UCL or the Union.