

Briefing: Student Happiness Index 2021

October 2021

Introduction

In 2021, the NUS and student insurance provider Endsleigh spoke to thousands of students to assess student happiness. The research used a 10-point scale to measure current happiness and optimism for the future. The research provides Student Happiness Index Score, with the possible score ranging -100 (all students are unhappy) to +100 (all students are happy). The research aims to provide an annual benchmark for student happiness across the UK.

Student Happiness and Optimism

- » Students were generally unhappy during the 2020/21 academic year, as evidenced by an overall score of -16 on the Student Happiness Index (39% of students reported feeling unhappy, with 23% stating that they felt happy).
- » 49% of respondents said their university experience has been less enjoyable than expected, compared to just 18% who say it has been more enjoyable.
- » 57% of all respondents rated themselves as neither happy this year nor optimistic for the future. Only 16% of students reported being both happy and optimistic.
- » More respondents felt more optimistic than pessimistic about their life after university (35% vs 20%), however almost half of respondents (45%) gave a neutral answer.
- » Undergraduate respondents were slightly more motivated by their own drive to succeed than postgraduates (34% vs 33%). Postgraduate respondents were more likely to be motivated by their interest in the subject than undergraduates (33% vs 22%).

Mental Health

- » Almost half (43%) of respondents said mental health had caused them the most concern during Covid-19, the highest score of all options listed.
- » Respondents reported that many news stories had caused them concern or anxiety, including the Black Lives Matter movement & racial equality (51%), Climate change (51%) and Leaving the EU (47%). 70% of female respondents stated that Sarah Everard's murder & women's safety had given them concern or anxiety, with this score at 50% when considering all respondents.

Undergraduate Happiness

- » Undergraduate students consistently rated their happiness lower than other student cohorts.
- » Undergraduates were more likely to be unhappy and pessimistic for the future *after* their first year, with 66% of undergraduate respondents second year or above falling in this group compared to just 53% of first year undergraduates.
- » There was a correlation between feeling safe and supported at university and being happy and optimistic for the future; nearly three quarters of undergraduate respondents who were happy and optimistic for the future said they felt safe when they were at university; compared to only 34% of those that felt unhappy and pessimistic and 45% of undergraduates as a whole.