

Statistical bulletin

Coronavirus and first year higher education students, England: 4 October to 11 October 2021

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

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Student mental health and well-being](#)
3. [Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on learning](#)
4. [Vaccination against COVID-19](#)
5. [Student behaviour](#)
6. [Coronavirus and first year higher education students data](#)
7. [Glossary](#)
8. [Measuring the data](#)
9. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- Average life satisfaction for first year students was 6.6 (out of 10), similar to all students (6.5), but lower than those aged 16 to 29 years in general (6.9), and significantly lower than the adult population of Great Britain (7.1).
- When asked about how they felt over the previous two weeks, 37% of first year students showed moderate to severe symptoms of depression and 39% showed signs of likely having some form of anxiety.
- When asked if their mental health and well-being had changed since the start of the Autumn term 2021, 43% of first year students reported that it had gotten much or slightly better; this is higher than was observed in a survey of all higher education (HE) students (32%).
- First year students indicated a clear preference for any mental health and well-being support to be face-to-face, with 70% reporting they would prefer this and only 13% saying they would prefer a virtual format.
- When asked about how prepared they felt for studying at university, 38% of first year students reported that the reduction in face-to-face learning since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic meant they did not feel well prepared.
- The majority (90%) of first year students said they had already been vaccinated against COVID-19 at least once; with 78% reporting having had two doses and 11% having just one dose.

The statistics presented 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 findings of similar surveys, this has an impact on the level of certainty of this research.

2 . Student mental health and well-being

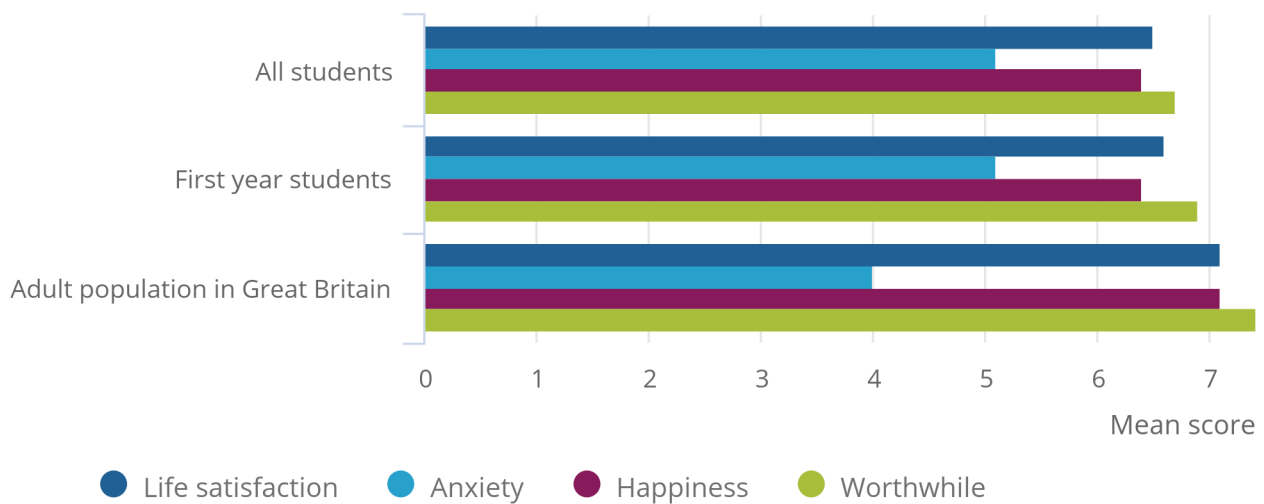
Average life satisfaction for first year students is 6.6 (out of 10), which is similar to the general population of students in England (6.5) (Figure 1). However, average scores are lower than those for 16 to 29-year-olds as a whole (6.9), and statistically significantly lower than the adult population in Great Britain (7.1).

Figure 1: Average ratings of life satisfaction for students are lower than general population

Average personal well-being ratings for first year students, England, September to October 2021

Figure 1: Average ratings of life satisfaction for students are lower than general population

Average personal well-being ratings for first year students, England, September to October 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Student Experiences Insights Survey, Student Covid Insights Study (SCIS) and Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

Notes:

1. Estimates for “first year students” are calculated from the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS) for foundation and first year undergraduate students in England, between 4 and 11 October 2021.
2. Estimates for “all students” are calculated from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS) for a representative sample of all higher education (HE) students in England, between 27 September and 4 October 2021.
3. Estimates for “adult population in Great Britain” are calculated from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, between 22 September and 3 October 2021.

Anxiety and depression

When asked questions about how they have felt over the last two weeks, 37% of first year students showed moderate to severe symptoms of depression. This is statistically significantly higher than both the general population of those 16- to 29-year-olds (22%) and the adult population of Great Britain (16%).

Additionally, when asked how anxious they felt in the same time period, responses from 39% of students indicated that some form of anxiety disorder was likely. This again is statistically significantly higher compared with 28% of 16 to 29-year-olds and 16% of the general adult population.

Please note that as this survey was conducted early in the 2021 to 2022 academic year, it is likely that this two-week period coincided with at least some of the students moving to or attending university for the first time. This may have contributed to these significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety.

When asked if their mental health and well-being had changed since the start of the Autumn term 2021, 43% of first year students reported that it had gotten much or slightly better. This is higher than was observed in a survey of all higher education (HE) students (32%). In contrast, 23% said that their mental health or well-being was slightly or much worse now since starting, which is similar to what was reported by all students (26%).

For more information about how indicators of depression and anxiety were determined, read [Section 8: Mental health and well-being measurements](#).

Eating disorders

Students were also asked questions from the Sick, Control, One, Fat, Food (SCOFF) questionnaire to assess possible presence of an eating disorder. Overall, responses from 23% of first year students suggested possible issues with food or body image. Responses from 27% of students suggested that they may have an eating disorder.

For more information about how indicators of depression and anxiety were determined, read [Section 8: Mental health and well-being measurements](#).

Mental health and well-being services

Over a fifth (21%) of first year students reported that they had engaged with mental health and well-being services since September 2020. The most frequently used services were general practice (GP) or primary care (47%), private counsellor or mental health service provider (30%), and the National Health Service (NHS) or Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme (28%).

When asked what services they would use if they required mental health and well-being services in the future, 16% of students reported they would go to a GP or primary care service, while 17% would use an on-campus university healthcare service.

Students indicated a clear preference for any mental health and well-being support to be face-to-face, with 70% of students reporting they would prefer this, and only 13% saying they would prefer a virtual format.

3 . Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on learning

Almost half (46%) of first year students reported that their academic performance had been significantly or majorly affected since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This is lower than the general student population (53%).

When asked about how prepared they felt for studying at university, 38% of students reported that the reduction in face-to-face learning since the start of the coronavirus pandemic meant that they did not feel well prepared. In contrast, 18% of students did not feel affected and 14% reported feeling well prepared.

The majority (53%) of students said that they would prefer a blended learning format in the future, with a mix of face-to-face and virtual lectures or seminars. However, 40% of students wanted face-to-face sessions only, while just 5% wanted online only.

More about coronavirus

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- [Explore the latest coronavirus data](#) from the ONS and other sources.
- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [coronavirus roundup](#).
- View [all coronavirus data](#).
- Find out how we are [working safely in our studies and surveys](#).

4 . Vaccination against COVID-19

The majority (90%) of first year students said they had already been vaccinated against coronavirus (COVID-19) at least once; with 78% reporting having had two doses and 11% having had just one dose. This is very similar to all higher education (HE) students (90%)

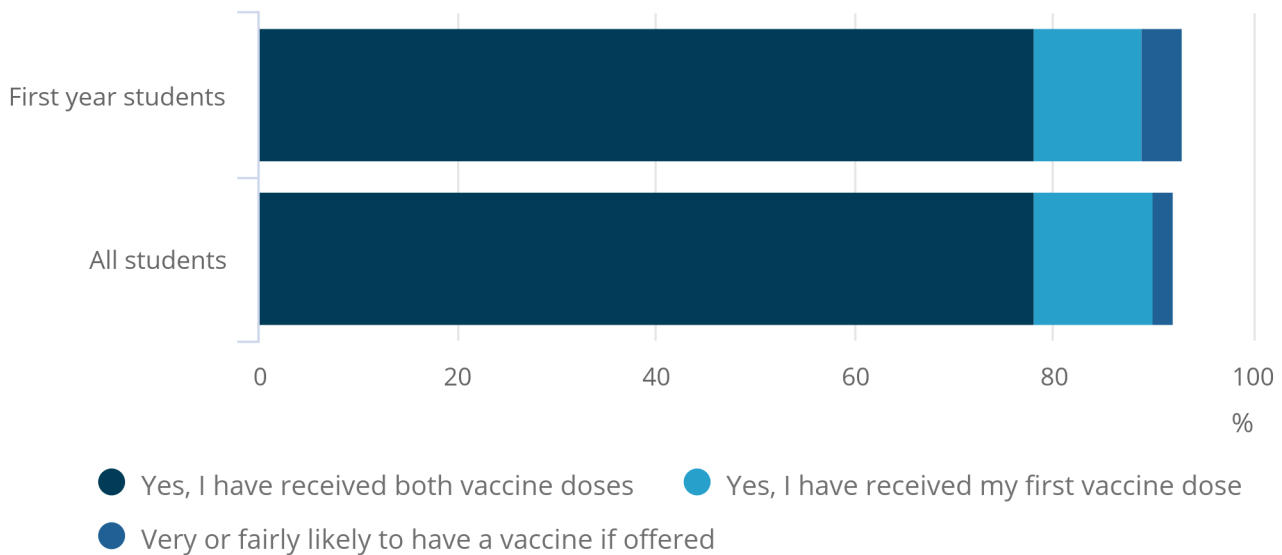
A minority of students (8%) said they had not been vaccinated against COVID-19. Of those, 35% said they were very or fairly likely to take a vaccine if offered, and 26% said they were fairly or very unlikely to do so.

Figure 2: The majority of students have received at least one vaccine dose

Vaccination rates for first year and all higher education (HE) students, England, September to October 2021

Figure 2: The majority of students have received at least one vaccine dose

Vaccination rates for first year and all higher education (HE) students, England, September to October 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Student Experiences Insights Survey, Student Covid Insights Study (SCIS)

Notes:

1. Estimates for “first year students” are calculated from the Student Experiences Insights Survey (SEIS) for first year students at universities in England, between 4 and 11 October 2021 (see Glossary).
2. Estimates for “university students” are calculated from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS) for students at universities in England, between 27 September and 4 October 2021 (see Glossary).
3. *Percentages based on sample counts less than 30.

5 . Student behaviour

When asked what they would do if they developed symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), 92% of first year students said they would request a test. This is similar to the percentage of all higher education (HE) students (90%).

Over half (54%) of first year students reported that if they developed symptoms they would stay at home for 10 days. This is similar to the proportion of all HE students who reported the same (58%).

If someone else in their household developed COVID-19 symptoms, 42% of first year students said they would stay at home for 10 days. This is also similar to all HE students (47%).

6 . Coronavirus and first year higher education students data

[Coronavirus and first year higher education students](#)

Dataset | Released 27 October 2021

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

7 . Glossary

First year students

Students included in this study are on their foundation year, or are first year undergraduate students studying at universities in England.

All higher education students in England

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published a similar survey of a representative sample of all higher education (HE) students in England. This survey is called the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS).

Where possible, comparisons have been drawn with the SCIS to compare the experiences and behaviours of first year students with that of all students. Where possible, the exact same questions have been asked in both surveys to facilitate this, but please note that the different time frames and sampling methods mean statistics are not directly comparable. The period of the SCIS used for comparison was 27 September to 4 October 2021.

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 the adult population in Great Britain. The comparisons are used to give a broad idea of the different experiences of each group, but the statistics are not directly comparable, as they measure data from different timeframes, slightly different questions and different sampling methods. The period of the OPN used for comparison was 22 September to 3 October 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.

8 . Measuring the data

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

The survey was conducted between 4 and 11 October 2021, using an online survey tool and all answers were self-reported. A total of 67,705 foundation or first year students at a selection of partner universities in England were invited to take part via their email address held by their institution. The response rate to the survey was 2.8%

At the time the survey was conducted, there were no restrictions to teaching and learning for higher education providers as a result of COVID-19. More information can be found in the [Higher education COVID-19 operational guidance](#).

Mental health and well-being measurements

Indications of depressive symptoms were determined using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-8) screener. Respondents were asked eight questions, and based on their answers, were assigned a score that indicates either no to mild symptoms or moderate to severe symptoms.

The anxiety score used in the analysis is derived using the first two items from the Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) screener. This is an established measure that assesses the degree of an individual's anxiety over the previous two weeks. Respondents were asked two questions and scored based on their responses.

You can [find out more about PHQ-8 and GAD-7 here](#).

Indications of issues with food, body image or an eating disorder were determined using the Sick, Control, One, Fat, Food (SCOFF) questionnaire. Based on responses to five questions, respondents were given scores indicating no issue, possible issues with food or body image, or possible eating disorder. To find out more about the SCOFF questionnaire read [SCOFF questionnaire: assessment of a new screening tool for eating disorders](#).

Weighting

Estimates in this report are based on weighted counts that are representative of the population of first year students studying at participating universities in England. Population totals are taken from the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\) 2019/20 estimates](#). Estimates are weighted to adjust for sex and university provider.

Uncertainty in the data

The experimental statistics presented in this bulletin contain [uncertainty](#). As with all survey data based on a sample, they are susceptible to respondent error and bias. This survey has a low response rate of 2.8%, which increases the uncertainty and the chances of non-response bias in these statistics. In some cases, we have used confidence intervals to determine whether differences between first year students, all students and the general population of Great Britain, are statistically significant.

9 . Related links

[Coronavirus and higher education students: England, 27 September to 4 October 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 22 October 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.

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

User requested data | 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](#)

User requested data | 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 coronavirus (COVID-19).

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

User requested data | 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 \(COVID-19\) latest insights](#)

Interactive tool | Updated as and when data become available

A live roundup of the latest data and trends about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other official sources.