

Together we **SHAPE** Tomorrow!

Our manifesto for the best
student life in the world



Intro from Jimena Alamo, President The SU Bath 2023 – 2025:

As President of The SU Bath, I am proud to lead a sector leading Students' Union, at a sector leading university. Synthesised from over 11,500 comments from current and prospective students, alongside a vast array of other data sources such as SU and national surveys, this manifesto outlines research led goals to ensure a world-leading student experience that few institutions are so well placed to provide.

We all know the last decade has meant a lot of uncertainty for the higher education sector. It has meant even more uncertainty and pressure on students. From several changes to the tuition and loan repayment systems, to the pandemic and industrial action in parallel, there isn't a single student that can say that their university experience has survived unscathed. The volatility of the sector and student experience by extension has meant that students' unions' work is to constantly react to new crises. Historically, we have left little time to plan for the future of the student experience in any given city.

The 'Together We Shape Tomorrow' work is one step in a new direction. We want to make sure we – a Students' Union in partnership with their institution – are prepared for the future. We went out and spoke to our students, from all years and all backgrounds, to hear what they thought our focus should be. We also spoke to the future participants of higher education and understood the concerns they already have regarding their university experience. Students and future students spoke; we listened. This manifesto has the ability to be a very powerful tool. It is an unprecedented effort, mapping a pathway for a future-proof, world leading student experience at Bath. As student leaders, we hope this work will allow us to pre-empt student needs, enabling the University to focus its efforts in the right places: where students need them most. Together, we can certainly shape tomorrow, in a way that is sustainable and empowers students to thrive during their time at university and after.



Intro from Eve Alcock, Director of Public Affairs QAA, former President Bath SU 2018 – 2020:

Students' Unions like Bath SU have a long history of delivering a vital and life-changing strand of the student experience for higher education students up and down the UK. The best student experiences are built on a strong foundation of partnership between a University and its Students' Union. Since I finished my two years as Students' Union President in 2020, the partnership between the University and SU has gone from strength to strength: setting long-term goals, prioritising collaboration, and preserving critical friendship to ensure that the university can utilise the expert lived experience of students when envisioning a future-proof university. The University of Bath community is, and will be, better off for investing in this partnership.

Delivering an excellent student experience is a constant journey, not a static destination. Within this document, The SU Bath has outlined some key goals the University should work towards to ensure the student experience at Bath remains world-leading over time. Across accessibility, learning, the city, student power, and community – meeting these goals will ensure students feel they belong and can thrive at Bath; the necessary components to ensure they can change the world around them. This work and the robust research and evidence underpinning the recommendations is a testament to the vitality of Students' Unions, and Bath SU in particular. These powerful student-led goals set a compelling precedent for how collaboration and partnership between universities and their SU's have the power to shape leading-edge institutional ambitions, role modelling the value of University and SU partnership as a tool for strengthening universities amidst challenging times within the sector.

Together We Shape Tomorrow:

Our manifesto for the best student life in the world.

This is our vision for the student experience at the University of Bath - an education and environment that will help us change the world.

We believe that when students come together, they shape the communities they are part of for the better. We grow and support communities of students to provide opportunities for others and change the world around us for the better.

The SU Bath is the collective body of students at the University of Bath. Throughout this manifesto, 'we' references both of us as students and The SU - the two are interchangeable.

Like many SUs, we provide social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities, support and advice, and represent the student community and its interests to the University and others.

Partnership is in our blood, in our hearts and in the concrete on campus. Good educational outcomes only happen thanks to a partnership between academics and students - and that is true at every level and in every aspect of a university, from classroom to boardroom and from course to campus facilities.

Often, it's our job to *respond* to things - proposals, plans, financial contexts and reviews of student services - centring the needs of students at Bath.

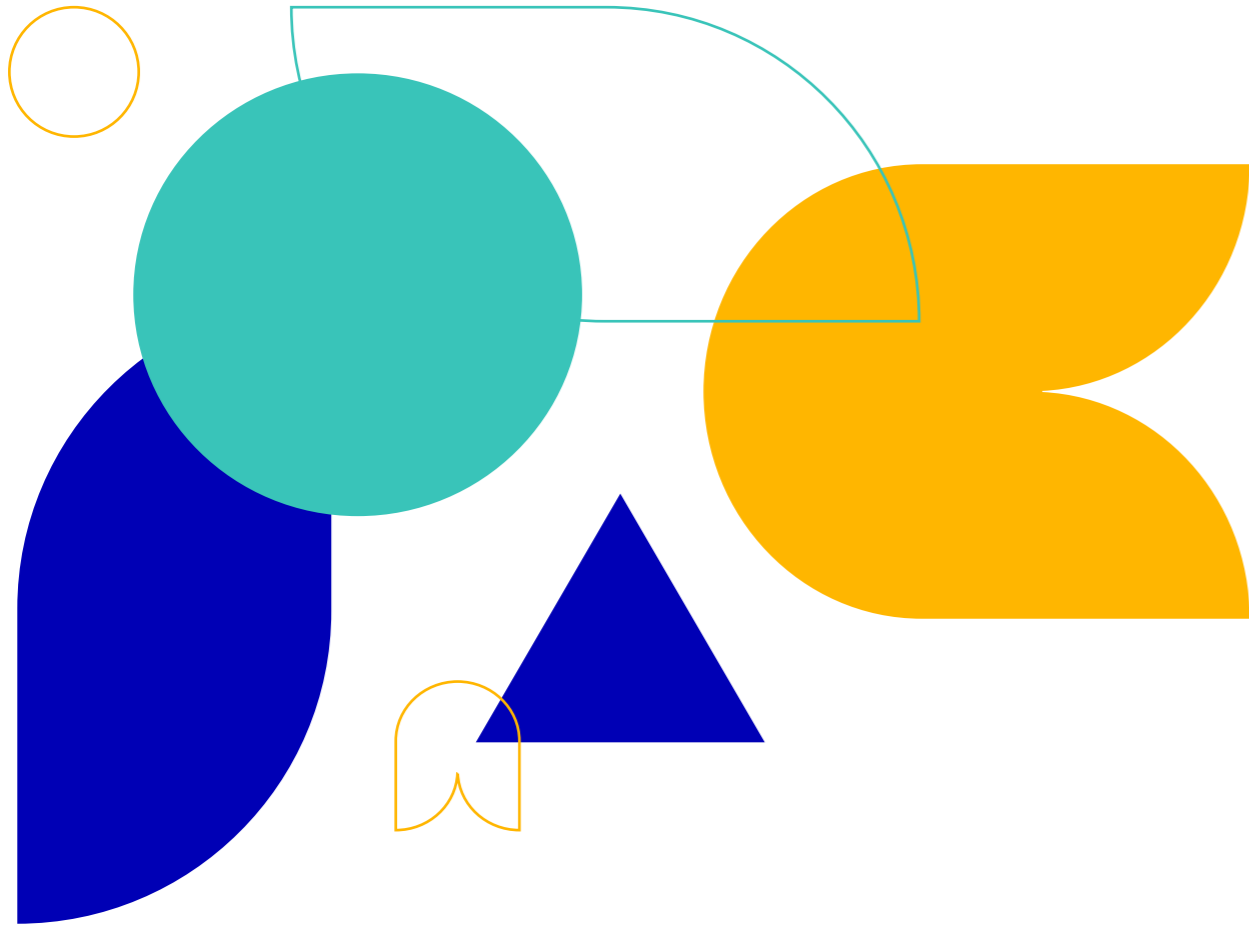
But real partners propose too. That is why we have worked hard over the past few months to create this manifesto with a bold ambition - that the University of Bath will be renowned for offering the best student life in the world.

To get here, we have consulted students, University staff and managers, community stakeholders and other SUs from both the UK and around the world. This manifesto is the summation of over 11,500 student comments collected from prospective and current students, as well as countless insight collected through years of research into student needs both generally and topically.

We have drawn on practice from other universities (both domestically and globally), learning from other sectors (both education and beyond) and have engaged students in creative conversations about the problems they face and the ambitions they hold.

We have six core ambitions for student life at the University of Bath:





There are aspects of our manifesto that we think the University of Bath ('the University') is great at now, elements where we think there's work to do, and components that will take time to work through to realise.

We say "best in the world" not because we believe in competition¹ - but because universities can take a cautious, risk averse approach, rather than being boldly ambitious and creative about the issues that students face. We think Bath can be better, and lead in this space.

Some of our goals involve a different, better funding settlement for students, universities and our cities. Some involve bravery, imagination and a different way of thinking. Many are about how we (as students and the University) work in partnership; the decisions we make, the areas that we prioritise and the approach we have to each other.

This is a busy time in a challenging funding environment. But we want to be able to work positively, in partnership, at every level and within

every corner of the University to discuss, plan and implement our manifesto in the coming years. Where we have broad goals, we expect to discuss what resources might be put in place to realise them; to continue improving the lives of the whole student body at the University, and to maintain and grow our exceptional ranking for student experience.

Where we have proposals, plans or ideas, we expect support to make them happen, and to be able to engage in positive discussion about a variety of ways to realise our ambitions for an outstanding university offer together.

As students, we dare to actively participate in discussions concerning students wherever they happen, and fearlessly challenge whenever student experience is not at the centre of decision making.

When students and the University work in partnership, we don't just shape a better university and student life - together we help students to go on to work with those around them to forge a better world and a better tomorrow.



6 ¹ University of Bath rankings <https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/rankings-and-reputation/generation-z-.html>

The University of Bath will offer the most accessible university experience in the world



We are diverse - in our cultures and ethnicity, our prior experiences, our subject choices and in the way we learn.

We see this diversity positively - we value inclusivity and representation across identities and backgrounds. We advocate for social justice, equality, and the breaking down of barriers related to race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity.

We expect institutions, workplaces, companies and communities to reflect and support our diverse perspectives. We see diversity as essential for progress and social harmony. We value our University operating on a human scale - the breadth of our partnership should facilitate the rewarding collaboration and innovation that diversity offers.

Sometimes "access" is viewed through disadvantage - through disability, race or socio-economics - a frame which emphasises a "deficit"

to be "fixed". But for us, access is about an ambition - where our diverse characteristics, backgrounds and political opinions become a strength to share and draw upon. We are ambitious that access at the University goes beyond the Equality Act, and that we seek to be a leading example of accessibility in the sector.

We believe that everyone deserves access to education that is inclusive, adaptive, and supportive - empowering us to reach our full potential so we can go on to change the world.

For us, access is about three things:

- 1 Our environments, teaching and services anticipate, and where that is not possible, respond rapidly and effectively to **disability and access**.
- 2 We can **afford** to learn and live comfortably.
- 3 Our whole community understands and celebrates **difference**.

Students told us:

Disability

Students shared with us their experiences regarding the implementation of Disability Access Plans (DAPs) across the University. In the *SU and Disability Advice Service Accessibility Survey 2022* students who had seen DAPs implemented successfully saw this support aiding them to achieve their potential. Those who had struggled told us that DAP information was not shared with all relevant staff, or was not being implemented.

In 2023/24, the Disability Advice Team reported that there were 1811 DAPs produced for undergraduate students; 87% of these contain the three adjustments - recorded lectures, notes in advance and the ability to self-record.

Students told us about their frustrations with the lack of lecture recordings and the impact on learning, especially for those who need to review content (not limited to students with a DAP or undisclosed disability or medical needs, but also international students, student carers, or students needing to work to afford university).

This is not a new issue and has explicitly been an SU Top Ten priority issue three times in the past 10 years². Despite this, elected student Faculty Reps reported (2023-24) that staff were not following through with the lecture recording progress made in the previous academic year (*SU Academic Exec meeting 24.11.23*), as well as widespread anecdotal evidence and individual cases of students acutely affected by this ongoing inconsistency - particularly for disabled students.

1811
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PRODUCED FOR
UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS

87%
OF DAPS CONTAINED
THE THREE
ADJUSTMENTS:
Recorded lectures
Notes in advance
Ability to self-record

Students who saw
DAPs implemented
effectively felt
supported to reach
their potential

Students who
struggled reported
a lack of shared
DAP information
and inconsistent
implementation



"I'm dyslexic and really struggle keeping up with lectures. I find it challenging to take in verbal information, especially when there [are] little visual aids. Hence, recorded lectures are vital to my learning." - 2nd Year Undergraduate Female student

42% of students reported that they received recorded lectures for all lectures, a further 38% reported receiving for the majority of lectures (*Together We Shape Tomorrow Survey May 2024*). A key theme from the Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement activity was recorded lectures. Students spoke positively regarding the flexibility and accessibility of being able to catch up on content if they were ill, disabled, or had other commitments, thus relieving anxiety and pressure. Students particularly valued having recorded content available to support revision and understanding of complex topics.

Beyond recorded lectures making education accessible for disabled students, we also hear from students that they are struggling financially, leading to choices being made between earning money and attending lectures. 1 in 4 students are reducing their travel to campus due to their financial situation and 12% are missing lectures because they need to work.

42%
OF STUDENTS
REPORTED RECEIVING
RECORDED
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38%
OF STUDENTS
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RECORDED LECTURES
FOR THE MAJORITY
OF LECTURES



1 IN 4 students are reducing their travel to campus due to their financial situation

Affordability

Students are continuing to feel the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and continued increases in costs for students is impacting on all areas of the student experience. In the SU's *Impact of the increase in cost-of-living survey 2023* we saw students commenting on the negative impacts of their finances on their lives and student experience, with feedback given again in the *Together We Shape Tomorrow Survey May 2024*.

The situation has not improved for students, and for some we see impacts worsening, with students reporting cutting the size of meals or skipping meals due to a lack of funds, and this impacting their levels of concentration on their studies. Nearly half of students told us that they were worried about a potential negative impact on their final degree grade due to the cost-of-living crisis.

"I am currently paying 130% of my maintenance loan towards rent. This is before bills, food, transport and other living expenses. Without financial support from my family I would be severely in debt or homeless." - Undergraduate, Home fee payer (Housing Survey 2024)

In addition to current students telling us their financial concerns, we saw prospective students attending open day already highlighting concerns with the costs associated with being a student, demonstrating that this issue is not one which will go away soon. It is also not a new issue, with issues around student finances having been part of the SU's Top Ten priority issues seven times since 2011/12.

Students also tell us about frustrations with campus costs. Whilst students welcomed the introduction of the £1.50 meals on campus, the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement also highlighted that students continue to view food and drink on campus as very expensive and would welcome more mid-price options which provide a greater variety and higher nutrition. There are also growing concerns that these options will be further limited or removed all together, as University financial pressures grow. We believe it is essential that this basic need for students is protected.



12%
OF STUDENTS
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NEED TO WORK

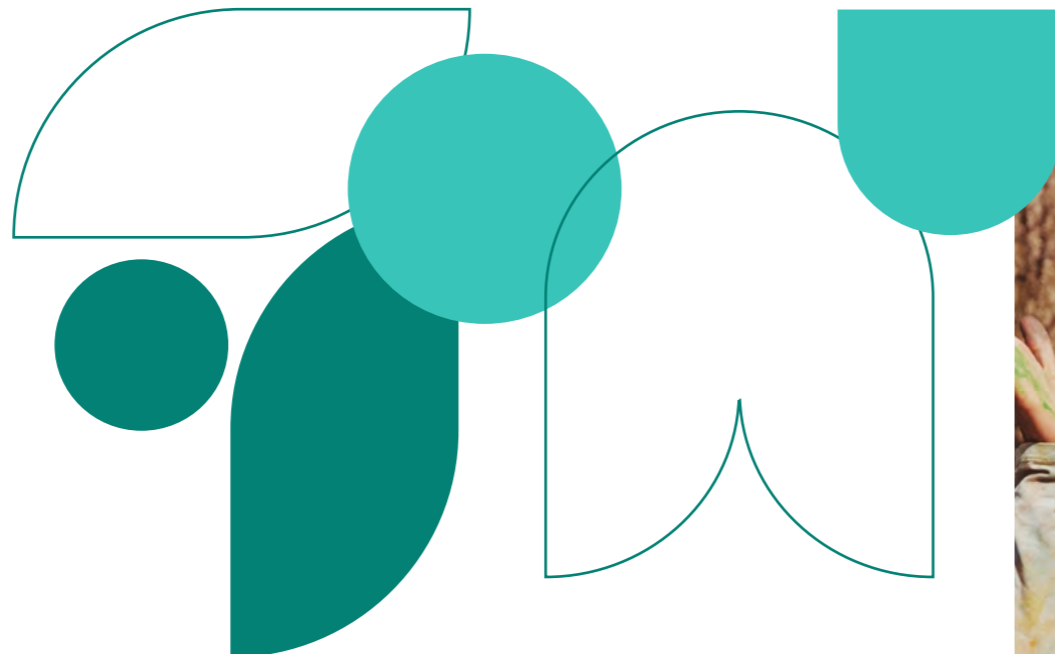


**ALMOST
50%**
OF STUDENTS WERE
WORRIED ABOUT A
POTENTIAL NEGATIVE
IMPACT ON THEIR
FINAL DEGREE GRADE
DUE TO THE COST-
OF-LIVING CRISIS

Difference

Students are also worried about political polarisation, their identity and background not being respected or understood, and through discussion groups, have expressed a desire for the University to better address controversial social and political issues. Students have identified that more support is needed for cross-cultural facilitation on campus, especially navigating differences between home and international students.

With reports from students on differential approaches to disability access initiatives and treatment from various University departments, we believe all students should be able to expect equity of treatment and experience from all areas of University delivery.



On disability, we want to see:

- ❶ Inclusive practice in teaching and learning as a de facto standard - with action plans and feedback measures on every programme that drive adoption and improvement.
- ❷ A commitment to ensuring that all students understand disability through induction - so that we can support and engage each other.
- ❸ Every student with a DAP gets the adjustments they need without friction - and is able to rapidly escalate for resolution, if not, without fear of reprisals.

On affordability, we want to see:

- ❶ The University calculates, adopts and recognises a minimum income³ for students - and where that can't be met, offers both financial support and a plan delivered internally and with its partners to drive down the costs that students face.
- ❷ A student basic needs approach and centre⁴ to provide a comprehensive support system ensuring that every student has access to essential resources like food, housing, mental health services, and academic support.
- ❸ A commitment - regularly tested for its efficacy - that every student enrolling at the University understands the likely costs they will face, and is

offered world-leading support to manage their money (i.e. through a meaningful, cash-value financial support scheme).

- ❹ Ensuring value for money for placement students through an ongoing assessment of support on offer before, during and after placements - adopting standards in the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework⁵.

On difference, we want to see:

- ❶ Visible targets and action plans, involving students, to improve the diversity of both staff and students at subject level - and a commitment to both engaging in and excelling in each and every relevant diversity charter or standard over the next five years.
- ❷ An outright ban on the instigation of romantic or sexual relationships between staff and students, and a dedicated inquiry, operated in partnership, into the causes of complaints from students about students that leads to preventative programming.
- ❸ A joint University-SU development plan to ensure that support exists for underrepresented communities to thrive and are enabled to both interact with others and celebrate and promote their cultures and concerns.
- ❹ A review to understand and address the experiential differences between home and international students, with a collaborative action plan built to provide an equity of experience.



2

**We will be
the most
empowered
students in
the world,
and this
will help us
change the
world**



We are motivated. We chose Bath because we wanted more control and influence over our education - seeking personalised and flexible learning experiences that cater to our interests and needs.

We see the University as an enabler of our ambitions to change the world. Through cutting-edge research, innovative teaching, and a commitment to social responsibility, we want to drive progress and address global challenges - making the world healthier, more equal, and fairer.

When we feel powerless - over our education, our experience or our lives - our health suffers, our satisfaction declines and we learn and earn less.

We believe that student power - exercised responsibly and mindful of responsibilities - helps students understand how they can shape their education and the world around them.

For us, empowerment is about three things:

- ① We understand our rights, processes and entitlements, and the responsibilities the University and others have to us.
- ② Student influence whenever a decision is made that could impact us - shaping decisions about our course, our university and our city.
- ③ Student choice: we are given maximum opportunities and exemplary support to shape what we learn and do around our talents and passions.

Students told us:

Rights

In 2023/24 (December 2023–July 2024), 149 individual students sought advice from the SU's Advice and Support Team relating to Individual Mitigating Circumstances (IMCs). Trends show that this is more likely to be home, undergraduate, and students who have disclosed a disability to the University. Nearly a third were also from POLAR quintiles 1-3.

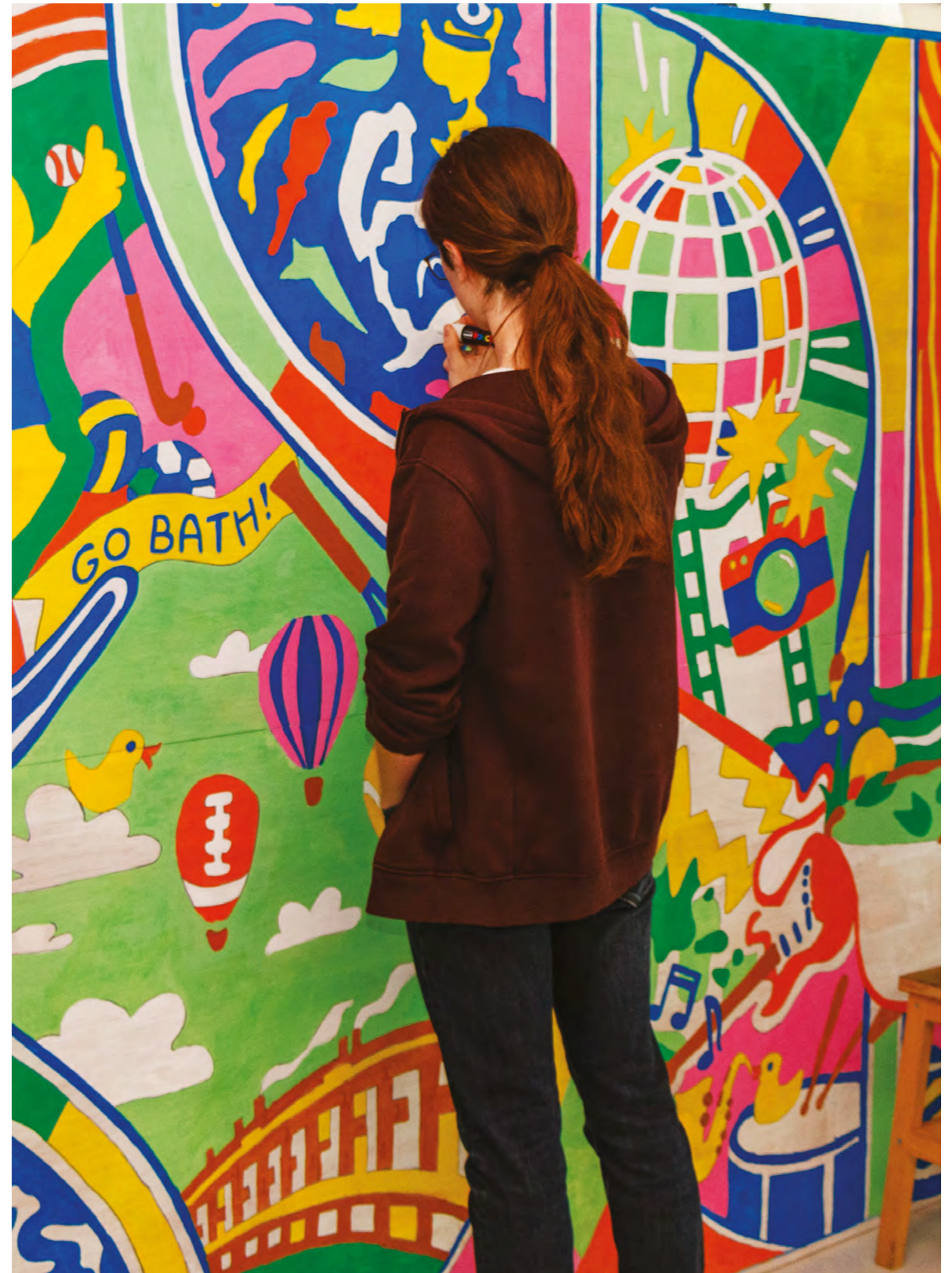
Over 100 students also sought advice relating to an Academic Appeal and a further 50 related to academic misconduct. In contrast to the IMC trends, these students were more likely to be overseas fee payers, with high numbers from an Asian ethnicity and postgraduate level of study.

Students told us, as part of the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement, that they see a real positive impact from having lectures delivered in person, preferring this over online delivery (not to be confused with recorded lectures, which as we see earlier in this report students highly value as an addition to their learning experience and an essential for accessibility).

Prospective students told us at open days (June 2024) that one of their key concerns was whether they would enjoy the course they choose, and what happens if they have made a mistake, whether they have the right to be able to change their course once they register. This speaks to how essential transparency of student rights and expectations are to student confidence and therefore student experience and success.

100+
STUDENTS
SOUGHT ADVICE
RELATING TO
AN ACADEMIC
APPEAL

50
STUDENTS
SOUGHT ADVICE
RELATING TO
ACADEMIC
CONDUCT



Influence

The SU annually facilitates the election, and ongoing support, of over 500 student Academic Representatives, along with student representatives who are members of core University committees. SU Officers are members of all major decision-making committees including University Council, University Finance Committee and University Senate⁶.

We see annually thousands of students engaging in SU elections, standing as candidates or voting, demonstrating that students are keen to have their say and use their influence to improve theirs, and others', experiences.

Students can give feedback through a range of mechanisms from formal representative structures, committees, surveys, and other informal feedback collecting opportunities on their course/research and the wider student experience. One of the key mechanisms for providing feedback on taught units is through the Online Unit Evaluation process. OUEs require a 30%, or 30 students, threshold for the OUE to be reported and actioned on, and significant numbers of OUEs fail to meet this threshold despite work in recent years to improve promotion to students. This means vital student insight is lost or ignored through the snags in this process.

Choice

Students like choice; the *National Student Survey (2019, 2021, 2023)* tells us that around 30% of students do not agree that there is an appropriate range of options to choose from on their course. We also hear from elected student Academic Reps that the reduction of unit choice following Curriculum Transformation has resulted in less flexibility to build a suite of content that they wish to study for some courses. This is often originally their main driver for choosing the University and their course.

500+
**student Academic
 Representatives
 elected and supported
 by the SU each year**



On rights, we want to see:

- ❶ A clear statement of rights – offering detail about what students can expect from the University and how they can resolve issues rapidly and without fear of reprisal when those rights are not met.
- ❷ A placement specific statement of rights – ensuring students on placements (both paid and unpaid) understand what they can expect from the University and employers, and how they can seek support when on placement.
- ❸ Further investment into peer support – ensuring this programme is a dedicated, credit bearing, and student led education programme with both compulsory and student-led elements that assists in transition, reveals the “hidden curriculum”, integrating social, study skills and health education, helps students manage their own development and builds understanding over what students should expect. Enabling all students, especially those from marginalised and/or widening participation backgrounds, to succeed.

- ❹ A commitment to carefully analyse casework and complaint causes and trends – as well as sources of occasions where students fail to live to up the responsibilities that the University sets – with joint action to prevent problems.

On influence, we want to see:

- ❶ A rigorous approach to module feedback where all students are invited to reflect on their own efforts and engagement as well as teaching, learning and facilities – and where it is compulsory for every

module leader to respond publicly both to feedback and the realities of student life with adjustments and improvements, regardless of sample size.

- ❷ A culture of partnership at subject level, where student representative communities form agendas for change and respond to feedback trends that they continually work with academics and professional services staff on to enhance provision.

- ❸ All professional services units to work in partnership with The SU to develop a student influence plan that combines formal representation with survey work and student partners that both assures and enhances the support on offer at the University.

On choice, we want to see:

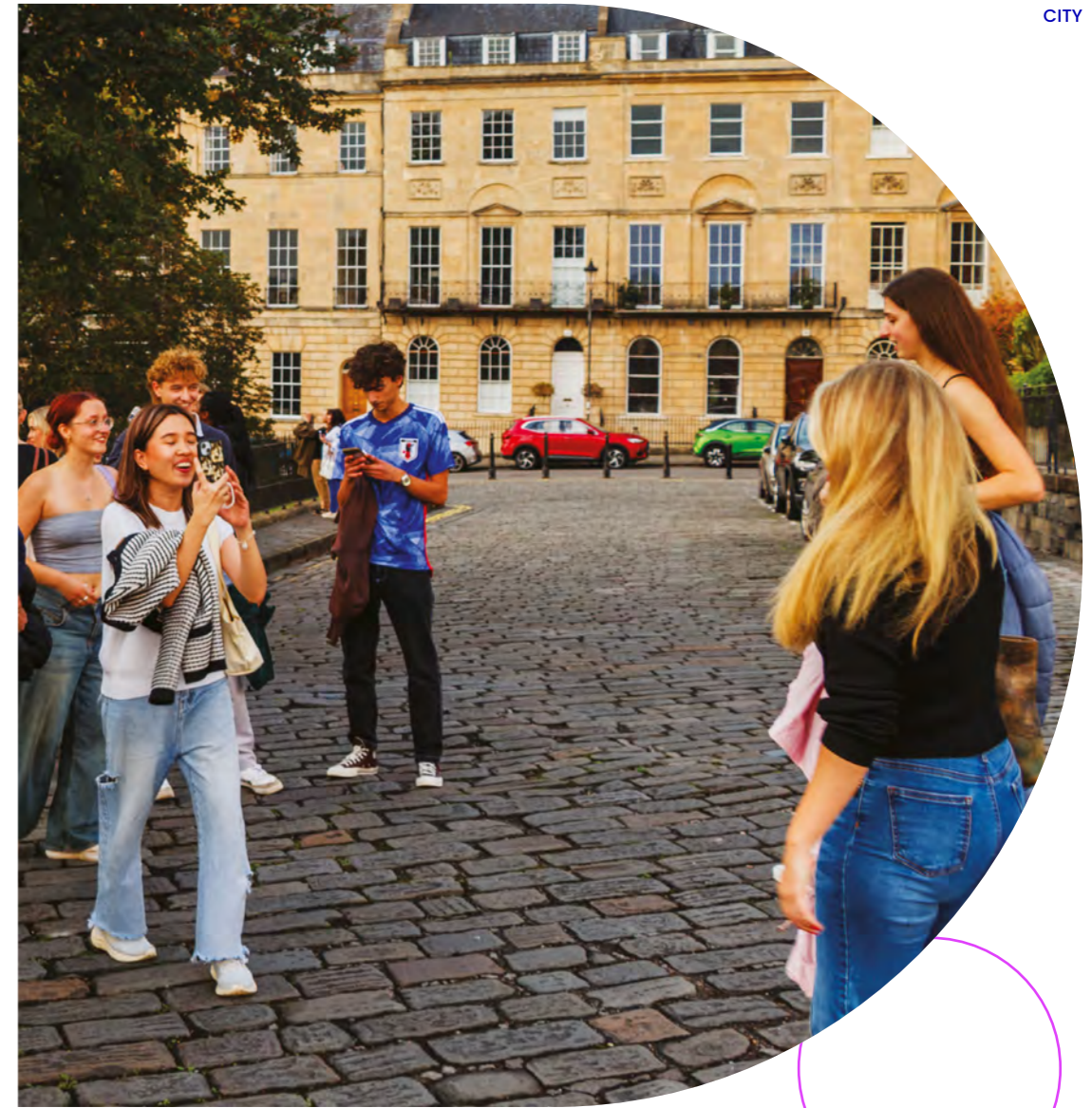
- ❶ A commitment to a curriculum that allows students to engage in interdisciplinary activity and that enables students to obtain credit both for their major area of study and wider interests – in conjunction with other HE providers, employers and the wider community.

- ❷ To work towards maximum flexibility in learning – including online, hybrid, and in-person classes to accommodate different learning styles and life circumstances. All students will be able to tailor their education to fit their personal and professional commitments, enabling them to balance work, study, and other responsibilities more effectively.

- ❸ A curriculum that enables all students to benefit directly from and engage in the creation of new knowledge – growing innovation and critical thinking.

3

Bath will be the best city in the world to be a student



We love our city. We chose Bath because it offers a rich history and vibrant culture - and we love that it's designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We think a great student city should offer a great living and learning environment with high levels of safety, beautiful surroundings, and a close-knit community. Its growing business community also offers opportunities for professional growth and career advancement.

We expect Bath to be our home - and many of us would like it to become our home after graduation. But for too many students, accessing housing that is affordable, of a reasonable distance from campus, safe and conducive to learning, is not possible.

We believe that students are citizens, and that both student-focused facilities and enhanced influence of students will improve their learning and personal growth, and the success of the city as an economy and community.

For us, being the best city is about three things:

- ① Safe, affordable and near to campus housing that is conducive to learning.
- ② An approach to student employment that helps us to integrate earning and learning.
- ③ City infrastructure that recognises us as citizens of the city and potential long-term residents, employees and business owners.

Students told us:

Housing

The subject of housing, and particularly privately rented accommodation, has been a key concern for students for a long time. The SU has included issues related to housing in its Top Ten priorities seven times since 2010/11, demonstrating that this isn't a new or time specific issue.

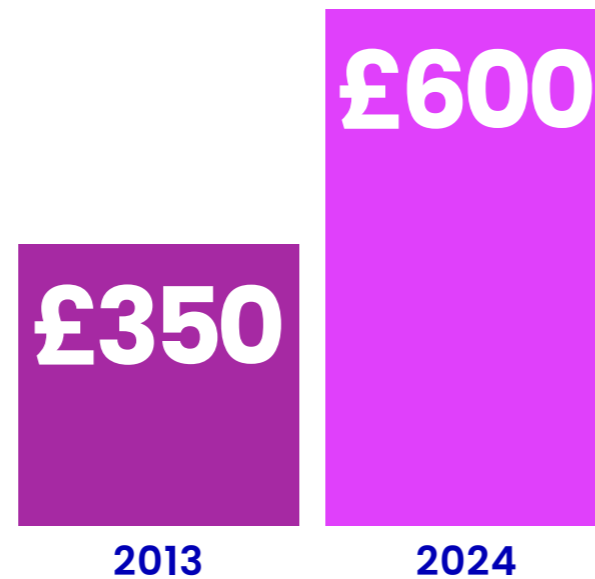
Students told us during the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement that rents are high, and the quality of housing is poor. In the eleven years between private sector housing surveys of students in Bath, the average monthly rent (exclusive of bills) has increased from £350 to over £600, and students experiencing problems with the condition of their property increased from 67% to 86%. 62% of students in the *SU Housing Survey 2024* felt that their accommodation did not represent good value for money, and almost half of students said that they could not definitively say that they would be able to afford their accommodation for as long as they needed it. Our international, particularly postgraduate, student community are paying higher rents, often for expensive private purpose-built student accommodation, perceived as a more safe and higher quality option and to avoid issues with guarantors when dealing with landlords and letting agents.

High rents combined with a highly competitive market for rented student accommodation has left students feeling pressured by lettings agents and landlords to sign for properties either without viewing them, or with very little time to consider if it is the right property for them.

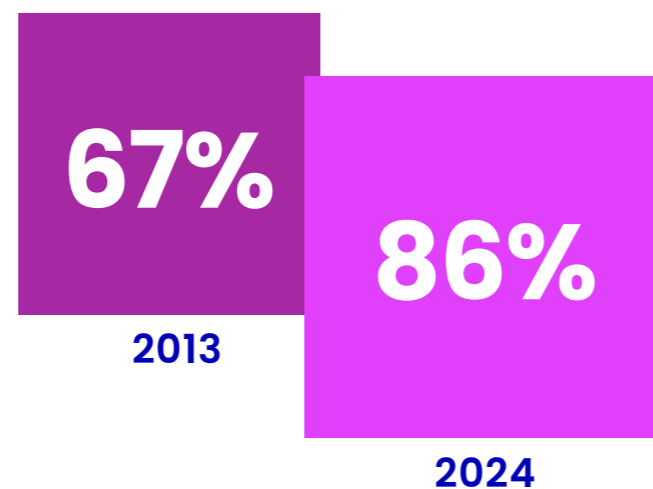
Disabled students also told us that their choice of accommodation was very limited in the private sector, with students more likely to have to take a property because there were no other options available to them.

"Demand too high, places going within an hour, so no other choice but to grab immediately." - Home fee payer, Undergraduate (Housing Survey 2024)

AVERAGE MONTHLY RENT



PROBLEMS WITH CONDITION OF HOUSING



High rents and a highly competitive market has left students feeling pressured by lettings agents and landlords

Many students sign without viewing the property or with limited time to decide



"Landlords also put unfair pressure on tenants to make a choice. We did a house viewing at 5 o'clock one afternoon, and we got a call at midnight that day demanding a decision." - Home fee payer, Undergraduate (Housing Survey 2024)

Students on placement, and doctoral students, found it particularly difficult to secure housing due to either not being able to attend viewings in person or properties all being taken by the time they are in a position to secure accommodation.

"We didn't end up viewing any due to all of us being on placement at the time and the letting agency stating we would lose the house if we waited to view it when one of us was able to."

"I'm a PhD student who got an offer the summer before the semester. I met the other PhD students in my department who got their offers around the same time because the interview process was late. ALL of us struggled a lot to find a place to stay. University accommodation was full, and there were very few properties."

Students told us about poor living conditions. 39% felt that their accommodation was not in a good condition, and 35% felt that it did not provide them with a good place to study, (Housing Survey 2024) leading to students seeking alternative spaces.

Significant numbers of students are living in properties with damp or mould present and felt uncomfortably cold in their homes and 1 in 5 are living in homes with electrical or gas hazards. These poor conditions are having a negative impact on students' academic studies and general wellbeing. For many of our students they do not know their rights as a tenant or feel that tenants do not have enough rights or know where to turn to for support.

"Horrendous sickness during the period without a boiler. This was also during exam season, so I lost valuable revision time."



1 IN 5 STUDENTS ARE LIVING IN HOMES WITH ELECTRICAL OR GAS HAZARDS

Student employment

Students told us that the impacts of the increases to cost of living is having an ongoing impact on all aspects of the student experience. Funding is not comfortably covering housing costs, students are reducing or skipping meals to save money, and increasing numbers of students report that the cost-of-living impacts are having a negative impact on their mental health.

We know from the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement that students see positive impacts in the opportunities they have to make friends and build communities through SU clubs and societies, and that students who engage are more likely to feel that they belong and are less lonely (*Be Well Surveys 2021, 2022, 2023*). However, increases to cost of living are impacting this. A third of students have reduced their engagement with extra-curricular clubs and societies and 44% have reduced socialising with friends to save money (*Together We Shape Tomorrow Survey May 2024*).

One way that students are trying to resolve this issue is through working part time. Over half of students are working alongside their degrees, with 77% saying that this is because of the increases in cost of living.

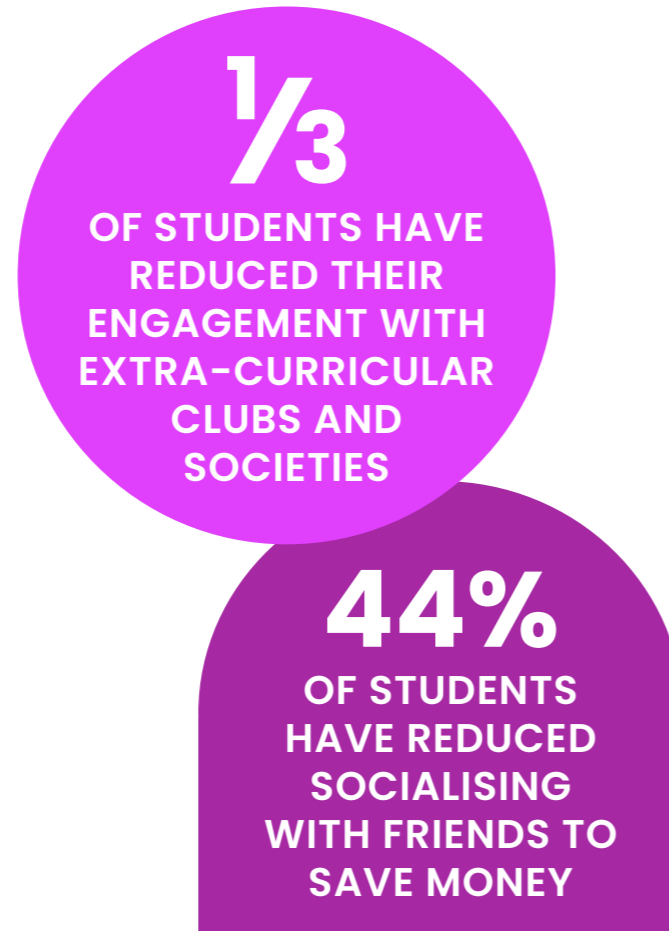
Most students are working between 1 and 11 hours a week, however 10% of students are working more than 23 hours a week alongside their studies.

"I have to work 60 hours a week in order to be able to support myself which directly and negatively impact every other aspect of my life." - PGT distance learner, male, home fee payer

Whilst working provides much needed financial support for students, the impacts on their studies and wider student experience is apparent.

"I have not been able to take any extra activities or be able to join clubs as I barely have time to study. If it comes to studying, I treat it as a priority, so I do not fall behind, but definitely I had few under-slept nights after work which did affect my health." - PGT distance learner, male, home fee payer

"I can't spend as much time on the extra learning things for my course, like extra readings to develop my learning. I'm only able to do the basic readings and assignments required for my course." - UG third year, female, home fee payer



City infrastructure

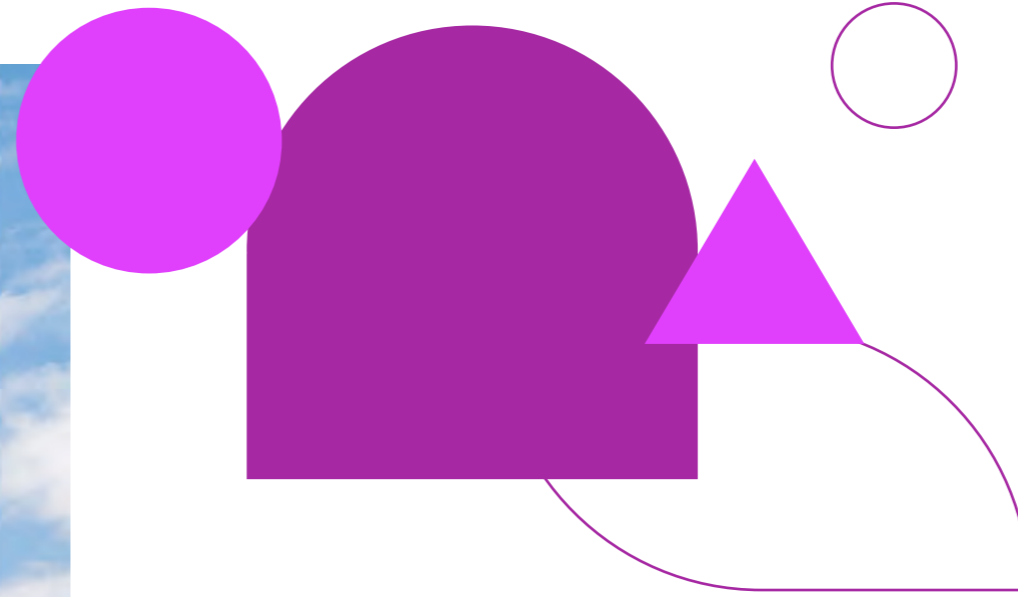
64% of students do not feel part of the local community where they live (*Housing Survey 2024*), with students picking up on anti-student rhetoric from long term residents leaving them feeling that they are not welcome in Bath.

"Lots of hostility towards students, women threatened legal action and shouted slurs and derogatory terms to one of our housemates because we were awake at 7am? Apparently too early?"

The city transport infrastructure for students getting to campus is highlighted year on year as one of the biggest issues faced by students in Bath. Students feel that the service provided is not value for money when faced with increasing prices, long delays at peak times, and overcrowding particularly at the start of each semester.

A quarter of students told us that they were reducing their travel to campus in 2023/24 to save money, with students missing lectures and other campus activities to reduce travel costs.

Increasing numbers of students report that the cost-of-living impacts are having a negative impact on their mental health



On housing, we want to see:

- ❶ A jointly owned student living strategy between the Council and universities in the city that seeks to guarantee that all students will be able to access affordable, safe, suitable and nearby accommodation – which includes bespoke support for the differing needs of PGT, PGR and international students in relation to housing.
- ❷ A city-wide housing accreditation approach that gives students assurance over safety and standards in their housing, and a city-wide approach to students knowing their rights as tenants, working towards all students in the city having access to redress assistance when a need to tackle a rogue landlord arises.
- ❸ Support for international students to access housing through a University guarantor scheme.

On employment, we want to see:

- ❶ A University-wide student employment strategy that seeks to maximise the number of opportunities for paid employment for students in the University's workforce, including supervisory and managerial roles as well as technical training and qualifications.
- ❷ The University to use its supply chains and wider influence to promote good student employment in the city, acting as a hub for opportunities and promoting good practice that strikes a good balance of flexibility between students and employers.

- ❸ Policies and practices in the University that recognise that students are often in employment to make up for student loan deficits, changing assessment loads and timetables to ensure that students can balance earning and learning.

On city infrastructure, we want to see:

- ❶ A strategy to secure affordable, accessible and reliable transport – with deeper collaboration between partners over cost and demonstrable improvements to service and a commitment to sustainable transport initiatives, including cycling and walking, to reduce the environmental impact of student travel.
- ❷ A commitment to working with partners to create social spaces for students to meet, collaborate, and relax, ensuring that the city offers more than just retail, sleeping and dining options. Existing space (e.g. vacant retail space) should be transformed into functional areas for students, addressing their needs for study, co-working, and social interaction, while integrating students into the broader community and economy.
- ❸ A plan on student integration in the city, with a programme of events that engenders collaboration between students and the city's long term residents involving science, business and the arts.

4

The University of Bath will be the most healthy and supportive student community in the world



We view our health as an important issue – we are proud that we are highly ranked in independent league tables for our world leading courses (such as Sports Science) and recognise that the University is a leader in high-quality research in health, as well as a leading university for sports.

We know the importance of awareness, access to resources, and support systems. We call for de-stigmatisation, comprehensive counselling services, and regular mental health education. We also know the value of preventative measures and a supportive environment that addresses mental health triggers and promotes overall well-being.

In our consultations, many expressed difficulties in making friends and building a sense of community, especially for those of us who are international and first-year students. We have been told of long wait times for support services and have a sense that sometimes teaching and assessment can harm our mental health unnecessarily.

We believe that health for students is both an enabler of academic success and an outcome in itself – it enhances academic performance, reduces stress, and improves overall wellbeing.

For us, being a healthy student community is about three things:

- ① An approach to health that is aspirational – and recognises that good mental health is both an important outcome and a precursor to our academic attainment.
- ② A portfolio of student support services that is responsive, student centred and provides space to for us to learn together.
- ③ Academic and social communities that build belonging and ensure that none of us feel we are alone at the University.

Students told us:

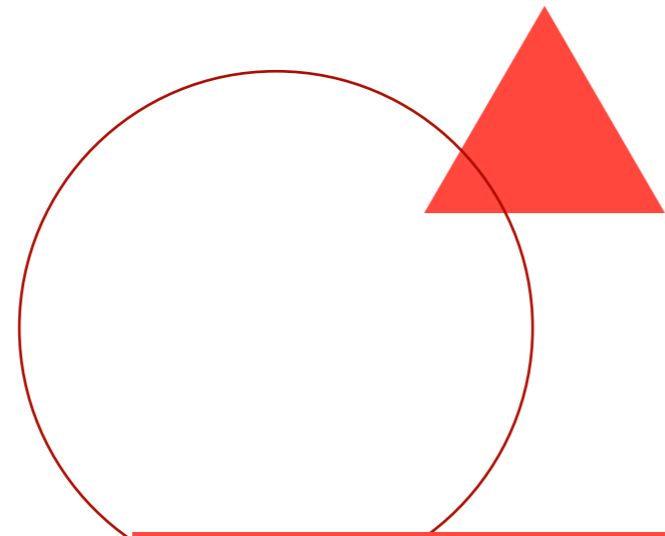
Health

Data from The SU and University Be Well Surveys (2019 – 2023) show that year on year more students are experiencing difficulties with their mental health, with increased numbers of students since the pandemic reporting that they arrived at university with a pre-existing mental health condition.

Students described high levels of stress and anxiety as part of the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement, with this particularly peaking around assessment periods, resulting in students criticising the bunching of assessments, and lack of communication between unit convenors, which negatively impacts their mental health.

Impacts of the increases in cost of living are also being felt by students in relation to their health and wellbeing, students are cutting back on personal hygiene and health items to save money and physical and mental health is being negatively impacted.

Students told us that preventative measures which would support student health included greater promotion of support available through channels students are already using (lectures, social media, emails), specific wellbeing offering for doctoral students, year-round wellbeing activities such as mindfulness practices, stress management, and self-care strategies to build resilience in students, and the reduction of key 'stressors' - namely the bunching of assessments (*Be Well Survey 2022, Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement*).



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**Students are
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**Physical
and mental
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a result**



Student Support Services

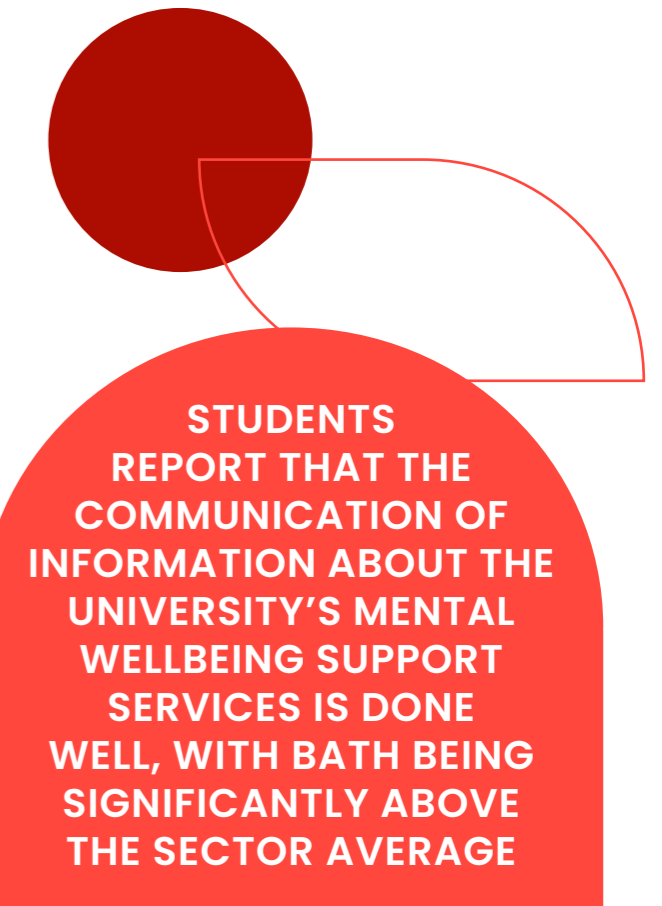
Students speak positively about support services, counselling and mental health services available through the University, as well as the support they receive from a wide range of staff in roles across professional and academic services. Positively, students also say that they would be willing to seek help should they start experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

Students report that the communication of information about the University's mental wellbeing support services is done well in the *National Student Survey*, with Bath being significantly above the sector average.

Three quarters of students agree that, when needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and support services had been helpful (*National Student Survey optional question bank 2024*), however students from black ethnicities are less likely to agree.

However, students told us about difficulties in accessing support services, such as long wait times for counselling or mental health support. A third of students accessing University Therapeutic Services reported waiting more than 4 weeks for an appointment, and half of these waited over 8 weeks (*Be Well Survey 2023*). It is also vital that students understand their entitlement to these services and support infrastructure while they undertake placements. Students suggested improving the availability and accessibility of mental health support services on campus. Students also highlighted the importance of being able to access a diversity of therapists reflecting the diverse student population.

Doctoral students have identified the dynamic of being students as well as staff and colleagues (when teaching) as something which can cause tension within supervision relationships, with some students not feeling able to raise honest feedback



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and seek support because of this dynamic (PRES 2023). Anecdotal evidence and feedback via The SU Advice service has also indicated a disparity in the pastoral training of doctoral supervisors, impacting on the consistency of health and wellbeing support students can hope to access. Many doctoral students do not feel able to access extracurricular opportunities because of their teaching responsibilities.

Year on year we see half of our student community reporting that they are supporting someone else who is experiencing mental health problems which in turn causes them to experience stress (*Be Well Surveys 2019 – 2023*). Support therefore needs to be in place for those supporting others, opening dialogue and conversations, and supporting students to seek professional support where needed.

Communities

Being part of a community and having a sense of belonging is important to students. Prospective students told us at open days that they expect to make lifelong friendships and meet lots of new people when coming to university (*Together We Shape Tomorrow open day engagement*), so these expectations are starting long before students arrive at Bath.

Students spoke positively of finding their communities through SU clubs and societies, and also departmental activities and events when living in University halls (*Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement*). Be Well Surveys show year-on-year that students engaged in extracurricular activities were less likely to feel lonely and more likely to feel a sense of belonging and community.

64% of students are satisfied with the opportunities they have to interact socially with other students. Barriers faced were linked to reduced finances due to increased cost-of-living and the intensity of their course, leading to a lack of time to engage with others (*Together We Shape Tomorrow Survey May 2024*).

Distance learners and students living off campus also had difficulties connecting with other students due to restricted opportunities to access on-campus facilities designed to facilitate students coming together.

The community within an academic department is important to students. 72% of students reported forming their friendship group at university by making friends on their course (*Together We Shape Tomorrow Survey 2024*). Recent feedback from undergraduate student representatives showed that being an integral part of the University community was highly important to them and they felt part of a community of staff and students. Despite this, there are around 30% of students who are not feeling part of a community within the University (*National Student Survey optional bank of questions 2024*).

We saw clear connections between students' feelings of being part of a community at a departmental level and the engagement with academic representation, SU departmental societies, and peer support schemes. This speaks to the need for investment in academic community development.

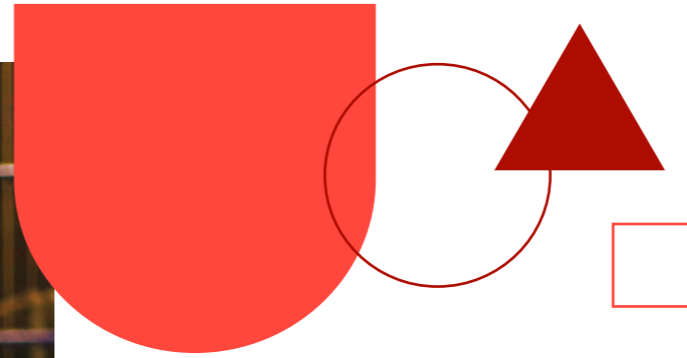
64%
OF STUDENTS ARE
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INTERACT SOCIALLY
WITH OTHER
STUDENTS

72%
REPORTED
FORMING THEIR
FRIENDSHIP
GROUP BY MAKING
FRIENDS ON
THEIR COURSE

**AROUND
30%**
OF STUDENTS DON'T
FEEL PART OF A
COMMUNITY WITHIN
THE UNIVERSITY

Some of our student communities find making connections and having a sense of belonging more challenging, particularly communities who are based off campus (distance-learners, placement students), and those here for a limited time (one-year master's courses).

**Feedback from
undergraduate student
representatives shows
that being an integral
part of the University
community was highly
important to them**



On health, we want to see:

- ① Counselling and advisory services that are culturally competent, student-centred, and easily accessible, including expanding online counselling options – with a high priority review of wait times.
- ② New staff training programs must include mandatory mental health awareness training, regularly updated to reflect new research and best practice, supporting all staff with pastoral responsibilities to do their role safely.
- ③ Ensuring there is placement specific health and student support guidance.
- ④ To work towards all new students engaging in an initial mental health check-up that enables them to develop a personal plan to maintain and improve their wellbeing.
- ⑤ To aspire to join the “healthy campus” initiative and guarantee all students affordable access to facilities, services and activities aimed at improving their physical health – regardless of their sporting prowess.
- ⑥ Collaboration to build an inclusive sport and physical agenda, enabling all students to take part in physical activity regardless of physical or financial access barriers.
- ⑦ A city-wide partnership between the universities, SUs, NHS and public health officials that integrates services and prevention efforts and provides friction-free pathways for students that need support ensuring students do not fall through the gaps between services as they transition to, through and beyond university.

On student support services, we want to see:

- ① Counselling and support services that are responsive, culturally competent, student-centred, and accessible – including expanded online options.

② Mandatory and regularly updated mental health awareness training for academic staff, alongside peer support networks guided by professionals so staff with pastoral responsibilities are supported to deliver outstanding guidance throughout our academic lives.

③ Ensuring there is placement specific health and student support guidance, and that placement students understand the differences in support they can expect from their University and their employer.

④ A campus master plan that sees the university work towards spaces that are conducive to social learning, healthy and maximises “third” spaces owned by students as their second, academic home – with the ability to prepare food for themselves and others as central to the plan.

On academic and social communities, we want to see:

① For every subject area to host a thriving academic community body, which is trusted to and is capable of taking responsibility for student representation, social activity, study skills and subject-focused career activities, and for the SU to be resourced to enable this consistently across the institution.

② A commitment to systematically measure the belonging of students in a way that enables targeted action to boost associative activity on campus.

③ Create a bespoke programme of enhancements based on the needs of international students, maximising the benefits of being a global and diverse university.

④ A move over time to maximise the number and quality of physical spaces across campus and in the city for use by student communities, providing a “home” for students whatever their subject.

5 Our learning experience at Bath prepares us to change the world



We are ambitious. We are curious, inquisitive, sociable and engaged in our education.

We come here to learn - from leading academics, inspiring teaching and cutting-edge technology - so that we can change the world. We want to ensure we can all access the outstanding learning opportunities at the University and make the most of these opportunities when being taught, when on placement and/or undertaking research. We also want to learn from each other, and our wider community. And we want to learn how to do things for ourselves. We will only change the world when we can work with, inspire and influence others.

We think that learning is changing. Artificial Intelligence isn't just about academic integrity - it has tremendous possibility for the future of learning and life. We must find ways to address this shift in society to enable a future-proof learning experience.

We believe that our learning should help us change the world - we think that clear support for independent study that builds our confidence and cutting-edge teaching, learning and assessment will help us do so.

For us, learning is about four things:

- ① A consistently high-quality teaching and learning experience - where delivering the basics removes barriers, and we are given the feedback we need to apply our knowledge, not just repeat it for assessments.
- ② Being able to access, influence and be exposed to the real world outside of the classroom.
- ③ The best support for learning available - from the University and each other.
- ④ A supportive, nurturing and bespoke environment for research students.

Students told us:

High quality teaching

The University of Bath scores highly year-on-year in the *National Student Survey* with regards to the quality of teaching students receive and sits above the sector average. This together with the achievement of TEF triple Gold, shows a high level of learning and teaching at the University. Students told us during the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement about the positive impacts that stimulating and interested academic staff made to their academic experience.

However, there are inconsistencies, and students also told us about staff who were disinterested in the subjects and students, who relied too much on old, repeated content and reading from slides. Students told us they benefit from passionate and helpful lecturers and an interactive course delivery. The *National Student Survey optional bank 2024* showed that course delivery was an area of concern for students, particularly that the delivery of the course has not been stimulating. This was also one of the key themes raised by student Academic Representatives in Staff Student Liaison Committees.

Prospective students at open days told us that even before choosing their course or university of study, they are already thinking ahead to wanting a good outcome with a good career post-graduation.

Feedback on teaching is primarily collected through all student surveys (*National Student Survey*, *Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey*), *Online Unit Evaluations*, and student representative feedback shared at *Staff Student Liaison Committees*. There are clear inconsistencies with regards to how students are involved in action planning following *NSS* and *PTES* (and *PRES/PDES*) results being available.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH CONSISTENTLY SCORES ABOVE THE SECTOR AVERAGE IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY FOR QUALITY OF TEACHING

COURSE DELIVERY WAS AN AREA OF CONCERN FOR STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY THAT THE DELIVERY OF THE COURSE HAS NOT BEEN STIMULATING



National Student Survey data reveals that University of Bath students are dissatisfied with the quality of learning feedback, rating it significantly below the sector average

Assessment and Feedback

They also told us about issues with assessment and feedback - including unfair grading, a lack of timely and constructive feedback, and inconsistencies across units.

Year-on-year *National Student Survey* data shows that students are not happy when it comes to feedback that helps them to learn. Bath is significantly below the sector average in this area and students are asking for clear and constructive feedback that helps them improve their academic work (*Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement*).

Despite assessment and feedback being an SU Top Ten priority issue nine times since 2011/12, and multiple working groups to tackle the issues, students continue to be unhappy. They told us that they are:

- Frustrated with delays in receiving feedback, leading to difficulties in applying the feedback to future assessments and improving their performance.
- Lacking the detail or specifics needed in their feedback to help them understand where they went wrong or how they can enhance their work.
- Noting inconsistencies in feedback quality between different markers or departments.
- Concerned when their work is marked by individuals who lack expertise in the specific subject area, leading to feedback that may not be relevant or useful.

Students value feedback as a crucial component of their academic development, but improvements to timeliness, detail, consistency and relevance is necessary to enhance their learning experience and help them to reach their full potential.

Students want to perform to their best and, to do this, need the tools to help them to succeed in their assessments. Students told us about limited availability to past papers, exemplar answers or solutions to exam questions, and needing clarity in assessment criteria to help them to achieve their potential (*Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement*).

Group work continues to be a contentious form of assessment, whilst some students thrived and

welcomed opportunities to simulate real working situations alongside others, others raised concerns about the frequency it is used as an assessment method for some courses and how unequal contributions from group members are dealt with and the impact on individual grades.

"Far too much group coursework, particularly in the final year of my degree - it becomes about who you know, how clever your group is and how hard everyone in the group is willing to work. This is not fair at all and often I felt I did far more work than others in my groups" - National Student Survey 2024 open comments

Real world influence

Students reflected on the positive impact that having real world influences on their courses had, from connections with industry, to 'real-life' application of course content, and the chance to undertake a placement to apply their learning and develop key skills (*Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement*). 52.17% (*NSS 2024 question B5.5*) of students agreed that the taught portion of their course prepared them for placement, indicating room for improvement in managing student expectations and preparedness for this aspect of learning.

Within The SU, every year over 4,000 students participate in voluntary roles, either volunteering for local charities or projects, or as a student leader giving back to the student community at the University of Bath. Many students were frustrated that their learning and skills developed from voluntary activity was not formally recognised, and for many others, the option to engage with these opportunities is not possible due to financial constraints.

Doctoral students told us that they do not have the capacity to take on additional voluntary or student leadership roles due to the pressures of both their research and teaching demands. Almost 70% of doctoral students report taking on paid teaching roles alongside their research (*Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023*). Therefore, they are not able to engage with the same level of opportunities as their postgraduate taught or undergraduate peers.

Support for learning

As previously mentioned, students spoke positively about the support they received from staff to support their learning, academic and professional services staff linked to their course or department/ the School. The University of Bath scores incredibly highly on questions related to academic support and organisation and management in the *National Student Survey* and is above the sector average.

However, students told us that workload and bunching of assessments are not supportive for their learning. Workload had been consistently low scored in the optional bank of questions in the *National Student Survey* from 2017 onwards. Students do not agree that their workload is manageable, the course applies unnecessary pressures on them, they cannot always complete work to their satisfaction due to the volume of work, and they generally do not have enough time to understand the things they have learnt.

We heard from students the negative impact of bunched assessments and high workloads on their mental health and students have less time available to them due to needing to work alongside their studies.

We have heard some instances of placement students falling between the cracks if things go awry when on placement, and misunderstandings about responsibilities for pastoral care – particularly, what issues should be raised to the employer and their responsibilities, and how or whether the University can or should support students in these instances.

The usage of GenAI is steadily growing. Student Academic Representatives raised concerns about the consideration of their impact on idea generation and creativity, timesaving, and accuracy checking. Students call for more vigilance in reviewing literature, both in terms of reliability and potential copyright issues; they are worried about non-native English speakers who may lean more on AI when lacking confidence in expressing their ideas. They raised questions about the future of education, raising doubts about the fairness and effectiveness of assessing students using AI. Whilst AI is likely to become more featured in the future, students want to see support and guidance from the University as well as opportunities to explore what it has to offer.



Research students

Doctoral students have noted a shift in staff contact to being a mix of in-person and online, and spending more time themselves working off campus, with meetings held virtually becoming more accepted.

The dynamic between doctoral students and staff is markedly different when compared to other student groups: doctoral students' primary point of contact is their supervisor and researchers in their field, creating a dynamic that resembles colleagues more than student-teacher. This dynamic is exacerbated by the fact that many doctoral students take on paid teaching work, often placing them in a grey area between staff and students.

As one student stated:

"In my department, I get the feeling that staff don't really respect PhD students' opinions as much, and ultimately the PhD students are considered as staff when it's convenient to, but as students when our opinions are too controversial or they don't want to listen." – Department of Biology & Biochemistry PRES Open Text Comment

Students feel their workload is unmanageable, with excessive pressure that prevents them from completing work to their satisfaction or fully understanding what they've learned



On high quality teaching and learning, we want to see:

- ❶ Every member of academic staff to hold a relevant teaching qualification - and for all staff to be trained to embed wellbeing in the curriculum and its delivery, including those who support placement, PGT and Doctoral students.
- ❷ A systems approach that ensures that all students can access academic support, including contacting and getting timely responses from academics, including during the placement.
- ❸ Deeper, granular learning in partnership with students on the cause of poor NSS, PTES and PRES scores - with action plans for improvement in every subject area.

On the world outside of the classroom, we want to see:

- ❶ A work- and volunteering-first academic model, where academic credit is awarded and time able to be taken on every programme for the learning that students get from taking responsibility and serving others.
- ❷ A switch over time to a career design⁷ approach that enables us to integrate sustainability, employability, health, and well-being in our long-term plans - with a range of activities, both in house and with partners, that help us get there. And enhanced support for every student to start their own business - and where self-employment is neither possible nor allowed, a commitment to employ and engage student staff as managers, supervisors and decision-makers in every aspect of campus delivery.
- ❸ Ensuring students understand the expectations they will face during placement and that this is addressed during the taught portion of their course.
- ❹ The climate emergency reflected as a key priority of the University, and collaboration with students to build an ambitious plan to address sustainability.
- ❺ A review of transition support to the job market for international students, including promotion of post-study work visas as means to access student talent to small and medium enterprises, a review of support for students on and obtaining placements, and a deeper understanding of international labour markets.

On support for learning, we want to see:

- ❶ A review of all shared facilities, services, spaces and software to determine demand, assure capacity and identity and eradicate "pinch points".
- ❷ A guarantee of proper support and consistent approach for groupwork - enabling students to understand how to get the best from each other, hold each other to commitments when made and raise issues and get support when things go wrong.
- ❸ A guarantee of proper support and consistent approach for placement - enabling students to understand how to get the best from this portion of their degree, and how and where to raise issues and get support from employers and the University if things go wrong.
- ❹ A commitment to review curricula and assessment with AI in mind - reassessing what it is that we want graduates to be able to do, with a focus on knowledge creation and application at all levels - moving away from regurgitation and synthesis. There should also be digital literacy programs to help all students and staff develop essential skills for the AI age.

On research students, we want to see:

- ❶ Supervisors limited to a manageable number of supervisees to ensure quality guidance and support. Clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors to ensure consistent and effective support for research students, with appropriate training provided. Doctoral students should have the right to refuse additional assignments not directly connected to their research if they impede their primary objectives as agreed with their supervisor.
- ❷ Opportunities for doctoral students to develop skills in leadership, teamwork, project management, teaching, and supervision. Doctoral studies should include broad and flexible modules to develop general competences. Integration of professional development opportunities within the doctoral curriculum should be supported.
- ❸ Viva panels should provide feedback to both students and supervisors, including independent members to ensure impartiality. Research students should be encouraged to participate in professional development activities and gain experience as academics through teaching and supporting undergraduate courses to prepare research students for academic and professional careers.

The University of Bath will excel from the strongest, most constructive partnership between students and their university in the world

6



To underpin all of the above, we aspire to strike the most constructive, assertive and productive partnership between students and their university anywhere.

It should involve:

- ❶ A commitment to **pre-induction research** that enables teachers, professional services staff and other students to understand who is on each programme, as well as their needs and ambitions – so that delivery can adapt to the students we have, not the students we'd like.
- ❷ A new **agreement** between students and the University that starts from the **principle** that we should be able to exert our **influence** wherever a decision is made about us.

❸ An agreement that centres the SU as the fosterer of **leadership opportunities** – a clearing house that gives students confidence that their independent input can have impact, offering defined educational and career benefits in the process.

- ❹ Extended **premises** for the SU that maximise space for us to learn, coordinate, discuss and plan initiatives and influence student life.
- ❺ An annually agreed **partnership agreement** that sets out the University's and SU's joint commitments to improve the student experience over that year, beyond the Top Ten.

A final note from our supporting facilitator, Jim Dickinson editor at WonkHE:

This is a tough time to be working in or leading a university – finances are increasingly constrained, regulatory expectations are high, and there are demands from policy makers to do “more with less”.

But it’s a tough time to be a student too – demands on their time and wallet have increased, their mental health is worsening and their fears about the future look increasingly well founded.

I’ve been working with students’ unions for the best part of thirty years now – and they’re also feeling the strains of catering to a growing and diverse student body.

In that environment, it’s easy to feel ground down – but given the right scaffolding, support and encouragement, students are always able to solve problems, think strategically and set out for themselves what they need from a university experience.

That’s why it’s been so exciting to see the work that students have put in at Bath to reimagine their student experience.

Higher education policy in the UK is often constrained by a suffocating nostalgia for a sector that was smaller, less diverse, less accommodating and less concerned with the world beyond the campus gates.

Some of the manifesto’s ideas are challenging, some much easier to implement – all remind us that students want their universities to focus on the future in a way that enables students to shape that future.

References and further reading

1. Accessibility Survey January 2022, 153 respondents
2. Be Well Surveys 2019 – 2023, average response rate 1,500 – 2,000
3. National Student Survey 2019 – 2024
4. Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2024
5. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023
6. Sector insight from WonkHE
7. Staff Student Liaison Committee minutes 2023–24
8. Student Housing Survey March 2024, 819 respondents (602 from the University of Bath, survey run by The SU Bath but also advertised to Bath Spa University and Norland College students)
9. SU Advice and Support Centre casework trends 2023–24
10. SU Academic Exec Committee 2023–24
11. SU Impact of the increase in Cost of Living Survey February 2023, 989 respondents
12. SU Officer manifestos 2018 – 2024
13. SU Standpoints 2021 – 2024
14. SU Top Ten priority issues 2010 – 2024
15. Together We Shape Tomorrow Open Day postcard engagement activity June 2024, over 250 completed, equalling over 790 comments
16. Together We Shape Tomorrow postcard engagement activity March 2024, over 2,000 completed, equalling over 11,500 comments
17. Together We Shape Tomorrow Survey May 2024, 885 respondents
18. Together We Shape Tomorrow SU Student Leader Workshops March 2024, over 40 Student Leaders in attendance

