

# **Cost of Living: Analysis Report**

**City Students' Union**

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# Recommendations

The following recommendations have been set out by the Union based on findings from the NUS Cost of Living research.

Statistics	Recommendation
<p>67% of City students have expressed concern over financially managing in the cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>25% of students are left with under £50 to cover living costs for a month after rent and bills.</p>	<p><b>Food</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with the option of 'mini meals', where for half portions they pay half the price</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with cheaper snacks, including cup noodles, fruit and granola bars.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce university loyalty cards for hot food, allowing students to pay less if making X number of purchases in the week.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reintroduce the 'Too Good to Go' App in catering outlets to provide students with reduced 'Magic Bags' and to reduce food waste.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In addition to the +++ Introduce food vouchers for students in need of financial support to buy meals on campus + to be</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce daily affordable hot breakfast club options.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to the reusable scheme for hot drinks, introduce a similar scheme for food containers (bring your food container and get a discount).</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Course Costs</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free printing for all students up to 250 (black/white or colour) pages per academic year.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with at least two free graduation tickets and remove the price for gown hire.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Travel</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the gaps in timetables and reduce the number of days on campus.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce an affordable bike scheme.</li> </ul>

<p>43.2% of City students have ranked housing costs as the main pressure point.</p> <p>This pressure was felt mostly by 58% of students who are privately renting a house or a flat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the local council and private landlords to reduce rents and/or advertise affordable student accommodation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with more student accommodation companies to provide more affordable options to students</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a hub/database for students to find other students to house-share with</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with professional legal support for renting/housing needs</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide emergency halls of accommodation for students (especially international students)</li> </ul>
<p>59% of students highlight that the cost of living has had a moderate to major impact on their mental health and wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of City's free mental health service, <i>TogetherAll and the Wellbeing App</i>.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of City's available facilities, such as the private showers on campus, available to all students free of charge.</li> </ul>
	<p>Providing a check-in support from personal tutors regarding the cost of living (flagging students in need and being aware of the support available for students).</p>
Jobs	<p>Make students first policy when offering temporary part-time jobs at City</p>

# Report headlines

## Financial Concerns

1. **Students are cutting back on their essential and non-essential costs, with spendings towards socialising being the largest cut back.** A quarter of students are left with under £50 to cover living costs for a month after rent and bills.
2. **67% of City students have expressed concern over financially managing in the cost of living.**
3. **In times of financial need, students are mainly topping up on money through their family support networks.** 36% of students have sought financial support or a loan from family and many feel the impact on those financially supporting them.
4. **The cost of housing (including rent, energy and water bills) was widely seen as causing the most financial pressure on students.** This worry was higher for students living in privately rented housing.

## Wellbeing

5. **Over half of City students are finding the cost of living to have a large impact on their mental health and wellbeing.** This tends to be higher for students who privately rent alone, identify as having a disability, or belong to a Black ethnic group.

## Financial Support

6. **Students look to University financial support and intervention to ease the Cost of Living.** Access to more bursaries/grants and widening their eligibility was the most popular response, as well as a need for more student discounts to help with student life and living costs. Support for housing costs (such as providing more affordable university accommodation) was also a popular response.

# Introduction

Since late 2021, the UK has experienced a surge in the price of goods and more significantly, energy prices. With inflation rising and household income and wages not increasing at the same pace, this has led to a cost of living (CoL) crisis. The crisis refers to the fall in real income, which is adjusted for inflation and tax changes. In October 2022, inflation stood at 11.1% - the UK's highest rate since 1997 ([Office for National Statistics](#)). The crisis has worsened in recent months as the hike in energy costs has resulted in price rises of utility, food, and transportation.

## How does Cost of Living impact students?

The CoL crisis has significantly impacted higher education students. Inflation for students could be as high as 14% - higher than the national average, according to [Save the Student's research](#). Meanwhile, government funding has only increased by 2.3% in Maintenance Loans for students, generating a significant shortfall for students to fully cover their living costs. For around two thirds of students, the maintenance loans are not enough to live on. [The Office for National](#) statistics has found that one in four students had to take on new debts in response to the rise in cost of living. More concerningly, students are increasingly worried that the crisis will affect their academic performance in university and cause detriment to their mental health and wellbeing; 45% of students have reported a decline in their mental health and well-being since the start of the 2022 academic year. The impact of CoL on students is evidently severe, yet university leaders have warned students are at risk of becoming the “forgotten” group during this crisis ([Universities UK](#)).

## Aims of this report

These findings indicate the immense difficulties students across the country are facing. The Students' Union obtained results from the National Union of Students survey, seeking to understand the impact of the CoL crisis on students at City. Specific areas of focus include student well-being and mental health, living expenditures, housing cost rises, and use of financial support/assistance. Assembly meetings held in November 2022 and February 2023 also gave students the opportunity to share their suggestions on how the university could best support them during the crisis.

Using the NUS survey results & data acquired from the assembly meetings, this report aims to investigate the following:

1. Students' financial concerns and the areas where they are struggling the most from a financial lens
2. The general sentiment of students regarding the CoL crisis
3. The impact of the CoL crisis on students' wellbeing and mental health
4. How the University and Students' Union can better support students throughout the crisis

This report summarises both the quantitative data and qualitative data acquired and also provides insights based on the students' responses. Recommendations for the University and Students' Union have also been included.

## **Methodology**

This report is based on an online survey created by the National Union of Students (NUS) that aimed to understand the impact of the CoL crisis on students across the UK. The mixed method survey contained over 60 questions, including likert scales, multiple choice questions, and open-ended questions. This provided both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey received responses from 424 City students.

Some of the report's recommendations have been taken from student feedback obtained during two Assembly meetings, the first of which was held in November 2022 and the second in February 2023. Attendees were able to share their biggest challenges and provide suggestions for how the University could better support them in the crisis.

## **Demographics**

Most students who participated in the survey were in their first year of study (40%), 23% of students were in second year, and 37% in their final year (including third/fourth year). A similar mix of students from undergraduate level (49%) and postgraduate taught level (45%) was found in the survey; 6% of students were from postgraduate research level.

There were 48% of home students and 52% of international students who participated in the survey. The sample was made up of 15% of students with a disability.

The ethnicity of students who responded to the survey was also recorded; 38% of students reported their ethnic background to be White, 38% as Asian, 10% as Black, 6% as Mixed and 8% as Other.

# Analysis

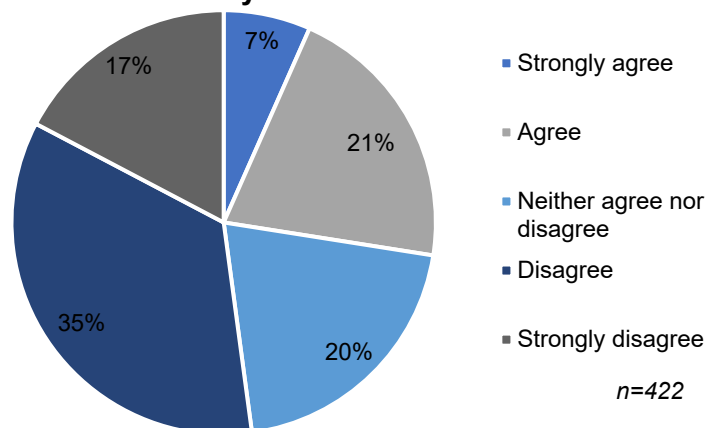
## Financial Concerns

Largely cutting back costs already, 24% of students at City have under £50 after rent and bills.

The majority of students (97%) stated that they have had to cut back on essential and non-essential spendings in some way, with almost a quarter (24%) reporting that they are left with just £50 a month after paying rent and bills. The highest cutbacks in spending since the beginning of 2022 has been on socialising.

Over half of students (52%) disagreed that they had enough money to live comfortably and 20% of students neither agreed or disagreed.

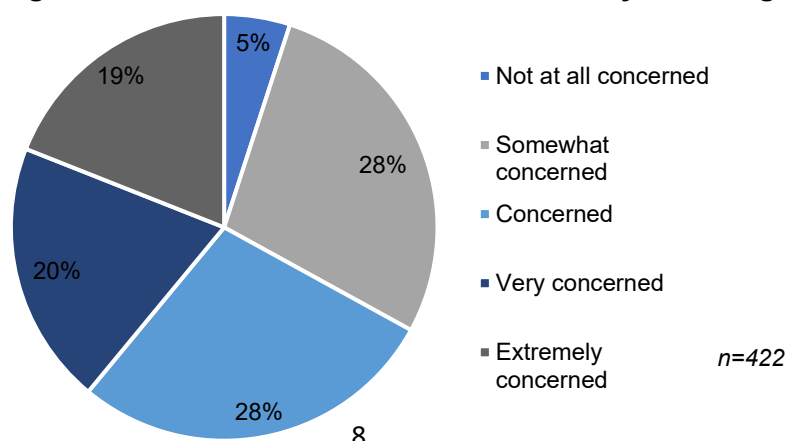
**Graph 1a: Percentage of students who reported that they have enough money/ financial support to live comfortably**



67% of City students are concerned with managing financially.

Students shared their level of concern on financially managing their living costs; 67% of students indicated that they were concerned with managing financially including 13% of students feeling 'very concerned' or 'extremely concerned'.

**Graph 1b: Percentage of students concerned about their ability to manage financially**



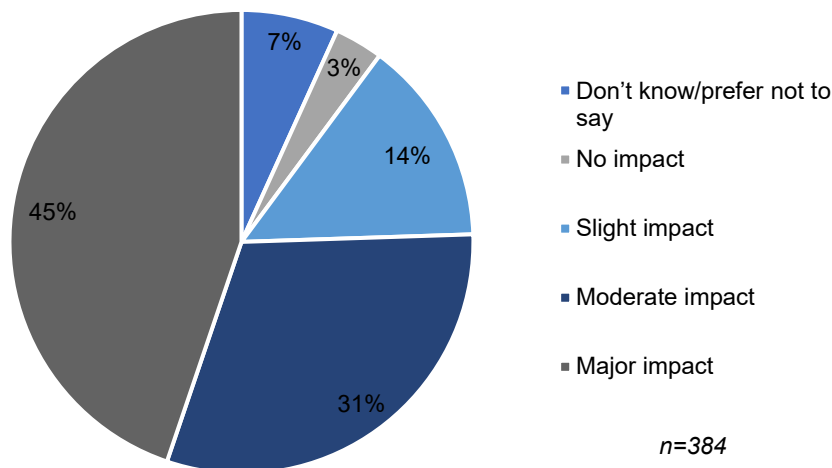


## Where students have sought financial support or assistance, this has mainly been provided by family.

Students told us which sources of financial support or assistance they have turned to in order to meet the pressures of the cost of living. Most students reported that they have sought financial help from their family, with a quarter (24%) of responses indicating that students have received financial support from their family and 12% of all responses indicating students have received a loan from their family. 30% of students are having to access their savings in order to make ends meet. 7% stated that they had not sought any financial assistance.

Students identified that the cost of living is having a significant impact on those financially supporting them. 45% of students at City highlight a 'major impact' and 31% of students highlight a 'moderate impact'.

**Graph 1c: Impact of cost of living on those who provide financial support to students**



## City students have ranked housing costs as the main pressure point.

The highest ranked financial pressure for City students is the cost of housing including rent, energy and water bills. This financial pressure of housing costs was felt by mostly students who are

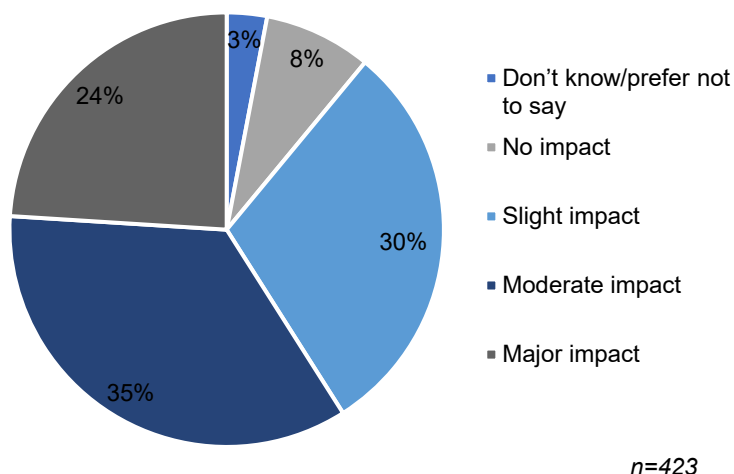
- privately renting a house/flat (58%)
- living with parents or guardians (18%)
- living in halls of residence (13%)

# Student Wellbeing

59% of students highlight that the cost of living has had a moderate to major impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

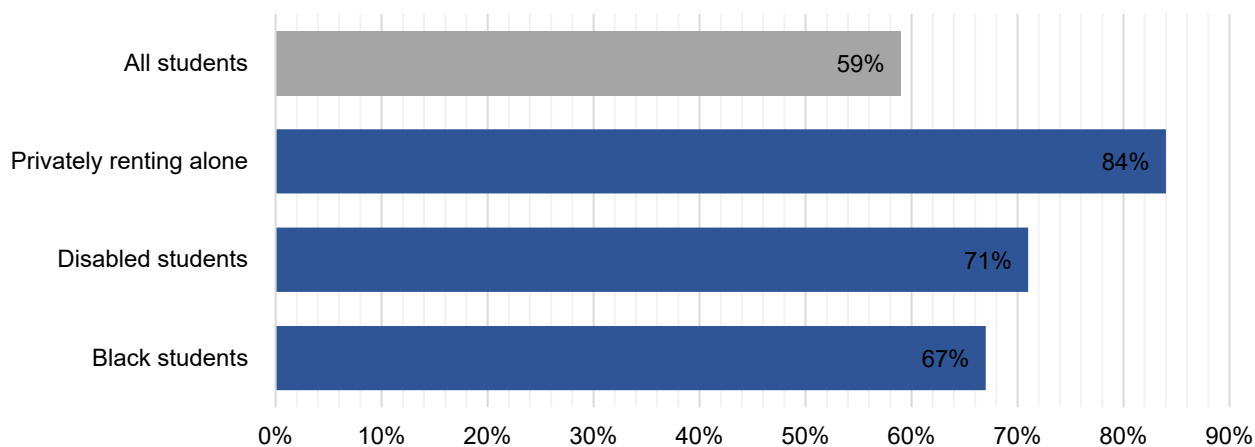
Over a third of students (35%) reported that their mental health and wellbeing has been 'moderately impacted' due to the cost of living; almost a quarter (24%) of City students have reported the crisis as having had a 'major impact'.

**Graph 1d: Impact of cost of living on student mental health and wellbeing**



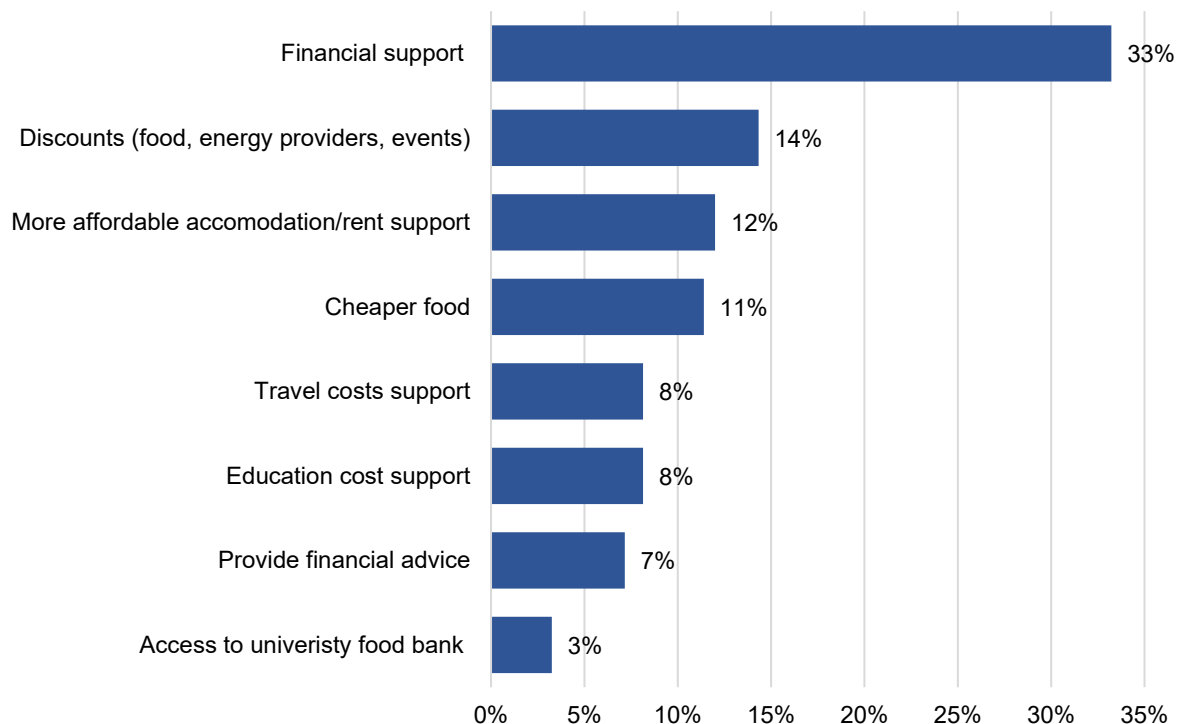
The impact of the CoL crisis on mental health and wellbeing differs among City students. The below graph highlights student demographics that reported the greater impact on their mental health and wellbeing as a result of the cost of living crisis; 84% of students who are renting alone have reported having the most impact on their wellbeing, followed by disabled students at 71% and Black students at 67%.

**Graph 1e: Highest mental health and wellbeing impact of cost of living by student demographics**



# Cost of Living Support - Assembly

In free text form, students were asked to share how City can help students during the cost of living crisis.



The overarching theme was a desire for financial intervention from the university. Receiving financial support from the university was the most popular response from students, followed by suggestions for:

- more student discounts available issued by City in various living aspects including food, rent and events
- more affordable housing options available to students
- cheaper food available at City's catering outlets on campus
- travel costs support for students commuting on to campus
- education cost support for expenses such as reading materials, equipment, and printing costs

Other suggestions included increasing the minimum PhD stipend to the London living wage and allowing students to opt for online teaching to relieve the pressure of travel costs and other costs.