

Background

In January 2021 the Unite Foundation alongside Stand Alone, the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) and Spectra carried out a second survey of higher education students who are either care-experienced or estranged from their families to understand how they were experiencing lockdown and what they felt they needed in order to be healthy, happy and academically engaged.

You can read the report from our survey at the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic [on our website](#).

Participation

166

Students completed the survey

80%

Not on the Unite Foundation scholarship

22%

trying to shield

30%

Key Workers

5%

With caring responsibility

The student experience is not narrow; they are student medics, student nurses, student care workers, student parents, student retail workers, student teachers, student carers, students vulnerable to COVID.

Accommodation

Of those not in their student accommodation but happy about that, all responded that this was due to being with other people; social interaction and company.

Of those not in their student accommodation and not happy about it, all responded that *this* was due to being with other people; lack of personal space due to sofa surfing or the COVID unsafe behaviour of others.

64%

in intended student
accommodation

60%

neutral or happy
where they are

13%

need to travel to be
somewhere secure

Where you live, and the people that are with you, is central to everyone's pandemic experience. Security of accommodation is a driver for some students to break guidelines and expose themselves to the risks of travel.

Health

33%

identified a specific need to support their health

Priorities:

- 22% = Mental health support
- 19% = Compliance of others with COVID public health guidance
- 13% = Social interaction
- 11% = Access to exercise opportunity
- 11% = Access to health services

Like the wider population, deterioration of mental health is a factor for care experienced and estranged students. University student services should include health as a topic within their dialogue and proactively work with students to help them access university, NHS and self care.

Wellbeing

27%

had something to say about wellbeing...

... and commented on what would help keep them socially connected and/or entertained. All prioritised connection to other members of the student or university community (as contrasted with general public) as the central purpose.

Isolated students are craving human interaction with their peers. Universities, societies, charities and other stakeholders should prioritise offering social opportunity that allows for active dialogue over mass, passive, 'viewing'.

Academic engagement

Over a third had something to say about their ability to engage with remote learning

16%

of all respondents described a big gap between the quality of their academic experience and what they are expected to be able to achieve (assessment) – they want much more adjustment and action from their university to reflect the reality of distance learning.

8%

were feeling the strain financially which was impacting on their study.

4%

were disappointingly still digitally or physically excluded from their programme of study either due to connectivity or lab/studio access.

Universities need to be relentless in reaching out to care leaver, estranged (and other) students to identify and resolve barriers to learning. Teaching and learning staff should communicate assessment requirements/adjustments explicitly within the context of a remote learning environment to reassure students consideration has been given to the COVID 19 circumstances.