

Home and Hearth: Arts SU Housing and Community Report

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Introduction

Even before the pandemic, UAL students consistently raised housing issues to Arts SU as important factors impacting on their student experience. The buildings we inhabit and make our homes (even if only during term time) impact on our emotional and physical health, our sense of safety and belonging, and on our ability to learn.

All of this has been compounded by the increased time we spend in our homes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting measures put in place to reduce transmission, including multiple lockdowns.

Art students have always been of particular interest to the media in their relationship to housing. Seen as cultural innovators, where art students choose to reside has been read by the media at best as a sign of “the next cool place”, and more negatively, as a sign of coming gentrification.

Through this project, we are looking to explore the realities of lockdown living in London, away from the media's binary portrayal of art students either as “gentrifiers” or “suffering for their art”.

Space poverty, lack of access to studios and technical resources, and poor quality housing are having a disproportionate impact on creatives both in terms of their practice, and their well-being.

Research from the London School of Economics (LSE) found on average that young people working and studying from home in London during lockdown had 11 feet x 10 feet (10.4m²) of personal space to live in¹. The conditions we inhabit severely impact on our creative output, and for students whose work is assessed through an often subjective creative framework, this can have particularly challenging outcomes.

Meanwhile a survey by the National Union of Students (NUS) has found that 22% of students are “unable to pay rent in full during the previous four months”, while 27% “had been unable to pay bills”. In addition, 69% of students are “concerned about their ability to rent”.

A third of students “believed they would not be able to leave their tenancy agreement during the pandemic”. The pandemic has also seen a rise in students living with their parents or guardians (30%, up from 21%). A quarter of students had to self-isolate during the autumn term. Of these students, 57% “said they did not

¹ “Lockdown for London’s young house-sharers” (2020), London School of Economics, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Lockdown-for-London-young-house-sharers>

receive any support from their accommodation provider.”²

It is not only our relationship with buildings that makes a sense of “home” for students at UAL. Their interactions with their peers, and their sense of belonging, is also vitally important. This study also seeks to explore notions of friendship and community, and what that looks like at UAL this year.

This research, conducted by the Arts SU Policy Team, will give us a snapshot of life as a London art student in the 2020/21 cohort, and speak to the wider context of an academic year group for whom the pandemic has injected more volatility into an already precarious housing and employment landscape.

The report shall be divided into two parts: the first shall discuss issues concerning housing and accommodation, while the second shall discuss issues concerning community. Finally, this reports makes a series of recommendations on how UAL can begin responding to these issues. However, it is also our intention for this report to ask as the start of an ongoing conversation around housing and student life.

² “Student renters face a financial crisis due to the pandemic”, NUS, <https://www.nus.org.uk/articles/student-renters-face-a-financial-crisis-due-to-the-pandemic>

Methodology

The research for this report was conducted via an electronic survey, accessible to all current UAL students. The survey was composed as a series of Likert-style questions and open text comments. It asked students about their experiences of housing and their sense of community at UAL, as well as collecting demographic data.

The survey was promoted through the Students' Union communication channels, such as social media, weekly email newsletters and the course rep system. It was also promoted collaboratively with the UAL Internal Comms Team, the UAL Postgraduate Comms Team, and through course teams.

The survey received 500 responses, with an accurate sample of current UAL students across all six Colleges. The results of this survey are accurate at a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 4%, in line with standard social research practice.

Project artwork

Arts Students' Union commissioned a current UAL student to produce artwork inspired by the theme of housing to illustrate this research report.

The commissioned artist is Miroslav Radu, currently studying on the BA (Hons) Architecture course at Central Saint Martins.

Radu described his inspiration for the artwork:

"The series of images was inspired by how the pandemic has affected my daily rituals at home.

Spending more time at home has unearthed patterns and behavioural changes in myself and the people I live with.

This research has led me to understand the important relationship between mental health and space, and how housing needs to be updated to a live/work model."

The purpose of commissioning this work is not only aesthetic, but to complement the findings of the research by providing a first-hand visual account of how students at UAL are experiencing housing and community at this time.

Executive Summary

Methodology

- An accurate sample of 500 responses was collected by electronic survey, comprised of current UAL students across all six Colleges.

Findings

Rent guarantors

- 26.04% of respondents were not able to provide a UK-based homeowner as a guarantor to secure their accommodation.
- The majority of these respondents were EU students (52.08%) or international students (28.57%), compared to only 13.33% of Home students.

Studying from home

- The three common barriers that respondents face when studying from home are:
 - needing to use the same room for work and for sleep (68.64%)
 - lack of access to technical resources at home to undertake their practice successfully (52.54%)
 - too many distractions at home (48.94%).

Housing costs

- 36.48% of respondents indicate that “almost all” of their monthly income goes towards housing costs (including rent and bills), while 25.93% indicated that “three quarters” of their monthly income does.
- It is a cause for concern that a significant number of respondents (30.79%) are dependent on debt in order to pay their housings costs.

Staying warm

- 62.19% of respondents have worn more than one layer of clothes to bed to stay warm.
- 33.33% of respondents have worn outdoor wear (for example, a hat, scarf, coat or gloves) while in their home to stay warm.

Accommodation impacts on well-being

- Respondents described what impact their accommodation has on their well-being. The three most common responses are:
 - affecting their ability to study, for example affecting their concentration levels or needing to work from bed (64.67% of respondents)
 - impacting negatively on their mental health (57.11%)
 - difficulty sleeping and associated tiredness (52.22%).

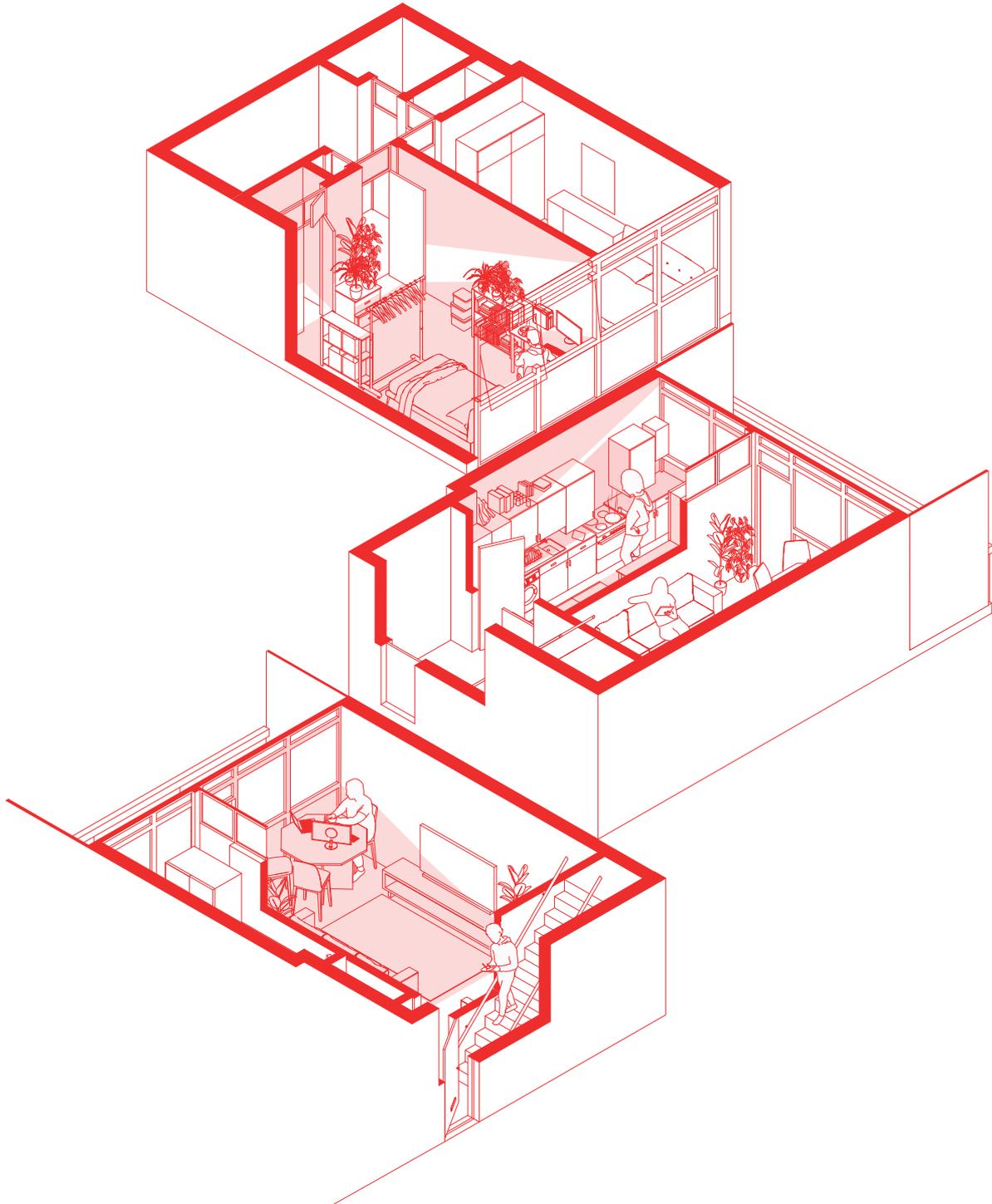
Community at UAL

- 66.74% of respondents cited their course as their main way in which they have built friendships since coming to university.
- The second highest response is that their friendships are formed with people they are allocated accommodation with (29.64%).
- 18.33% they do not feel they have made any new friendships at university.

Time out from study

- Almost half of respondents (47.29%) had considered taking time out from their studies.
- 56.38% of respondents consider dropping out of university with varying degrees of regularity.

Part I: Housing



Where students choose to live

The majority of respondents to the survey are in private rentals: rented from a landlord or agency (53.4%). 30.8% of respondents are in halls of residence, either those provided by UAL (22%) or in private halls (8.8%). A smaller proportion of respondents are living with their family (10.4%) or living in a home that they or their family own (2.6%).

In terms of where UAL students are residing in London, Southwark is the most popular borough (14.7% of respondents reside there), with Lambeth (9.51%) and Islington (8.1%) not far behind. These are central locations with easy access to many of UAL's colleges (London College of Communication is in Southwark).

The least popular boroughs – unsurprisingly – are the outer boroughs of London (Havering, Hillingdon, Bexley) that are seen as more difficult to commute into university from. However, 9.11% of respondents were not residing in London at the time of taking this survey – indicating that the pandemic may have pushed them to return to the family home outside of London.

There are three main factors that influence where UAL students choose to reside in London: convenience to get to university (55% of respondents indicated this as a main factor), affordability (50%), and what is the easiest option (25.2%).

Only 18.2% of respondents indicate that it was their desire to live with friends that influenced where they choose to reside.

11% of respondents said that they live where they do because they had no other option. This was the case for 21.15% of respondents who currently live with their families, and only 7.12% of respondents who are in private rentals.

Other reasons respondents provided: I wanted to meet other students (18%), I wanted / needed to be close to friends (12.6%), the location was convenient to my place of work (9.8%), I wanted / needed to be close to family (5.6%), I needed to live with my family (3.6%), I wasn't aware of other options (3.2%), and having caring responsibilities (1.4%).

Securing accommodation and guarantors

Respondents were asked about how they went about securing housing, and any barriers they faced.

Initial costs

They were first asked how they paid the initial costs required to secure their housing, for example, a deposit or the first month's rent.

The three most common responses were: personal savings (42.83%), money gifted by friends, family and/or partner (36.09%), or money borrowed from friends, family and/or partner (15.65%). This illustrates how dependent students are upon family or support networks with financial means in order to secure accommodation, and may indicate that students who lack these networks or families who can support them financially may face considerable challenges in securing accommodation in London. This is a consistent theme that emerges throughout the findings in this report.

Other responses include: student loan (12.83%), salary (8.7%), they sought work or took on additional hours (4.78%), they used their overdraft facility (3.91%), used a credit card (2.61%), received a scholarship (1.3%), borrowed money from a bank (1.3%), social security benefits (0.65%), pay-day loan (0.22%) or sought support from UAL (0.22%).

Rent guarantors

Respondents were also asked if they were required to provide a UK-based homeowner to act as a guarantor, in order for them to secure their accommodation. Finding a suitable guarantor can be a challenge for a number of students, including international students, students leaving care, students that are estranged from their families (including LGBT+ students), and students on low incomes.

For those who were required to provide a UK-based homeowner as a guarantor, over a quarter of respondents (26.04%) were not able to meet this requirement. The majority of these respondents were EU students (52.08%) or international students (28.57%), compared to only 13.33% of Home students.

For those unable to secure a guarantor, respondents described how they were instead required to provide 6 months' rent upfront. This could be as much as £6000 for some respondents; a prohibitive amount of money to find in one go for a number of students, particularly those from lower incomes.

Evaluating your accommodation

Respondents were given the following statements and asked to evaluate their accommodation in relation to the on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

- My accommodation represents good value for money
- My accommodation is in good condition
- My accommodation has adequate space to live in
- My accommodation has adequate space to study in

My accommodation represents good value for money

Respondents living at home (not unsurprisingly) were most positive about their accommodation representing good value for money, with 68.63% giving it the most positive rating (5). Respondents living in halls managed by UAL were least positive about their accommodation being value for money, with only 8.18% rating it 5 (strongly agree). This is compared to 15.91% of respondents living in halls of residence managed by another provider. The mean score from a respondent in private halls is 3.23, and only 2.98 for those in UAL halls.

"My accommodation represents good value for money"	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	5.62%	13.86%	29.96%	33.71%	16.85%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	6.36%	27.27%	36.36%	21.82%	8.18%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	2.27%	25.00%	36.36%	20.45%	15.91%
In my family home (e.g. with parents)	0.00%	5.88%	15.69%	9.80%	68.63%
In my own home (i.e. a house you or your family own)	0.00%	8.33%	16.67%	25.00%	50.00%

My accommodation is in good condition

Respondents living in private rentals were least positive about the condition of their accommodation, over 20% of respondents giving it a 1 (5.62%) or a 2 (15.73%).

Again, respondents were slightly more positive about private halls of residence than UAL halls, with 29.55% in private halls strongly agreeing with the statement, and only 18.18% in UAL halls. The mean score from a respondent in private halls is 3.89, and 3.69 for those in UAL halls. The mean score for respondents in private rentals is 3.53.

"My accommodation is in good condition"	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	5.62%	15.73%	19.85%	37.45%	21.35%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	1.82%	10.00%	23.64%	46.36%	18.18%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	2.27%	6.82%	20.45%	40.91%	29.55%
In my family home (e.g. with parents)	1.96%	1.96%	7.84%	23.53%	64.71%
In my own home (i.e. a house you or your family own)	0.00%	7.69%	0.00%	7.69%	84.62%

My accommodation has adequate space to live in

Although respondents in private halls overall more strongly agreed with the statement than those in UAL halls (31.82% as opposed to 21.82%), those in private halls also more strongly disagreed than those in UAL halls (4.55% as opposed to 3.64%). The mean score from a respondent in private halls is 3.86, and 3.73 for those in UAL halls. Those in UAL halls overall have the lowest mean score.

"My accommodation has adequate space to live in"	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	3.01%	13.53%	14.66%	33.46%	35.34%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	3.64%	9.09%	20.00%	45.45%	21.82%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	4.55%	9.09%	13.64%	40.91%	31.82%
In my family home (e.g. with parents)	1.96%	5.88%	21.57%	23.53%	47.06%
In my own home (i.e. a house you or your family own)	7.69%	0.00%	0.00%	23.08%	69.23%

My accommodation has adequate space to study in

Respondents were asked to evaluate their accommodation on the basis of how much space it has to enable their studies. Although respondents in UAL halls overall more strongly agreed with the statement than those in private halls (20% as opposed to 15.91%), those in UAL halls also more strongly disagreed than those in private halls (10.91% as opposed to 4.55%).

Across the board, this question received the lowest mean scores of any of the statements. The mean score from a respondent in private halls is 3.48, and 3.27 for those in UAL halls. The mean score for respondents in private rentals is 3.32.

This indicates that while respondents are more likely to feel their home provides them with the space to live in sufficiently, that is not the case for them to live and undertake their studies in.

"My accommodation has adequate space to study in"	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	10.86%	16.10%	25.09%	25.84%	22.10%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	10.91%	17.27%	25.45%	26.36%	20.00%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	4.55%	6.82%	40.91%	31.82%	15.91%
In my family home (e.g. with parents)	5.88%	23.53%	11.76%	25.49%	33.33%
In my own home (i.e. a house you or your family own)	7.69%	7.69%	30.77%	30.77%	23.08%

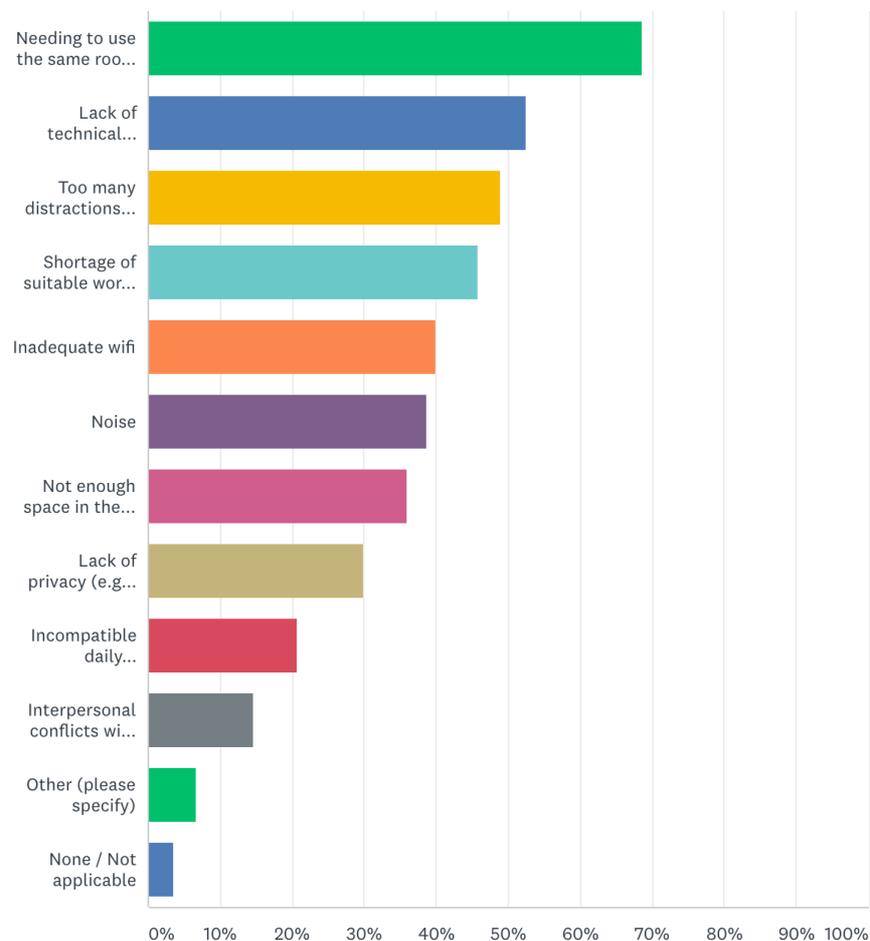
Studying at home

Respondents were asked about their experience of studying from home this academic year.

There were three common barriers that respondents faced when studying from home: needing to use the same room for work and for sleep (68.64% of respondents), lack of access to technical resources at home to undertake their practice successfully (52.54%), and there being too many distractions at home (48.94%).

Only 3.6% of respondents found that they had encountered no difficulties in adapting to studying at home.

Other issues that respondents face include: shortage of suitable work surfaces (45.76%), inadequate Wi-Fi (40.04%), noise (38.77%), not enough space at home (36.02%), lack of privacy e.g. for video calls (29.87%), incompatible daily routines or working hours with housemates (20.76%), and interpersonal conflict with housemates (14.62%).



Respondents were asked to provide examples of how they have had needed to adapt in order to successfully study from home.

The responses included a number of novel innovations, as well as highlighting the difficulties many students face:

“Using Collab to meet with tutors, having to take photos of work to get advice on how to improve or mistakes that have been made, having to use the computer at home instead of at college where I can avoid distractions.”

3rd year undergraduate student, Wimbledon College of Art

“Working from home has been difficult because I don't have a designated working space since the room I am renting is small. I can't afford the UAL dorms near my university (LCC) so I had to rent privately. Because the library and studio spaces are closed, I have no outside working space either. This has made completing my projects more stressful.”

1st year undergraduate student, London College of Communication

“I share a room with two of my sisters and it's the only space besides the living room I can comfortably do work. However, they have online schooling too so sometimes we all do it in the same room which is inconvenient.”

2nd year undergraduate student, London College of Fashion

“As it was cheaper to accommodate privately than in student accommodation, I had to work full time to be able to afford it, so many times I had to miss my online sessions, or quickly catch up with the recordings while at work. In order to find time for studying outside the teaching sessions I'd do it after work, at 2-3am, which often annoyed my flatmates because I'd make noise going around the flat.”

1st year undergraduate student, London College of Communication

“I've set up a desk in my bedroom as this is one of the only places I can have privacy and quiet when watching lectures and working. I cannot access any facilities so it has to be done all online but sometimes the WiFi won't work properly so have to use my phone data.”

3rd year undergraduate student, London College of Fashion

“Changing my whole daily routine to fit around that of who I share accommodation with. Waiting to use shared common areas so that we each have privacy at a time when we are living and working in such close proximity to one another. Buying and building furniture such as desks to create a workspace. Buying other accessories to make workspace more efficient and ergonomic such as an adjustable laptop stand, external keyboard and mouse, external monitor. Paying to hire equipment that I would have been using at or borrowing from the university.”

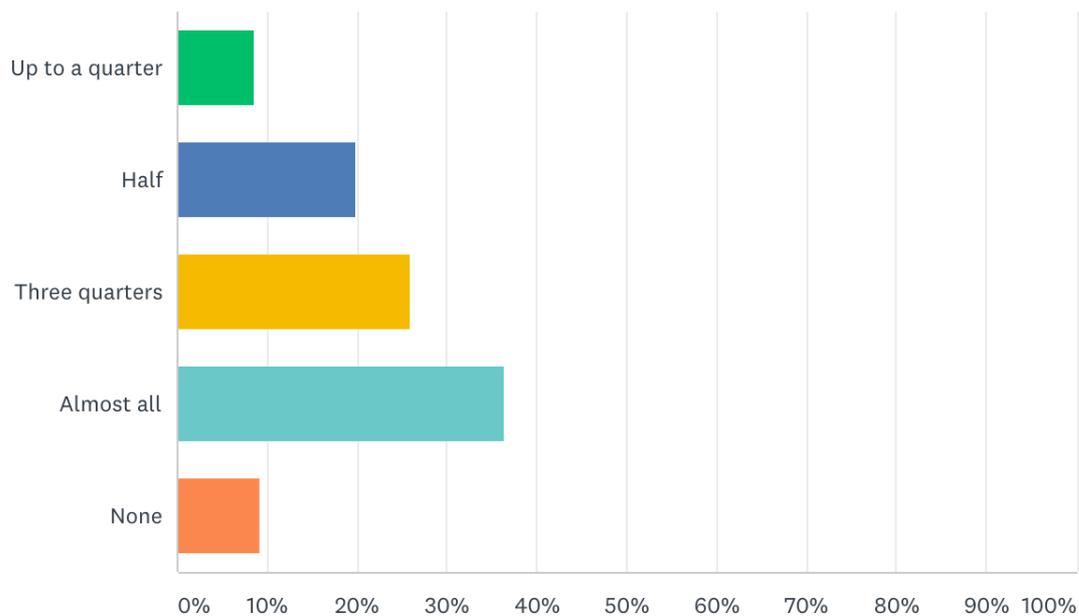
2nd year postgraduate taught student, London College of Communication

Housing costs

Respondents were asked about housing costs, including rent, and how they manage these costs.

Proportion of monthly income

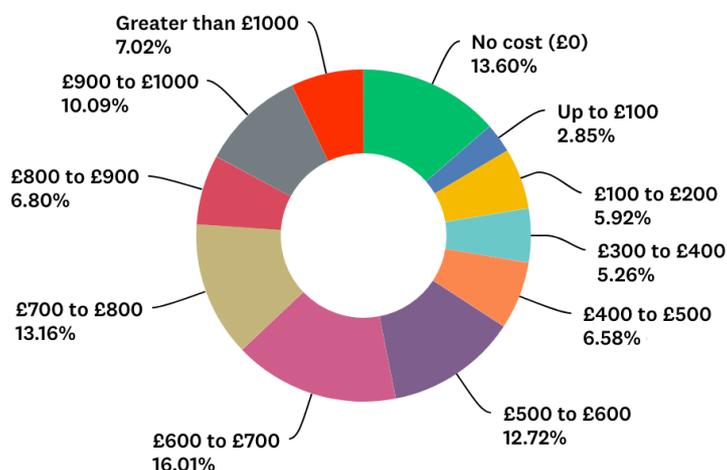
They were first asked about what proportion of their monthly income goes towards housing costs (inclusive of housing bills, rent, mortgage payments etc.). 36.48% responded “almost all”, while 25.93% indicated “three quarters”. Only 9.23% of respondents responded that “none” of their monthly income goes towards housing costs, and almost 70% of those respondents either live with their family (27.27%) or live in a home that they or their family own (41.67%).



Monthly rent or mortgage payments

Respondents were asked how much they specifically contribute towards monthly rent or mortgage payments (excluding other housing bills).

This chart shows the breakdowns:



The data can also be analysed by provider (below). When looking at the upper end of the price brackets (excluding family or personal homes), the comparison between private rentals, UAL halls and private halls can be seen thusly. It is clear from the data that a far higher proportion of respondents are paying over £1000 per month in rent in private halls of residence (20%), by comparison to UAL halls (8.08%), however respondents still feel that private halls represent better value for money (see: "Evaluating your accommodation" above)

	£700 to £800	£800 to £900	£900 to £1000	Greater than £1000
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	16.47%	6.43%	10.04%	6.02%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	13.13%	10.10%	18.18%	8.08%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	10.00%	10.00%	2.50%	20.00%

Paying housing costs

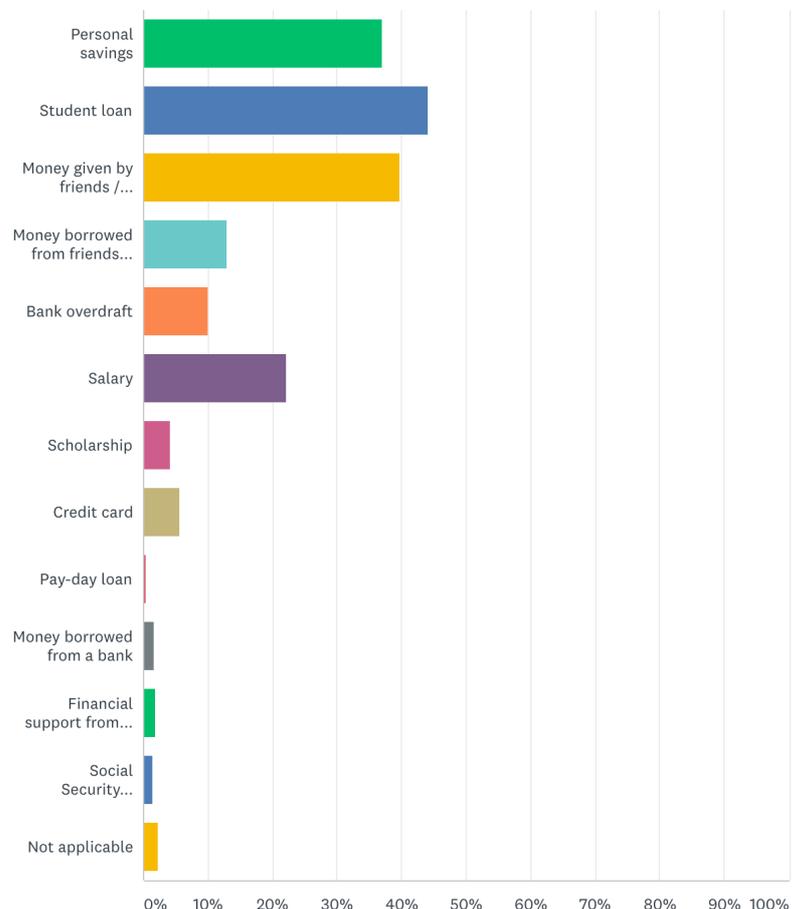
Finally, respondents were asked about the source of the money that they then use to pay their housing costs.

The three most common responses were: student loan (44.1%), money given by friends, family and/or partner (39.74%), and personal savings (37.12%).

It is a cause for concern that a significant number of respondents (30.79%) are dependent on debt in order to pay their housing costs. 12.88% of respondents have borrowed money from family, friends or their partner to pay their housing costs. 10.04% of respondents pay their housing costs with their bank overdraft, while 5.68% use a credit card, and 1.53% have borrowed money from a bank. A very small proportion of respondents (0.43%) have taken out a pay-day loan to pay their housing costs.

This is echoed in the findings of the Arts SU Cost of Study report (2018) that found that over a quarter of respondents (26.76%) needed to take out a credit card, bank overdraft, pay-day loan or other form of private debt to fund their studies. This demonstrates a worryingly high dependence by UAL students on private debt to fund both their studies and their ability to live in London.

Other means through which respondents pay their housing costs include: their salary from a job (22.27%), a scholarship (4.57%), financial support from UAL (1.97%), or social security benefits, such as housing benefits (1.53%).



Property conditions

Respondents were asked about the conditions of the properties they live in, and what impact that has on their studies.

Current property conditions

They were first asked about common problems that are often associated with properties that are rented to students.

The three most common problems present with the respondents' properties are: draughty windows and doors (37.71%), mould (26.12%), and condensation (24.24%).

Other problems respondents reported with their property include: damp (23.29%), slugs, mice or other infestation (18.35%), leaking roof or windows (14.59%), electrical safety hazards, such as exposed wiring or faulty appliances (12%), and gas safety hazards, such as leaking gas or a faulty boiler (3.76%).

36.12% of respondents reported no problems with their current property. Excluding respondents living in a family or owned home, the proportion of respondents reporting no problems with their property were highest in private halls of residence (70%), and lowest in private rental properties (23.85%). UAL halls scored between these two figures at 46.15%.

The chart on the follow page shows the breakdown of problems by provider (private rental, UAL halls and private halls). Respondents in UAL halls reported the lowest level of infestations (15.38%) as opposed to 22.59% in private rentals and 17.14% in private halls. The most frequent problems reported by respondents living in UAL halls is the prevalence of draughty windows and doors (28.57%).

In every category, private rentals scored the worst, with 47.28% of respondents living in a private rental reporting a problem with draughty windows and doors (the most frequent problem for that type of accommodation).

	Damp	Condensation	Mould	Leaking roof / windows	Draughty windows/doors	Electrical safety hazards	Gas safety hazards	Infestation	None
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	32.22%	33.89%	35.98%	20.08%	47.28%	15.06%	5.02%	22.59%	23.85%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	8.79%	13.19%	14.29%	10.99%	28.57%	12.09%	0.00%	15.38%	46.15%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	8.57%	8.57%	2.86%	5.71%	8.57%	0.00%	0.00%	17.14%	60.00%

Staying warm

Respondents were asked what measures they have taken to stay warm, while avoiding the costs associated with turning on or turning up the heating.

Many respondents reported needing to wear additional clothes in order to stay warm in their houses. 62.19% of respondents have worn more than one layer of clothes to bed. 33.33% of respondents have worn outdoor wear (for example, a hat, scarf, coat or gloves) while in their home.

Other responses include: staying longer in university or college buildings, such as the library or in classrooms, to stay warm (14.77%), choosing to socialise rather than staying at home (11.19%), or staying elsewhere to stay warm, such as with parents, friends or a partner (9.62%).

Over a quarter (27.52%) of respondents reported that they did not need to take any extra measures to stay warm in their house.

Impact on well-being

Respondents were also asked about the impact the condition of their accommodation has had on their well-being.

There were three main impacts that respondents reported: affecting their ability to study, for example affecting their concentration levels or needing to work from bed (64.67% of respondents), impacting negatively on their mental health (57.11%), and difficulty sleeping and associated tiredness (52.22%).

Other ways in which their accommodation has impacted on respondents' well-being include: discomfort in everyday life, for example getting dressed or getting out of bed (32.67%), budgeting issues, for example, choosing between energy costs and other spending (28.22%), feeling embarrassed to invite friends or family to their home (22.22%), difficulty maintaining belongings, such as difficulty drying clothes or damage from mould (16%), unable to complete university assignments (13.78%), trying to spend as little time in their home (10.44%), and developing or exacerbating a physical illness, such as respiratory illnesses or colds (10.22%).

14.22% of respondents reported that the condition of their accommodation had no impact on their well-being.

Respondents were asked to describe what negative impact, if at all, their accommodation and living situation has had on their studies. There are a wide range of responses:

"The expense for me of paying rent has been vast. It is half of my student loan, so I have had to work any hours I can pick up around my studies to keep up. As I have been working as a chef, the hours and environment are pretty gruelling at times. This has meant I have had less time for my assignments, and I mainly am making stop motion animation which is incredibly time consuming."

3rd year undergraduate student, Camberwell College of Art, living in a private rental in Lambeth

"I do fine art painting - usually we would be able to use the studios at the university to create our work. However, due to corona restrictions we cannot access the uni so I have to produce work in accommodation. I feel this limits me as I do not want to get paint or other materials on the accommodation, especially as you can lose your deposit."

1st year undergraduate student, Camberwell College of Art, living in UAL halls in Southwark

"Difficult to study and watch online lectures as I don't own a laptop and I struggle to hear when all 3 of my flatmates are being loud. The internet breaks sometimes too."

2nd year undergraduate student, Central Saint Martins, living in a private halls of residence in Southwark

"I definitely experience a lot of stress due to my accommodation. I've bothered my landlord many times to fix all our issues and he says he will yet never show up. Paying so much money for such a small space that isn't up to good standards also creates a lot of stress. I believe that this stress overflows and negatively affects my studies. Also working from my bed is just a massive issue but sadly I have no other space I can work from. I think the mental link of your bed being a space to relax and rest makes it so that I just feel unfocused and tired when I try to study there. I find it difficult to focus in lectures as I'm often in discomfort."

1st year postgraduate student, London College of Communication, living in a private rental in Southwark

"Barely managing to keep up with assignments, even though the actual workload required is very small during the pandemic. Mental health has been exceptionally low, largely due to being isolated from most of my friends and family and not being permitted to socialise properly with on my course or see anybody else in my building."

1st year undergraduate student, London College of Communication, living in UAL halls in Lewisham

"It is much more difficult to focus when the area I have to work in is the same area I sleep in. I feel unfocused and much more distraction prone. I also can't tackle any large-scale or messy projects because I don't have the space and can't get mess in

my room. This has limited the mediums I have used this year and what projects I am willing to try.”

1st year undergraduate student, London College of Communication, living in a private rental in Ealing

Support services

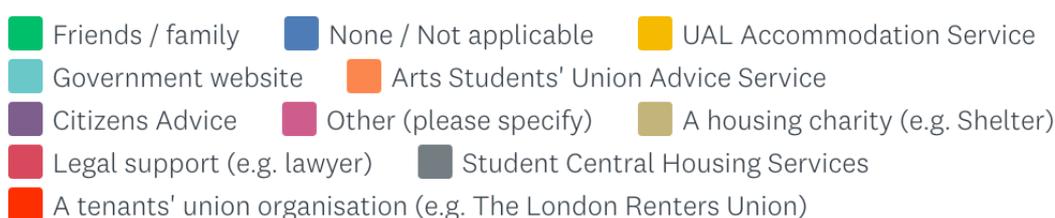
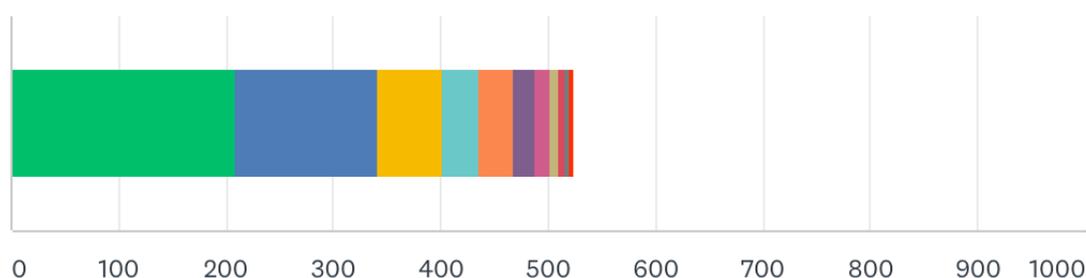
Respondents were asked about what services they have contacted (if any) if they need support and advice with their living situation.

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that family and friends (52.25%) are who they have turned to for support about housing. This again solidifies the vital role that families and support networks play in helping respondents navigate the housing landscape, and the illustrates the considerable disadvantage students without those networks may be in.

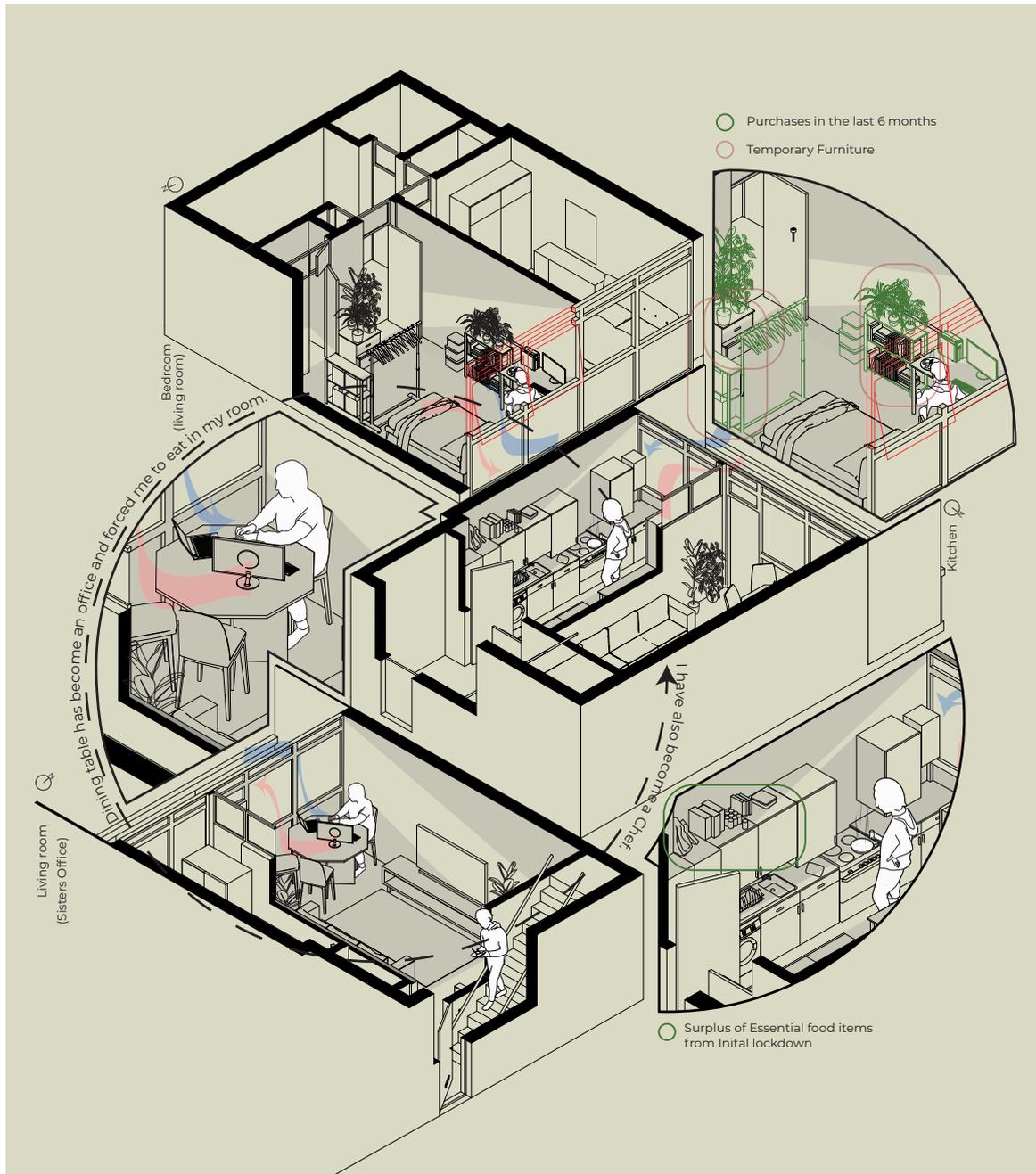
14.75% of respondents had contacted the UAL Accommodation Service, and 8% had contacted the Arts SU Advice Service. It should be noted, when respondents who live in UAL halls are filtered out, the same proportion of respondents go to the SU Advice Service for support as UAL Accommodation Services (7.47%). An explanation for this may be that those who live in UAL halls are more likely to go to Accommodation Services for support as they are essentially seeking help from their landlord.

Other sources of support include: government websites (8.5%) and Citizens Advice (5.25%).

33.25% of respondents responded “none or not applicable”, indicating they have either not sought support or have not needed it.



Part II: Community



Problems

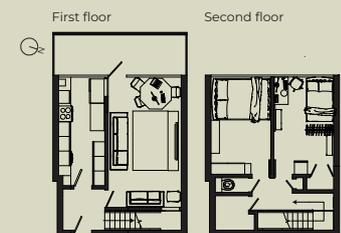
More demand for storage space.
 Sound amplifies through house
 Space feeling smaller
 Conflict with being with family 24/7

Outcomes

More time to cook.
 More time to read.
 Daily walks.
 New plants.

Changes in my daily ritual

Waking up later than usual, no need to account for commute.
 More time spent in my room resulting in longer duration of walks.
 Increased trips up and down the stairs.



Friendships at UAL

A sense of home and a sense of belonging are inextricably linked to our place in a community, and therefore this report also seeks to understand how respondents have experienced friendships and community during this year.

Where friendships are formed

Respondents were asked where they had formed their friendships since coming to UAL.

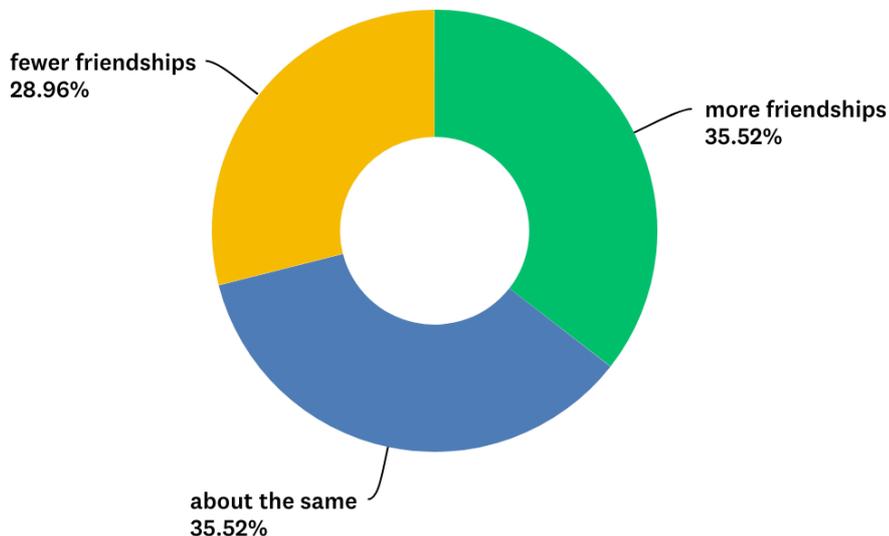
Overwhelmingly respondents cited their course as their main way in which they have built friendships since coming to university (66.74%). The second highest response is that their friendships are formed with people they are allocated accommodation with (29.64%).

Worryingly however, the third most frequent response given is that they do not feel they have made any new friendships at university (18.33%). When broken down by year of study, 23.36% of respondents who did not feel like they had made any friendships since coming to UAL are in the first year of their degree. This speaks to the detrimental impact that the pandemic has had on community-building, and the isolation some students may be feeling since coming to UAL.

Other frequent responses given include: making friends with fellow international students (14.48%), people from my hometown (13.8%), and people I share my hobbies and interests with (10.41%).

New friendships

Respondents were asked to assess whether they felt since coming to university, they have more friends than before (35.42%), the same amount (35.52%), or fewer friendships (28.96%). The chart below illustrates the responses:



Respondents were asked to explain their answer in open text comments. Those who felt they had fewer friendships provided some context:

"Because of the pandemic, we only have physical classes twice a week and we usually do our own work in class. Thus, there is not much chance to make friends. Another reason is we are all divided into smaller groups in our course because of social distancing and I have not met anyone in other groups."

1st year undergraduate student, London College of Fashion

"Since lockdown, I haven't been able to develop new relationships. Old friends from my BA have graduated and moved abroad and at the moment it's not possible to find newer connections during lockdowns/work from home, leading to depression on a professional and personal level."

1st year postgraduate taught student, Central Saint Martins

"It is very hard to socialise at UAL as students are spread out across London and there are no social spaces at LCF (the canteens are tiny). I rarely saw my classmates before COVID-19 and now it is even worse."

2nd year undergraduate student, London College of Fashion

"I have one good friend in my class. I feel due to the competitiveness as a whole in the class room I tend to keep to myself as I feel work is more important than friendship. I have had short friendships that don't last very long as people move friendship groups quite a lot."

2nd year undergraduate student, Central Saint Martins

Loneliness

Respondents were asked about whether they experience feelings of loneliness at university.

Over half of respondents (52.39%) have experienced feelings of loneliness during term, compared to just under a third of respondents (32.12%) who have experienced feelings of loneliness outside of term time. 15.49% of respondents have never experienced feelings of loneliness while at university.

When broken down by accommodation provider, respondents living in UAL halls are the most likely to say they feel lonely in term time (58.33%), and the least likely to say they never feel lonely (11.46%). The breakdowns can be seen in the chart below.

I feel more lonely...	In term time	Outside of term time	Never
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	51.90%	31.65%	16.46%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	58.33%	30.21%	11.46%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	50.00%	30.00%	20.00%
In my family home (e.g. with parents)	48.89%	37.78%	13.33%
In my own home (i.e. a house you or your family own)	27.27%	45.45%	27.27%

Respondents were also asked whether they have someone who they live with who they can talk about their day. 73.18% of respondents say they do, while over a quarter (26.82%) do not.

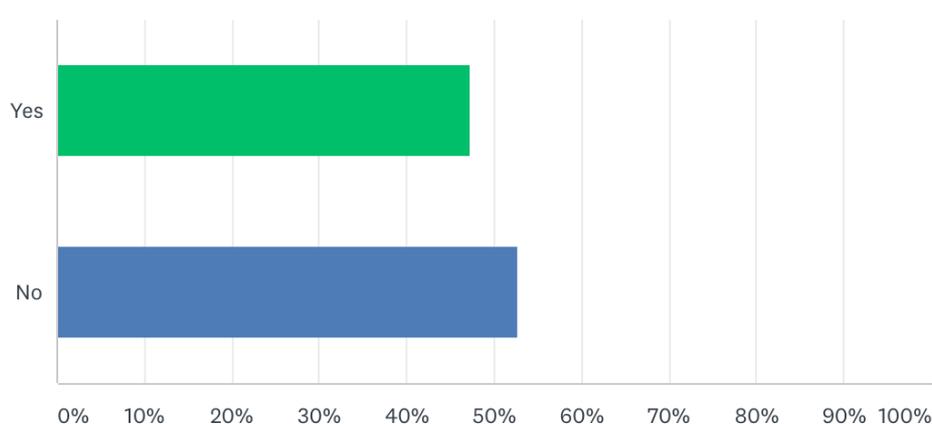
When broken down by accommodation provider, those in UAL halls are the least likely to say they have someone they can talk to about their day (56.84%). The breakdowns can be seen in the chart below.

Do you have someone you live with who you can speak to about your day?	Yes	No
Private rental (e.g. rented from a landlord or letting agent)	79.41%	20.59%
Student accommodation managed by my institution (UAL halls)	56.84%	43.16%
Student accommodation managed by another provider (e.g. private halls of residence)	70.73%	29.27%
In my family home (e.g. with parents)	77.78%	22.22%
In my own home (i.e. a house you or your family own)	81.82%	18.18%

Time out

Retention and continuation are important issues for the university, and for students. Community and a sense of belonging is a key factor in retaining students and preventing non-completion of studies. Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards taking time out of their studies, and whether they had considered leaving studies altogether.

Respondents were first asked whether they had ever considered taking time out of their studies. Almost half (47.29%) had considered it, while over half (52.79%) had not considered it.



Respondents were also asked how often, if at all, they considered dropping out of university.

Over half of respondents (53.62%) never considered dropping out of university. 19.68% of respondents considered it termly, 14.25% considered it monthly, and 9.95% considered it weekly, and 2.49% considered it daily.

When broken down by year of study, those on year 2 and 3 of a degree are the least likely to say they never consider dropping out. This indicates that, contrary to expectation, it is not those that are experiencing their first year of UAL during a pandemic that are most at risk of dropping out. The breakdown can be seen in the chart below.

How often, if at all, have you considered dropping out of university?	Never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Termly
1st	62.30%	2.87%	11.07%	13.11%	10.66%
2nd	40.50%	2.48%	8.26%	14.88%	33.88%
3rd	42.37%	1.69%	10.17%	15.25%	30.51%
4+	54.55%	0.00%	0.00%	36.36%	9.09%

Recommendations

1. **Establish a working group to act on the recommendations of this report, in partnership between UAL and Arts SU.**

The Cost of Study steering group, established by the university in response to Arts SU's research report on the Cost of Study in 2018, acts as a flagship for how student-led research and university policy innovation can align. The same approach should be adopted towards the findings of this report, establishing a working group of relevant stakeholders across the university and Students' Union to act on its recommendations.

2. **Introduce a UAL rent guarantor scheme.**

Our research has found that 1 in 4 students who require a UK-based rent guarantor are not able to secure one. In lieu of this, students are required to pay an exorbitant amount of money up front to secure their accommodation. This disproportionately impacts on international students, but also Home students from vulnerable backgrounds, such as care leavers and those estranged from their families. UAL should look to other universities that have introduced rent guarantor schemes, and replicate best practice in the HE sector by providing their own scheme. For example, the London School of Economics (LSE) operate a rent guarantor scheme, where the university acts as a guarantor for international students who have lived in an LSE halls of residence. University College London (UCL) operate a rent guarantor scheme for overseas and EU students, with provision in exceptional circumstances to UK students where no alternative UK guarantors are available.

3. **Commit to a UAL Affordable Rent strategy.**

UAL must ensure that a strategy is in place to increase the affordability of UAL halls. There is a clear desire by students at UAL to live amongst their peers, but currently students from low income backgrounds are priced out of housing provision by their own university. This may drive students into lower quality accommodation in the private rental market. Our research has demonstrated the role that good quality accommodation plays in students' ability to study and perform well academically. Making good quality accommodation affordable is essential to ensuring

fairness, and may contribute to reducing attainment differentials. UAL should meet with the SU to work in partnership towards an Affordable Rent Strategy. An option that may need to be considered is running a certain proportion of rooms at a loss, and cross-subsidising accommodation from other university income streams.

- 4. Join up UAL's access and participation plans (APPs) with its accommodation strategy, to ensure that its accommodation offer is not prohibitive to students from widening participation backgrounds.**

In relation to recommendation 2, UAL should join up its work on widening participation and accommodation wherever possible. Monitoring the impact of accommodation on access, and then academic performance from marginalised or low income groups, is essential if UAL is to tackle these differentials holistically.

- 5. Invest in and promote the Arts SU Housing Advice Service.**

The Arts SU Advice Service provides independent and bespoke advice to UAL students about housing contracts. Ensuring that the service is well-funded and robust will increase the number of students who know their rights in relation to private rentals, and decrease the likelihood of exploitation of UAL students by landlords.

- 6. Introduce means-tested housing bursaries.**

UAL should explore the option to invest in means-tested housing bursaries, to help students make decision on accommodation based on what environment will be most conducive to their studies, as opposed to what is affordable. Ensuring that students who are financially worse off have monetary support empowers students to make their own choices about the type of accommodation that is best for them and their practice, while removing the pressure of affordability from the decision-making process.

- 7. Run a UAL-wide communications campaign during the winter months about keeping students warm.**

The findings from our research that shows the number of students that are living in cold conditions during the winter

months must be of concern to UAL. Running a communications campaign about what support is available from the university to stay warm, including hardship bursaries, during the winter months would raise awareness about the issue and ensure students are aware that UAL understands the need for students to study in conducive living conditions. Include a direct reference to fuel poverty in the promotion of the hardship fund, and explore the feasibility of introducing a winter fuel allowance to low-income students.

8. Ensure that debt advice is widely promoted to students.

UAL students are regularly depending on debt to pay monthly living expenses, such as rent. UAL already provide debt advice through the university's Student Advice Service, and run events (such as those connected with National Money Week) to join up this advice with front-facing UAL services. To further tackle this issue, UAL must link up the work done by the Cost of Study steering group, such as the extension of hardship funding and the exploration of interest-free loans, with accommodation information. UAL should explore whether the targeting of the hardship fund and its communications towards those experiencing debt can alleviate the situation for those in serious cases. UAL and the SU should in partnership work to normalise conversations around debt in all aspects of the university, particularly between students and tutors, in order to ensure students are signposted to support accurately.

9. Explore the capacity for UAL to invest in alternative accommodation stock or work in partnership with a student lettings company.

Other universities have invested in a property portfolio off-campus housing that they then rent out to students as a landlord, keeping rents affordable for students. Brunel University has a partnership with student letting agents where rents are kept low through an agreement based on a steady supply of student tenants. These schemes should be explored for their feasibility at UAL.

10. Support and promote SU initiatives aimed at reducing student loneliness

Loneliness and social isolation have a negative impact on students and their ability to learn. The pandemic has intensified these problems; however they pre-exist, and will outlast, the

pandemic. The SU are undertaking initiatives, such as the Arts SU Companion Scheme, to tackle the issue of student loneliness. The project has been successful (with 280 students paired up in 2019/20, and an additional 547 as of publication in 2020/21) however with UAL support and promotion, the scheme could be more sustainable and far-reaching.

11. Greater support for students considering taking time out or dropping out of their studies.

The number of students considering taking time out or dropping out of their studies is concerning. Running a communications campaign appealing to students who are considering dropping out to seek support, and evaluate the options available for them to stay, would normalise conversations between staff and students about what measures can be put in place. Strengthening the levels of support students receive one-to-one, through the university's personal tutorial policy, may be one route to explore additional interventions.

Author

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Calum Sherwood is the Senior Policy and Research Officer at Arts SU, having worked in education policy since 2012. Calum studied Politics and Sociology at the University of Bristol and holds an MSc in Social Research from Birkbeck, University of London.

Arts SU Policy Team

Arts SU is an independent charity who work to represent and support students at the University of the Arts London. This project was led by the Arts SU Policy Team, who focus on producing high-quality research on academic and social issues that impact on our members.

If you have any questions about the report, contact c.sherwood@su.arts.ac.uk

