

#MyFEJourney: What you told us

Transport is not just a means to an end: it impacts students' budgets, lives and even course and placement choices. As part of the #myFEJourney campaign, we asked you not just for cold, hard numbers on how much you spend, but also for the impacts of this on your daily lives. A thousand of you responded, and this is what you said.

Who answered us?

In total, we received a thousand responses to the survey. The **majority of respondents were aged 16- 19 (66%)**. Of the respondents, 44% were studying for A Levels or the local equivalent and 35% were taking apprenticeships. **80% were studying full time**. Three quarters of respondents (74%) lived at home with parents or guardians.

The most responsive region were those in the East Midlands, which gave 22.5% of responses, followed by the South East with 19.74% of responses. There were responses from all nations and regions of the UK.

Getting to work

It is clear that the major mode of transport for students is buses, closely followed by travel by car – unless you live in London! On an average day almost half (**48%**) **say they travel to their college, work placement or apprenticeship by bus**. Those who live in East Midlands are significantly more likely than those in any other region to travel this way (69%). 39% say they travel by car – although this drops to 13% when only those who live in London are considered. Almost a third of students walk to their place of work or study: 32% across the country.

The **majority (87%) say they spend between 0 and 2 hours a day commuting**, 11% say it takes them more than 2 hours a day and 2% have no commute at all.

The cost of travel

Nearly half of learners (46%) spent over £20 per week on travel to and from their place of learning. Over forty percent of students (**44%**) **spend between £0 and £20 on travel per week**, and overall **17% say that their commute costs them nothing**.

Although you would expect there to be significant regional variation contained in the answers for this question, in fact travel costs appear fairly consistent across the UK.

Five percent of students report that their travel costs represent 76%-100% of their weekly budget. In contrast, for **39% travel spend represents less than 25% of their weekly budget** (in the East Midlands this is significantly lower at 28%), and significantly higher in the North East (52%) and Yorkshire (47%). The proportion of their budget spent on travel is reasonably consistent for all groups of students. The region in which they live has a more significant impact on travel cost.

Funding travel

1 in 3 (31%) say their travel costs are covered by their parents/guardian (significantly more of those in East Midlands (44%) and the North West (42%) rely on their parents to help with their travel costs). **22% work part time in term time** and this helps with their travel costs. **1 in 5 (20%) rely on their savings** to fund travel costs.

A concern raised was the disproportionate cost of travel in comparison to the rise of wages, as well as the impact of travel costs on other areas of a students' life.

“£4 per day might not seem like a lot of money but sometimes it’s the difference between eating that day or not”

The impact of travel costs

Half (49%) of respondents were concerned about the amount of money they spend on travelling. There was significant regional variation in this, however, with **many more students in Wales considering themselves not concerned: 46%.** This could be due to a **widely available young person’s discount scheme in Wales, which [NUS Wales won the fight to reinstate.](#)**

When given the opportunity to write about their concerns, 38% indicated that expense was a major factor, particularly in comparison to low wages.

“My travel is really expensive as I have to pay full price when traveling on the train as I don't get any discounts being an apprenticeship and I do worry regarding such a large amount to pay for travel”

Travel and its impact on student choice

1 in 10 (10%) said that the cost of travel was very or extremely influential in the decision on their choice of college, work placement or apprenticeship. Almost half (48%) said it was somewhat or fairly

influential. When this was broken down by region, almost 1 in 5 students in London said that transport costs had been very or extremely influential, higher than those in other regions on the UK.

This shows the urgency of addressing transport policy in the UK and finding solutions to these problems: it is not just affecting students’ pockets but significant choices that they make about their lives.

1 in 5 (20%) said it had affected their ability to get to their place of study. This was slightly higher for students who live in London or the North West, both areas reporting 25%.

Respondents in **Yorkshire were significantly less likely to say they had been unable to get to college or work because of travel costs (82%).** Students and apprentices do receive discounts in some areas of Yorkshire, for example Sheffield, discounts are available for those under 18 and for apprentices with NUS and Apprentice Extra cards.

When students expanded on their reasons for missing days of placement or study, **44% said that it was having little or no money which kept them away,** and this had knock on effects on their use of annual leave and other time:

“I didn't have the travel fare I needed for the week so I booked it as time off so as not to disrupt my position in the company.”

1 in 4 (26%) said it was **too expensive, they couldn’t afford to go.** One response warns against assuming parental contribution:

“I hadn’t been paid by work and neither had my parents so I couldn’t afford to get a train ticket to come to college.”

What are students paying for?

Of those who use the bus or train to travel **1 in 5 (18%) say the bus or train is not at all reliable.** This is somewhat higher in the East Midlands and the North West, where 25% and 27% of students respectively said that transport was not at all reliable. Across the board, **7 in 10 (71%) say it is somewhat or fairly reliable.** Only 12% say it is very reliable.

3 in 10 (29%) say availability of buses or trains is terrible or poor, 4 in 10 (41%) say availability is fair and 3 in 10 (30%) rate it as good or excellent. The North East comes out best with 64% of respondents saying availability there is fair.

When looking at **cleanliness of the transport used, 3 in 10 (30%) rate it as terrible or poor** (particularly in East Midlands – 56%). 4 in 10 (41%) rate it as fair and 3 in 10 (29%) as good or excellent.

When asked for further comments, 34% of students expanded on unreliable services and the effect on their learning:

“Buses are often late and cause lateness to lessons and thus reprimands from teachers”

Sixteen per cent of respondents raised further issues about the price of transport, often saying

that they would prefer to walk and save money, and **13% even find driving and running their own cars, walking or cycling a cheaper alternative.**

“Before driving I would get the bus, which was often late. But since driving I’ve had no issues and the cost isn't too much more than the bus was”

What do we want?

NUS has longstanding policy of campaigning for travel discounts for apprentices and FE learners of all ages.

There is currently a gap in the offering, where many local councils will offer discounts to those aged up to 18, and those in full time education, but this does not cover apprenticeships.

It is clear from the responses in this survey that transport affects many areas of learners’ lives, and is not just a means to an end.

The call for subsidised travel was made spontaneously by 1 in 10 of the survey respondents, particularly for those on apprentice wages who will often earn £3.50 per hour.

Local lobbying

Transport infrastructure

Where there is a concentration of employers and learning providers in one area, there should be subsidised, specialised travel from the local area to these points, which runs at relevant points of the day.

Local discounts

In London, the Apprentice Oyster Card offers a significant travel discount, however it lasts only for one year and should be available for the length of the apprenticeship.

National level policy changes

Extending discounts

Across the UK, discounts currently available either to those 18 or under or those in full time study should be extended to apprentices.

We believe that all apprentices, and all those undertaking study (full or part-time) should be eligible for a 16-25 railcard regardless of age, just as is the case for those currently in full time education.

To make the railcard more useful for commuting to work and study, the peak time minimum fare cap should be lifted from the rail card usage conditions.

In the long term we would like to see free bus and tram travel, if not all travel, extended to all 16-19 year olds, enabling young people to access further study, training or work without a financial barrier.

Get in touch

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact **Emily Chapman, Vice President (Further Education)**.

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