

# NUS-USI Student Wellbeing Research Report 2017



**Student  
Wellbeing  
survey**



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# Foreword

When I stood to be elected for a second term as NUS-USI President I did so on a manifesto that pledged to deliver a better understanding of the current state of affairs in relation to student mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland. I am proud that in the pages that follow we now have a much clearer picture, not only of the current pressures and challenges faced by our student body, but of the implications that those pressures have for their wellbeing.



NUS-USI conducted this research in response to our consultations with students, during our regular visits to students' unions and campuses. We designed it in consultation with student representatives, and we worked with students' unions, officers and clubs and societies to promote the survey as widely as possible amongst students across all further and higher education institutions across Northern Ireland.

The empirical research that we have gained through this research project will, I believe, provide a very useful evidence base which not only illustrates the breadth of the mental health and wellbeing problems facing students, but also shines a light on the factors and pressures that contribute to them. This research also provides an insight into what actions students believe could help address the mental health and wellbeing problems that they face.

This is possibly the largest and most detailed research project ever carried out on student mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland. The findings of this survey are extremely troubling, and it is absolutely crucial that these findings act as a wake-up call to politicians on the need for stable devolved government, to addresses the real and damaging problems facing the public whom they are accountable to.

In the weeks and months ahead we will be working with our membership to determine how we can ensure the findings of this research do not sit on a shelf gathering dust. Instead, we want to ensure that this research and the findings it has delivered can act as a catalyst for change in terms of the culture surrounding mental health as well as the support available to students in Northern Ireland.

Some of the findings in this report are damning, many are a cause of great concern and I am quite clear in my belief that if action is not taken immediately, that we could be facing a serious crisis in terms of student mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland. To that end, we have made a series of recommendations at the end of this report which outlines some of the initial steps that we believe politicians and others can take to begin to address the serious issue we are examining.

Finally, I want to offer my sincere thanks to the over 3,600 students who took the time to feed into our research as well as all of those involved in compiling the research survey, promoting it and finalising this report. I would urge everyone to take the time to examine the findings in this report and to commit to addressing the pressures facing our student body.

**Fergal McFerran**  
**NUS-USI President**

# Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

- 1.** The majority of students (78%) have experienced mental health worries over the past year, and this is particularly true for students over 18.
- 2.** Stress is the top mental health symptom identified by 81%, with other major factors being lack of energy, being unhappy or down, and anxiety.
- 3.** Students typically turn to their friends when they need help with mental health, although GPs and family are also popular avenues of support. Family support is especially important for those with learning disabilities. The support students receive is considered helpful by two thirds.
- 4.** Where professional help was sought, one in ten were able to access this the same day, and one in six able to get some support within a week.
- 5.** Over half of students were aware of the mental health services at their college or university, although only a small percentage had turned to their institution or students union for help which suggests this is not due to a lack of knowledge about services available. Counselling is the service most widely known, followed by disability services and peer support. Few students had used the mental health service at their institution (less than one in ten) but those who did generally waited a month or less.
- 6.** Although not always the first choice for mental health support, half of students in the survey would feel comfortable talking to their GP.
- 7.** Top factors identified as contributing to individuals' mental health were their course, lack of money, family issues, work pressures and relationships.
- 8.** The impact of mental health is felt widely across everyday life for students, with top issues being the effect on their quality of life, on studies and grades and relationships.
- 9.** Almost half of students, and particularly those from NI, felt that student mental health in Northern Ireland had deteriorated in the past 5 years. This was again attributed to work/study issues, and financial pressures. Students felt this could be alleviated by increased financial support for students or reducing student debt, investment in mental health services or more education about mental health.
- 10.** Earnings from paid work are the most common external financial support for students, while many also receive financial support from friends and family.
- 11.** Over half (55%) agreed with the statement "I am concerned about my future levels of debt", compared to 70% of students in the 2014 Pound in your Pocket survey.
- 12.** When asked "I regularly worry about not having enough money to meet my basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills", a comparison against the 2014 PIYP survey indicates that there has been a reduction in concern about having enough money.

# About the Research

# Objectives

NUS-USI worked with the NUS Insight team to conduct research to examine the landscape regarding mental health and wellbeing of students in Northern Ireland.

## Objectives

The key research aim was:

- ↳ To find out what proportion of students are worried about their mental health and what factors impact negatively on this
- ↳ To gain an insight into students' view on services, policy changes or other ideas to address the mental health issues that students are facing
- ↳ To compare, where possible, data gathered about money worries, against the 2014 Pound in Your Pocket survey for Northern Ireland

Underlying research aims addressed by the research also included:

- ↳ To align with NUS100 "Wellbeing and welfare are central to the student experience"



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# Methodology

## Student Online survey

An online survey was carried out between 6<sup>th</sup> December 2016 and 15<sup>th</sup> February 2017 of further and higher education students in Northern Ireland to find out what proportion of students are worried about their mental health and what factors impact negatively on this.

A total sample of valid **3,680** responses was gathered in the survey. It was promoted to students in NI from the NUS extra database and more widely via face-to-face student engagement in class, and at exam time. Students were encouraged to complete the survey 'there and then'. Regular updates of completed surveys were provided, and institutions targeted appropriately during the duration of the field work period.

The sample of respondents involved in the online survey reflected a range of student types, ages and course levels across all institutions. The majority of respondents were aged between 16 and 22 (77%), over half (53%) were in FE, and over a third (42%) were undergraduates in HE.

Full time students accounted for the vast make-up of the sample (86%), while the gender split was 62% women taking part and 37% man, and 1% defining as 'in another way' . The data has been weighted to reflect the HESA gender split across the UK which is 54% female, 46% male.

The majority of the respondents (89%) indicated they were NI students studying in NI, and most identified as white (96%). Most popular subjects studied by participating FE students were ICT (15%), Health, Public Services and Care (12%), and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (11%). The most popular subjects studied by those in HE were Education (14%), Business and administrative studies (7%), or Engineering (8%).

Sixteen per cent of the sample indicated they had a disability, impairment or long term health condition; 11% have caring responsibilities for one or more dependent children under the age of 18; and 6% have caring responsibilities for a disabled adult, or unwell relative.

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# Reading this report

## *Significant differences*

A number of questions have been broken down and compared with each other, according to key demographics and identified segments.

Where there are any significant statistical differences between answers, they are reported where applicable and to a large enough base size ( $n > 30$ ) and are valid at a confidence level of between 95% and 99%. Where there are significant differences across demographics and segments, they are highlighted clearly.

# Research Findings

# Student Wellbeing in NI

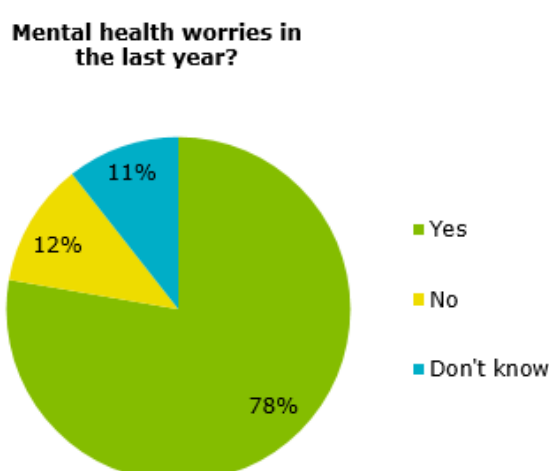
## Individual Students' Wellbeing

Students were asked a series of questions about their mental health and wellbeing, to gauge the extent to which mental health is a problem, including how and where they sought support, their perception of how helpful this was, and the time span for treatment. They were also asked about what contributed towards their mental health and how it affected their everyday life.

## Students' Mental Health

The majority of students in Northern Ireland have had worries about their mental health in the past year. This is regardless of whether it has been formally diagnosed or not.

**Figure 1: Mental health worries**



Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

**C1. Have you had any worries about your mental health within the past year, regardless of whether you have been formally diagnosed?**

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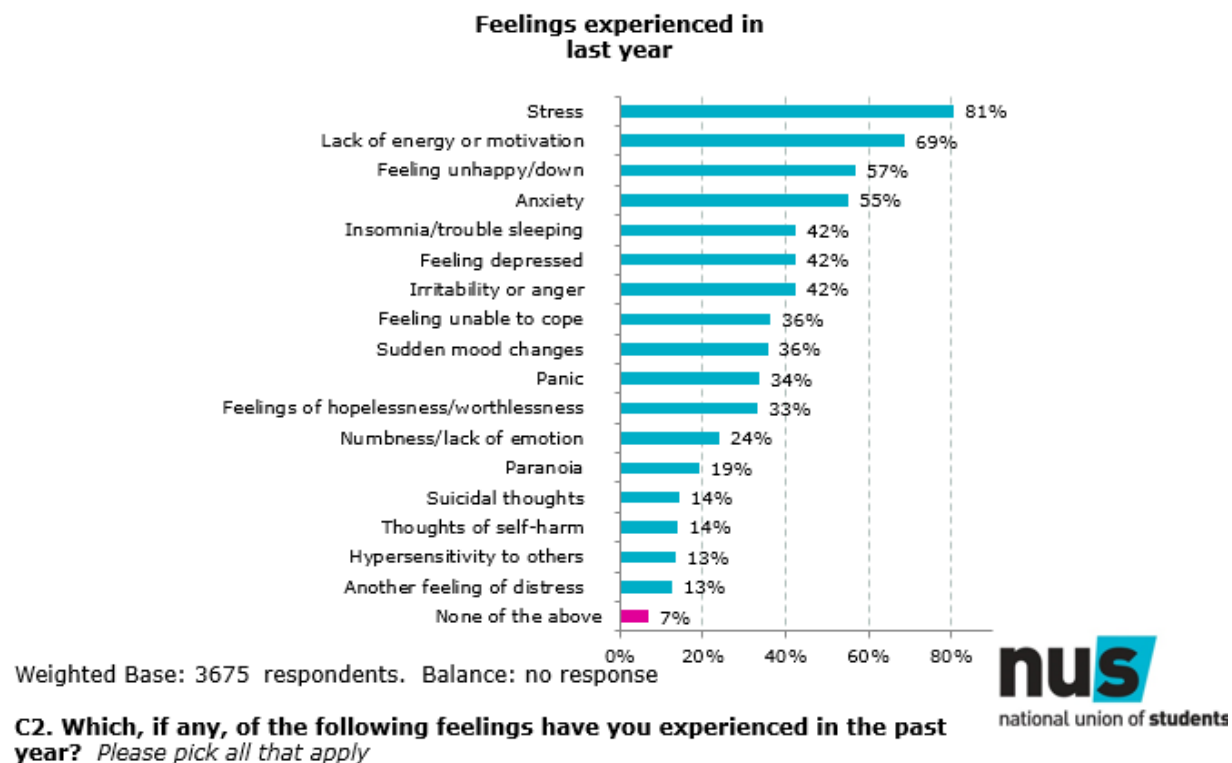
## Significant differences

Looking closer at the different age groups, the youngest students of between 16-18 years are significantly less likely to be worried than any of the other age groups below 40. People who identify as heterosexual are less likely to be concerned than other identities. People with a learning disability are more likely to be concerned than those without.

## Feelings experienced

Stress was identified as the most common feeling experienced by students in the past year (81%) followed by a lack of energy or motivation, a general feeling of being unhappy/down, or feelings of anxiety. Less than 10% had experienced none of the health worries identified.

**Figure 2: Feelings experienced in the last year**



### Significant differences

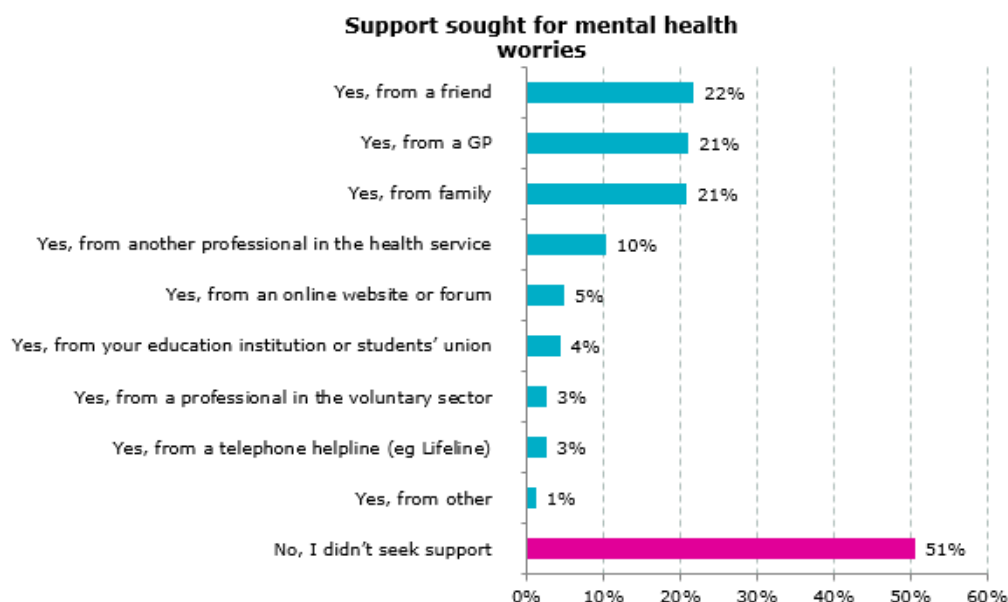
Stress is significantly less likely to have been experienced by entry level students than all other students, except apprentices. Stress is significantly more likely to be suffered by people who identify as bisexual than other identities, and people with learning disabilities than those without.

Men are significantly less likely than other genders to experience several of the feelings listed, such as being unhappy/down, insomnia, feeling depressed, sudden mood changes, irritability or panic. People who identify as heterosexual are significantly less likely to feel depressed, to self-harm or to experience suicidal thoughts than other identities.

## Seeking support – where do students look for help?

When looking for support with mental health problems, the most popular choice of support is from a friend (22%), followed closely by one in five who will turn to either a GP or their family. One in ten (10%) sought other professional help. Only a small percentage (4%) turned to their institution or Students' Union. Over half of all respondents didn't seek support of any type.

**Figure 3: Support sought for mental health problems**



Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

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**C3. Have you sought support for a problem with your mental health within the past year?**

*Please pick all that apply*

### Significant differences

Students aged 16-18 years are significantly less likely to seek support from their GP than other students under the age of 40. People who identify as heterosexual are significantly less likely to seek support than other identities from either their GP, friends or health service professionals.

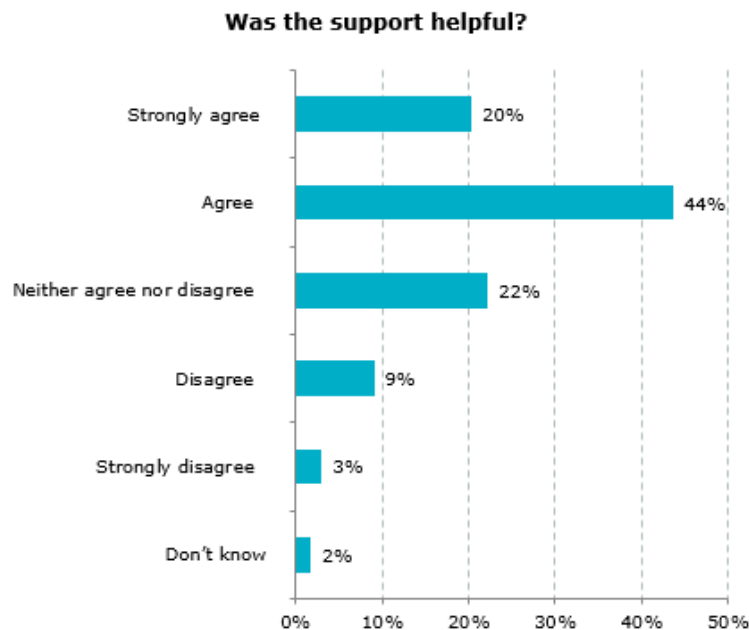
Students with a learning disability are significantly more likely to seek support from within their family. People who identify as heterosexual are significantly more likely than other identities to say they didn't seek any support.



## Seeking support – was it helpful?

The majority (almost two thirds: 64%) of those who sought help and advice for their mental health issues agreed (strongly agree or agree) that it was helpful. Just over one tenth (12%) felt that it was not helpful (disagree or strongly disagree).

**Figure 4: Was the support received helpful?**



Base: 1605 respondents. Balance: those who did not seek support

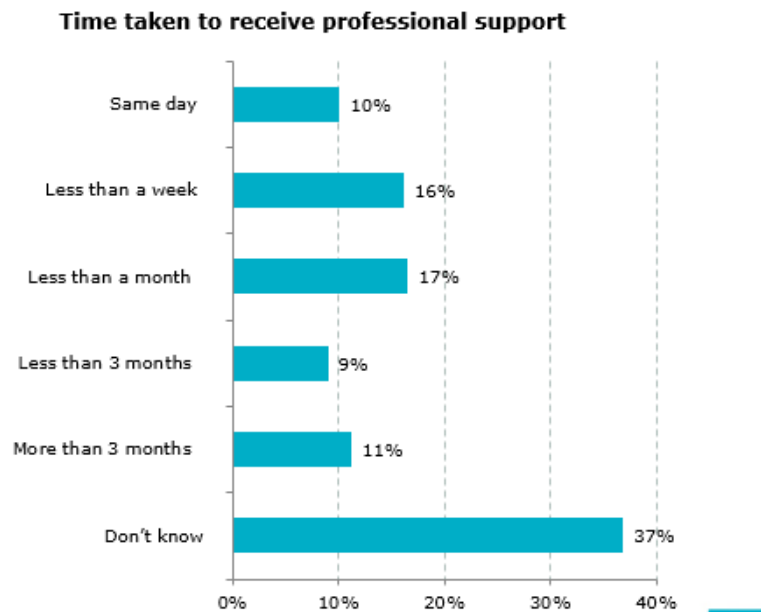


**C4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the statement "The support I received was helpful"?**

## Professional support – time taken to get help?

As figure 5 shows the time taken to receive professional help varied but was most commonly reported to be less than a month or less than a week (excluding those who didn't know).



**Figure 5: Time taken to receive professional help?**

Base: 1605 respondents. Balance: those who did not seek support

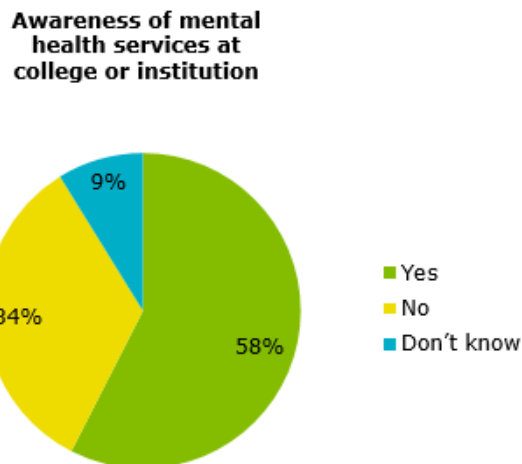
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national union of students

**C5. If you did seek professional support, how long did you have to wait for that support?**

## Seeking support – awareness of mental health services

Over half (58%) of students were aware of the mental health services at their college or university, but a third (34%) were not.

Although only a small percentage (4%) had turned to their institution or Students' Union for support (Figure 3), the above would suggest that this is not due to a lack of knowledge about the services available.

**Figure 6: Awareness of mental health services at place of study**

Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

**C6. Are you aware of any mental health services at your place of study?**

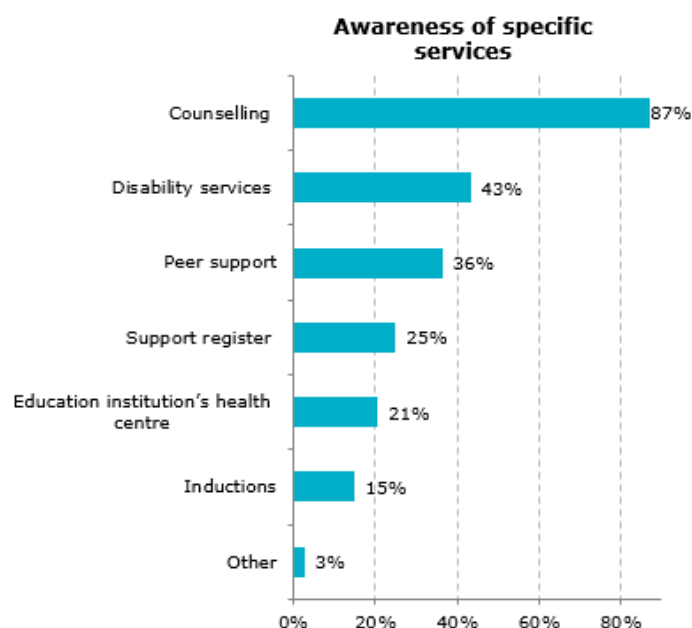


### **Significant differences**

People with a learning disability are significantly more likely to be aware of the mental health services at their place of study.

### **Seeking support – awareness of specific services at place of study**

Students were most likely to know about the counselling service at their place of study (87%). Fewer than half had heard of disability services (43%), or were familiar with peer support (36%), and only a quarter were knowledgeable about the support register.

**Figure 7: Awareness of specific services at place of study**

Base: 2113 respondents. Balance: Those unaware of mental health services



**C7. If so, what services are you aware of at your place of study?**

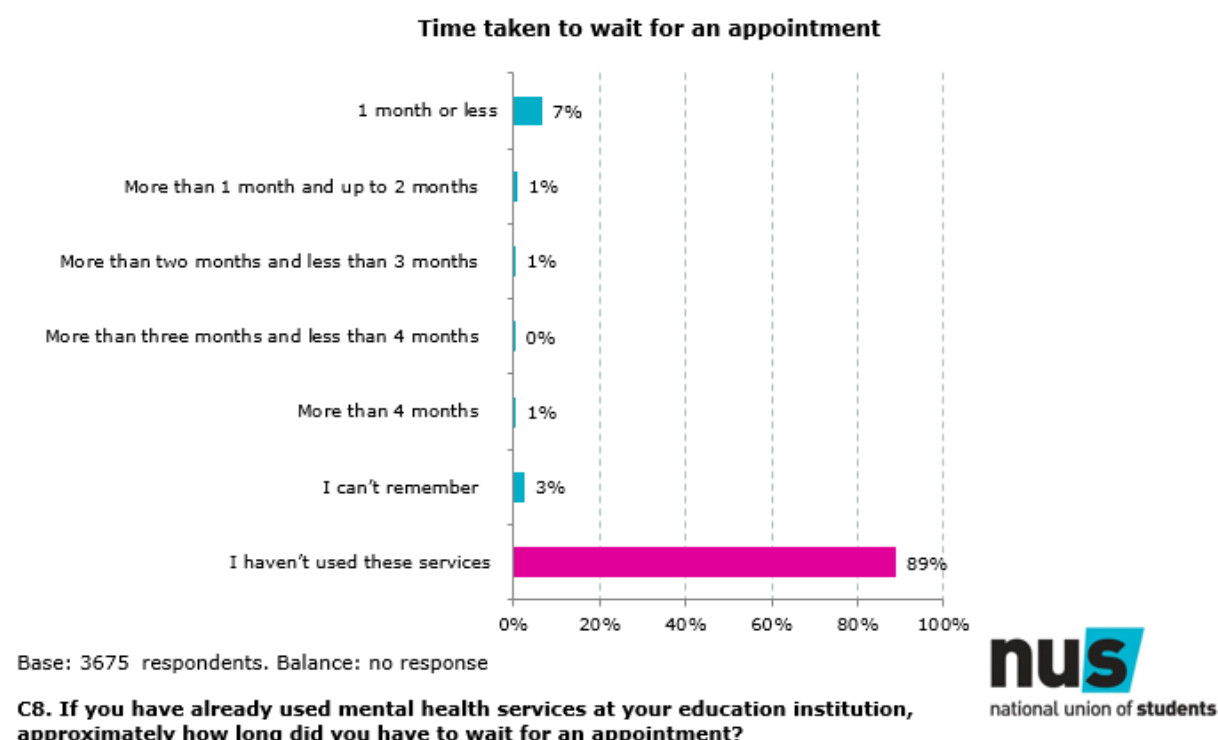
### *Significant differences*

Those students with a learning disability are significantly more likely than those without to be aware of the disability services and the support register.

### **Seeking support – time taken to wait for mental health services appointment at Institution**

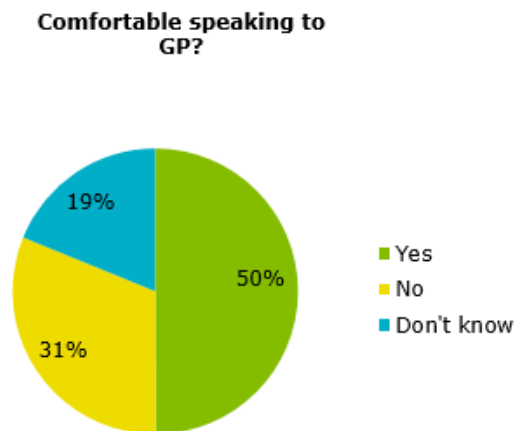
Few students had used the mental health service at their institution (less than one in ten) but those who did generally waited a month or less (7%).

**Figure 8: Time taken to wait for mental health services appointment at education institution**



## Seeking support – talking to a GP

Half of students agreed that they would feel comfortable talking to their GP about mental health. Almost a third (31%) said they would not feel comfortable, and almost one in five (19%) didn't know.

**Figure 9: Talking to a GP about mental health?**

Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

**C9. Do you feel comfortable speaking to your GP about your mental health?**

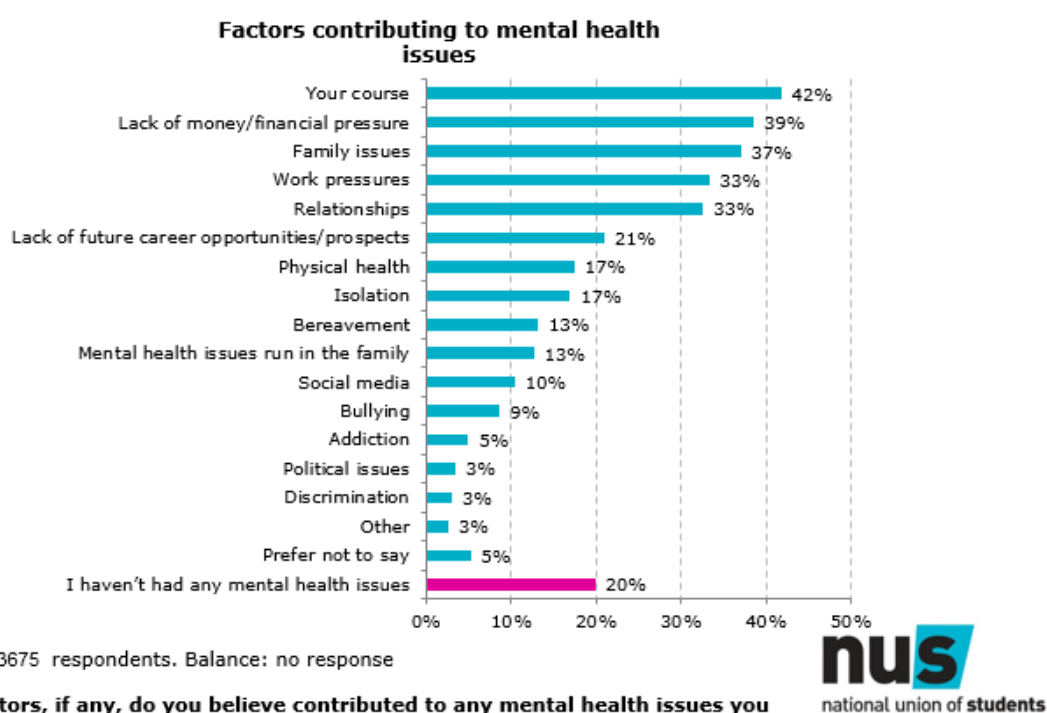


### *Significant differences*

Students with a learning disability are significantly more likely to feel comfortable talking to their GP than those without.

## **Causes of Mental Health**

A wide variety of factors were identified as contributing to those experiencing mental health issues. The most commonly identified causes were: their course, lack of money, family issues, work pressures and relationships.

**Figure 10: Factors that may have contributed to mental health?**

### Significant differences

Students aged 19-26 are significantly more likely than 16-18 year olds to say their course, work pressures, lack of money or lack of future career opportunities have contributed to their mental health issues. People who identify as heterosexual are significantly less likely to attribute their mental health issues to lack of future career opportunities or bullying than other identities.

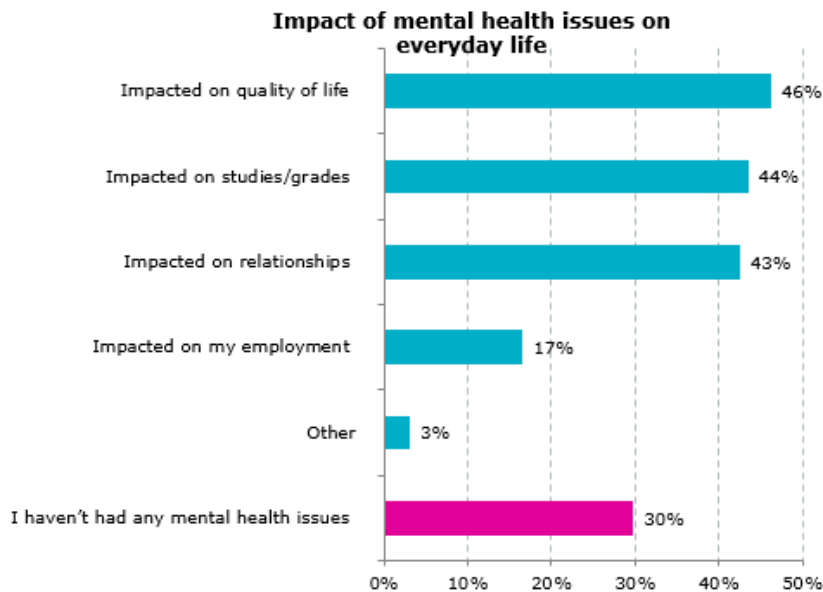
People with a learning disability are significantly more likely than those without to cite the top issues of their course, family issues, relationships, lack of money, lack of future career opportunities, physical health, isolation as contributing to mental health issues. They are significantly less likely to say they have not had any mental health issues.

### Impact of Mental Health

The impact of mental health is felt widely across everyday life. Over four in ten agreed that it had impacted on their quality of life (46%), on their studies and grades (44%), and

similar numbers identified that their relationships had suffered (43%). A smaller proportion felt it had affected their employment (17%).

**Figure 11: Impact of mental health issues on everyday life?**



Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response



**C11. What impact have any mental health issues had on your everyday life, if any?**

### *Significant differences*

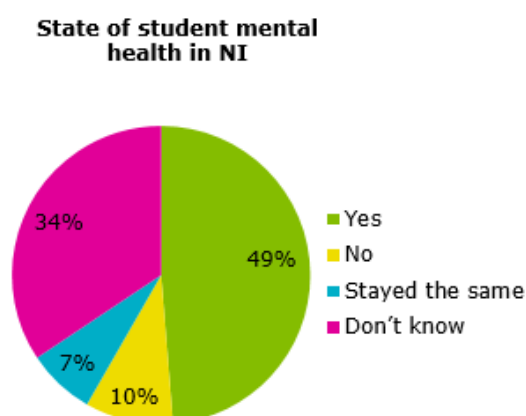
Older students (19-26 year olds) are significantly more likely to report that mental health issues affect everyday life; and students with a specific learning disability are significantly more likely to be affected than those without.

16-18 year old students are significantly less likely than other students up to the age of 26 to say their life had been impacted by any of the above factors, and are the student group significantly most likely to say they have not had any mental health issues. Students with a specific learning disability are significantly more likely to be affected in all of the scenarios listed than those without.

# Mental Health Issues Across NI

Almost half of students felt that student mental health in Northern Ireland has deteriorated in the past 5 years. One third did not know, however.

**Figure 12: State of student mental health in NI**



Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

**D1. Do you believe that student mental health in Northern Ireland has deteriorated in the past 5 years?**



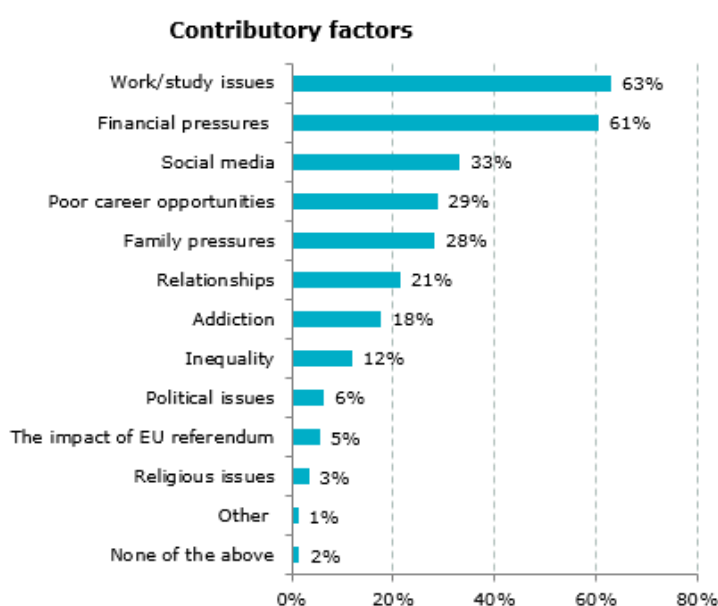
## Significant differences

Students from NI are significantly more likely than students from other countries to agree that mental health in NI has deteriorated.

## Mental Health Issues – contributory factors

Work/study issues (63%) and financial pressures (61%) were thought to be the main reasons why mental health in NI has deteriorated in the past five years. Social media, poor career opportunities and family pressures were the next most commonly mentioned factors - chosen by approximately a third each.



**Figure 13: Contributory factors to deterioration in mental health issues in NI**

Weighted Base: 1791 respondents. Balance: those who don't believe that mental health has got worse



**D2. What factors, if any, do you believe have contributed towards this?**  
Please pick the top three issues

### Significant differences

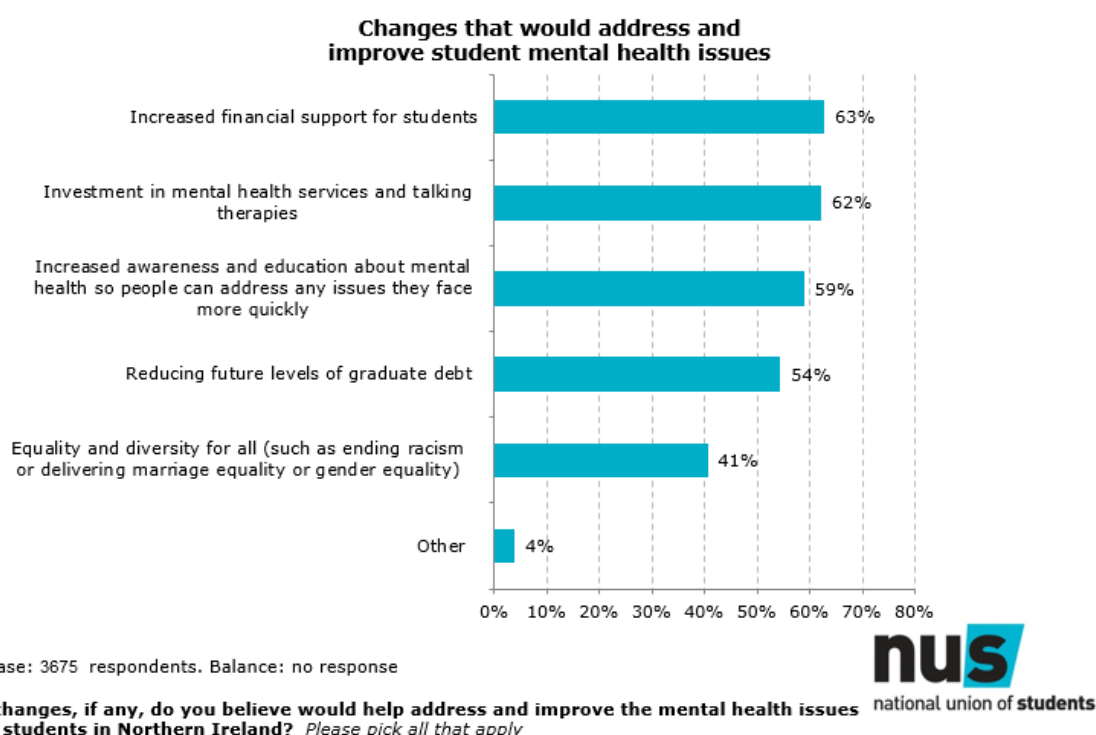
Younger students of 16-18 years are significantly less likely than students aged 19-35 to attribute financial pressures or poor career opportunities as a contributory factor.

## Mental Health Issues – what could improve mental health?

Given that financial pressures are seen as a key factor in the deterioration in mental health in NI, it is fitting that increasing financial support for students was the most popular change identified to help improve mental health (63%).

Investment in mental health services and talking therapies was also thought be equally important (62%); and marginally fewer felt that an increase in education about mental health is needed (59%).

**Figure 14: Changes that would address and improve student mental health issues in Northern Ireland**



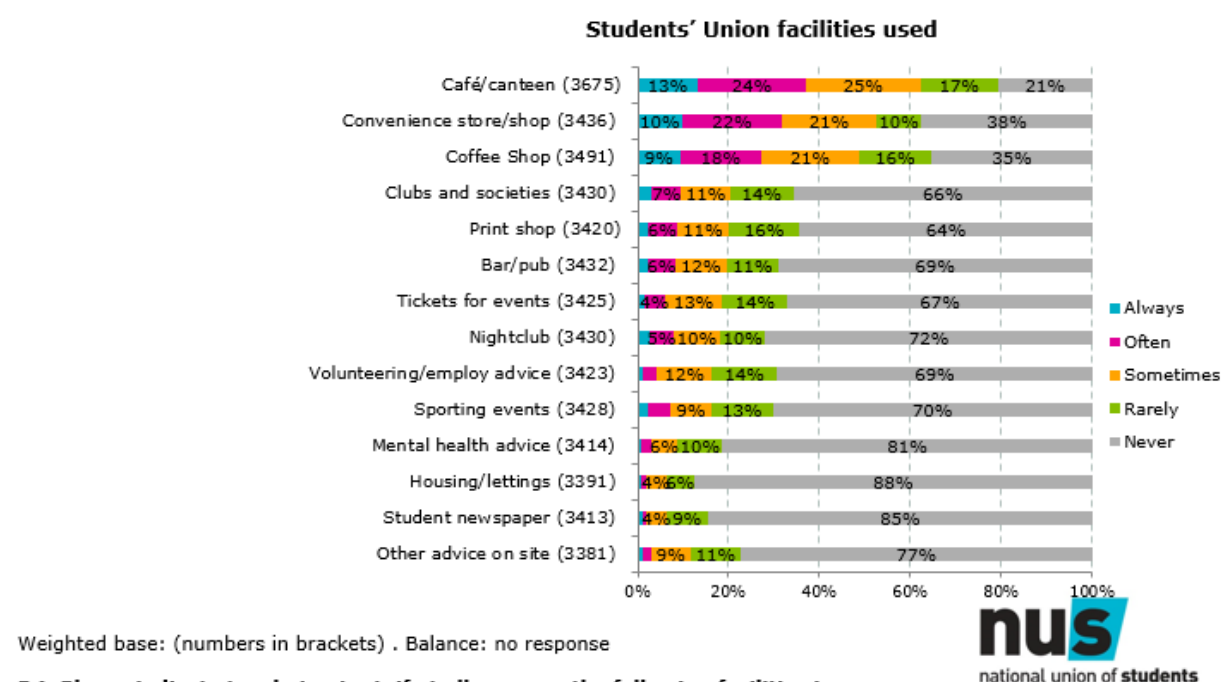
### Significant differences

Younger students of 16-18 years are significantly less likely than older students aged 19-26 to agree that the top four changes above will improve mental health issues in NI. People who identify as heterosexual are significantly less likely than other identities to agree that equality and diversity for all will improve mental health issues.

People with specific learning disabilities are more likely to agree than those without, that investment in services, increased awareness and education, and equality and diversity for all would improve the situation.

### Use of all facilities in Students' Unions

When looking at students' use of Students' Unions' facilities in Northern Ireland, fewer than one in ten (9%) use the services for mental health and wellbeing advice services at least sometimes. In fact, other than the café/canteen, the convenience store and the coffee shop many of the facilities are used by only one in five students or less.

**Figure 15: Facilities used in Students' Unions in Northern Ireland**

**D4. Please indicate to what extent, if at all, you use the following facilities in your Students' Union. Please pick all that apply**

## Supporting comments

Verbatim comments support the key findings above – that many students suffer from mental health issues, that more help and support is needed, and that financial worries are linked.

**Figure 16: Comments about mental health and related experiences**

### Main themes:

- ✓ **Personal experiences of mental health problems**
- ✓ **More help and support needed**
- ✓ **Financial worries**
- ✓ **Institution not supportive/helpful**

"I worry that my feeling depressed has changed how my friends and family see me..."  
(Man, 21-22, UG)

"Not enough being done to address the problem, not enough people talking about it."  
(Man, 16-18, FE)

"As a nursing student in particular I feel immense strain financially."  
(Woman, 27-30, UG)

"the professional help within the education is not good."  
(Woman, 19-20, FE)

Base: 432 respondents. Balance: no response

**D5 If you have any comments you'd like to share with us about your mental health and related experiences please type your comments in the text box below.**

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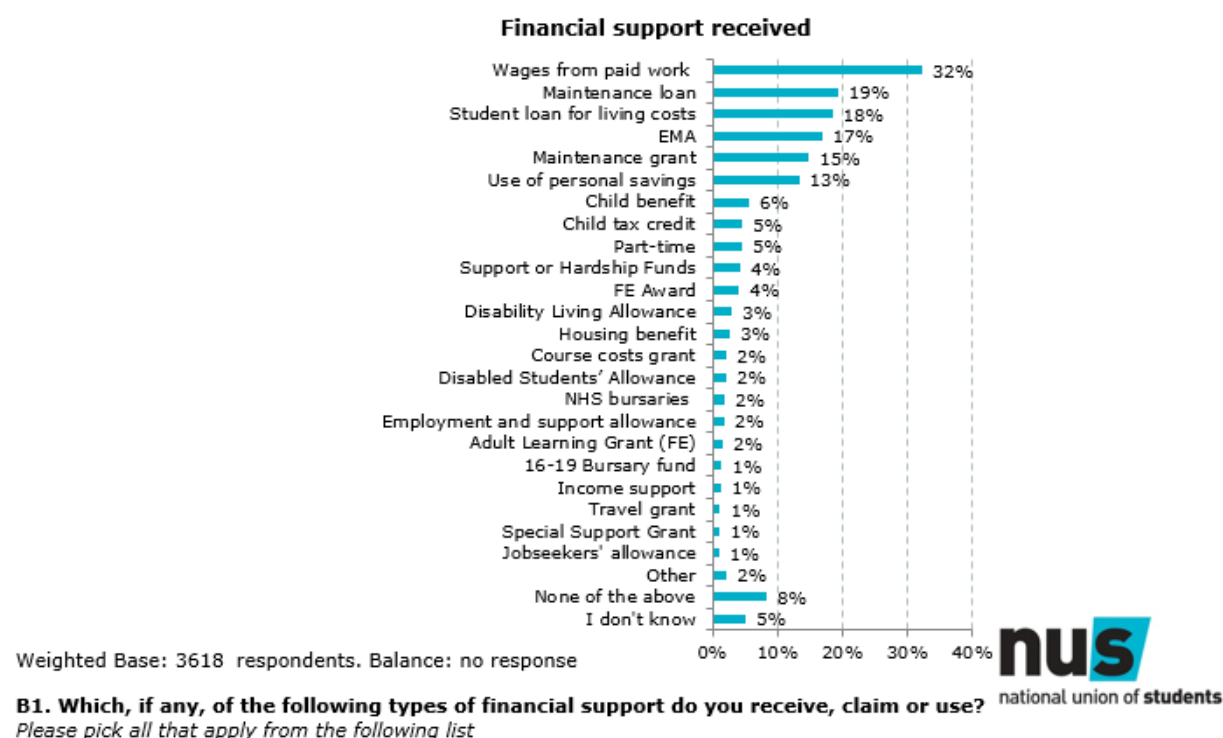
# Pound in Your Pocket – update on 2014 survey findings

In addition to researching wellbeing across the Province, the survey also looked at financial worries and concerns experienced by students, which as we have seen are one of the contributing factors to stress.

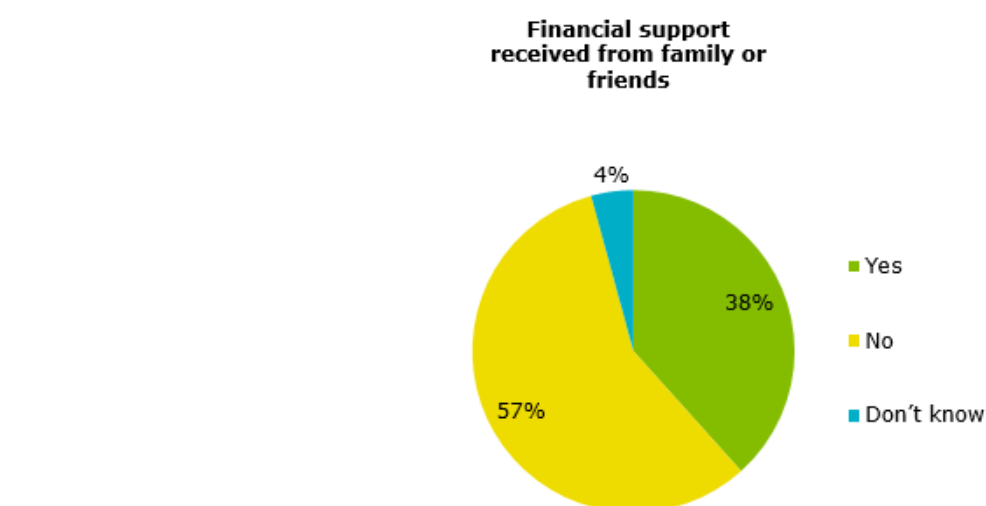
The following section of the report highlights the key findings from the finance questions, and where we have re-asked a question from the 2014 NI Pound in Your Pocket survey a comparison has been made. The 2014 report had a similar sample size -3,245 compared to 3,680 in the present survey. The same methodology was used, but the demographic profile is different, so any comparisons made should be seen as indicative and not a direct, or like for like, comparison of data.

## **Financial support received, claimed or used**

Earnings from paid work are the most common source of external financial support for students in Northern Ireland (32%). Over one in ten rely on either a maintenance or student loan, EMA or maintenance grant or personal savings.

**Figure 17: Financial support received**

Fewer than four in ten (38%) received financial support from friends or family.

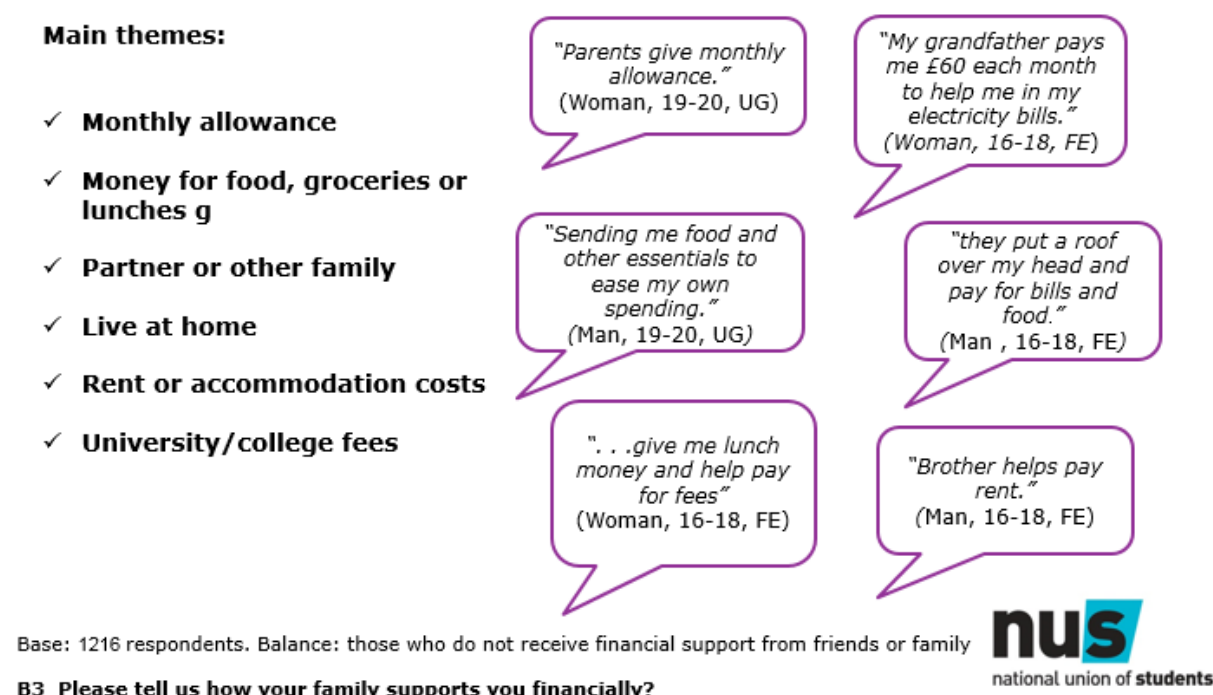
**Figure 18: Financial support from friends or family**

Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

**B2. Do you receive any financial support from your friends or family?**

Of those who received financial support from their family, many received this as a monthly allowance or regular pocket money from parents (over half the sample are in FE). Groceries and money for food or lunches was specified as a regular form of support. Some were supported by their spouses, or by the extended family with financial help from grandparents or siblings. Many students recognised the financial assistance involved in living at home, and again this is supported by half the sample being from FE. Help was often provided with high level expenditure such as rent and accommodation costs, and in paying tuition fees.

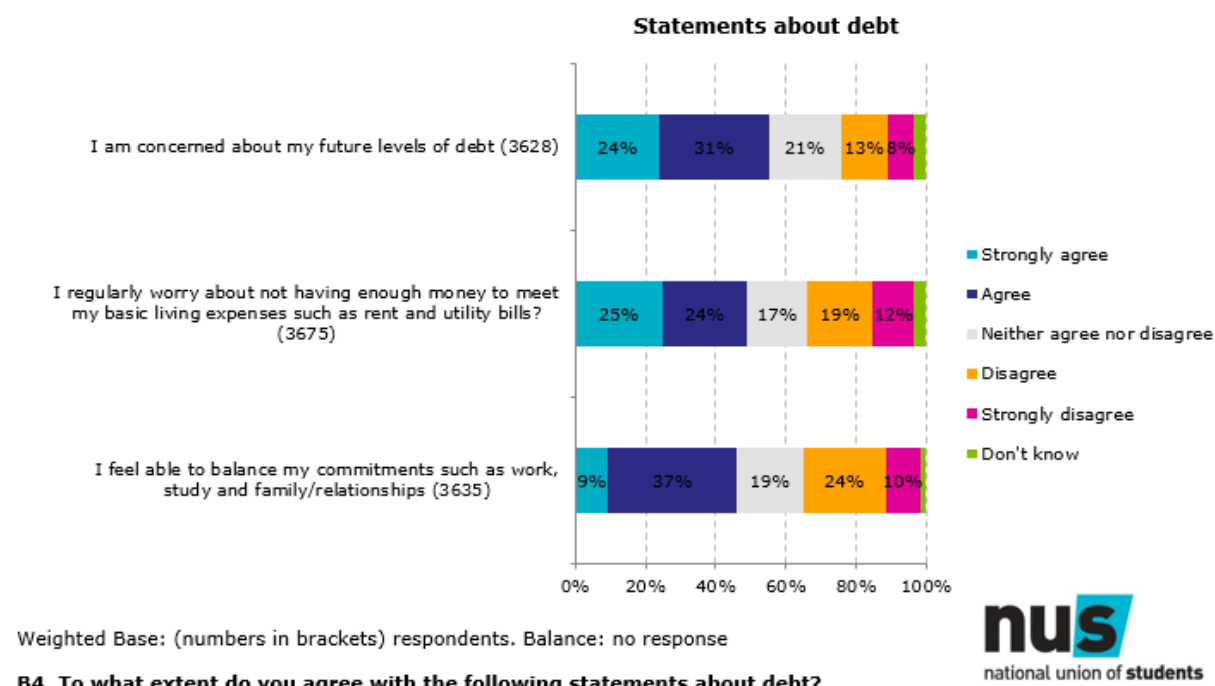
**Figure 19: Actual support received from family**



## Money worries and the work life balance

Students were then asked for their levels of agreement with three statements about money worries and their work life balance. There was substantial agreement (of either strongly agree or agree) with all of the statements. Over half (55%) agreed they are concerned about future levels of debt.

Slightly fewer (49%) agreed that they regularly worry about not having enough money to meet basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills. When it comes to being able to balance commitments such as work, study and family/relationships fewer than half (46%) agreed they were able to do this.

**Figure 20: Statements about Student Debt**

## Comparisons against 2014 Pound in Your Pocket survey

Two of the statements in Figure 20 were also asked in the 2014 Pound in Your Pocket survey.

In the 2014 survey, 70% of students said they were concerned about future levels of debt, which decreased to 55% in the 2017 survey.

Figure 21 shows data gathered by agreement (agree/strongly agree) with the statement "I regularly worry about not having enough money to meet my basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills" by all respondents in 2014 and 2017. The chart also shows a breakdown of age, FE/HE and equality groups for the present year's data. It indicates that there has been a reduction in concern about having enough money, where the level of agreement by all respondents has reduced by 9 percentage points since 2014.

**Figure 21: 2017 NUS USI Wellbeing survey, agreement with statement "I regularly worry about not having enough money to meet my basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills" – by 2014 data; and 2017 data by age, FE/HE and equality groups**

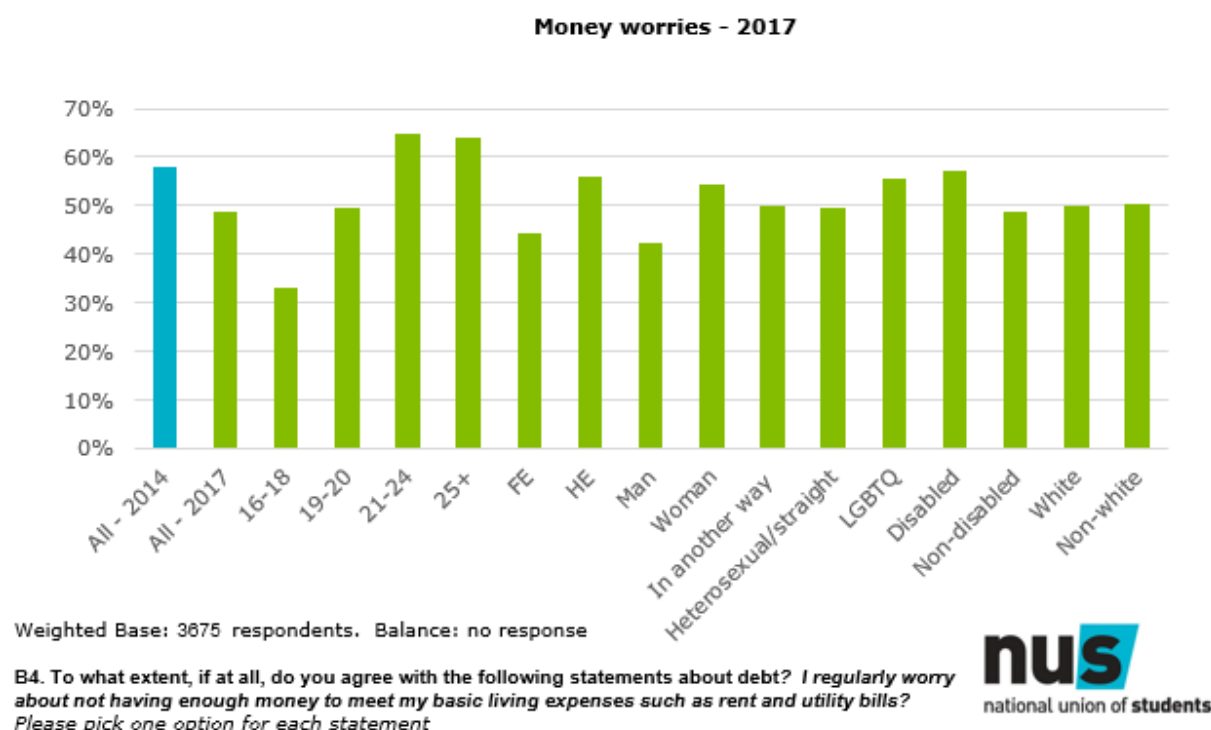
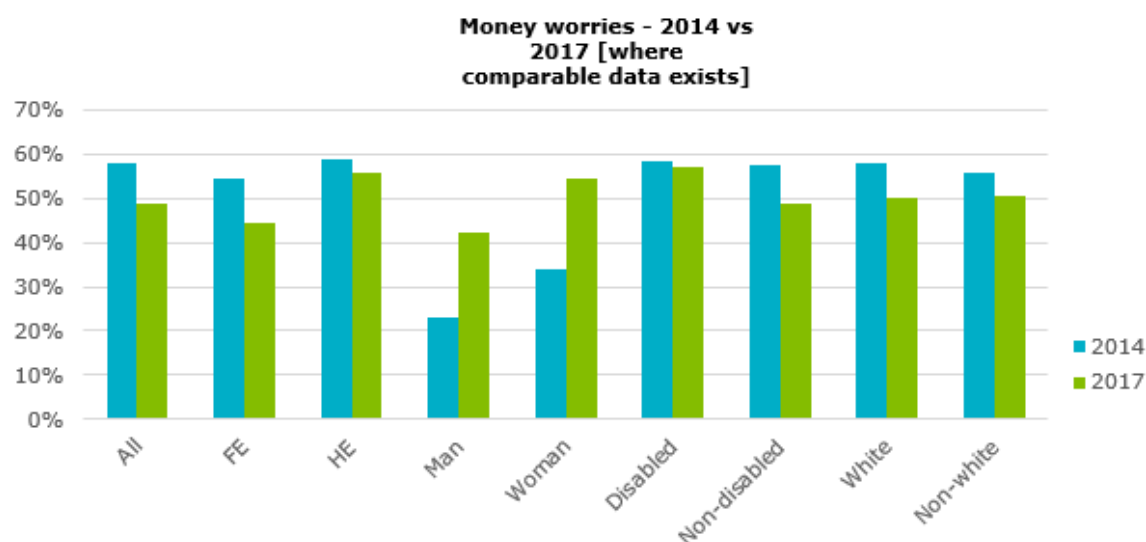


Figure 22 looks at the data from the two surveys in further detail where comparable data exists, and this also indicates that there has been a reduction in the levels of concern about money worries in all groups, except gender where there has been an increase.



**Figure 22: 2017 NUS USI Wellbeing survey, agreement with statement "I regularly worry about not having enough money to meet my basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills" – against 2014 data where comparable data exists**



Weighted Base: 3675 respondents. Balance: no response

B4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements about debt? *I regularly worry about not having enough money to meet my basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills?*  
Please pick one option for each statement

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# Conclusion and initial recommendations

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# Conclusion & Initial Recommendations

## Conclusion

This survey is possibly the largest and most detailed research project specifically in relation to student wellbeing and mental health ever carried out in Northern Ireland. The survey provides a clear insight, and an important empirical evidence base on the experiences and pressures faced by students in further and higher education. Mental health problems affect so many people from all sections of society. Addressing mental health and wellbeing is a clear way in which government can be responsive to the needs of the public and build a better future for all.

The fact that 78% of students surveyed said they have experienced mental health worries over the past year sends out a very clear signal that this issue must be addressed urgently by government. It is troubling that significantly more respondents (49%) believe that student mental health in Northern Ireland has deteriorated over the past five years, compared to those who thought it had not (17%). The extremely concerning findings of this research should act as a warning sign to politicians that action is essential to address the devastating scale and impact of mental health problems amongst students. Government must ensure that it acts pro-actively to make wellbeing and mental health a key priority.

There is also food for thought from this research for Universities, Colleges and their students' unions as well. The support networks available to students must be holistic and so the learning environment within which students exist must be well-equipped and flexible enough to deliver the appropriate support and relevant signposting necessary to allow their students to thrive.

It stands to reason that working to address student mental health issues will have long-term benefits, not just for the individual student but also for wider society. Ensuring students are equipped with the help, support and advice they need to address the issues they face could quite dramatically help to shift the culture within wider society of the stigma related to mental health matters. More resourcing for student mental health services could help improve retention rates and help more students to complete their

studies. Helping to enable students to complete their studies could massively boost the economy, because it could deliver increased skills and qualifications. The impacts of poor mental health and wellbeing can have such a profound effect upon so many aspects of students' lives, not just their studies, as evidenced by this report.

Having mental health services at an institutional level is simply not enough, we need the services to be well funded to ensure support and appointments are delivered as quickly as possible to address the mental health problems facing the students. It is essential that the length of time that students wait for an appointment with a counsellor or mental health service is as minimal as possible, so that people who are seeking assistance receive it as quickly as possible. It is also important that other students' union services which could help with mental health and wellbeing related matters, like financial and careers advice services, are provided with the appropriate resource to allow them to deliver their services comfortably.

The factors that respondents believe contributed to any mental health problems they had must be examined by government in the work they do around any mental health strategy and service provision.

The fact that 39% of respondents said they believed a lack of money/financial pressure contributed to their mental health issues is a very clear sign that students require increased financial support from government. Student debt and the difficulties that students have in making ends meet are issues that government must consider and address. The cost of living has risen massively in recent years and government should address this by increasing student support on the basis of inflation annually. Also, students who started paying their Student Loan Company debts in the 2016 year, have on average over £1,500 more debt than those who started paying the previous year, and this is a clear practical example of the significant financial pressures faced by students.

## Recommendations

Ahead of the recent Assembly elections in Northern Ireland, NUS-USI published a student manifesto which reflected the key issues which, after ongoing consultation with students we believe should be issues of priority for our politicians to address. Within that student manifesto there were a number of recommendations which we believe are worth repeating here - in light of the findings of this research – as we believe they could go some way to addressing either the causes of poor mental health and wellbeing or the implications that it can have for students. We too have included recommendations for higher and further educational institutions. It's important to note that these are only initial recommendations, we will be working closely with our member students' unions to determine a more detailed action plan to meet the challenges presented by this research, head on.

We recommend:

- A coherent mental health and wellbeing strategy is delivered, working across government departments to address the pressures facing students and the impact they have upon their wellbeing and mental health.
- That part of any cross-departmental strategy should include resource to deliver a programme of work that would develop peer-led campaigns to address the culture and stigma surrounding mental health on campuses across Northern Ireland.
- Government invests in students' unions and student support services in further and higher education so that all students, including international students, receive the best possible support and advice on careers, mental health and finance matters.
- Action is taken to alleviate the financial pressures students face, by delivering inflationary rises in all forms of student support to ensure that the financial support students receive reflects the cost of living which they face.
- As decisions may be taken in relation to the funding of further and higher and education in the future we would encourage Government and the sector to consider the damning implications of further marketization and a potential increase in student fees, in the context of the mental health and wellbeing of both students

and staff. Our recommendation is that tertiary education should be publicly funded and that a funding system based on debt is unsustainable and irresponsible.

- That all higher and further educational institutions in Northern Ireland carry out a thorough audit of the support services and relevant processes they have in place, working with professionals to identify any potential gaps that exist and improvements that can be made to ensure students receiving the most effective support and signposting as quickly as possible.

The impact that mental health issues has had upon students is extremely troubling, with 46% of respondents saying that mental health issues had impacted on their quality of life, 44% saying that they had impacted upon their studies and grades, and 43% saying they had impacted upon their relationships.

It is clear that the results of this research strongly illustrate the need for urgent action from government, institutions and others to address the pressures that students face. That is why we are calling for all of those with a responsibility for tertiary education and a duty of care to those who access it to take heed of these findings and to act upon them.

We believe our initial recommendations provide a starting point for politicians, Institutions and those involved in student support processes to come together to determine the collective, coordinated action that can and needs to be taken to tackle this issue head on.

Our vision is one in which higher and further education is accessible to all, but that also means that a student must be able to access a learning environment which is structured to allow them to thrive and fulfil their potential. We believe the evidence base provided by this research can inform decisions in a way that allow that vision to be realised.

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