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Stay at home students change university life as we know it

Nearly half a million students in the UK are shunning the traditional university lifestyle and choosing to live at home with their parents to save money while they study, a survey revealed today.

Faced with the prospect of burgeoning debt, significant numbers are opting to stay put and no longer fly the nest for their first taste of independence, an experience many have taken for granted for years.

Eight out of ten pay no rent to their families and of those that do, the majority pay just a token to the running of household. Their preference for new universities in metropolitan centres has led to researchers dubbing them the 'Metros', as opposed to 'Retros' who still adopt a more traditional approach.

Metro students commute for up to four hours day. They are five times more likely to have part-time paid employment during term-time than their counterparts living in halls, and two thirds never join in with campus social life, according to The 2006 Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey.

After university halls, living at home is the second most popular option and is adopted by two out of ten students, or 449,488 of the 2,247,440 recorded student population, the report says. Students who live at home are three times more likely to attend a modern university than a traditional or red-brick institution.

Professor Stuart Sanderson, associate dean at Bradford University School of Management, said: "These findings bear out what many of us working in higher education have suspected for a little time: that increasingly students are choosing their university because of their lifestyle choice as well as class and income.

“There is a clear group of students who worry more about being saddled with a huge debt when they graduate, and have adapted the traditional university lifestyle. They live at home, commute long-distances, work in term-time and pursue their social life almost entirely off campus.

“They are missing out on the wider aspects of a university education while better-off undergraduates can spread their wings and whoop it up a little with their peers. The value of a degree remains undiminished. Students see it as a passport to a specific occupation and a better quality of life.”

Peter Taylor, head of universities for Sodexo, said: “Many students have to juggle their studies with part-time jobs. Therefore it is very important for us to help improve their daily life by providing services which meet their needs and busy lifestyles. This survey helps us understand what these needs are and enables us to work with universities to provide suitable solutions.”

Published first in 2004, the Sodexo survey is unique in the questions it asks. It shows students are becoming increasingly alert to third-world poverty and their environment. Half felt it was important to buy Fairtrade and farm assured produce.

A third of students work part-time during term-time, with half who work doing 11-20 hours a week. Working in retail is the most popular job. But having a job is no guarantee of financial comfort. One in five students who work survives on less than £30 a week.

Although one in four students expects to graduate debt-free – up from one in ten two years ago - most estimate they will graduate with an average debt of £11,345. For those living at home, the figure is £9,418.

The Sodexo survey questioned 2,200 students at 112 institutions using an on-line poll.

- Ends -

CASE STUDY 1 – Metro Student Jo Meekley

University: **Southampton University**

Course: **Environmental Engineering**

Year of study: **5th Year (4 years plus a foundation year)**

Accommodation: **Living at home with parents**

Debt expectation: **Minimal**

Job: **Up until recently Barmaid in a hotel (10 hours a week)**

Monthly rent: **£0**

Money per month (after rent): **£100**

Joanne Meekley is 23 and in her fourth year at Southampton University studying Environmental Engineering. Jo also did a foundation year, meaning that she has been in higher education for a total of five years.

Joanne will come out with minimal debt when she graduates, and she puts this down to the fact that she was able to live at home with her parents throughout her time at University. Jo also worked as a barmaid in a hotel. She worked there since she was 15. She said: "I have also worked part time all the way through the previous four years at university and full time during all holidays to make sure I am not in debt when I leave university."

She decided to go to Southampton partly because the course was highly rated and secondly because there was the option to live at home. She said that while many of her friends went away to University, she and others who stayed in Southampton and got jobs, so she didn't feel like she was being 'left behind'. Her decision to go to University was based purely on academic grounds.

CASE STUDY 2 – Retro Student Emma Slater

University: **Bristol University**

Course: **Law (3 year course)**

Year of study: **Second year**

Accommodation: **Shared house**

Debt expectation: **£9,000**

Job: **Occasional part time job – 3 to 4 hours every few months.**

Monthly rent: **£315**

Money per month (after rent): **£300 (loan split over the months in term)**

Emma is at Bristol University in her second of three years. She does not pay for her rent or her tuition fees; her parents pay for both.

She said: "I originally went to university for academic reason purely. But I am now realising it's a lot about the social life. You can have a lot of fun as well as study – I am involved in lots of drama and ballroom dancing." Emma does not have a proper part time job although she does work occasionally for the university on their open days. She says she would not be able to have a part time job because of two reasons; her course is so demanding and also, there are too many other social things going on and a job would compromise her social life hugely.

But Emma is not worried about the debt, and believes the debt will be worth it because in her opinion there is an indefinite amount of time to pay it off. Emma said: "Debt doesn't worry me."