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DEATH OF THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE: EDUCATION NOW JUST A MEANS TO AN END

Research out today shatters long-held perceptions of students as lecture-skipping, beer-drinking socialites, with modern-day undergraduates an ambitious bunch, determined to boost their job prospects and earning potential.

Three-quarters of the UK's 1.2 million* full-time undergraduates view university as a way of improving their career potential, according to the 2008 Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey.

Money is also increasingly important to today's career-minded students, with 60% motivated to study by a desire to achieve higher salaries, compared to just 36% in 2004.

And with anticipated graduate debts at unrivalled heights since top-up fees were introduced two years ago, the tradition of university as a party-focused 'life experience' is obsolete, with today's students prepared to work hard to make their investment pay off.

Social lives are now firmly on the back burner, with less than a third of students listing this as a key reason to go to university.

The number of hours students spend socialising while at university has also dropped dramatically in the last two years. In 2006, 44% of undergraduates spent five hours or more of a typical weekday on their social lives, whereas a mere 14% devote this much time nowadays, and nearly a third (31%) spend just an hour or less each day having fun.

When they do venture out, students aren't partying in university bars. Two-thirds (67%) now do most of their socialising off campus – a sharp increase from 2006, when 44% of undergraduates were moving away from a university-centred social life.

And it seems the nation's binge drinking culture does not extend to university life. More than four in ten (44%) students claim to drink a maximum of 10 units – or five pints – each week, and a remarkable 23% do not drink at all.

"The whole university experience is becoming much more disjointed, and less centred around campus," says Peter Taylor, head of universities for Sodexo.



“Two thirds of students live in non-university accommodation, so it’s no wonder that most socialising takes place off campus. However the community spirit hasn’t disappeared entirely – university coffee bars, cafes and restaurants are still popular daytime haunts, with three times the number of students choosing on-site eateries at meal times, compared to off-campus venues.”

Instead of partying, it seems today’s university swots are hitting the books hard, with more than three-quarters (76%) spending two hours or more of a typical weekday on private study, and over a quarter (28%) devoting four hours or above.

This generation of students are also health conscious. Nearly two-thirds (63%) do an hour’s exercise or more each day, and 84% make an effort to eat healthily.

Unfortunately their finances aren’t so healthy, with the majority (63%) expecting to accumulate debts of over £10,000 by the time they leave – a significant jump from 2006, when 39% predicted they would end up with debts this high. Strikingly, over a third (37%) expect to leave more than £17,500 in the red, and nearly one in five (18%) anticipate debts of over £20,000.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the majority of students are taking this in their stride, with almost two-thirds (64%) feeling confident that they are making a sensible investment in their future career.

And interestingly, money concerns come far lower down the rankings than those about work or results. Seven in ten students (70%) worry about achieving the degree classification they want – up from 57% in 2006 – while just 43% lose sleep over money.

“In the past, socialising was as much a part of university life as attending lectures, but this research shows that the university experience has now radically changed,” comments Professor Sally Burrows, Associate Dean of Bradford University’s School of Management.

“Today’s average undergraduate is extremely hardworking – often working part time as well as studying. They socialise less, drink in moderation, rarely skip lectures and worry about getting the results they need to succeed in the competitive job market.”

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** Higher Education Statistics Agency, full-time undergraduate students in the UK 2006-7*

Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey 2008

Published first in 2004, then in 2006, the Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey gives a uniquely detailed analysis of the student experience, from how they choose and fund a university education, to their lifestyle and eating habits. Over 2,000 students participated in the research, from 139 universities around the UK. A full copy of the report will be available from 11 September from www.sodexo.co.uk

Additional findings

- **Rate your prof!** – while perhaps not yet as prolific as the online rants of the US, more than a quarter of students (26%) have written about their university or tutors on a message board or blog
- **Virtual learning** – a minority (4%) now log in to lectures, rather than attending
- **Virtual social lives** - While physical socialising is on the decline, nearly 9 in 10 students (88%) use social networking sites each week
- **Off-campus socialising** – when they do go out, 52% of students do most of their socialising in non-university venues, and an additional 15% always socialise off-site
- **No money for booze** – nearly two-thirds of students (62%) spend just £20 or less on socialising, including alcohol and cigarettes
- **Food eats into money** – food and groceries are the biggest outgoings for many students, after rent. While half of all students manage to get by on £20 a week or less, 26% spend between £21 and £30 on food and groceries, 10% spend £31-40, and 14% spend £41 or more
- **On-campus dining** – when it comes to eating out – rather than cooking their own meals in their own residences – 74% of students dine in university outlets, rather than non-university eateries.
- **Brands are not king** – just 6% of students seek out branded food from catering outlets, and while coffee giants – such as Starbucks and Coffee Nero – are more seductive when it comes to a caffeine fix, around three-quarters still maintain that the name doesn't matter
- **Student accommodation** – less than a third (32%) live in university accommodation: 46% rent non university flats/houses, 9% live in their own flat/house and 13% live with their family
- **Funding university** – 76% of students take out student loans (compared with 65% in 2006), 51% receive money from parents, 35% run up bank overdrafts, 32% use their own savings, 27% get LEA grants, 8% use credit cards and 5% have bank loans
- **Paid work** – in addition, 33% juggle part-time jobs alongside their studies and a minority of 2% hold a full-time job during term time. Strikingly, nearly half (49%) of students who continue to live at home with family to cut costs while studying have a part-time job during term time
- **Zero debt students dwindling** – in 2006, nearly a quarter (24%) of students expected to graduate with no debt at all, while now, just 14% are anticipating leaving in the black
- **International students richer?** – nearly three-quarters (74%) of all non-European students, and 54% of students from elsewhere in Europe expect to graduate with £2,500 of debt or less – compared to just 15% of UK students
- **Green students** – The majority of students (64%) want to see more green initiatives at their university, with women (70%) more environmentally concerned than men (56%). Most students make the effort to recycle, with just 21% not bothering

Regional highlights (more regional data available)

- **London & SE** students are the most likely to accumulate **very large debts** – 23% expect to leave university over £20,000 in the red, compared to 18% nationally. And yet more students in this region get parental support (53%) than anywhere else
- **London & SE** students are also the **most ethically minded** – more here are prepared to pay a premium price for free trade, organic and free range produce than in any other area
- More students in **SW & Wales** cite the **social life** as a key reason to go to university than any other region (35%, compared to 31% nationally). This area also has the most students doing the least independent study – more than a quarter (26%) spend just one hour or less each day
- **SW & Wales** students are also the **greenest** – a higher proportion recycle than in any other region – perhaps as more students here feel their university has sufficient facilities
- **East & Midlands** students are the **most studious** – a third (33%) spend four hours or more each day on independent study, compared to 28% nationally. Yet 76% still worry about achieving their desired degree classification – more than anywhere else



- Students in the **East & Midlands** are **least likely** to have a **part-time job** during term-time – just 27% do, compared to 33% nationally
- **Northern** students (NW, NE, Yorks & Humber) are most likely to **spend lots of time socialising** mid week. Nearly one in five (18%) spend five hours or more having fun on an average weekday, compared to 14% nationally
- Perhaps as a result, they are also the most likely to seek out **discount deals** – 49% choose where to go based on how cheap it is, a higher proportion than anywhere else in the UK
- Students in **Scotland** expect to leave with the **lowest debts**. In total, 29% expect to graduate with £2,500 debt or less, compared to 18% nationally. And just 9% expect to accumulate debts of £20,000 or more, compared to 18% nationally
- And contrary to the region's reputation for serving up deep fried Mars bars, students in **Scotland** are amongst the **most health conscious**, with 85% claiming to eat healthily
- More students at university in **Northern Ireland** live at home with their parents than anywhere else – 35% **live with their family**, compared to 13% nationally
- They are also most likely to **do paid work** during term-time, with more than half (53%) working part-time, compared to 33% nationally

About Sodexo

In the UK and Ireland, Sodexo employs 43,000 employees, and provides food and facilities management services to clients at over 2,300 locations in the corporate, education, healthcare, leisure and defence sectors.

Sodexo has more than 50 years' experience of providing food and facilities management services to state schools, independent schools, colleges and universities.

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