



Activity name	Post 16 Student Life
Date	Tranche 5 (Sept 2020 – Aug 2021) and Tranche 6 (Sept 2021 – Aug 2022).
Total number of sessions	46
Total number of students	1438
Total number of target students	304
Institutions involved <i>* Institutions that completed surveys</i>	Bridgwater and Taunton College*, City College Plymouth, Cornwall College*, Discovery College*, Exeter College*, King Edward VI Community College, Petroc, Sir John Hunt Community Sports College*, Stoke Damerel Community College, Strode College*, Teign School*, The Blue School*, The Ilfracombe Church of England Academy, The Spires College, Tor Bridge High*, Torquay Academy.

Introduction

This report details the impact of the ‘Student Life’ core workshop offered by Next Steps South West (NSSW) as part of the Office for Students’ Uni Connect programme. This activity was delivered to KS5, Year 12 (Level 3 Yr1) and Year 13 (Level 3, Yr2) students studying in Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, which is NSSW Tranches 5 and 6.

This session is designed to build on the Pre-16 Student Life and Budgeting workshop, delivered to KS4. The KS5 session is designed to extend what was learnt at KS4 and provide a deeper understanding of student life in HE. Further information about student finance is discussed as well as signposting for additional advice on budgeting. This session draws upon the real-life experiences of students in HE to provide relevant context.

Aims

This workshop aims to support students with their knowledge of studying at HE and provide an opportunity for them to gain an insight into what life might really be like for an HE student. Information regarding accommodation options, budgeting, socialising, and different forms of support are discussed. Focus is placed upon workshop attendees having the chance to ask a current HE student about their life at university. These aims align with key barriers identified by NSSW relating to lack of Knowledge of HE.

Evaluation Design and Data Collection

The evaluation of the Student Life activity consisted of a post-session survey that is tailored to the activity. Students are asked a series of structured qualitative and quantitative questions which relate to the anticipated outcomes of the workshop.

These post-activity evaluation surveys are designed to evaluate the short-term outcomes using the indicators detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Anticipated outcomes for Post 16 Student Life Workshops

Barrier to HE	Short-term outcomes	Indicators
<i>Knowledge of HE</i>	Increased understanding of the wider benefits of HE study for ≥ 80% students	Students are able to identify social, academic, and career benefits of HE study
		Students are able to Identify different support services available during HE study

Responses are anonymous and could not be traced back to individual students. Out of the 1438 students who participated, 334 completed the survey and this evaluation report details the findings from those surveys.

Results

In the first section of the survey, students were asked how much they knew about certain aspects of higher education as a result of participating in the session. The results are displayed in Figure 1.

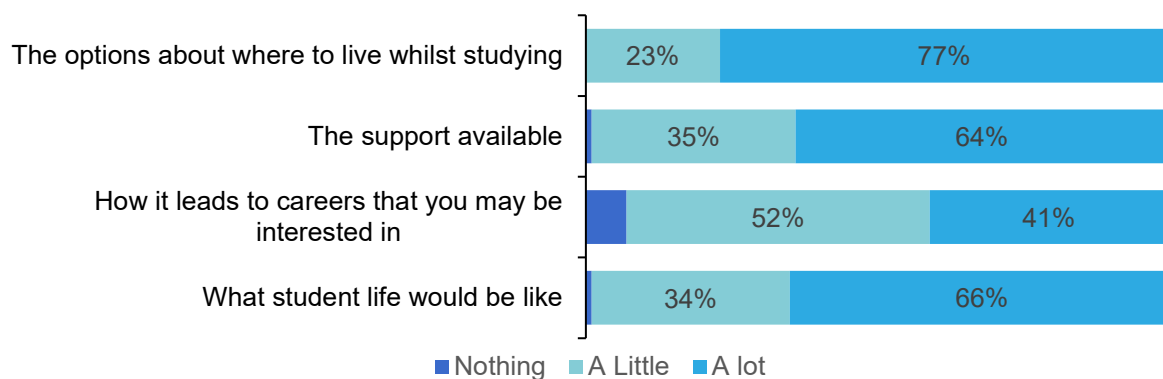


Figure 1. Level of participant knowledge about Student Life as a result of participation in a workshop.

Over three quarters of respondents felt that they knew 'A lot' (77%) about the options on where to live while studying and the rest knew, 'A little'. Approximately two thirds of participants also reported that they knew 'A lot' about the support available (64%) and what student life would be like (66%), whilst a third reported that they knew 'A little' about both these areas. 59% of students said that the session had given them a little or no insight into how HE leads to careers they are interested in. This finding may be because the link between HE and careers is only lightly touched upon in this session and not the focus of this workshop. Overall, this data suggests that the majority of attendees benefitted from attending the session.

To further assess the impact of the session, students were asked to consider statements regarding their knowledge about what student life might be like and their confidence in making informed decisions about HE. Respondents were required to complete a 5-point Likert scale by selecting an option ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' for each statement. Figure 2 shows their responses.

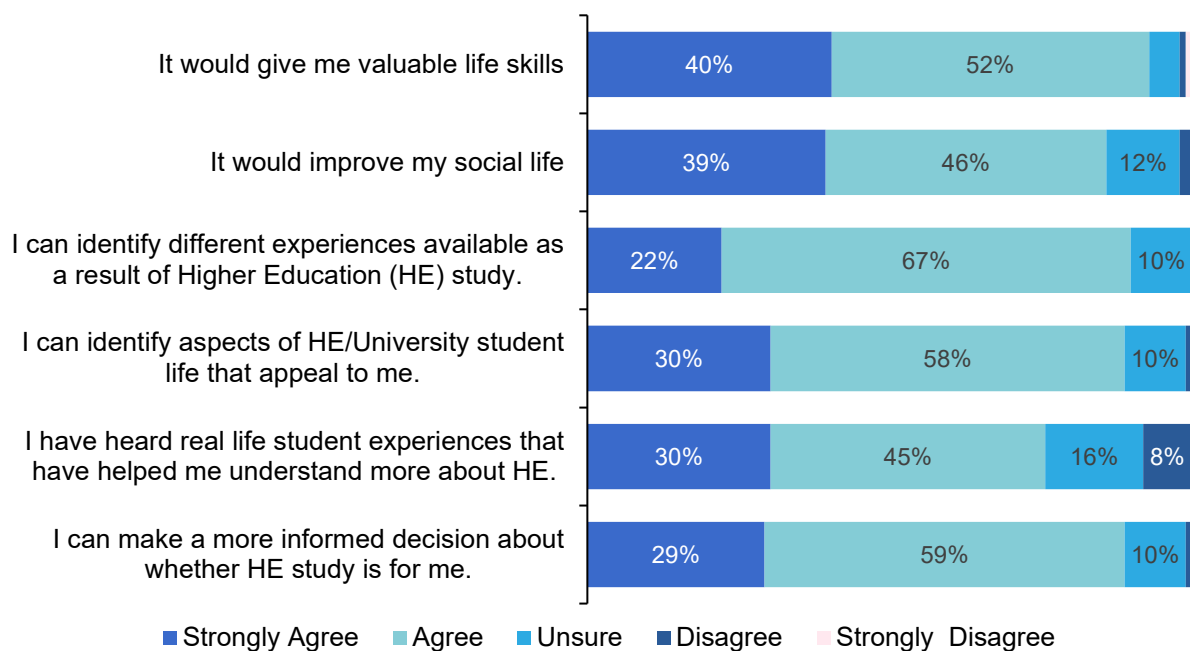


Figure 2. Respondent’s knowledge of student life and confidence in decision making about HE.

A total of 92% of responses indicated that students either ‘Agree’ or Strongly ‘Agree’ with the statement: (going into HE) ‘would give me valuable life skills’. Similarly, students also felt that HE would improve their social life, with 85% stating ‘Strongly Agree’ or ‘Agree’ with this statement.

In terms of identifying experiences available as a result of studying at HE, 89% of students felt that they were able to do this with most saying that they ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’ with this statement. Likewise, nearly 90% of students also felt that they were able to identify aspects of HE/University student life that appealed to them with most choosing to ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’ with this statement. This data suggests that the session had a positive impact for most students in terms of informing them about the opportunities available to them at HE and how these might apply to them personally.

A collective total of 75% of students felt that they had heard real life experiences that had helped them understand more about HE. However, a quarter of students surveyed selected either ‘Unsure’, ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly Disagree’ to this statement. The opportunity to interact with a current university student is a key part of the student life workshop. Unfortunately, the Covid lockdown restrictions in 2020 and 2021 prevented student ambassadors from attending workshops in person and sharing their higher education experiences. Although virtual workshops were delivered during this time, it was often difficult for student ambassadors to be present due to frequent school timetabling changes. Furthermore, students who took part in virtual workshops were not able to interact with a student ambassador in the same way those who took part in face-to-face workshops. It was reported that this impacted the quality of the conversation and ability to hold open discussions. In the absence of student ambassadors, outreach officers drew upon their own experiences and shared videos about student life.

With regards to making a more informed decision about whether HE is right for them, most students stated ‘Agree’ (59%) or ‘Strongly Agree’ (29%) with the statement that they could now do this. These findings show that the workshop had a positive outcome upon students’ confidence and ability to make educated decisions about HE. It is suggested that additional NSSW Core Offer workshops may benefit those students who still felt ‘Unsure’ (10%).

Figure 3 details the responses to a question requiring students to identify two things that they learnt about Student Life and Student Support. Of the 284 students who completed this question, 432 unique responses were submitted. Qualitative analysis revealed that student responses fell into seven broad themes (outlined in Figure 3).

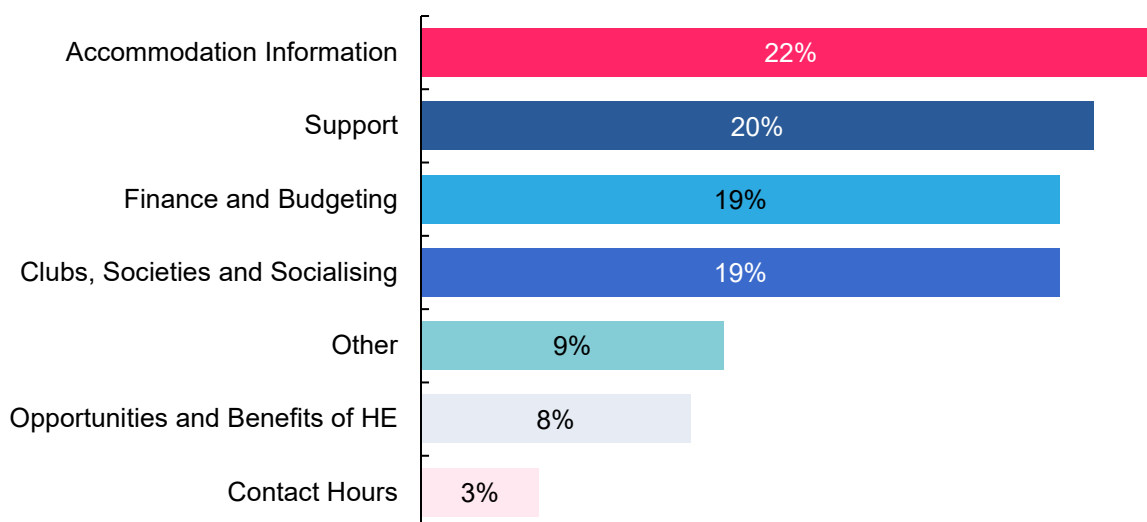


Figure 3. What did students learn about Student Life and Student Support?

The data shows that students felt they learnt most about four areas: ‘Accommodation’ (22%), ‘Support’ (20%), ‘Finance and Budgeting’ (19%) and ‘Clubs, Societies and Socialising’ (19%) and that knowledge gained was broadly equal across these themes. It is important to note that ‘Support’ encompassed a broad range of ideas and although some responses were specific (for example, “academic support”), most students provided generic statements which did not specify the type of support being referred to. This is illustrated in Table 2, which gives examples of comments to explain the emergent categories from the feedback. The collected data suggests that this workshop was successful in increasing participants understanding of the various aspects of student life in HE. This links directly with the individual aims of the activity (identified in Table 1) whereby following the workshop, students should be able to identify the social and career benefits as well as different support services available during HE study.

Table 2. Student's feedback about what that had learnt about Student Life and Student Support

Thematic Category	Number of Responses	Quote from comments
Accommodation Information	95	"You can live at home or on campus." "Types of accommodation at Uni" "You can live with friends in your own house."
Support	85	"There is help available when needed." "There is a lot of support available." "There are many people/places to go to within campus that can support you with various needs."
Finance and budgeting	85	"Don't have to pay the money upfront when taking out a loan." "Budgeting apps can be a strong tool to manage your finances." "The amount of money needed for 1 year."
Clubs, Societies and Socialising	82	"There are opportunities for social life and interaction." "About fresher's week and the clubs etc." "Society can help through Uni life."
Other	37	"There's 392 different uni's to go to." "About UCAS points." "Choose a subject you are passionate about."
Opportunities and Benefits of HE	33	"It improves independence and self-motivation." "You can study a course while living abroad."
Contact Hours	15	"Not that much time is spent in lectures." "Every course has different contact times and responsibility is solely on you."

Figure 4 shows the responses from to a question asking students to identify the most useful things they gained from the session. A total 234 students completed this question. Qualitative analysis revealed that student responses fell into nine broad themes.

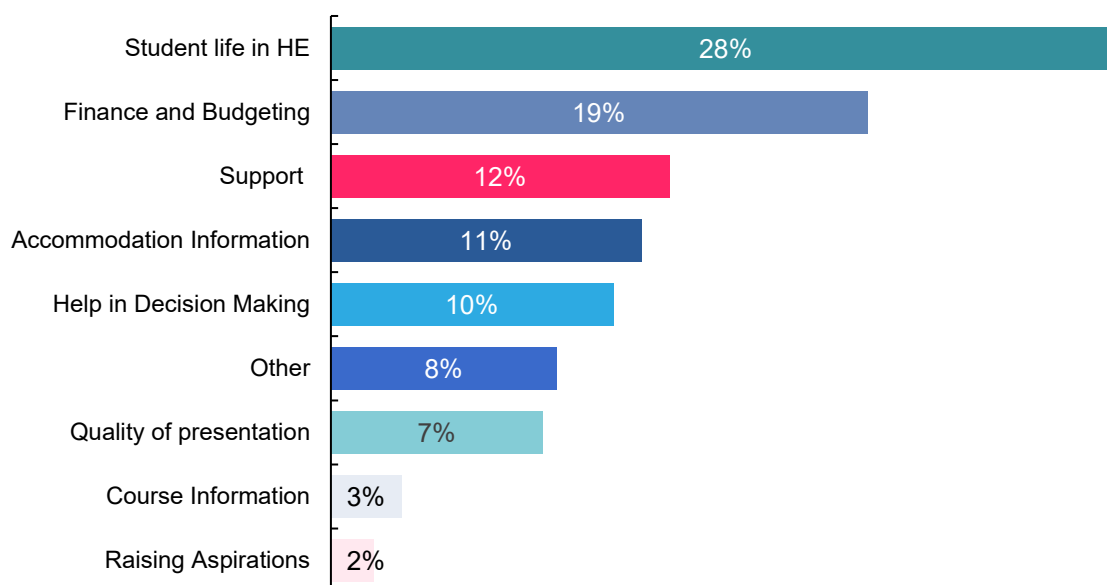


Figure 4. What students thought was the most useful thing that they gained from the session.



Over a quarter of students (28%) felt that information about student life in HE was the most useful thing they learnt from the workshop. This theme encapsulated a broad range of responses, many of which referenced how useful it was to hear about university experiences from current HE students. 19% of students identified information about finance and budgeting to be the most helpful aspect of the session. Information about support (12%), accommodation (11%) and help with decision making (10%) were relatively equal in terms of how useful students found them.

The results in figure 4 and the feedback in table 3 highlight the benefit of using current HE students to talk about their experiences. This session provides an engaging and valuable opportunity for participants to learn about student life in HE.

Table 3. Student’s feedback about what was the most useful thing they had learnt during the session.

Thematic Category	Number of Responses	Quote from comments
Student Life in HE	76	<p><i>“I learnt a lot more about what it’s like to be at university.”</i></p> <p><i>“Experiences from current Uni students.”</i></p> <p><i>“The knowledge on what happens at university and the opportunities available.”</i></p>
Finance and Budgeting	50	<p><i>“I learnt about finance and how to pay for university.”</i></p> <p><i>“The money side of things and how to pay it back depending on how much money you make.”</i></p> <p><i>“How to save money and the essentials you need to spend it on.”</i></p>
Support	31	<p><i>“The knowledge about the support available.”</i></p> <p><i>“That you can come to Uni at whatever age and that there is a lot of support around Money.”</i></p> <p><i>“Where to get support.”</i></p>
Accommodation	30	<p><i>“I learnt about different places I could live if I choose to go to university.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel less worried about accommodation.”</i></p>
Help in Decision Making	28	<p><i>“It made the decision whether I want to go into HE easier.”</i></p> <p><i>“What to think about with your next steps in education.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel slightly more confident around the idea of staying in Plymouth - identified good reasons to stay.”</i></p>
Other	21	<p><i>“The facilities available for physical education”</i></p> <p><i>“Uni isn’t for me”</i></p> <p><i>“That everyone will be in a similar position”</i></p>
Quality of Presentation	20	<p><i>“The presenter was clear, and the communication was always there between us and them. I understood the topics covered thoroughly so thank you.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was a great presentation!”</i></p>
Course Information	7	<p><i>“Learning about foundation courses.”</i></p> <p><i>“What university life will be like varying from different courses.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can specialise in your course.”</i></p>
Raising Aspirations	4	<p><i>“The idea that Uni is now a possibility”</i></p> <p><i>“It opened my mind to ideas about university.”</i></p>



Figure 5 shows the responses to a question asking what they would still like to know about student life. 117 students answered to this question and responses were categorised into six themes.

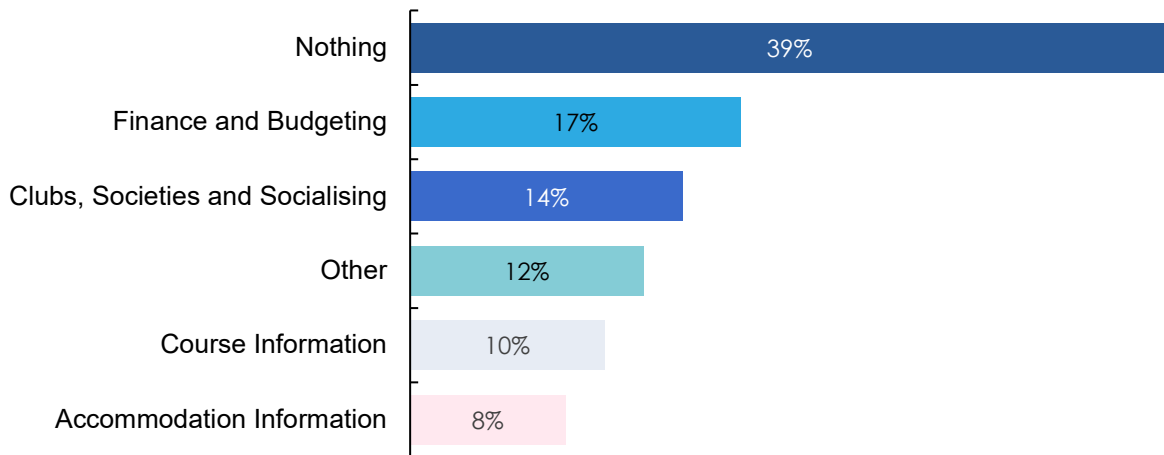


Figure 5. What would students still like to know about Student Life.

Over a third of students (39%) said that there was nothing more they wanted to know about student life following the session. This can be interpreted as the workshop having been successful in informing students about life in HE. 17% of students said that they would like to know more about finance and budgeting and 10% said they wanted to know more about course information. These students may benefit from additional NSSW workshops and may be directed towards others in the NSSW progression framework such as ‘Student Finance’ and ‘Choosing a Degree Course’. Example responses are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. Student’s feedback about they would still like to know about Student Life

Thematic Category	Number of Responses	Quote from comments
Nothing	60	<i>“I think a lot was covered and answered for my future life.”</i> <i>“Everything’s been answered.”</i> <i>“Not much more, most was covered in the session.”</i>
Finance and Budgeting	26	<i>“Average costs of student life and ways to manage them without preventing yourself from having fun.”</i> <i>“Ways to reduce costs.”</i> <i>“Would like to go more in depth on finances.”</i>
Clubs, Societies and Socialising	21	<i>“I would like to see some examples of the kind of clubs there are available.”</i> <i>“More about how the societies work.”</i> <i>“A little more about the sports opportunities at uni.”</i>
Other	18	<i>“Successes people have had from university courses.”</i> <i>“How big a step up from A levels it is.”</i> <i>“Student life with anxieties and disabilities.”</i>
Course Information	15	<i>“Talking more in depth about the types of degree available and what kind of teaching involves (academic or practical).”</i> <i>“The different course options for one subject.”</i> <i>“Structure like assignments and what to expect work wise.”</i>



Accommodation Information	13	<p>“If you can change group if you are unsure about the people in your student let.”</p> <p>“Still more about living accommodation.”</p> <p>“What the accommodation looks like inside.”</p>
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Conclusions

Overall, the data suggests that the Student Life workshop had a positive impact on the students who took part. Analysis showed a high level of increased knowledge of student life in HE and confidence in making decisions about their future. Furthermore, students were also able to identify how HE would benefit them personally, (*Figure 1*) and were able to reference specific elements such as student accommodation, support available in HE as well knowledge on student finance and budgeting, (*Figure 2*). It can be stated that the workshop reinforced participants’ overall knowledge and understanding Student Life in HE and therefore, was effective in meeting its principal aim.

Finally, 99% of students were able to identify at least one source of support that would be available to them in HE (Table 2). This indicates that the student life workshop was highly successful in achieving its objective in enhancing knowledge of support available at university.

Table 5. Outcomes achieved for KS5 Level 3 Student Life Workshops in T5 and T6

Barrier to HE	Short-term outcomes	Indicators	Evidence	Target Outcome
<i>Knowledge of HE</i>	Increased understanding of the wider benefits of HE study	Students are able to identify social, academic, and career benefits of HE study	<p>92% of students felt that HE would offer them valuable life skills</p> <p>85% of students felt HE would improve their social life</p> <p>89% of students could identify different experiences available</p> <p>88% of students identified aspects of HE life that would appeal to them.</p> <p>Target 80%: T5+T6 Results >80%</p>	Achieved
		Students are able to identify different support services available during HE study	<p>99% of students were able to identify the support available to them in HE.</p> <p>Target 80%: T5+T6 Results >80%</p>	Achieved

Recommendations

Covid restrictions during T5 and T6 limited the amount of student ambassador participation in the student life workshop during this time. This impacted some of the delivery of this session resulting in a quarter of participants stating that they did not feel that they had heard about real life student experiences. It is anticipated that the number of positive responses to this statement will increase in future tranches as student ambassadors have resumed their role in delivering this workshop.



It is proposed that the question asking participants whether they understand how HE can lead to a career they are interested in is re-evaluated. The rationale for this is twofold: the focus of the workshop is 'Student Life' and therefore the link between HE and a career falls beyond its remit, secondly, student ambassadors have not yet embarked on their graduate careers so are unlikely to include detail on future employment in their presentations. Students interested in exploring the routes from HE to employment may benefit from additional NSSW workshops focussing on careers. These recommendations would support activity and survey development moving into Tranche 7 and beyond.