



EC Students' Association

Student Life Survey Report

April 2025

Overview

The EC Students' Association's Student Life Survey is an annual research project that runs between February Break and Spring Break each year. It differs from student surveys run by Edinburgh College, because it delves into aspects of student life that go beyond their learning, teaching and support experience. The aim of the survey is to understand the challenges that are currently facing students, by asking questions about their housing, finances, access to digital devices and travel. We also ask some questions around the sense of belonging at Edinburgh College, and to what extent students engage with college activities beyond their course.

This year, we received 905 responses, a record response level, up from 629 last year. We're very grateful to the team of Learning Development Tutors who played a huge part in promoting the survey and allowing students to complete it during class time. This helps to spread the word amongst the student body to those who might not normally engage in this kind of feedback activity. Students were asked to take part via several different platforms, including our fortnightly newsletter, our Class Reps channel and our website. We also offered incentives of a £50 voucher prize draw for students who completed the survey.

The survey's results are an important insight into some of the challenges facing the student community, outlined in the sections below.

1. [Housing](#)
2. [Finances](#)
3. [Digital Resources](#)
4. [Travel and Transport](#)
5. [College Life](#)
6. [A Deeper Dive – learners with a mental health condition](#)
7. [Conclusion](#)

Some of the key headlines:

- Most respondents feel safe and happy in their current living situation
- Most respondents feel that they belong at Edinburgh College
- Most respondents feel that Edinburgh College is a welcoming place
- Most respondents have access to a digital device that they can use for online learning
- Most respondents feel broadly positive about the College's facilities

Despite the overall positive narrative indicated by the above statistics, parts of the report still make for sobering reading, particularly when students are expressing themselves about some of the challenges they are facing. The students' quotes are evidence that Britain's cost of living crisis, including an acute housing shortage, is ongoing:

“This turns out to be very expensive for me, since my bursary, is not enough to cover all financial needs, including renting an apartment, payment of all bills, etc., but unfortunately I don’t have any other options.”

Difficulties with finances, precarious living situations and long commutes are damaging students’ mental health, wellbeing, and their ability to study. These stories are just a small snapshot (drawn from 905 students) of the vast range of challenges students across Edinburgh College are juggling alongside their studies. There will also be students who chose not to fill out the survey or refrained from answering certain questions and sharing their struggles.

The Student Life Survey is a valuable piece of research that has had encouraging results but also emphasises the importance of the College and the Students’ Association working together to allow students to thrive in their learning and beyond. It also provides us with useful evidence to back up many of the conversations we have had with individual students throughout the year, showing the reality of student life in 2025.

Who took part in our survey?

Since the reboot of the survey in 2024, we have been asking our survey respondents for some key demographic data, and we hope gathering this information will assist with understanding how students’ identities, such as gender, ethnicity, disability and caring responsibilities can impact on their experiences more broadly.

The headlines from our demographic information are:

- 56% of respondents are female.
- 62% of respondents are white (Scottish/Irish/British). The next highest ethnicity is white (other background) with 17%.
- 60% of respondents are aged 16-19. The next largest age group was 20-25 with 18% of respondents.
- 17% of respondents identify as being D/deaf or disabled, or have a long-term physical health condition.
- 25% of respondents have a mental health condition.
- 16% of respondents are parents or carers (including young carers).
- The survey respondents were studying mainly at our largest campuses, Granton (50%) and Sighthill (42%).
- 93% of respondents had an EH postcode.

The demographic evidence we gathered will be referenced throughout this report when we want to explore certain statistics further, such as with section six, where we take a deeper dive into the results of those who declared they have a mental health condition.

Housing

"It's very expensive and hard to find accommodation. I work and study and I can barely afford to rent a room I live in."

The first section of the survey focused on housing, as we know this is a big challenge facing students in Scotland's cities. According to research conducted by the National Union of Students Scotland in 2024, 12% of students in Scotland have experienced homelessness while studying.¹

As expected, students' living situations and conditions vary, as shown in Fig 1.

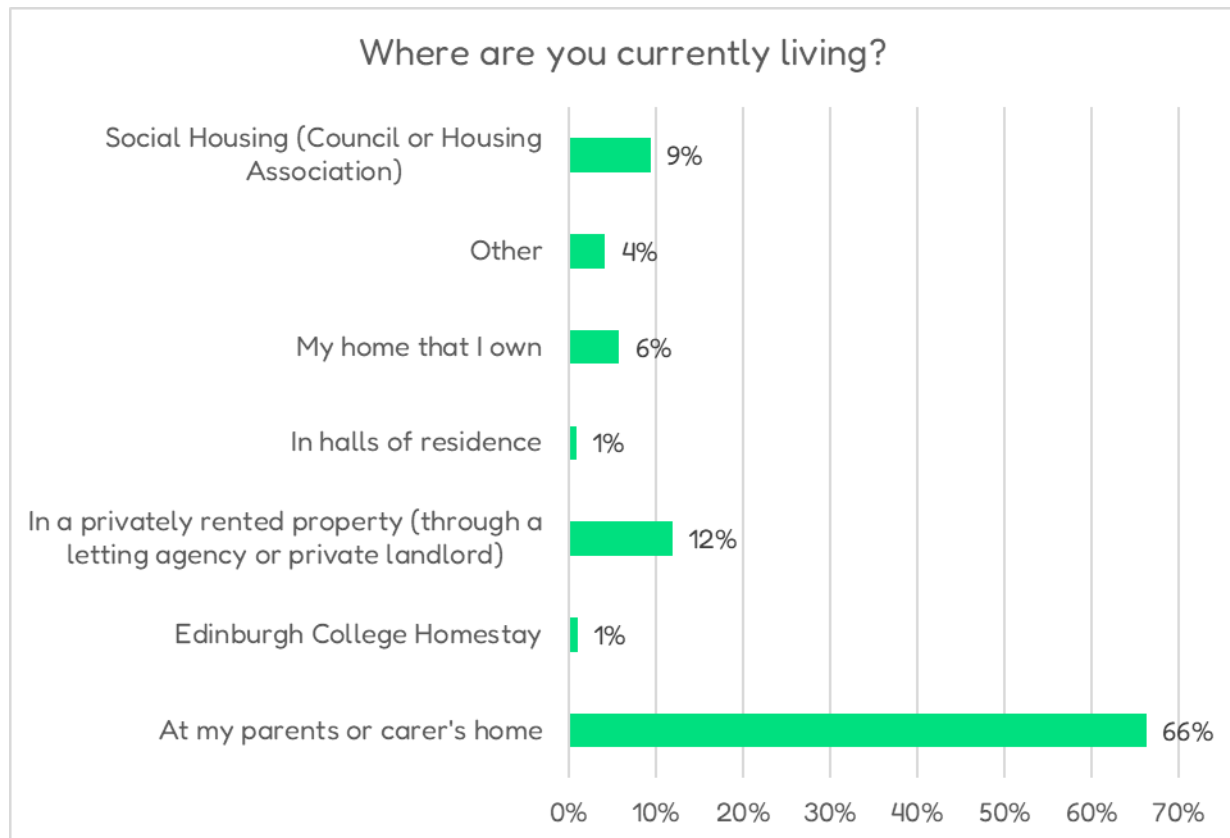


Figure 1: Where are you currently living?

When we asked where they are currently living, 66% stated that they were living at their parents' or carers' homes. This is perhaps to be expected, given that the largest group to complete the survey were aged 16-19. 9% of respondents were living in Social Housing (Council or Housing Association) and 12% said they were living in private rented accommodation.

To drill down into this further, we asked who people were living with (Fig. 2). Mostly, respondents were living with parents/carers and/or siblings (68%) followed by 16% who lived with their spouse, partner and/or kids, and 8% who lived alone. Only 5% of respondents said they were living with other students, peers or friends, which potentially shows how college student populations differ from students at university.

¹ Broke Students, Broken System, National Union of Students Scotland report, February 2024, pp.27-36 https://www.nus-scotland.org.uk/brokestudents_brokensystem (accessed 28 April 2025)

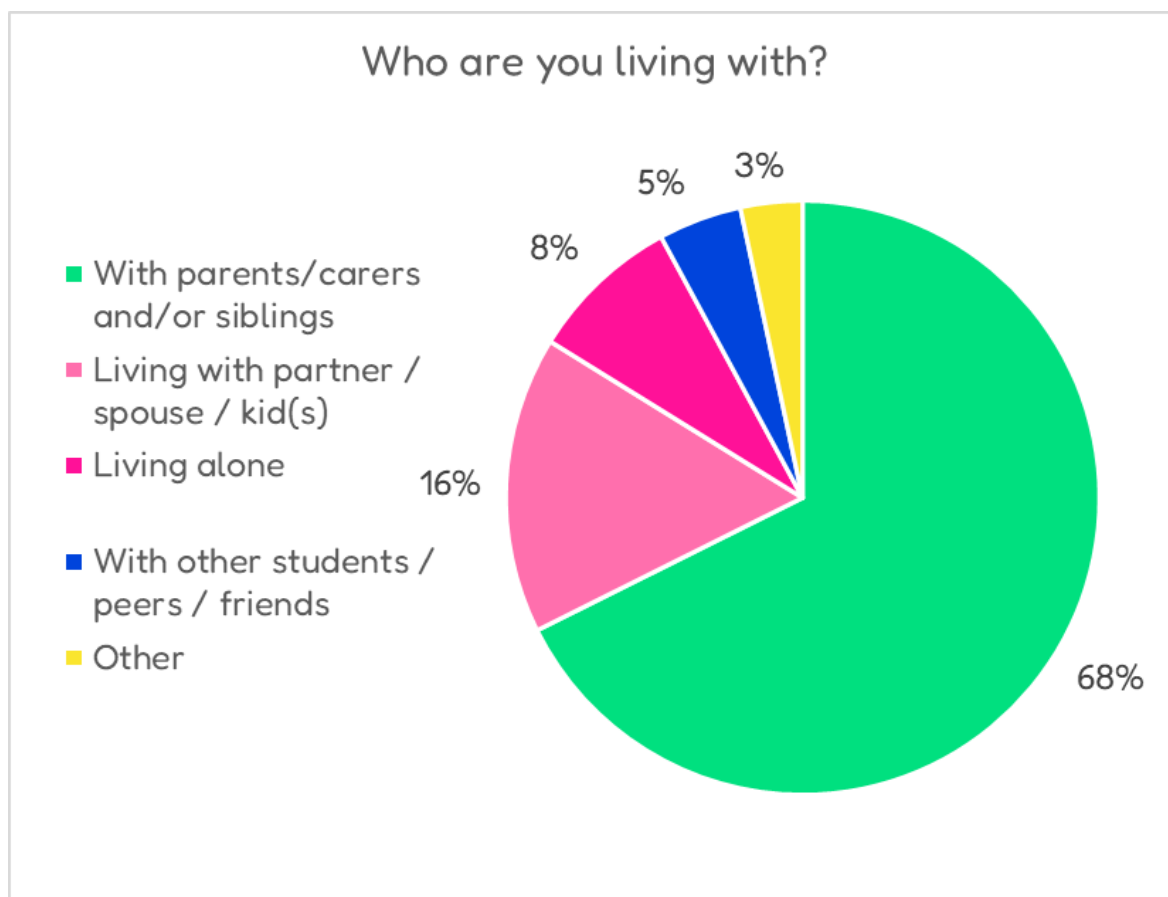


Figure 2: Who are you living with?

We followed up by asking whether they felt happy in their current living situation, to which 87% said yes, and whether they felt safe in their living situation, to which 96% said yes. These are slightly higher numbers than last year (in 2024, 80% said they felt happy, and 93% said they felt safe).

Unfortunately, there were some students that said they felt neither happy, nor safe in their current living situation. The reasons behind this vary, as shown below:

- Tensions and fallouts with family
- Safety concerns about the area in which they live, some incidents of violence and theft cited
- Difficulties with neighbours
- Unhygienic housing conditions (including damp/mould, rodent infestations), or dilapidated housing such as heating not working and draughty windows
- The price of property rentals
- Noise and overcrowding at home, with unsuitable space for studying

It is concerning that 37 respondents (4%) said they did not feel safe in their current living situation. Delving further into this data showed that just over half of the respondents who did not feel safe at home identified as women.

“My parent and I both have mental health problems. She hasn't really been able to look after herself let alone me for the past 6 years. It has put a strain on our relationship. I live at home because I have to, not because I want to. I feel trapped.”

Sadly, there are a number of students who are experiencing incredibly challenging scenarios at home. Three students were referred to our safeguarding team based on comments around feeling

unsafe or in a crisis point in their lives. The following are direct quotes from respondents and illustrate the varied and concerning difficulties they are currently experiencing in their home lives.

Trouble at Home

“

“Too many arguments and too many fights”

“Me and my mum bring a lot of stress to each other, we both don't like the way we live”

“I work in the evenings, I raise my son alone who is diagnosed with ADHD and autism. I go to college 3 days a week, I currently have no time for myself, life is constantly on the run... unfortunately, I feel resigned, tired. away from family and support. And the area where I live is not safe, people near me is very bad, make trouble, we're not feels safe, my son also feels bad in his current school”

Living precariously

“Not having enough money to always be able to buy food for the week.”

“Stressful as I became homeless in September 2024, didn't have a place to go until October. Now 2025 is here I am in supported accommodation receiving government funding to pay the £350/week cost, however I am going onto an HNC course which will strip me of my funding and I won't have adequate money to pay for the accommodation.”

Struggling to study

“I'm just not comfortable in the flat, sleeping on single bed, having to clean after other flatmates mess. Don't have a space or quiet place I can seat and do my studies, always on my bed whenever I'm in. (Spending most of my time in one spot).”

“It has been a struggle to keep a job that will work around my college schedule and also pay enough for me to afford my expenses”

“At the moment I am living with my friend and sleeping on his sofa! I want to have my own place where I can focus on study and have my own private place.”

Safety concerns

“I am not allowed to do anything the flat that I am currently in and I would like to add more locks to my door to make me feel more safe.”

“I live in a place where there is a lot of crime, I also feel unsafe because i live with a flatmate who is much older and is irresponsible.”

“Flooded 3 times by neighbours of course nobody to blame we are losing our savings and insurance cos someone has broken pipes. Child is living in dampness and dangerous conditions.”

”

In summary, the qualitative feedback we've seen from these comments indicates some trends emerging. For those in a negative housing situation, this is characterised by unaffordability, poor living conditions, negative impacts on well-being, and significant challenges in finding suitable and secure accommodation. The feeling that rent and heating costs are too high is clearly supported by the broader themes of financial strain and inadequate housing. Much of this is also reflected in our [Finances](#) section, and in the direct student quotes included throughout this report.

Further questions in the housing section give a more general picture of how students feel most of which is broadly positive:

- 10% of respondents said it was challenging or stressful to arrange where they live
- 31% of respondents do not feel their accommodation is affordable
- 85% said their accommodation met their expectations when they moved in
- 71% said they felt they had enough information about their housing options when they decided to come to college
- 34% said they were interested in getting housing advice in the future

It is worth bearing in mind that those people who are living within their parents' home may not feel as stressed as those who are seeking housing on the open market.

How can we help?

"College need to make a thing for students wanting to find a place to live together but not in the halls of residence."

We asked students for suggestions on the type of housing advice they might like to see in future from college. These included:

- As suggested in the quote above, implementing a type of forum where students can meet other EC students who are looking for private accommodation
- Information and guidelines, for instance, on the average cost of renting, how to budget and tenants' rights
- Recommendations of cheap options for accommodation and housing, and areas that are cheaper for students
- Guidance on the different types of accommodation available (private; social; student accommodation) and how the process of applying works for each one
- Information tailored to those who are about to leave home for the first time

There perhaps is some work to be done to highlight the support and systems that are already available to students via Edinburgh College and the Students' Association. For example, drawing their attention towards the [Housing section](#) of EC Students' Association's website, as well as the support that the Wellbeing and Guidance teams can give.

Finances

“The cost is way too much for a student dorm. I’m getting a full bursary funding and that doesn’t cover my rent like it’s intended to.”

For this section, we wanted to build a picture of where students are with their money and finances. The cost-of-living crisis continues to put a strain on students financially as well as mentally.

When asked about their employment status the highest proportion of students said they were not working (50%) or were in part-time work (39%), as shown in Fig. 3.

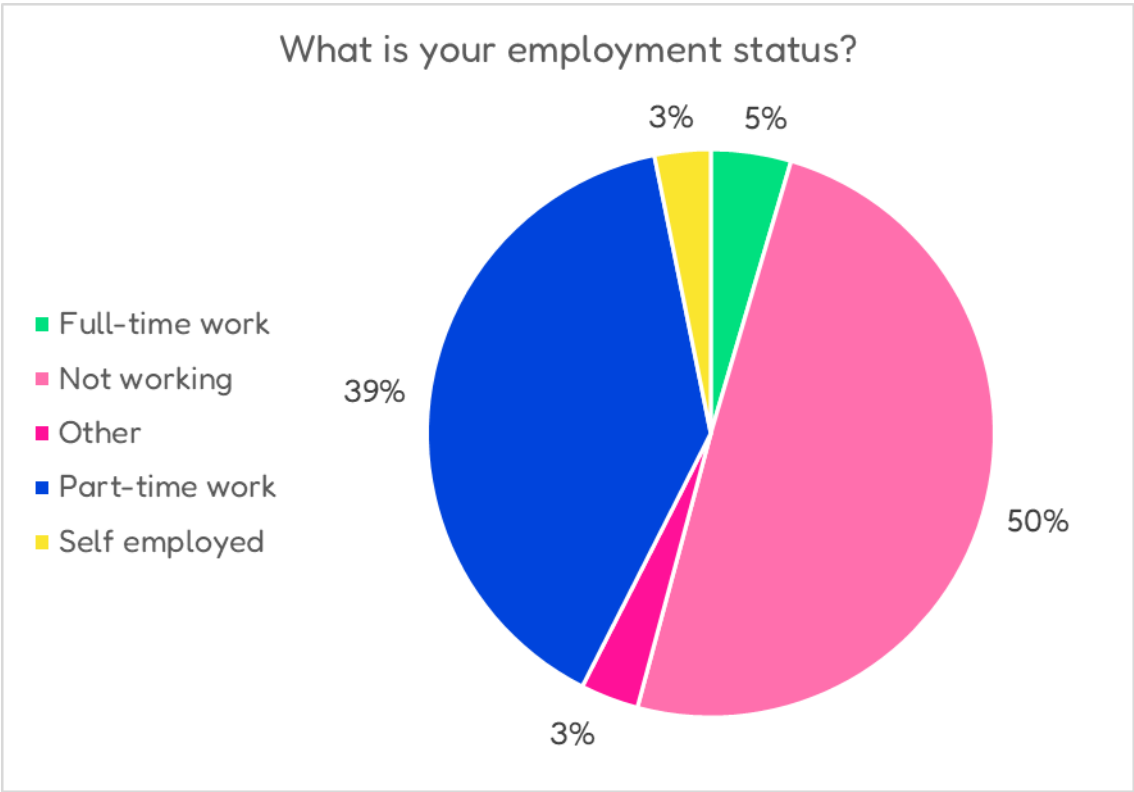


Figure 3: Employment Status

We asked students what kind of funding they received. As Fig. 4 shows the largest group (62%) were funded by Edinburgh College funding, for example via a bursary, Education Maintenance Allowance, or childcare funding. This suggests that the largest group is also in Further Education.

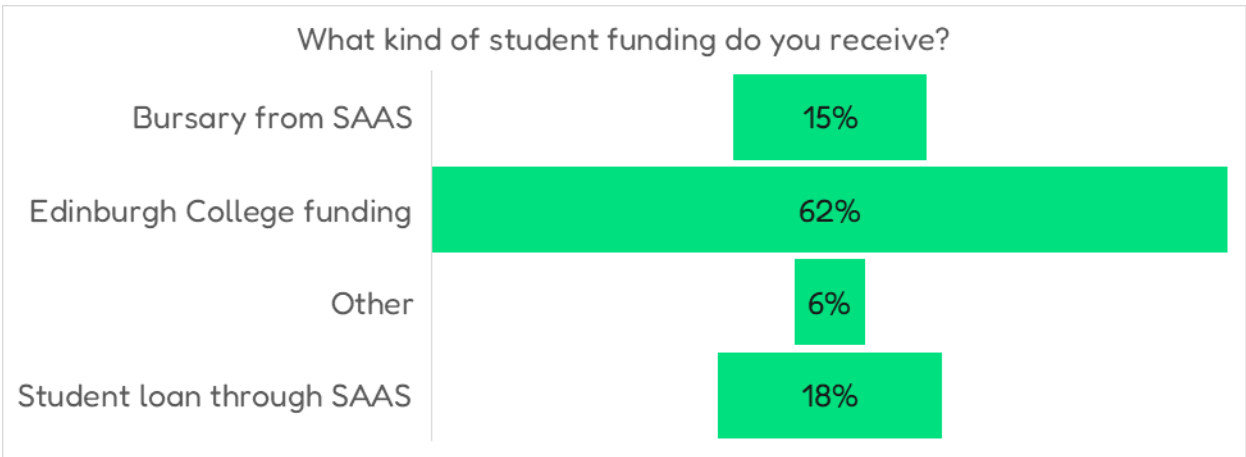


Figure 4: Student Funding

When asked about their average monthly income after taxes, more students (42%) said they earned between £0-600 pounds per month than those who took home £601+ per month (40%).

We know that money worries feature highly on students' list of concerns, so we explored this further by asking "From a scale of 1-10, how much stress do money and finances cause you?" For this, a score of 1 equalled 'least stressed' and 10 equalled 'most stressed'. As you will see from Fig. 5, we received responses on every point of the scale, but the highest scoring value was 7 out of ten, with 15.4%. 75 people (8.4%) said they felt the 'most stressed' (10 out of 10).

If something unexpected happens. Like mobile/laptop breaks, I'm not sure if I'll be able to replace it.

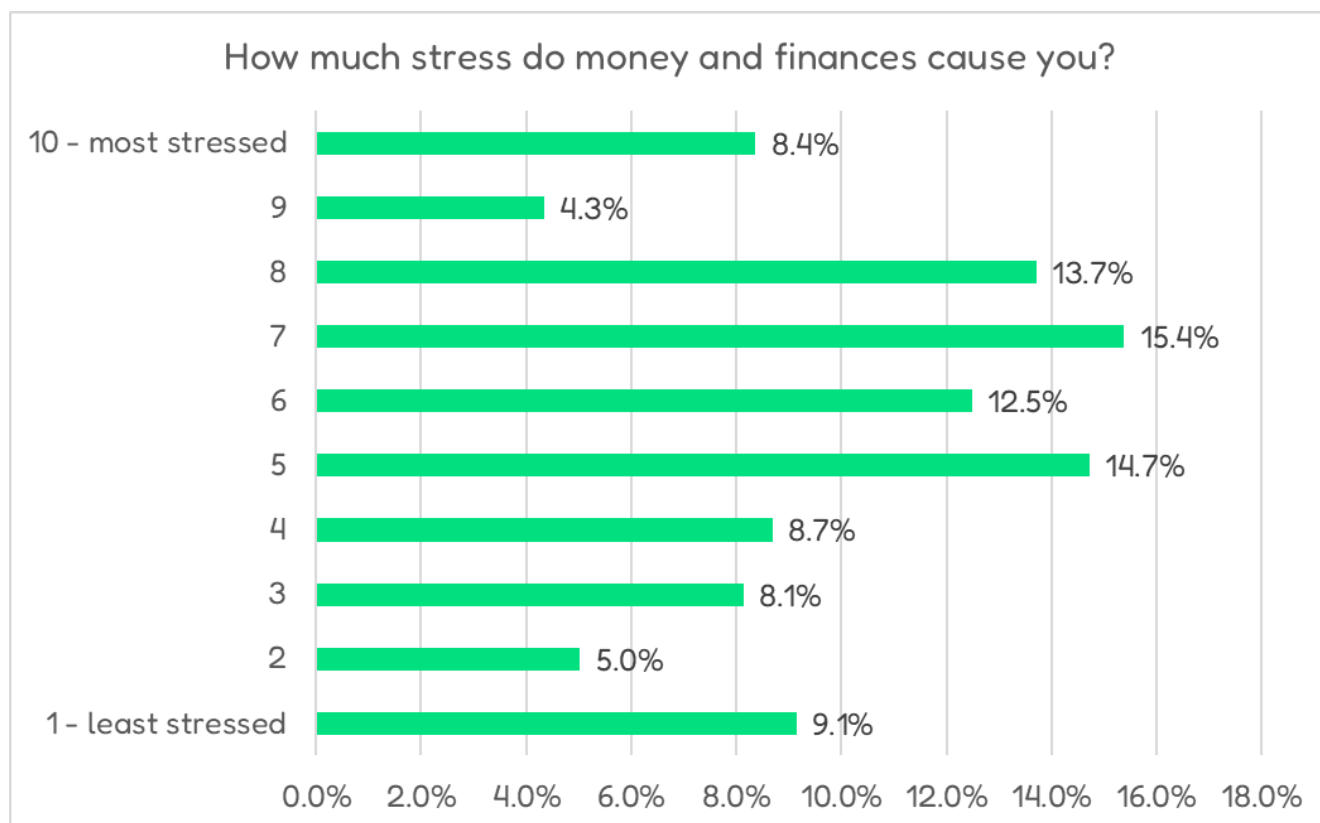


Figure 5: Financial Stress

Of the 77 people who said they felt '10 out of 10 stressed':

- 57% were female
- 23% identified as D/deaf, disabled, or having a long-term health condition
- 40% had a mental health condition
- 47% were aged between 16-19
- 21% were parents or carers (including young carers)
- 45% were not working
- 52% were receiving their student funding from Edinburgh College
- 25% had an average monthly income of between £0-600 after tax
- 59% said they were never able to save money

We asked students what the most important aspects of managing their finances were, and their highest priorities were staying within a budget, and saving more money each month.

When it came to saving money each month (see Fig. 6) 49% of respondents said they were either never, or only occasionally able to save money.

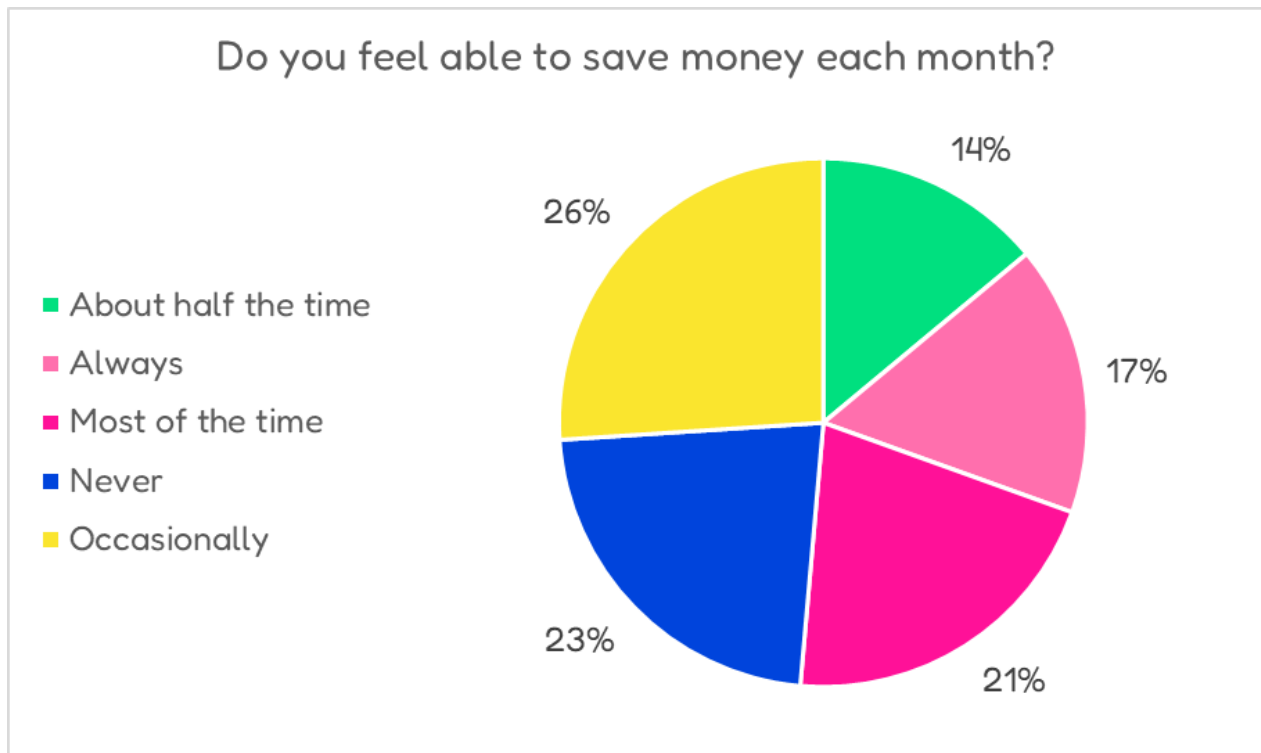


Figure 6: Saving Money

The majority of respondents (83%) felt that the college provided them with enough information about finances and funding.

One trend that we did see, which was the same as 2024's survey, is that students are keen to find out more information about jobs that are available in Edinburgh. The importance of part time jobs was also highlighted, as this helps students to juggle paid work around their college work.

It has been a struggle to keep a job that will work around my college schedule and also pay enough for me to afford my expenses.

For those who are looking for work, we need to make sure we are signposting the College's [JobZone](#) page, the [careers advice webpage](#) hosted by the Guidance Team. LDTs also offer support with writing CVs, and there are external sources of support available, including Skills Development Scotland's [careers service](#).

Digital Resources

This section explores our respondents' access to digital resources. Most of the survey respondents (92%) had access to a device with a keyboard, to allow them to take part in online learning, such as accessing Moodle and Teams. Only 9% of the respondents said they shared this device with someone else in their household during college hours.

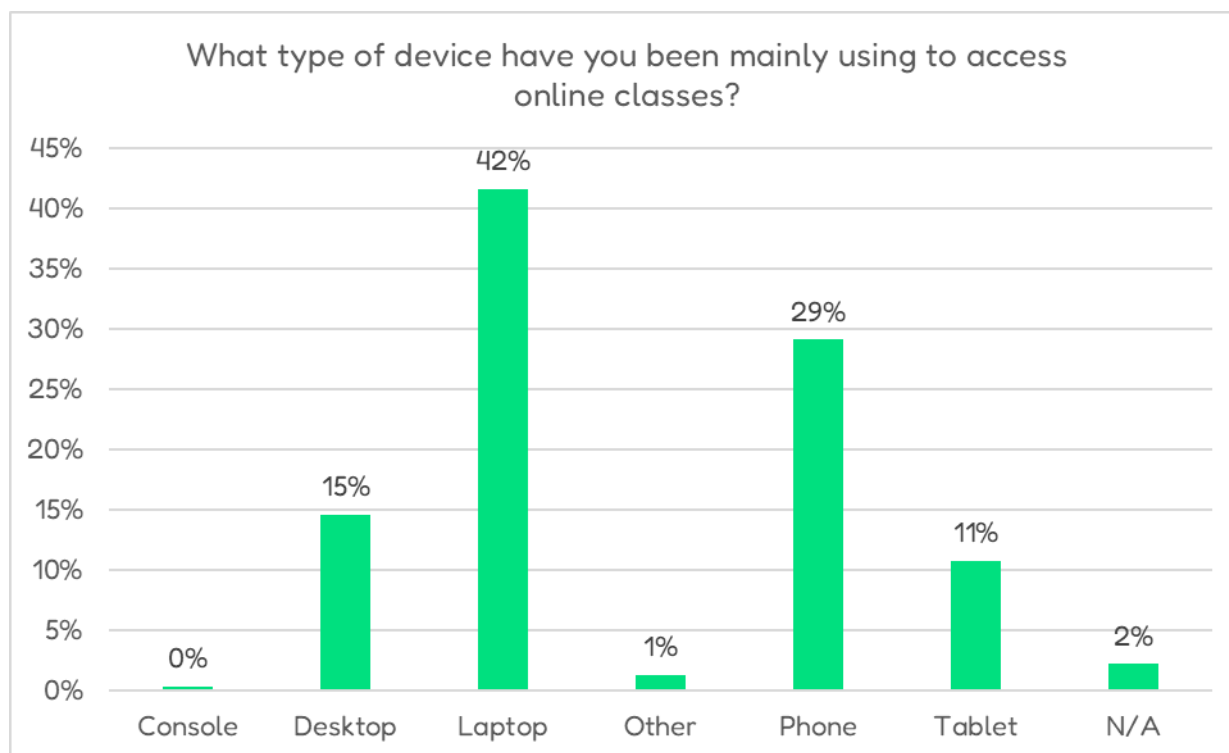


Figure 7: Digital devices for college

There is a variety of devices being used by students to access online classes, as shown in Fig. 7. While the laptop is still the most used device, there are 29% of students using their phones as primary means of accessing classes.

The above figures are encouraging, as it shows that digital poverty is not a huge concern among the survey respondents. The high proportion of students using their phones to access online classes is something worth noting, which builds on the trends we saw from last year's survey results and from anecdotal evidence gathered from Class Reps. The prevalence of phone usage, especially among our younger learners, also shows the importance of mobile-friendly approaches in learning and teaching, as well as the importance of providing PCs at Edinburgh College, for when students need to focus on a larger or more complicated piece of written coursework.

37% of respondents aged 16-19 are mainly using their phones to access online learning

Travel and Transport

Of the 905 survey respondents, 54 (6%) said that their course is not delivered on campus. For the remainder, who are taught on campus, the campus-by-campus split of respondents is listed below.

Campus	Number	Percentage %
Granton	419	50
Midlothian	19	2
Milton Road	47	6
Sighthill	348	42

While it is understandable that there are significantly larger numbers of respondents based at Sighthill and Granton, the larger campuses, there is a significant lack of engagement from students at Midlothian and Milton Road. This also tends to reflect our engagement in other projects, such as voters in the EC Students' Association elections. Targets for next year will include getting more Milton and Midlothian students energised to engage with EC Students' Association engagement activities throughout the year.

We asked students to share how they travelled to campus, and as Fig. 8 suggests, bus is by far the most frequently used travel option with 63%, followed by those who drove their car alone (11%) and those walking (8%).

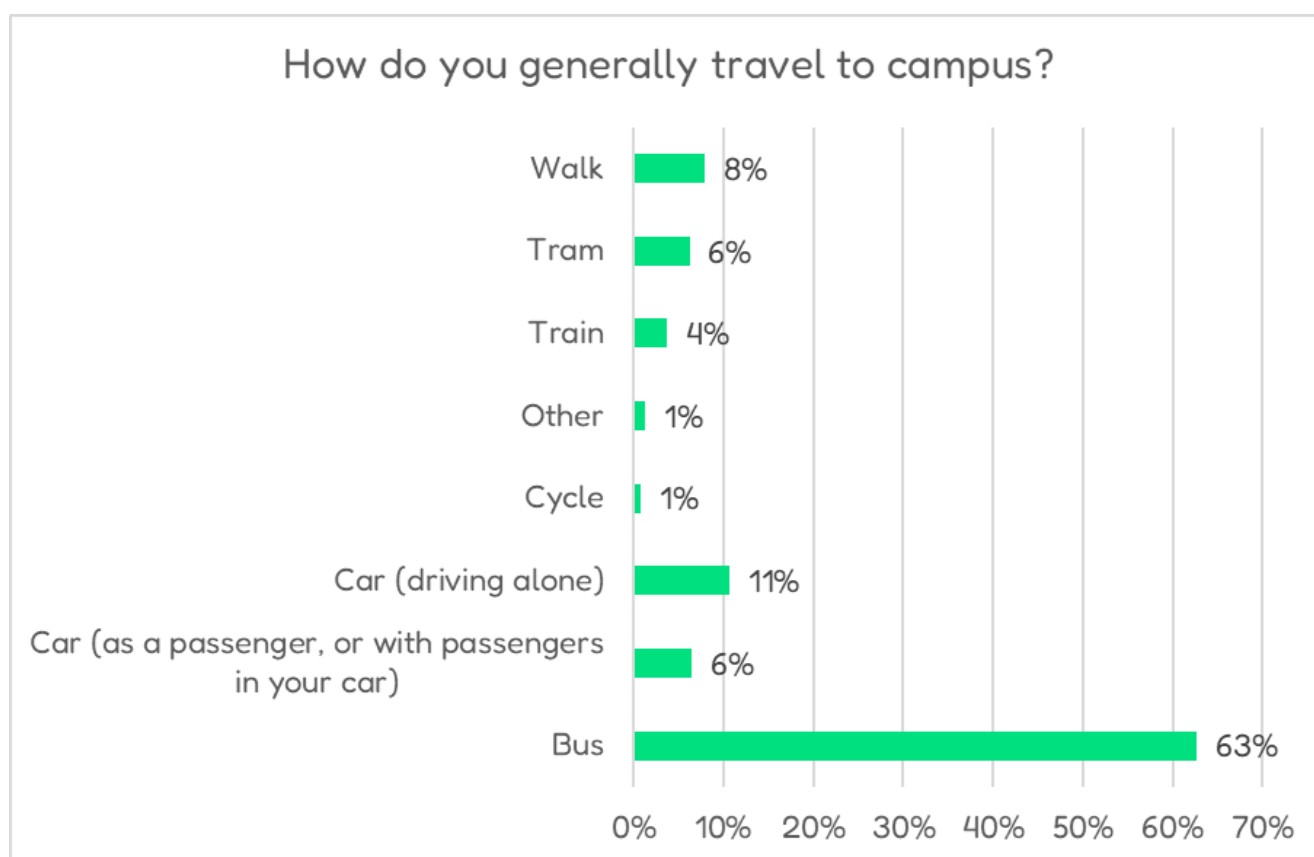


Figure 8: Travel to Campus

The data gathered here suggests there is scope to encourage more students to choose sustainable modes of transport when coming to college, such as opting to walk, cycle or lift-share with other students.

College Life

We asked students more about how they feel about Edinburgh College life more generally, to get a better understanding the general reputation of the college among students.

The results were hugely positive here, with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “as a student, I feel like I belong at Edinburgh College”. This is up from 89% last year.

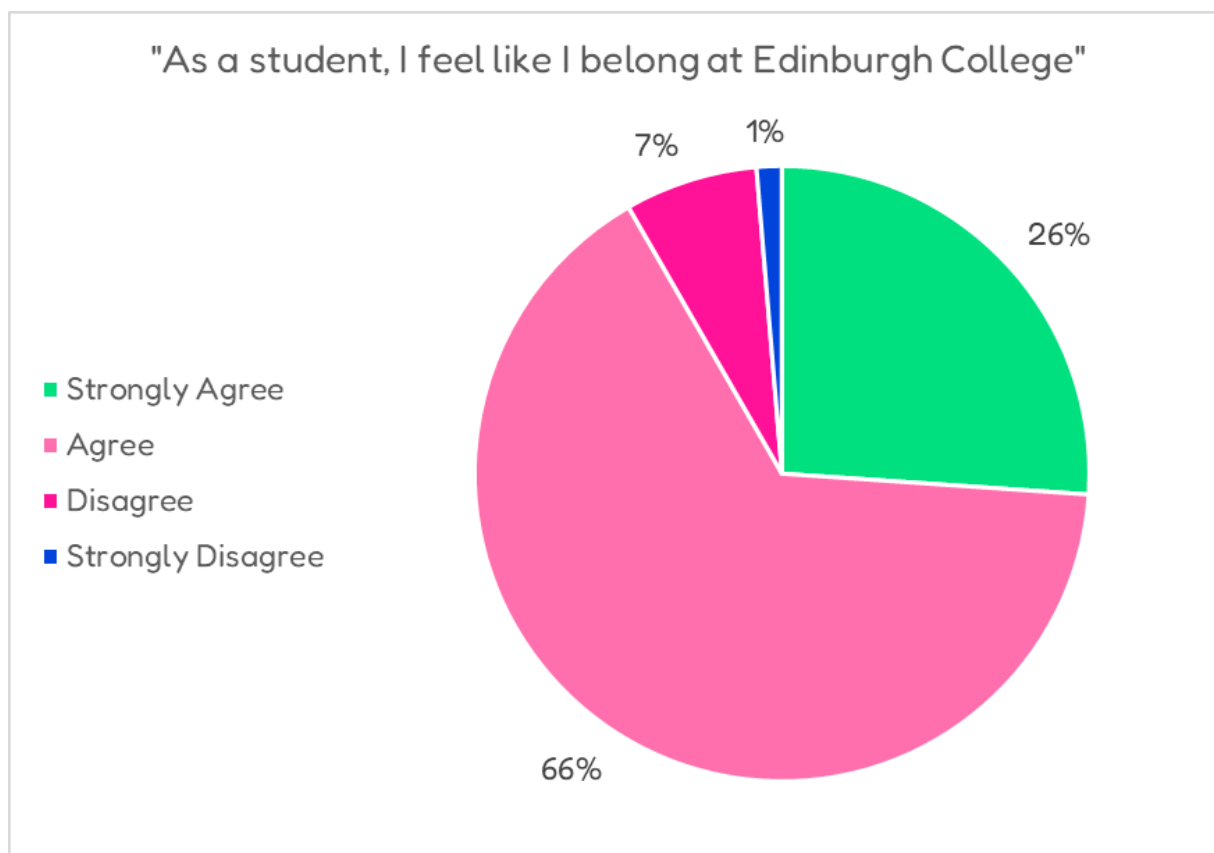


Figure 9: Sense of Belonging

The results were even stronger with the next question, when 95% agreed or strongly agreed that Edinburgh College is a welcoming place (up from 94% last year).

There is a strong indication that most students feel most connected to their curriculum areas, e.g. their course (43%) or their class (42%) rather Edinburgh College as a whole (10%) or their campus (5%).

As shown in Fig. 10, we asked respondents to share with us whether they engaged with college activities outside of their course, and 14% said they were involved either in EC Students' Association's activities and events – which included Class Reps and Lead Reps (9%) – or activities run by the College (6%). This demonstrates an increase from last year, when only 9% said they engaged with activities outside of their courses. 65% of respondents said their course was enough, and a further 20% said they would like to become more involved.

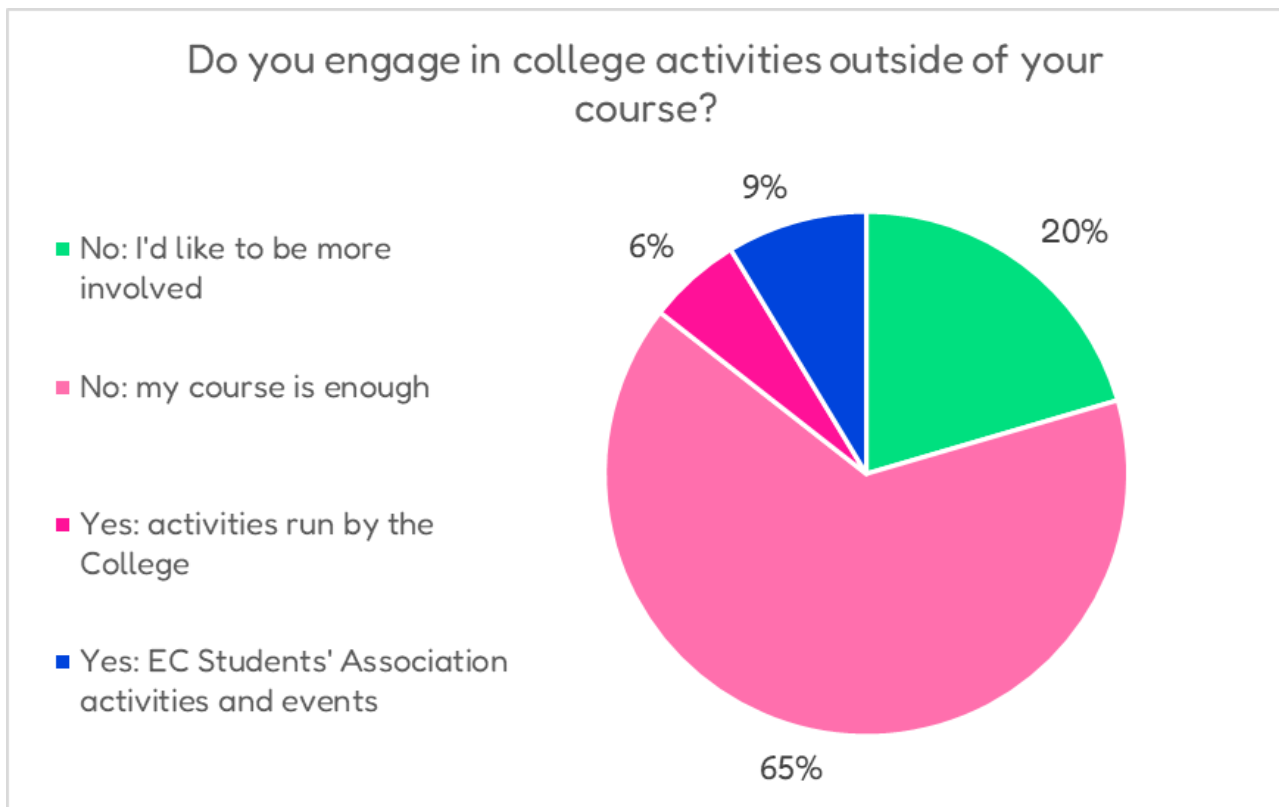


Figure 10: Engagement in College Activities

Following conversations with Class Reps and Lead Reps this year, we delved deeper into the question of how students feel about college spaces and facilities, breaking them into the following categories:

- Learning spaces (e.g. classrooms, libraries, computer labs, workshops)
- Social spaces (e.g. hub spaces, canteens)
- Outdoor spaces (e.g. benches, smoking areas)
- Toilets
- Wi-Fi
- General cleanliness

We asked students to rank each of these areas on a scale of 1-5, with one being 'awful' and 5 being 'brilliant'.

Learning spaces scored well, with 77% of respondents ranking them at 4 or 5 out of five. Likewise, the respondents also ranked the general cleanliness highly, with 75% scoring it 4 or 5 out of 5.

For social spaces and outdoor spaces, the response was more mixed, but still weighted broadly positively:

- Social spaces: 58% of respondents ranked them 4 or 5
- Social spaces: 28% ranked them 3 out of 5
- Outdoor spaces: 49% of respondents ranked them 4 or 5
- Outdoor spaces: 32% ranked them 3 out of 5

Within this ranking system, the areas that scored least well were the toilets and the Wi-Fi, as shown in Fig. 11 (toilets) and Fig. 12 (Wi-Fi).

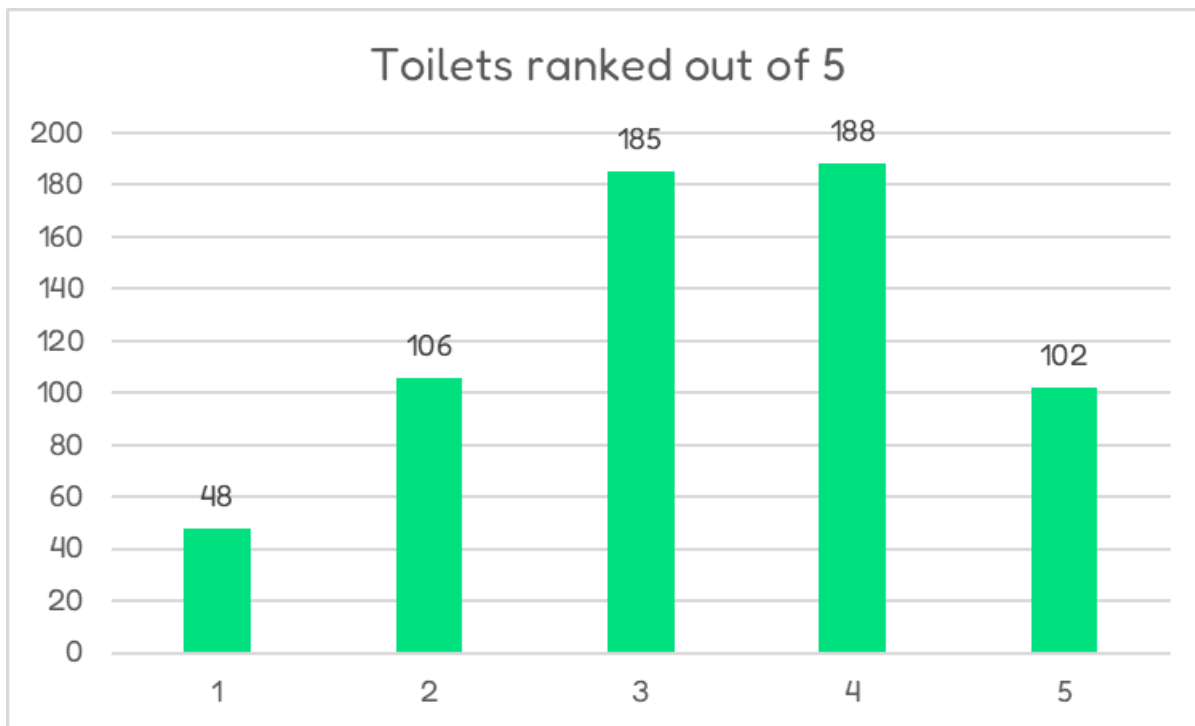


Figure 11: Toilets at Edinburgh College

As the data shows, 24% ranked the toilets 1 or 2 out of five.

When it comes to Wi-Fi at college, students ranked the service even lower, with 35% of respondents giving it a 1 (17%) or 2 (18%) out of 5. As demonstrated in the 'digital resources' section above, with increasing numbers of students relying on their phones for online learning, the Wi-Fi could be causing issues to the overall student experience going forward. These two areas that received the most negative rankings also echo the feedback we have been gathering from our Class Reps over the last year.

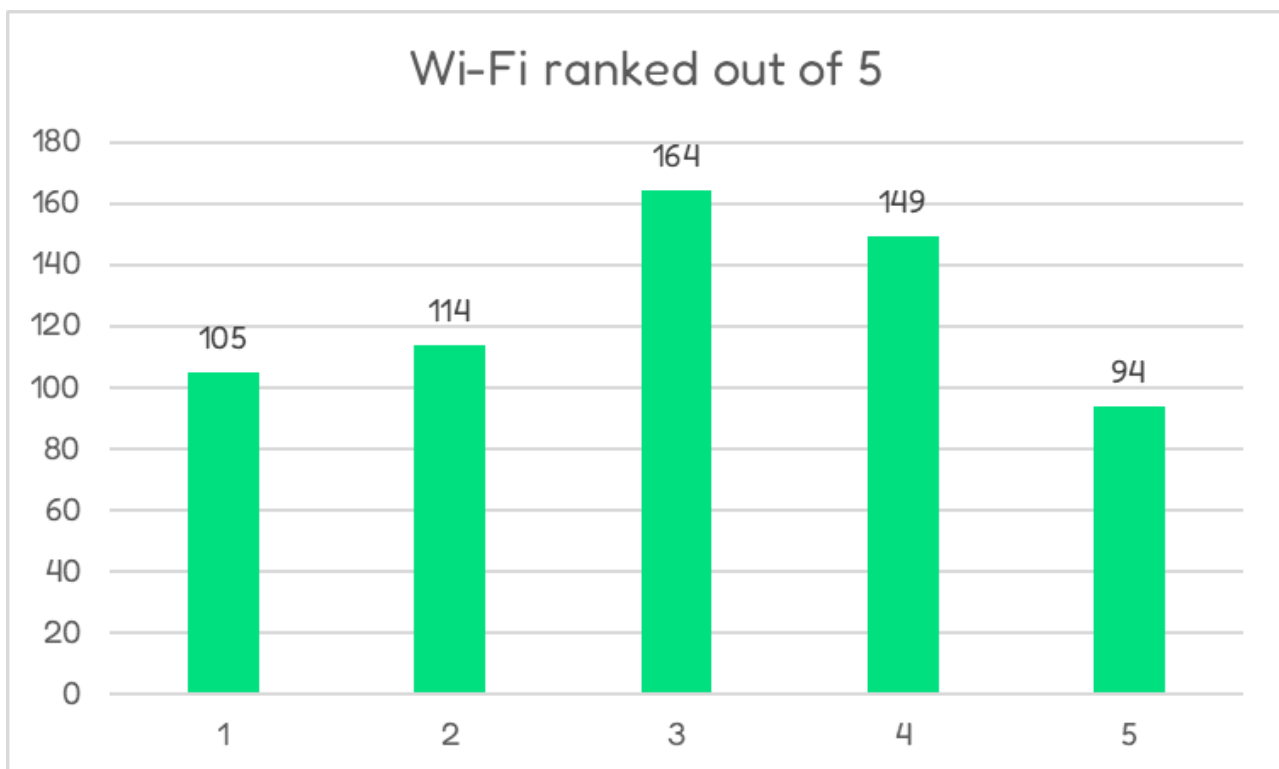


Figure 12: Wi-Fi at Edinburgh College

What would students change about Edinburgh College?

For the final part of this section, we asked students “**What 1 thing would you change to improve your Edinburgh College experience?**” While the responses ranged widely, there were some key trends that emerged.

Infrastructure and facilities

Students flagged again the need for consistent and reliable Wi-Fi. There was also concern about some of the physical infrastructure, including the lifts frequently being broken, heating systems being unreliable and uncomfortable or broken chairs in some classrooms.

General cleanliness

A lot of students reflected on the need for improving the toilets, including general cleanliness and maintenance such as fixing broken locks, as well as addressing the lack of supplies such as soap and sanitary products. Students also flagged the uncleanliness of keyboards and IT equipment.

Enhancing social spaces

A lack of comfortable and adequate social spaces is a recurring theme. Students are keen for there to be more comfortable and functional social areas, including quieter areas, and spaces for group work and relaxation. Providing quieter spaces would help make the campus more inclusive and accessible, especially for those with sensory issues.

In terms of the outdoor spaces, students requested more sheltered seating, particularly in the assigned smoking areas. Non-smokers requested that smokers stand away from the main entrances.

Students flagged that the provision of social spaces very hugely depending on the campus.

Expand food options

Students would like to see a provision of more diverse and affordable food choices, including healthier options and vegetarian options, while keeping the prices as low as possible.

Improve communication

There was a desire to streamline communication between staff and students, including better communication from lecturers regarding absences and class changes.

College culture & community

There was a desire for a diverse range of social clubs, events and activities provided, including:

- more events for mature students
- more sports activities
- inclusive spaces and support networks for diverse student populations

Some students advocated for more support for high school leavers, to smooth their transition into college. One student flagged concerns about catcalling on campus and the impact that has on the culture and community at college.

A Deeper Dive – Learners with a Mental Health Condition

Our 'deeper dive' section in last year's Student Life Survey Report focused on learners aged 16-19. However, this year, as we asked for the first time about whether survey respondents considered themselves to have a mental health condition, we wanted to find out more about the results. One quarter of respondents said they had a mental health condition (253 students overall). We hope this data will be useful for both Edinburgh College and the Students' Association as they work together on the Student Mental Health Agreement, which was launched in May 2024.

At a glance

For this chart, green highlighting indicates a which dataset shows a higher percentage. Purple highlighting indicates that the data is the same across both sets.

Key Findings	Learners with MH condition	Overall data
Are female	60%	56%
Are aged 16-19	60%	60%
Identify as D/deaf or disabled, or have a long-term health condition	33%	17%
Are a parent/carer	20%	25%
Live at their parents/carer's home	65%	66%
Happy with their living situation	84%	87%
Feel safe in their current living situation	93%	96%
Not currently working	59%	50%
Receiving their student funding from Edinburgh College	62%	62%
Taking home between £0-£300 per month after taxes	23%	25%
Can 'never' save money each month	25%	23%
Feel '10 out of 10' stressed about money	12%	8%
Agreed/strongly agreed that they belonged at Edinburgh College	92%	92%
Agreed/strongly agreed that Edinburgh College is a welcoming place	94%	95%
Would like to get more involved with activities at college	20%	20%

To summarise, learners with mental health conditions share similarities with the overall survey respondents, especially in terms of their age profile and living situations. It is positive to see that these students also feel similar levels of belonging and being welcomed at Edinburgh College, and are just as likely to say they would like to get involved in more activities beyond their courses.

However, it is also worth noting that learners with mental health conditions are more likely to identify as having another disability/long-term health condition, less likely to be working alongside their studies, and tend to experience higher levels of stress in relation to their financial situation. This highlights the importance of supporting our more vulnerable students and ensuring they have access to information and support the college and its external partners can offer.

Student Life Survey: Conclusion

This survey, which was completed by 905 students over the course of February-April 2025, is an extensive piece of research that gives a snapshot of life experienced by students, beyond their day-to-day studies at Edinburgh College.

This report has focused on the overall insights, but having collected demographic data, we can now also drill down into the experience of specific groups of students as needed, such as the experiences of the students with a mental health condition that we have explored in [section six](#).

Largely, the survey respondents feel positive about Edinburgh College. They feel it is a welcoming place to which they feel a sense of belonging, which is hugely encouraging. From our research into their thoughts on services and facilities, there are some strong themes emerging around what would improve the college experience, including a better Wi-Fi system, cleaner campuses and more spaces where students can relax, study and socialise.

As the data has shown, students are facing challenging situations, both in their housing, and in their finances, as the cost-of-living crisis continues. While most respondents feel that enough information and support is provided and available, there is scope to provide more information to students, using different platforms, so that these resources are accessible to everyone.

Signposting the information and support that is already available to students, such as our Wellbeing Team, the Guidance Services and online resources through our website, is an important part of Edinburgh College's and EC Students' Association's shared responsibility. We are also committed to building links with the wider charity sector, to ensure students know what additional support is available to them beyond their campuses.

In a reality where students are struggling to make ends meet, where student funding cannot cover the cost of rent and bills, or when students cannot afford to heat their homes, the importance of jobs was also highlighted by students. This demonstrates the importance of services such as Edinburgh College's JobZone site, which lists jobs that might be of interest to students, as well as the careers guidance that is offered to many students as part of their course.

The report will also be circulated to, and inform discussions with:

- Edinburgh College Board of Management
- Student Success Committee
- Class Reps and Lead Reps
- Senior Management Team
- EC Development Trust
- EC Students' Association Board of Trustees

The report will be made available to students via the Students' Association's website. Comparisons with data from previous years will also be published online.

The Edinburgh College community is responsible for providing as many opportunities, information, resources, and support sources as possible, to empower students in all areas of their lives, and to encourage them to grow in confidence in the face of the frequent challenges that life can throw at them. With Edinburgh College's positive reputation among students, we are in a strong position to build what is already being provided, to work together and make sure students can thrive both in and outside of college.