Candidate Guide

WHAT'S GOING ON IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND BRIGHTON UNIVERSITY?

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BSU ELECTIONS 2024

BRIGHTON STUDENTS' UNION
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What's going on in Higher Education and Brighton?

When writing your campaign aims, it will be useful to know what is going on in the sector, University and Students' Union. This may help when you're writing campaign ideas! So here is a quick rundown of the hot topics in Higher Education and Brighton student stats if you need inspiration for your writing!

Cost of Living Crisis

The country continues to face a cost-of-living crisis that is having a detrimental impact on university students. The Student Academic Experience Survey (2023) showed that 76% of university students feel that the cost-of-living crisis has affected their studies. Maintenance loans have only increased by 2.8%, but this falls short of the current rate of inflation which in January 2023 was 10.7%. Yet rent for student accommodation has increased by an average of 14.6% over the past two academic years, according to a new report from Unipol and Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi), meaning rent now swallows up nearly all of the average maintenance loan. Hepi in June found that 55% of students are now doing paid work, compared with 45% in the year previously. The impact on students is huge and students need more support at a government and university level

Generative AI

A hot topic in higher education is the use of generative AI and the impact on education, learning and assessment. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools include ChatGPT and Google Bard, among others, and they can be used in a number of different ways. They can be great to boost productivity but there is also the increased risk of academic misconduct if using these tools. The question in the sector at the moment is what should the University's stance be to the use of AI? Should it be incorporated into learning? Should it have severe punitive measures? The Quality Assurance Agency has published some guidance on how to manage the rapidly increasing use of General Artificial Intelligence and they recommend universities avoid outright banning of AI tools. Instead, they should look at the positive effects it may have on teaching and learning, while also keeping academic standards.

Commuting Students

Recent research by the Sutton Trust suggests that more undergraduate students than in previous years could be living at home and commuting to university, with the number of commuting students on the rise. It's clear across the sector that there is a lack of support for commuting students, with their university experience looking significantly different to non-commuters. They can't access many social activities, can struggle where there is a lack of space for in-between lectures, are more at risk of feelings of loneliness and feel less likely to belong to their university community. However, with commuters on the rise, it's important that universities ensure they are able to offer the support they need.

Industrial Action

As you'll be aware, there has been ongoing industrial action across the country. As a result, students are continuously being affected through not receiving all their educational content, delays in marking and more.

Unfortunately, the student experience is collateral damage in a long disagreement between universities and those who work in it. The UCU have since reballoted to continue their mandate for better pay and working conditions however, they weren't successful on this occasion. This doesn't mean, there won't be another reballot in the future

General Election

Before January 2025, the government must call a general election. This may be before the start of your role, or it might during your first term as an officer. The general election is important because it will shape the future, and all students should want to be a part of this. Alarmingly, in 2019, 15.6 million people did not vote in the general election, that's more than any party received in votes! Our future will be built by students and young people of today, but only if they are heard. Voting gives power, influence and a stake in society.

Harassment & Sexual Misconduct

The OfS are issuing guidance to universities on what regulations they must set in regard to harassment and sexual misconduct. The current regulations the OfS are planning to impose are (1) OfS will provide clear definitions of harassment and sexual misconduct to support consistency across the sector, (2) each provider must create and publish a single document explaining the steps it will take to protect students, how they will handle incidents, how they will support individuals and the training it intends to provide, (3) each provider must have the capacity and resources to deliver everything required, (4) Ensure freedom of speech and academic freedom are protected, (5) prohibit non-disclosure agreements that forbit students from talking about incidents of harassment or sexual misconduct and (6) set regulatory requirements on universities in relation to personal relationships between students and relevant staff.

Community & Belonging

Feelings of loneliness is on the rise for university students, with data showing around 16% of students reported feeling lonely every day, 32% on a weekly basis and 19% monthly. This is a significant number of students, and so another hot topic in the sector is how do we better support students and prevent feelings of loneliness. This is also linked to the importance of creating a sense of belonging and the desire to drop out of university. Students who feel a sense of belonging at their university are also more likely to do well at their degree.

Access & Participation Plan (APP)

All Universities must have an access and participation plan which sets out how universities intend to support all students and remove any barriers to access and participation. The University have submitted theirs in 2024 and this is an exciting time to see new initiatives on improving the accessibility and inclusivity of education. This involves addressing risk areas e.g., the impact of cost on education, and the university must outline intervention strategies they intend to deliver on. The APP is monitored by the OfS, and they have set out new regulations this year which mean that universities must annually review their APP and determine if they need to amend their strategies if they are shown to not be working.

Housing crisis

There is a housing crisis for students. Rent prices are rising astronomically high and the availability of houses is lower than ever. This is across the sector and unfortunately there is no easy solution. In addition to the crisis, the government has been discussing the renters reform bill which will also have an impact on students.

The bill abolishes no-fault evictions, doubles the notice period for rent increases, gives tenants more rights to keep pets in properties, introduces a new ombudsman covering all private landlords (someone who handles complaints), introduces a new property portal which covers legal requirements and guidance for landlords and tenants, and lastly gets rid of assured shorthold tenancies. As students you would be on a tenancy like this, e.g., a six-, 12- or 24-month contract, instead the bill proposes that all tenancies have a rolling contract with no specified end date, and instead tenants can give two months' notice to bring the contract to an end. Landlords would be able to evict a tenant under reasonable circumstances. This has pros and cons for students and will certainly change how the student housing market works.

What's going on at Brighton University?

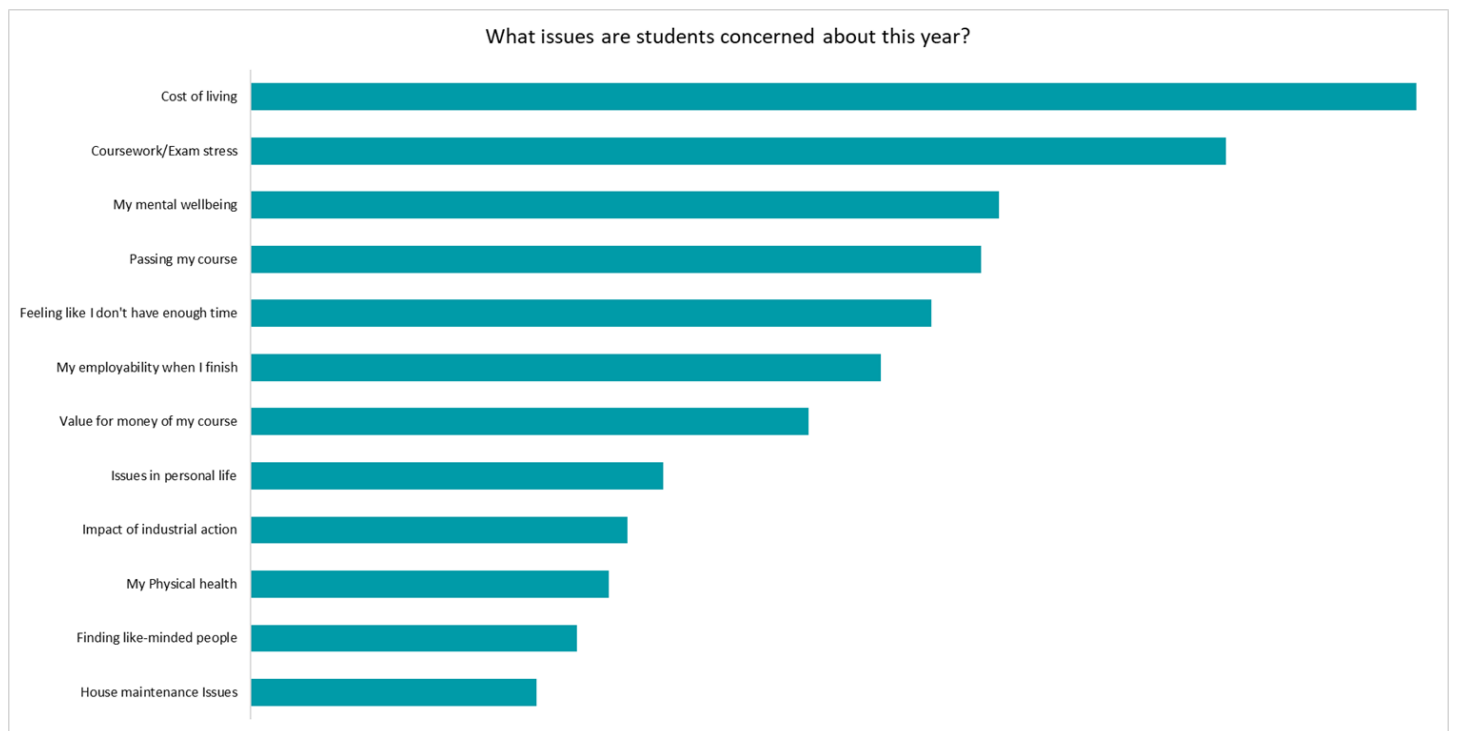We have gathered data from our pulse surveys and data to let you know what we have seen students bring up!
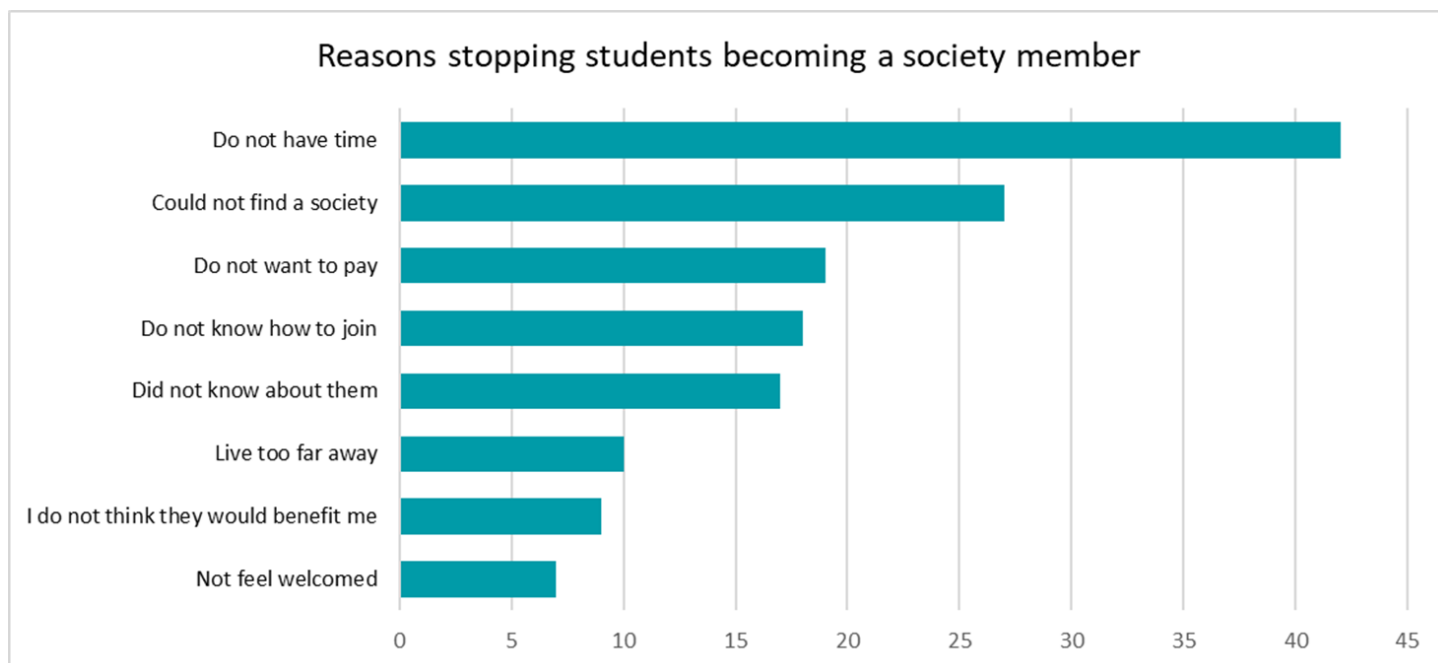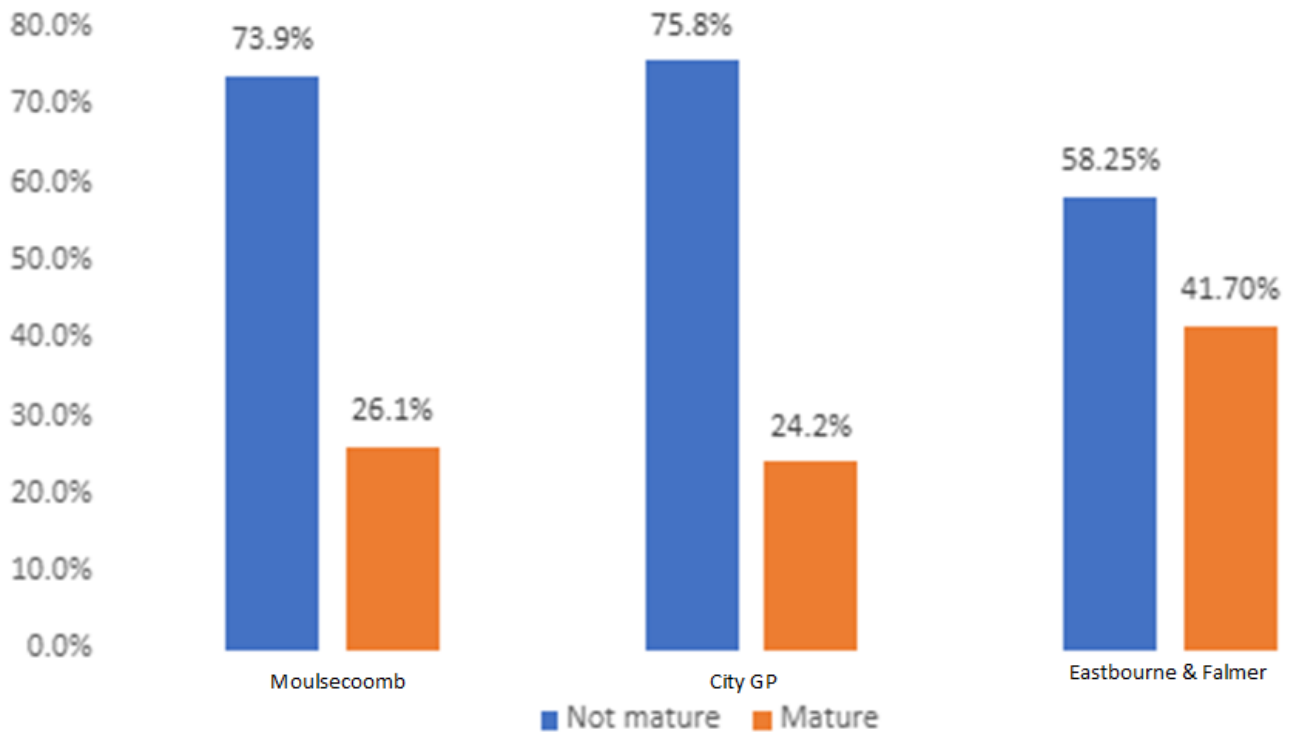

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

What do we get out of these numbers:

- High number of students who are confident of completing their course, feel like they belong at the University and have many opportunities to socialize.
- Almost all students have a broadly positive view of the SU. However, some students are not aware of the positive changes that BSU makes (but still have a positive opinion of the Union overall).
- Brighton university specifically has the challenges of a split campus. Eastbourne, Falmer, Moulsecoomb and Grand Parade are all somewhat separate.
- From *figure 1.* Students' biggest concerns at BU are the cost of living crisis and exam stress.
- There is a free food pantry for students to use on all the campuses which has significant interest run by the SU.
- From *figure* 2. Most students who are not getting involved more with university life are too busy. This lines up with one of students' biggest concerns being exam stress. Students don't have enough time to do other things because they are stressed with exams.
- The Brighton rental market is particularly difficult compared to other university towns across the UK. 78% of students in one survey start looking for a house for the next academic year before Christmas. 61% of them start looking for a house in October or November. This is very early and potentially doesn't give students enough time to make good friends before they have to think about moving in with them.
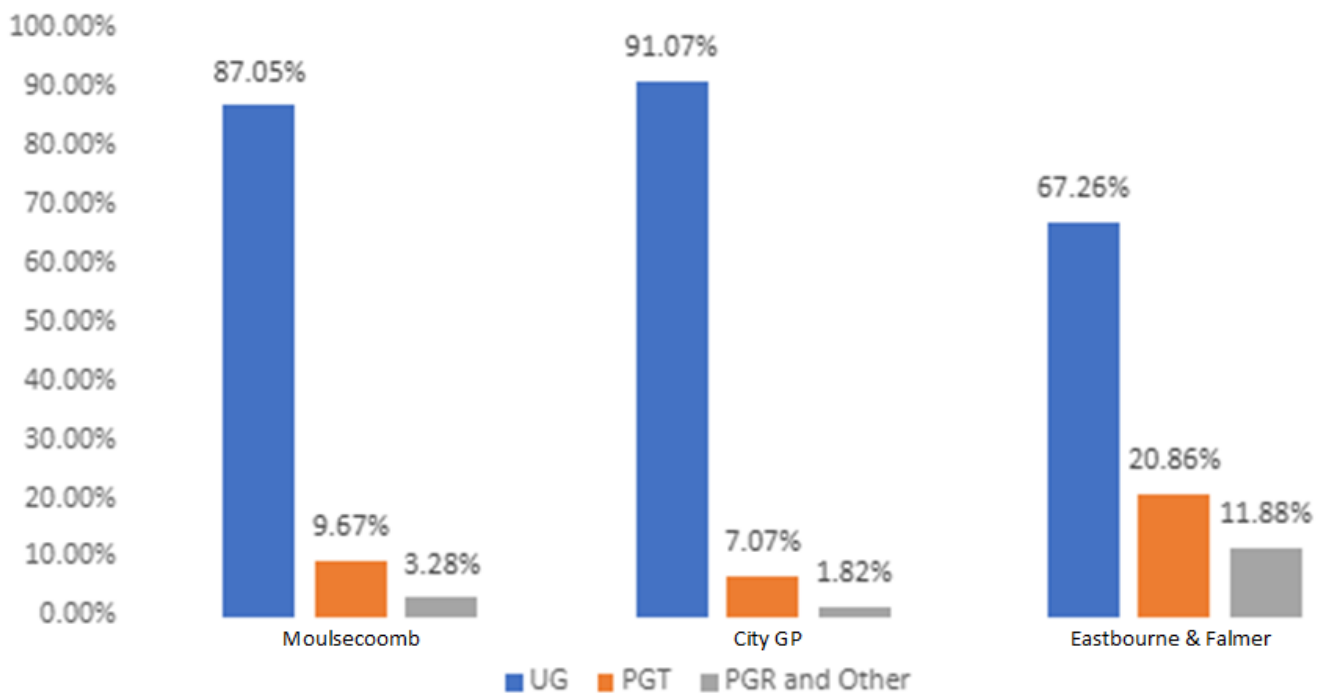
What about the different campuses?

As Eastbourne campus will be closing in the next year and courses that were based there will be transferred to Falmer the figures have been merged to show the range of students combined.
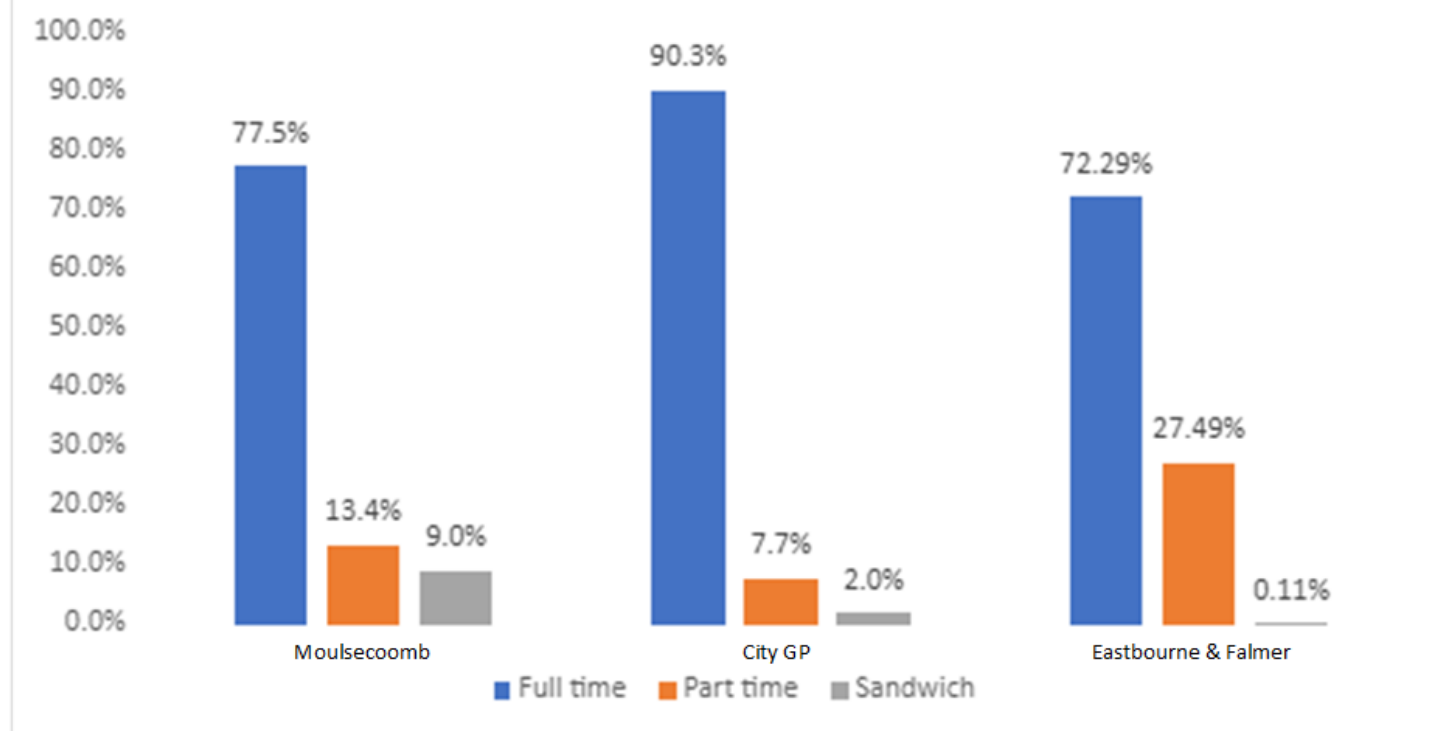
Percentage of mature students

	Not mature	Mature
Moulsecoomb	73.9%	26.1%
City GP	75.8%	24.2%
Eastbourne & Falmer	58.25%	41.70%

Level of study

	UG	PGT	PGR and Other
Moulsecoomb	87.05%	9.67%	3.28%
City GP	91.07%	7.07%	1.82%
Eastbourne & Falmer	67.26%	20.86%	11.88%

Mode of study

Full time, Part time, Sandwich percentages by campus:

- Moulsecoomb: Full time 77.5%, Part time 13.4%, Sandwich 9.0%
- City GP: Full time 90.3%, Part time 7.7%, Sandwich 2.0%
- Eastbourne & Falmer: Full time 72.29%, Part time 27.49%, Sandwich 0.11%

What else is going on?

- The SU is currently undergoing a Democracy Review, which will mean it's a great chance to get involved in what changes you would like to see in the workings of the Students' Union
- The government has made changes to student visas which mean that international students will no longer have the right to bring dependents, unless they are on postgraduate research programmes. This will not affect anyone who is already on a student visa, it came into effect in January 2024
- The government released the Student Adjustments Planner aimed at helping students with disabilities and health conditions.

Interesting reads

- https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2023
- https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Student-accommodation-costs-across-10-cities-in-the-UK.pdf
- https://www.unitegroup.com/living-black-at-university
- https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/student-mental-health-in-2023.pdf
- https://s33320.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/Approaches-to-addressing-the-ethnicity-degree-awarding-gap.pdf
- https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-to-make-commuter-students-the-centre-of-the-campus/
- https://business.blackbullion.com/download/student-money-wellbeing-2023/
- https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/united-kingdom/insights/uk-student-accommodation-report
- https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf
- https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/costoflivingandhighereducationstudentsengland/30januaryto13february2023#:%7E:text=1,,early%20November%202022%20(91%25)