



# THE BIG TERM ONE REPORT 2025

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# ABOUT THE BIG SU TERM ONE REPORT

This report brings together SU insights from five major feedback touchpoints across the first three months of the academic year.

## Surveys included in this report

This report draws on a suite of student surveys conducted across Welcome and Term One, designed to capture both how students experience arrival and how that experience evolves once teaching, assessment and everyday routines are underway.

The Term One Survey forms the primary evidence base for this report, providing the most comprehensive view of student experience once initial impressions have been tested by term-time reality. Findings from the Welcome Survey are used as a comparator to understand how confidence, belonging and expectations shift from arrival into the first academic term.

Two short pulse surveys played a particularly important role in shaping the analysis and narrative of this report. The "First Impressions of Teaching" survey captured early perceptions of teaching quality and academic engagement at a critical point before assessment pressure intensified. The "But seriously, how are you?" survey provided insight into students' emotional wellbeing during Term One, helping to contextualise quantitative experience measures and highlight how academic pressure and social connection interact.

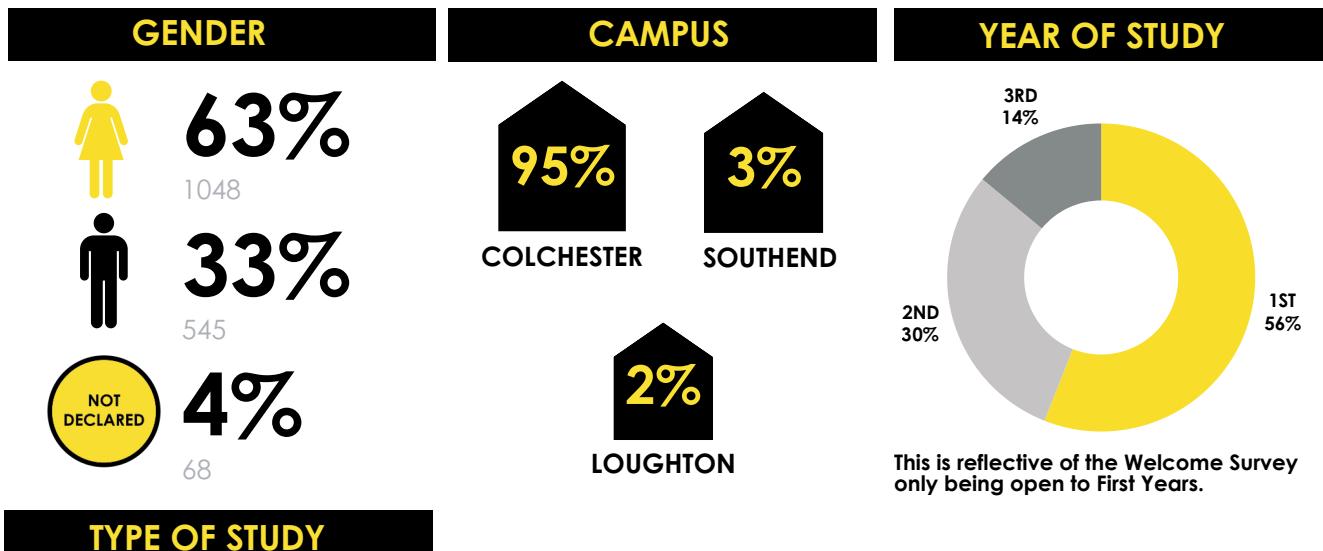
Together, these surveys allow the report to move beyond a single snapshot in time and instead reflect the lived student journey across Welcome and Term One, combining structured data with emotional context.

**Due to the Southend campus closure announcement on 2 December, the Term One Survey was not issued to students based on the Southend campus.** This is reflected in the response profile for that survey and has been taken into account when interpreting the findings.

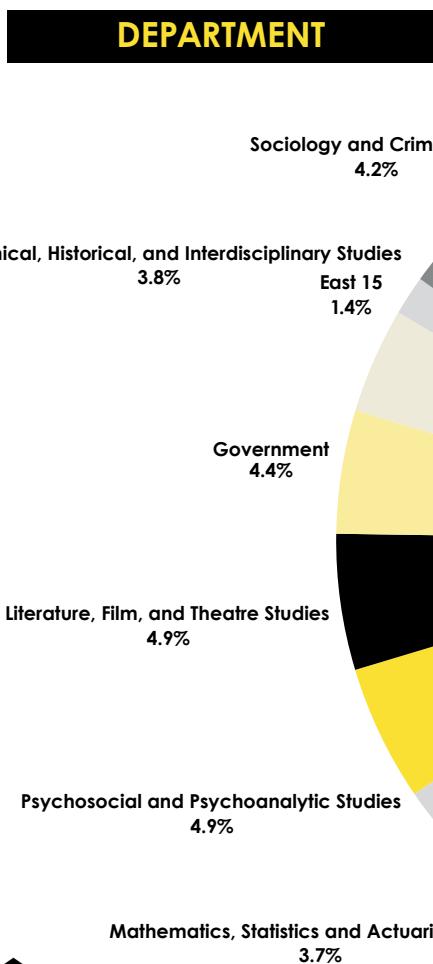
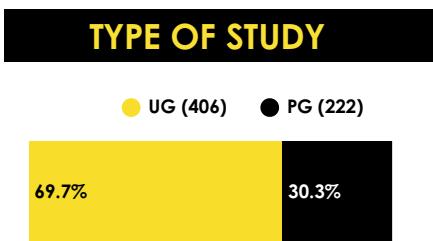
The table below summarises the surveys included, their timing, audience and response volumes.

Survey	Timing	Who	Student Responses
<b>Welcome Survey (1st Years Only)</b>	6 - 13 Nov	1st years	690
<b>First Impressions of Teaching</b>	30 Oct - 5 Nov	All students	837
<b>But seriously, how are you?</b>	14 - 20 Nov	All students	901
<b>Term One Survey (excluded Southend)</b>	4 - 11 Dec	All students	1,012
<b>Nightlife at Essex Survey (targeted)</b>	2 - 12 Dec	All students	287

## WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEYS



This is reflective of the Welcome Survey only being open to First Years.



## **HOW TO READ THIS REPORT**

**This report is structured around the student journey from arrival to everyday reality.**

While Welcome creates reassurance, excitement and early connection, it is during Term One that students begin to experience university life as it will actually be lived; through teaching, assessment, routines, relationships and competing pressures.

For this reason, the report follows a deliberate progression from Welcome, through Term One, to the point where initial impressions are tested by day-to-day academic and social experience. This approach allows us to understand not just how students feel at a single moment in time, but how confidence, belonging and engagement are formed, reinforced or weakened as the term unfolds.

The three main sections of the report reflect the core drivers of student success in this period:

- **University Life & Belonging** explores whether students feel connected, supported and confident in their place at Essex as early optimism settles into routine.
- **Setting Students Up for Academic Success** examines how teaching quality, clarity and support shape academic confidence and advocacy once term-time study begins.
- **Helping Students Connect & Engage** looks at how easily students can sustain social connection and involvement beyond their course, and what barriers affect participation as pressures increase.

Together, these sections show how belonging underpins confidence, academic experience reinforces or erodes that confidence, and engagement determines whether connection is sustained over time.

Viewed collectively, they highlight Term One as a critical window where relatively small, well-timed interventions can have a lasting impact on student experience, wellbeing and success.

## **BEHIND THE DATA IS A STUDENT STORY**

This report **combines data and student voice** to show how life at Essex feels in practice. Alongside each section, we share a **short, anonymous student story** that reflects the most common experiences and themes in the data.

**These stories are not about individual journeys, but about patterns.** They bring together real student feedback to show how experiences shift from Welcome through Term One, and how teaching, belonging, support and wellbeing shape that journey.

# HOW THIS REPORT CONNECTS TO SU MEMBERSHIP

This report doesn't just share what students told us during Welcome and Term One, it shows how those experiences connect directly to the role of the Students' Union and the value of SU membership.

The Students' Union exists to support students academically, socially and personally, and to represent their interests within the University. Each section of this report reflects a core part of that role.

**University Life & Belonging** explores whether students feel connected, supported and able to find their place at Essex. This links directly to the SU's role in helping students find their people, feel at home and build a sense of community beyond the classroom.

**Setting Students Up for Academic Success** focuses on teaching quality, academic confidence and student voice. This reflects the SU's commitment to helping students get a great degree and dream job, and to ensuring their academic interests are represented, heard and acted on.

**Helping Students Connect & Engage** examines how easily students can access opportunities, sustain social connection and overcome barriers to involvement. This aligns with the SU's role in supporting students to grow their own way, without pressure, and to engage in ways that work for their lives, responsibilities and wellbeing.

**The Impact of Your Students' Union** brings these themes together by showing how SU activity, representation and support shape students' early experience; from social connection and wellbeing to confidence, belonging and advocacy.

By linking student feedback to these areas, the report shows how SU membership is not an add-on to university life, but a core part of how students experience Essex in practice. It also demonstrates how student voice directly informs SU priorities, activity and partnership with the University to improve the student experience.



# AT A GLANCE: WHAT TERM ONE TELLS US

## Term One is where the student experience becomes real.

Welcome creates energy and reassurance, but it is during the first full academic term that students decide whether university life works for them academically, socially and personally. This report brings together survey data and student voice to show how belonging, confidence, engagement and wellbeing evolve through Term One, and what this means for institutional priorities.

Student experience in Term One is not uniform across year groups.

While overall satisfaction, belonging and confidence remain strong, deeper analysis shows consistent variation by stage of study. Second-year students in particular report lower satisfaction, belonging, engagement confidence and advocacy than other cohorts, identifying a key mid-cycle pressure point in the student journey.

### 1. Extend Welcome into Term One

Welcome opens the door. Term One embeds the experience.

Welcome provides reassurance and optimism, but Term One data shows that confidence and satisfaction are tested once routines and pressures set in.

### 2. Reinforce Belonging Beyond Welcome

Belonging is built through people, not moments.

By the end of Term One, 79% of students feel they belong. This remains positive but is not guaranteed once early excitement fades.

### 3. Protect Academic Confidence Early

Confidence depends on clarity and consistency.

Students arrive confident in their course choice, but academic confidence becomes more variable by the end of Term One where delivery and expectations feel inconsistent.

### 4. Reduce Barriers to Engagement

Engagement drops when access becomes harder.

Most students want to engage, but Term One pressures reduce confidence to do so. Neutral responses reflect uncertainty, not disengagement.

### 5. Use Term One as a Wellbeing Protection Window

Wellbeing follows belonging and confidence.

Wellbeing challenges emerge where academic pressure combines with isolation or uncertainty.

# **UNIVERSITY LIFE AND BELONGING**

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## A STUDENT STORY: UNIVERSITY LIFE & BELONGING

“ A first-year undergraduate, new to Essex, living off campus and commuting in. They arrive during Welcome feeling excited, optimistic and relieved to be here. Events are busy, people are friendly, and there’s a strong sense that university life is about to begin.

**“At the start, everything felt exciting. There was always something going on and everyone was in the same boat.”**

As Term One progresses, that early buzz begins to fade into routine. Lectures become more intense, timetables fill up, and commuting means less time on campus. Making friends feels harder when days become more transactional. Academic pressure, cost-of-living concerns and time constraints start to shape how connected they feel.

**“Once teaching really got going, it felt harder to stay on campus or see people outside of lectures.”**

What helps is not buildings or services, but people. Friendly peers in seminars, approachable lecturers, and moments where support feels visible and personal. Being able to ask questions in class, feeling recognised by staff, and having reasons to stay beyond lectures begin to rebuild confidence.

**“When lecturers were approachable and classes felt interactive, it made a big difference.”**

By the end of Term One, belonging feels different. Less about excitement, more about whether university life fits into everyday reality. They feel more settled academically, more selective socially, and clearer about what helps them stay connected.

Belonging is no longer automatic. It needs reinforcing through connection, consistency and support.

**“I don’t feel lost anymore, but staying connected takes effort.”**

”

# 1. UNIVERSITY LIFE & BELONGING

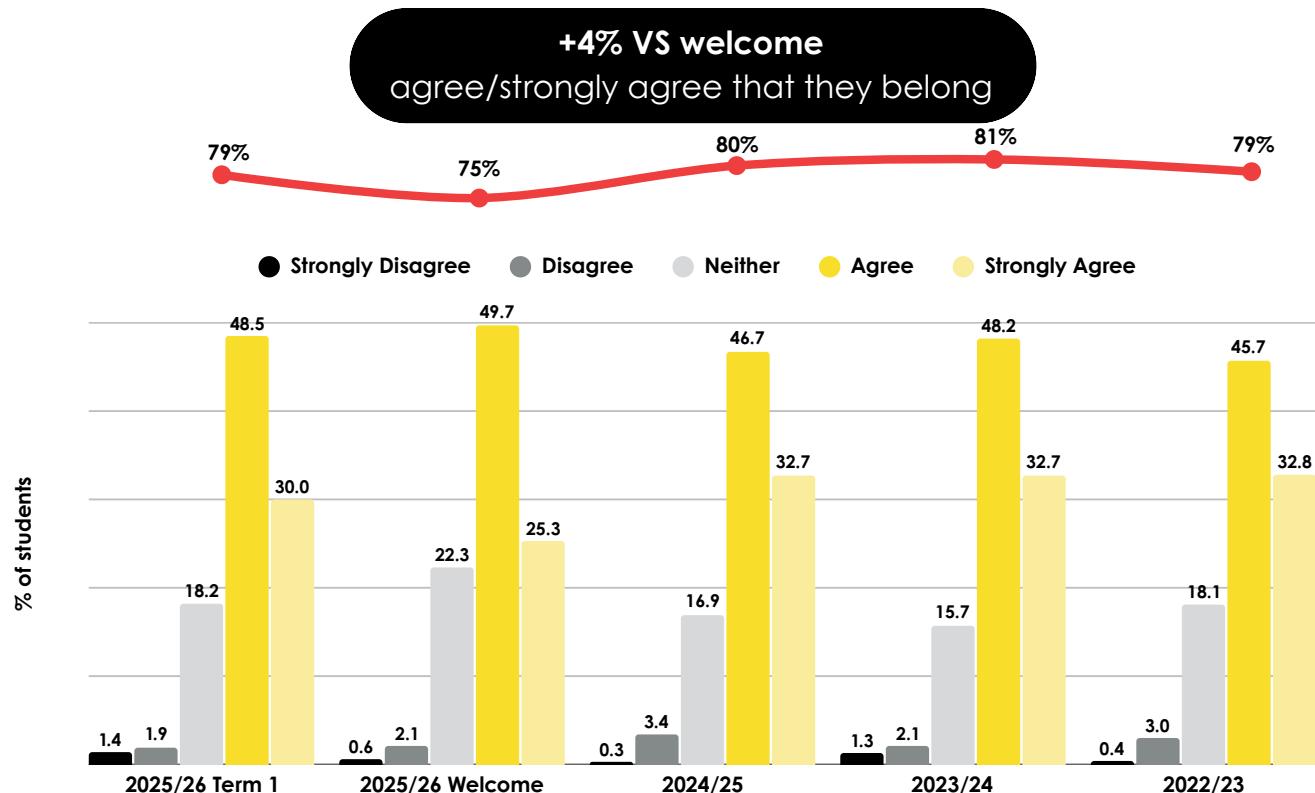
How students feel at Essex by the end of Term One, and how that compares to their arrival. This section explores satisfaction, belonging, whole-Essex experience and emotional wellbeing.

Belonging isn't just a metric; **it's one of the strongest predictors of retention, wellbeing, academic confidence and student success**. It's also the emotional thread that ties the Welcome experience to the reality of the first full term.

This section starts with belonging and uses it as the lens for understanding all student experience measures.

## 1.1 BELONGING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

**To what extent do you agree with the following statement?: "I feel like I belong at the University of Essex"**



Our "sense of belonging" score shifted over the first term, **rising to 79% by the end of Term One** after an initial dip to 75% during Welcome. This is slightly lower than 80% last year and 81% the year before. While still broadly positive, this pattern reflects how students' sense of belonging evolves as they move beyond Welcome and into the realities of term-time study.

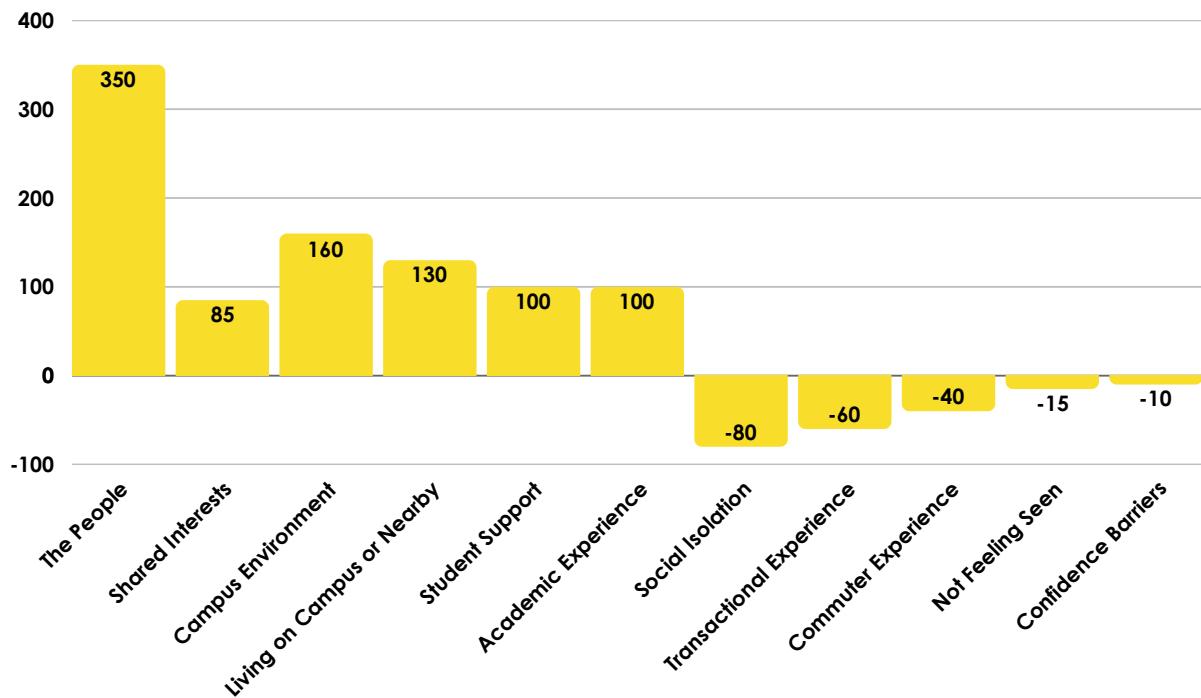
Looking across different year groups, levels of belonging are not evenly distributed:

- **Final-year students report the strongest sense of belonging, with 82% agreeing or strongly agreeing,**
- Followed by first-year students at 78% and second-year students at 77%
- **Postgraduate students report the lowest sense of belonging, at 75%, suggesting a more fragmented experience for this cohort.**

Belonging is shaped primarily by people, consistency and connection, rather than infrastructure alone. Welcome can create an early sense of excitement and connection, but by the end of Term One this often softens as academic pressures increase, cost-of-living challenges intensify, and timetable barriers begin to affect students' ability to engage.

## 1.2 WHAT SHAPES STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING

To understand changes in belonging at Essex, it is essential to examine why students feel they do or do not belong. This analysis highlights the factors that most influence students' sense of connection to Essex.



The results show that students' sense of belonging at Essex is shaped primarily by people, consistency and connection, not infrastructure alone. The chart above outlines the key factors that strengthen or weaken belonging, each of which is explored in more detail on the following page. **Feeling welcomed by peers and staff, finding "their people" through societies, and spending time on campus are the strongest contributors to belonging.** A safe, comfortable campus environment and knowing that support is available further reinforce this sense of connection.

**Belonging is built socially, not structurally.**

**Where belonging is weaker, it is most often due to social isolation and low engagement.** Students who struggle to make friends, commute in and out, or experience university in a purely transactional way find it harder to feel part of the community. A smaller number feel disconnected because they don't feel seen, supported or able to fit in.

It is important to note that a **significant proportion of students neither agree nor disagree** with belonging statements at this stage. Across responses, these neutral positions consistently reflect uncertainty and transition rather than disengagement. For many students, belonging is still forming in Term One and remains responsive to connection, consistency and support.



## What helps students feel they belong

### The People

~350 responses

Friendly peers and welcoming staff are the strongest drivers of belonging. Feeling accepted, included and able to be yourself matters more than any single service or space.

### Shared Interest (Societies, Clubs & Activities)

~85 responses

Societies, clubs and shared-interest groups help students build connections and feel part of a community, particularly during transition periods.

### Campus Environment

~160 responses

A safe, welcoming and pleasant campus environment contributes to emotional comfort and a sense of being "at home" at Essex.

### Living on Campus or Nearby

~130 responses

Living on or near campus – and spending more time at university – naturally builds familiarity and connection over time.

### Student Support

~100 responses

Students feel they belong when they know help is available and staff care about their wellbeing, academically and personally.

### Academic Experience

~100 responses

Enjoying a course and having approachable lecturers can support belonging, though this is less influential than social factors.



## What makes belonging harder

### Social Isolation

~80 responses

Students struggle to make friends or meaningful connections, leading to loneliness and emotional distance from university life.

### Transactional Experience

~60 responses

Attending lectures and leaving straight after – limits opportunities to build relationships or feel part of a community.

### Commuter Experience

~40 responses

Commuting reduces time on campus and access to social activity, making it harder to form connections, even when students want to engage.

### Not feeling seen

~15 responses

Some students feel unnoticed, undervalued or unsupported, which weakens their sense of belonging and connection to the institution.

### Confidence Barriers

~10 responses

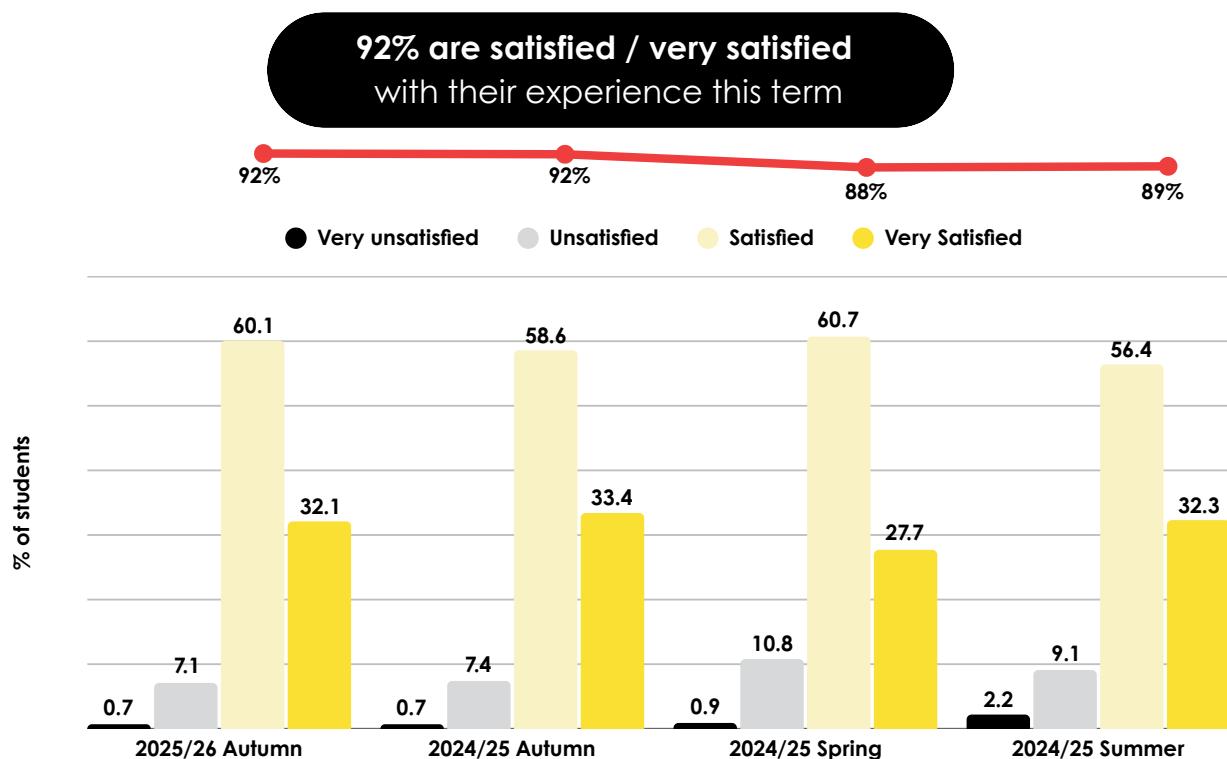
Cultural differences, confidence, language or identity can create additional barriers to feeling comfortable and included.

This suggests that student experience and events that create reasons to stay on campus (and help students form relationships) are likely to have the greatest impact on belonging.

## 1.3 SATISFACTION THROUGH THE LENS OF BELONGING

This sense of belonging directly shapes how satisfied students feel with their overall experience.

### How satisfied have you been with your experience this term?



Overall student satisfaction in Term One stands at 92%, unchanged from the same period last year (92%). This indicates a strong and consistent start to the academic year and suggests that early-term student experience at Essex remains positive.

Looking more closely at the data, satisfaction varies by year group.

- **First-year students report the highest levels of satisfaction**, with 96% stating they are satisfied or very satisfied, reflecting a particularly strong Welcome and transition experience.
- Satisfaction is **lower among second-year students at 89%**
- Before rising again among **final-year students at 91%**
- And **postgraduate students at 92%**

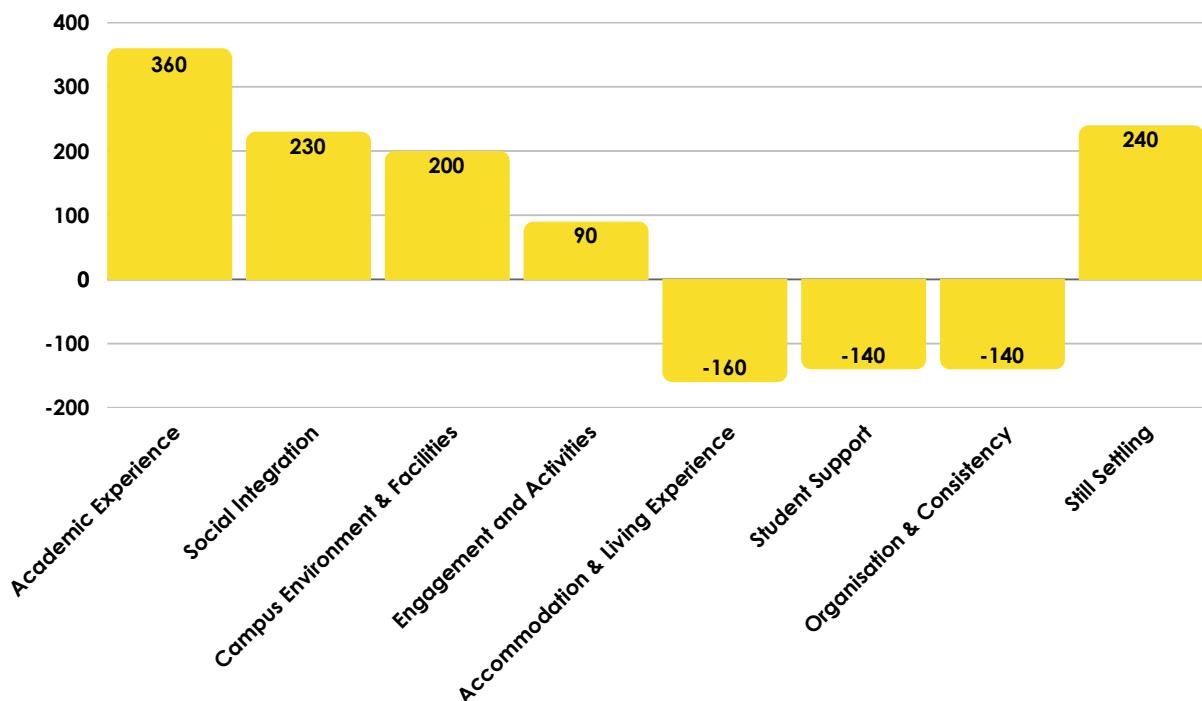
This variation suggests that while entry into university life is working well, the experience of continuing students, particularly those in their second year, may require closer attention.

While satisfaction begins at a high level, it is important to note that last academic year saw a decline later in the cycle, falling to 88% in the Spring Term and 89% in the Summer Term. This pattern suggests that although initial impressions are strong, sustaining satisfaction over time remains an ongoing challenge.

Taken together, this highlights the importance of maintaining momentum beyond Welcome, particularly as students progress through their studies and expectations shift towards academic delivery, assessment and day-to-day university systems.

## What's driving satisfaction in Term One?

Term One satisfaction is shaped by effective teaching and early social integration, but for many students this positive experience is still forming and needs sustaining over time.



### Positive areas shaping satisfaction

#### Academic experience

The strongest driver of satisfaction, with students highlighting engaging teaching, interesting content and supportive staff.

#### Social integration

Making friends and feeling socially settled significantly increases satisfaction, particularly when connections form early.

#### Campus environment and facilities

The campus is widely viewed as a positive asset, valued for its environment, facilities and sense of safety.

#### Engagement and activities

For students who participate, societies and activities enhance enjoyment and involvement beyond academic study.

### Negative areas shaping satisfaction

#### Accommodation and living experience

A key source of dissatisfaction, with students citing cost, noise, maintenance and living conditions.

#### Student support and communication

Concerns focus on unclear communication, slow processes and difficulty navigating support.

#### Organisation and consistency

Specific frustrations with organisation and inconsistent experiences, rather than overall dissatisfaction.

### Opportunity Areas

#### Still settling

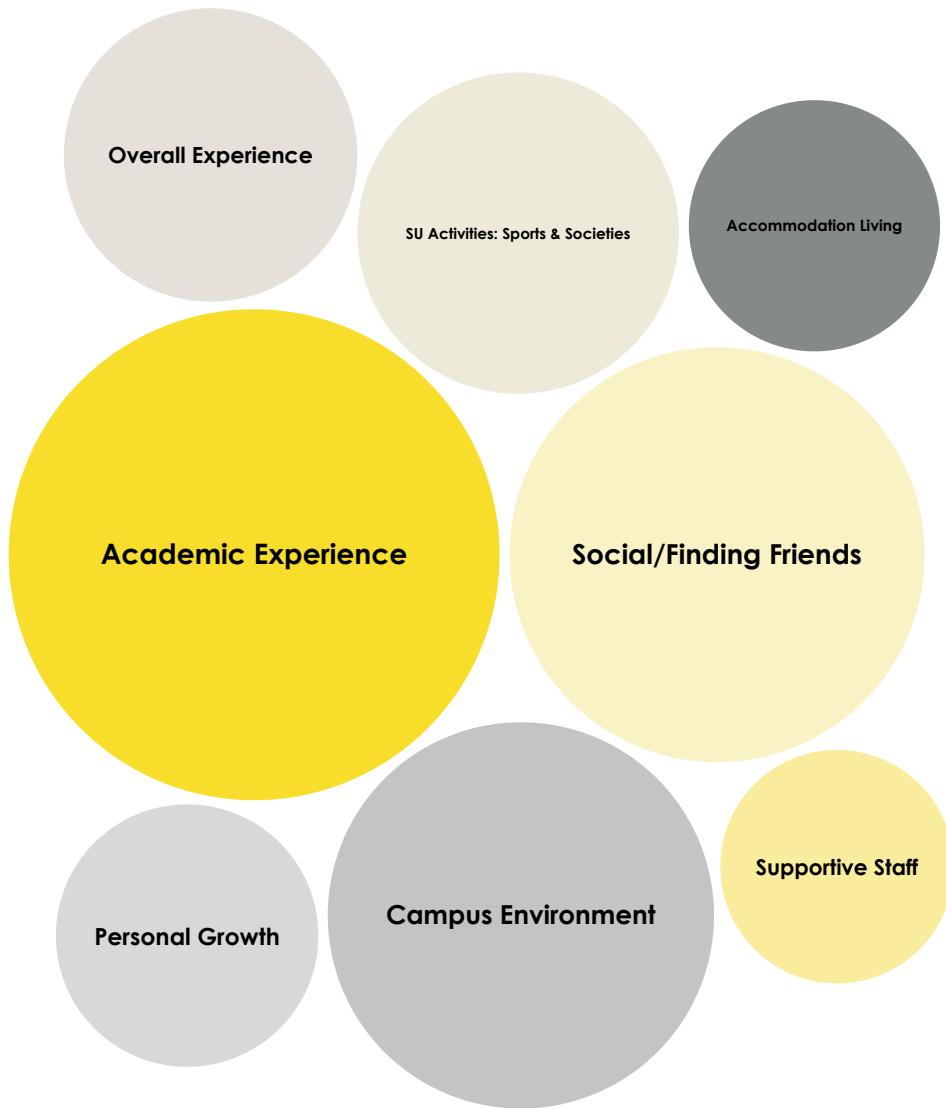
Many students report that they are still adjusting. **This represents a key point in the student journey to embed positive experiences**, but also a clear risk area where satisfaction may decline without continued support into Term Two.

## **1.4 STUDENT EXPERIENCE & BELONGING**

This section brings together what students value most, how their experience changes from Welcome to the end of Term One, and where improvements matter most.

### **What students value most**

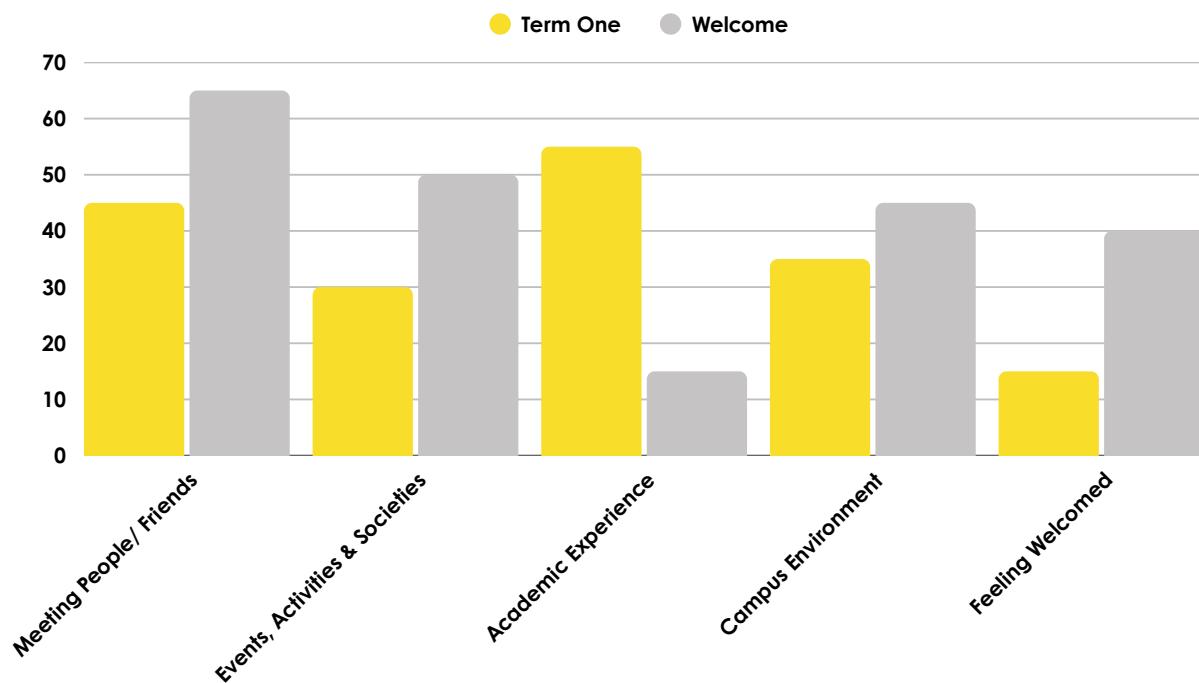
**“What has been the \*best thing\* about your experience of being a student at the University of Essex \*this term\*?”**



The best parts of Term One are driven by **strong teaching, new friendships and a campus environment** that supports both learning and social life.

**Academic experience and social connection dominate what students value most**, with the campus and opportunities to get involved acting as powerful enablers. Together, these themes explain the strong early-term satisfaction and sense of belonging seen across the survey data.

## From Welcome to Term One: How the *\*Best Thing\** Evolves



### What students value during Welcome

Welcome is about arrival and reassurance. Students consistently describe the best aspects of their experience as meeting people, attending events and feeling welcomed into the University community. Campus atmosphere and first impressions dominate feedback, while academic experience features less prominently.

At this stage, students are primarily looking for social connection and confidence — signs that they belong.

### What matters by the end of Term One

By the end of Term One, students' focus shifts from first impressions to everyday experience. Teaching and course quality become the most frequently cited positives, alongside having established friendships rather than simply meeting new people.

The campus is no longer described as a first impression, but as a place to live, study and spend time. Engagement also becomes more selective, with students highlighting societies and ongoing involvement rather than one-off events.

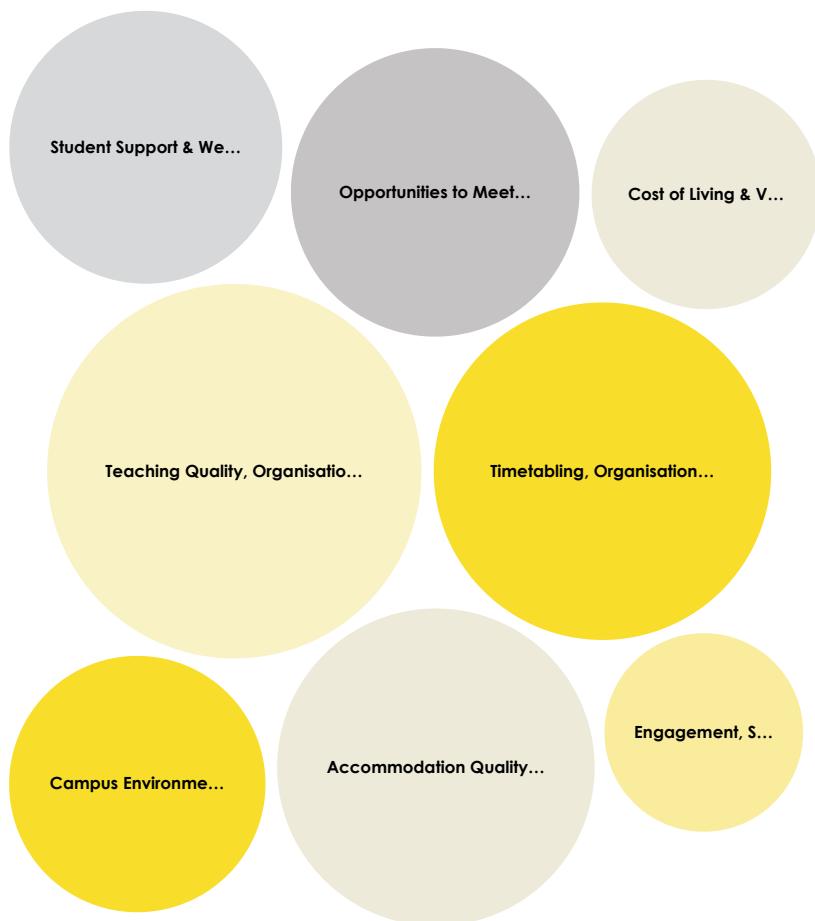
**Welcome opens the door; Term One embeds the experience.**

### What this shift tells us

The transition from Welcome to Term One marks a move from orientation to integration. Early belonging is created through social activity and atmosphere, but sustained belonging depends on academic experience, peer relationships and consistent support.

## Challenges to the Student Experience

If you could change or improve ONE thing about your first term what would it be?



Students' suggested improvements focus on practical, structural issues rather than a lack of enjoyment or engagement.

The most common areas for improvement relate to academic delivery, organisation, accommodation and communication — all of which tend to become more visible as the term progresses. Importantly, many students remain broadly satisfied, suggesting that addressing these issues represents an opportunity to protect and strengthen already positive experiences, rather than fix a fundamentally negative one.

### What they said...

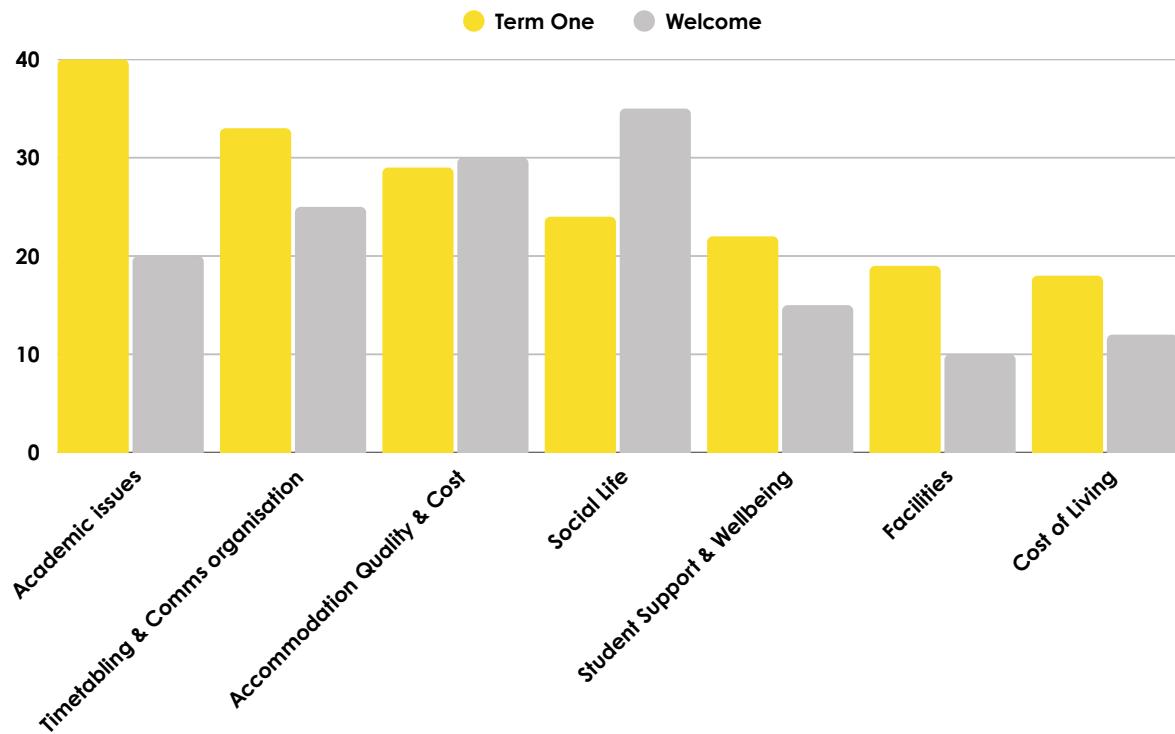
#### Teaching quality, organisation & assessment

“ Some of the teaching feels inconsistent, and expectations around assessments aren't always clear ”

#### Timetabling, organisation & communication

“ Timetables and information change at short notice, which makes it hard to plan and stay on top of things ”

## How priorities change over time: What students want to improve: Welcome vs End of Term One



**During Welcome, students' suggested improvements are dominated by social experience and immediate living arrangements, reflecting the challenges of settling in.**

**By the end of Term One, concerns shift toward academic delivery, organisation and support, as students engage more deeply with teaching, assessment and day-to-day university systems.**

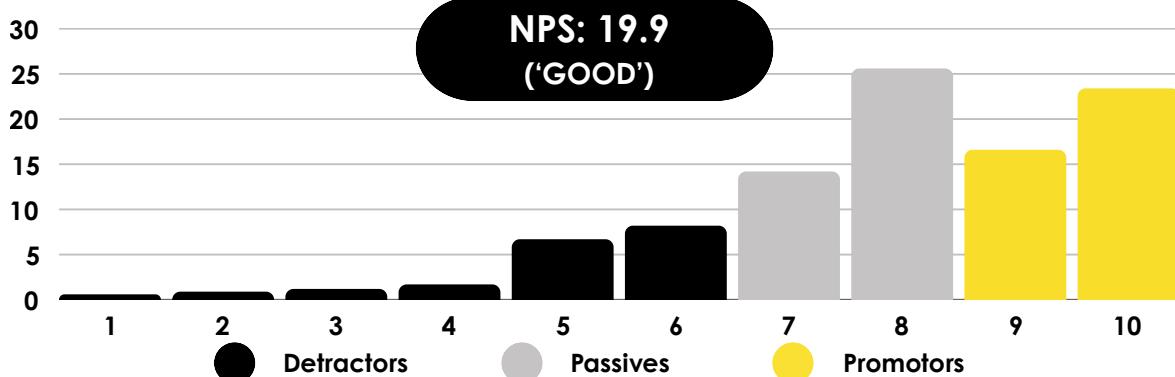
Accommodation remains a consistent concern at both Welcome and the end of Term One. However, by the end of Term One it sits alongside, and is increasingly outweighed by, **academic delivery, organisation and assessment** as students' priorities shift from settling in to day-to-day university systems.

**Welcome concerns focus on social adjustment and accommodation, while Term One issues shift toward teaching quality, organisation and academic infrastructure.**

## 1.5 BELONGING AND ADVOCACY THROUGH NPS

NPS captures more than overall satisfaction; it reflects how confident students feel in their experience of Essex. This section examines how patterns in recommendation align closely with belonging, reinforcing the link between connection, engagement and advocacy.

**On a scale of 0–10, how likely would you recommend the University of Essex?**



### Why students rated the way they did

The University's overall Net Promoter Score (NPS) stands at 19.9. However, this headline figure masks notable variation by year group:

- **First-year students report the strongest advocacy**, with an NPS of 24.6,
- followed closely by third-year students at 23.6
- and postgraduate students at 21.2.
- **Second-year students report a much lower NPS of 4.7**; while this result is based on a smaller sample size and should therefore be interpreted with some caution, it nevertheless represents a significant drop compared with other year groups and has a substantial impact on the overall score.

#### Promoters (scores 9–10)

Promoters feel academically engaged, socially connected and positive about their overall experience.

- Good teaching and supportive staff
- Strong sense of community
- Enjoyment of campus life

#### Passives (scores 7–8)

Passives are generally satisfied but not yet confident enough to recommend.

- Still forming overall views
- Mixed experiences
- Some uncertainty

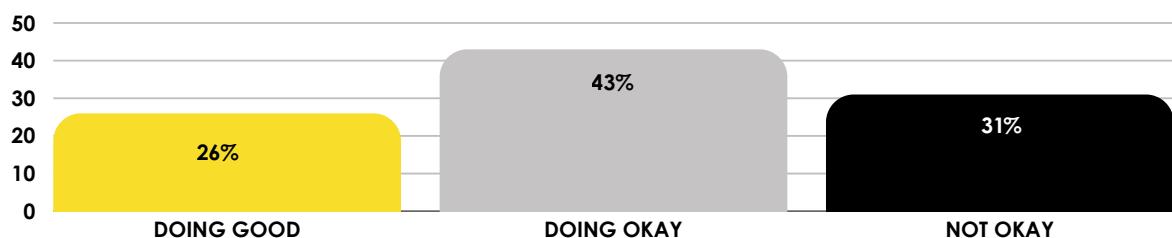
#### Detractors (scores 0–6)

Lower scores are driven by recurring issues rather than disengagement.

- Teaching and organisational issues
- Accommodation and cost pressures
- Communication and belonging challenges

## 1.6 WELLBEING THROUGH THE LENS OF BELONGING

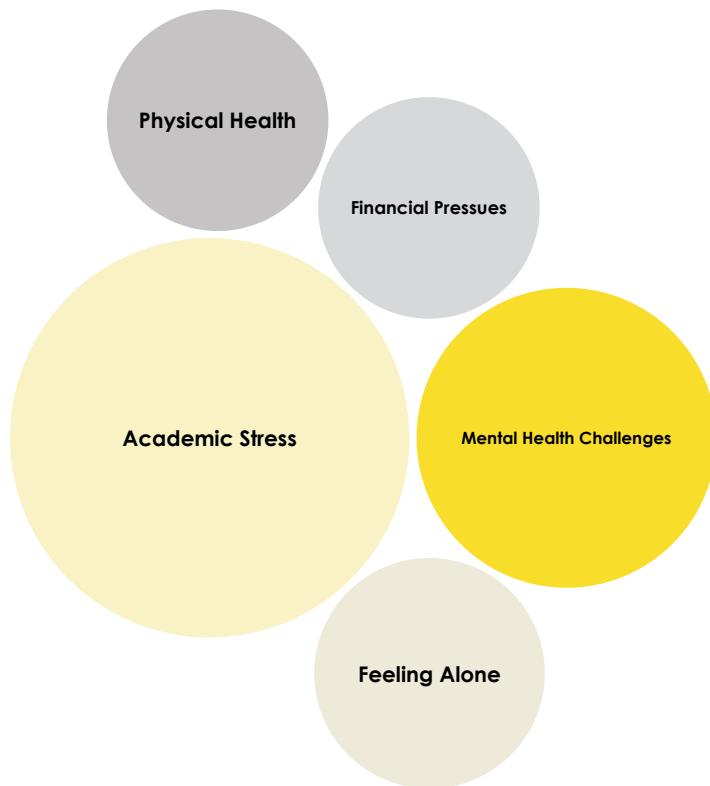
Wellbeing does not sit separately from the student experience. This section examines how students' sense of belonging interacts with academic and social pressures to influence wellbeing during Term One. The "But seriously, how are you?" pulse survey provides a snapshot of students' emotional wellbeing and mirrors the patterns seen elsewhere in this report between wellbeing, belonging and academic experience.



Responses show a mixed but stable wellbeing landscape. Many students report feeling generally okay or positive (69%), particularly those enjoying the new environment and settling into university life. However, 31% report feeling not okay, with pressures that closely mirror the belonging and satisfaction findings elsewhere in this report.

### What's driving students who are not feeling okay

The most commonly cited factors are:



These responses suggest that wellbeing challenges in Term One are **less about isolated personal difficulties and more about the intersection of academic pressure and social connection** during the transition into full-term study.

## What's supporting students who are doing well

Students who report feeling okay or positive are not free from pressure, but they feel able to cope. Their responses point to a small number of consistent themes:

- **Enjoying the new environment** Many students describe a sense of excitement about being at university, valuing the campus, independence and the feeling of a fresh start.
- **Managing, not avoiding, worries** Some students acknowledge concerns but feel these are currently manageable rather than overwhelming.
- **Feeling physically well** A smaller number cite good physical health as helping them stay positive day to day.
- **Study-Life Balance** A few students highlight having some sense of balance between study and life, even if it is still developing.
- **Mental wellbeing** Very few describe good mental health explicitly, suggesting that doing well in Term One is more about context and coping than the absence of stress.

Overall, students who are doing well tend to feel settled enough, supported by optimism, momentum and early belonging rather than a lack of challenge.

### Student wellbeing in Term One is closely tied to belonging.

Where students feel socially connected, academically supported and settled into university life, wellbeing is more resilient even when pressures exist. Where academic stress combines with social isolation, wellbeing is more fragile.

**This reinforces Term One as a critical window of opportunity.** Supporting connection, clarity and confidence at this stage can play a significant role in protecting student wellbeing and sustaining positive experience as students move into later terms.

## 1.7 UNIVERSITY LIFE & BELONGING SUMMARY

### What Term One tells us

#### **Term One is where the student experience becomes real.**

Welcome creates energy and optimism, but by the end of the first term students are judging their experience through everyday realities: teaching quality, social connection and how supported they feel when things get busy.

#### **Belonging remains strong, but it is not guaranteed.**

By the end of Term One, 79% of students agree they feel they belong; an improvement on Welcome, but slightly lower than previous years. This shift reflects a point in the academic cycle where academic pressure, cost-of-living concerns and timetable constraints begin to shape how connected students feel.

#### **Belonging is shaped primarily by people, consistency and connection, not infrastructure alone.**

Students feel they belong when they form friendships, feel welcomed by peers and staff, and have reasons to stay on campus beyond teaching. Where belonging is weaker, it is most often linked to social isolation, commuting, or experiencing university in a purely transactional way.

#### **Satisfaction is high, but still forming.**

Overall satisfaction stands at 92%, driven primarily by effective teaching and early social integration. However, previous years show satisfaction tends to decrease later in the academic cycle, making Term One a critical period for embedding positive experiences rather than relying on strong first impressions.

#### **Wellbeing follows belonging.**

Students who feel socially connected and academically supported report greater resilience, even when under pressure. Where academic stress combines with isolation or uncertainty, wellbeing is more fragile; reinforcing the close relationship between belonging, satisfaction and mental health.

**Belonging is not experienced equally across year groups.** Final-year students report the strongest sense of belonging, while second-year and postgraduate students report lower agreement. This suggests that belonging becomes more fragile once the structure and momentum of Welcome has passed, reinforcing the importance of actively sustaining connection and consistency beyond initial transition.

**Welcome opens the door. Term One determines whether students stay engaged, supported and confident in their future at Essex.**

#### **What needs to change**

- Belonging should be treated as a Term One priority, not a Welcome outcome.
- Early-term decisions about teaching, timetabling and communication should be assessed for their impact on connection, not just efficiency.

**Primary ownership:** Joint (University + SU)

# SETTING STUDENTS UP FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

## A STUDENT STORY: SETTING STUDENTS UP FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

“ A first-year undergraduate, now partway through their first term. They arrive feeling confident they've made the right choice. Welcome provides reassurance that they're on the right course, surrounded by people starting from the same place and lecturers who seem approachable.

**“At the start, I felt confident I'd chosen the right course.”**

As Term One progresses, confidence starts to be tested. Teaching becomes more demanding, assessments feel closer, and expectations begin to matter more. When delivery feels inconsistent or support isn't clear, uncertainty creeps in.

**“Sometimes it's not always clear what's expected, especially once assignments start.”**

This isn't about disliking the subject. It's about navigating a new academic environment and adjusting to how university learning really works.

What helps is clarity and consistency. When teaching is well structured, lecturers are approachable, and expectations are explained early, confidence begins to settle. Opportunities to ask questions, discuss ideas and engage actively in classes make a noticeable difference.

**“When lecturers explain things clearly and encourage questions, it makes you feel more confident straight away.”**

Support also comes from feeling represented. Knowing there are routes to raise academic issues, and that student voice is taken seriously, helps students feel less isolated when challenges arise.

By the end of Term One, academic confidence feels earned rather than assumed. Students are more aware of what good teaching looks like for them, more confident asking for help, and clearer about what supports their learning.

Confidence is no longer just about choosing the right course. It's about whether teaching, support and engagement consistently reinforce that choice.

**“I feel more confident now, but it really depends on how classes are run and how supported you feel.”**

”

## 2. SETTING STUDENTS UP FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

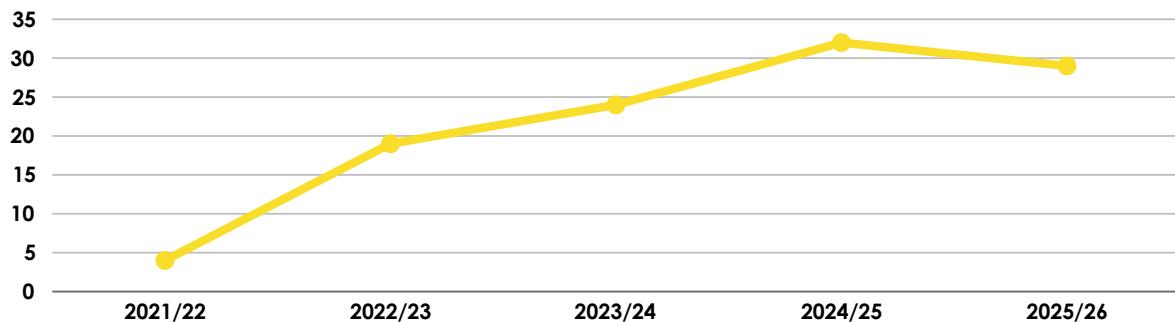
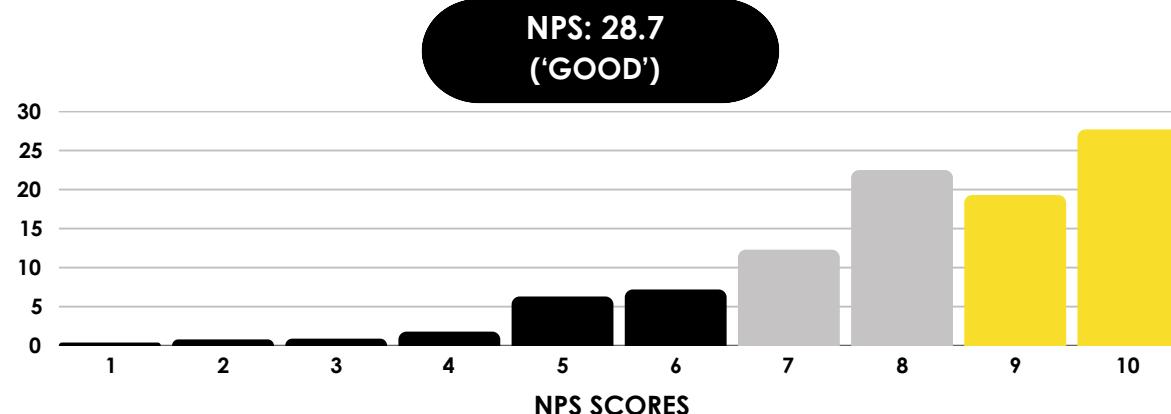
This section looks at how confident students feel in their course, their skills and the academic support around them by the end of Term One.

**Term One academic success is driven by early reassurance, consistent teaching, and visible support.**

### 2.1 COURSE ADVOCACY (COURSE-LEVEL NPS)

If students would recommend their course, it is a strong signal that things are working.

**On a scale of 0–10, how likely would you be to recommend your course to a friend or potential student?**



Course-level NPS shows a strong upward trend over time, peaking at +32 in 2024/25, before a **slight dip to +29 this year**.

This sustained improvement reflects growing student confidence, particularly where teaching is consistent, expectations are clear and academic support is visible early on. The next page highlights department-level shout-outs driving strong advocacy.

**Protect consistency early. Focus on clarity of expectations and early assessment support.**

## Department shout-outs

A number of departments stand out for particularly strong course-level advocacy in Term One. While these results should not be read as league tables, they consistently reflect the same patterns seen elsewhere in the report: clarity of expectations, consistency in delivery and visible, approachable support early in the term.

- **Health and Social Care** NPS +41

Consistently strong advocacy, supported by clear course structure and strong staff support.

- **Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies** NPS +42

High advocacy driven by engaging content and strong staff-student relationships.

- **Literature, Film and Theatre Studies** NPS +39

Positive scores linked to engaging teaching and a strong academic community.

- **Economics** NPS +36

A strong NPS performance, reflecting clarity of delivery and academic standards.

## Strong results with smaller response rates

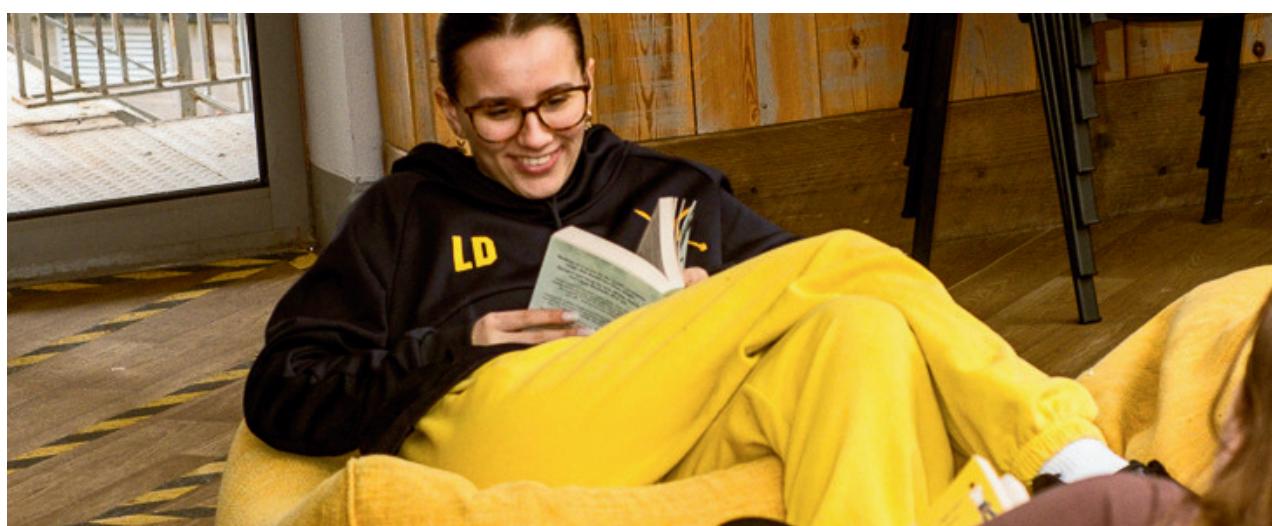
(interpret with caution)

- **Essex Pathways** NPS +42

High advocacy linked to clear structure and transition support.

- **Edge Hotel School** NPS +40

Very positive feedback reflecting vocational focus and staff engagement.

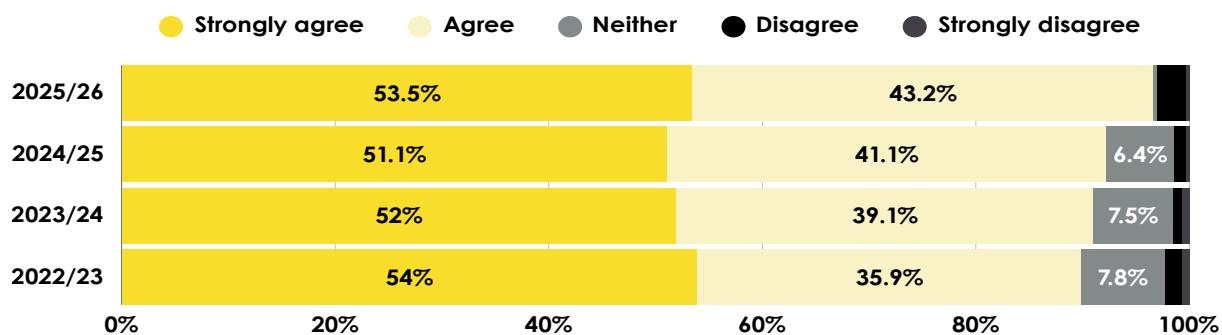


## 2.2 COURSE FIT

Feeling settled in your academic choice matters. This question, asked in the Welcome Survey, captures whether students feel reassured they are on the right course, or whether uncertainty is starting to creep in.

**To what extent do you agree with the following statement?  
“I am on the right course”**

**97%**  
agree or strongly agree



Agreement with “I feel like I’m on the right course” reached **97% during Welcome**, up from 92% last year and continuing a clear upward trend. This is a particularly strong result, as early uncertainty about course fit is a known risk factor for withdrawal.

**Term One Course-level NPS reinforces this picture.** Courses with the strongest advocacy are those where early confidence in course choice is backed up by clear expectations, consistent teaching and visible academic support.

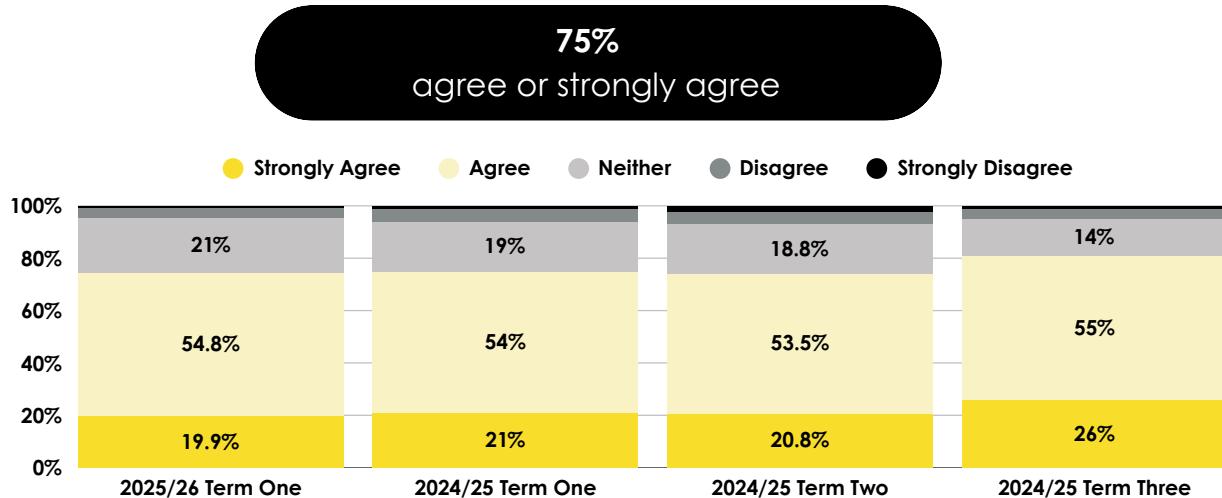
Overall, the data shows a clear progression. Confidence established at Welcome is strengthened through early teaching and assessment, leading to higher recommendation by the end of Term One.

**Confidence is high at Welcome.  
The job is to keep it high through delivery.**

## 2.3 ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE

Confidence is not just about ability. It is about clarity and support. This measure helps us understand how confident students feel in their academic skills as they move through Term One.

**To what extent do you agree:  
“I feel confident about my academic skills”?**



Overall, 75% of students agree or strongly agree that they feel confident in their academic skills, **down from 82% at the end of 2023/24** (an end-of-year comparison is not available at the time of reporting).

Academic confidence varies more clearly by stage of study than by subject area. There is a pronounced progression across year groups:

- Only 64% of first-year students reporting confidence,
- Rising to 72% among second years,
- 81% among final-year students
- And 82% among postgraduate students.

**This pattern reflects the role of familiarity with academic expectations and assessment in shaping confidence early in the academic journey.**

While confidence among undergraduates is generally positive, it is more uneven. Several departments stand out as strong performers, supported by robust sample sizes and consistently high agreement. Language and Linguistics reports the highest levels of confidence, with over 80% of students agreeing they feel confident in their academic skills. Strong results are also seen in Health and Social Care and Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, alongside Sociology and Criminology, Government, Essex Business School and Economics.

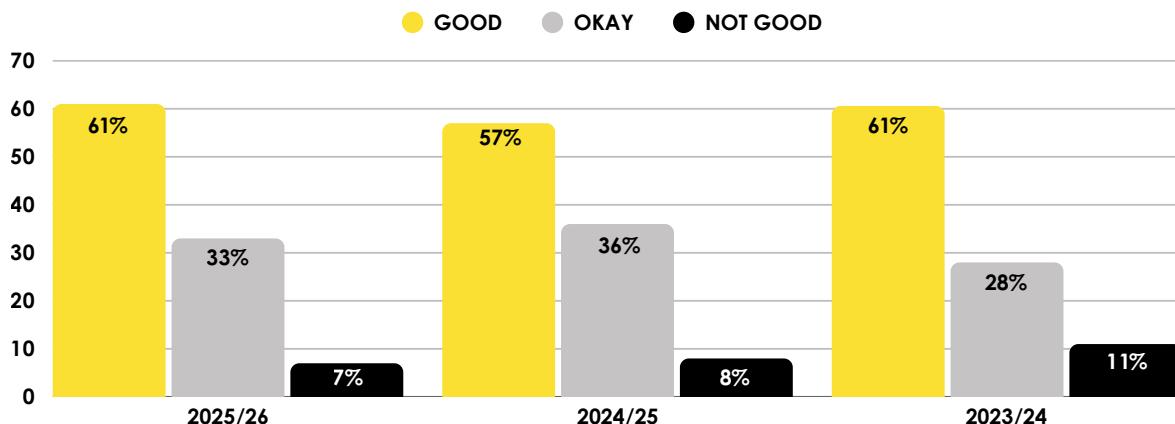
Overall, the data suggests that where academic skills and expectations are clearly framed and well supported from the outset, students are more likely to feel confident in their ability to succeed, particularly as they progress through their studies.

**Focus UG academic skills support early, not mid-year.**

## 2.4 FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF TEACHING

First impressions count. Each November, we ask students a simple question to spot early signals of what's working in teaching.

**“How have your classes and lectures been so far?”**

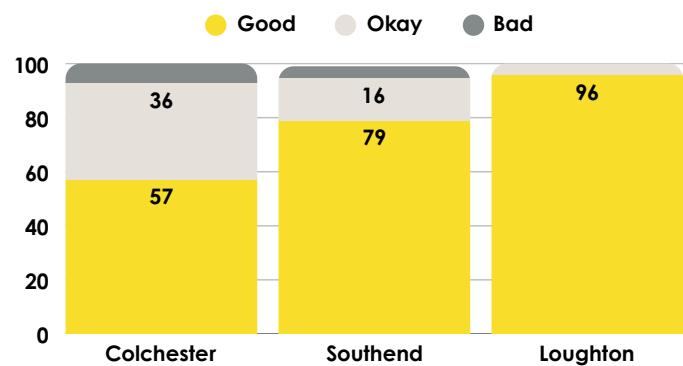


**61% of students  
rated their experience as good overall**

Overall, 61% rated their experience as good and only 7% bad.

**Results vary notably by campus:**

- Loughton shows exceptionally strong feedback, with 96% rating positively
- Southend also performs well with 79% rating teaching as good.
- Colchester, although still broadly positive (57% rated as 'good'), has a higher proportion of "Okay" responses, suggesting that teaching is satisfactory but could be improved.



### What's working well

- The quality of teaching is the most frequently cited factor (32.9%).
- Followed by classes being described as interesting and informative (17.3%).
- Where teaching lands well, students' overall perceptions of their academic experience are consistently stronger.

### What's not working

- Variation in teaching delivery and clarity is the most common concern (34.6%).
- This reinforces that teaching style and delivery have a significant impact on early academic confidence.
- Compared to previous years, a lack of academic support (19.2%) and lack of engagement (19.2%) have both increased as reasons for lower ratings.

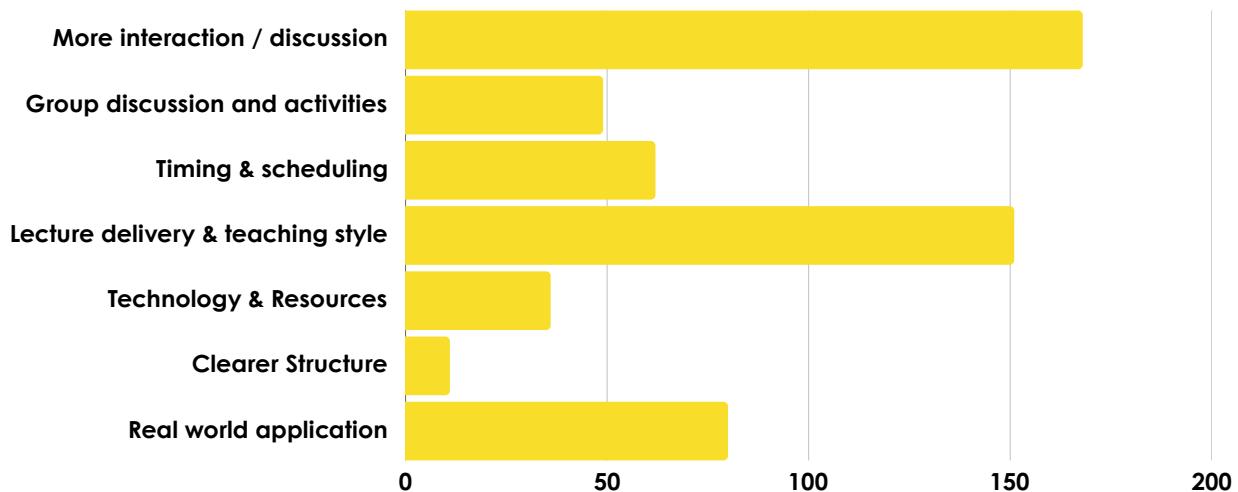
### Opportunities: what students want to see changed

Where experiences are less positive, priorities focus on **higher teaching standards (27.8%)** and **increased academic support (16.7%)**. Early perceptions shape academic confidence and engagement long before assessment results arrive.

## 2.5 THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE IN TERM ONE

Day-to-day teaching shapes how engaged students feel. This question highlights what students say would make their lectures and classes more interactive, effective and engaging.

### How could your lectures or classes be made better, more interactive or more engaging?



**Most requests are about interaction, not content.  
Prioritise participation and structure.**

Across all student groups, there is a clear call for more interactive and engaging teaching. The strongest themes focus on interaction and delivery, with students asking for more discussion, opportunities to ask questions, and teaching that feels less one-directional.

When students mention “group work”, they are usually referring to small-group discussion and in-class activities, rather than assessed group projects. This reflects a desire for participation and peer learning during teaching, not changes to assessment design. Requests focus on how teaching is delivered, rather than what is taught, reinforcing that relatively small changes to delivery, structure and interaction can have a meaningful impact on confidence and engagement in Term One.

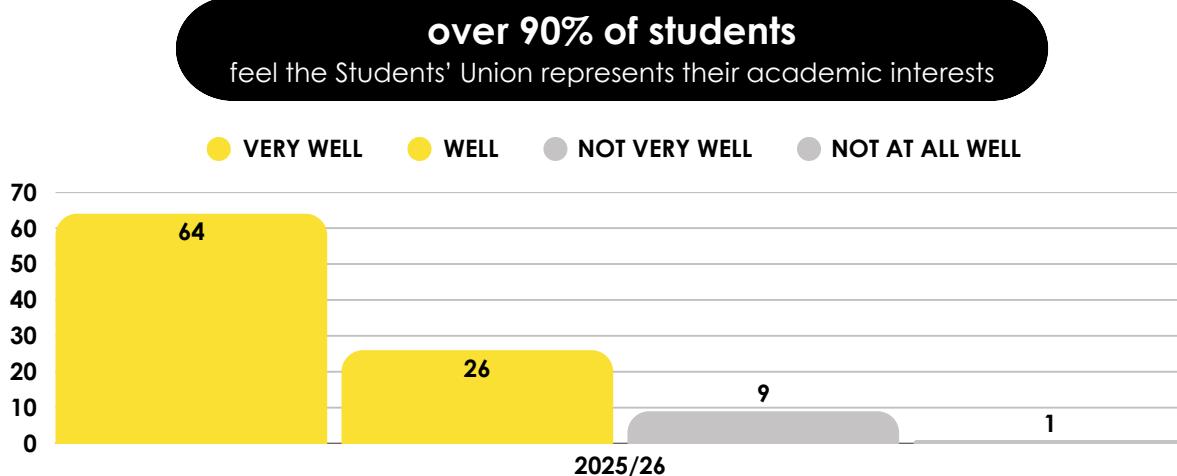
#### Key takeaways:

- A strong desire for more interaction and discussion during teaching
- More in-class small-group activities to support participation and understanding
- More engaging delivery, rather than longer or more content-heavy sessions

## 2.6 STUDENTS' UNION & ACADEMIC REPRESENTATION

Academic success is also about feeling heard. This section explores how well students feel the Students' Union represents their academic interests and why perceptions vary. Feeling academically represented reinforces confidence and belonging, particularly as academic pressure increases beyond Welcome.

### How well does the Students' Union represent students' academic interests?



#### Why students feel positively represented

##### Student voice and representation ~265 mentions

Students value the SU as the collective student voice, raising academic concerns in meetings and decision-making spaces.

##### Direct academic support and casework ~185 mentions

Many students referenced practical, one-to-one academic support, with personal experiences of advice and intervention strengthening confidence in the SU.

##### Trust in officers and representatives ~140 mentions

Confidence in approachable and student-focused officers plays a key role, with trust in individuals reinforcing trust in the SU.

##### Communication and engagement ~95 mentions

Students highlighted positive engagement through feedback, surveys, and comms.



#### Why some students do not feel academically represented

##### Limited visibility of impact ~55 mentions

Some students were unsure what difference the SU makes academically. Opportunity: Make impact clearer by sharing what changed, why, and because of whom.

##### Perceived lack of influence over academic decisions ~48 mentions

A minority of students felt the SU has limited power over academic matters. Opportunity: Clarify the SU's role, remit, and influence, including where it successfully shapes decisions.

##### Low awareness of academic representation ~ 42 mentions

Some students said they were unaware of how academic representation works. Opportunity: Improve signposting and visibility of academic representation routes and support.

## 2.7 SETTING STUDENTS UP FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS SUMMARY

### What Term One tells us

#### **Academic confidence is built early.**

Students arrive at Essex feeling confident they are on the right course, with agreement reaching 97% at Welcome. This early reassurance provides a strong foundation, but it must be sustained through consistent teaching, clear expectations and visible academic support once Term One begins.

#### **Advocacy reflects confidence, not just satisfaction.**

Course-level NPS continues a strong upward trend over time, remaining positive at +29 this year. The strongest advocacy is seen where early confidence in course choice is reinforced by clear delivery, supportive staff and consistency between Welcome messaging and academic experience.

#### **Academic confidence varies significantly by stage of study.**

Overall, 75% of students feel confident in their academic skills, but confidence is lowest among first-year students, with only 64% agreeing they feel confident. Confidence increases steadily by stage of study, reaching over 80% among final-year and postgraduate students. This progression highlights the importance of early clarity, skills development and expectation-setting during the transition into university-level study.

#### **Teaching quality is the critical driver.**

Across all academic measures, teaching quality emerges as the most influential factor. Where teaching is engaging, structured and supportive, students report stronger confidence, clearer direction and higher recommendation. Where experiences are weaker, concerns focus on teaching consistency, academic support and engagement rather than subject content.

#### **Engagement is about interaction, not content.**

Students are clear about what would improve their learning experience: more interaction, discussion and opportunities to participate during lectures and classes. Where students mention group work, they are most often referring to small-group discussion and in-class activities, rather than assessed group projects.

#### **Feeling heard strengthens academic confidence.**

Over 90% of students feel the Students' Union represents their academic interests. Where representation feels strongest, it is driven by visible student voice, practical academic support and trust in officers and representatives. Where confidence is lower, it reflects gaps in visibility and understanding rather than dissatisfaction.

#### **What needs to change**

- Early academic confidence should be protected through delivery, not messaging.
- Improving teaching consistency and assessment clarity in Term One will have a greater impact than later-stage academic interventions.
- Student voice and representation should be treated as part of the academic infrastructure, not a parallel system.

#### **Primary ownership:**

- Teaching quality & assessment clarity: University-led
- Academic representation & student voice: SU-led
- Transition into academic study: Joint

**HELPING  
STUDENTS  
CONNECT  
   
& ENGAGE**

## A STUDENT STORY: HELPING STUDENTS CONNECT & ENGAGE

“I didn't feel settled straight away and that was okay.”

When I first arrived at Essex, everyone kept saying I would “find my people”, but in the first few weeks it did not quite feel like that yet. I went to my lectures, spoke to people on my course and tried a couple of events, but it took time before anything really clicked.

Things changed once term got going. Seeing the same faces each week helped, and going to a Students' Union event with someone from my course made it feel less intimidating. I did not suddenly become super social, but I started to feel like I belonged here.

Looking back, what helped most was knowing I did not have to do everything at once. Finding your place is not instant. It builds bit by bit.

”

### 3. HELPING STUDENTS CONNECT & ENGAGE

University life is not just about lectures and deadlines. It is also about feeling part of something.

This section looks at how students connect in Term One, how confident they feel engaging with what Essex has to offer, and where things work well or fall short when it comes to social life and nightlife.

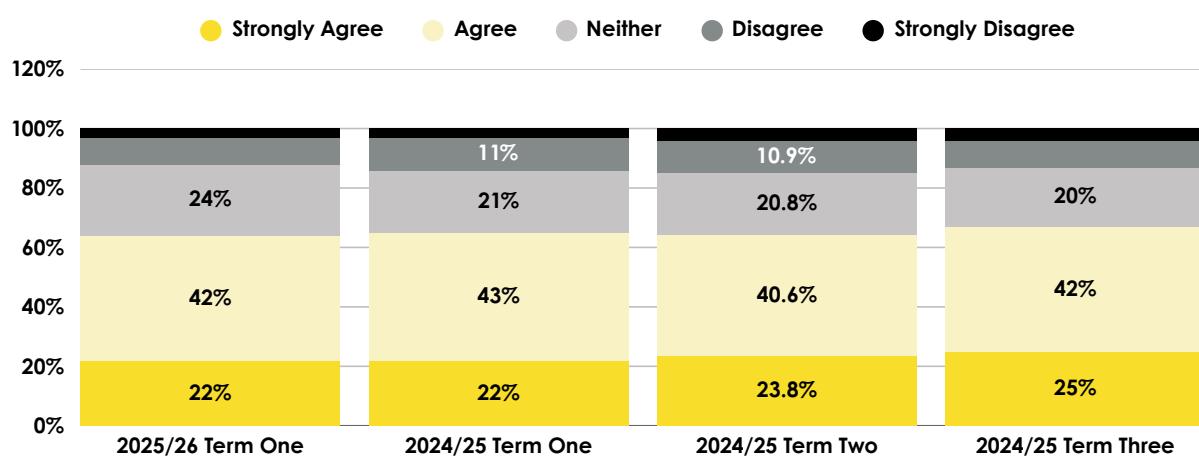
Connection often starts early, but not everyone finds it easy to get involved straight away. Term One remains a critical point for building belonging.

#### 3.1 BUILDING CONNECTION EARLY

Feeling part of a course community and making friends early plays a big role in how settled students feel.

This section explores whether students feel connected to others on their course and how easily friendships form in the first month. Overall sentiment is positive, but a significant group are still finding their feet in Term One.

**To what extent do you agree:  
“I feel a sense of community with others on my course”?**

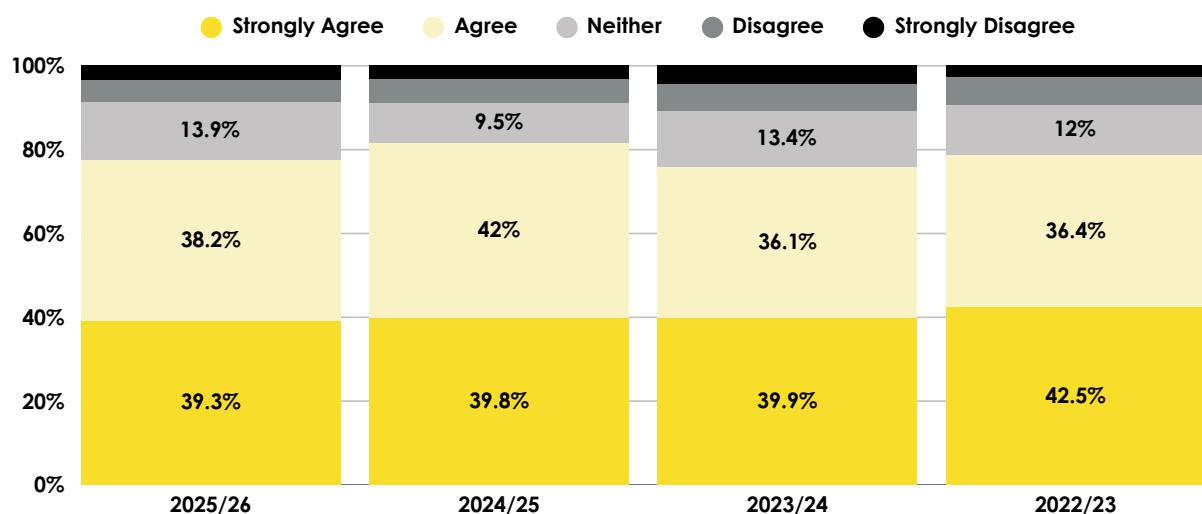


A clear majority of students feel a sense of community on their course, but connection is still forming in Term One.

In Term One 2025/26, 64% of students agree they feel part of a course community, in line with previous years. However, 24% feel neutral, suggesting many students are still finding their place early in the year. Disagreement remains low and stable (12%), indicating that lack of community is not widespread, but early connection is not yet universal.

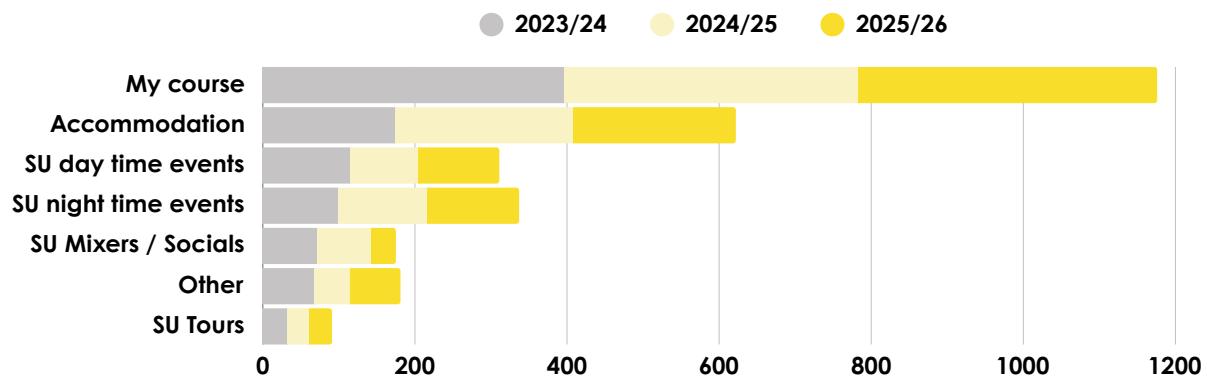
## "I made friends in my first month at University"

This section seeks to explore a key aspect of welcome, the extent to which first year Essex students have been given the opportunity to meet other students and whether they have made friends in their first month.



Positive responses dipped to **78%**, down from 82% last year. While it's a small drop, it's not a worrying one. This year's result is still higher than 2023/24 (76%), showing a generally stable pattern over time rather than a decline in social connection.

## Where did you make friends?



In this question respondents were able to choose more than one option, as applicable to their experience.

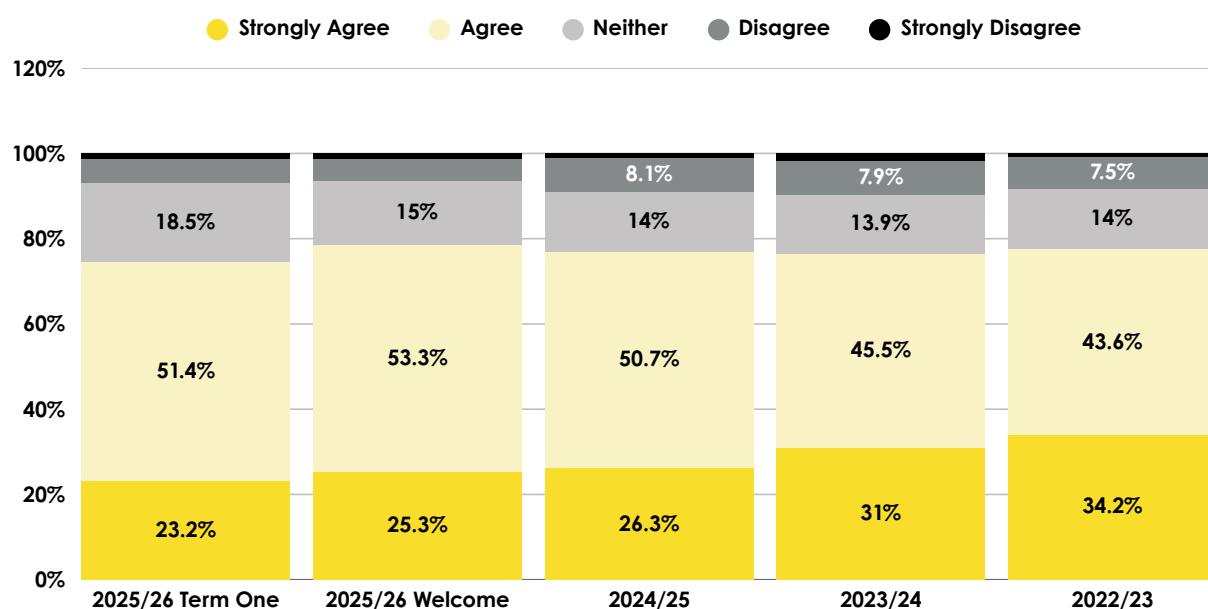
Perhaps expectedly, most students made friends on their **course (393)**, followed by **in accommodation (213)**, reflecting the two areas where they spend the most time.

Of significant interest is the total number of respondents who made friends through **Students' Union led activities (287)**. When combined, these activities exceed accommodation and come close to the number of friendships formed through courses. This pattern helps explain why social experience appears **both as one of the "best" and "worst" aspects of students' first month**. Students who engaged early with course-based induction or SU led activities were far more likely to make connections. Those who missed these touchpoints were more likely to report homesickness or loneliness.

## 3.2 ACCESSING OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND THE COURSE

This section looks at how confident students feel engaging with opportunities beyond their course and the barriers that limit participation. The findings show that motivation alone is not enough. Time, cost and confidence continue to shape who is involved.

### To what extent do you agree: “I am able to engage with the opportunities that the University of Essex has to offer”?



As with academic confidence, early awareness at Welcome needs to be sustained once term begins.

Around **75% of students agree that they are able to engage** with the opportunities the University of Essex has to offer in Term One 2025/26. This represents a drop from Welcome, suggesting that early awareness does not always translate into ongoing engagement once teaching and assessment begin.

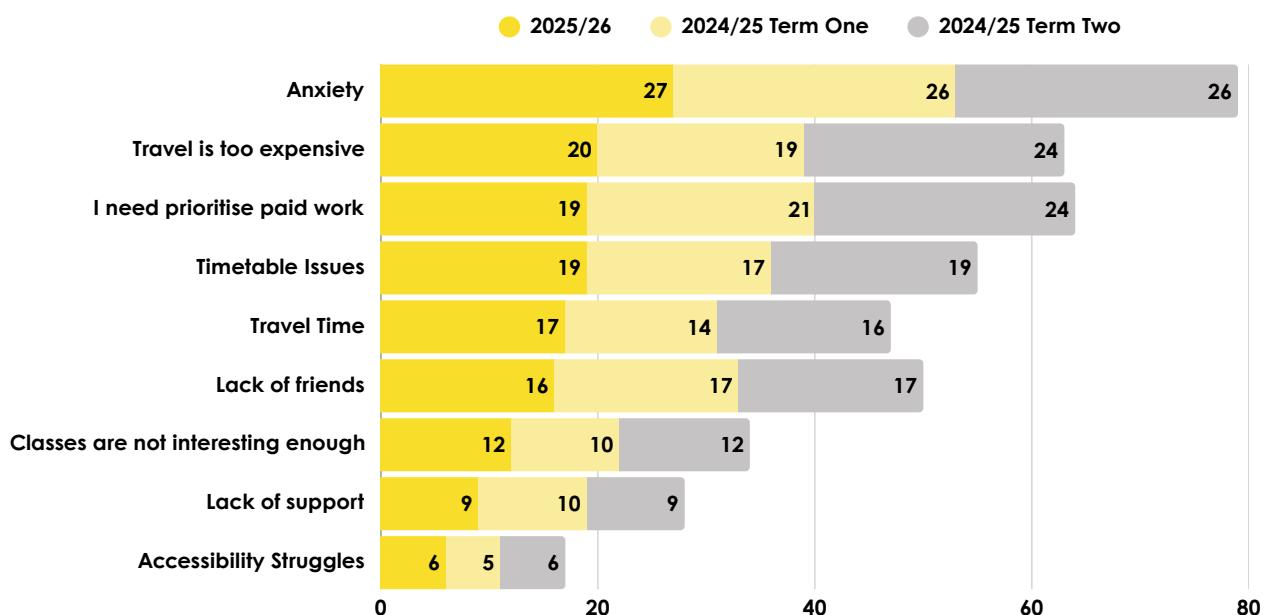
Agreement varies notably by year group:

- **Final-year students are the most confident in their ability to engage, with 80% agreeing**, likely reflecting greater familiarity with university systems and opportunities.
- Agreement is **lower among first-year students at 72%**,
- And among **second-year and postgraduate students at 73%**, indicating that less experienced or time-pressured cohorts may face greater barriers to participation.

Neutral responses primarily indicate uncertainty rather than disengagement. Students in this group appear open to involvement but are unsure how to navigate opportunities once academic demands and personal pressures increase. This presents a clear opportunity to convert early awareness into sustained engagement through clearer pathways, better signposting and reduced friction.

**Engagement is not the issue. Sustaining it beyond Welcome is. The largest opportunity sits with students who are interested but unsure how to get involved once term is underway.**

## If there are barriers to you engaging with opportunities, what are they?



Barriers to engaging with opportunities are mainly practical and personal, rather than academic.

Students most commonly cite factors such as **anxiety, travel costs, paid work and timetable pressures** as barriers to engagement. These reflect structural and wellbeing-related challenges that sit outside the classroom.

While the question focused on engagement with opportunities, **some responses relate to the academic experience, such as teaching or staff relationships**. These options were included in the survey design but are selected far less frequently, reinforcing that disengagement is more often about access and capacity than dissatisfaction with teaching.

Overall, the findings suggest that many students want to get involved, but need engagement to feel easier, more affordable and more flexible.

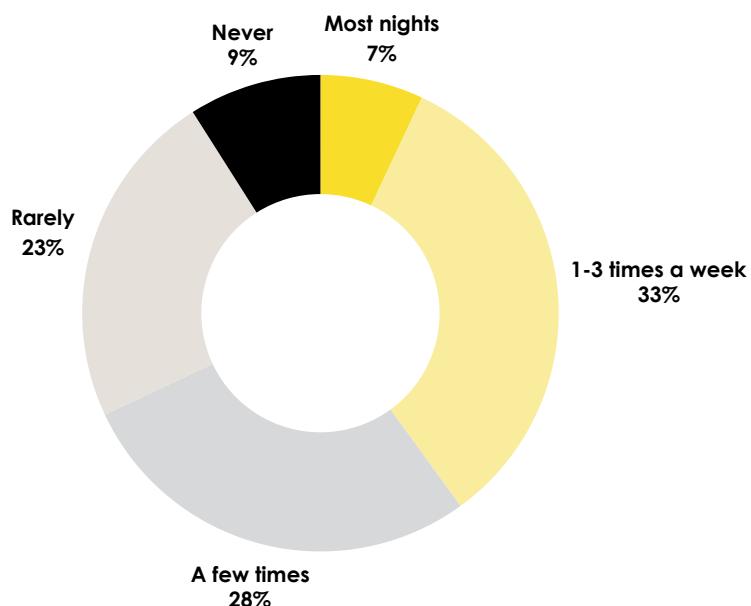
**Students are not disengaged from opportunities. They are constrained by time, cost and confidence.**

### 3.3 SOCIAL LIFE & NIGHTLIFE ENGAGEMENT

Social life is an important part of the student experience, but it does not look the same for everyone.

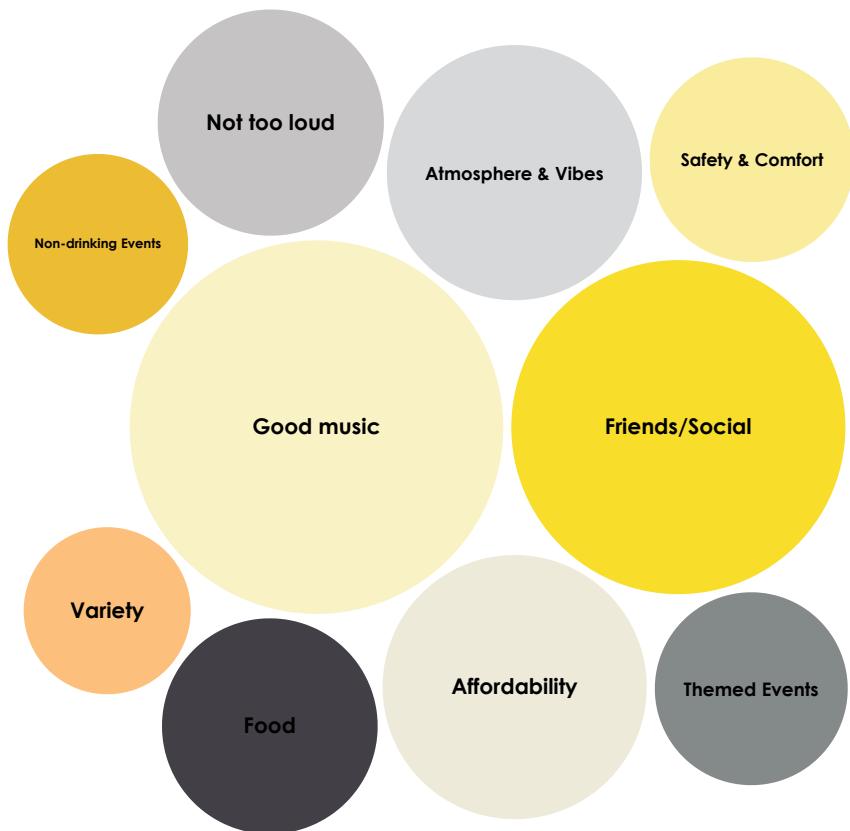
This section explores how often students go out, what they value in a great night out, and the types of social activities they want more of. The data highlights a wide range of preferences and expectations.

#### How often do you go out at night?



Most students go out in the evening or at night at least occasionally during term time, with around a third going out 1–3 times a week and a further 28% doing so a few times a month. A smaller group go out very frequently, with only 7% going out on most nights.

## What does a great night out look like for you?



Music consistently anchors how students imagine an ideal night. Genre, familiarity and theme matter more than the venue itself, reinforcing the importance of clearly defined, music-led nights that students can easily identify with.

There is no single "ideal" vibe. Students describe a wide range of preferences, from high-energy party atmospheres to calm, cosy and low-stimulation socials, showing that a varied evening offer is essential.

Relaxed does not mean boring. The most common imagined vibe is low-key and comfortable, with space to talk and enjoy good company, highlighting strong demand beyond traditional late-night clubbing.

Fun and social connection are the real drivers of a successful night. Students focus more on enjoyment, laughter and spending time with friends than on specific activities or formats.

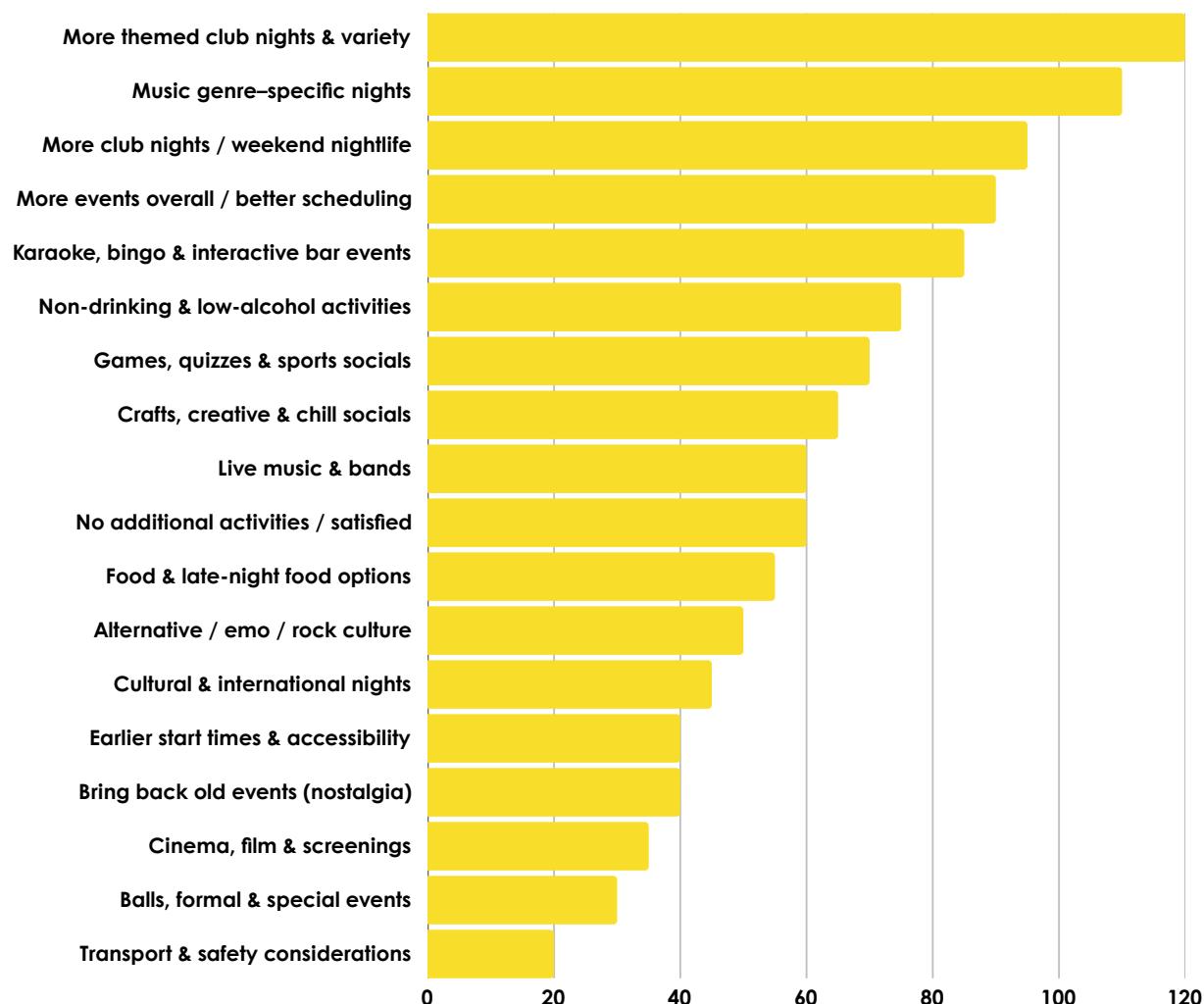
Students want lively spaces that feel energetic without becoming overcrowded. Comfort, ease of movement and the ability to enjoy the atmosphere without chaos are important to overall satisfaction.

Feeling safe, included and respected shapes how many students define a good night out. A welcoming and inclusive atmosphere is particularly important for women, queer students and marginalised groups.

Themes, lighting and visual atmosphere meaningfully elevate events. Décor, aesthetics and creative touches help nights feel special, intentional and different from generic club nights.

Food and more casual spaces enhance the overall evening experience. Pub-style environments, food options and opportunities to wind down play an important role in how students experience and remember a night out.

## What activities do you wish were available more often?



- **Strong demand for variety in nightlife**, with students particularly calling for more themed and genre-specific club nights rather than repetitive, standard events.
- **Weekend provision feels lacking**, especially on Fridays and Saturdays, contributing to a perception that there are fewer events overall than in previous years.
- **Clear appetite for non-drinking and low-pressure socials**, including karaoke, quizzes, games, crafts, film nights and chill events, showing that evening activities extend well beyond clubbing.
- **Distinct student sub-cultures feel under-served**, notably alternative/emo, cultural and international communities, who want more regular and recognisable events that reflect their identities.
- **Practical factors shape engagement**, with students highlighting earlier start times, late-night food options and transport/safety as important to their ability to attend and enjoy evening activities.

## 3.4 WHEN SOCIAL SPACES DON'T WORK FOR EVERYONE

Choosing not to go out often reflects practical and personal barriers rather than lack of interest.

This section focuses on what gets in the way of nightlife and what would make social spaces feel more comfortable and accessible. It points to practical opportunities to make social experiences feel safer, more inclusive and easier to opt into.

**If you don't go out often, what are the main reasons?**



The nightlife survey reinforces findings from the end-of-term engagement question, showing that disengagement is driven primarily by cost-of-living pressures, academic workload, fatigue and access issues rather than a lack of interest. However, nightlife-specific factors, particularly safety concerns, late scheduling, alcohol-centred culture and a perceived lack of quality or variety, further amplify these barriers.

Taken together, this suggests that improving student engagement requires not only better promotion, but structural changes to affordability, timing, inclusivity and wellbeing-led design.

## 3.5 HELPING STUDENTS CONNECT & ENGAGE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### What Term One tells us

#### **Connection starts early, but belonging takes time.**

Most students begin forming friendships and feel some sense of community on their course in Term One. However, a consistent neutral group shows that belonging is still developing for many students, rather than fully established. Early connection matters, but it does not happen instantly for everyone.

#### **Courses and the Students' Union are the main gateways to friendship.**

Students are most likely to make friends through their course and accommodation, reflecting where they spend the most time. Students' Union activity also plays a significant role in early connection, with SU-led events forming a major route into friendship alongside academic spaces. Students who engage early through these touchpoints are far more likely to feel socially connected.

#### **Confidence to engage drops after Welcome.**

Students arrive feeling confident about engaging with opportunities, but this confidence reduces once Term One begins. This drop is most evident among second-year and postgraduate students, who report lower agreement than final-year students. Across engagement measures, neutral responses reflect uncertainty rather than disengagement, indicating that many students remain interested but feel less able to navigate opportunities once academic and personal pressures increase.

#### **Neutral responses reflect uncertainty, not disengagement.**

Across engagement measures, a stable group of students neither agree nor disagree that they feel able to engage. This points to hesitation rather than lack of interest. These students represent a key opportunity, as they are open to involvement but unsure how to take the next step.

#### **Barriers to engagement are practical and personal, not motivational.**

Time pressures, paid work, travel costs, anxiety and fatigue are the most common barriers to engaging with opportunities. These challenges sit largely outside the classroom and reflect access and capacity rather than dissatisfaction or apathy.

#### **Social life looks different for different students.**

Most students go out at least occasionally, but patterns of social engagement vary widely. A significant group rarely or never engage in nightlife, reinforcing the need for a broad and flexible social offer that does not assume a single model of student life.

### What needs to change

- The priority in Term One should be making engagement easier, not offering more.
- Effort should focus on reducing friction (time, cost, confidence), even if that means doing fewer things better.
- Neutral responses represent the greatest opportunity; students who are open to engagement but constrained.

#### **Primary ownership:**

- Engagement design & delivery: SU-led
- Structural barriers (timetabling, workload, travel): University-led
- Cost, access and wellbeing pressures: Joint

# THE ROLE OF THE STUDENTS' UNION

## A STUDENT STORY: THE ROLE OF THE STUDENTS' UNION IN TERM ONE

“ A first-year undergraduate, settling into university life during their first term. They arrive knowing the Students' Union exists, but not really understanding what it does. At first, it feels like a place for events and something you might dip into if you feel confident enough or have time alongside lectures.

**“I didn't really know what the SU was for at the start. I thought it was mostly nights out and societies.”**

As Term One progresses, the SU becomes more visible in everyday life. Social spaces start to feel familiar. Events feel easier to attend once they have met a few people. Seeing the same staff and students each week builds a sense of comfort and belonging.

What stands out is how the SU creates low-pressure ways to connect. Places to spend time between lectures, events that do not require knowing anyone in advance, and spaces where it feels okay to just turn up.

**“It made a big difference having somewhere to go that wasn't just lectures or accommodation.”**

When academic pressure increases, the SU takes on a different role. Knowing there is somewhere to go for advice, representation or support brings reassurance, even if they do not need to use it straight away. Seeing student officers talk about academic issues, surveys and feedback helps them feel less alone in their concerns.

**“I didn't need help personally, but it was reassuring knowing it was there and that students actually have a voice.”**

By the end of Term One, the Students' Union feels less like an optional extra and more like part of the university experience. Not something separate from academic life, but something that supports it socially, practically and emotionally.

The impact is not always dramatic or visible in a single moment. It shows up in feeling connected, supported and represented as university life becomes more real.

”

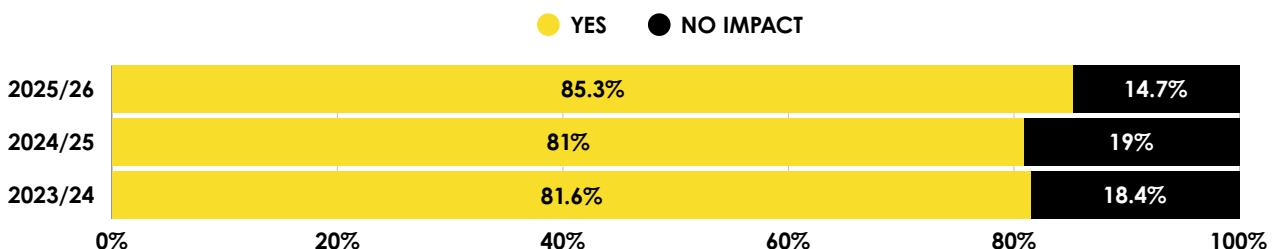
## 4. THE IMPACT OF YOUR STUDENTS' UNION

This section explores the impact of Essex SU on students' experiences this term, drawing on feedback about SU-run events, activities, spaces and representation. Students were asked to reflect on both the social and academic role of the Students' Union and how well it supports and represents them.

### 4.1 OVERALL IMPACT ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

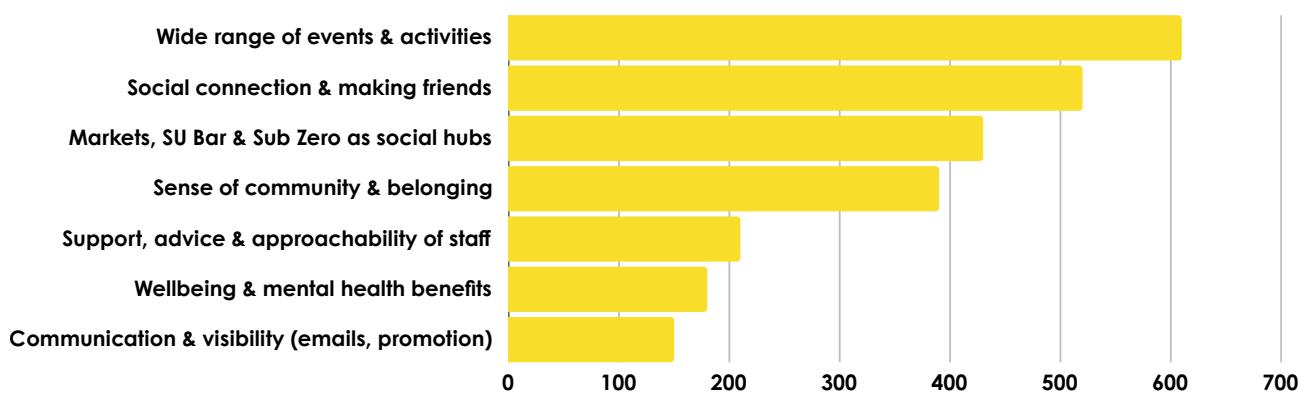
**85% of students**  
said the SU had a positive impact

In Term One, **85% of students said the SU had a positive impact on their experience.** That's not just a strong result, it's direct evidence that the core benefits of SU membership are landing exactly where they matter most: right at the start.



### Reasons for Students' Perceptions of Impact

To better understand these views, students were invited to explain the reasons behind their answers. Feedback points to the variety of events and activities on offer, opportunities to make friends, welcoming social spaces, and the sense of belonging created by the SU.



### What they said...

“ The SU made it so easy to meet people and feel part of something straight away – the events, spaces and atmosphere genuinely shaped my first term at uni. ”

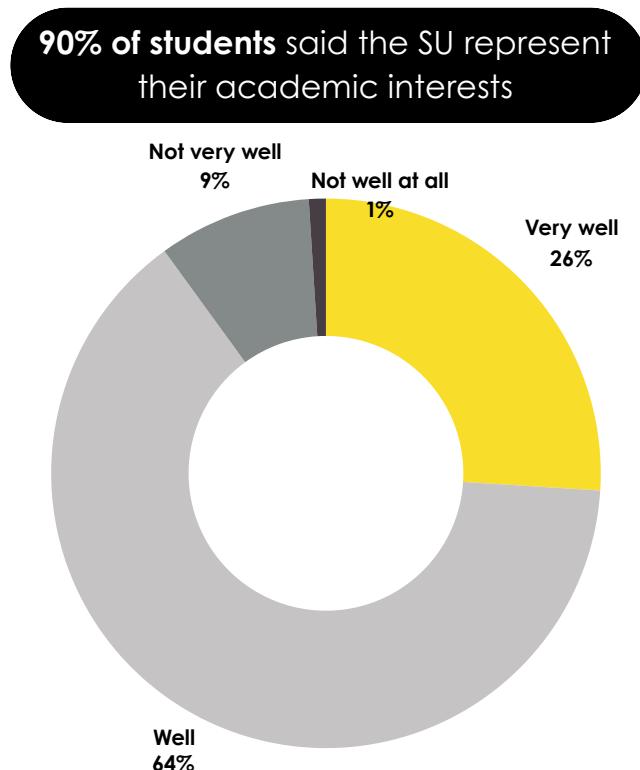
“ Having social spaces, activities and approachable staff all in one place made a huge difference to my wellbeing and sense of belonging at Essex. ”

## 4.2 REPRESENTATION OF ACADEMIC INTERESTS

### In your opinion, how well does the Students' Union represent students' academic interests?

Academic representation is a core part of the Students' Union's impact on the student experience.

**Earlier in this report (see Section 2.6), students consistently describe feeling academically represented when student voice is visible, when issues are raised on their behalf, and when support feels personal, accessible and responsive.**



Over 90% of students report that the Students' Union represents their academic interests well, reinforcing the importance of representation in building academic confidence and belonging during Term One.

**The SU's impact is felt most strongly where representation is tangible: through course reps, officers raising issues in academic forums, and one-to-one academic advice and casework.** These mechanisms help students feel less isolated when challenges arise and more confident navigating academic systems, particularly as assessment pressure increases beyond Welcome.

Where perceptions of representation are weaker, this is less about dissatisfaction and more about visibility and understanding. As highlighted earlier in the report, some students are unsure how academic representation works in practice or what influence it has on decision-making. This reinforces the importance of clearly communicating not just that representation exists, but what has changed, why, and the importance of student voice.

Academic representation is not an add-on to teaching and learning, but a reinforcing mechanism that strengthens confidence, belonging and advocacy. **Making representation more visible, timely and clearly linked to outcomes will further increase its impact as students move beyond Term One.**

## 4.3 THE IMPACT OF YOUR STUDENTS' UNION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### What Term One tells us

#### **The Students' Union plays a significant role in shaping the early student experience.**

In Term One, 85% of students report that the SU has had a positive impact on their time at Essex, reinforcing its role as a key contributor to belonging, connection and wellbeing at the point where students are still settling in.

**Students most strongly associate the SU's impact with opportunities to meet people, feel part of a community and access welcoming social spaces.** SU-led events, activities and venues consistently appear as gateways into friendship and connection, particularly for students who engage early. This aligns closely with findings elsewhere in the report that belonging is built through people and participation rather than structures alone.

#### **The SU also plays an important academic role.**

Over 90% of students feel the SU represents their academic interests, with confidence driven by visible student voice, practical academic support and trust in officers and representatives. Where perceptions are weaker, this is primarily due to limited awareness of how academic representation works or what impact it has, rather than dissatisfaction with the principle or intent of representation.

#### **Overall, the SU's influence in Term One is both social and academic.**

Its impact is most visible where it helps students feel connected, supported and represented during the transition from Welcome into everyday university life.

### What needs to change

- The Students' Union should be seen as a core delivery partner in Term One transition, not an enhancement or add-on.
- Visibility of impact matters as much as impact itself; particularly for academic representation.
- Decisions about student experience in Term One should actively involve the SU from the outset.

#### **Primary ownership:**

- SU visibility, communication and impact storytelling: SU-led
- Strategic alignment in Term One: Joint

**WHAT  
THIS ALL  
MEANS**

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## **5. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Term One is where the student experience becomes real.**

Welcome creates early reassurance, but it is during the first full academic term that students begin to judge whether university life works for them academically, socially and personally.

Overall experience in Term One remains positive, but outcomes are not consistent across year groups. First-year students report strong satisfaction following Welcome, while final-year and postgraduate students show greater confidence and stability. In contrast, second-year students consistently report weaker satisfaction, belonging, engagement and advocacy, resulting in a significantly lower Net Promoter Score.

This pattern highlights the need for a more targeted approach to student experience; one that sustains confidence, belonging and advocacy beyond the first year, rather than assuming early success will carry through.

**This report is intended to shape decisions, not just understanding.**

## **KEY ACTIONS FOR 2026/27**

Three priorities this data should now shape:

### **1. Treat the first six weeks as transition, not business as usual**

#### **University**

- Keep teaching, assessment and timetables stable in the early weeks.
- Set expectations clearly and early.

#### **Students' Union**

- Reinforce where students can get support and advice.
- Normalise uncertainty and help-seeking early on.

#### **Joint**

- Align messages and expectations across Welcome and early Term One.
- Treat early Term One as a shared transition period, not a handover point.

### **2. Protect academic confidence through clarity and consistency**

#### **University**

- Be clear about assessment, standards and expectations from the start.
- Reduce avoidable variation in early teaching and communication.

#### **Students' Union**

- Make academic representation visible and easy to access.
- Support students to raise issues early.

#### **Joint**

- Treat student voice as part of the academic experience, not an add-on.
- Use early-term insight to identify and respond quickly to emerging issues.

### **3. Make engagement easier, not bigger**

#### **Students' Union**

- Focus on fewer, clearer, low-pressure opportunities.
- Make it easy to understand how to get involved once term starts.

#### **University**

- Minimise structural barriers (timetabling, workload, travel).

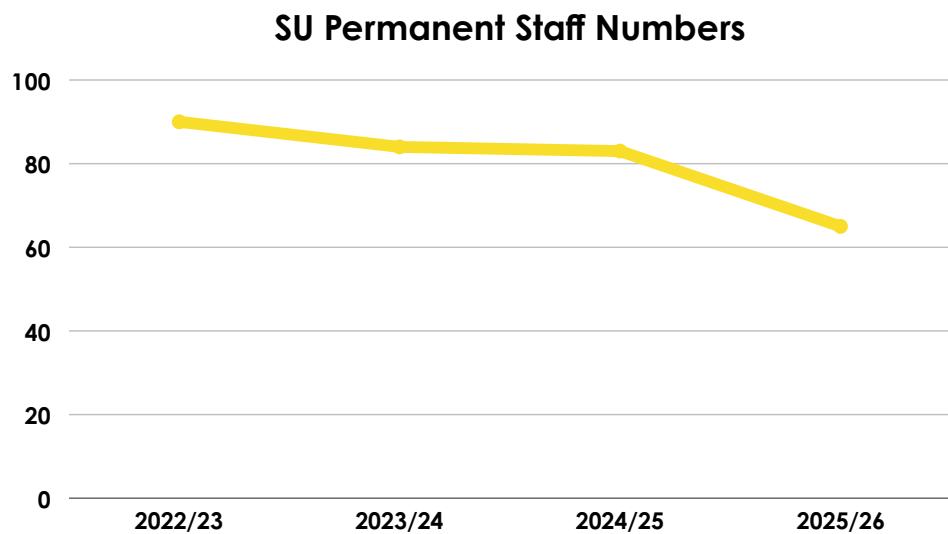
#### **Joint**

- Avoid overwhelming students with competing messages.
- Recognise engagement as part of wellbeing and belonging, not an optional extra.

## A REMINDER. WHAT THE DATA DOESN'T TELL US.

The Term One Survey provides a rich picture of how students experienced their first month at Essex. It highlights what worked well, where the sticking points were, and how the first few weeks shaped students' sense of belonging and confidence. However, there are also important parts of the story that the data alone cannot show.

One of the biggest **unseen factors is the level of resource behind this year's term one activity.** The scale and quality of the welcome experience was delivered during a period of significant **staffing reduction and ongoing financial constraint.** Permanent staffing levels have fallen sharply over four years:



Term One was delivered with the smallest team the SU has had in recent memory, alongside a decreasing block grant and tightening budgets across all areas. The report shows impressive results, but it does not reveal the level of effort, flexibility and determination that staff demonstrated to keep the student experience at the heart of everything.



**THANKS FOR  
READING!**