

# CHECK-INS<sup>®</sup>



CITY  
STUDENTS'  
UNION

## Term One Check-ins Report 2023/24

### Executive Summary

The student Check-ins project is a wellbeing and insight project delivered by City Students' Union that conducts telephone interview calls with mostly new and returning City students. The Check-ins have been an ongoing termly project since the pandemic year, offering students with support information and gathering insight into the term experience. The calls act as a signposting opportunity to seal potential information gaps to students on the various support and services available to them and operates on a peer-to-peer support system with student callers handling calls.

The project was delivered on campus by a team of 22 trained student check-in callers between October 23 to 3 November 2023. Over the 10-day period, **the Union made 7,892 calls to City students and completed 1,876 check-ins in total.** 1 in every 4 calls made were continued on to complete a check-in.

**790+**  
hours  
of call-time

**7,892**  
phone numbers  
dialled

**1,876**  
students had a  
Check-in call

The check-in calls collected feedback on various aspects of the experience in the initial weeks of term. Conversations were framed around **campus experience**, **course experience**, **cost of living**, **student communications** and **student support**. The full question set can be found in Appendix A.

#### Campus + Course experience

**74%** of recorded campus experience responses were overall positive.

**89%** of students rated their teaching experience as overall good.

#### Community



**78%**  
of students felt a  
part of a community  
at City. 12% did not.

#### Cost of Living



**1 in 2**  
students were  
concerned about their  
ability to financially

#### Communications + Support

**93%**  
of students felt  
all or most of  
the essential  
information was  
communicated  
to them.

**80%**  
of students felt  
confident in  
knowing  
where to go  
for support if  
ever needed.

## The main issues we found

### The events offer across City should be tailored to students who may otherwise not engage due to differing needs.

Our report shows that students of differing needs and types may be prone to engaging less with activity. Factors like commuting, placement, being mature or postgraduate or distance learners present different challenges to non-academic engagement.

### Making campus a hub for different and more prioritised spaces would keep students on campus.

Our report highlights that student space provisions can be improved by providing larger capacity for more on-demand spaces for students to use, and adding more group and individual purposed spaces on campus. The most common response that will keep students on campus was having more study spaces.

### Students want their timetables to be efficient and more friendly to their varying needs.

Our report noted that coming to campus has a cost, whether it's travel, declining work hours or arranging childcare. Timetabling arrangements of disproportionately weighted teaching days spread across the week may mean commuting to campus more than students can, as consistently noted in previous SU reports.

### Seminar and tutorial organisation has opportunity to be more engaging for students.

Our report highlights that students want more out of seminars to bridge teaching in lectures and aid assessment preparation.

### Travel costs are the leading financial strain for City's students and a cost that can be helped to reduce.

Our report indicates that students are finding travel costs to come to university a strain on their finances. This cost is increased when commuting into campus for shorter teaching days.

### Early and consistent communications are helpful to students to ensure need-to-know information is known.

Our report shows that communicating information in a simplified and timely manner across different channels will help students to catch essential information and to manage email overload.

## What we need to fix

- There is a need to consider more focused activity for specifically commuter, placement, mature, postgraduate and distance learner students including types of events and their timings.

- Current provisions of study spaces across campus should have capacity reviewed.
- Plans in the Student Gateway project for communal/social spaces should consider check-ins feedback.

- Timetabling should minimise long gaps between classes.
- Timetabling should avoid standalone lectures in daily teaching schedules.

- Organisation of seminars and tutorials should be reviewed on a school basis.

- Travel bursary should be widely promoted across the academic year and more accessible to postgraduate and international students.

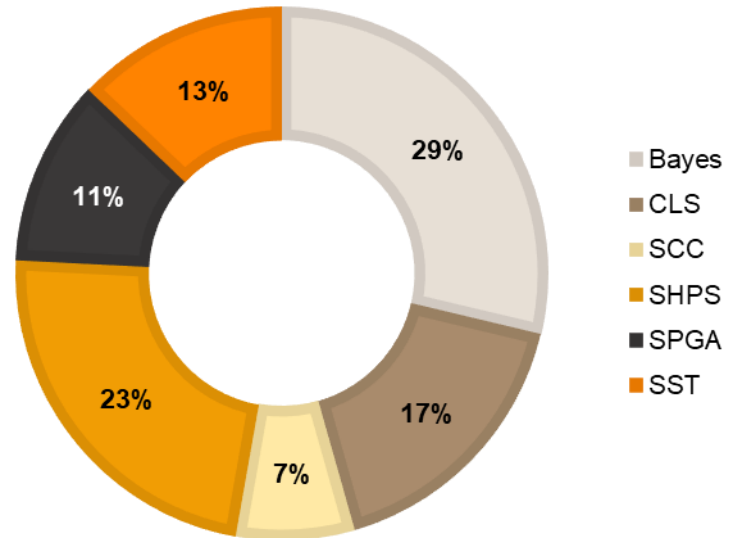
- School and central communications should consider a more connected approach and a consistency in communications across all channels.

## Demographics

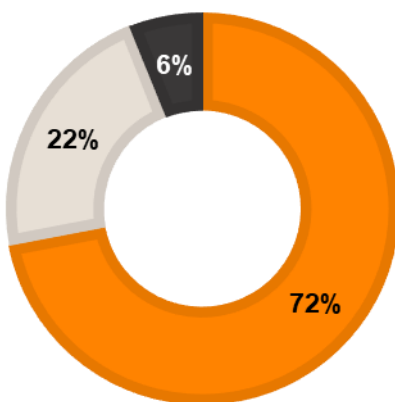
The response rate of 1,876 students for this terms' check-ins reflects around 10% of City's student population had received a check-in. A demographic breakdown of students who received a check-in call are highlighted below to show the range of students reflected in our check-ins call data.

In order to ensure representation of the student population in the check-ins feedback, the call target population were kept proportional to population sizes of schools. 29% of the check-in calls were completed with Bayes Business School (Bayes), followed by 23% of School of Health & Psychological Sciences (SHPS), 17% of City Law School (CLS), 13% of School of Science & Technology (SST), 11% of School of Policy & Global Affairs (SPGA), and 7% of the School of Communication & Creativity (SCC).

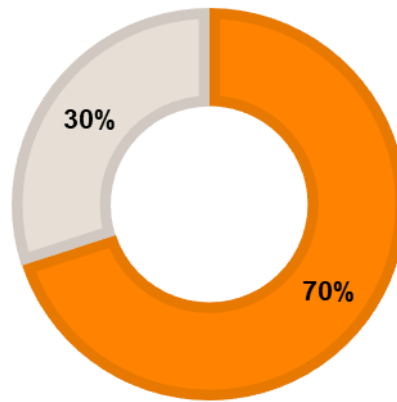
**Schools**



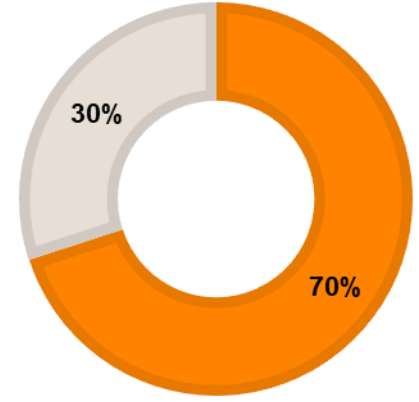
**Year of study**



**Domicile**



**Level of study**



■ First years ■ Second years ■ Final years ■ Home ■ International ■ Undergraduate ■ Postgraduate

- 72% of students who received a check-in call were new students at City including foundation year and first year students. Most students were full-time students (92%) and in their undergraduate studies (70%).
- 70% of students who received a call were home students while 30% were international students.
- 43% of students we called stated they are living at home with parents or guardians, 33% of students are privately renting either alone, with friends or with family, and 17% are living in student halls. Those living at home tended to be higher among returning students including final years, undergraduates and at School level with SPGA, SST and SHPS. Students who were privately renting were higher among international students and postgraduate students.



## Analysis

The check-in's call data recorded responses to 20 questions from 1,876 City students. Each call invited feedback on the **campus experience** and sense of **community** in term one, the **course experience**, students' experiences with the **cost of living**, the level of **student support** and **student communications** received.

This section explores the analysis of the student experience in these following areas, providing demographic breakdowns to further understand experiences of specific student communities at City.

### Campus experience

**74% of recorded campus experiences were positive.**

Students' response on overall campus experience for term one was generally positive with most of the responses referring to early campus experience as exciting and having good social activity. Positive interactions with staff, meeting new students and attending welcome events has played a fundamental role in helping students have a good experience on campus.

A fraction of responses that were negative of the campus experience during the first few weeks of term one attributed mainly to the difficulty in navigating City's campuses, particularly locating rooms for new students and timetabling issues such as accessing and reading timetables. Similar pre-arrival issues were also noted in the SU pre-arrival experience survey.

#### Campus activity: What's been good and how it can be better.

##### Reference to what has been good about activity on campus in term one

Society events		46%
Course-based activity		34%
SU events / activity		22%
Sports team events		8%

Most of the good activity students shared on the calls related to enjoying the range of society events, course-related events and SU and sport events.

- **Society events** and engagement was the main source of activity students enjoyed participating in including meeting and socialising with other like-minded students over a mix of events.
- Students who noted they had attended **course-based activities** ranged from induction and orientation sessions, course breakfasts and socials.
- **SU events** highlights for students ranged from freshers fairs to black history month events to a range of welcome events delivered.
- Many students also referred to different careers and networking sessions that has had positive engagement. Students additionally mentioned University wide activity and opportunities taking place during Welcome and early term 1 including careers and volunteering fairs.

The main factors students may not have engaged with activity on campus included;

- not being on main campus enough/on campus for minimal days
- online students/distant learners
- mature students and postgraduate students.

Many students who hadn't engaged in activity happening on campus reported that having more society events and course-based activity tailored to different types of students would further add to their campus experience. These should particularly have a focus towards students who are commuters, on placement, mature, postgraduate and distance learners. There was an emphasis on making events more accessible and open to students who are not members of certain societies and catering to different timings of events. A wider offer for both casual and academic events from

**sports to inter-department socials to career-related to leisure**

activities were noted across the check-in calls. A focus of international student-related activity was another area of engagement opportunity for more tailored and relatable events.

Open text comments also suggested limited time on campus, due to commuting as well as other responsibilities such as paid work and family, hindered the full campus experience.

**Navigation: How easy has it been using campus.**

**84% of students have found it easy to navigate campus. 16% did not.**

Most students found it generally easy to navigate around City's campus, with over half (52%) of students who received a check-in call reporting that getting to where they want to go in City's campus has been 'easy' and a third (32%) reporting it has been 'very easy'.

Students who found difficulty in navigating campus were higher for

- first year students,
- undergraduate students,
- international students.

The data also shows that students from SHPS were more likely to report difficulty in navigating campus than for other schools.

### What would making finding campus destinations easier?

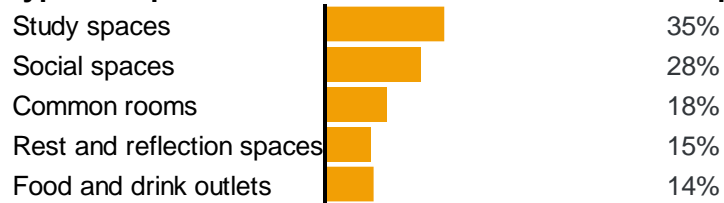
More visible signs and markings	61%
Better awareness of City's navigation app	37%
More maps	34%
Easier to understand building names/lettering	27%

- Feedback on ways that would ease navigation across campus highlights that most students would find greater **visibility of signage** helpful. This includes signs and trail markings visible on building floors and walls. Comments from the calls indicate that signs being clear and visible in overcrowded settings is important and that there is a consistent display of signs outside and inside buildings.
- While there was generally good awareness of the **CityNav app**, there were high reports that the app isn't always reliable and may not always be in working use. Feedback also highlighted that the app could be more digitally engaging and updated to make it more user friendly to use, as well as for offline use.
- A recurring line of feedback students shared was having an easier system of identifying rooms with buildings, with several students citing that timetabling information of required rooms numbers should be accompanied with building names and that letter room prefix matches that of the building name, for example Tait (T).

## Student spaces: what spaces will make students want to spend more time on campus.

When asked which spaces would increase their time on campus, having more study spaces available on campus was the most popular response among students. Other spaces indicated the value of additional social and communal areas, quiet places and food and drink outlets on campus.

### Types of spaces students would like to see on campus



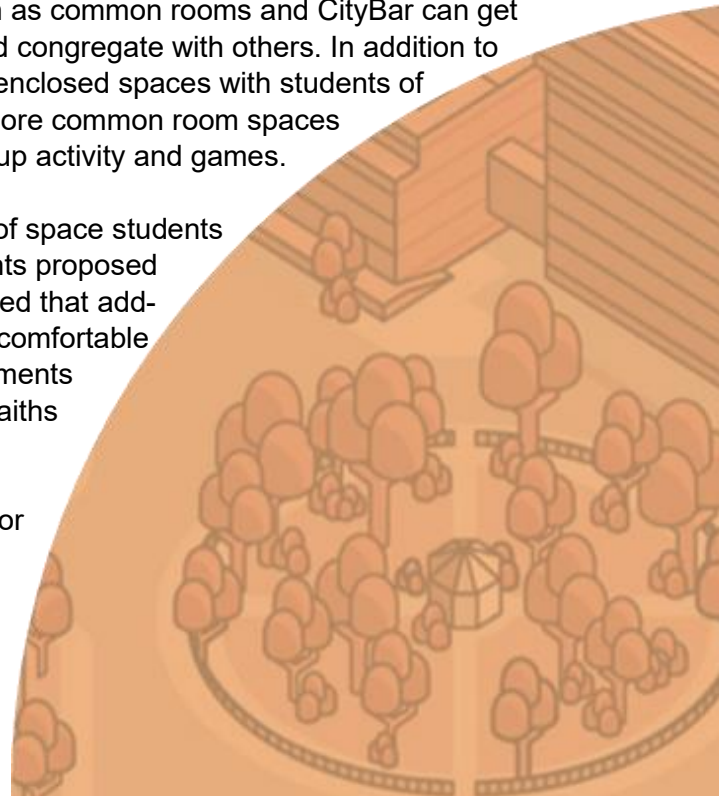
Over a third of students agreed that **study spaces** are an important part of staying on campus. Its current provisions on campus were generally thought to have a limited availability of quiet study areas and bookable rooms. Students also noted a disproportionate amount of quieter study spaces in Bunhill Row to group study rooms. A variety of suggested study spaces ranged from wanting more informal areas for both individual and group work, and more computer desks with laptop docking equipment. Some comments highlighted the importance of comfortability in study spaces including comfortable seating, working plug sockets and ensuring spaces are not overcrowded.

Students shared that they wanted more spaces for the purpose of socialising with others. Suggested **social spaces** included predominantly having more seating and lounge areas, as well as gaming areas and other recreational areas for different leisure activities. Other comments from the open text results show that students would like more outdoor spaces available to them on campus including green spaces and sports playing areas for different team sports.

Many students cited that current **communal areas** such as common rooms and CityBar can get overcrowded and limits the use of space to socialise and congregate with others. In addition to social spaces, communal rooms were seen to be more enclosed spaces with students of similar cohorts e.g. of departments and level of study. More common room spaces would be helpful for society events and as a hub for group activity and games.

**Quiet spaces** for rest and reflection were another type of space students felt would add value to their campus experience. Students proposed places for rest and relaxation between classes and shared that additional seating areas could help this. This includes more comfortable seating areas with couches and sleep pods. Some comments also suggested larger prayer room spaces for different faiths in different buildings.

**Food and drink** places were another key attracting factor of campus to 14% of students who had a check-in call. The main pull to using campus food outlets more is convenience including affordable prices, longer opening hours and access to more food places and vending machines across various buildings like Bunhill Row, Rhind and Franklin Building. Students noted that canteen areas usually fill up with limited seating to eat.
















## Community

**78% of students felt a part of a community at City. 12% disagreed and 10% were unsure.**

A high number of students (78%) felt a sense of community during the first term. Based on the qualitative comments of the calls, students owed the community feeling to the **welcoming and helpful** atmosphere at City, community within **course mates** and **course staff**, the opportunities available to meet new people through **activities, sports and societies**, finding other students from **similar communities** and backgrounds, and the **diversity** on campus. The community measure was 16 percentage-points higher in last year's check-in calls at 94%.

This figure of students' level of belonging and community at City show a variance across schools, year of study and level of study as shown below.

### Level of community by school, year of study and level of study

All		78%	All		78%
Bayes		79%	1st year		79%
CLS		78%	2nd year		78%
SCC		81%	Final year		73%
SHPS		74%	UG		80%
SPGA		80%	PG		73%
SST		83%			

- Students from SST reported high levels of community at City in their check-in call at 83%. Students from SHPS noted slightly lower than average levels of community at 74%.
- New students in their first year of study felt more a part of a community (79%) than students in their final year of study (73%).
- Postgraduate students (73%) are less likely to feel a sense of community at City on average than undergraduate students (80%).

### Increasing community: what would make students feel more a part of a community.

Students generally shared that feeling a sense of community was important. Factors that may have impacted community during the first term included being on placement, a distant learner, being time-poor and not being on campus regularly.

- The main feedback for students wanting to attend and participate in events were the timings of events not catering to student's time while on campus or starting too late.
- Students who wanted to connect with others outside of their course prefer more tailored events to meet likeminded students including for international, postgraduate and mature students.
- Students who stated they are uncomfortable with connecting with new people, suggested more proactive involvement from societies and staff to bring students together through activity.
- Some students mentioned that while aware of community building activity, they choose to leave campus and prefer to not engage.

Other open text comments noted during some call conversations on community referred to the impact of the current conflict in the Middle East on students including Jewish and Muslim students.



## Course experience

**89% of students rated their teaching as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. 1% of students rated it as poor.**

Expectation management of the course experience in the initial weeks of term one has been positive with 93% of students finding course expectations to be met. Teaching for the majority of students called is in-person, of who most (89%) are pleased with the overall teaching. Generally, 1% of the students who received a check-in call found teaching to be poor. The graph below shows satisfaction with teaching by school, and year and level of study.

### Teaching satisfaction by school, year of study and level of study

All	89%	All	89%
Bayes	87%	1st year	90%
CLS	92%	2nd year	87%
SCC	96%	Final year	85%
SHPS	89%	PG	93%
SPGA	90%	UG	87%
SST	88%		

- At least 87% of students from across all schools rated overall teaching as good, with Bayes being 2 percentage-points lower and SCC being 7 percentage-points higher than average.
- New students (90%) generally were more satisfied with their teaching experience than final year students (85%) who were 4 percentage-points lower than overall average.
- Postgraduate students (93%) were more likely to have found their overall teaching experience good in term one than undergraduate students (87%).

### Course improvements: what improvements do students want to see on their course.

Issues of **timetabling** arrangements were predominantly raised by students as not being student friendly, mostly around the length of teaching days and the number of days required on campus across the teaching week. The main priority for students remains that both of these timetabling considerations should cater to students’ commuting and working needs.

- Many comments highlighted avoiding large gaps between classes and standalone 1-hour classes on teaching days.
- Students wanted a more condensed spread of campus days across the teaching week to consider travel costs. Teaching days should have a balance of not being intensely ‘jam packed’ or too short with single classes.

Improvements to **seminars** focused on making sessions more interactive, engaging and practical.

- Seminar learning should supplement lectures by reviewing lecture content, assessment support, and focus on more practical elements of theory that may have been covered in lectures.
- Some students also noted that seminar discussions aren’t recorded or notes and materials including worksheets aren’t shared following the session.

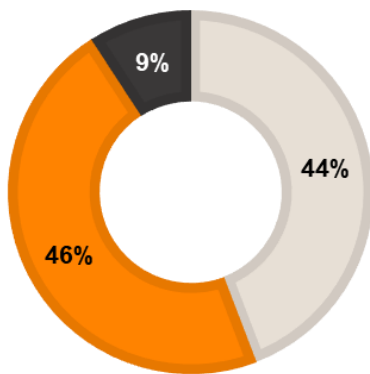
Comments on **teaching delivery** mostly related to in-class experiences that should be more engaging with students. Feedback on teaching consistently referred to:

- Improving the quality of the live lecture experience, where experiences of poor audio quality in in-person/online lectures, disruptive student behaviour, and overcrowded and poorly ventilated class venues can dampen the overall course experience.
- Increasing lecture engagement in class and overall course. Several comments referred to lecturer presentation skills often feeling like slide reading with minimal interaction.
- Accessing pre and post learning resources of lectures and seminars including lecture slides ahead of class, and lecture recordings and seminar/tutorial materials after class. Another area of course feedback cited on calls, were worries on managing workload and upcoming exam period.

## Cost of Living

**60% of students at City are cutting back on their spending. 46% of students are concerned with financially managing. 10% preferred not to say.**

Similar to last year's figures (60%), more than half of students we called indicated they are cutting back on their spending due to the cost of living. Last year's National Union of Students (NUS) Cost of Living data revealed that City students reported the highest cutbacks being on socialising.



### % of student concerned with financially managing

The check-in calls recurrently highlighted that cost of living remains a worry for City students with its impact changing the way students are spending their money. There are more students who are concerned with financially managing their money than those who are not. 46% of students stated a level of concern in managing financially at the time of the call, with 7% of students indicating 'very concerned' or 'extremely concerned'. 44% of students indicated they are not concerned.

■ Not concerned ■ Concerned ■ Prefer not to say

### Most concerned with financially managing

All	46%	All	46%
Bayes	40%	1st year	46%
CLS	48%	2nd year	48%
SCC	52%	Final year	31%
SHPS	51%	UG	47%
SPGA	43%	PG	45%
SST	41%		

- Students from across schools showed similar levels of concerns on financially managing, though slightly higher reports of concerns among SCC and SHPS students. Students from these schools also had more students reportedly cutting back on spending due to the cost of living.
- New students generally were more concerned with financially managing than final year students. Undergraduates showed slightly more concern of financially managing than postgraduates.
- While there were no significant patterns in cost of living based on students living arrangements, students privately renting with a family member/s compared to other living arrangements were more likely to cut back on their spendings and be more concerned with financially managing.

## Financial worries: What are student's financial concerns.

### Main strain on finances



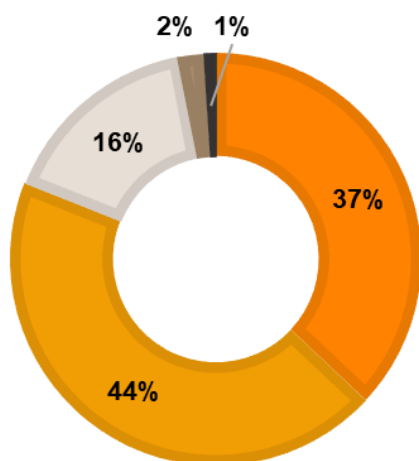
Last year's NUS Cost of Living data showed that the main financial pressures for City students were housing costs including rent and energy/utilities, followed by food and travel.

- This year, two-thirds of students shared that **travel** costs to commute into university is the leading financial strain. Costs were greater for students who had longer commutes. Travel cost worries were shared by postgraduate and international students who felt less support in accessing City's current travel bursary that is not eligible to them. Our callers noted in their call feedback that travel costs were one of the main concerns generally flagged on calls overall.
- This followed by **housing** costs where 45% of students highlighted increasing rent, energy and utility bills and other costs for the home has been a financial pressure. Housing cost strains were significantly higher among students who are living in private rented accommodations.
- **Food** costs were highlighted by students as being another source of strain, particularly increasing grocery shopping prices. Students also highlighted that food and drink prices on campus is generally too expensive and adds up when students tend to be on campus more.

## Support

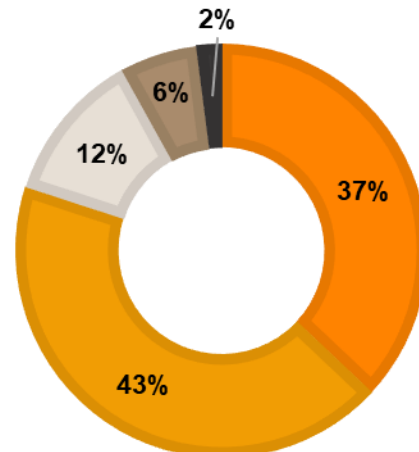
**4 in 5 students said they felt supported during Term 1 and know where to go for support.**

% of students who feel supported



- Very supported
- Supported
- Neutral
- Very not supported
- Not supported

% of students who are confident in seeking support



- Very confident
- Confident
- Neutral
- Not at all confident
- Not confident

81% of students felt supported so far in the first term, while 3% of students did not feel supported. The level of confidence in knowing where to seek support reflected similar numbers. 8% of students did not feel confident in seeking support, slightly higher than the level of students who generally don't feel supported at City. The below graph shows the variance between different demographics in the level of support they feel at City and how confident they are in seeking support.

## Schools

- Students generally felt similar levels of support across all the schools. Students from SST and Bayes reported higher levels of support felt in term one (83%), while students from SST (84%) and SPGA (83%) reported higher levels of confidence in knowing where to go for support. Generally, students from SHPS and CLS reported slightly lower than overall average levels of feeling supported and the confidence in accessing support when needed.
- There were higher levels of confidence in knowing where to go for support for students in SPGA, SCC and SST than levels of feeling supported overall.

## Year of study

- Generally new students felt more supported than returning students. Across all years, first year students felt higher levels of support in term one and confidence in knowing where to go if they ever needed support. Final year students felt lower levels of support in comparison, while general confidence in knowing where to go for support was higher than their levels of support felt.

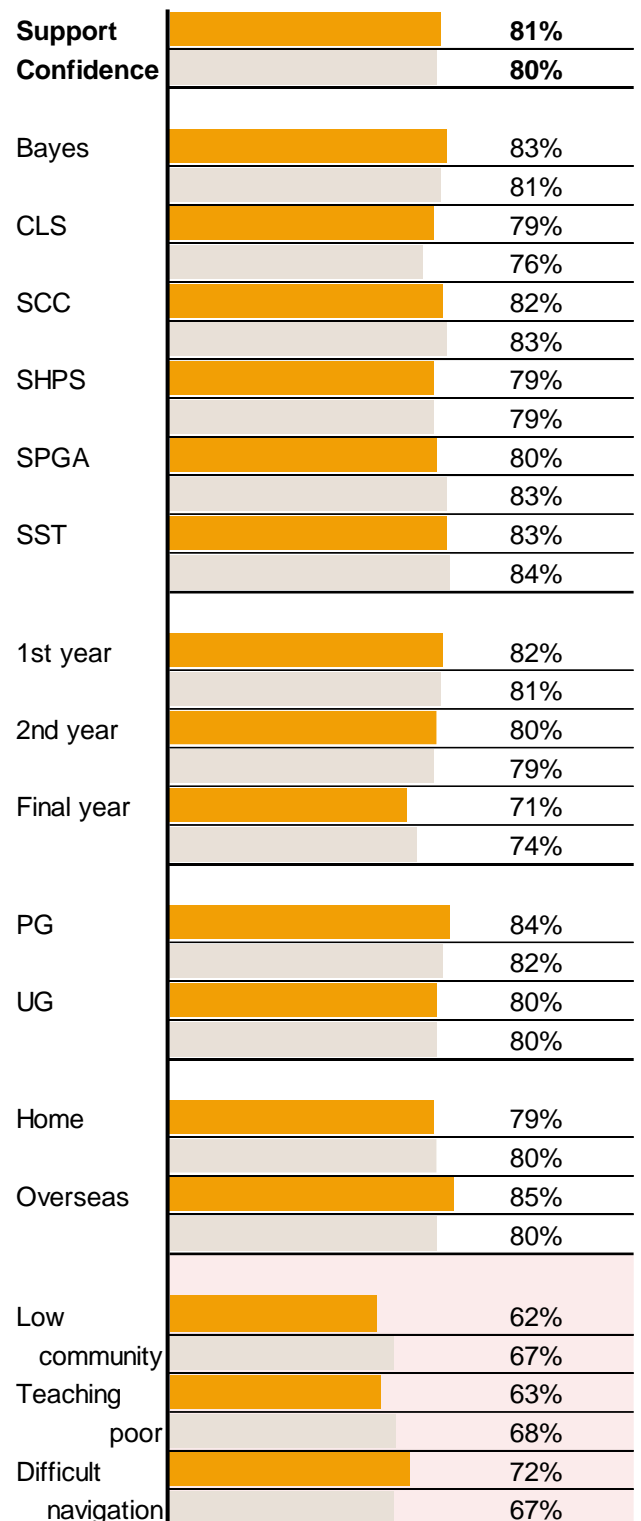
## Level of study

- Postgraduate students felt slightly more supported and confident in seeking support if needed than undergraduate students.

## Domicile

- International students felt more supported than home students. Similar levels of confidence in knowing where to go for support if needed was reported by both home and international students.
- Students who felt low community, or did not find their teaching experience as good overall, or overall had difficulty in navigating campus, generally felt less supported.** These students similarly had less confidence in knowing where to go for support. This can suggest that student's sense of community and teaching satisfaction has a direct link with how supported they feel at City.

## Level of support and confidence in seeking support



Check-in caller feedback at the end of the project highlighted that while students felt more aware of the support information provided and confident in knowing where to access support if required, some students generally aren't inclined to seek or use different support available at City.

## Student communications

**93% of students shared that they received all or most of the information they needed for the start of term.**

77% of students shared that they received all the information they needed from the University, their school and the SU. 16% agreed most of this information had been shared.

The main positive highlights to the communications in the first few weeks of term included frequent emails of essential information students expected to receive and answers to key questions; this ranged from support services, university activity, course information and SU events. Information provided in emails were reported as clear and informative and generally important to know and be aware of.

- While email communications have been frequent across the University, school and course, and SU, comments also related to email intake being quite high and therefore making it difficult to retain more important information.
- It was also noted that some information may be excessive and not entirely relevant to students especially if multiple emails are being sent at the same time. Students generally shared that they would like to see more course and school communications.
- Student's experiences with email response times from City staff varied and were mixed.
- Similar to the SU's pre-arrival survey findings, students highlighted communications in pre-arrival had delayed key information like registration, timetables and induction activity.

### Receiving communications: what students want to be aware of.

The main importance to the communications students wanted to receive is being:

- **Helpful:** being well informed and informed early of what may be going on or upcoming issues that may affect them. Students mentioned it is helpful for information being proactive that offers both guidance and answers.
- **Accessible:** having consistent ease of contacting and reaching relevant staff and teams.
- **Consistent:** consistency across various communications channels (i.e. University and course emails, Moodle, StudentHub) and ensuring all necessary information communicated is efficient, readily available and organised within one email than several.

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### Check-in call feedback

The check-ins collected additional feedback from our caller team to follow up on their on the ground call experiences. As highlighted in the wider report, the main topics that arose in off-script conversations were recurringly **financial concerns** relating to travel and **course related concerns** ranging from module experiences and managing academic workload.

Additionally, our check-in call feedback survey for students who received a check-in call was completed by 49 students, approximately 3% of the total students called. 76% of these students scored their calls between a 7 to 10 with 10 being the most helpful, and 84% of students agreed that the information provided on their check-in calls covered everything they needed.

“ The call was honestly helpful, it was nice to have someone check-in other than the usual family and friends, who may not necessarily be the best equipped to answer our questions. ”



## Appendix A

### Check-in calls question set

#### Campus Experience Block

1. How has your experience on campus been so far since you started at City?
2. How easy did you find getting to where you want to go in City's campus?
3. What would have made finding the destination/room that you were travelling to on campus easier?
4. What sort of spaces would you like to see that would make you want to spend more time on campus?
5. Do you think there is enough activity on happening on campus?
  - a. What has been good about activity happening on campus?
  - b. What activity would you like to see more of?

#### Course / Programme Block

6. Is your course so far meeting the expectations you had before arriving at City?
7. How are you finding the on campus/online teaching experience?
8. If there was one thing City could do to improve your course so it meets your expectations, what would it be?

#### Cost of Living Block

9. Are you cutting back on your spending because of the cost of living? (e.g. rising rent, travel costs, energy bills)
10. How concerned are you about your ability to manage financially at present?
11. What might be causing the most strain on your finances?

#### Student Communications Block

12. Please can you rate the level of communication you have received from the University, your school and the Students' Union, on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being none of
  - a. What other information would you like to receive?
  - b. What has been good about the communication you have received?

#### Student Support Block

13. How supported would you say you feel at City?
14. Where would you place yourself if this was on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 feeling like there's no support at all and 5 feeling very supported.
15. If you were in need of support at City, how confident would you be in knowing where to go?
16. Is there anything you're really worried about at the moment?

#### Community Block

17. Would you say you feel part of a community at City this year?
  - a. What makes you feel part of a community at City?
  - b. What do you think would make you feel part of a community at City?