

Session Title:	From Student Finance to Fresher's Week: Helping Students Prepare Practically and Financially for Higher Education
Speaker(s):	Ahmar Ehsan – Funding Information Services Account Manager at SLC (Student Loans Company) Tom Allingham – Communications Director at Save The Student
Chair:	Emily Richards – HELOA Non-Commercial Partnerships Manager Edge Hill University
Reporter:	Ross Pickering – HELOA London Group Chair City St George's, University of London

Speaker(s) Institutions and Bio Information:	<p>Ahmar Ehsan has worked at the Student Loans Company for the past nine years as <i>Funding Information Services Account Manager</i> for the Midlands region and has previously worked in Student Recruitment at Coventry University and as a Careers Advisor at several large colleges and Sixth Forms across the West Midlands, with a career working in Further and Higher Education in some capacity spanning 25 years.</p> <p>Tom Allingham has worked at Save the Student for the past eight years, leading on their Press and Communications with the Media and presenting on student finance, budgeting while at university, and the tips and tricks students can use to manage their finances whilst studying. He previously studied at Queen Mary, University of London and has worked in or around the Higher Education space for around a decade.</p>
Overview and aims of this session:	<p>This session led in collaboration between Ahmar and Tom examines the behaviour and trends of students when applying for Student Finance and the student decision-making with a narrative of how early engagement in discussing finance in outreach with prospective students can boost recruitment.</p> <p>Featuring data and insights from the Student Loans Company (SLC) and Save the Student's top budgeting tips to help students prepare financially for university.</p>
Workshop Content	<p>Ahmar Ehsan led the first half of the session showcasing recent trends and insights into applications for Student Finance at a regional level, with a number of graphs (please see presentation slides for the statistics) which display regional application figures for specific geographical areas. A summary of the key points at national level is outlined below:</p>

- o Despite ever more online campaigns, and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) sessions led by universities, schools and SLC, more students are leaving it later to actually apply and submit their Student Finance application **after** the set 'deadlines' – See graph on Slide 3 for detail
- o **Late Submission** – Students are leaving it later to submit their application, which is resulting in more students arriving not receiving their expected full payments, and having to seek support when they first start university and amend their application to obtain their 'entitled' amount, as it will default to the minimum payment if students do not include the correct details/apply late
- o The **Introduction of the Plan 5** 'Terms and Conditions' from September 2023, reducing the threshold in England for repayment to £25,000 and the extension of the repayment term from 30 years to 40 years has increased concerns about repayments and interest, especially with high inflation in the past few years
- o **Seeking an Apprenticeship** or other alternative study or employment options instead of higher education progression
- o **Cost of Living and 'Student loan debt' concerns**, meaning that students entering higher education with a lack of educational awareness about student finance and/or continuing their course due to worries about student finance and having a funding shortfall (*More on this from Tom Allingham shortly*)

Tom Allingham led the second half of this session focused on the National Student Money 2025 Survey Results and the impact the cost of living is having on students' wellbeing and participation within higher education.

The Cost-of-Living crisis

- o Still lingering on and very acute
- o The average student now spends £1,142 per month on living costs whilst at university (Higher in London and elsewhere)
- o Average loan is £640 pcm, which is £500 short of what students actually need to be able to live effectively
- o The increased costs are up 3.4% (in-line with inflation), but adjusted from previous years, students are still suffering from 14% and 17% increases which occurred in 2022 and 2023 when inflation was over 10% nationally for much of those years
- o London is the most expensive location for students costing on average £1,269 pcm on living costs

- o Northern Ireland is the cheapest location for students costing on average £977 per month

What do students spend their money on?

- Rent = £529
- Groceries = £146
- Transport = £67
- Eating out and socialising = £61
- Clothing and Shopping = £40
- Subscriptions e.g. Spotify and Netflix = £13
- Other = £215

Total = £1,142 pcm on average (Rent is 47% of income)

The Impact of rising costs and the student housing crisis

Figure 1 – Table showing rise of commuter student(s)

Year	Distance from Campus	Living with parents
2020	21 mins	12%
2021	21 mins	10%
2022	22 mins	13%
2023	24 mins	15%
2024	25 mins	15%
2025	26 mins	15%

- o The number of commuter students is increasing (See Session 4.6. – *The rise of the commuter student for more details about this trend*)
- o The number of students living at parents is increasing
- o The distance students travel to and from university is increasing, especially in large cities and metropolitan areas e.g. London and Birmingham

Parental contributions are falling – but not equally

Figure 2 – Table to show average parental contributions

Household Income	Average monthly parental contribution in (2024)	Average monthly parental contribution in (2025)	Difference
£25,000 or less	£54	£45	-£7
£25,001 - £35,000	£102	£93	-£9
£35,001 - £45,000	£235	£98	-£137
£45,001 - £55,000	£246	£157	-£89
£55,001 - £65,000	£249	£292	+£43
£65,001 +	£320	£342	+£22
Average	£171	£146	-£25

- o You can clearly see that lower-middle income families are really feeling the squeeze in cost-of living with those who have household income between £35,000 and £55,000 contributing significantly less towards helping their child financially whilst at university, especially in the £40k area
- o Higher inflation and significant increases in mortgage and rent costs for parents means they no longer have spare funds/savings available to help their children financially whilst they are at university despite cost-of-living pressures for students

Maintenance Loans haven't kept up with inflation

- o 2021/22 – Shortfall of £406
- o 2022/23 – Shortfall of £1,546
- o 2023/24 – Shortfall of £1,860
- o 2024/25 – Shortfall of £1,906

Since inflation skyrocketed in 2022 and 2023, maintenance loans have fallen way behind, and are now £2,000 short of where they should be just from five years during COVID-19, let alone the fact that threshold for the Maximum Maintenance Loan has not been increased since 2008.

The Impact of lackluster Maintenance Loans

- o 10% of Students are using Food Banks
- o 50% of students are suffering from poor mental health at university directly caused by a lack of money / funding
- o 30% of students say financial concerns impact their grades
- o 61% of students are skipping meals to save money

The realities of Student Finance

- o The increase(s) to Tuition Fees won't really make any difference to monthly repayments, as the student loan repayment is still 9% over the threshold for most Plans
- o Most students won't likely to be eligible (unfortunately!) for the reinstated maintenance grants as announced by GOV.UK - [Targeted maintenance grants for students to be reintroduced - GOV.UK](#)
- o Students will almost always need extra financial support on top of their loans, and this has been the case over many years
- o There might be an expectation that Parents or Guardians contribute more than they anticipated

<p>Roundtable discussion including Q&A session:</p>	<p>Ahmar Eshan: Have you (as practitioners) noticed any reluctance from students to submit their finance application this last year/recently? If yes, any specific reason(s) why?</p> <p>Comments/Hands up:</p> <p>Ross Pickering - City St George's, University of London: "As a London based institution, I have noticed a strong reluctance for students who are from a Muslim background and in neighbourhoods with significant Muslim populations feeling apprehensive about applying, applying late, or trying to avoid applying for Student Finance altogether, due to concerns around the Interest attached to Student Loans, and this being frowned upon/forbidden. However, I think this will be mitigated by the introduction of the Sharia Compliant Student Finance which the Gov.UK has announced in conjunction with the introduction of the LLE (Lifelong Learning Entitlement' from September 2026/2027"</p> <p>Wishing to remain anonymous "Students are much more interested now in seeking an apprenticeship than higher education, with one of the main reasons in my sessions being sighted as the 'Student Loan debt' with one Careers Adviser saying to me recently 'Should we still be encouraging sixth form students to go to university or shall we be signposting them to apprenticeships?' – This is the sentiment I hear from some of my key contacts within schools and colleges"</p> <p>Tom Allingham: How is your university helping prospective students with the cost-of-living/student finance?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Bursaries and Scholarships o Financial Aid o Microwaves o Workshops delivered by Student Services or Student Unions o Support for accommodation o Flexible payment plans
<p>Tips for students:</p>	<p>Tom Allingham (Save the Student) –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Start a budget ASAP using predicted Maintenance Loan amounts and hidden parental calculator o If they are already earning, open a second bank account to start to learn money management e.g. Monzo o Encourage them to think about what really matters with a student bank account <p>'71% of students wish they received better financial education'</p>

	<p>Highlight the support on offer, even if it feels unglamorous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Explain how hardship funds work in your IAG sessions o If your campus has foodbank, mention this explicitly o Promote any other schemes that address basic needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mention warm spaces in the community ✓ Free use of microwaves etc.. ✓ Free sanitary products available <p>‘50% of students say that it is straightforward enough to get advice from their university on support that is available’</p> <p>Some money-saving tricks they can use right now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Encourage prospective and current students a 16-25 Railcard (which can be linked to an Oyster Card in London) o Apply for a NUS Extra Card (You can do this as staff too!) o Use Cashback websites for all online purchases o Use Airtime rewards for money back on your phone bill <p>Useful apps to download</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Olio ✓ TooGoodtoGo ✓ Shopmium
Summary and Useful Links:	<p>Ahmar Eshan (SLC) – To help drive early application submission, promotional messages and supporting resources are featured across the SFE online platforms:</p> <p>The Student Room: www.thestudentroom.co.uk/studentfinance UCAS: www.ucas.com/sfe YouTube: www.youtube.com/SFEFILM For Practitioners: www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/supporting-materials/ SaveTheStudent: www.savethestudent.org</p>
Contact Information and Get in touch:	<p>Ahmar Ehsan: Ahmar_Ehsan@slc.co.uk Tom Allingham – tom@savethestudent.org</p> <p>Find all the resources and guides mentioned in this session at: sts.ac/heloa26links</p>