



HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDENT WELLBEING

2026 UK REPORT

Research by:

YouGov

Reported by:

Studiosity

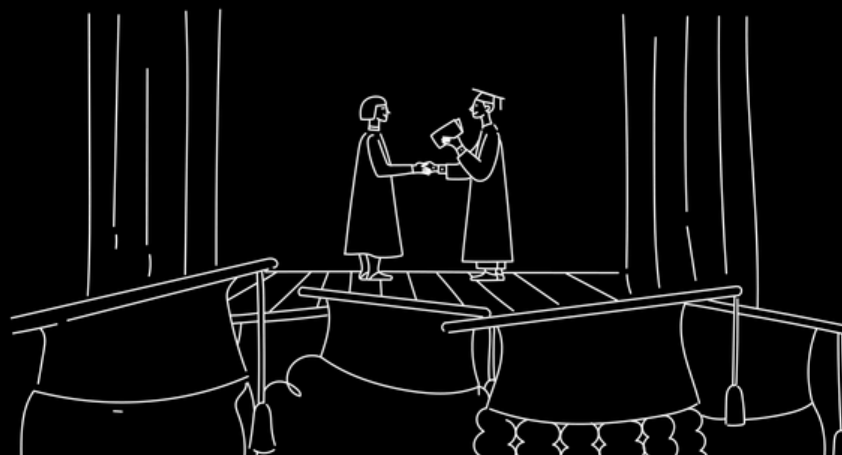




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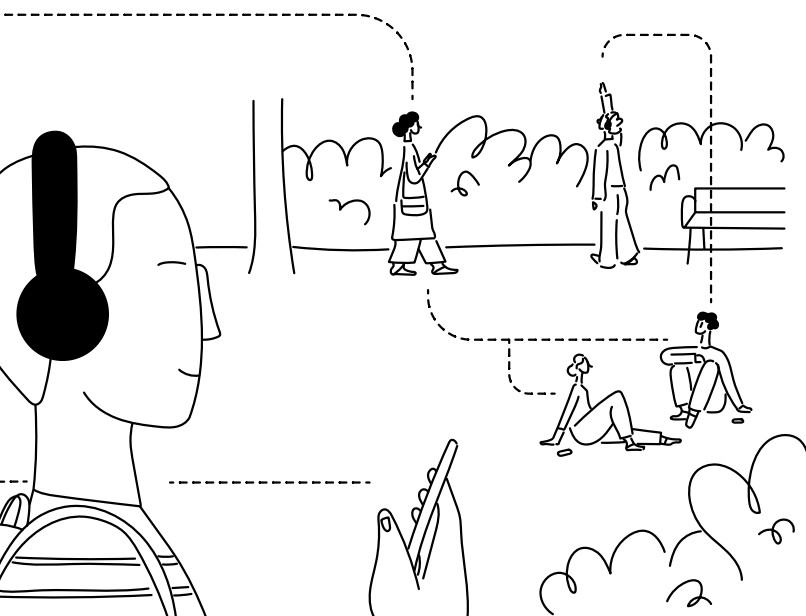


From YouGov®

The education sector continues to be a powerful force for global transformation, with today's students set to become tomorrow's leaders, entrepreneurs, carers, and more. As the landscape of higher education evolves, it is important for institutions to actively engage with student feedback, address concerns, and implement recommendations that reflect the realities of learners.

Students are navigating increasingly complex terrain. To ensure their success, universities should strive to provide personalised support, foster a sense of belonging, and support integration of AI-driven support and tools in studies with clear guidance.

This survey captures the voices of students, to support education leaders in their ongoing efforts to help shape learning experiences that not only meet current academic needs, but also empower students to achieve their future aspirations.





From Universities UK



Vivienne Stern MBE

Chief Executive, Universities UK

Dear colleagues

AI is changing the way students learn, just as it is changing the way many workplaces operate. We're in a fascinating period where both students, and universities, are working out how to adjust to this transformative technology. This report throws important light on the issues, giving us insight into what students think. It shows that the adoption of AI as part of study is growing, but that students are often very thoughtful about the implications of their use, especially for their ability to develop their own critical thinking skills.

It is important that students have confidence in using AI to enhance, rather than replace, genuine learning and that they are clear about what is and is not permitted by their university.

This report shows we still have some way to go in this regard. While 66% of students report that their university had provided training, policies, or guidance on the ethical use of AI, 17% stay that they have not received such support, and a further 17% are not sure. This can lead to anxiety about what is and is not permitted. While universities are learning too, this confidence and clarity gap needs to be narrowed and eventually closed.

As AI adoption shapes the world into which our graduates emerge, universities will need to ensure that students are able to learn how to harness the enormous opportunities the technology will offer across a huge range of fields, but also to be the architects of responsible and safe adoption across the economy.

Vivienne Stern MBE



From Studiosity



Isabelle Bambury
Managing Director UK and Europe, Studiosity

To our partners in education:

The 2026 findings present a clear mandate for the sector: while student AI adoption has climbed to 71%, so too has the accompanying stress, with 60% of AI users feeling anxious about how to use these tools correctly. We are witnessing a 'confidence paradox' where 95% of students feel they are learning with AI, yet 43% simultaneously worry it is eroding the very critical thinking skills they need for the future.

At Studiosity, we have extended our student-first approach to meet this moment through a both support *and* validate models. We know that 75% of students are now stressed about being wrongly flagged by detection tools - a fear that directly impacts their sense of belonging and academic persistence. As well as providing university-approved, pedagogical AI feedback, we are now also able to offer a 'stabilising scaffold' that allows students to self-validate their progress at any hour.

In the 2026 UK report:

71%

of students using AI for study, up from 64% in 2025.

75%

of AI users report stress over being wrongly flagged for plagiarism.

43%

of students worry that AI is eroding their critical thinking and communication skills, underscoring the demand for pedagogically-sound feedback.

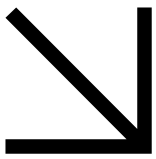
This isn't just about academic integrity; it's about employability. With student optimism regarding the job market falling to 47% this year, our role is to ensure that the 74% of students who equate high grades with subject mastery are actually developing the genuine, verified competence they need to thrive. By supporting the student and validating the learning, we provide the psychological and academic safety required to navigate a volatile, AI-augmented world.

Isabelle Bambury



ANNUAL GLOBAL STUDENT WELLBEING SURVEY

1: Use of AI



2026

Research
carried out by:

YouGov[®]

Reported by:

Studiosity

Why:

As AI use continues to grow among students (71%), education leaders are looking at behaviour and impact amongst students to proactively protect and shape positive degree experiences and protect the quality of credentials.

Takeouts for leadership:

- **Provide clear, student-friendly AI policies and training**, addressing student adoption and confusion over current policies in place – including clarification of ownership and privacy (40% each are student stressors).
- **Reconsider detection tools** that give false-positives, as 75% of students using AI in their studies feel some level of **stress in being wrongly flagged**.
- Establish pathways to **protect students from wrongful ‘cheating’ accusations**, as students are most stressed about this when using AI in their studies (52%)
- **Position pedagogically-sound AI as a learning support tool** that reduces fears about skill loss and builds confidence in responsible use.



Chapter 1: AI and wellbeing

71%

have used AI tools to help with assignments or study tasks.

This is up from 64% last year, with usage primarily driven by female students and older students.

60%

have experienced stress whilst using AI tools as part of their studies.

This has remained stable from last year (60%), with slightly more saying they experience a lot/ some stress this year (19%, up from 17%).

67%

of students say their main use of AI tools for studies was to help them learn.

This was more of a use case for students over getting things done faster (33%).

95%

of students have some level of confidence that they are learning as well as improving their own skills whilst using generative AI tools.

This has remained stable from last year (95% learning/ improving skills), although there are some shifts from slight to moderate confidence.

43%

of students are concerned that using AI for written assignments is reducing critical thinking/ communications skills.

52%

of students are stressed by being accused of cheating when they did nothing wrong while using AI.

This was followed by ownership of work when AI is involved (40%), and privacy/ security concerns (40%).

75%

of students using AI feel some level of stress about being wrongly flagged by AI detection tools.

66%

of students say their university provided training, policies, or guidelines on the ethical use of AI.

52%

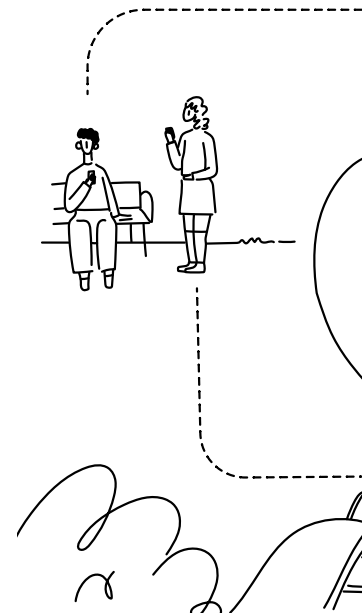
of students think their university is adapting fast enough to include AI study support tools.

This is up from 47% from last year.

73%

of students who feel like they somewhat or very much belong in their university community have used AI tools.

This is up from 69% last year, and compares with 27% who feel like they belong that have never used AI tools this year.



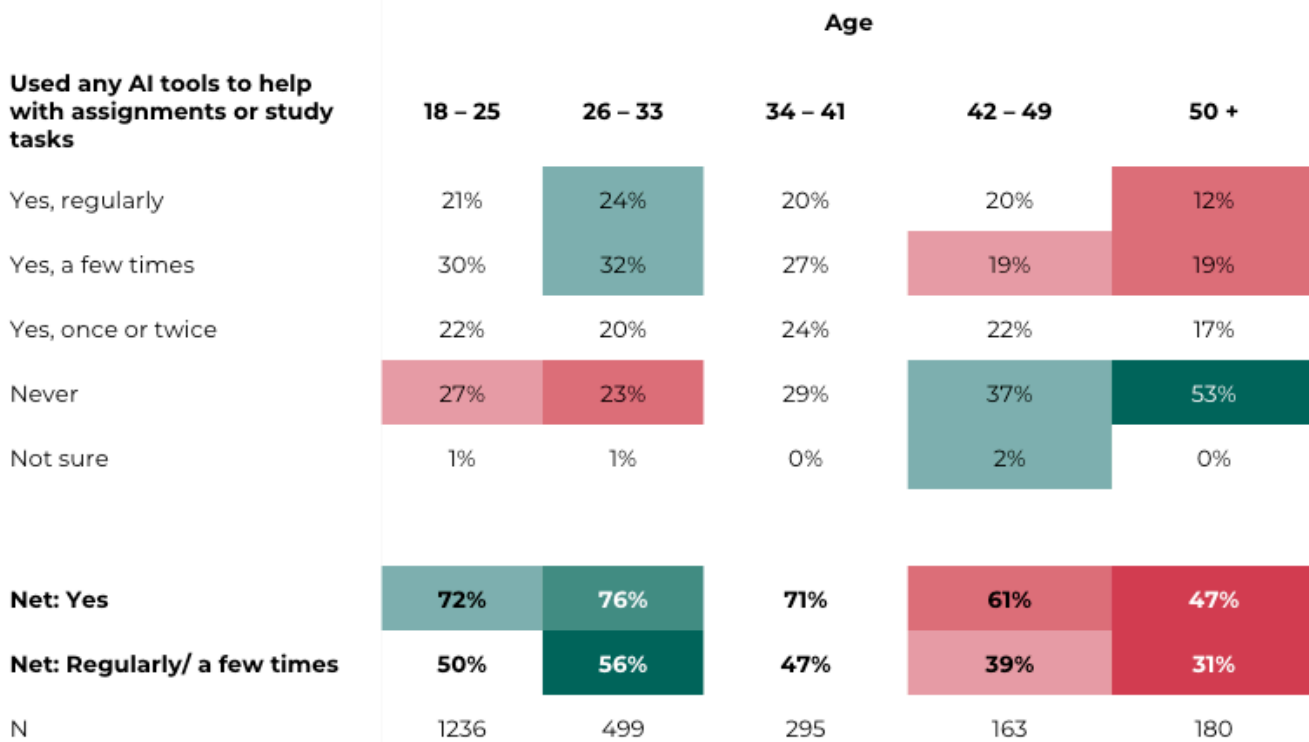
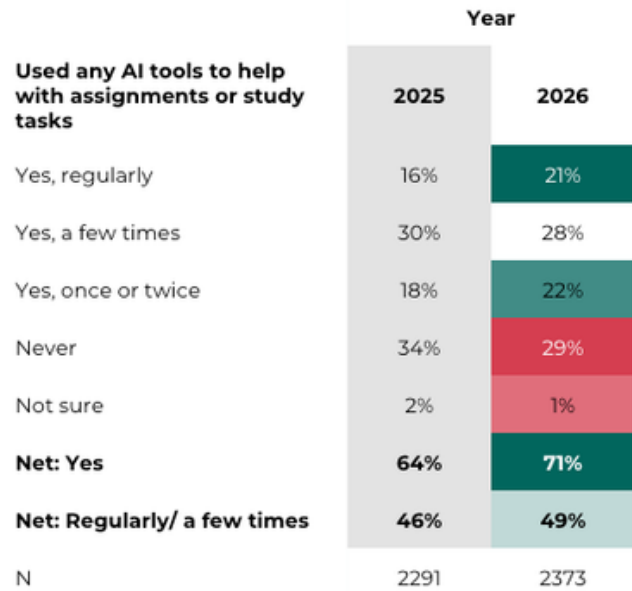


Trends for 'Use of AI'

Have you used any AI tools to help with your assignments or study tasks?

Student's usage of AI tools to help with assignments or study tasks has increased since last year, from 64% to 71%.

While 18-25 year old students were the early adopters in 2025, as their usage remained stable compared to last year (72% up from 70%), students aged 26+ have generally increased their adoption of AI tools for study this year, especially among 26-33 year olds, as 76% have ever used these tools in studies compared to 66% previously.



While male students still use AI more frequently (77%) than female students (67%), the gender gap is narrowing. This shift is driven by a significant increase in adoption among female students; only 32% report never using AI tools this year, a notable drop from 42% in 2025.

International students are more likely to report using AI tools to help with their studies than domestic students (87% compared to 69%). While this remains level among international students from last year, usage among domestic students has increased by 9% from 2025.





Have you used any AI tools to help with your assignments or study tasks? Contd.

Usage generally increased across different areas of study, with the more notable increases in adoption of AI tools among those who study law (75%, up from 57%) and business (89%, up from 80%). Less students who study humanities and social sciences (58%) and creative arts (52%) report using AI tools to help in their studies compared to most other subjects, however in both areas this does increase slightly compared to last year (52% and 46% respectively).

Area of study	Used any AI tools to help with assignments or study tasks combined			N
	Net: Uses AI tools	Never	Not sure	
Business	89%	11%	0%	233
Medicine	81%	17%	2%	107
STEM	79%	20%	1%	562
Law	75%	24%	1%	132
Other	68%	32%	0%	310
Psychology	67%	31%	1%	203
Nursing	66%	33%	1%	106
Humanities and Social Sciences	58%	41%	1%	485
Creative Arts	52%	48%	0%	149

AI adoption continues to correlate with student belonging. Usage among students who feel they belong rose to 72% this year (from 67% in 2025), consistently outpacing those who do not feel they belong (62%). Even though the latter group saw a significant jump from last year's 47%, the trend suggests that stronger institutional ties facilitate higher levels of academic tool adoption.

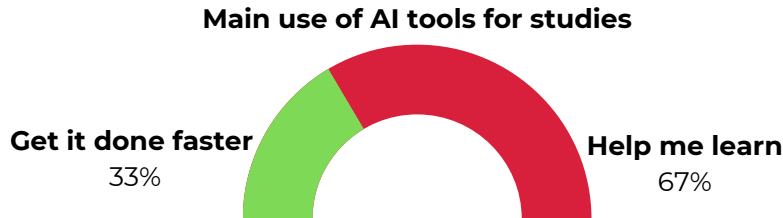
Used any AI tools to help with assignments or study tasks	Belonging					Net: Likely to feel like they belong	Net: Unlikely to feel like they belong	All
	Not much at all	Not much	Neutral	Somewhat	Very much			
Yes, regularly	21%	20%	16%	18%	27%	20%	21%	21%
Yes, a few times	20%	23%	27%	30%	30%	29%	22%	28%
Yes, once or twice	18%	20%	27%	24%	17%	22%	20%	22%
Never	41%	36%	29%	28%	25%	27%	38%	29%
Not sure	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Net: Yes	59%	63%	70%	72%	74%	72%	62%	71%
Net: Regularly/ a few times	41%	43%	43%	48%	57%	50%	42%	49%
N	117	247	350	1062	597	2009	364	2373





AI tools - helping students learn vs getting studies done faster.

For students who use AI tools to help with their assignments or study tasks, when asked to choose, 67% mainly use as a study aid – to ‘help them learn’, while 33% say their main use is for speed – to ‘get it done faster’.



The main themes around using students using AI tools to ‘help me learn’ include: finding sources/citations; clarifying and explaining concepts; summarising and structuring information; and overcoming learning barriers and ideation.

Meanwhile, students using AI tools to ‘get it done faster’ mention: efficiency and time management; reducing workload and stress; and improving their productivity or organisation.

Looking at 18-25 year old students, 68% say these tools help them learn and 32% say its to get things done faster. This compares to 26-33 year old students, who have increased their adoption of AI tools, who lean slightly more towards speed over help with learning (37% compared to 63%).

Main use of AI tools for studies	Age				
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42 – 49	50 +
Get it done faster	32%	37%	36%	29%	20%
Help me learn	68%	63%	64%	71%	80%
N	898	376	208	104	83

Female students, who have also increased their usage in AI tools for study, are more likely to use AI tools to help them learn (70%) compared to male students (64%).

Domestic students are more likely to use AI tools in their studies to help them learn (69%) compared to international students (59%), perhaps as international students balance financial concerns and social pressures more alongside their studies.

For some students, finding efficiencies is key to balancing other responsibilities, with students in some form of employment more likely to use AI tools to help get their studies done faster (35%, compared to those not in employment at (27%), as are those who have carer responsibilities compared to those with none (40% compared to 31%).





AI tools - helping students learn vs getting studies done faster contd.



Get it done faster

"It's permitted and gives me more time to focus on things that require more attention/ I'm struggling with and to maintain free time."
- International student, 18-25, UG, STEM, regular user

"AI gives faster and detailed response sometimes with verified links to search more than the web or Internet does." - 26-33, Postgraduate, Law, Once or twice user

"AI helps summarise and filter content so that I can get through huge reading lists faster, by focusing on the most relevant pieces/information in each." - 18-25, Undergraduate, Humanities and Social Sciences, Regular user

"It can help me organise my ideas better into a planned list format. It can help you quickly come up with different ways of expressing your ideas." - 18-25, Undergraduate, Humanities and Social Sciences, Regular user

"Everyone else on my course uses AI so I feel I have to use it too to "catch up". I would be at a disadvantage if I didn't use it." - 18-25, Undergraduate, Creative Arts, Regular user

"I only use AI (Grok mostly) to speed up assignment progress, giving me templates and ideas on what to write, or after finishing, which bits to cut out based on marking criteria." - 26-33, Undergraduate, Accountancy, Regular user

"During a stressful time I used AI to help me get something done by a deadline." - 18-25, Undergraduate, Humanities and Social Sciences, Once or twice user

"If I feel really stressed and worried that I won't get an assignment done on time then I use AI to help me come up with ideas of what to write and how to structure them." - 26-33, Undergraduate, Psychology, Once or twice user



To help me learn

"I use AI to help me when I get stuck on areas of reports and essays, to give me some prompts and ideas about what to write." - 18-25, Undergraduate, Business, A few times/ infrequent user

"AI can enhance my learning by encouraging me to think from different perspectives, or help me find resources." - 26-33, Postgraduate, Psychology, regular user

"AI hallucinates, responses are homogeneous and often lack depth, but it can be really helpful for recommending ideas at the start of a project." - 26-33, Undergraduate, STEM, Infrequent user

"AI will help me think of things to explore further. I used it as a tool to discover what I don't know. Then when it gives me ideas of things I haven't thought of, I can then educate myself on that." - 26-33, Postgraduate, Law, Regular user

"Faster way to summarise the theories and concepts. AI tools are like study-buddies in a way." - 26-33, Postgraduate, Business, Infrequent user

"I use AI to explain complex topics in a simpler way and also to optimise my routine. It is also great to check whether you have understood something." 18-25, Postgraduate, Other subject, Once or twice user

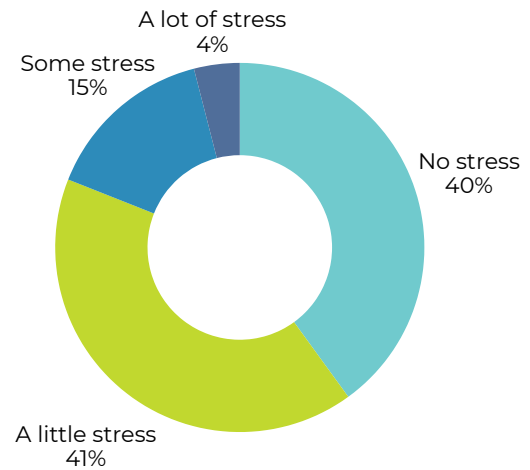
"I would practice or make AI quiz me. Help me write my ideas better." - 26-33, Postgraduate, Humanities and Social Sciences, Regular user

"It helps break down technical jargon and also help me to prioritise and regurgitate information I've learned I don't have anyone directly around me who has even finished college so having that feedback loop I've found helpful." - 26-33, Undergraduate, STEM, Regular user



Stress experienced by students while using AI tools as part of studies.

While usage has increased overall among UK students, stress in how to correctly use these tools has stayed part of their higher education workload. 60% of students experience stress while using these tools, including 19% who experience a lot or some stress. This compares to 60% and 17% respectively last year.



The historical trend - that higher-achieving students feel less stress about AI - largely persists, though with minor shifts in the middle tiers. This year, 'Credit' students reported a slight increase in stress (66%), overtaking 'Pass' students who saw a marginal decrease to 62%. This shift might reflect a move toward using AI for complex learning aids rather than just efficiency.

QD2NEW Stress experienced while using AI tools as part of studies	Average grade			
	Pass (50 – 64%)	Credit (65 – 74%)	Distinction (75 – 84%)	High distinction (85 – 100%)
No stress	38%	34%	45%	48%
A little stress	39%	46%	38%	36%
Some stress	14%	15%	15%	14%
A lot of stress	9%	6%	2%	2%
Net: Any stress	62%	66%	55%	52%
Net: A lot/ some	23%	21%	17%	16%
N	172	585	570	171





Stress experienced by students while using AI tools as part of studies contd.

Similar to last year, students studying Psychology were the most stressed overall about using AI as part of their study workload, with only 30% reporting 'no stress at all', level with previous (31%), especially in comparison this year to students studying humanities and social sciences reporting no stress (42%) and STEM (39%).

Compared to previous year, while any stress experienced stays at a similar level (62%), international students appear to be twice as likely to feel 'a lot' of stress while using AI as part of their studies (6% compared to 3% previously), with 23% experiencing a lot/ some stress this year. Meanwhile, 18% of domestic students feel a lot/ some stress, with 40% feeling 'no stress at all'.

Stress experienced while using AI tools as part of studies appears to an extent linked to concern about losing critical thinking/ communication skills. Students who experience any stress while using AI are more concerned about skill reduction (48%), compared to those who experience no stress (34%).

Stress experienced while using AI tools as part of studies

Concerned that using AI for written assignments is reducing critical thinking and/or communication skills.	No stress	A little stress	Some stress	A lot of stress	Net: Any stress
Strongly Disagree	15%	8%	8%	14%	8%
Disagree	30%	21%	22%	20%	21%
Neutral	20%	24%	18%	17%	22%
Agree	22%	36%	37%	19%	35%
Strongly Agree	12%	11%	16%	30%	14%
Net: Disagree	45%	29%	30%	34%	30%
Net: Agree	34%	47%	52%	49%	48%
N	686	663	249	71	983





Stressors while using AI tools as part of studies.

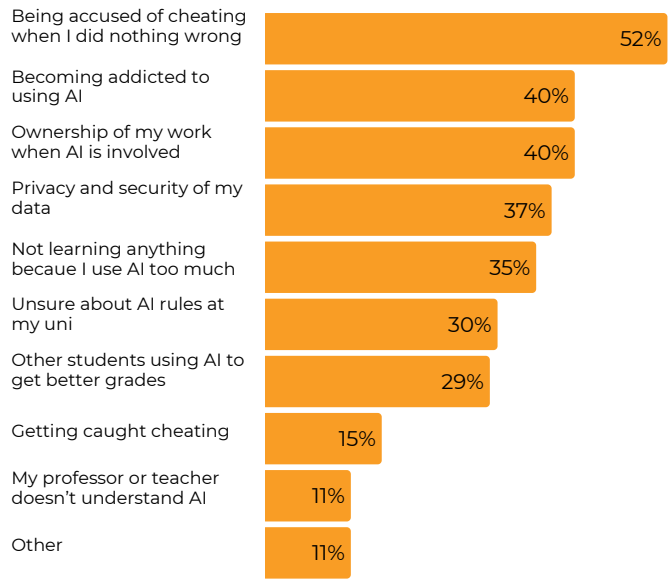
When students were asked what their top three most stressful parts of using AI were, 52% reported that being accused of cheating when they did nothing wrong was a top stressor – with 27% ranking this as their very first reason.

Four in ten (40%) students are most stressed either about the ownership of their work when AI is involved, or for privacy/security of their data (40%). A similar proportion are stressed about becoming addicted to using AI (37%), while over a third (35%) worry about other students getting a competitive advantage, and three in ten (30%) are stressed that they are not learning anything because of their reliance on AI tools in their studies.

While most students report that their institution provides training, policies or guidelines on the ethical use of AI, three in ten (29%) are still stressed about their uncertainty of the rules on AI, while one in ten (11%) are stressed that their professor/teacher lacks understanding of AI.

Younger students were less stressed about the ownership of their work (37% compared to average 46% of 26+), while more likely to be stressed that they are not learning anything (35% compared to average 22% of 26+).

Top 3 AI Stressors



"Thinking the company will give my data to the university." – 42-49, Undergraduate, A lot of stress using AI

"The favouritism of the students who use ai and those who don't." – 18-25, Undergraduate, A lot of stress using AI

Top 3 AI Stressors	Age					All
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42+		
Being accused of cheating when I did nothing wrong	54%	51%	49%	48%		52%
Ownership of my work when AI is involved	37%	44%	42%	55%		40%
Privacy and security of my data	37%	47%	37%	41%		40%
Becoming addicted to using AI	36%	43%	37%	27%		37%
Other students using AI to get better grades	37%	29%	37%	28%		35%
Not learning anything because I use AI too much	35%	23%	22%	21%		30%
Unsure about AI rules at my university	27%	30%	36%	32%		29%
Getting caught cheating	16%	13%	18%	16%		15%
My professor or teacher doesn't understand AI	10%	12%	13%	12%		11%
Other	10%	8%	11%	20%		11%
N	577	211	105	90		983





Stressors while using AI tools as part of studies contd.

'Pass' up to 'Distinction' students cite their top stressor when using AI as being accused of cheating when they did nothing wrong (average of 53%), with 43% of 'High Distinction' students saying the same – however, these students are more likely to be stressed about ownership of their work when AI is involved (48%), with 39% of these other students saying the same.

Top 3 AI stressors	Average grade			
	Pass (50 – 64%)	Credit (65 – 74%)	Distinction (75 – 84%)	High distinction (85 – 100%)
Being accused of cheating when I did nothing wrong	56%	54%	50%	43%
Ownership of my work when AI is involved	44%	36%	42%	48%
Privacy and security of my data	27%	39%	43%	45%
Becoming addicted to using AI	37%	36%	35%	42%
Other students using AI to get better grades	34%	39%	34%	32%
Not learning anything because I use AI too much	33%	30%	29%	30%
Unsure about AI rules at my university	25%	30%	32%	19%
Getting caught cheating	19%	14%	16%	16%
My professor or teacher doesn't understand AI	15%	12%	11%	10%
Other	11%	10%	9%	14%
N	107	384	306	90

Being accused of cheating when they did nothing wrong is a top stressor across areas of study, and is particularly more of a stressor among those studying humanities and social sciences (66%), compared with students studying psychology (51%), law (47%), business (46%), and STEM (49%).

Ownership of work closely follows for those studying psychology (47%) and business (44%), while privacy/ security concerns follow for those studying STEM (44%) and law (39%), while the next stressor among those studying humanities and social sciences is other students gaining a competitive advantage in their grades (42%).

“As it's from DSA it's in a sort of grey area I worry about.” – 18-25, Undergraduate, A little stress using AI

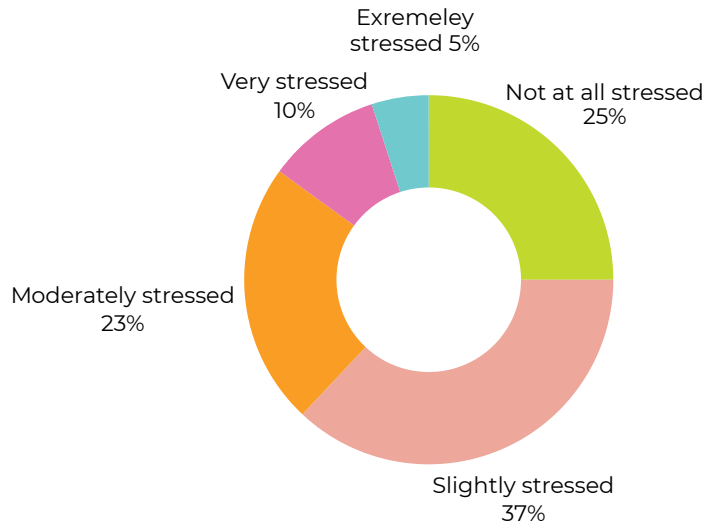
“Guilt over using it, although I know it is only a study aid and is the 21st century equivalent of reading textbooks.” 50+, Postgraduate, Some stress using AI





Stressors while using AI tools as part of studies contd.

75% of UK students who use AI to help with their studies fear being wrongly accused of AI plagiarism. While 15% report being 'very' or 'extremely' stressed about AI detection tools, only 25% report feeling no stress at all. This highlights a significant trust gap between students, their tools, and institutional detection methods.



The burden of AI-detection stress falls heaviest on international students, 81% of whom report anxiety - significantly higher than their domestic peers (74%). This trend also varies by discipline: psychology students are the most concerned (85%), followed by journalism and communication (80%, n=26), STEM (78%), and business (76%).

Interestingly, while this stress is felt across all grade levels, higher-achieving students tend to report more 'moderate' than 'extreme' anxiety. This likely reflects a balance between a high awareness of academic integrity and confidence in their own abilities.

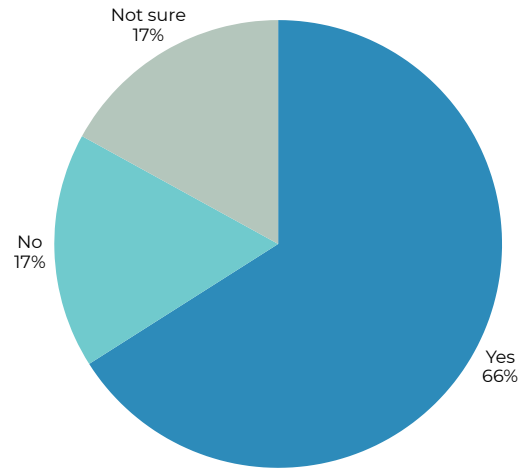
Stress about being wrongly flagged by AI detection tools	Age				
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42 – 49	50 +
Not at all stressed	23%	24%	27%	40%	39%
Slightly stressed	40%	34%	32%	27%	36%
Moderately stressed	23%	25%	23%	19%	14%
Very stressed	10%	12%	13%	8%	3%
Extremely stressed	4%	5%	5%	6%	8%
Net: Slightly OR Moderately stressed	63%	59%	56%	46%	51%
Net: Very stressed OR Extremely stressed	14%	17%	18%	14%	10%
Net: Some level of stress	77%	76%	73%	60%	61%
N	898	376	208	104	83





Provision of training, policies, or guidelines on the ethical use of AI by institutions.

Two-thirds of UK students (66%) report that their university has provided training, policies, or guidelines on the ethical use of AI. In contrast, 17% say their institution has not provided this, while the same proportion are unsure whether this has been provided or not.



Current University Approaches: Students report a wide variety of institutional responses to AI. Where policies are clear, universities often use "traffic light" systems or dedicated website briefs to signal appropriate usage. In more restrictive environments, institutions rely on blanket bans and detection tools, forcing students to depend on their own judgement or external sources for AI literacy.

The Clarity Gap: A lack of clear guidance directly correlates with student anxiety. Those without access to formal policies report significant confusion over "permitted use," leading to a strong demand for mandatory training on AI ethics and responsible use to help reduce stress.

Key Demographics and Subject Trends: The provision of AI guidelines varies significantly across student groups and disciplines:

- Despite being more likely to use AI overall, business students (58%) are less likely to have received formal guidelines compared to those in law (73%) and STEM (70%).
- Female students are more likely to be unsure if policies exist (19%) compared to males (14%).
- Younger students (18-25) are more likely to report not being provided with guidelines than their older peers (15% vs 19%).
- International students report better access to training, with only 12% lacking guidelines compared to 17% of domestic students.



Provision of training, policies, or guidelines on the ethical use of AI by institutions contd.

YES



"AI is permitted - in order to HELP you. Anything directly quoted from sources of AI are flagged as plagiarism." Undergraduate, Scotland

"AI is allowed to support the work, but not to produce submitted work (i.e. not permitted to generate text to be included in reports). Any AI use must be clearly described in the submitted work." Postgraduate, South West

"Assignments allocated a traffic light system to define how much AI use is acceptable. AI declarations used to declare and monitor AI usage." Undergraduate, Wales

"A mandatory course on how to use AI to help with our work." Undergraduate, London

"We are encouraged to use it in certain ways, rather than it being banned." Undergraduate, Yorkshire & the Humber

"Ethical guidelines for how AI can (or mostly can't) be used for assessments. No training on using AI or anything like that." Undergraduate, South West

"AI is not allowed because Turnitin's detection will flag it up. You can get a 0 for using it. I think individual module leaders might have opinions and the ability to stray from that guidance but it's pretty rigid." Undergraduate, Wales

NO



"Different lecturers said different things on AI use some encouraged us to use it others made it clear any AI would lead to a bad grade. And potential disqualification of work." Undergraduate, South West

"Because they said it will decrease our thinking ability." Postgraduate, Yorkshire & the Humber

"I do not remember any except a warning that Turnitin can detect it." Postgraduate, Yorkshire & the Humber

"I learnt to use AI by myself." Postgraduate, Midlands

"No training on how to use AI. Reason is because they will become lazy to read and depend on AI for every study." Postgraduate, London

"The only thing that is mentioned is that we're not allowed to use it and will get accused of plagiarism. There is no guidance and how to use it alongside our own work." Undergraduate, South East

"They did nothing, apart from say DON'T USE IT. Everyone still used it." Postgraduate, North East

"They encourage you to disclose the use of AI but this feels like a trap to me." Undergraduate, North West

"They didn't want it to be used. Instead they should be teaching students how to use it effectively. It will be a part of our futures and our careers so it's important to learn it." - Postgraduate, Scotland

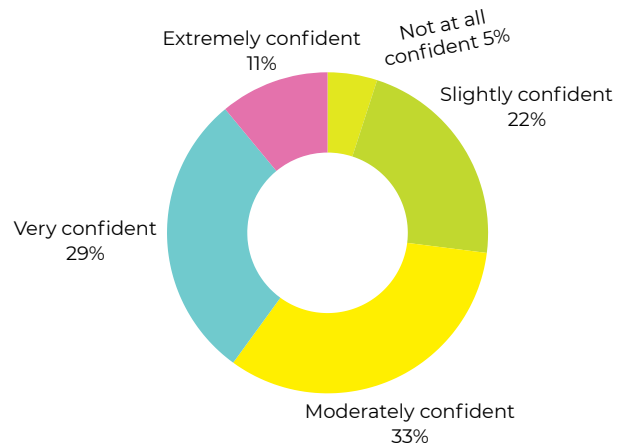
"It would be helpful if the university offered clearer guidance on what's acceptable and how AI can be used responsibly in our studies." - Undergraduate, North West



How confident are you that you are learning when using AI tools as part of your studies?

UK students express high levels of confidence in their ability to learn alongside AI; despite the associated stresses, the vast majority feel they are gaining knowledge through these tools. This sense of self-assurance is widespread among AI users, with a mere 5% of respondents reporting no confidence in their learning outcomes when using AI.

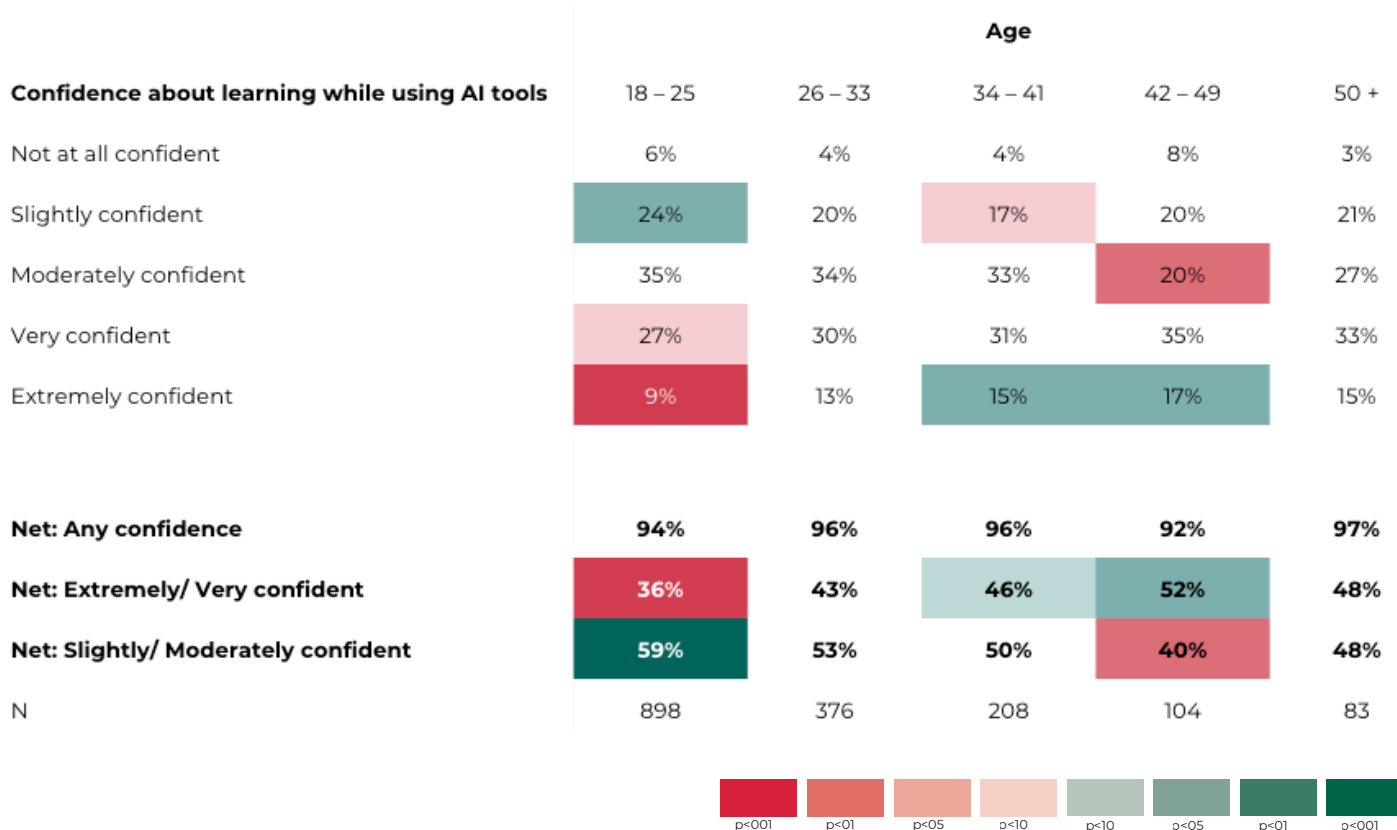
22% of students are 'slightly confident', 33% are 'moderately confident', 29% are 'very confident', and 11% are 'extremely confident'.



This is a similar level of confidence to last year, where only 5% said they were 'not at all confident' that they were learning as well as improving skills while using generative AI tools. Moreover, as students seem to move from slight to moderate confidence compared to last year (from 26% and 29% respectively), this suggests students are becoming more accustomed to integrating AI into their study routines.

Male students are more likely to feel 'very' or 'extremely' confident that they are learning when using AI tools (48%), compared with female students (34%), who in contrast are more likely to only feel 'slightly' confident (25%) compared to male students (17%).

Interestingly, confidence seems to increase with age, as 9% of 18-25s are 'extremely confident' that they are learning when using AI tools as part of their studies, compared to 13%-17% of older students.





How confident are you that you are learning when using AI tools as part of your studies? Contd.

By area of study, lack of confidence in learning while using AI tools is more evident among students studying humanities and social sciences, with 11% saying they are 'not at all confident', in comparison to most other study areas. Business students on the other hand, who are more likely to use these tools and as a learning enhancement than most other areas, have high confidence that they are learning while using, with only 1% feeling 'not at all confident'.

Meanwhile, lack of confidence is more evident among 'Pass' students, as 10% say they are 'not at all confident' that they are learning when using AI tools as part of their studies, compared to 3% of students at 'Distinction' or above.

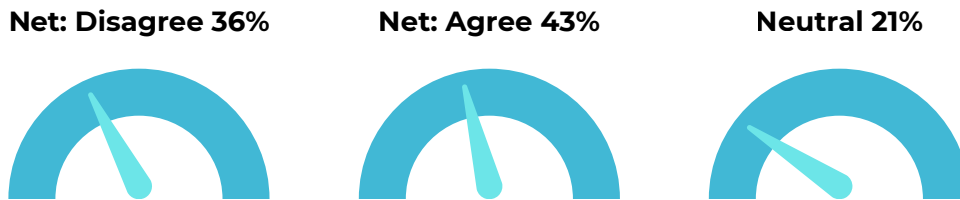
Confidence about learning while using AI tools	Average grade			
	Pass (50 – 64%)	Credit (65 – 74%)	Distinction (75 – 84%)	High distinction (85 – 100%)
Not at all confident	10%	7%	3%	3%
Slightly confident	24%	22%	20%	20%
Moderately confident	38%	36%	29%	20%
Very confident	21%	26%	35%	36%
Extremely confident	8%	9%	14%	20%
Net: Any confidence	90%	93%	97%	97%
Net: Extremely/ Very confident	29%	34%	49%	56%
Net: Slightly/ Moderately confident	61%	59%	49%	41%
N	172	585	570	171





Concern that using AI for written assignments is reducing critical thinking and/or communication skills.

Although confidence in learning while using AI tools remains high, there is still concern that using AI for written assignments is reducing their critical thinking and/or communication skills, with 43% in agreement. Meanwhile one in five are undecided (neutral 21%) and 36% disagree.



The Three Mindsets

Students' attitudes toward skill reduction generally fall into three categories based on how they use AI:

- *The Concerned:* These students fear AI is doing the "hard work," leading to a loss of problem-solving abilities. They worry that relying on AI for rewording makes them less able to express ideas in their own voice, diminishing their sense of ownership over their work.
- *The Neutrals:* This group views the impact as context-dependent. They advocate for personal responsibility and moderation, believing that AI is a tool whose effect depends entirely on the user's intent.
- *The Confident:* These students view AI as an enhancement rather than a replacement. They cite benefits for accessibility and efficiency—particularly for those with learning differences or English as a second language—and feel in control of their usage.

Agree/Disagree - Concern that using AI for written assignments is reducing critical thinking and/or communication skills.	Confidence about learning while using AI tools						Net: Extremely/ Very confident	Net: Slightly/ Moderately confident
	Not at all confident	Slightly confident	Moderately confident	Very confident	Extremely confident	Net: Any confidence		
Strongly Disagree	11%	6%	7%	11%	35%	11%	18%	7%
Disagree	9%	15%	23%	36%	28%	25%	34%	20%
Neutral	14%	25%	26%	18%	12%	22%	16%	26%
Agree	22%	40%	31%	29%	14%	30%	25%	34%
Strongly Agree	43%	14%	13%	7%	12%	11%	8%	14%
Net: Disagree	20%	21%	30%	47%	62%	37%	51%	26%
Net: Agree	65%	54%	44%	35%	26%	42%	33%	48%
N	93	360	542	481	193	1576	674	902

"It has the capacity to [reduce skills] but people also have the capacity to use their own minds and use AI less if it becomes problematic." — Psychology Student (Neutral)





Concern that using AI for written assignments is reducing critical thinking and/or communication skills contd.

Who is Most Concerned?

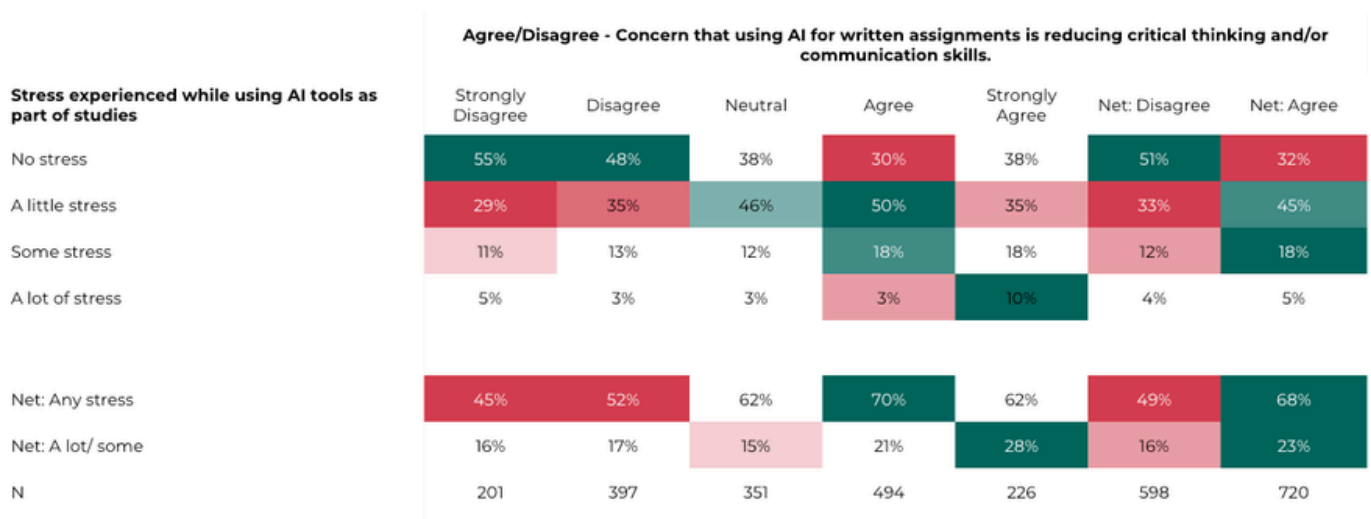
The data reveals clear demographic and behavioral divides regarding the fear of skill decline:

- Nationality & Language: Concern is significantly higher among International students (59%) than domestic students (40%), likely driven by those for whom English is a second language (51%).
- Age: Younger students (18-25) are more worried (47%) than those over 25 (37%).
- Intent: Students using AI primarily for speed are more concerned about skill loss (48%) than those using it as a learning aid (40%).
- Confidence Paradox: There is a direct inverse correlation between confidence and concern. Only 26% of "extremely confident" students worry about skill reduction, compared to 65% of those "not at all confident."

The Stress Connection & The Role of Training

There is a clear link between concern, lack of guidance, and student wellbeing:

- Stress Levels: Students concerned about skill loss are far more likely to experience stress (68%) than those who are not concerned (49%).
- The Training Buffer: Access to institutional policies acts as a safety net. Students without clear guidelines are more likely to experience stress (64%) than those with access to training and ethical frameworks (58%).





Concern that using AI for written assignments is reducing critical thinking and/or communication skills contd.



Concerned (Net Agree)

"AI just parrots what it reads online, it doesn't help people to come up with new ideas or think through their ideas critically." - 18-25, Humanities and Social Science

"I think it takes away a lot of processes and originality that were present in writing assignments before. I think it's reducing our capacity to think for ourselves." - 18-25, Psychology

"When I use AI for critical thinking and communication skills, I am killing my cognitive functions and making my AI my brain." - 18-25, STEM

"When you using AI you focused only on the feedback it gives but do not want to provide answers to your assignment based on what you know or what you have learnt." - 26-33, Business

"Well if I put it all to AI (which I don't but e.g.) then I feel less ownership of my work for example my writing style - if I let AI reword some of my sentences that are too wordy." - 18-25, Creative Arts

"It offloads a lot of the hard thinking that I had to do previously, and this can make me worse at writing or communication." - 18-25, STEM

"Cheating in some aspects." - 18-25, Creative Arts

"Because it replaces the act of research and reward." - 18-25, STEM

"I find myself relying too much on AI to draft ideas or polish sentences, which means I'm not doing the heavy lifting of structuring my thoughts or finding the perfect word myself. It's making me Mentally lazy." - 26-33, Business

"I've never been good at writing. I get Impostor syndrome from thinking I am no longer capable of writing." - 18-25, STEM

"I don't want to do 100% of my work with AI; I want to think for myself." - 18-25, Business



Not concerned (Net Disagree)

"AI helps me learn more and does not hinder or limit me from thinking and critical communication." - 26-33, Creative Arts

"I don't just copy and paste, I share my ideas with the AI and it corrects me and gives me possible solution." - 18-25, STEM

"I ask it to exclusively use academic materials from open source databases like Medline, pub med, cinahl etc. so material is relevant and correct." - 26-33, Nursing

"I disagree because of how I use it. I do not use AI to write any of my assignments, but I will use it to proof read my work for spelling/grammar mistakes before submission or to clarify any ideas that I am unsure about." - 18-25, Other subject

"You still need to know the content and the theorists. AI is also flagged if just used to purely to copy and paste." - 18-25, Humanities and Social Science

"It's only helping me grasp the idea behind the topic. Not that it's teaching me something wrong entirely." - 18-25, STEM

"Because I feel like I am using AI as a place to start to help me come up with more ideas of my own. It is something I use to spark ideas and creativity." - 26-33, Psychology

"I often question the AI and come up with more elaborate questions which require critical thinking to make." - 18-25, Law

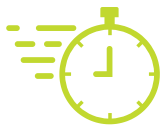
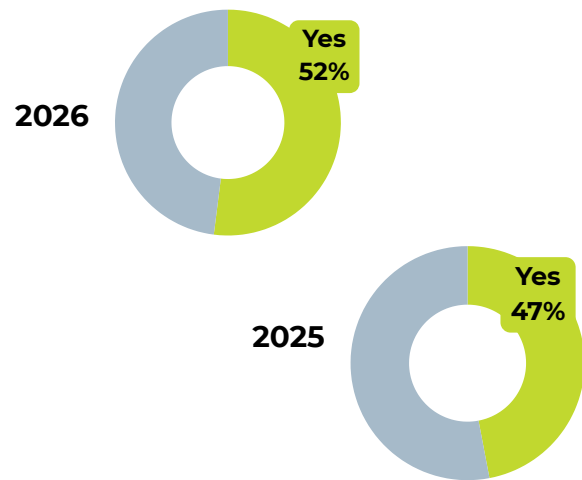
"Using AI actually helps me develop my communication skills because I learn how to phrase prompts clearly and evaluate the quality of responses." - 18-25, Medicine



University adapting fast enough to provide AI study support tools?

As AI tools and technology continue to rapidly develop, 52% of students surveyed believe their university is adapting fast enough to include AI support tools for study, up by 5% from 2025 – however, 48% of students still believe there is more to be done.

Those who say their university is adapting fast enough, tend to cite integration or provision of tools and training, while those who say their university isn't, tend to cite their university's stance against AI use or ambiguous messaging.



University adapting fast enough

"...They have recently started providing information and guidance on AI tools." - Postgraduate, East of England

"They have guidelines to help students adapt." - Postgraduate, - Yorkshire & The Humber

"By integrating AI tools into our learning." - Postgraduate, Northern Ireland

"The students are more open to explaining their use of AI in learning and research..." - Undergraduate, Yorkshire & the Humber

"Our study now includes interactive learning materials and AI quizzes, as well as more personalised human feedback and faster marking for some assignments." - Undergraduate, North West

"Our professors advice us to study using AI." - Undergraduate, London

"Acknowledging it and provides somewhat clear ways of using it and lecturers often talk about using it." - Undergraduate, Midlands

"They've adopted systems and methods to tell when AI is accepted or not." - Undergraduate, North West

"We have more online courses that can help with AI research." - Undergraduate, London



University not adapting fast enough

"Afraid it will stop us from learning." - Undergraduate, Midlands

"anti ai and don't want to incorporate it as a learning tool." - Undergraduate, South West

"For the moment, we are free in our use of AI." - Postgraduate, London

"I am unsure on their policies and how they are going to implement it." - Undergraduate, East

"I don't think my university is adapting fast enough to include AI support tools. While some lecturers mention AI in discussions or warn against misuse, there hasn't been much formal guidance or integration into learning platforms." - Undergraduate, North West

"No, my university hasn't really addressed AI yet. There are no clear policies or training, so students are mostly figuring it out on their own." - Postgraduate, London

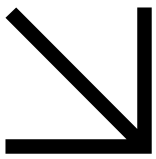
"There is ambiguity as to what they deem appropriate use." - Undergraduate, Wales

"I think it's mostly from friction between staff." - Undergraduate, North West



ANNUAL GLOBAL STUDENT WELLBEING SURVEY

2: Human Connection



2026

Research
carried out by:

YouGov[®]

Reported by:

Studiosity

Why:

Better understanding of “belonging” to a university community as part of student experience is vital because it is widely known to impact student retention and overall wellbeing, while student confidence in contacting staff for support is key for academic success.

Takeouts for leadership:

- Identify and proactively support students who report lower belonging, **offering tailored support and check-ins.**
- Meet unmet demands by **expanding and formalising student mentorship programs**, particularly for younger students or those in undergraduate degrees.
- **Foster a culture of approachability and open, anonymous communication**, emphasising empathy and proactivity among staff, across accessible channels.
- **Confidence is a stress-reducer:** Students comfortable contacting their teachers report a 22-point lower incidence of daily or constant stress.



Chapter 2: Human connection

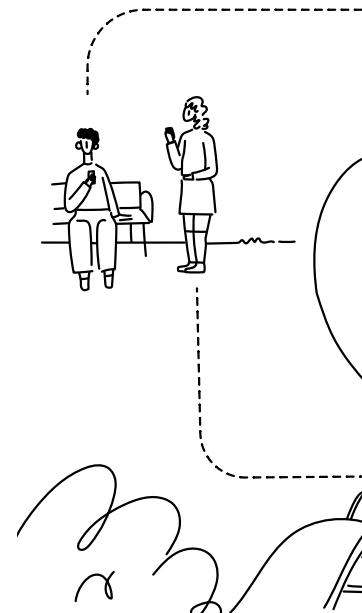
85% of UK university students have a net positive sense of belonging.

42% of students who were not assigned a mentor in their first year said they would have liked one.
This is 7% down from 2025.

37% of students who do not feel like they belong in the university community, do not feel confident contacting their professor or teacher with questions.

23% of students at 'Pass' rate do not feel confident asking their professor or teacher questions.

23% of students who are stressed daily/constantly do not feel confident asking their professor or teacher questions.





Trends for ‘Human connection’

Do you feel like you ‘belong’ in your university community? (for example, do you feel supported and included?)

In 2026, the majority of UK university students surveyed have a positive sense of belonging, with net 85% ‘likely to feel like they belong’.

Compared to last year, while the net positive sense is similar (84%), positive shifts are observed as students shift away from feeling ‘neutral’ (by 5%) and towards feeling somewhat (by 2%) or very much feeling like they belong (by 3%), as proportions of students who feel not much of a sense, or at all, remain relatively stable.

Sense of belonging varies significantly by study mode. Remote students are the most likely to feel disconnected, with 20% reporting a lack of belonging compared to just 13% of both on-campus or hybrid students.

Similarly, part-time students report lower levels of belonging (81%) than their full-time peers (87%). These gaps suggest a critical need for targeted check-ins and digital support channels for remote and part-time learners, who may find on-campus resources less accessible.

‘Distinction’ students especially feel likely they belong in their university community (89%), compared to students with lower attainment levels of ‘Credit’ (84%) and ‘Pass’ (80%).

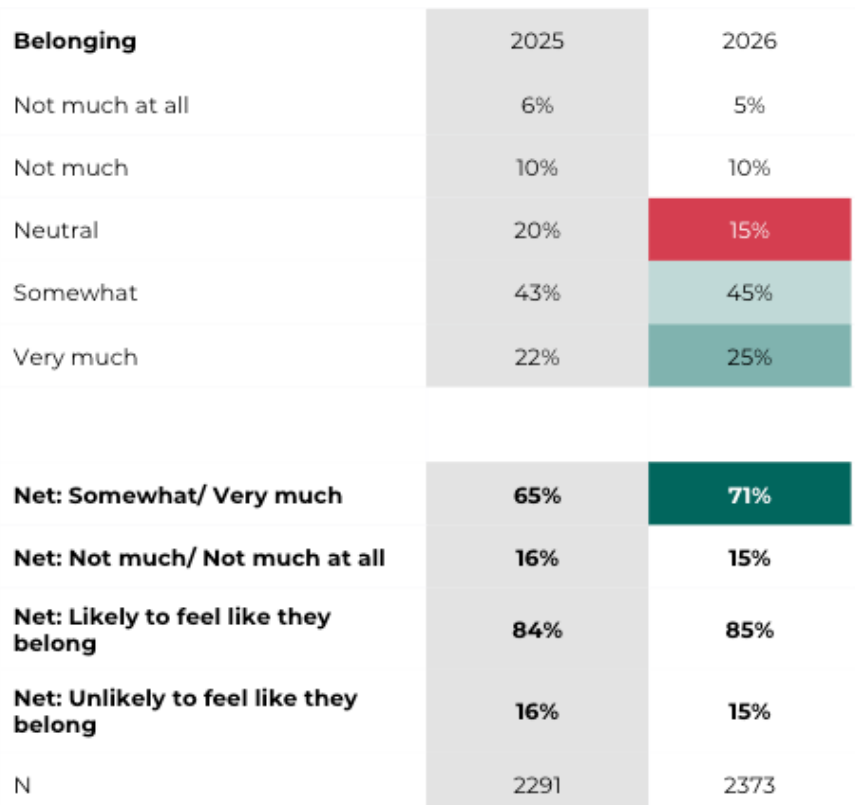
By areas of study, there is a 11% difference between medical students who remain the most net positive (92%), and creative arts students the least (81%).

“I always received academic information support from my school.” – London, Fully remote

“The tutors are good and approachable if support needed. We have a WhatsApp group which is chatted on daily.” – London, Fully remote

“I am a lot older than the majority of students that are studying in my university but I don't feel like there's that much of a divide.” – South West, Mixed on/ off campus

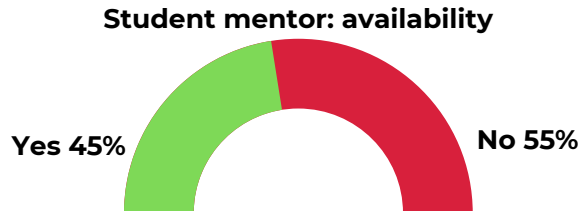
“I feel like the tutors make a huge effort to be engaged and I feel I could approach any of the staff personally.” – South East, Mixed on/ off campus





Mentorship – availability and need.

This year, less than half of all UK students (45%) had a student mentor assigned to them in their first year at university – down from 52% who had a formal student mentor in their first year in 2025. Meanwhile, among those not assigned a student mentor in their first year at university, 42% would have liked to have a mentor.



Older students are the least likely to be assigned a student mentor in their first year, with 68% of students aged 42 and above saying they were not assigned one, yet within those students 37% felt they have a need for one.

Focusing on 18–25-year-old students, 52% say they did not have a student mentor assigned in their first year of study, yet among these students 41% felt they would have liked one.

Additionally, international students are more likely to have a student mentor assigned to them in their first year of study (57%, compared to 44% domestic students).

Assignment and need for peer mentors varies by faculty, with highest need among business students, compared to 36% among humanities and social sciences students.

Student mentor: availability			Student mentor: need		
Area of study	Yes	N	Area of study	Yes	N
Medicine	65%	107	Business	51%	127
Nursing	52%	106	Nursing	50%	54
Law	49%	132	Medicine	48%	42*
STEM	47%	562	Law	47%	73
Business	45%	233	STEM	42%	303
Humanities and Social Sciences	43%	485	Other	41%	187
Other	41%	310	Creative Arts	40%	94
Creative Arts	39%	149	Psychology	38%	131
Psychology	36%	203	Humanities and Social Sciences	36%	287

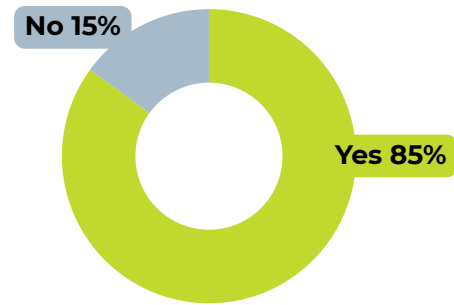




Confidence in contact of professors and teachers.

The majority of students (85%) say they are confident in contacting their professors or teachers with questions, commonly mentioning approachability or friendliness, clear communication channels, encouragement, and empathy. Some students mention small class sizes that contribute to personal relationships, and a sense of independence in their studies.

However, 15% say they are not confident contacting their professors or teachers with questions, with students expressing fear of judgement or embarrassment, perceived lack of availability or intimidation, or social anxiety.



'Distinction' students (75-84%) are more likely to feel confidence here, as only 10% do not feel confident, with 14% of 'High Distinction' students saying the same – in contrast to students at 'Pass' level, where 23% say they are not confident contacting their professors or teachers.

Moreover, lack of confidence in contacting their teachers is felt more among students who are stressed 'constantly (more than twice a day)' or 'daily' (23%), as well as those not likely to feel they belong (37%), underscoring the need for accessible touchpoints between staff and students, with targeted outreach and support for more vulnerable students.

Boosting students' confidence in this area could help reduce stress, as students who feel confident reaching out for help are less likely to report daily or constant stress (31%) compared to those who are not confident (53%).

Average grade

Confident contacting professor or teacher	Pass (50 – 64%)	Credit (65 – 74%)	Distinction (75 – 84%)	High distinction (85 – 100%)
Yes	77%	82%	90%	86%
No	23%	18%	10%	14%
N	255	809	774	252





Confidence or lack of confidence in contacting professors or teachers with questions.

YES - confident

"All of my lectures provided specific areas to ask questions, sometimes anonymously. Teachers of my seminars also ensure to say that questions are welcome." – 18-25, Undergraduate, On campus only

"As it's distance learning that is the only way to communicate with my tutor." – 42-29, Undergraduate, Fully remote

"I feel like they are approachable and explain things well. We can also post online on our class 'forum'." – 26-33, Postgraduate, On campus only

"There's no shame in asking, I just find it easier to learn that way" – 18-25, Undergraduate, Mix on/ off campus

"We get assigned a specific lecturer and they're responsible for us for a whole year and it allows a bond to be built." – 18-25, Undergraduate, On campus only

"The ones I interact with most of my time usually share what they think I should make my broader research on making my studentship in the university environment worthwhile." – 18-25 Undergraduate, On campus only

"My professor has been very active in answering emails from other students and making sure everyone on the course has access to the materials. He never hesitates to emphasise that we can always reach out to him or the Student Support Staff if we are struggling with study or study-life balance." – 19-25 Undergraduate, Fully remote

"I feel confident contacting my professors because they're approachable and open to helping students. They usually encourage us to ask questions if we're unsure about something, and they respond in a supportive and respectful way. It makes it easier to reach out without feeling nervous or judged". – 18-25, Undergraduate, Fully remote

NO - not confident

"3-5 business days for a response via email." – 34-41, Undergraduate, Fully remote

"Afraid of asking silly questions." – 18-25, Undergraduate, On campus only

"Classes are huge so it's really hard to get a response." – 18-25, Undergraduate, On campus only

"Feel like I am inconveniencing them, and treated as if I am stupid for not knowing something." – 34-41, Postgraduate, Fully remote

"It is quite intimidating and professors are busy. They are also experts in their field and I am worried about coming across as not knowing/stupid." – 26-33, Postgraduate, On campus only

"You have to do it on a public channel." – 18-25, Undergraduate, On campus only

"They have often provided generic standard information or advice I had already contemplated and considered." – 18-25, Undergraduate, Mix on/ off campus

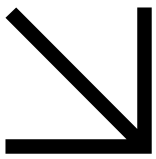
"I think the culture in UK is more different than the culture back in my home country. So, I would always feel a bit unsure on how to approach professors." – 18-25, International Postgraduate, Mix on/ off campus

"...being a foreigner, I'm always thinking I'm asking dumb questions or interacting too much." – 34-41 Other language speaker, Undergraduate, Fully remote



ANNUAL GLOBAL STUDENT WELLBEING SURVEY

3: Student Stress



2026

Research
carried out by:

Reported by:

Why:

Identifying the evolving challenges faced by today's students provides the evidence base necessary for universities to refine their support systems and ensure both student wellbeing and academic success.

Takeouts for leadership:

- **Targeted support:** Expand access to counselling and proactive "check-ins," offering specific guidance on balancing academic, professional, and personal lives.
- **Career-centric wellbeing:** Enhance career services to address the 44% of younger students (18–25) who rank future prospects as a major source of stress.
- **Collaborative Design:** Actively integrate student feedback into wellbeing initiatives to ensure solutions are co-created and fit for purpose.



Chapter 3: Student Stress

73% of UK university students feel stressed 'monthly or more'.

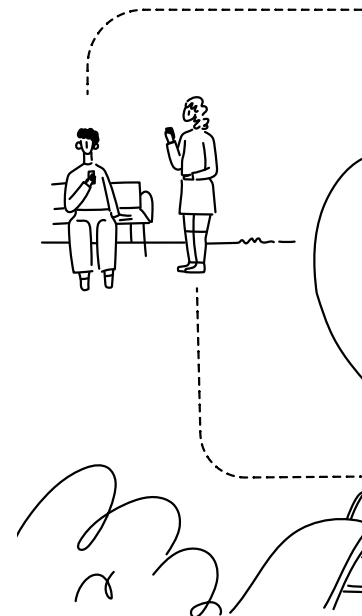
38% of 18–25-year-old students are stressed 'constantly/ daily'.
A slight improvement from 42% last year.

50% of students unlikely to feel like they belong feel stressed 'constantly/daily'.

76% of UK nursing students are stressed 'weekly or more',
while business students are least likely to be stressed 'weekly or more' at 57%.

44% of students aged 18-25 ranked 'future career prospects' as a top cause of stress,
with 12% ranking this as their biggest cause of stress.

39% of female students report experiencing daily or constant stress.
This is compared to 28% of males.





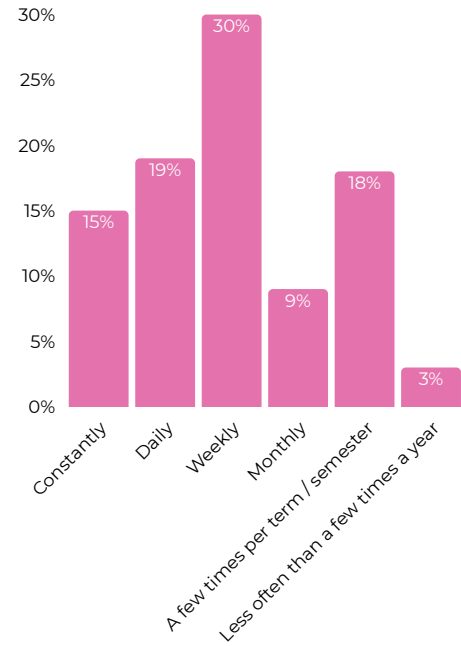
Trends for ‘Student stress’

How often do you feel stressed by studying?

Age-based stress: Younger students continue to report the highest levels of anxiety, with 38% of those aged 18–25 experiencing daily or constant stress. While this remains higher than any other age group, there is a positive downward trend; high-frequency stress in this cohort has declined by 4 percentage points from last year's 42%.

The Widening Gender Gap: Conversely, the gender stress gap is widening. Female students report significantly higher levels of daily stress (39%) than their male counterparts (28%). This divergence is driven by a notable improvement in male wellbeing, with high-frequency stress among men dropping from 32% in 2025 to 28% today.

Academic Performance and Discipline: Stress levels correlate significantly with both grades and fields of study. Students at the ‘Pass’ mark are nearly twice as likely to experience constant stress (21%) as their higher-achieving peers in the ‘Distinction’ and ‘High Distinction’ categories (both 12%).



By subject, nursing students report the highest pressure, with 76% feeling stressed weekly or more - including 46% who are stressed daily or constantly. This is followed closely by:

- Languages: 75% stressed weekly or more
- Law: 73% stressed weekly or more

In contrast, business students report the lowest frequency of high-level stress at 57%, representing a significant 19-point gap compared to nursing.

The Belonging

Connection: The data reinforces the critical link between institutional integration and mental wellbeing. Half of all students (50%) who feel they do not belong in their university community experience daily or constant stress. This is a stark contrast to the 32% of students who feel connected to their community, highlighting that fostering a sense of belonging is one of the most effective levers for reducing student stress.

How often felt stressed by studying	Age				
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42 – 49	50 +
Constantly (more than twice a day)	17%	14%	12%	13%	11%
Daily	21%	17%	18%	15%	15%
Weekly	29%	33%	33%	24%	23%
Monthly	9%	9%	11%	11%	6%
A few times per term / semester	17%	20%	15%	23%	26%
A few times a year	2%	3%	5%	6%	10%
Less often than a few times a year	2%	3%	4%	6%	8%
Never	2%	1%	2%	1%	3%
Net: Any stress	98%	99%	98%	99%	97%
Net: Monthly or more	76%	73%	74%	64%	54%
Net: Weekly or more	68%	64%	63%	52%	48%
Net: Constantly/ Daily	38%	31%	30%	28%	26%
N	1236	499	295	163	180

p<.001
 p<.01
 p<.05
 p<.10
 p<.10
 p<.05
 p<.01
 p<.001



Primary drivers of student stress.

The academic burden: While several factors contribute to student anxiety, academic pressures are the most pervasive. When asked to identify their primary stressors:

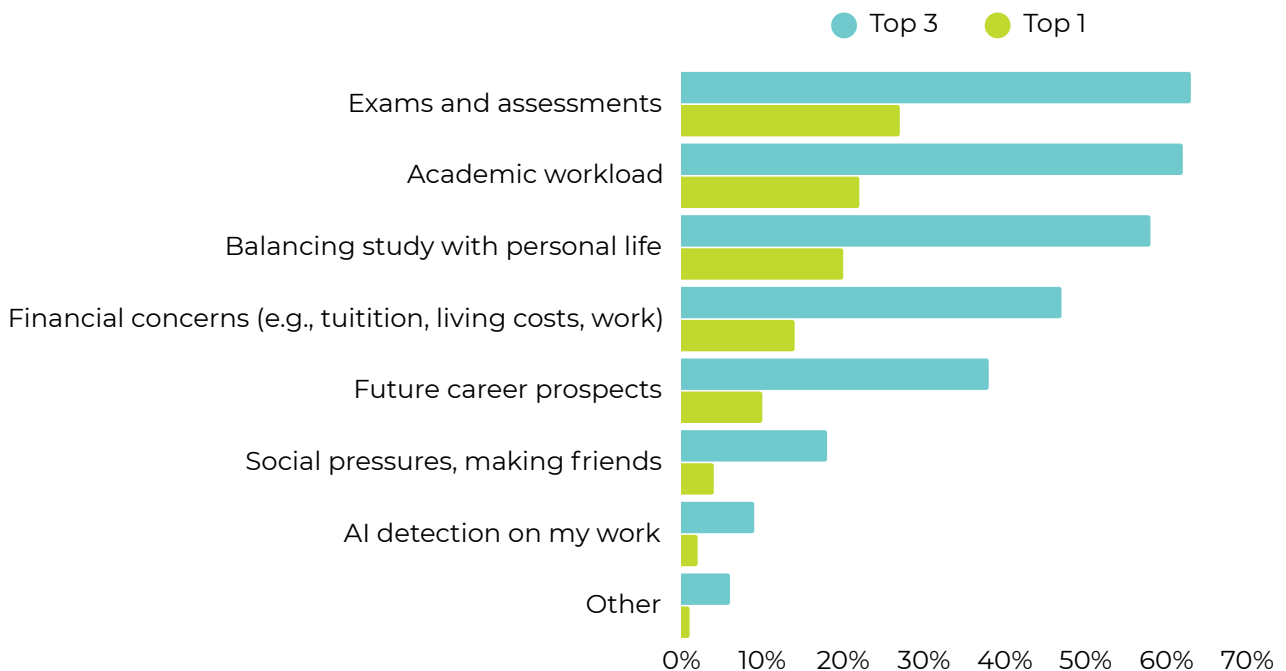
- Exams and assessments are the most common concern, ranked by 63% of all students.
- Academic workload follows closely at 62%.
- Work-life balance is a major factor for 58% of the student body.

When students were asked to rank their single biggest stressor, the hierarchy becomes even clearer: 27% identify exams as their #1 concern, followed by workload at 22%.

Future career prospects vs. immediate pressure: Against the backdrop of a straining UK job market, 38% of all students rank future career prospects as a major stressor. This concern is felt most acutely by younger students (aged 18–25), with 44% identifying it as a top reason for stress, compared to just 30% of those over 25.

However, a "priority gap" exists for these younger students. Despite their high level of career anxiety, they are still more likely to be overwhelmed by immediate, short-term pressures:

- Exams: 29% (Ranked #1)
- Workload: 22% (Ranked #1)
- Financial Concerns: 15% (Ranked #1)
- Future Career: 12% (Ranked #1)



“Managing my part time job with my studies. Studying full time while working part time left me with barely any time to rest.” – 18-25, Postgraduate, Stressed Daily

“Feeling behind peers in terms of future income prospects.” – 18-25, Postgraduate, Stressed a few times per term/ semester

“Balancing my caring responsibilities and finding time to study.” – 42-49, Part time Undergraduate, Stressed a few times per term/ semester



Demographic drivers: Life balance and career pressure.

The "balance" gap: age and employment: For older and part-time students, the primary source of tension is the conflict between their studies and their external lives.

- **Age:** Students over 25 are nearly twice as likely to rank Work-Life Balance as their number one stressor (26%) compared to those aged 18–25 (15%).
- **Study mode & work:** This pressure is felt most acutely by part-time students (32%) and those in full-time employment (32%), both of whom cite balancing commitments as their top concern significantly more than full-time students and those not in full-time employment (16%) respectively.

Gender differences: academic vs. social pressure: While both genders share high levels of anxiety regarding workload and careers, their secondary stressors diverge:

- **Academic stress:** Female students are more likely to be stressed by exams and assessments (65%) than male students (59%).
- **Social pressure:** Conversely, male students are significantly more likely to report social pressures as a top cause of stress (22%) compared to female students (14%).
- **Shared concerns:** Academic workload (~62%) and future career prospects (~38%) remain consistently high concerns across both groups.

International vs. domestic: the career and AI divide: The 2026 data reveals a stark contrast in the priorities of international and domestic students:

- **Career focus:** Future career prospects are a major concern for 53% of international students, compared to 36% of domestic students. Crucially, international students are twice as likely to rank career prospects as their #1 top reason for stress (19% vs. 9%).
- **AI & social pressure:** International students are nearly twice as likely to be stressed by AI detection tools (14% vs. 8%) and more likely to report social pressure.
- **The domestic focus:** In contrast, domestic students are more affected by the immediate academic environment, with more reporting stress from exams (64%) and workload (63%) than their international peers (52% for both).

Top Reason for Stress	Age				
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42 – 49	50 +
Exams and assessments	29%	21%	22%	26%	28%
Academic workload	22%	26%	21%	22%	17%
Balancing study with personal life	15%	21%	29%	31%	30%
Financial concerns (e.g., tuition, living costs)	15%	14%	15%	14%	12%
Future career prospects	12%	11%	6%	4%	2%
Social pressures, making friends	5%	2%	4%	0%	3%
AI detection on my work	2%	3%	3%	2%	2%
Other	1%	2%	0%	2%	6%
N	1236	499	295	163	180





Subject-specific drivers: Financial and career anxiety.

While exams and assessments remain the dominant stressor across the general student body, specific disciplines show significant deviations:

The financial burden in nursing: Nursing students face a unique hierarchy of stress. Unlike most other cohorts, they are more likely to rank financial concerns as their #1 stressor (25%) - placing it significantly higher than even exams and assessments (17%).

- The discipline gap: This financial anxiety is more than double that of students in STEM and Psychology, where only 11% rank finances as their primary concern.

The career outlook in creative arts and professional services: The "career anxiety" noted in the 18–25 demographic is felt most acutely in the arts and vocational professional degrees:

- Creative arts: These students are the most likely to be primarily stressed by future career prospects (16%).
- Law and business: These high-stakes professional tracks follow closely, with 14% of students in each field ranking career outlook as their top source of study-related stress.

Top Reason for Stress	Area of Study									
	STEM	Medicine	Nursing	Psychology	Business	Law	ities and Social Sc	Creative Arts	Other	
Exams and assessments	30%	28%	17%	29%	25%	25%	27%	12%	28%	
Academic workload	25%	25%	16%	25%	16%	16%	24%	23%	24%	
Balancing study with personal life	17%	16%	22%	23%	21%	17%	20%	17%	24%	
Financial concerns (e.g., tuition, living costs)	11%	18%	25%	11%	13%	18%	15%	22%	14%	
Future career prospects	9%	7%	10%	8%	14%	14%	9%	16%	5%	
Social pressures, making friends	4%	3%	5%	1%	7%	6%	2%	6%	2%	
AI detection on my work	2%	3%	5%	1%	4%	2%	2%	1%	2%	
Other	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	
N	562	107	106	203	233	132	485	149	310	





Student comments on changes or improvements to enhance wellbeing.

Many students call for more proactive, accessible, and timely support and mental health services, including regular check-ins, clearer signposting, or quiet spaces for relaxation.

Students highlight the need to reduce academic pressures and want universities to acknowledge external pressures and provide flexibility.

Financial stress is also a recurring theme, and students also want more career guidance and practical workshops and opportunities to prepare for life after university.

“For wellbeing, the university could provide easier access to mental-health support and create more spaces for students to relax or socialise between classes.” Full-time, 3rd Year Undergraduate

“The workload was very heavy and we all found the final year really hard, especially on our mental health.” – Full time, recently completed student

“Expand free 24/7 mental health chat services and mandate stress-management workshops.” – Part time, international postgraduate

“They could have well-being catch-up workshops tailored to helping students manage stress of placement and workload. Group study partners for peer support in later years of the course.” – Full time, recently completed student

“Ensure big deadlines are more spread out so workload doesn't cause extreme amounts of stress.” – Full time, 2nd Year Undergraduate

“Provide more financial help, offer better support when things go wrong and check up on students who report having problems.” – Full time, current postgraduate

“Many students suffer financial hardship, more should be offered to help. And funding should be made more accessible, including telling students in specific (and so useful!) terms what help is available (...and what isn't).” - Full time, recently completed postgraduate

“Check-ins concerning future plans for careers.” - Full time, recently completed postgraduate

“More training on career prospects.” - Full-time, 2nd Year Undergraduate

“Better signposting, ensuring rigorous training of mental health professionals.” – Full time, recently completed undergraduate



ANNUAL GLOBAL STUDENT WELLBEING SURVEY

4: Employability



2026

Research
carried out by:

YouGov[®]

Reported by:

Studiosity

Why:

As majority of students seek degrees and qualifications to help guarantee a secure job post-graduation, understanding student's perceptions of their preparedness in joining the workforce is key to identify areas for improvement.

Takeouts for leadership:

- **Expand practical, career-focused services** that encourage transparency on the current job market, **investigating links with businesses** for internships, placements, and workshops to help students feel better equipped for the workforce.
- Provide guidance, facilitate discussions on how **AI is transforming the workplace**, integrating AI skills training into programs, particularly in fields where this is most concerning.
- Encourage methods of reflective, practice assessments that go beyond the grades for **students to demonstrate true understanding** of their field and skills.



Chapter 4: Employability

76%

of all students agree "My degree is helping me develop the skills I need to succeed in my future job"

47%

of all students agree "I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation"

This is compared to 51% last year.

41%

of all students agree "I'm concerned that AI will make it harder for me to get a job in my field of study"

39%

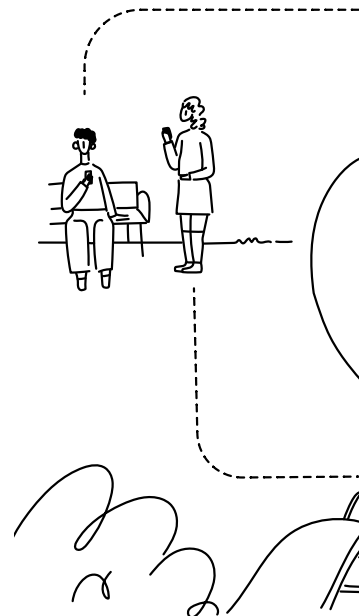
of all students agree "AI skills will be important for getting a job in my field of study"

74%

of all students agree "If I get a good grade, it means I learned the subject well"

21%

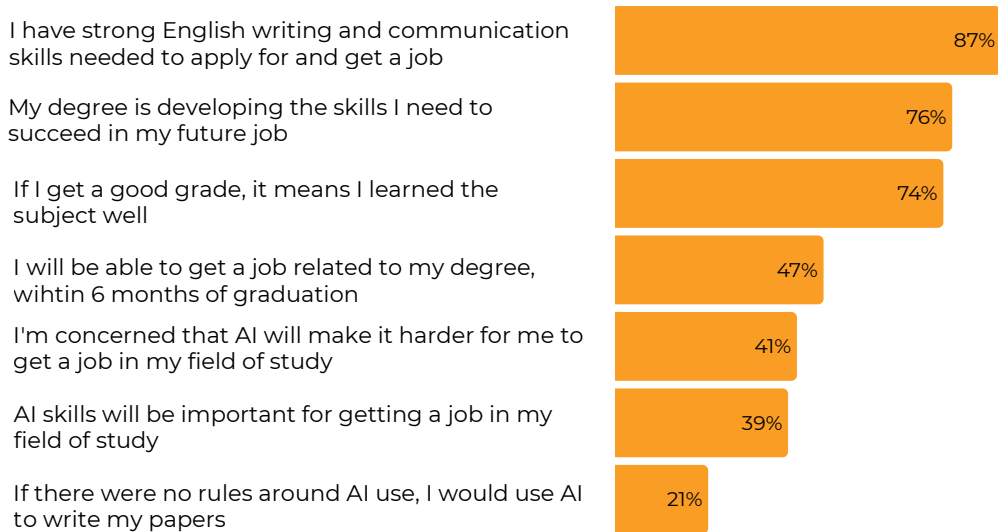
of all students agree "If there were no rules around AI use, I would use AI to write my papers"





Trends for ‘Employability’

“My degree is helping me develop the skills I need to succeed in my future job.”



Across all students surveyed, three quarters agree with the sentiment “My degree is helping me develop the skills I need to succeed in my future job”, up slightly from 74% last year. 8% disagree while 16% remain neutral.

Students aged 26-41 are more likely to net agree (82%) compared to other students, while only 28% of students aged 18-25 are in strong agreement (75% in net agreement).

Meanwhile, the higher the attainment level, the more likely students are to agree they are developing the skills needed to succeed in their future job.

Among the highest achievers (High Distinction, 85-100%), 35% ‘strongly agree’ with this sentiment, however this is down slightly from 43% in 2025.

My degree is developing the skills I need to succeed in my future job	Average grade			
	Pass (50 – 64%)	Credit (65 – 74%)	Distinction (75 – 84%)	High distinction (85 – 100%)
Net: Disagree	14%	8%	6%	6%
Neutral	17%	16%	15%	14%
Net: Agree	69%	75%	79%	80%
N	255	809	774	252





“I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation.”

High stress levels appear to dampen students' optimism about the job market. Those experiencing daily stress are nearly twice as likely to doubt they will find degree-related work within six months (11%) compared to their less stressed peers (6%).

Interestingly, there is a strong link between workload and perceived career readiness; 81% of students who are most stressed by their academic workload feel confident about their post-graduation job prospects. This suggests that while heavy workloads are a stressor, students view them as a necessary path to skill development.

In contrast, for those whose primary stress is 'future career prospects,' the anxiety seems driven by a volatile job market rather than their own abilities, as 73% still believe they are developing the necessary skills for success.

I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation	Age				
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42 – 49	50 +
Net: Disagree	25%	15%	12%	20%	21%
Neutral	33%	28%	27%	38%	40%
Net: Agree	42%	58%	61%	42%	39%
N	1236	499	295	163	180

Across all students surveyed, less than half (47%) agree with the sentiment “I will be able to get a job related to my degree, within 6 months of graduation.”- down from 51% in 2025 – with just one in five in strong agreement (19%), down from one in four last year (24%). A third (32%) are neutral, while 21% disagree.

Declining agreement is seen amongst students aged 18-25, who are less likely to agree than older students overall - as just 16% are in strong agreement (compared to 19% last year) and 42% in net agreement (compared to 46% last year). Students aged 26-33 are less likely to strongly agree with this sentiment this year compared to last (24% vs 31%).

Creative arts students are among the least likely to agree with this sentiment (24%), in comparison to medicine and nursing students who tend to be most confident (74% and 71% respectively).

Agreement tends to increase with attainment level, as 38% of 'Pass' students feel they will get a degree related job in this timeframe compared to 57% of 'High Distinction' students. Meanwhile, domestic students seem to have less confidence in this than international students (46% agree compared to 55%).





“I'm concerned that AI will make it harder for me to get a job in my field of study.”

Students seem divided on whether AI will increase the difficulty of securing a degree-related job, with 41% in agreement (including 14% who strongly agree) and 37% who disagree. Meanwhile, over a fifth (22%) remain neutral on this sentiment.

Students aged 18-25 are most concerned about AI making it harder to get a related job at 49%, in comparison to 32% of students aged over 25, suggesting the concern is over the idea that AI could automate entry-level roles, while older students may feel more confident based on their experiences or reskilling.

Nearly half (48%) of students who are stressed constantly/ daily are concerned that AI will make it harder for them to get a job in their field of study, more so compared to those who feel stress less often than daily (38%).

Interestingly, there is more of an equal divide on this viewpoint among regular users of AI tools in studies, with 41% respectively in agreement or disagreement. Meanwhile, non-users are more likely to strongly agree with this sentiment (18%) compared to users (13%).

Students studying languages and creative arts tend to be more concerned, with over half agreeing - in comparison to students studying medicine (28%) and nursing (19%) in particular, who agree.

Over four in ten students who study law, humanities and social sciences, STEM, and business are concerned that AI will make it harder for them to get a job in their field of study.

Used any AI tools to help with assignments or study tasks

I'm concerned that AI will make it harder for me to get a job in my field of study.	Used any AI tools to help with assignments or study tasks				Net: Yes	Net: Regularly/ a few times
	Yes, regularly	Yes, a few times	Yes, once or twice	Never		
Net: Disagree	41%	38%	39%	32%	39%	39%
Neutral	17%	21%	23%	23%	21%	20%
Net: Agree	41%	41%	38%	45%	40%	41%
N	491	663	515	688	1669	1154

I'm concerned that AI will make it harder for me to get a job in my field of study.

Area of study	Net: Disagree	Neutral	Net: Agree	N
Creative Arts	25%	21%	54%	149
Law	30%	23%	47%	132
Humanities and Social Sciences	30%	24%	46%	485
STEM	32%	22%	45%	562
Business	36%	21%	43%	233
Psychology	46%	15%	39%	203
Other	49%	22%	29%	310
Medicine	54%	18%	28%	107
Nursing	56%	24%	19%	106





“AI skills will be important for getting a job in my field of study”

Across all students surveyed, slightly more agree that AI skills will be important for getting a degree-related job than disagree (39% and 35% respectively), while one in four remain neutral (26%).

There may be some underestimation of how specialised AI skills will matter in their field among younger students, as although students aged 18-25 are more concerned that AI will make it harder for them to find a job, agreement that AI skills will be important for them tends to be lower (38%) in comparison to older students aged 26-41 (45%) – who may be more cognisant of the acquisition of skills to remain competitive.

Students in business (63%), STEM (55%), and law (50%) tend to be in higher agreement that AI skills will be important for getting a degree-related job, with those studying humanities and social sciences (24%) and creative arts (18%) in lowest agreement. For these latter students, as concern that AI will make it harder for them to get a degree-related job tends to be high, there may be some disconnection around relevance to their fields or lack of guidance in how their complementary skills can boost employability.

Meanwhile, while international and domestic students are similarly concerned that AI will make it harder to get a degree-related job (48% and 41%), international students are more likely to believe AI skills will be important for getting a job in their field (55%) in comparison to domestic students (37%).

AI skills will be important for getting a job in my field of study	Age				
	18 – 25	26 – 33	34 – 41	42 – 49	50 +
Net: Disagree	37%	31%	28%	31%	42%
Neutral	25%	24%	26%	33%	34%
Net: Agree	38%	45%	46%	36%	24%
N	1236	499	295	163	180

Area of study	AI skills will be important for getting a job in my field of study			N
	Net: Disagree	Neutral	Net: Agree	
Business	14%	23%	63%	233
STEM	20%	25%	55%	562
Law	31%	19%	50%	132
Medicine	41%	22%	37%	107
Other	42%	26%	33%	310
Nursing	55%	15%	30%	106
Psychology	39%	33%	28%	203
Humanities and Social Sciences	44%	32%	24%	485
Creative Arts	60%	21%	18%	149



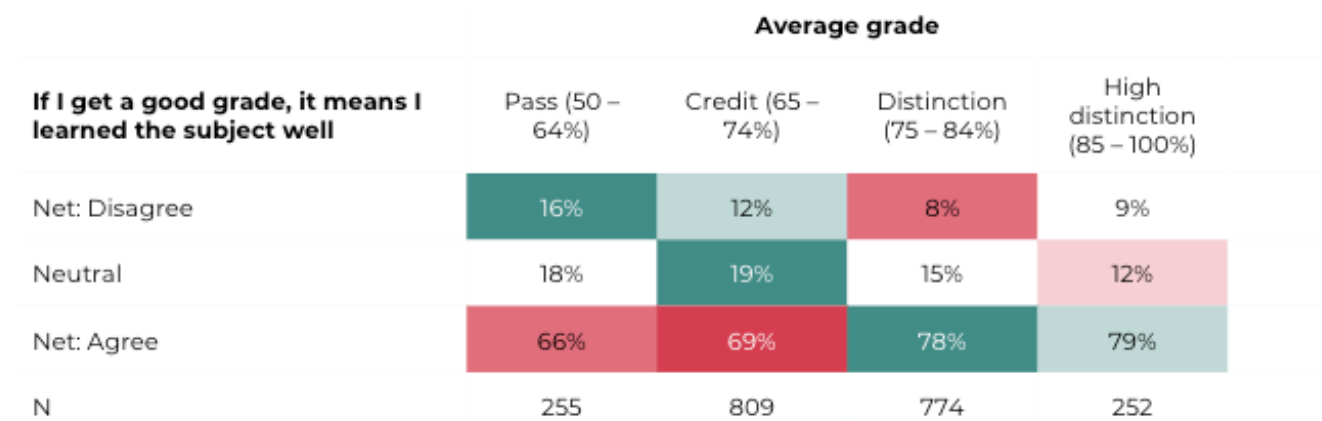
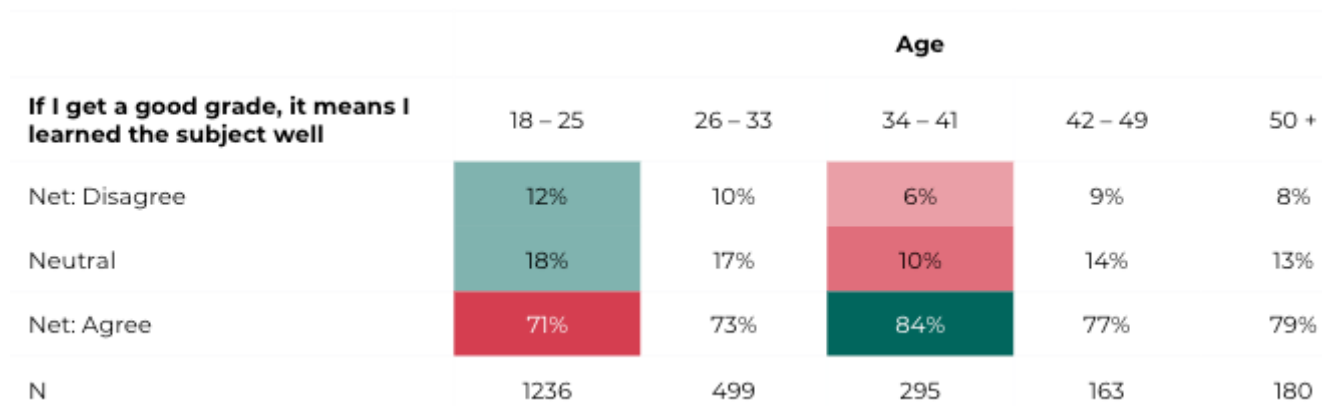


“If I get a good grade, it means I learned the subject well”

Three quarters of all students surveyed (74%) agree with the sentiment “If I get a good grade, it means I learned the subject well”, including 27% who ‘strongly agree’. While just one in ten disagree (10%) and 16% feel neutral.

There are some nuances by age when it comes to agreement, as students aged 34-41 are more likely to agree overall (84%), in comparison to younger students aged 18-33 (71% and 73% respectively).

When looking at area of study, while net agreement is a little more universal for this sentiment, students in nursing (38%) are more likely to ‘strongly agree’ that a good grade means they learned the subject well, compared to those studying humanities and social sciences (25%), psychology (24%), and creative arts (24%).



There is a direct link between academic attainment and the belief that grades reflect true subject mastery. While 66% of ‘Pass’ students equate a good grade with deep learning, this sentiment rises to nearly 80% among ‘Distinction’ and ‘High Distinction’ students.

This belief is even stronger among students who are highly confident in their ability to learn using AI. Regardless of whether they use AI for speed or support, 79% of those who feel "very" or "extremely" confident in their AI-assisted learning believe their grades reflect subject mastery - compared to 69% of those with moderate confidence. This suggests that high confidence in AI tools may reinforce the assumption that high marks equal deep understanding, potentially masking gaps in a student's actual grasp of the subject.





“If there were no rules around AI use, I would use AI to write my papers”

Only one in five students (21%) admit they would rely entirely on AI for their papers if no rules existed. In contrast, 62% of students disagree, signalling that a clear majority values academic honesty regardless of enforcement (with 17% remaining neutral).

Certain cohorts show a higher openness to total AI reliance if rules were removed:

- Age: Students aged 34–41 are the most likely to admit to this (33%), significantly higher than any other age those aged 18–25 (19%).
- Gender: Male students (28%) are nearly twice as likely as female students (16%) to rely totally on AI.
- Residency: International students show a higher inclination toward reliance (30%) compared to domestic peers (20%).

Interestingly, a student’s relationship with AI evolves as they become more familiar with the technology:

- As confidence in "learning" with AI declines, so does the desire to use it for entire papers. This suggests that more advanced students better understand AI’s limitations as a learning tool, even if they value its efficiency.
- Habitual use predicts a shift in ethics; 41% of regular users would rely totally on AI without rules, compared to just 7% of non-users. This indicates that a student’s personal "use case" and exposure to the tool are just as influential as university policy in shaping their academic integrity.

Confidence about learning as well as improving skills while using generative AI tools

If there were no rules around AI use, I would use AI to write my papers

	Not at all confident	Slightly confident	Moderately confident	Very confident	Extremely confident
Net: Disagree	67%	57%	53%	53%	45%
Neutral	15%	24%	22%	17%	18%
Net: Agree	18%	19%	25%	30%	36%
N	93	360	542	481	193





Student comments on changes or improvements for employability:

Many students express needs for more career-focused workshops, placements, and practical advice on pathways, mentioning requests for real-world learning and opportunities, internships/ placements, with some mentioning employability skills to be integrated into the curriculum.

"...they do have job fairs but these does not help international students. also providing additional qualifications by affiliating with other international bodies relevant to the degree prepares students to gain more." - Full time, postgraduate student

"Be honest about grad job struggles, we hear so much success but not enough about how tough it truly is. I have signed up to so many grad job websites to understand what is available in my area (very little)." – Full time, current undergraduate

"Collaborate with companies within our field of study so we can secure jobs after finishing the programme. And/Or organise work placements." – Full time, current undergraduate

"More career fairs, meeting potential employers, more jobs within the university itself." – Full time, recently completed Postgraduate

"More support on career development, finding jobs, build CVs, etc." – Part time, recently completed Postgraduate

"Should actively mentor students in person and help them develop key skills that are applicable in the work environment, that are required in many jobs but not taught e.g. learning bookkeeping software." – Full time, recently completed undergraduate

"Basic mandatory courses, jobs, cv, taxes etc." – Full time, current undergraduate

If I get a good grade, it means I learned the subject well

Area of study	Net: Disagree	Neutral	Net: Agree	N
Business	8%	13%	78%	233
Medicine	8%	14%	78%	107
Psychology	12%	11%	77%	203
Nursing	10%	16%	74%	106
STEM	11%	17%	72%	562
Humanities and Social Sciences	10%	18%	72%	485
Other	10%	18%	72%	310
Law	12%	17%	72%	132
Creative Arts	8%	23%	69%	149



Survey background

YouGov

YouGov is a global public opinion and data company, international market research and data analytics firm headquartered in the UK with operations in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.

Studiosity

Studiosity's AI-for-Learning is a critical component of the modern university, ensuring all students can engage in ethical generative AI to receive feedback, for successful, credible, graduate outcomes with visible learning outcomes for teachers. Universities around the world partner with Studiosity to grow student success at scale, via 24/7 formative writing feedback, discussion about core skills, and peer-to-peer connection.

Studiosity has run Student Wellbeing Surveys with UK university students since 2019. In October 2025, YouGov was commissioned by Studiosity to conduct a global wave of this research.

Objectives and methodology

Objectives

The survey investigates students' own responses to key areas of their wellbeing during study. This annual survey seeks to better understand and discuss the motivations, emotions, and demands of university students, to provide the data and findings to higher education leadership, to support initiatives and solutions. This year, the survey focused on topics such as experiences of artificial intelligence, connection to other students, stress, importance of grades, experiences of cheating, optimism for the future, and institutional belonging.

Methodology

Sample & Target Group:

Studiosity produced the questions for this survey with advice from YouGov to ensure robust data collection. YouGov gathered the responses from students in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States, Singapore, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates via an online survey.

The survey was conducted by the YouGov analysis institute. The survey ran from 17th October to 22nd November 2025 and gained 10,330 responses, with 2,373 students of UK universities (slightly higher than the UK sample size of 2,291 in 2025).

This survey was collected on the YouGov and partner panels, where each member has accepted to participate in online interviews and has received an E-mail invitation with a link to the survey. The sample definition is created in order to provide a representative cross-section of the UK population, based on the target group and the purpose of the survey.



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