



**Global  
Student  
Living**

**Market Insight Report**

# **The impact of accommodation on student wellbeing**

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**Australia & New Zealand**

November 2019



Global Student Living (GSL) is the definitive channel for professional news, information and insight into student living and lifestyle around the world.

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# Introduction

## About this study

Rising concerns around wellbeing and mental health, particularly in the higher education sector, have prompted accommodation providers to think more about how they support students not only in terms of their mental health but also their overall sense of wellbeing and how they can facilitate a positive living environment.

The Student Wellbeing matters report revealed that the student wellbeing challenge is real, but that there are significant gaps in our understanding of how accommodation is linked to student wellbeing. In 2018, we conducted a study across Europe looking at student mental health and wellbeing in purpose-built student accommodation to help us understand this link in more detail. We also wanted to see which accommodation factors specifically are connected to optimised wellbeing, and if there are any ways that accommodation providers can have a positive influence on students.

We then extended the fieldwork to include Australia and New Zealand: having teamed up with APSAA, we invited institutions and accommodation providers to take part in the initiative, in order to

discover both common factors and differences that we can take from the different countries involved.

Participating institutions and providers invited their students to complete a short online survey, sent to students in purpose-built accommodation. The survey covered the whole accommodation experience, from choosing accommodation through to future plans, as well as specific questions around wellbeing and the challenges students face.

We had a great response from the APSAA community, with over 1,500 students taking part in the study and responses coming from over 35 institutions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who collaborated with us on the study.

## What this report will and won't tell you

While the study is not nationally representative of the student population in Australia, it is largely reflective of the population in purpose-built student accommodation, with a high proportion of international students and the majority living in off-campus accommodation. In

## Background

In 2018, GSA and Red Brick Research released the **Student Wellbeing Matters report** – a comprehensive international review of the evidence around student wellbeing and the role of accommodation across the UK, Germany, Spain and Australia.

Recommendations from the Student Wellbeing Matters report led us to establish this primary research project.

The Student Wellbeing Matters report can be downloaded via the GSA website here:

<https://www.gsa-gp.com/wellbeing/>

**GSA**<sup>1</sup>  
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this report, we have looked at the general picture, but also focused on international students and domestic students separately – as well as pulling out any fundamental differences between those living in on-campus and off-campus accommodation.

As the study is based on a snapshot survey, it is limited in terms of how far we can understand what drives wellbeing itself and more importantly what causes low wellbeing, but it does touch on some characteristics and behaviours that could help identify a more vulnerable student. This study does not take into account pre-existing issues or socioeconomic factors that can predetermine mental health outcomes, but rather focuses on the specific issues that students are facing while at university and provides some context in terms of the current struggles that students face.

This study looks at the link between accommodation performance and wellness, and the impact that a positive or negative experience can have on how a student feels about their own sense of wellbeing.

As part of the survey, we also used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale© to gauge respondents' sense of

wellbeing. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale© was developed to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. The scale is widely used and has been validated for use in a large variety of geographical locations and different settings including education. Students' answers are a reliable way of classifying students into subgroups according to their general mental wellbeing. For more information on the Warwick-Edinburgh scale, please see the appendix.

This report highlights the reality of the wellbeing challenge among students, understanding the link between accommodation and wellbeing, and the impact on the overall university experience. We hope that providers and institutions will use the results from this study to initiate conversations about how to tackle the challenge, building collaboration to drive positive changes and initiatives that can help to optimise wellbeing.

*With special thanks to*



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# Key Findings

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## The student wellbeing challenge is widespread

- 95% of students are struggling at university to the extent that it is having a significant negative impact on their personal wellbeing.
- Nearly 1 in 5 students agree that they have seriously considered dropping out of university
- Current wellbeing levels for students show nearly 1 in 4 are classified as having 'low wellbeing' according to the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale®. Wellbeing varies by subgroup, with international students tending to feel more positive.
- There are some characteristics that can indicate an increased risk of low wellbeing, and behaviours associated with these risks can begin before they even step onto campus.
- On the whole, universities are meeting expectations in terms of the overall experience they are offering, but there is room for improvement. 1/3 of students are unconvinced that their university really cares about their wellbeing, and more

students agree that their accommodation team cares about their wellbeing than their university.

## The importance of accommodation choice should not be underestimated

- The process of finding accommodation is on the whole positive, but our findings reveal that there can be negative outcomes when a student doesn't get the accommodation they want or expect.
- As in the UK, student accommodation is a valuable part of the decision about where to study, and for international students the living environment is one of the biggest driving factors for studying in Australia in particular.
- A bad experience in accommodation will impact negatively on students. For those living away from home, accommodation is more important in the decision about where to study than location and extra-curricular activities.
- Getting your first-choice accommodation has a huge

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95% of students are struggling at university to the extent that it is having a significant negative impact on their personal wellbeing

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influence on the student accommodation experience, and is subsequently linked to a better perception of the overall university experience. Failing to get first choice means a student is much more likely to feel negatively about their accommodation experience. Furthermore, when it comes to the impact on wellbeing, getting your first-choice accommodation matters more than getting your first-choice university.

### The living environment really matters to student wellbeing

- Accommodation providers in Australia are arguably delivering a better experience than in the UK, with ratings for Australian operators outperforming those of the UK on a number of different accommodation factors including overall satisfaction.
- The living environment is of critical importance to student wellbeing. 85% of students report that their accommodation has had an impact on their overall sense of wellbeing. Accommodation and the living environment should be considered a vital part of any strategy,

particularly in relation to wellbeing.

- While the good condition and quality of accommodation are basic requirements, a good accommodation experience is about more than just the room and its contents, with softer measures (like the management and the moving-in experience) also influential in driving up satisfaction scores.
- There is no silver bullet when it comes to influencing wellbeing in accommodation, but some accommodation factors influence wellbeing more than others. As well as impacting on overall satisfaction levels, the moving-in experience has an impact on a student's happiness, particularly for international students.
- How a student feels in terms of their own mental wellbeing can influence how they feel about their accommodation, particularly for those with low mental wellbeing. However, there are signs that a good management team and a team that takes wellbeing seriously can have a positive impact on their accommodation experience.

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...when it comes to the impact on wellbeing, getting your first-choice accommodation matters more than getting your first choice university

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# The wellbeing challenge is widespread

## Struggles are commonplace

University is a big adjustment for many, and even though it is an expected and positive change for most, students can still struggle with the gravity of change, regardless of how prepared they feel they are for it. We asked students whether they had experienced struggles during their time at university.

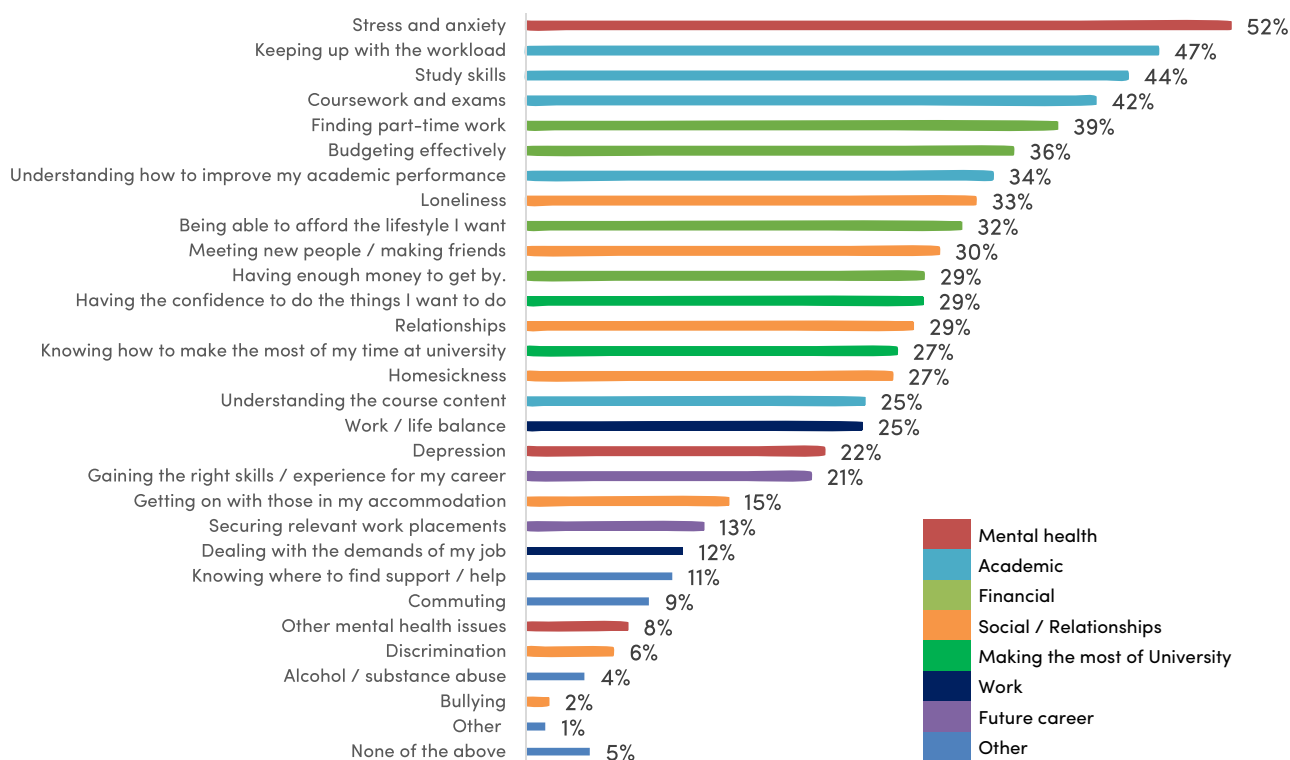
The results are alarming and reveal that the struggle for students is real, with a staggering

95% of students having struggled during their time at university to the extent that it has had a significant negative impact on their personal wellbeing.

The most common struggle is stress and anxiety with more than half (52%) saying they have suffered with this during their time at university. Students are experiencing a number of different struggles: students say they have, on average, experienced 7 struggles from a list of 27, ranging from mental

health through to academic, financial and social issues.

Mental health issues are common with more than 1 in 5 citing depression as a struggle. Stress and anxiety, while seen as a more common mental disorder and not classified in the same way as severe mental illness, is the factor most highly correlated with depression and other mental health issues among our sample. If issues are not dealt with, these can snowball into bigger, more serious mental health issues.





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In general, domestic students are more likely to admit they suffer with struggles than international students – on average, international students ticked 6.5 options from the possible 27 struggles, whereas domestic students selected 8.1. Domestic students are more likely to struggle with their workload, work-life balance, finances, having the confidence to do the things they want to do, depression / stress and anxiety, etc.

Aside from stress and anxiety, the most common struggles centre on the academic side of university life, with 'keeping up with the workload' and 'study skills' most prominent. Money worries are the next biggest issue for students, followed by the social aspect of the experience. Loneliness is a problem for 1/3 of students – meeting new people / making new friends has been a struggle for 31%, while relationships are a struggle for 28%. In particular, social worries tend to be interlinked, and those struggling to get on with others in their accommodation tend to be more likely to suffer with other issues too.

'Getting on with those in my accommodation' is more of a priority for those in on-campus accommodation, but this also

means that it becomes more of a struggle for these students, and a bigger deal for them if it isn't working out how they expected.

### Dropping out is a distinct possibility for 1 in 5

On the whole students are satisfied with their university experience, and we see some very similar statistics with how students feel about their overall experience in Australia compared to the UK.

87% are satisfied with their university experience (which is consistent with that of the UK), with only 4% saying they are dissatisfied; this suggests that universities are largely delivering on what students expect.

However, there is a risk that if the struggles students are experiencing are not dealt with properly, they can impact whether students desire to continue their studies.

### 19% agree they have seriously considered dropping out of university compared to 20% in UK

Nearly 1 in 5 students say they have considered dropping out of university. This is a worrying statistic for universities, and one

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that needs further exploration, especially as there is a clear link between a student's sense of wellbeing and their propensity to drop out. It is also important to note that the types of struggle that a student faces can influence whether they consider leaving university or not.

As you might expect, the more serious the struggle, the more likely they are to want to drop out, so those who 'strongly agree' they have considered dropping out are more likely to be suffering with depression, other mental

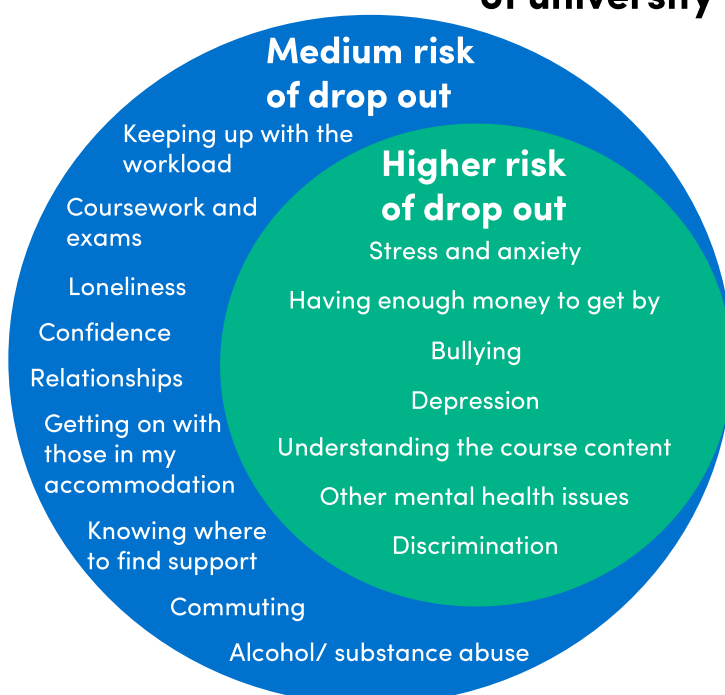
health issues, or serious financial concerns (struggling to get by), or struggling to understand the course content.

Those who 'tend to agree' they are considering dropping out are more likely to be suffering from social struggles such as relationships, getting on with those in their accommodation, loneliness, as well as stress and anxiety – issues that can at least be addressed and hopefully rectified, but could turn into something more serious if left to get worse.

### Current wellbeing levels for students are lower than benchmarks

Students who took part in the study answered the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale. Australian students show slightly higher mental wellbeing scores than their UK counterparts, but worryingly, wellbeing scores show nearly 1 in 4 of our Australian sample falls into what the UK National Health Service would classify as the 'low wellbeing' category (see

## Common struggles for those 'seriously considering dropping out of university'



Higher risk struggles are those most commonly experienced by students who are very seriously considering dropping out of university.

There are a number of 'medium risk' struggles, which if not dealt with could develop into more serious struggles, meaning they become more at risk of dropping out of university.

appendix for details on the scale and classification). For students in both our UK and ANZ studies, the average wellbeing score is lower than the average for the UK total population and suggests that students in particular are a more vulnerable subgroup. Understanding how operators and institutions can help to limit low wellbeing should be a priority.

### Wellbeing is higher among international students

Interestingly, international students (especially Chinese and Indian students ) tend to have higher wellbeing scores than domestic students, regardless of living situation (off-campus or on-campus). We see more Chinese and Indian students being classified in the 'High' wellbeing category too, in both the UK and Australia.

It is also interesting to note that wellbeing scores for Australian students in the UK are higher (51.68) than those who are studying at home (46.26 ). International students are also less likely to have considered dropping out, and there is an argument that they have benefitted from taking more time to explore the options and decide where they want to go.

## Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scores

The 14-item scale has 5 response categories, summed to provide a single score. The items are all worded positively and cover both feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing, thereby making the concept more accessible.<sup>1</sup>

	TOTAL ANZ	TOTAL UK	UK NHS HEALTH SURVEY 2016 <sup>2</sup>
Mean Warwick Edinburgh Scale Score	47.43	46.77	49.9

Wellbeing Classification	TOTAL ANZ	INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	DOMESTIC STUDENTS
High (Score 59+)	11%	13%	6%
Ok (45-58)	52%	51%	53%
Quite Low (41-44)	15%	14%	16%
Low (40 and below)	23%	22%	24%

<sup>1</sup> Prof Sarah Stewart-Brown <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/health-survey-for-england-2016>

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Those students who are more likely to identify as having lower levels of wellbeing (score of 40 or below) include:

- Younger students, especially those who are first year UG students
- Students that have a disability
- Domestic students from Australia or New Zealand
- Female students
- Students more likely to consider dropping out
- Students more likely to have experienced struggles – mental health issues and stress and anxiety in particular

### There are some characteristics that indicate low wellbeing

There are certain characteristics and behaviours that could indicate low wellbeing and providers should be on the lookout for these. If a student's purpose (their motivations for being at university) or needs are not being fulfilled during their time at university, or if their purpose is unclear, then this can potentially have a detrimental

impact on how they feel about their whole university experience and how they feel in themselves.

Our analysis shows that those with lower levels of wellbeing are less engaged with the whole decision-making process in terms of where to study and live, are less clear on why they are there, or feel they have been forced into the decision. They also lack confidence and are less likely to know how to make the most of their time.

Those with low wellbeing are also more likely:

- To be struggling, especially with the basics of university life like study skills, keeping up with the work, and making friends.
- To not know where to find the right support

Conversely those with 'high' wellbeing (score 59+ on WE scale) are more likely to value the social element of the experience – they find it much easier to build relationships with others and make the most of social opportunities available. Consequently, they have found the process much easier and have had a more positive accommodation experience so far because they have developed



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stronger relationships with the resident team and other students in their accommodation, resulting in a stronger sense of community. Those with low wellbeing can struggle with this element of the experience, and operators need to take a proactive approach to relationship and community building.

### Universities are meeting expectations but could do more to show they care...

While the majority are largely content with their overall university experience, a much lower proportion agree that their university cares about their wellbeing.

Nearly two-thirds of students (in both Australia and the UK) feel their university cares about their wellbeing, meaning that more than a third of students either actively disagree with this statement or are indifferent to it. For some students, their lack of agreement may be because they are unaware of the support the university offers, or because they are happy to support their own wellbeing and don't see it as a priority for the university. However, the proportion who agree that their accommodation team cares about their wellbeing is significantly higher (69%) than

the proportion who think their university cares (65%). For those who have low wellbeing, fewer than half agree that their university cares, meaning they are more at risk of feeling isolated and unsupported. These findings suggest that more could be done by universities to help vulnerable students, and that they need to find ways of identifying and engaging with these students better – and earlier.

# The importance of accommodation choice

The process of finding accommodation is broadly positive, but we cannot underestimate the importance of this part of a student's journey...

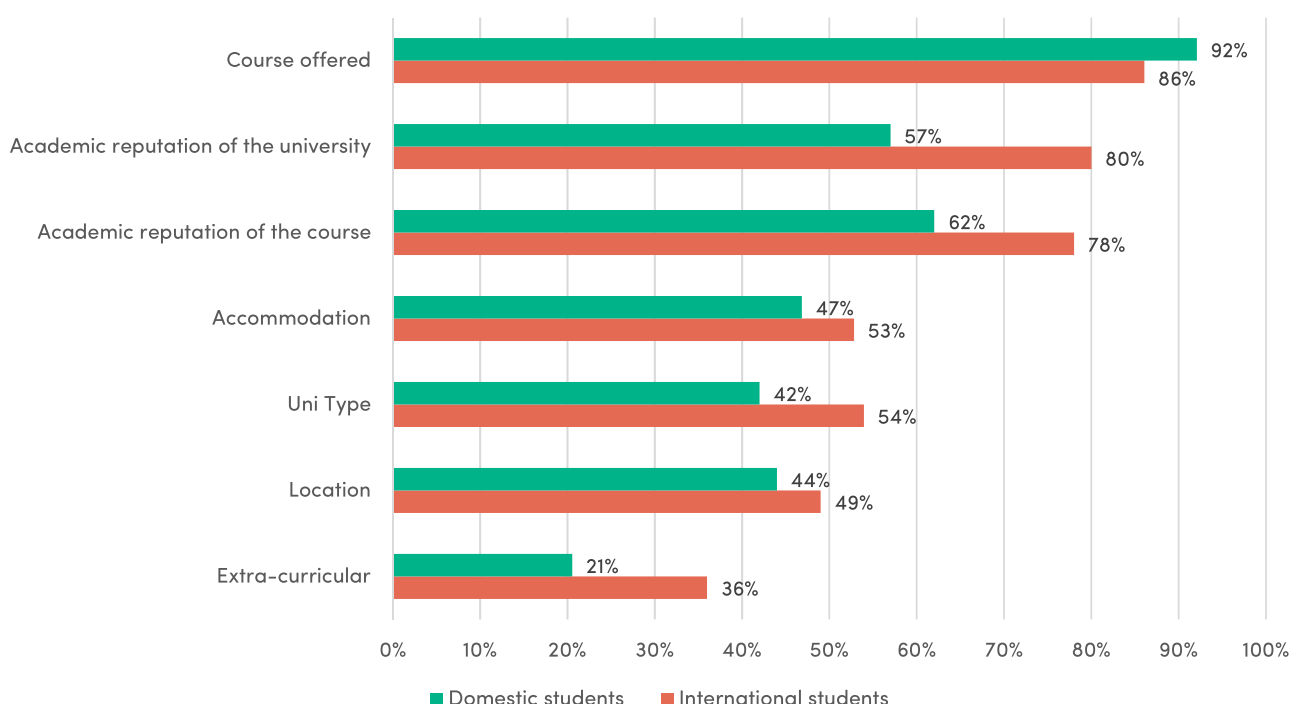
It is a valuable part of the decision about where to study in the first place

We asked students (all of whom have chosen to live away from home) to tell us the importance of

a number of factors when thinking about how they choose where to study; as you would expect, factors relating to the course and university reputation are of prime importance.

Accommodation is also an influential factor in the decision. In fact, as in the UK and Ireland, accommodation is more important in the decision about where to study than the specific location of the university and the extra-curricular activities on offer. This is especially true of

## Importance of factors in decision about where to study - 'Very important' by international and domestic students



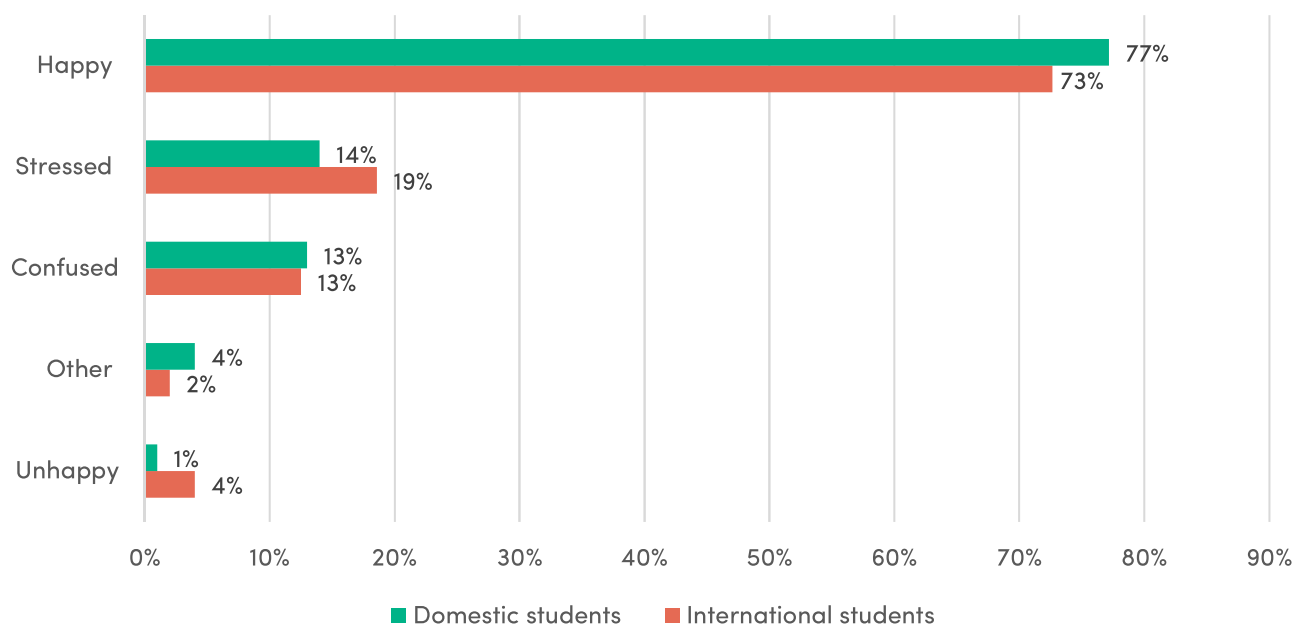
those who have chosen to live in on-campus accommodation, where it is also seen as more important than the type of university.

On the whole, international students rate almost all factors in their decision as more important compared to domestic students, suggesting they may be more strongly invested in the decisions they make, and arguably may have taken more time researching the different accommodation options that are available.

### The process of finding accommodation is harder for international students

The process of finding accommodation is, on the whole, a positive one. The majority feel happy with the process (74%), and this is particularly true of those who are in on-campus accommodation. Those in off-campus accommodation, particularly international students, are more likely to say they have felt stressed by it.

### How did you feel about the process of finding your accommodation? domestic vs. International Students.



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### Students have numerous priorities for their accommodation – these differ by subgroup

Students were asked to tell us the factors that were most important to them when searching for student accommodation. This is a good indicator of the accommodation factors that could potentially influence a student's sense of wellbeing in their accommodation.

For example, if security is a priority (as it is for international students) and the security in their accommodation is not as expected, then students may feel unsafe: this could potentially have a negative impact on their sense of wellbeing, particularly if lack of security causes an issue or incident.

It is important to note that priorities when searching for accommodation differ depending on the type of student, and there are distinct differences between international and domestic students and those choosing on- and off-campus accommodation.

Although price remains the dominant factor across most subgroups, international students cite 'safety and security' as the most important factor (price

comes second). This is unsurprising, considering one of the key motivations for international students to study in Australia is the 'safe' environment.

Safety and security is also more of a priority for those in off-campus accommodation, regardless of whether they are domestic or international. International and off-campus students are also more focused on the physical aspects of the accommodation, such as the visual appeal, condition and quality and international students in off-campus accommodation are also more likely to prioritise their own space.

Domestic students are motivated by convenience and location-based aspects, like travel time to study and amenities, which are high priorities compared to international students.

Domestic students are also more likely to prioritise the social aspects of the experience, so opportunities for social interaction are more important to them.

Interestingly, the type of accommodation can also indicate the level of support needed, so those who choose on-campus accommodation tend to cite

student care and support as more important than those who choose off-campus. This is interesting when institutions are thinking about the levels of support required in their accommodation.



### Top Search criteria split by International / Domestic and Accommodation type

	INTERNATIONAL	DOMESTIC	ON-CAMPUS	OFF-CAMPUS
1	Safety and security*	Price*	Price*	1 = Price
2	Price	Travel time to study*	Travel time to study	1= Condition and quality*
3	Condition and quality*	Wi-Fi	3 = Safety and security	Safety and security*
4	Wi-Fi	Condition and quality	3 = Wi-Fi	Wi-Fi
5	Travel time to study	Safety / security	Condition and quality	Travel time to study
6	Bedroom space*	Travel time amenities*	Travel time to amenities	Bedroom space*
7	Range quality of amenities	Range / quality of amenities	Study space	7 = Range / qual of amenities*
8	Travel to amenities	Opportunities for social*	Bedroom space	7 = Travel time to amenities
9	Study space	Bedroom space	Range quality of amenities	En-suite*
10	En-suite*	Study space	Opportunities for social*/ student care*	Study space

*\*Indicates that students in this subgroup are significantly more likely to prioritise this factor when searching for their accommodation.*

## Accommodation choice can dictate how students feel later on

Early experiences in accommodation can directly influence how a student feels about their whole university experience: more importantly, this can impact on their sense of wellbeing.

Whether a student gets into their first-choice university or not matters when it comes to how they feel about their university experience and their general wellbeing. Furthermore, for those who don't get their first-choice

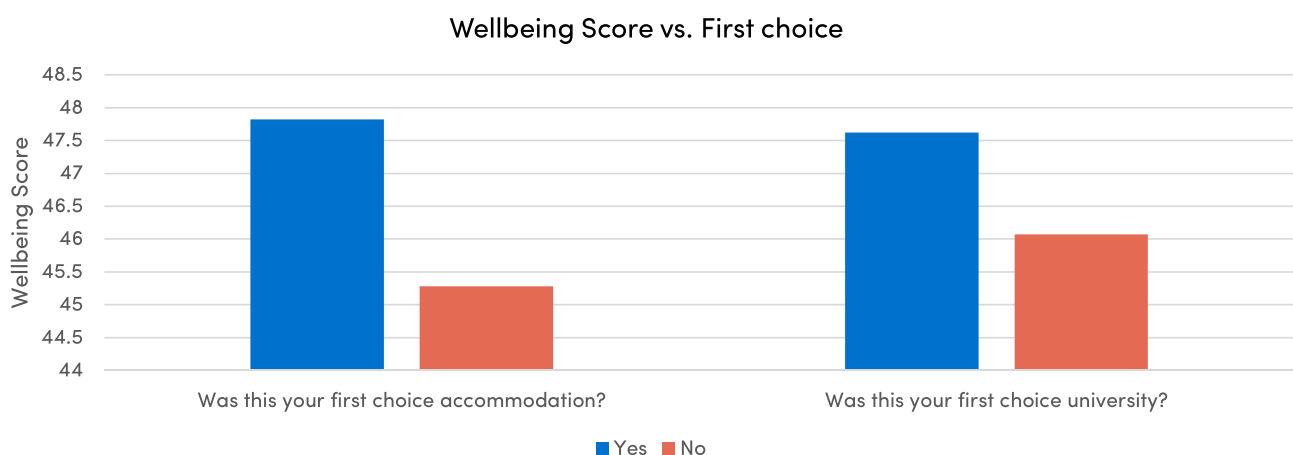
university, it is more likely that they won't get their first-choice accommodation either.

While the majority of students got their first-choice university (88%) and accommodation (84%), it is important for institutions to bear in mind how influential this part of the process can be for a student: those who get their first-choice accommodation have a higher wellbeing score than those who don't. Wellbeing scores are impacted more by getting one's first-choice accommodation than getting into their first-choice university, so getting first-choice accommodation is arguably more important to student wellbeing

than getting into to their first-choice university - especially as more students get their first-choice university than their first-choice accommodation.

As we discuss later on in the report, getting the first part right in terms of the application process, information they receive, and moving-in experience are all vital. Understanding how this part of the process can be improved is certainly going to be beneficial for providers, not just in the short-term but in the longer term for students' wellbeing.

## Wellbeing score versus first choice accommodation / university





# The living environment really matters

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## Accommodation providers are arguably delivering a better experience than in the UK

Students are generally content in their living environment with 78% rating their accommodation as 'Very good' or 'good'; international students in both the UK and Australia tend to rate their accommodation even more positively.

Australian operators in particular are doing something right and when we look at how the findings from Australia compare to the UK, there are some defining factors that set them apart.

## Australia compared to the UK:

- Higher satisfaction with accommodation overall (70% in UK and figures are higher when looking at both international (79%) and domestic students (75%))
- Higher proportion agree their accommodation team cares about their wellbeing (65% vs 57%)
- Higher sense of community (55% ANZ vs. 41% UK) and tend to get on better with flatmates. On the whole,

there are low levels of conflict, with only 4% saying some / all of their housemates don't get on at all, whereas in the UK it is 10% who say some / all of their flatmates don't get on at all

- Higher positive impact from accommodation on wellbeing (71% ANZ vs 56% UK)

Interestingly, it is the social elements of the experience that tend to set Australia apart from the UK, with more of a community feel to accommodation, as well as a better relationship with management teams.

## Accommodation providers have a role to play in student wellbeing

Students agree that their accommodation is having some form of impact on their wellbeing and there is a clear link between their accommodation experience, how they feel about their university as a whole and, more importantly, their overall sense of wellbeing.

While their experience is generally good, the struggles and low levels of wellbeing identified in this research, show that operators could be doing more to optimise wellbeing.



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We asked students, on a scale, what impact their accommodation was having on their overall sense of wellbeing.

71% say their accommodation has had a positive impact on their sense of wellbeing.

This is much higher than the UK (56%) and is consistently higher across both domestic and international students, especially those in off-campus accommodation. International students tend to say their accommodation has had much more of a positive impact on their wellbeing compared to domestic students (whether in the UK or ANZ).

There is also a clear link between propensity to drop out and satisfaction with accommodation. Those who strongly agree that they have considered dropping out are 7 times more likely to rate their accommodation as 'very bad'.

There is evidence that those who have a negative experience in their accommodation are also more likely to rate their university experience negatively (33% vs 4%).

Although this is based on a small sample of people having negative experiences, this finding

aligns with figures from a much larger sample in the UK where those with negative experiences of accommodation were 10 times more likely to rate their whole university experience negatively.

### A good accommodation experience is more than just the room and its contents

Students want high quality, modern accommodation, and detailed analysis reveals the key drivers of overall satisfaction with accommodation are as follows:

- Condition and quality
- Value for money
- Management
- Moving in experience
- Noise levels
- Bed comfort / bedroom space

The key drivers identified are largely similar to the UK and suggests that there is a place for accommodation providers internationally to learn from each other as a result of serving students with similar needs.

They also confirm that it is about more than just the room and its contents, with softer factors like the moving in experience, noise

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levels and the management team influencing satisfaction levels.

Those who say their accommodation is having a 'very positive' impact on their sense of wellbeing are more likely to have prioritised the following in their search for accommodation: condition and quality; communal areas; opportunities for social interaction; safety and security; student care and support; visual appeal; sporting facilities; and resident life programmes. This shows that students understand the importance of the 'soft factors'.

### There is no silver bullet, but some accommodation factors influence wellbeing more than others

There isn't a complete list of factors contributing to wellbeing in accommodation – it is very much subjective, and dependent on numerous different factors including a student's existing mental health and wellbeing levels. However, certain factors contribute more to wellbeing than others, and these vary depending on the type of student.

For all student subgroups, having 'a residence team who takes their wellbeing seriously' and being 'close to amenities' has a positive

impact on students' wellbeing.

For domestic students, social elements such as 'relationships with others' and 'community feel' also have a positive impact; for international students, the moving-in experience and overall management influence the impact that accommodation has on their wellbeing.

Interestingly, the moving-in experience is also a predictor of satisfaction – especially for international students – and something that accommodation providers should be prioritising, as this can dictate not only how happy a student feels in their accommodation, but also their whole university experience and their wellbeing.

The biggest drivers of satisfaction with the moving-in experience are the arrival instructions, cleanliness, and check-in information: these are particularly important for international students. Providing accurate and sufficient information, therefore ensuring students know what to expect, is vital.

Those who have a negative moving-in experience often go on to struggle with other aspects of the experience, as it can inhibit their ability to make close relationships. We also tend to find

that the types of students who struggle with this first step are those who need more support anyway, so identifying these students earlier and offering the right support to help them settle into their accommodation is critical to giving them the best possible start.

### A strong management team can boost the experience for those with low personal wellbeing

How a student feels generally in terms of their personal wellbeing is a contributing factor to how

they feel about their accommodation, especially if they have low wellbeing.

For example, if you are classified as having low wellbeing, you are much more likely to say your accommodation is having a negative impact on your overall sense of wellbeing.

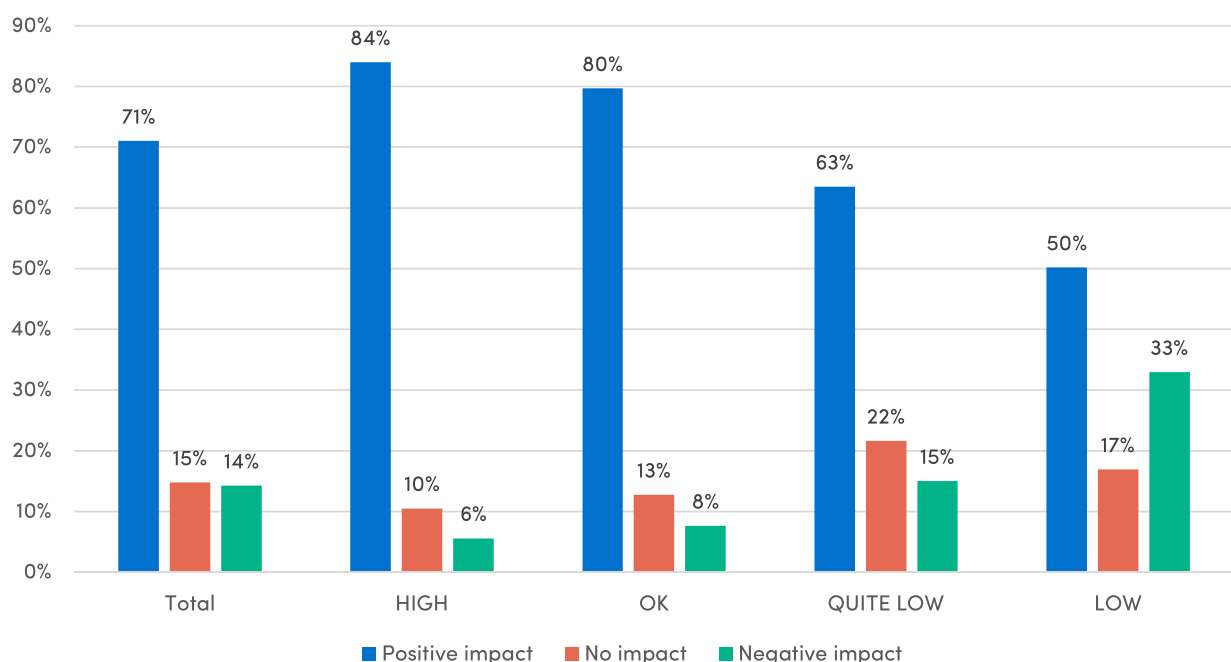
In fact, 52% of those saying that their accommodation is having a negative impact fall into the low wellbeing category – compared to just 23% of the total sample.

However, the opposite is not true. Those with high wellbeing are no

more likely to say their accommodation is having a positive impact than those with an OK wellbeing score, especially compared to those with quite low and low wellbeing scores.

It is much more likely for a student to feel their accommodation is having a negative impact on their wellbeing if they are already struggling with other elements of the university experience, or other mental health issues, and so a negative experience for someone with low wellbeing could be particularly harmful.

## Positive impact on accommodation by wellbeing classification



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Furthermore, someone who is classified as having low wellbeing will rate their accommodation lower across nearly all accommodation features, regardless of whether they think their accommodation is having a positive or negative impact on them. There is only one exception to this, and that is ratings for management: positive management ratings are correlated with accommodation having a positive impact, regardless of current wellbeing levels.

There are signs to suggest that a strong management team can act as an additional support to students if they are struggling with the social experience.

Those who strongly agree that their accommodation team are taking their wellbeing seriously, thinking of ways to improve the wellbeing of their students, and ultimately that they care about their wellbeing are less likely to be struggling with loneliness, relationships and meeting new people.



# Conclusion

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This report highlights that the student wellbeing challenge is not just a reality, but a widespread issue: students are struggling on a large scale. The sector needs to realise the wellbeing challenge that lies ahead, and collaborate to understand how best to tackle it.

Students need to understand that what they are experiencing is normal, but at the same time realise that these struggles should not simply be dismissed as a necessary part of university life. Universities and providers should be working together to understand ways to tackle anxiety and stress in particular, and to identify better coping mechanisms for students in order to prevent issues snowballing further.

We have also revealed the importance of the whole process from making the decision about where you study and live, to the level of information you receive about your accommodation, the moving-in experience, and then the accommodation experience itself.

Universities should try to encourage prospective students to really think about their accommodation choices and offer guidance where possible.

We have identified that there is no silver bullet and that accommodation providers have a challenging job ahead, but there are some simple things they can do to help promote optimised wellbeing while students are in their accommodation.

Engaging with students as early as possible in the process, particularly first years, can be of huge benefit. Being able to identify those who are more at risk – that is, the types of students who struggle with this first step, and who arguably need more support – earlier on is one option. Identifying these students from the start and offering the right support to help them settle into their accommodation is vital to giving them the best possible start.

As well as providing good quality accommodation, providers should be ensuring a smooth application, booking, and moving-in experience.

They should also be looking for ways to make processes more efficient, such as automating where possible in order to free up time for staff to interact with students.

We have established the value of a reliable but also caring management team – those who

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are going that extra mile and can have a positive influence on their students.

Finally, this report has identified a wealth of information about student wellbeing in accommodation, but there is no simple solution and we don't yet have all the answers.

There is arguably further research that can be done to understand more about the topics highlighted throughout this report, but we hope that this will act as a starting point for providers and institutions to make wellbeing a priority.

# Appendix

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## Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale©

We asked students to answer the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale© in the survey. The question was developed as a way of easily measuring wellbeing among the general population in the UK, and is widely used by organisations such as the NHS .

Respondents answer a set of statements about their feelings and thoughts, and a score is calculated based on their answers. Scores can then be classified into levels of wellbeing.

- The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.
- WEMWBS is a 14-item scale with 5 response categories, added to provide a single score ranging from 14-70. The items are all worded positively and cover both feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing.
- The questions are a set of statements about feelings and thoughts and ask people to tick on a scale how often they have experienced these feelings in the last 2 weeks.
- The scale has been translated into over 25 different languages and is used in large population surveys internationally, including those carried out by the National Health Service in the UK. The scale has over 1,200 registrations each year, and is included in over 200 publications annually. <sup>3</sup>
- We used the same classification that NHS UK use to identify low and high levels of wellbeing with a score of 40 or less being classed as 'Low wellbeing', a score of 41-44 as 'quite low', a score of 45-58 as 'OK' and a score of 59+ as 'High wellbeing'.

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3 <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

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### Sample profile:

We teamed up with APSAA and invited institutions and accommodation providers to collaborate with us on the study with participating institutions and providers inviting their students to take part. We surveyed 1,518 students in higher education studying in Australia or New Zealand and living in purpose built student accommodation.

Gender	Total Sample
Male	36%
Female	63%
In another way	1%

Age	Total Sample
18-21	58%
22-25	29%
25-29	8%
30+	5%

Stage of study	Total Sample
UG 1st year	24%
UG Intermediate	36%
UG Final Year	12%
PG Coursework / taught	20%
PG Research	2%
Other	6%

Nationality	Total Sample
<b>International</b>	<b>64%</b>
Chinese	23%
Indonesian	5%
Singapore	4%
Malaysia	4%
India	3%
Hong Kong	3%
Other	22%
<b>Domestic</b>	<b>36%</b>
Australia	32%
New Zealand	4%

Accommodation Type	Total Sample
Private Accommodation	67%
University Accommodation	33%

On-campus vs. Off-campus	Total Sample
On-campus accommodation	38%
Off-campus accommodation	62%





# Notes

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