

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

AT A GLANCE:
THE 2017 UNIVERSITIES
AUSTRALIA STUDENT
FINANCES SURVEY



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The *2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey* finds that while there has been slight improvement in university students' financial circumstances overall since 2012, a significant proportion of students continue to experience serious financial difficulties.

One-third of university students have estimated expenses that are greater than their income.

Some groups of students (low SES, Indigenous and regional students) are more likely to experience financial hardship.

Any slight improvement in students' finances is not because students are earning more, but because they are spending less.

SOME STUDENTS CANNOT AFFORD TO EAT

- Fifteen per cent of students — around one in seven — regularly go without food or necessities because they can't afford them.
- This rises to 18 per cent for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and 19 per cent for regional students – that's almost one in five.
- More than one in four Indigenous students regularly go without food or necessities.

STUDENTS' FINANCIAL CONCERNS

- Most students (58 per cent) are worried about their financial situation.
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely (63 per cent) to be worried about their finances, as are regional students (64 per cent).
- Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of Indigenous students are worried about their finances.
- Only 38 per cent of students feel they are in control of their financial situation. This falls to 35 per cent of low SES students and only 27 per cent of Indigenous students.
- One in ten (10 per cent) of students deferred their studies because they could not afford to continue, while one-fifth (20 per cent) reduced their course load for financial reasons.

INCOME AND SPENDING

- Median annual income for full-time domestic undergraduate students is \$18,300, while their median spending is \$14,200.
- One-third of students have expenses exceeding their income.
- This figure is slightly higher for low SES (37 per cent) and regional (38 per cent) students.

WORK

- More than four in five students (82 per cent) are in paid work.
- The share of students working more than 20 hours has grown. Nearly a third (30 per cent) of full-time students work more than 20 hours a week and more than 10 per cent work more than 30 hours. Only 35 per cent of students who work believe their work/study balance is satisfactory.
- More than one quarter of full-time students regularly miss classes because they have to work. Two in five (41 per cent) report that work has a negative impact on study.
- Thirty-six per cent of part-time students regularly miss classes to work and 52 per cent report that work has a negative impact on their studies.
- Around 39 per cent of students say that their work has little value to them apart from the money.

INCOME SUPPORT

- A third of students receive student income support.
- 42 per cent of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and 45 per cent of regional students receive student income support.
- Nearly half (49 per cent) of Indigenous students receive student income support.

“Multiple times I have thought of deferring because it was financially becoming too hard. Services available are just not accessible and fitting work and university together, whilst maintaining even above average mental health is near impossible...”

(Australian full-time undergraduate student)

“I work [as] much as I can to earn money so they [parents] do not have to pay for me but with full-time study my marks definitely reflects this.”

(Australian full-time undergraduate student)

“My financial situation is bad. If anything changes even a little, I would have to drop out of university and would most likely not be able to afford rent. Not sure what would happen.”

(Australian full-time undergraduate student)

The findings in the above section refer to domestic undergraduate students, unless otherwise specified.



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INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Indigenous students remain financially far worse-off than non-Indigenous students.

Seven out of ten Indigenous students worry about their financial circumstances (71 per cent).

More than a quarter (27 per cent) of Indigenous students regularly go without food or other necessities because they cannot afford them.

“... I now often eat meals at university, rely on friends to bring food over or pay for the ingredients so I can cook for them. I don't eat much anymore ...”

(Full-time Indigenous undergraduate student)

“I think the [HELP] loans which are repaid after you start earning a certain amount should continue. Without them many younger people will miss out on the opportunity to have a higher education.”

(Part-time Indigenous undergraduate student)

KEY FINDINGS

- Indigenous students are, on average, older and more likely to be supporting dependents—31 per cent compared to 18 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- This helps to explain why the median expenditure for Indigenous students is \$23,900, higher than a median expenditure of \$18,900 for non-Indigenous students.
- Two in five (42 per cent) Indigenous students have income that doesn't cover their expenditure.
- Indigenous students are less likely to receive financial support from family or a partner than non-Indigenous students — 36 per cent compared to more than 54 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- Only four in ten (42 per cent) Indigenous students reported having savings for use in serious financial difficulty, compared to six in ten for non-Indigenous students (62 per cent).
- Almost one-third of Indigenous undergraduates (33 per cent) and Indigenous postgraduates (31 per cent) have regularly missed classes to attend paid employment.
- One in two Indigenous undergraduates (48 per cent) and Indigenous postgraduates (57 per cent) indicated their work commitments adversely affect their university performance.
- Around 16 per cent of Indigenous students deferred their studies because they could not afford to continue and 28 per cent had to reduce their course load for financial reasons.



LOW SES STUDENTS

Undergraduate students from poorer backgrounds are more likely to experience financial hardship than their classmates from wealthier backgrounds.

More than six out of ten students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds worry about their financial circumstances (63 per cent), compared to 56 per cent for students from wealthier backgrounds.

More than 18 per cent of low SES students — around one in five — regularly go without food or other necessities.

KEY FINDINGS

- Full-time low SES students earn around the same as students from wealthier backgrounds, but their expenditure is 20 per cent higher.
- This is in part because low SES students are more likely to be financially supporting dependants (16 per cent) than students from wealthier backgrounds (11 per cent).
- Low SES students are also less likely to receive financial support from family or partner (52 per cent) than students from wealthier backgrounds (60 per cent).
- Low SES students are less likely to have savings for use in serious financial difficulties — 55 per cent compared to 63 per cent for students from wealthier backgrounds.
- Low SES students are more likely (23 per cent) to have reduced their course load for financial reasons compared to 18 per cent of students from wealthier backgrounds.

REGIONAL STUDENTS

More than six in ten regional students are worried about their financial circumstances (64 per cent), compared to 55 per cent for students from major cities.

Almost 19 per cent of regional students regularly go without food or other necessities. This is higher than students from major cities (13 per cent).

KEY FINDINGS

- The median income for regional students (\$23,300) is higher than students from major cities (\$19,200). But their expenditure is also 45 per cent higher, due to higher living expenses, such as accommodation costs.
- Almost four in ten regional undergraduate students (38 per cent) have expenses exceeding their estimated income.
- Regional students are less likely to receive financial support from family or partner than students from major cities — 48 per cent compared to 63 per cent.
- For financial reasons, 13 per cent of regional students deferred their studies and 22 per cent have to reduce their course load. This is higher than students from major cities who deferred (7 per cent) or reduced their course loads (18 per cent) for financial reasons.



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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Nearly 50 per cent of international undergraduate students are worried about their financial situation, compared to almost 60 per cent for full-time domestic undergraduate students.

Some 14 per cent regularly go without food or other necessities. This is consistent with the situation of local students.

KEY FINDINGS

- The estimated annual income of \$19,200 for international students is slightly higher than domestic students (\$18,300). But their expenses are also higher.
- Almost one in two (49 per cent) international students have expenses greater than their estimated income, compared to some 34 per cent for full-time domestic students.
- Nearly nine in ten international undergraduate students receive financial support from their family or partners, compared to 62 per cent for domestic undergraduates.
- International students who work do a median of 15 hours a week, compared to 12 hours a week for domestic full-time students.
- Around half (54 per cent) of international students have some savings that they can draw on in case of serious financial difficulties, with 38 per cent of these students reporting that they have had to use savings in 2017.
- International undergraduates were more likely than full-time domestic undergraduates to report assets under \$10,000 — 74 per cent compared to 58 per cent for domestic students.

“To make my way to this study, I actually have limited myself a lot, in terms of living standard, since I am on my family’s support... I am worried about my diet because I’ve been eating poorly. However, that’s the only expense I can cut down flexibly and easily, compared to public transport or textbook costs...”

(International undergraduate student)

“I am an international student with a scholarship funding by the Australian Government through DFAT. Hence, I understand and appreciate that my circumstance is actually much better than a majority of other students who are struggling to make ends meet, working many jobs while also studying. I believe that my financial situation is adequate and stable to see me through to the end of my studies.”

(International postgraduate coursework student)

ABOUT THE 2017 UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA STUDENT FINANCES SURVEY

The *2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey* gathers data about the financial situation of students at Australian universities.

More than 18,500 students from 38 Universities Australia member universities participated in this survey.

The 2017 survey follows earlier studies in 2012 and 2006.

Universities Australia undertakes this study at regular intervals to provide our members, Government and the public with a better understanding of students' financial circumstances.

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