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THE SU

Let's Talk Buses



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Let's Talk Buses

The findings



**51% of respondents wellbeing
has been impacted by the
removal of bundle tickets**



**69% of respondents
were using the student
bundle tickets**



**66% of respondents
use the bus everyday
to travel to campus**



**Students are concered about
the financial impacts this will
have on them**

Summary (TL;DR)

To gain further insight to the student experience using the bus system and wider public transport network (focusing on the removal of student bundle bus tickets), we launched a feedback form in September 2025 to understand the impact of travel on our students. We received a total of 245 responses and after data cleaning, 220 responses were analysed (56% Falmouth University; 44% University of Exeter) and it has highlighted the significant financial barriers that students are facing as well as the reliance of the student bundle bus tickets - the removal of which has had impact to student wellbeing.

What is the data saying?

- 66% of respondents use the bus everyday to travel to campus;
- 69% of respondents were using the student bundle tickets;
- 91% of respondents have been impacted by the removal of the bundles (with 51% of all respondents having impacts to their wellbeing as a result).

What are the students saying?

“With rent prices in Falmouth increasing for students, paying to get the bus everyday has become an extreme struggle. Many people including myself simply cannot afford it. I paid £220 for a year pass last year. This year the best bundle I can get is the £20 for a week - Which is extremely expensive when you put it into perspective that I'm at uni every day. The extortionately inflated bus prices (particularly over the last 2 years), is frankly offensive.”

“The extortionate bus ticket pricing is now becoming comparable with the expensive car parking situation. This does not align with the aim of campus to be more environmentally friendly.”

“I used the bundle ticket in the last term of the most recent academic year and it was a godsend because before I was spending up to £100 a month on transport because I had to get week tickets because I lived in town so I had to commute to my campus and I also had to travel up on weekends or multiple times in a single day to take part in societies, because of the cost I had to cut back elsewhere like my weekly food budget which meant eating a lot of food with poor nutritional value to the point where my blood work showed I was Iron and B12 deficient because of the food I had to eat during this time. And I am already cautious of money, I don't drink alcohol so it wasn't like I had to account for nights out or anything, most of my money went to travel last year and it wasn't a nice way to live. Whereas the upfront cost for unlimited travel was really useful”

“As an international student, I rely heavily on buses for attending classes, club activities, food shopping, and traveling around Cornwall. Not having a student bus pass is a real struggle. Last year, we paid around £290 for an annual student pass, but now the cost would be over £760 if I used the bus daily. This has a big impact on me as I cannot miss classes due to the conditions of my student visa, and walking long distances affects my health. Paying more than £760 a year for buses is simply not worth it, especially since it's more than three times last year's cost. I'm honestly still shocked that there is no student pass available, considering how many students in this town rely on buses every day.”

“I have a job and get a higher loan than a lot of people, however due to housing and rent prices, around 85-90% of my money goes towards that and I often have to go into overdraft just to get a bus. I also don't smoke, I don't partake in drugs and I barely drink alcohol so my spending habits are very minimal and yet due to the high cost of living in Cornwall it's still hard to be able to get by.”

What does this mean?

Students are being forced to make decisions between prioritising being able to purchase their weekly food shop and travelling to university for lectures. This is causing harm to their wellbeing, negatively impacting their student experience and it can be assumed that this will cause reduction in attendance and could lead to students choosing to study elsewhere or dropping out due to the unmanageable costs.

Introduction

Buses. Love them, loathe them, use them or not. Students love talking to us about them and we know how valuable they are to the student experience across our campuses. The public transport system creates a vital network and connects students to the vibrant life of Falmouth, Penryn, Truro and the wider Cornish community but, with the rising costs of living in Cornwall and the removal of the student bundle tickets, students are facing uncertainty and the need to choose between paying for travel and attending university or being able to afford their weekly food shop. A choice that students should not have to make.

As Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union, buses were always going to be on the agenda this academic year with Union priorities being voted in last academic year around this topic and two of our Sabbatical Officers tackling cost of living as their priorities for the upcoming year. However, the lack of student bundle bus tickets caused student feedback to skyrocket on this issue. So, something needed to be done to understand how this was impacting our students.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this research is to gather and analyse student insight into how the removal of student bundle tickets impacts their student experience and their overall perceptions of bus travel in Cornwall to inform decision-making and lobbying across the partnership and stakeholders to enhance the student experience.

This will be supported by the following objectives:

- To understand student travel patterns, specifically related to bus usage;
- To identify how the removal of the student bundle tickets has impacted students;
- To generate a data-driven evidence base to make recommendations for service improvements.

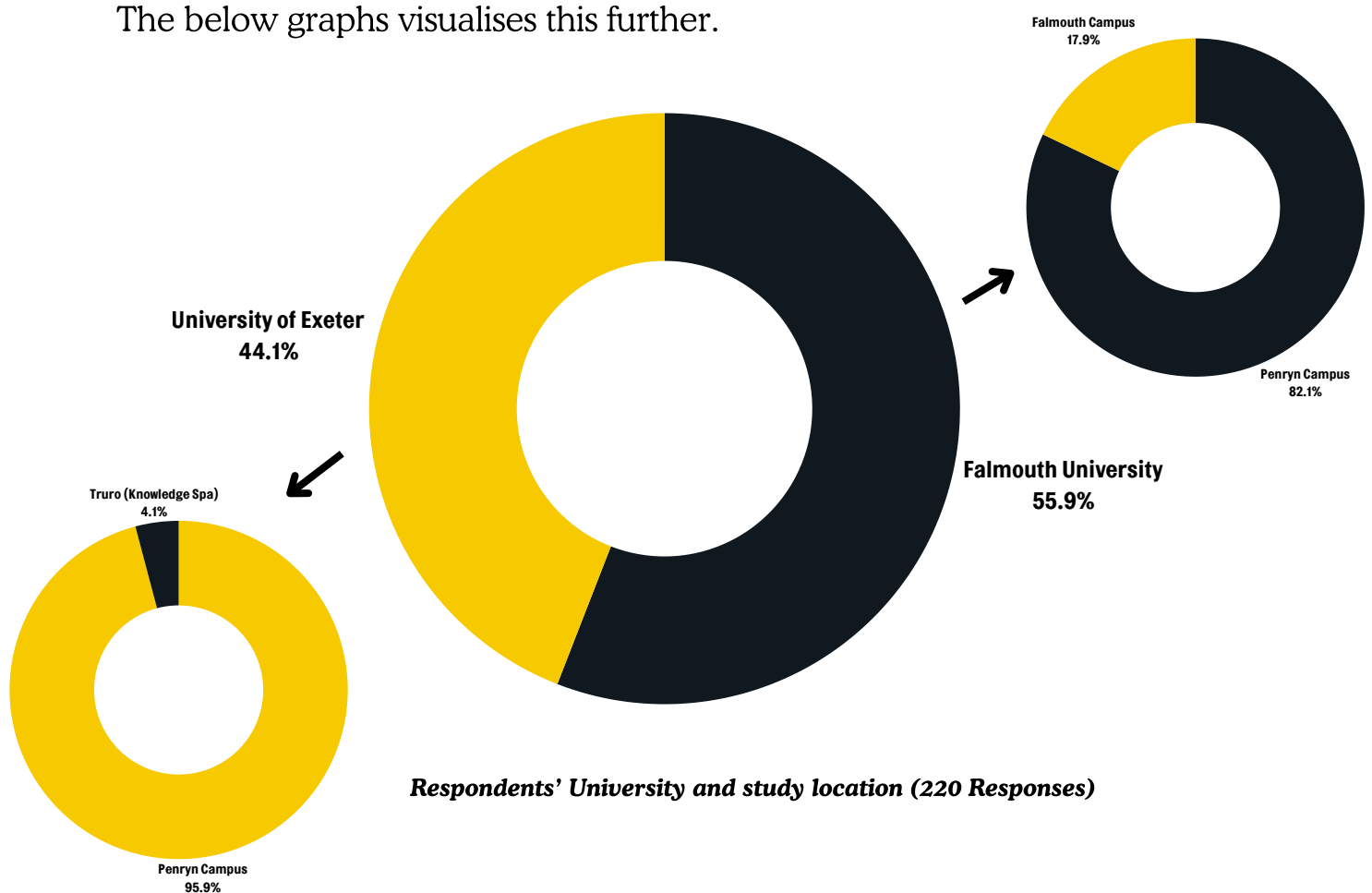
Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union launched an online feedback survey on Friday 5th September which was open until Tuesday 9th September and received a total of 245 responses from students from both universities (and all three campuses). After data cleaning, there were 220 responses analysed. This was promoted via a singular social media post, a single action newsletter, and Instagram stories and face to face interaction with students - there was no incentive provided. The results of the survey were then analysed using a range of statistical and thematic analysis.

The following report serves two main purposes. The first is to understand the student experience and attitudes towards bus travel within their university context and secondly, to identify how we (as part of the wider partnership) can adapt our offering to meet these needs and contribute to the improvement of the student experience.

Demographics

The survey achieved 220 usable responses with a total of 56% (rounded figure) coming from Falmouth University students and a further 44% from University of Exeter students. Respondents were also asked to select their study location (related to their campus). A large majority of respondents study at Penryn campus (88%) with 10% being based at Falmouth campus and a further 2% of respondents studying at the Knowledge Spa in Truro. For Falmouth University respondents, 82% were based at Penryn and 18% studying in Falmouth; whilst, for those studying at University of Exeter, 96% were based in Penryn and the remaining 4% studying in Truro. The research has captured viewpoints from our three core study locations and allows us to understand how the buses impacts each of these student groups.

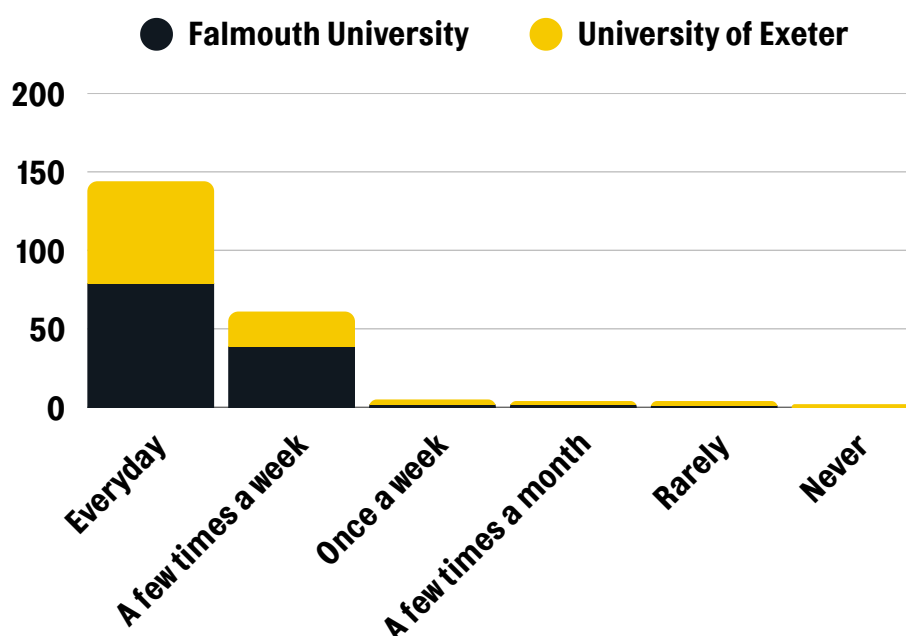
The below graphs visualises this further.



Bus Usage

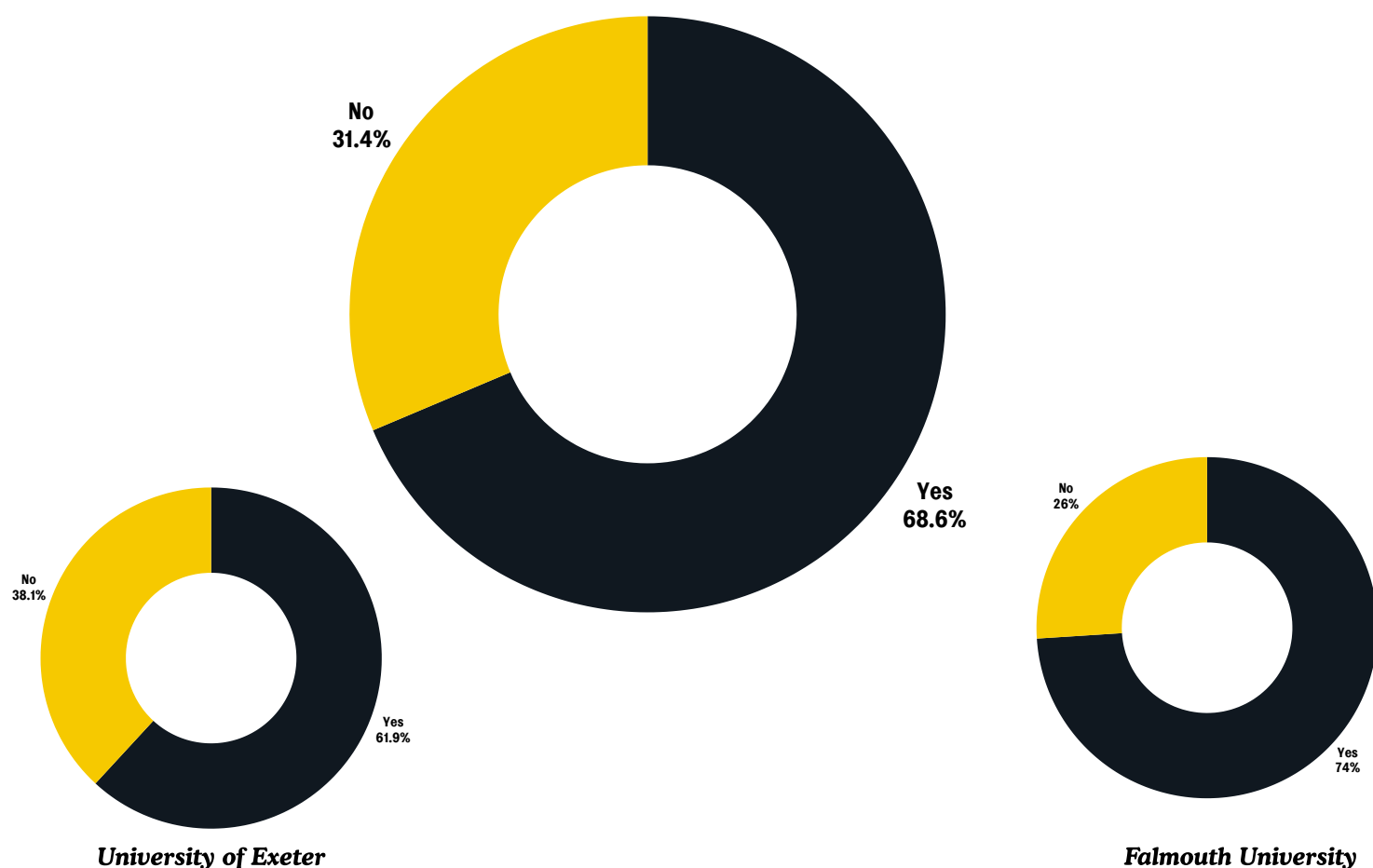
Respondents were then asked a series of questions to understand their usage habits related to bus travel and the student bundle tickets. 65% of respondents use the bus to travel to campus everyday, with a total of 95% of respondents using this method at least once a week. The below graphs outlines this as well as highlighting the travel frequencies of respondents by institution.

Respondents' frequency of bus travel (220 Responses)



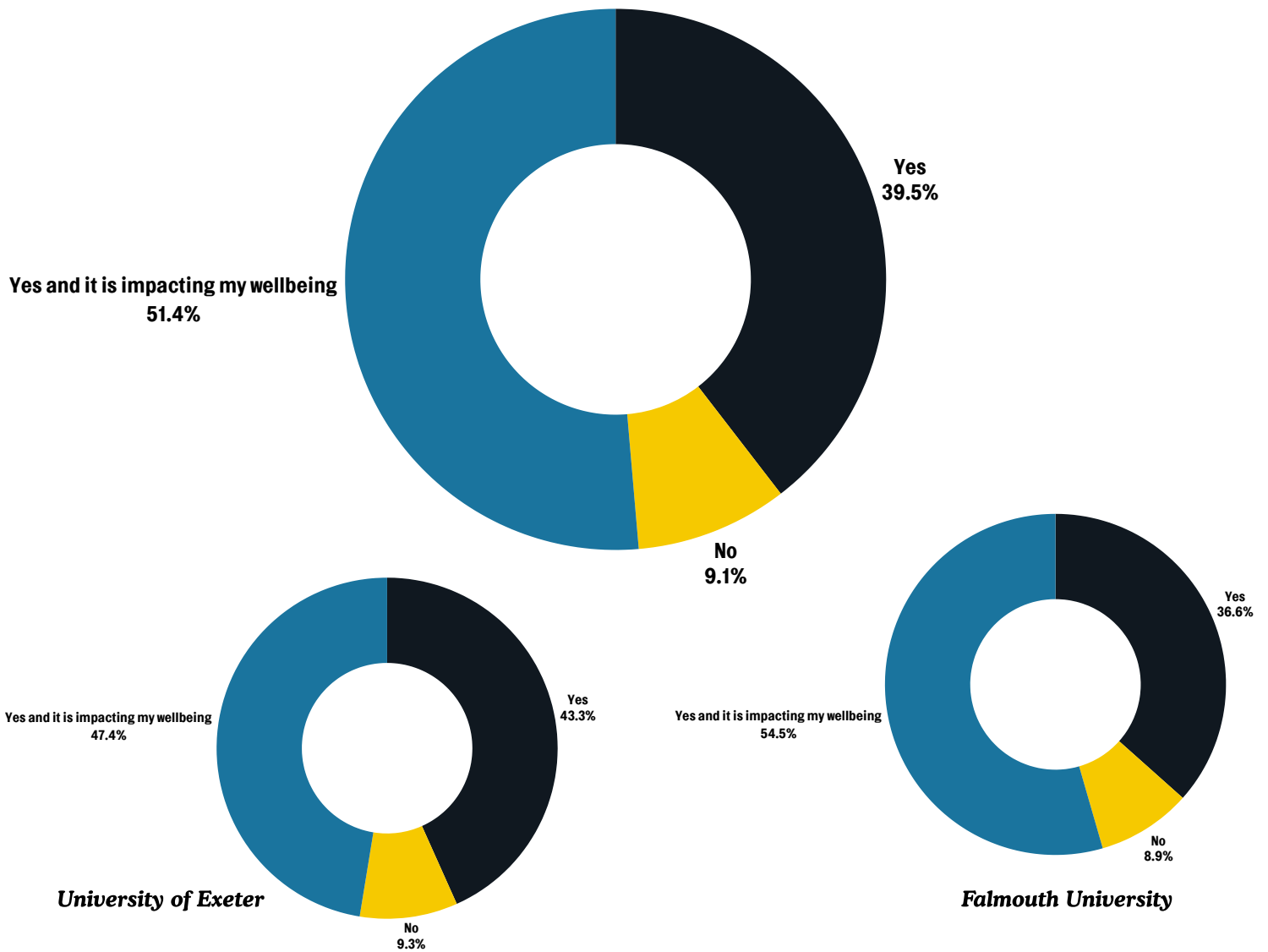
Respondents were also asked whether they had previously used the student bundle tickets for bus travel - 69% of respondents were using these with 31% not purchasing these (some as a result of no longer using buses as a transport method). The below graphs highlight this as well as identifying the differences between each institution.

Respondents' Student Bundle Ticket Usage (220 Responses)



Respondents were then asked if the removal of the student bundle tickets impacted them. 91% of respondents agreed that it was impacting them with 51% of this figure stating that it also had an impact to their wellbeing - the impacts of this were then explored via free text comments which will be outlined in the next section of this report. The following graphs visualise the responses related to the removal of the student bundle tickets and further delves into the institutional differences.

Has the removal of the student bundle tickets impacted you? (220 responses)



“I now avoid going into uni as much as possible as I cannot afford to buy multiple tickets a week. I now have less money for food and have had to reduce my grocery shop.”

Emerging Themes

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further insight into their experiences with an open comment box, this received a total of 157 comments with 89% being negative and 9% neutral. The key themes that emerged through these comments were:

- Transportation cost concerns;
- Student financial burden;
- Campus access and attendance;
- Transportation route and service challenges;
- Sustainability and environmental concerns;
- Disability and accessibility challenges.

Transportation cost concerns

What are students saying?

“...the tickets are so ridiculously priced, ive had to skip eating for weeks and have had to do uni work at home because i don't have the funds on top of rent to afford almost daily travel back and forth from my house to penryn campus. this is affecting my education and my mental wellbeing and causing me so much stress”

“The cost of the student bundle is/was obscenely elevated, moving around should not be a privelege especially if it's to further an education.”

“The cost of tickets severely impacts my weekly budget as I rely on the transport to get to uni on time.”

“...paying to get the bus everyday has become an extreme struggle. Many people including myself simply cannot afford it. I paid £220 for a year pass last year. This year the best bundle I can get is the £20 for a week - Which is extremely expensive when you put it into perspective that I'm at uni every day.

What does this mean?

Respondents have highlighted that the removal of affordable student bundle tickets has made travelling to campus increasingly expensive. Many described weekly and daily fares as “ridiculously priced” and “obscenely elevated,” with costs placing severe pressure on already tight budgets. The shift from annual passes (e.g. £220 last year) to expensive weekly or daily passes (e.g. £20 per week) has left students struggling to manage essential living costs, in some cases forcing them to skip meals or limit time on campus.

The financial strain is not only affecting attendance but also impacting students’ mental health and ability to fully participate in their education. Several students emphasised that “moving around should not be a privilege,” particularly when travel is essential to access teaching and learning. Current bus pricing structures are therefore being experienced as a barrier to equal participation in university life.

Student Financial Burden

What are students saying?

“...the more money I have to spend on tickets, the less I can use to eat and afford supplies for my course.”

“Without the bundle, going to university is much more expensive. Meaning sometimes I must make sacrifices in my personal life.”

“I'd planned my entire budget around student bus bundle prices, now I'm really going to struggle financially this year. The cost of living in Cornwall is already higher than most other uni locations and this really hasn't helped.”

The removal of bus passes has severely damaged my budgeting and is causing harm to my wellbeing because it means I not only have more stress about going places but I also have to focus about spending less on essentials like food and bills.”

What does this mean?

Respondents consistently expressed that the removal of affordable bus passes has intensified the financial pressures they already face. Rising travel costs are forcing many to reallocate money away from essentials such as food, bills, and course supplies. Several students highlighted that they had budgeted around the now-discontinued bundle prices, leaving them unable to sustain their planned finances for the year.

The increased expense of attending university is leading to difficult personal sacrifices and adding to the wider cost-of-living challenges in Cornwall, which students noted are already higher than in many other university locations. This added financial strain is not only affecting their ability to meet basic needs but is also contributing to heightened stress and harm to wellbeing.

Campus Access and Attendance

What are students saying?

“Bus prices are so high that I don't go to campus often.”

“When I lived in Falmouth, I currently am lucky enough to be in Penryn now, but I would some days miss lectures and watch them online because I couldn't afford a bus ticket to campus that day.”

“The cost of a simple return ticket to campus is source of consternation for myself and many of my friends to the point where we have decide not to take the trip in favour of saving money.”

“i simply cannot afford to get the bus five times a week into uni. it's made me miss so many lectures because i cant afford to go.”

“...We shouldn't have to feel like we can't even get to lectures let alone learn from them!”

What does this mean?

Respondents report that the rising cost of bus travel is directly limiting their ability to attend campus. High ticket prices mean some students avoid travelling altogether, opting to miss lectures or watch them online rather than pay for transport. Others described regularly having to choose between attending classes and saving money for essentials, with one student stating they “simply cannot afford to get the bus five times a week.”

This financial barrier is undermining the core purpose of university: accessing teaching and learning. Students expressed frustration at feeling unable to fully participate in their education, with some emphasising that they should not have to choose between financial stability and attending lectures. The affordability of travel has therefore become a significant issue of academic access and equity.

Transportation Route and Service Challenges

What are students saying?

“....their services, and are extremely unreliable. There’s been many instances where I’ve waited for a bus from Truro to Penryn campus and back, or Falmouth to campus and the bus has either broken down while I’m on it (and had to get off and wait a long time for another that isn’t guaranteed to show up), delayed by 10+ minutes, fail to update the timetable to say it’s cancelled or it shows up but drives away and having to wait an hour for the next one. It’s riskier to wait for a bus from the Moor late at night because they usually don’t show up and there’s only one an hour. If I can’t get one, then I’ll have to walk just over an hour to get home, not ideal for a woman alone at night.”

“ the removal of the u3 service is also really impractical for anyone living in falmouth and commuting to penryn campus”

“...thats in addition to the buses being slow and not always regular.”

What does this mean?

Respondents described bus services as unreliable, irregular, and in some cases unsafe. Reports included buses breaking down mid-journey, failing to arrive without notice, running significantly late, or leaving passengers behind despite being scheduled. These service failures often result in long waits and, in the case of evening travel, create additional safety concerns, particularly for women walking home alone.

The removal of key routes, such as the U3 service connecting Falmouth to Penryn campus, was highlighted as further reducing accessibility and convenience for commuting students. Alongside high costs, the lack of reliable and frequent services has left many students feeling that public transport is not a dependable option for accessing campus.

Sustainability and Environmental Concerns

What are students saying?

“The extortionate bus ticket pricing is now becoming comparable with the expensive car parking situation. This does not align with the aim of campus to be more environmentally friendly.”

“The campus is supposed to promote sustainability, both Universities are aiming to reduce their carbon emissions, ending the contract has not helped this, and will actually increase emissions due to more people driving in.”

“The removal of the bus funding is not aligned with the university of Exeter policy to try and make the campus greener.”

Taking the bus to campus was the most efficient and environmentally friendly way of travelling to campus. It is now basically the same cost to drive and pay for parking on campus which is far easier, but much worse for the environment.”

What does this mean?

Respondents raised strong concerns that current transport costs and reduced service options are undermining university commitments to sustainability and carbon reduction. The removal of affordable bus funding has made driving and parking on campus financially comparable to taking the bus. As a result, students warned that more people are likely to choose cars over public transport, increasing emissions and congestion.

They also highlighted the contradiction between universities' public commitments to sustainability and the practical barriers being placed on greener travel choices. Affordable and reliable bus travel was previously seen as the most efficient and environmentally friendly way of getting to campus; its decline not only limits access but risks reversing progress on institutional sustainability goals.

Disability and Accessibility Challenges

What are students saying?

"As a disabled student, i try to get the buses as the DSA taxis are a pain to sort out every single day. The buses rarely have room and i've ended up injured by the time i've gotten into class and it impacts my learning IMMENSELY"

"...Additionally friends with chronic illnesses or those who have difficulty walking for long periods of time rely on these busses but are losing out on their education due to the costs."

"As a disabled student, I cannot work on the side of university. I also receive no financial support from family. I could barely afford the annual student bus pass last year and now the prices as gone up. I fear I will have to walk from Penryn campus to Falmouth campus each day because there is absolutely no way I can afford to travel. This option will likely lead to burning me out and taking time away from my studies"

What does this mean?

Respondents highlighted that the current transport situation is creating disproportionate barriers to disabled students' participation in university life. Bus services were described as overcrowded and physically unsafe, with some students reporting injury when forced to travel in unsuitable conditions. Others with chronic illnesses or mobility challenges rely on bus travel as their primary means of reaching campus, yet rising costs are making this option unaffordable.

Several students stressed that, unlike their peers, they are unable to supplement their income through part-time work, leaving them with even fewer options to cope with the increased financial burden. For some, the lack of affordable and accessible transport could mean exhausting alternatives such as long walks between campuses, which risks further damaging health and limiting capacity to study. These accounts underline how current transport provision is not only financially exclusionary but also fails to meet the accessibility needs of disabled students.

Respondents consistently described transport costs and unreliable services as a direct barrier to their education. The removal of affordable bus bundles has left many unable to budget effectively, forcing them to skip meals, cut back on essentials, or miss lectures altogether. For some, simply getting to campus has become unaffordable, leading to fewer opportunities to study, collaborate, and fully engage in university life.

The issue is not just financial but deeply inequitable. Disabled students, those without family support, and students already stretched by the high cost of living in Cornwall are disproportionately affected, with some reporting that they may be pushed to exhaustion or further excluded from learning. Transport has effectively become a gatekeeper to education, where the ability to attend lectures depends on the ability to pay. Students also highlighted that unreliable and unsafe services—along with the removal of key routes—compound these challenges, while rising costs

risk pushing more people into cars, undermining both sustainability and university climate commitments. Collectively, these concerns demonstrate that current transport provision is eroding equal access to study and participation, and urgently needs to be addressed to ensure that no student is priced out of their education.

Recommendations

With the overall rising costs of living and external factors impacting the student experience, there is no quick fix to resolving student concerns around buses and public transport. The following section outlines some broad recommendations to work towards across the partnership (and local community) to help improve students' experiences with this issue.

Establish a student-provider working group (short term)

Create a dedicated form for students, The SU, the universities, FX Plus, the council and transport providers to regularly review transport provisions, identify issues and co-create solutions that reflect the lived experience of the student community.

Reintroduce affordable student travel bundles (long term)

Reinstate annual or termly student bus passes at a significantly reduced rate to ensure students can access campus without financial hardship. Pricing should reflect student budgets and the necessity of frequent travel for study.

Introduce a Student Transport Subsidy or Partnership Agreement (long term)

Work with local bus providers, Cornwall Council, and the universities to co-fund or subsidise student travel, ensuring affordability is prioritised as part of institutional commitments to equity and access.

Next steps

Alongside the Sabbatical Officers attending meetings with stakeholders on this issue and pushing for change, a key next step in addressing student transport challenges is the creation of a dedicated working group. This forum would bring together representatives from the Students' Union, both universities, local transport providers and Cornwall Council to ensure that student voices are consistently embedded in decision making around travel provision.

The working group would act as a structured space for raising concerns, monitoring service performance and the co-creation of solutions. By formalising dialogue between stakeholders, it would enable key student concerns to be addressed in a timely and collaborative way, rather than reactively.

It will also be essential that student representation within the group reflects the diversity of those most impacted by transport barriers. This means ensuring participation from commuting students, disabled students, those on lower incomes, and students living across Falmouth, Penryn, and Truro. Their lived experiences will provide crucial insight into how policies and service changes affect day-to-day access to education.

In the longer term, the working group can also serve as a mechanism for reviewing the impact of initiatives such as affordable bundles and subsidies, ensuring that student transport provision is fair, sustainable, and responsive to need.

Conclusion

This research has shown clearly that the removal of student bundle tickets and the rising costs of bus travel are creating significant financial, social, and academic barriers for students. Transport is no longer a neutral service but a decisive factor shaping whether students can attend on campus provisions, afford essentials, and fully participate in university life. The impacts fall hardest on disabled students, those on lower incomes, and those commuting from further afield, raising serious concerns about equity and inclusion.

Alongside affordability, issues of reliability, accessibility, and sustainability further compound the challenge. Without action, there is a real risk that transport will continue to undermine student wellbeing, reduce attendance, and contradict institutional commitments to fairness and climate responsibility.

The recommendations outlined in this report, most urgently the establishment of a Student–Provider Working Group, offer practical steps towards a fairer, more sustainable transport system. It is essential that all partners act collaboratively and decisively to ensure that no student is priced out of their education.



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& EXETER
STUDENTS'
UNION**