



What impact has COVID-19 had on university students?

Findings from the Enlitened platform

May 2020

Foreword



**By Chris Newson, Chairman and CEO of
The Student Room Group
and Founder of Enlitened**

2020 has been an unprecedented year so far – not least for the higher education sector. The past couple of months have been a tumultuous time for university staff and students, with an incredible pace of change both required and delivered across the HE sector.

As we prepare and scenario plan for what the coming months may bring, I want to share some of the student engagement and wellbeing insights that have been captured through the Enlitened platform in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on student life.

For those of you who are less familiar with Enlitened, the platform captures real-time student insights on behalf of our university partners to help them understand the need for, and impact of, change. Enlitened is a software as a service (SaaS) product that asks students at our partner universities up to 30 questions each week relating to engagement and wellbeing through a mobile phone app. Student responses are anonymised and our university partners are able to see and analyse student question responses (and student-submitted ideas for improvement) through a data dashboard.

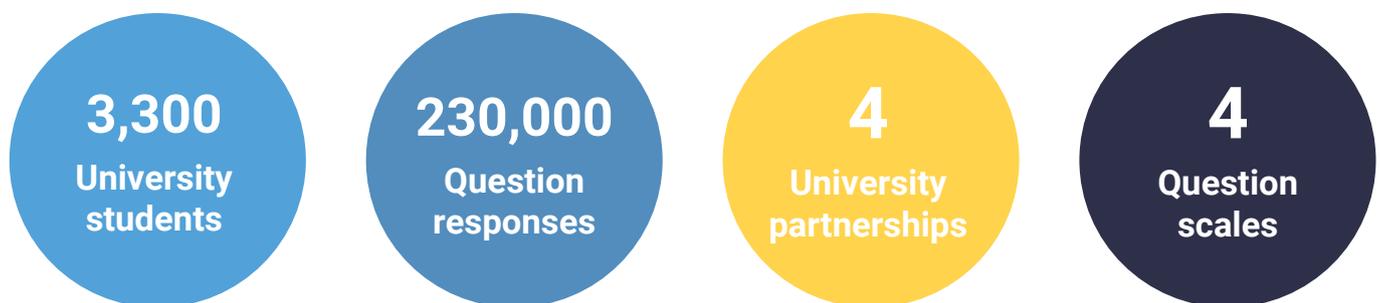
Our university partners have kindly agreed to share the aggregated data presented in this report, which shows the top level trends and insights from student question responses across four institutions since the COVID-19 situation escalated in March. This report, and the insight it shares, aims to contribute to the sector's growing understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the student experience. We hope you find it valuable.

Key research findings

We saw a decline in many of our student engagement and wellbeing scores throughout the month of March when the impact of Coronavirus was starting to be felt. In most cases, these scores now seem to be showing signs of recovery throughout April.

- We've seen a decline in the number of students who are reporting that they feel 'emotionally well'.
- We've seen that students have generally responded well to how their university has communicated with them in relation to Coronavirus.
- We've seen students report very low levels of motivation to study remotely.
- We've seen a decline in how connected students feel to other people.
- We've seen our lowest scores this academic year for students' 'overall satisfaction' with their course.
- We've seen our lowest scores this academic year around whether students feel their course is 'value for money'.
- We've seen our highest scores this academic year in relation to managing money – students are thinking more about their finances.

Sample



Analysis of a 12-week period from 3rd Feb – 26th April 2020

This report provides a snapshot of the current landscape for our Enlitened partner institutions during the time frame stated. The sample is not representative of the wider population.

For full details of the Enlitened question scales and score methodology, please get in touch with the Enlitened team at enlitened.enquiries@thestudentroom.com



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Insights from the Enlitened platform



How have students responded to Coronavirus?

Since the 18th March, students have been asked questions via the Enlitened app about how Coronavirus has impacted their university experience. This has involved asking questions which fall in to the following subscales:

- **Communication** – how students are reacting to communications about COVID-19.
- **Learning experience** – reflecting how the impact of COVID-19 is affecting students' learning.
- **Social and wellbeing** – gauging the social and wellbeing affects of change relating to COVID-19.

After an initial dip in scores, we've seen a slow but steady recovery since the end of March.



Based on 34,000 question responses from 1,700 students from 18th March - 26th April.

Key insights

Communication

72% of students agreed that their university was communicating well with them in relation to Coronavirus.

46% agreed that they felt well supported by their university.

Learning experience

71% agreed that they had access to the online resources they need to study.

27% agreed that they felt motivated to study.

Initially, only **39%** of students agreed that assessment processes for their course were clear to them. This has since increased to **60%**.

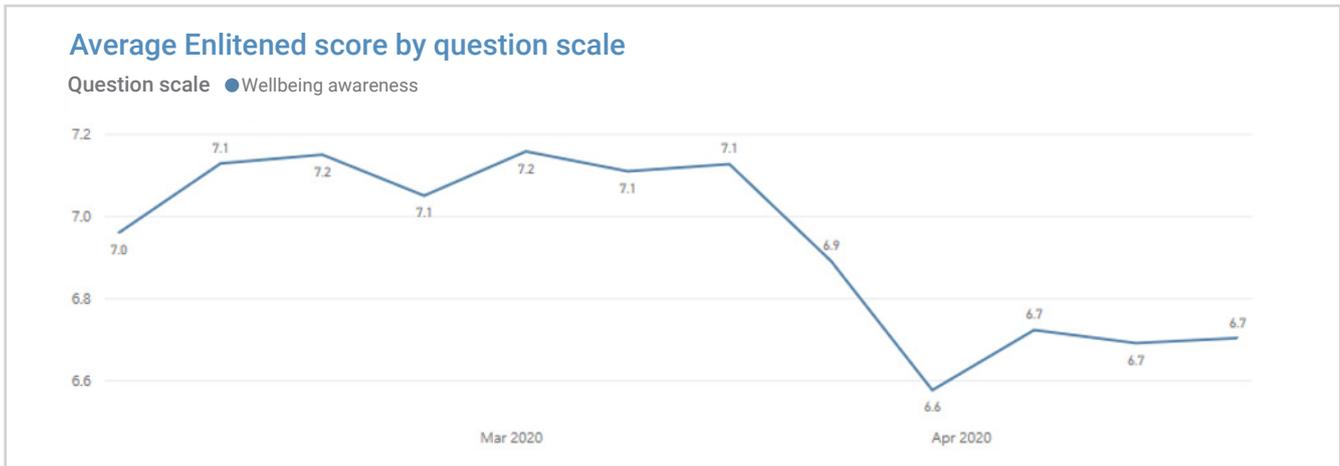
Social and wellbeing

65% agreed that they knew how they could contact their uni support services if they had Coronavirus concerns.

Initially, only **36%** agreed that they felt able to cope with current uncertainty - this has since increased to **49%**.

What has the impact been on students' wellbeing?

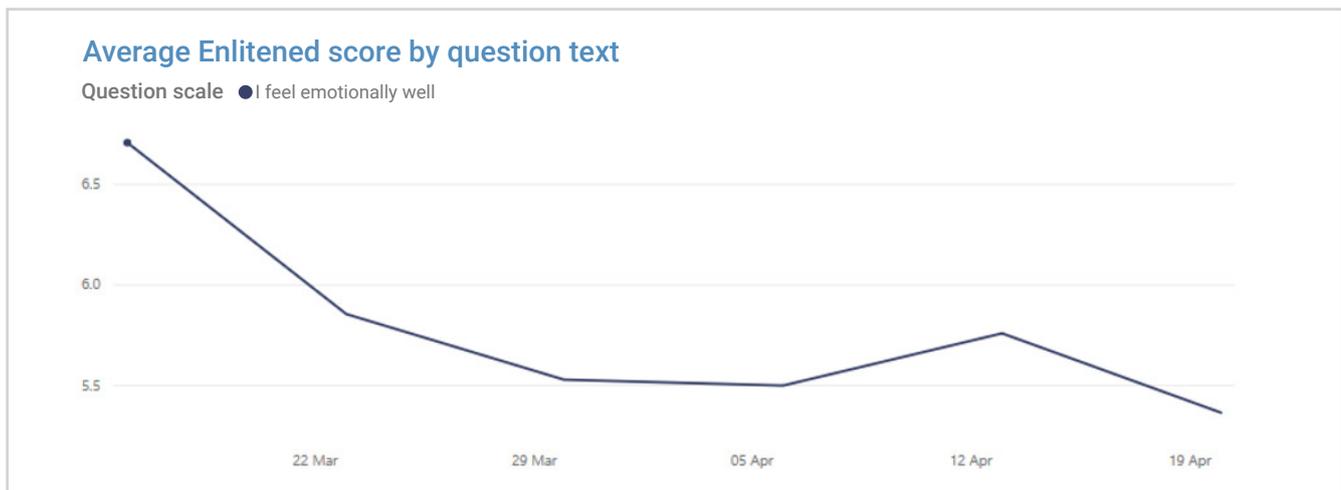
In the last two weeks of March, we saw a steep decline in 'wellbeing awareness' subscale scores, which looks at what students say about their wellbeing and the way they manage it. This looks to be stabilising throughout April.



Based on 7,000 question responses from 2,100 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

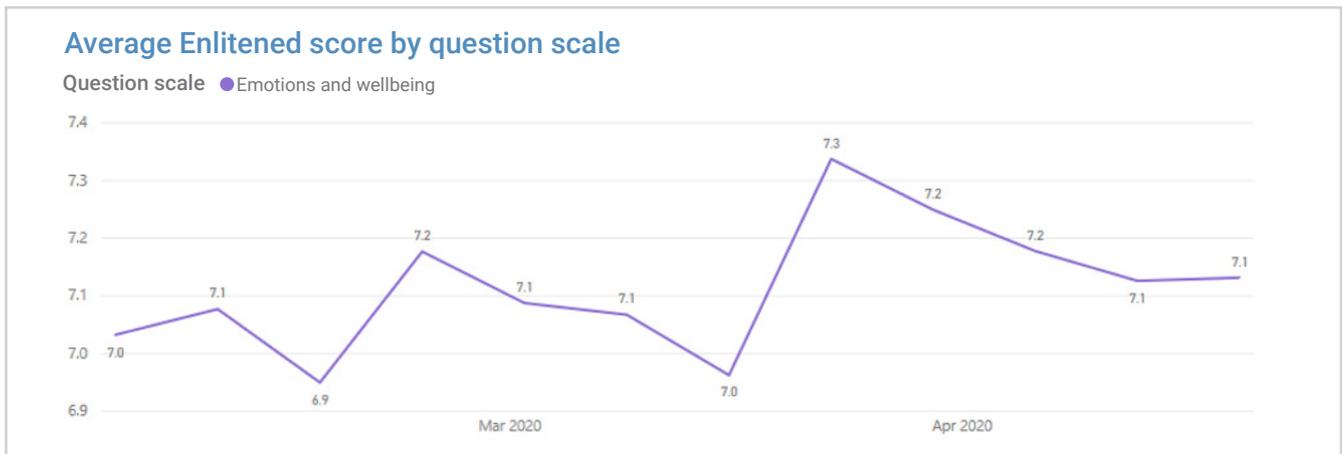
Key insights

48% of students are reporting that they feel 'emotionally well' – a decline from **63%** in mid-March.



Based on 610 question responses from 610 students from 16th March - 26th April.

Conversely, since mid-March we've seen an increase in scores in our 'emotions and wellbeing' subscale, which gauges students' sense of optimism, trust, resilience and security.



Based on 13,200 question responses from 2,400 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

Key insights

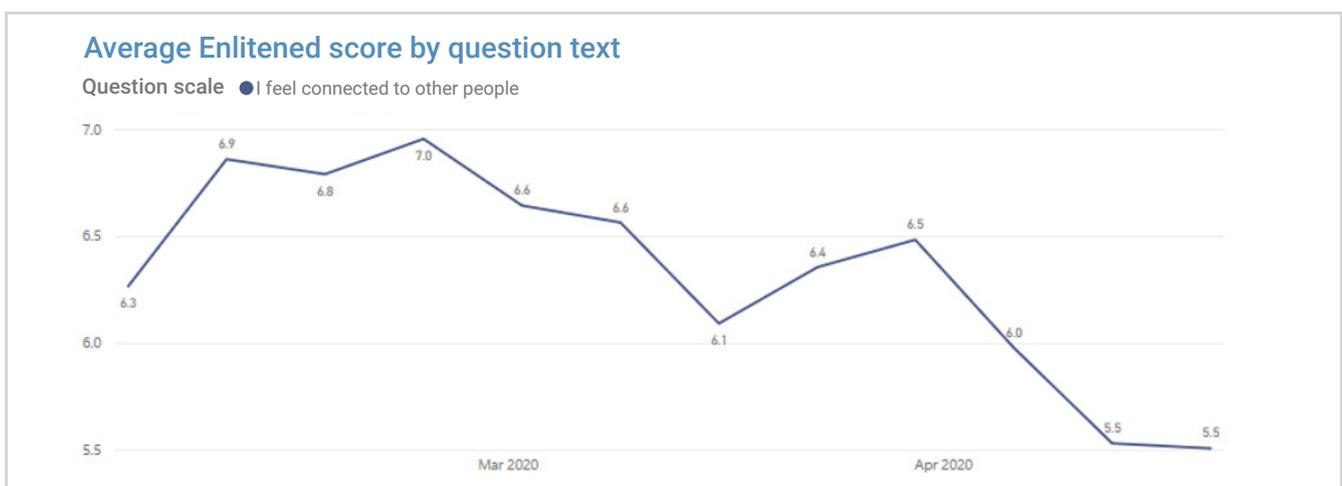
89% of students are currently reporting that they feel 'grateful' for what they have in life – an increase from **81%** in mid-March.

85% of students are currently reporting that they feel they have 'people in my life that care about me' – an increase from **73%** in mid-March.

77% of students are currently reporting that they feel 'trusted by the people around me' – an increase from **67%** in mid-March.

What has the impact been on how connected students are feeling?

We've seen a steep decline in how connected students feel to other people since the beginning of April. The score of 5.5 is the lowest we've seen this academic year.



Based on 1,480 question responses from 1,400 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

What has the impact been on students' learning experience?

Since early March, we've seen a decline in scores in our 'teaching and engagement' subscale, which gauges how students feel about the way classes are taught and how engaging their course is. This looks to be recovering throughout April.

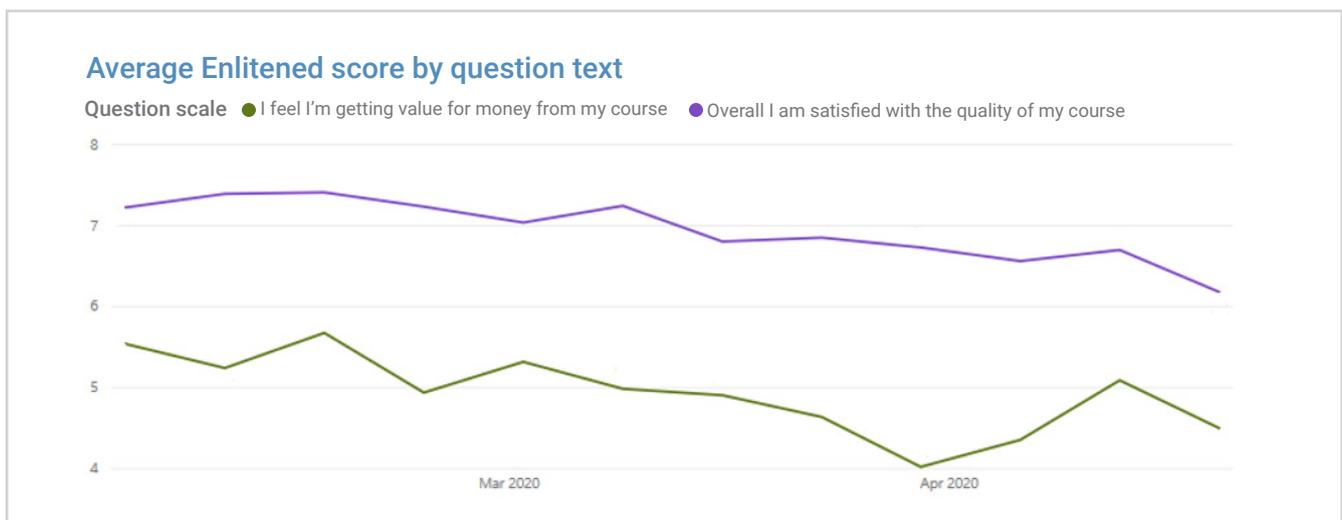


Based on 27,900 question responses from 2,800 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

Key insights

25% of students agreed that they felt they were 'getting value for money' from their course at the end of March – a decrease from **46%** in early March and the lowest we've seen this academic year. This has since recovered slightly to **36%**.

61% of students currently agree that overall, they're 'satisfied' with the quality of their course – a decrease from **77%** in early March and the lowest we've seen this academic year.

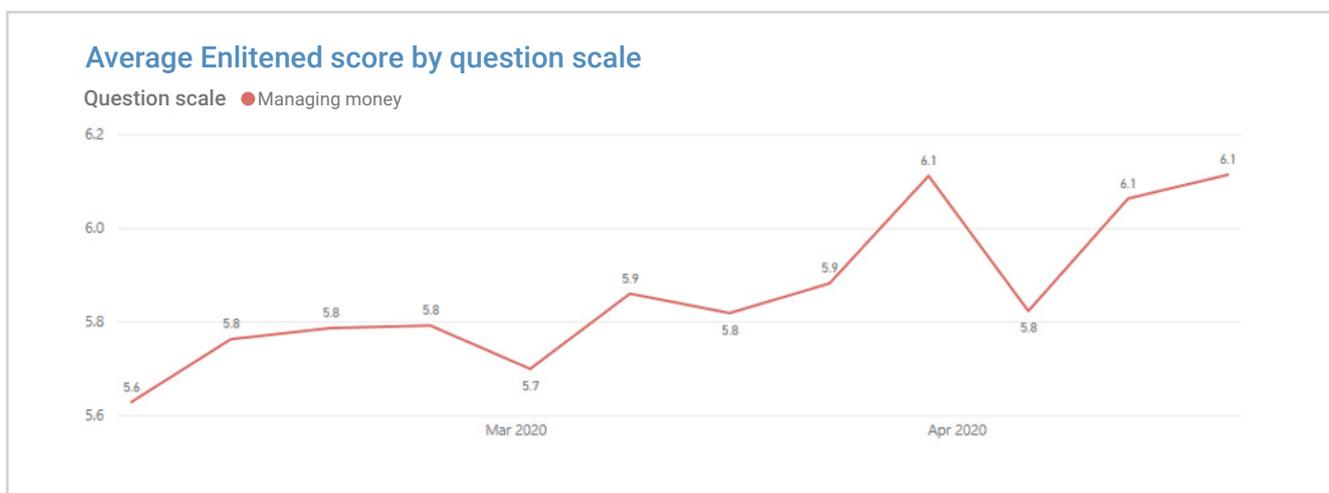


● Based on 1,400 question responses from 1,350 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

● Based on 1,500 question responses from 1,400 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

What has the impact been on students' perceptions around finances?

Since early March, we've seen an increase in scores in our 'managing money' subscale, which gauges how students feel about their finances and the university's support services. The score of 6.1 is the highest we've seen since the start of the academic year.



Based on 13,100 question responses from 2,500 students from 3rd February - 26th April.

Key insights

91% of students agreed that they make sure they have 'enough money for essential costs' – an increase from **75%** in mid-March.

68% of students agreed that they make sure they 'only spend what they can afford' – an increase from **58%** in mid-March.

82% of students agreed that they 'think ahead when it comes to money' – an increase from **65%** at the start of March.

50% of students agreed that their university 'tells them about funding opportunities' – an increase from **35%** in early March.

Conclusion

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The findings in this report provide interesting initial insights into how COVID-19 has impacted student engagement and wellbeing so far.

During the time period when this data was collected, universities have reacted to the pandemic commendably; swiftly moving services online in the absence of face-to-face teaching. The growing improvement of students' scores regarding communication, learning experience, and social and wellbeing perhaps indicates that students are starting to adapt to the new reality of working and learning remotely.

It is perhaps not unexpected that after an academic year of ongoing disruption to face-to-face teaching, first due to strike action and then caused by the pandemic, we're seeing our lowest ever Enlitened scores in relation to 'value for money' and 'overall satisfaction' with the quality of their course.

The decline in reported emotional wellness of students is also a concern and something to be addressed as we consider what the 'new normal' looks like. However, it is heartening to see that students have recognized the fast and thorough response from universities in communicating with them about Coronavirus.

Whatever the next academic year holds, it is clear that developing a strong sense of university community and connection, even from a distance, is going to be more important than ever. Remote learning is pointing the way for an acceleration of digital strategies and the ability to communicate flexibly with students in real time to maintain and improve their engagement.

If you have any questions about the insight in this report, or would like to discuss the Enlitened platform in more detail, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us at enlitened.enquiries@thestudentroom.com



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HELPING STUDENTS THRIVE

Enlitened is a division of The Student Room Group, alongside The Student Room, Get Revising and Marked by Teachers. The Student Room Group has been supporting students since 2001, and The Student Room website has become the UK's biggest and most popular education website. It receives around 10 million visits each month and is used by over 70% of all students every year.

Enlitened was developed in 2018, as a unique platform designed to drive continuous improvement in wellbeing, engagement, student experience, continuation and equal opportunities, and therefore NSS, TEF and league tables.

Enlitened has three core roles:

1) Delivering proactive, personalised support directly to students' phones

Students get tailored engagement and wellbeing advice, plus signposting to university and 3rd party support services – on their phone, when they need it.

2) Amplifying the student and university voice

Integrated student voice functionality enables the university to respond to feedback and ideas, setting expectations and closing the loop.

3) Real-time engagement and wellbeing insights

Universities, faculties, services and SUs get clear data and actionable insights to drive systematic improvements in student engagement, satisfaction and wellbeing.