



The Experiences of Undergraduate Commuter Students

Brunel University London

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Foreword

It is, of course no secret that the lives of students in the UK have changed enormously over the last decade. The model of the full time, on campus, financially secure student who can dedicate 100% of their time to degree study is an out-moded one and aligns with the lives of a very small minority in today's world of Higher Education. Students in UK universities now, and this is certainly the case at Brunel University London, have complex lives which see them pulled in various directions on a daily basis, as they juggle the demands of part time work, family commitments, caring responsibilities, financial concerns and their general well-being. In this scenario, degree study is just one priority amongst many and not always, depending upon individual circumstances, the top priority. And then, of course, as analysed in this current report, comes the question of travel to and from the place of study and all the stresses and strains this entails.

And yet, it is true to say that despite much work undertaken by universities in the UK there is still a structural imperative which can be regarded as an adherence to that out-moded model of the "typical student." Whether this relates to timetabling, to support, to enabling facilities, to resources, indeed to the cultural understanding of its students by a university generally, an apparent acceptance of the new reality in terms of student cohorts has been slow to develop. This is perhaps the particular reason why such a report as this one undertaken at Brunel University London is so important.

Brunel's student population is now one which sees commuter students in a majority. As the report makes clear, we have not yet adapted to this fact and have not yet made that radical step of understanding the needs of these students as a whole. Small steps have been taken and we can thank those colleagues who have been responsible for their efforts. We can also thank the Student Union at Brunel for constantly pushing this as an agenda item over the last couple of years. But we have not done enough in a timely fashion and this report will function as a "call to arms" to act now and help these students enjoy an experience at Brunel every bit as good as those students who do not have to commute. I wish to thank our colleagues for taking the time to research this very important subject and thank also the many students who participated in this research. The resulting report is both enlightening and instructive. I look forward to working with these colleagues and those students as we push forward with positive solutions in the coming years.



Professor William Leahy

Vice Provost (Students, Staff & Civic Engagement)

Executive Summary

This research investigates the following issues:

- The commuter student population at Brunel University London and the intersection with 'under-represented' groups of students;
- The experiences of being a commuter student at Brunel;
- The issues commuter students face while studying at Brunel, the types of support/ resources they have drawn on and the types of support/ resources they require;
- Ideas, policies and practices the University could use to better support commuter students to enhance their experience, progression and success.

The research was undertaken between December 2019 and April 2020 with undergraduate students using two stages of data collection. The first stage of data collection involved an online questionnaire open to all undergraduate students. The questionnaire was targeted at those undergraduates who self-identified as 'commuter students' and those who identified as 'on campus' students living in university accommodation. The second stage of data collection involved in-depth interviews with a sample of 10 undergraduate students who self-identified as commuter students.

Participating students came from across all three Colleges at Brunel: College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences; College of Engineering, Design and Physical Sciences and College of Health and Life Sciences.

This report details the context of the study, the research methods used, the key findings, and recommendations for Brunel and the wider higher education sector.

Key findings and recommendations are summarised below.

Key findings

- Three fifths of students identified that the most common impact on attendance are caused by traffic and public transport delays.
- Commuter students seek to optimise their time through non-attendance and make strategic decisions about when to commute to campus.
- Commuter students are very much less likely to participate than on-campus students in all social and study activities, except work placements where there is no difference between the two groups.
- Just over half of the commuter students do not know what university support and services are available.

Recommendations

This report makes the following recommendations:

- Develop the signposting of support, facilities and services currently available to commuter students.

- Work with a commuter student panel to create a dedicated commuter student University webpage.
- Develop a commuter student network to link new Brunel commuter students with those already studying here.
- Offer commuter students the opportunity to attend a dedicated webinar at the beginning of the academic term in which available on-campus services and facilities are outlined.
- Encourage staff to consider commuter students' lives when making decisions around student engagement and attendance. Recognise that for many commuter students, engagement is not linked to attendance.
- Continue to roll out dedicated commuter student study and social spaces on campus. Increase the number of lockers and kitchenettes available to commuter students across colleges and departments.
- Where possible, individual departments should consider consolidating the timetable to ensure that lectures are clustered together.
- University to work with the Union of Brunel Students to develop a student Union Officer to represent the views of commuter students.

Introduction

In 2017, the total student population at Brunel was approximately 12,000, with 8,364 undergraduates (Brunel University London, 2017). The University has seen an increase in the proportion of commuter students, with 45% of undergraduates living more than five miles away from campus and 26% more than 10 miles away in 2018/19 (Appendix 1) (Brunel University London, 2020). With their numbers growing, there is an urgent need to recognise the experiences of these students and consider whether they are commonly also from under-represented groups (OfS, 2018).

Context

In 2016, the Higher Education Statistics Authority reported that 328,000 students across the UK had chosen to remain in their family home (Cashmore, 2017) during their studies. While there is currently no agreed definition of 'commuter student' in the UK, Thomas and Jones (2017) have used the term to refer to those who have the same home and term-time address, irrespective of the distance from the place of study.

According to the Student Academic Experience Survey (Neves and Hillman, 2017), these commuter students are significantly less likely to say they are learning a lot on their courses than their peers living in university halls of residence. This has clear ramifications for student experience more generally, and student access, progression and success more specifically (OfS, 2018: 10).

As Goddard (2017) identified:

- Students who travel have lower rates of academic engagement;
- Students who live at home are less likely to get a 2:1 or 1st class degree;
- Living more than 30 minutes from campus is correlated with greater academic failure;
- Students who live at home are less likely to get a graduate job.

With numbers of these students growing and particular issues becoming apparent, there is a need for universities to recognise and understand the experiences of these students and develop guidelines in order to enhance their experience. Goddard (2017) encouraged universities to find out about their commuter student population and experiences.

Research aims

Against this background, this study was funded by the Access and Participation Fund at Brunel. Its aims were to:

- Enhance knowledge of, and better recognise, the growing cohort of commuter students;
- Better understand the composition of the commuter student population;
- Provide an evidence base (quantitative and qualitative) to ensure Brunel can attract and support these students in ways that enable access, progression and success at university (OfS, 2018: 10).

The Research

For the purpose of this research, commuter students are understood as those who have the same home and term-time address (Thomas and Jones, 2017) irrespective of the distance from the place of study.

This report is based on fieldwork conducted between December 2019 and April 2020 at Brunel University London. This study devised a mixed methods approach based on questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Data was collected in two key stages:

Stage 1: This involved two phases of questionnaires. The first questionnaire was aimed at students who self-identified as commuter students. The second similar questionnaire was aimed at students who live on campus in student accommodation.

- **Phase 1:** This comprised a 10-minute online questionnaire with 117 commuter students was conducted between December 2019 and March 2020. The online questionnaire, prepared using Online surveys, had a mix of quantitative and open qualitative questions (Appendix 2). All undergraduate students were sent a short email and questionnaire link by their Department with those identifying as a commuter student encouraged to participate.
- **Phase 2:** This comprised a 10-minute questionnaire with a comparison group of 98 undergraduate students living on campus in university accommodation for the academic year 2019-2020 and was conducted between March and April 2020. These participants are referred to as 'on-campus' students in this report. The questionnaire, prepared using Online Surveys, had a mix of quantitative and open qualitative questions (Appendix 3). All undergraduate students who had lived in university accommodation in the 2019-2020 academic year were sent a short email with a link to the questionnaire from the University Accommodation Team inviting them to participate in the questionnaire.

Stage 2: This comprised in-depth interviews (Appendix 4) with 10 students who took part in the Phase 1 online questionnaire and self-identified as a 'Commuter Student' and expressed a willingness to be interviewed and keep a multi-media diary to capture their experiences (Appendix 5). These interviews took place over three months in 2020.

The interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed. All students were given £10 for taking part in the interview.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and the informed consent of all participants was sought prior to participation. All participants who took part in the research were assured that their comments would be treated in confidence and any quotes used would be anonymised. The study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences, Brunel University London (Appendix 6 and 7).

Analysis of data

Quantitative questionnaire data were analysed using SPSS. Qualitative interview and questionnaire data were analysed using thematic analysis which focused on identifying, describing and then analysing common themes across the data set using a coding approach. The 10 interview participants were also among the 117 commuter student questionnaire respondents.

Questionnaire respondent demographic data

The key demographics of gender, age and ethnicity of our survey respondents are found in tables 1, 2 and 3. As the survey was self-selecting, this is not a representative sample of the Brunel commuter or on-campus students and this demographic data is not intended to reflect the demographic profile of all Brunel undergraduate students.

Table 1: Gender of commuter students and on-campus students

Gender	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Female	53%	61.9%
Male	46.2%	37.1%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%
Non-Binary	0%	0%
Other	0%	0%

Table 2: Age of commuter and on-campus students

Age	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
18-20	58.1%	54.6%
21-24	28.2%	42.3%
25-29	10.3%	3.1%
30+	3.4%	0%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%

Table 3: Ethnicity of commuter and on-campus students

Ethnicity	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
White-English	15.4%	17.5%
White-Welsh	0%	1%
White-Scottish	0%	1%
White-Northern Irish	0%	0%
White-British	5.1%	0%
White-Irish	1.7%	0%
Irish Traveller	0%	0%
Gypsy or Traveller	0%	0%
Any other White background	11.1%	16.5%
White and Black Caribbean	0.9%	1%
White and Black African	0.9%	0%
White and Asian	0.9%	0%
White and Black Caribbean	0%	1%
Any other Mixed / Multiple background	3.4%	2.1%
Asian-British	10.3%	4.1%
Asian-Indian	11.1%	12.4%
Asian-Pakistani	7.7%	7.2%

Asian-Bangladeshi	5.1%	0%
Asian-Chinese	0%	7.2%
Any other Asian background	3.4%	9.3%
Black-British	3.4%	5.2%
Black-African	7.7%	12.4%
Black-Caribbean	1.7%	0%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	0.9%	0%
Caribbean background	0%	0%
Arab	7.7%	1%
Other	2.6%	2.1%

Modal pictures of commuter students and on-campus students

Table 4 presents a modal picture of the typical characteristics of our two groups of students. ‘Modal’ refers to the most common value of a variable, so for example, the most common gender was “female” for this group of commuter students at 53% and the most common ethnic background was “Asian” at 38%.

Table 4: Comparing modal commuter and on-campus students

Characteristic	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Gender	Female, 53%	Female, 62%
Age	18-20, 58%	18-20, 54%
Ethnicity	Asian, 38%	Asian, 41%
Entry qualification	A-level, 80%	A-level, 66 %
Not first in family to attend Uni.	66%	72%
Not Full Maintenance grant	58%	72%
No caring responsibilities	87%	92%
Part-time job	Yes, 50%	No, 69%
Full-time student	96%	99%
BSc	53%	56%
Science subject	73%	55%
Contact hours	13+, 40%	9-12, 35%
Commuting disruptive?	Yes, 82%	No, 90%
Campus activities, average	1.3	3.02
Live with parents	90%	n/a
Distance of commute, average	12 miles	n/a
Time of commute, average	1-2 hours, 49%	n/a
Mode of travel	Bus, 57%	n/a
Cost of commute, average	£5	n/a

Overall the commuter and on-campus students participating in this study are similar in many ways in that both tend to be 18-20 year old females with Asian ethnic backgrounds, not be first in their families to attend university, to have A level entry qualifications, to be studying for BScs, not have caring obligations, not be in receipt of full maintenance grants; however, commuter students are more likely to have part-time jobs, longer contact hours, take less part in campus activities and as would be expected, report that commuting is disruptive. The average commute is around 12 miles, typically by bus and costs around £5 and is from the parental home.

Comparisons of commuter and on-campus students

Tables 5 to 11 present in more detail the differences between the commuter students and on-campus students who participated in this study.

Table 5: Age distributions

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Age	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
18-20	68 (58%)	53 (55%)
21-24	33 (28%)	41 (42%)
25-29	12 (10%)	3 (3%)
30+	4 (3%)	0 (0%)

The commuter student group age distribution differs significantly being slightly older (average age, 21.18 vs. 20.51 years) ($\chi^2 (3) = 10.35, p = .02$).

Table 6: Ethnicity

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Ethnicity	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
White	39 (33%)	35 (37%)
Black	16 (14%)	17 (18%)
Asian	44 (38%)	39 (41%)
Mixed	6 (5%)	2 (2%)
Other	12 (10%)	3 (3%)

There was no significant difference between the commuter and on-campus student groups in distribution of ethnic backgrounds ($\chi^2 (4) = 5.93, p = .20$).

Table 7: First in family to attend university?

Frequencies (% in brackets)

First in family to attend university?	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Yes	37 (32%)	23 (23%)
No	77 (68%)	70 (72%)
No response	3 (2%)	4 (3%)

There was no significant difference between the commuter and on-campus student groups in likelihood of being first in family to attend university ($\chi^2 (2) = 1.89, p = .39$).

Table 8: Full maintenance grant?

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Full maintenance grant?	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Yes	49 (42%)	22 (28%)
No	67 (58%)	57 (72%)

Commuter students were significantly more likely than on-campus students to hold a full maintenance grant ($\chi^2 (1) = 4.20, p = .04$).

Table 9: Caring responsibilities?

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Caring responsibilities?	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Yes	15 (13%)	8 (8%)
No	107 (87%)	89 (92%)

There was no significant difference between the commuter and on-campus student groups in likelihood of having caring responsibilities ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.94, p = .33$).

Table 10: Part-time job?

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Part-time job?	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Yes	58 (50%)	30 (31%)
No	58 (50%)	66 (69%)

Commuter students were significantly more likely than on-campus student groups to hold a part-time job ($\chi^2 (1) = 7.61, p = .006$).

Table 11: Degree courses

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Degrees	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
BA	18 (15%)	16 (17%)
BSc	62 (53%)	54 (56%)
BEng	31 (26%)	12 (12%)
Other	6 (5%)	15 (15%)

There was a significant difference between the commuter and on-campus student groups in distribution of degree types ($\chi^2 (3) = 11.15, p = .01$), with a greater rate of BEng in the commuter group and a greater rate of “other” in the on-campus group.

Findings

This section is organised by themes identified through the data analysis and the key research questions under investigation, as follows: commuter students' views on attendance; commuter students' participation in university activities; and, other university experiences. In addition, this section looks at commuter students' views on existing university support and what more the University could do to better support these students.

1. Commuter students' views on attendance

Commuter students were very significantly more likely than on-campus students to report that their journey to university affected attendance at classes. $\chi^2(1) = 107.69$, $p = .0001$.

Table 12: Commute impacts attendance at classes?

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Commute impacts attendance?	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Yes	95 (82%)	9 (10%)
No	21 (18%)	84 (90%)

To examine whether having a longer commute had a significant negative impact versus a shorter commute, the participants were divided into a shorter commute group who had an average travel time to campus of up to 1 hour ($n = 48$) and a Longer Commute group who had an average travel time of more than 1 hour ($n = 69$).

Table 13: Impact on attendance at class: longer commute v. shorter commute?

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Commute impacts attendance?	Longer Commute	Shorter Commute
Yes	62 (90%)	33 (70%)
No	7 (10%)	14 (30%)

Longer commuting students were significantly more likely than shorter commuting students to report that commuting affected attendance at classes ($\chi^2(1) = 7.28$, $p = .007$).

This is supported by the qualitative questionnaire and interview data collected from commuter students. Eighty-six questionnaire respondents gave reasons for the impact of commuting on attendance. These responses are themed and quantified as follows:

Table 14: Reasons for impact on attendance

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Key themes:	Response mentions:
Traffic and public transport delays	52 (60.84%)
Not worth commuting	14 (16.38%)
Commuting time	10 (11.7%)
Health and wellbeing concerns	7 (8.19%)
Cost of travel	5 (5.85%)
Parking	3 (3.51%)

i. Traffic and delays

The overwhelmingly most common reasons (60.84% of responses) for the impact on attendance are traffic and public transport delays. These delays lead to students missing lectures or being late:

In past years, if lectures were very early in the morning (e.g. 9am) sometimes I'd miss them due to the traffic. (Questionnaire, 108)

Traffic and cancelled trains have meant that it is impossible for me to get to campus at all, or traffic has meant that I have been late to lectures. This means I am often behind and having to catch up. (Questionnaire, 31)

This experience was reiterated in interviews, with students commenting on the unpredictability of the commute:

It is hard to attend those 9am lectures when ... you know you can't really tell whether your commute's going to be as easy ... it's not consistent, there's no consistency with the commute. (Interview, 200217_001)

Students explained that the ensuing lateness causes embarrassment, discomfort and awkwardness when joining lectures:

I once had an experience where I was ten minutes late...I couldn't bring myself, find the strength to walk into class because I was so late, and I ended up walking around for ten minutes outside [the lecture theatre] because I was trying to convince myself to walk in...I was too scared to walk in. (Interview, 200121_001)

Response to lateness varies among lecturers, with some students 'locked out' due to 'zero tolerance' for lateness (Questionnaire, 77) and thus having a 'wasted journey':

Due to train delays or traffic I have ended up getting late to tutorials and as a result the tutors wouldn't let me into the class. (Questionnaire, 86)

Other lecturers take a more understanding approach and are 'more accommodating' (Interview, 200217_002):

One of my lecturers just nods and we try to communicate silently that I'm late but she's fine with that. (Interview 200121_01)

ii. Commuting time

As mentioned in 11.7% of questionnaire responses, the time taken to commute – whether with delays or not – deterred some students from even undertaking the journey. This was closely linked to timetabling and the number and length of classes on a given day:

There are days when I have only one hour of lectures for the entire day, so it is hard to find the motivation to spend 3 hours commuting in order to stay for only one hour in campus. (Questionnaire, 7)

My daily commute is an hour, if I only have 1 class I won't come in, [as] my total travel time is the same as class time. (Questionnaire, 10)

Even for students who are driving and not reliant on public transport, early lectures require particularly early journey starts. This is often due to long commuting times rather than long distances. For example, this student, living in Bedfordshire, describes her morning:

So a lot of my am starts can be quite difficult, so you can't really anticipate traffic, what I try and do is leave home two and a quarter hours early before a lecture starts, so 6.45 I'm on the road! And it's basically luck of the draw whether I'm here at exactly nine o'clock, half past eight ... (Interview, 200217_001)

It is clear that students, faced with long journey times, sometimes actively choose not to attend lectures at certain times and on certain days. Those that do, have to ensure that they leave plenty of time for their unpredictable journey.

iii. Not worth commuting

Students seek to optimise their time through non-attendance and make strategic decisions about when to commute to campus. 16.38% of questionnaire responses noted that it was sometimes not worth commuting onto campus. As one student put it: "It's not worth attending a lecture which is 1 hour" (Questionnaire, 46). Others felt frustrated as they explained the conundrum their timetable presented:

My timetable is so stupid I have one 2-hour lecture 4 days in the week. ... could've just put all lectures in 2 or 3 days. (Questionnaire, 47)

We sometimes have a 1-hour lecture at 3 or 4pm which is too late and pointless for me to commute 2-3 hours just to attend that. (Questionnaire, 62)

With resources made available online, the decision not to attend becomes easier:

Sometimes it doesn't appear to be the best use of time if you can get the lecture online afterwards and make better use of your resources. (Questionnaire, 66)

If I only have a single lecture scheduled I may not come in and use Panopto instead. (Questionnaire, 87)

Students make considered decisions based on the temporalities, geography, and economics of their particular commute:

Sometimes maybe we have a like short lecture one day I might not go in because it's not worth the time and the money spent for a short lecture which I could be at home and use that extra time I would have spent travelling to study. (Interview, 200122_001)

Some students are actively making the decision to prioritise study time over commuting time, even when that means missing lectures.

iv. Health and wellbeing

Fatigue, stress and anxiety linked to lengthy travel times and frequent delays are highlighted in 8.19% of questionnaire responses. This is an issue that can compound non-attendance:

Due to personal health issues, and just general wellbeing (including mental well-being), the journey is exhausting and mostly very stressful. (Questionnaire, 19)

It is difficult to commute and attend every lecture, it has had an impact on my health. (Questionnaire, 109)

I need to wake up early considering my commute time so can feel quite tired especially if it's a long day at uni. (Questionnaire, 20)

Health and wellbeing issues have a negative impact on attendance and add to the sense that the commute is not worthwhile, especially when lecture material is available online.

v. Cost of travel

The cost of the regular commute is a challenge and deterrent for many students, albeit highlighted in a smaller proportion of responses (5.85%). This is another factor that leads to strategic decision-making about when and when not to attend lectures. This is primarily linked to a perceived lack of timetable coherence:

Sometimes we come in just for one session but have to pay a lot. (Questionnaire, 100)

This can also be due to peak travel times which increase the regular cost of commuting:

Travelling during peak times tends to be on the expensive side so I avoid attending lectures at these times. (Questionnaire, 111)

vi. Parking

For students driving onto campus, an additional time burden was finding somewhere to park, causing lateness or absence from lectures:

Depending on the car space available I have been either late or didn't go to a lecture as there is no spaces to park. (Questionnaire, 59)

However, for other students, the changed campus parking arrangements were a “great improvement” (Interview, 200217_001), making parking far easier for early lectures, and encouraging attendance and reducing lateness.

While the majority of students find commuting to and from university to be a difficult, demanding and tiring experience, a small number of interviewed students reported that their commute to university was not always an unpleasant or negative experience, but one that afforded an opportunity to ‘think and plan’ the day:

It's like reflection time, it's between being at home and being at university, it's like what do I need to do today and it's putting the radio on, listen to something like that or an audio book... just a bit of time to chill out. (Interview 200217_002)

For other students it offered an opportunity to listen to music, read papers for seminars and lectures, catch up with university work and, in some cases, sleep:

...to sleep...while commuting I listen to music...read the slides of the lectures I've missed. (Interview 200204_002)

So, when it's actually all going quite smoothly and I get on the bus and everything I generally, I just am on my laptop doing work. At the moment if it's very early I might have a little nap. (Interview 200227_001)

While a number of students highlighted the difficulties they encounter travelling to and from university, they were pragmatic and understood it was a necessary feature of their university experience and something they had to encounter in the pursuit of their degree:

It's [commuting] not something I look forward to but it's necessary. (Interview 200122_001)

As some students specifically acknowledged, most issues associated with travelling are beyond the University's remit. Notwithstanding this, these issues and experiences can often negatively impact on overall student experience and social and academic engagement. These issues are further discussed below.

2. Participation in university activities

As table 15 shows, commuter students are very much less likely to participate in all activities than on-campus students, except work placements where there is no difference between the two groups. On-campus students are between twice and three times more likely to participate, depending on the type of activity. Commuter students participate in an average of 1.35 activities from those listed, whilst on-campus students participate in an average of 3.02 activities.

Table 15: Participation in university activities by commuter v. on-campus students

(* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$)

Activity	Commuter Students n=117	On-Campus Students n=98
Student union**	10%	41%
Social events**	15%	48%
Clubs and Societies**	29%	61%
Sports**	20%	40%
Volunteering*	14%	25%
Work placements	25%	25%
University events**	9%	30%
College and department organised events**	15%	30%

i. Impact of Commuting on Participation

In the questionnaire, 76.9% of the commuter students answered 'yes' when asked whether their travel time and/or other commitments make participation in activities at the university difficult. They offered a range of reasons including time, timing and timetables, their other commitments, and the requirements of the activity.

ii. Timing

28.9% of respondents highlighted that activities are scheduled in the evening or at weekends:

Societies and sports clubs often meet late in the evening or on the weekends, which means that to attend some of these I would not arrive home before midnight. Having then to leave early the next morning, often 6:30am, is very tiring. (Questionnaire, 66)

It was not possible to commute home with the times of events being so early in the morning or late at night. Or last minute. (Questionnaire, 53)

My training sessions are until 11 in the evening, meaning I get home at 00:15 at best. (Questionnaire, 40)

Unsurprisingly, some students felt that being a commuter student made it harder to socialise and join university activities, and that they would be more likely to participate in social activities if they lived on campus:

Because I do not live on campus I sometimes find it hard in social situations...feeling left out because I cannot drink with everyone else like I would like to. (Questionnaire, 117)

If I lived on campus I would participate in more activities on campus. (Questionnaire, 49)

In some cases, students identified that they were unable to participate due to a requirement to get home, as one student explained: “I always need to be back home before it gets darker” (Questionnaire, 8). Another student explained:

I have some events that actually run during the evening but I can't attend because they run on too late and, yeah, so I have to be back home by that time (Interview 200121_001)

The other issue is where activities are scheduled at the weekend:

...having a long commute means that travelling to Brunel on the weekend for only a few hours to take part in the activity makes it impractical as well as expensive. (Questionnaire, 31)

iii. Safety

One additional challenge arising from activities scheduled in the evening is the worry about travelling home afterwards:

A lot of activities are in the evening, nervous travelling home alone in the dark after activities which end later in the evening. (Questionnaire, 17)

Some students identify safety issues as a factor that has stopped them from participating in evening social activities at University:

Again, because of the length of time it takes to get to and from university I have never really considered joining a club. Also, because Brunel is in quite a rural area, I don't think I would always feel safe to commute past 7'o clock during Autumn and Winter months. (Questionnaire, 96)

...most of the events are at night and it's harder to commute during the night because it feels unsafe as well (Interview 200122_001)

iv. Impact of Travel Time on Participation

For all activities, the students who commuted for more than 1 hour were less likely to participate than those who commuted for 1 hour or shorter (table 16), and this general tendency was significant ($p = .004$).

Table 16: Participation in university activities: longer commute v. shorter commute

(* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$)

Activity	'Longer' Commute (more than 1 hour)	'Shorter' Commute (1 hour or less)
Student union	6%	16%
Social events*	9%	23%
Clubs and Societies	25%	35%
Sports	17%	23%
Volunteering	10%	19%
Work placements	19%	33%
University events*	4%	15%

College and department organised events	10%	21%
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Students with a longer commute participated in an average of 1.00 activities. Students with a shorter commute participated in an average of 1.85 activities out of the 8 types of activity. This is still less than the on-campus students who, as noted in table 15, participated in an average of 3.02 activities. The students offered reasons for this which include their timetable, transport, other commitments, and the nature of the activities on offer to them.

v. Timetable

Where students felt that there is the potential to participate there can be issues with how activities fit into their timetable and day:

Societies and clubs usually take place in the evening which makes it much harder to attend if you finish lectures in the middle of the day, as you don't have a room nearby to rest or work in until the evening. (Questionnaire, 66)

Since most lectures are 9am it is difficult, especially days that seminars are distanced a long time after lectures. (Questionnaire, 30)

Students identified the implications of this in terms of time and commute:

By the time I finish my lectures I am very tired and on top of that I have to commute 1 hour and 30 minutes to arrive home. No energy left for attending any events. (Questionnaire, 73)

There were also implications as a result of placement locations and organisations. As one student explained their placement had been split into two which resulted in spending "one term on campus in lectures then the other 2 on placement and vice versa" and the alternating absence from campus made it "difficult to keep up with events" (Questionnaire, 112).

vi. Accessible Transport

In addition to travel time, students talk about transport and accessibility. Students shared how the timing of activities results in "a very late drive home" (Questionnaire, 67) and the challenges of having to drive at peak times which extends the length of the commute.

Those students who use public transport acknowledged difficulties posed by transport services that are only available at particular times of day:

I am limited to 8pm for my last bus from Uxbridge to my town. (Questionnaire, 56).

Another student highlighted the effort they made to learn about available transport options, and acknowledged the support they sometimes receive to assist with their journey:

...my last bus I can take is at, only at 8pm...so night life and just doing more socialising in the evening sometimes isn't possible for commuting students, and I've realised that with other people. I've had the lucky situation where my dad can sometimes pick me up, or I know which trains go where half the time because some of them miss Slough, some of them go straight to Reading and stuff, it depends on which services. (interview, 200227_001)

These are important considerations given that they add to the complexity of the commute.

vii. Work/personal commitments

Students identified personal commitments as impacting upon their ability to participate. With 50% of the commuter students in paid work, students raised this as an issue:

...the part-time work which I do because I need to support myself, won't allow me to attend anything else apart from my scheduled lectures/seminars. (Questionnaire, 108)

viii. Activity/club requirements

Students provided explanation for what they feel willing or able to participate in, particularly in relation to sports clubs:

Sports are on a Wednesday which is usually a non-teaching day, I am less likely to travel in if I don't need to. (Questionnaire, 90)

One student explained the reason they are unable to join a sports club is because of the timing of the activities and their commute which negatively impacts their ability to fully commit: "I cannot attend regular practice sessions" (Questionnaire, 80).

Those that do join identified some further challenges:

...made it into the 2nd team but it was difficult to make trainings and matches due to times. Training was at 8-10am which meant I have to wake up at 5 and I was sweaty for the rest of the day and had to bring a big bag for change of clothes. (Questionnaire, 93)

ix. Worth it?

Given earlier comments about travel, time and personal commitments, and recognising that challenges relating to these are greater for longer commute students, some considered whether it was worth participating:

I have commitments outside of university, i.e. job, family and friends, so it's not beneficial for me to spend extra time on campus. (Questionnaire, 92)

There are times when you have to analyse if the activity is worth 3 hours of commuting or not, and usually the answer is 'No'. (Questionnaire, 7)

14.4% of students felt that University social events and activities had to serve a purpose to justify remaining on or returning to campus after lectures had finished and at an additional cost:

Some societies start late and I would either have to stay for long hours to wait for it or come back which is quite costly. (Questionnaire, 27)

I think I've not had a chance to participate in societies as much as I would like to, because a lot of that is five o'clock, six o'clock start for these kind of events and it's like my lecture ends at twelve, I'm not going to hang around for six hours doing nothing (Interview 20017_002)

Further reference was made to the multiple factors that influence the decision-making of commuter students:

I must consider the balance of time during my week include work, studies and social. (Questionnaire, 25)

x. Impact of non-participation

These challenges to participation in University activities have implications for how involved students feel in wider university life:

...during my first year, it is more difficult for me to develop friendships and join clubs as well, just because after university, after my lectures, I would just go back home. So the rest of my friends live, a lot of them stayed at university for the first year, just for experience wise, and they would do things in the evening, so it was a bit difficult for me to join in in there with what they were doing or any of the societies because by that time it would be time to go home. (Interview, 200303_001)

I think it's had quite a significant impact, just because especially in first year, like my friend I had from secondary school that comes here, all the people he was in halls with he's friends with just because he lives with them. It's very difficult for someone that commutes to have that kind of connection when you're in lectures for only an hour or two, and everyone's keeping to themselves and making notes, it's not the easiest way to make friends. So I think it's had a little bit of a social impact but I've made friends here, I make friends quite slowly anyway. So that could partially be down to me as a person, but I think yeah, it's not helped me making friends but to say it's hindered me, slightly but a lot of that can just be down to me. (Interview, 20017_002)

These experiences illustrate the limits to commuter students' abilities to be involved in university life.

3. Experiences of 'spaces' and 'places'

Students remarked that a lack of 'spaces', 'hubs' and 'places' on campus to rest, relax, eat, work and socialise was problematic particularly when students had a block of time between lectures:

There are limited spaces for students on campus living off-campus...hubs to chill out for a bit, and hubs around campus away from the busy main strip of campus. (Questionnaire, 54)

Sometimes during breaks between lectures, I don't have a place to stay and being in the library or kitchen facilities is not what I want. So eating in my car or walking about is what I resort to. I would appreciate it if there were more resting quarters for commuters or if they were made more accessible (even weekends) and 'advertised'/made aware of to show its for public use. (Questionnaire, 44)

4. Existing support for commuter students

When asked what they thought Brunel currently does to support commuter students, over half (51.48% - n= 44) left the question blank. A further 37.4% (n=32) of students responded 'nothing' and a 9.36% (n=8) responded that they either 'did not know' or were 'not sure'. This demonstrates the need for the University to better engage and communicate with this group of students.

Table 17: Brunel's current support for commuter students

Frequencies (% in brackets)

Key themes	Theme response mentions (n=117)
Nothing	32 (37.4%)
Don't know/ not sure	8 (9.36%)
Parking	8 (9.36%)
Panopto/ lecture material	5 (5.85%)
Bicycle scheme	4 (4.68%)
Transport links	4 (4.68%)
Understanding staff	2 (2.34%)
Financial support	2 (2.34%)
On-campus kitchens	2 (2.34%)
Other	12.87% (11)

Among the 'nothing' responses there was sharp criticism of the University for both ignoring the existence, and neglecting the needs, of commuter students:

Nothing whatsoever, we're completely forgotten about. Especially when we feel invalidated and deemed bad students when we struggle to attend uni on days when we only have one lecture/lab/seminar. (Questionnaire, 19)

Nothing, there is no consideration for those that might be late due to traffic or other commitments (e.g. doctor's appointment). I have been refused entry to lectures and tutorials because of this when it wasn't my fault. (Questionnaire, 89)

Considerably smaller proportions of students (9.36%, n=8) were positive about the changes to campus parking which they felt recognised their commute and enabled and encouraged their attendance and punctuality. Flagged in interviews, the 'reasonable' cost of parking was additionally considered a mechanism through which commuter students are supported.

Only five students (5.85%) praised the accessibility of lecture material via Panopto recordings and blackboard learn for supporting commuter students. This was explained further in interviews:

Say it snows one day and I can't drive in that and there's a lecture, obviously if you're on campus you can walk in and it might be a lecturer calls it off but if they still manage to get in, it's not that I ... it's not that I missed that lecture, it's recorded which is good. (Interview 200217_002)

It is possible that this is considered a support for all students, rather than being focused especially on those commuting and therefore not given greater regard in questionnaire responses.

The bicycle scheme and good public transport links to campus were also highlighted as positives for a small number of commuter students, mentioned by just 4.68% (n=4). Further smaller proportions flagged understanding by staff, financial support and the on-campus kitchens as important support. The campus kitchens were favourably discussed in interviews:

There are several on-campus kitchens, which I think ... is really helpful. ...I myself will go there to like heat up some food and eat... there is a tv... we can sit and eat. (Interview 200121_001)

However, it is disappointing that, overall, commuter students seem to have low awareness of these facilities.

Overall, the results demonstrate a lack of awareness among commuter students about current support available to them, as this student sums up:

As far as I am concerned, nothing. At least nothing that I was able to hear of for the past 2 years. (Questionnaire, 38)

5. What more can Brunel University London do to support commuter students?

In the questionnaires, 56% of commuter students (n=55) offered suggestions for what more the University can do to improve its support, with some student giving multiple suggestions. The responses fall into six thematic areas which are summarised in table 18 below. This was also explicitly discussed in interviews.

Table 18: Student suggestions for what more the University can do
Frequencies (% in brackets)

Area for Improvement	Commuter Students (n=117)
Travel and Transport	30 (33%)
Timetable	22 (18.8%)
Teaching and Support	10 (8.9%)
Facilities	8 (6.9%)
University Activities	5 (4.3%)

i. Travel and Transport

Travel and transport were the most widely cited areas where Brunel could provide further support (33%). This is unsurprising given the impact that travel has on students' experiences of university life. Within this, students referred to cost, a potential shuttle bus, parking and a commuter student travel network.

With the current student discount, one student noted that their "travel card per month is approximately £100 for zone 1-2" (Questionnaire, 96). Multiple responses requested financial assistance from the University, for example with "travel expenses or discount travel cards" (Questionnaire, 73) or "some sort of bursary for travel" (Questionnaire, 93), and a "free Oyster card" (Interview, 200204_002).

14.5% (17) students felt it would be valuable to have a University shuttle bus:

Include special buses for Brunel students only. For instance, University of West London have buses that take their students from Ealing Broadway campus to their Brentford campus for free. They also have stops between the two campuses. Brunel could apply these too (e.g. buses to and from Uxbridge station, West Drayton, Hayes & Harlington, etc.). (Questionnaire, 108)

University buses (not TFL) that pick up and drop off students from specific key points around London. (Questionnaire 7)

The Union of Brunel Students are currently exploring this possibility and some responses indicated that students were aware of this project and the potential future arrangements:

I think shuttle buses would be quite useful to go by train stations because it reduces cost and time because they'd go direct to the university. (Interview, 200122_001)

One student gave a detailed account of the costs involved in travel, how they seek to make savings and the potential impact of a bus from Uxbridge to campus:

The monthly ticket from my town instantly saves me £40. And then on top of that, rather than taking the Uxbridge buses which costs on a monthly basis around £60 or £70, depending on how much you take it, it's £1.50 twice a day, £3, times on average, twenty two days,

And so it would save me around £70 or £80 per month. (Interview, 200227_001)

Two students acknowledged that parking was an important issue “but that’s been improved over the years I’ve been commuting” (Interview, 200217_001). However, there was an acknowledgement about the challenges of on and off campus traffic, and a request for further management:

the peak hour time, the traffic from the actual car park all the way down to the ... out of university from the roundabout and out to Uxbridge Road, it’s very ... it’s very difficult to get out and it takes maybe about twenty minutes just to get out of the university. (Interviews, 200303_001)

A final suggestion was to develop a commuter student network as a mechanism for support in relation to travel:

I do genuinely think there could be something that gets commuters talking and discussing routes. For example, if someone has come into a lecture at nine am and there is a commuter says ‘oh by the way guys the M1 is absolutely chock-a-block or the M25 is bad’, depending on which route they’re taking. Share a common interest and you know it’s information exchanged about the travelling in and whatever, depending on whichever route they take (Interview, 200217_001).

ii. Timetable

The second key area came in relation to the timetable (18%). Students commented on the value of lecture times that “won’t be affected by rush hour” (Questionnaire, 90) and enabling them to avoid peak travel by scheduling “lectures between the morning and evening peak hours” (Questionnaire, 108). In addition, students suggested reconsidering the start and end times for teaching:

Many students feel the timetabling is not in favour of commuter students - start too early or finish too late, therefore lengthening travelling time. (Questionnaire, 70)

They also gave specific suggestions for timing:

Try to have the earliest lecture/seminar at 9am rather than 8am. (Questionnaire, 20)

Timetabling more lectures during the afternoon. (Questionnaire, 80).

Additionally, condensing timetabled days was highlighted:

Timetabling could be better in years such as Level 1 and 2, often times there has been a lecture timetabled for the morning, then a large gap (3-4 hrs) until the next lecture. When living off campus this

can make that time in between highly unproductive as you can't study for so long and there's only so much you can do. (Questionnaire, 39)

There are clear benefits identified in condensing the days, as this student explained:

So that there will be less days that commuting in will be necessary. As at the moment there are days where I only have one, one-hour lecture, with days where I have a 3+ hour gap. Filling that gap with this lecture would mean an extra day to work independently. (Questionnaire, 31)

As well as having a positive impact on students' time, it would also save them money by reducing the number of times they are required to travel. What feels like a relatively small shift in the timetable can have a large impact on students:

Just moving a lecture forward by that one hour can help students massively (Interview, 200217_002)

iii. Facilities

6.9% of responses related to the University's facilities and included a request for more study and seating areas "where people could probably rest or charge their phones or devices you know?" (Interview, 200121_001). There were also suggestions about access to lockers to provide "somewhere to store our stuff" (Interview, 200217_001).

There were requests for more kitchen space:

I'd like to keep my ... if I've got food with me, I'd like it keep it in a refrigerator. I don't think there is a communal fridge area. But somewhere we can put our food and reheat it if we need to or ... because I know we have a meeting house but really it's booked up most of the time. I am aware that there's a small kitchen in the Michael Sterling Building but it doesn't feel that clean and it's not the largest of spaces if that makes sense. It's not really somewhere you can eat food as well, it's quite a small space... the sort of kitchen area/break room is probably the largest concern, which I think ... it would definitely help commuters, it would definitely help. (Interview, 200217_001)

And requests for bookable overnight accommodation:

...if there were spaces available for them to stay overnight in the actual like free rooms that are available because like a few students, a few of my friends, when they do stay at university with friends, they just stay over at their dorm sometimes and that's not really ... I mean they literally just like sleep on the floor! So that's not really ... I mean it's for a day, but maybe make that sort of thing available as well, so they can just rent it out for the evening or something. (Interview, 200303_001)

The final issue raised was about not being able to access locked teaching and other rooms which led to the suggestion “to open the campus early, close later and open on weekends” (Questionnaire, 53). Some commuter students would value a campus map that identifies rooms that are available to them to “make students more aware of the facilities available for use” (Questionnaire, 44).

iv. Teaching and Support

8.9% of questionnaire responses referred to teaching related matters and access to sessions off campus. Responses included a request for lecturers to live stream sessions and to “standardise methods of recording lectures” (Questionnaire, 53):

Lectures should ideally always be put online as they finish and lectures themselves should be video recorded rather than voice recorded. Video allows you to see what is happening in the room as well as it being much more consistent than the hard to hear voice tech currently used. This is useful for everyone not just commuters, as well as helping when it comes to revision or if you're ill and can't attend a lecture (Questionnaire, 66)

There was also a suggestion to provide support for students who may be late due to travel disruption:

Give 10 mins extra time for people that live off campus in case they are late to sessions before not allowing students into tutorials and lectures (Questionnaire, 79)

v. University Activities

As highlighted earlier in the report, commuter students provided a number of reasons why they found it challenging to get involved in activities on campus. One made a direct plea: “please make it more possible for off-campus students to join activities” (Questionnaire, 5). Another asked that the University “have things in place so people can still drink and be social without worrying how to get back home.” (Questionnaire, 117). There were several ideas about how that might be possible which included timing, given the challenges about travelling late in the day or at weekends:

maybe have a few like afternoon activities going on, rather than everything in the evening...for students who are commuting, that's a bit more difficult to go all the time. So yeah, maybe that would be easier just if more activities are on Wednesday afternoon (Interview, 200303_001).

As the findings show, commuter students experience a range of challenges and have provided examples of the decisions they make to balance their lives as students with their lives outside University. The complexities of the social, financial and time implications, along with the suggestions for adaptations that can be made to help them, are important to understand so that the University can respond in ways that will enhance the commuter student experience.

Recommendations

From these findings, this report makes the following recommendations about how best to support undergraduate commuter students at Brunel University London.

i. Commuter Student Signposting

Continue to signpost the support, facilities and services currently available to commuter students.

ii. Dedicated Commuter Student Webpage

Work with a commuter student panel to create a dedicated commuter student University webpage.

iii. Commuter student network

Develop a commuter student network to link new Brunel commuter students with those already studying here.

iv. Commuter Student Webinar

Offer commuter students the opportunity to attend a dedicated Webinar to take place at the beginning of the academic term in which available on-campus services and facilities are outlined. This will provide an opportunity for the University to showcase what they are doing to specifically support commuter students.

v. Staff Awareness

Encourage staff to consider commuter students' experiences when making decisions around student engagement and attendance. Recognise that for many commuter students, engagement is not linked to attendance.

vi. Commuter Student Facilities

Continue to roll out dedicated commuter student study and social spaces on campus. Increase the number of lockers and kitchenettes available to commuter students in different colleges and departments.

vii. Timetabling

Where possible, individual departments should consider coordinating the timetable to ensure that lectures are clustered together. This will consolidate the number of commuting days required by students.

viii. Student Union Commuter Student Representative

University to work with the Union of Brunel Students to develop a student Union Officer to represent the views of commuter students.

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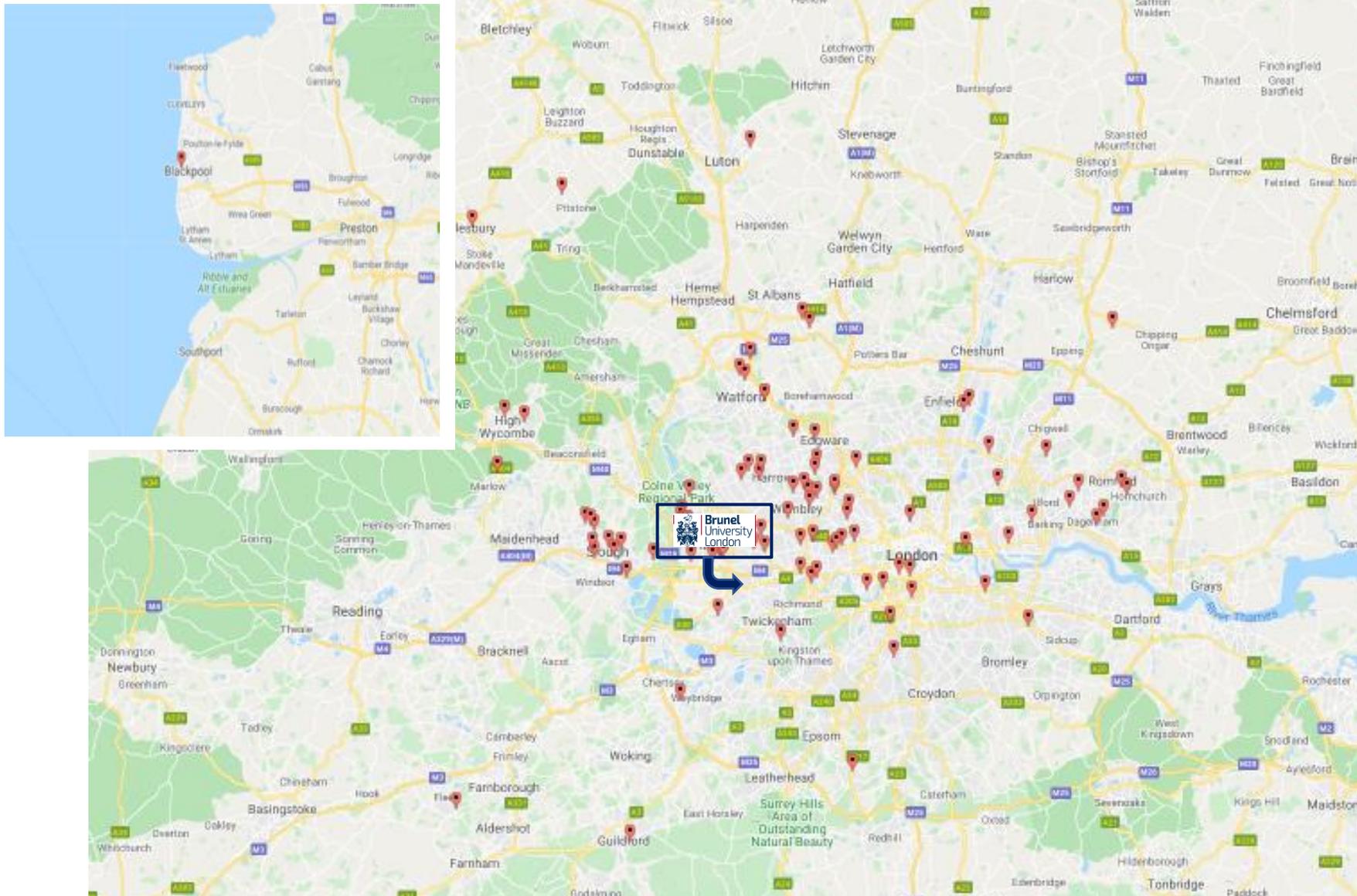
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of commuter students' home postcodes



Appendix 2: Questionnaire for commuter students

Study title: Commuter Students

Introduction

Dear Student,

The Department of Education, Brunel University London, is running a research project entitled “**Commuter Students**” which aims to explore your experiences of being an **undergraduate commuter student** at Brunel. The findings of the study will help develop recommendations and guidelines in order to better support and retain commuter students at Brunel.

Your participation in this study will be very useful as it will help us understand the experiences of commuter students at Brunel University London. Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential and securely retained on the Brunel password protected network.

By pressing submit at the end of the survey you are giving consent to participate.

This survey is being conducted by Brunel University London. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr Ellen McHugh, (ellen.mchugh@brunel.ac.uk 01895 268977). Alternatively, if you wish to discuss any ethical considerations please contact, Professor David Gallear, College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Cbass-ethics@brunel.ac.uk).

Thank you for your time.

Commuter Student definition:

Based on the Student Engagement Partnership’s 2017 report, commuter students are defined as **those who have the same home and term-time address, irrespective of the distance from the place of study.**

1. Do you currently commute to Brunel University London?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Have you ever been a commuter student? (Please refer to commute student definition)
 - Yes
 - No

If you answered yes to either of the two above questions, please continue.

ABOUT YOU

3. What is your current postcode?

4. What gender do you identify with?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other (please specify):

5. What is your age?
 - 18-20
 - 21-24
 - 25-29
 - 30+
 - Prefer not to say

6. What is your ethnic group? Please read the following list before choosing the one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.
 - White-English
 - White-Welsh
 - White-Scottish
 - White Northern-Irish
 - White-British
 - White-Irish
 - Irish Traveller
 - Gypsy or Traveller
 - Any other White background
 - White and Black-Caribbean
 - White and Black-African
 - White and Asian
 - Any other Mixed /Multiple background
 - Asian-British
 - Asian-Indian
 - Asian-Pakistani
 - Asian-Chinese
 - Any other Asian background
 - Black-British
 - Black-African
 - Black-Caribbean
 - Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
 - Arab
 - Other (please specify):

7. What qualifications did you have before coming to Brunel (Tick all that apply)?
 - BTEC
 - HND
 - Access Course
 - A-Levels
 - International Baccalaureate (IB)
 - Undergraduate degree

- Other (please specify)
- 8.** Are you the first person in your family (in relation to parents/guardians and siblings) to enter higher education?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know/Prefer not to say
- 9.** Are you in receipt of a Full Maintenance Grant?
- Yes
 - No
- 10.** Have you ever been in receipt of a Pupil Premium Grant?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 11.** Are You Registered Disabled?
- Yes
 - No
- 12.** Have you ever been a looked after child (e.g. lived with foster parents; lived in a residential children's home; lived in residential setting like a school or secure unit; been adopted)?
- Yes
 - No
- 13.** Do you have any caring responsibilities (e.g. for partner, children, parents, siblings)?
- Yes
 - No
- 14.** Do you have any dependent children in the following age groups?
- None
 - Under 5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 11-16 years
 - 17 years +
- 15.** Do you have a part-time paid job?
- Yes – if yes, please answer qu. 16.
 - No – if no, please go to qu. 17.
- 16.** On average, how many hours of paid work do you do a week?
- 0-5 hours
 - 6-10 hours
 - 10+

ABOUT YOUR COURSE

17. Are you studying?

- Part-time
- Full-time

18. What type of degree are you presently studying?

- BA
- BSc
- BEng
- Don't know
- Other (please specify)

19. Which department do you belong to?

- Brunel Business School
- Department of Arts and Humanities
- Department of Clinical Sciences
- Department of Computer Science
- Department of Design
- Department of Economics and Finance
- Department of Education
- Department of Electronic and Computing Engineering
- Department of Life Sciences
- Department of Mathematics
- Department of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering
- Department of Politics, History and Law
- Department of Social Sciences, Media and Communications

20. Approximately how many hours of timetabled contact hours do you have per week?

- 0-4 hours
- 5-8 hours
- 9-12 hours
- 13+ hours

21. How important were the following in your decision to study at Brunel University London?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely Important
Academic reputation					
Specific programmes/course					
Academic Facilities (e.g. library, classrooms, study spaces, etc.)					
Academic support					
Support services					
Student mix/diversity					

Location					
Accessibility by public transport					
Distance from home					

21.a. Is there anything not mentioned above that was important to you?

22. Where do you currently live?

- Student accommodation on campus (Rented from Brunel)
- Private sector student accommodation
- Parent's or guardian's home
- Shared house or flat rented alone
- Shared house or flat rented with friends
- Own home alone
- Own home with partner or children
- Other (Please specify): _____

23. Have you moved closer to Brunel in order to study?

- Yes
- No

YOUR COMMUTE TO BRUNEL UNIVERSITY LONDON

24. Have you ever lived on campus?

- Yes
- No

24.a. If yes, when did you live on campus? (Tick all that apply)

- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4

25. Approximately, how far do you live from Brunel University London?

- 0-1 miles
- 2-5 miles
- 6-10 miles
- 11-20 miles
- 21-30 miles
- 30+ miles

26. What is your average travel time to Brunel University London?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2+ hours

27. How do you usually travel to Brunel University London? (Tick all that apply)

- Walk

- Car (self-drive)
- Car (given a lift)
- Cycle
- Scoot
- Bus
- Tube
- Train
- Taxi
- Other (please specify)

28. How much does it cost per day to travel to Brunel University London (return journey)?

- No cost
- £3 or under
- £4-5
- £6-8
- £9-10
- £10+
- Other (please specify)

29. Does your commute ever have an impact on your attendance at lectures/seminars/tutorials?

- Yes
- No

29.a. If yes, please explain why and the impact it has had:

29.b. If yes, how often does this happen:

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Regularly

ACTIVITIES AT UNIVERSITY

30. Do you participate in any of the following activities at Brunel University London? (Tick all that apply)

- Student Union organised events
- Social events
- Clubs and Societies
- Sports
- Volunteering
- Work placements
- University organised events
- College and Department organised events

YOUR VIEWS OF BEING A COMMUTER STUDENT AT BRUNEL

31. Do you feel that your travel time and/or other commitments make participating in activities at University difficult?

- Yes
- No

31.a. If yes, please provide details

32. Please provide any other information about your experiences of commuting to Brunel University London that you think would be useful.

33. What do you think Brunel University London currently does to support commuter students? Please provide details.

34. Is there anything else Brunel University London could do to better support commuter students? Please provide details.

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

Thank you for your help. We are inviting all students who currently commute to participate in a follow up interview to discuss their experiences of being a commuter student at Brunel University London. The interview will take up to 1 hour and will take place either by phone or in person on campus. You will also be invited to keep a multi-media diary for a typical week at Brunel. You can use the photograph, voice memo, video and notes capabilities on your mobile phone to capture your experiences of journeying to and from university and your experiences while at Brunel.

Material from the multi-media diaries, questionnaires and interviews will be used to create an exhibition at Brunel University London.

All students taking part in the interview and multi-media diary will be given a £10 voucher to compensate them for their time.

If you are interested in participating please complete the details section below indicating either your email address or mobile number as the best means to contact you.

Your details will be treated confidentially by us, and will not be passed on to anyone else. They will only be used for research purposes and will be securely retained on a Brunel password protected network.

Name:

Telephone No:

Email:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for 'on-campus' students

Study title: Non-Commuter Students

Introduction

Dear Student,

The Department of Education, Brunel University London, is running a research project entitled "Commuter Students" this year. Alongside that we are now undertaking a project which aims to explore your experiences of being an **undergraduate "non-commuter students"** which aims to explore your experiences of being an undergraduate non-commuter student at Brunel. The findings of the study will help develop recommendations and guidelines in order to better support and retain non-commuter students at Brunel.

Your participation in this study will be very useful as it will help us understand the experiences of non-commuter students at Brunel University London. Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential and securely retained on the Brunel password protected network.

By pressing submit at the end of the survey you are giving consent to participate.

This survey is being conducted by Brunel University London. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr Ellen McHugh, (ellen.mchugh@brunel.ac.uk 01895 268977). Alternatively, if you wish to discuss any ethical concerns please contact, Professor David Gallear, College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Chair, (Cbass-ethics@brunel.ac.uk).

Thank you for your time.

Commuter Student definition:

Based on the Student Engagement Partnership's 2017 report, commuter students are defined as **those who have the same home and term-time address, irrespective of the distance from the place of study.**

1. Have you ever been a commuter student? (Please refer to commute student definition)

- Yes
- No

ABOUT YOU

2. What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify):

3. What is your age?

- 18-20
- 21-24
- 25-29
- 30+
- Prefer not to say

4. What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.

- White-English
- White-Welsh
- White-Scottish
- White-Northern Irish
- White-British
- White-Irish
- Irish Traveller
- Gypsy or Traveller
- Any other White background
- White and Black-Caribbean
- White and Black-African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed/Multiple background
- Asian-British
- Asian-Indian
- Asian-Pakistani
- Asian-Bangladeshi
- Asian-Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- Black-British
- Black-African
- Black-Caribbean
- Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
- Arab
- Other (please specify):

5. What qualifications did you have before coming to Brunel? (Tick all that apply)

- BTEC
- HND
- Access Course
- A-Levels
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Undergraduate degree
- Other (please specify)

6. Are you the first person in your family (in relation to parents/guardians and siblings) to enter higher education?

- Yes
- No

- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

7. Are you in receipt of a Full Maintenance Grant?

- Yes
- No

8. Have you ever been in receipt of a Pupil Premium Grant?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

9. Are You Registered Disabled?

- Yes
- No

10. Have you ever been a looked after child (e.g. lived with foster parents; lived in a residential children's home; lived in a residential setting like a school or secure unit; been adopted)?

- Yes
- No

11. Do you have any caring responsibilities (e.g. for partner, children, parents, siblings)?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you have any dependent children in the following age groups?

- None
- Under 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-16 years
- 17+ years

13. Do you have a part-time paid job?

- Yes – if yes, please answer qn 14.
- No – if no, please go to qn 15.

14. On average, how many hours of paid work do you do a week?

- 0-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- 10+ hours

ABOUT YOUR COURSE

15. Are you studying:

- Part-time
- Full-time

16. What type of degree are you presently studying?

- BA
- BSc
- BEng
- Don't know
- Other (please specify)

17. Which department do you belong to?

- Brunel Business School
- Department of Arts and Humanities
- Department of Clinical Sciences
- Department of Computer Science
- Department of Design
- Department of Economics and Finance
- Department of Education
- Department of Electronic and Computing Engineering
- Department of Life Sciences
- Department of Mathematics
- Department of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering
- Department of Politics, History and Law
- Department of Social Sciences, Media and Communications

18. Approximately how many hours of timetabled contact hours do you have per week?

- 0-4 hours
- 5-8 hours
- 9-12 hours
- 13+ hours

19. How important were the following in your decision to study at Brunel University London?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely Important
Academic reputation					
Specific programmes/course					
Academic Facilities (e.g. library, classrooms, study spaces, etc.)					
Academic support					
Support services					
Student mix/diversity					

19a. Is there anything not mentioned above that was important to you?

YOUR COMMUTE TO BRUNEL UNIVERSITY LONDON

20. Does your commute ever have an impact on your attendance at lectures/seminars/tutorials?

- Yes
- No

20.a. If yes, please explain why and the impact it has had.

20.b. If yes, how often does this happen?

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Regularly

ACTIVITIES AT UNIVERSITY

21. Do you participate in any of the following activities at Brunel University London? (Tick all that apply)

- Student Union organised events
- Social events
- Clubs and Societies
- Sports
- Volunteering
- Work placements
- University organised events
- College and Department organised events

22. What do you think Brunel University London currently does to support commuter students? Please provide details.

23. Is there anything else Brunel University London could do to better support commuter students? Please provide details.

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Appendix 4: Commuter student interview guide

TOPIC GUIDE

In-depth interviews with commuter students

(Amend as appropriate whether face-to-face or telephone)

All questions to be asked in relation to interviewee's completed questionnaire.

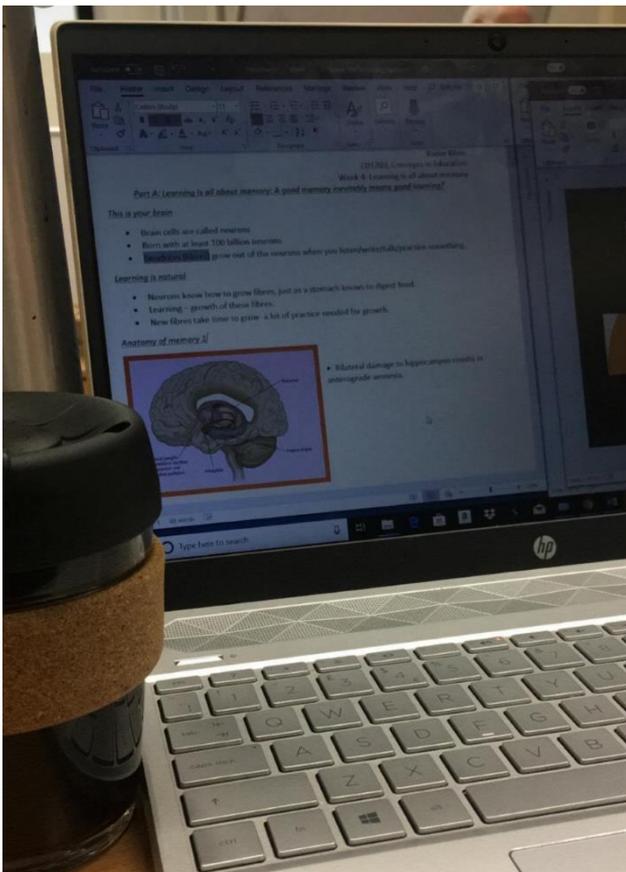
TOPIC	QUESTIONS
Introductions and consent form	<p>Introduce self and explain the purpose of the project and aim of interview (i.e. to interview commuter students and understand their experiences and how the university can better support them)</p> <p>Ensure signed consent form and recap on main points.</p> <p>Ask interviewee to introduce themselves</p> <p>Make sure the following information obtained from the questionnaire is correct: demographics/personal details</p>
Current Living Arrangements	<p>Can you please confirm where you currently live?</p> <p>How do you travel to Brunel?</p>
Main question:	<p>Why did you choose to commute to Brunel?</p> <p>What is your experience of commuting to Brunel University London?</p> <p>What is good about commuting to Brunel?</p> <p>Any challenges with your commute?</p> <p>What is a 'normal' commute to Brunel?</p> <p>How does commuting make you feel?</p> <p>Do you enjoy commuting?</p> <p>Will you continue to commute?</p>
Student Experience	<p>Does your commute impact on your student experience?</p> <p>PROBE for details e.g.</p> <p>Negative impacts</p> <p>Positive impacts</p> <p>Do you attend all your timetable lectures/tutorial/seminars</p> <p>Do you attend/participate in extra-curricular activities?</p> <p>(If no, why not?)</p> <p>PROBE for details e.g. (Look at questionnaire)</p> <p>Social events</p> <p>Clubs and societies</p> <p>Have you made friends at Brunel?</p> <p>Do you feel you belong?</p>
Support offered	<p>How do you find the support at Brunel?</p> <p>PROBE – Look at questionnaire</p>
Better supporting Commuter students	<p>What could Brunel University do to better support and improve the experiences of commuter students?</p> <p>PROBE for details e.g. (Look at questionnaire)</p> <p>Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment</p>

	<p>Extra-curricular opportunities</p> <p>Social events to help encourage friendships and foster a sense of belonging</p> <p>Wellbeing</p> <p>Facilities</p> <p>Anything else you would like to say/add?</p> <p>If there is anything that occurs to you over the next few days and weeks, please feel free to contact me.</p>
Multi-media diary	<p>We are asking all students to keep a multi-media diary for a typical week at Brunel.</p> <p>You can use the photograph, voice memo, video and notes capabilities on your mobile phone to capture your experiences of journeying to and from university and your experiences while at Brunel.</p> <p>Are you happy to do this?</p> <p>Research team to follow up with an email.</p>
Further contact	<p>We will send them an electronic summary of the report.</p>
Thank and close	<p>Thank interviewee</p> <p>Give them £10 voucher – get date and signature.</p>

Appendix 5: Photographs and annotations



This photo was taken during one of my first commutes into Brunel, on registration day! This is the beginning of my journey as a commuter student at Brunel.



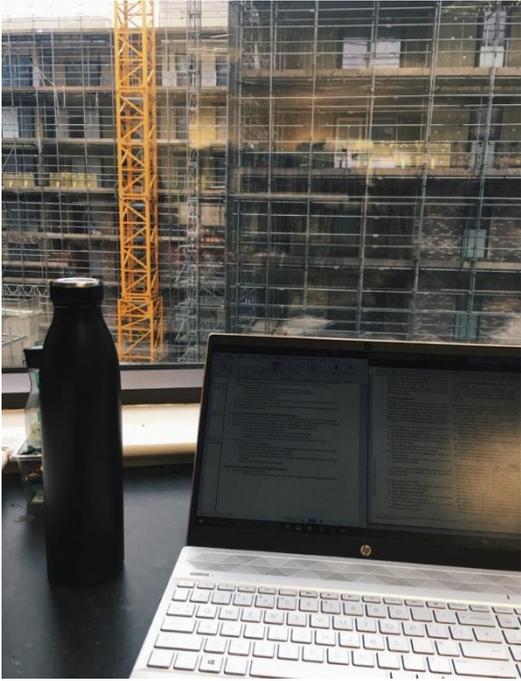
Here is one of the many lectures during my time at Brunel. Coffee consumption is a must, especially after commuting onto campus for morning lectures.



Walking and the tube are how I commute into Brunel. Here is a photograph of me walking to the train station to take the tube to Uxbridge, on a sunny day!



The pond on campus, filled with ducks and other sea life, is one of my favourite sites on campus. I walk past here every time I commute into campus.



As a commuter student, most of my studying occurs off campus. This image is taken at Gayton Library on Harrow-on-the-Hill, a space I visit to study frequently.



Excluding lectures and other taught sessions, I spend most of my time on campus at Crackle and Hum café. This image was taken on a cold autumn afternoon and is the view I see every time.



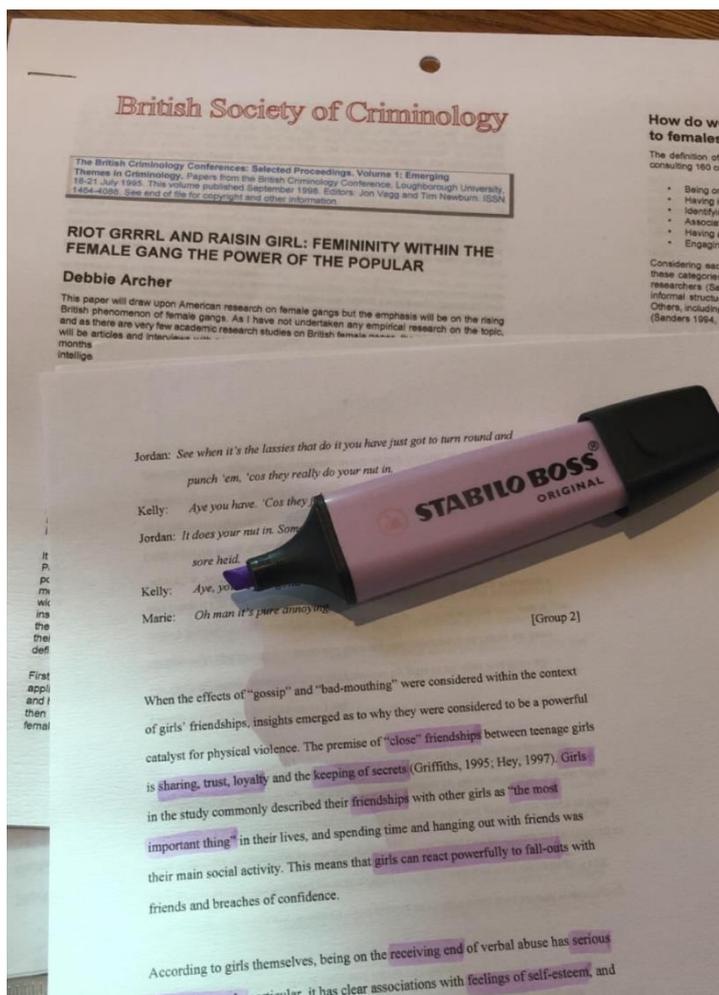
As the tube is one of my commuting means, this photograph showcases the later commutes back home, as the sun is beginning to set. Commuting on the train allows me to view the serene greenery which surrounds the Uxbridge area.



My Doc Marten shoes are my go-to shoes when I commute into Brunel. They are extremely comfortable for an hour and a half's commute.



This is one of the commuting Metropolitan Line tube stations I use to commute to Brunel. The sunny weather and clear skies are a wonderful sight!



As a commuter student, I utilise time before, in between and after lectures to read either material relating to my degree or other interests. I usually read during my commute too.

Appendix 6: Participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – INTERVIEW (POST-QUESTIONNAIRE)

Study title: Commuter Students Research Study

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The broad objective of this study is to explore the experiences of commuter students (undergraduates) at Brunel University London and develop recommendations and guidelines in order to better support and retain them. The project will culminate in a report of findings, actionable recommendations and multi-media outputs.

Why have you been approached?

In order to improve the experiences of students at the University we want to understand the experiences of current commuter students. As a commuter student you have valuable experiences to share with us and have indicated that you may be interested in participating in this project.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and the decision to take part is yours. The research process requires a time commitment from you, and so we anticipate that those who volunteer will have a genuine interest in the topic. There is no obligation for you to participate.

What would my participation involve?

This is a collaborative research process which is seeking to do research into this area differently. We are keen to undertake this research with you rather than about you. As a result of the approach being taken it is a little more complex and time consuming than other research you may have previously been involved in as there are several parts to the process:

Questionnaire: *you have already completed an online questionnaire which you gave your consent for and subsequently indicated your interest in being involved in this next stage of this research.*

Interview: *we would like to interview you to give you an opportunity to share your experiences of being a commuter student at Brunel University London. These will take place either by phone or in person at Brunel University London.*

Multi-media diaries: *you will be invited to keep a multi-media diary of a typical week at Brunel. You can use the photograph, voice memo, video and notes capabilities on your mobile phone to capture your experiences of journeying to and from university and experiences while at Brunel.*

Material from the multi-media diaries, questionnaires and interviews will be used to create an exhibition at Brunel University London.

All students taking part in the interview and multi-media diary will be given a £10 voucher to compensate them for their time.

How will the research data be used?

Findings of the project will be disseminated via an exhibition, and a report and recommendations. In addition, the research team will present findings at selected conferences/ seminars and through writing academic papers for publications.

Anonymity

Pseudonyms will be adopted and you will remain anonymous in data presentation. Any data that may identify other individuals, groups or specific locations will be omitted. Data will be retained confidentially in a locked/secure/password protected location for up to five years and may be used as the basis to plan future research, in line with University policy.

Your right to withdraw from the study

If you agree to take part in the study, you are totally free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. Voluntary participation is key and you can also decide whether or not you want us to use any data that we have collected up to that point.

Who is conducting this research?

The project researchers are Dr Anne Chappell, Dr Ellen McHugh and Dr Emma Wainwright, Department of Education, Brunel University London and is funded by Brunel University London.

How do I know that this study has been carefully reviewed?

The Brunel University Research Ethics Committee has reviewed this study to ensure that it complies with university guidelines in terms of anonymity, confidentiality and data protection, potential harm to participants etc. All this is part of our standard procedure and ensures that research is conducted ethically.

Research Integrity

Brunel University London is committed to compliance with the Universities UK Research Integrity Concordat. You are entitled to expect the highest level of integrity from our researchers during the course of their research.

What are the indemnity arrangements?

Brunel University London provides appropriate insurance cover for research which has received ethical approval.

If I agree to be involved, what happens next?

The research team will send you a consent form which you will be asked to sign and date. This will demonstrate that you have been fully briefed about the research process; read the information provided; and had any questions answered.

Staying in touch

If you would like to discuss any thoughts or observations that occur to you after your participation in the study, please contact Dr Ellen McHugh: Ellen.mchugh@brunel.ac.uk, 01895 268977

Contact for further information and complaints

If you have any questions at any point during this research you should contact ellen.mchugh@brunel.ac.uk 01895 268977. Alternatively if you wish to discuss any ethical concerns please contact, Professor David Gallear, College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Chair, Cbass-ethics@brunel.ac.uk

Thank you.

Appendix 7: Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

Study title: Commuter Students Research Study

Please tick (✓) all boxes below as appropriate, and date and sign as indicated.

A.	I have read and understood the participant information sheet above. I feel clear about what is involved and expected of me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
B.	I understand that my participation is totally voluntary. I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time and am not obliged to provide any explanation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
C.	If I do wish to withdraw, I understand that I can choose to withdraw some, or all, of the data collected up to that point.	<input type="checkbox"/>
D.	I understand that anonymity will be assured in any data collected and that pseudonyms will be used for any reference to individuals, groups or specific locations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
E.	I confirm that I have been given plenty of opportunities to ask questions, and where questions have been asked they have been answered to my full satisfaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>
F.	I give my informed consent for recording and transcribing of the research conversations and understand that the data will be stored at Brunel University London under Data Protection regulations for up to 5 years after the study is completed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
G.	I understand that the findings of this research will be published in journals/books; disseminated through national and international conferences, research seminars, symposia, workshops and media coverage (where relevant); used to inform policy development; used in teaching and course development; and any audio, videos, images I share may be included in an exhibition.	<input type="checkbox"/>
H.	I agree to take part in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I agree to be involved in the research conversations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I agree to share photographs, videos that I take for possible inclusion in an exhibition.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant's full name
(PRINT)

Date

Signature

Researcher's name
(PRINT)

Date

Signature

Participant's Email Address

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