



British International School Riyadh

Rise of the 'stay at home' students

Students are increasingly keeping accommodation costs down by going to local universities and living with their parents

Hannah Elder and her mother Anne: after totting up the cost of halls of residence she decided to stay at home – and says it has brought the family closer

If there were an index tracking sales of cheap kettle-and-toaster sets, it would surely be sloping downwards. The kitchen starter-kit was once a crucial purchase for every undergraduate in the country. But surging fees and the impact of the recession has seen the rise of the stay-at-home student. With accommodation in student halls now costing an average of more than £3,800 a year, thousands of undergraduates are opting to study for a degree while living with mum and dad to avoid building up a mountain of debt.

Last year, more than 310,000 [students](#) opted to study at local universities while living at home, according to the government's [Higher Education Statistics Agency](#). That is 19% of all undergraduates – up from just 8% in 1984. The main reason, according to research from Liverpool University, is financial pressure. The research shows that nearly eight in 10 students living with their parents do so to save money. And with estimates suggesting students will pay an average of £48,409 in living costs and course charges when [tuition fees](#) triple next September, the trend for stay-at-home students is set to grow. A survey by HSBC last month found more than a quarter of parents plan to ask their children to live at home during the university years to help keep costs down.

For some, it is a perfect solution. Ricky Lawless, 21, has just finished his third and final year studying diagnostic radiography at St George's, University of London. He spent his time commuting on a 25-minute train ride from his home in Thornton Heath, south London, to campus. "I wasn't planning on staying at home, but I got my place at St George's through clearing, and when I realised how close it was, I thought I'd avoid spending loads on halls," he explains. "I'd planned to make friends and work out who I wanted to live with in my second year, but after buying a £600 train season ticket, I found it really easy to get from home to lectures, friends and nights out."

Lawless made the train journey about 15 times each week. "After my first year, I realised my course placements were nearer my home than the actual campus so I ended up staying with my parents."

Lawless's tuition fees were paid for by the NHS, and his family background made him eligible for a £3,000-a-year means-tested bursary.

That, plus living at home and working in part-time jobs, meant he avoided going into the red. "I earned about £3,000 a year working as a swimming pool lifeguard and hospital healthcare assistant," he says. "My parents said they wouldn't ask me for rent until I had a full-time job, and I don't drink alcohol, so that saved me loads. Apart from the train, my biggest expense was going out every Tuesday and Friday night, and rounds for all of my mates." Despite ~~netting the drinks in~~ Lawless says he is set to graduate with savings of around £13,500

But he admits it was tougher to be fully involved in campus life while living at home – indeed, the Liverpool research found only a fifth of stay-at-home students were involved in extra-curricular activities, compared with 70% of those living on campus.

For many, being a commuter-student is not a first choice. Susan Garfirth, 20, has just finished her first year of education studies and social care at Northampton University. "On my Ucas form I put down five different courses at Northampton, purely because it's a 15-minute drive from my home," she says. "I come from a single-parent family – my mum's a teaching assistant – so it would have been too expensive to move away to halls. I would have got myself into awful debt."

Garfirth receives a £2,000 maintenance grant and £1,000 university bursary, but pays for the family food shopping as well as vet bills for her two cats, so still has to take out a student loan to get by. "I'm desperately hoping to cope without it in my third year – I want to avoid the extra debt," she says. To that end, she has just started a part-time job at sandwich chain Subway. "But the bills for books, petrol and car costs all add up."

At freshers' week, Garfirth felt nervous that she'd struggle to make friends while living at home. "I felt like I couldn't go out to the union with everyone else, because I couldn't drink and drive. But then I met a good friend from my course, and now I stay on her floor after a night out. In fact, living at home has worked out pretty well, even though I hated the idea to start with. After a long day at uni I can come home and cook myself a nice meal, then go to bed without worrying about fire alarms going off at three in the morning."

It is Mum that does the cooking for Hannah Elder, 20, who is going into her second year studying TV production at Bournemouth University next month. That, she says, is one of the plus points of living at home. "Initially, I considered moving into a uni let because I was worried about struggling to meet new people and felt as if I needed to live with other students," she says. But after totting up the cost of halls, and realising commuting to uni meant she could keep her part-time job in a residential care home, she decided to stay put.

She has some regrets however. "If you live at home you have to make that extra bit of effort to go to parties and nights out. After my first year of uni, I've learnt that I need to make more of an effort to go out and socialise with friends from my course next term. Sometimes it's harder to get the energy to go out to town, because I don't live across the road from the clubs like other students. But if you never go, then you stop being invited."

Elder also admits she doesn't feel as independent as other students, and is hoping to move out in her third year. She does, however, feel closer to her family. "I thought living at home would mean I'd be fed up of still seeing my parents every day and that my relationship with them would worsen, but it really hasn't," she says. "They don't constantly check up on me, but do encourage me to socialise and have nights out – they want me to make the most of uni. I'm lucky to have supportive parents. They'll probably be the ones who will be sick of having me around if I don't move out within the next couple of years."