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GAUGING THE IMPACT OF STUDENT ACCOMMODATION ON **WELL-BEING**



THE CLASS
FOUNDATION

abf RESEARCH

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The Class Foundation

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ABSTRACT

To identify the best possible housing solutions for students, The Class Foundation has sought insights into whether and to what extent student accommodation influences well-being. Our research has been premised on two questions: (1) Do certain facilities and/or services have a positive effect on the well-being of students? (2) Which students have the best living experience on average?

In order to answer these questions, The Class Foundation teamed up with ABF Research to execute the 'Student Well-being' survey. Among other things, the survey measured student well-being on the basis of the 'Mental Health Inventory 5' (MHI-5), an international standard for gauging mental health which consists of five questions related to how the respondent has felt in the past 4 weeks. Based on respondents' answers, an average score was calculated with a value between 0 (very unhealthy) and 100 (perfectly healthy). Respondents qualified as psychologically health if they attained a score of 60 or higher. Any score lower than 60 is considered psychologically unhealthy.

In addition to questions about well-being and housing experience, questions were asked about personal, educational, and housing characteristics. This combination of questions made it possible to relate the well-being of students to their housing situation. The results of our research are set out in this report.

FIELDWORK

The fieldwork of the student well-being survey took place between 7 and 23 June 2021. Students were approached in two ways: (1) commercial Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) providers surveyed a selection of their tenants, and (2) a random sample of respondents from the annual national student housing monitor “Living as a Student” were re-approached.

The re-approached students indicated that they were living at their family home, with a social student housing association, or renting from a private landlord other than the commercial PBSA providers selected by The Class Foundation. The re-approached students formed the comparison group in our study. A total of 1,993 respondents living in the Netherlands completed the survey. Table 1 shows the number of respondents segmented by type of accommodation.

The survey was weighted to provide a fully representative snapshot. This weighting was conducted bearing in mind the following variables: type of accommodation (student housing associations/PBSA/private landlord/living at home), type of student (domestic/international), educational attainment level (Bachelor’s/Master’s degree), and type of university (applied science/research).

Table 1: # of respondents by type of accommodation;
Source: ‘Student Well-being’ survey

Type of Accommodation	Respondents
Student housing associations	623
PBSA	507
<i>Xior</i>	201
<i>The Student Hotel</i>	130
<i>Student Experience</i>	33
<i>OurDomain</i>	117
<i>StuNest</i>	9
<i>Casa400</i>	6
<i>Other</i>	11
Private landlord	423
Living at home	440
TOTAL	1993

MHI-5 SCORE

Among the respondents of the 'Student Well-being' survey, the average score came out to 58.6, which is slightly below the threshold at which a person is considered to be psychologically healthy (a minimum score of 60). One possible cause of this low average score could be the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. However, without being able to compare the 'Student Wellbeing' survey results with a previous survey conducted before the coronavirus pandemic, it becomes increasingly difficult to validate this hypothesis. Additionally, scores might have been influenced by the timing of the 'Student Well-being' survey, which took place towards the end of the academic year while respondents were in the midst of assignment submissions and final exams.

Table 2 (on the following page) shows the average MHI-5 score for different groups. Additionally, the table shows the proportion of students who self-identified within the last four weeks as (1) happy, (2) calm and peaceful, (3) very nervous, (4) downhearted and low, or (5) so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer them up. On average, domestic (Dutch) students, research university students, and Master's students scored higher on well-being than international students, applied sciences students, and Bachelor's students. It is also notable that well-being was typically lower for older students than younger ones. In particular, students older than 23 living at their family home or renting accommodation from a housing association scored lower on overall well-being.

If we zoom in on students' living situations, those with access to shared facilities scored highest on well-being. As far as the type of accommodation is concerned, students who rented a living space from a commercial PBSA provider scored highest on well-being. In terms of services and facilities available within the residential complex, students who had access to on-site welfare support scored highest on well-being. The well-being of students who had access to a café from their landlord was also relatively high.

Table 2: MHI-5 broken down into different target groups; Source: 'Student Well-being' survey

Target Audience	#	MHI-5	Share of students that usually or constantly feel...				
			happy	calm & peaceful	very nervous	downhearted & low	down in the dumps
Total	1,993	58.6	31%	24%	18%	13%	6%
< 20 years	484	60.0	36%	28%	18%	12%	7%
20-21 years	553	59.1	32%	25%	18%	14%	5%
22-23 years	495	58.0	29%	20%	17%	12%	5%
> 23 years	461	56.9	27%	23%	19%	14%	7%
Domestic (Dutch)	1,287	59.3	31%	24%	15%	11%	5%
International	706	55.6	31%	24%	29%	20%	12%
Bachelor's	1,452	58.1	30%	23%	18%	14%	6%
Master's	541	60.3	33%	27%	18%	10%	5%
Applied sciences	741	57.1	27%	22%	18%	14%	7%
Research university	1,252	59.9	34%	26%	18%	12%	6%
Living at home	440	58.0	28%	24%	17%	13%	5%
Rooms with shared facilities	758	59.6	33%	24%	17%	12%	5%
Independent units	795	58.0	31%	24%	20%	13%	8%
Student housing associations	623	58.4	30%	24%	18%	13%	6%
PBSA	507	59.9	36%	29%	19%	11%	8%
Private landlords	423	58.7	31%	20%	18%	13%	6%
Community activities	400	61.5	41%	31%	18%	8%	5%
Well-being support	122	67.0	50%	41%	16%	2%	4%
Community manager*	258	61.1	42%	34%	21%	10%	7%
Security guards	322	59.9	37%	29%	22%	11%	8%
Repair/building manager	780	59.2	32%	25%	19%	13%	6%
Cleaning service	735	59.3	33%	24%	18%	13%	6%
Community network	588	59.4	32%	24%	18%	10%	4%
None of the above	404	57.7	31%	22%	19%	13%	8%
Cinema	128	61.7	42%	29%	19%	5%	3%
Café	220	63.7	47%	39%	20%	7%	6%
Shared cars, bikes, etc.	310	61.3	42%	34%	24%	10%	7%
Gym	254	61.9	43%	34%	22%	8%	7%
Relaxation area	507	60.7	39%	30%	21%	12%	6%
Restaurant	279	61.0	42%	33%	23%	9%	5%
Study/collaboration spaces	416	60.2	40%	31%	22%	10%	7%
Roof terrace/courtyard	717	60.7	36%	26%	17%	9%	5%
Laundry service	858	58.9	33%	25%	21%	12%	7%
Swimming pool	8	--	--	--	--	--	--
None of the above	418	57.3	28%	21%	17%	15%	7%

* The Dutch version of the survey mistakenly asked for the presence of a "communicatiemanager" (communications manager) instead of a "community manager" at the question regarding "gemeenschappelijke diensten" (common services).

LIVING EXPERIENCE

In the survey, the question was asked what grades the respondent would give their living experience on a scale of 1 to 10. The results of this question are shown in Table 3. On average, students give their living experience a 7.1. A quarter of the students with a 6 or lower are not satisfied with the living experience. On the other hand, 15% give a 9 or 10 to their living experience.

The average living experience of students who rent from a student housing association, commercial PBSA and other private landlords do not differ much from each other. The MHI-5 score from Table 2 shows a similar picture.

It is striking that students living at their family home show the opposite picture when it comes to the well-being of the student and the living experience. The well-being of this group scores slightly lower than average, while the living experience scores higher than average with a 7.4. A quarter of students living at family home give their living experience a 9 or 10.

Table 3: Living experience broken down into different target groups; Source: 'Student Well-being' survey

Target Audience	Living experience rating	% > 6	% 7-8	% 9-10
Total	7.1	25%	60%	15%
< 20 years	7.3	23%	56%	21%
20-21 years	7.1	25%	58%	16%
22-23 years	7.1	24%	65%	12%
> 23 years	6.8	29%	60%	11%
Domestic (Dutch)	7.2	23%	62%	15%
International	6.8	36%	49%	15%
Bachelor's	7.1	26%	57%	16%
Master's	7.2	21%	67%	12%
Applied sciences	7.1	26%	58%	16%
Research university	7.1	24%	61%	15%
Living at home	7.4	22%	52%	25%
Rooms with shared facilities	6.9	27%	64%	9%
Independent units	7.1	26%	61%	14%
Student housing associations	6.9	28%	63%	9%
Commercial PBSA	7.1	24%	60%	16%
Private landlords	7.0	26%	62%	12%
Community activities	7.6	13%	67%	20%
Well-being support	7.7	11%	69%	21%
Community manager	7.4	21%	61%	19%
Security guards	7.4	18%	63%	19%
Repair/building manager	7.1	24%	65%	11%
Cleaning service	7.1	24%	65%	11%
Community network	7.2	19%	69%	12%
None of the above	6.8	30%	59%	12%
Cinema	8.0	10%	61%	29%
Café	7.6	14%	65%	20%
Shared cars, bikes, etc.	7.6	14%	66%	20%
Gym	7.7	11%	65%	23%
Relaxation area	7.4	18%	65%	17%
Restaurant	7.7	10%	70%	20%
Study/collaboration spaces	7.4	20%	61%	19%
Roof terrace/courtyard	7.2	21%	65%	13%
Laundry service	7.0	26%	60%	14%
Swimming pool	--	--	--	--
None of the above	6.8	29%	62%	9%

SERVICES & AMENITIES

Table 4 shows well-being and living experience broken down by type of accommodation and available services/facilities. This table highlights that a number of services/facilities — such as security guards or gyms — were predominantly available in living spaces operated by commercial PBSA providers. With a view to the reliability of the data, well-being and living experience are not measured if fewer than 40 respondents indicated that they had a certain service or facility at their disposal.

It is interesting to see whether the well-being and living experience of students differed within a type of accommodation. Students renting housing from a student housing association seemed to experience a higher level of well-being when the housing complex offered communal activities or had a communal relaxation area, shared roof terrace, or courtyard. These services/facilities also provided a better living experience for students.

As mentioned earlier, students renting from commercial PBSA providers scored relatively high in comparison to those renting from student housing associations and private landlords in the field of well-being. In particular, the residential complexes where students have access to support in student welfare, a community manager, a cafe and/or a gym, indicate that students have a relatively high level of well-being and living experience. When looking at the commercial PBSA providers, it is striking that the tenants of those that offer relatively few services and facilities compared appears to be lower than among students who rent from a commercial PBSA provider that do have services and facilities.

Services and facilities offered in the housing of other private landlords have little effect on the well-being and living experience of students. Other private landlords also offer the fewest services and amenities compared to social housing associations and commercial PBSA providers.

Table 4: Average MHI-5 and living experience by type of accommodation; Source: 'Student Well-being' survey

	Services/Amenities	#	MHI-5	Living experience rating
Total	Community activities	400	61.5	7.6
	Well-being support	122	67.0	7.7
	Community manager	258	61.1	7.4
	Security guards	322	59.9	7.4
	Repair/building manager	780	59.2	7.1
	Cleaning service	735	59.3	7.1
	Community network	588	59.4	7.2
	None of the above	404	57.7	6.8
	Cinema	128	61.7	8.0
	Café	220	63.7	7.6
	Shared cars, bikes, etc.	310	61.3	7.6
	Gym	254	61.9	7.7
	Relaxation area	507	60.7	7.4
	Restaurant	279	61.0	7.7
	Study/collaboration spaces	416	60.2	7.4
	Roof terrace/courtyard	717	60.7	7.2
	Laundry service	858	58.9	7.0
	Swimming pool	8	--	--
	None of the above	418	57.3	6.8
Student housing associations	Community activities	79	63.2	7.4
	Well-being support	13	--	--
	Community manager	56	58.1	6.9
	Security guards	33	--	--
	Repair/building manager	328	58.2	6.9
	Cleaning service	281	58.6	7.0
	Community network	240	58.5	7.1
	None of the above	134	56.5	6.9
	Cinema	2	--	--
	Café	35	--	--
	Shared cars, bikes, etc.	41	56.7	7.0
	Gym	17	--	--
	Relaxation area	131	60.1	7.1
	Restaurant	15	--	--
	Study/collaboration spaces	39	--	--
	Roof terrace/courtyard	290	60.6	7.1
	Laundry service	295	57.7	6.9
	Swimming pool	1	--	--
	None of the above	179	57.0	6.8

	Services/Amenities	#	MHI-5	Living experience rating
Commercial PBSA	Community activities	284	61.9	7.8
	Well-being support	105	67.6	7.8
	Community manager	188	63.1	7.7
	Security guards	269	61.0	7.7
	Repair/building manager	357	61.3	7.4
	Cleaning service	369	60.9	7.3
	Community network	238	62.5	7.6
	None of the above	37	--	--
	Cinema	121	62.6	8.1
	Café	174	64.9	7.8
	Shared cars, bikes, etc.	249	62.5	7.8
	Cym	220	63.6	7.7
	Relaxation area	321	61.9	7.6
	Restaurant	250	62.8	7.7
	Study/collaboration spaces	347	61.3	7.8
	Roof terrace/courtyard	281	62.0	7.4
	Laundry service	453	61.0	7.2
	Swimming pool	6	--	--
	None of the above	23	--	--
Private Landlords	Community activities	37	--	--
	Well-being support	4	--	--
	Community manager	14	--	--
	Security guards	20	--	--
	Repair/building manager	95	57.3	7.1
	Cleaning service	85	57.4	7.0
	Community network	110	56.9	7.0
	None of the above	233	59.7	7.0
	Cinema	5	--	--
	Café	11	--	--
	Shared cars, bikes, etc.	20	--	--
	Gym	17	--	--
	Relaxation area	55	57.7	7.1
	Restaurant	14	--	--
	Study/collaboration spaces	30	--	--
	Roof terrace/courtyard	146	58.8	7.1
	Laundry service	110	56.1	6.9
	Swimming pool	1	--	--
	None of the above	216	58.4	6.9

DOMESTIC VS. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Finally, this report draws a comparison between domestic (Dutch) students living away from home and international students living in the Netherlands. In general, Dutch students scored higher on well-being and living experience than their international counterparts. In particular, international students were more likely than Dutch students to self-identify as nervous, gloomy, and depressed.

One of the more striking aspects of this research is that the well-being of domestic students in general did not seem to depend very much on the services offered in their residential complexes. In contrast, international students who rented accommodation where few services were offered had a relatively low level of well-being (MHI-5: 50.3) compared to the group who lived in accommodation where services were on offer. The well-being of international students was particularly high in residential complexes where communal activities and support for well-being was readily available.

A pronounced difference in well-being was observed between Dutch and international students when services were not offered in residential complexes. However, when services were offered, the average living experience of both groups was higher on average.

Table 5: MHI-5 and living experience by type of student; Source: 'Student Well-being' survey

	Domestic (Dutch)		International	
Number of respondents	847		706	
Average MHI-5 score	60.0		55.6	
Share of students that usually or constantly feel...				
happy	32%		31%	
calm & peaceful	24%		24%	
very nervous	15%		29%	
downhearted & low	10%		20%	
down in the dumps	4%		12%	
Living experience rating	7.1		6.8	
Share of students with a living experience of				
6 or lower	23%		36%	
7-8	67%		49%	
9-10	10%		15%	
	MHI-5	Living experience	MHI-5	Living experience
Community activities	61.7	7.6	61.1	7.7
Well-being support	--	--	63.7	7.6
Community manager	63.2	7.4	57.9	7.4
Security guards	61.0	7.5	57.7	7.3
Repair/building manager	60.6	7.2	56.2	6.9
Cleaning service	59.8	7.2	58.3	6.9
Community network	60.0	7.3	57.3	7.2
None of the above	60.0	6.9	50.3	6.6
	MHI-5	Living experience	MHI-5	Living experience
Cinema	63.3	8.0	57.6	8.1
Café	65.5	7.6	60.4	7.6
Shared cars, bikes, etc.	63.8	7.8	57.5	7.3
Gym	63.0	7.6	60.3	7.7
Relaxation area	62.1	7.5	58.0	7.2
Restaurant	61.9	7.7	59.3	7.6
Study/collaboration spaces	59.4	7.1	56.0	6.9
Roof terrace/courtyard	62.0	7.3	57.0	7.0
Laundry service	59.9	7.1	57.2	6.9
Swimming pool	--	--	--	--
None of the above	58.6	6.9	51.7	6.4