

Student Emotional Journey (Weeks 1-4)



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Executive Summary

As part of the **Student Transition project led by Student Communities** at the University of Bristol, with **Bristol SU supporting the insight-gathering** for this work, this report summarises the experiences of first-year undergraduate students during their first four weeks at university.

Purpose of the Student Communities Transition Work:

- To better understand how students feel and what they experience as they settle into university during Teaching Block 1 (TB1) and Teaching Block 2 (TB2).
- To link this with students' experiences before they arrive, using the pre-arrival platform.
- To share learning with staff across the university, helping to improve communications and student activities.
- To use this feedback to design a new transition programme planned for pilot in the 2026/27 academic year.

In this report, student experiences are presented along a timeline to help illustrate and interpret their journey, including what they needed to know, their priorities, and their emotions at each stage.

The emotional journey outlined in this report is informed by research conducted during Teaching Block 1 (TB1), including:

- 2,650 survey responses collected by Student Communities over a four-week period
- Six one-hour focus groups facilitated by Student Communities
- One two-hour co-creation workshop delivered by Bristol SU

This work will continue in Teaching Block 2 (TB2), exploring student experiences on a month-by-month basis.



Weeks 1-4 at a glance

Week 1

Students prioritise **socialising**, feeling **excited but overwhelmed**. Early needs include managing **practical arrangements** (such as finances, accommodation and navigating the city, including transport) and developing a sense of belonging: feeling part of a group, making connections, and starting to feel part of the university community.

Week 2

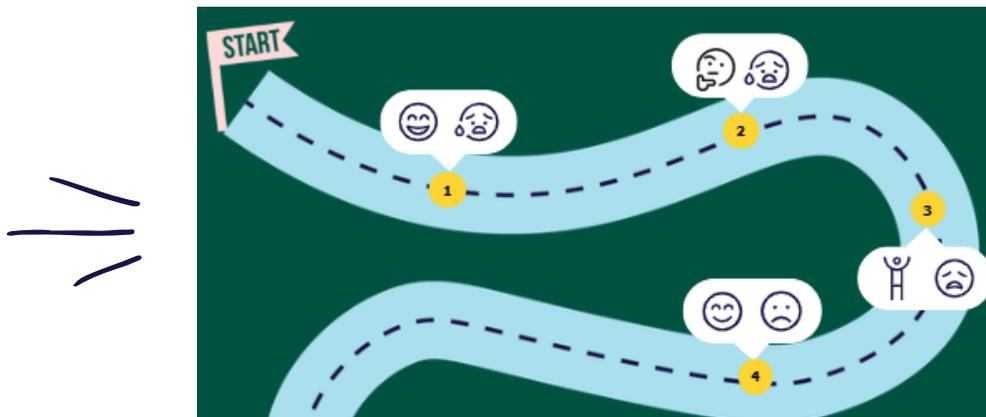
Students begin to feel the **pressure of independence**. Attending classes, navigating campus, and continuing to build friendships become key focuses.

Week 3

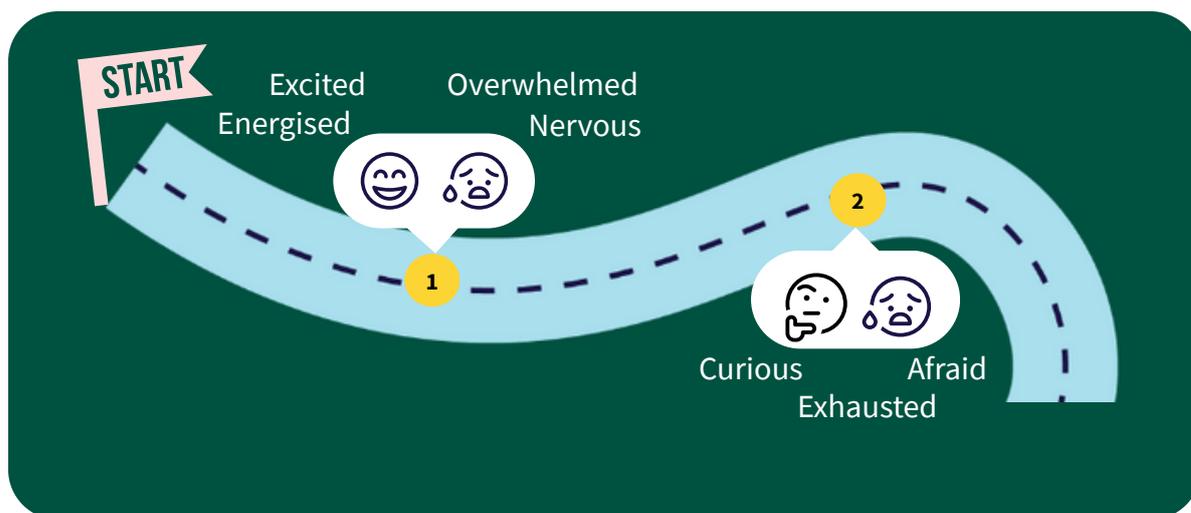
As **academic engagement** increases, students may feel settled but **exhausted** by their busy schedules. Time is often focused on joining societies, using gyms, and exploring the city. **Balancing study with daily life remains challenging** for some.

Week 4

Academic demands increase, with some students finding **workloads and deadlines stressful**, while many report feeling **more settled and developing routines**. For some, the initial excitement has reduced, leading to questions about course or city choice, emerging financial pressures, and increased interest in wellbeing support and employment opportunities.



Insights: Weeks 1-2



1 W/c 15 Sept (Welcome)

Socialising, making friends, meeting flatmates, **trying out new things** and **going out** to events as much as possible is the priority.

Students are also **settling into accommodation**, working out **transport**, doing **IKEA/grocery shops**, setting up banking/sorting finances, and adapting to culture and completing document checks for international students.



- Share practical guidance on registration, campus navigation, and finances.
- Promote social activities and opportunities to meet peers.
- Develop awareness of available University and SU services early.

2 W/c 22 Sept (TB1, week 1)

Adapting to both studying and living more independently, the adrenaline wears off and reality of university life sets in.

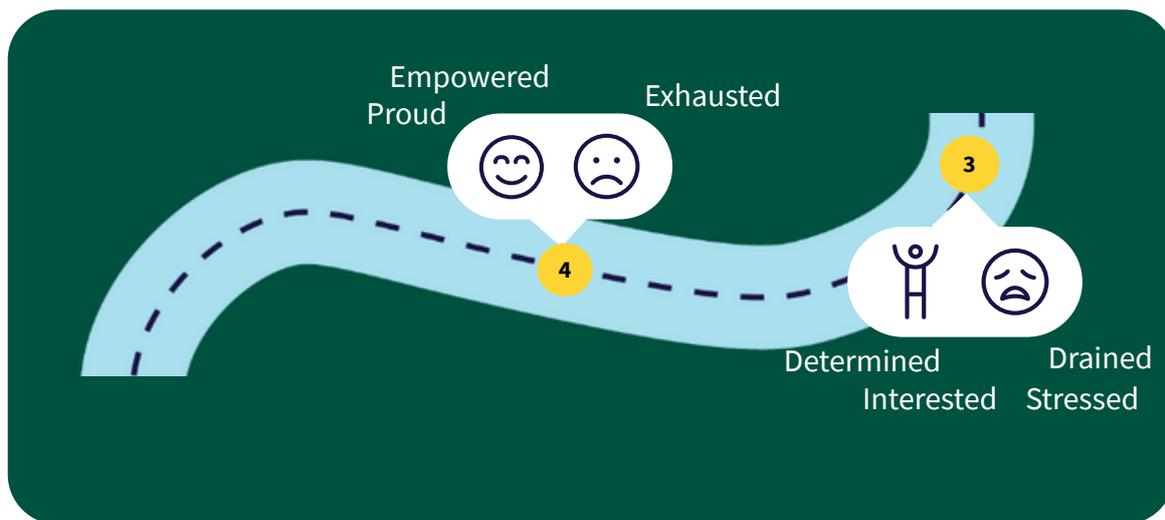
Classes start for most so locating and attending lectures, **continuing to make friends** and meeting course mates is priority.

Many fall ill and **struggle to handle life tasks** such as cooking and budgeting. Some are unsure about how to **access support services** and the NHS.



- Provide guidance on lectures, timetables, and campus navigation.
- Share practical tips for budgeting, cooking, and independent living.
- Signpost wellbeing, NHS access, and other support services.

Insights: Weeks 3-4



3 W/c 29 Sept (TBI, week 2)

Starting to settle in for many and continuing to attend classes as academic workload increases, whilst focusing heavily on **joining and participating in society activities**, gyms and exploring/shopping in Bristol.

Juggling life and study commitments continues to be a challenge, as many are still ill and finding their feet with independent living. Some start to **suffer from imposter syndrome**, questioning their place/ability on their course.



- Highlight academic and IT support for coursework and study skills.
- Encourage balance between academic work, social activities, and rest.
- Signposting stress management resources.

4 W/c 6 Oct (TBI, week 3)

Studying becomes challenging and stressful for some as **work intensifies and deadlines mount up**, most now feel settled and start to enjoy student life, **finding more rhythm and habits**.

For some, the initial excitement of university has worn off, and they **question their choice of course and city**, or start to **struggle financially, seeking more health support (e.g., mental health, NHS)** and employment opportunities.



- Communicate support for academic pressure, deadlines, and revision.
- Provide information on financial, employment, and mental health resources.
- Encourage use support services for academic, and reflective opportunities.