

# What are the main challenges faced by commuter students, and how can LSE support this growing group?

Selina Swift

See this project presented by the researcher: <https://youtu.be/R2tuc8S3Hy0>  
If this project has informed your practice, let us know at [lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk](mailto:lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk)

## Background

Commuting students at LSE often have a very different university experience in comparison to those who live in LSE halls or within close proximity to LSE. This research aims to (1) be able to provide a clearer definition of a commuting student so that their needs can be met, and (2) to highlight the unique challenges faced by commuting students, and to understand how they can be supported by LSE financially, socially, and logistically.

## Literature Review

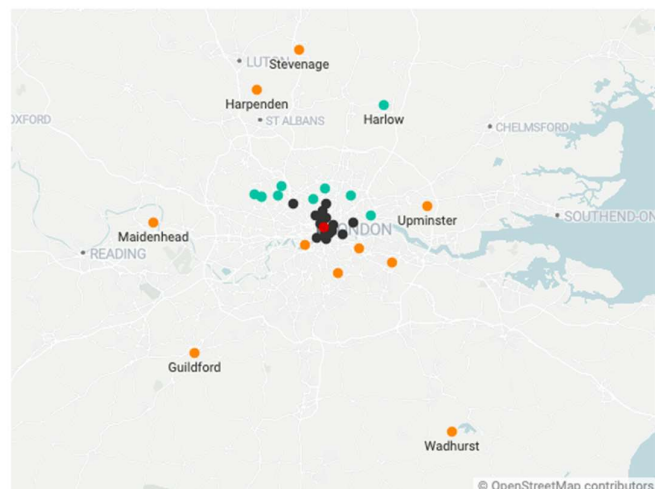
I researched how other UK universities support their commuting student community for my literature review. The University of Birmingham states that 1/4 of its student body choose to commute to its campus, and they provide an information page on its website which includes tips and advice for commuting students (Birmingham.ac.uk). Their student union has a Commuter Students' Officer and also runs a Commuter Students' welcome day (Guild of Students). Further, only 15 out of the 24 Russell Group universities had information and guidance that was easy to find and access for their commuter students, which highlights that commuting students lack national support.

## Methodology

I developed a survey which was split into two main sections; the first gathered information about the participant's individual commute, and the second explored wider questions around being a commuting student at LSE. A challenge to this survey was how to define who should be able to participate; technically, with LSE being a London university with no clear boundaries to its campus, everyone has to commute in some way to LSE. I decided to open my survey up to all students to capture the challenges faced by all commutes, large and small.

### Where do LSE students commute from?

Map showing where survey respondents commute to LSE from.



#### Key

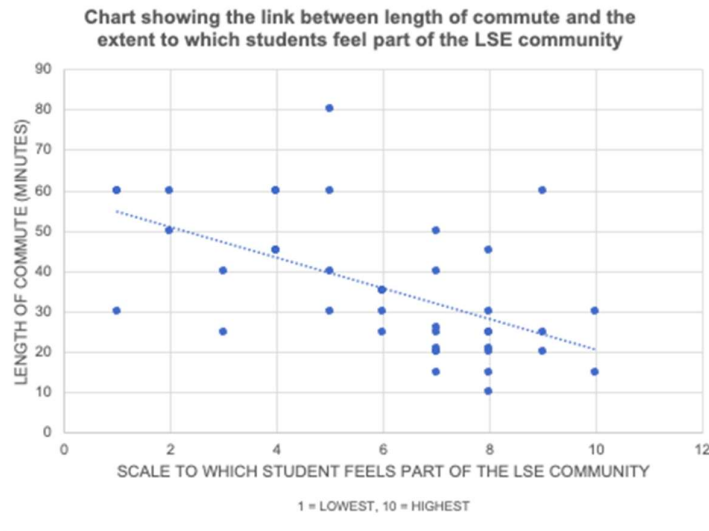
- LSE
- Zones 1 & 2
- Zone 3+
- Has to take National Rail service

Source: Selina Swift, LSE Change Makers 2020 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

## Key Findings

### 1. Defining a 'commuting student' is challenging

- Survey responses to how to define a commuting student were hugely varied.
- Due to the unreliability of tube zones and travel services, time of commute is the best metric to measure this group of students. For more information on this, see the [full report](#).
- One structure could be where 'On Campus' students are defined as those living in LSE halls, 'Off Campus' students are those living up to 30 minutes commute away from the LSE campus, and 'Commuting' students are those with more than a 30 minute commute.



### 2. Commuting students are less likely to feel integrated in the LSE community

- The survey found that students who had a longer commute were less likely to feel integrated in the LSE community (as shown in figure 2). See [full report](#) for more information.
- Further to this, the five participants who live outside of the tube zones all reported scores lower than 5/10.

### 3. Commuting students are more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background, and most cite financial reasons for choosing to commute

- In the survey, 100% of participants who are the first in their families to go to university have a commute time that is 30 minutes or more. See [full report](#) for more.

### 4. Both LSE academic departments and LSESU clubs and societies could make changes to support commuting students

- Suggestions for how clubs and societies could improve included earlier in the day to help with commuter safety, and offering virtual options.
- Suggestions for how departments could improve included holding events in the daytime and being more flexible with timetables.

### 5. Timetabling was a key concern

- Many participants felt that LSE could help commuting students by holding less classes at 9am or 6pm. When students have to come in for a 9am class or lecture for example, they often have to travel at peak times which significantly increases the price of travel. See [full report](#) for more.

## 6. There are both disadvantages and advantages to being a commuting student

- In the survey, the most prevailing concern was the difficulty of socialising as a commuting student, and another major concern was the logistical matter of relying on trains and taxis.
- However, many participants also recognised the unique advantages of being a commuting student, with many stating they felt they had a healthy separation between home life and university life; “not always being in the LSE bubble” and being able to spend time with family.

## Recommendations

I am providing recommendations at three levels regarding the effort in terms of time, money, and resources it would take to implement them. See the [full report](#) for an expanded explanation of these.

### Lower effort / short-term:

- Give commuting students the option to have lectures and office hours online.
- Make a new page on the LSE website dedicated to commuting students with advice and tips.
- Add a commuting students page to the official LSE freshers welcome guide.
- Run a commuters welcome event at a non-peak time (e.g. early afternoon) during welcome week.

### Moderate effort / ongoing:

- Allow commuting students to request timetable changes without dispute.
- Make departments and teaching staff more aware of the challenges faced by commuting students.
- Collect and collate more data on commuting students.
- Commuting students to get priority for lockers on campus / more need to be installed.

### Higher effort / long-term:

- Create a ‘virtual hall.
- Introduce a Commuter Students Officer to the LSESU.
- Create a commuter lounge - a space exclusively for commuter students to rest, eat, and socialise.