



## Bea Hughes, PhD Student

### Case Study

As part of the Student Happiness Index 2023, Endsleigh had the privilege to speak with Bea, a postgraduate student at the University of Gloucestershire, currently undertaking a PhD in Eco-linguistics.

Bea has always worked alongside her studies. During her undergraduate degree she held multiple part-time jobs, but she currently works full-time in a bookshop. Bea told Endsleigh that in the past the money she earned as an undergraduate would be spent on holidays and other 'luxury' items, but now all her earnings go towards buying essentials, such as food and rent. Working full-time alongside her PhD is a necessity due to the cost-of-living crisis. The weekly cost of her food bill has doubled.

As an undergraduate, the high cost of rent meant having to live in an undesirable part of town in cramped conditions. Rent has increased exponentially over the past few years and Bea admits that if she didn't now live with her partner, her rental situation would be very difficult. At least now some of the outgoings can be shared.



### Financial impact on studies

Funding at PhD level is an issue. While a student loan pays tuition fees for Bea to write her thesis, other activities that are necessary for her to successfully complete her research are not funded. The ability to travel to attend conferences both in the UK and abroad, to share research, make connections and collaborate are all an important part of study, but the costs these impose on early-career academics make them prohibitive. Being unable to afford a trip to attend a conference in Austria for example, has meant Bea has missed out on academic opportunities.

“The university has a small amount of funding available for some activities,” explained Bea. “But these are allocated as expenses, so you need to be able to afford to pay out before they’ll reimburse you. It was recommended that I go on the Austria trip, but it was just way beyond my financial capability.”

Bea admitted that continual financial pressure has often led to her considering whether she should pause or stop studying altogether. If she had known the cost-of-living crisis was going to happen she would definitely have put her PHD on hold.

*“I knew humanities was a higher risk career choice due to general lack of funding in the arts and whilst I used to be idealistic and motivated by my passion, I’m becoming more practical. I need a career that will pay back the time, money, and effort I’ve invested. It’s such a shame. It’s as if we’re all being driven down the same career funnel.”*

### Impact on mental and physical health

Speaking about the toll this financial pressure has taken on her wellbeing, Bea explained that she is constantly trying to prioritise to make sure she gets enough sleep and eats well.

“Self-care must be my number one, rather than a luxury, because I’m running myself to the best of my abilities. I’m using all my free time, balancing lectures, researching, writing my thesis, and working full-time.”

*“I don’t really socialise. I carve out free time months ahead because of everything I’m juggling. I’m aware it’s a huge undertaking and at times I can get quite physically poorly.”*

Bea’s money worries are constantly in the back of her mind. She believes post-graduates are a ‘forgotten group’, often neglected by universities both in terms of future career planning and social provision, with no sense of community - it’s a ‘completely different experience to undergraduate’ and ‘very isolating’.

### Looking to the future.

Bea is banking on the connections she makes throughout her PHD for possible job opportunities once her thesis is complete in 2026. She has been collaborating with a university in Japan, but the unknown of what will be open to her career wise when her PhD is due to be completed is a constant worry.

