

WHATUNI

2026 AWARD SUBMISSION: COST OF LIVING

A submission from Buckinghamshire New University in
partnership with Bucks Students' Union



RELENTLESSLY SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN A COST- OF-LIVING CRISIS.

Context and Challenge

Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) and Bucks Students' Union (SU) work side-by-side to make sure rising costs don't stand in the way of our students' success.

Our partnership is truly unique. We listen closely to our students, ask what would make the biggest difference, and we invest in initiatives that provide practical, targeted support where it matters most.



AT A GLANCE

(2024/25)

£1,010,494*

Invested in direct student financial support

15,000+

FREE meals provided across campuses

2,617 STUDENTS

received hardship or bursary funding

+7.3%

Higher progression rates among bursary recipients

£670,000

invested in a free, accessible co-curricular programme

£208,549*

Emergency & Hardship Fund supported **605** students

£438,268*

Thrive Bursary supported **611** low-income students



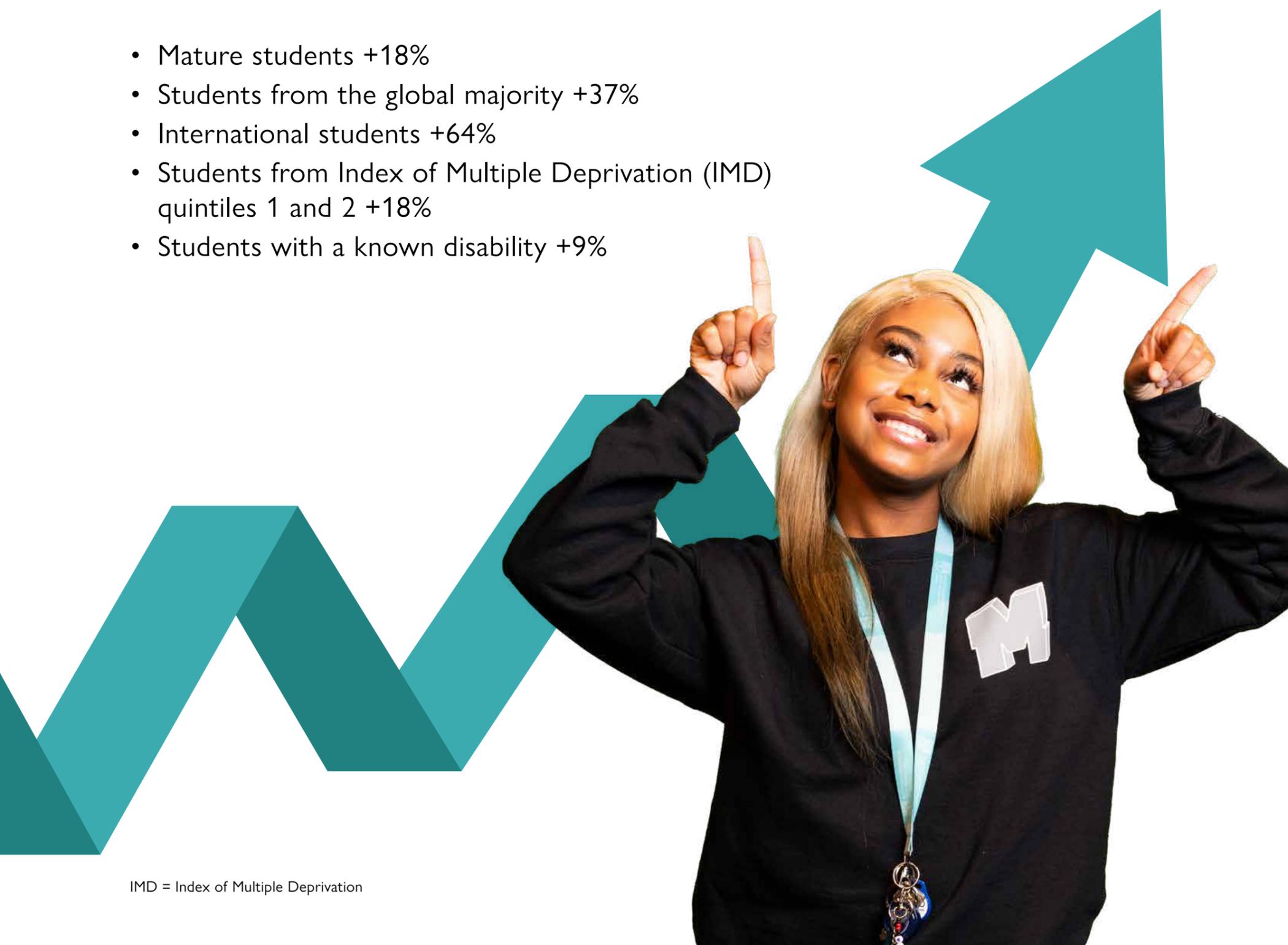
***Students don't need to repay financial support**



OUR STUDENT COMMUNITY IS MORE DIVERSE THAN EVER - AND WE COULDN'T BE PROUDER

We've seen significant increases in year on year engagement with the following communities.

- Mature students +18%
- Students from the global majority +37%
- International students +64%
- Students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 and 2 +18%
- Students with a known disability +9%



WE LISTENED. WE ACTED.

Identifying needs

BNU and Bucks SU use continuous feedback to respond in real time to hardship and wellbeing pressures. Insight comes from the National Student Survey, internal surveys, SU membership surveys, student representatives, 'Big Conversation' listening exercises, bursary casework data, and end-of-year feedback from funded students.

Students told us they needed:

- Flexible learning around work and caring responsibilities
- Clear, immediate signposting in emergencies
- Affordable ways to participate fully in university life

We responded with integrated, accessible provision.

Where pressure was greatest

In 2024/25, the main financial pressures were food (392 cases), household bills (391), rent (354), transport (273) and course resources (137).

We prioritise underrepresented and financially vulnerable groups

- Students from IMD quintiles 1-2
- Care leavers and estranged students
- Commuter students
- Disabled students



IMD 1-2 students now participate in co-curricular activity at higher rates than their more advantaged peers - reversing historic trends.



SHAPING INITIATIVES

Working hand-in-hand with the SU, student ambassadors and frontline teams, we've developed a campus-wide approach that combines financial aid, wellbeing support and practical cost-saving measures.

Every pound is invested where students need it most, and spread across a population of **8,000**, the impact is clear.

Financial safety net:

- **£1,010,494** allocated to **2,617** students
- **£208,549** Emergency and Hardship funding supporting **605** students
- Rapid **£200** Emergency Fund payments for urgent needs
- Unlike traditional annual hardship windows, we operate year-round funds at point of need

Targeted bursaries:

- **£438,268** Thrive Bursary awarded to **611** low-income students
- Dedicated support for care leavers and estranged students

Tackling food insecurity:

- **15,000+** free meals annually
- Monthly meal packs
- Always-open Food Bank and food refill stations
- Free breakfasts, lunches & dinners

The Big Deal:

A sector-leading, free-to-access programme of clubs, sports and trips offering **3,000+ opportunities** and **8,000 hours** of skills training annually, saving students approximately **£200 per month**. Participation has risen 35% over the past year.

- **67%** say it influenced their choice to study at BNU
- Enabled **37%** to stay at BNU when money was tight



Reducing everyday costs:

- Cut prices in cafes by up to 30% and offer a £2.99 deal
- Froze rent to offer the most affordable accommodation in the South East
- Preloved household goods scheme
- Free sanitary products and essentials
- Commuter kitchens and warm campus spaces
- Laptops available for free loan
- Competitive halls offer including low rent, inclusive services (bills, wifi, free laundry credits and reduced laundry costs) and zero deposits.

Employment and flexibility:

- As a Real Living Wage employer, BNU and the SU invested approximately **£385,000 in 2024/25** in paid on-campus roles and student opportunities, increasing to a projected **£450,000 in 2025/26**, providing fair, flexible work.
- Jobshop matches students to employment, supported by compressed timetables and flexible delivery.
- Money and Mind Week launched, integrating financial capability with mental wellbeing support.



SUPPORTED STUDENTS GO FURTHER

Measurable impact

Our support is not reactive, it drives student success.

Through integrated financial aid, fair employment, free participation and structural cost reduction, BNU demonstrates institutional leadership in removing cost barriers and sustaining student success during a national crisis.

- Bursary recipients progressed at rates +7.3% higher than non-recipients
- IMD 1+2 participation in co-curricular programmes at higher rates than peers, reversing historic trends
- 2,617 students accessed direct financial support

IMD = Index of Multiple Deprivation



STUDENT VOICES REFLECT THE IMPACT:

“ Now I can pay my phone bill and travel to my exam. ”

“ Without BNU’s support, I wouldn’t have got this far. ”



THEIR VOICE
MATTERS

“ The Big Deal is the difference between making it through a term or not. ”

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:

BNU.AC.UK

COST OF LIVING

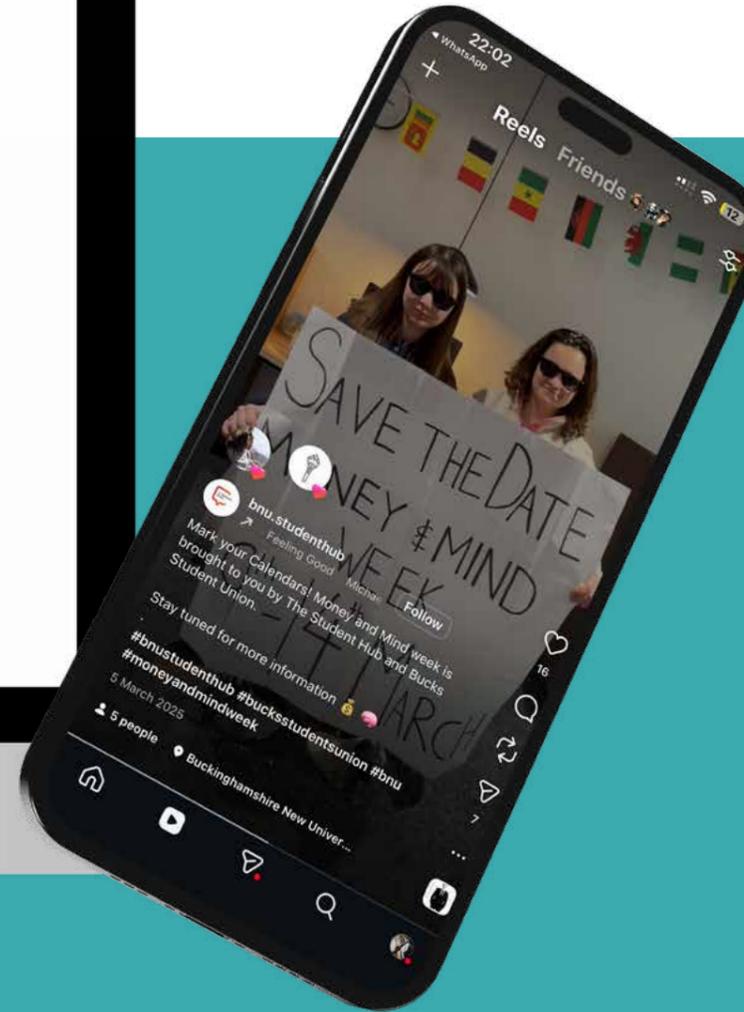
SUBMISSION



Information video for students

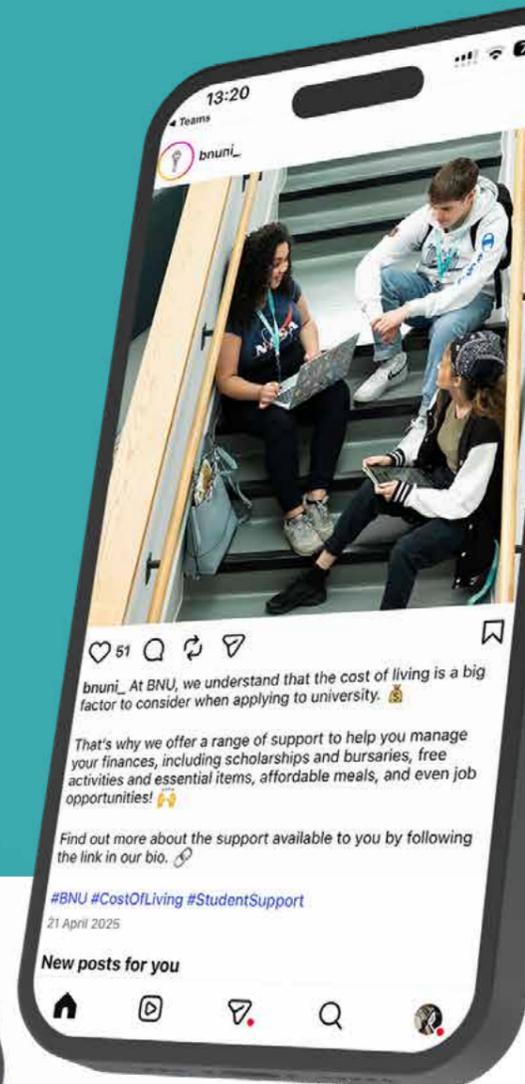
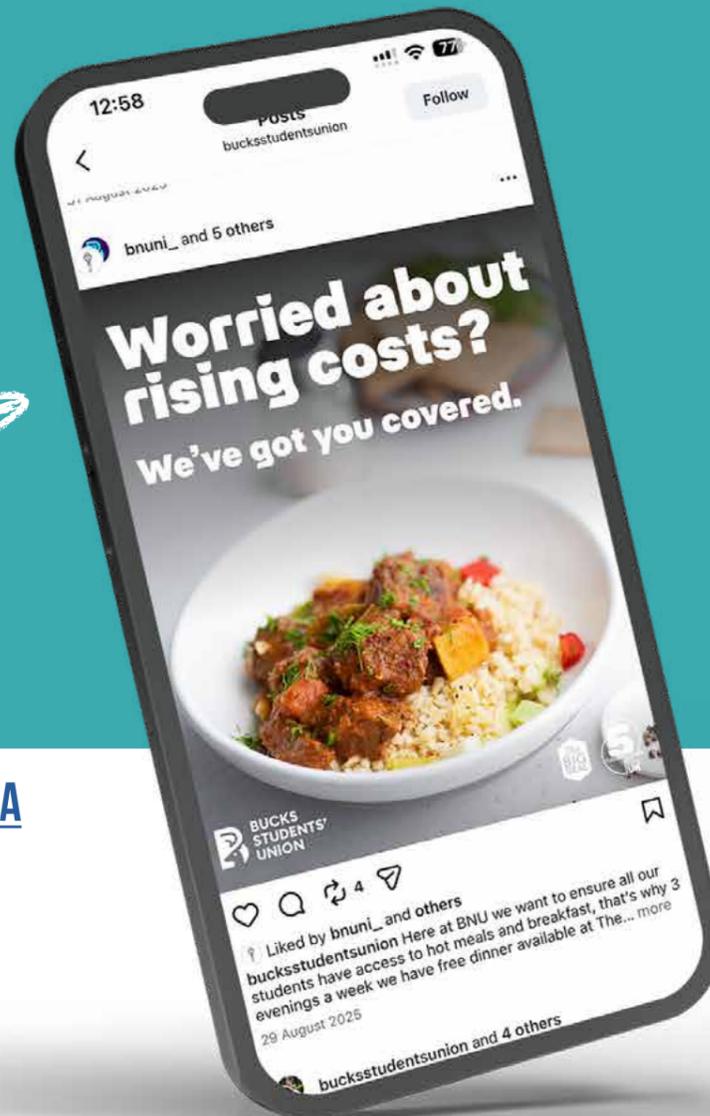
Cost of Living Hub

In this Cost-of-Living Hub, we've pulled together all of the [award-winning support](#) currently on offer to our students at BNU. As a Top 2 University in the South East of England for Student Support (Whatuni Student Choice Awards 2025), we also advise and tips to reduce your costs and manage your money more effectively.



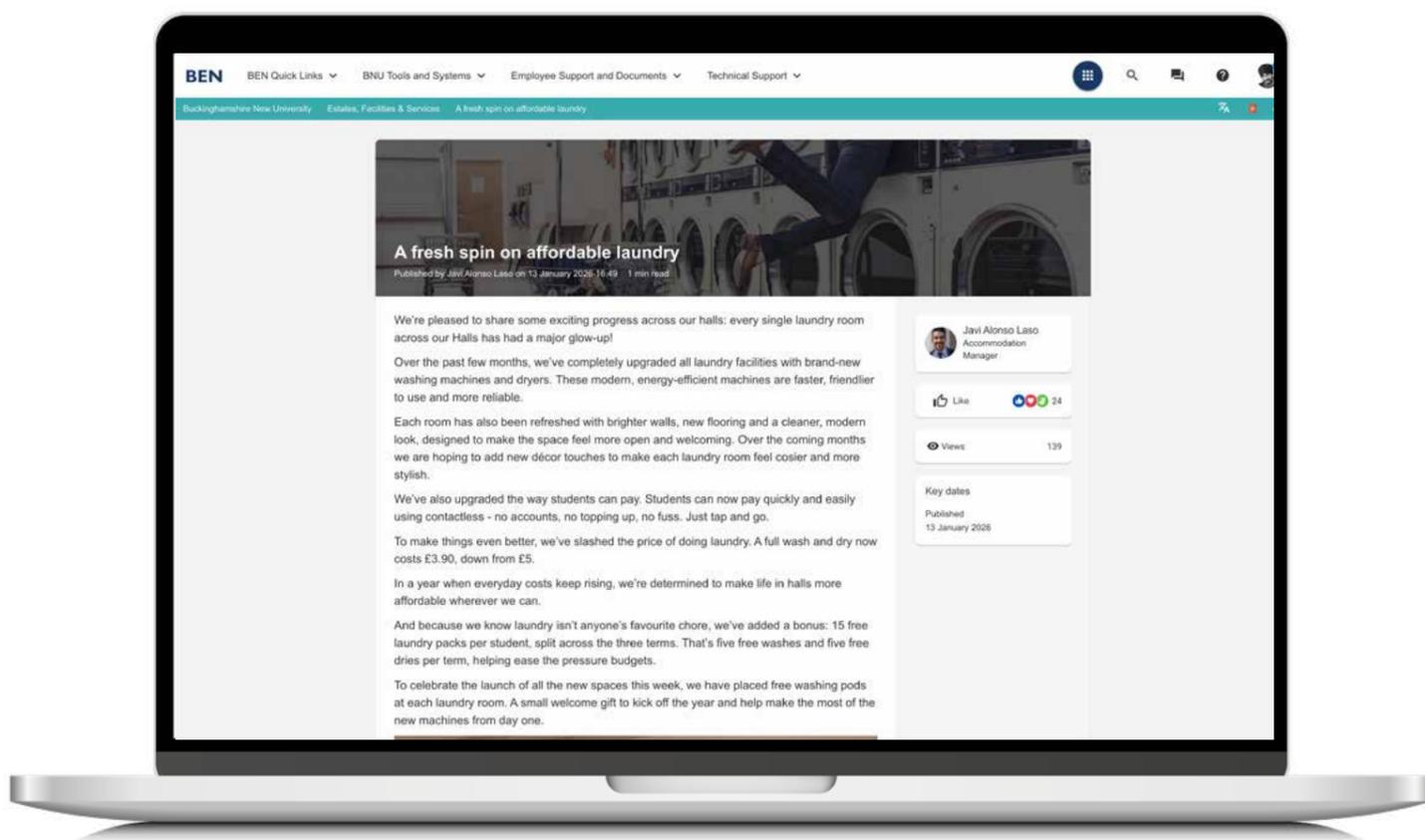
View the cost of living on our [WEBSITE](#)

On [SOCIAL MEDIA](#)





Above: Bucks Students' Union newspaper [ARTICLE](#)



Through our staff intranet so all colleagues can signpost students to support



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891

