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Homesickness in the Modern Age: Students Craving the Sounds of Home

- Even with virtual family dinners and message app hangouts with friends, 74% of international students say it's the sounds of home they miss the most
- Yet despite the initial challenges of moving overseas, they overwhelmingly agree that studying abroad has a positive, lasting impact (99%)
- HSBC has published 'Sounds of Home' – research on trends surrounding homesickness for students, including when they get homesick and what is missed the most.

From keeping a seat at the table for virtual family dinners, to staying up to date on the lives of friends, research by HSBC shows the majority of students studying away from home are using technology like video calls, Instagram, WeChat and WhatsApp to connect with friends and family – but this doesn't stop them missing home.

According to John Goddard, Head of retail banking and wealth management for HSBC Channel Islands and Isle of Man, the research findings should resonate locally with many students across the islands being in higher education off-island.

The HSBC research, entitled 'Sounds of Home', found that, globally, 92% of students say that they miss the familiarities of home while studying overseas, with almost six in 10 (57%) saying it's the sensory experience they miss most, and three quarters (74%) specifically missing the sounds of home, such as the hustle and bustle of local markets (26%) and birds, insects or native animals (20%) as sounds they are most likely to miss.

While moving away from home to study is an exciting adventure for students which they say has a positive, lasting impact (99%), it can take some adjusting to. 43% students feel homesick at least once a week or more, nearly half (49%) believe missing family and friends has impacted their academic performance, and for two in five (40%), being away from home has affected their ability to get a good night's sleep.

John Goddard, Head of retail banking and wealth management, HSBC Channel Island and Isle of Man, said:

“These are global figures, but they clearly apply to the large number of Channel Island students who study off-island. There are many benefits to studying away from home – new adventures, new skills and independence – but that doesn’t stop you missing the familiarity of home. For our islanders it is hard not to miss the homely sounds of waves crashing on the beaches, cows mooing and seagulls squawking. Whilst HSBC provides financial guidance and support for island students who are away from home, ‘Sounds of Home’ helps us understand their experience better.”

Baroness Susan Greenfield, former fellow at The University of Oxford and CEO of Neuro-Bio Ltd said:

“International students were born into a connected, digital era, but the majority still miss their familiar lifestyles in the real world. Whilst it’s reassuring that this young generation is not living in a cyber parallel universe, the challenge is how to off-set the absence of family, friends, location, and language, in tangible new ways. Sounds and smells are - more than the other three senses - the most pervasive and the least contextual. Perhaps sounds are so important in homesickness because they are hard to encapsulate in a specific, single memory, and play a bigger role in our on-going consciousness. Sound also allows room for imagination, conjuring up in your mind a personal scenario. This means sound can be used to good effect to induce a sense of personal well-being.”

For more information about HSBC’s International Services visit:

<https://internationalservices.hsbc.com/index/overseas-education/>

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Note to editors:

* 2,000 figure combines the following:

Guernsey: Just over 600 students were studying off-island and enrolled in higher education in the UK in 2017 (Education Services, Data and analysis – States of Guernsey).

Jersey: For 2017/18, there were 1,400 students studying at UK universities across all years – (Higher Education Statistics Agency, UK).

The research

The Sounds of Home is an independent consumer research study into the experience of international students commissioned by HSBC. It provides authoritative insights into the emotional toll of moving to a new country as a student and explores perceptions of homesickness and living in an unfamiliar country. The findings represent the views of 897 international students from 11 countries and territories: Australia, mainland China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, UK and USA. The research is based on a sample of students aged 17 - 29 years old who are current international students or who have studied abroad in the last 5 years and was conducted between 12th June 2019 and 24th June 2019.

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