



Supporting good practice in student accommodation: considerations for senior university leaders

With over 1.2 million full-time students in the UK (close to 60%) living away from their own or family home, accommodation is a huge part of many students' experience of university. It's crucial that all students have access to safe, quality, and affordable accommodation throughout their higher education.

Recently, some UK towns and cities have experienced shortages of suitable accommodation, with knock-on effects for students. The availability of suitable student accommodation is highly variable throughout the country; with some areas under significant pressure, while others currently manage to meet demand, or are even experiencing an accommodation surplus.

and international students is also likely to continue affecting demand for accommodation

³. At the same time, accommodation shortages driven by a range of factors, including macroeconomic circumstances, are forecast to

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³ Figure 1 -

beginning of the 2022/23 academic year. The longer approach
advocated for in this briefing will benefit students and help institutions to plan
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Assessing the current and future situation

Clearly, different student bodies will have different needs in relation to
accommodation: whether an institution operates a highly 'residential' model, has

- x Are there other higher education institutions in the local area whose students make use of the same housing stock? How should they be factored into this?
- x Considering your future student number projections, how many students (and their dependants) do you expect to require accommodation, either purpose built or privately rented, in the coming years? It will be important to consider students at all points of study, for the duration of their time at university, not just those typically subject to an accommodation guarantee. It is also helpful to consider the proportion of students who are likely to go on to the Graduate route and remain living in the same housing stock.
- x Do you understand the different types of accommodation your student population is currently looking for, and their cost? Do you expect the demographics of your student body to change in the coming years (eg undergraduate/postgraduate mix; international student domicile; proportion of students with dependants) and this likely to change the nature of demand? We recognise that due to the ongoing political uncertainty around future international student recruitment policy it may be necessary for universities to plan for several scenarios.

Case study understanding demand for accommodation at Bournemouth University

At Bournemouth University, an annual analysis is carried out to understand demand for student accommodation from the first year undergraduate and postgraduate student intake. The team calculate the percentage of first year undergraduate and postgraduate students who book accommodation within the university's available portfolio. This is split into four categories: domestic undergraduate; international undergraduate; domestic postgraduate; and international postgraduate. Over the past five years, the university has built an understanding of average demand in each category, which can be used to forecast demand against future student recruitment targets. They can also understand how many rooms are likely to be required - including a prediction of over or under supply at an early point in the recruitment cycle.

For instance, the university identified that there was likely to be a small accommodation shortfall for the September 2022 intake and developed a support package for any first year student unable to find long term accommodation by the

start of term. This package included free travel on university and some local buses; a monthly payment to help with higher costs of living; and access on the priority waiting list for the next available room in the university portfolio. All students in receipt of the package were offered a room by the end of October.

This analysis model is now being used to inform student recruitment numbers, by indicating how many students the university is likely to be able to house within its own portfolio in future years. While currently only targeted at the first year undergraduate and postgraduate intake, its ability to accurately predict accommodation demand from different applicant types is valuable in allowing the university to plan its accommodation offer accordingly. The university is currently considering whether there is scope to expand and develop this model to forecast accommodation demand for their total student population.

Internal working

Accommodation is closely linked to other elements of a university's operations, including recruitment, admissions, internationalisation, and student wellbeing. It is important that there are strong links between the relevant internal teams, and that they all work cohesively together.

In addition, some universities, especially those with large postgraduate student intakes, may be less directly involved in providing accommodation to all new students than has typically been the case for first year undergraduates. Especially where there are accommodation shortages, it will be important to consider how all students receive accurate information about the local accommodation market, to support them in making informed decisions about how best to secure suitable housing. This may entail offering more direct advice and information on suitable options, including within the private rented sector, including in collaboration with the students' union and/or specialist agencies such support will also benefit returning undergraduate students.

- x Do the teams responsible for student recruitment and admissions, both domestic and international, engage regularly with the teams responsible for accommodation in relation to student number planning?
- x Does the university team responsible for the delivery of the accommodation offer have a broader remit and strategic understanding of accommodation demand and supply in the local area?

- x Does student number planning include a consideration of the ~~legal~~ residual impact of accommodating students in the local area for the duration of their studies, even where the university does not have a direct role in providing this accommodation (eg within the private PBSA and HMO sectors)?
- x What is the university's current accommodation guarantee? What changes might be needed to ensure this guarantee is fair, transparent, and achievable? Does the guarantee prioritise the student groups most in need of such support?
- x How can you ensure students are ~~housed~~ within reasonable distance of the university? If students' expectations cannot be met, how is this communicated to them, and what mitigations (eg travel grants) are put in place?
- x Does the institution have an agreed position on whether it considers itself a housing provider of last resort to students? If so, how is this pursued eg temporary accommodation in dorms/hotels? What relationship would this have with statutory responsibilities, and how might these evolve? In particular, in Scotland the ~~Scottish~~ Government is considering whether to include universities within scope of legislation that would place a requirement on public sector bodies to prevent homelessness, which could potentially represent a significant shift in expectations of institutions.
- x What support and information, including via the students' union, is available to students who experience issues with housing, including affordability? If this is not provided 'in-house', are students signposted elsewhere?

Case study: University of ~~Leicester~~ student number planning

The University of Leicester recognises that student experience must be a key consideration in future planning. To support this, the university's Estates and Campus Services department has been integrated into the student ~~number~~ planning process for several years. Representatives from the department sit on the university's Student Number Planning Group, which also includes the Head of Admissions and Head of Recruitment.

This group meets ~~monthly~~ and aims to consider ~~all~~ relevant perspectives in determining student number targets, before raising these to the Executive Board for approval. The group also genera(e)5.1 (5 (fo)2 (r-))in

between all partners, actions are evidenced and measurable, while also being realistic about the demands each of the partners are facing.

Solutions

Each university and local area will face its own challenges, and the scale and nature of any solutions will therefore vary. It will be important to bear in mind that while both local PBSA and HMO markets are likely to play an important role in any solutions, the optimum ways of working with these, and the degree of direct influence a university can have, will likely differ.

- x What information about accommodation does the university make available to students in advance of them joining? How does this set their expectations, and does it give them sufficient time to make informed decisions? Are communications to students clear about the need to secure accommodation before arriving on campus, including signposting international students to relevant Home Office support pages and advice?
- x Does the range of accommodation on offer in the local area (both university and private PBSA, and HMOs) offer a diverse range of options, suitable for different types of students? For instance, accommodation at a range of price points, PBSA suitable for returning students, HMO and non-HMO accommodation that is more suitable for families...
- x What is likely to be an appropriate balance between PBSA and the

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