

Dear all

As you will be aware, housing is a huge issue for students at this University. Over the past six months, since your decision to increase rent in a cost of living crisis, you will have heard from us on multiple occasions. Despite repeated requests, backed up by a petition signed by over 800 of your students, we have received no reply.

You will also be aware that the University of Stirling Students' Union will unequivocally back action taken by students in regard to housing conditions. This will include, but is not limited to, boycotts, occupations, and rent strikes. (Support For Actions For Better Housing Motion, passed with 98.7% in favour, 13th April 2023)

Nobody wants this action to occur. As such we have laid out below, as clearly and concisely as possible, the asks of the students of the University in relation to your housing provision. As always, we are open to dialogue on any and all of the below points.

Ask 1: We ask that the University Reduces Rent on All University-Owned Accommodation by 10%.

Last year, before the above inflation increase in rent imposed by the University, over half of your students lived on less than £50 per week. As you will know, one in eight students in Scotland have been homeless while studying. It is simple - if students cannot afford to live, they cannot study.

Following our petition, and questions from MSPs and the Minister for Higher Education, you justified your rent hike in the press by claiming it was the knock on effect of increased costs e.g in energy. As prices have decreased in the last six months, we assume this will also be passed on to your tenants.

We believe a 10% decrease on your properties is a fair ask. It will return rent to close to that of the 2021/22 Academic Year, and help your students who are still suffering through a cost of living crisis.

Ask 2: We ask that the University does not increase student numbers next year unless adequate space is created to accommodate all of us.

Over the past 4 years the student population has increased from 14,000 to 18,000. In that time we have seen a reduction in available study spaces on campus and an increase in student homelessness. It is fundamentally unsustainable for students to study without adequate housing/without a home.

On 5th October 2023 the Students Union, with 100% support, passed a 'Commitment to Fighting the Housing Crisis' motion which outlines that the Union believes "That the University of Stirling must establish new affordable accommodation before increasing its intake of students" and that the Union resolves "That the Sabbatical Officers should lobby the University to introduce policy so that the number of students they take is accurately compatible with available affordable accommodation in Stirling."

For reference, the Students Union motion can be found here:

[https://www.stirlingstudentsunion.com/pageassets/your-voice/make-a-change/general-meetings/October-GM-Agenda-and-Papers-Final\(2\).pdf](https://www.stirlingstudentsunion.com/pageassets/your-voice/make-a-change/general-meetings/October-GM-Agenda-and-Papers-Final(2).pdf)

Ask 3: We ask that the University makes a commitment to meet the Repairing Housing Standards and the tolerable standards.

Over the past two years we have surveyed student accommodation, efforts which are now being taken up by the Students Union. Through that work we have encountered numerous issues which do not meet these standards. Such as; wasp infestations, windows falling out or unable to shut, leaks, damp, lack of heating/hot water over the winter, majorly damaged seating, etc.

We are asking you to make a public commitment to meet these standards, and to provide easy and accessible avenues for students to draw your attention to these issues, as well as a simple guide to what the repairing standards and tolerable standards are. We also ask that you actively take accountability where these standards are not met by fixing the issues, apologising to the affected student(s), and where reasonable offering a reduction in rent.

For reference, here is a link from Shelter Scotland explaining both repair standards and tolerable standards:

https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/repairs/private/responsibilities

Ask 4: We ask that the University creates appropriate avenues to report faults.

In order to maintain the repairing standard, it is imperative that students are able to report faults as they appear. Relying on being able to find staff in the middle of the night is not good enough. Be it through integration with the app or a 24/7 phone line, residents must be able to report faults, see what progress has been made, and be given statutory notice when tradespersons are arriving to fix problems.

We deem this necessary in order to hold accommodation services to account and maintain safe and comfortable accommodation for all residents.

Ask 5: We ask that the University provides more accessible accommodation.

There is a general lack of on-campus accommodation. This has had a negative impact on all students, but has especially impacted disabled students. The current provision of accessible accommodation is inadequate and expensive. There should be more accessible accommodation provided for these students, at a more reasonable price.

Ask 6: We ask that University staff give notice before entering rooms and do not randomly lock bedrooms.

The conditions under which students live necessitates some level of intervention, be it check-ups, cleaning, or just general maintenance, such activities are both welcomed and appreciated. There is however growing discontent regarding the manner in which such activities are performed, many students will find themselves unaware of the services and will enter the room noticing sudden changes which they had not made or they will find themselves locked out. The latter is a problem many may face when they have gone out for necessities or a social event because they have left their keys inside the room which has been locked. Without foreknowledge this situation is difficult to avoid and as such a notification either one or two

weeks in advance of the service should mostly resolve this issue. Even then, one may simply forget and leave their room unlocked with the keys still inside leading to the same issue. Given it reduces accessibility especially with those who have certain issues with memory or attention span, we ask that when services are performed, doors remain unlocked so as to ensure no such issues arise. A student's space is crucial to their wellbeing, and to ensure that the student feels their space is secure they must be permitted to know when the room is being attended to so they have full confidence that their privacy is respected.

Ask 7: We ask that the University provides free bedding to all student accommodation bedrooms.

The University used to provide free bedding for all students staying in on-campus accommodation. As of this year, you have begun charging £34 for single beds and £52 for doubles. This is an example of obvious profit-seeking, and bedding should once again be free for all.

In the interest of transparency, we will be publishing this letter, your response, and all future communication.

In eager anticipation of your response,
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