



BRIEFING PAPER

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Student accommodation FAQs

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Contents:

1. How many students live away from home?
2. What sort of accommodation is available?
3. How much does accommodation cost?
4. Is the quality of accommodation regulated?
5. What proposals are there to change the situation?



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Summary

Residential higher education is entrenched in English culture and leaving home to study is considered to be an important part of the higher education experience.

The main problem area around student accommodation is **cost**. Students are concerned about the **level of student support to cover costs** and the **availability of low cost rooms**. **Reliance on private purpose-built accommodation** and its regulation is another growing area of concern particularly with recent problems about accommodation being unfinished for the start of the academic year.

In 2018/19 1.1 million full-time students in the UK, or **62%, lived away from home**.

The proportion of students living anywhere other than with their parents fell from around 90% in the early 1990s to around 80% at the end of the decade and 75% in 2011/12. It has since increased back to 80% in 2017/18.

Around 30% of students live in private rented accommodation, 20% in university owned 'halls', 18% their own residence and 8% in private sector halls. More than half of new undergraduates live in university or private sector halls.

Over the past decade there has been a shift away from university owned purpose-built accommodation and towards privately-owned buildings

International students are more likely to live in purpose-built accommodation than home students and they are particularly likely to opt for more expensive studio flats.

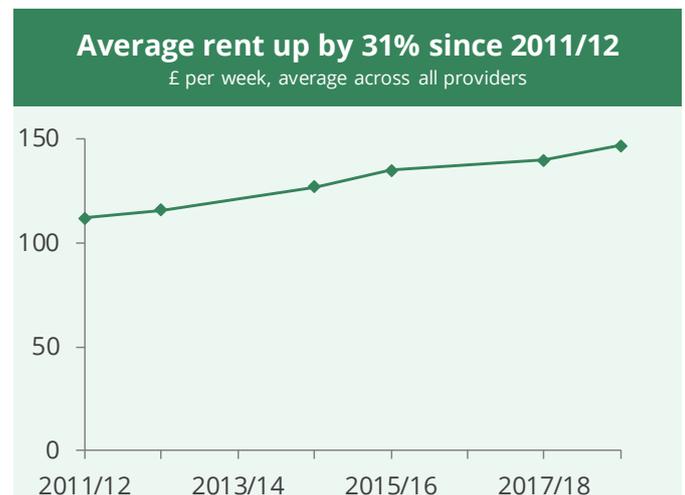
Ethnic minority students, particularly those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, and disadvantaged students are more likely to live at home than other groups. In 2014/15 fewer than 20% of students from the highest socio-economic groups stayed at compared with around 40% from the lowest groups.

The average student rent in purpose-built accommodation was £147 per week in 2018/19. Rents were highest in London, £30 per week higher than any other region for university 'hall's and £60 per week higher than any other region for private sector 'halls'.

In 2018/19 the **most expensive types of purpose-built accommodation were catered rooms at just under £200 per week**. Among self-catered accommodation average weekly rents were just under £200 for studio flats, £150 for en-suite rooms and around £120 for rooms without en-suite.

The **average annual rent was £5,403 for accommodation owned by universities** and **£6,462 for the private sector**. These rents **were 62% and 74% of the maximum maintenance loan** (outside London) respectively.

Between 2011/12 and 2018/19 the maximum support for maintenance (outside London) increased by 36% in cash term. Rents varied sector-by-sector, but averages increases were typically in the 30-40% range over the same period.



4 Student accommodation FAQs

Useful background reading:

- [Purpose Built Student Accommodation: Where is the Market Going and What do You Need to Know?](#) 1 March.
- Universities UK [Accommodation Code of Practice](#)
- Higher Education Policy Institute, [Somewhere to Live](#), November 2019 and [Homeward Bound, Defining, understanding and aiding 'commuter students](#), December 2018.
- Shelter, [Student housing and the law](#)
- Cushman & Wakefield [UK Student Accommodation Report 2019/20](#)

1. How many students live away from home?

Accommodation in the UK higher education sector is still based on a residential, boarding school model of provision, with students predominately moving away from home to study. But there are also a large number of 'commuter students' – students living at home whilst at university.

In 2018/19 **1.1 million full-time students in the UK, or 63%, lived away from home**¹. The rate for first year students was slightly higher than those in other years at 64% compared with 61%.²

A [report](#) by the Sutton Trust in 2018 found that **a quarter of undergraduate students aged 20 or under in 2014/15 lived at home and commuted** to study at university and that in some parts of the country, especially in major cities, the proportion was higher.³

1.1 How has this varied over time/by local area?

In recent years **the proportion living away from home has fallen slightly, from 64% in 2014/15 to 61% in 2018/19**.⁴ Earlier data which uses a slightly different classification suggests that **the rate was lower at the end of the last decade; between 53% and 55% in 2007/08 to 2009/10**.⁵

Earlier data still, which simply looks at whether students live with their parents or 'elsewhere' (including their own home), shows the proportion living anywhere other than with their parents fell from around 90% in the early 1990s to around 80% at the end of the decade.⁶ It continued to fall during the 2000s to around 75% in 2011/12.⁷ After a break in the series the latest data shows that the rate has increased back to around 80% again from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

The Sutton Trust report found **no real change in the proportion of students living at home between 2009/10 and 2014/15**. There was a small increase in those leaving home to attend university further away⁹, from 40.9% to 42.4%. There were wide regional variations in the proportion moving to university, from 85-86% in the South West,

There is no clear evidence of a recent increase in students living at home during their studies.

¹ Away from their own or parental/guardian home.

² [Full-time and sandwich students by term-time accommodation 2014/15 to 2018/19](#), HESA

³ Sutton Trust, [Home and Away, Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility](#), February 2018

⁴ [Full-time and sandwich students by term-time accommodation 2014/15 to 2018/19](#), HESA

⁵ [PO 59070](#) [On Students: Finance] 14 June 2011

⁶ DfEE, Statistics of education student support, England and Wales, various years

⁷ Data from the 1990s is based on maintenance grant/loan support levels rather than where they said they lived.

⁸ [PO 169720](#) [On Students] 14 October 2013

⁹ More than 57 miles

South East and East of England to 64% in Scotland and 66-68% in the North East, London and the North West.¹⁰

1.2 Which students stay at home?

The Sutton Trust report showed that **ethnic minority students and disadvantaged students were more likely to live at home** than other groups:

The traditional view of what it means to go away to university, moving out and far away, is very much the preserve of white, middle class and privately educated young people from the south of England. These differences represent a consistent (and somewhat growing) divide in higher education experiences. (p22)

The largest social gradients were in:

- Students who stay at home and commute a 'short' distance to university: around 30-35% of those from 'lower' socio-economic groups compared with 13% of those from the 'highest' category.
- Students moving a 'long' distance from home: more than 10% of students from the three highest socio-economic categories compared with 6-7% in the three lowest.

Overall fewer than 20% of students from the highest socio-economic groups stayed at home while around 40% from the lowest groups did so.

66% of students from a Pakistani background and 71% from a Bangladeshi background stayed with their parents and commuted a 'short' distance to university. Around 20% of both White and Chinese students lived at home, the lowest rate of any ethnic group. They were also more likely to move a 'long' distance to attend university

A report by the Higher Education Policy Institute, [Homeward Bound: Defining, understanding and aiding' commuter students'](#), December 2018 discussed issues facing students living at home.

1.3 How far do students travel to university?

The Sutton Trust classified the distance from home into short (0-57 miles), medium (57-152 miles) and long (152 miles+). Overall 75% of young undergraduates moved from away from home. Within this group there were similar proportions who moved a 'short' (43%) or 'medium' (42%) distance to university. Only 15% moved more than 152 miles away. Students from Northern Ireland were most likely to move a 'long' distance; 34% of those moving to university went more than 152 miles from home. Those from the South West were next most likely with 20%.¹¹

Students with parents in the professional and managerial 'class' are less likely to live with their parents and more likely to attend a university far from home.

A large majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi students live at home

¹⁰ Sutton Trust, [Home and Away. Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility](#), February 2018

¹¹ Sutton Trust, [Home and Away. Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility](#), February 2018

A survey for the BBC in 2014 found that among students who left home the **average distance to university was 91 miles**. Those with family homes in Scotland, the North East and South West travelled the furthest.¹²

The Save the Student [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019](#)¹³ found that students lived an average of **20 minutes** from their university.

1.4 Is the situation different for international students? Do more live on-campus? Is the quality of accommodation they chose different from home students?

International students are more likely to live in purpose-built accommodation than home students. They are particularly likely to opt for more expensive studio flats. **Just over half of private providers let the majority of their properties/rooms to international students** in the latest NUS/Unipol accommodation survey. This was much higher than university accommodation where 17% fell into this category. The report commented on the overall pattern:¹⁴

This reflects the heightened importance that non-UK students attach to living in purpose-built accommodation with the added benefits that it provides, not least enhanced security, greater social opportunities, pastoral support, proximity to study and university services, and choosing an option that they perceive as more of a known quantity

International students say that quality, location, value for and money and cost are most important when deciding where to live. These results are very similar to those for other students. The same survey found that international students are more likely to stay in the same (purpose-built) accommodation for longer and they place a higher value on this when choosing accommodation.¹⁵

1.5 Is there a shortage of accommodation?

In many cases the problem is not volume of accommodation but cost. A report by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), [Somewhere to live](#), says that there is a “need for more inexpensive accommodation

Long-term undersupply is set to continue in key towns and cities.

Cushman and Wakefield, 2019

¹² [Students travel an average of 91 miles from home to attend university](#), The Guardian, 18 August 2014

¹³ Save the Student, [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019 – Results](#), 13 March 2019

¹⁴ NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

¹⁵ Knight Frank/UCAS, [Student accommodation Survey 2018/19](#)

and an increasing lack of low-cost rooms which needs to be addressed.”¹⁶

Most universities do not have enough places for all students in university-owned accommodation so many universities commit to housing first years as a priority group.

1.6 Is there a ‘crisis’ in student accommodation?

The HEPI report [Somewhere to live](#) says that the current system of student accommodation **is not working as well as it should**:

There are problems with the provision of adequate accommodation. Some areas are now saturated with half-empty developments. Others lack enough rooms. This autumn, more than 1,500 undergraduates were required to find temporary accommodation at very short notice because their student housing schemes were unfinished.

The cost of residence is also an issue – and one that is becoming ever more significant. One HEPI survey confirms that the cost of living is now a higher priority for students than tuition fees.¹⁷

A [BBC article](#) in October 2019 discussed the problem of unfinished accommodation blocks at 22 universities including: Portsmouth, Swansea, Lincoln, Liverpool and Bristol.¹⁸

In 2017 students at UCL carried out a five-month rent strike in protest over high rents – the strike eventually led to UCL freezing rents and increasing their accommodation bursary:

Student campaigners today declared “a major win” after a five-month rent strike in protest over costly accommodation prices came to an end.

The protest group UCL Cut the Rent has reached a deal with the university after 200 students withheld their rents – which range [from £154 to £276 a week](#).

The group has accepted an offer by the university to freeze its lowest rents for 2017/18. UCL Accommodation has also pledged to increase its accommodation bursary for less well-off students to £600,000 in the 2017/18 academic year and the same amount for the next year.¹⁹

There is a need for more inexpensive accommodation and an increasing lack of low-cost rooms which needs to be addressed.

HEPI, Somewhere to Live

¹⁶ HEPI, [Somewhere to live: Why British students study away from home – and why it matters](#), November 2019 p46

¹⁷ HEPI, [Somewhere to live: Why British students study away from home – and why it matters](#), November 2019, p43

¹⁸ “[University students ‘cheated’ by rise in unfinished housing](#)”, *BBC News*, 4 October 2019

¹⁹ “[Students win £1.5m pledge from UCL after five-month rent strike](#)”, *Guardian*, 6 July 2017

2. What sort of accommodation is available?

Students tend to live in four main ownership types of accommodation: university provided accommodation such as halls of residence, private purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), private rented accommodation, or with their family.

2.1 What are the most common ownership types?

The table opposite breaks down the latest data. Across all students living away from home the largest single type was 'other rented accommodation'. These are private rented properties which are not purpose built. **More students were in private rented than purpose-built accommodation**, whether it be university provided or private sector halls.

The situation is different for **first year students who are much more likely to live in halls**. In 2018/19 33% were in university provided accommodation and 12% in private-sector halls. Only 15% were in private rented accommodation.²⁰

An UCAS survey²¹ gave the following distribution of students:

Across the UK, around **30% of full-time first year students live in private purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA)**, up from 22% five years ago. A further **40% live in halls** or accommodation provided by the university, this proportion has remained broadly unchanged over the same period. The remaining 30% of first-year students either live in the private rented sector or at home with parents or guardians.

The majority, 69%, of PBSA beds are owned and operated by universities.²² Universities still provide the largest number of bed spaces, providing 53% of all rooms available in 2018/19.²³ The number of purpose-built student accommodation bed spaces in the UK has risen to a record 627,115 in 2018/19.²⁴

Just over **half of all students (54%) rent rooms or houses from private landlords** and estate agents.

Students' term time accommodation

Full-time students in 2018-19

| | number | % of known |
|------------------------------|---------|------------|
| Parental/guardian home | 368,000 | 20% |
| Own residence | 316,000 | 17% |
| Other rented accommodation | 551,000 | 30% |
| Provider maintained property | 352,000 | 19% |
| Private-sector halls | 161,000 | 9% |
| Other | 67,000 | 4% |

Source: [Full-time and sandwich students by term-time accommodation 2014/15 to 2018/19](#), HESA

More than half of new undergraduates live in university or private sector halls

²⁰ [Full-time and sandwich students by term-time accommodation 2014/15 to 2018/19](#), HESA

²¹ UCAS, [Student Accommodation Survey 2018/19](#)

²² <https://content.knightfrank.com/research/169/documents/en/uk-student-property-report-development-pipeline-2018-19-5155.pdf>.

²³ <http://www.cushmanwakefield.co.uk/en-gb/research-and-insight/2018/uk-student-accommodation-report-2018>.

²⁴ ibid

How has this varied over time?

Over the last decade the most important trends were:^{25 26}

- **Fewer students in university maintained property;** down from 25% in 2005/06 to 20% in 2009/10 and in recent years.
- **More rented accommodation which is not purpose built** for students; up from 25% in 2007/08 to 32% in 2014/15, before falling somewhat to 29% in 2017/18
- **More students in private-sector halls;** up from 3% in 2007/08 to 8% in 2017/18

Over the past decade there has been a shift in purpose-built accommodation away from university- and towards privately-owned buildings.

2.2 What are the most common 'stock types' of student accommodation?

The NUS and Unipol survey of purpose-built student accommodation breaks down accommodation into several different stock types. These cover the provision of meals, broad type of accommodation and services such as en-suite facilities. In the 2018/19 survey the most common types were:²⁷

- *Self-catered en-suite rooms:* 220,000 bed spaces across the 100 institutions and 64 private/charitable providers covered. This was **54%** of their bed spaces. Just over half were owned by private providers
- *Studio flats:* 66,500 bed spaces, **16%** of the total. Ownership was split evenly between universities and private providers
- *Self-catered 'standard'²⁸ rooms:* 64,100 beds spaces, **16%** of the total. 86% of these rooms were owned by institutions.
- *Flats²⁹:* 27,200 bed spaces, **7%** of the total. 81% of which were owned by private providers.

The remainder were a mixture of catered or part-board rooms and houses. Most of these stock types were owned by universities.

How has this varied over time?

Between 2011/12 and 2018/19 the number of 'standard' self-catered rooms fell by almost 40% and from 27% of bed spaces to 16%. Over the same period the **number of self-catered rooms with en-suite facilities increased by 16%**. The largest growth of any major stock type over these years was in **studio flats**; up from just under 17,000 bed spaces (4% of total) to more than 66,000 (16% of the total). The number of beds in purpose-built studio flats increased by more than 50%.³⁰

Since 2011/12 there has been a shift in purpose-built accommodation towards rooms with en-suite facilities and studio flats

²⁵ [Full-time and sandwich students by term-time accommodation 2014/15 to 2017/18](#), HESA

²⁶ [PO 169720](#) [On Students] 14 October 2013

²⁷ NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

²⁸ Shared washing and toilet facilities

²⁹ Self-contained unit with shared facilities including living space

³⁰ NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

2.3 How prevalent is contracting-out of accommodation?

Private contractors provide an increasing share of student accommodation in purpose-built stock. In 2018/19, the proportion of **bed spaces provided by the commercial sector had reached half** of total stock an increase from 39 per cent in 2012/13. The NUS/Unipol *Accommodation Costs Survey 2018* gave the following reasons for the rise of private sector involvement in student accommodation:

- the shift of higher education from an elite to a mass enterprise, resulting in a step change in residential demand that universities were unable to meet
- institutions mitigating risk by opting increasingly to enter into partnerships with the commercial sector, rather than expanding their own stock
- purpose-built student accommodation becoming a sector favoured by property investors to achieve high returns.

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Portsmouth Graham Galbraith has said that there is a "serious lack of scrutiny about how the private student accommodation system operates":

Anyone going through university towns and cities will have seen new blocks of student flats mushrooming skywards.

These are often private investments, but the cash fuelling this building boom is public money - in the form of the maintenance loans to cover students' living costs.

Prof Galbraith says it seems extraordinary that billions of pounds of taxpayers' money should go into these private rental projects with so little accountability.

"There is no real control," he says, and he warns that new blocks can open without even a "conversation" with the university.

He also wants better consumer protection for students signing housing contracts, arguing that some "arrangements are incredibly one-sided".³¹

In 2019 87% of all new beds have been delivered by private sector providers.

Cushman and Wakefield 2019

³¹ ["University students 'cheated' by rise in unfinished housing"](#), *BBC News*, 4 October 2019

3. How much does accommodation cost?

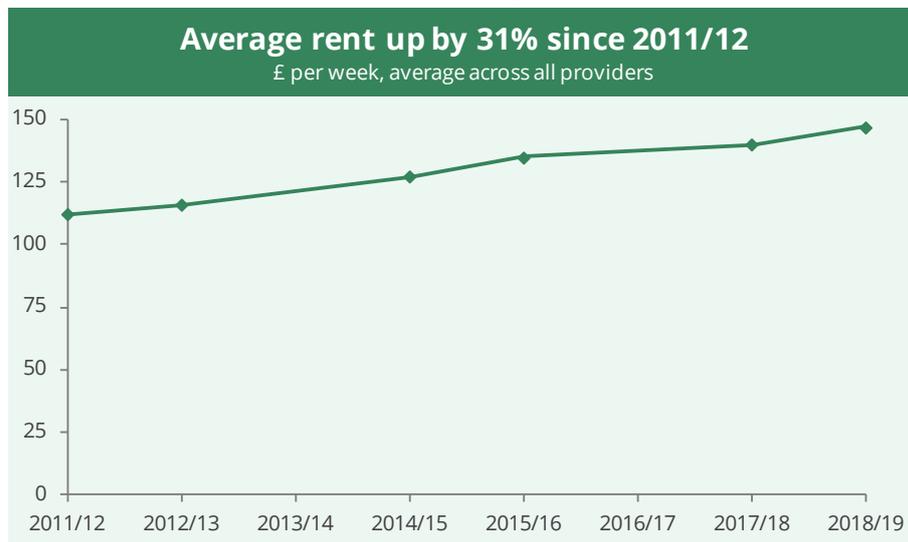
The NUS and Unipol *Accommodation Costs Survey 2018* found that the average student rent in purpose-built accommodation was **£147 per week** in 2018/19. The average **private sector rent was £153 per week** compared with **£140 per week in university owned** accommodation. The number of weeks per year covered by rent contracts varies, but the overall **annual average rent was £6,366**.

The Save the Student [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019](#) found that average rents were £126 per week in both private halls and private landlords and £137 per week in university accommodation.

The 2014/15 Student Income and Expenditure Survey found that average housing costs³² for full-time English students across all types of accommodation were around £3,600 per year. This is skewed by the 16% who had no housing costs. The average for students renting privately without other students was around **£4,800 per year**, It was lower for those in university accommodation at **£4,500 per year** and **£4,400** for those renting with other students.³³

Rents or housing costs cover can cover different elements such as utility bills, broadband and other facilities. Headline costs may therefore not always compare like with like.

3.1 How have rents changed over time?

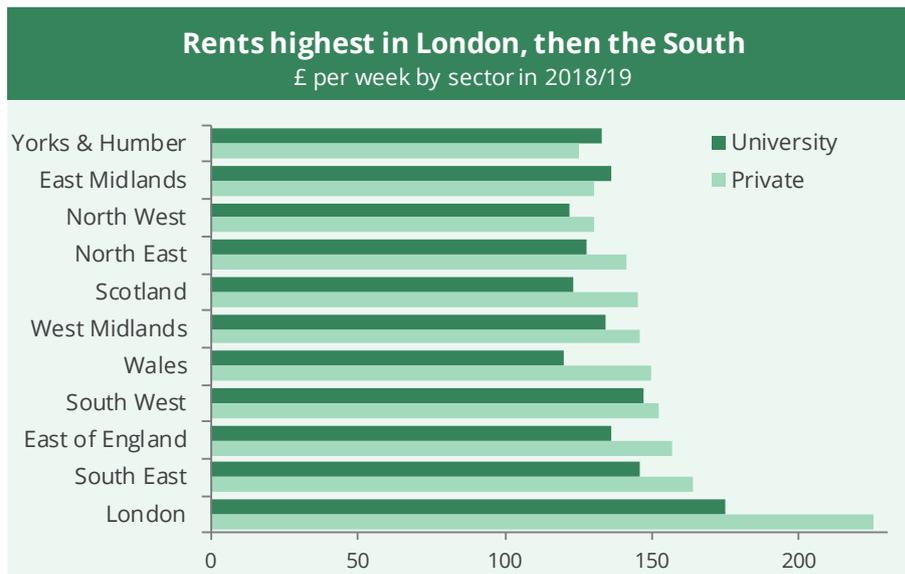


Source: NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

³² Rent and other housing costs such as Council Tax and retainers

³³ DfE, [Student income and expenditure survey 2014 to 2015](#)

3.2 How do rents vary across the country?



Source: NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

Average annual housing costs for those renting in the 2014/15 Student Income and Expenditure Survey were **£5,600 in London and £4,400 in the rest of the country**.³⁴

The [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019](#) found rents varied from £161 per week in London to £104 per week in Yorkshire and the Humber.

3.3 How do rents differ between different types of accommodation?

In 2018/19 the most expensive types of purpose-built accommodation were catered rooms at just under £200 per week. Among self-catered accommodation:³⁵

- Studio flats were most expensive; **£197** per week in the university sector and **£193** per week within private providers.
- En-suite rooms averaged **£145** per week in university and **£148** in private sector halls.
- Standard rooms in (no toilet/washing facilities) cost an average of **£117** per week in university and **£126** per week in privately owned halls.

3.4 Where can I find information on the cost of halls at individual universities?

Several different university league tables list accommodation costs in their detailed descriptions (normally after selecting an individual institution). They include:

[The Guardian University League Tables 2020](#)

³⁴ DfE, [Student income and expenditure survey 2014 to 2015](#)

³⁵ NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

[UNI Compare University Rankings 2020](#)

[The Complete University Guide -University league tables 2020](#)

3.5 Is accommodation affordable?

A [2019 report](#) by a property services company stated that “the average price of a new en-suite bed space has remained at **70% of the maximum student maintenance loan** over the last three years, raising concerns around affordability”.³⁶

In 2018/19 the maximum maintenance support for a student from England living away from home outside London was £8,700.³⁷ This was all provided in loans which are partly dependent on family income. The average annual rent was £5,403 for accommodation owned by universities and £6,462 for the private sector. **These rents were 62% and 74% of the maximum maintenance loan respectively.** In London the maximum maintenance loan was £11,354 and average rents £7,147 and £10,715 in the university and private sectors respectively. The average loan in university accommodation was a similar proportion of maximum maintenance as the rest of the country (63%), but much higher for private sector providers at 94%.³⁸

Between 2011/12 and 2018/19 the maximum support for maintenance (outside London) increased by 36% in cash term. Rents varied sector-by-sector, but averages increases were typically in the 30-40% range over the same period.³⁹

For more detail on changes to maintenance support over time and how the amount of support varies with household income see the briefing paper [The value of student maintenance support](#)

The NUS 2019 survey found that **half of students struggle to pay their rent:**

More students than ever are struggling to pay rent.

This year, 1 in 2 students (50%) say they struggle to pay rent. This is a staggering number – yet the consequences are even more concerning.

Almost two-thirds of you (63%) say the cost of accommodation negatively affects your mental health. More than a third add that money worries affect their studies. Again, these figures are higher than a [year ago](#).

Rents for student accommodation, particularly in the private sector, take up the majority of maintenance support.

3.6 What do students think about the cost of their accommodation?

The Save the Student 2019 survey found that **1 in 3 renters** said student accommodation was **poor value for money**.

³⁶ Cushman and Wakefield, [UK Student Accommodation Report 2019/20](#), 11 December 2019

³⁷ Students starting in 2016/17 or later

³⁸ Financial Memorandum - Loan, Grant and Tuition Fee Rates for Academic Year 2018/19, and earlier, SLC

³⁹ NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

3.7 How do students pay for accommodation?

The Government provides **maintenance loans** which can be used to cover the cost of accommodation. In 2019/20 the maximum loan available to students living away from home in London is £11,672.

The Save the Student [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019](#)⁴⁰ said “**most students borrow money to pay for accommodation**” and parents are the biggest contributor with “46% of students saying the bank of mum and dad coughs up the extra cash”. However as many as 40% borrow from a bank (overdraft, loans or credit cards).

The Save the Student survey found that **parents paid £44/week** on average towards student accommodation (**£2,288 each year**).

A number of commentators, including Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.com, have suggested that maintenance loans should be increased so that they cover the cost of accommodation. An e-petition asked the Government to match the minimum maintenance loan to the UK university accommodation annual average.⁴¹ The Government response to the petition published in April 2019 ruled out any changes in loan amounts:

The Government has no plans to change the minimum maintenance loan so that it is linked to average UK accommodation costs. This would place additional demands on public spending, which would be met through higher taxation, including on those who have not themselves benefited from University. It could also lead to price increases in student accommodation. The Government plays no direct role in the provision of student residential accommodation regardless of whether the accommodation is managed by universities or private sector organisations.

Maintenance loans are a contribution towards a student’s living costs at University rather than necessarily to cover them in their entirety. Survey evidence shows students’ living costs vary widely and it is therefore not realistic to come up with one figure that represents “the cost of attending university”. Students supplement their living costs support through a variety of means, including parental support, their own employment, or savings.

3.8 Do universities make a profit on accommodation?

In 2017/18 UK universities spent a total of £1.40 billion on ‘residences operations’ and received income of £1.83 billion. Both income and expenditure have increased slightly in the past few years. The balance has remained broadly the same. Whether this is a ‘real’ profit or even a good indicator of profitability is open to question as it excludes any capital expenditure/financing. In addition, some other costs of universities may not be identifiable at this level of detail. The balance

⁴⁰ Save the Student, [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019 – Results](#), 13 March 2019

⁴¹ [Increase the maintenance loan to cover the UK average university accommodation](#)

between income and expenditure on residences varies greatly between universities.⁴²

4. Is the quality of accommodation regulated?

University accommodation

Universities that provide halls of residence must comply with a Government approved code. University provided accommodation is exempt from the licensing requirements which apply to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

Three codes of practice are approved for use in England:

- The Universities UK/Guild HE Code of Practice for the Management of Student Housing, dated 1 May 2019.
- The ANUK/Unipol Code of Standards for Larger Developments for Student Accommodation Managed and Controlled by Educational Establishments, dated 1 May 2019.
- The ANUK/Unipol Code of Standards for Larger Developments for Student Accommodation NOT Managed and Controlled by Educational Establishments, dated February 2006.⁴³

Each university will have signed up to one of the first two codes set out above and the third code is for halls of residence owned and managed by private companies. Information on the codes of practice is set out on the Citizens Advice website at [Student housing - standards in halls](#). The codes set out standards in a range of areas such as:

- repairs and maintenance
- fire, gas and electrical safety
- security
- management of your tenancy/licence
- complaints.

Baroness Andrews, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), described the purpose of the codes in 2006:

The codes reflect a Government commitment to improve housing conditions for students who will see a positive change in the way accommodation run by universities and colleges is managed on and off-campus.

Those who sign up to the codes will do so as part of their commitment to providing students with a first-class housing service, by providing quality student accommodation that encompasses health and safety, security measures, and tenancy information, including deposits and the means of resolving disputes. Clearly students, their parents and the universities and

⁴² HESA, [Higher Education Provider Data: Finance](#). Tables 7 and 8

⁴³ *The Housing (Approval of Codes of Management Practice) (Student Accommodation) (England) Order (2019/884)*.

colleges themselves, will be greatly reassured as to how such accommodation is managed under these codes.

Only colleges of higher and further education whose accommodation is specifically listed in the first of these two codes will be granted an exception from HMO licensing. Commercial providers who comply with the third code may expect lower licensing fees because their voluntary compliance with the ANUK code should ensure high management standards and so reduce the burden for local authorities of managing their licensing arrangements.⁴⁴

Privately provided accommodation

Private providers of purpose-built student accommodation are subject to HMO licensing requirements. Providers must seek a licence from the local authority in order to let premises – the licence sets standards for conditions in HMOs and management practices.

Students living in private rented housing are subject to the same regime that applies to most tenants living in the private rented sector in England. In addition to licensing requirements if the property fits the definition of a licensable HMO, the local authority may operate a selective licensing scheme requiring private landlords in designated areas to obtain a licence before letting premises.

The 2017 Conservative Government proposed further interventions to help improve standards in the private rented sector, including: legislation to require all private landlords to sign up to a redress scheme; and the regulation of all letting and managing agents. These measures could be included in the Government's proposed *Renters' Reform Bill*.⁴⁵

4.1 Has the quality of accommodation improved over time?

There is no simple way to judge the quality of accommodation and whether this has changed over time. The changes in stock type shown in the NUS and Unipol survey give an indication in broad changes in facilities. The report's authors said:⁴⁶

Overall, the provision of standard rooms with shared facilities has reduced by 30,000 rooms (28 per cent). This is as a result of universities taking many of them out of use to make way for higher quality replacement accommodation.

[...]

High-quality stock including studios have seen the greatest growth in volume terms. Older stock is being lost from portfolio

[...]

Private providers have shaped the market according to a model of higher-specification, higher cost and predominantly en-suite provision (plus the rise of the studio flat phenomenon). This is a lead which institutions have followed.

⁴⁴ DCLG Press Release 2006/0049, 16 March 2006

⁴⁵ [Queen's Speech December 2019 - background briefing notes](#), 19 December 2019, p46

⁴⁶ NUS/Unipol, [Accommodation Costs Survey 2018](#)

[...]

Highlighting some of the strategic tension in the sector, 59 per cent of institutions reported that their highest-priced accommodation sold out most quickly ...

The Cushman & Wakefield UK Student Accommodation Report 2019/20 said of new purpose built accommodation:⁴⁷

High quality is now standard across new schemes, with outstanding common and amenity spaces supporting the student experience. However, such accommodation does come at a price, with little evidence of more 'affordable' schemes being delivered at any scale, especially with land prices and build costs remaining stubbornly high.

4.2 Problems with accommodation

According to the [Save the Student 2019 survey](#) **most students are satisfied** with the quality of their housing. However, the Save the Student [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019](#) ⁴⁸ found that **90% of students** had experienced issues with housing. The most common complaints were about housemates.

The survey identified the 10 biggest problems for student renters:

1. Noisy housemates **(45%)**
2. Housemates stealing food **(33%)**
3. Damp **(35%)**
4. Lack of water/heating **(32%)**
5. Disruptive building work **(20%)**
6. Landlord visits **(16%)**
7. Rodents & pests **(16%)**
8. Dangerous conditions **(5%)**
9. Burglary **(5%)**
10. Bed bugs **(3%)**

See section 4.5 (below) for information on students' rights to tackle these issues and where to get help.

4.3 Does poor accommodation affect students?

The Save the Student survey have found that poor accommodation can have a negative impact on students' mental health and can lower academic grades. A report by Student Minds, the UK's student mental

⁴⁷ <http://www.cushmanwakefield.co.uk/en-gb/research-and-insight/2018/uk-student-accommodation-report-2018>.

⁴⁸ Save the Student, [National Student Accommodation Survey 2019 – Results](#), 13 March 2019

health charity, recommended that accommodation should be designed with students' mental health well-being in mind.⁴⁹

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Portsmouth, Graham Galbraith has said that accommodation should have more communal spaces and fewer self-contained studios to alleviate problems with isolation and loneliness.⁵⁰

4.4 Problems with student accommodation in 2019/20

A number of problems with accommodation were reported at the start of the 2019/20 academic year.

[Unfinished accommodation](#) was an issue in a large number of universities and in October 2019 the universities minister [called a summit](#) to address the problem which had resulted in hundreds of undergraduates having to find last-minute temporary housing at the start of the new term.

In September 2019 the University of the West of England in Bristol was criticised for the quality of accommodation provided. The university had installed 8x10ft "studio pods" in a car park on campus in response to increased demand for accommodation. Students complained that living in the pods was damaging to their mental health.⁵¹

2019 has been characterised by a number of schemes being delivered late, damaging both the reputation of the sector and the student experience of those affected.

Cushman and Wakefield 2019

4.5 What can students do about problems with accommodation?

The universities' regulator, the Office for Students does not have powers to regulate private accommodation providers. In cases of unfinished accommodation, students are advised to complain first to their institution, then to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator if they are not satisfied.

For students living in private rented housing, landlords have repairing obligations – where they fail to carry out repairs the tenants can request assistance from the local authority's environmental health officers (EHOs). EHOs have power to act where landlords are in breach of licensing requirements and where an inspection reveals the presence of a Category 1 or 2 Hazard under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). There are also requirements on landlords to ensure that let properties are fit for human habitation at the point at which they are let and remain so throughout the tenancy. These duties were introduced for new tenancies entered into on or after 20 March 2019 but will be extended cover to all private tenancies in England on 20 March 2020.

For more information on tenants' rights in relation to conditions in private rented housing see House of Commons Library Briefing Paper:

⁴⁹ UPP and Student Minds, [Student living: collaborating to support mental health in university accommodation](#), 2016

⁵⁰ Wonkhe, [What can we do about student accommodation costs?](#) 21.8.19

⁵¹ ["Student pods at UWE Bristol 'not fit for humans'"](#), *BBC News*, 22 October 2019

[Housing conditions in the private rented sector \(England\)](#). Other relevant papers include:

- [Houses in multiple occupation \(HMOs\) England and Wales](#)
- [The Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#)
- [Selective licensing of private landlords \(England & Wales\)](#)

4.6 What should a student do if they have problems paying for accommodation?

Students in financial difficulty should contact their institution's student services for advice. Universities should have a [hardship fund](#) which can provide loans which may be used for accommodation costs.

4.7 Are students bad neighbours?

In 2006 a Universities UK report, *Studentification: a guide to opportunities, challenges and practice*, 2006 discussed the impact of students on communities.

It has been said that growing numbers of students living in the private rented sector has resulted in increased rubbish and litter, noise, antisocial behaviour, poor housing quality and feelings of a 'loss of community'.⁵² Large numbers of student in an area can also create 'ghost towns' over the summer.

Residents in Bristol have long been complaining about noisy students and in response the university is paying for night-time patrols to curb anti-social behaviour by students:

The [University of Bristol](#) is paying for night-time police patrols in areas around its campus after years of complaints from residents about loud parties and disruption caused by its growing number of students living in rented houses.

While a number of British universities already fund or subsidise police activities to safeguard students and staff, [Bristol](#) appears to be the first university to pay for police to protect residents from students.

[...]

In recent years a number of universities have contributed to local police forces in return for increased security patrols on or around campuses. The University of Newcastle and Northumbria University pay £50,000 for patrols on Friday and Saturday nights, known as Operation Oak. But that scheme was initially created to protect students and [concentrates on antisocial behaviour](#), with noise a matter for the local authority⁵³

Local authorities can use their planning powers to issue an Article 4 direction to require that planning permission must be sought before a family home can be converted into an HMO. Article 4 directions can apply to certain designated areas/streets within an authority's area – these directions have been used to try to limit the number of student

Studentification is the process by which specific neighbourhoods become dominated by student residential occupation.

Tensions between 'town' and 'gown' have been documented as far back as the 13th century but it is following the expansion of higher education in the 1990s that this issue has become more prominent.

⁵² UUK [Living Together, Working Together](#) 2012

⁵³ "[Bristol University pays for late-night police patrols targeting noisy students](#)", *Guardian*, 18 October 2019

HMOs in certain areas. The House of Commons Library briefing paper: [Houses in multiple occupation & planning restrictions](#) (July 2017) provides further information.

The HMO management regulations are primarily aimed at protecting the residents, e.g. from risk of fire, but also require residents to dispose of rubbish in accordance with the arrangements made by the manager. Changes to licensing conditions introduced on 1 October 2018 require:

- **Compliance with the local authority's storage and waste disposal scheme (if one exists).** This condition requires the licence holder to comply with any scheme or directions issued by the local authority prescribing the number and use of receptacles for the storage and disposal of domestic waste generated from the HMO. It is intended to address the problems that can arise from inadequate waste disposal facilities at HMOs, such as rubbish accumulation and pest infestation.⁵⁴

It is recognised that students also benefit neighbourhoods by bringing income into the area and a UUK report, [Living Together, Working Together](#) outlines a number of other benefits from students such as voluntary work done by students in local communities.

⁵⁴ *The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Mandatory Conditions of Licences) (England) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/616)*

5. What proposals are there to change the situation?

5.1 Government

The Government has no policies on student accommodation - universities are autonomous and the Government plays no direct role in the provision of student residential accommodation. However, the Office for Students (OfS), which is the HE regulator, has a duty to ensure that the student experience provides value for money. It has been suggested that OfS should monitor student accommodation as part of its value for money remit.

Government proposals to extend regulation in the private rented sector more generally will affect students living in the sector. There are proposals to require landlords to sign up to a redress scheme and to regulate letting and managing agents. The intention to abolish section 21 “no fault evictions” of assured shorthold tenants has caused particular concern for landlords letting to students. They are worried that it will be harder to evict tenants at the end of what is typically a one-year fixed-term agreement. An FAQ document was published alongside the consultation paper: [A new deal for renting: frequently asked questions for landlords and tenants](#). The paper states:

We know that there are some circumstances that could make it difficult for certain groups of tenants and landlords – such as those who rent to students or those who grant an agricultural tenancy – to operate within the new framework as proposed. It may be necessary for these groups to be placed outside the scope of our new tenancy framework or be provided with specialist provisions. One option could be, for example, providing these groups with specialist new grounds for possession under Schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1988.

We will therefore give consideration as to which groups might require specialist provision, and the form that such provision might take.⁵⁵

5.2 Opposition

The Labour Party Election 2019 manifesto said that a Labour Government would abolish tuition fees and re-introduce maintenance grants. This could potentially give students more living cost support which could be used to pay for accommodation.

5.3 Augar Review

In February 2018 the Conservative Government launched the Augar Review of post-18 education and funding. The [Augar report](#) said that significant concerns had been expressed about the cost of student accommodation. The report stated that standards of accommodation had improved but it made comments on the cost of accommodation:

⁵⁵ MHCLG, [A new deal for renting: frequently asked questions for landlords and tenants](#), July 2019,

A significant theme in the call for evidence was concern about the student cost of living; indeed several surveys have found that this is often a greater cause of anxiety for students than the level of debt incurred from tuition fees. The Accommodation Costs Survey calculates that in 2018/19 weighted average rents for student accommodation absorbed 73 per cent of the maximum funding available to students in the form of grants and loans, up from 58 per cent in 2011/12, reflecting the significant recent increase in accommodation costs. (p188)

The concerns we heard about the cost of student accommodation extended to quality and to the lack of transparency about costs and profit. We believe that HEIs retain a responsibility for overall student welfare and delivering value for money and that this extends to university accommodation, whether or not they are the direct provider. We recommend that the government and the OfS should work with HEIs to:

- Ensure that students are given improved and more consistent data on the range and cost of available accommodation. This should include cost to student and cost to provider to highlight the level of surplus made and where this is directed.
- Improve transparency around rent models and profit levels for student accommodation.
- Devise appropriate benchmarks for the proportion of maintenance support spent by students on accommodation.

The public subsidy of student maintenance, much of which is spent on accommodation, gives the OfS a legitimate stake in monitoring the provision of student accommodation in terms of costs, rents, profitability and value for money. The government should also provide a clearer picture of private sector involvement in student accommodation by commissioning a comprehensive financial analysis of private developers and operators of purpose-built student accommodation to understand the profits that private business and investors are making from student rents.

Recommendation 7.6 The OfS should examine the cost of student accommodation more closely and work with students and providers to improve the quality and consistency of data about costs, rents, profits and quality. (p196)

The review went on to make the following recommendations about overall maintenance support:

- **Recommendation 7.1** The government should **restore maintenance grants** for socio-economically disadvantaged students to at least £3,000 a year.
- **Recommendation 7.2** The expected **parental contribution should be made explicit** in all official descriptions of the student maintenance support system.
- **Recommendation 7.3 Maximum maintenance support should be set in line with the National Minimum Wage** for age 21 to 24 on the basis of 37.5 hours per week and 30 weeks per year.

Recommendation 7.3 would result in a “marginal reduction” in the amount of support available and it would be lower than the amount spent by students outside London. The authors noted that many students can and do work part-time while studying.

The Augar review was independent of Government and the Government’s response to the review was expected in the winter 2019. The [Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019](#) said that a Conservative Government would carefully consider the recommendations:

Review made thoughtful recommendations on **tuition fee** levels, the balance of funding between universities, further education and apprenticeships and adult learning, and we will consider them carefully. We will look at the **interest rates** on loan repayments with a view to reducing the burden of debt on students.

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