All Party Parliamentary Group on Students

Briefing for attendees

"What are the challenges of integrating students within well-established communities?"
Monday 9 November; 4:00pm-5:00pm
Room R – Portcullis House, Bridge Street, Westminster, London SW1A 2LW

Speakers:
Mark Stanley, Vice President, Societies and Community, Bangor Students' Union
Dot Kirk, Senior Community Organiser, Brighton Students' Union
Cllr Anita Lower, Local Government Association Anti-social Behaviour spokesperson
Ben Howlett MP, Bath, Vice Chair of APPG on Students (chairing the meeting)

Agenda:
4:00-4:05: Guests arrive
4:05-4:10: Chair's introduction
4:10-4:15: Student Officer to speak
4:15-4:20: Student Union Community Organiser to speak
4:20-4:25: LGA spokesperson to speak
4:25-4:55: Group discussion
4:55-5:00: Chair's reflections

Event summary:
There can at times be challenges involved in integrating students within well-established local communities. Constituents may report problems with noise and litter, while lifestyle differences may foster tensions between students and neighbours.

Many students' unions do very considerable work to help tackle community problems, and students regularly work in partnership with the community to improve cohesion and run community projects. This roundtable is an opportunity to explore the ways in which students and students' unions are doing this, and to share and develop understanding about common issues experienced by communities in which students form a part.

A resource will be produced after the roundtable – incorporating items raised in the discussion – that will collate case studies, best practice and recommendations that will offer Members practical guidance for responding to community problems.

Key issues:

Universities and students unions can proactively address concerns in the community about students using:
- Community Officer sabbatical positions
- Staff with specific mandates for building community relations
- Lead initiatives and forums that promote understanding between students and local communities, such as 'Good Neighbours' guides.

Students can play a proactive role contributing to their communities:
- A NUS survey published by Unite Students in June 2015 found that **28% of students volunteer whilst at university[1]**
- Research from February 2015 found that **the majority of students in employment six months after graduating remain in the region in which they studied**, at 57.4%.[2]

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[1] http://www.unite-group.co.uk/binaries/962/467/student-insight-report-2015-living-final.pdf
[2] http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/hecsu_graduate_migration_report_january_15.pdf

- Many courses actively include elements of participation in the local communities with. **44.9% of universities require at least some students to undertake community 'placements'.**[3]

There are common problems in communities in which students form a part, but the best way to address them is through improving understanding and management of those issues, and building respect between different sections of the community.

Complaints about students producing excessive rubbish/litter:
- **Community cohesion can be significantly improved by student unions' and universities working with councils to identify the particular needs of students.**
- Students in private rented accommodation, often houses of multiple occupancy, can produce more rubbish than non-student households, yet there is limited space or adequate bin provision/collection for the quantity of rubbish they produce.
- From directing students to where to order new bins to appropriately advertising collection dates, **improving information sharing between students and authorities can alleviate community tensions.**

Communities can identify noise and anti-social behaviour as issues that damage relations with students:
- **For many students, moving to university and living outside of halls of residence may be their first experience of independent living.** They may be unused to the responsibilities this gives them to the community around them and may have a limited awareness of how their behaviour affects others.
- **It is important that both students and non-student residents feel part of the same community.** From simple introductions with neighbours when students move in to participating in local community initiatives that build relationships between students and the wider community, many projects can relieve tensions that stem from an 'us and them' mentality.
- Residents should feel they can raise and resolve any issues with students directly. But, when necessary, it is important that complaints procedures are robust and consequences are proportionate. **There are responsibilities for everyone involved in the student community and wider community – unions, universities, council services, police, etc – to work together and build a culture of mutual respect.**

Tensions can stir amongst communities fearful of the impact on the cost and quality of housing/accommodation of large numbers of student residents.
- Common misconceptions about students who rent private housing include the perception that students 'take up' all the rented houses in an area and drive out 'local people' as well as driving up rent prices.
- However these are part of a broader housing crisis, which is a problem faced by everybody in the private rented sector – student and non-student alike.
- In the short term landlord licensing, operated by local authorities, can help drive up standards.
- In the long term, the solution must be to build more housing so that there is enough to meet demand, and so that there is sufficient choice. The best way to address common problems experienced is through improving understanding and management of those issues, and building respect between different sections of the community.

For further information, please contact Alexander Lee, Public Affairs Officer, National Union of Students (alexander.lee@nus.org.uk).

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[3] https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/how-can-universities-support-disadvantaged-communities