



The State of Student Housing

Wednesday 20th December; 10:15am-11:15am
Macmillan Room, Portcullis House, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

The APPG met to discuss the current state of student housing and accommodation, in particular issues facing students with regard to affordability, quality and safety. The event was attended from Parliamentarians, students' representatives and organisations with an interest in education.

Izzy Lenga, Vice-President for Welfare at the National Union of Students (NUS), spoke about the cost-of-living crisis students are facing and how many are struggling to afford basic accommodation. She went on to speak about the changes in the student housing market, and how the rise of purpose built accommodation (PBSA) is further evidence of the marketization of higher education. Izzy spoke about NUS's ongoing research project *Homes Fit for Study*, which aims at developing a holistic understanding and evidence base of first-hand experiences of student housing. She argued there has been a rise in fuel poverty experienced by students across the country and finished by calling for a rebalance of the student accommodation market, bringing students into the planning making process.

Martin Blakey, Chief Executive of student housing charity Unipol, began by talking about the work Unipol does to support students to access good quality accommodation, including by supplying housing, providing advice, and running accreditation schemes. Martin highlighted the difference between PBSA and smaller residential houses. While PBSA is broadly of a high standard, the building of high-end purpose-built apartments has led to affordability issues for students. Meanwhile private residential accommodation can tend to be more affordable, but is often low quality. Martin believes students benefit from a residential experience and would like to see a strategic decision made over whether students are generally housed in PBSA or residential. Martin was keen for the OfS to introduce a rule that each university must make an affordability statement on their student accommodation provision.

Abdi Duale, student representative of GSM London, spoke about his personal experience as a student not being able to afford residential accommodation in London, staying at home and missing out on key student experiences as a result. Abdi highlighted the cost-of-living issues that many students are facing, including earning lower wages, increasing transport costs, hidden course costs, and the abolishment of maintenance grants for students from low income backgrounds. Students facing cost-of-living crises are unable to access the full student experience, with many unable to dedicate sufficient time to their studies or socialise due to working.

Sarah Jones is the Director of Research and Development at Empiric Student Property, the largest providers of PBSA in the UK, across 29 cities, totalling 84 buildings. Sarah spoke about Empiric's move away from building high-rise student accommodation towards smaller more residential units in close networks. She argued that the biggest challenge for PBSA is offering enough choice for students and that it provides value for money. She argued that whilst there are more students participating in the higher education system, there is no one type of student and one size fits all with regards to accommodation. She noted that 43% of university accommodation offered to students are standard and argued that many universities are not able to afford to refurbish, and called upon the sector to respond.

In comments from the floor, attendees raised further issues on affordability and safety of student accommodation:

- Students are having to sign up to accommodation very early often without understanding their rights and having the correct information available.
- After the tragedy of Grenfell Tower, attendees asked about the safety of high-rise buildings offered to students and whether the atrocity of Grenfell could deter students from signing up for such accommodation.
- Attendees argued that there needs to be greater responsibility on universities to ensure that students will be housed appropriately and that further planning will aide in this.

For further information, please contact Ayesha Ahmed, Public Affairs Officer, National Union of Students (ayasha.ahmed@nus.org.uk).