

Dear Purpose Built Accommodation Providers and Landlords for student tenants,

We are writing to you on behalf of Keele University Students' Union, in our capacity as student representatives, to ask you consider the unprecedented situation our students, renting in the private sector, find themselves in as a result of the global pandemic. We are appealing to you to work with us to make a difficult situation better for students struggling to cope with the situation they find themselves in.

Keele University and some private providers have already been able to support student tenants and entered into rent waiver or reduction arrangements. If this is something you have been able to do for our students, please accept a massive Thank you on behalf of Keele Students Union.

Whilst we understand the circumstances are different, we thought it would be helpful for you to be made aware of what the University has already done to support students who are/were renting on campus:

- Students were given a no penalty release from their contracts
- Their belongings have been kept safe for them at no additional charge for them to collect as soon as is feasible
- Students have had their final installment waived and if they've already paid their final installment then it has been refunded
- Students remaining on campus have been given support, health guidance and updates.

Below we have provided a statement on our stance on the situation regarding student accommodation within the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The National Union of Students is calling on the government to continue to help landlords such as yourselves and students through this crisis, but we as a Students' Union have our own stance on this and guidance on scenarios to assist with circumstances current students are facing. We believe the position we have taken strikes a fair and balanced approach as student circumstances are becoming increasingly severe and we must support them accordingly.

In addition to [government](#) measures already in place we advocate the following:

Where students are no longer living in the property:

We as KeeleSU believe that private sector PBSA (Purpose Built Student Accommodation) providers and landlords for students should offer their tenants the option of a no-penalty release from their contractual obligations, including rent payments. If a student wishes to be released from their contract and rent has already been taken for forthcoming months, we ask for it to be refunded, along with their deposit, if they are not occupying their premises.

We believe small scale or individual landlords should use the Mortgage Holiday scheme by the government to provide for a contractual release under the same terms above for students. Where this is not possible, then this should be explained to student tenants in writing with evidence to show why this is the case. We then advocate a significant reduction in rent, dependent on individual circumstances, of paying at most 25% of what would be ordinarily paid to mitigate the difficulties both landlords and tenants find themselves due to the crisis we are in.

We are asking landlords to be considerate regarding students' belongings that have been left behind; bearing in mind that a student cannot legally and safely obtain their belongings under the current COVID-19 restrictions if they have already moved out before agreeing to one of the above scenarios. We request landlords agree to give current/former student tenants the ability to collect their belongings at the soonest, legally possible, opportunity.

Where students are still occupying the property:

It must be recognised that students are not equal in their financial circumstances especially if they are still occupying their accommodation. Student financial situations vary drastically. Many students rely on part-time jobs, savings, personal debt and family income to pay for accommodation. The majority of these circumstances are affected by the current pandemic meaning that many can no longer fully cover these costs but are still accommodation. In addition, student finances are increasingly being used to fund food and additional resources to complete their studies. We as such advocate that financially impacted students, because of loss of employment and severe financial disadvantage, should have the offer of a waiver or a heavily subsidised rent of paying at most 30% of original rent cost. Where necessary with the agreement of the student currently residing in accommodation, a subsidised payment plan may be an option, where the student tenant(s) are in a situation of significant financial strain.

Where students have yet to move in to a property:

We are additionally calling on landlords to be flexible, and contact students who have signed contracts for 20/21 to discuss their personal circumstances, where they are not be

able to move in because of Covid-19 restrictions. Some options may include a no-penalty release or changing fixed terms in line with guidance, as it is updated.

We understand these are difficult times we're all going through as we know that you also have families to support and we thank you for considering student circumstances. We believe this is the best balance point.

Students will likely be contacting you about their agreements because of the predicaments they are in. We encourage you to get back in touch with them to have a definitive answer so they can mitigate the impact on their studies and continue to focus on their completion.

If you need any further clarity or if you have any other concerns not covered in this statement please get in contact with su.housingfair@keele.ac.uk, so we can work together to lower the concern of outstanding housing matters to students.

We hope you share this with your boards and colleagues where appropriate. We look forward to hearing from you and working in partnership with you in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Leroy Cohoone - Activities and Community Officer
Mari Chappell - Education Officer
Fflur Harman - Welfare and Internationalisation Officer
Daniel Grimsdell - AU and Sport Officer