2 April 2020

Dear Eva,

Universities UK’s response to NUS’ open letter on student renters

We thank you and NUS for your commitment to ensuring student renters are protected and supported by their universities and government during this national crisis. UUK shares this commitment. We appreciate that many student renters have been facing high levels of uncertainty, both those who have left their accommodation and those who remain in occupancy.

UUK and our members are working hard to support all students and ensure that no-one is unfairly impacted by the Covid-19 virus. Please find below our response to NUS’ five ‘asks’ of universities who own and/or manage student accommodation:

1. Universities must stay updated with, and implement best practice public health guidance, communicate clearly with their tenants and provide maximum support.

UUK and our members fully support the effective communication and implementation of official public health guidance. We agree that it is vital that universities communicate clearly with their students, especially as guidance changes.
Universities are putting support mechanisms in place for student tenants, including those who are self-isolating, such as arranging food supplies to be delivered and regular check-ins for student wellbeing.

2. Every university must offer a no-penalty early release from tenancy contracts or rent obligations for the current and next academic year

Many universities are waiving or refunding the fees for the third term of this academic year, as well as increasing or creating hardship funds for students in difficulty. Universities are also in discussion with private third-party providers leasing accommodation to their students, both purpose-built and houses in multiple occupation, encouraging fairness in this challenging situation.

UUK has shared information with government about potential scale of losses by universities from accommodation fees, catering and conferences which could be up to £600 million for England alone.

3. Absolutely no evictions must take place for the duration of the crisis

We agree that this is extremely important. We welcome that government guidance has been updated to ensure that institutions operate a ‘non-eviction’ policy, as well as communicating this with third party private providers. As you know, students renting privately are protected from eviction by emergency government legislation. Again, we will be happy to work with the NUS to strengthen this assurance.

UUK fully supports the requests made by Stand Alone, the Unite Foundation, Become and NNECL. Universities will continue to provide the supportive and safe environment that is so vitally important for estranged and care-experienced students.

4. Any tenants who are financially impacted by the Coronavirus must have their rents subsidised, significantly reduced or waived entirely for 6 months

5. Suspend all rent increases for the next 12 months

Many students supplement their student loan with additional income from part-time work to cover their living costs while they study. We understand that Covid-19 will considerably disrupt student’s ability to work, as well as their

The voice of universities
families’, resulting in financial hardship. Universities are already doing what they can to provide support, including boosting hardship funds and providing subsidised food for students still on campus to try to ensure that additional financial burden is not passed to students.

We agree that it should not be assumed that student loans are sufficient income for all students in the current circumstances and additional financial support should be made available by the government, in addition to university hardship funds. Universities and government also need to be mindful that Covid-19 may have a long-term financial impact for some students, after the current restrictions ease.

Yours sincerely,

Alistair Jarvis
Chief Executive