

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

Introduction: Building the Foundations

The Big Idea

What does it really mean to feel at home at university?

Not just having a room – but having stability, security, and somewhere you belong.

The big idea behind the Blueprint is simple:



Every student should have a safe and stable #HomeAtUniversity – so they can succeed.

Why This Matters

University systems are frequently built upon an assumption that students come from a safe and stable home that they will return to between semesters.

For care-experienced and estranged students, that safety net often doesn't exist.

That can mean:



Housing insecurity year round



Much greater financial pressure



The stigma of feeling different and not belonging at university



Statistically significant risk of dropping out

Nationally, care-experienced students and estranged students drop out in their first year at nearly twice the rate of other students. According to HEPI research, care experienced and estranged students are 50% more likely to say they have considered withdrawing from study than their peers.



Without a safe and stable home, success at university becomes significantly harder.

About the Unite Foundation

Since 2012, the Unite Foundation has been changing this by:



Providing free, 3-year accommodation scholarships for almost 1,000 care-experienced and estranged students so far



Supporting a community of care experienced and estranged students: All of Us



Commissioning research to inform universities, policy makers and national governments on how accommodation measures can transform academic progression and success for these marginalised students.



At the heart of our work is the knowledge that when these students have a safe and stable home, they can thrive.

Introducing the Blueprint

The Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity takes what works and turns it into a practical framework for universities.

It's built around eight key "rooms", each representing a part of a supportive student experience:



Guaranteed access to year-round accommodation



Personal housing plans



Record keeping and using data



Removing the rent guarantor barrier



Strong accommodation arrival support



Student belonging through community



Compassionate Communications within accommodation systems



Financial stability through accommodation scholarships



Together, these rooms answer one question: What does it take for students to truly feel at home?



Continued

What This Is (And Isn't)

The Blueprint isn't a checklist.

It's a way of:

 Spotting gaps and opportunities within your current services

 Identifying what good looks like for care experienced and estranged students

 Taking practical steps to implement improvements



You don't need to have everything in place; every step forward makes a difference.

What This Means For SU Officers

You are key to making this real. As an SU officer, you can:

 Ask where the system isn't working  Amplify student experiences

 Identify gaps between policy and practice

 Advocate for change within your institution

You won't be doing it alone. The Unite Foundation provides tools to support you, including:

 A set of helpful 'Explainers'

 An Audit Toolkit

 An Action Planner

 A Handover Tool to sustain progress

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about accommodation. It's about:

Fairness

Belonging

And whether all students have the chance to succeed



A home at university shouldn't be the exception, it should be the expectation.



Continued

Be Part of the Bigger Picture

This work doesn't stop at one university. The Unite Foundation wants to hear from you:

✔ What's working well? ⚠ Where are the pinch points?

★ What practice goes beyond the Blueprint?



By sharing your journey, you help shape the future of support across the sector.



Next: Room 1

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Guaranteed Year-Round Accommodation

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

Imagine trying to succeed at university... without knowing where you'll live for part of the year.

For many care-experienced and estranged students, this isn't hypothetical — it's reality.

The Big Idea behind Room 1 of the Blueprint is simple:



Students should have safe, stable accommodation all year round – including summer.

Why This Matters

University systems often assume students can “go home” outside term time. But for some students, there is no safe home to return to.

That creates real challenges:



Nowhere to stay during long breaks (especially summer)



Expensive short-term housing options



Constant moving between places



Increased risk of homelessness

And when housing isn't stable, everything else is affected:

Mental health

Academic focus

Retention and progression

Sense of belonging



If a student doesn't know where they're living next, everything else becomes harder.

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, students experience certainty – not crisis.

Strong approaches include:



Guaranteed and priority access to halls during term and vacation periods



Proactive identification and communication (early and frequent information)



Emergency accommodation options when things go wrong



Joined-up support (housing + finance + wellbeing working together)



The key shift: From “support if things go wrong” to “stability built into the system.”

In Practice: University of Strathclyde

At Strathclyde, this room is already taking shape:



Summer accommodation available for care-experienced and estranged students



Priority / guaranteed access to halls



Emergency housing for crisis situations



Information shared before arrival and throughout the student journey



Strong links between accommodation, support staff, and external partners

In one year, 16 students were supported over the summer.



What stands out isn't just the offer — it's how proactive and joined-up it is.

What to Watch For

Even strong systems can have gaps:

Not all students may be eligible for accommodation support (e.g. estranged students)

Some periods may not be covered



This means housing support must connect with financial advice and wider policy.

What This Means For SU Officers

You don't run accommodation, but you can shape how it works.

Ask your institution:

? Do students have access to accommodation all year round?

? Who is included – and who isn't?

? Do students know this support exists?

? What happens in a crisis?

And importantly:

 Amplify student experiences through your own and national student voices

 Highlight gaps and inconsistencies

 Advocate for housing as a basic condition for success, not a bonus or a response to 'hardship'

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about rooms or rent. It's about:

Stability

Fairness

And whether students can fully take part in university life



A #HomeAtUniversity shouldn't stop when term ends.



Next: Room 2

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Personal Housing Plan

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

Imagine trying to study, work, and plan your future... while constantly worrying about where you'll live.

For care-experienced and estranged students, housing decisions aren't just choices, they're high stakes that determine choices before during and throughout the university journey.

The Big Idea behind Room 2 of the Blueprint is simple:



Every student should have a clear, supported personal housing plan.

Why This Matters

All students think about housing – where, when, how much. But for some students, the implications are much bigger, and at the same time they may be less likely to have someone trusted to talk it through with.

Without support, this can mean:

😬 Constant stress about future housing ⚠️ Real risk of homelessness at transition points

📦 Last-minute decisions with limited options

🚫 Not asking for help due to stigma or lack of trust

And just like Room 1, the impacts:

Mental health

Academic focus

Confidence and belonging



If housing isn't planned, it quickly becomes a crisis.

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, housing situations for care-experienced and estranged students are always known, not just when things go wrong.

Strong approaches include:



Accommodation planning for the full university journey is explicitly at the heart of welcome and induction



Housing discussed routinely in consistent check-ins alongside finance, wellbeing, and study



A regular contact students can build trust with



The key shift: From “students ask for help” to “support checks in with students.”

In Practice: University of Bath

At Bath, this room is built into the student experience:

- ✓ One-to-one meetings every semester, every year, as a standard aspect of bursary receipt
- ✓ A consistent holistic agenda where students know there'll be safe space to discuss any aspect of their student life
- ✓ Housing always part of the conversation, alongside study, wellbeing and finances
- ✓ Dedicated support for care-experienced, estranged students, carers, and others

These conversations aren't siloed; they identify any issues as they emerge and connect students to support early should they ever need it without **reaching crisis**. Around 260 students engage with their system each year.



Continued

What to Watch For

Even well-designed systems need careful delivery:

Housing planning needs to feel safe, consistent, and non-judgemental

Students may still hesitate to disclose relevant information if 'student to university' conversations are not holistic

Housing should be an explicit conversation component for all students not just care-experienced and estranged populations



Trust is what makes this room work – not just process.

What This Means For SU Officers

Your role is to make sure planning isn't left to chance.

Ask your institution:

? Do students have routine opportunities to talk about housing fragility?

? Are these conversations proactive or reactive?

? Do students know who they can talk to – and trust them?

? Is housing treated as essential, or just if a student brings it up ?

And importantly:

 Highlight student experiences of "falling through the gaps"

 Spot where support relies too much on self-advocacy

 Push for consistent, relationship-based discussion models



Continued

Key Takeaway

This isn't about paperwork or forms. It's about:

Staying ahead of risk

Building trust

And making sure no student is navigating alone



A #HomeAtUniversity isn't just about where you live – it's about knowing what comes next.



Next: Room 3

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Record Keeping

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

Imagine trying to improve something without knowing what's working. That's the challenge this room tackles.

The Big Idea behind Room 3 of the Blueprint is simple:



Universities should consistently identify, record input, and track student outcomes; using that insight to improve accommodation systems and support.

Why This Matters

Care-experienced and estranged students are often a small and under-identified group. That means their experiences can easily be missed.

Without good data, universities can't answer key questions:



Are students staying and succeeding?



Are housing services contributing to retention?



Who is still being missed?

And when that happens:

Gaps stay hidden

Support isn't targeted

Progress is harder to measure



If it isn't recorded, it's much harder to improve



Continued

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, data becomes a tool for insight — not just reporting.

Strong approaches include:

-  Consistent identification of relevant students connecting outreach, accommodation, student support, and other teams to build a dynamic picture of the university population
-  Tracking participation in accommodation services uptake (e.g. rent guarantor scheme)
-  Following academic progress over time, not just at one moment
-  Using data actively to evaluate and improve retention



The key shift: From “we think this works” to “we can see what works – and for who.”

In Practice: Heat (Higher Education Access Tracker)

HEAT shows how this room can work at scale:

- ✓ Tracks students from outreach into university and beyond
- ✓ Links data with national datasets (i.e. HESA)
- ✓ Captures participation in interventions like accommodation services over time
- ✓ Enables comparison between different student groups

It doesn't just show who gets in, it helps universities understand individual and aggregated journeys. Data can be visualised and analysed to identify patterns, gaps, and impact. This tool can inform your Blueprint work long-term and help you accurately articulate the connection between housing services and degree completion. Many universities are existing members of HEAT with staff usually housed in Outreach or APP teams – build these relationships to leverage it for your needs.



Continued

What to Watch For

Good record keeping isn't just about systems:

Students may not always be identified or recorded consistently

Definitions (e.g. estranged vs care-experienced) can vary

Data may be collected but not meaningfully used



The real value comes from using available data to inform actions.

What This Means For SU Officers

You don't need to run the data – but you do need to ask the right questions.

Ask your institution:

? Are care-experienced and estranged students clearly identified?

? Do we track who is accessing support like housing schemes?

? How often is this data reviewed – and by who?

? What has changed as a result?

And importantly:

Push for transparency and accountability

Highlight where student experiences aren't reflected in data

Advocate for evidence-led decision making



Continued

Key Takeaway

This isn't about spreadsheets. It's about:

Visibility

Accountability

And making sure no group of students is overlooked



When you can see what's happening, you can start to change it.



Next: Room 4

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Removing the Rent Guarantor Barrier

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

Imagine finding the perfect place to live... and then being told you can't have it because you don't have a guarantor.

For many students, that's a temporary hurdle. For others, it's a complete blocker.

The Big Idea behind Room 4 of the Blueprint is simple:



Students should be able to access housing without being excluded by the rent guarantor requirement.

Why This Matters

Most landlords, purpose-built student accommodation providers, and some university halls tenancies require a guarantor – usually a parent or guardian who can cover unpaid rent or damages. But for care-experienced and estranged students, that person often doesn't exist.

This can lead to:

✗ Being rejected from accommodation

👑 Paying more for limited alternatives

⚠ Increased risk of unsafe or unstable housing

🔄 Barriers to moving into housing at all



Housing access shouldn't depend on who you can call for help.



Continued

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, students have real routes into housing – not dead ends.

Strong approaches include:



University-backed rent guarantor schemes



Partnerships with alternative rent guarantor providers



Clear, early information about what a rent guarantor is, and options



Support navigating the student rental market



The key shift: From “you need a guarantor” to “we’ll make sure this isn’t a barrier.”

In Practice: What Universities Are Doing

Across the UK, universities are stepping in to remove this barrier:

- ✓ Providing full and clear information about rent guarantors on their websites
- ✓ Providing rent-guarantor services for students who require them
- ✓ Prioritising care-experienced and estranged students in fee-free arrangements with commercial rent guarantor providers
- ✓ Removing the rent guarantor requirement in halls of residence they own or commission

Schemes vary – but the principle is consistent: no care experienced or estranged student should be locked out of housing, or be financially penalised, because of their circumstances.



Continued

What to Watch For

Even when effective schemes exist, some barriers can still remain:

Criteria like not including 1st years, requiring a co-signer, or paying extra admin fees

Poor signposting and resulting low awareness among students at their point of need

A design and language that reflects a focus on international students with differing needs



Removing the barrier means offering a solution and making it accessible, visible, and inclusive.

What This Means For SU Officers

This is a clear, practical area for change.

Ask your institution:

? Do we require a rent guarantor for university halls?

? Do we offer a rent guarantor scheme?

? Who can access it, who can't, and for what types of housing?

? Do students know about it early enough and does it have a cost

? What happens if a care-experienced or estranged student doesn't meet the criteria?

And importantly:



Highlight real student experiences of being blocked from housing



Identify hidden barriers in eligibility or awareness



Push for system-level solutions, not case-by-case fixes



Continued

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about paperwork. It's about:

Access

Fairness

And whether students can fully participate in university life



A #HomeAtUniversity shouldn't depend on having a rent guarantor.



Next: Room 5

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Additional Support on Arrival

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

Starting university is a big moment.

Now imagine arriving ... already worrying about housing, money, and whether everything will fall into place.

For some students, the transition isn't just exciting – it's fragile.

The Big Idea behind Room 5 of the Blueprint is simple:



Students should receive targeted, practical accommodation services early and throughout arrival.

Why This Matters

University “welcome” processes often assume everyone starts from the same place.

But care-experienced and estranged students may:



Already be in housing crisis



Be managing their move alone



Be dealing with delayed student finance



Not know how to access accommodation services



Have very little margin for error

Those first few days and weeks can quickly become overwhelming.

And when the start is unstable, it affects:

Confidence

Sense of belonging

Ability to settle and focus



First impressions don't just matter – they shape outcomes.

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, students feel supported in relation to their housing from day one – not after a problem arises.

Strong approaches include:



Early or flexible move-in options to housing



Clear communication before arrival avoiding assumptions about ‘home’



Practical help with moving and settling in



Early connection to accommodation and wider services



Fast, joined-up problem solving should issues arise



The key shift: From “support is there if you find it” to “we’re with you all the way to and through arrival.”

In Practice: Uwe Bristol

At UWE, arrival support is built as a **whole-university approach**:

- ✓ Pre-arrival summer campus school to build confidence and familiarity
- ✓ Early accommodation dialogue with pre-set adjustments (e.g. no deposit, no rent-guarantor)
- ✓ Flexible, responsive support for real-life challenges (like moving logistics)
- ✓ Consistent joined up working between accommodation, finance, and student support teams
- ✓ Proactive identification and adjustments for delays in student finance affecting rent

Students are introduced to the comprehensive accommodation pathway early, removing the need to independently search for information or help later. Around 270 students are supported through this approach each year.



Continued

What to Watch For

Welcome pathways can miss the mark:

Information overload with fragmented strands of action

Support that relies on students asking first

Services that aren't connected, leading to repeated explanations



A “good welcome” isn’t just friendly – it’s practical, proactive, and joined-up.

What This Means For SU Officers

You play a key role in shaping the student experience from day one.

Ask your institution:

? Can students access accommodation as early as they need it?

? What services exist specifically for those arriving without a safety net?

? How are potential housing barriers avoided in the first few weeks?

? Are services working together — or in silos?

And importantly:

 Share student experiences of difficult arrivals

 Spot where “welcome” doesn’t match real need

 Advocate for arrival services that are built around lived experience



Continued

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about welcome events. It's about:

Safety and stability

Confidence

Practical input that sets students up to succeed from the very start



A #HomeAtUniversity should feel like a home – from before, through, and after arrival.



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Student Belonging through Community

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

Room

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The Big Idea

Imagine arriving at university and feeling like everyone else already has their people. A family to call. Friends from home. A place to go during weekends, holidays, and quieter times of year.

For many care-experienced and estranged students, those connections can be harder to find.

The Big Idea behind Room 6 of the Blueprint is simple:



Students should have opportunities to build meaningful connections, community, and a sense of belonging throughout their time at university.

Why This Matters

University success is about accommodation, finances, and academic experience. It's also about belonging.

Care-experienced and estranged students may be more likely to experience:



The perception that they are different from other students, and a stigma of shame about their lived experience



Limited or no networks to turn to for emotional support and connection



Difficult experiences during holidays, celebratory periods and university closures



Challenges finding a commonality with others and their 'place' within university life



Continued

These feelings don't just surface on arrival. They can become particularly real when campus becomes quieter:

Summer vacations

Christmas and winter breaks

Bank holidays

Graduation periods

Weekends and evenings



A student can have a room in halls and still feel isolated. A #HomeAtUniversity is about community connection as well as accommodation.

What Good Looks Like

When this room is "built", universities and Students' Unions actively create opportunities for belonging through community.

Strong approaches include:



Care-experienced and estranged student societies, networks, or liberation groups



Informal social opportunities throughout the year using halls and other university spaces as both communication channels and hosting resource



Activities in accommodation during holiday periods, inviting private residential students in too, to make campus a vibrant space full of social connection.



Activity that focuses on social connection for its own sake as well as practical 'need', with wide opportunity for students to shape content and lead.



Online communities that help students feel seen and stay connected locally, regionally and nationally



The key shift: From "Students know support exists." to "Students belong to a community."



Continued

In Practice: University Of Bristol

At University of Bristol University, support for care-experienced and estranged students includes and goes beyond practical help.

The university recognises that belonging and connection are essential components of student success.

As part of its approach, the university:

- ✔ Supports a Care Leavers and Estranged Students Society which hosts informal social events throughout the year in the city and on campus including halls
- ✔ Maintains contact during vacation periods and collaborates with accommodation teams and other colleagues to identify periods when additional connection may be valuable
- ✔ Creates opportunities for peer connection in halls and faculties through signposting and trust building
- ✔ Encourages students to shape activities and support opportunities



The focus isn't about organising events. It's on enabling successive cohorts of students to find and continually build belonging through community.

Community Beyond the Campus

Community doesn't have to stop at the university gates.

The Unite Foundation supports All of Us – a UK-wide community exclusively for care-experienced and estranged students. All of Us provides routes – online and in real life – for care-experienced and estranged students to connect with one another.



All of Us

Students can access:

- 👋 Meetups and themed events – online, in halls, or in the local area
- 📰 An exclusive student-edited newsletter
- 🎁 Freebies and opportunities
- ✍️ Student-authored blogs and resources such as 'Top tips for summer'
- 🌐 A national network of students and graduates
- 📢 Opportunities to organise, collaborate, and influence change together

For students who may be the only care-experienced or estranged student they know, communities like All of Us can be transformational. A student's community can exist on campus, online, locally, and nationally.

What to Watch For

Community isn't just organising events.

Students may still struggle to engage if:

- ❌ Activities feel tokenistic
- ❌ Activity only appears once at the start of the first academic year
- ❌ Opportunities are poorly promoted or are entirely staff-led
- ❌ Students are expected to create community entirely without resources
- ❌ Community disappears when it is valued the most in holidays and quieter periods



Belonging is built through consistent and authentic relationship building, not one-off activities.

What This Means For SU Officers

This room is often where Students' Unions can have the greatest influence.

Ask your institution:

- ? How are care-experienced and estranged students supported to build connections?
- ? Does this include information and opportunity for connections where they live?
- ? Is there a care-experienced and estranged student network, society, or community space?
- ? What happens during holiday periods when campus life slows down?
- ? Are students aware of communities like All of Us?
- ? Who is responsible for fostering opportunities for connection?
- ? How are students shaping community activity themselves – how can this be amplified?



Continued

And importantly:

 Champion inclusive communities and peer interaction

 Encourage care-experienced and estranged student groups where they exist

 Create opportunities for networks to emerge where they don't, including in accommodation

 Think about the quieter moments in the university calendar, how can students living year-round continue to find social warmth

 Promote local and national opportunities for connection

Not every university will have enough students to sustain a dedicated society or network and that's okay. The goal isn't necessarily to create a new group. The goal is to ensure students have opportunities to connect with other students who understand their experiences, whether that's through local activity, wider liberation communities, or national networks like All of Us.

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about events. It's about:

Belonging

Friendship

Connection

And knowing that you're not facing university alone

A safe and stable #HomeAtUniversity isn't only a place to stay.

It's a community that stays with you. Everyone needs somewhere to belong.



No student should feel like they're navigating university on their own.



Next: Room 7

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Compassionate Accommodation Communications

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

Room

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The Big Idea

Imagine missing a rent payment. Now imagine receiving an email with the subject line: "OVERDUE PAYMENT – IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED"

For many students, that's stressful. For care-experienced and estranged students, it can be much more than that. It can trigger significant anxiety, undermine mental health and; reinforce feelings of not belonging; creating deep-seated fear about safety.

The Big Idea behind Room 7 of the Blueprint is simple:



Universities should communicate with care-experienced and estranged students in ways that are clear, compassionate, and recognise their housing circumstances.

Why This Matters

Many university automated systems are designed to communicate risk. Missed payment? Generate a stern email. Missed deadline? Issue a warning. Accommodation concern? Escalate immediately, and with high threat, to prompt an immediate resolution by the student. Alternatively, auto-communications can convey assumptions that everyone has family, and all 'go home' at some point.

While these communications may be efficient, they are often impersonal, highly triggering and without consideration of the recipient.

Care-experienced and estranged students may be:



Living in halls all year round



In a crisis unrelated to housing and their anomalous compliance is a soft signal of welfare need



Continued

Managing risk of homelessness

 Waiting for delayed student finance payments outside of their control

 Navigating the tenancy process and communications without any experience or adult support

 Having a disability, neuro-divergence or long-term health condition that makes communications inaccessible

 Untrusting that a team behind such communication to be a realistic location of empathy, support and advice

A message that feels routine to an institution can feel overwhelming to a student.



The way we communicate can either build trust or create barriers.

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, communication is designed around understanding, not just compliance.

Strong approaches include:

 Using empathetic and student-centred language without assumption on ‘home’ or ‘family’

 Welfare first; assuming students may need help, not just enforcement

 Detailing trusted support routes alongside problems

 Routinely establishing constructive relationships in buildings before situations escalate

 Reviewing template communications through a care-experienced and estranged student lens



The key shift: From “You have failed and are in trouble.” to “We can help you sort this.”



Continued

In practice

At universities that have implemented this room, care-experienced and estranged students are recognised as a group who may face additional barriers and stressors.

Before accommodation issues arise:

- ✓ Template communications are reviewed for tone, accessibility, and inclusivity
- ✓ Accommodation services or student support contacts, that are already familiar, are signposted alongside every request for action
- ✓ An environment exists where students and accommodation teams have opportunity to communicate before situations can escalate
- ✓ Accommodation teams knowledgeable across diversity, disability and communication barriers embed that expertise into systems design
- ✓ Automated communication systems are balanced with human contact.



Accommodation inclusion can be emphasised rather than undermined by reviewing communication policy and templates.

What to Watch For

Compassionate accommodation communication doesn't mean avoiding difficult conversations.

Students still need:

- ✓ Clear expectations
- ✓ Accurate information that is pertinent to their specific needs
- ✓ Awareness of consequences in the event of issues

However, institutions should avoid:

- ✗ Language that 'others' the lived experience of care experienced or estranged students
- ✗ Threatening language
- ✗ Communications that assume wrongdoing
- ✗ Escalating before support routes have been deployed
- ✗ Requiring students to repeatedly explain difficult personal circumstances



Communications can be clear, inclusive and compassionate.

What this means for SU Officers

This room is often hiding in plain sight.

Ask your institution:

- ? How are template accommodation communications reviewed and updated?
- ? How are care-experienced and estranged students communicated with?
- ? What happens when a student misses a payment or deadline?
- ? Has anyone reviewed these messages from a CEES student perspective?
- ? Are frontline accommodation staff trained in compassionate communication?

And importantly:

-  Share student experiences of communications that felt punitive or unhelpful
-  Review the language used in standard templates and policies
-  Advocate for communications that build trust and encourage help-seeking

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about emails. It's about:

Trust Dignity Belonging

Creating a culture where students feel seen and able to ask for help

The right message at the right time can stop a small problem becoming a crisis.



A #HomeAtUniversity isn't just built through accommodation and support. It's built through the way institutions speak to care experienced and estranged students.



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Accommodation Scholarships

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

Imagine going to university... without worrying about rent.

No juggling payments. No choosing between housing and everything else.

The Big Idea behind Room 8 of the Blueprint is simple:



Students with access to free or heavily subsidised accommodation bridge the outcomes gap.

Why This Matters

For most students, accommodation is their biggest cost. The Unite Foundation Scholarship Scheme, and independent evidence from JISC, shows that these accommodation scholarships deliver academic outcomes that match closely to students without a care experienced or estranged background.

NUS data on the financial contributions made by parent's states: that 86% of parents support their child financially at university with living costs, with most parents contributing £200 per month, and 1 in 10 contributing over £1000 per month. For care-experienced and estranged students, there's usually no financial input from family. That can mean:

📅 Constant and high financial pressure risking retention

⚠️ Use of unsafe or inappropriate housing 'options'

🧠 More paid work with little time or energy for study

🚫 Feeling excluded and different from the "typical" student experience

Even when other support is in place, accommodation cost alone can still be a big barrier.



If housing isn't affordable, it isn't accessible.

What Good Looks Like

When this room is “built”, students have **real financial breathing space**.

Strong approaches include:



Free or subsidised accommodation scholarships



Year-round coverage (not just term time)



Clear, well promoted, access for eligible students



Wraparound services alongside the accommodation offer



The key shift: From “help with housing information” to “reducing or removing cost.”

In practice: What this looks like

Across the sector, this approach is already happening in some areas:

- ✓ Some universities partner with the Unite Foundation to offer 3-year scholarships for some students or deliver free halls accommodation throughout study years themselves.
- ✓ Others offer a single-year accommodation scholarships for all eligible students or discounted fees that reflect the summer period. In Scotland, care experienced students can apply for a summer bursary to cover these extra costs
- ✓ Others are introducing targeted schemes for care-experienced or estranged students
- ✓ Accommodation scholarships are often combined with wellbeing, transition, and community services
- ✓ Partnerships with external providers or funders help scale up provision

Research shows that stable, funded accommodation:

- Improves retention
- Reduces critical stress
- Supports progression and completion



Continued

What to Watch For

Not all schemes are created equal:

Highly competitive, low value, models can reduce student incentive to apply

Short-term support may not provide full stability so whilst helpful, should not be considered a full solution

Terminology around accommodation (and other) services should be described as measures of equity rather than addressing a 'deficit' in a student

Students may still face unusual costs outside rent so continue to explore accommodation and finance holistically



The most effective schemes are predictable, accessible, and long-term.

What this means for SU Officers

This is where bold change can happen.

Ask your institution:

? Do we offer accommodation scholarships in any form?

? Who can access them, and how visible and easy is that process?

? What steps would be needed to make them year-round and/or long term?

? What additional support sits alongside them?

? Is our housing stock underutilised in any way or at any time?

And importantly:

 Highlight the impact of financial pressure on housing

 Identify where care experienced and estranged students specifically are priced out (e.g. due to covering the additional weeks rent during summer vacation)

 Advocate for scalable, inclusive funding models that address the particularity of care and estranged lived experience



Continued

Key Takeaway

This isn't just about funding. It's about:

Stability

Equity

And giving students the freedom to focus on their future



Reducing or removing housing costs will transform the student experience.



Next: Where Next

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Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

unitefoundation.org.uk

Where Next?

Turning Ideas into Action

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

The Big Idea

You've explored all eight rooms of the Blueprint.

You've seen the challenges that care-experienced and estranged students can face, the impact that housing has on student success, and the practical ways universities are responding.

Now comes the most important question: What happens next?

Because the Blueprint wasn't designed to be something you simply learn about. It was designed to help you create change.

Why This Matters

A safe and stable #HomeAtUniversity isn't just about accommodation.

It's about whether students can:

🎓 Stay and succeed in higher education

🧠 Focus on their studies and wellbeing

👉 Feel a sense of belonging

🏠 Navigate university without housing insecurity

And while the Blueprint is focused on care-experienced and estranged students, many of the approaches you've explored benefit a much wider group of students too.

Better accommodation systems. Earlier support. Fewer barriers. Clearer information. Stronger transitions.



When universities build a better home for students with the least support, they often improve the experience for everyone.



Continued

What You've Explored: In The Content Of This Suite, You've Visited Eight Rooms

Room 1: Guaranteed Year-Round Accommodation

Ensuring students have somewhere safe and stable to live throughout the year.

Room 2: Personal Housing Plans

Helping students plan and avoid housing crises.

Room 3: Record Keeping

Using data and insight to understand need and improve support.

Room 4: Removing the Rent Guarantor Barrier

Ensuring students aren't locked out of housing because of their circumstances.

Room 5: Accommodation Measures Supporting Arrival

Enabling students to settle in and feel at home from day one.

Room 6: Student Belonging through Community

Fostering connections in accommodation and on campus that support retention.

Room 7: Compassionate Accommodation Communication

Creating inclusive and student-centred communications.

Room 8: Accommodation Scholarships

Reducing financial pressure through free or subsidised housing.



Each room addresses a different challenge and potential improvements. Together, they create the conditions for students to stay, belong, and succeed.



Continued

What Good Looks Like

Building a #HomeAtUniversity isn't about implementing everything at once. It's about making progress.

That might mean:

 Improving an existing accommodation offer

 Raising awareness of services that are already available

 Removing a specific barrier  Gathering better data

 Building stronger partnerships across the university

 Embedding support into policy and practice



The key shift: From “Do we already do this?” to “What could we do better?”

Your Next Step: Start with the Blueprint Audit Workbook

Now that you've read through each room, the best place to begin is the Blueprint Audit Workbook.

The Audit Workbook helps you:

 Assess your institution against all eight rooms

 Identify areas of strength

 Spot gaps and opportunities for positive action

 Understand where your university currently sits



Before deciding what to change, it's important to understand where you are now. Think of the Audit Workbook as your baseline.



Continued

Then Build Your Blueprint Action Plan

Once you've completed your Audit Workbook, it's time to decide what happens next.

The Blueprint Action Planner helps you:

-  Prioritise areas for improvement
-  Plan conversations with decision-makers
-  Set realistic goals and actions
-  Coordinate activity across your Officer team



By sharing your journey, you help shape the future of support across the sector.

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

Not every institution will have:

- A visible care-experienced and estranged students' network
- Strong local data
- Existing campaigns
- Dedicated staff capacity

That's okay.

The Blueprint brings together:

- Student lived experience
- Research and evidence
- Sector-wide practice
- Case studies from across the UK

The goal isn't to wait until problems become visible. It's to use the best available evidence to build a better system.



Use local insight where it exists. Use national evidence and Blueprint resources where it doesn't.

Building Change That Lasts

Meaningful change often takes longer than a single Officer term. That's why the Blueprint includes a Handover Document to help Officers:

-  Track progress
-  Share key contacts
-  Record ongoing work
-  Ensure projects continue year after year



The aim isn't just to start change. It's to make sure that change lasts.

Share What's Working

The Blueprint isn't a finished project. It will be a dynamic movement across Students' Unions and universities.

The Unite Foundation wants to hear:

✅ What's working well? ⚠️ Where are the pinch points?

💡 What innovative approaches are emerging?

🚀 What practice goes beyond the Blueprint itself?

At the end of the academic year, you'll have the opportunity to complete an **SU Annual Return**, helping to share learning from across the sector. Your experiences can help shape future resources, influence sector conversations, and inspire other institutions.

We can also host free webinars for you to come together with your peers in other SU and share triumphs and challenges. Get in touch with us on any aspect of the Blueprint.

What This Means for SU Officers

You don't need to solve every issue in one year. You don't need to be an accommodation expert. And you don't need lived experience to make a difference.

What you can do is:

👂 Listen 📖 Learn 🔍 Identify gaps 📢 Raise issues 🤝 Build partnerships

🏛️ Influence decisions 🌱 Leave things better than you found them

That's how lasting change happens.

Key Takeaway

The goal of the Blueprint isn't simply to improve accommodation. It's to create the conditions for care-experienced and estranged students to thrive.

A safe and stable #HomeAtUniversity supports:

Access Retention Success Wellbeing Belonging

And ultimately, a university experience where students are defined by their potential, not limited by their circumstances.



Continued

What Next?

1. Complete the Blueprint Audit Workbook

Understand where your institution currently sits against the eight rooms.

2. Build your Blueprint Action Plan

Identify your priorities and plan your approach.

3. Start the conversation

Work with students, university staff, and decision-makers to drive change.

4. Capture and share your progress

Use the Handover Document and SU Annual Return to keep momentum going and help shape the future of the Blueprint.

Building a #HomeAtUniversity doesn't happen all at once. It happens one room, one conversation, and one improvement at a time.