

Compassionate Accommodation Communications

Blueprint for a #HomeAtUniversity

Room

7

of 8

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



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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.”



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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.



Next: Room 8

Published: August 2026 / Next Update: August 2027

The Unite Foundation is a CIO registered in England + Wales 1198601 / Scotland SCO51987

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