

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



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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



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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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