

**COMMITTEE:** Union Council

**SUBJECT:** Support Rent Strikes

**APPROVAL DATE:** 10/03/21

**RENEWAL DATE:** 10/03/24

**PROPOSER:** Gabby Willis on behalf of SHU Rent Strike

**SHEFFIELD HALLAM STUDENTS UNION NOTES:**

1. The Sheffield Hallam University Rent Strike (SHU Rent Strike) was launched in term 1 of 2020-21 and has received over 500 sign ups from students in support of its demands. (See additional notes)

2. The cost of rent for purpose-built student accommodation represents 73% of the maximum student loan available (up from 58% in 2012). Only a small proportion of students qualify for the maximum loan. [2]

3. Necessary public restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus have led to unprecedented hardship for students and families across the UK [3]

4. That the government implemented national lockdown on the 5th of January 2021 left many students unable to occupy their accommodation. Consequently, students have paid rent for rooms they are unable to access without breaking COVID restrictions. [4]

5. That worldwide travel restrictions have meant that international students that have returned home are prevented to make use of their accommodation. [5]

6. Many staff working within student accommodation have little or no training with dealing with disclosure of sexual violence within accommodation, this has led to students who disclose feeling unsafe and unheard when voicing concerns and when reporting incidents.

7. The advertisement of university services such as wellbeing, the Student Advice Centre, and Report and Support around student accommodation is wholly inadequate, with many students not knowing of these services or not being fully aware of their purpose and the support they offer.

**SHEFFIELD HALLAM STUDENTS UNION BELIEVES:**

1. The government and the university management misled students into moving into term-time accommodation, promising a ‘near to normal student experience’, knowing that this would be undeliverable and even dangerous. This decision was made to get us to pay fees and sign accommodation contracts.

2. That despite the best efforts of university support staff, mental health provision available for students has been wholly inadequate. (Hallam How are you Survey)

3. More broadly, the unethical behavior of the accommodation sector should be challenged to prevent the cycle of rising rent, unsafe conditions, and lack of accountability.

4. That it is right for the SU to support SHU Rent Strike and all the demands in this motion.

**SHEFFIELD HALLAM STUDENTS UNION RESOLVES:**

1. To stand in solidarity with those currently withholding rent, either through inability to pay, or to lobby the University to meet all of SHU rent strike’s demands.
2. To support the rent strike by publicising the rent strikers demands to all students in a joint letter with campus unions, and financially by covering reasonable printing and campaign material costs.
3. To use its social media and contact database to tell as many students as possible how to get in touch with the rent strike and how to join in and share its press database with the rent strikers.
4. A staff member or officer to meet with the campaign on a regular basis (no less than once a month and as is needed for the progression of the campaign).
5. To pressure university management to regularly use the nomination agreements it has with large PBSAs to offer substantial rebates for students. (see additional notes).
6. To provide practical support, advice, and advocacy for rent strikers that accommodation providers may attempt to evict or victimise in line with the advice provided by the NUS [6].
7. In the unlikely event that it be required, the union should oppose measures by the university or accommodation providers to intimidate students on rent strike. Union officers should address threats or incorrect statements from the university or accommodation providers by posting open statements in the press, on their website and via social media.
8. To increase the amount of advertisement of the Student Advice Centre, wellbeing service and report and support within PBSAs with nomination agreements.
9. To push for a good and consistent level of sexual violence awareness training to be implemented across accommodation providers.
10. To assist in the creation of a student renters union.
11. To lobby the NUS to call high profile national protests and organise students in support of its own policy for a financial bail-out of the university sector and grants for student living costs and create a space on the SHSU website to keep students updated on the progress of this campaign.

**References**

[1] [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfno4C\_92vKdhstW7p1GVIUgcmlvaJ7B7XKR0QXw D1VToekRQ/viewform?usp=sf\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfno4C_92vKdhstW7p1GVIUgcmlvaJ7B7XKR0QXw%20%20D1VToekRQ/viewform?usp=sf_link)

[2] <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/nus-and-unipol-accommodation-cost-survey-2018-full-report>

[3] [https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/09/covid-driven-recession-likely-to-push-2m-uk-f amilies-into-poverty](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/09/covid-driven-recession-likely-to-push-2m-uk-f%20amilies-into-poverty)

[4]<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-national-lockdown>

[5] <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

[6] <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/students-on-rent-strike>

**Additional notes**

Sheffield Hallam university does not directly own any of the accommodation used by its student body. Here is the breakdown of how the accommodation works at Sheffield Hallam University

* Nominated partner: Roughly **3,500** students are allocated via the Accommodation Service at SHU into 17 different partner halls each under **annual agreements.**
* Direct let partner: Roughly **1,200 students** use the same landlords but have been **encouraged** to go to them directly and are not allocated through the SHU service.
* Managed halls**: 500 students** are currently in the two managed properties, Bramall Court and Charlotte Court. **Our staff operate and run the sites under SHUEL.**
* SNUG private landlord: An estimated **10,000 students find their own accommodation through SNUG registered landlords.**
* Non-SNUG private landlord:  Not all students will use SNUG accredited landlords. An estimated **2,000 students will choose this as an option**.

This policy does not specifically ask for the students union to lobby the university to fight for **tuition fee rebates** for our students as it has been decided that focusing our efforts on building the ongoing NUS campaign will be more advantageous, however here is a quote from a recent article.

"The situation is in flux and many universities are working on what support looks like should the lockdown continue. Universities have been provided hardship funds by the government to provide for particularly vulnerable students, and many are lobbying the private sector to do right by their students."
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dpa4a/english-universities-student-rent-rebate-refund?fbclid=IwAR0koFufs9qM4y-tK1dh3XPyFgvkCEItu9R_4xrL-mAQsEjqH3NwsOG6DcU>

**SHU Rent Strike Demands**

* Cap rent at 50% of the maximum maintenance loan (inline with NUS policy)[2] - page 11
* Reimburse students who had to pay rent for January but could not use their rooms
* No penalty, early withdrawal from tenancy contracts for this year and the next
* Perpetrators of sexual violence to be removed from halls immediately pending a timely investigation
* Improved mental health support
* Creation of a student renters union