

Accommodation Fees

Student Proposal for 2018-2019

1. SUMMARY

This paper seeks this committee's recommendation to UEC for a reduction in accommodation fees for 2018-2019 to what they would have been had the University been using RPI for the last nine academic years; to commit the University to an extensive review of accommodation fees with a focus on:

- Where the funds paid for accommodation fees are actually spent,
- Pricing options including differential pricing,
- Options to increase the number of returners; and

a commitment to a freeze on future accommodation fees until the review is completed.

During the past two academic years the Union has worked with the common rooms (both JCR and MCR) to research student views on the fees charged by the University to live in College and consult on a plan to make changes to the way the University consults on and adopts fees. The next section provides a summary of the data gathered and presents the students' rationale for asking and expecting the above proposal.

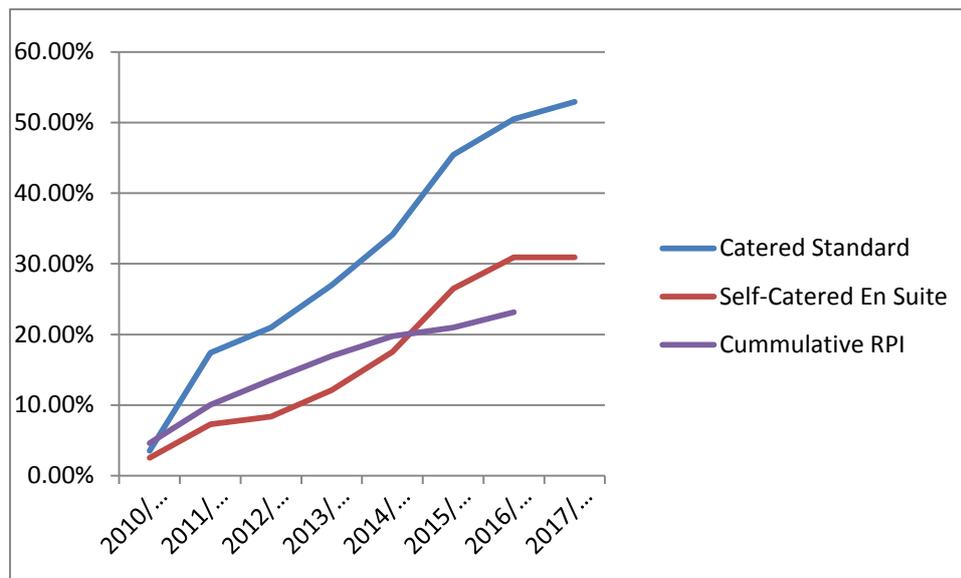
2. RATIONALE

Historic review

While we recognise the University's commitment last year to raise accommodation fees by the predicted RPI, we are still concerned and disheartened that fees have been raised in years past with no explanation or expressed basis. To reiterate the position taken during the 2017-2018 fee consultation, the increase based on RPI is an increase on an artificially high amount. As indicated in the following table, the university's rate of increase can be characterised as sporadic and illogical.

| Academic year | % increase in single room, catered, shared bedroom | % increase in self-catered, en suite | RPI % in year of announcement |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 17/18 | 1.6 % | 0% | |
| 16/17 | 3.5% | 3.5% | 1.8% |
| 15/16 | 9% | 8% | 1% |
| 14/15 | 6% | 5% | 2.4% |
| 13/14 | 5% | 3.5% | 3.0% |
| 12/13 | 3% | 1% | 3.2% |
| 11/12 | 13% | 5% | 5.2% |
| 10/11 | 3.5% | 2.5% | 4.6% |

Shown as cumulative percentages:



This type of data lends credibility to the students' concerns that accommodation fees are raised with no discernible reason or justification. Had the University used the reasonable increase of RPI for the past nine academic years, the 2018-2019 fees would be set at £5775 for catered, standard accommodation and £5139 for self-catered, en suite.

Durham Compared

A total of 12 Universities' accommodation fees were compared, including Durham, for the academic year 2016-2017. The accommodation offered by each institution was first split by catering type (i.e. catered or self-catered) and then the lowest and highest fees were compared from each one. The comparison took into consideration the fact that Durham's contract length is 38 weeks, as standard, meaning accommodation offered by other institutions for 50/51 weeks was not considered, as it was deemed that this would be an inaccurate comparison.

While Durham's upper fees for both catered and self-catered accommodation were by no means the highest, their lower fees were the highest in both instances and by a significant margin. Durham's lowest catered fee was over £1000.00 per year more expensive than the next highest equivalent.

What is most notable however, is the variation in accommodation fees that are offered by other institutions. At Durham, there is a 7.1% difference in price from the lowest to the highest fee option if you want catered accommodation. For self-catered accommodation, there is a difference of 11.9%. Bar one University (which only had one catered halls of residence and therefore no differentiation in price) the average % difference for catered accommodation is 31.6% in the sample compared in this review. For self-catered accommodation, the average % difference was larger at 48.5%.

Accommodation was differentiated mainly by room feature (i.e. en suite, washbasin in bedroom, double bed, room size) or by hall/college (i.e. newer halls with better facilities were priced more highly than older halls with fewer facilities). Some institutions had a set fee for an en suite room, regardless of which hall/college it was in and others had multiple fees for an en suite room based on

the quality of the hall/college it was in. Some accommodations also had differentiation between rooms of the same style within one hall/college (i.e. rooms were graded based on their size, location, condition).

Please see the table in Appendix A for a summary breakdown of accommodation fees for each institution.

There were far fewer accommodation fees published for the 2017-2018 academic year which is why the sample size is smaller for this comparison but a similar pattern can be seen. The upper fees at Durham for both catered and self-catered accommodation are not the highest but the lower fees are. This means that while some students at other Universities do pay more for their accommodation, they also have the choice to pay a lot less should they wish or need too. Durham doesn't currently afford this option.

For the 2017-2018 accommodation provided at Durham, there is a % difference of 35.8% in total from the lowest priced room (self-catered non-en suite room not including freshers or congregation week) and the highest room (en suite catered room including freshers or congregation week). The average % difference from the other 6 institutions compared in this review is 46.4%. The variety in accommodation itself is also vastly different in other institutions. For instance the upper self-catered price in one University was for a 2 bedroom flat and in another it was for a double studio.

The majority of other institutions also offer a wider range of contract lengths for their accommodation. Accommodation is offered on a 40/41/42/43/44 week let basis in many Universities considered in this review, meaning that students have the choice to pay more and stay longer for their money, or save money and go home sooner.

Please see the table in Appendix B for a summary of accommodation provided by each institution in the review.

Student Views

Recognising that student feedback/information gathering takes many forms, the common room presidents approached garnering student opinion in different ways; five colleges asked the same set of questions to participants with another two colleges asking similar questions. The remaining colleges spoke with and gathered opinions through meetings and feedback sessions at which students were invited to voice their opinions and concerns for the state of accommodation at college. Overall, more than 2,000 students participated. All data gathered was provided to the Union for collating.

Durham students very much see the benefit to college accommodation. From the five colleges asking, the majority of participants, at least over 70% from each college, either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that there are some elements of their college accommodation that they cannot get in private accommodation. In addition to this, one other college reported that 81% of their participants agreed that college provides elements not available in private accommodation. However, when asked whether college accommodation provides good value for money, the responses were very negatively skewed with an average of 72% of participants either selecting 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. At the high end of the response spectrum, one college found 81% of participants selecting a rating with negative associations ('disagree' or 'strongly disagree'). These results would indicate that students

feel there are a number of important aspects of College accommodation that are valued by students that they cannot get from private accommodation. That being said however, students also feel that the price of their College accommodation, for what facilities/features they actually get, is not good value for money as the current prices stand.

When asked whether college accommodation provides better value for money than private accommodation, on average 75% of participants 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with that statement.

Participants were then asked if they would prefer to live in College accommodation if price was not a factor. Of the Colleges who provided a full set of responses to this question, on average 61% of participants either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they would prefer to live in College accommodation if price was not a factor. Again, there were quite drastic differences between Colleges; only 40% of one college's participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they would prefer to live in College accommodation, compared to 82% of another college's participants. This again perhaps emphasises the perceived differences in the standard of accommodation for the price being paid.

The qualitative responses gave some further insight to student opinion on accommodation fees. The majority of experiences offered by participants related to the price of College accommodation being too high, and the implications that this has had on their life as a student. Many participants felt that fees are too expensive for what is actually available in College accommodation and that friends at other Universities pay considerably less for better quality accommodation. Participants also made reference to the fact that the increased fees will put off prospective students from coming to Durham, and particularly those from lower income families, making Durham an even less diverse, and more elitist, University than it is already. A number of participants also described wider negative implications of being priced out of College accommodation; for instance feeling isolated and pushed out. Those who chose to live in, and pay the high fees, described feelings of guilt towards their parents who have had to foot the bill for their unnecessarily expensive College room, as student loans no longer cover this cost.

Another common theme mentioned by participants focused on the facilities available in College and how these have impacted on experiences of living in. The majority of experiences relating to facilities were negative, mentioning things like not being able to control heating, only having access to a bath (no shower) and mould in rooms. A number of participants also suggested that additional services, such as laundry facilities, are also very expensive in College. This was also very closely linked to price, as the majority of participants stated that facilities of this low standard are not worth the high prices that the University are charging for them.

Campaign

As you can imagine, students feel very strongly that the increase of accommodation fees year on year is damaging the community feel of the colleges, i.e. the Durham Difference. The highest student democratic, representative body has passed a policy calling for the creation of a campaign to fight the continued increase in accommodation fees. The full text of the policy passed unanimously by Assembly can be read in Appendix C. Appendix D provides the text of a change.org petition signed by over 1,600 supporters as of 25 May 2017.

Appendix A

Summary of 2016-2017 Fees

| University | Catered accommodation fees | | % difference | Self-catered accommodation fees | | % difference | Overall % difference |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|
| | Lower | Upper | | Lower | Upper | | |
| UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM | £6,831.00 | £7,353.00 | 7.1% | £4,814.00 | £5,464.00 | 11.9% | 34.5% |
| UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS | £5,616.00 | £7,566.00 | 25.80% | £3,486.00 | £6,837.00 | 49.0% | 53.9% |
| UNIVERSITY OF BATH | £3,675.00 | £7,502.00 | 51.00% | £2,470.00 | £5,814.00 | 57.50% | 67.10% |
| UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS | £5,084.00 | £8,011.00 | 36.5% | £3,840.00 | £6,360.00 | 39.6% | 52.1% |
| BRISTOL UNIVERSITY | £5,265.54 | £7,826.28 | 32.7% | £3,136.14 | £6,497.40 | 51.7% | 60.0% |
| LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY | £5,047.71 | £6,897.13 | 26.8% | £3,247.45 | £6,384.72 | 49.1% | 52.9% |
| NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY | £5,064.15 | £6,088.25 | 16.8% | £3,281.46 | £6,837.00 | 52.0% | 52.0% |
| UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER | £4,058.00 | £7,187.00 | 43.5% | £2,865.00 | £6,436.00 | 55.5% | 60.1% |
| UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM | £4,688.74 | £6,428.56 | 27.1% | £4,312.00 | £7,179.00 | 39.9% | 39.90% |
| NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY | £4,299.75 | £4,299.75 | 0.0% | £2,702.70 | £5,418.00 | 50.1% | 50.1% |
| UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM | £5,079.00 | £7,868.00 | 35.4% | £3,563.00 | £10,559.00 | 66.3% | 66.3% |
| OXFORD UNIVERSITY | £4,922.00 | £6,158.00 | 20.1% | £3,200.00 | £4,119.00 | 22.3% | 48.0% |

Appendix B

Summary of 2017-2018 Fees

| University | Catered accommodation fees | | | Self-catered accommodation fees | | | Overall % difference |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------|--------------|----------------------|
| | Lower | Upper | % difference | Lower | Upper | % difference | |
| UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM | £6,940.00 | £7,616.00 | 8.9% | £4,891.00 | £5,464.00 | 10.5% | 35.8% |
| UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW | £6,289.92 | £6,956.04 | 9.6% | £3,524.43 | £5,353.53 | 34.2% | 49.3% |
| UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS | £5,837.00 | £8,170.00 | 28.6% | £3,915.00 | £6,486.00 | 39.6% | 52.1% |
| READING UNIVERSITY | £5,726.00 | £7,215.60 | 20.6% | £4,620.00 | £9,800.00 | 52.9% | 41.6% |
| UNIVERSITY OF YORK | £5,664.00 | £7,150.00 | 20.8% | £4,239.00 | £6,121.00 | 30.7% | 40.7% |
| NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY | £4,368.00 | £4,368.00 | 0.00% | £2,730.00 | £7,073.50 | 61.4% | 61.4% |
| BOURNEMOUTH UNIVERSITY | £6,585.20 | £6,585.20 | 0.00% | £4,402.80 | £6,098.80 | 27.8% | 33.10% |

Passed: 9 May 2017

Policy: Cut College Costs

Assembly notes:

1. Accommodation fees in Durham have steadily risen over the past nine academic years exceeding the Retail Price Index (RPI) by a difference of over 25%.
2. The University's commitment to increasing accommodation rates by RPI is merely a small increase to an already exaggerated rate.
2. For 2017-2018, Durham has announced accommodation fees of £6940 for catered, standard accommodation and £5336 for self-catered, ensuite.
3. Had the University used the reasonable increase of RPI for the past nine academic years, the 2018-2019 fees would be at £5775 for catered, standard accommodation and £5139 for self-catered, ensuite.
4. A review of 12 peer institutions' accommodation rates reveals that while Durham's upper fees for both catered and self-catered accommodation were by no means the highest, their lower fees were the highest for both catered and self-catered and by a significant margin. Durham's lowest catered fee is over £1000.00 per year more expensive than the next highest equivalent.
5. The variation in accommodation fees offered by peer institutions is significantly greater than what is offered at Durham. Bar one University reviewed (which only had one catered college and therefore no differentiation in price) the average % difference for catered accommodation is 31.6%. For self-catered accommodation, the average % difference was larger at 48.5%.
6. At Durham, there is a 7.1% difference in price from the lowest to the highest fee option if you want catered accommodation. For self-catered accommodation, there is a difference of 11.9%. For 2016-2017 Durham's accommodation rates for 2016-2017 include a shared room discount of just £225.

Assembly believes:

1. Clear evidence exists showing that there have been exaggerated increases in accommodation fees resulting in Durham being an outlier amongst peer institutions.
2. Exploring and setting differential prices on already inflated rates will not fix the problem of too high accommodation fees.
3. A lowering of the base rate of accommodation fees is necessary before any differentiation occurs.
4. High accommodation rates make living in college too high for returning students resulting in a loss of students returning to live in college and a loss of the college as a true student community.

5. The University has been unable to identify why accommodation rates are set so high or where the money from accommodations fees is specifically distributed within the University budget.

Assembly resolves:

1. To mandate the President to create and put on a campaign with the purpose of lobbying the University to:

- lower 2018-2019 accommodation fees to what they would have been had the University been using RPI for the last nine academic years;
- commit to an extensive review of accommodation fees that includes student consultation with a focus on:
 - Where the funds paid for accommodation fees are actually spent;
 - Pricing options including differential pricing;
 - Options to increase the number of returners; and
- freeze accommodation fees until the conclusion of the review.

Change.org Petition

Accommodation fees in Durham have steadily risen over the past nine academic years exceeding the Retail Price Index (RPI) by a difference of over 25%. The University's commitment to increasing accommodation rates by RPI is merely a small increase to an already exaggerated rate. For 2017-2018, Durham has announced accommodation fees of £6940 for catered, standard accommodation and £5336 for self-catered, ensuite.

Had the University used the reasonable increase of RPI for the past nine academic years, the 2018-2019 fees would be at £5775 for catered, standard accommodation and £5139 for self-catered, ensuite. A review of 12 peer institutions' accommodation rates reveals that while Durham's upper fees for both catered and self-catered accommodation were by no means the highest, their lower fees were the highest for both catered and self-catered and by a significant margin. Durham's lowest catered fee is over £1000.00 per year more expensive than the next highest equivalent. The variation in accommodation fees offered by peer institutions is significantly greater than what is offered at Durham. Bar one University reviewed (which only had one catered college and therefore no differentiation in price) the average % difference for catered accommodation is 31.6%. For self-catered accommodation, the average % difference was larger at 48.5%.

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Clear evidence exists showing that there have been exaggerated increases in accommodation fees resulting in Durham being an outlier amongst peer institutions. Exploring and setting differential prices on already inflated rates will not fix the problem of too high accommodation fees. A lowering of the base rate of accommodation fees is necessary before any differentiation occurs.

High accommodation rates make living in college too high for returning students resulting in a loss of students returning to live in college and a loss of the college as a true student community. The University has been unable to identify why accommodation rates are set so high or where the money from accommodations fees is specifically distributed within the University budget.

We are calling on Durham University to:

- Lower 2018-2019 accommodation fees to what they would have been had the University been using RPI for the last nine academic years;
- Freeze accommodation fees until the conclusion of the review.
- Commit to an extensive review of accommodation fees that includes student consultation with a focus on:
 - Where the funds paid for accommodation fees are actually spent;
 - Pricing options including differential pricing;
 - Options to increase the number of returners.