

Dear Abertay University

This is a public letter regarding the cost of accommodation in Abertay University owned student halls and student halls Abertay university work in partnership with. Over the past few years, the cost of student living, including the cost of finding a place to live, has gone up tremendously. Rents between the 2018 academic year and the 2019 academic year have gone up by 3.2%. When comparing to 5 years ago, the cost of current Abertay student halls has gone up by as much as 13.5%. Student support funding has not kept up with this figure in that time, despite a commitment from the Scottish Government to have this funding keep up with the real living wage.

We estimate from what data we have that the current average Abertay University room costs around £410 per month. Students will receive sometimes as little as £530 per month in student support from the Scottish government, most of which is in loans, incurring further costs down the line. This, along with increasing prices of food, hygiene, clothing and other essentials, is causing students to lead unhealthy life styles in order to stay afloat during their studies. This impacts mental health and student wellbeing, leading to more resources also being needed in those areas to help students.

Some students will be forced to take a job to stay afloat, including in their first year. This is well known to cause stress and anxiety, which can impact their ability to study and succeed. The latter cases are found particularly in EU and International students, who don't have access to student support to the degree that home students do.

60% of Abertay students say that they can't, or could not previously, sustain living in Abertay University halls with their levels of income. In the same survey we conducted, 89% of those who said they had access to a SAAS loan said that they felt too much of it would be spent on accommodation rent in Abertay Halls. 52% of students living or having lived in Abertay Halls say the cost of rent has prevented them from buying basic amenities in the past. On the doorstep, when asking whether students felt their accommodation was worth the price they were paying, as many as 40% living in Abertay halls said no, most simply citing high rents as the reason.

All these above factors are why we are formally requesting you set a 0% rise in rents for Abertay University halls in the academic year starting in September 2020. We would also recommend a review of what accommodation providers the university partners with to ensure student spaces in halls for upcoming academic years. Parker House halls' rents start at around £550/month, eating up a vast part of students' support funding before other essentials are factored in. The same stands for Keiller Court, which costs students around £480 per month. We have found similar issues for students living in these halls when it comes to the ability to keep up with living costs, as a result of those high rents. As such, we hope you will also consider seeking out cheaper providers to partner with in the future, so as to offer students more affordable and viable choices for their student accommodation, hopefully as soon as September 2020.

We do not believe Abertay University actively treats students as a source of monetary income. However, the truth is that students are further and further out of pocket as the years go by, and increased housing costs are a big contributing factor in this. As such, we hope that you will take these recommendations seriously and duly consider their implementation.

We hope to have an answer from you regarding these recommendations by the New Year, when students return to their studies. As a matter of interest to our members, we will be publishing your response.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Owen Wright', written in a cursive style.

Owen Wright
President of Abertay SA
on behalf of members of Abertay Students' Association.