

Dear [Matt Rodda, Reading East / John Redwood, Wokingham]

As lead representatives of Reading University Students' Union, we feel compelled to write to you to address a rising concern impacting the 20,000 members of our student community in relation to the developing COVID-19 pandemic. This deeply unsettling time has had an array of effects and a chief concern pertains to accommodation rent payments. An increasing number of students have been returning home in accordance with guidance issued by the Government to ensure personal safety and to protect the national interest, leaving them to face great uncertainty with rent payments.

We sincerely hope the Student Accommodation Sector will come together quickly, moving past the current fragmented approach in adopting best practice. We are reaching out to you to support us in lobbying private third-party providers, including Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs), to enable students wishing to terminate their contracts to do so by offering the option of a cost-free release to all tenants. The area's residential ecosystem and the future of our student community depend on this. We all share a collective duty to amplify these concerns.

Government intervention is necessary, and your support is critical in ensuring that PBSA providers and landlords act on these issues voluntarily, which is well within their powers. While some have done so, others are refusing to waive these fees, which is deeply unjust. Students should in no way be financially penalised for respecting Government guidance and embracing their civic duty, thus saving lives. Landlords who experience a financial impact have access to a three-month mortgage holiday.

In writing this letter, we are speaking on behalf of tens of thousands of students across the city and they are counting on your support. Anxiety is at an all-time high and the current fragmented approach only exacerbates matters. We urge you to join us in ensuring that accommodation providers allow students to surrender their tenancies with immediate effect. At the moment, it is still possible to avert a crisis for student renters, as long as swift action is taken to guarantee that providers who are well placed to absorb these costs, do so. This will prevent untold damage from being done to the sector and protect our student community for years to come. We look forward to hearing from you. Please find attached a copy of the open letter that has been sent to non-University PBSA providers and HMOs.

Yours Sincerely

Rachel Wates, RUSU Diversity Officer 20/21
Bandy Karki, RUSU Welfare Officer 20/21
Rachel Osborne, RUSU President 20/21
George Ingram, RUSU Education Officer 20/21
Alex Rose, RUSU Activities Officer 20/21