

## FAQ on fire-safety in student accommodation following the recent Bolton Fire

On Friday night a major fire broke out at The Cube student accommodation block in Bolton. If you were affected directly by that incident, make sure you contact Bolton University and/or students' union for further guidance – they have some FAQs for those affected [here](#). This FAQ is for students who have concerns about fire safety in their current accommodation in any other development.

### What rules apply to student halls?

Any new-build or refurbished building in England and Wales, including student halls, must comply with the Building Regulations 2010. These buildings also need to comply with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). In 2005 it became law in Scotland that new builds over 18 metres must have sprinkler systems. In 2007 it became law in England and Wales it became law that any new build tower blocks over 30 metres need to have sprinklers. In 2014 it became law in Wales for all new residential developments to have sprinkler systems put in place – this goes much further than the law in England and Scotland.

Buildings constructed before these dates will still have to meet certain legal standards around fire safety. For example, in England and Wales, these are contained in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Beyond this, there are codes of standards for student accommodation developments. The accommodation codes help to regulate the management of student halls. They are voluntary schemes where providers commit to maintaining professional benchmark standards for managing large student developments. This scheme is only relevant for providers who sign up to them and meet certain standards. They cover the management of a property, rather than the construction.

Code members are expected to meet certain safety requirements, and if you are concerned you should first raise your concerns with your landlord. If you are not satisfied, or feel your enquiry has not been taken seriously, then you can submit a complaint under the Codes. Follow this link to the [National Codes](#) and here for the [Student Accommodation Codes](#). Your provider may be a member of one or both of these codes.

### Is all cladding dangerous?

No. Following the tragedy at Grenfell the major concern has been around blocks which have Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding. Government figures show that as of 31<sup>st</sup> October there were still 18 student accommodation buildings above 18m in height with ACM cladding on them that had yet to be 'remediated'. Most of these have plans in place to remediate the cladding in the near future.

Concerns have been raised about other cladding types including High Pressure Laminate (HPL) cladding by the government's Expert Advisory Panel and others. However, the spread of this cladding is unclear and there are no current government initiatives to have it removed.

It is important to remember that the cladding is a part of a whole building, and often the safety of a building can come down to how it is managed rather than just what the building materials are. If individual components are not of limited combustibility, it may be that they can be safe if when all of those components are combined have fire spread resistance. Please take advice from local fire and rescue experts on a case by case basis.

You can read more about the government's actions and data here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-safety-programme>

## What should students/parents do if they are concerned?

If you have concerns about fire-safety in your student accommodation you should, in the first instance, contact the landlord/accommodation provider detailing your concerns, asking questions and seeking remedy if it is needed.

If they refuse to communicate in a productive manner, then you can contact your university and/or students' union with your concerns and seek advice. Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State for Education, has "written to all university vice chancellors [in England] asking that they - and their commercial partners - review fire safety procedures and safeguards across residential, teaching & research accommodation" so they should be able to advise.

Follow this link to the [National Codes](#) and here for the [Student Accommodation Codes](#) where you can seek further advice and make a complaint if your accommodation provider is a member of one of the codes, and is not responding in a satisfactory manner or you have concerns about fire-safety.

You can also contact your local fire and rescue services and ask them to carry out an assessment.

The housing department of your local authority or your local elected councillor may also be able to help.

## What are NUS doing?

We are calling on all political parties to commit to urgent action on unsafe cladding, fire-safety regulations and standards in the student accommodation sector more broadly.

We are working closely with our partners in the student accommodation Codes of Standards to see what more can be done to address any concerns.

And we will be working number of other stakeholders on this issue in the coming days and supporting students and our students' unions as best we can. We will communicate further as matters development.

If you have further questions, please contact [welfare@nus.org.uk](mailto:welfare@nus.org.uk)