Kevin Stewart MSP
Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH31 3DG

CC: Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education & Science

Thursday 26th March 2020

Dear Minister,

Student housing and the COVID-19 pandemic

I am writing to you to raise a number of issues relating to student housing arising from the current COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time of writing, we are aware of students not being allowed to leave their contracts early in both university-owned and purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA).

This is a particular issue within PBSA where we have had reports of students wishing to end their leases in PBSA early in order to go home but being told by their accommodation provider that they need to find a replacement tenant if they wish to do so.

Given that we are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, PBSA providers must allow tenants to end their contracts early if they wish to do so, with a guarantee that they will not have to pay rent for the remaining period on their contract. Given that tenants on a Private Residential Tenancy are able to give just 30 days notice to leave their current contract with no penalty, this measure will ensure parity for those currently living in PBSA. We welcome the recent public commitment from Unite to release students from their contract and would urge you to work with other private providers to ensure this is the case for all students with no conditions.

Furthermore, NUS Scotland is calling for the rent and utility bills of any person whose income is impacted by coronavirus to be waived or significantly reduced for 6 months as this crisis continues. This should, and must, include all students regardless of whether they live in student halls, the private rented sector of PBSA.

I look forward to your response on these pressing matters.

Yours sincerely,

Liam McCabe
NUS Scotland President