

Ben Beadle,

National Residential Landlord Association

Friday 27th March 2020

Dear Ben Beadle,

NUS Open Letter to the National Residential Landlord Association

We are contacting you as the CEO of the forthcoming NRLA, the leading representative body of Private Rented Sector (PRS) landlords.

The Coronavirus pandemic has crystallised many of the issues that students face as renters and immediate action is needed to prevent a series of crises from taking hold.

NUS has written to Universities UK and private sector Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) providers asking them to implement our five 'asks' to protect student renters through this crisis. The full rationale behind our asks can be found in our [recent article in WonkHE](#).

Hundreds of thousands of students rent from PRS landlords across the country. As a result, we are now writing to seek your support for our five asks and urge you to communicate them to the membership of the NLA and RLA.

1. Landlords must stay updated with, and implement best practice public health guidance, communicate clearly with your tenants and provide maximum support.

It is vital that landlords keep up to date regarding their responsibilities for the health of tenants and communicate with them clearly. It seems we are still awaiting a full suite of government guidance for managing their properties and NUS is lobbying government for such advice to be issued regarding responsibilities for repairs, gas-safety checks and other activity and if/when such advice appears landlords must follow this.

We do know that [the government has advised](#) that there should be no in-person viewings, routine inspections or house moves taking place during this current period of lockdown. We urge all landlords put the safety and welfare of their tenants at the forefront.

2. Landlords should offer a no-penalty early release from tenancy contracts for the current and next academic year

All universities have now either ceased operation or moved provision online. Many students will either have to, or wish to, return to an alternative residence as a result of Coronavirus. Whilst the government's current guidance asks students to remain in their current residence many students will already have relocated.

Landlords should offer student tenants who have left the opportunity of a no-penalty release from their current tenancy contract or rent obligations at the earliest opportunity. Many universities have already done this, as have private sector PBSA providers such as Unite and Liberty Living. Now PRS landlords must also have a collective response. Placing additional financial pressure on students in this time of crisis, when they are not even utilising the accommodation, is wrong.

If such an action would impact on a landlord's mortgage payments, they should seek access to a mortgage holiday and other government support.

Students, anomalously in the PRS, often sign tenancy contracts many months ahead of when they will actually take residence in that property. As a result, many landlords will also have tenancy agreements in place for students for the academic year 2020/21 – many of which will begin from June/July 2020 onward.

It is possible that lockdown procedures or a delay to the next academic year will prevent many students from moving into accommodation that they have already signed an agreement for.

If this happens, landlords should offer a similar release from contract for those students. If a student wishes to be released in either of these situations and rent has already been taken for forthcoming months, it should be refunded along with their deposit.

Landlords letting to students rely on university physically occurring, and unfortunately at this time it is not. Students should not be further penalised for this. We cannot have a situation where millions of students are left paying for tenancies that they no longer can or should utilize.

If this does not occur, I am sure many students will seek to re-sign for their future property.

3. Absolutely no evictions must take place for the duration of the crisis

Many students will need to overstay their Assured Shorthold Tenancies as a result of Coronavirus and are allowed to do so until a landlord serves an eviction notice. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [confirmed a holistic ban on evictions](#) for at least 3 months. We expect all landlords to follow this legislation.

It is imperative that these students are allowed to remain in their home for as long as they need. Housing insecurity at this time is not only an issue of student welfare or social justice but an urgent public health need.

4. Any tenants who are financially impacted by the Coronavirus must have their rents subsidised, significantly reduced or waived entirely for 6 months

Many student tenants will be experiencing financial hardship at this time. Student finance systems in the UK are paying their final instalments as usual. However, we know from a wealth of data that student finance rarely covers the cost of rent. NUS is lobbying government to secure a range of financial support for students impacted by Coronavirus.

Students rely on support from their families, wages from part-time work and private debt to meet their living costs. The first two of these income streams are likely to have been significantly impacted by the current crisis and to ask students to be saddled even more with the latter would be wrong. In addition, many students do not receive student finance and others may be forced to overstay their contracts without having financially planned to do so.

Whilst we continue to call on government to financially support students in this time of crisis, if landlords have students who face difficulties paying their rent, we are asking them to significantly reduce or waive entirely those obligations for 6 months. Indeed, given that many students have now been instructed to stay put, when they may have moved out and taken the option of a release from contract, this should be done pre-emptively.

Under no circumstances do we want to see students building up rent arrears to be paid back at a later date. The current crisis has no immediate end in sight and saddling impacted students with such unpayable debt is unacceptable.

If such an action would impact on a landlord's mortgage payments, they should apply for a mortgage holiday.

5. Suspend all rent increases for the next 12 months

Finally, whilst we do not know exactly what the future holds we know that it would be wrong to exacerbate the financial difficulties of student renters at this time. We are asking all student landlords suspend any rent increases during this crisis for current tenants and any that were planned in the immediate future.

Yours sincerely,

Eva Crossan Jory,

Vice-President for Welfare

National Union of Students