

Our Community Too

Local issues have a huge impact on student lives.

**It's Our Community Too –
councillors must listen to our views
on issues including housing,
council tax and childcare.**



OUR

COMMUNITY

TOO

nus *scotland*
national union of **students**

Our Community Too: NUS Scotland's local government elections campaign

Councils are responsible for so many decisions that affect the lives of students and apprentices.

In the lead up to the local government elections, Students' Associations across Scotland will be reminding councillors that it's Our Community Too.

It's Our Community Too!

Rent is going through the roof, student parents can't find childcare to fit around their course and apprentices are still expected to pay Council Tax despite often living below the poverty line. Councils are responsible for so many decisions that affect student lives – and that's why it's so important for Councillors to listen to student views.

NUS Scotland's Our Community Too local government elections campaign is focusing on the following issues:

Extend student Council Tax exemption to apprentices: While students are exempt from council tax, apprentices still have to pay. This is unfair and we want Councillors to fight for apprentices to be made exempt too.

Housing: We want councillors to use the powers they have to help students access better quality housing and crack down on dodgy landlords. This can be done using powers such as rent pressure zones and creating more HMO regulated properties.

Childcare: Our [Bairn Necessities report](#) on student parents published last year found many student parents are struggling with the cost and flexibility of childcare. As the roll out of increased childcare hours continues across Scotland, we want to see a requirement placed on councils to consult student parent groups and consider how best to fit their needs.

This briefing looks at each of the above issues, highlighting the problems students currently face and the action we'd like to see taken.

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Our Community Too: Council Tax exemption for apprentices

Apprentices currently don't qualify for full Council Tax exemption despite the fact they are often paid well under the Living Wage. This is unfair. The Scottish Parliament has the power to introduce full Council Tax exemption for Foundation level apprentices and those on the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. We want to councillors across the country push Parliament to take action on this issue.

Background on Council Tax

In Scotland, Council Tax levels are in bands from A to H, with H being the highest band and A being the lowest. Local councils set the amount they'll charge for band D, and the rest of the bands are charged as a percentage of that rate. These percentages are set by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government also has the power to decide who is eligible for Council Tax discount and exemption, and how much of a reduction they'll receive.

Apprentice income

From April 2017, the National Minimum Wage for a first year apprentice under 19 years old will be £3.50 per hour. This gives an annual income of £6,734, based on an apprentice working 37 hours a week and being paid for 52 weeks a year.

This is almost £1000 less than the £7625 available to higher education students from the poorest areas. It also remains significantly below the poverty line. However, apprentices are often considered to be workers rather than students and are therefore are not entitled to any of the benefits that a student is entitled to. One such benefit is the exemption from Council Tax. Full time students do not pay Council Tax during their studies, whereas full time apprentices do.

The current deal for apprentices and students

Apprentices currently don't qualify for full Council Tax exemption, despite the fact their income is often below the poverty line. However, full time Scottish students are eligible for a 100% exemption if the property is occupied solely by students, or a 25% discount if all but one of the adults living at the property are students.

Apprentices can be eligible for a discount if they're earning below £195 a week - which is still below the 18-20 minimum wage - and if their apprenticeship is recognised by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Information and implementation of this discount across local authorities is varied, but using information available on Edinburgh council's website as an example, apprentices living in the capital

city are offered a 25% discount if they live with a non-apprentice adult, or 50% discount if they live alone.

How this impacts apprentice finance

Average Council Tax for a Band D is around £1,149 a year¹. Compared to others paying full Council Tax and working a 37 hour week with paid annual leave this represents:

- **8.5% of an apprentice's minimum wage** income with the 50% discount applied;
- **14.75%** of the income of someone on the under-18 minimum wage (£7,792.20), or **7.3%** if they receive a 50% discount;
- **10.66%** of the income of someone on 18-20 minimum wage (£10,774.40), or **5.28%** if they receive a 50% discount;

By comparison, for **those earning the average UK salary of £28,028²** Council Tax represents **just 4.1%** of their earnings.

Apprentices should be exempt from Council Tax

We want apprentices to receive the same Council Tax exemption as students. This must take the form of access to a 100% Council Tax exemption and clear information about how to apply for this council websites. While councils don't decide on who's eligible for exemption, it's likely that in the next few year we'll see a national discussion on Council Tax and how councils are funded. Councillors elected in May will be a loud voice in this conversation. For us, the key considerations on Council Tax must include putting apprentices on par with other learners.

Like students, apprentices are often struggling to support themselves through their learning. While apprentices may undertake much of their training within a workplace setting that does not mean they are full-time workers, and they have to strike a constant balancing act between study and work. The fact that many of them are not even guaranteed to receive a minimum wage after completing the first year of their apprenticeship means it is clear they do not benefit from the protections that their full-time colleagues do.

For apprentices who have no other means of earning outside of their apprenticeship, having to pay for Council Tax creates additional financial stress and can also affect the amount of time they're able to dedicate to their learning. If prospective apprentices believe they will not be able to afford to cover their living costs within their apprentice salary this could limit their choice of course and even their ability to take on an apprenticeship at all. While the Scottish Government is investing in apprenticeships there is still a need to open these opportunities up to everyone by ensuring would-be apprentices can fund their studies.

Our local election ask

The Scottish Parliament has the power to introduce full Council Tax exemption for Foundation level apprentices and those on the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. We want to councillors and MSPs across the country push the Scottish Parliament to take action on this issue.

¹ Based on Scottish Government datasets <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Local-Government-Finance/DatasetsCouncilTax/CTBand201617>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2016provisionalresults#average-earnings>

Our Community Too: Rented Housing

Students are spending up to 82% of their monthly income on rent and often face high rents in exchange for low quality housing in an increasingly competitive market. Scotland's local authorities have more powers to clamp down on bad housing than ever before; we want council candidates to commit to using these powers.

Current issues in housing

Students make up a significant part of Scotland's private rented sector and they often face high rents for low quality housing in an increasingly competitive market. Scotland's local authorities have more powers to clamp down on bad housing than ever before – council candidates must commit to pushing their councils using these powers.

Cost

Across Scotland, there's been a 15.64% increase in rent for 1 bedroom in a shared property since the last local election 2011. Over the same time period, inflation was 11.85%. Last year the average rent for 1 bedroom in a shared property, a popular choice for students, was £340 per month. In some cases, **students are spending up to 82% of their monthly income on rent**. It's likely some students will be spending even more than this.

Below you is a breakdown of student support and the average rent for 1 bedroom in a shared property as a percentage of monthly income.

	Total Support	Split over 10 months	Rent as % of monthly income
HE student on maximum Support	£7,625	£762.50	44%
HE student on lowest support	£4,750	£475	71%
FE student on full bursary	£4,125	£412.50	82%
Apprentice minimum wage	£3.50 an hour	37 hour week: £518	65%

Quality

In 2014 NUS UK published the “Homes Fit For Study” report into student housing. It found varying degrees of quality in housing across the sector- only 87% of properties had smoke alarms, and 32% had carbon monoxide detectors. Over three quarters of students had experienced a problem with their home – with 61% having experienced damp or mould and 52% reporting that their accommodation was cold.

Security of tenure

Ahead of 2016’s Private Housing (Tenancies) Act, one of NUS Scotland’s priorities was giving students more security in when they can leave their tenancy. The private rented sector is increasingly catering for students - and others - who are seeking more long-term homes, but tenants often face having their tenancies terminated through no wrongdoing on their part. This changed as part of the Act passing, but it’s yet to be seen how consistently these laws will be applied.

Supply (HMOs)

In Scotland, any rented property occupied by three or more people who aren’t related requires a ‘Houses in Multiple Occupation’ (HMO) license. These licenses are designed to ensure the safety and security tenants, and relates to issues like fire safety, ventilation, with secure locks on doors and windows. However, in 2011 the Scottish government gave local authorities the power to limit the number of HMOs in an area if they think it would lead to an “overprovision”. As students are more likely to live in HMO properties, this has potential to limit the amount of housing available to students in particular areas. This is of greatest concern when housing gets limited in areas near to university or college campuses, and forces students to travel further for study – or live in less affordable areas.

Private Housing (Tenancies) Act 2016: Powers for councils and tenants

The most recent housing act, the Scottish Government’s Private Housing (Tenancies) Act 2016, introduced new protections for tenants and powers for councils. Particularly, the Act:

- **Reduced grounds for repossession** – meaning tenants have more security that they won’t be evicted from the property for reasons beyond their control, and giving tenants the power to remain in their property beyond the end of their initial contract.
- **Limited rent increases** – the Act restricts landlords to only reviewing the rent on a property every 12 months.
- **Introduced rent pressure zones** – councils now have the power to designate an area as a ‘rent pressure zone’, which allows councils to limit the rent increases in this area. While NUS would have preferred the rent controls to be go further – this is a positive step

Our local election ask

Once all of the powers in the Private Housing (Tenancies) Act come into effect later this year, Scottish councils will have more power to improve the lives of tenants than ever before. We want candidates running in local authority elections to guarantee that these powers will get used.

Particularly, we want to see councillors using their powers to:

- **Introduce rent pressure zones** in areas where students face particularly high rents – ensuring that landlords aren’t exploiting students, and that students don’t face unreasonable rent rises way over and above the cost of living.

- **Clamp down on rogue landlords**, ensuring that all landlords are registered, and aware of their responsibilities to provide secure, accommodation of a high standard.
- **Ensure that there are sufficient HMO licensed properties** in areas with a high student population, and avoid using licensing powers to limit students' access to housing.

Our Community Too: Childcare

Over the next 3 years, the amount of free childcare a child is eligible for will almost double. As this roll out begins, we want to see councillors consulting with student parents to ensure that the system put in place meets the unique needs of student parents.

Background

In 2016, NUS Scotland released the Bairn Necessities report into the experiences of student parents. The report looked into the challenges that student parents face, both within their college or university and in their wider lives. Key findings included:

- While no central statistics are held on the number of students with children, NUS Scotland found that student parents could make up between 7 and 19% of the student population at some institutions.
- For those parents received funding for childcare, only 50% found it covered the costs.
- Where there was a shortfall between their childcare funding and the cost of childcare, this shortfall ranged from £20-£100 at college or £100-700 at university.

Access to nursery provision and childcare is essential for student parents to access their college or university. While some institutions have on-campus nurseries or partnerships with local nurseries, these are often oversubscribed, expensive or not practical for the student.

Student parents even reported paying high deposits to reserve nursery places, sometimes before they've even confirmed their place at the college or university. Equally, those who get a place find themselves having to book their child into a nursery for a full or half day just to have childcare to cover a class that could last an hour.

The current picture

Since 2002, local authorities in Scotland have had a duty to ensure that all 3 and 4 year olds have access to childcare if their parents request it.

Since 2014, three and four year old children, or two year old children if they are looked after, under a care order, or whose parents are in receipt of certain benefits, have been entitled to 600 hours of free care a year – equivalent to 16 hours a week during school term time. However, for many students this will barely cover the hours they're in the classroom, let alone the time spent in work or non-contact study hours.

The future of childcare

In 2016 the Scottish Government announced a target of expanding this to 1140 hours a year, almost double the current provision, alongside a consultation on the wider vision for childcare in 2020.

For students, this is a unique opportunity to address some of the technicalities of the system that don't meet the unique needs of a student parent, including:

- Address the allocation of childcare places both on and off campus, ensuring they meet the needs of students.
- Where an institution doesn't have childcare facilities, reserving places at local off campus facilities for students.
- Moving towards a system where places are measured in hours, not days, to give parents more flexibility.

Our local election ask

Without access to sufficient childcare, parents can be forced to take on high amounts of debt, rely on friends or family, or even miss classes all together. For some people, none of these are an option.

The councillors elected in May will be the councillors who oversee the roll out of the government's increase in childcare funding, which will save thousands of pounds a year for student parents. Ahead of the local authority elections, we're asking council candidates to commit to consulting student parent groups when they're looking at the roll out. Doing this will ensure that the implementation of the government's increase will be done in a way that works for student parents, and addresses some of the unique challenges that student parents face.