

Students on rent strike

A practical guide to organising a rent strike and understanding the legal risks

**England and Wales
2017**

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“When they say “rent hike”

...we say “rent strike!”

The cost of purpose-built student accommodation has been rising steadily above inflation, and certainly above students’ incomes.

In many parts of the UK, the maintenance loan is not enough to cover rents. So it is no surprise that in the last two years, we have seen students take to rent strikes as a tactic to bring about change. This is not just an issue of cost – students have protested over appalling conditions, building work and other problems.

Universities are systematically failing to provide affordable accommodation for their students, and have either invested in expensive new-builds or sold old property to private developers.

Now, students are taking matters into their own hands, and winning. This guide is to help student activists learn from others’ actions, support Students’ Unions to respond to the needs of their members, and provide information on the legal implications of rent strikes.”

Shelly Asquith, NUS Vice President (Welfare)

Introduction

Students are facing a cost of living crisis, and for many this pressure has become increasingly unmanageable as well as unjust.

The affordability issue

The proportion of privately provided purpose built student accommodation has grown by 42% since 2014¹, and we know that private providers charge approximately 40% more than university run halls.² The Student Accommodation Costs Survey shows that 2012-13 the cost to the student living in purpose built accommodation has gone up by 18.4%. The issue of affordability is most keenly felt in London, but also affects other regions. The average weekly rent in London in 2015-16 is £225.83, 69 per cent more than the average rent for the rest of the country which stands at £133.57. We also know that in the South West the two highest rent categories have increased from covering 55% of the stock to just over 80%.

The answer to this crisis is not to get students to rent exclusively from the private sector. Approximately 38% of students live in housing in the private rented sector. More broadly the lack of affordable housing to purchase and a lack of supply generally in this sector has caused a huge increase in rental prices. The cost is high, yet the quality of housing is often poor.³

Students are rapidly running out of affordable housing options, and feel that their institutions are not listening. Alarming, only 52% of institutions claim they recognise the need for an agreed policy on a range of affordable accommodation.⁴

More than housing

We know that students are struggling to meet the cost of living.

On the basis of average rent figures for accommodation outside London, out of £4,888.54 per year, the current funding structure leaves

students, on average, £851 to cover all other living expenses, including food and clothing. Students today leave university with an average of £44 000 of debt, and many also take on consumer debt on top of this.

We know that poor quality and expensive housing affects access and learning.

The high-cost of living may deter students from working class and other marginalised backgrounds from even considering degree level education. Some students will be forced to base their choice of education provider on proximity to their family home or the local cost of living, rather than the quality of teaching and learning. First degree students who live at home have a high rate of non-continuation at 10%, compared to 4% for students who live in institution maintained accommodation.⁵

We know that the cost of living crisis is damaging for student mental health.

Research that shows that 63% of respondents worried about their finances very often and 33% were considering work that may affect their wellbeing, such as night shifts.⁶

History of rent strikes

Rent strikes have been used as a tactic all over the world. They have a particular history in the UK, although the largest recorded in Europe to date was in Barcelona in 1931 when up to 100,000 tenants reportedly went on rent strike.

Some notable dates, including significant student rent strikes are listed below.

1891. In the late 19th century a rent strike in London's East End helped to win the Dockers Strike.⁷

1912-1915. Tenants organised a wave of rent strikes across the country against high rents,

effect if student integration on non-completion (2011), p.22.

⁶ Poppy Brown, *The invisible problem? Improving students' mental health*, HEPI (2016), p.23.

⁷ [Leeds Tenants Federation](#)

¹ NUS/Unipol, [The Accommodation Costs Survey 2014-16](#), p.6.

² 'Flat Out', *The Economist*, 18.02.2016.

³ NUS, [Homes Fit for Study: The state of student housing in the UK](#) (2014), p.41.

⁴ NUS/Unipol, *The Accommodation Costs Survey 2014-16*, p.8.

⁵ Higher Education Academy 'What Works' programme, [Good practice in student retention: an examination of the](#)

ending in Glasgow, where the strike forced the government to introduce rent controls for the private sector.



Glasgow rent strike 1915

1934. The Leeds Tenants Federation led a rent strike against the divisive first rent rebate scheme.

1930s. Unemployed workers' organisations used rent strikes as action against evictions. Private tenants waged a prolonged rent strike in the East End of London against high rents.

1960. 35 tenants' associations in the London borough of St Pancras joined to form the United Tenants Association and 1,400 tenants went on rent strike against council plans to raise rents to market level.



St Pancras rent strike: the largest in UK history

1968 – 1973. In Liverpool a rent strike lasted six months and won a small reduction in rent.

1972. Students at the University of Sussex went on rent strike over substandard accommodation, including damp and fungus. 77% of tenants withheld a total of £35,000 for 15 weeks and won a victory from the university. The final agreement

stated that "the planned hall of residence known as Park House 6 shall not be built, as its design sharply conflicts with the students' 18 requirements". The university was also forced to back down from its proposed 6.5% rent increase, which was knocked down to 3.5%⁸

1973. Students at the University of Sussex went on rent strike again. This time, the dispute was over grants. Students had sustained a significant real-terms cut in their living grant. Two thirds of students paid their rent into an account set up by the Tenants' Association. According to Ed Goddard, students at 24 universities around the UK took part in rent strikes that year.⁹

RENT STRIKE BACK

A rent strike by all University Tenants (including contracted guest houses) is to begin today according to Mr. Vince Morris, a Grants Committee spokesman. There will be a boycott tomorrow at one of the eating places on campus, he said. The place will be chosen from the Snack Bar, Refectory, Salad Bowl and Falmer House Bar. This will be the first of a series of lightning boycotts this term, Mr. Morris said. The aim of the strike and the boycotts is to disrupt the Governments' financial system on a nationwide scale in support of the N.U.S. claim for a £100 increase and full-time grants for all full-time students.

The organisers want to avoid hurting any students, clerical or manual workers - who work in this system. The action is to be nationwide, but organised in individual universities and colleges.

Regional and national marches are to be organised, he said.

Sussex University's Student Union backed the national claim last term. A committee was elected. It was, in terms of a motion, to rely "on the initiative of the grass-roots organisations of students in actions which these think are most suited to their own areas and through the numbers and extent of such actions ensuring that the campaign is protracted." A Union General Meeting at 12.30pm.

Account of the Sussex rent strike from the University newspaper, 1973

1975. Students at the University of Warwick staged a rent strike and occupied university

⁸ Ed Goddard, [Student Radicals: An incomplete history of protest at the University of Sussex, 1971-75.](#)

⁹ As above

property. 1,600 students took part, withholding £27,000. Local MPs also offered support.

1980. Rent strikes were organised in Walsall and Kirklees against large rent increases.

1987. Students at the University of Warwick went on rent strike again, as they demanded a £57 rent cut, following a rent increase and news that the university was profiting from accommodation. More than 80% of tenants paid into a Union strike fund, accumulating around £112,000. In addition, students voted to boycott the University's outlets, causing them a loss of £25,000 for the duration of the strike. The University responded by withholding the block grant it normally gives to the Union, and by taking out an injunction through the High Court against students and sabbatical officers. Eventually the Union won a settlement including half-rent, and the university dropped the injunction.¹⁰

UNION
OF
STUDENTS
University of Warwick

Coventry CV4 7AL

Tel 0203 62669

your ref
in reply please quote KdeG/vs:

28th February 1975

Dear Student,

The letter now going out from the administration to those students who haven't yet paid their rent to the University represents an attempt by the University to panic us into paying our rent at an increase of 35% over last term.

Basically the University is preferring to use threatening tactics rather than seeking a solution. If the University cannot afford to lose £85,000 this year through a rent freeze, there is no way they can risk 1,000 empty campus rooms next year. Mr. Rowe-Evans' threat is empty.

The Union has already contacted the Coventry MP's to inform them of the University's decision regarding rents and accommodation. The MP's, who support the Rent Strike, will be asked to raise the matter in the House of Commons and with the D.E.S.

The Union is also contacting Coventry City Councillors to ask them to put pressure on the University to reverse its decision.

The Executive will be considering further action over the weekend and will bring proposals to the Rent Strike Action Committee meeting on Monday, and the U.G.M. on Tuesday.

Mr. Rowe-Evans' letter makes use of threats. It doesn't answer the following points:

(1) Why should students be exempted from the National Rent Freeze when they are suffering the ravages of inflation on a fixed and low income?

(2) Why should rents go up by 35% when the grant was only increased by 25%, most of which was already eroded by inflation before students got the money?

The original reasons which led to a U.G.M. decision in favour of a Rent Strike still stand. Approximately 1600 people have withheld rents, and the Rent Strike Fund stands at approximately £27,000. Students cannot afford 35% rent increases, threats or no threats.

Don't be panicked. 1600 people withholding rent can win!

Yours fraternally,

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Warwick Students' Union condemns threats by the university (Jake Bernard)



"We Can't Afford the 33% Increase" – students protest a rise in rents at Warwick, 1975
(Photo by Jake Bernard)

Thinking of going on rent strike?

Since the inception of the National Union of Students we have sought to defend and advocate for the rights of students, and support political activism to flourish across the student community.

Rent strikes have been a long-standing feature of the student movement. Over the past two years, an unprecedented number of students across London have decided to go on rent strike because they feel it is the only lever left for them to influence change for themselves and their peers.

A 'rent strike' essentially involves an individual withholding rent. It is important to be aware that you have no legal right to withhold your rent – it is a political action. A rent strike can be a powerful campaigning tool, especially when strikers join together to create a movement, however there are serious consequences that each individual needs to be aware of.

Purpose and scope of this guide

This document is intended as a first point of call for students who want to learn more about the experience of going on rent strike and the potential legal risks. It is not and cannot be comprehensive guide as to how to successfully hold a rent strike, rather we envisage this as stimulus to prompt discussion and sharing across the student community.

We have drawn on the experiences of current students to offer campaigning advice and tips for students considering action (page 8). The students we have interviewed do not have all the answers and nor do we because every situation is different

¹⁰ The Boar, [Crisis and Cliché](#) (2010)

depending on the action and the accommodation provider/institution. For this reason, we encourage individual students and Student Unions to seek their own advice based on their own particular concerns and circumstances. This guide offers some guidance to give students a basic understanding and awareness of the legal risks and implications of going on rent strike (page 15).

You can find an example of a rent strike fund policy to support your campaign (page 17). We have also included some sources and links at the end of this document to help students locate further support and information (page 18).

NUS do not have the expertise or capacity to provide legal advice or casework support to individuals, however if you have any questions about this guide please contact us using the details below.

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“When people first hear about rent strikes they think, ‘that sounds a bit scary,’ but where they have happened lots of students who don’t necessarily see themselves as political have become involved because they see hundreds of other people in their halls doing it. It’s about strength in numbers.”

Shelly Asquith, NUS Vice President Welfare

Practical Guide

Part 1: Campaign guide

Part 2: Legal implications

Part 3: Draft policy

Part 1: Campaign Guide

Background

We have focused in this document on the action in London because so far it has been the most developed and widely reported, however we are keenly interested in and supportive of the actions that are taking place all over the UK.

Below we have summarised the experiences and reflections of a handful of students from UCL, SOAS and Goldsmiths who withheld their rent from purpose built accommodation providers in the past year. The names have been changed to protect the privacy of participants. Given the number of students we have spoken to the content below should not be taken as representative of the whole, but we hope that some of the reflections will provide food for thought for the wider student community. We are very grateful for the time given by participants in creating this document.

The passion and dedication of these individuals came across strongly in conversation, and we hope that other students who are struggling with the affordability and quality of their housing take strength from this. Each individual will have a different reason for taking action by withholding rent. While collective action and support is vital for the success of a strike, every individual we spoke to was clear that each individual needs to make their own decision. Crucially, every institution is different (e.g. some renting to more private providers than others) and so each campaign group needs to develop their own strategy.

There is no right way to organise a housing campaign, but in each of these cases rent strike action has been taken as a last resort once all other options have been exhausted. These options include building an evidence base, using a combination of negotiation and direct action, and sitting on rent-setting groups. A measured and rational escalation of action is important to win respect from your peers, supporters, and the people you are trying to influence.

In addition, campaigners have pursued different practical goals to achieve their shared vision for affordable housing, including setting up a guarantor scheme or a housing fund, implementing affordability requirements and

calling for rent decreases or freezes, or simply getting a seat at the table.

Case study 1: UCL

In what became the largest rent strike in UK history, the UCL dispute started with students united in their outrage at the appalling conditions in a particular student hall. The cheapest single room available for UCL students cost £135 per week, with other rooms at prices beyond £250 per week. Fourteen students shared one bathroom and one hob between them, with dysfunctional heating and a host of cockroaches.

Before escalating to a strike, students launched a petition, securing more than 1,000 signatures, before presenting it to university management. With little response, they took to more direct forms of action, including a "tent city" protest in the main university square, and a flash occupation of management offices.



UCL students occupy management offices

Key to raising awareness of these actions was effective use of press releases, securing media coverage – and reputational concern to UCL.

A small rent strike began in the summer of 2015. After the university ignored petitions and other actions the organisers decided to start canvassing for a bigger strike. Organisers talked of the need to devote real time to canvassing, and publicising through e.g. social media, poster and demos.

In January 2016 approximately 150 students withheld their rent, and the university was asked for a comment by the media. This scrutiny encouraged the university to agree to meet the strikers in February and offer to

freeze the rent for the subsequent year. Deciding that this concession was not enough, in May approximately 800-1,000 students withheld their rent. The cumulative ripple effect of gradually expanding action allowed students to test the effects and experience of rent striking, and showcase this to other students.

After the first meeting with the university the students were given a 'notice to quit', threatening eviction in 4 weeks' time. The strikers organised a big demonstration in protest and no evictions materialised.



UCL rent strikers protest high rents

The strike action on May was met with threats and intimidation from the university. The students knew that the university could only withhold a degree if the student had not paid their tuition fees (the same does not apply for outstanding rent), but they were not aware of the legal action that could be taken against them. Students were called to say that their debts had been passed to a debt collector, at which point they tried to gather fragments of legal advice and information.

They were told that if they were evicted, while rent striking has no protection in law, theoretically they could fight the case in court on grounds of the accommodation provider breaching their contract and providing housing that is not fit for purpose. On the other hand, if their debt was passed on to a debt collector and payments were not met the student would have no defence in court. Overwhelmingly the advice they received was to avoid being taken to court because there is no legal right to withhold rent.

The strikers called a large demonstration to coincide with the university's open day, at which point the institution decided to meet the strikers again. There were 3 or 4 negotiations with the head of student accommodation, the vice provost of operations, the estates management, the students' union and the NUS VP Welfare. The university offered £350 000 in accommodation bursaries for the 2016

academic year (an increase of £150 000 on their original offer), and £500 000 for the following year as well as rent freezes on one third of rooms.

The organisers said that it was important for them to gain an agreement before students graduated or left for the summer. They felt that once students left they would no longer be protected by the collective strength of the movement, and would be more likely to be chased for debt. After holding a ballot to decide whether or not to accept the deal, the students decided to call off the strike, and re-located the open day demonstration off campus.

International students faced particular barriers to going on strike. UCL has a policy of acting as a guarantor for international students so they can sign a contract in the private sector for their second year. UCL refused to act as a guarantor for striking students, so a number of international students on strike were forced to leave the strike in order to secure future accommodation. Organisers recommend trying to set up a guarantor scheme through the student union to enable more students to strike if they want to. In this case it was not possible because of the short timeframe and different opinions about what the role of the union should be.

On reflection the strike organisers regretted not setting up a strike fund early in the action. They only found out later that paying into a fund could be one way of protecting their credit rating.

Case study 2: Goldsmiths

In 2015 students became aware that three halls were set to be privatised, asking for more money from students but with no improvement in conditions in return. In the winter of 2016 students petitioned the university and went on strike in the summer.

The organisers planned to pay money into a rent strike fund to gain a degree of protection from debt collectors. Although this did not help the students who could not afford their rent and could therefore not afford to pay into the strike fund. They put a series of motions to the Student Assembly to mandate union support first for the rent strike and second for the union to set up a bank account. The organisers worked with the head of finance to set up the fund through the student union, although they not doing this sooner. The strike fund came with conditions – when a student paid in the

university would be informed, but students were able to withdraw at any time.



Posters designed by Goldsmiths Cut The Rent

Organisers used badges, leaflets, and word of mouth to get students involved in the strike. Students tapped into the university's fears about their reputation which was at risk from negative media coverage in national newspapers. They used banner drops (particularly in halls that were used for open days or public facing events) to draw further attention to the strike action, and call for the university to act on disrepair issues. They also kept a bank of complaints and pictures of accommodation to make a collective rather than individual call for these issues to be fixed. The organisers were clear on the importance of the strike being led by strikers. This was crucial to really understand the concerns and experiences of fellow strikers.

The strike movement involved hall representatives from every hall to get more students involved. This was crucial as part-time housing officers and strike organisers were banned from a number of the halls. When the organisers started to arrange the petition to pledge strike action, they found out that other students had started organising independently. It was a challenge for them to bring students together to form a more coherent movement.

The Goldsmiths Cut the Rent group were able to gain some pieces of legal advice and

information via Shelter, the Radical Housing Network and one of their student housing officers who was also a first year law student. They also consulted an organiser who had gained experience through the UCL action. Organisers felt that while this information was helpful, it was not enough. They wanted to know more about the legal implications, particularly to give students accurate information on how withholding rent could affect their credit rating.

Anecdotally organisers suspected that private providers of accommodation would be more likely to pass debt onto a debt collector. They felt that debt collectors tried to undermine the unity of the strike, 'picking off' individuals. Organisers felt they did not have the expertise or capacity to support students dealing with debt collectors.

Decisions were not made in negotiation meetings without the consent of the movement. In these meetings the student union, the president, housing officers and hall representatives were present to advocate for the strikers. Typically they met with the deputy warden, registrar, senior management team (including legal and communications) from the university.

Organisers felt that it was useful to have connections with other strike movements across London, in the hope that this would cause a domino effect of concessions from universities. They also felt that support from the union made them less vulnerable and gave them a stronger voice in meetings with the university management.

The strike ended after the university offered to freeze the rates of the cheapest rooms.

Case study 3: SOAS

In April 2015, over 150 students living in SOAS halls of residence (owned and managed by a private provider) withheld over £100,000 in rent to protest against unsanitary living conditions. The provider had failed to respond to cockroach and rodent infestations, unsafe and insecure infrastructure, repeated hot water outages, and many other problems.

The students withheld their final instalment of rent of at least £769.08 each, which was due to be paid on Thursday 23rd April.

During negotiations, the provider agreed to meet the demands of the striking students by making a full and unreserved apology to residents, holding regular open meetings with

residents, and attending monthly meetings with the Students' Union, the Residents' Council and SOAS, with published minutes. However, the provider failed to meet the demand for compensation for residents, instead offering to set aside £1,500 to reinvest in the Dinwiddy estate. This worked out to about £3 per resident and did not include any improvements to Paul Robeson House. The Residents' Council called this offer "insulting" and the rent strike continued.



Flyers used in the SOAS rent strike campaign

Following further negotiations, the housing provider made an offer of £40 to each Paul Robeson resident and £90 to each Dinwiddy resident and agreed to consider individual claims for compensation. Residents taking part in the rent strike voted overwhelmingly to reject this offer. The rent strike continued, while residents also put in individual claims for compensation. The provider have awarded compensation to residents who made individual claims, who have been awarded between £70-£360 additional compensation, on top of the £40/£90 compensation awarded to all residents. The appeals process has now been concluded with all those contesting their individual award receiving additional compensation.

Following a sufficient compensation offer, the Residents' Council, which represents residents of the halls within SOAS Students' Union, called an end to the rent strike and residents have paid their final instalments of rent following a commitment from the provider to reimburse them for having endured poor housing conditions.

This win sets a precedent for other student housing campaigns and should give confidence to activists in taking action over similar issues. Students at UCL have also taken part in a rent strike, having rejected a compensation offer. At City University, a sustained protest resulted in a pay-out of £300,000 from a private provider. Across Scotland, the Living Rent Campaign,

calling for rent controls in the private sector, is gaining huge support.

Lessons learnt

Set up a rent strike account

This is a bank account where payments can be sent, in lieu of paying rent, to ensure students don't otherwise spend the money. It can be effective as leverage, to demonstrate to the university that the money is set aside, should they concede to demand. Ideally this can be set up through your students' union well in advance and publicised widely. See part 3 for a draft policy.



"Pay into the fund" – poster from Warwick, 1975 (photo by Jake Bernard)

Plan ahead and understand the risks

Consider in advance whether you are going to withhold the entire fee, or the increase (if there is one). Make sure you understand and communicate to others the potential legal implications of going on strike (see part 2). If in doubt, seek more specific legal advice from a qualified lawyer or an advice centre (see part 4).

Devote time and communicate!

Organisers need to be committed to spreading the word to other students beyond their social circles. Tactics used by rent strikers include canvassing door-to-door, contacting the press, distributing flyers on campus, using small protest actions to draw attention, and lecture shout-outs.

This work takes time and energy, but is a proven way of raising awareness and numbers.

Read on for some tips on effective campaigning and creative communication!

Flyers

Hand out leaflets that succinctly explain the issue, focusing your energy on busy areas. Educate. Agitate. Organise. What is the housing problem? Why should students be angry? How can they get involved? Include at least one 'action' students reading it can take, even if it is a follow-up to check the hashtag or come to a meeting. Team up to flyer so there's a few of you to give you more motivation.

If you don't feel comfortable directly handing out leaflets, consider putting them under doors in halls, or slotting them into books in the library.

Shout-outs

Find out when big lectures and events are taking place and politely ask the facilitator for a couple of minutes at the beginning. You can use this chance to reach a large audience to introduce the issue and encourage students to get involved with the campaign. Most of them will be on their phone or laptop if they are in a lecture, so consider challenging them to an on-the-spot tweet.

If you aren't sure when and where large lectures are happening, speak to student activists who may be able to put in a word and get you invited in. Or speak to trade union reps, such as your UCU branch, who may be sympathetic and willing to let you speak.

Videos

Make a short video of you or others explaining the issue. Short campaign videos work best, usually no longer than 1 minute 30.

Cover campus

Think of creative ways to spread the campaign on campus in ways that people cannot avoid such as posters in the toilets and lifts, stickers inside textbooks and symbols students can wear to start conversations. Below is a badge Goldsmiths rent strike campaign created, and handed out for free to students.



Banners

When holding an event, stall or just want to draw attention to the campaign, consider making a sheet banner. By getting students together to design and paint the banner before the event, you create an opportunity to publicise the campaign.

Even if you don't have an action, simply dropping a banner from a prominent spot on campus (a window or a bridge for instance) is a small act of resistance that will grab attention. Make sure to share photos!

Blockade

Stopping the function of something does not have to mean a physical withdrawal of labour or a road blockade. Direct action tactics in the past have included encouraging as many students as possible to send emails to a specific target, call a hotline, or write letters and postcards.

Protest

Traditional protest methods such as static demonstrations, marches and occupations can all be great ways of raising awareness and getting more people involved. Consider your target and location carefully. Is there a particular institution you want to bring attention to? Is the location accessible for those taking part?

Some of the most impactful actions on campuses have focused on pre-existing events such as open days of big university committee meetings. Sometimes, the leverage is not necessarily about physical disruption but reputational damage.

Grab headlines

Make use of student, local and national media to put pressure on the university. You might find it easier to be clear about your message – what you are doing and why – if you delegate press activity to a select few people.



Students at Goldsmiths shared photos on social media explaining why they supported the strike

Sharing stories

Case studies can be a really effective tool in communicating just how unjust the rent issue is by those directly affected. These are often more likely to be picked up by the media, and having students journalists can speak to is useful to add to a press release.

Having students speak first-hand about their experiences can be powerful, but bear in mind not everyone will be comfortable doing so. Consider hosting an event where you can invite external speakers in to recount their experiences.

Reach out to other campaigns

Outside your campus, there will be others working on housing issues, in the local community or at other colleges and universities. Making links with them could benefit your rent strike – they could have experience of accessing the local media, understanding of the local housing market, or may wish to join your canvassing sessions and protests. See below for examples of relevant campaigns and campaigners.

Radical Housing Network

Groups affiliated to this network work on a wide range of housing issues, including private renting, social housing, squatting, benefits, homelessness, and co-operative housing. They focus on 'justice from below' and support a diversity of tactics, including direct action. There are groups like this, as well as tenants' activist and tenants' unions across the country operating under various different names.

Generation Rent

This is a national campaign to change the way renting works across the country, with a large focus on better rights for tenants in the private rented sector. [Generation Rent](#) is comprised of various local tenant activist groups, and offers support and advice in setting up new initiatives.

Living Rent Campaign

This is formed of a coalition of groups and individuals determined to improve the landscape for private renters in Scotland; specifically calling for rent controls. Formed in 2014 to campaign around the Scottish Governments' housing bill, the [LRC](#) is currently only operating in Scotland, and now focuses on tenants' unionism.

Defend Council Housing

DCH is a national campaign calling for greater investment in social housing. The campaign works with others to organise actions such as the 'March for Homes' and conferences on housing issues. They also provide resources

and briefings on issues relating to housing, such as MIPIM (a property investment event) and Right to Buy.

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

Primarily a campaign focussing on free education, [NCAFC](#) campaigns on a range of issues relating to funding cuts and 'reforms' affecting students. The national campaign forms an over-arching committee made up of local campus anti-cuts and free education groups.

Unite / Unite Community

Unite is a 'general union', representing workers in many sectors and trades, and is the UK's largest in membership. The 'Unite Community' membership includes students and unemployed people to bring the values of the labour movement to those outside of organised workplaces. Unite Community campaigns on issues such as benefit sanctions and housing. Many areas have branches, and there is most likely a Unite branch in your college or university. You can find a list of regional contacts [here](#).

Build momentum over time

A rent strike is most effective in combination with other tactics. The strikes explained above achieved change because they grew over time, escalated, or used other actions as additional leverage. This showed the institutions that the students were serious and gave people various ways to be involved.

Maintain strength in numbers

A critical mass of fellow strikers offers some protection – it is harder to replace or ignore hundreds or even thousands of students. An absolutely key component of building a successful rent strike is to recruit as many tenants as possible.

Strikers should lead the campaign

It is important that those leading the campaign have direct experience of going on rent strike so they can fully understand the challenges and concerns of those they are leading.

Decide how you want to work with your Student Union

Some rent strike campaigns have found it helpful for their union to hold a referendum to officially support the strike action, but we understand that every union is different. If a union does not officially support your action,

they could act as a mediator between the strike organisers and the university.

Create a network of support

Build in opportunities to support each other and talk about your experiences, and keep an awareness of who might be struggling. Be sure to share clear signposting information of where to go for support.

Consider writing a joint statement between your campaign, Student Union and trade unions and sending it to university management outlining your requests in relation to the rent strike. Be sure to also communicate with your elected officers, such as the VP Welfare.

Organise a meeting with staff and students and get the trade union branches to publicise it. Statements and meetings can be the groundwork for establishing support networks, which can be useful for gathering advice.

Make decisions together

When developing a strategy and negotiating make sure you have processes in place to agree decisions with your fellow students. A strike will be stronger if it is collectively owned and shaped by all those involved.

Raise money

It's likely you'll need funds to print leaflets, buy banners, and pay for any other campaign-related costs. If your rent strike is supported by students outside the halls of residence, ask them to show solidarity by contributing a few pounds. You can do this easily by setting up an online fundraiser.

Translate material

UCL used materials in various languages to engage international students quickly and simply. Find out if there are activists in your circle, or students on your course, willing to help with this.



致Hawkridge House 的所有住户：

我们需要解决施工造成的问题！

如大家所知，Hawkridge 的施工至今仍未结束。当大家签署住宿协议时，UCL 承诺过施工会在 1 月结束。而根据他们最新的报告，直到 4 月 26 日施工才能完成。大家每周支付 132.3 元并不是为了获得被施工毁掉的伦敦住宿经历。UCL 破坏了对大家的承诺，将不合格的学生宿舍出售给我们。这是一桩不可接受的丑闻。

施工造成了一系列问题，从睡眠不足，紧张，焦虑到丧失隐私权。因为施工造成的灰尘和噪音，很多 Hawkridge 的住户无法在早晨睡觉，无法在房间内学习并且患上头痛和其他健康问题。因为脚手架，窗外再无风景可言。不少人不能开窗，还有人发现施工人员在窗外往里窥探。许多人已向校方投诉这些问题，但 UCL 对投诉邮件置之不理，完全不给回复。

施工的问题已经拖得太久，导致眼下复习考试季来临情况日益恶化。正因如此许多住户愿意为使 UCL 在考试期间停工以及使每个受施工影响的人获得赔偿而作出努力。UCLU - 学生会 - 以及我个人将全情投入帮助大家在这件事上赢得正义。我已和 UCL 谈话过并要求他们立即停工并给大家赔偿。但是，他们把这两个要求都拒绝了。他们最多只能做到在 4 月 26 号前结束有噪音的工作。他们还说如果有人想要搬出去到另外的学生宿舍可以及早联系住宿办公室。（邮箱：s.cosgrave@ucl.ac.uk）

但是搬出去并不是一劳永逸的事情，反而可能造成比噪音和施工带来的更多的压力。所以 Hawkridge 的住户和 UCLU 需要向 UCL 施加更多的压力使他们切实完成对大家的责任。

我也和 Hawkridge 的居委会谈过，他们告诉我领导本次与 UCL 的维权对抗。为了本次维权的成功，大家需要互相帮助贡献力量。大家有绝对的权利去投诉，去抗议，去要求 UCL 停止无视停止忽略有所作为。UCLU 和我将会为大家提供建议和支持。大家已迈出的第一步是向 UCL 投诉 Hawkridge 的情况。这步暂时没有很成功是因为大家之前发邮件的对象还不算“幕后大佬”，如果大家一起直接向 UCL 的管理层发送邮件，要求停工和赔偿，他们将不敢忽视最广大居民的要求。

所以请大家直接将投诉邮件发到以下地址：

w.wilson@ucl.ac.uk, c.plank@ucl.ac.uk 以及 rex.knight@ucl.ac.uk

（已经发过邮件的同学可以将原邮件转发至这三人并点出原邮件发送时间以及没有收到回复的事实）

如果大家有任何疑问请给我发邮件 (david.dahlhorn.13@ucl.ac.uk)。

最好祝福，

David Dahlhorn

UCL 学生会学生住宿代表

Example of translated material targeting international students at UCL

Part 2: Legal implications

NUS instructed [Bindmans LLP](#) to develop the guidance below in May 2016. Making yourself aware of the general guidance above is a good starting point for students thinking of going on rent strike, but we urge students and organisers to seek specific legal advice as they see fit.

Please note that the following guidance only applies to England and Wales.

A rent strike, or withholding rent, has no basis in law. There is no legal right to withhold rent even when a landlord has failed to carry out repairs or when the rent is very high or unaffordable. At times it can be a powerful tactic to try and encourage change but it should be remembered that withholding rent can be a risky tactic. As rent is not paid rent arrears build up putting tenants at risk of losing their homes. Tenants that do not pay rent run the risk that their landlord will issue possession proceedings and try to evict.

The last few years has seen a huge increase in the cost of student accommodation. Rent costs have spiked and student debt skyrocketed. Rent strikes are growing as a part of a campaigning tool to encourage universities to better control rents and provide better value for money. But what are the implications? Do you know the possible risks?

A rent strike is a political action and can be a way to highlight the issue and try and achieve change. However there are potentially very serious consequences:

- Loss of accommodation
- County Court Judgments
- Potential impact on employment
- Problems with future renting
- Visa and Home Office implications

Rent strike, a dangerous tactic?

A rent strike, or withholding rent, has no basis in law. There is no legal right to withhold rent even when a landlord has failed to carry out repairs or when the rent is very high or unaffordable. At times it can be a powerful tactic to try and encourage change but it should be remembered that withholding rent can be a risky tactic. As rent is not paid rent arrears build up putting tenants at risk of losing their homes. Tenants that do not pay rent run the risk that their landlord will issue possession proceedings and try to evict.

What are the possible implications?

Possession proceedings

As rent builds up arrears accrue and a landlord can issue a claim for possession. It can be surprisingly easy and relatively quick for a landlord to gain possession where there is unpaid rent. For an assured tenant, if a landlord is able to prove at least 8 weeks arrears, from when the notice of possession is served and the date of hearing the court must make an outright possession order.

A landlord does not need to prove any particular ground, simply that there are rent arrears. There would be no defence to argue that the rent is “unreasonably high” or prohibitive. A rent strike would not be a defence to a possession claim.

The court would also order the tenant to pay legal costs and court fees which can add to the debt.

County Court Judgment or ‘money judgment’

A landlord can bring court proceedings for the unpaid rent. Rather than a claim for possession or even alongside a claim for possession a landlord can issue a claim for a County Court Judgment for the unpaid rent. A claim for such a debt can be issued online and lead to a County Court Judgment. Enforcement of the court order can then follow and allows a landlord to take a range of option:

- Sending bailiffs
- Trying to seize funds from a bank account.
- Take sums from any employer e.g. from part time work

The consequences of rent arrears and/or a county court judgment can have longer term implications as follows.

References

It is common for landlords to seek references before agreeing to let a property to a prospective tenant. As part of checking whether or not to rent landlords can ask for details of rent payments to previous landlords. If your rent payment history and rent has been withheld a potential landlord can be less likely to consider you are a tenant in future.

Credit reference check

A County Court Judgment for rent arrears is information that will be linked to you through credit reference agencies. It can have an impact for a number of years and will not be avoided simply because the debt arose through a rent strike. Details of past debt and financial problems will be stored by credit reference agencies and checked by banks, financial institutions and even some employers. This may be linked to you for many years and extend far beyond your time at University. A credit reference check can make it more difficult to obtain financial services later in life. A judgment because of a rent strike may stop you gaining a loan or mortgage.

Impact on career and certain types of employment

A county court judgment against you for rent arrears is something that appears as part of your credit history. Certain jobs require you to disclose information about civil judgments and debts.

For example legal regulators such as the Law Society asks about Court Judgments, accountancy regulators check you are someone with 'good standing'. Judgments that arise because of rent strike may impact in these areas.

It is common for employers to check credit reference history for certain types of roles, for example those working in finance can be checked for past debt and credit problems. Employers will not know from such checks that credit problems arose because of a rent strike. All they will see is that there was a judgment or debt.

Immigration/visa

The Home Office when extending visas frequently asks whether there is a civil Judgment outstanding. If you need to apply to extend a visa or vary your visa status the presence of a civil Judgment can have implications for your visa application.

Disrepair? Can I withhold rent?

There is no legal right to withhold rent even when a landlord has failed to carry out repairs. Tenants who do not pay the rent run the risk a landlord will issue possession proceedings and try and evict them. It can be possible to put aside rent money in order to carry out repairs but the circumstances in which this can take place are limited and tenants must comply with a clear sequence of events including:

2. Allowing the landlord reasonable time to carry out works and if these are not done notifying the landlord that unless the works are carried out by a certain date the tenant will then deduct the cost of the works and rent due.
3. If the landlord still does not act within a reasonable period then obtain three quotes for repair work from reputable contractors and send these to the landlord.
4. If the landlord still does not respond or carry out works then ask for it to be carried out by the contractor who provided the lowest quote.
5. Pay for the work and keep a receipt and send a copy to the landlord.
6. If the landlord then ignores the request to refund works then indicate that the costs of the work will be deducted from future rent payments. This does not pay for any compensation only for the cost of the works. It is a strict procedure and great care should be taken before undertaking this.

It is generally inadvisable for tenants to withhold rent because of disrepair and if rent is withheld it should be put aside.

If engaging in a rent strike put the money aside into a separate account and weigh up the potential implications. Go in with your eyes open and be aware of the risks and real dangers.

1. Notifying the landlord in writing that works are required.

Part 3: Draft rent strike fund policy

1. The Fund shall be called "The University/College of _____ Union Rent Fund"
2. The Fund shall exist for the sole purpose of receiving and disposing of the following moneys:
 - a. Payments from members of the Union who are resident in Halls of Residence of the University/College/Institution.
 - b. Such payments shall be equal in value to the amount of the rent which would have been charged to the member by the University/College for his/her place in Hall, had the rates which were applied been those which were in force during the academic year beginning [insert date].
 - c. Interest accrued on such sums.
3. The Fund shall have the following officers:
 - a. Treasurer – the Treasurer of the Fund shall be the Finance Officer of the Union. He shall be responsible for:
 - i. Keeping the accounts of the fund
 - ii. The day to day management of the fund's financial affairs
 - b. Assistant Treasurers – there shall be four Assistant Treasurers who shall:
 - i. Be full members of the Union
 - ii. Be elected by the general meeting of [insert date] or any subsequent general meeting
 - iii. Be mandatable by, responsible to and recallable to any general meeting
 - iv. Assist the Treasurer in his duties
4. The Fund shall dispose of its money only as follows:
 - a. Capital accrued as in 2a above – the capital in the Fund may be paid either:
 - i. To the University/College – such payments may be made only by the resolution of a general meeting; or
 - ii. To the Hall committee of the University/College – such payment shall be limited to a maximum total value equal to the total value of the Hall fee elements in the moneys received; or
 - iii. To any contributor to the Fund who wishes to withdraw his contribution to the Fund, provided that no contributor shall thereby receive more than the amount of this contribution.
- b. Interest accrued as in 2b above – the interest accrued in the Fund shall be paid to the Union for the purpose of organising the rent strike campaign, or such other purpose as a general meeting shall decide.
5. The Fund shall hold one current and one and one deposit account with the [name] Bank Ltd
 - a. The signatories to these accounts shall be the Treasurer and any two of the Assistant Treasurers.
6. Receipts may be signed on behalf of the Fund by the Treasurer or any one of the Assistant Treasurers.
7. The accounts of the Fund shall:
 - a. Be open to inspection by any member of the Union
 - b. Be presented to the general meeting at least once every two weeks
 - c. Be audited by [insert name/s]
8. This constitution may be altered only by resolution of the general meeting save that clauses 4ai and 8 may be altered only by unanimous resolution of a general meetings.
9. In this constitution:
 - a. "Fund" means the University/College of [insert name] Union Rent Fund
 - b. "Union" means the University/College of [insert name] Union
 - c. "University/College" means the University/College of [insert name]
 - d. "General meeting" means general meeting of the University/College of [insert name] Union
 - e. "Treasurer" means the Treasurer of the Fund
 - f. "Assistant Treasurer" means any one of the Assistant Treasurers of the Fund

Further sources of information & support

Further sources of information and support

Shelter

[Shelter](#) can offer housing advice online, in person and on the phone. Their help line number is 0808 800 4444.
www.shelter.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

You can contact your local bureau for legal or housing advice. Their website also has particular [information on dealing with debt](#).
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Mind

Mind has particular information on [managing the link between mental health and money](#). It is likely that your local Mind branch will also run support groups.
www.mind.org.uk

Rethink

Rethink explains the circumstances in which creditors will [write off debt](#) for people with chronic mental health issues.
www.rethink.org

Law Centres Network

You can find your local law centre through the [Law Centres Network](#).
www.lawcentres.org.uk

LawWorks

[This charity](#) may be able to help you find pro bono advice.
www.lawworks.org.uk

Tenants Unions

[NUS has put together](#) a to help students set up their own tenants union, which can be a good way to building a support network across a whole community.

Campaign groups

You can find various 'Cut the Rent' campaign groups on social media.

Student Unions

NUS has a [directory](#) of all unions.

Bindmans LLP

[Bindmans](#) is a law firm with particular expertise in relation to issues around human rights, discrimination and public authorities' powers.
www.bindmans.com

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