

NUS Wales' response to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's call for evidence on the Renting Homes (Amendment) (Wales) Bill.

About NUS Wales

National Union of Students Wales (NUS Wales) is the representative body of more than 250,000 students in Wales. We work on behalf of 20 member students' unions on the issues that affect students in higher education and further education.

Response

(1) NUS Wales believes the direction of travel set by the Renting Homes (Amendment) (Wales) Bill is mostly positive, especially around strengthening tenants' rights around 'no-fault' evictions. NUS has consistently advocated for the complete abolition of 'no-fault' evictions across the UK. Our underlying principle is that if landlords have a legitimate reason to acquire their property, they should not be using 'no-fault' evictions. However, there are elements of the Bill we feel do not go far enough in strengthening the rights and experiences of student tenants in Wales.

(2) We believe the Bill would deliver positive outcomes for students in the Private Rented Sector (PRS). The proposals would give students greater agency and security over where they choose to live, work and study. In response to suggestions of a student exemption within the Bill, we would completely oppose this approach and believe it would create a two-tier system. Establishing a legal divide between student renters and non-student renters in this

Bill could lead to the further divergence of the law down the line, to the detriment of students. We also believe this approach could leave student renters open to exploitation by landlords.

(3) In Scotland, landlords objected to the introduction of indefinite tenancies in the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016. Landlords argued that they would only be able to know a tenant's intent to move out – and therefore be able to put their properties on the market for next year's student cohort – one month in advance. Landlords argued that this would cause housing shortages and difficulties for new/returning student cohorts. NUS has seen no evidence of this trend emerging since the introduction of the legislation in Scotland.

(4) NUS' 2019 Homes Fit for Study report¹, which surveyed over 2,000 students on their experience of the PRS, found that "for students living in the [...] sector, 57 per cent of them had already started looking for their new home, to move into in the summer/autumn term of 2018, by December of the previous year (2017)". The report also found that "the experience of looking for somewhere to live was viewed as being negative by students, who cited the main challenges as feelings of stress and pressure, of being rushed into deciding on where to live".

(5) We believe the Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) market has been overlooked in the Renting Homes (Amendment) (Wales) Bill. It is vital this sector receives consideration in the Bill as well. As the Bill's explanatory memorandum states, the PRS was once dominated by young people and students. While students still exist in the PRS, many now choose to rent in the growing PBSA market. We support the exemption of student accommodation standard contracts in the Bill and would support the PBSA market also being exempt.

(6) Specific research on student accommodation reveals serious concerns. Both the NUS/Unipol Homes Fit for Study report and Save the Student surveys² show several worrying trends. We believe the Committee and Welsh Government should pay due consideration to these reports in regards to the development of the Bill. We remain concerned that despite there being laws in place around deposit protection for more than a decade, more than a third of students are still receiving no evidence that their deposits are in a protection scheme.

(7) Ultimately, NUS Wales supports the Bill and believes it would deliver important protections to renters – including students. We oppose any amendment that would differentiate students from other renters within the PRS sector but believe specific attention should be paid to the PBSA sector. We believe the reports referred to in this response highlight a number of very serious issues and challenges students face when renting and would urge Welsh Government to take action on them.

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<https://www.savethestudent.org/accommo>

[ation/national-student-accommodation-survey-2020.html](https://www.savethestudent.org/accommo)

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