



3 May 2024

Dear Members of the University of Sydney Senate,

I write to you as President of the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association as I am deeply concerned with the current student housing crisis.

Secure, affordable, accessible housing is not only a fundamental human right – for many students, their experiences of housing are central to their University experience. University students, like many renters in NSW, are facing significant barriers to accessing affordable housing. This crisis is exacerbated by a progressive reduction in University provided accommodation in Sydney (City of Sydney, 2023). International students in particular are at significant risk of homelessness, as well as associated vulnerabilities including overcrowding, hot-bedding, excessive rents, high bonds, and unauthorised additional charges, evictions, and contract conditions (Gurran et al., 2021; Hastings et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2023). People with disability and First Nations People are also at higher risk of homelessness (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).

The lack of affordable housing was repeatedly noted in the final report of the Australian Universities Accord which linked secure and affordable housing to student safety, and emphasized the provision of safe and affordable student housing as the responsibility of universities and Government. The final report stated in recommendation 23 (p. 188) that “The review is recommending that providers have appropriate risk management strategies for international education that include consideration of access to and availability of affordable student housing”. Clearly this is a national and state priority that needs attention, planning and action on the part of all universities, including the University of Sydney.

I, on behalf of SUPRA, recommend that the University of Sydney develops a 10-year Student Housing Strategy to address a lack of affordable and accessible student accommodation for University of Sydney students. The Strategy should have short, medium and long term goals outlined in 3, 5 and 10 year Plans.

We also recommend that the Strategy:

- Ensure that the development and implementation of the Strategy have at its core ongoing and thorough consultation with student representative groups.
- Have as its primary goal an increase in genuinely affordable student accommodation for as many students as possible. Genuinely affordable housing should be at a rate of no more than 30% of Centrelink student payments.

- Explores the possibility of guaranteeing the availability of University-owned and operated accommodation for all international students for the first semester of studies, to reduce the risk of scams and exploitation of this vulnerable cohort.
- Should include plans to address the specific housing needs of at-risk groups including international students, people with disability and their carers, and First Nations Peoples. Additionally, it should provide for a diverse range of accommodation for parents with children and people with accessibility needs.
- Have as its majority focus non-market led approaches to addressing student housing including, but not limited to:
 - Student housing that is not profit driven and that has high levels of University oversight that ensures both affordability and quality of accommodation,
 - Student social housing via partnership with NSW Government,
 - The provision of support, in the form of University land and resources, to current or new student cooperative housing groups.
- That the University commit to cease the sales of University-owned land, and instead use land to implement the initiatives outlined above. This should include the re-opening of International House for student housing as a priority.

SUPRA, through our advocacy, campaigning, casework, publications, and legal work, is deeply committed to the issue of student housing. We are available and ready to contribute to the University's accommodation strategy, and hope you will take our recommendations on board.

Sincerely,

Weihong Liang,

President

Sydney University Postgraduate Student Association (SUPRA)

References

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